MAKING WAVES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN
SULLE ONDE DEL MEDITERRANE'O

Proceedings of the 2nd MMHN Conference
Messina - Taormina, 4-7 May 2006

Edited by
Michela D’Angelo   Gelina Harlaftis   Carmel Vassallo
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Foreword

The Mediterranean Maritime History Network (MMHN) has come a long way since that day ten years ago when a small band of historians decided on a number of initiatives to give the Mediterranean a more prominent presence in international maritime history circles. Increased participation in conferences beyond our shores, our own conferences in Malta, Messina-Taormina, Izmir, and - still to come - Barcelona; publications; a website and a directory hosted by the University of Malta’s Mediterranean Institute, are testimony to that commitment made a decade ago.

Throughout these ten years, the MMHN has rested firmly on three major pillars: Professor Michela D’Angelo, of the University of Messina; Professor Ruthy Gertwagen, of the University of Haifa; and Professor Gelina Harlaftis of the Ionian University. All three have been an invaluable source of support for me and an inspiration to us all. More specifically, they have ensured the academic success of each of our meetings by organizing sessions which have given us insights into some of the most exciting research being conducted in the field of Mediterranean maritime history.

Professor D’Angelo, in particular, was responsible for the hosting of the 2006 Sicily conference which put a still fledgling movement firmly on its feet. Ably assisted by her team of young, up-and-coming historians, especially Diletta D’Andrea and Flavio Corpina, Professor D’Angelo had the overall responsibility for the organization of the conference and was able to secure generous backing for it.

Hers as well was the decision to undertake the awesome task of publishing all the papers in these proceedings, over and above the selection of the papers customarily published in the University of Malta’s Journal of Mediterranean Studies, and thus offer researchers access to the wide and varied range of contributions in its entirety. The MMHN owes her a debt of gratitude. I look forward to many more years of fruitful cooperation.

Professor Carmel Vassallo
Coordinator Mediterranean Maritime History Network
## Index

**Foreword**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pag.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPIROS N. ASONITIS</td>
<td>Charles I Tocco and his naval activities in the Ionian region (XIVth-XVth centuries)</td>
<td>VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIANA GILLILAND WRIGHT</td>
<td>Bread and Falcons: the view from Crete in 1501</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIQUEL ÀNGEL CASASNOVAS CAMPS</td>
<td>The Ottoman and Barbary attacks on the Balearic Islands during the XVIth century</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRIAN SANDBERG</td>
<td>‘Through Naval Practice and the Association with Foreigners’: French nobles’ participation in Mediterranean religious struggles, 1598-1635</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHMED RENIMA</td>
<td>The Algerian fleet of the XVIth and XVIIth century: the navy that made a State</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEITH A.J. McLAY</td>
<td>‘A Mediterranean Amphibian’: British warfare, 1693-1713</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TITO BENADY</td>
<td>Gibraltar as a naval base for the Royal Navy during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars 1796-1808</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIUSEPPE RESTIFO</td>
<td>A night of fire in Tripoli (1804)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAN CHESSELL</td>
<td>Britain’s Ionian Consul: Spiridion Foresti and intelligence collection</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DILETTA D’ANDREA</td>
<td>Gran Bretagna e Mediterraneo in età napoleonica tra ‘strategia talassocratica’ e ‘laboratori costituzionali’</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KYRILLOS NIKOLAOU</td>
<td>La politique maritime impériale de la Grande Bretagne: Famagouste 1878-1882</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELI LEMONIDOU</td>
<td>La Marine alliée en Grèce pendant la Première guerre mondiale</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAURA HAMETZ</td>
<td>Envisioning the Italian Mediterranean: Fascist policy in steamship publicity, 1922-1942</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARMEL VASSALLO</td>
<td>Al servizio di Sua Maestà Brittannica: i maltesi nella Royal Navy</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New light on Negropont</td>
<td>Pierre A. MacKay</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Discoveries in Alanya Castle: Ship-graffiti and some comments</td>
<td>Z. Kenan Bilici</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on shipping in the Eastern Mediterranean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement of naval supplies during the XVIth century: Venetian</td>
<td>Eyüp Özveren, Onur Yildirim</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arsenale and the Ottoman Tersane compared</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La navigation vers le Levant à l’époque moderne (1545-1715) vue à</td>
<td>Jean-Pierre Farganel</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>travers l’exemple de quelques voyageurs français</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La polacre, bâtiment de commerce méditerranéen à travers deux</td>
<td>José-Luis Cortés</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contrats de construction provenant de chantiers navals marseillais</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au début du XVIIIe siècle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ports et lieux d’abordage calabrais entre le XVIIIe et le XIXe</td>
<td>Mirella Mafrci</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siècle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilità delle popolazioni costiere del Mediterraneo. Il caso di</td>
<td>Biagio Passaro</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>una famiglia sorrentina a Corfù nella prima metà del XIX secolo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il Museo ‘Mario Maresca’ a Meta. Una testimonianza delle attività</td>
<td>Massimo Maresca</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marittime nella penisola sorrentina nel XIX secolo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Seek Perfection’. A Future with the Admiralty H.M. Dockyard School</td>
<td>Mario Ellul</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta, 1900-1939</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consoli dei mercanti nel Levante veneziano</td>
<td>Cristina E. Papakosta</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta and the rise of the Greek-owned fleet in the XVIIIth century</td>
<td>Katerina Papakostantinou</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navi greche in Sicilia durante il XVIII secolo. Pratiche sanitarie</td>
<td>Fabio P. Di Vita</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e relazioni commerciali</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigners in an unfamiliar Market: European business practices and</td>
<td>Katerina Galani</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>culture in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 18th century</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THEOHARIS PETROU, *Cases of espionage in the area of Eastern Mediterranean at the end of XVIIIth and the beginning of XIXth century.* Pag. 375

GELINA HARLAFTIS, *The fleet ‘dei Greci’. Ottoman and Venetian Greeks in the Mediterranean sea-trade, XVIIIth century* " 385

GERASSIMOS D. PAGRATIS, *I Consolati della Repubblica Settinsulare in Sicilia (1800-1807)* " 419

**MERCHANTS, GOODS, IDEAS**

SEVEN AGIR, *Empires looking Seawards: The benefits and costs of foreign seaborne trade* " 435


IVAN GRECH, *Percezioni di isolamento nel Mediterraneo. Malta nel ‘600: canali di comunicazione e circolazione di notizie* " 457

ELENA FRANGAKIS-SYRETT, *The Mediterranean commercial world of the XVIIIth century: Ottoman and Italian ports* " 469

ROSARIO LENTINI, *British merchants and goods in Palermo (1797-1816)* " 485

LAURA CALOSCI, *La transformation du commerce méditerranéen catalan en relation avec Gênes et Marseille durant la première moitié du XIXe siècle* " 495

IDAMARIA FUSCO, ANGELINA MARCELLI, *La Calabria della seta: una regione del Mediterraneo* " 509

LUIGI PICCIONI, *Liquorice juice production in Calabria, XVIIIth – XXth centuries* " 533

FLAVIO CORPINA, *Il commercio marittimo tra Stati Uniti e Trieste (1825-1865)* " 539

NICOLA CRINITI, *American shipping and trade with Barcelona (1800-1861)* " 553

SERGIO DI GIACOMO, *Trade and Consular relations between the United States and Livorno in the mid-XIXth century* " 567
THE PORT AND THE STRAITS OF MESSINA

ANNA MARIA PRESTIANI GIALLOMBARDO, Lo Stretto e il porto di Messina nell’antichità (età greca)  Pag. 573

MARIA CANNATÀ FERA, Zancle città bellissima

MARIA CACCAMO CALTABIANO, The coins of the Straits: images and symbols of the political identity of Messana and Rhegion in the Vth century BC  "  603

ANTONIO PINZONE, Le port de Messine à l’époque romaine  "  607

ROSA SANTORO, The damned charm of Scylla and Charybdis  "  617

ENRICO PISPISA, Il porto di Messina dall’XI al XV secolo  "  623

SALVATORE BOTTARI, The port of Messina, 1591-1783  "  629

MICHELA D’ANGELO, ‘The Emporium of Trade of the Two Seas’: The re-launching of the port of Messina, 1784-1815  "  653

ROSARIO BATTAGLIA, Il porto e la città di Messina tra rilancio e decadenza (1815-1920)  "  671

MARIÀ GABRIELLA ADAMO, Le Port de Messine, l’emplacement du Phare et le Détroit à travers les témoignages de quelques écrivains et ‘chroniqueurs’ français au tournant de 1860  "  681

MARIÀ TERESA DI PAOLA, Tra mare e terra. Il porto di Messina all’alba del XX secolo  "  693

LUCREZIA LORENZINI, Le Détroit de Messine et la métaphore de l’existence  "  715

THE RESOURCES OF THE SEA: SCIENCE, FISHING & LEISURE

OLIVER CRAIG, MARCO BIAZZO, MARY ANNE TAFURI, Paleodi-etary records of coastal Mediterranean populations  "  723

ATHENA TRAKADAS, ‘Exhausted by Fishermen’s Nets’: Roman sea fisheries and their management  "  737

MARIÀ LUCIA DE NICOLÒ, Comunità costiere e storia della pesca nel Mediterraneo (XVI-XVIII secolo)  "  751
LISA BOTTER, OTELLO GIOVANARDI, SAŠA RAICEVICH, Migrazioni della flotta peschereccia di Chioggia nel Mare Adriatico tra il XIX e il XX secolo

VIVIA BRUNI, Research on marine biology in the Straits of Messina

SALVATORE SPEZIALE, Navigare in acque “tem-peste”. Epidemie e controllo marittimo in Africa mediterranea dall’età della peste all’età del colera

MARIA SIRAGO, La balneazione a Napoli tra ‘800 e ‘900.

CLAUDE ARNAL, Jeannette Villepreux Power à Messine. L’Argonauta Argo et l’invention de l’Aquarium (1832)

SEA, CULTURE AND IDEOLOGY

RUTHY GERTWAGEN, The emergence of the cult of the Madonna as the Patron Saint of Sailors and of Ports

ERIC DURSTELER, Muslim renegade women: Conversion and agency in the early modern Mediterranean

JOSÉ MANUEL VÁZQUEZ LIJÓ, Los escenarios de las deserciones. Refugios y salidas profesionales de los prófugos de la Real Armada del siglo XVIII

ROSARIA BOTTARI, Questione della lingua: matrice veneta e rotte commerciali

CARMEN DEPASQUALE, Le rôle de la mer dans la vie maltaise d’après quelques ouvrages en français du XVIIIe siècle

CARMELINA GUGLIUZZO, Il cosmopolitismo e l’identità marittima maltese

JAN BERTING, Représentations collectives et manières de penser l’Autre dans le cadre des relations Nord-Sud, Sud-Nord

CHRISTIANE VILLAIN-GANDOSI, Les stéréotypes dans les jeux de l’identité-altérité Nord-Sud dans l’espace méditerranéen
Luigi Piccioni

Liquorice juice production in Calabria
XVIII\textsuperscript{th}-XX\textsuperscript{th} centuries

1. \textit{Liquorice: the root and the juice}

The subject of this paper is the extract of liquorice, the juice obtained by boiling the crushed root in hot water, and then filtering and drying it.

The four or five botanical varieties of liquorice used for commercial purposes are diffused within a Euro-Asiatic belt that goes from the Iberian peninsula to the North-Eastern Chinese province of Liaoning and between the 30\textsuperscript{th} and the 45\textsuperscript{th} degree north latitude. In this belt the plant grows wild in relatively small areas with a dry and warm climate and in sandy, deep soils, generally along big rivers.

The medical properties of the root were well known from ancient times in the whole Eurasia. This circumstance allowed the development of liquorice trade between the production areas and much wider consumption areas, where the plant did not grow. This trade could be within short distances but also areas that extended for thousands of kilometers. The amount of root traded over long distances was always very small when compared to strategical goods such as spices, cereals or tissues. Nonetheless, liquorice trade was quite constant over the centuries and from the Early Modern Period it progressively increased.

On the western side of the liquorice belt, we have evidences of long-distance trade from at least the 12\textsuperscript{th} century (around 1191). In fact, bales of liquorice root were regularly sent from Constantinople to Regensburg in Bavaria through Kiev. In the subsequent centuries, there is additional evidence testifying to the existence of two main trade flows, the first moving from eastern Spain to Provence, Flanders and England; the second from the big Syrian emporiums of Antioch, Aleppo and Acre to Marseille and Venice.

2. The “modern” juice

Greek, Latin and medieval medical treatises often described liquorice juices and compounds in which liquorice was an important ingredient.
And yet, none of them showed clear evidence of a product similar to what we call today liquorice extract. Thus, it is difficult to determine the exact period when an international trade of this peculiar good began. For instance, we do not know where and when the liquorice juice took the present-day commercial features – probably the solid extract went through a process of standardization in the first decades of the 16th century. In the 1540s, in fact, for the first time some botanical and medical treatises described a product that is clearly the one we know today.

In the following century, evidences of international trade of liquorice juice became more clear and numerous, while the fame spread of small northern European centres of root cultivation and juice production, like Pontefract in England and Bamberg in Bavaria. In this period the global consumption of juice in Northern Europe seemed to increase significantly. The juice came from these local centres and especially from Mediterranean areas like Spain, Crete and, by the last decades of the century, from southern Italy.

At this early stage, Spanish production gained a solid reputation that was bound to endure for centuries, even though Italian juices exceeded in quantity and quality the Spanish products by the 18th century. Still today in England the expression “Spanish juice” is synonymous with pure liquorice extract.

3. Origin and characteristics of the Italian production areas

Southern Italy, and more specifically Calabria, entered this young international market in the second half of the 17th century with a good quality juice that conquered quickly the favour of merchants and final consumers. The earliest evidence we have about an Italian juice production for northern European markets dates back to 1678, but we also have a great number of documents about the following years showing the establishment of a strong liquorice district in the northern Ionian part of Calabria. During the 18th century northeastern Calabria, Sicily and northeastern Abruzzo established themselves as the main Italian areas for manufacturing juice. While Calabria began producing liquorice juice in the 1670s, Sicily probably began around the middle of the 18th century, and Abruzzo after 1760. There were also two areas that were less important: southeastern Calabria and the plain of Capitanata, in northern Apulia.

An important difference among the three main production areas is that Abruzzo and Calabria, at least in the 18th and 19th centuries, exported juice rather than the root. During some periods they even experienced a lack of raw material for their manufacturing needs, while Sicily, in contrast, continued exporting both juice and root.
One can say that the fortune of these three areas has been different. While Abruzzo was able to preserve and progressively expand its manufacturing heritage, the Sicilian firms have totally disappeared and Calabria keeps only one of the many important firms of the past.

4. The Calabrian leadership and its features

In spite of its quite sad end, the Southern Italian area where the production of liquorice juice has been historically more Successful was northern Ionian Calabria. For more than 250 years the largest quantity of Italian liquorice juice, and always the best, has been produced in its factories each year. Usually, it was also the best payed on the world market. This leadership was based at least on three elements: the excellent quality of local raw material; the soundness of the main firms; the high technical standards of production. The root from the Ionic area has one of the most harmonic balances among the different components and, in particular, between the active principle, the glycyrrhizin, and sugars. This is an aspect that has always been strongly appreciated both in the pharmaceutical and the confectionery industry.

Calabria experienced for over two centuries a peculiar mix of small and medium firms, often of very short life, and big firms embedded in aristocratic latifundia. For the owners of these latifundia, the production of liquorice juice was usually the most profitable among their many activities, and it was carefully pursued to improve the global economic balance of the estate. Moreover, the large amount of land owned by these families allowed to obtain more easily the root, often scarce and subject to a strong commercial competition. This kind of business structure allowed the formation, during the 18th and 19th centuries, of a solid network of great northern Ionian enterprises, very long-lived and whose trade-marks soon became famous all over the world.

The high technical standards were the result of two main factors: the entrepreneurial soundness and the existence of a traditional nucleus of well skilled workers coming from a small mountain district in the neighbourhoods of Cosenza. This territory, suspended between the hard plateau of the Sila and the basin of the Crati river, was a typical area of seasonal migration. Its inhabitants were accustomed to spending the summer months looking after the lands and woods of the Sila, and in winter they were engaged in several specialized work in the hills around the Crati river or on the flat coast of Calabria and other provinces. From the second half of the 17th century onward, some of these seasonal migrants became the keepers of the best technical knowledges about the manufacture of liquorice juice so that they were soon recognized as the masters of this art. They were
employed in Calabria but also in Sicily, Apulia and even in the far Abruzzo. Some of these men, moreover, were not manual workers but technical managers, often able to transform themselves in independent businessmen. This local dynasty of masters would dominate the Calabrian liquorice manufacturing scene far into the 20th century.

5. The rise and fall of Calabrian juices

From its apparition, at the end of the 17th century, to the first half of the 20th century almost all the Calabrian juice was exported in Northern Europe and in some extra-European countries. Until the end of the 18th century most of the Sicilian and Calabrian production reached the foreign markets through the port of Leghorn. The cases of juice were sent there directly from the places where they were produced or through the port of Messina. Leghorn merchants successively sold and sent the juice mainly to Marseille, Amsterdam, Antwerp and London. Smaller amounts reached the northern Adriatic (for a short time Venice and then Trieste), often through Messina, and were then sent to the markets of Central and Eastern Europe.

After the Napoleonic Wars, these flows seemed to undergo important structural changes, probably due also to a strong increase in demand, as testified, for example, by British trade statistics. In Italy, this growth resulted in the birth of many new companies and plants as well as a strong rise in the export of juice and the confirmation that the national and especially Calabrian products were most appreciated by Western markets. The structure of trade was simplified. The number of brokers decreased. The great Calabrian producers often took advantage of the purchase of their whole production by a single buyer over a period of several years. Leghorn disappeared as an intermediate trade center and the big producers began to arrange by themselves the shipment of their liquorice to the northern harbours from the warehouses they had established in Naples.

This global success of the Calabrian manufacturers was nevertheless undermined by some internal weaknesses and by some major transformations of the international markets that became more and more evident at the turn of the 19th century.

Regarding the Calabrian manufacturers, it is necessary to stress that they had always been able to control only the first step of the cycle, while everything concerning the placement of the juice remained constantly in the hands of the merchants. This situation prevented them to have a clear knowledge of the markets, of their changes, and to develop adaptive strategies. When the dramatic political and economic events of the first half of the 20th century upset the international flows of trade, even if only
temporarily, or when the liquorice market experienced changes that made less strategic the high quality Italian juices, the great Calabrian producers were in no condition to reshape their supply and to build new, still profitable, commercial relations. The access to alternative, conspicuous sources of income led these aristocratic families to give up easily the manufacture of liquorice when it seemed to require too expensive efforts.

An exception to this model were the Amarellis, a relatively small family of Rossano, who were able to survive enlarging the range of commercial items and diversifying the final markets by relying entirely on their autonomous entrepreneurial effort. The same strategy was adopted by the small capitalist producers of Abruzzo.

Other major changes reshaped the international trade of liquorice juice from the middle of 19th century and inevitably damaged the Italian manufacturers. In the 1830s there began a network of innovative Provençal producers capable of dumping juice and confectionery liquorice-based of medium quality at competitive prices on European markets. In Great Britain, MacAndrew and Forbes, a big British capitalist company, emerged and soon dominated the international market through the creation, for the first time, of a real global market for liquorice. Finally, synthetic substances progressively substituted high quality liquorice extracts in the pharmaceutical industry.

In conclusion, even if only few traces of the history of this important production remain in Calabria, it has been thanks to the liquorice juice that this region took part in the creation of a global market of manufactured goods in the last three centuries.

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