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Murder in Jerba: Honour, Shame and Hospitality among Maltese in Ottoman Tunisia

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Little is known about the sizeable Maltese communities developing along the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean in the mid-nineteenth century, and the extent to which the migrants reproduced Maltese cultural traditions and practices overseas. This article considers this question through a microhistorical analysis of events culminating in the murder of a Maltese woman in the Ottoman Regency of Tunis in 1866. A close reading of transcripts from the interrogation of witnesses and the accused, all members of a Maltese community in Jerba, reveals their shared cultural practices and beliefs surrounding the provision of hospitality, honour and shame. Viewed from this perspective, the curious responses of the witnesses to the murder of their compatriot become meaningful, and the crime is reframed as an honour killing.

Keywords: Hospitality; Honour; Shame; Mediterranean; Tunisia; Violence; Maltese; Microhistory

Introduction: Crisis in the Hinterlands

At 8:00 pm on Friday evening, 23 November 1866, Caterina Tortora, a 54 year-old Maltese woman, was felled by a bullet to the head while standing at an open window of her home on the remote island of Jerba in Ottoman Tunisia. It did not take the local police long to learn the identities of the likely assassins, since Tortora's husband and extended family were with her that evening and all had witnessed the shooting. They claimed that the murderer was a "Mr Vincenzo Azzopardi", one of the five Maltese ambulant musicians who, immediately prior to the murder, had been playing music, quite loudly, directly under her window.

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The day after the murder, the five musicians found themselves confined in the local jail awaiting the arrival of the nearest British consular officer, who would determine their fate. Because a Maltese—and hence a British subject—had been murdered, and because the primary suspects were all Maltese, this matter fell under the jurisdiction of British consular authorities.[1] While decisions in minor cases involving British citizens or subjects living in Ottoman territories were often made summarily, individuals charged with serious crimes such as murder were given formal trials in Constantinople or Malta. These trials were costly, as they required the transportation of both the accused and witnesses to the trial location, and their maintenance for the duration of the trial. Hence, consular authorities first determined if such a trial would be "worthwhile" (i.e., if there was enough evidence for a conviction) and carried out extensive preliminary investigations in cases of murder, which was a capital offense.

When British Vice Consulate officer J.H. Stevens arrived in Jerba over a month after Tortora's death, the five suspects were still in the local jail: Vincenzo Azzopardi, aged 33, and his brother Eugenio, 35; Giovanni Said, 20; Stefano Caruano, 18; and Guiseppe Persico, 15—all natives of Malta. Stevens proceeded to hold a Consular Court hearing, interviewing each suspect and 16 witnesses. His report, dated 13 January 1867,[2] spans 29 handwritten pages, and consists of a record of the questions asked of each witness, usually by Stevens himself, followed by their answers over a period of several days. Interviews were conducted in Italian, but often translated into Maltese by a local interpreter, Vincenzo Caruana, and the responses appear to have been transcribed in English directly from the spoken Italian.[3] Long testimony of the accused follows. Of the 21 people interrogated, two were Italian, one was French, and the majority were Maltese.[4] Beyond what they reveal about that day, these statements are rich with clues about the townsfolk's attitudes toward each other, and, ultimately, their shared cultural beliefs and practices.

Some notes regarding the limitations of using the transcript of a court hearing for a study of cultural values are in order here. In conducting his hearing, Stevens was trying to ascertain guilt and innocence regarding a crime; his goal was not to develop a detailed understanding of local customs and beliefs. He was guided, rather, by his responsibility as officer of the British Empire to keep the peace among his subjects in this part of the Sublime Porte. The existing arrangement, which enabled foreigners accused of crimes to escape local jurisdiction and instead be tried by their own governmental representatives, was always a tenuous one dependent on its continued approval by local authorities. In fact, the *status quo* in Tunis may have been in jeopardy. In the 1850s, the Bey of Tunis issued several complaints to British authorities regarding the criminal activities of the growing number of Maltese immigrants. He wrote to the British Consul General in Tunis in 1853 about "certain Maltese, who come to our Regency without any sort of profession or commerce, and who may be the source of the improper acts which have disturbed the inhabitants".[5] Later that same year, he proposed a series of stringent measures regarding the Maltese to assure the peace.[6]

Concern about the criminality of British subjects in the region reached Lord Clarendon, the Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs, who suggested that "stringent measures

are required" to enable the consular officers in Tunis to "exercise a proper control over the unruly and turbulent Maltese and Ionians".[7] Thus, Stevens may have had strict instructions to control those under his charge. In fact, while he was Acting Vice Consul more than a decade before Caterina's murder, he had deported three Maltese from Tunis: one for being a "reputed thief" and the others for harbouring materials that suggested involvement in criminal activities.[8] Stevens' role in this affair, therefore, may have been motivated by both a desire to serve his country or his superiors, and his interest in advancing his own career.

We should also note that Stevens's report concerns not the actions of Maltese in Malta, but rather those of a community of Maltese immigrants living in a rural outpost of the Ottoman Empire. That their behaviours reflect Maltese and not local customs is indicated not only by the community's relative insulation from the local population, but also by the fact that almost all the individuals featured in Stevens's report were born in Malta and had arrived only recently in Jerba. Moreover, most were members of subaltern classes and rural or village Malta. These conclusions are supported by the linguistic repertoire of the interviewees. Malta at this time was characterized by considerable diglossia, with Maltese the language used in rural villages and Italian serving as a *lingua franca*, especially in international trade, and as the language of the educated upper classes (Cassar, 2001).[9] Only six of the Maltese witnesses spoke to the court in Italian; the rest communicated through the consulate officer's interpreter. For these reasons, we will propose that in exploring the shared culture of these recent migrants, we will be revealing much about that of Malta as well.

A careful reading of the statements of the 21 interviewees yields valuable information about shared cultural codes related to honour, shame and the provision of hospitality in this small community. It is the surprising nature of the testimonies that leads us to these insights. Instead of expressing their relief at the apprehension of the accused killer(s), Stevens's witnesses raised doubts about the behaviour of the victim and her husband. The landlords, a respectable merchant-cum-landlord family, in their own view pious, religious and well-educated, were portrayed in this testimony as vindictive and engaged in immoral behaviour, while the musicians were described as "good" people who were respectful and displayed the appropriate degree of "shame".

These puzzling responses merit further reflection. They are analyzed here using methods of microhistorians (Ginzburg, 1980, 1989; Muir & Ruggiero, 1991, 1994)—namely the "evidential" or "conjectural" paradigm (see Ginzburg, 1989), following what has been termed "Ginzburg's razor", in which the interpretation requiring the fewest hypotheses is deemed the most probable (see Muir & Ruggiero, 1991: xix). Through this method, scholars aim to uncover more general phenomena such as the worldview of a group of people, often members of subaltern classes, through a careful analysis of "slender clues" (Ginzburg, 1989: 124). Microhistorical research has been influenced by and the product of anthropological insights, and is particularly sensitive to the subtle "nuances of power" (Muir & Ruggiero, 1991: xx). In the present study, when the witnesses' statements are interpreted as motivated not by personal interests or individual idiosyncrasies, but by specific cultural codes regarding honourable behaviour, the townspeople's attitudes toward landlords, musicians and the purported

crime are elucidated, and the murder is reframed as a culturally justified, and perhaps even expected, "honour" killing.

Hospitality, Honour and Shame in the Mediterranean

The question of a Mediterranean "honour and shame" complex has been the subject of considerable anthropological interest for several decades (Coombe, 1990; Davis, 1977; Gilmore, 1987a; Herzfeld, 1980; Lever, 1986; Peristiany, 1966; Schneider, 1971; Wikan, 1984). This "complex" has even been described as one of the unifying elements of a Mediterranean "culture-area" (Gilmore, 1987c). In the classic model, "honour" and "shame" represent reciprocal moral values or "two poles of an evaluation", and are viewed as especially important in small-scale societies (Persitiany, 1966: 10–11). Honour has been described by Pitt-Rivers (1966: 21) as: "the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is ... his *claim* to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim ... recognized by society." While other societies may have similar codes, the Mediterranean honour system has been described as distinct in its relationship to sexuality and sexual identities (Davis, 1969; Gilmore, 1987b). Many works on the topic focus specifically on the question of sexual shame and the ways in which family honour may be based on the sexual mores of its women (Delaney, 1987; Schneider, 1971). The following work highlights another aspect of honourable behaviour: that which is linked to the provision of hospitality.

Critiques of the honour/shame model emerged almost at the same time as the model itself. Some researchers have questioned the necessary association of honour and shame with the Mediterranean region, and whether or not these notions have been as widespread or uniform as claimed (Gilmore, 1987c: 5; Herzfeld, 1980; Pina-Cabral, 1989; Wikan, 1984). The thesis that cultural unity in the region stems from cultural contact for "thousands of years" (Davis, 1977: 13) requires further development, and Pina-Cabral (1989: 401) notes the relative dearth of historical research needed to defend such assertions. The lack of analytical precision behind these concepts, which are often discussed using the English-language glosses *honour* and *shame*, has been a common theme as well (Wikan, 1984; Herzfeld, 1980, 1987). Herzfeld (1980: 340) points out, for instance, that some scholars define "honour" as an index of female chastity, while others describe it as one rooted in economic stratification. Anthropologists may be tempted to make use of the multivalency of such terms "rather than seek analytical precision" (Wikan, 1984: 649). Herzfeld (1980: 340) calls for the abandonment of English-language glosses and a focus on usage in specific ethnographic contexts. He also suggests that hospitality, a more narrow value system, may be a better basis for cross-cultural comparison (Herzfeld, 1987: 75).

We need not conclude from such critiques, however, that these concepts should be abandoned altogether. As even one of the staunchest critics has noted: "the significance of these values in each culture should not be minimized" (Herzfeld, 1980: 339). We can view honour as a culturally relative trope or theme with many variations: while the underlying principles may be similar, they may be "clothed in conceptions not exactly equivalent from one place to another" (Pitt-Rivers, 1966: 21). To proceed in this way,

we must first determine how people were evaluated in mid-nineteenth-century Malta, and which practices and customs may have migrated with the Maltese to the Regency.

It is difficult to answer these questions because Malta has been remarkably absent from most discussions of Mediterranean honour and shame. This is surprising, for the archipelago is a Mediterranean location *par excellence*, situated between the sea's eastern and western basins, and represents a nexus of the multiple, cross-Mediterranean cultural contacts that many deem responsible for the purported cultural unity of the region (Davis, 1977: 13). The Maltese, speaking a language with a Semitic basis and extensive Romance loan words, have long been viewed by many of their neighbours as a hybrid or liminal population—as "ambivalent Europeans" (Mitchell, 2002). Their language and folklore contains elements found along both the southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean: scholars have long recognized practices akin to those found in North Africa, such as a belief in the evil eye and similar funerary practices (Pullicino, 1972, 1979), and yet Malta is a Catholic country where divorce is illegal and parish saints are celebrated at annual village festivals.

The once-strict segregation of public and private space along gender lines and the veiling of women in previous centuries also suggest parallels with many other Mediterranean regions more prominently featured in debates on honour and shame. Malta rarely appears in such discussions, however, due to the paucity of anthropological research there until recently. As Sant Cassia (1993b) notes, this contrasts strikingly with other former British colonies. Even the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century folklore studies conducted in many of these countries were not developed in Malta to any similar degree: British colonial administrations did not actively support ethnographic research in Malta or Cyprus, for reasons Sant Cassia (1993b) clearly delineates.[10] As a result, until Boissevain's (1965, 1969) pioneering research of the 1960s, there were few fine-grained studies from which to determine whether there were indeed Maltese conceptions analogous to the Greek *timi* or the Sicilian *onore*. Tantalizing clues that such conceptions have existed can be found, however. Wettinger has collected a series of incidences from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Malta involving the alleged entrapment of men into marriage, and cases in which individuals attempted to recover their daughter's and/or family's honour through arranged marriages. The fifteenth-century pursuit and murder of Cola Caxaru, a member of one of Mdina's most prominent families, by dozens of peasant men and women after he entered a married woman's courtyard, is perhaps the most dramatic example in Wettinger's compilation, and may represent an early honour killing (Wettinger 1980). Ciappara's (2001: 393) examination of seventeenth-century marriage traditions, in which he finds intriguing contrasts to other Mediterranean sites regarding the dishonour associated with female sexuality, reminds us of Maltese specificity.

What now follows aims to expose aspects of nineteenth-century Maltese beliefs and practices concerning honourable behaviour and the options available to people who had been dishonoured, thus establishing a basis for further historical analysis of this under-represented cultural tradition. Before proceeding, some background information is needed to explain why so many Maltese were living in the remote Tunisian island of Jerba at the time of Caterina's assassination.

European Immigrants in Tunis and the Hinterlands in the mid-Nineteenth Century

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, while the French were carrying out policies to "make Algeria French" (Prochaska, 1990), the neighbouring Regency of Tunis[11] remained a remote and relatively autonomous outpost of the Ottoman Empire, not yet dominated by European powers. Despite continued Muslim rule, significant numbers of immigrants were settling there from Europe, attracted by a growing international trade that had begun long before the French occupation of the region in 1881 (Anderson, 1986: 98). Already, by 1822, European merchants controlled almost all the olive oil exported from Sfax (Anderson, 1986: 99), and trade with Europe increased rapidly by the mid-nineteenth century. Most of these migrants settled in the city of Tunis, where a sizable European immigrant population of 9,000 to 18,000 was established by the 1850s, out of a total population of approximately 80,000,[12] most of whom were impoverished day labourers, fishermen, artisans or ruined sharecroppers.

Two-thirds of the migrants were Maltese; the remainder originated in Sicily, Pantelleria, Sardinia, Naples and Greece. A trading elite from Marseilles and Genoa also settled there (Ganiage 1960: 25). Although the immigrant communities in Tunis have been described in detail in primary sources and have been the focus of recent scholarly study,[13] we know very little about the 3,000 to 6,000 Europeans who settled in the smaller coastal towns across the Regency. Trade in these smaller towns was not as attractive to large firms, but independent merchants—Maltese in particular—were finding that they could make a solid income importing European products in their small sailboats and returning home to sell local raw materials [14] (Price, 1954: 51). Not only was Malta nearby, but also the archipelago—due to its high population density, notable lack of natural resources and its increasingly significant British naval installations—experienced a near-constant demand for North African foodstuffs. Once traders were established in these port towns, others arrived to fill the need for tailors, mercantile agents, boat builders, labourers, and cafe and tavern keepers, occupations held by many of the people Stevens interviewed during his investigation. Because most of these migrants were Catholic, and representatives of the Church eventually followed them, we can use the dates of the establishment of Catholic parishes to approximate the consolidation of these immigrant communities: Sousse, 1836; La Goulette, 1838; Sfax, 1841; Jerba, 1847; Mahdia, 1848; Bizerte, 1851; Porto-Farina, 1853; and Monastir, 1862.[15] Jerba, where Caterina's murder took place, was the most remote of these sites of substantial European settlement (see Figure 1).

The island of Jerba was described in the late 1820s by the Sardinian Consul to Tunis as one of the most fertile he had seen, covered with beautiful gardens cultivated with care.[16] Orange groves, fig and pear trees, rich olive plantations, vegetable gardens and date palms abounded. Others noted homesteads spread out across the rambling countryside, "dotted by a great number of neat little white-washed houses".[17] During the mid-nineteenth century, the 20,000 to 40,000 indigenous inhabitants of the island, Muslims of the schismatic *kharejidite* faith and Jews [18] were prosperous relative to the rest of the country.[19] Most Jerbans were cultivators, fishermen and sailors, or participated in an important cottage textile industry, weaving fine dresses, shawls, burnooses

Figure 1 Map of the important settlements in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Tunisia.

and blankets of wool and silk (Monchicourt, 1929: 268–269). There was also an extensive commercial trade with other Tunisian towns, and with Tripoli, Constantinople and Malta. The rich olive groves produced olive oil, 750,000 gallons of which were exported in good years. The islanders also produced and exported wool, sponges, octopus, grapes, raisins, dates, hides and skins, and imported barley, wheat, corn and cotton goods, including some from Malta. By the late 1840s, this thriving trade involved at least 65 Tunisian vessels, four British (probably Maltese) merchant ships and over a thousand Tunisian seamen.[20] Maltese, Sicilians, Neapolitans and Greeks began to settle in Jerba during the first decades of the century to take part in this thriving international trade and to work as sailors, sponge fishermen, small shop keepers and day labourers. There were between 200 and 350 Catholics on the island by 1842,[21] and at least 330 in 1879 (Soumille, 1981: 32). As in other Tunisian coastal towns, Maltese made up the overwhelming majority, comprising 75 per cent of the immigrant population through the 1880s,[22] as illustrated in Table 1.

Houmt-Souk and the *Fondouk* Tortora

Most, if not all, of these immigrants settled in the village of Houmt-Souk, the site of Caterina Tortora's murder. The principal port town and commercial centre,

Table 1 Baptisms in Jerba, 1848–1877, by decade

Year	Maltese	Italians	Others	% Maltese
1848–1852	91	10	0	90
1858–1867	80	34	2*	69
1868–1877	81	27	0	76

*Two children of Spanish nationality.
Source: Soumille, 1981: 34.

Houmt-Souk was located on the northern coast across the bay from Sfax. Prior to the nineteenth century, the village had been segregated by religion and included a clearly defined Jewish quarter, the Hara-el-Kebira. The town grew with the arrival of European migrants [23] and, by the mid-1850s, it was comprised of several neighbourhoods. At some distance from the town centre was the Jewish quarter. The European and Muslim elite, including wealthier traders, lawyers and consulate representatives, lived in the town centre near the main market.[24] Poorer Europeans settled north of town on the road to the port in a neighbourhood comprised largely of *fondouks*.

Fondouks,[25] one- to two-storied, multi-family apartment complexes comprised of a series of rooms surrounding a central courtyard, were inhabited by Muslims and Jews in Algeria and Tunisia, and were still being used well into the twentieth century.[26] The *fondouk* had a counterpart in Maltese urban architecture, called the "*kerrejja*". This was a large building organized around a common yard that housed various families of urban poor in small discrete rooms, often in conditions of deprivation.[27] *Fondouks* could be found in Tunis as early as the twelfth century, serving as dwellings and warehouses for merchants of North Mediterranean city-states and consulate officers (Woodford, 1990: 33). Merchants inhabited some of the rooms and stored goods in others, often on the second level, keeping their horses and other livestock in the courtyard. By the nineteenth century, many of the original trading families had left these *fondouks* for larger homes, and poorer European immigrants began to take their place. They lived in dismal conditions, with whole families occupying a single room. Often their only ventilation was provided by the door opening onto the common courtyard (Callens, 1955), and a communal kitchen, washing area and outhouse were shared by the residents. One traveler described the *fondouks* in 1850s Tunis as follows:

> For the working-class families, there are *fondouks* ... whose inhabitants are mostly Maltese, or often Greek or Italian. Fifty to sixty families and their children are crammed together, and their children live "pell-mell" during the day in the middle of dirty and poorly combed women. (Dunant, 1858: 43)

The "*Fondouk Tortora*", where Caterina Tortora was killed, was typical. It was named after its owners, Caterina and her husband Michele, a Maltese trading couple who lived on the premises and rented out rooms to other Maltese. In the middle of the front wall was a large gate, often locked at night. Inside was a large square courtyard,

with dwelling rooms around it, and a gallery around the upper floor onto which rooms opened up on one side; these rooms were occupied by Maltese families. To the right of the front entrance were six rooms on the ground floor inhabited by the Tortoras. Stevens made a diagram illustrating the front of the *fondouk*, and carefully marked the scene of the crime.

From Stevens's report, we can infer some basic characteristics of this immigrant neighbourhood. The *fondouk* residents lived simply. Most households consisted of married couples living together with their children in one room. Some households in neighbouring *fondouks* were comprised of celibate men living with each other, or sharing rooms with their married brothers or business partners. Some residents worked as masons or day labourers at the port, while others were members of a fledgling *petit-bourgeoisie*, and ran cafes or small tailoring shops in the town centre. Women worked as well. Calcedonia Vella, for instance, a 45 year-old midwife, spent the day of the murder delivering a baby, and, at 8:00 pm, the time of the murder, she was still working, this time on the other side of town at the home of a "Mrs Medina" (perhaps as midwife or housekeeper). The immigrants also worked long hours. Many of the people interviewed had gone to bed right after supper and were already asleep when Caterina was killed. Such was the case with shopkeeper Fortunato Vella, who slept while his wife, still working, sewed in the same room. They also rose early: Antonio Vella told Stevens that the morning after the shooting, he went to his shop "as usual", leaving only around six that morning to attend Tortora's funeral.

Stevens's report reveals notable status distinctions between *fondouk* landlords and their tenants. Not only did landlords Michele and Caterina Tortora own the building, but they occupied six rooms, in contrast to their tenants, who lived with whole families in one room. The Tortora apartment, furthermore, had windows, a meaningful indication of prestige in other such buildings.[28] Mr. Tortora was a trader, we learn, but he seems to have been semi-retired. On the fateful Friday, he and his family were home all day, apparently in mourning, although we never learn which relative had died. Unlike their tenants, who rose early and fell asleep right after dinner, they enjoyed leisure time on a regular basis: their relatives testified that the family gathered at the Tortora's apartment each evening after supper, where they listened to Michele Tortora read aloud from a "storybook". Finally, they were better educated than the majority of those interviewed by Stevens: many *fondouk* residents were illiterate and spoke only Maltese,[29] while the Tortora family were both literate and spoke Italian as well— both indications of higher social status in nineteenth-century Malta (Cassar, 2001). Since the murder occurred in such close quarters, Stevens found easy witnesses in the many *fondouk* tenants; the fact that the woman killed was one of the *fondouk* landlords will become significant in what follows.

Tensions in the *Fondouk*: Hospitality Denied

Early on in Stevens's investigation, he learned that the wandering musicians who had allegedly shot Mrs. Tortora had been at the *fondouk* earlier that day. They had been hired by a local Maltese lawyer, Gaetano Figar, to play at the room of his young niece,

Maria Camesulli, who that day had given birth to a baby girl. However, the Tortoras, "being in mourning, sent them away under some irritation".[30] This prior encounter between the landlords and the musicians provided Stevens with a potential motive for the murder, and he thus focused his inquiry on that conflict and the behaviour of ambulant musicians in general to determine whether or not the events of that day could be significant to his case.

The musicians were not outsiders, but well-known local residents. When asked by Stevens: "Who are the individuals who play and are musicians?", 22 year-old Giovanni Duagli responded to his question quite literally: "I know that the two brothers, Vincenzo and Eugenio Azzopardi, are musicians—the former plays on the fiddle and the latter on the Violoncello."[31] He reported that Giovanni Said and Guiseppe Persico were taking lessons from them, adding, "I do not know whether the other accused, Stefano Caruana, plays on any instrument or whether he is learning." The musicians often came to the *fondouk* to perform. Witnesses testified that it was common for them to play both inside and outside the *fondouk* walls, and during the day as well as in the evening. Musicians nearly always performed at life-cycle celebrations such as births or marriages: as one woman explained to Stevens: "Whenever there were any rejoicings the musicians came to play." Not only was it usual for the musicians to pass in the street at night, but "they often sat on the Ducana [a stone bench] which is outside the *Fondouk* in the street to play".

Customarily, the musicians were compensated with tips. When asked if the band of musicians were "amateur players" or if they "play for money", Fortuna Vella replied: "I do not know whether they play for pleasure, but I know that whoever sends for them pays them." Playing music was not their primary occupation, however. Vincenzo Azzopardi was also a tailor who worked at a small shop near the central market with his younger apprentice, Stefano Caruano. Azzopardi's older brother, Eugenio, worked at the port. On the day of the crime, Eugenio had been at the marina all day, and returned only at sundown to eat dinner. Musicians Giovanni Said and Guiseppe Persico owned a tavern together in the town centre.

The leading musician and primary suspect, Vincenzo Azzopardi, was well known to the locals. His testimony is the most detailed of Stevens's report, and provides a fascinating look at the world of single immigrant men in the Regency, a world of cafes, bars and shops in the town centre. While he never admitted to the shooting, his narrative does present a potential defence of his behaviour: extreme intoxication. According to Azzopardi, at 3:00 pm on the fateful day, he was in his shop "sewing a pair of trousers", when Giovanni Said told him: "Let us go to play because Gaetano [Gaetano Figar, lawyer and uncle of the new mother] has sent for us." Vincenzo answered: "Go and bring the instruments from the house." He and Giovanni then left for the *fondouk*, and first played outside Maria Camesulli's door when Gaetano Figar, already inside, welcomed them, saying "Come in, come in." They entered the room and began playing, but were soon interrupted by Maria's father, who asked them to stop, "Because the Proprietor does not wish it." Vincenzo said, "We will play *God Save the Queen* and go." Gaetano gave them a 5 piastres piece and some drink, and asked them to play at his shop. Azzopardi continued:

> Whilst in his shop which is a Tavern, he gave us to drink several times and each of us drank upwards of ten glasses of Rum; we finished a large bottle. From thence we went away half drunk and passing by the Shop of Raffaele Tombarello who said to us what have you gained today, and we replied Thank God, as Gaetano had given us ten Piastres besides the first five Paistres. There, we found Giuseppe Bartolo who said play and I will give you to drink and Luigi Medeschini who was present bought rather a large glass of rum. We played and then we returned by the street ... and went to the Tavern of Guiseppe Persico and Giovanni Said, and there also we played and drank wine; and I and Giovanni made a drinking bout of it.[32]

At this point, Vincenzo stated that he wanted to go home, but he was convinced otherwise by Italian national Gaetano Ajello, who said: "No, let us go round as usual." So, he reported to Stevens, "we went in the street and went the usual round playing", passing by the church, and finally returning to their room in the "Rushedali" *fondouk*. After this, Vincenzo claims to remember nothing more: "From thence I found myself in Irons without knowing the cause."

Summarizing these various accounts, Stevens's superior concluded that after first being sent away from the Tortora *fondouk*, the musicians "repaired to some Taverns where they played and drank until about 8 o'clock at night". While Azzopardi claimed to have simply passed out after that, only to awaken in jail, others saw him and his band return to the *fondouk* immediately before the shooting, "armed with a double barreled Gun". The entrance to the courtyard was locked, so the musicians played outside, directly under the windows of the Tortora residence. According to these eyewitnesses, Mrs. Tortora then opened a window onto the street, saw the musicians, and decided it "more prudent to remonstrate with them from a distance". She went to the upstairs terrace, but, as a British authority later summarized, "she had scarcely presented herself at one of the windows when she was shot through the head".[33]

So far this appears to be a sad tale of unruly drunkards blindly striking out at a woman of higher status. What is especially intriguing, then, is the response of Stevens's witnesses. We might assume that the hard-working, early-rising tenants would have cherished their sleep and disliked loud disturbances late at night. In fact, many residents of these crowded quarters told Stevens that they were awakened by the music the evening of Caterina's murder. We might also safely assume that most tenants would be relieved at the apprehension of a murderer. It is thus noteworthy that not one individual interviewed by Stevens spoke negatively about the musicians, despite the fact that the musicians, according to their own testimony, were regular patrons of local bars and cafes and prone to considerable drinking followed by general carousing throughout town after sundown. Instead, they discussed the musicians positively and asserted repeatedly that they enjoyed listening to them. For instance, when asked if the musicians ever disturbed anyone, Carmelo Duazli replied: "To me they have never done any bad action. I cánnot say with regard to others." Stevens allowed the accused to question the witnesses as well. When asked by the musicians if he had ever heard of them bothering anyone while passing and playing under the windows, Guiseppe Caruana, in bed at the time of the crime, replied: "No, on the contrary, you afforded us pleasure and we often went to the window to hear you." Vincenzo Azzopardi then asked Caruana if he

ever saw him carrying weapons while playing music or passing by. Caruana was again supportive, stating: "No, I have not seen you with arms and I must have seen you pass a hundred times."

The fact that their neighbours never indicated to Stevens that they found the musicians dangerous or immoral in any way may have been due to real fear. Because the accused were allowed to question the witnesses themselves, their presence may have shaped the witnesses' testimony significantly. The *fondouk* tenants may have wanted to follow the safest path. If they condemned the musicians only to find them acquitted, they could have been in real danger. Thus, the overwhelmingly positive testimony toward the musicians may represent a form of passive complicity on the part of Stevens's witnesses.[34] On the other hand, it is possible that some of those interviewed may have indeed viewed the musicians as blameless, especially if they considered other people or factors ultimately responsible. The Tortora family's banishment of the musicians from their *fondouk* earlier that day, which appears in the testimonies of many, points to such an interpretation. Even the statements by Caterina's relatives reveal that there were ongoing tensions between the musicians and the Tortora family. Benedetto Bellia, Michele Tortora's 50 year-old nephew, offered his version of the events that Friday night:

> On the night of the murder ... I went after supper with my family according to our habit to the room occupied by my uncle and aunt. Uncle Michele took a storybook and was reading aloud. My Aunt Caterina was sitting by his side. We heard music in the street, and my son Lorenzo opened the door giving on the street and put out his head but withdrew immediately, saying that he saw a gun aimed at him: the musicians continued playing. At that time, my Aunt Caterina said, "Is it not a shame of these cursed musicians. Was it not enough for them to come to the *Fondouk* this morning but that they should come again to my door? Let me go up to say two words to them," and she went up to the Terrace and opened a window looking on the street, saying "Is it not a shame that you should come again now!" At the instant [sic], a gun was fired. I had followed her to the Terrace and being behind her, she fell in my arms [sic]. ... At the same moment, my uncle Michele approached the window, saying, "Sons of ... is this the manner to kill my wife." A voice answered from the street, "Do you want the other," meaning the contents of the second barrel. ... We cried out for help and several of the neighbours ran to assist the murdered woman. ... The women who inhabit the *Fondouk* were beating their knees, exclaiming, "Oh Holy Mother."

According to Benedetto, Caterina was upset when the musicians came to play at her *fondouk* earlier that day, and became further angered when they returned later that night, for she assumed that they had done so purposefully to annoy her. She thus went out to the terrace, where she admonished them loudly. Bellia's son, Lorenzo, recounted the events only slightly differently:

> My aunt Caterina made the remark, saying "Tonight being Friday, why have they come and stopped instead of continuing their way as usual. I fancy they must have come for us." And addressing my uncle Michele, who was in the adjoining room, my Aunt added, "See what a shame, it is not enough in the day time but they should have also come tonight, apparently done expressly?"

The Tortora family, already sensitized by the conflict with the musicians earlier that day, assumed that they had returned that evening only to further harass them. The fact

that the musicians played directly under the Tortora's windows suggests that this supposition may have been perceptive. Why did the musicians feel the need to irritate this family? An answer is provided by Lorenzo Bellia. When the musicians asked him if he or anyone else in his family had anything to "say to them", Lorenzo denied having had any long-term problem ("neither I nor my father ever have had anything to say to any of you"), but added: "But in regard to my uncle Michele, you have always had a malice against him because he did not want musicians and when you came to the *Fondouk* he gave you charity and sent you away."

"Have You No Shame!": Caterina's Outcry and Calcedonia's Reply

As the investigation progresses, it is the actions of the victim's family that are called into question by Stevens's witnesses. This is best indicated by the testimony of the local midwife, Calcedonia Vella. Instead of responding succinctly to Stevens's questions, Vella seemed to go out of her way to expound, and, in the process, provide the clearest condemnation of her landlord's behaviour and a defence of the musicians.

Question: Were you at the *Fondouk* in the forenoon of the day of the occurrence?

Answer: Yes, I was at the *Fondouk* of Tortora to assist at the confinement of the wife of Ippolito Camisoli, which took place half an hour after midday, and at about two o'clock came the musicians, V. Azzopardi and Giovanni Said to play. I descended to go to my room when I met in the Court M. Tortora, who said to me, "Go and send away the musicians." I answered, "I don't drive away anyone from the House of others." He then went up himself and sent them away.

Question: Did you see the musicians descend and leave?

Answer: Yes, I did.

Question: What did they say?

Answer: I saw them leaving crestfallen, but I did not hear them say anything.

Instead of responding to Stevens's first question regarding her presence at the *fondouk* at noon with a simple "yes" or "no", she chose to outline the whole encounter between Tortora and the musicians. She explained that Michele Tortora asked her to send the musicians away, but she refused. She then reported to the court her own response to Tortora in which she alluded to biblical strictures regarding the importance of hospitality ("I don't drive anyone from the House of others"),[35] simultaneously defending her actions and highlighting the inappropriateness of her landlord's request. The musicians, on the other hand, appear in Vella's account as respectful, leaving "crestfallen" and, according to Vella, silent.

Stevens then asked Vella about Caterina Tortora's health. This was a question he asked others as well, attempting, we can presume, to provide the court with evidence that Caterina did not die from natural causes.

Question: Did you see the woman Caterina on that occasion?

Answer: I did not see her at that moment.

Question: Whilst alive, did the woman Caterina enjoy good health?

Answer: I never heard she had been ill.

Again, instead of a "yes" or "no" reply to Stevens's question about the landlady's health, Vella responded obliquely. Why? She may have been trying to avoid implicating the musicians further in the crime, or she may have wanted to suggest that, while she was not ill, Caterina did not enjoy the good health she had. It is clear that Calcedonia Vella was not fond of her landlords, and that she felt differently about the musicians. When asked by Vincenzo and Eugenio Azzopardi if they ever "committed a bad action" when they came to play at the *fondouk*, she responded "No, never", and added "Besides, you are not people to do an evil action." The brothers then asked: "You who are a midwife, and assist always at the confinement at which we played in token of rejoicing, have you ever observed, if, on being at times sent away, we have answered in a brutal manner?" "No," she replied, "you were always ashamed and returned to the street to go away without saying anything."

While nowhere in Stevens's report do we find the word "honour", a clue that an honour code was involved is the regular appearance of the words "shame" and "ashamed". Unfortunately, we do not know how these words were uttered in the spoken Italian or Maltese. We do know, however, that at the moment just prior to the shooting, some Maltese word or phrase that was translated into the English word "shame" was uttered.[36] According to many witnesses, this was one of Caterina's last words to the musicians (and their common language was Maltese). It is worthwhile to review instances in which the term as uttered by Caterina appears in Stevens's report.[37]

> [To her family members]: "Is it not a *shame* of these cursed musicians? Was it not enough for them to come to the *Fondouk* this morning but that they should come again to my door? Let me go up to say two words to them."
>
> [To the musicians]: "Is it not a *shame* that you should come again now!"
>
> (Benedetto Bellia's testimony; emphasis added)
>
> [To her family members]: "See what a *shame*, it is not enough in the daytime but they should have also come tonight, apparently done expressly?"
>
> (Lorenzo Bellia's testimony; emphasis added)
>
> [To the musicians']: "Have you no *shame*!
>
> (Gaetano Ajello de Salvatore's testimony; emphasis added)

The use of a word translated as "shame", but without an "honour" equivalent, should not surprise us. Although most academic discussions of honour/shame codes highlight behaviours or qualities associated with the achievement or loss of honour, shame can be equally significant. This was certainly what Wikan (1984: 636) found in working with women in Cairo,[38] where shame (Arabic: *'eb*) was a more salient concept

than honour, and was uttered regularly in daily life. In Cairo, a mature individual is one who has "shame"—that is, one who is aware of the social norms and standards for ideal behaviour and is eager to meet these standards. Whether or not a person is worthy of respect, and what kind of behaviour one can expect from them, is dependent in part on whether they possess sufficient "shame", and thus can be held accountable for their actions. People she interviewed used *'eb* to chastise each other or to call attention to questionable behaviour.[39] According to the witnesses' statements, Caterina Tortora seems to have used the word or phrase translated as "shame" in a similar manner when she publicly condemned the musicians as people with no shame. This public condemnation alone could be viewed as a blow to their standing in the community, an attack on their honour.

We must next account for the many times that people told Stevens that, following their banishment from the *fondouk*, the musicians were "ashamed". When asked if the musicians said anything when Tortora asked them to leave the *fondouk*, mason Ippolito Camesulli, father of the newborn, responded: "They said nothing: but *ashamed*, they descended the staircase and went away" (emphasis added). The midwife's lengthy response also takes on additional import when viewed in this light. When asked by the brothers if they ever responded "in a brutal manner" when sent away, she responded: "No, you were always *ashamed*" (emphasis added). Ippolito and Calcedonia are in effect responding to Caterina's earlier question "Have you no shame?" "Yes," is their reply through their interlocutor, the Court, "they did have shame." This assertion is significant. As people with shame, they should have been treated with greater respect.

Hospitality, Honour and Shame in Houmt-Souk

Hospitality is highly valued in many societies worldwide (see Mauss, 1967[1925]), and in some Mediterranean localities, the granting of hospitality to others is an integral element of honourable behaviour.[40] For instance, among the Bedouins of western Egypt, Abou-Zeid (1966: 16) writes: "the most important way of displaying honour of the *beit* (people of one tent) is to offer refuge". In Pefko (Rhodes) and Glendi in Western Crete, social worth, or *timi*, is especially well expressed through hospitality (Herzfeld, 1980: 343). An individual or family's honour and prestige can be enhanced through instances of generosity (Zinovieff, 1991).

It is honourable to provide hospitality; a corollary to this principle in many societies is that it is dishonourable to deny hospitality, particularly to those in need. In Pisticci, Italy, for instance, a guest must be offered a chair outside of the family home; the denial of a chair is a meaningful act indicating an important social slight (Davis, 1969: 74). In Iran, Simpson-Hebert (1987: 27) writes, a host wants to honour his guest so that the guest will view the host as honourable; at the same time, "a guest can never be turned away, for that would be even more dishonourable", and hosts will try to honour their guests by offering all that they have (Simpson-Hebert, 1987: 31). In rural Greece, Du Boulay (1991: 45) found that along with the provision of mutual aid to kin and neighbours, there is also a practice of asymmetrical assistance of those in need in which individuals give with no expectation of anything in return.[41] In fact, she found that it is

viewed as sinful *not* to give to certain people, such as beggars, and that powerful stories of hospitality refused exist in local folklore (Du Boulay, 1991: 49). The denial of hospitality is viewed quite harshly: people must be hospitable to those in need, otherwise "they are reprimanded by the village. It is considered to be bad behaviour as well as immoral" (Du Boulay, 1991: 49). By denying the musicians hospitality, by sending them away from the *fondouk*, the Tortoras were dishonouring them and behaving in a "shameful" manner themselves. Moreover, as I elaborate below, they were disrespectful of both tenants and musicians by interrupting a cycle of reciprocity important to the maintenance of social relations in this small community.

The Tortora's social standing in the community may have played a role in the villagers' assessment of their behaviour. Many have noted that honour codes are relative in that the amount of "honour" accorded an individual leads to expectations about how that person should behave (see Pitt-Rivers, 1966; Davis, 1969: 80). In contemporary Malta, Boissevain found an association between honour, prestige and social expectations among residents of a Maltese village in the 1960s. He wrote that: "a person must behave as a moral person in order to maintain his social standing, his position on the prestige ladder" (Boissevain, 1969: 47). An individual must respect the social norms for his or her respective roles, and act as a "good" father, mother, son, neighbour, and so forth. Honour is easy to lose, and "public failure in some area of the moral code brings with it a loss of honour and, thus, of prestige" (Boissevain, 1969: 48).

Expectations regarding hospitality and generosity are relative as well. Because people with less have less to offer, their hospitality towards outsiders is often valued more highly than that of wealthier individuals. With wealth comes prestige, but also an obligation to be hospitable (Black-Michaud, 1975: 181), a *noblesse oblige* that is often particularly pronounced regarding the needy (Sahlins, 1972: 205). As Herzfeld (1980: 343) notes, a wealthier man's *filotimo* (love of *timi*, or "dignified self-restraint") "may actually be at greater risk than that of his economic inferiors". Similarly, in Sarakatsan society, poor people must be treated with respect by those of higher status: "It is the very fact of his dependence on the generosity and forbearance of those in greater power and prestige that morally prevents them from exploiting him" (Campbell, 1964: 293).

The Tortoras were, by all accounts, in a higher status group than their tenants. They held considerably more wealth and owned property; indeed, their tenants were dependent on them in many ways. Michele's occupation as a trader and the family's education, as evidenced by their higher literacy rate and greater linguistic capital, further enhanced their prestige.[42] Tortora was certainly held in higher esteem by the British Consul General, who described him to other authorities as "a respectable Maltese".[43] If there were a local "honour" code similar in any way to those already cited, the Tortoras would have been judged according to higher standards, for their behaviour would have been expected to reflect and reinforce their elevated moral standing in the community. In this respect, they did not fare well, and they were not granted a favourable appraisal in their tenants' testimony. In fact, it seems they could be quite hard on their tenants. Ippolito Camesulli, the mason whose wife had delivered a baby, stated that, after the musicians arrived and began playing for him and his wife, they were soon interrupted by Michele Tortora: "After playing the first air Michele Tortora came up in

a great passion and trembling, sent away the musicians and threatened to send us away also." The threat to evict this family with new infant, which could have amounted to a death sentence to both mother and child, was not a noble act. In addition, as *fondouk* owners, the Tortoras were the people most able—and perhaps most expected—to offer hospitality to *fondouk* visitors. Yet they declined to do so, and in the process interfered with the tenants' ability to engage in what were likely important local customs of gift exchange.

Gift exchange has been described as the social "glue" that keeps the peace in small-scale societies, particularly those removed from the daily machinations of state power, as was this community of Maltese in Ottoman Tunisia.[44] Gift giving does not simply set objects in circulation, but also provides the conditions necessary for the reproduction of social life (Godelier, 1999: 48). Daily gifts and hospitality offered to friends and neighbours in small communities are often in the form of balanced reciprocity. Mauss (1967[1925]: 3) long ago observed that while such gift exchange is obligatory, it is nevertheless carried out as if a voluntary act. Gift giving involves what Bourdieu (1977: 5) termed a "*méconnaissance*", or misrecognition. To ensure the smooth operation of gift exchange, the actors cannot be entirely unaware of the underlying "truth" of their exchanges, but, at the same time, they must always refuse to recognize this truth (Bourdieu, 1977: 6).

Musical performances can be viewed as gifts governed by these principles. The musicians regularly participated in the celebration of life-events, and made regular rounds playing music in the evening. When they were called to play, they would close their shops (and thus cease to pursue their own financial gain), and unite at the requested location. Their "gift" of music was reciprocated by a small payment. It is important to underscore here that offering performers drink or other such token gifts both symbolizes and helps to create equality between the participants. While a form of balanced form of reciprocity, in that the token payment is immediate and customary, this should not be viewed as an economic transaction akin to purchasing a loaf of bread at a market. In Jerba, each side treated the other's offering as an act of generosity, a blessing. When asked what he had earned that day, Azzopardi and his band replied: "Thank God as Gaetano had given us Ten Piastres", as if this payment was not obligatory but the result of divine providence.[45]

In order to participate in this important cycle of reciprocity, listeners sometimes had to offer the musicians hospitality—a place to play—whether it was at a family home, a café or a bar. The listeners became hosts and the musicians their guests. By denying the musicians an opportunity to play their music in the *fondouk*, and thus in preventing them from offering their "gift" to the residents, the Tortora family was in essence preventing both parties from engaging in this customary gift cycle. Furthermore, this practice rather unnecessarily reminded their tenants of their temporary and subordinate status. Like immigrants living in state-run housing, whose inability to invite others to their apartments underscores their lack of true home and temporary "guest" status (Rosello, 2001: 16–17), the tenants were prevented from playing the role of host.

The greatest insult for the musicians however, was Michele Tortora's habit of sending them away with money before they could finish playing their usual round of songs.

This amounted to a real affront and humiliation, a rejection of their "gift" of music. By refusing their music and, moreover, by offering money to send them away, the Tortoras humiliated the musicians and, in effect, reduced them to the status of mere beggars. This behaviour could be viewed as their attempt to secure more power and prestige from their compatriots by insulting and humiliating them. These encounters did not go unnoticed; as young Lorenzo Bellia so perceptively observed: "You have always had a malice against [Michele Tortora] because he did not want musicians, and when you came to the *Fondouk* he gave you charity and sent you away." As Mauss (1967[1925]: 11) noted, not only is there an obligation to give presents, but there is also an obligation to receive them. To refuse to accept a gift is "the equivalent of a declaration of war; it is a refusal of friendship and intercourse". A response to the Tortora's actions, it would seem, was pending.

Negotiating between Hierarchy and Moral Equality

> The conceptual systems which relate to honour provide, when each is taken in its totality and in its varied contexts, a mechanism which distributes power and determines who shall fill the roles of command and dictate the ideal image which people hold of their society. At the ultimate level of analysis, honour is the clearing-house for the conflicts in the social structure. (Pitt-Rivers, 1966: 73)

Rosemary Coombe has criticized much research on honour and shame as being too rooted in Durkheimian tradition and structural-functionalism, resulting in a neglect of the ways marginal peoples may have viewed dominant beliefs and their impacts on their lives. Instead, she writes, these cultural systems are seen as simply reflecting and reproducing the existing social structure: "within such a framework, all activity always serves to sustain the dominant discourse" (Coombe, 1990: 224). She calls for a more sensitive approach that considers the various ways that a dominant symbol may speak to different people in given situations. A code of honour should be conceptualized as a "repertoire of available symbolic resources put to use in significative practices" (Coombe, 1990: 231), with a goal of understanding culture as "constantly reproduced, modified and transformed" through the actions of social agents, while recognizing that such actions may also be constrained or enabled by cultural traditions (Coombe, 1990: 234).

There is similar room for interpretation and change regarding gift exchange. As Godelier (1999: 12) underscored, giving creates a relationship of solidarity with the receiver, but also a relationship of superiority, for the person who receives a gift becomes indebted to the giver until he or she reciprocates. Both equality and sharing, as well as difference and inequality, are created in this single act. This ensuing ambivalence and duality allows for a fair degree of play as actors in small-scale societies negotiate creatively for status, power, parity or difference.[46]

The events leading to Caterina's murder illustrate such a negotiation at work. The Tortoras acted as if they were so far above their tenants that they could behave according to different standards, without retaliation. They were operating as if the community were hierarchical in structure. The *fondouk* residents interviewed, on the other hand,

indicated their dissatisfaction with the Tortoras' behaviour, and instead claimed an underlying moral equality.

Whether or not an individual must react to a social slight depends on whether that slight was intended. This is a matter of interpretation, and people sometimes pretend not to notice a slight (Pitt-Rivers, 1966: 28), or collectively ignore certain behaviours that are carried out by individuals considered beyond the pale, as in the case of a mentally ill man discussed by Pitt-Rivers (1966: 57–58), or the unsocial *amahbul* of Kabyle society (Bourdieu, 1966: 93). In so doing, they are treating such individuals as "shameless", or socially beyond the pale (*los sin vergüenza* in Andalusia; Pitt-Rivers, 1966: 40). However, when slighted by an individual considered to be a social equal, individuals must decide whether or not to react. As Pitt-Rivers (1966: 28) writes: "If he realizes that he has been insulted (and others will usually help him to realize it), yet does nothing about it, then he is dishonoured."

What array of responses were available and culturally acceptable to the insulted Maltese musicians and tenants? Honour codes can require an individual to behave in a way not normally sanctioned in his or her society when action is necessary to recuperate one's lost honour. In his study of feuds among peoples of the Mediterranean and Middle East, Black-Michaud (1975: 141) writes that in sedentary societies, conflicts that reach a stage marked by the outbreak of violence are those in which "the most important prize is honour". Nowhere in the societies he studied is murder a prescribed manner for obtaining redress for material wrongs, but it is legitimate in cases of slighted honour (Black-Michaud, 1975: 142). Among the Sarakatsani, Campbell (1964: 287) found that people who behave in a manner disrespectful to an individual or family "make it clear that they consider its social existence of no account", and the family must reply at once if its reputation is to survive. In resulting honour killings, what is most important is effective action, which may be accomplished "without warning by a bullet fired from behind cover, or a knife in the back" (Campbell, 1964: 318).

The fact that Michele Tortora publicly banished the musicians from his *fondouk* after they had been sent for by a local notable, his regular humiliation by sending them away with money and his wife's announcement later that evening that they were people with no shame, were insults. If they had been murmured to the musicians privately, the affair might have had a different conclusion, but these were public acts. The musicians were faced with a choice: if they were to continue to accept a subordinate social standing, they would not have needed to respond, for only challenges issued by an equal deserve to be taken up (Bourdieu, 1980: 100). It is in treating the Tortora's behaviour as insulting and by thus responding by killing Caterina that they were making a claim to an equal moral standing.

Conclusion: An Honourable Murder?

The curious responses of the local Maltese residents of Houmt-Souk to Stevens's interrogation lead us to conclude that the community was bound by a common value system regarding reciprocity, the provision of hospitality, the social slight that ensues

when such hospitality is denied, and the slighted victim's array of possible responses. The witnesses' testimony suggests that the musicians' retaliation was viewed by their neighbours not as the crazed behaviour of drunken fools, but as understandable given the Tortoras' actions. The musicians responded to the Tortoras' insults creatively, using a "repertoire of available symbolic resources" in their attempt to shape their world while respecting the limitations imposed by their cultural traditions. It is because they all shared an understanding of this symbolic repertoire that the other *fondouk* residents could treat the crime as if it represented a justified "honour" killing.

The methods used in this article have allowed us to glimpse the likely factors motivating the behaviours of a people in the past and to delineate their unique worldviews, value systems and mechanisms of social control. This exploration indicates that an honour/shame code existed at this time in Malta, one that was linked to strongly held views about moral equality, reciprocity and hospitality. As is often the case in micro-historical analysis (Cohen, 1991; Muir & Ruggiero, 1991), further historical research will assist us in better understanding this under-studied population of masons and labourers, traders and midwives. It is hoped that this analysis has indicated the most promising directions for fruitful study into the cultural mores of Maltese of previous centuries.

Epilogue

His investigation completed, Stevens reported to his superiors that, while there were "ample grounds" for bringing Vincenzo Azzopardi to trial as the principal author of the murder of Caterina Tortora, there was not enough evidence to "bear out the charge of complicity imputed to the other four individuals"—Eugenio Azzopardi, Giovanni Said, Stefano Caruana and Giuseppe Persico—and these four were finally set free. The documents pertaining to the crime were sent to the Criminal Court in Malta, which decided to hear the case. Azzopardi's defence was that the crime was committed by the Italian, Gaetano Ajello. In April, the prisoners and the 16 witnesses were sent to Malta on a naval vessel for the trial.[47] In the end, Vincenzo's testimony could not compete with that of the two eyewitnesses, Gaetano Ajello and the French priest, Abbé Bois. On 18 May 1867, Azzopardi was convicted of the murder of Caterina Tortora and condemned to death. This conviction raised a public outcry in Malta, however. Several members of the Maltese Government Council met with the newly appointed Governor of Malta, Sir Patrick Grant, and presented him with a request for clemency signed by 1,300 people, an astounding figure for that time. The Governor declined to consider clemency, however, and the French Consul at Malta interpreted his steadfastness on this matter as due both to the specificities of the case and the need to send a message to the "unruly" British subjects in the Levant and North Africa that "their governments can reach them and punish them, despite the great distances and obstacles".[48] Vincenzo Azzopardi was executed outside the ramparts of Valletta on 23 May 1867.

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Notes

[1] Europeans living in Ottoman territories at this time were under the protection and jurisdiction of their respective consulates, an arrangement ostensibly to ensure that Christians received fair treatment under Muslim rule, but which also led to a chaotic multiplicity of legal codes (Marsden, 1972: 25). In the mid-nineteenth century, there were 14 foreign consulates in the Regency of Tunis, including the longstanding French and British consulates, those of Tuscany, Naples, Spain, the Kingdom of Sardinia and Austria, and consuls of an honorific nature, such as Belgium, the Netherlands and the United States. Provisions regarding the British jurisdiction in the Sublime Ottoman Porte for this period are outlined in the *Orders of Council* of 1844, 1863 and 1864.

[2] "Proceeding of the Consular Court held at the Island of Gerba for the Preliminary examination of the Murder of Caterina Tortosa [sic], British Subject, alleged to have been committed by Five British Subjects," 13 January 1867. Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), Foreign Office (hereafter FO) 339/98.

[3] This inference is suggested by the many corrections made to the text, as in the following examples: a) "~~Exactly between the two eyes~~ she was wounded by a ball exactly between the two eyes ..."; b) "~~by trade washerwoman~~ midwife by profession ..."

[4] These are the social categories Stevens employed in his report. The French man was the priest Andrea Bois, born in the Duchy of Savoy.

[5] November 1853, in Baynes, 8 December 1853, Colonial Office (hereafter CO), 158/172.

[6] 10 January 1854, Malta 382, CO 158/172, PRO.

[7] 10 January 1854 from Foreign Office to Colonial Office, CO 158/172.

[8] At their residence, authorities found three daggers, four files, a rope ladder and wax used to make impressions of locks (1853 list, FO 335/103/3).

[9] Malta has been characterized by Italian/Maltese diglossia since at least the fifteenth century, with Italian serving as a cultural high language, the language of the elite and of business, while Maltese was "associated with ordinary people and popular culture" (Cassar, 2001: 261).

[10] Sant Cassia notes that Maltese and Cypriot nationalisms drew inspiration from their nearest mainlands, Greece and Italy. For this reason, any study of local customs was potentially dangerous, for folklore studies could be "hijacked" by politicians from these countries and thus threaten British rule (Sant Cassia, 1993b: 299). Linkages found with nearby North African societies were similarly threatening, and it is for these reasons that research into these questions was not promoted in any systematic way by British authorities (see Sant Cassia, 1993b).

[11] The use of "Tunisia" to refer to this country at this time is an anachronism. Until its occupation by the French, the country was known by the name of its capital city, Tunis. The provinces of the Ottoman Empire were known by the Turkish term, "*oçaklar*", which was

translated by European powers as "regencies" to indicate their semi-autonomous status (see Anderson, 1986: 40).

[12] According to records of the Catholic Church, there were 12,064 Catholics in the Regency, 9,150 of them in Tunis alone (Dunant, 1858: 258). These figures did not include the small numbers of Protestants and Greek Orthodox immigrants also present. Consular estimates vary widely, in part because immigrants often arrived clandestinely and did not always register with their respective consulate offices. Because a substantial proportion of the European population, such as celibate men, rarely appeared in church records, and because there was an enormous floating population, Ganiage (1960: 19) believes that the official figures should be increased, perhaps even doubled; hence the wide range presented here.

[13] Published primary sources include Anselme des Arcs (1889), De Flaux (1865), Dunant (1858), Guerin (1862) and Pellissier (1858). More recent contemporary sources include Ganiage (1960), Sebag (1998) and Smith (2000).

[14] Olive oil was an increasingly important export during the nineteenth century, with much of it being shipped to the soap industry in Marseilles. This led to a shift in the centre of trade from Tunis to the ports near the olive-producing region, such as Sousse, Monastir, Mahdia and Sfax (see Valensi, 1985: 224).

[15] There is no clear start date for these settlements because even during the previous centuries of conflict and piracy between power holders along the northern and southern Mediterranean, traders occasionally profited from the hostilities and maintained temporary bases on "enemy" shores.

[16] Count Filippi became Consul of Sardinia to Tunis in 1825 and toured the Regency in the late 1820s. His report of the tour was republished in Monchicourt (1929).

[17] Monchicourt, 1929: 268–269; Temple, 1835: 159.

[18] Members of the Jewish community told Udovitch and Valensi that they were in Jerba before the destruction of the second temple (i.e., by 70 C.E. or even earlier), long before the arrival of the Muslims. The community can be found at the same place in maps of the sixteenth century as it is today (see Udovitch & Valensi, 1984: 8–11).

[19] In 1845, the island is described as "the richest and most flourishing part of the whole Regency" (30 June 1845, Crowe, FO 102/24, PRO).

[20] 31 March 1848, FO 1020/32, PRO.

[21] British consular representatives report a much larger European presence in Jerba than Soumille, estimating that there were 350 British subjects there in 1845 (30 June 1845, Crowe, FO 102/24).

[22] In his examination of the *actes de catholicité* in Jerba from 1848 to 1882, Soumille (1981: 33) found that Maltese represented 77 per cent of the baptisms, 79.1 per cent of the marriages and 72.6 per cent of the deaths during this period. Italians represented 21.4 per cent of the baptisms and 26.4 per cent of the deaths. The disproportionate representation of Italians in the cemetery suggests that some Maltese may have returned to Malta during their old age and died there.

[23] The spatial reordering of colonial cities is of increasing interest to scholars concerned with the articulation of social boundaries and the creation of new social identities. Colonial spatial reorganization often overlaid earlier kinds of residential segregation, which in many cities under Ottoman rule was principally according to religious and ethnic/trade identities (see Wright, 1991). It is of interest that here space was segregated more by religion and class, and far less by ethnicity/race.

[24] Sebag, 1959: 493.

[25] Also spelled "*fonduq*" in Stevens's report, "*Foundouk*" (also variously known as "*caravanserail*" and "*khan*") were similar to Sicilian *robbas*, in that they were both single buildings sheltering multiple families, many of which were related, and the buildings were named, often with family surnames, as was the *Fondouk* Tortora (see Chapman, 1971).

[26] See Bahloul (1995) and Danon (1955). For a detailed description and sketch of a similar building, see Bahloul (1995: 13–15). See Callens (1955) for images of *fondouks* in Tunis. Bahloul eloquently describes the social relations of one such Jewish-Muslim multi-family household in Sétif in colonial Algeria in the mid-twentieth century.

[27] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of *History and Anthropology* for this information.

[28] See Bahloul (1995: 31).

[29] Nine of the 21 people interviewed signed in Stevens's report with an "X". These included all of the accused except Vincenzo Azzopardi, Benedetto Bellia, Calcedonia Vella, Ippolito Camesulli, Gaetano Figar and Margherita Caruana—all Maltese.

[30] 16 February 1867, FO 102/80, PRO.

[31] Unless otherwise noted, all citations from the Jerba residents are taken directly from Stevens's report without editing (13 January 1867, FO 339/98, PRO).

[32] We never learn which songs were played by the musicians except for "God Save the Queen". It is possible that these were *ghana*, a form of traditional Maltese music (see Fsadni, 1993). According to one version of the history of this folklore form, these songs were typically sung at night, by younger men, in wine-bars, as song-duels that consisted of creative exchanges of insults as the men dueled for honour and prestige (Fsadni, 1993). While Azzopardi states that he was engaged in a "drinking bout" while exchanging songs with Giovanni Said, it is possible that we have here early evidence of *ghannejja* (singers of this musical form) at work, extending their practices into the Maltese immigrant communities of rural Tunisia.

[33] All citations in the paragraph are from Wood, 16 February 1867, FO 102/80, PRO.

[34] On passive and active complicity in relation to banditry in Mediterranean societies, see Sant Cassia (1993a: 785–786).

[35] There are many passages in the Old and New Testaments that outline the importance of offering hospitality to others. One such passage is Hebrews 13:2; see also Matthews (2001).

[36] Whether this was *ghajber*, *mithija* or some other phrase remains unknown.

[37] It is interesting that the Court's principle eyewitness presenting testimony on behalf of the deceased, the local French parish priest, Father Andrea Bois, quoted the musicians, but paraphrased Caterina Tortora, and thus did not repeat her purported outburst. He simply stated that she "invited the musicians to withdraw as they were in mourning". His obscuring of Caterina's outburst further suggests that it may have been viewed locally as cause for response.

[38] Wikan (1984) suggests that we view shame as "experience-near" and honour as "experience-far".

[39] In her work with Bedouin, Abu-Lughod (1986: 107–109) describes an elaborate honor code that was also relative: "If individuals fail to embody the honor-linked values ... they lose the standing appropriate to their age, level of wealth, gender, or even genealogical precedence." She does not find a similar use for the word *'eb*, however, but instead details with eloquence the linkages between *'agl*, or self-control, and *hasham*, modesty or "feelings of shame in the company of the more powerful".

[40] In fact, Herzfeld (1987: 75) suggests that we consider hospitality instead of honour to allow for more precise analyses and comparisons.

[41] Du Boulay (1991: 42) discusses the seeming contradiction in North Euboea, Greece in the offering of such reciprocity especially to strangers, who are viewed with suspicion, if not hostility. The more strange someone is, "the more they are offered hospitality". She finds that this is ultimately because true strangers are viewed as a less of a long-term threat. Asymmetrical giving of this kind is viewed as something reciprocated not in this lifetime, but in heaven (Du Boulay, 1991: 49).

[42] For a discussion of a correlation made between honour and distance from manual labour, see Gilsenan (1977).

[43] Wood, 16 February 1867, FO 102/80, PRO.

[44] While purportedly under the control of their consulate officers, there is considerable evidence that many Maltese disregarded British and Tunisian law and amassed great fortune through a regular contraband trade (see Clancy-Smith, 1994: 162–163).

[45] Dawe and Cowan note a similar "misrecognition" at work in the offering of money to musicians in Crete and northern Greece, respectively (see Dawe 1998: 42–43; Cowan, 1990: 105).

[46] This point is elaborated in Bourdieu (1980); see also Zinovieff (1991: 128).

[47] 21 March 1867 FO to Wood; 16 February 1867 Wood to Lord Stanley; 13 April 1867 Wood to Commander Bosanquet, H.M. Enterprise, FO 102/80, PRO.

[48] 1867, Carton 367, "Agents Diplomatiques et Consulaires de France à l'Etranger", Archives Diplomatiques, Nantes, France.

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