

Settlement of Muslim Black Slaves in Early Modern Europe (Valetta, 27 Sep 22)

Valetta, Malta, Sep 27, 2022

Deadline: Mar 2, 2022

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This conference, organized by IS-LE COST Action (CA18129) Islamic Legacy: Narratives East, West, South, North of the Mediterranean (1350-1750), aims to bring together scholars who work on forced migration of Black Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean.

The Aghlabid Emirate of the eighth and ninth century is known to have subjected endogenous Berber Blacks into slavery. Some of these slaves converted to Islam and made headway in the Aghlabid world. Keeping Berber Blacks as slaves continued in the following centuries. Black individuals continued to be subjected into slavery by both Christians and Muslims alike. Records show that there were Black slaves in Medieval and Early Modern Malta. Their presence on the island departs from the religious conflict between Islam and Christianity which was reduced from the seventeenth century onwards to one of corsairing between the North African Muslim troops and the Maltese corsairs. Yet, there were other Christian nations engaged in corsairing even if the Knights of Saint John, who took over the government of the island of Malta in 1530, assumed leadership in this sector and developed corsairing into a proper trade and economic activity.

Cyprus and Crete were also other islands where Blacks (both in servile and free condition) moved and settled to carry out a stable life until the modern times. Other Black communities are attested at least during the nineteenth century in Epirus, Macedonia, and on the coast of Montenegro (the community in the port city of Ulcinj was particularly developed). Blacks had a more sporadic but still significant presence in Sicily and in many maritime Italian cities (Naples, Livorno, Genoa), and they certainly were not unknown in Spain, for instance in Seville.

Blacks represent a component of Mediterranean visual arts, architecture and artefacts: Black Baldassarre (or Gasparre) in the Journey/Adoration of the Magi; "Four Moors" monument in Livorno (different in origin from but still similar to the Sardinian [and also Corsican] flag); the "moretto" (floor) lamp in Venice until the Harapi i Beledijes (1916), portrait by Kol Idromeno. The presence of Black figures and personages in this domain has been so far scarcely addressed by the specialist and would deserve a more intense attention.

All these geographically scattered and qualitatively different attestations of the presence of Black people in the Mediterranean basin show the intensity and duration of the trade routes linking the northern shores of the Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Africa through North Africa and the Levant. Through these routes not only slaves but different kinds of merchandise were circulated in a network of connections which is slowly being discovered and described by the scholars.

The conference will seek to explore the ethnicity of these Black persons (slaves or manumitted) who had settled permanently or transitorily in different areas of the Northern part of the Mediterranean from the late Middle Ages up to the abolition of slavery in the Mediterranean. How were they described and what was their status? What type of religion did they profess? Were they considered inferior or equal to other slaves or to other sections of the local population? Were they forced to abjure and once converted, were they considered different from the rest of the population because of their skin colour or were they given the same status? What was the exact context which brought them into slavery and under which circumstances were they manumitted? What types of networks, if at all, existed to facilitate their redemption? Were they the subject of diplomatic correspondence between different principalities and Mediterranean states? Can this particular ethnic group be considered as part of the Mediterranean diaspora? Can these people be defined as a repressed group or were they considered as part of a larger ethnic group that was being kept in bondage? As for art history, the conference would like to gather experts who could provide a general description of the nature and function of the appearance of Black persons in paintings, on buildings and artefacts in the Northern Mediterranean explaining the impact this kind of presence had on the perception of the Blacks. Scholars who have been working on the Mediterranean world during Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Times and have material related to stories of Black slavery in the Mediterranean are invited to submit a proposal for consideration.

Deadline and details:

This call for papers is now open for those researchers who are interested to participate in the conference. They are invited to submit their proposals with a title, an abstract (no more than 300 words) and a brief bio (maximum of 15 lines) before March 2, 2022 to: Dr. Alessandro GORI (frd322@hum.ku.dk) or Dr. Simon MERECICA (simon.mercecica@um.edu.mt).

In addition to the specific standards established by COST Association regarding COVID-19 pandemic, researchers must also consider the measures adopted by local or national authorities in Malta. They might be required to be fully vaccinated and / or present a COVID-19 negative test to be able to participate in this activity.

Reimbursement of expenses:

CA1829 might be able to reimburse travel and accommodation expenses to a limited number of researchers not yet affiliated to the Action. Applications should be submitted along with the proposals.

For further information, please visit: <https://is-le.eu/>

Working Group: 2

Scientific Coordinators: Alessandro GORI (frd322@hum.ku.dk) and Simon MERECICA (simon.mercecica@um.edu.mt)

Reference:

CFP: Settlement of Muslim Black Slaves in Early Modern Europe (Valetta, 27 Sep 22). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 13, 2022 (accessed Apr 27, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/35907>>.