

*Gift Exchanging Practices between  
the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Ottoman Empire:  
'Cose Turche' and Strange Animals*

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Hacı Hüseyin Efendi, special envoy of the Ottoman sultan, Mahmud I (b. 1696, r. 1730–54), landed in Naples on 31 August 1741, together with a large retinue of more than 60 people, and rich gifts for King Charles of Bourbon (Carlo di Borbone, b. 1716, r. 1734–59 as King of the Two Sicilies and 1759–88 as Charles III of Spain, Carlos III de España).<sup>1</sup> The envoy had first stopped in Sicily, in the port town of Messina, where he arrived almost two months earlier, on 7 July, in order to spend there the required 12 days of *sciorino* (the exposure of goods in the fresh air so that they could be purified) and a quarantine period of 40 days, which was later reduced to 30 in consideration of the good health of the special envoy, his retinue and the entire crew. The envoy spent the days of *sciorino* on the boat and was then hosted in a place called 'Paradiso,' in the palace of Prince Borracchini, which, allegedly, had been tastefully furnished beforehand 'in Turkish style with various sofas covered with rich fabrics, curtains, carpets, mirrors, crystals, and other pieces of furniture, all rich and of a good taste.'<sup>2</sup> Throughout his stay in Messina, the king's representative in town, the Marquis of Torreblanca, together with other local nobles, made every effort to look after and entertain the Ottoman envoy. They visited him on several occasions, sent him abundant refreshments and organised different entertainment, such as harquebus shooting expeditions as well as boat and riding excursions in the surrounding area. He was also presented some locally produced merchandise that, it seems, he had expressly requested to see, buying 'some rolls of silk and various carpets' (*alcune pezze di drappi di seta, e varj tapeti*)<sup>3</sup>, while also ordering some other products for his personal use, which

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<sup>1</sup> On the historical and political circumstances that determined the arrival of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi in Naples and, in particular, on the treaty of peace, commerce and navigation drawn up in Constantinople on 7 April 1740 between the Porte and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, see ROSITA D'AMORA, 'The Diplomatic Relations Between Naples and the Ottoman Empire in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: Cultural Perceptions,' *Oriente Moderno* 22 (83), no. 3 (2003): 716–20. Not much is known about Hacı Hüseyin Efendi. His *lakab* (nickname) was Küçük ('small') and he was an employee of the Ottoman government in the department dedicated to the collection of the *jizya*, the head tax imposed on non-Muslims. He died in 1155 H. (1742), shortly after his return from Naples and he was buried in the cemetery of the Gazi Atik Ali Paşa mosque in the Çemberlitaş neighbourhood of Istanbul. See SEMAYI EYİCE, 'Bir Türk Elçisinin Portesi,' *Belleten* 41, no. 163 (1977): 555–63.

<sup>2</sup> 'all'uso turco con varj sofà coperti di ricche stoffe, e con cortine, tappeti, specchi, e placche di cristallo, e altri mobili tutti ricchi, e di buon gusto.' See *Relazione della Venuta di Hagi Hussein Effendi Inviato straordinario della Porta Ottomana. E della pubblica Udienza, che ha avuto dal Re Nostro Signore il giorno 18 Settembre 1741* (Naples: Per Francesco Ricciardi Impressore del Real Palazzo, 1741). Hereafter quoted as *Relazione*.

he would collect when passing Messina again on his way back to Constantinople. On 15 August the Ottoman envoy was invited to go and admire a *gran festa* that was celebrated in Messina every year,<sup>3</sup> and to attend, on that same day, a *serenata* and a ball organised expressly in his honour in the palace of the Prince of Villafranca.<sup>4</sup> The Ottoman envoy declined both invitations, pleading that it was contrary to the customs of his country to make a public appearance before having been received by the king. Finally, on the night of 19 August, after he was presented with ‘various edibles’ (*varj comestibili*),<sup>5</sup> Hacı Hüseyin Efendi, together with his retinue, boarded for the capital of the kingdom on the same Neapolitan war ships that had brought him to Messina: the *San Filippo il Reale* and the *San Carlo*. Due to the unfavourable winds, though, the ships could not leave the Messina harbour till 22 August when they eventually set sail at around ten o’ clock in the morning.

All these details, and many others, are related in a fascinating anonymous contemporary account describing the arrival and stay of the Ottoman envoy in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and dealing, in particular, with the public audience he had with King Charles of Bourbon on 18 September 1741, which was also represented in a beautiful and detailed etching by Francesco Sasoni (b. 1705–?), accompanying the text.<sup>6</sup> Many other details and very interesting behind-the-scenes information about this visit can also be gathered through the rich documentation, largely still unexplored, kept in the Archivio di Stato di Napoli (hereafter ASN), covering the history of the political, commercial and cultural relations between the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Ottoman Empire from the events leading to the stipulation of the 1740s treaty until 1861, when the diplomatic relations between the two states came to an end due to the annexation of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies to the Kingdom of Italy.<sup>7</sup>

A close reading of the *Relazione*, comparing its rhetoric and the information that it provides with the information contained in the archival documents, sheds useful light on the rather theatrical visit of the Ottoman envoy to the capital of the Kingdom

<sup>3</sup> The *gran festa* is most probably the Feast of the Assumption, also known in Messina as *La vara* (or *La bara*), celebrated there on 15 August at least since the sixteenth century. During the religious procession accompanying the celebrations, a coffin of the Virgin and a pyramid-like structure are paraded through the town to symbolise the Virgin Mary’s death and assumption into heaven.

<sup>4</sup> In the first half of the eighteenth century, a *serenata* was a musical composition that usually had a congratulatory purpose. Serenades were vocal-instrumental compositions mostly written to Italian texts, situated somewhere between a *cantata* and an *opera*. They were very popular with the royal courts of Europe, usually accompanying celebrations or other important events in the lives of monarchs and the nobility. The *serenata* organised for the Ottoman envoy in Messina was entitled *La Fortuna a piè di Messina ovvero La Costanza premiata dalla Virtù*.

<sup>5</sup> *Relazione*.

<sup>6</sup> *Relazione*. The quotations regarding Hacı Hüseyin Efendi’s stay in Messina are on pages A2r–A3r of the *Relazione*. Not all pages are numbered. On the text of the *Relazione*, see also D’AMORA, ‘The Diplomatic Relations Between Naples and the Ottoman Empire,’ 721–22.

<sup>7</sup> For a preliminary discussion of the documents concerning the relationships between the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies kept at ASN, see ALDO GALLOTTA, ‘Le relazioni tra l’Impero ottomano e Napoli,’ in *Atti del Convegno sul tema: Presenza araba e islamica in Campania. (Napoli–Caserta, 22–25 novembre 1989)*, ed. Agostino Cilardo (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1992), 323–35.

of the Two Sicilies and the exchange of gifts that took place on this occasion. Archival documents also help clarify some circumstances regarding the preparation of the *Relazione* itself and its narrative celebrating a significant diplomatic accomplishment by King Charles, as well as quite clearly showing how the ruling monarchy was very keen on having this text published and distributed at the earliest possible time.

Indeed, the *Relazione* was printed by Francesco Ricciardi, 'Impressor di Real Palazzo,' immediately after Hacı Hüseyin Efendi's departure from Naples on 18 October 1741, which is the last event described in the account. In the *Relazione* the envoy's departure date is referred to as 'Mercoledì 18 dell'andante'<sup>8</sup> clearly showing the promptness with which the account was published. This is confirmed by a document from Antonio Coppola, dated Monday 23 October 1741 and addressed to the state secretary, the Duke of Salas (1698–1771), in which we learn that the writer, informed by the duke of the king's express request to have the *Relazione* printed that same week, decided to prompt the artist, Francesco Sasoni, to finish the etching (*lamina di rame*) representing the public audience so that it could be inserted at the beginning of the *Relazione*.<sup>9</sup>

From the same document we also learn that, having personally visited Sasoni in his house, Antonio Coppola verified that 'the lower part of the etching representing people' (*la parte di basso colli Personaggi*)<sup>10</sup> still had to be completed, and, since this was, according to Sasoni, a very difficult task to accomplish in such a limited time, he asked the authorisation to be helped by his apprentice Abbate Alessandro D'Andrea. His request was granted so that 'with both of them working, and with one working while the other was resting, the etching could be finished within the prescribed time' (*faticando ambidue e, l'uno in quelle ore che si riposa l'altro, possa compirsi nel termine prescritto la lamina*). Sasoni must have accomplished his commission in time, even though, probably for editorial reasons, the etching was inserted at the end of the text rather than at the beginning as previously planned. In a series of documents dated between 31 December 1741 and 4 February 1742, the Regia Giunta asked to determine what could be a fair payment for Sasoni, and resolved that the remuneration for a similar etching would normally be 15 ducats. However, in consideration of the promptness Sasoni showed in carrying out the work and other things he had to arrange, it was decided that he should be paid 18 ducats.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, in another document with no signature or date (but datable after 23 October 1741), also urging the etching to be finished, it is mentioned that the *Relazione* was already printed and that 'new copies' (*nuovij esemplari*) had to be issued the following Tuesday.<sup>12</sup> This could set the date of the publication of

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<sup>8</sup> *Relazione*.

<sup>9</sup> ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.

<sup>10</sup> ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.

<sup>11</sup> ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.

<sup>12</sup> ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents. As 23 October was a Monday, we could assume that the following Tuesday could be 24 October, or 31 October at the latest.

the text even earlier and might explain why some copies of the *Relazione* do not include Sesoni's etching.<sup>13</sup>

### **The city as a stage: performing power and the politics of pageantry**

Why was the king so eager for the account on the visit of the Ottoman envoy to be published in such haste? I would argue that the *Relazione* must have been conceived and promoted as a relatively easy-to-divulge text, and final, tangible act of a rigorously choreographed event that took place in Naples between the end of August and mid-October 1741. Indeed, the *Relazione* was a pamphlet sponsored by the newly established monarchy both to satisfy the natural curiosity of the public for the presence in the Bourbon capital of the members of the Ottoman legation with their eccentric and luxurious appearance, and to promote, in a propagandistic style, the prestige of the ruling house by exalting the new and important Ottoman ally, the precious gifts he had brought from the sultan to the king and the sumptuous reception prepared for the sultan's representatives.

The Kingdom of Naples and Sicily, with Charles of Bourbon as its first ruling monarch, had become an independent state in 1734, only a few years before the arrival of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi and his retinue in Naples. The first years of Charles's reign are generally considered the 'heroic age' of the new dynasty, a distinctive moment fostering a process of profound renewal that in the king's intentions was to eventually lead to the creation of a state able to compete with the other major European monarchies. The many political and administrative reforms promoted by the new Bourbon king and his entourage were coupled with his clear determination to transform Naples into a vibrant capital city. Starting from 1737 he fostered the civic rebirth of Naples, reshaping its architectural fabric through ambitious urban projects, from Europe's most celebrated opera house, the Reale Teatro di San Carlo, bearing the royal name, to one of its largest poorhouses, the Reale Albergo dei Poveri. At the same time he renewed the royal palace of Naples, while ordering the construction of three other majestic residences outside the city: the royal palace of Capodimonte and the royal palace of Portici, whose construction started in 1738, and, later on, the royal palace of Caserta, initiated in 1752.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Charles of Bourbon promoted a foreign policy clearly aimed at encouraging the economic development of the kingdom, guaranteeing security, especially of its long and highly exposed Mediterranean borders, and consolidating the monarchy. The stipulation of the treaty with the Ottoman Empire was one of the first and probably most important and acclaimed results of this policy and it was still celebrated, with great pomp, more than a year later on the occasion of the arrival in Naples of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi.

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<sup>13</sup> This is the case, for example, of the copy of the *Relazione* kept in the library of the Società Napoletana di Storia Patria in Naples.

<sup>14</sup> For a comprehensive study on how Charles of Bourbon's architectural and urban programme served as a prominent tool of statecraft and was used to help consolidate the monarchy, see ROBIN L. THOMAS, *Architecture and Statecraft. Charles of Bourbon's Naples 1734–1759* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013).

From this point of view, while providing a detailed account of the events occurring during the stay of the Ottoman envoy, the *Relazione* presents a narrative that revolves entirely around the need to validate and promote the ruling dynasty by meticulously describing how the Bourbon's power was displayed and performed.<sup>15</sup> In the description of each stage of the envoy's visit, emphasis is given to the magnificent receptions prepared by the court, the strict observance of the protocol, the great care paid to every detail and the enthusiastic reactions both of the Ottoman legation for the favourable reception received and the Neapolitan *popolo* for the unusual oriental extravaganza taking place right before their eyes in the streets of their city. In this reconstructed narrative, the city of Naples itself becomes the natural and central stage of this power performance, while the 'prodigious crowd' (*prodigiosa folla*)<sup>16</sup> of its citizens are the enthusiastic and acclaiming public of spectators. The impression is that, at least in the textual reconstruction of the events drawn up a posteriori in the *Relazione*, nothing is left to chance. A completely different scenario emerges from the documentation kept in the ASN, recording what was actually happening behind the scenes, from the difficulty of making ends meet due to the considerable expense, to the constant urging of different artisans to finish their works, as we have seen in Francesco Sesoni's case.

For example, almost two pages of this 18-page-long report of the 'flawless' visit of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi are devoted to the praise of the beauty and pleasantness of the palace of the Prince of Teora in Chiaia<sup>17</sup> where the envoy was hosted and the very detailed description of the refurbishments made before the guest's arrival, also underlining the great effort that had been made 'to decorate [the Palace] according to the Turkish Style' (*per ornarlo alla maniera turca*).<sup>18</sup> Even more detailed is the description of the public audience that Hacı Hüseyin Efendi had with the king and the display of the gifts he brought to Naples for him.

The anonymous reporter starts by illustrating how, on the day, different troops of soldiers of the Bourbon Army were meticulously lined up in the streets along the route between the residence of the envoy and the royal palace, while also recounting 'the confusion of the uncountable people' (*confusione dell'innumerabile Popolo*) belonging to every social class and thronging the streets, terraces, balconies and windows in order to witness the event. Then, with a wealth of details, he describes the viceroy's room in

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<sup>15</sup> Two studies, although both focusing on the Spanish viceroy (1503–1707), offer a very good perspective on public rituals in Naples and the way they were used to project images of power as well as the reception they received from their diverse participants: GABRIEL GUARINO, *Representing the King's Splendour. Communication and Reception of Symbolic Form of Power in Viceregal Naples* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); JOHN A. MARINO, *Becoming Neapolitan. Citizen Culture in Baroque Naples* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> *Relazione*.

<sup>17</sup> The construction of Palazzo Mirelli di Teora (previously called Palazzo Barile di Caivano) was started in the seventeenth century by architect and sculptor Cosimo Fanzago (1591–1678) for the aristocratic family Barile di Caivano and then completed by architect Ferdinando Sanfelice (1675–1748) (see *infra*) in 1703 for the new owner Carlo Mirelli, Prince of Teora.

<sup>18</sup> *Relazione*, A3r–A4r.

the royal palace where the reception took place, together with the ‘temporary structure’ (*apparato effimero*), realised ad hoc by the highly regarded Neapolitan architect Ferdinando Sanfelice (1675–1748).<sup>19</sup> Once again, the accent is on the grandeur of the staging and the valuable objects, textiles and materials used for this performance of power as well as the elegance, precious garments and jewels of those members of the court who took part in the ceremony, and, most of all, the king himself whose ostentatious dress embodied the highest and most striking representation of the monarchy’s power.<sup>20</sup> The last part of this section contains the account of the parade of the envoy from his residence to the royal palace, followed by the description of the reception itself, during which the envoy addressed the king and presented him his credentials and the gifts he had brought from Constantinople.

### Staging the gifts: *superbi regali* for a most magnificent monarch

According to the *Relazione*, the day before his audience with the king, Hacı Hüseyin Efendi gave orders to deliver all the ‘superb gifts’ (*li superbi regali*) the sultan had sent to King Charles to the royal palace, where they were purposefully put on display on different tables in an anteroom close to the audience hall for their admiration. As the most tangible testimony of the recently concluded treaty and the consideration in which the sultan held the Neapolitan king, they naturally formed a central element of the narrative of the *Relazione*, the magnificence of the homage received being used to exalt the magnificence of the Bourbon court. In order to more effectively and vividly portray how the Ottoman envoy addressed the king as he presented him the sultan’s gifts, while otherwise entirely written in the third person, in this case the *Relazione* resorts directly to the envoy’s voice. This is reported through the Italian translation of the official discourse delivered by Hacı Hüseyin Efendi made by the ‘royal dragoman’ (*regio dragomanno*). What the anonymous author of the *Relazione* might have so appreciated in the envoy’s address – or at least in its translation – as to include it in the text is the perfect symmetry in presenting the two monarchs. Besides the more specific epithets used for each of them (for example, Sultan Mahmud is called ‘a servant of the two holy cities [i.e., Mecca and Medina]’ or ‘a refuge of the Ottoman faith,’ while King Charles is remembered as ‘King of the Two Sicilies’ and ‘Infante of Spain’), both are referred to as ‘the most magnificent’ (*magnificentissimo*), ‘the most majestic’ (*maestosissimo*), and ‘the most powerful’ (*potentissimo*).<sup>21</sup> To be put ideally on the same

<sup>19</sup> *Relazione*, A3r–A4r. This description is the textual counterpart of the aforementioned beautiful engraving realised by Francesco Sasoni.

<sup>20</sup> The *Relazione* expressly mentions that the diamonds and other precious stones decorating the king’s clothes and hat alone were estimated to be worth much more than two million Neapolitan ducats, an exorbitant sum for the time, if, by means of comparison, we consider that the same *Relazione* mentions that the daily allowance given to the envoy and his retinue was one hundred Neapolitan ducats.

<sup>21</sup> Here is the transcription of the entire passage of the Italian translation of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi’s address: ‘Questi sono li regali, che l’Imperadore delle due Terre, Re delli due Mari, Servo delle due Sacre Città, magnificentissimo, maestosissimo, e potentissimo, Refugio dell’Ottomana fede, e potente Monarca, Sultano figlio di Sultano, Sultano Vittorioso Mahmud Han, mio Signore mi ha ordinato di presentare dall’Imperiale sua parte assieme con la sua amichevole Imperiale Lettera a Vostra Maestà Re delle due Sicilie, Infante delle Spagne, Fortissimo, Serenissimo, Magnificentissimo, Maestosissimo, e Potentissimo Re Carlo, che Dio eterni la gloria sua.’ *Relazione*.

level as the ruler of the mighty Ottoman Empire would grant the young king of the newly established Neapolitan kingdom the possibility of boasting his court's internationally acquired prestige, further testified by the arrival of precious gifts. For the same reason, the gifts also had to be meticulously 'staged' not only, as mentioned above, in the immediate proximity of the audience hall on the day the envoy was received by the king, but also in the text of the *Relazione* itself. As such, they were carefully listed at the end of the account under the heading 'The gifts that the Sultan had his special envoy present to His Majesty are the following (*Li regali, che il Gran Signore ha fatto presentare dal suddetto suo Inviato Straordinario a S. M. sono li seguenti*)'. This very detailed list contains 75 entries for a total of approximately 150 items, some of which also indicating the kind of container they came in. Elsewhere the exact number of precious stones decorating the objects is clearly specified. The list records a total number of 2,432 precious stones: diamonds, pink diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, pearls and turquoises of various sizes, decorating different items such as a sword with a golden hilt and a horse tack.

The list opens with the most eye-catching gift, a Tatar-style tent (*Padiglione o sia Tenda alla Tartara*), which was pitched for display in one of the courtyards of the royal palace, and continues by enumerating structural elements, such as the four columns holding it up, and different furnishings like mattresses, blankets, pillows and the carpets decorating it. The material, colour and provenance of the furnishings are often mentioned in implicit reference to their rarity or high value. Another highlight of the list is clearly the four Arabic horses, which were instead kept in the royal stables, and a long roll of highly decorated riding equipment and accessories. Among the other objects there are firearms (gun and rifles, some of which produced in Greece or Constantinople), many different kinds of fabrics and, rounding off the inventory, a little bottle made out of precious rock and containing distilled rose water closed with the seal of the *Gran Signore*.

Interestingly, the list of the Ottoman gifts is preceded by a reference to the gifts personally received by the envoy while in Naples, in the very last episode of this very detailed account: a very beautiful, 'superbly dressed' (*superbamente guaruito*) horse which he mounted upon his arrival in Naples to reach the residence prepared for him and a farewell gift, a most valuable ring with 'three most perfect and beautiful brilliant-cut diamonds' (*con tre bellissimi, e prefettissimi brillanti di molto valore*) presented to Hacı Hüseyin Efendi two days before his departure. No mention is made of the presents the king had sent to Constantinople the year before<sup>22</sup> that the sultan's gifts were meant to reciprocate, the difficulty in meeting the large expenditures or the Neapolitans' disappointment when they realised that the Turks had stolen some of the furniture and

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<sup>22</sup> Some information about these gifts can be found in SILVANA MUSELLA GUIDA, 'Relazioni politiche e commerciali tra il Regno di Napoli e la Porta Ottomana nei primi anni del regno di Carlo di Borbone. I doni per e da Mahmud I,' in *Mondi lontani*, Serie Quaderni di Palazzo Reale, ed. Annalisa Porzio (Naples: Associazione Amici dei Musei, 2014), 13–17.

fabrics from the palace where they were hosted. The narrative of the *Relazione* had to be flawlessly celebratory.

### The envoy at the Regio Teatro di San Carlo

Even when the focus of the account is on the envoy, the narrative seems to be used mainly to reinforce the need to praise the Neapolitan ruling dynasty and its accomplishments. In describing the envoy's attire during the audience with the king, for example, the anonymous author of the *Relazione* underlines that the envoy 'was wearing the same clothes and ceremonial turban that the most important ministers of the Porte wear when they are received in the presence of the sultan' (*vestito coll'istessa veste, e turbante di cerimonia, con cui li principali Ministri della Porta sogliono andare all'udienza del Sultano*), implicitly hinting at the fact that, by using the same dress code as in the presence of the sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Hacı Hüseyin Efendi was granting equal dignity to King Charles. Similarly, when after the audience with the king, the Ottoman envoy expressly requested to see the highlights of the capital, according to the author of the *Relazione*, he was showing, 'very good taste and a refined mind' (*ottimo gusto e fino intendimento*). Furthermore, and rather significantly, among the places he visited, Hacı Hüseyin Efendi seems to have particularly admired two of the royal residences whose construction, as previously mentioned, was ordered by King Charles as part of his ambitious architectural renewal projects: the palace of Capodimonte, still under construction, which the envoy found 'grand and superb' (*grandioso e superbo*) and the royal palace of Portici, which it would seem he had explicitly expressed a 'great desire' to see.<sup>23</sup>

A few days before his departure for Constantinople, more precisely on 11 October 1741, Hacı Hüseyin Efendi made his last public appearance, attending a *serenata* in the 'magnificent and spacious' (*magnifico spazioso*) Regio Teatro di San Carlo that had also just been recently built. If Naples emerges from the *Relazione* as the natural stage for the performance of power of the Bourbon court, the visit of the Ottoman envoy also involved the staging of a real piece of theatrical entertainment.

In a passage from a document dated 4 October 1741,<sup>24</sup> we read that, probably during one of his visits around town, Hacı Hüseyin Efendi saw the Teatro di San Carlo 'without lights' (*senza lumi*) and was informed by his dragoman Ali Çavuş that it was not possible to appreciate a theatre when it was not properly illuminated. The envoy then admitted that he had actually hoped to be able to admire the theatre illuminated (*con li lumi*), but he had not dared to openly request it. Hacı Hüseyin Efendi was then officially informed that, anticipating his desire, the king had already instructed that a

<sup>23</sup> According to the anonymous author of the *Relazione*, Hacı Hüseyin Efendi also visited the Crypta Neapolitana – 'the marvellous grotto that leads to Pozzuoli' (*la meravigliosa grotta che conduce a Pozzuoli*) – and the countryside of Bagnoli, the hill of San Martino and its Carthusian monastery, the arsenal, the dock and other remarkable places. When in Portici, he also went to the nearby town of Torre del Greco, to observe the 'prodigious lava vomited by the Vesuvius' (*la prodigiosa lava vomitata del Vesuvio*) during its most recent eruption, which had occurred between the end of May and the beginning of June 1737.

<sup>24</sup> The document is entitled 'Relazione d'alcuni discorsi d'Ali Chiaous Dragomanno dell'inviato Straordinario della Porta,' see ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.

*serenata* be staged in his honour so that he could 'listen to the music of these countries and see the dances and the scenes.' The envoy was overjoyed and profusely expressed his appreciation to the king, promising to inform the sultan of his benevolence and generosity.<sup>25</sup>

As known from contemporary sources, Charles of Bourbon did not like music. According to Venetian adventurer Giacomo Casanova (1725–97), who met him in Madrid in 1768, the king 'had no taste for music' (*n'avait aucun goût pour la musique*); an opinion confirming what French scholar Charles de Brosses (1709–77) had noticed during the performance of the *dramma per musica* entitled *Partenope* at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples on 4 November 1739, when, while impressed by the grandeur and magnificence of the newly built theatre, he could not hold back from remarking about the king: 'This man certainly does not like music' (*Cette home assurément n'aime pas la musique*).<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, in early 1737, instead certainly interested in and well aware of the social importance of music, the king had ordered the construction of the San Carlo to replace the old Teatro San Bartolomeo. The new theatre named after the king was a natural architectural continuation of the royal palace and was inaugurated on 4 November of the same year on the occasion of the king's name day. The Teatro di San Carlo soon became one of the most prestigious theatres in Europe, as well as the visual and musical setting to represent the power of the Bourbon court.<sup>27</sup> It was therefore the ideal location for staging a farewell ceremony for the Ottoman envoy that could leave him with an impactful and long-lasting impression just before his departure.

Unfortunately, the great majority of the documents regarding the first years of activity of the Teatro di San Carlo were lost in a bombing raid during the Second World

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<sup>25</sup> The transcription of the entire passage is as follows: 'Oggi doppo pranzo sono andato a vedere l'Inviato, gli hò dimandato, se aveva poi veduto il Palazzo reale, mi hà risposto di sì e che lo aveva trovato bello, e magnifico. Gli hò richiesto se aveva veduto anche il Teatro reale, mi hà replicato che l'aveva veduto, ma male perche non vi erano li lumi, senza de quali li aveva detto Ali Chiaous, che non si potevano ben vedere li Teatri, e che egli avrebbe avuto molto piacere di vederlo con li lumi, non ardiva di dirlo, nè di dimandarlo. Gli ho replicato, che non era nemen necessario, che lo dicesse, e lo dimandasse, perche S.M. aveva colla solita sua benignità prevenuto il suo desiderio, mentre aveva ordinato che gli si preparasse in detto Teatro una rappresentazione per fargli sentire la musica di questi Paesi, e vedere li Balli e le scene, che V. Ecc.za mi aveva ordinato espressamente di andar oggi da lui a raggiugliarlo di questa nuova grazia, che S.M. voleva fargli. Ne è rimasto contentissimo, e mi hà incaricato di pregare V. Ecc.za à fare per lui a S.M. li maggiori ringraziamenti, e dirle che mai si scorderà della benignità, e generosità di un così gran Rè, e che di tutto informerà puntualmente il Gran Sig.re.'

<sup>26</sup> See BENEDETTO CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII* (Naples: Presso Luigi Pierro, 1891), 345–46; PAOLO FABBRI, 'Vita e funzioni di un teatro pubblico e di corte del Settecento,' in *Il teatro di San Carlo 1737–1987. L'opera, il ballo*, eds Bruno Caglio and Agostino Ziino, vol. 2 (Naples: Electa, 1987), 61.

<sup>27</sup> The bibliography on the Teatro di San Carlo is vast and there are numerous sources on the history of the royal theatre, its origins, functions and repertoires. In particular, see FRANCO MANCINI, ed., *Il Teatro di San Carlo 1737–1987*, 3 vols (Naples: Electa, 1987); FRANCO CARMELO GRECO and GAETANA CANTONE eds, *Il teatro del re. Il San Carlo da Napoli all'Europa* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1987); CARLO MARINELLI ROSCONI, ed., *Il Teatro di San Carlo. La cronologia, 1737–1987*, 2 vols (Naples: Guida editori, 1987); PAOLOGIOVANNI MAIONE and FRANCESCA SELLER, eds, *Teatro di San Carlo di Napoli: Cronologia degli Spettacoli 1737–1799*, vol. 1 (Naples: Altrastampa Edizioni, 2005).

War.<sup>28</sup> The *Relazione della Venuta di Hagi Hussein Effendi* and a few documents in the Archivio di Stato di Napoli are the only remaining contemporary accounts of the *serenata* in honour of the Ottoman envoy. According to the *Relazione*, the *serenata* performed for Hacı Hüseyin Efendi was composed for six voices, ‘the best ones and most excellent among the virtuosi (*le migliori e più eccellenti fra il ceto di virtuosi*)’ and accompanied by the capital’s most famous instrumentalists. It lasted for more than three hours. Between the first and second part, and at the end of the *serenata*, five men and five women all performed various very skilled dances, also impressing the public with their inventive and rich costumes, which, like those of the singers, were based on ‘very ingenious models’ (*ingegnossissimi modelli*). Furthermore, the *Relazione* includes other interesting details such as the seats from where the envoy and his retinue attended this ‘theatrical feast’ (*fiesta teatrale*) as well as the dainty and delicate refreshments that were served to them throughout the performance. However, no mention is made of the title or the contents of the *serenata*, neither have I been able to find a libretto that could be connected to it.<sup>29</sup> A few archival documents help us to shed some more light on this event though.

First of all, we learn that the *serenata* was originally scheduled for Monday 9 October, but it was then postponed to the following Wednesday after the request of the ‘virtuosi cantanti’ for more time to practice their parts.<sup>30</sup> We also learn that the king made sure that the *serenata* was accompanied by some dances<sup>31</sup>, ‘because, otherwise the ceremony will not be very pleasant’, (*por que diferentemente la función no será tan gustosa*).<sup>32</sup> From different documents we can also gather that there was a lot of concern about which of the local nobles and members of state would be allowed to attend the performance, how to allocate the tickets to them and, in particular, which part of the theatre would be more appropriate for the envoy and his retinue to sit in so that they could properly appreciate the music and admire the scenes. In particular, the members of the *Giunta del Teatro* were especially worried that they would not be able to recognise the hierarchy of the various members of the envoy’s retinue and make mistakes in allocating them a place not fitting for their rank. Therefore, they requested a detailed

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<sup>28</sup> See CAROLINA BELLI, ‘Il San Carlo attraverso le fonti documentarie,’ in *Il teatro del re. Il San Carlo da Napoli all’Europa*, eds Franco Carmelo Greco and Gaetana Cantone (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1987), 174.

<sup>29</sup> Unlike the *serenata* organised for Hacı Hüseyin Efendi in Messina, the *Catalogo Sartori* does not list any libretto that could be linked to the *serenata* that took place in Naples. I would like to thank Suna Suner from the Don Juan Archiv Wien for the information about the *serenata* organised for Hacı Hüseyin Efendi in Messina and for having very kindly made materials from the *Catalogo Sartori* available for me.

<sup>30</sup> Letter dated 5 October 1741 and addressed to the Duke of Salas, ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.

<sup>31</sup> Apparently, while not so keen on other theatrical representations, King Charles was instead passionate about dance and when going to the theatre he would always request that at least two dances be performed. See CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII*, 343.

<sup>32</sup> Letter dated 10 October 1741 and addressed to Matteo Ferrante, a member of the *Giunta del Teatro* (the theatre management committee), ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.

note from the envoy's interpreter that could help them to solve this matter.<sup>33</sup> Finally, we learn that the envoy and the closest members of his retinue were assigned two boxes in the first row, the same ones that had been given on a different occasion to the ambassadors of Spain and Venice, while his other servants were to be placed in the fourth row.<sup>34</sup>

The archival documents do not report the title or the contents of the *serenata*. However, the letter addressed to the Duke of Salas from the *Giunta del Teatro* on 5 October 1741 clearly mentions all the names of the singers performing in it: Francesco Tolve, Giovanni Manzuoli, the Florentine castrato who was among the most admired singers of the time,<sup>35</sup> Vito Romito and the famous castrato Gaetano Majorano, better known as Caffarelli, notorious for his unpredictability and insolence, both on and off stage.<sup>36</sup> The female singers were Teresa de Palma and Anna Maria Strada, also known as Stradina. The document specifies that the singers for the *serenata* were chosen over other singers recently arrived in Naples, like Giovanna Astrua,<sup>37</sup> in order not to distract the latter from memorising their parts for the 'new opera' and keep them as a 'novelty' (*novità*) for that performance.<sup>38</sup> The 'new opera' the document refers to is *Ezjo*, the *dramma per musica* (libretto by Pietro Metastasio, music by Domenico Sarro) that was staged a couple of weeks later, as was customary, on the occasion of the king's name day on 4 November 1741. The impression given by this document is that the staging of the new opera was given more attention than the performance in honour of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi. However, it must be considered that the king's name day was the most important date in the theatre's events calendar,<sup>39</sup> and that the cast chosen for the *serenata* was certainly not a second-rate option.

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<sup>33</sup> Letter dated 7 October 1741 and addressed to the Duke of Salas, ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents. Unfortunately, this note, if ever provided, does not seem to be among the documentation of the ASN.

<sup>34</sup> Letter dated 5 October 1741 and addressed to the Duke of Salas, ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents. This information is confirmed by the *Relazione*: 'Fu il suddetto Ministro collocato con li primarj del suo seguito in due palchi della prima fila i quali ne componevano un solo per essersi levate espressamente le framezze, che li dividevano, e li restanti de' suoi domestici furono situati ne' Palchi superiori della quarta, e quinta fila,' see *Relazione*. The *Relazione* adds a few more details: the divider between the two boxes in the first row where the envoy was hosted was removed in order to create a larger single space and his servants also occupied the fifth row and not only the fourth as originally planned.

<sup>35</sup> Francesco Tolve and Giovanni Manzuoli are also mentioned as performing in the *serenata* in CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII*, 400.

<sup>36</sup> CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII*, 353–5.

<sup>37</sup> Giovanna Astrua, considered by Voltaire 'the most beautiful voice in Europe' (*la plus belle voix de l'Europe*), arrived in Naples in 1741 when she was already quite famous and stayed there till 1747.

<sup>38</sup> Letter dated 5 October 1741 and addressed to the Duke of Salas, ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.

<sup>39</sup> As previously mentioned, this particular day was also chosen as the date of the theatre's inauguration in 1739.

The singers performing for Hacı Hüseyin Efendi and his retinue were all very active on the Neapolitan musical scene of the time<sup>40</sup> and some of them, like Giovanni Manzuoli, Caffarelli and Anna Maria Strada, were internationally acclaimed, taking part in many of the most important productions of that period.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, as put in the *Relazione*, they could be certainly considered among ‘the best [voices] and most excellent among the virtuosi’ (*migliori, e più eccellenti fra il ceto dei virtuosi*). We learn from the *Relazione* that the *serenata* was a big success. The Ottoman envoy uttered expressions of great satisfaction for the ‘magnificent feast’ (*magnifica festa*) that he apparently really did enjoy not only for the singing, dancing and exquisite spectacle, but also for the view of the theatre full of the most distinguished nobility of Naples. It is clear that two performances had taken place at the same time at the Regio Teatro di San Carlo on the night of 11 October 1741 – one on and the other off the stage – and that they had been both carefully arranged and performed.

**Epilogue: the departure of the *Ministro del Gran Signore* and the arrival of the ‘wondrous beast’**

A week later the *Ministro del Gran Signore* boarded ship to return to Constantinople. However, not long after, another very peculiar ‘guest’ from the Ottoman Empire would arrive in Naples and was recounted, paraded, staged and later also displayed in a very similar manner. This time the new guest, which arrived on 1 November 1742 at the royal palace of Portici, was an elephant, a ‘wondrous beast’ as a local gazette defined him,<sup>42</sup> presented to the Neapolitan public as another gift from the Ottoman sultan to the king of Naples.<sup>43</sup>

As with the envoy, the elephant also aroused great pleasure and astonishment in the city, in addition prompting the immediate publication of an account accompanied by an engraving that was written by naturalist Francesco Serao (1702–1783), who was at the time *protomedico* of the kingdom, and printed by the same royal publisher that had

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<sup>40</sup> These singers would often perform together. Caffarelli, Giovanni Manzuoli and Anna Maria Strada, for example, had played together in *Alceste in Ebuda* put on in the Teatro di San Carlo on 20 January 1741 on the occasion of King Charles’s birthday. See CLAUDIO SARTORI, *I libretti italiani a stampa dalle origini fino al 1800. Catalogo analitico con 16 indici*, 7 vols (Cuneo: Bertola & Locatelli Editori, 1990–1994), I, 61.

<sup>41</sup> For example, in the *Ezio* staged on 4 November 1741, Caffarelli acted in the main role of Ezio. Another singer performing in the *serenata*, Teresa de Palma, was also in the cast of *Ezio* in the role of Onoria, SARTORI, *I libretti italiani*, III, 86.

<sup>42</sup> See D’AMORA, ‘The Diplomatic Relations Between Naples and the Ottoman Empire,’ 724.

<sup>43</sup> The elephant was not actually a gift but had been requested by the Neapolitan king together with other rarities and obtained, not without some difficulties, in exchange for 12 slabs of marble. On the nature of this present and the stay of the elephant at the Bourbon court, see MAURIZIO CRISPINO, ‘Un elefante a corte,’ in *Un elefante a corte. Allevamenti, cacce ed esotismi alla Reggia di Caserta, Catalogo della Mostra* (Naples: Fausto Fiorentino, 1992), 107–14; D’AMORA, ‘The Diplomatic Relations Between Naples and the Ottoman Empire,’ 724–5; GÜNER DOĞAN, ‘Osmanlı İmparatorluğu-İki Sicilya Krallığı İlişkilerinin Başlaması ve İstanbul’dan Napoli’ye Diplomatik bir Hediye Sultanın Fili,’ *Toplumsal Tarih* 275 (2016): 62–67.

published the *Relazione*.<sup>44</sup> The great impression that the arrival of the elephant must have left on the Neapolitan people is also clearly testified by the numerous works of art that this exotic animal inspired.<sup>45</sup> Most interesting is the fact that the elephant also seems to have made his remarkable appearance at the Regio Teatro di San Carlo, not as a guest of honour in this case, however, but to perform on the stage. On December 1742, the *Giunta del Teatro* asked the king's permission to use the elephant in a *mise-en-scène* of the opera *Alessandro nelle Indie* based on a libretto written in 1729 by famous librettist Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782), with the music of Domenico Sarri (1679–1744), who was *maestro di cappella* at the court at the time.<sup>46</sup> The opera was to be performed on occasion of the carnival from 20 January through 25 February 1743.<sup>47</sup> The members of the *Giunta* explained that they intended to use the elephant in the scene where gifts were presented, probably referring to the twelfth scene of the first act when Cleofide, queen of part of India, crosses the river and arrives at Alexander's camp while her servants bring him gifts.<sup>48</sup> In particular, they underlined that it would be of 'great acclaim' (*gran plauso*) if the elephant could appear on stage, 'for the rarity and beauty of the animal' (*per la rarità e la bellezza dell'animale*), and the novelty that it would be to admire such a big and rare animal in the royal theatre, 'arousing in

<sup>44</sup> FRANCESCO SERAO, *Descrizione dell'elefante pervenuto in dono dal Gran Sultano alla Regal Corte di Napoli il primo novembre MDCCXXXII* (Naples: presso Francesco e Crisoforo Ricciardi, 1742). Despite the scientific approach in describing the animal that, in the author's intentions, was meant to satisfy the curiosity of the public, Serao's narrative also openly praises the Bourbon dynasty as worthy of such a precious present. On Serao's description, see also CRISPINO, 'Un elefante a corte,' 109–10. In the same year another Neapolitan doctor, Luigi Visone, sent to press a book inspired by the elephant, *Discorso di Luigi Visone intorno all'elefante*, provoking the immediate polemical response of Francesco Serao. See CARLANTONIO VILLAROSA, *Ritratti poetici di alcuni uomini di lettere antichi e moderni del regno di Napoli del marchese di Villarosa i.e. Carlantonio Villarosa* (Naples: Stamperia e carteria del Fibreno, 1834), 309.

<sup>45</sup> On the arrival of elephants as gifts to different European monarchs and the works of art of many court poets and painters inspired by what became a real 'elephantomania,' see STEVEN F. OSTROW, 'Pietro Longhi's Elephant. Public Spectacle and Marvel of Nature,' in *A Golden Age of European Art. Celebrating Fifty Years of the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation*, eds James Clifton and Melina Kervandjian (Houston: Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, 2016), 89–90. In particular, the 'Neapolitan' elephant appears in two famous paintings, one by Giuseppe Bonito, who had also portrayed the envoy and his retinue the year before, and the other by Pellegrino Ronchi, who reproduced the elephant clearly following the engraving contained in Serao's description; see D'AMORA, 'The Diplomatic Relations Between Naples and the Ottoman Empire,' 715–16, 725. The arrival of the elephant probably also inspired different representations of elephants for nativity scenes, see MUSELLA GUIDA, 'Relazioni politiche e commerciali tra il Regno di Napoli e la Porta Ottomana,' 26–27; GIOVANNA PETRENGA, 'Gli animali di attrazione e da compagnia nei dipinti della Pinacoteca della Reggia di Caserta,' in *Un elefante a corte. Allevamenti, cacce ed esotismi alla Reggia di Caserta, Catalogo della Mostra* (Naples: Fausto Fiorentino, 1992), 91. Furthermore, when the elephant died, a Spanish painter, Giovanni Alvarez Quiñon, was commissioned to portray its skeleton, which was reconstructed to be put on display, see CRISPINO, 'Un elefante a corte,' 110.

<sup>46</sup> In those years, Domenico Sarri set several of Metastasio's librettos to music, such as *Achille in Sciro*, the first opera put on in the Teatro di San Carlo on the day of its inauguration in 1737 and the previously mentioned *Ezio* staged on 4 November 1741.

<sup>47</sup> MAIONE and SELLER, *Teatro di San Carlo di Napoli*, 41–3. The previously mentioned Caffarelli, Giovanni Manzuoli and Giovanna Astrua were in the cast of this opera too.

<sup>48</sup> The story of *Alessandro nelle Indie* centres on the love between two Indian rulers, Poro and Cleofide, at the time of Alexander's Asiatic campaigns.

everybody great wonder' (*in tutti cagionasi meraviglia*).<sup>49</sup> Finally, they concluded that the presence of the elephant would encourage people to flock to the theatre to admire 'something that only the greatness of His Majesty the King could have made happen' (*cosa che solo per la grandezza di S.M. può aversi*). Moreover, they also reassured him that they would take all the possible precautions to make sure that the elephant would not be disturbed by the lights or the noises of the musical instruments.<sup>50</sup> It would seem that after initially refusing to grant permission for fear that the elephant could be hurt, afterwards the king probably changed his mind, there being some later references that seem to suggest he elephant's presence on stage the following January.

After this alleged great appearance in the Teatro di San Carlo, not much is known about the 'wondrous beast,' beside the fact that for some years to come it might have remained an attraction for many Neapolitans, who continued to go and admire it by tipping its keeper.<sup>51</sup> However, the elephant would acquire new fame after its premature death in 1756, most probably as a consequence of a bad diet. Following the king's orders, its body was given to the Accademia delle Scienze to be studied, and its skeleton was then reconstructed to be put on display first in the Museo Borbonico (now Museo Archeologico Nazionale), and then in 1819 in the Museo Zoologico where it still stands today.<sup>52</sup>

Between the end of the summer of 1741 and the spring of 1743, the streets of Naples, its newly built royal residences, as well as the majestic Teatro di San Carlo, inaugurated only a few years earlier, became the stage of a series of attentively choreographed events starring two special guests coming from the 'East'. Both the Ottoman envoy Hacı Hüseyin Efendi and the elephant, by virtue of their rarity and extraordinary appearances, became a public spectacle, aroused great interest and curiosity, and generated many both written and visual responses.

The city itself became a stage where the pomp and ceremony of parading and displaying these two guests to a curious general public at the same time enacted the legitimation and celebration of the new ruling monarchy. In particular, both architecturally and politically connected to the royal palace, the Teatro di San Carlo was the performative space where the presentation of the two visitors was staged within the frame of theatrical representations, both as guest of honour, as in the envoy's case, and as a special walk-on attraction in the case of the elephant.

The rich and fascinating written and visual narrative enabling the reconstruction of these events, and the archival documents providing behind-the-scenes information, openly show that the both on- and off-stage performances arranged to receive and present the envoy, and the gifts sent to the king of Naples and Sicily from the sultan, on one hand had the clear intent of leaving a positive and long-lasting impression on

<sup>49</sup> The original documents relating this episode are among those destroyed during the Second World War but they are quoted in CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII*, 407–8.

<sup>50</sup> CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII*, 408.

<sup>51</sup> CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII*, 407.

<sup>52</sup> 'Un elefante alla corte dei Borboni,' <http://www.cmsnf.it/686/>, accessed 7 April 2022.

the diplomat of the new Ottoman ally, and on the other hand aimed to assert the power of the Bourbon both in and outside the kingdom, while, in particular, leaving an even longer-lasting impression on the Neapolitans. In this context, the public and meticulously arranged staging of the 'superb gifts' brought to Naples by Hacı Hüseyin Efendi, as well as the presentation of the elephant as a gift, were clearly considered the most impressive, clear and tangible testimonies of the esteem and consideration with which the powerful Ottoman sultan regarded the Bourbon king. Hence, they were aptly used to legitimise the newly established monarchy by inspiring sentiments of wonder, admiration and devotion in the king's subjects.