

Cervantes, Cyprus, and the Sublime Porte: Literary Representations of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Jew Solomon Ashkenazi

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The aim of this study is to explore, with particular attention given to Ottoman Jewish subjects, Cervantes' recreations of the political and economic realities of eastern Mediterranean societies in *El amante liberal* (*AL*) and *La gran sultana* (*GS*).¹ Ottmar Hegyi (1998) thoroughly details and challenges the different treatment that the aforementioned works have been given by critics in comparison to that given to Cervantes' North African captivity plays, *El trato de Argel* (*TA*) and *Los baños de Argel* (*BA*).² Although the merits of Hegyi's observation connecting *AL* and *GS* will be discussed later in this paper, it is necessary to first establish that these two works are also bound by their chronological and geographical settings, both of which are related to seminal historical events that, although they occurred in the 1570s, were still relevant to the 17th-century Spanish public. In the case of *AL*, the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus figures prominently, while in *GS*, Ottoman relations with Persia and Spain, as well as Spain's military operations in Flanders, are constantly referenced. More immediately relevant to Ottoman Jews,³ however, were the social, political and economic environments of Cyprus and Istanbul that gave them extensive freedom of movement and access to the sultan's court. The Jew Solomon Ashkenazi, who served not only as the Venetian *Bailo*'s physician in Istanbul and then as an advisor to the Ottoman Grand Vizier Sokollu, but who was also active in Mediterranean commerce, took advantage of those favorable circumstances. As a result, Ashkenazi should be considered the real-life embodiment of Cervantes' literary Jewish characters in *AL* and *GS*.

Before detailing the affairs of Solomon Ashkenazi, it is imperative to clarify the historical context that defines *AL*, specifically as it relates to Venetian and Ottoman Jews. The Venetian government's ambivalent attitudes toward and relationships with its Jewish subjects in its colonies, for example, help explain the social situation on Cyprus in the years immediately preceding Cervantes' *AL*. When Mahamut responds to Ricardo's opening lament, the renegade is reinforcing what the Spanish reader already believed about the loss of Cyprus (i.e., the negative implications of Muslim expansion). Echoing Catholic sentiments,⁴ Mahamut proclaims the following: "Bien tendrás que llorar [...] si en esas contemplaciones entras; porque los que vieron habrá dos años a esta nombrada y rica isla de Chipre en su tranquilidad y sosiego, gozando sus moradores en ella de todo aquello que la felicidad humana puede conceder a los hombres" (*AL* I, 138). Mahamut's recollection of an idyllic Cypriot life prior to the 1570 Ottoman invasion does not, however, reflect

¹ All citations from Cervantes' works are from editions indicated in "Works Cited".

² "Se solía considerar [*TA*, *BA*] como realistas, nacidas de experiencias personales, y [*GS*, *AL*] como fantásticas, imaginarias, o italianizantes. Sobre todo, la crítica tendía a tratar la *GS* con poca benevolencia, poniendo en duda la competencia histórica de Cervantes" (Hegyi, "Cervantes y la Turquía otomana", 21).

³ I utilize the term "Ottoman Jews" to broadly refer to Jews living under Ottoman rule. Distinctions between different Jewish communities (e.g., Romaniot versus Sephardic Jewry) will be made when necessary.

⁴ It is important to distinguish, especially in the eastern Mediterranean, between "Catholic", "Greek Orthodox", and "Christian", with the latter being the most general term applicable when it is not necessary to specify. As Greene reminds us, "[a]lthough the Crusades had begun as a Christian attack on the Muslim world, the Latin capture of Constantinople in 1204 left a legacy of bitterness between eastern and western Christendom that was, at time, even stronger than the antipathy felt by Muslims and Christians toward each other. Now [in the late 16th and throughout the 17th century], at last, the Ottomans were driving the hated Latins out of the Greek world" (Greene 6).

the condition of the Jews of Cyprus, especially in the decade before the war. First, it should be made clear that the city chosen as the setting for *AL*, Nicosia, did not have a Jewish community during Venetian rule (1489-1571) (Arbel 1979, 24).⁵ Nicosia was a hostile city for Jews, who had to survive pogroms, for example, but Famagusta “had a heterogeneous population, including several ethnic and religious minorities such as Copts, Armenians, Syrians and Maronites, that may have created a more hospitable atmosphere for the Jews who decided to establish themselves there” (Arbel 1979, 24). Second, the Jews of Famagusta dedicated themselves to moneylending, usually to the poor, and to more locally-centered trade (i.e., trade that was not international in scale) (Arbel 1979, 25). Therefore, the center of Jewish life on Cyprus was Famagusta, and the experience of the Jewish community there embodied the cycle of tolerance and persecution that Jews experienced in Venetian colonies.

As Venetian subjects, the Jews of Famagusta were subject to the same restrictions that their brethren in Venice and other colonies were, including the obligatory wearing of a yellow hat (Arbel 1979, 26). Venetian laws until the mid-16th century unequivocally placed Jews in an inferior position to Catholics, denied the former the right to own property, and eventually mandated the creation of a separate living quarter, the *ghetto*, in Venice proper (Paudice 115).⁶ Despite these restrictions and sporadic anti-Jewish violence,⁷ the Jewish population of Famagusta increased to 150-200 in the early 1560s (1.5-2% of the city’s population) due to relatively stable conditions on the island: “Until the clouds of war reached Cyprus, Famagusta offered the Jews a safe retreat in times of difficulties, good economic opportunities, personal security and easy access to and from other Jewish centers in the eastern Mediterranean region” (Arbel 1979, 30, 31, 34).

The death of an Ottoman sultan created a situation of instability and uncertainty, not only within the Empire but also without, as peace treaties with foreign nations had to be renewed. Arbel demonstrates the effect that this transition period had on Venice, especially with regard to Cyprus: “Ottoman rulers liked to open their reigns with some conquest, and Selīm’s intention to seize Venetian Cyprus had been known even before his accession. Now disturbing rumours about his bellicose intentions began to reach Venice” (Arbel 1995, 55; see also Jacobs 71). From the Ottoman point of view, Cyprus had become a base for corsairs who seized Muslim pilgrims on their way to the Holy Cities of Islam and valuable tax revenue from Egypt en route to Istanbul, and only “by taking Cyprus could this threat to the practice of the faith and to the integrity of the Empire be eliminated” (Hess 15). The Ottoman and Venetian rhetoric, coupled with a seemingly imminent Ottoman attack, made the Jews’ situation not only in Cyprus but also in Venice even more precarious. Rozen observes that “Jews were considered foreigners no matter where they lived, whether in the Italian states or in the [Ottoman] Empire”, and an impending military conflict between Christian and Muslim blocs invariably led to the resuscitation of the stereotype of the disloyal Jew (Rozen 124). I disagree with Bonacich’s assertion that middlemen minorities are disloyal by nature to their sovereign nations,⁸ yet she is correct in stating that middlemen

⁵ In 1554, the governor of Cyprus “explicitly reported that there were no Jews to be found in Nicosia”, and Elia of Pesaro, a Jewish traveller in Cyprus in 1563, writes of only one community (that of Famagusta) (Arbel 1979, 24).

⁶ For a more comprehensive study of the origins of the Italian *ghetto*, see Benjamin Ravid (1975a). The Jews of Famagusta, like the Jews of Crete, also endured ignominious everyday restrictions such as the one that required them to purchase, at whatever price set by the vendor, any goods that they touched at a market (Starr, especially 70).

⁷ In 1554, Venetian officials in Famagusta burned copies of the Talmud, which had been banned throughout Italy that year, along with about fifty other books that had been printed in Hebrew (Arbel 1979, 28; 1995, 95).

⁸ Later in this study I will discuss numerous examples of simultaneous Jewish loyalty to Venice and the Ottoman Empire, especially during times of war. One Jew in particular, Solomon Ashkenazi, demonstrates a dual loyalty to both powers, risking his life in order to facilitate the signing of a peace treaty in 1573.

minorities “are accused of having ‘dual loyalties’, a familiar cry against the Jews, [who are also] seen as parasites” (Bonacich 591).

The ascension of Selīm II in 1566 and subsequent rise in tensions between the Venetians and Ottomans threatened the peaceful state of affairs in the eastern Mediterranean and in turn worsened the Jews’ situation in Famagusta under Venetian rule. The accusations circulating in Venice of a Jewish fifth column acting against the interests of the Republic of St. Mark were by no means unprecedented, as Jewish loyalty to Venice had also been questioned during the 1537-1540 Veneto-Ottoman war.⁹ The geopolitical circumstances of the late 1560s were distinct, however, and Selīm II’s known desire to seize Cyprus unintentionally created a dangerous situation for the Jewish population of Famagusta, who invariably were looked upon with suspicion by Venetian authorities and seen as a threat in the event of an Ottoman invasion of the island (Arbel 1979, 28–29). Yet, curiously enough, the July 26, 1568 order expelling Jews from Cyprus only applied to *non-native* Famagustan Jews, indicating that Jews were not treated monolithically. Arbel originally viewed the 1568 expulsion decree in the following light: “On the one hand, when the Venetians acted against the Jews out of religious motivations, their directives applied to all the Jews living under the banner of St. Mark [...] On the other hand, the expulsion of the ‘foreign’ Jews from Famagusta was directly related to the episode of the alleged plot; *it was mainly an act of prudence guided by considerations of security*” (Arbel 1979, 29–30; emphasis mine). Arbel later modified his own claim, de-emphasizing the role pragmatic politics played and stressing the Venetian authorities’ anti-Jewish attitude (Arbel 1995, 62). Although the genuine motivations of the Venetian authorities’ 1568 expulsion remain arguable, that decree’s connection to the more extensive 1570 order of arrest and confiscation is unquestionable.

After the impounding of Venetian ships in Istanbul in January 1570, Venice decided to retaliate with similar measures against Ottoman interests in its own harbors. On March 6, 1570, the Venetian Senate voted overwhelmingly (167 to 5 with 14 abstentions) to detain all “‘Turks, Levantine Jews and other Turkish subjects and their goods, cash and credit’ everywhere in the Venetian state” (Ravid 1982, 41).¹⁰ Not all Ottoman merchants were subject to the Venetian arrest order, however, as Ottoman Christians were exempt from imprisonment and confiscations. Ravid argues that “the Jewish merchants were interned together with the Ottoman Turkish merchants, not because of their Jewish religion but on account of their Ottoman nationality”, and he seems to foreshadow Arbel’s (1979) first assessment of the situation (Ravid 1975b, 276). If political concerns were in fact paramount, then Ottoman Christians should have been considered just as much of a security risk on account of their Ottoman nationality. Yet Ottoman Christians were exempt from such measures, making claims of political motivation dubious while simultaneously strengthening Arbel’s (1995) modified argument that religious factors were at the root of Venetian decrees (see also Rozen 138; Arbel 2001, 85).

The outbreak of war and the Ottoman attack on Cyprus in the summer of 1570 worsened even further the already delicate situation in which Jewish (and Muslim) merchants found themselves in Venice and its territories. During the early months of the war, the Venetian fleet “operated against foreign vessels which transported Jews, and goods belonging to Jews, across the

⁹ Throughout the 16th century, “Venetians made cynical use of the image of the treacherous Jew [...who was] depicted not as one of the foreigners in the city which hosted various ethnic and religious minorities, but as the enemy of Christianity, a fifth column in the midst of Venetian society [...] Turks and Jews, they were the enemies. The former used armies and galleys, the latter the weapons of perfidy, an attribute which the deep-rooted Christian myth viewed as an outstanding characteristic of Jewish nature” (Arbel 1995, 146, 64).

¹⁰ This arrest order was subsequently forwarded to Venice’s overseas colonies, and, in the case of Corfu, all Jews were suspected of treason and prevented from leaving the island in August 1570 (Arbel 1995, 65, 68).

Adriatic, with the pretext that ‘Jews had been the instigators of the war’” (Arbel 1995, 67–68). One of Selīm II’s advisors, the Jew Don Joseph Nassí, was considered by the Venetians to be the personification of Jewish disloyalty and the instigator of the Cyprus war. In fact, a booklet entitled “Dialogue between Selīm and Joseph the Jew”, which began circulating in 1571, “reflects the opinion, common not only in the ruling class, but throughout Venetian society, that Nassí had a central role in persuading the Sultan to launch the war which finally wrested from Venice its biggest and richest overseas colony” (Arbel 1995, 57).¹¹ A common sentiment among Venetians was that the Cyprus war was “una guerra ebraica [...e] il Doge disse che ‘la guerra era stata loro mossa dal Turco per spie et mali uffici fatti da hebrei’” (Pullan 281 [Nunziatura di Venezia, IX, 292, 295, 368 // 17, 24 giugno, 14 ottobre 1570]). On December 18, 1571, the Venetian authorities expelled all Jews, without exception, from the territories of the *Serenissima*. Unlike the 1568 Famagustan decree of expulsion and the 1570 order of arrest and confiscation in Venice, the 1571 decree applied to all Jews, thereby revealing the Venetian authorities’ religious, rather than political, motivations.¹² This, then, is the hostile and dangerous environment in which Ottoman Jewish merchants, such as the anonymous trader in *AL*, and Venetian Jewish subjects in Istanbul, such as Solomon Ashkenazi, not only survived, but also in which many ultimately thrived.

Venice’s reaction to those two seminal events of 1571 (i.e., expelling its Jews after the loss of Cyprus and victory at Lepanto) is merely one example of how Christian nations were forced to adjust to a Mediterranean in which Cyprus was now under Ottoman dominion. Hegyi utilizes 16th-century contemporary accounts to argue that, “as in the wake of the Turkish conquest of Constantinople (1453), European public opinion could not psychologically come to terms with the loss of Cyprus either. The Turks were regarded as usurpers of the territories conquered by them, and ideas to ‘liberate’ them persisted, even if the half-hearted and ill-conceived attempts to do so failed to materialize” (1992, 221, 223). Although displaced somewhat by the importance in the Catholic world of the victory at Lepanto, Cyprus still remained in the forefront of the 17th-century Spanish public’s conscience, as reflected by continual references in the works of authors such as Cervantes and Lope de Vega. In the *Captive’s Tale*, Ruy Pérez references “la famosa isla de Chipre, que estaba debajo del dominio del Veneciano: y pérdida lamentable y desdichada” (I, 39, 476),¹³ while the protagonist in *Guzmán el Bravo* similarly recounts the Ottoman takeover of Cyprus and the Catholic response: “La cristiandad, alborotada toda con la braveza de Selín, cuyas vitorias no refiero, que no son mi propósito, determinó oponerse al enemigo común” (*Guzmán el Bravo* 299–300). Although we can never know for sure Cervantes’ true motivations for setting *AL* in Cyprus, it is clear that more than forty years after the Ottoman conquest of the island, Cyprus was still relevant to Spanish society: “the Cyprus question was kept alive in the minds of western Christianity. Such an atmosphere would give added relevance to Cervantes’ *AL* for contemporary

¹¹ The role of Don Joseph Nassí in eastern Mediterranean politics and commerce, his place within Mediterranean Jewry, and his possible involvement in the Cyprus war is far too complex to be dealt with in this study (see İnalçik 10; Jennings 223). For our purposes, it suffices to establish that Venice blamed Nassí for the loss of Cyprus.

¹² “Since the Majesty of the Lord God has granted to all Christendom and especially to this Republic so fortunate and outstanding a victory over the Turk by the defeat of his fleet, it is appropriate to show some sign of gratitude towards Jesus Christ our blessed defender and protector by making a demonstration against those who are enemies of his holy faith, as are the Jews [...] Therefore, in the name of the Holy Spirit, for the honor of God and in no interest of the state and private individuals, *all of the Jews of whatever rank, status, sex or position are to leave this city* at the end of the two year period of grace which is granted to them by their charter” (Ravid 1982, 42–43 [ASV, Senate, Terra, 185r–v]; emphasis mine).

¹³ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*. Luis Andrés Murillo ed. Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1978. All citations of this text will follow the following format (part, chapter, page).

readers, in whose perception the story would become associated with events in the here and now” (Hegyí 1992, 224).¹⁴

While it has been argued that *AL* is not historical in nature (Eisenberg), García Cárcel succinctly states that “la literatura no tiene por qué ser la representación de la historia” (García Cárcel 19). Nevertheless, I agree with Hegyí when he concludes that “Cervantes achieves a surprising degree of actualization in this love-story [*AL*], presenting it in a historical setting and a geographic milieu familiar to educated contemporaries” (Hegyí 1992, 216). In light of the fact that Nicosia lacked a Jewish community until 1571 and that the Jewish population of Cyprus was not drawn to international commerce, the arrival of the anonymous Jewish merchant, coming from North Africa with Leonisa and his cargo of textiles, would appear to be a fantastic literary creation of Cervantes. Jennings documents, however, the profound demographic and professional changes that affected the Jewish population of Cyprus immediately following the Ottoman conquest of the island: “Although Jews may have been somehow restricted to Magosa [Famagusta] under the Venetians, and they do not appear in survey of 1572, the judicial registers mention them in a village, also having a tax farm, and being in long distance trade. A small number lived in Lefkoşa [Nicosia]” (Jennings 164). Jews took advantage of their new-found freedom by relocating to the capital and engaging in mercantile enterprises from which they had been previously been excluded, a fact that Jennings highlights by detailing the business dealings of prominent Jewish merchants who lived in Nicosia during the early years of Ottoman rule (Jennings 143, 145).¹⁵

Therefore, I would argue that the Jewish merchant’s appearance in Nicosia accurately reflects the ameliorated situation of the Jewish residents of Cyprus and Jewish traders in general that was a direct result of Ottoman expansion and maritime protection. In addition, three other aspects of *AL* faithfully represent the historical reality of that era: the anonymous Jewish merchant’s role as middleman in a war-torn Mediterranean, his goods (including a highly-coveted female slave), and his ability to dictate the ship’s course. One of the arguments used to discount the realism of *AL*, as well as of *GS*, is the fact that Cervantes was never in Cyprus nor Istanbul. The multicultural environment of Cyprus, however, and the fact that Algiers and Cyprus were part of the same Ottoman commonwealth, in which administrative standards were applied to both entities, would indicate that on the whole they were more similar than distinct. Although the question of Cervantes’ sources will be discussed further when *GS* is analyzed, “a careful reading of [*AL*] in juxtaposition with contemporary knowledge about Cyprus strongly suggests that Cervantes made a *deliberate effort* to introduce local colour into his portrayal of Cyprus, not explainable solely on the basis of his permanence in Algiers”, further underscoring his unique approach to representing the Muslim world (Hegyí 1992, 216; emphasis mine).¹⁶

In a previous paper (Gordon) I claimed that Cervantes’ representation of the anonymous Jewish merchant in *AL* was verisimilar, as I focused on the latter’s role as commercial intermediary between Christians and Muslims. I slightly modified Johnson’s analysis of Marginalist Economic Theory in the 16th-century Mediterranean corsair economy to argue that the Jewish merchant took

¹⁴ Hegyí is also of the opinion that while “the conquest of Cyprus by the Ottomans is not part of the plot, such references provide a temporal framework for the story, linking it to history, thereby enhancing its credibility” (Hegyí, *Cervantes and the Turks*, 222).

¹⁵ By the first decade of the 17th century, the Jewish population of Nicosia had become large and stable enough to also financially support housing for its destitute co-religionists (Jennings 55).

¹⁶ Cervantes’ estimate of 500 Janissaries on Cyprus, for example, is in line with historical sources. A glaring omission in *AL*, and ironically a reason why this work could be considered ahistorical, is the absence of any characters of Spanish nationality. *AL* is Cervantes’ only story in which Spaniards do not appear (Hegyí, *Cervantes and the Turks*, 223, 244).

advantage of the economic reality not just for monetary gain but also to maintain his identity (i.e., his Judaism) (Johnson 144). Clamurro depicts Mahamut as the indispensable intermediary who crosses borders, moving between worlds, because of the material opportunities offered by the Ottoman system (Clamurro 197). Yet in order to take advantage of *el sueño turco*, Mahamut must renounce one identity and assume another; on the other hand, the anonymous Jewish merchant can succeed in the Muslim world without having to apostatize, avoiding not only a personal conflict, but also the social ramifications that accompanied repudiating one's faith.¹⁷ The one aspect of my original argument that I would correct, however, is my assertion that the situation of Jewish merchants was precarious, mostly as a result of their minority status. I failed to distinguish between Jewish merchants sailing under the banner of the Republic of St. Mark, for example, and those who traded under the auspices of the Ottoman Empire.

I have already enumerated the hardships that Jewish merchants suffered in Venice and its territories leading up to and during the 1570 Veneto-Ottoman war, yet it is necessary to contrast that situation with the one enjoyed by Ottoman Jewish merchants during that same period in the larger Mediterranean basin. The level of the Ottoman Empire's interest in and benevolence toward European Jewry in the 16th century had no precedent in the history of Islam (İnalçik 3). Ray observes that "one of the most fascinating consequences of Jewish settlement in Ottoman lands was the way in which their status as Ottoman subjects altered their relationship to Christian Europe" (Ray 55; see also Goffman). The protection of Jewish merchants by the Ottoman Empire, and the subsequent predicament in which western European powers found themselves, can best be illustrated by Veneto-Ottoman relations in the 16th century. Foreigners, and explicitly Jews, were tolerated in Venice as merchants in the early modern period, but trade activities there were well-regulated, with the goal of maintaining the prominence of local Venetian merchants.¹⁸ Jewish merchants in Venice began to participate more in international commerce, despite the restrictions in place, as a result of the 1540 Veneto-Ottoman peace treaty. Negotiating from a position of strength, "the Ottoman state anticipated that its protection of foreign subjects would result in reciprocal protection of Ottoman subjects in foreign lands" (Rozen 128). While Jewish merchants had been technically trading under Ottoman protection for decades, only in the mid-16th century had their participation in international commerce reached a level of such importance that the Ottoman government would risk alienating its Venetian trading partners in order to protect them. One of the unintended consequences of the 1540 peace treaty, for example, was an increased Jewish role in international trade: "When the Venetians accepted the Capitulations, they never imagined that Jews might exploit them to their advantage and gain certain rights" (Rozen 137). In fact, after 1541, a significant portion of Venice's most lucrative trade was either controlled or strongly influenced by a religious minority, the Jews, who had previously been vigilantly excluded from such dealings (Arbel 1989, 48; Greene 142).

Venice's hand was also forced decades later when Uskok pirates were at the height of their terror in the Adriatic Sea, a shipping lane that was nominally under Venetian control. Not only did Venice sign the 1573 peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire from a position of weakness, but the *Serenissima* was also forced to take responsibility for corsair attacks against Ottoman shipping,

¹⁷ For a more detailed account of the societal implications for renegades, see Hutchinson, especially 41-46.

¹⁸ "International maritime trade became the privilege of a limited group of Venetian patricians and citizens. Trade with the Levant (i.e. with Greece, Cyprus, Crete, Anatolia and the Black Sea, Egypt and Syria) always received special attention in Venetian commercial policy and practice, and the Republic was vigilant in its exclusion of foreigners from participation in the trade with these areas" (Arbel 1989, 39). In contrast, no such restrictive policies existed under the Ottomans (Greene 10).

even when Jews were involved: “Whenever Jews were captured and their merchandise confiscated by these pirates [Uskoks], a whole mechanism of combined Jewish and Ottoman pressure started to function in the Turkish capital, to the great embarrassment of the Venetians, who were not always able to prevent this piratical activity” (Arbel 1989, 51; see also Rozen 136). Despite decades of action and intervention by the Ottoman Empire in order to protect its Jewish merchants, Venetian authorities continued to protest the application of Ottoman law to that religious minority. The Venetian Ambassador to Istanbul in the 1560s, believing that Jews as a group were innately inferior, “insisted that the Sultan’s agreements with foreign countries were designed to protect his subjects and were never meant to protect the Jews. We have already seen that in reality things were different, and the Ottomans reacted with all seriousness to violations of agreements even when the injured parties were Jewish” (Rozen 137).

The cases of Ḥayyim Saruq and Solomon Ashkenazi best illustrate the complex nature of Veneto-Ottoman relations in the 1560s and 1570s, while also simultaneously providing real-life templates for Cervantes’ fictional Jewish merchant in *AL*. It is not clear with which Jewish community Saruq identified, but it is known that he moved to Venice in 1560 and maintained business dealings throughout the decade with Aaron di Segura, a prominent member of one of the most powerful Jewish families in Istanbul (Arbel 1995, 96, 99). Although the details of Saruq’s bankruptcy do not concern us here, the Venetian reaction of impounding his merchandise that was destined for Segura in Istanbul does.¹⁹ By confiscating Saruq’s goods, the Venetian authorities were acting legally and within their authority to compel Saruq to met his financial obligations to his Venetian creditors; the Ottoman authorities, however, claimed that both Saruq and Segura were commercial agents of the sultan (Arbel 1995, 115). We have already seen that Ottoman intervention to protect its Jewish subjects in trade and from piracy was steadfast, but “when the interests of people close to the Sultan’s court were not respected, Ottoman intervention was forceful” (Rozen 137).²⁰ Arbel documents how Ottoman officials took advantage of Venice’s tenuous position by falsifying claims of ownership or patronage (in exchange for a percentage of the recovered merchandise) of a Jewish merchant’s goods that were confiscated by Venetian authorities (Arbel 2001, 85).

While the scale of the diplomatic crisis that the arrest of Saruq and the confiscation of his goods provoked was exceptional, similar crises were not uncommon in the second half of the 16th century, and Saruq as an Ottoman Jewish merchant should certainly be considered fairly typical. Mantran believes that one of the main factors contributing to the rise of Jewish intermediaries was the “inaccessibility of the Ottoman government [that] favored the creation of middlemen who had an interest in the development of foreign trade in the ports of the empire” (Mantran 130). As has been demonstrated, until the first half of the 16th century, local Venetian merchants were fairly successful in retaining their privileged status when it came to the lucrative international trade, yet in times of war, they turned to Jewish intermediaries (Mantran 131). Hostilities between the Ottoman Empire and Venice during the 1537-1540 war prevented Venetian merchants from trading openly with the Levant, so Jewish merchants filled the vacuum and took possession of a

¹⁹ For a more thorough analysis of Ḥayyim Saruq’s business dealings, see “The Pandora Box of Ḥayyim Saruq’s Bankruptcy” in Arbel 1995, 95-144.

²⁰ Dursteler summarizes the Venetian catch-22: “Involvement in trade with Ottoman officials could be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, their commerce was greatly desired; yet, direct involvement in facilitating this trade had the potential to open a Pandora’s box of requests for special treatment, tax exemptions, priority in loading goods on ships with limited space, trade in contraband goods, avoidance of customs duties, and especially Venetian liability for damages incurred in transit” (Dursteler 122).

significant portion of that trade (Arbel 1987, 165).²¹ Therefore, it is quite reasonable to believe that in similar circumstances (i.e., the 1570-1573 Veneto-Ottoman war) the anonymous Jewish merchant in *AL* would be en route to the Sublime Porte with luxurious goods, both material and human.

Before the addition of Leonisa, the Jewish merchant's cargo consists principally of textiles. In her recounting of her adventures to Ricardo, Leonisa describes her transfer to the Jewish merchant: "Venía un judío, riquísimo mercader, y toda la mercancía del bajel, o más, era suya; era de barraganas [a certain type of cloth] y alquiceles [a Moorish garment], y de otras cosas de Berbería se llevaban a Levante" (*AL* I, 172).²² The Jewish merchant significantly increases the value of his already luxurious merchandise through his acquisition of Leonisa, desired by all and, according to Ricardo, "la más hermosa mujer que había en toda Sicilia [...y] era la de más perfecta hermosura que tuvo la edad pasada, tiene la presente y espera tener la que está por venir" (*AL* I, 142). In his study about Jewish slave owners in Istanbul, Ben-Naeh laments that "where the [Ottoman archival] documents leave us in difficulty is that many references to Jews buying slaves do not specify whether they bought them for personal use or for resale" (Ben-Naeh 320).²³ In the case of the anonymous Jewish merchant in *AL*, however, we know that the answer is both. After unsuccessfully attempting to have sexual relations with Leonisa, the Jewish merchant decides to take advantage of the *residencia* in Cyprus, where the presence of multiple Ottoman high-ranking officials creates a seller's market, in order to maximize her profitability (*AL* I, 172). The anonymous Jewish merchant's decision to sail to Cyprus could also have been influenced by Cyprus' reputation as a center of the Mediterranean slave trade (Jennings 7).

There does not appear to be a need to increase Leonisa's desirability, given Ricardo's description and the reactions of male characters toward her throughout the work, yet the Jewish merchant chooses to present her in an extravagant dress. The narrator recounts in hyperbolic language her entrance into the tent at the *residencia*:

[El judío] traía de la mano a una mujer vestida en hábito berberisco, tan bien aderezada y compuesta, que no lo pudiera estar tan bien la más rica mora de Fez ni de Marruecos [...] Venía cubierto el rostro con tafetán carmesí; por las gargantas de los pies que se descubrían, parecían dos carcajes [...] al parecer de puro oro; y en los brazos, que asimismo por una camisa de cendal delgado se descubrían o traslucían, traía otros carcajes de oro sembrados de muchas perlas; en resolución, en cuanto el traje, ella venía rica y gallardamente aderezada. (*AL* I, 157)

Cervantes' seemingly exaggerated description of the sale of one female slave begs the following question: was such a scene in the Mediterranean in the late 16th century realistic? Focusing on the dress itself, Hegyi answers in the affirmative: "Although the reader may feel himself transposed into the magic world of *Thousand and One Nights*, thrilled by Cervantes' enthusiastic description

²¹ Arbel observes that "Jews contributed to keep the commerce between Venice and Ottoman lands going through indirect channels even when the two states were conducting military operations against each other" ("Jews in International Trade", 95).

²² Contemporary sources attest to the Jewish dominance in the textile trade and the power they wielded as a result: "The official representatives of the Republic in the Turkish capital reiterated time and again during the 1550's and 1560's that Jewish merchants completely dominated the supply of wool, cloth and camlets, and that the Venetian merchants in Istanbul were unable to acquire these products and export them unless willing to comply with the conditions imposed on them by these Jewish businessmen" (Arbel 1989, 48; see also Ravid 1992, 272).

²³ Although Jewish male ownership of non-Jewish female slaves presents myriad problems for rabbinic authorities, as their interactions contradict Orthodox Jewish law, there was a "gap between rabbinic rhetoric ideals and the dynamic daily existence of Jews from all social strata" (Ben-Naeh 315).

of Leonisa's dress [...] Cervantes had more than a superficial notion of the varieties of dress found in Islamic lands and the commercial transactions involving cloth and other textile products in the Mediterranean" (Hegyí 1992, 239). Luttikhuizen also argues in favor of a verisimilar depiction, yet places more emphasis on the bright colors, dyes and exotic textiles, which were in vogue in Britain and Continental Europe at the time: "Es en este contexto que ha de entender por qué el *shador* que lleva Leonisa llamó tan especialmente la atención [...] El judío, como buen comerciante y buen conocedor de los gustos orientales, pidió una gran suma por el vestido [...] De todos modos, lo que aquí más suscita la atención es el color, no el precio del vestido" (Luttikhuizen 824).²⁴

In addition, the Jewish merchant's decision to adorn Leonisa with dresses and jewelry accurately reflects a common practice of that era. Although by presenting Leonisa in that manner the Jewish merchant transgresses one of the cardinal rules of slave-selling, as that practice was strictly forbidden, he is simultaneously following the accepted cultural norm of breaking the aforementioned rule (Barrio Gozalo 98). Finally, the fact that a Jew would own an exceptionally beautiful female slave like Leonisa, especially during wartime, is attested to in written documents of that period. Ben-Naeh not only details the purchase by Jews of female slaves acquired during the 1570-1573 Veneto-Ottoman war, but he also cites early 17th-century Salonican rabbinic *responsa* (i.e., Jewish judicial rulings) that discuss the Ottoman ban against Jews owning female slaves, as well as the rationale behind that prohibition (there was a widespread belief that the Jews' female slaves were of a higher quality than those in the royal palace) (Ben-Naeh 323, 321).

The descriptions referring to the anonymous Jewish merchant's geographic route also indicate that Cervantes' work was in line with historical reality. The merchant's port of departure is not explicitly stated in the text, yet it is probable that it is either Algiers or Tunis, especially given the quality of his merchandise and the fact that they pass the island of Pantelleria en route to Tripoli. After dropping off the shipwrecked Turks in Tripoli, the Jewish merchant plans to continue on to Chios, yet news of the *residencia* in Cyprus forces him to reconsider his route. Before analyzing the importance of the Jewish merchant's decision-making, it is worth citing Hegyí's observations about geography in *AL*:

Even if Cyprus is a long stretch from Chios, there is nothing in the geographical details here that could not be reconciled with reality. The fact that the merchant can determine the ship's route means that he is not a mere passenger, but, if not the owner of the vessel, at least in a position that allows him to give instructions to the crew. Does this episode reflect Mediterranean reality? It certainly does. (Hegyí 1992, 241)

Furthermore, the attention to detail throughout the work of the innumerable topographic points of reference underscores the realism of *AL*. For example, Ricardo makes clear that he was brought to "Trípól de Berbería" (not to be confused with "Trípól de Siria"), while Mahamut correctly locates Muhammad's tomb in Medina (Hegyí 1992, 227, 232).²⁵

The fact that the Jewish merchant can change course and set sail for Cyprus instead of Chios indicates that he is either the owner of the vessel or a well-connected associate of the owner. Thus we must again ask ourselves if *AL* accurately depicts the Mediterranean in that era or whether Cervantes let his imagination run wild. The two major impediments to Jewish ownership or

²⁴ Luttikhuizen is referring to the extensive critical attention that Leonisa's dress has garnered due to its seemingly excessive price (1,000 *escudos*), especially when compared to Cervantes' own ransom (500 *escudos*). In addition, the narrator of *AL* makes the observation that, when the dress was sold, "les pareció a todos que el judío anduvo corto en el precio que pidió" (*AL* I, 160).

²⁵ "Cervantes accuracy in attributing Muhammad's tomb to Medina should not be taken for granted, given the errors one often finds in western sources in this regard, some of which assume that it was in Mecca" (Hegyí, *Cervantes and the Turks*, 232; see *AL* I, 162).

command of ships were personal religious restrictions (e.g., working on the Sabbath) and external political factors (e.g., being able to legally own ships and participate in international trade). We have already established that a significant portion of 16th-century Ottoman Jewish merchants disregarded Jewish law concerning female slaves and that the Ottoman Empire's legal protections provided a unique haven for Jews in the economic realm. Therefore, it is more than reasonable to conclude that the Jewish merchant was more than just a mere trader, and as Dursteler clarifies, Jews were not solely middlemen in commercial transactions: "While it is generally maintained that Jews were the primary intermediaries in the Levantine trade, in the Venetian sources they appear to have been more involved in their own trade" (Dursteler 131).

With regard to Jewish shipowners, they began to comprise a stable subclass of Jewish entrepreneurs in the middle of the 16th century, which not surprisingly coincided with their rise in legal and social status within the Ottoman Empire (Arbel 1995, 184). We have already met one of those shipowners, Ḥayyim Saruq, whose bankruptcy and subsequent loss of goods through confiscation heightened Veneto-Ottoman tensions in the 1560s. Another Jewish shipowner, Solomon Ashkenazi, the same man who eventually mediated the peace to end hostilities in 1573, continued operating a commercial vessel in the Mediterranean throughout the conflict, not unlike the Jewish merchant in *AL*: "In spite of the war and risks involved, Ashkenazi tenaciously advanced his commercial ventures. Unable to cope from afar with the problems of his Cretan business affairs, he decided to send his brother, who was then in Poland, to look after them, at the same time asking the *Bailo* [the Venetian representative in Istanbul] to back him in the new endeavour" (Arbel 1995, 84). The components of Ashkenazi's complex personal and commercial situation just described should not be overlooked. Ashkenazi was a Venetian Jew who, by serving as the *Bailo*'s doctor in Istanbul, enjoyed a certain amount of political protection when trading with Venetian colonies. Unable to leave Istanbul during the Cyprus war, Ashkenazi relied on an extensive network of kinsmen throughout Europe who could attend to his commercial dealings and guarantee that his business interests were being protected. Despite trading with letters of recommendation from the *Bailo* and despite having assurances from Nassí that sending merchandise to Crete was safe, Ashkenazi suffered a fate similar to that of his brethren in Venice, a confiscation of his goods and a substantial financial loss because of his religious affiliation.²⁶

Although Ashkenazi's brother and goods were eventually released, this incident on Crete underscores the uncertainty of the Mediterranean in wartime that Ashkenazi, even with political protection, and the Jewish trader in *AL* had to navigate. Therefore, I would argue that their commercial dealings during the 1570-1573 Veneto-Ottoman conflict embody the definition of a merchant that Adelman and Aron put forth: "Merchants adopted public roles to market private goods for personal gains; they produced exotic epicures abroad for sumptuous tastes at home; they served at the hither edge of empires to service the needs of the conquerors and conquered alike" (Adelman and Aron 2). It must also be remembered that Ashkenazi was more than just a prominent merchant; he was a well-respected doctor (serving as the *Bailo*'s physician in Istanbul) who eventually became an advisor to Grand Vizier Sokollu as a result of his political acumen and role in helping to end the Cyprus war. Ashkenazi's multi-faceted career was by no means uncommon or unprecedented, and as Adelman and Aron observe, "[merchants'] cultural brokering activities enabled them to adopt a variety of positions, between public and private spheres" (Adelman and Aron 5). Although the services of Jewish intermediaries who doubled as doctors, translators,

²⁶ "It seems as if the Venetian officials on Crete had not been aware of Ashkenazi's importance for Venice's interests and treated him, as well as his Jewish relative and agent, as enemy subjects, and their goods as enemy property" (Arbel 1995, 82, 83).

merchants, etc. prior to Ashkenazi's time have been well-documented, the 16th-century Mediterranean provided a unique social, political and religious milieu in which they could thrive. The actions from the 1520s until the 1540s of two highly-placed North African Jews (Jacob Ruti and Jacob Rosales), for example, serve as templates for Ashkenazi's political and economic maneuverings decades later. Yerushalmi documents how Ruti and Rosales worked to avoid military conflicts between their Muslim sovereigns and the Portuguese crown, acting as intermediaries between the powers (Yerushalmi 1032–1035).

How is it, then, that a Jewish doctor who was a native of Udine and graduate in medicine from the University of Padova, and who had left northern Italy amid a wave of anti-Jewish measures in the mid-16th century, could demonstrate simultaneous loyalty to his native Venice and the Ottoman Empire, which had offered him refuge, and become the most trusted, pivotal figure in brokering a peace agreement? Ashkenazi had no connections to the sultan's court when he arrived in Istanbul, yet after the *Bailo* Barbaro introduced Ashkenazi to the head dragoman (i.e., royal interpreter) in the late 1560s, our protagonist began to slowly develop relationships of trust with various high-ranking Ottoman officials, including Grand Vizier Sokollu (Arbel 1987, 176–177). Pedani-Fabris notes that Ottoman sultans rarely sent Jews as representatives to Venice during peace time, yet they regularly sent them as intermediaries during war time because Jewish envoys were considered the safest option for both sides (Pedani-Fabris 111). On the other hand, and in spite of the circulating anti-Jewish sentiments and imprisonment of Ottoman Jewish merchants at the time, “Venice, or rather the Venetian oligarchs, had no qualms about using Jews, among others [...] as confidential middlemen in the secret negotiations which were conducted during the war” (Arbel 1995, 146). Sokollu was a friend of the Venetians, yet he could not openly negotiate a peace agreement with them during hostilities without presenting his rivals within the sultan's court an opportunity to accuse him of treason and force him out of power. In addition, Sokollu had advocated expansion in North Africa rather than in Cyprus, a position that would have left him even more vulnerable to charges of treason had it become known that he sought to end the Cyprus war (Hess 12).

Therefore, Veneto-Ottoman negotiations had to be conducted in secret by a trusted third party who had relatively free access to both Venetian and Ottoman authorities in Istanbul, and the Jewish doctor Solomon Ashkenazi, who under the guise of medical visits could speak with both Sokollu and Barbaro, willingly offered his services for the cause of peace (Arbel 1987, 176–177).²⁷ On two occasions, Ashkenazi was arrested and sentenced to be impaled on hooks, yet each time his powerful patrons who desired peace worked to free him because of his indispensability (Arbel 1987, 178). Only for a brief period, when Venice openly went through the French ambassador in Istanbul in 1572, was Ashkenazi not the primary intermediary, yet he soon after resumed his role as chief negotiator, eventually helping to draft the peace agreement that was signed in 1573 (Arbel 1987, 178).

Bailo Barbaro's open praise of Ashkenazi to the Venetian authorities, who had only two years earlier ordered the decree of expulsion for all Jews, highlighted the risks Ashkenazi took and subtly urged his government not to forget the Jew's loyalty in helping secure peace.²⁸ In addition,

²⁷ Barbaro was under house arrest during the entire Cyprus war, a fact that renders Ashkenazi's services even that much more critical (Arbel 1987, 176).

²⁸ “*Quanto si sia Rabi Salomon affaticato in questa trattatione, et a qual cimenti et pericoli egli abbia convenuto star saldo, io non mi presumo veramente de dirlo, perché non so come l'habbia tanto destrezza et giudicio, e come non sia uscito del buon sentimento, perché questa pratica si è trattata così gagliardamente da tutte le parti, che dicendolo mi persuado che difficilmente sarei creduto. Io mi rendo sicurissimo che la Serenità Vostra, secondo la solita cortesia sua, non si dimenticherà delli continui et segnalati servitii che sempre egli ha fatti in tutta questa guerra con tanti*

Barbaro included in that same correspondence a letter that Ashkenazi wrote imploring the Venetian authorities to rescind their expulsion order and reopen their doors to Jews. Not only did the 1573 peace treaty, which echoes the terms of its 1540 predecessor, bind Venice to treat all Ottoman merchants (including Jews) properly, but also the 1573 *condotta* reaffirmed the Jews' legal right to live and trade in Venice (Arbel 1987, 179).²⁹ In fact, after the Venetian authorities rescinded their expulsion order, Ashkenazi wrote to Barbaro that “the entire Hebrew nation feels itself highly obliged to this most excellent Republic, for indeed, in no other part of the world was it better treated than there” (Arbel 1987, 1 [Barbaro's Letter-book, II, f. 439v]). Although Ashkenazi's claim that Jews were best off in Venice should be viewed somewhat skeptically, especially given the privileged status of Ottoman Jews, I believe that the expressions of gratitude toward the only Christian power in western Europe that accepted Jews were genuine.

In essence, Ashkenazi demonstrated a triple loyalty to his Venetian homeland, the Ottoman Empire, and his Jewish brethren, undermining Bonacich's claim that middlemen minorities are inherently disloyal (see note 8). Ashkenazi, like Ruti and Rosales before him, were embodiments of the multi-skilled, 16th-century Jewish intermediary who could move between the Muslim and Christian worlds and advocate peace between two seemingly irreconcilable blocs. Additionally, Murphey's summary of the versatility of 16th- and 17th-century Jewish doctors could very easily be applied to Ashkenazi:

A great many doctors in the premodern age resisted being confined to a narrow specialty or even to a single field of endeavor. Furthermore, a position as private body physician to a well-placed official or to the sultan himself provided a natural opportunity for the physician to act as his patron's adviser and representative in nonmedical matters. Due to their command of foreign languages, the employment of recently immigrated Jews as diplomatic envoys was both usual and expected. (Murphey 64)

After the end of hostilities in 1573, Ashkenazi served the *Bailo* Barbaro for another year before becoming an advisor and trusted member of Grand Vizier Sokollu's inner circle, influencing such events as the election of the king of Poland (1574-1575), where he had previously served as a court physician, and helping broker another peace agreement, this time between Florence and the Ottoman Empire, in 1578 (Arbel 1995, 86; 1987, 176; Aymard 708, 710). Ashkenazi's simultaneous roles as doctor, merchant and advisor to Sokollu throughout the 1570s is what allows this Venetian Jew living in Istanbul to personify the fictitious Jewish characters in Cervantes' *AL* and *GS* and to bridge these two works set in the eastern Mediterranean in a period in which Jews enjoyed a privileged status in the Ottoman Empire.

As has been previously highlighted, *AL* and *GS* are connected not only for their geographical commonalities, but also because the latter, set during Murād III's reign (1574-1595),

danni e pericoli suoi, et quanto per questa conclusione con valor, amor et prudentia 'l sia affaticato'” (Arbel 1987, 178 [cited in *Copialettere Barbaro*, II, f. 413]; emphasis mine).

²⁹ The 1589 charter for the Jews of Venice is outside the scope of this study, yet it is worth referencing here because that document was unprecedented in terms of Jewish-Venetian relations. Although the 1589 charter did not put Jewish merchants quite on the same level as native Venetians, it did guarantee Jews freedoms that were only possible as a result of Ashkenazi's role in securing the 1573 peace treaty and *condotta*. For example, the “third paragraph provided for security in time of war. No doubt recollecting their treatment as Ottoman subjects during the Venetian-Ottoman wars of 1537-40 and 1570-73, Jewish merchants wanted assurance that henceforth as Venetian residents they would not be so treated again. Therefore it was to be provided that in all cases of war with the Turks or with any other ruler they could not be detained, nor reprisals taken against their property, nor their families disturbed, nor could they be banished, but they were to continue to enjoy their security, and be able to buy and sell everywhere as usual (Ravid 1976, 198-199).

could be considered a chronological sequel to the former, which takes place during Selīm II's (1566-1574). In his introduction to Cervantes' *Persiles*, Carlos Romero Muñoz expounds upon the phenomenon of "*doble cronología*", which underscores the importance of distinguishing between the era in which a literary work was written from the period in which it is set (Romero Muñoz 32). Just as the themes of *AL*, specifically the loss of Cyprus, were still at the forefront of the 17th-century Spanish public, so too were those of *GS*, namely the exotic nature of Istanbul, the sultan's harems, the Ottoman-Persian conflict and Spain's military presence in Flanders. Although the Spanish-Ottoman peace treaty of 1580, for example, was a reality for Cervantes' public, it is still an unrealized event in *GS* and a source of tension among the Ottoman viziers.³⁰

Perhaps the characteristic that most strongly binds together *AL* and *GS*, however, is their treatment by some critics as being unrealistic. Eisenberg includes *GS* in his list of Cervantes' ahistorical works, while Rey Hazas, by focusing almost exclusively on the amorous relationship between the sultan and Catalina, discounts any possibility that the play could be characterized as realistic, classifying the work as one of Cervantes' most "literaturizadas" (Rey Hazas 38, 51, 52). Hegyi (1998), among others, counters those claims by pointing out that Cervantes' accurate, detailed description of the cosmopolitan setting of Istanbul and its customs strongly suggests the writer's desire to faithfully portray late 16th-century Ottoman society.³¹ In refuting what he considers misguided criticisms of the *GS* for its supposed lack of realism and historicity, Hegyi extensively details the written documents and oral sources that served as the foundation for Cervantes' work, arguing that "*GS* seems to be the most carefully documented play in the Golden Age as far as Turkish history and circumstances are concerned" (Hegyi 1992, 20–21).

Cervantes' years in Italy presented him with the opportunity to become familiar with the ubiquitous *gacetas* and Venetian fortnightly reports that contained details of the Ottoman Empire that were unavailable in Spain at the time, while his years in captivity in Algiers corresponded with a period of increased communication between Istanbul and Algiers as a result of not only high-ranking renegades in the latter city being well-connected to Murād III and his court, but also of the physical relocation of countless families and their slaves from the Empire's capital to the North African port (Hegyi 1992, 35–37). Especially when compared to his contemporaries who never left the Iberian Peninsula, Cervantes' access to sources, both written and oral, should be considered extraordinary. As a result, "the relevant question here is not whether Cervantes' sources were accurate from the point of view of modern scholarship dedicated to Ottoman studies, but whether or not he drew substantially on material that his contemporaries would have regarded as historical and reasonably reliable" (Hegyi 1992, 23). Thus, the accurate portrayal of Ottoman Jews in *GS* can be better understood, namely as one part of the verisimilar depictions of the complex political situation of the Ottoman Empire, as well as of the cosmopolitan social climate of Istanbul, especially with regard to religious matters, that are ubiquitous throughout this play.

The representation of Ottoman-Persian tensions, highlighted by the infighting among the viziers, constitutes perhaps the most accurately-detailed aspect of Ottoman foreign policy in *GS*. The root of this specific conflict can be traced to the main religious division within Islam, between *sunnis* and *shic'as*, which was originally exploited by the Ottomans for political gain: "The Ottoman

³⁰ Although no definite date is given within the text of *GS*, Hegyi convincingly demonstrates that in 1576 there was a well-known Persian diplomatic mission to Istanbul. In addition, Hegyi attributes references to Phillip III and the 1601 Persian embassy to Spain as anachronisms that Cervantes, like all other writers, included to enhance his literary work (Hegyi 1992, 11, 13, 179).

³¹ Clamurro, for example, emphasizes the uniqueness of the details included in *GS*: "Tampoco se encuentra otra novela cervantina que preste tanta atención detallada a la vida y costumbres de los turcos" (Clamurro 194). García Lorenzo provides an exhaustive list of critics who have defended the historical accuracy of *GS* (García Lorenzo 204–205).

adoption of Sunnism was designed to aid the incorporation of the Arab lands conquered in 1517 and to distinguish the Ottoman Empire from Shi‘i Iran” (Darling 527). This internal rift in Islam was well-known in educated European society and utilized as a point of reference, as we shall see later in this study, for the Catholic-Protestant struggle (Hegyí 1992, 164).³² It should not be surprising that Cervantes can distinguish between the Islam of the Ottomans and Persians because he similarly does so with regard to Algiers’s Muslim population in the *Captive’s Tale* (I, 45, 495). During the Persian ambassador’s meeting with the viziers, one of the sultan’s advisors addresses the former in the following derogatory manner: “Ese cabeza roja, ese maldito / que de las ceremonias de Mahoma, / con depravado y bárbaro apetito” (*GS*, vv. 1026–1028). As this vizier not-so-subtly berates the Persian diplomat for his red turban, which in turn is a criticism of his adherence to *shi‘a* Islam, the sultan is hiding behind, not coincidentally, a curtain that is green, the color of *sunni* Islam. Details such as these led Hegyí to conclude that charges against Cervantes of being ahistorical were unwarranted and unfounded: “El que Cervantes dispusiera de información sobre un detalle tan minucioso referente a Turquía, como son los insultos de moda, invalida las opiniones de quienes le quieran tachar de incompetente en materias de historia” (Hegyí 1998, 28). The physical nature in which the Persian ambassador is treated, as well as his subsequent expulsion from the meeting, are both attested to by contemporary sources and should not be considered mere Cervantine inventions.³³

Likewise, the portrayal of the four viziers, divided into two camps regarding further military action against Persia (hawks and doves), and their arguments are in line with historical reality. It is at this point that Grand Vizier Sokollu and indirectly his advisor Solomon Ashkenazi, who supported Sokollu’s peace initiatives, reappear, existing both in history and in the literary world of *GS*. It should be remembered that Sokollu did not advocate for a military campaign against Cyprus and could only attain his goal of peace with Venice through a secret intermediary in order to protect himself against charges of treason. Sokollu faced a similar predicament with regard to the Ottoman-Persian conflict, and in *GS*, a dovish vizier who could very easily be expressing Sokollu’s sentiments, utilizes a European analogy, which Cervantes’ public would have had no trouble understanding, in arguing against renewed hostilities: “Triste historia es la que leo; que a nosotros la Persia así nos daña, / que lo mismo que Flandes para España. / Conviene hacer la paz, por las razones / que en este pergamino van escritas” (*GS*, vv. 1079–1083). Upon seeing the Persian ambassador enter, Madrigal expresses in a single exclamation, without any further explanation or commentary, his desire to Andrea that the peace talks fail (“¡Plega a Dios que las paces no se hagan!” [*GS*, v. 539]). Even the *gracioso* understands the negative ramifications that an Ottoman-Persian peace would have for Spain, as the Ottoman Empire could turn westward and devote more resources to fighting Christian Europe (Hegyí 1992, 166). Despite Madrigal’s verbalization of the Spanish geopolitical point of view, Cervantes’ 17th-century public would have been well aware that peace between Spain and the Ottoman Empire had been a reality since 1580. A peace treaty between the Ottomans and Persians, however, had not yet been signed (and would not be until 1618, two years after Cervantes died), and the Ottoman preoccupation of a Spanish-Persian alliance was very much a threat. As a result, the hawkish vizier not only expresses his

³² In his 1635 autobiographical *Relación*, the *hidalgo* Domingo de Toral y Valdés travels through Persia and observes that the *shi‘as* there “son herejes en respecto de los turcos y de la ley de Mahoma, y por esto son tan opuestos á los turcos que nunca hacen paces con ellos” (Toral y Valdés 503).

³³ Hegyí views the literary treatment of the Persian ambassador’s interactions with the viziers in the following manner: “Prácticamente todos estos detalles pueden documentarse independientemente en relatos de testigos de la época[...como, por ejemplo,] la costumbre de llevar a los embajadores a la presencia del sultán, sujetándoles los brazos” (Hegyí, “Cervantes y a Turquía otomana”, 27).

distrust of Persia's intentions when mentioning that the latter's emissaries have been visiting the Spanish court, but he also calls for the forceful removal of the Persian ambassador, insultingly addressing him as "embajador cristiano" (*GS*, vv. 1036–1038, 1059).³⁴

The final aspect of the Ottoman Empire's relations with Europe that Cervantes faithfully represents in *GS* concerns non-Muslim spies in Istanbul. Andrea, who appears "en hábito de griego", reveals his identity to Madrigal and recounts his exploits and services abroad (*GS*, vv. 421, 480–483). The fact that Andrea is dressed like a Greek is not a mere coincidence, as "Jews, like Armenians, Greeks, Slavs [...] were apparently considered to be ideal candidates for such missions [espionage in Istanbul]" because of their ability to dissimulate (Arbel 1995, 146). Önalp also views this inclusion of espionage as a genuine reflection of 16th-century life in the Ottoman capital: "Entre otras realidades históricas, cabe decir también la existencia en Estambul de una red de espionaje al servicio de España. Nos lleva Cervantes al mundo de los espías al introducir en la trama de su comedia a un agente de espionaje" (Önalp 385).

Spain was not the only Catholic power, however, that relied on a network of spies, as Venice also prioritized espionage during the 1570-1573 Cyprus war. Despite rising anti-Jewish sentiments in Venice that ultimately culminated in the expulsion of the Jews in December 1571, Venetian authorities had no issue in taking advantage of their Jewish subjects' ability to dissimulate nor in sending them as secret agents into Ottoman territories (Arbel 1995, 146). One of the spies that Venice pressed into service was the Jew Ḥayyim Saruq, whose commercial activities closely mirrored those of the anonymous Jewish merchant in *AL* and whose confiscated property created an international crisis between Venice and the Ottoman Empire. The compromising situation that Saruq found himself in as a wartime spy, not unlike Ashkenazi's role as intermediary at least in terms of the risks involved, was a result of his multi-faceted identity: "As before, Saruq's Jewishness, his being an Ottoman subject, and his involvement in international trade, were the key elements in the intricate relationships which accrued around him" (Arbel 1995, 145). The Venetian Council of Ten demonstrated their commitment to missions like Saruq's by authorizing, in November 1570, an essentially unlimited use of funds to ensure these missions' success.³⁵ In addition, Saruq was given the autonomy to create his own secret code book, choosing the terms and translations as he saw fit, yet since "the coded letters had to appear as authentic as possible, these commercial terms must have been typical in the milieu of the *Levantini* Jewish merchants" (Arbel 1995, 149).

The ability of Jews like Saruq and Greeks, or at least spies like Andrea who dressed as Greeks, to circulate freely in Istanbul is a testament to that city's cosmopolitan makeup. In fact, the multi-ethnic constitution of the Ottoman capital provided Cervantes with the ideal setting for *GS*: "La aparición de personajes híbridos, en términos religiosos y culturales, que han sido una cosa u otra, o las dos a la vez [...] hace más complejas las relaciones entre las diferentes comunidades que comparten ese espacio" (Castillo 224).³⁶ In this environment, therefore, both in reality and in literature, it becomes more difficult to maintain the traditional divisions between ethnic and religious groups. According to Castillo, "en zonas de contacto cultural como Argel o Constantinopla no podemos preservar la fantasía social de que entre el Uno y el Otro haya una

³⁴ The vizier's insult is doubly effective because it characterizes the ambassador as "[un] traidor no sólo a su pueblo sino también a su fe" (García Lorenzo 209).

³⁵ According to Arbel, the exact wording was "'quanto sarà bisogno' [...] an unusual phrase reflecting the urgency of the situation" (Arbel 1995, 146 [cited in *Archivio di Stato, Venezia*, Cons. X, Secreti, reg. 9, f. 102]).

³⁶ Hegyi also underscores Cervantes' mastery in representing demographic diversity within the Ottoman realm: "Uno de los aciertos de Cervantes es precisamente su capacidad de poner de relieve la abigarrada variedad humana que residía en las ciudades de los dominios otomanos" (Hegyi 1998, 32).

diferencia intrínsecamente radical [...] Cervantes destruye esta dicotomía mostrando la complejidad de las relaciones entre el cristiano y el Otro” (Castillo 220, 221). Castillo’s focus on Christians’ relations with the “Other” is especially relevant when viewed through the prism of apostasy, which was much more of a problem for Christians than it was for Jews, for example. Early in *GS*, Salec openly admits his lack of faith to Roberto (“yo ninguna cosa creo” [*GS*, v. 191]), further demonstrating the relatively free environment of Istanbul, yet “while we certainly have realism here what is surprising is that the scene could appear in a literary text at all. It is definitely contrary to the conventional treatment of the renegade in Spanish literature (which admitted only condemnation, re-conversion, and preferably martyrdom to atone for the apostasy). The deviation from the stock solutions attests to Cervantes’ originality” (Hegyí, *Cervantes and the Turks*, 194–195). Although the theme of renegades falls outside the scope of this study, it is imperative to reiterate that Christians in Muslim territories faced different problems than Jews did. We have already established how Mahamut in *AL* could only achieve *el sueño turco* through conversion while the Jewish merchant could retain his Judaism and still continue to benefit materially from the corsair economy. This distinction should be kept in mind as the Jews of Istanbul, especially those that appear in *GS*, are subsequently analyzed.

The niches that Sephardic Jews (i.e., those emigrating from Portugal or Spain) carved out within the Ottoman economy, society, and political world eventually benefitted any Jews who possessed the requisite skill set to succeed in the propitious environment created by the Ottoman system, such as the Cervantine Jewish characters in *AL* and *GS*, Ḥayyim Saruq, and Solomon Ashkenazi. In discussing the case of Ashkenazi, Arbel observes the following:

[O]pportunities opened before the Jews of Istanbul and other commercial centres of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, were not overlooked by those who had an enterprising spirit, including such persons as Ashkenazi, who cannot be described merely as merchants [...]

Ashkenazi’s rise in Istanbul, and his involvement in the Ottoman relations with Venice, represent not only the important role of this Jewish physician in the Ottoman court and its politics, but also the way that it was used to further the private and public interests of Jewish entrepreneurs. (Arbel 1995, 86, 185–186)

The overwhelming majority of Ottoman Jews, however, were not as economically successful as Ashkenazi (or the Jewish merchant in *AL*) nor did they even engage in international commerce. Ottoman Jews figured prominently in the “middle bourgeoisie comprised of agents of the central and Istanbul administrations [...as well as] doctors and surgeons of the Palace [...] and farmers of various taxes and customs duties” (Mantran 134).³⁷ Among the myriad Jewish characters presented in *GS*, for example, we find a merchant and a palace doctor. In *AL*, the Jewish merchant actively participates in the Mediterranean slave trade, and, although Jews do not explicitly have a similar role in *GS*, Jews in 16th-century Istanbul did. Kizilov reports the activity of about 2,000 Jews slave traders who belonged to a guild, while Panaite details the role that Jewish middlemen in Istanbul had in reselling merchandise obtained through piracy (Kizilov 28; Panaite 74).

Ottoman Jews living in Istanbul in the last quarter of the 16th century, especially those like Ashkenazi who were well-connected to the sultan’s court, are portrayed fairly accurately in *GS*.

³⁷ Tsur reaffirms Mantran’s observation, focusing exclusively, however, on the Ottoman Sephardi elite: “Some of them integrated into the Ottoman merchant class, sometimes serving in key administrative economic positions that were allowed to non-Muslims and thereby founding a kind of new Jewish milieu: an economic-political network with links to almost every important Ottoman center—Istanbul, Salonika, Izmir, Baghdad, Basra, Aleppo, Damascus, Tyre, Acre, Jerusalem, and Cairo, among others” (Tsur 97–98).

While Jewish characters in Spanish Golden Age literature tended toward a more generalized, stereotypical representation, with an emphasis on exaggerated comical characteristics, Cervantes presents various Jews in realistic roles in *GS*, humanizing them more than the overwhelming majority of his contemporaries did (Cid 227, 218). Fine argues that the positive effect that the Jews have on the plot in *GS*, as well as the fact that the doctor has a name (Sedequías), breaks the stereotypes normally reserved for Jews in literature (Fine 187). I agree with Fine's general assessment, yet I would add that not only is the presentation of the Jews in *GS* not stereotypical, but also that the roles of the Jewish characters (namely, Sedequías and the merchant), although not emphasized in the text, are verisimilar depictions of highly-placed Ottoman Jews.

Upon discovering the presence of Catalina in his harem, the sultan asks Rustán why only now is he finding out about such a beauty. When Rustán replies that he was waiting until Catalina recovered from the “profundas melancolías” that afflicted her for years, the sultan then wants to know who cured her (*GS*, v. 555). The answer, “Sedequías, el judío, tu doctor”, is revealing for various reasons, both from a literary and historical perspective (*GS*, v. 558). Even if Cervantes did not have access to that specific information, the fact that a sultan's doctor in the late-16th century would be Jewish is more than just believable, it is an accurate reflection of reality. Between 1548 and 1609, the percentage of Jewish doctors in the sultan's entourage rose from 47% to 66%, indicating that “as the sixteenth century drew to a close, we thus see little or no evidence of an erosion of either public or sultanic confidence in the skillful services provided by Jewish doctors” (Murphey 65). By curing the future sultana, Sedequías becomes an indispensable component of *GS*'s plot, despite never appearing in the play. What seems less plausible, however, is that the sultan's doctor would risk his privileged position to secretly treat a female slave in the harem without either first asking for permission or later keeping his patron informed.³⁸ Notwithstanding Cervantes' creative liberties, the fact remains that the sultan's doctor is Jewish, and “his inclusion of this seemingly insignificant detail becomes significant as indicating an effort on his part to reconstruct local colour and to infuse some realism into his play” (Hegyí, *Cervantes and the Turks*, 79).

Another Jewish character who is crucial to the plot and who does not appear in the play, is the merchant who brings to Istanbul Catalina's wedding dress, without which she would not marry the sultan. This scene, which occupies no more than a handful of lines, contains many parallels to *AL*, specifically to Leonisa's presentation at the *residencia*. Like his counterpart in *AL*, the merchant in *GS* is anonymous, follows the same general geographical route (sailing east across the Mediterranean), and is in possession of a dress worthy of a sultana.³⁹ When Mamí asks Rustán who made the dress, the latter explains the circumstances surrounding the dress's arrival: “Un judío le trujo / de Argel, a do llegaron / dos galeras de corso, / colmas de barcas, fuertes de despojos, / y allí compró el judío / el vestido que he dicho” (*GS*, vv. 1949–1954). The connection between Jews in Algiers buying goods acquired during corsair raids is also attested to by contemporary sources: “Viven todos [los judíos] (como es su uso en toda parte) de algún modo de mercancía... [y muchos] compran las ropas y otras cosas que los corsarios traen robados y las vuelven a vender a mercaderes cristianos, en que ganan buena ganancia” ([pseudo-]Haedo 111–112). We have already established that the Jewish merchant's cargo in *AL* is similar to that regularly traded in the late

³⁸ When the text deviates from historical reality, Hegyí implores us to remember that “Cervantes no es ni historiador ni pretendió serlo. Por supuesto, la *GS* es ficción” (Hegyí 1992, 25).

³⁹ Leonisa, like Catalina, is also destined to be sent as a gift to the sultan's harem in Istanbul, a fact that further underscores the regal quality of the dress in which the Jewish merchant sells her.

16th-century Mediterranean economy, and therefore, the authenticity of the representation of the Jewish trader in *GS* should not be doubted:

There is absolutely no reason why Christian style-dress could not have been obtained in Constantinople via Algiers or through other means. Cervantes is, in fact, providing reliable information about trade transactions in the Mediterranean. In *AL* he also makes mention of a Jewish merchant on his way from Barbary to the Levant [...] Here, Cervantes may very well rely on his experience in Algiers, where he must have become aware of the commercial activity involving links with Constantinople. (Hegyí, *Cervantes and the Turks*, 76)

Although Cervantes never spent time in Istanbul, *GS* faithfully depicts the situation of certain types of Ottoman Jewish professionals, specifically the Jewish merchant who brings luxurious textiles from the Maghreb and the sultan's highly-skilled Jewish doctor (Sedequías) who cures Catalina.

Chronological and geographical considerations will always connect *AL* and *GS*, yet these two works are also bound by their realistic portrayal of late 16th-century Ottoman Jews. Although the Jewish characters in *AL* and *GS* are mostly anonymous, occupying a relatively insignificant amount of the text, especially when compared to Muslim characters, they are indispensable to the plots and accurate representations of highly-placed Jews who were crucial to the Ottoman Empire in that period. These Cervantine creations have real-life manifestations in Solomon Ashkenazi and Ḥayyim Saruq, both of whom utilized their unique position as Jews to thrive economically and socially, yet of the two, only the former was simultaneously a court physician, political advisor and an international merchant. Despite the fact that Cervantes was never in Cyprus nor Istanbul, his eastern Mediterranean works capture, for lack of a better word, the favorable situation of Ottoman Jews there. Likewise, our author's appropriation of elements of Lope de Vega's *comedia nueva* (e.g., the *gracioso*) facilitated the verisimilar recreation in *BA* of the more precarious condition of the Jews in Algiers. The publication of *BA*, Cervantes' literary response to Lope de Vega's *Los cautivos de Argel*, in which a Jewish slave owner is featured, motivated Lope to address the nuances of Jewish life in other corsair port cities such as Tunis, and is a theme that I intend to explore in a subsequent study.

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