# Marcello’s Orientalism

The 50 Psalms of David published by Benedetto Marcello between 1724 and 1726 constitute the bulwark of his fame, not only within his lifetime but also for a century-and-a-half or more after he died (1739). Yet they stand completely apart from other psalm repertories of his or adjacent centuries because they were not designed for liturgical use. They were, like much of the rest of Marcello’s music, academic exercises intended to stimulate rational discussion and redirect music based on Old Testament texts towards the musical values of antiquity. How exactly he acquired and perceived these values for the first part of this study, how he to implemented them the second, and they were received over time and place the third.

## Sources and Places of Inspiration

Born to a noble family of what were considered modest means in 1686, Benedetto Marcello found a rich intellectual legacy awaiting him. His mother, Paolina Capello, was an occasional poet. He and his brothers Alessandro and Gerolamo all eventually practiced that art. Alessandro developed a wide array of skills including “design” (drawing), invention, and music. He played the violin and, in his typically occasional way, he composed Arcadian cantatas and a handful of violin sonatas and concertos. He was a gadabout of the first order and was rumored to be a ladies’ man. He contributed, though sparingly, to the Republic of Letters, where he was more drawn to applied science than to the arts. He traveled substantially and, like many other Venetians of the time, invested poorly. Gerolamo was, like Benedetto, quieter and more serious. He wrote a few essays and poems but seems to have involved himself in a career more deeply than his brothers. For a few years (*c.* 1718-20) he was heavily involved with Venetian affairs in Lombardy.

The family palazzo (if one were looking north from the Grand Canal it would be immediately to the right of the Palazzo Vendramin-Calergi, in which Richard Wagner spent his final days) was a relatively plain one in the parish of Santa Maria Maddalena. Alessandro was said to have painted frescoes on the walls and ceiling of the church, though no evidence of this will be seen today. The records of the church passed to San Marcuola several decades ago. Little is to be learned of the Marcellos there, apart from the names of a few siblings who died in early childhood.[[1]](#footnote-1) Records in the state archives, on the other hand, show Alessandro to have held several offices that dealt with various matters in the Venetian Ghetto. The most important of these offices was that of Auditor Vecchio (xx-yy), an office which made judgments of matters of dispute. The connection is closest thing to evidence of any awareness on the part of the Marcellos that the ghetto even existed apart from physical proximity. The parish of Santa Maria Maddalena was near the apex of the Grand Canal’s “arch.” It separated the Ghetto from the Canal by a relatively short distance.

It is therefore entirely conceivable that an awareness of Hebrew chant could have some through an open window on summer nights. In the era preceding motor boats and loud speakers, Venice was a notably quiet place where sounds carried easily across rooftops, around corners, and over the water. The audibility of certain sounds was essential the regulation of daily life, for workers’ days, debtors’ curfews, the departure of the mail boat, and the hours for mass and vespers were announced by a single set of giant bells in the Campanile near the Ducal Palace.[[2]](#footnote-2)

When one looks at the careful differentiation of the three major traditions of Judaism in Venice—the Sephardic, the Askenazic, and the Levantine, and when one appreciates the arduous detail involved in making transparent the connections between Marcello’s model, his interpretations of them, and his own creations—one concludes that his knowledge of musical practices associated with Judaism of his time was anything but casual.

As a young man, Marcello had immersed himself in the Arcadian movement. At least ninety percent of his nearly 400 cantatas for solo voice treat pastoral subjects. Much of the poetry he set appears to have been his own.[[3]](#footnote-3) In Arcadian imagery, bucolic settings had an inherent advantage over all other sources of literary inspiration. At the same time, classical mythology was seen to express a corresponding sense of innocence. In Marcello’s *oeuvre*, these related values evolved along separate paths. The virtue of natural settings was pursued in his countless lyrical works, such as the cantatas for solo voice and basso continuo. His madrigals were also Arcadian in their themes. It was the drama and emotion of that offended a sense of innocence that led Marcello to involve himself in the 1720s with epic poetry. Familiar epics formed the basis of his dramatic cantatas (some for solo voice, some for two voices). A new sensitivity to themes of injustice seemed particularly to inform his carefully selected forays into this realm.

Marcello understood the texts of the Psalms of David in high relief—that is, as plays for a cast including God (epic narrative), All the People (lyrical infusions), and David (laments). It is these three elements that form the contours of each of the first fifty psalms (Roman Catholic numbering system) in their respective ways. That the Psalms came to be the repertory of his music for which he was best known in his own time, and the only repertory for which he was known by succeeding generations is undoubtedly a consequence of their balanced representation of three personal interests. It was Biblical poetry that wedded the musical settings to the elusive intellectual ideals of Marcello’s academic environment.

Marcello’s musical settings were scattered across eight volumes that appeared between 1724 and 1726. The texts were in the vernacular paraphrases of Girolamo Ascanio Giustiniani 1675-?), like Marcello an academically-oriented, musically interested nobleman. The Marcello and Capello families had a long-standing involvement with the Teatro Sant’Angelo, the Giustiniani with the Teatro San Moisè.[[4]](#footnote-4) Psalms paraphrases in the vernacular had a history as long as that of the Reformation in Protestant communities in Scotland, England, and the Swiss Romand. What was distinctive about Giustiniani’s paraphrases was that they were sensitive to the Arcadian values of the Italian academic milieu. In the non-Italian cases, the use of the vernacular signaled an adaptation to Protestant liturgies. In the Venetian cases, the works were explicitly academic and clearly non-liturgical. Italian oratorios were sometimes based on vernacular texts, but in the Venetian *ospdali* (where some of Marcello’s Psalms were performed[[5]](#footnote-5)), oratorios were in Latin. Latin remained the language of the church.

Giustiniani’s paraphrases were recognized for their conscientious re-rendering f the original Hebrew texts. What were perceived as the clutter and artifice of recent versions were stripped away. Ancient Hebrew culture, for its part, was recognized among academics for its asceticism, in contrast to the hedonism of ancient Greek culture.[[6]](#footnote-6) Giustiniani and Marcello seem to have been kindred spirits in their zeal for disapproval of pleasure and fancy, though the liberties taken by an ever increasing number of visitors to Venice (as opposed to the majority of Venetians themselves) were continuously more numerous.

Each of the eight volumes of the *Salmi di Davide* was issued at a separate time. Printed by Domenico Lovisa in exquisitely prepared folio editions, each volume contained an engraving capturing an important aspect of the main message and prefatory letters from two or three noted musicians and/or academicians expressing great praise for Marcello’s achievement. By the 1720s, music was rarely published in Venice, though between 1500 and 1700 Venice had been one of the principal centers for music printing. The presses of the Low Countries (especially Amsterdam), Paris, London, and Vienna were now in ascent because of more modern means of typography, but the challenges of typesetting the *Salmi di Davide* greatly exceeded what had previously been expected for any music printer.

Marcello introduced into several of his works paradigmatic quotations of Hebrew chant, for which he gave both text and music (both running from right to left). His sources were identified as coming from Sephardic, Ashkenazic, or Levantine traditions. Additionally, he employed two quotations from ancient Greek odes, and in one instance provided an ecclesiastical incipit from Roman Catholic liturgy. The resulting requirements for interleaved typesetting won recognition in the *Giornale dei letterati d’Italia.* They reported on his achievement in several installments, covering two volumes in each review. The final report, which appeared in 1727, read as follows:

The seventh volume came out in 1726, in 168 pages, with eight Psalms (36-43). The eighth contained another seven, in 181 pages, bringing the total to 50, and appeared in the current year,1727.[[7]](#footnote-7) Both contain specific introductions for the reader, letters from individual maestri of music to Sig. Marcello commending his musical compositions, and the poetic paraphrases of the Psalms of that volume by Sig. Giustiniani. This [impressive] work, with such perfection of characters[[8]](#footnote-8) and such a majestic presentation, has been prepared in the workshop of [Domenico] Lovisa, whose music printing certainly no one has surpassed up to now in beauty or presentation.[[9]](#footnote-9)

 In addition to the intermediation of Giustiniani’s poetic paraphrases and Lovisa’s printing, each volume of the *Salmi* contained as a frontispiece an engraving by either Giuseppe Camerata or Sebastiano Ricci. The engravings, which sought to convey the major Psalm typologies, were organized into a cycle of four theme, the whole conveyed twice. The scheme was:

* Songs of praise (Vols.1 and 5)
* Songs of war (Vols.2 and 6)
* Songs of divine punishment (Vols. 3 and 7)
* Sacrificial invocations (Vols. 4 and 8)

Camerata was responsible for the first two, Ricci for the latter two. The most powerful images are Camerata’s, of an elevated King David playing his harp, and Ricci’s, of David’s plea for mercy, his harp (greatly shrunken) at his feet. Ricci was well suited to creating scenes of awe, and that awe high on the agenda of what Marcello sought to convey.

<illustration>

 The psalms within each volume follow their Biblical outlines and do not exclusively contain such a simple clustering of moods. The conventional literary typologies of the Psalms of David embraced seven categories, which were by no means distributed evenly. They were:

* Songs focused on kingship and/or the holy city of Zion
* Songs of trust and thanksgiving
* Laments
* Royal songs and songs for special occasions
* Wisdom sons
* Liturgies (mainly for commemorative occasions)
* Songs of sacrifice

## Possible Sources and Places of Inspiration

The proof that Marcello’s interest was prompted in the first instance by the absorption in antiquity that academicians found so compelling in the 1720s is provided by his two quotations from early Greek sources. No staff notation was employed in the few fragments of Greek odes that survive. The staff notation in the Lovisa print looks like an optometrist’s chart, which Roman characters turned sidewise to represent some of the musical content; the Greek text underlay is suitably reproduced in pointed Greek script.

The pedigree of what is identified as “Homer’s Hymn to Ceres” does not bare close scrutiny, but we only appreciate that fact from the scholarship of generations subsequent to Marcello’s. Marcello appropriated the quotation in a great flush of translation into modern vernacular languages. The first French translation of Homer had been published only in 1723, and the literary circles in which Marcello moved would undoubtedly have noted the event. Similarly, Dionysius’s Hymn to the Sun is quoted in Psalm 16.

Normally, allusions to Greek music in the Italian academies concentrated on the tetrachord system, theories (and mathematical methods) of tuning the lyre, and modern modal interpretation—in the absence of actual music. These discussions had been rife in Zarlino and later music theory works from the Veneto. (They were to remain so, up to the present day, although the springboards for discussing them kept changing.) To the extent that there was any access to ancient music, its musical substance and poetic substrates had been entirely ignored. No one had tried to compose new music according to either its principles or its models.

However, that is exactly what Marcello tried to do. Guided by the poetry and current knowledge of religious practice (as it might have been deduced by direct observation or conveyed through learned discussion [we have no way to know which]), he set out to compose music which would accommodate the behavioral practices of specific Jewish liturgical practices. These included the separation of men and women (the women usually being sequestered in balconies), an emphasis on “purity” of many kinds, and an articulation of several musical styles observant of specific Psalm-function categories.

In cannot have been purely coincidental that the Hebrew traditions of Psalm cantilation that Marcello claimed to represent corresponded to the three largest communities in the Venetian ghetto. These were the Levantine (from 1541), Sephardic (from 1580), and Ashkenazic (from mid-17th century) communities.[[10]](#footnote-10) Their members came respectively from The Balkans and the Middle East; from the Spanish diaspora (then including Italy, Austria, Turkey, and parts of South America); and from Central and Eastern Europe.

Marcello’s capture of chant melodies available have served recent scholarship well. While it has been recognized for some time that the *Salmi di Davide* wedded Hebrew melodies from Psalms outside the first fifty to his new compositions, Seroussi has recently shown (as Israel Adler suggested decades ago) that by transcribing them at all he made a valuable contribution to ethnomusicological and diaspora studies. Serioussi (xx) has detailed the continued circulation of certain melodies in diverse congregations and communities throughout Europe, the Middle East, and South America.

Not least of the values of Marcello’s transcriptions is his careful attention to rhythmic detail. Marcello is at pains to render triplets in duple contexts, dotted figures, and a range of other features not generally expected in the generalized contours of chant repertories. In other words, he was attempting to transcribe faithfully what he heard. There was no other rubric available, although his detailed knowledge could have been enhanced in two entirely distinct ways. First, and perhaps even likely, he could gleaned from oral transmission details of an academy that had flourished in the ghetto before the plague of 1630. No documentation survives, apart from a short account attributed to the rabbi Leon of Modena (1579-1649). Modena was such a compelling speaker that Christian noblemen attended his sermons. It is not inconceivable that older forms of Judaism were known in Venice through its occupation (until 1687) of the Morean Peninsula of Greece, where the Jewish community was held to be the particularly thorough in its preservation of Hebrew script. The vernacular was eschewed in their services. Mention should also be made of the Jewish university that had flourished in Venice before the plague.

Additionally, he almost certainly sought means to hear cantilations in the synagogues that were close to his family’s palazzo on the Grand Canal. The ghetto lay immediately to the north of the parish of Santa Maria Maddelena and stretched towards the Canaregio Canal and the Fondamente Nuova. The Ashkenazic synagogue was the biggest and the closest to Marcello’s home. The Marcellos owned property near the mouth of the Ghetto. Alessandro Marcello, the most senior brother, served briefly (1722-23) in the office of Auditor Vecchio, a government judgeship which resolved disputes between Christians and Jews. [[11]](#footnote-11)

The extent of these excursions into replication of themes from (arguably) surviving chants and odes is largely concentrated in the third and fourth of the eight volumes. Their appearances are summarized in Table 1.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Psalm (RC numbering) | Rite or Tradition | Source quoted | Notes |
| 9 | Sephardic | Psalm 143 |  |
| 10 | Ashkenazic | Psalm 113 |  |
| 14 | Sephardic | Psalm 117 |  |
| 15 | Ashkenazic | Hymn “Maos tsur” |  |
| 16 | Greek | “Dyonisius’ “ Hymn to the Sun | Now attributed to Mesomedes Lyricus. |
| 17 | Sephardic |  |  |
| 17 | Ashkenazic |  |  |
| 18 | Sephardic | Intonation of unknown origin |  |
| 18 | Greek | Homer’s Hymn to Ceres (inc.) |  |
| 19 | Ashkenazic | Mystical poetry |  |
| 21 | Ashkenazic | “Oration” | Could be a Ladino text inaccurately transcribed. Quoted in Mayr’s *Samuele* and Rossini’s *La Siège de Corinthe* |
| 22 | “Ashkenazic” |  | Actually Aramaic |

Table 1. <blah blah>

Repeated for reference:

These included the separation of men and women (the women usually being sequestered in balconies), an emphasis on “purity” of many kinds, and an articulation of several musical styles observant of specific Psalm-function categories.

NB on the Greeks: Jan Assmann, working on the intellectual history of antiquity, observed that the heritage of ancient Egypt cold be considered a “subject of fascination” but not of “understanding.” The distinction has some applicability to Marcello’s perception of the Israel of David.

## How Marcello Understood the Psalms ==

Although Marcello gave the marriage of poetry to “harmony” as the main goal of his undertaking, he acknowledged that his aim was not so much a literal realization as an analogical one. The question became how to situate the values of the remote past within the musical resources and practices of the present. According to his reading of Hebrew cultural practice (as reiterated in the carefully footnoted introduction to his first volume of Psalms), Moses sang canticles celebrating the flight from Egypt with “the sons of Israel.” His sister Miriam, with her cymbal, “intoned” the same canticle. It was David who introduced the use of multiple choirs in the tabernacle, for which he also composed songs and hymns. As many as 24 choirs were used there. They were supplemented by independent groups of instruments of many kinds. Prominent among then were the psaltery and the bell.

In the current singer of Hebrew communities evidences of ancient practice were easily identified, he said. (For Greek music, he acknowledged that it was necessary to turn to manuscripts.) Certain textual emphases could be enforced musically by means of recent invention. To signify the awe-inspiring impetus of Divine Justice, for example, one could employ unusual modes. “Diatonic-chromatic” modulations known from madrigals could be employed by substituting enharmonically notated [?] passages that would be rendered imperfectly on “artificial” instruments, especially the [enharmonic] harpsichord. Where such considerations are not present, there are other means that might be pursued.

Above all, it was important to perform the Psalms without arbitrary ornaments, especially in passages addressing God [Of course Hebrews would not have used the name….xx] or speaking of things divine, because the petitioner had to be respectful and humble. It went without saying that the singers had to be consistent in timing, clear in pronunciation, and in tune. The accompanying ripieno instruments, although variable in number, should be appropriately proportioned, such that the basses would be emphasized in order to simulate the style of antiquity.

In a note to the readers in Book Two, Marcello amplified slightly. He reported that among the Hebrews only hymns, canticles, and psalms were still sung because they were the only music handed down by oral tradition. He noted that Moses ordained that there should be three uses of the trumpet: (1) [to announce] solemn sacrifices and religious feasts, (2) to announce the beginning of Jubilee and sabbatical years, and (3) to encourage and soldiers. It fell to David to introduce these practices in the Tabernacle. He wrote canticles and psalms. He ordered the making of various instruments. After the Temple was built, music of a high and decorous order was made. This continued until the Hebrews were routed by the Romans.

In his introduction to Book III, Marcello concentrates on details: the rending of Greek, issues of tuning and temperament, modes, and material specific to individual works, for this is a book in which a large number of quotations of “ancient” sources is present. He explains his choices of ancient models for individual works and verses. He allows various accommodations to performers, according to the constitution of their ensembles. The subtleties of his intentions for interpretation are more difficult to ferret out here than in most of his other books, where there is some applicable case near to hand.

On the other hand, Book Three contains some of the most ambitious settings of the entire collection. The alternating passages of narrative and reflection are contrasted musically by eighth-or sixteenth-note figures that suggest a dominant image suggested allegorically in the text and brutually long strings of whole notes that convey the emphatic voice of God. Consider, for example, the verse “Allor tu gradei, Signor,” derived musically from Homer’s [incompletely preserved] “Hymn to Ceres” in Psalm 18 (Example 2). The articulation marks in the bass part are frequently used by Marcello, who was a cellist.





*Example 2. Greek model for the verse “Allor tu gradirei, Signor” in Psalm 18.*

In the introduction to Book IV he makes special note of Psalm 21, a “prophecy.” It calls for solo voice, and musical acknowledgment of what he terms “the Redeemer of the World expiring on the Cross.” The “great mystery” of the Passion suggests to him accompaniment by violas. These instruments, in the hands of experts, can “actively inspire emotional engagement and sorrow.” His setting of Psalm 21, set for alto and two violas, certainly represents the peak of sorrow among the fifty works. Some passages call for violoncello solo as the only bass support. An example in which the melody is, additionally, derived from a German Jewish “intonation on an oration” is provided by the verse “Signor, non tardi dunque il tuo soccorso.” The incipits of model and realization are shown in Example 1.





*Example 1. Incipits for the verse “Signor, non tardi dunque il tuo soccorso” in Marcello’s setting of Psalm 21. Note that with respect to the conventional notation underneath, the pitch contour of the model must be from right to left.*

This theme was used diversely by Simone Mayr, in his oratorio *Samuele* (1821), and soon after by Rossini, in *La Siège de Corinthe* (1826). Ambiguities of social function and religious persuasion followed Marcello’s Psalms wherever they went.

 The Jewish liturgical year separates (in the same manner as the Christian) the High Holidays, Sabbaths, and festivals from ordinary days. The components with musical potential within individual services are these: (1) psalms, (2) penitential prayers, (3) strophic liturgical hymns, (4) doxologies, (5) priestly blessings, and (6) Biblical verses. A curiosity of Marcello’s acquisitions from Hebrew sources is that the content does not usually correspond exactly to the claimed source in its location or liturgical function. Initially, he does confine his sources to psalms (e.g., in his setting of Psalm 9 he borrows from Psalm 143 in the Sephardic rite; in Psalm 10 he borrows from Psalm 113 in the Ashkenazic rite.) Psalm 15 quotes a popular hymn (“Maos tsur”) from the Ashkenazic tradition. The source for a quotation in Psalm 19 is mystical poetry. <xx add from Don’s notes> After quoting from what he termed an Askenazic prayer in Psalm 22, Marcello abandoned further exploration of “ancient” and “oriental” material.

 He turned his attention instead to the models of Palestrina, adapted to conform to the musical values he considered appropriate to the performance of the Psalms.

 Among the values he continued to pursue were the proper use of cantillation (for scriptural recitation), voicing patterns that preferred lower voices, and accompaniment that was limited to strings (and usually harpsichord). In Jewish practice, the ritual chanting of Biblical readings (cantillation) employed two styles—a more poetic one for the Psalms, Proverbs, and book of Job as well as a simpler prose style for everything else. Cantillation practices varied from sect to sect of Judaism (for example, there were no special Psalm cantillations among the Ashkenazim). In other sects, the grammatical constructs understood to inhere in the textual material were extensive and complex. (An instructive aphorism was offered by Eliyahu Schleifer in 1992: “Simple tunes may be ancient, or they may be later simplifications of more complicated chants.” This is a crux of an issue that chant studies share with folksong studies. Formalization can lead to endless elaboration, but the need to share repertories among large populations can quickly undermine refinements.)

 One place where all these prescriptions converge with the preference for male voices and monophonic music (based on Marcello’s observations in the synagogues of the ghetto) is in Psalm 42, “Dal tribunal augusto," set for bass and xx. It is one of most widely performed of the *Salmi di Davide*, perhaps because of its suitability to virtuoso display. (Despite all Marcello’s caveats concerning self-important performance, the melodic leaps required of the voice are merciless.) <xx tessitura>

 It was obviously impractical to exclude female voices altogether, but across the whole collection the required voices largely exclude sopranos. Musical figures largely responded to the text at hand. Marcello heavily employed madrigalian word-painting. Homophonic writing anticipated the participation of « all the people » ; their role was to simulate the throng petitioning or responding to God. Contrapuntal writing was supposed to exhibit (as much as express) the strictness of God. The more elaborate i twas, the more was being demanded of « the people ». Monophonic writing typically represented David xx.

 It is more difficult to determine Marcello’s thoughts on when and to what extent voices and instruments should be replicated. A fair summation of his many volume introductions and the tidbits that can be gleaned from the testimonials appearing in them is that his priorities were (1) performers of professional-level merit and (2) great and lesser numbers for part as suited the availability of such talent and the physical circumstances at hand. *Solo* and *tutti* markings are numerous, though moreso in the instrumental parts than in the vocal ones.

 With respect to the use of instruments, Marcello clearly departed entirely from strict sects of Judaism, among whom the exclusion of instruments recognized their abandonment after the Expulsion from the Temple. Yet in early texts some of the Psalms were prefaced by prescriptions of instruments : Psalms 4 and 6 were suited to strings, Psalm 5 to « flutes » and so forth. (Nowhere did Marcello call for flutes, which were banned by the Papacy for liturgical purposes.)

 Marcello did provide a highly differentiated set of practices of the strings. He consistently emphasized the violoncello, ostensibly because it suited the overall range of the voices for which he scores. He called on violas for laments. Individual passages might be marked for bassetto or marcato or pizzicato xx. Cues that are more consistent than in most other music of the time recognize the coming and going on individual instruments.

 His contrapuntal practice is similarly varied. He uses homophony and polyphony in alternation. He employs a wide range of points of imitation. He reserves the *stile da cappella*, which is used sparingly, to express the « redress of vice. » The question that arises from his careful musical glosses on the paraphrase texts is how to synthesize all the resulting instantiations of one or another feature of « classical purity » into single works. Over and over, Marcello assigned highly active passages to the strings and kept the voices extremely static. He used the meter 3 8 very extensively to convey the pastoral quality of divine care. Those properties converge in Psalm 22, « Se il Signore moi Pastore » (The Lord is my shepherd)., although initially the voices are highly active and the accompaniment static.

 Pedal points that are arguably madrigalist word-pictures are used to underscore references to such concepts as eternity, as for example in Psalm 28 (title xx), which is written in the *stile da cappella;* and hope, as in the conclusion of Psalm 32 (xx title), another work in the *stile da cappella*. Both instances illustrate his belief that « the holy way to redress vice [is] with rules and precepts » such as those afforded by the otherwise imitative contexts in which these word-settings occur.

Reception: The immediate success of the Psalms was generated primarily by respect for learnedness. Marcello’s espoused aim was to recapture the “purity” of ancient music, especially that music which could be associated in his own time with musical practices in Judaea. His goal was, in a sense, a historically correct *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It had no predecessors and, despite the high regard in which the works were held, few imitators (Wagner’s later attempts notwithstanding, since his goal was to use the musical artillery of the here-and-now to dramatize medieval legends).

As a musical historian, Marcello was the most learned Italian of his time. Whether his Venetian colleagues appreciated the depth of his learning is difficult to judge. It may be that much of the lip-service paid to Psalms was superficial: endorsers believed their own status would be enhanced by attesting to their “appreciation.” Nonetheless, the spread and consistency of the Psalms made them one of the most heavily distributed repertories of the century. Marcello’s Psalm settings were substantial works, comparable with Bach cantatas in their sectionalization. Each Biblical verse received its own movement. Movements were carved off and gouged out, usually with texts that were translated or removed altogether in the nineteenth century. The Psalms themselves, like Marcello’s satirical treatise on the culture of opera, *Il teatro alla moda*, were barely ever out-of-print from his time until today. Yet like other cultural manifestations that exhibit the workings of a unique mind, the Psalms are largely invisible (and inaudible) today.

There are many possible reasons for this. The most important may be that they are generally taken to belong to the sacred vocal repertory. Among the aims of this paper is to resituate them in their original niche—works to please academicians. In forging a path from today’s neglect, back through many layers of cultural adaptation, to the original settings and to Marcello’s own motivations, we will examine <xx>.

1. The records of the church passed to San Marcuola several decades ago. Little is to be learned of the Marcellos there, apart from the names of a few siblings who died in early childhood. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Separate, smaller sets of bells at the Rialto and the Arsenal served some additional functions. See E. Selfridge-Field, *Song and Season: Science, Culture, and Theatrical Time in Early Modern Venice* (Stanford University Press, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. On Marcello’s cantatas, see E. Selfridge-Field, The Works of Alessandro and Benedetto Marcello (Oxford University Press, 1990). Many updates and findings on the cantata texts appear in Marco Bizzarini, xxx. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Giustiniani and Marcello may have been distantly related: the mother of the first was the daughter of Giovanni Capello. Both occupied series of offices notorious for stringent enforcement policies on public behavior and/or financial rectitude. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Marcello’s Psalms were reportedly performed in the famous music room of the Ospedaletto (the Ospedale dei Derelitti). [xx photo op] [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. I speak here of the Venetian intellectual attitude of the time, not of more general views. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The publication date given on the title page is 1726, but documentary evidence provided at close range is almost infallible in matters of dating. The *Giornale* certainly fell into this category; it was published bi-monthly. Some of the testimonial letters were from intellectuals who were reputed to be composers. Among composers, the most prominent of the letter-writers were Giovanni Bononcini, Francesco Gasparini, Geminiano Giacomelli, Johann Mattheson, and Georg Philip Telemann. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “Perfezione”, in Italian, referred to the taking of a skill (here printing) to the highest level possible. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Giornale dei letterati d’Italia*, 37 (1727), 537f. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The earliest Jewish populations in Venice can be traced to the thirteenth century, when there were two synagogues on the long island known as the Giudecca (but previously as Spinalunga). In 1541 the Senate permitted Jewish merchants to build storehouses in the Ghetto. Mercantilism was strongly encouraged in Venice because the government welcomed the additional custom duties it generated. On the other hand, Jews were not allowed to own property. Inquisition regulations prohibiting the presence of the Talmud and the printing of books in Hebrew in Venice would have privileged oral tradition. Most Jews resided in the Ghetto but they were not required to do so. Jews were subject to a curfew, but so too were most other sectors of the population. Debtors were only allowed outside their homes for a half-hour a day. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Selfridge-Field, *The Works of Alessandro and Benedetto Marcello* (1990), xx. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)