

The Slave and the Courtesan

Sorcery and Cultural Encounters in Early Modern Malta

A COLORADO COLLEGE SENIOR THESIS

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Classics-History-Politics

The Colorado College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

By

Owen Bean

May/2013

With the advisement of Carol Neel

The present essay examines the traffic in magical goods and services between Maltese prostitutes and Muslim slaves in seventeenth-century Malta, as it is represented in the Archives of the Inquisition in Malta. Past analyses of these archives have focused on these interactions as elements of superstition and folk religion in early modern Malta. This essay asserts that the magical trade provided a form of common engagement between slaves and prostitutes as subaltern groups. In my analysis, I use close readings of denunciations before the Maltese Inquisition and historical examples from other scholarship. This essay will be useful to those interested in Maltese history, Christian and Muslim encounters, and the problems of universalism in post-colonial discourse.

Dedicated to my parents,
Jeff Bean & Sydney Skillman,
Whom I love dearly.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Maltese islands have borne the footsteps of many travelers and pilgrims as a singular crossroads nestled in the heart of the Mediterranean. The human landscape of the Mediterranean Basin is defined by connection. Braudel spoke of the Mediterranean as “the sum of its routes, land routes and sea routes, routes along the rivers and routes along the coasts. An immense network of regular and casual connections, the life-giving bloodstream of the Mediterranean region.”¹ As an island, however, Malta is also defined by its insularity and specificity, forever caught on the periphery yet strengthened by its local identity. Therefore, the history of Malta is largely one of ambiguity and paradox: it is a tale of global connection and local isolation, provincial cosmopolitanism, and a people’s anxious negotiation between roots and routes.

The Maltese islands lie between Sicily and Libya; if one were to fly from Syracuse to Tripoli, one would pass over Malta in about a third of the flight-time. The archipelago consists of the islands of Malta, Gozo, Comino, Cominotto, and Fifla. Only the largest three of the tiny islands are inhabited: Malta with 95 square miles of territory, Gozo with 26 square miles, and Comino with barely one square mile. The island of Malta itself hosts most of the archipelago’s population, while Gozo and Comino remain primarily rural areas. Malta is shaped like a slice of cake that has been tilted on its side and placed into the sea. The island’s northeastern shores rise into gentle slopes toward formidable cliffs in the southwest. The sheer limestone precipices of the Dingli cliffs (after the nearby village of Had-Dingli) once protected the southern part of the island from raids by the Barbary States, lending to the island’s reputation as a natural fortress.

Malta’s convenient position in the center of the Mediterranean has made it a tempting target for foreign conquest. In its approximately three millennia of civilization, the island has been controlled by Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, the Spanish, the Knights of St. John, the

¹ Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, Vol. 1, 276

French, and the British. Malta's small geographical area allows for a thorough consideration of local history and politics, but the island's long subjection to foreign powers and its location in the Mediterranean also means that this local history must be positioned within a broader regional and supraregional context. Early modern Malta lies at the intersection of European and African political and cultural systems, integrating the small island with much wider global connections that allow the historian to understand early modernity outside of a European context. Malta's history is thus intertwined with the history of the Mediterranean. It cannot be properly understood outside of this larger role.

The connections created by the Mediterranean, however, are also defined by violence. The sea lies at the intersection of the Christian and Islamic worlds, and the history of the Mediterranean world bears whispering echoes of the mythology of Crusade and the ideology of religious war. Malta, in particular, lies at the heart of this greater mythology, as its history is largely correlated with that of the Order of St. John, or the Knights of Malta. Histories of grand conflict, however, largely override and ignore the apparently trivial anecdotes of ordinary men and women who regularly traversed these cultural and religious borders, but those smaller stories are real. The renegades of the Barbary fleet converted from Christianity to Islam out of spiritual piety and economic necessity. The women of Greece and Armenia negotiated religious boundaries in their interfaith marriages with Catholic and Muslim men. Histories of contact between the Christian and Muslim world speak of violence with all of the inevitability of tectonic movement, but they ignore the local specificities that create fault-lines and discontinuities in their logic. Malta, as a focal point of friction between local and universal histories, provides exactly the kind of clarifying lens necessary to understand what 'Christian-Muslim contact' actually means. Unpacking the valence of Malta for the construction of

European identity in its relationship to a Muslim other enriches and problematizes interpretation of inter-faith politics and holy war, important themes in the seventeenth century.

Maltese Historiography: Between Europe and the Mediterranean

Two national historical narratives that originated in the politics of the Cold War have come to dominate modern Maltese historiography. These two narratives fundamentally disagree on the nature of domestic Maltese identity, but their political implications primarily affect Maltese foreign policy. The first tradition centers on the arrival of St. Paul in Malta, as documented in Acts 28 of the New Testament. Roman Catholics in Malta mark this event as the origin of an uninterrupted Christian faith that continued through the Arab conquests to the present day. In 2010 C.E., Pope Benedict XVI came to Malta in an Apostolic Visitation commemorating St. Paul's shipwreck in Malta. After his visit to St. Paul's Grotto, he gave a speech to the Maltese people, claiming that "thanks to [Saint Paul's] presence among you, the Gospel of Jesus Christ took deep root and bore fruit not only in the lives of individuals, families and communities, but also in the formation of Malta's national identity and its vibrant and distinctive culture."² This speech typifies the representation of Malta's Roman Catholicism as the roots of Maltese identity. In this interpretive context, Malta's Christian identity brings the island into a European sphere of influence. Simultaneously, however, it elevates Malta as the conscience of Europe, favoring conservative Roman Catholic morality that eschews the perceived cultural and sexual liberality of continental Europe.

Another competing tradition emphasizes Malta's Semitic origins and the years of medieval Arabic rule. Early studies in Maltese linguistics and folklore did not have an explicit

² Benedict XVI. 2010. "Visit to the grotto of St. Paul" (speech). Transcript and video from the Vatican, "Apostolic Journey to Malta" http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100417_grotta-malta_en.html.

historical narrative, but rather located Malta in a pan-Mediterranean context that emphasized Phoenician, Syrian, and Semitic origins. This emphasis started to gain traction with historians that sought to reinterpret Malta's European heritage through St. Paul. In 1989, Godfrey Wettinger published an article in *The Sunday Times* that argued that the Maltese had assimilated to the culture, language, and the religion of their Arab conquerors. This thesis directly confronted the pro-European and pro-Catholic Maltese interpretation of a continuous Christian heritage. As Wettinger introduced his article, "apparently such ideas are considered by some as the local equivalent of what would lead to un-American activities in the U.S.A., no doubt leading to un-Maltese activities here."³ The question of language and folklore in Malta became part of a controversy that dominated political discourse in the second half of the twentieth century. This tradition lends itself to a Maltese variant of post-colonialism; by claiming that Malta is essentially Semitic, the tradition de-legitimizes the reign of the British and the Order of St. John. It presents such historical periods as part of grander epochs of European imperialism.

These two major, orthogonal, historical meta-narratives competed in the late 1980s and 1990s, when the Nationalist party and the Labor party debated Malta's heritage and its consequences for Maltese foreign policy. The Nationalist party, as a political group driven by Catholic conservatism and moral values, sought closer ties to Italy and Christian Europe through the European Union. Their voter base was particularly strong among the adherents of the Cult of St. Paul in Malta, or *Pawlini*, who believed in Malta's continuous Christian heritage and that the island belonged with Christian civilization. The Labor party worked in the legacy of the Cold-War politician Dom Mintoff, who sought to move Malta away from northern European influence and position Malta as a Mediterranean power. The Labor party advocated Cold War neutrality

³ Wettinger, G. "Did Christianity Survive in Muslim Malta?" *The Sunday Times* [Malta], 19 November, 1989, <http://melitensia.wth.com/incoming/Index/The%20Arabs%20in%20Malta/198901.pdf>.

and membership in the Non-Aligned Movement. For the Labor party, Malta's Mediterranean Semitic background was a means of finding common ground with other post-colonial governments and oil-rich neighbors like Libya. While a variety of intermediate historical frameworks are undoubtedly more nuanced than this dichotomous representation, Maltese historians still work within the shadow of this binary of European and Semitic Malta.⁴

These perspectives emerge in Maltese historiography when discussing the Hospitaller period (or 1530 C.E. to 1798). The Hospitaller period corresponds with the early modern period, a period ambiguously defined as “roughly between the end of the Middle Ages and the start of the nineteenth century.”⁵ This definition, however, merely describes a span of time, while historians associate early modernity with its own distinct set of values like those of the Renaissance or Reformation. Cultural movements do not encapsulate early modern culture, but they are aspects of it. The editors of *Handbook of European History 1400-1600* describe the Renaissance and Reformation as “concepts [that] still retain distinct signatures as aspects of a world which was, at the same time, late medieval and early modern.”⁶ The label “early modern,” however, suggests that early modernity is merely a developing or primitive modernity, without its own characteristics or traits. Instead, in current usage it is best described as a pre-modern and post-medieval era which contained the conditions into which the modern world could emerge. *Early Modern Europe: An Oxford History* describes the early modern era as one in which “a consumer economy, a free exchange of ideas, toleration, and the rational, unitary state were *beginning* to emerge: it is in this sense that the centuries between 1500 and 1800 formed the

⁴ Mitchell, *Ambivalent Europeans: Ritual, Memory, and the Public Sphere in Malta*, 7-17.

⁵ Cameron, *Early Modern Europe: An Oxford History*, xvii.

⁶ Brady, *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600*, xxi.

‘early modern’ period of Europe’s history.”⁷ This view is greatly influenced by sociological and historical thought on modernization.

Modernization theory emerged out of sociological thought in the 1950s, and has since become one of the most influential theoretical paradigms in the social sciences. While modernization theory lacks a central canonical text that expresses all its hypotheses, the theory is still held together by a number of common assumptions. The primary assumption defines modernization as “a historical process leading from traditional to modern societies, thus implying a sharp antithesis between tradition and modernity.”⁸ Modernization is also assumed to be a global and inexorable process that began in Europe and spread to the rest of the world through European imperialism and colonialism. Such assumptions suggest a teleological (perhaps even social Darwinist) view of history in which Euro-American society forms an inevitable and progressive destination for all civilizations. Such biases can be seen in the distinction between ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ worlds, distinctions that assume that all civilizations aspire to become a part of the West. Modernization theory is now disfavored because of its Eurocentric assumptions, but the model continues to have a pervasive influence in the study of sociology and history.⁹

In this broader interpretive context, Maltese historians characterize the Hospitaller period as the movement from Malta’s medieval Arabic past to a more modern European present. Historians of the island disagree, however, on whether or not this transformation was a good thing. For example, Victor Mallia-Milanes writes that “to the native inhabitants [of Malta] the impact of the Hospitallers’ ideas and the influence of their completely new way of life and wide economic networks were a powerful, innovative, Europeanizing force which gently eclipsed the

⁷ Cameron, *Early Modern History: An Oxford History*, xix.

⁸ Knöbl, “Theories That Won’t Pass Away,” 96.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 104-5.

dullness of their archaic way of life.”¹⁰ Mallia-Milanes’ description clearly bears echoes of modernization theory and the problems of periodization. He privileges Europeanization as innovation that drives out its stagnant and “archaic” (that is, Arabic) counterpart. On the other side of the spectrum, Carmel Cassar writes that the Inquisition allowed the Church “to establish complete hegemony over Maltese society, a state of affairs barely disturbed in the centuries that followed.”¹¹ Cassar’s argument implicitly criticizes the Church and the Hospitaller narrative that re-writes Malta’s ‘true’ heritage as Semitic, and that moved Malta into an oppressive cultural environment. These historians are two of the most prominent in current early-modern Maltese historiography: Mallia-Milanes specializes in the economic and political history of Hospitaller Malta, while Cassar specializes in Malta’s cultural history.

Mallia-Milanes and Cassar present Hospitaller Malta as a period in which foreign influence brought great transformations. Both historians, however, make the mistake of presenting these modernizing transformations as replacing what came before. They ignore that human diversity and heterogeneity allow contradicting ideas to co-exist in a state of tension: while one Maltese person might conform to the changes of the Counter-Reformation, another Maltese person might resist them and continue their traditional practices. Cultural hegemony is rarely so complete that there would be no friction at the local level, and the Hospitallers and the Church of Malta are no exception. Mallia-Milanes and Cassar’s historical narratives represent the Maltese people as completely passive, without agency: Maltese indigenous people simply conform to whatever new changes the Church or Hospitallers introduced to Malta. According to Mallia-Milanes, European modernity had “gently eclipsed” the Maltese way of life. According to Cassar, the Church and the Order peacefully remolded Malta’s Semitic origins according to their

¹⁰ Mallia-Milanes, *Hospitaller Malta*, Introduction, 41.

¹¹ Cassar, *Society, Culture, and Identity in Early Modern Malta*, 225

own political needs. No sense of conflict galvanizes these historiographic narratives. No sense of friction between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ cultural forms is evident, nor do the Maltese themselves deviate from the Church and Hospitallers’ programs.

Malta: The New Frontier

A new theoretical framework might move Maltese historiography from this binary between Semitic and European identities or from the transition between medieval and modern forms. Instead of trying to categorize Malta into dichotomous and simplified narratives, it would be more useful to understand how Malta works as a frontier in which ethnic groups are not homogenous or part of cut-and-dry categories. Malta presents an obvious comparison to a frontier. The island is positioned in the center of the Mediterranean; more precisely speaking, it lies between the Christian and Islamic worlds of Europe and Africa. In *The Mediterranean*, Fernand Braudel describes Malta as part of a Christian defensive front throughout the sea – that “to the Turks and corsairs, Christendom presented a frontier bristling with defences.”¹² Such frontiers are also the cultural edges to “a civilization [that] exists fundamentally in a geographical area which has been structured by men and history. That is why there are cultural frontiers and cultural zones of amazing permanence: all the cross-fertilization in the world will not alter them”¹³ Braudel conceived of Malta as a Christian frontier that marked the boundary between homogenous Christian and Islamic civilizations. For Braudel, Malta’s history represents a cultural collision point between the diametrically-opposed East and the West, and the characterization of Malta as either a Semitic or European nation fits within this narrative. As a frontier of a civilization, Malta could be represented as a bastion of Christendom in a Muslim

¹² Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 837.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 770.

Mediterranean, or as a Muslim outpost controlled by Christian overlords. Another definition of frontier, however, potentially addresses Malta's ambiguity and the lack of tension in Maltese historiography.

Anna Tsing's *Friction*, an anthropological work on the impact of globalism in Indonesia, presents a concept of frontier with implications for historical thinking and the idea of a frontier. Anna Tsing defines a frontier as a space – both physical and ideological – in which general cultural narratives (or universals) engage with particular forms. The universal is an ideal that is true across cultures, and it is a political tool through which cultures can conform or conflict with each other. When it is engaged in a specific frontier, however, the universal adapts to a more localized form. Tsing argues that “engaged universals travel across difference and are charged and changed by their travels.”¹⁴ For example, the Maltese Labor party under Dom Mintoff sought to use the powerful universal ideals of socialism, neutrality, post-colonialism, and Mediterranean culture to form relationships with governments like Qaddafi's Libya. The ideologies of Mintoff's Labor Party and Qaddafi's *Jamahiriyah* had completely different meanings, but they were able to use such universals to find common ground across cultural boundaries. These divergences, however, also mean that universals and cultural movements cannot be understood as monolithic entities. Something always changes in translation across cultures.

When a universal adapts to a localized form, friction accompanies the translation. Tsing notes that “friction reminds us that heterogenous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power.”¹⁵ Local groups are displaced, new groups take power, meanings within the universals are changed, and hegemonic control is disrupted or asserted. Like

¹⁴ Anna Tsing, *Friction*, 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

a language, a cultural universal cannot adapt into its local form (or dialect) without taking on its own peculiar characteristics. Languages and ideas do not translate perfectly; the meaning is always changed by the act of translation. Everything is messy, and there is no such thing as a smooth transition.

Malta is a frontier in Tsing's sense that different groups try to realign the island with a greater universal idea each group represents. The Order of St. John tried to realign Malta first with its vision of a Crusader past and later with an Enlightened Europe. The Maltese Bishop and Inquisitor tried to bring Malta in line with Tridentine reforms. Between these respective efforts, changes and transformations inevitably brought tensions and shifts in power. The Order of St. John largely displaced the Maltese nobility that ruled before them. The arrival of the Holy Office in Malta displaced some of the authority of the bishop. Such shifts, however, focus on the balance of power at the top of Malta. The bottom of the social ladder is also important, especially when analyzing cultural transformations. The displaced and dispossessed – slaves, prostitutes, and peasants – reveal the cracks where the transformations have not been smooth or peaceful. Instead of portraying Malta as a space where people are so casually rewritten, historians can consider how its broad transformations were resisted or subverted by local forms. This process will allow readers of history's past to move away from broad dichotomies like how the "east" and "west" clash in Malta, and instead think about how such monolithic thinking is regularly subverted in historical realities. The present essay opens such a rereading of the history of early-modern Malta.

CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Maltese Language and Geography

Foreign dominance has played a key role in the development of Malta's language. Each power that has conquered Malta has left its mark on the cultural heritage of Malta and the linguistic strata of Maltese. Maltese is currently classified as a Semitic language. This heritage most likely dates back to the Arabic conquests of Malta and Sicily in 870 C.E. Today, Maltese uses a Latin alphabet and it borrows its lexicon from a wide variety of languages, especially from the Romantic family. While examining differences in vocabulary across languages makes for a relatively shallow comparison, this short table may help visually demonstrate the hybrid nature of Maltese:¹⁶

English	Maltese	Arabic (Latin Alphabet)	Sicilian	Standard Italian
God	Alla	Allah	Diu	Dio
Church	Il-Knisja	Kanīsa	Crèsia	Chiesa
Knight	Kavallier	Faris	Cavaleri (pl)	Cavaliere
Inn	Lukanda	Funduq	Lucanda	Locanda
Bottle	Flixxun	Zujaaja	Flascuni	Bottiglia
Summer	Sajf	Sayf	Astati	Estate
Shirt	Qmis	Qamis	Cammisa	Camicia

Perhaps the most striking Maltese word is *Alla*, particularly given the ferocity with which the Maltese fought the Ottoman Turks and the Barbary corsairs. The image comes to mind of Maltese and Barbary sailors preparing to attack each other, each side praying to the same God with the same word. It is also worth noting that the word *Qmis* is shared in languages across the Mediterranean. It could ultimately come from Arabic *qamis*, Latin *camisia* (shirt), Hellenistic Greek *kamision* (shirt), or Hebrew *qamas* (enclose, grasp).¹⁷ Maltese is known for being a

¹⁶ The order of this list was chosen at random, but the words themselves were not. Multiple lists have been published comparing Maltese to Arabic and Sicilian, in part due to linguistic curiosity and also due to the twentieth-century political debate over Malta's Semitic or Romantic heritage. Brincat, Joseph. *Maltese and Other Languages: a Linguistic History of Malta*, (Sta Venera, Malta: Midsea Books, 2011), 104-6.

¹⁷ *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th edition., s.v. "qms"

linguistic *mélange*, but it is useful to remember that cross-pollination is true of all languages. Languages are never monolithic – it would be strange to think of culture in the same way.

Maltese has been in a constant process of transformation – particularly through the early modern period. Before the arrival of the Order, the official documents of Malta were written in either Latin or chancery Sicilian. Maltese was used in everyday and informal speech. Bilingual Maltese, however, probably began to adopt these specialized administrative terms into the informal Maltese language. Between 1200 and 1530 C.E., Maltese began adopting the Romantic elements of Sicilian into Maltese.¹⁸ When the Order of St. John arrived in Malta, they brought the reforms made to Italian by the humanists. The Tuscan dialect – high or ‘modern’ Italian – became the administrative language of Malta. As the islands’ prosperity increased, foreigners from across Europe arrived in Malta and Italian became the most common language for interethnic communication.

Despite these changes, however, the ethnic Maltese continued to speak in a way that set them apart from foreigners. Educated Maltese adopted Italian as a formal language quite well and became excellent writers, but they continued to use Maltese in their daily lives. When speaking Italian to foreigners, bilingual Maltese also tended to use Sicilian features to varying degrees that depended on social class and education. In 1726, this preference for ‘corrupted’ Italian apparently annoyed the Grandmaster, who wrote that “he fervently desires that this people can learn from the scholars of the good Italian Language, in order to remove the corruption of Sicilian once and for all.”¹⁹ By then, the Grandmaster was thinking in terms of a pure Italian language that was connected with an ethnic Italian people – the hybrid Maltese were outside of this worldview of monolithic forms.

¹⁸ Brincat, *Maltese*, 103.

¹⁹ “...desidera ardentemente questo Popolo possano fare imparare agli scolari la buona Lingua Italiana, per togliere una volta la corruttela di quella di Sicilia.” Brincat, *Maltese*, 204.

By the seventeenth century, Maltese had already adopted characteristics of Sicilian and Italian, but for foreigners Maltese was clearly not European in origin – a fact that was often addressed by writers in their description of Malta. The Jesuit Fr. Athanasius Kircher, who visited the cave-dwellers of Malta in 1637, reported that “in both islands, the inhabitants speak pure Arabic, without any admixture of Italian or of any other language.”²⁰ Pajoli, in his transcription of an anonymous French account, records that “the language used by the inhabitants, like their customs, resembles more an African than a European language.”²¹ Later, the same account claims the inhabitants “speak a corrupt Arabic language, mixed with gibberish Italian, almost similar to the Lingua Franca in the port of Constantinople.”²² These descriptions represent the variety of perspectives on the origins of Maltese, and the fact that travelers’ accounts frequently tried to classify the language suggests that the classification mattered to their audiences. In the eyes of these European travelers, Malta had to be African, European, or corrupt – it was never “Maltese.”

The confusion is part of a debate that spanned most of the seventeenth century over whether Malta was a European or African land. The island’s position halfway between the continents made it an anomaly in geographers’ atlases. This phenomenon was not simply a geographical curiosity. By the early seventeenth century, Europeans had begun thinking of Europe and Africa in terms of a dichotomy between Christian and Muslim people. In part, this idea was a pipe dream – a hope for a unified Christendom in a continent that had been torn apart by Reformation and civil war. As Nancy Bisaha notes, “such rhetoric underscored cherished concepts of papal monarchy as well as a harmonious and militant Christendom capable of

²⁰ Ciantar, *Benedictine’s Notes*, 46.

²¹ “La langue naturelle de ceux du Pays, et la plus part de leurs coutumes, ont toujours plus ressemblé à celles d’Afrique qu’à celles d’Europe.” Trans. from Ciantar, *Benedictine’s Notes*, 102.

²² “Ils parlent d’un langage Arabe corrompu, melangé d’un baragoin Italien, à peu pres comme la Langue Franche sur le Port de Costantinople.” Text from Ciantar, *Benedictine’s Notes*, 175. Trans. from 144.

answering the formidable unanimity of the Ottoman Empire.’²³ Malta, as a bulwark of Christendom and the victor of the Great Siege of 1565 C.E., took a central role in this mythology, and the Order of St. John actively emphasized its Crusader heritage in garnering support. The Maltese people, however, who spoke a form of Arabic but practiced Roman Catholicism, filled an ambiguous space between Christian and Muslim identities.

The Order of St. John

The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John, of Jerusalem, of Rhodes, and of Malta is a religious fraternity tracing its origins to the Crusades of the twelfth century. The Order is a militant order of Knights Hospitaller, one of the last remaining vestiges of the Crusader concept of war as a religious service. Over the centuries, the Order has accrued a variety of titles and nicknames, most common of which are the Order of St. John, the Knights Hospitaller, the Religion of Jerusalem, the Knights of Rhodes and Malta, and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. The present essay will use all of these names interchangeably, with a preference for the Order of St. John, or ‘the Order,’ and the Knights of Malta, or ‘the Knights.’

The Order began as a group of knights living in religious community and working in an infirmary near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. They worked in the aftermath of the First Crusade’s conquest of much of the Holy Land by Western knights, and the Second Crusade’s botched attempt to secure their territorial gains. The Order first began providing medical care to the pilgrims of Jerusalem, but in the course of the twelfth century began to serve as armed escorts for pilgrims to other holy sites. In 1183, the Order of St. John’s existence was

²³ Bisaha, Nancy. *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 141.

confirmed by the papal bull of Pope Paschal II, but this papal charter only confirmed what had previously been a well-established, if informal, association and practice.

As a militant order, the Knights Hospitaller were part of the same tradition as the Knights Templar, but the orders differed in both ideology and political allegiance. The defeats of 1187 had greatly weakened the authority of the Christian King of Jerusalem and led to struggles between feudal barons and the Crown. In these struggles, the Templars habitually sided with the barons, while the Hospitallers sided with the monarchy. The numerous clashes between Hospitaller and Templar formed a rivalry that lasted for nearly a hundred years, until in 1258 they agreed to settle their disputes and work together in war against the Saracens. Ultimately, however, this agreement was short-lived; by 1290 C.E., the Kingdom of Jerusalem had fallen to a series of rapid Saracen and Turkish sieges at Tripoli, Acre, Tyre, Sidon and Berytus.

The Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem was lost, and with it the militant orders' original *raison d'être* as defenders of the Hospital and the Temple. The losses triggered massive changes among the militant orders. In 1307, the French King Philip IV targeted the Knights Templar as a subversive military and religious body that might be used as an instrument of papal power against him. He accused the Templar of idolatry and denying Christ, and arrested and executed every Templar in France – effectively dissolving the Templar. The Order of St. John almost shared the same fate, but they adapted themselves to fill a new valuable role in the Mediterranean, and their strategic necessity granted some immunity against dissolution.

The loss of the Christian strongholds along the coast of the Levant had jeopardized Christian security in the eastern Mediterranean, and the Order of St. John changed its strategic role to one of island power and naval warfare. The Order invaded the island of Rhodes, forcing out a Turkish garrison and establishing a new headquarters on the island. In 1307, only a few

weeks before the destruction of the Templar, Pope Clement V confirmed the Hospitallers' possession of the island. The Order of St. John had changed their role from an army based in Jerusalem to a navy based in Rhodes, and their idea of religious war had changed with it. Instead of fighting in large-scale battles and sieges, the Order of St. John's religious war had transformed into small-scale naval battles and pirate raids. They took on an aggressively militant role as a Mediterranean naval power, combating Barbary pirates and Ottoman ships as the "Knights of Rhodes." The Order still mourned the loss of Jerusalem, however, and their title of *La Religione Gerosalemitana* recalled idealistic values of a grand crusade and the loss of the Holy City.

The next two hundred years of the Order's history may be characterized as a series of relatively small victories and devastating defeats. In the first half of the fourteenth century, the Knights continued developing their navies and fortifications at Rhodes; by the mid-century, there were four hundred Hospitallers in Rhodes. During this period of development, the Knights attempted to pen the Ottoman Empire to the mainland coasts, but this goal inevitably failed in the wake of massive Turkish victories. Brilliant sultans had revitalized the Ottoman Empire under a strong central leadership and a powerful military, and the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries witnessed a long series of Ottoman campaigns and conquests in Armenia, Anatolia, North Africa, Greece, and the Balkans. In contrast, the European states failed to live up to the Order of St. John's hopes for a unified Christendom, and the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Europe were dominated by plague, war, and schism. The Great Schism of papal authority in Avignon and Rome between 1309 and 1376 C.E. further confused the Order's allegiance and its role as a papal instrument. The conflicts of the Hundred Years' War pitted the Kingdom of England against the Kingdom of France from 1337 to 1453 C.E. – much to the chagrin of the Order, who recruited from both states.

For brevity, the present essay can only briefly mention these events of massive historical significance. This narrative ignores much of the innovation and brilliance of late medieval Europe and the multitude of factions and divisions that made up the Ottoman Empire. The ‘big picture’ of the Knights’ history through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, is that they were a small force fighting with the irregular support of divided European states against the extremely powerful Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 C.E. hammered this point home to the Order and the European literary culture. European preachers and pamphleteers bemoaned European fractiousness against the Ottoman Empire’s onslaught. The conquest of Constantinople made the Knights of Rhodes and their harassment of Turkish shipping a priority target for the Ottoman sultanate. In 1522 C.E., Suleiman the Magnificent began his reign by launching a massive invasion of Rhodes. This invasion turned into a six-month siege of the Order of St. John and its fortifications, until the Order was finally forced to abandon its fortress there.

After the loss of Rhodes, the Order of St. John began appealing to European rulers for a new headquarters. In 1530 C.E., Charles V of Spain offered them Malta, Gozo and the port of Tripoli as a permanent lease; however, they would lose Tripoli to the Ottomans led by Turgut Reis in 1551 C.E., and the city soon became another port for the Barbary pirates. With their arrival into their new home, the Knights of Rhodes became the Knights of Malta. This arrangement angered the Maltese nobility, who had received promises from Alfonso V in 1527 C.E. that Malta would permanently be under the direct administration of the Spanish kings. The Order’s leadership supplanted the Maltese nobility’s power under the *Università*, or noble council, and the civil and military organization of Malta quickly became centered on the Order of St. John. The Grandmaster of the Order was ostensibly the head of a religious order who

answered directly to the Pope, but in Malta he adopted the role of a secular prince in all but name, while ecclesiastical authority was left to the bishop and inquisitor in Malta.

The Order of St. John was divided into eight *langues*, or chapters made up of knights from a particular language or nationality. These *langues* were from Provence, France, Auvergne, Italy, Aragon, Allemagne (or Germany), England, and Castille. The Order's constituency, a mix of pan-European nobility meant that it had significant power in appealing to foreign rulers and nobles, who usually had relatives in the Order's ranks. It also meant, however, that the Order was subject to capricious changes in foreign affairs: when King Henry VIII separated the Church of England from Catholic authority, he also seized the Order's English holdings in 1540 C.E. The Order of St. John, however, was extremely tolerant of Protestantism, and even had Protestant members through its German *langue*. The Order was more interested in looking outward and pursuing its Crusader-era *raison d'etre* of holy war against the Ottoman Empire and the Barbary pirates.

The Grandmaster of the Order, Jean de Valette, originally planned to build a fortress city on the Sciberras peninsula as early as his ascension in 1557 C.E. He invited a number of engineers to the island to prepare designs, but the process was interrupted when the Ottoman Empire occupied the peninsula in the Great Siege of Malta in 1565 C.E.²⁴ The siege ended in the unlikely victory of the Christian defenders, and brought an end to the Ottoman Empire's reputation of invincibility. The Ottomans' defeat, while probably trivial in terms of purely military objectives, was a massive propaganda victory for the Order. The Order quickly found itself in the spotlight of attention of Christian princes and monarchs all around Europe, and countless pamphlets were published describing the siege. A wide variety of detailed maps

²⁴ Hughes, Quentin. *Malta: A Guide to the Fortifications*, (Valletta: Said International, 1993), 249.

described the siege of Fort St. Elmo in Malta.²⁵ The attention gave the Order the support that it needed to build a new fortress-city to protect Malta's harbors.

La Città Nuova and the Rise of the Corsair

Valette's appeals to foreign kings for financial support were met with a massive response. Donations poured in from all over Europe to support the Order and defenders of Malta – the bastion of Christianity against the Turkish threat in the Mediterranean. Pope Pius IV donated 15,000 *scudi*, Emperor Philip II of Spain promised 90,000 *livres*, Sebastian of Portugal 30,000 *cruzados*, and Charles IX of France 140,000 *livres tournois*.²⁶ Many of the members of the Order donated the income of their Commanderies, or donated gifts from their own private wealth to support the Order. These massive donations funded the construction of a new city on the Sciberras peninsula, a city that came to be named after the Grandmaster – the city of Valletta.

The construction of a city and fortifications, however, is an extremely expensive endeavor. The Order, spurred on by fear over a possible second invasion, needed all of the workers and laborers that it could get, but it could not afford to pay all of them. In 1587, the Grandmaster and the Council of Valletta wrote a letter to their Papal ambassadors justifying the existence of the *corso*. One point of the letter stated that Malta needed a steady supply of slaves to continually build its galleys, fortifications, and public works. Without the free labor offered by slaves, the Order would not be able to pay its workers. The performance of the workmen would also decrease, as the foremen would not be able to beat their workers (*con bastonate*) as they did with the slaves.²⁷ The Order had been using slaves and forced labor at least as far back as their

²⁵ The world's most complete collection of these maps can be seen in Ganado, Albert. *A Study In Depth of 143 Maps Representing the Great Siege of Malta of 1565*. Valletta: Bank of Valletta, 1994.

²⁶ Roger de Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, (Valletta: Progress Press, 1985), 95.

²⁷ Victor Mallia-Milanes, *Venice and Hospitaller Malta, 1530-1798: Aspects of a Relationship*, (Marsa, Malta: P.E.G. 1992), 93-4.

occupation of Rhodes, but the Great Siege had diminished their slaves' numbers. In 1568, Francesco Balbi's account of the siege noted that Valette used Muslim slaves as cannon fodder and that "a great many slaves working on the earthworks and defenses continued to die under the enemy's fire."²⁸ In the wake of the siege, the Order returned to pirate raids in their need for more money and slaves. Our current estimates state that the Order under Jean de Valette captured a total of 2883 slaves, freed 562 Christian slaves, and procured a total income of about 400,000 ducats between 1557-68.²⁹ The island's economy increasingly relied on this pirate trade, and privateering against Turkish-Barbary forces escalated quickly through the late sixteenth century.

Malta's pirate trade even grew to such a point that it damaged the Order's relationship with the other Christian powers. Even though the mythology of Crusade continued to hold a powerful allure through the sixteenth century, European demand for Turkish goods often outweighed religious prejudice, resulting in delicate diplomatic paradoxes. The Battle of Lepanto in 1570 C.E. began as a united Christian effort to rescue the Venetian colony of Famagusta on Cyprus from the Ottoman Empire. This battle, in which the Order of St. John played a key role, curtailed the Ottoman navy's strength in the region and secured European naval power in the Mediterranean. After Lepanto, however, Venice returned to trading with Turkish Istanbul, and Maltese piracy frequently jeopardized their trade interests in the Levant. Maltese corsairs would occasionally raid Venetian ships and seize Christian cargo on the grounds that it had originally belonged to Jewish and Muslim merchants. Several such seizures created such outrage in the Republic of Venice that the Pope prohibited Order of St. John and the Maltese corsairs from interfering in Venetian trade. The event prompted the Grandmaster La Cassière to issue the following instructions to Frà Cuppones on his voyage to the Levant in 1578:

²⁸ Balbi, *Siege of Malta*, 110.

²⁹ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 34.

We order and command you not take notice of any Venetian vessel unless for obtaining news, you will not stop them to take away from them any sort of contraband and infidel goods and men; you will let them go unmolested on their voyage.³⁰

Diplomatic crises between Malta and Venice characterize the expansion of privateering through the late sixteenth century. Slavery played an integral part in Malta's economic growth, and this unrestricted growth led to concerns that Malta's corsairs needed to be better regulated.

By 1605 C.E., the need for new regulations on privateering became obvious to the Grandmaster of the Order. In 1604, the Venetian Hospitaller Leonida Loschi noted that Grandmaster Alof da Wignacourt "took under his control" the issuing of licenses to fly the flag of the Order, and would only issue them on the condition that they would not "molest or attack any Venetian ship or other craft, with or without infidels and infidel goods on board, or inflict harm to Venetian domains."³¹ In 1605, the *Tribunale degli Armamenti* was established in order to further regulate privateer activities. This organization was made up of five commissioners chosen by the Grandmaster. The *Tribunale* issued licenses to corsairs, established the procedure for bringing litigation against corsairs, and strictly defined legitimate corsair activities. Corsair ship-owners and captains had to swear to the *Tribunale* that they would not attack "ships, merchants, goods and persons of Christians, nor of any other person, even an Infidel, who displays the safe conduct of the Grand Master or of any other Christian princes, under penalty of making up all the damage."³²

These regulations, however, were frequently manipulated or defied outright throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Maltese captains continued to prey on Greek and

³⁰ Mallia-Milanes, *Venice and Hospitaller Malta*, 123.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

³² Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary*, 108

Maronite traders, arguing that they were schismatics, not Roman Catholics, and that they did not qualify as true Christians.³³ The nature of “safe conduct” granted to non-Christians was also ambiguous. On one occasion, a Jewish merchant visiting the island was imprisoned and enslaved, despite his furious protests that he had a Venetian passport to protect him.³⁴ Occasionally during the next two hundred years, the corsair’s oaths were little more than formalities meant to placate Venice and the Pope.

³³ Earle, *Corsairs*, 109.

³⁴ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 40.



Fig. 1: William Rogers, "A Knight of Malta," in *Honor, Military and Ciuill*, by William Segar (London: Robert Baker, 1602). Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.

The Knights of Malta cut a compelling figure for the literary audiences of seventeenth-century London. They recalled romantic sentiments of ancient nobility and chivalric masculinity.



Fig. 2: Matteo Perez d'Aleccio, *L'Assedio e Batteria dell'Isola di San Michele ADI XXVIII DI GIVGNO*, Plate VI. 1582, engraving, 315x453mm. Valletta, National Museum of Fine Arts.

This 'siege map' dramatizes the bombardment of Fort Saint Michael during the Great Siege of Malta in 1565 C.E. Such maps were incredibly popular in Europe in the aftermath of the siege, and captured a nostalgic sense of Crusader glory. Today, Fort Saint Michael is a garden in the town of Senglea, colloquially known as *L-Isola* or *Città Invicta* after the Maltese victory.

CHAPTER THREE: SLAVES

The Muslim Slaves as a Maltese Minority

The number of slaves in Malta and Gozo at any given historical time period is difficult to estimate. The Order did keep records of slaves captured, but they are typically estimates and do not take privateering by non-Order members into account. Ultimately, however, a good approximation is that the Maltese captured somewhere around 3,500 slaves between 1601 and 1621, and that this rate is relatively stable throughout the century.³⁵ Malta's general population also grew at a steady pace, despite the plague, famine, and occasional Turkish raid. In 1590, a census recorded that 32,920 people were living in Malta. In 1632, another census recorded that 51,750 people were living on the islands.³⁶ Therefore, slaves were a substantial minority on the island, perhaps accounting for 10-20% of the total population in Malta in the seventeenth century. This slave population was particularly focused in the harbor areas, where the slaves belonging to the Order were kept in prisons.

Most of the slaves in Malta belonged to the Order of St. John, but a substantial number were kept as domestic servants for the Maltese elite. When a corsair galley returned to Malta with new slaves, those persons immediately entered quarantine as a measure against plague. The quarantine could last as long as forty days, but the length of confinement was usually shortened by the number of days since last contact with suspect lands. Once the quarantine had ended, the slaves would be distributed on the island. If the galley belonged to the Order, then the strong adult males would be kept as galley-slaves and the women and children sold off to private owners. By this arrangement, the number of slaves belonging to the Order outnumbered private slaves two to one, according to an estimate from 1632 C.E.

³⁵ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 32-6.

³⁶ "Census Taking in Malta," National Statistics Office of Malta, accessed January 21, 2013, <http://www.nso.gov.mt/site/page.aspx?pageid=577>.

A slave who belonged to the Order was essentially kept for public use. The Order's slaves worked in the galleys, maintained the island's fortifications, and were leased out to private owners as unskilled labor. They were kept in prisons, or *bagni*, based in the harbor areas of Valletta, Senglea and Vittoriosa. As the most permanent dwelling for the slaves in Malta, the prisons therefore represented the center of Muslim culture on the island. When the galleys returned to shore, the slaves returned to the prisons. An anonymous French description of Malta described the slave prison as "built as if it were the Conciergerie, without anything interesting in it except for the confused assemblage of peoples so different from each other in color and country."³⁷ The slaves came from backgrounds as diverse and cosmopolitan as the Europeans of the harbor areas, and they were therefore a kind of pan-Islamic population, a minority presence was focused in the slave prisons of the harbor areas.

In the Inquisition archives, most of the slaves are simply referred to as *schiaivi Infedeli*, or Infidel slaves, so that 'slave' and 'Infidel' were virtually synonymous in Maltese depositions. Some of the slaves were actually Jewish, but they were only rarely referred to as such in contemporary records and they were clearly vastly outnumbered by the Muslim slaves. Occasionally, the slaves would be given slightly more specific ethnic designations like 'Moor' (*schiaivo moro*) or 'Turk' (*schiaivo turco*). These labels were extremely imprecise and could refer to anyone from North Africa, Turkey, or the Levant. Ethnic categories in seventeenth-century Europe were not as heavily based on racial difference as they would become in the transatlantic slave trade nearly a century later, but they were loaded with vague and complex associations. The term 'Turk,' for example, could simply refer to someone who spoke the Turkish language, but it could also refer to circumcised Christian men, Muslim Greeks, or homosexuals. The label 'Moor' in Malta generally referred to an Arabic-speaking person from North Africa or Syria, but

³⁷ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 93.

it also broadly referred to anyone with black or dark skin. Ludovico Sforza, the Duke of Milan from the end of the fifteenth century, famously adopted the nickname of *il Moro* after his unusually dark skin. The Duke even performed his adopted ethnicity as a demonstration of his courtly persona, importing expensive Ethiopian slaves and hiring musicians in blackface to perform at his court.³⁸ The exotic displays at the Milanese court underscore the heart of early modern European ethnocentrism. Turks and Moors were ambiguous categories, to be sure, but as categories they always reflected a non-Christian other – an other that was exotic, lascivious, violent, manipulative, powerful, or even demonic.

As a response to their perceptions of Islam as the alien and unknown, the members of the Order of St. John treated the Muslim slaves with deep suspicion as a minority in their society. Muslim slaves always presented the threat of escape, rebellion, or collusion with invaders. Whenever rumors surfaced of an imminent attack by Ottoman or Barbary raiders, the Grandmaster of the Order repeated existing proclamations that the slaves were to be guarded at all times. Although at night, privately-owned and galley slaves were supposed to be returned to their slave prisons or *bagnos*, where they would be locked until morning, in peace-time the enforcement of these measures was apparently lax. Pietro Duzina, the first true inquisitor of Malta distinct from the bishop, sent a report to the Pope in 1575 C.E. that noted that

The Grandmaster complains that the Lord Bishop is preventing the servants or slaves of the Clergy from being returned to the *bagnos* at night. This contravenes the Grandmaster's edict, even though edicts of this kind are for the public good. The Lord Bishop has a responsibility to compel the aforementioned slaves to be detained in prison with the others. If the Bishop is unwilling or negligent, the Grandmaster should fulfill this obligation as dictated above.³⁹

³⁸ Elizabeth McGrath, "Ludovico il Moro and his Moors," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 65, 2004: 67-94, accessed April 12, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4135105>.

³⁹ Pietro Duzina, "Circa Praetensiones," in *Documentary Sources of Maltese History, Part 4*, ed. Stanley Fiorini. Msida: 2001.

Duzina's primary intent in this passage was to clarify the issues of secular and ecclesiastical authority in Malta, but the passage reveals that the Grandmaster's edicts on slave incarceration were regularly ignored in the decade after the Great Siege of 1565. Furthermore, the incarceration of the slaves was treated as a matter of "public good."⁴⁰ Duzina treats the slaves as a dangerous, albeit necessary, part of Maltese society who must be secured in the dark for the public safety of Malta.

Islam and the Christian Other

Most of the ships in the Order's navy were galley ships that were powered by oarsmen. These galleys had a fairly limited range and could never be away from shore for more than a few days at a time, but they were well-suited for the Order's raids against Tunisia and the Levant. These galleys were quite small by modern standards, but they were run by enormous crews of about four to five hundred men. The Order's flagship, the *Galera Capitana*, had about 190 fighting-men and 374 oarsmen in 1637, while the other galleys typically had 163 fighting-men and 280 oarsmen.⁴¹ The oarsmen were slaves, prisoners, or conscripted debtors called *buonavoglie*. The *buonavoglie* were Christian debtors who joined the Order's navies to pay off their debt. They had more freedom than the slaves and convicts, and therefore had more to lose if they did not return to Malta.

Of course, keeping such a large number of slaves onboard ran the risk of mutiny in the middle of combat, so the Order typically separated the Muslim slaves by mixing them with Christians. The galley captains treated the *buonavoglie* as reliable crewmen that could watch for

⁴⁰ Duzina's use of the phrase "public good" is particularly revealing because it imposes a limitation on the absolute authority of the Grandmaster. The Grandmaster's edict should not be followed simply because the Grandmaster issued the command, but because the edict is for the good of the public. The statement resembles the political philosophy of public utility in Grotius' *De Jure Belli*, but Duzina arrived in Malta ten years before Grotius' birth.

⁴¹ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 340.

unrest in the crew. The Commander Macedonia recommended that there should be two *buonavoglie* for each oar, as “it is well known what a help they are in combat, and how important it is by means of them to keep control over the Turkish oarsmen.”⁴² The crews of Maltese galleys were not fully cohesive groups, and captains relied on division and suspicion to keep their crews in line.

Life aboard the cramped galleys was brutal and difficult for both Christians and Muslims. Many of the crewmen had been driven by desperation into crime and debt, and lived harsh and violent lives. In 1625, Marescialle Gerlande described the crews as made up of ignoble and inexperienced men:

It is very true that the greater part of the soldiers who are on the galleys [of the Order] are men without experience, science or merit of a real soldier, because the galley-captains are everyday forced and constrained by importunate prayers kindly to accept youths, sons of whores or courtesans, still beardless, as well as several baptized Turks or Moors, still too young, together with bandits of the same class, men gathered from here and there, not worth a penny and without any sort of courage, in such a manner that one cannot say whether [they galleys] or well or badly provided with capable and valorous men.⁴³

Gerlande believed strongly in the aristocratic values espoused by the Order of St. John, and he was therefore biased against the classless and poverty-stricken crewmen of the Order’s galleys. It would not be completely incorrect, however, to assume that the Maltese sailors were as rough a crowd as sailors of other civilizations and harbors. Gerlande’s description, along with the general tone of contemporary historical accounts, also reveals that the slaves were at the bottom of the lowest classes of society. The Maltese associated the slaves with criminals, prostitutes, and baptized Muslims, and they were social outcasts from all of the groups of society except their own. The Order did not permit Muslim slaves to marry nor have children, so that a slave had very little with which to forge an independent space or personal identity. Islam was one of the

⁴² Wettinger, *Slaves*, 341.

⁴³ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 360.

few ways with which the Muslim slaves could assert their own identity and create a new cultural context for themselves.

Islam provided the common ground that gave the slaves their communal identity as a minority in Malta, despite the wide cultural differences among them. The slaves' faith and practices were the only universal forms that they could share, and it was precisely what set them apart from the Christian Maltese. As might be expected, the Muslim slaves felt betrayed by those among them who had converted to Christianity. In 1655 C.E., the Prior reported that unmarried Christian slaves should be kept separate from Muslim slaves so that "they might live comfortably without molestation from the prison convicts or the unconverted slaves."⁴⁴ The slaves were never forced to convert, in part because such conversions would introduce anxieties over the morality of keeping Christians as slaves. Slaves who did convert to Christianity, however, did not receive many special privileges. The Order and the Church may have made this decision out of fear that such incentives would promote disingenuous conversion. Such a policy could also have been too similar to those of the Ottoman Empire, which offered tax incentives to anyone who converted to Islam. Therefore, the slaves were allowed to practice their religion and celebrate certain holidays in the prisons, albeit in a limited form.

The slaves were led in their religious practices by prayer-leaders that the clerks and officials of the Order called *papassi*, *dervis* or *marabuti*. The *papassi* were selected by the other slaves to become religious leaders, and they were exempted from work and other normal slave duties. A *papasso* oversaw burials of slaves, cared for the property of sick slaves, and generally maintained a loose organizational structure among the slaves. In 1631, a *papasso* rebuked another slave for refusing to lend money to other Muslims without proper security.⁴⁵ While a

⁴⁴ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 476.

⁴⁵ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 443.

papasso could conceivably have formal religious training, it is more likely that the *papassi* were chosen based on their literacy. As slaves from a wide variety of countries and peoples, the *papassi* most likely had equally wide interpretations of Islamic teaching. Superstitions and folk practices from multiple cultures blended together, explaining some of the lenient attitudes toward magic among slaves that standard Islamic teaching typically prohibits.

As has already been mentioned, the slaves came from all of the various Muslim populations around the Mediterranean, a people brought together by circumstance and loosely unified by faith. In this sense, they resembled the Knights of Malta: the Knights came from all corners of Christian Europe, and the slaves came from all of the parts of the Ottoman Empire. The Knights' pan-Christian origins were a crucial part of their concept of universal Christianity. The Knights' organization into *langues* unified under a single banner embodied the ideal of a unified Christian world. The Knights were living proof that German Protestants could fight together with Spanish Catholics – that the fractious nature of early modern Europe was not a natural or intrinsic part of Christianity. The Knights represented a vision of Christian universalism that was centered on the cosmopolitanism of the *langues*. By the same token, the slaves' pan-Islamic origins were centered on a similar sense of Islamic universalism. Religion created enough commonality between the slaves that they could form a group identity in Malta. The form of Islam that the slaves practiced, however, was very different from the 'traditional' Islam that might be taught in the *madrasas* of Istanbul or Medina. Despite the unifying power of religion, Islam still adopted a localized form in Malta.

Exotic Commerce

Slaves in Malta had the option of paying a ransom in order to buy their freedom. Upon a slave's arrival in Malta, he or she was given the option of negotiating a ransom price. Ransom arrangements were a lengthy process that largely went back and forth between the slaves, the clerks of the Treasury, and the merchants that traded in Malta, Europe, and the Levant. Slave ransoms and exchanges made up a significant portion of international Mediterranean commerce. Petro Reverco and Giovanni Giustiniani, for example, obtained safe conduct from the Order in 1600 C.E. to travel with nine slaves to the Levant and collect their ransoms.⁴⁶ Ransom dealing was clearly a profitable enough venture to warrant such a lengthy voyage. Of course, the business of human trafficking was also intensely personal. In 1651, a Maltese woman named Sufia purchased a slave from the Order who had already spent twenty-seven years as a galley oarsman. She hoped to exchange this slave for her brother, who had been a slave in Tunis for the past three years.⁴⁷ Such exchanges occurred periodically throughout the seventeenth century, but they were never as common as ransoms. Slavery was a big business, and the commoditization of human lives was a central part of Malta's economy under the Order of St. John.

Given the large number of slaves in Malta, it seems that very few could afford to pay their ransom. Immediate manumission seems to have been the privilege of wealthy merchants and ship's captains who could afford to pay their ransoms on their return to their homes. The rest of the slaves had to arrange to pay their ransoms over time; in practice, this process could take years or even decades. In 1646 C.E., a black slave named Hatia, an oarsmen on the *Vittoria*, was promised that he would become a free man after ten years, during which he would remain a slave but with a wage of 18 *tari* a month. Hatia replied that he was 45, had been an oarsmen for sixteen

⁴⁶ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 235.

⁴⁷ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 285.

years, and would likely be dead after ten years. The Audiencia relented, and agreed to free him after five years.⁴⁸ Ransom was a faint and distant hope, but it was hope nonetheless. There was a reason, therefore, for the slaves to try to make money while they were ashore. Money offered the possibility of freedom at an old age.

Malta, however, presented few opportunities for a slave to find private work. The Order's slaves were given exhausting work on the galleys or repairing fortifications. Private slaves, like those belonging to Matthiolo Delia of Birgu, were occasionally given the ability to earn their own living, but they had to pay their owners a daily sum in exchange for the risk of letting them go unguarded.⁴⁹ The most common form of economic activity among the slaves seems to have been in small-scale trade. Historical accounts frequently mention that the slaves sold food or trinkets around the cities. In 1659, a German traveler named Niederstadt wrote that "the prison of the slaves lies at the head of Saint Mark Street, eminent in size and site, in which Turks and Moors are kept under guard at night, some with chains on their feet, others without, enjoying the freedom to trade and to practice their Mahometan religion."⁵⁰ These two freedoms – the freedom of trade and the freedom of religion – would eventually produce a market in which the slaves would sell spiritual and magical cures.

Trade requires that one has some skill or ability that one can capitalize on. In this respect, the slaves as a group had very few competitive advantages. The Order's slaves were typically chosen as unskilled labor in exhausting tasks, and they had very little time to work for their own benefit. The slaves did, however, have one advantage: the Europeans and local Maltese regarded them with a kind of superstitious awe. The Muslim slaves were outsiders, a group of people representing a vague and insidious other. In 1632 C.E., a slave named Hali told an Inquisitorial

⁴⁸ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 191.

⁴⁹ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 234.

⁵⁰ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 93.

assistant that the local Maltese believe that “the writing of we infidels are magical,” and that they “suppose that we infidels are devils and mages.”⁵¹ Hali’s deposition grants some insight into the local slave culture of Malta. Muslim slaves were willing to capitalize on Maltese superstition in order to sell prayers and magic, and they were given an air of foreign exoticism that catered to their reputations as sorcerers and mages. In this respect, the Maltese perception of Muslims is analogous to European perceptions of the Romani, or ‘gypsies,’ as an exotic and dangerous people with otherworldly and magical power. Inquisition records certainly reveal that the Maltese regarded the Muslim slaves as experts in all things mystical and magical. The slaves’ exotic backgrounds gave them a small advantage in their otherwise powerless circumstances.

⁵¹ “Perche loro l’immagino [sic?] che noi infedeli siano diavoli e magari.” AIM Crim. Proc., 52A, fol. 23.

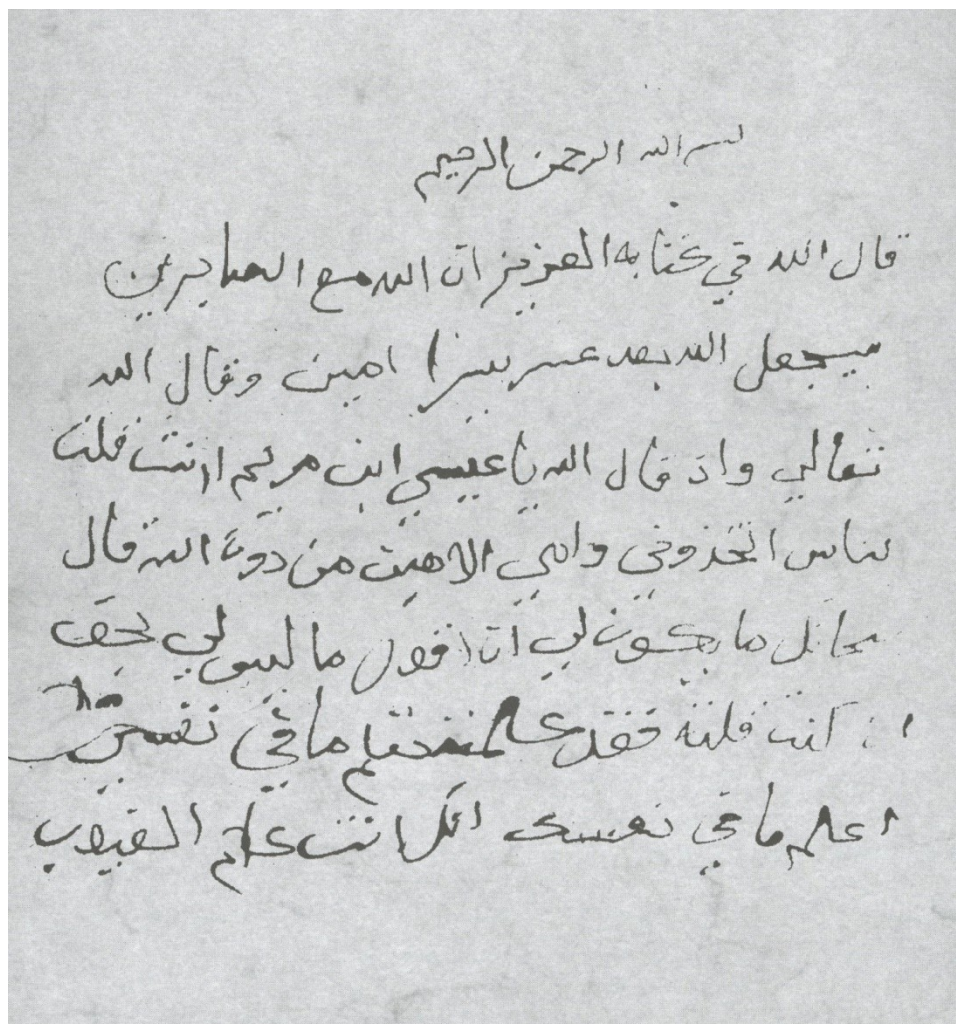


Fig. 3: AIM, Crim. Proc., 101A, f170^v. Malta Series I, 2137A. Courtesy of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Collegeville, MN.

This intriguing Arabic script is part of a document from the Inquisition proceedings against Hag Mihamed Hafrin, who had been accused of sorcery.

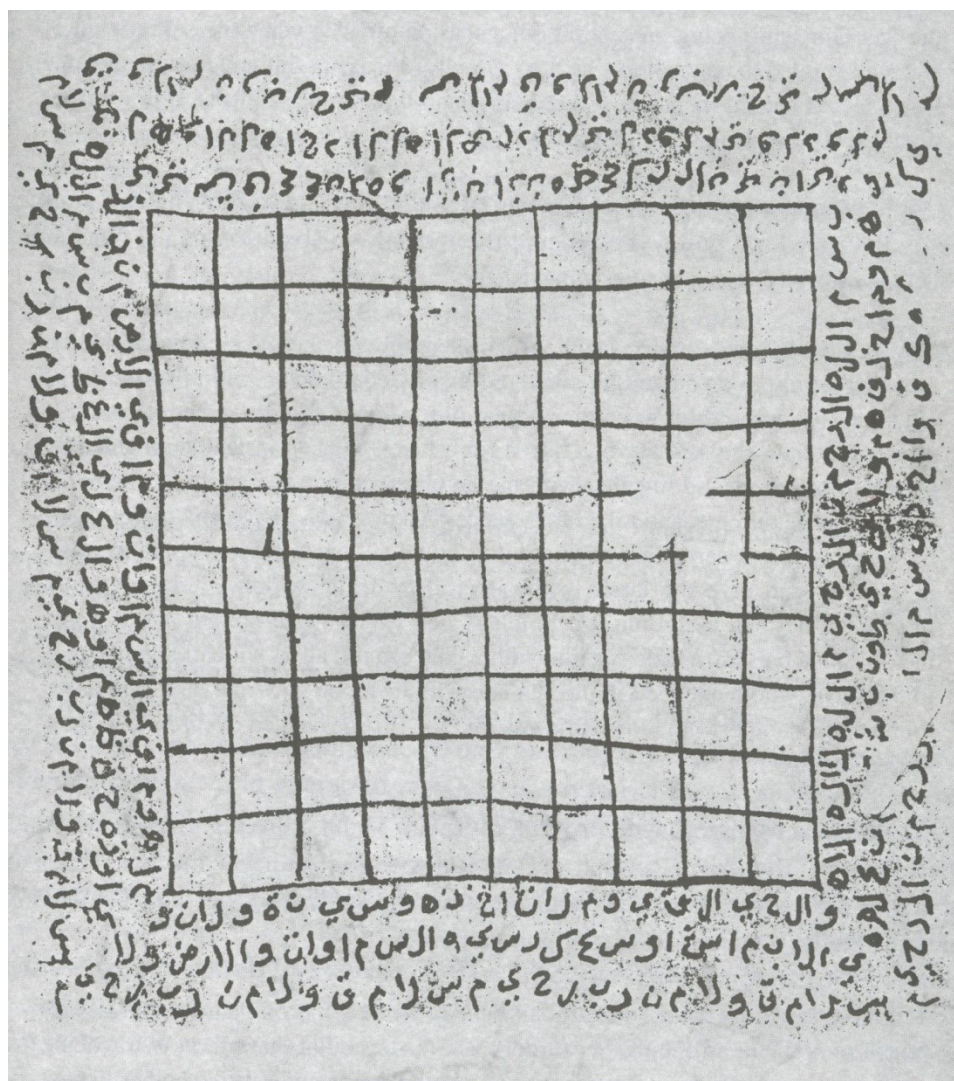


Fig. 4: AIM, Crim. Proc., 101A, f165. Malta Series I, 2137A. Courtesy of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Collegeville, MN.

This second illustration is also from the trial of Hag Mihamed Hafrin. It appears to be an example of a ‘magic square,’ an occult sigil that combined mathematics and astrology to receive mystical properties. The Sufi mathematician and occultist Ahmad al-Buni demonstrated how to build magic squares in c. 1200.



Fig. 5: Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, 1514. Copper plate. Frankfurt, Städel. Accessed April 15, 2013. Reproduced from Wikimedia Commons, <http://commons.wikimedia.org> (accessed April 15, 2013).

This old master print shows the despondent figure of Genius in a melancholy state. A 4x4 magic square appears in the top-right corner. Magic squares were made popular in Europe by the German humanist and occultist Cornelius Agrippa through his *De Occulta Philosophia*.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROSTITUTES AND WITCHCRAFT

The Growth of Prostitution in Malta

The expansion of corsair activities would have profound social consequences on the non-slave populations of Malta. The maritime economy of Valletta, Senglea, and Vittoriosa brought immigrants of diverse nationalities to Malta. Merchants, sailors, and knights came from all corners of Europe and the Mediterranean, forming the population of the harbor areas into a medley of different backgrounds. This diversity was further intensified by the presence of the slave prisons, which by papal verdict were filled with people that were not Catholic. Maltese corsairs would also commonly die at sea or be captured by the Barbary fleets, leaving behind their widows. Innocenza Camilleri, a Gozitan woman, had only married for a year when her husband was captured on one of the Order's galleys. She was fourteen, and without a husband or any financial support, she resorted to prostitution. A Maltese man, and a family friend, swore to a court that her husband had died, even though he later admitted that he did not know her husband. Camilleri remarried, but in less than two years, her husband had left her. She resorted to prostitution again for another thirty years, until she finally heard that her first husband was alive. She came before Inquisitor Antonio Pignatelli in 1649 to beg for forgiveness and to wait for her husband's return.⁵² Camilleri's story is a typical illustration of how the rapid growth of prostitution in early modern Malta correlated with the growth of the *corso* and maritime trade in the harbor areas.

The inquisitors believed that the Maltese prostitutes were one of the most sinful aspects of Maltese life. In 1596, Inquisitor Innocenzo Del Bufalo noted that "On this island of Malta, and especially in Valletta, there is a great number of prostitutes."⁵³ Maltese religious organizations

⁵² Bonnici, "Maltese Society Under the Hospitallers," in *Hospitaller Malta*, ed. Mallia-Milanes, 331.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 331.

worked to erase the combat the spread of prostitution, but they never succeeded. Andrea Hagius, a Jesuit, opened two houses for reformed prostitutes in Valletta. In the 1680s, however, Andrea, was accused of sleeping with the women and the inquisitor, Caracciolo, sentenced him to prison. He was eventually released and restored to the Jesuits, but he was forbidden for continuing his work with the prostitutes.⁵⁴ Under Fabio Chigi's leadership of the Holy Office, he considered a monastery that would provide help for reformed prostitutes. He decided, however, that this monastery would never truly eradicate prostitution from the island, and decided that "one can provide for this monastery by dedicating to it part of the money prostitutes left in their wills. An alternative solution could be that prostitutes, all through their life, are made to contribute a yearly sum for the monastery."⁵⁵ Prostitution had become a widespread and normal part of life under the Order of St. John, a natural extension of an economy centered on the *corso*.

The prostitutes catered to the new demographic of enterprising foreigners in the harbors. The financial stability of these women was dependent on the goodwill of their male clients, and many of them sought spiritual means to secure that goodwill. They sought out love spells or potions that would make their lovers and clients, or *amici carnali*, fall in love with them. Such magical practices were prohibited by the inquisitor and the Counter-Reformation Church in Malta; therefore, prostitutes looked outside of the Christian population of Malta, to slaves who might sell cures to the prostitutes in exchange for money or services. Inquisitor Federico Borromeo records that his tribunal in Malta was much preoccupied with the Muslim slaves who were spreading superstitions, incantations, love-philtres, and other 'similar vanities' among the

⁵⁴ Bonnici, "Maltese Society Under the Hospitallers," in *Hospitaller Malta*, ed. Mallia-Milanes, 331-2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 331.

women and the simple-minded while they went about the town “selling their wretched goods, such as befitted their condition.”⁵⁶

Pietro Duzina, the first true inquisitor of Malta distinct from the bishop, published an edict in 1575 C.E. that emphasized the Inquisition’s intent to root out heresy, so that “there might not be some stain or wrinkle of heresy... or contagious plague and great affront against the divine Majesty like the sin of heresy, which misdirects the straight path of our faith that alone brings salvation.”⁵⁷ Prostitutes buying love magic from Muslim slaves was hardly heretical – at least in the sense of an organized theological break from orthodoxy – but the Inquisition intended to remove such superstitious practices from Malta. In large part, this was due to the broader mission of the Counter-Reformation Church to educate the masses and standardize religious doctrine to prevent heterodoxy. The other motive of the inquisitor, however, was much more specific to Malta. After every denunciation or deposition regarding love magic, the inquisitor would ask the witness if he or she believed that this sorcery could conjoin the free will of man (the witness, faced with torture, always told the inquisitor ‘no’). The problem was not just that the prostitutes falsely believed in devils or magic, but also that such things could overpower free will and make someone fall in love with you – contradicting one of the central tenets of the Tridentine reforms. By assuming that free will could be constrained, the prostitutes and alleged sorcerers were coming dangerously close to Protestant assertions of predestination and lack of free will. Cases that dealt in local folk religions and superstitions, like curses and the evil eye, still carried the shadow of Protestant heresies.

Every case that came before the Inquisition was documented in the Inquisition Archive, a collection of manuscripts that are currently available in the Cathedral Archives of Mdina, Malta.

⁵⁶ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 421

⁵⁷ Pietro Duzina, “Datum in conventu Sancti Augustini Rabbati,” in *Documentary Sources of Maltese History, Part 4*, ed. Stanley Fiorini (Msida: 2001).

Witnesses were summoned or arrived spontaneously at the Inquisitor's Palace in Birgu. There, they would sit before the Inquisitor and answer his questions. Witnesses provided their name, age, and, if known, parents. While they spoke, their answers were recorded by a secretary of the Inquisition, who essentially filled the role of court stenographer. The questions of the Inquisitor typically followed a general formula, and were written in the documents in Latin. The answers by the witness were invariably written in Italian. If the witness did not speak Italian, his or her responses were translated. Muslim slaves who came before the Inquisition likely spoke Turkish or Arabic; their answers were recorded in Italian as well, suggesting that the Inquisitor would find a slave or a Jesuit who could translate from Arabic. The Archives of the Inquisition in Malta contain testimonies from a wide cross-section of Maltese society, and therefore provide extremely useful material for early modern cultural studies.

Prostitutes and Witches

Fears of miscegenation and interfaith sex dominated bodily mores, and Christian women were prohibited from even being in the same house as Muslims. As the depositions in Inquisition cases reveal, Muslim magicians and healers often used intermediaries to contact their customers. These intermediaries would frequently be other slaves or prostitutes with whom they have worked before. The meeting between one slave and two Christian prostitutes at the slave's prison typifies the scenario. In August 1635, the case was brought before Inquisitor Fabio Chigi – who would later become Pope Alexander VII. This case involved a Maltese madame named Gioseppa. The witness, a woman named Magalina (presumably also a prostitute), was “disgusted with her lover.” Gioseppa told her that in order to attract men that she desired, she needed to use magical means. Gioseppa took her to the slave prison; there, she spoke with the prison captain,

one of Magalina's clients. They then met with a slave named Mohammed, who gave her water to wash her face "in order to appear beautiful and be loved by everyone."⁵⁸ Gioseppa also told her that earth inside her doorway might make her lover come, and tied together braids that would "restrict the dreams of my lover, that he cannot sleep." Magalina admitted that she did this herself "only one time that night."

Every witness that came before the Inquisition for superstition and witchcraft faced severe penalties for their behavior. Therefore, Magalina had ample motivation to present herself as a good Christian faced with overwhelming spiritual temptation and corruption. In this context, she might have manipulated her confession to place greater blame on Gioseppa. If Inquisition confessions and depositions may be grouped as a literary genre, then Gioseppa typifies the trope of a corrupt seductress within Magalina's denunciation. Gioseppa is a pimp, an older woman who is deeply entrenched in the seedy world of prostitution and magical ritual. In the confession, Magalina always follows Gioseppa's lead: first, in going to the slave prison; second, in manipulating the prison captain; third, in speaking to Mohammed; finally, in independently conducting magical rituals. When the inquisitor asks if Magalina ever believed that this sorcery could conjoin free will, Magalina fervently emphasizes that "I have never believed nor do I believe this." Of course, this rejection of magic contradicts her claim that she participated in the braid ritual *sola una volta quella sera*. As close attention to Magalina's case demonstrates, the Inquisition documents must be read critically, but they still contain useful information on cultural representations of slaves and "witches" in seventeenth-century Malta.

Another case confirms confessional manipulation and Inquisitorial vilification of prostitutes. This case was brought before Inquisitor Fabio Chigi a year before Magalina's denunciation, in October 1634. The testimony is by a nineteen-year-old woman named Annica

⁵⁸ ...mi dasse un acqua p lavar la fascia per parer bella et esser amata da' ogn-uno. AIM Crim. Proc., 51B, fol. 643^v

Greca, who lived in Valletta, who appeared spontaneously (that is, without compulsion) to the Inquisition tribunal. She begins:

Four months ago I was left by one of my lovers. A courtesan named Sperantia la Fornara – who lives in the whorehouse nearby – saw me crying, and asked me what happened. I told her about the breakup, and she then told me that she knew of a woman who knew remedies for reconciliation with lovers, but that she wanted me to give her four *scudi* to give to said woman. But I did not give her such things, saying to her that I wanted to see the practice anyway. She promised to give me a remedy from the woman to make me reconcile with my lover.

After about a month, I went into her house unannounced with one of my servant girls (who is already dead). The woman greeted me with a large plate of salt in her hand and a hearth lit with flame. She threw the salt into the fire invoking the Holy Devil. I said Jesus, but she said to me that I should not name him because the sorcery would not have effect. Since I had a medallion of St. Helena, she made me enter into another room, saying that I had to stay there while I carried holy things.

I soon saw that she had done the salt ritual. She took a knife with a black handle and a plant in a flowerpot (*grasta*), saying words I did not know, and tied her braids until one at night, saying that she tied the dreams of her lovers. Three times she did it for my lover, naming his name three times in my presence, and that of the salt she had made for me in my presence for around ten times.

She said that another woman had done this sorcery, at the end I discovered that she had done as I had seen. Because I did not see some effect, she said she needed to be paid for the sorcery to work. She said that she had learned these sorceries from a slave named Omar, and that this Omar had made [little drawings] to carry under the tongue that could allow [kissing a man] to make you reconcile with him. She also told me then that she knew to make certain signs with the finger of the hand in order to make the lovers come unthinkingly. Finally, she threatened that she would do a ritual to make my lovers leave me if I ever revealed her to the Holy Office of these things.⁵⁹

This story reinforces the fact that denunciations must be treated with some skepticism, mostly due to the sensational depiction of devil worship in the account. Sperantia supposedly learned to

⁵⁹ AIM Crim. Proc., 51B, fol. 653

worship *Il Diavolo Santo* from a Muslim slave named Omar, but this would be an unlikely form of Arabic magic. Medieval treatises on Islamic prophetic medicine and natural philosophy describe magical rituals, talismans, and spells, but their powers were derived from Allah – not demons.⁶⁰ Christians, by contrast, were much more likely to correlate magic with devil-worship. Therefore, while it is possible that Omar taught the ritual to Sperantia as a means of summoning *djinn*, it seems likely that the ritual was invented by a Christian. The exaggerated performance-like aspects of the ritual also suggest that the ritual was intended to impress. Throwing the salt into the fire while praying to *Il Diavolo Santo* would certainly make an impression on any pious Catholic, and the whole event seems like a radical departure from ‘normal’ behavior. The spectacle of the ritual could have been used by Sperantia to impress Annica into thinking the magic would work, but it seems more plausible that Annica invented the entire account as a fiction for the Inquisitor. It verges on the bizarre that a prostitute would invite a nineteen-year-old girl into her house and begin worshipping the devil in front of her – all for the possibility of earning four *scudi* (about enough to buy two loaves of bread).

Annica represents herself as a scorned lover who accompanied a prostitute into a devil-worshipping ritual out of sheer curiosity. She piously wears a medallion of St. Helena, and invokes the name of Jesus in contrast to Sperantia’s *Il Diavolo Santo*. Her servant, who has already died in the three months since the event, conveniently cannot corroborate her denunciation. Sperantia, however, is presented as a devil-worshipping prostitute. Annica derisively labels the other woman as a whorish courtesan (*cagna donna corteggiana*). Other accounts, however, generally call a prostitute *una donna peccatrice*, *una donna inhonesta*, or simply *una corteggiana* – labels that are far less condemnatory than Annica’s *cagna donna*. If Annica’s testimony were false, it would bring up some suspicions regarding why she would

⁶⁰ Pormann, *Medieval Islamic Medicine*, 144.

target a prostitute, perhaps explaining whom her wayward lover left her for. Still, the account also bears some salient details worthy of inspection.

The rituals that Annica describes are common throughout the depositions. Sea salt, unknown herbs or periwinkle, knives with black handles, and knots are all common elements of Maltese love magic.⁶¹ If Annica had made the story up, it is plausible that she could have heard of such rituals from friends or gossip. In Annica's denunciation, the slave Omar is still present, but he is a shadowy figure referenced only by Sperantia. While Sperantia is the primary antagonist of the denunciation, Omar is the true origin of Sperantia's error. According to Annica, Sperantia's superstition and devil-worship all originate from Omar, who taught her the dark rituals. The denunciations regularly portray the intermediaries as having fallen from grace (in contrast to the witness' innocence), and the slaves as an insidious force in the background.

Antonia Fontana came before Fabio Chigi in 1635, under the accusation of witchcraft. Like many of the other women who came before the Inquisitor, she was a prostitute. The Inquisitor announced a summation of her confession for the record:

You, Antonia Fontana, daughter of Gioseppe (Sr.) and Paola from Naxxar, married today to Gioseppe of the Kingdom of Naples, inhabitant of the City of Valletta, around the age of thirty. You spontaneously came before this Holy Office and judiciously confessed that around six years ago – in the state of a sinful woman – you were called by a certain person into their house, where you found an Infidel. According to your deposition, he said that he could make your carnal friends fall in love with you using words written with ink and saffron – he offered similar things to you, and you accepted two items of this love magic. You made this confession because you are not in his service, but reject him. You confessed further that in the same period, the same person called you into the same house. There, you found a vase full of periwinkle sitting on a table, surrounded by lit holy candles. A person, who was wearing red clothes according to your description, was reading a bit of writing – but you did not know what it was. The person said that you needed to take some leaves, and you took a branch.

⁶¹ Cassar, "Witchcraft Beliefs and Social Control in Seventeenth Century Malta," in *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology, Volume 5*, ed. Brian P. Levack, 324.

You brought the branch to some other person who took part of these leaves,
saying that that for the sorcery to have an effect, you had to celebrate a mass.⁶²

Antonia's deposition provides some insight into the power of language and writing in Maltese magic and superstition. The illiterate Maltese lived in a world in which the written word dominated their lives. The sacred word of God was written in printed texts, in a language that they could not understand. The Order of St. John issued its edicts and bans through written publications. Through writing, the power of words could be preserved. As has been mentioned, a slave named Hali pointed out to the Inquisitor that the Maltese believed that "the writing of we infidels are magical."⁶³ The magic "words written in ink and saffron" were likely written in Arabic, but their power and mystery were also derived from the writing itself.

The ritual that Antonia describes also conveys a sense of exotic power, but it also contains familiar elements. The scene is quite dramatic: the holy candles, the red clothes, and the sanctity of the ritual all portray an exotic and foreign ritual, something distinctly apart from the normal everyday life of a Maltese woman. Antonia, however, also mentions that the ritual involved celebrating a mass. The ritual incorporated elements of Roman Catholicism with superstitious tradition, suggesting that the Maltese thought of both as having otherworldly powers. By conflating the mass with sorcery, Antonia implies that power can have both divine and magical origins, or even that these two sources might be the same. The ritual was a hybrid, an ambiguous creation that defied the Inquisitor's prohibitions against mixed Christian and pagan beliefs.

⁶² AIM Crim. Proc. 51A, fol. 69.

⁶³ "Perche loro l'immagino che noi infedeli siano diavoli e magari." AIM Crim. Proc., 52A, fol. 23.

Maltese Men and Witchcraft

Women were not the only Christians that sought out Muslim slaves. Maltese men also looked for love magic that could attract women. Domincia Zammit, a sixty-year-old Maltese woman, came before Fabio Chigi in 1635 to denounce her friend's son. Her testimony was short, but revealing:

About two years ago, the wife of Angelo Camilleri and his daughter told me that Domenic Camilleri – their son and brother, respectively – had been in a rage and had broken a holy icon under his feet (I do not know of what saint).

And this same Domenic, again about two years ago, told me that he had made a charm (*fatto una sortilegia*) from an Infidel that would make every woman desire him. Wherever he put his feet, there the woman would go to find him. After a year, he also told me more times that when faced with his confessor, he threw this charm into the sea, and I believe Vittoria and Maria might also know this.⁶⁴

This account seems more plausible than Annica's denunciation. Domincia's age and respectability makes her a more reliable witness than a nineteen-year-old girl, and she admits that she only knew of Domenic's activities secondhand. The denunciation suggests that witchcraft and sorcery was a regular topic of conversation in Maltese gossip. Domincia's account also confirms that women and prostitutes were not the only customers of Muslim slaves, suggesting that sorcery and ritual was more widespread than such a limited audience.

The mother and sister had told Domincia about young Domenic's behavior, suggesting that this was a private that had been troubling them, and they had been seeking advice. Domenic's spiritual crisis, therefore, is a family affair and a cause of concern for friends and family. A comparable scenario in the twenty-first century, perhaps, would be a member of the family becoming addicted to drugs and meeting with a bad crowd. This interpretation puts Domenic into a slightly different light than the prostitutes of the other denunciations. In the

⁶⁴ AIM Crim. Proc., 51A, fol. 131.

earlier accounts, Sperantia and Gioseppa had been portrayed as damned individuals who were now leading others into temptation. Sperantia was worshipping devils, and Gioseppa was going into the slave prisons themselves. Domenic, however, had simply bought a charm, an act that Domincia mentions alongside his trampling of a holy icon. The overall impression is that Domenic is not beyond redemption, but rather needs guidance that his mother and sister cannot provide; therefore, Domincia goes to the Inquisitor for help.

Sorcery was not limited to the simple Maltese. In 1635 C.E., a member of the Italian *langue* of the Order of St. John came before Fabio Chigi for holding illegal texts. The knight, Vittorio Scaglia, confessed to helping people escape the Holy Office, collaborating with heretics, and reading books on black magic. Scaglia's library is like a cursory look at the most prominent books of Renaissance magic. The most prominent text he mentions is *The Key of Solomon* (or *Clavicula of Solomon*), a grimoire that detailed invocations and curses to summon demons and spirits. The second was a printed book on chiromancy, or palmistry, written by "Ecomanzia." He also mentions reading a book he calls *The Astrolabe* (*L'Astrolabio*) by Pietro d'Abano, a fourteenth-century Italian philosopher and astrologer who was condemned by the Inquisition for magic.⁶⁵ The books represent a new source for magical knowledge that came from written sources – grimoires and texts for a learned audience of natural philosophers and humanists. Ironically, the contents of these books were not far removed from the practices of the slaves. *Key of Solomon* draws from a tradition of Jewish and Arabic alchemists and Pietro d'Abano advocated the natural philosophy of Averroes and other Islamic Aristotelian authors. The sources that Scaglia confessed to reading drew from the same tradition in which the prison slaves in Malta worked.

⁶⁵ AIM Crim. Proc., 51A, fol. 18.

The role of Aristotelian philosophy in Islamic theology and natural philosophy is an enormous subject beyond the scope of this essay. That translations of Aristotle, however, particularly impacted Islamic natural philosophy and medicine is worth stating. In the eleventh century, Ibn Sina modeled his *Kitab al-shifa*, or *Book of the Cure*, on Aristotle's philosophy; however, this work was only a medical treatise in the sense that it presented the soul as 'curable' of ignorance through philosophy. Ibn Sina's fourteen-volume *Canon of Medicine*, however, remained the most authoritative medical encyclopedia for centuries. In addition, Ibn Sina's treated the soul as an independent and transcendent object that could produce ill-effects in other bodies without instruments, and therefore accepts phenomena like the evil eye and magical practices.⁶⁶ Ibn Sina's influence makes it likely that folk healers incorporated the Aristotelian elements of Ibn Sina's medical treatments into their spiritual and magical remedies. This possibility becomes more likely in light of Giacomo Montalto's description of a Muslim folk healer in Malta.

In one case tried before Inquisitor Onorato Visconti in 1624 C.E., a man from Valletta named Giacomo Montalto testified that he had paid a slave to treat his sick wife. Unlike the prostitutes' cases, Giacomo's case does not involve *sortilegia*, or witchcraft, but the Inquisitor's interest suggests that the case is just as based on superstition. The Inquisitor seemed more concerned with the fact that the slave offered a 'spiritual cure,' rather than the healing itself. The slave's cure is a ritual, suggesting an overlap between medicine and magical power that could affect a man's soul.

Passing by the front of my house at this time was an infidel slave who had bad eyes and walked with a cane, and was selling fritters (*frittole*) in the street. I called him to the house to buy some fritters for my little son; when he entered, he saw how sick my wife was, and asked what she had. I responded that she did not feel well, and I asked if it would be enough for the spirit to cure her. He told me

⁶⁶ Sharif, *History of Muslim Philosophy*, 492.

that he did not understand medicine, but that there was another slave who did understand it – and that he would bring this slave later.

The following day the first slave returned with another slave. I do not know the name of this second slave, but he is a man of tall stature with a little bad eyesight, walks with a cane, and is roughly fifty years old, who I would recognize if I saw him. The fritter-slave brought him into the house, and the said slave came into the house and looked at my wife. He said that she had been cursed, and that it would be enough to cure the spirit. He then demanded a zucchini in exchange for perfumes – which I gave him.

He went away and came back the following morning, and asked for the fire, a wash-basin, three cane pieces, and four candles. He placed the perfumes in the fire, lit the four candles, filled the wash-basin with water and myrtle leaves, arranged the canes into a triangle, and then put a sheet over this thing. Then, he made me carry a handful of dirt from near the door of the house and another handful of dirt from the other door – and those he put near the wash-basin. He then said to inhale through the nose in order to clear its sniffing, and to take that earth and line the inside of the washbasin. Then, he told me to extend my hand inside the washbasin and inside I would find a spiny thing; that this would be a wax statuette with a stick in the back and a nail. He then took with him the three [cane pieces] that he had brought with him and the four candles, and told me not to discuss these things with the confessor, and after the month to throw the statue into the fire.⁶⁷

Once Giacomo finished his story, the Inquisitor Visconti asked if he “believed that this infidel could cure the true sickness by his ability.” Giacomo answered that “I searched for a cure to the sickness, but by virtue I did not do it on reflection.” Perhaps the most striking part of Giacomo’s testimony is how casually the encounter begins. The first slave is selling fritters in the street, a far cry from the portrayal of slaves as dangerous and manipulative in the other depositions. The healer only demands a simple zucchini in exchange for the treatment. If the warning against confession had not been mentioned at the end of the account, then the entire scene would seem like an everyday part of Maltese life.

⁶⁷ AIM Crim. Proc., 44A, fol.156.

It is easy to recognize the Aristotelian elements in Giacomo's description of the cure. The slave healer's cure incorporated elements of earth from the door, water from the basin, air from the perfumes, and fire from the candles. Like Ibn Sina, the slave regards the soul as a treatable part of human health, and that proper treatment in this case involved treating the soul (*che gli bastava per l'animo di guarirla*). The slave also claims that the spiritual affliction is the result of a curse (*disse che lei era ammagata*). This emphasis on spiritual treatment is likely what made this case a matter for the Inquisition. Matters of the spirit were the domain of the Church; indeed, the Counter-Reformation doctrine represented the Inquisition as the instrument for the spiritual well-being of Christian people. By going to a Muslim slave, Giacomo was giving spiritual power to a man outside the context of the Church. The treatment was clearly superstitious, but it implied that Giacomo believed in powers affecting the spirit beyond those prescribed in Church doctrine.

Slaves were a powerless group in Maltese society, but Giacomo's testimony reveals that they were treated with some authority on matters of magic and healing. In the account, the spiritual healer is giving commands and orders to a free Maltese man. Contrast this dynamic with the words of Inquisitor Borromeo, who – as mentioned before – claimed that the slaves were “selling their wretched goods, such as befitted their condition.”⁶⁸ For a moment, the spiritual healer is not a wretched slave, but a healer respected for his expertise. The exchange of magical goods and services created a contested space in which the slaves could assert their authority and status. In the world of magical trade, they were not part of the lowest classes of society, but a group of people whose knowledge gave them higher status.

⁶⁸ Wettinger, *Slaves*, 421.



Fig. 6: de Favray, Antoine. *Une jeune femme maltaise*, 1745, oil on canvas. Louvre, Paris. Reproduced from ArtStor, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed April 15, 2013).

This eighteenth-century portrait depicts a young Maltese woman.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

A prominent element of the early modern world was the creation of lanes of communication across the globe. Connection creates new circuits of communication that stretch across borders and allow an unlimited number of encounters. These networks allow the negotiation of shared spaces, shared ideals, and shared identities. Eventually, these negotiations create a sense of self that is unitary and founded upon commonality. Different people find common ground; in doing so, they become a unified identity. This common ground is the universal, the ideal with which one can align and find shared values with other people across cultures. Universalism emphasizes commonality over difference, and it suggests that people can reach across borders and find kindred souls. This emphasis on connection, however, conflicts with the specificities and particulars of local difference. Universalism privileges the global narrative over the local one. It claims that the struggle of a single group is only relevant within a broader context.

Even the most idealistic and inclusive conceptions of the world, however, always seem to have some element of exclusion. Humanists who profess the most ardent love for mankind nevertheless despise the elements of mankind that can produce genocide and misery. Environmentalists who uphold the supremacy and balance of Nature must confront the possibility that humans are an integral part of Nature, and that artificiality is not in opposition to Nature but a part of it. By this argument, a trash heap is as 'natural' as a wasps' nest or beaver's dam, and must be loved as wholly and equally. Such universals embrace certain ideals and certain peoples at the exclusion of others. Ultimately, this exclusion is a form of marginalization and erasure, as groups and parts of the idealized object are made less in the idealization. The fascist is treated as inhuman. The trash heap is treated as unnatural. Universalists idealize the object of their adoration, erasing all of that object's flaws and inconsistencies in the process.

In a similar process of erasure, the universal also overrides the individual components that make up parts of its ‘whole.’ The universal speaks with the authority of all – it is the point of its universality. With such authority, the universal drowns out local forms and erases signs of local resistance. The Counter-Reformation Church, for example, sought to create a unity of ecumenical doctrine that subsumed all local practices into a cohesive and unified theology. The Inquisition attempted to erase the differences between the parishes in Malta and the parishes of northern Germany. People with deviant or heretical beliefs, like the Maltese prostitutes and ‘witches,’ were processed and reformed in Inquisition tribunals. The Counter-Reformation church tried to create unanimity among its constituent members; in practice, this process amounted to a form of thought control. Such is the hegemonic power of the universal: it aims to enact its idealized visions of the world that drown out disagreement, override local differences, and privilege the common identity over the individual.

The hegemonic power of the universal is its potential to align people’s thoughts with the goals and ideals of the universal. The hegemonic control of a group and the hegemonic power of a universal are not the same thing. A universal is a powerful idea that can disrupt and create hegemonic control among peoples. A universal does not necessarily serve to reinforce existing hierarchies, but it can be used to enact new ones or disrupt existing power relationships. When a universal translates across localities and differences, it encounters friction: the areas of awkward, unequal, disruptive, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference. An idea never translates perfectly. It is always reframed and transformed to accommodate local particulars and specificities. This friction is not resistance, but friction creates the interstitial spaces in which resistance to the universal can be found. These are the spaces in which the universal does not fit; they are the areas in which the local asserts itself against the universal. For example, the Order of

St. John sought to remake Malta into a bastion of Christendom, a cosmopolitan island driven by external conflict with the Islamic world. This vision relied on an understanding of Christianity and Islam as absolute cultural boundaries with no commonalities between them. The Maltese, however, occupied an ambiguous space as a Semitic people with Roman Catholic values. Their identity defied the Order of St. John's ideal of clashing civilizations.

Subaltern groups are those groups that are displaced and dispossessed by the engagement of the hegemonic universal. In this essay, the Muslim slaves and the Christian prostitutes are those people who make up the subaltern. By purchasing magical goods and services, the women were effectively looking for power, and the stability that power offered. In early modern Malta, the order and financial stability of women's lives depended on their relationships with men. The Order of St. John's campaigns against Islam, however, had made many Maltese women into orphans and widows. The Order had fashioned Malta after its idea of Crusade and religious war, and this refashioning inevitably disrupted the lives of the Maltese. By going to the Muslim slaves and seeking out love magic, Maltese women were looking to have some control over their own lives. Love magic could find a husband or a regular client. It offered security and the possibility of a higher position in society. In its most rudimentary form, the presence of magic in Maltese society represented the hope for power among the powerless.

The Muslim slaves and Christian prostitutes were able to find some common engagement by hoping for similar things: the slaves for their freedom, and the prostitutes for security and control. This common engagement resisted the hegemonic control of the Order of St. John and the Inquisition. By creating temporary alignment between Christians and Muslims, the slaves and prostitutes resisted the Order's ideology of permanent religious war. By creating hybrid rituals of Christian, Muslim and pagan sources, the slaves and prostitutes defied the Inquisition's doctrine

of ecumenical reform and purity. This resistance was not conscious, but it did not have to be. The prostitutes did not go to the Muslim slaves out of civil disobedience, but rather out of a desire for greater individual stability and control. Their misalignment with the universalistic visions of the Order of St. John and the Inquisition was enough to create disparities between ideals and reality. The common engagement of Muslim slaves and Christian prostitutes subverted the hegemonic programs of the Order of St. John and the Inquisition.

Bibliography

Manuscript Sources in the Cathedral Museum Archives, Mdina, Malta

Archives of the Inquisition, kept at the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta, and on microfilm at the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Collegeville, Minnesota.

Processi 44A, 156

Processi 51A, 18, 69, 131

Processi 52A, 23

Processi 51B, 643^v, 653

Processi 101A, 165

Printed Sources

Balbi, Francesco. *The Siege of Malta, 1565*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005.

Benedict XVI. 2010. "Visit to the grotto of St. Paul" (speech). Transcript and video from the Vatican, "Apostolic Journey to Malta"
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100417_grotta-malta_en.html.

Bisaha, Nancy. *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004.

Brady, Thomas A. *Handbook of European History*. New York: Leiden, 1994.

Braudel, Fernand. *The Mediterranean*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

Brincat, Joseph M. *Maltese and Other Languages: A Linguistic History of Malta*. Sta Venera: Midsea Books, 2011.

Cameron, Euan. *Early Modern Europe: An Oxford History*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.

Cassar, Carmel. "Witchcraft Beliefs and Social Control in Seventeenth Century Malta," in *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology, Volume 5*, ed. Brian P. Levack. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Cassar, Carmel. *Society, Culture and Identity in Early Modern Malta*. Msida: Mireva Publications, 2000.

Ciantar, Joe Zammit. *A Benedictine's Notes on Seventeenth-Century Malta*. Hal Tarxien: Gutenberg Press, 1998.

De Giorgio, Roger. *A City By An Order*. Valletta: Progress Press, 1985.

Earle, Peter. *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970.

Elizabeth McGrath, "Ludovico il Moro and his Moors," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 65, 2004: 67-94, accessed April 12, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4135105>.

Ganado, Albert. *A Study In Depth of 143 Maps Representing the Great Siege of Malta of 1565*. Valletta: Publishers Enterprises, 1994.

Hughes, Quentin. *Malta: A Guide to the Fortifications*. Valletta: Said International, 1993.

Knöbl, Wolfgang. "Theories That Won't Pass Away: The Never-ending Story of Modernization Theory." In *Handbook of Historical Sociology*, edited by Gerard Delanty and Engin F. Isin, 96-107. London: SAGE Publications, 2003.

Mallia-Milanes, Victor. *Hospitaller Malta, 1530-1798: Studies on Early Modern Malta and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem*. Msida: Mireva Publications, 1993.

- Mallia-Milanes, Victor. *Venice and Hospitaller Malta, 1530-1798: Aspects of a Relationship*. Marsa: P.E.G., 1992.
- Mitchell, Jon P. *Ambivalent Europeans: Ritual, Memory and the Public Sphere in Malta*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Morris, William. *The American Heritage Dictionary*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982.
- National Statistics Office of Malta, "Census Taking in Malta." Accessed January 21, 2013. <http://www.nso.gov.mt/site/page.aspx?pageid=577>.
- Pietro Duzina, "Datum in conventu Sancti Augustini Rabbati," in *Documentary Sources of Maltese History, Part 4*, ed. Stanley Fiorini. Msida: 2001.
- Pormann, Peter. *Medieval Islamic Medicine*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown UP, 2007.
- Sharif, Miyad Muhammed. *A History of Muslim Philosophy*. Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1966.
- Tsing, Anna. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005.
- Wettinger, Godfrey. *Slavery in the Islands of Malta and Gozo ca. 1000-1812*. San Gwann: Publishers Enterprises, 2002.

Artwork and Illustrations

- Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, 1514. Copper plate. Frankfurt, Städel, accessed April 15, 2013, Wikimedia Commons, <http://commons.wikimedia.org>.
- Matteo Perez d'Aleccio, *L'Assedio e Batteria dell'Isola di San Michele ADI XXVIII DI GIVGNO*, Plate VI. 1582, engraving, 315x453mm. Heritage Malta, Valletta.
- William Rogers, "A Knight of Malta," in *Honor, Military and Ciuill*, by William Segar. London: Robert Baker, 1602. Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.