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SLAVE TRADE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA:
THE CASE OF SICILY IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

The 45th week of studies promoted by the International Institute of economic history Francesco Datini, *Serfdom and slavery in the European economy 11th-18th centuries*, held in Prato in 2013, has drawn the attention of scholars towards a theme that has been at the core of a new proliferation of studies in the last decades. The numerous contributions have highlighted, in a comparative and long-term perspective, multiple aspects of a more complex and complicated phenomenon – the slave trade – than the traditional interpretative studies carried out¹.

The nineteenth and twentieth century European historiography had diminished the importance of the slave trade in the Middle Ages, considered as a characteristic phenomenon of the classical and Roman times². This concept, developed on the basis of the Marxist theory about the succession of socio-economic formations, has been re-evaluated and widely surpassed by Charles Verlinden that – with the work *L'esclavage en Sicilie* – offered new research perspectives that have given rise to specialized studies on medieval slavery³.

¹ The contribution of the Conference were published in the volume *Serfdom and slavery in the European economy 11th-18th centuries*, Atti della Quarantacinquesima Settimana di studi 14-18 aprile 2013, a cura di S. CAVACIOCCHI, Firenze 2014. In recent years many scholars have focused on this topic, analyzing the aspects and characteristics in different parts of Europe (trafficking, condition, domestic servitude, the trade routes in the Mediterranean Sea) in a perspective of long-term continuity. For a diachronic and comparative survey in the Mediterranean context, please refer to the contributions and to the bibliography – inserted into them – of the acts mentioned above.

² For the transition from ancient slavery, to medieval one, please see Y. ROTMAN, *Les esclaves et l'esclavage: de la Méditerranée antique à la Méditerranée médiévale, VI^e-XI^e siècles*, Paris 2004.

³ C. VERLINDEN, *L'esclavage en Sicile au bas moyen âge*, in «Bulletin de l'Istitut historique belge de Rome», Bruxelles-Rome 1963, pp. 13-113.

Among them we can remember the studies of Jacques Heers⁴, Domenico Giofrè⁵, Kenneth Morgan⁶, Francesco Panero⁷ and many others⁸.

Concerning Southern Italy and Sicily, besides the aforementioned Verlinden, the works of Gaudioso, Anastasi Motta, Trasselli⁹ are particularly noteworthy; although many references to slaves in the island are present in many publications related to Sicilian and generally Mediterranean medieval trade.

Indeed, Sicily has played in the scenario of the Mediterranean economy and for the whole of the Middle Ages, a central role in the dynamics of trade exchange becoming an attractive conquered territory.

In the market perspective, studies of Heide and Shaube¹⁰ about the Mediterranean and Eastern trade have registered numerous transactions of

⁴ J. HEERS, *Esclaves et domestiques au Moyen Age dans le monde méditerranéen*, Paris 1981.

⁵ D. GIOFRÈ, *Il mercato degli schiavi a Genova nel secolo XV*, Genova 1971.

⁶ K. MORGAN, *Slavery, Atlantic Trade and British Economy, 1660-1800*, Cambridge 2001.

⁷ F. PANERO, *Servi e rustici. Ricerche per una storia della servitù e della libera dipendenza rurale nell'Italia medievale*, Vercelli 1990.

⁸ For an introduction on the historical debate over the medieval slavery in the Mediterranean Sea, please see S. KARPOV, *Schiavitù e servaggio nell'economia europea. Sec. XI-XVIII*, in *Serfdom and slavery in the european economy*, cit., pp. 3-10. About the slave trade in Europe, please see C. VERLINDEN, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale, Péninsule ibérique - France*, t. 1, Bruges 1955; ID., *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale. Italie - Colonies italiennes du Levant - Levant latin - Empire byzantin*, t. 2, Gand 1977.

⁹ M. GAUDIOSO, *La schiavitù domestica in Sicilia dopo i normanni. Legislazione, dottrina, formule*, Catania 1992 (rist.); G. ANASTASI MOTTA, *La schiavitù a Messina nel primo Cinquecento*, in «Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale», 70 (1974), pp. 306-342; C. TRASELLI, *Considerazioni sulla schiavitù in Sicilia alla fine del Medioevo*, in «Clio», I (1972), pp. 67-90. The bibliography on the subject is ample. Among the most recent studies, in addition to those mentioned, please see *Mediterranean Slavery Revisited (500-1800) / Neue Perspektiven auf mediterrane Sklaverei (500-1800)*, Zurich 2014 and the edited monographic issues of G. FIUME, *La schiavitù nel Mediterraneo*, in «Quaderni storici», 107/II (2001); EAD., *Schiavitù, religione e libertà nel Mediterraneo di età medievale e moderna*, in «Incontri Mediterranei», XVII (2008). Studies in recent decades have focused to analyze also specific areas of the phenomenon. To mention Henri Bresc's and Laura Sciascia's gender studies on slave women (H. BRESK, *Femmes et esclavage dans la société sicilienne*, in *Memoria storia e identità. Scritti per Laura Sciascia*, a cura di M. PACIFICO, M.A. RUSSO, D. SANTORO, P. SARDINA, pp. 93-112; L. SCIASCIA, *Schiavi in Sicilia: ruoli sociali e condizione umana*, in *De l'esclavitud a la llibertat: esclaus i lliberts a l'edat mitjana*, ed. M.T. FERRER I MALLOL et J. MUTGÉ I VIVES, Barcelona 2000, pp. 527-545) and studies on Jewish slaves trade in Sicily (please see S. SIMONSOHN, *Between Scylla and Charybdis: the Jews in Sicily*, pp. 441-445 to which we refer also for the bibliography on the topic).

¹⁰ A. SCHAUBE, *Storia del commercio dei popoli latini del Mediterraneo sino alla fine*

slaves treated as «valuable goods and a reserve of cheap labor»; a trade that has spanned the centuries, without setbacks. It is not meaningless, in fact, if in the Arab-Norman era, Al-Istakri, in valuing the goods to be sold, wrote that Sicily «was fertile and rich in cereals, cattle, slaves»¹¹.

In the late Middle Ages between the 14th and 15th century, some studies have highlighted the role of the Sicilian port cities as places for the sale of slaves and trading for distribution in the wider Mediterranean area.

However, due to the scarcity of available sources or certificates, no particular attention has been paid to the city of Messina. The city, located in the north-eastern end of the island, between Sicily and Calabria, between Scylla and Charybdis, was still relegated by historiography to the role of subordination compared with other island realities, despite the contributions of Trasselli and Alibrandi¹².

This project aims at analysing the role of Messina in the slave trading in the fifteenth century and contributing to the deepening of a phenomenon increasingly important in the late medieval Sicily.

A market whose scope and scale are not clear, but that is rebuilt in its facilities as a phenomenon characterizing the dynamic business of the late Middle Ages as evidenced by the substantial demand and the volume of business.

Also it was not confined to the city, but involved various local and foreign actors, acquiring a Mediterranean relevance finding similarities with studies of Barcelona and Valencia¹³.

My research, carried out on unpublished archival material and joined to recent studies offered in the international scene, can offer additional pieces to the reconstruction of a ‘puzzle’ typical of the Mediterranean area.

The examined documents belong to a variety of sources and funds (narrative and archival; notary and parchment funds) of the Sicilian archives and in particular of the Peloritan capital city.

The most relevant sources for this research undoubtedly are notarial acts

delle crociate, trad. it., Torino 1915; W. HEYD, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au Moyen Age*, voll. 2, Leipzig 1885-1886, rist. anast. a cura di F. RAYMOND, Amsterdam 1959.

¹¹ AL-ISTAKHRI, *Libro dei climi*, in M. AMARI, *Biblioteca arabo-sicula*, Torino-Roma 1880-82, I, p. 6.

¹² See in particular C. TRASELLI, *Mediterraneo e Sicilia all'inizio dell'epoca moderna. Ricerche quattrocentesche*, Cosenza 1977, pp. 73-169; M. ALIBRANDI, *Messinesi in Levante nel Medioevo*, in «Archivio Storico Siciliano», s. III, XXI-XXII (1971-72), pp. 97-110.

¹³ A. FRANCO SILVA, *La esclavitud en la peninsula ibérica a fines del Medioevo. Estado de la cuestión y orientaciones bibliográficas*, in «Medievalismo. Boletín de la Sociedad española de estudios medievales», 5 (1995), pp. 201-209.

of State Archive of Messina. Documents provided by notarized deeds during the 15th century consists of 11 registries between 1401-1495 and data that can be deduced from the deeds are unexpectedly copious¹⁴.

Mostly, the records of notaries offer numerous certifications and useful information for a wider reconstruction of Mediterranean slavery: in particular several commercial transactions, contracts, sales, but also shipments in order to practice the slave traffic. It is not always possible to obtain exhaustive information on social dynamics and on the inclusion of the slave in the local context, but I would like to report the results of my investigation which represents only part of a larger study on the 15th century urban context and the Mediterranean trade of late Middle Ages¹⁵.

In the fifteenth century, following the crisis of the fourteenth century, Sicily was depopulated, «a kind of empty land», said Trasselli, which needed new workers mainly provided by the immigration¹⁶. In this context, also the slave trade in the island experienced a boom and in particular Messina played a leading role for its geographical position, a strategic commercial point, a port of many Mediterranean routes and redistribution of the products to enter the market. A city that is from the second half of the century in an economic growth thanks to the specialization of some economic sectors such as the cultivation and production of sugar (sugar cane and silk cultivation)¹⁷.

Numerous are the purchase contracts throughout the fifteenth century that attest an increase in slave traffic from the East to the western coast of Africa.

In 1300, the examined scrolls provide documentary evidence of Saracen slaves *de montibus Barcarum*, in other words, of the area south of Cyrenaica, Greek slaves or *ad partes Romanie*¹⁸.

¹⁴ Archivio di Stato di Messina, Fondo Notai di Messina (from now on ASMe), voll. 1-12.

¹⁵ We anticipate some results of a broader and more detailed work on slavery led in the notarial Messina background of the fifteenth century being published. Even if only little is known about the conditions of transport on slavers, there is evidence for a mortality of about 30 per cent. Please see C. VERLINDEN, *Medieval slavers*, in *Economy, Society and Government in Medieval Italy*. Essays in Memory of Robert L. Reynolds, ed. by D. HERLIHY, R.S. LOPEZ and V. SLESSAREV, Kent 1970, pp. 1-14.

¹⁶ TRASSELLI, *Considerazioni*, cit., p.67.

¹⁷ S. EPSTEIN, *Potere e mercati in Sicilia*, Torino 1996, trad. it. di A. Guaraldo, testo originale *An island for itself: economic development and social change in late medieval Sicily*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 198-215.

¹⁸ In 1307 the Leonardo Muccoso from Messina sells to Angelo Grande a Romanian slave for the sum of 2 ounces and 15 tari; whereas in the following year on 12th April 1308 Perrono de Palma, a builder from Messina, sells an originary Saracen slave *de Montibus Barcarum* for 5 ounces; Sergio de Bonito from Messina binds a Saracen slave named Suldana

Thanks to the documents investigated between 1410 and 1494, it is possible to draw an exact map of the trade routes of trafficking. The East is the main place of origin of slaves, which are imported by following ancient trade routes dating back to the mid-ninth century. The Persian geographer Ibn Khuradadhbih, in fact, noted – among the major products that came in the «sea of the West» – «Slavic, Greek, Frankish and Longobardic slaves, Greek and Andalusian female slaves, beaver leathers and other furs, perfumes and medicinal substances, resin»¹.

Up to 1468 – throughout the first half of the century and up to sixties of the fifteenth century – Circassian²⁰, Tartar²¹, Russian²², Ethiopian²³, *Boschini*²⁴ slaves are also mentioned. In the last decades of the century, the trade of black Ethiopian slaves is becoming more substantial and almost exclusive, in particular from Africa after the closing of trade with Constantinople²⁵.

It is not always easy to identify the origin of them, given that to their origin was applied a generic description referring to the colour of the skin (fair or black)²⁶ or ethnicity (Slavic, Greek, Turkish) or religion (*baptizatus*, *christianus*, *infedelis*)²⁷.

his sister Isabella, while Messina Costantino Ruggero Frappinio sells Gulisano a Saracen slave named Benincasa for the sum of 100 tari (3 ounces and 10 tari), ASMe, perg. 217 (Messina 2 marzo 1307, V ind.); perg. 223 (Messina, 12 aprile 1308, VI ind.); perg. 226, (Messina, 29 maggio 1310, VIII ind.), perg. 239 (Messina, 5 novembre 1315, XIV ind.); perg. 260, (Messina, 10 gennaio 1321, IV ind.). Regesto in A. SEMINARA, *Le pergamene dell'Archivio di Stato di Messina. Inventario e regesto*, Messina 2007, pp. 114; 116; 117;121; 127.

¹⁹ B. LEWIS, *Europa barbara e infedele. I musulmani alla scoperta dell'Europa*, Milano 1983, p. 132.

²⁰ ASMe, notaio T. Andriolo, vol. 2, ff. 203v; 309r; notaio Giordano, vol. 5, ff. 147v; 170v.

²¹ ASMe, notaio P. Armato, vol. 1, f. 54rv; notaio T. Andriolo, vol. 2, ff. 197rv; 200v; notaio F. Mallono, vol. 4/I, f. 411rv; vol. 4/II, ff. 671v-672r; notaio M. Giordano, vol. 5, ff. 28rv; 258r.

²² ASMe, notaio T. Andriolo, vol. 2, ff. 75v-76r; 81r; 206v-207r; 332rv; notaio F. Mallono, vol. 4/II, ff. 508v; 509v; 554r-555r; 694v-695r; notaio M. Giordano, vol. 5, ff. 281rv; 327r.

²³ ASMe, notaio F. Mallono, vol. 4/II, f. 568r.; notaio M. Giordano, vol.5, ff. 5v-6r;191v; vol. 6I, f. 70r.

²⁴ ASMe, notaio T. Andriolo, vol. 2, ff. 78rv; 81v; 82r; 82v.

²⁵ ASMe, notaio M. Pagliarino, vol. 6/I, ff. 143r; 147v; 207r; vol. 6II, ff. 431v-432r; 448r; 472r; 502v; 553r; vol. 7/I, ff. 17v; 46v; 85v; 88r; 89r; 121r; 122r; 127r.

²⁶ Like, for example, Anna, *servam albam* (ASMe, notaio M. Pagliarino, vol. 6/I, f. 15r.) or Nicola (ibid., f. 52v) or Antonio, slave *aulivignum* (ASMe, notaio T. Andriolo, vol. 2, f. 63r.). In 1426 Iosep Saba, jew of Siracusa, sells to Nardo Gotto of Messina, slave *nigrum* (ASMe, notaio T. Andriolo, vol. 2, f. 235v).

²⁷ Like Giorgio, turkish slave, but with fair skin (ASMe, notaio T. Andriolo, vol. 2, f.

People from Messina were inserted in the international trade not only as dealers in the local and regional market, but also as participants in the slave traffic, together with merchants of various nationalities. It is the case, for example, of Stefano Branca²⁸.

Local operators bought from the regional market – which had its main trading centre in the shopping square of Syracuse – and sold the slaves both in urban context and in neighbouring Calabria²⁹.

The slave trade was supposed to represent an economic profitable enterprise if in the middle of the fifteenth century several members of the urban society invested through contracts of commendation or with the system of the ‘colonna’ in the trips *ad partes Romanie* or *ad partes Barbarie*, designed to find goods in international markets and in particular slaves to enter the local market.

The possession of slaves, although a luxury, was not reserved only to the nobility of the island, but it used to involve «aristocrats, merchants, craftsmen, big and petty bourgeoisie» that fueled the market demand.

Moreover – according to the documents – the slave was a status symbol of social condition, very attractive and desired not only by the nobility, but by anyone in possession of a little amount of money; this was an evidence of how in Sicily, but generally in Europe, the cultural value of the slave-owning exceeds the interest and the economic role of slaves³⁰.

12v) or Abraham, slave *saracenorum inimicorum* (ibid., f. 120r). From the East five slaves are bought by Pino Russo aliter de Presbitero Aloysio and Perrone de Ioffo, *cives messanenses* (ASMe, notaio T. Andriolo, vol. 2, ff. 71rv, 8th march 1418). The same Pino, few day after, bought other two slaves about 14 years old from East (ASMe, notaio T. Andriolo, vol. 2, f. 73rv, 19 march 1418).

²⁸ In the month of march 1418 are documented various business transactions that attest an active participation of Stefano Branca in the importation of slaves from the East and in the sale inside the port of Messina (ASM, notaio T. Andriolo, vol. 2, ff. 71rv; 73rv; 82r; 82v. In exchange for slaves purchased from Romania, Messina exported oil and wine of southern Italy. The notary Andrea de Basilico had entrusted in a limited partnership 100 litres of oil and 30 loads of red wine for a trip that would take *ad partes Romanie* to Philip Muleti that, with the proceeds of the sale of such products, had to buy 2 slaves that are a male and a girl. ASM, FN, notaio Giordano, vol. 5, cc.28r.-v.

²⁹ ASMe, notaio M. Pagliarino, vol.7/I, ff. 177v-178r; 409rv; 509r; vol. 7/II, ff. 609r; 754v, cit. in E. VERMIGLIO, *L'area dello Stretto. Percorsi e forme della migrazione calabrese nella Sicilia bassomedievale*, Palermo 2010, pp. 202-207. The slave trade was already documented in the previous century (ALIBRANDI, *Messinesi in Levante*, cit., pp. 107-110).

³⁰ Please refer to the study of S. EPSTEIN, *Speaking of Slavery: color, ethnicity and human bondage in Italy*, Ithaka NY 2001, in which the scholar analyzes the Genoese notarial documents to achieve an analysis on the cultural significance of the medieval slavery.

In some cases, the purchase of the servant occurred by instalments or by paying a deposit in cash and a balance in land or handicraft products (it is the case of a blanket given for paying a slave).

Between buyers and sellers, a special role is played by the Jewish component. Jews were forbidden, in all the kingdom, to own Christian slaves; the baptism of black slaves was used as a tool to force the sale of them, as in the case of certain transactions between Messina and Reggio³¹.

Slavery, although prohibited by religion, was not a social or moral problem, nor for the Christian world nor for the Muslims. It was an institution whose legality was accepted and widely common, due to the habit of the practice. The Christian Church only suggested how to treat the slave, while the Koran recommended the emancipation of slaves as an act of charity and compensation of sins³².

The servant tampering was a frequent act, as proved in the examined documentation, especially stated in the wills in which, on deathbed, the master freed his slave in an act of forgiveness of sins. It would also leave the testamentary legacies and recognize a *pro maritaggio* dowry to women.

After the Turkish conquest of Constantinople, the trade route for the purchase of slaves moved to the dark continent and to the sub-Saharan area. The Ethiopian, Moorish or Saracen slaves contributed to conspicuously increase, in the 16th century, the slave traffic, which will be a monopoly, throughout the Mediterranean, of the Portuguese merchants.

From an analysis made on prices and carried out on the investigated documentation, it can be said that the cost of a slave was between 6 and 15 ounces. The price varied depending on gender, age, use, but especially on price: the physical conditions. Women, as found in other port cities, cost

³¹ The *magnificus* Gulotta Stayti bought by Leone, jew of Messina, two Ethiopian slaves: the slaves Leonardo and Caterina were *mori*, but *baptizati*. (ASMe, notaio M. Pagliarino, vol. 7/II, f. 663r), in VERMIGLIO, *L'area dello Stretto*, cit., p. 207. In 1492 *honorabilis* Pietrus Gambadauro sells to domino Ferdinando de Acigua, neophyte medical physicist, black slave Fatima about 30 years to *usum magazenorum* (ASMe, notaio M. Pagliarino, vol. 7/I, f. 520v). See S. SIMONSOHN, *The Jews in Sicily, vol. 17: Sciacca, Caltabellotta, Agrigento, Syracuse, Noto, Catania, Scicli, Randazzo, Messina. Addenda et Corrigenda*, Netherlands, 2010; A. SCANDALIATO, *Schiavi di ebrei ed ebrei schiavi nel Quattrocento siciliano*, in «Nuove Effemeridi», XIV, n. 54 (2001/II), pp. 20-29. For an in-depth about the practice of forced conversions and baptisms in the modern age see M. CAFFIERO, *Battesimi forzati. Storie di ebrei, cristiani e convertiti nella Roma dei papi*, Roma 2004, that deepens the relationship between the church authorities and the Roman Jewish community among the sixteenth and the twentieth century.

³² S. TRAMONTANA, *L'isola di Allah*, Torino 2014, p. 275.

more than men, probably because they were destined to have children, who for legal status acquired the condition of a slave by their mother. The average age was around 30 years, although there were demands of younger people between 8 and 12 years old and older men (50 years). A valuable and profitable commodity even in the inter-regional market, if Alfonso I allowed the inhabitants of Reggio to import, without deductible costs: mules, slaves and other goods from Sicily and Messina³³.

The type of contract of sale follows the language and formulas of economic transactions in use in Sicily for the pet trade; this is to emphasize the consideration of the slave not as a legal entity, but as a commodity.

The negotiation of the servant, sold *pro sacculo pleno ossum*, occurred *ad modum fera* or *ad usum machazenorum*. In the first case, the seller was not liable to vices and hidden or manifest defects of the slave who was sold *cum omnibus defectis etiam infermitatibus*; in the second, *ad usum machazeni*, however, the buyer reserved the right of a legal action in case of any onset of defects that could be prosecuted in the times and in different ways according to customary provisions of the Sicilian cities³⁴.

Among the causes detectable by documentation and object of criticism, there were not only physical defects, but also those concerning the behavioral sphere:

In 1492 Tonia de Stayti, a noblewoman from Messina, had purchased from Bernardo di Venosa of Modica an Ethiopian servant named Christoforo³⁵; the servant, however, had proved to be *stultum, reum et furiosum*³⁶ *ac pixalectu*³⁷. Conditions for which the buyer could prosecute, in terms of the law, a legal action.

Routinely, also the vices and diseases encountered in the sold subject could produce, *de jure*, the termination of the contract.

In the case above mentioned instead, the slave had fled in order to return to the seller. Therefore, the noblewoman brought legal action for getting

³³ G. SPAGNOLIO, *De rebus rheginis*, a cura di F. MOSINO, Vibo Valentia 1998, II, p. 339.

³⁴ According to customary provisions of Marsala, Matteo Gaudioso remembers that, after forty days a redhibitory action is not allowed (GAUDIOSO, *La schiavitù domestica*, cit., p. 93).

³⁵ ASMe, notaio M. Pagliarino, vol. 7/I, f. 166v (3 february 1492).

³⁶ *Furiosum* probably refers to epilepsy, also called on the form of *mal caduco* (the falling sickness), because it was much feared, «tacevasi quasi ordinariamente espressa riserva nei contratti» (GAUDIOSO, *La schiavitù domestica*, cit., p. 89).

³⁷ In these cases, according to the Sicilian doctrine «si ammette la restituzione se trattasi di difetto della vescica, ma se l'orinare nel letto capiti non trattandosi di male fisico, la restituzione non può aver luogo» (ivi, p. 90).

back the good *ad locum sue residence or habitationis* giving power of attorney to Giovanni Viridura. Otherwise she demanded the refund of 6 ounces deposit paid with damages and interest (The day after the same Tonia buys from a merchant of Syracuse another fourteen-year-old slave named Antonio)³⁸.

The slave in fact was, first of all, an investment; the work done by him could be leased to third parties or be destined for domestic or productive service of the owner with great flexibility according to the profession of the same owner. Even studies by Floren Sabatè have demonstrated the presence of slaves in Barcelona and Catalonia, in all areas of work throughout the fifteenth century³⁹.

The European historiography attributed to the Mediterranean slavery an essentially urban and domestic trait, that is a shared opinion also in the studies of M. Gaudioso for Southern Italy and J. Heers for Catalonia⁴⁰.

Work activities performed by slaves, especially in urban areas, referred to domestic servitude: for women *ad opus servendi*⁴¹ in the housework or as a nanny or nurse (e.g. breastfeeding) or concubine for the entertainment of the owner. However, recent studies have shown larger work areas of the servile population in agriculture and handicrafts. A Mediterranean «urban, domestic and artisanal in character, ethnically diverse» slavery, milder than the Roman one according Patterson, but with not completely antithetical features – according to Debra Blumenthal – compared to the Atlantic and colonial planters of cotton⁴².

Often Sicilian documents only record the business transaction, not providing information about the intended use of the purchased goods. However

³⁸ ASMe, notaio M. Pagliarino, vol. 7/I, ff. 166v; 167r.

³⁹ F. SABATÈ, *Gli schiavi davanti alla giustizia nella Catalogna bassomedievale*, in *Serfdom and slavery in the european economy*, cit., pp. 390-392.

⁴⁰ «El principal valor que define la esclavitud es el económico. Los beneficios del tráfico de seres humanos y de su rendimiento laboral fueron la razón de ser de la institución a lo largo de los siglos» R. GONZÁLES ARÉVALO, *Ordenanzas municipales y trabajo esclavo en la Corona de Castilla (siglos XV-XVI)*, in *Serfdom and slavery in the european economy*, cit., p. 431.

⁴¹ ASMe, notaio M. Pagliarino, vol. 6/II, ff. 431v-432r. The Minor Friars of the Convent of S. Francesco di Messina declare that the Minister of almsgiving had bought an Ethiopian 9-year-old girl slave named Lucia *ad opus servendi* sister Agata. After sisister Agata' death, it was decided that the servant goes at the service of Antonello Ismiridi.

⁴² O. PATTERSON, *Slavery and Social Death. A Comparative Study*, Cambridge-London 1982; D. BLUMENTHAL, *Enemies and Familiars. Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-Century*, Valencia/Ithaka 2009.

several clues allow to assert that slaves were used for farm work (as in the case of those employed in the farmhouse of Massa in the properties of the nobilis Betta Crisafi)⁴³, in crafts or even business activities as in the case of Giovanni, slave of the noble Luchetto de Carro, to whom the master will give lessons in reading, writing and sum for the mercantile use⁴⁴.

From a comparative analysis on the operating costs, including purchase prices, wages and maintenance, it may be considered advantageous to employ slaves instead of salaried manpower, although the initial investment not always could be profitable for the transience of the good that could sicken or die.

You cannot rebuild statistically – in reference to Sicily – the servile presence in relation to salaried manpower. However, the high presence of slaves appears justified by the ease of finding in port cities, this condition being unlike other realities in which we find the prevalence of salaried workers as in the case of Florence in the fifteenth century⁴⁵.

The servant – considered as an investment – was subject to protection: the contracts provided restrictive clauses as the prison for the theft of the property.

⁴³ ASPa, *Tabulario S. Maria Maddalena in Valle Iosaphat*, perg. 833 (3th august 1413) cit. in D. SANTORO, *Messina l'indomita. Strategie familiari del patriziato urbano tra XIV e XV secolo*, Caltanissetta-Roma 2003, pp. 83; 186.

⁴⁴ ANASTASI MOTTA, *La schiavitù a Messina*, cit., p. 314. Indeed, Karpov says that slaves in the Middle Ages are numerous considering both domestic ones and those involved in the cultivation of the land; not only in times of war and conquests, but also as a growing phenomenon in periods dominated by devastating epidemics, as was the Black Death in the fourteenth century, when the very large import of slaves from the East was useful to rebalance the lack of manpower caused by the Plague. Probably used also in *extra domus* work, however, is not possible to assert – as noted by R. Salicrù – that the slave must necessarily carry on the business of his master (R. SALICRÙ, *Slaves in the Professional and Family Life of Craftsmen in the Late Middle Ages*, in *La famiglia nell'economia europea (secc. XIII-XVIII)*, a cura di S. CAVACIOCCHI, Firenze 2009, pp. 331-332). Not always be deduced from documents that are limited mostly to record the business transaction, the use to which they were allocated was often for domestic services, as can be seen in Genoese documents where slaves are employed *ad faciendum servicia in domo et extra*. GIOFFRÈ, *Il mercato degli schiavi*, cit. According to Trasselli the contract of work of children in the workshop of a master or in the house of a master for several years to the compensation only of a bed to sleep in or the clothes, did not differ in the manner of treatment, from the slavery condition. Also restricted and limiting forms, however, are not comparable for a different legal status that blocked its freedom.

⁴⁵ C. KLAPISH-ZUBER, *La famiglia e le donne nel Rinascimento a Firenze*, Roma-Bari 1988, pp. 253. F. ANGIOLINI, *Schiave*, in *Il lavoro delle donne*, a cura di A. GROPPI, Roma-Bari 1996, pp. 98-101.

We do not know much about the treatment of the slave in the Sicilian low Middle Ages, but the comparison of the studies in the Mediterranean basin, can detect a humanization of servile condition probably thanks to the interference of Christianity. The legislation – introduced by Frederick II of Aragon in 1303 for the treatment to be reserved to Christian slaves or those coming to conversion – suggests as the servant was a good to protect, thus discouraging his escape.

Nevertheless, there are escape cases in the Messina literature which finally demonstrated the intolerance of bondage. These events gave rise to claims and controversies at the Royal Curia for the recovery of the good or for refunding the sum as a warranty of the buyer.

In conclusion, the several commercial transactions, carried out into the Sicilian squares, let come to light the importance of an economically convenient trade, fueled by strong demand among the Mediterranean regions.

In the wide range of international studies, a comparative analysis of the documents shows such dynamics of an international trade, a flourishing trade in which Messina took the role of a centre of clearing of goods coming from the East first and from Africa after the fall of Constantinople.

The archival survey, therefore, identifying areas of origin, costs, mode of transport, type of contracts, intends to offer useful elements for an in-depth analysis and interesting ideas for further survey about Mediterranean slavery.

ABSTRACT

Durante il Medioevo, gli schiavi hanno rappresentato uno dei beni più importanti del commercio mediterraneo. Il presente lavoro intende proporre una riflessione sulla schiavitù in Sicilia nel basso medioevo attraverso una particolare prospettiva: il porto di Messina nel XV secolo. Per la sua strategica posizione, tra isola e penisola, tra Oriente e Occidente, la città assume una decisiva rilevanza nel panorama commerciale mediterraneo, configurando il suo porto come un importante mercato di importazione e redistribuzione di schiavi. Questo contributo – presentato all'Università di Atene in occasione del XVIII Annual Mediterranean Studies Congress e qui proposto in una versione corredata da note – esamina il commercio mediterraneo degli schiavi attraverso le fonti meridionali e documenti inediti dell'Archivio di Stato di Messina.