Proposal for the 3rd MMHN Conference

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Travelling in the Central Mediterranean in Early Modern Times The Networking of a North-South Axis

This paper is about maritime traffic at the central Mediterranean but with a difference. More often than not, when one analyses seafaring activities for the Mediterranean, one speaks either about commerce or corsairing. The latter has conditioned the writing of the history of this sea. The history of the Mediterranean is often seen as a history of war and conflict. New pastures are being sought where contact between the different people living along the shores of this sea are being studied. Commerce and trade has become a subject of study.

However, there was the third factor which until now has not been sufficiently studied. A number of elite individuals undertook a voyage for cultural and/or religious purposes. This sort of travelling is often associated with Northern Europe in the figure of the Grand Tour. However, this sort of voyage is not only a northern experience. There were people from the south, including Malta, that undertook this sort of voyage and even published their accounts as early as the late sixteenth century. In this paper, I will be dealing with these experiences.

The study of these stories offers amazing instances of encounters, where different Mediterranean civilizations came face to face. These encounters help to keep the Mediterranean as a centre of learning, viewed in the North as the Middle Sea for the confluence of civilizations. The small island of Malta had a role to play. It was not only a land of confrontation with the Ottoman Empire and Islam but also a place of contact.
Biographical Note

Dr Simon Mercieca is a French-trained historian who has specialised in demographic and behavioural history. He teaches aspects of early modern Mediterranean history at the University of Malta and at Szeged University, Hungary. He also teaches cultural industries at the Université de Nice Sophia-Antipolis in France. He is the director of the Mediterranean Institute of the University of Malta and has published extensively both in Malta and abroad. Amongst his numerous publications, there are a number of papers and books related to maritime topics. The European Science Foundation appointed Dr Mercieca chairman of the expert panel history whose duty it is to grade European and world history journals.