HOSPITALLER MALTA’S COMMUNICATION SYSTEM WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD IN THE EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Ivan Grech
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HOSPITALLER MALTA’S COMMUNICATION SYSTEM WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD IN THE EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Ivan Grech

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Malta for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

December 2016
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Ivan Grech B.A., B.A (Hons), M.A (ID Number: 500168 M), declare that this dissertation has been done by me; that the work of which it is a record has been done by me; that it has not been accepted in any previous application for another degree. I also declare that all works cited in the text have been consulted by me personally.

______________________________
Ivan Grech

29 December 2016

Date
To the memory of my father, Carmel Grech
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CONVENTIONS

Italics were used for words not in English. Square brackets were adopted when the spelling of original manuscript terminology was not clear, or to write letters omitted in abbreviated original text. When citing magistral correspondence, the surnames of the sender and the addressee were given throughout, except in the tables for reasons of space, while the designation (receiver, procurator) of the various Hospitaller correspondents was omitted due to the huge inconsistencies in the original documentation. The only exception was done in the case of Hospitaller ambassadors. The spelling of proper names in original texts was retained when possible, although the Italian version was generally preferred to the Latin one. In case of inconsistencies, one form was chosen and used throughout the dissertation. The term ‘Regno’ (an abbreviation for ‘Regno delle Due Sicilie’) was used to indicate Southern Italy and Sicily under Spanish Habsburg rule.

Tables 1 to 4B list a selection of Hospitaller representatives and correspondents stationed outside Malta from 1601 up to 1621, Alof de Wignacourt’s last full year as grand master of the Order. Due to obvious constrictions created by the lack of space, separate tables -covering the years 1601-1611 and 1612-1621 - had to be created in order to fit in all the agents and correspondents throughout the entire period in question. In these four tables, multiple entries under one heading usually indicate a handover of the post within the same year in question, or a temporary deputy. Alternatively, they could indicate a division of tasks, especially in case of sizeable territories, as for Germany. Empty slots in these tables indicate years for which relevant data from the sources consulted is not available. In the vertical columns indicating the location in which these correspondents were posted, ‘Priory of Lombardy’ was preferred to ‘Lombardy’ since in Hospitaller jurisdiction the priory in question included also lands in present-day Piedmont. At times, throughout the dissertation, the terms ‘Hospital’ and ‘Religion’ were used for the Order of St John of Jerusalem, as is normal in Hospitaller terminology.
The seminal idea for this project about Hospitaller Malta’s communication system goes back to the immediate months following the submission of my masters dissertation at the University of Malta way back in December 1996. In a half-hearted attempt to rekindle the fire for academic research, I was occasionally consulting documentary volumes of the Order of St John’s outgoing correspondence, trying to further my knowledge on the Knights’ affairs in Genoa, the core theme of my masters. In the process, patterns of systematic contacts and news transmission between early modern Malta and the Mediterranean world started emerging. Hence the concept to try and recreate Malta’s communication system with abroad started taking shape. The ambition from the onset was to adopt a holistic approach. The analysis of Malta’s overseas communications had to develop in unison with that of the prime reasons why such contacts had to be fostered in the first place by the governing elite of the island. In consequence, the whole study rests on the Order’s provisioning, fund transfer, and intelligence-collection policies, the three overarching activities necessary for Malta’s survival in an early modern Mediterranean conditioned by the Habsburg-Ottoman rivalry. Originally the intention was to study this communication system throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the course of my research advised otherwise, as I risked being overwhelmed by the sheer breadth of such an ill-conceived task. Consequently, I progressively narrowed the temporal framework of the study, ultimately deciding to concentrate primarily on the first two decades of the seventeenth century. This period coincides with the magistracy of Alof de Wignacourt, an age of significant infrastructural changes in the history of our island, and one which still deserves more attention than it has been hitherto afforded. The ultimate aim of the study is to show how the coordinated management of the Order’s institutional activities involving communications between Malta and foreign territories was an inherent part of the island’s centenary gestation period conducive to statehood.

As will be evinced by any trained eye in historical studies which affords even a cursory glance at this dissertation, considerable time and energy has been dedicated to the perusal of the Order of St John’s Italian outgoing correspondence. Ideally, any historical analysis of a certain breadth should be based on the consultation of the largest possible number of different primary sources from as many different archives as possible. However, logistics and the necessity to trace early modern Malta’s foreign contact-patterns, apart from the names of Hospitaller agents and correspondents stationed outside the island, conspired in unison to persuade me to dedicate a huge amount of time to the reading of these letters. This was done in the knowledge that no other kind of Hospitaller documentation provides the type of systematic inference I was looking for, without which this study would not have been possible. The benefits and inevitable lacunae inherent in this
choice are evident in the tables listing the Order of St John’s agents and correspondents throughout Wignacourt’s twenty-year tenure, which are inevitably incomplete. Extensive research in the Notarial Archives of Valletta or the exhaustive consultation of the Order’s land registers and prioral visits, for example, could help to fill some gaps in these data collections, but this would take more than a lifetime of research, a luxury which, alas, I am denied. It is hoped, however, that this study can constitute a solid platform for further analysis of Hospitaller Malta’s communication system with the Mediterranean world, many chapters of which still have to be written.

Ivan Grech

December 2016
# CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. iv

Conventions.................................................................................................................................. v

Preface ........................................................................................................................................ vi

Abbreviations .............................................................................................................................. xi

List of Maps, Tables and Flow Charts .......................................................................................... xii

A Note on the Currency ................................................................................................................ xiii

Introduction ..................................................................................................................................... 1

   The Thematic Framework ........................................................................................................ 1

   Source Analysis and Methodology .......................................................................................... 6

   Primary Sources, Correspondence, and Methodology .............................................................. 13

1. **The Hospitaller Order of St John, Malta, and the Mediterranean World** ............ 17

2. **Islands, Frigates, and Couriers. Hospitaller Malta and the Sicilian Contact Network** 48

3. **From Sicily to Italy and Beyond. Hospitaller Malta’s Euro-Mediterranean News**

### Transmission Routes ................................................................................................................. 74

   Hospitaller Malta and the Communications Infrastructure of Continental Europe ............. 74

   Land Routes: From Sicily to Fuori Regno .............................................................................. 79

   The Malta-Naples-Rome connection ...................................................................................... 80
Florence, Genoa, and Milan .......................................................... 86
Venice and the East ........................................................................ 90
Charting Out the Sea Routes: the Transport of Information by Sea .......... 91
Hospitaller Communication Routes in the Western Basin ......................... 94
   Sicily and the Tyrrhenian Route .................................................. 94
   Palermo and Sardinia ................................................................. 96
The Eastern Basin ......................................................................... 100

4. Getting to Know the Enemy. The Order of St John’s Intelligence Network and the Flux of International News to Malta ................................................................. 108
Hospitaller Malta’s Intelligence Sources ............................................ 109
   Information via Constantinople and the Ionian Islands ...................... 109
   Consular Networks as Providers of Intelligence ................................ 114
The Transmission of Intelligence to Malta ........................................ 117
Alternative Sources of Information and Christendom’s Early Warning System .......................................................... 122
   Warnings Against Plague ................................................................ 124
Gauging the Effectiveness of Intelligence Networks ............................. 126
Malta: Christendom’s Southernmost Listening Station .......................... 128
   Malta’s Early Warning System at Work ......................................... 132
The Verification of News .................................................................. 134
The Flux of International News to Hospitaller Malta ............................ 139

5. The Flow of Hospitaller Capital. The Mobilization of Funds from the Order of St John’s European Estates ......................................................................... 146
The Order of St John, Geopolitics, and the Growth of Western Capitalism .... 146
From Latin Syria to Malta: Continuity and Change in Hospitaller Fund Transfer ................................. 153
   Networking and Institutional Coercion: The Surveillance of Hospitaller Personnel .... 153
The Remittance of Prioral Funds: Bills of Exchange, Merchants, and Financiers .................................................. 160
Patterns of Hospitaller Fund Transfer .................................................. 166
Commercial and Financial Information, Liquidity Problems, and Financial Re-Routing... 171
The Transport of Hospitaller Bullion .................................................... 181
6. **Obstacles to Mobility. Hospitaller Malta’s Struggle to Keep Communication Lines Active** ................................................................. 187

How Far was Hospitaller Malta from the Surrounding World? ........................................ 187

The Order’s Continental Reach and Other Impediments .................................................. 197

Remedies to Affliction: Hospitaller Malta’s Efforts to Keep Communication Lines Active ........................................................................ 202

7. **Hospitaller Malta’s Communication System in Operative Mode** ................................. 208

Sicily, the Order’s Galleys, and Hospitaller Malta’s Communication System ............... 209

The Galley Trip of 1613: A Case-Study in Hospitaller Logistics and Early Modern Networking .................................................................................. 212

Chronicle of a Crisis: Malta and the Prelude to the War of Candia .................................. 219

**Conclusion** ......................................................................................................................... 225

**Appendix** .......................................................................................................................... 233

**Bibliography** ....................................................................................................................... 244

Manuscript Sources ............................................................................................................. 244

Secondary Sources .............................................................................................................. 250
ABBREVIATIONS

Amb.  Ambassador

AIM  Archives of the Inquisitor, Mdina (Malta)

AOM  Archives of the Order of Malta, National Library of Malta

f.  folio

ff.  folios

Lib.  Library Manuscript Collection

NAM  National Archives of Malta, Mdina (Malta)

NLM  National Library of Malta, Valletta (Malta)

r.  recto

v.  verso
LIST OF MAPS, TABLES AND FLOW CHARTS

MAP 1 The Mediterranean .................................................................xiv
MAP 2 Hospitaller Malta’s Trunk Communication Routes.................................xv
MAP 3 The Maltese Islands, Sicily, and Calabria ..........................................50
MAP 4 Major Patterns of Hospitaller Fund Transfers ..................................166
TABLE 1 Hospitaller Agents in Sicily (1601-1611) ......................................72
TABLE 2 Hospitaller Agents in Sicily (1612-1621) ......................................73
TABLE 3A Hospitaller Agents and Correspondents in Europe and the Ionian (1601-1611) .....................................................104
TABLE 3B Hospitaller Agents and Correspondents in Europe and the Ionian (1601-1611) .....................................................105
TABLE 4A Hospitaller Agents and Correspondents in Europe and the Ionian (1612-1621) .....................................................106
TABLE 4B Hospitaller Agents and Correspondents in Europe and the Ionian (1612-1621) .....................................................107
TABLE 5 Consuls of the Maltese in Sicily Appointed by the Order of St John in the Early Years of the Seventeenth Century ..............................................116
TABLE 6 Some References to Maltese Consular Posts on the Continent that Emerge from Hospitaller Outgoing Correspondence of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries .................................................................119
TABLE 7 Malta as Provider of Intelligence to Christendom during Alof de Wignacourt’s Administration .................................................................131
TABLE 8 Delivery Times of Incoming Correspondence to Malta ..................190
FLOW CHART Patterns of Hospitaller Fund Transfer to Sicily via Venice ........169
A NOTE ON THE CURRENCY

With the arrival of the Order of St John in Malta in 1530, the island’s monetary situation started
cycling to suit the agenda and affairs of the new government. The Knights Hospitallers embarked
on projects for the transformation of the infrastructure and economy of their new base to meet the
challenges inherent in their religious and military ethos. Up to their arrival, the currency in
circulation on the island was prevalently Sicilian, and hitherto we have no documentary evidence
that any other foreign coinage was injected in the Maltese economy. Shortly after it established its
Convent in the maritime city of Birgu, the Order obtained permission from Charles V to mint its
own coins, which started gradually replacing the currency in circulation at the time on the island.
The monetary connection with Sicily remained strong, however, as the basic unit of account
remained the silver scudo which was equivalent to 12 tari. By the time the Order was ousted from
the island in 1798, Malta was fully integrated into a European financial network which made wide
use of credit transfer mechanisms to exchange one currency with another and to facilitate the
transfer of funds across different territories. At an institutional level, these mechanisms were
mainly used to transfer funds generated by the Order’s estates to Malta or to wherever they were
needed. At the same time, the island’s gradual integration into ever wider international commercial
networks increased the volume of financial transactions with abroad by merchants residing on the
island. The overall result was that all sorts of foreign currencies - from Hungarian thalers, to
Spanish doubloons, and from Venetian zecchini to genovine, livournine, ducats, and Louis d’or –
whose value was fixed by the Order’s Common Treasury, ended up circulating in Hospitaller
Malta from time to time.

For an overview of the monetary changes introduced by the Knights in Maltese economy, see Felice
Restelli and Joseph C. Sammut, The Coinage of the Knights of Malta, vol. i (Malta, Emmanuel Said
MAP 1

The Mediterranean
MAP 2

Hospitaller Malta’s Trunk Communication Routes
INTRODUCTION

The Thematic Framework

Communications is a multifaceted concept which can prove awkward to muster, not least because it has to be distinguished from other related terminology, such as communication and information. Very broadly and succinctly, communication concerns the transport of messages, at least according to William N. Parker’s simple equation, while information has to do with knowledge. Communications, on the other hand, can be considered as a broader notion which encompasses both communication and information, for it implies the distribution through space of people, goods, and news. Before the invention of the telegraph and wireless technology, however, the distinction between communications and communication becomes more blurred, not to say irrelevant, since the transmission of any kind of news could not be independent from physical transport. This spatial dimension of information delivery, therefore, partly condones the casual interchange of the terms communications and communication in any study dealing with pre-industrial society, such as the present dissertation, where it can be considered permissible to speak of a ‘communication system’ when implying a network of contacts which conveyed oral and written messages, goods, funds, animal, and man.

With this terminological clarification in mind, it can be said that communications encompasses a range of topics which touch on all sorts of human activity. In consequence, scholarship dealing with the history of communications is similarly wide in scope and thematically eclectic. Themes pertinent to the subject vary from surveys on networks for the dispatch of messages and letters, to the use of orality for a more immediate exchange of knowledge, and from the cultural relevance of information exchange to its manipulative use by politics. Defining from the onset the precise contours of a study on communications, therefore, becomes an imperative prerequisite to classify the themes chosen and justify their selection.

1 Scholarship on the ‘theory of communication’ has hitherto still failed to arrive at a satisfactory and universally acknowledged definition of the term communication. While the debate on the issue is still open, some experts in this field advise on the simultaneous adoption of a number of concepts which should be applied with flexibility. Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen Foss, Theories of Human Communication (Illinois, Waveland Press, Inc., 2011), 4-5.
4 Ibid.
5 As in the title of the present study.
The present study deals primarily with patterns of official news transmission of the central-Mediterranean archipelago of Malta in early modernity, and more precisely in the early decades of the seventeenth century. Within this remit it concentrates on the nexus between the nature of the information being dispatched and the itinerary of the delivery, while explaining the reasons why a small Catholic island governed by the religious military Order of St John of Jerusalem needed to keep overseas contacts in an early modern Mediterranean world; how it managed to sustain these contacts through the mechanisms of its communication network; and how it manipulated this network to deal with the contingencies that crossed its path. The prime objective of the dissertation, therefore, is to reconstruct and explain the structure of this communications network. A consequent objective is to show how the governing elite of the island exploited this network with the ultimate aim of sustaining and protecting its archipelago-base while perpetrating the Order of St John’s hospitaller and military ethos. In order to achieve these objectives, it was necessary to adopt a tendentially holistic approach which could make possible the analysis of the interconnections and interdependencies between state-run activities ranging from provisioning and financing, to military activity. The ultimate attempt is to recreate the logistical efforts required at an institutional level to guarantee the survival of an archipelago lying on the Mediterranean military frontier.

Since, in the great majority of cases, the transmission of information in pre-industrial society implied the movement of people, a good part of this study will be dedicated to the analysis of:

a. the delivery and the receipt of information through state-established systems of communication which involved sea and land transport, couriers, official representatives, and other human contacts;

b. the sea and land traffic which allowed the Maltese islands to forge systematic correlations with other territories.

By recreating and analysing this system of contacts, the study will explore two fundamental realities of Hospitaller Malta. One is how the Knights Hospitallers kept active communication lines along which the exchange of all sorts of knowledge with a rapidly expanding world took place. The other is how they had to coordinate their maritime and continental affairs in order to administer the Maltese archipelago and perpetrate their ethos of a religious military Order at the service of Christendom’s struggle against the Muslim. It is not possible to comprehend the historical development of Hospitaller Malta in an international context without considering the vicissitudes of the Order’s landed property spread throughout all latitudes of continental Europe, and the interaction between this property and the Order’s maritime activity. These estates, divided into units known as commanderies which in turn were grouped into priories, were mostly acquired
in the Middle Ages and increased considerably the institution’s communication potential and leverage since they constituted contact points hosting Hospitaller personnel randomly spread throughout European territory. Although the Order and its Mediterranean bases were distinct realities, their activities and destinies were intricately inter-related, for the Knights’ hospitaller and military mission - so heavily reliant on these prorial resources - impacted on the populations, infrastructures, and economies that they governed. Throughout its displacement west, the Order transferred its statal powers from one base to the next, affording the Knights territorial control, legislative powers, minting independence, and an autonomous diplomatic activity. The inherent resources of each base and the collaboration of the local populations were essential prerequisites for the perpetration of the hospitalller cause and the implementation of infrastructural developments, military and otherwise. According to Anthony T. Luttrell, this concept of the ‘order state’, and the ‘island order state’ in particular, was transplanted to Malta when Charles V ceded the island as a fief to the Hospitallers in 1530. This complicity between the Order and its new island base had inevitable repercussions on Hospitaller Malta’s communications infrastructure with abroad, with the ultimate and overarching aims to provision the island, relocate prorial capital, and collect intelligence. As will be shown in the following chapters, this communications network was an ulterior element in Malta’s road to statehood.

As a religious community of brethren which by the twelfth century had become fully involved in Christendom’s crusading effort and enduring war against Islam, the Order of St John was compelled to establish and foster contacts at all levels and of various nature from a very early stage of its existence. This state of affairs rendered the Order both a magnet and a transmitter of information, apart from a recipient and distributor of supplies and otherwise, and consequently impacted on the communication agenda, dynamics, potential, and frequency of its different bases throughout its gradual displacement west from the Middle Ages in Latin Syria up to Malta in early modernity. Since the years of sojourn in the east, the Order had to ship provisions, manpower, horses, and cash from Mediterranean ports to its bases. This elicited the maintenance of contacts with a wide stretch of Euro-Mediterranean territory and with the commanderies which were a source of raw materials, fighters, supplies, and currency. At the same time, as a military institution whose activities had international implications, the Order had to sustain official contacts at the highest diplomatic levels, ranging from the exchange of correspondence with European potentates such as Spain, France, the Empire, and Rome, to Asian powers such as Persia. This diplomatic leverage afforded the Order further communication potential, although the mechanisms

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7 Ibid., 27.
of high-level diplomacy - and therefore the role of the Order’s ambassadors and special embassies to foreign courts - will hardly be afforded any space in this dissertation. It is obviously a subjective choice dictated by the thematic texture of the study which stresses more on the communication routes through which Hospitaller Malta was provisioned with supplies, gained military and market intelligence, channelled its funds, and stayed updated on international affairs. It will be shown, in fact, how communication-wise the Southern Sicilian town of Scicli, largely inconsequential to the major Mediterranean traffic and salient events of any age, was in many ways more relevant to Hospitaller Malta than diplomatic powerhouses like Madrid or Paris. Scicli and its relevance to Hospitaller Malta can in fact constitute a most apposite example of microhistory, that is the craft of analysing a case study in history confined within modest geographical proportions as a means to draw insights on broader historical narratives. The contacts between Scicli and Hospitaller Malta fall within the multitude of ‘inter-Mediterranean’ exchanges which contribute further to the ‘history in the Mediterranean’, and which consequently harbour the potential to add yet another small chapter to the many that collectively constitute the ‘history of the Mediterranean’.9

Neither will Hospitaller Malta’s contacts with North Africa be given much importance here. The choice was not dictated by the absence of such contacts, but rather by early modern Mediterranean geopolitics and by the Order of St John’s structural identity. In fact recent historiography has insisted on the commercial and information fluxes between Christendom and Islam in early modernity, confirming how the military and religious-ideological frontier in the Mediterranean world was not an impediment to other forms of intercourse.10 The Maltese trading community and even individual hospitallers, had mercantile interests which solicited trips to North African hubs11 and the Order itself, in different instances throughout its sojourn in Malta, exchanged diplomatic courtesies with North African beys.12 The dissertation, however, deals

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12 For example: Archives of the Order, Malta (AOM) 1422, Lascaris Castellar to Ali Bassà of Tunis, f. 69v, 22 March 1644; AOM 1431, Lascaris Castellar to the [Bey] of Tunis, f. 146, 13 August 1653; AOM 1435, de Redin to the Bassà of Tripoli, ff. 165v-166r, 20 December 1659.
primarily with systematic contact patterns at a governmental level and consequently concentrates on Hospitaller Malta’s two major channels of communication which shunned North African shores for obvious geographical and structural reasons. The first was with Christendom, where the Order had its commanderies and its agents, both of which were vital for the island’s livelihood. The dissertation, almost in its entirety, is based on the interaction between the Convent (the Order’s headquarters) and the Hospitaller representatives on the continent, such as procurators and receivers, considered by Grand Master John Paul Lascaris Castellar (1636-1657) as the ‘pillars of the Religion’. The second channel was with the Levant from where intelligence on the Ottoman fleet, and therefore on possible onslaughts on Malta and Christendom’s littoral, flowed at a regular pace via official channels of news-transmission. The Order had spies in the Muslim half of the Mediterranean, as stated in some of its official histories and as will be shown further on in this study, but the dissertation will focus primarily on how intelligence collected by such spies and various informers - Hospitaller and otherwise - was systematically channelled to Malta to be processed by the Order’s hierarchy.

The timeframe chosen has been narrowed to the early years of the seventeenth century in an attempt to give accurate and detailed insights into the communication mechanism of Hospitaller Malta at a point in time while omitting from the outset any implausible ambition of exhausting the subject through the entire stay of the Order on the island. The restriction in the period under observation allows for a more in-depth analysis of available sources and the effect that geography, climate, and international and transterritorial events and contingencies, such as war and plague, had on Hospitaller Malta’s communication network. Apart from this, as Molly Greene has pointed out, the seventeenth-century Mediterranean has not been awarded the attention it deserves by historiography. Despite contemporary attempts in history writing to reassess the past of the Inland Sea during the ‘long seventeenth century’, Greene’s view is in part shared by Faruk Tabak, who denounces the limited geographic sweep of most of the studies dedicated to the Mediterranean in the ‘autumn’ of its discontent, and by Daniel Hershenzon who claims that Western Mediterranean history, particularly after the expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain

13 ‘i Ricevitori che sono le colonne della Religione’. AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Drost (High Germany), f. 310v, 29 December 1656.
between 1609 and 1614, is still an ‘understudied’ field. In consequence, these scholarly gaps augment the appeal of the Seicento when approaching themes pertinent to early modern Mediterranean history.

The period under analysis, primarily the first two decades of the seventeenth century, coincides with the magistracy of Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt (1601-1622), whom H.J.A Sire ranks with the ‘prominent Grand Masters’ of the Religion for his pragmatic guile in overcoming difficulties. By that time the dust of the Ottoman Siege of Malta of 1565 was buried under the new city of Valletta which helped to stabilize the Order’s presence on the island, providing the Hospitallers with a new centre of gravity and fresh roots as the Rhodian nostalgia faded for good. Wignacourt’s administration injected new enthusiasm within Hospitaller quarters as the institution started coming to terms with the instability created in the previous thirty years due to ecclesiastical intrusion, and new energies were invested in the war against Islam. The Order and the island were prepared for another century of military confrontation and survival through the exploitation of a communication network the mechanisms of which will be explained in the coming pages.

Source Analysis and Methodology

No historical aspect of any territory can be analysed apart from the geopolitical setting in which it unfolds. In order to discuss how Hospitaller Malta kept in touch with the surrounding world, it is imperative to look at the communication mechanisms and geohistorical setting of the Mediterranean and beyond in early modernity. Consequently, it is necessary to consult sources which deal with communications at various thematic and conceptual levels. The literature on the history of news transmission in the early modern age can be roughly divided into studies which concentrate on courier systems of confined national or territorial boundaries, and scholarly analysis with wider breadth and scope which deal with transnational and transterritorial news-relay routes and information exchange. A measure of subjective sampling from this extensive historiographical field, which is gaining an ever-growing popularity among scholars of the social sciences, helps to chart out the publications and sub-themes more pertinent to this study. Vincenzo Fardella de Quiernfort, for example, recreates Sicily’s courier and postal network from the Middle

21 Ibid., 76.
Ages up to the Unification of Italy, while recent Portuguese historiography, making ample use, among other documentary sources, of ecclesiastical documentary material, has dissected the Lusitanian early modern courier system, corroborating findings with quantitative data and pictorial reconstructions depicting the intricate structure of interconnections which enabled a reach into the remotest of corners of the Iberian country. Johann Petitjean adopts a more regional perspective by concentrating on Italy as a vehicle of information with other parts of the Mediterranean in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, focusing in particular on the roles of Venice and Ragusa as east-west information connectors and elaborating on the transmission of intelligence from the Eastern Mediterranean to Italy. E. John B. Allen, on the other hand, meticulously reconstructs the principal post-delivery routes of mainland Western Europe and Britain which became established from the Late Middle Ages. Wolfgang Behringer’s study stands out for its macrohistorical and revisionistic approach to pre-industrial communications. While dissecting the Habsburg Empire’s postal network set up in the heart of Europe at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Behringer elaborates on the concept of a Communications Revolution, which up to then scholarship had confined to North America during the Industrial Revolution - predating it to Renaissance Europe. For Behringer, the apportionment of space and the interconnections created by this network in European territory not only brought about a seismic change in Western European society, comparable in terms of impact to other, more historically acclaimed revolutions such as the Scientific and Industrial ones, but was a necessary precondition for their occurrence.

The role of major cities as centres for the collection and relay of information, and consequently for cultural exchange, is attracting substantial attention in early modern historiography. Derek Keene insists on the importance of cities in international networks, highlighting the relevance of trade for the exchange of ideas and the multiple forms of interaction between urban centres and the territories surrounding them. Authors like Peter Burke, Filippo

26 Behringer, passim.
de Vivo, on the other hand, concentrate more on the connectivity potential of cities like Venice in an international context, adopting a wide approach which comprehends the cultural and political connotations of communication. The implicit nexus between information, communication, and culture makes the consultation of newsletters, both handwritten and printed, an unavoidable exercise for the historian whose research interests comprise forms of information exchange which started proliferating with the onset of the modern era. As the Italian historian Rosario Villari points out, apart from a rise in literacy, post-Gutenberg Europe witnessed an unprecedented surge in the dissemination of information, a process which was partly an offshoot of the changing relationship between rulers and their subjects and the ensuing rise in political consciousness. Several studies on the writing, content, and cultural pertinence of handwritten and published newsletter, avvisi, and gazettes have seen the light in recent decades. Apart from the already mentioned Burke, de Vivo, and Petitjean, writers like Zsuzsa Barbarics and Renate Pieper, Sandro Bulgarelli, Diana Carrió-Invernizzi, Mario Infelise, and Massimo Petta rank with several other historians who have analysed one aspect or another of the newsletter-boom in early modernity, a phenomenon which constituted a primitive form of journalism. Recurring amply to the consultation of original newsletters from various archives and libraries, these authors dwell on the function of such documents in the birth process of public information and the impact that the political, military, commercial, and factual information they purveyed had on a European society veering towards modernity. A cursory look at the reference notes of the publications mentioned above gives an idea of the copious publication in the past decades of works on newsletters in English and other languages, and the wealth of primary newsletter sources available for consultation in European collections which not even extensive monographs on these documentary sources could possibly include in their entirety.

The complexity of human contact networks, however, makes the exclusive perusal of studies which deal explicitly with some form or other of communication somehow restrictive and definitely insufficient. The accessibility and relocation of supplies and funds, and other overarching themes implicit in the running of a state warrant the consultation of histories with an even broader thematic reach. The persisting relevance of Braudel’s *Mediterranean* and the three tomes of *Structures* proves fundamental for the comprehension of themes comprising, among others, geography, land and sea transport, the obstacles created by distance to travel, and consequently to the transmission of information, and credit mechanisms in early modernity. Immanuel Wallerstein’s *The Modern World-System* established novel reference benchmarks in post-Braudelian historical scholarship, especially with respect to the broadening of European economic perspectives and the shift of the global financial and economic centre of gravity to Amsterdam by the early seventeenth century. The works of other world historians like Herbert Heaton, Giorgio Spini, Paul Kennedy, David Landes, Felipe Fernández-Armesto, and Azar Gat help in defining the economic and geopolitical setting in which the story of a small state like Hospitaller Malta unfolds by displaying communication channels on a micro and macro level, and in consequence geopolitical interconnections and interdependency on a regional and transterritorial scale. Kennedy and Gat, in particular, elaborate on the fundamental theme of the complicity between the fortunes of entire states and their potential to access their resources in order to finance warfare. The consultation of publications with such an extensive geographic sweep was mandatory in order to contextualize Malta’s early modern history in a Euro-Mediterranean setting, especially in view of the Order’s extensive property in Christendom which rendered the Knights and their archipelago-base particularly sensitive to the unfolding events of the times beyond their shores. Molly Greene’s works are more Mediterranean-centric and have been consulted to clarify the

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readjustments of the region’s military frontiers and the strategic stalemate that came to be created in the post-Lepanto era through, among other reasons, the constrictions of galley warfare, improved fortifications, logistical difficulties, manpower shortages, and inflation.\(^{46}\)

Although the period under survey is the early seventeenth century, the medieval phase of the Order of St John of Jerusalem had to be afforded a modicum of consideration for obvious structural and chronological reasons. The assembly of any communication system spread over extensive territories is a gradual process which could run for decades and centuries. Malta in early modernity ended up being integrated into a Hospitaller network of contacts which had been in the making since the eleventh century. The grooming of the Order of St John’s international communication channels was a process which ran parallel with the development of its hospice and military roles in the Holy Land and the acquisition and collection of estates throughout the continent, rendering the consultation of some of the Order’s official chronicles like those of Iacomo Bosio,\(^{47}\) Bartholomeo Dal Pozzo,\(^{48}\) and Abbè de Vertot\(^{49}\) an unavoidable preamble to give an idea of the foundation of vital Hospitaller stations in the Mediterranean and beyond. Apart from being contemporaries, and therefore first-hand witnesses of the era under study, these chroniclers had access to the Order’s official documents and archives. Consequently their accounts provide a wealth of information not only on the main events which moulded the history of the Order and early modern Malta, but also on other more structural aspects of the island’s life and that of the Mediterranean world as perceived by the Hospitaller elite. Heavy reliance was made on Dal Pozzo’s chronicle, for example, which covers up to the late seventeenth century and provides countless details and insights on Hospitaller Malta’s maritime life, communication lines, and geographic perceptions from an insular context.

The presence or establishment of contacts - of an official or unofficial, permanent, temporary, or occasional nature - is implicit in most of the instances where mention is made in these histories of human movement pertaining to Hospitaller activity. These could verge from the setting up of a Hospitaller settlement or the presence of a preceptory on the Mediterranean littoral or mainland Europe, all sorts of diplomatic activity and the flux of information involving the Order, the transaction of goods by land or by sea for the service of a commandery or that of the Convent, and the logistics involved in Hospitaller military mobility. Apart from similar official


\(^{47}\) Iacomo Bosio, Dell’Istoria della Sacra Religione et Ill. Militia di S. Gio. Gerosolimitano (Venice, 1695).

\(^{48}\) Bartholomeo Dal Pozzo, Historia della S. Religione Militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta. 2 vols (Verona, 1703 and Venice, 1715).

\(^{49}\) R. Abbè de Vertot, The History of the Knights of Malta (London, 1728).
chronicles, the publications of prominent Hospitaller medievalists like Norman Housley, Jonathan Riley-Smith, Dominic Selwood and H.J.A. Sire directly or indirectly throw light on the formation of the Order’s communication network. A host of other recent publications, thematically less ambitious, and with a more restricted geographic scope, concentrate more on particular territories to recreate the establishment of a specific Hospitaller presence or other. Italian historiography, for example, soundly entrenched in its rigorous archival tradition and ready to indulge in archaeological research in order to suffice for documentary deficiencies, has been quite industrious in recent years in tracing and charting out the medieval origins of several Hospitaller preceptories in Italy. The conference proceedings edited by Josepha Costa Restagno, for example, analyse a host of cases describing how such Hospitaller settlements cropped up in Piedmont, Lombardy, and Emilia Romagna, and about the origins, layout, growth, and relevance of other Hospitaller settlements in Liguria and Tuscany, with direct or indirect links to maritime embarkation points. Judith Bronstein and Anthony Luttrell provide insights on the economic and financial links between the Order’s European priories and its military commitments in Latin Syria. Bronstein elaborates on how the administration of western Hospitaller priories, primarily those of St Gilles and Sicily (the Priory of Messina), was subject to modifications and adjustments in order to cater for the monetary needs of the Order’s cause in Syria in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, while Luttrell throws some light on how the Order channelled its funds east in the fourteenth century through the services of international financiers and bankers. Together with Alison Hoppen’s classic study on the Hospital’s finances in early modernity, Bronstein and Luttrell’s publications provide the thematic platform for the analyses of the channeling of Hospitaller funds to Malta and elsewhere, a pivotal subtheme of this dissertation which elaborates

53 Sire, passim.
55 Bronstein, passim.
further on my study ‘Flow of Capital’ about aspects of the financial connections between Genoa and Hospitaller Malta in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The first specific reference to the Order of St John’s communication network in Maltese historiography must be that of Louis de Boisgelin, whose comment on the Hospitallers’ continental reach inspires the opening lines of this dissertation. Two centuries later, Carmel Cassar talks of Hospitaller Malta’s communication system while elaborating on the impact of the Knights’ sojourn on the island. Neither Maltese nor Hospitaller historiography, however, have given much attention to themes dealing specifically with the way early modern Malta kept active contacts with the Mediterranean and beyond. Two studies which ponder on certain aspects of Hospitaller Malta’s communication network deal mostly with the island’s postal system in the early modern era. Sylvester Bonavia’s and Alfred Bonnici’s works – two hitherto unpublished university dissertations – have the merit of revealing technical details that the craft of the transmission of letters in pre-industrial times involved. Both draw heavily on eighteenth-century sources, attempt to reconstruct the postal organization and history of Hospitaller Malta, and give scant importance to the seventeenth century. Frans Ciappara discloses information from the Archives of the Inquisition of Malta on the way the inquisitors in eighteenth-century Malta communicated with Rome and other parts of Italy. In more than one way, this dissertation will elaborate further on the approach outlined in my paper ‘Struggling Against Isolation’ regarding Hospitaller Malta’s communication system. More than one theme discussed, or simply touched upon, in ‘Struggling’ will be revisited and expanded upon here. The most prominent of these themes are perceptions from an insular context; the use of the Southern Sicilian town of Scicli as a Hospitaller post; the generic exploitation of Sicily for the channelling of mail, funds, and as a geographical bearing for Hospitaller galleys; the Order’s Levantine communication channels for the collection of intelligence; the relevance of the Tyrrhenian route for Hospitaller Malta; and the island’s role as an early warning sentry to Christendom’s central Mediterranean territories.

59 Louis de Boisgelin, Ancient and Modern Malta, i. (London 1804), 289.
60 Carmel Cassar, Society, Culture and Identity in Early Modern Malta (Malta, Mireva Publications, 2000), 64 and 104.
63 Frans Ciappara, The Roman Inquisition in Enlightened Malta (Malta, 2000), 8-11.
Primary Sources, Correspondence, and Methodology

The core primary source at the basis of this entire study is the Order of St John’s official outgoing correspondence written throughout Alof de Wignacourt’s magistracy. This particular archival collection is made of copies of original letters which the Order wrote and sent to foreign royalty and dignitaries, and especially to Hospitaller personnel stationed outside Malta. The principal languages used by the Order in its official documents throughout its history were Latin, French, Spanish, and Italian, but the letters consulted are mostly in Italian, which by the period under study was widely used by Hospitaller bureaucracy even to correspond with places where Italian was not the official language. This was a reflection of the Order’s linguistic trend which by early modernity saw a decrease in the use of Latin by the Knights for their record-keeping purposes. Italian started to be adopted with greater frequency from the mid-fifteenth century, although it was still corrupted by Latin terms and spelling techniques. The use of Italian afforded greater linguistic flexibility and variety than Latin for the drafting of records on a daily basis. Italian gained further popularity within Hospitaller ranks when the Order settled on Malta, an island which inevitably encouraged greater interaction with Sicily and Southern Italy, and where the use of the Sicilian dialect was more popular than any other foreign tongue.

The function of letters as information carriers - whether at a diplomatic or personal level, as business correspondence, merchant letters, newsletters, or otherwise - has been subjected to a re-evaluation in modern historiography. Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond, in their comprehensive overview of the contribution of correspondence to the rise of the West, discuss how the pertinence of letters as a major historical source has grown in stature in recent years, due also to the emergence of the history of communication as a comparatively novel historiographical branch. Energetically brushing aside the notion that correspondence is ‘just information exchange’, Bethencourt and Egmond exalt the genre of letter writing in its totality, from the most intimate to the institutional, and its potential as a means to create transterritorial networks. Francesca Trivellato and economic historian Claudio Marsilio highlight the increasing importance of merchant letters and business correspondence as a documentary source to recreate

65 For a discussion of the official languages used by the Order from its origins up to the sixteenth century, see J. Brincat, ‘The Languages of the Knights: Legislation, Administration and Diplomacy in a Multilingual State (14th-16th Centuries)’, in Language and Diplomacy, J. Kurbalija and H. Slavik (eds.) University of Malta, Malta 2001, 261-79.
66 Ibid., 267-73.
68 Ibid., 5.
private and institutional financial networks. In tracing the rise of business, commercial, and financial information and its contribution to the creation of a more efficient Euro-Atlantic trade organization, both Trivellato and Marsilio stress the importance of business letters as a primary source for commodity prices, exchange rates, currency quotations, product descriptions, and other data related to the economic and financial climate of the age.

In Hospitaller Malta’s case, the sequential consultation of the Order’s outgoing magistral correspondence is an unavoidable task if any attempt at recreating the island’s systematic connectivity with abroad is to harbour aspirations of credibility. No other documents in the Maltese archives, for example, provide such extensive information on Hospitaller Malta’s official patterns of news transmission, communication routes, and overseas contacts. Such information ranges from data on mail delivery through the use of sea crafts, couriers, and foreign postal networks, to the occasional exchange of oral information; and from the collection of military and market intelligence, to systematic evidence permitting a modicum of statistical analysis on the average travel times required to connect Malta with the surrounding world. The magistral outgoing correspondence is also useful to recreate the inflow patterns of newsletters to Malta and acts as an institutional equivalent to the business correspondence of foreign financial networks, enabling the historian to reconstruct Hospitaller fund-transfer patterns, an exercise which otherwise would probably have to be aborted due to the huge lacunae in the Order’s Common Treasury documents for the early decades of the seventeenth century.\(^71\)

These letters also act as a documentary surrogate by providing mere evidence, and occasionally clear hints of the content and nature, of official incoming correspondence to Malta which has seemingly gone lost. In Genoa’s case, for example, the Order’s outgoing correspondence frequently records the Convent’s receipt of official mail from Hospitaller agents stationed in the Republic, affording the historian an idea of the timing and frequency of the official exchange of information between the two states. Similar knowledge helps to tone down the largely unidirectional nature of the existing correspondence by Hospitaller personnel in Maltese archives which, with the exception of batches of ambassadorial correspondence from Rome and France, is almost entirely outgoing for the period under study.\(^72\) Other incoming correspondence manuscripts which include a handful of letters written within the two decades under analysis can be found in the documents AOM 57 to AOM 61. These five documents, which are oddly not classified with

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\(^71\) The only Common Treasury documents which constitute an exception in this regard for the first two decades of the seventeenth century are AOM 737 and AOM 775. AOM 452 to AOM 460, the Liber Billarum manuscripts which cover the years 1599 to 1622, provide information on the financial transactions between the Order’s agents on the continent, mainly involving the Order’s receiver in Palermo.

\(^72\) The few exceptions are AOM 1213, which includes letters from different ambassadors in Rome and France for the years 1626 to 1643; AOM 1251 to AOM 1261, which include letters of hospitaller ambassadors in Rome to Malta for period under study; and AOM 6428, which include some ambassadors’ reports from 1614 to 1645.
the rest of the correspondence under Section IX of the Order’s Archives, include mostly letters addressed to the Order by European royalty. Occasionally they also include letters sent by Hospitaller personnel stationed outside Malta during Alof de Wignacourt’s magistracy. Very frustratingly for our purposes, the correspondence from Italy included in AOM 61 which could be of interest to us is almost exclusively sent from the northern half of the peninsula. Similar lacunae in Hospitaller archives render the consultation of the Order’s outgoing correspondence even more pertinent, for these batches of letters are the only ones hitherto available which cover our period in its entirety, while providing a wider geographic compass in terms of places to which letters are addressed, albeit with a substantial bias towards Sicily and Italy.

The consultation of the magistral correspondence has been corroborated mainly by information from the Liber Conciliorum, the Liber Conciliorum Status, and the Liber Bullarum documents kept at the Archives of the Order, Malta. The Liber Conciliorum documents deal with the decisions taken by the Grand Masters and the Order’s Council on all sorts of administrative issues regarding Hospitaller Malta. In 1623, the Order decided to start classifying decisions regarding foreign affairs separately in the Liber Conciliorum Status documents. These Conciliorum manuscripts provide information on the postings of Hospitaller personnel on mainland Europe and thus give a clearer and more comprehensive idea of the extent of the Order’s communication network. The Liber Bullarum documents also provide information on assignments handed out to Hospitaller personnel and occasionally help to fill gaps regarding Hospitaller posts on the continent which are hardly traceable in the magistral correspondence, as in the case of the Hospitaller agents in Marseilles and Calabria for example. The Bullarum are also useful to trace assignments of Maltese consular posts overseas and for the frequent instructions handed by the Convent to the Order’s galleys about to embark from Malta on maritime missions to fetch provisions, supplies, and funds, to collect intelligence, for corso raids in Barbary, the Levant, or the Western Mediterranean, or for escort missions. These instructions supply the historian with a wealth of information about Hospitaller Malta’s contacts with the Mediterranean littoral and with the Order’s agents stationed abroad, and therefore throw further light on Hospitaller Malta’s communication system.

The combined analyses of the secondary and primary sources outlined above help in the recreation of Hospitaller Malta’s communication system and provide insights on how this system worked in practice within the geopolitical constraints of the age. The whole concept and aim of the

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73 See, for example, AOM 61. In AOM 58, which includes incoming correspondence from France, only folios 36 to 55 cover Alof de Wignacourt’s magistracy, and with several empty pages. In AOM 59, some letters addressed to Wignacourt from Iberia can be found in folios 95 to 106, while in AOM 60, the incoming letters from foreign royalty relevant to our timeframe are mostly confined to folios 51 to 57.

74 Mostly from Savoy, Piedmont, Tuscany, Milan, Modena, and Parma.

75 For example: AOM 454, f. 262r, 25 May 1602.

76 For example: AOM 458, f. 290v, 21 August 1612.
present dissertation come to fruition in chapter seven, the last chapter, which is based on the reconstruction of two seventeenth-century hospitaler maritime trips some decades apart undertaken to supply the Maltese islands. Through these case studies it will be shown how Hospitaller Malta’s communication system worked in full operative mode, highlighting the coordinating efforts needed at a territorial and maritime level between the Convent in Malta and its maritime and continental personnel. The analysis of these documentary samples emphasizes how the Order had to connect with its foreign representatives, exploit shipping routes and foreign courier services, remain updated on international affairs, foreign market forces, and currency and product price fluctuations, collect, verify, and process intelligence on the enemy, and adapt and react to contingencies in pre-industrial real time, all in order to see the trips through and supply its archipelago base while striking the most favourable trading and monetary deals possible in the process. The case studies illustrate a main objective of the dissertation, that is to show in a tangible way how early modern Malta’s affairs were interconnected on a global level, and were consequently conditioned by forces displayed in the Mediterranean, Europe and beyond. A failed monetary remittance from a commandery or rumours of an Ottoman sortie from Constantinople could impinge on Hospitaller shipping by delaying trips or altering their course, and therefore conditioned Malta’s existence.

In order to comprehend similar cases of Hospitaller Malta’s connectivity potential and mechanisms it was necessary to set the scene in the preceding chapters in which the Convent’s communication system is recreated. Chapter one outlines the Mediterranean geopolitics of the age, the early development of the Order of St John’s communication network, the institution’s displacement westwards from Latin Syria up to the settlement on Malta, the changes that this settlement brought about to the island, the islanders, and the Order itself, and the basic necessities which made communication so vital, mainly provisioning, the transfer of capital, and the collection of intelligence. Chapters two and three reconstruct the Order’s network of foreign agents and how they interacted with and exploited Mediterranean shipping routes and the courier networks operative in Sicily, Italy, and beyond for the transfer of information and otherwise to and from Malta. Chapter four recreates Hospitaller Malta’s intelligence collection network while chapter five shows how the Order made use of financial mechanisms of the age and exploited its contact network to transfer its prioral funds from the commanderies to Malta or wherever they were needed. Chapter six strives to show the effects that geography, distance, climate, events like war, and contingencies like plague had on the transmission of news to and from Malta. Ultimately it is hoped that the recreation of this communication network not only throws new light on the period under study, but provides a fresh analytical approach to Hospitaller Malta.
THE HOSPITALLER ORDER OF ST JOHN, MALTA, AND THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

From Latin Syria to Malta: the Hospitaller Communication Network

According to Louis de Boisgelin, who was published in the early nineteenth century, Hospitaller Malta’s communication network stretched from Cadiz to St Petersburg.\(^1\) The claim, stemming from what must have been sound archival knowledge on the historian’s part,\(^2\) has been strengthened further by posthumous research and scholarship. Decades of historical studies since, dealing with a plethora of aspects of Hospitaller life,\(^3\) have shown the Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem to be an institution with a surprisingly intricate and far-reaching web of contacts which had started to be fostered and extended since its foundation in eleventh-century Syria as a community of brethren intent on providing shelter, care, and assistance to pilgrims visiting the Holy Land.\(^4\) By the early twelfth century Brother Gerard, the founder of the Jerusalem hospice of the Order, was establishing a travel network for the transport of pilgrims from Western Europe to the Holy Land. He set up a series of hospices, from Southern Italy to Saint-Gilles in Provence, most of them in relevant embarkation posts for the maritime crossing to Palestine which ultimately served as service stations for provisioning the Frankish states in Syria during the crusading years.\(^5\)

While the Order’s settlement in Asti (Piedmont) provided a transit station between Southern France and the Northern Italian hinterland, on the Tuscan shores Pisa was the first maritime city to host a Hospitaller presence, and in the southern end of the peninsula the Order settled first in Bari,

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1 Louis de Boisgelin, Ancient and Modern Malta (London, 1804), i, 289.
2 Although Boisgelin fails to make specific archival references in his history of Malta, the section he dedicates to the Order gives ample reassurance as to his knowledge of the structure and workings of the Order. His appendices are replete with detailed information on Hospitaller expenditure and property. In some of his rare footnotes he does cite specific letters written by Hospitaller dignitaries (in volume one, pages 254-5 for example). His overall approach is that of a critical assessment of Hospitaller historiography, often citing earlier historians, like Iacomo Bosio and Abbé de Vertot, and correcting chronological errors which, according to him, had been committed by other scholars (see for example volume 2, page 32). Boisgelin, passim.
Otranto, and Taranto on the Apulian coast and Messina in Sicily. By the middle of the twelfth century the Order had established itself in the important embarkation port of Genoa. According to Ann Williams, the Order’s Western European structure of properties divided into priories and langues had already been established by the fourteenth century, providing the Order with a series of contact points throughout vast expanses of the continent. The Order also endeavoured to establish commercial contacts and by the beginning of the fifteenth century, for example, Hospitaller consulates could be found in Jerusalem, Ramla, and Damietta.

Substantial evidence of the Hospitallers’ reach in the Mediterranean, mainland Europe, and occasionally beyond is also clearly displayed in the official histories of the Order. In recounting the military engagements of the Hospitallers, the trips of their squadron around the Mediterranean, the collection of intelligence, the diplomatic missions to foreign courts, the vicissitudes involving their estates on the continent, the flow of currency and merchandise to and from their base, episodes pertinent to the lives of individual knights, and other events related to the unfolding history of the time, chronicles such as those of Giacomo Bosio, Bartolomeo Dal Pozzo, and Abbè de Vertot provide a random, disconnected, yet generally reliable and indicative picture of the contact sources that the Order could rely on.

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10 As regards the early years of the Convent, Iacomo Bosio, for example, speaks of territories in Provence donated to the Knights in the twelfth century and of thirteenth-century privileges granted to the Hospital to export goods from France to Syria or elsewhere. Iacomo Bosio, Dell’Istoria della Sacra Religione et Ill. Militia di S. Gio. Gerosolimitano (Venice, 1695), i, 176 and 173 respectively. Abbè de Vertot, on the other hand, mentions how the Order used to send old hospitallers with the title of preceptors to administer its estates in Europe; he speaks of the remittance of revenue from the West to sustain Hospitaller activity in Palestine; he claims that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the grand masters were well versed on European affairs; he refers to a letter of reproach sent from the Convent to the commanders of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway for their failure to deliver funds after the loss of the Holy Land. Abbè de Vertot, The History of the Knights of Malta (London, 1728), i, 24, 114 and 261 respectively. However, these are just a few examples among many which can be found throughout these official accounts. Similar instances from Dal Pozzo implying the setting up and existence of a network of communications which served the Order throughout its centuries-old history will be cited further on in this study. Bartholomeo Dal Pozzo, Historia della S. Religione Militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta. 2 vols. Verona, 1703 and Venice, 1715.
By the time the Order landed in Malta in 1530, it could draw on an established contact network of ambassadors, diplomatic envoys, financial representatives, priors, commanders, procurators, consuls, agents, spies, and other occasional sources. These in turn could usually solicit the services of an unspecified number of diplomatic contacts, informers, personal acquaintances, couriers, and errand boys, most of them historically anonymous, who allowed the Order a degree of reach into Mediterranean and mainland European territory which would otherwise have been unattainable in a pre-industrial world where news and information travelled solely with people, on sea craft, or horseback.

*The Hospitaller Island Phase: Relocation and Adaptation*

The significance of active communication lines for any form of human settlement or endeavour in all civilizations cannot be unduly stressed. Adam Smith, in his classic eighteenth-century political economy treatise *Wealth of Nations*, evidenced the correlation between the dominance of major passageways and the fortunes of states. For islands throughout the millennia before the industrial age of mechanical innovation, where man, animal, and wind were the sole propellers of movement and thus conveyors of information, the importance of such correlation could reach proportions pertinent to the survival of a community in a relatively short period of time. Islands and aspects related to their existence, nature, and survival have attracted the attention of several minds since the dawn of literature. Homer’s Ithaca is the elusive destination of seemingly endless wanderings, soul-searching, and peregrinations; for Hesiod they were the heroes’ den and sorrowless places of repose; while Artemidorus of Daldis apparently listened to countless oneiric evocations while traveling from one island to another. In contemporary literature, Michel Mollat du Jourdin claims they are donations to the sea following seismic unrest; the Bosnian Croat scholar Predrag Matvejević dwells on their uniqueness, ascribed mainly to their distance from the mainland, but also describes them as remote places of solitude and penance, occasionally chosen as depositories of social outcasts in specially-built penal colonies; Felipe Fernández-Armesto sees them as

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11 Whenever the documents consulted for this study do not specify the exact nature of the post or office being referred to, the generic term ‘agent’ will be adopted. An ‘agent’ could be a financial or a diplomatic representative or a procurator appointed by the Order in a specific town, city, or district.
‘knots in the net of commerce’ and shares the view that in many cases they were worlds of want, ever dependent on mainland supplies and perennially fighting a precarious battle for survival, and Pietro Citati considers them an ‘archetype’ of western thought, timeless and surreal places which epitomise mankind’s solitude.

The theme of the presumed isolation of islands has long passed through the ordeal of scholarly debate and the historical verdict enacted leaves little room for reconsiderations. Doyens of history writing such as Braudel, Peregrine Horden, and Nicholas Purcell were unequivocal in dismissing the possibility that in by-gone eras islands in confined expanses such as the Mediterranean could have suffered complete detachment from the surrounding world. Fernández-Armesto, broadening his views to planetary proportions, acknowledges that sea lanes were mostly charted along islands. However, he is reluctant to dismiss isolation completely in cases of particular remoteness and does not altogether reject the possibility of self sufficiency in the case of extremely remote islands with large-enough hinterlands, citing Hawaii and the Easter Island as examples.

The shift - ushered largely by the French school of the Annales - from an anthropocentric concept of man’s past to an approach more reliant on geographical determinism inevitably imposes particular parameters when analysing island histories. More than one author has dealt with the character-moulding effect that islands exert on their dwellers, how the latter’s language, identity, rhythm of life, and attitude to foreigners assume distinct features, how they earn a renown for introspection and are inevitably condemned to a life of passive expectation, were waiting for whatever the sea decides to deliver to their fold often contributes to a more somnolent existence. Fernández-Armesto stresses the role of the sea and its irresistible influence in shaping the lives and perceptions of islanders and the destiny of islands, regardless of their size. The Maltese medievalist Charles Dalli, on the other hand, reassesses the concept of insularity by drawing socio-geographic parallels between different groups of central-Mediterranean archipelagos. In outlining

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18 Pietro Citati, La mente colorata. Ulisse e l’Odissea (Milan, Oscar Mondadori, 2004), 125.
20 Fernández-Armesto, 326; 334-9.
21 The school of the Annales, starting from its member-founders Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, insisted on an interdisciplinary approach in which geography, economics, and anthropology were given greater relevance in historical studies in an effort to break what Peter Burke calls the ‘monopoly of political history’. For a succinct analysis of the introduction in the social sciences of such multidisciplinary trends that emerged mostly in twentieth-century France and the United States see Georg G. Igers, Historiography in the Twentieth Century. From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge (Hanover and London, Wesleyan University Press, 1997), chapter 5 and Peter Burke, History and Social Theory (New York, Cornell University Press, 1993), 14-17.
22 Grech (2006); Matvejević, 30-1; Mollat du Jourdin, 277.
23 Fernández-Armesto, 327.
the distinctions between various islands created by sheer size, he ponders on the ‘ecology of smallness’ and asserts that islands closer to the size of Malta deserve an independent analysis, one which, notwithstanding the differences at times created by contrasting politico-religious situations, finds common traits in the limitations of the landscape and ensuing problems of provisioning, in the fear and preoccupation caused by exposure to sea sorcerers, in the perception of the outside world, in a ‘self-contained’ reality conducive to the preservation of language and tradition, and in the resort to piracy and enterprising economic activity as remedies to insecurity and poverty.24

The island phase of the Hospitaller Order of St John started in the last decade of the thirteenth century. The fall of Acre in Syria in 1291 brought to an end two centuries of Latin penetration and settlement in the Middle East and consolidated a process of land reclamation by Islam which would see the Ottoman stock dominate the eastern and southern basin of the Mediterranean by the mid-sixteenth century.25 While for most of the Catholic forces involved in the Levant, expulsion from Syria meant retreat to their European bases, for the military orders it ushered a search for a new home and a redeployment of their services. The Teutonic Order colonized and governed Prussia and Livonia, and went on to fight for years against Lithuania.26 The Templars settled in Cyprus in 1291, orchestrated naval expeditions against Mamluk strongholds, and defended the island of Ruad near Tortosa, before suffering persecution and suppression at the hands of the government of Philip IV of France in the early fourteenth century.27 As for the Hospitallers, lengthy sojourns in Cyprus (1291-1310) and Rhodes (1310-1522) were followed by a relatively brief interlude of wandering on the mainland continent.28 This meant that by the time Emperor Charles V conceded them Malta as a fief in 1530 they were well accustomed to life on an island. In a way, the Knights of St John had become islanders themselves.29 Their mindset was conditioned by an insular mentality which brought in its wake that inevitable collateral of angst, sense of precariousness, and fear of isolation the echoes of which permeate through the official documents of the Order.30 The historian can discern such distress despite the fact that, as decades of permanence on Malta rolled by, the Order seems to have developed a sense of identity and bondage with the island which – to answer Simon Phillips’ query – can be

26 Housley, 204.
27 Ibid., 207-14.
28 Ibid., 214-31.
perceived through the ‘possessive phraseology’31 adopted even in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Hospitaller manuscripts,32 not only for Malta, but also for its sister islands and the city of Valletta.33

However, the reluctance and scepticism with which the Order ultimately accepted to settle on Malta, due also, no doubt, to the Spanish-imposed burden to govern Tripoli in Barbary,34 perhaps are also a reflection of those inconveniences that life on an island implied and with which the Hospitallers were by then well accustomed to. The eagerness betrayed by the Order’s hierarchy for a return to Rhodes,35 another island yet larger, far greener, and more opulent than Malta,36 was a statement of unequivocal priorities – the potentially strategic discomfort of a Greek post in the very heart of enemy territory, hours away from hostile Anatolia, was preferred to the meagerness of the Maltese archipelago, on the doorstep of Christendom and a day’s sail from fellow Catholic Sicily, another Habsburg island in arms against Islam.37 The years in the East had battle-hardened the Knights and refined their predatory instincts to a degree that allowed them enough military confidence to seek a return to the base on which they had suffered a major attack by a Mamluk squadron in 1440 and three terrific sieges in the span of seventy-eight years,38 and which ultimately saw them as expelled losers in January 1523. Rhodes was an excellent trading post from where the Hospital sold sugar to the West and bought cloth for reselling in the Levant.39 It was

32 Speaking of the shipment to Malta of two biscuit-laden vessels, Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt gives instructions that they were to be towed by Hospitaller galleys ‘sino alla vista di q[ue]sta n[ost]ra isola’. AOM 1397, Wignacourt to the Prior of Rome, Aldobrandini (Generale delle Galere), f. 79, 9 March 1618. At times Wignacourt’s reference to the islands is even more personal, calling them ‘queste mie isole’ (my islands). AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Monsignor Antonio Tornielli, ff. 213v–214r, 29 May 1619 and Guzo ‘mia isola del Gozzo’, AOM 1398, Wignacourt to the Provinciale de Conventuali di San Francesco, f. 308v, 22 August 1619.
33 Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Rocafull talks of ‘la nostra isola del Gozzo’ when discussing the garrisoning of the island in view of a feared Ottoman attack, and Alof de Wignacourt talks of ‘nostro isolotto del Comino’ when referring to the ‘beautiful’ fort built on the islet and in another instance talks of ‘questa mia città Valletta’. AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocafull to Marino (Venice), ff. 134v-135r, 6 August 1708, AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Amb. Guevara (Rome), ff. 321v–322, 25 July 1620, and AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Generale de Conv[entuali di S[an] Fran[ces]co, ff. 75v–76, 31 January 1621 respectively.
34 Boisgeline, ii, 15-19. The Hospitaller hierarchy took time to adjust to the idea of settling on Malta. Three years after the dismal report of 1524, the Order was lobbying with European monarchs hoping they would intercede with Emperor Charles V to allow them to settle on Malta. AOM 625, f.23 and AOM 412, ff. 253-4.
35 Housley, 230-31. According to Housley, the Order was still hoping to recover Rhodes in 1565 while Luttrell claims that the Hospitallers’ hopes of abandoning Malta protracted beyond the Ottoman Siege of Malta. Housley, 232 and Luttrell (1993), 261 respectively.
36 On the landscape, produce, strategic relevance, and trading attractiveness of Rhodes see, for example, Housley, 214-5 and Luttrell (1993), 271. See also NLM Lib. 163, Abate Cenni, Historia dell’Ordine Sacro e Militare de’ Cavalieri di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano scritta dall’Abbate Cenni, 45-6. Abbot Luca Cenni was writing in the second half of the seventeenth century and dedicated his history of the Order to Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner. Part of this account has been published in George Paul Pisani, The Battle of Lepanto. 7 October 1571. An Unpublished Hospitaller Account. Malta, BDL Books, 2015.
37 For an elaboration on the most obvious differences between Malta and Rhodes, see Luttrell (1993), 264-5.
38 In 1444, 1480, and 1522. Housley, 225-8.
39 Ibid., 216.
closer to enemy lines, a base station from which the Knights were in a position to launch amphibious operations against the foe on the Anatolian and Syrian coasts with greater ease and from where they could continue to happily disrupt Muslim trade due north from Alexandria and raid illegal Christian shipping with Egypt. Most conveniently, an immediate return to Rhodes would have spared the Order the energies and draconian measures needed to fortify a new post. The Greek island needed no new military infrastructural master plan and suited the Hospitallers’ bellicose purpose more than a post in the central Mediterranean could have done. From Rhodes it was somewhat easier for them to perpetrate that Holy War of aggression which, apart from the hospice services, had become an integral part of their cause since the thirteenth century in Syria when the shift to a military role took place.

**Administration of an Island: Provisioning, Capital, and Conflict**

When the Order settled on Malta, on the other hand, it was well aware from the onset of the problems it was to face in provisioning the island’s population. It is quite easy for the historian to meet random references in the copious documentation pertaining to the Hospital about the unsustainability of the archipelago, leaving him with little doubt that the logistics for the purchase of wheat, the staple cereal of any pre-industrial society in the Mediterranean, were by far the prime worry of all grandmasters some of whom talked blatantly of the ‘unbearable torment’ of hunger when trying to convey the sense of anxiety gripping the population in times of acute shortages. Such problems continued to condition the life and policy of the institution throughout its stay on Malta and were periodically inflated by a steadily expanding demography which did not experience any significant and long-term reversals as the modern age unfolded. Episodes which

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40 Ernle Bradford, *The Shield and the Sword* (London, Penguin Books, 2002), 57; Housley, 214-5; 217; Greene (2007), 115-6; On the importance of Rhodes as a stopping station for trade with the Levant and between Egypt and the Black Sea, see Luttrell (1993), 265. It is not that the shift West discouraged the Knights from persisting in their harassment of freight transport in Egyptian waters. In 1608, for example, the galleys of the Order caught a timber-laden vessel with forty Turks sailing in Alexandria’s waters. Bartolomeo Dal Pozzo, i, 540; Dal Pozzo’s chronicle is replete with similar episodes of Hospitaller naval attacks on shipping in Levantine waters. See, for example, Dal Pozzo, i, 543; 578; 635; 653-4; 725; 760; and 762.

41 Luttrell (1993), 261.


43 See, for example, Boisgelin’s account of the 1524 Hospitaller Commission’s report on the Maltese archipelago. Boisgelin, 15-19.


45 For example: AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Prince Nixemi (Palermo), f. 165r, 3 November 1708.

46 In May 1603, while discussing the offloading of Levantine wheat in Syracuse and consequent availability of provisions in Sicily, Wignacourt complained with his agent in Palermo about shortages in the Maltese islands due to that year’s bad harvests and ‘la moltiplicazione dell’habbitatori’. AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Aflitto (Palermo), ff. 157-158r, 19 May 1603.
resulted in severe population losses, such as the mass forced exodus from Gozo by the Turks in 1551 (see below) and the plague of 1676 which claimed over 11,000 lives, were relatively brief interruptions in an otherwise constant demographic rise. Contemporary descriptive accounts of the island like that of Abate Cenni lament its arid, rock-strewn terrain, limited cultivable land, lack of trees and rivers, and insufficient natural springs and rainfall. The Hospitallers sent to carry out a reconnaissance of the proposed island post in 1524 highlighted the insufferable summer heat. Pauperism was apparently rampant and peasant folk lived miserable lives inducing some grandmasters to repeatedly refer to the population with the epithet ‘questo povero popolo’. The same Abate Cenni, on the other hand, talks enthusiastically of the island being ‘ricca d’abitatori’ who died almost exclusively of old age due the ‘salubrious’ air which blessed the archipelago, while in the early 1700s Inquisitor Caracciolo described the island as ‘full of gardens with all sorts of savoury fruits’.

However, despite similar attestations to the archipelago’s pleasant ambience, the sterility, barrenness, and lack of self-sufficiency of Malta were obsessively underlined by the various magistracies, at times even to Imperial courts deep in the Northern European hinterland, which were made aware of the aridity of Christendom’s southernmost outpost. In the summer of 1569, in charting instructions to a naval expedition, Grand Master Pietro del Monte (1568-1572) complained how this ‘sterile’ island had become even more barren after the ruinous landing of the Turks four years earlier and how the Maltese, left even more destitute after the siege, were unable to grow crops in formerly fertile areas. Grand Master Perellos y Rocaful (1697-1720) complained with the Order’s ambassador in Rome that even the best land in Malta ultimately offered a very low yield. Drought - not an infrequent visitor – was potentially more destructive than enemy

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48 NLM Lib. 163, Cenni, 61-2.
49 Boisgelin, 15-19.
50 AOM 1466, Perellos y Rocaful to Padre Generale de Carmelitani (Rome), f. 36v, 3 March 1705.
51 NLM Lib. 163, Cenni, 64.
52 Some examples: AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 341-342r, 6 October 1604; AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Gio. Maria Attardo, ff. 112v-113r, 30 March 1606; Ibid., f. 248, 22 July 1606; AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 44-45r, 6 February 1607; Ibid., Wignacourt to Gio. Maria Attardo, ff. 236v-237r, 20 September 1607.
53 NLM Lib. 163, Cenni, 64.
54 Ibid., 62.
55 Archives of the Inquisition of Malta (AIM), Memoriale 1, Inq. Caracciolo, ff. 55v-56r.
56 AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria, and Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, ff. 424v-426r, 6 September 1615.
57 AOM 432, f. 253, 27 June 1659.
58 AOM 1468, Perellos y Rocaful to Amb. Sacchetti (Rome), ff. 106v-107r, 6 August 1707.
visitation. The countryside could end up in a ‘deplorable’ state months before summer, leaving scant hope of a decent harvest, a thirsty livestock, and little water to irrigate the cotton fields. The first three months of 1607, for example, apparently went by without any rainfall and it was feared that the island’s entire harvest of that season was bound to be lost.

However, such drastic and dramatic claims warrant a measure of scepticism when approaching these documents, in the hope of attaining an enhanced, more comprehensive, and more sober historical understanding. Even if allowance is made for possible exaggerations in the language used, one cannot vouch for the absolute accuracy of these official accounts. Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt’s claim of a months-long rainless period in winter, could simply be a linguistic short-cut in order to render the idea of an exceptionally dry season, for it is hard to imagine ninety whole winter days without any sort of precipitation, even for an island in the middle of the Mediterranean. The absolute reliability of such documentary material can also be questioned on grounds of necessity. It is not to be excluded that such a desolate climatic scenario, more often than not accompanied by the parallel plight regarding the poor state of the Order’s coffers, was inflated by the Hospitaller hierarchy in order to strengthen its chances of provisioning from foreign sources. This said, the frequency of such exhortations by the Order regarding the island’s agricultural deficiencies, and the fact that in the great majority of cases they were addressed to Hospitaller agents and representatives abroad, should suffocate temptations to relegate them categorically as wilfull orchestrations in the hope of attracting sympathy and assistance from Christendom.

References to Malta’s meager landscape, lack of natural resources, and dry climate, in fact, can also be found in contemporary sources not pertaining to the Order, and by default provide further testimony to Hospitaller Malta’s dependency on foreign imports, and consequently on communication with abroad, in order to survive. In a report on the archipelago written by a foreigner soon after the plague of 1676, the author is bemused by the peasants enjoying their siesta after a day’s work in the fields under the punishing sun during the dry season.

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60 ‘si corre grandissimo pericolo di perder tutto il raccolto del presente anno, poiche son passati tre mesi che non è mai piovuto in quest’isola’. AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 92-93, 30 March 1607.
61 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 See also Mallia-Milanes (2008), 569.
65 ‘l’ardor del sole è insoffribile tale però non rassembra a i lavoratori della campagna, i quali nulla curandosi della frescura dell’ombra, come si fussero d’una natura impastata di ghiaccio, anche nelle ore meridionali, e di riposo, sotto cocentissimi raggi del sole prendono saporitissimo sonno’. Relazione
Pignatelli found seventeenth-century life in Malta so unpleasant that he requested a transfer to a post in Flanders and compares Malta’s situation early in 1648 to that of a besieged enclave, with the rationing of provisions and food stocks sufficient only for fifteen days.

The Order was also concerned with the obvious correlation between subsistence and demography, which in extreme cases could apparently lead to some Maltese abandoning the island for want of food, as is claimed to have happened in 1595. Dal Pozzo says that when the Hospitallers settled in Malta the population of the islands hardly reached 22,000 and that by the 1620s it had doubled. It was not unusual for officials to be sent over from Sicily to carry out a census of the population in order to judge if the amount of the tratte, the licences granted by the Sicilian Viceroy for the free export of wheat to Malta, needed to be adjusted accordingly. In 1604, the demand for a demographic count came from Malta since the population was deemed on the rise and therefore needy of a larger volume of wheat from the Regno than the usual 12,000 salme per year. Ten years later yet another survey found the population to be 41,084 and in 1632 another census by Sicilian officials found the population to have increased by another 10,000.

Following the Protestant Reformation, even religious inhibitions with a potential to discourage trade with northerners were vigorously opposed by the Convent. Hospitaller Malta could not afford to be selective in her trading contacts and permissions from Rome were sought in order to allow English ships to offload much-needed merchandise in Malta while adopting the necessary precautionary measures to avoid contacts between northern crews and the local population in order to spare the island from heretical contagion. Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt, on the other hand, wary of the maritime barriers which confined the islanders to a

dell’Isola di Malta, opuscolo N[umero] 33 della Miscellanea di Manoscritti Vari (MS), Biblioteca Berio, Genoa, f. 7r. On the same report see Giovanni Semprini, ‘Malta nella seconda metà del Seicento (Da un manoscritto del tempo)’, Archivio Storico di Malta, iv, (1933), 97-112.

66 Paolo Piccolomini, ‘Corrispondenza tra la Corte di Roma e l’Inquisitore di Malta durante la guerra di Candia (1645-69)’, Archivio Storico Italiano, xli (1908), 57.

67 Ibid., 58-9.

68 Dal Pozzo, i, 370.

69 Ibid., i, 672-3. For a more detailed overview of Malta’s demographic rise in early modernity, see Cassar, Society, Culture and Identity, chapter 6.

70 As happened in 1590, for example. Dal Pozzo, i, 324.

71 AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), f. 140, 3 May 1604. A salma of Malta was equivalent to 206 kgs, while that of Licata was equivalent to 225 kgs. Cassar, Society, Culture and Identity, xvii.

72 Dal Pozzo, i, 588; 598.

73 Ibid., 803.

74 ‘del modo che si devan accettare in questi nostri porti li vasselli inglesi, onde speriamo che daranno con le loro mercanzie gran commodità et utili à queste nostre sterili isole senza pericolo di macchiar in partealcuna li coscienze di questi popoli’. AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Fabritio Verello, ff. 269v-271r, 25 August 1605. Three months earlier, despite protests by the island’s Inquisitor, Wignacourt was willing to allow the crew of an English vessel to offload gunpowder and provisions in Malta on condition they did not sell or buy books. The Grand Master justified his claims in Rome arguing that at the time no Mediterranean port was denying access to English ships. AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Amb. Mendes (Rome), ff. 161v-162, 18 May 1605. However, in the autumn of that same year, port officials in Malta prevented the crew of an English ship from landing, in order to conform with directives previously received from Rome. AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Siniscalco Pupitiers, ff. 386v-389r, 13 November 1605.
very limited countryside, inhibiting them ready access to alternative provisions abroad, pointed out the claustrophobic experience of dwelling on an island cut off from the rest of humanity by a ‘spacious and vast’ sea.\textsuperscript{25}

Closely related to the persistent problems of provisioning and next in line on the Order’s agenda of daily vicissitude was the generation of capital and its channeling to its island base or to wherever funds were required. The Order’s main source of income was the wealth produced by its estates on the continent. Acquired mainly during the Order’s stay in Syria through bequests, donations, or direct purchase, these estates were divided into priories and commanderies and could be found throughout mainland Europe. More property was gained in the fourteenth century when a good part of the possessions of the suppressed Order of the Templars was passed on to the Knights of St John. All these estates generated their income primarily through the produce of the land and the lease of property\textsuperscript{76} and were bound by statute to regularly send to the Convent one-third of the net income which was labeled with the technical term responsions. The progressive acquisition of each single unit of this property\textsuperscript{77} helped to change the course of the Order’s history, adding a continental dimension to what originally had started off as primarily a Mediterranean venture. Having edifices and lots of lands throughout the mainland gave the Hospitallers an extensive and intricate reach in European territory and anchored their destiny irremediably to the climate, geography, diplomacy, and contingencies of the continent.\textsuperscript{78} The flow of capital from these commanderies to accommodate the needs of the Hospitallers and the island population they governed was of paramount importance for the Order, not only for the obvious requirement of provisioning their base, as already indicated, but to suffice for all the military exigencies solicited by an island post in a Mediterranean at war.

The lingering conflict with the Ottoman Turk, in fact, classified third on the Order’s priority agenda. History has shown that the post-Lepanto era was a period of substantial balance between the two dominating powers of the Inner Sea: Habsburg Spain controlled the north and

\textsuperscript{25}‘tutti rinchiusi in queste steriliss[im]e Isole cinti di spacios e vasto mare e privi affatto di poterci per terra in modo alcuno rimediare et havere scampo’. AOM 100, letter to the Jurats of Messina, 266v-267, 11 March 1603 and ‘questo afflittissimo popolo che sta serrato in un’isola, d’onde non puo uscire à sua posta (come potria fare ogni altro per buscarsi da vivere)’. AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), ff. 314v-315r, 12 September 1606.


\textsuperscript{77}See some examples in footnotes 6 and 7 above.

\textsuperscript{78}Grech (2010), 149.
western basins; the Ottomans mastered the Levant and North Africa.\textsuperscript{79} In the sixteenth century, the introduction of heavier artillery in naval warfare created the necessity for larger galleys with larger crews in times of manpower shortages. Navy-building costs spiralled to barely-sustainable levels, sapping energies and resources on both sides. As H. J. A Sire and Molly Greene point out, after Lepanto neither side could muster enough resolution to seriously attempt a large-scale invasion into the rival’s basin.\textsuperscript{80} The ensuing stalemate was the result of the lack of drive and of calculations based on deficient feasibility. Exhaustion, rather than decline, determined the lack of initiative starting from the last decades of the sixteenth century. The sprawling hinterland of the Ottoman Empire still allowed the Turks the necessary resources required for a quick rebuilding of their fleet within months after the losses of Lepanto.\textsuperscript{81} This in part explains why the threat of another Ottoman attack was such a persistent perception in Christendom and why it was so difficult for a small Catholic post like Hospitaller Malta to discount. Abate Cenni speaks of post-siege Malta as a place blessed with a ‘\textit{perpetua pace, et una felicità mirabile}’\textsuperscript{82} and where any alarm of possible war and invasion was soon dismissed as an inflated fear.\textsuperscript{83} Yet the chronicler goes on to describe in no small detail the extensive preparations carried out during Grand Master Dal Monte’s administration to counter a possible onslaught,\textsuperscript{84} although he does point out, as has been indicated above, that it was not unusual for members of the Order’s Council to exaggerate such fears in order to justify their more substantial demands for help, especially from Rome.\textsuperscript{85}

Intelligence reports and mere hearsay from the East were often based on frenetic activity in the enemy’s docks which more often than not were the prelude to aggressive Ottoman sorties around the Mediterranean. The effective intentions of war councils were far more difficult to gauge and were usually revealed once the relative operation was already on course. Certain scholars are rather confident in their assertions that some form of effective threat did actually exist. According to Daniel Goffman, the Ottoman threat to the Italian peninsula was ‘ever-present’ in the 1500s, although his claim stops short of making specific distinctions between the different periods of the century.\textsuperscript{86} Gabor Ágoston claims that the possibility of a Turkish onslaught could have been

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 226.
\textsuperscript{82} NLM Lib. 163, Cenni, 65.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 67; 69-70.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 71.
‘real, perceived, or exaggerated’ but declines from relegating it to pure fancy. Giovanni Murgia explains, for example, how the authorities of that ineptly-defended landmass that was Sardinia continued to worry about their domain’s ‘static’ and ‘mobile’ defence systems deep into the 1600s. Spain’s loss to Islam of La Goletta (Northern Africa) in 1574 pushed the line of Christendom’s defense upwards, exposing further the military insecurities in the western lobe of the Mediterranean and sharpening the vulnerabilities of Sardinia, whose agricultural and pastoral activity, apart from tuna and coral industries, were subject to incessant disruptions by enemy pirate raids. Alexander H. de Groot, on the other hand, has no qualms in stating that the Ottoman threat for the Christian Mediterranean frontiers remained ‘real and dreadful’ for over two centuries after Lepanto, although he does concede that Turcophobia in Christendom was consciously and consistently fomented by the Catholic clergy.

Whatever the outcome of the debate, it is only through the decisive privilege of historical hindsight that contemporary historians can assert with a certain degree of conviction that the Ottoman threat from the latter part of the sixteenth century was shorn of any foundation. For Christendom’s populace in the pre-industrial era the fear of the Turk was very real right up to the second half of the eighteenth century, with varying degrees of intensity according to the exposure level of their territory to possible Muslim onslaughts. As for the population of Hospitaller Malta, the phobia of the Ottoman antagonist needed no Catholic propaganda to be systematically rekindled for over two-hundred years after the Ottoman siege of Malta. Few other Christian lands could have been more dangerously exposed than a group of small islands on one of the most enduring battle frontiers in the history of man. For millions of continental landlubbers who afforded the security provided by the buffer of thousands of square kilometers of European hinterland and who hardly ever experienced the sight of sea sorcerers, let alone the ignominy of an assault, the Turk remained an abstract fear which hardly ever materialized, despite evidence

90 On the historian’s privileged position through hindsight and the possibility to draw on multiple sources, see Grech, (2006), 164.
91 The several episodes of extensive preparations in Malta following anti-Ottoman alerts are a testimony to this claim. See below.
92 Apart from the coastal areas and islands of the Catholic Mediterranean, the only continental territories directly exposed to the Turk were those on the eastern border of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
that Turcophobia persisted even among inland populations. The coastal populations on the Catholic side of the Mediterranean war frontier, however, were denied the luxury of such reassurance. Very close encounters of the most unpleasant kind, such as the one experienced by the population of Malta in July 1614, when a Turkish force between 3000 and 4000 strong landed on the south-eastern coast of the island before heading to Barbary to quash the rebel castle of Tripoli, gave a credibility to the Ottoman threat more than any clerical campaign or popular perception could have ever done. As for the Hospitaller corps, their preventive action was usually triggered when the level of alert was still at its initial stages and the enemy was nowhere in sight. Whatever was deemed as a tangible omen of an attack instigated widespread measures by the Order.

One documentary example suffices to illustrate such a scenario. When in March 1708 news of the fitting of the Turk’s fleet in Constantinople was reaching Malta, the Order embarked on a series of typical measures to counter a possible onslaught. galleys were sent to Naples, Rome, Tuscany, and Genoa to alert on the situation; ammunitions and engineers were ordered from Genoa and a vessel hired for their shipment to Malta; negotiations were opened with Lucca in Tuscany for the export of gunpowder and a passport was issued to a tartana owner for its transport to Malta; further permissions were sought from Palermo for the export of ready-made gunpowder or its manufacture wherever possible and a commission was sent to France and Italy in an attempt to fetch further explosives; the militia in Malta embarked on a fire-practice programme and requests for more troops were sent to Rome and the Duke of Tuscany; a ship was to sail to the papal port of Civitavecchia to embark these troops and ammunitions from

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93 As documented by news-sheets from places like Bologna, for example, deep in the Northern Italian hinterland. Sandro Bulgarelli, ‘Gli avvisi a stampa bolognesi del Cinquecento’, in Accademie e Biblioteche d’Italia, Anno XLIII (26ª Nuova Serie) nos. 1-2, gennaio-aprile 1975 (Fratelli Palombi – Editori, Roma), 8.
94 I discuss the idea of the western European territory as a buffer zone against Turkish raids in my paper ‘The Dread of Violence and the Lure of Conflict’. Grech (2010), 147.
95 Carmel Cassar, Society, Culture and Identity (2000), 88. Dal Pozzo gives the figure of 4,000. Dal Pozzo, i, 588-93. The Order’s official correspondence repeatedly reports that the Turkish contingent that landed on Malta numbered 3000, that it was involved in skirmishes with the Knights, that the Turks landed on two other occasions in the same mission on Malta, and that they burnt cereal fields before leaving. See, for example, AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Accarigi (Scicli), f. 278r, 6 July 1614 and Ibid., to Sollima (Messina), ff. 279v-280, 8 July 1614.
96 For the decisions taken by the Order’s Council consequent to this emergency, see AOM 265, ff. 199v-214.
97 The first reference mentioned in the minutes of the Order’s Council is dated 13 March 1708. AOM 265, f. 199v. See also AOM 1469, Segretario Cacherani to Borgherini (Florence) and Lomellino (Genoa), f. 45r, 18 March 1708.
98 Ibid. Perellos y Rocaful to Lomellino (Genoa), ff. 47v-48r, 23 March 1708.
99 Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to the Republic of Lucca, f. 60, 6 April 1708.
100 Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to Amb. Sacchetti (Rome), ff. 104v-105, 30 June 1708.
101 Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to Riggio (Palermo), ff. 54v-55r, 3 April 1708; Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to Prince Nixemi (Palermo), ff. 69v-70r, 26 April 1708; Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to Riggio (Palermo), ff. 71-72r, 26 April 1708.
102 Ibid. ff. 71-72r, 26 April 1708.
103 Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to Marino (Venice), f.48, 23 March 1708.
Genoa, the Order’s receiver in Venice, who had been briefing Malta on the Porte’s preparations, was asked to keep updating the Convent on military movements in Constantinople; Hospitaller diplomacy in the papal court started soliciting the lobbying activity of friendly cardinals to help convey the Order’s requests; reconnaissance missions were sent to the Levant; the Council’s decisions on the situation were dispatched to the Order’s ambassador and agents in Rome, Florence, and Genoa, and Naples was also alerted on the situation; soundings were carried out to see if the Papacy and the Duchy of Tuscany could send their galley squadrons to Malta; attempts were made to export more supplies from Sicily; further military engineers were sought from France and Florence to advice on the necessary preparations; Rome was sounded to verify if the Swede Hekel, presumably a military consultant, could be sent over until the alarm lasted; Hospitallers in Europe were summoned to the Convent; ships were sent to Leghorn seeking more ammunitions; a loan of up to 100,000 genovine was to be contracted in Genoa to pay for the ammunitions since the Order’s Treasury was short of liquidity and permission from Rome was to be sought to pledge Hospitaller property in case this was demanded by Genoese creditors. By April 1708, the same month in which all these measures were being implemented, the threat of an Ottoman attack apparently started to abate, yet not enough to reassure the Order, which in fact refused to send its galleys in aid of Spain in Oran besieged by Algerian troops. There was also the problem of a small Turkish fleet caught roaming the Mediterranean on its way to Barbary, forcing some French and Spanish Hospitallers to travel to Marseilles via the straits of Messina to avoid sailing close to Tunisian waters. The sister island of Gozo – always an easier, more vulnerable, and therefore more attractive target for the Turk, as 1551, for example, had

104 Ibid., f. 48, 23 March 1708.
105 The receiver was a financial representative of the Order in a certain district whose main function was to collect and channel the responsions of that district to the Convent or to wherever was instructed by the Order. For an overview of the office of the receiver, see Simon Mercieca, ‘Aspects of the Office of the Receiver of the Hospitaller Order of St John’, unpublished B.A. Hons dissertation, Department of History, University of Malta, 1991.
106 AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Marino (Venice), f. 48, 23 March 1708.
107 Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to Cardinal Paulucci (Rome), ff. 83v-84r, 30 April 1708 and Perellos y Rocaful to Cardinal Imperiale (Rome), f. 85r, 30 April 1708.
108 Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to Consul Theodoro Andrilli (Zante), f. 49, 23 March 1708; Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to the Consuls of Corfu and Zante, ff. 55-56r, 3 April 1708.
109 AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Amb. Sacchetti (Rome), ff. 46v-47r, 23 March 1708.
110 Ibid., Secretario Cacherani to Borgherini (Florence) and Lomellino (Genoa), f. 45, 18 March 1708.
111 Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to Commendatore Del Bene (Florence), ff. 50-51r, 23 March 1708.
112 Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to Riggio (Palermo), f. 54r, 24 March 1708.
113 Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to Amb. Sacchetti (Rome), f. 56r, 6 April 1708.
114 Ibid., f. 56r, 6 April 1708.
115 Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to Amb. Sacchetti (Rome), ff. 56 – 57, 6 April 1708.
116 Ibid., ff. 56-57, 6 April 1708.
117 Ibid., ff. 56-57, 6 April 1708.
118 Ibid., f. 72, 27 April 1708.
119 AOM 265, ff. 208v-209r, 18 May 1708.
120 AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Commendatore di Giovanni (Messina), ff. 136v-137r, 11 August 1708.
shown\textsuperscript{121} - was reinforced;\textsuperscript{122} the Prior of Messina, lieutenant Tancredi, was posted on the island to supervise the military preparations there and carried specific orders to brief Malta in case of sightings of enemy craft in Gozo’s vicinity.\textsuperscript{123} By the 13 July, Malta had received news from Zante and Sousse that the Turkish armada had set sail from Constantinople\textsuperscript{124} and intelligence-gathering missions were still being sent to the Levant.\textsuperscript{125} The whole ordeal was not without diplomatic consequences for the Order. The Papacy, dealing with its own threat in the presence of Imperial troops in the Ferrarese area, demanded back its contingent from Malta\textsuperscript{126} and was hoping for some compensation from the Order in the form of a Hospitaller relief expedition to bolster the defenses of the papal territories.\textsuperscript{127}

All this feverish activity implied, and involved, time, paperwork, expenses, logistical reorganization, the movement of people, the shifting of resources, the coordination of contacts, the activation of diplomatic channels, and endless days of waiting. It is arduous to imagine such a profusion of energies had the imminence of an attack not been perceived as genuine. As with other similar alarms throughout the Order’s stay on Malta, the peril subsided in a matter of weeks. However, the extreme prudence of the Order in such cases throughout the post-1565 era, although ultimately and systematically unjustified,\textsuperscript{128} demands a degree of historical contextualization. Apart from news from official stations, snippets of information, and wild rumours which darted from all corners of the Mediterranean and which the Convent had to evaluate, digest, and verify, the Order’s perennial sense of peril was fomented by its past. The sense of foreboding of a Turkish

\textsuperscript{121} In 1551 Dragut, the heir to Barbarossa, led the Ottoman navy in a full-scale attack against Malta as a reprisal against the loss of his base of Mehedia to a joint Spanish-Hospitaller expedition the year before. After failing to breach Malta’s defences, he reverted his attentions on Gozo, taking a good part of the population as slaves before heading to attack Tripoli in Barbary. Sire, 66.

\textsuperscript{122} AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Amb. Sacchetti (Rome), ff. 119v-120r, 24 July 1708.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., ff. 120v-122r, 27 July 1708; Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to the Prior of Messina, Tancredi (Gozo), f. 132r, 5 August 1708; Ibid., f. 136, 8 August, 1708.

\textsuperscript{124} AOM 265, ff. 213v-214r, 13 July 1708.

\textsuperscript{125} AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Giuseppe Nobili (Trapani), f. 117, 15 July 1708.

\textsuperscript{126} After a decision by the Council, the Order’s squadron was fitted in haste and on 30 June 1708 left Malta to transport the papal troops to Anzio. AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Amb. Sacchetti (Rome), ff. 104v-105, 30 June 1708.

\textsuperscript{127} Grand Master Perellos y Rocaful was reluctant to give in to Rome’s wishes on grounds that the demand for assistance from the Papacy had not been formulated clearly enough, that the Hospital’s coffers could ill afford to sustain such an expedition, and that the Order did not wish to tarnish its neutrality status by involving itself in a conflict between two Catholic powers. AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Amb. Sacchetti (Rome), ff. 100v-101, 28 June 1708. There exist several historical accounts of anti-Ottoman preparations in Malta in view of a possible full-scale onslaught from Constantinople, as the one referred to above during Dal Monte’s administration. Dal Pozzo, for example, talks of extensive preparations undertaken in Malta in 1635 following rumours of an attack from the Levant. Dal Pozzo, i, 832. Two of the most detailed and exhaustive studies of the preparations that went on in Malta and Gozo and the preventive measures taken by the Order when an attack was feared from the Levant are those of Dal Pozzo himself, who dedicates almost twenty whole pages to the preparations of 1645, when the sortie of the Ottoman fleet intended for Candia was initially feared to be directed against Malta, and that of Carmel Testa regarding the Ottoman Crown incident of 1761. See respectively Dal Pozzo, ii, 96-114 and Carmel Testa, \textit{The Life and Times of Grand Master Pinto. 1741-1773} (Malta, Midsea Books, 1989), 247-59.

\textsuperscript{128} The Turkish landing of 1614 described above, in fact, was the closest Hospitaller Malta ever came to a large scale direct confrontation with the enemy after 1565. H.J.A. Sire, 76.
attack which accompanied the Order was primarily the result of five hundred years of grim encounters with Islam. The Hospitallers’ reputation as a military unit with an enduring commitment to Christianity’s crusading tradition was well-earned and their prowess in battle, both on land and, even more insistently, at sea, did not fail to draw the congratulatory attention of historiography. ‘Formidable’ is the adjective used by both Ernle Bradford and Molly Greene to describe them. H.J.A. Sire lauds their dedication and efficiency in defending the Christian East, while stressing that their maritime ‘brilliance’ deserves the status of distinction when comparisons are drawn with other contemporary Catholic navies. Norman Housley expresses admiration for their defensive use of artillery and their capacity to conjure innovative engineering solutions when discussing their Rhodian military architecture. Salvatore Bono is full of admiration for their piratical daring and states that their ‘primacy’ within the ranks of the early seventeenth-century Christian corsairs was unquestionable. For John Julius Norwich their dexterity at naval warfare was without parallel, while Anthony Luttrell praises their talent for adaptation and instinct for survival when facing possible extinction in the aftermath of defeat.

Yet, however glorious and commendable was their record, consisting of a military curriculum replete with successful episodes of anti-Muslim harassment through privateering, carefully-planned naval expeditions, and - that ultimate test of resilience in conflict - siege warfare, the long-term historical judgement regarding their first few centuries of battle with the enemy leading to 1565 is that of defeat. Ever since the fall of Acre in Syria, the history of the Order of St John was one of a gradual and forced displacement west. It was simply the inevitable outcome of a hugely unbalanced encounter. When the test was one of endurance protracted over centuries, the sheer weight, muscle, and driving force of Islam and the rising Ottoman colossus could not be matched by a small community of warrior brethren which only occasionally could count on aid from other Catholic forces.

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129 Bradford, 15.
130 Greene actually uses the term twice in successive pages to describe the Knights. Greene (2007), 105-6; Grech (2010), 147. She also labels them as ‘fearsome Christian predators’. Greene (2003), 236.
131 Sire, 13.
132 Ibid., 85.
133 Housley, 228-9.
134 Bono, passim, but especially 351-65.
137 See, for example, Caoursin’s account of the siege of Rhodes of 1480, Guglielmo Caoursin, L’Assedio della Città di Rodi, Translated to the Italian by F. Rappini (Genoa, 1992), chapter 1 and Francesco Balbi da Correggio, Diario dell’Assedio all’Isola di Malta (18 maggio-17 settembre 1565) (Delegazione Granpriorale di Genova, Genoa, 1995).
138 Abate Cenni is rather categorical in labelling as remote any possibilities that the Order had of obtaining help from Christendom in times of peril. NLM Lib. 163, Cenni, 71. Luttrell emphasizes the unwillingness of the Catholic powers, and most notably Venice, to help Rhodes in 1522, while Housley underlines the Order’s isolation in Rhodes and how Grand Master d’Aubusson was well aware that there existed no realistic hope of relief from Christendom. Luttrell (1993), 263-4 and Housley, 230 and 232.
The memory of this history had left the Hospitallers psychologically conditioned, preventing them the luxury of categorically dismissing any hint of potential menace from the Porte. Even though centuries of experience in dealing with military intelligence allowed the Order’s hierarchy to ultimately assess with almost unfailing precision the weight of periodic perils, such assessment was usually the result of weeks and months of agonizing doubts and uncertainty which not always spared it the grinding onus of engaging in massive defensive preparations while the assessment was in process, as in 1645, 1708, and 1761. Grand Master Nicholas Cotoner (1663-1680) expressed his irritation at the unfoundedness of so many a rumour of an attack on Malta, but had to admit that the Order had no option other than remaining alert while expecting the worst. 139

During the threat of 1708, this extreme Hospitaller caution, typical of similar situations, was communicated in an update sent to the Order’s receiver in Venice. 140 Even a success like the months-long resistance in the siege of Malta – a combination of inspired leadership, knightly valour in combat, valiant resistance by the islanders, logistical blunders by a divided enemy command and, perhaps the most telling factor, over-stretched enemy communication lines which prevented the Ottomans from a hefty replenishment of their resources – was not without its lessons and ominous warnings for the Hospitaller hierarchy. The tardiness of Don García de Toledo’s relief expedition from Sicily left little doubt that the priorities of Habsburg Spain lay elsewhere in Europe, and primarily in the Netherlands, a problem so manifestly evident for the Order that it was clearly stated in one of its official histories 141 and openly declared to Ottoman royalty in a rare moment of a diplomatic disclosure to the enemy 142 some three-hundred years before Braudel pointed it out again. Christendom provided no guarantee of a quick relief in case of enemy attack. 143 The glory of the outcome of the siege did echo throughout Europe, 144 yet the Hospitallers’ reassurance about the situation with which they had to connive on the battle frontier of a sea at war was not strengthened. The victory of 1565 piled on the sense of predicament

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139 ‘tuttavia è bene di star prevenuti poiche seben delle nuove che vengono da Levante à pena si verifica una di 20 (...) non potendosi saper qual sia la vera non può disprezzarsi alcuna massima in materia tanto importante’. AOM 1444, Nicholas Cotoner to Tarasconi, ff. 152v-153r, 19 November 1669.

140 ‘per quest anno non abbi sussistenza veruna l’armamento turchesco di che noi restiamo persuasi che non fusse tale da poter dare apprehensione, quantunque richiedessese la prudenza di cautelarsi per il quale motivo habbiamo procurato ultimoamente di rinforzare la nostra Isola del Gozo, giàche resta tuttavia la voce che un numero di sultane e di galere sia per passare in Tunisi e Tripoli...volendo noi che nel passaggio non li venga la voglia di far qualche tentativo in quell’Isola, ò che venendogli la ritrovino in quello stato di difesa che conviene’. AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Marino (Venice), ff. 134v-135r, 6 August 1708.

141 ‘Nè meno in quel caso si poteva sperare alcun valido soccorso dalle corone: perche trovandosi implicate in guerre atrocissime di stato, e di Religione, non si sarebbono così prontamente mosse à sovvenire à gl’altri bisogni, quando erano così fieramente travagliati da’ loro medesimi’. NLM Lib. 163, Cenni, 71.

142 In 1635, writing to the Ottoman Sultan Zachia about the Catholic-Muslim confrontation in the Mediterranean, Grand Master Antoine de Paule declares how the Order ‘non puo’ sperare alcun soccorso da Potentati Christiani’. AOM 1414, Antoine de Paule to Sultan Zachia Ottomano, ff. 15v-16r, 26 January 1635.

143 Braudel (1986), 1014-26; Grech (2006), 165.

144 For example, Thomas Frelleer, A Classical Traveller in Eighteenth-Century Malta: Johann Hermann von Riedesel (Malta, Mondial Publishers, 1997), 28.
regarding their destiny which the Knights had accumulated since the fall of Acre. It was another experience which, together with the frequent sightings of enemy vessels roaming Maltese and central Mediterranean waters, the amphibious raids on the archipelago, and worrying news of an Ottoman onslaught carried over by the sea from the Levant, Barbary, and other corners of the Mediterranean, denied the Order a modicum of respite from a potential peril which rendered them so adamant not to take any sign of threat lightly.  

If the Order’s trinity of enduring priorities – provisioning, the flow of capital from their estates, and intelligence – remained largely unaltered since its days in the East, the logistics implied in sustaining these priorities were subject to necessary alterations and adaptations with every change of base. Island garrisons presented obvious differences from mainland strongholds and the conditioning factors inherent in the upkeep of their communication lines - their distance from the coast, their vicinity to important shipping lanes, and the size, productivity, and resources of their hinterland - differed from one island to another. When the Order arrived in Malta it once again had an island home to manage, although with dissimilarities in geography when compared to the previous Levantine experiences. The Hospitallers were now at a safer distance from the Porte yet within dangerous reach of the Muslim enclaves of Barbary. Intelligence information regarding the Turk, which from Cyprus and Rhodes could be obtained first-hand and at a more frequent and rapid rate, now had more distance to travel and had to rely on a greater number of listening stations. Islands like Corfu and Zante were now further east to the Convent and became vital providers of knowledge on the activities and intentions of Constantinople. Most significantly, the landing on Malta brought the Hospital within the orbit of Sicily. Malta had been a satellite island of Sicily since time immemorial. The umbilical cord with the huge mother island to the north had been covered - not severed - by the sea and the relationship of dependence dictated by vicinity

146 Enrico Basso highlights how Hospitaller Rhodes was one of Christendom’s best observatories and information-collection centres regarding Ottoman affairs. Rhodes was an obvious stopping station for ships returning from the Eastern Mediterranean, and therefore could receive information on the happenings in Egypt, the Holy Land, and Syria. The stations of the Catholic forces in the East were generally in a good position to absorb and convey to the West intelligence on the Turk. In the fifteenth century, Milan, for example, was systematically updated on the affairs of the Porte via Genoese Chios and the Genoese residents of Pera. Enrico Basso, ‘Il mondo orientale nella corrispondenza del Priore di Lombardia da Rodi (fine secolo XV)’, in Cavalieri di San Giovanni e territorio. La Liguria tra Provenza e Lombardia nei secoli XIII-XVII. Atti del Convegno Genova – Imperia – Cervo, 11-14 settembre 1997, J. Costa Restagno (ed.) Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri, Genoa 1999,507-15; Housley underlines Hospitaller Rhodes’ ‘function as a communications centre between Romania, Cyprus, and the West’. Housley, 215.
148 I use this imagery to illustrate Malta’s intimate relation of dependence on Sicily for provisioning in my paper ‘Flow of Capital in the Mediterranean’ (2005), 199.
and land yield had a centuries-old history. When the Order settled on Malta it was itself absorbed into this dependence. It needed, and demanded, a radical and structural change in the Order’s communication network. Sicily became the most immediate outlet of a contact route which ran along Italy, reaching deep into the European hinterland, right up to Britain, the North Sea, and the Baltic. Palermo provided links with the Iberian peninsula and the east coast of the island was often the first recipient of news from the Levant, the Greek archipelago, and the Adriatic.149

Through this system of communication channels the Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem shook Malta out of its medieval slumber and broadened its territorial horizons, stretching them to limits which would have been unthinkable in the pre-Hospitaller era, when Malta’s insular nature was also a consequence of a geography substantially rejected by the main east-west and north-south shipping lanes of the age.150 We do know, for example, that by the twelfth century Malta had regular commercial ties with Southern Sicily and North Africa and that the island attracted both Christian and Muslim pirates;151 that Maltese cotton was sold in the northwestern basin of the Mediterranean152 and in Genoa in particular;153 that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the same product was exported on a regular basis to Sicily, Southern Italy, Valencia, and Barcelona154 and that in the fifteenth century Catalan merchants were providing the Maltese with wheat.155 But despite the fact that the dearth of primary sources still renders Medieval Malta, in many ways, a historical wilderness and censors definite conclusions in many fields, it is quite safe to assert that the reach of the island’s contacts was, to say the least, expanded and diversified with the advent of the Order.

The structural, cultural, social, and economic changes which the Order brought to the island have been amply discussed and dissected in a copious collection of melitensia material. Scholars of pre-industrial Malta have analysed how the settlement of the Religion in the harbour town of Birgu was the initial stage of a long process of change for the archipelago and its population;156 how the Order gave islanders more security; how Malta was integrated more enduringly into established maritime trade routes, increasing its role as a transit station for the flux of humans from and to all latitudes of the Mediterranean; how the extensive infrastructural projects of the Order modified the urban landscape of the islands and revived and diversified their

151 Charles Dalli, Iż-Żmien Nofsani Malti (Malta, Pin, 2002), 44.
153 Dalli (2002), 44.
154 Ibid., 44; 165.
155 Ibid., 207.
economy, creating employment for their labourforce;157 how Malta’s hospital and medical facilities were immeasurably improved;158 how attempts were made to improve agriculture and render the soil more fertile;159 how the presence of an elite multinational corps of European gentlemen with the vows of personal poverty, chastity, and obedience helped to breathe Baroque flavours into Maltese society, culture, art, and architecture;160 how a newfound prosperity was conducive to a steady demographic expansion;161 how, as with Rhodes, the Hospital rendered Malta strategically relevant;162 and how Malta’s port activity and trade contacts with Sicily and North Africa gained in vigour.163

Perceptions from an Insular Context: Hospitaller Malta and an Expanding World

Although inevitably slow and gradual, these changes helped to introduce Hospitaller Malta to the early modern era. It was an age of widening perceptions where the concept of space was passing from regional to global. The thirst to rediscover the vestiges of classical antiquity prompted travel writing to the eastern basin of the Mediterranean mainly from the later part of the seventeenth century.164 Territorial ambition encouraged exploration beyond long-established boundaries. A Dutch propagandist, for example, dreamt of world domination by his seafaring nation, with an empire stretching from Mexico to Sumatra, and to China, Patagonia and black Mozambique.165 Efforts to make maritime travel safer had started to be made in thirteenth-century Genoa with the writing of the first portolans, rudimentary shipping guides drawn up to help seamen find their bearing.166 Improvements in navigation technology resulting in larger ships with better sailing technique, capable of carrying larger supply volumes over longer voyages, combined with human entrepreneurship, the irresistible call of the sea, and the timeless lure of wealth and conquest,

159 Luttrell (1993), 265: In December 1602, for example, Alof de Wignacourt was expressing his satisfaction at the importation of fruit trees to Malta ‘per il desiderio che habbiamo d’haver in queste Isoledelle belle frutto’. AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Gier[oni]mo Vitelli, f. 339r, 12 December 1602.
161 Fiorini, passim; Luttrell (1993), 265-6.
164 Freller, 16-8.
165 Fernández-Armesto, 377.
166 According to some scholars, marine charts also helped in the writing of the Odyssey. Matvejević, 186; The earliest portolan which survived to our times charts a route between Acre and Venice in the early thirteenth century. Fernández-Armesto, 499.
helped to break the high seas’ codes and to herald a season of unprecedented transoceanic exploration. Mystery and awe gave way to bold curiosity and the Atlantic ceased to be considered as the ‘ocean of shadows’ of early medieval times, attracting the conquistadors’ predatory ambition. The possibility of venturing beyond the Azores, the frontier limit of European penetration into the Atlantic in pre-Colombian times, stopped being a mental inhibition. Within the space of a few years in the last decade of the fifteenth century, transatlantic shipping established lasting oceanic highways between Iberia, Britain, and the American continent, and the Portuguese’s circumnavigation of Africa created an alternative trading connectivity between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. Maritime trading routes on a global level were thus created and the perseverance in the research to reduce losses through disorientation in the open seas ultimately resulted in the solution of the longitude problem in eighteenth-century Britain.

Through the concept of the mappa mundi which started to make headway in Renaissance cartography, the inhabitants of Europe and the Mediterranean betrayed an awareness that they were living in a much larger world than previously thought. Anthony Luttrell claims that the perception that the Maltese had of the outside world was very restricted before the advent of the Order, although he stops short from sustaining his claim. The exploration of the confines of Medieval Malta’s idea of the surrounding world and whether these perceptive boundaries were stretched further with the advent of the Order would constitute a digression from the more circumspect contours of the present study. The intent here is to attempt an assessment of the knowledge of early modern geography, environment, and urban life beyond Malta of the Hospitaller elite which was the architect, manipulator, and prime exploiter of the contact network under survey.

The formulation of such an assessment implies a number of difficulties of a complicated nature. As with any historical study, the sources available dictate the outcome, comprising flaws and shortcomings. Any picture with aspirations of veritability trying to depict the Order’s outlook on the surrounding world from early modern Malta, any results allowable by surviving records regarding Hospitaller knowledge of what lay beyond the island’s horizon, are inevitably bound to be lame and incomplete. Yet the official histories and archival records of the Order, together with

167 To paraphrase Fernández-Armesto.
169 Abulafia (2010), 81.
170 Fernández-Armesto uses the ‘highway’ imagery to describe how oceans, and primarily the Atlantic, connected entire continents, particularly from the Age of Discoveries onwards. Fernández-Armesto, 490-1; 496.
171 Although intended for a popular readership, Dava Sobel’s account of the scientific saga which brought about the solution of the longitude problem is highly readable and erudite at the same time. Dava Sobel, Longitude. London, Harper Perennial, 2005.
172 Matvejević, 177-9.
173 Luttrell (1993), 257.
other sources pertinent to Hospitaller Malta consulted for this study, provide glimpses of the world surrounding the archipelago in early modern times as it must have appeared, or was perceived, from the viewpoint of sections of its governing establishment: glimpses of Mediterranean, continental, and global geography and perimeters; information regarding which distances and lands were considered remote and which territories were considered perilous; notions and knowledge of far-off lands, cultures, and peoples.

The availability of navigational guides, travel accounts, and portolans, such as the ones written by the Hospitaller Opizo Guidotti in the 1600s, provided the maritime sector of the Order with a wealth of descriptive information regarding Mediterranean coasts, lands, islands, islets, promontories, peninsulas, capes, berths, gulfs, ports, bearings, distances between territories, apart from the sizes of landmasses, the illustration of cities, the presence of lighthouses and towers, and occasional details on populations, topography, and vegetation. Apart from these technical write-ups, the annual roamings of Hospitaller fleets and the desultory, albeit incessant, influx of all sorts of information to the island also ensured that the Knights’ knowledge of the Mediterranean’s geography continued to be updated throughout the Order’s stay in Malta. The official instructions to the Order’s squadron for its periodic trips around the Inner Sea are a testimony to a navigational expertise and the possession of copious geographical data accumulated over centuries of seafaring and thousands of nautical miles of sailing. The fleets’ courses were meticulously charted along established and oft-tried routes which hugged familiar shores and were interrupted by well-known stopovers. The respective captains were usually left with little room for manoeuvre and their initiative and improvisation skills were often limited to situations of adverse weather and enemy sightings. However, despite their centuries of experience in Mediterranean seafaring, the relatively close North African coast apparently still harboured portions of obscurity for the Knights. A century after settling on Malta, in fact, long stretches of the coast of Barbary were still unknown territory for them, so much so that in 1630 six galleys were sent on a reconnaissance mission to chart the landscape from the Cape of Misurata to Tripoli and discover 170 miles of barren and portless coast, with no real shelter for safe anchorage and a maritime traffic of little significance. A thorough reconnaissance of Bougie on the Algerian coast, for example, is recorded to have been carried out only in 1664. There existed valid logistical reasons which could partly explain the Hospitallers’ procrastination in exploring more assiduously a territory so relevant for their military affairs. Politics and ideology apart, geography and climate

174 Only a late-nineteenth-century copy of Guidotti’s manuscript is available at the National Library of Malta. Guidotti includes also a number of accounts of his travels on the ships of the Order. NLM Lib. 413, O. Guidotti-Cav. di Malta. Viaggi Portolani Etc. Rome, 1895.
175 The Liber Bullarum documents provide several examples of such instructions to Hospitaller galleys. See, for example, AOM 432, ff. 253-4, 27 June 1569.
176 Dal Pozzo, i, 785.
177 Ibid., ii, 315.
conspired to discourage lengthy sailing ventures along the Mediterranean coasts of North Africa. The fear instilled by the Maghreb’s coastal topography, for example, was deeply-rooted in the seafarers’ psyche. Since antiquity, the entire stretch of sea from Morocco to Tunisia had claimed the lives of countless mariners. Reefs and shallows stretching for entire miles off these southern Mediterranean coasts are a serious impediment to smooth cruising. Contrary to the northern Mediterranean, coastal landmarks are hard to come by, especially along the shores from Tunisia to Benghazī, and the only shelter of any significance between Alexandria and Tripoli, in modern Libya, was Tobruk. The entire region is less rich in islands which could provide shelter and replenishing facilities when compared to the northern half of the sea and, to complicate matters further, the dominant pattern of northerly winds which blow along these North African coasts creates serious impediments to navigation through rowing and sailing both in summer and winter.¹⁷⁸

The Order’s perception of the expanses that surrounded its post - apart from systematic reference to the more obvious Mediterranean garrisons, islands, and ports of call which were an integral part of the Convent’s daily affairs - can also be evinced from scattered details loosely recorded in its documents. In the early seventeenth century Lampedusa was known to be a deserted island¹⁷⁹ and Sardinia was renowned for its sizeable population of mouflons.¹⁸⁰ Civitavecchia was famous for its great abundance of timber and the craftsmanship of its workforce, capable of building excellent galleys.¹⁸¹ The densely wooded mountains of Calabria could supply oars for ‘a thousand galleys’.¹⁸² The orchards surrounding Coron provided olive oil in abundance¹⁸³ and the houses of Nauplia (Napoli di Romania) were made of wood and varnished with oil paint.¹⁸⁴ The island of Caprara off the Northern Apulian coast was considered a treasure trove.¹⁸⁵ Lucca in Tuscany, and the island of Ischia, were famous for their therapeutic baths¹⁸⁶ and it was known that Pantelleria, south of Sicily, was used as a penal colony for the banishment of convicts.¹⁸⁷

¹⁷⁹ Dal Pozzo, i, 533. Even islands like Marettimo and Ustica were known to be uninhabited. NLM Lib. 282, f. 219v and 214r, respectively.
¹⁸⁰ AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Ventmiglia (Sardinia), f. 126, 2 June 1607.
¹⁸¹ AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Prior and Amb. Gattinara (Rome), ff. 433v-434r, 17 October 1616.
¹⁸² AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), f. 10v, 17 January 1616.
¹⁸³ Dal Pozzo, ii, 555.
¹⁸⁴ Dal Pozzo, ii, 615.
¹⁸⁵ In 1663, the Order’s search for a treasure supposedly hidden on the island proved fruitless. AOM 1439, Raphael Cotoner to Caravita, f. 32r, 29 March 1663.
¹⁸⁶ AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Commander Berzetto, ff. 478v-479, 17 December 1619.
¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 270. Occasionally even Gozo could be used to ostracise errant Hospitalers. In late 1613, following papal orders, the Knight Bernizzone was to be locked away in some monastery in Gozo. AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 533, 20 October 1613.
The conflict with Islam, problems of provisioning, and the adventures of the Order’s ships sporadically introduced into the Hospitaller world other geographical deposits which otherwise would have had little or no significance to the Convent. The rock of Safino off Valona in Albania could provide the Hospitaller squadron with water and timber\textsuperscript{188} and in 1646 a galley of the Order was shipwrecked on the island of Capri, outside the gulf of Naples.\textsuperscript{189} The squadron’s wonderings in the Tyrrhenian could include sailing close to the islets of Ponza and Montecristo.\textsuperscript{190} News could reach Malta of sightings of enemy galliots off the coast of Ustica, to the north of Sicily,\textsuperscript{191} or that a Maltese corsair captured some Turks on the Greek island of Sapienza.\textsuperscript{192} Oil could be obtained from Linosa, to the north of Lampedusa.\textsuperscript{193} Favignana, off the northwestern tip of Sicily, could shelter the squadron following news of enemy ships sailing north from Tripoli and Tunis.\textsuperscript{194} The Aegadian island was also used to mark the northernmost limit of the Southern Sicilian coast, a notoriously dangerous stretch of territory for Christian shipping,\textsuperscript{195} which the Hospitaller galleys had to ply to protect the grain ships from Malta on their way to load provisions from the \textit{caricatori} of Girgenti or Licata.\textsuperscript{196}

Remoteness could be a very relative concept in pre-industrial society. Rather than on distance, it was based on accessibility and well-established routes.\textsuperscript{197} For the Order, the pertinence of the European hinterland was strictly proportional to the presence of its estates. Abbé de Vertot talks of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway as being the ‘remotest’ of all European countries.\textsuperscript{198} Grand Master Perellos y Rocaful blatantly relegated news arriving to Malta regarding the Russo-Swedish war of 1709 as irrelevant to the Order on grounds that the theatre of the conflict was so distant.\textsuperscript{199} Travelling to Flanders was considered uncomfortable and uncertain.\textsuperscript{200} But even territories much further south could be considered difficult to reach. Alof de Wignacourt, for instance, apologized with the authorities of the Republic of Ragusa for taking long to inform them about his election to the magistry of the Order, blaming the delay on the fact that the city-port

\textsuperscript{188} Dal Pozzo, ii, 638.
\textsuperscript{189} AOM 1424, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola, f. 86r, 11 May 1646.
\textsuperscript{190} Dal Pozzo, ii, 451.
\textsuperscript{191} AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Corsetto (Licata), ff. 262-263r, 18 October 1607.
\textsuperscript{192} AOM 1464, Perellos y Rocaful to Marino (Venice), f. 101v, 25 July 1703.
\textsuperscript{193} Consolato del Mar (CDM) vol. 1 (1697-1703), file 1, f. 13r.
\textsuperscript{194} AOM 1442, Cotoner to Generale delle Galere Del Bene, f. 61v, 16 September 1666.
\textsuperscript{195} Dal Pozzo, ii, 10.
\textsuperscript{196} AOM 1461, Perellos y Rocaful to Generale delle Galere Giacomo d’Escrenville, f. 67, 26 September 1699.
\textsuperscript{197} Braudel (1986), 357.
\textsuperscript{198} Vertot, 261.
\textsuperscript{199} ‘…che allora correvano intorno all’armate de moscoviti e svetesi e del seguito nell’ultima battaglia. \textit{Quantunque questi successi non c’interessano per la loro lontananza…’}. AOM 1470, Perellos y Rocaful to Consul Gio Batta Verdizotti (Corfu), f. 172r, 25 November 1709. Notwithstanding this claim, the Order was hoping the Russians would overcome the Swedes and distract the Turk on that far eastern front. AOM 1470, Perellos y Rocaful to Consul Gio Batta Verdizotti (Corfu), f. 172r, 25 November 1709.
\textsuperscript{200} ‘\textit{gl’incomodi di un viaggio incerto’}. Dal Pozzo, ii, 412.
was such a far-off place from Malta, although no similar arguments seemed to hold for Venice, for example, lying several miles north of Dubrovnik (Ragusa) but definitely more accessible through well-established communication routes. Ragusa, in fact, was infamous for its poor location which rendered her the periodic victim of food shortages. The relatively short trip from Rome to Malta along the Tyrrenian coast was deemed too long, uncomfortable, and perilous unless it could be done on Hospitaller galleys, while Bohemia was another territory considered remote and the scant news reaching the Convent regarding the Order’s commanderies there was attributed to distance.

That the Order’s existence, through its multifarious international affairs, was somehow becoming more intricately entwined with that of an ever-expanding world can easily be deduced from its correspondence, official histories, and other manuscript sources. On his accession to the throne of Portugal in September 1578, King Henry, in a courtesy letter to the grandmaster in Malta proclaimed himself as ‘King of Portugal and the two Algarve on each side of Africa, Lord of Guinea and of conquest, navigation and commerce of Ethiopia, of Arabia, Persia and India’.

Giacomo Bosio, who harboured a reverential respect for geography, mentions the Oceano Britannico and speaks of Scandinavian people travelling to the Holy Land; he gives a description of the Holy Land, of Syria, and the Middle East, mentioning the Dead Sea, and the Euphrates and Mesopotamia as the oriental boundaries of the whole of Arabia. In recounting the travails and adventures of the itinerant and rebellious Iachia, a Catholic Prince of Ottoman blood, Dal Pozzo mentions the Khan of the Tatars; the prince’s connections with the Muscovites and Cossacks; his missions in places like Trebizond, Cherasonda, Sinope, and Caffa; his knowledge of the mountains of Albania, Serbia, Bosnia, Thrace, and Macedonia among others; and proposals for the Order to join in anti-Turk ventures in Thessaly, Bulgaria and Thrace. The chronicler’s references to Mediterranean topography range from the Dardanelles to Morocco, while he cites the ‘Geografia Blauiana’ to describe Caribbean topography and economy, with their sugar and tobacco plantations, mentioning exotic locations such as the Virgin Islands, Guadeloupe, and

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201 AOM 1380, Wignacourt to the Re却ors of the Republic of Ragusa, f. 41v, 15 February 1601.
203 AIM, Memoriale I, Inquisitor Caracciolo (1706-1710), ff. 33v-34r. The Roman littoral was a dreaded stretch of coast which created logistical problems in occasions of stormy weather. In 1587, a Hospitaller embassy to Rome stopped in Gaeta, a port in Campania, and covered the remaining distance to Rome overland by horse and carriage. Dal Pozzo, i, 297.
204 AOM 1381, Wignacourt to the Prior of Bohemia, Poppel, f. 321, 22 November 1602.
205 Dal Pozzo, i, 159-60.
206 Bosio hails geography as an exact science which deals in detail with lands and how they are divided. Bosio, i, 139.
207 Ibid., i, 42.
208 Ibid., i, 139.
209 Dal Pozzo, i, 820-4.
210 Ibid., ii, 173 and 189.
Martinique. Abate Cenni, on the other hand, mentions the Pillars of Hercules and looks beyond, making direct references to the ocean in a metaphor to render homage to the magistracies of the Cotoner brothers in their endeavour to increase the fame and reputation of the Order to transcontinental proportions. Books belonging to Hospitallers living in Malta included world atlases and descriptions of particular empires; a manuscript dealing with the establishment of European commerce in the Indies; accounts of travels to Constantinople; voluminous sixteenth-century publications on the expeditions of the Portuguese in the Orient, with descriptions of cities, landscapes, and the human textures of those lands and other travelogues, maps, and topographical descriptions of continental territories ranging from Africa to Asia and America.

Diplomacy and economic interests played a role in expanding the Hospitallers’ network of contacts. In the mid-seventeenth century the Order joined the European trend of transoceanic conquest and purchased Saint Christopher’s and a host of other islands in the Caribbean. The first official diplomatic rapprochements with Russia were established in 1698 and less than a

211 Ibid., ii, 195; 203-204.
212 NLM 163, Abate Cenni, 6.
213 Not all books at the National Library of Malta necessarily belonged to the Hospitallers. Some could have been acquired by, or donated to, the National Library after the Order had left Malta and were therefore not consultable by the Knights during their stay on the island. In the case of most of the books, however, the ownership by individual Knights or the Order can be verified. The library manuscripts NLM Lib. 602, Lib. 603, Lib. 604, and Lib. 605, for example, are indexes and lists of books present at the Order’s library compiled during the Hospitaller’s stay on Malta. NLM Lib. 266 is an index of the library of the Camerata (residence of Hospitallers assisting the sick) written in May 1741. Some Hospitallers, like Bailli de Breteuil, gave a personal touch to certain publications by having their name inscribed on books belonging to their personal library. For an overview of books belonging to Hospitallers which passed on to the Order and went on to form a public library, see C. Depasquale, ‘Books and Libraries in 18th-century Malta’, in Celebratio Amicitiae. Essays in honour of Giovanni Bonello, M. Camilleri and T. Vella (eds.) Fondazzjoni Patrimjonju Malti, Malta 2006, 87-101.
214 See, for example, Ioannis Blaeu, Geographia Baviana (Amsterdam, 1658). A reference to this work can be found in NLM Lib. 602, f. 53r, and Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, Atlante Veneto nel quale si contiene la descrittione geografica, storica, sacra, profana e politico degli imperij, regni, provincie e stati dell’universo, loro divisione e confini. Opera e studio del Padre Maestro Coronelli Ministro Conventuale cosmografo della Serenissima Repubblica ad uso dell’accademia cosmografica degli argonauti. (Venice, 1696). A reference to this work can be found in NLM 602, f. 31r.
215 AOM 6474 (Miscellanea), Breve manoscritto in confutazione d’una storia dello stabilimento e del commercio degli Europei nelle Indie, pubblicato da Guglielmo Tommaso Raynal in Ginevra 1780.
216 Giovanni Benaglia, Relazione del viaggio fatto a Costantinopoli e ritorno in Germania dell’Illustissimo Signor Conte Alberto Caprara, gentiluomom della Camera dell’Imperatore e da esso mandato come Intermunto straordinario e plenipotenziario per trattare la continuazione della tregua. (Venice, 1685). A reference to this work can be found in NLM 602, f. 45r.
218 Depasquale, 94.
219 For a recent analysis of the Order’s colonial involvement in the Caribbean, see Thomas Freller and William Zammit, Knights Buccaneers and Sugar Cane. The Caribbean Colonies of the Order of Malta (Malta, Midsea Books, 2015).
220 For an overview of Russo-Maltese relations from the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century, see P. Stegny, ‘Russia and Malta from Boris Shermetev to Emperor Paul I’, in A Journey
century later Grand Master Emmanuel de Rohan de Polduc (1775-1797) sought to establish economic relations with the United States of America in an attempt to diversify, amplify, and improve the commercial horizon of the islands.221 Neither did Hospitaller Malta remain alien to the West’s particular fascination with Persia. Accounts of missions to modern day Iran were published in Venice222 and Persian goods usually arrived to the Mediterranean along the route passing through Aleppo and Smyrna.223 In December 1682, a certain A. Revest deposited some drapes from Persia with the Common Treasury as a pawn for a small loan224 and in 1704 a Frenchman, Giovanni Billion, sought a reference from the Convent for him to be welcomed favourably in the court of the King of Persia.225

The acquisition of knowledge by the Convent regarding the military manoeuvres on the Eurasian border was not infrequent. War compelled the Hospitaller hierarchy to keep as updated as possible on any military manoeuvres taking place in Eastern Europe and Asia. The Order’s resident ambassador in Rome was kept informed on Persian progress against the Turk by the briefings of the Persian ambassador in the papal court.226 All sorts of military distraction for the Turks on the rear and to the north of the Ottoman Empire was welcome news for any Catholic post in the Mediterranean as this almost invariably meant a reduced Ottoman activity in the region. In 1577 the fear of an Ottoman attack abated as soon as news reached Malta that Persia had waged war on the Porte.227 Towards the end of 1603, briefings from Bohemia reported on the Turco-Catholic clashes south of Buda.228 In 1629 fears of an Ottoman sortie soon abated when it became known that the Grand Turk Amurat was engaged against the Persians.229 In the summer of 1638, news arrived from Zante that the Turkish army was heading for Persia230 and Dal Pozzo gives details of the Ottoman conquest of Babylon and the massacre that ensued.231

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223 Braudel (1986), 286.
224 AOM 646, 226, 9 December 1682.
225 AOM 1465, Perellos y Rocaful to the King of Persia, f. 34r, 20 February 1704.
226 Dal Pozzo, i, 549.
227 Ibid., 127.
228 AOM 1382, Wignacourt to the Prior of Bohemia, f. 375, 29 December 1603.
229 Dal Pozzo, i, 776.
230 AOM 1417, Lascaris Castellar to Latino (Zante), f. 151r, 11 August 1638.
231 Dal Pozzo, ii, 47.
That ‘Murky Time’: The Seventeenth Century and its Demons

However long the journey was, however tortuous the routes were, however difficult it was for certain obstacles to be avoided or surpassed, news from such distant places somehow managed to make its way to early modern Malta through paths along which the Knights of St John of Jerusalem had established enduring contacts. The sum of these contacts formed a communication network. The coordinated exploitation of this network allowed Hospitaller Malta to develop into an early modern Euro-Mediterranean state and to make it through some turbulent decades, including those of the seventeenth century. That ‘murky time of corsairs, free-wheeling consuls and converts of uncertain identity’ was a tormented century bedeviled with the demons of plague, war, banditry, piracy, famine, and social strife so tragically familiar to any pre-industrial society, and more so to that of the 1600s, an age in which the widespread social havoc induced some historians to try and draw comparisons of unrest between different territories and to speak of a crisis of the seventeenth century. These were turbulent years for the western world. As scientific observation started gradually gaining greater credibility and Cartesian philosophy, which exalted the powers of reason above all others, was making headway among scholarly circles, society was questioning its dogmatic belief in a metaphysical fundamentalism which had been conditioning all walks of life for centuries. Baroque philosophy and mannerisms were winning over proselytes across territories and societies, heavily conditioning court etiquette, inter-state diplomatic procedures, and ceremonials at sea. The spectre of social chaos moulded the intellectual mood of the period. Political thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes embraced Machiavellian stances and theorized in favour of iron-fisted rulers capable of stamping their authority on their realm even at the expense of the individual’s liberty. Attempts at implementing an absolutist ideology also had long-term practical consequences for European and Mediterranean States. Long-drawn-out wars, fought with armies which had grown in size and were better and more

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232 Greene (2003), 235.
233 For the ‘general crisis’ of the seventeenth century and the social problems which plagued this era see, for example, Geoffroy Parker, Europe in Crisis 1598-1648 (Sussex, The Harvester Press, 1980); G. Parker, and L.M. Smith (eds.), The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century (London and New York, 1997); D.H. Pennington, Europe in the Seventeenth Century (London and New York, 2003).
234 The adjective ‘Cartesian’ derives from the French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650), considered as one of the fathers of the rise of European rationalism. His conceptual elaborations were based exclusively on reason and logic, and are considered as fundamental for the emergence of a western secular society. For a concise and readable overview of the history of Western philosophy in the modern era see, for example, John Cottingham, The Rationalists (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988).
236 For a general overview of the rise and implications of absolutism in Europe and related political theories see, for example, Richard Bonney, The European Dynastic States 1494-1660 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991), 305-416.
expensively equipped following the fourteenth-century military revolution, were inducing a measure of administrative restructuring by different states in an attempt to improve tax-collection and meet the ever-increasing demands imposed by military conflicts.

As for the Inner Sea, the unofficial retreat of the Great Powers after Lepanto, which saw Spain reaching out more insistently to the Atlantic and the Ottomans reverting more attention to Persia, liberated the piratical energies of corsairs of different creeds who roamed and pillaged freely around the Mediterranean for well over the first half of the century while the northerners, towards the end of the sixteenth century, started their gradual intrusion in the western basin, taking over routes and trading contracts formerly dominated by the Italian city-states which had long lost their commercial vigour.\textsuperscript{237} French commercial activity, a substantial victim of this lesser war for the first six decades of the century, began its recovery from the 1660s primarily through the trading impositions of the French state which sought financially beneficial rapprochements with the Ottoman Porte and worked on a gradual clampdown on corsairing in the eastern basin which ultimately proved successful.\textsuperscript{238} It is within the context of these historical developments, contingencies, and this protracted period of chaos that the communication system of Hospitaller Malta will be analysed, starting with the study of the links with nearby Sicily, which constituted Malta’s most vital communication platform with the rest of the world. Through the contacts with nearby Sicily and other important Mediterranean centres for exigencies of provisioning, fund transfer, and the collection of information, it will be shown how Malta was integrated in the major economic and social transformations of a western society on the threshold of modernity.

Despite the restricted timeframe chosen, the dynamics concerning the mobility patterns discussed may very well apply to the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, for this reason cross-reference will be made to both these centuries. As twentieth-century historical scholarship has amply proved, the limitations on movement imposed by the physical setting and the technological deficiencies of the age varied very little throughout these centuries. What was valid in medieval times was almost as valid at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. Advances in navigation technology did occur and European states did make an effort to improve roads, build more bridges and canals, and speed up the delivery of information through more efficient courier services, yet throughout the pre-industrial era man emerged a systematic loser in his eternal fight

\textsuperscript{237} According to Braudel, ‘the English were everywhere in the Mediterranean’ towards the end of the sixteenth century. Braudel (1986), 628. For the ‘arrival’ of the Dutch in the Mediterranean, see ibid, 629–40.
\textsuperscript{238} Greene (2003), 235–45.
against the tyranny of distance. Napoleon, as Paul Valéry said, marched only as fast as Caesar.


Braudel actually cites Valéry’s quote twice in the space of a few pages in order to stress the frustrating difficulties man encountered for entire centuries in trying to speed up transport. Braudel (1985), 424 and 429.
**ISLANDS, FRIGATES, AND COURIERS**

**HOSPITALLER MALTA AND THE SICILIAN CONTACT NETWORK**

**Sicily in the Century of its Discontent**

Historiography has established Sicily’s connectivity potential in the Mediterranean world since medieval times. The Sicilian historian Carmelo Trasselli, for example, underlines how Sicily became a commercial hub on a regional level, carving out an ‘honourable’ place for itself, together with the Italian maritime republics, as regards trading contacts with the Levant.¹ Focusing in particular on the fifteenth century, Trasselli highlights also Sicily’s commercial interchange with Cyprus; Messina’s port activity and frequent economic contacts with Africa and Asia Minor; the Sicilian role of the Catalan merchant colony and the Datini family; the island’s commercial contacts with Barbary, and Tunisia in particular; and how it was exploited by Venetian shipping.² From a methodological perspective, he stresses the importance of consulting alternative Sicilian archives to make up for the documentary material lost in Messina during the quake of 1908 and World War II, making obvious emphasis on the archives of Palermo, but even on those of Trapani, which throw light on Messina itself and on Sicily’s connections with Rhodes, for example, and the island’s interconnecting role on the Genoa-Levant route.³

Sicily’s regional connectivity emerges also, albeit indirectly, from a close study of the Order of St John’s and Malta’s documentary sources. Trasselli’s methodological ploy to compensate for perished sources when recreating Sicily’s economic history can be extended to Malta. The archipelago’s history, and by default its archival material, constantly highlight the Italian island’s communication faculties, and more so in early modernity due to the rich manuscript heritage of a Hospitaller administration which by the period under study was exploiting to the full Sicily’s littoral to communicate with abroad. Alof de Wignacourt’s magistracy coincides with the reign of Philip III of Spain (1598-1621), when Malta was integrated into a *pax hispanica* which witnessed a reinvigoration of Spanish might in a period of relative peace and stability.⁴ The period heralded a century of discontent for Sicily, when banditry, famine, popular rebellion, epidemics, and natural catastrophes, combined with ecclesiastical oppression and viceregal

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¹ Carmelo Trasselli, *Mediterraneo e Sicilia all’inizio dell’epoca moderna (Ricerche quattrocentesche)* (Cosenza, Pellegrini Editore, 1977), 97.
² Ibid., *passim*.
³ Ibid.
⁴ For a comprehensive overview of the period, see Giorgio Spini, *Storia dell’età moderna*, vol. ii, 1598-1661 (Turin, 1965).
misappropriation of public administration, conspired to harden living conditions on the island.\(^5\) Despite this dire state of affairs, however, Sicily retained its connectivity potential on various levels, not least culturally, as adamantly asserted by a contemporary Sicilian historiography determined to brush aside the scholarly axiom that early modern Sicily was encased in isolation, and particularly so in the long seventeenth century. The Italian cultural historian Santi Correnti, for example, emphasizes the island’s aspirations of autonomy, but mostly its ‘cultural effort’ and contribution in the seventeenth century, refusing to corroborate Denis Mack Smith’s idea of an inward looking society, despite its fierce individualism.\(^6\) Irrespective of Sicily’s insularity and geographical constraints, however, the island increased its relevance for Malta throughout the Order’s stay, as will be shown in this chapter and the following. Through the Order’s communication leverage, early modern Malta adapted to an expanding world. The island increased its overall connectivity as the Mediterranean was receding from global centrality and established its relevance to Habsburg Spain’s central Mediterranean defence strategy, starting with the Knights’ exploitation of a cluster of posts on the Sicilian littoral and the viceroys’ communication infrastructure.

**Hospitaller Malta and Sicily’s Communication Infrastructure**

The geography of Sicily, the ‘benigna nutrice’ of the Maltese islands,\(^7\) had much to offer to the Knights of St John and the Maltese. The literature on Siculo-Maltese relations has been revealing on the commercial traffic between the two islands and illustrates how the produce of Sicily’s opulent landscape, the goods manufactured by its population, and the imports which poured to its shores from Italy and the rest of the Mediterranean were systematically exploited by Malta and its governments.\(^8\) The Habsburg presence at such a relatively close range gave the Order a measure of military reassurance\(^9\) seldom experienced in its Levantine years, but it was the island’s subsistence and communication potential which intrigued and were coveted most by Hospitaller Malta. The


\(^6\) Ibid., 7-31.

\(^7\) NLM Lib. 163, Abate Cenni, *Historia dell’Ordine Sacro e Militare de’ Cavalieri di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano scritta dall’Abbate Cenni*, 62.


kind of lush fertility which surrounded the Convent in Rhodes\textsuperscript{10} was now only accessible across a sixty-mile sealane, yet the day’s sail needed to cover the short journey in normal weather conditions allowed the Hospital a much more immediate access to its continental affairs than it had ever afforded throughout the earlier centuries of its existence.

While the Sicilian hinterland - with its livestock farms, its fruit groves, its cheese, wine, and olive oil production, its sulphur mines,\textsuperscript{11} its deposits of ice close to the east coast, and, above all, its agricultural expanses that rendered the island a major Mediterranean grain exporter - was the undisputed prime provider of the inhabitants of Malta,\textsuperscript{12} the daily contacts that the Order of St John fostered across the channel were mainly, and inevitably, limited to the littoral and its immediate vicinities. This pattern of contacts had originated centuries earlier, starting with a Hospitaller foundation in Messina. The Order had been exploiting Sicily’s provisioning and communication potential since medieval times to transfer men, horses, cash, and supplies from its estates in Christendom to its bases in the East, capitalizing on Messina’s access to central-


\textsuperscript{11} The language used by Grand Master Wignacourt when sounding his agent in Licata regarding the market price of sulphur in Sicily implies that Hospitaller Malta regularly imported this raw material from Sicily: ‘zolfo...altre volte s’e havuto a meglio mercato’. AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Accarigi (Licata), f. 291r, 19 November 1601. See also Ibid., Wignacourt to Accarigi (Licata), f. 258r, 15 October 1601.

\textsuperscript{12} Grand Master Perellos y Rocaful’s admission in this regard could not have been more explicit: ‘Ad un popolo pero solito ricevere da costesto Regno quasi tutto il suo alimento’. AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Riggio (Palermo), ff. 165-6, 3 November 1708. On Malta’s dependence on Sicily from a contemporary account, see also Giovanni Semprini, ‘Malta nella seconda metà del seicento (Da un manoscritto del tempo)’, Archivio Storico di Malta, iv, (1933), 97-112.
Mediterranean shipping and its communication facilities with Italy and the Levant.\textsuperscript{13} By the first half of the twelfth century the Hospitaller House of Messina had acquired prioral mandate over the rest of Sicily and Southern Italy.\textsuperscript{14} The establishment of such a strong jurisdictional presence in the city-port is indicative of the Order’s geopolitical priorities and paved the way for the foundation of further Hospitaller posts on the Sicilian littoral. It can be argued that the Order adapted its administrative needs to the island’s geography and restless social temperament. The Order profited from the opulence of the Sicilian territory but could ill afford to remain embroiled in what Denis Mack Smith calls the ‘proud insularity’ of its wild hinterland which was always reluctant to acknowledge the various establishments that governed the island.\textsuperscript{15} The very structure and ethos of the Order compelled it to exploit first and foremost the communication possibilities offered by the island with the surrounding world. This implicitly meant the establishment of other Hospitaller stations on Sicily’s littoral throughout the Order’s history. Consequently, by the period under study, the Knights could count on a contact point practically on all latitudes of the island, rendering Malta’s affairs more Sicily-centric than ever before. As will be shown in this study, Sicily was not only vital for provisioning Malta, but also for the channelling of Hospitaller prioral funds and for the exchange of information between Malta and the rest of the world.

\textit{Scicli: Hospitaller Malta’s Gateway to Christendom}

The communication patterns randomly secluded and dispersed in Hospitaller documents unfold very clearly with every folio and page turned to reveal a contact network based on a cluster of posts, towns, and cities which the Hospitaller Malta exploited on a quasi-daily basis. The most immediately accessible point of call with an urban structure was Scicli. The town close to the south-eastern tip of the island, was already an attraction for Maltese, Calabrian, North African, and other Mediterranean merchant ships centuries before the Order settled in Malta.\textsuperscript{16} In pre-Hospitaller Malta, commodities from the island were shipped to Scicli to be exchanged with Sicilian products.\textsuperscript{17} Lying at an altitude of 120 metres in the district of Modica, it was surrounded by fields which produced olives, vines, and fruit. However, rather than as a centre for production, Scicli gained a measure of renown and relevance as a transit station through which merchandise and commodities flowed with regularity from and to Sicily. The river, which flowed next to the dwelled-in areas, connected the town with the port at the end of the valley. The Treccani


\textsuperscript{14} Sire, 160-1.


\textsuperscript{16} Dalli (2002), 44.

\textsuperscript{17} M. Aloisio, ‘Maritime activity between Malta, Sicily and North Africa in the Late Middle Ages’, in \textit{The Maltese Islands and the Sea}, T. Gambin (ed.) Midsea Books, Malta 2015, 22.
encyclopaedia dismisses this harbour as of little importance, yet for Hospitaller Malta it became the most immediate gateway to Christendom and its relevance for the Knights of St John and their shipping activities gained in stature as time went by, so much so that in the early years of Grand Master Nicholas Cotoner’s administration the Order was contemplating the building of a fortress in the town’s whereabouts for the exclusive benefit of the Hospitaller fleet. The seat of the Order’s procurator stationed in Scicli was often the first recipient of Hospitaller Malta’s correspondence and the last post at which mail from Sicily, Italy, the rest of the continent, and occasionally beyond was gathered before it was shipped to Malta. The Scicli-Malta crossing service acquired enough renown to be sought by the occasional itinerant in search of a ferry service between the islands. In the summer of 1614, after spending days stranded in Syracuse waiting for the return of the Hospitaller galleys from the Levant to cross to Malta, the island’s new inquisitor, Fabio Delagonessa, finally decided to cross overland to Scicli and catch the ferry for the channel crossing. Three years later, the Order’s agent in Scicli was informed of the imminent arrival of a traveller from Nauplia who was to catch the frigate Malta after crossing from Messina or Syracuse. The small Sicilian town’s function as a dispatch relay station was so familiar among the Order’s corps that it could be casually referred to even in letters addressed to Hospitaller personnel residing as far north as Germany.

The most frequent and regular mail connection between Malta and Sicily was carried out by a number of vessels, usually, feluche, fregate, speronare, or tartane, owned by various captains or padroni, some of them with Maltese surnames. It was imperative for the Order that these vessel-owners could be trusted since such a significant portion of the islands’ survival depended on their reliability and efficiency. Thus, where possible, enduring relationships forged on sustained collaboration came to be created. In 1587, for instance, we find Padron Vincenzo Rispolo, member

18 Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti, vol. 31 (Founded by Giovanni Treccani, Rome, 1936-44), 154.
19 AOM 1442, Nicholas Cotoner to Frá Mariano Perello (Scicli), f. 37v, 12 June 1666.
20 Hospitaller terminology regarding the Order’s contacts is not always consistent. At times, procuratore or ricevitore could be used for the same person in different instances and the distinction conveyed by the different titles is not always clear. In one particular document, the Hospitaller agent in Syracuse is referred to as procuratore in one folio and as receiver in the adjacent folio. AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Montalto (Syracuse), f. 309 v, 7 September 1618 and Ibid., f. 310r, 8 December 1618. This inconsistency in the use of specific terminology in Hospitaller documents can also be encountered in references to names of seacraft. Carmel Cassar, Society, Culture and Identity in Early Modern Malta (Malta, Mireva Publications, 2000), 68-9. In this dissertation, the terms adopted are those which, according to the author, are used with more consistency for the same individual in Hospitaller documents.
21 In the summer of 1601, for example, the Hospitaller Commander Britto was considering the option whether to travel to Malta directly from Syracuse or to cross by land to Scicli and catch a Malta-bound boat from there. AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Zumbo (Syracuse), ff.124v-125r, 12 June 1601.
22 AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 267r, 1 July 1614.
23 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Mattiolo Cassar (Scicli), f. 212r, 19 June 1617.
24 AOM 1394, Wignacourt to the Grand Prior of Germany, ff. 357-358r, 23 July 1615.
25 For example, we find a Padron Santoro Curmi and a Padron Pietro Magro. AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), f. 171, 2 June 1605;
of a prominent family of merchants,陪伴着一个骑士团的摩托船和他的护卫舰对巴巴里进行了一次私掠出海。

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Vincenzo Rispolo was crossing the channel regularly to deliver mail and occasionally to ship cash for the payment of provisions on behalf of the Università, the municipal authority which managed the provision of cereals for the Maltese population. A trusted collaborator of the Order, Rispolo was praised for his ‘diligence and loyalty’. In 1601, for example, the Order’s procurator in Scicli was encouraged to entrust dispatches addressed to Malta from ships harbouring in Scicli to this padrone or to anyone deputizing in his stead, who occasionally could be his son. In this way the provision of the service remained within the family, providing the Order with surplus reassurance regarding the positive outcome of the delivery. Rispolo became such an habitué of the Order’s delivery service that throughout the years he ended up being referred to simply as Padron Vincenzo, denouncing an established familiarity among Hospitaller quarters where first-name references were rarely the norm.

The ferry services of the Rispolo family were somehow acknowledged and rewarded by the government some years later, when the Order paid for the education of Vincenzo’s son, Giovanni Matteo, a Dominican friar who was sent to complete his studies in Paris. When in early 1603 Padron Nardo Greco, the owner of a frigate which transported mail across the channel, was accused of smuggling, he was immediately reinstated into the Order’s delivery service after his merchandise was duly offloaded and checked for contraband goods. Lorenzo Attard, a Maltese owner of a frigate, sent to Messina late in 1701 to attend to the commercial needs of Maltese community there, was described as a man who was held in high regard by the Order’s hierarchy.

26 For the mercantile activity and the social rise in Maltese society of the Rispolo family, see Carmel Cassar, Society, Culture and Identity in Early Modern Malta (Malta, Mireva Publications, 2000), 84-93; Anne Brogini, Malte, Frontière de Chrétienté (1530-1670), (École Française de Rome, 2006), 378-379; 608-9; 639; and passim. Brogini’s index references to the Rispolos are completely unreliable and in large part do not correspond to actual references in the text. At one point there is a reference to a blank page. 27 Bartolomeo Dal Pozzo, Historia della S. Religione Militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta, i, (Verona, 1703), 293. 28 AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 84-85r, 17 February 1614. 29 The Order’s trust in Rispolo was clearly stated: ‘giache habbiamo per lunga esperienza conosciuto la diligenza e fedeltà sua’. AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 257v, 12 October 1601. 30 Ibid., Wignacourt to Zumbo (Syracuse) and Sollima (Scicli), f. 228v, 6 September 1601. 31 For example: AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 89v, 29 March 1608. 32 Cassar, Society, Culture and Identity (2000), 90. See also AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 364, 29 July 1615. The documents do not specify if the Dominican friar was the same Rispolo who occasionally carried mail between Malta and Sicily instead of his father. 33 AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), f. 82, 18 February 1603. Incidentally even Nardo Greco was occasionally referred to simply as Padron Nardo in Hospitaller correspondence, which can be considered as another indication of an enduring working relationship with the Order. AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 85r, 25 April 1601. The same could be said of a Padron Gabriello. AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Sortino (Syracuse), f. 280, 17 September 1608. 34 ‘huomo da noi stimato per le sue buone qualità’. AOM 1462, Perellos y Rocaful to di Giovanni (Messina), f. 160r, 27 November 1701.
The so-called fregate del passo\textsuperscript{35} or fregate del canale were the most assiduous mail carriers and could cross the channel almost exclusively for postal services, similarly to the varca currèra which mail-connected Sicily and Southern Italy with various surrounding islands, or more specifically the Regie barche-corriere, which connected Palermo and Trapani to all three Aegadian islands and with Pantelleria, Lampedusa, and Ustica.\textsuperscript{36} These frigates were Hospitaller Malta’s swiftest, most consistently punctual, and readily available link to the continent and apparently could sustain a measure of rough seas and winds,\textsuperscript{37} which occasionally allowed them to dare the crossing even outside the sailing season. The turbulences of winter could wreck havoc in the normal mail delivery service between the islands and the mailboat could end up stranded in Scicli, or Malta, for days on end, especially between November and February.\textsuperscript{38} Yet as soon as the sea’s anger abated these vessels rarely shirked from attempting the trip to the other side of the channel, which could be a bold act in the choppy Mediterranean waters, undoubtedly instigated by a sense of duty as much as by the pressing and unquenchable demands for news which the Convent imposed over its entire communication personnel.\textsuperscript{39}

Sheer convenience, however, meant that mail would also be transported on many vessels which crossed to and from Sicily with cargoes of commodities, not unlike practices adopted by Venice, for example, whose authorities were practical enough to allow the simultaneous transport of merchandise and letters on the same frigates.\textsuperscript{40} The mail boats which ferried mail between Sicily and Malta often carried cargoes of cloth for the Order’s crews, filato (spun thread),\textsuperscript{41} and occasionally other commodities such as meat.\textsuperscript{42} In general, vessels would take on board letter parcels simply because their travel route happened to coincide with stopovers where mail waiting for delivery would have accumulated, or places to which mail was habitually destined. Thus mail addressed to Malta could be transported with frigates carrying ice\textsuperscript{43} or wine from the eastern coast.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Bartolomeo Dal Pozzo, \textit{Historia della S. Religione Militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta}, ii (Venice, 1715), 40-1.
\item Vincenzo Fardella de Quiernfort, \textit{Studi di storia postale dal medioevo all’unità d’Italia. Un contributo alla conoscenza della storia postale del Regno di Sicilia} (Palermo, Edizione Aziz, 1989), 65; 140.
\item Dal Pozzo, ii, 41.
\item The mailboats could be held in Scicli for well over a week in fact, a terribly long time for the Convent to remain without news updates considering that the channel crossing could be carried out in less than a day in favourable winds. See for example, AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), 5 January 1602, f.39r and AOM 1387 Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f.89v, 29 March 1608. See also chapter 6.
\item For example: AOM 1381 Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 39r, 5 January 1602.
\item See, for example, AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Accarigi (Scicli), f.221v, 21 May 1613 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Accarigi (Scicli), f.316r, 22 June 1613 respectively.
\item AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Accarigi (Scicli), f. 37, 3 February 1617.
\item An example: AOM 1445. Cotoner to Commander Barone, f. 114r, 28 January 1676. In January 1697, for example, mail was lost with the frigate carrying ice which fell prey to some Tripolitani while sailing next to Catania. AOM 1460, Adrian de Wignacourt to Amb. Sacchetti (Rome), f. 203r, 18 January 1697; Ibid., Adrian de Wignacourt to Cordova (Sicily), f. 204, 18 January 1697.
\end{thebibliography}
of Sicily; a frigate heading to Trapani would stop at Scicli to deposit mail; letters from Messina would be delivered to Malta by a Genoese-owned *filuca*, or by a French ship from Marseilles which would have stopped at Messina before proceeding to Malta with a cargo of wheat, or by a ship laden with barrels of pitch. On its way to Licata, a vessel would drop mail at Scicli and stop there again on its return journey to collect and carry letters to Malta; a *filuca* from Palermo would stop at Scicli to collect mail addressed to Malta from Rome and cross the channel to hand it over to the Convent; a frigate from Naples would stop at Messina, pick up mail, and carry it to Malta, similarly to a vessel sailing from Barcelona, which would stop at Palermo to pick up Malta-bound mail; and a westward bound *caicco* from Zante would stop at Syracuse, collect mail, and ship it to Malta.

Beyond Scicli, the Order’s habitual Sicilian itinerary, moving in a clockwise direction, consisted of Licata, Girgenti (modern day Agrigento), Sciacca, Trapani, Palermo, Messina, Augusta, and Syracuse. Capo Passero, the site of a garrisoned fort at the southernmost tip of the eastern coast, was more of a geographical bearing and a convenient temporary stopping point for Hospitaller shipping rather than a depository of mail and goods. Pozzallo’s tower, a few miles to the west, provided welcome shelter for Hospitaller galleys in case of sudden encounters with enemy vessels when roaming the channel, and the Order’s arsenal was ready to sustain this military service as in 1615, for example, when it replenished the stronghold with ammunition from Malta. The Order’s galley squadron at times regrouped under Pozzallo’s tower before plying the whole Southern Sicilian coast up to Trapani in search of enemy corsairs. Sicilian grain intended

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44 AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Zumbo (Syracuse), f. 353v, 27 December 1602.
45 AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 258r, 14 August 1604.
46 AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), f. 274, 5 October 1602.
47 AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Ginori (Rome), ff. 306v-307r, 14 December 1607.
48 AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 122, 8 April 1616.
49 AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 289v, 25 August 1605.
50 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 262-263, 27 May 1613.
51 AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), ff. 475v-476r, 31 October 1612.
52 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 451r, 5 September 1613.
53 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Montalto (Syracuse), f. 206v, 17 June 1617.
54 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Lo Porto (Scicli), ff. 301v-302r, 6 September 1617. AOM 1766, f. 444.
55 AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Paolo La Restia (Governor of Modica), ff. 219v-220r, 13 May 1615.
56 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Accarigi (Scicli), f. 53v, 26 February 1617; Ibid., Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 58v, 26 February 1617.
for shipment to Malta was usually stored in the grain cylos of Licata, Girgenti, and Sciacca on the southern coast. Grain was also shipped to Malta from Terranova (Gela), Scicli itself, and Pozzallo during the 1500s, but the cereal-exporting role towards Malta of these three towns appears to have been much reduced by the seventeenth century, except for fleeting references such as when a frigate was sent to load broad beans from Terranova, or occasional crossings to Pozzallo to load grain. However, these are desultory episodes which scale down to inconsequential references, at least when roped in with the multitude of channel crossings for the export of Sicilian grain to Malta throughout the early seventeenth-century decades under study. When in 1618, in coincidence with severe grain shortages in Malta, news had it that the County of Modica in Southern Sicily was storing grain in Pozzallo after a bountiful harvest, the Hospitaller agent in Scicli, specifically asked by the Order to intervene in person, was exceptionally sent on a mission to speak to the Governor of Modica to check the feasibility of a possible export to Malta.

Of the principal grain-exporting towns on the Southern Sicilian shore, the Order, and Hospitaller Malta in general, kept regular contacts mostly with Licata. The town was closer to Scicli than Sciacca and Girgenti, and mail from Malta concerning shipments and payments of grain cargoes usually travelled by land between the two posts. It was a contact pattern dictated also by administrative procedure since the export permits of grain and other commodities obtained in Palermo, and occasionally Messina, were usually sent to Licata to release their transport across the channel. Trapani, close to the northwestern tip of the island, was primarily exploited as

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59 Brogini, 43 and passim.
60 One can hardly find references to the export of grain from Scicli, Terranova, and Pozzallo in the Order’s outgoing correspondence for the first decades of the 1600s, for example. Even Brogini’s references regarding cereal export from these towns stop mostly towards the end of the sixteenth century. Brogini, passim.
61 AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Scicli), f. 111r, 13 March 1609.
62 Mostly in the 1650s. See Brogini, 594 and AOM 644, f. 3v, 26 June 1653.
63 AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Francesco Lo Porto (Scicli), f. 41, 7 February 1618.
64 Cassar, Society, Culture and Identity (2000), 75, Table 7.
65 For example: AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 208r, 12 August 1601; AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Corsetto (Licata), f. 51r, 7 February 1608; Ibid., Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 52r, 21 February 1608.
66 See chapter seven.
67 On the occasions that the wheat export permits were obtained in Messina, they were usually sent straight to Palermo just the same for the export order to be implemented. See, for example, AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), ff. 423v-424, [13] September 1612 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), ff. 457v-458r, 16 October 1612.
68 For example: AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Accarigi (Licata), f. 208v, 19 August 1601; AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Ferro (Trapani), f. 300r, 12 December 1607.
an alternative provider of wheat and biscuit for Hospitaller crews,\textsuperscript{69} apart from being a stopping point for the Hospitaller squadron during its roamings in the western basin of the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{70}

Considerable amounts of mail-parcels were addressed to Palermo on the north coast and Messina near the northern tip of the east coast. Being the viceregal and administrative seat of the island, Palermo received a substantial portion of official Hospitaller mail addressed to Sicily. The Hospitaller receiver in Palermo, apart from managing the Order’s financial matters of the district, also had the uncomfortable onus of guaranteeing the regular concession of the grain export permits to Malta by the city’s authorities.\textsuperscript{71} Rome apart, Palermo was probably Hospitaller Malta’s most frequently tapped foreign urban centre. Together with Naples, it was Madrid’s prime substation in the middle of the Mediterranean and the Hospitallers’ diplomatic antechamber when dealing with their distant Spanish masters. Most importantly, the Order used it as its financial clearing house through which a good part of the payments of the wheat exports destined to Malta were made.\textsuperscript{72}

Messina’s role, on the other hand, was fundamental for the forwarding and the receipt of Hospitaller Malta’s mail to and from Italy. The city, renowned for its busy mint,\textsuperscript{73} was a vigorous trading connection with the peninsula as its privileged position on one of the most bustling Mediterranean straits provided its port with frequent traffic in either direction. Whoever sought a relatively quick connection with Italy was likely to find it there. The Order imported timber and masts for its galleys via Messina\textsuperscript{74} and the annual trip of the Genoese silk galleys to the port occasionally allowed the Knights to transfer to Sicily or Malta their Northern European funds deposited in Genoa and to maintain active communication lines with the Republic, Northern Italy, and the rest of Europe.\textsuperscript{75} Through Messina, Hospitaller Malta kept mail contact with the Tyrrenian coast and a cluster of Italian cities, primarily Naples, Rome, Leghorn, Genoa, and Milan.\textsuperscript{76} Further south on the east coast of Sicily, the Order maintained regular connections mostly with Syracuse rather than Catania, which seems to have been marginalised for most of the time by

\textsuperscript{69} For example: AOM 1387, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 102-104v, 12 April 1608; AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 383v-384r, 12 November 1605.

\textsuperscript{70} In September 1640, for example, the Convent instructed the galley squadron to stop and provision Trapani after plying Sardinian waters and the islets in the whereabouts against the galleys of Bizert. AOM 1419, Lascaris Castellar to Prince Landgrave, Generale delle Galere, f. 143r, 25 September 1640.

\textsuperscript{71} See, for example, AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Corsetto (Licata), f.54v, 21 February 1608.

\textsuperscript{72} For episodes of Hospitaller financial transactions involving Palermo see, for example, AOM 453, ff. 238-249 (yrs. 1600-1601); AOM 457, f. 240 (yr. 1610); AOM 459, ff. 298-302r (yr. 1619). See also chapters 5 and 7.


\textsuperscript{74} See, for example, AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), f. 355v, 28 October 1605 and AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 269, 31 October 1607 respectively.


Hospitaller contact routes for the period under study. The documents of the Liber Bullarum and Liber Conciliorum attest that the Convent posted official procurators in Catania in the early 1600s, yet Maltese archives provide no evidence of a regular correspondence exchange between the Order and Catania in the early part of the seventeenth century. As late as 1676, in fact, Hospitaller agents in Sicily were encouraged to send their mail further south to Syracuse, which was considered a more convenient depository of letters on the east coast of Sicily, a station from where mail could be dispatched with greater frequency to Malta, contrary to Catania where mail could accumulate for weeks on end and dispatches lose relevance and become outdated waiting for a frigate. That in 1616, when the rigours of winter were already past, an official letter from the Senate of Catania took more than a month to reach the magistral desk speaks volumes on the peripheral status of the Sicilian town in the overall communication network of Hospitaller Malta.

Augusta was appreciated for its port and its capacity to provide all sorts of edible commodities, but mostly it was coveted for its bakeries which often provided the Order with biscuit to feed its galley crews. According to Dal Pozzo, in the mid-1600s the Hospitaller galleys were receiving such a bad treatment in Syracuse that in 1649 the Order transferred the official seat of its procurator from that port further north to Augusta, defined as a good berth where all sorts of provisions could be found. However, there is no evidence in Hospitaller documents that the Order had an agent stationed in Augusta in the first decades of the 1600s. Syracuse was a port from which the Order exported to Malta ice and wine, among other provisions, and victuals, weapons, and water to Hospitaller ships. The city-port was occasionally used for the delivery of mail from Malta when Scicli was bypassed by the Order’s ships or by the usual mailboats when they travelled directly up the east coast. It was not unusual, in fact, for mail from Hospitaller

77 AOM 100, f. 134r, 29 January 1600 and AOM 457, f. 230,25 October 1611.
78 For a definition of agent as used in this dissertation see chapter one.
79 AOM 1445, Cotoner to Bertone, f. 114r, 28 January 1676.
80 AOM 1395, Wignacourt to the Senate of Catania, f. 124r, 8 April 1616.
82 In the summer of 1667, for example, wheat shortages due to bad harvests in Augusta were creating serious problems for the Order which needed to export biscuit for its galley crews. The Hospitaller squadron delayed its harbour in Augusta in fact, in the hope that biscuit would materialize just the same, as it received news from Malta that the Order was not in a position to export alternative wheat at will from other Sicilian ports. AOM 1443, Nicholas Cotoner to Generale del Bene, f. 48, 7 June 1667.
83 Dal Pozzo, ii, 166-7.
84 For example: AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Zumbo (Syracuse), ff. 124v-125r, 12 June 1601 and Wignacourt to Zumbo (Syracuse), ff. 234v-235r, 10 September 1601.
85 AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Zumbo (Syracuse), f. 353v, 27 December 1602;
87 For example: AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Settimo (Syracuse), f. 35, 8 January 1604, f. 35; AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra, ff. 364 – 365r, 12 October 1611; and AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Syracuse), ff. 88v-89r, 17 February 1614.
Malta to be delivered on the Order’s galleys or other vessels directly to one of these Sicilian stations other than Scicli. Ordinary dispatches to Messina, for example, could at times be delivered directly by a frigate which sailed from Malta without stopping at Scicli. The delivery routes, as stated above, were dictated mostly by convenience, which depended mainly on the availability, and destination, of boats travelling to Sicily, the schedule and itinerary of the Order’s galleys, the winds, and the urgency with which mail had to be delivered, which at times induced the Order to hire vessels specifically to deliver urgent dispatches. However, whichever route was travelled to deliver letters from Malta, once mail arrived in Sicily it had to be entrusted to the local postal network or express couriers in order to be carried to other stations on the island.

The Rise of European Diplomacy and the Formation of Courier Networks

Once mail from Malta was deposited in Scicli the Order’s agents had to rely on the network of local foot or horse-couriers for letters to be delivered to their next destination on the island. Pre-industrial societies were heavily reliant on these human carriers for the overland delivery of messages. Any form of organized human settlement since the dawn of the first urban structures inevitably ended up dependent on the swiftest possible news transport service that man, seacraft, and horse or other animal could guarantee. Administration, diplomacy, war, and commerce – the activities, that is, which monopolized the agendas of any state - demanded an incessant flow of information and communiqués. Size and distances were paramount conditioning factors. The more complex the structure and the vaster its territory, the more intricate the courier network had to be.

In Classical Antiquity, the Greco-Roman world was kept together by an elaborate system of posts. However, as so often the case in the ascent of humanity, greater improvisation originated in the East. It was the Orient which first conjured the more ingenious means of news-transmission, with the use of pigeons, swallows, and occasionally dogs to dispatch messages, and to come up with more elaborate organizational solutions to mail-connect vast expanses of land as

88 For example: AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 240r, 17 September 1601; AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Syracuse), ff. 88v-89r, 17 February 1614; and AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Lo Porto (Scicli), f. 245, 30 June 1619.

89 AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 255r, 19 September 1608.

90 At times, for security purposes dictated by contingencies, the frigates sent to Sicily would be escorted by a Hospitaller galley, if one was available. See, for example, AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), ff. 158v-159r, 7 July 1601. Frigates were not only hired to deliver mail, but also for intelligence purposes. In 1609, for example, the Knight Riccio Salvatico was sent with Pardon Vincenzo Rispolo to the Levant to enquire about the military manoeuvres of the Turk. Dal Pozzo, i, 543-4.
the modern age was approaching, while western itinerants observed in admiration. While chronicling his ventures in China, Marco Polo talks enthusiastically of the yamb, the post houses on the roads branching out from the city of Kanbalu which could be found also in remote mountainous regions and which were capable of keeping four hundred horses at a time ready for the messengers of the Grand Khan and the ambassadors in his court. A system, continues to document in awe the Venetian traveller, that could rely on boats dedicated solely to the transport of official messengers across rivers and lakes; and which had clerks at each station annotating the times of arrival and departure of each courier and was periodically controlled by surveillance officers. He goes on to describe horse-couriers capable of travelling two hundred and fifty miles a day and, if need be, even by night guided by light-bearers on foot; and the foot-messengers, who allegedly could match the horses of Tartary for speed, with bells attached around their waist to herald their arrival, who passed on parcels of mail to each other at three-mile intervals, and whose service was so efficient that they could provide the Khan’s court at Shan-du with dispatches saving up to seven days in travelling time. These human runners formed part of an oriental tradition which relied mainly on foot-messengers for the upkeep of communications, like the chatirs of Persia, renowned for their resilience, who were groomed in the profession from a very young age and trained to run tirelessly carrying their supplies in a back-pack, and whose knowledge of the territory they covered allowed them to avoid the main roads using short cuts to speed up the deliveries and reduce the risk of assault by bandits interested in the money and valuables which they occasionally carried; or the official twin messengers of the kings of India who ran two leagues at a time carrying message parcels on their heads. The Japanese couriers were allegedly the fastest, travelling up to 50 miles a day, a prodigious distance when compared, for example, to the Venetian couriers who covered a maximum of 35 miles daily. The Ottomans used the state couriers called ulaks to deliver the official mail within the confines of the empire and the çavus, the military messengers, for the delivery of official correspondence to European rulers. Over long journeys, these messengers would probably rest in the caravanserais, places of rest which dotted the roads connecting Istanbul to the Balkans.

92 Marco Polo, The Travels of Marco Polo, T. Griffith (ed.) Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, Hertfordshire 1997, 125
93 Ibid., 126-8.
95 Polo, 126-8.
96 Braudel (1985), 430.
98 Ibid., 603-4.
In medieval Western Europe, the Holy Roman Empire had a three-route postal system connecting Germany, Italy, and Spain. Merchants and vagrants of various identities were entrusted with the occasional delivery of correspondence. In Germany letters were deposited in butchers’ shops and by the mid-twelfth century institutions such as the University of Bologna were apparently setting up *ad hoc* postal structures for the exclusive use of their student community, a custom which was followed by other universities in Italy, Spain, and France. The production of goods and their trading imposed the need for some sort of courier services between towns, such as those interconnecting Danzig, Augsburg, and Vienna. In the fourteenth century Venice set up the *Compagnia dei corrieri.* However, in these early attempts at establishing systematic communication services in medieval Christendom, it is hard to trace hints of regular, efficient, widespread, and official postal and courier structures that guaranteed a measure of reliability. Private enterprise, mostly based on closely-knit family or ethnic ties and often stimulated by financial requirements to establish and sustain intricate communication networks for the transfer of news and currency orders, could achieve more than governments in setting up efficient and relatively fast courier services on a continental level. Iberian merchant families, for example, corresponded across Europe for business matters. The Tasso family of Bergamo established their company of ordinary couriers with regular dispatch times, which ran along important routes connecting Venice to Milan and Rome, for example. Wealthy banking families such as the Datini of Florence manipulated a network with branches in Florence, Pisa, Genoa, Avignon, and Barcelona, which provided contacts spanning from Cadiz to Lisbon, London, and Bruges, and leaving an archival inheritance of thousands of letters, while the Medici’s banking and communication network was vaster still, with ramifications in lower Germany and the East.

The first Western European organized news-delivery services, and therefore the first forms of a structured postal and courier networks, started to be established with the rise of the diplomatic machinery of the powers of Christendom. The establishment of relatively efficient and regular systems of dispatch and correspondence carriers throughout the Latin West was the answer to a particular geopolitical condition which started becoming more pertinent with the emergence of secular states. The growing pretentions of sovereignty, interconnected interests, and, most tellingly, mutual distrust if not outright fear of these states were gradually rendering the creation of some form of official, regular, and ultimately permanent relations with other western political institutions or states of various forms and dimensions an unavoidable necessity. By the early 1300s

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100 Allen, 2-3.
103 Burke, 392.
the Christian powers had assimilated whatever diplomatic knowhow was absorbable from the vestiges of Europe’s Germanic, Byzantine, and Islamic past to start moulding their own variant of a diplomatic service, with their prime tutor being the papacy, the West’s pioneer in the elaboration of regular diplomatic activity, an exigency prescribed in great part by the systematic confrontation with the Holy Roman Empire.\footnote{Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London, Peregrine Books, 1965), chapter 1.} By the fifteenth century, as humanist culture was gradually blossoming into the Renaissance and the force of Church and Empire continued waning, the emerging secular states were upgrading their diplomatic corps to survive in a Christian Commonwealth\footnote{Paraphrasing Mattingly.} strewn with strife, international intrigue, and battlefield activity. This structuring process was also a by-product of Turkish influence on westerners, mainly Italians. As shown by a modern historiography intent on reassessing the long-neglected Ottomanist imprint on western state-structure, foreigners residing in the Ottoman Empire ended up transferring to their home nation diplomatic techniques harnessed from the Turk.\footnote{D. Goffman, ‘Negotiating with the Renaissance State: the Ottoman Empire and the New Diplomacy’, in *The Early Modern Ottomans. Remapping the Empire*, V. H. Aksan and D. Goffman (eds.) Cambridge University Press 2007, 61-74.} According to Daniel Goffman, the know-how accumulated by the Italians in Ottoman lands was ‘critical’ in defining an emerging Renaissance diplomacy, which subsequently was to become a model for other European states.\footnote{Ibid., 70.}

In the late 1400s the Italian states, ever suspicious of falling victim to looming foreign aggression which could be wielded by the far superior might of France and Spain, and permanently wary of the closer menace emanated by their peninsular neighbours, started sending resident diplomats to the prime courts of Europe to foster precautionary liaisons. The lord of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, shrewd enough to anticipate the crisis that was to be unleashed with the French invasion of Italy of 1494, paved the way by sending a resident ambassador to Spain in the hope of obtaining protection against Naples. In the following years he sent resident envoys to London, the Habsburg court, and France. Naples, Venice, and Florence followed suit in sending embassies abroad. The papacy, which up to then had only been a receiver of resident embassies, adapted to the international contingency and started sending resident embassies abroad following 1495.\footnote{Mattingly, 146-7.}

The various embassies thus established needed to communicate regularly with their parent court, to send regular reports and dispatches to their king or lord, and in turn to receive specific instructions regarding what attitude, stance, or policy to adopt in the court of their residence. This contributed in no small measure in compelling states to upgrade or enhance whatever loose postal structures and courier networks had existed up to then. Communication routes had to become more established and alternative ones were to be found in case the ordinary routes were temporarily

\footnote{Ibid., 146-7.}
untraversable. Mail carriers, either by land or sea, had to become more reliable and regular and more frequent stopping and changeover stations - where couriers could eat, rest, change horse if necessary, or simply relay their mail parcels to the next courier - had to be erected at more or less equidistant intervals, at least along the principal delivery routes. The result of all these concomitant circumstances during the fifteenth century was the gradual emergence of national postal systems in the principal states of Western Europe. Whether that of King Louis XI of France was the first official royal postal system to be set up is debatable. The Crown of Spain had established its own official correspondence transmission service before the 1450s but still failed to monopolize the national courier system which was still dominated by local fraternities throughout the country, and up to a century later Philip II's administration still found it convenient to continue using the services of the Taxis family which had been entrusted with the Imperial postal service of the Habsburg House since the early 1500s, providing couriers for Spanish and foreign diplomatic correspondence. However, the drive by these secular states to centralize their administration meant that, before long, they succeeded in harnessing the machinery of news transmission within their own territory. A similar official service was gradually established in Sicily, starting in the mid-sixteenth century with a number of viceregal decrees known as prammatiche, introducing an organized courier network throughout the island. This network was exploited by the Hospitaller administration to connect with the various parts of Sicily and subsequently beyond, starting with the delivery of mail to Scicli.

**From Scicli to the rest of Sicily**

The Hospitaller agent in Scicli had the duty to send mail received from Malta to wherever instructed by the Order. Whenever possible the Order, forever wary of the financial strains on its Treasury, tried to reduce dispatch costs by relying on the normal postal service of the locality, usually indicated with the term ‘ordinario’ in Hospitaller documents. Local connections between Scicli and Syracuse, and between Scicli and Palermo, for example, were apparently quite frequent and the Order preferred to make use of this service whenever available, although delivery

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110 Allen, 3-9.
111 Dursteler, 'Power and Information', 602-3; Fardella de Quiernfort, *Studi di storia postale*, 51.
112 Fardella de Quiernfort, 40-82.
113 For example: AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), ff. 158v-159r, 7 July 1601; AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 89v, 29 March 1608 and Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 90, 31 March 1608; Ibid., Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 124v, 29 April 1608. The *corriere ordinario* was usually a foot-courier who was obviously slower than an express horse courier and needed more stops to rest. Fardella de Quiernfort, 82, footnote 73.
through this postal service generally took longer due to the more frequent stops on the way to collect other mail.\textsuperscript{114}

Hospitaller sources do not always allow the historian to reconstruct all the different delivery stages through which land and water mail carriers passed in order to transport dispatches from the point of departure to the post of arrival. Apart from the specific instructions imparted to Hospitaller agents posted beyond Malta as to where and how to forward single dispatches and mail parcels from and to Malta, instructions about the main postal stages via which an individual letter was to be delivered were usually written on the letters themselves.\textsuperscript{115} However, these were generic indications, useful enough for the agent to carry out successfully the delivery in question, as happened in the great majority of cases, but not always sufficient for the historian to recreate the exact route through which the correspondence was carried until it reached its destination. One notable exception, and only to a certain point, could be Sicily, a huge island by any standard but a comparatively small territory, whose particular relevance to the Order, contained landmass, geographical configuration, and relatively short distances were in part responsible for the voluminous records produced by the Order’s administration describing the routes and flux of information mostly along the island’s littoral, both on land and by sea. Even in Sicily’s case, however, it is problematic to find Hospitaller sources which reveal the full itinerary of a dispatch, with details of all the intermediate delivery stages between two main posts. In order to have a better idea of such routes followed by local couriers on mainland European territory we have to consult alternative sources.

The sixteenth-century viceregal decrees mentioned earlier provided Sicily with a postal courier system modelled on that of Habsburg Spain. These decrees, issued in order to regulate the entire courier system of the island, were part of a broader plan to provide the Regno with official mail connections within Sicily and Southern Italy, and most importantly between Sicily and Naples with a royal ferry service from Messina.\textsuperscript{116} The instructions imparted in the \textit{prammatiche}...

\textsuperscript{114} ‘..presupponendo noi che costi sia allo spesso occasione di poter mandare lettere in quellacittá (Syracuse)’. AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 289v, 25 August 1605 and, with reference to the Scicli-Palermo delivery service, ‘presupponghiamo vie sieno spessi occasioni da poterlo fare’. AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 228v, 29 August 1608.
\textsuperscript{116} Farrella de Quiernfort, 51-2. Farrella de Quiernfort mentions three sixteenth-century Sicilian decrees in particular, those of 1577, 1579, and 1584. De Quiernfort was aware of the existence of the decree of 1579 but did not have access to the original version by the time he published his \textit{Studi di storia postale}. However, in his study he reproduces whole excerpts from the decree of 1584 which were in turn reproduced word for word from the \textit{prammatica} of 1579, entitled ‘Ordini fatti sopra l’ufficio del Mastro de Corrieri del Regno di Sicilia dall’illustrissimo, et eccellentissimo Sig. M. Antonio Colonna’ (Palermo, 1579). Farrella de Quiernfort, 61-82. A printed copy of the decree of 1579 was kindly sent to me by the late Italian postal historian Aldo Cecchi. According to Cecchi, this decree was reprinted in 1690 and a copy can be found in the State Archives of Palermo, \textit{Tribunale del Real Patrimonio serie Mastro Portulano}, vol. 2394.
are very clear, detailed, and articulate, betraying a will by the island’s Spanish masters to provide a
regular and reliable service. The Mastro de Corrieri, the courier master, was to manage the whole
postal structure. He was responsible for manning stations with licensed and trustworthy couriers
who were familiar with the territory they were to traverse and could obtain free passage over rivers
and passes. He was also responsible for providing the necessary supply of horses at the various
posts, for keeping a lieutenant in the main towns of Palermo, Messina, Syracuse, Marsala and for
coordinating the postal contacts between Messina, Calabria, and Naples. At the end of each year
he was to submit a report on the special couriers sent outside Sicily together with a justification for
their dispatch and verifications of the deliveries. A measure of accountability was to be imposed
on all those involved in running the operations in order to limit delays and find remedies in case
they occurred, apart from ensuring that the system’s overall management was parsimonious.
Record keeping was to be taken very seriously. The wording of these royal decrees give the
distinct impression, at least, that a policy of intransigence was to be adopted in the registration of
the various delivery stages. Records regarding the timing of the consignment of mail were to be
kept by each official residing in each post, who could also decide whether to employ a horse or
foot courier for the next stage. Such administrative rigour, if applied, provided Hospitaller Malta
with a measure of guarantee regarding the timing and regularity of its dispatches through Sicily.

The postal decrees specified the tariff rates to be paid to foot- and horse-couriers per
number of miles covered, with the latter obviously costing more. The principal routes connecting
Palermo to Messina, Syracuse, Marsala, and Licata had special fixed payment rates which
comprised the return journey. The written dispatches had to clarify the dispatch expenses,
including extra payment rates charged for couriers held at a post for over a day to wait for a reply,
a service occasionally used by the Order when the need for news was pressing and to exploit ferry
connections from Scicli, as will be shown. Delivery instructions in the viceregal decrees
differentiated between the maximum mileage that special couriers were expected to cover in the
schedules of summer (April to October) and winter (October to March). If the delivery was to be
carried out within the day, a courier could be expected to cover 50 miles in summer and 40 miles
in winter, practically matching the feats of the Japanese couriers mentioned earlier. If
performances fell short of these set standards, the viceregal authorities could impose penalties at
their discretion. This allowed the Order to formulate rough estimates for the time needed to
deliver news through Sicily.

When dispatched, a courier was briefed on the nature and destination of the mail parcels
he would be carrying and, most importantly for the courier and the historian, on the stages of the

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117 Fardella de Quiernfort, 76-81.
118 Ibid. 77.
119 Ibid., 76-81.
trip which were clearly spelt out beforehand. The decrees in fact, laid down in remarkable detail the routes along the Sicilian territory which the couriers had to follow with regularity. The authorities which drafted the document went as far as to provide instructions to the courier master on how to send a dispatch from Palermo to Messina, for example, with the different stages to be touched if the courier hugged the coast or if he passed through the alternative mountain route, dictating the days of dispatch and arrival according to the season. The mountain route, for example, passed through the likes of Troina and Randazzo, locations which could prove relevant for Malta’s information relay system, but were too remote to warrant an entry in Hospitaller correspondence. These instructions were imparted in an attempt to instill regularity, establishing the days of dispatch of ordinary mail along the principal routes in advance. This explains why the Order expressed concern when news from Sicily registered undue delays. Strict delivery deadlines, in fact, were imposed on the couriers, with an extra day being allowed for crossings carried out during the winter months, presumably to make allowance for inevitable delays caused by heavy roads and other disruptions due to bad weather.

Pre-industrial Sicily’s communication infrastructure faired badly even when compared to contemporary European standards. Lack of collaboration between local and central authorities, the landowners’ selfish interests, the viceroy’s lack of drive and endemic incapacity to stamp their authority at local levels, together with the sheer costs of eventual infrastructural construction meant that up to the late 1700s Sicily was still deprived of a proper road network. Not even the most travelled and essential road connecting Palermo and Messina along the northern coast guaranteed safety and smooth travel. Lack of proper roads made travel slow and had perverse effects on the island’s economy, rendering product prices less competitive than in other parts of the Mediterranean. Grain from the hinterland was transported to the caricatori on pack animals and peasants could take hours to reach their fields. The deforestation process which started in the sixteenth century facilitated the occurrence of landslides and heavy precipitations during the rainy season provoked havoc, ruining landscapes, destroying bridges, and disrupting road travel.

The same courier service connected Sicily’s three major coasts, such as the one linking Palermo to Syracuse, a distance which could be covered in a maximum of five days. The Palermo-Marsala route went round the northwestern corner of the island and, pertinently for Hospitaller matters, touched Trapani before reaching its destination. In the summer schedule, for example,

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120 Ibid.
121 Ibid. 76.
122 Ibid.
124 Finley, Mack Smith, and Duggan, 150; 186-8.
dispatches from Palermo were to leave on a Friday and arrive in Marsala the following day.\textsuperscript{125} These were some of the principal Sicilian mail-delivery routes, and what emerges from Hospitaller documents is that the Order made full use of these postal services to mail-connect with the stations on the Sicilian littoral most pertinent for Malta’s affairs, either through the use of Sicily’s ordinary postal delivery or the employment of special local couriers. As already explained, the Order was mostly interested in maintaining regular contacts with the main towns on the island’s littoral. In terms of communication relevance, the vast Sicilian hinterland was very often of little significance for Hospitaller affairs, with the only exception being the Palermo-Licata crossing perhaps, and in instances in which connection with the Order’s Sicilian estates was required. As explained, Sicily’s inlands were serviced by poor roads throughout the pre-industrial era\textsuperscript{126} and could be perceived as an obscure and perilous territory even by Sicilian coastal dwellers themselves who often shunned venturing away from the littoral.\textsuperscript{127}

The use of the Sicilian courier network by the Order depended much on timing, and timing, as with any state, conditioned the entire gamut of activities pertinent to Hospitaller Malta’s survival, which relied almost entirely on the coordinated handling of provisioning, fund transfer, and the collection of military information at an international level. If the forwarding of mail to or from Malta coincided with the dispatch of the Sicilian couriers from a particular post, matters were facilitated because the dispatch to the next town would take place within the same day. Otherwise mail would have to wait for the next dispatch on schedule, which could take days, depending on the station and season. If a specific delivery was considered urgent, or the news-item in question warranted exclusive attention and celerity, as so often happened, the ordinary service was discarded and special foot or horse couriers had to be employed or hired on purpose,\textsuperscript{128} and if need be they were made to travel day and night.\textsuperscript{129} In May 1614, for example, a horse courier was to cross from Scicli to Palermo, travelling night and day, to cancel a financial transaction with Spain, and was not to return to Scicli before he was given a reply on the outcome.\textsuperscript{130} Palermo was a pivotal piazza for Hospitaller Malta. The Barcelona-Palermo connection, for example, accounted for the relocation to Sicily of a good portion of the Order’s Iberian funds. Consequently, the disruption of timely contacts with Palermo was an option the Order could ill-afford.

Particularly urgent information was obviously dispatched on horseback. Once in Scicli, for example, priority mail to Messina could be dispatched with a horse-courier while less pressing

\textsuperscript{125} Fardella de Quiernfort, 77-78.
\textsuperscript{126} Braudel (1986), 383.
\textsuperscript{127} Finley, Mack Smith, and Duggan, 150.
\textsuperscript{128} Some examples: AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 289v, 25 August 1605; AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 128r, 19 May 1608.
\textsuperscript{129} For example: AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 255r, 19 September 1608.
\textsuperscript{130} AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Accarigi (Scicli), f. 218r, 18 May 1614.
news to Palermo was sent with a *corriero a piedi*.\(^{131}\) At times information classified as too important by the Order to be dispatched with the normal mail would be carried across the channel by a specially-appointed envoy who would hand it in person to the Order’s procurator in Scicli.\(^{132}\) Alternatively the sea routes were opted for in order to bypass, in full or in part, the land routes. The norm, however, was to dispatch correspondence with foot-couriers, even when the journeys involved long coast-to-coast stretches of Sicilian territory such as the Scicli-Palermo crossing.\(^{133}\) In any case, it was imperative that mail left Scicli at the earliest for it to be delivered to one of the coastal stations outlined above. For this reason, when possible, and to reduce expenses, specially-hired couriers were not to be burdened with anything other than Hospitaller mail.\(^{134}\)

On leaving Scicli, whoever was assigned to carry mail from Hospitaller Malta followed habitual itineraries, similar to the ones described in the Sicilian decrees described above, as evidenced in Hospitaller documents. A courier would travel to Licata, drop mail there and cross acres of hinterland to reach Palermo or occasionally Trapani to deliver the remaining relevant dispatches. The other path saw couriers crossing to the east coast of the island and pursue the journey north, more or less parallel to the shores, stopping over at either Syracuse or Augusta or both before reaching Messina, where mail directed to the resident Hospitaller agent, the local authorities, or to cities outside the kingdom - a space termed *fuori regno* (beyond the Kingdom) in Hospitaller and Sicilian parlance - would be deposited.\(^{135}\) It was also quite usual for couriers to be hired to cross over directly to Palermo and Messina,\(^{136}\) or simply to deliver mail and dispatches to one of the other towns along the Sicilian coast without going further.\(^{137}\) Couriers could also be hired at some station other than Scicli to carry specific mail or messages to another post or city. Thus a parcel could be sent to Palermo through a courier hired by the Order’s agent inLicata,\(^{138}\) or couriers would deliver mail from Palermo to Scicli to catch the ferry to Malta,\(^{139}\) or to Augusta, from where the letter parcels would be shipped to Malta.\(^{140}\) Alternatively mail would be shipped or delivered overland to Syracuse from where it would be dispatched to Palermo or Messina with

\(^{131}\) AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Lo Porto (Scicli), ff. 453v-454r, 30 November 1619.
\(^{132}\) AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Lo Porto (Scicli), ff. 264v-265r, 31 July 1617.
\(^{133}\) AOM 1390. Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Scicli), f. 391, 31 October 1611 and AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Lo Porto (Scicli), ff. 453v-454r, 30 November 1619.
\(^{134}\) AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Cavarretta (Messina) and Ponte (Naples), f. 41r, 15 February 1601.
\(^{135}\) For example: AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 161v, 19 May 1603; AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), f. 331v, 5 October 1605; AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), ff. 273v-274r, 14 November 1607.
\(^{136}\) For example: AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 28r, 10 January 1608; Ibid., f. 93v, 12 April 1608.
\(^{137}\) For example, a special courier could be hired to travel to Licata from Scicli to deliver a letter of the Procuratori of the Common Treasury. AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 208r, 12 August 1601.
\(^{138}\) AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 108r, 18 May 1601.
\(^{139}\) AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 97r, 17 March 1617.
\(^{140}\) AOM 1463, Perellos y Rocaful to Riggio (Palermo), ff. 137v-138, 29 July 1702.
couriers.\textsuperscript{141} As hinted above, the land routes could be discarded or bypassed, or their use could be reduced, when sea trips with frigates or galleys were scheduled towards one of the main stopping stations on the Sicilian coast. Padron Vincenzo’s mail boat, for example, would carry mail addressed to Italy and beyond directly to Messina and pick up the Malta-bound mail from Scicli on its return trip, reducing the use of couriers to one direction only.\textsuperscript{142} The Order’s communication agenda gave convenience absolute priority. Available dispatch opportunities had to be grabbed at any stage to deliver news in the shortest time possible.

The same routes were usually followed in the reverse direction to deliver mail addressed to Malta from Sicily or beyond. It was quite normal for the mailboats sent over from Malta to be held at Scicli to wait for mail to be delivered from the habitual stations around Sicily.\textsuperscript{143} The same procedure was at times adopted with couriers who, after their arrival at their original destination, would be held in that post, at times for days, in order to wait for and collect mail which they had to deliver on their return journey to Scicli.\textsuperscript{144} Here mail would be deposited with the Order’s agent and kept until the frigate from Malta crossed over or they would find the mailboat already waiting to take on mail, either because it would have arrived in Scicli before the couriers, or because, as described above, the Order's agent would have kept it on hold from its previous trip specifically to wait for the couriers with their return mail. This was usually done in cases when the Order demanded a swift reply about urgent business or was expecting news of a particular nature in anticipation.\textsuperscript{145} Keeping the mailboat on hold in Scicli indirectly helped to put pressure on the couriers who were to return to the post with mail and it also saved up on channel crossings since it gave time for mail from Palermo, Messina, Syracuse, and other stations to arrive at Scicli and to be delivered to Malta with the same crossing. On Malta’s end, the staying period of occasional couriers sent on purpose from abroad was usually reduced to the shortest necessary, at times just a few hours, perhaps just enough for the grand master’s office to formulate a reply, in order not to make them miss convenient cross-overs to Scicli.\textsuperscript{146}

The Order’s network of interconnections with and within Sicily, and indeed with the rest of the Mediterranean and the continent, usually followed habitual patterns of movement and transport. This was both convenient – the routes were chosen according to distance and viability – and reassuring, since it allowed a measure of traceability in case of unpredictable contingencies

\textsuperscript{141} See respectively, AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Sortino (Syracuse), f. 280, 17 September 1608 and AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Mazzara (Syracuse), f. 42r, 23 January 1613.

\textsuperscript{142} AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 108r, 18 May 1601.

\textsuperscript{143} For example: AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 28r, 10 January 1608; Ibid., Wignacourt to Falco, f. 82, 18 March 1608.

\textsuperscript{144} For example: AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 199, 25 June 1605; AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 89v, 29 March 1608.

\textsuperscript{145} For example: AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 297, 11 September 1605; AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 28r, 10 January 1608.

\textsuperscript{146} AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Cardinal Doria, ff. 314v-315r, 30 July 1616.
resulting in the interruption or breakdown of the communication line. Couriers could be sent out on search missions to look out for other couriers thought to be lost.\footnote{For example: AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 201r, 25 June 1604.} The delivery patterns adopted by the Order were so well-established in fact, that Hospitaller agents were informed and reassured if on occasions dispatches were to arrive to their posts via alternative stations,\footnote{AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 240r, 17 September 1601.} and agents were sometimes asked to report to the Convent the dispatch date and their forecast of the arrival times to the final destination of outgoing mail from Malta.\footnote{AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), f. 281v, 14 August 1618.} The agent in Messina, for example, would communicate to Malta the day and hour he received a parcel from Malta addressed to Rome, and the day in which the courier assigned with the mail-carriage anticipated his arrival in the papal seat, thus giving the Order an idea when the information would be in the hands of its representatives in Rome.\footnote{AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), f. 168 v, 25 April 1619.} This afforded the Hospitaller hierarchy a degree of control on its dispatches and some form of delivery parameters in case of registered delays.

However, the Order was not rigid in the management of its network and proved flexible in its application, which in practice implied the delegation of a measure of decision-making to its agents in matters of news-delivery. The Order’s ultimate concern and priority were obviously the nature of the news and its dispatch or arrival in the shortest time possible, not the way in which it was delivered. Thus it could be left to the agent in Messina, for example, whether to brief Malta by sending a courier to connect with a mailboat in Scicli, or directly through a frigate or filuca sent from Messina to Malta.\footnote{AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Cavarretta (Messina), f. 49r, 19 February 1601.} The receiver in Palermo could decide to discard the land route altogether and opt to send pressing information to Malta directly by sea, by-passing the Sicilian courier network;\footnote{AOM 1468, Perellos y Rocaful to Riggio (Palermo), ff. 55v-56r, 5 April 1707.} and the procurator in Scicli could decide to send mail to Palermo by a specially-hired foot- or horse-courier.\footnote{come meglio vi parerà the procurator Accarigi was once told by Wignacourt. AOM 1392, Wigncourt to Accarigi (Scicli), f. 170v, 16 April 1613.} The agents also had the autonomy to weigh agendas and prioritize mail accordingly, with the faculty to decide dispatch times and alter pre-established delivery routes. It could be left to the agent in Scicli, for example, to decide whether to grant clearance to the mailboat that would have just crossed the channel and dispatch it with more mail to Syracuse, or to send it back to Malta with news that his discernment would have classified as urgent.\footnote{AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Zumbo (Syracuse) and Sollima (Scicli), f. 228v, 6 September 1601.} The Order’s constant demand and necessity for the latest possible updates regarding whichever issue was monopolizing its daily agenda meant that both land and sea routes were exploited to the full, sometimes alternatively or in unison, in order to ensure a regular flux of information between Malta and the continent. While mail from Syracuse, for example, would be on its way overland to Scicli to catch the mailboat, fresher news that in the meantime would have
arrived at Syracuse would be sent directly to Malta by boat.\textsuperscript{155} If the Scicli-Malta connection, for some reason or other, was temporarily interrupted, specially-hired couriers could be re-directed to Licata, for example, from where mail was ferried to Malta.\textsuperscript{156} Parallel land and sea routes would occasionally be used to transfer the same information in order to increase the probability of the safe delivery of the dispatch to its final destination in the shortest time possible. News sent to Messina addressed to the Hospitaller galleys harboured in that port would be ferried from Malta to Scicli, from where it would be delivered overland by a courier to the straits, while at the same time a duplicate of the same dispatch would be shipped directly to Messina along Sicily’s eastern coast.\textsuperscript{157} The Hospitaller agent in Messina would then hand over to the galleys the dispatch which would have arrived first.\textsuperscript{158} Mail parcels addressed to Rome would be ferried across the straits from Messina and carried overland through Calabria, while parcels with duplicates would be shipped north along the Tyrrhenian.\textsuperscript{159} This system of dispatching information in multiple copies was normal practice in a pre-industrial world where so much could go wrong. In the Sicilian communication network, for example, letters could be sent in various copies and via various routes to increase the possibilities of a successful delivery.\textsuperscript{160}

A substantial amount of Hospitaller Malta’s incoming and outgoing information was channelled via this system of contacts with Sicily.\textsuperscript{161} While the frigates, galleys, and other vessels ensured that the connection between the two islands was hardly ever interrupted, the Sicilian mail delivery and courier services provided the Order and the islanders it governed with a relatively quick, efficient, and reliable closed-circuit communication network across the territory in the Mediterranean which mattered most for the survival of Hospitaller Malta, and which allowed it to communicate with the rest of the world, to remain provisioned, and to channel its funds. This combined maritime and land connection with Sicily hooked early modern Malta to a western world, and Italy in particular, undergoing an information and financial revolution. As will be shown in the coming chapters, the simple ferry connection to Southern Sicily afforded Hospitaller Malta access to a world of contacts and to the evolving economic and cultural dynamics of the age, providing the island with the unique opportunity to drift into the flow of modernity. However, before we recreate Hospitaller Malta’s connections between Sicily, Italy, and beyond, it would be preferable to chart out the dominant Mediterranean and continental routes along which information was carried in the early modern era.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., Wignacourt to Zumbo (Syracuse), ff. 180v-181r, 25 July 1601.
\textsuperscript{156} For example: AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Zumbo (Syracuse), ff. 234v-235r, 10 September 1601.
\textsuperscript{157} AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 180v, 4 May 1612.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., f.180v, 4 May 1612.
\textsuperscript{159} AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 158, 8 April 1614.
\textsuperscript{160} Fardella de Quiernfort, 43-4.
\textsuperscript{161} Grech (2006), 168-9.
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Sources: AOM 104 to AOM 107; AOM 457 to AOM 460; AOM 1391 to AOM 1400.
FROM SICILY TO ITALY AND BEYOND
HOSPITALLER MALTA’S EURO-MEDITERRANEAN NEWS TRANSMISSION ROUTES

During Alof de Wignacourt’s magistracy, the defeat of distance by western technology was still over two centuries away. Yet the restructuring and centralization process of the emerging European economies helped render communication networks more intricate and far-reaching, facilitating contacts by the multiplication of effort, if not by the improvement of effective speed. At sea, the breaking of the high-seas’ code and consequent victory over the ocean was a huge step for humanity, but hardly added anything to make Mediterranean shipping swifter. The persistent reliance on long-established traditional maritime routes, however, gave access to ports of call whose landward connectivity intersected more structured and more efficient courier networks, which in turn enhanced territorial reach and consequently the access to widening communication possibilities. Through the combination of these maritime and territorial connections, and the Knights’ shipping activities and network of foreign representatives, seventeenth-century Malta was ultimately capable of communicating on a global level, forging connections from the Caribbean to Safavid Persia, starting with the linkage facilities provided by Sicily and Italy.

Hospitaller Malta and the Communications Infrastructure of Continental Europe

Beyond Sicily, the more distant the territory and the longer the journey undertaken to deliver mail, the more arduous it is for the historian of early modern Malta to deconstruct and recreate the various intermediate stages and stopovers of each route travelled to transport letters to and from the island. From Hospitaller documents consulted for this study it emerges, for example, that mail from Flanders was habitually delivered to Malta via Rome, but it is highly problematic, if not impossible, to reconstruct with certainty the exact route taken by the couriers after leaving the northernmost station to head south and cover the hundreds of miles of territory before reaching the papal seat. Since early modern Malta, like other states, used the communications infrastructure

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2 For an overview of the developments of shipping throughout the ages see, for example, Felipe Fernández-Armesto, Civilizations (London, Pan Macmillan, 2001).
established in continental territory, it is necessary to chart out the principal courier routes in Christendom and beyond in order to have an idea of the itineraries along which the island’s outgoing and incoming mail was delivered.

Modern historiography has reconstructed the principal European courier delivery routes which came to be established by early modernity. E.J.B. Allen, for example, opts to start from Northern Europe, adopting a more postal infrastructural perspective⁴ to chart the channel connections bridging Britain to Northern France and the rest of the continent. The author then proceeds to illustrate the most popular direct courier routes connecting Spain, France, Flanders, the Germanies,⁵ and Italy. All roads lead to towns says Braudel,⁶ and very obviously the most prominent ramifications originated from - or came to a halt at - the main cities and ports which connected the Euro-Mediterranean world in the early modern era, and which were inevitably pertinent to early modern Malta’s affairs, as can be evinced from Hospitaller documents, albeit indirectly in most cases. The centralization process which by the sixteenth century was taking place in the bureaucratic administrations of Habsburg Spain and Valois France meant that Madrid and Paris were the predominant recipients and dispatchers of written material throughout the era, and therefore monopolized and conditioned much of the courier traffic taking place on mainland Europe. Flanders in the north, with Antwerp in particular, and Vienna as the Imperial seat, were other information poles of attraction which dictated considerable portions of news transmission fluxes.⁷ The same is valid for some of the most important ports on Christendom’s Mediterranean littoral which provided links between the sea and the European hinterland, the most popular being Barcelona, Marseilles, Genoa, and Venice.⁸ Allen gives scant importance, however, to other city-ports like Palermo and Messina which had considerable mail-distribution relevance in the central Mediterranean, particularly for an island like Malta in early modernity.

Allen goes on to illustrate the relevance of routes passing through French territory and how much Habsburg Spain depended on them to connect with Flanders and the Low Countries, Britain, the Germanies, and Italy. For example, he traces out the connection running through Madrid, Paris, and Brussels and the Low Countries, and the journey required to reach Vienna from

⁵ This is the term adopted to describe the different territories which made up the land of Germany in the age under analysis. In Hospitaller correspondence, Germany is usually divided into ‘High’ and ‘Low’ Germany, a terminology used also by Judith Bronstein to describe this regional division of the country in the Middle Ages. Judith Bronstein, The Hospitallers and the Holy Land, Financing of the Latin East 1187-1274 (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2005).
⁷ Allen, passim, but mostly chapter four.
⁸ Ibid., especially chapter four.
the French capital. In early modernity, Vienna became an established relocation centre for the distribution of Hospitaller capital and the flux of newssheets to Malta, especially through the links with Venice, very likely making use of the weekly courier service on the Vienna-Venice route.

Mail from Vienna would make it to Madrid via Lyons, thus linking the two epicentres of the Habsburg world. Lyons was another pivotal Hospitaller redistribution centre, especially through its connections with Marseilles, from where commodities were regularly shipped to Malta on behalf of the Convent, similarly to the shipments down the Adriatic on the Venice-Malta route commissioned by the Order’s hierarchy. Apart from these consignments from Marseilles, by the early seventeenth century French shipping to the Levant was also exploiting the victualling, fitting, and hospital services offered by the island. Lyons was also important to connect the French court with the papacy along roads which passed through Turin, unless the route through Switzerland was taken. In the courier-infested territory of France, the city stands out for its centrality in providing interconnections between Spain, France, Britain, and Italy. It was the nodal point linking Madrid to England and a regular mail-delivery service, which ran every fifteen days, connected the city to Venice, while the Lyons-Avignon route provided an alternative approach to Northern Italy. At times couriers from Madrid, after reaching Barcelona via Saragossa and Lerida, instead of embarking for the rather slow sea voyage to Genoa, would travel overland along the Spanish coast, cross the Pyrenees and reach Lyons via Avignon. From there they would embark on a multiple-stage journey to cross the Alpine gateway of Susa, which placed them on course to reach other territories throughout the peninsula. Courier runs along Italy were focused mainly along the north-south axis composed of Milan, Florence, Rome, and Naples which provided connections with the rest of Italy, and were inevitably vital for Hospitaller Malta’s mail connections, not least to reach important centres in Christendom. Mail from Malta sent overland through Northern Italy would make it to Lyons via Milan, for example.

9 Ibid., passim.
10 For example: AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Giuseppe Conte Rabatta (Vienna), f. 378r, 13 November 1656 and AOM 1470, Perellos y Rocafu to Dietrichstein (Vienna), f. 159v, 19 October 1709.
12 For a general overview of the various ramifications of routes connecting continental territory, see Braudel (1986), 276-95 and Allen, chapter four.
13 For the Marseilles-Malta connection in general, see chapters five and seven. For shipments to the Convent from Marseilles in the early seventeenth century see, for example, AOM 454, f. 264v, f. 279, f. 285r, f. 343r, f. 260r, and f. 299v. For the Venice-Malta shipments, see below.
14 AOM 459, ff. 313-315r, 27 February 1616.
15 Allen, passim.
17 Allen, especially chapter four.
18 AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Bertone (Lombardy), f. 159, 19 May 1603.

76
Italy’s pertinence in pre-industrial communications continues to warrant historiographical attention, highlighting the country’s road ramifications and its role as connector on Christendom’s north-south and east-west axis, with ample sea-land linkage for crossovers between Mediterranean waters and continental territories. Italy’s relevance for Hospitaller Malta accounts also for the thematic bias evident in this study, and this chapter in particular, where the overall focus is by and large on the main Italian and Sicilian cities, perhaps at the expense of other communication centres equally deserving of attention. One such blatant example is Marseilles which provided Hospitaller Malta with connections reaching the heart of France where the Order had some of its richest estates. Such a conscious imbalance in favour of the likes of Palermo, Messina, Naples, Rome, Genoa, Venice, and to a lesser extent Florence and Milan, apart from being dictated by the documentary material consulted, was also instigated by the role of these centres in connecting Malta with the rest of the Mediterranean world. The Marseilles-Malta connection, as for one, was mostly carried out by land or sea, or a combination of both, along the Tyrrhenian route and through Sicily. In 1606, in a desperate attempt to fetch alternative wheat from Marseilles following poor Sicilian harvests, the Order communicated with the French port via special couriers hired to run the entire length of the Tyrrhenian, starting with the Scicli-Messina connection, and continuing from the tip of Italy across the straits. Such lengthy deliveries through special commissions which bypassed indigenous postal stations were exceptions, affordable only through rank and wealth. Special couriers, for example, were sent to Malta to herald aristocratic births, and in 1615 a specially-assigned courier carried royal mail all the way from Spain to Valletta.

Hospitaller Malta’s exploitation of the Italian peninsula, started with the Ionian coast of Calabria, that ‘island without sea’, as Predrag Matvejević labels the region, probably in reference to its remoteness. Malta occasionally imported barrels of olive oil and timber from the Gulf of Taranto. Italy’s land routes provided connections throughout the entire length of the peninsula and afforded the Order access to its continental affairs, mostly through couriering services. Starting at the southern tip of Calabria, the mother of all Italian routes left the toe of the peninsula

19 See, for example, Johann Petitjean, L’intelligence des choses: une histoire de l’information entre Italie et Méditerranée (XVIe-XVIIe siècles), Rome: École française de Rome, 2013.
20 Allen, 60-6.
21 See chapters five and seven.
22 The whole course of the dispatch is charted out in the following letters: AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 312v, 11 September 1606; Ibid., Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), ff. 310v-311r, 11 September 1606; Ibid., Wignacourt to Amb. Mendes (Rome), f. 312, 11 September 1606.
24 AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 70v-71, 4 February, 1615.
25 Predreg Matvejević, Mediterraneo. Un nuovo breviario.. Trans. from the Croatian to the Italian, S. Ferrari (Garzanti, 1999), 33.
26 For olive oil: AOM 458, f. 290, 21 August 1612 and AOM 459, f. 323v, 12 July 1616. For timber: AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), f. 60v, 26 January 1603 and AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 280v, 14 November 1607.
across the Messina straits. It wriggled north passing through Cosenza and Naples, reaching Rome, arriving at Florence, and continuing up to Bologna, from where it branched to the north-west to reach Turin, providing connections with France through Alpine passes, and to the north-east through Mantua and Trent on the way to the Brenner pass to meet further routes leading to Southern Germany,\(^{27}\) giving the Order access to its central and Northern European estates.

This courier road throughout Italy’s spinal cord and its lateral ramifications enabled the maintenance of contacts with either side of the peninsula and its busier port outlets. On the Adriatic, it connected mainly with Trieste, Venice, Ancona – from where the Order could ship cereals and arms\(^{28}\) - and Otranto, right at the bottom of Italy’s heel, so crucial for the transmission to Malta of military intelligence on the Turk.\(^{29}\) On the Tyrrhenian coast, heading south, the road provided access to Genoa, Leghorn - a fundamental re-routing city-port in Hospitaller Malta’s communication system as the seventeenth century progressed\(^{30}\) - Civitavecchia, Naples, and eventually Sicily. Braudel elaborates on the roads which ran ‘at right angles’ to the main highways,\(^{31}\) like those crossing the Tuscan Apennines which connected the Adriatic to Milan. Through these roads, other roads branched out to connect the larger towns, like the one running from Bologna to Florence, from where Malta’s mail to and from Rome could be channelled; and those which crossed the peninsula laterally, joining the Adriatic to the Tyrrhenian, like the Barletta-Naples route, the road linking Ancona to Florence and Leghorn, and that connecting Genoa to Ferrara. Braudel also gives importance to the multiple coast roads which ran along the Tyrrhenian coast linking Italy with Southern France and Spain,\(^{32}\) providing Malta with an alternative, or complementary land route, to the maritime itinerary which connected the island with Italy’s Tyrrhenian littoral, with France, and with Spain, as seen earlier in the courier connection with Marseilles.

These various interconnections made up Italy’s main road network, enabling the peninsula to keep contacts and exchange information with the surrounding world of the age. The Madrid-Rome route, for example, so essential for the Order to sustain relations with its two major political reference points, had a triple connection. One ran overland via the south of France through Provence, Languedoc, Lyons, up to the Alpine cross to veer south passing through Turin, Bologna and Florence. The other two routes passed through Barcelona, one reaching Italy via Nice, and the other passed through Genoa and Florence before reaching Rome.\(^{33}\) These routes were definitely

\(^{27}\) Allen, chapter 4.  
\(^{28}\) AOM 1426, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 80, 25 April 1648 and AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Malvicino (Venice), ff. 237v-238r, 3 September 1602 respectively.  
\(^{29}\) See chapter four.  
\(^{30}\) See chapter six.  
\(^{31}\) Braudel (1986), 279-82.  
\(^{32}\) Ibid.  
\(^{33}\) Allen, chapter four.
vital for early modern Malta, even though it is hardly ever explicitly or exhaustively recorded by the Order’s administration. The Order made ample use of Genoa and Barcelona to connect with continental territory, for example, often using a combination of land and sea routes to deliver mail and otherwise. While in Rome in April 1606, a Hospitaller embassy on its way to the court of Savoy was mulling the possibility of sailing on the Hospitaller galleys from Civitavecchia to Genoa from where it would have travelled north to Turin. The Catalan port, on the other hand, was Hospitaller Malta’s principal gateway to Spain, as clearly indicated by Hospitaller documents. The Barcelona-Palermo connection was much exploited by Hospitaller Malta for monetary transactions, mail transport, and the shipment of merchandise. Once dispatches from Malta reached Barcelona, it is easy to imagine and obvious to presume that mail addressed to Madrid, for example, was carried by local couriers along the Lerida-Saragossa route described earlier, and that the same route was used in the reverse direction to deliver to Barcelona whatever was Malta-bound through the city-port. Travel options for transporters were very limited says Braudel, for they had to rely on other people’s services, and therefore on established roads. In any case, life on an island imposed on the Order the exploitation of a communication network composed of a combination of maritime and land routes, which only in part was of Hospitaller making, and in which continental message-delivery mechanisms and Mediterranean sea-crossings were occasionally supplemented with specific and feasible alternative connections, both on land and by sea, provided or commissioned by the Order.

**Land Routes: From Sicily to Fuori Regno**

If not specifically addressed to Sicilian posts, Hospitaller Malta’s outgoing mail was generally destined to the Western Mediterranean, Italy, central and Northern Europe, Constantinople, or the Levant. With few exceptions, and notably the dispatches which the Order sent directly to its listening stations in the Eastern Mediterranean, all this written material was channelled through Sicily. Once Hospitaller Malta’s dispatches and mail bundles arrived in Sicily, any correspondence destined to stations beyond the island had to be delivered primarily to Palermo or Messina, the two information redistribution centres in the belly of the Mediterranean which provided the Order

34 For the Barcelona-Genoa-Malta route, for example, see AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Genoa), f. 149r, 30 April 1609. Dispatches from Malta to Barcelona could be sent via Rome or directly by sea. AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Amb. Segreville (Rome), f. 330v, 27 November 1602. For further evidence of Malta’s connections with Genoa and Barcelona, see below.
35 AOM 6428, ff. 17-27v, 28 July 1606.
36 For the Barcelona-Palermo-Malta connection in either direction see, for example, Bartholomeo Dal Pozzo, *Historia della S. Religione Militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta*. vol i (Verona, 1703), 166; 786; AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Afflito (Palermo), ff. 70-71r, 12 February 1603, and AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 192, 2 June 1617.
37 Braudel (1985), 416.
38 See chapter two.
and its subjects with a constantly active communications platform with a reach ranging from Iberia to the Adriatic and occasionally beyond in both directions.

Messina, the hinge of the Order’s Mediterranean contact network, was a point of accumulation and redistribution of Malta’s outgoing and incoming mail, a process which was facilitated with structural developments in the Sicilian postal network soon after the Order settled in Malta. In 1540, the courts of Sicily and Naples had reached an agreement to set-up and share the cost of a regular mail-connection service between Sicily and Calabria for official use only.\(^{39}\) Sicily had to provide two *feleuche* in Messina to transport mail between the two kingdoms and the service was extended to private use in 1550.\(^{40}\) As hinted above, the city-port channelled Malta’s correspondence to Italy, where Rome,\(^ {41} \) the principal ports on the Tyrrhenian, or Venice\(^ {42} \) on the Adriatic, were generally the final or intermediate destination. Writing his memoirs from Malta at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Inquisitor Caracciolo emphasized the importance of having trustworthy human contacts in Messina capable of guaranteeing the forwarding of mail to and from Italy.\(^ {43} \) The city’s popularity as a port of call inevitably increased its mail-distribution potential and guaranteed greater frequency in connections with other parts of the Mediterranean. When in the early seventeenth century, the Order expressed irritation at mail dispatch delays from Zante and Corfu, it was suggested that correspondence from these islands should be channelled to Malta via Messina to speed up the last stage of their delivery.\(^ {44} \) On a general note, however, when Hospitaller Malta’s outgoing mail was routed through Messina, the two most obvious destinations were Naples\(^ {45} \) and Rome.\(^ {46} \)

The Malta-Naples-Rome connection

Naples, the cosmopolitan centre of Italy’s deep south, was another pivotal location for mail collection and redistribution. By the mid-sixteenth century, the viceregal government endowed the


\(^{40}\) Ibid., 51-2.

\(^{41}\) For the Malta-Messina-Rome connection, see AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), f. 212r, 4 July 1605 and AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), ff. 157v -158r, 8 April 1614.

\(^{42}\) For example: AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 135v, 10 April 1612. In most cases, the Malta-Messina-Venice deliveries were probably carried out via Rome.


\(^{44}\) AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Gio. Leonardo Latino (Zante), f. 458r, 23 September 1613; Ibid., Wignacourt to Gio. Andrea Lirapavoti (Corfu), f. 458v, 23 September 1613.

\(^{45}\) For the Malta-Messina-Naples connection see, for example, AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), ff. 180v-181r, 8 July 1608 and AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 430, 26 November 1611.

\(^{46}\) For the Malta-Messina-Rome connection see, for example: AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 430, 26 November 1611 and AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), ff. 423v -424, 7 September 1620.
kingdom with postal stations which connected Naples with the southern tip of Calabria, with Lecce and Otranto on the Apulian coast, and with Rome. The Hospitaller receiver stationed in the city was the Order’s prime reference for its affairs in the country’s entire southern region. He forwarded mail to hospitalers in Capua and Barletta. He dealt with local authorities to obtain licenses for the export of all sorts of merchandise from Campania to Malta, like wheat, metals, timber, salted meat, olive oil, salt peter, barley, legumes, drapes, marmalades, perfume, biscuit, wine, fruit, tallow, gunpowder, hemp, bitumen, sea craft, cloths, oars, ropes, sails, and masts for the Order’s navy; all kinds of metal hardware for the galleys; entire consignments of arquebuses; and carriage horses for the grand master’s stables. He could intercede for someone in Catanzaro to be awarded an office in the Kingdom; reimburse a Hospitaller creditor using funds from the Order’s estates in Bari (Apulia); deposit funds in Cosenza for trading purposes; hire and dispatch boats to load wine for Malta from sites along Campania littoral, like Castiglione, Nocera and Belvedere; and cover the expenses of a frigate dispatched from Corfu to Malta to brief the Convent on the Ottoman navy. He supervised and updated the Order’s headquarters on the building of Hospitaller galley hulls in the city’s docks, on occasions covering the expenses through duties owed to the Order in Foggia, deep in the Apulian hinterland; and he lobbied in the viceregal court to obtain provisioning facilities for the Hospitaller galleys in Otranto, Brindisi, and Gallipoli in the heel of Italy. The reach of his services enabled him also to overview the commission for the purchase and export to Malta of galley masts from Calabria, apart from olive oil produced in the Apulian commanderies of the Order; and his considerable administrative compass occasionally ranged across the channel when his influence was requested by the Order’s

Fardella de Quiernfort, 51.

For examples of the export from Naples to Malta of such commodities, see respectively: AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Francesco Maria Sangri, f. 114v, 28 April 1605; AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Marullo (Naples), f. 135r, 6 August 1708; AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 47-48, 23 January 1606 and ff. 278v-279r, 14 August 1606; AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), f. 66, 3 March 1607; AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), f. 275, 14 November 1607; AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 65v-67r, 14 February 1609; AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), f. 321, 25 October 1608; AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Caraffa (Naples), ff. 266-267r, 14 August 1609; AOM 1470, Perellos y Rocaful to Grimaldi (Naples), f. 102r, 13 July 1709; AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), f. 278, 6 November 160; AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), f. 217, 11 June 1616; AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 252v-253r, 17 September 1608; AOM 1251, f. 9r, 1 January 1600; and AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 43v-44r, 19 January 1609.

AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), f. 204r, 30 June 1606.

AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), ff. 176v-177r, 17 May 1616.

AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Hospitaler Antonio Cattaneo, ff. 387v – 386r, 2 November 1618.

AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), ff. 384-385r, 2 November 1618.

AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Gio. Andrea Lipravoti (Corfu), f. 239v, 23 June 1616.

AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Caraffa (Naples), ff. 181-182r, 29 May 1609.

AOM 1470, Perellos y Rocaful to Grimaldi (Naples), f. 143, 26 September 1709.

For example: AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 224v, 2 August 1610.

For example: AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Commander Geronimo La Motta, f. 552r, 17 December 1612.
agent of Messina in need of export permits to release the shipping of timber or pitch from the straits to Malta.\footnote{58}

Most pertinently for the transmission of information, however, Naples provided Hospitaller Malta with another vital connection point for the receipt and delivery of information. Mail would be shipped across the straits to the tip of Calabria from where it would be delivered overland to Naples, if necessary by a special courier riding day and night,\footnote{59} probably taking the route through Cosenza and Castrovillari,\footnote{60} or it could be shipped directly from Messina to Naples.\footnote{61} When possible, direct sea crossings between Malta and Naples for mail delivery purposes were shunned. The Naples-Malta crossing was taken on by vessels to deliver merchandise.\footnote{62} Frigates or Neapolitan \textit{feluche} did occasionally carry mail from Campania to Malta, even in winter,\footnote{63} but the consignment of outgoing dispatches from Malta to Southern Italy was usually carried out through the partially overland route through Sicily, since sea crossings to Naples were considered too unpredictable.\footnote{64} Mail boats could end up being held in Calabria for days, for example.\footnote{65} Although the shipping of mail from Malta to Naples could not always be avoided,\footnote{66} the Order considered it swifter and safer to mail-connect with mainland Italy via Sicily’s tried and trusted courier service,\footnote{67} and Hospitaller agents could be severely reprimanded by the Order if the transfer of priority mail between Malta and Campania was carried out entirely over water.\footnote{68} At times Naples-bound frigates carrying passengers and correspondence from Malta would still drop mail in Scicli for it to be delivered to Naples, in the certainty that the letters would arrive before the passengers.\footnote{69}

Perhaps the prime relevance of Naples was the relatively swift overland connections it provided with Rome. The Tyrrhenian waters between Naples and Rome were a dreaded stretch of sea and were gladly avoided by unarmed vessels without sufficient escort,\footnote{70} fearing Infidel pirates

\footnote{58} See respectively AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 261r, 18 August 1610 and AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Abenante (Naples), f. 341r, 17 August 1614.
\footnote{59} AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 257, 29 July 1617.
\footnote{60} Allen, 62; 64.
\footnote{61} AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), ff. 34-35r, 23 January 1613.
\footnote{62} Frigates delivering salted meat, for example. AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Caraffa (Naples), f. 324r, 23 September 1611.
\footnote{63} See, for example: AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Scicli), ff. 188v-189r, 28 June 1611 and AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Amb. Guevara (Rome), f. 466, 17 December 1619.
\footnote{64} ‘nascondo nelle filuche intoppi impensati’. AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 317, 21 September 1617.
\footnote{65} Ibid.
\footnote{66} See, for example, AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), ff. 272v-273r, 11 August 1617 and Ibid., f. 301, 6 September 1617.
\footnote{67} AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Caraffa (Naples), f. 153, 23 May 1611.
\footnote{68} See, for example, AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 321, 24 September 1617.
\footnote{69} AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Caraffa (Naples), f. 153, 23 May 1611. On the handing of mail in Scicli by Naples-bound craft, see also AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Lo Porto (Scicli), f. 266, 8 August 1617.
\footnote{70} Allen, 62.
who constantly plied these coasts and who could find shelter in the Pontine islands for example.\(^{71}\) In 1587, a Hospitalier embassy to the Pope wanted to avoid the ‘dangerous Roman coast’,\(^{72}\) and Naples-bound travellers from Malta who intended to reach Rome could be given the option to cover the distance between the two cities on horseback.\(^{73}\) In the summer of 1678, Malta’s outgoing inquisitor Ercole Visconti was shipped to Rome escorted by three armed brigantini.\(^{74}\)

If not delivered directly to Rome from Messina, a distance which couriers could cover in ten days,\(^{75}\) or even five if the matter was urgent,\(^{76}\) mail from Malta would be addressed to Naples to be subsequently handed to the *procacci*, for example, couriers who carried both goods and mail,\(^{77}\) and who could deliver mail to Rome in one or two days,\(^{78}\) probably passing through Capua and the Via Appia.\(^{79}\) Apparently it was even cheaper to deliver mail to Rome via Naples than directly by sea via Messina, since this could save the Order’s coffers several scudi a year.\(^{80}\) The connections through Naples were far-reaching in either latitude and mail delivered to the city for redistribution could end up in Spain or Poland.\(^{81}\) Another huge advantage of Naples was that it could attract information fluxes due south from either side of the peninsula. Correspondence from Spain, France, Germany, Flanders, and Italy would accumulate in Naples before being delivered to Malta directly or via Scicli.\(^{82}\) A good part of this mail would be diverted south via Genoa\(^{83}\) and Venice.\(^{84}\) This meant that mail from the Western Mediterranean, from Northern European territory, from Milan and the Northern Italian hinterland would be delivered via Genoa directly to Naples or with Rome as an intermediary stopping point,\(^{85}\) and that correspondence from Germany, Bohemia, other territories in the heart of Europe, and from Constantinople and other parts of the

71 Dal Pozzo, ii, 403;
72 Ibid., i, 297
73 AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), ff. 130v-131r, 10 April 1616.
74 Dal Pozzo, ii, 459.
75 AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 479-481, 24 December 1611.
76 AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), ff. 310v-311r, 11 September 1606.
77 AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 131v-132r, 19 May 1608.
78 AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 352v-353r, 30 October 1606.
79 Allen, 62.
80 AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), f. 352v, 30 October 1606.
81 For Spain see, for example, AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Abenante (Naples), f. 184r, 20 April 1613. For Poland, AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), f. 98v, 31 March 1604.
82 AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Abenante (Naples), ff. 128v-129r, 24 March 1614. Late in 1611, for example, frigates from Naples and Messina carried to Malta mail arriving from Rome, France, Spain, Flanders, and Italy. AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 448v-450r, 8 December 1611. For the Rome-Naples-Malta connection for the delivery of mail addressed to the Convent from Italy, Spain, and France, see AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 242-244r, 21 May 1613.
83 For the Genoa-Naples mail connection see, for example, AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Genoa), ff. 53v-54r, 23 January 1606.
84 For the Venice-Naples-Malta connection see, for example: AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), ff. 168v-169r, 7 May 1616. For further elaborations on Venice’s mail distribution potential towards Malta, see below.
85 For the Genoa-Rome-Naples-Malta connection see, for example, AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Amb. Mendes (Rome), ff. 378-379, 7 November 1605. For the Rome-Naples-Malta mail connection, see also AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), f. 357v, 6 December 1603.
Levant would reach Naples after accumulating in Venice and Rome. Naples’ location on the Southern Tyrrhenian allowed the city to carry out mail exchanges with more than one port on the Western Mediterranean littoral, as will be shown further on. Florence occasionally could also act as a stopping station for Naples-bound mail or small goods which not always stopped at Rome on the way south.

Rome’s relevance to Hospitaller Malta, in fact, was also dictated by connectivity apart from political intercourse. The services of the Order’s ambassador in Rome were in constant solicitation by the Hospitaller hierarchy. The spirituality and belligerent temporality which had been forged into the creed and status of the Order since the Middle Ages rendered the Papacy an inevitable diplomatic magnet for the Order, instigating a thematically prolific exchange of correspondence between the Order and Rome. Correspondence at this institutional level was mostly exchanged with the resident Hospitaller ambassadors in the Holy See, a number of cardinals - sought for their pro-Hospitaller lobbying in the papal court - and with the Pope himself. The Order’s need for papal advice, approval, protection, and intercession in matters pertinent, among others, to war, diplomacy, the Order’s estates, and its age-old privileges, mostly regarding tax exemptions, ensured that the Rome-Malta communication line was one of the most vibrant information channels fostered from Malta. However, not all Hospitaller mail which found its way to Rome was destined to the papal court. As described above, far from being a purely correspondence terminal, Rome was also a mail transit station, a condition which endowed the city with further particularity in the context of the Order’s communication network. With the exception of Florence and Milan perhaps, Rome was Hospitaller Malta’s only urban centre lying in hinterland territory with mail-redistribution potential in the Mediterranean basin. This increased the importance of Florence and Naples as intermediary stopping points and relay stations for the delivery of Hospitaller Malta’s outgoing and incoming mail through Rome.

86 For the Constantinople-Venice-Malta and the Bohemia-Venice-Malta mail routes see, for example, AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Langosco (Venice), f. 148v, 19 June 1602.
87 Feluche from Naples delivered mail addressed to Malta from Germany, Bohemia, Constantinople, and different parts of Italy. AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Amb La Marra (Rome), ff. 255-257r, 19 June 1612 and AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 258 – 259, 8 August 1606. For the Venice-Naples-Malta delivery-route see, for example, AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), ff. 168v-169r, 7 May 1616. For the France-Rome-Naples-Malta mail route see, for example, AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Amb. Lomellino (Rome), ff. 389v-391, 20 November 1610.
88 For example, AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Amb. Lomellino (Rome), ff. 384-385, 20 December 1608.
89 Ivan Grech, ‘Struggling Against Isolation. Communication Lines and the Circulation of News in the Mediterranean: The Case of Seventeenth-Century Malta’, Journal of Mediterranean Studies, xvi, 1/2, (Malta 2006), 166. The manuscript volumes from AOM 1251 to AOM 1261 contain the correspondence addressed to the Convent by the Order’s ambassadors in Rome for the period under study.
90 For Florence’s role in the forwarding of mail from Malta to elsewhere see, for example, AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Gaetani (Florence), f. 491v, 10 October 1613 and AOM 1398, Wignacourt to the Duke of Modena, f. 348r, 7 October 1619.
91 Procacci could be dispatched from Florence to Rome with sealed parcels, for example. AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Gaetani (Florence), f. 383v, 20 December 1608. For the Florence-Rome-Naples-Malta
Apart from reporting periodically and regularly to the Order’s base and attending to his duties of representation in the papal court, the resident Hospitaller ambassador in Rome had to carry out the administratively mundane tasks of letter transmission, just like any other ordinary Hospitaller agent stationed beyond the Maltese shores. This involved the forwarding of letters from Malta to cardinals, or to other ambassadors, nuncios, or envoys of other states. Thus, for instance, through Rome, Malta could occasionally connect with the Kings of Persia and Hungary, receive correspondence from London, and be updated on Hospitaller matters in Bohemia and Prague. In the case of Italian nationals, the Hospitaller ambasadorial post in Rome could be further burdened with the administration of the Order’s Roman receivership. In 1611, for example, Nicola La Marra, the former Hospitaller receiver of Palermo, was assigned with the dual appointment of ambassador and receiver in Rome. Most plausibly, La Marra’s experience and craft in handling the considerable volume of Hospitaller postal traffic and financial transactions that flowed through Palermo weighed heavily on the Order’s evaluations when assessing the distinguished curriculum demanded by an assignment of such political relevance.

In most cases, the interconnection patterns described earlier for Naples in terms of mail distribution fluxes to and from Hospitaller Malta were also valid for Rome, since the Rome-Naples mail route was heavily relied on by Malta to maintain active communication with Europe. Through Rome, Hospitaller Malta exchanged news with Northern Italy, with Venice, which subsequently provided connections with the East, and with central and Northern Europe. However, the Order exploited Rome’s diplomatic stature mostly to communicate with Spain and France. As hinted above, Madrid and Paris pulsated with diplomatic activity more than any other European centre in pre-industrial times. Rome’s mail-connections with Paris, for example, were greatly coveted by French ambassadors who at the dawn of the seventeenth century tried to delivery connection see, for example, AOM 1387, Witnacourt to Capece (Naples), f. 374v, 20 December 1608.

92 An example: AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Cardinal Borghesi (Rome), f. 415, 14 November 1611.
93 AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Amb. Lomellino (Rome), f.356r, 30 November 1609.
94 For examples of connections with Hungary, London, and Prague respectively via Rome see, for example: AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 217-218, 14 July 1611; AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Santinelli (Rome), f. 359v, 6 December 1603; AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Amb. Mendes (Rome), ff. 185v-187r, 19 July 1607; and AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Amb. Lomellino (Rome), ff. 284v-285, 12 September 1610.
95 AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Iacomo Bosio (Rome), f. 87, 3 March 1611.
96 Ibid.
97 With Lombardy, for example: AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Santinelli (Rome), ff. 269v-270r, 26 August 1604 and AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 242-244r, 21 May 1613.
98 For example: AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Acugna (Rome), ff. 36-37r, 24 January 1611 and AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 439v-440, 8 October 1612.
99 With Bohemia and Germany, for example. See AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Amb. Mendes (Rome), ff. 185v-187r, 19 July 1607 and AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Amb. Segreville (Rome), f. 291, 12 November 1602 respectively. For the Malta-Rome-Brussels connection see, for example, AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Amb. Gattinara (Rome), ff. 143-144r, 15 March 1621.
100 See, for example: AOM 1259, Amb. La Marra (Rome) to Wignacourt, f. 14r, 13 April 1613.
break their dreaded dependence on Venice’s monopoly over postal links with Constantinople by creating an alternative route that would see mail from the Ottoman centre delivered to France via Ragusa, Ancona, and Rome. Via Rome, Hospitaller Malta kept mail-contact with Barcelona, Saragossa, Valladolid, Castile, and Lisbon in Iberia; and Paris, Marseilles, Lyons, and other French locations like Champagne and Nancy. At times the mail parcels addressed to the Hospitaller administration from France and Spain were so inflated with letters, that the Order’s ambassador in Rome was compelled to forward their delivery south with the ordinary official mail, since hiring a special courier would have been financially unfeasible.

Florence, Genoa, and Milan

The relay of Hospitaller Malta’s mail from Naples and Rome to Northern Italy and beyond, reaching latitudes and destinations ranging from west to east, and the delivery of news in the reverse direction, often depended on the information-distribution quadrilateral of Florence, Genoa, Milan, and Venice. The role and relevance of Florence in the overall communication network of Hospitaller Malta has already been discussed briefly above, and through Milan mail from Malta could be relayed to Portugal and France. Yet, what emerges from the Order’s correspondence is that the role of Florence and Milan, however vital at times, was by no way comparable to that of Genoa and Venice, whose access to the sea gave them the obvious dual advantage of exploiting maritime news-transmission options while acting as ports of call, and hence as connectors between sea and land routes which ramified deep into Italian and Northern European hinterland. It was only a logical consequence that Tuscany’s general communication relevance and potential, particularly for early modern Malta, blossomed with the steady rise of Leghorn throughout the seventeenth century, but this will be discussed further on.

The Genoa-Milan route, on the other hand, brings us to the question regarding the essentiality of communication corridors in commercial and geopolitical settings. The causative interconnections between location and history, so evident for many a territory, are blatant in

102 For examples of the Malta-Rome-Iberia mail connection see, AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Amb. Segreville (Rome), ff. 77v -78r, 18 February 1603; AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 80, 17 February 1612; and AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Amb. Gattinara (Rome), ff. 312v -313r, 26 July 1616.
103 For Malta’s mail connections with various places in France via Rome, see AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 92v-93r, 5 December 1615 and AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Amb. Gattinara (Rome), f. 52r, 16 February 1617.
104 AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 315, 10 July 1612.
105 See, respectively, AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Quartiero (Milan), f. 118r, 24 April 1610 and AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Bertone, f. 159, 19 May 1603.
Genoa’s case. Steven A. Epstein makes an unequivocal statement in favour of geographic determinism in the opening lines of his comprehensive study on the city-port’s rise to prominence in Mediterranean and global history.\textsuperscript{107} Shunned by ancient Phoenician and Greek settlers due to its rugged coastal terrain and poor natural resources, Genoa’s claim to historical relevance was progressively carved out of its bearing, where the interchange between sea and land transport allowed the Genoese to traffic from the North Sea to the Mediterranean, and from the Atlantic to the Black Sea.\textsuperscript{108} In the Middle Ages, English wool and Flemish drapes arrived in Italy through Genoa after being transported overland via Geneva, and silk was carried to Flanders in the reverse direction from the Ligurian port.\textsuperscript{109} Merchandise offloaded from vessels in Genoa or nearby Voltri on the Western Riviera of Liguria was carried north on mule-backs along steep Alpine passes providing access to the upper Po valley. Mules carried goods to Piacenza, and occasionally travelled further on.\textsuperscript{110} According to Jacques Heers, another convinced asserter of the huge incidence of geography on the affairs and destiny of man, Genoa’s role as an emporium of Lombardy’s produce was exclusively due to its vicinity to the waterways of the river Po, which provided transport opportunities at convenient prices.\textsuperscript{111} The mountain passes accessible from the Western Ligurian coast, in fact, gave access to Milan and eventually Geneva.\textsuperscript{112}

In analysing the importance of communication lines in early modern history, the Italian early modernist Giorgio Spini puts to the fore military strategy and politics, rather than commerce, by insisting on the importance of the passageways connecting Genoa to the rest of the continent in the backdrop of the turbulences of the times, and the seventeenth century in particular. He stresses the relevance of the connections between the Hispanic-Genoese Mediterranean, Habsburg Flanders, and Imperial Germany, especially during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) and how, during the Olivares administration, this equilibrium risked being tipped in France’s favour, with catastrophic consequences for Spain, if only Louis XIII had not been so occupied by the Huguenots in French territory to avoid, or ignore, any involvement in Italy.\textsuperscript{113} It was therefore imperative for Spain to control the corridors passing through Piedmont and Lombardy, and to dominate the routes through the Alsace-Lorraine region to keep clear the communication lines reaching the heart of Germany, in order to pursue the Habsburg dream of subduing Protestant

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 9-12.
\textsuperscript{110} Epstein, 10.
\textsuperscript{111} Heers, 262.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 261-2.
unrest, re-unite Christendom under a Universal Catholic Monarchy, and consequently liberate logistic and military energies against Islam in the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{114}

Such were the international implications of Genoa’s immediate overland connections with the Duchy of Savoy, Milan, and Northern Europe up to the North Sea. The city-port acted as Malta’s connecting station with Northern European hubs, similar to Marseilles, from where Hospitaller agents could occasionally brief the Order on Maltese shipping in the North Sea.\textsuperscript{115} Hospitaller Malta exploited these routes for mail-contact and otherwise, either on a regular or occasional basis, depending on the item in question.\textsuperscript{116} As will be further elaborated in chapter seven, in the mid-seventeenth century Genoa became Malta’s nodal connection with Amsterdam when the latter was dominating an emerging modern world-system. Hospitaller agents in Genoa, for example, commissioned the purchase of goods from Flanders\textsuperscript{117} and ordered the building of warships, the purchase of timber and galley masts, and the shipping of commodities from Amsterdam for the Order.\textsuperscript{118}

Via the Ligurian emporium, the Hospital channelled its funds south from Spain, France, and occasionally Germany;\textsuperscript{119} exported to Malta weapons, ammunition, and military armoury, generally fabricated in the foundries of Milan, apart from string, paper, marble, and edibles; fetched the occasional grain cargo when the reliance on more regular suppliers was frustrated; provided the magistral cellars with Monferrato wine; commissioned the building of galleys and the purchase of hardware for their fitting, apart from caps for their crews;\textsuperscript{120} was kept updated on

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 475-7.

\textsuperscript{115} Mdina Archives, Consolato del Mare, File 1, ff. 105-114, Domenico Simon (Marseilles) reporting to the Order on 24 May 1703.


\textsuperscript{117} AOM 1422, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), ff. 164v-165, 9 August 1644 and Ibid., f. 233, 15 December 1644.

\textsuperscript{118} For example, AOM 1432, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), ff. 56v-57, 15 April 1655; AOM 1423, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), ff. 151v-152r, 23 May 1645; and Ibid., Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 177v, 30 June 1645.


\textsuperscript{120} For some examples of the mentioned commodities which Hospitaller Malta imported from or via Genoa see, respectively, AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), ff. 150v-151r, 30 April 1609; AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Caloro, ff. 60v-61r, 19 February 1611; AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocafull to Lomellino (Genoa), ff. 47v-48r, 23 March 1708; AOM 1421, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), ff. 202v-203r, 14 September 1643; AOM 1431, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), ff. 175v-176r, 4 October 1653; AOM 1422, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 67v, 17 March 1644; AOM 1426, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 44r, 29 February 1648; AOM 1427, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), ff. 143v-144r, 30 August 1649; AOM 1426, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), ff. 93v-94r, 18 May 1648; AOM 1464, Perellos y Rocafull to Spinola (Genoa), f. 45v, 28 April 1703; AOM 1470, Perellos y Rocafull to Spinola (Genoa), f. 109r, 3 August 1709; AOM 1430, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), ff. 20v-21r, 28 January
international news with the regular flux of *avvisi*; and exchanged mail with all sorts of places, mainly in Northern and Western Europe. Continental roads and passages with access to the Western Mediterranean picked up maritime routes which flowed into the Ligurian Sea and converged on Genoa, rendering the Republic such a convenient information entrepôt. Genoa and the sea allowed Hospitaller Malta to interact with Marseilles; exchange mail with Nice; connect with Monaco on the French Riviera; correspond with Catalonia, Castile, and Lisbon; collect mail from Valencia or Alicante; link with Majorca; reach Lyons; and have access to Piedmont, Lombardy and Prague. Occasionally the Order’s mail from Germany would be delivered from Genoa instead of Venice as was the norm, and correspondence dispatched from the Serenissima could end up transferred to the other side of the peninsula to be collected at some point along the Tyrrhenian by Hospitaller galleys returning from Genoa to Malta, presumably when sea departures from the lagoon were not readily available, or unfavourable contingencies discouraged sailing in the Adriatic. Cruising along the Italian Adriatic was not always pleasant. Exceptionally, even Hospitaller goods commissioned through Venice were shipped to the Convent from Genoa. But mail-fluxes from Germany through Genoa or, more specifically, via the Venice-Genoa route appear to be exceptions rather than standard information-delivery patterns.

1652; AOM 1461, Perellos y Rocafal, to Lomellino (Genoa), ff. 99v-100r, 17 July 1700; AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), f. 497, 10 October 1613; AOM 1430, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 168, 21 September 1652; AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Clavesana (Genoa), ff. 470v-471r, 13 November 1616.

121 For the Malta-Genoa-Spain connection and Genoa as news-provider to Hospitaller Malta, see Grech (2006), 163-74.

122 For examples of information-exchange between Hospitaller Malta and these places through Genoa see, respectively, AOM 1407, Anton de Paule to Torriglia (Genoa), f. 176v, 28 July 1628; AOM 1424, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 54v, 11 March 1646; AOM 1423, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), ff. 151v-152r, 23 May 1645; AOM 1426, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 179r, 3 October 1648; AOM 1421, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 102v, 18 May 1643; AOM 1422, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), ff. 169v-170r, 31 August 1644; AOM 1430, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), ff. 203v-204r, 30 November 1652; AOM 1417, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 143v, 30 July 1638; AOM 1416, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 12v, 12 January 1637; AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), ff. 276-277r, 24 August 1611; AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Genoa), f. 100r, 17 April 1603.

123 AOM 1413, Anton de Paule to Cebà (Genoa), f. 17r, 11 February 1634.

124 For the Germany-Venice-Malta mail connection see, for example: AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), ff. 337v-338r, 23 October 1605 and AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), f. 130, 18 May 1610.

125 AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocafal to Marino (Venice), f. 107, 30 June 1708.


127 AOM 1406, Anton de Paule to Torriglia (Genoa), f. 182r, 12 August 1627.
**Venice and the East**

Access to communication channels and corridors retained comparable high relevance for the north-east of Italy. One of Spain’s ambitions was to interrupt Franco-Venetian communication lines across the Valtelline pass.128 The route through the Venetian terraferma, passing through Brescia and Bergamo, connected the Adriatic port to the northern heart of Italy, to the Valtelline, the Swiss cantons, and Grison in particular, and from there to France, Flanders, and eventually England, enabling Venice to benefit from the supreme luxury of by-passing Spanish territory – primarily the Duchy of Milan – in the era of the post Cateau-Cambrésis treaty of 1559.129

In early modernity, Venice was capable of exploiting its location, topography, its refined diplomatic pedigree, its privileged relationship with the Ottoman Porte and defiant independence from Habsburg policy, together with its celebrated postal service, in order to elevate its status to that of prime information vector between East and West.130 The postal couriers of Venice were the most trusted connection between the Ottoman Empire and Europe, and the communication arteries along which they trekked crossed kilometers of European hinterland providing forward and backward linkages on a trans-continental expanse ranging from the North Sea to the Bosphorus. By the seventeenth century, a well-established Venetian postal service provided weekly connections to Brussels and Vienna, a monthly service to Constantinople, and other courier runs to the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Poland.131 The regularity of these mail-carriage services were in great demand from senior diplomats, merchants, and financiers alike, notwithstanding the Serenissima’s notorious reputation for violating other people’s mail and her endemic habit of manipulating incoming and outgoing information.132

Hospitaller Malta was among the states whose survival-related exigencies and international affairs compelled them to rely on Venice’s continental couriering. The Order’s need to remain briefed on international affairs; to absorb military-related information from Ottoman territory; to monitor, reach, manage, and financially exploit its estates in the Venetian terraferma and central Europe;133 and to export to Malta timber felled in the Imperial woods, medicinals for the Sacra Infermeria,134 and other merchandise such as iron, glass,135 and crystal136 from the

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128 Spini, 475-7
131 Burke, 406.
132 See, for example, Burke, passim; Dursteler, ‘Power and Information’, 601-623; Petitjean, 177-246.
133 See chapters four and five.
134 AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), f. 245v, 8 August 1610 and AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), ff. 210v-211r, 17 June 1617.
135 For example AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), f. 143r, 15 April 1616.
lagoon, imposed a strict communication agenda on Hospitaller administration which rendered the maintenance of regular relations with the Serenissima an absolute priority. Venice allowed the island to mail-connect with Constantinople\textsuperscript{137} and to sustain contacts with territories lying deep in central and Eastern European hinterland such as Hungary, Poland,\textsuperscript{138} Germany, and Bohemia. When towards the end of 1610, Guinigi, the newly-assigned Hospitaller receiver to Venice, arrived in the lagoon, one of his first official acts was to notify the Hoapitaller agents in Germany and Bohemia about his posting.\textsuperscript{139} The lagoon also attracted Malta-bound mail from the Northern Italian hinterland. Correspondence and news from cities like Mantua and Ferrara\textsuperscript{140} was occasionally delivered to Malta via Venice instead of being dispatched directly south along the peninsula, and through its receiver in Venice the Order could reach deep into Northern Italian hinterland to conduct money-transfer orders to Bologna for example.\textsuperscript{141} The Republic’s superior capacity to attract mail parcels from the surrounding territory was due to the dual advantage provided by her postal infrastructure and the ready access to the Adriatic. Venice, like Genoa, Marseilles, Barcelona, and other city-ports of relevance, provided alternative message-transfer options through their immediate access to Mediterranean waters, allowing states like Hospitaller Malta to exploit sea routes in either basin of the Mediterranean which served the island’s purposes. In order to appreciate more the communication role of these ports, it is important to gain an idea of the regular and less regular maritime routes which connected Malta to the rest of the Mediterranean.

\textbf{Charting Out the Sea Routes: the Transport of Information by Sea}

The problem of charting out the news delivery patterns to and from Malta with reasonable accuracy is potentially easier to solve when circumstances permitted the preference of the shipping option over land routes. Braudel claims that up to the sixteenth century information was mostly carried overland, possibly because it was usual to carry correspondence with merchandise, and sea transport not always guaranteed the expected yields.\textsuperscript{142} Suffice it to say that the bulk of northwest textile exports to Italy - mostly Flemish and English - was carried overland, generally to end up

\begin{footnotes}
\item[136] For example AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), f. 397, 7 August 1613.
\item[137] For example, AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Langosco (Venice), f. 118r, [11] May 1602 and AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), f. 393v, 16 February 1606.
\item[138] For connections between Malta with Hungary and Poland through Venice see, respectively, AOM 1460, Wignacourt to Marino (Venice), f. 189v, 13 November 1696 and AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Alessandro Mausoni, f. 204v, 31 May 1616.
\item[139] AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), f. 404v, 19 December 1610.
\item[141] AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), f. 245, 5 June 1612.
\item[142] Braudel (1986), 284-90
\end{footnotes}
offloaded in Genoa and Venice.\textsuperscript{143} The tendency apparently shifted in the seventeenth century with the entry of the northerners in the Mediterranean,\textsuperscript{144} a pattern partly corroborated by evidence from the comparatively small Hospitaller world, where occasionally Flemish ships carried Hospitaller Malta’s mail\textsuperscript{145} and were hired by the Order to import cereals from Southern Sicily and to ship merchandise from Venice to Malta.\textsuperscript{146}

Over relatively modest distances, such as sea travel around Sicily or from Sicily to Southern Italy, the by and large uninterrupted crossing between two ports was indicated in Hospitaller documents. At times these manuscripts also provide information about the intermediate harbouring in ports along the route towards the final destination,\textsuperscript{147} although sudden changes in courses owing to temperamental weather, corsair-sightings, or some other unpredicted occurrence which solicited the crew’s improvisation could never be discounted, forcing captains to use one of the multitude of ‘routes within routes’ as Horden and Purcell call them.\textsuperscript{148} The systematic and sequential consultation of the Order’s documents, and of the magistral correspondence in particular, allows the charting out of early modern Malta’s incoming and outgoing maritime information-delivery routes, enabling the historian to distinguish between chance and norm, and therefore to discriminate between news collected fortuitously, and established communication channels through which the Hospitaller hierarchy exchanged information with abroad on a regular basis.

The random collection of data often took place along what can be termed sporadic crossings, or casual routes according to Braudelian terminology.\textsuperscript{149} These were the sea crossings with stopovers at Malta, or which somehow intercepted Hospitaller maritime traffic, which do not provide sufficient indications of frequency to be justifiably labelled as systematic patterns of movement. Such news regarded mainly the delivery of information to Malta by word of mouth rather than written material. It was news divulged by crew members of ships which happened to cross the maritime path of Hospitaller shipping or Malta-bound vessels, or which ended up landing

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\textsuperscript{144} Braudel (1986), 285 and 290.

\textsuperscript{145} In April 1614, for example, mail from Zante to Malta was carried by a Flemish ship which had loaded a timber cargo on the Greek island. AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Gio. Leonardo Latino (Zante), f. 142v, 8 April 1614; in November 1656, Malta’s mail to Venice was delivered on a Flemish ship which happened to stopover in Malta. AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Spreti (Venice), f. 281v, 15 November 1656.

\textsuperscript{146} For shipments of grain from Southern Sicily, see AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Pugiades (Licata), f. 395r, 17 September 1614 and Ibid., f. 427, 10 October 1614. For shipments from Venice see AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), f. 416r, 7 October 1614; Ibid., f. 425v, 17 October 1616; and AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), ff. 387v-388r, 11 September 1616.

\textsuperscript{147} For some examples of Hospitaller shipping itineraries in the western Mediterranean, see AOM 454, ff. 260-261v and AOM 460, f. 316v.

\textsuperscript{148} Horden and Purcell, 140.

\textsuperscript{149} Braudel (1986), 276.
in Malta for victualling, ship-repair, shelter, under forced escort, or because compelled to do so by the elements. These crew members, either spontaneously or under interrogation, threat, or torture, reported on enemy sightings and preparations, or plague occurrences. Authentic facts, scraps of information, hearsay, dubious revelations, and downright fabrications rebounded from all corners of the Mediterranean, darted from one basin to the other, were exchanged between crews, disclosed by fugitives or captives, ricocheted off islands and coasts, picked up by mariners in ports to be carried elsewhere, and ultimately could end up deposited in the headquarters of an archipelago Order-state willing to supplement official and systematic data-collection with the accidental accumulation of knowledge.

Episodes of such randomly-assimilated news abound in the centenary history of Hospitaller Malta, more so in a long seventeenth century in which sea wolves and privateers were having a seemingly unrestrained field day. A few examples suffice to help visualize how similar information made it to the island. In 1591, the survivors of a Turkish galliot shipwrecked near the islet of Comino denounced the presence of other Turkish vessels sheltering in Lampedusa;\(^{150}\) in 1607, after diligent interrogation, some Greeks who landed in Malta from Djerba reported on possible enemy sorties from Barbary;\(^{151}\) in the summer of 1609, a vessel from Tunis informed that an Algerian 23-bench galliot - a potentially succulent prey for the Knights’ galleys - was shortly to cross from Tunis to Constantinople.\(^{152}\) Ships sailing south from the Northern Mediterranean, usually heading to the Levant, briefed Valletta on Muslim vessels sighted off islets such as Maretimo and Pantelleria, or on the whereabouts of Hospitaller galleys last seen in Marseilles;\(^{153}\) a fugitive from Barbary would inform on corsair vessels leaving North Africa;\(^{154}\) and an east-bound ship from Leghorn would reassure on the absence of plague in the Tuscan port.\(^{155}\)

The other sea lanes pertinent to Hospitaller Malta’s affairs and information gathering are those which can be termed habitual or trunk routes,\(^{156}\) the sea crossings that is, which crop up with such insistence as to deserve the classification of established sea lanes which witnessed systematic and enduring traffic. These maritime itineraries were of paramount importance for Hospitaller Malta’s livelihood and, naturally enough, the island’s communication network was moulded along their path. They were constantly relied-on by the island for the transport of merchandise, specie

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\(^{150}\) Dal Pozzo, i, 328-9.
\(^{151}\) AOM 1386, f. 112v, 2 May 1607.
\(^{152}\) AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Ottavio d’Aragona, f. 213, 13 June 1609.
\(^{153}\) See respectively AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Scicli), ff. 338v-339r, 10 October 1610 and AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Centorio (Admiral and General of the Hospitaller Galleys), f. 368, 23 August 1616.
\(^{154}\) AOM 1394, Wignacourt to the Admiral and General of Hospitaller Galleys, f. 234v, 20 May 1615.
\(^{155}\) AOM 1442, Cotoner to the Receivers of Palermo and Messina, f. 74, 13 November 1666.
(cash), supplies, and information, and can be divided into sea routes in either basin of the Mediterranean.

**Hospitaller Communication Routes in the Western Basin**

**Sicily and the Tyrrhenian Route**

The frequentation of the Mediterranean’s major shipping lanes was surprisingly consistent from Antiquity to early modernity. Horden and Purcell, in their critique of John H. Pryor’s thesis on maritime history up to Lepanto,\(^{157}\) largely endorse the latter’s reconstruction of the Inner Sea’s prevailing maritime routes throughout the ages, albeit with some specific reservations, such as the extent of the restrictions on navigation and the effective observance and temporal boundaries of the sailing season.\(^{158}\) In the western basin of the Mediterranean, shipping along the Tyrrhenian and the coasts of France and Spain was a favourite route giving access to the northern shores of the sea. Alternatively, vessels leaving Sicily veered north-west to reach Sardinia and subsequently the Provençal coast, or turned west to dare the open sea and sail to the Balearics and further on to the Spanish littoral.\(^{159}\)

These time-honoured navigational itineraries, mostly confined to the north-west Mediterranean, also guaranteed Malta’s preferred links with mainland Europe. Coasting prevailed in the pre-steamship Mediterranean,\(^{160}\) and coasting due north and south along the Tyrrhenian was by far the predominant sea passage connecting Malta with mainland Europe,\(^{161}\) a communication pattern established since the Norman domination of the archipelago, when Malta’s commercial outlook veered drastically from south to north with a consequential reduction of contacts with North Africa.\(^{162}\) Knowledge of the prevailing currents and the north-westerly and north-easterly winds which dominated Mediterranean shipping,\(^{163}\) apart from familiarity with the coastal environments repeatedly frequented by subsequent generations of seafarers, rendered navigation along these habitual routes more reassuring, reducing risks due to the unexpected and the unknown, and allowing the occasional extension of the sailing season well into winter.

In early modernity, Malta’s maritime activity along these tried and tested sea lanes was not only dictated by logistics conditioned by geography, winds, and currents, but also by the administrative agenda of a Hospitaller government whose affairs, and consequently those of its

\(^{157}\) Ibid., passim.

\(^{158}\) Horden and Purcell, 137-43.

\(^{159}\) Ibid., 138.

\(^{160}\) Braudel (1985), 418.


\(^{162}\) Cassar, Carmel, A Concise History of Malta (Malta, Mireva Publications, 2000), 60.

\(^{163}\) Horden and Purcell, 137-8.
archipelago-base, were heavily conditioned by its landed possessions throughout Christendom and
by the need to draw supplies and information from the continent. Of course, as with so many an
experience in Malta’s history, the island’s regular shipping activities had Sicily as their first
maritime bearing. Some of the habitual routes for the exchange of news and otherwise by
Hospitaller Malta have already been outlined earlier, in fact, when describing the various journeys
along Sicilian coasts for the delivery of mail parcels, merchandise, and victuals: the ferry service
between Malta and Scicli, interrupted only by angry seas; the channel crossings from the cylos on
Sicily’s southern coast; shipping along Sicily’s eastern coast with Syracuse, Augusta, and Messina
as the main ports of arrival and departure; coasting along the Southern Sicilian shores for
connections with Trapani and Palermo; and the occasional sea-passages between Palermo and
Messina along the northern coast of the island.164 Once the Messina strait was crossed, documents
continue to testify how shipping to and from Hospitaller Malta, carrying supplies, funds, and mail,
usually hugged Italy’s Tyrrhenian littoral and the western coasts of the Mediterranean,165 although
crossovers to Sardinia from Trapani or through the Sicilian channel were not to be discounted,
especially when Hospitaller galleys were sent on plying or bullion-collecting missions, with
instructions to sail to Marseilles, or to turn west and travel to the Balearics.166

The attraction exerted by major ports like Naples, Genoa, Marseilles, and Barcelona
moulded shipping itineraries.167 The Tyrrhenian route stretched Hospitaller Malta’s contacts to the
western shores of the sea. Coasting between the Northern Hispanic-Mediterranean littoral and the
Ligurian Sea could be tediously slow but provided the Order with a relatively secure access to
Marseilles and Barcelona, and therefore to its French and Iberian estates, funds, and affairs.168
Mail parcels addressed to Marseilles from Malta could be dispatched by sea via Sicily. If sent
through Rome, it could be left to the Order’s ambassador at the papal court to decide via which
route to relay the mail to the French port, with a stopover in Genoa being one of the options.169
Incoming mail to Malta from Marseilles was usually dispatched via Genoa.170 Ships, and
Hospitaller vessels in particular, leaving Marseilles and heading to Southern Italy and the central

164 For an example of a crossing along Sicily’s entire northern coast, see AOM 1419, Lascaris Castellar to
Prince Landgrave (Generale delle Galere), f. 143r, 25 September 1640.
165 See, for example: Grech (2005), 197-198. See also AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Amb. Gattinara (Rome), f.
181v, 17 May 1616. Returning from Marseilles or on their way to the French port, Hospitaller galleys would
stop at Genoa, for example. See AOM 1379, Garzes to Cavaretta (Messina), f. 129v, 8 July 1599 and AOM
1398, Wignacourt to Clavesana (Genoa), ff. 87v -88r, 20 February 1619.
166 See, for example, AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Sforza (Generale delle Galere), ff. 388-389r, 15 December
1606; AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 122v, 8 March 1613; and AOM 259, ff. 130-
131r, 20 August 1655.
167 Horden and Purcell, 138.
168 On the Barcelona-Genoa route see for example, Braudel (1986), 487-93. For the route’s pertinence to
Hospitaller Malta, see Grech (2005), 196-204.
169 See, for example, AOM 1395 Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 133r, 13 April 1616 and Ibid., to Amb.
Gattinara (Rome), f. 133, 13 April 1616;
170 For example, AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Genoa), ff. 156v-157r, 19 June 1602 and AOM 1407,
Anton de Paule to Torriglia (Genoa), f. 176v, 28 July 1628.
Mediterranean, for example, would normally stopover at Genoa to deposit and collect mail and supplies.\(^{171}\) Whether the subsequent mail-delivery south from Genoa was entirely covered over water or partially overland depended on the delivery options available to the Hospitaller agents in Genoa at the time of the dispatch. Contacts between Genoa and Malta could take place either through the overland courier routes along the peninsula or by sea, with probable stoppages along Italy’s Tyrrhenian coast and in Sicily,\(^{172}\) or else through a combined land and sea route. Coasting due south along the Tyrrhenian to central Italy could in fact envisage possible stopovers in Leghorn or Civitavecchia.\(^{173}\) Subsequently, mail deposited in these ports could be shipped to Malta on the papal galleys,\(^{174}\) or those of Naples for example,\(^{175}\) depending on departure timings, and shipping connections and opportunities. Otherwise it could be transported overland to Rome to exploit the abundant information delivery services which the papal seat provided. Another favourite north-south route was the Genoa-Messina crossing,\(^{176}\) covered also by Genoa’s galleys which periodically sailed south to load silk from the Sicilian port, occasionally carrying Malta’s mail either way.\(^{177}\) From Messina, mail would then be delivered to Malta directly by sea or through Sicily’s courier service, as explained in chapter two. In several cases, however, Hospitaller documents are silent on the exact itinerary of such deliveries, providing only the dispatch and arrival stages, as in the case of Hospitaller contacts with Sardinia and Barcelona through the north-western tip of Sicily.

**Palermo and Sardinia**

Portions of Hospitaller Malta’s incoming and outgoing mail through Sicily were also delivered via Palermo. While Messina relayed the bulk of Hospitaller Malta’s mail to and from Italy, and occasionally the Levant, primarily for the relay of intelligence, Palermo’s information delivery function seems to have been more circumscribed to the western basin of the Mediterranean. Palermo’s relevance for the Hospital’s communication network was above all the upkeep of contacts with Spain. As mentioned earlier, the Barcelona-Palermo connection was extensively

\(^{171}\) For example, AOM 1404, Anton de Paule to Clavesana (Genoa), f. 133, 30 April 1625 and AOM 1431, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 58, 28 February 1653. For examples of the coasting of Hospitaller shipping along Northern Mediterranean and Tyrrhenian shores, see AOM 1431, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 58, 28 February 1653 and chapters five and seven.

\(^{172}\) For example: AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Amb. Mendes (Rome), ff. 378-379, 7 November 1605 and AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Genoa), f. 57, 6 March 1610.

\(^{173}\) AOM 1470, Perellos y Rocaful to the Prior of England, Ferretti (Civitavecchia), f. 26r, 31 January [1708]. The letter is included in the correspondence manuscript for the year 1709. It is highly probable that the letter is wrongly dated and that the year should be 1709, plausibly an error by the scribe.

\(^{174}\) AOM 1413, Anton de Paule to Cebà (Genoa), f. 89r, 15 July 1634.

\(^{175}\) AOM 1419, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 91, 5 July 1640.

\(^{176}\) AOM 1414, Anton de Paule to Cebà (Genoa), ff. 110v -111r, 14 August 1635.

\(^{177}\) For similar shipment services rendered by the Genoese galleys to Hospitaller Malta, see Grech (2005), 197.
exploited by the Order,\textsuperscript{178} not least because it provided access to Aragon, Catalonia, and Castile, and more particularly to the Hospitaller ambassador in Madrid.\textsuperscript{179} The Order used the Catalan port to import drapes to the island, ship chest-loads of coins collected from its Spanish estates, conclude financial transactions with the transfer of bolle from Malta,\textsuperscript{180} and exchange regular correspondence with Spain.\textsuperscript{181} Mail parcels from Barcelona and the rest of Spain addressed to the Convent were usually deposited in Palermo to be subsequently carried to Malta by ships heading south, when available,\textsuperscript{182} or via the usual overland courier deliveries to catch the Scicli ferry service. Catalan ships which harboured in Palermo were occasionally exploited by the Hospitaller agents in the city for the transport of cereals, the delivery of mail to Malta,\textsuperscript{183} and the shipment of correspondence to Barcelona.\textsuperscript{184}

Hospitaller documents are rather dry on the exact route travelled either way along the Barcelona-Palermo connection. As explained earlier, direct dispatches through uninterrupted sea crossings between the two ports were quite unlikely. Palermo-bound ships from Barcelona were more likely to coast all the way along the northern shores of the Mediterranean and the Tyrrenian coast, or else interrupt the crossing with stops in the Balearics and Sardinia, for example. As already explained, Hospitaller galleys heading to Spain would take the Tyrrenian route or pass along the Northern Mediterranean after taking the Trapani-Sardinia route.\textsuperscript{185} The Hospitaller-Iberian exchange of correspondence, channelled mostly via Palermo and occasionally Messina,\textsuperscript{186} was in fact also carried out through Naples, Rome, and Genoa, with sections of the journey probably covered overland.\textsuperscript{187} As hinted at earlier, mail parcels from Iberia deposited in Genoa, for

\begin{footnotes}
\item[178] For the Barcelona-Palermo-Malta mail connection see, for example: AOM 1385, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 396-397r, 16 December 1601 and AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 451r, 5 September 1613.
\item[179] See, for example, AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 235v – 236r, 20 September 1607; AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 36v-37, 20 January 1615; Ibid., ff. 171v-172r, 6 April 1615.
\item[180] See chapter five.
\item[181] For some examples of similar contacts see Dal Pozzo, i, 554-5; AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 578-79, 31 December 1612; AOM 1409, Anton de Paule to Mulatrier (Genoa), f. 218r, 26 October 1630; AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 81v-82, 4 February 1615; AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Genoa), f. 67r, 10 April 1601; AOM 1413, Anton de Paule to Cebà (Genoa), f. 101, 17 August 1634; AOM 1419, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 91, 5 July 1640; AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Amb. Segreville (Rome), f. 330v, 27 November 1602; AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), f. 262v, 26 August 1604.
\item[182] AOM 1389, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 156, 12 June 1610.
\item[183] AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 257v-258r, 8 October 1607 and AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 451r, 5 September 1613.
\item[184] AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Amb. Segreville (Rome), f. 330v, 27 November 1602 and AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), ff. 380v-381r, 30 October 1618.
\item[185] For example: AOM 457, f. 267, yr. 1610 and AOM 259, ff. 130-131r, 20 August 1655.
\item[186] For the Malta-Messina-Rome-Madrid mail route see, for example, AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 259, 27 May 1613.
\item[187] For example: AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Amb. Mendes (Rome), ff. 399-400, 16 December 1606; AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 85v, 20 February 1609; AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 242-244r, 21 May 1613. AOM 1414, Anton de Paule to Cebà (Genoa), ff. 110v-111r, 14 August 1635.
\end{footnotes}
example, would be dispatched to Rome from where they reached Malta by land or by sea, shipped over by the papal galleys for example,\textsuperscript{188} or through a combined land-sea voyage.\textsuperscript{189} Otherwise they were shipped directly from Genoa on the galleys of the Republic or other ships heading to Malta,\textsuperscript{190} as according to the general mail-transmission pattern between Genoa and Malta described earlier.

As for the delivery of Hospitaller Malta’s outgoing mail to Barcelona, if delivered via the Tyrrenhian route, an intermediate stopover in Genoa was deemed preferable. The transport of information to Catalonia could be slow and cumbersome. At one point in 1640, Hospitaller mail took eight months to make it to Barcelona.\textsuperscript{191} An exception surely, considering the ridiculous delay even by pre-industrial standards and the frequency of the contacts between Catalonia and Palermo within the confines of Hospitaller Malta’s communication network (see also chapter five). Yet the fact that the Order’s agent in Genoa was briefed that, from then on, all Barcelona-bound parcels sent via Rome were to be relayed through Genoa, is indicative of a certain reputation for convenience and reliability – comparative, at least, if not exactly absolute – which the Ligurian city-port enjoyed in the mail-distribution sector. It is also a confirmation of a distinct contact pattern between Hospitaller Malta and Iberia.\textsuperscript{192}

Through Palermo, Hospitaller Malta connected with Sardinia, although archival evidence encountered throughout this study on this particular route is very sparse.\textsuperscript{193} The official contacts between the mammoth island and early modern Malta do not seem to have been frequent. According to available records, at the dawn of the seventeenth century trips to Sardinia accounted for less than 0.5 % of the overall outgoing shipping to Italy from Maltese harbours.\textsuperscript{194} The odd contact was also provided by ships from Marseilles or Toulon which stopped in Sardinia before sailing to Malta,\textsuperscript{195} and Hospitaller galleys plying its endless coastline and satellite islets like San Antioco and San Pietro would stop to pay courtesy visits to the island’s royalty as happened in 1659,\textsuperscript{196} for example, before crossing to Trapani to replenish their supplies.\textsuperscript{197} But mail delivery from Cagliari, the seat of the Order’s agent on the island, could be painfully slow and dispatches

\textsuperscript{188} AOM 1413, Anton de Paule to Cebà (Genoa), f. 78v, 27 June 1634.
\textsuperscript{189} AOM 1416, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 114r, 21 July 1637; AOM 1430, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), ff. 104v-105r, 13 June 1652.
\textsuperscript{190} AOM 1423, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 258, 19 October 1645; AOM 1425, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 106v, 29 August 1647.
\textsuperscript{191} AOM 1419, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 91, 5 July 1640.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., f. 91, 5 July 1640.
\textsuperscript{193} For example: AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 221-223v, 16 July 1604.
\textsuperscript{194} Carmel Cassar, Society, Culture and Identity in Early Modern Malta (Malta, Mireva Publications, 2000), 75.
\textsuperscript{195} AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Afflitto (Palermo), ff. 364v-365r, 8 December 1603 and AOM 1444, Cotoner to Gio. Di Gio, f. 89, 13 June 1669.
\textsuperscript{196} AOM 1766, f. 448r.
\textsuperscript{197} AOM 1419, Lascaris Castellar to Prince Landgrave (Generale delle Galere), f. 143r, 25 September 1640. See also AOM 1464, Perellos y Rocaful to Marullo (Naples), ff. 87-89r, 9 July 1703.
could take from seven weeks to three months to arrive. On one particular occasion, a dispatch took five whole months to reach Malta, an outrageous delay which could be explained by a lack of urgency and the absence of systematic and regular contacts between the two islands, more so when one considers that a pollacca could cover the distance between Toulon and Malta in just eight days, and that in 1704 a French ship sailed from the coasts of Sardinia to Malta in seven days carrying dispatches from the Hospitaler squadron. Direct sea passages between Palermo and Cagliari could occasionally be commissioned from Malta, however, especially in cases when urgent information was required by the Order regarding possibilities of provisioning from the island.

Sardinia had always found it hard to fully integrate into the mainstream trading fluxes within the sea expanses of its environs. The story of the island is that of a slow and slumberous adaptation to a Mediterranean economy in evolution. Regional mutations in commerce and finance were difficult to muster for Sardinia’s population, whose pastoral rhythms imposed a diffuse outlook on foreign intrusion, whether material or intellectual. The Sardinian author Raimondo Carta Raspi inveighes against the ‘excessively insular’ and stubbornly conservative disposition of the Sardinian people. He stigmatizes the island’s fossilized economy and material decadence, especially during the Aragonese, Spanish, and Piedmontese dominations between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries which saw Sardinian demography dwindle and sink into spiritual atrophy. Yet, notwithstanding its reclusive and lethargic nature, the island’s assets attracted foreign interest, dictating inevitable interaction with the outside world. Since the twelfth century, Sardinia’s extensive wheat lands were much contended by the Pisans and Genoese alike, and supplied the ports of Marseilles and Barcelona with cereals. Hospitaller Malta looked up to Sardinia as an alternative cylo of cheaper wheat in times of great need, but apparently did so reluctantly. Very occasionally Hospitaller financial transactions with Barcelona were carried out via Cagliari, mostly to pay for biscuit supplies to be picked up by the Hospitaller galleys, and records do exist of attempts by the Order in the seventeenth century to import legumes, salted

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198 AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Ventimigilia (Cagliari), f. 369r, 20 December 1608 and AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Ventimigilia (Cagliari), f. 138r, 10 April 1609.
199 Ibid., f. 251v, 5 August 1609.
200 AOM 1444, Cotoner to Gio. Di Gio, f. 89, 13 June 1669.
201 AOM 1465, Perellos y Rocaful to General Baglio di Tavora (General of Squadron), f. 99r, 18 July 1704.
202 AOM 1387, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 362-363, 29 November 1608.
206 AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Afflitto (Palermo), ff. 364v-365r, 8 December 1603. ‘..che in annate calamitose conviene far q[ue]ll che si puo’, e non quel che si vorrebbe’. AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Afflitto (Palermo), ff. 30 – 31v, 8 January 1604.
207 AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Sardinia), f. 243r, 13 September 1608.
208 AOM 455, f. 276v, 13 October 1605.
meat, and timber via Cagliari. However, an official consulate for Sardinia was appointed in Malta only in 1709 and the prevailing impression is that Sardinia remained one huge, distant, and remote mass of obscure territory for Hospitaller Malta, infinitely less relevant than Sicily for many an inherent reason, but most obviously because it’s considerable distances from any continental shore made it so uncomfortable to reach. In 1657, the Order was finding it virtually impossible to withdraw revenue from its Sardinian estates via Palermo since all sort of traffic between northwestern Sicily and Sardinia had apparently been frozen, at least temporarily, and attempts were being made to alternatively transfer the Order’s Sardinian funds via Leghorn, although this could have been a side-effect of the plague raving at the time in Northern Italy. The island’s wildlife could provide the odd deer or mouflon for the amusement of the Hospitaller elite, but the reliable provision of essential goods was another matter. When in the summer of 1604 the Order was sounding the availability to import up to hundred barrels of much-needed tallow from Sardinia for the months of September and October, the Order’s receiver in Palermo quashed the possibility within weeks, informing Malta of how unlikely it was for such a transaction to go through.

The Eastern Basin

Hospitaller Malta’s systematic contacts with the eastern basin of the Mediterranean were largely monopolized by two arterial routes for the delivery of information. The first was made up of the often complementary exploitation of overland and maritime linkages with Venice. News in pre-industrial society hardly ever travelled in straight lines. More often than not it twisted its way along tortuous routes until it reached nodal urban centres which provided greater dispatch and delivery guarantees with enhanced speeds. In the mid-sixteenth century, for example, diplomatic mail from Rome to Portugal often made its way north to be ultimately delivered via Antwerp. In 1616, the Order sent its official mail to Poland via Venice, not only because of the connections in that direction provided by the Serenissima, but also because it felt reassured that the dispatch

209 AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Cagliari), f. 369r, 20 December 1608. For the importation of salted meat from Sardinia by Hospitaller Malta, see also AOM 663, f. 17v, 13 May 1605.
211 ‘alcuna comunicazione né traffico nella dett’Isola di Sardegna’. AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Galilei (Pisa), ff. 260v-261r, 1 March 1657.
212 See respectively AOM 1443, Cotoner to Com. Morano, f. 32r, 19 April 1667 and AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Cagliari), f. 369r, 20 December 1608.
213 AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 221-223v, 16 July 1604 and Ibid., ff. 259v-262r, 26 August 1604.
215 Braudel (1986), 357.
would ultimately be delivered. The lagoon’s capacity to magnetize information from distant areas of the Mediterranean, and the eastern half in particular, permitted the Maltese islands to be alerted on plague outbreaks in the Greek archipelago and Tripoli, for example, or to receive information from Levantine outposts such as Candia (Crete) and the Dalmatian littoral, where Ragusa was by far the most important mail connection with Istanbul.

Unfortunately this study can boast of very few documentary entries regarding the Malta-Ragusa mail connection in the early seventeenth century. Instances of official correspondence exchange on this route throughout this period are too sparse and we need more evidence than this study can afford in order to talk of anything close to a mail exchange pattern. The Ragusa-Constantinople mail service did help to attenuate excessive dependence on Venice for contacts with the east, and we know that this occasionally enabled the Order to receive intelligence updates directly or indirectly from the city-port. The odd Maltese galliot sailing up the Adriatic would stop in Ragusa, and Maltese traders in the 1700s bought wine in Dalmatia for cash. Indeed, at times vessels from Malta sailed right up to Fiume to deliver dispatches regarding the acquisition of licenses from the Imperial authorities to export timber for the Order’s arsenal. Yet access to Ragusa was still problematic due to the city’s odd location, as denounced by Alof de Wignacourt at the start of his magistracy, a condition which resulted in provisioning difficulties for the city. Those same contacts linking Ragusa with the Ottoman hinterland, which gave the Republic an edge in terms of information from the Porte’s domain, were the cause of a perceivable diffidence apparently harboured by Hospitalier personnel towards the Republic. In 1687, the general of the Hospitalier squadron plying the Adriatic twice chose to by-pass the Dalmatian port in the same mission, not only because of suspicions of contagion, but also because the general was ‘little inclined towards the Ragusans’. However, the paucity of evidence encountered in this regard prevents definite conclusions on the Malta-Ragusa connection. Further research is required on the subject, notably in the archives of Ragusa itself.

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216 AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Alessandro Mausonio, f. 204v, 31 May 1616.
217 See respectively AOM 1460, Wignacourt to Marino (Venice), f. 175r, 8 August 1696 and AOM 1466, Perellos y Rocaful to Marino (Venice), f. 141v, 13 October 1705.
218 See respectively AOM 1460, Wignacourt to Marino (Venice), f. 189v, 13 November 1696 and AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), ff. 142v-143r, 15 April 1616.
219 On Dubrovnik as a mail connector between the West and the Ottoman Empire, see Petitjean, 311-79.
220 See, respectively: AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Langosco (Venice), f. 53v, 25 February 1601; Ibid., f. 151v, 22 June 1601; and AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Domenico Bisante (Constantinople), f. 235r, 29 July 1605.
222 AOM 1415, Anton de Paule to the Councillors and Rectors of the Republic of Ragusa, f. 37v, 17 March 1636.
223 AOM 1413, Anton de Paule to the Republic of Ragusa, f. 145r, 6 November 1634.
224 Mallia-Milanes, (1972), 89.
225 AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Conte D’Erbestein, f. 358v, 30 August 1656.
226 See chapter one.
228 ‘poco inclinato à Ragusei’. Dal Pozzo, ii, 649 and 652.
Everything indicates, through the analysis of early seventeenth-century Hospitaller documentation, that the exchange of information between Malta and Venice usually took place through the partial overland route through Italy. Outgoing mail to Venice could be deposited in Messina from where it was dispatched north with the usual _staffetta_ (horse couriers), or ordinary couriers, with probable stopovers in Rome. However, when the occasion arose, mail from Malta was exceptionally shipped directly to Venice with vessels which happened to stop in Malta before sailing to the Serenissima. In the reverse direction, once the Malta-bound correspondence parcels arrived in Venice, they were carried south to the island via habitual overland routes, passing through Rome, or later on in the century through Leghorn. Alternatively, they could be deposited in Naples from where frigates carried them to Malta together with other mail parcels which would have accumulated in the port of Campania.

In similar cases, however, Hospitaller Malta occasionally came up with its own alternative delivery solution. Malta-bound mail from Venice, in fact, was at times shipped on vessels hired to transport goods and cargoes - especially timber from the Imperial woods - down the Adriatic to Malta. On such occasions the sea route option could solve a problem for the Order, since the traditional Venice-Rome land route via which mail was dispatched to Malta suffered from occasional courier shortages. Sea trips, moreover, were considered safer for the transfer of delicate merchandise such as crystal, and in 1614 it was preferred to ship a portrait of San Carlo Borromeo from Venice to Malta and spare the painting the stressful overland route down the peninsula. However, extemporary postal solutions similar to the Venice-Malta direct shipment seem to have been exceptions rather than the norm, not least because the embarkation of mail from Venice had to coincide with that of cargoes destined to Malta which, although periodic, do not seem to have been frequent enough to satisfy the island’s postal connectivity requirements with the

229 See, for example, AOM 1391, Wignaourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 135v, 10 April 1612
230 See, for example, AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Acugna (Rome), ff. 36-37r, 24 January 1611 and Ibid., to Iacomo Bosio (Rome), f. 109r, 24 March 1611.
231 AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Spreti (Venice), f. 281v, 15 November 1656.
232 AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), f. 105, 30 March 1618.
233 For example, AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Amb. la Marra (Rome), ff. 439v-440, 8 October 1612. For the Venice-Rome-Malta mail connection see also AOM 1212, f. 5r.
234 For example, AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Spreti (Venice), f. 292v, 27 April 1657.
235 AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), ff. 168v-169r, 7 May 1616.
236 For example: AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), f. 452, 8 October 1612; AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), ff. 88v-89r, 20 February 1619; and AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Scalamonti (Venice), ff. 360-361r, 30 June 1621. For an overview of the trading relations between Hospitaller Malta and Venice and the cargoing of merchandise on Venetian vessels to Malta in the eighteenth century, see Mallia-Milanes (1972).
238 AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Scalamonti (Venice), f. 272, 5 July 1620.
239 AOM 1393, Wignacourt, to Guinigi (Venice), f. 248r, 9 June 1614.
Northern Adriatic.240 As so often happened when sea routes were considered for the transmission of Hospitaller mail, the dispatch had to be coordinated with already-scheduled sea voyages, with few exceptions, such as channel crossings between Malta and Sicily which on occasions were commissioned for the sole purpose of mail-shipment as seen above. So in the case of mail-exchange with Venice, the use of partial overland transportation through Italian territory seems to have prevailed either way, while the shipping of information down the Adriatic to Malta was mainly carried out with the transport of merchandise commissioned by the Order. This relay of mail was yet another service among the many which the Serenissima provided to Malta. Similarly to other peninsular stations mentioned earlier, Venice provided early modern Malta with access to supplies, to Hospitaller funds generated in the heart of continental Europe, and with international news through the dispatch of news-sheets. More particularly, Venice was Malta’s prime link with Constantinople, affording the island an alternative lookout on the enemy, and contributing to pronounce further Italy’s importance for the Knights and their subjects.

Italy’s intrinsic resources and geographic protrusion in the heart of the Habsburg-Ottoman conflict not only rendered it Spain’s military promontory in the Inner Sea,241 but also an information and cultural vehicle in a post-Gutenburg world which saw the origins of the contemporary phenomenon of news circulation. The peninsula’s relevance for Hospitaller Malta was more pronounced still for all sorts of reasons pertinent to subsistence and survival, but also because of the historical conjuncture which saw the Order settling in Malta just when the Regno was about to endow itself with a proper couriering infrastructure, Europe’s financial revolution was maturing, and the information boom started peaking, enabling Malta to catch the bandwagon of western modernity through the exploitation of the communication system of its Hospitaller government.

Within the context of belligerency, connections with Sicily, Italy, and the rest of the Mediterranean also allowed Malta to provide a listening service to Christendom on military affairs. Hospitaller Malta’s other prevailing news-transmission route in the eastern basin, in fact, was by and large a one-way supply of information from the Order’s listening stations in the Greek Archipelago and the Levant, and was almost exclusively carried out to provide the island with intelligence on its Ottoman antagonist. Notwithstanding the constraints on mobility which hampered communications in the pre-industrial era, Hospitaller Malta managed to exploit its geographical bearing and an enhanced international connectivity to perform consistently in the battle for military information within the Habsburg-Ottoman rivalry.

240 For example: AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), f. 393v, 16 December 1606. For other examples of shipments of goods from Venice to Malta, see AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), ff. 468v-469r, 24 December 1611 and AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), f. 48, 12 February 1617.
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**Sources:** AOM 100 to AOM 104; AOM 453 to AOM 457; AOM 663; AOM 1380 to AOM 1390.
TABLE 3B

Hospitaller Agents and Correspondents in Europe and the Ionian (1601-1611)

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Sources: AOM 100 to AOM 104; AOM 453 to AOM 457; AOM 1380 to AOM 1390.
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<td>Antonio Cataneo</td>
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<td>Alfonso d’Avolos</td>
<td>Alfonso d’Avolos</td>
<td>Alfonso d’Avolos</td>
<td>Jacobo de Bulleux?</td>
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<td>Camillo Caloro</td>
<td>Camillo Caloro</td>
<td>Camillo Caloro</td>
<td>Clavesana</td>
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<td>Conrado de Rosembach</td>
<td>Scheiffardt</td>
<td>Bernardo de Glostein</td>
<td>Bernardo de Glostein</td>
<td>Georgi Brocardi di Schauenburg</td>
<td>Georgi Brocardi di Schauenburg</td>
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Sources: AOM 104 to AOM 107; AOM 457 to AOM 460; AOM 1391 to AOM 1400.
<table>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hospitaller Agents and Correspondents in Europe and the Ionian (1612-1621)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Marseilles</strong></td>
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<td>Naples</td>
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<td>Priory of Lombardy</td>
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**Sources:** AOM 104 to AOM 107; AOM 457 to AOM 460; AOM 1391 to AOM 1400.
GETTING TO KNOW THE ENEMY
THE ORDER OF ST JOHN’S INTELLIGENCE NETWORK AND THE FLUX OF INTERNATIONAL NEWS TO MALTA

A state’s priority, claims Adam Smith, is to protect its subjects from foreign aggression.¹ The collection of information on the enemy is an inherent necessity for the accomplishment of this duty. The Hospitaller Order of St John’s need to remain updated on Ottoman offensive activities and intentions was strictly tied to the military ethos of the religious institution, and to the survival of its base on the Mediterranean military frontier. Intelligence on the foe could have a domino effect with far reaching inter-related consequences on Hospitaller Malta, which could regard military strategy, shipping schedules, provisioning, and fund collection, increasing the reliance on the island’s communication network. But the collection of intelligence at an institutional level could also harbour positive diplomatic collaterals within one’s own allied camp, especially for a small peripheral state. Malta’s accumulation of information about the Ottomans enhanced its prestige and relevance within Christendom, rendering the island’s precarious equilibrium on the Catholic-Muslim divide a propitious opportunity towards the acquisition of a superior international stature. Malta’s dichotomous situation as a frontline state reserved more than one benefit to counterbalance the constant discomfort of exposure to the enemy. The capture of slaves through maritime raids, which had beneficial effects on Maltese economy and society,² was coupled by the intelligence-relay service to the Catholic-Habsburg bloc.³ Together with states like Venice, Ragusa, and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, Hospitaller Malta formed part of an extensive espionage network which kept Madrid and its central Mediterranean allies and outposts alerted on enemy military designs.⁴ Whether Malta fits into the discourse of the Turkish scholar Emrah Safa Gürkan regarding the state-building side-effects of the institutionalization of espionage⁵ is still a thematic proposition which could provoke future analysis. What is certain, however, is that, together with the participation in concerted Catholic maritime missions, Malta’s role as

¹ Adam Smith, Wealth of Nations (Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Classics, 2012), 691.
⁵ Ibid., 95-6.
intelligence provider integrated the island further into Habsburg central-Mediterranean military strategy. Hospitaller Malta’s peripheral status within Spanish Habsburg domains was thus converted into an active service to Christendom, boosting the island’s relevance within the Habsburg-Ottoman rivalry through the workings of the Knights’ communication system.

_Hospitaller Malta’s Intelligence Sources_

**Information via Constantinople and the Ionian Islands**

War is as old as humanity and espionage is the brainchild of war. The need to know one’s enemy, to fathom his nature, weigh his strengths, analyse his weaknesses, and, most importantly, to read his mind and anticipate his movements has always been an ambition among belligerent adversaries, in times of war and peace alike. In his timeless classic *Art of War*, the mother of all military treatises written some 500 years B.C., Sun Tzu dedicates the last chapter to the collection of intelligence, stating how advance knowledge is ‘The means by which enlightened rulers (…) conquered others (…) for it is the knowledge of the enemy’s true situation’.\(^6\)

The Hospitaller Order of St John was not shorn of logistical information related to enemy territory, gained both prior to and during offensive sorties in enemy domains throughout centuries of warfare. The Order’s documents and official histories provide ample descriptions of fortified enclaves and ports, apart from navigational data, regarding the Greek archipelago and the Muslim half of the Mediterranean, which the Hospitallers acquired during their years of residence in the Levant and continued to accumulate when on Malta through their naval offensive exploits, their seaborne sounding missions, and via informants. Hospitaller galleys returned to base from the Levant with sketches of enemy fortresses\(^7\) and occasionally reconnaissance missions were sent to Barbary specifically to report on the type of enemy vessels being fitted there.\(^8\) According to the contemporary chronicler Bartholomeo Dal Pozzo, the walls of Prevesa were made of such hard rock that the city was practically immune to enemy mining action and cannon balls bounced off its bastions, reminding the Knights Hospitallers of how awesome and resilient Ancient Roman military architecture could be. The stronghold was strategically important because it dominated the Gulf of Arta in Greece and the excellent timber from its nearby territories was used for shipbuilding by Barbary forces. The port of Navarino on the Ionian side of Morea (the Peloponnese) was sheltered from all kinds of winds and waves. It was considered the best port of Morea, the most comfortable for the Turks to group their fleet in when they sailed west in their anti-Christian sorties, and the Greek population of the environs, renowned for its favourable

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\(^7\) As in 1601, for example. AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Prince Doria, ff. 207v-208r, 31 August 1601.

\(^8\) AOM 1386, ff. 282v-283r.
predisposition towards invaders, was ready to supply Catholic forces with livestock. On the eastern coast of the Adriatic, Durazzo was poorly-defended, while Castelnuovo (modern Herceg Novi) was known as an excellently-fortified stronghold, and were it not for a bout of plague, the tactical incompetence of its defenders, and divine intervention against ‘Ottoman barbarity’, it would never have fallen to Catholic troops in 1687, sustains Dal Pozzo.\textsuperscript{9} The chronicler elaborates on enemy combat ploys, describing how some Ottoman ramparts were defended by bronze cannons which the Order had abandoned in Rhodes,\textsuperscript{10} how in their siege of La Goletta of 1574, the Turks built ramparts out of sacks of sand and bales of wool to provide the assailants with some shelter in that flat portion of North African terrain, and how caichs were used to cut communication lines between La Goletta and Tunis.\textsuperscript{11}

It was important for the Order not to lose ground in the war of intelligence, for its Muslim antagonist was equally competitive in gaining insights and advance knowledge on its foe, betraying a surprisingly far-reaching logistical and military curiosity.\textsuperscript{12} In the sixteenth century, the Sicilian Viceroy Juan de la Vega voiced concern on the efficiency of Ottoman intelligence which allowed Constantinople to remain updated on Hispanic affairs from Sicily up to Iberia.\textsuperscript{13} The Ottoman espionage network was in fact much wider than feared by de la Vega. The Turks raided Spanish ships to gain information on the New World\textsuperscript{14} and at the dawn of the seventeenth century, the Ottoman admiralty was drawing intelligence from Morisco settlers in North Africa, Spanish Jews residing all over the Mediterranean, European merchants living in Istanbul, and Barbary crews whose cosmopolitan composition allowed the collection of military inference from recruits originating from locations as distant as Northern Europe.\textsuperscript{15} With such an intricate intelligence network capable of providing information on a regional, continental, and global level, it was definitely within the Porte’s capacity to stay informed about a frontier archipelago south of Sicily. The Porte apparently never let Malta drift too far from its intelligence radar. Just over a decade after 1565, Sultan Amurat already had a scale model of the fortified city the Knights were building on Mount Sciberras,\textsuperscript{16} proof that, in the immediate post-siege era at least, the Turk still harboured ambitions to eliminate the Hospitalle nuisance at the source and spare the Ottoman half

\textsuperscript{9} For this information on Muslim territory, see Bartholomeo Dal Pozzo, \textit{Historia della S. Religione Militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta}, 2 vols (Verona, 1703 and Venice, 1715), ii, 535; 536; 592; 594-5; 645; and 667 respectively.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., ii, 523.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., i, 80-81.
\textsuperscript{12} On the Ottoman intelligence network in early modernity see Gürkan, \textit{passim}.
\textsuperscript{14} Felipe Fernández-Armesto, \textit{Civilizations} (London, Pan Macmillan, 2001), 494.
\textsuperscript{16} Dal Pozzo, i, 144.
of the Mediterranean a measure of military-related angst. Consistent Catholic aggression in the Levant potentially created defensive worries for the Porte comparable to the perceived hazards of Ottoman onsloughts in Christendom. If we are to believe Hospitaller sources, the sack of the island of Langò (Kos) by a Catholic squadron in 1604 fomented unrestrained rumours within Ottoman quarters of a massive enemy onslaught in the Levant.\textsuperscript{17} Can we speak of a Muslim Mediterranean gripped by a Catholic-phobia? Unless sources from the Ottoman side of the divide are also consulted, similar suppositions will never acquire veritable historical credentials.

Apart from knowledge on Muslim topography, recorded and memorized over decades and centuries, the Order of St John needed more immediate information on its enemy’s military movements and intentions which had to be updated as fast as pre-industrial information-delivery means would allow. The collection of intelligence could be systematic or fortuitous, as described earlier in this study, and could prove useful either for defensive or aggressive purposes. As regards defensive purposes, the Order needed to remain updated mostly on the sorties, size, position, and intended targets of the Ottoman fleets, since assaults by the Turk on the Maltese archipelago could never be discounted. Usually the alarm level of Hospitaller Malta and the coasts of Italy and Sicily was stepped up as soon as it was known that the Ottoman fleet had reached Navarino.\textsuperscript{18} From that point onwards, any Catholic coastal post in the central Mediterranean was a potential target. Scraps of intelligence were mingled with guesswork in an attempt to anticipate the targets of the enemy fleet in question,\textsuperscript{19} while inevitable preparations were undertaken. On these occasions, Catholic outposts within reach of the Ottoman fleet were a potential target and could feel threatened. Enemy armadas could change plans and targets while their mission was on course. Predicting the ultimate victim of an enemy fleet was, at best, an arduous exercise, and remained so even when the Ottoman threat started waning after the Treaty of Carlowitz in 1699. In the initial stages of the threat of 1708, Morea, Calabria, and Malta were all classified as possible targets.\textsuperscript{20} Hence the Order at times informed its intelligence correspondents to keep sending updates to Malta until the Ottoman fleet retreated to Constantinople to make sure that the peril had definitely

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 489-90.
\textsuperscript{18} In September 1609, for example, Malta was warned that a Turkish fleet heading to Navarino probably had Gozo in its sights. AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 286v, 2 September 1609. In June 1615, Malta and Sicily were alerted as soon as it was known that a 70-galley strong Turkish fleet had harboured in Navarino. AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Accarigi (Scicli), f. 293, 25 June 1615.
\textsuperscript{19} On the Catholic camp’s guesswork regarding possible Ottoman targets, see Braudel’s rendering of the months preceding the Ottoman siege of Malta of 1565. Fernand Braudel, The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II. Trans S. Reynolds, 2 vols (London, 1986), 1014-26.
\textsuperscript{20} AOM 265, f. 199v, 13 March 1708.
subsided. If intelligence had it that the Ottoman fleet was going to winter outside Istanbul, the Order’s informants were asked to keep updating Malta on its manoeuvres.

For these reasons, the Order needed the systematic transmission of military information to Malta and, apart from the occasional news on the enemy which arrived from Barbary, it had two principal intelligence-delivery routes on which it could rely. One route, as already mentioned in chapter three, passed through Venice, providing Malta with information from Constantinople, although news from the Ottoman capital could also reach Malta via the Zante-Messina route. It was usual for the Order to have anonymous informants in Constantinople, at times referred to with the generic terms ‘friends’, ‘trusted’ individuals or ‘very important’ persons. On occasions these informants sent information to Malta in crypted mail, usually via Venice or Messina, from where coded dispatches sent by Hospitaller undercover agents in the ‘Orient’ were delivered to Malta. Otherwise it could be the French Ambassador in the Porte who kept the Order updated on Ottoman intrigues. It was not unusual for the Order to exploit the services of foreign diplomatic personnel for the forwarding of its mail to remote places. The French Ambassador in Venice, for example, occasionally relayed mail from Hospitaller Malta to Constantinople.

The other Hospitaller intelligence-route linked Malta to Morea and its multitude of island-listening stations and coastal sites which contributed to keep Malta and Christendom abreast with the military projects devised by the Porte. In a magistral letter addressed to the Hospitaller ambassador in Rome dated April 1613, the Order’s trunk sources of information on the enemy are stated very clearly: they were the ships coming from the Levant and Barbary, but mostly dispatches sent by informers in Constantinople, Corfu, Zante, Otranto, ‘and in all maritime centres of Christendom’. These other ‘centres’ could also include places like Nauplia, whose intelligence-gathering relevance for Hospitaller Malta seems to have developed late and was

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21 For example: AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Giovanni Andrea Lipravoti (Corfu), f. 354, 8 October 1618 and AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Giovanni Andrea Lipravoti (Corfu), f. 370v, 21 October 1619. See also AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Francesco Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 405r, 31 August 1620.
22 AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 520, 1 November 1620.
23 For the Constantinople-Venice-Malta connection, see AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Malvicino (Venice), ff. 198v-199r, 25 June 1604 and AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), ff. 176-177, 10 July 1607.
24 For example: AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 150v, 27 April 1616.
26 Some examples: AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Malvicino (Venice), f. 189, 16 June 1603 and AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Malvicino (Venice), ff. 324v-325, 27 September 1604. In 1606, a certain Geronomo Perenda offered to send briefs to Order while residing in Constantinople and was ready to exchange correspondence written in cipher for greater caution: ‘e se per maggior cautela vi parà scrivere in modo che non siano intesi da altri, ne potrete mandare una cifra, come a voi gusterà…’. AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Geronimo Perenda (Naples), f. 236v, 18 July 1606.
28 AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), ff. 317v-318r, 27 June 1615.
29 Ibid., f. 140v, 22 March 1615.
30 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 189 r, 29 April 1613.
mainly operative through the Maltese consulate in the eighteenth century. In the magistral outgoing correspondence of the first two decades of the seventeenth century, in fact, Nauplia is hardly mentioned once as an important listening station. More information could be collected from lands in the vicinity of the centres referred to in Wignacourt’s letter. Agents, Hospitaller or otherwise, often had their own network of informants deployed in the surrounding territory where they were posted. Giorgio Latino, posted in Zante, had his man in Constantinople who briefed him regularly whenever he returned to the Greek island and occasionally he sent agents on one-off sounding missions to places like Modon. Apart from this, the above-mentioned letter of 1613 states that several coastal sources acted as intelligence-providers. However, it emerges clearly from Hospitaller documentation that, in the seventeenth century, the two principal posts in the Greek archipelago through which intelligence was channelled to Hospitaller Malta were Corfu and Zante. These Ionian islands were ideally placed on the crossroads of maritime trade between Venice, the Greek archipelago, and the Levant, and therefore could intercept news carried in and out of the Adriatic and from the Peloponnese.

It appears that up to the early seventeenth century, Hospitaller Malta did not have representatives of its own posted on these Ionian islands, although this is not easy to evince from seventeenth-century Hospitaller documentation which rarely defines unambiguously the exact administrative nature and posting of information-providers beyond Maltese shores. The Order of St John’s outgoing correspondence is priceless in permitting the reconstruction of Hospitaller Malta’s communication system, yet occasionally it can be misleading, for the wording of each letter not always gives a clear indication of the designation of the recipient. As for the early decades of the seventeenth century, for example, it is only very sporadically that the Order’s scribes indicated the locality of the post of the addressee at the top of each letter, thus clarifying where the letter was addressed to, and consequently providing indications regarding the

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33 AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 312r, 9 September 1618.
35 The volumes with the outgoing magistral correspondence usually have an initial index which provides indications of the posting of many agents, Hospitaller or otherwise, but with gaps and inconsistencies. See, for example AOM 1380 for the year 1601 and AOM 1399 for the year 1620. One of the earliest examples of seventeenth-century magistral outgoing correspondence where the location of the post is indicated next to the name of the addressee is a letter to Corfu dated 16 August 1602. AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Gio Andrea Lipravoti (Corfu), ff. 211v-212r, 16 August 1602.
designation of the post. This procedure started becoming more standardized by the eighteenth century.

**Consular Networks as Providers of Intelligence**

This difficulty in establishing the exact intelligence source from Hospitaller documentation is more pertinent when consulates were involved. The consuls of any nation were commercial agents whose prime task was to assist merchants of that same nation in the foreign location they were stationed in. Their posts, however, afforded them a privileged vantage point, allowing them to collect all sorts of data - political, commercial, military, and otherwise - from and about the territory they resided in, information which in turn they could relay to the parent nation or to other states with which they corresponded.\(^{36}\) Hospitaller documentation, especially for the pre-eighteenth century period, can be ambiguous in cases when the Order corresponded with consuls abroad, or simply referred to them in official letters. At times the location of the post is given while the addressee’s name is omitted, and it is up to the historian to verify, if possible, which consul of which nation is providing information. Thus, for example, we find a consul of Otranto briefing the Convent via Naples regarding the Turk,\(^{37}\) or relaying letters to Malta via the Hospitaller galley squadron;\(^{38}\) and consuls on Corfu and in Otranto updating the Order on the progress of the Christian forces in the Levant,\(^{39}\) without a clear indication whether these were actually the consuls of the Maltese or of some other nation in these localities. Dal Pozzo, on the other hand, describes the agents on Corfu and Zante which supplied the Order with information simply as correspondents, a definition which implies an exchange of information but which does not specify the nationality of the agents sending the letters or which state was subsidizing them on a regular basis.\(^{40}\)

In the great majority of cases, however, the Order’s outgoing correspondence does state the name of the addressee on the Greek islands which provided Malta with intelligence. Giovanni Andrea Lipravoti in Corfu, and Giovanni Leonardo Latino and Giorgio Latino in Zante, for example, were the recipients of several magistral letters throughout Alof de Wignaourt’s administration. However, it is hardly possible to find traces in Hospitaller documentation that - according to what emerges from Cristina E. Papakosta’s research - these were actually Spain’s

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37 AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocafal to Marullo (Naples), f. 95v, 2 June 1708.
38 AOM 1443, Cotoner to Cigala, f. 222v, 12 August 1668.
39 AOM 1453, Carafa to the Consuls in Corfu and Otranto, f. 157r, 3 September 1686.
consuls posted on the Greek islands. One very rare instance in early seventeenth-century Hospitaller documentation where the correspondent from Zante, for example, is actually defined as some sort of agent of the Spanish crown, is in a letter addressed to the Order’s receiver in Venice dated March 1609.

The duties of these consulates included also that of informing Christendom with ongoing affairs in Constantinople and the Ottoman world in general. It was quite normal, in fact, for consuls of western potentates posted in the Peloponnese and other Levantine stations to complement their commercial duties with that of espionage, and to relay west information about the Turk, as was typical of Venice, for example, which exploited this dual consular function to spy on anyone who crossed its path in the eastern half of the Mediterranean. As already hinted at, the Order’s documents do provide sporadic indications that the Order itself made use of Maltese consuls posted abroad to draw whatever information possible on Ottoman military intentions, but this is mostly valid for the eighteenth-century. By that time Hospitaller Malta’s overall communication network was more developed and the Order was in a position to collect intelligence regarding the Turk and Barbary forces through Malta’s own consular network, which was being extended in the Levant and other parts of the Mediterranean. Malta received intelligence and updates on Levantine shipping from the consulship of the Maltese in Zante, for example. More intelligence at various instances of the eighteenth century was received from the consuls of the Maltese in Corfu, Pantelleria, and Ragusa.

Yet, a lot of ground still needs to be covered regarding Malta’s early modern consular network before we can have a comprehensive picture of how the whole system worked, and before we can formulate an accurate assessment of its contribution to the island’s communication network in early modernity. Everything indicates that Malta’s overseas consular network was extensively widened throughout the eighteenth century, a process which probably started in the second half of the seventeenth century. In the early 1600s, we find that the Order appointed consuls for the

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41 Papakosta, see the tables in pages 308 and 312.
43 Papakosta, 306-07.
45 For Corfu: AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Console Verdizotti (Corfu), f. 69v, 25 April 1708. For Pantelleria: AOM 1465, Perellos y Rocaful to Carlo Ferreri (Pantelleria), f. 93v, 8 July 1704.
Maltese in Messina, Mazzara, Sciacca, Trapani, Syracuse, and Palermo, a sequence of assignments which indicates continuity with Malta’s tradition of consular appointments in Sicily dating back to the Middle Ages, but which tells us little else.  

**TABLE 5**

**Consuls of the Maltese in Sicily Appointed by the Order of St John in the Early Years of the Seventeenth Century**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE OF APPOINTMENT</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>CONSULAR POST</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 April 1602</td>
<td>Joanni Baptiste Mole</td>
<td>Messina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 December 1603</td>
<td>Bartholo de Marchesi</td>
<td>Mazara (del Vallo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 December 1603</td>
<td>Caloyro Brigata</td>
<td>Sciacca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 December 1604</td>
<td>Petro de Oca</td>
<td>Mazara (del Vallo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 August 1606</td>
<td>Andrea Cavaretto</td>
<td>Trapani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 August 1610</td>
<td>Mauro Saltalla</td>
<td>Syracuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 November 1610</td>
<td>Luciano Maida</td>
<td>Palermo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 August 1611</td>
<td>Albano Cilia</td>
<td>Syracuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 January 1614</td>
<td>Vito Capriata</td>
<td>Sciacca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 July 1616</td>
<td>Silvio Condulli</td>
<td>Syracuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 May 1620</td>
<td>Gio Vito Parisi</td>
<td>Trapani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 September 1621</td>
<td>Luciano Scarso</td>
<td>Syracuse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources, respectively: AOM 454, f. 259r; AOM 454, f. 324v; AOM 454, ff. 324v-325r; AOM 455, ff. 256v-257r; AOM 455, f. 296; AOM 457, f. 269r; AOM 457, f. 273r; AOM 457, f. 285r; AOM 458, f. 313v; AOM 459, f. 323v; AOM 460, f. 313r and AOM 1399, f. 221r; AOM 460, f. 342r.

Unless the sequential establishment of consular posts is recreated through the analysis of the existing *Liber Bullarum*, the magistral outgoing correspondence, and other Hospitaller documentation for the Order’s entire stay in Malta, we will never have a proper idea of how this official web of commercial contacts developed. A similar process would have to be concurrently supplemented with extensive soundings in foreign archives in the hope of unearthing systematic correspondence exchanges over extended periods of time between Malta and consuls of the Maltese stationed overseas. The recreation of patterns of systematic contacts is only possible through copious documentation. Anything less will impede us from drawing definite conclusions on the entire gamut of affairs and information-relay operations that these commercial agents were

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48 The Order apparently reinforced this tradition in the immediate years after its settlement on Malta: ‘Usava la Religione tenere in tutte le città maritime di Sicilia consule per difendere li vassalli e giudicare le cause’. AOM 415, f. 249, yrs 1531-1534.

49 See, for example, Tables 5 and 6.
involved in. Apart from some exceptions similar to the ones outlined above, these current gaps prevent us also from drawing solid conclusions on the kind of information that these consuls exchanged on a systematic basis with Malta’s government. The same argument is valid for the exchange of information which must have taken place - but which hitherto seems largely undocumented - between consuls of foreign nations posted in Malta and the Order. With this evidence as a base, everything indicates that for the early decades of the seventeenth century Malta’s intelligence service from the Levant was also aided by Spanish consuls or agents in listening stations like Zante and Corfu.

The Transmission of Intelligence to Malta

This intelligence trail across the Ionian to Malta was far from an efficient or punctual one. Hospitaller magistracies complained liberally about the delays with which updates from Zante and Corfu arrived to Malta,\(^{50}\) and how at times the information in question was outdated or would have been received earlier from alternative sources.\(^{51}\) Agents on these Greek islands at times tried to justify these delays, blaming them on the disruption of sea traffic caused by conflicts in the whereabouts of their posts.\(^{52}\) Whole months could go by outside the sailing season, in fact, without any news arriving to the Convent from Zante for example,\(^{53}\) an unbearable delay for Hospitaller Malta, especially considering Zante’s relevance for the relay of intelligence to Malta, notwithstanding the extenuating circumstances provided by weather disruptions. It was a frustration the Order had to live with and attempted to amend since its displacement from Rhodes.

As discussed earlier, the former Greek island-base of the Order was supremely placed to intercept knowledge on the Turk. With the relocation to Malta, the Order’s intelligence radar was stretched by hundreds of miles. Distance, the currents, and the winds could be unforgiving enemies of fresh news. Partial atonement for the problem was sought through detouring via intermediate delivery-stations such as Otranto and Messina, which at times could speed up dispatches.\(^{54}\) Delivery through Messina was encouraged by the Convent as this was considered essential for accelerating the final delivery-stage, very obviously because of the frequent and multiple connections along the Messina-Malta route, not least due to the option of dispatch to Malta via

\(^{50}\) For example; AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 204 r, 31 May 1616.

\(^{51}\) In December 1619, for example, the Order complained that news sent from Zante some weeks earlier ‘ci sono arrivati tanto tardi che per altre strade li havevamo ricevuti molti giorni avanti’. AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Pietro Latino (Zante), f. 489r, 27 December 1619.

\(^{52}\) AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Giovanni Andrea Lipravoti (Corfu), f. 102v, 30 March 1618.

\(^{53}\) AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 150v, 27 April 1616.

\(^{54}\) For example: AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 248, 22 July 1617. For the Zante-Otranto-Malta trail see, for example, AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Horazio Latino (Otranto), f. 466v, 29 September 1620, and for the Corfu-Otranto-Malta trail see Ibid., Wignacourt to Francesco Lipravoti (Corfu), f. 467r, 29 September 1620.
overland couriering to connect with the ferry service at Scicli.\textsuperscript{55} Information from Otranto was also delivered to Malta via Messina.\textsuperscript{56} Yet even the agents in Otranto had to deal with their fare share of complaints from disgruntled Hospitaller grand masters regarding excessive delivery-delays. At times letters from Otranto took over a month to make it to Malta, rendering the news-content of the delivery outdated,\textsuperscript{57} especially when mail was first delivered overland to Naples before it was shipped to Malta.\textsuperscript{58} It was the magistral office in Malta itself which, on more than one occasion, suggested that dispatches from Otranto and other eastern posts should avoid detours through Naples and be sent directly to Messina to hasten deliveries,\textsuperscript{59} although occasionally even the detour through Messina was not sufficient to reduce delays.\textsuperscript{60} The relay of mail either way through Naples often created problems for the Convent and in 1617 it was suggested that Rome-bound Hospitaller mail from Malta was to avoid stoppages in Naples not to slow down deliveries.\textsuperscript{61} On special occasions, when news from the Levant was required urgently by the Order, the agents in Otranto were exhorted to send news to Malta directly by sea, by-passing both Naples and Sicily.\textsuperscript{62}

It is very probable that, similarly to Corfu and Zante, Hospitaller Malta’s prime intelligence reference point in Otranto was not selected from within the Order’s ranks. For years in the early 1600s in fact, the Order’s correspondent from Otranto was Giovanni Pietro Lipravoti, a relative of Giovanni Andrea Lipravoti, Spanish consul in Corfu and prime correspondent to the Order from the Greek island regarding Ottoman matters.\textsuperscript{63} What emerges from the sources consulted is that the Lipravoti were a dynasty of agents stationed in different periods on important knots of the intelligence trail which supplied Christendom with information from the Eastern Mediterranean, and that Hospitaller Malta was one of the recipients which benefitted from their services. As the seventeenth century unfolded, we also find a Demitrio Lipravoti who replaced his uncle Giovanni Pietro Lipravoti as agent in Otranto when the latter died,\textsuperscript{64} and at a later stage Francesco Lipravoti, brother of Giovanni Andrea of Corfu, who occasionally relayed to Malta

\textsuperscript{55} For the Otranto-Messina-Scicli-Malta route, see AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 242r, 24 May 1615.
\textsuperscript{56} For example: AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 232r, 13 July 1617.
\textsuperscript{57} As happened in the autumn of 1619: ‘per l’avvenire si facci dilig[enz]a che ci arrivino più presto poi che quando sono tanto vecchi non ci servono à niente’. AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Francesco Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 427v, 13 November 1619.
\textsuperscript{58} AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Francesco Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 213, 11 May 1614.
\textsuperscript{59} AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Demetrio Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 616, 31 December 1613 and AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Horatio Guidano, f. 239r, 23 June 1616.
\textsuperscript{60} AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Francesco Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 213, 11 May 1614.
\textsuperscript{61} AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), ff. 37v -38r, 3 February 1617.
\textsuperscript{62} AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Fran[ces]co Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 93, 5 February 1615.
\textsuperscript{63} See Tables 3B and 4B. According to Hospitaller records, Giovanni Pietro (Otranto) was the uncle of Giovanni Andrea (Corfu). AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Giovanni Andrea Lipravoti (Corfu), f. 297, 10 October 1608.
\textsuperscript{64} AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Demetrio Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 539v, 9 September 1612 and AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Demetrio Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 616, 31 December 1613.
information sent from the Greek island-listening stations via the Apulian town.\textsuperscript{65} It was apparently normal practice to choose communication agents from within the same family. At one point in 1620 we find a Horatio Latino in Otranto relaying to Malta mail he had received from his nephew Giorgio Latino in Zante.\textsuperscript{66} On his turn, the latter Latino makes a reference to his father as an agent who fed intelligence to Malta from Zante in the early years of the century.\textsuperscript{67}

\textbf{TABLE 6}

\textbf{Some References to Maltese Consular Posts on the Continent that Emerge from Hospitaller Outgoing Correspondence of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE OF REFERENCE TO POST</th>
<th>NAME OF CONSUL</th>
<th>CONSULAR POST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 March 1649</td>
<td>Cesare Dogali</td>
<td>Genoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 June 1667</td>
<td>Scipione [E]scuro</td>
<td>Otranto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 July 1703</td>
<td>Gio Batta Noiret</td>
<td>Civitavecchia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 September 1703</td>
<td>Taulignan</td>
<td>Zante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 April 1704</td>
<td>Carlo Ferreri</td>
<td>Pantelleria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 June 1704</td>
<td>Antonio Homodei</td>
<td>Marsala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 December 1704</td>
<td>Lorenzo Olivieri</td>
<td>Palermo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 January 1705</td>
<td>Antonino Calandra</td>
<td>Messina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 July 1705</td>
<td>(?)</td>
<td>Brindisi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 April 1707</td>
<td>[Gio Batta] Ricca</td>
<td>Scoglitti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 June 1708</td>
<td>Giacomo Aurisicco</td>
<td>Naples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 November 1709</td>
<td>Gio Batta Aurelo</td>
<td>Nice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 June 1709</td>
<td>Pompeo Tieso</td>
<td>Syracuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 June 1709</td>
<td>Antonino Gaucci</td>
<td>Syracuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 May 1743</td>
<td>Girolamo Sciattino</td>
<td>Genoa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources, respectively: AOM 1427, f. 60; AOM 1443, f. 55v; AOM 1464, ff. 100v-101; AOM 1464, f. 129v; AOM 1465, f. 60; AOM 1465 ff. 74v-75r; AOM 1465, ff. 153v-154r; AOM 1466, f. 23v; AOM 1466, f. 107v; AOM 1468, f. 59v; AOM 1469, ff. 105v-106r; AOM 1470, f. 175r; AOM 1470, f. 74v; AOM 1470, f. 81r; AOM 1502, ff. 79v-80r.

Irrespective of the state which designated them, the Order’s informants in Otranto were much appreciated within the Order and could be handsomely remunerated for their services. In 1612, the agent stationed in the port, Giovanni Pietro Lipravoti, was granted a one-off payment of

\textsuperscript{65} For example: AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Fran[c]es[io] Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 371r, 21 October 1619.

\textsuperscript{66} AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Horazio Latino (Otranto), f. 466v, 29 September 1620.

\textsuperscript{67} AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 108, 31 March 1604. The presence of members of the Latino family in the information relay service from central Mediterranean and Levantine posts further weakens Petitjean’s hypothesis that Giorgio Latino was simply a pseudonym covering authorities in Zante. Petitjean, 403.
50 ducats from Malta to be effected via the Hospitaller receiver in Naples,\(^68\) probably a gesture of gratitude at a time when Giovanni Pietro was apparently suffering from ill health.\(^69\) Otranto was a listening station in its own terms, and its intelligence links could prove an alternative provider of information for the Order when news from Corfu or other Ionian sources dried out,\(^70\) although at times it could only replicate news which would have already arrived to the Convent via Corfu\(^71\) or Zante several days before.\(^72\) Otranto’s relevance to Hospitaller Malta and to Christendom in general was not solely due to the relaying of information from and to the Ionian islands.\(^73\) The Apulian town’s links with Cattaro, for instance, provided a connection with Istanbul through the Aegean which was an alternative to that via Venice.\(^74\) Otranto redistributed news from the eastern side of the Adriatic and the Levant to Rome and Venice,\(^75\) and Greek informants at the service of Spanish espionage used the port to send information to Naples about Ottoman shipyards and arsenals deployed in Constantinople, the Sea of Marmara, and Gallipoli.\(^76\) Positioned at the mouth of the Adriatic, Otranto was an important regrouping point for Hospitaller shipping, similarly to Trapani or Capo Passero in Sicily. Catholic fleets on anti-Muslim missions regrouped at Otranto to collect dispatches with instructions sent from the Holy See, and Hospitaller galleys out at sea connected with Rome and Malta via the port.\(^77\)

When pressed for fresh information on the Turk and updates from its habitual Ionian and Levantine sources were hard to come by, the Order had to reach out directly to collect intelligence by sending charter frigates from Malta to Barbary,\(^78\) Zante, Corfu, Ragusa, or other listening stations,\(^79\) hiring the services of boat-owners of any nationality available on the island at the time, from Spanish to Ragusan.\(^80\) When in 1645 news reached the Convent about preparations in the Porte’s dock’s which ultimately were to lead to the start of the War of Candia (1645-1669), a

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\(^68\) AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Abenante (Naples), ff. 109r, 26 March 1612.
\(^69\) AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Giovanni Pietro Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 109, 26 March 1612.
\(^70\) For example: AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Giovanni Andrea Lipravoti (Corfu), f. 297, 10 October 1608.
\(^71\) AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Giovanni Pietro Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 306, 30 August 1618 and Ibid., f. 354v, 8 October 1618.
\(^72\) AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Francesco Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 299v, 4 August 1619.
\(^73\) In the eighteenth century, the Venetian agent in Malta used Otranto to deliver his letters to Corfu. Mallia-Milanes (2008), 331.
\(^77\) Dal Pozzo, ii, 644, 638, and 641.
\(^78\) An example: AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Lo Porto (Scicli), ff. 290v-291r, 27 August 1617.
\(^79\) For Ragusa, see Dal Pozzo, i, 840.
\(^80\) AOM 1380, Letters patent by Wignacourt to Alonso Contreras, f. 282, 10 November 1601 and Ibid., to Francesco di Florio, f. 282r, 6 November 1601.
brigantino was sent to make soundings in Zante, Stanfadie, and Navarino, and another was sent to Valona, Santa Maura and Castel Tornese, on the westernmost point of the Peloponnese, opposite Zante. Direct frigates were also sent to Malta by the informers on Zante or Corfu, for example, when it was deemed that the information at their disposal could not wait for the habitual delivery via Southern Italy or Western Sicily, or particularly alarming contingencies demanded the immediate briefing of Malta as soon as agents in the Ionian had fresh news available. The hiring of frigates or other sea craft specifically for the direct delivery of information was particularly expensive and it was usually done when the sailing season was well on course and Ottoman fleets were already roaming the Eastern Mediterranean. The Zante-Messina crossing, for example, could cost 50 scudi and if a frigate or caicco from the Greek island were to deliver news directly to Malta, the dispatch could cost as much as 120 scudi, more than five times the annual salary of a barber on the Order’s galleys at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Otherwise, mail could be sent to Malta with the first vessel which stopped at Zante before continuing its course towards the central Mediterranean. Similar direct dispatches by sea at times were also sent to Valletta from Corfu. Agents, in fact, were instructed to dispatch these frigates only if the information at their disposal, usually concerning the whereabouts of the Turkish fleet, was absolutely confirmed. Despite these efforts and expenses, however, the Zante-Malta crossing could end up delivering news already two-weeks old. At times the Order sent vessels on reconnaissance missions right up to Istanbul, but they could take months in coming back. Such missions could prove useless if the sailing season was in its peak.

Another source of intelligence-collection could be the Order’s galleys. The route followed by the Hospitaller squadron from the Ionian round Morea was charted in the sixteenth century. Obviously the use of the Hospitaller galleys for reconnaissance and soundings was a routine procedure rather than an exceptional measure in times of red alert. However, if the galleys did manage to intercept information classified as important by the command in charge of the sortie, frigates with the news in question were dispatched to update Malta, either directly or via Southern Italy or Sicily, usually from Trapani, Palermo, and Messina. If the galleys’ mission happened to

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81 Dal Pozzo, ii, 107.
82 AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 300, 17 July 1614.
83 AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 359, 25 August 1616; AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 199v, 14 June 1617; AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 312r, 9 September 1618.
84 AOM 294, f. 121v.
85 AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), f. 263, 8 July 1619.
86 AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), f. 321r, 11 September 1618.
87 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 199v, 14 June 1617.
88 Ibid., f. 199v, 14 June 1617.
89 AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 248r, 24 May 1615.
91 Ibid.
be in the western basin of the Mediterranean, briefings to the Convent could be sent from ports like Marseilles or Genoa, places that is, from where dispatches were delivered with greater regularity. The instructions imparted to the galley squadrons from Malta prior to a mission remained substantially unchanged for decades on end throughout the Order’s stay on Malta. Copious documentation in which similar phrases were repeated ad nauseam in successive reports are testimony of a maritime tradition dictated by a war which dragged on for decades and centuries. Stopovers at Zante and Cerigo (Cythera) for the collection of information on the Ottoman fleet were the norm. In 1657, for example, with the War of Candia well on course, the squadron was instructed to sail to Crete if the stopovers at the Greek islands mentioned above proved fruitless in terms of intelligence-collection. However, as with the exchange of information with Sicily and other places, the Order was also flexible when it came to the itinerary to be followed by its galley-squadron and did not impose strict adherence to the instructions imparted at the onset of the maritime trips if the situation dictated otherwise. Consequently, galleys could end up plying whole stretches of the Dalmatian coast to make soundings on the enemy.

Alternative Sources of Information and Christendom’s Early Warning System

Venice and the listening stations in Morea supplied the Order with fairly regular - albeit not always punctual or hasty - updates regarding the enemy. But Malta’s perilous frontier existence imposed superior data-collection needs than those afforded by tried and tested routes. Any sort of information supplied from either basin of the Mediterranean about potential dangers or preys, whether sailing from the Levant, Barbary, or roaming other corners of the sea, was welcomed and diagnosed by the Order. These sources of information, combined with news deposited in Malta by, or extorted from, foreign ships which stopped over from different latitudes of the sea, as described in earlier chapters, kept Malta fairly up to date with the maritime trails, if not the intentions, of the enemy.

Malta’s intelligence network, in fact, formed part of a much more elaborate international early warning system within Christendom with which Catholic potentates circulated information gathered by their informants to alert their own forces and subjects, as well as fellow co-religionist states, on the menace created by the common enemy. All kinds of exposure to the enemy,

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92 AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Generale delle Galere Gattinara, f. 266, 21 July 1619.
93 Ibid., f. 179, 8 May 1619.
94 See, for example, AOM 1766, passim.
95 AOM 1766, ff. 400-403.
96 Dal Pozzo, ii, 648.
97 See, for example, Gürkan, passim.
whether on land or at sea, demanded fully operative defence structures and alarm mechanisms. On the Hungarian-Turkish frontier, deprived of large physical boundaries which could dissuade Turkish temptations of invasion, the Habsburgs kept garrisoned a network of fortified strongholds which also acted as an alert system against large-scale Ottoman offensives. Throughout the sixteenth century, considerable Spanish resources were spent on Mediterranean coastal defensive systems with the building of a series of watchtowers conceptually similar to the ones built in Malta in the late 1500s and 1600s, from which fires by night and smoke during daytime warned local militias and populations on threatening approaches from the sea. These strongholds formed part of an extensive vigilance network in the Spanish Mediterranean and indeed Christendom, where mutual collaboration was a necessary diplomatic annex for survival. Spanish Habsburg authorities in the Mediterranean alerted each other in instances of perceived common danger. In the summer of 1558, the Sicilian Viceroy warned Mallorca of a large Ottoman fleet which had passed the Straits of Messina and early in 1613, Sardinia received confirmation from Sicily of an imminent Ottoman attack.

Hospitaller Malta formed an integral part of this early warning system. Whether through its agents on the continent, the various consuls representing Maltese interests around the Mediterranean, or through the representatives, consulates, or authorities of other Catholic powers, the archipelago managed to receive a degree of supplementary intelligence. Information regarding the Turks could be sent to Malta from a Knight residing in Lecce (Apulia), Sardinian authorities warned Hospitaller shipping of Algerian squadrons plying the coasts of their island, the Order’s agent in Marseilles informed of Barbary vessels sailing along the coasts of Provence, and the Ragusan agent in Naples sent briefings regarding the manoeuvres of the Ottoman fleet. Briefings could arrive from anywhere in the Mediterranean, even from the sister island of Gozo. Inevitably geopolitics and distance imposed closer collaboration with Sicily, Naples, and Rome. Ottoman and other Muslim maritime approaches from Barbary towards the central Mediterranean

99 Casanovas Camps, 21-34; Couto, 304-5.
100 Ibid., 29.
102 Ibid., 29.
103 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Horatio Guidano (Lecce), f. 200r, 17 June 1617; Ibid., f. 250r, 22 July 1617.
104 AOM 1465, Perellos y Rocaful to Scarampi (Marsamuscetto), ff. 145v-146r, 22 November 1704.
105 AOM 1465, Perellos y Rocaful, to Baglio di [Lesa] (General of the Hospitaller Squadron), f. 65r, 10 May 1704.
106 AOM 1415, Anton de Paule to the Councillors and Rectors of the Republic of Ragusa, f. 37v, 17 March 1636.
107 See, for example, AOM 1464, Segre[ta]rio Cacherani to Gen[era]lle Vaini, f. 116v, 24 August 1703. In the potential crisis Malta was facing in 1708 due to a possible Ottoman onslaught (see chapter one), Gozo was specifically asked to alert Malta in case a suspect *bergantino* was sighted in Maltese waters. AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to the Prior di Messina e Luog[otenen]te Tancredi (Gozo), f. 132r, 5 August 1708.
108 For a clear statement of the Order’s wish to foster closer ties with Rome for mutual alerts, see AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Amb. Lomellino (Rome), ff. 262v-263, 5 October 1608.
were very likely to have Habsburg lands in their sights. Consequently the latter had the utmost interest in fostering mutual collaboration in the face of a common peril. Alerts on enemy sorties arrived to Malta from Messina and Palermo. Trapani was particularly well-positioned to inform on sorties from Barbary. The town’s location in the northwestern tip of Sicily was considered appropriate for the catchment of news from the western half of North Africa. When in September 1614 the Order commissioned a search to track two men who had been sent to Barbary on a sounding mission, the task was handed to the Hospitaller agent in Trapani, who occasionally could also be asked to update Malta on a daily basis on possible anti-Christian sorties from North Africa. Syracuse on the opposite side of Sicily was more likely to relay news from the Levantine coast of Africa or regarding Muslim activities in the eastern half of the Mediterranean. When it was sensed that the danger was more imminent, the agents and courier systems were discarded and warnings sent directly by sea, as in 1609, when the Viceroy of Naples sent a charter filuca to Malta to warn the Order of a possible sortie of the Ottoman fleet, in turn instigating the Order to send filucas on sounding missions to Corfu and Zante.

As already hinted at, Catholic states could also alert each other in cases of the perceived vulnerability and accessibility of potential preys or pronounced weaknesses in specific enemy strongholds in the Muslim half of the Mediterranean. In 1602, Mahometta in Barbary was rampaged by Hospitaller crews after reliable briefs on the military feasibility of such an undertaking convinced the Order that the Muslim stronghold was there for the taking. In March 1618, the Order received information from Spain via Palermo that a fleet of over twelve vessels had to leave Algiers at the end of the previous year to head for Constantinople, and the help of Hospitaller galleys was requested to intercept it.

**Warnings Against Plague**

This international alert mechanism was also adopted to warn against places or sea craft known or suspected to be hit by plague. The consequences of plague were so justifiably dreaded by any

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109 AOM 1389, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 357, 27 October 1610 and AOM 1381, Wignacourt to the Governor of Gozo, f. 244, 7 September 1602 respectively.
10 For an example of the Order’s agent in Trapani sending warning regarding corsairs, see AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Scipione di Ferro (Trapani), f. 211r, 2 September 1607.
11 AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Francesco Parisi (Trapani), f. 394v, 12 September 1614.
11 AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Francesco Parisi (Trapani), ff. 124v-125r, 15 March 1615.
13 In September 1608, for example, the Order’s agent in Syracuse warned of enemy sightings off the Apulian coast. AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Sortino (Syracuse), f. 280, 17 September 1608. For news regarding Barbary sent to the Convent from Syracuse, see also AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Syracuse), ff. 594v-595, 6 December 1613.
14 Dal Pozzo, i, 543.
15 Ibid., 543-4
16 Ibid., i, 461.
17 AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 80v, 9 March 1618.
industrial community, that even the suspicion of contagion could have paralytic effects on entire territories, and islands in particular. If effective contagion could spell sure death for entire portions of populations, the simple fear or rumour of plague could lead to isolation, and small islands with insufficient natural yields such as Hospitaller Malta were particularly vulnerable to such contingencies and understandably wary of their occurrence.118 The medical expertise and commitment which the Knights honed over centuries and which they successfully transposed to Malta was coupled with early modern secular tendencies in the western world where adversities started to be progressively fought through reason, science, and human endeavour, other than sheer hope in divine intervention. By the early modern period, one of the few truths that western states had managed to grasp regarding plague was that prevention, rather than tardy remedies, offered tangible possibilities of survival.

The Hospitaller Order of Saint John was undoubtedly fully in line with these secular approaches to fight plague. Under the Knights, Malta became infamous for its rigour in applying quarantine.119 A few days’ stay in the Lazaretto on the islet in Marsamuscetto could be a ‘boring sojourn’120 while waiting to obtain medical clearance, but it was very unlikely that an incoming vessel, Hospitaller or otherwise,121 was spared the tedium if known to be arriving from infected places or locations suspected of contagion. Quarantine procedures, however, had to be supplemented by updated information from as many parts of the Mediterranean as possible, and possibly beyond: information about the provenance of ships; about the origin and the route travelled by cargoes of merchandise or slaves before these were loaded on vessels;122 about infected places; about territories suspected of infection; about formerly-infected places which were deemed safe again,123 and about the encounters at sea, the routes travelled, and the stopovers effected by Hospitaller and other Catholic squadrons. The Order’s ships were not only instructed to avoid coasts known or suspected to be infected, but also fellow Catholic squadrons thought to be victims of plague or known to have frequented places hit by the contagion, especially in the Levant and Barbary.124 Plague-related news and warnings arrived to the Convent from all over the

118 For a general overview on plague, its origin and consequences in the pre-industrial era, and Hospitaller Malta’s struggle to avoid contagion, see Ivan Grech, ‘Dread the Grim Reaper: Early Warning Strategies as a Means of Plague Prevention. Hospitaller Malta’s Fight Against Contagion’, Journal of Maltese History, vol. 3, no. 2, Malta 2013, 9-27.
120 ‘nojosa dimora’. Dal Pozzo, ii, 626.
121 Dal Pozzo, ii, 626.
122 See, for example, Dal Pozzo, ii, 679. In 1619, two ships and their cargo of flax coming from Djerba had to be abandoned for fear that they originated from an infected place. AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 224, 17 June 1619.
123 Dal Pozzo, ii, 641 and 646.
124 AOM 1766, f. 445r. In 1687 the Hospitaller squadron, while in the Adriatic, was instructed to avoid contact with the Venetian navy and the Levant, where it was suspected that plague was raving. Dal Pozzo, ii, 645.
news regarding not only the plague barometer of the Inner Sea, but also cases of contagion well beyond the Mediterranean. In October 1617, the Senates of Syracuse and Palermo warned the Order about the state of the plague epidemic ravaging, among other places, in Flanders, a most pertinent piece of information for the Order considering the number of Flemish ships stopping at Malta and hired on a fairly regular basis by Hospitaller personnel to transport grain from Sicily and goods from Venice. The distance between Malta and Flanders was massive in pre-industrial times, infinitely longer than today and, at face value, long enough to reassure and safeguard the islanders and their governors from apparently implausible chances of infection from such remote areas of Europe. Mail from Flanders could take an average of two months to arrive to Malta. Yet, late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth century mutations in economic and commercial dynamics were bridging distances between extreme European polarities. Hospitaller Malta fits perfectly in the Braudelian paradigm of the entry of the northerners in the Mediterranean and the senatorial warnings from Palermo and Syracuse in 1617 are both a consequence and a testimony of this transitory maritime scenario.

_Gauging the Effectiveness of Intelligence Networks_

How effective was this intelligence network in safeguarding the survival of Hospitaller Malta? Were all the warnings of enemy sightings and military preparations truly responsible - fully or in part - for sparing the archipelago from the extreme consequences of another full-scale Ottoman onslaught in the post-siege era? How many potential Muslim landings similar to the one of 1614 were the islands spared purely as a result of timely alerts? And the entire decades free of plague epidemics which the islanders enjoyed under the Knights were also the culmination of constant international vigilance and mutual inter-state collaboration within Christendom, apart from the severe application of quarantine practices? However legitimate, these questions are practically impossible to answer with certainty in the great majority of cases, for the only possible proof of the efficacy of this information-transfer system, as with any precautionary measure, would be the comparative study with outcomes had the system itself not been operative.

Tangible evidence of the usefulness of intelligence-transfer practices can be found in instances when information was delivered and used for offensive military exercises, as in the case of Mahometta mentioned above, or when Hospitaller or Christian vessels were alerted to avoid

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125 For instances when Hospitaller Malta received warnings against plague, see Grech (2013), 22-3.
126 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to the Senate of Syracuse, f. 373r, 1 November 1617.
127 See chapter three.
128 See Table 8 in chapter six.
129 Braudel, 606-42.
routes and maritime expanses known at the time to be frequented by enemy ships. On other occasions, warnings could advise extra vigilance, as when the Hospitaller galleys were used to guard grain cargoes crossing the Sicilian channel when news of possible sorties from Barbary reached Malta. The implementation of precautionary measures following the timely delivery of information about enemy offensive preparations could also act as a deterrent and impose strategic reconsiderations in the enemy camp before an actual attack was launched. According to Dal Pozzo, letters which the Turks somehow managed to sneak from Licata in 1645 regarding the massive defensive operation which the Order was setting up in view of a possible full-scale Ottoman siege on Malta that same year, imposed a strategic rethink on the Porte’s side which ultimately chose to attempt the taking of Candia instead.

As regards plague-avoidance, an obvious conclusion that can be drawn from Hospitaller documentary material is that the Order of St John was a religious institution that harboured in its ethos healthy doses of secular realism which compelled it to adopt with consistency and rigour the precautionary tools available in pre-industrial times in the struggle against contagion. Failure to observe preventive measures could and did occasionally lead to contagion. One of the last plague epidemics to hit pre-industrial Western Europe was that of 1720, when a ship from the Levant bribed its way through quarantine in Marseilles. Knowledge of the territories hit by plague, coupled with the application of quarantine, helped to reduce the risk of infection. In 1664, passengers carried over to Malta by a tartana from Marseilles were held in quarantine since the Order had been informed of the possibility that the port of Toulon – an obvious and likely stopping point for ships sailing south from Marseilles - was infected by contagion. The Hospital, in fact, tried to stay updated on the policies adopted by port authorities around the Mediterranean in particular contingencies, especially regarding harbours lying on routes that crossed Malta more frequently. Sanitary clearance given in Genoa and Leghorn to ships sailing down the Tyrrhenian from the coast of Provence could prove reassuring enough for Malta’s health department when deciding whether to allow these ships in the island’s harbour. What Hospitaller Malta, just like any other pre-industrial State, was impotent to avoid was the increase in crammed urban living conditions, especially in the demographically prolific harbour areas which, in the cases when the epidemic did hit the island as in 1592-93 and 1676, were probably conducive to large death.

130 For example: AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Corsetto (Licata), ff. 110v-111r, 6 May 1607.
131 For example: AOM 1461, Perellos y Rocaful to Giacomo d’Escrenville (Generale delle Galere), f. 67, 26 September 1699.
132 Dal Pozzo, ii, 112.
134 AOM 1440, Nicholas Cotoner to Barone (Sicily), f. 91r, 12 November 1664.
135 AOM 259, f. 3r, July 1651.
tolls. Yet the debate on whether plague in the West was defeated or controlled through preventive measures, the natural evolution of the epidemiological cycle, or a combination of both, is still open in historiographical circles.

The fact that in a highly promiscuous Mediterranean, so susceptible to contagion, Hospitaller Malta, according to available records, suffered only two truly severe bouts of plague almost a century apart can be adopted as evidence of the Knight’s sanitary commitment, more so when the increase in regional interconnections, maritime traffic, and migratory fluxes involving all latitudes of the Middle Sea which Malta experienced with the advent of the same Knights is considered in the equation. Malta’s greater integration in early modern maritime traffic with the advent of the Order and the island’s cruel exposure to North Africa undoubtedly increased its vulnerability to epidemics and warranted greater caution and effort in preventing unhealthy contacts. However, whatever the outcome of the issue on the efficacy of early warning and intelligence systems, the influx of information to the archipelago, regarding both military and epidemiological foes, allowed Hospitaller Malta to turn from a passive recipient of knowledge to an active provider of news, especially by channeling intelligence through Habsburg possessions in the heart of the Mediterranean and through Rome, and carve out for itself the role of Christendom’s southernmost sentinel.

Malta: Christendom’s Southernmost Listening Station

If there was one commodity – cotton apart, perhaps – which early modern Malta could export with a certain degree of regularity to the rest of Christendom, it was information. The Order of St John had clear vested interests in divulging to Spanish Habsburg possessions, to Rome, and to other Catholic forces all the information deemed urgent and pertinent regarding the military enemy and plague which arrived to the island’s shores. The role of information-provider helped to enhance Hospitaller Malta’s relevance to Christendom. Through its listening service, Malta contributed to a coordinated vigilance in the face of a common threat and to the mutual alert

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137 Grech (2013).
138 Sardinia, for example, suffered twice as many bouts of plague during the same period. Corridore, 84.
139 Cassar(2000), passim; Brogini, passim.
141 See Grech (2006).
142 Cumin was also exported from Malta during the time of the Knights, but in progressive smaller quantities. By the end of the eighteenth century a good part of the archipelago’s cultivable land was being used to grow cotton to the detriment of other crops, including cumin. Cassar (2000), 31-2.
143 For an example of the Constantinople-Malta-Rome intelligence trail, see: AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 365v-366r, 10 August 1612.
system explained earlier, of which Malta was a beneficiary. This commitment was clearly stated in magistral diplomatic writings from time to time. In a letter to Palermo in 1606, Alof de Wignacourt stated that

It seems convenient that we inform the Viceroy (of Sicily) with all the news we receive from the Levant. ¹⁴⁴

The Order remained faithful to this commitment which apparently became an integral part of the institution’s ethos. Years later, in fact, Nicholas Cotoner stated that it was the Order’s ‘duty’ to inform the Sicilian authorities with occasional briefs regarding the state of health of Marseilles and Toulon,¹⁴⁵ for example, since ships leaving these French ports were very likely to stop somewhere in Sicily when sailing south. Close ties were sought with Messina, so vital for intercepting news from around the Mediterranean due to the considerable maritime traffic which crossed its path.¹⁴⁶ Crew members of ships arriving to Messina from North Africa were sounded on the state of health of Muslim cities in the south of the Mediterranean.¹⁴⁷ In the 1630s, the Order also liaised with Ragusa in the hope of acquiring updates on west-bound Ottoman sorties.¹⁴⁸ Similar relations for the specific exchange of intelligence were obviously also sought with Rome. In 1608, the Order’s ambassador in the Holy See, apart from renewing Malta’s pledge to update the Papacy on Ottoman affairs, was instructed to underline the island’s strategic relevance, and how important it was that intelligence gathered from international quarters was shared with the governors of the archipelago since it could result beneficial for Christendom that intelligence is channelled to Malta due to the very important location occupied by our fortresses and galleys.¹⁴⁹

Since Rome was the seat of multiple ambassadors and envoys from all over Christendom and beyond, apart from a centre for the collection and redistribution of news, it was the recipient of a constant flux of information both from Catholic and Muslim territories which could prove highly relevant to a frontier archipelago like Hospitaller Malta.¹⁵⁰ The Papacy already had a privileged communication channel with Hospitaller Malta through the exchange of information with the

¹⁴⁴ ‘parendoci conveniente che di tutti gli avvisi che ci capitano di Levante il Vicerè ne sia consapevole’. AOM 1385, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 240r, 18 July 1606. For another example of news of potential Muslim sorties being channelled to Palermo via Malta, see AOM 1387, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 225v-226r, 25 August 1608 and Dal Pozzo, i, 578-9.
¹⁴⁵ AOM 1440, Nicholas Cotoner to Barone (Sicily), f. 91r, 12 November 1664.
¹⁴⁶ ‘ci par conveniente per la reciproca intelligenza che si deve tenere in cotesta città’. AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), f. 243, 18 July 1606.
¹⁴⁷ See, for example, AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 476v, 15 October 1615.
¹⁴⁸ AOM 1415, Anton de Paule to the Councillors and Rectors of the Republic of Ragusa, f. 37v, 17 March 1636.
¹⁴⁹ ‘gia che puo risultare in beneficio della Christianità che ci si dieno per l’importantissimo luogo nel quale sono nostre fortezze e galere’. AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Amb. Lomellino (Rome), ff. 262v-263, 5 October 1608.
resident inquisitors on the island, but the maintenance of official contacts with the Order enabled Rome to benefit from the much wider and more resourceful communication network on which the Knights could count on. On its part, the Order kept its promise and alerted Rome whenever it deemed necessary regarding Ottoman plans, as in the summer of 1617, for example, when Malta warned the Holy See of the Turk’s apparent intentions to assault the papal coasts on the Adriatic. Rome was appreciative of these vigilance courtesies and periodically exhorted the island’s authorities to persist in their service.

It was in the Order’s interest that successful Muslim raids in the central Mediterranean, and particularly Sicily and Southern Italy, were limited to a minimum, as much as it was humanly possible at least, and that preparations were implemented in time in case of possible or unavoidable onslaughts on nearby coasts. Although most of the Muslim raids on Catholic shores were hit and run affairs, undertaken for pillage purposes and to grab booty, human and otherwise, the Order could ill-afford the possibility of enemy strongholds being established on nearby Catholic shores, within easy reach of Malta. Apart from that, the possibility that Muslim marauders could reach, attack, and damage Hospitaller property on the continent could never be discounted. Hospitaller documentation of 1611 recounts how Muslim shipping raided the Commandery of Sant’Apollinare di Montebello (Priory of Pisa), looting cylos and carrying with them grain and wine. The ‘Turks’ had a reputation for rampage which they periodically nurtured. When in 1620 they took Manfredonia in Apulia, they carried with them even the iron grids protecting the castle’s windows. The Order was already weary of the damage inflicted from time to time on its continental property by invasive Catholic troops and was only too willing to contribute to avoid further damage on its estates within reach of Muslim amphibious attacks.

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151 See for example, Paolo Piccolomini, ‘Corrispondenza tra la Corte di Roma e l’Inquisitore di Malta durante la guerra di Candia (1645-69)’, Archivio Storico Italiano, xli (1908), 45-127. For the Maltese Inquisitor as a ‘maritime observatory’ for the Holy See during the War of Candia, see also Petitjean, 400-6.
152 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Prior and Amb. Gattinara (Rome), ff. 259v-260r, 30 July 1617.
154 AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Gaetani (Florence), ff. 407v-408r, 14 November 1611.
155 AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Balio e Generale Gattinara, ff. 403v-404, 31 August 1620.
TABLE 7

Malta as Provider of Intelligence to Christendom during Alof de Wignacourt’s Administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR OF WARNING</th>
<th>PLACE INFORMED OR ALERTED</th>
<th>DOCUMENTARY SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1603</td>
<td>Naples</td>
<td>AOM 1382, f. 207r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1603</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>AOM 1382, f. 207r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1603</td>
<td>Rome, Palermo, Naples</td>
<td>AOM 1382, ff. 214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1603</td>
<td>Gozo</td>
<td>AOM 1382, f. 264r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1604</td>
<td>Palermo, Scicli, Licata, Messina &amp; the southern coast of Sicily</td>
<td>AOM 1383, f. 135; 135v-136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1605</td>
<td>Scicli and Southern Sicily</td>
<td>AOM 1384, ff. 155v-156r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1606</td>
<td>Palermo, Messina, Syracuse</td>
<td>AOM 1385, f.199r; 201v-202r; f.230; f.240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1606</td>
<td>Messina</td>
<td>AOM 1385, f. 243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1607</td>
<td>Scicli, Licata, Palermo, Messina</td>
<td>AOM 1386, f.110v-112; f.160r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1608</td>
<td>Scicli, Palermo</td>
<td>AOM 1387, f. 28r; 225v-226r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1609</td>
<td>Naples</td>
<td>AOM 1388, f. 129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1609</td>
<td>Palermo</td>
<td>AOM 1388, ff.249v-250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1609</td>
<td>Naples, Rome</td>
<td>AOM 1388, f. 137-138r; ff.266-267r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1609</td>
<td>Messina, Palermo, Naples</td>
<td>AOM 1388, f. 286v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1609</td>
<td>Palermo</td>
<td>AOM 1388, f.287v-288r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1610</td>
<td>Palermo</td>
<td>AOM 1389, ff.71v-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1610</td>
<td>Scicli, Syracuse, Messina</td>
<td>AOM 1389, f.338v-339v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1612</td>
<td>Palermo</td>
<td>AOM 1391, f. 459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1613</td>
<td>Palermo, Trapani</td>
<td>AOM 1392, ff. 170v-171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1614</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>AOM 1393, f. 87r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1614</td>
<td>Palermo</td>
<td>AOM 1393, f. 125v-126r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1614</td>
<td>Palermo</td>
<td>AOM 1393, f.219r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1614</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>AOM1393A, f.397v-398r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1615</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>AOM 1394, f. 148v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1615</td>
<td>Rome, Palermo, Naples</td>
<td>AOM 1394, f. 248r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1615</td>
<td>Palermo, Messina, Syracuse, Southern Sicilian coast</td>
<td>AOM 1394, f. 293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1615</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>AOM 1394, f.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1615</td>
<td>Messina</td>
<td>AOM 1394, f. 377v-378r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1616</td>
<td>Palermo, Naples, Rome</td>
<td>AOM 1395, ff. 185v; 193-195r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1617</td>
<td>Palermo, Syracuse, Pozzallo</td>
<td>AOM 1396, f. 281v-282r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1617</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>AOM 1396, f.259v-260r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1617</td>
<td>Naples</td>
<td>AOM 1396, f.247r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1618</td>
<td>Palermo, Naples, Rome</td>
<td>AOM 1397, f.154v; 155r; 157v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1619</td>
<td>Palermo, Messina</td>
<td>AOM 1398, f.264v-265r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1620</td>
<td>Palermo</td>
<td>AOM 1399, f. 360v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1620</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>AOM 1399, f. 379</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first reference in twentieth-century historiography to Malta’s role as ‘sentinel’ is probably that of Paolo Piccolomini. The author does not speak enthusiastically of Hospitaller Malta’s performance in its self-assumed role of Catholic frontier vigilante, although the wording he uses seems to suggest that he is referring more to the island’s patrol and corsairing activity,
rather than its role as an anti-Muslim alerter to the rest of Christendom.\textsuperscript{157} His scepticism perhaps stems from the fact that he was consulting documents from the Inquisitor’s archive, not the most objective sources when assessing the Order’s operations in any field. The unflattering image that Piccolomini carves out from these documents is that of a dissolute Order which lacked discipline throughout its ranks and whose Council sessions were a noisy romp led by a decrepit Grand Master Lascaris Castellar prone to bouts of rage.\textsuperscript{158} Here again, regardless of Piccolomini’s allusions, it is practically impossible to arrive at definite conclusions on the efficiency of these warning systems. Warnings could go unheeded, be unfounded, or arrive late, or not frequently enough. On other occasions, even when alerts regarding possible Turkish attacks on Malta were reliable and did arrive on time, they helped the archipelago to prepare itself but could not spare it from ruinous landings, as in the case of July 1614. In May of that year, the Order was already sounding Sicily to stock Malta’s granaries following rumours of a Turkish attack on the island which took place the following July.\textsuperscript{159} One could easily argue, on the other hand, that objectivity can hardly be expected from the official documentation of the governors running this alert network. What the Order’s documents do, however, is allow the historian to illustrate the mechanism when it was in operative mode.

### Malta’s Early Warning System at Work

The first preoccupation for the administrators of an archipelago when faced with a potential military menace was mutual alert between the sister islands to ensure the timely implementation of precautionary measures throughout the entire domain. As seen above, warnings could occasionally arrive from Gozo, but the responsibility of safeguarding the entire archipelago fell on the Convent. Gozo’s strategic fragility - a result of its smallness, limited population and garrisoning, and short, yet decisive detachment from Malta – was a matter of constant concern for the Order. Malta could prove intimidating even for sizeable fleets which drifted close to the archipelago, but Gozo was easier to bully, creating added liability for the Order which had to spend surplus energies in vigilance to warn and safeguard the more vulnerable of its islands.\textsuperscript{160} A small enemy fleet, just five- or six-ships strong, could be audacious enough to attempt repeated landings on Gozo with ambitions to take the guard, as happened in the summer of 1607,\textsuperscript{161} further proof that Malta’s sister

\textsuperscript{157} ‘ora debbo aggiungere che dalla corrispondenza degli inquisitori emergono altresì fatti tali da permettere almeno il dubbio se l’Ordine fosse pari alla sua missione di sentinella avanzata della Cristianità’. Piccolomini, 60.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{159} AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 198 v-199r, 11 May 1614.
\textsuperscript{160} For an example of Gozo being deemed as a possible target, see AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Governor Rossermini (Gozo), f. 264r, 21 August 1603.
\textsuperscript{161} AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), Ventimiglia (Messina), and Settimo (Syracuse), f. 160r, 26 June 1607.
island was considered a comparatively easy prey by the enemy. If, on the other hand, it was deemed that a particular threat could have a regional reach, the next obvious place that the Order had to alert was Southern Sicily.

If Malta received news of Muslim fleets that had intentions of roaming Maltese waters, and the channel in particular, warnings were sent to Scicli with direct frigates. Apart from being Hospitaller Malta’s gateway to the rest of Christendom, the Sicilian town was also a military centre which controlled the southern county of Modica. The aim was to alert the whole stretch of Southern Sicily and any Catholic vessels which happened to roam in the whereabouts, especially if it was known that the danger was already close by. In such cases, Hospitaller agents stationed along the southern coast of the Italian island were immediately notified and instructed to use their contacts in order to alert the entire coast. In 1604, a frigate from Barbary warned of the fitting of thirteen vessels in nearby Bizerte in Tunisia, lying just 150 miles from Marsala in the northwestern tip of Sicily, prompting the Order to send warnings to its agents in Scicli and Licata. In similar cases, the lack of precise information on the targets of the enemy created uncertainty within Hospitaller ranks, inducing the Order to study all eventualities, which could consist of a raid on Gozo or Malta, an attack on Hospitaller vessels or the interception of Malta-bound cargoes crossing the channel, or an assault on Sicilian shores.

Thus in the case of 1604, similarly to other instances in Hospitaller Malta’s history, the courier system used to deliver mail via Scicli was activated to send warning dispatches to the Habsburg authorities in Palermo and Messina. Attempts were also made, via a courier from Scicli and the frigate of Padron Vincenzo, to intercept the Hospitaller galleys which three days before the alert had left for Trapani to escort wheat vessels. The Order’s dispatches to its squadron carried instructions not to load too much wheat from Sicilian grain cylos which could slow down the crossing in case the ships were intercepted by Murat Raysi’s sortie from Bizerte. The frigate was to remain at the service of the galleys in case these needed to send urgent messages to Malta.

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163 ‘per maggior sicurtà et avvertenza delli vasselli che hanno a navigare per questi mari’. AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), ff. 135v-136r, 17 April 1604. See also AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 28r, 10 January 1608.
164 AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), ff. 135v-136r, 17 April 1604.
165 Ibid., Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), f. 135, 17 April 1604.
166 Ibid., f. 135, 17 April 1604.
167 Ibid., f. 135, 17 April 1604 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), f. 135, 17 April 1604.
168 Ibid., Wignacourt to Cambiano (Generale delle Galere), f. 136, 17 April 1604.
169 Ibid., f. 136, 17 April 1604. See also AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 110v, 6 May 1607; Ibid., Wignacourt to Corsetto (Licata), ff. 110v-111r, 6 May 1607; Ibid., Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo),
The reach of the alerts handed out from Malta depended on the level of the threat as perceived by the Order. A few pirate ships caught cruising through the Malta-Sicily channel could prompt the Convent to send warnings to Palermo, Messina, and Syracuse, usually via Scicli. The warnings could be addressed to the respective authorities in Sicily or to ships which were to carry provisions to Malta from Sicilian ports so that they delay their crossing until the peril subsided or at least adopt extra caution. But when deemed very serious, news was also transmitted to Naples, and Rome, as in 1603, when a French ship from Constantinople informed the Order of a potential Muslim sortie numbering around forty ships; or in May 1641, when rumours from Tunis that a sizeable fleet was to leave Bizerte having Gozo as a possible target prompted the Convent to warn Naples as well as Palermo. Through this system, news that Hospitaller Malta received from Constantinople, from listening stations in the Greek archipelago, from occasional ships stopping over from the Levant and other parts of the Mediterranean, and from charter vessels sent to make soundings in the Muslim half of the sea was passed on to Christendom via Sicily and Italy. This information-relay service that Hospitaller Malta rendered to Christendom, and the need of reliable information for the safety of the archipelago, imposed on the Order’s hierarchy the rigorous analysis of the intelligence data delivered to the Convent. It was imperative that news transferred to Christendom from Malta was as reliable as possible.

**The Verification of News**

Hospitaller documentation reveals the prominence allowed to the verification of information in the Order’s agenda. Centuries of warfare and manoeuvring through the quagmires of international
conflict and diplomacy had rendered the Order a world-weary institution, anything but gullible and perfectly conscious of the unreliability of human nature, and of the potential traps to be avoided when dealing with friend and foe alike. Very little was accepted at face value when processing information, and verification was mandatory in the absence of absolute certainty. Inquiries and reports were commissioned by the Order to authenticate the credentials of a foreign creditor, verify robbery claims directed against a Muslim, or monitor the habits of a licentious knight, with Hospitaller detectives occasionally sent out in incognito to collect evidence on site and provide the Convent with first-hand accounts. Information, especially when transmitted orally, could arrive at its final destination battered and modified after enduring the travails of pre-industrial delivery. Towards the end of March 1605, the Convent still wanted to confirm the death of Pope Clement VIII despite having received the news from different sources. Apart from being subjected to alterations during its transmission, information could be casually or willfully corrupted at the source. The spread of rumours, such an irresistible temptation for human nature, was a favourite courtly pastime in the time of the Knights, just as in any society since the birth of human agglomerations. Murals of Minoan Crete show members of the elite whiling time away gossiping frivolously. Rumours caught within the Order’s radar could have been artificially fabricated by the enemy to create logistical diversions in an attempt to conceal effective military strategies. In 1635, it was discovered that rumours spread throughout the Mediterranean of an imminent Ottoman attack on Malta had apparently been fabricated by the Porte whose real aim was to attack the Persians. The consequences of rumours could be unpleasant for the Order, both on a reputational and practical level, since its very existence and that of its domain depended on the maintenance of international connections. The Order was very sensitive to safeguarding its repute within Christendom. Knights could be expelled for misconduct, but little could be done to restrain rumours orchestrated to undermine the reputation of the institution in European courts, as in 1640, for example, when a Discalced Carmelite was reported to be fomenting a defamation campaign in Rome aimed against Grand Master Lascaris Castellar.

\[177\] For example: in 1706 the Order was trying to settle a claim of a failed reimbursement of credit in Apulia put forward by a certain Giorgio Laitano; in 1605 the accusations of theft addressed against Ali Mustafa of Aleppo were being analysed while the accused was being held in custody; and in 1612, commissioners were sent undercover to Catanzaro in Southern Italy to spy on the Knight Antonino Cattaneo, rumoured to be living in sin, prior to a decision on whether to extradite him to Malta or not. See respectively: AOM 1467, Wignacourt to Commander Fran[ces]co di Capua, f. 129, 2 October 1706; AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Prior Muleti, f. 63v, 19 February 1605; AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Luogotenente Ponte, f. 66v, 17 February 1612.

\[178\] AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Amb. Mendes (Rome), f. 89r, 23 March 1605.

\[179\] Fernández-Armesto, 346.

\[180\] Dal Pozzo, i, 832.

\[181\] For example: AOM 1443, Nicholas Cotoner to Amb. Verospi (Rome), ff. 251v-252r, 4 November 1668.

\[182\] AOM 1419, Lascaris Castellar to Padre Generale de Carmelitani Scalzi, ff. 163v-164r, 5 November 1640.
Whoever was on the receiving end of the spread of misconceptions or unjustified phobias, hardly had any options to contain the damage. Rumours, in fact, could have tangible repercussions on the economy of states or territories, on their military agendas, and on the psyche of entire populations when the latter perceived that their security was threatened. Not even Spain could subdue collective frenzies following occasional rumours of imminent Ottoman invasions. When Hospitaller Malta, just like any other state, ended up a victim of similar situations, it could only try to remedy when the news was already in circulation. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Order was trying to convince the English envoy in Genoa that allegations regarding the ill-treatment inflicted on English and Dutch vessels in Maltese ports were completely unfounded. To corroborate its claims, the Order dispatched to the Ligurian port a report on Malta’s port activity drafted by the English consul on the island.

The most malign and dreaded of all distortions, however, regarded plague. The nightmare of isolation was never so real for Hospitaller Malta as when news that the island was hit by plague spread in other parts of the Mediterranean. The mere possibility of contagion in Malta instilled enough fear in nearby states to induce them to implement preventive measures even before the authenticity of the information was confirmed. Usually contacts with nearby Sicily were the first casualty in such situations, cutting the most vital lifeline of Hospitaller Malta, as happened in 1676. But similar fears regarding Malta’s sanitary situation could have regional repercussions. In 1767, ships suspended their trips to the Regno after news from Rome that Malta was infected by plague had made it to Southern Italy. Normal traffic was only resumed once it was proved that the news was false.

On its part, the Order was particularly cautious when evaluating news about the enemy. The Hospitallers knew all too well from their very own history and contemporary experience how difficult it was to collect precise intelligence. Fears Harbourd by Grand Master Pierre d’Aubusson (1476-1503) of Turkish attacks on St Peter (Bodrum), Kos, or Rhodes in 1477 only materialized three years later with the siege of 1480. When in 1687 a Hospitaller contingent assaulted Valona, they discovered it was much better defended than previously imagined. As explained earlier, it was very easy for antagonists to get it wrong about the size, whereabouts, chartered routes, and intentions of enemy armies and fleets. Data from different sources could be discordant.

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183 See, for example, Couto, 305.
184 Casanovas Camps, 31-2.
185 AOM 1464, Perellos y Rocafull to Baglio Spinola (Genoa), f. 45v, 28 April 1703 and f. 46r, 28 April 1703.
187 Ibid.
188 Mallia-Milanes (2008), 442.
190 Dal Pozzo, ii, 638.
In 1606, the Convent received news from Otranto and Messina that the size of a Turkish fleet roaming the Mediterranean was only a third of what had originally been rumoured from Barbary,\textsuperscript{191} and in the summer of 1617, a Turkish fleet was reported to be over 72 vessels from Palermo, but less than fifty vessels from Messina and other places.\textsuperscript{192}

Updates from the Levant on the sorties of Ottoman fleets had to be authenticated with news from crucial cross-roads like Messina.\textsuperscript{193} Whether faulty or not, similar intelligence conditioned the Order’s strategy. The military situation or threat in question had to be weighed and decisions taken accordingly and in haste, sometimes before the exact enemy logistics were known. The Order had to decide whether to implement precautionary measures on both of its islands or just Gozo; whether to summon knights from its continental priories; whether to alert its galley-squadron if it was out on a mission, or send it out to confront the enemy fleet if it was known that the latter was small and beatable; and, if need be, whether to alert Palermo and Messina or just Southern Sicily, or whether to upstage the alert and warn Naples and Rome also. With so many uncertainties to be evaluated and so much at stake in case poor judgment prevailed, the Order’s hierarchy had no option other than blend extreme caution with scepticism, while exploiting its information network to try and arrive at the truth. The Order found it difficult to believe, for example, that fifty enemy vessels crossing from Prevesa to Calabria could only have the Lipari islands as their ultimate target and not Gozo.\textsuperscript{194}

Even though similar news originating from different locations could be confusing, the Order still encouraged its agents to source intelligence from as many different places as possible.\textsuperscript{195} This allowed verifications and updates to be carried out, in the hope of formulating a clearer picture of the situation being dealt with. It was much more reassuring for the Order when information was confirmed from different sources, especially if these were wide apart and possibly allowing cross-checks between data deriving from either ideological divide of the sea, for this practically guaranteed the authentication of the information delivered beyond any reasonable doubt. News from Algiers that reached Malta via Tunis, for example, could end up being

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\textsuperscript{191} AOM 1385, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 201v-202r, 30 June 1606.  
\textsuperscript{192} AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), ff. 291v-292, 28 August 1617.  
\textsuperscript{193} For example: AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Prior La Rocca, f. 287r, 2 September 1609; Ibid., Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 286v, 2 September 1609, and Dal Pozzo, i, 840.  
\textsuperscript{194} On this particular occasion, in fact, Gozo was warned to remain vigilant and the frigate of Padron Vincenzo was to remain stationed in Scicli to update Malta about news of the whereabouts of the Turkish fleet obtained via Syracuse and Scicli. AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Governor Rossermini (Gozo), f. 221v, 27 August 1602 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Zumbo (Syracuse) and Sollima (Scicli), f. 222, 27 August 1602.  
\textsuperscript{195} In 1708, the Order’s receiver in Venice was instructed to collect and send news regarding the latest rumour of a possible Ottoman sortie from different places, not just Venice: ‘ci preme aver da più luoghi riscontro di quell che passa …’, and the receiver in Naples was instructed to send news ‘per tutte le vie più spedite potendo da tutte le notitie ricavarsi cognition che servono di regola’. See AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Marullo (Naples), f. 59v, 6 April 1708 and Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to Marino (Venice), f. 59, 6 April 1708 and Ibid., Perellos y Rocaful to Marullo (Naples), f. 59v, 6 April 1708 respectively.
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confirmed from Genoa and Marseilles, and during the War of Candia news from the Levant could be confirmed by news-sheets from Genoa.

The need of dependable intelligence at all times implied that the Order had to rely on ‘trustworthy’ informers, as explained earlier, especially in Constantinople, from where sounder and fresher updates regarding imminent Turkish sorties could be obtained. The supposed reliability of these individuals was often flaunted by the Order when transmitting fresh news or confirmation of earlier data to Christendom. Yet, Dal Pozzo comments how caution had to be adopted even when processing such intelligence from Istanbul due to possible betrayals of the ‘enemy within’, a possible allusion to spies within Catholic, if not Hospitaller, ranks at the service of the Porte, which could result in deceptive information being sent to the Convent. Dejanirah Couto denounces, for example, the dubious reliability of the copious flow of information delivered to Christendom through the avvisi di Constantinopoli. Reliability, in fact, was hard to come by when dealing with informers at any level. Venetian authorities, for example, were notoriously scrupulous in dissecting the dependability of their sources. The Order, on its part, admonished sailors frequenting the Maltese channel who capriciously fed false information to Hospitaller personnel about the enemy fleet. This said, however, the Order still declared its preference to Hospitaller, rather than lay informers. This was clearly stated in Hospitaller magistral documentation in the second decade of the seventeenth century, for example, when a certain Horatio Guidano, a Knight who occupied some unspecified post within Spanish ranks, was appointed to keep the Order updated on the Turk by sending information to the Convent via Naples and Messina.

197 AOM 1425, Lascaris Castellar to Giorgio Latino, f. 26, 18 March 1647.
198 For example: ‘ci sono stati rinfrescati di poi per via di Constantinopoli da persona degna di fede’, AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Amb. Lomellino (Rome), ff. 137v-138r, 10 April 1609. In 1612, when commenting updates from Constantinople transmitted to Rome via Malta, it was said that the information was sent ‘con lettere molto fresche da persona di qualità et fedelissima’, which was usual to send information ‘del quale non dubitiamo (…) che non sieno veri et sicurissimi’. AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 341, 31 July 1612.
199 Dal Pozzo, i, 840.
200 Couto, 303.
202 ‘havendo noi (…) fatto sapere à questi marinari si daranno più nuova falsa d’armata et di capriccio loro che gli faremo castigare severisсимamente’. AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Lo Porto (Scicli), f. 296r, 30 August 1618.
203 AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Horatio Guidano, ff. 414v-415r, 3 September 1615.
204 Ibid., ff. 414v-415r, 3 September 1615 and Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), f. 126, 8 April 1616. The relay of information by this informer through Naples was eventually sidelined due to usual delays encountered in the centre of Campania. AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Horatio Guidano, f. 239r, 23 June 1616. In 1617 we find Guidano providing the Convent with information via Lecce in Apulia. See above.
The collection of intelligence from these various sources allowed the Order to obtain information about potential threats aimed at Malta or fellow Catholic territories in the heart of the Mediterranean. But the gradual social, cultural, and demographic metamorphosis which Malta of the Knights savoured through the early modern decades following 1530 had strengthened and widened the island’s network of interconnections with Latin Christendom and beyond, and consequently amplified the breadth of international affairs which the Hospitaller and Maltese elites found pertinent to their existence. The ruling class of Hospitaller Malta wanted to know what was happening around the known world of its times.

**The Flux of International News to Hospitaller Malta**

The loss of Rhodes concealed long-term benefits for the Order which the itinerant fighting brethren were very obviously unable to appreciate in the immediate years following the tragedy of 1522. The nostalgia for their beloved Greek island, the eight years of wandering which frustrated visions of lengthy settlements and long-term structural planning, and the heavy heart with which they ultimately settled on Malta blurred any prospect of improvement for the Hospitallers’ existence inherent in the geographical relocation to their new island-base. Vicinity to Sicily not only meant a wider range of potentially more accessible provisions and closer Habsburg and Latin allies in case of need, it also implied a more immediate contact with Italian and continental societies. If, on the one hand, the Order’s displacement west resulted in greater delays in the transmission of intelligence from the Levant, on the other hand it shortened the delivery times and the exchange of information with the rest of the continent in an age when the dissemination of political, military, commercial, and factual information on a wide scale was experiencing an unprecedented surge. By the sixteenth century Italy, emerged as the intellectual centre and the prime market for the collection and diffusion of information in Western Europe, only to be followed by France, Germany, Flanders, and England, as the early modern age unfolded.

The circulation of news at an international level was also fomented by the large-scale military confrontations which dragged on for years. Christendom’s struggle with the Turk, the war in Flanders, the Civil Wars in England, and the Thirty Years’ War, provided copious journalistic fodder. Proximity to the Italian peninsula allowed quicker access to this information on a more regular basis. The dissemination of printing presses, the growth of correspondence networks, and the increased circulation of gazettes and news-sheets, both handwritten and printed, were simultaneously products and perpetrators of what Giorgio Spini calls the birth of the Europe of

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205 Cassar(2000), *passim.*
public opinion, particularly from the seventeenth century onwards. Information about matters directly or indirectly pertinent to the public good started to be progressively demanded, sought, and assimilated not only by the learned few who constituted the ‘republic of letters’, but also by a wider public, as substantial illiteracy in different strata of society was partially defeated through public readings.

Newspapers, in fact, were an offshoot of the *avvisi* which started to circulate with greater frequency and regularity in Europe from the late sixteenth century. The content of these *avvisi*, either handwritten or printed in the form of newsletters usually attached to normal correspondence, regarded international, territorial, and local issues, and therefore was also conditioned by the place they were written and printed in. Those published, for example, in Bologna, an important node in Northern Italy’s communication network and a producer of original *avvisi* in its own terms, reported mainly on wars and political matters, public ceremonials, and current news about the day-to-day happenings of the city and its surrounding territories. The Italian historian Giovanni Scarabelli criticizes historians for their lack of sufficient use of *gazettes* and *avvisi* when attempting to reconstruct the history of the early modern period, not least because these news-sheets can give insights on the perception that their readership had of the known world of the time. According to Zsuzsa Barbarics and Renate Pieper, the rendering provided by contemporary newsletters of the military struggle in the sixteenth-century Mediterranean is more veritable than that found in several historical accounts.

As the dissemination of political information became a thriving trade, printing centres started sprouting up especially in the northern half of Italy. Cities like Rome, Bologna, Genoa, Milan, Turin, and Venice, to varying degrees and in different stages, flourished into printing hubs of *gazettes* which provided current news, as did other centres of information-exchange further north, such as Antwerp, Amsterdam, and London, especially from the seventeenth century onwards. Braudel claims that Venice, for one, disseminated *avvisi* in an ‘unending stream’, and

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208 Bethencourt and Egmond (2007), *passim*.
209 The distinction in meaning between *avvisi* and *gazettes* is still rather blurred among scholars of the genre. For some elaborations on the evolutions of the term *avvisi*, its definition and overlaps with the word *gazette*, see Infelise (2007), 47-52.
210 Bulgarelli, 9.
214 Braudel (1986), 368.
in an apparently unending stream they were conveyed to Hospitaller Malta, and not just from Venice. Unfortunately Maltese archives host only a handful of printed *avvisi* which are known to have survived from the time they must have been in circulation on the island or at least available within Hospitaller circles, but they provide a glimpse of the global reach of the information somehow making its way to the island, which could include recollections of Jesuit missionaries in Japan and China in the late sixteenth century. Of course copies of *avvisi* similar to the ones which must have been delivered to Hospitaller Malta are consultable in foreign archives, but unless other *avvisi* are unearthed in Malta we will never know for certain what kind of foreign news was exactly being read with regularity on the island through these news-sheets. The aim here, however, is to reconstruct the flux of international news to Hospitaller Malta rather than scrutinize the content of news-sheets, and to do so the Order’s outgoing correspondence once again suffices to help us recreate specific delivery patterns. The mapping of the channels which kept Hospitaller Malta in touch with global current affairs can in fact constitute a historiographical consolation, if not a surrogate, for the apparently very poor survival record in Maltese archives of handwritten and printed news-sheets which were effectively read by the Knights and presumably other members of Maltese society.

Before doing so, however, the historian has to adopt caution and learn how to interpret what the scribe in question intended by the term *avvisi* in an epistolary context. As pointed out by Mario Infelise, reference to *avvisi* in correspondence could also imply a normal news item and not necessarily a separate and ‘specialised’ news-sheet. ‘*Avvisi*’ of corsair sightings sent to Malta from Syracuse were probably simple routine warnings included in normal dispatches. When in the early months of 1601 the Hospitaller receiver in Naples addressed *avvisi* to the Convent regarding the peace concluded between France and Savoy, was he reporting news sent in a normal dispatch or attaching a separate news-sheet with the usual correspondence? The same applies for the continuous flow of *avvisi* about the Turk from Christendom’s listening stations in the Levant and it is difficult to understand whether the *avvisi* sent from Bohemia by the Hospitaller receiver

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215 Two of these avvisi, dated September 1565, reproduce eyewitness accounts of events regarding the soccorso of 1565. _Avvisi novi della città di Malta, come passin le cose doppo la perdita de Santo Ermo, la qual com’è piacquio à Dio ha cresciuto core anostri, & sematolo à nemici_ (Alessandro Benaccio, Bologna, 1565). National Library of Malta, Melitensia Collection; _Novi avisi venuti da Napoli, con la giunta, e intrada del Sig. Don Grazia nell’Isola di Malta col numero delle genti sbarcate, & col nome del generale di terra, & del maestro di campo, et alter nove como legge[n]do inte[n]derete._ (Di Napoli alle dodici di settembre. MDLXV). National Library of Malta, Melitensia Collection.

216 Grech (2006), 166 and footnote 22.

217 For some libraries and archives where collections of similar avvisi and newsletters are kept in Italy and other parts of Europe see, for example, Braudel(1986), 368; Bulgarelli, 6-9; Barbarics and Pieper (2007), 53-79.

218 Infelise(2007), 47.

219 AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Zumbo (Syracuse), f. 154v, 19 June 1602.

220 AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), f. 65v, 10 April 1601 and Ibid., ff. 90v-91r, 25 April 1601.
Metich in 1608 were separate newsletters or not. But in several cases the distinction between the two interpretations is made obvious in Hospitaller correspondence by the very wording used to indicate separate newsletters sent over to the Convent. The Order’s agents in Genoa, for example, were systematically acknowledged by the magistral office for sending avvisi del mondo or novità del mondo with practically every mail bundle they sent to the Convent, so much so that the grand master in question occasionally accompanied the notice of arrival of the news-sheets with the term ‘i soliti’ (the usual).

On other occasions, the Hospitaller agents in Venice and Genoa would send avvisi delle occorrenze del mondo (news on what is happening around the world) and the Prior of Bohemia would send avvisi che corrono in coteste bande (news on what is happening in Bohemia and the surrounding lands). Occasionally the magistral wording specified that the Order received avvisi with the usual mail, giving the dates of the incoming correspondence and specifically discerning between news-sheets and letters. The difference is made evident for the reader when the term gazzetta is used, clearly indicating a separate news-sheet, although even in this case there are occasions in which the Order’s scribes themselves declare the subjective irrelevance of the disparity between gazzette and avvisi, another corroborative evidence justifying the persistent confusion among contemporary scholars regarding attempts at arriving to clear distinctions between the terms.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Convent was demanding newsletters on a weekly basis from Rome. These were the ‘usual gazettes’ eagerly awaited in Malta with every mail dispatch from the papal seat. The authorities in Malta specifically demanded newsletters of good quality, presumably meaning that Hospitaller agents could choose from different kinds of news-sheets to dispatch to Malta, and when none were delivered with the normal mail the Order did not hesitate to underline its dismay to its representatives in Rome, insisting that the gazettes were to be sent ‘uninterruptedly’. At times, on the other hand, the Rome-Malta postal service

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221 AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Metich (Bohemia), ff. 304v-305r, 10 October 1608.
222 For example: AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Genoa), f. 359v, 6 December 1603 and AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Genoa), f. 40, 20 January 1605.
223 For example: AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), ff. 41v-42r, 26 January 1608 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Genoa), f. 95v, 12 April 1608.
224 AOM 1387, Wignacourt to the Prior of Bohemia, f. 242v, 13 September 1608.
225 For example: AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Malvicino (Venice), f. 258r, 20 August 1603.
226 At one point, in a letter to the Order’s receiver in Rome, the scribe writes ‘gazzetta (o siano avvisi)’. AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Aldobrandini (Rome), ff. 227v-228r, 8 July 1618.
227 AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Santinelli (Rome), f. 101r, 18 May 1601.
228 ‘solita gazzetta, la quale aspettiamo con ogni disspaccio’. AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Santinelli (Rome), f. 224v, 31 August 1601.
229 ‘Non mancherete di mandarci ogni settimana con il piego della staffetta, come ha usato sempre il vostro antecessore (ie: Receiver Santinelli) di fare la solita gazzetta, e che sia di buon carattere’. AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Ginori (Rome), ff. 46v-47r, 23 January 1606.
230 AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Aldobrandini (Rome), ff. 227v-228r, 8 July 1618.
would send the ‘avvisi soliti della gazzetta’,\textsuperscript{231} or several gazettes with the same bundle,\textsuperscript{232} those same bundles which occasionally delivered the avvisi of England and Flanders.\textsuperscript{233} Hospitaller Malta received a constant flux of newsletters from its agents at the Holy See, some undoubtedly produced in the city itself, others inevitably re-channelled from other cities in Northern Italy and beyond. This was to be expected since Rome was such a central information redistribution centre. Malta also received the avvisi of England and Hungary from Venice,\textsuperscript{234} from where Hospitaller agents also sent the ‘usual news of the world’,\textsuperscript{235} the avvisi correnti of Milan, Friuli, and France,\textsuperscript{236} and occasionally Vienna,\textsuperscript{237} apart from accounts regarding ongoing continental wars.\textsuperscript{238} The newsletters from Hungary could also be channelled to Malta via Naples.\textsuperscript{239} The Campania centre was an inevitable - at times unavoidable - mail station through which news-sheets were channelled south towards Malta with the normal mail, and through Hospitaller documentation it emerges that its role as a centre for printing and newsletter-distribution gained in stature as the early modern period unfolded, vis-à-vis Malta at least. Records testify that the Convent was receiving generic avvisi from Naples by the onset of the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{240} 

Lehong was another port through which Hospitaller Malta was updated about the international scene. Regular official contacts between Lehong and Hospitaller Malta were late to develop, at least if we stick to the seventeenth century. Apparently it was only towards the middle of the century that this connection line along the Tyrrenian started pulsating with greater frequency and consistency, also a consequence, perhaps, of the diplomatic friction between Genoa and the Order which in part compelled the latter to look for alternative reference points along the north Tyrrenian.\textsuperscript{241} For the first two decades of the 1600s, there is hardly any trace in the Order’s documentation of some form of regular Hospitaller representation in the port and practically none is traceable in the magistral outgoing correspondence. One exception is made up of a feeble

\textsuperscript{231} AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Santinelli (Rome), f. 77v, 18 February 1603.  
\textsuperscript{232} AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Santinelli (Rome), f. 279v, 15 October 1602; AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Santinelli (Rome), f. 36r, 10 January 1603; and Ibid., f. 128r, 30 April 1603.  
\textsuperscript{233} AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Santinelli (Rome), f. 369r, 29 December 1603.  
\textsuperscript{234} AOM 1460, Wignacourt to Marino (Venice), f. 152, 11 May 1696.  
\textsuperscript{235} AOM 1464, Perellos y Rocafuhr to Marino (Venice), f. 101v, 25 July 1703.  
\textsuperscript{236} AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Guigni (Venice), f. 93v, 15 March 1617. For avvisi of France, see also AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Prior Martelli, f. 188v, 20 April 1613.  
\textsuperscript{237} AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Scalamonti (Venice), f. 492, 1 September 1621.  
\textsuperscript{238} For example: AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Guigni (Venice), f. 337v, 4 July 1613.  
\textsuperscript{239} AOM 1391, Wignacourt to the Prior of Hungary, f. 213v, 24 May 1612.  
\textsuperscript{240} For example: AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), f. 48v, 19 February 1601 and Ibid., ff. 181v-182r, 25 July 1601.  
references to a certain Prior Martelli in 1617, too vague and inconsequential to be considered as solid evidence of some form of official proxy delegated by the Order for the general administration of its affairs in the city-port. Of course, by the beginning of the seventeenth century commercial shipping connections between Malta and Leghorn were already established and Hospitaller galleys did stop at Leghorn in their periodic trips along the western shores of the Mediterranean, but throughout the first few decades of the seventeenth century, the Order’s official contacts in Tuscany seem to have been stationed in Florence and Pisa. The gradual rise of Leghorn throughout the late 1500s and 1600s as a commercial emporium strong enough to tilt the balance of trading contacts along the north Tyrrhenian and attract shipping formerly destined elsewhere had inevitable long-term repercussions on the relations with Hospitaller Malta. By the second-half of the seventeenth century, Leghorn seems to have taken over from Florence and Pisa as the main Tuscan transmission centre for the Convent, and news-delivery to Malta was obviously affected. In 1609 we find a reference to avvisi being sent to Malta from Florence, but the regular dispatch of handwritten and printed news-sheets from Leghorn to Malta, usually via Messina, apparently started taking place much later. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Malta was receiving a seemingly conspicuous flow of printed gazettes and avvisi from its agents in Leghorn, some of which, if not a good part, probably printed in other places, such as Bologna.

This transmission pattern of news-sheets from and through Italy, complemented by the regular news updates and accounts on international affairs in the official correspondence dispatched regularly by the Hospitaller representatives stationed throughout Europe, allowed the

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242 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Buondelmenti (Florence), f. 63, 26 February 1617. Prior Martelli, however, must have acted as some sort of unofficial contact for the Order in Leghorn and apparently had been doing so for a number of years. In 1613, he is referred to as a Hospitaller contact in the Tuscan port in a letter addressed to Malta by the Order’s ambassador in Rome. AOM 1259, Amb. La Marra (Rome) to Wignacourt, f. 263r, 19 October 1613.
244 An example: AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 590r, 6 December 1613 and Ibid., to Gaetani (Florence), f. 630, 31 December 1613.
247 AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Gaetani (Florence), f. 159r, 30 April 1609.
248 For example: AOM 1464, Perellos y Rocaful to Bussotti (Leghorn), f. 73r, 16 June 1703; AOM 1465, Perellos y Rocaful to Bussotti (Leghorn), f. 22r, 18 January 1704; AOM 1466, Perellos y Rocaful to Bussotti (Leghorn), f. 95v, 10 June 1705.
249 Definitely by the second half of the seventeenth century, however. See, for example, Grech (2006), 168 and footnote 35.
250 For example: AOM 1462, Perellos y Rocaful to Bussotti (Leghorn), f. 107r, 30 July 1701; AOM 1467, Perellos y Rocaful to Bussotti (Leghorn), f. 59, 18 April 1706; Ibid., f. 108, 18 August 1706. On 3 April 1702, the Convent received ‘diversi avvisi stampati e manoscritti’ from Leghorn. AOM 1463, Perellos y Rocaful to Bussotti (Leghorn), f. 101r, 31 May 1702. In July 1703, Bussotti was again acknowledged for having sent several printed and handwritten avvisi with different letters dispatched to Malta: ‘Ne habbiamo ricevuti molti colle tre vostre del 21, 26 e 28 del passato ...’. AOM 1464, Perellos y Rocaful to Bussotti (Leghorn), f. 100, 25 July 1703.
251 AOM 1466, Perellos y Rocaful to Canonico Bussotti (Leghorn), f. 162r, 14 December 1705.
Convent in Malta to remain informed about the major happenings of the known world of the time, accompanying the Order along decades of political and military turmoil throughout the long seventeenth century and beyond. Thus the Knights were kept informed about the progress of the rebels in Styria;\textsuperscript{252} about anti-Moorish measures in Spain;\textsuperscript{253} about the wars and armies in Flanders in the early seventeenth century;\textsuperscript{254} and about the Ottoman-Persian conflict.\textsuperscript{255} In May 1618 we find what must be one of the earliest, if not the first official reference to the Thirty Years War received in Malta.\textsuperscript{256}

The degree of relevance of this information for the Order undulated according to the political dynamics in play, but even more dramatically according to the territories concerned. Wars and armies on the move more often than not incurred damage to estates, edifices, and crops,\textsuperscript{257} and since the livelihood of Hospitaller Malta was heavily reliant on the produce and income of the Order’s continental property, news regarding the shifting theatres of European conflict was avidly anticipated in the Convent for it could impinge on the flow of funds from Hospitaller commanderies to Sicily, Malta, or wherever the Knights needed their capital.

\textsuperscript{252} AOM 1384, Wignacourt to the Prior of Bohemia, ff. 275v-276r, 25 August 1605.
\textsuperscript{253} AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Amb. Lomellino (Rome), ff. 390-392r, 23 December 1609.
\textsuperscript{254} AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Hospitaller Melzi (Flanders), f. 92r, 27 March 1608 and Ibid., to Alfonso d’Avolos (Flanders), f. 115v, 24 April 1609;
\textsuperscript{255} AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), f. 63r, 26 February 1617.
\textsuperscript{256} The letter refers to another letter dated 18 June 1618 received by the Order with ‘nuove delle turbolenze di cointo Regno di Bohemia’. AOM 1397, Wignacourt to the Prior of Bohemia, f. 270, 7 August 1618.
\textsuperscript{257} See, for example, Grech (2010), 145-53.
The accumulation of European estates while in Syria, through bequests, donations, or direct purchase, was a long-term investment with irreversible implications for the Hospitaller Order of St John. If well managed, extensive land possession in the agrocentric societies of pre-industrial Europe meant wealth in abundance and long-term prosperity which hardly any other economic activity could guarantee. Woods became timber, orchards provided fruit, and vineyards wine, fields yielded grain cargoes and all kinds of other crops, and farms reared livestock which provided meat, milk, cheese, wool, hides, and multiplied into other livestock, all of which could be consumed or used directly, bartered, or monetized. By the dawn of the early modern age, the Order had long upstaged its income-generation potential by diversifying the systematic exploitation of its estates. The commanderies and their various members dispersed throughout European territory could be sold or leased out, in full or in part, on short or long lets. Over the centuries, Hospitaller edifices ended up merged into an ever-expanding continental urban fabric as long-term population levels soared and the urbanization process gained pace. The Order’s architectural spaces within and outside urban walls were divided into grounds, rooms, apartments, houses, and workshops which could be sold or rented out. More income was derived from occasional gifts, exceptional impositions on these continental estates, fees for the admission of new members to the Order, and portions of inheritance of deceased Knights which by statute were due to the common crusading cause. It was up to the receivers and procurators stationed in Europe to collect and manage the

1 For a general overview of how the Order of St John of Jerusalem accumulated these estates in the first centuries of its existence, and how these estates were exploited to improve the economic condition of the Hospital see H.J.A. Sire The Knights of Malta (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1996), especially Chapter eight; Dominic Selwood, Knights of the Cloister. Templars and Hospitallers in Central-Southern Occitania 1100-1300 (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1999); Judith Bronstein, The Hospitallers and the Holy Land, Financing of the Latin East 1187-1274 (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2005).


3 The spoglio was four-fifths of a Knight’s property which passed on to the Order after his death. The mortuary consisted of the fruits of a commandery from the day the commander died till the start of the next financial year. The vacancy consisted in the fruits of the commandery accumulated in the following financial
overall resulting funds from the various ricette – Hospitaller financial jurisdictions dispersed throughout the continent which served as depositories of the Order’s revenue. Profits from Hospitaller trading, privateering, and pillaging activities provided further introts for the Common Treasury of the Order. A large cargo of soap confiscated in the Levant, for example, could fetch a handsome price on the Roman market and from time to time foreign governments sounded the Order to sell them slaves, a commodity in perennial demand in a Mediterranean arena where fighting, rowing, and the ensuing casualties ensured that the manpower-supply trade was rarely inactive.

But the generation of income through land, stone, inheritance, donations, trade, and crime was not always sufficient to sustain an institution like the Order of Saint John, whose self-imposed charitable ethos and much more financially taxing anti-Muslim militant creed implied enduring social, economic, and military engagement on regional and continental levels spanning centuries. As consistent frontliners on the Mediterranean’s ideological barricade and compulsive hoarders of landed property, the Hospitallers took upon themselves commitments which rendered compulsory and inevitable their introduction into a Euro-Mediterranean economy which, as the early modern age unfolded, was becoming increasingly reliant on capital and on financial transactions for the relocation of funds. These financial transactions ultimately became a distinctive feature of western early modernity, bringing about changes in the credit markets which collectively earned the historiographical tag of ‘financial revolution’.

For a generic overview of the Order of St John’s sources of income and the definition of related terminology, see Alison Hoppen, *The Fortification of Malta by the Order of St. John. 1530-1798* (Edinburgh, 1979), 140-55.


AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 285v-286, 12 July 1620.

AO M 1417, Lascaris Castellar to Gio Andrea Doria (Viceroy of Sardinia), f. 80v, 9 April 1638.


Hoppen (1979), 144.

For an account of the Order’s acquisition and occasional loss of European estates from the Middle Ages to modern times, and a pictorial representations of their continental location, see Sire (1996), passim.


For a brief overview of the benefits to international trade by the financial innovations in the sixteenth century see, for example, John H. Munro, ‘The Low Countries’ Export Trade in Textiles with the
Scholarship on the Order of St John hitherto still lacks a thorough, authoritative, and comprehensive study on the financial dealings of the Hospitallers throughout their history. Judith Bronstein’s study analyses the Order of St John’s economic efforts in the West and Latin Syria to help finance Hospitaller crusading mission in the Holy Land in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Bronstein shows how the Order received land and towns as donations, bought and sold property, invested in animal husbandry, cleared forests to gain agricultural land, traded in land and animal produce, and lent money in a drive to expand its economic activity, both in Latin Syria and Europe, especially France, in order to finance its fighting in the Levant and withstand the dual Mamluk and Mongol menace from different latitudes. Glimpses on the economic activities, and consequently on the monetary transactions of the Order for the fourteenth century can be found in the writings of Anthony Luttrell, who acknowledges the documentary lacunae in this field, yet manages to provide a picture of a financially enterprising Order which by the beginning of the 1300s was quite well-versed in monetary transaction mechanisms, acting as both lender and borrower to supplement its income.

The financial strains of the confrontation with Islam in the Eastern Mediterranean were too pronounced to be sufficiently and readily eased by the sole reliance on the European estates, whose capacity to generate and transfer cash was often too sluggish or downright insufficient for the pressing needs of war. To conquer Rhodes in 1310, the Order had to take hefty loans from the Papacy and its Florentine banking families. The Bardi, the Peruzzi, the Acciaiuoli, and the Alberti continued to credit the Order demanding a minimum interest of 6 per cent and the pledging of Hospitaller estates in Europe as repayment guarantees, a basic fund-raising mechanism, similar to that adopted by the merchants of Antwerp in the sixteenth century, which the Order exploited since its years in Latin Syria and continued to exploit right up to its last days in Malta in the eighteenth century, when widespread post-Revolutionary turmoil and the consequent confiscation of several of its estates in Europe castrated its creditworthiness. Further borrowing was

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12 Bronstein, *passim*.
13 Ibid.
16 Braudel (1985), 251.
17 Bronstein, 48. The Order continued to pledge its property to contract and cover loans even during its island phase in the East. Luttrell, ‘Interessi fiorentini’ (1959), 318.
contracted from bankers of Pistoia for the defence of Rhodes in the second half of the 1300s and although repayment commitments could waist all the income of several priories, the Order was still sufficiently resourceful to become a creditor itself, lending sums to royalty and to its former Florentine creditors, apparently suffering losses when the Acciaiuoli and the Peruzzi went bankrupt towards the mid-fourteenth century. Similar setbacks were physiological hiccups in an otherwise enduring history of monetary investments which saw the Hospitallers venture more insistently into the world of finance as their history unfolded, perhaps less conspicuously and spectacularly than the Templars, whose wealth and banking prowess attracted French monarchic greed with fatal consequences, but with more lasting dividends which contributed to the Order’s survival and military activism for several centuries. Documentary focus on early-modern Italy alone reveals that the Hospitallers made investments of varying proportions from north to south of the peninsula. Manuscript sources mention Hospitaller investments in the Banco di Lampugniano in 1607 and refer to a 7 per cent investment in the territories of Milan and Cremona in 1609; the Order and members of its property in Liguria held a number of luoghi in the Genoese bank of San Giorgio and at one point in the mid-seventeenth century the Order was willing to cash in on other assets in the form of luoghi di monte held in Rome.

Naples was apparently another favourite market for the Hospitallers to invest their money in. Income from the sale of property was converted in assets which yielded an interest and thousands of ducats could be deposited in the Monte della Pietà of the city. When in 1636 the Viceroy of Naples wanted to punish the Knights Hospitallers after their galleys confiscated a

24 AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 55-56, 11 February 1607.
25 AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Amb. Lomellino (Rome), ff. 143v-145r, 30 April 1609.
26 Ivan Grech (1996), 101-6. A luogo, from the Latin locum, was a quota of the Genoese public debt placed on the market with a nominal value of 100 lire. The luoghi generated an annual interest but their value varied constantly and were used as a means of payment in financial transactions, with the result that the lira de luoghi came to constitute another currency on the Genoese market. Jacques Heers, Genova nel ’400. Civiltà mediterranea, grande capitalismo e capitalismo popolare. Trans. P. Mastrosa (Milan, Jaca Book, 1991), 85 and 106. For an example of Hospitaller profit made from an investment in the Bank of San Giorgio, see AOM 663, f. 4v, 12 February 1605.
27 AOM 259, f. 38, 20 August 1652.
28 Income from the sale of two houses in Naples was to be placed ‘in alcun luogo sicuro per cavarne quelli frutti annuali che si sogliono dare’. AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Caraffa (Naples), f. 189v, 13 June 1609. In 1613, with reference to Naples, Alof de Wignacourt speaks of the ‘molte rendite che sono in castello Regno’. AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Abenante (Naples), ff. 161-162, 1 April 1613.
29 In 1618, the Order deposited 15,000 ducats in the Monte della Pietà of Naples. AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), f. 144v, 21 April 1618.
grain-laden Flemish vessel which had left Barletta to replenish other Spanish outposts, he found nothing better than to freeze the Hospitaller assets held in the various banks of his kingdom. Although the above are scant references which deserve deeper and more quantitative attention, they are indicative of a Hospitaller Order eager to exploit the possibilities offered by financial investment, more so in Italy, a country which had distinguished itself as a pioneer in the emergence of early modern western capitalism.

This capacity of the Order of St John to generate funds, irrespective of the source, was often an answer to short-term administrative and survival priorities but one which, protracted over decades and centuries, placed the institution and the island-bases it governed, such as early modern Malta, on a par with other continental states in terms of availability and accessibility of resources to finance their military infrastructure and activism. According to world historian Paul Kennedy, in early modernity the geopolitical fragmentation of Europe, even with Habsburg power at its zenith, created a spiral of strategic rivalry between the powers of Christendom which encouraged a rudimentary arms race for the resolution of conflicts, particularly from the early 1500s when the ‘military revolution’ started gaining further momentum. Unlike other powers like Ming China or Mogul India, Europe was a divided continent where inter-state antagonism was augmented by confessional strife after the Protestant schism, and where Spanish Habsburg might was enough to intimidate the other states but not to impose absolute hegemony, stimulating a bellicose competition which remoulded state administrations and elicited the multiplication of efforts to generate and exploit resources, financial and otherwise.

War historian Azar Gat shifts the main focus on the resources available to European states in early modernity, arguing that the dramatic rise in the size of armies, navies, and general war expenses of the powers of Christendom in the early modern era, rather than being related to the military revolution of the age, was consequential to the capacity of the states themselves to find the necessary resources to compete against each other and to improve, both technically and numerically, their destructive potential in a fragmented geopolitical setting. Gat’s argument is in part corroborated by Niall Ferguson, who simplifies the argument further and straightforwardly

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33 Kennedy, the ‘Introduction’ and the first three chapters.
equates the faculty to fight with money, while Geoffrey Parker states how the whole saga of the Dutch revolt was heavily conditioned by Spain’s recurrent financial crises.

One can argue whether Hospitaller Malta, and the Order of St John in particular, fit into Gat’s paradigm. The Order of St John’s military arena was largely restricted to the Mediterranean and its liminal contours, and its sole competitor and antagonist during the island-phase was Islam, and the Ottoman Empire in particular, a military colossus of early modernity, occasionally aided by auxiliary forces from Barbary, which the Hospitallers could only confront in official warfare as a contingent in large Catholic coalitions, or else harass through maritime raids in lesser, unofficial conflicts. Otherwise the Knights had to defend themselves within their walls as in 1480, 1522, and 1565. On the continent, the Order’s prime bellicose interest was substantially a passive one. The Knights lacked military adversaries within Christendom yet could do little to impede the exploitation and plunder of its European estates by the troops of various continental powers except from lodging feeble diplomatic utterances in the hope that other potentates intervened in their stead to implement remedies which the Order, a flyweight in a Europe of domineering nation and territorial states, was impotent to enforce.

However, despite its status as a substantial passive observer and occasional victim of continental military competition, the Order had to fight its own lesser or official wars in the Mediterranean, and whether as an assailant, besieger, supplier of troops and galleys, or besieged defender, it was nonetheless compelled to maximise its military potential in order to survive and inflict as much damage as possible on Islam. Throughout its gradual displacement west after its foundation in Syria, the Order had to review and upgrade its military machine and approach to warfare. It ventured in maritime warfare with the building and upkeep of a galley squadron and, like so many other powers, had to update its military infrastructural designs to adapt to changes imposed by the gunpowder revolution. The Order sought further improvements throughout its stay in Malta and kept an eye open for possible technological improvements which could provide it with a military edge. In 1603, the Hospitaller hierarchy was mulling the acquisition of a

37 Small contingents of Knights sent to aid anti-Turkish Imperial campaigns on Christendom’s eastern front, such as in 1739, were sporadic instances of Hospitaller continental military engagement which cannot be deemed as full-scale military involvement on European territory by the Order. AOM 1498 Despuig to Amb. Baglio de Schade (Rome), ff. 51v-52, 2 March 1739.
38 Grech, ‘Dealing with Manpower Shortages in the Mediterranean’.
40 Ibid., 146-50.
supposedly new secret formula for making saltpetre,\textsuperscript{41} and by the mid-seventeenth century it added another galley to its squadron.\textsuperscript{42}

Whatever the causation of the Order’s destiny – the military mission demanded resources yet, irrespective of the demand, no mission would have been possible without sufficient availability of resources and the capacity to source them in the first place - Hospitaller efforts to sustain their militancy and provide for the bases and populations they governed would not have been possible without the availability of sufficient capital. Although the Order was not competing in the European arena, it was nonetheless a Catholic force fully enveloped in Mediterranean warfare and its history can be annexed to Gat’s argument regarding the conditioning factor of the availability of resources. The monies generated in Europe by the commanderies, raiding, capital investment, and otherwise rendered Hospitaller militancy on Christendom’s side feasible for practically 700 years, moulding the Order of St John’s history, giving it an imprint and direction which otherwise would not have been possible. While the income from donations and privateering booty was largely fortuitous, although occasionally spectacular, that from European estates and investments was more structural and dependable, albeit subject to multiple contingencies. These resources allowed the Hospitallers to become fortification and galley builders for centuries on end, making it possible for them to survive and recover from crushing defeats, relocate their efforts, lick their wounds, and come back for more. Just as Ottoman resilience was largely due to the Anatolian hinterland’s backup, as manifested by the remarkable post-Lepanto recovery,\textsuperscript{43} the Order of St John’s centenary stamina was sustained by its European estates. The analogy, however improbable due to the immeasurable dimensional gap between the two antagonists, can be considered plausible. More so, the income from these estates allowed the Hospitallers to participate in aggressive naval warfare with an efficiency and compulsive indulgence which rendered the Order a model for the smaller Catholic powers of the Mediterranean with proselytising effects. In the sixteenth century, the foundation of the Tuscan Order of St Stephen and its galley fleet was inspired and modelled on that of the Hospitaller Order of St John.\textsuperscript{44}

The overall result of the Knights’ resources and military involvement was that the Order of St John, and eventually Malta, became perhaps Spain’s most faithful ally in the Mediterranean. Hospitaller Malta was one of the few Catholic forces on which the Habsburgs could rely on almost unfailingly when demanded by anti-Muslim duty, with relatively few collateral demands and implications which rarely went beyond the annual concessions of the duty-free export of grain

\textsuperscript{41} AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Malvicino (Venice), f. 164v, 19 May 1603.
\textsuperscript{42} Grech, ‘Dealing with Manpower Shortages in the Mediterranean’.
from Spanish Mediterranean outposts. The eleventh-hour *soccorso* of September 1565, one-off monetary donations such as aid for the post-siege construction of a new city-fortress,\textsuperscript{45} and sporadic ambassadorial plights in times of dire food shortages\textsuperscript{46} were instances of exceptional Habsburg attention elicited by early modern Malta in an otherwise centenary history of loyal peripherality. Hospitaller Malta was hardly of any weight to the Spanish crown and the benefits of the island stronghold for the Habsburg cause did not stop there. Malta was a Spanish fief conceded to the Order of St John as part of the Kingdom of Sicily and did not feel threatened by Habsburg might. It was free from the Spanish threat which conditioned other European and Catholic states. If anything, Habsburg presence in Sicily provided added reassurance for the islanders, at least on a perceptive if not effective level. In turn, Malta’s size and peripheral status to the Habsburg world could be of no significant nuisance to Spain. Malta was not locked in the continental logistical quagmire which was partly responsible for the decades of European internecine warfare throughout early modernity, and was neither burdened by internal confessional schisms. It was perhaps the most fundamental of Catholic forces, for its sole military obsession was Islam and was mentally and logistically free to pursue its mission with a single-mindedness which hardly any Catholic force in early modernity could afford. Malta was Spain’s loyal sentinel in the middle of the Mediterranean which guarded its own limited confines while keeping an eye open on Habsburg shores in Southern Italy, a dependable cluster of rocks with the added bonus of units of Hospitaller property scattered throughout Europe which consistently funded its subsistence and militancy. To make these funds available to its needs, the Order had to relocate them from Europe to its headquarters or wherever they were needed, and to do so it had to rely on its communication and financial network sprawled all over the continent, a web of contacts consisting of receivers, procurators, secretaries, and agents in general, plus a host of merchants, financiers, and money-changers.

*From Latin Syria to Malta: Continuity and Change in Hospitaller Fund Transfer*

**Networking and Institutional Coercion: The Surveillance of Hospitaller Personnel**

The mobilization of funds was an exercise fraught with difficulties in pre-industrial Europe. Time, distance, the elements, the search for the right financiers or reliable merchants who could clear bills of exchange, the expenses and risks involved in the transportation of cash over land and sea, or the payment of interest charged on relocated sums when cashed in one place to be reimbursed in another were all factors which had to be dealt with when sourcing and transferring money. For the Order of St John there was the added difficulty of spending a good part of its existence on islands.


\textsuperscript{46} Dal Pozzo, i and ii, *passim*.
One inherent weakness in Hospitaller administration, in fact, was that the commanderies, the Order’s lifeblood, were scattered throughout all latitudes of Christendom. This provided welcome alternatives when income from some property dried out for some reason or another, yet created several difficulties at an administrative level. Controlling and defending Hospitaller estates, while sustaining a regular contact with them for all sorts of activities, not least the sourcing of funds, was an arduous task for the Order. In a way, the Order had similar problems to Habsburg Spain in collecting money from a fragmented mass of possessions, with the added handicap that it was not endowed with Spanish muscle and influence to impose its interests and policy when problems arose. What arguments or means were available for the Hospitallers to stave off the confiscation of all its estates in England, to block a Venetian *sequestro*, or to curb the freezing of its banking assets in the Kingdom of Naples mentioned earlier?

Distance was obviously a massive hurdle, even to impose internal administrative discipline. Whether in Syria, Cyprus, Rhodes, or Malta, the Hospitaller Convent was an absent landlord vis-à-vis its European estates, with all the ensuing difficulties in personnel supervision that this implied, just as it was practically impossible for the Dutch directors in Amsterdam to keep strict control on the running of their VOC (United East India Company) activities overseas. In the 1300s, payments to Rhodes from the German priories started defaulting and by the following century the Order was finding it difficult to collect responsions from Hungary and practically impossible from Scandinavia. The Order was plagued by similar problems throughout its existence and was perfectly aware of the difficulty to enforce its Council’s decisions on its personnel, and consequently of the importance of the goodwill and professionalism of its agents for the smooth running of its affairs. The Order could not afford to lower its guard, for the repercussions of poor or fraudulent administration on the continent reverberated right down to the Hospitaller headquarters and came to bear on the Common Treasury.

The efficiency of the surveillance of personnel was often directly proportional to vicinity and reach. While in Malta, it was comparatively easy for the Order’s headquarters to keep a closer eye on agents in nearby Sicily, potentially reachable through a day’s sailing and a maximum of

51 Sire (1996), 197.
52 Alof de Wignacourt could not put it more clearly in a letter to Rome in the early months of his magistracy: ‘conoscendo che i buoni ordini operano molto poco se non sono aiutati dalla diligen[za] e sollecitudine de i Ministri...’. AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Amb. Porras (Rome), f. 34, 5 January 1602.
two days horse travel from Scicli to the island’s opposite coastal extremities. But the more distant from Hospitaller Malta was the agent, the more complicated it was to execute regular and effective vigilance. Months could pass by, for example, without receiving any form of writing from Southern Germany. Europe’s heartland could seem a very remote place from a Mediterranean island context. Continental perceptions from the Convent could be hazy and at times the Hospitaller hierarchy could even encounter problems locating and properly picturing some of its own lands in Europe, at least up to the early seventeenth century. In 1602, the Convent was trying to establish whether the Principality of Tyrol fell within the Priory of Germany or that of Bohemia, and the doubts apparently persisted for years. In 1615, despite extensive research in the archives of the Italian and German Langues, the Order still could not figure which priories comprised the territory of Tyrol (a region across the Austrian-Italian Alps) and the receiver in Venice had to be commissioned to try and solve the dilemma. Similar problems render the idea of how complicated it could be for a group of Knights stranded on a rock in the middle of the Mediterranean to access, keep contact with, and consequently exert some form of control over very distant possessions.

One way for the Order to verify its state of financial affairs on the continent was to oblige its receivers and procurators to send reports on the accounts of their respective ricette as regularly as possible. This provided the Common Treasury in Malta with knowledge on the funds available for the execution of the various transactions needed by the Order and its archipelago base. The prevailing impression in early modern Hospitaller historiography has hitherto been that the Order’s administration lacked consistency and regularity in its record-keeping regarding financial transactions, fund transfers, and the income and expenditure from its priories. Should we review our convictions on this matter? A close analysis of the magistral outgoing correspondence for the first half of the seventeenth century alone would suggest that the Order solicited accounts from its financial agents on a fairly regular basis, although not always obtaining the desired results. Most of

53 A horse courier, for example, could cover the Scicli-Messina crossing in a maximum of one and a half days, and the distance between Scicli and Palermo could be covered in a maximum of two days. See, respectively: AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 312v, 11 September 1606; AOM 1384, Wigncourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 329, 3 October 1605; and AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Scicli), f. 204v, 21 July 1610.
54 In January 1615, Wignacourt complained that six months had gone by without receiving official letters from Southern Germany. AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Rosabac (High Germany), f. 63, 20 January 1615.
55 AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Poppel (Prior of Bohemia), f. 69v, 15 February 1602.
56 AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), f. 510r, 13 November 1615.
57 At one point in 1656, Lascaris Castellar, in demanding a balance account from the Venetian receivership, states explicitly how important it was for the Convent to receive financial updates from its European priories: ‘e quanto per nostro governo per saper di somma ci potremo far capital perché senza questa luce vivremo alla cieca’. AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Spreti (Venice), ff. 282v-283, 10 December 1656.
these records seem to have been lost. No similar collection apparently survives in the Maltese archives. However, as in the case of the flux of news-sheets and *avvisi* described in chapter four, official Hospitaller correspondence to Europe helps us chart a reviewed picture of the Order’s record-keeping efforts in early modernity. Obviously the letters dispatched from the Convent only give indications about the nature, provenance, and occasionally the regularity of the accounts in question, without disclosing detailed contents or hints of possible uniformity of presentation between the various financial reports dispatched from all over Europe. But we have to make do with what we have in the hope that future archival findings will fill gaps and clarify present doubts. We know that the receivers were obliged to send the Convent annual balance sheets reporting the financial situation of their priories. This is also explicitly stated in a letter to the Grand Prior of Germany in 1617. But some magistral letters hint clearly at regular financial accounts (usually termed *conti* or *bilancio dei conti*) received or solicited by the Convent on a more regular basis. At various instances in the first half of the seventeenth century, we find that income accounts were to be sent from Florence, High Germany, and Milan on a monthly basis. A letter dated April 1617 talks of a *bilancetto*, a brief balance account of the income and expenditure of a *ricetta*, sent to the Convent by the receiver of Naples for the previous month of February. Other letters tell us that balance accounts were also sent, expected, or solicited from Palermo, Messina, Syracuse, Lombardy, Lyons, Venice, the Low Countries, Hungary, and Dacia, albeit with hardly any indication regarding the frequency of the reports. Very occasionally some letters give extra indications of the type of information contained in the accounts sent to Malta, such as a list of the commanders who paid their dues and those still indebted to the priory and the Convent, or regarding the appointment of commissioners to review the accounts of a specific Hospitaller jurisdiction. Others talk of a ‘succinct’ report on income and expenditure sent from Rome for

60 In 1612, the receiver in Florence was asked to send a monthly ‘nota dell’introito’ to the Convent. AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Gaetani (Florence), ff. 443v-444r, 8 October 1612. In 1615 the receiver in High Germany was told to send monthly accounts ‘like his predecessors’, meaning that the practice had been established for quite some time. AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Rosabac (High Germany), f. 63, 20 January 1615. In 1656, the receiver in Milan was asked to send the Convent monthly records of current exchange rates on the back of balance sheets. AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Sforza Milzi (Milan), f. 189r, 20 May 1656.
61 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), f. 106r, 3 April 1617.
62 For Palermo see, for example, AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 464, 23 September 1613. For Messina: AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), ff. 369v-370r, 7 November 1605. For Syracuse: Ibid., Wignacourt to Settimo (Syracuse), ff. 74v-75r, 16 March 1605. For Lombardy: AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Bertone (Lombardy), ff. 277v-278r, 14 August 1606. For Lyons: Ibid., Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), f. 379r, 21 November 1606. For Venice: AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), f. 247, 25 July 1609. For the Low Countries: AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Conrado [Schoffard], f. 112r, 30 March 1618. For Hungary: AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Prior di Ungaria, f. 213, 18 August 1608. For Dacia: AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Hundt (Prior of Datia), ff. 181v-182r, 9 June 1606.
63 AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Muchental (High Germany), f. 215r, 2 July 1606.
64 AOM 1384, Wignacourt to the Prior of Germany, ff. 276v-277r, 25 August 1605.
example, or hint at obvious delays in the submission of annual balance accounts. Notwithstanding the Convent’s dictats, the problem of receiving the reports from distant territories when desired still prevailed. In 1605, the receiver in Bohemia sent the accounts of two successive years of his ricetta with the same dispatch. Delays of many years were also registered from High Germany, and in 1616 even the receiver of Palermo was reprimanded for taking too long to send his accounts to Malta.

For the smooth running of its networks, financial and otherwise, the Order had no option but to trust its judgement when recruiting personnel and to remedy when such judgement proved flawed. Alessandro Marzo Magno declares that credit networks in pre-industrial society were based on ‘one fundamental element: (...) trust’. Francesca Trivellato also emphasizes the importance of trust for the proper functioning of mail and financial networks in pre-industrial society. Tightly-knit organisations based on kinship, co-religion, and friendship were often the answer to keep together the web of interconnections needed for the transfer of information and currency across territories in a society where any form of effective control from a distance was next to impossible. There was no suprastructure of international surveillance. The Order was completely enmeshed in this network of international interconnectedness, for its continental property transcended national, political, and confessional boundaries, implying that the mechanisms for the mobilization of Hospitaller funds formed part of an international financial network which became a distinctive imprint of western capitalism by early modernity. Inevitably, even the Order had to rely on trust and reputation when recruiting its agents and, when the occasion arose, exploited family ties to ensure continuity in the running of a post, on a permanent or temporary level. When in 1608 the Hospitaller agent in Trapani had to take leave from his post to travel to Campania, he proposed a relative of his as a temporary substitute, and in 1621 the Prior of Lombardy sent his nephew to the town of Asti to collect the payment of hundreds of sacks of wheat owed to the priory by the local community. In 1708, the Giavotto brothers succeeded each other as Hospitaller procurators in Scicli.

Obviously the Order could wield the ultimate measures adopted by any organised institution to impose its will, what Trivellato calls ‘institutional coercion’, ranging from the

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65 AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Aldobrandini (Rome), f. 89r, 20 February 1619.
66 AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Metich (Bohemia), f. 275, 25 August 1605.
67 AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Muchental (High Germany), f. 332r, 7 September 1610.
68 AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 160v-162r, 2 May 1616.
69 Alessandro Marzo Magno, L’invenzione dei soldi. Quando la finanza parlava italiano (Milan, Garzanti, 2013), 162.
71 AOM 1387, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 327v-328, 25 October 1608.
73 AOM 1469, Perellos y Rocaful to Domenico Giavotto (Scicli), f. 89, 9 May 1708.
handing out of warnings to the dismissal of agents and consuls\textsuperscript{74} from their posts, with ensuing possible punishments. In 1614, the Hospitaller receiver of High Germany was severely reprimanded for not having remitted funds to Venice where they were needed to commission shipments to Malta\textsuperscript{75} and in 1620, Baldassarre Guinigi, former receiver of Venice, was imprisoned in the Maltese fortress of St Elmo for leaving his ricetta with over 11,000 scudi in the red.\textsuperscript{76} On their part, Hospitaller representatives at various ranks, from ambassadors to procurators, had to weave their own local network of contacts within the confines of their post in order to satisfy demands dispatched from Malta. In its communiqués to various Hospitaller agents stationed abroad, the Convent more than once insisted on the need to commission reliable individuals capable of carrying out the task in question, using adjectival phrases with specific terminology such as ‘diligent’, ‘competent’, ‘faithful’, and ‘trustworthy’ to describe the qualities sought to keep the financial accounts of Hospitaller estates in High Germany; to deliver in person delicate correspondence from Messina; to transport by sea a hefty amount of specie from Naples; or to intercept the Hospitaller squadron at Capo Passero.\textsuperscript{77} Usually it was left to the official Hospitaller representative in question to find the right contact. Giacomo Buonsegno is described as an aide to the Venetian receivership who ran commissions for the ricetta for a number of years leading to 1602,\textsuperscript{78} and in 1614, the Order’s receiver in the Priory of Lombardy was to find a trusted person to carry out a financial transaction in Milan.\textsuperscript{79} Occasionally Hospitaller officials stationed in Europe and elsewhere were also sought for profiling purposes. Giovanni Malvicino was appointed Hospitaller receiver in Venice in 1602 after receiving favourable references from Langosco, his predecessor, and some other Hospitallers.\textsuperscript{80} In 1605, the Order asked the Prior of Germany to suggest a successor to Theodoro Dattenbergh, the receiver of Low Germany,\textsuperscript{81} and in 1610 La Marra, the receiver in Palermo, was to carry out an inquiry on Luciano Maida who was being considered as a candidate for the post of consul of the Maltese in Palermo to replace Nardo Parnis.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{75} AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Rosabac (Upper Germany), f. 320, 31 July 1614.
\textsuperscript{76} AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Scalamenti (Venice), ff. 569v-570r, 23 December 1620.
\textsuperscript{77} For similar examples where Hospitaller agents were advised to commission ‘qualche persona diligente a voi ben vista in detto luogo’, a ‘persona pratica e fedele’, a ‘huomo fidato’ or a ‘persona fidata e diligente’, see, respectively, AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Ratenou (Upper Germany), ff. 343v-344r, 30 November 1609; AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 311, 14 December 1607; AOM 1368, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 150v-151r, 16 June 1607; and AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), ff. 155v-156r, 15 May 1605.
\textsuperscript{78} AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 266v-267, 3 October 1602.
\textsuperscript{79} AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Piedmont), ff. 365v-366r, 29 August 1614.
\textsuperscript{80} AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Langosco (Venice), f. 49v, 17 January 1602.
\textsuperscript{81} AOM 1384, Wignacourt to the Prior of Germany, ff. 247v-248r, 29 July 1605.
\textsuperscript{82} AOM 1389, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 311v, 28 September 1610.
Hospitaller officials posted abroad, in fact, had a key role in recommending individuals to the Convent for official posting in the service of Hospitaller Malta, whether as consuls or otherwise. In 1621, the Hospitaller agent in Lombardy dispatched favourable references to Malta about a certain Agostino Quartiero, recommending him for the appointment as principal notary of the Order in the State of Milan. Quartiero eventually got the post and his licence was renewed three years later. The agents had the obvious advantage of being more knowledgeable regarding what the locality they were posted in could offer, but at times the Order gave its own suggestions. In 1602, for the shipment of wine and biscuit from Trapani, the Order suggested Simon Corso, described as ‘familiar to the Religion’ and apt to carry out the consignment. But the ultimate decision usually lay with the agents, who first and foremost had to verify the availability of the contact in question. Friends and acquaintances could be enrolled as informants and influential contacts occasionally proved useful. An informer in Sardinia, potentially a more obscure and remote place than locations further north to Malta, could provide useful information for the provision of goods from that island. At one point in 1608, the Order was relying on the intercession of the Count of Benevento to export Apulian cereals as alternative provisions for Malta in times of shortages. According to a letter dated January 1620, the acting Hospitaller receiver in Castile had to contract a loan from some ‘friends’ to cover a large payment on behalf of the Order made in Palermo, and in 1703 a certain prince Nixemi put in a word with Sicilian authorities on behalf of the Order to allow the Hospitaller squadron to load more provisions than usual in the ports of Syracuse and Augusta.

On a more structural and official level, agents, and receivers in particular, could have their personal secretary who ran errands on their behalf or deputised in their posts, but it is not always possible from Hospitaller documentation to verify if an agent had a segretario or not. However, whether seconded or not, these agents were expected to transfer the Order’s funds from the European priories, and to do so they exploited the basic mechanisms of fund transfer available in early modernity: the bill of exchange, the transfer of cash by land and sea, or a combination of both.

84 A marginal entry confirms the licence renewal. AOM 1400, Alof de Wignacourt to Quartiero (Milan), f. 654, 30 November 1621.
85 AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), f. 331r, 27 November 1602.
86 At one point, for example, the Hospitaller ambassador in Rome, Ruiz de Prado, was advised to inform himself ‘per mezzo d’amici et di terze persone’, apart from the Hospitaller receiver in Rome, regarding a certain unspecified matter. AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Amb. Ruiz de Prado (Rome), f. 274, 7 August 1618.
87 AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 221-223v, 16 July 1604.
89 AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 38, 15 January 1620.
90 AOM 1464, Perellos y Rocaful, to Prince Nixemi (Palermo), f. 123, 15, September 1703.
91 For some examples of secretaries or deputies to receivers see, AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Quartieri (Milan), f. 359v, 30 November 1609; AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Abenante (Naples), f. 302v, 10 July 1612 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), ff. 251v-252r, 19 June 1612.
The lure of finance proved irresistible for the Knights of St John, not only for its inherent promise of providing more readily available capital, but also because of the possibilities it afforded to mobilize and relocate it. Just like so many other states, bankers, proprietors, merchants, and traders, one of the main problems that the Order had to face was how to transfer its funds from where it was generated to where it was required. The Knights Hospitallers could not afford to remain alien to a financial world which was evolving in search of more efficient, logistically viable, and quicker credit transfer mechanisms. The Order had the great majority of its landed property and assets, and consequently its money, in Europe. When, and if the commanders managed to collect what was due from the estates they administered, they had the duty to pass a third of this income, the responsions, to the receiver responsible for the Hospitaller financial jurisdiction under which the estates in question fell. At that stage, according to instructions from the Convent, the receiver cashed and used the funds, in part or in full, for whatever transaction was required, or transferred them to the Convent or to other locations dictated from Malta. Towards the end of 1620, the Priory of Lombardy transferred 950 doubloons to a group of bankers in Genoa on behalf of the Order: 444 doubloons were withdrawn by the Hospitaller receiver in the city-port to cover commissions on behalf of the Convent, while the remaining 506 were transferred to Messina. In 1656, the Venetian receiver was instructed to withhold enough funds from the Venetian priory, and those transferred from Germany, to cover the purchase of timber from Fiume in the north-east corner of the Adriatic since the Order lacked enough cash to effect the transaction from Malta. Funds could be transferred in stages according to the Order’s needs. In 1607, 18,000 scudi were to be remitted from Venice to Palermo in three tranches amounting to 3,500, 4,500, and 10,000 scudi respectively. The route taken by Hospitaller funds depended also, in fact, on the Knights’ activities, commercial and otherwise, and the European markets from where the Order purchased its goods. Money could be needed in Genoa to pay for anchors commissioned for a galleon; in Venice to cover the systematic purchase of merchandise and its shipment to Malta; in Rome to sustain the costs incurred by court proceedings in the Sacra Rota (tribunal of the Roman Catholic Church); in Naples to export wine and other goods to Malta; in Messina to

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92 The bankers were Damiano and Henrio [de Frâche]. AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Semiomo (Lombardy), f. 578, 23 December 1620.
93 AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Spreti (Venice), ff. 276v-277r, 25 September 1656 and Ibid., ff. 281v-282r, 15 November 1656.
94 AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 257v-258r, 8 October 1607.
95 For example: AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Semiomo (Lombardy), f. 306, 25 July 1620.
96 For example: AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Florence), f. 383, 12 September 1614 and AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Scalamonti (Venice), f. 393, 18 July 1621. For the systematic shipment of goods from Venice to Malta, see chapter four.
97 AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Domenico Carretto (Turin-Priory of Lombardy), f. 175v, 25 September 1656.
98 AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 65v-67r, 14 February 1609.
cover a timber consignment;\textsuperscript{99} in Trapani or Syracuse to provide the galleys with biscuit;\textsuperscript{100} or in Palermo for the usual payment of the \textit{tratte}\textsuperscript{101} or to pay the tenderer providing the Convent with meat.\textsuperscript{102}

Apart from the direct transfer of money in cash, which will be dealt with in greater detail later on in this chapter, the other fund-transfer option available for the receivers was that which in Hospitaller documentation is frequently referred to in Italian as the \textit{rimessa}, literally a remittance of funds which usually had to involve at some stage the use of bills of exchange. Fernand Braudel and Richard Bonney seem to disagree about the breadth of the use and influence of the bill of exchange in the Mediterranean world and beyond in the pre-industrial era. According to the French historian, the bill of exchange, or something conceptually very close to it, was already being used in Islam by the tenth or eleventh century of the Christian era.\textsuperscript{103} In other instances, however, he does concede that it was only in Christendom that the bill was widely used, that in Syria it was debased of any value,\textsuperscript{104} and that its use in Islam was ‘so exceptional (…) as to suggest that it was unknown in the East’.\textsuperscript{105} Bonney, on the other hand, states that currency transfer tools similar to the bill of exchange were ‘restricted to Latin Christendom’ and were alien to other parts of the world such as Muscovy, Islam, or Spanish America.\textsuperscript{106} Irrespective of where the truth lies, what is certain is that by early modernity the widespread use in Europe of the bill of exchange rendered it a protagonist of the rise of western capitalism. The advantages it offered to whoever used it were undisputed: it provided a loophole for circumventing strict ecclesiastical laws on usury; it allowed the concession of loans veiled as otherwise; it could be cashed by its deadline date or it could be renewed or transferred; it allowed the relocation of funds without the physical transfer of cash, reducing the risks of loss through thefts and physical assault; it could be used as payment for commercial transactions; it allowed the transfer of funds between places with different currencies, and rendered international payments possible when states prohibited the exportation of precious metals; it was a credit instrument which gave the possibility of financial gain through the fluctuations of exchange rates between different places.\textsuperscript{107} It was ‘a marvellous instrument’ according to Marzo Magno, but one which had its discomforts: it demanded ‘an organisation

\textsuperscript{99} For example: AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), ff. 391v-392r, 16 December 1606.
\textsuperscript{100} For Trapani, see for example AOM 1389, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 71v-72, 24 March 1610.
For Syracuse, see for example AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Settimo (Syracuse), f. 213r, 30 June 1606.
\textsuperscript{101} For example: AOM 1388, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 233, 14 August 1609.
\textsuperscript{102} AOM 1385, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 404v, 1 December 1606.
\textsuperscript{103} Fernand Braudel (1985), 390.
\textsuperscript{105} Braudel (1986), 465.
\textsuperscript{107} Marzo Magno, 161-3. For an explanation of how the bill of exchange worked, see also Bonney, 430-1. Braudel recounts how in the late sixteenth century the broker Simón Ruiz bought and sold bills of exchange on the Medina del Campo-Florence axis purely to make a profit. Braudel (1986), 497.
capable of covering both the market where it (the bill) was issued and the market where it was to be cashed'.\textsuperscript{108} The Hospitallers had such an ‘organisation’ made out of receivers, procurators, and agents posted throughout Europe in the nerve centres of the Order’s prioral and financial network, not dissimilar to the network of continental branches of medieval commercial enterprises such as that of the fourteenth-century merchant of Prato Francesco Datini, by some considered as the very father of the cambiale as used in Western Europe.\textsuperscript{109}

To put it simply and succinctly, the bill of exchange was a credit instrument containing a promise of payment to another party.\textsuperscript{110} For the Order during the period under study, the bill or letter of exchange provided the possibility to relocate its funds from its continental priories dispersed mainly in Iberia, France, Flanders, High and Low Germany, Bohemia, and Italy. In a nutshell, the transfer mechanism can be explained thus:\textsuperscript{111} the Order might need a sum of money in Palermo to purchase wheat, for example. If the receiver of Palermo was not in possession of the necessary amount of funds, he would have to relocate the required sum from one of the Hospitaller priories in Europe. To do so he would have to find an individual or a group of individuals, who could be merchants or financiers, or a financial institution (who we can call the ‘creditor’), with enough cash available in Palermo to cover the sum required by the receiver, usually against the payment of a commission. The receiver would then hand the creditor the bill of exchange – usually sent to him from a Hospitaller priory where the Order was solvent - covering the entire sum through funds from the Hospitaller priory in question. The creditor, or whoever he appointed by proxy, would then be able to clear the bill and be reimbursed his due in markets like Castile, Barcelona, or Lyons, for example, centres where the Order had receivers who collected Hospitaller funds from the respective priories in Iberia and France, and consequently places where the Order was solvent. In this way the rimessa would have been effected, without any actual transfer of money taking place, and the Order would have its sum available in Palermo to purchase its wheat.

For the whole mechanism to work, the Order needed to be financially covered in the receiverships where the bills were cleared, mainly Castile, Barcelona, Lyons, High and Low Germany, Bohemia, and the main receiverships in Italy, that is Lombardy, Venice, Florence, and Naples. What emerges from the Hospitaller documentation consulted is that Palermo and

\textsuperscript{108} Marzo Magno, 163.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 160. Iris Origo immortalised Datini’s life in a book about the merchant’s activities but is certain that Datini was not the inventor of the modern bill of exchange, although he used it frequently. Iris Origo, \textit{The Merchant of Prato. Daily Life in a Medieval Italian City} (London, Penguin Books, 1992), 147.
\textsuperscript{110} The Zingarelli dictionary defines it as a ‘credit instrument containing a promise made by a person to pay, or appoint someone in his/her stead to pay, another person a sum of money. Zingarelli, Nicola (ed.), \textit{Il nuovo Zingarelli. Vocabolario della lingua italiana} (Bologna, Zanichelli, 1987). According to Iris Origo, ‘the bill of exchange made it possible to transfer purchasing power without the shipment of actual coins’. Origo, 82.
\textsuperscript{111} Giuseppe Felloni describes the mechanism of the use of the bill of exchange with reference to merchants and their representatives located in two different European markets, but his model can be adapted to the type of transactions the Order used to relocate prioral funds. Felloni, 107-8.
Messina were vital Hospitaller financial centres where substantial sums from the Order’s continental priories were ultimately deposited through remittances, and occasionally cashed. Although this study cannot boast of documentary material from any such bills involving Hospitaller fund-transfer transactions from European priories for the period under study, alternative documentary sources will be used to recreate the stages, fluxes, and routes along which these remittances travelled, allowing the Order to transfer funds from its European estates. This fund-transfer mechanism is in fact illustrated, or hinted at, in several letters of the magistral outgoing correspondence and occasionally in other Hospitaller sources such as the *Libri Conciliorum*. Some examples might help us understand this financial mechanism better.

In 1606, the Order’s receiver in Palermo, La Marra, was to collect from a certain Theodaldo Thedaldi 700 scudi on behalf of a secretary of the Order, Commander Vigliasecca, through the conversion of a bill of exchange signed by Ferramonti Pallavicino of Valladolid. Although we are not told if Viglasecca collected the sum for personal use or on behalf of the Order, the transaction constitutes an example of how a sum is made available in one place to be reimbursed in another through the bill of exchange mechanism. Hospitaller documents provide other examples where similar transactions were carried out to transfer the Order’s money. In 1612, the Order was planning to cash an unspecified sum in Palermo to subsequently reimburse it in Castile. In 1617 the Order’s financial agent in Barcelona, Cotoner, sent letters of exchange to Malta to be eventually cashed by the Hospitaller receiver in Palermo, and more bills amounting to 2,582 florins were to be cashed in Messina at the rate of 6 tari per florin from the merchants Carlo Frenes and Onofrio Carbonel. Later on that year, the receiver in Messina was to present a number of letters of exchange sent from Venice to some merchants operating in the Sicilian city-port and to deposit the proceeds in a bank in Messina. Similar transactions were carried out on the Bohemia-Messina axis in 1619, and thousands of reals a month for a specific period would be reimbursed in Madrid or Valladolid by the Order’s receiver in Castile to whoever was indicated

112 In 1615, for example, the receivers of Germany, Bohemia, Lombardy, Florence, Genoa, and Naples were all commissioned to transfer funds to Messina. AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 461, 8 October 1615.
113 Grech (2005), 199.
115 For some examples of transactions effected with the use of bills of exchange addressed to places like Castile, France, or other places, see AOM 107, f. 191r, 20 April 1623; Ibid., f. 202v, 10 June 1623; Ibid., f. 205v, 14 June 1623; Ibid., f. 210v, 3 July 1623; Ibid., f. 223r, October 1623.
116 AOM 1385, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 213v-214r, 1 July 1606.
117 AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 312r, 14 December 1607.
118 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 353, 22 October 1617.
119 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), f. 353v, 22 October 1617.
120 ‘per riscuotersi costì in Messina da cotesti mercanti alcuni partiti di denari (...) rimetterli subito in cotesta tavola di Messina’. AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), f. 403r, 7 December 1617.
121 ‘rimessivi di Bohemia dal Ric[evito]re Nostiz’. AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), ff. 452v-453r, 30 November 1619.
on letters of exchange sent from Scicli. Bills cashed in Palermo at the rate of 12 tarì per scudo, could ultimately be reimbursed in Castile at 10 reali per scudo, for example.

Obviously these payments could go through only if the Order was solvent in the priories where the final reimbursements were effected, subject that is to the successful and timely collection of the responsions. Early in 1615, the Order was planning a remittance of 16,000 scudi on the Castile-Palermo axis. A certain Don Ottavio d’Aragona provided the receivership of Palermo with the cash for the purchase of a wheat consignment. He was handed the bills of exchange addressed to Receiver Brisegno, the Hospitaller receiver in Castile. It was hoped that by the time d’Aragona arrived in Madrid to cash his due, Brisegno would have the sum available to cover the payment. If not, it was agreed to delay the payment till May of that year until the responsions were collected by the Castilian receivership. Similar transactions, therefore, could take months to be concluded, but allowed the Order to have ready cash where it was needed. Credit on bills of exchange, in fact, was cashable in stages and their clearance could be diffused through time, allowing a receiver to effect some urgent payments while buying time to receive reassurance from European priories about the solvency of the ricetta where the reimbursement was to take place. In 1620, the Hospitaller receivership in Palermo was instructed to cash only half of the 20,000 libre in bills at its disposal, 3,000 libre of which were to be deposited in Syracuse to pay for biscuit and saltpetre. In this way the Order gained time to receive notification from Spain that its Castilian coffers could cover the remaining bills in the hands of the receiver in Palermo.

It was important for the Order’s agents on the receiving end of these remittances to cultivate contacts with wealthy members of the community within or in the vicinity of their financial jurisdiction in order to have valid alternatives when cash was needed. At one point in 1614, the Hospitaller receiver in Palermo had the Countess of Modica as an alternative creditor in case a substantial cambio of 120,000 reali with Don Ottavio d’Aragona did not go through, and in the meantime was negotiating a cambio of 4,000 scudi with a certain Donna Maria Vries who was known in the Convent as having cash available. The Order, on its part, had to be kept updated by its receivers deployed throughout the continent on the state of the coffers of the respective ricette to be able to decide on the provenance and the amount of remittances it was in a position to effect. In the summer of 1617, the Convent was waiting for information from Spain to see what funds could be transferred to Palermo, also because at the time no bills could be issued on Lyons

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122 AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Lo Porto (Scicli), ff. 552v-553r, 30 November 1620.
123 AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 337, 4 August 1620.
124 AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 36v-37, 20 January 1615.
125 AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 208v-209, 22 May 1620.
126 Ibid., ff. 208v-209, 22 May 1620.
127 ‘che per quanto ci è stato detto tiene il den[a]ro in ordine’. AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 489-490r, 26 November 1614.
or other places in France. These bills were also used in the reverse direction, allowing Hospitallers and members of the Maltese population to deposit sums in the Common Treasury and withdraw them from a foreign bank or one of the Order’s receivers in Europe against the presentation of a bill of exchange, a mechanism used also by the Order to pay for commissions abroad. To pay for the building of a galley in Barcelona in 1604, money could be withdrawn from Palermo or from any place where the money of the foundation set up on purpose for the building of the galley was deposited.

Similar fund-transfer mechanisms, widely adopted in Western Europe since medieval times, were quite a frequent practice in Hospitaller administration. At one point in 1621, it is recorded that the Order’s agent in Venice was receiving remittances from Germany on ‘a daily basis’, a frequency which at face value might seem rather suspicious if afforded literal status, yet one which seems to be corroborated by other similar episodes. In 1607, for example, in conjunction with an abundance of debased currency in Sicilian markets, receivers in Italy were expected to affect daily remittances to Palermo. These transfers allowed the Order of St John to effect payments on a continental level, with Hospitaller money travelling along several routes and in all directions in Western Europe’s financial network, from the coasts of the Atlantic and the heart of Europe, to the midst of the Mediterranean. Thus a cargo of goods shipped to the Convent by a merchant from Venice could be paid with letters of exchange cashed in Paris; proceeds from the sale of rice in Corfu could end up deposited in Naples; and a deposit of cruzadi in Lisbon allowed a payment in Sicilian currency in Messina through the financial mediation of the Order’s receiver in Genoa.

Of course, fund transfers could be aborted, delayed, or re-thought according to unfavourable exchange rates, the reluctance of the Order to fork out the commissions demanded on the transfer, or the whims of creditors unconvinced by the reimbursement guarantees provided by the Order. In 1612, a remittance through letters of exchange for 5,450 ducats on the Bohemia-Venice connection was not accepted and the bills were sent back to Bohemia. The following year, 4,000 florins remitted from Bohemia were not cashed in Venice since the Order’s merchant of reference in the Serenissima was temporarily absent and alternative financiers consulted were

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128 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 246-247r, 22 July 1617.
129 Blouet, 107. See also some of the examples from AOM 107 in footnote 115 and AOM 1006, passim, for the years 1770 to 1798.
130 AOM 101, f. 34r, 5 April 1604.
131 ‘giornalmente’. AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Scipione Trento, ff. 588v-589r, 24 October 1621.
132 AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 215-216r, 2 September 1607.
133 AOM 1400, Wignacourt to David [Vanusle] (Venice), ff. 357v-358r, 30 June 1621.
134 AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), f. 104, 24 April 1610.
135 ‘con poliza da pagarsi à vista à Cesare Passalacqua’. AOM 1429, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 73r, 21 May 1651.
136 AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Metich (Bohemia), f. 259, 19 June 1612.
demanding an ‘exorbitant’ interest on the exchange.\textsuperscript{137} In 1614, the Order was finding it difficult to cash a bill of 120,000 \textit{reali} in Palermo.\textsuperscript{138} In 1620 it was pointed out to the Hospitaller receiver in Lombardy that some merchants in Messina were refusing to clear bills for 2,500 \textit{scudi} he had remitted to the Sicilian port on behalf of the Order.\textsuperscript{139} From similar episodes it emerges that, apart from its own network of agents, the Order needed the services of a host of financiers, merchants, bankers, or individuals with the required cash available who were involved in the craft of fund transfer and were in a position to supply the Knights with cash where it was required, allowing the Order to effect payments on an international level since its pre-Malta phase along fund-transfer routes which became established through time.

\textit{Patterns of Hospitaller Fund Transfer}

\textbf{MAP 4}
Major Patterns of Hospitaller Fund Transfers

Bronstein and Luttrell do give generic indications of Hospitaller fund transfers from Europe, effected to finance the Order’s activities in the Levant in the pre-Malta period, but without elaborating on the mechanisms used except for occasional cash transfers by sea.\textsuperscript{140} One has to see if and to what extent the Order’s medieval sources consulted by these historians elaborate on the

\textsuperscript{137} The merchant who apparently provided the Hospitaller receivership in Venice with cash on a regular basis was a certain Seifrid. AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Metich (Bohemia), f. 116r, 8 March 1613.
\textsuperscript{138} AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 428v, 10 October 1614.
\textsuperscript{139} AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Semiomo (Lombardy), ff. 486v-487, 10 October 1620.
\textsuperscript{140} Luttrell, ‘Actividades economicas’, 179; 180; 182; Luttrell, ‘Interessi fiorentini’, 321-2; Bronstein, 79; 140.
kind of financial transactions adopted in the first place. Commenting on the correspondence consulted to reconstruct contacts between Latin Syria and some of the Order’s western priories in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Bronstein denounces the generic nature of a good part of the letters she sourced, which make it difficult for the historian to pin down even the very ‘needs’ of the Hospitallers.\textsuperscript{141} The early modernist is apparently more privileged in this regard, for Hospitaller sources of the Malta phase are generous in outlining not only the credit transfer mechanisms adopted by the Order, but also the patterns and routes of these transfers which emerge from the Knights’ financial and communication network. According to Luttrell, in the fourteenth century the Order employed the services of several financiers, mostly Tuscan, and Florentine in particular, to transport its funds from Paris, London, and Lisbon to Avignon; and from Catalonia, France, and Venice, to Rhodes. Barcelona and Venice apparently became important fourteenth-century centres for the transport of Hospitaller funds from Iberia and Germany respectively to the Levant, and merchants from Narbonne occasionally transported to the Levant the Order’s money collected from Languedoc.\textsuperscript{142}

As outlined above, the Order continued to rely on the services of financiers in its Malta phase and some Hospitaller fund transfer patterns persisted, at least in part, up to early modernity. Venice and Barcelona, for example, retained their role in the transfer of the Order’s funds from Germany and Iberia respectively, with the difference that the terminal point of the transfer was usually Sicily or Malta, not Rhodes.\textsuperscript{143} Hospitaller documentary sources establish the centrality of Italy for the relocation of the Order of St John’s funds from Europe in early modernity. By the early decades of the seventeenth century, Italy was benefitting from a rush in precious metals which started flowing through its exchange markets with the decline of Antwerp, taking on the role of prime vector of Spanish silver.\textsuperscript{144} The peninsula’s geography and protagonism in the financial evolution of the West, especially from the Renaissance onwards,\textsuperscript{145} rendered it the ideal vehicle through which the Knights could channel their money from Iberia, France, Flanders, Germany, and Bohemia.\textsuperscript{146} Just as in the case of the flux of mail, news-sheets, avvisi, and financial accounts outlined earlier, the Order’s displacement west and ultimate settlement on Malta shortened, and therefore hastened and facilitated all sorts of contacts with Italy, and consequently

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 140.
\textsuperscript{144} Braudel (1986), 494-6; 499.
\textsuperscript{145} Ferguson, 70.
\textsuperscript{146} The priories of Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland were grouped under the Tongue of Germany. The Priory of Hungary was suppressed around 1538. From 1252, Poland was normally included under the title of Bohemian priors. Up to 1610, the only Polish preceptory was that of Posen and an independent Polish priory was only formed in 1775. The Order’s estates in the Low Countries usually fell under the jurisdiction of Hospitaller preceptories in Germany. Sire (1996), 190-7.
with the rest of Europe. The dispatch of a good part of Hospitaller remittances at some stage had an Italian city as a transitory or final destination. Obviously, since in the case of remittances similar to the ones explained above, the effective transfer involved bills of exchange, the flow of remittances followed established patterns of mail transfer to and from Hospitaller Malta. Cities like Venice and Genoa, therefore, played vital roles for the collection and redistribution of Hospitaller funds. Through the Serenissima, the Order collected and redistributed its funds from High and Low Germany and from Bohemia, apart from the funds of the Priory of Venice.\textsuperscript{147} Genoa was used as a collecting station for Hospitaller funds from the Priory of Lombardy and occasionally Iberia, France, Germany, and Flanders.\textsuperscript{148} Once the Order’s funds were deposited in Genoa and Venice, the Hospitaller receivers in these cities would in turn remit them, in full or in part, to other collecting stations according to the Order’s and Malta’s needs, with the ultimate destination often being Malta, Palermo, or Messina as explained earlier.

Florence was a favourite intermediate stage in the remittance south of Hospitaller funds along the Italian peninsula. Funds from Bohemia and Germany could find their way to Florence, either directly or through Venice for example.\textsuperscript{149} Funds thus collected in Florence could be subsequently redirected in full or in part to Rome, Naples, or Sicily, for example.\textsuperscript{150} On its part, Palermo was a collecting station for Hospitaller remittances from Iberia and France.\textsuperscript{151} The Order’s Iberian funds, including those of Valladolid, Aragon, Navarre, and Portugal, were usually deposited in Madrid and those of France, including those of Paris, Tolouse, Aquitaine, and Champagne, in Lyons.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{147} For the Germany-Venice fund trail, see AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Hundt (Germany), ff. 323v-324, 27 September 1604 and AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Muchental (High Germany), f. 60v, 9 March 1608. For the Bohemia-Venice fund trail, see above and AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Metich (Bohemia), f. 60r, 23 January 1606 and AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), ff. 325v-326r, 23 September 1611.

\textsuperscript{148} Grech (2005), 197-200. For the Flanders-Genoa financial connection see, for example, AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Alfonso D’Avolos (Flanders), f. 416r, 30 December 1605 and AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Quartiero (Milan), f. 424r, 14 November 1611. According to Sire, since the twelfth century Hospitaller preceptories in territories considered today as Swiss and Dutch formed part of the Tongue of Germany and therefore their proceeds formed part of the Order’s German responsions. Sire (1996), 192. In 1621, for example, Hospitaller funds from Germany ‘et altre parti’ were to be channelled to Venice. AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Scipione Trento, f. 166v, 4 April 1621.

\textsuperscript{149} For the Bohemia-Venice-Florence-Malta fund trail see, for example, AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), 325v-326r, 23 September 1611. For possible Germany-Florence fund transfers see, for example, AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Muchental (High Germany), ff. 146-148r, 9 June 1607.

\textsuperscript{150} For example: AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Medici (Florence), f. 411, 30 December 1605; AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Gaetani (Florence), f. 295r, 31 August 1611; AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), ff. 157v-158r, 8 April 1614.

\textsuperscript{151} Grech (2005), 199.

\textsuperscript{152} This transfer pattern is occasionally stated explicitly in Hospitaller documentation: \textit{le ricette di Madrid e (...) Leone dove cadono rispettivamente tutti gli effetti della Religione di Francia e Spagna}. AOM 262, ff. 246v-247r, 4 May 1686. See also AOM 262, f. 7v and 16v, 21 May 1672. For the Lyons-Palermo currency remittances see also, for example, AOM 1385, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 202, 30 June 1606.
Funds collected from Spanish commanderies could subsequently be relocated to Barcelona to be transferred elsewhere.\textsuperscript{153} As outlined above, the Order’s receivers in Castile, usually residing in Madrid or Valladolid,\textsuperscript{154} and the Hospitaller contact point in Barcelona\textsuperscript{155} had a direct communication line with the receiver in Palermo for the remittance of funds to Sicily.\textsuperscript{156} Similarly, French responsions intended for remittance to Sicily via bills, were deposited in Lyons for subsequent transfer to Palermo, for example, either directly or else through Genoa.\textsuperscript{157} Messina was the other major Sicilian depository of Hospitaller funds.\textsuperscript{158} As a busy central Mediterranean port,
holder of an industrious mint, vibrant trading hub for the production and redistribution of silk, and Hospitaller Malta’s prime mail connection with Italy, Messina was an obvious magnet for the Order’s funds from Italian and other European priories. It was a terminal credit depository similar to Palermo, from where Hospitaller wheat and other merchandise were subsidized, and a final stop on the Order’s currency trail before cash was shipped to Malta. Despite the fact that the fairs in the city could dry up the availability of capital in Sicilian markets, and therefore momentarily jeopardize currency exchanges and the potential relocation of funds on an international level, the city port was a vital depository in the Order’s early modern financial network. It was in Messina that prioral funds from France, Spain, Italy, and Germany were to be remitted during the Ottoman siege of Malta to help sustain Malta’s defence. At one point in 1613, the Order’s receiver in Florence was instructed to transfer all responses from then on to Messina and Grand Master Lascaris Castellar’s administration waxed lyrical when speaking of the city on the straits, describing it as the best place where to deposit Hospitaller funds, a coffer from where credit could be sourced more readily.

Through this financial network, Hospitaller funds from Germany, Bohemia, Castile, Barcelona, Lyons, Lombardy, Venice, Genoa, Florence, and Naples found their way to Sicily, Malta or wherever they were required. For this network to operate efficiently and effectively, the Common Treasury had to communicate the financial needs of Hospitaller Malta to the various receivers and procurators posted on the continent. It was up to these representatives to keep the Convent updated on the collection stage of the responsions, and consequently on whether the priories were solvent or not, on the availability of bullion in European markets, and on the commodity prices on a continental level. This allowed the Order to decide from where it could draw funds and where these had to be relocated according to Hospitaller Malta’s needs.

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160 Fairs could create financial exchange problems for the Order. In 1606, the exchange funds on the Palermo-Barcelona axis for the purchase of wheat stalled. The Hospitaller receiver in Palermo was advised to wait for the right moment before operating remittances from Catalonia in order to let the effects of the fair in Messina to wear down: ‘che allora speriamo si cambiaria con minor disavantaggio che al presente poiche sarà cessato l’impedimento della fiera di Messina che si suol assorbire tutto il den[a]ro’. AOM 1385, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 252v-253, 8 August 1606.


162 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Gaetani (Florence), f. 521r, 20 October 1613.

163 Hospitaller receivers in Italy were encouraged to remit funds in Messina, described as the ‘luogo più comodo per valersene (ie: dei soldi) la Religione prontamente’. AOM 259, f. 38, 20 August 1652.

164 In 1652, for example, the Procurators of the Order’s Common Treasury reported to the grand master and Council on the financial reports sent by the receivers of Genoa, Madrid, and Valladolid regarding the ‘stato della moneta’ in Spain. AOM 259, f. 61v.
The direction of the flow of the remittances was not always unilateral vis-à-vis the patterns described above. Late in 1614, for example, thousands of ducats and gold scudi were to be transferred from Florence and Naples to Venice where hefty funds were needed to buy various supplies and ship them over to the Convent.\textsuperscript{165} At times, Hospitaller funds deposited in Sicily were subsequently remitted to Genoa to exploit the more favourable exchange rates operative at the time in question on the Ligurian market.\textsuperscript{166} One of the receivers’ tasks, in fact, was to remain informed on the exchange rates offered on the various financial markets and to liaise with the Common Treasury in Malta to be able to choose the best market possible where to exchange Hospitaller funds, subject to feasibility and contemporary contingencies, with the aim of sparing the Order’s Treasury excessive payments on interests. The receiver in Florence, for example, could be afforded the responsibility to decide whether to remit funds to Naples or Sicily, depending on which option best suited the Order’s financial interests.\textsuperscript{167} In 1614 the Order’s receiver in Bohemia proposed to remit Bohemian responsions to Amsterdam where they could be cashed and shipped down the Atlantic to Messina in order to avoid the usual remittance through Venice, where interests for these financial transactions were apparently too high at the time.\textsuperscript{168} The Common Treasury proposed a trial remittance of 2,000 ducats on this route to judge its feasibility and profitability when compared to the Venetian route. The Bohemian receivership had to report to the Convent once the remittance was effected.\textsuperscript{169} Apparently the transaction proved worthwhile although the other examples available for this study to corroborate this claim are few and far apart.

We know that in 1617, 2,000 scudi were transferred on the Bohemia-Amsterdam route and another 1,000 scudi were to be relocated on the same route the following May.\textsuperscript{170} In the summer of 1619 the receiver in Messina was asked to verify if a remittance of 1,000 scudi on the Bohemia-Amsterdam route to Messina had been carried out.\textsuperscript{171}

The high interests demanded for similar transactions on the Venetian market was apparently a recurrent theme in the Hospitaller financial world, to an extent that they could induce the reconsideration of currency fluxes along time-honoured remittance routes such as that from

\textsuperscript{165} AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Gaetani (Florence), f. 383, 12 September 1614; Ibid., Wignacourt to Abenante (Naples), f. 384r, 12 September 1614; Ibid., Wignacourt to Guinigi, f. 490v, 26 November 1614.


\textsuperscript{167} ‘second che conoscerete essere nostro vantaggio’. AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Gaetani (Florence), f. 144v, 31 May 1608.

\textsuperscript{168} ‘per sfuggire il grosso danno che si riceve nel rimettere a Venetia’. AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Metich (Bohemia), ff. 320v-321r, 31 July 1614.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., ff. 320v-321r, 31 July 1614.

\textsuperscript{170} AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Nostiz (Bohemia), f. 367, 27 October 1617.

\textsuperscript{171} AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), f. 317, 29 August 1619. It could be that this transaction was the one that had to be carried out in May 1618 (see below), but we cannot be sure of this.
High Germany to Venice. In 1607, the Order gave instructions for its German funds to be transferred to Genoa or Florence if interests on the Venetian market remained high, and three years later the Order expressed its dismay that fund remittances from Germany were being directed to Venice and not Genoa. Problems due to distance and accessibility could crop up at the responson-collection stage. In the mid-seventeenth century, the commanders of the Priory of High Germany were complaining that depositing responsions in cash with the receiver of the priory was no longer feasible. His residence (not specified here), claimed the commanders, was too distant and the dangers and expenses of cash transport were too high. The city of Basle, deemed more reachable by the dissident German commanders, was suggested as an alternative collecting station, a centre where the Order could post an intermediary depositario with the authority to receive responsions and forward them to the next remittance stage. The Swiss city, which had been used earlier in the Order’s history to remit Hospitaller funds to Venice, was also suggested because of the presence of bankers who could transfer Hospitaller money in Lyons and spare the Order the interests being demanded in Venice. Months after the proposal was presented, however, it was ditched and the normal practice of depositing responsions with the receiver of High Germany was resumed. It was then up to the receiver to decide whether to remit the funds to Lyons or Venice according to convenience.

It was essential for the Order to remain informed on the market situation within the orbit of its financial and communication network. Knowledge on commodity prices, currency exchange rates, and the degree of liquidity in markets was vital in order to purchase merchandise and relocate prorial funds accordingly in the perennial attempt to strike the best possible deal by intercepting the most economical exchange rate, exploiting the least expensive purchase, and concluding the most economic transaction. Early modernity witnessed the rise of business, commercial, and financial information in merchants’ letters and otherwise. By 1540 one could already find printed commodity price lists in Antwerp. In Florence, currency exchange rates

172 AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), ff. 50v-51r, 6 February 1607.
174 AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Gottifredo Drost (Priory of High Germany), f. 308r, 1 May 1656.
175 Present-day Switzerland fell under the Hospitaller jurisdiction of the German Tongue. Sire (1996), 192 and 194.
176 ‘o ve vi sia un depositario il quale abbia autorità di ricevere il denaro’. AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Gottifredo Drost (Priory of High Germany), f. 308r, 1 May 1656.
177 At one point in 1621, 1,000 scudi were transferred from Basle to Venice for the purchase of goods to be shipped to Malta. AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Scalamonti (Venice), f. 393, 18 July 1621.
178 With reference to the Swiss bankers: ‘che ci faranno rispondere il denaro in Leone con minor cambio di quello si sente farlo tener in Venecia …’. AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Gottifredo Drost (Priory of High Germany), f. 308r, 1 May 1656.
179 Ibid., f. 308v, 2 October 1656.
180 Trivellato, 82-3.
were quoted on a weekly basis\textsuperscript{182} and economic information on a European level was available on periodical publications from the late 1500s.\textsuperscript{183} The need of knowledge on currency-related news, such as product availability and description, insurance rates, and information on the negotiability of letters of exchange, generated business correspondence.\textsuperscript{184} The Order’s receivers and agents on the continent somehow or other intercepted this kind of information, although it’s very difficult to say from which source they derived it. This study can boast of one reference, sourced from the Order’s manuscripts, to what appears to have been an official exchange-rate list dated 29 April 1621 and mentioned in a letter addressed to the receiver in Naples in May 1621.\textsuperscript{185} But hardly any conclusions can be drawn from a single reference, so we cannot say that Hospitaller personnel consulted similar exchange rate lists on a regular basis, although it is very plausible. It is easy to imagine, however, that some of the information was also gained first hand from the knowledge of their jurisdiction or from informants. Whichever the source, Hospitaller agents themselves transmitted this kind of economic information on an institutional level to Malta. Hospitaller documents attest the flow of similar economic and financial news to the Convent dispatched from Hospitaller continental personnel.

These updates allowed the Order to adapt its purchase strategy according to what was offered on markets within its reach. Thus the Order was in a position to know that better quality and cheaper biscuit for its galley crews could be fetched in Trapani rather than Syracuse or Palermo,\textsuperscript{186} or the other way round according to contingencies,\textsuperscript{187} that caulking material of better price and quality could be found in Syracuse rather than Messina,\textsuperscript{188} and what price was being asked for the wholesale of tallow in Sardinia,\textsuperscript{189} or for rice in Candia.\textsuperscript{190} Hospitaller agents managed to obtain detailed price lists for the export of grain, timber, metals, and oarsmen from Naples;\textsuperscript{191} they were briefed that olive oil was being sold cheaply at Monopoli in Apulia,\textsuperscript{192} and received tips regarding the price of muskets in Lombardy\textsuperscript{193} and of ammunition in England.\textsuperscript{194} They spared the Order extra expenses on the purchase of gunpowder – the most sought after

\textsuperscript{182} Braudel (1986), 379
\textsuperscript{183} Trivellato, 85.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 87-8.
\textsuperscript{185} With reference to a remittance of 4,000 ducats from Naples to Venice: ‘pagabili in moneta di banco perché così deve intendere il cambio il quale per la cartella de 29 d’aprile correva (...) che viene ad essere con il minor danno che si possa ricevere in fare la detta rimessa’. AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Falco (Naples), ff. 265-266r, 25 May 1621.
\textsuperscript{186} AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 374v, 16 November 1604 and AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Ferro (Trapani), ff. 269v-270r, 31 October 1607.
\textsuperscript{187} AOM 1389, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 126, 18 May 1610.
\textsuperscript{188} AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Settimo (Syracuse), f. 397v, 18 November 1604.
\textsuperscript{189} AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 221-223v, 16 July 1604.
\textsuperscript{190} AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), ff. 54-55, 23 January 1606.
\textsuperscript{191} AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Franc[es]co Maria Sangri, f. 114v, 28 April 1605.
\textsuperscript{192} AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), f. 376, 7 November 1605.
\textsuperscript{193} AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Lombardy), f. 117, 8 March 1613.
\textsuperscript{194} AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Genoa), f. 397v, 20 December 1604.
commodity in case of an enemy threat – by suggesting that it could be bought at cheaper prices in Naples rather than Palermo; they were in a position to compare the prices of Flemish and Apulian cereals with those of Sicily and Naples, and to evaluate the convenience of shipping sulphur from Southern Sicily rather than importing it from Naples. Comparatively fresh knowledge on international markets permitted the Order to gauge the feasibility of importing excellent-quality saltpetre from Flanders and wine from Calabria rather than Syracuse, taking into consideration delivery costs and time.

Through its information network, Hospitaller Malta’s reach in early modern European economy was apparently boundless, enabling Hospitaller administration to consider buying military ammunition from far-off centres like Warsaw, and opting to pay for thousands of cantara of gunpowder in France rather than Germany according to convenience and viability. It was a considerable advantage for the Order since, while having to manoeuvre within the constraints of a pre-industrial communication network, it allowed the Knights to consider economic and financial options on an international arena and to avoid, as much as possible, overdependence on one particular market or other.

Of course these economic and financial updates where nowhere more pertinent than for the export of Sicilian grain, the staple provision of pre-industrial Malta. The Order’s agents posted along Sicily’s littoral kept the Convent informed on harvest forecasts, effective agricultural yields, and grain prices on the island’s markets. Palermo exchanged information with Malta on the general situation and quality of Sicilian harvests, cereal price fluctuations, and supply levels in the wharves of Licata, Sciacca, and Girgenti.

Frequent updates were also dispatched across the channel from Licata, at times on a daily basis, and briefings were also exchanged with

\[\text{AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 169v-170, 30 April 1620.}\]

\[\text{For Flemish wheat see Dal Pozzo, i, 525. For Apulian wheat and barley see AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 60v-61r, 26 January 1603.}\]

\[\text{AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Abenante (Naples), ff. 312v-313r, 31 July 1614.}\]

\[\text{AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 117v, 8 March 1613.}\]

\[\text{AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 503v, 13 November 1615 and AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), ff. 348v-349r, 17 October 1616. For the possible purchase of saltpetre from Syracuse, see AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Mont’alto (Syracuse), ff. 460v-461r, 8 October 1615.}\]

\[\text{AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), f. 355, 23 July 1615.}\]

\[\text{A cantaro was a weight measure equivalent to between 50 and 80 kgs. Nicola Zingarelli (ed.), Il nuovo Zingarelli. Vocabolario della lingua italiana (Bologna, Zanichelli, 1987), 288.}\]

\[\text{AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Hospitaller Meltio, ff. 116v-177r, 24 April 1610.}\]

\[\text{For example: AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), f. 340, 6 October 1604; AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 210-211r, 25 June 1605; AOM 1388, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 248r, 25 July 1609; AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 195-196, 20 April 1613; AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Pugiades (Licata), ff. 358v-359r, 26 August 1614.}\]

\[\text{AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Accarigi (Licata), f. 196v, 25 June 1604; AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Romeo (Licata), ff. 273v-274r, 26 August 1604; AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Carlo Corsetto (Licata), f. 181v, 9 June 1606; AOM 1388, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 285v-286r, 31 August 1609; AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Pugiades (Licata), ff. 383v-384r, 3 August 1613 and Ibid., f. 408r, 13 August 1613.}\]

\[\text{AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Corsetto (Licata), f. 128, 19 May 1608.}\]
First and foremost the Convent tried to predict agricultural yields in order to plan in advance its grain purchase strategy for the season in question. Harvest forecasts were based on weather contingencies. Rainfall levels were a fairly reliable barometer to forecast harvests. Droughts and storms could be equally punishing on crops. Early modern Sicily was apparently a more arid place than its medieval equivalent and demographic swells increased the demand on agricultural yields. South-easterly winds – the dreaded scirocco – carried with them sands from North Africa, suffocating entire agricultural expanses both in Malta and Sicily. Whole harvests from fields of wheat, barley, and vines could go lost. When this happened, Hospitaller Malta knew that most probably it would have to pay more for its provisions or otherwise look elsewhere to stock its wharves. The Order, in consultation with the Common Treasury and the agents in Sicily, evaluated the various grain prices offered on the Sicilian market in conjunction with the effective and potential availability of grain in Malta and across the channel. In principal, and according to market logic, abundant harvests implied lower prices. If this was not so, the Order took its time to look around for a better bargain, perhaps discarding the option to buy from the old harvest and wait for the next, when prices could be more attractive. Grain prices could vary considerably over a short span of time on the same market and between one Sicilian market and another. During the same summer, grain prices in Palermo could go down from 64 tari to 50 tari per salma, while in Licata grain would be sold at 40 tari per salma. On other occasions prices went down by just a few tari or else they could decrease on a daily basis. In the summer of 1607, Licata informed the Order that grain prices were going down despite the fact that cylos were

206 AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Settimo (Syracuse), f. 196, 25 June 1604 and AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Sortino (Syracuse), f. 142r, 31 May 1608.

207 For examples of harvest forecasts reaching Malta from Palermo and elsewhere in Sicily, see AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Accarigi (Licata), f. 244, 9 August 1603; AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Bernardo Capece (Palermo), f. 175v, 7 June 1606; AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), f. 153v, 31 May 1608; Ibid., Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 161, 2 June 1608 and Ibid., ff. 171v-172r, 30 June 1608; AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 211v-212, 2 September 1607; and AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Corsetto (Licata), f. 128, 19 May 1608.

208 See, for example, AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Accarigi (Licata), f. 103, 7 May 1602 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Staiti (Palermo), ff. 122v-123r, [11] May 1602.


210 Ibid., 230.

211 For Malta, see: AOM 1385, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 174v-175r, 7 June 1606. For Sicily, see: AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Afflitto (Syracuse), f. 254v, 6 August 1611. When the scirocco failed to damage Sicilian harvests, this was news deemed worthy to communicate to Malta. AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Corsetto (Licata), f. 94, 24 April 1607.

212 In 1604 the Order was paying higher prices than usual for its grain due to bad weather. AOM 1383, Wignacourt to the Prior of Bohemia, ff. 410v-411, 20 December 1604.

213 As in the summer of 1609, for example, when Sicilian wheat was being sold cheaply due to abundant harvests: ‘non si sente altro che una straordinarissima abbondanza di formenti à prezzi dolcissimi’. AOM 1388, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 285v-286r, 31 August 1609.

214 For example: AOM 1387, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 215v-216, 18 August 1607.

215 AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 160v-162r, 2 May 1616.

216 AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 286v-287r, 11 July 1614.

217 In late 1613, Hospitaller sources reported a three-tari per salma decrease in the price of Sicilian wheat. AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 614v-615, 31 December 1613.
being emptied at a furious pace. In September of that year, in fact, grain in Syracuse was being sold at 10 tari per salma, or less. Such low prices usually occurred when markets were flooded with cereals. Fertile seasons in Sicily had to be exploited to the full by Hospitaller Malta.

All this constituted vital information for the Convent. Apart from allowing the Order to gauge the availability and potential sufficiency of Sicilian grain stocks, and consequently whether alternative grain markets had to be tapped, it could impinge on the timing, quantity, and routes of Hospitaller fund transfers from the continent to subsidize the purchases. If Malta was well stocked with grain, the Order could decide to take the chance and suspend purchases from Sicily in the hope that prices deflated later on in the season. If not, the island’s government had to act quickly to coordinate the transfer of sufficient funds to Sicily before grain prices started rising again by the end of summer when Sicilian stocks would start dwindling. The overall result was that a portion of Hospitaller funds were consistently channelled to Sicily, mainly to Palermo and Messina, where they were either used directly to subsidize the grain purchases or transferred to places like Licata, from where cereals were bought to be shipped to Malta, or else Syracuse or Trapani on opposite ends of the island for the baking of biscuit to be loaded on Hospitaller galleys. Consequently, weather moods in the Mediterranean, the stock levels of grain wharves in Malta and Sicily, and overall market fluctuations conditioned the Order’s fund-transfer strategy. Forecasts of a deficient Sicilian harvest could force the Order to speed up the collection of mortuaries and vacancies in Germany and remit the funds collected to Venice from where they would be transferred south. Alternatively, abundant harvests throughout Sicily as in 1610, coupled with shortages in the circulation of silver currency for which Sicily was notorious, could cause a dramatic decline in grain prices, creating a conjuncture too favourable for the Order

218 Cereal stocks ‘calavano à gran furia in quei caricatori (...) e che però tuttavia andavano abbassando di prezzo’. AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 204v-205, 11 August 1607.
219 AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Sortino (Syracuse), f. 213v, 2 September 1607.
220 See for example: AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), f. 268, 25 August 1605.
221 Alternative provision sources did not always suffice. In the first half of 1603, notwithstanding its efforts, the Order failed to fetch enough alternative wheat from the Levant to see Malta through until the next harvest. AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Afflittio (Palermo), ff. 142v-143r, 12 May 1603.
222 See for example: AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 163-164, 29 June 1607.
223 AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 267-268r, 25 August 1605.
224 At one point in 1604, for example, the Order’s agents in Venice, Florence, Genoa, and Naples were to transfer to Palermo all the funds possible for the purchase of wheat. AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 370-372, 16 November 1604. This is just one example. More will be provided further on.
225 See, for example: AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Pugiades (Licata), ff. 358v-359r, 26 August 1614 and AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 93v-94, 20 February 1619.
226 See, for example, AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Mazzara (Syracuse), f. 270v, 19 June 1612 and AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 208v-209, 22 May 1620.
227 See, for example, AOM 1389, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 71v-72, 24 March 1610 and AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 222, 27 May 1613.
228 See, for example, AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Muchental (Germany), f. 136, 19 May 1608.
229 AOM 1389, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 242v-244r, 2 August 1610.
230 Mack Smith,217. Such shortages were mainly the result of the over-evaluation of gold in relation to silver. Braudel (1986), 463.
not to exploit, by injecting its own currency from all over Europe in the Sicilian markets to buy grain. Systematic Hospitaller fund-transfer patterns thus came to be established to meet the subsistence needs of early modern Malta, with thousands of scudi of the Order’s credit being deposited in Palermo from Spain and Lyons, either directly or through Genoa and Naples. Funds could also reach Palermo or Messina from Germany via Venice, or from Lombardy via Genoa. Naples, a grain market in its own terms and a banking centre from where to relocate Hospitaller funds, was a conveniently close market to tap for alternative credit when time was pressing. Between 1599 and 1628, a span of years covering the period under study, the Royal Mint of Naples minted 13 million ducats, coins which were immediately injected into circulation, rendering Naples one of the money markets less likely to end up insolvent in the Mediterranean. In September 1605, as soon as the Convent received news that wheat prices in Sicily had gone down, the receiver in Palermo was ordered to purchase wheat for 20,000 ducats remitted from the ricetta of Naples. In early 1618, when delays in Hospitaller remittances from Lombardy, Genoa, and Venice were compromising the baking of biscuit in Messina, the Common Treasury suggested that 3,000 ducats could be withdrawn from Naples to cover the commission.

The Convent’s cereal barometer which updated early modern Malta on the availability and prices of grain within the confines of the Hospitaller world, and Sicily in particular, had to be accompanied by a wider knowledge of the solvency situation and currency exchange-rates of Euro-Mediterranean markets which somehow intersected the Order of St John’s communication and financial network. As explained earlier, the remittance of funds from Hospitaller financial centres to Sicily, Malta, or wherever the Order needed capital, was an operation which depended on a few basic conditions. First, the priories had to be solvent, meaning that enough responsions were to be collected to satisfy Hospitaller Malta’s needs. Like any institution which relied on financiers or money-lenders to transfer its funds, or which provided payment facilities at a distance, the Order was jealous of its creditworthiness. As it was to learn at its own tragic expense...
in the post revolutionary crises of the 1790s,\textsuperscript{241} defaulting on payments could spell ruin, a dreaded implication which Alof de Wignacourt seemed wary to avoid when drilling the simple equation to the receivership of Palermo in the summer of 1612 regarding the use of bills in either direction from Malta:

we cannot send bills (bolle) if we are not sure that the transactions to be carried out through them can be paid for sure.\textsuperscript{242}

Secondly, the European markets hosting the priories had to be solvent themselves in order to allow currency conversions required by the Order’s transactions. Currency exchange rates could also be determined by the degree of availability of bullion on a particular market. In 1609, the Order was worried that its receiver in Castile would have to pay hefty interests if compelled to fork out all payments in silver at a time when Spain was experiencing severe shortages of the metal.\textsuperscript{243} The Order was not always happy to effect payments in silver\textsuperscript{244} and cash transactions in Madrid occasionally could prove difficult to carry out, as denounced in 1618 by Brocchero, the Order’s ambassador in the Spanish Court.\textsuperscript{245} Shortages in currency on a certain piazza could shoot interests upwards in money-lending transactions, as happened to Philip II in 1561 when he contracted an asiento\textsuperscript{246} of 100,000 ducats on the Genoa exchange at the outrageous rate of 21.6 per cent.\textsuperscript{247}

Thirdly, and similarly, the markets where the Order had to cash its funds to carry out payments had to have liquid currency available. In other words, the Hospitaller agents had to find financiers, merchants, or anyone with enough cash available to provide the Order with the sums required. This was a basic prerequisite to finalize remittances where the payments of goods were to be effected. Regional contingencies could swallow up capital to a degree that made it difficult for Hospitaller personnel to find solvent financiers, as in the case of the Messina fairs mentioned earlier. Consequently, the Order needed constant market information on multiple levels to be kept updated on what cash it could rely on, the exchange rates offered in Europe, which markets offered the best rates for the remittance of funds, and which markets were more solvent than others. As partly explained earlier, Hospitaller receivers and procurators were tasked to provide this information to the Convent and were allowed a degree of autonomy by the Order’s hierarchy when

\textsuperscript{241} Grech (1999), 207-17.
\textsuperscript{242} ‘non si possono spedire bolle se non quando siamo sicuri che i cambi che si devono fare in virtù di esse possino essere pagati sicuramente’. AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 346-347r, 31 July 1612.
\textsuperscript{243} ‘mentre in Spagna ne corre pochissimo’. AOM 1388, Wignacourt to the Governatore di Modica, f. 281v, 28 August 1609.
\textsuperscript{244} AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), 402v-403, 25 August 1615.
\textsuperscript{245} AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), ff. 50v-51r, 21 February 1618.
\textsuperscript{246} An asiento was ‘a short-term loan at high interest’. Céline Dauverd, Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean. Genoese Merchants and the Spanish Crown (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015), 68.
\textsuperscript{247} Braudel (1986), 489.
deciding which markets were best to deposit funds in. Apart from this, when demanded by circumstances, Hospitaller agents posted on the continent communicated with each other to coordinate the most feasible fund transfers possible. In 1615, Sollima in Messina and Ponte in Naples were advised to collaborate in finding the best way to transfer funds and reduce the losses that the currency exchange and transfers on the Naples-Messina fund stream were incurring due to the silk fair being held in Messina.

Receivers were allowed enough administrative leeway to decide whether to deposit sums in Naples, Messina, or Palermo in the summer months according to the most convenient interests rates which, to their knowledge, were on offer. This way they had funds available to buy cereals that same winter, or by the following spring in order to buy thousands of cantara of biscuit in Syracuse or Trapani, right in time to stock Hospitaller galleys when the sailing season started. Receivers and procurators had also the remit to negotiate currency exchange rates, although the last word was usually dictated from Malta on such matters. In early 1613, following the advice of the Common Treasury, the terms for a remittance to Messina negotiated by the receiver in Naples were overruled by the Convent, deeming the transaction unfavourable. Each receiver had a market zone of competence according to the Hospitaller financial jurisdiction he was posted in. The receivership of Palermo, for example, was consulted by the Order for its knowledge of Spanish markets, and could be asked to update Malta with the currency exchanges in Sicily, Lyons, Provence, Barcelona, and Castile.

Thus, knowledge about the level of capital available on a piazza for bills to be cleared and payments to be effected had to be supplemented by information regarding the availability of Hospitaller responsions collected in the various priories. In June 1606, the German priories provided the Order with the most secure financial guarantees to remit capital in Sicily by October of that year to cover grain exports. The situation would change drastically with the onset of the Thirty Years War. If, as explained earlier, the Order did not have funds available in Castile, the transactions on the Castile-Sicily axis would stall or be postponed. The receiver in Palermo could brief the Convent regarding the larghezza di cambio, the availability of currency, in the

248 AOM 1385, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 174v-175r, 7 June 1606.
249 ‘per occasione della fiera della seta’. AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 351, 23 July 1615.
250 For example: AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Gaetani (Florence), f. 144v, 31 May 1608.
251 See, for example, AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), f. 374v, 16 November 1604 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Malvicino (Venice), f. 386, 16 November 1604.
252 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Abenante (Naples), ff. 134v-135r, 22 March 1613.
253 AOM 1388, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 249v-250r, 5 August 1609.
254 AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 401, 3 September 1612.
255 AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 312, 10 November 1612.
256 AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Medici (Florence), ff. 122v-123r, 2 June 1607.
257 See chapter six.
258 See also AOM 1388, Wignacourt to the Governatore di Modica, f. 109, 11 March 1609.
Spanish and French markets, but the Order would not be able to exploit the favourable contingency unless it had enough money available on those markets, as apparently was the case in early 1607.\(^{259}\) This was a most unfortunate situation for the Order. A market flooded with currency was an opportunity not to be missed. The Genoese would take the trouble of dispatching express couriers from Madrid all the way to Antwerp simply to exploit favourable market conditions in Northern Europe.\(^ {260}\)

Financial interdependencies on a Euro-Mediterranean level conditioned Hospitaller monetary administration. The Order manipulated its fund-transfer strategy according to its needs, to its current financial condition, and to international market fluctuations. Knowledge of the possibility to effect favourable exchanges on Sicilian markets could induce the Order to commission daily remittances to Sicily from its receivers in Italy to exploit the profitable situation.\(^{261}\) If only a maximum of 6,000 libre in bills could be cleared in Saragossa (Aragon), cash availability in Palermo would be limited.\(^ {262}\) Information from Messina that coins were circulating more freely on the opposite end of Sicily could deflect Hospitaller remittances to the Palermo-Lyons axis.\(^ {263}\) Similarly, knowledge that coins were circulating in greater abundance in Naples rather than Palermo\(^ {264}\) could encourage the Order to remit responsibilities in the centre of Campania. The Order’s hierarchy, in consultation with the Common Treasury,\(^ {265}\) had to study the best options available to remit funds to Palermo or elsewhere if interest rates demanded on the Palermo exchange were exceptionally high, as claimed by the Order in July 1606.\(^ {266}\) Market contingencies conditioned Malta’s grain-purchasing strategy, forcing the Order to make adjustments in its fund-relocation policy. What appeared viable in spring, could not be practicable by autumn. In the early months of 1617, the only way to transfer 40,000 scudi to Palermo appeared to be via Castile and Aragon,\(^ {267}\) but by the end of September of that year the Order was encountering difficulties in transferring funds from Spain.\(^ {268}\) However, funds could also be transferred in cash and the Order of St John chose to adopt this option whenever circumstances allowed it.

\(^{259}\) AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 55-56, 11 February 1607.

\(^{260}\) Braudel (1986), 367, footnote 55.

\(^{261}\) ‘cambi si potranno fare vantaggiosi per tutte le piazze rispetto all’abundanza della moneta che corre costi di mal peso’. AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 215-216r, 2 September 1607.

\(^{262}\) AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 162, 7 May 1616.

\(^{263}\) AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 578-579, 31 December 1612.

\(^{264}\) AOM 1385, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 177, 9 June 1606.

\(^{265}\) See, for example, AOM 1396, Wigncourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 124v-125, 22 April 1617.

\(^{266}\) Writing to the receiver in Naples in July 1606, Wignacourt complained about the ‘grossi, et insoliti interessi che corrono presentemente nella piazza di Palermo’, and voiced the same complaint with reference to Palermo to the Procuratore in Messina a few weeks later: ‘non si possono fare (...) cambi senza un gravissimo et insolito interesse’. AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 216v-217, 2 July 1606 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Procuratore Ventimiglia (Messina), f. 243, 18 July 1606 respectively.

\(^{267}\) AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 124v-125, 22 April 1617.

\(^{268}\) AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 328r, 26 September 1617.
The Transport of Hospitaller Bullion

The transfer of money in cash became more problematic as western capitalism started maturing, trade volumes on an intercontinental level started increasing, and the government treasuries of modern monetary economies started becoming more demanding. The payment of the salaries of ever growing mercenary armies, just to mention an activity which could require hefty amounts of specie, solicited a flow of currency which the bills of exchange, those ‘privileged goods’ which played such a distinctive role in the financial revolution of pre-industrial western society, were not always able to satisfy. The obvious problem with the transfer of cash was that it was reliant on man, animal, currents, and winds in quantities and forces more or less proportional to the amounts of bullion in ingots or coins relocated. A solitary courier could only carry gold coins in his garments to minimize the weight and make up sums of any significance worth transferring, with the inevitable risk of falling prey to rascals and bandits. When much larger amounts of cash, usually at institutional levels, had to be carried over long distances, the transport dynamics became more intricate and the incidence of geopolitics, financial feasibility, and climate increased. After the bourse of Antwerp was set up in 1531, Spanish silver was shipped north to Antwerp and Bruges in the zabras (vessels) of Biscay to pay the salaries of Habsburg mercenaries, a transport pattern which allowed Spain to avoid the troubles in French territory, but which started encountering severe difficulties after 1568 when English pirates started targeting this traffic, disrupting the plans of the Duke of Alva and inflicting a heavy blow to Spain’s Atlantic route.

As an alternative, in the 1570s Philip II risked transporting bullion overland through France to finance Spanish warfare in the Netherlands, but this required heavy escort, recourse to diplomacy to obtain the French monarchy’s permission, and the agency of Genoese financiers. The Genoese shunned the land route from Cartagena to Barcelona in the second half of the sixteenth century, deeming it dangerous for the transport of their cash. The war with the ‘Turk’, which attracted more Spanish capital to the Mediterranean from the 1570s, and the greater influx of American silver in Seville from the 1580s, invigorated the Barcelona-Genoa sea route for the transport of specie and it was only after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 that the Spanish could transfer their bullion north in Dutch ships.

The transport of Hospitaller bullion was, geographically speaking, a lopsided maritime affair, since it was mainly restricted to shipments in the western half of the Mediterranean. With

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269 Braudel (1986), 375.
270 Ibid., 484 and 499.
271 Ibid., 480-3; Grech (2005), 200.
272 According to Braudel, the routes across France were used by the Spanish only up to 1578. Braudel (1986), 484-7.
273 Ibid., 490.
274 Ibid., 487-93.
275 Bonney, 437-8.
the exception of Venice, all the principal ports through which the Order could ship its funds – mainly Barcelona, Marseilles, Genoa, Naples, Messina, and Palermo - were in the Western Mediterranean. With a single galley trip in these waters, which occasionally could include stops in other harbours of the Spanish, French, and Italian littorals, the Order could end up collecting and ship with relative safety to Sicily or Malta the responsions from its Iberian, French, Italian, and occasionally German priories when currency from the latter was deposited in Genoa and not Venice.\(^{276}\) The shipment of Hospitaller money from Amsterdam along the Atlantic described above was apparently highly exceptional and until further evidence is provided we cannot conclude that this traffic became a systematic pattern in Hospitaller bullion transfer as the seventeenth century progressed. Neither do the documents consulted for this study provide any indication that Hospitaller bullion from the European priories was shipped along the Adriatic from Venice, for example, notwithstanding the Republic’s pivotal role in the transfer south of the Order’s funds, as evidenced above. In the Adriatic, the Order apparently could not count on a service similar to the one which occasionally could be provided by Genoese galleys when they carried Hospitaller capital south along the Tyrrhenian on their way to load Sicilian silk,\(^ {277}\) and deploying Hospitaller galleys solely to ship funds from Venice could be unfeasible, especially when risk factors were considered in the equation.

The Ottoman threat could have continental and maritime implications for Hospitaller Malta, conditioning traffic related to the archipelago well beyond the islands’ shores. Shipments of commodities from Venice destined to the Convent could be delayed to avoid the risk of encountering Turkish fleets at the mouth of the Adriatic if Hospitaller intelligence suspected the concomitant possibility of enemy sorties west beyond Morea.\(^ {278}\) The Order was ready to risk shipping these commodities from Venice, often in single unescorted Flemish vessels, as described earlier in this study, presumably because this option was still more feasible than transferring merchandise overland through Italy, but it was apparently not prepared to take similar risks to transfer its bullion. Single merchant ships hired by the Venetian receivership could not provide the degree of security guaranteed by armed galleys and the Order could count on alternative fund transfer options from Venice anyway. The Western Mediterranean was not exempt from similar

\(^{276}\) Grech (2005), 198.

\(^ {277}\) At times the Order exploited the service of Genoese and Spanish vessels to transfer prioral bullion and merchandise. Grech (2005), 197-8. See also: AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Genoa), f. 92, 2 April 1605; Ibid., f. 229, 29 July 1605; AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), ff. 150v-151r, 30 April 1609; AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), f. 118, 24 April 1610; AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), ff. 276-277r, 24 August 1611; AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), f. 338, 4 July 1613; Ibid, f. 413r, 13 August 1613; Ibid, to Torriglia (Messina), f. 410v, 13 August 1613 and AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), f. 384v, 12 September 1614. According to Grand Master Nicholas Cotoner, the Genoa-Messina sea route was travelled on a yearly basis by several vessels, providing a convenient maritime connection for whoever wanted to transfer goods or money south along the Tyrrenidian. AOM 1444, Cotoner to Guglielmo Balbiano, ff. 36v-37r, 29 March 1669.

\(^ {278}\) See, for example, AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), ff. 292v-293r, 28 August 1617.
Muslim menaces. As already mentioned, the Tyrrhenian coast south of Rome was not renowned for safe shipping and Ottoman sorties could occasionally roam Calabrian waters, but the possibility of collecting several responsions in one trip and escorting them with multiple galleys rendered these ventures worthwhile for the Order.

As for the continental transfer of Hospitaller responsions, this study has no solid evidence that the Order’s currency was systematically transported overland in its journey towards Sicily, Malta, or elsewhere. It must be said that in the case of the fund remittances explained earlier, Hospitaller documents do not always specify whether these were effected in bills of exchange or specie, or a combination of both. When discussing the transfer of Spanish capital through France in the 1570s, Braudel seems to suggest that we cannot conclude that money travelled in specie unless it is specifically stated in documents. In the case of the Hospitaller remittance mechanism for the relocation of funds from the European priories, it is highly unlikely that the Order was in a position to systematically transfer substantial sums overland in cash without some kind of escort, and the carriage costs would probably have been prohibitive. However, the overland transport of specie when responsions were collected to be deposited with the receiver of the respective priories – as in the case of High Germany described earlier - or by merchants at some stage of the remittance from Europe cannot be excluded. At one point the Order’s contemporary chronicler Dal Pozzo seems to imply that the Hospital’s Castilian responsions deposited in Madrid were carried overland to the Spanish Mediterranean coast, a journey between 150 and 200 miles long, where they had to be loaded on the Order’s galleys. A rare and explicit reference to the overland transport of Hospitaller cash is made in a letter dated September 1607, when the Order was planning the carriage of a sum from Licata to Palermo for the purchase of wheat on behalf of the Università. The wording of the correspondence, however, specifies that the transfer in question was to go through only under appropriate escort and the whole operation was to be carried out in great secrecy, presumably to limit the risk of ambush. The decision was left to the receiver of Palermo who apparently approved, for by the end of the following month a sum in cash was transferred along the Licata-Palermo land route.

Notwithstanding the risks and costs involved, cash transfers afforded more than one advantage, all of which justify why an institution like the Order of St John occasionally chose to transport its own money in physical bulk at some stage during the relocation of its funds: they

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279 Ibid., ff. 292v-293r, 28 August 1617.
281 Dal Pozzo, ii, 277-8.
282 The Università was the Maltese municipal council whose powers, a few decades after the Order settled in Malta, were gradually and mainly restricted to the administration of grain. Carmel Cassar, *A Concise History of Malta* (Malta, Mireva Publications, 2000), 84-5.
283 AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 249v-250r, 23 September 1607.
284 AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 271-272, 31 October 1607.
allowed a greater control on the overall transfer, making it possible to avoid territorial troubles, defy market fluctuations, and bypass *piazzas* where liquidity was poor and exchange rates unfavourable; and they reduced the number of remittance stages, cutting on transaction costs and consequently diminishing the dependence on money-lenders, merchants, and intermediaries, saving on commission charges. In 1605, the Order was considering alternative options to transfer its Spanish money from Barcelona, probably also in cash, since a previous transfer of 30,000 scudi from the Catalan exchange through a remittance mechanism had cost the Order an exorbitant 12 per cent interest.\footnote{\textit{\`{p}oi che (…) si uscirebbe dall’insopportabile danno che si patisce pi\`{u} che mai nel cambio delle bolle per Barcelona che nell’ultimo della 30 mila scudi non `e stato meno di 12 per cento’}. AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 302v-304r, 23 September 1605.}

A typical bullion-collecting trip by Hospitaller galleys in the western half of the Mediterranean envisaged stops on the Spanish, French, and Italian littorals, to conclude the journey in one Sicilian port or more before crossing over to Malta.\footnote{See, for example, AOM 259, ff. 49v-50r, AOM 432, f. 254 and Dal Pozzo, ii, 206; 227-9.} Galley trips of this scale were usually commissioned with multiple tasks. Logistics, the costs involved, the Order’s military schedule, and the seasons made it highly unlikely for the Order to plan galley trips solely to ship bullion,\footnote{Grech (2005), 198.} unless the distances involved were relatively short and the operation was financially worthwhile, as in 1612, when currency on the Sicilian market was easily available and money presumably cheap.\footnote{News from Sicily had it that the ‘commercio della moneta si `e allargato’, so the Order sent galleys to load cash from Messina. AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina) ff. 246v-247r, 6 June 1612.} On other occasions, the galleys would be sent on purpose from Malta to pick cash, normally from Palermo or Messina, especially if the sums involved were substantial.\footnote{See, for example, AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 465v, 12 December 1611; AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), ff. 246v-247r, 6 June 1612.} The Order’s documents talk of Hospitaller galleys returning from Messina with sacks full of *scudi*, at times in their thousands,\footnote{AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 145v, 22 May 1610; Ibid., f. 155, 12 June 1610.} and in 1616 the Convent sent three galleys to Palermo to collect the grand sum of 30,000 *scudi*.\footnote{AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 78, 7 March 1616.}

But the norm was to schedule longer trips with multiple commissions. Hospitaller galleys sailing the in the western half of the Mediterranean would also stop in Genoa to take on board goods,\footnote{Dal Pozzo, ii, 206.} harbour in the Island of Elba to load a cargo of iron,\footnote{Ibid., ii, 206.} and transport oarsmen from Naples.\footnote{AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 353v-354r, 30 October 1606.} These trips were meticulously charted by the Order, for their stoppages had to be coordinated with the Hospitaller agents stationed in the respective ports where the galleys had to load bullion, merchandise, or otherwise, as will be shown in chapter seven. Whichever method was used to relocate responsions through Iberia, France, and Italy, prioral bullion intended to be shipped to Malta from the western half of the Mediterranean had to be made available in cash in...
ports like Cartagena, Alicante, Barcelona, Marseilles, Genoa, or Naples for example. An account of 1569 explains how Iberian funds were to make their way to Malta after being collected from Portugal, Castile and Leon, relocated to Aragon and deposited in Barcelona, from where they were to catch a shipping connection to Genoa, Naples, or Sicily to be presumably picked up by Hospitaller galleys. Fast forward a century, and we find three Hospitaller galleys in 1652 sailing north along Sicily’s eastern coast and the Tyrhenian, drop mail addressed to Genoa at the Ligurian Riviera, and stop at Nice before sailing to Marseilles to load goods and bullion made available from the French priories. The departure from Marseilles was to be delayed to see if Maisenseuls, the Hospitaller receiver in Lyons, was in a position to provide the galleys with further cash before they coasted to Genoa to collect more funds made available in the Ligurian port and continue their trip south along the Tyrhenian for a stopover in Campania to load more silver and gold obtained from the Knights’ *spogli*. 

Episodes a century apart such as these indicate a certain recurrence in the Order’s monetary administration, but enough similar documented instances exist in between to corroborate claims of fairly standard procedures regulating the transfer of Hospitaller bullion in the western half of the Mediterranean. A superficial look at the twenty years or so under study would reveal similar bullion-collecting trips in 1605, 1606, 1607, 1610, 1613, 1616, and 1621. Occasionally this cash could stall in Sicily according to Hospitaler Malta’s needs, as in 1607 when thousands of *scudi* were shipped in great secrecy from Barcelona to Messina. Hospitaller cash could also travel between Sicilian markets to cover costs of purchases commissioned by the Convent, as when specie were shipped to Syracuse to finance the making of biscuit for the Order’s crews.

If the Order’s money from cash shipments, remittances through bills of exchange, or the routine collection of responsions from the priories was not held in Sicily, Southern Italy, or elsewhere, it was usually shipped to Malta either by the Hospitaller squadron during its trips in the Western Mediterranean or by galleys sent on purpose from Malta to collect funds, as explained earlier. At times Hospitaller bullion, or credit in bills of exchange converted to money, was

\[\text{Grech (2005), 197-202.}\]
\[\text{AOM 432, ff. 253-254, 27 June 1569.}\]
\[\text{Dal Pozzo, ii, 206 and AOM 259, ff. 49v-50r.}\]
\[\text{See, respectively: AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Bertone (Lombardy), ff. 309v-310r, 23 September 1605; AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 353v-354r, 30 October 1606; AOM 1386, Wignacourt to the Gen[eral]le delle Galere, ff. 87v-88r, 21 March 1607; Dal Pozzo, i, 554-5; AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Paolo La Restia, Governatore di Modica, f. 291, 7 June 1613; AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Amb. Gattinara (Rome), f. 181v, 17 May 1616; AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Balio Conte di Brie, Generale delle Galere, ff. 568v-569r, 22 October 1621.}\]
\[\text{AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Gio Batta Abenanti, Cap[ita]no della Capitana, f. 116r, 19 May 1607.}\]
\[\text{AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Afflitto (Syracuse), f. 293, 31 August 1611 and AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Mazzarra (Syracuse), f. 245v, 6 June 1612.}\]
deposited in Naples, Palermo, or Messina\textsuperscript{301} to exploit the return home of the Order’s galleys roaming the Mediterranean at the time to be subsequently shipped to Malta. This way Hospitaller galleys drifting along the coasts of Sicily, or returning from the Western Mediterranean or from missions in the Levant, would load the Order’s funds previously deposited in physical bulk in Naples, Palermo, or Messina, or cashed in these ports through exchanges with markets like Barcelona, Lyons, Lombardy, Venice, Genoa, or Florence.\textsuperscript{302} It was very unlikely that substantial sums in cash were transported in vessels other than galleys unless for relatively short distances, such as channel crossings between Malta and Southern Italy for the transfer of the \textit{Università’s} cash, the money of the ‘\textit{popolo’}. This cash was usually shipped to Licata on the padroni’s frigates to pay for wheat from the wharves in Southern Sicily,\textsuperscript{303} although in October 1607, cash on the Malta-Licata route was carried in four galleys.\textsuperscript{304} But the use of galleys for the specific shipment of bullion along such short crossings seems to have been an exception.

Whatever logistics were involved, the relocation of prrioral funds tested the Hospitaller Malta’s communication network to the full, for the transfer operations, whether in physical bulk, through financial remittance mechanisms, or a combination of both, had to overcome the entire gamut of tyrannies which bridled pre-industrial man’s efforts when trying to sustain systematic connections through time and space. Distance, topography, the winds and the currents, bureaucracy, war, and epidemics, combined with the eternal frailties of human nature, all conspired to hinder, restrain, or slow down communication. The struggle to surmount barriers and maintain contacts knew no truce and Hospitaller Malta, lying precariously on the Habsburg-Ottoman divide, with a radius of continental interests ranging from Portugal to Bohemia, and harassed by Mediterranean perils emanating from North Africa and the Levant, had to grapple consistently with similar contingencies to defy isolation and survive.

\textsuperscript{301} AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 147r, 1 April 1613. For more similar examples, see above and chapter seven.

\textsuperscript{302} See, for example, AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), f. 317, 23 September 1605; AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 26-27r, 3 January 1607; AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), ff. 377v-378r, 20 November 1610; AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 191, 28 June 1611; AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Alessandria), f. 496v, 10 October 1613; AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), ff. 332v-333, 17 August 1614; Ibid., Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 379v, 12 September 1614; Ibid., f. 428v, 10 October 1614; AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 87r, 16 March 1616; AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 337r, 10 October 1617.

\textsuperscript{303} Some examples: AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Scicli), ff. 94v-95r, 26 March 1612; AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 125, 8 March 1613; AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 84r-85r, 17 February 1614. In 1614, the instalments in cash of a \textit{cambio} of 20,000 reals a month on the Castile-Sicily remittance route contracted with the Countess of Modica were to be shipped from Scicli on the frigate of Padron Vincenzo. AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Accarigi (Scicli), ff. 404v-405r, 28 September 1614.

\textsuperscript{304} AOM 1386, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 260, 14 October 1607.
OBSTACLES TO MOBILITY
HOSPITALLER MALTA’S STRUGGLE TO KEEP COMMUNICATION LINES ACTIVE

How Far was Hospitaller Malta from the Surrounding World?

So much could go wrong when trying to communicate in a pre-industrial society, so many obstacles had to be surpassed, so many variables had to be considered and dealt with. Seasonal moods, the winds, the currents, distances, the vagaries of landscape, missed connections, bad roads, the lack of roads, deficient courier services or their absence, diplomatic stumbling blocks, mischievous foreign jurisdictions, contingencies, temperamental markets, and human negligence, incompetence, and malevolence just to mention the most obvious that immediately come to mind.¹

In essence, communication in all its facets implies the transfer of some form of information or message, which in a preindustrial context implied, or could imply, the transfer of humans, supplies, merchandise, currency, or otherwise. Therefore the issue of distances and time is unavoidable for the historian who sets himself the quixotic and quasi impossible task of trying to establish a reliable model of how far, in terms of travel times, a rock in the middle of the Mediterranean was from the world surrounding it in early modernity. When tackling such a complex remit, the need for inspiration and guidance becomes more pronounced, and reverting to the *Annaliste* tradition, and to one of its doyen pioneers in particular, becomes second nature to an early modernist irrespective of the revisions and reconsiderations the approach of the French school has been subjected to in the decades since it appeared on the scene of historical scholarship.²

Fernand Braudel’s rendering of the implications and complexities involved in pre-industrial communication efforts and networks persists in its validity and can be reasonably downscaled and applied to a more contained context similar to that of Hospitaller Malta, starting with the French


master’s frank denunciation of the impossibility of formulating definite and accurate matrices about average delivery speeds in pre-industrial times.\textsuperscript{3} So we can safely declare from the onset that it is not possible to establish precise averages of travel and transport speeds in order to formulate an idea of journey times to and from Hospitaller Malta. What possible definite averages or conclusions can we draw about the time needed to sail between Venice and Malta, for example, when in the eighteenth century a ship from the Adriatic port could take from eleven to 71 days to reach the island?\textsuperscript{4} If we are to stick to transport over water alone, currents in any sea could create huge discrepancies between travel speeds in either direction along the same route, a problem which already appeared obvious to a medieval traveller like Marco Polo when describing some strong currents in the Indian Ocean which made return journeys from the south of Madagascar next to impossible.\textsuperscript{5} The same way as the currents in the Straits of Messina could create problems for crossings between the west and east of the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{6} 

So we will not try to create what cannot be created, but simply give an idea of some of the effective early modern distances which separated Malta from the surrounding world, however lame, inconclusive, and misleading this idea could be. Braudel estimated that the Mediterranean’s diameter could be sixty days long.\textsuperscript{7} So can we say that Malta was, very roughly, almost a month from the Straits of Gibraltar and a month and a few days away from the coast of Syria? But can we deem this a reliable and acceptable approximation considering that a vessel could sail from Crete to Cadiz in a month?\textsuperscript{8} And what about distances on the north-south axis? Connections with Mediterranean littorals could be carried out directly by sea, but those beyond implied a combination of travel stages on land and sea, both of which could harbour particular delays and contingencies of their own. We know, for example, that in 1658 the Knight Carlo de Sales took four months to reach the Caribbean from Malta,\textsuperscript{9} but how frequent and long were his inevitable stops? In 1603, an irritated Alof de Wignacourt complained that a letter from the Prior of Castile took over three months to reach Malta\textsuperscript{10} and towards the end of 1620, he was still wondering about what happened to an official letter he had written to the King of Persia eleven years before, since he was still unsure whether or not it had been delivered successfully.\textsuperscript{11} At an exceptional yet

\textsuperscript{3} Braudel, 360-1.
\textsuperscript{4} Victor Mallia-Milanes, ‘Some Aspects of Veneto-Maltese Commercial Relations during the XVIII\textsuperscript{th} Century’, unpublished M.A. dissertation, Department of History, University of Malta, 1972, 154 and 156.
\textsuperscript{5} Marco Polo, \textit{The Travels of Marco Polo}, T. Griffith (ed.) Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, Hertfordshire 1997, 249.
\textsuperscript{7} Braudel ultimately gives this approximation after giving averages ranging between two months, eighty days, and three months. Braudel, 363, 365, and 371.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibíd., 362.
\textsuperscript{10} AOM 1382, Wignacourt to the Prior of Castile, ff. 373v-374r, 29 December 1603.
\textsuperscript{11} AOM 1399, Wignacourt to the King of Persia, ff. 553v-554, 2 December 1620. For the letter in question, see AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Amb. Lomellino (Rome), ff. 329-330, 26 October 1609.
indicative level, correspondence from Lisbon could take over a year to be delivered to the Convent, but mail from Cologne addressed to Malta could take almost three months to arrive. On 22 January 1612, the Convent registered the receipt of a letter from Lucerne in Switzerland dated 8 October 1611, while mail from Mantua dated 25 November 1615 made it to Malta only on 3 April of the following year. A letter from Bohemia dated 22 October 1619 reached Malta over two months later, ‘held back by bad weather’ according to the correspondence in question and presumably, we would add today, by the initial disruptions of the Thirty Years War. But in 1607 a particular letter from Bohemia took five months to make it to the grand master’s desk. Mail could take four months to reach Malta from Cracow but almost eight months from Graz in Austria, lying 350 km closer on a south-west axis. A letter from Amsterdam dated 22 October 1619 took two and a half months to make it to Malta. News-sheets from Constantinople dated 8 November 1613 were relayed to Rome from Malta with a dispatch dated 17 February 1614, yet the Order labelled the information as fresh and recent. The Smyrna-Malta and Corfu-Malta sea crossings could be carried out in twelve days, similarly to the sea journey to Malta from Chios, a few kilometres off the western coast of Anatolia. These were considered remarkable times in the Order’s headquarters, although documents register a record Zante-Malta crossing of 4 days in the summer of 1615, Padron Mattio Zangaropullo arrived in Malta on 25 June with mail from Zante dated 20 June, a feat for which he was paid a well-earned 120 scudi. Letters from Aleppo, deep in the Syrian hinterland, could take two months to be delivered to Malta. According to Dal Pozzo, in 1613 some escaped Christian slaves sailed to Malta from La Goletta in seven days, the

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12 AOM 1470, Perellos y Rocafual to Cardinal Conti (Lisbon), f. 119, 18 August 1709.
13 See, for example, AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Alfonso d’Avolos (Flanders), f. 230r, 29 August 1608; AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Alfonso d’Avolos (Flanders), f. 70r, 14 February 1609; and AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Alfonso d’Avolos (Flanders), ff. 294v-295r, 12 September 1610.
14 AOM 1468, Perellos y Rocafual to Nesselrode (Cologne), f. 158r, 30 November 1707.
15 AOM 1391, Wignacourt to the Cantoni di Lucerna, ff. 83v-84r, 17 February 1612.
16 AOM 1395, Wignacourt to the Duke of Mantua, f. 132, 10 April 1616.
17 AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Nostiz (Bohemia), f. 83, 17 February 1620.
18 AOM 1386, Wignacourt to the Prior of Bohemia, f. 188, 19 July 1607.
19 AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Hospitaller Martin Sudo, ff. 230v-231r, 16 July 1604.
21 AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Jac[om]o et Marco [Vanufli] (Amsterdam), f. 32v, 15 January 1620.
22 AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 87r, 17 February 1614.
23 AOM 1429, Lascaris Castellar to Cesare Latino (Zante), f. 119, 4 September 1651 and AOM 1388, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 287v-288r, 2 September 1609 respectively.
24 With particular reference to a French vessel which in 1609 arrived in Malta from Chios, Wignacourt’s comment was that it made it ‘in just 12 days’ (‘12 giorni soli che partì da Scio’). AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Amb. Lo nellino (Rome), ff. 121v-122, 30 March 1609.
25 AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), ff. 325v-326r, 28 June 1615.
26 AOM 1400, Wignacourt to P[ad]re Tommaso di Novara de M[ino]ri Osservanti di San Francesco in Aleppo, f. 29r, 15 January 1621.
same time it took a vessel from nearby Tunis to sail to Malta in the summer of 1609,\textsuperscript{28} and a frigate could make it from Messina to Malta in four days.\textsuperscript{29}

**TABLE 8**

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Column I: place of departure of letters addressed to Malta; Column II: the number of cases analysed; Column III: maximum delivery time in days from cases analysed; Column IV: minimum delivery time in days from cases analysed; Column V: average delivery times over all the specific cases analysed (rounded off to the closest day).

Sources: AOM 1381; AOM 1382; AOM 1383; AOM 1384; AOM 1385; AOM 1386; AOM 1387; AOM 1388; AOM 1389; AOM 1390; AOM 1391; AOM 1392; AOM 1393; AOM 1393A; AOM 1394; AOM 1396; AOM 1398; AOM 1399; AOM 1400; AOM 1467; AOM 1646.

The calculations for the delivery time of incoming correspondence to Malta is based on the date of the respective letter – which is not necessarily the date of dispatch – and the date of its arrival in Malta. The table gives an idea of how long incoming letters took to make it to Malta, not of effective travel times. To give an idea, sheer winds and currents could carry a boat from Trapani to Malta in six days,\textsuperscript{31} but the calculated average for mail-delivery on the same route came up to 24 days.

But what does this sparse and sporadic data about connections with some of the extremities of the Hospitaller world in early modernity tells us except from what we already knew through mere logical deduction, that is that Malta could be between a few days to over a year away from its

\textsuperscript{28} AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Don Ottavio d’Aragona, f. 213, 13 June 1609.
\textsuperscript{29} AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Cambiano, the administrator of the galleys harboured at Qala di San Paolo, f. 168v, 21 May 1603.
\textsuperscript{30} With very few exceptions, the table above is based on the period 1601-1621. The years 1604, 1608, 1612, 1616, and 1620 were leap years. Adriano Cappelli, *Cronologia, Cronografia e Calendario Perpetuo* (Milan, Hoepli, 1988).
\textsuperscript{31} Dal Pozzo, ii, 544.
surrounding Mediterranean, continental, or global environs? And are we correct in taking this information for face value, basing our conclusions on contemporary accounts and official documentary material? This brings us to the question of the sources, the historian’s own indispensible tyranny. We need them if we have to make any form of progress towards our objective, yet they have to be handled with care and we can only reveal what they tell us effectively, otherwise we would be venturing even further in the realm of fiction. As for records of direct sea crossings similar to the one’s given above, we can safely consider them as authentic one-off travel times between points of departure and arrival, although unrecorded stoppages can never be discounted. However, as denounced earlier, the matter complicates itself further when we need an idea of travel times for distances combining land and sea travel. Even here, unless or until other copious documentation is unearthed, we cannot do without the Order’s official correspondence – definitely for the twenty years or so under review at least - to obtain any form of systematic readings about how long it took the Convent on Malta to receive or deliver information in an international context.

But what do these letters really tell us? In a magistral letter to the Order’s ambassador in Rome dated 2 February 1621, we are told that on 1 February 1621, the Convent received a letter from its Hospitaller agent in Paris dated 16 December 1620. The ambassador was informed that the Paris letter made it to Malta in six days from Marseilles. So what inference on travel times to Malta can we deduce from this single documentary item? At first hand we can conclude that the letter took forty-one days to make it from Paris to Marseilles, and an overall forty-seven days to make it to Malta, or a period very close to this, and probably we would be close to the truth. But can we vouch that the date on the letter is the same date of the dispatch from Paris? Forty-one days to cover the 500 km or so from Paris to Marseilles surely implies stoppages, if not delays along the way. And once in Marseilles, was the letter dispatched to the next stage of the journey on the same day it was delivered to the port? And if not, how long did it stay there? And are we sure that the Marseilles-Malta crossing was carried entirely over water? It could have been delivered overland to Genoa or Leghorn, for example, and shipped to Malta from there, or else carried by couriers overland all the way to the Straits of Messina, ferried across the channel, to be loaded with other mail on a maritime connection to Malta, or instead carried overland to Scicli to be subsequently ferried to Malta. All these options, and possibly others, were delivery possibilities which we cannot discount for they are implicit in the scant information, and lack of it, about the letter from Paris. Letters could have the date of dispatch and arrival written on the back of their last page, and some original letters received by the Order’s hierarchy which have survived occasionally do provide us with this kind of information. A letter from Madrid dated 27 February 1621 was

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32 AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Amb. Guevara (Rome), ff. 88v-89r, 2 February 1621.
33 Ibid., ff. 88v-89r, 2 February 1621
34 Braudel, 364.
received in Malta on 3 May 1621\textsuperscript{35} and a letter from Savoy dated 29 October 1647 arrived to the Convent on 21 January 1648.\textsuperscript{36} However, these letters not always provide this kind of information on their back. At times they simply record the date when the letter was read in the Order’s Council\textsuperscript{37} which is of little use to us. So what can we do when this is the case or when we do not have the original letter at hand and have to rely solely on the outgoing correspondence of the Order? Another problem is that, bar some exceptions such as the ones mentioned earlier, most of the Order’s incoming correspondence similar to the letter from Paris is, up to now, considered lost. This means that heavy reliance on the Order’s official outgoing correspondence is unavoidable if we want to come up with some form of idea, however hazy, regarding travel speeds to and from Hospitaller Malta. Apart from this, the information about incoming delivery times in the correspondence available for the period under study far outweighs data about outgoing delivery times from Malta to other places. These are shortcomings we have to be aware of and accept before we continue our task. Yet another problem we have to compromise with is that, as William N. Parker puts it, in pre-industrial times information arrived ‘in a rush rather than in a steady stream’,\textsuperscript{38} an inconvenience the Order wanted to avoid or attenuate whenever possible, as was pointed out to the receiver of High Germany in 1607 when he was reprimanded for sending to Malta a dispatch with 18 letters at once.\textsuperscript{39} Large mail bundles were also to be avoided for reasons of extra costs since dispatch charges were imposed according to the weight of the mail parcels.\textsuperscript{40}

As explained earlier, we do not know for how long our letter from Paris was effectively travelling to Marseilles and if, and for how long, it stalled at the port before being dispatched to Malta. The accumulation of mail at the moment of dispatch or at forwarding stations was a normal occurrence, even for the Order. This was mainly due to bad weather or to the time mail was kept on hold waiting for the right delivery or shipping connection. For an island, any form of continental connection implied a ferry crossing, the severance of which imposed periods of temporary isolation. Outgoing mail could be bundled for days on end in Malta waiting for calmer weather to ship it to Sicily,\textsuperscript{41} or simply for the departure of the galleys to Messina from where it would be ferried to Italy.\textsuperscript{42} Mail from Europe could remain stranded in Scicli for almost a month in winter due to angry seas, and in the meantime more mail parcels would arrive and accumulate, waiting for the storms to abate,\textsuperscript{43} to the impotent irritation of the Order’s hierarchy which was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} AOM 59, f. 434v.
\item \textsuperscript{36} AOM 61, f. 31.
\item \textsuperscript{37} For example, AOM 58, f. 36 and AOM 61, f. 105v.
\item \textsuperscript{39} AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Muchental (High Germany), f. 48, 6 February 1607.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Ibid., Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), f. 247, 22 September 1607.
\item \textsuperscript{41} AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Amb. Guevara (Rome), ff. 147v-148r, 6 April 1620.
\item \textsuperscript{42} AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Malta), ff. 147v-148r, 1 April 1613.
\item \textsuperscript{43} AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), ff. 123-124r, 25 March 1619. See also AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 147v-148r, 1 April 1613.
\end{itemize}
accustomed to such delays, especially in the colder months of the year.\textsuperscript{44} At one point in 1620 the frigate from Scicli ferried to Malta 36 letters from Rome alone, dated between January and March of that year,\textsuperscript{45} and early the following year two frigates from Naples and Messina delivered at one go 37 large letter parcels dispatched ‘from different places’ which had been delayed due to bad weather.\textsuperscript{46} In 1603, nine letters from Palermo dated between the 16\textsuperscript{th} and 23\textsuperscript{rd} June arrived in Malta all in one batch on the 3\textsuperscript{rd} of July.\textsuperscript{47} Mail was regularly bundled in Genoa before it was dispatched to Malta in one parcel with the first shipping or land-courier opportunity. Letters dated 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 10\textsuperscript{th}, 17\textsuperscript{th} and 24\textsuperscript{th} February, and 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 10\textsuperscript{th} March could arrive with the same dispatch to Malta on the following 7\textsuperscript{th} April, as happened in 1612;\textsuperscript{48} on 30 January 1615 the Convent received a parcel from Genoa with letters dated 21\textsuperscript{st} and 28\textsuperscript{th} November 1614 and 5\textsuperscript{th}, 12\textsuperscript{th}, and 19\textsuperscript{th} December 1614,\textsuperscript{49} and in 1616 four letters written in August made it to Malta all at one go in the last week of September.\textsuperscript{50} Parcels from France and Spain could arrive to Rome so heavy with letters that their possible dispatch with horse couriers to Sicily would have to be discarded to avoid heavy costs.\textsuperscript{51} Letters could arrive bundled together from places like Piedmont or Venice, with the result that the information they carried would be weeks, if not months, old.\textsuperscript{52}

Exceptional delays or travel times similar to some of those outlined above were physiological in pre-industrial society, as were all sorts of inevitable contingencies, and the Order, just like any other state, institution, or individual trying to communicate with distant places, could do very little to avoid them. Couriers could go missing, ferry frigates or vessels carrying correspondence could perish, letters could be misplaced, lost, sent to the wrong destination, fall prey to land or sea bandits, end up stolen or thrown overboard, and mail parcels could be violated or arrive soaked.\textsuperscript{53} Notwithstanding similar accidents and delays, the Order had nonetheless


\textsuperscript{45} AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Amb. Guevara (Rome), ff. 102-104r, 20 March 1620.

\textsuperscript{46} AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Amb. Guevara (Rome), ff. 56v-57r, 26 January 1621.

\textsuperscript{47} AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Afflito (Palermo), f. 206, 5 July 1603.

\textsuperscript{48} AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), ff. 140v-141r, 19 April 1612.

\textsuperscript{49} AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), f. 78, 4 February 1615.

\textsuperscript{50} AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Clavesana (Genoa), f. 414, 30 September 1616.

\textsuperscript{51} AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 315, 10 July 1612.

\textsuperscript{52} AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Alessandria), f. 374v, 22 July 1613 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), f. 436, 28 August 1613.

\textsuperscript{53} Similar episodes emerge quite frequently in Hospitaller documentation. For some examples, see: AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 201r, 25 June 1604; AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), f. 206r, 1 July 1604; AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Settimo (Syracuse), f. 210, 1 July 1604; AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Gio. Loenardo Latino (Zante), f. 228r, 16 July 1604; AOM 1460, Wignacourt to Amb. Sacchetti (Rome), f. 151r, 11 May 1696; Ibid., Wignacourt to Amb. Sacchetti (Rome), f. 203r, 18 January 1697; AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 269v-270, 25 August 1605; AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), f. 379r, 21 November 1606; AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Settimo (Syracuse), ff. 348v-349, 12November 1603; AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Lo Porto (Scicli), f. 322r, 29 August 1619; AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Gio Maria Attardo, ff. 242v-243r, 18 July 1606; AOM 1443, Cotoner to Amb. Verospi
established its own unofficial parameters on delivery times, and regulated accordingly its dispatch
demands on Hospitaller communication personnel, especially regarding connections with centres
lying on the more sensitive routes pertinent to Malta’s survival.

For obvious reasons, the Order was particularly demanding on the regularity of contacts
involving Sicily. Too much depended on connectivity with the nearby island, and lying just a
day’s sail away in normal weather conditions rendered it perhaps the one piece of Hospitaller
communication network on which the Order could exert some form of institutional pressure, if not
effective control. Nothing could be done to repress Poseidon’s moods in the channel, but courier
delivery times between Scicli and the other vital stages on Sicily’s littoral, mainly Palermo and
Messina, were fairly standard and the Order was less inclined to condone deficient dispatch
performances on these land routes, irrespective of the season. When in October 1610 the Convent
did not receive confirmation of the overland arrival of mail in Palermo dispatched from Malta six
days earlier, Wignacourt would not accept excuses due to bad weather, especially since he had
already been briefed from Messina of the arrival of mail sent simultaneously from Scicli on the
same day together with the letters to Palermo.54 The Hospitaller agent in Scicli was to admonish
the courier who had carried the mail to Palermo and ordered never to use his services again.55

Special horse couriers, in fact, normally took one day to cover the Scicli-Licata crossing, two days
to cover from Scicli to Palermo, and between one day and a maximum of 36 hours to ride from
Scicli to Messina.56 Judging from these speeds, a ride from Scicli to Palermo and back could be
carried out in four days, and the Scicli-Messina-Scicli trip could be covered in around three days,
possibly two. So when in late December 1607 the ferry frigate to Malta failed to deliver mail from
Palermo or Messina, because the respective couriers dispatched from Scicli failed to return with
mail in twelve days, the Order demanded explanations.57 As a tentative remedy, the Convent
insisted that couriers were not kept on hold for too long in places like Palermo or Messina, for
example, and that they were to be dispatched back to Scicli as soon as possible.58 Similar
complaints from Malta regarding delivery problems were not uncommon, especially when the

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54 ‘e non si può scusare con il cattivo tempo’. AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Scicli), f. 355, 27
October 1610.
55 Ibid., f. 355, 27 October 1610.
56 For the Scicli-Licata crossing, see AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 329, 3 October 1605 and
AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), ff. 312v-313r, 11 September 1606. For the Scicli-Palermo
crossing, see AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 329, 3 October 1605, AOM 1389, Wignacourt to
Grimaldi (Scicli), f. 182r, 10 July 1610 and Ibid., f. 204v, 21 July 1610. For Scicli-Messina, see AOM 1385,
Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 312v, 11 September 1606.
57 AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), ff. 315v-316r, 31 December 1607.
58 Ferry frigates in Scicli could be kept waiting for days for the return of couriers from Palermo or Messina.
AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 297, 11 September 1605. See also AOM 1396, Wignacourt to
Matthiolo Cassar (Scicli), ff. 368v-369r, 31 October 1617.
Order remained without mail from Palermo for a long time, but delays and shortcomings based on the Order’s expectations were inevitably registered on other communication routes in Sicily and beyond. Dispatch problems could be registered along the Messina-Syracuse-Malta delivery itinerary or the Messina-Naples courier route. Preoccupations were also voiced due to lack of updates from Naples, the lack of deliveries from Rome or exceptional delays from forwarding stations like Florence, and because weeks went by without the receipt of mail from Venice, France, Spain, or Germany. The Order, in fact, could also have specific expectations regarding delivery times on routes beyond Sicily. In February 1609, the procurator in Messina was to make sure that mail addressed to the Hospitaller ambassador in Rome was to arrive in not later than eight days, and a letter dispatched from the Convent dated 30 March 1609 was expected to make it from Messina to Rome by the following Friday, 6th April.

However, as already pointed out in chapter four, the Order expressed its greatest frustrations regarding sluggish deliveries from listening stations in the Levant. In September 1613, the Convent complained on the solita tardanza, the usual delay, of the dispatches from Zante and Corfu, which was to be expected as mail from these two listening stations more than once arrived in Malta bundled with that of Otranto. Letters from these two islands could take over a month and a half to be delivered to Malta. Late in 1621, Messina, a forwarding station of news from the Levant, was informed that the latest mail from the Eastern Mediterranean carried ‘news so old that it was useless’. Letters could also stall at Otranto from where mail could take from a month to

59 See, for example, AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 357v, 21 October 1604; AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 336-337, 23 October 1605; AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), f. 60v, 23 January 1606; and AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Matthiolo Cassar (Scicli), ff. 368v-369r, 31 October 1617.
60 For similar episodes see, for example, AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), f. 341r, 4 November 1603; AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), ff. 430v-431r, 18 December 1617; AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), f. 88v, 23 March 1605; AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), ff. 396v-397r, 27 November 1617; AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 50v, 7 February 1608; AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Buondalmenti (Florence), f. 142r, 9 April 1619; AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), f. 328, 16 October 1606.
61 See, for example: AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), ff. 321v-322r, 22 June 1613; AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Falco (Naples), f. 59r, 26 January 1621; and AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), ff. 54-55, 23 January 1606.
62 AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), ff. 88v-89r, 22 February 1609.
63 AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), ff. 127v-128r, 30 March 1609.
64 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Gio Leonardo Latino (Zante), f. 458r, 23 September 1613.
65 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Gio Andrea Lipravoti (Corfu), f. 458v, 23 September 1613.
66 For example: AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Gio. Pietro Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 329r, 24 July 1612; AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Fran[c]es[co] Lipravoti (Otranto), ff. 334v-335r, 9 September 1619; AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Fran[c]es[co] Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 300v, 25 July 1620.
67 For similar dispatch times from these listening stations and the relevant complaints by the Order, see chapter four and: AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Gio Andrea Lipravoti (Corfu), f. 184, 20 April 1613; AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), ff. 300v-301r, 17 July 1614; AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 388r, 16 August 1615; AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 150v, 27 April 1616; and Ibid., f. 204r, 31 May 1616.
68 ‘li avisi del quale erano tanto vecchi che non hanno servito di niente’. AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), ff. 618v-619, 7 November 1621.
over two months to be delivered to the Convent. The delivery performance of this intelligence trail reaching Malta from the Eastern Mediterranean, occasionally passing through Otranto and Messina, was often criticised by the Order, probably due to the pertinence of the information demanded rather than for any specific delivery shortcomings registered along this route when compared to the rest of Hospitaller Malta’s contact network. As evidenced earlier, delays in the dispatch of information concerned all latitudes of Malta’s communication network. Hospitaller ambition for efficiency and celerity was at times frustrated by the services of foreign mail systems which the Order was compelled to adopt for the transmission and receipt of news. At one time, for instance, Hospitaller ministers and agents in Spain, complained about serious delays in the receipt of mail from the Convent caused by what they deemed unnecessary detours. Mail addressed to Barcelona, Saragossa, and Valladolid was first being re-routed through Madrid before its final delivery, a result, perhaps, of the Spanish court’s itch to control any information crossing Iberia. But no communication channel, however, was as exclusive as the one linking Malta to its listening stations in the east. Outdated news or the lack of information regarding commanderies, provisions, capital, merchandise, markets, relations with other powers, or otherwise was frustrating and potentially deleterious for Hospitaller Malta, just like any sort of oblivion on the state of affairs beyond its shores. Yet, not knowing in time or at all the intentions and level of preparation of the enemy plunged the island in a state of insecurity which could only be diluted by the freshest, most frequent, and most accurate intelligence updates possible.

Hospitaller Malta was cursed with similar impediments when trying to communicate with the surrounding world. As already explained, those outlined above were fairly common delays and contingencies, predictable irregularities which somehow fell within the anomalous normality of pre-industrial communication dynamics and which the Order, just like any administrative structure of its age, had to connive with on a daily basis. But these were obstacles and inconveniences which more or less occurred along Hospitaller Malta’s established communication routes. Further difficulties were encountered when the Order needed to reach into European territory - at times into its own prioral territory - which was bypassed by the more oft beaten tracks of the Order’s communication network. Worse still, the Order occasionally had to come to terms with the interruption or complete breakdown of whole sections of its communication network. Tyrannies like confrontational diplomacy, war, epidemics, and natural catastrophes, disrupted Hospitaller Malta’s international connectivity to a degree which could warrant structural remedies.

69 See, for example: AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Fran[ces]co Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 243v, 9 June 1614 and AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Gio. Pietro Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 73v, 17 February 1612. For complaints regarding dispatch delays from Otranto to Malta, see also: AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Demetrio Lipravoti (Otranto), ff. 184v-185r, 20 April 1613; AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Fran[ces]co Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 213, 11 May 1614; and AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Fran[ces]co Latino (Otranto), f. 388, 16 August 1615.

70 AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 80, 17 February 1612.
The Order’s Continental Reach and Other Impediments

The maintenance of contacts with the principal nodes on the Order’s communication network, whether along the Mediterranean littoral or, even more so, within the European hinterland, could harbour multiple difficulties of its own. These difficulties, however, reserved supplementary complications when contacts veered away from the principal communication routes connecting Malta with the rest of the Hospitaller world. The mobility of the Order’s international representatives throughout the confines of their Hospitaller jurisdictions provided partial solutions to this problem. It was within the remit of members of Hospitaller continental personnel to temporarily relocate from their base, or delegate someone to do it in their stead, whenever required by their duties in order to reach portions of continental territory which otherwise could have remained inaccessible to the Convent. Whether to collect funds, to carry out administrative duties in the commanderies, or otherwise, these Hospitaller pathfinders had to move around, adding to the Order’s considerable reach in the European hinterland. Thus the receiver of Lombardy had to travel to places like Serravalle, Tortona, and Pontecorone to collect 1,000 scudi to be transferred to Messina, or else to publish a papal bull in Casale and Villanova; the receiver in Venice went in person to Bologna to report on the mortuary and vacancy of a commandery; the Prior of Bohemia relocated to Silesia to subdue ‘rebels’ living on Hospitaller lands; and the receiver in Florence travelled on horseback to the Tuscan town of Arezzo to carry out inheritance procedures of a dead commander. Similar episodes fell within the normal day-to-day administrative life of the Order’s landed property. On a more structural and long-term basis, the Order had to verify the state of its continental estates through the five-yearly prrioral visits introduced in the fourteenth century and the drawing up of the cabrei, land tenures compiled every twenty-five years, a practice introduced in the beginning of the seventeenth century to enable the Convent to assess and itemise its possessions and human resources.

Distance could be a hindrance on more than one level, not least financially, and the Order tried to remedy whenever possible and feasible. In 1605, in order to settle a legal matter in the lands of Putignano and Fasano in Southern Italy, Prior La Rocca, residing in Naples, was to find a judge who had to reside not more than thirty miles away from the territory in question in order to

\[71\] AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Caloro (Lombardy), f. 81r, 8 March 1617.
\[72\] AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Quartieri (Milan), f. 314v, 28 September 1610.
\[73\] AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Loschi (Venice), ff. 103v-104r, 24 April 1607.
\[74\] AOM 1381, Wignacourt to Poppel (Prior of Bohemia), f. 294, 12 November 1602.
\[75\] AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Amb. Guevara (Rome), ff. 432-433, 20 September 1620.
\[76\] For a succinct explanation of the cabreo and the visita, see Ivan Grech, ‘The Hospitaller Commandery of San Giovanni di Prè in Genoa. Aspects of its Historical Development in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, unpublished M.A. dissertation, Department of History, University of Malta, 1996, chapter 3. See also NLM Lib. 189 and NLM Lib. 600.
reduce the costs and discomforts of those involved during legal proceedings, and in 1610 the commission for an inquiry on the administration of a commandery in Drosi, Calabria, was handed to a Hospitaller residing in Cosenza for reasons of vicinity. In 1613, the Grand Prior of Germany was denied a loan of 8,000 florins to go in person to the Imperial Diet. The trip to the county of Tyrol in modern-day Austria to recover a debt owed to a Hospitaller could seem so immeasurably long and expensive for the receiver in Bohemia as to ultimately make him desist from undertaking the journey. The Convent gave up writing to the Count of Benevento in 1613 for the latter’s residence in the lands of Castilla La Vieja (Old Castile) was around 300 miles away from the Court of Madrid and trying to reach him via mail seemed pointless. When in 1617 the Convent was evaluating the case of the Sicilian Alfonso del Carretto who requested to become a member of the Order, the Order’s Lieutenant of Messina was commissioned with finding a Hospitaller who lived in the whereabouts of the Southern Sicilian town of Sciacca, close to the place of birth of del Carretto, to fetch the necessary documents attesting the noble lineage of the aspirant member. Del Carretto’s birthplace, in fact, was considered too remote, and it was deemed too expensive for him to travel all the way south across Sicily from Messina, where he was apparently residing. In 1620 the Order had to find someone to send to the town of Jesi in the Italian region of Marche on the Adriatic to settle a matter with the local bishop, for there were no Hospitaller representatives in the whereabouts. Perhaps the Order was trying to remedy to similar situations when in December 1623 it appointed a procurator in the provincia Marcianconitana.

The Order’s reach in continental territory, in fact, was heavily conditioned by the presence or not of a Hospitaller posting and the distance of the relevant residence from wherever the Convent needed to establish a contact with, apart from the mail network of the locality in question. Contacts with the Hospitaller receiver in Champagne in Northern France, for example, could be compromised if mail addressed to him was dispatched to the district of Lorraine, more than 80 leagues away from the receiver’s residence, but which still fell under his Hospitaller jurisdiction. In 1613, the receiver in Venice was instructed to dispatch mail addressed to Champagne to the

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77 ‘che non sia più lontano di 30 miglia di dette terre ... per il loro minor incomodo’. AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Prior La Rocca (Naples), f. 289v, 30 August 1606.
78 AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 264, 18 August 1610.
79 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to the Grand Prior of Germany, f. 289, 5 June 1613.
80 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Com. [Cris]toforo Simon di Ton (Tyrol), f. 83, 11 February 1613.
81 ‘tal che non vi haveria servito di niente se gli havessimo scritto’. AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Gio Andrea Lipravoti (Corfu), f. 184, 20 April 1613.
82 AOM 1396, Wignacourt to the Luogotenente of Messina (Priory of Messina), f. 91v, 15 March 1617.
84 AOM 107, f. 239r, 16 December 1623.
receiver of Lyons, lying almost 200 km further south, but from where letters were sure to be delivered safely to their destination.  

However, communication could be aborted even after distance, the reach in continental territory, and other hurdles were surpassed. The politics within foreign jurisdictions could create serious impediments to Hospitaller Malta’s communication network over a geographical stretch ranging from nearby Mediterranean ports to remote continental lands. The fragmentary nature of Hospitaller continental property and overall communication network condemned the Order to compromise with a wide variety of administrative checks which kept the Convent’s foreign affairs agenda constantly busy. Insolent port officials in Scicli could slow down exports across the channel to Malta, warranting appeals by the Convent to the Sicilian Viceroy himself, and the customary shipment of ice from Catania could be threatened due to a matter of unpaid debts. Ecclesiastical authorities in Saragossa and throughout the Kingdom of Aragon hindered Hospitaller commissioners from carrying out the regular visits of the Order’s property within those Spanish jurisdictions. In 1612, a Bailiff wasted a whole month trying to be granted an audience with the Grand Duke of Savoy on behalf of the Order and in 1615 the recovery of the spoils of a Knight from the lands of Monferrato required the intercession with the lord of Mantua by the Order’s receiver in Venice. Diplomacy in all its confrontational facets, in fact, from the well-known stories of sequestration referred to earlier in this study to the closure of ports of the Regno, could jeopardize established patterns of contacts and therefore hinder Hospitaller Malta’s communication with abroad. The lingering attrition with Genoa over ceremonial squabbles at sea which climaxed in the diplomatic rift of 1655 resulted in tangible collateral effects on the official relations and communications between the Order of St John and the Republic.  

War, at times the by-product of deficient diplomacy and an inevitable dismantling force of established communication systems, potentially wrought greater damage in Christendom for the Order than in the Mediterranean, where confrontation with the enemy was the norm. Internecine European warfare in early modernity, which reached its disruptive climax during the Thirty Years

85 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), ff. 75-76, 11 February 1613.  
86 AOM 1387, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 52v, 21 February 1608.  
87 AOM 1462, Perellos y Rocafuerto to Com. Diego Pappalardo, ff. 111v-112r, 9 August 1701.  
88 AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Amb. Mendes (Rome), f. 232, 16 July 1604 and AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 437, 8 October 1612.  
89 AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Bailiff Cambiano, ff. 541v-542r, 9 December 1612.  
90 AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Guinigi (Venice), f. 251v, 25 May 1615.  
War, and continued to reap havoc up to the following century, periodically caused damage to the Order’s continental estates. Of course all levels of war against Islam in the Mediterranean had their own effects on Malta’s communication dynamics. In 1618, the disruption of maritime traffic around Corfu was hindering the regular dispatch of updates from the Ionian island to Malta. Muslim sorties at the mouth of the Adriatic could impinge on the shipping timetable from Venice to Malta and sightings of enemy vessels between Malta and Sicily could condition maritime traffic in the channel, warranting delays and armed maritime escorts. Yet, despite similar inconveniences, the struggle against the Muslim could reserve benefits in terms of booty through whichever level of war it was obtained from. What possible benefits could the Order, and consequently Malta, reap from endemic European warfare? Fear of a full-scale Ottoman assault on the archipelago usually implied several expenses in short-term precautionary measures and long-term infrastructural development, but occasionally could also mean the hope of some form of aid from Christendom. But can we safely assert that any form of Ottoman threat, however recurrent, was as consistently draining on the Order’s coffers as, for example, the Thirty Years War? Even if Dal Pozzo’s claim that the Order failed to receive responses from Germany for twenty whole years up to 1640 still has to be subjected to thorough historical verification, it can be safely stated that war on the continent brought only the destruction of estates, the interruption of contacts, and the loss of income to the Order.

The repercussions on Hospitaller Malta’s existence brought about by conflict in Counter Reformation Europe could come in different shapes and forms. Entire Hospitaller estates in Aragon and Catalonia were left depopulated and in desolation after the expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain decreed by Philip III in 1609. The occupation of Hospitaller commanderies by Protestants implied the loss of control over these lands by the Order until the heretics were evicted. When similar incidents occurred, contacts between Malta and this property were inevitably severed. In 1612, the Order could not find a Bohemian or Polish Knight who could provide some information about the situation of a church and commandery on the confines of

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94 AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Gio Andrea Lipravoti (Corfu), f. 102v, 30 March 1618.
95 See chapter five.
96 Ships laden with provisions or merchandise could be warned to delay or suspend their crossing to Malta if sightings of enemy vessels in the channel were reported, or else they had to be escorted. See, for example, AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Lo Porto (Sicili), ff. 264v-265r, 9 July 1619 and AOM 1463, Perellos y Rocaful to Hospitaller Saluzzo, f. 146v, 15 August 1702. See also Blouet, 116.
97 Ibid., 107.
98 Grech (2005), 204-5.
100 See, for example, AOM 1391, Wignacourt to the Prior of Bohemia, ff. 90-91r, 11 February 1613.
Bohemia and Silesia, where a Protestant preacher had established himself.\textsuperscript{101} The wars of the Monferrato in Northern Italy between the Spanish and French which ultimately shattered the ‘pax hispanica’\textsuperscript{102} did not only interrupt regional trade, as reported in the summer of 1615 by the Order’s receiver of Lombardy, stationed in Alessandria in modern-day Piedmont,\textsuperscript{103} but inevitably impinged on the Hospitaller world. In March 1617, the Convent expressed its doubts to the Duke of Mantua on whether access to the Hospitaller provincial chapter in Piedmont for the collection of some documents would be possible due to these ongoing wars,\textsuperscript{104} and the rent and collection of income from Hospitalller property effected by the Franco-Spanish conflict was next to impossible.\textsuperscript{105} By 1619, the Convent started receiving news of the collateral damage to its existence brought about by the Thirty Years War. With a letter dated 25 May 1619, the Prior of Bohemia reported how the provincial chapter in his jurisdiction had to be suspended due to the havoc of war.\textsuperscript{106} By the summer of the following year, the receiver in Low Germany was already communicating his doubts to Malta on whether the ongoing wars would allow the normal collection of the responsions.\textsuperscript{107} Months went by in 1621 without any mail from Bohemia arriving to the Convent, and when finally one letter made it to Malta on the 13\textsuperscript{th} November it brought confirmation of the bad omens dispatched from Bohemia the previous year.\textsuperscript{108}

Acts of God, like floods and earthquakes,\textsuperscript{109} and widespread epidemics were other sworn enemies of communication. Modern historiography has reviewed the extent to which plague could have epoch-moulding effects on the course of humanity.\textsuperscript{110} Scholars like Paul Slack and Oliver Rackham express serious doubts whether plague, notwithstanding its widespread devastations on

\textsuperscript{101} AOM 1391, Wignacourt to the Prior of Bohemia, ff. 552v-553r, 17 December 1612.
\textsuperscript{102} For an analytical overview of European geopolitics and conflicts throughout this period, see Giorgio Spini, \textit{Storia dell’età moderna}, vol. ii, 1598-1661 (Turin, 1965).
\textsuperscript{103} AOM 1394, Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Alessandria), f. 317, 27 June 1615.
\textsuperscript{104} AOM 1396, Wignacourt to the Duke of Mantua, f. 89r, 15 March 1617.
\textsuperscript{105} AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Buondalmenti (Florence), f. 238r, 13 July 1617. It was not the first time that this was happening. Four years earlier Gaetani, the then Hospitaller receiver in Florence, was granted temporary leave from his post to see to the repairs of his commandery which had been damaged by the soldiers of Savoy. AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Gaetani (Florence), f. 630, 31 December 1613.
\textsuperscript{106} AOM 1398, Wignacourt to the Prior of Bohemia, f. 287, 21 July 1619.
\textsuperscript{107} ‘ci dispiace il dubio che tenete che per le guerre di cotesti Paesi haverete per l’avvenire gran difficoltà in recuperare i carichi et altri den[a]ri che si devono al (…) Tesoro’. AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Schauenburg (Low Germany), f. 233v, 10 June 1620.
\textsuperscript{108} ‘le gran rovine che sono state fatte dalla ribelli del Sacro Impero al Priorato e Com[m]en[de et Beni di nost[ra] Relig[ione]’. AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Nostiz (Bohemia), f. 644, 17 November 1621.
\textsuperscript{109} Grech (2005), 204.
entire social fabrics, could be held responsible for the demise of entire civilizations. Yet the incidence on all sorts of pre-industrial communication by the epidemic were undeniable. It could impede financial transactions and disrupt commerce, and it unsettled entire regional contacts by interrupting communication routes. In 1630, in order to reach Germany from Barcelona, the Queen of Hungary had to avoid Northern Italy where plague was raving and re-route through the south of the peninsula to reach the Adriatic port of Ancona from where she was to be escorted for the rest of the journey north. Hospitaller Malta, whether a direct protagonist of plague or a victim by default of epidemics in distant arenas, more than once had to suffer the brunt of similar situations and adjust accordingly in order to keep communication lines with abroad active. In 1613, the provincial chapter in the Priory of Bohemia had to be called off due to plague. Similar disruptions were recurrent in Hospitaller Malta’s history and persisted throughout the Knights’ stay on the island. The Convent had to wait for over two years to be able to send an emissary to Turin to congratulate Vittorio Amedeo on his accession as Duke of Savoy which took place in 1630, as access to Piedmont was blocked by plague and wars in the northwest of Italy. Plague, or the suspicion of plague in Malta usually meant the vicergal imposition of the breakdown of contacts with Sicily, as happened in 1655 and 1676. The plague which hit Marseilles in 1720 had serious negative effects on Maltese commerce, and in 1743 the spread of the epidemic in Messina and Calabria compromised the flux of cotton exports from Malta. Whatever the cause of the interruption of contacts with abroad, however, Hospitaller Malta had to find remedies from within its very limited possibilities to try and re-establish a modicum of regularity along the principal communication channels which guaranteed its survival.

Remedies to Affliction: Hospitaller Malta’s Efforts to Keep Communication Lines Active

What possible remedies could a central Mediterranean archipelago implement and impose in the sea of chaos and contingencies within which it had to survive? How could a body of a few hundred

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113 AOM 1434, Martin de Redin to Agente Rosa, f. 83v, 10 May 1658.
114 Dal Pozzo, i, 785.
116 Dal Pozzo, i, 809.
117 Dal Pozzo, ii, 230-1; AOM 259, ff. 137v-138r.
118 For the consequences of plague on Hospitaller Malta, see Grech (2013), 20-4.
120 Blouet, 112.
brethren stranded on a rock in the middle of the Mediterranean, which could remain detached from the rest of humanity for weeks on end, remedy to the multitude of adversities which the pre-industrial world kept throwing at their direction? At a cursory glance, what appears evident to the historian is the huge sense of impotence which pervades Hospitaller Malta’s existence. The archipelago’s daily life was conditioned by a series of dependencies over which the Order had little or no control whatsoever. A tempest or the mere rumour of a plague could snap the lifeline with Sicily; fluctuations on foreign markets, -themselves occasional victims of temperamental weather and international forces - could condition the provisioning policy of the island; monarchical moods could result in the depopulation of entire commanderies; conflicts originating from geopolitical antagonism, religious ideology, the lust for territory, and post-revolutionary nationalistic fervour could trigger fatal plunges in the flow of capital from the priories.\textsuperscript{121} Malta of early modernity was constantly challenged by one or other of these afflictions, yet had to face them head on, for the very nature and ethos of its Hospitaller government, and the historical evolution of the Mediterranean world in early modernity, compelled the island to remain enveloped in the dynamics of an international structure far greater and far more intricate than the one it had been accustomed to in the pre-Hospitaller era.

So the Order did what was within its possibility, from Malta and within a foreign context, to keep its communication network active and to find alternative solutions when international connections were interrupted. Commanderies lost to the Protestants in Poland or Bohemia, for example, could be recovered through force, the payment of Imperial impositions, or diplomatic manoeuvres soliciting the direct intervention by secular authorities.\textsuperscript{122} Lengthy diplomatic negotiations requiring papal arbitration finally restored some normality in the official relations between Hospitaller Malta and the Republic of Genoa at the dawn of the eighteenth century after the rift of 1655.\textsuperscript{123} On a more day-to-day level, important letters were sent contemporaneously in duplicate via different routes to increase the probability of their successful delivery. Copies were dispatched when mail was reported lost\textsuperscript{124} and, in order to keep track of the route and delivery times of its dispatches, the Order could ask its agents to send briefings regarding the day and even


\textsuperscript{122} For some examples, see respectively: AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Poppel (Prior of Bohemia), f. 223r, 31 August 1601; AOM 1392, Wignacourt to the Prior of Bohemia, ff. 90-91r, 11 February 1613; AOM 1383, Wignacourt to the King of Poland, f. 230, 16 June 1604. By 1617 the Order was still trying to recover some of its evicted commanderies. AOM 106, ff. 51-52r, 2 September 1617.

\textsuperscript{123} Ivan Grech (2009), 607-9.

\textsuperscript{124} See, for example: AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Amb. Mendes (Rome), ff. 61v-62, 3 March 1607 and Ibid., to Falco (Scicli), f. 65r, 3 March 1607 and AOM 1386, passim for duplicates sent to Florence, Venice, Milan, and Rome when original mail was lost in Pozzallo; AOM 1398, Wignacourt to Amb. Ruiz de Prado (Rome), ff. 155v-156, 25 April 1619; AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Scalamonti (Venice), ff. 360-361r, 30 June 1621; AOM 1460, Wignacourt to Amb. Sacchetti (Rome), f. 151r, 11 May 1696.
the hour in which they received mail.\textsuperscript{125} As in the case of financial transactions, the implementation of different levels of institutional coercion by the Order was necessary to try and ensure the best possible service by its personnel. Too much depended on the professionalism and efficiency of the Hospitaller agents stationed beyond Malta and all levels of communication were under the Convent’s scrutiny, from correspondence delivered by European diplomatic powerhouses to communiqués between the sister islands of the archipelago, and it is not always easy for the historian to establish which among these commanded priority within the Hospitaller communication agenda. The lack of mail from the Hospitaller ambassador in Rome was naturally considered a serious administrative fault by the Order.\textsuperscript{126} But even delays during the mild season in the supply of biscuit to the Order’s fleet in Augusta were deemed unacceptable.\textsuperscript{127} The Order had to put up with similar shortcomings throughout its Maltese sojourn. In 1664, a furious Nicholas Cotoner imprisoned a courier and whoever else was responsible for the dispatch of a letter from Gozo which only made it to the Convent the following day.\textsuperscript{128} The Order made its voice heard if mail parcels were kept in a courier’s residence for too long; if too many letters were bundled in the same parcel; if the ferry frigate arrived surprisingly late notwithstanding fair weather; if mail was dispatched from Messina on an unarmed vessel; if expected briefings regarding financial transactions from Milan failed to arrive; if dispatches from Rome were not delivered to Naples in time to connect with favourable shipping connections; and if no news arrived from Messina regarding the retreat of the Turkish fleet to Navarino.\textsuperscript{129} Similarly to the rather frequent complaints regarding delays along the intelligence trail from the Levant and other instances of more or less unexpected delays along continental routes, the Order tried to redress what it deemed anomalous situations or deficient behaviour by its communication personnel.

However, some dispatches were granted priority. Bills of exchange and institutional letters were privileged goods, as Braudel says, which were often afforded a privileged treatment and consequently their delivery could be faster than normal travel speeds.\textsuperscript{130} Although they were still subject to the unforgiving law of the various obstacles which restrained pre-industrial communication efforts, distance and the winds above all else, their elite status allowed them the

\textsuperscript{125} See, for example AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Scicli), f. 355, 27 October 1610 and AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), ff. 123v-124r, 11 April 1618.
\textsuperscript{127} AOM 1463, Perellos y Rocafuert to Statella (Augusta), ff. 126v-127r, 12 July 1702.
\textsuperscript{128} Apparently the dispatch was delayed after it arrived in Malta because it was not addressed directly to the grand master as it should have been. Cotoner complained that it took ‘sopra un’ora e mezza, et haverebbe anche più tardato se non l’havessimo aperta e ci sarebbra venuta alle mani molto più prontamente se fosse stata indirizzata a noi’. AOM 1440, Nicholas Cotoner to the Gov[ernatore] del Gozzo, f. 51r, 7 May 1664.
\textsuperscript{129} For similar examples, see: AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Capece (Naples), ff. 56v-57r, 11 February 1607; Ibid., f. 247, 22 September 1607; Ibid., Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 257v-258r, 8 October 1607; AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Quartiero (Milan), f. 97, 12 April 1608; AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Ponte (Naples), ff. 253v-254r, 20 August 1603; AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), ff. 332v-333, 17 August 1614.
\textsuperscript{130} Braudel (1986), 368.
luxury of that extra push which only governments or money in abundance were able to provide in an era so dire for the maintenance of long-distance contacts. Just as charter frigates were dispatched east and to Barbary to collect intelligence at first hand and bypass the intermediate stages connecting Malta to the Levant and other parts of the Muslim world, the Order employed special couriers who occasionally were requested to travel day and night to shorten travel times, especially within the Regno. At times agents were ordered to give the Order’s official mail absolute priority over other correspondence from Malta when forwarding letters to centres like Rome, that way couriers would be burdened with less mail and time would be gained. The same could apply for incoming mail to Malta. In early 1604, in fact, the Convent was surprised that ordinary mail from Rome was arriving before the Order’s official mail sent with the staffetta, mounted couriers. Channelling information through forwarding stations like Messina, Venice, and Lyons could speed up dispatches, or at least increase the chances of successful deliveries. Late in 1610, the Order gave orders that all outgoing mail from the Priory of Germany was to be dispatched through Freiburg in the southwestern corner of Germany, at the time apparently considered a safer forwarding station than others in the region. As mentioned earlier, information hardly ever travelled in straight lines but was usually channelled through well-connected information centres which provided better and more frequent dispatch services. On the other end of the same argument, places like Catania and Naples, which could slow down the forwarding of dispatches mostly due to administrative inefficiency, could be avoided.

Far more serious complications were created by widespread catastrophes like war and plague, so tragically frequent in the pre-industrial Euro-Mediterranean world as to fall within that anomalous normality which the Order, and consequently Malta of early modernity, had to connive with. The only remedies in such cases were attempts at prevention and the re-routing of established communication channels, depending on the situation. Hospitaller Malta did its utmost to prevent contagion within its environs through strict quarantine procedures and early warning

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131 For an example of charter vessels sent to collect intelligence from Barbary, see AOM 105, f. 72v, 11 July 1614.
132 For example: AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Accarigi (Scicli), f. 218r, 18 May 1614 and AOM 1434, Martin de Redin to Guglielmo Galesi, f. 67r, 14 April 1658.
133 See, for example, AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), ff. 88v-89r, 22 February 1609.
134 AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Amb. Segreville (Rome), f. 50v, 12 February 1604.
135 See above and chapter 3. For Messina as a forwarding station for intelligence from the Levant see chapter four and specifically AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Gio Leonardo Latino (Zante), f. 458r, 23 September 1613 and Ibid., to Gio Andrea Lipravoti (Corfu), f. 458v, 23 September 1613.
136 AOM 1389, Wignacourt to Ratanau (High Germany), ff. 387-388r, 20 November 1610.
137 Braudel (1986), 357.
138 See chapter three. Dispatches on the Messina-Rome route could cost more and take between three and four extra days to be delivered if channelled through Naples. This seems to have been a recurrent problem for the Order, at least during the two decades or so under study. See, for example: AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), ff. 148v-149r, 31 May 1608; AOM 1388, Wignacourt to Caraffa (Naples), ff. 332r, 3 November 1609; AOM 1395, Wignacourt to Hospitaller Horatio Guidano, f. 239r, 23 June 1616; AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Balsamo (Messina), ff. 123v-124r, 11 April 1618.
systems, and therefore to avoid isolation through the interruption of contacts with the archipelago by foreign states, albeit not always reaping the desired results. However, when international contact channels were momentarily interrupted, the Order, at any point in time throughout its stay on Malta, had no alternative other than to implement structural modifications in its communication network to come up with back-up routes for the channelling of mail, merchandise, or otherwise. If plague prevented the usual consignment of paper from Genoa, which supplied Hospital Malta and the rest of the Mediterranean with the writing material, the Order made arrangements for paper to be alternatively shipped from Venice with the first opportunity, and an entire year’s supply of clothing material for the galley crews could be bought in Marseilles instead of Naples if plague in Southern Italy froze all market activity. In 1629, when the War of the Mantuan succession was raging in Northern Italy and traffic through Genoa was disrupted, mail addressed to the Convent from Marseilles was alternatively sent through Leghorn from where it was dispatched to Malta via Florence and Rome. This was a necessary precaution to reduce the loss of mail parcels. Normal dispatch through Genoa was resumed once the risk was over.

The importance of Leghorn as a forwarding station in Malta’s communication network, in fact, grew in stature as the seventeenth century progressed. The Tuscan port became absolutely vital in the mid-1650s after the diplomatic rift with Genoa and during the plague in various parts of Italy which disrupted all sorts of traffic through the Kingdom of Naples, including the transfer of funds, and was compromising Malta’s mail traffic with the entire peninsula. In August 1656, the Convent lamented how it had not received mail from Naples or Milan for quite a long time. Duplicates from Venice and mail from Tuscany and Lombardy addressed to Malta had to be sent via Leghorn. This was a way to shun the disrupted land routes throughout Southern Italy and ship mail coastwise along the Tyrrenian to Malta. Apparently, in fact, the usual horse-

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140 Grech (2009).


142 AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Spreti (Venice), f. 292r, 16 April 1657.

143 Ibid., Lascaris Castellar to Brancaccio (Naples), f. 157v, 15 December 1656.

144 AOM 1408, Anton de Paule to Bussetti, f. 180r, 25 June 1629.


146 AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Ludovico Galilei (Priory of Pisa), f. 250v, 19 June 1656.

147 Hospitaller funds from Tuscany, for example, were to be channelled south via Leghorn or Messina in order to bypass Naples. AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Ludovico Galilei (Priory of Pisa), f. 250v, 19 June 1656 and Ibid., ff. 250v-251r, 14 June 1656 and f. 254, 26 August 1656.

148 Respectively: AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Verospi (Rome), ff. 236v-237r, 16 November 1656 and Ibid., to Sforza Melzi (Milan), f. 192r, 26 August 1656.

149 AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Brancaccio (Naples), ff. 151v-152r, 14 August 1656.

150 Respectively: AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Spreti (Venice), ff. 272v-273r, 20 August 1656, Ibid., Wignacourt to Galilei (Florence), f. 257, 29 November 1656, and Ibid., Wignacourt to Carretto (Turin), f. 175r, 28 August 1656.

151 AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Galilei (Florence), f. 257, 29 November 1656.
courier service connecting Rome to Calabria had been interrupted.\footnote{152}{AOM 1646, 26 August 1656, Lascaris Castellar to Sforza Melzi (Milan), f. 192r, 26 August 1656.} Grand Master Lascaris Castellar more than once commented how propitious the route through Leghorn had become to keep Malta in touch with the rest of Christianity since so many other routes through Italy were blocked.\footnote{153}{‘questa strada è ben opportuna stante il mal contagioso che si trova in molte parti’}. Naturally, even the routes of outgoing mail from Malta were affected as mail addressed to Naples and several other places had to be sent via Leghorn, mostly to safeguard the interests of the Common Treasury ‘throughout Christianity’, as stated in one magistral letter, a clear hint that the Order’s prime worry in a similar crisis was the re-location of prioral funds.\footnote{154}{AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Silvestro Cartoni (Leghorn), f. 412v, 26 April 1657.} The receivers of Bohemia and other priories were strongly encouraged to collect what was due in responsions, since contagion in Naples had blocked fund deposits from that part of Italy.\footnote{155}{AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Collovrat (Bohemia), f. 324, 28 March 1657.} Orders were given from Malta for entire commanderies to be confiscated if administrators failed to deliver the goods since the Order was financially on its knees.\footnote{156}{’molto esausta’ were the terms used. AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Collovrat (Bohemia), f. 324, 28 March 1657.} The Order kept receiving contrasting news on the plague situation in the Kingdom, but by the beginning of 1657 the intensity of the epidemic seemed to be diminishing in Naples and by the end of April Malta received news that the epidemic was practically extinguished in central Italy.\footnote{157}{See, for example, AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Brancaccio (Naples), ff. 152v-153r, 22 September 1656; Ibid., to Brancaccio (Naples), ff. 155 v – 158 v,15 December 1656; Ibid., to Brancaccio (Naples), f. 158v, 18 January 1657, and Ibid., to Verospi (Rome), f. 243r, 28 April 1657.} However, the return to normality was slow. By the end of February 1657 the Convent was still receiving reports regarding the loss of several letters due to plague since the postal service from Naples had been completely disrupted\footnote{158}{AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Brancaccio (Naples), f. 160r, 28 February 1657.} and a tender for the supply of timber to Malta could only be concluded once it was made sure that the crisis was completely over.\footnote{159}{AOM 1646, Lascaris Castellar to Verospi (Rome), ff. 240v-241r, 1 March 1657.}

Similar maddening hindrances and adversities which afflicted Hospitaller Malta had to be suffered and, when possible, mitigated or remedied, for whatever the contingency, whichever obstacle had to be surpassed, avoided, or eliminated, the Order of St John’s hierarchy had to get its plan right in order to coordinate the schedule of its affairs and provide subsistence for its base, relocate its funds to wherever they were needed, prepare for conflict, and sustain active contacts for whatever issue was occupying its agenda. Hospitaller Malta’s communication network in operative mode was composed of various parts which somehow had to function with a modicum of unison, elasticity, and coordination within the sea of contingencies of pre-industrial society.
The administration of a society implies a multitude of complexities. It is the craft of compromise and adaptation. A government has to adjust to the inherent resources and constraints of its territory, to the geography of its environs, to the produce and political will of foreign nations, and to the unexpected.\(^1\) The exercise is the more intricate for a small archipelago almost entirely dependent on foreign produce. When the Order settled on Malta in 1530, the island was little more than a central Mediterranean Habsburg outpost. Its existential rhythms must not have been dissimilar to those of the Spanish \textit{presidios} of the Maghreb, those ‘miserable’ places of neglect, shunned by North African trade routes and whose supplies could only arrive over water.\(^2\) But the ethos, mission, international stature, and continental property of the Order imposed remedies to this situation, which could only be achieved through sheer endeavour. The Knights not only started carrying out infrastructural changes to the archipelago, but had to use their resources to improve Malta’s connectivity with the surrounding world. The latter objective was achieved through the coordinated deployment of the Order’s naval resources and foreign personnel, together with the exploitation of the communication systems of foreign states. The way this entire network worked in practice will be shown through two case studies sourced from Hospitaller documentation, dated 1613 and 1645 respectively. The first episode chronicles a routine bullion-collection trip by the Hospitaller galleys in the Western Mediterranean. The second, the shipment of a timber consignment from the North Sea to Malta in the weeks preceding the outbreak of the War of Candia. The choice of these two particular maritime trips from Hospitaller Malta’s turbulent history is not a casual one, and neither are the historical instances in which they occur. Apart from illustrating Hospitaller Malta’s communication system in full operative mode, displaying the efforts needed to collect bullion and supplies through shipping in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, they are a testimony of a bureaucracy in evolution and of how the island’s affairs were becoming more intricate on an expanding international stage. The episodes show how, as the seventeenth century progressed, the Knights were transforming Malta from what in theory was a

\(^1\) For comprehensive overviews of how nations manage or not to exploit their resources and to adjust to the world surrounding them see, for example, Adam Smith, \textit{Wealth of Nations} (Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Classics, 2012) and David S. Landes, \textit{The Wealth and Poverty of Nations} (London, Abacus, 1998).

Spanish fief, to what in practice matured into an island-Order state capable of orchestrating financial transactions at a continental level, of collecting and processing intelligence to protect its subjects and its shipping, and of dealing with other powers in Christendom when faced with a military threat. To conduct such affairs, as stated earlier in this study, the Order usually had to start by exploiting its links with Sicily.

**Sicily, the Order’s Galleys, and Hospitaller Malta’s Communication System**

The mother of practically all connectivity involving Hospitaller Malta’s communication network was obviously Sicily, the island-world and geographic epicentre around which all of Hospitaller Malta’s international activity evolved. However immeasurable was the Knights’ contribution to the rise of Malta’s international stature, the archipelago’s medieval dependence on regional geography was, if anything, augmented during the Hospitaller era. After the settlement of 1530, Hospitaller international affairs and maritime activity, together with Malta’s demographic expansion, imposed a greater exploitation of the Sicilian littoral and hinterland by the Order’s new post, rendering Malta’s existence in early modernity more Sicily-centric than ever before. As explained in earlier chapters, whether to import supplies, relocate funds, or channel incoming and outgoing information, the Order relied heavily on its personnel deployed in a clockwise direction from Palermo to Trapani. The communication network of Hospitaller Malta was operated through a combination of land and water transport requiring the coordinated use of vessels, couriers, agents, and a host of other contacts. The ferry crossings to Scicli constituted a historical continuum, periodically rekindling the umbilical links with a territory whose produce and geographical bearing kept on sustaining Malta’s survival throughout early modernity. While Scicli was Malta’s most immediate link to Christendom, and Messina the prime contact with Italy, Palermo was the administrative centre through which so many of Hospitaller Malta’s Sicilian affairs were managed, just as the receiver of Naples had substantial jurisdictional leverage over Hospitaller operations in Southern Italy.3 As the viceregal seat and the official residence of the Hospitaller receiver of the Priory of Messina,4 Palermo allowed the Order to conduct operations involving all the important coastal stations of the island: export permits negotiated with the viceregal government were dispatched to the grain wharves in the south, and to Messina, Syracuse, Scicli, and Trapani to release the shipments of cereals, wine, meat, and other commodities relevant to Malta’s needs; commissions to bake biscuit for the Order’s galleys were sent to Trapani, Syracuse, or Messina; the necessary funds to finance these operations were transferred to the relevant ports after the collection of responsions from Sicily or the relocation of prioral currency

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3 See chapter three.
4 See, for example: AOM 100, f. 161r; f. 238v; 263v and AOM 101, f. 44r and f. 222v.
from Europe; and ships were hired and insured for the transfer of these provisions and other commodities to Malta or elsewhere.  

These Hospitaller interconnections within the confined space of Sicily not only served Malta’s provisioning and upkeep of contacts with abroad, but were also necessary for the management of the Order’s overall maritime activity. The Sicilian littoral served also as a geographical bearing point for the Order’s squadron. Apart from anti-Muslim naval missions, Hospitaller galleys were occasionally tasked with collecting intelligence, escorting cargo ships and Catholic royalty around the Mediterranean, and with the transport of supplies, merchandise, bullion, mail, and manpower. Irrespective of the latitudes they had to sail to on either side of the Christian-Muslim divide throughout their missions, these galleys usually retraced their routes to harbour at some point on Sicily’s coast before putting up sail again to travel to Malta or elsewhere. Naval stops in Sicily were logistical stages necessary for victualling or for taking on board commodities, supplies, or otherwise, but they were also convenient to maintain contact with the Convent. The charting of the galley trips, which planned in advance the routes and stops of these missions, tied the Hospitaller naval generals and captains with rather strict maritime itineraries, which obviously could be ignored in case of emergencies created by weather or bellicose contingencies, but which provided the Convent with a measure of knowledge regarding the positioning of its fleet. Through this planning, the Convent increased the possibilities of intercepting its galleys at some point during their mission in order to impart new orders or communicate warnings regarding enemy sorties from Barbary or the Levant. Knowing that the fleet was going to harbour in Palermo or Messina, or somewhere along Sicily’s eastern or southern coasts, allowed the Order to reach its galleys within a matter of days through the activation of its

5 For some examples of similar operations, see: AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), 29 September 1620, f. 456, 29 September 1620; AOM 1386 Wignacourt to Corsetto (Licata), ff. 303v-304r, 12 December 1607; AOM 1389, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), f. 367, 27 October 1610; AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 282-283r, 21 June 1612; AOM 1387, Wignacourt to Sortino (Syracuse), f. 71, 16 March 1608; AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Scicli), f. 175r, 10 June 1611; AOM 1387, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 90v-91r, 31 March 1608; AOM 1385, Wignacourt to Scipione di Ferro (Trapani), ff. 344v-345r, 16 October 1606; AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Pugiades (Licata), ff. 313v-314, 31 July 1614; AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 427-428r, 7 September 1620; AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 285v-286, 12 July 1620. For the relocation of prioral funds to Palermo and their redistribution to other Sicilian ports according to Hospitaller Malta’s needs, see chapter five.


8 Dal Pozzo, vols. i and ii, passim.

9 See, for example, AOM 432, ff. 220r-254v and AOM 454, ff. 260-261 v.

contact network with and throughout Sicily. Letters were dispatched, at times with special couriers, from Scicli to Palermo, Trapani, Messina, and Syracuse with instructions to intercept Hospitaller galleys in case they landed in these ports. Alternatively charter frigates were sent directly from Malta to ports like Syracuse, for example, to alert about enemy sightings in the channel. Frigates from Malta and couriers from Scicli were sent to connect with the galleys at Capo Passero, a routine stopping point for Hospitaller shipping down the eastern coast of Sicily. The receiver in Palermo could be tasked to verify if the galleys were in nearby Trapani and letters addressed to the squadron’s generals were sent simultaneously to different ports, occasionally via both land and sea routes and to ports in Southern Italy also, to increase the possibility of making contact with the fleet.

The whole system was also used in the service of Christendom to intercept other Catholic galleys in cases of enemy threats. In April 1613, following news that a fleet from Bizerte was planning to ambush Sicilian galleys on a mission in Barbary, the Order warned Palermo via Scicli. In an attempt to intercept the galleys, the authorities of Trapani were encouraged to try and re-establish contact with the Sicilian fleet themselves. The frigate of Padron Magro was sent from Malta to reconnoitre in Barbary, while another vessel plied the Southern Sicilian coast between Scicli and Trapani, and a knight was to cover the same route overland to try and sight the galleys.

These connections involving Sicily’s waters and topography were logistically extended to Italy and the rest of the Hospitaller world, providing Malta with a substantial reach in continental territory. As evidenced earlier in this study, Hospitaller Malta’s affairs could ramify to regional and global proportions, creating interdependencies spanning hundreds of kilometres throughout the Order’s communication network. Failure to collect the usual quota of responsions in Bohemia due to an indebted commandery could mean the lack of remittances to Venice, which in turn implied

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11 For example: AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), ff. 135v-136r, 17 April 1604; AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli), f. 161r, 29 June 1607; AOM 1386, Wignacourt to Falco (Scicli) f. 165r, 3 July 1607; AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Scicli), f. 306r, 3 September 1611; Ibid., Wignacourt to Generale Vaccheras, f. 306v, 6 September 1611; Ibid., Wignacourt to Afflitto (Syracuse), f. 307r, 6 September 1611; and AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 174r, 24 April 1612.
12 For example: AOM 1380, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), ff. 79v-80r, 20 April 1601; AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), f. 75, 11 March 1604; and AOM 1397, Wignacourt to Francesco Lo Porto (Scicli), f. 240, 16 July 1618.
13 AOM 1387, Wignacourt to La Marra (Palermo), ff. 255-256r, 19 September 1608.
14 For example: AOM 1383, Wignacourt to Sollima (Scicli), ff. 135v-136r, 17 April 1604; AOM 1382, Wignacourt to Zumbo (Syracuse), f. 263r, 21 August 1603; Ibid., Wignacourt to Ventimiglia (Messina), f. 263; AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 180v, 4 May 1612; and AOM 1396, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), Ponte (Naples), Sollima (Messina), ff. 168v-169r, 20 May 1617.
15 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 170-171, 16 April 1613.
16 Ibid., f. 170-171, 16 April 1613.
17 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Don Ottavio d’Aragona, f. 173, 16 April 1613.
the stalling of the usual shipment of goods for the Convent down the Adriatic;\textsuperscript{18} the receiver in Palermo had to be informed in time that the consignment of cloth in arrival from Barcelona was to be loaded on the same ships hired by him in Palermo to transport cereals to Malta;\textsuperscript{19} and clearance for the Marseilles-Malta shipment of a cargo of masts and lateen yards had to be obtained in Paris.\textsuperscript{20} The initial connection which launched all these operations was usually the frigate service between Malta and Scicli. If, following instructions by the Common Treasury, thousands of \textit{scudi} in bills had to be cleared in Barcelona to be cashed in Palermo by the time the Hospitaller galleys sailed in the Sicilian port to collect the bullion, the whole process had to be triggered off with a ferry crossing to Scicli from where a courier would be dispatched to brief the receiver in Palermo about the whole transaction.\textsuperscript{21} Correct timing in these operations was essential and had to be achieved despite the entire gamut of obstacles to communications in the pre-industrial era, for a missed connection could translate into extra days, weeks, or months wasted in delays, and time, as in any stage in man’s social development, had its costs. Nowhere do these collective efforts coordinated from Malta emerge more clearly than in the maritime activities of the Order for the collection of bullion and supplies.

\textit{The Galley Trip of 1613: A Case-Study in Hospitaller Logistics and Early Modern Networking}

As explained earlier in this study, the Order occasionally found it convenient to organize maritime trips to collect funds from its European priories made available in cash in the Mediterranean ports of Spain, France, and Italy. The itinerary of these maritime ventures planned in Malta had to be communicated to the relevant Hospitaller personnel stationed on the European continent. Members of the Order’s personnel were tasked in advance by the Convent with specific commissions which had to be executed before the scheduled stops of the galleys along the Western Mediterranean littoral. This way the galleys would be able to take on board whatever was made available by the Hospitaller agents in accordance with the original commissions dictated from Malta. The terminal actors in similar operations were the galley crews and the Order’s agents stationed in the Mediterranean ports, but an unspecified number of other Hospitaller agents and contacts throughout Europe could end up involved. Instructions imparted from the Convent to the receivers in Barcelona and Marseilles to provide the Hospitaller galleys with goods and bullion implied the activation of contacts within the Spanish and French hinterlands for the provision and transport to the respective ports of the consignments demanded. The receiver in Castile had to provide the

\textsuperscript{18} AOM 1390, Wignacourt to Com. Vratislao (Bohemia), ff. 422v-423, 14 November 1611.
\textsuperscript{19} AOM 1391, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 578-579, 31 December 1612.
\textsuperscript{20} AOM 1399, Wignacourt to Com. La Motta, f. 115r, 28 March 1620.
\textsuperscript{21} See, for example, AOM 1384, Wignacourt to Capece (Palermo), ff. 355v-356r, 28 October 1605.
galleys in Barcelona with the bullion he would have collected from his priory, just as the receiver in Lyons had to liaise with his counterpart in Marseilles, and the Hospitaller agents in the Priory of Lombardy had to communicate with each other for the dispatch of bills, bullion, or merchandise to Genoa to intersect shipments down the Tyrrenian route.

The Hospitaller galley trip of 1613 constitutes a case-study of the communication system adopted and manoeuvred by Malta’s establishment in an early seventeenth-century context. The stages of the maritime journey documented in the Order’s manuscripts trace primarily the squadron’s calls at ports throughout a typical bullion-collecting voyage around the western half of the Mediterranean. Unlike the pre-Candia episode which will be discussed later, the dimension of the whole excursion of 1613 might deceptively appear more regional than global. However, it highlights in greater detail the synergic efforts required by Hospitaller personnel on land and sea to carry out similar missions successfully. The departure of the galleys was shifted a few days forward than originally planned. They were to leave Malta for Spain on 18 July 1613 and were expected back by the beginning of the following October. The planning of the whole excursion obviously started weeks before the departure. By June the Hospitaller agents in Palermo and Lombardy, so pivotal for the Order’s entire financial network, were notified with the trip. Carlo Valdina, the Order’s receiver in Palermo, was instructed to effect a cambio worth 10,000 scudi to subsidise the purchase of up to 3,200 salme of cereals. The cambio was ultimately to be covered by the cash carried over from Spain by the galleys. The receiver of Lombardy was instructed to remit the maximum amount of currency possible to Genoa, where it was to be changed in Spanish doubloons by the time the galleys on the return trip were in Ligurian waters. Part of the overall plan was that ultimately the bulk of the bullion shipped on the return journey would be in reals. The Order intended to effect a purely financial transaction at Messina on the galleys’ return to exchange the equivalent of 40,000 to 60,000 scudi in the waters of the Straits at the best rate possible and make an immediate profit on the transaction, another indication of how Hospitaller investment habits had evolved since the foundation of the Order to become more resonant with the times. Money was used to make money, without the purchase of property in between.

In conjunction with these arrangements, the Convent charted the combined land and maritime logistics involving calls at various ports, starting with those of Sicily. After stopping at

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22 AOM 1400, Wignacourt to Balio di Brie (Generale delle Galere), ff. 568v-569r, 22 October 1621. See also chapter 5.
23 See chapter five and below.
24 The galleys were to pick two ambassadors of Messina from Pozzallo on the 16 July instead of the 18 July. AOM 1392, Wignacourt to the S[ignori] del Senato di Messina, f. 346r, 9 July 1613.
25 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 373r, 22 July 1613.
26 Ibid., Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 356v-358, 13 July 1613.
27 Ibid., ff. 356v-358, 13 July 1613.
28 Ibid., Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Lombardy), f. 324v, 22 June 1613.
29 Ibid., Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 373r, 22 July 1613.
Pozzallo in a courtesy detour to pick up a viceregal embassy on its way to Spain, the five galleys were to sail to Trapani to load biscuit for the crews and other provisions. The permit for the purchase of 200 cantara of biscuit had to be obtained from Palermo and sent to Trapani by not later than the 15th July. The biscuit was to be paid in Palermo only after the arrival of notification from Trapani that at least part of the consignment had been loaded on the Hospitaller galleys. After leaving Trapani, the squadron was to ply the waters of the Aegadian islands of Favignana and Marettimo in search of enemy corsairs according to updates collected while in Sicily. The squadron was then to cross to Sardinian waters for another plying session and then sail to Marseilles. From the French port, the squadron’s captain was to send dispatches, by land or by sea, to brief the Order’s agents in Barcelona and Castile of the galleys’ arrival in Marseilles and inform them that their first stop on the Spanish coast was to be Cartagena for the collection of merchandise and bullion. Once the squadron left Marseilles, it was to ply the Balearics and the nearby North African coast for more policing before travelling to Cartagena. If the Order’s receiver was not in the Spanish port at the time of the squadron’s arrival, he was to be notified with the dispatch of a courier. The receiver’s task was to provide the galleys with bullion at Cartagena in the shortest time possible not to keep the squadron on hold. Next, the galleys were to coast north to Barcelona to collect more merchandise and all the bullion made available by the Order’s agents in the port before coasting north to France. Once back in Marseilles, the galleys were to collect bullion and tow the new capitana being built in the French port for the Order’s navy before resuming sail to reach Ligurian waters.

Similar plans, however, could have to be updated while missions were already on course. Diplomatic considerations forced the Convent to communicate with its galleys while in Marseilles in order to re-chart the voyage before reaching Genoa. A few days after the galleys left Malta, a dispatch was hastily sent to Genoa to be subsequently forwarded to a contact in Marseilles who was to hand it to the general of the Order’s galleys as soon as they harboured in the French port. The instructions were to stop at Savona on the Western Ligurian Riviera when sailing was resumed. From here only two galleys were to sail to Genoa to pick up bullion, before coasting

30 Ibid., Wignacourt to the Signori del Senato di Messina, f. 346r, 9 July 1613.
31 Ibid., Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 326, 22 June 1613; AOM 458, f. 307r.
32 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 326, 22 June 1613.
33 Ibid., f. 326, 22 June 1613.
34 AOM 458, f. 307r.
35 Ibid., f. 307r.
36 Ibid., f. 307r.
37 Ibid., f. 307r.
38 Ibid., f. 307r.
39 Ibid., f. 307r.
40 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 312v-313r, 15 June 1613.
41 Ibid, Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), f. 374r, 22 July 1613.
back west to join the rest of the fleet which was to sail south in unison along the Tyrrhenian.\footnote{Ibid., f. 374r, 22 July 1613.} This was a precautionary measure in an attempt to avoid further squabbles with Genoa over the interminable question of salutes at sea.\footnote{Ivan Grech, ‘Il prezzo dell’onore nel Mediterraneo: rapporti e dissidi diplomatici tra Genova e l’Ordine di Malta nel Seicento’, in Cavalieri di San Giovanni in Liguria e nell’Italia settentrionale. Quadri regionali, uomini e documenti. Atti del Convegno Genova, Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè, 30 settembre-2 ottobre 2004, J. Costa Restagno (ed.) Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri, Genoa-Albenga, 2009, 587-609 and 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, 2, (December 2005), 201.}

As outlined in earlier chapters, Hospitaller agents, and particularly those posted along the maritime route of such missions, were granted leeway by the Convent to exploit the most immediately available shipping connections destined to Sicily or Malta. The Order’s agent in Genoa, for example, had the option to ship commodities commissioned by the Convent on Genoa’s silk galleys which sailed to Messina in summer, or else wait for the Hospitaller galleys on their return from Spain and France.\footnote{AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), f. 338, 4 July 1613.} Alternatively, these cargoes could be sent earlier with frigates or ships sailing to Sicily or Malta from Genoa. In May of that year, for instance, an English ship transported to Malta sixteen bales of arquebus fuses (\textit{miccio})\footnote{Ibid., Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), ff. 235-236r, 21 May 1613.} and the following August, while the Order’s squadron was already roaming the western Mediterranean waters, weapons, other goods, and an unspecified amount of Hospitaller bullion which had already been cashed in Genoa were shipped on Genoa’s galleys to Messina from where they were to be transported to Malta with the first shipping connection, or be kept on hold to be loaded on the Order’s squadron on its return.\footnote{Ibid., Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), f. 413r, 13 August 1613 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 410v, 13 August 1613.} Similar arrangements along the Mediterranean silk route allowed the Order to exploit all connections available to ship to Malta cargoes commissioned from the continent. On the galleys’ route south along the Tyrrenian, further stops were planned in Leghorn, in Naples for the collection of more bullion and furniture for the magistral palace made on commission by a certain Hospitaller Vitelli, and subsequently in Messina.\footnote{Ibid., Wignacourt to Abenante (Naples), f. 433r, 28 August 1613 and AOM 458, f. 307r.} Some of the logistics of the return journey were implemented while the mission was on course. While in early August the Convent kept itself updated on the prices, quality, and quantity of cereals available in the wharves of Southern Sicily for eventual purchases to be subsidised by the bullion carried by the galleys,\footnote{AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Pugiades (Licata), ff. 383v-384r, 3 August 1613 and Ibid., f. 408r, 13 August 1613.} saltpetre intended to be exported to Malta was stocked in Syracuse to be picked up by the galleys on their return to Sicily.\footnote{Ibid., Wignacourt to Mazzarra (Syracuse), ff. 390v-391r, 7 August 1613.} Updates on the cereal situation in Sicily, in fact, provided
the Order with the opportunity to exploit the squadron’s journey to the full if favourable bargains for the purchase of grain could be obtained.

Contingencies, just like diplomacy, could impose logistical alterations to the original plan while the mission was on course. Late in September, up to 600 *cantara* of biscuit were to be prepared in Messina rather than Syracuse. The death of the Hospitaller procurator in Syracuse, Mazzara, created a temporary administrative void which momentarily denied the galleys the option to load provisions in the port on the eastern coast of Sicily. The biscuit in Messina was to be subsidised by bullion bound to be collected from Naples – a *piazza* hardly ever short of cash - and was to be carried by the galleys or by another vessel. Biscuit apart, since the galleys were expected in Sicily by the end of the month, the procurator in Messina was pressured with finding a buyer ready to accept a currency exchange at 10 per cent, probably through the clearance of bills, to load the resulting bullion on the galleys. Plan B was to exchange up to 15,000 *scudi* at 8 per cent and transfer them to Palermo for the purchase of cereals. It is not clear whether any of these last two transactions were carried out, for they could have been superseded by others commissioned by the Convent in October, in which the bullion to cover the purchases in Palermo was to be provided by the galleys (see below).

By the beginning of October, it was evident that the galleys’ return was going to take longer than scheduled. They harboured in Marseilles only on the 4th October. This gave the Convent the opportunity to review some of the original logistics and exploit the mission further. With a letter dated 10th October, the receiver of the Priory of Lombardy was instructed to deposit further funds in Milan to be subsequently deposited in Genoa, while the agent in Genoa was commissioned to prepare a batch of ironworks prepared in Savona for the Order’s arsenal, all in time to be picked up by the galleys returning from Spain. Meanwhile the galleys, whose arrival in Messina was now expected around the beginning of November, had to be intercepted yet again to be handed updates regarding the eventual deposit of cash equivalent to 20,000 *scudi* in Messina. Part of the sum was to be covered by the bullion in *patacche* collected in Naples, and the rest was to be paid in reals. The sum was to be subsequently transferred to Palermo to cover

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50 Ibid., Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), ff. 477v-478r, 23 September 1613 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Mendes (Generale delle Galere), f. 478, 23 September 1613.
51 Ibid., Wignacourt to Mendes (Generale delle Galere), f. 478, 23 September 1613.
52 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Torriglia (Messina), f. 459, 23 September 1613.
53 Ibid., f. 459, 23 September 1613.
54 As confirmed to the Convent by information via Rome dated 19 October. AOM 1259, Amb. La Marra (Rome) to Wignacourt, f. 263r, 19 October 1613.
55 AOM 1392, Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Alessandria, Priory of Lombardy), f. 496v, 10 October 1613.
56 Ibid., Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), f. 497, 10 October 1613 and Ibid., f. 526, 20 October 1613.
57 Ibid., Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 527v-529, 20 October 1613.
58 Ibid., Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 497v, 10 October 1613 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Balio d’Acri et Generale Mendes, f. 498, 10 October 1613.
59 Ibid., Wignacourt to Balio d’Acri et Generale Mendes, f. 498, 10 October 1613.
the cambio contracted to pay for cereals purchased at the onset of the trip.\textsuperscript{60} By October, normal administrative service was resumed in Syracuse with the posting of the new procurator Paolo Grimaldi, reinstating the option of a galley-stop in the port to load biscuit.\textsuperscript{61} It was a timely alternative for the Convent, for fresh intelligence about enemy sightings in the Malta-Sicily channel meant that the galleys had to be intercepted to be warned in time. On the 20\textsuperscript{th} October, the Convent received a warning dated 17\textsuperscript{th} October by the Jurats of Licata, who three days earlier had received warnings from Sciacca that six enemy galleys were plying the southern coast of Sicily.\textsuperscript{62} The Convent dispatched letters of warning in triple copy addressed to the general of its galleys to Syracuse, Messina, and Naples.\textsuperscript{63} The intention was to intercept the galleys as early as possible. If the galleys were not in Syracuse, a special courier was to cover the Syracuse-Messina stretch, travelling day and night to try and intercept the galleys in the straits.\textsuperscript{64} If the attempt failed, the procedure was to be repeated to try and intercept the galleys in Naples.\textsuperscript{65} Ultimately it proved to be an unfounded threat\textsuperscript{66} and, in November, Syracuse was informed that the galleys were to stop there to deposit 1,500 scudi at the rate of 12 tari per scudo.\textsuperscript{67} The Hospitaller procurator in Scicli was to be reimbursed 1,000 scudi to cover commissions ordered by the receiver in Palermo once the latter received the sums deposited on purpose by the galleys in Messina.\textsuperscript{68} The lack of Hospitaller liquidity in Sicily due to delays in the arrival of the bullion was in fact stalling payments owed by the Order in all corners of the island.\textsuperscript{69}

In the first week of December, a tartana from Syracuse informed the Convent that the galleys had arrived in Messina on the 25\textsuperscript{th} November, although the Order still deemed it necessary to verify the news,\textsuperscript{70} as was habitual practice in the information processing procedures of the Knights. The agent in Palermo received notification from Messina of the galleys’ arrival in the Straits, where the squadron loaded hundreds of cantara of biscuit which had been granted export clearance with a permit sent previously from the viceroyal court,\textsuperscript{71} and where it deposited 20,000 scudi which were duly transferred to Palermo.\textsuperscript{72} It was a timely deposit, for the price of wheat to be purchased had apparently gone down by 3 tari per salma.\textsuperscript{73} With this sum in hand, the Hospitaller receiver in Palermo was finally in a position to settle some payments: he could cover

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\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., f. 498, 10 October 1613.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., f. 498, 10 October 1613.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., Wignacourt to Balio d’Acri et Generale Mendes, f. 549r, 21 October 1613.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Syracuse), f. 548r, 21 October 1613.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., f. 548r, 21 October 1613 and Ibid., to Sollima (Messina), f. 548, 21 October 1613.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Syracuse), f. 548r, 21 October 1613 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Abenante (Naples), f. 548v, 21 October 1613.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Syracuse), ff. 562v-563, 9 November 1613.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., Wignacourt to Grimaldi (Syracuse), f. 571v, 9 November 1613.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., Wignacourt to Accarigi (Scicli), f. 580r, 18 November 1613.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 589, 18 November 1613.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 597-598r, 6 December 1613.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), f. 589, 18 November 1613.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 614v-615, 31 December 1613.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., ff. 614v-615, 31 December 1613.
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the purchase of thousands of salme of wheat in Licata; was able to pay for the ships hired to transport the provisions to Malta; could reimburse the carriage and insurance of 750 salme of wheat to Syracuse for the baking of biscuit; and was in a position to subsidise the shipping of albagi (woollen cloth) from Scicli. When the galleys finally made it to Malta on 19th December, apart from the new capitana from Marseilles, they carried with them bullion and commodities picked up in Genoa and Naples, mail parcels from Genoa, which included letters from Lombardy and Germany, and mail from Otranto which had been previously delivered overland to Naples to intercept the galleys’ return. Other mail and goods were carried over from Messina and presumably from Syracuse. This provides a tangible explanation why at times mail addressed to Malta took longer to be delivered when compared with effective delivery times of the age. Shipping connections such as the galley trip in question were too convenient not to be exploited, and therefore Malta-bound mail had to wait.

Apart from the physiological delays characteristic of such maritime trips - partly due, no doubt, to the onus of towing a new galley hull south along the Tyrrenian during the tail-end of the sailing season - the only blip of any relevance in the entire voyage apparently happened in Leghorn, where a Malta-bound prisoner was not escorted in time from Siena to be embarked on the galleys. It was one missed connection in an otherwise elaborately coordinated mission spanning months, in which the Order’s maritime and continental affairs intersected to produce economic collaterals in Sicily and Malta. The produce of Hospitaller estates acquired in a bygone crusading era throughout Iberia, France, Central and Northern Europe, and Italy, was converted to money-of-account, which in turn was converted to bullion through the exploitation of credit-transactions typical of a financial revolution which was ushering western society into modernity. Hospitaller credit generated on the continent ended up transferred between the territorial extremities of Sicily in a collective effort by Hospitaller personnel to feed and stock the Maltese archipelago, and bullion generated in remote continental territories of an ever growing and ever more interconnected world, ended up injected into Malta’s economy through the networking efforts of an early modern communication system in full operative mode.

The coordinated logistics of the entire trip have all the imprints of the workings of a state bureaucracy which necessitated a measure of international leverage to implement its plans. The capacity shown in 1613 to react in time to intelligence updates by taking the necessary precautions

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74 Ibid., Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 527v-529, 20 October 1613.
75 Ibid., Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), f. 606, 31 December 1613.
76 Ibid., Wignacourt to the Grand Prior of Germany, f. 626, 31 December 1613; Ibid., Wignacourt to Caloro (Genoa), f. 606, 31 December 1613; Ibid., Wignacourt to Pagliaro (Alessandria, Priory of Lombardy), f. 620, 31 December 1613; and Ibid., Wignacourt to Demetrio Lipravoti (Otranto), f. 616, 31 December 1613.
77 Ibid., Wignacourt to Sollima (Messina), f. 605, 30 December 1613.
78 Ibid., Wignacourt to Amb. La Marra (Rome), f. 590r, 6 December 1613 and Ibid., Wignacourt to Gaetani (Florence), f. 630, 31 December 1613.
against enemy marauders partly explains how Malta was in a position, for example, not to be caught entirely unprepared in the ruinous Turkish landing of 6 July 1614, although more timely briefs from the Levant could have helped to contain further the impact of the assault. A boastful Wignacourt, in fact, complained that if information from Zante regarding the landing, dated 2 July, had been delivered to Malta in time, the Turks would have found much stiffer opposition. As the decades rolled by, however, this same bureaucracy became more intricate and capable of coordinating operations with a much wider territorial and diplomatic reach. Hospitaller Malta refined its communication network as the seventeenth century progressed, gaining greater stability and credibility on an international stage. Thus the island’s establishment was in a position to amplify its geographic reach and diplomatic leverage, allowing it to carry out commercial negotiations in Nordic ports while soliciting military interventions from Christian powers solely on its behalf, as evidenced by the episode leading to the outbreak of the War of Candia of 1645.

**Chronicle of a Crisis: Malta and the Prelude to the War of Candia**

In the early months of 1645 the Hospitaller Order of St John was once again gripped by the fear of an Ottoman onslaught directed against Malta. By January of that year news had already reached the island that the docks in Constantinople were preparing for a sortie in spring. Premonitions of the dark skies looming ahead were also fomented by the Convent’s unease over the depredation of a Turkish galleon carried out by the Hospitaller galleys a few months earlier. The galleon was on its way to Alexandria from Constantinople and was allegedly carrying Ottoman royalty. Regardless of whoever the galleon was carrying, the sensitivity of the Porte had been provoked, rendering the possibility of an Ottoman reprisal against the Order more than just a standard preoccupation. This was no ordinary threat. It could not be dismissed by routine precautionary measures. Dispatching a garrison to Gozo and pleading for the viceregal concessions of surplus tratte to stock the grain wharves would not have sufficed. The Order’s hierarchy was hassling members of its personnel on the continent to heighten their awareness about the inflated needs that

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79 The landing of 1614 is discussed briefly in chapters one and four. For an account of the landing, see Bartholomeo Dal Pozzo, *Historia della S. Religione Militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta*, i, (Verona, 1703), 588-93.

80 The information arrived in Malta via Messina only on 16 July, over a week after the Turks had left the island. AOM 1393A, Wignacourt to Giorgio Latino (Zante), 17 July 1614, ff. 300v-301r.

81 AOM 1423, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 36, 23 January 1645.

82 Ibid., f. 36, 23 January 1645.

such emergencies usually created for Malta. The level of the alert was high enough to demand widespread help from Christendom. The Order was apparently confident that similar appeals were not to fall on deaf ears, secure in the knowledge that the threat had endemic regional implications. By January 1645, in fact, fear of an Ottoman naval sortie was apparently already freezing Christian shipping in the Levant.

Appeals for help were lodged to Spain, France, the Duke of Savoy, and a host of other Catholic potentates, and diplomatic efforts were made to assemble an international Catholic fleet in Messina. News of an impending full-scale siege in summer were reaching the Convent ‘from everywhere’, both through official and occasional sources. Zante supplied Malta with news after sending agents on purpose to Constantinople. A Dominican friar, who stopped in Malta after retracing his steps through Poland when travelling to Persia due to the tense situation in the East, alarmed the Convent with first-hand information about the intensive preparations going on in Constantinople. By April the perception of the threat was so acute that the Order went as far as to ask the kings of Poland and Sweden to create a diversionary attack in Eastern Europe, possibly with the aid of the Cossacks, those ‘sworn enemies of the Ottomans’, in the hope of distracting the Turk on that front and possibly disrupt his naval schedule for the oncoming sailing season.

In the meantime the Order had activated its receivership in Genoa to sound the possibilities of shipping a cargo of timber, galley-masts, and lateen yards from Amsterdam to Malta. However, Scandinavian commercial interests and geopolitical rivalries conspired to disrupt Hospitaller plans. The war between Denmark and Sweden over shipping dues and territorial gains which had started in May 1643 rekindled the age-old struggle for primacy in the Baltic and was reaching its climax just when Malta was preparing for what appeared to be an inevitable attack from the Levant. In early modernity the Baltic supplied the arsenals of European states with ship-

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84 For example: AOM 1423 Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 89 r, 20 March 1645 and Ibid., Lascaris Castellar to the Luogotenenti of the Priories of Italy, Messina, Barletta, Capua, Rome, Pisa, Venice, Lombardy, and the Priors of Germany and Bohemia, ff. 35v-36r, 23 January 1645.
85 Ibid., Lascaris Castellar to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, f. 34, 23 January 1645.
86 AOM 257, f. 216v.
87 AOM 1423, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 36, 23 January 1645.
88 Ibid., Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 114, 8 April 1645.
89 ‘...assedio che da ogni parte si sente doverci portare il Turco in questa state’. AOM 1423, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 89r, 20 March 1645. News was coming ‘da diversi parti, così di Levante, come di Barberia e Venetia...’, AOM 257, f. 135v.
90 AOM 1423, Lascaris Castellar to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 125r, 23 April 1645.
91 Ibid., Lascaris Castellar to the Kings of Poland and Sweden, f. 116, 13 April 1645.
92 Ibid., Lascaris Castellar to the Kings of Poland and Sweden, f. 116, 13 April 1645.
94 For the full range of preparations taken against a possible siege in 1645, see AOM 257 passim, AOM 258 passim, and Dal Pozzo, ii, 98-114.
building and ship-repair material like timber, hemp, pitch, tar, and flax. It also supplied other commodities like copper and cheap grain in huge quantities, stimulating the inevitable lust for control and consequent enrichment of the regional powers, whose ambition was to dominate the strategic river outlets on the sea through which commodities flowing from the various Nordic hinterlands were transhipped and carried to other destinations. Denmark’s privileged control of the Sound, the narrow straits which regulated maritime traffic between the Baltic and the North Sea, was historically contested by Sweden, making long-term peaceful coexistence between these two neighbouring powers a precarious affair. The strategic implications of the war of 1643–45 widened to include other powers. Norway aided Denmark by attacking Sweden along the Norwegian-Swedish borders and the Dutch ended up involved on Sweden’s side.

This geopolitical extension of the conflict reverberated down to the central Mediterranean, hampering Hospitaller Malta’s interests. The Baltic war had inevitable consequences on northern markets, increasing the demand for timber with the result that the Order was encountering difficulties in purchasing the shipbuilding material commissioned for its vessels from Amsterdam. The Order was resigned to delaying the purchase and spend more than predicted on the cargo since the prices of timber, and of masts in particular, had gone up during the course of the war. With letters dated 10th and 17th June, Genoa informed the Convent that a good part of the overall timber cargo had been assembled, but shipping it over was going to be problematic since the Netherlands had been requisitioning available large-sized vessels to employ them in its naval engagements on Sweden’s side. Guglielmo Bertolotto, the Order’s contact in Amsterdam, was actually finding difficulty in hiring a vessel to ship the consignment to the Mediterranean, fearing that the Dutch state would block the operation. In a way the delay of the shipment south was perversely opportune for the Order, and could have been inevitable anyway, since the possibility of a full-scale sortie from Constantinople would have conditioned the timing of the Nordic shipment’s entry into the Mediterranean. All sorts of Catholic supply routes crossing the central Mediterranean risked being intercepted by the Ottoman fleet if Malta or other Habsburg lands in the central Mediterranean were the ultimate target of a siege. Ships hired in Genoa to transport goods to Malta along the Tyrrenian route, for example, were being warned to use caution when approaching Southern Italy, for the logistics of the Ottoman fleet were difficult to predict. In the

*95 The Times History of the World, 188.*
*97 For a brief overview of the war of 1643–45 between Denmark and Sweden, see Bonney, 251-2.*
*98 AOM 1423, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), 151v-152r, 23 May 1645.*
*99 Ibid., Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 177 v, 30 June 1645.*
*100 Ibid., ff. 201v-202r, 22 July 1645.*
*101 Ibid., ff. 201v-202r, 22 July 1645.*
*102 Ibid., ff. 201v-202r, 22 July 1645.*
*103 Ibid., ff. 151v-152r, 23 May 1645.*
two years preceding 1645, for example, sizable Turkish fleets had twice ravaged the coasts of Calabria.\textsuperscript{104}

In the early days of June, Malta was still expecting a full-scale siege since the Order’s intelligence had warned of the probability that the Ottoman fleet would make it to Malta by the end of the month.\textsuperscript{105} News from Zante had it that part of the Ottoman fleet was already in Chios\textsuperscript{106} and on the 12\textsuperscript{th} June a tartana from Smyrna informed that the Turkish fleet had already started gathering in Navarino.\textsuperscript{107} So the Order was biding its time to clear formalities for the consignment from Amsterdam, while preparing for a siege and keeping itself updated on the Turk’s military intentions and manoeuvres. It was only in the early days of July that the Convent started receiving news from Zante and Otranto that the Ottoman fleet was heading to Candia after docking for thirteen days in Navarino.\textsuperscript{108} Zante informed that the Turk had left Navarino on the 21\textsuperscript{st} June.\textsuperscript{109} Apparently for the first time since the start of the crisis, the Order learnt of the possibility that the true and ultimate objective of the Turk was not Malta and neither the central Mediterranean, but treated the information with a mixture of relief and scepticism. Although different intelligence sources confirmed that the Turk was heading back east, they failed to converge on a uniform version of events. With a letter dated 17\textsuperscript{th} June, the Hospitaller receiver in Venice had informed the Convent that the Ottoman fleet had been hit by plague and that, according to rumours, it was going to sail all the way back to Constantinople.\textsuperscript{110} Alternative sources insisted with the Convent that the enemy had in fact retreated to Constantinople, ignoring Crete altogether.\textsuperscript{111} However, the Order’s doubts about the authentic war plan of the Porte were not soothed. Why would the Ottoman fleet sail as far as Navarino in the Western Peloponnese if Candia had been its primary target in the first place?\textsuperscript{112} When the Order had time to digest the situation calmly after the peril had subsided, the opinion among the Hospitaller hierarchy was that the sortie to Navarino could have been a diversion to catch Candia unprepared while making believe that Malta was the real target, or that Malta had effectively been the target in the first place but that the Turk changed strategy and reverted his attention to Candia after being informed that Malta was well prepared for a siege.\textsuperscript{113}

Regardless of the doubts over the Turk’s real intentions, by the end on July 1645 Malta seemed out of danger.\textsuperscript{114} With a letter dated 22\textsuperscript{nd} July, in fact, the Order informed its agent in

\textsuperscript{104} Dal Pozzo, ii, 71-3 and 80.
\textsuperscript{105} AOM 1423, Lascaris Castellar to Spinola (Genoa), f. 161r, 10 June 1645.
\textsuperscript{106} AOM 258, f. 20r.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., f. 20r.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., f. 28r and AOM 1423, Lascaris Castellar to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 188, 11 July 1645.
\textsuperscript{109} AOM 258, f. 28r.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., f. 29r.
\textsuperscript{111} AOM 1423, Lascaris Castellar to Giorgio Latino (Zante), f. 188, 11 July 1645.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., f. 188, 11 July 1645.
\textsuperscript{113} AOM 258, f. 49.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., f. 33r.
Genoa that the Ottoman fleet had retreated eastwards, thus Bertolotto was given the go-ahead to ship the cargo from Amsterdam.\(^{115}\) Soon after sending this dispatch, the Convent received news from Genoa dated 23rd June that the timber cargo had been assembled and that Bertolotto had finally managed to hire a vessel for the transport south.\(^{116}\) On Saturday evening, 12th August, the Order received confirmation from Zante that the Ottoman fleet had arrived in Candia.\(^{117}\) Hospitaller Malta’s war plan changed in a matter of days and in mid-August the Order’s squadron left for Messina to join other Catholic forces about to sail to the Levant to join the Venetian fleet in aid of Candia.\(^{118}\) The expected timber cargo from Amsterdam was actually bought at a better bargain than expected but made it to Malta only in October.\(^{119}\) To the disappointment of the Convent, the quality of the timber material fell short of expectations. The masts and lateen yards were actually smaller than those ordered and of a different type, and therefore useless. An explanation was going to be solicited from Bertolotto in Amsterdam.\(^{120}\) The Order would have to commission the purchase of other timber material to sustain its new mission on Christendom’s side in the Levant.

The galley trip of 1613 and the whole episode leading to the outbreak of the War of Candia constitute an emblematic synthesis of how Hospitaller Malta was enveloped in an ever-expanding Mediterranean world, and of how the various interconnections of the Order’s communication network hooked Malta to the extremities of this evolving early modern reality, conditioning in various ways and to various degrees the island’s existence. The pre-Candia episode in particular shows how, through Hospitaller Malta, Scandinavian geopolitics and market forces in the North Sea and the Baltic somehow intersected Ottoman expansionist policies in the Mediterranean. Similar to the galley trip of 1613, the pre-Candia event constitutes also a historical synopsis of Hospitaller Malta’s communication system in full operative mode and illustrates further the organisation and coordination needed for the Order to carry out its operations and to safeguard its island post: intelligence updates from the Levant had to be communicated to Hospitaller contacts in the North Sea via intermediary centres like Genoa; plans for bulk purchases from Amsterdam had to be adapted in real time to market fluctuations created by regional conflicts in the Baltic; shipments down Europe’s Atlantic coast had to be synchronised with the movements of the Ottoman fleet through the logistical analysis of information updates from listening stations in the Levant; the Order’s contact network had to be activated to solicit help from Christendom,
including audacious diplomatic appeals to Sweden and Poland which, if heeded, would have probably compromised the Polish-Ottoman peace, all for the sake of a Catholic island-outpost in the middle of the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{121} The pre-Candia crisis of 1645 epitomises how Hospitaller Malta, through the exploitation of faculties honed over decades, was in a position to react to international contingencies originating from different latitudes of the globe. It was yet another stage of Malta’s coming of age. Every year the Order still had to present the Viceroy of Sicily with a falcon, symbol of Malta’s status as a Spanish fief. Yet the rock Charles V had conceded the Knights over a century earlier had developed into something much more than a mere Habsburg outpost.

\textsuperscript{121} AOM 1423, Lascaris Castellar to the Kings of Poland and Sweden, f. 116, 13 April 1645.
CONCLUSION

The Order of St John’s displacement west in the pre-industrial era was permanently interrupted at the end of the summer of 1565, when the Turk’s ambition to oust the Hospitallers from their new island post had to come to definite terms with the dire law of military logistics. Unless taken within the space of a season, Malta was out of reach for a force based in the Dardanelles. Several threats of invasion from the East were to follow 1565, tormenting the islanders right up to the second half of the eighteenth century, and some of them serious enough to warrant full-scale military preparations. But the Knights’ settlement on the island was to persist for over two centuries. It was a temporal blip in the millennial history of the archipelago, yet strong and long enough to re-shape Malta’s destiny.

The immediate decades following the siege were to prove of fundamental importance for the island’s future. The relocation of the Order’s headquarters to Valletta in 1571 was a statement of military and administrative intent for the Knights, but one which reserved much deeper and far-reaching implications for Malta and its inhabitants. Valletta as the Order’s new Convent was the first sign of Malta’s institutional detachment from Spanish Sicily, the first indication that Malta’s old capital, Palermo, was to be substituted - in spirit and eventually in practice - by an indigenous centre of operations designed by the Knights on early modern concepts in military infrastructure. Were the Ottomans to besiege Malta again, they would have faced an island less reliant on foreign aid and capable of superior military stamina. As the stuttering magistracies of the late sixteenth century gave way to the much more stable administrations of the first half of the seventeenth century, when stronger pontifical backing drastically reduced the risk of impeachment of Hospitaller leaders by fellow insubordinate brethren, Malta started to be transformed from a mere satellite of Sicily into an island with the adornments of a state.

The geopolitics of the Mediterranean in the post-Lepanto era favoured the Order in the long-term implementation of its infrastructural vision for Malta. Although the looming Ottoman threat was periodically disruptive and hugely conditioning for the Knights and the islanders, it was never again to materialize in a prolonged dramatic onslaught similar to 1565. As the Habsburg and Ottoman superpowers shunned open confrontation and the military frontier stabilized to a stalemate, successive generations of Hospitallers were in a position to exploit the archipelago’s assets to suit their needs and those of their base, not least by re-elaborating a system of contacts which capitalized on the proximity to Sicily and all the consequent benefits in provisioning and connectivity. The conjuncture was all the more favourable due to the administrative reforms
carried out in Sicily and Southern Italy in the second half of the sixteenth century, when Habsburg viceroys endowed their territory with an enhanced courier network similar in concept to that of other states of the time. The resulting communication system facilitated contacts between the central Mediterranean, Northern Italy, and the rest of the continent, providing Hospitaller Malta with more viable routes to other parts of the world.

As the decades went by after the Order’s settlement in 1530, the day’s sail to Sicily ended up giving access to a far larger geographical stretch than Malta had ever known before the Hospitaller era. While for Medieval Malta, Scicli was a mere trading post, convenient for the barter of commodities with Sicilian products, for Hospitaller Malta it became the most immediate gateway to Christendom and an ever-expanding world. Contacts with North Africa continued to be fostered and were probably expanded and intensified in early modernity, especially through the commercial activity of the Knights. However, it was mainly towards the European continent and beyond, through the Order of St John’s affairs, estates, and communication network, that Malta’s connectivity experienced its greatest surge. In the Mediterranean, maritime traffic connecting different latitudes of the sea started including Malta more insistently in its itinerary, especially along the Tyrrhenian route which became an integral part of the island’s existence. Mediterranean ports provided access to the Order’s priories, consequently increasing Malta’s continental reach. Commodities commissioned by the Convent from the European hinterland were shipped to the island via Barcelona, Marseilles, Genoa, Naples, and Venice, apart from Sicily, Calabria, and Apulia. Through consistent interaction with these ports and territories, and the overland contact networks provided by the Order’s agents and representatives, Malta’s affairs became linked to the extremities of the Euro-Mediterranean world. By the early seventeenth century, Maltese harbours were giving berth to ships from the Atlantic coasts of France.¹ The island exploited the entry of the northerners in the Mediterranean, hiring Flemish vessels to ship grain from Sicily and transport timber and other merchandise down the Adriatic. Goods were imported from the North Sea via connecting stations like Genoa, and commercial liaisons fostered with Scandinavia were consolidated in the eighteenth century through the shipping of timber to Malta on Swedish ships.² These connections widened Hospitaller Malta’s shipping and market options, affording the island provisioning alternatives which boosted its survival possibilities in times of calamities, whether natural or induced by man.

¹ This traffic is explained in a serious of instructions by the Convent to a Hospitaller embassy to France: ‘...et altri luoghi marittimi del Mediterraneo, ma ancora dell’oceano come Bordiaux in Gascogna, San Malo, Nantes, e la Rochella et altri in Bretagna et Rovano, ... et Diepe in Normandia, li cui vasselli ordinariam[en]Je sono ben ricevuti in questi porti di Malta’. AOM 459, ff. 313-315r, 27 February 1616.
The structure of agents which allowed this kind of connectivity was also responsible for the delivery of all sorts of information to Malta. Military briefs on the enemy were channelled to the Convent from all corners of the Mediterranean. Hospitaller Malta’s most exclusive channel of communication, in fact, was for intelligence purposes, and was fostered mainly and most regularly with the Adriatic and the Levant. Through these links and sources of information, Malta could also corroborate its sanitary condition by briefs on the epidemiological situation of the surrounding world. News on European affairs was delivered to the island through the Order’s official correspondence, or via printed and handwritten news-sheets, allowing the island to keep in touch with the political, social, and cultural scene of the age. Market intelligence regarding all sorts of products and the degree of liquidity of certain European financial centres made it to Valletta through Mediterranean ports, enabling the Hospitaller establishment to make informed decisions regarding the quality and convenience of its purchases, and the relocation and exploitation of its funds. In consequence, bullion generated in Hospitaller priories was injected into the island’s economy after being relocated via international financial centres through credit mechanisms and cash transfer, and the archipelago was supplied with provisions and commodities purchased from markets within the orbit of Malta’s shipping routes. The implementation of similar operations involving any kind of transfer to and from Malta - whether of information, supplies, manpower, or bullion - more often than not had to came to terms with a combination of obstacles to mobility which conditioned life in pre-industrial societies. Commissions and deliveries required planning in advance and coordinated efforts between Hospitaller maritime and continental personnel which had to be orchestrated from the Order’s headquarters. Such operations had to be constantly monitored from the Convent, which had to deal with the various contingencies created by man, the elements, epidemics, or chance. The hindrances to these commissions could only be surpassed or circumvented through the exploitation of Hospitaller Malta’s communication network in full operative mode.

As evidenced by this study, the logistical interaction between Hospitaller personnel on land and at seaenabled early modern Malta to exploit infrastructural breakthroughs in European postal delivery. Sea traffic connected the island with the Order’s network of continental agents which reached the extremities of Western and Central Europe, mostly due to the landed possessions which the Hospitallers had accumulated since their days in Syria. Notwithstanding its limitations, this network intersected communication lines rendered more accessible through the continental apportionment of space largely implemented by the Habsburg administration from the early sixteenth century onwards. It can be argued that Hospitaller Malta’s communication network adds a maritime dimension to the concept of Communications Revolution which, according to
Wolfgang Behringer, triggered enduring changes in Europe’s social structures. They allowed all sorts of communication activities to be carried out for the benefit of the island Order state. The microhistorical interchanges between Malta and Sicily provided access to macrohistorical frameworks through an ‘organizational invention’ which rationalized the division of space throughout European territory.

The establishment of this international connectivity operated by the Knights was obviously a gradual process, for it evolved in parallel with the growth of Hospitaller Malta’s communication network. However, the reconstruction of the administrative evolution of statal structures over periods spanning centuries is not the stuff that can be dealt with in a single monograph, and this study is no exception. What the sources under scrutiny allow us to do is draw some conclusions on the restructuring that Hospitaller Malta’s international bureaucracy was subjected to in the wider framework of the Order’s permanence on the island. The Order’s network of agents already in place at the beginning of the seventeenth century allowed Hospitaller Malta to survive, develop, and confront the Ottoman Empire. The network was not the finished product, however, and was subjected to adjustments to fit the changing needs of the Order and its island-post. Hospitaller documentation in Maltese archives discloses no evidence, for example, that in the first twenty years of the seventeenth century the Order had an official agent resident in Leghorn, which ended up becoming an important mail-relay station for Malta as the century progressed. Maltese maritime exchanges with the eastern coast of Sicily were well established by the beginning of the seventeenth century, but everything indicates that the Order’s official contacts with ports like Augusta and Catania were slow to develop. A similar argument can be adopted regarding the island’s consular network in foreign territory which started to be extensively expanded towards the end of the seventeenth century. It was only in the eighteenth century that the Order reformed and re-organized its postal system and during the same century the island ended up functioning as an intercontinental mail-connection station and an information exchange centre for other European powers. The same is valid for Hospitaller Malta’s intelligence sources from the Levant, where everything indicates that, up to the early seventeenth century at least, the Order had no permanent agents of its own on listening stations like Zante and Corfu, and had to rely on Habsburg espionage services stationed on these islands to be briefed on the Ottoman enemy.

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4 Ibid., 342.
6 Like Venice, for example, Victor Mallia-Milanes (ed.), In the Service of the Venetian Republic. Massimiliano Buzzaccarini Gonzaga’s Letters from Malta to Venice’s Magistracy of Trade 1754-1766 (Malta, PEG Publications, 2008), 73; 343; 369; 373; 385; 395; 415; 469; 484; 537; and 551.
Whatever the conclusions that can be drawn regarding the various development stages of this communication system, it can be said that the Order of St John’s advent to Malta can safely be classified under the ruptures which ultimately gave a distinctive imprint to the island. The Hospitaller Order of St John was to widen, lengthen, and expand Malta’s geographical connectivity to unprecedented proportions. What started as a charitable venture in eleventh-century Syria, by the middle of the seventeenth century had crossed the Atlantic to reach the Caribbean, carrying along the way a cluster of rocks south of Sicily, integrating them into a world network of contacts just when the West was savouring the first glimmers of modernity. Documentary evidence hitherto has shown that the extremities of pre-Hospitaller Malta’s world fell by and large on regional boundaries. Medieval Malta’s reach hardly ever surpassed the liminal contours of the Mediterranean. Thanks to the Order, Malta became somehow known from the New World to the royal court of Persia.

Although still a Spanish fief and heavily reliant on foreign supplies, early modern Malta started gradually acquiring the imprint of a state. Decades of reform and stabilization within Hospitaller Malta’s establishment moulded an administrative structure capable of devising and implementing a market strategy, of relocating funds across hundreds of kilometres through elaborate financial mechanisms, and of collecting and processing intelligence on its behalf and for the benefit of fellow co-religionist states. The Order’s institutionalization of these affairs for the administration of its island-base, coupled with a daring diplomacy which solicited official attention from all latitudes of the known world, bridged the hierarchical distance between Malta and other powers of the time, paving the way for eighteenth-century absolutist aspirations under the distinct influence of French magistracies. One can argue that what started emerging under Alof de Wignacourt cannot be encased in contemporary historiographical definitions of a nation state. But does any European country of the time fit perfectly in such interpretations? Were any of the European monarchies of the age, for example, other than ‘dynastic conglomerations’ on the slow and winding road of transition from feudalism to a capitalist modernity? What is undeniable is that Hospitaller Malta, just like various French provinces or the Kingdom of Naples, was developing a ‘political personality’ of its own, a distinctive centralized bureaucracy which was ultimately to evolve into a unique form of absolutism. Nominally a fief, in practice a state in the making and with a communication leverage completely out of proportion with its dimensions, Hospitaller Malta dealt with its shortcomings and exploited its privileges in order to steer its own administrative destiny towards a secular future. Deprived of an adequate tax base due to demographic insufficiencies, Malta was however spared the social rebellions and religious

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fratricides which plagued so many of its contemporary European societies and could count on income from widespread foreign estates which unfailingly provided alternatives, both in terms of market access and in terms of communication options, despite the inherent weakness in their scattered nature which rendered them vulnerable to the continent’s vicissitudes. The bureaucratic freedom afforded to the Knights by their Spanish masters since Charles V’s donation of 1530 allowed the island to develop into a politico-economic anomaly which a dirigiste administration of religious warriors guided towards modernity on a parallel journey with other European states.

Similarly to other contemporary political realities, this administrative growth is none more evident than within the context of war, and of the Habsburg-Ottoman conflict in particular. For the archipelago, the Muslim threat could have multiple implications, depending on the level and authenticity of the alert, ranging from possible raids on Gozo to a full scale siege on Malta. Ottoman and Barbary shipping could condition Hospitaller maritime activity in the Mediterranean and beyond, forcing the Order to coordinate its intelligence and maritime activities to intersect and alert ships carrying supplies, merchandise, or bullion to the Convent from Sicily, down the Adriatic, along the Tyrrhenian, or along Europe’s Atlantic coast, depending to the cargo in question. Threats to Malta and its maritime activity apart, the Order exploited its communication system to pass on intelligence to Habsburg outposts in the Mediterranean and to Rome whenever it deemed that the peril in question could have regional implications. Hospitaller Malta’s early warning system acted as an ancillary to Spain’s central Mediterranean defence efforts. For the island, the implications of this intelligence-forwarding role were mainly twofold: Malta’s subsistence and communication dependency on Habsburg territories in the central Mediterranean implied that the island had an obvious strategic interest in preventing any sort of Ottoman foothold, and therefore of an assault, on Sicily or Southern Italy; and the warning service rendered to other Catholic territories inflated the Order’s relevance for Christendom.

Malta’s convenience to Habsburg Spain stemmed also from the Order’s continental estates and assets. These resources, together with booty from the corso and other sources of income, afforded Hospitaller Malta a degree of independence when managing military conflicts, allowing it to participate in the overall financial burden incurred by anti-Ottoman campaigns in the Mediterranean, together with Spain, the Papacy, Venice, and other potentates. Through Hospitaller prioral funds, Malta’s bellicose contribution to the active defence in the central Mediterranean was also a financial one and helped to ease Habsburg Spain’s general costs of warfare. Apart from allowing high levels of self-sufficiency in military campaigns, Hospitaller estates and funds rendered Malta of early modernity unique when compared to other Catholic

Mediterranean islands. No other island in the Mediterranean could boast of such a ramified financial network in Europe, for no other island had a government possessing such a widespread mass of continental property whose main aim was to generate capital and to relocate part of it to Malta or elsewhere according to the island’s needs.

The financial transactions consequent to this network introduced Malta to what Braudel labels as the ‘reasonable’ world of paper money and bills of exchange and to a future which was still denied to mammoth islands like Corsica and Sardinia, whose largely barter-based and ‘half-enclosed’ economies were substantially still alien to a financial revolution which was providing the West with an extra economic dimension.\(^{10}\) Early modern Malta became the southernmost economy in Christianity where the use of the bill of exchange – hitherto hardly known to whole chunks of the planet - became the norm at an institutional level. Apart from a military frontier, Malta also became a Mediterranean financial frontier with economic links reaching up to Amsterdam in a phase when Dutch capitalism was replacing Mediterranean capitalism,\(^{11}\) hooking the island to a fledgling western capitalist economy. How, at which point, and to what extent the Maltese and their financial activities followed suit in this new economic dimension is a different story, one which cannot be dealt with here. The arrival of the Knights, however, marked an undeniable economic and financial watershed for Malta. Following their settlement in 1530, Hospitaller bullion and bills of exchange started to be used to import all sorts of goods to Malta, toning down and phasing out the barter era of the island,\(^{12}\) giving it an economic edge not only at a regional level vis-à-vis other Mediterranean islands with far greater indigenous resources, but possibly anticipating similar processes in other European nations. It took the reforming efforts of Gustavus Adolphus and the intervention of foreign entrepreneurship to pull a northern power like Sweden out of its barter phase from the second decade of the 1600s, introducing it to a mercantile economy centred around Amsterdam.\(^{13}\)

Hopelessly shorn of raw materials, with cotton as the only product of any significant exportable value, and a cultivable land which hardly sufficed to provision the local population, Malta of early modernity lacked the intrinsic qualities to seize the entire spectrum of opportunities offered by a western world on the verge of global pre-eminence. Proximity to Sicily helped in an age when Italy was a pioneer in monetary innovation and information exchange, but it was not enough. Although pre-industrial Malta could hardly ever afford to be an inward-looking entity and was perennially forced to depend on regional connectivity for its survival long before the advent of

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\(^{11}\) Braudel, 510.

\(^{12}\) On the use of credit instruments and mechanisms in sixteenth-century Malta which helped to tone down the barter era within the island’s economy, see Joan Abela, ‘Port Activities in mid-Sixteenth Century Malta’, unpublished M.A. dissertation, Department of History, University of Malta, 2007.

\(^{13}\) Kennedy, 81-5.
the Knights, without the Order’s network of agents it could never have attained the same level of territorial connectivity that it enjoyed after 1530. Without the Order, the island’s international dimension could never have experienced the same growth, starting with the increment of the island’s incidence at a regional level, not only on an active and preventive military level, but also on an economic one. Through the Order of St John’s affairs, the island could surprisingly influence nearby markets. Just as the arrival in Seville of Spain’s Atlantic fleet could inflate commodity prices in Spain, the arrival of Hospitaller bullion in Sicily could have the same effect on Sicilian cereal prices, albeit on much more modest proportions.

Whether it took a day’s sail to reach Sicily or entire months to connect with some other part of the world, the outlook from Malta changed considerably with the Order. The island was obviously still subject to spasms of isolation imposed by weather, diplomacy, or epidemics, and the Knights’ hierarchy could not avoid feeling ‘isolated and besieged by the sea’, especially in the depths of winter when contacts with the surrounding world could be severed for weeks on end. Yet Hospitaller Malta’s communication system and its coordinated management by the Order of St John not only waged an ultimately successful struggle against the long-term interruption of overseas contacts, but extended Malta’s reach from regional to oceanic, in an age when the world’s centre of gravity was shifting from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. Through the Knights’ networking structures and unrelenting efforts to communicate, Malta was able to be an active participant in a changing western world and continued to carve out a special place for itself in the history of civilization.

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14 For the effect on the European price revolution of the transfer to Spain of American silver in early modernity, see Braudel, (1986), 476-542.
15 AOM 1393, Wignacourt to Valdina (Palermo), ff. 75-76r, 31 January 1614.
16 ‘essendo nel cor dell’inverno isolate ed assediati dal mare’. AOM 454, f. 276, 27 December 1602.
APPENDIX

A Dissertation in the Making

[The following is the very first draft of Chapter 1 which I sent via email attachment to Prof Victor Mallia-Milanes of the History Department (University of Malta) on Thursday, 5 May 2011. References within the text to secondary sources and my personal research collection were left in bold]

Chapter 1

According to Boisgelin, who was writing in the eighteenth century, Hospitaller Malta’s communications network stretched from Cadiz to St Petersburg. [Boisgelin, i, p.289] The claim, stemming from what must have been sound archival knowledge on the historian’s part, has been strengthened further by posthumous research and scholarship [footnote commenting on book]. Decades of historical studies since, dealing with a plethora of aspects of Hospitaller life, (as an example cite BA thesis on Hospitaller bibliography) have shown the Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem to be an institution with a surprisingly intricate and far-reaching web of contacts which had been fostered and extended since its foundation in eleventh century Syria as a community of brethren intent on providing shelter, care, and assistance to pilgrims visiting the Holy Land. Substantial evidence of the Hospitallers’ reach in the Mediterranean, mainland Europe, and occasionally beyond is also clearly displayed in the official histories of the Order. In recounting the military engagements of the Hospitallers, the trips of their squadron around the Mediterranean, the collection of intelligence, the diplomatic missions to foreign courts, the vicissitudes involving their estates on the continent, the flow of currency and merchandise to and from their base, episodes pertinent to the lives of individual knights, and other events related to the unfolding history of the time, chronicles such as those of Bosio, Dal Pozzo, Abate Cenni, and Abbe de Vertot provide a random, disconnected, yet reliable and indicative picture of the contact sources that the Order could rely on.

By the time the Order landed in Malta in 1530, it could draw on an established contact network of ambassadors, diplomatic envoys, financial representatives, priors, commanders, procurators, consuls, agents, spies, and other occasional sources. These in turn could usually solicit the services of an unspecified number of diplomatic contacts, informers, personal acquaintances, couriers, and errand boys, most of them historically anonymous, who allowed the Order a degree of reach into Mediterranean and mainland European territory which would otherwise have been unattainable in a pre-industrial world where news and information traveled solely with people.

The significance of active communication lines for any form of human settlement or endeavour in all civilizations cannot be unduly stressed, yet for islands throughout the millennia before the industrial age of mechanical innovation, where man, animal, and wind were the sole propellors of movement and thus conveyors of information, such importance could reach proportions pertinent to the survival of a community in a relatively short period of time. Islands and aspects related to their existence, nature, and survival have attracted the attention of several minds since the dawn of literature. Homer’s Ithaca is the elusive destination of seemingly endless wanderings, soul-searching, and peregrinations; in his psalms, King Solomon describes them as lush places of plenty, and islanders as generous folk (Matvejevic, 234; consult original psalm); for Hesiod they were the heroes’ den and places of repose (Matvejevic, 233; consult Hesiod); Artemidorus of Daldis apparently listened to countless oneiric evocations while traveling from one island to another (Rethinking, 38); Ovid writes of Ariadne’s plight when abandoned on a barren island by Theseus on the return trip to Athens from his Minotaur-slaughter expedition in Crete; (Ovid,
The theme on the presumed isolation of islands has long passed through the ordeal of scholarly debate and the verdict enacted leaves little room for reconsiderations. Doyens of history writing such as Braudel and Horden and Purcell were inequivocal in dismissing the possibility that in bygone eras islands in confined expanses such as the Mediterranean could have suffered complete detachment from the surrounding world. Fernandez-Armesto, broadening his views to planetary proportions, acknowledges that sea lanes were mostly charted along islands. However, he is reluctant to dismiss isolation completely in cases of particular remoteness and does not altogether reject the possibility of self-sufficiency in the case of islands with large-enough hinterlands. citing Hawaii and the Easter Islands as examples. (Armesto, 334-9, very size of these islands)

The shift - ushered largely by the French school of the Annales - from an anthropocentric concept of man’s past to an approach more reliant on geographical determinism (Dalli; Iggers chapter 5?; Burke ‘Hist & Social Theory?? Still to verify) inevitably imposes particular parameters when analysing island histories. More than one author has dealt with the character-moulding effect that islands exert on their dwellers, how the latter’s language, identity, rhythm of life, and attitude to foreigners assume distinct features, how they earn a reknown for introspection and are inevitably condemned to a life of passive expectation, were waiting for whatever the sea decides to deliver to their fold often contributes to a more somnolent existence. (Matvejevic / M du Jourdin / Grech, Struggling)

Fernandez-Armesto stresses the role of the sea and its irresistible influence in shaping the lives and perceptions of islanders and the destiny of islands, regardless of their size. (Armesto, 327) Charles Dalli, on the other hand, reassesses the concept of insularity by drawing socio-geographic parallels between different groups of central-Mediterranean archipelagos. In outlining the distinctions between various islands created by sheer size, he ponders on the ‘ecology of smallness’ and asserts that islands closer to the size of Malta deserve an independent analysis, one which, notwithstanding the differences at times created by contrasting politico-religious situations, finds common traits in the limitations of the landscape and ensuing problems of provisioning, in the fear and preoccupation caused by exposure to sea sorcerers, in the perception of the outside world, in a ‘self-contained’ reality conducive to the preservation of language and tradition, and in the resort to piracy and enterprising economic activity as remedies to insecurity and poverty. (Dalli)

The island phase of the Hospitaller Order of St John started in the last decade of the thirteenth century. The fall of Acre in Syria in 1291 brought to an end two centuries of Latin penetration and settlement in the Middle East and consolidated a process of land reclamation by Islam which would see the Ottoman stock dominate the eastern and southern basin of the Mediterranean by the mid-sixteenth century. (Molly Greene) While for most of the Catholic forces involved in the Levant expulsion from Syria meant retreat to their European bases, for the religious-military orders it ushered a search for a new home. (Luttrell in Hosp Malta) As for the Hospitallers, lengthy soujourns in Cyprus (1291-1310) and Rhodes (1310-1522), followed by a relatively brief interlude of wandering on the mainland continent (footnote), ensured that by the time Emperor Charles V conceded them Malta as a fief in 1530, for them to govern together with Tripoli in Barbary, they were well accustomed to life on an island. In a way the Knights of St John had
become islanders themselves ([cite Luttrell in Hosp Malta??) and their mindset was conditioned by an insular mentality which brought in its wake that inevitable collateral of angst, sense of precariousness, and fear of isolation the echoes of which permeate through the official outgoing correspondence of the Order, ([Grech, Struggling] the documentary material which constitutes the backbone of this study. The reluctance and scepticism with which the Order ultimately accepted to settle on Malta (see [MALTA] [1], Boisgelin reference to Commissions report) perhaps are also a reflection of those inconveniences that life on an island implied and with which the Hospitallers were by then well accustomed to. The eagerness betrayed by the Order’s hierarchy for a return to Rhodes, ([Milanes, In the Service, 39] another island yet larger, far greener, and more opulent than Malta, ([On Rhodian landscape & produce see Luttrell, in Hosp Malta, 271]) was a statement of unequivocal priorities – the (potentially) strategic discomfort of a Greek post in the very heart of enemy territory, hours away from hostile Anatolia, was preferred to the meagreness of the Maltese archipelago, on the doorstep of Christendom and a day’s sail from fellow Catholic Sicily, another Habsburg island in arms against Islam. ([for the differences between Malta & Rhodes see Luttrell in Hosp Malta, 264-5] The years in the East had battle-hardened the Knights and refined their predatory instincts to a degree that allowed them enough military confidence to seek a return to the base on which they had suffered two terrific sieges in the span of forty-two years ([mention 1440 & 1444 in Luttrell]) and which ultimately saw them as expelled losers in 1523. Rhodes was closer to enemy lines, a base station from which the Knights could launch amphibious operations against the foe with greater ease and from where they could continue to happily disrupt Muslim trade due north from Alexandria. ([Molly Greene; Bradford ‘Shield & Sword, 57; On Rhodes’ imp as a stopping station for trade to Levant & between Egypt and Black Sea see Luttrell in Hosp Malta, 265] The Greek island suited the Hospitallers’ military purpose more than a post in the central Mediterranean could have done. From Rhodes it was somewhat easier for them to perpetrate that Holy War of aggression which, apart from the hospice services, had become their raison d’être (vocation/mission) since the thirteenth century in Syria when the shift to a military role took place. ([Grech,Clioh paper]

As for Malta, the Order was well aware from the onset of the problems it was to face in provisioning the island’s population. ([the Commission’s report?, reference in Milanes, Venice, pg. 1] It is quite easy for the historian to meet random references in the copious documentation pertaining to the Hospital about the unsustainability of the archipelago, ([quote Jean Quintin?] leaving him with little doubt that the logistics for the purchase of wheat, the staple cereal of any pre-industrial society in (Europe and) the Mediterranean, were by far the prime worry of all grandmasters. ([Grech, Struggling] Such problems continued to condition the life and policy of the institution throughout its stay on Malta and were periodically inflated by a steadily expanding demography ([footnote on how GMs highlighted this; [MALTA][2A]) which did not experience any significant reversals as the modern age unfolded. ([episodes such as severe population losses such as 1676 plague were relatively brief interruptions in an otherwise long-term demographic rise]) Contemporary descriptive accounts of the island lament its arid, rock-strewn terrain, limited cultivable land, lack of trees and rivers, and insufficient natural springs and rainfall. ([A. Cenni, pp. 61-62] The Hospitallers sent to carry out a reconnaissance of the proposed island post in 1524 highlighted the insufferable Summer heat ([MALTA][1]) while Inquisitor Pignatelli found seventeenth-century life in Malta so unpleasant that he requested a transfer to a post in Flanders. ([MALTA][5]) Pauperism was apparently rampant, ([MALTA][4]) and peasant folk lived miserable lives ([A. Cenni, p. 64] inducing some grandmasters to repeatedly refer to the population with the epithet ‘questo povero popolo’, ([examples, [PERCEPTIONS], 4/9/1604; [COMMUN], 22/3/1606; [COMM] 18/7/1606;[SEASONS] 7/6/1606.) although Abate Cenni, in the second half of the seventeenth century, talks enthusiastically of the island being ‘ricca d’habitatori’ ([A. Cenni, p. 64]) who died almost exclusively of old age due the ‘salubrious’ air which blessed the archipelago. ([Cenni, p. 62] while an eighteenth-century German traveller was surprised to discover that the climate in Malta was more temperate than expected. ([Freller, Classical Traveller, 37]).
However, the sterility, barrenness, and lack of self-sufficiency of Malta were obsessively underlined by the various magistracies. In the summer of 1569, in charting instructions to a naval expedition, grandmaster Pietro del Monte (check & cite original source) complained how this ‘sterile’ island had become even more barren after the ruinous landing of the Turks four years earlier and how the Maltese, left even more destitute after the siege, were unable to grow crops in areas which formerly had bore them fruit. ([CURRENCY] 27/6/1569) Grandmaster Perellos y Rocaful complained with the Order’s ambassador in Rome that even the best land in Malta ultimately offered a very low yield. ([MALTA] 6/8/1707.) Drought - not an infrequent visitor – was potentially more destructive than enemy visitations. The countryside could end up in a ‘deplorable’ state months before the setting in of Summer, leaving scant hope of a decent harvest, a thirsty livestock, and little water to irrigate the cotton fields. ([Milanes, In the Service, 569]) The first three months of 1607, for example, went by without any rainfall and it was feared that all the island’s harvest of that season was bound to be lost. ([SEASONS] 7/6/1606)

The Order was also concerned with the obvious correlation between subsistence and demography. Dal Pozzo claims that when the Hospitallers settled in Malta the population of the islands hardly reached 22,000 and that by the 1620s it had doubled. ([MALTA][2][B]). It was not unusual for officials to be sent over from Sicily to carry out a census of the population in order to judge if the amount of the tratte, the licences granted by the Sicilian Viceroy for the export of wheat to Malta, needed to be adjusted accordingly. (an example: that of 1590, [MALTA][1][A]) In 1604, the demand for a demographic count came from Malta since the population was deemed on the rise and therefore needy of a larger volume of wheat from the Regno than the usual 12,000 salme per year. ([MALTA] [2]) Ten years later yet another survey found the population to be 41,084 ([MALTA][1][A]) and in 1632 another census by Sicilian officials found the population to have increased by another 10,000. ([Dal Pozzo, 1, 803]) Even religious inhibitions with a potential to discourage trade with northerners following the Protestant schism were vigorously opposed by the Convent for the sake of convenience through contacts in Rome in order to allow English ships to offload much-needed merchandise in Malta while sparing the population the danger of heretical contagion. ([REFORMATION], 25/8/1605, ‘daranno con le loro mercanzie gran commodità et utili à questa nostra steril’Isola senza pericolo di macchiar in parte alcuna li coscienze di questi popoli’). Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt, on the other hand, was wary of the maritime barriers which confined the islanders to a very limited countryside and prevented them a ready access to alternative provisions abroad. ([PERCEPTIONS] 12/9/1606; write Italian quote in footnote)

Closely related and next in line on the Order’s agenda of daily problems was the generation of capital and its channeling to their island base or to wherever funds were required. Apart from the corso activity, the piracy by decree which earned the Hospital a ten per cent cut on every booty earned by corsairs flying the Order’s flag, the Order’s main source of income was the wealth produced by its estates on the continent. Acquired mainly during the Order’s stay in Syria through bequests, donations, or direct purchase, these estates were divided into priories and commanderies and could be found throughout mainland Europe. More property was gained in the fourteenth century when a good part of the possessions of the suppressed religious-military order of the Templars was passed on to the Knights of St John. All these estates generated their income primarily through the produce of the land and the lease of property and were bound by statute to regularly send to the Convent, the Order’s headquarters, a fixed portion of this income labeled with the technical term responsions. The progressive acquisition of each single unit of this property helped to change the course of the Order’s history, adding a continental dimension to what originally had started off as primarily a Mediterranean venture. Having edifices and lots of lands throughout the mainland gave the Hospitallers a quasi-capilarous reach in European territory and anchored their destiny irremediably to the climate, geography, diplomacy, and contingencies of the continent. (Grech, Clioh paper) The flow of capital from these commanderies to accommodate the needs of the Hospitallers and the island population they governed was of paramount importance for the Order, not only for the obvious requirement of provisioning their base, as already hinted at, but to suffice for all the military exigencies solicited by an island post in a Mediterranean at war.
The lingering conflict with the Ottoman Turk, in fact, was third on the list of permanent preoccupations with which the Order had to grapple. History has shown that the post-Lepanto era was a period of substantial balance between the two dominating powers of the Inner Sea: Habsburg Spain controlled the north and western basins; the Ottomans mastered the Levant and North Africa. (Molly Greene, ‘Ott in Medit’) In the sixteenth century, the introduction of heavier artillery in naval warfare created the necessity for larger galleys with larger crews in times of manpower shortages. Navy-building costs spiralled to barely-sustainable levels, sapping energies and resources on both sides. As Molly Greene points out, after Lepanto neither side could muster enough resolution to seriously attempt a large-scale invasion into the rival’s basin. (Molly Greene, Abulafia book, 225-6) The ensuing stalemate was the result of the lack of drive and of calculations based on deficient feasibility. Exhaustion, rather than decline, determined the lack of initiative starting from the last decades of the sixteenth century. The sprawling hinterland of the Ottoman Empire still allowed the Turks the necessary resources required for a quick rebuilding of their fleet within months after the losses of Lepanto. (Greene, Abulafia book, 226) This in part explains why the threat of another Ottoman attack was such a persistent perception in Christendom and why it was so difficult for a small Catholic post like Hospitaller Malta to discount. Abate Cenni speaks of post-siege Malta as a place blessed with a ‘perpetua pace, et una felicità mirabile’ (Ab Ce, 65) and where any alarm of possible war and invasion was soon dismissed as an inflated fear. [Ab. Cen, 65] Yet the chronicler goes on to describe in no small detail the extensive preparations carried out during grandmaster Dal Monte’s administration to counter a possible onslaught. (Ab Cen, 67; 69-70) although he does point out that it was not unusual for members of the Order’s Council to exaggerate such fears in order to justify their more substantial demands for help, especially from Rome. (Ab. Ce, 71)

Intelligence reports and mere hearsay from the East were often based on preparations and fittings of fleets, on unusual activity, that is, in the enemy’s docks. The effective intentions of war councils were far more difficult to gauge and were usually revealed once the relative operation was already on course. Certain scholars are rather confident in their assertions that some form of effective preparations in 1761; C. Testa, episode of 1768, explain in footnote) Whatever the outcome of the debate, it is only through the decisive privilege of historical hindsight that contemporary historians can assert with a certain degree of conviction that the Ottoman threat from the latter part of the sixteenth century was shorn of any foundation. (Grech, Struggling; cite Blondy’s article) For those living in Christendom in the pre-industrial era the fear of the Turk was very real right up to the second half of the eighteenth century. (Dal Pozzo, for example see [TURK TH], yr 1614, for extensive preparations in 1635; Milanes, ‘In the Service’, 70, massive anti-Malta preparations in 1761; C. Testa, episode of 1768, explain in footnote) Whatever was deemed as a tangible omen of an attack instigated widespread measures by the Order.

One documentary example suffices to illustrate such a scenario. When in March 1708 news of the fitting of the Turk’s fleet in Constantinople was reaching Malta, the Order embarked on a series of typical measures to counter an eventual onslaught: galleys were sent to Naples, Rome, Tuscany, and Genoa to alert on the situation; [T.T. 18/3/1708]; ammunitions and engineers were ordered from Genoa and a vessel hired for their shipment to Malta; [T.T 23/8/1708]; negotiations were opened with Lucca in Tuscany for the export of gunpowder [GUNPOWDER, 3/4/1708; 6/4/1708] and a passport was issued to a tartana owner for its eventual transport to Malta; [GUNPOWDER, 30/6/1708] further permissions were sought from Palermo for the export of gunpowder or its manufacture in Malta [GUNPOWDER, 3/4/1708; 6/4/1708] and a commission was sent to France and Italy in an attempt to fetch further explosives; [GUNPOWDER, 6/4/1708] the militia in Malta embarked on a fire-practice programme and requests for more troops were sent to Rome and the Duke of Tuscany; Hospitaller diplomacy in the Papal Court started soliciting the
lobbying activity of friendly cardinals to help convey the Order’s requests; [DIPL] 30/4/1708 a ship was to be sent to Civitavecchia to embark (these) troops and (the) ammunition from Genoa [T.T, 23/3/1708] reconnaissance missions were sent to the Levant; the Council’s decisions on the situation were shipped to the Order’s ambassador and emissaries in Rome; soundings were carried out to see if the Papacy and the Duchy of Tuscany could send their galley squadrons to Malta; [T.T 23/3/1708, various index cards] attempts were made to export more supplies from Sicily; [T.T 24/4/1708] further military engineers were sought from France and Florence to advice on the necessary preparations; Rome was sounded to verify if the Swede Hekel, presumably a military consultant, could be sent over until the alarm lasted; Hospitallers were summoned to the Convent; ships were sent to Livorno seeking more ammunitions; a loan of up to 100,000 genovine was to be contracted in Genoa to pay for the ammunitions since the Order’s Treasury was short of solvency and permission from Rome was to be sought to pledge Hospitaller property in case this was demanded by Genoese creditors; [TT, 6/4/1708] By April 1708, the same month in which all these measures were being implemented, the threat of an Ottoman attack apparently started to abate [TT, 6/4/1708] yet not enough to reassure the Order. There was still the problem of a small Turkish fleet caught roaming the Mediterranean. The sister island of Gozo – always an easier, more vulnerable, and therefore more attractive target for the Turk, as 1551, for example, had shown - was reinforced [TT, 5/8/1708] and up to July intelligence-gathering missions were still being sent to the Levant [TT, 15/7/1708] The whole ordeal was not without diplomatic consequences for the Order. The Papacy, dealing with its own threat in the presence of Imperial troops in the Ferrarese area, demanded back its contingent from Malta and (apparently) was hoping for some compensation from the Order in the form of a Hospitaller relief expedition to bolster the defences of the Papal territories. [T.T 28/6/1708]

All this feverish activity implied time, paperwork, expenses, logistical reorganization, the movement of people, the shifting of resources, the coordination of contacts, the activation of diplomatic channels, and endless days of waiting. It is arduous to imagine that such energies would have been profused had the imminence of an attack not been perceived as (anything but) genuine. As with other similar alarms throughout the Order’s stay on Malta, the peril subsided in the matter of weeks. However, the extreme prudence of the Order in such cases throughout the post-1565 era, although ultimately and systematically unjustified, (footnote on Turkish raid of 1614, see [TURKISH THREAT]) demands a degree of historical comprehension. Apart from news from official stations, snippets of information, and wild rumours which darted from all corners of the Mediterranean and which the Convent had to evaluate, digest, and verify, the Order’s perennial sense of peril was fomented by its past. The sense of foreboding of a Turkish attack which accompanied the Order was primarily the result of five hundred years of grim encounters with Islam. The Hospitallers’ reputation as a military unit with an enduring commitment to Christianity’s crusading tradition was well-earned and their prowess in battle, both on land and, even more insistently, at sea, did not fail to draw the congratulatory attention of hist...

‘Formidable’ is the adjective used by both Ernle Bradford (Shield & Sword, 15) and Molly Greene to describe them. For John Julius Norwich their dexterity at naval warfare was without parallel, (Greh, Clioh paper/M.Greene/ JJ Norwich/ E.Rossi/Ubaldini, include comments by these authors intext??) while Anthony Luttrell praises their talent for adaptation and instinct for survival when facing possible extinction in the aftermath of defeat. (Luttrell, Hosp Malta, 258-9)Yet, however glorious and commendable was their record, consisting of a military curriculum replete with successful episodes of anti-Muslim harassment through privateering, carefully-planned naval expeditions, and - that ultimate test of resilience in conflict - siege warfare, the long-term historical judgement regarding their first few centuries of battle with the enemy leading to 1565 is that of defeat. Ever since the fall of Acre in Syria, the history of the Order of St John was one of a progressive displacement West. It was simply the inevitable outcome of a hugely unbalanced encounter. When the test was one of endurance protracted over centuries, the sheer weight, muscle, and driving force of Islam and the rising Ottoman colossus could not be matched by a small community of warrior brethren which only occasionally could count on the aid by other Catholic forces. {quote Abate Cenni on matter, p. 71!!; In 1522, for example, the Venetians & other forces denied their support to Rhodes. Luttrell in Hosp Malta, 263-4)

238
The memory of this history had left the Hospitallers psychologically conditioned, preventing them the luxury of categorically dismissing any hint of potential menace from the Porte. (Grech, Struggling) Even a success like the months-long resistance in the siege of Malta – a combination of inspired leadership, knightly valour in combat, valiant resistance by the islanders, logistical blunders by a divided enemy command and, perhaps the most telling factor, over-stretched enemy communication lines which prevented the Ottomans from a hefty replenishment of their resources – was not without its lessons and ominous warnings for the Hospitaller hierarchy. The tardiness of Don Juan’s relief expedition from Sicily left little doubt that the priorities of Habsburg Spain lay elsewhere in Europe, and primarily in the Netherlands. Christendom provided no guarantee of a quick relief in case of enemy attack. (Braudel; Grech, Struggling) The glory of the siege did echo throughout Europe, (forexample, Freller, ‘Classical Traveller’, 28) yet the Hospitallers’ reassurance about the situation with which they had to connive on the battle frontier of a sea at war was not strengthened. 1565, a victory, piled on the disillusionment which the Knights had accumulated since the fall of Acre. It was another experience which, together with the frequent sightings of enemy vessels roaming Maltese waters and worrying rumours of an Ottoman onslaught carried over by the sea from the Levant, denied the Order a modicum of respite from a potential peril which rendered them so adamant not to take any sign of threat lightly. (Grech, Cloih paper; Try to include fear of Turkish attack in Abate Cenni, p. 65!!)

If the Order’s trinity of enduring priorities – provisioning, the flow of capital, and intelligence – remained largely unaltered since its days in the East, the logistics implied in sustaining these priorities were subject to inevitable alterations and adaptations with every change of base. Island garrisons presented obvious differences from mainland strongholds and the conditioning factors inherent in the upkeep of their communication lines - their distance from the coast, their vicinity to important shipping lanes, and the size, productivity, and resources of their hinterland - differed from one island to another. When the Order arrived in Malta it once again had an island home to manage, although with inevitable dissimilarities in geography when compared to the previous Levantine experiences. The Hospitallers were now at a safer distance from the Porte yet within dangerous reach of the Muslim enclaves of Barbary. Intelligence information regarding the Turk, which from Cyprus and Rhodes could presumably be obtained first-hand and from where it was surely attainable at a more frequent and rapid rate, now had more distance to travel and had to rely on a greater number of listening stations. Ports like Naupulia (Milanes, In the Service, 14) and islands like Corfu, Cephalonia, and Zante were now further east to the Convent and became vital providers of knowledge on the activities and intentions of Constantinople. Most significantly, the landing on Malta brought the Hospital within the orbit of Sicily. Malta had been a satellite island of Sicily since time immemorial. The umbilical chord with the huge mother island to the north had been covered - not severed - by the sea (reference to geology in pre-ice age?) and the relationship of dependence dictated by vicinity, sheer mass, and land yield had a centuries-old history. (insert considerations on Sicily and medieval Malta??) When the Order settled in Malta it was itself absorbed into this dependence. It was a radical and structural change in the Order’s communication network. Sicily became the most immediate outlet of a contact route which ran along Italy, reaching deep into the European hinterland, right up to Britain, the North Sea, and the Baltic. Palermo provided links with the Iberian peninsula and the east coast of the island was often the first recipient of news from the Levant, the Greek archipelago, and the Adriatic. (Grech, Struggling)

Through this system of communication channels which the Knights manoeuvred from their Convent in Malta, and which this study will strive to recreate, comprehend, and explain, the Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem shook Malta out of its medieval slumber and broadened its territorial horizons, stretching them to limits which would have been highly improbable to reach(by and large unreachable) in the pre-Hospitaller era, when Malta’s insular nature was also a consequence of a geography largely peripheral to the main east-west and north-south shipping lanes of the age. (Cassar, Concise, 1) The structural, cultural, social, and economic changes which the Order brought to the island have been amply discussed and dissected in a copious collection of melitensia material. Scholars of pre-industrial Malta have analysed how the
settlement of the Religion in the harbour town of Birgu was the initial stage of a long process of change for the archipelago and its population; (on how Malta was transformed by the Knights see for example, C. Cassar, Concise History, 121-130; Luttrell, Peregri nationes, 19; Milanes, Peregri nationes, passim) how the Order gave islanders more security; how Malta was integrated more enduringly into established maritime trade routes, increasing its role as a transit station for the flux of humans from and to all latitudes of the Mediterranean; how the extensive infrastructural projects of the Order modified the urban landscape of the islands and revived and diversified their economy, creating employment for their labour force; how Malta’s hospital and medical facilities were immeasurably improved; how attempts were made to render the soil more fertile; (Milanes, Peregri nationes; Luttrell, Hosp Malta, 265; another example: [MALTA] [2A]) how the presence of an elite multinational corps of European gentlemen with the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience helped to breathe Baroque flavours into Maltese society, culture, art, and architecture; how a newfound prosperity was conducive to a steady demographic expansion; how, as with Rhodes, the Hospital rendered Malta strategically relevant. (Luttrell, Hosp Malta, 265)

Recent analysis of what still remains a largely untapped source - the Maltese notarial records - has highlighted the trading interaction between the Hospitallers and Maltese merchants and strengthened the thesis that Malta’s port activity gained in vigour with the arrival of the Order, even incrementing trade contacts with North Africa. (Joan Abela MA thesis, still to read entirely)

Although inevitably slow and gradual, these changes helped to introduce Hospitaller Malta to the early modern era. It was an age of widening perceptions where the concept of space was passing from regional to global. The thirst to rediscover the vestiges of classical antiquity prompted travel writing to the eastern basin of the Mediterranean mainly from the later part of the seventeenth century. (Freller, Classical traveler, 16-18)

A Dutch propagandist, for example, dreamt of world domination by his seafaring nation, with an empire stretching from Mexico to Sumatra, to China, and Patagonia. (Armesto, 377) Efforts to make maritime travel safer had started to be made in thirteenth-century Genoa with the writing of the first portolans, rudimentary shipping guides drawn up to help seamen find their bearing. (for progress of portolans, Mollat du Jourdin, 154) Improvements in navigation technology resulting in larger ships with better sailing technique, capable of carrying larger supply volumes over longer voyages, combined with human entrepreneurship, the irresistible call of the sea, and the timeless lure of wealth and conquest, helped to break the high seas’ codes (to paraphrase Armesto) and to herald a season of unprecedented transoceanic exploration. Mystery and awe gave way to bold curiosity and the Atlantic ceased to be considered as the ‘ocean of shadows’ of early medieval times. (Abulafia book, M. Balard, 183) attracting the conquistadore’s predatory ambition. Within the space of a few years in the last decade of the fifteenth century, transatlantic shipping established lasting oceanic highways between Iberia, Britain, and the American continent, and the Portuguese’s circumnavigation of Africa created an alternative trading connectivity between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. (Armesto, 490) Maritime trading routes on a global level were thus created and the perseverance in the research to reduce losses through disorientation in the open seas ultimately resulted in the solution of the longitude problem in eighteenth-century Britain. (Dava Sobel)

Through the concept of the mappa mundi which started to make headway in Renaissance cartography, the Europeans and Mediterraneans betrayed an awareness that they were living in a much larger world than previously thought. (Matvejevic, 177-9) Anthony Luttrell claims that the perception that the Maltese had of the outside world was very restricted before the advent of the Order. (Luttrell, Hosp Malta, 257). What was the perception of this world from Hospitaller Malta and what were the boundaries of this perception? These are intriguing and ambitious questions, definitely too ambitious to be tackled comprehensively and successfully in this study. The research effort required to produce a veritable picture of early modern Malta’s outlook on the surrounding world would imply the consultation of a far greater number of sources than those listed in this dissertation, and even then any results allowable by surviving records regarding knowledge of what lay beyond the horizon would almost exclusively be restricted to that of the governing elite,
with the almost complete exclusion of the native population. Yet the official histories and archival records of the Order, together with other sources pertinent to Hospitaller Malta consulted for this study, do provide occasional glimpses of what was considered remote and to which limits did the awareness of foreign territory stretch while living in early modern Malta.

The southern coast of Sicily was considered dangerous yet the relatively close North African coast was not that familiar to the Knights. ([PERCEPTIONS], yr 1629, DP, ii, p.10.) A century after settling on Malta, in fact, long stretches of the coast of Barbary were still obscure territory for them, so much so that in 1630 six galleys were sent on a reconnaissance mission to chart the landscape from Capo Misurato to Tripoli and discover 170 miles of barren and portless coast, with plenty of water for replenishment yet with no real shelter for safe anchorage and a maritime traffic of little significance. [Dal Pozzo, I, 785] In the mid-eighteenth century, the heirs of the victim of a notorious corsair desisted from facing a trip to Turin to reclaim a handsome booty from the Council of Sardinia, apparently deeming the voyage deep in the north of Italy too long and tiresome. (Milanes, In the Service, 239) Alof de Wignacourt apologized with authorities of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) for taking long to inform them about his accession to the magistracy of the Order, blaming the delay on the fact that the city-port was such a far-off place from Malta. [COMM] 152/1601 Bohemia was considered as a remote territory and the scant news reaching the Convent regarding the Order’s estates there was attributed to distance [COMMANDERY-BOHEMIA] 22/11/1602, yet towards the mid-eighteenth century the Order found itself compelled to deal with Imperial demands for Hospitaller troops for anti-Turk engagements on the Danube. ([PERCEPTIONS], 12/9/1606) In the early seventeenth century the Order was considering a proposal to take over and garrison the deserted Polish territory of Podolia which confined with Ottoman territory in order to counter Turkish and Tartar invasion attempts through the Eurasian border. [D.Pozzo, I, 529-30] In 1702, the Inquisitor in Malta, in a spout of bitterness, declared that life in the Convent was worse than in the Kingdom of England. ([DIPL] 26/6/1702, cite phrase in footnote) betraying a grim view of Britain which was shared by the Ragusans, who up to beginning of twentieth century apparently still considered the island kingdom as a ‘dark and spiteful’ land. (Matvejevic, 224) Abate Cenni uses the term ‘ocean’ twice in the space of a few pages of his history, in what must be one of the the very few direct references to the Atlantic in Hospitaller documentary writing. (Cenni)

On his accession to the throne of Portugal in September 1578, King Henry, in a courtesy letter to the grandmaster in Malta, proclaimed himself as ‘King of Portugal and the two Algarve on each side of Africa, Lord of Guinea and of conquest, navigation and commerce of Ethiopia, of Arabia, Persia and India’ [DP, i, 159-60, in [DIPL], yr 1577] Books belonging to Hospitallers living in Malta included a late-sixteenth century publication recounting the recollections of Jesuit missionaries in Japan and China. (Grech, Struggling, 166 & footnote 22); the establishment of European commerce in the Indies. ([INDIES], AOM 6474, Miscellanea); highly detailed eighteenth-century accounts of the landscape, land-produce, economy and human texture of North and South America ([ST CHRISTOPHER’S Islds], 1763); histories of the Crimea and ‘little Tartaria’; ([PERCEPTIONS] yr. 1785) and accounts of travels in Russia, Asia, Persia, and Constantinople, with a description of Siberia. ([PERCEPTIONS] yr, 1785, bstill to verify at Biblio)

In 1605 a Portuguese gentleman, Diego dè Melo de San Paio, ‘happened to land in Malta’ from the Indies on his way to Rome to obtain Papal permission to join the Order. ([INDIES] 25/6/1605) In recounting the travels and adventures of the vibrant and rebellious Catholic Prince of Ottoman blood Iachia, Dal Pozzo mentions the Khan of the Tatars; the prince’s connections with the Muscovites and Cossacks; his missions in places like Trebizond, ‘Chersonoda’, Sinope, and Caffa; his knowledge of the mountains of Albania, Serbia, Bosnia, Thrace, and Macedonia among others; and proposals for the Order to join in anti-Turk ventures in Thessaly, Bulgaria and Thrace. ([PERCEPTIONS] yr 1629, Dal Pozzo, I, 820-24) In 1636, four Theatine priests were leaving Malta to reach Georgia in Asia to carry out missionary work. [GEORGIA] In 1663, Grandmaster Rafael Cotoner speaks of the head of a Jesuit priest shipped over from Japan to Sicily presumably to be revered as a relic. ([JAPAN]) In the mid-eighteenth century the Order joined the European
trend of transoceanic conquest and purchased the islands of Saint Christopher’s in the Caribbean.

[Dal Pozzo] In 1668, a clergyman with ambitions to preach in the Indies lodged a request to become a member of the Order. [ACCEPTANCE] 8/1/1668 The first official diplomatic rapprochements with Russia were established in 1698. (Maroma book) That same year the Hospital was assisting a certain fra Giuseppe Maria of Jerusalem on his mission to Ethiopia. [ETHIOPIA] (comment that Ethiopia was the name by which the whole of Africa was referred to in Antiquity, Krizova, 115, see ‘Definitions’ file)

If we are to believe a seventeenth-century English publication, the Order also had an ambassador in Babylon, however odd and irrelevant such a post may seem to the needs of the Hospital. ([BABYLON]; footnote: it is legitimate to question the pertinence of such a claim, apart from the reliability of the document itself...the ambassador’s letter reproduced is suspiciously undated & Babylon was also the name with which Egypt was called – Molly Greene article in Abulafia; rem to check Dal Pozzo) Apparently there existed in the West a particular fascination with Persia and Hospitaller Malta was not completely alien to this connection. Accounts of missions to modern day Iran were published in Venice [PERSIA] and Persian goods usually arrived to the Mediterranean along the route passing through Aleppo and Smyrna. [Braudel, 286] In 1625 the Roman gentleman and adventurer Pietro della Valle arrived in Malta after traveling around Persia and India. [PERSIA, yr. 1625] In 1704 a Frenchman, Giovanni Billion, sought a reference from the Convent for him to be welcomed favourably in the court of the King of Persia. ([DIPL], 20/2/1704). In December 1682, a certain A. Revest deposited some tele di Persia with the Common Treasury as a pawn for a small loan. [PERSIA]

The acquisition of knowledge by the Convent regarding the military manoeuvres on the Eurasian border was not that infrequent. War compelled the Hospitaller hierarchy to keep as updated as possible on any movements in Eastern Europe and Asia. The Order’s resident ambassador in Rome was kept informed on Persian progress against the Turk by the briefings of the Persian ambassador in the Papal court. ([PERSIA]) All sorts of military distractions for the Turks on the rear and to the north of the Ottoman Empire was welcome news for any Catholic post in the Mediterranean as this almost invariably meant a reduced Ottoman activity in the region. Reports of turmoil between Christians and Turks in Hungary, for example, reached the Convent in 1575. ([PLAGUE], 10/8/1601, DP, I, 106) Two years later the fear of an Ottoman attack abated as soon as news reached Malta that Persia had waged war on the Porte. ([PERSIA], Dal Pozzo, I, 127) The Convent received reports of clashes in 1594 between the Imperial troops and the Turk on the Austro-Hungarian border. ([COMM] yr. 1591, DP, I, 349-50) In 1603, briefings from Bohemia reported on the Turco-Catholic clashes south of Buda. ([INTELLIG], 6/9/1603) In 1635 the preparations for a possible siege were interrupted when a feluca’s return from a reconnaissance mission in the Levant confirmed that the rumours of a possible attack were mere diversionary machinations by the Ottoman regime whose real intent was an anti-Persian campaign. ([TURKISH THREAT], yr. 1635; Dal Pozzo, I, 832.) In the Summer of 1638 news arrived from Zante that the Turkish army was heading for Persia. ([B. THREAT], 1/6/1638) In 1709, to the Order’s disappointment, the consul in Corfu was sending updates to the Convent on the Russo-Swedish war which was impeding the ‘Muscovites’ from troubling the Ottomans on that far eastern front. ([RUSIA])

However long was the journey, however tortuous were the routes, whatever obstacles had to be avoided or surpassed, news from such distant places somehow managed to make its way to early modern Malta through paths along which the Knights of St John of Jerusalem had established enduring contacts. The theme of this dissertation is concerned with the structure of this network of communications which allowed the Maltese islands to foster systematic correlations with other territories and which guaranteed their survival in a violent, precarious, and rapidly expanding world. Since, as stated earlier, the travelling of information in pre-industrial society implied the movement of people, a good part of this study will be dedicated to the delivery, and the receipt, of information through:

242
a. a state-established system of contacts which involved sea transport, couriers, and some kind of agent or human contact;

b. the occasional and spontaneous arrival of ships to a base through incidental or planned landings. In the case of Malta this implies an overview of the commercial sea lanes which crossed the island and through which the archipelago was not only provisioned, but also received all sorts of news from the surrounding world.

The timeframe chosen has been narrowed to the seventeenth century, partly also due to the author’s fascination with the age. It was a tormented century bedeviled with the demons of plague, war, banditry, famine, and social strife so tragically familiar to any preindustrial society, and more so to that of the 1600s, where the widespread social havoc induced some historians to try and draw comparisons of unrest between different territories and to speak of a crisis of the seventeenth century. (some generic reference) These were turbulent years of change for the Western world. As scientific observation started gradually gaining greater credibility and Cartesian philosophy, which exalted the powers of reason above all others, was making headway among scholarly circles; society was questioning its dogmatic belief in a metaphysical fundamentalism which had been conditioning all walks of life for centuries. Baroque philosophy and manners were winning over proselytes across territories and societies, heavily conditioning court etiquette, inter-State diplomatic procedures, and ceremonials at sea. (Grech, “Stendardo”; Thomas Kirk) The spectre of social chaos moulded the intellectual mood of the period. Political thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes embraced Machiavellian stances and theorized in favour of iron-fisted rulers capable of stamping their authority on their realm even at the expense of the individual’s liberty. Attempts at implementing an absolutist ideology also had long-term practical consequences for European and Mediterranean States. Long-drawn wars fought with larger and better equipped armies were inducing a measure of administrative restructuring by different States to improve tax-collection in an attempt to meet the ever increasing demands imposed by military conflict. It is within the context of these contingencies that the communication system of Hospitaller Malta will be analysed.

It was also a choice dictated by practical reasons imposed by the necessity to draw a limit to the archival material that had to be consulted. However, the dynamics concerning the mobility patterns discussed may very well apply to the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, references to both these centuries are not lacking. As has been amply proven by the French school of historical scholarship and its proselytes, the limitations on movement imposed by the physical setting and the technological deficiencies of the age varied very little throughout these centuries. What was valid in medieval times was almost invariably valid at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. Advances in navigation technology did occur and European states did make an effort to improve roads, build more bridges and canals, and speed up the delivery of information through more efficient courier services, (Braudel, Structures) yet throughout the preindustrial era man emerged a systematic loser in his eternal fight against the tyranny of distance. (Braudel, Structures) Napoleon - as Braudel said - marched only as fast as Caesar. (Braudel, Structures)

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1 For a concise and readable overview of the history of Western philosophy in the modern era see, for example, J. Cottingham, The Rationalists (Oxford University Press, 1988).


3 For a general overview of the rise and implications of absolutism in Europe and related political theories see, for example, Bonney, 305 – 416.
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¹ ‘Corrispondenza’ here means the official Italian outgoing correspondence of the Order of St John. The volume for the year 1600 is missing.
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