

Comparing global slave markets; comparing Mediterranean slaveries (16th -18th centuries)
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This position paper is aimed at promoting the discussion regarding the existence of a peculiar experience of slavery in the modern Mediterranean. In order to address this subject, I will first sketch a proposal to define the main features of the three major slave markets at the turn of the 16th century: the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Pacific/South Asian. Then I will try to show some of the differences in how the slave trade worked, and how slaves were treated, inside the Mediterranean basin by comparing two Italian ports, Venice and Palermo.

The position I am trying to express is that Mediterranean slave trade had distinctive features opposed to other global markets, showing *longue durée* recognizable patterns; but it is important to remind how every port had a different function in those systems; this way I'll be able to point out how world history and global history are better used when focusing at the links and connections between single ports and regions, rather than painting global, holistic frescoes. Those attempts could be useful when we have sources so exceptional like Carletti's, but nonetheless it is a rather oversimplifying approach that could hinder the understanding of the mechanisms underlying different slave markets.

Francesco Carletti's travel around the globe: comparative analysis of slave markets

The best tool to explore global slave prices and markets is Francesco Carletti's book *Ragionamenti sul mio viaggio intorno al mondo*, detailing his circumnavigation of the world at the turning of the 17th century. Carletti has arguably been the first person to trade in 'human cattle' in three continents. Price fluctuations are helpful to better understand the living conditions of enslaved people throughout the world, and the way how they were subjugated and sold depending on various factors. Carletti's book enables us to sketch a proposal regarding the differences between the three major global slave markets in 1600: the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Pacific/Indian/south Asian.

In the Mediterranean scenario there was an oscillation in the condition of being a war prisoner, a house/field slave or a captive waiting to be ransomed; a single person could experience every one of these different identities during their captivity. The condition of the slave was reversible thanks not only to redeeming institutions but also to the help of private patrons, or by fleeing. There was also a reciprocity in the sense that both sides, the Muslims and the Christians, were actively taking prisoners and enslaving people, and from both sides there were redeeming attempts. There was also a religious motif behind the war and the corsairs' raids. The economic factor was important because

during the golden age of Mediterranean piracy the corsairs' chiefs had good revenue.

In the Atlantic slave trade the major feature being that the totality of slaves was bought for bondage work, not for exchange nor for religious or war reasons, and, contrarily to the Mediterranean one, it worked one-way. The fate of African slaves in the Americas was irreversible, in the sense that they could not come back to their birthplaces. The global merchant class raked high revenues through the slave trade, but as Carletti showed during the first part of his voyage, they were exposed to highly fluctuating prices. Another major feature was the dimension of the displacement area, which was bigger if compared to the Mediterranean one, since the enslaved people bought in the African continent could end up working in India or in North America.

In the Pacific area, during and after the Imjin wars, the condition of a slave could oscillate among the lines of being a war prisoner, a war refugee or in some places (the *Nobi* in Korea for example) the *caste* system dictated that a specific group of people were set to be slave for life, a condition that was hereditary. Carletti expressed his astonishment regarding the extremely low prices for Asian slaves, particularly Korean and Japanese in the Modern Pacific, due to war and overpopulation, phenomena that led to a generalized situation of extreme poverty and starvation, thus keeping prices and revenues very low. This gave way to what Carletti describes as a bleak and unbelievably tough existential condition, where humans were seen as goods, or commodities, and treated as such. This is probably the most important feature of the Pacific slave trade: enslaved people were not seen as assets, as an investment, unlike in the Atlantic and Mediterranean slave markets.

Carletti's travelogue is a rather unique and unrepeated source of information about slavery during a specific period, from 1594 to 1602; he took part in the slave trade and made detailed observations on the social life of slaves all around the world, he reflected on slavery and changed his mind about the subject while sailing on the routes of global trade from Sevilla to Capo Verde to Colombia, Peru and Mexico, then the Philippines, Japan, China, Indonesia and India, and he was himself a captive during his trip back home, prey of Dutch pirates. A savvy and well spoken merchant, Carletti noted the differences existing, for example, between the life of female African house slaves in Peru that attended mass on Sunday covered in gold; and the fate of young female Korean refugees that were offered by their parents to the Portuguese ship's crew, and were so cheap that even African male slaves working on the Portuguese ships could afford to buy or rent them. Also the caste system in several Asian countries made some castes to be born already into a condition of slavery or semi-slavery (See the *Nobi* in Korea in that period for example).

Comparing different Mediterranean encounters with slavery: Palermo and Venice in the 17th century.

If Carletti's book helps us to understand how human beings were bought and sold in a global

scenario, in order to better understand local differences it could be useful to analyze two important ports of the Mediterranean and how they dealt with the enslavement of their citizens.

Palermo and Venice suffered for centuries the scourge of Ottoman Regencies' corsair war, with consequent disruption of trade routes and constant fear among the population. But there are several substantial differences between the experience of slavery suffered by Venetians and Panormitans. First of all, the role played by the two ports in Mediterranean politics is not comparable, since Venice was a maritime power that was experiencing some sort of decline at the end of the 16th century, but still had a strong network of informants, traders and diplomatic actors that wouldn't vanish until the end of the Republic in 1797; its extremely long borders made it necessary for them to keep constant contacts with several foreign governments, the greatest example of this being the *triplo confine* in the Balkans with Austrians and Ottomans.

Palermo was the capital of a Spanish viceregal see, and while local nobility struggled for political independence, it had to heavily rely on Spanish army fleet to contrast the pirates; its long and jagged coastline and small islands and archipelagoes made it a constant target of corsair raids, making the fear of an attack by land as intense as fear of an attack during sea trips, which was the only possibility for a Venetian to be captured besides war.

Those political and geographical differences, although important, were not sufficient to create a huge difference between the experience of slavery in mediterranean ports. Christians and Muslim slaves alike suffered very similar conditions: violence, plague, famine, death, conversion, faith in the redeemers. Economic, social status were also pivotal in determining what kind of life a slave would endure, and thus prices could greatly vary also based on nationality: enslaved Sicilians were usually cheaper than Venetians and there are several reasons to explain this. First, the perceived wealth of the Venetians opposed to Sicilians; then the fact that Venetians enslaved people were usually trading ships crews and merchants, and Venice needed to keep a functioning fleet so their ransom was a priority.

Another striking difference is the gender balance in the lists of captives: Sicilian women were more likely to be kidnapped than Venetians, because of the regularity of land raids by Tunisian corsair ships.

As Carletti's book is a unique and rather exceptional testimony of global slave prices and experiences, Palermo archive is exceptional in the sense that has enabled me to cover the topic of female slavery, something that for example could not be done in Venice since female Venetians slaves 'almost didn't existed' as pointed out by archivist and scholar Andrea Pelizza.

There were other major differences, for example in how the redeeming efforts were deployed by those two Italian cities, but I think that for the purposes of this position paper I have already provided enough evidences to back my point

Conclusions

Mediterranean slavery was a peculiar phenomenon, markedly different from the Atlantic and Pacific slave trades, yet every port had its defining traits. Social and economic status was what defined the Mediterranean experience of slavery more than religion or national identity, and it is a long term trait of Mediterranean slavery. Gender was greatly influencing prices of ransom and overall experience of captivity, but as we saw comparing Palermo and Venice, there were women who were way more exposed to the perils of being kidnapped and auctioned.

So in conclusion I want to express a methodological concern regarding how to do effective global history. I believe it is more useful to focus on the geographical and economic routes that were connecting specific cities/regions rather than trying to paint a general overview that could erase the internal differences of those complex systems, as I somehow did in the first part of this position paper regarding Asian slave markets. Instead, it could be more effective to study the links between ports like those traveled by Carletti, Goa-Macao-Nagasaki, Cabo Verde-Colombia, Acapulco-Manila; or the infra-Mediterranean routes like Venezia-Dubrovnik-Durrës among others, or the Marseille-Tunis one just to make some examples.

The case studies I brought over here wanted to express how the quality of historiographical sources can vary greatly during different eras and in different places; in this sense Carletti's book is a rather exceptional account, making it almost impossible to apply the same method to other periods. The same goes for the Palermo archive regarding Mediterranean female slavery, as the research approach used in that case can not be applied for the same period to other Mediterranean ports such as Venice.