Converting Enslaved Muslims in Early Modern Naples: Charity, Identity, and Solidarity in the Seventeenth Century

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Introduction

In a printed conversion narrative from 1648, a Neapolitan Jesuit sought to convert a 'Moorish slave', an act which, for early modern Christians, fell under the rubric of charity.[1] Resisting this transformation, the enslaved man repeatedly declared, 'I was born a Turk and as I was born, so I want to die'.[2] The author declared the 'perfidious Muslim' *ostinato* or obstinate, a trope which encapsulated a range of Christian stereotypes such as that Muslim religious identity was intransigent and Muslim solidarity impenetrable.[3] Still, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, 'Moorish' and 'Turkish' slaves—individuals hailing primarily from the Ottoman 'East' North Africa, or Sub-Saharan Africa and who often spoke Turkish and/or Arabic—were the prime conversionary targets for Neapolitan clerics such as Jesuits and

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[1] Christians considered converting Muslims as charity—an act of care—because it was seen to save the convert's soul from eternal damnation. Early modern understandings of charity, broader than today, included economic, moral, and religious conceptions as well as ideals of social order. MIRI RUBIN, 'The Idea of Charity Between the Twelfth and Fifteenth Century', in MIRI RUBIN, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 54–89.

[2] CARLO BOVIO, *Esempi e miracoli della ss. Vergine madre di Dio Maria detti nella Chiesa del Giesù in Roma*, 5 vols, vol. 4 (Venice: Antonio Bortoli, 1704), 31. This man lived in the home of the heirs of Ottavio d'Aragona Taglivia (1565–1623) a successful naval commander for the Viceroy of Naples and Sicily. As he sleeps in the carriage house, he likely worked as a driver, page, or horse-trainer. Describing the same conversion at an earlier date, the Spanish Jesuit Nieremberg called this man 'confirmed in his hardness and obduracy' and 'born obstinate and incompetent'. Other examples can be adduced. A hospitalised Muslim man whom Theatine Camillo de Lello (1550–1614) sought to baptise around 1596 repeated that 'he was born a Turk, and that as a Turk he wanted to die'. A Palermo account printed in 1676 described a 'Turk' 'obstinate in not wanting to become a Christian'. SANZIO CICATELLI, *Vita del P. San Camillo de Lellis* (Naples: Secondino Roncagliolo, 1627), 112; JUAN EUSEBIO NIEREMBERG, *Lettere spirituali del padre Eusebio Nieremberg della Compagnia di Giesù* (Rome: Niccolò Pezzana, 1669), 349; SILVESTRO TORNAMIRA, *La Compagnia di Giesu* (Palermo: Carlo Adamo, 1676), 333. This essay considers enslaved men. For Jesuit conversions of enslaved women, see e.g., EMANUELE COLOMBO, 'Enslaved Muslims on the Early Modern Italian Peninsula: Encounters, Ransoms, and Conversions', *Church History and Religious Culture* 104, no. 3–4 (2024): 422–43. Jews too also characterised as resistant to conversion, as when the Spanish Jesuit Antonio de Guevara imagined God surveying the Jews of Naples 'in their obstinacy […]': ANTONIO DE GUEVARA, *Lettere dell'illvstre S. Don Antonio Di Gvevara, Vescovo di Mondognetto*, 2 vols, vol. 2 (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de'Ferrari, 1560), 240.

[3] Both Muslims and Jews were characterised as so impossible to convert that 'washing a blackamoor white', an emblem of impossibility, was sometimes used to describe efforts to convert them. ALCIATO ALCIATI, *Emblemata Andreae Alciati iurisconsulti clarissimi* (Lyon: Guillaume de Roville, 1548), f. 57r; THOMAS CALVERT, *The Blessed Jew of Marocco: Or, A Blackmoor Made White. Being a Demonstration of the True Messias out of the Law and Prophets, by Rabbi Samuel, a Jew Turned Christian* (London: Broad, 1648).

Theatines.[4]

Scholars have investigated diverse facets of clerical conversion efforts in Naples and elsewhere in Italy.[5] Rather overlooked, however, is the self-reinforcing network of printed narratives which furnished clerics with models and tactics. Understanding that stories of successful conversion inspired further conversions, these short narratives, in part because they were easily remembered, often circulated for many decades. Beginning to appear with greater frequency around the 1630s, they accompanied printed promotional materials such as Jesuit annual newsletters and appeared in sermon collections, clerical *Lives*, and menologies. Probably also conveyed in private conversations, the accounts were recycled well into the eighteenth century.[6] Printed conversion narratives advanced purposes apologetic, laudatory, and didactic. While their audience was in part the enslaved, these narratives were also designed to provide inspiration and guidance to clerics. This article turns to this less-examined vein of evidence to consider conversion strategies and tactics as these intersected with aspects of charity, identity, and solidarity.[7]

Printed conversion narratives centred at Naples reveal Jesuits, Theatines, and other clerics devoting much attention to converting enslaved Muslims. While clerics were not to use force in conversion, such narratives nevertheless advised clerics to orchestrate forms of 'soft' force to ensure conversions by encountering individuals in

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[4] Enslaved Muslims in Naples ranged from the olive-complected to Sub-Saharan African. Jesuits made no distinctions in complexion or ethnicity among Muslims, instead approaching identity as both rooted in religion and monolithic. On black Africans in Naples, see GIULIANA BOCCADAMO, '"Mori Negri" a Napoli Tra Cinque e Seicento', in *Il chiaro e lo scuro: gli Africani nell'Europa del Rinascimento tra realtà e rappresentazione*, ed. GIANFRANCO SALVATORE (Lecce: Argo, 2021), 143–58.

[5] Converting 'Turks' and 'Moors' at Naples should not be conceived in overly local terms, for while Naples possessed local particularities, as the narratives analysed herein show, conversion was intimately embedded in a much broader Mediterranean: a series of networked port spaces such as Ragusa, Cagliari, Florence, Madrid, Genoa, Tripoli, Puglia, Dolcigno, and countless others. EMANUELE COLOMBO and PAUL SHORE, *Jesuits and Islam in Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2023); EMANUELE COLOMBO, "Infidels' at Home: Jesuits and Muslim Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Naples and Spain', *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 1, no. 2 (2014): 192–211; PETER MAZUR, 'A Mediterranean Port in the Confessional Age: Religious Minorities in Early Modern Naples', in *A Companion to Early Modern Naples*, ed. TOMMASO ASTARITA (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 215–34; PETER MAZUR, ' "Combating 'Mohammedan Indecency'": The Baptism of Muslim Slaves in Spanish Naples, 1563-1667', *Journal of Early Modern History* 13, no. 1 (2009): 25–48; JENNIFER SELWYN, *A Paradise Inhabited by Devils: The Jesuits' Civilizing Mission in Early Modern Naples* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); LANCE LAZAR, 'Negotiating Conversions: Catechumens and the Family in Early Modern Italy', in *Piety and Family in Early Modern Europe*, eds BENJAMIN KAPLAN and MARC FORSTER (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 152–77; GENNARO NARDI. *Opere per la conversione degli schiavi a Napoli* (Naples: Ufficio catechistico diocesano, 1967).

[6] A Jesuit circular from 1592 reported a 'good harvest of the converts of Naples' and seven 'Turks' newly 'gathered to the Christian religion'. ANONYMOUS, *Annuae litterae Societatis Iesu anni 1592* (Florence: Philippum Iunctam, 1600); LUKE CLOSSEY, *Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[7] An important exception to this claim consists of CHIARA PETROLINI, SABINA PAVONE, and VINCENZO LAVENIA, *Sacre metamorfosi: racconti di conversione tra Roma e il mondo in età moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2022) and work by Pavone. Examining slave conversion narratives from Naples, Pavone highlighted strategies of fearmongering, spectacularity, images and visions, and tropes of whitening, odor, and obtaining sight. SABINA PAVONE, 'Conversion Narratives of Slaves in Naples in the Early Modern Period: Some Case Studies', 15th European Social Science History Conference, Leiden University, 26–29 March 2025 (unpublished).

restricted settings. Private and enclosed, hospitals and *palazzi* allowed clerics to capitalise upon the vulnerability of isolated and ill individuals. As a subspecies of charity, conversion manipulated enslaved identities and experiences of solidarity. Meanwhile, charitable institutions such as hospitals manufactured still other alterations in socioreligious identity with varying degrees of subtlety. Working to 'accommodate' Islamic tropes such as visions of the hereafter and dreams, printed narratives also counseled clerics to focus upon praxis over doctrine and to look to incremental approaches. Clerics paid special attention to the social and religious identity of Muslim slaves and new converts, especially their status as poor and their relative social isolation.[8] Most slaves, bereft of community and kin, earnestly longed for kin and family. Speaking to such desires, printed narratives supplied alternative models of maternity and paternity. Printed conversion narratives altered clerical as well as convert identities, pushing clerics to veil polemics against Islam, emphasise affect, and offer gentler forms of persuasion in what one might term a 'feminisation' or 'domestication' of conversion.[9] Some clerics developed surprisingly pragmatic approaches to retaining converts, which ranged from helping converts find employment to creating identity documents to help converts visit their native countries. Such practical forms of solidarity, suggested these narratives, bolstered convert identities as Christian and embedded them more firmly in Christian community. In spite of repeated assertions of Muslim 'obstinacy', printed seventeenth-century conversion narratives present Muslim slaves' religious identity as eminently fluid and manipulable, with Christians showing themselves more intransigent and militant when it came to matters of religious identity. Such narratives also reveal that clerics approached conversion at least in part as a matter of emotional connection. By treating individuals sympathetically, appealing to key aspects of a would-be convert's identity, and speaking to deep needs for solidarity, clerics could successfully persuade Muslims to embrace a new Christian identity.

Background: Enslaved Muslims in Naples; Conversion, Identity, and Charity

Christians enslaved Muslims in the Mediterranean from at least the tenth century, and Naples was home to enslaved Muslims long before the mid-sixteenth.[10] However,

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[8] Poverty, or being impecunious, was a reality of early modern life. 'The poor' might refer to destitute men or women, the ill or disabled, foundlings, the elderly, vagrants, foreigners, pilgrims, the insane, or the wounded. In general, 'the poor' were those who suffered diverse forms of calamity yet lacked the social support to address difficulty. Slaves almost always fell into this category. ANNE GOTMAN, *Le sens de l'hospitalité. Essai sur les fondements sociaux de l'accueil de l'autre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001).

[9] As Miller noted, Jesuits framed their conversion efforts at Naples as a kind of overseas alter-mission— 'another Indies'—as a way of inciting zeal. RACHEL MILLER, 'Converting 'the Indies' of Naples in Luca Giordano's *St. Francis Xavier Baptizing Indians* Altarpiece', *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 6, no. 2 (2019): 249–69.

[10] CHARLES VERLINDEN, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale* (Bruges: De Tempel, 1955). In 1390, Raimondello Orsini, prince of Taranto, sent to King Louis gifts of a camel, three coursers, a 'fully stocked Silver Table', two 'Mammon Cats' who 'almost spoke', a Turk, and a 'Black Slave'. ANONYMOUS, *Giornale dell'Istorie del Regno Di Napoli […] dall'anno 1266 fino al 1478* (Naples: Giovanni Gravier, 1770), 45.

Mediterranean naval conflict amplified after 1550 as Christian powers built fleets to rival the Ottoman empire's large navy. As Christians conducted raids in North Africa, purchased slaves there, and poached crews and rowers from Ottoman ships, Southern Italy saw a considerable increase in resident enslaved Muslims. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century, male Muslim slaves arrived in larger numbers and became an essential part of Naples' military establishment, most serving as galley rowers. Some worked on constructing fortresses or building galleys in the Arsenal while others served in domestic homes. By the first decade of the seventeenth century, an estimated ten thousand Muslim slaves resided in Naples, a population roughly double that of other cities in Italy.[11] Between 1583 and 1664, Neapolitan Jesuits baptised 2,365 enslaved people there.[12]

Religious and civic groups issued multiple forms of charity to enslaved Muslims in early modern Naples, including food, religious instruction, and sometimes medical care.[13] To some enslaved Muslims or new converts, such offerings may have made a crucial difference in survival. Yet charity often had strings attached. Religious groups might offer food and medical care with no further obligations to attract non-Christians into their orbit, but, over time, accepting charitable offerings might imply a *quid pro quo*; perhaps a tacit assent to Christian efforts to indoctrinate. Arriving in Naples in 1552, Jesuits were converting 'Moorish' and 'Turkish' slaves by the end of the 1580s.[14] A new clerical turn to converting Muslim slaves in Naples coincided with the large influx of enslaved Muslims there after the Christian victory at Lepanto (1571) and state attempts to track and regulate this new religious identity, for Naples immediately founded a registry to record slave names and 'signs of their homelands'.[15] As such, conversion was always intimately tied to bureaucratic efforts to surveil and affix civil and religious identities.[16] Jesuits and Theatines were most active in conversionary

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[11] COLOMBO, 'Infidels'.

[12] More broadly, Bono estimated that 1500–1800, Central and Western Europe hosted ca. 2.5m Muslims. SALVATORE BONO. *Schiavi musulmani nell'Italia moderna: galeotti, vu' cumpra', domestici* (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1999), 73–5.

[13] Jesuits served as conduits for private alms, persuading 'many Lords' to give alms to slaves. FRANCESCO SCHINOSI, *Istoria della compagnia di Giesu, appartenente al regno di Napoli*, 4 vols, vol. 3 (Naples: Vincenzo Mazzola, 1756), 571.

[14] COLOMBO, 'Infidels', 9. Conversion efforts were also reactions to a perception of increased numbers of Christians embracing converting to Islam in Islamic lands. On this, see TIJANA KRSTIĆ, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2020).

[15] At the decisive naval battle of Lepanto, Christians bested Muslims. Six thousand Muslims were captured and divided according to how many galleys nations had contributed to the effort. The Spanish king received 1,926 slaves. PEDRO SAINZ DE BARANDA, *Coleccion de documentos ineditos para la historia de Espana*, 22 vols, vol. 7 (Madrid: Viuda de Calero, 1845), 80; PLACIDO TROYLI, *Istoria generale del Reame di Napoli*, 5 vols, vol. 5 t. 2 (Naples: n.a., 1753), 285.

[16] The 1571 law also noted that 'many Turks and Moors […] had been made free' in Naples and that the state wished 'to know who these are and how many'. Therefore all manumitted Muslims were to appear in the Royal Chancellery to register and produce proof of manumission. Manumitted 'Turks and Moors' were arguably never fully free, for they were required to carry written proof of freedom at all times, under penalty of galley slavery for noncompliance. ALESSIO DE SARIIS, *Codice delle leggi del regno di Napoli*, 12 vols, vol. 1, *Della ragion ecclesiastica, e sue pertinenze* (Naples: Vincenzo Orsini, 1792), 3–5. Naples also passed laws regulating interactions between baptised and unbaptised Muslims in 1555 and 1581.

efforts. The Theatine Paolo Burali d'Arezzo (d. 1578), archbishop of Naples and later cardinal, is sometimes credited as the first to make large-scale efforts toward converting the 'large number' of 'infidel slaves' at Naples, for in 1577, he founded a lay confraternity, a group of 'pious and learned' people to educate and catechise slaves 'with charity and zeal'.[17]

Mediterranean religious identities were distinctly relational: defined by what they were not. Abrahamic religions shared so many resemblances that each, but Christianity above others, insisted upon exclusivity.[18] Conversion frequently resulted in paradox. For example, while conversion to Christianity could be envisioned as a primarily or purely spiritual transformation with no effects on social or civil status—for clerics had reiterated for centuries that conversion did not result in manumission for slaves—it was in practice tightly bound to social identities, which were in turn comprised of discursive formulations, behaviours, mental universes, practices, and cultural patterns. Then, while the goal of Christian conversion—and therefore by extension shared by Neapolitan clerics—was homogeneity, or Christianity for all, in practice, Christians seemed to view converted Muslims as always poised to 'backslide' into their natal religious identity. As a result of this view and other exclusionary policies, Muslim converts rarely saw full acceptance or integration into early modern Christian society, causing conversionary ideals to chafe against outcomes. Most clerics and most Muslim slaves, however, probably saw conversion to some extent as a process through which one identity, that of 'Moorishness' or 'Turkishness', was wholly or partially eliminated and replaced by Christianity, a new set of rules, beliefs, and linguistic practices. Both Muslims and clerics probably also saw conversion as inherently related in one way or another to Muslim solidarity. Since Neapolitan and church law strictly segregated converts from former Muslim coreligionists, conversion was implicitly seen as automatically riving any sense of a unified Muslim community, with the two resulting identities—Muslim and convert—requiring careful and constant separation.

Certain ground rules governed conversion. Printed conversion narratives regularly featured converts asking—sometimes begging—for baptism, a detail meant to underscore to clerics and other readers the understanding that force was prohibited in conversion. The requirement of voluntarism in conversion had been articulated in

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Conversion efforts were therefore always deeply entangled with secular and municipal initiatives, a point which cannot be fully explored herein.

[17] Scipione Mormile, a 'Knight', presumably from the military crusading order of Saint John of Jerusalem, was appointed this organisation's head. The group first met at the Church of San Arcangelo, built in 1561 by citizens in divine propitiation for being spared from Ottoman attack, then relocated to the Archbishop's Palace. GIOVANNI BONIFACIO BAGATTA, *Vita del Ven. Servo di Dio Paolo Burali d'Arezzo* (Verona: Giovanni Berno, 1698), 252.

[18] There were nevertheless important differences between the three so-called Religions of the Book. Particularly applicable in this context is Mark Cohen and Mercedes García-Arenal's arguments for Islam's greater tolerance of religious minorities; its allowance of more fluidity in religious identity; and its provision of more possibilities for social mobility for enslaved people than in Christianity. MARK COHEN, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); MERCEDES GARCÍA-ARENAL and GERARD ALBERT WIEGERS, *A Man of Three Worlds: Samuel Pallache, a Moroccan Jew in Catholic and Protestant Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

the thirteenth century when Thomas Aquinas insisted that Christianity was valid only if freely chosen.[19] However, at Naples in 1290–93 and Spain in 1391, the principle of *favor fidei*, which conceived of conversion as so irredeemably good that it needed to be induced by any means necessary, led to waves of mass, forced baptisms.[20] Since in Iberia, Christian doubts as to the sincerity of converts after these forced baptisms led to widespread social disorder, there was a firmer and more widespread consensus among sixteenth-century clerics Europe-wide that conversions should take place voluntarily and not by force.[21]

Muslim Solidarity and Isolating Converts in Homes and Hospitals

In 1571, Naples officially prohibited all contact between 'Moors and Turks' on the one hand and formerly Muslim men who had recently accepted Christianity on the other. Converts and former coreligionists could neither cohabit, converse, trade, eat, or drink together.[22] The law explained that it aimed to prevent 'the Moors and Turks who are not Christians' from 'pervert[ing] those who have already come to the Holy Catholic Faith so that they return to their Mohammedan sect', thus revealing that even innocuous forms of sociability with former coreligionists were seen as destabilising conversion.[23] As with claims of Muslim 'obstinacy', the 1571 law points to the Christian sense that solidarity, or at any rate influence between Muslims and new converts persisted even after conversion. Printed conversion narratives echoed perceptions of an uninterruptable Muslim solidarity by depicting the profound influence which Muslim companions had on new or potential Christians. As one story recounted, a friend of a potential convert-slave 'whispered in his ear' all day to 'remain firm' and not abandon 'their holy and great Prophet Mohammed', and this man was 'more impressed by a single word that his Moorish companion said than by hundreds and

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[19] JENNIFER WEED, 'Aquinas on the Forced Conversion of Jews: Belief, Will, and Toleration', in *Jews in Medieval Christendom: Slay Them Not*, eds KRISTINE UTTERBACK and MERRALL PRICE (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 129–46.

[20] JOSHUA STARR, 'The Mass Conversion of Jews in Southern Italy (1290-1293)', *Speculum* 21, no. 2 (1946): 203–11; on forced conversions, see TAMAR HERZIG, 'The Coerced Conversion of Convicted Jewish Criminals in Fifteenth-Century Italy', in *Forced Conversion in Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, eds MONICA JUNEJA, KIM SIEBENHÜNER, and KEITH P. LURIA (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 266–89; YONATAN GLAZER-EYTAN, 'Incriminating the Judaizer: Inquisitors, Intentionality, and the Problem of Religious Ambiguity after Forced Conversion', in *Forced Conversion,* 235–65; KEITH LURIA, 'Conversion and Coercion: Personal Conscience and Political Conformity in Early Modern France', *The Medieval History Journal* 12, no. 2 (2009): 221–47.

[21] On post-conversion suspicion, see MARINA CAFFIERO, 'Il sospetto di apostasia. Schiavi turchi e conversioni di fronte al Sant'Uffizio romano', in *Per Rita Tolomeo: scritti di amici sulla Dalmazia e l'Europa centro-orientale*, eds ESTER CAPUZZO, BRUNO CREVATO-SELVAGGI, and FRANCESCO GUIDA (Venice: La Musa Italia, 2014), 289–304.

[22] The penalty was five years' galley service and life service if one repeated this infraction. DE SARIIS, 3–5. This prohibition had earlier been articulated in canon law, though was not always enforced.

[23] The 1571 law cited the giving of 'bad examples', underscoring how both Christianity and Islam emphasised living exemplars. This law also banned Muslim ridicule of converts. If any 'Moor or Turk' dared to mock or 'insult with words or deeds baptised Moors or Turks', they could be forced into lifetime galley service. It therefore seems clear that converts did not garner automatic or necessarily any respect from former coreligionists, with Christians deeply concerned that converts were susceptible to their influence. By suggesting that mere taunts could destabilise conversion, the law presented conversion as fragile, unstable, and eminently reversible. DE SARIIS, 3–5.

thousands [of words]’ said to him by Jesuits.[24]

While there is no way to gauge levels of solidarity among enslaved early modern Muslims in Naples with any precision, historians have identified broad sources of solidarity across the Islamic world more generally. As Janet Abu-Lughod first showed, Islam enjoyed rapid success across a vast expanse by providing an identity that transcended language and region, and a system of shared morality and trade ethics.[25] Across a vast and multilinguistic empire, even though one might not know the personal history of a fellow Muslim or speak their language, sharing an Islamic religious identity nevertheless furnished a sense of recognition, trust, and solidarity. Ritual, too, bolstered solidarity among Muslims across linguistic and political divides; in particular the shared experience of daily prayer. The role of both slave and émigré would also have engendered fraternity and solidarity. Galley service and rowing involved intense collective discipline and collaboration, while being a slave and foreigner in Naples likely created feelings of comradeship generated by similar trials and experiences. Like immigrants and slaves everywhere, enslaved and converted Muslims in Naples, uprooted and stripped of family and community ties, responded by recrafting new bonds, usually centred around sociability and worship. Such communal bonds helped eliminate feelings of isolation and precarity, and in turn increased feelings of security, well-being, and group belonging.

It is no accident that printed conversion narratives featured no conversions at Naples’ Arsenal, where large concentrations of Muslim slaves laboured; nor any conversions occurring after major sermons. Instead, printed narratives depict enslaved Muslims as converting primarily in contained spaces: private rooms, domestic homes, a hospital, a prison cell, and galleys—this latter when the Theatine Camillo De Lellis found ‘three sick people among those slaves who were Turks’ on the galleys of Messina and exhorted them ‘with such efficacy that he induced them to detest Mohammedanism and to ask for Holy Baptism’.[26] This focus on enclosed settings and captive audiences reflects known conversionary tactics of Jesuits and other Neapolitan clerics, as when Girolamo d’Alessandro began to ‘interfere in the halls of the noble palaces well supplied with slaves destined to perform the office of cabin boys’ and the Jesuit Father Girolamo targeted Muslims ‘who lived permanently in Naples in the service of their Masters’.[27] An attention to converting enslaved Muslims in private

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[24] NIEREMBERG, *Lettere spirituali*, 349–51. These writings circulated during Nieremberg’s lifetime (1595–1658) and were published posthumously in 1669.

[25] Abu-Lughod argued that Islam transcended national and linguistic identities to bind a vast empire. JANET ABU-LUGHOD, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[26] CICATELLI, *Vita del P.Camillo de Lellis*, 171.

[27] COLOMBO, ‘Infidels’, 10; ANTONIO BARONE, *Della vita del Padre Pierantonio Spinelli della Compagnia di Giesù* (Naples: s.n., 1707); SCHINOSI, *Istoria*, 41–2. Lay congregants too went ‘looking for [slaves] for the houses of Padroni’ and ‘entered palaces’ to ‘preach Christ to Mohammedan souls’. If one considers that historically, only Inquisitors were allowed to enter private homes, entry into private *palazzi* appears unprecedentedly intrusive and novel. Notably, elite slaveowners were opposed to these conversion efforts and required insistent persuasion. ANTONIO MANFREDI, *L’unico infante massimo, il Verbo in carne, rappresentato in più spettacoli* (Naples: Giacomo Raillard, 1695), 457.

spaces might be supposed to link to a conception of conversion as a deeply individual decision. However the attempt to convert Muslims in isolated venues seems more likely yoked to the persistent perception, as adumbrated above, of an impenetrable Muslim solidarity.[28] That is, printed conversion narratives presumably operated on the assumption that only bracketing potential individual converts off from former coreligionists might render them susceptible to clerical overtures. Clerics therefore tried to isolate converts from Muslims and former coreligionists, and enclosed facilities ensured greater control over catechumens and kept them securely isolated from untoward influences.[29]

Neapolitan clerics applied similar strategies in seeking conversions in hospital settings. In the early modern period, both charity and hospitality institutionalised ideals of assisting individuals in crisis. These forms of assistance were seen as both a religious and civil duty: an obligation to protect and nurture individuals who lacked primary groups able to care for them.[30] While printed conversion narratives reveal little about 'real' motivations for conversion; scholars have shown that, as with enslaved Christians on Muslim shores, some Muslims converted not for reasons of religious conviction but rather pragmatic expediency. As was well known at the time, conversion could lead to significant life improvements for a Muslim slave: better food, social mobility, healthcare eligibility, and sometimes even citizenship.

In their focus upon isolating potential converts, printed conversion narratives moved rather beyond this acknowledgement by revealing the clerical perception that deeply-held identities might be manipulated when enslavement and poverty led to circumstances of disempowerment, isolation, illness, and vulnerability, and that converts were most likely to relinquish natal religious identity at times of crisis or necessity. As printed conversion narratives suggested, clerics should target Muslims in settings of vulnerability, which often meant charitable settings such as hospitals. And

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[28] Along with anxieties about Muslim solidarity, lay Christians and clerics alike voiced concerns that religious identities could not be recognised 'from the outside'. Since 'Moors and Turks' resembled Christians, Muslims were legally mandated to wear an identifying ponytail (the *cerro*) to visibly signal their religious and status difference from Christians. Jews were to wear a sash 'of yellow cloth four fingers wide'. DE SARIIS, *Codice delle leggi* (22 October 1571), 3–4. Then, while Christians were uneasy when religious others 'blended in', they were also alarmed at the 'overexpression' of Islamic identity, as when Spain outlawed speaking in Arabic and observing Muslim holidays.

[29] Residential facilities to house potential catechumens operated 1637–49. Paolo Israel would found an institute to house slaves before conversion in the 1720s. GIULIANA BOCCADAMO, *Napoli e l'Islam: storie di musulmani, schiavi e rinnegati in età moderna* (Naples: M. D. Auria, 2010), 10, 235, 239; PETER MAZUR, 'A Mediterranean Port in the Confessional Age: Religious Minorities in Early Modern Naples', in *A Companion to Early Modern Naples*, ed. ASTARITA, 215–34 (224).

[30] Anciently, 'hospitality' meant caring for barbarian, strangers, or foreigners who lacked a primary reference group, and this notion were absorbed into Christianity. Mediterranean Catholics therefore saw welcome and the offer of a safe place to stay to the distressed as a moral obligation. While the outlines of *hospitalitas* and *caritas* which undergirded Christian hospitals also appeared in the corporal works of mercy—'feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome in the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, and bury the dead' (Matthew 25:35–46)—these principles also animated a wide range of other ethical, moral, and cultural discourses and practices, on which, see JULIAN PITT-RIVERS, *From Hospitality to Grace: A Julian Pitt-Rivers Omnibus*, eds GIOVANNI DA COL and ANDREW SHRYOCK (Chicago: HAU Books, 2017).

as such narratives showed, the clerical healing of physical pain could also engender conversion. After one cleric heals an ailing Muslim's arm with three signs of the cross, the man is so filled with love for his benefactor that he cannot 'detach himself from his side', which then 'greatly facilitated his conversion'.[31] At this time, physical healing was seen as materialising spiritual principles, while 'health' frequently appeared in ambiguously spiritual and physical terms, as when the Madonna of San Carmine advises a 'Turkish Moor' to convert because it is 'fitting for your health'.[32]

A number of printed conversion narratives—several 'Nativity' accounts, a 'Moor' from Cagliari, and a conversion at Naples' Hospital of the 'Nuntiata' (Annunziata)—featured baptisms *in extremis* or just before death, with slaves either falling ill immediately upon requesting baptism, or requesting baptism when their health declines, as with the man at the Annunziata.[33] Though this man resisted conversion long and fiercely, when his health grew 'hopeless', he 'suddenly […] asked for baptism'.[34] An accompanying emphasis on the quick and miraculous learning of catechisms, described in greater detail below, reminded clerics and converts that people often contracted illness and died quickly but that the catechisms requisite for conversion could be effected with consummate rapidity. Mentions of rapid conversions *in extremis* were designed to convey a sense of the urgency of conversion to converts and clerics. In the 'Nunziata' account, the water on the slave's forehead had scarcely dried when, 'rejoicing, and invoking the Most Holy Name of Jesus and Mary, which who before he could not hear named', the man passed from this life.[35]

Deathbeds were long a charged and existentially transformative site for Christians, with angels and demons seen as battling for individual souls as people prepared to expire. Hospitals brought this intimate domestic site of spiritual decision—the sickbed—into a semi-public realm, allowing clerics to update the terms of the medieval battle. That is, as suggested by the De Lellis account, the battle for souls was at times transposed to a new conflict, that between Christianity and Islam. As De Lellis' efforts at Naples' Annunziata hospital show, clerics were not at all above taking advantage of the physical and mental weakness, isolation, and limited mobility brought about by hospital stays to urge conversion upon those relegated to hospital beds. Rather than considering attempts to convert the ailing a species of entrapment,

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[31] LONGARO ODDI, *Vita del venerabil servo di Dio P. Francesco di Girolamo* (Rome: Mainardi, 1761), 46. Colombo and Mazur have noted that the upstanding behaviour of Christian clerics—behaviour implied by the 'Papasso' reference—was equally important in spurring Muslim conversions.

[32] CAPUTO, Il Monte carmelo, 120.

[33] By the sixteenth century, along with S. Eligio and S. Nicolo al Molo, the Casa Santa dell'Annunziata had become one of Naples' three main hospitals. Founded by a lay confraternity under royal auspices in 1318, after diverse transformations and absorbing many smaller hospitals, the hospital cared for the sick, housed foundlings, and distributed alms and dowries. GIOVANNI VITOLO, 'L'ospedale di S. Eligio e la Piazza del Mercato', in *Napoli angioino-aragonese. Confraternite, ospedali, dinamiche politicosociali*, eds GIOVANNI VITOLO and ROSALBA DI MEGLIO (Salerno: Carlone, 2003), 39–146 (96).

[34] LIBORIO SINISCALCHI, *Iddio del cuore Gesù Bambino. Discorsi per la Novena* (Venice: Lorenzo Baseggio, 1754), vol. 2, 259–60. Galley service involved extreme epidemiological risk since diseases frequently circulated in naval and port settings.

[35] CICATELLI, *Vita del P. Camillo de Lellis*, 112.

force, or harassment, such endeavours were widely considered praiseworthy, with the conversion of Muslims at death's door accounted a victory.

The Annunziata story also showed how the Muslim acceptance of charity could require alteration in social and religious identities, for the episode explains that the ailing 'Turk' concealed his religious identity to obtain hospital admittance, then altered his identity at the hospital, confessing and receiving Christian communion in order to receive care. Clearly, religious and not medical criteria dictated hospital admission, while changes in religious identity were required for charitable care. The De Lellis narrative thus illuminates some of the broad paradoxes attending early modern hospitals and Christian charity. Though wedded to ideals of egalitarianism, inclusion, and universalism in theory, in practice, Christian hospitals were carefully segregated, allocating space and care according to religious identity. As against universality and inclusion, charity was rather more carefully stratified; qualified by the terms of individual and group identity.

The De Lellis anecdote further indexed other ways in which, while providing care and protection to the vulnerable, hospitals extended control to segregate, order, shape, and map social identities, sorting social and religious identities not only through their policies and politics of admission but by physically bracketing off the potentially dangerous or contagious.[36] That is, for De Lellis to seek to effect conversions at the Annunziata was of special significance, for this hospital stood outside of Naples' city walls in the famously decrepit and crime-ridden area of *Malpasso*. This exterior location was intentionally selected, and reflected civic and religious efforts to externalise disease and moral undesirables.[37] While concretising tensions between ideals of inclusion and fear of uncleanliness both moral and physical, charity, hospitals, and conversion freely mixed conceptions of the spiritual and the physical in relation to illness and wellness, and such conceptions had concrete effects in the mapping of urban and civic space.[38]

Conversionary Strategies: Accommodation

Neapolitan religious orders skillfully orchestrated spatial strategies of isolation to reconfigure convert identities and belonging in community. Jesuits especially have also

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[36] As Foucault observed, Renaissance hospitals combined care, spiritual transformation, and exclusion. MICHEL FOUCAULT. 'Madness only exists in society', in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966–84)*, ed. SYLVÈRE LOTRINGER (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1996), 7–9; JOSEP BARCELÓ PRATS, 'The Birth of the General Hospital: Background and Development of a New Physical and Symbolic Space of Care in the Late Medieval City', in *The Medieval and Early Modern Hospital: A Physical and Symbolic Space*, eds ANTONI CONEJO DA PENA and POL BRIDGEWATER MATEU (Rome: Viella. 2023), 97–112.

[37] This exteriorising dynamic also governed brothels and *lazzaretti,* placing them far from the city's centre.

[38] Early modern hospitals were very different from today's physical spaces of care, and were arguably more religious than medical. In Naples, *diakonia*, the medieval charitable institutions which cared for the poor, were church appendages. Charity always had a religious function and was understood as applying to spiritual as well as physical needs. Though hospitals were usually founded and governed by secular figures and groups, they also harboured relics and kept priests present. For the evolution of Naples' urban hosptial network into an urban welfare system over time, see SALVATORE MARINO, 'The Urban Impact of Hospitals in Medieval Naples', in *The Medieval and Early Modern Hospital*, eds CONEJO DA PENA and BRIDGEWATER MATEU,165–90.

been credited with a wide range of other conversionary strategies, including a 'top-down' approach which targeted elites or royals on the theory that subsequent conversions would ripple throughout the social hierarchy. Jesuits have also been credited with manipulating diverse forms of visual and theatrical spectacle toward conversionary ends.[39] Jesuits infamously employed 'accommodation', or adopting facets of other cultures, to facilitate Christianity's embrace.[40] With accommodation, clerics used elements of a 'target' religion to make Christianity appear more appealing or familiar. As printed conversion narratives show, Neapolitan clerics frequently employed tactics of accommodation, using Islamic symbols and ideas to gain the ear and trust of enslaved Muslims.

Thus several printed conversion narratives foregrounded symbols and ideas from Islamic texts, as when one Muslim from Lecce dreams of 'a ladder that extended from the ground to Heaven'.[41] He cannot ascend this ladder 'because [he is] not baptised'. Ladders and stairways featured in several important Suras, as when Muhammad finds a ladder (*ma'arij*) of gold and ascends it to the upper skies. The Sura of the Ascension (*Sura Al-Ma'arij*, Ch. 70) described angels and spirits ascending to God, and Suras 52:38 and 6:35 referred to a ladder (*sullam*) or stairway (*ma'arij*) as a spiritual means by which humans might ascend to heaven. Another printed conversion narrative from Naples employed well-known Islamic eschatological and soteriological concepts by describing a convert's joy and happiness as so great after choosing Christianity that 'it seemed to him that he was in Paradise'.[42] The reference appealed to Muslim sensibilities and identities by virtue of its resonances with Islam, while suggesting that clerics might profitably substitute Paradise for heaven without overmuch doctrinal distortion, since both otherworldly sites offered believers divinely

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[39] Jesuit spectacularity extended into many realms, including affective piety—the sighs, tears, and 'tears of jubilation' shed by clerics while baptising converts, but also the commissioning of artwork and building impressive architectural edifices; and also staging plays and grand public processions. For example Naples' Jesuit Father Girolamo used spectacularity to great effect. In addition to parading white-robed neophytes 'around the most populated streets of [Naples]', this cleric staged spectacular dockside religious processions 'for many years' for the thirty Spanish Galleys docked at Naples during the war of Messina (1647 and 1674–8), and for the sick at the *darsena* (dock) hospital. In this procession, convicts released from their chains sang Litanies of the Blessed Virgin and processed two by two, carrying lit torches and an effigy of Saint Francis to the Church of Santa Maria del Rimedio. Girolamo also erected extravagant shipboard altars to influence rowers. The altar between the rowers' benches displayed an image of the Virgin, while that on the stern featured 'the Holy Protector'. Both altars 'were crowned with a great many lights, and a large crucifix was placed in view on two cushions'. At the end of his Lenten sermon cycle, Girolamo delivered a sermon from a *tartana* (boat) in the harbor and issued a papal blessing and plenary indulgence. Large numbers of people ('the whole city') attended. ANONYMOUS, *Annuae litterae Societatis Iesu 1592*; ODDI, *Vita del venerabil servo*, 33–5.

[40] The most famous example of Jesuit accommodation is the seventeenth-century Chinese Rites Controversy. For donning Mandarin dress and integrating Confucian principles and ancestor worship into explanations of Christianity, critics alleged that Jesuits distorted Christian principles. For Jesuit accommodation strategies in Naples in addition to those described herein, see DAVID GENTILCORE, "Adapt Yourselves to the People's Capabilities': Missionary Strategies, Methods and Impact in the Kingdom of Naples, 1600–1800', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 45, no. 2 (1994): 269–96.

[41] SILVESTRO TORNAMIRA, *La Compagnia di Giesu* (Palermo: Carlo Adamo, 1676), 333–34.

[42] NIEREMBERG, *Lettere spirituali,* 349–51.

prepared eternal bliss.[37]

In another printed conversion narrative, a convert witnessed a vision of Joseph bearing a silver vase. Vessels and ewers surely represented hospitality and welcome, and were redolent of spiritual purity for bearing water for ritual ablutions. Yet the silver vase also summoned specific messages from the Qur'an and Hadith. Muhammad prohibited believers from drinking from precious vessels in this life since overattachment to luxury often accompanied disbelief.[43] However in Paradise (*Jannah*), believers could expect to drink from unique and exquisite silver vessels (*Al-Insan*, 76:15–16), and, in some Qur'anic traditions, vessels for a particular river of Paradise, *al-Kawthar*, were also fashioned of silver. Thus Islamic tradition contrasted precious metals as used in this world with more lasting spiritual values in the hereafter.[44] To inform a Muslim slave that he would be 'rewarded with heavenly riches and salvation' for small acts of devotion, as in one Neapolitan conversion narrative, therefore invoked familiar Qur'anic promises.[45]

Several printed conversion narratives emphasised the magnificence and splendour of heavenly figures, as when in one slave's vision of Mary, she is 'surrounded by splendour' and her white sleeves are so preternaturally long as to touch the ground. Such descriptions were surely intended to resonate in both a theological and accommodationist key. However descriptions of riches and illumination also spoke to slave identity, perhaps creating awe or desire among slave audiences whose lives were as a rule materially impoverished. For enslaved individuals, descriptions of wealth and splendour likely had a powerful and evocative effect at levels both social and theological, and it is possible that references such as these subtly reoriented enslaved Muslims toward a Christian orbit, recasting their hopes for solidarity and belonging in slow and incremental steps.

Several conversion narratives featured dream-visions, as when one 'Turkish Moor' awaiting execution hears a voice in a dream telling him to awake and convert, or as when Mary appeared to several converts.[46] Dreams were an accepted vehicle of authority and knowledge within Islam, and the Qur'an featured several. Sura *Yusuf* (12) described a royal dream of lean and fat cows and a prophetic dream of stars, while Suras *Al-Anfal* (8:43) and *Al-Fath* (Ch. 48) described Muhammad's dreams of war and conquest. As the Hadith *Sahih al-Bukhārī 7045* affirmed, dreams from Allah provided

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[43] Sura 43:34 (*Az-Zukhruf*) described houses with roofs and stairways of silver as associated with disbelief.

[44] SILVESTRO TORNAMIRA, *La Compagnia di Giesu* (Palermo: Carlo Adamo, 1676), 333–4.

[45] Conversion narratives also invoked key elements of Islamic ethics. When a would-be convert asks Mary to make special accommodations for him and she complies, she proves herself a woman of her word. The narrative thus gestured to the importance of promise-keeping, a virtue highly regarded in Islamic ethics. SYED IQBAL ZAHEER, *Tafsir Ishraq Al-Ma'an: Being a Quintessence of Qur'anic Commentaries*. (Bangalore: Iqra, 2008), Al Rad on Sura 13, 1919; MAǦĪD FAḪRĪ, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 86.

[46] The man was a slave to the nobleman Giovanni Battista Sestriglia, and his conversion had taken place four years earlier in Cagliari. FILOCOLO CAPUTO, *Il Monte carmelo in cui si tratta della miracolosa imagine di N.S. del Carmine del regio convento di Napoli* (Naples: Lazaro Scoriggio, 1636), 119–21.

guidance. With precedents in Islamic tradition, dream-visions provided a powerful form of suggestion to converts, helping them access Christian 'mysteries' and using Islamic forms to legitimate the divine identity of, and messages from, Christian holy figures.[47]

Printed conversion narratives employed accommodationist strategies and attended to perceptions of Muslim identity by emphasising ritual and practice over doctrine. More orthoprax than orthodox, Islam asked less in the way of doctrine than Christianity and instead focused upon the practice of specific behaviours such as *Salah*, or daily group prayer. Several printed narratives therefore tacitly recommended to clerics that, rather than focusing upon doctrine, they might more profitably introduce Muslims to Christianity via small, practical, and incremental activities, even activities so simple as witnessing a creche scene. Thus one conversion took place after an enslaved Muslim man approached a Nativity creche simply out of 'curiosity'. Surely the creche episode gestured to the clerical attention to spectacle as a means of arresting and engaging convert attention. It hinted that, given Islam's lack of a pronounced tradition of figural representation and given Islam's prohibition of figural images in contexts of worship, Muslims might be especially responsive to the life-sized human effigies which featured in Neapolitan nativities.[48] Yet more significantly, the episode reminded clerics that even minute gestures, feelings, and practices—in this case, simple curiosity, witnessing, and proximity—might draw a person closer to Christianity. Another printed narrative featured a conversion initiated by the simple act of lamp-lighting, and another still depicted a cleric effectively recalling a convert from apostasy by the simple act of reciting Christian prayers in unison with him. This last instance, in which the cleric accommodated by recalling *Salah*, reminded clerics to seek inroads with enslaved Muslims via small, shared acts. To advise clerics to recite prayers together with converts, moreover, further reminded clerics of the critical importance of establishing bonds of solidarity with converts. Narrative instances such as these suggested that Muslims might be introduced to Christianity obliquely and even surreptitiously by exposure to seemingly minute and innocuous gestures and practices.[49]

Surrogate Kinship and Slave Identity

Mary appeared in both Islamic and Christian traditions, and, because of this overlap, she has been seen as a figure who allows for offering comparatively easy accommodation between the two religions.[50] Early modern printed conversion

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[47] IBRAHIM AL-MASIH, 'Dreams and Visions Among Muslims', *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 18, no. 2 (2022): 106–26.

[48] Neapolitan nativity narratives were meant as regionally specific since elaborate, life-sized Nativity scenes were a Neapolitan specialty.

[49] CICATELLI, *Vita del P. Camillo de Lellis*; GIACOMO CELLESI. *Vita del servo di Dio padre Giulio Mancinelli* (Rome: Varese, 1668), 154.

[50] Mazur and Colombo both noted the use of Mary in conversionary efforts. MAZUR, 'Mohammedan Indecency'; MILLER, 'Converting 'the Indies'. Notably, the accounts analysed herein did not emphasise reason, which both Mazur and Colombo presented as a core Jesuit strategy from this period. That is,

narratives centred around Naples made much use of Mary, and she appears to multiple converts in dreams and visions. Yet, while Mary clearly appeared for reasons of accommodation, printed narratives also featured her as a distinctly maternal figure, in this way speaking directly to the identity of converts as isolated and detached from natal kin. Only one of the narratives analysed herein cast Mary in romantic terms, as when one Muslim slave declares himself 'in love with her'. Yet this account then immediately 'correct' itself to depict Mary as a 'great mother'.[51] The remainder of conversion narratives analysed herein uniformly portrayed Mary in maternal terms. Thus one enslaved 'Turk' encounters a 'beautiful matron like a majestic throne with a little son in her arms', and in other incarnations, Mary appears as a 'majestic matron' and an abundant source of kindness, comfort, and motherly reassurance to converts.

Paralleling their stress on spiritual motherhood, printed conversion narratives also made much of longings for paternal attachment among the enslaved. New converts and enslaved people, lonely and alienated, clearly longed for their natal families and perhaps especially fathers, as when one convert fantasises about visiting his father in Dolcigno.[52] Islamic society, like Christian, was deeply paternalistic, with Muslim fathers morally and spiritually obligated to raise their children with affection, protection, and care. The adage of 'wishing to die in the religion of one's father' surely underscored this patrilineal rooting of Muslim identity. Other printed narratives invoked paternal themes when enslaved Muslims had visions of Joseph as a venerable old man at Mary's side. In one narrative, the holy husband urges the convert to call himself 'Joseph', thus furnishing the convert with a new name and more importantly, an identity rooted in a masculine but now Christian lineage.[53]

In keeping with their attention to spiritual fatherhood, printed conversion narratives anchored in seventeenth-century Naples called upon clerics themselves to cultivate fatherly personae—as when in several Jesuit narratives, clerical fathers guided converts back to the fold. In one episode, an enslaved Muslim man addresses a Christian cleric as 'good Papasso'.[54] Expatriate Muslim slave communities in Naples and elsewhere were led by Imams—'Papassi'—older, respected men who led rites and maintained customs.[55] To figure a Jesuit cleric as a 'Papasso' reminded clerics of how loyalty and identity were fashioned gradually and in minute stages over time, and that an an allegiance to Muslim leaders and father figures could be transformed into an

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they argued that moving beyond medieval polemics, Neapolitan Jesuits stressed reason as a principle shared between Christianity and Islam. COLOMBO, 'Infidels', 81.

[51] BOVIO, *Esempi e miracoli della ss. Vergine*, 32.

[52] He plans to escape on Genoese ships headed for Tripoli then go to Puglia via Ragusa. SIMONE BAGNATI, *Vita del servo di Dio P. Francesco di Geronimo della Compagnia di Gesu* (Naples: Felice Mosca, 1725), 67–8.

[53] NIEREMBERG, *Lettere spirituali*, 350.

[54] ODDI, Vita del venerabil servo, 35.

[55] The Papasso enjoyed privileges such as being exempt from work. In Naples a clandestine group of Muslims led by a Papasso was found in 1562. PETER MAZUR, 'A Mediterranean Port in the Confessional Age: Religious Minorities in Early Modern Naples', in *A Companion to Early Modern Naples*, ed. ASTARITA, 215–34, 224.

allegiance to paternally benevolent Christian clerics.[56] Finally, allusions to surrogate parent-couples helped comfort and reassure potential slave converts by making clear that setting aside Islam would not ask converts to renounce their patrilineage or parental ties. As narrative visions of the Holy Couple and the depictions of the interventions of benevolent Jesuit fathers showed, conversion to Christianity simply supplied converts with new sets of parents to watch over and protect them. By foregrounding the importance of parental figures to converts, printed conversion narratives spoke to convert identity as individuals bereft of natal kin, attending to desires for familial solidarity by supplying them with new and alternative kinship ties.

Printed conversion narratives did not solely rely on accommodation. Several narratives framed their appeals so as to speak to Islamic and Chrisitan religious identity at once. The printed narrative of the conversion of Mohammed el-Attaz, for example, applied an approach rather out of keeping with others. El-Attaz, Muslim prince and first son of Fez, converted in 1656 and took the name Baldassar Loyola Mendez, becoming a Neapolitan Jesuit. A printed narrative of his conversion described el-Attaz as raised strictly 'according to the superstitious Alcoranic law'. However while reading the 'Alkoran', he heard 'an internal voice in his heart' execrating Muhammad, which then prompted his conversion.[57] The account of Mohammed el-Attaz/Loyola Mendez' conversion therefore mirrored both Saint God's call to Augustine to 'Take up and read' as well as the Jesuit founder Ignatius Loyola's conversionary transformation through reading. Yet the el-Attaz account also reflected Muhammad's conversion to Islam, for according to Islamic tradition, in around 610 CE, the archangel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad in a cave on Mount Hira near Mecca. Gabriel commanded Muhammad to recite but the latter demurred, declaring himself illiterate. Yet upon being embraced by Gabriel multiple times, Muhammad was miraculously able to read the Qur'an, with this event marking Muhammad's role as God's messenger.[58] The el-Attaz account's decisive emphasis upon literacy and reading were not echoed in other narratives.

In another account which seemed to cleave closely to Christian values, the Virgin instructed a certain 'Moor' to request burial at the Church of Carmine in Cagliari so

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[56] Christian galley rowers too also called Girolamo 'their 'Protector', 'Advocate' and 'Father', kissing both his hand and the hem of his garment. ODDI, *Vita del venerabil servo*, 46. Colombo and Mazur noted that the upstanding behaviour of Christian clerics—behaviour implied by the 'Papasso' reference—was an equally important spur to conversion.

[57] As Loyola Mendez, the former Muslim preached to enslaved people in Genoa and Naples, converting over three hundred Muslims in the *annus mirabilis* 1666–67. At Marbella in 1671, five enslaved Muslims converted after simply hearing of Mendez' conversion. GIUSEPPE ANTONIO PATRIGNANI, *Menologio di pie memorie d'alcuni religiosi della Compagnia di Gesu*, 4 vols (Venice: Niccolò Pezzana, 1730), vol. 3, 115–20; COLOMBO, 'Infidels', 77. Colombo has written extensively about Mendez. See for example, EMANUELE COLOMBO and ROCCO SACCONAGHI, 'Telling the Untellable: The Geography of Conversion of a Muslim Jesuit', in *Space and Conversion in Global Perspective*, eds GIUSEPPE MARCOCCI, ALIOCHA MALDAVSKY, WIETSE DE BOER, and ILARIA PAVAN (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 285–307.

[58] CARLOS EIRE, 'Early Modern Catholic Piety in Translation', in *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, eds PETER BURKE and RONNIE PO-CHIA HSIA (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 83–100. With thanks to Sama Mammadova for pointing out important Islamic parallels here.

that his interment would be attended by 'almost the entire city'.[59] Muslims were surely attentive to postmortem honor, yet 'good deaths', posthumous *fama*, and funeral pomp received decisively high emphasis in Christian societies. At the same time, the narrative gained power and relevance by drawing upon the threads of slave identity. Poor and inhabiting the lowest ranks of Christian society, enslaved people could scarcely hope for dignified burials. As converts were both socially and politically isolated, crowds did not typically gather at their funerals. In the instance of the Moor from Cagliari, the Virgin offered a quid pro quo for agreeing to alter religious identity. For relinquishing his identity as a Muslim, the enslaved man would enjoy a new form of solidarity, namely belonging in a Christian community, and his burial would be attended by his new spiritual compatriots.

Attending to other socioeconomic and material facets of Muslim slave identity, printed conversion narratives recommended that the Jesuit clerics use religious objects or tokens to subtly alter the religious status of potential converts. Most enslaved Muslims were impoverished and so did not own much. Therefore even small tokens, baubles, and devotional objects such as the 'crowns […] medals […] [and] crosses fixed with images' of the sort that Father Girolamo supplied to sermon auditors at Naples could stimulate feelings of gratitude and loyalty.[60] As printed conversion narratives showed, some Muslim converts kept *agnus dei*, rosaries, and 'similar devout things' in their personal boxes of 'riches' and 'precious gifts'.[61] Such tokens could function as placeholders for conversations, ideas, or people, or an *aide-memoire* for prayers. In their simple materiality, such tokens served as repositories for different kinds of meaning and confirmed religious faith while surmounting language barriers. As the Neapolitan Jesuit Mancinelli noted, such objects betokened 'affection', pointing out how seemingly invaluable items could serve as vessels for attachment and suggesting that the gratitude stimulated by religious tokens could generate new bonds of solidarity, connection, and obligation between recipient and giver.[62]

Tokens worn or displayed such as medals, rosaries, and crucifixes, moreover, made identity publicly visible. Thus, in one episode, a Jesuit cuts off the forelock—a symbol of Muslim identity—of a convert who intends to apostatise, then uses this token to publicise the man's reconciliation with Christianity by hanging it as a trophy of 'defeated infidelity' at the altar of San Francesco Saverio.[63] However, more significant than the display functions of religious tokens was that the mere handling, accepting, or owning of such tokens could, like other minute gestures and acts of practice, alter and impact religious identity. Tokens bearing figural imagery, for example, contravened Islamic prohibitions against the use of figural representation in worship contexts. For this reason, for a Muslim to accept or handle a figurally inscribed

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[59] A Holy Office notary was said to have recorded the event. CAPUTO, *Il Monte carmelo*, 121.
[60] ODDI, *Vita del venerabil servo*, 46.
[61] CELLESI, *Vita del servo di Dio*.
[62] CELLESI, *Vita del servo di Dio*.
[63] BAGNATI, *Vita del servo di Dio*, 67–8.

token or small image arguably altered and interfered with their religious commitments and, in turn, spiritual identity. Similarly, simply owning a religious image, as did one convert in these narratives, subtly recalibrated a person's religious approach and allegiance, and hence their religious identity.[64]

Conversionary Realism: Economic Assistance and Identity Documents

At the same time that many printed conversion narratives took more careful account of the emotional needs and identities of converts, some presented a deep realism as to the kinds of solidarity and charity which converts truly required. Sixteenth-century conversion accounts had often been triumphal and celebratory, for example highlighting clerics weeping while baptising Muslims and describing magnificent groups of white-robed converts paraded through city streets. By contrast, some seventeenth-century accounts addressed more difficult challenges of maintaining Christian commitments among converts. Recognising that converts who suffered from economic precarity were not well embedded in society and that nostalgia for one's homeland put them at risk of apostasy, printed conversion narratives addressed the problem of convert employment. Thus, while conversion narratives still employed miracle and divine entities, some forwarded more realistic and practical strategies.

One narrative showed how a Jesuit father supported a convert by locating employment for him.[65] When this convert and former slave fell to begging to survive, he began to blame conversion for his economic decline. Assaulted by 'the demon', he began to fantasise about returning home to 'the sweetness of his country and the comforts that he could enjoy in it' and 'the comforts of his mother's house'. Seeing Father Geronimo preaching in Naples, the would-be apostate was momentarily 'moved' with 'new, better thoughts' that were 'reborn in his heart'. Rejuvenated, he vows to die of hunger rather than abandon his new faith. However, Geronimo then extended a gesture of substantial charity and deep solidarity by offering the man a job with a fruit seller. This act allowed the man to forgo begging and secure his place within the Christian community. It also effected a transformation in identity—by renewing the convert's commitment to his Christian identity—and in solidarity, with Father Geronimo coming to stand as a surrogate father for the convert. With a greater sense of worldly and spiritual security, the convert abandoned his longings for his country and became a peaceful and productive Christian citizen.[66] As this conversion narrative showed, while inspiring preaching could rekindle religious commitment in the moment, true charity and 'deep' forms of social assistance were required to restore a genuine and abiding sense of religious solidarity for Muslim converts within Christian

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[64] Along similar lines, another account shows a Muslim slave who unknowingly engaged in a version of Christian charity— 'always offered something' to those who beg alms at his master's house—and in this way merited Mary's attention.

[65] This man had worked on papal galleys and was baptised in Rome (ca. 1691–1700), then fell into poverty after purchasing his freedom. He was unable to improve his economic circumstances because he was banned from practicing 'any trade' in Christian lands. BAGNATI, *Vita del servo di Dio,* 67–8.

[66] BAGNATI, *Vita del servo di Dio*, 67–8.

society.

Europe's proximity to North Africa, West Africa, and Turkey made it comparatively easy for converted Muslims to return to their homelands and reembrace Islam. Moreover by the sixteenth century, it was understood among Mediterranean traders that a Jewish merchant might practice as a Christian in Christian lands, then resume his Jewish identity in Ottoman lands where he was permitted to worship openly as a Jew.[67] However, Catholicism severely penalised any fluidity in religious identity and categorically prohibited such switches. A Neapolitan decree of 1555 prohibited freed and converted 'Moorish and Turkish Slaves' from returning to their country 'to continue their infidelity' without written permission from the King (*in scriptis obtenta*), suggesting that geographically conditional apostasy among slave-converts was seen as common.[68] The political commentator Traiano Boccalini (1556–1613) voiced a similar view. In a work written before 1613 and published in 1678, Boccalini claimed to have seen 'many' slaves depart from Naples then go to Rome to 'become Christian'. From Rome they traveled to Marseilles then on to Algeria, 'laughing at our ease in having given them faith'.[69] Departure to a Muslim homeland reveals one important way that Muslims resisted the conditions of enslavement and reclaimed former religious identities.

As printed seventeenth-century narratives suggested, many alleged 'apostates' simply wished to see their families and then return to Christian lands. At least one Neapolitan cleric adopted a distinctly practical approach to conversion, helping individuals navigate this wish by producing an unusual administrative document. As his biographer explained, the Jesuit father Mancinelli created a 'special certificate which declared the bearer reconciled to the Catholic church'.[70.] This form allowed its holder to visit the Dar-al-Islam while protecting returnees to Europe from severe 'ecclesiastical judges'—the Inquisition. One could therefore in principle use this document to travel to Turkey, practice as a Muslim, then peacefully reenter Europe and resume life as a Christian. While there is no evidence that such a document existed, Mancinelli nevertheless reported that his certificate allowed enslaved Muslims to 'convert more easily', to 'take refuge in their homelands' and be '[re]converted as Christians', and that the document was 'of great benefit to many'. This narrative indicated the Jesuit awareness, and presumably acceptance, of the fact that Ottoman lands were more tolerant of fluidity in religious identity than Christian ones. By providing a means of surmounting potential difficulties involved in religious identity-switching, Mancinelli's document was quite radical.[71] In roundly subverting orthodoxy,

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[67] COHEN, *Under Crescent and Cross*; GARCÍA-ARENAL and WIEGERS, *A Man of Three Worlds*.
[68] DE SARIIS, *Codice delle leggi* (28 Nov 1555), 3–5.
[69] TRAIANO BOCCALINI, *La bilancia politica del Boccalini* (Castellana: Giovanni Hermano Widerhold, 1678), 140–1; 326–7.
[70] CELLESI, *Vita del servo di Dio*, 154.
[71] Conversion efforts also amplified bureaucratic and impersonal aspects of converter identity, for efforts to manage conversion repeatedly generated more and more careful administrative oversight. Thus Jesuits reorganised the Congregazione di Schiavi in 1615 and their College in 1618, with Father Ferracuto reassigned to teach Arabic to 'more readily engage in catechising the Mohammedans'. A later

Mancinelli's form underscored a rogue side of Jesuit identity: a willingness to bend official rules toward desired ends. Mancinelli's document also demonstrated considerable emotional support and solidarity to converts, along with a strong helping of realism: a willingness to help them retain and rekindle natal bonds. Finally, in mediating conversions across international borders, Mancinelli's document conveyed decidedly modern identity valences, acknowledging growing state bureaucracies and calls for proof of identity in an age of increased mobility and boundary-crossing.[72]

Conclusion

What do printed conversion narratives centred at Naples tell us about the identity, solidarity, and charity of Muslim slaves, their converters; and conversionary approaches in the early modern period? Such narratives reveal that, in converting enslaved Muslims, Jesuits, Theatines, and other clerics altered simple and traditional top-down approaches and developed a variety of new conversionary strategies. Realising that conversion, a species of charity, generated countless paradoxes in practice, printed conversion narratives advised clerics to employ a strategy of 'divide and conquer': to disrupt perceived Muslim solidarity and isolate individuals within enclosed spaces such as homes, hospitals, and galleys. Clerics therefore took decisive and calculated steps to prey upon convert vulnerability, plying their trade upon ill and dying individuals at hospitals. At these sites in particular, paradoxes in charity both produced and mapped new convert and other social identities. Neapolitan clerics also employed diverse strategies of accommodation, inserting a broad range of Islamic religious symbols into Christian appeals and emphasising praxis as against doctrine. Understanding slave identities and the longing of exiles for natal kin, clerics used printed conversion narratives to promise slaves the attentions of spiritual parental figures while showing decided paternal attention to vulnerable slaves, converts, and would-be apostates. While speaking to core elements of slave social identity and experience such as poverty, such narratives also acknowledged convert needs for belonging and solidarity. Printed narratives showed clerics as willing to dissimulate: to veil their rancour against Islam, and as offering 'deep' forms of charity to bolster conversion to Christianity including employment assistance and the creation of administrative identity documents that enabled converts to 'switch' their religious identity in diverse international settings. While conversion narratives recursively returned to a stereotype of Muslim 'obstinacy', these same narratives revealed an understanding that Ottomans treated religious identity with comparative fluidity and that Christians were rather less flexible in such matters. Finally, through careful clerical

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report describing eighteen slaves converted by 'the Father destined to take care of them' indicates efforts to target, or assign clerics to specific cohorts of potential converts. A greater attention to bureaucracy surely shaped the identities of those who engaged in it. That is, an amplified focus upon administration would have increased an overall attention to planning, enumeration, measurability, and attempts to fix social identities over time. SCHINOSI, *Istoria*, 372; 151–2.

[72] On the growth of bureaucracy in Southern Italy, see Roberto Delle Donne, *Burocrazia e fisco a Napoli tra XV e XVI secolo. La Camera della Sommaria e il* Repertorium alphabeticum solutionum fiscalium Regni Siciliae Cisfretanae (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2012).

attention to the identity of Muslim slaves—by addressing their experience, hopes, fears, and needs—conversion narratives showed that 'obstinate' Muslim slaves, contrary to being religiously intransigent, and if addressed with the right techniques and approaches, were indeed quite open to conversion.