

# Starting a Family in another Land: Spaniards in Malta, 1580s to 1640s<sup>1</sup>

Simon Mercieca

## Introduction

Demographers are confronted with considerable difficulties when they set about studying family structures. This paper will seek to show that the behaviour of Spanish migrants in Malta in the early modern period conforms to the migratory patterns evident elsewhere. The term 'migrant' is here understood as referring to a person who changes his habitual place of residence in a more or less permanent form by crossing an administrative boundary.<sup>2</sup> A key marker of a permanent move to a new land is marriage and the starting of a family there.<sup>3</sup>

## Methodology

Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux and Richard Wall have cautioned researchers against relying on literature to understand changes in the model of the family. Instead they advise adopting an interdisciplinary approach for an analysis of families in the past; an approach that looks at the historical, anthropological, economic and legal aspects. In addition they insist that households should be studied from different perspectives such as marriage, age at marriage, parents, economic activity and origins. Furthermore, one needs to define the gender and power relationships present within a household and follow the family over a period of time. Not only must one identify the individual histories and private lives but

---

1 This paper – which focuses on behavioural aspects among those families whose head was a Spanish migrant – forms part of a larger study on Spanish migrants in Malta.

2 E. van de Walle, *Multilingual Demographic Dictionary*, from the French Section edited by L. Henry, Liege 1982, 92.

3 *Ibid.*

also the cycles of the household formation in relation to the position of each member within that family.<sup>4</sup>

For this to materialise, Fauve-Chamoux and Wall maintain that, for each and every sector of the family identified, one needs to use the different sources including tax books, parish registers, censuses, family reconstructions and genealogical research, electoral lists, and so on. It is only after sifting through all these sources that one can really begin to talk about the existence or otherwise of different family models about which there is still a lack of knowledge and understanding. This method helps to bring out any pattern underlying the formation of households and the arrangements made following successive remarriages, as well as the work undertaken by adults.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, the Department of History at the University of Malta has been engaged in building up data on the past population of Malta following Louis Henry's model of family reconstruction for the period 1550s to 1648. Based on the parish registers of Birgu, Bormla, Senglea and the two parishes of Valletta, all the families present in the harbour area between 1550 and 1650 have now been reconstructed.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, a number of rural parishes have been reconstituted and in 2014 the resulting database contained over 250,000 individuals, spanning from 1532 to 1850.

This database will not be used on its own but will be supported by two other independent sources, namely, the bibliography existing on the subject and an unedited demographic source: the attestations made by Spanish migrants who wanted to marry in Malta or their widows who wanted to marry again and appeared before the Ecclesiastical Courts to obtain permission. Thus, the quantitative and qualitative methodology adopted for this research uses the triangulation method to guarantee the authenticity, reliability and trustworthiness of the demographic results.<sup>7</sup> The data base consists of 39 marriage acts that had mostly taken place in Valletta or another of the harbour cities;<sup>8</sup> 33 *Status Liberi* cases involving Spanish plaintiffs; and 3 *Status Liberi* cases involving Maltese widows who were married to Spanish migrants.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that one sets up a family in a particular locality is often taken as an indicator of an intention to stay. There are cases of Spaniards who first appear in court as plaintiffs requesting a *Status Liber* to marry and then later appear again as witnesses in someone else's marriage. Agostino Rodrigues was a Spaniard from Biscay. He requested permission to marry in Malta in 1603, and by December of that same year, he was living in Cospicua and again appeared in front of the Ecclesiastical Court, this time as a witness in

4 A. Fauve-Chamoux and R. Wall, 'Nuptialité et Famille', in *Histoire des Populations de L'Europe, Des Origines aux prémices de la révolution démographique*, eds. J.P. Bardet and J. Dupâquier, Paris 1997, Vol. 1, 365.

5 Fauve-Chamoux and Wall, 365.

6 This reconstruction excludes slaves who are not included in the reconstruction of families for reasons related to demographic calculations. They are only included in those cases where they got married in Malta.

7 N. Golafshani, 'Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research', *The Qualitative Report*, viii, 4 (2003), 597–607.

8 Vide Appendix 1.

9 S. Mercieca, 'Fonti religiose per lo studio della famiglia a Malta', in *Popolazione e Famiglia nel Mezzogiorno Moderno. Fonti e nuove Prospettive d'Indagine*, ed. G. da Molin, Bari 2007, 125–64.

the marriage of a fellow Spaniard.<sup>10</sup> Bernardus Cadavaglia was another Spanish migrant whose arrival in 1602, and eventual marriage in that same year, marked the beginning of a long stay in Malta.<sup>11</sup> Francesco Ferrer was from Barcelona and like many other compatriots appeared both as a plaintiff and then as a witness in court proceedings for a *Status Liber*. He arrived in Malta in 1614, married in the same year,<sup>12</sup> and took up residence in Senglea.<sup>13</sup>

Both the marriage acts and the attestations of the *Status Liberi* documentation discussed here have to be analysed within the historical context of the period, which happened to be an extremely turbulent time for Spain. The death of Philip II in 1598 marked what some consider as the beginning of the end of Spanish Habsburg hegemony in Europe.<sup>14</sup> Shortly afterwards war engulfed nearly all of Europe with Spain engaged in hostilities almost incessantly during the first half of the seventeenth century and suffered crashing defeats; at sea at the Battle of the Downs in 1639 and on land at the Battle of Rocroi in 1643, which many historians have claimed marked the end of Spain's military greatness.

Internally, seventeenth-century Spain evolved at different rhythms according to the period and the region. In overall terms, population would seem to have remained fairly stable with a slight upward tendency but while the population of Castile and Southern Spain plummeted that of the Cantabrian and Mediterranean coasts tended to increase.<sup>15</sup> In the case of the Crown of Aragon the expulsion of the Moriscos and the plague, had a negative impact on population but recovery was swift.

## Spanish migrants in Malta

Migration was an important phenomenon in Early-Modern Spain involving movement in both directions with Spaniards leaving and foreigners arriving in Spain. We have fairly reliable overall statistics for the former, at least as far as the Americas are concerned. Research indicates that the outflow may have reached 0.4 per cent of Spain's total population in any one year.<sup>16</sup> Most of these Spaniards would seem to have headed for the New World.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly for our purposes, migration to the Americas was, in principle, restricted to Castilians in this epoch and this meant that Catalans, Valencians and Majorcans seeking fame and fortune abroad, typically had to look elsewhere for

10 Archivum Archiepiscopus Melitensis (AAM), *Status Liber*, Box 3, no. 62.

11 AAM, *Status Liber*, Box 2, no. 76; Box 3, no. 4.

12 AAM, *Status Liber*, Box 10, no. 77.

13 AAM, *Status Liber*, Box 15, no 88; Box 18, no. 26.

14 G. Darby, *Spain in the Seventeenth Century*, London 1994; H. Kamen, 'The Decline of Spain: A Historical Myth?', *Past and Present*, No. 81 (November 1978), 24–50.

15 A. Simon, *La España del Siglo XVII*, Madrid 1991, 18–19.

16 J.P. Poussou, 'Migrations et mobilité de la population en Europe à l'époque moderne', in *Histoire des Populations de L'Europe, Des Origines aux prémices de la révolution démographique*, eds. J.P. Bardet and J. Dupâquier, Paris 1997, Vol. 1, 265.

17 Poussou, 264–70.

opportunities. As is immediately evident from the appendices, 'Spaniards' settling in Malta came overwhelmingly from these three regions.

Up to 1648, 39 Spanish migrants have been identified with certainty to have married in the harbour area. The *Status Liberi* between the 1590s and 1648 account for another 36 cases, but none of the Spanish names traced in the Parish Acts match those of the *Status Liberi*. This explains the high level of under-registration in the Acts. At least, 73 Spanish grooms were in Malta at some point or other, in addition to other Spaniards whose presence is known since they appear as witnesses; however either because they were already married abroad, or because they decided to remain single, their names escaped registration in the Catholic Church's marriage records.<sup>18</sup> Names of individuals in the *Status Liberi*, who declared being from Portugal or Sardinia were also included, as these two areas had a very close relationship with the Spanish heartland of the Habsburg Empire.

There is no doubt that the absolute number of Spanish migrants in Malta was even higher. These figures clearly hide a high under-registration in the Acts, besides the fact that the origins of migrants, at least, as far as parish records go, were not always recorded, while a number of *Status Liberi* have gone missing over time. Moreover, local ecclesiastical authorities seem to have had difficulties in recording correctly the surname of migrants. In other words, there exists a risk that the surname registered in the *Status Liberi* and that written in the Marriage Act could be different, because of spelling or pronunciation issues, as these were recorded by two different ecclesiastical persons. This leads to considerable difficulties when seeking to match the names declared in the *Status Liberi* and the marriages registered in the Parish Acts.

Poussou claims that migration was leading to skilled labour shortages in Spain, in particular in the southern towns of the peninsula.<sup>19</sup> Many of those who left were artisans, thereby creating shortages in the skilled metal-craft sector.<sup>20</sup> However, we have encountered relatively few skilled migrants arriving in Malta. Out of forty entries in the Parish Acts, only three migrants were registered with titles: two had the title of *signore*<sup>21</sup> and one of *maestro*.<sup>22</sup> The rest carried no title whatsoever, thus implying a lower social condition. This is corroborated by the *Status Liberi*, where the Spanish migrants are mostly sailors, followed by a few who were servants.

The literature about migration discusses at length what is perceived as the predominantly male nature of migration. This is now being re-assessed and E.G. Ravenstein's 'Laws of Migration' are being proven correct by demographers.<sup>23</sup> In the

18 Vide Appendix 2.

19 Poussou, 277.

20 Ibid., 276.

21 Parish Archives (PA) Malta, St Paul Parish Valletta, Marriage Acts, 02–02–1625, 02–05–1627.

22 PA Malta, St. Paul Parish Valletta, Marriage Acts, 28–02–1602.

23 E.G. Ravenstein, 'The Laws of Migration', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (June 1885), 167–235; and W. Tobler, 'Migration: Ravenstein, Thorntwaite, and Beyond', *Urban Geography*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1995), 327–43.

nineteenth century, Ravenstein observed that women moved much more than men but their mobility was confined to short distances while over longer distances males predominated.<sup>24</sup> Malta's geographical position as an island meant that in early modern times it represented long-distance travel for any migrant who wanted to reach the island. This may explain why the island received relatively few female migrants. All the Spanish migrants found in the *Status Liberi* are male. Many of these Spanish migrants settled in Valletta or one of the harbour communities, marrying within the area; there are also cases when Spanish migrants married women from the countryside,<sup>25</sup> but in most cases, the bride was from the place where the Spanish migrant had settled down in Malta.<sup>26</sup>

Alfred Perrenoud thinks that urban dynamism rests squarely on migration.<sup>27</sup> The countryside does not offer the economic potential to attract migrants. This probably explains why almost all Spanish migrants settled in Valletta or in one of the Three Cities rather than in the countryside. It is within these urban areas that migrants succeeded in finding work and their place in a new society although not everybody's efforts was crowned with success.

The predominant activity of Spanish migrants was related to the maritime sector, either as sailors or soldiers on galleys, with a few who opted to work as servants with distinguished knights.<sup>28</sup> The fact that a number of these migrants held a job connected to the seafaring activity of the Order of St John explains their need to live in the harbour area.

Not all Spanish migrants sought permanent residence in Malta. Some fell under the category of temporary migrants. These were normally youngsters or adults who would leave their hometown or village for a period of a year or more but who would eventually return to their place of birth. Some Spanish witnesses, who appeared in court to testify in favour of their compatriots, must have definitely fallen in this category since they only appeared once in the local Church records when they were asked to testify. Poussou argues that most of the temporary migrants did not leave out of sense of adventure but as a result of local conditions and problems.<sup>29</sup> Most of the Spanish migrants appearing in the *Status Liberi* came from port cities and sought a job in Malta's maritime sector, an indication that the prospects in Malta might have been better than in Spain during that period.

It is very difficult to unearth the presence of this type of temporary Spanish migrant in the sixteenth century through the records studied owing to the lacunae in such data. But the early seventeenth-century *Status Liberi* records show that there were a number of

24 Poussou, 270.

25 The database of the Maltese parishes reveals that most of the Spaniards were living in the harbour towns.

26 Judging from the current database, a number of Maltese brides marrying Spanish migrants during this period of study hailed from the parish of Porto Salvo. This part of Valletta was extremely popular as an area of residence with a number of migrants in Malta.

27 A. Perrenoud, 'Variables sociales en démographie urbaine. L'exemple de Genève au XVIIIe siècle' in *Démographie urbaine*, Lyon : Centre d'histoire économique et sociale, 1977, 143–72, cited in Poussou, 280, 283.

28 Vide Appendix 2.

29 Poussou, 279.

Spanish migrants who may have come to Malta briefly for work and then decided to marry on the island. When this happened, it would be necessary for the man to ask members of his community, together with local friends and other foreigners whom he had befriended in Malta, to come forward and testify in his favour. The fact that the names of a number of Spanish migrants who sought permission to marry do not reappear in the parish acts is an indication that they did not take up residence here. The difference between those who stayed and those who left can be somehow unearthed from the *Status Liberi*. Those who left would definitely not reappear as witnesses in the cases of other Spanish migrants. This is also an indication that by the time the next case came up, these Spaniards would have already left the island, without leaving any trace in the parish registers. Thus, when new Spanish migrants arrived, new members from the community would be invited to appear before the Ecclesiastical Court. Both migrants and witness were normally asked by the Ecclesiastical Court about their backgrounds and relationship with their country of origin. In a situation where illiteracy was rampant, this source offers a glimpse on kinship which other types of documentation cannot offer. This type of contact was normally important for those migrants who established a commercial venture; contact with their relatives back home helped them foster a trading route.

Within this study on migration, one ought to look at corsairing as another possible option for Spaniards seeking residence in Malta. However, corsairing and migration need to be studied from a different perspective, which till now has not been analysed. In Europe, it was not a rare incident for migrants who failed to get a job to revert to banditry or other acts of criminality.<sup>30</sup> From time to time, the authorities in towns sought to banish them to the countryside. On the continent, this led to some confusion since at times it was difficult to distinguish between ordinary workers and bandits. Both were to be found on the road usually between June and October. They followed erratic patterns, seeking help from the various houses along the countryside that offered assistance to pilgrims. This sort of mobility came to be known as *subsistence migration*. On studying the *Status Liberi* documentation, one notices a somewhat similar pattern. On being discharged from their job with the knights of St John's squadron, or enticed by better prospects, they entered the world of corsairing. This was the case of Francesco Fernandi from Lisbon (at this time Lisbon was part of the Habsburg domain), who arrived in Malta around June 1623.<sup>31</sup> At first he worked as a sailor but, either because he was dismissed or owing to better prospects, he joined a corsairing vessel. This is confirmed in a separate sitting, by Sebastiano Baldagno, a foreigner living in Vittoriosa, who appeared in court as a witness in the case of the Catalan migrant Antonio de Blandes. Baldagno told the court that Francesco Fernandi was by December of that same year working as corsair on the armed vessel of *Signor* Castelnovo engaged in expeditions to the Levant.<sup>32</sup> This is not the place

30 Ibid., 281.

31 AAM, *Status Liber*, Box 18, no. 49: Francesco Ferrandi appeared in front of the Ecclesiastical Court on 26 June 1623.

32 AAM, *Status Liber*, Box 18, no. 21: Sebastiano Baldagno was asked to be a witness in a case instituted by Antonio de Blandes, a Catalan but known also as Maiorochino, on 23 December 1623. He told the court that '*Francesco Ferrando, portoghese, hoggi*

to discuss the relative merits of corsairs, pirates, privateers, and suchlike but there exists a very extensive bibliography on corsairing, including the recent work of Molly Greene, which offers a very good account of the skulduggery of corsairs based on extensive work in local archives.<sup>33</sup>

### Spanish family structure in Malta

The fact that most Spanish migrants were engaged in maritime activity may have affected the timing of their marriages and procreation. It is an established fact that among seafarers there was an increase in conceptions in the month of October when maritime activity slackened considerably and the level of conception remained relatively high up to April when sailings recommenced in earnest.<sup>34</sup>

These migrants were found living in what might be termed nuclear families, which in itself represents a sort of contracted family. In the absence of what anthropologists term 'extended families', one could seriously question what sort of authority, if any, these Spanish migrants wielded within their households in Malta. Normally, male supreme authority within families is associated with extended families.<sup>35</sup> This was very authoritative in structures with the head of the family, or *pater familias*, controlling the family. Inheritance in such families was typically unequal with the eldest receiving the bulk if not all of the estate.<sup>36</sup>

It is within this nuclear structure that parents are thought to assume what is termed a more liberal stand. They are expected to interfere less and less in the future of their children.<sup>37</sup> Reading the life stories as retold by migrants themselves in the *Status Liberi*, it is clear that they came from nuclear families and ended up forming nuclear families in Malta. In most cases, the migrants or their witnesses do not delve into their family backgrounds. Those that do mention parents, make no reference to siblings or their paternal or maternal lineages. In the *Status Liber* of Vincenzo de Stefano, who was from Navarre, the Sicilian Placidus Briandi told the Court that 'I went to live in the house of the father of the plaintiff and at that time he was still a young lad apprenticed in the craft of barber.'<sup>38</sup> Michele *de Civitate Barsalona* (sic) attested 'that I know the plaintiff [who in this case was Francesco Ferrandi] and his mother and father in Lisbon, their home city',<sup>39</sup> while in another case, the Frenchman Gaspare de Olivieri attested that 'I know the plaintiff

*di marinaio sopra l'armata del signor Castelnuovo andato a corseggiare in Levante.'*

33 M. Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of the Mediterranean*, Princeton–Oxford 2010.

34 S. Mercieca, 'Community Life in the Central Mediterranean – A Socio-Demographic Study of the Maltese Harbour Towns in Early Modern Times. Bormla: 1587–1815', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Paris IV–Sorbonne, 2002.

35 E. Todd, *L'origine des systèmes familiaux, Tome 1: L'Eurasie*, Paris 2011.

36 E. Todd, *Explanation of Ideology: Family Structure & Social System*, 1985, translated by D. Garrioch, London 1983.

37 E. Todd, *La Diversité du monde: Famille et modernité*, Paris 1999.

38 AAM, *Status Liber*, Box 13, no. 27: 'mi son ritirato in casa del padre del p[ro]ducent[e] quale allora era quasi figliolino che esercitavi l'arte di barbiero'.

39 AAM, *Status Liber*, Box 18, no. 49: 'che conosco al p[ro]ducent[e] et essi padri (sic.) et m[ad]re in Lisbona'.

Salvatore Bodai, that is first in his homeland of *Catalogna* and I stayed at their house and know his mother.<sup>40</sup>

In the case of Malta, a nuclear family model can be traced in the records up to the middle of the seventeenth century. A quick look at the *Status Animarum* records, the yearly list of families present in each parish, indicates that this model was prevalent amongst Maltese families. But these documents go beyond the period under study. The preliminary results confirm the general idea held by Jean-Louis Flandrin for Europe<sup>41</sup> that, between the 1580s and 1648, Spanish families in Malta also upheld the nuclear family model. In other words, from the moment when the registers used for this study began being kept up to 1648, Spanish migrants followed a nuclear family model as opposed to an extended family one and, like in the rest of Western Europe, the normal household was the conjugal one.<sup>42</sup> Do such findings bear out what Peter Laslett affirms<sup>43</sup> that there was no relationship between early marriage and large extended families and late marriage and small families? It was generally thought that Mediterranean families fell under the extended typology. However, research carried out covering Italy, France and Spain shows that this is not the case and the findings about the behaviour of these Spanish migrants are in line with these studies. Similar results are being obtained in studies regarding North African families during early modern times.<sup>44</sup> The fact that migrants were away from home meant that, even if they wanted, they could not adopt an extended type of family.

The size of the families of the Spanish migrants was within the parameters established by Peter Laslett and Richard Wall for pre-industrial Europe: about four to five living persons.<sup>45</sup> This size does reflect a small family but this does not mean that there was a low fertility. While the social realities can differ from one Spanish/Maltese household to another, one needs to take into account the issue of late marriages and migration, which in these cases definitely had an impact on the size of the family. One also needs to take into account the rate of mortality among children, which was definitely high. More importantly, infant mortality risked not being recorded in parish records. These were some of the major causes both locally and abroad that caused shrinkage of the size of the family. Our particular situation shows that Spanish families were small but fertility was high.<sup>46</sup>

What happened with Spanish migrants, in particular those coming from urban centres, falls squarely within what was observed by Fauve-Chamoux and Wall, when

40 AAM, *Status Liber*, Box 3, no. 4: 'che conosco il producente Salvatore Bodai cioè prima in *Catalogna patria sua et ho praticato in casa loro et conosco sua madre*'.

41 J.L. Flandrin, *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality*, translated by R. Southern, Cambridge 1979, 53.

42 *Ibid.*, 66.

43 P. Laslett, 'Introduction: The History of the family', in *Household and Family in Past Time*, eds. P. Laslett and R. Wall, Cambridge 1972, 1–89.

44 F. Loualich, 'In the Regency of Algiers: the Human side of the Algerine *Corso*', in *After Braudel: Trade and Cultural Exchange in the Mediterranean, XVI–XVIII centuries*, eds. C.J. Heywood, M.S. Omri and M. Fusaro, London 2010, 84.

45 P. Laslett and R. Wall eds., *Household and Family in Past Time*, Cambridge 1972.

46 Vide Appendix 1.



they affirmed that in big urban centres, boys left the family household before the girls.<sup>47</sup> At least certain attestations made in the *Status Liberi* confirm the existence of such a phenomenon, in particular when one studies the age at which a number of migrants left their family abode. In at least two cases, the male migrants declared having left when still in their early teens.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, the documents do not give the exact rank or position within the family to better assess this factor. Didaco Duran left his parents' home at the age of 13 to become a servant of the knight Alvaro Altaminor.<sup>49</sup> Francesco Pedrasi from the city of Solterra, also left his parents' home at that same age to go to Marseilles where he joined the knights' squadron.<sup>50</sup> While such comments indicate the existence of a world diametrically opposed to that previously thought, the geographical differences are not of a latitudinal nature between north and south, but more geophysical; coastal cities behaving differently from rural centres. Social differences were important during the *ancien régime* and they were more marked in the countryside than in the towns, especially those overlooking the coasts. But these geophysical differences had a minor impact on Malta since the island is probably too small to have suffered from this rural/urban divide.<sup>51</sup>

### Women's autonomy

Demographic studies relate the different social status that existed among married men and women, as well as widows and widowers. Normally, it is thought that those females who married very young were more susceptible to being subject to the authority of their husband or the authority of their husband's family than those who married later in life.<sup>52</sup> The reconstruction of families does not give us information about the type of power relationships that existed among these families where a Spanish migrant, head of the family, is assumed to have taken over, even though, the female protagonists of these marriages are, on average, older at the time of marriage than their counterparts marrying a Maltese man for the first time.<sup>53</sup> The average age at marriage of a bride marrying a Spaniard was 23. This calculation does not take into consideration whether the bride was marrying for the first time or was a widow. A lower age would be established only if the calculation is done on those marrying for the first time. Their average age was 16. By the middle of the seventeenth century, one still finds migrants marrying brides on the threshold of puberty, set at 12 years of age, which was the minimum age required for a

47 Fauve-Chamoux and Wall, 353.

48 Vide Appendix 2.

49 AAM, *Status Liber*, Box 1640, no. 43.

50 AAM, *Status Liber*, Box 23, no. 73.

51 S. Mercieca, 'Hal Kirkop fis-Seklu Tmintax: Harsa Analitika lejn Ġrajjieta', in *Hal Kirkop u l-inhawi ta' madwar*, ed. H.C.R. Vella, Malta 2008, 28–54.

52 S. Mercieca, 'The Spatial Mobility of Seafarers in the Mediterranean: A case study based on *Status Liberi* Documentation (1581–1640)', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2002), 385–410.

53 Mercieca, 'Community life', Chapter 4. During the 17th century, the average age at marriage of women in Malta was 20.

girl to be married. The average age at which widows remarried was, as expected, higher but, since the exact age is only known for two widows, it is very difficult to arrive at a representative estimate.<sup>54</sup>

The *Status Liberi* also attest to the fact that the widows of Spanish husbands enjoyed a sense of autonomy. They appeared before the Ecclesiastical Court on their own accord, bearing in mind that since their husband's family was not in Malta, they could easily shed the assumed submissiveness that women had to show towards their husband and/or to his family and look after their own interests.<sup>55</sup> This is what Margherita, widow of Stefano Majorca, did in 1614.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in 1625 Agostina, widow of Hieronimo Rodrigo, sought permission to remarry, after the death of her husband abroad, without making use of a male proxy or escort.<sup>57</sup> Caterina reported the death by drowning of her Catalan husband, Francesco Luntet, which had happened while he was sailing on a Hospitaller galley.<sup>58</sup>

Fauve-Chamoux and Wall note that the most important demographic variable is the age of marriage of females at their first marriage.<sup>59</sup> Through this, one can judge the different types of marriages existing amongst different societies and the form of reproductive behaviour that the family will adopt. The *Status Liberi* documentation in general, and these cases of Spanish migrants in particular, confirm this line of thought. In general, during the pre-industrial age, women were younger than their male counterparts at marriage but, more often than not, the wife outlived her husband, if she surpassed all the mortality traps linked to pregnancies and giving birth.<sup>60</sup>

The age at marriage of the Spanish migrant spouse (judging from the *Status Liberi* documentation) confirms the general pattern that has been delineated for pre-industrial Europe: migrant men tended to marry later than the locals. In Malta, the average age of the male Spanish migrant at marriage was 23 years, two years older than that of the locals.<sup>61</sup> The reconstructed families and *Status Liberi* confirm that most of the families, like the rest of the families in Malta at the time, lived together till death separated them. But, once death struck, the chance of remarrying was very high, especially for the males. However, as the *Status Liberi* show, widows too sought to remarry, although not perhaps with as much success as men. Both biological and socio-cultural realities were not always on the side of women in the marriage market. In turn, the higher the frequency of remarriage, the greater the chances of babies within the family resulting in more complex relationships within such families.

54 Ibid.

55 Fauve-Chamoux and Wall, 362.

56 AAM, *Status Liber*, Box 10, no. 97a.

57 AAM, *Status Liber*, Box 16, no. 97. One of the witnesses said that he was from Marseilles, but the surname would seem to indicate that he was from Spain.

58 AAM, *Status Liber*, Box 6, no. 7.

59 Fauve-Chamoux and Wall, 360.

60 Mercieca, 'Community life'.

61 S. Mercieca, 'Anatomies of Spanish Settlers in Malta between 1580 and 1648: their Family Stories', forthcoming.

## Conclusion

The Ecclesiastical Registers and Church tribunal documentation are eye-openers to the challenges that Spanish migrants and their families faced.<sup>62</sup> The need to procure a *Status Liber* shows the element of suspicion that always accompanied marriages to foreigners. For the Church, this judicial procedure provided the necessary proof that the spouse was not married elsewhere or, in case of a previous marriage, that the spouse was dead. For the contracting wife, it meant having concrete information about her future husband's social respectability from trusted sources.

Historical demography confirms that what today may be seen as a challenge arising from intermarriages was, in fact, faced by past generations as well. Even if, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, foreigners marrying in Malta appear to have been of the same religion, in terms of identity, they were already conscious that they were definitely different as the use of the word 'nation' clearly indicates. Demographic events always take place within a space of time. For these reasons, geographical differences are important but such differences go beyond the concepts of religion and get stuck in the concepts of identity. Like the rest of the migrants, the Spanish spoke different languages, each one reflecting his region or place of birth. But persons in the past, as those of today, had to make their own choices. They were not afraid to embrace diversity as they understood it. These Spanish migrants, like the rest of the migrants who came to Malta in the early modern period felt comfortable marrying a Maltese woman, and becoming part of the Maltese stock or 'nation'. On their part, Maltese women had no problem interacting with them.

---

62 Poussou, 263.

## Appendix 1 – Parish Acts

Groom's Name	Groom's Surname	Rank*	Country	Bride's Name	Bride's Surname	Age of Bride
Pietro	Oglado		Valenzia	Giulia	Morales	
Pietro	Plantez		Spain	Giovanella	Muir	
Antonio	Blau		Spain	Marietta	Ferrandis	
Ernardo	Daler		Spain	Maria	Russa	
Nicola	Di Messa		Spain	Maria	Grech	
Aloisio	Fernandes		Spain	Isabella	X	
Pietro	Ferrara		Spain	Rosa Anna	Rosso	19
Michael	Olivier		Spain	Clementina	Chircop	20
Giacino	Paglia		Spain	Marian		40
Aloisio	Pares		Spain	Paulica	Bugeni	29
Francesco	Pris		Spain	Maria	Moglet	
Giovanni	Romanes		Spain	Bartolomea	Gatt	
Francesco	Romero		Spain	Maddalena	Camilleri	15
Giovanni	De Santi		Spain	Isabella	Magro	
Domenico	De Silvestro		Spain	Maria	Micallef	
Tommaso Aloisio	de Sosa		Spain	Diana	de Laimo	
Antonio	Sporias		Spain	Caterina	x	
Michele	De Stefano	1	Spain	Imperia		
Michele	De Stefano	2	Spain	Caterinuzza	Caruana	
Gregorio	Randon		Malta	Grazia	Vondan	
Lorenzo	De Alonso		Majorca	Geronima	Cassia	
Pietro	Busa	2	Majorca	Caterina		
Antonio	Cola		Majorca	Agata	Russo	
Cristofero	Dalmao		Majorca	Lucrecia	Trincavella	

Country	Date of Marriage	Parish	Rank*	Offspring	Occupation	Other details
	24-06-1601	Valletta				
	25-09-1565	Rabat				
	06-10-1566	Birgu				
	07-01-1618	St Paul Valletta				
	02-06-1627	Birgu				
	22-10-1656	Birgu	2			
	01-12-1624	St Paul Valletta	1	5		
	18-10-1656	Bormla	1	1		
	16-01-1628	St Paul Valletta	2			
	05-07-1665	Bormla		1		
	19-06-1619	Birgu				
	10-08-1566	Gudja				
	16-01-1628	Porto Salvo	1			
	13-08-1589	Bormla				
	03-05-1638	Birgu	2			Had 4 offspring from first marriage
	02-05-1627	St Paul Valletta	1	1	Signore	
	16-05-1560	Birgu	2			
			1	1	Maestro	
	15-09-1541	Birgu	2		Maestro	
Spain	02-02-1625	St Paul Valletta	2		Signore	
	29-09-619	St Paul Valletta				
	28-05-1602	St Paul Valletta	2	6	Signore	
	11-08-1634	St Paul Valletta	1			
	30-8-1614	Bormla	1			

<b>Groom's Name</b>	<b>Groom's Surname</b>	<b>Rank*</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Bride's Name</b>	<b>Bride's Surname</b>	<b>Age of Bride</b>
Michele	Gherau		Majorca	Adriana	Cassar	
Giovanni	Martines		Cogliarda	Zilfe		
Pietro	Palmieri		Majorca	Francesca	Sciriha	
Giovanni	Pineda		Majorca	Agostina	Grech	
Pietro	Sala		Majorca	Valenzia	Marchical	
Raimondo	Sipaletto	1	Majorca	Giacobina	Pace	14
Giacobo	Tortelli	1	Majorca	Caterina	Azzopardi	18
Magiz	Olivia	1	Castilia	Laurentia	Cassar	19
Michele	Aiguas	1	Catalonia	Paolina	Anaicha	
Giovanni	Arrigo Calabrese		Catalonia	Agnesa	Sciriha	
Pietro	Balesteri		Catalonia	Giulia	Vella	
Stefano	Ferrara		Catalonia	Catarinella	Bonnici	12
Antonio	Giobet		Catalonia	Margarita	De Facio	
Giovanni	Longo Spagnolo		Catalonia	Agata	Falzon	
Michele	Pica Catalano	1	Catalonia	Aloisia	Failla	16

\*Rank stands for marriage frequency

Country	Date of Marriage	Parish	Rank*	Offspring	Occupation	Other details
	13-09-1665	Birgu	1			
	20-04-1560	Birgu	1			
	07-10-1657	Birgu				
	13-10-1658	Bormla				
	12-11-1656	Bormla		2		
	15-07-1655	Bormla	1	1		
	21-06-1664	Bormla	1	3		
	09-08-1635	St Paul Valletta	1	1		
San Riquas	17-01-1610	Bormla	1			She married twice afterwards.
	11-11-1576	Gudja	1	2		
	23-10-1605	Bormla	3			
	16-08-1658	Bormla	1			
	29-12-1616	Birgu	1			
Tarxien	02-02-1566	Gudja		8		
	30-07-1643	Bormla	1			

## Appendix 2 – Status Libero

Series	Name	Surname	Position	Date
Box 1, no. 7	Alonsio	Benedicto	Plaintiff	7 October 1593
	Hieronimus	Conca	Witness	
	Pietrus	Rodrigues	Witness	
Box 2, no. 76	Bernardus	Cadavaglia	Plaintiff	19 September 1602
	Sebastiano	Lopes	Witness	
	Petrus	Torrens	Witness	
Box 3, no 4.	Salvatore	Bodai	Plaintiff	28 March 1603
	Bernardus	Cadavaglia	Witness	
Box 3, no. 11	Salvatore	de Argilla	Plaintiff	18 November 1600
	Raimondo	de Veri	Witness	
	Petrus	Buschi	Witness	
Box 3, no. 23	Pietro	De Castro	Plaintiff	10 October 1603
	Agostino	Rodrigues	Witness	
Box 3, no. 62	Agostino	Rodrigues	Plaintiff	22 September 1603
	Aloisius	de Alsevedo	Witness	12 September 1603
	Lorenzo	Ferrar	Witness	
	Didacus	de Galbis	Witness	
Box 8, no. 31	Domenico	de Silvia	Plaintiff	27 May 1611
Box 9, no. 11	Giovanni	de Aumanda	Plaintiff	17 April 1612
	Bernardo	de Sa Abedra	Witness	
	Antonio	Froncolo	Witness	
Box 9, no. 13	Joseph	Deguavara	Plaintiff	8 June 1613
	Marcus	Samuno	Witness	8 th June 1613
Box 9, no. 46	Antonio	Durer de Olivares	Plaintiff	27 October 1612
	Gullielmus	de Canti de Zolen	Witness	
	Joannes	Bompare de Olivieres	Witness	
Box 10, no. 40	Antonio	Beasani	Plaintiff	22 June 1614
	Christophero	Dalmas	Witness	
	Antonio	Natale	Witness	



Country of Origin	Occupation	Residence	Age
Spagna	soldier		
Regno di Spania	<i>buonavoglia</i>		
	<i>buonavoglia</i>		
Catalano			24
Catalano			
Catalano			
Catalonia	<i>nauta</i> on the galley of the Grand Master		19
Catalonia			
Vieli in Catalonia	servant		
	knight		
	servant		
Majorca			28
		Bormla	
Biscay	soldier		34
Huercera	soldier		
	soldier		
	lieutenant		
Lisbona	<i>miles</i>		22
Castile (Villadiego)	servant		
	knight		
	servant		
St Sebastian	servant		25
	<i>maestro</i>		
	<i>nauta gallionis sacre Religionis</i>		22
	<i>nauta</i>		
	<i>nauta</i>		
Majorca	sailor		21
	sailor		
Cagliari			

<b>Series</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Surname</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Date</b>
Box 10, no. 75	Antonio	Rius	Plaintiff	1 September 1614
Box 10, no. 77	Francesco	Ferrer	Plaintiff	3 December 1614
Box 10, no. 79	Joannis	Font	Plaintiff	21 December 1619
Box 12, no. 28	Paolo Giovanni	De Allegretto	Plaintiff	2 November 1619
Box 13, no. 27	Vincenzi	De Stefano	Plaintiff	13 March 1620
	Laurenzio	Alonso	Witness	
Box 14, no. 1	Vinceno	Allegro	Plaintiff	19 December 1620
	Petrus Antonio	Molle	Witness	
Box 15, no. 88	Baldino	Simiano	Plaintiff	12 November 1622
	Francesco	Ferrer	Witness	
Box 16, no. 26	Pietro Giovanni	de Garagona	Plaintiff	30 June 1624
Box 17, no. 54	Francesco	Romero	Plaintiff	7 January 1628
	Jacobus	Paglia	Witness	
	Gregorius	Roldans	Witness	
	Joannes	Perali	Witness	
Box 18, no. 21	Antonio	de Blandes	Plaintiff	23 December 1623
	Valentius	Closa	Witness	
	Sebastiano	Baldagno	Witness	
Box 18, no. 26	Francesco	Viges	Plaintiff	3 April 1623
	Francesco	Ferrer	Witness	
Box 18, no. 27	Pietro	Ferrara	Plaintiff	28 January 1622
	Marcus	Hieres	Witness	
	Francesco	Solseda	Witness	
	Oblandus	Solari	Witness	
Box 18, no. 49	Francesco	Ferrandi	Plaintiff	26 June 1623
	Michael		Witness	
	Francesco	Viges	Witness	
Box 18, no. 69	Paolo	Pasiglione	Plaintiff	20 April 1623
	Francesco	Viges	Witness	
Box 20, no. 75	Bernardo	Ferrer	Plaintiff	4 July 1630

Country of Origin	Occupation	Residence	Age
Barcelona	<i>buonavoglia</i> on a Hospitaller galley		
Barcelona			26
Barcelona			20
Aragon	sailor		27
Valencia	<i>barbiere</i>		23
Maiorca		Valletta	
Maiorca			
Maiorca			
Catalonia	sailor		22
Catalonia		Senglea	
Barcelona			
Ispanae	soldier		24
Portughese	servant		
Portugal	soldier	Valletta	
Valenzia	servant		
Majorca			20
Barcelona		Bormla	
	sailor	Vittoriosa	
Majorca	sailor		22
Barcelona		Senglea	
Portugal			19
Ispanus			
Ispanus			
Ispanus		Valletta	
Lisbona			25
Barcelona			
Maiorca	sailor	Senglea	
Barcelona	sailor		22
Maiorca	sailor	Senglea	
Villanova	servant		19

<b>Series</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Surname</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Date</b>
	Don Francesco	Sabatrier	Witness	
	Don Filippo	Galceron de Banios	Witness	
Box 22, no. 47	Francesco	Fernandes	Plaintiff	
Box 23, no. 73	Francesco	Pedarsi	Plaintiff	8 November 1633
	Laurentius	Ruis de Herrera	Witness	
	Aloisio	Seron et Gusman	Witness	
	Gabriele	Peres de Varis	Witness	
Box 24, no. 123	Antonio	Cole	Plaintiff	8 October 1633
	Carlos	de Torres	Witness	
Box 25, no. 21	Antonio	Cardona	Paintiff	3 July 1635
	Salvatore	Avayano	Witness	
	Michaele	Massott	Witness	
Box 30, no. 43	Didacus	Duran	Plaintiff	8 August 1640
	Don Pietro	de Anaiia	Witness	
	Don Alvaro	Altimiano y sottomaioir	Witness	
Box 32, no. 128	Leonardo	De Cordova	Plaintiff	1 March 1642
	Francesco	De Leone	Witness	
Box 33, no. 27	Francesco	Ernandes de Gusman	Plaintiff	22 April 1633

Country of Origin	Occupation	Residence	Age
	knight		
Solterra	servant		23
	knight		
	knight		
	knight		
Majorca	sailor		20
Majorca			
Majorca			20
Majorca			21
			29
Seviglia	servant		27
	priest		
	knight		
Saragosa			25
Saragosa			
Granada	soldier		23