When Paul I came to the throne in 1796, Malta and Russia had long had a common enemy. It was the Ottoman Empire, its Muslim Turks, and its Barbary corsairs. Unlike Malta, a central Mediterranean archipelago with well-protected, deep-water harbours, Russia had been a largely landlocked country whose territorial expansion historically had tended to be across internal frontiers, from Kiev to Muscovy to Kazan. With the advent of Peter I, however, and especially after his declaration of war against Turkey and the acquisition of the Black Sea port of Azov in 1696, Russia began to nurture a naval and maritime policy. This policy was two-pronged: to the North in the struggle with Sweden for access to the Baltic; to the South in the long drawn out confrontations with the Turks in their extensive domains, hemming Russia in from the Mediterranean, and indeed from the Black Sea.

Paul I's keen interest in Malta and its Catholic, aristocratic order of chivalry, must be seen in the light of a string of earlier acquaintances, overtures and schemes of mutual interest between the Czars of Russia, on one hand, and the Knights of Malta, on the other. Two of his best known predecessors, Peter I (1672-1725) and Catherine II (1729-1796), already had set their sights on Malta, its knights and, not least, its famous fleet. Given the new-found commitment to naval and maritime undertakings, Petrine Russia now had an ideological as well as a strategic shared interest with the Mediterranean headquarters of the anti-Turkish, anti-Muslim crusaders.

From Russia's point of view, this interest was also technical and professional, in so far as the successful equipment, organization and the leadership of its own Russian fleet was concerned. This made sense, too, in the context of the Western expertise and support which both Peter and Catherine sought, coveted and to an extent emulated,
as a matter of policy. Apart from their own intrinsic merits, development and advancement were needed for Russia if she was to compete meaningfully and to restrain any adversaries, be these Swedes, Turks or Poles.

The Grand Masters, no less than the Czars, had an interest in furthering this growing relationship, constrained though they were by an imposed Western European policy of 'neutrality' in foreign affairs (except for fighting the Infidel), and generally by a statutory adherence to Roman Catholicism, the Pope being the Order of St John's spiritual head. But Russia was, of course, a Christian country, and an anti-Turkish one at that. Moreover it became increasingly, from Peter's time onwards, one of the 'Great Powers' on the continental chess-board, a position further assured to it by Catherine II.

When the victorious boyar general Boris Scheremetyev, who had planned the Azov campaign, arrived in Valletta's Grand Harbour from Rome, as Peter I's emissary, in 1698, the Spanish Grand Master Ramon Perellos had him met by a high-level caravan at sea and had a gilded carriage awaiting him ashore, together with a procession of pine torches and a platoon of guards. In the Order's magnificent conventual church during the feast of Pentecost on 18th May, Scheremetyev sat below the Grand Master under his baldacchin at High Mass and, much moved, he prostrated himself before the sacred relic of St John the Baptist, the Order's protector. On the following day, Grand Master Perellos reciprocated gifts in style when, in the Great Hall of the Council in Valletta, he awarded Scheremetyev the accolade and Gold Cross of Devotion, with permission to wear it upon his shield or banner when fighting against the Turks. This (so far, very rare) Russian visitor thus became "the first Russian Grand Cross of the Knights Hospitaller". He would hardly be the last.

Czar Peter I's interests were not that chivalrous, as Czar Paul I's may have largely been later. His instructions to Scheremetyev were to check out Malta's fleet and fortifications, and indeed formally to suggest to Perellos a combined Russo-Maltese operation against the Turks (as he duly did). But pomp, pageantry and ceremony mattered no less than the great cause at hand; the more so since France had mended its fences with the Porte.

France was a lingering background factor in Russo-Maltese relations for three main reasons: first, its eastern Mediterranean diplomacy and the growing commerce with it, which influenced Peter I;
second, its Enlightenment and subsequent revolution, which influenced Catherine II; and third, its revolutionary and territorial wars, supposedly following from the new ‘egalitarian’ philosophy of liberation, anti-aristocratic, anti-monarchical and anticlerical, which largely influenced Paul I in an opposite direction, although perhaps not altogether, given his bad treatment of the Russian nobility.

The French presence and policy put the Knights of Malta in a cleft stick situation: most of the Knights were French and many of the Order’s estates were in France, but the French Revolution had seen their confiscation, thereby impoverishing the Order, while the ideas it promoted went smack against what the Order was and had traditionally stood for since its foundation by the Blessed Gerard in the early 12th century to protect Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land. Not unlike the Templars, the Teutonic Knights and some other religiously-inspired Christian orders of chivalry, the Knights Hospitallers took vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience in the monastic tradition, but they were not estranged from the ways of the world. Although it seems Muslims and Jews were not excluded from treatment in their hospitals, they had strict codes of ethics and were brothers-in-arms in the crusade against the Muslim menace. ³

After the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin, the Muslim sultan, in 1187, the Knights repaired to Acre, from where they eventually moved to Rhodes, until driven out by the Ottomans in 1522. For nearly three centuries, they made of Malta in the central Mediterranean their main fort and bastion, stopping the Muslim advance westwards, most spectacularly in the Great Siege of Malta of 1565, and solely or jointly they repeatedly participated in forays against the Ottoman Empire, such as at the Battle of Lepanto, against the Moors and Barbary corsairs, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. They were less poor and pious by then in their courtly swagger and swashbuckling attire, moving around their splendid baroque buildings decorated with the finest painting, marble sculpture and gilded treasure; but they had held their ground until the cataclysm unleashed by the French revolution and the outstanding general which this eventually threw up, with his sights set on a domination extending from Paris to Cairo, to London, to Moscow, and still further beyond. Several French knights felt, foremost among them the well-connected Bosredon de Ransijat, that they had joined the Order to fight the infidel, not their countrymen: their deeds showed it well enough when they reneged in 1798, as Bonaparte’s fleet surrounded Malta’s harbours. ⁴
Czarina Catherine II, Paul I's mother, was, like Peter I, much interested in Malta and the Order of St John. In 1770, during the first Russo-Turkish War, Catherine tried and failed to persuade the Portugese Grand Master, Pinto, to allow the Russian fleet to use Maltese ports. In 1788, during another Russo-Turkish conflict, the French Grand Master de Rohan refused to allow Maltese galleys to cooperate with the Russian navy in its attacks on the Turkish fleets. Clearly, the Knights of Malta would not be drawn into an alliance with a non-Catholic power in a war against the decaying Ottoman Empire, when French commerce with the Near East was prospering, and the old Catholic-Muslim battle-lines certainly were not as drawn as they had used to be in the previous two centuries.

The Order was ready and willing to assist the Czarina in the technical business of training and organizing her fleets, however. Both Grand Master Pinto, in 1770, and Grand Master de Rohan, in 1789 (the year of the French Revolution) agreed to help Russia out in this. To train a squadron of Russian galleys, as requested by Catherine, de Rohan sent one of his rising stars, Count Giulio Litta. A handsome 25 year old Milanese who was Captain of the Magistral galley, the young knight dazzled Catherine, who went out of her way to compliment him. He was received, too, by the Czarevich Paul. Litta, the youngest general in the Russian service, immediately distinguished himself, particularly by his determining attack on the Swedish flagship at the Battle of Svenskund in 1790. Giulio Litta had a brother, Lorenzo, then a monsignore but, like him, on the up and up. Both would figure prominently on the Russian scene, especially after 1796, during Paul I's reign.

Catherine's interest in Malta went further than Peter's. She wanted a full diplomatic rapport, with an accredited ambassador in Valletta. She hoped, according to one British historian, "to turn Malta into a Russian satellite", employing agents and spies to establish a pro-Russian party. Those in Russian employ, under Russian influence of one kind or another or sympathetic to it, in the last quarter of the 18th century, would have included the likes of Cavalcabo, Psaro, Zahra, Lorenzi, and some others. Although the Order refrained from granting Russia full diplomatic status, a consular presence was established effectively nonetheless. A charmer when she wanted, Catherine was not easily deterred. With the Marquis Cavalcabo in 1770, she sent the vain Grand Master Pinto a flamboyant full-length portrait of herself, executed in oils by the Russian artist Dmitri Levitzki (1735-1822), and accompanied by a poem lauding the...
Grand Master. Pinto acceded to Admiral Sergius Babinkoff's proposition that Russian naval officers should complete their training on the Order's ships, and loaned him two of his knights, one of them being the Count Michele Sagramoso, to assist in the Russian fleet's reorganisation. Sagramoso, who attracted Catherine's attention, was involved in the Warsaw negotiations between 1773 and 1776 for the return of the Ostrog estates, which had been willed to the Order by a Polish nobleman in 1609, and their transformation into a Polish Priory with several commanderies and a very considerable annual revenue for the Order. Although Valletta could not be allowed to become a Russian naval base or a warehouse for her provisions, Russian ships were graciously permitted to victual at Malta from time to time. A Russian naval hospital was dedicated to the Knights, and the eight-pointed cross raised above it.

During the years he spent in Malta, the Czarina's envoy Cavalcabo received his instructions directly from Count Panin, who headed the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs in St Petersburg, and who also acted as a tutor to the future Czar Paul I. To this day, Levitzki's attractive and imposing Czarina, conveyed to Malta by Cavalcabo, hangs on display in the 'state rooms' of the President's Palace in Valletta.

The plot thickens during the reign of Paul I, which lasted from 1796 to 1801. Paul became Czar at the age of 42 after a traumatic childhood: his father had been murdered; his mother was not conspicuous for her maternal instincts. In the aftermath of the French revolution, the guillotine and regicide, Europe was in the grip of the Napoleonic wars on land and at sea, shifting alliances and counter-alliances, new ideas and uncertain futures.

In his own way, Paul was a romantic, even an idealist, although power apparently soon went to his head, as it usually does. A fixed point in the compass was, for him, the Order of St John. The Knights of Malta epitomized a good old-fashioned ethos, chivalry, refinement, gentlemanly manners, which he felt deserved to have a sobering effect on the fast changing world around him, a world seemingly gone mad. Now the Knights had been evicted unceremoniously from Malta by General Bonaparte on his way to Egypt, with a huge fleet, in June 1798, bypassing Nelson's fleet off Sardinia. Under an uninspiring Austrian Grand Master, von Hompesch, abandoned by several of his own knights, they had surrendered without much of a fight, and left, with Hompesch repairing to Trieste. Three months after their arrival in Malta, however, the French troops were
themselves besieged and sheltering behind the walls, as a result of a popular armed insurrection by the Maltese inhabitants, who on the whole had not taken kindly to their newly-arrived, demanding, demeaning and generally lawless republican masters.

Czar Paul I was concerned. He was interested. He was adamant. How could such a noble, Christian, age-old European institution be allowed to come to grief like that? What would become of it? Who would lead it? What would happen to its remaining properties, its revenues? Where would it be based? Why should the Island of the Knights, which stricti juris belonged to Naples, fall to France? Or go to Britain? Why not Russia? What was the world coming to?

Paul had long been a fan of the Knights. Giulio Litta, who became a confidante and adviser of his, wrote to Cardinal Doria saying that the Knights of St John had been an object of palpitating interest to Paul “dalla sua piu' tenera infanzia”. In his youth he had been much impressed by a voluminous work about the history of the Order of St John by the Abbe' Rene' Aubert de Vertot, published in French in 1726 and translated into English two years later. His tutor Panin saw nothing but a boy’s innocuous foolishness in Paul’s gesture when, having read this book, he decided to be a Grand Master, or pretended to have become one, “a purple bed curtain answering for a cloak”.

On becoming czar, Paul went out of his way to endear himself to the Order, lavishly endowing it with proceeds from the captured Polish Priory, which in January 1797 he officially transformed, and soon reinforced, as the Grand Priory of Russia, with a special uniform designed for Russian knights. As a result of the partitions of Poland in the mid-1790s, the Order’s Grand Priory on Polish territory, and all its revenues, had become Russian property, just when the Order’s dignity and income had been suffering one blow after another due to the confiscation of its estates on the continent by republican France. Proceeds from this to the Order’s Casa del Comun Tesoro in Valletta amounted to 300,000 crowns. The Pope, if only as the Order’s spiritual head, was not less interested. Lorenzo Litta, Giulio’s brother, was summoned from Warsaw to be the Apostolic Nuncio at St Petersburg. Both the Grand Master and the Pope wooed the Czar, who was led to believe that his chance to shine had come. It was agreed that Czar Paul I would become the ‘Protector’ of the Order of St John conjointly with the Holy Roman Emperor and the King of the Two Sicilies.

Received in audience by the Czar on 29th November 1797, Giulio
De Litta, in his capacity as the Order's 'Ambassador Extraordinary', acquainted His Imperial Majesty "with the universal wish of the whole Order that you would deign to become chief of this establishment, and accept a title so dear, and so encouraging to us all", the title being that of "Protector of the Order of Malta". As a token of gratitude and recognition, the Grand Master and Supreme Council of the Order sent Paul, through De Litta, "the Ancient Cross of the celebrated La Vallette, that invincible defender of our Island who bequeathed his name to a city which he alone has rendered impregnable". "This cross", De Litta added, "has hitherto been religiously preserved in the treasury of our Cathedral Church, as a precious monument, which constantly recalled to our remembrance the glorious military exploits performed by a Grand Master of Malta, who might properly be termed the Hero of Christianity; and now we feel a pleasure in offering it to your Imperial Majesty, as a proof of our gratitude, as a mark worthy of his piety, and as a happy presage of the renewal of our prosperity".¹¹ Nine months later (26th August 1798), in a protest against the same but by now humiliated Hompesch and his knightly entourage, we find the Grand Priory of Russia describing Bonaparte's invading republicans as "banditti a hundred times more infidel than those against whom the duties of their profession armed them".¹²

Much had changed within the space of a year. Unfortunately the text of a treaty being carried to Valletta from St Petersburg by a Polish knight, in connection with Paul's patronage, fell into Napoleon's hands at Ancona. When the French took over Malta in June 1798 the first person to be booted out was Russia's resident ambassador, Antoine O'Hara: "in an hour!", he was told.¹³

Russia joined the coalition against France. In the summer of 1797, while Malta's republican takeover was being planned in Paris and Toulon, following upon the French occupation of Corfu and the other Ionian Islands, Russia dispatched a fleet to the Mediterranean under Admiral F. F. Uschakov to check and counter French expansionism eastwards, to protect the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.¹⁴ Various exchanges, understandings and treaties now ensued between Russia, Naples, Britain and other powers uniting against the seemingly unstoppable French advances, with Russia formally joining the second anti-French 'Coalition' formed by Britain, Naples, Portugal and Turkey in January 1799, which Austria also joined. Russia's resentment of France had the better even of its traditional adversity towards Turkey.
While the allies generally recognized that strategically Malta had to be wrested out of French hands, what Paul I was more bent upon actually was, as it turned out, himself becoming the Grand Master of the Order. This prospect presented itself more clearly once Grand Master Hompesch was being held to have betrayed the Order, by giving in to the French Republic too readily and scurrying away to Trieste under Austria's wing. Ironically, the inertia blamed on Malta's first and last Austrian Grand Master, Hompesch, had been induced partly by his gratuitous belief that Russia, among others, would come to his aid and thus prevent the Order's expulsion. In fact, a number of knights had sought asylum in St Petersburg. In August 1798 the knights of what was now the Russian Grand Priory, who were by no means fully or legitimately representative of the Order as such, denounced his alleged betrayal and announced that they regarded him as "deposed from the rank to which we raised him". No longer obliged to obey him, they threw themselves into arms of their "august and sovereign Protector, Paul I, Emperor of all the Russias". Dependent as he was on Austrian asylum, Hompesch was nudged into an abdication in July 1799 by Emperor Francis II, to whom it was far more important that the Russian army in Italy be not withdrawn. The relic of St John the Baptist, before which a century earlier a Russian boyar had bowed at St John's cathedral in Valletta, was despatched to St Petersburg, where it arrived in October, and it was an exultant czar who now bowed before it - in the chapel of the imperial palace at Gatchina.\textsuperscript{15}

Paul I's declaration of 13th November 1798 began thus: "We, by the Grace of God, Paul I, Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias, in consideration of the wish expressed to us by the Bailiffs, Grand-Crosses, Commanders, Knights of the Illustrious Order of St John of Jerusalem, of the Grand Priory of Russia, and other members assembled together in our capital, in the name of all the well-intentioned part of their Confraternity, we accept the title of Grand Master of this Order, and renew on this occasion the solemn promises we have already made in quality of Protector, not only to preserve all the institutions and privileges of this Illustrious Order for ever unchanged in regard to the free exercise of its Religion, with everything relating to the Knights of the Roman Catholic faith, and the jurisdiction of the Order, the seat of which we have fixed in our Imperial residence; but
we also declare that we will unceasingly employ for the future all our care and attention for the augmentation of the Order, for its re-establishment in the respectable situation which is due to the salutary end of its institution for assuring its solidity, and continuing its utility..." 

Unfortunately for the Czar, who had himself elected Grand Master of the Order during an extraordinary meeting of the Russian Grand Priory on 7th November 1798, and a few weeks later crowned by the Archbishop of Thebes, Pope Pius VI was prepared to accept him as the Order's protector but not as its Grand Master. In Roderick Cavaliero's words: "the Knights of St Peterburg elected a Greek schismatic as head of a Roman Catholic order, an honorary Grand Cross who had never been a Knight, a married man who had taken none of the vows of poverty, chastity". Married, and with mistresses, he might have added; but that would not have scandalized some who had indeed taken such vows. Among the first to taste Paul's anger at this papal non-compliance were the Litta brothers, who quickly fell from grace.

Although Paul's attachment to the Order certainly preceded the French takeover and the Maltese insurrection in 1798, which lasted two years, it came to coincide with an unsettled state of affairs in Malta, when sovereign title to the country itself was in question. Russia thus became more than ever embroiled in the 'Malta Question', one that mostly interested France, Britain, Naples, the Order of St John, and of course Russia. Russia's naval presence in the Mediterranean and the capture of Corfu in March 1799 by Ushankov made the plot thicken further, especially in the eyes of some leading British admirals and captains, including Nelson, who strongly suspected that Russia was planning to take Malta. London was more cautious and more diplomatic, since Russian cooperation in the wars against France was appreciated, but what happened in the periphery did not always correspond to what was decreed in the metropolis. Having been duly warned accordingly, Nelson actually wrote to the Russian Admiral Ushcakov on 25th September 1799, who had dropped anchor at Palermo earlier that month, saying that he would "rejoice most cordially when we go against Malta" for he was satisfied that it was not to be taken (from France) "without more force against it". Admiral Nelson also wrote a long letter to Czar Paul I saying that Britain had no designs on Malta: she supported the Sicilian claim over it. This was in line with an understanding that
the Order should return and with a convention signed in St Petersburg on 29th December 1798 by the British Ambassador Whitworth and the Russian Chancellor Woronzow. Upon its surrender Malta would be given a garrison supplied by Britain, Naples and Russia, who would hold the Island on behalf of the Order. Orders were in the pipeline for a Russian contingent of some 3,000 troops to be sent to Malta to assist the Maltese in reducing Valletta under the command of Prince Dimitri Volkonski.18

In December 1799 the Czar’s minister at Palermo, Chevalier Italinsky, arrived in order to coordinate allied measures after Malta had been restored to the Order. He met with Maltese representatives of the towns and villages, explaining the position. Russia would be sending troops to help the Maltese and a Russian commandant or governor. In advising about the allocation of quarters, Italinsky would have the Russian contingent stationed in the fortified capital city, a proposition to which the anti-Russian British officer-in-charge, Sir Alexander Ball, strongly objected. Ball, who dearly wished to be the governor himself, did everything in his power to discourage Russian interest and a Russian presence in Malta, realising no doubt that if the Order returned, there was a pretender in waiting as its leader, one who was also the ruler of Russia, whatever the Pope might say. In January 1799 a bold but unsuccessful attempt to assault the French garrison from within the walls of Valletta had been masterminded by a former corsair and colonel in the Russian service, Lorenzi, together with a Catholic priest and some others, who had been arrested and executed by the French.19 Had Lorenzi planned to raise the Russian flag on the ramparts? Suspicions of this kind were not wanting, as each power sought pretexts, real or imagined, whereby to strengthen its hand in the eventual power-sharing arrangement over Malta. Anglo-Russian relations deteriorated to such an extent that in February 1800 the British ambassador was asked to leave St Petersburg. In July 1800, disappointed by rewards for his exertions, Paul would be prompted to abandon the Second Coalition at least partly because Napoleon had tactfully offered him Malta, together with the release of 6,000 Russian prisoners in Holland, who could form Malta’s garrison.20 In December of the same year, by which time Britain had taken hold of Malta (excluding Naples, Russia and indeed the Maltese representatives from the capitulation), Russia joined Denmark, Sweden and Russia in a treaty of ‘armed neutrality’. Paul I was hardly ‘neutral’ towards Britain. In reaction to his and the Order’s exclusion from Britain’s
new acquisition in the Mediterranean, Grand Master, garrison and all, he placed an embargo on all British ships in Russian ports, practically closing the Baltic to British commerce. In the British press, the Russian czar was denigrated as 'Crazy Paul' and caricatured as a bear; but the British would not give in easily to his demands or his blackmail.21

If Paul I really wanted to take Malta, not simply to be the Order's Grand Master, he probably lost his best chance when Admiral Ushakov's fleet, with 2,000 troops abroad, never set foot on the island, and never sailed there, deployed instead in Sicilian and subsequently in Aegean waters. It was expected, even awaited, and its would-be arrival used by Ball to try and force the French to surrender; but it never arrived, perhaps fearing a double deal, or regarding the Aegean presence as more vital. It has been suggested that Ushakov's Black Sea fleet did not go because it was in disrepair but, as Gregory has noted, why it never set sail for Malta in any weather remains something of a mystery. Circumstances – political and personal - prevented the blockading British fleet from being omni-present in Maltese waters, but whenever the blockade slackened some French supply vessel was likely to reach the besieged French garrison under General Vaubois. By the time one of the czar's generals, Baron Sprengporten, could go out with the intention of becoming its Russian governor, Malta had been occupied by the British. No Russians would be allowed to land; nor indeed had any Russians assisted in the insurrection; their assistance in Malta was no longer needed, least of all by the British. Russia's absence from Maltese shores at a time when its presence was being solicited by Admiral Nelson, at least formally, brings to mind a later notable passivity or hesitancy: that's when Mussolini's well-equipped Italian navy did not sail to take a largely undefended Malta in June 1940. By the time an Italo-German invasion plan was hatched, circumstances had changed remarkably.22

Twists and turns in policy, for which Paul I's reign is known, clearly were not a monopoly of the Russian throne. Whether Paul really wanted Malta at all or not, his burning desire to see her restituted to the Order of St John did become a distinct possibility shortly after his own macabre assassination. More than anyone else, he surely had prepared the path for it. Article X of the Treaty of Amiens in 1802 prescribed that Malta would return to the Order under the protection of the Great Powers, including Russia, subject to certain conditions. The British held they would rather see Russia present there than France, if peace could thus
be achieved and assured.

By 1803, however, Napoleon’s behaviour and their second thoughts made them change their mind again. Instead of evacuating their forces, they decided that they would stay in Malta themselves, alone, indefinitely - an occupation that was not internationally consented to before the Treaty of Paris in 1814 and ratified at Vienna in the following year. By that same dispensation, the Ionian Islands also went to Britain, mistress of the seas. Paul’s son and successor, Alexander I, renounced to the grand mastership of the Order on assuming the throne in 1801, and the Pope had by then named a successor to Hompesch.\textsuperscript{23}

The Order may have been granted a reprieve through Czar Paul I’s protection when it most needed support, but it still ended up wandering from place to place, sometimes haltingly, until it eventually quartered and settled on a site in Rome, where it thrives to this day, responsible for many philanthropic activities throughout the world. More recently it has revived some of its historic associations with Malta, a sovereign state in her own right since 1964, when the British flag was finally lowered.

Paul I’s reign has been the subject of various studies, old and new. His Malta focus was a rather central one, but it needs to be seen in a broader context. The two overriding factors would seem to have been the growing Russian naval and mercantile interests in the Mediterranean region, about which Norman Saul has written,\textsuperscript{24} mingled with the fascination exerted by an order of chivalry epitomizing Christendom which over the centuries confronted the spread of Ottoman power and of Islam.\textsuperscript{25} At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, a third underlying factor was the threatening revolutionary republican upsurge, leading to widespread warfare and continental upheaval, a perfect antithesis to what the Knights of Malta had represented in their quaint citadels, where they too were elitist and despotic after all.

One biographer has seen Paul I as the first of a series of Russian rulers attempting “to cope with a radically modernizing world through an essentially conservative ideology”.\textsuperscript{26} Others, in search of coherence or rationality, have been more inclined to be dismissive.\textsuperscript{27}

In so far as Maltese-Russian relations are concerned, these were never so close as they were during his reign but, certainly, without being limited to it, before or after (as could be seen from an excellent exhibition mounted some years ago by the Valletta-based Russian cultural centre at the President’s palace). Two of the Order of St John’s most precious icons brought to Malta from Rhodes - that of Our Lady of Philermos,
which used to be housed in the chapel of the conventual church; and the
baptizing hand of St John the Baptist, which was placed in that church's
oratory - were sent to Russia after the fall of Malta to Napoleon.

Writing in 1999, the Cambridge historian Riley-Smith noted that
these were later transferred to Belgrade and are now in Montenegro.²⁸
Perhaps in time - without being disparaging to Islam - they might be
regarded as a reconciliatory offering to Catholic-Orthodox exchanges
over the years.

Notes
¹ Commissioned for a congress on art, history and architecture in St.
Petersburg, this paper by Professor Henry Frendo first appeared in the
Russian history journal Ruskii Vopros (Brno, Czech republic), 2002,
n.3.
² R. Cavaliero, The Last of the Crusaders (London, 1960), 104. On this
visit see also G. Schembri, The Malta and Russia Connection (Malta
1990), 5.
³ For a short illustrated account see J. Riley-Smith, Hospitallers: The
History of the Order of St John (London 1999).
⁴ See for example C. Testa, The French in Malta, 1798-1800, (Malta
1997).
⁵ R. Cavaliero, The Last of the Crusaders, 160.
⁶ E. W. Schermerhorn, Malta of the Knights (London 1929), 283-284.
⁷ On all this see i.a. A. Vella, Malta and the Czars (Malta 1965), 17-20,
and D. Gregory, Malta, Britain and the European Powers, 1793-1815
(London 1996), 104-105. An unpublished dissertation by a former
student, E. Micallef Valenzia, Aspects of Russo-Maltese Relations,
1770-1994 (Univ. of Malta, 1995) contains a reproduction of the
portrait, f.2.
⁸ M. J. Rouet de Journel, Nonciatures de Russie d'apres les documents
authentiques (viii), q.a. A. Vella, Malta and the Czars, 23, ftn.1.
⁹ See Histoire des Chevaliers Hospitaliers de Saint Jean de Jerusalem,
appele' depuis Chevaliers de Rhodes et aujourd'hui Chevaliers de
Malta (Amsterdam, 1772, 5 vols).
¹⁰ E. M. Almedingen, So Dark a Stream (London 1959), 23, ftn.2.
¹¹ See the text (English translation) in G. Schembri, The Malta and
Russia Connection, 86-87.
¹² Ibid, 88.
¹³ F. W. Ryan, The House of the Temple : A Study of Malta and its


15 See the text (in English translation) in G. Schembri, he Malta and Russia Connection, 79

16 Ibid., 238.


18 For details about this aborted uprising see C. Testa, op. cit., passim.

19 D. Gregory, Malta, Britain and the European Powers, 15.


22 The way in which Britain acquired possession of Malta from Naples continued to be debated in Maltese and indeed in Italian historiography, in the latter case especially during the Fascist period. For an earlier academic Maltese version see for example Mgr Alfredo Mifsud's Origine della soveranità inglese su Malta (Malta 1907).

23 See i.a. N. Saul, Russia and the Mediterranean, 1797-1807 (Chicago, 1970)


27 J. Riley-Smith, Hospitallers, 55.