Sezione monografica / Theme section

Contacts on the Move

Toward a Redefinition of Christian-Islamic Interactions in the Early Modern Mediterranean and Beyond

Introduction

Christian-Islamic Interactions. In the last decades, the emergence of a new research trend on the "early globalization" has influenced the study of Early Modern History from many points of view. New theoretical concepts are re-shaping our perception of the "long Renaissance": not longer just a season of Iberian expansionism and of European conquest, but rather a era of connectedness on a world scale[1]. Interaction, circulation and mobility are the key words of the most innovative approaches that – thanks to the pioneering works of leading scholars such as Sanjay Subrahmanyam (1997; 2011), Timothy Brooks (2008; 2015), Serge Gruzinski (2016) and Patrick O'Brien (2006)[2] – are now informing a substantial revolution both in methods and at the interpretative level. The great availability of sources written in different languages and the sharing of knowledge and linguistic skills among the international community of academics are changing the way we do history and the topics we focus on.

It is not a coincidence that the study of religious relationships beyond the *Holy War* represents a cornerstone in this frame. As historians are stressing the routes of political, cultural and economic communications through lands, oceans and empires, a constantly-growing number of cross-cultural and trans-religious go-betweeners begins to populate the Early Modern centuries[3].

The Mediterranean basin, with its porous and unstable borders between the areas under Muslim rule and those dominated by a Christian majority, represents a fruitful scenario for this kind of research. From its earlier history

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[*] This volume moves from the International Workshop *Christian – Islamic Interactions. Mobility, Connection, Transformation (1450-1800)*, organized by Giuseppe Marcocci, Serena Di Nepi and Felicita Tramontana in 2014 (February 10-11) at Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa.

[1] As for the definition of connectivness we take over the persuasive proposal by Ghobrial in J.-P. Ghobrial, *The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory*, in «Past & Present» 222 (2014), pp. 51-93.

[2] S. Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1997; Id., *Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia*, in V. Lieberman (ed.), *Beyond Binary Histories: Re-imagining Eurasia to c.1830*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor (MI) 1999, pp. 289-316; T. Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World*, Bloomsbury, New York 2008; S. Gruzinski, *Les Quatre parties du monde. Histoire d'une mondialisation*, 2nd ed., Point-Seuil, Paris 2006; Id., *L'aigle et le dragon. Démesure et mondialisation au XVIe siècle*, Fayard, Paris 2012; P. O'Brien, *Historical traditions and modern imperatives for the restoration of global history*, in «Journal of Global History» 1 (2006), pp. 3-39.

[3] N. Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth Century Muslim between Worlds*, Hill and Wang, New York 2006; M. García-Arenai - G. Wiegers, *Un hombre en tres mundos: Samuel Pallache, un judío marroquí en la Europa protestante y en la católica*, Siglo XXI, Madrid 2006 and so on.

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the *Mare nostrum* has been the realm of travelers, soldiers and sailors, moving by land and sea from one region to the other. Circulation of people and objects, trades between the shores of the Mediterranean are amply testified since the antiquity. Even for periods once thought stagnant recent works have revealed a profusion of movement and communication across and around the Mediterranean. The consistent Spanish, French and Italian historiography on slaves and renegades has been recently enriched by new investigations in libraries and archives that shed light on a broad range of intermediaries: from soldiers to merchants and slaves, from diplomats to missionaries and artisans, from translators to collectors and travelers, each of them a moving fragment of this "liquid continent"[4].

This volume aims to engage in a dialogue with this well-established research trend taking into account diverse historiographical approaches and analyzing the relationship between Christians and Muslims from different, but yet interconnected, perspectives: legal history, intellectual and social history, Ottoman studies, art history. By fostering a discussion that incorporates the main historiographical debates on the topic, the volume wants to provide a comprehensive and original picture of contacts between Muslims and Christians in the Early Modern period. It investigates themes that are still unexplored or deserve revision while shedding new light on the diverse trajectories of Muslim-Christian interactions, in different geographical contexts. The five essays analyze the relationship between Christians and Muslims from different, but yet interconnected, perspectives: legal history, translations, daily interactions, border-crossing, cultural images. We aim at highlighting themes that are still unexplored or deserve revision and throw light on the diverse trajectories of Muslim-Christian interactions and in a varied geographical context. Assuming the ancient liquidity as a moving step, we are focusing on the practical side of this story focusing on the individual experience and on the way it has been recorded and transmitted to us. For this reason, a certain micro-historical scent enters each essay and a selection of sources supports all our case studies.

We try to overcome traditional disciplinary boundaries by choosing to read together educated translations from Arabic to Latin (Katarzyna K. Starczewska), illegal sexual encounters in Istanbul (Eric Dursteler) and in Counter-Reformation Sicily (Umberto Grassi), the development of a common set of diplomatic legal norms and practices, a question of diplomacy and piracy (Guillame Calafat) and the account of a Maronite from Aleppo travelling toward Paris (Bernard Heyberger). The fruitful dialogue among methodologies and sources – usually walled in research on history of art, books, culture, diplomacy, conversion and gender – allows us to make a detailed picture of cross-cultural Mediterranean in the Early Modern period.

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[4] D. Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011.

Connecting zones. A wealth of contacts and encounters were made possible by the Mediterranean's multiform networks. Diplomacy, war, trade, slavery and religious missions all established such networks, whose knots and entanglements defined a virtually endless range of possibility for such relationships. The idea that the Mediterranean space was a 'porous' one – a datum that recent historiography has established beyond doubt – was commonly accepted by those who lived through this period of inescapable connectedness. Connections were not limited to official or semi-official diplomatic channels or to the rules of international trade, but included – perhaps most typically – a great many interactions of other kinds, which involved multitudes of different people. Scholarship has already laid a solid foundation for study by demonstrating how frequent such interactions were; the paramount challenge now is to seek to define categories capable of doing justice to this complexity.

A few examples may help clarify this point. The international goods trade involved not only buyers and sellers abroad, but a far greater array of actors: producers, who may or may not have known that their products were bound overseas to infidels' lands; marine insurers; notaries or those acting on their behalf, who recorded both transactions and negotiation rules at various moments; judges and consuls, whose task it was to resolve any divergences that might arise among the vast array of actors involved in trade negotiations; rowers and others involved in the concrete business of transporting (say) silk, spice, metal and salt from Istanbul to Venice and vice versa; overseas retailers and consumers; and all those who, although they did not buy in person, were somehow part of the market, or of the public with an opinion on the market: servants, cooks, scullions, neighbours and so on, all the way to authors of pamphlets, treatises, comedies, missionaries' texts and works of art, all of whom, in their various ways, reacted to the circulation of objects and narrated it.

Slavery is another paradigmatic example of the wide-ranging impact of individual experiences. The fluctuations in the privateering activities of Turks, Christian powers and Berber regencies ensured a continual intake of *captivi* for all the powers involved. The great slave markets and the *bagni* of Algiers, Tunis, Smirne, Malta, Livorno, Naples, Marseilles and so on were populated by Jews, Christians, Eastern Christians, Muslims, black Africans, northern Africans who had just been taken into slavery and who were reasonably hopeful that they could regain their liberty. Throughout the Mediterranean Basin and beyond, one could both be born a slave and become one. It was an accident that was liable to happen; when it did happen, it could and must be resolved. One could lose one's freedom easily: a pirate attack on a badly defended beach, a looted ship, a lost battle were all normal occurrences whose consequences were known to everybody. But liberty could also be regained: a lucky escape, a (true or false) conversion at the right moment, an adroit exchange, an offer of ransom at the right moment, the ability to become indispensable to one's master – all these could help one to escape the terrible condition of servitude. Any single slave's fate could involve numer-

ous other protagonists: one's companions in misadventure; one's relations at home, who might be seeking news; those who were, in one capacity or other, part of the network of contacts who could facilitate a ransom payment; the judges and masters whose task it was to decide of one's liberty, and the magistrates who established the conditions for enfranchisement; people met along the way, who could aid or hinder attempts at (self-)deliverance; slave merchants; intermediaries working on the freeing of prisoners; the missionaries with whom one met; preachers pushing for conversion (in either direction); finally, those myriad events and actors which will always remain in the shade because they are impossible to trace, but which played some role in each prisoner's choices: the artists and polemicists who had described the hardships of slavery; the adventurous, remarkable narrations of those who had been "on the other side" and had reported marvellous occurrences and perilous adventures; the fear of infidels, whether Turks or Franks. The ways in which slavery was imagined in these travellers' tales acquired multiple reverberations and cross-references through repeated narration, and affected in turn both slaves' real lives and the tales, dreams and nightmares of a huge public.

Diplomacy itself, for all its codified rules, did not elude these patterns of interaction: a consul who was called upon to resolve a controversy while representing his fellow countrymen's interests acted, too, from within a network of relationships, facts, knowledge, information, politics, memories, ideals and interests. In short, any one action was loaded with the weight of one's contacts, whether personal or pertaining to one's larger group; however elusive it may be, this "loadedness" now needs to be put front and center.

Such an approach allows us to refine current definitions of the Mediterranean in the modern era, going beyond the category of contact zone (useful as the latter is to convey the area's complexity clearly). The Mediterranean that was being redefined after the fall of Constantinople – the Mediterranean of the age of Suleiman the Magnificent, of the Italian wars, of the devastating impact of the Reform on European politics, of Philip II, of the fall of Budapest and of the sieges of Vienna – was a cramped space acted on by competing state powers partly impelled by conflicting and aggressive religious ideals. Inevitably, both within and well beyond the area's geographical boundaries there recurred opportunities for both positive and conflictual relationships, which were loaded with multiple significances. The flourishing of go-betweeners, on which much outstanding recent scholarship has focused, straightforwardly reveals the frequency and numerousness of these contacts. Keywords such as culture, translation, circulation of ideas and books, economy, conversion, ransom, slavery, missions and piracy are among the many that have been proposed to describe this dynamic world. Our idea, and the challenge that the present work sets out to meet, is that it is essential to attempt to piece together these various elements, typically separated by different disciplinary approaches and methodologies. For instance, although figures and data on the material bases of interaction are brought out by research in archives, libraries and museums, rarely does scholarship

on social history interact with the productive ideas coming from works on culture and intellectuals. In the present work we propose to assert the importance of combining the worlds of imagination and narrative with concrete case studies, in order to reconstruct the forms and varieties of contemporary people's awareness of connectedness.

From contact-zones to contacts on the move. Departing from the "liquidity" of the Mediterranean, we decided to focus on concrete and practical aspects of these interactions by focusing on individual experiences, daily contacts and the way these have been recorded and transmitted to us. We aim to narrate concrete stories of men and women that, coming from different cultural, social and religious background, were caught in the middle of one of the early modern Muslim-Christian networks.

In order to overcome the representation of this consecutiveness as a involuntary juxtaposition of countless and amazing episodes, we gathered a group of "exceptional" events that clearly show how common that exception was, carefully overlapping narrations and facts that, all together, offer a insight view of the multiple interactions.

The methods and approaches of microhistory infuse the following chapters with significance and content. Once pieced together, the results of rigorous research on a wide spectrum of sources can offer new perspectives on Christian-Islamic relations. These 'normal' lives, yet extraordinary ones because of their seeming exceptionality, redefine the scheme, broadening and moving its boundaries.

Contact becomes a part of what is normal, and it is the way in which one experiences it and her/his awarness of it, that makes all the difference. The six case studies we gathered here offer an entry point into this kind of inquiry. They reveal how contemporary people marked their inevitable belonging to the category of go-betweeners and moved agilely and easily in a universe that was marked by this inevitability of contact between different people.

The human element of connectedness has been addressed mostly from two perspectives. Firstly through the study of particular groups or communities, such as the so-called trans-imperial subjects or diaspora networks[5]. In addition to this, in the last decades of the 20th century, research has increasingly been interested in the life path of single individuals, who crossed religious and geographical borders, ambassadors, traders etc.[6]. According to most historians following the different stages of an individual biography

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[5] C. Moatti - W. Kaiser (eds.), *Gens de passage en Méditerranée de l'Antiquité à l'époque moderne. Procédures de contrôle et d'identification,* Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris 2007; E. Rothman, Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2011; F. Trivellato, *The familiarity of strangers: the Sephardic diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period*, Yale University Press, New Haven - London 2009; S.D. Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: the global trade networks of Armenian merchants from new Julfa*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2011.

[6] N. Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels*, cit.; J.-P. Ghobrial, *The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory*, cit.; M. García-Arenal - G. Wiegers, *Un hombre en tres mundos*, cit.

not only allows to catch her/his ability to cross geographical, religious and cultural borders, but also by and large the connectedness between worlds that for a long time had been supposed to be remote. Hannā Dyāb, the protagonist of Bernard Heyberger's contribution in this volume (*A border crossing Ottoman Christian at the beginning of the 18th Century: Hannā Dyāb of Aleppo and his account of his travel to Paris*), is one of those crossing-border characters. He was a Maronite Christian from Aleppo who accompanied the French traveler Paul Lucas through Syria in 1707 and followed him to Paris.

While taking advantage of the use of those theoretical categories that have shaped recent studies on go-betweeners – such as fluid identities, connections, interactions and mobility – Heyberger pays attention to his character's deep roots in the local context he comes from. This approach, recently discussed by John Paul Ghobrial (2014), allows the French scholar to shed light on how Hannā Dyāb's background influenced his impressions, first of all on his fellow Christians who inhabited the Ottoman provinces.

In addition to being a zone of contacts, the Mediterranean was also one of conflict. In the early modern period, open wars between the Ottomans and the Christian states of Europe over the control of the Mediterranean, alternated with what has been called "the low intensity war", fought by corsairs and pirates. In spite of these, contacts between the two shores remained constant and whether they were peaceful or conflictual, the relations between Christian and Muslim Countries in the Mediterranean gradually shaped a set of common diplomatic norms and practices. The role played by individuals and groups and more specifically by diplomats in connecting different cultural and legal worlds is also one of the themes addressed by many contributions.

Guillaume Calafat (*A «Nest of Pirates»? Diplomatic Mediators in Algiers during the 1670s*) departing from a variety of diplomatic experiences, warns us not to pinpoint a single intermediary profile, but instead suggests to stress their hybrid and mobile nature, and take into account their local involvement – that is to say, their ability to simultaneously mobilize several levels of interference, involving a large body of linguistic, political and legal interpreters, in several segments of society. Calafat also shows how to write a common, interconnected history of 17th century trading diplomacy in the Mediterranean region, implying both conflict and negotiation. The considerable number of peace and trade treaties concluded between European and North African sovereigns reveal a long common history, involving economic exchanges and commercial, political and military negotiations on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. Finally, the contribution fully acknowledges the importance of the geographical and chronological context, 17th century Algiers, and discusses the complex political relationships between the Porte, the Christian States of Europe and the Regency of Alger.

The importance of the geographical location, in fact, is one of the trajectories followed by this dossier, which addresses Muslim-Christian interactions not only across different historiographical perspectives but also in a variety of geographical locations, such as Aleppo, Paris, Algiers, Istanbul and Persia.

Besides acknowledging the Mediterranean as the contact zone[7] *par excellence*, some contributions of the volume highlight the importance of certain places as spaces of interactions and sociability. Calafat makes a similar reasoning while discussing diplomatic treaties and addresses the complex relationships between the Porte and the Regencies.

Intellectual history has so far provided many examples of interactions between Muslim and Christian scholars: disputes, exchanges, transmissions, etc. In this research framework the history of the Latin translation of the Qur'ān, described by Katarzyna K. Starczewska, unfolds an interfaith collaboration, emphasizing and shedding light on the cases in which Church officials commissioned translations to Muslims or Muslim converts.

Sexual encounters represent a new frontier on the history of social practices and Eric Dursteler and Umberto Grassi (*Ambiguous Boundaries. Sex Crimes and Cross-cultural Encounters in the Early Modern Iberian World*) address the topic by focusing on different places and from different perspectives. Durstler's chapter brings us to Istanbul and among the Venetian expatriates' community, investigating cross-cultural sexual relations in the city. Meanwhile, Grassi researches sex as a part of the wide *spectrum* of everyday interactions between Muslims and Christians. Trials held by the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily against Christian renegades accused of false beliefs regarding sexual transgressions and sodomy shed light on the ways by which sexual attraction, fascination, and deep affective bonds sometimes could cross religious and cultural boundaries. As Dursteler (*Sex and Trans-cultural Connections in Early Modern* Istanbul) definitively shows these intimate links played an important role not only in individual connections that transcended religious and cultural boundaries, but they also had implications for broader diplomatic and political relations between early modern Venice and the Porte. Love affaires between Christians and Muslims, both men and women, and the intertwining of homosexual issues with a more classical gender perspective, contribute to *give concreteness to* the paradigmatic image of the go-between. Quests for more sexual freedom, curiosity toward the other, pure love, daily life represent a innovative approach to religious conversions, which suggests that identity and belonging should also be considered within the frame of such personal affair.

For this reason, we believe that the continuous focus on biographies and well documented case studies uncovers a thicket of intertwined contacts that always include a full spectrum of human relationships and that, for this rea-

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[7] The term appeared in Mary Luise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* where it was defined as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet" *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, Routledge*, London - New York 2008 (ed. or. 1992), p. 7. This theoretical category has become common by historians with regard to the Mediterranean: E. Rothman, *Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, in «Comparative Studies in Society and History» 51 (2009), pp. 771-800; W. Kaiser *et al.*, *Union in Separation: Diasporic Groups and Identities in the Eastern Mediterranean (1100-1800)*, Viella, Rome 2015, and amply discussed by literary scholars (D. Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2003).

son, have to be always analyzed in their entirety. On the other one, the unquestionable relevance of individual choices put under question a full range of methodological issues. Who were the authors and why did they write? Which sources are available? What about people unable to write? What about their consciousness on the connectedness they were experiencing? Did they feel a serious religious difference that now we carefully avoid to recognize?

There are no definitive answers to such a questions. We are rewriting and retelling about the inevitable overcoming of borders in the past by working on a very fragmented documentary basis. Despite its being well rooted in Braudel's work, this new history of Mediterranean (and Global) interactions is unceasingly renewed by the findings of new evidence, and the map of Muslim-Christian interactions undergoes continuous reassessments.

The continuous discoveries of new documentation in the archives of Europe, Asia and the Middle East suggests that the moment has come to look at the interactions in their complexity and diversity departing from the reading of original sources. Someway, we hope that the direct contact with new sources might be the engine of new questions and new researches.