
CONFERENCE REPORTS

*The Seafarers of the Mediterranean**

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The XVIIth International Maritime History conference was held in Naples between 28th-31st January 1980 and was jointly organised by the Institute for the History of Trade and Navigation directed by Luigi de Rosa, Naval University Institute in Naples and by the International Commission for Maritime History, chaired by Michel Mollat. The theme of the conference was 'Seafarers of the Mediterranean'. The large number of participants and speakers once again demonstrated the continuing vitality of the International Maritime History conferences which have now been held 17 times and survived unharmed the hiatus caused by the Second World War. This is due both to the interest aroused by particular branch of history, and to the originality of many of the issues that have been thrown up by these conferences — and to which the recent Neapolitan gathering also contributed.

However, the conference theme did tend to encourage largely descriptive contributions. This meant that the speakers had to take particular care not to confine themselves too narrowly to a given subject or problem, and were required to make a special effort to put their own findings and research in the perspective of those broader issues and interpretations which such a conference should attempt to elaborate. In fact, there were very few papers that were narrowly confined, and these were on the whole justified by the particular complexity of the problems to which they were addressed. The result of the con-

* While this report was going to press a 2 volumes work, *Le genti del Mare Mediterraneo*, edited by R. RAGOSTA, with an Introduction by LUIGI DE ROSA, Naples, Lucio Pironti Editore, 1981 has been published. The volumes include, in their original languages (English, French, Italian, Spanish), besides the reports and communications held at the Conference, a series of essays referring to the same subject.

ference as a whole was to provide a broad chronological and geographical panorama of the different ties between man and the Mediterranean sea. Within this panorama it also proved possible to explore the complex political, legal, economic and social forces which lay behind these ties and which determined the changing attitudes, life styles and patterns of work of man in the Mediterranean area over the centuries.

This broad panorama was introduced fittingly by J. L. Miège (*Navigation and Seafarers in the Mediterranean*) who was able to draw both on his wide experience as director of the *'Maison de la Méditerranée'* at Aix-en-Provence and on the results of a recent conference held in Aix on the 'origins of navigation and seafaring in the Mediterranean' (20-22 Sept. 1979). Miège summarised recent developments in French writing on maritime history, and drew attention to the close links between the expansion of navigation and the evolution of the political, economic and social structures within which the seafarers on the modern period operated.

Nearly two-thirds of the papers delivered at the conference dealt with the Western Mediterranean, the remainder with the East. The role played by the East in both the medieval and the modern period is well known in general outline, and recently scholars from many of the countries in this area have studied a number of important and interesting aspects of the development of navigation. There have, for example, been a series of Yugoslav works on the Republic of Ragusa; Israel has contributed much to the study of navigation in the Eastern Mediterranean in the medieval period; and there have been important Turkish studies on the Ottoman fleet in the modern period. Other scholars have also studied aspects of navigation in this area too. P. Schreiner, for example gave a paper on 'Men and ships in the Byzantine Empire between the VIth and XIIth centuries', which was concerned with the role of navigation and seafaring in Byzantine society. The paper was based on a series of legal and religious texts which are the only sources not only for the history of navigation in the Byzantine Empire but for its social, economic and political history as well. Using the well-known 'Code of Rhodes', a compilation of Byzantine laws and maritime custom, Schreiner was able to establish in considerable detail the legal and economic status and position of the sailors. Commenting on this paper, G. Marcou defined certain philological and interpretative aspects of the 'Code of Rhodes', and discussed the value of the manuscripts of the Orthodox monasteries for study of Byzantine maritime history.

The history of seafaring in the Eastern Mediterranean poses problems of sources which are not limited to any one chronological period, but also involve linguistic and logistic problems, making it a particularly difficult field for the Western scholar to explore. Such problems need to be resolved if we are to attain a proper perspective and avoid committing major errors. Nevertheless, the interest which many of the issues related to that area have for

the history of the European Mediterranean as well meant that a number of other problems were also discussed. In his paper on 'Corsairs: class relations and social conditions in the Barbary cities after Lepanto', C. Manca applied modern concepts of 'under-development' to the Barbary states, and defined the corsairs as a sort of *ante litteram* sub-proletariat. But in view of the difficulties involved in applying to so particular a civilization economic models evolved for quite different societies and given the absence of any effective demonstration of the relevance of this general interpretative model to the history of the Barbary states, this proved no easy task.

New information of the activities of the Venetians and the Genoese in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Black Sea was provided by D. Jacoby ('Seafarers in the Aegean under the Venetian Empire'). The rich archives of Venice and Genoa, which have often attracted the attention of foreign scholars, make it possible to study both the activities and the economic role of Venetian and Genoese seamen in the Eastern Mediterranean. By using in addition the sources available in the countries affected by these activities, the full impact of the Genoese and Venetian presence on the political, economic and social life of these areas can be fully explored. Jacoby examined the relationship between the seamen of the Aegean and the maritime organisation of the Venetian state, and as well as assessing their contribution he emphasised the problems facing those who worked for a far-off country and yet were in contact with a society whose political organisation was not only quite different but also often hostile.

For the Westerner in the modern period the main source of this hostility was the Ottoman presence. As M. Cizarka showed in his paper ('Ottomans and the Mediterranean 1550-1650'), which provided a wealth of statistical data culled from the *Basvakealet Arsivi* in Istanbul, Ottoman influence on the seas was considerable, even though this began to decline after the beginning of the XVIIth century. A fall in ship-building evident from the early XVIIth century began to affect all forms of seafaring activity, and this decline was to increase rapidly in subsequent centuries. M. Fontenay ('Ottoman galley crews and their recruitment in the mid XVIIth century') provided further evidence of the decline of the Ottoman navy in the XVIIth century, even though the geography of the recruitment of the galley crews showed that the Ottoman fleet was still operating over very considerable distances. Yet even for the short period covered by Fontenay (1652-1661) there is clear evidence that this area was declining, and the numbers of galley slaves from distant areas such as Spain and Portugal dwindled away to nothing.

The crisis of the Ottoman navy also affected those institutions which had evolved for training seamen. Generally such institutions came into being in the Eastern Mediterranean only when the different parts of the vast Empire began to attain some degree of autonomy, as was the case in Greece (C. Hadzioussif 'Greek sailors in the XIXth century'). Yet the need for such institu-

tions had always been felt even in the smaller ports of the Eastern Mediterranean, and M. Milosevic ('The training of seamen at Boka Kotorska in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries') showed that even in a small maritime centre like this Danube port significant progress had been made even at a time when it is not easy to discover other similar institutions in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is also interesting that many Russian seamen attended school at Boka Kotorska to prepare them for their craft.

The unity which the Byzantine and then the Ottoman Empire created in the Eastern Mediterranean was well reflected in the organisation of seafaring, creating a degree of uniformity in the patterns and seasons of maritime activity and ensuring the continued presence of a large war fleet. Yet the maritime life of the Western Mediterranean in the same period was both more dynamic and more varied. In his paper ('The Dream of Ulysses: maritime activity in Mediterranean culture as a structural problem'), J. E. Ruiz-Domenec outlined the principal events and developments in the history of the Western Mediterranean. In this wide-ranging paper the author attempted to explore the role of seafaring in the formation of that cultural tradition which dominated the Mediterranean from the Homeric epics onwards, and to relate the development of seafaring activities with the social and economic developments occurring along the shores of the Mediterranean. Ruiz-Domenec in fact outlined an organic interpretation of seafaring life, arguing that its representation in Mediterranean culture from the earliest times clearly reflected patterns and aspects of broader trends in social and economic development. The validity of this interpretation can be tested against the wide-ranging examples used to illustrate it and it must be said that Ruiz-Domenec admirably achieved the object of the conference by transforming a particular issue into the basis for a broad and general synthesis.

Most of the papers dealing with particular issues deriving from the general theme of the conference were concerned with a Western Mediterranean, and provided a detailed picture of the various commercial, social, legal and technical aspects of seafaring life.

A number of papers were devoted to technical issues such as the origin, tasks, and life on board of the ship crews who sailed the Mediterranean. M. Balard ('The crews of the Genoese fleets in the XIVth century') gave a masterly description of the organisation of Genoese crews in the late Middle Ages. M. Scarlata analysed the composition of the crews of the royal galleys in the same period ('Seamen and landsmen: the crews and craftsmen of the royal galleys in the XIVth & XVth centuries'), J. Guiral examined those of Spain ('Spanish crews in the Mediterranean as seen from the East-XIVth-XVth centuries'), and A. Zysberg those of France ('Life on board of the French galleys: problems of discipline, provisioning and social relations...'). The crews of all these merchant and military fleets shared in common a life of great hardship on board together with all the risks and uncertainties that went with the way of life, and the papers

did not indicate any substantial differences between the different countries discussed. This provided an element of unity in a world that was otherwise divided by the differing economic and political interests of the states which bordered on the Western basin of the Mediterranean. Nor did this unity diminish as the centuries passed, as was demonstrated in the papers by U. Tucci ('Sailors and galley crews in XVIth Century Venice') by I. Meyer ('Sailors and seafarers of Mediterranean France and Spain in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries: a comparison') and by J. Munday ('The Crews of British Ships of War in the Mediterranean: 1700-1860'). But life on board did vary with the type of vessel used, and in particular its safety, even though the rigid hierarchy of tasks remained unaltered and reached its most extreme form on the ships of war.

The papers by A. Lutrell ('Late Medieval Galley Oarsmen') and S. Bono ('Slaves on the galleys and in Italian convict settlements - XVIth-XIXth centuries') highlighted the heterogeneity of the crews of the Mediterranean fleets in the medieval and modern periods. Both drew attention to the role of the oarsmen, especially the galley slaves, in the functioning and manoeuvrability of the Mediterranean fleets, and touched on many of the problems facing these humble seamen — not least of which being the provision of *bagni*, or prisons, to house them in the major Mediterranean ports.

But seafolk also included those engaged in ship-building, and L. Balletto ('The men and equipment of the Genoese ships bound for the East in the XIIIth century') described how complex a task it was for the Genoese to 'fit out' a ship for the East. The seafarers were dependent on the support of the dockyards, which were engaged not only in building ships but also in repairing them and providing the equipment needed on board. The complex activities involved were described by P. Adam ('Naval Arsenals in the Mediterranean'), and he attempted to relate the role and function of these Arsenals to the more general process of the economic expansion of the maritime cities of the Mediterranean, proposing a model valid for both Pericle's Athens and the Italian maritime republics of the Middle Ages. Adam also argued that these arsenals should be seen as fore-runners of 'industrial' production, since both in terms of the forms and types of labour used and the concentration of man-power involved they fore-shadowed even from the earliest times more advanced types of production.

These studies of the crews and of ship-building related primarily to long distance navigation and the considerable technical demands which this gave rise to, but M. Del Treppo and S. Anselmi also drew attention to the important place held by coastal navigation. Although covering much shorter distances and technically less demanding, coastal traffic played a fundamental role in the seafaring life of the Mediterranean. Mario Del Treppo discussed the seaborne trade of a small XVth century feudal lordship in the Cilento in the Kingdom of Naples. Although this was rather exceptional, given the prevailing attitudes of the Southern Italian nobility in the Aragonese period, there were many

similar cases if we look at the Mediterranean as a whole, especially the West. But the modest scale of this maritime commerce reveals that it was intended to supplement rather than replace revenue from the land, and the unusualness of this 'user' of the sea described by Del Treppo should be recognised. Anselmi examined the coastal trade of a small settlement near Ancona, placing emphasis on the shipping used rather than on the crews and cargoes, and provided an interesting description of the relatively neglected topic of the vessels used in the modest coastal navigation of the Adriatic.

Another group of papers was concerned with the commercial aspects of the general theme of the conference. C. Battle discussed Barcelona's maritime trade in the XIIIth century ('The activities of the Barcelona merchants engaged in maritime trade in the XIIIth Century') and examined the ways in which these seaborne activities were combined with operations on the land which provided the principal basis, and Battle showed that despite the important maritime operations these merchants remained closely tied to land-based activities. Dealing with a slightly later period but still on the Iberian peninsula, C. Verlinden ('Mediterranean seamen in Spain and Portugal: XIVth-XV Centuries') showed how the widening of horizons following the discovery of the New World together with the greater specialisation necessitated by trans-oceanic navigation served to break what might be called the umbilical cord which had previously bound seaborne trade to agriculture.

H. Kellenbenz ('Seamen of the North in the Mediterranean from the late Middle Ages to the XVIIIth century') also dealt with widening horizons and provided a detailed description of the factors which had drawn merchants vessels from Northern Europe to the Mediterranean throughout the modern period, even though the epicentre of international trade was already beginning to shift elsewhere. Despite this shift, the Mediterranean continued to have an important commercial attraction, and provided Northern Europe with many goods and products which could not easily be found elsewhere. Dealing with the very end of the period covered by Kellenbenz, G. Cingari ('Men and ships in the Straits of Messina in the XVIIIth Century') showed that there were many foreign vessels trading around Messina at this time, especially from Northern Europe. In addition to describing the movement of shipping in the area, he went on to examine the relationship between the centres of maritime activity and their hinterlands in this area, and argued that the relative lack of involvement in maritime trade of the local population was to be explained by the backwardness of the productive organisation of this distant part of the Kingdom of Naples.

Cingari's paper pointed to the need to broaden the discussion of seafaring activities so as to examine the economic and social pressures which did, or else did not, encourage men to turn their attention to the seas. G. Airaldi ('Sailors, ethnics and society in the Medieval Mediterranean') turned to this social 'hinterland' in her discussion of the ethnic origins of late medieval Genoese sailors,

and similar problems were discussed in more general terms by G. Pistarino ('The seafolk of the Genoese Commonwealth from the XIIth to the XVth Centuries'). Taking Genoa and its Mediterranean colonies as a single political unit, he argued that the seamen of the Ligurian Republic constituted the essential 'cement' on which the creation and preservation of this unity depended in the late Middle Ages. The fundamental role played by this group led Pistarino to examine the economic and social forces which lay behind its formation, which was closely related to the economic and political factors which underpinned the rise of the Genoese Republic. Equally important was J. C. Hocquet's paper on Venice ('The seafolk of Venice -- an essay in social history'), in which he used his wide knowledge of XVth century Venetian society to describe the ways in which the composition of the Venetian galley crews reflected the complex social fabric of the city and its mainland, showing how the hierarchy on board ship reflected this economic, social and cultural 'hinterland'.

C. Moschetti ('The social and organisational aspects of the seafolk of the Bay of Naples in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries') discussed the economic situation of the Neapolitan seafarers in this period. He concentrated on what was one of the most closely knit and well organised groups, those engaged in coral fishing, which was mainly based on the communities just to the south of Naples itself. Moschetti described the economic, legal and social organisation of the coral fishing enterprises both on land and sea, and assessed their economic consequences for the populations of the Bay of Naples.

As well as these commercial and social issues, the legal instruments and methods of under-writing used by seafarers were also studied in the context of the wider question of the safety of both men and goods on the seas. On this theme, the most wide-ranging paper was given by J. Cabestany ('The Consulate of the Sea and the *Consules de Utramur* under the Aragonese Crown-XIIIth-XVth Centuries'). He examined the influence of the institutions created by the Crown of Aragon on the development of the navies of the states under its control. Cabestany argued that the Crown's legislation provided an element of uniformity among these navies which not only had their own and often quite different traditions, but were also often in competition with one another. J. P. Filippini ('French sailors and their consul at Livorno in the XVIIIth century') took the example of the activities of the French consul at Livorno in the XVIIIth Century to show the importance of an effective system for protecting seafaring nationals, and how this was carried out by the consular service. Since the Livorno case could be applied to all the French consular agents operating in the Mediterranean, Filippini's example takes on a more general significance. As the French consular service in the XVIIIth century was also one of the best organised and most active in the Mediterranean, the description of the Livorno consulate allows us to understand better and more fully how it functioned.

M. Fernandez Basas ('Castilian merchants and the problem of maritime safety in the Mediterranean in the XVIth Century') also dealt with problems

of safety at sea for both ships and their cargoes by examining the insurance methods used by XVth Century Castilian merchants. As is well known, there is a relatively small but important body of literature devoted to maritime insurance, and drawing on this Fernandez Basas sketched its development in Burgos and neighbouring maritime centres in the XVth Century, which was closely related to the trade in raw wool which the region supplied at this period in large quantities to Tuscany and Florence in particular. Cabestany also broadened the perspective of the discussion of seafarers by introducing the question of insurance, and this was carried further by J. Richard and H. Bresc who drew on some unusual sources. Richard ('Seafarers as seen by medieval Crusaders and Pilgrims') used the diaries and accounts written by pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land in the mid-XVth century to describe conditions of life on board ship, as well as the relationships between the travellers and the crews. Bresc ('The Saints and Sanctuaries of the Mediterranean Seafolk from the XIIIth to the XVth Centuries') described the religiosity of the seafarers on the basis of their *pietas*, the secular and religious names given to their ships, and the diffusion and significance of the sanctuaries which played an important role in the religious sentiments of the Christian seafarers in this period. Both served to widen our understanding of the traditional life and activities of the Mediterranean seafarers.

Thus far attention was concentrated mainly on the sailors and merchants, but until the end of the XVIIIth Century the seafarers of the Mediterranean also included pirates and corsairs. These were the subjects of the papers by F. Babudieri ('The Uskoks - their organisation and activities on land and sea') and C. Trasselli ('Shipwrecks, Piracy and Fraud'). The former dealt with the Uskok phenomenon of the XVth Century, describing their origins, areas of settlement, seaborne operations, customs and traditions, while Trasselli ranged over a wide period from the Middle Ages onwards and across the whole Mediterranean to explore the concept and significance of piracy. While Babudieri implied that piracy was a phenomenon with clearly delineated contours, Trasselli doubted that this was the case, arguing that it was more widespread in the Mediterranean than is generally thought since it could easily be disguised in forms that seemed far from piracy, as for example many of the activities carried out under the flag of the Order of Malta.

Because of its illegal nature, it still remains difficult to penetrate inside the phenomenon of piracy, but this is not the case for another, albeit temporary, group of seafarers - the emigrants. In his paper ('Ships and Passengers in Emigration from Italy to the United States 1880-1900') I. Glazier provided an example of what modern computer techniques can reveal about the demographic, social and economic circumstances of the emigrants from the Old to the New World at the end of the XIXth century. In this paper he summarised the preliminary findings of a massive study on Italian emigration to the United States which is based on the passenger lists of the ships entering American ports,

using advanced computer analysis. The sample used represented 1% of the total emigration from Italy to the USA between 1880 and 1900, and for the first time enables us to explore the most intimate aspects of the social background of the diaspora which played so great a part in the history of both countries at the turn of the century. The summary of findings presented by Glazier also revealed how difficult it proved to transform these emigrants of all ages and social conditions into seafarers, even on a temporary and involuntary basis.

Another seafarer who appeared in the course of the conference was the naval sailor. G. Pighini ('Italian Naval Ratings in the Far East between 1900 and the Second World War') described the operations of the Italian navy in the Far East from the late XIXth century to the Second World War.

A wide range of problems, approaches and questions were then tackled in the effort to explore the past of the 'Seafarers of the Mediterranean'. Many of the contributions raised important general issues and threw interesting new light on many aspects of the life and past of these men, paving the way to a better understanding of the life and conditions of the seafolk of the Mediterranean from the Middle Ages to more recent times.

