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STRUGGLING AGAINST ISOLATION COMMUNICATION LINES AND THE CIRCULATION OF NEWS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: THE CASE OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY MALTA

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Communication with the outside world is vital for the survival of any community, regardless of time and geography. This is particularly so for an island community. Lying uncomfortably on the North-South, East-West, Muslim-Christian divide of the Inland Sea in the Early Modern era, and forever wary of the threat from Barbary to the South and the Ottomans to the East, Hospitaller Malta lived in a constant state of readiness for war and in a perpetual state of dependence for subsistence on Sicily and beyond. The need to maintain open the lines of communication with the mainland of Europe, and to be constantly updated on the maritime movements of the enemy was absolutely essential for the survival of the island.

The present study, based mostly on the outgoing correspondence of the various Hospitaller magistracies throughout the seventeenth century, will attempt to analyse the Knights' endeavours to keep open communication lines with foreign states and territories.

Islands and their problems have elicited a privileged place in maritime historiography. Whether as vital stations along important shipping routes or as marginal places often by-passed by civilizations and history, their role and condition, their subsistence, their centrality to the flow of goods and the diffusion of cultures and, most prominently, their supposed isolation have much intrigued scholars of the social sciences.

Braudel argues that the sea surrounding them acts as an element of both unity and division, yet confidently asserts that some mountain regions are more insular than many Mediterranean islands.¹ Horden and Purcell energetically brush aside allegations concerning the remoteness and inaccessibility of many islands, dismissing as a 'malign tendency' attempts to depict them as isolated worlds.² Matvejević labels them as 'particular places' whose characteristics are inevitably determined by their geophysical setting and, primarily, by the distance from the mainland.³ Mollat du Jourdin, for whom islands are 'gifts offered to the sea or lands conquered by it

following seismic phenomena',⁴ dwells on the mythical inspirations that islands have evoked in man throughout the millennia of his existence. In his oneiric evocations man idealized islands as a paradise lost, an eternal source of nostalgia,⁵ elusive Ithacas obstinately sought throughout lifetimes of longing and cerebral peregrination.

Lying along vibrant shipping routes, at the very heart of the Muslim-Christian embattled border and less than a day's sail from opulent Sicily, early modern Malta offers sound arguments to sustain with conviction the debate outlined above against the view that islands were isolated worlds.

However, the scholar's viewpoint, although privileged in many ways, not least because it can adopt a holistic approach and draw on a multiplicity of sources, is inevitably partial. Rather than the effective isolation of islands, the conceptual foundation of the present study is nourished by a diametrically opposite preoccupation, one which tries to assess the perception of isolation from within an insular context.

Separation from the *terraferma* endows islanders with distinct features. It weighs on their relationship with the outside world. Tendentially they are of a more introspective nature, yet their welcome to newcomers is potentially warmer than that of mainland populations. Their language is different from that spoken in the nearby coast.⁶ In many ways sea peoples, and islanders in particular, have often been passive protagonists of history, adopting an attitude of anticipation. Waiting became for them a sort of 'existential condition'⁷—they waited for the return of a vessel, for the landing of foreigners, for the safe call at port of eagerly longed-for merchandise, for a cargo of life-saving victuals; they scrutinized the horizon in terrified anticipation of raids by sea sorcerers, hoping that they never materialised; they waited for a storm to abate to cross to the mainland and, most ardently, they waited for news.⁸

Like castaways from a shipwreck, the Hospitallers landed in Malta after eight years of wandering and soul-searching following the loss of Rhodes in 1522. Shadows of the hostility towards the island and its feasibility as a fief expressed by the Hospitaller Commission of 1524⁹ still permeate the documents handed down to posterity by the Order's well-oiled administrative machine. In the official outgoing correspondence of Hospitaller Malta, the main source at the core of this study, the various Grand Masters hardly ever refer to the island by its proper name. One of the terms they most frequently used, rather than, or apart from, island, land, or domain, was *scoglio*—barren rock. The words of the Hospitaller hierarchy consistently betray a glaring lack of affection towards the outpost Charles V had handed them to govern. The nature of the island, the meagreness of its resources

and the poverty of its soil, its perilous position, so inviting to enemy sorties from Barbary,¹⁰ were obsessively underlined, inflated, and pointed out to popes, foreign monarchs, princes, and, with an even greater vigour, to the Order's emissaries and agents abroad, as if to remind them of their paramount duty to see to the island's needs in the daily running of their office.

The Hospitallers had been grappling with the hazards of living cut off from the mainland for hundreds of years. The sojourn in Cyprus followed by two and a half centuries of permanence on Rhodes had implanted the island mentality in the Hospitaller psyche long before their arrival in Malta. That lingering sense of precariousness which became second nature to the Order's life throughout its years in the East, in the very heart of Muslim territory, surrounded by water and by enemy outposts, was only heightened by the sieges at Rhodes and Malta in 1522 and 1565 respectively. If there was one lesson learnt by the Order during the siege of 1565 it was that Habsburg priorities lay elsewhere, primarily in the northern heart of Europe. Protestant Netherlands occupied the mind and energies of the Spanish king to a degree far superior than any island south of Sicily could ever have hoped for or aspired to.¹¹ The delays and procrastination which characterised the saga of Don Garçia de Toledo's relief expedition, the subject of so much controversy among historical circles but expertly placed in its context by Braudel,¹² made the Order realise that in times of future trouble the island would probably have to stand alone again.

Fear of possible military isolation, closely related to the siege-phobia which accompanied a good part of the Religion's existence,¹³ ran parallel with the constant anxiety to provision the Maltese archipelago. Islands may not have been isolated and early modern Malta was certainly not, yet the Hospitaller hierarchy's preoccupation with maintaining open communication channels with the mainland is one perception the historian cannot dismiss or ignore.¹⁴ Striving to keep the Convent informed and updated on the events of the world surrounding it, from the North Sea to the Levant, was absolutely essential in the ongoing struggle against isolation. The thirst for news was comparable to the appetite for grain and the Order's network of ambassadors, diplomats, and agents deployed at the political nerve centres of Christian Europe was certainly not sufficient to quench it. All potential sources of fresh news—official and otherwise—were tapped. The unexpected call at port of a merchant ship could result in information as revealing as that brought over by the galley squadron on its return from its periodic missions in the Levant. The Order was very sensitive to any reverberation which the waves carried over from the East and Constantinople in particular. There was docked the Sultan's armada, the source of so much preoccupation

for the Convent. The slightest hint or rumour of feverish activity regarding the fitting out of the Ottoman fleet would reshuffle any agenda on the Grand Master's desk.

Like so many other aspects of the structure of a state, the system of Hospitaller Malta's contacts with abroad was set on a well-defined hierarchy. Resident ambassadors were kept in the diplomatic powerhouses of early modern Europe such as Paris. Most importantly a resident ambassador was also kept in Rome,¹⁵ the inevitable guiding light for a religious institution, the much-consulted See which conditioned immeasurably the diplomatic activity of the Hospital. Rome did not only mean the Pope, the spiritual and temporal leader whose paternal approval in matters of international relevance was sought and longed-for by an Order which was constantly craving for justification from the supreme authority in Christendom. It also meant an intricate network of unofficial representatives, usually cardinals, whose lobbying activity in the Papal court strove to gain favours for the Hospital in several matters.¹⁶

Venice, mistress of the Adriatic, architect and jealous asserter of its very own international policy, often independent from Habsburg necessities and Catholic stances, deserves to be treated separately.¹⁷ Its geography, privileged ties with the Ottoman world, overall diplomatic network, and celebrated postal service made it the prime Western European recipient, and indeed manipulator, of information from the East.¹⁸ Although the Republic had no resident Hospitaller ambassador, its unique capacity to provide news was vital for the bellicose alertness of a Mediterranean island at war with Islam and the Order strove constantly to draw on the *Serenissima's* sources of news and diplomatic intelligence throughout its sojourn in Malta.¹⁹ The Hospitaller agents stationed in Venice periodically provided the Convent with what were termed the *avvisi* or *novità del mondo*, handwritten chronicles delivered with the normal administrative correspondence which were intended to update the Hospitaller community on the main happenings in Venice and Europe.²⁰ These *avvisi* were primarily a product of the climate of the age. At times they were sent in printed format from Venice, which had developed into one of Europe's major publishing hubs, or from other ports like Leghorn.²¹ The invention of printing had nourished the desire to publish and was slowly changing the average man's perception of the surrounding environment, from local to regional and from regional to global. Suffice it to say that by the late sixteenth century the recollections and accounts of the daily life, encounters, and evangelical efforts of the Jesuit missionaries in China and Japan were being sent to Europe for printing.²² The seventeenth century in particular, was a century which witnessed what Villari calls a 'boom' in the

proliferation and dissemination of information, a result of a general rise in the degree of political consciousness across all strata of society. Strict monarchical rule throughout Europe was instigating a reaction to authoritarianism which manifested itself in publications, flyers, posters, and pamphlets with political content.²³

However, it was, perhaps, on the Tyrrhenian side of the Italian peninsula that Hospitaller Malta held the most pulsating of all its communication lines. The axis formed by Genoa, Leghorn, Naples, Messina, and Palermo was relied upon on a quasi-daily basis by the Convent. First and foremost came Sicily. Its grain supplies and immediate vicinity to Malta dictated an enduring bond between the two islands which the Order could not but exploit. Dispatches from Malta to the Italian mainland, when not sent directly by sea, were usually delivered via Palermo or Messina. A system of couriers was then employed to carry the dispatches to important centres like Naples, Rome, or beyond. These couriers can be compared to the 'human carriers' employed in the East, like the Chinese 'porters', who delivered news faster than the horses of Tartary, or the *chatirs* of Persia, who carrying urgent letters and precious commodities could travel for hours at a stretch, expertly exploiting short-cuts off the main transport arteries.²⁴ For more urgent news to be carried by land, the Order would hire a *corriero a cavallo*, although more reluctantly due to the higher costs involved.²⁵

Notwithstanding all its flaws and shortcomings, its terrible inefficiency and unreliability, the communication system of an early modern state such as Hospitaller Malta was still capable of remarkable feats. Unmasking an impostor was one of them.²⁶ Tracking down a renegade, an escaped prisoner, an errant knight, or a criminal on the run was another. In such cases the first 'stations' to be informed were the principal Receivers in Sicily and along the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy, the most obvious and likely out of all the immediate destinations for a Christian on the run from Malta. They were alerted in order to take immediate action in case the escapee happened to land in their whereabouts. In March 1705, for example, the Order reported the flight from Malta of Hospitaller Luigi de Rousset, who had secretly embarked on the *filuca* of Antonio Buttari, docked on purpose for the occasion at the inlet of St Julians, with two boxes of silver lent to him by some creditors a few days before.²⁷ Two months later de Rousset was tracked down and imprisoned in Naples.²⁸

Sicily's land mass also acted as a point of encounter for the Hospitaller galley squadron. It was somewhere along the Sicilian coastline that the squadron regrouped at one stage or another during its wanderings around the Mediterranean. And the Sicilian coastline was the first destination of

the *filucas*, *saicas*, or *speronaras* sent in trepidation by the Grand Master in order to re-establish contact with the squadron when too much time passed by without news of its whereabouts reaching the Convent.²⁹

Sicily was the terminal point of a Tyrrhenian axis which served the Order for two important purposes. One was that of channelling funds from its estates in Western Europe. Hospitaller funds from France and the Iberian Peninsula were usually collected in Genoa to be subsequently transported or deposited in Sicily or Malta.³⁰ The other was that of exchanging news with the rest of the European mainland. Here again Genoa played a vital role, at least up to the mid-seventeenth century. Genoa was the equivalent of Venice on the Tyrrhenian, providing the Order with news of major events in Europe through the periodic dispatch of the *avvisi*.³¹ It also acted as a liaison for the official correspondence between the Hospital and the Iberian peninsula, with Madrid in particular.³² This pattern of contacts changed drastically after 1655, when an age-old dispute between the Order and Genoa over the question of precedence at sea came to a climax which ended up severing official contacts between the two states for the rest of the century.³³ The outcome of the diplomatic rift not only changed Hospitaller habits in fund transfer, with *piazas* further south along the Tyrrhenian taking over Genoa's former role,³⁴ it also altered routes along which correspondence was delivered to and from Malta. Leghorn, for example, started providing the Convent more frequently with the *avvisi*³⁵ and Spanish mail started reaching Malta with greater frequency via Naples, which also provided the Order with the *avvisi pubblici*.³⁶

The city-ports along the Tyrrhenian, together with Venice, enabled the Order to have a relatively comprehensive information network with multiple sources ensuring a greater coverage of international affairs and of other, lesser events, more pertinent to its day to day survival. Outside the Italian peninsula, its direct line with the European mainland, Hospitaller Malta reached out eastwards more than anywhere else for news. The Ottoman threat, whether real, imminent, or simply a mental fabrication stimulated by ongoing war and memories of grim encounters, was a ghost that the Hospitaller and Maltese communities had to live with on a daily basis. This situation created a greater anticipation for information from the Levant than from any other corner of the Mediterranean. The return of the galley squadron from its seasonal missions in the East constituted the 'official' and most reliable source for the Convent as regards briefing on the movements and intentions of the Turk. Once safe in port, the captains of the squadron would be summoned by the Grand Master to relate on their mission and to verify, dismiss, or confirm any rumours from the Levant that would have

reached Malta while the squadron's mission was under way. The Order, in fact, went to considerable pains to verify news. When a foreign vessel, a merchant ship, or a *corso* expedition returning to cash in on its booty called at Malta's harbour, the Order's officials were prompt to sap all possible information from members of the crew. Captives and freed Christian slaves were also interrogated in the hope of scraping together bits of information on the situation in the Levant,³⁷ and all this was cross-checked against other knowledge gathered by the Order's 'intelligence' services. Hearsay and rumours were in fact rather common, even within diplomatic circles.³⁸

The Greek archipelago often acted as a channel through which the political and military climate of the eastern end of the Mediterranean reached the West. Islands provided other islands with information. The Maltese consul in Corfu and the Hospitaller agent, or some other European envoy, in Zante briefed the Convent—albeit with inevitable delays in the delivery—and provided news of any relevance that filtered from Muslim quarters.³⁹ These contacts with the East, coupled with Malta's frontier location and vicinity to Barbary, enabled the island to act as sentinel for the rest of Christendom against the Ottoman peril. News or rumours that reached the Convent on the movements of the Porte's armada or sightings in Maltese waters or elsewhere of sizeable enemy squadrons were swiftly communicated to the Catholic world via Sicily and other ports and cities in Italy.⁴⁰

Malta's role as sentry on behalf of Christendom was not restricted to military matters only. Rumours or verified information on plague were communicated to the European mainland with an even greater urgency. According to Mallia-Milanes, Hospitaller Malta's health department and its severe quarantine measures rendered it a 'bulwark' against the spread of plague.⁴¹ If siege-phobia was not always justified, as claimed by some historians, no similar argument would stand against the widespread plague-phobia present throughout the Mediterranean. The strict measures adopted by a state like Hospitaller Malta to avoid contagion in its own territory were fully justified by the biblical devastation periodically caused in all corners of the known world by this epidemic of unknown origin and for which a hapless pre-industrial medicine consistently failed to find any remedy. Prevention was the only defence. Solidarity, mutual collaboration, and special agreements between states and cities were normal occurrences. Genoa and Ragusa (Dubrovnik), for example, developed communication links for the mutual provision of political and sanitary information and warnings against plague. Ragusa briefed Genoa on the situation in the Balkans, Constantinople, and the Levant while the Genoese' task was that of alerting the Adriatic port on any possible contagion in the Western Mediterranean and North Africa.⁴²

Rumours of a plague, whether founded or not, could cripple an early modern state and islands in particular. Authorities spared themselves no energy in trying to discredit any claims among the international community that the contagion was making headway in their own territory. Such rumours could travel faster than the disease itself and the very first precautionary measure of any state was to sever all communication with the suspect territory. In 1676, when the first reports of a *mal contagioso* in Malta were making headway in Europe, the Grand Master painfully and repeatedly tried to reassure the rest of Christendom and quash the malign and fatal gossip by attributing the isolated deaths on the island to the *mal di stagione*, a normal seasonal flu.⁴³ He failed miserably. It proved to be a true and proper epidemic which ultimately claimed over 11,000 deaths.⁴⁴ Inevitably, the first ties to be severed were those with Sicily, where orders were given that even correspondence from Malta was to be rejected.⁴⁵ Understandably this rang alarm bells for the Order, for the interruption of all sorts of contact with Sicily not only meant the obvious headache of finding alternative sources for provisioning the island, but potentially meant the first step towards the interruption of all communication with the much-relied upon Tyrrhenian route. On its part the Order showed itself to be mature and sensible enough in 1705, when it refused to interrupt trade with Pantelleria, and in turn contribute further to the isolation of the tiny place, after adamantly refusing to give any credence to rumours of the spread of plague on that island.⁴⁶

When the Hospital settled in Malta in 1530 the island was still a remote medieval reality. Contacts with the outside world were mainly restricted to Sicily, domain of the Viceroy, feudal lords of the Maltese archipelago.⁴⁷ The world beyond Sicily was often unreachable, too distant and too alien for the Maltese community. With the arrival of the Hospitaller Order the island's relationship with the surrounding areas underwent a gradual yet dramatic change. The Order's religious, military, and hospitaller roles, its estates throughout the European mainland, and its dramatic impact on the island's economy all contributed sensibly to widen, increase, improve, and intensify contacts with abroad, and especially with the European mainland—contacts of a commercial, diplomatic, financial, mercantile, informative, and at times trivial nature.⁴⁸ With the coming of the Order, Malta was not only transformed into a fortress against the advance of Islam and a health facility against the spread of plague, but also developed into Christendom's southernmost listening station at the forefront of Western Europe's early warning system against the bellicose intentions of the Infidel. Notwithstanding its meagre resources, Hospitaller Malta, through the exploitation of its

perilous frontier position and its efforts to cultivate and nurture its communication channels within the Mediterranean and beyond, managed to carve out a special role for itself in a divided Mediterranean while continuing its very own struggle against isolation.

LEGENDA

AOM – Archives of the Order, Malta

f. – folio

r. – retro

v. – verso

Notes

1. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. Trans. S. Reynolds. 2 vols (London 1972–73), 276.
2. Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford, 2001), 225.
3. Predrag Matvejević, *Mediterraneo. Un nuovo breviario*. Trans. S. Ferrari (Zagreb, 1999), 27.
4. Michel Mollat du Jordin, *L'Europa e il mare dall'antichità a oggi*. Trans. Fausta Catalda Villari (Bari, 2001), 19.
5. *Ibid.*, 277.
6. Matvejević, *Mediterraneo*, 30–31.
7. Mollat de Jordin, *L'Europa e il mare*, 277.
8. Matvejević, *Mediterraneo*, 30.
9. Louis de Boisgelin, *Ancient and Modern Malta*, vol. ii, book 1 (London, 1804), 15–19.
10. For a general overview of the geography and topography of the Maltese islands in early modern times see, for example, Giovanni Semprini, 'Malta nella seconda metà del Seicento (Da un manoscritto del tempo)', *Archivio Storico di Malta*, IV (Malta, 1933), 97–112.
11. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 1014–1026.
12. *Ibid.*
13. For a comprehensive analysis on the authenticity of the Ottoman threat in the post-1565 era see Alexander H. de Groot, 'The Ottoman Threat to Europe, 1571–1800: Historical Fact or Fancy?', in Victor Mallia-Milanes (ed.), *Hospitaller Malta*

- 1530–1798 (Malta, 1993), 199–254. For some other considerations on the same subject see Ivan Grech, 'Flow of Capital in the Mediterranean: Financial Connections between Genoa and Hospitaller Malta in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *International Journal of Maritime History*, XVII, No. 2 (December 2005), 193–210.
14. Examples of episodes to support this claim abound in the outgoing correspondence of successive Grand Masters. The following are only sporadic, yet typical, cases: In May 1658, Grand Master Martin de Redin expressed his angst at the interruption of the Naples-Messina route, so vital for the supplies of goods and news to Malta, due to the suspect of plague along those coasts. Archives of the Order, Malta (AOM), de Redin to Resa, f.83v, 10 May 1658; The letters in AOM 1445 are replete with Nicholas Cotoner's words expressing tangible pre-occupation over the difficulty to maintain contacts with the mainland during the plague which hit the island in 1676; In December 1678, the same Cotoner expressed relief at the call at port of some French ships laden with grain from the Levant after complaining about the unusually short supplies from Sicily. AOM 1446, Nicholas Cotoner to Rondinelli, f.214r, 30 December 1678.
 15. The only collections of incoming correspondence from Hospitaller ambassadors resident abroad that can be found in the Archives of the Order in Malta regard the ambassadors in Paris and Rome. However, registers of correspondence of various magistracies show that, at some time or other, the Order held a resident ambassador in other courts such as Naples, for example. AOM, *Repertorio*, f. 41. On the ambassadorial service of the Order Boisgelin says: '(the Order) sent ambassadors throughout all Europe: a proper place was them'. Boisgelin, *Ancient and Modern Malta*, vol i, book 2, 194.
 16. For comments on the Hospitaller lobby in Rome see Ivan Grech, 'Il prezzo dell'onore nel Mediterraneo. Rapporti e dissidi diplomatici tra Genova e l'Ordine di Malta nel Seicento', a forthcoming publication read at an international conference entitled 'Cavalieri di San Giovanni in Liguria e nell'Italia settentrionale. Quadri regionali, uomini e documenti', 30 September–2 October 2004, Genoa (Italy).
 17. For an overview of the history of the Republic of Venice see John J. Norwich, *A History of Venice* (London, 1983); David Chambers and Brian Pullan (eds), *Venice. A Documentary History 1450–1630* (Oxford, 1992).
 18. Eric Dursteler, 'Power and Information: The Venetian Postal System in the Early Modern Eastern Mediterranean', paper read at the 4th International Congress of Maritime History in Corfu (Greece), 23–27 June 2004.
 19. For a general overview of the diplomatic relations and hiccups between Hospitaller Malta and the Republic of Venice see Victor Mallia-Milanes, *Venice and Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798. Aspects of a Relationship* (Malta, 1992).
 20. Some examples: In March 1695, the Venetian ambassador in Rome pledged that the Order was to be kept updated on the Republic's next campaign in the Levant through the *soliti avvisi*. AOM 1460, Wignacourt to Ambassador Sacchetti (Rome), f.30, 18 March 1695; In June 1701 an official message of appreciation was sent to Marino, the Hospitaller receiver (a financial representative) in Venice, for

- dispatching the *soliti fogli degli avvisi*. AOM 1462, Perellos y Rocaful to Marino (Venice), ff.79v–80r, 5 June 1701; In August 1707 Marino reported *nuove del mondo* to the Convent. AOM 1468, Perellos y Rocaful to Marino (Venice), f.113v, 19 August 1707.
21. For example AOM 1463, Perellos y Rocaful to Agent Bussotti (Leghorn), f.101r, 31 May 1702.
 22. Francesco Zanetti (ed.), *Avvisi del Giappone degli anni MDLXXXII, LXXXIII et LXXXIV, con alcuni altri della Cina dell' LXXXIII et LXXXIV. Cavati dalle lettere della Compagnia di Giesù (Ricevute il mese di Dicembre MDLXXXV)* (Roma, 1586). National Library of Malta.
 23. Rosario Villari, 'Introduzione', in R. Villari (ed.), *Uomo Barocco* (Roma-Bari, 1991), x.
 24. Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century*. Vol. I: *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible* (London, 1985), 429–430.
 25. An example: In February 1666 two urgent parcels were to reach Naples and Rome from the Convent. The instructions for Barone, a Hospitaller agent in Sicily, were to employ a *corriero volante à cavallo con il quale patteggiarete il prezzo che converrà darsegli, procurando che sarà il meno possibile*. AOM 1442, Nicholas Cotoner to Barone, f. 17v, 24 February 1666.
 26. In August 1658, for example, the receivers in Milan and Venice were instructed from Malta to look out for a certain Paolo Grimaldi from Palermo who was falsely claiming to be a Hospitaller on some important diplomatic mission. AOM 1434, de Redin to the receivers of Milan and Venice, f.136v, 18 August 1658.
 27. AOM 1466, Perellos y Rocaful to Duca della Bagnara, f.40v, 16 March 1705.
 28. *Ibid.*, Perellos y Rocaful to Procuratore di Giovanni (Messina), f.69v, 5 May 1705.
 29. An episode to illustrate one such situation: In October 1703 a *speronara* was sent to Scicli, off the southern coast of Sicily, to collect any information available on the location of the Hospitaller galley squadron and ease the mind of a worried Grand Master. Giduatto, the Order's receiver in Scicli, was to report to the Convent by sending back the *speronara* immediately. If no news was available, the boat was to be sent forward along the southern coast or wait until the end of the week and return to Malta with the mail from Palermo. AOM 1464, Segretario Cacherani to Giduatto (Scicli), ff.136v–137r, 18 October 1703.
 30. Grech, 'Flow of Capital', *passim*.
 31. At times the Order was also provided with the *gazzette*. See, for example, AOM1425, Lascaris Castellar to Giorgio Latino, f.26, 18 March 1647.
 32. Three examples from three successive decades: AOM 1414, de Paule to Cebà (Genoa), f.98v, 23 July 1635; AOM 1421, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f.102v, 18 May 1643; AOM 1429, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f.73r, 21 May 1651.
 33. Grech, 'Il prezzo dell'onore nel Mediterraneo', *passim*.
 34. *Ibid.*
 35. An example: AOM 1441, Nicholas Cotoner to Procuratore Barone, f.81r, 15 October 1665.

36. Two examples: AOM 1464, Perellos y Rocaful to Gallucci (Naples), f.37r, 25 February 1703; AOM 1468, Perellos y Rocaful to Marullo (Naples), f.113r, 19 August 1707.
37. See, for example, below, footnote 40.
38. See, for example, AOM 1414, de Paule to the *Luogotenente* of the Priory of Lombardy, f.25r, 23 February 1635.
39. Some examples: AOM 1449, Carafa to [Talignau], French Consul in Zante, f.89v, 8 May 1682; AOM 1463, Perellos y Rocaful to Consul Verdizotti (Corfu), ff. 183v–184r, 11 November 1702; A vessel from Cephalonia brought news that the Turks sent out warships to challenge a large Venetian fleet in Andros. AOM 1460, Adrian de Wignacourt to Ambassador Sacchetti (Rome), ff. 182v–183r, 18 September 1696.
40. In May 1664, some Christians who landed in Malta after escaping from Sousse (Tunisia) reported that three galleys from Tunis were to unite with others from Algiers on their way to a corso mission *terminate la luna della loro Pasqua*. The Hospitaller galley squadron, thought to be harbouring in Trapani, in the western corner of Sicily, or some other Sicilian port was to be alerted immediately. So were the other Sicilian coasts in the vicinity: *sarà bene che facciate correre tal'avviso per coteste spiagge, acciò possino meglio ripararsi da ogni danno che potesse loro capitare*. AOM 1440, Nicholas Cotoner to Perello, f.51v, 7 May 1664. In July 1707 the Order briefed Rome on the sightings in Maltese waters of a number of Ottoman vessels. AOM 1468, Perellos y Rocaful to Ambassador Sacchetti (Rome), ff. 93v–94r, 17 July 1707.
41. Victor Mallia-Milanes, 'Between Archaism and Innovation. Hospitaller Malta's contribution to Mediterranean navigation in early modern times', paper read during the proceedings of the conference *III Seminario Internacional de Historia de la Naviación: Islas y navegación en época medieval y moderna 15–17 de junio de 2005, Granada* (Spain). A forthcoming publication.
42. Dragoljub Živojinović, 'Genoa and the Ragusan Merchant Marine during the Eighteenth Century', in Raffaele Belvederi (ed.), *Atti del IV Congresso Internazionale di studi storici. Rapporti Genova—Mediterraneo—Atlantico nell'età moderna* (Genova, 1990), 65.
43. AOM 1445, the correspondence of Grand Master Nicholas Cotoner, mostly with Sicily and Rome, for the first three months of 1676.
44. Joseph Micallef, *The Plague of 1676: 11,300 Deaths* (Malta, 1985), *passim*.
45. AOM 1445, Nicholas Cotoner to Patrimoniali (Sicily), f.128, 28 March 1676.
46. *Non si è mai pensato di levare il commercio à codest isola, poiche quantunque si fusse sparsa la voce che si fusse costì scoperto il mal contagioso, è stato puro equivoco, ne da me l'è stato prestato quell credito che voi supponete*. AOM 1466, Perellos y Rocaful to the Giurati of Pantelleria, f.134r, 18 September 1705.
47. For a comprehensive and highly scholarly overview of Malta in medieval times see Charles Dalli, *Iż-Żmien Nofsani Malti* (Malta, 2002).
48. On the transition period, and eventual change, of the Maltese islands after the arrival of the Hospitaller Order of St. John in 1530 see Mallia-Milanes, 'Between Archaism and Innovation', *passim*.