Itinerario (2025), **49**, 18–42
doi:10.1017/S0165115324000329

ARTICLE

Human Trafficking, Beautiful Women, the Land of the Cockaigne, and Burmese Bells: The Significance of the Sexual Reminiscences of the Florentine Merchant Francesco Carletti (1573–1636) in *Ragionamenti del mio viaggio intorno al mondo* [Chronicles of My Voyage Around the World]

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Abstract

Ragionamenti del mio viaggio intorno al mondo [Chronicles of my voyage around the world] by Francesco Carletti (1573–1636), a Florentine slave merchant and the first private individual to circumnavigate the globe, is a rich source of information about human trafficking from Africa to Spanish America. Carletti writes in detail about his encounters beginning in 1594 in Africa, America, and Asia, including the Philippines, Japan, Macao, Malacca, and Goa, before returning to Europe via the Cape of Good Hope in 1602. But what makes Carletti's record extraordinary are his reports about the sexuality of the peoples he observes in these locations. Following the publications of earlier Italian travel writers Niccolò dei Conti (1395–1469) and Antonio Pigafetta (1491–1531) about the practice of Asian men purposely piercing their genitalia to insert studs and other objects to gratify their female sexual partners, Carletti investigates this phenomenon, concludes its verity, and attributes its existence to the dominance of women's agency in Asia. Carletti's recollections of his voyage are testimony to how exploration during the early modern era catalyzed a transformation in racial discourses and the appreciation of erotic desire in foreign cultures.

Keywords: Francesco Carletti (1573-1636); slavery; sexuality; racial differences; global travel writing

Introduction: The Extraordinary Life of Francesco Carletti

When the Florentine merchant Francesco Carletti set off from Seville to Santiago on Cape Verde with his father Antonio in January 1594 to buy African slaves whom he planned to sell in Cartagena (Colombia), little did he know that his journey would extend beyond this business mission to Panama, Peru, and Mexico in the New World, and on to a series of maritime passages taking him to the Philippines, Japan, Macao (where Antonio died in 1598), Malacca, Goa, the South Atlantic island of Saint Helena, and finally to Lisbon. During the eight years of his travels outside Europe, Carletti kept detailed records of the places he saw and those he visited, the merchandise he bought, and the people he met. Unfortunately, during his homeward trip to Europe in 1602, as the Portuguese vessel on which he sailed rounded the Cape of Good Hope and neared Saint Helena, the crew of

two Dutch-owned ships sponsored by the United Zeeland Company seized his boat, held him and the other passengers hostage, and confiscated all his property, including the exhaustive chronicle he had compiled during his voyage.[1] Once back in Europe, Carletti made his way to Middelburg (Zeeland) in the Netherlands and began a series of lawsuits for the return of his goods and papers. Although the Dutch legal authorities in 1605 did award him partial compensation of 13,000 florins, a sum that was barely enough to cover his legal expenses, the greatest loss was his collection of personal writings about his expedition.

Upon his return to Florence in 1606, Carletti had an audience with his sovereign, Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferndinando I de Medici (1549–1609), and reported his travel experiences to him. The duke advised him to write in detail what he had communicated to him verbally. Although Carletti was not the first person to keep a diary of a worldwide circumnavigation—that feat was realized by another Italian Antonio Pigafetta (1491–1531), the chronicler of Ferdinand Magellan's last voyage—Carletti was the first private individual to accomplish a global journey without royal or religious sponsorship.[2] He completed his written text *Ragionamenti del mio viaggio intorno al mondo* (Chronicles of my voyage around the world) circa 1619, but it was only published in 1701, long after his death, and after having been revised and edited by, among others, the well-known writer Lorenzo Magalotti (1637–1712).[3] A number of modern scholars have demonstrated that there is controversy over the accuracy of the transmission from Carletti's manuscript to the first published version—Carletti's 1619 text was also lost, but four copied manuscripts of the supposed original are available.[4] Twentieth-century Italian editions of Carletti's *Ragionamenti del mio viaggio intorno al mondo* abound, and since the 1960s there have appeared translations in English, Dutch, German, Japanese, French, and Spanish.[5]

[1] Details of this episode in Carletti's life may be found in Claudia Swan, "Fortunes at Sea: Mediated Goods and Dutch Trade, circa 1600," in *Sites of Mediation: Connected Histories of Places, Processes, and Objects in Europe and Beyond, 1450–1650*, ed. Susanna Burghartz, Lucas Burkart, and Christine Gottler (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 371–405; Martine van Ittersum, *Profit and Principle: Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories, and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies, 1595–1615* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), especially chapter 3, "Why Was *De Jure Praedae* Written?," 105–88; C. G. Roelofson, "Het trieste slot van een reis om de wereld in het begin van de zeventiende eeuw: De affaire Carletti," *Mededelingen van de Nederlandse Vereniging voor Zeegeschiedenis* 20 (1970), 13–30.

[2] Antonio Pigafetta, *The First Voyage Around the World, 1519–1522: An Account of Magellan's Expedition*, trans. Theodore J. Cachey, Jr. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). The Italian title of this work, which first appeared in 1524, is *Relazione del primo viaggio attorno al mondo*. See the modern Italian version, edited by Andrea Canova (Padua: Antenore, 1999).

[3] Among Magalotti's letters was found the first edition of Carletti's text which was entitled: *Ragionamenti de Francesco Carletti fiorentino sapra le cose da lui vedute ne suoi viaggi, dell'Indie Occidentali e Orientali come d'altri paesi*. For more information about this early edition, see Giuliano Bertuccioli, "Francesco Carletti: A Florentine Merchant in Japan and China in the Years 1597–99," in *Travels to Real and Imaginary Lands*, ed. Giuliano Bertuccioli (Kyoto : Italian School of East Asian Studies, 1990), 1–31; and Michela Bussotti, "Francesco Carletti, cultures marchandes et saviors de l'Orient à la fin du XVIe siècle," *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna* 48:2 (2023), 513–37.

[4] The four manuscripts include the Codex 1331 T.3.22 which is located in Rome's Biblioteca Angelica; a second version known as the Codex 47, is in the Biblioteca Moreniana (Florence); the Gionori-Venturi rendering which is a direct copy of Codex 47; and the Magliabecchiano version which corresponds to the edition possessed by Magalotti. See Elisabetta Colla, "Southeast Asia 'Ethnic Minorities' in an Account by the Florentine Merchant Francesco Carletti: A 17th Century Manuscript," in *Ethnic Minorities and Regional Development in Asia*, ed. Huhua Cao (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 33–48, and see 44n1. Refer also to Bertuccioli, "Francesco Carletti," 7n4 for a listing of all the editions of Carletti's work published in Italy since 1701.

[5] Bertuccioli, "Francesco Carletti," 8n5. In this study, I utilized the English translation by Herbert Weinstock, *My Voyage Around the World* (New York: Random House, 1964), and hereafter, Carletti, *My Voyage*. This translation is based on the Codex 1331 (T.3.22) version in the Biblioteca Angelica, which is favored by many of the translators of Carletti's text in other languages. To date there is only one full biography of Carletti, that by Gemma Sgrilli, *Francesco Carletti, Mercante e Viaggioatore Fiorentino* (Rocca S. Casciano: Licino Cappelli, 1905). According to Colla, Sgrilli relied heavily on the edition in the Biblioteca Moreniana.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000329 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Carletti divided his chronicle into two parts, each of which he named "Discorso" (Discourse); each has six chapters known as "Ragionamenti" (Considerations). The first Discourse he dubbed the West Indies, which begins with the expedition from Spain and ends with arrival in the Philippines, while the second Discourse, the East Indies, commences with departure from the Philippines and concludes with his stay in Zeeland, visits to France, and homecoming to Florence. The geographical boundaries of these Discourses reflect the division of the globe between Portugal and Spain ratified in the 1494 signed Treaty of Tordesillas: along a meridian of 370 leagues (including the west coast of Africa), the lands to the east would belong to Portugal, and the lands to the west to Castile.[6] The writing style of Carletti's memoir, in epistolary format directed toward Duke Ferdinando, is reader friendly, often light-hearted and amusing, illuminating about the flora and fauna and the local cuisine of the regions he visited, as well as informative about navigation details, including latitude and longitude, monsoon patterns, and shipboard maintenance routines. Unlike the more formal travel reporting by clergy, courtiers, and even humanistic scholars of the same era, Carletti's presentation seems down-to-earth and even salacious in certain parts. Here and there in his writing, Carletti refers to passages from Giovanni Boccacio's stories.[7]

Ferdinando's interest in Carletti's experiences, however, was more than just entertainment. Ever since the 1560s the Medici rulers had sought to find a role in the expanding global enterprises of the Spanish and Portuguese empires.[8] From that time the Medici princes had begun to establish a labyrinth of networks fostering agents, affiliates, and diplomats to investigate and import global goods as well as to acquire information about the increasing numbers of sites to which Europeans had regular maritime contact.[9] Thus, Carletti's reminiscences of his travel adventures to his sovereign Ferdinando were integral to the monarch's strategy to strengthen Florence's commercial and diplomatic position vis-à-vis the Spanish overseer and to learn more about the particulars of the widening world beyond Europe. Carletti's chronicles were a unique reportage of three Iberian outposts—Manila, Macao, and Malacca—as well as the two states Japan and China, places that neither Ferdinand Magellan (1480–1521) nor the well-known Italian traveler Filippo Sassetti (1540–1588) had visited.[10]

Reading *Ragionamenti del mio viaggio intorno al mondo* in the third decade of the twenty-first century, one may be easily dazzled by Carletti's achievements: not only his adeptness to overcome the practical difficulties and perils of a global maritime tour in the late sixteenth century as a private individual subject to the regulations of the Iberian empire, but also the extent to which he steeped himself in the cultures of the places he visited.[11] In

[6] On the Treaty of Tordesillas, see Lawrence A. Cohen, "The Events that Led to the Treaty of Tordesillas," *Terrae Incognitae* 47:2 (2015), 142–62.

[7] Compare comments by Nathalie Hester, "Italian Travel Writing," in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, ed. Tim Young and Nandini Das (Cambridge, 2019), 206–20.

[8] Brian Brege, *Tuscany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2021), 31–58.

[9] Ibid., 1–30, 144–50.

[10] Sassetti, also serving as an informer to the Medici rulers, wrote about the Portuguese Estado da India policies, the power of the Mughal empire, spice trading, and the flora and fauna of South Asia. See Barbara Karl, "'Galanterie de cose rare...' Filippo Sassetti's Indian Shopping List for the Medici Grand Duke Francesco and His Brother Cardinal Fernando," *Itinerario* 32:3 (2008), 23–41.

[11] Brege, *Tuscany*, 392–3, note 7, has plotted the chronological and geographical stages of Carletti's round-the-world voyage. The page listings in parentheses refer to Carletti's discussion of these places in the English translation, Carletti, *My Voyage*:

Florence (29 May 1591) to Seville (3–4).
Seville (8 January 1594) to Cape Verde (4–6).
Cape Verde (19 April 1594) to Cartagena de Indias (16).

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both Japan and Macao he attempted to learn the languages of these locations, concentrating on both spoken and written Japanese and Chinese; these accomplishments are, however, beyond the scope of this essay.[12] Instead, here in this study of Carletti and his travels, the focus is on how his experiences as a slave merchant in Africa, Central and Latin America, and Asia inflected his perceptions of men and women. He found the racial differences and sexuality of the inhabitants in these locations keys to understanding the dynamics of the societies where he sojourned.[13] From the earliest passages in Carletti's *Ragionamenti*, the reader may observe that the author is especially drawn to female beauty and sexuality, especially that of African women partnered with Portuguese men.[14] In Asia, women struck his libidinal fancy while Asian men, whom he witnessed performing *palang*, that is their piercing their genitals and inserting various metal studs into their penises, peaked his fascination. He writes with astonishment about the goal of this practice, which he understood was meant to enhance the pleasure of a man's female partner in the act of sexual intercourse.[15]

Cartagena de Indias (12 August 1594) to Nombre de Dios (24–6).
Nombre de Dios to Casa de Cruces (27–9).
Casa de Cruces to Panama City (September 1594) (29–31, 33).
Panama City (November 1594) to Lima via Callao (January 1595) (31–9, 48).
Lima (May 1595) to Acapulco (June 1595) (48, 51–5).
Acapulco to Mexico City (June 1595) (55–7, 69).
Mexico City (March 1596) to Acapulco (March 1596) (69–70).
Acapulco (23 March 1596) to the Velas/Ladrones/Marianas Islands to Cavite near Manila (June 1596) (78–81).
Manila (May 1597) to Nagasaki (June 1597) (90–1, 99).
Nagasaki (3 March 1598) to Macao (15 March 1598) (136, 139).
Macao (December 1599) to Malacca (183–7).
Malacca to Cochin (March 1600) (196–200).
Cochin to Goa (March/April 1600) (200).
Goa (25 December 1601) to Saint Helena (14 March 1602) (226–9, 249).
Saint Helena (14 March 1602) to Fernando de Norontha (6 April 1602) (229–43).
Fernando Norontha (2 May 1602) to Middleburg, Zeeland (7 July 1602) (243–4).
Brielle (near the Hague) (December 1605) to Paris (19 December 1605) (267–8).
Paris (May/June 1606) to Florence (12 July 1606) (3, 270).

[12] On Carletti's learning Japanese, see Bertuccioli, "Francesco Carletti," 11–3; on his studying Chinese, see Bertuccioli, "Carletti," 15–7; and Bussotti, "Francesco Carletti," 527–30.

[13] Sexuality, as discussed in this essay, is a cultural/social construct. As David Halperin writes on page 257 of his study, "Is There a History of Sexuality?," *History and Theory* 28 (1989), 257–74: "The acts of sex have no history, ... they are merely a functioning of the body that lies outside of history and culture. The meanings that are attributed to these acts, are a social construct." Similarly, as Ruth Karras posits in her book *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (London: Routledge, 2017), 7, "Sexuality refers to the universe of meanings that people place on sex acts, rather than the acts themselves." For understanding changing sexual ideology in Europe from the time of the Renaissance to the eighteenth century, see Katherine Crawford, *European Sexualities, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[14] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 9; see too comments by Frank X. Eder, *Sexuality in Premodern Europe: A Social and Cultural History from Antiquity to the Early Modern Age* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 211–3, on race and sexual desirability.

[15] For a historical introduction to the practice of *palang*, also known as *sacra*, see Donald E. Brown, James W. Edwards, and Ruth P. Moore, eds., *The Penis Inserts of Southeast Asia: An Annotated Bibliography with an Overview and Comparative Perspectives* (Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California Press, 1988), 1–28. On page 1 of this book, the editors write that the objects inserted in the penis take one of five forms. Three forms involve the insertion of objects under the skin of the penis: (1) tiny bells; (2) small solid balls, or pellets; (3) small, solid non-spherical objects. The other two forms entail (4) pins inserted crosswise through the penis; and (5) a pin or bar through the penis, which holds a ring object around the penis. The practice of *palang* refers to these latter two forms.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000329 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Carletti's experiences here represent the racial-sexual interface of European maritime expansion, a theme pursued in the well-known study by Ann Stoler of bodily intimacy, sexual discourses, and the colonial state.[16] But, as Carmen Nocentelli demonstrates in her 2013 book *Empires of Love: Europe, Asia, and the Making of Early Modern Identity*, Europeans' perceptions of foreign sexual discourses were open to variation already in the early modern era when racialized contexts facilitated by overseas encounters turned matters of Eros into matters of ethnos. She argues that in the early modern world periphery, circa the sixteenth-early seventeenth centuries, the perception of race as a category of human difference, and what she terms "domestic heterosexuality," as an organizing structure of socio-subjective experience, interacted in such a way that interracial desire took on new meanings and possibilities.[17] Nocentelli delineates race as "less a category of biological difference than a broad spectrum of practices and discourses concerned with religious affiliation, cultural habitus, geographic origin, and humoral composition,"[18] and domestic heterosexuality as "a form of conjugal relation that demands the melding of love and erotic desire,"[19] operating outside the economy of heterosexual patriarchy.

Particular passages in Carletti's *Ragionamenti* affirm Nocentelli's thesis that eroticism shaped views of racial identity, and vice-versa, and that interethnic intimacy transformed ascriptions of racial difference. From the very first pages of the memoir one may read about the author's interest in Black women, as he narrates the household arrangements of the Portuguese inhabitants of Nom de Deus on Cape Verde: "Portuguese men love these black women more than their own Portuguese women, holding it as a certain and proved fact that to have commerce with them is much less harmful and also a much greater pleasure, they being said to have fresher and healthier natures."[20] Carletti's observations here set the tone for further comparisons he makes in the course of his global journey; he is wont wherever he goes to assess the beauty and sexual appeal of the women he encounters and to relate their bodily attributes to his impressions of the men with whom they form attachments.

Several facets of domestic sexuality gain more prominence in Carletti's Second Discourse, East Indies, where he discusses the gratification of polygamy and the celebration of Eros, as well as the centrality of female pleasure in sexual intercourse. Carletti's reports of his experiences in Asia duplicate the accounts of earlier travel raconteurs, including Pigafetta, who write in detail about the *palang*, how men "big and small have the head of their members pierced from side to side with a rod of gold or tin, as thick as a goose quill."[21] Pigafetta also wrote about another form of genital modification, the insertion of tiny round hollow bells into the penis,[22] the purpose of which was to bring ever more amusement and satisfaction to women in the act of sexual intercourse.[23]

[16] Ann Stoler, *Cardinal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

[17] Carmen Nocentelli, *Empires of Love: Europe, Asia, and the Making of Early Modern Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 5–7.

[18] Ibid., 5.

[19] Ibid., 94. Nocetelli underlines how the erotic element in domestic heterosexuality was a threat to European ideals of gender hierarchy and patriarchal authority—as she writes here, "[Sexual] desire militated against stability and made but a poor foundation to build a family."

[20] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 6; see too Ivana Elbl, "'Men Without Wives': Sexual Arrangements in the Early Portuguese Expansion in West Africa," in *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 61–85.

[21] Nocentelli, *Empires of Love*, 18–9; see too the translation of Pigafetta's comments about *palang* in Emma H. Blair and James A. Robertson, eds., *The Philippine Islands, 1493–1803*, 55 vols. (Cleveland, Ohio: A. H. Clark, 1903–1909), 33: 171–3.

[22] Nocentelli, *Empires of Love*, 27.

[23] Sun Laichen, "Burmese Bells and Chinese Eroticism: Southeast Asia's Cultural Influence on China," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38:2 (2007), 247–73.

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Knowledge in Europe of this particular custom preceded Pigafetta's description —the travel narrative of the fifteenth-century Venetian merchant Niccolò dei Conti (1395–1469) details his visits to India and Southeast Asia and how he became acquainted in Burma with shops run exclusively by women selling these bells. The women informed Conti that men intent on marrying needed to have these objects inserted in their members—otherwise they would not be able to find a wife.[24]

The reports of *palang* and Burmese bells by Conti and Pigafetta were not unique, and were preceded and succeeded by those of other well-known persons either conveying their own direct observations of these phenomena or relating that information from these witnesses to others. In the first category belong the accounts by Duarte Barbosa (1480–1521), Luís Vaz de Camões (1524–1580), Ralph Fitch (1550–1611), Antonio Galvano (1490–1557), Jan Huygen van Linschoten (1563–1611), Ma Huan (1380–1460), and Tomé Pires (1468–1524 or 1540), Gabriel Romelo (fl. 1550), Ludovico de Varthema (1468–1517); and in the second category those by João de Barros (1496–1570), Giovanni Francesco Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), and Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1485–1557).[25] Conti's information about the penis bells became well known because Poggio Bracciolini, an eminent humanist scholar, included in his 1447 publication *On the Vicissitude of Fortune* (De varietate fortunae) discussion of Conti's Asian travel experiences with the bells.[26]

Carletti's exposé of the sexual behavior of people of different races and cultural habits is historically significant for what it tells about Western perceptions of gender, racial differences, and sexual identity in communities outside Europe during the early modern era. It also brings into stark contrast the contemporaneous ideals of Counter-Reformation Christianity in Europe—that sexual intercourse was restricted to monogamous matrimony, that marriage was indissoluble, that virginity and celibacy were superior to marriage, and that masturbation, sodomy, contraception, and abortion were mortal sins—with the sexual mores and habits of those persons Carletti observed. By the second half of the sixteenth century, religious dictates outlawed sexual pleasure and desire for both men and women while societal tenets upheld the great importance of female chastity for family honor and women's own responsibility for children born out of wedlock.[27] Although historians in the past four decades have demonstrated that the paradigm of

[24] Lincoln Davis Hammond, *Travelers in Disguise: Narratives of Eastern Travels by Poggio Bracciolini and Ludovico de Varthema*, trans. John Winter Jones (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 14.

[25] Michael Smithies, "Body Ornamentation and Penile Implants in Siam and Pegu," *Journal of the Siam Society* 82:1 (1994), 81–88. The Chinese Muslim fifteenth-century maritime explorer and travel writer Ma Huan gives a detailed account of how the Burmese bells were implanted. He writes in his well-known work *Yingya shenglan* (The overall survey of the oceans' shores; 1433): "When a man is over twenty years old, they take the skin which surrounds the *membrum virile*, and with a fine knife shaped like (the leaf of) Chinese chives they open it up and insert a dozen bells inside the skin; (then) they close it up and protect (it) with medicinal herbs." Cited in Sun "Burmese Bells," 250.

[26] As interest in Conti's travels increased, the account in Poggio's *Vicissitude* began to circulate independently, and in 1492 became a separate publication entitled *India Recognita*. This work was eventually translated from Latin into Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, and English. See Kim M. Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian People and Cultures in European Travel Writing, 1245–1410* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 140. Studies of Niccolò dei Conti's travels in India include Anne-Laurie Amilhat Szary, *Le voyage aux indes de Nicolo de Conti (1414–1439)* (Paris : Chandeigne, 2004); and Michele Guéret-Laferté, ed., *Niccolo de'Conti: Le L'Inde les voyages en Asie de Niccolo de'Conti* (Turnhout : Brepols, 2004).

[27] Crawford, *European Sexualities*, 232–7; see too Merry E Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice* (London: Routledge, 2020), chapters 2 and 3. This book offers important insights into religious and racial intermarriage on a global scale before and after the Counter-Reformation. Both Crawford and Wiesner-Hanks discuss in their studies in passing that for European men, women's sexual pleasure was rarely a concern.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000329 Published online by Cambridge University Press

repressed sexuality in the past and near present is no longer viable,[28] knowledge about the discourses and construction of the sexual lives of persons beyond the Western metropole is still wanting. To be sure, the recent interest in global history and the academic field of area studies have to a certain extent made apparent such lacunae, thus revealing the flaws of stereotyping the *ars erotica* of the East under the rubric Orientalism.[29] But as Carletti's writings and those of his contemporaries and predecessors indicate, the significance of women as enthusiastic agents and even power holders in Asian male–female sexual relationships has not been subject to the same amount of attention. And by the time Carletti's *Ragionamenti* was published, and became better known in the nineteenth century, European attitudes toward race and hierarchical gender regimes, both at home and abroad, had crystalized into new paradigms about ethnic differences and female inferiorities, which also lent support to ideas about racism and colonialism. By then, racial "others" were regarded as lacking the attributes of civilization because of their refusal to follow bourgeois patriarchal sexual norms in Euro-America.

Carletti's observations about Luso-African sexual contact and Asian erotic practices are a window on how visions of alterity may be transformed by the reality of interaction. His experiences may seem exceptional because of his extensive travel itinerary. But if one focuses on his detailed narratives relating the familiarities of seduction, cross-racial desire, and the joy of sexual satisfaction, his observations and encounters signify how the power of Eros had become integral to the course of European discoveries during the early modern era, and not least the testimonies thereof. This study explores how Carletti's *Ragionamenti* provides evidence of a particular phase in European perceptions of peoples of different regions in the sexual arena before Western political and economy hegemony took over much of the globe and denigrated the freedom of sexual expression in diverse cultures outside Euro-America.[30] And finally, but not least, this essay attempts to reveal the contradictions, complexities, and controversies in Carletti's memoir—for all his powers of observation and analysis, the Florentine merchant is also inconsistent about what he appreciates as well as denigrates about other persons. Such discrepancies make for interesting reading and insight into the mind of a late sixteenth-century Christian, merchant, and cosmopolitan.[31]

[28] In the last four decades, historians of early modern Europe have produced a steady stream of sexuality studies about men, women, and gender, in which age and social class are also examined in relation to theological doctrine, medical matters, and codes of conduct. See Jacqueline Murray and Nicolas Terpstra, "Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Renaissance Italy: Themes and Approaches in Recent Scholarship," in *Sex, Gender and Sexuality in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Jacqueline Murray and Nicolas Terpstra (London: Routledge, 2019), 1–17; and Bette Talvacchia, ed., *A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Renaissance* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012).

[29] Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality*, 10; Phillips, *Before Orientalism*, 141–2, suggests that the narratives of medieval travelers are wanting in discussion of sexual encounters between European men and Asian women. This is not surprising, she posits, because the majority of extant sources were composed by Franciscan or Dominican friars, while laymen also did not report sexual relations. She concludes that the trope of foreign men wanting to take sexual possession of local women was more characteristic of later colonial era empires.

[30] Relevant to this discussion is the observation by Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality*, 9–10, that the studies of sexuality by the modern historian Michel Foucault were centered upon male sexuality. Katherine Crawford, "Privilege, Possibility, and Perversion: Rethinking the Study of Early Modern Sexuality," *Journal of Modern History* 78 (2006), 412–33, 414, also reminds readers that among the topics Foucault ignored were marriage (the central focus of sexuality for most people) and women (the primary subject class for those who wished to regulate sex and sexuality in the past). For more discussion on Foucault and how he viewed sexuality in China, see Leon Antonio Rocha, "Scientia Sexualis versus Ars Erotica: Foucault, van Gulik, Needham," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 42 (2011), 328–43.

[31] In following Carletti's narrative, I realized that in some ways his life is analogous to another prominent figure in overseas history, David Livingstone (1813–1873), a Scottish missionary and Africa explorer. In his lifetime Livingstone's name became associated with the "three Cs": Christianity, commerce, and civilization, in reference to his missionary work, his struggles to end the commercial slave trade, and his efforts to develop educational

Francesco Carletti: The Slave Merchant and Human Trafficker

Francesco Carletti was born in Florence in 1573 to a long-standing family line of merchants. When he was eighteen, his father Antonio—then engaged in the import and export trade with Spain and Portugal and their colonies—sent him to Seville where he apprenticed with Nicolò Parenti, another Florentine merchant, and with whom he followed the subjects of a commercial education, including negotiation, languages, calculation, weights and measures, and not least, geography.[32] In 1593 Antonio joined his son in Seville, and the two embarked in January 1594 to Cape Verde with the aim of buying Black slaves for export and sale in the West Indies.[33] By then, Cape Verde had become the principal site for the purchase of African slaves destined for Spanish America. In the preceding 150 years Iberian expansion in the Atlantic had resulted in the occupation of Madeira, the Canary Islands, and the Azores with the Portuguese establishing major trading factories and bulking centers in Arguin, the Cape Verde Islands, Elmina, and São Tomé.[34] Driven by commerce with multiple polities on the African mainland, and the local production of commodities such as textiles, sugar, and cotton, several of these outposts rapidly became Portuguese colonies peopled by Iberians and increasingly, by mixed-race Luso-Africans.[35] The initial impetus behind the slave trade to Spanish America was to supply labor in regions being developed economically but without a sufficient local work force population to staff the profitable mining and sugar production enterprises.[36] The Carlettis also planned to market slaves in Central and South America, and thus they hoped to profit from the first two of the three principal human trafficking routes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the trans-Atlantic, the intra-American, and the trans-Pacific (in operation from the 1560s).

In the first of his Considerations in his first Discourse, West Indies, Francesco Carletti gives an overview of his journey from Seville via Cadiz to the small city Nome de Deus (Cape Verde), and sketches how the local economy thrived on trade run by both

institutions in Africa, endeavors that did not earn him praise from colonial governments and white settlers. But on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Livingstone's birth at a conference held in Zambia, the organizers of that meeting, who were well aware of the controversies surrounding Livingstone's reputation, decided to entitle that gathering "Analyzing Livingstone's Life and Legacy Through Contradiction, Complexity, and Controversy." See the blog by London School of Economics historian Joanna Lewis, issued on May 2, 2017 about that conference. Carletti's life story may also be evaluated with this second set of "three Cs" in mind.

[32] Bussotti, "Francesco Carletti," 514.

[33] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 3–4. As foreigners the Carlettis were prohibited from travelling on Spanish vessels, but as passages in *My Voyage* indicate, both father and son throughout the stages of their complex expedition were able to overcome this hindrance either through bribes or using their connections with Medici potentates.

[34] Antonio de Almeda Mendes, "The Foundations of the System: A Reassessment of the Slave Trade to the Spanish Americas in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, ed. David Eltis and David Richardson (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008), 63–94; Toby Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Linda Newson and Susie Minchin, *From Capture to Sale: The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish South America in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570–1640* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); William D. Phillips, Jr., "Slavery in the Atlantic Islands and the Early Modern Spanish Atlantic World," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, ed. David Eltis and Stanley Engerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 3: 325–49.

[35] George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003); José da Silva Horta, "Evidence for a Luso-African Identity in 'Portuguese' Accounts on 'Guinea of Cape Verde' (Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)," *History in Africa* 27 (2000), 99–130.

[36] Newson and Minchin, *From Capture to Sale,* 4–5.

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"Moorish" (Black) people and Portuguese residents.[37] He also discusses at some length Portuguese men's penchant for native Black women whom they marry or take as concubines, and with whom they father children.[38] He confesses that he himself finds Moorish women very beautiful, even physically more appealing than white women.[39] Such interracial heterosexual relationships were more common than exceptional in colonial situations. As Ivana Elbl reveals in her close study of the sexual order in the West African Portuguese outposts where there was little to no enforcement of Christian constraints or miscegenation prohibitions, a plurality of associations existed, from sexual license and coercion to the replication of conventional relationships through stable concubinage.[40] As a native of Florence, where since the fifteenth century Black slaves were a constant presence in the city, Carletti may have been acquainted with prevalent stereotypes about local elite white women seeking sexual contact with Black men, and Italian men having sexual relations with enslaved women.[41] While the former stereotype was a favorite topic of literary collections provoking readers' imagination and excitement,[42] the latter was a fact and common occurrence.[43] Thus, it is likely that the younger Carletti was acquainted with the nuances of interracial relations in his native Florence, and the anxieties they probably caused, such as threatening the customary social hierarchy within Italian society.

In the second Consideration, Francesco Carletti focuses on his own slave business. He gives details about the prices of slaves as well as the process of branding them "like cattle, horses, and sheep, with hot rods dipped in tallow candle ... on the chest or on an arm or on the backs (with symbols or numbers) so that the slave can be recognized," and he likens the entire purchase process to how people "buy a bunch of swine."[44] A few lines later in the same passage of this Consideration, Carletti also admits a certain crisis of conscience: "the branding process ... seems to me an inhuman traffic unworthy of a professed and pious Christian. No doubt is possible that it comes to making a profit out of men or, to say it more properly, out of human flesh and blood. And it is the more shameful if they have been baptized, for then, even if they are different in color and in the matter of worldly fortune, nevertheless they have the same souls, formed by the same Maker who formed ours."[45]

[37] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 5, 9–10. Here he remarks that the Portuguese bishop of Santiago was also a slave trader. At this point in his chronicle, Carletti uses the expression "Moorish" to refer to someone who is dark-skinned, and not necessarily a Muslim. "Moor" may also refer to the geographical origins of a non-white person.

[38] Ibid., 9; Elbl, "Men Without Wives," 72–3, notes that the offspring (both male and female) of a Portuguese father and African mother also enjoy inheritance rights if their mothers were not of slave status.

[39] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 9.

[40] Elbl, "Men Without Wives," 65–6, 69–71, 73; Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality*, 214, posits that among the African population there was little importance ascribed to whether a child was legitimate or not—she suggests that in the early modern era the continent was underpopulated, and hence, fertility was a constant concern among natives and colonists.

[41] Kate Lowe, "The Stereotyping of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe," in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, ed. T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 17–47; Steven A. Epstein, *Speaking of Slavery: Color, Ethnicity, and Human Bondage in Italy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001); Valentin Groebner, "The Carnal Knowing of a Coloured Body: Sleeping with Arabs and Blacks in the European Imagination, 1300–1550," in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 217–31.

[42] Groebner, "Carnal Knowledge," 227–8; Karina Feliciano Attar, "Dangerous Liaisons: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Renaissance Italian Novella," PhD diss., Columbia University, 2005.

[43] Evidence of the high numbers of illegitimate children born to Italian men and Black slave women originates in baptismal records. See Groebner, "Carnal Knowledge," 226. Female slave purchase documents indicate that the owners of slaves had the right to sexual contact with them. Refer to Epstein, *Speaking of Slavery*, 64–5, 83, 129–30, 135–6.

[44] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 13.

[45] Ibid. This passage, which conveys the attributes of someone with "humanity and sensitivity," as suggested by Antonino Forte, implies that Francesco Carletti was in reality against slave trading. Forte proposes that he

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The Carlettis acquired altogether 50 male and 25 female slaves at the price of 100 scudi each, plus paying per slave 25 scudi for a royal trade license, 16 scudi export permission, and 21 scudi carrying costs to Cartagena, as well as food expenses aboard ship.[46] They provide their purchased slaves with two meals a day, consisting of fat beans cooked in water with some oil and salt, and house the naked men and women in separate spaces aboard ship. Upon embarkation the males remained below decks, "packed next to one another in such a narrow space that when they wanted to turn from one side to the other they scarcely could do so."[47] The women "were in the open all over ship," but neither sex wore anything to cover "that part of the body which Original Sin has made seem more shameful than the other parts," although some of them, Carletti acknowledges, did rely on leather pieces, rags, or tree leaves to hide their genitals.[48] One may interpret Carletti's comments here about Black Africans' exhibiting their genitalia as characteristic of how Europeans differentiated themselves from Africans.[49] It is also noteworthy that the slave women Carletti bought for this passage did not feed his sexual craving for dark-skinned females about whom he confesses in his first Consideration—it would seem their physical attributes did not match those women with whom Portuguese or other white men coupled, and thus Carletti writes of them as merchandise which could be sold, traded, or exchanged for monetary gain.

The voyage to Colombia took thirty days, which for the most part Carletti found pleasant—less agreeable, however, was the daily routine of throwing overboard those slaves who had died because of disease or bad nutrition by eating raw fish.[50] The Carlettis lost seven of their own slaves due to these conditions, and of the remaining, many of them became "sick and half dead. We tried to restore them, not so much out of charity, it must be said, as not to lose their value and price."[51] Once in Cartagena, they also experienced further disappointment when they received only 180 scudi per slave, instead of the expected price of two to three hundred each.[52] Both father and son became ill in Cartagena and only in August 1594 began their journey to Nombre de Dios (Panama) from where, with the profits of selling Spanish merchandise they had purchased in Cartagena, they went to Panama City.[53] From there they took a ship to Lima, Peru, arriving in January 1595. At that time Lima was a major slave trading center which supplied labor for the Potosí silver mines (now located in Bolivia). The Carlettis benefitted once again from human trafficking, as they were able to sell four ill slaves to local Spaniards at great profit.[54] Surveying Lima's slave trade opportunities, the younger Carletti regrets that he was not able to bring all the slaves they had purchased earlier for sale in Peru. By

engaged in that occupation in service (perhaps out of filial piety) to his father. See the discussion in Forte, "Appendix: Francesco Carletti on Slavery and Oppression," in *Travels to Real and Imaginary Lands*, ed. G. Bertuccioli, 59–80. Despite Carletti's poignant misgivings about slaving here in this Consideration, it should be remembered that he composed these words in Florence some twelve years after his experience on Cape Verde.

[46] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 13–4. Throughout his chronicle, Carletti assesses the value of what he buys or sells in scudi. A scudo was a silver coin, first issued in 1551 under the reign of Charles V.

[47] Ibid., 15. On the mortality conditions of the Middle Passage, including the effects of "tight packing," see Newson and Minchin, *From Capture to Sale*, chapter 4, 101–35.

[48] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 14.

[49] Sergio Lussana, "'Furnisht with such members as are after a sort burthensome unto them': White Traveler Perceptions of Black Male Bodies and the Construction of Race, 1450–1730," *Gender & History* (forthcoming), argues that over time European men journeying in Africa took more interest in the physical and sexual attributes of Black African men.

[50] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 17.

[51] Ibid., 21.

[52] Ibid., 24.

[53] Ibid., 24–33.

[54] Ibid., 39.

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May 1595 he and his father make plans to go to Mexico where they intend to buy Spanish goods with the Peruvian silver they have accumulated, and thereafter to return to Lima and sell the Mexico-bought wares they meant to purchase, in regions outside that capital.[55]

This plan never materialized, because once they saw high-quality foreign textile products in Lima, which they realized originated in the cargo of silks imported there from China via the Philippines, as well as a vast array of Asian goods (including other highly valued Chinese textiles and porcelain as well as Japanese furnishings) in Mexico City, they decide to arrange passage from Acapulco to Manila. Still holding substantial cash in silver, they hoped to make arbitrage profits in Asia.[56] But the Manila galleon which sailed in March to Asia every year, arriving there in May, had restricted access only to those persons of Spanish heritage. Nevertheless, as on other occasions during their travels, this constraint proved no hindrance to the Carlettis and they were even able to arrange passage from Acapulco for themselves and shipment of their million scudi as well.[57] After sailing sixty-six days, they arrived at the Ladrones Islands (also known as the Mariana Islands) and from there made their way to Cavite and eventually Manila. The Carlettis now realized that the profits to be made in the export of Chinese textiles to New Spain were even greater than what they had estimated before their journey to Philippines.[58]

Manila was also an important market for the trans-Pacific slave trade. Human traffickers shipped people of various origins from East Africa, Portuguese India, East Asia, and the Muslim sultanates of Southeast Asia to the Philippines where they were bought and transported to Acapulco for sale in New Spain.[59] In his *Ragionamenti* Carletti makes no mention of that commerce. It may be that both father and son Carletti, after the disappointing results of their earlier speculation in slave commerce, had now opted to focus their entrepreneurial energies on importing Chinese and Japanese goods for export to New Spain. Although the younger Carletti did purchase slaves later while he was in Japan, the two men would no longer consider themselves slave merchants.

Francesco Carletti: The Purveyor of Male-Female Sexual Symmetry and the Dynamics of Sexuality in Asia

From this point in his journey, when he experiences his first direct observation of *palang*, Carletti's attention is drawn to gender relations in the Philippines, and eventually to that of the other Asian societies he visits. He communicates information about marriage practices, including dowry customs, inheritance laws, the absence of regard for female virginity before marriage, and significantly he writes about women's agency over their own

[55] Ibid., 48.

[56] Ibid., 56, 69.

[57] Ibid., 69–70. The Carlettis' exporting their cash earnings to Manila exemplified exactly what troubled the Spanish crown about the effects of American silver feeding the import of Chinese goods into the Philippines. As Timothy Brook writes: "The Spanish crown wanted American silver to flow east toward Spain to service Spanish consumption, not west to Manila in exchange for Chinese manufactures that were consumed in the Americas." See Brook, *The Price of Collapse: The Little Ice Age and the Fall of Ming China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2023), 93–7.

[58] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 82.

[59] Tatiana Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indios* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Cuauhtémoc Villamar, *Portuguese Merchants in the Manila Galleon System, 1565–1600* (London: Routledge, 2020); Stephanie Mawson, "Slavery, Conflict, and Empire in the Seventeenth-Century Philippines," in *Slavery and Bonded Labor in Asia, 1250–1900*, ed. Richard B. Allen (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 256–83; Josemaria Salutan Luengo, *A History of the Manila-Acapulco Slave Trade, 1565–1815* (Tubigon: Mater Dei, 1996).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000329 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sexuality.[60] Carletti's presence in the Philippines coincided with the ongoing endeavors of the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church to regulate the sexuality of both European overseas visitors and the Indigenous peoples they encountered.[61] The first Catholic missionaries to the Philippines had to combat animist religious traditions in which overtly sexual female shamans dominated spiritual rites, a situation which proved to be an uphill battle for the proselytizers.[62] It took more than a century after Magellan's arrival in 1521 in the Philippines for the Christian fathers to undermine female status and to convince men that women were evil agents bent on leading men astray. Let us look more closely at what Carletti witnessed in the Philippines and other locations in Asia about sexual relations between men and women during his sojourn.

The Philippines

Recalling his experiences in Manila, Carletti writes, with a certain engagement, in the *Ragionamenti*'s last section of the first Discourse, West Indies, about watching how Luzonese men and women enjoy the "pleasures of Venus."[63] Paying money to view by what means the local *bisaio* men "make a hole in their *membrum virile*," then place a lead stud from one side of the penis to the other, and finally insert a leaden star on top of the stud, Carletti assures his reader that what he reports is the truth.[64] He describes in detail the painful procedures men endured to modify their penises with the ultimate goal to increase the excitement of women during the act of sexual intercourse. He learns too that this "method of lustful pleasure" is also a way to prevent venereal disease as well as unwanted babies.[65]

In Manila Carletti is also struck by the appearance of the *bisaio* men who tattoo their entire bodies with geometric designs as well as representations of animals, plants, and the heavens, and otherwise remain naked, which he found "a beautiful and disquieting sight

[60] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 84–5. As a European man, Carletti would have been familiar with a number of taboos about sexual positions prohibited by Christian theology, which included "sex from behind" but also "woman-on-top." Marlisa Den Hartog writes in her study "Women on Top: Coital Positions and Gender Hierarchies in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Studies* 35:4 (2022), 638–57, that the norm in heterosexual relations then and there was the prioritization of the man's sexual pleasure. She argues that Nathalie Zemon Davis's famous publication "Women on Top" in her 1975 collection of essays *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* did not address sexual issues directly, and was essentially "a topos of cultural play in literature, art, and festivity" (640). For Den Hartog the matter of coital positions is central to understanding the place of gender inversion in Renaissance society, which she concludes was proscribed, according to theological principle on gender hierarchy, medical doctrine on female bodily inferiority, and codes of conduct for both male and female behavior. Although Carletti never uses the expression "women's agency" in his chronicle, he is aware, as expressed in his writing, of the difference between what he knows about heterosexual relationships in Europe—the regularity of monogamous marriage and its proscribed hierarchical conventions—and in contrast, what he observes in Asia with regard to the fluidity in relationships between men and women.

[61] Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality*, 225–7.

[62] Carolyn Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521–1685* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), xvii–xxi.

[63] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 83.

[64] Ibid., 83–84. Carletti employs the spelling *bisaios* for what is now commonly known as the Visayans, people who inhabit the Visaya Islands, one of the three main island groups in the Philippines. Visayans is the anglicized name of the *bisaios*. Although at this point in his chronicle he gives no information to explain his familiarity with *palang*, it is likely he was acquainted with Pigafetta's discussion of this matter in his work *First Voyage Around the World*, 58, as well as a number of accounts listed earlier in this paper. See Nocentelli, *Empires of Love*, 17–43.

[65] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 84. *Palang* was also probably considered a deterrence against sodomy. See Nocentelli, *Empires of Love*, 35–7. Refer also to Linda A. Newson, *Conquest and Pestilence in the Early Spanish Philippines* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 59–60.

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in the presence of their women."[66] In contrast, the *bisaio* women go about clothed but expose their legs and feet, which they adorn with bracelets composed of precious stones that correspond to their social status. They also decorate their left hands and compete among themselves to gain attention for their attractiveness to others. But Carletti did not appreciate that both men and women wore heavy earrings which deformed their ears,[67] and that both sexes painted their teeth with red varnish, while the wealthiest "gilded their teeth [in gold]."[68]

In her analysis of the women's social position in pre-Hispanic Philippine cultures, Brewer challenges earlier explanations of their powerful status. She objects to Anthony Reid's idea that women "were in a strong position ... in sexual matters" for its simplicity, and argues that *palang* (or what she calls *sagra*) along with other activities pivoting around sexual intercourse, including inheritance laws, the lack of value placed on virginity, and a relaxed acceptance of adultery, reflected the broad gender symmetry in power and authority that both men and women enjoyed in their daily lives.[69] Blanc-Szanton in her study of Spanish commentaries on *bisaio* sexual demeanor underlines their denouncement of the ease by which marriages could be dissolved, and in particular, that wives "on the slightest occasion abandoned husbands who displeased them," or that adultery was practiced by women with little or no punishment.[70] Carletti's ends his remarks about *bisaio* gender relations with a brief reference to the dowry the men must provide as a condition of marriage and the return of the dowry by the wife should she decide to leave her husband.[71]

Although both Carlettis had planned to return to New Spain after their Philippine visit, they once again faced obstacles. Aside from the illegality of their travelling on the Galleon to Acapulco, they were unable to procure a sufficient amount of Chinese and Japanese goods for trade because a fire had destroyed the *parian* (Manila's commercial neighborhood) where the merchandise was stored. In May 1597 the Carlettis decided to go to Japan to refurbish their supply of Asian goods, despite the Iberian set of regulations forbidding them to travel westwards.[72] In Manila they embarked with their silver bullion on a Japanese ship bound for Nagasaki and arrived there in June 1597.[73]

Japan

Carletti begins his report about Japan, which is the first Consideration in the second Discourse, East Indies, with disparaging remarks about the Spaniards in America, "they being changers, not to say destroyers, of everything."[74] The implication of his remark, made some nine years after he left the Philippines, is that during the rest of his visit

[66] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 85. See an illustration of these male body tattoos in the Boxer Codex collection: http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/metsnav/common/navigate.do?pn=116&size=screen&oid=VAB8326, "Pintados of the Visayas" (1595).

[67] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 85.

[68] Ibid., 86.

[69] Brewer, *Shamanism*, 31; Anthony Reid's remarks about penile adaptations are in his study *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450–1680: The Lands Below the Winds* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988), 1: 148–58.

[70] Cristina Blanc-Szanton, "Collision of Cultures: Historical Reformulations of Gender in the Lowland Visayas, Philippines," in *Power and Difference: Gender Island Southeast Asia*, ed. Jane Monnig Atkinson and Shelly Errington (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 345–84, and see especially 357–8.

[71] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 84.

[72] Brege, *Tuscany*, 125–6.

[73] On the close commercial relations between the Philippines, China, and Japan in the late sixteenth century, see Birgit Tremml-Werner, *Spain, China, and Japan in Manila, 1571–1644: Local Comparisons and Global Connections* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

[74] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 95.

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to Asia he experienced how local people maintained their indigenous customs, rites, and ceremonies without interference from outsiders.

Carletti's testimony about his stay in Japan where he remained about a year is both detailed and perceptive, and indicative of his openness to other cultures as well as his critique of them.[75] After debarking at Nagasaki the Carlettis went immediately to see "the spectacle" of the remains of twenty-six crucified Christians whose execution the Japanese leader Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) had ordered in February 1597.[76] The shock of this sight prompts the younger Carletti to discuss the nature of punishment in Japan, where those accused of crime can expect crucifixion, "even for the smallest things ... such as stealing a root or some other trifle," and where women with babies still nursing at their breasts were also crucified.[77] He also deliberates about the frequency by which both Japanese men and women commit suicide, slashing their bodies crosswise with a scimitar (a curved sword), the common occurrence of women aborting their unborn children, and the prevalence of wives complying with their husbands' directive to kill themselves.[78]

Carletti finds Japanese women to be very beautiful, and "reasonably white," but he complains that their eyes are tiny and their blackened teeth strange-looking—"just the opposite of us, as we want teeth of ivory white and golden hair such as is sung by the poets."[79] This remark about the color of their skin should be considered in the broader context of concurrent racial discourses, a subject which was at the time dominated by Africans and Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Japan, like China, was known to Europeans then as technologically advanced and militarily powerful.[80] Thus, these two East Asian countries were not believed to be inferior to Europeans, and the women deserving of the description "beautiful." It would take approximately another 135 years before Carolus Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (1735) posited the label *Homo asiaticus* as a single taxonomic group, and identified Asians as *fuscus* (dark).[81]

In subsequent comments about Japan, Carletti wavers between images of the country as both harsh and exotic. On the one hand, he is astonished by the severity of punishment for adultery, that is, a married woman having relations with a man who is not her husband. As Carletti reports in detail, the chastisement consists of the sex partners being bound with their hands behind their backs and taken in a wagon to the home of the husband. In the presence of the husband, the man's penis is cut off and placed on the head of the wayward wife while flesh from her vagina is removed, made into a garland and placed on the head of the male lover. Then they are paraded around town until they bleed to death.[82] On the other hand, Carletti considers Japan a land of unusual pleasantries,

[75] See Engelbert Jorissen, "Exotic and 'Strange' Images of Japan in European Texts in the Early 17th Century," *Bulletin of Portuguese-Japanese Studies* 4 (2002), 37–61, which on pages 44–9 analyses Carletti's observations about Japan.

[76] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 105; on page 120, Carletti estimates there were some 300,000 converted Christians. Carletti's first acquaintance with the presence of Christianity in Japan may have occurred already in 1585 when the Tenshō embassy (1583–1585) headed by the Japanese noble and convert Itō Mansho (1570–1612) visited Florence as part of its European mission tour. Carletti was twelve years old at the time, and probably had access to the many books and pamphlets published on the occasion of the embassy. On this printed matter, see Adriana Boscaro, *Sixteenth Century European Printed Works on the First Japanese Mission to Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 1973).

[77] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 106–7.

[78] Ibid., 125. One may ask if the Christian doctrine had any effect on the frequency of cruel punishment and suicide.

[79] Ibid., 126.

[80] Ibid., 114–5, 131. On Japan's relatively sophisticated weapon technology in the sixteenth century, and that of other Asian polities, see Rotem Kowner, *From White to Yellow: The Japanese in European Racial Thought, 1300–1735* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 119–20.

[81] Kowner, *From White to Yellow*, 278.

[82] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 126–7.

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especially with regard to food—he savors the locally grown fruits such as pears and oranges, as well as the delicious fish dishes prepared with the soy product miso, and served in lacquered red bowls with which he employs for the first time chopsticks.[83] He appreciates too the taste of powdered tea (*cha*) as well as rice wine (sake).[84] He also comments on the "delightful and beautiful houses" in which the Japanese live, and their unusual sleeping beds on mats made of rushes.[85]

Carletti's depiction of the cruel punishment Japanese adulterers suffer contrasts with his earlier account of sexual relations among Visayan men and women in which he emphasizes their erotic-sexual reciprocity, or what one may term *sexual symmetry* in heterosexual relations. Sexual symmetry refers to the phenomenon of a man's and a woman's passionate desire for each other being equal, and without discrimination into categories of active and passive partners.[86] It would seem that at this point in his travels Carletti was aware that the *palang* symbolized what variations there existed in Asia with regard to male-female sexual relations, and that not every society, including Japan, was permissive of sexual symmetry. Such understanding may have also affected about how he considered prostitution in Japan.

Carletti writes that the sex trade in Japan flourishes because families in general do not put much value on daughters, and those kinfolk in need of money frequently sell female offspring to traffickers.[87] This observation leads him to comment on how the Portuguese traders in Japan exploit girls and women from poor families. He reports that the Portuguese who come regularly from Macao for commerce and remain in Nagasaki for eight or nine months were in touch with Japanese agents who marketed young women, and sold them to these European merchants for their pleasure during their stay in Japan.[88] With the money they receive via the agent, the Japanese family can afford a dowry and the girls can marry eventually. As Carletti writes: "Many of the Portuguese find this Land of Cockaigne [in Italian, *cuccagna*] much to their liking—and what is better, it costs them but little, ... only three or four scudos, more or less, based on the time she stays with him."[89] Carletti also understands that the virginity of a bride is not a prerequisite of marriage and that women may enter marriage with or without their chastity intact. What is essential to contract a marriage in Japan is that the women have a dowry, and thus as Carletti writes in a condemning tone, such conditions sustain the Portuguese men's lust and ill behavior while in Japan.[90] But he is also reproachful of the "venereal

[83] Ibid., 108–11.

[84] Ibid., 100–1.

[85] Ibid., 122–3.

[86] For further information about sexual symmetry in European cultures, see David Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[87] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 127. On the history of human trafficking in Japan, see Maki Hidemasa, *Kinsei Nihon no jinshin baibai no keifu* (Studies on human trafficking in early modern Japan) (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1970). On female status in the Japanese family, see Haruko Wakita, "Marriage and Property in Premodern Japan from the Perspective of Women's History," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 10:1 (1984), 73–99.

[88] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 127–8. Information of the prostitution quarters in Nagasaki is discussed in Martha Chaikin, "'Unseasonable Winds of Love': A History of Prostitution and the Foreign Community in Early Modern Nagasaki," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 61 (2022), 1–33; and Yoko Matsui, "The Debt-Servitude of Prostitutes in Japan during the Edo Period, 1600–1868," in *Bonded Labour and Debt in the Indian Ocean World*, ed. Gwyn Campbell and Alessando Stanzani (London: Routledge, 2013), 173–85. Carletti writes on page 112 of his memoir about money equivalents—one Florentine scudo was the equivalent of eleven Spanish reales, or one Chinese tael. Brook, *Price of Collapse*, 171, estimates one Chinese tael in the sixteenth century was the equivalent of 37.3 grams of silver.

[89] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 128.

[90] Ibid.

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pleasures" in which the Japanese, including the gentry, indulge: "[They] perform the most abominable acts openly, like animals, not caring that they are seen."[91]

Despite his moralistic pronouncements about Portuguese men's behavior toward young Japanese women and his earlier comments expressing his remorse about his slave trading activities in Cape Verde, Carletti sees no wrong in his purchasing Japanese slaves.[92] The Carlettis' stay in Japan occurred during the last years of the Imjin Waeran (1592–1598) when Japan's infamous war with Korea and China was still taking place, and thousands of war prisoners were brought as slaves to Nagasaki. Without any tone of guilt or pity, Francesco Carletti reports he bought five men and women, at twelve scudi each, had them baptized, and set them free when he reached Goa.[93] No doubt Carletti was aware of the Lusitanian slave market in Japan before the onset of the Imjin Waeran—Portuguese evangelical activity and commercial exploitation in Japan were known in Europe—and thus, in the long term, Carletti ignored these factors into what he deemed a wider-ranging impression of Japan and its business opportunities: "I say that Japan is one of the most beautiful and best and most suitable regions in the world for making profit by voyaging from one place to another … and in that way one would very quickly make incredible wealth, and that because of their need of every sort of manufacture and their abundance of silver as of the provisions for living, as I already have said."[94]

Macao

The Carlettis' next stop was Macao, for which they were not allowed to book passage on a Portuguese ship, and so they sailed on a Japanese vessel. Carletti's account of Macao, the second part of the second Discourse, East Indies, is the longest Consideration in his entire oeuvre, but given the exhaustive details he offers, especially about geography and local customs, it is likely he did not relate this information from memory and instead utilized texts available to him in Florence.

From the time of their arrival in Macao, he and his father encountered difficulties: the Portuguese authorities arrested them for having violated the immigration laws. Before they were imprisoned, however, they gave to the Jesuits who had met their ship the hundreds of thousands of scudi they had carried with them from Japan for safe-keeping. The Jesuits also interceded on behalf of the Carlettis: after three days in custody, paying a fine of 2,000 scudi and promising to go to Goa as soon as possible, the father and son began their stay at Macao.[95] In July 1598 Antonio died, and the younger Carletti, then only twenty-five years old, received sympathetic treatment from both the Jesuits and the Portuguese authorities, who ultimately allowed him to continue his Macao sojourn

[91] Ibid. As Den Hartog, "Women on Top," 639, writes, in Renaissance Italy having sex from behind for heterosexual couples was the most contemptible position according to the sexual principles of Christian theology. See too Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality*, 151–4 on same-sex relations and gender transgressions in Counter-Reformation Europe.

[92] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 13, 115.

[93] Ibid., 115. But one of the slaves whom he calls Antonio remained with Carletti when he departed Goa, accompanied him to Florence, and thereafter went to Rome. Controversy exists about whether this Antonio is the same person known as Antonio Corea whom the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) drew and which became the basis of his famous 1617 painting "The Man in Korean Costume." See Stephanie Schrader, "The Many Identities of Rubens's 'Man in Korean Costume': New Perspectives on Old Interpretations," in *Looking East: Rubens's Encounter with Asia*, ed. S. Schrader (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2013), 1–23.

[94] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 132. Since the 1530s when silver mines were first discovered in Japan, leading daimyō (magnates) profited from Japan's trade networks within Asia. Carletti was proposing that Florentine shipping firms become an international supplier to Japan. This scheme may have been his motive during the time he was in Japan to learn the Japanese language, about which he writes in *My Voyage*, 132–5.

[95] Brege, *Tuscany*, 128.

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without the worry of immediate deportation.[96] At this point Carletti began a friendship with another Florentine Italian merchant and long-time Macao resident, Orazio Neretti, who had close knowledge of the intricacies of Portugal's agreement with local Chinese authorities in Guangdong to allow the Europeans to ship Chinese silk to Nagasaki in exchange for Japanese silver which they conveyed to Canton (Guangzhou).[97] Carletti also came under the influence of the Jesuit Lazzaro Cattaneo (1560–1640) whose own Chinese linguistic skills allowed him to contribute to Matteo Ricci's Chinese-Portuguese dictionary project.[98] Such connections helped Carletti gain insight into the intricacies of China, including some comprehension of the language.[99]

With the help of Cattaneo, Carletti was able to present in his Macao Consideration eight detailed pages about China's geography, including names and characteristics of major cities, provinces, rivers, mountains, and flora and fauna, and even information about Cochin China and Annam.[100] Cattaneo had accessed the famous map/atlas *Guang yutu* (Enlarged territorial atlas) by the Chinese scholar Luo Hongxian (1504–64) that was published posthumously in 1596.[101] Carletti arranged for a copy of this Chinese work be sent to Florence, where it remains today in the National Library of Florence.[102] This Macao Consideration, like that about Japan, is full of details on local mores, although Carletti does not specify what is particular to Macao and the Portuguese residents there. Instead, one finds a great deal of information about China in general—he writes about a variety of subjects, including alchemy, astrology, divination, payments and pricing, measurements and dimensions, food culture, language and entertainment, and not least the complexities of the silk-for-silver trade between Macao/Canton and Nagasaki. To purchase silk, Carletti had to offer cash to Portuguese "deputies" who travelled from Macao to Canton in Chinese vessels and would negotiate with the Chinese merchants there the purchase price of the silk. Carletti estimates that deputies carried some 250,000 to 300,000 scudi in reales, and after examining the merchandise and settling the agreed amounts in goods and payment, they returned one day later to Macao to distribute the merchandise to those who had prepaid.[103] In general, Carletti makes clear his admiration of China, not only for its

[96] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 142.

[97] Ibid., 142–3. On the politics of the Portuguese involvement in the Macao–Nagasaki trading route, see Reinier Hesselink, "The *Capitães Mores* of the Japan Voyage: A Group Portrait," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 9:1 (2012), 1–41. For a history of how the local authorities in Guangzhou established the silk for silver trade and the role of human trafficking therein, see Harriet Zurndorfer, "Human Trafficking and Piracy in Early Modern East Asia: Maritime Challenges to the Ming Dynasty Economy, 1370–1565," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 65:4 (2023), 908–31.

[98] On Lazzaro Cattaneo, see Elisabetta Colla, "16th Century Japan and Macao Described by Francesco Carletti (1573?–1636)," *Bulletin of Portuguese Japanese Studies* 17 (2008), 113–44. Cattaneo was also responsible for the building of Macao's St. Paul's College. Because he employed Japanese laborers in the construction work, the Chinese authorities accused him of building a "colossal fort," and from then onward Cattaneo encountered difficulties during his residency in China. See Tang Kaijian, *Setting Off from Macau: Essays on Jesuit History during the Ming and Qing Dynasties* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 106–8.

[99] Scattered through this Consideration on Macao, Carletti demonstrates his knowledge of writing Chinese characters, and his attempts to Romanize their sounds. For more information on how Carletti managed to inform himself about the Japanese and Chinese languages, see Bussotti, "Francesco Carletti," 527–30; and Bertuccioli, "Appendix: Foreign Words Appearing in the First Two Chapters of the Second Discourse [East Indies]," in Bertuccioli, *Travels to Real and Imaginary Lands*, 18–31.

[100] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 154–63.

[101] Luo's work is in the form of an atlas, with more than forty separate maps employing a grid system, and also includes a number of cartographic legends—twenty-four in all—for mountains, rivers, boundaries, roads, and other landmarks. On this Chinese geographical source, see Bussotti, "Francesco Carletti," 530–1.

[102] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 154.

[103] Ibid., 144–5. Carletti spent 90 Chinese taels per silk item, which he indicates was the maximum price. Later he finds he can buy the same amount of silk for 70 taels.

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inventions with regard to printing and gunpowder but also for the Chinese pursuit of knowledge in the mechanical and political arts, as well as in moral philosophy, mathematics, and medicine.[104] He also expresses his approval of the idea that the Chinese "king" (whom Carletti does not call "emperor") consults with his "educated nobles."[105]

And like his exposition about Japan, Carletti steeps himself in the social practices of China: arranged marriage and concubinage, slavery, infanticide, clothing and hair styles, and the restrictions placed upon women, including foot-binding.[106] He underlines that Chinese people hold their mothers in high respect and obey her wishes.[107] He stresses too that Chinese men have as many concubines as they can afford,[108] and that even poor men with little means purchase concubines from slave owners; children born of such unions belong legally to the slave owner's wife.[109] The poor, he writes, are wont to commit infanticide, especially female infants, or to sell children for a few ducats. He found the Chinese women very beautiful, especially their hair, but the Chinese men he thought were "not very handsome of face."[110] Chinese men, he observes, "are so jealous of these women that they never allow them to see anyone, not even their close relatives."[111] Carletti attributes the wide-spread practice of foot-binding to Chinese men's inclination to guard women from human contact outside the home. Such observations tally with what other Europeans, mainly Christian missionaries, wrote about Ming China.[112]

In July 1599 Carletti witnessed a two-day typhoon which caused much damage in Macao, including to vessels berthed in the harbor.[113] He writes about a fleet of ships from Siam which was destroyed by the storm, and the surviving ship occupants including both men and women. From them he hears the story of the Siam king who had his concubines fried in oil because they had been amusing themselves with certain fruits. These women were used to having pleasure with men whom they instructed to have inserted "rattles" (or bells) into their penises to enhance their own gratification, a custom the women brought from the kingdom of Pegu, which the Siamese king had destroyed.[114] In his account Carletti highlights how the queen of Pegu "had ordered that each man must have stitched between the skin and the flesh of his member two or three rattles as large as hazelnuts."[115] It is at this point in his recollections that Carletti makes one of the most important statements of his observations on Asian practices of male genital modification: "And that this is an invention by women is proved particularly by the fact that women are the masters of placing and adjusting these rattles."[116] He then reminds his reader that the Venetian traveler Niccolò dei Conti in his travel narrative also wrote about the old women in Pegu who sold these "rattles," which were of gold, silver, or gilded

[104] Ibid., 163–4.
[105] Ibid., 167.
[106] Ibid., 176–8.
[107] Ibid., 167.
[108] Ibid., 176.
[109] Ibid., 177.
[110] Ibid., 178.
[111] Ibid.
[112] For a history of Western attitudes toward foot-binding in China, see Patricia Ebrey, "Gender and Sinology: Shifting Interpretations of Footbinding, 1300–1890, *Late Imperial China* 20:2 (1999), 1–34.
[113] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 180.
[114] Ibid., 181.
[115] Ibid., 181–2. Phillips, *Before Orientalism*, 140, cites Poggio's account of Burmese men's penis modifications based on Conti's description: "The members of some men stretch way down their legs so that when they walk they ring out and may be heard."
[116] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 182.

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copper. The old women, Conti noted, performed the necessary procedure "to insert them between the flesh and skin."[117]

Carletti's mention of Conti's familiarity with Burmese bells is the prelude to his own purchase of "this diabolic invention," samples of which he bought in Macao and had shipped to Europe. Remarkably, the otherwise observant Carletti makes no mention of how such rattles, called *mianling* (Burmese bells) in Chinese, had become popular as aphrodisiacs in Ming China. Not knowing the Chinese language and relying for the most part on the Jesuits' understanding of local culture, Carletti would not have been exposed to the role that these bells played in the sexual lives of Chinese men and women, and in particular that of the elite.[118] It is also doubtful that Carletti's Jesuit interlocutors would have helped inform him of the sexual pleasures that Chinese men and women enjoyed, as depicted in late Ming novels and short stories.[119] These literary sources form a block of evidence explaining how the penis bells were employed in a Chinese setting: women inserted the bells into their vaginas before sexual intercourse, thus freeing men from penile disfigurement and defying Confucian teachings admonishing against bodily mutilation, while offering women increased sexual excitement.[120] In sum, *mianling* was a tool to enhance sexual symmetry in Chinese erotic practices.

Carletti's ignorance of the special role *mianling* had in the lives of the Chinese elite is not the only missing information in his chronicle about Macao. By the time he arrived there, some 2,500 Japanese slaves bought and brought by the Portuguese were situated on the isthmus, a state of affairs not mentioned in his *Ragionamenti*.[121] Nor does Carletti discuss the intricacies of living conditions on Macao where an estimated ten thousand residents composed largely of *casados* or *vezinhos*—Portuguese married men who were heads of households that included male slaves (strong-armed Black men), female slaves (usually of Asian origin, mainly Chinese), as well as their Chinese wives and children, and Chinese concubines and their offspring—resided.[122] Given Macao's relatively limited living space, it seems unlikely that Carletti would have missed evidence of these persons and their residential circumstances.

These lacunae in Carletti's Macao Consideration may be explained by his caution to avoid controversy with the Portuguese overseer. Given Duke Ferdinando's desire to

[117] Ibid., 182–3. In the same passage, Carletti also mentions another Florentine explorer, Amerigo Vespucci (1454–1512), who visited Brazil. From there, Carletti reports, Vespucci wrote in one of his letters to a Florentine official Piero Soderini "that the women of that country, being extremely concupiscent, give the men a certain herb juice to drink so as to increase the size of their members, and that if that juice does not succeed, they had the member bitten or stung by poisonous animals."

[118] Discussions about the appearance and use of *mianling* may be found in several sets of writings by well-respected Chinese literati, including Shen Defu (1578–1642) whose text *Wanli yehuo bian* (Gathered and edited in the country of the Wanli Era [1572–1620]) indicated the high prices people paid for this aphrodisiac. Another well-known literatus Xie Zhaozhe (1567–1624) in his encyclopedic compendium *Wu za zu* (Five-part intricately woven tapestry) also discussed the value of *mianling* as sexual boosters. Both Shen Defu and Xie Zhaozhe trace the source of *mianling* to Burma from where they were transported overland into southwest China. See Sun, "Burmese Bells," 252–5.

[119] Ibid., 258, lists eight well-known late Ming novels and short story collections in which *mianling* are frequently mentioned as integral to the characters' sexual pleasures.

[120] In the famous late Ming novel *Jin Ping Mei* (The plum in the golden vase), the main protagonist Ximen Qing possesses a set of *mianling* (costing four to five silver taels, a hefty sum in Chinese money) which he shares with one of his concubines. See the discussion in Keith McMahon, "Wives, Concubines, Prostitutes, and Other Men's Wives: The Portrayal of Sex in *The Plum in the Golden Vase*," in *Approaches to Teaching* The Plum in the Golden Vase, ed. Andrew Schonebaum (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2022), 253–62.

[121] Tang, *Setting Off from Macao*, 118.

[122] Charles R. Boxer, "Macao as a Religious and Commercial Entrepôt in the 16th and 17th Centuries," *Acta Asiatica* 26 (1974), 65–90.

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expand the Tuscan government's options to ship its material culture all over the globe, Carletti wrote here prudently. As the Iberian Empire controlled the worldwide sea lanes, it was advisable for the Florentine government to eschew any hullabaloo that might prevent the development of the sovereign's plans.

Malacca to Goa

Carletti departed Macao in December 1599 and arrived in Malacca in January 1600—the voyage took three weeks, followed a route passing the coasts of Cochin China (coastal Vietnam), Champa (Annam), Cambodia, Siam and Patani, and finally reaching the Malay Peninsula (Aurea Chersonesso).[123] Interestingly, Carletti begins his recollections here with his disapproval of shipboard arrangements: under the leadership of the Portuguese captain, members of the mixed crew composed of Arab, Indian, Turkish, and Bengali sailors were accompanied by "wives or concubines," which according to Carletti, "as a sight is no less indecent than filthy and unseemly, and which causes such confusions as it is impossible to make clear."[124] He rationalizes that "this evil [that] causes no little scandal" cannot be avoided because the crew would not otherwise work on these ships in the first place.[125] Carletti's remarks here may be read as yet one more instance of his wish to attest his Christian conscience to his sovereign when he had been in an environment that afforded acceptance of diverse behaviors and ethics not akin to his own religious principles.

But several pages further in this third Consideration of the second Discourse, Carletti takes the opportunity to express his pleasure about eating a native Malaccan fruit, the rose apple (*Syzygium jambos*). His description of his culinary experience is highly suggestive. He likens the fruit's appearance to a woman's complexion:

> For this fruit is of a pink color mixed with milky white and it has very lustrous skin, as delicate as could be desired. It is of a size like that of our eggplant and has an odor like that of a rose, so that if one eats it without peeling it, its juice seems to be flavored with rose water. And it delights the taste, being of a bittersweetness that never sates or nauseates one even if one devotes an entire day to eating it. And touching it also provides not a little delight, for one cannot touch anything more delicate or softer. And as for looking at it, there is no other mixture of white and pink which brings more delight to the eyes or is more like the flesh of a beautiful woman's face—more likely made up, as most of them are in our time, than natural. So that while enjoying this fruit and discarding a seed that is inside it, one comes to the extreme delight of four of our senses at one and the same time.[126]

The sexual innuendos of this passage contrast with the contents of the next few pages which analyze in precise detail Malacca's spice trade and the great profits the Portuguese administrators gain in their dealings with local and translocal merchants such as Javanese, Moluccans, and Indians.[127] Thus, the reader of the *Ragionamenti*'s relatively brief third Consideration is witness to diverse components of Carletti's disposition: his religious ethics, his voyeurism, and not least, his passion for commerce.

In March Carletti set sail for Goa—his voyage bypassed the Nicobar Islands, and then coasted along Sumatra, and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) whose gems, cinnamon, and elephants he

[123] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 186.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid., 189.
[127] Ibid., 190–3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000329 Published online by Cambridge University Press

discusses with fervor and excitement. After the ship reached Cochin, he arrived finally in Goa.[128]

Goa

Carletti spent twenty-one months on Goa—the longest stopover of his entire journey outside Europe, and the subject of the fourth Consideration of the East Indies. Here he focuses on the resident Portuguese and their love relations, as well as the intimacies of the local people's sexual lives. His descriptions of the local women include much detail about their appearance—the clothes and jewelry they wear—and not least their scrupulous hygiene habits: "Their cleanliness, in this they truly shame and outdistance all other women of the world of whatever nation."[129] He praises them for washing themselves after "taking care of their natural needs—using their left hand only," and after sexual intercourse, as well as bathing daily and perfuming themselves before going to sleep. Carletti also conveys the significance of women chewing what he calls *betre* (but which he probably means the betel leaf), a substance, he claims, when masticated smells like tarragon and incites sexual desire.[130] In this Consideration Carletti makes known his appreciation of the physical beauty of *mestiças* (*mestizze*), that is, women born to an Indian mother and a European father, and his personal preference for women with Bengali mothers and Portuguese fathers.[131] He generously applauds their desirability, and contrasts them with European women whose imperfections include "sagging breasts" after they have given birth.[132] He also engages in voyeurism in describing their appearance: "In their houses … they are naked from the waist up, as one sees all of the shoulders, the breasts, and the arms through the transparent bodice—and from the waist down one sees but little less, as they display the outlines of the entire body, which is made up of very well-proportioned members."[133]

Goa was the capital of the Portuguese Asia, the Estado da India. By the early seventeenth century, Goa had a population of circa 75,000 including some 1,500 Portuguese men formally married to *mestiças*, 20,000 Hindus, and the rest local Christians, Africans, and various other peoples.[134] At any given time, however, there were relatively few married Portuguese men, despite Viceroy Alfonso de Albuquerque (1453–1515) in 1510 promoting a policy of interracial marriage with "light-skinned" women who converted to Christianity. Over the long term the strategy failed—the Indian families who became Christian did not want their daughters to marry with European or *mestiço* men, and Portuguese males generally preferred to consort with slave girls rather than enter holy matrimony.[135] The population counted many slaves—a rich woman might have over three hundred slaves, while an unmarried artisan could possess as many as twenty.[136]

[128] Ibid., 196–200.

[129] Ibid., 216.

[130] Ibid., 216–7.

[131] Ibid., 208–9. He also notes that in Goa, Chinese, Japanese, Javanese, Moluccan, Bengali, and Peguese women are available and consort with European men.

[132] Ibid., 212.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Michael Pearson, *The Portuguese in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 93. See too Zoltán Biederman, "The Portuguese Estado da India (Empire in Asia)," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[135] Charles R. Boxer, *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire 1415–1825* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 64–5, 76–7. On the problems with Albuquerque's marriage policy, see Lauren Benton, *They Called It Peace: Worlds of Imperial Violence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2024), 75–81.

[136] Pearson, *The Portuguese*, 95–6.

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Sexual morality was very complex, and while by contemporaneous European standards, Goa experienced concupiscence on a grand scale, with Portuguese men known to have extensive harems of concubines, many of whom were in fact baptized local women, as clerical hostility to this situation weakened over time.[137]

Carletti sketches a rather free and loose way of sexual life in Portuguese Goa. For example, it was common for persons of slave status to sell on the streets both sugar conserves of fruits, which he describes as "very delicate and good," and themselves. He comments that the slave fruit vendors "are no less beautiful than they are fervent and loving with themselves as merchandise, so they rarely sell one without selling the other."[138] During the hot weather months of May, June, July, and August, the Portuguese ship crews and accompanying soldiers whom he deems "unmarried gentlemen with no belongings but cloak and sword" engage their "lubricity and idleness" with *mestiças*.[139] And for the first time in his chronicle, Carletti admits himself to having experienced women from around the world, and it is the Indian *mestiças* he finds the most desirable.[140]

He conveys in detail the lives of well-off resident Portuguese men who do marry *mestiças* in lavish ceremonies conducted by a priest in church.[141] These couples, Carletti writes, live in homes which are grand and comfortable; they are furnished mainly by Chinese-made items, including tables, cabinets, and chests gilded in gold, and plates made of Chinese porcelain. Dozens of household servants attend to their everyday needs and wants. When outside their homes, they are supported by an entourage of armed slaves for protection against bandits, and other indentured servants driving off the flies and holding parasols to shade their masters.[142] Carletti praises the intensity of love these interracial couples share, but acknowledges that married women frequently take a lover for whom she gives herself as a "slave."[143] If she is caught by her husband, the consequences are dire. Her husband may kill her, and he fears no punishment from Portuguese law while his wife "dies unjustly."[144] Indian wives are also known, Carletti adds, to be terribly jealous of any other paramours their lover/husband may have. In some cases, he writes, they will poison him. Also if the wife's husband wants to leave her, she will also try to kill him.[145]

What Carletti sees here is women's agency, a trait which he realizes in India may have deadly consequences. Women who poison their husbands, he reports, are subject to the Indian "law that wives should be burned alive with the bodies of their dead husbands, so that then the women would not cause their husbands' death."[146] Nevertheless, Carletti believes that "the propensity of Indian women to sacrifice themselves for love is so great as to be "more bestial than human,"[147] and therefore the threat of death does not eradicate a woman's desire for her paramour. But Carletti also discerns that some women take precautions in order not to be caught betraying their partners. They

[137] Ibid., 101.
[138] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 208.
[139] Ibid., 210.
[140] Ibid., 210–1.
[141] Ibid., 208.
[142] Ibid., 206–7.
[143] Ibid., 209.
[144] Ibid., 214.
[145] Ibid., 209.
[146] Ibid., 209–10. He is referring here to the practice of sati (widow burning). For a history of this custom, see Phillips, *Before Orientalism*, 118–21. See too Pompa Banerjee, *Burning Women: Widows, Witches, and Early Modern European Travelers in India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 211–3, which in a chronological chart lists all the early modern travelers who wrote about sati.
[147] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 214.

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make use of the palanquin—a portable litter, carried by two or four male slaves, in which the passenger sat "with the thighs and legs extended, as if on a bed, with cushions at the back and rugs beneath … and covered with a mat that protects them from sun and rain, and also so they may not be seen."[148] Travelling in a palanquin afforded the woman on a mission to meet her secret lover a certain anonymity, and therefore it was a safety net from the intrusion of a jealous husband or other lover. But the palanquin was also symbolic of the hybridity and fluidity of contact zones, and as Nocentelli also argues, representative of the ease by which erotic promiscuity transpired in the early modern era.[149]

The sexual excesses and covetousness of mixed-race couples are in stark contrast to the local people's marital habits, according to Carletti. He meets many native merchants who visit Goa for trade, and he is impressed by their honesty, reserve, and their morality.[150] These men "do not permit the taking of more than one wife,"[151] and moreover, "they keep their wives delightfully, highly adored with jewels of all kinds and with gold, with which some of them are so weighed down as to be immobilized."[152] He adds that these men do not mix with persons not of their religion, but however respectful Carletti holds these Indian men, he writes "that there is no other way but baptism for anyone wishing to enjoy the glory of God in the other life."[153] Here again, one sees how Carletti carries his religious ethics with him—tolerant of others, for the most part, but convinced of his own righteousness.

Concluding Remarks

Carletti's travel record is an astonishing blend of observations, emotions, and surprises. The author reveals his fortitude, his disappointments, and his pleasures unashamedly before his reader. One wonders what his sovereign Ferdinando thought about Carletti's oral testimony, and in particular, how he reacted to the details of his subject's account of his sexual escapades as spectator but also as partaker, if he had in fact disclosed them to him at that time. It is not easy to generalize about Carletti, as his memoir divulges a diversity of geographical locations, a wide variety of cultures, and differences in gender regimes. Nevertheless, one may try to interpret his life and writings according to the "three Cs": contradiction, complexity, and controversy. These three Cs originate in the three other Cs that dominate his chronicle: Christianity, commerce, and cosmopolitanism.

For Carletti, Christianity was a firm tenet in his life, and yet despite his religious belief, his behavior on certain occasions defied its teachings. The first episode in his chronicle that signals contradictory thoughts because of his piety was his reaction to the branding of the slaves he had bought—he admits his "confusion of conscience" and condemns the practice of men "making a profit out of men …, out of human flesh and blood" (First Discourse, Second Consideration). And yet, throughout his memoir, Carletti is consistent about his pursuit of monetary gain. He does not renounce his profession ever. Moreover, as the last episodes of *My Voyage* attest, he is tenacious about getting back from the Dutch

[148] Ibid., 213.

[149] Nocentelli, *Empires of Love*, 74–5. Nira Wickramasinghe shows in her book *Slave in a Palanquin: Colonial Servitude and Resistance in Sri Lanka* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 101–2, that in nineteenth-century British-ruled Ceylon, slaves and other low-class persons were not allowed to avail themselves of a palanquin, which by then was a status symbol for the island's rulers and the rich.

[150] Carletti, *My Voyage*, 205–6.

[151] Ibid., 206.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000329 Published online by Cambridge University Press

authorities what was stolen from him. He does not forget or forgive those whom he believes have done him wrong.

The business of trafficking slaves forces Carletti to consider racial differences aboard a ship that was hardly accommodating to the bodily privacy of the human cargo. He condemns the slaves for their immodesty, and yet he himself provides no items by which they can cover their genitalia. The implication of this contrary is that white men thought that naked Black men and women were culturally inferior, and deserved the contempt they suffered. But beauty could also invalidate this disapproval—Carletti was physically attracted to the many Black women he saw partnered with Portuguese men. What one discovers here is the complexity of Carletti's slave commerce—the Black women he buys for shipment to Spanish America were simply merchandise and were treated that way accordingly, and thus not representative of the beauties he himself might want to acquire for his own indulgence and pleasure.

The trope of naked *bisaio* men in the presence of clothed *bisaio* women which Carletti found "disquieting" during his interaction with them reveals the limitations of Carletti's cosmopolitanism. While he appreciates the women's "flirtatious meekness" and their "great artfulness," he downgrades the preferences both sexes possess for heavy earrings that stretch their ears to the point of deformity, and for red, varnished teeth. Carletti is no neutral eyewitness: he cannot understand why these people find satisfaction in these bodily presentations. Naked men covered in tattoos alongside women with unnatural teeth color did not conform to Carletti's beauty criteria—here the reader may conclude that, however much the Italian was open to viewing foreign cultures and peoples, he could not forget all his own European aesthetic values.

Similarly, while in Japan he appreciates the beauty of the women, who for him are "reasonably white," though he does not like their tiny eyes or their blackened teeth which he believes distract from their attractiveness. For him the frequency by which Japanese people commit suicide may have been startling, but he does not connect this phenomenon to the popularity of Christianity among Japanese people. At the same time Carletti's comments about the "bestiality" of Japanese sexual mores, and in particular that of its gentry class, remind one again of his adherence to particular Christian principles about sexuality. The complexity of Carletti's views are striking: on the one hand, his censure of Portuguese exploitation of Japanese familial poverty, and on the other hand, his general indifference to his procurement of slaves in Japan. Perhaps their relatively low purchase price influenced his decision to acquire them. Commerce was never far from his mind.

In Macao, Carletti is at first absorbed into the Jesuits' exposition of Chinese culture: a country ruled by a "king" who is in constant consultation with his government ministers, and a populace with great respect for their elders. But once he realizes that the acquisition of concubines is not restricted by status, and that even the poorest of men may access these women, Carletti begins to discuss the darker sides of Chinese life: the regularity of female infanticide, women's restricted physical mobility because of foot-binding, and, not least, the frequency and legality of married men's polygamy with women of slave status. This negative portrayal of Chinese family and social life may have blurred Carletti's perception of sexual enjoyment in China. Although he is aware that Burmese "rattles" are imported into China for sale and consumption, he does not elaborate about how the "rattles" are employed in Chinese sexual relations, nor does he refer to Chinese sexual symmetry in his exposé of *mianling.* While he does mention in his Macao Consideration Vespucci's warning about the consequences of Brazilian women's desire for "large members," Carletti does not link the availability of "rattles" in China with the sexual behavior of its inhabitants. Nevertheless, one may suppose such

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000329 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ambiguity on Carletti's part may be due more to his limited Chinese language skills than to any effort of his part to deny his own interest in the inhabitants' sexual practices.

The complexities and contradictions between Carletti's adherence to the Christian faith and his penchant for sexual enjoyment and voyeurism emerge clearly in his report about his journey to Malacca and his description of the rose apple. On the one hand, he condemns the crew for its "filthy … offensive" habit of taking their female partners with them aboard ship, and on the other hand, he has no problem with titillating his readers about female intimacy. One may interpret his condemnation of men and women having easy mixed contact aboard ship as a rebuke of those not practicing Christian values while his loquacious portrayal of the fruit was an act of self-promotion meant to convince readers of his sophistication and knowledge of female anatomy.

Carletti ends his stay in Goa in the same way he begins his journey in Cape Verde, with praise and admiration for the physical beauty of the women he observes and for the depth of their emotions toward the men they love. In these locations and the other places he visits, he conveys the power of sexual desire, that is, he demonstrates "the sexual interface" of Europe's expansion overseas in the early modern era. Carletti was not alone in writing about this phenomenon, but the wide geographical scope of his voyage and the detail of his reporting make his personal experience an unusual chapter in the history of global travel writing. By the time he visits Goa, interracial romance no longer seems to him so exceptional, as he relates openly about the delights of the sexual pleasures he enjoys there. Such discourses contrast to the serious tone in his discussions of how and why the *palang* and the Burmese bells have such popularity in Asian societies. He does not denigrate men who acquiesce to the insertion of studs or "rattles." Instead, one is left with the impression he remains in awe that men's submission to these practices is integral to their goal of reaching sexual symmetry in their physical relations with women. Having grown up in a European society where gender inversion was taboo and the paterfamilias standard in family life, Carletti discovered an alternative to heterosexual patriarchy. Unfortunately it would take centuries before the rest of the world would realize this option and situate the significance of sexual symmetry in the history of sexual behavior.

Acknowledgements. I thank Caterina Falcomer for her constant support and interest in my research and writing. I am also grateful to Jeroen Duindam, Fan Lin, and Yuki Morita for useful advice about relevant sources and stimulating discussions about Carletti. Also, I thank the reviewers of this article for their valuable and insightful suggestions for revision.

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Cite this article: Zurndorfer H (2025). Human Trafficking, Beautiful Women, the Land of the Cockaigne, and Burmese Bells: The Significance of the Sexual Reminiscences of the Florentine Merchant Francesco Carletti (1573–1636) in *Ragionamenti del mio viaggio intorno al mondo* [Chronicles of My Voyage Around the World]. *Itinerario* **49**, 18–42. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115324000329