Proposal for the 3rd MMHN Conference

Carmelina Gugliuzzo (University of Messina)

Mediterranean dockyards in the Early Modern Age: the case of Messina

Messina owes its peculiarities to the secular maritime and commercial tradition. The sixteenth-century cartography gave us the image of a city-port which was one of the most prestigious in the Mediterranean scenery, surrounded with embattled walls, protected in the west by the royal castles, the fortress of the Salvatore and by the Montorsoli (Michelangelo’s pupil) tower on the San Raineri isthmus and by the palace-castle in the Terranova area.

In Messina there had always been – from the early Middle Ages to the sixteenth century – the biggest Sicilian dockyards. At first, they were not so far from the Royal Palace. After the victorious intervention of the Sicilian fleet against the famous Turkish Great Siege of Malta, in 1565, the viceroy, Don Garcia from Toledo, ordered to build a new big dockyard in the extreme side of the sickled peninsula of St. Raineri, and next to the ‘under construction’ fort of St. Salvatore. The Sicilian Parliament in 1561 voted an allocation of 39 thousands annual scudi to build and to arm six galleys in order to add them to the other ten which were already in service. In the new dockyard the shipbuilding activity developed more and more.

The Messinese dockers built, not only the galleys of the Sicilian naval fleet, but also the galleys for the Maltese fleet (the Order of St. John’s fleet) and for the Spanish fleet. The evidence of the importance of Messina shipyards is showed by the fact that only during the XVIth century Messinese dockers built the celebrated galleys for the Order in 1546, 1555, 1571, 1588, 1594, 1597, 1598, 1606, 1625, 1632.

The Order had their own shipyards in Birgu, where since 1554 they built their galleys and which represented one of the most important activities of the island, but all shipbuilding material had to be imported, adding transportation costs to already-high labor expenses on the island, so it was a normal fact ordering a ship to be built elsewhere.

But the Messinese industrial jewel came to an end in the XVIIth century. It was dismantled in 1615 to give place to the artilleries of the fort St. Salvatore and the shipbuilding activity dispersed in various smaller dislocations.

The ship which was more frequently built in the Messinese dockyards, during their golden age, was the galley, the ship considered to be during Modern Age the queen of the Mediterranean. The aim of this paper is to show how the peculiar skills of the Messinese dockers during the Early Modern Age represented an important page of the Mediterranean history.
CV.  
PhD in “Economy, Society and Institutions of the Mediterranean Europe; ‘cultore della materia’ in the Modern History (2004) and active member of the Research team on “Confraternities in Southern Italy” within the PRIN Project of the University of Messina. Articles: A rebel colony: Malta, the British and the plague of 1813, written with G. Restifo (2002); Maltese Cosmopolitism and Colonial Urban Strategies: two faces of the same phenomenon (2006); Maltese Mdina (2009); Monographic Volumes: Fervori municipali: Feste a Malta e Messina in età moderna (2006); Dal quotidiano al politico nel Mediterraneo. Forme e spazi della sociabilità maltese in età moderna (2007); In veste devota. Le confraternite maltesi in età moderna, in press.  

EMAIL: elina100@hotmail.com