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Muslim Neophytes in Venice: Enslaved and Free People, 1750–1824

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Abstract

This article focuses on continuity in the practice of the conversion of Muslims and its social implications in Venice in the period 1750–1824. Neophytes were people of other religious confessions who converted and were baptized as Catholics. Among neophytes of Muslim origin in Venice at this time were enslaved people, formerly enslaved individuals, and free men and women, as well as others of uncertain status. While the article discerns patterns of continuity in the practice of the conversion of Muslims and the wider experience of enslaved people in Venice, it argues that significant changes occurred after the fall of the Venetian Republic in 1797. These developments emerged in response to the shifting political climate and legal reforms of the Napoleonic period (1806–1814) and the post-1814 period in which Venice came under Austrian rule, culminating in a reduction in the number of neophytes and enslaved people in the city. The geographical origins of the neophytes ranged from the Ottoman Empire and its regencies to Eastern Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Atlantic. Sources from Venice's Pius House of Catechumens reveal the types of work the neophytes performed and indicate how changes in ownership dictated slaves' or former slaves' trajectories before their arrival in Venice. The article also highlights how religious conversion from Islam to Catholicism was a watershed moment for individuals, one that had a major bearing on their living and working conditions and, in some cases, their social status.

Keywords

Venice – Muslims – conversion – continuity – enslaved – free people

Introduction

Was the practice of the conversion of Muslims and its social implications in Venice in the period 1750–1824 marked primarily by continuity or change? While discerning significant patterns of continuity in both conversion practices and the socio-economic consequences of conversion, this article argues that some changes became apparent after the fall of the Venetian Republic in 1797. These developments emerged in response to the shifting political climate and legal reforms of the Napoleonic period (1806–1814) and the post-1814 period during which Venice was under Austrian rule. The changes included a decrease in the number of Muslim neophytes, including enslaved people, in Venice.¹ The period under consideration here coincides with a number of significant political changes for Venice and its domains: following the French occupation, the Republic was declared dissolved (May 12th, 1797) and the Treaty of Campoformio sanctioned the cession of its territory to Austria (October 17, 1797).² After the short-lived Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy (1806–1814), Venice returned to Habsburg control before it was incorporated into the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom until 1866.³

The dynamics surrounding conversion in Venice during this era have not yet been fully explored. Key works by Natalie Rothman and Pietro Ioly Zorattini concentrate primarily on the period of the Republic of Venice from the beginning of the seventeenth century to the mid-eighteenth century. My sources shed light on the unexplored period from 1750–1824. Furthermore, this article concentrates specifically on Muslim neophytes, whereas Rothman and Zorattini

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- 1 Neophytes were people of other religious confessions who converted and were baptized as Catholics. *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica da s. Pietro sino ai nostri giorni specialmente intorno ai principali santi, beati, martiri, padri, ai sommi pontefici, cardinali ...*, compilazione del cavaliere Gaetano Moroni Romano, Venezia, Tipografia Emiliana, vol. XLVII, 1840–1861, 267.
 - 2 Frederic Chapin Lane, *Venice: a maritime republic* (Baltimore, 1973), 423; Giuseppe Gullino, *Storia della Repubblica Veneta* (Brescia, 2010), 307; Andrea Zannini, *Venezia città aperta. Gli Stranieri e la Serenissima XIV–XVIII secolo* (Venezia, 2009); Rosa Salzberg, “Mobility, cohabitation and cultural exchange in the lodging houses of early modern Venice,” *Urban History*, 46 (2019), n. 3, 398–418; Paola Lanaro, “Corporations et confréries: les étrangers et le marché du travail à Venise (XV–XVIII siècles),” *Histoire Urbaine*, 21 (2008), n. 1, 31–48; Giorgos Plakotos, “Diasporas, Space and Imperial Subjecthood in Early Modern Venice: A Comparative Perspective,” *Diasporas*, 28 (2016), 37–54.
 - 3 Adolfo Bernardello, *Venezia nel Regno Lombardo-Veneto. Un caso atipico (1815–1866)* (Milano, 2015), 227.

consider other religious groups as well.⁴ In spite of these differences, existing historiography provides a baseline against which to measure continuity and change between the 1590–1750 and 1750–1824 periods. This article emphasizes the ways in which conversion from Islam to Catholicism transformed the living and working conditions of individuals, and, in some cases, elevated the social status of the neophyte. While elements of continuity characterized the social profile of converts in the period under consideration in this article (including their average age, their work roles, and the role of marriage for women) important changes in this era also occurred, particularly concerning the geographical origins of neophytes and the treatment of children in the Venetian House of Catechumens.

A study of thirty-six cases of neophytes from the House of Catechumens of the city reveals the presence of enslaved Muslims (including recently enslaved captives as well as long-term slaves),⁵ formerly enslaved Muslims and free Muslims. The sources shed new light on the trajectories that brought them to Venice from the Mediterranean as well from the Atlantic and Sub-Saharan Africa.⁶ Furthermore, these sources show, as Zorattini and Rothman have shown for a distinct chronological period, the types of work these individuals performed and how changes in ownership dictated slaves' or former slaves' mobility before their arrival in Venice. For instance, in 1795, a 16-year-old

4 E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire. Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca, 2012); Pietro Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri. Conversioni a Venezia e nel Friuli Veneto in età moderna* (Firenze, 2008).

5 I use the terms 'slave' and 'enslaved' interchangeably throughout the article to refer to individuals or groups and recognize that regardless of the term employed, the status of enslavement was never voluntary. In terms of definition, a slave was a person who was not legally free in the Mediterranean. In Venice, as in other Italian cities, there were public slaves (property of the State) and private slaves (property of private citizens). The captive, according to Michel Fontenay's definition, was temporarily enslaved while a prisoner waiting for ransom, although very often the captives remained enslaved all their lives. In the case of obtaining their freedom, they could decide whether to remain in the community of arrival or return to their community of origin. Maria Pia Pedani, "Presenze islamiche a Venezia," *Levante*, 35 (1993): 13–28; Michel Fontenay, "Esclaves et/ou captifs : préciser les concepts," in *Le Commerce des captifs. Les intermédiaires dans l'échange et le rachat des prisonniers en Méditerranée, xve–xviiiè siècle*, ed. Wolfgang Kaiser (Rome, 2008), 15–24, here 16.

6 Sources documenting the activities of the House from 1750 to 1862 are preserved in the Historical Archive of the Patriarchate of Venice, hereafter (ASPV) and in the Archive of the Institutions of Hospitalization and Education, hereafter (AIRE). The archival groups used are: ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registro dei Neofiti*, 3 (1734–1911); ASPV, *Libro dei Cresimati di S. Stefano*, n. III; ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 2 (1779–1836); ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, (1836–1856); ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 1 (1744–1762). Archivio delle Istituzioni di Ricovero e di Educazione, hereafter (AIRE): AIRE, CAT G 3/4 e AIRE, *Fedi e diplomi di battesimo XVI–XVIII sec.*, CAT G 5.1.

Black Muslim and former slave from the Atlantic named Mariam came to the Venetian House of Catechumens from the Americas via the Ottoman Empire.⁷

The archive documents a large number of free Ottoman subjects and Black African people, whose status sometimes seems difficult to define. In certain cases, these individuals were formerly enslaved people or fugitives from enslavement or other harsh working conditions who arrived in the Italian ports. Some remained legally enslaved until 1806, while others were illegally enslaved even after 1806.⁸ The Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy, into which Venice was incorporated in 1806, applied the Napoleonic French code of 1804, outlawing slavery.⁹ The abolitionist movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tended to focus on Atlantic slavery and did not put the same emphasis on enslaved people in the Mediterranean basin.¹⁰ Slavery and captivity were practiced until the mid-nineteenth century in many Italian cities despite the legal abolition of slavery internationally and domestically for the various pre-unification Italian states, including in Venice after its periods of French and Austrian rule.¹¹

This article enters into a dialogue with two strands of the existing historiography on Muslim slavery and conversion in Venice in this period: the first concern is the conversion of free and unfree minorities and the second consideration is whether the experiences of neophytes who were slaves or former slaves in the context of Mediterranean slavery might be better understood in terms of trans-imperial geographical trajectories.¹² On conversion practices

7 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 2, f. 93. The name might be more associated with the female gender, but Mariam is identified as a male in the source.

8 In English I use the terms “Ottoman Subjects” and “Black Africans” instead of “Turks” and “Moors,” but in the original sources of that time the words used were “Turks” and “Moors.” For their specific definitions see Giulia Bonazza, *Abolitionism and the Persistence of Slavery in Italian States, 1750–1850* (Cham, 2019), 156, n. 126. In this article, due to the type of sources consulted and my interpretation of them, the meaning of “Moor” is specifically “Black African.”

9 Bonazza, *Abolitionism*, 58.

10 Salvatore Bono, *Schiavi. Una storia mediterranea (XVI–XIX secolo)* (Bologna, 2016); Bonazza, *Abolitionism*, 211–212.

11 Luca Lo Basso, *In traccia de’ legni nemici. Corsari europei nel Mediterraneo del Settecento* (Ventimiglia, 2002), 115; Ida Fazio, Rita Loredana Foti, “«Scansar Le Frodi». Prede Corsare nella Sicilia del decennio inglese (1808–1813),” *Quaderni Storici* 48, 143 (2) (2013): 501; Raffaella Sarti, “Tramonto di schiavitù sulle tracce degli ultimi schiavi presenti in Italia (secolo XIX),” in *Alle radici dell’Europa. Mori giudei e zingari nei paesi del Mediterraneo occidentale*, Vol. II, sec. XVII–XIX, ed. Felice Gambin (Firenze, 2010), 81–297.

12 Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 122–162; M’hamed Oualdi, *A Slave Between Empires. A Transimperial History of North Africa* (New York, 2020); Juliane Schiel and Stefan Hanß, “Semantics, Practices and Transcultural Perspectives on Mediterranean Slavery,” in

in the Republic of Venice specifically, there are studies on converts of different original religious confessions (though mainly free or enslaved Jews and Muslims) from the sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century, with fleeting references to the second half of the eighteenth century.¹³ Zorattini investigated the principal groups of converts in Venice's House of the Catechumens between February 1763 and August 1799.¹⁴ Rothman, for her part, in *Brokering Empire*, analyses the "transformative potential" of the conversion of Muslims in the period 1590–1670. She demonstrates how the House of Catechumens was not only a charitable institution designed to assimilate infidels but also a social institution that mediated the relationship between a patron (whether solely religious or a legal owner), a convert, and the Venetian state. In particular, religious conversion was an instrument that encouraged the permanent settlement of people from the Ottoman Empire within Venetian territory. Rothman shows that religious discipline came to serve as a method of control over this new population.¹⁵ Furthermore, Zorattini and Rothman find that conversion was fundamental to the social assimilation of both free and unfree neophytes, and that it served to improve their social standing. My research confirms that this remained the case into the early nineteenth century.

Concerning neophytes' trajectories and the role of Venice in the Mediterranean, new studies on Mediterranean slavery and trans-imperial history by Ottoman scholars specializing in North Africa have also profoundly changed perceptions of the region's central role in slave trade routes that connected not just to Southern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa but also to the Atlantic. This work has transformed our understanding of the routes enslaved people traveled, particularly within the Ottoman Empire. Slaves from the Ottoman Empire and its regencies were important also for Venice, among them enslaved North Africans, sub-Saharan Africans, and others from Atlantic colonies. Essentially, slaves were traded on multiple complex routes around the Mediterranean. Furthermore, as M'hamed Oualdi explained in *A Slave Between Empires*: "North Africa was not just the borderland of an (Ottoman or colonial) empire; rather it was one of many places for clashes and encounters between

Mediterranean Slavery Revisited (500–1800) – Neue Perspektiven auf mediterrane Sklaverei (500–1800), eds. Juliane Schiel and Stefan Hanß (Zürich, 2014), 11–24.

- 13 On Muslim people (free or enslaved) in Venice in the eighteenth century, see Ioly Zorattini, *In nomi degli altri*, 234–238; Ioly Zorattini, "La Pia Casa dei Catecumeni di Venezia durante la seconda metà del Settecento," *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura*, 2 (2014): 315–378. For other cases in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 29–31, 155.
- 14 Ioly Zorattini, "La Pia Casa dei Catecumeni di Venezia," 315–316.
- 15 Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 122–123.

competing imperial ambitions.” The Republic of Venice also had ambitions in North Africa, which they pursued both through Mediterranean wars and through the conversion and subsequent societal assimilation of Muslims to Catholicism by way of the House of Catechumens.¹⁶

Muslims in Venice were viewed as a distinctive group of foreigners in comparison to other minorities such as Greeks, Armenians, and Germans because they were considered dangerous. Thus, they were subjected to severe restrictions and treated as highly suspicious infidels (much like the Jewish minority) due to the ambiguous relationship that the Republic of Venice had with the Ottoman Empire during the early modern period. The Republic enjoyed a positive commercial relationship with the Empire, with important Ottoman merchants welcome in Venice, but territorial rivalries in the Eastern Mediterranean regularly provoked war. This dualism is also reflected in the social composition of Ottoman subjects who arrived in Venice: major merchants (free Muslims), war captives, and slaves who had been purchased. Muslims, of course, were not obliged to convert in the Republic of Venice, but in most cases enslaved people, domestic workers, and Muslims of modest socio-economic status did convert to Catholicism. Free Muslims could decide to convert to Catholicism if they wanted to settle permanently in Venice.¹⁷

For residents of the Republic of Venice who were not subjects, seventeenth-century legislation established that a son of foreigners became entitled to certain mercantile rights only after twenty-five years of residence in Venice. The ruling remained applicable to free Muslims in the eighteenth century (*cittadinanza de intus et extra*).¹⁸ In the rare instances when this legislation was applied to females, it was more likely to concern a widow rather than a daughter.¹⁹ In regard to enslaved Muslims, *Ancien régime* Venice observed legislation from November 22, 1336 that forbade the purchase and sale of slaves in the city. This

16 Oualdi illustrates his analysis with the example of the trans-imperial life of a former slave, the Tunisian general Husayn Ibn ‘Abdallah, and in the third section of this work we will similarly see among the slaves and former slaves who arrived in Venice a cohort whose trajectories and fluctuating ownership status forced them not only into a trans-imperial life but also into an un-free-free condition. This is especially apparent in the case of Mariam. Oualdi, *A Slave Between Empires*, 10.

17 Benjamin Ravid, “Venice and its minorities,” in *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400–1797*, ed. Eric R. Dursteler (Leiden, 2013), 466.

18 Anna Bellavitis, “Ars mechanica e gerarchie sociali a Venezia tra XVI e XVII secolo,” in *Le technicien dans la cité en Europe occidentale, 1250–1650*, eds. Mathieu Arnoux and Pierre Monnet (Roma, 2004), 164.

19 Anna Bellavitis, “Donne, cittadinanza e corporazioni tra Medioevo ed età moderna: ricerche in corso,” in *Corpi e storia. Donne e uomini dal mondo antico all’età contemporanea*, eds. Nadia M. Filippini, Tiziana Plebani, and Anna Scattigno (Roma, 2002), 99.

legislation also stated that an enslaved individual had to be released after four years. In 1386, however, this timeline was extended to ten years because of the decrease in the number of enslaved people in Venice and increased demand for them. In any event, as Alberto Tenenti's research has demonstrated, these laws were not respected: many notarial contracts indicate a commerce in enslaved people in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries.²⁰ Zorattini has further revealed the ongoing presence of enslaved people in the first half of the eighteenth century, and, as will be discussed below, the practice continued among neophytes in the latter half of the century and beyond.²¹

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, only the 1336 decree addressed the problem of slavery within the city. The Venetian legal-institutional framework was influenced by the international context: Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807 and the Congress of Vienna moved Europe in the same direction after 1814. Slavery was abolished within the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia in January 1816 with the extension of the Austrian civil code to the region.²² Slavery had remained legal in Venice during the first Napoleonic conquest (1797) although Napoleon normally freed slaves by proclamation when he conquered Italian cities as well as in the first Austrian period.²³ Given the decline of both Venetian trade with the East and of the merchant navy of the Serenissima in the late eighteenth-century, this was a period during which Venice sought to further increase trade in North Africa, pursuing peace agreements and commercial treaties with the Ottoman regencies from 1763 to 1792. After 1796, however, Venice could no longer outdo the autonomous provinces within the Ottoman Empire militarily and its interests increasingly fell prey to pirates. With this came a fall in the number of Muslims captured by Venice.²⁴

The article is divided into three sections and a conclusion. The first section sketches the History of the Catholic institution of the House of the Catechumens of Venice. The second section presents and analyzes continuity and change in the conversion of Muslim people (enslaved people, formerly enslaved people, and free people) in the House of Catechumens, considering the meaning of name changes, the relevance of social structures, the average age of neophytes, the impact of conversion on working conditions, and the role of marriage for women. The final section compares the trajectories of the

20 Alberto Tenenti, "Gli schiavi di Venezia alla fine del cinquecento," *Rivista Storica Italiana*, LXVII, I (1955): 52–53.

21 Ioly Zorattini, "La Pia Casa dei Catecumeni di Venezia."

22 Sarti, "Tramonto di schiavitù sulle tracce degli ultimi schiavi presenti in Italia (secolo XIX)," 290–291.

23 Bonazza, *Abolitionism*, 58.

24 Walter Panciera, *La Repubblica di Venezia nel Settecento* (Roma, 2014), 49.

neophytes in the period under study to those routes that were common in previous centuries and attempts to reconstruct the life stories of some of these enslaved and formerly enslaved people.

The House of the Catechumens of Venice

The conversion of Muslims took place in the Pious House of Catechumens, an institution founded in the intense counter-reformist climate of 1557 by the Jesuits. Its principal aim was to temporarily host Muslims, Jews, and those faithful to other religious confessions (such as Eastern Christians) while catechizing and baptizing them.²⁵ The Pious House of Venice, like that founded in Rome in 1543 by Pope Paul III, was not only meant to instruct catechumens, but also to aid neophytes' integration into society.²⁶ The institution reflected a collaboration between Venetian ecclesiastical authorities, the Jesuits, lay patriarians, and administrators of Venice's overseas domains. Unlike other Venetian charitable institutions, the House was largely directed by clerics, under the protection of a patriarch (*patriarca*), who was appointed as permanent president of the institute and presided over the meetings of the Congregation.²⁷ For its first fifteen years the institute moved to various locations throughout the city. The House accommodated men, women, and children of different ages, backgrounds, languages, and religious cultures. Men and women were taught separately both before baptism and afterwards, when they needed to be ready to leave the House.²⁸

In 1726 a congregation of the institution's governors discussed an architectural renovation of the structure and in 1727 the project began under Giorgio Massari, a prominent architect in the Republic of Venice. The new building

25 Wipertus Rudt de Collenberg, "Le baptême des musulmanes esclaves à Rome aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. I. Le XVII^e siècle," in *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée*, 101 (1989): 9–181; Marina Caffiero, "Juifs et musulmans à Rome à l'époque moderne, entre résistance, assimilation et mutations identitaires. Essai de comparaison," in *Les musulmans dans l'histoire de l'Europe. I. Une intégration invisible*, eds. Jocelyne Dakhli and Bernard Vincent (Paris, 2011), 593–609; Samuela Marconcini, "Una presenza nascosta: battesimi di turchi a Firenze in età moderna," *Annali di Storia di Firenze*, 7 (2012): 97–121; Cesare Santus, *Il "Turco" a Livorno. Incontri con l'Islam nella Toscana del Seicento* (Milano, 2019).

26 Giuseppe Ellero, "L'orto delle zitelle e l'istituto dei catecumeni," in *La Nuova residenza alle zitelle. Un centro servizi per gli anziani a Venezia tra giardini e laguna*, ed. IRE (Venezia, 2008), 11–24, here 21.

27 Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri*, 75–77.

28 Giuseppe Ellero, *L'Archivio IRE. Inventari dei fondi antichi degli ospedali e luoghi Pii di Venezia* (Venezia, 1997).

included two separate houses, one for men and one for women, with a church in the center.²⁹ Most of the baptisms took place in this church, although in some cases baptism was performed by the patriarch himself in a more distinguished church, such as St. Mark's Basilica. By 1855 the entire complex was restored.³⁰ The majority of the catechumens came from the ghetto of Venice, or were Jews from other Italian cities. Muslims who entered the House were mainly sailors, captives, enslaved people, and Black female domestic servants.³¹ Of 2635 catechumens who entered the House between 1557 and 1797, 1092 were male Muslims. Female Muslims numbered 538. Male and female Jews numbered 706 and 269 respectively. The majority of catechumens were aged between fourteen and thirty. Nuclear families featured, including 248 Jewish and fifty-one Muslim families.³² Christians (meaning non-Catholics) were rare, only thirty appearing in Zorattini's data.³³

Conversion often took place under coercive conditions but frequently served utilitarian purposes and resulted in improved living and working conditions for neophytes.³⁴ After being baptized and confirmed as Christians, enslaved neophytes were returned to their owners. Upon leaving the House of Catechumens, converts who prior to baptism were enslaved in the homes of Venetian patricians (*patrizi*) or officials of the Republic went immediately into service as domestics to noble and middle class families or became manual workers. This was also true for neophytes who had entered the House voluntarily, as free people. In addition to a large number of catechumens working in the service of Venetian nobles, others were employed in the arts and in the workshops of the city.³⁵ Two decrees of the Venetian Senate, dated January 2, 1676, and June 30, 1688, granted converts the right to join the ranks of any profession and be enrolled in the artisan and craftsman guilds.³⁶ In 1802 a decree established that young neophytes had to be employed in some trade by the age of fourteen.³⁷

29 Ellero, *L'orto delle zitelle*, 22.

30 Bernard Aikema, Dulcia Meijers, *Nel regno dei poveri. Arte e storia dei grandi ospedali veneziani in età moderna 1474–1797* (Venezia, 1989), 215–223.

31 Ioly Zorattini, "La Pia Casa dei Catecumeni di Venezia," 327.

32 Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri*, 128–130.

33 *Ibid.*, 127.

34 Giuseppina Minchella, *Frontiere aperte. Musulmani, ebrei e cristiani nella Repubblica di Venezia (XVII secolo)* (Roma, 2014), 217.

35 Ellero, *L'Archivio Ire*.

36 Capitolari in Pregadi, citati in AIRE, *Catecumeni*, CAT A 1, Capitoli, in P. Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri*, 238.

37 Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri*, 237.

Muslim Neophytes in the Venetian House of Catechumens: Continuity and Change

The sources consulted in the Archive of the Patriarchate of Venice and in the Archive of Institutions of Hospitalization and Education provide us with information on the geographical origin and status of neophytes, and in the cases of those enslaved or formerly enslaved, changes of ownership. Information on their work before entering the House of Catechumens and after conversion can occasionally be gleaned. Concerning baptism, there is ample detail about godfathers and godmothers who were nobles or clergy and occasional references to individuals from a more modest background. Normally, the neophyte took the surname of the godfather or godmother. The new first name did not necessarily relate to one of the godparents, but it did sometimes follow that pattern.

Among the owners or intermediaries who brought Muslims to the House of Catechumens were nobles, ship captains, and fishermen. There is clear evidence that conversion was usually fundamental to improving the status of Muslim neophytes (legally free or unfree), by allowing for a future marriage for women or creating better working conditions for men and women.

Existing statistical data generated by Zorattini shows the presence of 168 baptized Muslims in the Venetian House of Catechumens from 1700 to 1762. From 1763 to 1799, the House hosted twenty-three Muslims, of whom twenty-one were eventually baptized.³⁸ Our data includes thirty-six cases of Muslim converts (including enslaved individuals, free people, and people whose status could not be determined with certitude through sources), mainly Ottoman subjects and Sub-Saharan Africans. Thirty of these cases come from the period 1750–1797, with the remaining six cases occurring between 1798–1824. These early nineteenth-century cases provide an opportunity to reflect on continuity as well as change in the conversion practices of Muslims during the Napoleonic and Austrian periods. Of the thirty-six cases, there were thirteen individuals of uncertain status, four free Muslims, eight enslaved people, seven formerly enslaved people, and four fugitives from other situations of oppression. Thus, at least fifteen of these people (slightly less than half) were enslaved or formerly enslaved.

The table shows that most Muslims defined as “Turk” or “Moor” were men or young boys. The majority of the converts came from the Ottoman Empire but one boy, Mariam, was from the Americas and eight were from Sub-Saharan

38 Ioly Zorattini, “La Pia Casa dei Catecumeni di Venezia,” 320–321.

TABLE 1 Neophytes of Muslim origin converted in the Pious House of Catechumens of Venice (1750-1824)^a

Name	Age	Gender	Definition in sources	Religion of origin	Geographic origin	Status	Year of baptism	Work
Ussein	23	M	Turk	Muslim	NS	NS	1750	NS
Mussanouilc								
Abdalà Soleman	NS	M	Turk	Muslim	Tunis	NS	1750	NS
Bosgnach								
Isuf Ibrairolò	42	M	Turk	Muslim	NS passage to Ancona	NS	1750	NS
Soleman	21	M	Turk	Muslim	Tripoli	Captive	1751	former soldier
Mustafà	21	M	Turk	Muslim	Constantinople	former captive	1751	NS
Mehemet								
Memed Ali	12	M	Turk	Muslim	Constantinople	Son of two former slaves (Ossman Turk and Amet Abditegouich)	1751	NS
Ossman	NS	M	Turk	Muslim	Constantinople	former captive	1751	NS
Amet	NS	F	Turk	Muslim	Constantinople	former slave	1751	NS
Memed	12	M	Turk	Muslim	Tripoli	Captive	1752	ship's boy
Mustafà	NS	M	Turk	Muslim	Constantinople	NS	1752	NS
Giorsia								
Jusuf	29	M	Turk	Muslim	Smyrna	NS	1753	Sailor
Ibraim	NS	M	Turk	Muslim	Heraklion	Slave	1753	NS
Ibraim	16	M	Turk	Muslim	Chania	Fugitive	1753	NS
Ibraim Spail	22	M	Turk	Muslim	Bosnia	NS	1754	NS
Memet	17	M	Turk	Muslim	Bosnia (origin), located in Constantinople	Fugitive	1754	NS
Ali	29	M	Turk	Muslim	Marocco	former slave	1754	NS
Mustafà	NS	M	Turk	Muslim	NS	NS	1756	Shoemaker
Lazzaro Zen	NS	M	Moor	Muslim	Guinea	Slave	1770	NS
Aly	14	M	Moor	Muslim	Africa	Slave	1774	NS

a ASPV, Catecumeni, Registro dei Neofiti, 3 (1734–1911); ASPV, Libro dei Cresimati di S. Stefano, n. III; ASPV, Catecumeni, Costituti, 2 (1779–1836); ASPV, Catecumeni, Costituti, (1836–1856); ASPV, Catecumeni, Costituti, 1 (1744–1762); AIRE, CAT G 3/4; AIRE, Fedi e diplomi di battesimo XVI–XVIII sec. CAT G 5.1.

TABLE 1 Neophytes of Muslim origin converted in the Pious House of Catechumens of Venice

Name	Age	Gender	Definition in sources	Religion of origin	Geographic origin	Status	Year of baptism	Work
Hassan	15	M	NS	Muslim	Africa	NS	1774	NS
Abtelay	20	M	Moor	Muslim	Africa	former slave	1779	NS
Serimam	NS	M	Turk	Muslim	Named of Brescia	NS	1779	NS
Ibraim	10	M	Moor	Muslim	Africa	former slave	1780	NS
Mehemet	18	M	NS	Muslim	Bosnia	NS	1782	NS
Ibrahim Oscich	17	M	Turk	Muslim	NS	NS	1786	NS
Barca	12	M	Moor	Muslim	Tripoli	Free	1787	NS
Osan	20	M	Moor	Muslim	Tripoli	Free	1787	NS
Hassan	16	M		Muslim	Tunis	Fugitive	1794	former coffee makers
Zair	19	M		Muslim	Algiers	Free	1794	Sailor
Mariam	16	M	Moor	Muslim	Americas	former slave	1795	NS
Ali	NS	M	Turk	Muslim	Constantinople	Fugitive	1798	NS
Bachit	10	M	Moor	Muslim	"Arab Ethiopia"	Slave	1802	NS
Marsal	9	M	Moor	Muslim	"Arab Ethiopia"	Slave	1802	NS
Zena	22	F		Muslim	Ethiopia	NS	1806	servant of a dancer
Alima	20	F	Moor	Arab and	Cairo	Slave	1823	NS
Anna (with two female children, Rosa and Maria)	20	F	Moor	"savage" Muslim	Egypt	NS	1824	NS

Legend: M = Male; F = Female; NS = Not specified

Africa. The women in the group were mainly domestic workers or servants, while the men were usually sailors or employed in craft work. The average age of the neophytes was just nineteen years old. The majority of neophytes were male.³⁹

A number of cases of young African former slaves tell us much about their geographical origins and trajectories in the Mediterranean. In 1751 the Pious House welcomed Ali, who arrived from a city subject to the king of Morocco. Ali

39 The average age of the neophytes discussed in this study aligns with Rothman's findings that most catechumens were children or teenagers. Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 132.

was twenty-nine years old and spoke only Arabic. At the age of ten he was captured by the Berbers and later given to an Ottoman master, who posthumously freed Ali. Ali subsequently headed to Smyrna, where he worked until boarding a ship to Venice. There he was baptized on October 30, 1754.⁴⁰ Another case featured Mustafâ Mehemet, a 21-year-old from Constantinople. Mehemet was on a Turkish ship that sailed from Naples to Smyrna and was ambushed by a Maltese vessel. He remained a prisoner in Malta for five years before he was eventually ransomed and returned to Constantinople. Having experienced domestic abuse, Mehemet decided to leave home again. After passing through Corfu and Ragusa he reached Venice, where he decided to convert in 1751. Thus, although he had previously been a long-term captive, Mehemet was a free man when he entered the House.⁴¹

In 1774, Aly, originally from Africa and enslaved by one “Assan *Turco Tunisino*,” arrived in the House having fled his master. He was baptized on November 28, 1774, at the age of fourteen. He was given a new name, Daniel Domenico Barbaro, after his godfather, Daniel Barbaro di Samuel.⁴² In 1779, a Black African captive named Abtelay, who was in his twenties, took the baptismal name of Pietro Paolo Giorgio.⁴³ Abtelay had been imprisoned for two years in Tripoli, before being sent to Constantinople on a French ship used for the ransom of slaves. While still in captivity, he worked in the service of Captain Giacomo Costanzi for ten years. House sources occasionally describe captives’ original profession: one neophyte, named Mehmed, worked as a deckhand before his baptism and subsequently was employed “in servitude.” Hassan, before entering the House in 1794, worked in a cafeteria in Tunis, while Mustafâ had been a shoemaker.⁴⁴

There were several neophytes under the age of fourteen. In 1787 a twelve-year-old boy from Tripoli named Barca, together with his brother, Osan, was brought to Venice by Agostino Bellato, Venetian consul in Tripoli.⁴⁵ Barca was given the name Giovanni Paolo Antonio Agostino Carlo Fortunato, while Osan was given the name Marco Antonio Federico Francesco Fortunato.⁴⁶ Ibraim was a ten-year-old Black native of Tripoli who was presented at the Pious House by Venetian local Benedetto Adorno. In Tripoli, Ibraim had been sold to an Albanian from Ulcinj named Adem. Adem brought Ibraim with him

40 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 1, f. 112.

41 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 1, f. 64.

42 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 105.

43 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 117; ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 2, f. 3.

44 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 2, f. 3.

45 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 137.

46 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 2, f. 55.

to different parts of the Levant, before stopping for five months in Trieste, where he had arrived with a load of raisins.⁴⁷ In 1794 another boy from “Arab Ethiopia,” nine-year-old Marsal, arrived at the House. Marsal was a slave of Captain Matteo Raimondo of Rovigno but entered the house through the intermediation of Mrs. Marietta Pini. He could not write on arrival but learned to do so over the course of his education in the House. He was baptized in 1804 and subsequently confirmed by the bishop of Caorle, assuming the new name Vincenzo M. Giorgio Pini.⁴⁸ Even among the early nineteenth-century cases of African converts, several were enslaved children, including a ten-year-old Black male native of “Arab Ethiopia” named Bachit. Bachit was brought to the House by his master, Mr. Giovanni Pini, a Venetian resident originally from Egypt, and by Mr. Donato Battaglia in 1802. Bachit took the name Donato Pini subsequent to his conversion.⁴⁹

Black African women also entered the House. Zena, a Moorish woman from Ethiopia, had worked as a servant for Laura Teresa Fasanini, a dancer from Bologna. Zena had been married but her husband died in war. Zena was baptized in St Mark’s Basilica in 1806 by the patriarch of Venice, Nicola Saverio Gamboni, and given the name Laura Maria Savorgnan.⁵⁰ Among women with children or who gave birth in the House was Alima, a twenty-year-old Arab from Cairo. She was labeled “*selvaggia*” (ill-mannered) and her parents were categorized as “*Affricani più Turchi che Idolatri*” (Africans more Turks than Idolaters). Alima was bought in the Cairo market by Giorgio Scheffler, a native of German Tyrol, and thus arrived in Venice as a slave. In 1823, Alima’s son was born in the House. The nurse had him baptized and he was given the name Giambattista Rossetti, since he had been accompanied to the baptismal font by a Venetian shopkeeper of the same name.⁵¹

In another instance, an Egyptian woman named Anna arrived at the House in 1822 with her two small daughters. She was baptized along with her daughters in 1824 and renamed Anna Maria Dufour; the baptismal description suggests that she was about twenty years old and unmarried. On the day of the baptism Anna Maria married Mr. Antonio Lebolo Piemontese, a “shopkeeper.” Though it was not a legal adoption as we would understand it in contemporary terms, the convention of the time was that Antonio would assume fatherly responsibility for Anna’s daughters. Her elder daughter, just four years old, took

47 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 2, f. 7.

48 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 2, f. 107. ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 149.

49 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 2, f. 106. ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 148.

50 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 151.

51 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 166.

the name Rosa Maria at the time of her baptism. Rosa Maria's godfather was Mr. Bernardino Drovetti, son of the Consul General of France in Alexandria, Egypt. Anna Maria's younger child was also baptized and given the name Maria Catterina, although *sub condicione* (provisionally) due to the fact that she had already received baptismal water from a priest in Trieste.⁵²

Thus, baptized African women were at times married immediately after their baptism and if they already had children at that time, the new husband customarily adopted them. Marriage was, for the female neophyte, an important tool of integration into the new community and an important step towards guaranteeing a future for their children. In the period under consideration in this article, children were not separated from their natural mothers when entering the Pious House, whereas Rothman described children being routinely separated from their parents before entering the House in the seventeenth century.⁵³ Conversion represented an important step toward integration in Catholic Venice for Muslim women because it facilitated marriage and the adoption of their children.⁵⁴ Regarding marriage practices, the chronology of these cases shows that in the Austrian period (after 1814) marriage between foreigners was allowed, as long as the contracting parties were both Christian, even if they were of different ethnic origins.⁵⁵ During the preceding Napoleonic era, interracial marriage had been forbidden.⁵⁶

Escaped or other free Muslims who entered the House of the Catechumens of Venice of their own free will were often of modest socio-economic status and were regularly accompanied by local religious figures. For enslaved people, it seems that entry always involved the intermediation of their owner; in the case of free children, a guardian was involved. For example, on January 20, 1794, nineteen-year-old neophyte Zair d'Algiers took the name of Antonio Maria Comello, his godfather being Vincenzo Comello di Chioggia. Interestingly,

52 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 168. In this case *sub condicione* is referring to uncertainty about the validity of the previous baptism; the first baptism probably did not follow the Catholic norms, so the official baptism is the only one legal unless further evidence emerges that the first baptism was valid.

53 Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 135.

54 Minchella, *Frontiere aperte*, 68–69, 89.

55 *Codice Civile Universale Austriaco pel Regno Lombardo-Veneto*, parte 1, (Milano, Dalla Cesarea Regia Stamperia, 1 Novembre 1815), 14, 64.

56 One such illicit union ended in murder in 1810: a Christian "Moor," Giovanni Pietro Cotin, servant to the former patrician Vincenzo Gritti and native of Santo Domingo, and a Venetian servant named Marianna were colleagues and lovers. Marianna fell pregnant but Giovanni Pietro killed her, apparently in a fit of despair because they could not wed. Giovanni Scarabello and Veronica Gusso, *Processo al Moro, Venezia 1811: Razzismo, follia, amore e morte* (Roma, 2000), 46.

Vincenzo was not a Venetian patrician, but from a more modest background. After his baptism, Antonio moved to Chioggia to work as a sailor, just as his godfather did.⁵⁷ This case is an exception of course, because, as we have already seen, in all other cases the godparents and godmothers were patricians, nobles, or members of the middle-class, as they were in the seventeenth century.⁵⁸

Neophytes left the House only when they had a job, an owner, or a “guarantor” in the city. Adolescents without any guardian or godparent became children of the House, and thus remained in this structure until they were either adopted or reached an age at which they could find some form of employment. This pattern closely mirrored trends that prevailed through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵⁹ In essence, the practice of baptism and the reasons that led to it, along with the selection of a new name and the creation of a new Christian identity for the neophyte, do not seem to change at all in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as compared to earlier periods.⁶⁰ Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, religious conversion represented a fundamental tool for Muslims living in Venice. It was a critical step towards their assimilation into the host society and their ability to obtain better working and living conditions. The latter point was particularly true because the majority of free Muslims were employed in jobs of modest economic and social standing (such as oarsmen and servants), a socioeconomic pattern that was also true in preceding centuries.⁶¹

For slaves, conversion and baptism did not provide any guarantee of legal freedom but was a step in this direction. Before 1806 (during the Republic of Venice and the first Austrian period), an enslaved Muslim could not gain legal freedom without prior conversion to Christianity. From 1806 onward (during the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy, and particularly after Austrian legislation abolished slavery in 1816), legal freedom could be obtained without conversion, but conversion still played a crucial role in societal assimilation and the establishment of a new life.⁶²

57 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 137; ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 2, f. 83. On Comello, see also Ioly Zorattini, “La Pia Casa dei Catecumeni di Venezia,” 363.

58 Minchella, *Frontiere aperte*, 213.

59 Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri*, 237; Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 153.

60 Lucette Valensi, *Stranieri familiari. Musulmani in Europa (XVI–XVIII secolo)* (Torino, 2013), 149.

61 Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 131–132.

62 Simona Cerutti, *Étrangers. Étude d'une condition d'incertitude dans une société d'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 2012), 21.

Trajectories Between the Atlantic, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Mediterranean

The sources used to profile the Muslim neophyte group in Venice's Pious House are also helpful in reconstructing the geographical mobility of enslaved and formerly enslaved people around the Mediterranean. This group includes people from the Atlantic world and Sub-Saharan Africa as well as from the Ottoman Empire and its regencies.

Among the more famous eighteenth-century cases is that of the neophyte Lazzaro Zen, baptized on November 27, 1770. Lazzaro was the subject of the celebrated 1770 painting by Francesco Guardi, *Ritratto di Lazzaro Zen olim Ali Saba, moro della Guinea* (Portrait of Lazzaro Zen olim Ali Saba, Moor of Guinea). Lazzaro was originally from Guinea and the Zen surname, imposed on him at baptism, as always happened to neophytes, came from the governor of the Pious House, Renier Zen. It was the governor who commissioned the renowned painting. He had many children, one of whom was named Lazzaro upon his birth in 1746, but this child died young. Zen then gave the name to the convert in 1770. According to Giuseppe Ellero, it is possible that Renier Zen was Lazzaro's master as well as his godfather and the donor of the painting to the House. However, there is also a chance that the painting was commissioned by the House itself to be exhibited in the church of San Zaccaria on the day of Lazzaro's baptism in order to attract the Venetian public. The baptism of Black people was considered exotic and something that could be depicted in a painting to show the superiority of the Catholic religion.⁶³

A particularly remarkable case is that of a formerly enslaved man who ended up in the Mediterranean from the Atlantic. Mariam was a sixteen-year-old Black boy who came to the House from the Americas on February 5, 1795. It is unclear whether he had been baptized according to the Catholic rite in the Americas, but after he was purchased as a slave by a Turkish merchant in the American colonies, he was taken to Alexandria in Egypt, where he converted to Islam and was re-sold to another famous merchant Turk, named Hüseyin, who had held public office in Candia (Crete). Hüseyin brought Mariam to Candia. When Hüseyin was killed by a Venetian subject, Mariam remained a slave even though Hüseyin had intended to free him. Mariam made his way to Venice thanks to the Superintendent General of the Sea, Carlo Aurelio Widmann. An heir of Hüseyin had wanted to retain ownership of Mariam but the Venetian authorities claimed him in settlement of debts owed by Hüseyin to the

63 Giuseppe Ellero, "Ancora sulla famiglia Guardi, i conti Giovanelli e i luoghi pii veneziani," *Arte|Documento*, 15 (2001): 176.

Republic. Mariam's life shows how the circulation of slaves was a transoceanic enterprise, from the Atlantic to North Africa and then also to the Adriatic.⁶⁴

As far as we know, Mariam was the only enslaved person who arrived in Venice having spent time in the Americas. The enslaved people Bachit, Marsal, and Zena (discussed above) were from Sub-Saharan Africa. The stories are further indication of continuity in Venice's community of enslaved Muslims in the period under consideration in this article. Both Rothman and Zorattini have documented the circulation of people within Venice from outside the traditional Mediterranean slave trading routes in earlier periods. Rothman's research on the 1590–1670 period indicates that neophytes of Muslim origin came from the Ottoman Empire and its regencies, including the Greek islands, Anatolia, the Black Sea, and the Safavid and Mughal Empires. Such diversity is also a feature of the first half of the eighteenth century, as Zorattini has shown in the case of Vaiton (1734). Vaiton was a Turkish Moor from Congo and was bought in Leghorn (Livorno) by the singer Carlo Farinelli. Pietro Mascheri, Farinelli's agent, steered the boy to the House of Venice for education and conversion to Catholicism. After his conversion, Vaiton became the servant of a singer in Naples.⁶⁵ Building on these findings, my research shows that during the 1750–1824 period, enslaved Muslims came not just from the Ottoman Empire and its regencies, but also from Sub-Saharan Africa, and even included one individual from the Americas among their number.⁶⁶

In the second half of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, elite and socially ambitious members of Venetian society attached prestige to the possession of servants or slaves. Enslaved individuals considered exotic came not only from the Ottoman Empire but also from the Atlantic colonial world and Sub-Saharan Africa. Even though we are not able to establish exactly how many people in servitude originated from the Atlantic or Sub-Saharan Africa (see Tab. 1), this minority group illustrates the diversity and mobility of enslaved individuals in the Mediterranean in the period in question.

Conclusion

This research deepens our insight into the conversion practices experienced by Muslim people in the House of Catechumens. Furthermore, it broadens our

64 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 2, f. 93. Ioly Zorattini, "La Pia Casa dei Catecumeni di Venezia," 369–370.

65 Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri*, 236–237.

66 Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 131.

understanding of the lives of Muslim Ottoman subjects and Black people in Venice and around the Mediterranean between the middle of the eighteenth century until 1824. For the most part, the neophytes discussed in this article were servants, enslaved people, and formerly enslaved people who worked for Venetian patricians, consuls, nobles, and ship captains. Their presence in Venice reflected the mobility that characterized their working lives and the working lives of those who claimed to “own” them. In other words, most Muslims came to the Pious House because they worked for ship commanders or Venetian merchants, or were brought by consuls returning from overseas. Some arrived in Venice by chance and were then urged to convert by churchmen or local preachers. Some were escaping enslavement. Others were fleeing situations of oppression in their homeland. Enslaved people entered the House through the intermediation of their owners. Prior to conversion, some of the men had been employed in maritime jobs such as that of cabin boy. After conversion, they became servants. Other neophytes were craftsmen with manual skills. Post-conversion, the working conditions of most neophytes improved, but not always. For example, in the case of Zena, who was a servant before entering the Pious House, his conversion did not change his employment. Enslaved entrants continued to work as domestics for noble families after their conversion, as was the case for Alima (discussed above).

From 1750 to 1824, there was continuity in the practice of the conversion of Muslims, including enslaved people. However, there were changes in related phenomena, especially a progressive decrease in both the number of conversions and in the number of slaves from the turn of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the dissolution of the Republic of Venice in 1797 and associated political changes (Table 1). There were exceptions, of course, such as Alima who remained a slave in 1823, despite the abolition of slavery in 1816. There were fifteen neophytes in an unfree condition (if we include slaves and former slaves), about half of the total, but only eight Muslims of slave status among them in Venice in the period 1750–1824 and only three after 1797, far fewer than the fifty-five identified by Zorattini for the period 1617–1760.⁶⁷ The decrease was probably due to the progressive de-escalation of tensions between Venice and the Ottoman Empire, and the political changes wrought by successive spells of French and Austrian rule after 1806.

The sources tell us that there were more males than females resident in the House during the period under review, just as there had been in the first half of the eighteenth century.⁶⁸ Almost all the women who entered the Pious House were married immediately after baptism, among them those who already had

67 Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri*, 112.

68 Ioly Zorattini, “La Pia Casa dei Catecumeni di Venezia,” 320.

children. The importance of marriage in this context was also highlighted by Rothman, who found that children were separated from their natural mothers or parents in the seventeenth century. In the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, there is a change, children stayed with their natural mothers and were adopted by their new local stepfather. The number of young boys and girls involved was significant and, as per Rothman's figures for previous centuries, the average age of neophytes – nineteen years old in this case – was quite low. This indicates demand for young workers and helps to explain why poor or enslaved neophytes were usually baptized immediately on arrival in Venice.

From the 1750s to 1824, as in previous centuries, baptism amounted to an indispensable element in the process of entry into a new community, and for enslaved people it continued to represent a fundamental dynamic in their assimilation into society that lay outside the rights and condition of legal freedom ensured by the law. Conversion was a watershed moment marking the transition to a new life of better living and working conditions. It had significance for the lived realities of individuals that went beyond the theoretical significance of abstract legal norms. Baptism evolved into a ritual that often transmitted more than a hint of the exotic and sumptuous, the intention being to provide a powerful depiction and endorsement of the superiority of the Catholic religion. This dynamic was intensified when the neophyte was a Black African, as in the case of Lazzaro Zen. This focus on ethnic origin and color was less present in previous centuries.

To conclude, in the period 1750–1824, while the quantity of enslaved people decreased due to the abolitionist legislation introduced by the French and Austrian regimes (and there had only been three enslaved Muslims in Venice after 1797 to begin with), there was a continued but reduced presence of Muslim neophytes, most of them of modest circumstances. Despite their falling numbers, the practice of converting Muslims persisted and there was a definite continuity from the previous century in terms of the social and work background of neophytes (domestics, soldiers, artisans, sailors). At the end of the eighteenth century and until 1824 the Muslim neophytes in Venice were from Eastern Europe, the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, East Africa, and in a solitary case the Americas. There were regular changes of ownership and geographical trajectory in the Mediterranean, many of the neophytes being resold or captured several times in different parts of the sea from Smirne, Malta, and Corfu to Constantinople. The geographical origin of neophytes had partially changed from the period 1590–1750, when most enslaved and formerly enslaved people in Venice came from the Ottoman Empire, Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. In the decades before and after the fall

of the Republic, conversion remained a fundamental step in assimilation, in the improvement of living and working conditions, and in some cases in the elevation of status, just as it had been for Muslims in Venice in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

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