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PART B

MEDALEX

B1 RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGICAL QUALITY
Research and technological quality, including any interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary aspects of the proposal

In the late Middle Ages a constellation of groups shared the commercial spaces of Mediterranean cities. These groups were either formally defined (as the trading *nations* of Venice, Genoa, Catalonia, Florence, Montpellier, etc.), or were based on ethnic and religious affiliation (as Copts, Jews, Greek Orthodox, or *Mudéjar* Muslims). In either case, to different degrees, these groups cooperated with each other by working together in commonly shared networks. By monitoring a whole merchant community instead of single groups through a serial, homogeneous documentation and a coherent methodology, this project will produce a **multidisciplinary and consistent research** of the generally accepted social norms and institutional forces that governed business cooperation in a Mediterranean complex environment. By targeting patterns of interpersonal and inter-group cooperation, my project aims to validate the **hypothesis** that mixed commercial networks emerged across the Sea, which were strengthened by an intriguing mixture of cultural values and the institutions they created, and that cooperation was fuelled by the frequency with which key-players in these networks transgressed cultural boundaries. These dynamic and complex relations will be addressed in an empirical manner, by observing the economic networks encoded in one of the by-products of Mediterranean commercial culture: the *outre-mer* notaries and their registers. The Venetian notarial records drawn in Alexandria provide a multi-lateral picture of the activities of these heterogeneous communities, and particularly, show cooperation and interaction between individuals of different origins.

Studies on Merchant *Nations* have been numerous since the 19th century. Yet, the Mediterranean model of the commercial city has rarely attracted the interest of modern research on cross-cultural trade. Rivalry and networks in isolation have been the traditional unit of analysis in the field of Eastern Trade. Eminent scholars have made extensive inquiries into the influence of one single political entity in a whole region (Thiriet 1959; Balard 1978; Salicrù 1998), and recent case studies (as the Catalan and Venetian presence in Alexandria or Aleppo) still seem to be confined to the bi-lateral relations approach (Vallet 1999; Coulon 2004; Christ 2006). Following a tradition going back to the nineteenth century (Heyd [1885] : 1967) E. Ashtor devoted most of his career to the study of the Levant trade from a multi-national perspective, but his approach focused on competition rather than interaction, and neglected the very ideas of cross-cultural trade and that of a business community. Instead, he analyzed European presence in the Middle East as a long process leading to the Venetian supremacy in the Levant trade (Ashtor 1974; Ashtor 1983).

This traditional vision of Mediterranean competition between the main European trading powers is now changing. We know that, after several attempts during Fatimid and Ayyubid times, the Mamluk sultanate of Egypt managed by 1350 to attract the Euro-Asian spice trade. The Mamluk hinterland (Famagusta, Rhodes, Mecca or Aden) then became major trading hubs of the Euro-Asian trade channeled through the port of Alexandria. Particularly after 1420, as I argued in my Ph.D. dissertation on the Mamluk state, the sultans succeeded in defining clear policies regarding European investment, diverting traffic from former destinations like the Black Sea and established a long-lasting political and commercial *entente* with their major partners, such as the Venetians, Genoese, and Catalans. Empowered by the Venetian Government, public notaries were sent to Alexandria to make up legal documents. Those clerks consolidated as the only active Latin notarial institution in town, and provided services to all the foreign merchants. Several hundreds of these notarial records have survived for the period 1350-1460. Unlike most documentary evidence from European Archives, they provide a multi-lateral picture of the activities of those heterogeneous communities, and in particular, show cooperation and interaction between individuals of different origins.

Cooperation depicted in these multilateral source cannot be understood through the bias of one privileged group. As I showed in my research so far, economic super powers like Genoa, cooperated, and sometimes were prone to merge with minor trading polities as the cities of the French Midi. Florentine networks were decentralized, and overlapped with those of other French and Catalan cities. They operated via alternative hubs such as Tunis or Rhodes. Although the Florentines had their own galley system, in practice their convoys were open to Genoa and other nations. In

exchange, and in contrast with the exclusive character of other nations' commercial institutions, the Genoese consulate was open to Florentine merchants, and Florentine consuls acted as representatives of other nations, such as the Catalans. Together with Venice, the sovereignty of the major Italian powers extended over most Greek-speaking communities as well as over large groups of Mediterranean Jews, whose trading networks were deeply intertwined. However, patterns of cooperation between trading nations and other groups were far from linear: in some cases they were the effect of political alliances, sometimes they depended on commercial or navigational reasons, some other times to political domination, particularly in the case of minority groups (Apellániz 2009:3). Moreover, preliminary research shows that the Alexandrian community endured deep changes over time. A substantial reduction in the number of nations, the gradual disappearance of merchants from unknown origins and the emergence of a well-connected group of Muslim entrepreneurs in the European-dominated business milieu are some of these features. But the most striking is, without any doubt, the emergence of a heterogeneous core of powerful and active merchants who were more open and cooperative that I intend to explore in **months 18-23** (**paper#4**, see below).

Due to the conceptual limitations of single case studies, or bilateral approaches, Medieval cities of commerce as Alexandria have rarely been considered as a field of interest for the study of minority interaction and the role played by culture in those interactions. In the frame of meta-national narratives, often devoted to study of economic growth, medievalists have consecrated their efforts to reify political spheres (as M. Balard and F. Thiriet did respectively for the "Venetian" and "Genoese" Black Sea). Even if some authors have paid attention to the fact that, in some areas of the Mediterranean, colonial subjects and other local merchants collaborated with, or rather integrated, the main long-distance networks of Genoa and Venice, my proposed research intends to raise the fundamental question that so far has not been asked: do current units of study, methods and approaches still help to solve the current sharp debates on cross-cultural trade? Hosting both formally-defined nations as well as colonized and minority groups, can the complex milieu of Alexandria provide a most refined view of how cross-cultural trade functioned? What light can notarial records shed on identities and cross-cultural trade instead of, for instance, more popular sources like merchant correspondence? Regarding categories of belonging and difference, what can we learn from the Alexandrian records about early modern identity which could not be found out through single, one-group case-studies?

The study of single trading diasporas or dominant nations alone presents severe limitations. This is the conceptual gap that my proposed research aims to fill. Although researchers most often target dominant groups, the venetian notarial culture introduce us to a rich prosopographical dimension. Clerks provide more systematic data about individuals' origin and social status, but many people quoted in the documents do not seem to come from a recognizable city of origin. As they can be described only by ethnical and professional attributes, women, converts, people of unknown origins, slaves, Copts, Greeks, Jews or Muslims from Christian lands largely remain out of the *national* perspective. Through the elabobration of my working hypothesis (**paper#**1 on Florence, see B4) I will attempt to show that not all national groups were coherent, since some of them worked rather as decentralized networks (as the "Rhodian" or "Florentine" nations). Likewise, *entrepots*, and alternative trading hubs were of crucial importance as an alternative to "official" trade. Moreover, merchants embedded in these *entrepots*, like the Rhodians or the Jacobite Christians of Cyprus, have been neglected as they are not considered as "proper" trading nations in Alexandria. Although the Alexandrian records stress the role of these hubs as a base for alternative networks and stress their importance for the Alexandrian trade, they represent a serious gap in the bibliography (Ait 2005). As nation, religion and network did not always coincide, the cooperation and interaction phenomena I am addressing cannot be understood by uncritically accepting the identitarian framework provided by notary records. In order to provide the groups with a flexible definition of the categories of inclusion and exclusion, this study will investigate the transcultural strategies followed by unofficial members of the nations, who, acting in the fringes of networks and groups, enabled interaction throughout the group's boundaries.

Appropriateness of research methodology and approach

Annales-style research has yielded a vast literature on the evolution of main trading nations and diplomacy. Traditional economic history has provided us with a good secondary literature on contracts, economic cycles (as, for

instance, after and before the 1349 black death breakdown), and institutions like the consulates. Without completely abandoning this approach, it is already clear that in this study I will need to shift from the one-group paradigm to a unity of analysis and conceptual tools that allow me to hold the relational dimension. Underpinning my methodological approach is the **concept of network**. The very idea of network privileges the importance of social linkages above that of status, and explores functionality patterns of human interaction. Since my purpose is to capture whole systems of relations, irrespective of the actors and nature of agreements, the network analysis I intend to adopt differs from a standard narrative of medievalists and economic historians, biased on a privileged set of individuals or relations.

Methodologically, my research will proceed as follows: **(1)** I will delimit a set of real, mixed networks and communities, as opposed to pre-determined groups, as units of analysis, to be defined in the notarial data. **(2)** I will provide a comprehensive description of the social norms and institutional devices that governed business cooperation in a complex milieu and accompanied its major transformations, and **(3)**, I will investigate agency and culture in the networks, by focusing on the transcultural strategies followed by unofficial members of the nations, who, acting in the fringes of networks and groups, enabled interaction throughout the group's boundaries. The project defines (mixed) networks as the sum of individual interrelations at the basis of synergies between both national and ethnic/diasporic groups. As stated above, because overseas notaries are a multi-lateral source they help to capture this purely relational, inter-group dimension. The Venetian notary was the only Latin clerk active in Alexandria at a given time: in their casebooks, they notarized contracts, agreements and private deeds. My analysis focuses on links between individuals as they spring from their involvement in these records. The network approach I intend to adopt, focusing on patterns of relations (who signs contracts with whom, what kind of witnesses are preferred, tendencies in partner selection showed by a particular minority or nation, etc.), make it possible to overcome any particularistic, intra-group perspective. I will use network analysis (centrality measures, Graph Theory) to identify the actors of cooperation. As data from different notaries will be filtered through a **pioneering database model**, this original methodology will allow the proposed study to overcome the limitations of the current state-of-the-art, making it possible to seize the multi-lateral, inter-group dimension of the networks and identifying new communities. Since **month 12**, the enlargement of my set of evidence will have yielded sufficient and meaningful material to first, map the foundations of cross-cultural trade and, second, to define trading groups out of agency and cooperation, avoiding the risks of relying on definitions and categorization.

Regarding the social underpinnings of cross-cultural trade, my aim is to reconcile actual opposition between institutional enforcement and dominant social practice. In both the Muslim and Christian Mediterranean, the notary's services were most frequently required as a means to encourage good behavior and promote trust. Notaries did not just make up legal artifacts to be used at court; when complaining about fraud, many merchants meant to behave openly and publicly in order to ensure collective memory in what D. L. Smail has called "the public archives of memory" (Smail 1998, Imber 2002: 233 for the Ottoman notaries). Rather than the effective prosecution of deviant attitudes at court, they sought to give publicity to their behavior, which could eventually be used in future trials. Many quarrels (*protesto*) were accompanied by witness statements; hence the notary became the *bearer of a public knowledge* which could be used to discredit or even provoke a definitive ban on a given merchant in the city. These statements provide us with a good deal of information about why individuals made choices, and about the social norms that consolidated to adjust behavior and promote trust between strangers.

The notaries, however, were first and foremost a legal institution. Although the main trading nations produced their own inner formal and legal devices (consulates and consular justice, national merchant guilds, etc.) a centralized court of justice was never settled among European merchants. Merchants ran out of money, contracted debts or decided to send their merchandise on different ships, having to rely on foreigners for that. Commercial conflict demonstrates the other side of the coin to cooperation, and notary records show many informal, as well as formal mechanisms to cope with it. Some solutions have an intriguing informal character: for instance, when one consulate protects a cheating national, a **cross-national boycott** by other consuls can happen. Also, when fraud risks provoking a conflict with a member of the host society, social control from the whole community could be very strong, in order to prevent large-scale retaliation from Muslim authorities. **Witness selection** (as rival consuls) or

turning to both Latin and Muslim notaries for delicate matters have a clear informal character. Among the formal solutions to multi-lateral conflict, **official boycotts** (known as *batalazio*, from the Arabic word *batl*, to stop) were issued by Venetian authorities against cheating Muslim merchants. The most sophisticated of these mechanisms, a particular kind of **'arbitration court'**, will be one of my major objects of inquiry. Many episodes are to be found in the casebooks in which a merchant from the nation "A" is cheated by a merchant from nation "B". Arbitration courts, formed most often by third-party consuls (but also by trusted merchants) appear in the recors as a way to solve cross-national conflict. The origins, grounds of law, and the processes of negotiation leading to the designation of their members will be explored in **paper#3**. Thus, regarding the economic approach to these documents, I will have to consider the methods of the so-called neo-institutionalists. In the last years, economic-oriented writers have approached the world of medieval trade, such as the *Geniza* Maghrebi coalitions or the Genoese commercial institutions to reveal the mechanisms, whether formal or informal, underpinning the functioning of networks and economic groups. By exploring the social and institutional foundations that enabled cross-cultural trade, as arbitration systems (whose existence was enforced by the presence of the notarial institution itself) or cross-boycott, this project represents a break with my Ph. D. dissertation. However, I will take advantage of my training as an arabist to explore complementary parallels between European and the Muslim legal systems (particularly vis-à-vis the *hakm al-mazalim* or secular justice, administered by civilians, as well as the intriguing similarities between Christian and Muslim notarial institutions in Alexandria). Indeed, Arabic deeds were accepted by Latin legal institutions. Inversely, non-christian and even people unable to express themselves in any European language felt the necessity to make use of the Latin clerks' services.

In order to define groups from below, I will shift away from previous macro-scale, network perspective, to a microhistorical approach, mainly through biography and career reconstruction (**paper#2**, see B4). The transcultural strategies and the careers of key-players in the networks - particularly, people from unknown origins, unofficial nations' members or uprooted individuals - will be defined by the mapping of their careers through notarial records. Indeed, the notarial casebooks provide the necessary chronological continuity to illustrate personal and family strategies. To handle notarial evidence in a micro-analysis level, **the database** will allow me to easily locate single pieces of information and make possible accurate readings of both whole documents and single passages. As described below, this device is conceived to easily trace careers and compare tendencies on partner selection, check shifts in status, functions, etc. However, to get a vivid picture of the lower-rank actors' transcultural strategies, the notarial data will be briefly crossed with other complementary sources. Metropolitan material, and particularly government-related as petitions, trials and privileges complement notarial acts and offer meaningful traces of discourses and expressions of belonging of these lower-rank social actors. For this purpose, at the Venetian State Archives and in Malta [**months 11-12,** see B4], commercial lawsuits as the *Giudizi di petizion*, notarial records and chancery documents from Crete, as well as the Rhodian chancery records (*Libri Bullarum*, National Library of Malta) will be explored.

The information comes from a collection of medieval manuscript material, located in Venice's State archives. The source is a coherent series of medieval notary deeds, set up by Latin scribes granted by the Venetian government the right to act as notaries in Alexandria, and drawn according to the imperial jurisdiction rules. Only Venetian notaries operated in Alexandria, taking turns of two years. Documents are written in a *medieval Latin* that includes expressions in Catalan, *colonial Venetian* and other Italian dialects, with slight Arabic influence in terminology.

This is a history project with an important technology dimension, though is to be developed against a strong background. My research so far on the Alexandrian notaries plays a fundamental role to achieve my goals. As stated above, information is entered in a database. One of the advantages of the proposed research is the functionality provided by this device, whose main features have been already developed. A database draft, conceived to include complete abstracts of the documents, as well as the main prosopographic, geographic and archival information, was first developed by the present writer in ACCESS format. In 2007, the original model was re-elaborated by a senior computer engineer in MySQL language and turned into a web-based application. Data entry is currently limited to the six first series of Alexandrian records (300 documents providing information about a thousand different

individuals). As described in Table 2, at the end of the data-entry process the trove of empirical evidence will comprise **c. 750 Alexandrian deeds,** including **c. 3000 different actors involved**.

Fig. 1. Entering data through the administrator web interface

A web-based application has been developed to browse the Alexandrian data both at user and administrator levels, to enter and edit new information, and to administrate users. A research engine makes possible to query the database. The result of my preliminary work is a device that will allow me to enter, cross and analyse data from different casebooks, a crucial feature for the implementing the project's conceptual tools. The device is then conceived to solve the methodological and technical problems commonly faced by researchers (for instance, it solves the problem of keeping the different spelling variations of one single name). Moreover, through the database, relationships between individuals can be explored, but also between family groups or places of origin.

Originality and innovative nature of the project, and relationship to the 'state of the art' of research in the field

By applying the concept of *transculturation* (elaborated by the Cuban F. Ortiz for the Caribbean context) to the Mediterranean, a reflection on culture will allow me to advance the state-of-the-art and its strong bias on pre-determined groups and cultural areas. The process of research and the nature of most documentary evidence has led historians of pre-modern trading nations to analyze each individual group in isolation, hence predetermining the boundaries of early modern communities. When exploring these communities, a common strategy is to read a crystallized form of social structure into the institutional history, as in the case of Venetian citizenship, the Genoese *alberghi*, or the *dhimmi* and *mu'ahidun* under Muslim rule (Grendi 1981; Heers 1989; Molà and Mueller 1994; Mueller 1998; Theunissen 1998; Christ 2006). But in complex environments as that of Alexandria, identity was multi-layered, as cultural unity and homogeneity within major trading compounds did not exist. While belonging to ethnic minorities or Diasporas, many Alexandrian *dhimmis*, Greeks and Jews were embedded in multicultural polities as Genoa, Venice, Aragon or the different Muslim powers. These minority groups had to deal with old regime systems of status and pre-modern forms of citizenship in their homelands, where they were rarely considered as full-right citizens. When we study their patterns of relations, we observe that they do not seem to coincide with *national* categories.

Preliminary research on minority groups embedded in the major trading nations, uprooted individuals or colonial subjects represented in the notaries, shows that they constantly stumbled upon difficulties with government authorities due to harsh limitations on their rights, and shifted from one political identity to another according to the obstacles encountered in their careers as merchants and brokers. When we observe careers and family strategies on the long run, we can gather the different responses to the problem of limited access to commercial rights. Religious conversion, identitarian ambiguity, dissimulation, and the development of alternative networks in tolerant polities like Rhodes or Alexandria were among the most frequent (**Apellániz 2011**). If we focus on a complex business community instead of a particular network or ethnic group, we can monitor women, people from unknown origins (who represented up to 26% of the Alexandrian community in the 1360's) or from second-rank cities. Unlike full-right members of the main trading nations, for the mass of individuals whose rights were limited or weakly tied to their communities, categories of belonging were not embodied in legal definitions or in acts of authority. Instead *they were generated by the ability to use rights* (Herzog 2003). Genoese merchants converted into Muslim dragomans, fake Venetians, Greek Jewish renegades, Florentines under French or Pisan flag, Egypt-born Latins and Greeks, living in the fringes of European networks were prone to manipulate their status at their own advantage in negotiated processes (at the court or in relation to government authorities). This *transcultural phenomenon* I intend to scrutinize for the Alexandrian case is defined as the set of choices and strategies making possible one or more shifts in status or political belonging, sustained by attitudes and discourses reflected in the notarial acts. This *transcultural* element is stressed as we introduce time in our observation. The **seven notarial casebooks** covered in the proposed timeframe will provide us with a vast sample of individuals and family groups who, monitored over long intervals, had left traces of such shifts.

More importantly, although unofficial members of nations have only recently been considered by scholars (Beck 1982; Subacchi 1995; Dursteler 2006), preliminary research on the Alexandrian notaries show that they played a crucial role in the functioning of trading networks. Access to the sources and historiographical traditions conspire to lead researchers to investigate groups and individuals whose family names can be easily noticed in the documents as charge holders, and whose careers and family lines can be easily reconstructed in the long run (O'Connell 2009). For instance, a recent monograph on the 1418-1420 Venetian community in Alexandria focuses on the consul and on the relevance of patricians and official members of the nation (Christ 2011). Notarial activity, analyzed from a network perspective, reveals striking conclusions: from the point of view of the community's business relations (i.e. number of ties recorded in the documents), and together with Venetian noblemen, most active actors accommodate Greek merchants from Crete, naturalized foreigners, Venetian subjects working for the sultanate's authorities as tax collectors, informers in Cairo and Jewish merchants (Apellaniz 2011). Even if second-rank Venetians were extremely relevant from a centrality point of view (this is, they were well connected with the rest of the merchant community through numerous ties) they were even more important as brokers. Biographic research shows that out of the 18 most active merchants 9 were lower-rank Venetians, of whom 8 struggled at court for their rights or shifted to a different religion or political adscription. They provided the nation with cultural skills and performed particular duties that could not be carried by official members. Providing cultural complementarity to the main group, they enabled interaction between the official nation and its neighbors. By exploring the new casebooks and enlarging my set of evidence (see B4 workplan), I will attemp to validate the hypothesis that those characters were crucial for the functioning of networks, and acted as milestones of the boundaries between formal (nations) and informal (minorities) entities (**Paper#2**). Shifting to a micro-analysis, their biographies will help understand the criteria of exclusion and inclusion, and illustrate how inter-group relations, cooperation and tensions took place.

Timeliness and relevance of the project

Yet, my project does not just aim at producing positive research on the early-modern Mediterranean. Rather, it is my ambition to make a contribution to a current discussion on the Humanities, that I describe in the following paragraphs. This discussion is currently defined by a series of antinomies and can be summarized as follows: our understanding of how people struck business deals with strangers is marked by the opposition between economic formalism and informalism, institutionally governed as against socially controlled organizations, modern vs. medieval, and network analysis vs. the historical-descriptive analysis of networks. For this reason, my proposed

research will merge the interests of the social sciences to analytically construct groups, of economists for institutions, and recent historical contributions to an understanding of cross-cultural trade.

Indeed, a strong division of labor still emerges from studies of the Mediterranean empires such as the Genoese, Catalan and Venetian, in the context of the post-crusade *commercial revolution,* and studies of the functioning of cross-cultural trade. National European historiographies continue to chart in great detail the economic, diplomatic and technical aspects of specific nations and zones of influence, from the point of view of economic, bilateral relations and with a bias on growth. This *annales*-style historiography contrasts with recent debates on world-history, such as Diaspora studies, cultural mediation, conversion issues or the intercultural trade of the Early-Modern commercial networks. Inspired by the work of anthropologists (Barth 1956; Barth 1969; Cohen 1971; Ortiz [1947], 1995), the studies on trading diasporas have contributed much to our knowledge of how boundaries between groups are constantly redefined. <u>However, diaspora historians bypass the 1300-1500 period because, unlike the oceanic expansion of more modern times, the three classic exempla (i.e. Armenians, Greeks and Jews) appear embedded in state powers</u>. But for classic studies of trading diasporas under Fatimid rule, like those described in the *Geniza* (Goitein 1960; Goitein 1967; Udovitch 2002, among others), we have to wait until the 16th century to find interest in the issue of how ethnic and religious networks worked. The problem with research on Diasporas is that it looks for an ideal group 'type', tied by family solidarities and governed by ethic norms and social control. The emerging Diaspora paradigm, elaborated in contexts of weak legal coercion, bypasses the highly institutionalized environment of the Medieval Mediterranean, and dismisses the role of multi-lateral or even legal devices in governing inter-group relations.
Recent case studies often neglect the major form of organization of Mediterranean trade: the merchant nation. The latter, overshadowed by the dynamic, informal features of early-modern religious Diasporas, has been relegated to the field of a medievalism dealing with the technicalities of trade, or viewed as one step on the economic path leading to western world-hegemony (for a criticism on that literature, Shatzmiller 2007; Apellániz 2009:1). In addition, <u>Diaspora studies research also challenge economic theories that insist on the importance of institutions, particularly legal institutions, such as the consulates, notaries and courts of justice typical of the merchant nations. Significantly, Diaspora studies invariably focus on historical contexts lacking a central authority and a common legal system, where merchant networks functioned due to reciprocity, kinship and reputation control</u> (Baladouni and Makepeace 1998; Israel 2002; Trivellato 2003; Slezkine 2004; Chaudhury 2005; Israel 2005; Studnicki-Gizbert 2007). Nonetheless, in the late medieval Mediterranean world, under the umbrella of state powers and sharing the same spaces, a multiplicity of trading nations and ethnic groups operated under heavy institutional constraint. Kinship and ethnic ties constituted only one dimension of the relational landscape. The project's timeliness resides in how it addresses the problem of how cross-cultural trade functioned, not by focusing on pre-determined groups, but by mapping <u>cooperation and interaction at the light of jurisdiction, legal categories and state policies</u>. <u>Taking advantage of a multi-lateral source and the trans-national approach adopted at the HEC Department, the project will</u> contribute to enhance ERA excellence by applying Diaspora and world History novel approaches to the study of the Mediterranean, and by including economic (network) analyses and by the re-elaboration of sociological concepts.

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