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The *Journal of the Faculty of Arts* is being merged with *Economic and Social Studies*, also published by the University of Malta, and will henceforth appear as the *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* in order to express the attention which the University of Malta is focussng on the analysis of past and present problems of the Mediterranean region.

The *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* will be published twice yearly and will cover as wide an area of research as possible, including history, law, economics, medicine, sociology, political science, religion, sociolinguistics and culture. English will be the working language of the journal, but articles in French and Arabic will also be welcomed.

Outstanding subscriptions will be transferred to the new journal. Enquiries should be addressed to the *Editor, Journal of Mediterranean Studies, University of Malta, Msida (Malta)*.

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## CONTENTS

Forward	
The Editor	1
<b>Section I Mediterranean History</b>	
The Law of the Sea and the Mediterranean <i>Peter Serracino Inglott</i>	7
Secularization in Spain, Portugal and Greece <i>David Martin</i>	14
Reciprocal Migration: A Mediterranean Example <i>Charles J.M.R. Gullick</i>	31
Portugal and the Western Mediterranean: A Suggested Survey <i>Harry Bernstein</i>	42
Education in the Classical Mediterranean World <i>Charles Mizzi</i>	53
Distribution of Villas and Some Aspects of the Maltese Economy in the Roman Period <i>Anthony Bonanno</i>	73
<b>Section II Iberian History</b>	
Martin I of Aragon and Negotiations for Peace and Prisoner Exchange with Tunis (1398-1410) <i>Zaida Giraldo</i>	82
Medieval Macchiavelianism: A Study in 14th Century Castillian Diplomacy <i>Benjamin Taggie</i>	96
Late-Medieval Mediterranean Empires: The Catalan Example <i>Anthony Luttrell</i>	109
The Language Barrier: The Problem of Bilingual- ism and Muslim-Christian Interchange in the Medieval Kingdom of Valencia <i>Robert I. Burns</i>	116

Centralism and Regionalism in Eighteenth-Century Spain	
<i>W.N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley</i>	137
English Travellers in Late 18th Century Spain: Eyewitness Accounts	
<i>Norman Holub</i>	144
Funeral Laments and Female Power in Sardinian Peasant Society	
<i>Elizabeth Mathias</i>	153
<b>Section III Maltese Life and History</b>	
Concubinage Among the Clergy of Malta and Gozo ca. 1420-1550	
<i>Godfrey Wettinger</i>	165
Del Col.legi Dels Jesuites a la Universitat de Malta	
<i>Maquel Batllori</i>	189
Il Algodon de Malta y la Industria Textil Catalana	
<i>Pedro Voltas</i>	201
Historical Review of the Development of Medicine and Surgery in Malta	
<i>Paul Cassar</i>	206
The Plagues of 1675 and of 1813 in Contemporary Poetry	
<i>Paul Cassar</i>	213
Changes in the Epidemiological Pattern of Disease in the Maltese Islands	
<i>F.F. Fenech - R. Ellul Micallef - M. Vassallo</i>	221
Religious Symbolism in a Changing Malta	
<i>Mario Vassallo</i>	232
The Changing Status of Women in Malta	
<i>Sybyl O'Reilly Mizzi</i>	253
Contemporary Maltese Literature - An Interim Report	
<i>Daniel Massa</i>	264
Theatre in Malta	
<i>Joe Friggieri</i>	

## FOREWORD

This volume is being offered as a contribution by the University of Malta towards the study of the culture of the Mediterranean region.

The phrase '*culture of the Mediterranean*' and not '*cultures of the Mediterranean*' is here being used not because one is not aware of the differences that exist in this part of the world, but because of the fact that in spite of the variations that hide behind the language and national costumes of the countries that form the Mediterranean littoral, there exist fundamental similarities amongst them.

In this part of the world, renowned as it is throughout the history of the western world for its strategic importance, the ecological setting facilitated the *relative* isolation of different communities and of their civilization and culture: the mountainous peninsula, and the many islands, provided continuous and natural protection to their inhabitants, limiting cross-fertilization, and fostering among the local communities, by way of self-defence, a sense of communal cohesion not readily paralleled in larger communities. Formal unification mostly through military force, settlement, and rebellion following a period of relaxation by the conquering power, are a constant feature in the history of most Mediterranean communities. But although such a pattern of repeated rebellion against enforced unification fostered rather than hindered diversity, it did not entail total isolation or exclusiveness. Ecological factors did not prevent similar patterns from taking shape in the different communities. Perhaps it was the similarity of prevailing conditions, with which every community had to come to terms, that gave rise to such patterns. Concepts related to such items as 'honour', 'shame' and 'guilt', village traditions, mating patterns, organizations, networks, inheritance laws, and even indigenous economic structures, are easily comparable amongst the different Mediterranean societies. It is in this sense that one can talk of a regional Mediterranean culture that links the more particular folk-cultures, and