

# SHAKESPEARE AND HIS WORLD

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## Welcome to Week 7

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Welcome to Week 7 of *Shakespeare and His World*. This week, we're going to go to the very centre of the known world in Shakespeare's time, the Mediterraneans. I've called this week, 'The Clash of Civilisations'.

We're going back to Venice where we were two weeks ago with *The Merchant of Venice* and the world of money, but this week, we're going to look at the Moor of Venice, *Othello*. The Moor from North Africa who is hired by the Senate of Venice to lead their army and he leads them against the Turks. That takes him to Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean.

What I want to ask this week, and what we're going to explore through books and maps and images from Shakespeare's time, is how did the world of Christian Europe relate to the world of the Ottoman Empire based in the eastern Mediterranean and to the Muslim world of North Africa.

*Othello* is an extraordinarily interesting play in which different religions, races and cultures clash and join together. But in which we also discover that the threat to civilisation comes, not from an outsider with a different skin colour from that of the majority of the characters, but rather from a subversive insider, from the evil figure of Iago.

And what we'll discover, through looking at original documents and images, is that what Iago is able to play on is a set of preconceptions and stereotypes about women in Venice.

The Moor, the Venetian woman, the other Italians, and the figures from the margins of the known world – it's an extraordinary story, simultaneously a very simple domestic tale about marital jealousy and a story that opens up the whole history of the Mediterranean world in the time Shakespeare.