

Michela D'Angelo: In the Heart of the Early Modern Mediterranean: English Trade, Ships and Merchants in the Italian ports.

Although the Englishmen were 'far from unknown' and their goods were marketed in the Mediterranean ports during the Middle Ages, it was only in the sixteenth century that English ships sailed on a significant scale in the Mediterranean waters. Since then English merchants began to send not only ships and goods in South European ports, but also factors or agents to reside in Mediterranean ports, in order to establish trading posts in the Levant route. The presence of English ships, goods and merchants increased steadily so that by the end of the XVIth century, as Fernand Braudel pointed out, they were everywhere in the 'two Mediterraneans', both in Christian and in Islamic countries.

This paper will focus the sources and the recent research on English trade expansion in the heart of the early modern Mediterranean, particularly through the medium of some Italian States' ports. Along the changing maritime borderline between the Christian and Muslim Mediterranean, the Italian port-towns, chiefly the Tyrrhenian ports, played a relevant part in the English growing presence in the Mediterranean in the modern centuries. The ports of Genoa, Leghorn, Naples, Messina, etc. were involved directly in the Anglo-Italian trade and, moreover, they became calling ports in the route England-Levant. They were meeting-points, where English goods and Levant produce could be advantageously interchanged. A web of trade routes and maritime caravans, in fact, linked them to the major ports in Western and Eastern Mediterranean, as well as to the North African coasts. For example, the free port of Messina and especially the port of Leghorn became a 'bridge' between the western and eastern areas of the Mediterranean. English ships landed in these ports not only with a typical cargo for the local markets, i.e. woollen cloth, lead, tin, salted fish, etc., but also with additional goods bound and transhipped for Smirne, Aleppo, Tunis, etc.. English ships loaded in return the Levant produce, i. e. spices, raisins, wine, oil, silk, carpets, etc., carried from the Levant or North Africa and transhipped in the Italian ports for England. Besides the routes of the *Caravane Maritime*, the paper will focus also some of its 'protagonists', i.e. English merchants residing in the Italian ports, in order to sketch their trading connections inside (and outside) the Mediterranean.