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Caterina Depicted

The female figure has always been a source of inspiration for artists, and so has the East. Depending on the political and financial situation in the world, from prehistory to the present day, the East has been an element of cultural reference both as a place and as an idea.

The routes of cultural exchanges are never unilateral. They move in both directions and, depending on the period, create new cultural data, new nuclei, which in turn become cultural reference points: new East for other West-lands. In this paper, I would like to share my thoughts and reflections on the visual representation of the woman as a symbol of the East, as it was defined by the West in the 16th century through the representation of one particular woman: the queen of Cyprus, Jerusalem and Armenia, the Venetian Caterina Cornaro.

Venice had, for a long time, wanted to conquer the island of Cyprus [8, pp. 765–878]. The presence of Venetian merchants on the island is testified since the 14th century, and we know that Venice, and certain Venetian families, had a great influence on the island's economy [2, pp. 175–197; 9, pp. 59–100]. One of these influential Venetian families in Cyprus — and one of the most powerful families of Venice at that time — was the Cornaro family [3, pp. 67–85]. With a clever diplomatic move, the Cornaros managed to effect the engagement of King James II, of the Lusignan dynasty, to then adolescent Caterina. Before the young Venetian left her city for her long trip to Cyprus, the Venetian Senate decided to adopt her. From that moment on, the Serenissima Republic of Venice was officially the protector of the young bride. After the death of the king in 1473, his wife, Queen Caterina, ruled the island for 16 years alone, refusing to hand the realm to Venice [8, pp. 710–764]. However, after repeated threats of an Ottoman invasion on the island, the Queen was forced to seek help from her homeland. Cyprus passed into the hands of Venice, while Caterina retired to the small town of Asolo until her death in 1510 [12, pp. 153–167].

In the remainder of this paper, I would like to discuss the type of attire Caterina Cornaro is seen wearing in various portraits, and the possible relations between that and the Cypriot attire of the same historical period.

The clothing taste of Cypriots in the 15th and 16th centuries is known to us from the portraits of donors depicted in religious icons of the period. However, donors belonged to the higher social strata of Cypriot society — the ones that were more closely related to the rulers (the Venetians) — and the reason for their depiction was a formal one [1, pp. 89–94]. Therefore, their choice of attire was definitely made to meet the needs of a very precise formal moment. Without exception, all the donors seen on icons are wearing Western-style attire and, more specifically, of Italian taste [6, pp. 330–331].

The depiction of donors within a holy scene is in itself a Western habit, one that is only rarely found in the world of Byzantine tradition. More specifically, in the period with which we are concerned here this practice is connected with Catholic Europe. Thus, the Western dressing of the donors is directly related to their need to be present in an icon, and is absolutely consistent with their cultural background, as shown by both historical sources and more recent studies [7, pp. 224–226]. This fact is also recorded in archival documents concerning members of the ruling class; when these include lists of garments, they are all of Western taste [6, pp. 333–335].

With regard to the lower strata of the local population, there is almost no evidence relating to their attire, neither any clear and/or direct evidence concerning their garments, nor any information on the kind of fashion they adopted. Perhaps some elements can be extracted from icons and frescoes depicting scenes of everyday life, but the fact that hagiographers tended to depict older models (of clothing, architecture, etc.) in their work makes identification difficult.

Concerning Caterina and her attire, it would be useful to see how the Queen of Cyprus was presented in artworks commissioned by herself, or made during her lifetime [11, pp. 11–32]. Her most famous portrait was painted by Gentile Bellini, in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest (Ill. 123). In the painting, she is dressed entirely in the Venetian manner and all details emphasize her queenliness [15, pp. 36–37]. The only Eastern element that appears in the painting is the kerchief wrapped around her head, made of black velvet with gold embroidery that is reminiscent of the patterns on Venetian-Saracen metal objects. The use of the kerchief around her head is not supported in any way by contemporary Venetian fashion. This does not necessarily mean that this is a Cypriot fashion element, but can only be taken as a reference to the Queen's *exotic* and *Oriental* past.

The Queen is depicted with the same type of garments, with the exception of the kerchief, in all the known and alleged portraits of her, such as the relief found in the Correr Museum, Carpaccio's painting from the cycle of the *Miracle of St. Cross* in the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, her portrait by Albrecht Dürer in the Breman Kunsthalle (Ill. 124) and even in the painting by Tiziano, *La Schiavona* in London's National Gallery, which for many years was considered to be a portrait of Caterina where she is dressed in perfect Venetian fashion [6, pp. 274–276].

Artistic creation, as it is known, is inextricably linked to the society in which it is born and expressed. Together with the conditions and attitudes of society, artists express the fashions, desires and concerns of their time. We know that the use of Oriental garments has a long tradition in European art. Beginning in the Middle Ages, artists were using Oriental clothes to dress the persons who participated in scenes from the Old and New Testament. Often, these were not representative of the actual clothes worn by the people of the time, but versions that were distorted by the artists' inspiration and/or ignorance. With the exception of some artists-travelers, the misuse of clothing continued with the artists dealing with Orientalism in the 19th century. One could argue that this tradition carried on until Henri Matisse. The use of Eastern garments or other decorative details are the elements required to give 'an exotic touch' to a work of art. Matisse, for instance, used the 'Sayia', the Oriental garment, for both men and women during the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, even though at that time it was not used in the East.

This garment, Sayia, was a kind of ankle-long coat, open at the front, with short or long sleeves. It was made of sturdy fabric and was often decorated with ornate additions. During

Byzantine times, the Sayia was used by the ruling class [13, p. 108]. As reported by travelers, the same happened at the time of the Ottoman Empire, when Sayia was worn by the royal family and the court [5, p. 29] and was often made of Venetian fabrics [13, pp. 170–171].

This is the garment we will focus on, in the works of Tiziano and his school's, starting from the known portrait which, according to tradition, is associated with Cyprus: the one depicting Caterina Cornaro as St. Catherine, which belongs to the Uffizi Medici collection (Ill. 125). In this painting, the Queen is dressed as the virgin Princess of the East, with a long purple shirt with pearl buttons, and a coat made of green brocade with golden decoration open at the front, with short sleeves with pointed endings.

A number of portraits depicting Oriental women were painted using the same composition as that of St. Catherine and the same garment in different variants. In fact, we do not know for certain that these portraits depict Oriental women. However, tradition wants all of them to be women from the East, and the only common element they have, in addition to the actual composition, is this garment. Some examples are these of the *Young Woman Holding a Vase* of the Gemandegalerie in Dresden, the *Young Woman Holding a Kitten* in the Piero Corsini Gallery, New York, the *Young Woman Characterized as a Sultana*, John and Mable Ringling Museum, Sarasota and the well-known *Young Woman Holding an Apple* in the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

A typical example of the type is that of the Rita and Costas Severis collection, at the Centre of Visual Arts and Research (CVAR), in Nicosia (Ill. 126). This was made by an unknown artist who was close to Tiziano and was active in Venice in the second half of the 16th century. The canvas is Venetian in its weaving, and the colours are characteristic of the palette of the Venetian artist. The composition is that of the signed original, Tiziano's variant of the *Woman Holding an Apple*. The figure seems to be a little smaller compared to other works by Tiziano. This was caused by additions made at unknown time, on the top and bottom of the canvas. The young girl has her hair held up in the Venetian fashion, and wears pearl jewellery on her ears, neck and hair. The clothes are a variant of Tiziano's works: a striped shirt with a deep opening at the chest and a Sayia, in ochre colour, with red decorations on the edges. The sleeves are rolled up to the middle of the arm, and pointed at the ends. The garment is buttoned at the bottom with pearl buttons. The same buttons adorn the upper part too, but the artist — for reasons that remain unknown — has hidden them beneath the red stripe. The shirt's fabric is also of interest, as it looks like the Cypriot striped fabrics exported from the island to Venice, found in descriptions we come across in archival documents [4, pp. 117–118]. The simplicity of the decoration of the Sayia makes it easier to read its form. It makes it look like the known garment that existed in the wider area of the Middle East, and which survived in Cyprus until the beginning of the last century.

The painting, which belonged to an English family in Bristol, was believed to be a portrait of Caterina Cornaro made by Tiziano. Now we know that the work is not by Tiziano, nor is there any indication that this is indeed the queen of Cyprus. However, legend indicates a relationship between the painted pattern and the East, and in particular with the Queen of Cyprus.

As mentioned earlier, this garment has ancient origins, and travelers testified that it was a garment of the Ottoman elite. Furthermore, as also mentioned earlier, this garment, in an evolved form, was used in Cyprus in the 19th and 20th centuries. How was this garment used

during the 16th century, how did it come to the attention of Tiziano and other artists, and how can we be sure that this is not an invention of the artist but a real object?

During the second half of the 16th century, costume books emerged as a popular new genre. They reflect a greater curiosity about foreign cultures derived from travels and new discoveries. Venice and the Veneto, where at least nine such books were published between 1540 and 1610, played a leading role in the costume books' early development. The most famous and important example is Cesare Vecellio's *Degli Abiti Antichi et Moderni di Diverse Parti del Mondo...* of 1590, which became a model for the genre (Fig. 3). It includes more than 500 illustrations and pays special attention to Venetian and Ottoman dress.

Moreover, travel sketchbooks of painters who visited the East were in circulation between artists, as in the case of Giovanni Mansueti, whose sketchbook includes detailed representations of garments, architectural examples, animals and plants. The personal experience of Venetian artists with foreign costumes is also important. Many foreigners were present in the city: all of them were wearing their particular attire, among them many Cypriots [10, p. 2017].

To discover what the Sayia looked like in the 16th century, we need to look at Ottoman miniatures, which provide us with interesting examples of scenes in the Sultan's court. The garment was worn by both men and women, had many different kinds of ornaments and decorations, and was made of a variety of rich fabrics. A few samples are held in the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul [11, pp. 94–95, 108–109 and 112–113]. These confirm the information conveyed to us by both travelers and miniatures; that is, that these garments were a privilege of the ruling class, and were often made of expensive Venetian fabrics.

In Cyprus, no examples of this period survive. The connection between Sayia and the women of the East, particularly Caterina Cornaro, in the Venetian paintings can be taken as a hint. If combined with the presence of the garment in Cyprus during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, this hint can reinforce the hypothesis that the garment was on the island since at least the 16th century. In the absence of concrete data, however, this can only remain a hypothesis.

In conclusion, we must not forget that the East as a concept had always been a metaphor, a symbol that the West was aware of but only in part. The rest was a mystery, and one that had filled the East with charm.

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Title. Caterina Depicted.

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Abstract. One of the emblematic figures in the relationship between the Venetian Republic and the East is, without doubt, Caterina Cornaro, wife of the King of Cyprus, Jerusalem and Armenia, subsequently herself queen of the island, but, most importantly, 'daughter' of Venice. There are not many paintings depicting Caterina, produced either in her lifetime (1454–1510) or later. In all the works produced during her life, Caterina is depicted as a secular, royal figure, dressed in the Venetian manner of the time. In the works produced from the second half of the 16th century onwards, the Queen of Cyprus is depicted more freely, without any of the social stereotypes relating to her status. During the 1540s, Titian paints Caterina Cornaro as Saint Catherine of Alexandria. The artist's well known painting, now in Florence, for the first time depicts the Queen wearing a rich, short-sleeved cloak. This garment, in many variations, was meant to mark a long series of paintings depicting Caterina Cornaro as well as other women of the East for the next century. But why does the Venetian artist choose to dress the Queen of Cyprus in this garment? Did Caterina Cornaro ever wear clothes of an Eastern type? How did other women of the East dress during that period? Drawing on the context laid out above, as well as the study of contemporary sources, I try to answer these questions bearing in mind the political and financial relationships between a dying Empire and one close to its peak. The works of Titian and his followers are critically compared to the portraits of Caterina Cornaro made during her lifetime, especially in the attire. At the same time, the cloak shown in Titian's painting is compared to pictorial and other sources from the Ottoman world, in an effort to trace the Venetian artist's inspiration.

Keywords: Venice; Cyprus; Ottoman; costumes; Caterina Cornaro; Sayia; fashion; Oriental attire; Titian.

Название статьи. Изображая Катерину Корнаро.

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Аннотация. Одной из ключевых фигур во взаимоотношениях Венецианской республики и Востока, без сомнения, была Катерина Корнаро (1454–1510), супруга короля Кипра, Иерусалима и Армении, впоследствии сама — королева острова, но что важнее, «дочь» Венеции. Её изображений до нашего времени дошло не много. На всех прижизненных портретах Катерина предстаёт как светская, монаршая особа, одетая по венецианской моде своего времени. В произведениях второй половины

XVI в. королева Кипра изображается свободнее, вне каких-либо социальных стереотипов, связанных с её статусом. В 1540-е гг. Тициан пишет Катерину Корнаро в образе св. Екатерины Александрийской. На знаменитой картине мастера (ныне в галерее Уффици, Флоренция) королева впервые изображена в роскошном платье с короткими рукавами. В следующем столетии этот наряд в различных вариациях станет отличительной чертой целой череды изображений королевы, а также других «женщин Востока». Но почему венецианский художник одевает королеву Кипра в этот наряд? Носила ли Катерина Корнаро одежды восточного кроя? Как одевались в то время другие женщины средиземноморского Востока? Исходя из описанного контекста, а также опираясь на современные исследования, автор статьи отвечает на этот вопрос с учётом политических и финансовых взаимоотношений между двумя империями — умирающей и готовящейся к расцвету. Работы Тициана и его последователей сравниваются с портретами Катерины Корнаро, созданными при её жизни. В то же время платье, изображённое Тицианом, сопоставляется с живописными и другими прототипами из оттоманского мира в попытке выявить источник вдохновения венецианского живописца.

Ключевые слова: Венеция; Кипр; Оттоманская империя; история костюма; Катерина Корнаро; история моды; ориентальный стиль; Тициан.



Ill. 123. Giovanni Bellini. Caterina Cornaro, regina di Cipro, ca.1500. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.
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Ill. 124. Albrecht Dürer. Portrait of Caterina. 1494–1495. Kunsthalle Bremen.
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Ill. 125. Tiziano Vecellio. Santa Caterina d'Alessandria. 1542. Gallerie degli Uffizi. © Gallerie degli Uffizi



Ill. 126. Follower of Tiziano. Young Woman Holding an Apple. ca. 1500. Center of Visual Art and Research, Rita and Costas Severis Foundation.
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