



Georgio Scala and the Moorish Slaves: The Inquisition Malta 1598

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
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Georgio Scala, a young man of humble origins, from Damiata, was captured on a trading vessel by the Knights of Malta in 1590 not far from his home town. He was enslaved in spite of his protestations that he was a Christian and so began the story of his life in the island of Malta. After gaining his freedom some years later, Scala made a life for himself in Valletta, the new capital and married Bernardina Mendicino. Outwardly a good Christian, his behaviour and his consorting with Moorish slaves, however, caused some to question his religious beliefs, leading to his appearance before the Inquisition in 1598, accused of apostasy. The proceedings of his trial were discovered in the Cathedral Archives, Mdina, Malta and provide a vivid picture of the times, the interaction between the various communities in Valletta and the all-important role of the Inquisition. Among the folios of the proceedings were found three letters, written in the Arabic dialect of Sfax (Tunisia) by a scribe for Moorish galley slaves. The letters are a unique find, giving first-hand accounts of the misery of their lives at sea and on shore. This book is the result of collaboration among ten researchers from Birmingham, Exeter, Leeds and Malta, each revealing a different aspect of Scala's world. The end product is a fascinating study of Malta in the late 1600s, in which we hear, first hand, the voices of the common people, with all their immediacy and spontaneity, something not usually found in the dry dust of formal and legal documents.

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