



"A Place of Mediterranean Connectivity: the Maltese Frontier (Sixteenth to Seventeenth Centuries)"

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Twelve Cities – One Sea

Early Modern Mediterranean Port Cities
and their Inhabitants

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Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane

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A PLACE OF MEDITERRANEAN CONNECTIVITY:
THE MALTESE FRONTIER
(SIXTEENTH TO SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES)

Edward S. Casey observed that while time is one-dimensional, space is multi-dimensional. In this space, 'places' are references that locate and define: to be is to be in a 'place'.¹ This could define *frontier* experience.

The Mediterranean space-time defined by Fernand Braudel reflects the existence of 'moments' that give rise to 'places', particularly frontier areas, whose past or future strategic or economic acuity was or may not be the same. Presenting a history of the Mediterranean, the important work by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell² deliberately reversed Fernand Braudel's analysis.³ Whereas Braudel defined the unity of the Mediterranean before focusing on the divisions arising from the individuality of sea basins, islands and continental territories, the Anglo-Saxon historians drew on the interactions between Mediterranean fragmentations to develop the idea of a global connectivity of the sea over time.⁴ However productive it may be, the concept of 'connectivity'⁵ nevertheless cannot mask the reality of a Mediterranean plurality of temporalities (very long-term, long-term, event-based) and spaces, as defined by Braudel. The unity of the sea, under the sign of

¹ Edward S. Casey, 'Espaces lisses et lieux bruts. L'histoire cachée du lieu', *Revue métaphysique et de morale* 4, no. 32 (2001): 467–8.

² Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

³ Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, 2 vols (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966).

⁴ Brent D. Shaw, 'Challenging Braudel: A New Vision of the Mediterranean', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 14 (2001): 422.

⁵ Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Hervé Inglebert, *Histoire universelle ou Histoire globale?* (Paris: PUF, 2018).

the circulation of goods, people and ideas,⁶ concerns a small number of privileged actors, who are also the most visible (merchants, diplomats, etc.); the vast majority of people were unconscious of it, living their daily lives within the internal boundaries of their islands, at once open to trade and closed in on themselves, of their towns or villages, and of the political and religious powers that controlled the movement of their subjects and foreigners.⁷

Henri Bresc convincingly demonstrated that ‘there are times when the Mediterranean is a dead sea, and spaces where naval warfare, easy to organise, quick to attack and easy to concentrate, has brought only destruction and continental retreat’.⁸ While Purcell and Horden perfectly grasped maritime interaction, they sometimes generalised it to areas, coasts and islands which, *at certain times*, escape their overall destiny, or which emerge suddenly and for an indeterminate period, helping create a new maritime equilibrium. Indeed, as far as islands are concerned, there are times of ‘dead sea’ just as there are times of ‘shared sea’,⁹ and these times are not always the same, nor necessarily located in the same maritime spaces. This was particularly true during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, due to the conflict between the Ottoman and Spanish empires.¹⁰ In the middle of the Mediterranean, ‘absolute frontiers’¹¹ materialising on certain coasts and islands became the sites of major military and corsairing conflicts, as well as economic exchanges (ransom of captives, trade). And these ‘frontier places’, es-

⁶ Maria Fusaro, ‘After Braudel: A Reassessment of Mediterranean History between the Northern Invasion and the Caravane Maritime’, in *Trade and Cultural Exchange in the Early Modern Mediterranean. Braudel’s Maritime Legacy*, ed. Maria Fusaro, Colin Heywood, and Mohamed-Salah Omri (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010): 1–22.

⁷ Maurice Aymard, ‘La Méditerranée: Braudel toujours présent’, *Synergies, Monde Méditerranéen* 1 (2010): 79.

⁸ Henri Bresc, ‘Îles et tissu “connectif” de la Méditerranée médiévale’, *Médiévales* 47 (2004): 123.

⁹ Bresc, ‘Îles et tissu “connectif” de la Méditerranée médiévale’: 127–8.

¹⁰ Caroline Finkel, *Osman’s Dream. The Story of the Ottoman Empire (1300–1923)* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

¹¹ The expression is from Daniel Nordman, *Frontières de France. De l’espace au territoire (XVI^e–XIX^e siècle)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 43–4; on the concept of a frontier sea, see Jean Heffer, *Les États-Unis et le Pacifique. Histoire d’une frontière* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995); Renaud Morieux, *Une mer pour deux royaumes. La Manche, frontière franco-anglaise, XVII^e–XVIII^e siècles* (Rennes: PUR, 2008); Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary, *Qu’est-ce qu’une frontière aujourd’hui?* (Paris: PUF, 2015).

pecially the islands, were not always the same and did not embody the frontier with the same acuity over the centuries.

The case of the Ottoman islands in early modern times is revealing. By eliminating all traces of the Latin presence and unifying the Levant under their own authority, the Turks often deprived these islands of the strategic role they had played when they were places of confluence between Latins, Greeks and Muslims. For example, after its conquest by Süleyman the Magnificent in 1522, Rhodes lost the role it had played in the Hospitallers' era as economic intermediary between the Muslim East and the Christian West.¹² The destiny of Malta, on the contrary, became evident at the end of the Middle Ages, when it found itself placed *in frontiera barbarorum* and began to outwardly appear as a corsair base, crystallising the discontent of Muslim Africa.¹³ Fernand Braudel had already grasped this evolution towards a frontier which, although porous, was marked by military violence as symbolised by the name that the Spanish monarchy gave to the islands of the western Mediterranean under its control and which it considered its 'armed frontiers'¹⁴ during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Property of the Spanish monarchy, fiefdom of the Hospitallers since 1530, Malta benefited from the confrontation between the Habsburgs and the Osmanlis. The little island on the border of Europe and its sea routes became a strategic element in the Mediterranean area, a magnificent crossroads, a point of closure and a link between East and West: a *frontier place* in the dynamic sense of the term. The distinction be-

¹² Nicolas Vatin and Gilles Veinstein, eds, 'Introduction', in *Insularités ottomanes* (Istanbul: Institut français d'études anatoliennes, 2004), 13, <https://books.openedition.org/ifeagd/1454>; Nicolas Vatin, 'Îles grecques? Îles ottomanes? L'insertion des îles de l'Égée dans l'Empire ottoman à la fin du xvi^e siècle', in Vatin and Veinstein, *Insularités ottomanes*, 71–89, <https://books.openedition.org/ifeagd/1463>.

¹³ Henri Bresc, 'Malte et l'Afrique (1282–1492)', *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 71 (1994): 63–73; Henri Bresc, 'Sicile, Malte et monde musulman', in *Malta. A Case Study in International Cross-Currents* (Malta: Malta University Publications, 1991), 47–81; Henri Bresc, 'La genèse de l'identité maltaise', in *Mutations d'identités en Méditerranée*, ed. Henri Bresc and Christiane Veauvy (Saint-Denis: Bouchène, 2000), 141–57; Carmel Cassar, *Society, Culture and Identity in Early Modern Malta* (Malta: Mireva Publications, 2000), 1–10.

¹⁴ Natividad Planas, 'Pratiques de pouvoir au sein d'une société frontalière. Le voisinage de Majorque et ses îles adjacentes avec les terres d'Islam au XVII^e siècle' (PhD diss., European University Institute, 2000), 73–4; Angelantonio Spagnoletti, 'La frontiera armata. La proiezione mediterranea di Napoli e della Sicilia', in *Sardegna, Spagna e Mediterraneo. Dai Re Cattolici al Secolo d'Oro*, ed. Bruno Anatra and Giovanni Murgia (Pisa: Carocci, 2004), 20–1.

tween a frontier and a boundary or border is twofold: it is a space of tension and exchange, and a place that attracts attention, where people on either side clash while at the same time working together.¹⁵ During the oscillations of the Mediterranean frontier in early modern times, Malta emerged as one of the 'places' of the Spanish Empire and, more broadly, of the whole of Christendom. Like other places that, in Paul Ricoeur's words, 'were occupied, left, lost and found again by living beings', Malta was taken over by individuals and authorities and recognised as a medium of collective memory.¹⁶ During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it indeed became a place where agents of maritime 'connectivity'¹⁷ (corsairs, merchants, renegades, etc.) were both active and strictly controlled.

¹⁵ The historiography on frontiers is so vast that I will only mention a few key titles: Lucien Febvre, 'Frontière: le mot et la notion' (1928) republished in *Pour une histoire à part entière* (Paris: Sevpen, 1962), 11–24; Michel Foucher, *L'invention des frontières* (Paris: Fondation pour les études de défense nationale, 1986); Charles Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Robert Bartlett and Angus McKay, eds, *Medieval Frontier Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Pierre Toubert, 'Frontière et frontières: un objet historique', in *Castrum 4. Frontières et peuplement dans le monde méditerranéen au Moyen Âge* (Rome: École française de Rome; Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1992), 9–17; Pierre Toubert, 'L'historien, sur la frontière', in *L'Histoire grande ouverte. Hommages à Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 221–32; Daniel Nordman, *Profil du Maghreb. Frontières, figures et territoires (XVIII^e–XX^e siècles)* (Rabat: Ed. Faculté des Lettres de Rabat, 1996); Daniel Nordman, *Frontières de France. De l'espace au territoire (XVI^e–XX^e siècles)* (Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1998); Peter Sahlin, *Boundaries. The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 1989); Philippe Sénac, *La Frontière et les hommes (VIII^e–XII^e siècles). Le peuplement musulman au nord de l'Ebre et les débuts de la Reconquête aragonaise* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2000); Jennifer Heurley, 'Les frontières internes et externes de l'Irlande du Nord. Logiques territoriales et recomposition d'un espace conflictuel' (PhD diss., Paris-Sorbonne, 2001); Carlos de Ayala Martínez, Pascal Buresi, and Philippe Josserand, eds, *Identidad y representación de la frontera en la España medieval (siglos XI–XIV)* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2001); Anne Brogini, *Malte, frontière de chrétienté (1530–1670)* (Rome: BEFAR, 2006); Michel Catala, Dominique Le Page, and Jean-Claude Meuret, eds, *Frontières oubliées. Frontières retrouvées. Marches et limites anciennes en France et en Europe* (Rennes: PUR, 2011).

¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Points Seuil, 2000), 191.

¹⁷ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Empires between Islam and Christianity, 1500–1800* (New York: Permanent Black, 2018), 409.

1. *Defending and demarcating the frontier place*

The reality of the Maltese frontier was materialised through original sensory experiences: the overrepresentation of men of the church and men-at-arms in the harbour showed visitors and residents that they were in a very much Catholic urban space. Religious people were omnipresent: knights of Malta, staff of the Holy Office and the island's clergy.¹⁸ The Grand Harbour was composed of four cities at the beginning of the seventeenth century (Valletta and the 'Three Cities' – Vittoriosa, Senglea, Bormla/Cospicua), which became five at the end of the century, with the construction and settlement of Floriana (Fig. 5.1).

In the mid-seventeenth century, the Grand Harbour had a population of around 20,000, of whom between 8% and 10% were men of the church: in addition to the 500 or 600 Hospitallers, there were almost 1,500 men and women from the regular and secular clergy.¹⁹ In addition to the traditional religious feasts (Christmas, Easter, All Saints' Day, etc.), there were four important and specific Maltese feasts that helped to keep people in a permanent Catholic mood. On 10 February, there was the commemoration of the shipwreck of Saint Paul, the island's patron saint, whose cult developed considerably in the seventeenth century;²⁰ on 24 June, the feast of Saint John the Baptist (patron saint of the Hospitallers); on 29 June, *L-Imnarja*, the Feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, marked the start of the summer season and was the occasion for many festivities in the Grand Port; last, 8 September commemorated the victory against the Turks in the Great Siege of Malta. In 1665, for the centenary of the siege, a great commemoration mass had been celebrated in the Church of St John in Valletta, followed by a gigantic artillery salvo fired in the Grand Port (Fig. 5.2 and 5.3). The galleys in the port had all been illuminated, and parades of soldiers and battle re-

¹⁸ Emanuel Buttigieg, 'Negotiating Encounters, Controlling Spaces: Official Meetings between Grand Masters and Inquisitors in Valletta and Vittoriosa', in *The Roman Inquisition in Malta and Elsewhere* (Malta: Heritage Malta, 2017), 110–19.

¹⁹ Brogini, *Malte, frontière de chrétienté*, 682.

²⁰ Cassar, *Society, Culture and Identity*, 209–19; John Azzopardi and Alain Blondy, *Marc'Antonio Haxac and Malta's Devotion to Saint Paul* (Malta: Fondation de Malte, 2012); John Azzopardi, 'Les chevaliers de St Jean à Malte (1530–1798): promoteurs du culte de saint Paul', *Société de l'Histoire et du Patrimoine de l'Ordre de Malte* 25 (2011): 58–63; Alain Blondy, 'Culte paulinien et Contre-Réforme', in *Chrétiens et Ottomans de Malte et d'ailleurs* (Paris: PUPS, 2013), 91–2.

enactments had taken place throughout the day in the Grand Harbour cities.²¹

The religious feast dimension was inseparable from the military dimension of the Grand Harbour. Each of the five port cities was protected by its own walls. The general impression given by the harbour was very much a militarised one, with a succession of stocky bastioned ramparts, which, however, did not break up the port's population or society.²² Even if each town was individualised by its own walls, they were closely dependent on each other and obeyed the same rules and the same political and religious authorities. While Valletta housed the Hospitallers' convent, Vittoriosa was the seat of the Holy Office and the arsenal and Floriana was used for military training, the island's clergy were equally present everywhere, and goods were unloaded in each of the cities. Slave prisons were located in three towns of the Grand Harbour (Vittoriosa, Senglea and Valletta).²³

These impressive walls were proof of Malta's frontier position: within them, inhabitants and foreigners were in Christendom; beyond them, they were exposed to the Muslim danger (Fig. 5.4).

But the walls were also proof of the close surveillance imposed on the population living temporarily or permanently in the Grand Harbour. It was for this reason that some Maltese walls had eyes and ears, added by the Hospitallers above the entrance gate of the St Elmo fortress and on the watchtower above the Senglea wall (Fig. 5.5). These eyes and ears reminded everybody that they were protected by the po-

²¹ Archives of the Order of Malta [AOM] 261, fols 27r–27v, 28 July 1665.

²² Many excellent works have studied Maltese fortifications: Quentin Hughes, *The Architecture of Malta During the Period of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, 1530–1798* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1952); Quentin Hughes, *The Building of Malta during the Period of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem (1530–1798)* (Malta: Tiranti, 1986 [1956]); Quentin Hughes, *Fortress. Architecture and Military History in Malta* (Malta: Ben Uri Gallery & Museum, 1969); Roger de Giorgio, *A City by an Order* (Malta: Progress Press, 1985); Alison Hoppen, *The Fortification of Malta by the Order of St. John (1530–1798)* (Malta: Mireva Publications, 1999); Stephen Spiteri, *Fortresses of the Cross: Hospitaller Military Architecture (1136–1798)* (Malta: Heritage Interpretation Services Publication, 1994); Stephen Spiteri, *Fortresses of the Knights* (Malta: Book Distributors, 2001); Nicoletta Marconi, ed., *Valletta. Città, architettura e costruzione sotto il segno della fede e della guerra* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 2011).

²³ Anne Brogini, 'Les prémices d'une place marchande en Méditerranée. Malte au début de l'époque moderne (XVIe–XVIIe siècles)', in *La loge et le fondouk. Les dimensions spatiales des pratiques marchandes en Méditerranée, Moyen Âge–Époque moderne*, ed. Wolfgang Kaiser (Aix-en-Provence: Karthala, 2014), 209–26.

litical and religious powers, but above all that they were controlled by them (Fig. 5.6)!

The ramparts of the Grand Harbour marked the watertight frontier between Maltese Catholicism and the perils of the sea, and they were therefore subject to very strict political regulations. All Jewish, Muslim and Protestant foreigners were formally forbidden from crossing them and entering Maltese territory. In 1605, a grand master's order required the English merchants and sailors to remain alongside the quay:²⁴ while they had complete freedom on board, they could not go ashore or pass through the walls without a special authorisation from both the inquisitor and the grand master. The inhabitants were not allowed to board Protestant ships, socialise with the crews or even speak to them. In 1607, the order had been extended to Flemish and Dutch ships: only merchants were allowed to board ships and meet the Flemish and English men.²⁵ Muslims and Jews were also forbidden from crossing the harbour walls: they had to present customs with a document of safe conduct delivered exclusively by the grand master, which they had to keep with them throughout their stay in the Grand Harbour.

In addition to the safe conduct, non-Christians had to distinguish themselves physically from the Maltese by their clothing and appearance.²⁶ Since 1595, both free and enslaved Jews had had to wear a piece of yellow cloth: on the head for men and on the bodice for women. If a Jewish man hid the cloth with a hat, he was condemned to be whipped in public if he was a slave, or expelled from the port if he was a free man.²⁷ Muslims were always to be dressed 'as Turks'. In 1595, the Holy Office in Rome declared to the inquisitor of Malta that the 'physical distinctions served to ensure that everyone knew with whom they were conversing and having relationships'.²⁸ Maltese women were never allowed to talk to slaves or visit prisons, otherwise common women were condemned to be whipped, and noble women to pay ten scudi. In the event of sexual relations with Muslims, the women were sentenced to very severe convictions: whipping in public and banishment for four

²⁴ Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede [ACDF], Stanza Storica M 4-b (2), *Privilegi ai mercanti e agli Ebrei*, fol. 15r, 1605.

²⁵ ACDF, St. St. Q 3-d, *Raccolti di testi di lettere ed istruzioni del Santo Offizio agli Inquisitori e Vescovi*, fol. 123r, 23 November 1607 ('...che sopra li vascelli loro possono andare solamente quelli che hanno da comprare le merci e non altre persone ...').

²⁶ National Library of Malta [NLM], MS 152, *Prammatiche magistrali*, 140.

²⁷ NLM, MS 152, 129–30.

²⁸ ACDF, St. St. HH 3-b, *Inquisizione di Malta (1578–1684)*, without folio, 27 June 1595, own translation.

years the first time; whipping, scourging of the throat or chest and banishment for ten years in the event of a repeat offence. Muslims 'who dared to have carnal relations with Christian women' were punished by whipping and four to ten years in the galleys for free men, or whipping and ten years in the galleys, with no possibility of redemption for slaves.²⁹ The Order of Malta and the Inquisition encouraged the population to keep a close eye on non-Catholics. The grand master would give twenty scudi to any inhabitant who captured a Muslim who had landed on the island to fight or pillage.³⁰

The island of Malta, and particularly the Grand Harbour, were therefore an area strictly closed to religious differences.³¹ Non-Catholics were not allowed to reside freely in the port, or, if they were, only under very specific conditions, which were set out in the documents of safe conduct signed by the grand master. Relationships between islanders and non-Catholic foreigners were always controlled. Despite this daily surveillance, which gives the impression of a closed frontier, the Maltese harbour was nevertheless an important place for intercultural exchanges.

2. *Mediterranean exchanges in Malta*

Frontiers are not only characterised by conflicts and the surveillance of otherness, but also by intercultural exchanges. A large historiography has focused on this cross-cultural theme in several places of the Medi-

²⁹ ACDF, St. St. HH 3-b, *Inquisizione di Malta (1578–1684)*, fol. 1392r, 4 May 1658.

³⁰ NLM, MS 152, 707.

³¹ Liam Gauci, 'Maltese Corsairs and the Inquisition in Malta. Defending the Faith during the Last Years of Hospitaller Malta', in *The Roman Inquisition in Malta and Elsewhere*, ed. Margaret Abdilla Cunningham, Godwin Vella, and Kenneth Cassar (Malta: Heritage Malta, 2017), 156–63; Elina Gugliuzzo, 'Roman Inquisition and Social Control in Early Modern Malta', in *Roman Inquisition in Malta*, 164–71.

terranean, such as Crete,³² Livorno,³³ Marseille,³⁴ Venice,³⁵ the Barbary regencies,³⁶ etc. In the Hospitallers' Malta, intercultural exchanges were not as free and easy as in the Frankish ports or the major Mediterranean trading ports. Nevertheless, Malta became integrated in Mediterranean trade thanks to its active participation in the 'ransom economy'³⁷ practised in the Mediterranean in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Through corsairing, Malta opened to economic trade, and when in the early eighteenth-century private shipowners gradually abandoned *corso* in favour of maritime transport and trade,³⁸ the Barbary regencies very much followed suit.³⁹ Of course, the redemption of captives was not the only purpose of public and private slavery in the Mediterrane-

³² Molly Greene, *A Shared World. Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Molly Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants. A Maritime History of the Mediterranean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

³³ Guillaume Calafat, 'Être étranger dans un *port franc*. Droits, privilèges et accès au travail à Livourne (1590–1715)', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 84 (2012): 103–22; Guillaume Calafat and Cesare Santus, 'Les avatars du "Turc". Esclaves et commerçants musulmans à Livourne (1600–1750)' in *Les musulmans dans l'histoire de l'Europe*. Vol. 1. *Une intégration invisible*, ed. Jocelyne Dakhliia and Bernard Vincent (Paris: Albin Michel, 2011), 471–522.

³⁴ Mathieu Grenet, *La Fabrique communautaire. Les Grecs à Venise, Livourne et Marseille, 1770–1840* (Rome: École française de Rome; Athens: École française d'Athènes, 2016).

³⁵ Maria Fusaro, 'Les Anglais et les Grecs. Un réseau de coopération commerciale en Méditerranée vénitienne', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 58, no. 3 (2003): 605–25.

³⁶ Guillaume Calafat and Wolfgang Kaiser, 'The Economy of Ransoming in the Early Modern Mediterranean. A Cross-Cultural Trade Between Southern Europe and the Maghreb (16th–17th centuries)', in *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000–1900*, ed. Cátia Antunes, Leor Halevi, and Francesca Trivellato (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 108–30; Guillaume Calafat, 'Familles, réseaux et confiance dans l'économie de l'époque moderne. Diasporas marchandes et commerce interculturel', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 66, no. 2 (2011): 513–53; Guillaume Calafat, 'A "Nest of Pirates"? Consuls and Diplomatic Intermediaries in Algiers during the 1670s', *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 82, no. 2 (2018): 529–47.

³⁷ Wolfgang Kaiser, 'L'économie de la rançon dans la Méditerranée occidentale (XVI^e–XVII^e siècles)', *Hypothèses* 1 (2006): 359–68.

³⁸ Carmel Vassallo, *Corsairing to Commerce: Maltese Merchants in XVIII Century Spain* (Malta: Malta University Publishers, 1997); Carmel Vassallo, 'Consuls and Commerce: the Development of Malta's Consular Service in Eighteenth-Century Spain', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma* 28 (2015): 45–69.

³⁹ Daniel Panzac, *Les corsaires barbaresques: la fin d'une épopée, 1800–1820* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1999).

an. States and private individuals were looking for cheap labour; moreover, owning a slave could even be proof of a certain lifestyle.⁴⁰ But the redemption of captives was a very important trade which mobilised many actors in Malta: Christians (French from Marseilles, Maltese, Italians, Greeks and even Hospitallers), Muslims (Turkish, Barbarian, renegades) and Jews.

The case of Homor Ben Selem was revealing. A private slave in Malta, he received safe conduct from the Order of Hospitallers in 1595 to go to Istanbul to collect the sum for his redemption, and to negotiate the redemption of several Turkish slaves belonging to Hospitallers.⁴¹ He encountered knights and island merchants: through the intermediary of the knight Jacques de Vincheguerre (captain of a *saettia* ship and very active in *corso* and the ransom economy), he signed contracts with five merchants from Malta, including a Greek and a Frenchman living in the Grand Harbour, to trade with the Levant.⁴² During the first quarter of the seventeenth century, Homor Ben Selem became the preferred partner of the Hospitallers and the Catholic merchants of Malta, and he made numerous maritime trips between Malta, Tunis, Algiers and the Levant. This example clearly shows how relationships were established, in Malta itself, between commercial partners from the two shores. When this first undertaking was successfully completed, it generally led to the establishment of new relationships and the stabilisation of networks, or even to the diversification of networks by adding new, both Christian and non-Christian partners.

The combination of trading merchandise and ransoming slaves was a typical feature of Mediterranean trade.⁴³ Indeed, during the seventeenth century, the Maltese slave trade was regularly coupled with the goods trade. In 1605, Iusuf Hagim, a Jew from Tripoli, approached the Order with a proposal to trade between Malta, Tripoli and Alexandria, while at the same time ransoming Jewish slaves in Malta and Maltese slaves in Muslim lands.⁴⁴ Similarly, in 1610, rais Mahamet Ben Cassin

⁴⁰ Hayri Göksin Özkoray, 'L'esclavage dans l'Empire ottoman (XVI^e-XVII^e siècle): fondements juridiques, réalités socio-économiques, représentations' (PhD diss., PSL Research University, 2017), 36.

⁴¹ AOM 449, fol. 267r, 31 December 1595.

⁴² Notarial Archives of Valletta [ASV], R 286/5, fols 377r-378v, 4 January 1596.

⁴³ Wolfgang Kaiser, 'Asymétries méditerranéennes. Présence et circulation de marchands entre Alger, Tunis et Marseille', in *Les musulmans dans l'histoire de l'Europe*. Vol. 1. *Une intégration invisible*, ed. Jocelyne Dakhliia and Bernard Vincent (Paris: Albin Michel, 2011): 417-42.

⁴⁴ AOM 455, fol. 278r, 3 November 1605.

of Tripoli, proposed to ransom Christian and Maltese slaves in Barbary, then to come to Malta with the freed Christians as well as numerous goods to ransom Muslim slaves of the Order, and to sell useful goods on the Maltese market.⁴⁵ Gradually, trade with the infidels became commonplace for the Hospitallers, and the grand master sometimes granted certificates of safe conduct for commercial transactions without ransoming Christian slaves. In 1616, a *rais* from Sousse came to Malta to sell 'Barbary goods' (leathers, goatskins, wax, etc.);⁴⁶ in 1624, a *rais* from Alexandria transported luxury goods from the Levant;⁴⁷ and in 1635, *rais* Milet Bin Abdelaziz, from Tripoli, sold Barbary goods in Malta.⁴⁸

Trade relations also linked free men and slaves. In 1624, a Muslim slave in Malta named Mamet Faoni went into partnership with a Maltese merchant, Ambrosio Gardino, and a Jewish merchant from Tunis, Abraham Alfuri. The slave and the Maltese each invested 190 scudi in the purchase of a cargo of sugar in Tunis, which Alfuri was responsible for collecting, in anticipation of selling the goods on the market in Malta (the profits from the sale were to be shared equally between the two). At the same time, Abraham Alfuri had given Ambrosio Gardino a cargo of twenty-four pieces of fine cloth, transported from Tunis, to be sold in Malta.⁴⁹ This example testifies the leeway that Muslim slaves in Malta could have in their human and commercial contacts. Undoubtedly, Mamet Faoni's role in the trade between Malta and Barbary was a way for him to raise the sum needed to ransom himself out. But it was undeniable that, when trade was profitable, neither servile status nor religious differences (which as seen above were usually an obstacle to human relations in Malta) prevented the signing of contracts between islanders and 'infidels'.

The best proof of this can be found in the ease with which Maltese businessmen (including the Order) agreed to form ties with those who were the most visible manifestation of crossing frontiers between civilisations: renegades, apparently the symbol of the convergence between peoples and the living illustration of the danger of apostasy and transgression. At a time when Malta was asserting itself as the protector of Christendom and when the religious authorities (the Holy Office, the

⁴⁵ AOM 456, fol. 315v, 18 March 1610.

⁴⁶ AOM 459, fol. 333r, 22 October 1616.

⁴⁷ AOM 461, fols 302v–303r, 21 May 1624.

⁴⁸ AOM 465, fol. 308v, 22 December 1635.

⁴⁹ Pierre Grandchamp, *La France en Tunisie* (Tunis: Société Ancienne de l'Imprimerie Rapide, 1929), 4:99, 12 February 1624.

Hospitallers, the island clergy) were highly concerned with otherness on the island, the Order and private individuals showed no heed in going into partnership with these transgressors, many of whom were Maltese. In the 1590s, Maltese renegade Mohamed Malti, who lived in Tunis, became specialised in ransoming Maltese and Christian slaves;⁵⁰ in 1595, he went into partnership with a Neapolitan merchant, Silviano Gauderisi, set up shop in the Grand Harbour and became the Order's main intermediary for ransoming slaves between 1602 and 1610.⁵¹ In 1621, a Maltese merchant, Giuseppe Schembri, head of a company selling cumin from Malta, went into partnership with a renegade from Tunis, Morat Oggia, who had invested money in the Maltese company: the renegade's profits were to amount to one fifth of the profits made from the sale of cumin in Barbary.⁵² Similarly, in 1659, Joseph Icard, a Marseille merchant who had become Maltese, bought a trading boat from Osta Mamet, a Maltese renegade, to trade between Malta and Tunis.⁵³ Lastly, the renegade Morat Maltese was a *rais* from Tunis and close to the bey. His real name was Pietro Mifsud, and he was born in the village of Lia, Malta. In 1628, his four sisters and widowed mother were living in poverty.⁵⁴ In Tunis, he became an important corsair who went into partnership with Christians. He was wealthy and owned many slaves, particularly Maltese ones, such as Joseph Vella in 1651⁵⁵ or Girolamo Psinga in 1660,⁵⁶ and often helped out with their ransoming procedure, as he did for Francesco Bonifacio who was a Maltese bombardier.⁵⁷

This opening up of the island to the ransom economy and goods trade brought Malta into the heart of Mediterranean economic networks and helped it to emerge as a strategically important 'place'. But intercultural exchanges were not only economic, and, despite the control of the authorities, the population was marked by a certain mix, both legal and forbidden. In the Grand Harbour, Maltese society was very open to Catholic foreigners and many Maltese women married foreigners employed in seafaring jobs (merchants, corsairs, sailors, sol-

⁵⁰ Grandchamp, *La France en Tunisie*, (Tunis: Société Ancienne de l'Imprimerie Rapide; 1920), 4:54–5, 16 October 1593; 1:64, 15 August and 15 October 1594.

⁵¹ Brogini, *Malte, frontière de chrétienté*, 366, 382, 391–2 and 639.

⁵² Grandchamp, *La France en Tunisie*, 4:26, 21 October 1621.

⁵³ Grandchamp, *La France en Tunisie* (Tunis: Société Ancienne de l'Imprimerie Rapide; 1928), 6:227, 16 July 1659.

⁵⁴ Grandchamp, *La France en Tunisie*, 4:263, 2 May 1628.

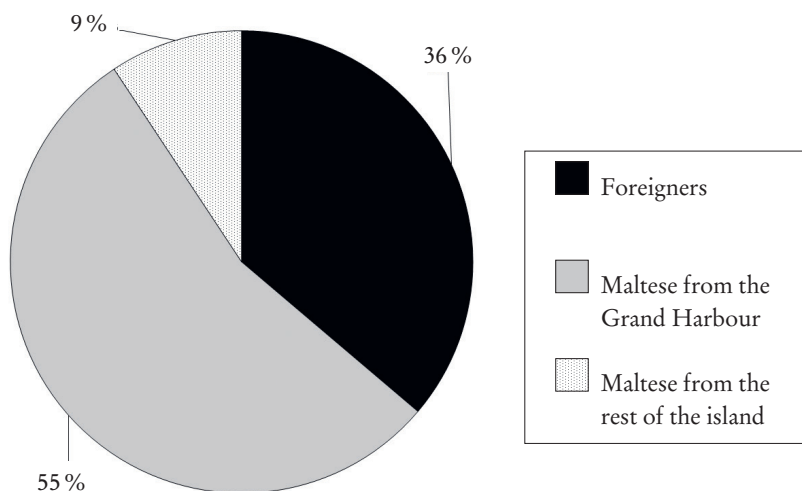
⁵⁵ Grandchamp, *La France en Tunisie*, 6:4, 8 February 1651.

⁵⁶ Grandchamp, *La France en Tunisie*, 6:261, 19 July 1660.

⁵⁷ Grandchamp, *La France en Tunisie*, 4:263, 2 May 1628.

diers, etc.). During the seventeenth century, 36% of marriages in the Grand Harbour united Maltese with foreigners who were French (40% at the end of the seventeenth century), Italian (28%), Greek (about 14%) and from northern Europe (about 4%).

Proportion of mixed and non-mixed marriages in the Grand Harbour (1585–1670)



Sources: Archives of the Cathedral of Mdina [ACM], AP Valetta, Porto Salvo, Liber Matrimoniorum, vols I, II, III, IV; ACM, AP Valetta, St Paul, Liber Matrimoniorum I, II, III; ACM, AP Vittoriosa, Liber I Baptizatorum, matrimoniorum, mortuorumque, Liber Matrimoniorum, II; ACM, AP Senglea, Liber Matrimoniorum I, II; ACM, AP Cospicua, Liber I Baptizatorum, matrimoniorum, confirmatorum et mortuorum, Liber II Matrimoniorum.

The large number of marriages to foreigners proves that Catholic immigrants were quickly integrated into the port's society: between 1575 and 1670, 80.1% of foreigners had married women of a different origin from their own, and most of them (86.4%) had married Maltese women (perfectly identifiable by their surnames, such as Abela, Agius, Attard, Azzopardi, Balzan, Bonnici, Burlo, Caruana, Cassar, Falson, Farruggia, Fenech, Greg, Imbroll, Mifsud, Sammut, Spiteri, Vella, Xi-

cluna, Zahra, Zammit, etc.).⁵⁸ Whatever the port city, foreign Catholics (or Catholic converts) married easily. In 1589, Amaroza Camilleri from Senglea married a French immigrant, François Macigue;⁵⁹ in 1621, Prudenzia Greg from Senglea married a Dutchman, Cornelius Closen;⁶⁰ in 1635, Giuliana Azzopardi from Vittoriosa married a Greek from Zante;⁶¹ and Florentia Xerri from Bormla married a Greek from Candia;⁶² in 1645, Petronilla Farruggia from Valetta married Frenchman Antoine Armage;⁶³ in 1665, the Maltese Angelica Copi from Vittoriosa married a Frenchman named Pierre Viane;⁶⁴ Cattarina Xicluna from Valletta married a Russian;⁶⁵ while Matteola Caruana from Senglea married a Frenchman named Gabriel Dougal.⁶⁶ Newcomers sometimes married foreigners too: in 1589, Frenchman Urbain from Provence married a Neapolitan woman in Senglea;⁶⁷ in 1605, Candiote Elena, who had come to the island with her parents, married a newly immigrated Rhodian;⁶⁸ in 1615, in Valletta, Frenchman Nicolas Lacroix married Lorenzina, daughter of an Englishman who had come to Malta;⁶⁹ in 1655, Maruzza Honorat, daughter of a Frenchman, was married to Giuseppe Carcasno from Sicily and in 1665,⁷⁰ the Greek Maria from Milos, who had arrived in Bormla, married a German.⁷¹ All these foreigners had married easily, as military and maritime activities left many women widowed and orphaned, with no male emotional or material support.

More dangerous for the preservation of religious identity were associations or friendships with Jews and Muslims, whether free or slaves. Contacts between Maltese and non-Christian slaves were often the result of poverty and the desire to leave the island for North Africa. In 1598, two Maltese women, one a slave and the other free, fled to Barbary with their Muslim lovers, one of whom was a slave and

⁵⁸ Godfrey Wettinger, 'Late Medieval Maltese Nicknames', *Journal of Maltese Studies* 6 (1971): 40–6.

⁵⁹ ACM, AP Senglea, *Lib. Mat. I*, 6, 6 August 1589.

⁶⁰ ACM, AP Senglea, *Lib. Mat. I*, 159, 31 January 1621.

⁶¹ ACM, AP Vittoriosa, *Lib. Mat. II*, fol. 35r, 15 September 1635.

⁶² ACM, AP Cospicua, *Lib. I*, fol. 49r, 14 January 1635.

⁶³ ACM, AP Valetta, Porto Salvo, *Lib. Mat. III*, fol. 165r, 10 August 1645.

⁶⁴ ACM, AP Vittoriosa, *Lib. Mat. II*, fol. 183r, 11 March 1665.

⁶⁵ ACM, AP La Valette, San Paolo, *Lib. Mat. III*, fol. 65r, 17 September 1665.

⁶⁶ ACM, AP Senglea, *Lib. Mat. I*, 607, 24 May 1665.

⁶⁷ ACM, AP Senglea, *Lib. Mat. I*, 6, 10 August 1589.

⁶⁸ ACM, AP Cospicua, *Lib. Mat. I*, fol. 11v, 19 June 1605.

⁶⁹ ACM, AP Valetta, Saint-Paul, *Lib. Mat. I*, fol. 72r, 28 November 1615.

⁷⁰ ACM, AP Cospicua, *Lib. Mat. II*, fol. 18v, 18 April 1655.

⁷¹ ACM, AP Cospicua, *Lib. Mat. I*, fol. 78r, 28 October 1665.

the other a freeman.⁷² In 1648, three Christian women from Valletta (a widow and two poor young girls) tried to flee to Muslim shores with their Muslim lovers;⁷³ captured by the port guard, they were sentenced to imprisonment by the inquisitor few months later.⁷⁴ In 1617, sailor Gioanne Calamia from Vittoriosa, and unemployed Francesco Carcep from Gozo, aged 18 and 20, attempted to flee with Jewish and Muslim slaves to Barbary, with the aim ‘to become Turks and earn money’ (*‘di farsi Turco e guadagnar denaro’*).⁷⁵ After being captured by soldiers, the two young men were judged very severely by the inquisitor, even though they had pleaded innocence, and their sentence to the galleys was longer than that of the slaves, even those who had converted to Catholicism: the four slaves were sentenced to four years’ rowing, while Gioanne and Francesco were sentenced to six years.⁷⁶

In the early modern era, Malta had become a ‘place’ in the Mediterranean between the Christian and Muslim shores. The economic dynamism of the Grand Harbour had encouraged population growth and maintained a high level of cosmopolitanism in the port through the regular arrival and settlement of foreigners. However, opening to ransoming traffic and the goods trade, and intercultural exchanges did not make the Maltese border disappear. The apparent connectivity and diversity of origins were always counterbalanced by a strong attachment to Catholicism. Contacts with both shores of the Mediterranean never dampened the awareness of otherness nor the danger that this otherness could represent. Non-Catholics and non-Christians were carefully excluded because it was impossible for some of them to settle in Malta and for others to live there freely. Indeed, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Maltese society reflected the duality of the frontier and the island had become a perfect ‘frontier place’ as Michel Foucher defined it: ‘The right frontier? Natural but discreet, open but protective, a place for exchanges and contacts, chats and encounters – in short, ideal!’⁷⁷

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⁷² Archives of the Inquisition of Malta [AIM], Processi 16A, fols 187r–188r, 27 August 1598.

⁷³ AIM, Proc. 61B, fols 741r–768r, August 1648.

⁷⁴ AIM, Proc. 61B, fol. 781v, 21 November 1648.

⁷⁵ AIM, Proc. 38A, fol. 261r.

⁷⁶ AIM, Proc. 38A, fols 308r–308v, 13 July 1617, inquisitor’s sentence.

⁷⁷ Michel Foucher, *Fronts et frontières* (Paris: Fayard, 1991), 9.

Abstract

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Malta became an important place of connectivity in the Mediterranean. A fiefdom of the Order of St John, the Maltese archipelago became the main Christian corsair port in the western Mediterranean, open to maritime trade but extremely closed to religious differences. Malta became a place of ransoming slaves, but also a key location for the materialisation of the Christian frontier and defence of Christendom. The religious authorities (the Order, the Inquisition and the clergy) protected Catholicism on the island. In modern Malta, cosmopolitanism existed, and foreigners were welcomed, but only if they were Catholics.

Keywords: Malta, frontier, connectivity, intercultural exchanges, religious surveillance