Ships, Saints and Sealore:

Cultural Heritage and Ethnography of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea

Edited by

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Archaeopress Archaeology

Archaeopress
Gordon House
276 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7ED

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978 1 905739 95 0
ISBN 978 1 905739 96 7 (e-Pdf)

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Cover image: *Voto* by Captain Giuseppe Giacomo and crew of the brigantine *Concezione* caught in a gale off the Alexandrian coast, Egypt, and saved by the intercession of the Virgin Mary in 1835
(courtesy of Is-Santwarju tal-Madonna tal-Mellieħa, Malta)

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Printed in England by CMP (UK) Ltd
This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com

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Foreword

For centuries Mediterranean and Red Sea peoples have worked in harmony, sailing and keeping to a seasonal rhythm of trade and fishing. Within this seasonal rhythm people must have travelled and come into contact with different cultures. What data do we have to support this contact and did it have a significant impact on the cultures involved? The present interdisciplinary volume seeks to explore what Fernand Braudel (d. 1985) termed the *longue durée*, or the long-term structures of ethnographic, historical and cultural narratives and archaeology.

The ship is the life of a seafaring community; its development has been conditioned by the morphology of and geography surrounding local waters, the regional climate, and the indigenous craftsmanship. It would be impossible to consider the maritime history of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea without looking at the spread of technological ideas, the shipwrights and their tools, the mariners – their life at sea, their tales and shanties, the merchants, traders and their goods, the risks of seafaring, the fear of the sea – gales, winds and sea pirates, and the prayers and belief of being saved from shipwreck through divine intervention. So what remains of that past heritage? The three-day interdisciplinary conference entitled 'Ships, Saints and Sealore: Ethnography of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea', held at the National Maritime Museum in Birgu, Malta, in April 2009, sought to answer this question by bringing together researchers from different countries to explore new ideas and methodologies.

This volume is a selection of the papers originally presented at the conference. In addition to these, we invited other researchers (Maravillas Aguiar, Alec Tilley, and Simon Mercieca) to contribute to the theme of this volume. The intention was to focus on filling some gaps in the knowledge and understanding of the maritime and cultural heritage, traditions and practices of communities living on the borders of these two seas. The subjects discussed by the researchers invited to contribute to the present volume are divided into five parts, covering such diverse themes as rituals and religious practices in various forms, *ex votos* and confraternities, the experiences of travellers and slaves, narratives and songs, the management of cultural heritage, and the maritime archaeology of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, past and present.

The introductory chapter by Seán McGrail introduces the reader to 'A seaman's view of the Mediterranean'. Drawing on the geographical setting of the Mediterranean he provides some fundamental facts on seafaring, commenting, for example, on the method early seafarers and explorers experienced by using 'visual pilotage', keeping eye contact with land and sea, a primitive but correct approach when compared to the navigational aids later mariners used in sailing away from the coast.

Part One – Maritime Rituals, Superstitions and Ship Images

Timmy Gambin opens Part One of this volume with a discussion on the subject of maritime religion with a paper entitled 'Maritime activity and the Divine – an overview of religious expression by Mediterranean seafarers, fishermen and travellers'. Gambin argues that as much as the sea was an important link with man and land, it has always been feared by the seafarer. He analyses the various rituals practised by seafarers from belief in superstition to specific rituals, and demonstrates with numerous examples the relationship between seafarers and the divine and in the many ways that this link has been 'manifested across time and space'.

Interpreting *ex-voto* representations is not only a visual exercise but one that explores what they offer in understanding the maritime and religious past. The question is what miraculous attributes did such *ex-voto* culture have? Simon Mercieca, in his 'Hazards at sea: a case-study of two *ex-voto* paintings from the Church of the Karmelitani Skalzi in Bormla, Malta', takes us through a detailed study on the interpretation of late votive maritime paintings at a time when steam vessels were being introduced. Did this make seafaring less hazardous and therefore *ex-voto* paintings declined? It is true that steam vessels can be safer compared to sailing vessels, which are more vulnerable to rough weather but in any case 'the fear of shipwreck remained omnipresent in the mind' of seafarers. Historically, these *ex-voto* paintings are important sources for understanding the seafaring past, as they can portray images that contain information about prevalent winds, currents, sails and anchorages as well as sealore practices that have now disappeared.

Part Two – Confraternities in Maritime Culture

The sea, people and their identity with a port city are marked by devotional traditions characterised by religious and maritime festivals. Such is the distinctive character of Messina with its religious and commercial roles celebrated by the public. Carmelina Gugliuzzo in her paper, 'The Holy Vessel: the *Vascelluzzo* of Messina during the early modern period', explains how the devotional traditions of carrying a small ship, the *vascelluzzo*, in a procession has a religious and symbolic importance for the people of Messina. Historically, this medieval port town was a well-known stopping place

for pilgrim ships on their way to the Levant or on their return to Italy, France or Spain. Messina's religious and maritime cultural identity is delineated by the confraternity of sailors who annually make a procession to venerate the holy ship. The ship symbolises the pride that locals feel for the city and reinforces their sense of identity.

Seafaring identity was, until fairly recent times, manifested in religious confraternities on the Maltese Islands. Manuel Magro Conti's paper 'Two maritime related confraternities established at Bormla (Cospicua) parish church, Malta' looks into how such groups operated on the basis of belonging and fraternal protection. They were male-oriented and went beyond religious activity to dictate the politics of a town or village.

Part Three – Maritime Heritage: Historical Narratives

Navigational treatises in sixteenth-century Mediterranean Spain have for many years provoked questions on the teaching of celestial navigation and the use of nautical instruments. Answers to these questions are awaiting new scholarly research. In this respect, one establishment founded in the sixteenth century, *Casa de Contratación* (The House of Trade) in Seville, which was originally set up for the administration of trade, became, over the years, a learning institution for chart-making and training pilots. As the fame of this institution grew it became a place for scientific research, whose products were cosmographic and maritime manuals, an example of which is discussed in Maravillas Aguiar's '*Quarti partitu en cosmographia pratica i por otro nombre llamado Espejo de navegantes* by Alonso de Chaves: a navigation manual for the instruction of Spanish pilots in the sixteenth century'. Aguiar's paper discusses the different sources that influenced Alonso Chaves' navigational manual as well as the Islamic instruments on board ship; however, the most interesting conclusion of this study is that the number of cosmographic and navigational texts produced by *Casa de Contratación de las Indias Occidentales* impacted various texts that were subsequently written in English, French, Flemish and German in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

A different aspect of maritime heritage is the study of historical narratives such as sea poems sung by Greeks to remember events of piratical activity, or freedom and escape from slavery. This genre is well documented in Greek texts of the post-medieval period. Efsevia Lasithiotaki's 'Images of pirates and slaves in traditional Greek popular songs' demonstrates how this genre of literature is still alive and popular among coastal peoples; the songs are examples of sea poems that were written and sung during Ottoman rule, and some of the texts and tunes of these poems go back to medieval times. One theme is about ransom: once caught, male captives were given a choice of either collecting ransom money or ending up as galley slaves. Converting to Islam, however, was a way out of this dilemma.

Part Four – Ethnography, Tourism and Maritime Heritage

Jeremy Boissevain introduces us to a discussion on Malta's maritime identity, which he sees as being annihilated by the commercialisation of apartments and hotels that have been built on the Maltese Islands. In his paper 'Sun, sand and sea: tourism and the commodification of Malta's maritime heritage', Boissevain contends that local foreign investors are sacrificing the maritime heritage which Maltese citizens once treasured as part of their own culture. The future is obscure. Malta is giving up her maritime heritage and patrimony, falling victim to locals and foreigners who are 'destroying the essence of its own identity and the patrimony of future generations'.

Tourism on the tiny island of Malta has, for a number of years, increased and one aspect of this has gone unnoticed. In 'Work, tourism and the sea: Bulgarian experiences in Malta', Irina Atanasova looks at a new wave of tourism in Malta: Bulgarians who are seeking the islands for holidays and/or developing their careers by settling there. Their impact on the island's tourism and economy is noted in a number of ways. This paper explores the reasons why Bulgarians of different professions and trade have chosen Malta as their destination. Apart from working in Malta and touring the country, they have promoted the idea of tourists coming on ships and spending a few hours on the island – 'the showcase effect'. They support the local infrastructure by staying in hotels and renting flats. The final point in this paper is that while Bulgarians have helped generate income for the islands, they, in their turn, have popularised the idea of Bulgaria as a tourist destination for the Maltese.

A project on the central coast of Catalonia is discussed by Eliseu Carbonell in 'Lateen sails versus fibreglass boats: the contradictions of a maritime heritage process – the Platja dels Pescadors on the Catalonian coast'. Carbonell shows how an attempt has been made to create or emulate an idealised fishing port of the past, which however contains both engine powered and sailing boats. This attempt to turn a small coastal town in Catalonia into a 'traditional' fishing village faced several problems, with the use of the beach as a landscape that became 'a game of dialectics of identity related to the beach, maritime culture and its political dimension'. Further the patrimonalisation of such a project has its faults: there is a lack of cohesion with the historic past in that the project tries to make a model of a maritime landscape which is inappropriate as it can only be symbolic, not authentic.

The urgent need of preserving the intangible heritage in Catalonia and Spain in general is one of the actions taken by the Maritime Museum of Barcelona, whose aim is to raise awareness of maritime culture and bring people together to appreciate their past. Enric Garcia Domingo's 'The Maritime Museum of Barcelona's approach to maritime ethnology: research and communications' revolves around the role that the Maritime Museum and the Centre for Promotion of Catalan Folk Culture fulfils among local communities, visitors and academics. Conserving the past is a way to understand maritime heritage but also is a means by which we can relive the past through activities that involve observation, interaction and the simple enjoyment of recreating something that has now all but disappeared.

Part Five – Maritime Archaeology: Traditions and Practices

Cheryl Ward's 'Sailing the Red Sea: ships, infrastructure, seafarers and society' is about how little of the Red Sea coast has been excavated. A shipwreck off Sadana Island, on the central Egyptian Red Sea coast, shows how vibrant trade was during the eighteenth century CE. Going back further in time, the maritime artefacts of the third millennium BCE excavated at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis show contemporary methods of shipbuilding techniques but also how the administration of ancient pharaonic Egypt worked. Moreover, the artefacts demonstrate the materials used for ship construction and how seafarers sailed the waters of the Red Sea. From this and a few other excavations along the coast, we can start to understand the life of the people and their networks into the hinterland and across the sea. 'With each excavation', explains Cheryl Ward, 'archaeologists move across time and space to reveal relationships between people and places, ships and cargoes, belief and action'.

Digging into the past and establishing relationships between traditional watercraft of different periods and regions is something that could be done if researchers continue to explore similarities in hull designs and construction techniques. 'The *dgħajsa*: a Phoenician survival' by Alec Tilley is an intriguing paper suggesting that some traditional boats still sailing the Mediterranean have their ancestors among ancient Phoenician designs. Tilley argues that the Maltese *dgħajsa* is one of them, and he shows construction features that in some ways parallel past and present boatbuilding techniques.

Documenting traditional boats is urgent, as these watercraft are fast disappearing. Seán McGrail discusses in his paper 'Maritime ethnography and archaeology' the methodology of recording and documenting traditional boats and demonstrates how these data can help when interpreting archaeological finds: examples are drawn from his fieldwork on South Asian boat typologies, used to explain the transition during the medieval period of European ships being built in a shell-first and then frame-first construction sequence. Also shown in this paper is how the reverse-clinker construction method of Bangladeshi boats throws light on the building of the medieval European *hulc*, a type that is not yet known from archaeological finds.

In an effort to record the final stages of the disappearance of traditional boats, the MARES team at the University of Exeter conducted a survey of the surviving dhows on the Yemeni coast in 2009. In their paper 'The maritime heritage of Yemen: a focus on traditional wooden 'dhows' ', Dionisius A. Agius, John P. Cooper and Chiara Zazzaro explain how the skills and knowledge of dhow building are in decline as more and more fishermen, in their eagerness towards modernisation, switch to fibreglass boats that are cheaper to build and faster to manoeuvre. The MARES team has documented the construction sequence of two different techniques: the keel-first method of the *ᶜobrī,* a double-ended craft with a straight stem-post, and the keel-last method applied to the *hūrī,* a transom-stern vessel with large stern-quarter wings, the latter being an unusual construction. Although wooden boats are still being used and maintained in various places along the southern coast of Yemen, no new traditional boats are being built.

The final paper of this section, 'The *hūrī* of Socotra: cultural treasure or coastal trash?' is by Julian Jansen Van Rensburg. The paper highlights a type of watercraft called a *hūrī*, that, unlike the one mentioned above, is most often a dugout canoe but can also be plank-built. It is a ubiquitous type found all along the coasts of the Western Indian Ocean, yet our historical and cultural knowledge of this craft remains limited. Here in Socotra, as in other Arabian and African countries, these craft were never abandoned, albeit used together with fibreglass vessels.

This volume collects new ideas for future research on maritime rituals and beliefs, maritime traditions and historical narratives, traditional boats and crafts, and management of cultural heritage. I would like to thank all the contributors to this volume for drawing out information and criticism for a better understanding of the maritime culture in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

We wish to acknowledge the Malta Maritime Museum; Joseph Mizzi of Midsea Books; the Mediterranean Institute of Maritime Studies; the MARES Project at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter.

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A seaman's view of the Mediterranean

Seán McGrail

Foreword

My archaeological fieldwork has been undertaken in northwest Europe and my ethnographic fieldwork in South Asia – neither of these activities has been in the Mediterranean. Before I became an academic, however, I spent much of my life between 1946 and 1966 in, or steaming through, the Mediterranean, often on board ships based on this island of Malta. I do, therefore, have some experience of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, by day and by night, in fair weather and foul, but in a ship and not a boat; under power rather than under sail; and mainly from the air since, from 1952 onwards, I flew as a pilot in the Fleet Air Arm. It could be said, therefore, that I have seaman's and an airman's memory of the areas with which this conference is mainly concerned.[1]

The physical geography of the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean is a semi-enclosed sea, extending some 2,000 nautical miles (nm) from east to west, with a greatest breadth, north to south, of around 700 nm. This almost non-tidal sea stretches from c. 6ºW at the Strait of Gibraltar to c. 36ºE on the Levant coast where there is a land route to Mesopotamia; and from 31º-37ºN on its African coast to c. 46ºN at the head of the Adriatic.

The semi-closed nature of the Mediterranean, its high temperature, and its almost cloud-free summers result in the rapid evaporation of the sea surface water. The rivers, notably the European Po, Rhone and Ebro, and the African Nile, replace only about one-third of the water lost by the sea due to this evaporation, and dynamic equilibrium is attained by a strong surface inflow from the Atlantic through the Strait of Gibraltar, and a less-pronounced inflow through the Bosporus and the Dardanelles Strait into the Aegean.[2]

In essence, this great sea consists of two basins (east and west) connected by two channels: the Sicilian Channel between Sicily and Tunisia (with Malta on its eastern approaches), and a narrower channel, the Strait of Messina, between Sicily and Italy. Throughout the Mediterranean, the continental shelf is generally narrow, out to some 40 nm in places, but less than 5 nm in others. From there the seabed drops, more or less steeply, to depths of over 500 fathoms (900 m).[3]

Along the northern shores of the Mediterranean, high ground within the coastal zone, and the many islands offshore – from the Balearics in the west to Cyprus in the east – mean that land is generally in sight from sea level. Thus, during periods of good visibility a boat may be sailed the length of the Mediterranean, more or less in open seas, yet without losing sight of land. Similar in-sight-of-land passages can be made not only across the Strait of Gibraltar in the west and along the Levant coast in the east, but also from the 'toe' of Italy via the Sicilian coast to the peninsula of Cape Bon in Tunisia.

Early seafaring in the Mediterranean

These geographical features mean that, in good weather, most (probably all), islands are visible from some point on the Mediterranean's European shores, from another known island, or from a boat that had not yet lost visual contact with known land. The coast of Africa is not so favourably endowed (Fig. 1). Being able to maintain visual contact with land means that early seafarers and explorers in the northern parts of the Mediterranean would have been able to use visual pilotage methods rather than the more complex navigational techniques needed to keep one's reckoning when out of sight of land.[4]

In favourable environmental conditions, during a long day, a paddled boat might be expected to make good 1 to 2 knots providing the crew could be rotated at intervals. An oared craft could probably make good 3 to 4 knots with the wind, and 1 to 1½ knots against a moderate wind. With the significantly lower sea levels prevalent before late Neolithic times, the longest open sea passage from mainland Europe to an island would have been the 45 nm, to the Balearic Islands in the west. In those latitudes at midsummer there are around 13½ hours of daylight between sunrise and sunset, and 15½ hours between morning and evening twilight. Thus, in optimum conditions, voyages to and from all Mediterranean islands could generally have been accomplished by oared craft within daylight and twilight hours. The use of sail – on present evidence, from before 3000 BCE in Egyptian waters and from around 2000 BCE in the Aegean – would have made faster transits possible in fair wind conditions; and increasing navigational abilities

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[2] U.K. Hydrographic Office, Mediterranean Pilot 5 (London: Hydrographer of the Navy, 1988), pp. 15-19, 36-37.

[3] U.K. Hydrographic Office, 15.

[4] Seán McGrail, *Boats of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, second edition), pp. 95-102.

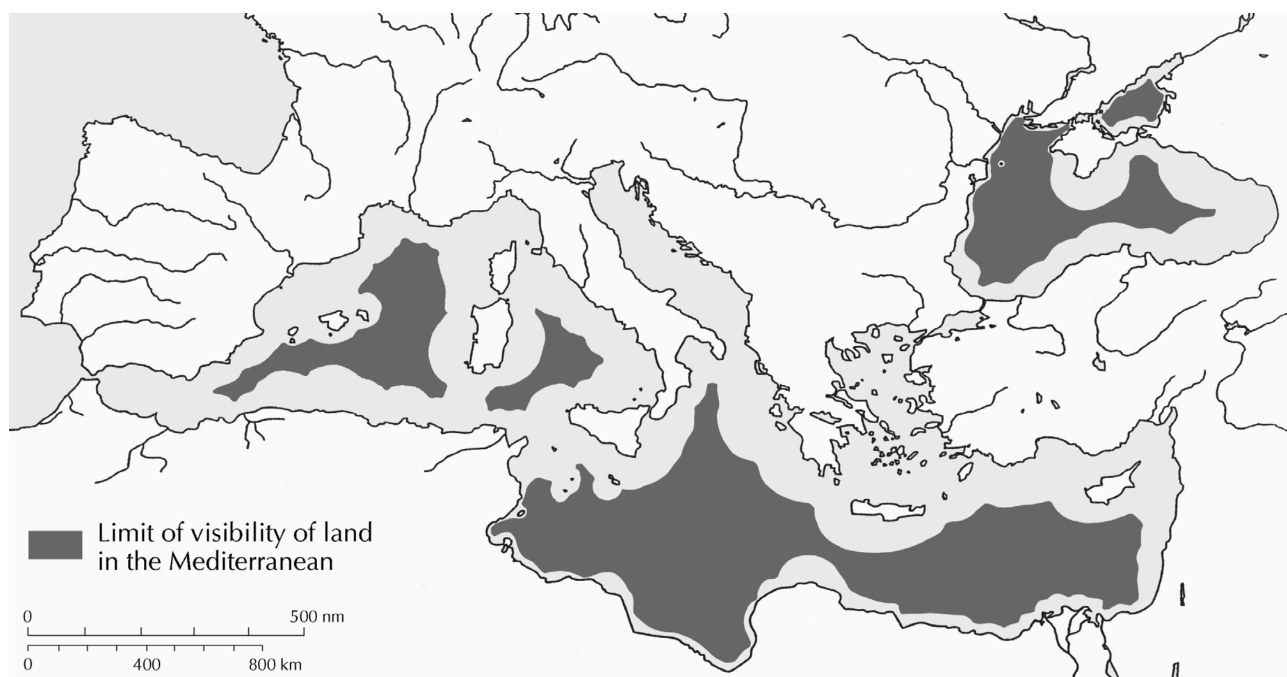

Fig. 1: Visibility of land from a boat at sea level in the Mediterranean (A. Trakadas after X. Henkel, 'Die sichtbarkeit im Mittelmeergerbier', Petermann's Geographische Mittelungen, 1901: fig.1).

would have made overnight passages practicable, with the aim of making a landfall around dawn.

As George Bass[5] pointed out long ago, seafaring was one of the earliest vocations: there were seamen before there were farmers, navigators before potters, and boatbuilders before wainwrights. From the eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea region, in particular Egypt, comes some of the earliest evidence for boats and for man's use of the sea. If data are wanted on any nautical task, one is likely to find that the ancient Egyptians not only devised a suitable artefact or a process, but also built a model or produced an illustration showing its use.[6] It is only a slight exaggeration to say that every main type of watercraft was built, and every means of propulsion and steering was used in early Egypt. For example, boats were steered not only by poles, paddles and oars (artefacts with a primary role of propulsion) but also by steering oars, side rudders and median (centreline) rudders. Evidence to date suggests that other eastern Mediterranean peoples did not take up the Egyptian median rudder, but used the side rudder as their main means of steering.

Using such knowledge of Egypt's ancient rafts and boats as a springboard we can now dive into Mediterranean antiquity and further investigate its rivers, coasts and seas, from the Strait of Gibraltar in the west to the Bosporus and the Levant in the east. Moreover, traditional rafts and boats may still be built and used in remote parts of the Mediterranean: recording such craft will very likely further illuminate early boatbuilding and use.

[5] George F. Bass, 'Marine Archaeology: a misunderstood science', *Ocean*, 2 (1980): 137-152.
[6] McGrail, *Boats of the World*, 14-54.

Maritime activity and the Divine – an overview of religious expression by Mediterranean seafarers, fishermen and travellers

Timmy Gambin

Abstract

Over the past decades, modern technologies such as electronic navigational aids, improved ship designs and accurate weather forecasts have all contributed to making maritime activity safer. However, even today the undertaking of a journey by sea or even a fishing trip involves varying degrees of danger. Over the centuries, those involved with earning a living at sea, as well as those simply travelling by ship, have invoked specific rituals and developed particular superstitions. These could be aimed at alleviating fears, supplication for a safe journey or simply to plea for a bumper catch. The relationship between seafarers and the divine is not limited to a particular chronological period, religion or geographical zone. The aim of this paper is to illustrate broadly how the maritime-divine link has manifested itself through time. The presentation has been divided into a number of themes that include ritual, iconography and the deities themselves.[1]

Key words: maritime religion, ritual, seafaring, navigation

Introduction

Humans are creatures of the land. The sea is not an environment that is conducive to human survival. The very posture of human beings, standing on two legs that are firmly placed on the ground, is taken away when one enters the water to swim. Whilst swimming, the normal point of view enjoyed by humans is also changed. We no longer have a relatively high vantage point and cannot see below us. Even those with the keenest of eyesight are hard pressed to see beyond the blur that welcomes those who open their eyes under water. Out of the water, some are imbued with a sense of fear and trepidation just by standing on the coast looking out to sea. Such a sense of apprehension is clearly described in some of the earliest texts from the eastern Mediterranean.[2] Despite such fears the sea is also a place of opportunity. Through fish, molluscs, seaweed and salt it has provided food, one of the vital elements for human survival. Above else, however, the sea has enabled humans to travel. Journeys undertaken across open sea spaces have pushed humans to move and occupy some of the more remote corners of our planet. Our ancestors quite literally took the risk of sailing into the unknown in search of resources and new lands where better lives could be made – often escaping pressures building at home. Whereas such individuals and groups took to the sea out of necessity others did so out of choice, to trade and exchange goods. Such exchange created networks that started to link areas of production with areas of consumption. In a Mediterranean context such networks expanded and contracted through history according to the surrounding geo-political landscape prevailing at the time.

Over the millennia, the continuous use of the sea has produced distinct groups of people including seafarers, fishermen, boatbuilders, merchants and others, whose lives and livelihood are directly linked to the sea. As for people who used the sea, one must also add those that travelled by sea but whose livelihood did not depend on it. Such persons would have included pilgrims, warriors and migrants. In this paper, my intention is to explore how people at sea developed specific and distinct religious beliefs and practices to relate to/move through/survive in this environment. Whereas the geographical focus of this paper is the Mediterranean, I propose that the unique links between the aforementioned people and the divine transcends geographical, cultural as well as chronological boundaries.

It is beyond this paper's scope to dwell upon philosophical questions as to what defines or comprises a religion. Reference to the Oxford English Dictionary reveals two plausible definitions for the purpose of this paper:

1. Action or conduct indicating belief in obedience to, and reverence for a God, gods or similar superhuman power
2. A particular system of faith or worship

Both these definitions cover the various aspects discussed below. In order to undertake a broad overview of this matter and garner a better understanding of maritime religious expression, I have divided discussion in this paper into these expressions, following four analytical categories:

1. Deities
2. Ritual
3. Maritime cultic landscapes
4. Dry offerings

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[2] Elisha Linder, 'Human apprehension of the sea', in *The Sea in History*, ed. E.E. Rice (Phoenix Mill: Sutton 1996), pp. 15-23.

Fig. 1: A Roman mosaic from Tunisia portraying Neptune (photo T. Gambin).

Deities

In the ancient religions of the Mediterranean, some form of activity and/or deity was nearly always associated with the sea. In the Late Neolithic, the inhabitants of the Maltese Islands constructed places of worship in prime coastal areas with one specific megalithic structure containing depictions of sea creatures.[3] For the Caananites, the god Yam represented the sea with its raw and untamed power and a negative perception that is ever-present in early biblical texts. Also from the Levantine pantheon Astarte travels to Egypt and takes on a role of 'intermediary between the Ennead of the Gods and the Sea'.[4] Astarte was to retain a special place in the hearts of seafarers as is reflected in the numerous votive offerings bearing her name and which were discovered in the multi-period maritime sanctuary at Tas-Silġ that overlooks the harbour of Marsaxlokk in Malta.[5] The Greek god of the sea, Poseidon, was the brother of Zeus and Hades. There are two sides to Poseidon (or Neptune in the Roman pantheon) – that of a creator of islands and calm seas contrasting with his role as the creator of earthquakes, drowning and shipwrecks (Fig. 1).

Despite it being quite evident that most gods of the sea were male, the role of an intermediary at sea, more specifically a female one, was common throughout the Mediterranean. In Greece, an early reference to such an intervention can be noted from the pages of the *Odyssey*. It is Athena who intervenes numerous times on Odysseus' behalf, most notably in the context of this study when she pleads with Zeus who relents and sends Hermes with instructions for the hero to return home.[6] The notion of female deities and their association with intervention at sea continues well into Roman times. In Alexandria, the twin-cult of Isis-Sarapis was much adhered to by seafarers undertaking the transport of grain from Egypt to Italy.[7] In various Mediterranean regions, the *Navigium Isidis* was a festival held in early March in honour of the goddess Isis. The opening of the sailing season was marked during this festival by the launching of model boats (loaded with offerings) into the sea.[8]

The notion of a female deity associated with intervention on behalf of seafarers continued and was essentially adopted into the Christian pantheon.[9] Our Lady is seen by Christian seafarers as providing a direct link between themselves and the Almighty – for what better way to reach the son than through devotion to the mother? Some

[3] Reuben Grima, 'The landscape context of Megalithic architecture', in *Malta Before History*, ed. Daniel Cilia (Sliema, Malta: Miranda Publishers, 2004), pp. 327-346.
[4] Peter Serracino Inglott, 'The sea in the Bible', in *De Triremibus: A Festschrift in Honour of Joseph Muscat*, eds. Tony Cortis and Timmy Gambin (M'Scala, Malta: PEG Books, 2005), pp. 3-10; Linder, 14-22.
[5] Anthony J. Frendo and Nicholas C. Vella, 'Les îles phéniciennes du milieu de la mer Malte du Néolithique à la conquête normande', *Dossiers d'Archéologie,* 267 (2001): 46-55.
[6] *The Odyssey,* translated by E.V. Rieu (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 5:30.
[7] David Fabre, *Seafaring in Ancient Egypt* (London: Periplus Publishing, 2004), p. 200.
[8] James Beresford, *The Ancient Sailing Season* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2012), p. 41; Fabre, 200.
[9] Ruthi Gertwagen, 'The emergence of the virgin Mary as the patron saint of seafarers', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 16 (2006): 149-161.

of the earliest nautical charts depict Our Lady as presiding over the seas and oceans. Seated with Jesus on her lap she oversees all that happens at sea. As explored below, it is to her mainly that Christian seafarers directed numerous rituals and offerings. As the mother of Our Lady, St. Anne also assumed a role in the Christian maritime milieu. Although not as widespread as the devotion to her daughter, St. Anne was venerated amongst sailors from the Atlantic coast of France where the church of Sainte Anne de-la-Pathe is a centre of this cult.[10] It was in fact French fishermen who took this cult across the Atlantic to Quebec. In the Mediterranean, St. Anne is known to have been held in high esteem on Spanish vessels[11] and the Order of St. John named of their largest ships *Santa Anna*.[12]

Essentially the Christianisation of large parts of the Mediterranean brought with it a gradual increase in minor deities (saints) with varying degrees of influence on those working and travelling at sea. These include saints with particular domains such as St. Andrew, patron saint of fishermen, St. Nicholas, patron saint of travellers, as well as others including St. Paul, St. Elmo and St. Christopher.[13]

Rituals

The study of ancient rituals is, at best, difficult. Archaeology does sometimes provide the remains of the physical setting within which it is assumed that rituals were performed. Such places can include temples, small sanctuaries and old churches. In the context of maritime rituals there are three main places where rituals are undertaken: 1) on the coast, 2) in maritime sanctuaries, and 3) on board the vessels themselves. I am here referring to rituals that are specifically and directly linked to journeys at sea. (In the section on 'dry offerings' below, other rituals that may be deemed to be indirectly linked to sea voyages are discussed.)

Given that rituals at sea were carried out on ships it is extremely difficult to study the remains of such rituals. Most commonly, the archaeology of ancient shipwrecks presents us with the remains of ceramic cargoes and possibly some limited wooden remains.[14] We are limited to a small number of material objects such as *louteria* (small portable altars/platforms) that are thought to have been used for onboard rituals (Fig. 2).[15]

Fig. 2: A *louterion* from the third century CE Site III in Filicudi, Sicily (photo T. Gambin).

Otherwise it is written sources that describe such specialised manifestations of maritime devotion related to sacrifices, offerings and prayers. Once again the *Odyssey* contains a description of such activity. Whilst travelling in search of his father, Telemachus comes across persons carrying out a ritual: 'they found the people [of Pylos] on the seashore sacrificing jet-black bulls to Poseidon'. When he and Athena joined Nestor at the banquet they were passed a gold cup with wine as a 'drink offering' – upon receiving the cup, Athena uttered this prayer:

> 'Hear me, Poseidon, Sustainer of Earth, and do not grudge us, your suppliants, the fulfilment of our wishes. First of all, grant glory to Nestor and his sons. Consider next these others, and recompense all in Pylos for their sumptuous offerings. Grant lastly, that Telemachus and I may successfully accomplish the task that brings us here in our swift black ship and afterwards reach home safely.'[16]

As can be deduced from the aforementioned passage, such offerings were made prior to departure in supplication for a safe journey or at the end in thanksgiving for arriving safely. There are also references to rituals and prayers at sea performed or recited at sea – mainly to counter perilous situations. Jewish seafarers for example resorted to the purchase of new ceramic containers onto which 'holy names' and invocations were inscribed before being thrown into the sea. Through this action it was believed that the divine powers would be appeased and hence the

[10] J. Gordon Melton, ed., *Religious Celebrations: An Encyclopedia of Holidays, Festivals, Solemn Observances and Spiritual Commemorations* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC CLIO, 2011), p. 36.

[11] Fletcher S. Bassett, *Legends and Superstitions of the Sea, and of Sailors in all Lands and at all Times* (Chicago and New York: Belford, Clarke, 1885), p. 315.

[12] See Joseph Muscat, *The Carrack of the Order* (Valetta: PIN Publications, 2000).

[13] Catherine Rachel John and Donald Attwater, *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints* (London: Penguin Books, 2005)

[14] Anthony J. Parker, 'The reservation of ships and artifacts in ancient Mediterranean wreck sites', *Progress in Underwater Science*, 5 (1980): 41-70.

[15] Irena Radic Rossi, 'Three more louteria from the Eastern Adriatic', *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, 20 (1991): 155-160.

[16] *The Odyssey* 3:60.

sea calmed.[17] Through anthropological studies it is also known that fisherfolk recited special prayers which were normally variations of prayers said on land. Other prayers were purposely developed for specific situations at sea. Fisherfolk from Syracuse in Sicily prayed to St. Anne during storms but to keep themselves safe from lightning bolts they recited a specific prayer to St. Barbara. There also existed special prayers that the wives of fishermen recited whilst the men were out at sea in difficult conditions.[18]

Mediterranean seafarers uttered prayers at any sign of approaching danger. An early nineteenth century English traveller, J. Webster, gives this detailed account of prayers said off Sicily on board the vessel he was sailing:

> 'It became very cloudy, and the ship, unable to make way, turned back toward Sicily. Shortly after, as we were going on rapidly though roughly, the owner of the vessel came on deck, carrying a little bell and a string of beads. After a brief consultation with the captain, he summoned the whole crew, who ranged themselves half on either side of the deck. The bell rang to give notice of the time for the commencing of the Aves, and one side chanted the first, and then the other took up the remaining in a higher key. The bell sounded, and Gloria Patri was sung, after ten Aves had been chanted in the manner just described. After this, each crossing himself, and falling on his knees, begun muttering in a hurried whisper the Litany of the Virgin, commencing with Kyrie Eleison, and giving about fifty epithets to the Madonna. Another chant completed the round, which, however, was no sooner done, than they recommenced the Aves – singing ten of them as before, repeating the Gloria, the Kyrie Eleison, and the concluding song, which process was gone through a third, fourth and fifth time. Then the crew dispersed, but their devotions were not over, for a few seconds after: one of the seamen struck up a long religious hymn, in the chorus of which, all his messmates most devoutly joined.'[19]

There is a clear division between formal prayer (Aves, Gloria and Kyrei Eleison) which the author recognises and the less formal 'religious hymn' recited by the sailors in a less structured and informal manner.

Another scenario that provided the context for rituals at sea was that of naval combat. Sacrifices and offerings were made to deities prior to meeting in battle. Thus, during the Persian Wars, before the Battle of Salamis was about to commence, Themistocles sacrificed three Persians alongside the admiral's *trireme* as an offering to Dionysius Carnivorous.[20] After this same battle the victorious Greeks offered thanksgiving to Zeus and 'danced to celebrate their triumph with shouts and stamping of feet'.[21] After a battle the victors would gather captured weapons, oars and even bronze rams and use these to set up a trophy, generally dedicated to the gods. Augustus gathered captured rams from enemy vessels he defeated at Actium and constructed an expansive memorial that was dedicated to Neptune and Mars.[22] In more recent times, an account reaches us through an Englishman serving as a slave on a Moorish corsair vessel. He describes how, before launching an attack, the Muslim corsairs performed a ritual at the bow of the ship. This consisted of the sacrificing of a goat and jettisoning parts of the animal overboard whilst reciting incantations. This highly ritualised phase of the attack was aimed at protecting those on board as well as facilitating the capture of the opposing ship.[23]

The 'birth and death' of a seagoing vessel were also marked by ritual. A seventeenth-century diary kept by a chaplain, Henry Teonge (d. 1690), serving on board an English vessel contains a detailed description of a vessel being launched in Malta:

> 'This day we saw a great of solemnity at the launching of a new brigantine of twenty three oars, built on the shore very near the water. They hoisted in her three flags yesterday, and this day by 12 they had turned her head near the water; when as a great multitude of people gathered together, with several of their knights and men of quality, and a cloud of friars and churchmen. They were at least two hours in their benedictions, in the nature of hymns and other their ceremonies; their trumpets and other music playing often. At last two friars and an attendant went in to her, and kneeling down prayed half an hour, and laid their hands on every mast and other places of the vessel, and sprinkled her all over with holy water.'[24]

On the other hand, an excellent example of a ritual marking the end of a vessel's life can be observed on the island of Vis in Croatia. For the feast of St. Nicholas (5th of December), islanders drag an old boat up a hill in the town of Komiza to a church that is dedicated to the same saint. It is offered as a token for the salvation of other boats as well as for the rebirth of the boat that has just ceased to exist.[25]

[17] Shelamo Dov Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza, volume I: Economic Foundations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), I: 324.

[18] Augusto Aliffi, Mariarosa Malesani and Liliana Gissara, *Pesca e pescatori nel siracusano* (Syracuse: Syrakosia, 2007), p. 82.

[19] James Webster, *Travels through the Crimea, Turkey and Egypt; Performed during the Years 1825-28* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830), pp. 246-247.

[20] Plutarch's *Lives*, volumes I-XI, translated by Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1914), II: 13.

[21] John Hale, *Lords of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the Birth of Democracy* (New York: Viking, 2009), p. 71.

[22] William M. Murray and Photios M. Petsas, 'Octavian's campsite memorial for the Actian War', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 79.4 (1989).

[23] Giles Milton, *White Gold: The Extraordinary Story of Thomas Pellow and North Africa's One Million European Slaves* (London: Sceptre, 2005), p. 247.

[24] G.E. Manwaring (ed.), *The Diary of Henry Teonge Chaplain on Board H.M.'s Ships Assistance*, Bristol, and Royal Oak 1675-79 (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1928), p. 128.

[25] Joško Buljubašić and Eni Božanić, 'The ritual of boat incineration on the Island of Vis, Croatia: an interpretation', *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 7 (2012): 17.

Fig. 3: Various stages of the maritime procession held annually in Cartagena, Spain (photos T. Gambin).

A ritual that is still performed in many ports throughout the Mediterranean is that of processions at sea. One such procession takes place in Cartagena, Spain, on the 16th of July. The feast celebrating the Virgen de Carmen starts with a 'maritime procession' that is followed by numerous people including fishermen, sailors and their family members. At some point during the procession a minute of silence is observed so as to pay respect to the deceased members of the maritime community. Once the statue reaches the fishing port it is loaded onto a large trawler together with priests (in full regalia) and numerous other officials. This boat makes its way out to Cartagena Bay followed by a large number of fishing boats and pleasure craft. Of importance is the fact that for this occasion, fishermen are joined by their wives and children in a domain that is usually reserved for men. Once the boats reach a certain point, prayers are said and a wreath shaped as an anchor is thrown into the sea. By taking the statue of the Virgen de Carmen out to sea the fisherman are ensuring that she knows where they work and will thus be in a better position to keep a watchful eye over them when at sea (Fig. 3).

Prayer recited by participants of the Cartagena procession:

> 'Salve Marinera
> Hail ...! Star of the Sea,
> In the seas - Iris of eternal bliss.
> Hail ...! Phoenix beauty,
> Mother of Divine Love
> In your people
> A sorrow
> Your mercy of comfort;
> Fervent
> Reach the Sky
> And to you
> And to you, our cry
> Hail! Hail! Star of the Sea ...
> Hail ...! Star of the Sea
> Hail! Hail! Hail! Hail!'[26]

Such processions take place in many coastal towns of the Mediterranean although they may differ slightly in form. At Porticello in Sicily for example, it is a painting of Maria Santissima del Lume that is carried out to sea on a fishing boat towards Capo Zafferano where a chapel dedicated to the same saint is situated close to a lighthouse. Fishermen enter their boat into a form of lottery so as to be selected to transport the painting. Other boats carry the band, dignitaries and family members. Once landed on the headland, fireworks mark the journey of the painting towards the chapel. Boats and their occupants line up in the anchorage below with people making their way up to the chapel to leave their offering at the altar. The ritual comes to an end when all have deposited their offerings and return to their boats to return home. Not all processions are dedicated to Our Lady: in Mazara del Vallo, Sicily, it is the statue if San Vito that is taken out to sea.[27] In Birżebbuġa, Malta, I have observed that the statue of St. Peter is taken out twice – once each by the followers of rival band clubs. For these separate occasions, the boats and statue are clad in the respective colours (red and green) of the band clubs.

What these rituals have in common is that the deities are removed from the relative safety of their normal resting place, the church, and are transported to what is an unfamiliar realm. It seems as though those involved are asking their deity to see for her/himself the conditions that they face every day. In exchange for prayers and offerings, the believers ask for compassion. Of utmost importance is the context within which these specific rituals take place, discussed below.

Maritime cultic landscapes

In ancient times, natural features such as offshore islands, promontories and headlands were, for a number of positive and negative reasons, considered by seafarers as significant places.[28] Various factors influenced their perception. Firstly, the prevailing conditions around such features often differ from what one encounters in the open sea. Such distinct weather conditions are caused by a combination of factors including wind patterns, changes in seabed topography and wave/swell combinations. When taken all together these create confused seas and unfavourable conditions. One may think that this would have led seafarers to avoid such areas which brings us to the second factor that influenced the perception of ancient mariners – that of recognition. Offshore islands and headlands provided navigators with indispensable landmarks for navigation. Through the recognition of these features ancient seafarers could not only work out their whereabouts but also set a new course. Furthermore, islands offered vessels the possibility for rest, replenishment and shelter. At one and the same time therefore islands and headlands were both dangerous and desirable. Whether they liked it or not, ancient mariners had to come to terms with this duality. In this light, it is not surprising that such features within the natural landscape assumed roles that transcended the pragmatic aspects of a journey. These features evolved into focal points where people at sea could connect with their maritime deities.

Such a concept was discussed in detail in the thought provoking publication *The Corrupting Sea*, in which Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell propound the idea of 'Religion of Mobility' whereby: '... navigation, which is so essential a component of Mediterranean life, is also paralleled in a cultic topography. Particular features of the sea-voyage are marked as sacred, especially those coastal havens, springs or landmarks that are most important to the business of navigation'.[29] Seafarers sailing in the

[26] All observations including the recording of prayers were done by the present author during fieldwork in Cartagena in July 2008.

[27] Orietta Sorgi, 'La pesca e i suoi numi tutelari. Il culto di Maria Santissima del Lume a Porticello', in *Santi a mare: ritualita' e devozione nelle communita' costiere siciliane*, eds. Ignazio Buttita and Maria Emanuela Palmisano (Palermo: Regione Siciliana, 2009), p. 62.

[28] Jamie Morton, *The Role of the Physical Environment in Ancient Greek Seafaring* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001), pp. 185-193.

[29] Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study*

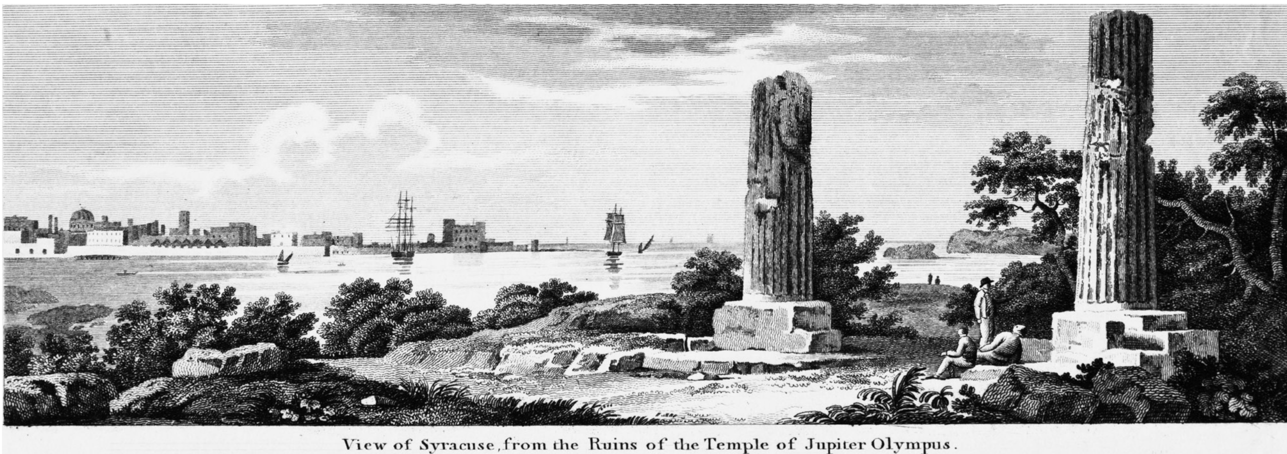

Fig. 4: Early nineteenth-century sketch showing the archaeological remains that provide good indicators for vessels entering the harbour (after William Smyth 1823; courtesy of the Wignacourt Museum, Rabat-Malta).

Mediterranean would thus find themselves moving within a maritime cultic landscape. This meant making visible features such as temples or shrines that would be instantly recognisable by those sailing in their vicinity. Most ancient cultures with a seafaring element constructed or adopted such 'seaward looking' places of worship in places of navigational importance. Pushed by a desire to understand better what pushed the ancient Greeks to construct the massive temple of Poseidon at Sunion, Ellen Churchill Semple studied and compiled a list of similar sites and coined the term 'templed promontories'.[30] By doing so she was able to highlight this phenomenon as being pan-Mediterranean. It was of course not just the Greeks that built such sites. The Phoenicians too constructed or, as in the case of Tas-Silġ in Malta, adopted existing structures for their own purposes.[31] With the spread of Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean many of these coastal temples were absorbed into the Roman maritime milieu. Deities to which such temples were dedicated included, amongst others, Astarte, Poseidon, Hermes and Hercules.[32] The usefulness of ancient structures as navigational markers was noted many centuries later by the renowned British hydrographer William Smyth (d. 1865). In his *The Hydrography of Sicily and Malta* he includes numerous archaeological remains. Within the port of Syracuse in Sicily he notes on the map 'these two remaining columns [from an ancient temple] are an excellent leading mark in' (Fig. 4).[33]

*of Mediterranean History (*Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 440.

[30] Ellen Churchill Semple, 'The templed promontories of the Ancient Mediterranean', *Geographical Review*, 17.3 (1927): 357.

[31] Antonia Ciasca, 'Le Isole Maltesi e il Mediterraneo Fenicio', *Malta Archaeological Review*, 3 (1999): 21-25.

[32] See Nicholas C. Vella, 'A maritime perspective: looking for Hermes in an ancient seascape', in *The Greek Islands and the Sea, Proceedings of an International Colloquium held at the Hellenistic Institute, Royal Holloway, University of London, 21-22 September 2001*, eds. Julian Chrysostomides, Charalambos Dendrinos and Jonathan Harris (Surrey: Camberley, 2004): 33-57.

[33] William H. Smyth, *The Hydrography of Sicily, Malta and the Adjacent Islands* (London: Office of the Admiralty, 1823), Plate 21.

Maritime cultic landscapes did not cease to exist with the end of pagan antiquity. In many parts of the Mediterranean, Christian saints assumed the role previously held by the aforementioned deities. As previously discussed, Our Lady becomes the prime protectress of Christian seafarers. Expressions of such devotion are, for example, reflected in the cults of Madonna of Stella Maris (Star of the Sea) and Madonna di Porto Salvo (Safe Port). Other indicators of the link between saints and the sea may be deduced from place names – numerous headlands, bays and anchorages throughout the Mediterranean are named after Our Lady and other deities. Porto San Nicolo and Porto San Paolo in Sardinia, Sainte Marie de la Mer in France, San Niklaw in Malta and Punta de San Cristobal in Spain are but some examples.

The importance of chapels and churches for medieval seafarers is highlighted in contemporary sailing instructions known as *portolani*. In an echo from ancient times, chapels were used as distinct markers for recognising one's whereabouts as well as for the positioning of one's vessel in the an ideal position within an anchorage. Medieval sailing instructions for the Maltese Islands list chapels dedicated to St. George, St. Paul and St. Lawrence alongside others dedicated to Our Lady.[34] Some of these sites retained this function well into the seventeenth century with the Chapel of St. Paul in Saint Paul's Bay used as a marker for the ideal anchoring zone.[35] Other religious features such as crosses and statues were often placed in coastal areas and local fishermen used these as markers. An early modern pilot book drawn by a Christian mariner clearly indicates minarets as navigational markers on the otherwise featureless coast of North Africa. These religious buildings probably held similar religious significance for Islamic

[34] Arnold Cassola, 'The Maltese toponomy in three Ancient Italian portulans (1296-1490)', *Al-Masāq Studia Arabo-Islamica Mediterranea, International Journal of Arabo-Islamic Mediterranean Studies*, 5 (1992): 47-64.

[35] Timmy Gambin, 'Maritime links of chapels dedicated to St Paul', in *St Paul in Malta and the Shaping of a Nation's Identity*, eds. Joseph Azzopardi and Anthony Pace (Malta: OPM, 2010; first edition), pp. 147-157.

seafarers as did chapels and churches for their Christian counterparts.

Islamic respect for certain aspects of the Mediterranean's early modern maritime cultic landscape can be garnered from two contemporary examples. The first comes from the Strait of Gibraltar, where Muslim ships saluted a hermit: 'Apes Hill is a rock, of great height and extremely steep: on the top of it lives a Marabout wizard or enchanter; and what vessel so ever of the Turks [Muslim] goes by gives him a gun as she goes, to beg a fortunate voyage'.[36] The second example comes to us from the island of Lampedusa in the central Mediterranean. Items of food and drink were left at a shrine by both Muslim and Christian seafarers. These supplies were freely available to all mariners in need but it was believed that should mariners take on more supplies than required supernatural powers would prevent their vessel from leaving the port.[37] This show of solidarity amongst seafarers is made all the more astounding when one considers that during this period many Muslim and Christian seafarers were waging holy war against each other.

It was not only places of worship that assumed navigational roles but also burial places. Elpenor, a comrade of Odysseus, is buried with full armour (and therefore honour) in a barrow with an oar to mark his resting place. The oar also reminded the living that it was a seafarer, more specifically a rower, who was buried there.[38] In the past, such 'temporary' burials must have been commonplace amongst seafarers. Men succumbing to combat wounds or even natural causes whilst serving at sea would have had to be buried away from their homeland. The 'temporary' nature of this type of burial marker (an oar for example would gradually perish or be stolen) would explain their rarity in the archaeological record.[39] The description of another grave from the *Odyssey* leaves one in no doubt as to the intentions of those that built it:

> '… over their bones we soldiers of the mighty Argive force built up a great and glorious mound, on a foreland jutting out over the broad waters of the Hellespont, so that it might be seen far out at sea by the men of today and future ages.'[40]

Due to the heroic nature of the persons inhumed this monumental burial was clearly grander and of a more permanent nature than Elpenor's.

There is another very interesting example of a 'temporary' maritime cultic landscape. This particular form is of major interest due to the fact that is situated out at sea. When preparing the complex nets needed to trap tuna off the island of Favignana in Sicily, special attention was given to both the practical and the divine. The fish had to be guided through a series of chambers into the final one known as the 'chamber of death' where the tuna would eventually be killed and harvested. The entire set up was overseen by a cross that was adorned by numerous holy pictures: representations of Our Lady (mainly) and St. Joseph with palm leaves for decoration.[41] In Mellieħa Bay in Malta, the cross present on a similar complex of nets was positioned so as to face the village sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady that stands on a hill that dominates the bay where this activity took place. Such practices were observed up to the demise of this fishing technique a few years ago.

Dry offerings

This category covers examples of various types of offerings made to Mediterranean deities over time. These are not sacrifices that by their very nature are perishable and/or consumable but rather gifts of a more permanent nature. In the Bronze Age, anchors seemed to have formed one of the most popular forms of dry offerings. Votive anchors, for example, were noted in 'sacred contexts in the great port-towns of Byblos, Ugarit and Kition as well as at minor Levantine sites'.[42] Such offerings bring together the previously discussed notions of deities, ritual and maritime cultic landscapes. It is not possible to ascertain all three factors for each and every site where such offerings have been found, however. Although traces of such practices can be lifted from throughout the Mediterranean's history, we are not always presented with details related to the rituals involved with the actual placing of such objects.

One prime example is the placing of *ex-voto* paintings in churches.[43] Walls of numerous churches throughout the Mediterranean are adorned with representations of maritime scenes – often men, or groups of men, in difficulty due to storms or attacks on their vessels. In these particular circumstances vows are made that tie the individual (or group) to submit an offering to a particular deity that is housed in a particular church or chapel (Fig. 5). Such churches and chapels are not necessarily situated on the coast and choice may be determined by parish loyalty, tradition and/or belief in the power of a particular saint. Others, such as Notre Dame de la Garde, are very much part of the maritime cultic landscape. This particular church is situated atop a hill and is visible from far out at sea. With a large statue of Our Lady painted in gold on its roof, it is in itself an important navigational marker for those sailing off Marseille harbour. Although seafarers seemed to have preferred placing *ex-voto* paintings in shrines dedicated to Our Lady (as in Marseille), there are other saints whose shrines were adorned with such

[36] Manwaring, 47.
[37] Catherine A. Philips (trans.), *The Life of Captain Alonso de Contreras, written by himself* (New York: New York, A. A. Knopf, 1926), p. 45.
[38] *The Odyssey* 11:60-80.
[39] Should death occur whilst the vessel was underway then the individuals would be buried at sea.
[40] *The Odyssey* 24:80.

[41] Ignazio Buttita, 'Cultura marinara, ricerca folklorica e turismo 'culturale' ', in Sicilia: stato dell'arte e prospettive, in *Santi e mare*, eds. Ignazio E. Buttita and Maria Emanuela Palmisano (Palermo, Regione Siciliana, 2009), pp. 25-44, in particular pp. 26-27.
[42] Honor Frost, 'Two Cypriot anchors', in *Italy and Cyprus in Antiquity 1500-450 BC*, eds. Larissa Bonfante and Vassos Karageorghis (Nicosia: Costakis and Leto Severis Foundation, 2001), pp. 61-76.
[43] See Isabelle Borg, *The Maritime Ex-Voto: a culture of thanksgiving in Malta* (Malta: Heritage Books, 2005)

Fig. 5: A typical Mediterranean *ex-voto* painting from a church in Malta (photo courtesy of Midsea Books Limited).

offerings. The church of San Lorenzo in Liguria is one such example although the paintings within this shrine still contain representations of Our Lady.[44] In Vilanova i la Geltru in Catalonia are a number of paintings with dual dedications – those of Our Lady and St. Christopher, patron saint of travellers, mariners and ferrymen.[45] We do sometimes have information on the individual or group commissioning the painting but the artists more often than not remain anonymous.

Another form of dry offering that may be considered to be in a similar vein as *ex-voto* paintings are ship models. In the Tarragona area of Catalonia for example, ship models can be found hanging from the ceilings of numerous churches. Unlike their painted counterparts, such models and dioramas do not have religious representations.[46] Despite this, their presence in churches and chapels in Mediterranean, as well as in other parts of Europe, leaves one in no doubt as to their votive nature. Poorer persons, not being able to afford the commissioning of paintings or models may have offered simpler forms of ship representations. Ship graffiti are found on both the exterior and interior walls of numerous churches and chapels of the Maltese Islands. It is believed that these ship representations had similar functions to *ex-voto* paintings but differed in form; different, because very rarely did these ever include any sacred iconography.[47] It is reasonable to assume that the individuals who inscribed these ships travelled to the shrines specifically for this purpose. If they had simply wanted to express their 'art' it would have been easy enough to inscribe the walls of public buildings.[48] Other offerings that are maritime in nature that are sometimes found in chapels and churches include lengths of rope, planks and other miscellaneous pieces that may have played a vital role in saving a life at sea. The church of Our Lady in Qala on the island of Gozo was, up until recently, adorned with such offerings.[49] Other religious edifices received offerings. Corsairs operating

[44] P. Spagiari, 'Miracolose apparizioni e prodigiosi avvenimenti', in *La Devozione e il Mare: aspetti di fede e religiosita' in Liguria*, eds. Rinaldo Luccardini and Maria Teresa Orengo (Genoa, Tormena Editore, 2000), pp. 25-54.

[45] Anoni Sella and Enric Garcia, *Creencias del Mar* (Barcelona: Museu Maritim, 2003), pp. 178-179.

[46] Selia and Garcia, 187-191.

[47] See Joseph Muscat, *Il-Graffiti Marittimi Maltin* (Valetta: PIN Books, 2002).

[48] There do exist ship graffiti on public and private buildings in Malta but not comparable to the quantity inscribed on churches.

[49] Frank Theuma, 'A view of the sea: the maritime graffiti of the Immaculate Conception Chapel, Qala, Gozo', *Melita Historica*, 13 (2003-4): 413.

and setting out of Malta in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries offered part of their proceeds as the *Cinque Lancie* – the five lances. These consisted of five shares taken from captured booty. Amongst the beneficiaries of these shares were the nuns of the Convent of St. Ursula in Valletta. This payment was made so that the nuns would 'pray continuously for victory against the Infidel'.[50]

There are some dry offerings that can be directly linked to ritual. When, through the capture at sea of a Greek grain ship, Messina was delivered from famine in the seventeenth century, the senate of the city ordered the construction of a *vascelluzzo* (ship model) in silver.[51] To this day, the model is housed in the main church of the city. The ritual linked to the model entails that it is adorned with lengths of grain and carried around the streets once a year in commemoration of the favour received by the city.[52] This can be considered as a reverse of the aforementioned processions at sea. In this particular case it is the ship that travels through an unfamiliar landscape, that of the urban centre of Messina. Elsewhere in Sicily there existed less formal offerings and rituals than those just described. The streets of the fishermen's quarters were locations for more 'casual' religious activity linked to the sea. Homemade braids were hung on the shrine of Our Lady in Mirabella in thanksgiving for some form of grace received (generally linked to prayers for those working out at sea).[53]

Concluding remarks

Through the analytical categories described above and the examples these include, I hope that I have sufficiently demonstrated the link between people who use and travel on the sea and the divine as well as the plethora of ways that such a link was manifested across time and space. In no way can this paper be considered a conclusive and/or comprehensive study, however. The subject needs, and indeed deserves further in-depth studies. On the other hand, this paper is intended to act as a stimulus for those with an interest in the subject. It will hopefully stimulate other researchers to delve into and explore aspects of their local facets of maritime religion that they may know and that may be placed within the broader context alluded to on these pages. This is true not just for the Mediterranean but for any place where the sea has touched human lives.

[50] Peter Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1970), p. 126.
[51] See Carmelina Gugliuzzo, 'The Holy Vessel: the *Vascelluzzo* of Messina during the early modern period' in this volume.
[52] Elina Gugliuzzo, *Fervori municipali: Feste a Malta e Messina in eta' moderna* (Messina: Armando Siciliano Editore, 2006), p. 79.
[53] Aliffi and Malesani, p. 83