
THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN 1793 - 1797: IMPENDING COLLAPSE OF A GLORIOUS HERITAGE

The despatches of Antonio Miari,
Venetian Minister in Malta

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By the time Fra Antonio Miari had assumed the office of *Huomo della Repubblica* in Malta, the Order's fate lay less in the hands of Grandmaster De Rohan and his State Council than in those of the directors of national policy in France. Within the narrow span of four days (19-22 September 1792), the publication of the venomous *loi spoliateur*, which nationalised all the Knights' possessions in France, the abolition of the French Monarchy and the proclamation of the Republic, provoked within the Order an acute sense of isolation and impending disaster. On 22 October of the same year the National Convention abolished the Institution in France. This essay does not set out to provide a general survey of the original events which led to the final collapse of the Order of St. John. These are now widely known.¹ Its concern is with an intelligent, perceptive and intriguing firsthand account of the final four years of De Rohan's magistracy by Antonio Miari, a 38-year-old contemporary observer from Belluno and the Grandmaster's Secretary for Italian Affairs, gripped as he was by the *terreur de l'avenir* which the upheaval of the French Revolution generated within his Order.²

1. For general surveys of the history of Malta and the Order of St. John during the French Revolutionary period, F.W. Ryan, *The House of the Temple: A Study of Malta and its Knights in the French Revolution* (London 1930); F. Panzavecchia, *L'ultimo periodo della storia di Malta sotto il governo dell'Ordine Gerosolimitano* (Malta 1835); M. Miège, *Histoire de Malte* (Paris 1840), vol.II 267-480; vol.III, 1-13; R. Cavaliero, *The Last of the Crusaders; The Knights of St. John and Malta in the eighteenth century* (London 1960), 181-242.
2. Miari's despatches to the Doge are in A[rchivio di] S[tato] V[enice], *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, Filza lettere dell'Agente Veneto in Malta da 27 marzo 1793 sino 30 marzo 1797 da Ven[erando] Fra Antonio Miari. His despatches to the Venetian Magistracy of Trade are in ASV, C[inque] S[avi alla] M[ercanzia], *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76.

A "learned scholar" and "distinguished diplomat", Antonio Miari was appointed Resident Minister for Venice at the Grandmaster's Court in Malta on 1 February 1793, to deal with political, social and economic matters in the interests of Venice, its merchants and its subjects residing in the island.³ It is in this latter capacity that he traversed what is perhaps the most crucial period in the history of the Order, in a regular correspondence which he kept with the Doge and the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia* from March 1793 to March 1797. Though this collection of letters provides few startling revelations, it augments what is generally known through a fulness of detail and affords some fascinating sidelights on the history of the years they cover. Its author makes a clear effort to diagnose the reception and processing of the basically catastrophic character of the crisis within the Order. Moreover, in an unremitting pursuit of an appraisal of the economic and social state of the island, which partly sidetracks his main political concern, Miari provides an excellent review of Veneto-Maltese relations in the 1790s. These were indeed courageous letters which told some hard truths which needed telling.

A STATE OF ISOLATION

The Order's strength and vitality had long lain with its past, and the history of its struggle to justify the reason for its existence throughout the ages had been underscored by a protracted academic debate, whose validity rested exclusively on the inviolability of custom and tradition.⁴ It had never been in the Order's nature, nor in its capacity,

3. "Onde tutto impegnarmi al rispettabilissimo servizio della Serenità Vostra, sia invigilando ai suoi essenziali politici riguardi à questa parte, sia agli interessi d'ogni genere, non meno che ai vantaggi dei sudditi Veneti, come altresì alla conservazione non solo, ma all'aumento ancora se sia possibile della reciproca amicizia e buona intelligenza tra la Serenità Vostra e questa Sacra Religione." ASV, *Senato, Segreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 21 March 1793. See also ASV, *CSM, Diversorum, busta 403, fascicolo 76*, 21 March 1793; *ibid.*, Copia di lettera scritta da S[ua] A[ltezza E[minentissima] al Doge di Venezia in data de 22 Marzo 1793; "Questo Signor Cavaliere Comendator Miari," the Inquisitor of Malta reported to the Vatican Secretary of State, "ricevè dalla sua Repubblica di Venezia le Lettere Credenziali, colle quali viene dichiarato Ministro degli Affari in quest'Isola, e che immediatamente si portò a presentare all'Eminentissimo Gran Maestro. La mattina seguente venne formalmente a darne a me parte, ed in seguito praticò un tal atto con tutti i Ministri dell'altre Corti qui residenti". Archives of the Inquisitor] M[alta], *Corrispondenza* 102, f.62, 21 March 1793. For a brief note on Miari's career, H.P. Scicluna, "Notes on the Admiralty House, Valletta", *Archivum Melitense* IX,2 (1933), 71. From June 1795 to June 1798, Miari lived in a commodious palace in South Street, Valletta, known later as Admiralty House, now housing the National Museum of Fine Arts. *Ibid.*, 60; V.F. Denaro, *The Houses in Valletta* (Malta 1967), 106.

4. The international organisation of the Order has been described as "already out of date in political terms by the thirteenth" century. J. Riley-Smith,

nor even in its will, to adapt to a new environment, as the years under review illustrate with great lucidity.

On the international spectrum, the French Revolution marked for the Order a definite break with its past, and confirmed with irrefutable logic the Institution's irrelevance to the present. In these circumstances, the Order's conscious sense of isolation was both 'a state of mind' and 'an objective condition'. The loss of its principal protector in the institution of the French Monarchy shattered its system of political allegiance and dependence, upon which the entire structure of its political and social status was built. The abrupt termination of its flow of *responsiones* from France, Germany and Northern Italy, and its diminished revenues from Spain, Portugal and those parts of Italy which were still unconquered by the French armies, depleted its treasury in Valletta beyond all hope of recovery. By the end of 1795 the loss "was estimated to have amounted to 471,784 Maltese scudi"; and this did not include "the loss on the Antonine estates, on which the Order as far as the year 1792 must have incurred an outlay of a full million of scudi". The Order's revenues had fallen to approximately one-fourth.⁵ Above all, the Order was ill-prepared and ill-equipped for its final blow. The economic comfort it had enjoyed from the strategic positional value of its headquarters in Malta had been seriously shaken by the shift in international relations, rather than by the debatable economic decline of the Mediterranean; its naval power and importance had been considerably weakened by technological advances, Anglo-French trade rivalries in the Levant and the rise of the Barbary States. It could not, on the one hand, take refuge behind its inveterate statutes by faithfully observing for an indefinite period of time a strict neutrality in the midst of so turbulent a crisis without Great-Power protection. Nor, on the other hand, could it afford to take sides formally and actively participate in the coalition against France, without incurring exorbitant expenses.

On the domestic level, an exuberance of deep, undisciplined temperamental contrasts sharpened the main issues at stake. A month after the execution of Louis XVI, Mgr. Julius Carpegna, Inquisitor General and Apostolic Delegate in Malta, wrote to the Cardinal Secretary of State in Rome:⁶

The Knights of St. John in Jerusalem and Cyprus c.1050-1310 (London 1967), 475-476.

5. W.H. Thornton, *Memoir on the Finances of Malta ...* (Malta 1836), 25-26; ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 30 March 1797; Panzavecchia, 317-318, 330; J. Bosredon de Ransijat's accounts in AOM 6406; AOM 274, ff.257v-258v, *Relazione dei Commissari deputati per esaminare le spese pubbliche*, 9 December 1795; L.de Boisgelin, *Ancient and Modern Malta* (London 1805), vol.1, 296-326; W. Hardman; *A History of Malta during the period of the French and British occupation 1798-1815*, ed. J. Holland Rose (London 1909), 547-549.
6. AIM, *Corrispondenza* 102, ff.60v-61r, 23 February 1793.

Yesterday morning, in the main square of Valletta, forty French Knights formed a mutinous assembly. Their design was to proceed to the house of M. Como (sic), the French Minister, remove the Royal Arms and transfer them to the auberge of the [French] Langue; and this for the reason, that since M. Como (sic), Minister of the King, could not continue in his office (the King having expired) without offering allegiance to the new Constitution, thereby rendering himself unworthy of retaining the Royal Insigna. On being informed of the incident, the Maestro Scudiero of His Eminence the Grand Master went personally to the square and by force of persuasion managed to disperse the assembly and to make each one return to his home. In the afternoon the heads of this party were arrested by this Government.

Another incident occurred the preceding night in one of these cities, known as Senglea or l'Isola. Six or eight *martingao*, i.e., captains of French vessels, encountered a patrol; and on being asked their identity by the latter, the former answered they were *La Ronda*. On being further pressed as to which *ronda* it was, they seemed confused and to avoid being surprised, they put their hands on their swords. The soldiers, however, immediately pointed arquebuses at them and constrained them to give up and accept arrest. It is not known as yet which resolution will be taken by this Government.

A 'VERITABLE PICTURE'

In his early correspondence, Antonio Miari claimed to portray "a veritable picture" of the prevailing tension on the island. But he also did far more. He offered a valuable conspectus of the political, social and economic context of the Order's crisis, though he said little of the existing conditions of the indigenous population. The island, he claimed, was geared to such a state of "valid and imposing defence" as on the eve of "a formal siege".

I have never felt convinced that this Island has ever been seriously threatened by the French Republic; but presently it seems extravagant merely to entertain the idea.⁷

The excessive concentration on the massive amount of work that was entailed, and the crippling economic setbacks that were encountered in order to realise the solid defence programme, envisaged against any possible aggression, would, thought Miari, inevitably make the Order experience "the consequences of an evil by far greater than those of a war which the French would ever hope to wage by their arms."⁸ Measures taken to offset this predicament, such as the attempt to ne-

7. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 21 March 1793.

8. *Ibid.*

gotiate a loan of 400,000 Maltese scudi,⁹ or the open invitation to all Knights to come to the rescue of the Order "with spontaneous succours" in proportion to their means,¹⁰ would only alleviate the situation temporarily. The Order, he predicted, would before long have to resort to more drastic measures, such as the imposition of a general tax upon its European possessions, which, however unpleasant to the already impoverished Knights and other members of the Order, was the only reliable means of augmenting its income; only such a tax could be calculated with a definite degree of certainty.¹¹ These measures, in Miari's view, "would very likely constitute our dying breath".¹²

Miari searches beneath the surface for the roots of a greater evil. To solve the economic and financial crises, which he defined as "the direst straits", it was necessary, he thought, to combat a wide range of abuses, thefts, embezzlements and a "ridiculous and prejudicial sense of priorities". However, as so often happens in political psychology, when one comes to implimenting austere reforms, one is faced with insurmountable obstacles from all quarters. "Evil," he said, "cherishes its own obstinate protectors and perpetrators." The preponderance of French Knights and their intrigues against the stability of their languishing Institution obfuscated the search of a workable solution.¹³

9. AOM 274, f.223v, Supplica dell'Ordine al S. Pontefice relativa all'imprestito di 400,000 scudi maltesi, 5 July 1793; Panzavecchia, 321-322.
10. "Somma penuria di denaro nell'Orario Pubblico, per cui si è dovuto apprire un'imprestito di 400 mila scudi di questa moneta, e invitare tutti li Religiosi a sovvenire la loro Madre Comune con dei spontanei soccorsi, proporzionati alle forze d'ogn'uno." ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 11 April 1793.
11. "Sarà forse indispensabile venire ad un' aumento di risponsioni delle Commende dell'Ordine ed altri estremi partiti". *Ibid.*; "La perdita fatta da questa Religione di tutte le sue Commende esistenti nelle tre Lingue di Francia, avendo cagionato una notabilissima mancanza di rendite al Commun Tesoro, hà dato à progettarsi in un Consiglio Ordinario, che fù convocato, ne' scorsi giorni, di duplicarsi le corrisposte delle Commende esistenti nelle altre Lingue; onde riparare in qualche maniera la sudetta mancanza. Ed essendo stato approvato simil progetto, sono stati nominati i Commissarij, per formare gli opportuni piani, a quindi riferirli al Consiglio Compito, dal quale si devono approvare, perché possono eseguirsi." AIM, *Corrispondenza* 102, ff.61-62, 7 March 1793. "Benchè qui facciassi da questa Religione ogni possibile sforzo per restringere le sue spese ed equilibrarle al suo introito, molto considerabilmente diminuito dopo la rivoluzione di Francia, pure si teme, che non potrà giungere al desiderato equilibrio senza cercare d'accrescere nel tempo stesso le sue rendite. Il solo certo e calcolabile accrescimento può essere quello di aumentare le imposizioni e li diritti a favore della Religione sulli stessi suoi Beni e proprietà: ma questo mezzo, benchè il più sicuro è il più duro ancora per tutti gli individui dell'Ordine; quasi tutti già aggravati moltissimo per li pesi locali e per l'imposizioni de' rispetti sovrani. Quindi non si verrà à questo espediente, che al più tardi possibile, e quando realmente non si potrà più fare a meno".
12. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 11 April 1793.
13. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 21 March 1793.

We have no motive to trust neither their bounteousness, nor their intention, nor their judgement, since their head is an extremely exalted person.

No decree of the National Convention, he confessed, however economically debilitating, would succeed in extinguishing the Order. Rather, it was the perfidious and violent internal dissension that pervaded the entire body politic of the Order which would ultimately destroy it — that inherent incapacity to put up a spirited resistance to confront the enemy without with a will power and concerted action within. The Order was French dominated. The major naval and military positions, the principal administrative and judicial organs of State were either occupied or controlled by members of the French Langues. The fate of the Order lay almost exclusively in French hands. Every useful project of reform and economy “was rejected by that [French] party whose only end in life was annihilation and despair”. Miani trusted in the remote eventuality that a final catastrophe, “always dangerous and often fatal”, would force unity upon them.¹⁴

RELATIONS WITH THE VATICAN

De Rohan's caution and circumspection, characteristic of his politics during the period immediately following the *loi spoliateur*, contrasted sharply with his approach to what he was made to believe was necessary reform. This dichotomy was especially evident in his relations with the Vatican. In 1793 the Order had just narrowly survived a serious dispute with the Papacy. For quite some time, outstanding differences had existed between the Government of De Rohan and the Holy See over the extent and exercise of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The question would not have unduly worried either party, had not the Court of Naples claimed the right to interfere through its ‘alto dominio’. Commendatore Grimaldi, on behalf the Neapolitan Court, charged the Grand-

14. “Si dovrebbe credere che conosciuto il male fosse facile il rimedio: pure non è così; le Nazioni componenti l'Ordine di Malta erano da tanto tempo così poco assuefatte a riunirsi e ad agire in concerto, che ancora non ne trovano la via. Io spero non di meno che l'estremo pericolo ci unirà tutti, il che è il solo mezzo di far argine ad una truppa di falsi fratelli, che ad altro non pensano che a fare un bottino di tutto. Essi cercano ancora compromettere il Governo con delle misure esorbitanti verso la Francia, volendo solo il disordine, in cui unicamente sperano. Tutto quello ch'è prudenza, moderazione, misurata politica è posto da essi in ridicolo e sbandito dai loro consigli, nè vale tal volta, per non fare delle spese enormi, e malcombinare il dire non v'è denaro, ch'essi costì che costì tirano inanzi.” *Ibid.* On the extent to which the Order and Malta were under French influence, J. Godechot, “La France et Malte au XVIII^e siècle”, *Revue historique* CCVI (1951), 67-79; M. Chaillan, “Le commerce de Malte avec Marseille et la France”, *Memoires de l'Institut historique de Provence* (1935), 173-199; A. Hoppen, *The Fortification of Malta by the Order of St. John 1530-1798* (Edinburgh 1979), 156-167.

master, the four Grand Crosses (who made up the commission appointed by the State Council to settle the dispute amicably with Rome), the Inquisitor and the Bishop with the execution of 'fourteen articles' concerning the ecclesiastical differences. The Royal Court of Naples was determined to regulate the administration of the curias of the Inquisitor and the Bishop of Malta, to assimilate the diocesan curia with that of the Sicilian bishops and make it completely dependent on the Sicilian Crown. "A claim," observed Miari, "which had always been repudiated by the Order."¹⁵

De Rohan's reaction exceeded the limits that would have probably been tolerated previously. The driving power behind De Rohan's attitude was his *uditore* Muscat, whom Miari refrained from mentioning by name. He referred to him as "un sol soggetto" who was well-known to Tomaso Condulmer, the Venetian *Capitano delle Navi*, for the antipathy he had always nourished towards Venetians.¹⁶ The influence and prestige which Muscat appears to have enjoyed at the Grandmaster's Court, due to his advanced ideas and enlightened notions of absolute sovereignty and authority, prompted De Rohan to set up a reform ordinance to regulate the position of the Church in relation to the State. This ordinance, clever by the mechanics of eighteenth century despotism but fateful in its consequences, would have loosened the ties of the diocesan church with Rome and prevented the automatic execution in Malta of papal orders without prior approval through the State Council.¹⁷

It is ironic that the fatal stab to the Order had almost been dealt by its own "supremo superiore". Pius VI's fury and resentment had almost realised what the French revolutionaries had so far failed to achieve — the complete and immediate extinction of the Order.

The Pope has been furious in such measure against us, or rather against our Head, that he seriously threatened to mete out to us the treatment which his immediate Predecessor had reserved for the Jesuits. In essence it amounts to an assertion of our inexistence.¹⁸

The Pope's argument was simple. If the Order, itself a privileged institution, was not prepared to tolerate any further ecclesiastical privileges, it would be dissolved.¹⁹

All the pontifical wrath [continues Miari] would have descended upon the man, had the Grand Master not intervened on his be-

15. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 11 April 1793.

16. "Per l'indisposizione ancora, che molto inguistamente avea contro li sud-diti Veneti". *Ibid*.

17. Panzavecchia, 270-280.

18. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 30 April [1793]. The Society of Jesus was suppressed by Pope Clement XIV's Bull *Dominus ac Redemptor*, published on 16 August 1773.

19. Panzavecchia, 281.

half beyond the call of his duty, to the effect that he advanced in his office.²⁰

Muscat, the "unworthy Minister", as the Roman Curia called him,²¹ and who was later to defend "the exemptions and privileges of the Maltese Nation" against Napoleon's usurpation in June 1798,²² was in the end dismissed. Miari opined that De Rohan would live to regret the "tanta bontà e condiscendenza" he had shown Muscat, for although the "new law" had had to be withdrawn, the *uditore's* aspirations and ambitions bequeathed the ailing De Rohan "the indignation of the Pope" and the "profound displeasure of His Sicilian Majesty". The traditional intercession, on behalf of the Order, of the highly influential French monarch in international disputes like this, was a thing of the past.²³ Was it perhaps a move to regain the intransigent Pope's lost sympathy that in 1796 De Rohan offered Pius VI refuge and hospitality in fortified Malta, when the ominous threat for the partition of the Papal States emerged with the arrival of the French armies at Bologna?²⁴

20. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 30 April [1793].

21. Panzavecchia, 281.

22. Ryan, 307; Panzavecchia, 470-471.

23. "Tutti gli riscontri sono che si trattava realmente della nostra non esistenza. Pare impossibile, che un' Uomo illuminato com'è il Gran Maestro abbia voluto mettersi a questo repentaglio per conto di qualche ecclesiastica giurisdizione, che si vorrebbe riformare. Fortunatamente, ch'egli era sembra rinvenuto dal sistema che lui sopra tutti portava alla perdizione, dando luogo alla verità ha veduto che siamo così piccoli che non possiamo contrastare col Papa, che oltre ad essere una Potenza rispettabilissima per noi, è poi ancora il nostro Supremo Superiore: che le circostanze non sono più quelle de tempi passati, quando avevamo degli appoggi fortissimi quasi a nostra disposizione ...; Ha abbandonato dunque le novità che voleva introdurre, se non contro i positivi e reali diritti della Chiesa, almeno contro i privilegi della stessa, e contro le antiche consuetudini che vanta ...". ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 30 April [1793].

24. "Sono certo", wrote Miari, "che Vostra Serenità non ignora essere stato proposto seriamente al Papa di trasferirsi in Malta in caso di grave pericolo suo e della Chiesa, da cui è pur troppo minacciato." ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 29 September 1796. In 1796 the Pope made two requests to De Rohan: the first for the supply of "10,000 fucili ò in prestito semplicemente ò anche in vendita secondo più sia a grado dell'Eminentissimo Gran Maestro". The reason is given thus: "Costretto il Sommo Pontefice di fornirsi di una sufficiente forza armata, con la quale garantire il suo Stato da quelle ostilità che può giustamente tenere dalle armi Francesi calate nell'Italia dopo che si è interrotta ogni negoziazione di Pace tra di lui e la Nazione sudetta, e non avendo ne' suoi Arsenali tutta la quantità d'armi corrispondente al bisogno." The Pope's second request was that in order to keep "sicurezza e tranquillità de suoi sudditi," he was determined "di allontanare da suoi Stati tutti li condannati in vita nelle sue galere, come quelli che in caso di ostili incursioni possono essere perniciosissimi perché disposti sempre a tentare insorgimenti favorevoli ai nemici, sulla fiducia di esimersi così da quella pena che giustamente soffrono per i loro delitti. Desidera il Santo Padre di trasmettere tali condannati in Malta, luogo in cui possono più facilmente, che in ogn' altro essere custoditi, e

The isolationism, which by April 1793 had developed into a predominant feature of the Order of St. John, was therefore due as much to foreign forces, over which De Rohan had no direct control, as to his vanity and wild, secular political ambitions. Deprived, as the Order now was, of any serious protection, the disastrous consequences of the unnecessary dispute over ecclesiastical jurisdiction grew in dimension. It further weakened the Order's position and psychologically semi-disowned De Rohan in Rome and Naples. The cold, relentless realism of these developments determined the direction the Order's politics were to take during the next four years.

IN SEARCH OF AN ALLY . . .

In his letter of 25 February 1796, Miari wrote thus:²⁵

All that is here attributed to the Religion, such as its spirit imbued with zeal, energy and inventiveness, does not concern itself except with such means, more or less efficient, durable, and even almost instantaneously effective, by which the Religion, since it finds itself in exceptionally trying circumstances, may profit withal.

This is immediately followed by a reference to "the projects lately attempted".²⁶ The principal difficulty lay not in identifying the problem but in arriving at any decision to resolve it. The final years of De Rohan's magistracy were years of painful readjustment through abortive attempts to restructure a different set of political relationships and embark on domestic socio-economic ventures, in the vain hope of finding an answer to the many complex problems challenging the basis of the Order's existence and threatening the relative prosperity of the principality of Malta. Requests for patronage, disguised under different shapes and forms, were made by De Rohan with an almost urbane tone of resignation. These ranged from a political agreement with Britain and an economic treaty with the United States of America to a vague alliance with Catherine II's Russia. This was curious policy, completely at odds with the Order's traditional, conservative doctrine. The attempts failed. The inconsistency and imbalance shown by De Rohan and his State Councillors in taking important decisions accounted for their failure. These decisions were hardly ever based on pragmatic analysis of what was truly advantageous and what was not. Neither were they flexible or realistic enough. Their approach was as unsettled as De Rohan's 'programme of action' was unsettling. On certain occasions, he displayed mastery, tact, boldness and unrestraint; on others, he foiled all expectations.

ripresi, per l'impossibilità nella quale sono di fugire." AIM, *Corrispondenza* 102, ff.285-286, 29 October 1796. For the Grandmaster's reaction to the two requests, *ibid.*, ff.287-288, 30 October 1796.

25. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 29 February 1796.

26. *Ibid.*

Under the pretence of a strict adherence to its traditional statutory neutrality, the Order's position in relation to France was kept cautiously ambiguous. De Rohan made no formal declaration of policy until October 1793. News of the King's execution had arrived in Malta as late as 25 February, whereas Naples did not declare war on France until September of that year. The Grandmaster would not commit himself until the Court of Naples had defined its own position clearly.²⁷ Nevertheless, the case concerning the French *Homme du Roi* in Malta exposed the ambivalence of De Rohan's stand. Seytres-Caumont, whom Inquisitor Carpegna described as "a Knight of strict and righteous principles",²⁸ had been since 1778 Louis XVI's Resident Minister in Malta. After the execution of the monarch, De Rohan unhesitatingly reconfirmed him in that office and authorised him to continue to have the legitimate French arms over his official residence.²⁹ That was bold and vociferous. When Naples then declared war on France, and the Minister, in accordance with the terms of the donation-deed of 1530,³⁰

27. AOM 274, f.217, Lettera del Bali Francese con la quale annunzia la morte di Luigi XVI, Re di Francia, 8 February 1793; AOM 276, f.4, Il Gran Maestro partecipa al Consiglio la morte di Luigi XVI, 25 February 1793; Panzavecchia, 309. "Coll'ultimo ordinario è giunta a questo Gran Maestro una lettera di Monsieur, fratello dell'infelice Luigi XVI, con cui gli partecipa l'assunta Reggenza del Regno di Francia in occasione della Minoretà di Luigi XVII, ed invitandolo a dare delle pubbliche e solecite prove dell'attaccamento dell'Ordine alla Corona di Francia ed ai suoi Re. Questa notificazione, che si è saputa dal Pubblico, ha cagionato una sensazione e consolazione grandissima nell'animo della maggior parte, ma che pur non riflette al vero stato et alle circostanze dell'Ordine. Il Governo però temendo di compromettersi ha differito la sua risposta sin tanto che non siano meglio conosciuti li sistemi dell'altre Potenze; massimamente delle nostre Protettrici alle quali, permettendolo la nostra situazione, per ogni lodevole motivo dobbiamo cercar di uniformarsi ...; qui si continua a parlare di dichiarazione di guerra, ed ora anzi più che mai; ma è un fatto che ci manca non solo il denaro necessario per farle, ma ancora per prolungare la nostra propria sussistenza." ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 25 April 1793.

28. AIM, *Corrispondenza* 102, f.93v, 19 September 1793.

29. Ryan, 220, 221.

30. The French Knights, observed Mjari, "si lusingano presentemente, che la Spagna entrerà in Guerra con la nuova Repubblica, che per conseguenza li noti intimi rapporti obbligherà il Re di Napoli ad imitarla; ed eccoci in Guerra ancor noi; perché per li patti dell'Infeudazione dell'Imperatore Carlo V di quest'Isola alla Religione noi non possiamo ricevere in porto gli inimici della Corona di Sicilia." ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 21 March 1793. "Quell'intimazione a M.r Machau, Ministro Francese in Napoli per parte di Sua Maestà Siciliana, e ministerialmente significata a tutti li Ministri Esteri colà residenti, che sarà stata senza meno significata a Vostra Serenità, lo è stata ancora a questo Gran Maestro e Governo. Credo dunque dovere del mio officio sottomettere alla Serenità Vostra le misure, che qui ne sono risultate in contemplazione dei patti dell'Infeudazione fatta dall'Imperatore Carlo V. di quest'Isola alla Religione Gerosolimitana. Riguardando questo Governo la detta intimazione, come una formale dichiarazione di

could no longer enjoy in those circumstances the same representative character, De Rohan, "to endow him with a character which authorises him to stay in the island with a title of some standing", appointed him Protector of the French émigrés in Malta.³¹ Later, in a personal communication to Caumont, the Comte de Provence approved the Minister's conduct throughout the revolutionary upheaval and, on behalf of Louis XVII, reinvested him with the same character he had had before 1789.³²

This attitude anticipated De Rohan's famous manifesto of 10 October 1793.³³ He could now formally declare that his Order "ought not, could not, and would not, acknowledge" the "pretended French Republic".³⁴ This declaration was necessary. For, if the neighbouring Italian governments had morally given him the lead by joining the First Coalition, the presence of the British fleet in the Mediterranean had diplomatically incited him to action. It provided him with an important opportunity of demonstrating to Pitt's Ministry in London, to whom the first overtures for an alliance had been made a few months earlier,³⁵ the practical strategic value of the island's geographical position.

. . . ENGLAND

It was only in his letter of 27 June 1793 that Miari made a passing reference to what he preferred to call "rumours", which by then, he reckoned, should have reached Venice, attributing to the Maltese Government "the project of ceding this Island, under certain con-

guerra, ha risoluto di non dare più ricovero in alcuno di questi porti ai Corsari e ai bastimenti di guerra della Republica Francese, e di non permettere che neppure li mercantili inalberono l'inviso Paviglione Tricolore, riguardato come il segnale della ribellione, e della riunione de' Farisei; e siccome un certo M.r Aymar scrive da Genova che porterebbesi quanto prima in Malta per rimpiazzare questo Cav.r de Caumont Incaricato Francese sino da molti anni, così su dipersi riflessi è stata presa la rischizione di non permettergli di porre piede in terra ma d'obbligarlo a partire immediatamente. Intanto il Cav.re de Caumont continua a rimanere in paese, in quanto egli è, come tutti gli altri Ministri del Corpo dell'Ordine, ne ha avuto mai altre Credenziali, che quelle di Luigi XVI nel colmo del suo potere e della sua gloria gli diede presso questo Gran Maestro, e dipiù in quanto ha tuttavìa sulla porta della sua abitazione le antiche armi di Francia." *Ibid.*, 12 September 1793.

31. AIM, *Corrispondenza* 102, f.93v, 19 September 1793.

32. *Ibid.*, f.112v, 12 June 1794.

33. A.V. Laferla, *The Story of Man in Malta* (4th ed., Malta 1972), 131. The manifesto is reproduced, in translation, in Ryan, 220, and in Panzavecchia, 323-324.

34. After Ryan, 220.

35. R. Vella Bonavita, "Britain and Malta 1787-1798", *Hyphen* I, 1(1977), 3-4. This paper is a revised version of an earlier paper "Great Britain and Malta, 1789-1798: A Lost Opportunity?", which was read in the symposium on "The British in the Mediterranean", held at The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, Saturday, 8 December 1973.

ditions, to Great Britain."³⁶ He could or would not say what these conditions were, although negotiations with the British Government had been going on since December 1792. In return for adequate British protection, De Rohan offered a wide range of important base facilities, which included "troops, seamen, munitions, stores, limited naval support and . . . a strong strategic fortress with superb harbours."³⁷

In De Rohan's desperate search for political protection and financial assistance, England was an obvious choice. When on 1 February 1793 Britain declared war on France, her status in the Mediterranean was far from similar to the one she had enjoyed at the treaty of Utrecht, when she emerged as a Mediterranean power in possession of Gibraltar and Minorca. The base at Gibraltar was in fact the only one to remain "permanently and securely" in British hands until the first decade of the nineteenth century. Minorca was recaptured by Spain in 1781. Then, in August 1793, the French great Mediterranean naval base of Toulon revolted and was delivered by the royalists to the British. It was precisely at this juncture, in October 1793, that De Rohan issued his famous manifesto. Little did he realise that within two months that same port would have been surrendered to Bonaparte's military forces. But, then, was not this turn of events fortuitous for his purpose? Did it not strengthen, rather than weaken, the Grandmaster's objective to make Pitt's Ministry appreciate better Malta's importance? Again, when the British at last succeeded in conquering Corsica, the French *généralité*, they occupied it for only one year, 1795-96. For, when in 1796 Spain defected to the French side, and Leghorn, the supply port for Corsica and "for nearly two centuries the principal trading base for British merchants in the western Mediterranean", was seized by Bonaparte, not only were they forced to surrender their major acquisition; they had to withdraw completely from the Mediterranean until 1798. Pitt's decision to withdraw was in part psychologically fortified by almost certain knowledge that the island of Malta would remain immune from any French subversive influence.³⁸ In a rather implicit way, the manifesto had guaranteed precisely that. It also explains it. However, if criticism of De Rohan's manifesto may be justified on grounds of injudiciousness,³⁹ it should also be extended to Pitt's decision. An Anglo-Maltese alliance, such as De Rohan had envisaged, would have probably saved the British merchant not only the losses he suffered at the hands of privateers but also the "serious economic dislocation" which resulted from the withdrawal. "For over a year," according to a recent study, "no convoys operated beyond Gibraltar, and commercial organisations protested bitterly at the consequences,

36. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 27 June 1793.

37. *Vella Bonavita*, 6.

38. *Ibid.*, 11.

39. *Ibid.*

claiming that over 200,000 operatives in Lancashire, Yorkshire and the Midlands depended on exports to the Mediterranean for their employment."⁴⁰

... RUSSIA

In the same letter of 27 June, Miari pointed out that while negotiations for a treaty with Britain were in progress, the design for a similar alliance "with Moscow" had been simultaneously conceived.⁴¹

By the Second Partition of Poland in 1793, nearly all that had been the Order's Grand Priory of Poland within the Volhynia was received by Russia as part of her share of the spoil. A second major consequence was the suspension of the *responsiones* due to the Order from that Priory.⁴² De Maisonneuve's mission to Russia never having materialised,⁴³ De Rohan thought of despatching another courtesy mission to congratulate Catherine II on her new territorial acquisition. At the same time he would seek her protection and request her to sanction the privileges which the Order used to enjoy in its "ancient properties", now falling within the Czarina's jurisdiction. Catherine's self-assumed role of protectress of European nobility and the great prestige which Prince Poninski, Grand Prior of Poland and the staunchest promoter of this "new relationship", enjoyed at the Court of St. Petersburg, were positive and encouraging factors.⁴⁴ Both promised a successful outcome.

But there was more to the projected mission than mere diplomatic protocol. By 1793 the Order was endeavouring to promote what Miari described then as "a novel spirit of cordiality" with Russia. Its ultimate design, he wrote, was to create "new Muscovite Langues" to substitute those of Provence, Auvergne and France. This new relationship, continued Miari, was being "cultivated" and "fostered" by certain factions within the Order.⁴⁵ Miari felt disenchanted with this line of policy and was heartened only by knowledge of the fact that it would prove difficult for such a "design" to materialise, as, in his view, it infringed the statutes of the Order. Moreover, the State Council, which he describes as the ultimate sovereign authority in Malta, "was far from unanimous" over the issue. There was considerable internal differences of opinion as to what policy to adopt. The project would encounter, he thought, "insuperable" obstacles both in Malta and in Rome "because of the difference of Religion".⁴⁶

According to the Venetian Minister,⁴⁷ Prince Camille de Rohan, the

40. J.R. Jones, *Britain and the World* (Fontana 1980), 272-273.

41. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 27 June 1793.

42. N.E. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean 1797-1807* (Chicago 1970), 35.

43. Cavaliero, 205, 207.

44. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 8 August 1793.

45. *Ibid.*, 27 June 1793.

46. *Ibid.*, 27 June, 8 August 1793.

47. *Ibid.*, 14 November 1793.

Order's ambassador in Rome and a close relative of the Grandmaster, "would have loved to go on such a mission, but could not for lack of funds."⁴⁸ The choice of an envoy thus fell on the Milanese count, Giulio Litta, rear-admiral of Catherine's Imperial Fleet, who, for a completely unrelated reason,⁴⁹ happened to be in Malta at the time. Miari held an exceptionally high opinion of him. "He is certainly the individual most suited of all," he observed; "rich, fortunate, very well known at the Courts of St. Petersburg and Warsaw, he was endowed with talent, ability and finesse."⁵⁰ It was in 1795, however, after the Third Partition of Poland, that De Rohan finally accredited Giulio Litta to proceed to St. Petersburg.⁵¹ Litta was then in Warsaw. The year before, he had accompanied his brother Lorenzo, newly appointed Apostolic Nuncio to that city.⁵² He arrived at Catherine's Court in October 1795.⁵³

Circumstances were not however as propitious as they appeared to have been two years earlier. The case of the Maltese corsair Michele Borg, for example, could have possibly contributed towards straining Russo-Maltese relations.⁵⁴ Borg had preyed upon the Greek *tartanella* *San Giorgio* (master Panjoti Mexi) which was covered by Maltese letters-patent issued in 1788 and 1792. The merchandise belonged to Theodoro Calgnomo, a Russian "agent and subject", and was on its way to the Russian merchant, Alessandro Mexopulo, in Constantinople. Mexi, accompanied by the supercargo Antonio Catagne Crissaffili, another Russian, sought justice in Malta. Their case was lost, as rumours ran "unfairly", at the local Court of First Instance, against whose judgement they appealed to the Superior Court of Justice. Antonio Miari, as the Venetian Resident on the island, was approached by Russia's "Secretary and Interpreter" in Malta, to issue a declaration that the waters

48. *Ibid.* See Also N[atational] L[ibrary of] M[alta], *Library* 418, to Mayer, 27 March 1793; Cavaliero, 203.

49. Cavaliero, 206; A.P. Vella, *Malta and the Czars* (Malta 1965), 21. On Giulio Litta, G. Greppi, *Un Gentiluomo milanese guerriero-diplomatico 1763-1839 ...* (Milan 1896); G. Savastano, "Il Bali Giulio Litta Visconti Arese (1763-1839)", *Annales de l'Ordre Souverain Militaire de Malte XXI* (1963), 97-102.

50. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 14 November 1793.

51. AOM 274, f.246v, Il Bali Giulio Renato Litta nominato Ministro Plenipotenziario presso la Corte di Russia, 13 April 1795; Panzavecchia, 332-333; Ryan, 243.

52. Cavaliero, 206-207.

53. *Ibid.*, 210.

54. Panzavecchia, 332. For a general account of the relations between the Order and Russia, H. Smith, "The Order of St. John of Jerusalem: relations between Pope Pius VI and the Russian Grand Priory", *Scientia* XXVI, 2(1960), 52-73; *id.*, "Relations between the Court of St. Petersburg and the Court of the Grand Masters at Malta", *Melita Historica* III, 2(1961), 9-13; Z.de Borja, "Les relations de l'Ordre de Saint-Jean avec la Russie sous le régime de Catherine II", *Hidalguia* XXV (1957), 855-868; R.E. Cavaliero, "The affair of Ostrog: an episode in Malto-Polish relations in the eighteenth century", *Journal of the Faculty of Arts, The Royal University of Malta*, I, 2 (1958), 128-141.

of Prodano, where Borg's prize had been made, fell within the jurisdiction of the Serenissima, and that according to Veneto-Ottoman treaties all privateering in that area was illicit.⁵⁵

Within this constraining state of affairs, the likelihood of an early alliance with Russia diminished rapidly. Miari's letter of 2 January 1796, concerning Litta's mission to St. Petersburg, was marked by a predominant note of despondency and disillusion. "If the object of Litta's mission went beyond the simple exchange of compliments", he confessed, "there is hardly any reason for further reporting on it."⁵⁶ From Litta's correspondence, dated 9 October 1795, it transpired, said Miari, that he had come across a host of "negative attitudes" at the Court of Moscow "both towards the Grandmaster and the Order itself". He had shown "little confidence of being able to draw any advantages from his mission". Among Catherine's "various motives of displeasure" towards De Rohan, Miari considered that "the most biting" criticism the Empress had levelled against the Grandmaster was that the Order had been conducting diplomatic negotiations with France without ever consulting the other Powers for advice.⁵⁷ The Order had never sought Russian help. Given the complex and delicate European situation, the Order should have refrained from negotiating "separately with the French Republic".⁵⁸ Indeed, negotiations in Russia "were conducted in a desultory fashion because Catherine had little interest at the time in Maltese affairs."⁵⁹ When the Empress died on 16 November 1796, De Rohan's objective had not yet been attained.

55. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 24 April 1794 and encl.

56. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 2 January 1796.

57. *Ibid.* This had also been the reaction of the Emperor Francis II's Minister Plenipotentiary to the Order, "sostenuta non senza gran calore": "che qualunque conciliativa misura, anche in questo momento, si prendesse col Direttore, dispiacerebbe sommamente al suo Sovrano e a tutti li Principi Beligeranti Protettori dell'Ordine." *Ibid.*, 11 June 1796.

58. *Ibid.*, 2 January 1796.

59. Saul, 35. "Le lettere di Pietroburgo di quel Ministro dell'Ordine Bali Litta non annunciano grandi speranze di alcun felice successo delle di lui negoziazioni, come taluno s'era imaginato. Egli ha mandato copia d'una Nota Ministeriale, che non è stata qui neppure molto approvata. Ci si conferma, che se si otterrà la conservazione de' Beni dell'Ordine in Polonia sarà tutto quello che si potrà ottenere. Il Bali Litta ha ordine di ritirarsi subito che non avesse più alcuna speranza, che la sua dimora in Pietroburgo fosse per produrre qualche vantaggio a questa Religione. Il Bali Litta ne ha ora mai poca egli stesso cosichè tutti quelli che temevano che questa missione fosse per produrre qualche cambiamento ne' rapporti politici dell'Ordine con l'Estere Potenze saranno verisimilmente presto liberati d'ogni timore." ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 28 January 1796.

"Da Pietroburgo nulla abbiamo d'importante. Il Bali Litta è là non dico inoperoso ma senza avere sin qui conseguita niuna cosa di rimarco: anzi vi è sempre maggiore apparenza che oltre all'oggetto del complimento a quell'Imperatrice, e tutt' al più alla conservazione de' presenti Beni dell'Ordine in Polonia, come si spera, nulla s'otterrà d'avvantaggio, e tutti li concepiti pro-

... THE U.S.A.

In the mid-1760s Massimiliano Buzzaccarini Gonzaga, the Venetian Minister in Malta at the time, reported thus to the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*:

I found myself in a country where one is expected to pay the extreme of prices which are current in any major Capital of Europe.⁶⁰

And again:

The country is tranquil since it is well provided with all kind of essentials, even though these are available at exorbitant prices, and the poor are much afflicted.⁶¹

The comparatively high cost of living was in part indicative of the economic health and general social prosperity which, fairly consistently, marked eighteenth century Malta,⁶² only to be suddenly offset, after 1789, by the rapidly dwindling fortunes of the Order, "the largest and most important economic unit in the islands".⁶³ According to De Rohan, Malta in the early 1790s boasted a population of 150,000,⁶⁴ an obviously too highly inflated figure.⁶⁵ The deterioration in Franco-Maltese relations produced widespread unemployment.⁶⁶ The sharp decline in overseas trade, due mainly to the closure of traditional markets, like Barcellona,

getti rimaranno nel loro essere nella testa de progettisti." *Ibid.*, 6 February 1796.

"Benchè da qualche mese non mi sia dato l'onore di rassegnare a Vostra Serenità alcun cenno intorno la Missione Maltese in Pietroburgo, non ho per questo tralasciato di seguirla ne' suoi andamenti, e posso renderla ben certa, che niuna cosa vi è di nuovo, che interessare possa li pubblici riguardi, e che se non ritornerà totalmente priva d'effetto, questo sarà così leggero ed insignificante, che alcun Gabinetto non avrà ad allarmarsene". *Ibid.*, 28 May 1796.

"Niun rapporto politico poi mi si presenta ora di dover fare a Vostra Serenità, poichè credo che la Serenità Vostra sarà senza meno meglio informata della situazione di quest' Ordine in Francia, di quello che qui si sia. Perciò che riguarda lo stesso in Pietroburgo, stante l'esaltamento a quel trono del nuovo Czar Paolo Primo, il Ball Litta, già da molto tempo e più volte richiamato, dovrà trattenervisi, poichè vi si trova, per complementare il nuovo imperatore a nome di quest' Ordine, indi partirsene, essendo diggià qui ognuno persuaso, che nulla vi si concluderà mai, che sia veramente per essere di vantaggio e decoro a questa Religione". *Ibid.*, 16 February 1797.

60. ASV, CSM, *prima serie*, busta 601, 21 April 1766.

61. *Ibid.*, 26 January 1767.

62. See A. Luttrell, "Eighteenth Century Malta: Prosperity and Problems", *Hyphen* III, 2(1982), 37-51; B.W. Blouet, "The Maltese Economy", *Contemporary Review* (January 1964) 71-72.

63. B.W. Blouet, *The Story of Malta* (London 1967), 123-124.

64. P. Cassar, *Early Relations between Malta and the United States of America* (Malta 1976), 6.

65. Blouet (1967), 89-92, 93ff. *passim*; Luttrell, 41-42; Hardman, 539ff.

66. Cassar, 7.

had ruined the merchant class;⁶⁷ the catastrophic hailstorms of 1790 wreaked irreparable havoc to the peasants' lot; cotton trade, which was the island's major industry, steadily declined. Before 1789, cotton thread exports to Barcellona alone, for example, used to earn an average income of £500,000. Between 1792-96 import trade in general had become almost negligible.⁶⁸

To solve this acute problem, De Rohan in 1794 had tried to negotiate "a treaty of union and alliance" with the United States of America.⁶⁹ This was his third abortive attempt to find an ally. He sought a grant of lands in America, peripheral to the sea or to a navigable river, which the Maltese would have been encouraged "to clear ... cultivate ... and settle thereon."⁷⁰ It was a wise incentive for the heavy mass of unemployed to migrate in search of better opportunities. In return, the Order offered the United States what it had only recently offered Britain — all those facilities and services enjoyed by friendly States at the port of Malta. From United States Ambassador James Monroe's correspondence to Monsieur Cibon, the Order's Ambassador Extraordinary in Paris, it appears that American authorities were not against these proposals.⁷¹ It was agreed that a commission of inquiry would be despatched to Malta to report to Congress. On 17 December 1796 De Rohan felt the need to appoint William England United States Consul in Malta. For reasons yet obscure, however, negotiations seem to have been abruptly terminated. The commission of inquiry never arrived, nor did the projected alliance ever materialise.⁷² Unfortunately, there is no reference to these negotiations in Miari's correspondence, although one would have expected such a design to be of great concern to the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*.

Rising prices, unemployment, social tensions and the discomfiture of vain hopes of an immediate solution sparked popular disturbances. Miari makes a direct reference to this state of unrest in Malta:⁷³

67. Panzavecchia, 291-292.

68. *Ibid.*, 338; Hardman, 535; Thornton, 35. See also J. Debono, "The Cotton Trade of Malta 1750-1800", *Archivum: Journal of Maltese Historical Research* I(1981), 94-125.

69. Cassar, 5-9; E.E. Hume, "A Proposed Alliance between the Order of Malta and the United States, 1794", *William and Mary College Quarterly*, 2nd series, XVI(1936), 222-233.

70. Cassar, 7; "Would the United States consent to grant, in full right, to the Order of Malta some lands in America, in such quantity as may be agreed on between the two governments, placing such lands under the immediate protection and safeguard of the American loyalty?" Order's ambassador in Paris, Monsieur Cibon, to James Monroe, U.S. ambassador in Paris. Hume, 226.

71. Cassar, 8. See M. Wood, *The Importance of Malta considered in the years 1796 and 1798* (London 1803).

72. Cassar, 9; Panzavecchia, 339.

73. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 6 September 1796.

For several days in these parts certain disturbances have been noticed and some fears entertained, caused by certain inflammatory bills, which have been affixed even upon the doors of the Magisterial Palace.

The situation was accentuated by De Rohan's attitude of "indolence" and "indifference", which Miari attributed to senility (the Prince was 71) and to a condition of worsening health (he had been struck by paralysis in 1791 and never fully recovered since then). This state of affairs, observes Miari, would "before long" encourage a serious upheaval. Some suggested that the Court of Naples be asked to despatch a contingent of troops in order to overawe the potential rebels by a display of force: "under the pretext of protecting us, not from known enemies (since we have no need of that) but rather from those who are covert." Miari was more optimistic. "I candidly believe there is no need for this, nor do I see things so pessimistically, as some do."⁷⁴

A LOST OPPORTUNITY?

On 31 July 1796 the Spanish Prime Minister, Emanuel Godoy, the youthful Prince of Peace, wrote to De Rohan, in connection with what he called "repeated requests" made by Sultan Selim III to His Catholic Majesty to prevail upon the Grandmaster to conclude a peace treaty or truce with the Ottoman Porte.⁷⁵ The treaty or truce envisaged by the Turks, explained Godoy, would be based on three principles: that it would remain operative so long as Spain and the Porte remained at peace, that prisoners and slaves would be exchanged, and that free trade relations would be established and freedom of navigation mutually guaranteed.⁷⁶

The Porte's efforts to cultivate cordial relations with Malta lay in the logic of two recent developments. First, following the peace of Jassey, which ended the Russo-Turkish War of 1782-92, the intelligent Turkish ruler embarked on a grandiose scheme of modernising the structure of his empire. Within this framework, efforts were made in 1793 for the first time to establish Turkish embassies and permanently

74. *Ibid.*

75. "Mi affretto a partecipare a Vostra Serenità ch'ultimamente è pervenuta a questo Eminentissimo Gran Maestro una lettera del Principe della Pace, Primo Ministro di Sua Maestà Cattolica, con cui a nome del suo Sovrano li significa, che la Porta Ottomana ha fatto replicate e molte vive istanze presso il medesimo suo Sovrano per mezzo de' di lui diversi Ministri, perché si costituisca Mediatore della Pace, o almeno una Tregua fra essa Porta Ottomana e l'Ordine di Malta: che Sua Maestà Cattolica ne ha assunto l'impegno"; *Ibid.*, 22 September 1796; AOM 275, f.24, Lettera del Principe della Pace ... che partecipa al Gran Maestro le premure fatte al Re dalla Porta per stabilire una tregua tra la medesima e l'Ordine, 31 July 1796. Godoy's letter is reproduced in Panzavecchia, 340-342.

76. *Ibid.*

station Ottoman diplomats "in most of the major capitals of Europe — in many ways a more striking break with the Ottoman past even than the military reforms."⁷⁷ The Sultan's overtures to the Order conformed nicely to this novel practice. Secondly, in the early months of 1796, there was serious talk among influential quarters in Malta of reviving the *corso* in the Levant, in the hope of restoring what had "truly been in the past a veritable source of wealth", from which would be drawn "quite appreciable riches" to the harassment of Turkish commerce and shipping.⁷⁸ In fact, some 117,000 scudi are known to have been earned from prizes won during 1796, compared to the average annual income of 65,629 scudi derived from the same source during the decade 1787-1797.⁷⁹ Would isolated Malta find in Russia, with whom negotiations for a bilateral agreement were still in progress, the necessary emotional response that would admirably suit such an enterprise? What if the Knights of St. John and Maltese corsairs, heavily depressed by the current political and economic circumstances, be ultimately absorbed (perhaps unwittingly) in the massive designs of the Porte's most formidable enemy, intent on securing advantageous commercial positions beyond its southern frontier? Although by 1796 diplomatic relations between St. Petersburg and Constantinople began to display the semblance of being promoted and sustained, the Porte appears to have perceived the advantage of an early agreement with Malta — it would weaken at one blow all hopes of reviving the nefarious organised privateering in the Levant. The timing was all important. In fact, to avoid obvious delay, Godoy had suggested, in his letter to De Rohan, that the question of whether to include the Barbary Regencies in the treaty need not be then considered as it was irrelevant to the main issue. He knew very well that the scope of Malta's corsairing industry, to which the native economy was geared, had been drastically reduced to occasional punitive expeditions to these coasts.⁸⁰

Selim's cause found some solid advocacy in the island. His proposals were hailed by a few enlightened spirits who solicited De Rohan for fundamental reforms on the same lines. One leading advocate of this cause was the 32-year-old Maltese intellectual and political activist,

77. M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (London 1966), 23; S.J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Cambridge 1976), vol. I, *Empire of the Gazis: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire 1280-1808*, 266.

78. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 25 February 1796.

79. Luttrell, 45.

80. Panzavecchia, 341. "Li Corsari Maltesi si tengono fermamente nel diritto di predare li Barbereschi in servizio di chiunque si sieno, non avendo li Barbereschi alcun riguardo per li Maltesi che fossero in servizio di qualche Nazione Neutrale." ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 18 August 1796.

Michele Antonio Vassallo.⁸¹ Considering the Order's overwhelmingly regimented restrictions on trade movements with the Levant a severe hindrance to the island's economic development, he showed extraordinary vigour to convince the Government of the urgency of such reform. With clear Physiocratic overtones, he clamoured for the establishment of free trade between his country and the Ottoman Empire,⁸² which, particularly at times of crippling trade depression, would facilitate the exchange of goods and turn the port of Malta into a safe commercial depot for Levantine goods.

De Rohan declined to take a unilateral decision. Constitutionally he could not. The enlightened Prince had earlier in his magistracy shown some inclination towards a similar political direction, as Vilhena had shown before him at the beginning of the century.⁸³ Godoy's letter, incorporating Selim's proposals had first to be submitted to the Council of State and, if carried, to the Council of the Order, as the whole question directly involved key changes in the statutes. The State Council voted against the truce, definitely and absolutely, on the grounds that the construction of such a treaty would have held up to ridicule the Order's *raison d'être*. The State Council, says Miari,⁸⁴

had then effectively opined that it had to decline absolutely such a treaty, mainly that even the truce in itself, not constituting a necessity for the Order, would ever be against our Constitution and would be in breach of the good faith invested in us by the Italian Catholic Princes and their interests.

There was nothing it would do to budge the dead weight of custom and tradition, so far away was the Institution from the idea of progressive reform.

It was ironic that the only true redeeming hand of peace and reconciliation had been extended to the Order by none other than its sworn enemy, the Turk. It was even more pathetically ironic that the State Council resolutely turned down the only project that would have probably guaranteed a thriving trade and would have consequently

81. On Vassallo, who is more popularly known as Vassalli, A. Cremona, *Vassalli and his Times* (Malta 1940).

82. Ryan, 255; Panzavecchia, 340-342; G.A. Vassallo, *Storia di Malta* (Malta 1890), 611; A. Mifsud, *Knights Hospitallers of the Venerable Tongue of England in Malta* (Malta 1916), 257; Cremona, 23-33.

83. For Vilhena's projected truce with Turkey, AOM 267, ff.198-199v, *Relazione dei Commissari deputati sopra la proposta del Gran Vizir, 19 April 1723*; R.A. de Vertot, *Histoire de Chevaliers de Rhodes, et aujour'd'hui les Chevaliers de Malte* (Paris 1726), vol.IV, 237-238; Boisgelin, vol.II, 234-235; Ryan, 76-77; Cavaliero (1960), 114-116.

84. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 29 September 1796; AOM 278, ff.82-84, *Relazione dei Commissari deputati per esaminare il contenuto della lettera del Principe de la Paz, Primo Ministro di Spagna*; AOM 275, ff.25v-26, *Lettera del Gran Maestro ... al Primo Ministro di Spagna in risposta alla sua del 31 luglio 1796, 29 September 1796*.

postponed its inevitable extinction. Overwhelmed by an innate prejudice against the very concept of change, the Order by the late 1790s had become powerless to resist its own inertia. Its tragically obsessive attachment to its statutes, which could have been fairly easily repealed or reformed by a competent authority, has been rightly called "an unpardonable fatuity."⁸⁵

VENETO-MALTESE RELATIONS

The relationship between Antonio Miari and Antonio Poussielgues, the Venetian consul in Malta, seems to have been generally based on an attitude of mutual trust and magnanimity. On assuming office, the Minister promised the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia* that he would willingly extend to the consul all his assistance and would gladly conduct Poussielgues's activity to a better end if necessary. Miari held a high opinion of Poussielgues. This contrasted in a very striking manner with the view which Massimiliano Buzzaccarini Gonzaga had entertained of the man in the 1760s when Poussielgues was appointed Venetian consul.⁸⁶ Buzzaccarini Gonzaga described him as being unable to give "his complete attention to the aid of [Venetian] subjects, being a man of a hundred interests, each of which he regarded as more important than anything else". The only help which he then readily offered Venetian captains was motivated by the remuneration he thought he would derive from it.⁸⁷ Shortly afterwards, Buzzaccarini Gonzaga again refers to the "little or no service" the consul was willing to offer Venetian subjects, and to his "negligence".⁸⁸ The passage of more than a quarter of a century is likely to have changed the man's attitude towards his consular duties. For in 1793 Miari confessed to the *Cinque Savi*: "for the love of truth I must confirm that with his great zeal and dedication, his faith and the many abilities he possesses which are necessary in his position, he did hardly ever require my assistance" or advice, except occasionally in matters of a non-mercantile or a non-consular nature.⁸⁹

With the sole exception of the case of Giacomo Tiozzo, whose ship had been confiscated for the previous two years, and which the Minister described as "too complicated to explain in one letter," everything else which concerned the interests of the Republic, its merchants and its subjects in Malta in the early 1790s proceeded smoothly and methodically, with great fairness and attention under the efficient

85. Panzavecchia, 342.

86. Poussielgues was appointed Venetian Consul on 22 March 1766 by Grandmaster Pinto. AOM 569, f.194v; V. Malfia-Milanes, "Malta and Venice in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Consular Relations", *Studi Veneziani* XVII-XVIII (1975-76), 316-319.

87. ASV, CSM, *prima serie*, busta 601, 8 June 1767.

88. *Ibid.*, 8 June, 12 September 1767.

89. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 21 March 1793.

management of Poussielgues and the vice-consul.⁹⁰ In 1793, for example, Miari requested De Rohan to proceed against a certain Maltese corsair, Giuseppe Galea, after having been formally instructed to do so by the Venetian *Procuratore Generale* Angelo Memo.⁹¹ The year before, Galea and his lieutenant, who, Miari contended, "has been the guiltiest of all," had preyed upon some Venetian subjects in the waters of Prodano, despoiling them of 600 *tellari*. On grounds of having allegedly committed "worse crimes against the friendly and generous hospitality, with which they had been greeted, against public interests and the Law of Nations," and against the interests of his own *armateurs*, Galea was to undergo trial. His lieutenant had not yet been seized by the secular arm as he had sought asylum in church.⁹² De Rohan promised Miari that the Maltese Courts "would proceed further against corsair Galea until reparation was complete and the Most Serene Republic declared itself satisfied with it."⁹³ On another occasion the Grandmaster, without waiting for Miari's submissions, took legal action against a second Maltese corsair for having committed various irregularities "in the bay and waters of Zante"⁹⁴

The overall picture of Veneto-Maltese relations, which emerges from Miari's correspondence, is generally one of cordiality and mutual co-operation. Maltese corsairs, who had been in the past the root of all serious trouble between the two States, were now no longer creating "inconveniences". The Minister attributed this partly to "the most positive directives" issued by the Maltese Government to Maltese privateers, and partly to "the severest penalties" for those who infringed the law.⁹⁵ The ordinances regulating the *corso* were clear. So was De Rohan's disposition to readily justify the measures the Venetian authorities would take against illicit Maltese privateering in the Levant.

If Maltese corsairs [wrote Miari] dared for some reason show themselves in the waters of the Venetian Republic, or present themselves in any of its ports ... without any positive or visible need, or if they were unfortunate enough to find themselves thrust there without their fault, the Grand Master desired that, with regards to the first, the Republic would absolutely take whatever steps it considered necessary by way of compensation; with regards to the second, the Public Representatives should

90. "Altri affari mercantili non vi sono pendenti, il tutto procedendo con plausibile metodo ed attenta esattezza di questi Console e Vice-Console Nazionali". *Ibid.*, 21 March 1793; "Gli altri affari mercantili e marittimi procedono qui con quel credito ch'è dovuto alla Veneta Nazione, e con que' riguardi di questo Governo, che la Repubblica è in diritto d'esiggere da lui. in riflesso di quell'amicizia e parzialità di cui l'onora." *Ibid.*, 24 April 1794.

91. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 21 March 1793.

92. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 30 April [1793].

93. *Ibid.*, 25 April 1793.

94. *Ibid.*, 21 March 1793.

95. *Ibid.*, 30 April [1793].

limit themselves to furnishing the bare essentials for their sustenance but without letting them gain any advantageous position.⁹⁶

There is only one reference in Miari's correspondence to Veneto-Maltese trade during this period. The first months of Miari's ministry in Malta were marked by a severe shortage of grain. Having failed to secure supplies from other markets, De Rohan informed Miari, with near absolute certainty, that Venice possessed surplus quantities of that commodity, by far exceeding the amounts necessary to feed the Venetian population.⁹⁷ Fortunato Isouard, agent of the local *Università*, proceeded to the Adriatic city to purchase the necessary supplies that would serve the island until the next harvest. On asking the Doge to accede to De Rohan's urgent request, Miari confirmed, with near patriotic fervour, the meagre conditions in Malta, which approached starvation level.⁹⁸

Personally I can assure you, in all sincerity and candour, that the islands have an extreme need of grain provisioning, which in the present circumstances cannot be obtained anywhere else, nor would they exceed two or three thousand Maltese *salme*.⁹⁹

Isouard failed to make the necessary purchases.¹⁰⁰

In a small island like Malta, covering less than 245 square kilometers in area, few, if any, could really avoid getting directly or indirectly involved in a political crisis of a scale similar to that of the 1790s — indigenous and foreign alike. The Venetians residing in Malta at the time were no exception.¹⁰¹ During the years under survey, the Serenissima, instead of coalescing with Austria and Piedmont to resist French aggression, preferred, more out of apathy than hatred of getting entangled in European affairs, to maintain a policy of inaction, termed neutrality in ordinary diplomatic jargon. Miari was given word that no Venetians would be engaged in the regiment then being raised, or in any other similar recruitment, which would prejudice the position of

96. *Ibid.*, 25 April 1793.

97. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 17 April 1793.

98. Vassallo, 610.

99. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 17 April 1793. A Maltese *salma* was equivalent to 3½ Venetian *staia*.

100. *Ibid.*, 27 June 1793.

101. Venetian consuls were regularly instructed to see that neutrality was strictly observed by all Venetian captains and merchants in their respective consular town or port. The following are a few excerpts from Poussielgues's correspondence to the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*: "Colla veneratissima dell'Ecc. Loro in data delli 18 febraro trovai la copia dell'Articolo Sesto dell'Ordinanza 1779 proibendo il traffico de armi, e munizioni immediate di Guerra colle Nazioni Belligerenti. Sarà, come devo, comunicato atuali li sudditi capitani, e mi sarà di norma in tutte le occasioni". 29 March 1788; on 24 May 1788, he refers again to the *memoriale* he had received, dated 19 April, "de Loro premure circa l'osservanza d'una perfetta neutralità nel Commercio di tutti li sudditi..."; "ho notato la determinazione dell' Ecc.mo Senato che resta vietata ai sudditi la validità d'ogni privato legno a quelli delle potenze belligeranti," 5 July 1788. ASV, CSM, *prima serie, busta 711, sub die*.

the Republic. Facts proved otherwise. In September 1795 a ship was chartered to transport 150 soldiers and a large number of officers to Trieste under cover of the flag of Jerusalem. Not only were Venetian "vagabonds" encouraged to enrol but those knights responsible for the recruitment tried their utmost to attract sailors enlisted on Venetian vessels. This was not a pleasant experience for Miari. He could not remain idle in the midst of an enervating situation like that, which, if left unheeded, would grow worse. He acted quickly and unhesitatingly. First he protested forcibly with the Grandmaster. Such a recruitment of foreign sailors infringed the rights of territorial sovereignty and went against the Order's principle of neutrality. Then he summoned all Venetian captains and their "wavering crews". He admonished them with the serious penalties they would incur if they decided to abandon their ship in order to enrol in a foreign regiment. These included imprisonment and despatch-in-chains to Venice at the first opportunity. This reprimand, claimed Miari, made them change their minds. So too did De Rohan. He issued a *bando generale* which prohibited from then on the recruitment of any of his Maltese subjects and the projected voyage to Trieste fell through.¹⁰²

In October 1796 the Regency of Algiers made an arbitrary declaration of war on Venice. Algerine corsairs fitted out their powerful fleets and soon began to prey indiscriminately on all Venetian ships.¹⁰³ There were twenty Venetian captains stationed in Malta at the time.¹⁰⁴ Miari called on De Rohan to provide one of the Order's 'warships' to escort his fellow-countrymen safely back to the *Dominante*. The Grandmaster, with the backing of a unanimous vote of the State Council, acceded to his request in spite of the difficult circumstances,¹⁰⁵ Miari informed with haste all Venetian captains in Sicily, Tunis and Tripoli, who wished to avail themselves of this opportunity, either to proceed to Malta or to rendezvous in the port of Syracuse. There they would wait for the right moment to sail out in convoy under the overall direction of the *San Zaccaria*, captained by Fra Paolo Giuliano Suffren de Saint Tropez.¹⁰⁶

102. For the whole affair, ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 24 September 1795.

103. *Ibid.*, 27 October 1796. For Algiers during the French Revolutionary years, A. Devoulx, "La Marine de la Regence d'Alger," *Revue Africaine* XIII (1869), *passim*.

104. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 1 November 1796.

105. *Ibid.*

106. *Ibid.* De Rohan had given the following instructions to Suffren: "Partirete subito, che ve lo permetterà il tempo con la Nave *San Zaccharia* per convogliare, e condurre à Corfù li Bastimenti Veneziani qui ancorati; e passando per Siracusa, Augusta, e Messina farete lo stesso con quelli Bastimenti di detta Nazione, che si troveranno nellì sopra accennati Porti, e che si vorranno prevalere della vostra scorta. Eseguita tale Commissione ritornerete in questo Canale per fare il Corso contro li Barbareschi ... In cujus rei Testimonium Bulla nostra Magistralis in cera nigra presentibus est impresa. Datum Melitae in Conventu nostro die XXVIII: Novembris 1796". *Ibid.*, encl.

They departed sometime in mid-December.¹⁰⁷

In his letter to Doge Lodovico Manin, dated 30 March 1797, Miari submitted a plan by which Venice would contain the Dey of Algiers.¹⁰⁸ It was motivated by what he called two basic considerations. First, the Order's economic crisis had been for quite some time preventing her from accomplishing her objective, i.e., from arming her ships and sailing out in pursuit of "the enemies of the Catholic Faith". These included the Barbabesques, whose sporadic outbreaks interrupted and wreaked so much havoc to Mediterranean trade. Secondly, constrained with a serious preoccupation about her security at home, the Serenissima was incapable of despatching a considerable force in the Mediterranean to round up the Algerine pirates and privateers. The Order, suggested Miari, could be approached and requested to arm and equip fully two of her otherwise idle ships and set out on a specific mission against the Algerines, which would indirectly protect the navigation of Venetian vessels. Extra expenses incurred by the Order would be defrayed by the Republic. Miari estimated these to be roughly in the region of 1000 Zecchini a month. This project would benefit Venetian trade and navigation. It would also, according to Miari, benefit the Republic politically. If the Dey of Algiers were to complain against the vigorous forces being employed against his corsairs, the Serenissima would disclaim all responsibility for the Order's activity.

All this must be conducted with utmost secrecy, and the payment should be made (for safeguarding this discretion) either in hemp, or in wood, or in any other material which the Order may need, or, especially, in cash, if this is more convenient to Your Serenity. You should be informed that nobody knows of this project, whatever its nature, apart from the Venetian Consul, to whom I have given a passing hint.¹⁰⁹

Miari ends his letter by asking for official instructions from Venice.

If after all, Your Serenity would be pleased as to approve of it, I would strive to ensure its success, almost formally.¹¹⁰

INTO OBLIVION

The instructions were never received. Antonio Miari's letter, dated 30 March 1797, was to be his last to the Serenissima, in his capacity as *Huomo della Repubblica*. For within less than two months, the

107. "Frattanto non posso ultimare questa mia ossequiosissima senza partecipare a Vostra Serenità che il suddetto Sig.r Ball di Soffrein (sic) al suo ritorno ha fatto li più magnifici elogi di tutti li Veneti Capitani, che ha convogliato, tanto in rapporto alla loro esattezza e subordinazione, come in rapporto alla marina perizia, che hanno nella loro rotta dimostrato." *Ibid.*, 20 January 1797.

108. *Ibid.*, 30 March 1797.

109. *Ibid.*

110. *Ibid.*

Republic of St. Mark — its territorial integrity and almost everything of value that had, through the ages, contributed to the gorgeous city's splendour, elegance and serenity, including the imposing equestrian quartet, symbol of Venetian strength, majesty and glory — was occupied and looted by Napoleon's insensitive military machine. In October, by the Treaty of Campo Formio, the remnants "of that which once was great" passed into Austrian possession.

In Malta, the progressive and enlightened Prince died on 13 July. From this point, the complete collapse of the Order of St. John was simply a matter of months, constituting a painful epilogue to a glorious heritage. The Religion, remarks Schermerhorn, "had passed the stage where tact and enlightenment and conscientious regard for the Statutes could save it, and however progressive Rohan might desire to be, his inheritance and innate sympathies were backward looking, and tenacious for the Old Régime."¹¹¹ The convention converting the Polish Priory into a Russian Grand Priory, with an annual revenue of 300,000 zloty, and incorporated into the Anglo-Bavarian Langue, was in the end confirmed by Catherine's son, Paul I. It was signed on 15 January, a few months before De Rohan's death, and ratified by his successor Ferdinand von Hompesch on 7 August 1797.¹¹² But by then, Venice's

111. E.W. Schermerhorn, *Malta of the Knights* (Surrey 1929), 291.

112. "Benchè io non dubiti punto, che sia pervenuta a Vostra Serenità la notizia, che dal Sig.r Ball Litta Ministro Plenipotenziario di questo Sacro e Militar Ordine in Pietroburgo sia stato spedito a questo Eminentissimo Gran Maestro espressamente un corriere portante la novità dell'erezione d'un nuovo Priorato di quest' Ordine in quell' Impero; e che io non dubiti neppure, che la Serenità Vostra non sappia, come un tale corriere è stato poi arrestato da' Francesi in Ancona, intercettandoli li Pieghi ch' erano precisamente destinati per questo Eminentissimo Gran Maestro, non di meno credo essere di mio preciso dovere il partecipare l'una e l'altra cosa a Vostra Serenità in conferma di quanto le ho in altro tempo rassegnato, cioè che non le avrei, per quanto mi fosse stato possibile, lasciato ignorare cosa alcuna colà relativa, più o meno interessante questo Sacro Ordine, e la Serenissima Politica Veneta Dominazione. L'accennato accidente mi toglie però la possibilità di poter ragguagliare esattamente la Serenità Vostra, ma solo che finora si sa, per quanto si è potuto rilevare da una lettera del sud.to Ball Litta scritta al Vend.o Ball Francone, Ministro dell'Ordine in Napoli, scappata non so come dalle mani de Francesi, che si fosse convenuto di erigere nell'Impero di tutte le Russie un Priorato dell'Ordine Gerosolimitano in luogo e stato di quello esistente in Polonia, detto di Ostrog. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 16 March 1797. For the terms of the treaty, M. de Pierredon, *Exposition de l'histoire de l'Ordre Souverain de Malte au benéfice du pavillon des lépreux* (Paris 1929), 63-64; Saul 37-38; Vella, 23-24; Hardman, 361-363; Mifsud, 229-238; Panzavecchia, 364ff. See also De Maison-neuve, *Annales historiques de l'Ordre de St. Jean de Jérusalem depuis l'année 1725 jusqu'au moment présent* (St. Petersburg 1799).

"Non si sono ancora qui avute precise notizie del risultato delle negoziazioni del Ball Litta in Pietroburgo, le quali da molto tempo saranno forse a Vostra Serenità molto chiare e manifeste. Solo da alcune lettere particolari scappate dalle percusioni francesi, non so come, si sa che li vantaggi per

executioner had already sought authorisation from the Directory in Paris to proceed with his plans of seizing the tiny principality of Malta on his way to Egypt.¹¹³ The "close relationship" with Russia, which De Rohan had envisaged and promoted and which Antonio Miari had so consistently feared and criticised, precipitated the end of the Order in Malta.

It was one of the subtlest ironies in history. On 24 May 1697 the 'Western' Czar Peter the Great, having understood the political and economic importance of securing a useful ally in the tiny island fortress in the Mediterranean, had despatched General Boris Czeremetev to Valletta to study at firsthand the naval operations of the Order and possibly negotiate a bilateral treaty against the Ottoman Porte.¹¹⁴ A century later, almost to the day, the Czar Paul I, lover of lost causes, in his naivety and complacency, felt proud and honoured to welcome under his grand, chivalric protection, not that "angular rock which had eclipsed the glory of the Turkish crescent", but the Institution which had governed it for 268 years — now crippled, insolvent and decayed.

l'Ordine si dicono di molta conseguenza. Alcuni vogliono che ciò non possa essere senza gran sacrifici da parte dell'Ordine, altri che sieno stati accordati unicamente per un entusiasmo del nuovo Czar a favore dell'Ordine stesso, senza che però rest' alterata la sua Costituzione, come neppure li Politici rapporti con le altre Potenze, massimamente del Mediterraneo". *Ibid.*, 30 March 1797.

113. On 26 May 1797 Bonaparte had written to the Directory: "The island of Malta is of major interest for us; ... why should not our fleet or the Spanish, before going into the Atlantic, sail to Valletta and occupy it? ... The little island is worth any price to us." J.E. Howard (ed. & trans.), *Letters and Documents of Napoleon* (London 1961), vol.I, *The Rise to Power*, 191.
114. Schermerhorn, 280ff.; Vella, 16-17; Saul, 34.