
4 **The Cousin and the Ghostwriter: Domenico Sestini and Antonio Mondaini in Cyprus**

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4.1 Domenico Sestini from Florence to Basra to Larnaka in Cyprus

Less organic than Mariti's reconstruction, the narration of his cousin Domenico Sestini remains closer to the form of a diary [fig. 10]. The gaze of the naturalist and the numismatist leads to a narrative dense with details but far from the broader overviews of Mariti.

In 1777, Sestini began the long series of his travels towards the Near East, the fruit of his personal initiatives, but also favoured by the relationships of Mariti, and supported by powerful patrons, like Sir Robert Ainslie, the British ambassador to the Sublime Porte, whose large medals and coins collection was fully studied by Sestini. Ainslie also financed Sestini's expedition to Basra, destined to flow into his richest accounts yet: the *Viaggio da Costantinopoli a Bassora e Viaggio di ritorno da Bassora a Costantinopoli fatto dall'abate Domenico Sestini accademico fiorentino* (Sestini 1786; 1788).

Between 1774 and 1777, Sestini had lived in Catania, where Ignazio Paterno Castello, Prince of Biscari, had entrusted him with the study of his naturalistic and antiquarian museum. The resulting



Figure 10
Portrait of Domenico Sestini
(adapted from Luppi 1890, 482)

Descrizione, skilfully edited by Mariti, appeared in 1776 and then re-published in Livorno in 1787, with the aim to enhancing the patron's fame and presenting his collections in the panorama of European antiquarianism. Sestini had almost certainly been addressed to the illustrious patron by Mariti, who had established a lasting bond with him until the death of the gentleman from Catania, attested by dense correspondence and exchanges of antiquarian and naturalistic discussions (Salmeri 2001; Pasta 2021, 33).

From 1777 to 1792, Sestini travelled extensively through Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, the Aegean and the Balkan Peninsula, and gives extensive reports of these journeys (9 volumes of *Letters* published [Florence-Livorno] from 1779 to 1785 and 5 volumes of *Viaggi* from 1786 to 1815 [Florence-Livorno]).

In the last years of his life, he left the East and for a few years lived in Germany, where he devoted himself mainly to numismatic studies, illustrating various public and private collections. In 1810 in Paris and, after a brief stay in Florence as librarian to Grand Duchess Elisa Baciocchi, he moved to Hungary to illustrate the Hedervarian Museum. His fame as an antiquarian expert in ancient numismatics led the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinand III to appoint him professor at the University of Pisa.

Constructed as a reportage in near real time, the *Viaggi* can rely on an extensive scholarly apparatus based on Strabo, Curtius Rufus, Arrian and Pliny, and the Arab geographer and historian Abū'līdā. The focus of Sestini's archaeological interest is on the collection of

Greek and Roman inscriptions, but above all on the hunt for coins and medals, the catalogue of which he intended to publish.

However, the secular outlook we have detected in the account of Islamic monuments in the Holy Land by Mariti has interesting parallels in the observations Sestini leaves us in his *Viaggi*. Perhaps more than in Mariti, the erudite information on places, monuments and spaces of worship is extensive, sometimes with references to the biblical past, or the indication of local lemmas and toponyms, usually translated and clarified. The inclination for illustrative anecdote and participatory enthusiasm is less evident than in his cousin's narrative. But the perspective remains secular, immune to the sense of cultural superiority of many contemporary observers, and indeed even more clearly interwoven with anti-ecclesiastical cues than the one we recognise in Mariti.

Personal events may have influenced the strength of this polemical verve. Sestini was, in fact, a clergyman without a vocation; he had studied at the Scolopi School in Florence and because of the education he received, he retained an invincible repugnance, which complemented a bitter polemical attitude towards monks, religious orders and the Roman Curia. The polemical rants against nuns and friars, as well as the acknowledgement of his own 'restlessness', return frequently in the correspondence, even to the point of forcing him to admit his reputation as unscrupulous in matters of religion, certainly more exposed on this front than his cousin (Pasta 2021, 51).

Together with the Venetian merchant Salesio Rizzini, Mariti's correspondent and friend, a tired and somewhat disappointed Sestini disembarks in Cyprus at the end of January 1782, to quickly leave the island for Alexandria. The short stay did not involve any inspections and was complementary to the first volume of his cousin's *Viaggi*. In Famagusta "I find nothing but dismantled houses and churches, with almost no inhabitants. It is a horror to see a city so destroyed" (Sestini 1788, 132). Semi-abandoned is the fortress, poorly defended during the Turkish siege of 1570. The decline of the kingdom accentuated the negative picture of Mariti. But drought and the invasion of locusts have aggravated a context in which "the Turk is always the oppressor, and the Greek is timid, and even treacherous, according to the usual of all islanders" (Sestini 1788, 141). As expected, the clergy, accomplices of the Turks and holders of benefices, churches, and chapels, do not escape criticism, where the polemic takes on distinctly juridic tones (Pasta 2021, 65). Not even the proclaimed beauty of the girls of Cyprus convinces him, the description he leaves us on 27 January is decidedly caustic and unsolicited:

The next day, being Sunday, all the people of the Suburbs went to the Church, I speak of the Greeks. I had occasion to admire the women passed by, and who were dressed vaguely with a certain

scarlet piece on, but did not observe there those Cypriot beauties so much praised; one must remember that Venus was only one.¹

Larnaca, however, allows the meeting with European merchants, from which the list of trading houses and the outline of trade are derived. And above all, the visit to the vestiges of ancient Kitium with the British consul, Michel de Vezin; on the basis of Mariti's description, Sestini undertook to confirm his cousin's observations and intuitions and, also as a complement to the affirmed veracity of the reconstruction, he collected three Roman inscriptions in Greek and a Latin dedication to the Emperor Nerva, purchased for Ainslie. As reported by Mariti himself, Sestini provided a description of these with a translation [fig. 11] (Masson 1986; Calvelli 2008):

One day when we were walking with Mr. Consul De Vezin to see the site of the ancient Citium, now called Kitèò, and which lies between Larnica and the Borgo delle Saline, we observed many walls of old factories of the same, which were being excavated for material, and in these excavations a beautiful white marble base was found, consecrated to Jupiter Ceraunius and Venus Aphrodite, with the following inscription, which was bought by the said Consul. (Sestini 1788, 142-3)

On the seashore there is a village bearing the same name as the Borgo of the Saline, where there are several warehouses belonging to the European merchants of Larnica, as well as several rustic houses of Greeks and Turks, and it was in a house of a Greek that I found the following Latin inscription. Here is a demonstration of the City of Citti in dedicating some statue, or other, to Emperor Nerva, bearing the year 96 of Christ. Now this inscription is found at Mr. Cav. Ainslie, British Amb. at the Ottoman Gate, for whom I purchased it; as is another that Mr. De Vezin found, being carved in a black schist, dedicated by the Senate to Tiberius Claudius, Ilaus Justus Governor of the Island. Next to the same one is another Inscription, commemorating another Governor of Citium. (143-4)

¹ Sestini 1788, 131. Sestini's misogyny appears here clearly expressed in line with the standard of previous travellers to Cyprus, who contributed to deepen the gap between the imagined woman of the Myth and the real woman. Drummond's descriptions of female characters with a denser puritan accent seems to have mixed up misogyny with his sexual frustration: "The Greek women are by some thought beautiful, though they do not please my taste: but all agree that they inherit the libertinium of their ancestors. Money will purchase the last favour from any individual; for, notwithstanding the natural heat of their constitution, they are shamefully mercenary; and some of the husbands so indifferent about the chastity of their wives" (Drummond 1754, 143-4). See also Severis 1999, 20-6.

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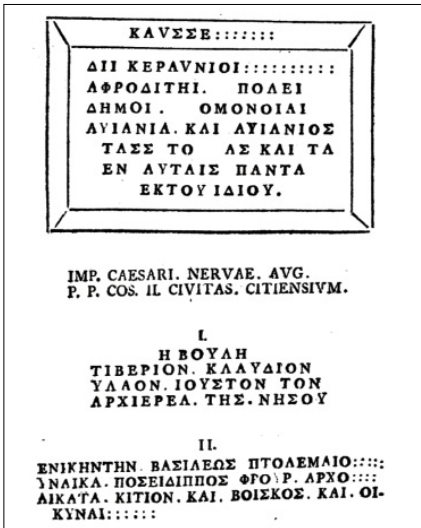


Figure 11

Ancient inscriptions transcribed by Domenico Sestini at Kition (from Sestini 1788, 142-4). Courtesy of Biblioteca Centrale Nazionale di Firenze

Beyond the Latin and Greek inscriptions that are also illustrated in the book, Sestini mentions diabase/volcanic rock tools (*macini* and *pile*, i.e. grinding tools) re-used as building materials for the construction of stone masonries.

What then increased my pleasure was to find wandering here and there pieces of porous lava, or cellulose lava, and others of fixed lava, which I supposed came from some extinct volcano on the island, and perhaps from the imminent mountain, called Santa Croce. Furthermore, pieces can be observed used in the external walls of the houses, and several millstones and pestles are found, which naturally must have been transported from some volcanic part of the island. Limestone mostly forms the complex of most of the mountains on this island; and those of Carpasso appear all white due to being of this formation; which always makes me assure that such matter could be the matrix of Volcanoes, as I have already mentioned. (Sestini 1788, 143)

Observing that there is no evidence for volcanic rock in the geological formation of the Larnaca surroundings, Sestini argues that the lithic material for these tools may have been supplied from distant procurement area. Interestingly, the observation of archaeological everyday use tools and the raw material they have been manufactured from, anticipates approaches of recent archaeological trends (Bombardieri 2010, 5-15; 2023). In the case for Sestini, this is the result of the cross-interest for naturalistic and antiquarian evidence, but also the evidence for a new dimension of archaeological field observation.

4.2 Antonio Mondaini: In the Shadow of an Anagram

We have very fragmentary documentary information about Antonio Mondaini. His name and his activities on the island can be traced essentially through four groups of documents:

- a. Cypriot archive documents attesting to Mondaini's presence and activity on the island;
- b. Mentions of Antonio Mondaini within the works of Giovanni Mariti and Domenico Sestini;
- c. Mariti-Mondaini epistolary;
- d. Works published under pseudonyms or anonymous works that we can attribute to Mondaini.

In the group A of the Cypriot documents, two appears particularly significant in determining the span of Mondaini's stay on the island.

The first document to refer to is the register of the Latin church in Larnaka. On 31 January 1762, it is recorded the wedding celebration of Antonio Mondaini and Thomasine Barthélemy, identified as "domini Juannis Provencalis de la Città, et dominae Mariae Picard eius coniugis filia legitima"; among the witnesses, Giovanni Mariti is listed first, along with the merchant Stefano Saraf and his wife Elisabetta Saraf [fig. 12].²

The second document is the register of trade between Cyprus and Great Britain in the period between 1777 and 1781 (Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou 1991). In this document, Antonio Mondaini appears as a "Tuscan merchant" and he is referred to as one of the two major exporters of products (foodstuffs, wine and textiles) to England, in close collaboration with the British vice-consul John Boddington. The export activity and collaboration involving the two, however, ended in 1777, as the document clearly indicates:

s(ieu)r Boddington alors consul d'Angleterre et s(ieu)r Mondaini neg(otian)t Toscan tous deux retires dans l'année suivante, et celles des années 1778 et des suivantes sont du s(ieu)r Michel de Vezin negociant et consul actuel. (Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou 1991, Table X)

² A copy of the document excerpted from the *Liber Matrimoniorum III a die 12 Aprilis 1733 usque ad diem 17 julii 1879* of the Latin Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Larnaka is now kept in the archives of the Costas&Rita Severis Foundation - CVAR in Nicosia. The document appears in the recent comprehensive edition of the *Register of Parish Weddings of Santa Maria delle Grazie* (Trentin 2019, 50). It is also documented that Thomasine died in Cyprus on 8 October 1769 and Mondaini, after a few years of widowhood, remarried Anne Mulet on 28 August 1771; the latter also died a few years later, on 3 August 1776, also on the island. For this information, see Trentin 2016, 164, 181; 2019, 50, 66-7; Bombardieri 2021a.

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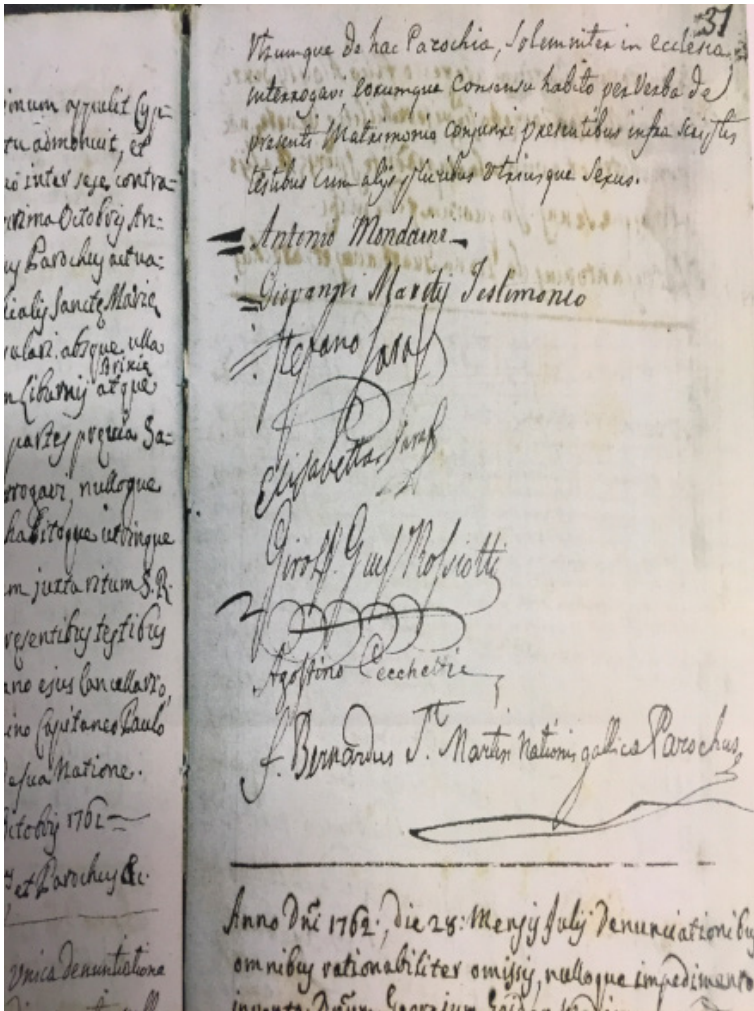


Figure 12 Record of the wedding of Antonio Mondaini and Thomasine Barthélemy (31 January 1762). Among the witnesses, Giovanni Mariti is listed first (adapted from *Liber Matrimoniorum III a die 12 Aprilis 1733 usque ad diem 17 Julii 1879*, Latin Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Larnaka)

Beyond fixing chronological references to Antonio Mondaini's stay in Cyprus, these documents suggest the perimeter of his mercantile and intermediary activities, also in relation to the privileged relationship he had with Giovanni Mariti. We know that Giovanni Mariti was appointed chancellor of the kingdom of Tuscany in Cyprus, under the auspices of the British consulate, as early as 1760, just upon his arrival on the island (Bombardieri 2019, 23). Tuscany had no official

diplomatic representation on the island prior to Mariti and it is easy to assume that its commercial interests were protected on the island by an intermediary figure recognised, albeit unofficially, by the other representations and within the framework of the balances and interests of the *Compagnia del Levante*. As Rita Severis argued, it is entirely plausible that Antonio Mondaini was this figure who, acting in the shadows, preceded Mariti in his official diplomatic functions (Severis 2007, 36). Mondaini was already active on the island and many years later was recognised as an intermediary on a par with the British vice-consul, as our second document testifies. Mondaini would therefore have been able to present Mariti to the British consul Timothy Turner as early as 1760. This is also the reconstruction proposed by Emilio De Tivaldo, who describes the genesis of the assignment given to Mariti as follows:

Timoteo Turner, Consul for the Government of Great Britain, was at that time residing on the aforesaid island, and at the same time performing the functions of Vice-Consul for the Emperor, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and the Dutch Republic. Mariti was known to this magistrate, and having found him to be full of scientific and literary enlightenment, as well as endowed with an uncommon delicacy of manners, he formed an intrinsic friendship with our Giovanni in such a way that after Antonio Mondaini of Leghorn had left Cyprus, he had him appointed chancellor of that consulate, a position he held to the entire satisfaction of the powers to which he belonged, and of his principal. (De Tivaldo 1834-45, 331)

Mondaini's common origin and positive predisposition towards Mariti is confirmed by our first document, in which the latter appears as wedding witness; in this privileged relationship, it must be acknowledged that Mondaini was in a position to provide Mariti with support and, above all, information of all kinds on the island. This information was in principle necessary for his assignment and would later prove fundamental in populating the works that would guarantee him fame and notoriety far beyond the island (Pasta 2008; 2021; Bombardieri 2019, 236).

The other three groups of documents we referred to at the outset become, therefore, of primary importance for understanding Mondaini's value as a source for Mariti and, at the same time, reconstructing the development of the interactions between the two through the decades.

Interestingly, there is no direct mention of Antonio Mondaini in the earliest Mariti's works. The volume (Tomo I) dedicated to the island within his *Viaggi* (Mariti 1769) contributed greatly to Mariti's fortunes and brought him a vast echo in Italy and throughout Europe. Mondaini appears explicitly later in one of Giovanni Mariti's

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historical works, *Istoria della guerra accesa nella Soria l'anno 1771 dall'armi di Aly-Bey dell'Egitto* (Mariti 1772a);³ in the preface to this work, Mariti explicitly acknowledges Mondaini's role, where we read:

I have lately come across a history of the war waged in Syria last year 1771 by the arms of Aly-bey of Egypt. I have reason to believe that it was written in Cyprus by Signor Antonio Mondaini, our Tuscan, a person of my particular acquaintance, an exact writer, dispassionate and a lover of truth. (Mariti 1772a, 14)

In this case, Giovanni Mariti – the lover of truth – acknowledged Mondaini's authorship of the work, but then published it under his own name in Florence in 1772, with a dedication to the wealthy merchant Stefano Saraf, already mentioned above.

In similar terms, in his scientific essay *Della Robbia. Sua coltivazione e suoi usi* published in Florence in 1776 again mentions the authorship of Antonio Mondaini:

I will reproduce in full a Memoir on the Cultivation of Madder according to the method practised in Cyprus, written by Mr Antonio Mondaini (our Tuscan on that island) Corresponding Member of this Reale Accademia de Georgofili. This Memoir has recently been removed from its Original by him, and this is the first time that it has been made available to the public. (Mariti 1776, IX-X)

Greatly interesting to investigate is Mariti's use of Mondaini's collected material (and even more the use of his already formed works); one would be inclined to regard this use as appropriation, were it not for the mention of Mondaini's authorship being so explicit. What then is the degree of reciprocity, if any? Is it a matter of Mondaini's own desire to convey his own writings through the name of his most famous friend? Or, on the contrary, is it a matter of Mariti's desire or need to swallow up the material made available by his friend to follow up his own production?

It is of course not possible to clarify one way or the other definitively and, likely, both drives played a role in the development of the relationship between the two over the years, as we shall see.

In this context, a notable contribution is provided by the Mariti-Mondaini epistolary, which is today preserved in the Fondo Mariti at the University of Bologna. The Fund was acquired in antiquarianism by Luigi Dal Pane and was recently included in the Archivio Storico. The 99 letters of Antonio Mondaini kept in the Fondo Mariti in Bologna traces back to a long period of correspondence between

³ On the episode and Mariti's work see also Rossi 1943.

1760 and 1791. Many of the missives are of an occasional nature and clearly indicate the close relationship of exchange between the two, unfortunately only documented in one direction by Mondaini's letters, as copies of the letters sent by Mariti to his friend are missing.

Some of the letters from the years of the publication of the two works mentioned above are particularly interesting in clarifying the questions we have attempted to enumerate.

One dated 26 March 1775 reads:

I note with pleasure that you have taken it upon yourself to present my Description dedicated to de la Robbia to the famous Accademia dei Georgofili. I wish it to have been appreciated

and even further down in the same letter:

I also send you the description of the snake, which you will find in the continuation of the same letter, and separately from this I send you that of the asp and that of the tarantula of Cyprus. If I can make you a copy of that of the chameleon, I will see to it that you receive it together, so that from this concern of mine, I flatter myself that you will see in my mind all the inclination to serve and please you. Already you have made it clear to me that you are in doubt as to whether I might have in mind to form a history and that for this reason you hold my notations in regard. The ease with which I give you all that little that you depart from me must make you persuaded to the contrary. Believing me capable of jealousy for your writings wrongly condemns a lack of friendship.

We may infer that Mondaini's willingness to provide the material that is insistently requested by Mariti is genuine, although the hint of Mariti's doubt and Mondaini's jealousy do not seem entirely functional for a deliberate and planned exchange.

In the following years, the picture changes significantly. The mentions of Mondaini in Mariti's works from explicit and laudatory become implicit, the friend from an overt source becomes a figure in the background to be referred to generically ("un viaggiator toscano", "un amico di Aix", as mentioned below in a greater detail) or even a reference to be refuted.

The latter is the case of the mentioned pamphlet by Mariti *Dissertazione istorico-critica sull'antica città di Citium* (Mariti 1787b). To better frame its character, it is worth recalling the occasional nature of the *Dissertazione*, wrote as a public response to a letter received from an unidentified "friend from Aix", who had doubted the hypothesis of the location of ancient Kition, already put forward by Mariti in his *Viaggi* (Mariti 1769, 51-7). It is evident that the friend to whom Mariti addresses the *Dissertazione* is indeed Antonio Mondaini, who on his

return from Cyprus we know had moved to Provence, the region from which his wife's family came (Severis 2007, 37; Bombardieri 2019, 237).

We quote here the opening section of the *Dissertazione*, in which we read Mariti's change of pace in his relationship to his friend and source:

When in Volume I Chapter III of my *Viaggi*, I described the ancient city of Citium, which I placed near the present city of Larnica or Arnaca, which, indeed, occupies part of the foundations of its ancient walls, as much as on the observations made by Sir Niebuhr, one of those travellers who had been sent to Arabia by Frederick V, King of Denmark, and with whom, during his stay in Cyprus in 1766, I had been there more than once to examine the matter more closely, for I had been looking at the ruins for five years. I also added that my opinion was not new, since I had come across an exact Manuscript containing the description of the things of Cyprus by Ascanio Savorniano, a Venetian gentleman, from which it was clear that he also placed the ancient Citium there. To corroborate my opinion, I wrote that Strabo, and Ptolemy placed Citium between the City of Amathus, now Old Limassol, and the Dades promontory, now called cape Pila.

This opinion of the true situation of Citium, after eighteen years I have written it, has now awakened in me the criticism of a Friend of mine, a man of merit, and whom I esteem, and who has also sojourned for several years in Cyprus. He tells me from Aix in Provence that it seemed strange to him that after so many other Geographers, Historians and Travellers, I should take away from the village of Citti the inveterate idea that the ancient city of Citium was placed there. I might doubt that his predilection for the said Village (a delightful and vague holiday resort of some wealthy Greek families, and a place of recreation also for the European inhabitants of Larnica) arose from those pleasant and delightful entertainments, which often and not only passed there between the Conqueror of India and the Goddess of the Island.

He endeavoured to attack me more with sarcasm than reason, concluding that I should rectify my error, that I should not adapt myself to the sentiment of Cavalier Niebuhr, and moreover that I should not undertake to support him. I myself, who have made it a rule never to be heated or spoil my blood by literary disputes, return as a gift to my Opponent all that he has written to me, and even thank him for having given me the opportunity to spend a few hours among the scholarly papers, reducing to a Historical *Dissertazione* the reply that I should make to him, with which I will even try to validate what I have already written about Citium. Therefore, I will take up the fuller narrative here, and then establish that the situation of that city was precisely where it was said to be, i.e. near the present city of Larnica. (Mariti 1787b, 5-7)

It is worth mentioning here that field observations would prove to be essential and Giovanni Mariti's reconstruction of Kition's location entirely well-founded (Bombardieri 2013, 594-8), as confirmed by the urban excavations conducted in Larnaka by the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus and the French Archaeological Mission in recent decades.⁴ But this is not the space to acknowledge Mariti's merit in the 'prehistory' of archaeological research in the Larnaka area (Nicolau 1976; Yon 2011, 36-8), as much as to attempt to sketch Mondaini's role as a source, in this case to refute.

The devaluation of Mondaini's argument passes through a very sarcastic attack in tones that seem to us to be slightly sly. Mariti does not hesitate to tell us that Mondaini's proposed localisation of Kition with the modern village of Citti is motivated by the fact that he spent his time in that village amusing himself with women (i.e. the Goddess of the island) and wine (i.e. Dionysus, the Conqueror of India). With a small variation, then, the revisitation of the standard 'Bacchus, Tobacco and Venus', which definitely sounds disqualifying and unnecessary to refute Mondaini's argument.

Additionally, what we can glean from the letters sent by Mondaini to Mariti about Kition and its location seem to suggest a very different tone of exchange and does not suggest that Mariti was "attacked more with sarcasm than with reasons".

In a letter dated back to 26 March 1775, Mondaini writes to Mariti:

But returning to the subject, I tell you that in order to show you my willingness to pay due gratitude to your friendship, I have been labouring for the last month and have made a sacrifice of all the evenings that are ordinarily devoted to the company. I began to speak about the third chapter of the mentioned book of yours and I found myself engaged in refuting your opinion and that of Mr. Niebhur in which you claim that Citium is located where Larnaca is at present and I am now sending you a letter of mine dated Friday 31 December in which you will observe what I have found to tell you about this matter. I hope that you will agree with me and that you will be grateful for my effort if, in the reprint of your book, you will refer to my opinion or put my letter in full. I leave you at liberty to do as you please.

And again, in a letter dated back to 9 July 1777 we read:

In truth I am surprised that you did not receive my second letter containing my observations on the third chapter of your travels in Cyprus, one dated 26 March 1775, and with Swedish Captain Fosterg, at the same time I sent you the Description of the Chameleon, with

⁴ Karageorghis 1974-2004; 1976; Yon 2006; Caubet et al. 2015; Cannavò et al. 2018.

a cavatello full of muscatella grapes from Cyprus, which you asked me for. Of all these things I have never received any reply from you, after having asked you several times, and so our correspondence has suffered a gap from that time until now; I am sorry that it has all gone up in smoke and principally my letter concerning the observations on the third chapter of your said travels, which cost me a great deal of effort to prove to you that ancient Citium was never the present city of Larnaca, as Mr. Niebuhr thought.

The letter of 31 December to which Mondaini refers is unfortunately not preserved among the 99 in the Fondo Mariti in Bologna; we must, however, assume that it arrived at its destination and that it contained what was quoted at the beginning of the *Dissertazione* ("that I reconsider my error, that I do not adapt myself to Cavalier Niebuhr's sentiment, and furthermore that I do not undertake to support him"). However, Mariti did not reply to Mondaini on the subject on any occasion between March 1775 and July 1777, nor did he transcribe the letter as Mondaini asked him to.

Although he had no difficulty in publishing Mondaini's two essays first and in full in 1772 (*Istoria della Guerra accesa in Soria*) and 1776 (*Della Robbia*), he does not now consider publishing the letter about Citium's location but feels compelled to refute it by indirectly calling it into question in the *Dissertazione*, without explicitly attributing it to Mondaini.

Something seems cracked and this is not the only evidence about. Information that clarifies the development of the relationship between Mondaini and Mariti from the 1780s onwards can be gathered from a manuscript that appeared in 2003 and then fully published by Rita Severis (Namindio 2007). The manuscript, which runs to over 300 pages and is dated 1785, contains fourteen letters, interspersed with some verse and accompanied by four watercolour illustrations and a schematic ink drawing.⁵ The author, who uses the pseudonym Namindiù (also read Namindio), indicates that the manuscript is intended for publication in *La Manon* in Provence (Severis 2007, 21).

This indication supports the possibility that the addressee of the *Dissertazione* and the author of the manuscript are the same person, leaving little doubt as to the identification between Antonio Mondaini and Namindiu/Namindio, as Rita Severis first suggested (Severis 2007, 33-7).

A definitive confirmation of Mondaini's choice to use the anagram of his name to sign his works comes to us from one of the letters

⁵ Interestingly, one out of the five illustrations, the only one in the text, schematically depicts a chameleon. This reptile attracted specific attention by numerous contemporary travellers (e.g. Drummond 1754, 245) [fig. 13].



Figure 13
 The Cypriot chameleon illustrated
 by Antonio Mondaini (adapted
 from Namindiu 2007, 304)

addressed to Mariti and preserved in Bologna. It is a letter sent from La Manon in Provence and dated 10 May 1788 in which we read:

I tell you again that in order not to expose myself openly in battle with the critics, I have taken from my name of Mondaini a pure anagram that gives me that of Namindio. I make use of this in my work, either to avoid the assaults of the censors, or to be in a state to be able to repel them by keeping myself under cover.

Such a choice was already clear to other correspondents, as attested by a letter sent in 1786 from La Manon to Marco Lastri,⁶ where Mondaini reveals his literary pseudonym and mentions his manuscript containing the Cypriot letters, presumably the same ones now edited by Rita Severis.

However, Mariti was certainly already aware at least as early as 1785 of Mondaini's desire to publish his works under a pseudonym-anagram and without the intermediary of his friend and his fame. In the preliminary letter to the reader that opens the manuscript containing the fourteen letters from Cipro Mondaini in fact writes as follows:

⁶ Firenze, Biblioteca Moreniana, Manoscritti Frullani 40, Lettere a M. Lastri, II. Here Mondaini specifically refers to his letters "spettanti alla storia di Cipro" (Pasta 2021, 22, fn. 41). The erudite Marco Lastri was active in Florence as Academic of Georgofili and Academic of the Crusca; numerous letters by Marco Lastri ranging from 1782 to 1798 are kept in the Fondo Mariti in Bologna.

I have written these letters of mine as a mere pastime, and to reduce to memory all the observations, which I had made during my stay on the famous island of Cyprus. I addressed them to a friend of mine in Tuscany, from whom they were asked for with great solicitude. He had a plan to have them printed, but I opposed his gracious dispositions, because he had already concluded to accompany them with a French translation, and in these two idioms to have them printed in Aix; the object, however, did not obtain any execution, because the revolution of France was opposed by forcing me to leave it. (Namindio 2007, 42)

Despite Mondaini's explicit request, however, one of Namindio's fourteen letters appears to have been published by the publisher Carlo Giorgi in Livorno immediately in 1786.⁷ In the Livorno edition, it appears titled: *Lettera di un viaggiatore toscano scritta da Cipro a un accademico etrusco* (Mondaini 1786). This is the fourth letter of the manuscript edited by Rita Severis, describing a trip to the Limassol region, which is reproduced in full with an additional short introduction.

As further proof that the publication was promoted by Mariti, it suffices to recall that the publisher of the *Lettera* was the same one with whom the *Dissertazione* was to be published the following year

⁷ A copy of the *Lettera* is now kept in the University Library in Genoa (inv. coll. misc. A.7.11). On the last page of the copy kept in Genoa a few lines have been handwritten: "Tutto è imposture! Fuor che Natura. Felici coloro che credano a un solo Dio Essenza Spirituale, studiano sul Gran Libro della Natura che sta aperto a tutti; e Glorificano sempre l'infinito Creatore, e non si confondano con santi e madonne, favole e chimere, inventate dalla malizia degli uomini per signoraggiare il mondo, e godersi i beni della terra a danno de' sciocchi. Dio solo è il mio Re, e la Coscienza il mio Sacerdote: ciò mi basta. Molini" (Everything is imposture! Beyond Nature. Happy those who believe in a single God Spiritual Essence, study in the Great Book of Nature that is open to all; and always glorify the infinite Creator, and do not confuse themselves with fables and chimeras, invented by the malice of men to rule the world, and enjoy the goods of the earth to the detriment of fools. God alone is my King, Conscience my Priest: that is enough for me. Molini). Presumably, the author of this note could be Giuseppe Molini, who was a bookseller in Florence, a general partner of the publisher Gaetano Cambiagi; Molini's bookshop was first located in Piazza del Duomo (circa 1770) and then (from early 1780s) on the Lungarno Archibusieri and would be inherited by his son who was noted for his trade in manuscripts, incunabula and ancient and contemporary editions in Italy and, through triangulations with his brothers, in Paris and London. We know that the *Della Robbia* volume had appeared with Cambiagi in 1776 and certainly this publisher and the Florentine bookseller Molini were both in contact with Mariti. As an alternative, the author of these lines may have been also Giuseppe's brother Giovanni Claudio, who moved to Paris in 1763, where he apprenticed with André-François Le Breton and then set up on his own from 1766, publishing in French and Italian, including the complete works of Vittorio Alfieri in 1803 and Beccaria's *Dei delitti e delle pene*. See Greco 1990; Rusu 2018; Bombardieri 2021a.

The opening motto "Tutto è impostura! Fuor che natura" appears inspired to Rousseau's celebrated concept of realising the natural self, specially focused upon his education theories elaborated in the *Émile* (see e.g. Scott 2021). In this background the *Lettera* includes a clear Rousseauian episode, when Mondaini encounters a Cypriot priest in the countryside between Kolossi and Erimi. See below in a greater detail.

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and that he prefaced the publication of the *Lettera* with a note stating: “This letter that is now coming to light was not long since received from Cyprus by a friend of mine, who graciously communicated and donated it to me”.

If compared with the same itinerary offered by Mariti in his *Viaggi*,⁸ Mondaini’s journey is differently approached. Four major sections may be outlined along an itinerary which appears much more oriented to human relationships and encounters than to the description of places.

In a broader perspective, the *Lettera* appears inspired to a studied variety of subjects and registers. Edutainment (education and entertainment) is the one of the key Horatian-based concepts in the eighteenth century aesthetics, and its basic principle is just the variety, as a necessary tool to escape tedium and attract the reader.

While Mariti give us a succinct list of first- and second-hand macro-evidence collected, Mondaini adopts a micronarrative for in-depth descriptions of any of the episodes he reports, with a greater variability in themes and tones. The first section is dedicated to a wedding party in Limassol, where Mondaini takes part as special guest. Here the romantic stereotypes widely selected for the bride Sophia is mixed up with the opposite register adopted for the description of the funny accident occurred to the Papas that involved the whole audience, including the participant observer Mondaini. Rapid changes in tone, style and forms may be observed, with prose and verses alternated.

In the following sections, one may pass through the register of philosophical exemplum offered by the rural priest who personifies the radical comeback to primitive laws of nature, to the detailed description of a folk music festival in Episkopi, which Mondaini provide us with an array of information of popular feasting performances of this community.

The archaeological account is limited to the last section, where Mondaini mentions ancient sources and his first-hand observations over the ancient Kourion, attesting the evidence of scanty ruins and archaeological materials on site (“this was the place where the city of Curi was located; one can still see several marble columns belonging to this city scattered around, along with further evidence of its ruins”). Interestingly, such evidence appears to produce a deep sense of impotence to Mondaini (“If one could do diligent research with impunity, one would find many rare vestiges underground, which would give a more extensive intelligence of her merit. The ignorant Turk does not allow this, and I must consequently remain here without telling you about it”) (Mondaini 1786, 28). It is worth recalling

⁸ The itinerary Limassol-Paphos with stop in *Piscopio* (modern Episkopi), *Colosso* (modern Kolossi) and record of the ancient site of Kourion is reported in Chapter XVII of the *Viaggi* (Mariti 1769). Cf. Appendix below.

that, a century later, the same evidence (and site) produced to Luigi Palma di Cesnola the opposite feeling and offered the perfect background to build up the fiction of his “Kourion Treasure” (Bombardieri 2015, 78-80; Bombardieri forthcoming).

Turning back to the events of its diffusion, we do not know whether Mondaini learned of the publication of the *Lettera* and in what form; in any case, we know that his choice to publish under an anagram-pseudonym was confirmed in the following years. Although the collection of the fourteen Cypriot Letters never saw the light of day in print, the following decade saw the publication at Archangelo Sartori in Ancona of firstly *La vita di Epicteto filosofo: considerata da Naminidio* (1797) and then the *Favole, aneddoti e novelle composte da Naminidio* (1798). While still Domenico Sestini wrote:

The illustration of various places on the Island of Cyprus is due to two Tuscan subjects who have for many years sojourned in this kingdom, and one is Mr. Giovanni Mariti Fiorentino my friend, and cousin, and the other is Mr. Antonio Mondaini Livornese, from whom we expect many interesting news, and observations, promising to publish them. (Sestini 1788, 131)

In the following decade, Mariti’s interests, like those of Mondaini, moved further and further away from the Cyprus *focus* and, with the same progressive parabola, the epistolary relationship between the two also became less intense and meaningful.

The evidence discussed above, which we can only consider fragmentary and inconclusive, lead us to glimpse a line of development unfolding over decades. A path through which the relationship between the two unfolds in the light of their vivid and personal interest in Cyprus and in the shadow of their respective (and equally personal) ambitions and weaknesses.

In an early phase of this relationship, until at least 1770, Mondaini is certainly Mariti’s main source from whom he gathers the information conveyed in the writing of his *Viaggi*. The immediate fame of this work, which was later translated and circulated throughout Europe (Pasta 2021, 25-9), guaranteed Mariti a personal and literary visibility that was probably translated into vanity, on the one hand, and, on the other, into an eagerness to respond to the expectations of an academic and political audience from which Mariti expected recognition. The information on Cyprus becomes essential at this point and Mondaini’s role of paramount importance.

In the second phase, between 1770 and 1775-76, Mariti published Mondaini’s works in agreement with him; presumably, Mondaini saw his friend’s fame as a vehicle to spread his own writings. The attribution of works from this phase is made difficult precisely by this

source-author dichotomy, which is moreover made explicit in Mondaini's letters preserved in the Fondo Mariti.

In the third phase, between 1775 and at least 1785-87, the balance of dichotomy and apparent common intents breaks down. The spark we can document is represented by Mondaini's distancing himself from the 'general agreement' about the location of ancient Kition. It is like to say that the source rebels, then. And Mariti's reaction appears to our eyes to be totally unhinged, perhaps precisely because it calls into question the two drives that for Mariti were constitutive of the relationship from the beginning: his vanity and the need to meet expectations. Mariti reacts with silence, not following up Mondaini's letter of 1775, and then with open polemic, writing and publishing his *Dissertazione*. From this moment on, Mondaini is no longer mentioned explicitly, but referred to polemically.

In the fourth phase, from at least 1785 onwards, the distance becomes a rift and Mondaini decides to present himself to his friend as an autonomous author. Mondaini is no longer the source for Mariti's work, but a new autonomous Namindio, an author-anagram: the opposite of what he had been up to this point, the reverse of Mondaini. This novelty on the scene appears not acceptable to Mariti, who responds to estrangement with estrangement. Conclusive in this sense is the publication of one of the Cypriot letters that Mariti had received with the explicit instruction not to publish. The programme of publication in France with translation and under the new pseudonym-anagram made Mariti realise clearly that the picture had changed. And the reaction, again unhinged in our eyes, is to publish the letter in the name of an anonymous Tuscan traveller: anonymous *versus* pseudonymous.