

The Daily Life of a Slave in the Cosmopolitan City of Valletta during 16-18th Century Malta

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Abstract

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<p>Who were the slaves? What role did they have in the history of Valletta? And more importantly, were they part of the local community? These are the questions that this research tries to address. This is done by looking at stories which show not only their work and contribution but more importantly the type of interaction they had with their owners and the community in general. Slavery is a shameful part of European and Mediterranean history when it was acceptable for a man, to own another man. There are stories of prohibited relationships, prohibited interaction and cruel punishment, but, maybe surprisingly for some, there are also stories of reciprocal respect, care, and manumission. The focus of this study is not to just list stories and facts, but to highlight situations which show the type of interaction that existed between the non-free and the free human beings.</p>		
Keywords Slavery, Interaction, Knights Period, Valletta,		

Declaration of Authenticity



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Declaration:

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of my own research. I, as the author, declare that this research study is my own composition which has not been previously produced for any other qualification.

The research study was conducted under the supervision of Mr. Vincent Zammit

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1. Introduction

For centuries, most of the world believed in and supported the institution of slavery. The idea that men could own other men was accepted in different countries during most of human history. Even the most acclaimed and praised civilisations had a system of slavery, from the city of Athens during the invention of democracy, to the Florence of the Renaissance up to the early decades of the United States which was founded through the Bill of Rights.

Throughout Malta's history, like in most countries, Slavery was an accepted institution that, despite its ugly history, still played an important role in different periods. During the period of the Order in Malta, many slaves ended up in Malta through corsairing. This practice was one of the main commercial activities of Malta and played a major role in influencing the socio-cultural and economy of these islands. Corsairing, practised through the licence issued by the Order, attacked the infidel's galleys, anyone who was not Christian and the non-Christian captives were made slaves. These activities were conducted by (1) Private corasaires, Maltese but also Italian, French and occasionally Spanish, who would have obtained a licence from the Order, (2) Individual knights and on some occasions also Grand Masters who would own their own vessels (3) And, the Order's galley squadron who would organise yearly campaigns against non-Christian ships (Cassar, 2004).

1.1 Research Background

This study about slavery in Malta addresses the period between the 16th century and 18th century. During this turbulent period in the Mediterranean, where major powers battled the control of this region, Malta saw the arrival of the Order of St John in October 1530. The Order was founded in the Holy Land in year 1048 as a Religious and Hospitaller Order, throughout its history it became a military power and possessed territories in the Holy Land from where it provided a military defence to pilgrims and its medical centres. After its expulsion from the Holy Land and other cities, they settled for around two hundred years in Rhodes until 1522, when they were expelled from Rhodes by the Ottomans and eventually settled in Malta.

Upon their arrival, the Order settled in the Birgu, a town by the sea where the Order could harbour their galleys. Following the victory over the Ottoman Empire in 1565, known as the Great Siege of Malta, a city on the promontory of Mount Xiberras started to be planned and designed in its entirety. Different European Monarchs and the Pope himself assisted in its construction through funds and expertise. This fortress city eventually became the seat of the convent of the Order, and it showcased the Order's

military, naval and Hospitaller valour. It was named Valletta after the Grand Master of the Order De Valette, the hero of the siege.

Following the transfer of the Order from Birgu to Valletta in 1571, the population of this new city grew drastically in the first two decades and eventually doubled by the 18th Century. From her studies of the *Rollo* of the parishes of San Paolo and Porto Salvo, Dr Christine Muscat estimates that in the mid-eighteenth century, the population of Valletta was around 16,000 to 18,000 souls. Since this number is based on the members of the parishes, this number excludes non-Catholics, such as slaves (Muscat, 2018). This is quite significant considering that today's population of Valletta is around 6,000 people (NSO, 2019).

Thanks to the grand harbour and the presence of the Order, Valletta and its port developed into an important commercial and trading location. Its prestige attracted a variety of individuals, local and foreign, such as merchants involved in sea trading and corsairing, service providers such as artisans, tailors, barbers, maids and other services one would find in any city and also job seekers would try their luck in this city (Muscat, 2018). For this reason, as also described by foreign travellers who visited Valletta during this period, this city was a vibrant cosmopolitan hub.

1.2 Research Aim, Objectives and Hypothesis or Question

This study aims to look into the day-to-day life of the slaves in Malta with the intention to shed light on the roles and contributions of the slaves towards the city of Valletta. This will be achieved by looking at the human interaction that the slaves had with the local community. For this reason, this research will look into major studies about the slaves in Malta with the aim of answering the below questions.

1. Who were the slaves?
2. What were the roles of slaves in Malta during the period of the Order?
3. How did they used to live and spent their time?
4. What was their relationship with the local community?

Ultimately this will help in the creation of a tour which focuses on the roles of the slave communities and individual slaves who contributed to the history of Valletta.

2. Literature Review

This chapter will discuss the studies of other well-known historians on the topic of slavery in Malta. Different researchers such as Cassar, Muscat, Wettinger and Zammit wrote about different areas of slavery in Malta, including their arrival, working conditions, socio-cultural aspects, and crimes.

2.1 Arrival to Malta

One of the most important and extensive studies about slaves in Malta is the book by the late Profs. Wettinger *Slavery in the island of Malta and Gozo ca 1000-1812*. In this work, one can find extensive information on the daily life of the slaves in Malta, from their capture to their manumission or any ill fate that they may have suffered. He wrote how their arrival at Malta, the newly captured slaves, and their captors, underwent strict quarantine for a period of up to 40 days. This was the fate of all arrivals to Malta, since for centuries this was the most effective way to prevent the spread of deadly pandemics. This was a period where today's vaccines and medicine are unheard of a pandemic could leave a negative effect on the population such as the 1675-76 bubonic plague in Malta which killed 11,300 out of a population of 70,000. (Muscat, 2018). For this reason, quarantine was taken very seriously by the Order and those who tried to escape quarantine were hanged and often their bodies were left visible to set an example. (Zammit, 2016)

With regards to the quarantine by the slaves and their captors, Wettinger (2000) and Muscat (2006) mention that all the expenses of the quarantine period had to be covered by their captors, whether knights, private corsairs, or the Order itself. This included clothes, food, transport, and a certificate of health. In fact, following the end of this quarantine period, most of the private corsairs put up for sale their captives in public auction to divide the sharing out the proceeds of the venture (Wettinger, 2000).

Muscat writes that each captured slave was registered on a list. These lists would normally include the slave's name, the father's name when available, the country of origin, and "any distinguishing physical mark such scars, maimed limbs, pimples or tattoos" (Muscat, 2004 pp 11). The same author in his work provides an abstract from an official document showing the registration of slaves:

"Ahmet Mehmel, 20 years, fair with a big head; Musali, son of Jusuf Bosnak, 28 years old approximately, wounded in his left shoulder and having various pimples on his nose" (Muscat, 2004, pp.12).

Muscat tells us that this detailed information about the physical appearance, or any other physical detail was obtained through the macabre practice of stripping each captive. These slave registers give us an idea of the traumas experienced by individuals during these periods. It must be noted that these practices experienced by captives were similar to other regions of the Mediterranean (Muscat 2004). Captives who were identified as coming from a high social class were given considerable attention since these could lead to the payment of a high ransom. Although some may try to hide their high social class to avoid the need to pay an exorbitant ransom, the captors would look at the palm of their hands to try to identify those who enjoyed life at court thus not bearing the signs of hard labour. Sometimes, the captors believed that corporal punishment was the ideal way to extract the identity of the individual (Muscat 2004).

2.2 Slaves Market

Wettinger, in his major work about slaves in Malta, highlights the different fate of the slaves captured by different entities. Healthy and strong male slaves who were captured by the ships of the Order would become the property of the Government of the Order and would be employed for their own use either on the galleys as rowers or ashore in the various institution such as the law courts, the magisterial palace, the hospital, and the auberges, and the fortifications (Cassar and Cassia, 2007). On the other hand, those found unfit or sick, the women and the children would typically be sold off. On the other hand, the privateers would sell all their captives and split the profits among the crew (Wettinger 2000).

In his research, Wettinger highlights the lack of primary sources about the location of the slave market. He mentions two contemporary sources written by two German travellers to Malta, one who visited Malta in 1632 and the other one in 1616. While the former describes a slave market in front of the Grand Master's palace, where, almost every day, captured Turks and serfs were publicly sold, the latter writes about the slave market located in a different square behind the Grand Master's palace. While highlighting these contradictory sources, Wettinger argues that the location behind the Grand Master's palace is more "plausible" since this area, where today one finds *is-Suq tal-Belt*, has always been associated with commerce and trade (Wettinger, 2000).

2.3 Slaves Community

While the presence of the Order of Saint John ensured a "permanent pool of slaves" in Malta, Wettinger writes that only indications of the number of slaves in one or more sections in particular periods exist, such as the number of privately-owned slaves or those who belong to the Order, those on the galleys or those ashore, it is difficult to obtain a global figure (Wettinger, 2000). Wettinger later suggests that

the number of slaves may have varied from around five hundred in the early sixteenth century up to around three thousand in the early eighteenth century (Wettinger, 2006). In 1556, out of some 487 persons who received the sacrament of confirmation 43 were privately owned slaves or ex-slaves, making them 10% of those who received this sacrament. This does not include slaves owned by the state. Another important chronicler referred to by Wettinger mentions the presence of around 1,000 slaves during the 1565 Great Siege who provided constructional work on the bastions and other fortifications, half of whom died during the fighting. (Wettinger, 2000). The difficulty to calculate the global amount of slaves during the different periods means that different authors give considerably different numbers in their estimates. For example, Muscat estimates that the global slave population in 1709, including those privately owned, owned by the order and working on the galleys, was of around 10,000.

Wettinger argues that throughout this period, the majority of the slaves were Turks or Moors from North Africa and the Levant. In fact, he notes that the Christian missionaries working with the slaves had to speak either Turkish or Arabic or both. Muscat and Agius write about the phrases used to describe the slaves. The idiom 'as strong as a Turk' indicate how Turks were judged as strong. The Moors of North Africa were also considered strong and hard workers, while on the other hand, blacks were seen as the worst rowers as apparently, they never adapted and were endemically homesick (Muscat and Agius, 2013). Wettinger writes that black slaves who arrived in Malta were already slaves of the Moors or Turks when captured. He argues that black slaves were a small section of the slave community. (Wettinger, 2000). Another small community of slaves were the Jews, who would have been captured on Muslim vessels. They were still considered as lawful pray as indicated in a letter by Grand Master Perellos who indicated that it was a custom to reduce Jews to slavery. (Wettinger 2000)

3. Methodology

3.1 Outline

This research will look into major studies about slavery in Malta and qualitative interviews to try to address some gaps in the knowledge about the role of the slaves in Malta.

This study opted for a Qualitative approach which concentrates on getting insight into a person's research and perspective on specific situations and stories (Hall and Harvey, 2018). The first interview was conducted with a senior executive officer and physical anthropologist at the National Inventory, Research and Archaeology Unit of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage. Ms. Debra Camilleri was chosen since together with her team they were the first people in Malta to conduct an intensive examination on the cranium and skeletons belonging to slaves living in Malta. Intrigued by her findings, she went out of her way to look for related documents in parish archives to try to give an identity to these individuals. In 2022, she presented her findings at a public event but during this interview, the interviewee had the opportunity to ask to indebt questions about these recent discoveries. The second interview was conducted with Mr. Liam Gauci, Senior Curator at Heritage Malta and the author of the book *In the name of the Prince: Maltese Corsairs 1760-1798*. He conducted research about both corsairing and also slaves in Malta.

They provided additional useful information for this essay since they dealt with primary data. These interviews were an opportunity not only to collect data but also to ask specific questions about their own findings. A set of open-ended questions were asked of the participants. The questions and topics discussed were different, since both participants work in different, yet related fields. During these semi-structured and in-depth face-to-face interviews, while the questions were mainly based on their findings, the researcher of this study also looked into their perspective on the topic of slavery following their analysis of primary recourses.

In addition to getting data from the interviews for the scope of this research, secondary sources were looked into. Information gathered from earlier studies such as published books and articles by well-known and respected historians in the field, provided an important starting point to review the literature. While history books will normally list facts and events, this research will attempt to identify relevant stories which can contribute to the declared aims of this study.

3.2 Ethical considerations

All the information compiled used by this study from the works of other researchers has an internal reference. In addition to that, at the end of this study, a bibliography was compiled for such reference. In regard to the interviews, both interviewees were given a consent form to sign before the interviews began. A verbal explanation of the consent form was also given. For this research, an Android Redmi phone was used to record the interviews. The participant was provided with the researcher's email address in case they had any additional questions or comments to make. The length of the interview was also disclosed to the participants.

3.3 Limitation

This research had several restrictions, the most notable of which was the word constraint of six thousand words, which meant that only a few narrowly focused concerns could be addressed. Moreover, it forced the researcher to concentrate on specific areas in order to stay within the predetermined constraints.

Another challenge is time. Setting up appointments proved to be very difficult because many participants had extremely busy schedules. Fortunately, every interview was completed successfully and on time. All the interviews have been recorded to eliminate the risk of missing important information.

4. Results, Analysis and Discussion

This section will address the daily life of the slaves in Valletta, from the type of work they performed to the interaction they had with the local community. Moreover, this research will try to identify and highlight the contribution that the slaves gave to Valletta.

4.1 Slaves owned by the Order of St.John

4.1.1 Work done by the Orders Slave

As we saw in the literature review, the slaves owned by the Order would either be employed on the galleys or ashore. The working conditions of the slaves on the galleys were identical to the conditions of non-captive individuals who ended up working on the galleys such as convicts, also known as *forzato* and the *Buonavoglie* who were recruited to pay the loans. The type of work on the galleys varied from rowing to handling heavy equipment, carrying provisions, cleaning, preparing meals, and handling the rigging and ropes. Most of these duties were done while chained and under the watchful eyes of the *argusin* or his assistants (Muscat, 2006). On the other hand, the slaves working ashore performed a great variety of tasks for the Order. Slaves would normally do the hardest and the dirtiest jobs and their free labour contributed to the building and maintenance of the bastions around the harbour. Other areas which heavily depended on slaves were the bakery, hospitals, dockyards, auberges and the Grand Master's Palace and armoury (Wettinger, 2000). Asked about the role of the slaves in Valletta, Liam Gauci pointed out that through slavery and coraisaring, the Order accumulated money and strength which helped it 'defend' the catholic faith and ultimately build Valletta.

4.1.2 Accommodation and Food

The slaves of the Order were housed in the *Bagno dell schiavi* which were the slave's prisons. The word *bagno* derives from the Italian word bathed since all the slaves upon entering the large prison were bathed and fumigated with vinegar and thyme (Muscat and Agius, 2013). There were three prisons in the Grand Harbour area, the first one was constructed in Birgu, another one in Valletta and one in Isla. Each evening, prior to sunset, slaves had to return to the prison accompanied by their warders, where they were then carefully counted. In the slave prison, they were given their daily ration of bread and a cup of soup known as *minestra* made from cereals and fried beans (Muscat 2006). If they had some

money, they could also visit the prison tavern to buy extra food. Buttiegieg also writes that it was through the Turkish slaves at prisons that coffee was introduced to the Maltese Society. Slaves not only brew and consumed the coffee but also sold it to earn some extra money. He highlights that even common people from the urban town used to visit the bagno regularly to have a taste of this unique beverage (Butiggieg, n.d)

4.1.3 Identifiability

Slaves had to wear a uniform provided by the Order. They were provided with winter clothes in early November and summer clothes on the feast of St John on the 24th of June. Moreover, slaves were recognisable through a conspicuous forelock on a completely shaven head and the iron clasp around one of their legs. These would ensure that slaves are recognisable and prevent escape (Muscat, 2006). These regulations were taken very seriously, in fact, if the hair of a slave resembled the normal haircut of Christians, they could have suffered the punishment of fifty strokes. With regard to clothing, they were severely punished if they damaged their clothes. Privately owned slaves or slaves who earned their own living were expected to buy their own uniforms (Wettinger, 2000). Ms Camilleri highlighted during the interview that women did not have a uniform yet they were still distinguishable since most of the women employed as domestic slaves were of sub-Saharan origins. In fact, Favray's eighteenth-century paintings *Maltese gentildonne* and the *Visit* depict female domestic slaves dressed similarly to other female subjects depicted in the same paintings

4.2 Slaves owned by Private Individuals

Slaves were also owned by private individuals such as knights, laymen, clerics, and other civilians who could afford to purchase them. A recorded episode of 1634 saw the capture of a significant number of black slaves, both male and female. Since they were found to be unsuitable for the work on the galleys and could not be easily absorbed by the local market, the Order gave special payment concessions for relatively poorer buyers, including Knights, to pay the average price of 115 scudi for each slave in credits. It is of no surprise that in 1779, Inquisitor Zondadari notes that there were so many slaves that even craftsmen, and the "lowest members of the people" owned one. While Knights could own their own slaves, they were prohibited to own female slaves under the age of 50 since this could jeopardise the oath of chastity. (Wettinger, 2000)

4.2.1 Knights and Grand Masters who owned slaves

Knights and the Grand Masters themselves would own slaves, most often obtained through private corsairing activities they participated in, or which they organised themselves. For example, Alof de Wignacourt, Grand Master during 1601-22, owned at least one galleon and several other smaller vessels, and the slaves that he captured during corsairing belonged to him and not to the Common Treasury of the Order.

It is said that by the time of his death, Grand Master de Valette owned 530 slaves. As mentioned during the interview by Liam Gauci, the city of Valletta is actually named after a corsair who rose the ranks of the Order making “money enslaving people and stealing stuff in the name of the holy catholic faith”. Other notable Grand Masters who owned a considerable number of slaves by the time of their death were Grand Master Verdala who is recorded to have left 660, Wignacourt left 200 slaves, Perellos left 135 slaves and Vilhena left 80. The number of slaves that the Grand Masters owned at the time of their death may not reflect the number of slaves they owned during their reigns. For example, Grand Master Pinto sold 120 slaves to the Treasury for the price of 150 scudi each. In 1606, when the Common Treasury of the Order lost 540 galley slaves, Wignacourt lent 115 of his own (Wettinger, 2000).

Apart from working on the Knights and Grand Masters privately owned galleys, their slaves would be used for a variety of other work. One of the most interesting to mention was that of sedan-chair carriers. Since the narrow streets of Valletta made the use of carriages hazardous and inconvenient, and most of the palaces and other buildings were large and had large staircases, the elderly knights preferred to be carried in sedan-chairs (Wettinger, 2000). There have been cases, where some of the slaves were freed upon the death of their knights or Grand Masters who owned them. For example, upon La Valette’s death, several manumissions were recorded. Another example are 27 baptised slaves owned by Verdala whom he wished to free as indicated in his last will. It is to be noted that not all were set free since for example, of the recorded 200 slaves owned by Wignacourt at the time of his death, only four baptised slaves were set free. (Wettinger, 2000)

4.2.2 Slaves owned by other individuals

The slaves owned by other private individuals often lived with the families that owned them. It is without saying that sometimes there was a level of affection between the owners and the slaves who become part of the family, even taking the surnames of their owners. There are numerous examples of domestic slaves being manumitted as per the owner’s wills or other notarial deeds. For example, Mattia Preti gave

to his slave his freedom and a collection of his drawings. Others granted freedom to their slaves in exchange for a ransom.

In 2022, Ms Camilleri in a public event, presented her studies on the skulls found in the 'secret' corridor of the old parish church of Zejtun. She dismantled the myth and local legends that these bones were of Maltese victims of an Ottoman attack on the village. Out of the 39 skulls found in this corridor, at least five pertained to sub-Saharan women. These identified women were slaves owned by private families and who were buried with their owners. These archaeological findings match records found in the parish documents which record female slaves which coincide with the same estimated time of death of these slaves. These were baptised and given Christian names such as Catherina. During the interview, Ms Camilleri mentioned that the documents she found while attempting to match her archaeological findings with archives prove that they had relationships in Malta by marrying other slaves, having children, and building their life in Malta. Since not all the slaves left Malta after the abolishment of slavery, Ms Camilleri argues that this shows that they have integrated with the local community "and essentially formed part of the Maltese population". While during her examination of the bones, she expected to find physical trauma, it was not the case and despite showing signs of common medical conditions, most of the individuals died naturally at the age of 50s and 60s.

Unfortunately, there were episodes where slaves suffered considerable harm from owners. For example, Philanthropist Catherina Vitale inflicted pain on her female slaves such as tying them to the railing of her staircase and having them flogged with a whip soaked in water to inflict more pain. On another occasion, her male slaves were ordered to pour boiling fat on the back of female slaves (Bonello 2022).

4.3 Life outside working-hours

4.3.1 Work the slaves did for their own benefits

Although the slaves had the status of non-free individuals, there were occasions or situations where they could have 'free time' outside their working environment. For example, in the middle of 17th century, slaves could engage in trade on their own account thus earning some money. The *Giornata* gave the possibility to the slaves to pay a fee to the owner for a leave of absence for the day. Such Slaves were called *franchi*. Moreover, in 1650 the Council of State of the order ordered that useless slaves owned by the Order were to obtain permission to wander freely and earn a living provided they return to the prison at night. (Wettinger, 2000)

Some of the work that they could engage in was hairdressing, shoe making, tailor and water seller. Hairdressing seems to have been the favourite occupation of the slaves since there was a demand for their service since male slaves had an imposed haircut. In the 17th Century, an Inquisitor mentions how some priests went to the slave prisons to be shaved since they charged less than Christian barbers. It must be noted that non-Christians could not rent out rooms unless in certain circumstances and with permission. That is why there was the presence of booths which was allowed for certain occupations. The slave booths were so widely spread in the streets of Valletta that it is recorded that in 1741, the Grand Master ordered the removal of the slaves' booths which were around the Palace. These were transferred to the site near the Jesuit's Church. A later limitation imposed in 1749 limited the barber slaves to work only near the prison guard room.

The amount of work that the barber slaves had made it possible for some to ransom themselves. This opportunity to ransom themselves was available to all the slaves. It must have been more difficult for female slaves to obtain enough money to ransom themselves. While most must have accepted their faith, others may have looked into unorthodox ways to obtain some money, such as prostitution, despite the government's ineffective attempt to clamp down on this profession. A 1742 entry on the fiscale's logbook reads:

“A lascivious female slave sent to prison until she is sold out of the island for her vices” (Wettinger, 2000, pp 499).

Slaves had restrictions on the type of work they could do for the same reason of security. They could not engage in farming since it slaves were prohibited from going into the countryside unaccompanied by their master or a warder. Fishing was also prohibited because they were prohibited to go within a mile of the coast unless in the town or the harbour and they could not go out of the harbour on any boat unless on the galleys as part of their duties.

4.3.2 Religious Practices

During the Order of St John's period, slaves were allowed to practise their religion freely. For Muslim slaves, there were Mosques in all three slave prisons. These were rooms which were transformed according to the needs of their religious faith. Slaves had permission to perform their evening prayer during the holy month of Ramadan and to celebrate other religious occurrences. In the eighteenth century, there was also the presence of a mosque adjoining the Muslim cemetery at Marsa (Wettinger,2000). The Jewish slaves also had a room specifically set up as a synagogue in the Birgu

slave prison which was commonly referred to as the Jews' Prison. This was initially used only on religious festive occasions but later also for the Sabbaths. British-Jewish historian Roth reports that the inquisitor of Malta in 1675 decreed that the Jews should not be forced to work on their feast days (Roth, 1931).

As mentioned, some slaves did convert and were baptised. The bishop of Malta had the spiritual charge of the privately owned slaves. Yet, there have been occasions when slaves sought the assistance of the Inquisitor. Since the ransom of a converted slave was lower, thus owners risked 'losing' him/her, owners sometimes hindered the work of the missionaries to convert the slaves. In 1636 and 1637, two slave owners from Valletta were accused in front of the Inquisitor of prohibiting their slaves from converting (Wettinger, 2000).

The slaves that were owned by the Order or the individual knights fell under the spiritual jurisdiction of the Order's own Prior. This ecclesiastical dignitary used the Conventual Church of St. John for the greater ceremonies and state occasions, while the day-to-day parish work was done at the church of Our Lady of Victories. Most of the baptisms of slaves belonging to the Order were performed there. This church eventually became the seat of the congregation for Converted Slaves. Baptised slaves went for confession on the first Sunday of the month, yet they only received Communion whenever the priest thought that they should (Wettinger 2000).

It must be pointed out, that converting to the catholic religion provided certain benefits to these slaves. These included: (1) the distribution of better food in the slaves' prison, (2) money allowance, (3) permission to marry Christians, (4) sleep at their own home if they were married, (5) ransom was lower (6) they generally avoided rowing on the galleys unless in it is in form of juridical punishment, (7) enjoyed the privilege of sanctuary like other Christians, and (8) in case they were condemned to death due to a crime, they were spared the painful torture before the execution (Wettinger, 2000) (Zammit, 2016).

Slaves who did not convert could face harsher punishments than the baptised slaves such as being executed for minor offences and death penalties which were proceeded by torture also to pressure the condemned to convert in the moments before their execution in order to save their souls. For example, two Muslim slaves who in 1698 were condemned for killing a poor man to rob him, were tortured with red-hot pincers and had their hands mutilated before eventually being hanged. Probably the best example of the state's ruthlessness was the show-style cruel executions of those found involved in the slave rebellion of 1749 (Zammit, 2016).

4.3.3 'Prohibited' interaction with the local community

Since several slaves came from Arabic-speaking North Africa's Maghreb region this made communication with the local Maltese community easier. These slaves could easily interact with locals which made it easier for Muslim slaves to date Christian Maltese females despite this being prohibited by the Church and State. (Cassar and Cassia, 2007).

In 1658, Grand Master de Redin complained about the lack of appropriate punishment that stops infidels from arrogantly being involved with Christian women. A proclamation that he issued included a number of regulations including the prohibition for the infidels to enter the property of any women or be in the presence of other women alone but also provided cruel punishments for those caught in the act. He dictated that if a non-Christian is caught with a Christian prostitute, he is to be whipped and have their ears and noses cut off, while if caught for the second time, they were to be hanged. Christian men who were caught with non-Christian women were to be sent to 10 years on the galleys and hanged if caught the second time. Despite proclamations and regulations, these were not always implemented and observed, in 1691 it was reported, maybe an exaggeration, that infidel slaves were

“having intercourse with everyone more than ever, and at all hours of the day going about the streets of the towns of these Our Dominions, and without any fear entering the houses of scandalous and dishonest women” (Wettinger, 2000, pp 521).

Examples of punishments related to this crime include a *papassi*, a Muslim prayer leader who in 1709 was transferred to the galleys as a punishment for “carnal intercourse with Christian women” and in 1738 three Christian women were whipped followed soon after that same day, by the whipping of three Turks and then of another four, “for the sin of fornication” (Wettinger, 2000, pp 521). Homosexuality was also considered a serious crime. In the 1740s, a slave was condemned to the galleys for two years because he was seen alone in the presence of a boy. On another occasion, a Maltese man accused to have a relationship with a slave was straight away condemned to 10 years of exile in Gozo since he was not suitable for the galleys. This sentence did not please the Grand Master who requested to be sentenced to hard labour (Wettinger, 2000).

One of the prohibited occupations which was prohibited but still practised by some slaves was that of magic. These slaves had Christian clientele, most often, local ladies who sought a charm to win the heart of a knight or local lad, or to put a spell on someone who had refused their overtures or angered them in some other way or removing a spell. The records of the Inquisitor provide several examples.

For example, in 1752, a woman from Rabat who feared being under a spell, together with three other members of her family, went to the slaves' prison in Valletta to find a slave who could remove this spell from her. A warder at the prison deposed in his witness that:

“... Approaching the prison entrance with one of the women, the slave told me to note that he had already agreed with the woman to remove the spell from her relative, on the promise of payment of four scudi. As he wanted at least two scudi straightaway and the woman did not have any money in her sack, she took off a ring from her finger...” (Wettinger, 2000, pp 529)

The practice of sorcery by some slaves may have strongly influenced the popularity of such practice with the Maltese public while at the same time, this popularity may have encouraged some of the slaves to practice sorcery, which they might not otherwise have done. Sorcery was one way in which the two different cultures interacted in Malta as a result of the existence of slavery (Wettinger, 2000).

5. Final Arguments

5.1 Conclusion

When passers-by arrested and assaulted two slaves returning from Zejtun after having a meal of ravioli with a Maltese family, the Grand Master set free the slaves and did not reward their interceptors. As Wettinger wrote:

“The incident is eloquent proof of the easy relations between the slaves and at least a section of the Christian population of Malta and of the tolerance of the government in peaceful times. Unfortunately, a rude awakening came about as the result of the unhappy events of 1749, when all the old prohibitions about the wandering of slaves in the countryside unaccompanied by their masters or warders were renewed”
(Wettinger, 2000 pp 73, 74)

It is a reminder that as mentioned by Ms Camillieri during the interview, we are talking about people who were enslaved and not free. From her research, it can safely be said that in the case of domestic slaves, they were cared for when they were sick, as also mentioned by Wettinger with regards to the slaves of the Order. On this point, Mr Camillieri points out that “it still remains very difficult to conclude” whether this care given by the owners to the slaves was being done “out of the goodness of their heart” or simply because the slaves were perceived as a “product”, who were bought and gave them free labour. In fact, Liam Gauci said that after all, slaves “were perceived as human merchandise, no more no less”.

5.2 Recommendations

This research attempt to examine stories and historic date with the aim of identifying the human element of the slaves. The focus of this essay was on situations and stories which show the interaction between the slaves and the local community to try to identify whether slaves were considered “human merchandise”, or they were seen as human beings deserving of care and affection. This is a multi-disciplinary topic which should be further studied for the benefit of our society. Moreover, this type of study can provide interesting tours which focus on the impact of the individuals on the building and places which are shown during the tour.

Every building and every street in Valletta tells us a story related to slaves. Valletta is full of these stories, often unknown stories, which contain shame about a period when individuals were considered and treated as properties, but also stories of success and interaction with the local community, stories which remind us that humans have always interacted with each other and lived as a community irrespective of their social and legal status.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: HND TG Long Essay Tour Itinerary

Merbha, Welcome to this tour!

The tour will be held in the cosmopolitan city of Valletta, with a special focus on the daily life of slaves during the knight's period. It is an easy walking tour that will take approximately an hour and a half.

As we walk through the city, following the key spots in Valletta, many stories and information will be narrated to our visitors. The emerging themes will be Religion, Work, Society, Life at the Bagnos dell Schiavi, Daily ration of food and Crime. It is important to acknowledge that sensitive topics will be mentioned these include sex, crime, homosexuality, punishments, suicide and torture. All the information is based on historical facts. This tour will be targeted at an adult audience only.

At the end of the tour the visitors will be provided with a warm coffee authentic to that period, just like the slaves used to brew and consume! Visitors are encouraged to ask questions and participate.

The locations for the tour are as follows:

- Hastings Garden – Introduction to slavery, captured slaves arriving to Malta, Lazarretto quarantine facility
- St John's Cavalier
- Wignacourt Fountain
- Jean de Vallete Square
- The Auberge of Castille, Leon and Portugal
- Castellenia
- St John Co-Cathedral
- Republic Square
- Grand Master's Palace