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Proceedings of History Week 2011



Proceedings of History Week 2011



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Żejtun: An eighteenth-century 'Smart City'

Carmel Vassallo

Introduction

Migration has been a key feature of human existence since the very dawn of history.¹ It has taken various forms and its intensity has varied over time. In this paper I propose to look at the Maltese entrepreneurial network which flourished in Spain from the late seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century and compare it to the 'classical' diasporas. In addition, I will highlight the particular importance of entrepreneurs from Żejtun in this phenomenon.

Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks

Trading and entrepreneurial networks have been around for a long time.² Setting aside the very early exchanges and developments in India, China, and elsewhere, it is probable that in the West the phenomenon originated in the mercantile colonies established by Phoenicians and Greeks.³ The trading-post empires they created were the predecessors of the considerably more extensive ones subsequently created by Occidentals.

Since then merchants have ranged far and wide in pursuit of profit but they have tended to concentrate in large numbers in a succession of cities that have tended to dominate the exchange of goods and services on an international scale. In Europe,

1 Refer to I. Goldin, G. Cameron and M. Balarajan's tour de force, *Exceptional People. How Migration shaped our World and will define our Future*, Princeton and Oxford 2011.

2 'Entrepreneurial networks' have been defined by *INC. Magazine's* encyclopaedia as 'an association of entrepreneurs organized, formally or informally, with the object of increasing the effectiveness of the members' business activities' at www.inc.com/encyclopedia/entrepreneurial-networks.html [20 December 2011].

3 R. Cameron, *A Concise Economic History of the World. From Palaeolithic Times to the Present*, New York and Oxford, 1997, 25-26, 32-37.

the fairs held at Provins, Troyes, Lagny and Bar-sur-Aube, collectively known as the Champagne fairs, emerged in the twelfth century as the most important meeting places for merchants from north and south.⁴ The focal point would subsequently move, in succession, to Bruges, Antwerp and Amsterdam.⁵

The Italians were key players in the world of international trade from early on and with the advent of the 'Commercial Revolution', family-based companies with headquarters in Florence, Siena, Venice, Milan and other Italian cities led the way as precursors of modern-day multinationals but were eventually outstripped by the Dutch, the English and to a lesser extent the French in a process which eventually led to the Mediterranean being completely eclipsed by the Atlantic. But just as the Inland Sea's star was waning, we note the increasing prominence in the West of peoples, originating in the eastern reaches of that self-same Mediterranean, who were destined to play a notable role in the European heartland's 'Big Bang' in the early modern period. It would be a clearly subsidiary role but it was to be a contribution completely out of proportion to their numbers. The most prominent of these eastern peoples were the Jews. Expelled from practically all European nations at some stage or other, they had been tossed around for centuries, always at the mercy of regal fiat and volatile public sentiment. In contrast to the Muslim 'other' who was clearly identified with the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, the Jews in the West were aliens living in a wholly Christian world, a liminal status which, to some extent, was also a characteristic of Greeks and Armenians. Christians and yet subject, like Oriental Jews, to Muslim masters, they were in a position to access the West in a manner that would have been impossible for Muslims, given the religious animosities and prejudices prevailing at the time. All three benefited from the gradual exclusion of Italian merchants from the Black Sea after the fall of Constantinople (1453) and some time later were the protagonists of what Braudel has referred to as a 'relentless invasion by eastern merchants' into late-sixteenth century Europe.⁶ According to Braudel, Armenians had got to Malta even earlier, in the mid-sixteenth century. Earlier still, in 1530, a substantial Greek community was established in Malta practically overnight when the Order of St John was given the island of Malta by the Emperor Charles V.

The Jews, Armenians and Greeks are the archetypal or classical diasporas but there have been others. A hitherto little known network was the Maltese one. Albeit endowed with certain special characteristics, it nevertheless shared with the Jewish, Greek and Armenian networks what could be considered one of the principal distinguishing features of the classical diasporas, namely, *liminality*, the occupation of a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold. The Maltese in fact lived on the mental and spatial frontier which separated the two mighty empires –

4 Cameron 1997, 62-68.

5 Cameron 1997, 96-97.

6 H. Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age 1300 – 1600*, London 1997, 129-133. F. Braudel, *Civilisation and Capitalism 15th-18th Century*, Vol. II *The Wheels of Commerce*, London 1982, 156.

the Ottoman and the Habsburg – which dominated the Eastern and Western halves respectively of the Mediterranean Sea. Though linguistically Semitic and thus sharing the same 'Eastern' quality of the historical diaspora peoples, the Maltese were, like the Greeks and Armenians, Christianised very early on. With the 're-conquest' of Sicily by Christendom, they settled down to become fervent Catholics. This condition would eventually prove to be the key that would permit them easy access into a Catholic southern Europe which was somewhat more suspicious of non-Catholic Greeks, Armenians and others.

Diasporas and enterprise

Since its origins in the early 1970s, the use of the term 'diaspora', in conjunction with trade or entrepreneurship has made considerable headway in historical, anthropological and other fields of study.⁷ Indeed, the continued relevance of diasporas was highlighted in the 19 November 2011 issue of *The Economist* which spoke of the 'magic of diasporas' in its front cover and called them 'a rare bright spark in the world economy.'

In the last few years, economic historians have adopted the term 'diaspora entrepreneurial network' to represent the phenomenon of the entrepreneurial networks associated with the so-called 'historical' diasporas: the Jewish, the Armenian and the Greek.⁸ Indians, Chinese and Arabs have been added to the first three even though they would seem to lack, as a collectivity, at least one of the basic attributes which some believe characterises a diaspora narrowly conceived, namely, collective forced dispersion.⁹ If, on the other hand, we subscribe to a wider concept of diaspora, namely, that it refers to all those belonging to a certain ethnic background who have left their land of origin and have settled, even temporarily, in lands far away but continue to keep close cultural ties with their land of origin, then Indians, Chinese, Arabs and many other ethnicities would qualify for the club. What Indians, Chinese and Arabs do, on the other hand, have in common with Jews, Armenians and Greeks is not having originated in the Protestant or Catholic Western European heartland which came to dominate the world stage in the early modern period. This has meant that in many instances they have had to rely on their own internal resources to articulate their networks and carve out niches for themselves, because they lacked, at least in the early stages, the diplomatic back-up or power-projection capability which has characterised European nations.

7 P. D. Curtin, *Cross-cultural Trade in World History*, Cambridge 1984, 2. Refer to F. Trivellato's *The Familiarity of Strangers*, New Haven & London, 2009, 10-16 for a discussion of the latest developments in this field.

8 I. Baghdiantz McCabe, G. Harlaftis and I. Pepelasis Minoglou eds., *Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks. Four Centuries of History*, London 2005.

9 G. Chaliand and J. Rageau, *The Penguin Atlas of Diasporas*, New York and London 1997, xiii-xix.

In a world where much economic activity, especially long distance trade, was governed by monopolies, treaties and other forms of state intervention and control, those lacking powerful political sponsors were clearly at a disadvantage. It is this lack of effective 'official' backing which constitutes one of the most important distinguishing features of the classical entrepreneurial networks and sets them apart from the Italian, Dutch, English, German, Scottish and other Western European entrepreneurial networks. But where are we to locate the Maltese in all this?

The Maltese case

Maltese merchants were, in general, very welcome in Catholic Europe. Subjects of the Grand Master whose highly-regarded Order was made up of *langues* containing the cadets of Europe's noble families, they were guaranteed preferential access to practically all of Southern Europe. This contrasted somewhat with the experience of Greeks, Armenians and others who were, on the one hand, non-Catholics and, on the other, subjects of the Ottomans. Edicts of expulsion were decreed for Greeks and Armenians from Spanish territory in 1663 and 1753.¹⁰ In 1782, a community of around two hundred Greek families that had prospered during the British occupation of the island of Minorca was obliged to leave.¹¹ They were considered schismatics not very amenable to 'assimilation'. In 1791 there were only two Greeks out of a total of 3,216 foreigners established in Spain's foremost commercial centre, Cadiz.¹² As Ottoman subjects, the Greeks and the Armenians were also considered politically unreliable elements whose economic activities only benefited the Turk's exchequer. In overall terms, therefore, it would seem that the Maltese may have had a considerable edge over other eastern minorities by virtue of the island being governed by the politically neutral, at least vis-à-vis intra-European political struggles, and most Catholic, Order of St John.

The Maltese in Spain

Early-modern Spain, point of entry for much silver and gold from the Americas, was probably the most important focus for trade networks from all over Europe. Domínguez Ortiz has claimed that the seventeenth was the century when the number of foreigners and their economic weight were at their highest point in Spain.¹³ He had in mind all foreigners, including agricultural labourers, artisans and such like, and not only those involved in mercantile activities. The total number of foreigners may have gone down in the following century but according to most researchers there is no

10 A. Domínguez Ortiz, *La Sociedad Española en el Siglo XVIII*, Madrid 1955, 252.

11 Domínguez Ortiz 1955, 251-252.

12 P. Collado Villalta, 'El impacto americano en la bahía: la inmigración extranjera en Cadiz 1709 - 1819', *Primeras Jornadas de Andalucía y América*, Huelva 1981.

13 Domínguez Ortiz 1955, 237.

doubt that much of eighteenth-century Spain's trade, both foreign and domestic, was still dominated by foreigners. There were a total of 27,502 heads of households in a detailed census of foreigners taken in 1791.¹⁴ Made up mostly of French subjects (48.47%), they also included Italians (26.85%), Portuguese (12.79%), Germans (5.82%), and Maltese (4.46%), amongst many others. These aggregate figures include all professions and in a study of detailed returns for 12,180 of the above-mentioned 27,502 householders, Salas Ausens and Jarque Martínez show commerce as being the occupation of only 2,104 or 17.27% of them.¹⁵ By way of contrast, the relatively small Maltese presence was almost exclusively devoted to trade.¹⁶

The Maltese, in fact, conform to Curtin's criterion, based on his world-wide study of cross-cultural trade, that members of a trade diaspora were 'specialists in a single kind of economic enterprise'.¹⁷ In contrast to the host society, which was a whole society, with many occupations, class stratification and so on, the Maltese, probably more than any of the other foreign communities in Spain, was a merchant colony with a very specific niche, the sale of cotton and cloth. Extensive research has already been carried out and published concerning the Maltese mercantile presence in eighteenth-century Spain and a brief sketch will suffice here.¹⁸

Probably as a consequence of initial contacts made while serving in the Order's navy or on board of corsair vessels, Maltese sailors/traders are known to have been established in Majorca and Barcelona in the mid-seventeenth century, trading in a wide range of goods and benefiting from special privileges granted to the Maltese out of consideration for the Order.¹⁹ It is worthwhile noting, in passing, that this privileged access was not limited to Spain but extended to Portugal, France and other places as well.²⁰ During the course of the latter half of the seventeenth century, these occasional sightings became more and more frequent and in 1699 there were at least thirteen brigantine expeditions to Spain and Portugal.²¹ The phenomenon of the brigantine expedition has been described in detail elsewhere²² and for our present purpose it will be sufficient to set out the description of the brigantine and its trade in eighteenth-century Malta to be encountered in the *Nuovo Dizionario della Marina*, an eighteenth-century manuscript found in the National Library of Malta:

Brigantino, Brigantin. It is a small and light vessel that serves both for corsairing and for trade and which is cut fairly deep in its bottom to permit it to go better under sails

14 M. Lafuente, *Historia general de España desde los tiempos primitivos hasta la muerte de Fernando VII*, Tomo 15, Barcelona 1887-1890, 184-185.

15 J. A. Salas Ausens and E. Jarque Martínez, 'Extranjeros en España en la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII', *Coloquio Internacional Carlos III y su Siglo*, Actas Tomo II, Madrid 1990, 993.

16 C. Vassallo, *Corsairing to commerce: Maltese merchants in XIII century Spain*, Malta, 1997, 256-7.

17 Curtin 1984, 5.

18 Vassallo 1997.

19 J. Pons and A. Bibiloni, 'Las relaciones comerciales entre Malta y Mallorca durante la segunda mitad del siglo XVII', in *Actas Primer Coloquio Internacional Hispano Maltés de Historia*, ed. C. Martínez Shaw, Madrid 1991, 31.

20 V. Mallia Milanes, 'Some aspects of Veneto-Maltese trade relations in the eighteenth century', *Studi Veneziani*, XVI, 1974, 503 - 553.

21 National Archive of Malta, *Consolato di Mare, Manifesti*, Bundle 1 for 1698-1701.

22 Vassallo 1997, 69-130.

and with oars. One could say it is a small galleon with the same sailing characteristics, the *speron* and the masting. These are the vessels which, albeit small, carry on Malta's big business, earning for the country considerable sums. They start their trade in Sicily where they take on large quantities of silk in Messina. They then sail up the coast of Italy to France, and always hugging the coast, trade in all the small places until they get to Spain which is where they ordinarily do the best business. In the past they used to be considered foolhardy if they ventured beyond the Straits of Gibraltar but nowadays they have arrived as far as Lisbon. They have managed to fill that vast city with fine Maltese cotton products which used to be a rarity in those lands but are now commonplace. These vessels normally have twenty oars and around twenty-two men. Some of them have two small cannon in the bow but their strength is in their musketry and swivel-guns of which they have as many as six and as a consequence they can defend themselves very well from Turkish galleons which in the main do not dare to attack them.²³

It is a succinct description of the vessel which first as a corsair ship and subsequently as a merchantman constituted the centrepiece of Malta's maritime economy. A highly adaptable craft manned by a highly adaptable captain and crew who were at the same time merchants, mariners and musketeers.

The Iberian Peninsula, and more specifically Spain, emerges as the most important area of operations for Maltese brigantines and so it remained, even in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, when the trade became both more important and more settled. We shall, once again, recur to the testimony of a contemporary to sum up the phenomenon, an anonymous German gentleman who travelled through Spain in the years 1764 and 1765, around the time when the brigantines reached their era of maximum splendour. He wrote that:

The Maltese do a lot of trade in Cadiz and you will not find any important city all over Spain where you cannot find them. They have more privileges and rights than Spanish shopkeepers who only sell small amounts... They take their merchandise from Genoa, Marseilles and other ports of the Mediterranean. They take everything and arrive with entire loads of all kinds of goods of which only a few are from Malta; they secretly use neutral ships in the ocean; in the Mediterranean they also take their own ships. These people live very badly, eat little, sell for low prices and take large sums of cash back home from Spain.²⁴

Characteristics

Maltese merchants in Spain were characterised by reliance on kith and kin at all stages for the conduct of their business; a high level of literacy, especially when compared to other foreigners; regular travel to and from their island to settle accounts and

23 National Library of Malta, Lib. Ms.223. Author's own translation.

24 W. Von Den Driesch, *Die ausländischen Kaufleute während des 18. Jahrhunderts in Spanien und ihre Beteiligung am Kolonialhandel*, Köln and Wien 1972, 241.

attend to other business matters, as well as spend time with their family; a tendency to set up business and live in close proximity to one another in veritable enclaves in the communities where they were established; a high regard for honour and trust in the conduct of business with each other and the tendency to settle any differences which arose during the course of dealings with their fellow nationals abroad, in their own home country.²⁵ In addition, they often undertook not to marry while on foreign business trips and we have indeed noted a considerably lower tendency for a Maltese to contract marriage with someone of another nation amongst the Maltese merchants established in Spain when compared to other foreigners, and this tended to reinforce their sense of separateness. When the community was large enough they established their own religious confraternities, with both spiritual and material welfare concerns, and separate burial arrangements, as well as securing the services of their own priests who could assist them in their own language. Finally we must note that Maltese merchants were at all time expected to give, and gave, considerable support to each other in return for a high degree of social control.²⁶

It must be emphasised that many of these characteristics are not peculiar to the Maltese and have been noted for the classical trading diasporas as well. Indeed, they have been shown to apply even beyond these to many other cases.²⁷ Each diaspora, whether relating to entrepreneurial networks or otherwise, has its peculiarities but the Maltese network established in Spain during the long eighteenth century clearly fulfils the basic criteria of dispersal, a collective identity which centred on an alien tongue, and a very real need to return to the homeland deriving in the main from the credit-dependant nature of their business and the families left behind.

The Importance of Żejtun

Contrary to the 'Smart City' project situated close to Malta's Grand Harbour, which has still to prove its worth, eighteenth-century Żejtun was a recognized centre of manufacturing and trade. As regards the former, the importance of cotton for Malta's rural economy in the early-modern period is well established, especially in the localities of Rabat, Mosta, Siġġiewi, Żebbug, Żabbar, Żurrieq and Żejtun.²⁸ Not so well known is the fact that merchants from the latter were also very prominent in the entrepreneurial network established in eighteenth-century Spain by Maltese traders. Żejtun was, in fact, one of five localities mentioned in a 1776 Chamber of Commerce Report as being the most important places of residence of merchants in

25 Vassallo 1997.

26 *Ibid.*

27 L. Fontaine, *History of Pedlars in Europe*, Cambridge 1996.

28 J. Debono, 'The Cotton Trade in Malta', *Archivium*, No.1, Malta 1981, 94. Also refer to an unpublished paper by Canon Don Joseph Abela based on research carried out at the Żejtun Parish Archives entitled 'L-Industrija tal-qoton fiż-Żejtun'.

the Maltese Islands.²⁹ Urban Senglea and Cospicua were by far the most prominent, which is understandable in view of their position by the Grand Harbour, but rural Żejtun, situated some distance away from the main harbour area, came in at third place. This vocation for commerce on the part of the inhabitants of Żejtun would seem to have become even more pronounced as the century progressed, especially as regards the ancient Kingdom of Valencia. In the 1771 census of foreigners, fully 32% of the Maltese merchants in the City of Valencia were from Żejtun.³⁰ We lack the corresponding figure for the 1791 census of foreigners for the capital city but in what seems to have been one of the next most important towns of Maltese settlement in the Kingdom, Jativa, a remarkable 55% came from Żejtun.³¹

As we have noted, Maltese merchants in eighteenth-century Spain tended to stick together, often in streets which over time became known as *Calle de los malteses* or 'The street of the Maltese' and those from Żejtun were no exception. In Jativa, at that time known as San Felipe, practically all of them lived in *Calle de Cami*, the principal commercial street, typically in 'shops' which doubled up as places of residence. At least sixteen of the twenty nine Maltese merchants living there were from Żejtun. These were Joseph, Peter and John Bonavia; Angel, Gregory, Saviour, and Michael Caruana; Saviour and Michael Busuttli; Saviour and Felix Attard; and Michael Scicluna, Paul Cipriot, Saviour Psaila, Michael Vella and Peter Brincat. The recurrence of the same family name would seem to indicate a reliance on family members as business associates.

The 1776 Chamber of Commerce Report referred to earlier, highlights not only the importance for Żejtun of trade in general and of the Spanish trade in particular, but also the spill-over effect that this business had vis-à-vis education. The report, in fact, claimed that traditionally the Maltese had carried on their business without ever having learnt the basic principles and, as a consequence, recommended the establishment of public schools in the five communities where merchants were most prominent to teach children how to read and write; how to draft a business letter and the basics of arithmetic.³² This awareness of the need for commercial education was well ahead of its time. It would not manifest itself in Spain itself until a century later. Regrettably, the project never got beyond the proposal stage except for one notable exception, Żejtun. In the early nineteenth century, a school was apparently established in Żejtun by Dun Alwig Camilleri to teach reading, writing and catechism free of charge, supported by Bishop Mattei and Spanish Consul Don Alberto Megino, both of whom had a house in the village.³³

29 J. Debono, 'The Chamber of Commerce and the cotton trade of Malta in the eighteenth century', *Melita Historica*, Vol.10, No.1, 1988, 37-38.

30 Vassallo 1997, 256.

31 Archivo Municipal de Xativa, *Expediente sobre extranjeros*, Signatura Antiga 1438, Matricula de 1791.

32 Debono 1988, 37-38.

33 Vassallo 1997, 274.

Local Hero

A man from Żejtun, Juan Camilleri, played a crucial role in the struggle that developed in the 1760s between the French, who had traditionally dominated cloth retailing, and the Maltese traders who were making considerable inroads into their business.³⁴ In an effort to block the Maltese advance, the French established a Traders Guild, a *Gremio*, to create a kind of 'closed shop' and sought to prevent the Maltese cloth traders from joining. Appealing to the *Junta de Comercio*, a sort of Ministry of Trade in Madrid, Juan Camilleri claimed, in defence of his compatriots, that the Maltese had had the right to trade in the City of Valencia for many years. The Maltese eventually won their appeal and Juan Camilleri was the first to join the Cloth Retailers Guild in 1767. Other Maltese followed suit until they came to constitute nearly 40% of all members in 1807.³⁵

Juan Camilleri had been born in Żejtun, where he owned a house and several plots of land and he visited his parents and wife there regularly. He had arrived in Valencia in 1747, at a very young age and in the company of his father, Joseph, who had been in the Spanish trade before him and who had taught him the ropes. By 1760 Juan had his own house and shop in the *Calle de La Virgen Maria* in Valencia. He was reputed to be both honest and a very good businessman, trading on his own account and in association with others. He kept proper accounts, paid his rent punctually and was worth considerably more than the 15,000 *reales* threshold required to join the Guild. He seems to have had business dealings with other cities in Spain and even traded with Palermo in Sicily. We have records showing him still in business in Valencia in 1774.³⁶ Juan Camilleri was reputed to be a good Catholic, according to a number of Spanish witnesses who testified as to his good character at the time of his application to join the *Gremio de Mercaders de Vara*, or Cloth Retailers Guild. He attended early morning mass regularly at the *Virgen de la Merced* Convent, prayed the Rosary with devotion, and practised other religious observances, including attendance at the Spiritual Exercises organized by the Jesuits. He had never been heard to swear and, on the contrary, was held to be a very modest person who was kind to all those who patronised his shop. He made his last will and testament in 1772.³⁷

The wider picture

Although the Maltese mercantile network in the eighteenth century centred on Spain and Portugal, there is, nevertheless, ample confirmation that it extended to other parts as well. A 1776 Chamber of Commerce report described Malta's trade in the following manner:

³⁴ Vassallo 1997, *passim*.

³⁵ Vassallo 1997, *passim*.

³⁶ Vassallo 1997, 301.

³⁷ Vassallo 1997.

For clarity's sake we can divide commerce into two branches; the first is that of the Maltese in Sicily, the second in Spain. Malta supplies the Sicilians and the Calabrians with sugar, coffee, cocoa, cinnamon, herbs, drugs, iron nails, glass, paper, planks, lead shot, powder and other goods and the Maltese purchase from Sicily the soda ash, sulphur, alum, pulses, barley, wheat and carob beans which they resell in Spain, Italy and Marseilles. The second branch to Spain consists of those who buy silk from Catania, Messina and Naples and all sort of cloth from Leghorn and Genoa for resale in Alicante, Malaga, Seville, Valencia, Ferrol, Cadiz and the Canary Islands.³⁸

Barcelona is mentioned further on in the report in connection with the wholesale trade in cotton yarn which constituted the other branch of Maltese/Spanish trade and was reliant mostly on a few dozen individuals, unlike the retail network elsewhere.

As regards France, the Maltese there were entitled to the same civil and commercial rights enjoyed by the indigenous population and had a long-established presence in Marseilles, but the nature and extent of this presence is still mostly to be determined.³⁹ The same applies to the Italian Peninsula. We know that Maltese merchants in Spain bought and sold goods and obtained credit in ports like Genoa, Leghorn and Naples but information is still fragmentary. South of Naples, Maltese traders had long been active in securing the provisions for the densely populated island but, as we saw above, they were also important articulators of a trade which supplied the Sicilians and Southern Italians with a wide range of goods. There is no reference, in the above citation, to a trade in woollen cloth but we have encountered evidence of Maltese merchants taking considerable quantities of this product from Catalonia and selling it in Sicily and Southern Italy.⁴⁰ An eighteenth-century report by Saverio Scrofani cited by Calogero Messina gives details of goods originating in Spain, particularly woollen cloth, supplied to Sicily.⁴¹ The relevant table is entitled '*Mercanzie di spagna che s'immettono in Sicilia principalmente per la via di Genova e pel mezzo dei Maltesi, Napolitani, Genovesi ec.*' It is noteworthy that of the various 'nations' responsible for the trade the Maltese are mentioned first. We have still to find out the nature of the Maltese trading network responsible for this business.

But Malta's mercantile network was not limited to Catholic countries. Malta was an important quarantine and rallying point for French mercantile shipping to the Levant; and despite official belligerency, it also had a notable entrepôt role of its own. The movement of goods and people to and from the North African Regencies and the Levant was constant during the seventeenth century.⁴² Cotton from ports in the Levant (Gaza, Haifa, Saida, Tripoli-in-Syria, Alexandretta, Cyprus) and Anatolia (Satalia, Smyrna, Constantinople) was a very important item and contacts in the seventeenth

38 National Library of Malta, Ms 1020, item 20.

39 J. Godechot, 'La France et Malte au XVIII^e siècle', *Revue Historique*, Tome CCV Avril – Juin 1951, 71.

40 Vassallo 1997, 210-216.

41 C. Messina, *Sicilia e Spagna nel Settecento*, Palermo 1986, 290-291.

42 D. Cutajar, 'The Malta quarantine, shipping and trade 1654-1694', *Mid-Med Bank Limited. Report and Accounts 1987*, Malta 1988, 19-66.

century probably laid the foundations for Malta's near monopoly status as supplier of cotton to the emerging *Indiane* manufactories in France and Spain during the eighteenth century. Despite repeated official prohibition of imports of cotton from the East it is very probable that some if not most of the prized 'Maltese' cotton may have originated elsewhere.⁴³ Malta's geographical proximity was clearly critical in determining the island's role as an intermediary between north and south and east and west but equally important must have been cultural factors such as language.

Christian corsairing based in Malta, portraying itself as engaged in a just and holy war against Islam, was a continual irritant to Muslim shipping and eventually drove the transport of Muslim goods and passengers into the arms of French shippers. Muslim corsairing, on the other hand, preyed on Maltese vessels. But this perpetual state of war was more in the nature of skirmishing and was not a total war. There was ample opportunity to carry on with the other, more mundane, aspects of life. Business is business and even corsairing is, when all is said and done, a kind of business. Maltese merchants could be found in Tunis purchasing prize ships and cargoes during the seventeenth century.⁴⁴ But this was probably outweighed by other types of business. Using safe-conducts and neutral shipping, Maltese merchants were continually tapping the Maghreb and the Levant for merchandise for consumption on the island or for re-export. In the middle of the eighteenth century, Maltese-flagged vessels arriving at the island from Muslim territories were far outweighed by vessels with goods consigned to the island but flying other flags, sometimes under the supervision of Maltese supercargoes and crewed and captained by Maltese.⁴⁵ Boubaker has, in fact, highlighted the 'privileged' position of the Maltese in Tunis compared to 'other Europeans' during the seventeenth century.⁴⁶ This privileged position must have had a lot to do with another important cultural component: language. Despite sharp religious antagonism the Maltese and Muslims in fact shared a common linguistic heritage and it is this linguistic and spatial proximity to the Muslim world that was probably the most important factor behind Malta's mediatory role in the early modern and contemporary periods but all we have to go on at the moment are occasional glimpses. We are far removed from being able to describe the nature of the Maltese presence in Muslim lands.⁴⁷

Summing up we can say that although we can assert with a considerable degree of certainty that Spain was the focal point of much of eighteenth-century Malta's trading network it is clear that there are many missing pieces in the jigsaw concerning

43 Vassallo 1997, 190-195.

44 S. Bono, 'Guerra Corsara e Commercio nel Maghreb Barbaresco (Secoli XVI-XIX)', in *El Comerç Alternatiu. Corsarisme i Contraban (SS XV – XVIII)*, G. Lopez Nadal ed., Mallorca 1990, 141-142.

45 C. Vassallo, *The Malta Chamber of Commerce 1848 – 1979. An Outline History of Maltese Trade*, Malta 1998, 24-25.

46 S. Boubaker, *La Régence de Tunis au XVII^e siècle: ses relations commerciales avec les ports de l'Europe méditerranéenne, Marseille et Livourne, Zaghouan*, Tunisia 1987, 175.

47 C. Vassallo, 'The Maltese entrepreneurial networks in the Maghreb in the early modern and contemporary periods', in *Les Iles Méditerranéennes. Relais de Civilisations*, ed. Abdelhamid Fehri, Kerkenna, Tunisia 2004, 199-207.

their presence in Sicily, mainland Italian states, France, the Maghreb and the Levant, and while we can, in principle, anticipate being able to fill in some of the blanks for Europe, the scant archival material available in Muslim countries does not bode well for the possibility of doing the same for the latter.

The end of an era

The debacle at the end of the Ancien Régime resulted in a near-complete reworking of the system we have described, although for a few years the momentum acquired during the eighteenth century spilled over into the nineteenth century. The establishment of British dominion over the Maltese archipelago, after a brief French *interregnum*, closed off Continental markets to Maltese-supplied cotton, but, for a brief period, Maltese merchants used trade contacts they had established in the previous century to distribute other goods, particularly agricultural produce.⁴⁸ It must, nevertheless, be stressed that the Maltese presence in the opening decades of the nineteenth century was but a shadow of what it had been in the closing decade of the previous century, although it showed greater resilience on Spain's south-eastern seaboard than was the case in the south west. Cadiz's Maltese mercantile colony, for example, went down from 217 in 1791 to 41 in 1801 and Malaga's went down from 35 in 1771 to 11 in 1817.⁴⁹ Further east, on the other hand, Almeria's went down from 32 in 1791 to 20 in 1808, Murcia's from 41 in 1791 to 32 in 1807 and Jativa's from 32 in 1791 to 22 in 1807.⁵⁰ In the city of Valencia, the core group of Maltese cloth retail guild merchants around which was constructed the large Maltese mercantile community there, only went down from 39 in 1793 to 35 in 1805.⁵¹

Some of the Maltese merchants established on Spain's eastern littoral in fact proved very adroit at adapting themselves to the new circumstances. They were the few who stayed on in contrast to the majority who would seem to have gone home. The Cachia, Seiquer, Scicluna, Cardona and Camilleri in the city of Murcia; the Butigieg in Cartagena; the Borja and Cachia in Lorca; the Cutajar in Alicante and the Attard, Mifsud, Piscopo, Busuttill, Formosa and Caruana in Valencia all played an important role in the economic development of their respective cities in the nineteenth century.⁵² Starting out as humble pedlars and shopkeepers in the eighteenth century they branched out into a whole range of activities during the course of the nineteenth century. They are a clear vindication of Eva Morowska's claim that first generation migrants often accumulate economic and human capital which once released by

48 C. Martínez Shaw, 'Del gran comercio al pequeño comercio. El comercio entre Cataluña y Malta, 1808 – 1823', in *Actas Primer Coloquio Internacional Hispano Maltés de Historia*, ed. C. Martínez Shaw, Madrid 1991, 227-241.

49 Vassallo 1997, 291-292.

50 *Ibid.*

51 Vassallo 1997, 40.

52 C. Vassallo, 'Maltese entrepreneurs in Spain, 1750s-1850s. Some lessons for the Present', *Storja 2003-2004*, Malta 2003, 76-83.

the relaxation of the attitudes of the host society is used by following generations to move into the mainstream society in a spectacular display of accomplishment.⁵³ The Caruana of Valencia are a prime example of this phenomenon.

From Rags to Riches: The Caruana of Valencia

The founder of the dynasty, Antonio Caruana Brignone, was born in Senglea in 1753, the mercantile part of the Grand Harbour of Malta. On the mother's side, the family had been in the Spanish trade for at least three generations and in 1768 Antonio and his brother Pedro Pablo were apprenticed to their maternal uncle, Joseph Brignone, in the *Gremio de Mercaderes de Vara*, or Cloth Retailers Guild. Pedro Pablo, the elder brother, continued in the Cloth Retailers Guild, appearing as a fully-fledged member in 1793, and indeed achieved considerable success in this line until 1805, when he decided to retire to Malta. His brother Antonio, on the other hand, moved on from cloth retailing very early on and went into manufacturing. His silk factory was awarded prizes and Royal Patronage for its technological innovations and the quality of its goods as well as for creating jobs. In 1806 he still retained contact with his native land, Malta, to where he exported some of his products. He died in 1819. His sons Peregri, Antonio and Josep continued building on their father's success. In 1855-1867, they were amongst the principal beneficiaries of disentailment, acquiring sixteen agricultural properties and five urban ones for a total of 1,341,650 *reales*, a huge amount for that time. The eldest of the three brothers, Peregri, who had been involved in his father's manufacturing concern, became a particularly active figure in the economy of nineteenth-century Valencia. Apart from property speculation he was also the driving force behind the project to establish Valencia's first issuing bank and was heavily involved in railway and potable water development.

The Caruanas and all those descended from the first generation that had taken the first step in a new land and stayed on eventually lost their Maltese connection. As Philip D. Curtin points out 'one immediately striking generalisation is that trade diasporas tend to work themselves out of business'.⁵⁴ But as the descendants of the eighteenth-century Maltese trade network were being absorbed into the indigenous populations other possibilities were opening up elsewhere for men of enterprise back in the 'old country'. The Continental Blockade set up by the Berlin decree of 1806 was a disaster for British trade but it provided a 'window of opportunity' for Malta and for a number of years it became an important centre of contraband. As many as one in five of those living on the island in 1807 were foreigners wheeling and dealing in a brisk trade in the sale and purchase of licences and goods most of which probably never touched the island. Malta was also considered a good place for Greek ships to offload cargoes of corn from the Black Sea, which were then taken up by Maltese and other merchants and taken to the Western end of the Mediterranean,

53 E. Morowska, 'The sociology and historiography of immigration', in *Immigration Reconsidered. History, Sociology and Politics*, ed. V. Yans McLaughlin, New York and Oxford 1990, 203-205.

54 Curtin 1984, 63.

especially Spain, but it was a relatively short affair and with the end of the war and the outbreak of cholera the bubble burst, causing an outflow of a not inconsiderable number of Maltese to the Barbary Regencies and the Levant, but as the saying goes, that is another story.

Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to examine the evolution of a trade diaspora – the Maltese – which shares many of the characteristics of the ‘classical’ diasporas but I have sought to show that their position vis-à-vis the classical diasporas could be described as a liminal one. Eastern by virtue of their language and living at the spatial margin between the eastern and western Mediterranean, the Maltese were, nevertheless, singularly Western by virtue of their Catholicism. In an age when religion was probably the most important mark of identity, the Maltese were thus able to access southern Europe in the early modern period with considerably greater ease than Jews, Armenians and Greeks, but the Maltese were also different from the classical diasporas in that they also had the benefit of powerful sponsors in the shape of the Hospitallers who governed their island and were respected and held in high esteem by the Catholic monarchs of Europe.

Diaspora entrepreneurial networks, at least as represented by the ‘classical’ cases, were clearly an attempt by ‘outsiders’ to participate in the process whereby Christian Europe overwhelmed the planet between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. In taking stock of the current state of the art and laying the foundations for new directions, I feel that we must seek to incorporate into the picture those who up till now have had little or no exposure. This must be done at both the macro and micro levels.

At the macro level we must seek to incorporate the diaspora entrepreneurial networks of other peoples or ethnicities, like the Maltese, that have not achieved the prominence and durability of Jews, Armenians and Greeks. At the micro level we must be wary of allowing successful individuals and/or families to hog the limelight. It is perhaps inevitable that these should set the pace but we must not overlook that diaspora entrepreneurial networks are composed mostly of a legion of micro-operators. In the case of trade, these Attards, Borgs and Caruanas were mostly pedlars, stall operators in markets and small shopkeepers. For every wealthy merchant who set up benefices, foundations, and so on to be remembered by, and left copious documentation for our perusal, there were thousands who just got by or even went under, sometimes ending up buried in some unmarked grave in a corner of some foreign field, for whom we only encounter, if we are lucky, some brief reference in a tax or other document. To these stories not crowned by success and to the small communities they often came from, such as Żejtun, we also have a responsibility.