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A REIGN OF AUSTERITY: ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES DURING THE RULE OF GRAND MASTER XIMENES (1773-1775)

In this article, which is part of his B.A.(Hons.) thesis, PETER FAVA looks at some of the grave problems faced by Grand Master Ximenes in the mid-1770s, an administration that was not exactly the embodiment of good government in any sense.*

Signs of the decadence that for many years had been eroding the moral political and economic foundations of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem became more pronounced by mid-seventeenth century. In the following century Grand Master Pinto's misgovernment, if anything, helped accelerate the rate of decline. Parallel to this one must also consider another important factor — one which seriously questioned the Order's very existence in the centre of the Mediterranean: the growing international indifference towards the Order's role as the bulwark of Christendom in direct proportion to the ever increasing interest and appreciation (especially European) of the absolute strategic importance of the Maltese Archipelago. This problem must have preoccupied the Order, more so, as there was little or nothing it could do about it. Indeed, late in Pinto's reign, many were the affronts to the Order's flag at sea and violations of the Order's privileges on land: clear indications to the fact that the Order had lost much in power and prestige.¹

Economically Pinto had been making both ends meet

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by raising loans, and the Treasury was barely managing to avoid deficits. Nevertheless, a debt of 400,000 **scudi** against the Maltese Commune² was honoured. Deficits from 1770 to 1773 amounted to about a quarter million **scudi**,³ while the Maltese Commune was bankrupt. Pinto's successor faced a formidable task to re-establish the Order's finances and the **Massa Frumentaria** on a sound footing. The Commune required a new financial set-up and a commission of four Maltese deputies⁴ was appointed immediately on Ximenes' election to draw up an advisory report. The commissioners discovered that Pinto had appropriated 293,000 **scudi**; that the Commune's officials and clients had overdrawn 234,000 **scudi**; and that 66,000 **scudi**, and perhaps much more, were unaccounted for.⁵ The **Massa Frumentaria**, however, began running into difficulties before Pinto's meddling. In 1728, Grand Master de Vilhena had appropriated its funds to finance the building of his palace at Mdina and the repairs to the old city's fortifications. Successive Grand Masters had followed suit, and by 1741 the sum thus appropriated had reached almost half a million **scudi**.⁶ During Pinto's rule the debts incurred were astronomical: public officials, who were aware of the Commune's position, would not divulge it. Consequently, the **Massa Frumentaria** rarely had any cash in hand to make the usual wheat purchases from Sicily. The reason was that loans were unsecured and could not be recovered at will. Out-of-season purchases had to be made at prohibitive prices or not made at all and the annual sizeable *tratte* (the special reduced tariff quota of grain condoned to the Maltese Commune and the Order from Sicily) of 20,000 *salms* were at times forfeited.⁷

On 28th January 1773, the rich Grand Prior of Navarre, Francesco Ximenes de Texada, succeeded Pinto. Ximenes had been one of the Order's financial administrators; he had occupied the post of Seneschal or president of the Maltese Commune. Ximenes had also been a commissioner investigating magisterial debts. Consequently on his election, Ximenes must have been fully aware that the Order faced economic, financial and moral collapse.⁸ An extensive reform plan was required to offset the danger.

One of Ximenes' election promises was that he would supply the market-squares with foodstuffs.⁹ There was an acute grain shortage during Pinto's last year, mainly because

he had arbitrarily borrowed the **Massa Frumentaria's** funds earmarked for wheat purchases.¹⁰ In fact the food shortage had become so acute that the Commune had to resort to buying wheat from grainships which happened to be in port. As its money was tied up with the commission agents in Sicily, the Commune incurred large debts against the Order's Treasury in order to pay for these extraordinary purchases.¹¹ Ximenes could have wound up the **Massa Frumentaria**, but the Maltese commercial community would have been adversely affected, and many concerns would have collapsed. Yet some observers believed that Ximenes' attempt to save the Maltese Commune was ulteriorly motivated in that the **Massa Frumentaria** would then honour its debts towards the Order's Treasury.¹²

Ximenes' immediate problem was to import wheat. Within two days of his election he sanctioned the importation of the essential commodity aboard foreign vessels, thereby removing the legal obstacle to merchants in their having to charter Maltese vessels.¹³ The Grand Master also commissioned the Order's agents in Sicily to purchase food-stuffs from state granaries. The Sicilian authorities seemed, however, reluctant to abide by their contractual obligations,¹⁴ for Sicily had little grain to export due to crop failures in 1772 and others forecasted for the 1773 season. Yet somehow some merchants still received preferential treatment.¹⁵ Under the circumstances, the Commune sought grain markets elsewhere and importations were quickly effected from Puglia, the Marches and other distant places to avert the impending famine.¹⁶

These efforts offered only a short respite for the provisioning of the Island required long-term planning, which had been notoriously lacking. This problem was to plague Ximenes throughout his short reign. Moreover the people had assumed that as soon as Ximenes was in government, he would also lower the price of grain.¹⁷ Ximenes, however, soon realised that election promises could not be implemented overnight. In fact, he drew up a list of priorities: primarily, that of stocking the Floriana and Valetta granaries, without creating an artificial shortage¹⁸; and secondly, that of imposing a minimum sale-price of grain, allowing the **Massa Frumentaria** a substantial profit margin so that the Commune would obtain cash flow and start repaying its

debts.¹⁹ If these measures were successful, the price of grain could be reduced. Ximenes began to implement his new policies by decreeing an increase in the price of grain.²⁰

As the Order itself faced grave economic problems Ximenes thought of reducing state expenditure. Carnival festivities were curtailed and free refreshments were limited.²¹ Treasury and palace officials were no longer exempted from payment of postage dues because the postal service ran a loss of 13,800 scudi.²² The customary Embassy of Obedience to the Pope made by a special envoy of the newly-elected Grand Master was to be made in a non-pompous manner by the Order's resident ambassador to Rome.²³ Yet, notwithstanding ambassador de Breteuil's frugality, he failed to stay within Ximenes' 1,000 scudi allowance and he demanded the reimbursement of 600 scudi.²⁴ Ximenes also withheld from de Breteuil an annual 500 scudi grant²⁵ which de Breteuil used to spend on gifts addressed to the Vatican Secretary of State and other influential officials, who lobbied with the Pope to consider favourably the Order's grievances. The ambassador was, however, prepared to pay for the gifts himself rather than alienate the goodwill of these friends.²⁶ When Pope Clement XIV wanted to present the Grand Master with the Estoch and Pilier²⁷, Ximenes asked for a postponement to avoid further ceremonial expenses.²⁸

As is often the case the unhealthy economic situation soon triggered a crime wave. The authorities were understandably quite concerned and the *Notabile Università* appointed a mayor, a jurat and a catapan to bring criminals to book. Malta was divided into nine districts and the three officials were appointed in each. These officials were also authorised to inspect public houses, inns, the prices of foodstuffs, of wine and of cotton, to check whether these were in line with the Commune's regulations. Retailers could be arrested for presenting bad quality goods on the market.²⁹ Notwithstanding such measures the people were generally dissatisfied. To make matters worse, a rumour was gaining ground that the government intended to raise the price of grain again, when for several months now the populace had expected a reverse measure.³⁰ The prohibition of hare-snaring, decreed on 14th February 1773, had created great resentment among peasants, who feared that hares would destroy their crops.³¹ This prohibition, moreover, instigated a bitter

church-state controversy. The clergy had expected to be exempted from the prohibition,³² by virtue of the privilege they enjoyed of exemption from secular jurisdiction. After several incidents involving priests and the Grand Master's game-wardens, Ximenes succumbed to pressure and the clergy had their way, as long as they did not trespass the demarcated reserved areas.³³ The Bishop, Mgr. Pellerano, had maintained all along that priests had as much right to go hunting as knights.³⁴ Yet estrangement and mutual mistrust among the ecclesiastical and civil bodies set in. The peasants had to do without hare-meat until August 1773, when the government intended to withdraw the sanctions. But, resentment against the law, however temporary its nature, was augmented by the fact that agricultural products were inexplicably selling at a higher price in the villages than in the towns.³⁵

In the meantime Ximenes' economic policies with regards to the Maltese Commune and the Order's Treasury did not have the desired effect during the first six months of his reign. He, therefore, decided to tighten the belt further. When the Commune's overdraft with the Order's **Conservatoria** and the **Camera di Pagamento** reached 200,000 **scudi**, Ximenes halted more advances.³⁶ He also appointed a commission to look into the Commune's finance and to suggest economies. This Commission reported that administrative and charitable expenses could be cut down and salaries reduced.³⁷ As regards the Order, certain administrative posts had to be abolished, while salaries and the hospital's budget had to be reduced.³⁸ The **Università degli studi** had to forfeit its government grant of 2,000 **scudi**, which entailed the dismissal of expatriate professors with effect from 1st October 1773³⁹ and the retention of the lesser qualified Maltese teaching staff members with an annual salary of 180 **scudi** each.

Still the Maltese Commune showed no signs of recovery and to make matters worse wheat was again scarce. A food riot seemed imminent and the Order immediately took steps to deter rebellion. Sentries for the night-watch at the Valletta gates were doubled, the Grand Master's palace guards were increased and the city-streets were patrolled at night.⁴⁰ Soon, when mysterious night-time fire signals were attributed to the insurgents⁴¹, a detachment of guards was posted at **Portes-des-Bombes** to arrest suspicious looking persons pass-

ing through. Peasants were prohibited from entering Valletta before 6 a.m. and their weapons were sequestrated. When Ximenes insisted on raising the price of grain to eighteen **tari per tumolo** members of the Order's council opposed this provocation and the Grand Master withdrew the edict.⁴²

Events in Sicily forced Ximenes to moderate his austere policies.⁴³ The Palermitans had rioted because of grain shortages and the Viceroy chose to flee to loyal Messina.⁴⁴ Grain exports to Malta were withheld, notwithstanding the Sicilian contractual obligations towards the Island and that these were already paid for.⁴⁵ Ferment in the Maltese countryside continued to spread as a result and Ximenes had to be more sensitive to popular discontent.⁴⁶ He soon abolished for a two-year period the state monopoly on the importation of foodstuffs, but the goods would still have to be sold to the Commune at negotiated prices.⁴⁷ Further, he declared Malta a free-port zone with the exception of commerce in grain and wine.⁴⁸ Although these measures were intended to free the island from its endemic shortages of foodstuffs, in fact, no solution to this problem had been found and Ximenes resorted to the repeal of the hare-hunting law from the 3rd November to the 12th December 1773⁴⁹, yet simultaneously forbidding the presentation to him of the people's grievances for November.⁵⁰ The hunting season was extended to the end of December for the food supply had not improved, but as from 3rd January 1774, harsher penalties were enacted in the new game-law. Popular discontent was quite obvious and the authorities imposed a general disarmament⁵¹, thereby eliminating the threat of an armed uprising. Nevertheless, anonymous satirical pamphlets, circulated clandestinely, criticised Ximenes' policy regarding the problem of shortages.⁵²

Beside grain, wine also became scarce and costly, especially when the sale of wine from the Auberges for outside consumption was prohibited.⁵³ No step were, however, taken to import the essential commodity. The shortage persisted for four months when in February 1774 large consignments were bought from vessels which chanced to call at Malta.⁵⁴

By the first year since Ximenes became Grand Master, the situation had deteriorated rather than improved. Inflation was rife and prices kept rising unchecked, especially those

of meat, oil, wine and bread.⁵⁵ A meat shortage was solved but only temporarily and in a most highhanded fashion, when Ximenes ordered the slaughter of oxen, belonging to peasants, who naturally protested vociferously yet without success.⁵⁶

The Maltese Commune on the other hand was still vexed with impending bankruptcy and the financial administrators now had to set a deadline for the settlement of overdrafts with interests.⁵⁷ The *Milizia Urbana* was disbanded thus saving the Commune 60,000 scudi annually.⁵⁸ Ximenes donated the Commune 30,000 scudi to mark his first anniversary as Grand Master although no festivities commemorated this occasion.⁵⁹ The Order also made some savings: repair work on Valletta streets was halted⁶⁰, and the free distribution of medicines was discontinued.⁶¹ The Order, however, increased its monthly contribution to the House of Poor Women for this could no longer meet the heavy demand for assistance.⁶² Notwithstanding these well-intentioned measures ferment was still spreading, mainly because Ximenes had failed to implement his election pledges.⁶³ Stop-gap measures contradicted the government's declarations that it envisaged a long-term policy. A short respite in the grain-shortage problem was obtained in December 1773, but the overall position had not improved. Four months after Malta had become a free-port zone, foodstuffs had remained scarce. In fact, merchants had no more success than the Order when seeking wheat purchases from Sicily. As the situation deteriorated, Ximenes gambled on cultivating direct trade relations via French and vessels of other nationalities with North African ports, which were prepared to sell oil, wheat, foodstuffs and livestock in return for wood, nails and iron. Papal sanction to waive the Order's statutes was sought merely as a matter of courtesy.⁶⁴

The price of wheat could not, however, remain the same when the local grain stocks had dwindled. The Commune's officials and the Grand Master conferred three times before deciding to raise the price from 20 to 25 scudi per *salma*.⁶⁵ Ximenes obviously intended to safeguard the Commune's interests rather than those of the people on whom its effect was devastating:

"Questo improve a forte aumento di prezzo sembrò tuttavia, e fù in realtà esorbitante alle forze di questi popoli, che stanchi già

da gran tempo d'avere pelcorso di ben più anni, comprato sempre a tari quidici il tummino il Frumento, ed a caro costo ogn'altro commestibile, null'altro desideravano dall' amato Sovrano cotanto da esse applaudito nella di lui elezione se nonche un qualche sollievo alle loro miserie." ⁶⁶

This price increase did not solve the shortage problem, which became critical when a total ban on Sicilian grain exports came into effect ⁶⁷ and famine was only averted when Ximenes made purchases from grainships which "Divine Providence chanced to be in port" ⁶⁸, irrespective of cost. Soon Ximenes' free-trade policy began to pay dividends: three vessels laden with oil arrived from Messina ⁶⁹; three grainships came from Ancona ⁷⁰; five from France ⁷¹ and three from Tunis ⁷². These new supplies were, however, not regular and a definite regular supply had still to be secured. In fact, these stocks were quickly exhausted ⁷³ while the debt-ridden *Massa Frumentaria* had its cash money tied up in Sicily for eventual purchases, which could not be made because of the export ban on state-owned grain. ⁷⁴ Until the political situation in Sicily was stabilised and royal authority was enforced, no definite arrangement regarding the Maltese grain-rights could be re-established. Under the circumstances, Ximenes advised the Order's agents in Sicily to exchange these rights for the costlier privately-owned grain so that quick shipments could be effected. ⁷⁵ But grain for export was difficult to come by in Sicily and the little found was exorbitantly priced. ⁷⁶ Yet a Maltese agent obtained an export licence for 1000 *salme* of state-owned grain from Girgenti. Notwithstanding the Maltese rights, the agent was forced to pay the export tax when other foreign merchants had obtained theirs duty-free. This injustice was greater because the Maltese Commune had been deprived of availing itself of its preferential tariffs throughout 1773. ⁷⁷ To add insult to injury, the Girgenti authorities reclaimed 600 *salme* as Girgenti had run short on grain. ⁷⁸

Ximenes felt that these obstacles could only be surmounted through diplomatic pressure at the Neapolitan court. Though previous protests had been upheld in Naples ⁷⁹ and the Order had been authorised to obtain 3000 *salme* of state-owned grain and 3000 *salme* of privately-owned grain, the Sicilians were reluctant to fulfill their obligations with regard to the state-owned grain. ⁸⁰ The Order's Minister

Plenipotentiary in Naples was asked to insist with King Ferdinand III that the Sicilian authorities would not prevent the Maltese Commune from exercising its rights to preferential tariffs on exports from the Sicilian state-owned granaries. The King had to be made aware that the Order could not accept this unilateral abrogation of the Maltese rights and threatened to take steps to prevent famine in Malta. Talks between the Maltese envoy Pignatelli and the Neapolitan chief minister Tanucci would have to be short and conclusive, for Ximenes suspected that Tanucci was playing a double role. To counter Tanucci's argument that the Sicilians could not honour fully Malta's annual right to 26,000 *salme* of grain at preferential export tariffs, Pignatelli would have to quote from the 1749 tariff agreement between the King of Spain and the Order granting Malta at least 20,000 *salme*.⁸¹

This diplomatic haggling was not going to feed the Maltese and grain purchases were sought from Ancona. Some 541 *rubbia* of Austrian grain were shipped to Malta⁸², but these were of a bad quality.⁸³ The Pope was willing to sell the Order 2,000 *rubbia* from the papal granaries. Ambassador de Breteuil promised Grand Master Ximenes that the Roman grain would be better and cheaper than that from the Marches.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the Sicilian ban was lifted.⁸⁵

The grain flow into Malta improved considerably in the later half of 1774. Substantial quantities were imported from Sicily.⁸⁶ Grain was also bought quite cheaply from Algiers.⁸⁷ The impasse with the Sicilian authorities was overcome when Ferdinand III upheld and reaffirmed the 1749 agreement.⁸⁸ After further representations from Pignatelli, "His Majesty had graciously deigned to issue an order in Sicily so that the Order's galleys be given any provisions they would require when Malta would face a shortage of foodstuffs."⁸⁹

The improvement in the grain supply raised hopes among the people that the price would be reduced to an acceptable level. The people were, however, deluded and discontent at Ximenes' intransigence was obvious in a graffiti daubed on the Grand Master's palace walls. The slogan read: "Poveri Maltesi, in che miserie vi ha portato questo Gran Maestro."⁹⁰ More rebellious feelings were expressed on a loose leaf of paper left in a Valletta street with an open threat that Ximenes would soon face a "Sicilian Vespers."⁹¹

Political stability on the Island was again being threat-

ened with the resurgence of the politico-religious conflict. The January 1774 ban on hunting was at the root of the problem, because the Bishop had permitted, without prior authority from the Grand Master, his master-mason and some priests to go hare-hunting. The Bishops contended that the hares were causing extensive damage to the fields of his tenants.⁹² These hares had been purposely let loose by Ximenes in order of let them breed to the extent of becoming a cheap supply of meat to the peasants. The problem could not be solved easily for both personalities remained steadfast and they even exchanged gestures of disrespect in public.⁹³

Incidents involving the game-wardens, priests and the Bishop's exemptees were on the increase.⁹⁴ It was the Inquisitor's opinion that the disorders were mainly due to a few hot-headed ecclesiastics, who, with episcopal backing, took sport in causing disturbances.⁹⁵ Several other petty incidents widened the division between the secular and ecclesiastical bodies.⁹⁶ The arrest and beating on board an Order's galley of a Bishop's manservant,⁹⁷ the arrest by the Bishop's police of the Order's soldiers who had beaten the manservant,⁹⁸ the breaking down of the Bishop's prison gates by knights who freed these soldiers,⁹⁹ the rumour that some knights intended to assault the Bishop's palace¹⁰⁰ and the fleeing of the Bishop incognito from Valletta to Mdina,¹⁰¹ brought matters to a head.

The Maltese clergy were so alarmed at the gross disrespect shown towards the Bishop and ecclesiastical immunity that they made a public demonstration en masse in support of the Bishop at the Cathedral Square in Mdina, where they solicited in a **Pro Memoria** the immediate convocation of the Chapter General to discuss the situation.¹⁰²

The Grand Master, the Inquisitor and the Bishop reported the case to Rome and the Pope reproached the Bishop's handling of the affair and his provocative stance taken on the hunting laws. The Bishop was suspended and called to Rome to answer for his actions.¹⁰³

Before the Bishop's trip to Rome, however, another grave incident helped to create further animosity among the people. The Bishop had decided to intone the **Te Deum** on 19th February 1775 as a sign of thanksgiving on the occasion of the birth of an heir to the throne of Naples. Ximenes, however,

refused to attend for the Order had not yet taken steps to celebrate the occasion. The **Capitano della Verga** (the Mdina municipal mayor) and the Commune's officials were forbidden from attending. Still the Bishop went ahead with the Cathedral services against Ximenes' wishes. The next day graffiti in red paint were smeared on the bastions near the Senglea, Cospicua and Vittoriosa gates with the slogan: **Viva il Vescovo ed il Re di Napoli, nostro Sovrano.**"¹⁰⁴

The politico-religious conflict, coupled with the government's austere policies were causing political instability. On the other hand there was a good supply of foodstuffs, though, sometimes, the Sicilian authorities tried to flout royal assurances to the Order.¹⁰⁵ The meat shortage was also solved with the importation of 300 head of livestock from Sicily.¹⁰⁶ Oil and charcoal could still be bought from Sicily, though there was an export ban on the commodities.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless the people were depressed for the cost-of-living had spiralled and Ximenes' economy measures were causing massive unemployment. They still hoped that the least the government could do was to reduce the prices of grain. Rumours were, however, officially disclaimed. Ximenes had no intention of sanctioning a price reduction until all the debts of the **Massa Frumentaria** had been repaid. Ximenes' economic advisors maintained that the Commune could never reduce the price, because this had remained high in foreign markets. The people, however, had no confidence in the Commune's financial administrators¹⁰⁸ because they feared that the profit reaped from the excessive selling price of grain was not being used to pay off these debts. The people's hopes received a severe jolt at the end of May 1775.¹⁰⁹ Although the grain price was fixed, it rose by five scudi per *salma* to thirty scudi, which left the **Massa Frumentaria** a profit margin of nineteen scudi per *salma*, because the grain had been bought at such a low price due to its poor quality. This artificial measure to keep the price high was quite unjust and it provoked bitter protests.¹¹⁰ The Inquisitor commented to the Vatican Secretary of State that the little food the **basso popolo** were eating, rendered them so weak that an infectious disease soon assumed epidemic proportions.¹¹¹ The Grand Master was implored several times by the Jurats of the Maltese Commune, by the Governor of Notabile and by Grand Cross knights to reduce the price. These pleas

were all rejected because the Grand Master still believed that it was the only way of saving the **Massa Frumentaria**. At the same time, Ximenes promised that soon he would reduce the price.¹¹² The Inquisitor also tried to mollify Ximenes, but the latter attributed his austere measures to the grain shortage prevailing at his election. These measures were to be withdrawn, when the granaries were replenished and the people's misery thus alleviated.¹¹³

Once again a wave of crime swept over the Island during the first months of 1775. House-breaking, highway robbery, assault and murder became an everyday occurrence and the authorities were quite alarmed. Appropriate harsh laws¹¹⁴ were enacted coming into effect on 22nd June 1775.

Ferment among the populace become more explicit, especially when the Bishop, who had been postponing his departure from Malta since September 1774¹¹⁵, departed to Rome in April 1775. Many other cases of disrespect towards ecclesiastical immunity from the Order's side helped to foment further agitation.¹¹⁶

Meanwhile, seditious rumours clamouring for a grain-price reduction were spreading. On 16th July 1775, Ximenes spontaneously reduced the price of Sicilian pears from twelve **grani** per **rotolo** to two **grani**. The famished people promptly bought all the pears. Yet the populace demanded a similar measure as regards grain¹¹⁷, but the Grand Master did not oblige. The summer months were almost over when the people expected their exhortations to be upheld. But again the rumour proved false.¹¹⁸ This state of affairs could no longer be tolerated by a few hot-headed priests and ecclesiastics, who under the leadership of Don Gaetano Mannarino and together with some three hundred supporters made an abortive insurrection on 9th September 1775. The rebels believed that they would have immediate popular support, which however was dismally lacking. One of the demands from the insurgents, who had occupied St. James Cavalier and Fort St. Elmo in Valletta, in return for their submission, was a reduction in the grain-price.¹¹⁹ Ximenes had only promised that he would study their request. A rumour quickly gained ground that the price would be reduced on the Grand Master's birthday, 4th October 1775.¹²⁰ A contemporary diarist, Abbè Boyer, summed up the situation quite concisely when he commented that "every day the people

were hoping that the grain-price reduction would be sanctioned on the next; but the people's hopes were always disappointed".¹²¹ The 4th October arrived and passed and the people's expectation was once more dashed.¹²² Ten days later, the price was surprisingly reduced to twenty scudi. The people were, however, not wholly grateful, for they had expected the price to be fixed at sixteen scudi.¹²³ Ximenes must have realised that the people needed to be appeased for, in fact, the **Massa Frumentaria** was now selling the grain at a small loss.¹²⁴ Ximenes' successor went one better for in December, (a few weeks after this price reduction that is) De Rohan lowered the price to an acceptable level, personally assuming liability for all the losses the **Massa Trumentaria** might incur.¹²⁵ But then, Ximenes lacked both the imagination and the courage to take such a step which, incidentally would have given his popularity, which by then was at its very low, a much needed boost.

During his Grandmastership, Ximenes failed to solve any of the most pressing problems. He proved to be a bad economist and a worse administrator. It is true that the Maltese Commune made a notable improvement in that it managed to pay off a 600,000 scudi debt against the Order's Treasury.¹²⁶ This gave it a new lease of life, but at the expense of demoralising the whole Island and making its people suffer inhuman deprivations so that Grand Master de Rohan found much to put right after Ximenes' death. The Maltese Commune still needed the sound financial foundations which would put it back on its feet permanently. The Island still had to be replenished with foodstuffs.¹²⁷ On his election, Grand Master de Rohan appointed a commission to look into these two crucial problems, and especially to advise him on the feasibility of his primary intention to reduce the price of grain. The commissioners soon pointed out, however, that Ximenes' economy measures in the Commune's administration had been faulty in many respects, making it definitely uneconomical to effect any reduction in the price. The **Massa Frumentaria** could ill-afford a lowering of the price. De Rohan, however, did, as stated above, reduce the price and made a personal surety for the loss. The commissioners also revealed that there were shortages of rice, oil and other foodstuffs. They showed concern about the **Massa Frumentaria's** lack of liquid cash, which was needed to pay

for a six-month supply of grain to be bought from Sicily at the preferential tariff prices.¹²⁸

In fact, the situation seemed to have reverted to the time of Pinto's death. Yet in this short span of time two extra ordinary events took place: the Bishop was forced to leave the Island and the priests led an abortive insurrection against the Order, demanding the observance of the Maltese rights and the reduction of the price of grain. At the end of Ximenes' reign the political and economic atmosphere was oppressive; a contemporary wrote:

"Grande era l'orrore col quali si viveva
in quest'Isola, e massime nella città
Valletta grande il silenzio, et grandi il
conceputo timore d'ulteriori sconcerti...
Non più si univano alla solita conversazione
famiglie e gl'amici perche sparse per
ogni via le spie. Vivevasi, insomma, con
una gran noia a con somma consternazione."¹²⁹

a terrible but true condemnation of a short and sad administration.

NOTES:

- 1 R. Cavaliero, *The last of the Crusaders* (London 1960) pp. 150-151; F. Panzavecchia, *L'Ultimo Periodo della Storia di Malta sotto il Governo dell'Ordine Gerosolimitano, Ovvero Frammento dell'Istoria di Malta* (Malta 1835) p. 43; F.W. Ryan, *The House of the Temple* (London 1930) p. 78.
- 2 For a comprehensive study of the Maltese Commune and its public bank, the *Massa Frumentaria* see A(rchives of the) C(athedral,) M(dina) 58, Not(itiae) Misc(ellaneae, Ser(ie) B.T. V, ff. 314 r-v; N[ational] L[ibrary of] M[alta] Univ[ersità] 190, ff.150 v. 52 r-53 r; A. Mifsud, *L'Approvvigionamento dell'Università di Malta nelle passate dominazioni*, in *Archivum Melitense*, III, v; A. Schembri, *Sul debito della Massa Frumentaria e progetto economico per estinguerlo* (Malta 1851) p. 5.
- 3 A(rchives of the) O(rder of St. John of) M(alta) 272, ff.15 v-18 r, 200 v, 234 r, 250 v and 252 v.
- 4 NLM 1146, *Gior(nale di) Not(izie)*, II, p. 234, 21.4.1773; ACM 59, *Not. Misc.*, Ser. B.T. VI, f.3 r.
- 5 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, pp. 215, 234, 236, 240 and 242.
- 6 A(rchives of the) I(nquisitor,) M(dina) *Gior(nale) Ist(orica)*, f.14 v.
- 7 *Ibid.*, ff.15 r, 16 r-v and 17 r; NLM 167, ff. 178 r-v.
- 8 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 112, 8.4.1771; P. Cassar, *Medical History of Malta* (London 1964) pp. 226-227; C. E. Engel, *L'Ordre de Malte en Mediterranee, 1530-1798* (Monaco 1957) p. 112; A.P. Vella, *Malta and the Czars* (Malta 1965) p. 9; M.A. Sant, *Coinage problems facing the Order of St. John in Malta* (M.A. thesis presented to the University of Malta, May 1967, unpublished) pp. 278-279.
- 9 NLM 167, f.178 r.

- 10 AIM *Gior. Ist.*, f.17 r; M. Miège, *Histoire de Malte* (Paris 1840, 3 vols.) II, p. 270.
- 11 AOM 272, f.75 v; AIM *Gior. Ist.*, f.2 v.
- 12 *Ibid.* ff.3 r, 17 v-18 r.
- 13 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 214, 30.1.1773.
- 14 AIM *Gior. Ist.*, ff.17 v-18 r.
- 15 D.M. Smith, *Modern Sicily after 1713* (London 1968) p. 276.
- 16 AIM *Gior. Ist.*, f.3 r.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 ACM 59, *Not. Misc.*, Ser. B.T. VI, f.3 r; NLM 167, ff.178 r-v.
- 19 A(rchivio) S(creto del) V(aticano), *Lettere dell' Inquisitore in Malta*, a 1775-1776, N. 137, quoted after F. Laferla, *Una Giustizia Storica. Don Gaetano Mannarino nella luce dei documenti* (Roma 1926) p. 28.
- 20 *Ibid.* "... (Ximenes) mi ha risposto che la penuria nella quali si ritrovò a principio del Magistero lo ha obbligato a crescere il prezzo..."
- 21 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 219, 21.2.1773
- 22 AOM 273, ff.20 r-21 v; NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 230, 3.4.1773.
- 23 AIM *Alla Segreteria di Stato*, Tomo IV, ff. 425 v-426 r, 22.3.1773; AOM 1364, f.11 v, 13.4.1773.
- 24 *Ibid.*, f.44 v, 7.7.1773.
- 25 *Ibid.*, f.18 r, 20.4.1773; f.20 v, 27.4.1773; f.22 r, 27.4.1773.
- 26 *Ibid.*, f.18 r, 20.4.1773.
- 27 E. Schermerhorn, *Malta of the Knights* (London 1929) p. 256.
- 28 AOM 1364, f.24 r, 11.5.1773; f.26 r. 18.5.1773.
- 29 NLM Univ. 33, *Registra degli Atti*, ff.4 r, 5 v, 28.8.1773; NLM Univ. 190, *Chirografi*, a. 1770-1782, ff.26 r-27 v.
- 30 Panzavecchia, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
- 31 NLM 429, *Bandi* a. 1772-1779, ff.16 r-17 r; NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.* II, p. 217; Panzavecchia, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
- 32 Miegè, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
- 33 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, pp. 230-231.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 NLM Univ. 190, *Chirografi* a 1770.1782. ff.23 r-v.
- 36 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 240, 8.6.1773.
- 37 *Ibid.* 21.4.1773; ACM 59, *Not. Misc.*, Ser. B.T. VI, f.3 r. The preacher of the Advent and Lenton sermons of the Church of St Lawrence in Vittoriosa had his allowance reduced from eighty to thirty *scudi*.
- 38 Laferla, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27; Panzavecchia, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 and 49-50.
- 39 AIM *Alla Segreteria di Stato*, Tomo IV, f. 431 v, 20.9.1773; AOM 273, ff.21 v-22 v; NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, pp. 256-257; NLM 167, f.178 r. A. Vella, *The University of Malta* (Malta 1969) pp. 48-52.
- 40 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 255, 12.9.1773.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 256, 15.9.1773. An anonymous author, writing in ACM 58, *Not. Misc.*, Ser. B. T. V, f.241 r, claims that members of the faction of Bailiff d'Oz, who had contested the election for the Grandmastership against Ximenes, were the offenders.
- 42 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 256, 15.9.1773.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 257, 28.9.1773; NLM 167, ff.178 r-v; Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 308-311; Panzavecchia, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.
- 44 G.E. di Blasi, *Storia Cronologica dei Vicerè, Luogotenenti e presidenti* (Palermo 1842) pp. 639-640.
- 45 NLM 167, ff.178 r-v.
- 46 Panzavecchia, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- 47 NLM 429, *Bandi* a. 1772-1779, f.55 r; NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, pp. 248-259; Panzavecchia, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- 48 NLM 429, *Bandi* a. 1772-1779, f.56 r; NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 259;

- p. 259; Panzavecchia, *op. cit.*, p. 51; G.A. Vassallo, *Storia di Malta* (Malta 1954) p. 709.
- 49 NLM 429, *Bandi a. 1772-1779*, f.61 r.
- 50 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 262, 7.11.1773.
- 51 NLM 429, *Gior. a. 1772-1779*, f.67 r; NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 273, 3.1.1774; Panzavecchia, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- 52 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 262, 7.11.1773.
- 53 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 262, 7.11.1773.
- 54 AOM 1529, f.18 v, 3.1.1774.
- 55 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 276, 18.1.1774.
- 56 *Ibid.*,
- 57 NLM 429, *Bandi a. 1772-1779*, f.68 r; NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 273; AOM 1529, ff.21 r-v, 17.1.1774, Ximenes to de Breteuil: "... We have been informed that the noble Luigi Gianni has been indebted by 1,000 Maltese *scudi* towards this poor Commune since 1752... We are very keen to see this debt recovered."
- 58 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, pp. 276-277, 20.1.1774; Panzavecchia, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
- 59 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 278, 28.1.1774.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 267, 12.12.1773. But in AIM *Gior. Ist.*, f.17 v it is recorded that the very costly works on the Valletta streets were paid from the Commune's funds.
- 61 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 277, 20.1.1774; Panzavecchia, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
- 62 AOM 273, ff.22 v-23 r, 14.1.1773. The House or Hospital of Poor Women in Valletta was founded in 1646 by Catherine Scoppi, who, bequeathed all her possessions for the maintenance of this charitable institute. See V. Azupardi, *Raccolta di Varie Cose Antiche e moderni, utile ed interessanti riguardanti Malta e Gozo* (Malta 1843) p. 128.
- 63 Panzavecchia, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46; A. Ferris, *Storia Ecclesiastica di Malta* (Malta 1877) p. 277; Vassallo, *op. cit.*, p. 708.
- 64 AOM 1529, ff.28 v-29 r, 79 r; AOM 1346, ff.183 r-v, 189 v.
- 65 NLM 1146, *Gior. ot.*, II, p. 279, 3.1.1774. However according to AIM *Gior. Ist.*, ff.3 r-v and Mifsud, *op. cit.*, p. 197, the increase was effected on 12th February 1774, and not 3rd February 1774. The later date is unacceptable because Ximenes, writing to Paternò Castello in Palermo mentions in two letters ... both 7th February 1774 — that he was forced to sanction an increase in the grain-price. See AOM 1529, ff.30 r-32 v.
- 66 AIM *Gior. Ist.*, ff.3 r-v. *Tari quindici il tummino* is equivalent to *scudi venti per salma*.
- 67 AOM 1529, ff.11 r-v, 3.1.1774; ff. 30 r-32 v, 7.2.1774; f.41 v, 21.2.1774; f.49 v, 21.2.1774; ff.67 v-68 v, 21.3.1774. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 276, 311; di Blasi, *op. cit.*, pp. 639-641.
- 68 AOM 1529, f.49 v, 21.2.1774.
- 69 *Ibid.*, f.50 r, 21.2.1774.
- 70 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 287, 4.3.1774; AOM 1529, ff. 56 v-57 v, 7.3.1774.
- 71 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 287, 4.3.1774; AOM 1238, f.196 r.
- 72 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 287, 4.3.1774.
- 73 AOM 273, ff.29 r-v, 4.7.1774.
- 74 Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 276.
- 75 AOM 1529, f.49 v.
- 76 *Ibid.*, f.95 v.
- 77 *Ibid.*, ff.67 v-68 v, 21.3.1774. The Grand Master reiterated to Paternò Castello on this injustice: "— mostrosità di tal sorte non l'aspettamo da codesto Mons. Arcivescovo, e Ministri, alli quali farate noto il nostro rammarico, e la sorpresa di un così crudo tratto."

- 78 *Ibid.*, f.51 v, 2.3.1774.
79 *Ibid.*, ff.67 v-68 v, 21.3.1774.
80 *Ibid.*, ff.81 v-82 r, 11.4.1774.
81 *Ibid.*, ff.93 r-94 r, 25-4-1774.
82 AOM 1529, f.146 r.
83 *Ibid.*, f.164 r, 1.8.1774.
84 AOM 1364, ff.251 r-v, 28.6.1774.
85 *Ibid.*, ff.120 v-121 r, 23.5.1774.
86 *Ibid.*, ff.119 r-v, 120 v-121 r, 23.5.1774; ff.123 r-v, 6.6.1774; f.159 r, 10.8.1774.
87 *Ibid.*, f.147 r, 18.7.1774.
88 *Ibid.*, ff.119 r-120 v, 23.5.1774.
89 *Ibid.*, f.137 v, 4.7.1774.
90 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 318.
91 *Ibid.*, p. 314.
92 AOM 1529, f.181r.
93 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 237.
94 AOM 1529, ff. 173 v, 185; P. Callus, *The Rising of the Priests, its implications and repercussions on Ecclesiastical Immunity* (Malta 1961) p. 18.
95 ASV *Lettere dell'Inquisitore in Malta a. 1773-74*, N. 136 quoted after Laferla, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.
96 AOM 1529, ff.178 r-v; NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, pp. 330, 334-335.
97 AIM *Alla Segreteria di Stato*, Tomo IV, ff.440, r-v; NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, 11, p. 336.
98 AIM *Alla Segreteria di Stato*, Tomo IV, ff.440 v, 441 r.
99 *Ibid.* ff.440 r-441 r; AIM *Gior. Ist.*, f.4 v; NLM 1146 *Gior. Not.*, II, p. 338; NLM 167, ff.182 v-183 r; AOM 273, ff. 45 r-v; AOM 1529, f.198 r.
100 AIM *Alla Segreteria di Stato*, Tomo IV, f. 440 v; AOM 1529, f.199 r.
101 AIM *Alla Segreteria di Stato*, Tomo IV, ff. 440 v-441 r; NLM 167, ff.183 r-v.
102 AOM 1529, ff.212 v-213 v; AIM *Dal Sant'Ufficio all' Inquisitore a. 1771-1777*, f.150 r; AIM *Alla Segreteria di Stato*, Tomo IV, f.441 v, 3.9.1774; AIM *Gior. Ist.*, ff.5 r-v; NLM 137, ff.183 v-184 r.
103 AIM *Alla Segreteria di Stato*, Tomo IV, f.442 r; AOM 1529, ff.234 r-v.
104 NLM 1146, *Gior. Not.*, II, pp. 346-347; NLM 137, ff.33 v, 35 r.
105 AOM 1529, f.204 r
106 *Ibid.*, f.166 r.
107 *Ibid.*, f.249 v.
108 NLM 137, f. 57 r.
109 *Ibid.*, f.63 r.
110 *Ibid.*, f.60 r.
111 AIM *Gior. Ist.* f.4 v; AIM *Alla Segreteria di Stato*, Tomo IV, f.445 v.
112 AIM *Gior. Ist.*, f.4 v.
113 ASV *Lettere dell'Inquisitore in Malta a. 1775-1776*, N. 137, quoted after Laferla, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
114 NLM 429, *Band a. 1772-1779*, f.112 r; NLM 137, f.71 r; AIM *Gior. Ist.*, f.4 r; AIM *Alla Segreteria di Stato*, Tomo IV, f. 450 v, wherein the Inquisitor informs the Vatican Secretary of State that Malta was infested with thieves.
115 AOM 273, f.46 r; AIM *Dalla Segreteria di Stato a. 1774*, ff.6101 r-v.
116 P. Fava, *Francesco Saverio Ximenes d eTexada, problems facing the Order of St. John during his Grandmastership, 1773-1775* (Bachelor of Arts thesis presented to the History Department, University of Malta in May 1970, unpublished) pp. 79-177.
117 NLM 137, f.84 r.

- 118 *Ibid.*, f.102 r.
 119 AIM Gior. 1st., ff.7 v-10 r.
 120 NLM 137, f.102 r.
 121 *Ibid.*, f.128 r.
 122 *Ibid.*, f.128 v.
 123 *Ibid.*, f.133 v; AIM Gior. 1st., f.35 v.
 124 *Ibid.*, f.45 r.
 125 *Ibid.*, f.45 v.
 126 *Ibid.*, f.36 r; NLM 794, p. 5.
 127 AIM Gior. 1st., f.44 v.
 128 *Ibid.*, f.45 r.
 129 *Ibid.*, f.31 v.

ON MALADMINISTRATION . . . AND AUSTERITY

Soon after the tragic invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the country's prisons were soon crowded with political prisoners. In one prison in Prague prisoners were trying to know more about each other. "I have been here for a little while now because I was against Dubcek," said one to a newcomer: "That's funny", replied the latter, "I have just been rounded up because I was for Dubcek!" "Beat this", came a quiet voice from a corner of the darkened damp cell: "I am Dubcek!"