

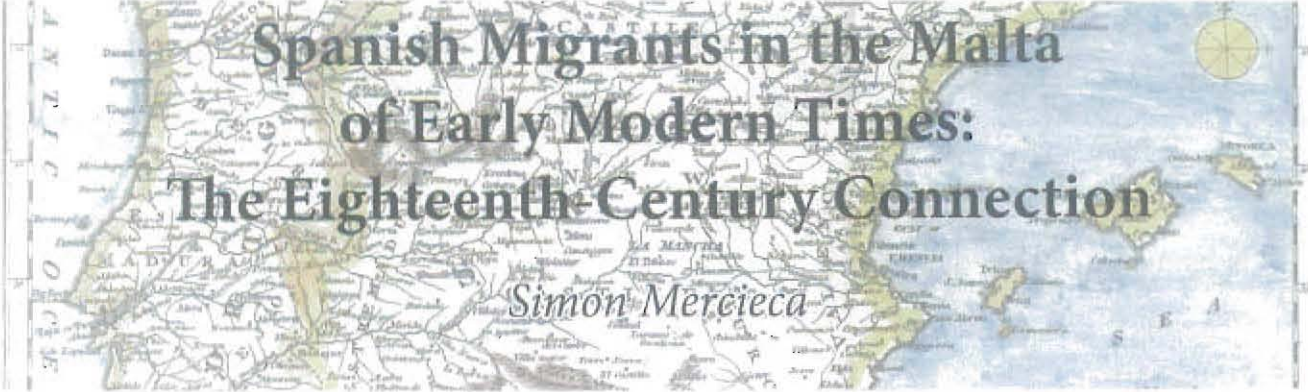
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Spanish Migrants in the Malta of Early Modern Times: The Eighteenth-Century Connection

Simon Mercieca

Diversity, Connectivity and Innovation

The following analysis is primarily a study of the relationships between Spain and Malta in a period when the Mediterranean Sea had exited, to use Ferdinand Braudel's words, the 'Grande Histoire'. According to Braudel the two events that most firmly connect the Mediterranean to the passage of modern world history are the Battle of Lepanto (1571) and the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon in 1798. The intermediate period is relatively lacking in major events, as the momentum shifted to developments across the Atlantic and towards Central and Eastern Europe as well as the Orient. Incidentally, these two dates, i.e. 1571 and 1798, are critical years in the history of Malta.

Malta was one of the players in the Battle of Lepanto. Three Hospitaller galleys, manned by Maltese and other European sailors, fought at Lepanto, contributing in the eyes of the Hospitaller historian, Bartolomeo Dal Pozzo, '*col loro valore*', to the decisive Christian victory.¹ More than two centuries later, Malta was again thrust in the role of protagonist in the re-entrance of the Mediterranean in the '*Grande Histoire*', as Napoleon, on his way to Egypt, conquered the Island and expelled the Knights of Saint John. This is the historical framework to the focus of this study, which involves the history of common people pressed into navigating the Mediterranean: the unsung protagonists in both the ebb and flow of the Mediterranean's participation in broader historical sweeps. Yet most accounts of the Battle of Lepanto and of Napoleon's invasion of

Egypt omit any reference to the contribution and experiences of those seafarers whose life remains unchronicled. It is those seafarers who will concern us: particularly the many who sailed the maritime routes of the Mediterranean and whose point of departure was one of the harbour towns of Spain and whose fortunes or eventual destination bound them to Malta. A number of issues relating to chronological and various thematic aspects relating to that link will be studied further on.

It could be said that the words *diversity*, *connectivity* and *innovation* capture in a nutshell the experiences of the Spanish migrants identified above. These terms, in the historical context studied in this paper, can be said to be tinged also by their association with the rigid norms of the Catholic faith. In those days, and contrary to present-day perceptions, ethnic diversity was accepted provided that foreigners, settling in Malta or joining the Hospitaller workforce, professed the Roman Catholic faith. Thus a monolithic situation in matters religious covered up diversities and pluralisms related to issues like race, income, or class. Connectivity, which is used here to capture the sense of mobility but also to designate the availability of and links to friendly ports and destinations, was also governed by Christian politics - though arguably less determinedly than one might think. Christian and Hospitaller vessels visited friendly harbours in the Mediterranean; the preferred ports of call were in Spain, France, and Italy. However, Christian knights were also expected to practise and encourage corsairing, especially in the central Mediterranean area. From the eighteenth



century onwards, this sphere of activity focused on the central and western Mediterranean. The Levant slowly receded from the sphere of military influence of the Hospitaller Order. Maltese sailors had therefore to adapt themselves to this new situation. Maltese and foreign sailors attached to the Order were allowed to join other Christian forces, particularly the French navy, and visit Muslim and Ottoman countries on trade missions. The Knights themselves started to seek better relations with North African rulers and in more than one instance during their rule in Malta they indulged in some extraordinary diplomatic feats, trying to aid or rescue certain Muslim rulers or supporting certain sectarian and ethnic interests against others in the same area and regencies.³ The Knights also tolerated private travel to Muslim and Ottoman states and regions, as long as the latter used vessels or entered harbours which were considered neutral. In the background of this Christian and Muslim conflict, travelling in North Africa or the Levant was not a hindrance to being engaged by the Hospitaller navy and eventually settling in Malta.

Finally, the theme of innovation should be seen in the context of foreign settlers in Malta and the periodical changes to the Hospitaller squadron's commitments. As will be explained, the presence of foreign mariners in eighteenth-century Malta is connected to the Hospitaller presence on the island and the ongoing changes to the make-up and manning of the Order's fleet.

An explanation on the methodology and sources behind this study is in order. The primary source for this study is an ecclesiastical document known under different Latin names, *Dictum* and *Status Liberi*, or by the Italian term, *Stati Liberi*. This document recorded petitions from foreigners who wished to marry locally, of widows or widowers who had lost their partner abroad and wanted to

remarry, as well as petitions from Maltese who had been absent from Malta and who, on returning back, wished to marry. All had to undergo court proceedings, appear before an ecclesiastical judge, usually the Vicar-General of the Island, and after being examined, the judge would grant or withhold permission for the marriage to proceed.

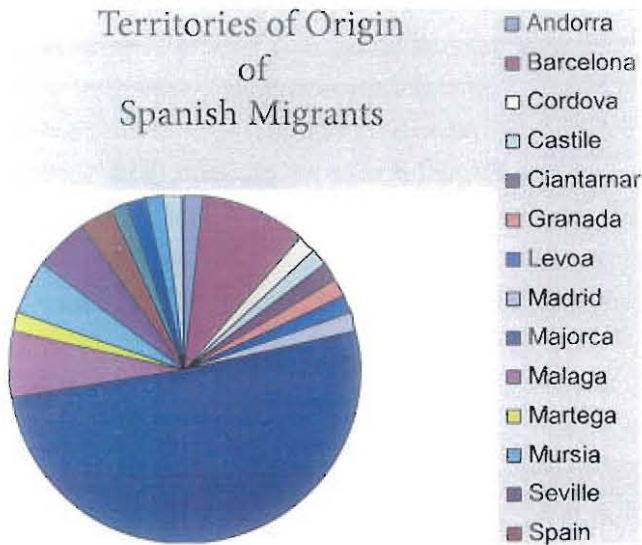
The period covered by the *Status Liberi* chosen for this particular study is the eighteenth century. The court documents are archived in bundles according to year. The research consisted in going through each and every bundle for the eighteenth century, preserved in the ecclesiastical archives of the Cathedral Museum. Each document found concerning individuals hailing from Spain was examined separately. It must be said that the Cathedral Museum and the Archives of Mdina are not the sole ecclesiastical archives that house this type of documents. The archives of the Church's Curia at Floriana also conserve the *Status Liberi* documentation, but the period covered by the Curia documents are predominately the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the nineteenth century and later. Eighteenth-century documentation is mostly preserved at the Mdina archives, which is what determined the choice of archival sources for this study.

In terms of statistics, this study of Spanish settlers in Malta is based on 60 cases. To these one must add also a number of witnesses, amongst whom many were Spaniards, who were called to give evidence in support of the petitioner's claim for "free status," that is, that the person concerned could be deemed free to marry. The period covered by these documents ranges from 1688 to 1797.

During this period, the Curia judges had to give a verdict on at least thirty Majorcans, (the majority from Palma di Majorca), six from Barcelona, four from Malaga, three from Seville, two from Murcia,

two from Saragosa, another two from Valencia. One of the petitioners described himself only as Spaniard. There was also one case from each of the following: Tarragona in Catalonia, Valenzia, Varsa Mayol, Martega, Andora Canura-Cardova, Castile–Raimel, Ciantarnar, Granada, Levoa, and Madrid.

Territories of Origin
of
Spanish Migrants



The Court Procedures

Usually the case was heard on that same day in which the written plea was submitted to the Curia. On his part, the ecclesiastical judge would demand to hear at least two or three witnesses before reaching a verdict. If there were more than two or three witnesses, the next hearings would be held over the following two or three days, after which the decision, or “licence” was given. It was only in difficult or unclear cases that the hearings dragged on for weeks if not months, as the court would ask for more witnesses.

Cases were heard all year round, including summer and even on New Year’s Eve or during Advent. It goes without saying that the Church followed its ecclesiastical calendar, that is the Christian calendar and the only days in which

cases were not heard were major feast days, such as Christmas Day, the Feast of the Annunciation, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, the Ascension, the Assumption and Sundays.

The local Church also corresponded with the *Suprema Congregazione del Santo Officio* of Rome concerning difficult cases, in order to have a ruling or clearance. This was rather rare but certainly not unknown, as certain acts refer to correspondence with Rome regarding particular pleas made for the recognition of *Status Liberi*.³

Not only those foreigners or Maltese who had been betrothed and therefore needed such a document in order to proceed with the wedding sought the *Status Liberi*. In some cases, once a foreigner arrived in Malta, or a Maltese returned back home, he too sought immediately to have his free status recognised by the Church despite the fact that he had not been betrothed nor intended to marry immediately. One finds a few such cases of Spanish plaintiffs in the records. For example, Francesco Giuseppe Rubino, who arrived in Malta on 23 January 1686, declared before the Bishop’s Court that he had only arrived in Malta the previous day but had immediately gone to the Curia to have his single status recognised by the local Church.⁴ Others waited some months before asking for this type of documentation. Sebastiano Rocha from Majorca, for instance, had been in Malta for about five months before submitting his petition to the ecclesiastical Curia.⁵

These documents generally start by giving us information about the petitioner himself, often consisting of a short summary of the plaintiff’s family background and travels before his arrival in Malta. This part is usually written in Italian. A Latin section typically follows, and also includes biographical abstracts of the plaintiff’s life. The next section of the file concerns the gathering of



information by the ecclesiastical judge. By the first half of the eighteenth century, this consisted of two parts. First there was the list of questions - usually four - which were asked in Latin to the petitioner. The answers were recorded in Italian. The questions were about family background, his travels, a direct question relating to whether he was single or, in the case of those married, if they were widows or widowers. Finally, they were asked to expand on their single status claim; the attestations of the witnesses followed thereafter. This part of the proceedings passed through various, sometimes drastic changes. On closer analysis one observes that there had been changes in the way the church authorities undertook proceedings in relation to the petitioner. In seventeenth-century documents the plaintiff was rarely asked to take the witness stand, and if he ever did, this was not recorded in the Acts. It was only in the eighteenth century that the petitioner began to be asked by the Church authorities to take the witness stand, giving personal details and answering questions about his life and his whereabouts.

From information gathered regarding Spanish settlers in Malta, one finds that their average age when requesting the *Status Libero* was 23 years. This figure tallies with the average marital age of Maltese males, which in the towns of Senglea⁶ and Bormla,⁷ for instance, was 25. In historical demography, it is an accepted fact that migrants tended to marry at a later age than the locals, primarily because they had greater difficulty in gaining acceptance and intermixing in an 'alien' society.⁸ In Malta, this did not prove to be the case with Spanish migrants, as they are to be found marrying within the same age bracket as the locals. According to this result, the Spanish migrants were getting married at a slightly lower age than the general average age recorded for the foreign migrants in Malta. In general, the foreign plaintiffs had an average age of 25.96 years when they took their marriage vows.⁹

Once the Church authorities granted the licence, or, as written in the documents, the immigrant qualified *per la licenza*,¹⁰ the next step, in the case of a forthcoming marriage, was for the parish priest to publish the marriage banns. The banns were issued in the parish of the bride, but for those petitioners who had settled in Malta the banns had also to be published in the parish of the groom. In the eventuality of the groom having already been betrothed in his country of origin, with the banns already published but the marriage not contracted, these documents could be presented in support of his plea to marry in Malta. Such cases could only arise from a situation where the groom had annulled his betrothal and was still in possession of the documents as proof of his single status. This was the case of Raphaelis Ferrer from the town of Palma in Majorca. The court documents contain direct reference to the publication of the banns in Palma di Majorca in connection with his annulled wedding. The banns had been published both in his parish of S. Nicola, as well as in that of his former bride, at the parish *Della Victoria*. A copy of these banns was attached to Ferrer's file.¹¹

At this point, one also needs to clarify that in those cases where a betrothal had been contracted, the groom or bride could not automatically proceed to marry a different spouse, unless they had first obtained in writing the annulment of the engagement. In the eighteenth century, betrothals, like marriage, could not be annulled without the prior approval of the Church and the consent of one of the parties concerned.¹² In some cases, the plaintiffs would have entered into pre-marriage arrangements either while staying in Malta or else while back at home. Thirty-three year-old Sebastiano Rocha, from Majorca, gave his promise of marriage, also known as *sponsalia*, to his girlfriend Caterina from Senglea, in 1744. However, after entering into a *sponsalia* agreement, he had to leave the island for the Levant. On his

return to Malta in 1744, he opened a *Status Liberi* proceeding so that he could honour his promise and marry Caterina.¹³

The story of Emanuele Sanchez from Malaga is different. In 1727 he entered into a marriage agreement with Caterina, daughter of the late Didaco Brignone. However, Sanchez annulled his promise of marriage, an annulment that was also corroborated by the parish priest of the Maltese town of Bormla. The parish priest, Gio Batta Crispo, was called as witness in the *Status Libero* trial of Sanchez where, he stated that the bride freed Sanchez '*dall'obbligo che ha di sponsalia e lo mando libero*'.¹⁴

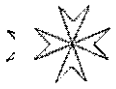
As in most cases, the petitioners were young when they left home, possibly in their late teens. Their testimony regarding the decision and timing of their first departures from home can be revealing about recurrent patterns. In fact, the average age at which these Spanish men left home was between seventeen and eighteen years of age.

In most cases, the Spaniards married locals, but some sought to take a bride from within the Spanish community. Sebastiano Rocha had entered into formal agreement with Jacobus Ferranti, a fellow native from Majorca, who was married and living in Malta, to marry his daughter, Caterina. This marriage agreement had been contracted about four and half years previously, that is 1737, when the said Sebastiano came to Malta for the first time. After promising to marry Caterina, Sebastiano immediately left for the Levant and returned to Malta in 1742. On the other hand Caterina's father, who was a sailor on a Hospitaller ship, visited Majorca in September 1742 and seized the opportunity to visit Sebastiano Rocha's mother, Antonia Anna. He dined at her house and told her of her son Sebastiano's betrothal to his daughter.¹⁵

The depositions of petitioners also carry information regarding their parents. The next step was to study the relationship between the survival of the parents, *i.e.* alive or deceased, and their children's decision to get married in Malta. The survival or otherwise of at least one parent seems to have had some influence on the migrants' timing of their departure. In most cases, the survival or otherwise of one of the parents influenced their decision whether to settle permanently in Malta or not. Unlike grooms hailing from Sardinia, where the majority of settlers – as emerges from a similar study undertaken on Maltese *Status Liberi* documentation – had already lost their mother at the time of their departure from home, the majority of Spaniards who settled in Malta had their mother still living at the moment of migration. On the other hand, in the case of the Spaniards, the majority declared that their father had passed away at precisely the moment they were seeking to marry in Malta.

Sometimes the consent of the mother was also sought prior to marriage. Could there be a relationship between the fact that the mother was still alive and the marriage practices in Spain, in particular those of the island of Majorca? Was the advice of the mother being sought in lieu of the father's blessing?

For example, when Ferdinando Giacomo returned for a short visit to Palma, he went to his mother's house to seek her permission to marry in Malta. This was corroborated by the testimony of witnesses. Michele Solivares declared, in court, that he had once been in Palma with Fernando Giacomo, who proceeded to his mother's home, where in his presence, the mother told Giacomo that '*poteva liberamente maritarsi in dett' Isola di Malta e non potendo per disgrazia maritarsi in quest'isola poteva condusse la di lui moglie in detta isola di Maiorca*'.¹⁶



Another witness, also a native of Palma in Majorca, Bartolomeo Pons, added that Giacomo's mother also told her son that in case he could not '*mantenere in dett'Isola di Malta con sua moglie, poteva condesse in Maiorca per mantenersi*'.¹⁷ Sebastiano Rocha's mother too was happy about her son's decision to marry in Malta, and gave him a small dowry consisting of '*un paro di lenzuoli di tela bianca*'.¹⁸

Yet, not all mothers were happy with their sons' decision to settle away from home. This was the case with Giovanni Franchis from Barcelona. His decision to take up residence in Malta, in 1734, did not have his mother's blessing. He requested his friend Gabriele D'Andrea from Majorca but residing in Valletta to ask whether his (Franchis') relatives could, should he happen to meet them, obtain his baptismal certificate. On one of his voyages, D'Andrea happened to be in Genoa where he met Giovanni Franchis' cousins. He asked them, should they happen to visit Barcelona, to have the courtesy to ask Franchis' mother to obtain his certificate of baptism. Upon returning to Genoa, they, the cousins, had the opportunity to meet Gabriele D'Andrea again and informed D'Andrea that Giovanni's mother had no intention of sending the requested documents.¹⁹ According to Michele Casanova, another witness also from Majorca, the mother's stand resulted from the fact that she was hurt by her son's failure to visit her during the past seven years.²⁰

The Witnesses

Summoning witnesses was the responsibility of the petitioner. He was responsible of identifying them and ensuring their presence on the day of the hearing. As already indicated above, the duration of Church proceedings varied according to the number of witnesses. Normally, the witnesses were subjected to a number of questions, but

prior to their summons, they had to hand in their personal details to the court clerk, giving their name, surname, status, age, country of origin and profession. Afterwards, they had to answer five questions before the ecclesiastical judge. The first one concerned personal data, which in this case was a repetition of what they had stated in the deposition regarding their name as witnesses but adding, in the case of foreigners, the place of residence in Malta as well as their profession here.

They were then asked if they had been promised money or bribed in any way; the reply was invariably negative. The next question regarded the name or names of persons who had asked him or her to take the witness stand. In the majority of cases, they answered that they had been requested by the petitioner himself to attend court. There was also the question concerning the background to their acquaintance with the plaintiff. This is an intriguing part of the records with detail about shared life and work circumstances. The last question concerned the single status of the plaintiff. The witness was asked to confirm under oath whether or not the plaintiff was single at that moment in time. In some cases, an additional question was put in cases where the plaintiff brought letters from the Curia of his home diocese. This document would confirm that the plaintiff had never been married back home.

The ecclesiastical judge checked that the ecclesiastical papers were properly signed, that the name of the bishop mentioned on the document was genuine and correct, and finally that the seals reproduced on the paper as well as the coat-of-arms on the letterhead were those of the bishop of the plaintiff's hometown. Witnesses were asked to identify the seals and confirm that everything was being done correctly. Sometimes, this question replaced the one whereby the witness

was asked to describe his or her acquaintance with the plaintiff, in particular in those cases where the witness had been summoned only to authenticate the bishop's details and coat-of-arms. Finally, the witness was asked to sign his deposition. Thus, in 1698, Michele Ermedrich from the city of Palma in Majorca summoned to court a priest who was in the service of the knight Pietro Onofrio Fiol, to authenticate the seals of the ecclesiastical letters that the petitioner had brought from Spain.²¹

This was the standard procedure adopted practically in all court sittings conducted by the local ecclesiastical courts throughout most of the eighteenth century. However, there were exceptions. The first exception concerned the Knights of Saint John. In cases where the petitioner asked for a Knight of St John to take the witness stand, especially where the petitioner was in service, a form of abridged trial was held. Furthermore, in such cases there was no need to summon other witnesses. Instead, the petitioner was asked to submit the Knight's declaration in writing or else the Knight was asked to appear in court to make a short statement in which he asserted that he knew that the plaintiff was single. In some cases, the Knights were also asked to verify the authenticity of foreign Episcopal seals. At the end of their deposition, the court asked the Knights to sign the deposition. It is interesting to note that once a Knight gave evidence, the court proceeding was immediately concluded and a verdict given in accordance with what had been declared by the Knight.²²

Witnesses also had the right to reappear in court, in particular if they thought they had omitted an important point in their first deposition and wished to add fresh information relevant to the plea.²³ This was the case, for example, with Giacomo Fernando from Palma. The witness Michele Suliveres of the city of Palma appeared twice in court. He asked to

reappear to give fresh information regarding the *Status Libero* case of Fernando that the witness Suliveres had forgotten to give on the previous day regarding the approval of Fernando's family in regard to their son marrying in Malta.²⁴

By the late eighteenth century, court procedures underwent a major change aimed at easing the process by decreasing both the number of witnesses as well as the delay before passing judgement. All witnesses summoned began to be asked just one question in relation to the circumstances of their acquaintance with the plaintiff, after which they would sign their deposition. In cases where the plaintiff had letters of attestation from his native parish confirming that he was single, the *Status Libero* was given without even calling witnesses.²⁵

In the majority of cases, petitioners got to know Maltese individuals during one of their voyages in the Mediterranean or whilst a Maltese Hospitaller's *vascello* or galley was in harbour. From the *Status Liberi* one can ascertain that the majority of Spanish settlers got to know about Malta when they joined the crew of one of the Hospitaller vessels. It was at this stage that they made new friends whom they would ask to act as witness in their *Status Libero* case. In fact, a number of witnesses testified that they came to know the plaintiff upon joining the ship on which they were both serving, or else when the vessel on which the witness was working entered harbour in Spain. In the latter instance, the witnesses usually stated that whilst the ship was in harbour, they met with members of the crew while on shore leave in an inn or *osteria*. In some cases, the witnesses also had the opportunity to go and stay for some days at the house of the petitioner's family. The expression used was that they had been living together as '*cammerati*', and had wine and dined together. For example, Alosio Casella from Genoa stated



he had been in Barcelona as a sailor on a Genoese merchant ship. In Barcelona, he met Paolo Arnò and had lodged in his house for six months, to the extent of becoming *buoni cammerati*.²⁶

Other witnesses, in particular those coming from the city of Palma, declared that they had known the plaintiff since childhood. Some added that they even used to play together while others affirmed that they had been neighbours.²⁷

Once in Malta, some of the Spaniards took up residence here. The matriarchal structure influenced their decision where to stay. From the evidence given, it transpires that some of the Spanish witnesses, who had been married in Malta, had taken up residence in the hometown of the bride.²⁸

The same trend appears through the study of the Marriage Acts. In fact, independent studies on the parish registers show that migrants, including members of the Spanish community, had a tendency to settle down in the same parish of the bride, in particular in those cases where the bride hailed from one of the harbour cities. The fact that they had taken up residence in Malta meant that they risked being asked by a friend to appear again in the *Status Liberi Processi* as witness, in particular when a colleague or Spanish friend had already followed in their footsteps and married here. Sometimes, it is even the witnesses themselves who indicate where they had taken up residence in Malta.

In most cases, witnesses called to testify were mostly seamen whom the petitioners had met on one of their voyages. From the Acts it clearly transpires that migrants preferred to have fellow countrymen as witnesses and, whenever possible, individuals who actually hailed from their same town or village. In terms of statistics,

therefore, the largest number of witnesses was of Spanish origin; followed by French, Italians and the locals.

In all, 60 plaintiffs called 157 witnesses to take the stand. Not all the witnesses declared their provenance, but the majority did. In fact, 138 clearly stated their place of birth and, of these, 65 came from Spain. The rest came from different areas in the Mediterranean, including Malta. The Spanish witnesses were mostly from Palma de Majorca or from nearby towns and villages (totalling 34 or 52.3% of all the Spanish witnesses). This is to be expected when one considers that most of the Spanish grooms hailed from this island. The rest came from Salamanca (1), Barcelona (3), Seville (3), Aragon (3), Cartagena (2), Catalonia (2), Cordoba (2), Granada (4), Malaga (1), Martega (1), Castille (1), Galizia (1), Valenzia (1), with another seven witnesses simply qualifying themselves as Spaniards.

Of the remaining witnesses who declared their provenance, 27 were from the Maltese islands, 59 from the Italian peninsula, 1 from Portugal (Lisbon), 3 from North Africa (2 from Algiers and one from Tunis), 3 from the Greek islands of the Levant, whilst the rest (9) were French, mostly from the southern coast.

However, some petitioners also brought as witnesses foreigners whom they had befriended in Malta, in particular in the city of Valletta. Such witnesses would have typically been considered to be reliable sources of information on the grounds of their profession or business activity, e.g. in their capacity as shop owners. Indeed, one of the witnesses explains that having a shop meant that people came to your premises and whilst waiting to be served or in the case of an inn, whilst enjoying themselves, talked or gossiped about anything including members of the foreign

and local community. Therefore, in the list of witnesses one comes across an individual who worked in a *mulino a vento*,²⁹ another who owned a *bottega* in Valletta and affirmed that the plaintiff used to come to his tailor's shop 'in occasione di tagliare i suoi abiti'.³⁰

The Routes of the Spanish Settlers

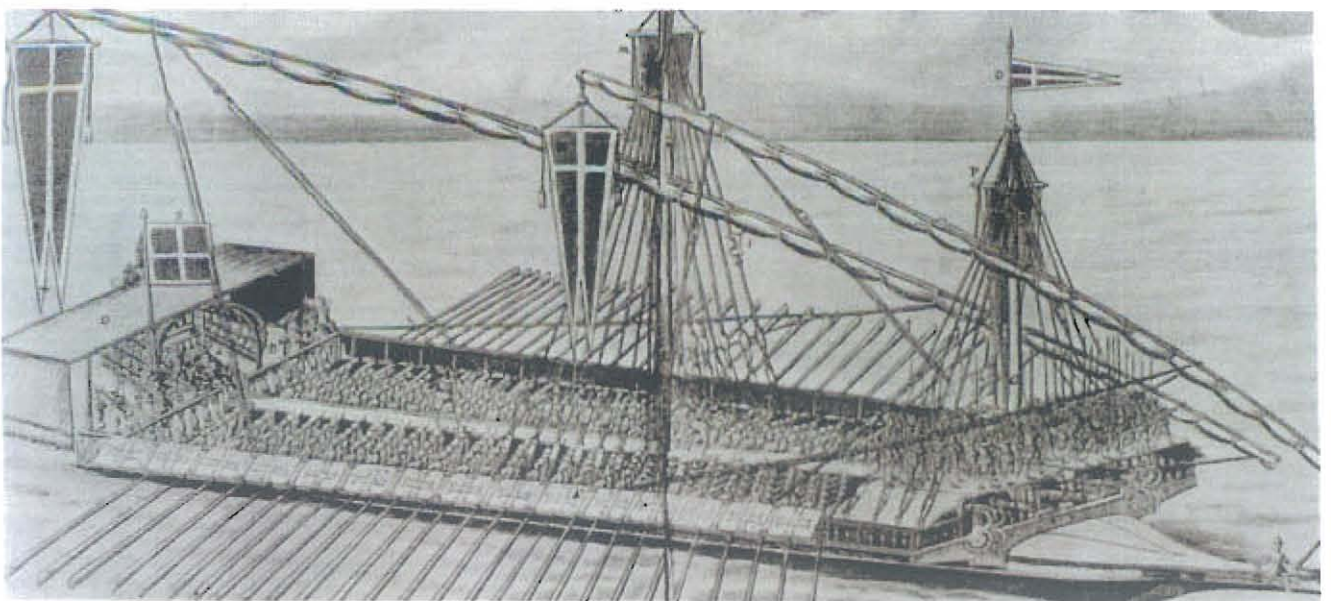
As already indicated in this paper, the Spanish settlers' itinerary can be separated into two groups, those who came directly to Malta and those who had visited and resided for a time in a number of other countries before settling on the Island. However, this schematic division is very rudimentary, in particular in regard to those who came directly to the island. A statistical look at the cases under analysis reveals that 53.6 per cent came indirectly to Malta; the rest came to Malta directly from a Spanish port. Those who came indirectly to Malta usually came via France, Italy, or Sicily, whilst a few were engaged in the Levant before settling on the Island.

Many of the Spaniards, in particular those living in the city of Palma on the island of Majorca are found to have come directly to Malta. While Hospitaller vessels were in harbour

at Palma di Majorca, young Majorcans asked to join the Hospitaller navy, usually as sailors, with the result that their new employers brought them straight to Malta.

Another category of individuals identified as having come to Malta directly from Spain consisted of people living in villages in the interior of Palma di Majorca or in towns or villages in the hinterland of the Spanish peninsula. The last itinerary was the traditional one identified with the movement of most migrants. According to Jean Pierre Pousseau, migrants moved first from the villages to the towns in the hinterland before settling in the harbour towns,³¹ from where they caught a boat which either brought them directly to Malta or took them on numerous travels around the Mediterranean coast before settling down in Malta.

The Knights' introduction of ships-of-the-line in 1701 facilitated contacts between both islands. The *vascelli* began to stop over at this island, with the result that they became an attraction for prospective Majorcans who wanted to become sailors. For many Majorcans, joining the squadron of the *vascelli* was an opportunity to revisit their hometown each time the squadron returned there.³²





Others left Majorca on smaller vessels, proving that smaller Maltese vessels at the service of merchants also visited this place. The Majorcans Cosma Gaia³³ and Michele Solivelas³⁴ declared they had come to Malta on a *pinchiotta*, which was a type of ship used for the transportation of merchandise. Others joined corsairing ships, such as the *tartana*. Gio Maria Serra declared that he had left the town of Forte, in Majorca, in 1703 on a *tartana* Majorcina.³⁵ In 1705, Giacomo Amaros from the city of Alvidia in Majorca came directly to Malta on a Hospitaller's *pincio*.³⁶ Others left the Spanish Peninsula on a French *pinciotta*³⁷ or an English merchant *pincio*,³⁸ whilst Paolo Arnò came to Malta from Sicily on a *checcia*.³⁹

Thus individuals living in the interior, such as in city of Mursia, are usually found first travelling to the capital city of Mursia (if they hailed from the nearby villages) and then proceeding to the harbour city of Cartagena from where they joined a Hospitaller vessel or a merchant ship that eventually brought them to Malta.

The fact that the important harbour city of Cartagena, which faces the eastern Mediterranean, is in this region explains why the highest number of Spanish settlers from the mainland came through this harbour. Cartagena was enticing to a number of male individuals, who often travelled on foot to this harbour town, from where they would join one of the ships that approached the harbour or else took a boat which was northbound to the larger harbour town of Barcelona, where they found employment as sailors on Spanish warships or French mercantile vessels. A few joined one of the Hospitaller ships-of-the-line, when the latter squadron happened to be in harbour. In 1743, for example, Francesco Di Matteo, when still at the tender age of ten, left his hometown of Mursia for Cartagena. Francesco's parents used their family connections in Cartagena to arrange for the transfer

of their son's residence. This voyage reveals the time this boy took to arrive in Cartagena from Mursia – one whole day. At Cartagena, he went over to his maternal uncle's home who took over the responsibility of his upkeep, until a friend of the family found him a job on a galley which was sailing to Barcelona.⁴⁰ Spaniards hailing from the city of Seville or the hinterland of this province made a different voyage as they usually travelled overland to the harbour city of Cadiz,⁴¹ and eventually sailed to Barcelona.

Yet the voyage was not always a direct one, and once they found employment as sailors in one of the Spanish harbours, the future Spanish immigrants made a number of voyages along the Mediterranean coast before settling permanently in Malta. They again can be divided into two principal categories; those who had been travelling in the western side of the Mediterranean, primarily engaged in commerce between Spain, Southern France, Genoa and Sicily, and the rest who went corsairing in the Levant. There were a handful of cases that ended up with very particular life histories, especially those who fell into slavery or participated in important battles and sieges. These will be analysed later in this paper.

These different travelling destinies were further conditioned, at least on the basis of the testimony given, by the type of ships chosen on leaving the Spanish peninsula. If the expeditions focused on the western side of the Mediterranean, they mostly focused on mercantile travel, involving the harbours of Cartagena, Barcelona, Toulon, Marseilles and Genoa. In this case, the ships would be small or medium-sized.

In cases where the petitioner was engaged in corsairing expeditions, usually on a Maltese galley or ship-of-the-line, the Central Mediterranean and

raids on North African coast would have been the most likely location. However, travelling to the east could also be undertaken for commercial purposes, especially if the plaintiffs had joined a French *vascello*, *pollacca*, *tartana* or *pincio*. Due to the peaceful relationships established during the reign of Louis XIV with the Ottoman Empire, French merchant shipping sailed unhindered, even if precautionary measures were taken by sailing in convoy. In the words of Bartolomé Bennassar, since in Malta there existed at the time a strong presence of French knights, the Island became, after 1680, '*le principal relais au commerce français avec le Levant*'.⁴² This situation led to a number of plaintiffs (including Spaniards) visiting countries such as Smyrna in mainland Turkey, Alexandria in Egypt and some had even settled down in Cyprus, which fell under Turkish rule in 1571.

At least in one case, the witness, Joannes Navarra from Marseilles, informed the court that before he and the plaintiff Emanuele D'Agostino from Barcelona settled in Malta, they had undertaken a number of voyages, mostly on the western side of the Mediterranean. However, they had travelled beyond the Mediterranean and had even visited the Indies together.⁴³

These *Status Liberi* Acts also give information about working practices both on Maltese galleys and ships-of-the-line, as well as other foreign ships. Working conditions varied amongst sailors working on state-financed warships and those working for private individuals. The latter could be engaged in both corsairing as well as in commercial shipping. State ships, irrespective of whether they were owned by the Order of Saint John or the Spanish Catholic King, had a very rigid contract. These ships were purely and simply floating war machines in the defence of their respective Christian States. Once, an individual

enrolled in military service with any of these two institutions, it was rather difficult for a soldier or a sailor to voluntarily quit. They could leave after making an official request, which was not always acceded to, or else when their regiment or sailing crew was disbanded.

There were a number of individuals who were conscripted into the Spanish army when a detachment happened to be in their hometown or village. Usually, when the army was on the move and stopped for a day or two to rest, a conscription centre was set up, and young individuals were encouraged to enrol. Once their name was registered they had to follow the regiment on all its missions throughout Spain and abroad.

According to some of these soldiers, they could also be sent to serve as soldiers on Spanish warships and to perform guard duties abroad, in particular in Sicily. It was not unknown, while the regiment was stationed in Sicily, that some took the opportunity to desert, by escaping to another Italian island or by joining one of the ships of the Order of Saint John, in particular in the harbours of Augusta, Palermo or Messina. Once on board the Hospitaller ship, the escapee was not liable to prosecution or arrest by the captain of his former vessel. He could come to Malta and find employment either as a member of the Grand Master's private guard or else by continuing to work as soldiers on one of the ships-of-the-line of the Hospitaller Order. However, once employed with the Order, release from service was difficult. They had either to escape, or obtain permission to leave their ship to join another vessel. On some occasions, the Hospitaller institution itself released its crew, as happened with Antonio Piero and his crew mate Agostino Lauda, who told the Ecclesiastical Court, in 1680, about '*la disciolta della conserva*' and also about '*la disciolta della compagnia*',⁴⁴ which gave them the opportunity to leave their Hospitaller galley to join another ship or else to go corsairing.



The working conditions on ships owned by private individuals were different. Here both the ships armed for corsairing as well those focusing on the transportation of goods were conditioned by the same type of contractual obligations. A crew member was free to leave the vessel once it reached harbour. The fact that the privately owned ships were usually manned by a few sailors allowed for more freedom to leave. On their part, ship captains were confident that they would find hands ready to join them in practically any Mediterranean port of call.

The analysis of the different routes taken by the Spanish migrants until they arrived in Malta revealed individual cases which, when analysed in the wider context of Spanish history, are an eye opener as to the feeling harboured by a number of Spaniards towards the military set up existing in Spain during the first half of the eighteenth century. Some of these men, in particular those coming from mainland Spain, were soldiers in the Spanish army. Giuseppe Lapegna, for instance, signed up as a soldier in the Spanish army of his Catholic King in the city of Burgos. He remained in the army until the army left Spain. It was within this circle that he befriended other soldiers, and it was with them that he ended up in Malta.⁴⁵

Many of these Spanish soldiers had left behind them the hardships endured in the army, as was the case for the majority of deserters. The reason why the Hospitaller squadron accepted Spanish deserters on board is varied. In the case of Giovanni Di Francesco from Malaga, the reason why he was accepted as a voluntary rower or *buonavoglia* was explained by one of the witnesses. It was said that, around 1687, the Hospitaller squadron under the command of bailiff Montenegro, was harboured at Palermo. Giovanni Di Francesco took this opportunity to enrol on the galley *San Luigi* as a voluntary rower

or *buonavoglia*. On his part the commander of the squadron, Montenegro, accepted him, as there was urgent need of rowers.⁴⁶

Desertion also resulted after massive military manoeuvres. In 1720, sections of the agreement of the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, by which the island of Sicily was ceded by Spain to the Kingdom of Savoy, were revoked. Instead, Sicily was returned to Spain and, in compensation, Savoy received the island of Sardinia. This diplomatic deal was followed by the transfer of military regiments from the Kingdom of Spain to Sicily, so that the former could assert its regained authority on the Island. Some Spanish soldiers took this opportunity to escape to Malta. In fact, in 1720, Francesco Lazzaro Laguna from the town of Augusta in Sicily embarked with other fugitive soldiers on a Maltese *tartana*, a merchant vessel belonging to Paolo Romano. He seized this opportunity during the transfer of the Spanish army to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilians from Barcelona, where he had been serving as a soldier. After two years and two months, he decided to desert his regiment.⁴⁷

In that same year, another Spaniard took the opportunity of the Spanish army's presence in Sicily to board a Sicilian felucca at Augusta and sail to Malta. Alfonso de Lucca from the city of Canura in the territory of Cordoba embarked at Barcelona on a Spanish ship '*con tutto il capo d'armata Spagnola*' and reached the reign of the Two Sicilies, working as a soldier for about 13 months before escaping to Malta to become a guard in the Grand Master's personal army.⁴⁸ 1720 and 1721 were particular years since other desertions were recorded. Didaco Grane from Cordoba also escaped from the Spanish army whilst in Sicily. He had been in the army for nine years, eight of which were spent in Valenzia, and a year and a half in Sicily before deserting.⁴⁹

Francesco Navarro from Terragona also deserted the army during the same period, with the difference that Navarro escaped whilst serving in Messina. Originally, he had been stationed in the 'land of Portugal'. Navarro went to Reggio in Calabria and afterwards travelled overland to Naples. He stayed in Naples for a month and a half and, finding two Hospitaller galleys in the harbour of Naples, embarked as a soldier on the *San Luigi* and reached Malta to join the Grand Master's squadron.⁵⁰ Navarro was not alone in this; there were many others with similar stories. He was joined by Didaco Grande from Salamanca who had been in the same regiment with Navarro, working with him in Portugal and travelling together to Sicily.⁵¹

The Petitioners' Profession

Once in Malta, the type of employment entered into by the Spanish petitioners can be categorized under three distinct headings. The first were those who sought employment as soldiers working on Hospitaller galleys or else as mercenaries working as personal guards of the Grand Master.

The second category comprised individuals seeking to enrol in the merchant navy. In this case, they usually embarked on French vessels on a number of voyages both in the western and eastern part of the Mediterranean, including visiting Turkish-dominated countries in the Levant. In most cases, these voyages were undertaken in convoys, or, as they were called, *carovana*.⁵² Here it must be said that employment with the mercantile fleet was the most popular with Spanish settlers and due to its popularity the manner in which the Spaniards joined was exceedingly varied. Thus, Spanish settlers who first found work on small Maltese boats such as the *tartana* ended up sailing even as far as the Levant, besides making frequent trips to Sicily. This was the case of Michele Pelegri, who

sailed on a *tartana* but once the ships-of-the-line fleet was introduced in the Hospitaller's fleet in 1701, he was one of the Spaniards to swap over to the *Vascello Magistrale* as sailor.⁵³

The third category was that of Spaniards in the service of individual Knights. Giuseppe Vige, for instance, emigrated from Barcelona to Lisbon in 1706 and it was in Lisbon that he found employment as cook with a Hospitaller knight ending up in Malta following his master's career.⁵⁴

Employment was also found by Spanish migrants engaged in building a new Hospitaller fleet. In fact, the commission to build some of the Hospitaller's ships-of-the-line or *vascelli* at the harbour of Toulon attracted workmen and craftsmen even from outside France. This was not an arbitrary choice but guided by the fact that the arsenal of Toulon, in the eighteenth century, became the most important enterprise of France, and, to use the words of Bartolomé Bennassar, it became '*l'entreprise pilote*'.⁵⁵ Baltassar Giulian from Rurera in Majorca left his hometown around 1704 for Toulon, attracted by the prospects of finding work at the arsenal. In Toulon, he applied and was accepted to work on the '*fabrica delli vascelli*'.⁵⁶ He was not the sole foreigner working on these ships. The *capomaestro* or master craftsman Nicola Felix hailed from Naples.⁵⁷ The prospects of good employment continued to be available even after the construction of a vessel was terminated for part of the workforce was enrolled as members of the crew on the ship. This was the case of Balthassar Giulian, who after finishing his term of employment at the arsenal, joined as a crew member one of the *vascelli*, the *San Giovanni*, which had been built at Toulon.⁵⁸

The documents even give us information regarding the life span of these vessels. At least



one of the Spanish foreign migrants was involved in dismantling one of these ships-of-the-line constructed in Toulon. The seaworthiness was estimated as lasting about twenty-five years,⁵⁹ after which, the Hospitaller Order would scrap the ship to have it replaced by a new one.

Michele Solivelas was employed as sailor on the magisterial *vascello* S. Giuseppe until this ship was decommissioned or dismantled. He was so impressed with the work as to have affirmed before the Ecclesiastical Court that all the good parts of the *vascello* were dismantled and transferred to another *vascello*. In the case of the S. Giuseppe, all its armaments were transferred to the ship-of-the-line Santa Croce.⁶⁰ Even the crew followed the same pattern as once a *vascello* was dismantled they had the opportunity to join another *vascello*, retaining the same posts.⁶¹

A sailor's job could vary and some of the Spanish plaintiffs achieved high positions, in particular those employed with the squadron of *vascelli*. It transpires from these acts that the squadron of the *vascelli* employed, as was in the case for the galleys, an *argozino*,⁶² *cannonieri* and *capomastro dei cannonieri*⁶³ and a *parrocettiere*.⁶⁴ The commander of the ships-of-the-line, as is the case of the *commandante* of the *vascello* San Giovanni, was allowed to take with him at sea a *maestro di casa* or servant.⁶⁵ It was not rare for Spanish migrants to feature in these roles and positions.

Once in Malta, not all the Spanish settlers continued performing the same job that they had in Spain. It has already been indicated that those individuals who in Spain were in the army either sought to become soldiers on one of the Hospitaller's *vascelli* or else sought work as mercenaries by seeking employment in

the Grand Master's private army. The difference in occupation was not significant in such cases. However, earning a living from sailing was not always rewarding and this situation was not only a problem for foreign but also for Maltese sailors. Many seafarers had to take up another profession to make ends meet. Josephus Muscat of Siggiewi worked as a sailor on a Hospitaller *pincio*, even travelling to Spain, but to earn extra money he also opened a butcher's shop in Valletta.⁶⁶ In other words, when the navy was in harbour, he worked at his shop. This was usually in wintertime, which was also the time when, for climatic reasons, most animals were slaughtered. Then in summer, when business was low as the slaughter of animals decreased drastically, he joined the fleet. Some even abandoned the naval career for good and went into service. In 1701, Gio Antonio Gavau, on arriving in Malta directly from Majorca began working 'nella cuttonina' in the house of Duppolles.⁶⁷

Most of the Spaniards sought to set up their residence in one of Malta's harbour cities, with the capital, Valletta, ranking as the most favoured place. In 1710, for example, the Majorcans Rafaele Maiol⁶⁸ and Michele Pellegrino⁶⁹ reported that they had settled in Valletta after marriage. From the testimonies, one can deduce that in the early eighteenth century the Spanish community had its own distinct quarters in Valletta. However, the Spaniards were not the only community to have their own quarters in Valletta. Perhaps, the strongest community in this city, at the turn of the eighteenth century, was the French, to the extent that Spaniards of French origin also sought to live within this particular precinct. Giovanni Gavau, for example, who was a Majorcan but of French origins, his parents having emigrated to this Island when he was still very young, decided to go and live in the French quarter in Valletta. In fact, from this deed, we know that there was a street in the city, which was known as *strada delli francesi*.⁷⁰

Unusual Episodes

In some of the *Status Liberi* the religious beliefs of some sailors come to the fore. In Malta, as well as in Spain, there are a number of ex-voto paintings and graffiti made by sailors as an expression of thanks for Divine help in moments of distress or danger at sea. These ex-votos were donated or executed to make public their acknowledgement for of having had their prayers for divine intervention heard.⁷¹ This religious element emerges in the documentation, and some recounted the traditions practised back home. In 1742, Nicola Budrago from Cartagena, but residing in Malta, told the Bishop's Court that he first made the acquaintance of the petitioner, the Spaniard Francesco di Matteo, in the latter's native city of Mursia. Budrago declared that he had visited this city with his sister and father-in-law to *esordire un voto* made with Our Lady of Fonsanta. This voyage obliged them to remain in this city for about ten days, during which time they found lodging in the house of Francesco's parents.⁷²

The religious element reappears again with a different twist, through the reported cases of acts of slavery endured by some of the Spanish sailors or soldiers in Muslim lands. The testimony given by ex-slaves of Spanish origins highlights the harsh realities of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, not least those resulting from the wars between Crescent and Cross.

There were at least two cases of Spaniards who had fallen into slavery as a result of this conflict. The background to this is that Malta remained in the context of conflict between Christian Europe and Ottoman Europe, with or without any exit from 'Grande Histoire'. The first episode concerned the capture of a small Spanish ship by Algerian corsairs. This event falls within the many acts of

piracy that were committed during this period by both sides in the name of religion. The second event, which was more important, revolved around the Ottoman siege of the city of Oran in 1708, and its eventual capture by the Turks. Didaco or Diego Mas recounted this first case. In a certain way, this case demonstrates how Muslim captors treated some of the captured slaves, in particular when they happened to be young boys. The case also reveals the internal, perennial, political problems that reigned in Algiers.

In his book, *Lumi e Corsari*, Salvatore Bono relates in some detail the house rebellions endured by one of the North African Regencies, in particular that of Algiers when Bey Mohammed ben Beker (1748-1754) was deposed and was succeeded, *dopo drammatici avvenimenti*, by Ali Aghà.⁷³ The *Status Liberi* also recounts in some detail another house rebellion: in this case against the master of an ex-Spanish slave. Diego Mas was 57 when he applied to have his single status recognised in Malta. He was born in the city of Majorca, and at the age of 8 left his native town on a brigantine to go to the Spanish mainland. Thirty miles away from the Spanish mainland his boat was overrun by five Algerian *vascelli*, the crew was taken captive and deported to the city of Algiers. After four years in slavery, he became a Muslim. He affirmed in court that:

'subito diedero per moglie la figlia di mio Padrone, con la quale cohabitai per piu anni et essendosi fomentata guerra fra detti Algherini dove fu ammazzato mio padrone, ed io abandonai la moglie e figli e me refugi in campagna, et ivi restai per molti anni e de la capitai in Tunisi, dove parimente mi fermai per piu anni et essendosi alla fine armata una Galiotta a corso mi sono imbarcato su di essa et a mala pena parito da Tunisi siamo stati depredate da queste galere e portati qui in Malta, che haveva venti quarto anni in circa'. (sic.)'



Two of the witnesses brought in his favour were Giovanni Mulet and Michele Sterlinch,⁷⁵ both from Majorca. The former had been a *forzato* on, a Palarmitan vessel, whilst the latter was a sailor on a Maltese ship. Mulet said that he knew the petitioner as a child and had met him up with him again in Malta.⁷⁶

Of particular interest is the testimony given by Joseph de Casali and Petrus Garsia, who were both, on two separate occasions, slaves of Christians. Joseph de Casali was 71 years old. He was the son of a former Algerian general of the galleys. He recounted that some 53 years back he accompanied his father, who was at the time the Commander-General or Admiral of the five *vascelli* who had captured the boat on which Diego Mas was sailing. He said that Diego was taken as slave and employed as a servant at his father's house for about three years '*e poi fu regalato ad altro Turco et io restai sempre a praticarlo e doppo alcuni anni fu mandato in Tunisi et ivi resto per molti anni*'.⁷⁷ Casali was brought to Malta as a slave at the age of 31. Forty years later he was still in slavery in Malta and there is no doubt that it was to lighten his situation that he became a Christian by receiving baptism. Perhaps the fact that he was the son of an Algerian general was the reason he was given lighter duties instead of being sent as a rower on the galleys. He was assigned work at the Auberge of the Italian knights. It was not only a case of keeping a watchful eye on him, but also one of securing a substantially better class of servant. Moreover, this also happened to Christian slaves of elite status in North Africa who were usually destined to different types of jobs normally assigned to captives from humbler backgrounds.

On the other hand, Petrus Garsia, the other witness, was originally a Christian working as a *servus* for the Hospitallers. He worked at the Infirmary, as a porter at the hospital's door. He told

the Bishop's Court that he had become acquainted with Casali in the city of Algiers some forty-two years back, when he (Petrus) was a slave before being sold to an *Aga di detta citta di Algiers*. On his part, Petrus succeeded in escaping to Spain.⁷⁸

The next witness was again a slave of the Hospitaller Order, one Antonio Mamo, who worked as a *carroziere* at the palace. He was 65 years old, married in Malta and was living in Valletta. He knew Diego about forty years back, when he had been sailing on corsairing vessels off Algiers. He recounted that in the Majorcan sea Diego had been captured by Algerian corsairs. Upon returning to Algiers, defined by Mamo as his fatherland, Diego was taken to the house of the Capitan *di vascello*. After some time, he was given as a gift to the Aga. There followed a rebellion by '*li grandi di detta Citta*' and the Aga was killed. Diego took refuge with all his family in the countryside. Eventually Diego was captured by the Knights, during the same voyage which had also seen the capture of the rest of the above witnesses. After the boat had been seized by the Hospitallers, the Knights found that he had apostatized, and thus was put back in chains and kept as a slave of the Order. According to Mamo, the capture had taken place about 25 years back.⁷⁹

The next witness was Ignazio Lanvia, another slave of the Hospitaller Order. He was 68 years old. He was a native of the city of Tunis and had been in Malta for the past fifty-four years. About 12 years previously, he had become a Christian and lived in the slaves' prison. He had known the plaintiff for about 34 years in the city of Tunis. They had both joined a *galiotta* in Tunis but immediately they left the port of Tunis the galley of Malta raided the *galiotta*, with the result that he too ended up as a slave of the Order.⁸⁰ For this shared experience with the plaintiff, he was also asked to give witness at the Church tribunal.

The following *Status Liberi* case recounts the story of a minor international event but of particular significance for the history of eighteenth-century Mediterranean. Because of its importance, I will quote verbatim from the testimony of the plaintiff, a survivor of this siege, who recounted his experience at Oran to the court judges. Salvatore Garcia aged 30 appeared before the Ecclesiastical Court in 1726. He hailed from Malaga and was the son of Francesco and Maria. At the age of 12, he embarked on a Genoese *vascello* for the city of Oran where he enrolled in the garrison of this fort and worked as *capo d'armi* and remained there for a year.⁸¹ During his stay, he was to experience the Turkish siege, which he described in detail to the ecclesiastical judge:

'che essendosi 18 o 19 anni sono assediata dalla tiranide del Turco la citta d'Aurano dove dopo un longo combatte fierissimo resto la citta sudetta con tutto il popolo, che rimase vivo preda di quella Nazione Barbara, trovandosi l'oratore ausiliare in detta citta' essendo d'eta giovanile maltrattato poi da quelli rendendolo in stato infelicissimo e dopo



un corso di piu anni, per i maltrattamenti ricevuti s'appostato dall'nostra Sto Fede. E perche Em e Rrmi Sri nel ultimo rincontro seguito dai Vascelli della Sacra Religione Gierosolimitana contre tre navi Tripolini l'oratore trovandosi imbarcato su uno di quelli dove per fortuna fu depredata dai detti vascelli portandosi nell'Isola di Malta dove da quell Santissimo Tribunale del Sant' Officio fu ricettato abiurando d'subito condannandolo pero in perpetua galea, et essendosi passato qualche tempo furono presi li dovuti giustificazioni fu dalla benignita' dell'Emo Gran Maestro aggrattiato riducendolo nel pristino stato, essendosi applicato in serviggio della detta Sacra Religione in qualita di marinaio'.(sic.)⁸²

In fact, having obtained his liberty, he embarked on a *vascello corsale* commanded by the Knight Pelubiei, on which he corsaired for six months. Afterwards, he enrolled as sailor on the ship *San Giovanni*.⁸³

A Christian marriage offered a legal proviso for these slaves of Catholic origin either to obtain their liberty or at least to alleviate their social position. At the same time, the cases of marriages of slaves of Spanish origin highlight the situation whereby slaves were also requesting the right to marry, which could only come about after having obtained their freedom. In fact, not being free men, slaves were not permitted to marry.⁸⁴

The general practice was for slaves to be first manumitted by their master, and afterwards, on receiving their free status, allowed to marry. This rule had also its exceptions, in particular in the case of those slaves, or prisoners, who had been condemned to slavery for having turned renegade on their Christian origin. Spanish inhabitants were in this period automatically considered to belong to the Christian faith. At the same time, these cases also reveal the complicated marriage

situation existing at the time in the Christian world. As the case of Diego Mas reveals, the Church did not recognise the marriages of Christians who had converted to Islam and got married according to the Muslim rite. Thus, for instance, in 1688 Diego Mas after 24 years in slavery applied to the local Church to have his *Status Libero* recognised. He testified that had been married in Algiers. The fact that he had returned to a Christian land also meant his legal right to marry according to the Catholic rites, as he had never been married by the Church. The fact that he had taken a Muslim wife in Algiers was not viewed by the Church as a proper marriage. The Church considered null and void marriages not contracted according to Catholic rites. An apostatised person, once reconciled with his former faith could 'remarry', as his marriage, according to the Muslim tradition, was not considered valid.⁸⁵

Furthermore, the *Status Liberi* documents are one of the few sources through which the literacy level of foreigners could be studied. The plaintiffs were asked to sign their deposition, either by writing their name or signing by writing an X. The high percentage of illiteracy was normal in the past and these acts substantiate general statistics. Out of the 61 cases studied, 32 signed as illiterates, 15 had no signature at all, whilst 14 signed their full name and surname. Therefore, if one has to eliminate from this study the number of unsigned cases, and base the calculation on 46 cases, one finds that 30.4 per cent of the Spanish plaintiffs were literate, which is a very high percentage for those times.

The level of literacy among the witnesses was not much different. 158 cases were used for this study. 35 signed the Acts, 85 signed with an X and another 38 failed to sign. Thus those who signed with their name and surname vis-à-vis the rest who signed with a cross amounted to 29.1%. In other words, the percentage of those who signed the Acts as witnesses was at the same level of that of the petitioners.

In analysing the occupation of those who were literate and those who were not, one finds that few of the sailors knew how to read and write. The only category of literate seamen was the shipping clerks. Interestingly enough, most of those Spaniards who were employed as servants or *maestro di casa* with Knights could sign their deposition properly. This suggests that the Knights usually employed literate persons in their service.

From Corsairing to Commerce: The External Scenario became Benign

The roots of trade with Spain are steeped in history, and the *Status Liberi* reveals the existence of commercial exchange between Malta and Spain dating back to the early eighteenth century as well as in the previous century, and extending thereafter. Antonio Carbone from Senglea affirmed to the Bishop, in 1717, that he had an established trading relationship with Antonio Serra from Majorca, whose son Gio Maria had taken up residence in Carbone's hometown. He said that he used to go to Castello di Porto Magione in Majorca for business – *per negozio*, and had sold to Antonio Serra '*cottone filato*'.⁸⁶ Yet, towards the end of the eighteenth century exportation to Spain blossomed, whilst the general income from economic mainstays decreased. The Spanish peninsula offered a gateway to the Atlantic and a number of Maltese began to use this trade link to even travel to America.

The *Status Liberi* confirm this change, since from the second half of the eighteenth century, one continues to come across cases with a Spanish Connection. However, the nature of these documents changed. After the second half of the eighteenth century, one finds mostly cases of Maltese merchants doing business in Spain or returned Maltese migrants from Spain who

travelled to Malta to marry a local. On the other hand, cases of Spanish merchants or sailors settling in Malta or marrying, at least judging from the *Status Liberi* documents preserved at the archives of the Cathedral Museum, dwindled to none. To some extent this reflects the overall situation regarding the decline in corsairing, which could have been one of the reasons for this decrease in the number of Spanish plaintiffs, as corsairing had been one of the primary activities attracting Spanish settlers to Malta. Instead, the second half of the eighteenth century witnessed the search for economic alternatives to replace the decline in corsairing activity, and an upturn in commerce and trading partnerships with Spanish merchants. Carmelo Vassallo considers the resulting trade network between Malta and Spain as a form of 'brisk trade'.⁸⁷

The trading pattern in Spain involved Maltese 'who buy silk from Catania, Messina and Naples and all sorts of cloth from Leghorn and Genoa for resale in Alicante, Malaga, Seville, Ferrol, Cádiz and the Canary Islands'.⁸⁸ Barcelona was another point of reference for Maltese merchants. Soon a blossoming activity was recorded on the Island, to the extent that some even sought to abuse and take financial advantage of commercial relations with Spain. In fact, as commerce with Spain improved, Malta witnessed some financial scandals related to trade with that country. The whole Island of Malta was destined to suffer from one of these scandals; this also led to political disturbances. Thus, a case in point occurred in 1797. Fortunato Panzavecchia had left noted in his diary the negative effects that a financial crisis in commercial transactions with Spain had left Malta, which caused a public outcry, and protests in Valletta after someone had embezzled the funds:

'Questi erano fondi di negozianti di Spagna presi ad prestito dai capitalisti maltesi, i quali

vendendo malsicuri i loro impieghi cessarono di fare prestiti, onde i negozianti di Spagna non trovando piu' a prender fondi il commercio di Spagna resto' avvenato, il popolo manco' di mezzo di sussistenza e sopravvenne una fame nell'Isola a segno tale, che alcune donne si nutrivano di sulla; ed il malcontento crebbe a segno che un di una partita di donne del Zurrico ed Zebbug et ci si presento' nella piazza domandando S.M. o al Reggente (Hompesch) impiego e pane e se non fosse Doublet che le acquieti sarebbe accaduta una rivoluzione'.⁸⁹

In itself, this reflection by Panzavecchia demonstrates the commercial importance that Spain began to assume for the Maltese Islands, and which in part is reflected in the *Status Liberi*. Relatively few petitions have been found of Spaniards seeking to marry in Malta during the second half of the eighteenth century. The Island had become less attractive as a destination for migrants. Instead, it was the Maltese who now began to migrate more often to Spain. The economic balance changed and from an Island receiving migrants, became an Island sending settlers abroad. Spain became one of the receiving countries and the cotton industry was one of the motivations. The need of good sails for the crossing of the Atlantic made Spain an attractive region for many Maltese working as agents in the export of the cotton fabric. Interesting enough, the identity-kit of the Maltese migrant was in part similar to that of the early eighteenth-century Spanish migrant to Malta. According to Vassallo:

'Maltese merchants in Spain were characterized by: a high level of literacy compared to other foreigners; reliance on kith and kin at all stages of the conduct of their business; regular travel to and from their island to settle accounts and attend to other business matters, as well as spending time with their families; a tendency to set up in

*business and live in close proximity to each other in veritable enclaves in the communities where they were established; a high regard for honour and trust in the conduct of business with each other and the tendency to settle any differences which arose during the course of dealings with their fellow nationals abroad, in their own home country.*⁹⁰

Once the silk and in particular the cotton industry collapsed, partly because of the takeover of Malta by Napoleon's forces, it failed to be resuscitated after Malta got rid of the French invader in 1800. The arrival of the British did not change things radically. First, Spain itself became part of Napoleon's empire. Secondly, Malta's cotton production was far eclipsed by the cotton that began to be imported from Spain, Egypt and later on the American continent.⁹¹ As an alternative, the British encouraged the cultivation of the potato crop, which was slowly introduced to Malta. In the process, Spain lost her economic attractiveness for Maltese migrants. New horizons were sought first in Corfu,⁹² and later across all the North African coast before the beginning of the new massive migration movement towards the new world of America, Canada, and Australia. But this movement has to wait for the twentieth century to come into full force, reaching its peak in the decades immediately following the Second World War.



Notes

- 1 Bartolomeo Dal Pozzo, *Historia della Sacra Religione di Malta*, (Verona, 1703), 20.
- 2 Carmel Testa, *The Life and Times of Grand Master Pinto*, (Midsea, 1989), 143-144.
- 3 Mdina Cathedral Archives, C(uria) E(piscopalis) M(elitensis) A(cta) O(rignaria), 209, no. 406, (1742) f. 406r.
- 4 *Ibid.*, CEM AO 592 (1686), f. 11r.
- 5 *Ibid.*, CEM AO 290, (1741-1742), f. 406r.
- 6 Antoinette Schembri, *Senglea 1586 – 1744, An Historical Demographic Analysis*, (Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of Malta, 1999), 124.
- 7 Simon Mercieca, *Community Life in the Central Mediterranean A Socio-Demographic Study of the Maltese Harbour Towns in Early Modern Times Bormla (1586-1815)*, (Unpublished PhD thesis submitted at University of Paris IV – Sorbonne, 2002), 234.
- 8 Simon Mercieca, 'Amicitia Extenditur ad Extraneos, Marriage Law and the Concept of Citizenship (1563-1789)', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, Vol. 10, Number 1 & 2, 2000, 151-171.
- 9 Simon Mercieca, 'The Spatial Mobility of Seafarers in the Mediterranean', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, Vol. 12, Number 2, 2002, 401.
- 10 Mdina Cathedral Archives, CEM A.O. 714 No. 41, (1699), f. 41r.
- 11 *Ibid.*, CEM AO 937, no. 187, (1714-15), f. 188r.
- 12 Antoinette Schembri and Noel Buttigieg, *A Demographic Study of Marriages in Vittoriosa, (1558-1850)*, (Unpublished B.A. Hons Dissertation, University of Malta, 1997), 46 – 51.
- 13 Mdina Cathedral Archives, CEM AO 290, no. 406, (1741-1742), f. 410v.
- 14 *Ibid.*, CEM AO 275, no. 316, (1728-29), f. 318r.
- 15 *Ibid.*, CEM AO 290, no. 406, (1741-1742), f. 410v.
- 16 *Ibid.*, CEM AO 270, no. 216, (1726), f. 221v.
- 17 *Ibid.*, CEM AO 270, no. 216, (1726), f. 220v.
- 18 *Ibid.*, CEM AO 290, no. 406, (1741-1742), f. 410v.
- 19 *Ibid.*, CEM AO 281, no. 43, (1734), f. 49r-v.
- 20 *Ibid.*, f. 50r-v.
- 21 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 713, no. 13, (1698), f. 17v.
- 22 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 592, no. 11, (1686); *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 790, No. 218, (1755) f. 219r.
- 23 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 270, no. 216, (1726), f. 221v.
- 24 *Ibid.*, f. 220r, 221v.
- 25 *Ibid.*, CEM AO 835, no. 297, (1791-1793), f. 298r.
- 26 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 265, no. 141, (1719), f. 145v.
- 27 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 270, no. 216, (1726), f. 220v.
- 28 I will give just one example out of many that can be traced through the study of the parish acts of the harbour cities. According to Senglea's marriage records, Giacobbo Ferrando from Senglea, married Giacobina Di Vincenzo from Senglea on 23-07-1726. When called as witness, Giacobbo Ferrando declared at the ecclesiastical court to have settled down in Senglea. *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 290 (1742),

- f. 410v.
 29 Mdina Cathedral Archives, CEM A.O. 713, no. 13, (1698), f. 16r.
 30 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 713, no. 13, (1698), f. 16v.
 31 Jean Pierre Poussou, *Bordeaux et le Sud-ouest au XVIIIème siècle*, (Paris, 1983).
 32 Mdina Cathedral Archives, CEM A.O. 726, no. 215 (1710), f. 217r, 218.
 33 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 726, no. 61, (1710), f. 215r.
 34 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 729, no. 358, (1711), f. 358r.
 35 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 740, no. 454, (1716), f. 454r.
 36 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 248, no. 96, (1707), f. 96r.
 37 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 263, no. 9, (1718), f. 14v.
 38 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 263, no. 9, (1718), f. 13r.
 39 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 265, no. 141, (1719), f. 146v.
 40 *Ibid.*, CEM AO, 292, no. 196, (1743), ff. 196r, 199r
 41 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 966, no. 38, (1744), f. 38r-v.
 42 Bartolomé Bennassar, 'La Méditerranée du Premier Rang aux Seconds Rôles (16e-18e siècle)' *Histoire de la Méditerranée*, ed. Jean Carpentier and François Lebrun, (Éditions du Seuil, 1991), 225.
 43 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 325, no. 183, (1766), f. 188r.
 44 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 579, no. 5, (1680), f. 6r.
 45 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 739, no. 69, (1716), f. 71a, 72r.
 46 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 715, no. 69, (1701), ff. 72v-73r.
 47 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 627, no. 120, (1721), f. 122r, 123r.
 48 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 627, no. 146, (1721), f. 149r.
 49 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 627, no. 146, (1721), f. 151v.
 50 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 627, no. 183, (1721), f. 184r-v.
 51 *Ibid.*, f. 189r.
 52 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 290, no. 406, (1742), f. 406r.
 53 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 722, no. 188, (1707), f. 188r.
 54 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 262, no. 253, (1717), f. 253r.
 55 Bennassar, 230.
 56 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 726, no. 61, (1710), f. 61r.
 57 *Ibid.*, f. 64r.
 58 *Ibid.*, f. 64v.
 59 Ettore Rossi, *Storia della Marina dell'Ordine di S. Giovanni di Gerusalemme di Rodi e di Malta*, (Roma-Milano 1926), 86.
 60 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 729, no. 358, (1711), f. 358r.
 61 *Ibid.*, f. 358r-364r.
 62 *Ibid.*, f. 358r.
 63 *Ibid.*, f. 363r.
 64 *Ibid.*, f. 362v.
 65 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 735, no. 74, (1715), f. 76r.
 66 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 722, no. 123, (1707), f. 125r.
 67 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 715, no. 150, (1701), f. 150r.
 68 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 726, no. 215, (1710), f. 217r.
 69 *Ibid.*, f. 218r.
 70 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 715, no. 150, (1701), f. 152r.
 71 Joseph Muscat, *Il-Kwadri Ex-Voto Marittimi Maltin*, (PIN, 2002).
 72 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 292, no. 196, (1743), f. 199v.
 73 Salvatore Bono, *Lumi e Corsari: Europa e Maghreb nel Settecento*, (Perugia, 2002), 131.
 74 Mdina Cathedral Archives, CEM A.O. 714, no. 41, (1699-1700), f. 41r.
 75 *Ibid.*, f. 42r.
 76 *Ibid.*
 77 *Ibid.*, f. 43r.
 78 *Ibid.*, f. 44v.
 79 *Ibid.*, f. 45r.
 80 *Ibid.*, f. 45v.
 81 *Ibid.*, CEM A.O. 951, no. 176, (1725-6), f. 178r.
 82 *Ibid.*, f. 180r.
 83 *Ibid.*, f. 178r.
 84 Mercieca, 2000, 161-163.
 85 Mdina Cathedral Archives, CEM A.O. no. 454, (1716), f. 456v.
 86 Mdina Cathedral Archives, CEM A.O. 740, no. 454, (1716), f. 456v.
 87 Carmel Vassallo, 'Maltese Entrepreneurial Networks', *Diaspora Canary Entrepreneurial Networks. Four Centuries of History*, (ed. Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, Gelina Harlaftis and Ioanna Pepelasis Minoglou), Berg, 2005, 131.
 88 Vassallo, 131.
 89 David Agius Muscat, 'Panzavecchia u Vassalli'. *Il-Mument*, 20-6-2004, 16.
 90 Vassallo, 130.
 91 Paul Cassar, *Early Relations Between Malta and U.S.A.* (Malta, 1996), 71.
 92 Simon Mercieca, "Il-Kultura ta' l-Ikel fl-Epoka Modern", *Dghajsa Karti*, ed. D. Massa. (Fakulta ta' l-Arti -2001), 97.

