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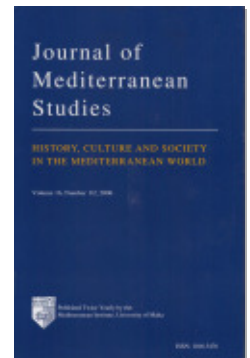
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‘THROUGH NAVAL PRACTICE AND THE
ASSOCIATION WITH FOREIGNERS’
FRENCH NOBLES’ PARTICIPATION IN
MEDITERRANEAN RELIGIOUS STRUGGLES, 1598–1635

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This article examines a group of ‘military migrants’, French nobles who engaged in Mediterranean maritime warfare, in an attempt to reconsider religious violence in the early modern period. The great religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have often been completely divorced from one another in early modern historiography—the Ottoman-Christian wars in the Mediterranean treated separately from the Protestant-Catholic conflicts within Europe. French nobles engaged in religious conflict within France throughout the long French Religious Wars of 1562–1629, but they also were very active in other religious struggles throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. Analyzing French nobles’ maritime activities exposes their social networks and their religious activism.

Introduction: A Unified Religious Struggle?

In June 1619, Sebastiano Montelupo wrote from Krakow thanking a Medici secretary for ‘the good news that you sent me of the peace in France and of the seizure of Turkish vessels by the galleys of the religion of Santo Stefano’. Montelupo found this news ‘*carissima*’ and prayed that God would maintain the ‘union’ in France and grant ‘prosperous fortune’ to the galleys.² Montelupo’s linkage of religious conflict within France to Christian warfare against the Ottoman Empire suggests that he saw these conflicts as aspects of a unified religious struggle. Writing from central Europe, Montelupo might be expected to confine his vision of religious warfare to the expanding conflict within the Holy Roman Empire, which would become the Thirty Years’ War, and to the Habsburg warfare on land against the Ottomans. Yet even in the heart of central Europe, Mediterranean maritime warfare could be perceived as a significant facet of a global religious conflict, as Montelupo’s correspondence shows.³

Montelupo’s comparative focus on civil conflict in France in 1619 may at first seem curious. The historiography of early seventeenth-century France

has long portrayed conflicts as unconcerned with religious issues, but instead motivated by noble rivalries, opposition to absolutism, or peasant discontent. However, new research shows that the 1598 Edict of Nantes was never fully implemented and that it hardly ended religious conflict within France.⁴ Confessional politics and religious activism continued to shape French nobles' participation in civil conflicts well into the seventeenth century. Thus, when members of the French court reacted to the Ottoman sack of Manfredonia in 1620, they—like Sebastiano Montelupo—could easily draw connections between this disaster and the calamities of civil war in France and Bohemia.⁵

This article explores the concept of unified religious struggle in the early seventeenth century through the experiences of French nobles involved in Mediterranean maritime warfare. I argue that examining the 'military migrations' of French nobles reveals both the religious motives that drew them into maritime conflicts and the social networks that they developed through their participation in Mediterranean warfare.

Military Migrations

We can better understand the connections between Christian-Muslim and Protestant-Catholic religious violence in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by focusing on the noblemen who organized, financed, and directed religious warfare in the Mediterranean. A number of excellent recent studies provide increasing detail on the daily lives of sailors and mariners in the early modern period, although often emphasizing an Atlantic world maritime perspective.⁶ Many studies probing French nobles' relationships to maritime activities unfortunately still focus either on analyses of royal fleet development or on prosopographical excavations of admirals and naval officers.⁷ Too few historians have followed Carla Rahn Philips's brilliant example in constructing a comprehensive analysis of noble officers and the processes they used in organizing naval warfare.⁸

The concept of 'military migration' can be useful in problematizing nobles' involvement in early modern maritime operations, especially in trans-national contexts.⁹ Noblemen serving outside of their native lands have often been labelled by historians as 'adventurers' or 'mercenaries'.¹⁰ Such characterizations portray nobles as fundamentally self-interested, emphasizing economic incentives for warfare while denying the possibility that nobles might have had sincere religious motives for engaging in violence. Conceiving of extraterritorial service in warfare as 'military migration'—including travels, voyages, extended stays, and permanent residency abroad involving military/naval activity—allows us to re-think nobles' relationships

with their native society, state institutions, religious bodies, and international organizations. The notion of 'military migration' allows us to examine noble involvement in a broad spectrum of maritime activities and to avoid an anachronistic vision of them as 'naval officers'.

French nobles can thus be effectively considered in the context of a new historical literature on early modern maritime history and in comparison with various other social groups throughout the Mediterranean that are examined in recent studies.¹¹ Alan James's important analysis of French naval organization, *Navy and Government in Early Modern France*, provides a fresh perspective on maritime administrative and naval history in seventeenth-century France.¹² Jean-François Dubost's work on Italian immigrants to France in the early modern period complements these maritime studies and permits a closer examination of Franco-Italian exchanges.¹³

My current research on the cultural history of violence in southern France and Tuscany during the early seventeenth century builds on these recent studies through an exploration of archival documents, published treatises, and printed pamphlets dealing with French 'military migrants'. A combination of manuscript correspondence, regional reports, and noble family records conserved in southern French *archives départementales*, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and the Archivio di Stato di Firenze sheds new light on the role French nobles played in religious warfare in the Mediterranean in the early seventeenth century.

Various motives led French nobles to become temporary, itinerate, or long-term 'military migrants'. Early modern noblemen's education normally included international experiences, and many French nobles sought training in arms and military skills in Italy during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹⁴ Henri de Gondi, duc de Retz, thus traveled to Florence to study Italian and horsemanship at the Medici court.¹⁵

Naval tactics, navigational techniques, and maritime experience were all valuable skills for early seventeenth-century nobles living along the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts. Henri de Nogaret de La Valette, comte de Candalle, served with the Tuscan galleys to gain naval experience in the 1610s. Maria de' Medici wrote to Cosimo II de' Medici that she wanted La Vallette 'to cruise on your galleys . . . and try to render himself more and more capable to serve the king . . . through naval practice and the association with foreigners'.¹⁶ Nogaret de La Valette praised the Tuscan Granduca's fleet as the 'best and most courageous Academy' for a first military experience after his cruise on the Tuscan galleys.¹⁷ Members of the Schömberg family also sought military and naval education at the Medici court.¹⁸ Some French nobles sought not only to acquire a generalized maritime

education, but also to have an apprenticeship in naval command with the forces of the Granduca.¹⁹

French Nobles and Religious Activism

Nobles living in southern France eagerly offered to serve in Italy when wars erupted in Savoy or other Italian states in the early seventeenth century.²⁰ Some of these military activities have been recognized in the historical literature, especially when French and Franco-Italian nobles joined Charles de Gonzague, duc de Nevers, in his effort to claim the Mantuan succession from 1627 to 1631.²¹ Yet, looking beyond state-sponsored intervention in Italy reveals a much wider and more continuous French participation in Italian warfare, especially in Mediterranean maritime conflicts and religious violence against Islamic enemies.

Members of the Ornano family were active in Corsican maritime activities in the early seventeenth century.²² Nobles from Marseilles, Toulon, and other southern French ports frequently offered to serve along with Tuscan maritime forces.²³ French nobles seem to have been closely involved with galley-building industries in Toulon, and some of those ships later saw service with Italian-led fleets.²⁴ French nobles played important roles in financing Mediterranean religious warfare, but their use of informal credit mechanisms and patron-client ties often left few traces in archival documentation. However, we can occasionally glimpse their loans, debts, transactions through their exchanges of jewelry, art objects, and currency.²⁵ The financing and organization of maritime warfare in this period seems to have been linked to religious orders and confraternities, motivated in part by what I call 'piety honour'.²⁶

Religious activism promoted joint maritime initiatives to attack Muslim shipping, protect Christian ships and territories from pirates, and defend Christianity from Ottoman fleets—most spectacularly at the siege of Malta of 1565 and on the Lepanto campaign of 1571. A French noble in the duc de Retz's household wrote enthusiastically to the Medici court proposing elaborate military operations against the Ottomans in North Africa in the early seventeenth century.²⁷ The comte de Joigny coordinated Franco-Tuscan naval operations in 1604.²⁸ Giovanni de' Medici reported on the fitting out of a corsair to be sent against the Turks in 1607 by French nobles who planned to sail under the ensigns of the Granduca. This 'large ship' was to be armed with 40 bronze guns and crewed by 300 Frenchmen.²⁹ However, a common religious cause could not prevent rivalries and differences from threatening the unity of Christian fleets. Medici correspondence reveals the

friction between Italians and French involved in joint maritime activities in the early seventeenth century.³⁰

Religious motives can be discerned in correspondence relating to French captives of the Ottoman naval forces and their families attempts to ransom them. Some French prisoners of war were eventually re-captured by Christian galleys and forced to serve on crews as oarsmen. Maria de' Medici and other members of the French court sought to get such French prisoners released through the intervention of the Medici court in the early seventeenth century.³¹

Nobles' religious convictions and confessional programmes were certainly not transparent, instead operating through complex religious-political positions and evaluations. Huguenots' religious motives can be identified in their separate expeditions and certain joint activities with Catholic forces. As the duc de Lesdiguières and his Huguenot noble followers fought in Savoy in the 1610s against Spanish forces and their allies, other French Protestants engaged in warfare against Muslims in the Mediterranean.

Toward a History of Mediterranean Noble Networks

Military orders' bellicose activities promoted the development of broad networks amongst Christian nobles throughout the Mediterranean. Members of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, or knights of Malta, represented an international military organization, with significant participation by French nobles. The order had become an increasingly visible symbol of the defense of Christianity during the sixteenth century, especially following the epic siege of Malta itself in 1565 by a powerful Ottoman army and fleet.³² The Christian naval victory at Lepanto in 1571 confirmed the status of the Mediterranean as a site of Christian renewal, even if the battle's strategic significance was fleeting. Nobles who wanted to display their Christian commitment through warfare were attracted to Mediterranean warfare and to service with the knights of Malta.

Contacts between French and Italian nobles were arguably especially important within the Order of Malta during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Two Medici queens of France reinforced Tuscan-French political and social connections in this period. Caterina and Maria de' Medici both facilitated French and Tuscan noblemen's participation in Mediterranean warfare. Jean-François Dubost has found that the greatest number of Tuscans served as knights of Malta precisely during the last quarter of the sixteenth century.³³ Members of many Franco-Italian noble families joined the knights of Malta in this period and fought for the Catholic

cause. During the early seventeenth century, three noblemen from the Franco-Italian Elbène family, for example, served as knights of Malta.³⁴

The Ordine di Santo Stefano, or Order of Saint Stephen, also provided French nobles with possibilities for service in Mediterranean warfare. Cosimo de' Medici organized this order after receiving papal approval in 1561, providing a new naval force to fight against Muslim navies and pirates in the Mediterranean. Several of the Florentine noble families who were involved in the initial organization of the Ordine di Santo Stefano had close connections with France. Bartolomeo Concini completed negotiations with the papacy for the foundation of the order, and the Concini family remained active in the order. Bartolomeo had two sons who were members of the order, and his grandson Concino became Maria de' Medici's favourite in the early seventeenth century. Domenico Bonsi assisted in the early development of the Ordine di Santo Stefano in the 1560s.³⁵ An important branch of the Bonsi family soon took control of the bishopric of Béziers in southern France and established themselves as Franco-Italian nobles. Such Franco-Italian noble families could use their connections with the Ordine di Santo Stefano to enhance and expand the existing cultural and social exchanges between Tuscany and France. Although the *cavalieri*, or knights, of the order tended to be almost exclusively Tuscan, many French and Franco-Italian nobles joined the order's military-naval expeditions as volunteers to participate in Mediterranean warfare against Muslim fleets and shipping.

The Concini and Bonsi families demonstrate how Franco-Italian families employed their kinship and client ties through religious orders and maritime activities in the Mediterranean area. Many other Franco-Italian noble families also developed Mediterranean maritime networks through the financing and practice of naval warfare in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Members of the Gondi, Orsini, Ornando, Rucellai, Strozzi, Gonzaga, and Savoie families all seem to have established networks of credit and clientage through the organization of Mediterranean warfare.

Conclusion

This brief examination of French maritime activities indicates that French nobles were much more involved in early modern Mediterranean religious violence than has previously been assumed. Catholic French nobles' social and military networks emerge more clearly from this initial analysis of Mediterranean maritime warfare, but there are some indications that Huguenot nobles were also active in the Mediterranean. More work needs to be done on French nobles, and other Mediterranean 'military migrants', to understand

fully their roles in linking Christian-Muslim warfare with European religious struggles. Early seventeenth-century French 'military migrants' seem to have forged networks across the Mediterranean that promoted broad conceptions of an ongoing unified religious conflict.

Notes

1. Research for this article was made possible by the generous funding of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the support of the Medici Archive Project. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.
2. Sebastiano Montelupo to Curzio da Picchena, Krakov, 22 June 1619, Archivio di Stato [hereafter, ASF], Mediceo del Principato [hereafter, MdP] 996, f° 390.
3. See Montelupo's other letters in ASF, MdP 996.
4. Brian Sandberg, *Heroic Souls: French Nobles and Religious Conflict after the Edict of Nantes, 1598–1635*, forthcoming; Marc Venard, 'L'église Catholique bénéficiaire de l'édit de Nantes. Le témoignage des visites épiscopales', in *Coexister dans l'intolérance. L'édit de Nantes (1598)*, ed. Michel Grandjean and Bernard Roussel (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1998), 283–302; Gabriel Audisio, 'La réception de l'édit de Nantes en Provence (1598–1602)', in *Coexister dans l'intolérance*, 267–282; Françoise Chevalier, 'Les difficultés d'application de l'édit de Nantes d'après les cahiers des plaintes (1599–1660)', in *Coexister dans l'intolérance*, 303–320; Stéphane Capot, 'La paix vécue à Castres au temps de l'édit de Nantes (1595–1670)', in *Paix des armes, paix des âmes*, ed. Paul Mironneau and Isabelle Pébay-Clottes (Paris: Société Henri IV and Imprimerie Nationale Éditions, 2000), 303–312.
5. Pierre Jeannin to Curzio da Picchena, Nancy, 18 September 1620, ASF, MdP 4759, n.p.
6. See: Pablo E. Pérez-Mallafina, *Spain's Men of the Sea: Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century*, trans. Carla Rahn Phillips (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
7. For example, see: Jean Meyer, 'La marine française de 1545 à 1715', in *Histoire militaire de la France. 1. Des origines à 1715*, ed. Philippe Contamine (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), 485–525; Michel Vergé-Franceschi, 'Les amiraux de France : 1492–1592 –Treize terriens', in *La France et la mer au siècle des grandes découvertes*, ed. Philippe Masson and Michel Vergé-Franceschi (Paris: Tallandier, 1993), 177–191.
8. Carla Rahn Phillips, *Six Galleons for the King of Spain: Imperial Defense in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
9. The concept of 'military migration' is constructed in dialogue with the burgeoning historical literature on migration, especially in early modern contexts. See: Jean-Louis Miège, ed., *Navigations et migrations en Méditerranée de la préhistoire à nos jours* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1990).

10. On 'mercenaries' and 'military entrepreneurs' in the early modern period, see: David Parrott, *Richelieu's Army: War, Government, and Society in France, 1624–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Janice E. Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Fritz Redlich, *The German Military Enterpriser and his Work Force: A Study in European Economic and Social History*, 2 Vol. [*Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*. Beihefte 48.] (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1964–1965).
11. Gelina Harlaftis and Carmel Vassallo, 'Maritime History Since Braudel', in *New Directions in Mediterranean Maritime History*, ed. Gelina Harlaftis and Carmel Vassallo, eds. (St. John's: International Maritime Economic History Association, 2004), 1–19.
12. Alan James, *Navy and Government in Early Modern France* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press and Royal Historical Society, 2004).
13. Jean-Francois Dubost, *La France italienne, XVI^e–XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1997).
14. Mark Motley, *Becoming a French Aristocrat: The Education of the Court Nobility, 1580–1715* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 123–168, 193–208.
15. ASF, MdP 5052, f° 451. Medici Archive Project, Documentary Sources Database, 17119.
16. Maria de' Medici to Cosimo II de' Medici, Paris, 21 February 1613, ASF, MdP 4729^A, f° 301. A letter of thanks followed: Marie de Médicis to Cosimo II de' Medici, Paris, 27 July 1613, ASF, MdP 4729^A, f° 317.
17. Henri de Nogaret de La Valette comte de Candalle to Belisario di Francesco Vinta. Civitavecchia, 18 June 1613, ASF, MdP 4759, n.p.
18. Henri de Schömburg comte de Nanteuil to Cosimo II de' Medici, Lyon, 19 July 1617, ASF, MdP 4759, n.p.
19. Louis de Marseillon to Belisario di Francesco Vinta, Livorno, 15 May 1610, ASF, MdP 4759, n.p.
20. For an example, see: Emmanuel de Crussol duc d'Uzès to Paul Phélypeaux seigneur de Pontchartrain, Assier, 17 June 1613, Bibliothèque Nationale de France [hereafter, BNF], Clairambault 1131, f° 357.
21. David Parrott, 'The Mantuan Succession, 1627–1631: A Sovereignty Dispute in Early Modern Europe', *English Historical Review* 112 (February 1997): 20–65.
22. Domenico d'Ornano to Belisario di Francesco Vinta, Château Trompette in Bordeaux, 15 September 1604, ASF, MdP 4759, n.p.
23. Louis de Marseillon to Belisario di Francesco Vinta, Livorno, 17 October 1607, ASF, MdP 4759, n.p.
24. Louis de Marseillon to Belisario di Francesco Vinta, Toulon, 26 July 1610, ASF, MdP 4759, n.p.
25. Jacques de Cabrol seigneur d'Ariffat[?] to Cosimo II de' Medici, Marseille, 20 April 1613, ASF, MdP 4759, n.p.
26. On 'piety honor', see Brian Sandberg, *Heroic Souls*.
27. Marin Malleville to Ferdinando I de' Medici, Firenze, 25 April 1600, MdP 4759, n.p.

28. Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi comte de Joigny to Ferdinando I de' Medici, Marseille, 12 November 1604, ASF, MdP 4759, n.p.
29. Giovanni de' Medici to Ferdinando I de' Medici, Paris, 18 November 1607, ASF, MdP 5157, f° 722.
30. Jacques Pierre to Ferdinando I de' Medici, Livorno, 12 July 1608, ASF, MdP 4759, n.p.
31. For example, see: Maria de' Medici to Cosimo II de' Medici, Paris, 14 November 1620, ASF, MdP 4729^A, f° 427. A broader account of Christian slaves in the Mediterranean is provided by Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, The Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500–1800* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
32. For a concise account of the siege of Malta, see: Thomas F. Arnold, *The Renaissance at War* (London: Cassell & Co., 2001), 128–132.
33. A. Spagnoletti's data cited in Franco Angiolini, *I cavalieri e il principe* (Firenze:
34. Dubost, *La France italienne, XVI^e–XVII^e siècle*, 246–247.
35. Angiolini, *I cavalieri e il principe*, 48–52.