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LATINS VERSUS UNIATES IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY MALTA

Carmel Cassar

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The Greek Population of Malta

On their expulsion from Rhodes in January 1523 the Knights of St John were followed by a Greek refugee community which originally numbered around 5,000 in 1530.¹ Most of these had eventually settled in Birgu and came to form three Greek parishes there.² It seems that during the first few decades of the Order's rule matters went relatively well for the Greek Catholic minority. Thus during his Apostolic Visit to Malta between 1574-1575 Mgr Pietro Dusina noted that the three of them catered for 74 households within the city renamed Vittoriosa.³ Mgr Dusina even interviewed three Greek rite priests namely Papas Manoli Greco, Papas Joanne de Jasorino and Papas Angelino Metaxi all of whom were asked questions about their ordination and several other general questions. The priests gave details on the rituals involved during baptism, marriage and burial. They also explained that they did not confess penitents because only the elderly priests did so in the Greek rite but they performed the extreme unction to sick. All rituals were carried out according to the Greek rite and they followed Greek rite books.

¹ Bosio, *Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione et Ill.ma Militia di S. Gio. Gerosolimitano*, Tome III, (Rome, 1602), p.2. For details about the Rhodiote community in Birgu see: S. FIORINI, *The Rhodiote Community of Birgu, A Maltese City: 1530-c.1550*, in «Library of Mediterranean History» I (1994), 183-241. See also G. LUPI, *Il rito greco a Malta*, in «Atti del Convegno Storico Interecclesiale», Bari, 30 aprile - 4 maggio 1969, tome III, (Padua 1973), 1247-1259. The total population of Malta in 1530, after the advent of the Order of St. John and its retinue, including the Rhodiote community, rose to about 25,000 inhabitants.

² Members of the Greek community were still conversing among themselves in Greek on the eve of the Turkish siege of Malta of 1565. Thus, Pietro Lo Manchuso recalled how Isabella, servant of Thomasino Gaya and, Johannica, servant of his uncle Antonino Lo Manchuso, spoke between them in Greek, a language, which he could not understand (parlorno insieme in greco... quali non so che siano per non intendere la lingua greca). C(athedral) A(rchives) M(alta), A(rchives of the) I(nquisition of) M(alta) Crim(inal Proceedings), vol. 3B case 22, fol.443v.: 17 March 1565.

³ AIM, Misc(ellaneous) vol. 7, 288; G. AQUILINA - S. FIORINI (eds), *Documentary sources of maltese history. Part IV documents at the Vatican. No. 1 Archivio Segreto Vaticano Congregazioni Vescovi e Regolari. Malta: Visita Apostolica no. 51 Mgr Petrus Dusina, 1575, Malta 2001, 159.*

closely. Most importantly Papas Manoli declared that he taught Christian doctrine to children in conformity to the Greek rite.⁴ By 1587, the most important of these parishes, the one dedicated to Our Lady of Damascus, was transferred to Valletta, while by 1617 the other two parishes had ceased to function.⁵ The existence of the Greek community was already flagging by the end of the sixteenth century, though the use of the Greek language survived well into the seventeenth century. Those Greeks, attracted by commerce and work opportunities, who settled in Malta naturally abided to the Byzantine rite whose representatives made their utmost to remain undisturbed in their jurisdiction. But the number of faithful who adhered to such congregations continued to diminish so that a general decline in the Greek community could be noticed by the middle of the seventeenth century.

It appears that by then the descendants of the original Rhodiotes were making use of both the Latin and Greek rites.⁶ The case of the Loretta family, which amongst its members produced Gioacchino Loretta (born 1637), a well-known follower of the Calabrian baroque painter Mattia Preti, is a clear manifestation of this ambivalent tendency.⁷ The Lorettas resided in Valletta and baptized their children at the Porto Salvo (Latin rite) parish. Thus in 1642 one finds a reference to the baptism of Maria, daughter of Filippo and Anna Loretta.⁸ The sons of the painter Gioacchino and his wife Caterina were likewise baptized at Porto Salvo later in the century. Thus, Francesco Faustino received baptism at Porto Salvo on 16 February 1687.⁹

Nonetheless, contact with the Greek parish was not given up by the Lorettas, for on 25 April of the same year their infant son was buried at the

⁴ The interviews were carried out on 20 February, 1575. Papas Manoli Greco had his first tonsure in Messina and was ordained by the Bishop of Zante in the Levant; Papas Joanne de Jatorino had his first tonsure from the Bishop of Modon in Malta during the reign of Grand Master Juan D'Homedes (1536-1553) and ordained by the Archbishop of Barletta; Papas Angelino Metaxi had his first tonsure from the Bishop of Modon but was ordained in Cairo by the Patriarch of Alexandria. AIM Misc. vol. 7, pp.265-268, 270-275.

⁵ F. CHETTA-SCHIRÒ, *Memorie su le Chiese e il Rito Greco in Malta*, «Archivum Melitense» IV (1930), 172, 170.

⁶ An early reference to the use of both rites is given by Claretta Sguero who on 18 June 1603 declared that she abided by the Latin rite but confessed at the Greek parish. AIM Crim., vol. 21B case 178, fol.536v.

⁷ D. CUTAJAR, *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Art in Malta*, in M. BUHAGIAR (ed), *Marian Art during the 17th and 18th Centuries*, Malta 1983, 16; *IBID.*, *The Followers of Mattia Preti in Malta*, in «Mid-Med Bank Report and Accounts», Malta 1988, 36-38.

⁸ P(arish) A(rchives) Porto Salvo - Valletta, Baptisms I, p.690: 31 March, 1642.

⁹ P.A. Porto Salvo - Valletta, Baptisms II, p.172.

parish of Our Lady of Damascus.¹⁰ It had by then become customary for the Greek community to register their deaths at the Porto Salvo parish, clear evidence that the Greek community of Valletta was fast being absorbed into the Latin rite parish. In 1600-1625 the parish was catering for a very small section of the Valletta population, a tendency that became more evident by the last quarter of that century as the following table suggests:

Table I: Baptisms at the Greek Parish, Valletta: 1610-1690

Years	Baptisms
1601 - 1625	71
1626 - 1650	21
1651 - 1675	39
1676 - 1690	7

Source: P.A. Greek Catholic Church, Vol. Unico: 1584-1977

By the early eighteenth century, the parish had decreased to such an extent that, in 1708, only nine of its male members were considered fit to serve in the militia.¹¹ Nevertheless a century later the parish was still catering for 76 Maltese 'Greeks' scattered between Valletta, Vittoriosa and Gozo as the following Status Animarum of 1803 shows:

Table II: Status Animarum - Greek Parish: 1803

	Men	Women	Total
Valletta	47	10	57
Vittoriosa	7	6	13
Gozo	-	6	6
	54	22	76

Source: P.A. Greek Catholic Church, Vol. Unico: 1584-1977, pp.120-21.

The sizeable Greek community in Malta seems to have melted into thin air, whereby its members adopted Maltese customs and habits and became completely integrated within the local community. The case studies that are discussed below seem to indicate that this was the result of multiple elements which indirectly forced the Greeks to integrate, in a subtle way, with the ruling Latin Catholic culture of Malta.

¹⁰ P. A. Porto Salvo - Valletta, Deaths II, fol.269.

¹¹ FIORINI, *Status Animarum I: A Unique Source for 17th and 18th Century Maltese Demography*, in «Melita Historica» VIII (1983), Table XVI.

The Greek Christians and the Roman Inquisition Tribunal

There may have been several reasons why the Greeks were completely absorbed by the local community. Malta was at the time a frontier society and whoever was in some way connected to Islam, intentionally or otherwise, was suspected of heresy or apostasy by the Roman Inquisition Tribunal. The case-study of Georgio Scala is eloquent evidence of this prevailing mentality. Georgio Scala, a twenty-five year old Christian Syrian, was accused by his newly wedded wife, Bernardina, daughter of Mastro Andrea Mendicino, of being a bad Christian. Amongst other she accused him of having refused to bring her the image of St Nicholas when she was sick in bed; also of scolding her whenever she nominated Christ before drinking water; and when she made the sign of the cross before going to bed and on waking up. Worst of all she accused him of having entertained some Muslim Moors at their home. On that occasion Bernardina declared that she had refused to make their acquaintance and would only cross herself in their presence. At this gesture both her husband and the 'Muslims' present poked fun at her. Scala was further accused of keeping a Muslim book, presumably on the Index of prohibited books, for safekeeping at their home.¹² Scala appears to have been imprisoned at the Holy Office and some days later was summoned in front of Inquisitor Honorato Hortensio to give evidence. He explained that he had escaped from his father's home in Syria and settled in Malta. He had opened a small shop in Valletta where he sold oil, vinegar and other consumables. In Eastertide 1598 Scala married Bernardina. Scala declared to have been brought up as a Greek Christian and stated that his uncle served as *papas*. In Malta, however, he attended Latin mass either at St John's Conventual Church or at St Paul's Parish. Scala must have looked at himself as an ecumenical person since he declared to converse with the Maltese Christians, Greeks and others alike. Nonetheless Scala must have kept in touch with the Greek community for when he once beat his wife, the *papas* scolded him for his misdeed.¹³ In a later deposition Scala declared that he knew how to speak Arabic, his native language, but neither knew how to write nor read the language. He even stated that he did not understand Turkish.¹⁴

Problems arose for Scala after a medical visit on 7 October when the surgeon Mastro Caloio Briata found out that he had been circumcised. Aware of the difficult position he had found himself in, Scala told the surgeon that

¹² AIM Crim., vol.16A case 5, fols. 77-78: 31 July, 1598

¹³ AIM Crim., vol.16A case 5, fols. 83-85v: 12 August, 1598.

¹⁴ AIM Crim., vol.16A case 5, fol. 94v: 20 August, 1598.

as a young boy he had been circumcised by the Turks against his will but that he had never attended any services in mosques. That same day, when brought to witness and give further evidence Scala explained that he had never apostasized but had been forcefully circumcised. He then explained that in Syria the Turks had the habit of collecting Christian youths from the streets and imprison them. Scala declared that he had himself experienced the ordeal on which occasion he was circumcised. However his father had petitioned to the Pasha and on payment of a tribute, he was able to return to his family.¹⁵ Scala expressed the difficulties faced by the Christians of the Middle East when he stated that some of those youths who returned to their families after the payment of the tribute took up living as Muslims.¹⁶ However Scala elaborated further on this point. He added that there existed very strict rules on this. Only Christian males were obliged to pay a tribute. Youths over the age of twelve, until they reached adulthood, were expected to pay half the tribute of adult males. Once the tribute was paid young males could not be touched by anyone as both the Kâdî (Islamic Law judge) and the Pasha punished those who broke such rules.¹⁷ Some days later a Franciscan friar, on his return from

¹⁵ AIM Crim., vol.16A case 5, fols. 114v, 115-v.: 7 October, 1598. Here Scala refers to the *devshirme* which was a levy of Christian children to be trained for posts in the Palace, the administration or the military. The *devshirme* was widely practised by the Ottoman Turkish rulers in the Balkans. See H. INALCIK, *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age 1300-1600*, London 1994 edn., 78; I. METIN KUNT, *The Sultan's Servants. The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government, 1550-1650*, New York 1983, 32.

¹⁶ AIM Crim., vol.16A case 5, fol.116.

¹⁷ AIM Crim., vol.16A case 5, fol.116-v. The Muslims had their own system for governing religious minorities usually known as the *millet* system by which a man's nationality was identified by his faith. Each minority sect was therefore treated as an autonomous unit, allowed to retain its own laws and customs in all matters that concerned its members. In their dealings with Muslims and in matters concerning security and order the members of the *millet* had to abide by the laws and regulations of the Muslim state. They were obliged to pay special taxes; and various petty restrictions were placed on them. They could not proselytize, they could only build new churches or synagogues under license; they wore distinctive dress so that they could always be recognised. Their menfolk could not marry Muslim women, though their women were often taken into Muslim harems where they were permitted to retain their faith. The administration of the *millet* was allotted to its religious head, whose business it was to see that his flock was law-abiding, paying the taxes that were due and refraining from treasonable activities. There were disadvantages in the system, the most notable being that the minorities had no ultimate sanction against the whims of their Muslim overlords; and every so often the Muslims would express feelings of contempt and dislike for the Christians by attacking them and burning their property. But most Muslim rulers found that their Christian subjects were well-behaved members of the community whose industry and professional skills enriched the state. Nonetheless the Orthodox Christians were inevitably second-class subjects forbidden to

Syria and the Holy Lands, confirmed this latter statement by Georgio Scala.¹⁸ In the sentence that ensued Scala was accused of apostasy, of having impeded his wife from practising her religious devotions, of having questioned the Christian faith, of keeping a Muslim book at home, and of having kept close relations with Muslims. Furthermore as an Orthodox Christian he was unable to practise his religion in Malta and had therefore observed the Latin rite. The sentence is eloquent proof that all efforts were made to transform Scala into a Roman Catholic.¹⁹

One comes across several snippets of information which enable us to understand that there was very little sympathy towards adherents of the Greek rite in Malta irrespective of whether this was Byzantine, that is, Uniate, or Orthodox. In 1597 Magnifico Jacobo Caloriti, presumably himself

bear arms or to ride on horse back, with the exception of the Patriarch himself, and obliged to wear distinctive dress. In dealing with the Muslims they had to accept the restrictions customary for a Christian *millet*, and had to pay special taxes imposed on the minority groups in theory because they were not required to serve in the armed forces. But within the traditional limits they were to enjoy complete self-government, obeying their own laws and customs. Their freedom of worship was guaranteed, together with their possession of the churches and monasteries that they had before the Ottoman conquest.

As the *millet* was based on religion and not on race or nationality in the nineteenth century sense, it embraced all the Orthodox within the Sultan's dominions, whether these were Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians or Vlachs they were all ruled by the Patriarch of Constantinople. When later the Ottomans conquered Syria, Palestine and Egypt the Christians there were also regarded as being under the Patriarchate of Constantinople although canonically the congregations remained under their respective Patriarchs of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria. Whatever the case the Patriarchs of the Middle East were obliged to defer to that of Constantinople for he lived at the seat of power and had access to the Sultan himself, or his Grand Vizier, while they could only deal with the local governors. It was after all the Patriarch of Constantinople who on their election submitted their names to the Sultan for confirmation, and he could therefore control their appointment. The Patriarch of Constantinople thus emerged as the ruler of the Orthodox world of the Near East, which had been reunited thanks to the Ottoman conquests. This unity guaranteed that Orthodoxy would endure and could resist the attacks made on it by missionaries from the Roman Catholic, and later, the Protestant Churches. In essence the Sultan assured the Greek Orthodox clergy that it would retain its religious freedom, 'internally and against the possibility of union with Rome'. S.J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol.1 *Empire of the Gazis. The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire 1280-1808*, (Cambridge, 1976), pp.58-59, 151-153.

¹⁸ AIM Crim., vol.16A case 5, fol.119-v: 12 October, 1598.

¹⁹ For his misdeeds Scala had to abjure and was made to serve for a year in the building of the Jesuit College in Valletta, confess at a Jesuit priest once a month and receive the sacrament for two years. He was also obliged to attend the Jesuit College every Sunday in order to learn Christian doctrine and had to recite the rosary three times a week. AIM Crim., vol.16A case 5, fols.121-122v: 18 October, 1598.

of Greek origin, deposed in front of the Holy Office that the five daughters of a deceased Greek *papas* - who had continued to live under the same roof even after their marriage - had the reputation of meddling in witchcraft. They were believed to make use of holy oil that they had stolen from the Greek Church after the death of their father, some twenty years before.²⁰ In another case of 1599 the Greek Joanne del Zante (present day Zakynthos) felt incensed when the Latin rite parish priest of Porto Salvo, unaware that del Zante was Greek, declared that all Greeks were heretics who do not deserve to converse with the Christians (meaning Catholics). When del Zante replied that the Greeks were good Christians as much as the Latins the priest repeated his view that Greeks were heretics who, Joanne stated, the Catholic priest repeated several times.²¹ A recent analysis of a list of Maltese students who frequented the Greek College in Rome compiled by Salvatore Bottari is at this point revealing. Bottari names sixteen students for the period 1584-1667. Only half of these took holy orders and fewer still were ordained priests. Most of the students did not remain faithful to the Greek rite. Some of the candidates, like Silvano Inguanes, objected to take the Oath of Allegiance as prescribed in the Bull of Pope Urban VIII. Others, like Antonio Giampieres, were actually prohibited to take the Oath by their parents. Pietro Vincelle was even prohibited from observing the Greek rite by his mother.²²

²⁰ AIM Crim., vol. 15A case 102, fol. 541-v: 21 February, 1597.

²¹ AIM Crim., vol. 17 case 133, fol.353: 1 September, 1599.

²² Giovanni Metaxi (1584-1585) left the College because he was unwell; Michele Agapito (1595-1602) studied logic and physics but later joined the Somaschi Congregation; Angelo Fiore (1611?-1612) received a doctorate and was ordained priest in Malta; Filippo Fiore, Angelo's brother, left after studying philosophy due to stomach troubles, he went to Naples and got married; Michele Cosentino (1613?) took the Oath of Allegiance to the Pope and studied theology, he became a Latin rite priest but remained attached to the Greek parish where he frequently preached in Greek; Giovanni Francesco Romano (1614?) took the oath in 1615 and left on terminating his philosophy studies; Giovanni Inguanes (1623- 1625) studied humanities but later joined the Society of Jesus, he died of tuberculosis when still a Jesuit novice; Andrea Paleologo (1625-1631) studied grammar, rhetoric, philosophy and *casi di coscienza*. He was ordained priest and left for Ancona where he became parish priest of the Greek Church. Later he became parish priest in the Greek Church of Vittoriosa in Malta; Carlo Bacchi (1640) registered as boarder at the College; Antonio Gampieres, when asked to take the Oath he preferred to remain a boarder because his parents would not permit him to do so and he later joined the Dominicans; Ignazio de Inguanes (1645) an Italo-Greek of Malta joined the College at the age of eighteen; Silvano Inguanes an Italo-Greek of Malta joined the College in 1665 at the age of sixteen and studied Logic but left in 1657 because he refused to take the Oath; Don Antonio Nardile (1654) joined the College at the age of twenty three, studied *casi di coscienza* and was ordained priest but was dismissed that same year; Lorenzo Ubaldesco de Piro (1659-1667) joi-

Nonetheless although the Greeks were often treated with contempt, and were at times labelled as heretics by Latin rite priests, the latter could not tolerate the rough treatment of a Greek *papas*. Eloquent evidence of such an attitude is put forward in the evidence of Don Chrispino de Charo, parish priest of St Lawrence in Vittoriosa. Don Chrispino was informed by a Maltese sailor - who had just returned from the Levant with the Grand Master's galleon - that on their trip in the Levant they had met a Christian vessel which carried on board several Christians amongst whom a Greek *papas* returning from Jerusalem. The captain of the Order's galleon had ordered a French armed frigate to check the vessel but these rough treated a Greek *papas* on board by taking off his clothes and hitting him. The sailor divulged a rumour that when one of the Frenchmen punched the *papas* the man's arm whittled in a few days. De Charo was particularly scandalised by the Frenchmen's behaviour because amongst other they broke the *papas*'s chalice into pieces. The sailor had informed Don Chrispino that the remains of the chalice were collected and cared for by another Maltese sailor.²³ In essence the mishandling of a priest, and the breaking up of sacred objects, by a group of French 'heretics' had caused scandal among the rank and file of Maltese on board the galleon even if the priest in question was an Orthodox schismatic *papas*.

The Greek Rite and the Gregorian Calendar

This does not imply that the Latin clergy had any particular sympathy for the Greek rite. In 1587 the parish priest of St Paul in Valletta, Don Joanne Emanuele, explained that on the first Sunday of Lent, on leaving his house to serve at his parish, he met the Greek *papas* Constantino Sguro, curate of the church of Calamia (Our Lady of Damascus in Valletta), accompanied by a Greek textile artisan (later identified as Joanne Cipriotto). Since the two men were buying meat, prohibited for Latins during Lent, Don Joanne commented about the confusion created by these Uniates for not abiding by the

ned the College in 1659 at the age of thirteen and remained there until 1667. During his stay he studied Metaphysics but on his dismissal it was found out that he should not have been allowed to join as his father was Latin. The College was reimbursed with the help of the Holy Congregation of Rites; Francesco Zerbo (1659-1663) joined the College as a boarder, studied grammar and received the minor orders; Pietro Vincelle (1665-1666) studied grammar but left the College because his mother did not allow him to observe the Greek rite. The Holy Congregation made him pay the expenses. S. BOTTARI, *Studenti Maltesi nel Collegio Greco di Roma (1575-1640)*, in «Melita Historica» XI n. 2 (1993), 210-212.

²³ AIM Crim., vol. 20B case 119, fol. 610-v: 2 March, 1602.

Gregorian calendar. Don Joanne even questioned the privileges enjoyed by those of Greek rite to which the Greek *papas* replied that those of Greek rite were allowed to follow their rules by the Holy See. The *papas* was overheard by the chaplain of the Order, Don Angelo Briante who was passing by. Don Angelo stopped and addressing Don Joanne asked 'Why is it they do not follow our rite?' Then he told the Greeks 'Are you Christians or not?' The Greeks replied together 'Yes, we are Christians!' And Don Angelo replied 'If you are Christians you must obey the Pope'. Joanne Cipriotto felt incensed by Don Angelo's reproach and emphatically pointed out 'We have nothing to do with the Pope, but we follow our Patriarch' at which Don Angelo promptly replied 'How come? Is not the Patriarch subjected to the Pope?' Then he turned to Don Joanne and *papas* Constantino and said 'Be my witnesses how this fellow said that he has no connection with the Pope'. At this point everyone went on his way.²⁴

Joanne Cipriotto was summoned at the Holy Office on 2 May and was asked about his childhood background. He explained that he had left the Levant as a youth. He admitted that he could not say what opinion the Christians of the Levant held of the Pope but stated that the Patriarch of Constantinople considered the Pope of Rome as head of the Universal Church and Vicar of Christ. Cipriotto must have felt terrified in the presence of the Inquisitor for he went on to admit that whoever does not obey the Pope is schismatic and a non-Christian since all Christians are expected to obey the Pope. Cipriotto later went on to say that there was nothing wrong to say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son because in the Holy Scriptures one finds that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.²⁵ Joanne Cipriotto was dismissed and the Holy Office now turned to the Greek *papas* Sguro. Naturally the *papas* must have been suspected of conforming to the Greek Orthodox rite rather than the Uniate model. He was therefore admonished and ordered to present himself at the Holy Office daily against the payment of 20 oncie (50 scudi) until further notice.²⁶

The Holy Office took its time to act on the matter. However by 28 June of that year Joanne Cipriotto was also obliged to present himself at the Holy Office against a fine of 100 scudi.²⁷ Some months later and precisely on 22 November *Papas* Constantino Sguro declared that he had sent two letters to Rome with the knight of the Order of St John Fra Caraffa. These letters were

²⁴ AIM Crim., vol. 7A case 51, fol.470-v: 19 April, 1587.

²⁵ AIM Crim., vol. 7A case 51, fols. 482-485v.

²⁶ AIM Crim., vol. 7A case 51, fol.488.

²⁷ AIM Crim., vol. 7A case 51, fol.471.

written by two Patriarchs of Constantinople the first by Hieremia (Jeremias II known as the 'Illustrious') and the second by Theolipto. This second letter confirmed the contents of the first. *Papas Sguro* explained that he had sent the two letters with a petition to his Holiness the Pope asking his advice on whether the Greek Catholics were expected to abide to the old calendar or according to the newly established Gregorian reform. *Papas Sguro* asserted that he felt obliged to do so since during the rule of Emperor Charles V, Pope Leo X had issued a Bull declaring that it was licit for the Greeks to live according to their rite and that no one had the right to molest them for this. *Papas Sguro* complained that he could not regulate himself on the matter as he had received no reply from Rome and had therefore adhered to earlier practices. He had even kept copies of both letters which he declared was willing to present to the Inquisitor.²⁸ In reality by 1583 Pope Gregory XIII, who changed the Julian calendar, repeatedly pressured the Patriarch of Constantinople, Jeremias II, to abide to the change. However the Patriarch repeatedly refused to do so and during that same year convened a Council in Constantinople. In effect opposition to the implementation of the new calendar was widespread throughout non-Catholic Europe. According to A.D. Wright the reform of the calendar in 1582 affected the ordinary sequence of the liturgical year throughout Catholic Europe but 'the change was long resisted by Protestant states and with even more perseverance in Orthodox Russia'.²⁹ In the case of Malta adherence to the Gregorian Calendar served as an important indicator of Catholic pressure on the Uniate minority.

The Filioque Issue: A Maltese Case-Study of 1602

But perhaps the best evidence of Roman Catholic pressure is provided by the issue of the *Filioque*. It is a known fact that the Council of Florence had approved a doctrine of papal supremacy which gave no guarantee of Eastern independence. Fourteen years later, in 1453, Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks but the two centuries that followed witnessed attempts to achieve what the Council of Florence had hoped to secure as a whole. Cardinal Bessarion, who had joined the Roman Church and was created Patriarch of Constantinople by Pius II, issued an Encyclical letter in 1462 in which he appealed to the Greeks to accept the agreements of the Council of

²⁸ AIM Crim., vol. 7A case 51, fol.471v.

²⁹ A.D. WRIGHT, *The Early Modern Papacy. From the Council of Trent to the French Revolution, 1564-1789*. Harlow, England, 2000, 44.

Florence, and in particular the papal supremacy and the *Filioque*. The *Filioque* issue was the main bone of contention between Greek Orthodox and Latin Christians in the early modern period and one which made life difficult for the Uniate churches with their Greek rite and allegiance to the Pope of Rome. When Bessarion called for unity based on the recognition of the Pope as Head of the Church, he did not intend to abandon Orthodox customs, usages and ways of worship.

To call for recognition of papal supremacy – as it was then understood in the West – was to invite the Orthodox to allow their internal affairs and policies to be directed by Rome and its representatives. To demand the adoption of the *Filioque* was to ask them to abandon their resistance to what they felt was an uncanonical distortion of the Orthodox accepted dogma. It was also to insist on the removal of that mark of identity which distinguished the Eastern from the Western tradition. At the same time the Orthodox authorities gladly employed the Latin missionaries as preachers and confessors and the local population received them with great enthusiasm.³⁰

The Orthodox had a total vision of the faith and practice of the Church, which included all that had been accepted as Holy Tradition, as the definitive interpretation of Scripture within the context of the ongoing life and development of the Eastern Church. Their quarrel with Rome was that the Papacy had distorted the Tradition, had introduced strange new doctrines like the *Filioque* or papal supremacy of jurisdiction, or practices such as the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist, or baptism by sprinkling instead of immersion. These were differences that could be seen and felt as alien innovations, which Rome tried to impose on the East. The true gospel, the true teaching of the Church was, for them, the Orthodox tradition and way of life as they had inherited it. Anyone who refused to accept any part of that tradition was bound to be a heretic and an innovator.

Once again the records of the Holy Office in Malta provide us with an interesting case-study of 1602, involving *papas* Nicodemo Discopulo of Crete - who arrived in Malta from Saint Catherine's convent of Mount Sinai - and the Messina born Greek sub-deacon Macario Gartagi. Both Greek rite clerics belonged to the monastic Order of St Basil. The case, examined during the inquisitorship of Fabrizio Verallo (1600-1605), provides ample evidence of the treatment of Greek 'heretics' who somehow fell foul with the local dio-

³⁰ K.T. WARE, *Orthodox and Catholics in the Seventeenth Century: Schism or Intercommunion?*, in D. BAKER (ed), *Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest – Studies in Church History*, X, Cambridge 1972, 259.

cese and the Roman Inquisition tribunal. The event took place in late April 1602 during an apostolic visit of the churches of Malta was being carried out. Don Antonio Bartolo, the Dean of the Cathedral and Vicar General of the diocese, was carrying out his visit of the Vittoriosa churches amongst which the Greek church of Our Lady of Damascus which catered for the Greek community of the 'Three Cities' of Vittoriosa, Senglea and Burmola (later known as Cospicua). All went well until Don Antonio asked *papas* Nicodemo to make a profession of faith as had been decreed by Pope Gregory XIII from the Greek rite clerics. For that reason, the Vicar exhibited the book with the said profession of faith written in both Latin and Greek.³¹ Don Antonio explained that Greek clerics thus had the option of reciting the profession in either of the two languages. However *papas* Nicodemo wanted to examine the profession before committing himself and asked Don Bartolo to leave it with him overnight. The following morning Don Antonio returned to the Greek rite church, accompanied by the assessor Don Salvo Xerri and notary Gio Luca Gauci, in the hope that *papas* Nicodemo would make the profession of faith. However Don Antonio noticed that *papas* Nicodemo was reluctant to kneel down and make the profession of faith and when he asked him the reason *papas* Nicodemo briefly mentioned the Holy Spirit and stood up. At that point Giacomo Metaxi, son of *papas* Manoli, entered the church and was asked to serve as interpreter as Don Antonio had no knowledge of Greek. However when Metaxi explained to *papas* Nicodemo what was expected of him the Greek *papas* replied, in Italian, that he was ready to make the profession of faith but refused to say that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son because that is not included in his Greek books. On learning of the 'error' Don Antonio reported the matter at the Holy Office.³²

That same day in his deposition Giacomo Metaxi confirmed Don Antonio's view and added that Don Salvo Xerri asked him to inform *papas* Nicodemo that the article had been established by the Council of Trent and had to be confirmed by both clergy of the Latin and Greek rite but Metaxi did not want to intervene any further.³³ This neutral comment induced the Inquisitor to examine Metaxi on his personal beliefs. During this second deposition Metaxi explained that the Greek books left out the *filioque* in the Creed. Thus as a Greek rite Christian he put himself in a difficult position

³¹ We learn that Don Antonio's copy included the synodal constitutions of the archbishopric of Messina and was published at that city in 1591. AIM Crim., vol. 22C case 251, fol. 1175: 25 April, 1602.

³² AIM Crim., vol. 22C case 251, fol. 1175-v.

³³ AIM Crim., vol. 22C case 251, fol. 1176-v.

when he declared that during his childhood he was taught in that manner by the deceased *papas* Constantino. However Metaxi added that he now said the Creed in its Catholic form as propounded by Holy Mother Church.³⁴

Papas Nicodemo was brought to witness on the following day. He explained the whole event in detail and defended himself by stating that he could not commit himself to an assertion in a Catholic state away from his home-base in the Levant. He went on to declare that his belief on the issue was similar to that of the other Greek rite residents of Malta, Messina and the Levant where during mass those of the Greek rite declare that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father only. He further pointed out that if he were to declare otherwise in the Levant he would be burned at the stake. He admitted his awareness that the Latin rite dictates otherwise but he could not conform to it as the Greek residents would refrain from attending his church.³⁵

When he was summoned to witness again on 1 May, *papas* Nicodemo refused to add or change anything from his first deposition. *Papas* Nicodemo based his reasoning on the fact that as an oriental Greek he had been brought up in the belief that the Holy Spirits proceeds from the Father. Secondly that his ancestors had not upheld the Council of Trent. Thirdly that the Greeks do not admit the existence of Purgatory, which point is upheld by Greeks theologians and scholars and if it did exist then they would be mad not to accept its existence. Fourthly that the Patriarchs of the Orient do not consider the Pope to be the universal head of all the Christians nor do they believe that he has power to guide and govern the universal church because the Patriarchs believe that they share a similar power and as a Greek *papas* he was not subdued to him. Nonetheless as an individual *papas* Nicodemo declared that he believed the Pope to be the head of the universal church, Vicar of Christ, and successor of St Peter from whom he inherited full power to rule and govern the universal church which can even be found in the Gospel. Fifthly he did not accept the Council of Trent because none of the Orthodox Patriarchs were present. The sixth objection concerned the veneration of sculptured images, since *papas* Nicodemo pointed out that in the Greek rite only icons are venerated. Finally *papas* Nicodemo declared that although he considered his Holiness the Pope to be the universal leader of the Church he felt unable to make a vow of obedience to him because he intended to return to his monastery in the Sinai. He was sure that on his return to his home base the patriarchs would excommunicate him, degrade him and he would not be allowed to say mass and therefore unable to make a living.

³⁴ AIM Crim., vol. 22C case 251, fols.1176v-1177v.

³⁵ AIM Crim., vol. 22C case 251, fol.1181v.: 26 April, 1602.

Inquisitor Verallo then asked *Papas* Nicodemo about the Greek rite ritual performed by the other clerics during high mass in Valletta and Vittoriosa. *Papas* Nicodemo replied that he had sung mass both at Valletta and Vittoriosa, in the company of the other Greek rite priests, and that they had always left out the *Filioque*. By his honest speech *papas* Nicodemo condemned himself in front of the Holy Office. He could not say what the other Greek clerics believed but declared that the sub-deacon who assisted him held similar views. Thus he even condemned his assistant.³⁶ The following day the twenty-two year old sub-deacon Macario Gartagi was summoned in front of Inquisitor Verallo. Gartagi confirmed all the points put forward by *papas* Nicodemo and even stated that during high mass the Greek clergy of Malta always left out the *filioque*, a tendency, he added, which was recurrent among the Uniate clergy of Messina and the Levant. Gartagi pointed out that this was done because they were not submissive to the Pope and in order to prove his point he mentioned the fact that when twenty years before the calendar was reformed and Pope Gregory XIII added ten days to it, the patriarchs had refused to accept this change and had given up their formal oath of obedience to the Pope to which they used to conform until that time. Gartagi then confirmed his belief in the other issues mentioned by *papas* Nicodemo including the issue of Purgatory.³⁷

It took some more time for the Holy Office to conclude the proceedings. Both the accused were given an identical spiritual penance on 15 May 1602. They had first of all to abjure their heretical beliefs wearing the penitential habit marked with a cross and with a candle in hand as a sign of reconciliation. They both had to confess twelve times a year and on the suggestion of their Roman rite confessor they were to receive communion every first Sunday of the month. They were also deprived of the administration of holy orders. Finally they were both to remain in Malta and could not leave without the issuing of a licence by Inquisitor Verallo or one of his successors.³⁸

The Malta case-study seems to imply that the *filioque* polemic should be considered as an *ad hoc* indicator of the pressure exercised on the Uniates to abide to Roman Catholic principles. On their part the Uniate Catholics did not offer any resistance to Pope Gregory XIII's formal act of adherence to Rome but some of their religious leaders continued to hold their previous beliefs and allegiances as a matter of conscience. In short they were ready to accept the role of the Papacy but felt that they had to resist a profession of faith which went

³⁶ AIM Crim., vol. 22C case 251, fols. 1182-1183.: 1 May, 1602.

³⁷ AIM Crim., vol. 22C case 251, fols. 1183-1185.: 2 May, 1602.

³⁸ AIM Crim., vol. 22C case 251, fols. 1191-1192v; 1195-1195v.: 15 May, 1602.

against their teachings and beliefs. This explains why Papas Nicodemo found it so hard to accept the impositions of the Roman clergy and the Inquisition.

On its part the Roman Inquisition made no attempts to understand the positions of the Uniate priests. On this occasion the Holy Office treated the Greek rite clerics in a way similar to the way it treated the Orthodox clergy. They were not considered so much as schismatics who required to be reconciled to the Church, but as if they were already Catholics, albeit Catholics who had fallen into certain errors from which they required to be purged. In later years, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the higher authorities of the Catholic Church itself adopted a far more rigorous position, in general forbidding all *communicatio in sacris* with Orthodox Christians.³⁹ This is reflected in the way matters were being treated by the Malta Inquisition Tribunal, from the times of Inquisitor Verallo, who was the direct representative of the Holy Office in Malta. In the earlier years of the rule of the Order of St John (1530-1798) the diocese appears to have taken little notice of the directives sent from Rome and persisted in its more tolerant attitude as far as the Greek rite clerics declared to be Uniates and not schismatic Orthodox Christians. The diocesan view must however have changed drastically by the times of Bishop Mgr David Cocco Palmieri (1684-1711) when Gregory XIII's declaration was included in the deliberation of the Synod which he held between 22 and 24 April 1703.⁴⁰

One needs to appreciate the context in which Rome was managing its affairs at the time in question. It was a time when the Holy See hoped to gain some compensation in the East for what had been lost in Northern Europe at the time of the Reformation. At all events it is clear that the Papacy fervently desired to extend its jurisdiction to include the Orthodox world, and organized its resources of money and manpower to achieve that objective. Latin missionaries were then being sent in the Levant to win the confidence of Greek Christians. Latin priests – notably members of the Society of Jesus – were at the time aiming to foster 'a Catholic nucleus inside the canonical boundaries of the Orthodox communion'.⁴¹ The inspiration for the Catholic clergy's activity in the East came

³⁹ C. DAVEY, *Pioneer for Unity Metrophanes Kritopoulos (1589-1639) and Relations between the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Reformed Churches*, The British Council of Churches, London 1987, 46-47.

⁴⁰ The declaration called 'Forma Professionis Fidei a Grecis Emittenda Iuxta Constitutionem S.S. Gregorii XIII', was written on alternate pages in Greek followed by Latin, and includes the Roman Rite Creed containing the *Filioque*, p.5. AAM Synodus Dioecesana Cocco Palmieri, Ms. Visitationes Pastorales XXVII (II), 3-13.

⁴¹ K.T. WARE, *Orthodox and Catholics in the Seventeenth Century: Schism or Intercommunion?*, 265.

primarily from Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino (1542-1621), himself a Jesuit, who knew Greek and was well versed in Orthodox church affairs. His zeal was inspired by his faith in the unity of the Church. For this reason he always strongly supported the Catholic missionaries, counseled and advised them, gave them his opinion on the difficult situations they encountered in their work, and spoke to the Pope on their behalf. The foundation by Pope Gregory XIII of the Greek College of St Athanasius in Rome in 1577 strengthen the hand of the Catholic Church where young Greeks were educated in all subjects but particularly theology.⁴² But the work of the Catholic missionaries was not confined to pastoral ministry and educational activities. They had instructions from Rome to do all they could to extend their influence in the Orthodox Church as a whole, in particular by backing suitable candidates for episcopal or patriarchal thrones, and preventing the election of rival, anti-Roman clergy.⁴³

The post-Tridentine popes took care, despite Spanish government interference and of Italian episcopal intransigence, to preserve evidence that papal authority was wider than the headship of the Latin rite alone: the Greek-rite clerics and monasteries of central and Southern Italy and Sicily during this period also acknowledged the Pope's supremacy.⁴⁴ The same applied to Malta of the Knights' of St John whose interaction with Sicily, Southern Italy and Rome remained very strong. There were renewed efforts to maintain relations with Eastern-rite churches in communion with Rome, or to bring them into communion.⁴⁵ Greek communities in Sicily and Southern Italy survived despite pressure from local post-Conciliar bishops to adopt the Latin rite.⁴⁶ Recognition of Roman authority could at times prove problematic, as in the case of possibly schismatic clergy to head the Maltese Greek community in the early seventeenth century. There were of course complications such as over the issue that married clergy were legitimately found among the Greeks by virtue of Greek canon law. But in the long run the Uniate minorities often lost their individual identity since they found themselves integrated within the folds of the Roman Church. As far as the Maltese Uniate minority is concerned it appears that by the seventeenth century most of its followers felt no point in remaining attached to the Greek rite which differed from the Latin one only in its form and language.

⁴² A. NICHOLS, *Rome and the Eastern Churches*, Edinburgh 1992, 282-288.

⁴³ C. DAVEY, *Pioneer for Unity Metrophanes Kritopoulos (1589-1639) and Relations between the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Reformed Churches*, 57.

⁴⁴ A.D. WRIGHT, *The Early Modern Papacy*, 18-19.

⁴⁵ A.D. WRIGHT, *The Early Modern Papacy*, 146.

⁴⁶ A.D. WRIGHT, *The Early Modern Papacy*, 147.