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## Healing, Translating, Collecting

Doctor Michelangelo Tilli across the Ottoman Empire  
(1683–85)

Working Paper

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# HEALING, TRANSLATING, COLLECTING: DOCTOR MICHELANGELO TILLI ACROSS THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE (1683–85)\*

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This paper focuses on a group of approximately 30 letters exchanged between the Medici court in Florence and a young physician, Michelangelo Tilli, travelling with a surgeon across different regions of the Ottoman Empire from 1683 to 1685. In response to a request made by the Sultan's court, in April 1683 doctor Tilli arrived in Smirne *en route* to Constantinople with the official charge of treating Pasha Mussaip, the Sultan's son in law and general of the Turkish fleet, who suffered from a painful and invalidating knee problem. During the Habsburg Turkish war and the failed siege of Vienna, while Christian armies were confronting the last Ottoman attack to Central Eastern Europe, doctor Tilli was sent in the enemy's quarters to cure one of its highest-ranking officers. This exceptional set of events produced an intense epistolary exchange as Tilli traveled with the Pasha's court from Belgrade, to Adrianople (today Edirne) Filippopoli (today Plovdiv) and Constantinople. Reports on health and medical therapies followed by the regular attempts at sending medicaments directly from Florence, intersect highly emotional descriptions of the collapse of the Ottoman armies in Vienna and Hungary.

A smaller and parallel correspondence took place between Tilli and his scientific mentor, doctor Francesco Redi, head physician at the Medici Court and one of Europe's leading figures consolidating the experimental method of scientific observation in the natural sciences, after Galileo. Redi supported his pupil sending advice and monitoring symptoms and progress. In the correspondence medical information is focused on practice and therapy, something that is generally missing from the early modern history of medicine, where the "gap between the written works of theory and the reality of daily practice" is an unresolved problem.<sup>1</sup>

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\*I thank Constantin Ardeleanu and Michał Wasiucionek for their comments and suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> James Shaw and Evelyne Welsh, *Making and Marketing Medicine in Renaissance Florence* (Amsterdam and New York, 2011), 236.

Going through Redi's letters, I soon discovered that, in the same years, he was overseeing other two Tuscan physicians travelling in Egypt and around Tunis. This rare constellation of lesser-known figures and texts resonates with current historiographical discussions on connected histories and with research strategies that investigate the possibility of finding ways to integrate micro-historical approaches to transnational/translocal history. This encourages us, as Francesca Trivellato writes "to think creatively outside the "box" of civilizations "juxtaposing micro and macro units of analysis."<sup>2</sup>

### OBSERVING, TASTING, TRANSLATING, COLLECTING

"Have you begun to stammer the Turkish language? I hope so. Please concentrate and make all possible efforts: try to learn it at all costs. The Granduke has asked me repeatedly if you are learning it so that you will be fluent in Turkish when you come back. I have always replied that I have unfailing trust in your capacities."<sup>3</sup>

The author of this letter sent from Florence to Constantinople on Nov 19, 1683, is doctor Francesco Redi (1626–1698), first court physician, and one of Europe's leading natural scientists. The letter is addressed to one of his closest pupils, doctor Michelangelo Tilli in Constantinople. Reading more, we understand why learning Turkish was crucially important:

"How are you going to observe animals, plants, soil and all that is part of natural history? How will you remark the medical treatments currently used by the doctors in that country? What method do they follow? And what about food? Do the courtiers and high standing officials have sumptuous and delicious banquets? I would appreciate if you could send me a few recipes of some especially popular dishes in Turkey, as well as some recipes of cakes and other delicacies."<sup>4</sup>

Healing, observing, tasting, communicating and eventually collecting both *naturalia* and antiquities required translating between languages and across cultures. These

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<sup>2</sup> Christian G. De Vito, "Verso una microstoria translocale (micro-spatial history)," *Quaderni Storici*, 3 (2015): 815–833; Francesca Trivellato, "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?" *California Italian Studies*, 2, 2011 <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/oz94n9hq>

<sup>3</sup> Francesco Redi, *Lettere*, Firenze 1825: 73

<sup>4</sup> Francesco Redi, *Lettere*, Firenze 1825: 73–74

practices are at the core of the dense correspondence between the Medici court in Florence, doctor Francesco Redi and Michelangelo Tilli (1655–1750) a twenty-seven-year-old physician graduated from the university of Pisa, who between 1683 and 1685 travelled to the Ottoman Empire with the official charge of treating “pasha Mussaip”, son in law of Sultan Mehmed IV, having married his daughter Hatice Sultan in 1675. He was a son of a Süleyman Agha and got his education in the Inner Palace before becoming Sultan Mehmed IV’s companion and favorite (musahib – hence the nickname). In 1666 he was named a second vizier and in 1673 the Deputy of the Imperial Stirrup. In 1683–1684 he acted as the Grand Admiral of the Fleet, as well as the commander in Morea.<sup>5</sup> It was a relevant diplomatic and political move to send a promising young physician to treat the Pasha during the crucial military campaign of the Turks in Central Europe against the Holy League. When Tilli arrived in Istanbul, the Ottomans were at war with the Hapsburg Empire, and the catastrophic consequences of the siege of Vienna in September 1683 resonate in his letters and reports, to date unpublished among the abundant literature on these events. Indeed, the doctor’s letters intersecting political and diplomatic information with medical therapy, botanical observation and the search for antiquities show “the plurality of functions performed by early modern medical practitioners.”<sup>6</sup>

European doctors were in high demand in the Ottoman Empire: Tilli’s mission was part of a tradition of physicians trained in Padova or Pisa moving to the Ottoman lands. A few years before his arrival in Constantinople, Giovanni Mascellini was the European diplomats’ doctor before being employed by the Grand Mufti “whose disease – Mascellini wrote to Florence – has degenerated owing to the ill treatments of some barbarous Turkish surgeon.” Having a European doctor was a mark of status and some travelers mention, with a note of irony, that an easy way of getting around in Ottoman

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<sup>5</sup> Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani*, vol. 4, ed. Nuri Akbayar, translated by Seyit Ali Kahraman, (Istanbul, 1996), 1203. He died in 1686, at the age of around 40. He composed poems in Arabic and Persian and apparently was a talented musician.

<sup>6</sup> Filippo De Vivo, “Pharmacies as centres of communication in early modern Venice,” *Renaissance Studies* 21, no. 4 (2007): 506; Alessandro Pini, the learned physician of the Venetian fleet, in 1703 wrote a geographical and archeological description of the Peloponnese, see Anastasia Stouraiti, “Printing Empire: Visual culture and the imperial archive in seventeenth century Venice,” *The Historical Journal*, 59, no. 3 (2016): 635–668.

society was pretending to be a doctor, as there was a widespread belief in the excellent medical knowledge of all Europeans.<sup>7</sup>

## FROM LEGHORN TO CONSTANTINOPLE

Leaving from Leghorn on a Dutch vessel on February 2, 1683, accompanied by surgeon Pasquali, Tilli arrives in Smirne on April 1<sup>st</sup>. The secretary of Granduke Cosimo III had given him precise information concerning credit to be paid by local merchants and adequate clothing for both “according to local custom as well as that of the Franks so that they can look good in Constantinople.” Informal instructions were also given, and they highlight the overlapping aims of the charge, as well as a broader transfer of objects, animals, and slaves through gift giving that the mission might entail:

“His Highness told me to let you know – writes the secretary – that were the Pasha willing to offer gifts, a nice antique Greek or Latin marble or bronze statue would be highly appreciated, or Greek and Latin coins, as we know that there are many such antiquities especially in Asia where they are found daily, and the Turks don’t care about them.”<sup>8</sup>

But gifts were not only meant to collect classical antiquities but also “positional goods” in Ottoman society:

“What the Granduke would value immensely –so the Florentine secretary – are some handsome Turkish horses or a young Circassian slave good looking and good-natured to be trained in the service of His Highness. I insist that he must be a native of Circassia and of no other nation, as those who sell them often camouflage them as Circassians, while they are Greek, Albanians, and Slavs that we do not want, as they do not train well”<sup>9</sup>.

A diplomatic network is organized to help the doctor travel from Smirne to Constantinople. He does not know where his patient, Pasha Mussaip, resides, as the Hungarian war might have moved him away from the capital city to Adrianople (Edirne) or Belgrade. Tuscany did not have a consul in Constantinople and therefore

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<sup>7</sup> More information on Italian doctors in the Ottoman Empire are in Cristian Luca, *Contributi alla biografia dei medici Jacopo Pylarino (1659–1718) e Bartolomeo Ferrati (?–1738)*, in Ovidiu Cristea, Gheorghe Lazar (eds.), *Vocatia istoriei. Prinos Profesorului Șerban Papacostea* (Brăila, 2008): 635–652.

<sup>8</sup> Firenze, Archivio di Stato (from now on ASF), MdP 1605, c. 242, 12 gennaio 1682.

<sup>9</sup> Ivi, cc. 245 r–v.

had to rely on an extensive web of protections granted by the Venetian Bailo, Dutch, British and French diplomats. In Smirne the French consul grants protection to merchants from Leghorn and with some regret Tilli notes that

“consuls in this city are considered highly, more than in Italian ports, and I think they occupy an eminent position, between that of ambassador and consul. Even Capuchins and Jesuits that live here abide by his decisions and serve him with great respect.”<sup>10</sup>

In Smirne the physician and surgeon change their attire: clothes are being made to fit in Turkish fashion, and yet without completely hiding their European identity. Jewish tailors sew the clothing for both travelers, using textiles, colours, and accessories that highlight their social and professional standing:

“One iron color satin dress with gilded silver buttons. Another one of bright red silk from Chio with silver buttons and two of simple red Turkish cotton cloth (boccaccino from the Turkish bogasi), two Venetian damask doublets, a dress with a sable lining and one of Dutch cloth with a leather lining, a dress of English cloth, one of camel hair lined with bright red satin, two sable calpachs and four pairs of babouches (slippers), two linen shirts and two breeches.”

The luxury textiles and fur fit with the cosmopolitan liveliness of Smirne that enchants Michelangelo Tilli with its extraordinary freedom allowing Franks to dress, live, and walk around without a dragoman and to

“dress in the French fashion as we do in Leghorn, or to dress as Turks or wear a wig and a hat and what is admirable is to see the Franks living in the best houses on the road facing the harbor where, if some Turk tried to provoke them, he would be soon chastised by the foreign merchants. Smirne is the only place in the whole of the Levant where all this freedom is allowed.”<sup>11</sup>

Eventually, the two travelers board a Turkish vessel sailing to Constantinople and a French doctor on board instructs Tilli on how to behave with the *kapudan pasha*:

“I took my shoes off before entering the room and then we were seated on a sofa covered with carpets and with lots of big cushions around it. I immediately realized that this Turk was jovial and

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<sup>10</sup> Ivi, c 249.

<sup>11</sup> Ivi, c. 250v.

wished to please me in all possible ways because of the patient I was about to treat.”<sup>12</sup>

They arrive in Constantinople on May 26, but Pasha Mussaip has already moved north to Belgrade with the army. The Venetian bailo oversees the gathering of information among his connections at court, and in the European community, and offers food and lodging. “The city appears almost empty and without any luxury, as the ministers and high ranking officers who with their courts and horses adorn the streets have all gone to the battlefield,” Tilli writes to Florence. There is widespread opposition to the war even among the military as many think that the army is not trained well enough and its strength is only due to numbers, not skill.

## BELGRADE

After two more months of travel, on July 24<sup>th</sup>, the physician and the surgeon reach Belgrade and receive a warm and kind welcome at the court of Pasha Mussaip, son in law of the Sultan:

“He has been suffering from a painful discomfort in the knee for 18 years. The same medicaments have been applied over and over, and therefore I am compelled to select. I think I will choose those that will not make things worse, even if they have been already employed.”

Tilli decides to be prudent in the treatment of his patient, with the approval of his mentor Redi who advised him to treat the pain with ointments and to “avoid cutting, as this is always risky.” For the next two months he is stationed in Belgrade. He observes the city, its beautiful streets, and multiethnic population speaking a variety of idioms:

“In addition to the Turkish language, from Sofia onwards one hears the Slavic one so that at Mass, after the priest has finished reading the gospel in Latin, the cleric sings in the Slavic language and the priest replies accordingly, as he has a missal translated from Latin into the Illyric idiom.”<sup>13</sup>

In Belgrade, different lifestyles and religious practices coexist:

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<sup>12</sup> Ivi, c. 247v.

<sup>13</sup> ASF, MdP 1605, c. 234v.

“People here live partly in the German custom and partly in the Turkish: rooms have a stove to provide warmth in the freezing winters. People from different religions live together: the majority are Greek Orthodox Christians, then come the Turks, the Jews and the Roman Catholics. There are very many mosques and only two Churches, a Greek and a Latin one. In the latter, 3 friars care for over 1000 Catholics. When they leave the convent, they don their tunics or cover them with Bulgarian styled clothes especially when a simple friar with a servant visits the sick holding a lamp under his fur coat.”<sup>14</sup>

Religious healing practices were popular not only among the Catholic minority. The Ottoman medical system comprised three different etiological and therapeutic traditions: humoralism filled the niche of learned medicine as it did in Europe. It enjoyed supremacy in urban communities, in the sultan’s palaces, and among the wider Ottoman élite and its legitimacy rested in the Galenic textual tradition inherited from Greek antiquity.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to folkloric and Prophetic medicine, Muslim humoralism was theologically neutral in its attitude towards illness and health. However, as in other western early modern medical systems, lay and religious healers and therapies were not perceived as incompatible alternatives, but rather in competition with one another. Should one fail, the patient could resort to the other two. Therefore, healers could rarely justify the high level of financial rewards they expected and humoral doctors could not necessarily demand the financial premium they believed befitted their long process of training and their theoretical knowledge.<sup>16</sup> Being embedded in the hierarchical Ottoman society, the realm of medicine acknowledged social and financial differences. Ottoman medicines offered multiple methods for getting better, but they were not available to all. For many Ottomans, medical options were limited, and medicine was also a means for social demarcation that in turn helped to reinforce status distinctions. In early modern Italy, having a personal doctor who often supervised an apothecary to make medicaments especially targeted to a private patient was a luxury, as most of the population was treated in hospitals. This was also the case between doctor Tilli and Pasha Mussaip whose social standing and political position entitled him to privileged treatment.

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<sup>14</sup> ASF, MdP 1605, c. 234v.

<sup>15</sup> Miri Shefer-Mossensohn, *Ottoman Medicine: Healing and Medical Institutions, 1500–1700* (Albany, 2009), 23–24.

<sup>16</sup> Ivi, 26.



In October the doctor sends some encouraging news to Florence

“the knee tumor is getting smaller, and the pain is no longer continuous, but intermittent. I hope that he will be able to put his leg on the floor without feeling any pain, but for the time being this is not feasible. The pasha feels a great relief and believes that applying the new medicaments by the early Spring he will improve considerably and therefore he did not allow me to leave and I have to keep following him.”

Letters are also full of political information about the “confusion and trouble” caused by the catastrophic defeat of the Ottoman army around Vienna, the Gran Visier’s escape to Buda, and the great number of deaths “caused by the Christian armies.” “However”, writes Tilli,

“we do not have any reliable information as no one of considerable standing has appeared to inform us. In the last 4 days, we have begun to see some scattered groups of ragged soldiers, some looking wild, some with no weapons, barefoot, with their skin barely covering their bones. They pass by, and each one tries to get home as quickly as possible and to forget about the war. They refuse to obey their commanders who try to slow them down.”<sup>17</sup>

A few days later, doctor Tilli writes to his mentor Redi with more information on his patient’s state of health and on the therapies:

“I am now applying on his knee mutton guts as well as a plaster made of broad bean flower with some large, boiled cabbage leaves and on top of it butter and ointment. I go on applying light things every day according to the need of softening or expelling what has been softened. When I touch the tumor, it recedes slightly and when I remove my finger it goes back to its original shape, as sponge shaped tumors do. When he puts his foot on the ground, he feels a strong pain in the joints of the bone.”<sup>18</sup>

Tilli asks Redi to send him

“a pot of rose ointment, a small quantity of human fat and a small pot of oil for the nerves from the Medici Fonderia (i.e the chemical and alchemic foundry in Florence where medicaments were also

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<sup>17</sup> ASF, MdP 1605, c. 235.

<sup>18</sup> Ivi, c. 255.

distilled and prepared) a very small quantity of perfumed quintessence to dilute in water would also be useful.”

These were the new medicaments that the Pasha was waiting for. Medicines were not only needed for Mussaip himself, but for the court as well. Surgeon, Pasquali, sick with malaria, was taking quinine and “I am now working both as physician, surgeon, and apothecary not only for the Pasha’s court, but also for those who cunningly smuggled into his retinue to enjoy these privileges” he tells his mentor, asking him to send more quinine and “one hundred of your pills, but smaller than usual, so that instead of swallowing two of them, it is better to swallow three.”

Because of the war, doctor Tilli hardly ever received what he asked for. The Pasha’s court kept moving, and this made things even more difficult. The routes through which medicaments were sent from Florence to Belgrade and later on to Adrianopoli (Edirne) went through Venice and Split or Ragusa. Painstaking instructions followed these precious small coffers through networks of kin, merchants, and diplomatic agents. In January, the coffer that Tilli had requested in October arrived via Venice in Split, but there it was stopped and sent back to Venice as the Morlacchi’s rebellion against the Turks had blocked all internal roads around Split. And yet, because Pasha Mussaip seemed to get better with the ointment for the nerves, two coffers were prepared and shipped along two different routes: the first one with more medicines through Venice, and the second one, very small and containing only the oil, smuggled in the official correspondence of the Republic with the Sublime Porte via Ragusa. The medical equipment contained in the coffers was prepared in the Medici foundry (Fonderia) in Florence under Redi’s supervision, and shipped all over the world: the letters mention the arrival of one of them in Goa, two in Transylvania and Redi himself had them shipped to Mexico. Generally, they were gifts to rulers and courts, as well as to convents and missionaries, so we can consider them “positional goods” as they meant to legitimize hierarchy and status without being sold on the market. The coffers had different sizes and contained a varying number of medicaments, mainly oils, ointments, and waters and therefore could be swallowed and smeared over the ailing parts of the body. The standard 12 ingredients were: oil against poisoning, oil for the stomach, oil for wounds, oil against worms, oil against spasms, candied julep, water against colics, water for skin rash, ointment for burning, ointment for nerves, and clay. The box contained 12 recipes to make the necessary compounds, suited to the condition of the patient, to the climate and the season. This “recipe book approach to pharmacy” rested

on a synthesis of Greek and Arab science received through Medieval Latin editions.<sup>19</sup>In Florence, hospitals, doctors, consumers, and apothecaries assembled their own collection of recipes, and ingredients were also used for cheaper and popular medicaments.

Doctor Redi sent his pupil a recipe to make drinking water with jasmine, musk, and citrus hoping that he would not have to bear for too long the increased charge of treating the Pasha and all his court. But the effort was producing some positive results and, “Pasha Mussaip is getting better – writes Tilli – and he now walks with a stick for eight or ten steps, something that he was never able to do in the past when he was in the hands of other physicians.”<sup>20</sup>

## THE COURT RETREATS

At the end of October, following news from the battlefield, the courts of the Sultan and of the Pasha left Belgrade. Tilli writes a long and detailed report to Florence describing what he saw and experienced: the colorful procession of soldiers, camels, and horses with rich decorations, followed by musicians playing their flutes, drums, trumpets and castanets in a “confused harmony.”

“I had to enjoy it – he comments with some irony – to benefit from the light of the torches more than from the uproar, and most of all I had to abide by the Pasha’s wish that I travel safely, protected from the violence that can burst out of these narrow roads.”

He admires the carriages and the litters “more for the luxury they exhibit than for the mechanical parts, as they are covered with solid silver.” The daughter of the Sultan and wife of Pasha Mussaip has a retinue of ten carriages. At every stop, beautifully colored pavilions are mounted and guarded by soldiers and eunuchs. But news from the battlefield reporting two tragic defeats with the deaths of all the Pashas, except two, infuse a feeling of gloom in the narrative, as the court retreats:

“passing again through Serbia and Bulgaria and entering Romania, we found that villages and towns were less populated and lacked fodder. In Bulgaria, soldiers burnt and destroyed those poor straw

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<sup>19</sup> On the *Fonderia medica* see Valentina Conticelli (ed.), *L’Alchimia e le Arti. La Fonderia degli Uffizi da laboratorio a stanza delle meraviglie* (Firenze, 2012); James Shaw and Evelyne Welsh, *Making and Marketing Medicine in Renaissance Florence* (Amsterdam – New York, 2011): 233–35.

<sup>20</sup> I, c. 257.

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huts that happened to be along the roads. Others have been spontaneously abandoned by their poor inhabitants trying to find shelter from the troops and to hide in some lonely and fertile places, away from the immense and open fields.”

On November 4, they arrive in Filippopoli, a city full of nice houses where wealthy Turks and well to do Greeks live out of the walls of the old city. Turks are more numerous than the Greeks, and the Greeks are more numerous than the Jews. After a few days, Pasha Mussaip and a small group of courtiers start moving in the direction of Adrianople. At this stage, the court with its rituals, hierarchy, and ostentation vanishes from Tilli’s narrative. The doctor’s gaze meets poor peasant families fighting for survival, as he looks for shelter every night in villages where huts are in deep snow. The first night, he writes

“we stopped in Papalic, where I found shelter in the small hut of a Bulgarian widow, who lived miserably with her three children that she brought up in the true faith. Her poverty did not allow her to have oil, nor candles but she had a supply of resinous bark that made enough light. The second night we stopped in Semischie, a village like the others and we were hosted in a more comfortable hut where a Bulgarian woman lived with 4 small children, and they were also taught the Christian religion by their simple and illiterate parents. I admired their devotion: when my servant gave one of the children a piece of cheese, his mother did not allow him to eat it so as not to break the ritual fasting of one of their Greek Easters. This group of huts is 40 miles from Filippopoli and 60 from Adrianopoli, it has no Latin or Greek churches and their poor inhabitants are compelled to travel together with all their children to one of these two cities to visit those poor monasteries, as in a pilgrimage. What rough education those poor people get, in these depopulated lands! The third night, our lodgings were better still and our host was a Turk who had a good supply of wood. The fourth night another Turk hosted us in a house and the fifth night we got to (Mustafa Pascia Cioprisi) a comfortable place with plenty of lodgings where a Turk tried his best not to let us in as we were Christians. He had traveled to a Christian town, Split, on some business and saw that the Franks there threw holy water over the beds; therefore, he asked us with great emphasis

not to throw anything mysterious in his home nor to profane his belongings.”<sup>21</sup>

At the beginning of November Pasha Mussaip and his small group of courtiers reached Sofia and then Filippopoli:

“The woods around Sofia are full of corpses and among them are some poor German slaves died of exhaustion, stuck in ice and snow, or having killed each other for a piece of bread... the few Muslims that survived and made it back to their countries are telling so many miserable stories that they discourage all those that are destined to leave for the next military campaign.”

During the retreat, the Pasha’s condition gets slightly worse, as he had to ride all day in deep snow, but after some rest he recovered.<sup>22</sup> At the beginning of December they reach Adrianople.

#### “HE CAN NOW PRAY BENDING DOWN ON HIS KNEES”

Tilli’s reports are extremely well received in Florence where The Granduke appreciates immensely the wealth of information. More medicines have been shipped via Ragusa, and a small box of ointment for the nerves has been mailed directly to the Venetian Bailo in Constantinople. A third small case has been shipped to Smirne to a Tuscan agent:

“Let’s see if we find a way to let you have the medicaments you ask for – so a letter sent from Florence – Unfortunately though, owing to the vessel’s quick departure from Leghorn, we were not able to ship medicines from Florence and we had to send what we had in our country apothecary, close to Leghorn.”<sup>23</sup>

Pascia Mussaip is appointed Captain of the Imperial fleet in charge of all policies concerning the sea, the islands, and the coastline. He will soon move to Istanbul, and Tilli is looking forward to seeing many Franks again. Because of the war, all the coffers with the medicaments have been sent back to Venice, and they are being shipped once more, this time to Smirne on a Dutch vessel. In February, they are back in

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<sup>21</sup> Ivi, c. 259–262.

<sup>22</sup> Ivi, c. 258.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, c. 260.

Constantinople, and doctor Tilli tries to get hold of the antiquities that the Granduke is longing for:

“It is an extremely difficult task, as every ambassador here collects antiques. On my way up to Belgrade, I asked in every village and every town and I was told that the Pope’s *internunzio* (internuncio) had collected all ancient coins, good or bad. So I am left with a few rusty ones of little value.”<sup>24</sup>

Pasha Mussaip is again about to leave, as his new charge of Captain of the Imperial fleet takes him to Chios, Negroponte, and Smirne. In April, Tilli starts making plans for coming back to Tuscany.

“His excellence Mussaip has enjoyed good health and feels very well. The constant pain he felt in his knee has lefts him, and he can use his leg a little, while until now it was paralyzed. ...I left the Pasha at the beginning of July, he is free from all pain in the knee, and he can now pray bending down with his knees and head on the ground without the help of all the people that had to hold him on both sides. I am giving him no medication. He is now holding in his hands a small box with the ointment for nerves that was sent to me via Ragusa, and he immediately had the recipe that was inside it translated into Turkish.”<sup>25</sup>

The Pasha writes a letter to Cosimo de Medici, thanking him and acknowledging Tilli’s medical skill. He pays the doctor 200 reali and surgeon Pasquali 100. In April 1685 both are in Malta. The Pasha has given Tilli a box containing three Persian books:

“I think they are history books and if this is so, they must be important. I have indeed heard that before the siege of Crete a Turkish effendi, a jurist, made a catalogue of all the books he happened to use in Turkish, Arabic and Persian and they are approximately 30 or 40.000; another learned man who read the catalogue estimated that the best books are the history books and they are approximately 1520 in Turkish, and all the other history books are in Arabic or Persian.”

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<sup>24</sup> Ivi, c. 267.

<sup>25</sup> Ivi, c.271.

In May the physician and the surgeon arrive in Messina and from there on an English vessel they land in Leghorn in June. The court in Florence is expecting them to appear in their Turkish clothes but

“I am so sorry not to be able to satisfy everybody’s curiosity, as I have donned my Levantine garb. In Malta I had already shaved my beard: it was so hot, and I could not stand the large trousers, leather calpac and all that one wears in summer in Constantinople where a fresh wind blows all the time. Had I known you very expecting to see me in my foreign clothing I would have stood all the discomfort in order to appear with a beard and in the fashion of the Levant, where I camouflaged as a Turk, or a frank or a tartar or eventually as an Italian, adapting myself to the most honorable and good looking style.”<sup>26</sup>

Doctor Tilli’s work, both as a political informant, physician and the acute observer was highly rewarded. In 1685 he was appointed director of the Botanical gardens of the University of Pisa with a very good salary. Going to the Ottoman Empire gave him a good chance of upward mobility in Tuscany. News of his success in treating Pasha Mussaip spread across the Empire, and a couple of years later, he sailed from Leghorn to Tunis, to cure the local Pasha.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The story of Michelangelo Tilli is shaped by a short time scale (1683–85), a macro spatial scale and an exceptional political and military context. As the title of this paper suggests, the young physician was expected to fulfill multiple roles: healer, political informant, observer of *naturalia* and collector of antiquities. He was also expected to come back speaking fluent Turkish. I have focused on the first two roles, leaving the others for further research. Tilli’s correspondence offers a rare insight into medical practice. While medical theory is accessible for historical inquiry in written tracts, everyday therapy is elusive, and it is difficult to understand if the two corresponded with each other. As in many Western early modern societies, pluralism characterized the Ottoman medical system where folk, religious and medical healers competed for clients. However, we need a nuanced approach in applying notions of medical marketplace and consumption to early modern societies. Medical pluralism did not mean free competition where

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<sup>26</sup> ASF, MdP 1606, c.170.

consumers could choose from a range of different products and suppliers, offering competitive prices. Studies of early modern health professionals and medical cures point to the crucial importance of social relations, credit, and cooperation.<sup>27</sup> On the part of the patients, obtaining medicines and care meant being well connected. Gift giving shaped Tilli's medical practice in the Ottoman Empire: the 300 reali the physician and surgeon received for what seemed to be a satisfactory therapy were more of a gift than a salary, and so were the medicines, travelling incessantly and hopelessly from Florence to Venice to Split or Ragusa. The coffer from the Medici foundry was a gift sent to rulers and missionaries in distant parts of the world. In this perspective, European doctors were important agents in transnational networks of information, and in the circulation of scientific practice and knowledge in the *République des Lettres* embedded in court societies where drugs, *naturalia* and antiquities shaped exchanges between the East and the West, enhancing status and prestige.

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<sup>27</sup> Sandra Cavallo, *Artisans of the Body in Early Modern Italy. Identities, Families, Masculinities* (Manchester, 2007); Sandra Cavallo and Tessa Storey (eds), *Conserving health in Early Modern Culture: Bodies and Environments in Italy and England* (London, 2017).