# STORJA 2015

## **STORJA** 2015

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## Preface: On Resuscitating a History Journal

## Henry Frendo

Having founded *Storja* as the journal of the University of Malta's History Society way back in 1977/8 upon coming down from Oxford, with the support of the then Professor of History the late Andrew P. Vella, I am pleased and honoured to write this preface at the invitation of its new editor Mark Aloisio and his board.

Dr Aloisio is a onetime member of the Society and a contributor of the article in the journal's 1996 edition entitled 'From Jerusalem to Valletta: The Evolution of the Order of St John's Chapter-General (1131-1631)'. So too are two members of his team. Emanuel Buttigieg, who was an MUHS committee member, and authored the article 'Church Bells and Street Fighting: Birkirkara and Don Joannes Matheo Camilleri (1545-57) in 2008, in the journal's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition. Stefan Cachia, another Committee Member, wrote about marriage in Late Medieval Malta 1486-1488 in the 2011 edition.

Storja's history has been one of hiccups for political and logistical reasons but I am glad to see it is back on track, and I wish it many more years of regular publication. Its purpose has been to offer researchers, sepecially but not only history students, an early opportunity for - and an introduction to - the disciplined skills of history writing and divulgating research findings.

The 30<sup>th</sup> edition listed the main articles published since 1978 as well as the composition of largely student-driven committees and editorial boards, with Charles Dalli and Charles Cassar in editorially supportive roles. As editor I could never rely on any funding so we depended on the occasional sponsorship and on sales. The first edition, which included an interview with Archbishop Sir Michael Gonzi, had sold best of all.

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I understand that all these contributions have now been digitised and placed on line.

This 2015 edition, after an interruption of seven years, contains an emphasis on early modern history, especially the Great Siege of 1565 on its  $450^{\text{th}}$  anniversary.

By way of a backdrop to what would follow, a contribution by Kate Fleet of Cambridge University takes us back a little earlier than that, to the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. The driving forces behind Sultan Mehmed II's Mediterranean policy were strategic and economic, largely paving the way to a continuum and indeed an escalation in Muslim-Christian rivalry and vice-versa in the following century and indeed beyond it.

We have three articles related to the Great Siege of 1565 (18th May - 7<sup>th</sup> September). One, in Italian, is by Federica Formiga, from a somewhat Italian and bibliographical perspective. Although in his seventies, the Sultan Soleyman 'the Magnificent' would not renounce the idea of enlarging his empire 'e Malta rappresentava la base per invadere l'Italia'. She quotes, inter alia, Balbi di Correggio, Onorato de' Medici and Vincenzo Laurenza. In his letter to Pope Pius IV, La Vallette held, in a typically Christian vs. Muslim strain and to arouse support, that 'la Cristianita' tutta deve essere liberata da queste crudelissime oppressioni'. She even cites popular poetry to show how other nations were much interested in Malta's role and fate. She adds that some 120 texts were published in Latin, Italian, Spanish, German, French, English and Greek about the 1565 event, spreading 'la fama della vittoria' in the 16th century. 'Non ci fu forma artistica che non sia occupata dell'assedio perche' come scrisse Voltaire "Rien n'est plus connu que le siege de Malte".'

In a revisionist mode Victor Mallia-Milanes questions the actual impact of this legendary epic posture in the context of a continuing Ottoman resilience in Mediterranean warfare after 1565. The siege did not really 'break the advance of the Ottoman Empire into the Western Mediterranean', he holds, citing examples of subsequent successful

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raids. However, Balbi di Correggio's assertion that it was Suleyman's 'dearest wish to capture Malta' is not to be under-estimated. While no empire takes kindly to defeat, the event may not be said to have remained so unaddressed in official Ottoman circles as we may have been led to believe by 'Malta yok' rhetoric (where is Malta?). At an academic conference in Izmir in 2010, in his paper 'The Great Siege of Malta (1565): New Information from the Ottoman perspective', Professor Akif Erdogru showed how the Great Siege was held to have been 'one of the most cumbersome and large-scale campaigns led by the Ottomans in the Mediterranean during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.' The attempt to take Malta as a priority negatively affected other Ottoman foreign policy interests in the Balkans and North Africa. Erdogru was basing his script on archival sources from the proceedings of the Ottoman High Court for 1564-1565, the Muhimme Defterleri. He was unaware of Arnold Cassola's work in this area (listing many Turkish participants) until I alerted him to it. What was at stake in 1565, Mallia-Milanes concludes, was not the Christian cause or Malta's, but the Hospitallers' 'risk of total extinction'. In other words they were fighting for their own survival, which is also true.

Mariana Grech gives a different perspective in her article 'Gozo after the Siege of Malta', basing herself on the acts of Notary Tomaso Gauci. This mainly contains an account of how Gozo sought to recover from the devastating attack on it and its population by the Turkish admiral Sinam Pasha and the corsair Dragut in 1551 after these had failed to take the Maltese citadel of Mdina. Demographically and culturally instructive, this assault of 1551 in Gozitan history was almost certainly more of a 'great siege' than that of 1565.

A telling entry is that by Iona Caruana on the matrimonial bed an expression of the customary marriage *mentalite*' in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Malta. Based on notarial archives, this article is a fascinating read, almost a throw-back to Vico's '*verum factum*' principle in his *Scienza Nuova*. In more mundane terms it brought to mind the evocative re-enactments of early modern marriages in Malta periodically staged in the square at Bubaqra, complete with notarial deed, period attire and musicians,

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even an *ghannej* for good measure, dowry readings and ritualistic manifestations, sheets and mattresses included. We also get the window sill with its pot of basil (*habaq*) plant, to indicate that the maiden inside was ready for marriage if a suitor presented himself. At Bubaqra he invariably does. Whether that was always so is a moot point. Security and status were part of all this; in other words, of course, it was not simply about going to bed - as implied by Favray's well-known  $18^{th}$  century painting 'The Visitors'.

Timothy Gambin's story about HMS Olympus - 'a tale of tragedy and heroics' – is historic in its own right but more so because it ties up with the discovery of the submarine itself off the Gozitan coast in recent years. Apart from the submarine's story in war, it highlights the value of marine archaeology as a source of knowledge, and of wonder. Based on his Andrew Vella Memorial Lecture in 2013, Gambin's work and career show what a very long way he has come since I had first met him years ago as an evening student in history. In further research undertakings about the Olympus story I was also delighted to note his collaboration with Joseph Stephen Bonanno, who wrote a first-class Honours thesis about the Four Lawyers in mid-19th century Malta. History pays (don't get me wrong; life is not all about money).

A seventh contribution, by Stefan Aquilina, brings us into the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a different way. Called 'The Manoel Theatre Academy of Dramatic Art: 1977-1980', this expose' focuses on the valiant attempts made at producing a professional Maltese theatre through this nascent Academy, the main life-blood of which was Mario Azzopardi, greatly helped along by a small team of British 'theatre-makers' – above all Adrian Rendle, and Peter Cox.

One arresting statement, not solely applicable to the theatre, to the art of acting or to the crop of very valid artists produced, is that from Robert Gagne's study *The Conditions of Learning*.

'Learning', he writes for the edification of us all, 'is a change in human disposition or capability, which persists over a period of time, and which

is not simply ascribable to processes of growth.'That 'learning' includes attitudes of precision, carefulness, competition and compromise.

I have no doubt that *Storja* will be injecting its fair share of learning and motivation among history students, practitioners and other readers of this very worthwhile surviving journal, which deserves every encouragement from students in different disciplines, members of the academic corps and the general public.

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## Editorial

## Editorial Board

"Nothing is better known than the siege of Malta". So runs the oftquoted statement by Voltaire; a statement which resonates with the popular perception of a siege which is often depicted as game-changing and described, in view of its attributed importance, as 'great'.

Irrespective of one's perceptions about the siege of 1565, it undoubtedly marks a useful milestone and historical marker in Maltese history and that of the Order of St John – the two groups which formed the main part of the victorious besieged and which claimed the laurels for that victory. For generations, the Order of St John and at least a vocal segment of the Maltese population lauded the military feats and acts of heroism carried out during the battles which spanned that summer 450 years ago. Romanticised images of the siege in art and literature helped to establish a perception of 'greatness'; a perception often reinforced by research assessments of the siege and its impact.

The siege of 1565 is arguably the single most popularly ingrained event in the historical consciousness of the Maltese, and at least for some an important ingredient in the formation of national identity. Consequently it is also a most potent rallying point for recalling the importance of history both as an academic discipline as well as a tool for understanding the present and glimpsing at the future hoping, to paraphrase Santayana, not to repeat the same mistakes. As such it resonates with the aims and objectives of the Malta University History Society, in particular the "oal to disseminate historical knowledge, promote historical research and encourage interest in history whilst ensuring that the discipline remains pertinent and relevant to Maltese society in general and University students in particular. History as a subject is hardly allocated more than forty-five minutes per week in schools. Besides, over the years, whenever curriculum restructuring was on the agenda, authorities have

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toyed with the idea of allocating the subject a yet more reduced share of the weekly timetable if any at all. The possibility of reducing history to an elective subject which students can opt to learn or not, especially in the senior schools at secondary level has also been mentioned. So far, thankfully, none of these threats have materialised. The relevance (one could equally use the term 'value' which is likely to strike a higher cord with the more economically minded) of history as a discipline goes beyond mere knowledge about past events. Of course history forms a country's and its people's identity as well as their political, social, economic and cultural structures, and consequently the knowledge of one's history implies an improved familiarity with oneself. Historical heritage (whether in its material and therefore tangible form as well as in its more transient counterpart such as food, local traditions, language and so on) is also a main tourist attraction. In a country where tourism constitutes a significant contribution to the Gross Domestic Product, historical heritage, and therefore its history, is a valuable asset in itself. It is consequently strange or incomprehensible that history as a discipline is not given more importance and consideration. It is equally incomprehensible how one can conceive the idea that history as a discipline should be further marginalised at secondary school level.

The early twenty-first century conflicts (which pit extreme fundamentalist Islam against various sundry alliances composed of moderate Muslims and the so-called Western democracies including the historically Christian states of Europe) should serve as a potent reminder of the ever existing risk that intercultural encounter evolves into intercultural conflict particularly in the presence of fiery spiteful discourse by charismatic leaders. Such discourse echoes the language used to fuel (and justify) the crusading spirit and associated military exploits of both Christians and Muslims in the centuries that followed the sermon of Pope Urban II in Clermont in 1095, and amongst which the siege of 1565 stands as one of the later episodes of a long blood stained list of wars. The relevance for our times of the study of those historical events, the circumstances which created them and the impact thereof shouts out loud for all to hear. Mindful of the above, whilst keeping in view last year's 450th anniversary since those fateful events, the Malta University History Society focuses this issue of its periodical journal *Storja* to assess the siege within the grander scope of things. Indeed, five articles out of seven seek to contextualise the so-called Great Siege of Malta of 1565.

The use of the adjective 'great', of course, represents the subjective attribution, to the qualified term, of qualities of eminence, superiority, impressiveness and importance when compared to the norm. It therefore follows that the juxtaposition of the words 'great' and 'siege' to identify the 1565 Ottoman siege of Malta implies a judgemental consideration of that siege whether in terms of the events which characterized it or in terms of its impact. The greatness of the siege is the subject matter of two articles in this edition of Storja. Victor Mallia Milanes reassesses the importance of that siege by questioning received perceptions about the significance of the successful defence of the Maltese Islands against the onslaught of the Ottoman forces by looking at both the short and long term impact for the Order of St John and the Hospitallers, for Malta and the Maltese, for the persona of Grand Master la Valette. Beyond the political rhetoric about the potential impact of a hypothetical Ottoman victory on Christian Europe, he argues that the real significance lay in the survival of the Order of St John and its acquisition of 'sovereignty', its permanence in Malta and the the physical, social, cultural and structural transformation of the Maltese islands. The 'greatness' of those events is an attribution by contemporary chroniclers, later historians and popular perception. Federica Formiga, on the other hand, does not hesitate to describe the siege as "great" and contextualises the Voltairian statement about the popularity of the siege in Early Modern Europe by noting that by the end of the sixteenth century at least 120 texts were written in Latin, Italian, Spanish, German, French, English and Greek to celebrate the victory against the Ottoman armies and that no artistic medium was exempt. Their leitmotif, she notes, was the perceived greatness and importance of that victory and the divine intervention which produced it.

Kate Fleet does not discuss the siege of 1565 itself, nor does she dwell on the sixteenth-century Mediterranean, but rather on the strategic

expansion of the Ottoman Empire under Mehmed II. Yet, the article does let transpire that the Ottoman onslaught of Malta in 1565 fits within the grand scheme of Ottoman expansion which had its origins more than a century earlier and continued, albeit at a slower pace well into the seventeenth century. That expansion was motivated by strategic and economic interests achieved through shrewd political considerations, military prowess, ability to manipulate the divisions between the multitude of small political and religious actors in the central and eastern Mediterranean and balancing between ruthless military conquest and soft rule of conquered populations.

Mariana Grech and Iona Caruana seek to offer a glimpse into the social life of the Maltese during the second half of the sixteenth century. Beyond the immediate disruption caused by the siege, life continued as usual in particular on the island of Gozo. Grech shows that that island was still recovering from its own (more devastating) attack fourteen years earlier and was relatively unscatched by the battles of 1565. The social-economic picture continued to be dominated by agriculture, social hierarchies delineated by the dichotomy between lessors and lessees, and for the more entrepreneurial (and non-risk averse) amongst the upper strata investment in the *corso* or wheat importation industries. Caruana on the other hand portrays the bedroom as an expression of inequalities: male versus female where the bedroom is depicted as a female niche in an otherwise masculine world; and wealth versus poverty where the bedroom became a window for the ostentation of one's affluence or the implicit lack thereof.

Two articles look at histories unrelated to the siege of 1565. The Second World War was, in a way, a second siege for Malta. Equally beleaguered, and likewise at least for some long tracts of the war, unable to be supplied, whilst being under constant bombing, it once again brought the horrors of war to Maltese shores. Of course there were substantial differences between the two sieges: the magnitude of the war, the much wider theatre of operations, the technologies used and their capability to kill, the role the islands played, the ideological beliefs over which the war was fought and so on. However, the tragedy associated with the loss of life remained (and remains) constant. Timothy Gambin's article on HMS Olympus brings together all these in one narrative: the history of a submarine and its crew which met death off the coast of Malta on 8 May 1842.

Finally, the tragedies of war make space for the much lighter tone of the theatrical stage or rather the early history of the Marcel Theatre Academy of Dramatic Art; in Stefan Aquilina's words an attempt to fill the void of "full time theatre context" in Malta. Aquilina explores the political (what he calls national) as well as the artistic dimension of the setting up of MTADA. Set up through the joint effort of the British Council, the Ministry for Education and the Manoel Theatre, MTADA is portrayed as having strong links with the Ministry for Education and participated in the "broader national movement that identified language as an ideal indicator to mark the emerging nation's collective identity". Beyond the political dimension, MTADA introduced the professional element in local theatre through the provision of technical and attitudinal training improving the quality of local theatre in general and that of the Manoel Theatre in particular.

And so *Storja* continues to weave its own history as always providing space for young graduates and professional historians alike to publish their research; thus giving its small contribution to the further development of history as a discipline in the Maltese islands by encouraging new blood (with apologies for the pun given the subject matter of this issue) and new insights into local historical research.

As another issue of *Storja* is published, we need to thank all those who helped make this possible in one way or another. Our gratitude goes to the contributors without whose papers this volume would not exist. We also need to thank all those members of the Department of History, as well as students, present and past, who gave a helping hand along the way. Last, but certainly not least, we need to thank the sponsors without whom this volume would not have been possible: Mrs Monique J. Grech, the Janatha Stubbs Trust and The Alfred Mizzi Foundation. Their assistance is very much appreciated and acknowledged.

## Godfrey Wettinger - A tribute

On Friday 22 May 2015, Maltese history lost one of its most distinguished exponents: eminent scholar Godfrey Wettinger.

Professor Wettinger is of course best known for his research on Medieval Malta in particular for the discovery of the oldest poem in the Maltese vernacular - Pietro Caxaro's Cantilena - which he discovered and published with Fr Mikiel Fsadni. Other seminal works include: *The Jews of Malta in the Late Middle Ages, Slavery in the Maltese Islands, Place-names of the Maltese Islands* and *The Arabs in Malta*. He was also a main contributor to the debate about the dis/continuity in Malta during the so-called Arab phase of Maltese history.

Maltese history was his life. He lectured at the University of Malta for over thirty years, and after retirement continued to frequent the University of Malta to keep in touch with the latest developments in the field.

Always eager to share his knowledge and approach to the discipline, Professor Wettinger instilled in his students an inquisitive mind that is never content with received knowledge or what appears obvious. He taught them to continuously ask questions and to leave no stone unturned.

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## The Siege of Malta, 1565, Revisited

## Victor Mallia-Milanes

I

It was a fearsome spectacle of violent determination, of pikes and flashing scimitars, of muskets, bows and arrows, of howling men, thousands of them, in colourful turbans waving banners and invoking divine assistance in their imminent *jihad*, and of Janissaries,<sup>1</sup> the Ottoman Empire's elite and most disciplined standing force of infantrymen, indeed its armour of self-confidence. The formidable Ottoman armada,<sup>2</sup> under the command of Piãle Pasha, with Mustafa Pasha as general of the land forces, to be joined later by Dragut's corsair fleet and that of Hasan Pasha of Algiers, arrived at the shores of Hospitaller Malta on 18 May 1565. The next day, some 23-25,000 Turks disembarked. To resist them were 500 Hospitallers and some 8,000 men.

Ten painfully long days later, the siege of the small fort of St Elmo had begun, marking the first phase of this epic drama. St Elmo fell on 23 June, ironically on the eve of the feast of St John the Baptist, the Hospital's patron saint. The next Ottoman targets were Fort St Michael on Senglea and the bastion defended by the langue of Castile in Birgu.

It seemed only a matter of time before the central Mediterranean island, small, weak, and barren, would fall once more in Muslim hands, and its governing body, the military-religious Order of St John, now under the leadership of Jean de la Valette, would be permanently relegated to a fossilised past. In the last thirty years the Ottomans had twice emerged triumphant over the Hospitallers - at Rhodes in 1522<sup>3</sup> and at Maghribi Tripoli in 1551.<sup>4</sup> Malta would be the third occasion. Four months later, in the second week of September, however, that same mighty armada and what had remained of its men, horses, and war *matériel* retreated from the island's shores and, with all their hopes frustrated, sailed back home

— in haste, as the autumn storms in the Mediterranean were approaching, and in shame, as the resistance the small, accessible, vulnerable island offered them was a hideous blow to Ottoman pride and prestige.

The great Spanish relief force under Don Garcia de Toledo had arrived on 7 September,<sup>5</sup> signalling the lifting of the siege. By then 'both besiegers and besieged had in fact reached the same pitch of exhaustion'.6 This time the Turks failed to achieve their ultimate goal to take Malta and destroy the chivalric institution of 'corsairs parading crosses'7 that for centuries had been harassing their men, women, and children, sacking their villages, blatantly interrupting their trade and commerce, interfering with their supplies, and inflicting heavy losses on their shipping. They left behind a tragic sight, whose realism would have stung Stendhal's acute psychological finesse into immediate action - a ravaged countryside, a putrid stench of death with rotting corpses littering the whole place, a trail of smoke, dust, and widespread devastation, and crowds of people, most of them badly wounded, chanting the Te Deum solemnly amid scenes of horror, sorrow, and jubilation at the conventual church of St Lawrence in the tiny coastal city of Birgu. 'Never,' confessed Francisco Balbi di Correggio in his diary, 'did music sound so sweet to human ears as did the peals of our bells on this day.'8 With Spain's naval forces and the Order's three well-armed galleys around,<sup>9</sup> it is curious why the Turkish armada was allowed to sail out of Marsamxetto harbour unchallenged. If it is correct to assume that Don Garcia had had instructions not to engage the enemy, but simply to relieve the Hospitaller island 'by a show of force',<sup>10</sup> then why did he set off for the Levant, in mid-September, 'in the hope of capturing at least some of the Turkish round ships in the rear of the [retreating] armada'<sup>11</sup>?

Basing himself on Spanish and Italian primary sources and other secondary literature, Fernand Braudel points out that 'alarming reports' had been spreading from as early as January 1565.<sup>12</sup> Indeed. A cursory survey of *Codex* 91 of the *Libri Conciliorum*, the records of the Order's Ordinary Council meetings kept at the National Library of Malta in Valletta, confirms that for the knights, the siege could not have been too

much of a surprise. The relevant minutes of the Council meetings are being reproduced in table-form below.

	The Hospital's Ordinary Council Minutes
	recording the 'alarming reports'
	of 1565 and related matters
1565	
19 January	Soldiers recruited in Naples and Sicily to serve in Malta; other
1) January	defence measures taken for an eventual Turkish assault.
	AOM,* cod. 91, fol.143v; Bosio,* iii, 496.
7 February	Chapter-general postponed ( <i>prorogata est</i> ) to 18 February. Three
· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	days later postponed again to first Sunday in May because of
	current rumours of a Turkish invasion.
	AOM, cod. 91, col. 144; Bosio, 495.
10 February	A general tax of 30,000 gold scudi imposed on all priories to
	finance further defence measures.
	AOM, cod. 91, col. 144; Bosio, 495.
23 March	Reports of a very likely assault reach Council.
	AOM, cod. 91, col.148; Bosio, iii, 498.
10 April	Council seeks detailed information as to the exact number and
	quality of servants in the employ of the Hospitallers;
	Council orders all servants who could not bear arms, and all
	Maltese and foreign donne di malaffare to leave for Sicily.
	AOM, cod. 91, col.150; Bosio, iii, 501.
17 April	Council decrees that a roll-call should be made of all knights and
	servants-at-arms residing at the auberges, and that these should
	examine carefully the state of their arms, etc, both defensive and
	offensive.
20 4 11	AOM, cod. 91, col.151; Bosio, iii, 504.
30 April	Chapter-general again postponed to the first Sunday in July.
4 More	AOM, cod.91, col.151v. Measures taken for a better defence of Gozo.
4 May	AOM, cod. 91, col.152; Bosio, iii, 503-504.
Ο Μον	A four-man commission assigned the task of seeing that all
9 May	provisions of wheat, barley, and vegetables were collected and
	taken to Birgu.
	AOM, cod. 91, col.152; Bosio, iii, 510.
	Nom, cou. 71, co.132, bosto, m, 510.
	[*AOM: Archives of the Order of Malta,
	National Library of Malta, Valletta
Rosio: Jacom	o Bosio, Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione et Ill.ma Militia di San
	Giovanni Gierosolimitano. Parte III. (Rome, 1602)]

If Balbi di Correggio's account of the episode is anything to go by, it was Süleyman's 'dearest wish to capture Malta'.<sup>13</sup> Not that the island itself was of any great importance to the Empire,<sup>14</sup> but it 'lay,' observes Jacques Heers, 'in the path of every Turkish raid or campaign westwards, and every time the Turks sallied forth, or returned East, they came across the Knights and their guns and ships'.<sup>15</sup>

Balbi di Correggio's diary is a first-hand account of what the sixtyyear-old Spanish arquebusier had personally witnessed during the siege. He identifies two reasons motivating Süleyman's attempt. Once Malta was in Ottoman hands, he quotes the sultan as saying, 'other more large-scale enterprises' would follow in an endeavour to realise what Süleyman's father had failed to accomplish - the conquest of Calabria; in 1480 the city-port of Otranto had already been taken (but then lost the following year).<sup>16</sup> The sequence of events subsequent to 1565 raises important questions, prompting me to challenge the authenticity of Balbi di Correggio's claim - even if only to invite historians of early modern times to rethink the narrative about these years. In 1574, the Ottomans took Tunis permanently, which lies nearer Sicily than Malta does. How many attempts did the Ottomans make to realise their objective, to seize Sicily and the whole of Latin Europe from their comfortable base in Tunis after that date? None that I know of. Why? Was there a change of heart? Did they start having second thoughts about the sanity of Süleyman's project? Were the 'strategic narrows' between Tunis and Sicily fraught with greater perils now than those between Hospitaller Malta and Sicily had been before 1565? Was it because of Malta's ever-present naval forces in the area, which tends to reconfirm the Order of the Hospital's unfailing political relevance to Europe? Lepanto, the much celebrated but meaningless Christian victory, could not have been that determining to change the course of Mediterranean history. The decisive factor, as Fernand Braudel points out, was the truce between the two major powers of the day which rendered the return of peace in the Mediterranean possible and marked the beginning of the 'naval decline' of the Ottoman empire. But that was concluded in 1581.17

There was a second reason, perhaps a more significant one as it had taken precedence in the diarist's thinking. Earlier in his account, Balbi di Correggio had underscored the sultan's increasing hatred and fury against the Order of St John<sup>18</sup> for the great and irreparable damage their piratical adventures in the Levant were causing the Empire. I am inclined to believe this to have been the sultan's true driving force. Lionel Butler once claimed that 'it is open to doubt whether they wished to acquire Malta, which they regarded as poor, unhealthy, and exposed'.<sup>19</sup> Whether Süleyman would have besieged Malta had not the knights been settled there is a moot point, certainly not an exercise in historical retrospection.

It is still not sufficiently clear why the powerful military machine of the Ottoman Empire had to wait so long to strike. The Ottoman triumph at Djerba in 1560 was a significant event;<sup>20</sup> but, like the Habsburg siege of Tunis in 1535 ('Charles V's greatest victory against Islam'<sup>21</sup>) and the battle of Lepanto in 1571, it was one without a morrow. In 1560, or perhaps the year after, the Ottomans appear to have missed a golden opportunity. The Habsburg expedition had ended up in a complete disaster, with half the armada sunk and some 600 of 'Spain's best men' lost.<sup>22</sup> The following year, Dragut destroyed seven more Spanish galleys, while in 1562, a storm wrecked what was left of that mighty armada, some 25 more galleys, off Malaga.<sup>23</sup> That would have been the right moment to strike at Malta when the Habsburgs could not have afforded to send any relief force to the Hospitaller island. With Tripoli in Ottoman hands, and Algiers, Bougie, and almost the rest of the Maghribi coast under the control of Süleyman's corsair-vassals, 'the Turks,' says André Clot, 'were masters of the sea'.<sup>24</sup> David Abulafia claims, and rightly so, that the victory at Djerba 'boosted the confidence of the Turks. They had good reason to feel that they were on the verge of a breakthrough.<sup>25</sup> Molly Greene makes a similar remark: 'The Ottomans were now firmly in control of the central Mediterranean'.<sup>26</sup>

The three remarks offer a plausibly realistic assessment of the situation, but it is not followed up by the pertinent question of *why* the Ottomans did not act then? Why did the Turks fail to exploit Spain's obvious

weakness? This seeming strategic error on the part of the Ottomans may explain their retreat empty-handed in September 1565. But appearances in the past could have been as deceptive as they can be today. There were forces at work which appear to have defied the cold logic of geo-politics and geo-strategic thinking. These may go far to convince historians that the opportunity the immediate Djerba aftermath had offered was not altogether inexplicably missed. It is one of the historian's tasks to offer explanations, to say why this or that event happened. But the reasons put forward, however plausible they may sound, may not necessarily be the real ones.

Interpretations may sound valid and convincing, and at the same time, as in the present case, be miles away from what had really motivated inaction. Some historians talk of the sultan's contemporary war against the Persians on his eastern frontier. A spirit of uncertainty, insecurity, and rebellion pervaded the empire. After the execution of Prince Mustafa in 1553, the prevailing 'fratricidal strife' between his two surviving sons, Bajazid, who had fled to Iran in 1559,27 and Selim,28 was a major preoccupation. With the Janissaries taking sides, more inclined to offer their support to the former, their loyalty to the sultan was put in doubt. The peace treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis (April 1558), which ended the 65-year struggle (1494-1559) between Spain and France for control of Italy, deprived the Ottomans of access to the safe and convenient base at the French port of Toulon, from where they could organise devastating activities against the Spain of Philip II, her trade, and dependencies.<sup>29</sup> There was, moreover, a raging famine and a plague epidemic, both of which could have disrupted the military programme. These conditions may have dictated Ottoman inaction in Western waters, indeed 'paralysing' Süleyman's movements and his ability to decide.<sup>30</sup> John Wolf further explains that without the sultan's physical presence at the theatre of war in the Western Mediterranean, his forces were 'immobilised'.<sup>31</sup> But would not the Turkish fleet under Piãle Pasha at Djerba weaken this claim? And what about the siege of Malta itself? Other than the Hospitallers, the Ottomans in 1560 had no one else to fear.

The knight Romegas, 'the most notorious' Hospitaller-pirate,<sup>32</sup> and 'the only Christian buccaneer to rival Dragut and Barbarossa in piratical panache' — perhaps an unfair assessment of the several other 'crusading corsairs',<sup>33</sup> including La Valette himself who in 1564 had authorised his nephew's expedition to seize Malvasia (Malmsey)<sup>34</sup> — made remarkably daring feats off Alexandria, preying on vessels laden with Oriental silk and other precious wares on their way to Mecca.

In these middle years of the [sixteenth] century [writes Braudel<sup>35</sup>], the boldest western corsairs were the Knights of Malta, led by La Valette, in the years 1554-1555 and by Romegas in about 1560. In 1561, the latter captured 300 slaves and several rich cargoes at the mouth of the Nile; in 1563, having set out with two galleys, he was seen sailing back to Cape Passaro with over 500 slaves, black and white and, heaped on to two ships (the rest had been sunk) the cargoes of eight ships he had captured. These prizes, the letters add, 'must have been very rich since they came from Alexandria'. In 1564, Romegas brought home three *corchapins* laden with oars, tow and munitions for Tripoli in Barbary, and a Turkish round ship of 1,300 *salme* which had left Tripoli for Constantinople with a cargo of 113 black slaves. The ship was taken to Syracuse, the *corchapins* to Naples

All these spectacular episodes, and more chilling ones besides, only provided the occasion for the siege. The true causes ran deeper and were of much longer standing. The Ottoman plans to gain control of the central Mediterranean can be traced to the mid-fifteenth century. In the first place, the conquest of Hospitaller Rhodes, a strategic gateway to the western Mediterranean, was long considered vital to the realisation of this policy. It explains the first significant attempt of 1480.<sup>36</sup> And so does the siege of Otranto that same year. The timing for both sieges appeared ripe. On the one hand, Albania had just been conquered, as had been almost the entire chain of Aegean islands, large and small.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, endemic rivalry persisted among the major centres of power on the Italian peninsula - Venice, Milan, Naples and the Papal States.<sup>38</sup> But both campaigns failed. Was Rhodes' and the Italian port-city's resistance far stronger than Mehemet II's invading force, or was

it the sultan's sudden death and the instability and fear of the unknown in the succession process that forced the Ottomans to retreat?<sup>39</sup>

Forty-two years later Süleyman succeeded where Mehemet had failed. In 1522 the knights were driven out and Rhodes turned Ottoman. Secondly, Ferdinand the Catholic's extension of the reconquista to a number of strategic points (presidios) on the western portion of the North African coast — the fortified island of Peñón de Velez on North Morocco was seized in 1507, Oran in 1509, and Algiers, Bougie, and Tripoli, all in 1510 — was in the long term a major force of permanent change. Not only did these developments promote the creation of the Barbary Regencies, enticing the Ottoman expansionist drive westward; they confirmed the great strategic potential of the central Mediterranean zone and the wisdom of Habsburg and Ottoman policy to try and gain complete mastery of it. The resultant clash between Christianity and Islam, which marked the history of the Mediterranean in the long sixteenth century, may therefore be attributed to Ferdinand's expulsion of the Moors from Granada in 1492 which inspired his ruthless realpolitik on the Maghribi coast.

## Π

Much has been written about the siege of Malta, both in its immediate aftermath and since.<sup>40</sup> Yet it would still be legitimate to ask how meaningful this siege is to the history of the Mediterranean. The year 2015 marks the 450th anniversary of this episode, which the enlightened eighteenth century considered unique and which contemporary chroniclers and later historians did not hesitate to call a great event.<sup>41</sup> This is perhaps understandable. To those who lived and witnessed directly the excitement of that savage experience with its massive loss of life, when thousands were slaughtered in the name of God, the term greatness invoked tragic drama, spectacle, heroism, and even the extreme of butchery. A similar perception is likely to be also entertained by the common man-in-the-street today, whose innocent knowledge of the episode was built on what s/he had learned in her/his early days

at school or simply through historical novels.<sup>42</sup> Interesting, exciting, and elegantly written though these may well be as literary works, they should be treated as pure fiction. The siege, no doubt, was impressive in its various manifestations — as much in the defenders' heroic resistance and in its ruthlessness and carnage as it was in the two sides' religious fanaticism and firmness of purpose to annihilate the enemy of the Faith. Moreover, the material and psychological extent of the disaster is acknowledged by the episode's absence from any narrative of contemporary Ottoman history. The event remains unaddressed in official Ottoman chronicles. Palace chroniclers did not dare, as was their traditional practice, record an Ottoman humiliation. Failure to achieve an intended purpose had to be erased from the Empire's collective memory. The chroniclers' own career, indeed their life, would have been at stake.<sup>43</sup>

However, one should sound a cautionary note here. With the development of historical scholarship, the professional historian is today familiar with the long-term perspective. To him the qualifying term (la longue durée) speaks a different dialect, devising a different vision of reality. It goes far beyond emotion and coldly poses several questions that help sustain a more meaningful dialogue with the past, not solely with the great men of the past.<sup>44</sup> Over how long a period were the effects of the siege felt? To what extent did its impact spread out through the Mediterranean, its broader, more immediate, and forcefully determining geophysical context, sufficiently to influence the prevailing conditions - by halting their development, perhaps by modifying them, or indeed by significantly redirecting them? Did the siege really break the advance of the Ottoman Empire into the Western Mediterranean? At certain levels, as will be shown, the effects remained vividly alive; at others, they soon faded out. The Order did succeed, for example, in keeping the Christian victory alive in the Hospital's collective memory and that of the Maltese as a significant event through its annual liturgical commemoration on 8 September. It is still observed today on Malta. On the other hand, to regard the siege, as some of my undergraduate students have been taught to do, as unparalleled and unequalled anywhere else is too fanciful, reaching the acme of parochialism, often the bane, unfortunately, of

Maltese historiography. Neither is it correct to claim that Hospitaller Malta was the first to show that the Ottomans were not invincible after all. That had already been spectacularly demonstrated at the siege of Vienna thirty-six years earlier, in 1529.

To consider the siege as marking the beginning of the decline of the Ottoman Empire is historically untenable.<sup>45</sup> It simply did not mark a decisive turning point in its history. It did not bring the Empire's expansionist strategies and efforts to an end. It did not mitigate the intense fear it had so severely generated throughout Christian Europe by one iota.<sup>46</sup> Nor did the frenetic pace of shipbuilding and repair activity at Galata, Gallipoli, and the other naval arsenals of the Empire slow down. Its traditional objectives and its ready access to over-abundant timber supplies and manpower continued to sustain its warlike policies and to support the construction of new galleys. Islands and coastal villages in the western Mediterranean remained as vulnerable to Muslim corsair raids as they had been before 1565, providing the Empire with a constant flow of slaves. In 1566 the Turkish fleet sailed into the Adriatic with some six to seven thousand men, ravaged the towns of Ortona-a-Mare, San Vito, and Vasto on the coast of Abruzzo, and then set them on fire.47 That same year witnessed, too, both Süleyman's massive expedition with some 300,000 men to Central Europe (Szigetvár, in Hungary) and the capture of Chios from the Genoese. Two years later the Ottoman armada sailed in defence of Muslim Sumatra against the Portuguese. By May 1570 the conquest of Venetian Cyprus was nearly complete. From Malta to Lepanto, 'the Ottomans still maintained,' notes Onur Yildirim,<sup>48</sup> 'their diplomatic relations with the principal political powers of their time in terms favourable to enhancing their supremacy against their eastern and western neighbours'. Yildirim is referring in particular to the truce with Austria and the revised terms of peace with Poland in 1568. In the summer of 1573, notwithstanding the crushing defeat the Ottomans had experienced at Lepanto, a new fleet, constructed within five to six months,<sup>49</sup> ravaged the coasts of Sicily and southern Italy,<sup>50</sup> and at the same time 'subdued' Yemen after years of revolt.<sup>51</sup> The following year, the Ottomans took Tunis and La Goulette permanently from Spain. Fez on Morocco was captured in 1576.52 To these 'astonishing achievements' should be added Murad IV's recapture of Baghdad, '22 years after it had been lost in 1617,' Crete in 1669, and in 1683 Vienna was besieged again.<sup>53</sup> If, by the later half of the sixteenth century, 'further expansion of the empire' did in fact begin to grind gradually to a halt, betraying early symptoms of decline, it may only be attributed to the death of Süleyman in September 1566<sup>54</sup> and to 'a number of fundamental weaknesses', like 'inflation and financial difficulties, rural depopulation, problems with the *timariote* system which had important social and economic consequences, undue influence of court favourites and women in the affairs of state.<sup>255</sup> Other contributory elements included the sultanate itself,<sup>56</sup> like Süleyman's own 'unworthy successor', Selim II, 'the first of the do-nothing sultans'.<sup>57</sup> These were more determining factors than the repulsion of the huge Ottoman armada at Malta, which 'merely strengthened the desire for revenge'.<sup>58</sup>

Desmond Seward puts the argument very neatly and succinctly: 'the siege had decided nothing, and the Turks completed their conquest of the Levant.'59 The 'military threat to the Christian west,' says Henry Kamen, 'continued to be very real.'60 That the need was felt to form with urgency another Holy League between the papacy, Venice, and Spain over the question of Cyprus was further proof of this. Moreover, the decline of the Ottoman Empire, like, for example, that of the Republic of Venice, was in part a relative phenomenon. The extent of one's power is measured by contrasting it with that of its rivals. One's might grows, or appears to grow, relatively weaker if that of its rivals is seen to grow stronger. If one does not keep up with the enemy's progress, one starts falling behind. In its various manifestations, the rise of the nation-state in Europe with its accompanying strengths - political consolidation, military sophistication, steady economic growth, restructure of society, and cultural development - was one major element which rendered the Ottomans weaker by comparison. The Ottomans failed to progress at the same pace as Europe.<sup>61</sup>

Within the sphere of Hospitaller history, the far-famed victory of 1565 was necessary — to revive its morale, regain its self-confidence and

sense of direction, recover its prestige, reaffirm its political relevance to Christian Europe, and reclaim its traditionally close rapport with its patrons. Ironically, it was in the Order's interest to keep the threat of Islam alive, as it alone could underscore the Hospital's political relevance and sustain its reason for existence. If there was no such threat, real or feigned, the Order would have had to create it.

Within the context of the local history of Malta, the siege had set in motion forces which not only modified the island's physical, social, and cultural physiognomy: they determined the shape and form its structural transformation would assume. As pointed out elsewhere over a decade ago,<sup>62</sup> the observations David Herlihy made on the Italian city of Pistoia<sup>63</sup> apply perfectly well to the central Mediterranean island — 'changes in the size and character of its population, the economic activities of its people in town and countryside, governmental institutions, distribution of wealth, social divisions, and culture in both its religious and secular manifestations'.

The two distinct historical contexts, the Order's and Malta's, were mutually interactive. It was in part the outcome of the siege, but to a greater extent (as will be shown later) la Valette's own failure to find a better place for his Convent, which retained the Hospitallers permanently on Malta.<sup>64</sup> In the long term, the regular flow of funds from their vast estates in Europe, channelled and invested on the island, the knights' own lavish standard and style of living, their consistent crusading activities, their wide network of diplomatic representations throughout Europe, their consular agencies set up in almost every port city in the Mediterranean, their aspirations of grandeur and claim to sovereignty — all these collectively helped to transform Malta radically for the better. By the time the French Revolution broke out in 1789 the island which the eight-man commission had visited and reported upon so negatively in 1524 was no longer recognisable. On the other hand, Malta too contributed its small, but significant, share to the Hospital. It helped the Hospitallers 'to survive' as an institution and to retain, by and large, unlike all the other military orders, its original character.65 Secondly, Malta, with its 'relatively isolated, self-contained and easily

controllable environment', helped to enhance the Hospital's 'devotional side'.<sup>66</sup> Thirdly, the island 'also gave the Order sovereignty'.<sup>67</sup> This multifaceted interaction between the two phenomena, Malta and the Hospital, may only be attributed to the outcome of the siege of 1565.

There is one other issue worth reflecting on — the controversial figure of Jean de la Valette, as he is more popularly known. No controversy surrounds his heroic performance, first, in the whole tragic drama, in forcefully leading his knightly team and Maltese subjects to withstand the Turkish-assault, and, secondly, immediately after the siege, in building the new fortress-city in all its Renaissance splendour, majesty, and elegance.<sup>68</sup> He died in 1568. His dominating physical stature, his overwhelming personality combining intelligence, religious conviction, and military discipline, elicited fear, reverence, and reassurance. He could not fail to leave a lasting impression on whoever came in his presence. His image has barely changed since then. A closer look at the true man, not at Antoine de Favray's artistic representation on canvas, where he is depicted as a demigod, but at the pen-portrait extant in surviving archival documentation, provides a better understanding of one of the most outstanding masters of the Order of St John. It reveals an underlying reality which historians had for long inexplicably tended to ignore — the Hospitaller warrior's attitude towards his principality, the negative perception he consistently entertained of Malta's potential. This is where controversy lies. He was a mortal like everyone else. He detested the island's weaknesses and the stark limitations its size inevitably imposed on the Order, too physically small and restricted to meet his grandiose ambitions. The person who is generally acclaimed as one of the island's greatest heroes, to whom a majestic bronze monument has fairly recently been erected in the heart of Valletta, did all he could within his powers to transfer his Convent to a better place. His appeal to the general-chapter in 1548 to move the Hospitaller headquarters to Tripoli is one classic example. There were others, in 1559 and 1567.69

To conclude: it has often been claimed that the knights defended the Christian cause with dedication and great determination.<sup>70</sup> However,

in the Ottoman siege of Malta, what really lay at stake was not the Christian cause. In the late fifteenth century, Venice had lost a whole string of important islands and other strategic posts, like Lepanto on the Gulf of Corinth, Modon, Coron, and Navarino, and yet Christendom remained intact. Rhodes was lost in 1522, with the leading Christian powers (the Habsburgs and the Valois) taking barely any notice, totally absorbed in making political and territorial gains on the Italian peninsula. Yet Christian Europe survived unharmed, as it would again and again after the fall of Cyprus in 1570, the loss of Tunis four years later, of Crete in 1669,71 and of the Morea late in the second decade of the eighteenth century.<sup>72</sup> So, if one strips these and similar events of all their political rhetoric, what really was at stake in 1565 could not have been the Christian cause. Nor could it have been Malta's. If the island surrendered, most of its inhabitants would have probably been put to the sword or enslaved; those spared the ordeal would have either had to await being ransomed or experience a radical cultural change, a process of Islamisation like that of other Christian islands captured by the Turks or Barbary corsairs. For two centuries from AD 870, Malta had experienced Muslim rule,<sup>73</sup> without disappearing from the map of the Mediterranean. Was not Hospitaller Malta, after all, the greatgrandchild of Muslim Malta? In the siege, what lay quintessentially at risk of total extinction was the Hospitaller institution. On this occasion, it was definitely not a question of the conventual headquarters being brutally forced to migrate to another location. It was literally a pure struggle for survival. La Valette and his knights knew very well that, if Malta capitulated to the Turkish forces, not only was there nowhere else to go, they could not expect to be treated the same way they had been on leaving Rhodes. The loss of Malta would have annihilated the Hospital completely.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Cameron W. Bradley, 'Hybrid Identities: Ethnicity, Religion, and the Janissaries in Sixteenth-Century Constantinople', in *Mediterranean Identities in the Premodern Era: Entrepôts, Islands, Empires*, ed. John Watkins & Kathryn L. Reyerson (Surrey, 2014), 53-71. Also André Clot, *Suleiman the Magnificent*, trans. Matthew J. Reisz (London, 2005), Appendix 3, 'The Janissaries', 338-39.
- <sup>2</sup> Cfr. Idries Bostan, 'Ottoman Maritime Arsenals and Shipbuilding Technology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilization*, iii, ed. K. Cicek *et al.* (Ankara, 2000), 735-744; Colin H. Imber, 'The Navy of Suleyman the Magnificent', *Archivum Ottomanicum*, vi (1980), 211-82; Andrew Hess, 'The Evolution of the Ottoman Seaborne Empire in the Age of the Oceanic Discoveries, 1453-1525', *American Historical Review*, lxxv, 7 (1970), 1892-1919; Palmira Johnson Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery* (Albany, 1994).
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, N. Vatin, L'Ordre de St. Jean de Jérusalem, l'Empire Ottoman et la Méditerranée entre le deux sièges de Rhodes (1480-1522) (Louvain, 1994); Kenneth M. Setton, The Papacy and the Levant, 1204-1571, 4 vols. (Philadelphia, 1976-84), iii, 203-216; Ettore Rossi, Assedio e Conquista di Rodi nel 1522 secondo le relazioni edite ed inedite dei Turchi (Rome, 1927); id., 'Nuove ricerche sulle fonti turche relative all'Assedio di Rodi nel 1522', Rivista degli Studi Orientali, xv (1934).
- <sup>4</sup> On Hospitaller Tripoli, Ettore Rossi, *Il dominio degli Spagnoli e dei Cavalieri di Malta a Tripoli (1510-1551)* (n.p., 1937); id., 'Il dominio dei Cavalieri di Malta a Tripoli (1530-1551) e i rapporti dell'Ordine con Tripoli nei secoli seguenti (1551-1798)', Archivum Melitense, vi, 2 (1924), 43-88.
- <sup>5</sup> See Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds (London, Collins, 1972-73), 1017-1020; John Guilmartin Jr., *Gunpowder and Galleys: Changing Technology and Mediterranean Warfare at Sea in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge,1974), 176-93.
- <sup>6</sup> Braudel, The Mediterranean, 1017.
- <sup>7</sup> This is how the Senate of the Venetian Republic dubbed the knights of Malta. See Alberto Tenenti, *Piracy and the Decline of Venice 1580-1615*, trans. from *Venezia e i corsari*, *1580-1615* (Bari, 1961) by Janet & Brian Pullan (London, 1967), 39.
- <sup>8</sup> Francisco Balbi di Correggio, La Verdadera Relación de todo lo que el anno de MDLXV ha succedido en la isla de Malta (2nd edn, Barcelona, 1568). Trans. Ernle Bradford, The Siege of Malta 1565 (London, 2003), 168.

<sup>11</sup> Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 1019.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ibid., 180-81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1015.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Balbi di Correggio, La Verdadera Relación, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Jacques Heers, *The Barbary Corsairs: Warfare in the Mediterranean*, 1480-1580, trans. Jonathan North (London, 2003), 96.

- <sup>16</sup> Balbi di Correggio, La Verdadera Relación, 32. Also Frederick C. Lane, Venice: A Maritime Republic (Baltimore/London, 1973), 236-37; M.E. Mallett & J.R. Hale, The Military Organization of a Renaissance State: Venice c.1400 to 1617 (Cambridge, 1984), 51; Colin Imber, The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power (Basingstoke, 2002), 36.
- <sup>17</sup> Braudel, 1139-1142.
- <sup>18</sup> Balbi di Correggio, La Verdadera Relación, 28.
- <sup>19</sup> Lionel Butler, 'The Order of St John in Malta: An Historical Sketch', in Council of Europe, *The Order of St John in Malta with an exhibition of paintings by Mattia Preti, Painter and Knight*, ed. Council of Europe (Malta, 1970), 23-46: 28.
- <sup>20</sup> See, for example, G. Monthicourt, *L'expedition espagnole contre l'ile de Djerba* (Paris, 1913).
- <sup>21</sup> Gábor Ágoston, 'Information, ideology, and limits of imperial policy: Ottoman grand strategy in the context of Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry', in *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, ed. Virginia H. Aksan & Daniel Goffman (Cambridge, 2007), 75-103: 98.
- <sup>22</sup> David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (London, 2011), 429.
- <sup>23</sup> Henry Kamen, *Philip of Spain* (New Haven/London, 1997), 88-89.
- <sup>24</sup> Clot, Suleiman, 172-74.
- <sup>25</sup> Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, 429.
- <sup>26</sup> Molly Greene, 'The Ottomans in the Mediterranean', in *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, ed. Virginia H. Aksan & Daniel Goffman (Cambridge, 2007), 104-116: 109.
- <sup>27</sup> See Négociations de la France dans le Levant, ed. E. Charrière (Paris, 1886), 569-570.
- <sup>28</sup> Christine Woodhead, 'Perspectives on Sūleyman', in Sūleyman the Magnificent and His Age: The Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern World, ed. Metin Kunt & Christine Woodhead (London/New York, 1995), 164-190: 178, 179.
- <sup>29</sup> See Dahiru Yahya, *Morocco in the Sixteenth Century: Problems and Patterns in African Foreign Policy* (Harlow, 1981), 33.
- <sup>30</sup> Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 989-990.
- <sup>31</sup> John W. Wolf, *The Barbary Coast: Algeria under the Turks 1500 to 1830* (New York/London, 1979), 41.
- <sup>32</sup> Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, 429.
- <sup>33</sup> For both quotes, Stephan O'Shea, Sea of Faith: Islam and Christianity in the Medieval Mediterranean World (London, 2007), 297, 298.
- <sup>34</sup> Ubaldino Mori Ubaldini, La Marina del Sovrano Militare Ordine di San Giovanni di Gerusalemme di Rodi e di Malta (Rome, 1971), 216-217, 250.
- <sup>35</sup> Braudel, The Mediterranean, 875-876.
- <sup>36</sup> See Setton, *The Papacy*, ii, 346-63.
- <sup>37</sup> Stanford J. Shaw, History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, i: Empire of the Gazis: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire 1280-1808 (Cambridge, 1976), 47-49 passim.

- <sup>38</sup> On the state of the various powers on the Italian peninsula in early modern times, Italy in the Age of the Renaissance 1300-1550, ed. John M. Najemy (Oxford, 2004); and Early Modern Italy 1550-1796, ed. John A. Marino (Oxford, 2002).
- <sup>39</sup> For an overview of Mehemet II's vast conquests, Shaw, Ottoman Empire, i, 55-70.
- <sup>40</sup> See, for example, Giacomo Bosio, Istoria della Sacra Religione Gerosolimitana di Rodi e di Malta, iii (Rome, 1620), books xxiv-xxxiii; Pierre Gentile de Vendôme. Della Historia di Malta (Bologna, 1566); C.S. Zabarella, Lo Assedio di Malta (Turin, 1902); J.F. Guilmartin, Gunpowder and Galleys (Cambridge, 1974), 176 et seq.; Braudel, The Mediterranean, 1014 et seq.; Kenneth M. Setton, The Papacy and the Levant, 1204-1571, 4 vols. (Philadelphia, 1976-84). The siege is discussed in vol. iv. See also Victor Mallia-Milanes, 'The Birgu Phase in Hospitaller History', in Birgu: A Maltese Maritime City, ed. L. Bugeja, et al (Malta, 1993), i, 73-96; Stephen C. Spiteri, The Great Siege. Knights vs Turks mdlxv: Anatomy of a Hospitaller Victory (Malta, 2005).
- <sup>41</sup> That is how the Turkish invasion of Hospitaller Malta gradually came to be popularly known as the Great Siege.
- <sup>42</sup> These include, for example, Nicholas Prata's Angels in Iron; David Bell's Ironfire: An Epic Novel of Love and War, also titled The Sword and the Scimitar; James Jackson's Blood Rock; and The Religion by Tim Willocks. The list can be stretched indefinitely.
- <sup>43</sup> Onur Yildirim, 'The Battle of Lepanto and its Impact on Ottoman History and Historiography', in *Mediterraneo in Armi*, ed. R. Cancila, ii (Palermo, 2007), 533-556.
- <sup>44</sup> See, for example, Fernand Braudel, 'History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée', in Fernand Braudel, On History, trans. Sarah Matthews (London, 1980), 25-54.
- <sup>45</sup> For an excellent overview of the history of the Mediterranean in early modern times, Michel Fontenay, 'The Mediterranean, 1500-1800: Social and Economic Perspectives', in *Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798: Studies on Early Modern Malta and the Order of St John of Jerusalem*, ed. Victor Mallia-Milanes (Malta, 1993), 43-110.
- <sup>46</sup> See, for example, Alexander H. De Groot, 'The Ottoman Threat to Europe, 1571-1830: Historical Fact or Fancy?', in Mallia-Milanes, *Hospitaller Malta*, 199-254.
- <sup>47</sup> Salvatore Bono, I corsari barbareschi (Turin, 1964), 154-155.
- <sup>48</sup> Yildirim, *Battle of Lepanto*, 538.
- 49 Ibid., 550.
- <sup>50</sup> Shaw, Ottoman Empire, i, 179.
- <sup>51</sup> Braudel, *Mediterranean*, 1137; also Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire*, *1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (Basingstoke, 2002), 61-62.
- <sup>52</sup> See Yahya, *Morocco*, 67-68.
- <sup>53</sup> Clot, *Suleiman*, 299-300.
- <sup>54</sup> See, for example, Henry Kamen, Spain, 1469-1714: A Ssociety of Conflict (4th edn: London, 2014), 116.
- <sup>55</sup> Clot, Suleiman, 299.

- <sup>56</sup> H.G. Koenigsberger & George L. Mosse, *Europe in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1971), 194.
- <sup>57</sup> After Braudel, The Mediterranean, 1046.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Desmond Seward, *The Monks of War: The Military Religious Orders* (London, 1972), 288.
- 60 Kamen, Spain, 116.
- <sup>61</sup> See Shaw, Ottoman Empire, i, 169.
- <sup>62</sup> Victor Mallia-Milanes, 'Introduction to Hospitaller Malta', in Mallia-Milanes, *Hospitaller Malta*, 11-12.
- <sup>63</sup> David Herlihy, Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia: The Social History of an Italian Town, 1200-1430 (London, 1967), 13.
- <sup>64</sup> The Hospital's resolution to settle permanently on Malta has often been attributed to the outcome of the siege. There was a time when I, too, used to ascribe to this view until I had the opportunity to study the Grandmaster's ideas and personality more closely.
- <sup>65</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, *Hospitallers: The History of the Order of St John* (London, 1999), 116.
- 66 Ibid., 117.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid., 119.
- <sup>68</sup> See Victor Mallia-Milanes, 'Frà Jean de la Valette 1495-1568: A Reappraisal', in *The Maltese Cross*, ed. T. Cortis (Malta, 1995), 117-129.
- 69 Ibid., passim.
- <sup>70</sup> See, for example, Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, 432.
- <sup>71</sup> Shaw, Ottoman Empire, i, 212-213; Lane, Venice, 409-410.
- 72 Ibid., 410-411.
- <sup>73</sup> Charles Dalli, *Malta: The Medieval Millennium* (Malta, 2006), 51.

# The Ottomans in the Mediterranean in the Later Fifteenth Century: the Strategy of Mehmed II

# Kate Fleet

Under the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II (1444-1446, 1451-1481), the Ottoman empire greatly expanded its territories eastwards across Anatolia, north across the Black Sea and westwards across the Balkans. Part of this expansion was into the eastern Mediterranean, a zone dominated by the Italian city states of Venice and Genoa which had commercial interests and territorial holdings there. Two major calculations lay behind Mehmed's policy in the Mediterranean: strategic requirement and economic interest. From a strategic point of view, Mehmed needed to protect his territories, Ottoman commercial shipping and military transportation at sea as well as to secure his advance westwards. From an economic point of view, he wanted to control maritime trade routes and to take over commercial interests and economic assets. His strategy of conquest consisted of a combination of direct conquest, temporary tributary arrangements and more longterm alliances, and his success was due in particular to the cautious speed of conquest, the internal divisions of the region and his ability to manipulate and benefit from them.

## Strategic requirements

When Mehmed came to the throne his state was in effect divided in two, the Asian and European territories separated by the Straits which ran between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and which were both dominated by Constantinople and allowed the city to survive. The significance to the Latins of control of this waterway was recognised by Giovan Maria Angiolello, captured by the Ottomans at Negroponte (Euboea) in 1470, who regarded their inability to stop the Ottomans passing from Anatolia to Europe as a major reason for Christian failure during the crusade of Varna.<sup>1</sup> Well aware of the "great difficulties" which Latin ships in the Straits had caused his father Murad II, Mehmed was determined to remove this threat.<sup>2</sup> One of his first actions, therefore, after taking the throne was to erect a fortification, Rumeli Hisarı, on the European shore opposite Anadolu Hisarı on the Asian side, equipping it with cannon whose immense cannon balls sped along the surface of the sea "as if they were swimming".<sup>3</sup> Built "in order to deny passage to all vessels, big and small, sailing from the Black Sea toward our [i.e. the Byzantine] harbour and to provide easy passage from Asia Minor to Thrace for his [Mehmed's] troops",<sup>4</sup> this fortification secured Ottoman control of the waterway.

Mehmed's next target was Constantinople which he described in the words attributed to him by Kritoboulos, who wrote a biography of Mehmed and whom Mehmed appointed governor of Imbros (Imvroz, modern Gökçeada), as "always fighting against us, lying in wait for our goods and battening on our misfortunes and injuring us as much as possible".<sup>5</sup> For Kritoboulos, Mehmed "thought, as was true, that if he could succeed in capturing it and becoming master of it, there was nothing to hinder him from sallying forth from it in a short time, as from a stronghold for all the environs, and overrunning all and subduing them to himself".<sup>6</sup> Constantinople fell in May 1453.

With the Straits now under his control and Constantinople in his hands, Mehmed was able to turn his attention to the Aegean. The islands there posed a strategic threat. Those close to the entrance to the Dardanelles, Imbros and Limnos (Lemnos),<sup>7</sup> threatened his movement in and out of the Straits. The islands of Cyprus and Crete provided major bases for Venetian naval activity and Chios, close up to the Anatolian coast opposite İzmir, posed a potential threat as a base for hostile activity against Ottoman territory. Rhodes was a very well located base for Hospitaller operations against the Ottomans, dominating the north-south sea route and being close to the Ottoman mainland. All these islands in Venetian, Genoese or Hospitaller hands represented further danger as bases for pirates and corsairs who could operate from them with impunity. Corsairs, "noted for energy and courage", who "cut the roads and caused every kind of damage to the traders and captured the travellers"<sup>8</sup> in the estimation of Mustafa Celalzade, were supplied by the islanders of Naxos<sup>9</sup> and by the Gattilusio of Lesbos.<sup>10</sup> Catalan pirate attacks from Rhodes against Ottoman territory were one of the reasons for the Ottoman expedition into the Aegean under Yunus in 1455.<sup>11</sup> The islands also provided accessible locations for runaway slaves, a problem of economic significance in a world in which slave labour played such a major role.

Mehmed needed therefore either to conquer or to neutralise these islands. In 1455 he despatched two expeditions into the Aegean. That under Hamza attacked Chios and Kos, and that under Yunus sailed against Naxos and the islands near Rhodes,<sup>12</sup> attacking Kos but failing to take the fortress and retreating "leaving behind many Turks, some slain by the fortress's garrison" and some victims of "intestinal disease",<sup>13</sup> and taking the Genoese settlements of Old and New Phokaea on the Anatolian mainland near İzmir. Limnos fell in 1456 as did Enez (Ainos) on the north Aegean coast south of Edirne which was taken "before the explosion of cannon had even had time to deafen the ears of the effete infidels".<sup>14</sup> Although his actions resulted in the arrival of a papal fleet in 1456, the expedition was largely ineffective and sailed away again, leaving very little disruption in its wake. Lesbos was captured by the Ottomans in 1462 and its ruler, Domenico Gattilusio, "drawn into the chain of subjection".<sup>15</sup>

From early on in his reign Mehmed began to expand his territories westwards across the Balkans, conquering the Peloponnese (Morea, Mora) and moving through Serbia, Bosnia and into Albania. Ottoman forces even raided Friuli, appearing within sight of Venice itself. In 1480 an Ottoman fleet under Gedik Ahmed Paşa, described by Angiolello, who was later to serve with him, as a much loved and brave man,<sup>16</sup> took Zakynthos (Zante), Cephalonia, where the population, having lost faith in the administration, sued for peace,<sup>17</sup> and, defeating all in his path, Venetian, Genoese, French or Spanish,<sup>18</sup> Lefkas (Lefkada, Santa Maura, Ayamavra), from where he sent the population to Istanbul.<sup>19</sup>

Mehmed had Italian ambitions. In 1472, after the fall of Negroponte, Venice noted "the threatening advance" of the Ottomans towards Italy.<sup>20</sup> As early as 1463, Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga had written from Rome to his father Lorenzo II, saying that Mehmed had conquered Bosnia and "many hold that, unless the Turk is strongly opposed, in less than a year and a half he will take a great part of Italy".<sup>21</sup> Slightly later than Gonzaga had predicted, Gedik Ahmed Paşa sailed across the Adriatic in 1480 and captured Otranto, "the key to Italy".<sup>22</sup> Sigismondo de'Conti noted the suspicion that the hand of Venice lay behind this attack, a suspicion he could not himself, however, confirm.<sup>23</sup> That Venice was in fact implicated in some way is supported by Setton who has noted that "If they [the Venetians] did not in fact encourage the sultan to attack southern Italy, they certainly kept his secret".<sup>24</sup> Having taken Otranto, the Ottoman forces quickly rebuilt it, strengthening its defences with walls and a double ditch<sup>25</sup> before conducting raids against Brindisi, Lecce and Taranto. For contemporaries, the war for Italy had now begun<sup>26</sup> and many feared for the fate of the peninsula.<sup>27</sup>

The Peloponnese, with its abundance of provisions and its location, was an essential base for Mehmed in his advance westwards and its conquest was "of the first importance, because of the war against the Italians he was planning for the near future".<sup>28</sup> But the Peloponnese was also an essential part of Venice's trade set up in the eastern Mediterraean and Venice held Negroponte and Modon (Methoni) and Koron (Koroni), "the right eye of Venice",<sup>29</sup> on the southern tip of the Peloponnese. These locations, together with Crete and Cyprus, gave Venice naval dominance in the Aegean. Venice had major commercial interests in the region and these bases were essential for their protection. From the Ottoman point of view Venetian dominance in the eastern Mediterranean was not acceptable while Ottoman advance there and in the Peloponnese greatly threatened Venetian trade. The result was a war between Venice and Mehmed which broke out in 1463. According to Sphrantzes, the Venetians planned the war against the sultan "in order to take over the Morea by all possible means".<sup>30</sup> In a letter dated May 1459 to the Franciscan preacher, Jacopo della Marca, papal nuncio in the March of Ancona, Bessarion wrote from Ferrara about the situation

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in the Peloponnese, and described the great wealth of the region, noting that "that country can support fifty thousand horsemen without having to seek food from any other source",<sup>31</sup> the importance of provisioning troops being stressed also by Bartolomeo Minio, *provveditor* and *capitanio* at Napoli di Romania (Nauplia, Nafplio) in a report to the Senate in which he stated that the Ottomans were determined to seize territory in order to prevent soldiers from surviving there.<sup>32</sup>

The war was ultimately concluded, most unsatisfactorily from a Venetian point of view, in 1479 when, "showing inferiority and shame", the Venetians "threw themselves on the mercy of the sultan", as the Ottoman grand *vezir* Karamanlı Nişancı Mehmed Paşa put it.<sup>33</sup> The war cost Venice heavily both in terms of territory, the Serenissma loosing Limnos, Shkodër in Albania and lands in the Peloponnese, and money, the financial settlement imposed being a substantial one for Venice but "less that a simple, salty drop in the great sweet water oceans"<sup>34</sup> for the Ottomans according to Mehmed Paşa, but one which the Ottoman ruler nevertheless accepted "graciously and with great pleasure",<sup>35</sup> symbolising, as it did, a humiliating defeat for the foremost Mediterranean naval power of the period.

Venice had lost Negroponte in 1470 when Mehmed had despatched 100 ships, "the smallest [of which] resembled a mountain"<sup>36</sup> to the "country of the evil one"<sup>37</sup> and when fighting had been so intense that combatants were "hair to hair, beard to beard",<sup>38</sup> but retained control of Crete (until 1669), Cyprus (until 1571) and Modon and Koron (until 1500). From a strategic point of view, Mehmed in fact had no need to conquer these places, an undertaking which would in any case have been extremely difficult to pull off. Venice was sufficiently weakened by defeat in the war and had no interest in provoking further hostility. It needed its commerce and was already having to pay heavily to maintain and protect it,<sup>39</sup> and thus a peaceful modus vivendi with Mehmed was its only option.

For the Ottomans reaching such a modus vivendi was easier to organise with the Genoese and was implemented much earlier and without resorting to any major military operations. Mehmed's relationship with the Genoese was less confrontational, partly due to the greater accommodation which Genoa, or more precisely the Genoese colonies, had traditionally pursued with the Ottomans and also due to the smaller level of Genoese activity in this period. Chios was put under pressure early on in Mehmed's reign when in 1455 Hamza demanded payment by the Chiotes of 40,000 ducats owed to Francesco de Draperis, a major Genoese alum merchant who held the concessions for alum mines in Ottoman territory<sup>40</sup> and who was described in the instructions given by the Venetian Senate to Lorenzo Moro, envoy to Mehmed II in 1451, as "Genoese and a subject of the emperor of the Turks". Moro was instructed, among other things, to get Mehmed or Ottoman officials to force Francesco to pay a Venetian, Giovanni de Mercato Novo, who had conducted business with Francesco through a factor called Domenico de Magistris, the considerable sum of money he owed him.<sup>41</sup> Anxious to ensure a peaceful co-existance with the Ottomans, the Genoese decided on a tributary arrangement and Chios, "the right eye of Genoa",<sup>42</sup> thus remained in their hands until finally falling to the Ottomans in 1566. Genoese compliance, and payment of a considerable annual sum, was in many ways far more satisfactory for Mehmed than being forced to launch a full-scale attack on the island, in the process possibly (though probably not) provoking a response from Genoa and being left with the need to invest resources in retaining the island. For the success of his strategy in the eastern Mediterranean Mehmed did not need to occupy the island but compliance from those who did.

Relations with the Hospitallers were a different issue. The Hospitallers were a hostile presence close to Ottoman mainland territory. Rhodes, a magnate for "disruptive" Franks from Genoa, Venice and other places and a "source of evil and sedition and a gathering point for the people of immorality",<sup>43</sup> was the stronghold of the Hospitallers who "wander night and day and pillage on the face of the sea".<sup>44</sup> The island was, as Caoursin noted, a most suitable naval base and an excellent location from which to attack the Ottomans.<sup>45</sup> From here the Hospitallers preyed on Ottoman shipping and seized Muslim pilgrims.<sup>46</sup> Tansel argues that its location between Istanbul and Egypt rendered its capture essential

for the conquest of Egypt,<sup>47</sup> which actually fell to the Ottomans in 1517, three years before Rhodes. There is evidence that at the end of his reign, Mehmed was contemplating an attack on the Mamluks,<sup>48</sup> which, if so, would have made capture of Rhodes of importance not just for his Aegean policy but also for any land campaign to the south. In any case, the location of Rhodes and the presence of the Hospitallers meant that, as Kemalpaşazade remarked, it had "become necessary to eradicate this base of sedition".<sup>49</sup> A large force of ships and 30,000 men, according to Oruç,<sup>50</sup> were despatched to Rhodes in May 1480<sup>51</sup> under-the-command-of-Mesih-Paşa,-whom-Spandounes noted-"was of the house of Palaiologos" and his relative, having been captured together with his two brothers at the fall of Constantinople.<sup>52</sup> Mesih Paşa's expedition was, however, unsuccessful, a failure for which contemporaries held him responsible,<sup>53</sup> and he was forced to withdraw in "defeat and shame"<sup>54</sup> after a siege lasting 89 days.

# **Economic motivation**

Mehmed's conquests in the Mediterranean were not motivated solely by strategic concerns, for Ottoman conquest was, as it had been from the early days of the state, also driven by the desire to take over economic assets. As the state grew and the apparatus of rule expanded, so, too, did its need for financial reserves, giving a further impetus to conquest. Control of the Straits was not just about the safe passage between the east and west sections of Ottoman territory, but also about the ability to levy tax on all shipping passing along it to and from Constantinople, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.<sup>55</sup> The capture of Constantinople itself was also economically motivated.<sup>56</sup>

Possession of the Aegean region offered considerable economic advantages. It was a major trading zone for both east-west trade across the Mediterranean, north-south trade between Istanbul and Alexandria and the North African coast, and trade to and from the Black Sea. Its ports were lucrative sources of customs and revenue, and it was also productive in natural resources such as salt and alum. The prosperity of the region impressed Ottoman writers. Lesbos, unfortunately, as Tursun Bey sourly remarked, "in the hands of infidels and sinners",<sup>57</sup> was "a prosperous place" with "many blessings", so productive that, in the estimation of Kemalpaşazade, it "resembled the rose gardens of paradise".58 The Peloponnese, too, was "full of blessings", its sheep lambed twice a year, its rivers were the equivalent of the Nile and the Euphrates, and it was unequalled in productivity.<sup>59</sup> The commercial dynamism of the markets and ports was also noted. Rhodes was a "great business house of the wealth of the Franks"60 and Negroponte "a market place of the great merchants of Frengistan li.e. the land of the Franks]...full of valuable goods and merchandise and money",<sup>61</sup> a view supported by Kemalpaşazade who spoke of "an ancient market town...brimming over with silver and gold, every corner was full of provisions, every nook full of treasure and riches".<sup>62</sup> Conquest in the Aegean therefore offered control of trade routes and access to lucrative sources of income.

The significance of control over economic assets in the region is highlighted by the trade in alum, a fixer in dying cloth, which was produced in Anatolia and was a major export item westwards.<sup>63</sup> This trade was now in Ottoman hands and represented a highly lucrative source of income. Just how lucrative this trade was for the Ottomans is made clear in a letter written to the pope Pius II by Giovanni da Castro who discovered alum at Tolfa, near Civitavecchia, in 1461.

Today I bring you victory over the Turk. Every year he wrings from the Christians more than 300,000 ducats for the alum with which we dye wool various colours. For this is not found among the Latins except a very small quantity...But I have found seven mountains so rich in this material that they could supply seven worlds. If you will give orders to engage workmen, build furnaces, and smelt the ore, you will provide all Europe with alum and the Turk will lose all his profits. They will accrue to you and thus he will suffer a double loss. There is an abundance of wood and water there. You have a harbor nearby in Civitavecchia where ships may be loaded to sail to the west. Now you may equip a war against the Turks. These mines will supply you with the sinews of war, i.e., money, and take them from the Turks.<sup>64</sup>

The Ottoman sinews of war, which Giovanni da Castro argued would be snapped by his discovery of alum at Tolfa, were also supplied by other Aegean sources of income. The "inviting morsel"<sup>65</sup> of Enez, conquered by the Ottomans in 1456, was an obvious target. A major trading centre, it was known for "its great productivity, its favourable situation, its rich soil, and many other things".<sup>66</sup> Profiting "abundantly from commerce" with the nearby islands including Imbros and Limnos,<sup>67</sup> the river Maritza (Meric, Evros) allowed trade with the interior, as well as producing "many fish of every sort, large and small and fat".<sup>68</sup> Enez's greatest asset, however, was its salt, "the greatest resource and the one in which it overwhelmingly excels nearly all its neighbours both in wealth and in revenue is the salt that is produced there, more and better than anywhere else. By distributing and selling it through all Thrace and Macedonia, the city amasses an immense quantity of gold and silver, as it were in a steady stream".<sup>69</sup> Its harbour and rich salt mines were the major motivation for Ottoman attack, although the anger of the Ottomans over the harbouring of runaway slaves there also played a part.<sup>70</sup>

Mehmed's interest was not merely to conquer but also to maintain and develop the economic assets of the region. Having taken Constantinople, he set out to re-invigorate it and to recreate a thriving commercial centre, forcibly transferring population to the city from other parts of his empire. He showed equal concern to boost the economy of the islands, offering tax exemptions to those who wanted to go and settle on Bozcaada (Tenedos), and building a castle there to protect Ottoman commercial vessels,<sup>71</sup> a policy which quickly saw an improvement in the conditions of the island.<sup>72</sup> Samos (Sisam), taken by Mehmed in 1453, had been deserted by its population which had suffered badly from corsair attacks. Mehmed ordered the settlement of population on the island, but without great success. He therefore offered an incentive promising those who settled there exemption from taxes (*avariz-i divaniye*), resulting in a movement of people to the island from both Rumeli and Anatolia.<sup>73</sup>

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### The reasons for success

Mehmed thus had strategic and economic reasons for a campaign of conquest in the eastern Mediterranean. But why was he successful? Although not traditionally regarded as a naval power, Colin Imber remarking that "the Ottoman Empire was never a first rate sea power",<sup>74</sup> the Ottomans had taken to the sea early on in the existence of the state,<sup>75</sup> and Mehmed had a population to hand which included experienced mariners as well as Latins who moved into Ottoman employment.<sup>76</sup> The pragmatic course of conquest which he adopted in the region further facilitated his advance. Outright conquest was not always the first, or indeed initially feasible, option. Control through tribute was a common arrangement, particularly in the early stages of Mehmed's reign, and one which had its attraction both for the Ottomans and the Latins. Dorino Gattilusio, for example, held Enez under an arrangement with the Ottomans whereby he paid a percentage of the production of salt per annum plus other annual taxes<sup>77</sup> and Chios "purchased a tolerable relationship" with Mehmed by means of an annual tribute.78

A major factor in Ottoman success was the political nature of the region which prevented any unified opposition to Mehmed's advance. In this world, the Ottomans represented less an infidel and implacable enemy and more a power centre like any other. Indeed, the outlook of many of the local Latin lords was not so much couched in terms of the grand scheme of the Hospitallers waging war against the infidel or the great game of the Papacy driving forward a crusading Christendom, but in more basic terms of daily survival and retention of their island domains, and in consequence many of them appeared before Mehmed after the fall of Constantinople and offered submission. Good relations with Mehmed could ensure survival, the widow of Nerio Acciaiolo, ruler of Athens, being able to keep her position "because she had sent many gifts to the sultan in order to remain in power".<sup>79</sup>

Many turned to the Ottoman ruler in their internal power struggles, much as the Byzantines had in the previous century. Thus when Palamedes, lord of Imbroz, died, leaving Enez to his son Dorino Gattilusio II and Helena

Notaras, the widow of his other son, Giorgio, together with her children as co-heirs, the widow appealed through her uncle to Mehmed against Dorino who was unwilling to share his inheritance. She informed the sultan that Dorino was plotting against him, and was in communication with the Italians, collecting arms and hiring mercenaries and planning to place garrisons on Enez and the islands.<sup>80</sup> Thierry Gancou argues that Kritoboulos's account of these events is not convincing and that it was in fact highly unlikely that Dorino was conspiring with the Italian maritime powers or planning to overthrow his alliance with Mehmed, something he-would not have been in a position to contemplate. However, given her very weak position, Ganchou argues, this was Helena Notoras's "only card" to play when approaching the sultan for support.<sup>81</sup> Helena Notaras was the daughter of Loukas Notaras, the Megas Doux who was executed together with two of his sons by Mehmed after the fall of the Constantinople.82 Whether or not Dorino was acting as Kritoboulos describes, this event thus highlights the extent to which Istanbul was perceived as a centre to which Latin factions could turn in internal feuds and clearly illustrates the fluidity of politics in which any religious or ethnic consideration played a far less significant role than pragmatic calculations of survival.

Infighting in the Peloponnese was most useful for the Ottomans, and most irritating for the Venetians who did not want to see the area fall to Mehmed. In 1454 the Senate despatched Vettore Capello with instructions to investigate the situation there. The Doge Francesco Foscari instructed Vettore Capello that he was to "insist upon concord and agreement with respect to all existing differences" between the despots Thomas and Demetrios and the Albanians "and to contrive a sound peace and harmony between them".<sup>83</sup> In fact, such harmony and peace would have suited the Ottomans at this point too, and it was urged on them by Turahan after his successful military incursion into the region in 1454. Infighting continued, however, for the various local lords "did not realize that they resembled fish caught in the middle of the net, unaware that they are all gradually being pulled toward dry land, but which persist until that moment to pursue and devour each other, so that the little fish are eaten by the big".<sup>84</sup> Thomas Palaeologos

the despot of the Morea, transferred lands to Mehmed "as if he were handing cabbages from a garden",<sup>85</sup> Corinth, "the head of the body of the Morea",<sup>86</sup> fell and "pitiable Morea became a sheep in the jaws of a wolf".<sup>87</sup>

Mehmed was well aware of the divided nature of politics in the Latin world, both in the Aegean and even on the Italian mainland, knowing, according to Benedetto Dei, "how everything in Italy was fractured and in a state of open war".<sup>88</sup> He thus sought to play one power off against another, balancing Venice-with-support-for-Florence, for example. Apart from political allegiance, the eastern Mediterranean was also affected by religious antagonism between Greek Orthodoxy and Latin Catholicism, a further division which Mehmed understood and attempted to manipulate. In the siege of Rhodes, Mesih Pasa expected to find an island divided and "an unfaithful population, ready to rebel, terrorized by fear and easily corruptible with promises".<sup>89</sup> An appeal to such a division appears to have been part of his tactics, for, in reply to the Ottoman ambassador's call for surrender, the Grand Master's envoy replied that the Hospitallers were unafraid of Ottoman threats, adding "there is no discord between the Greeks and the Latins. We adore Christ with a single faith and sound spirit".<sup>90</sup> From an Ottoman point of view, such a religious divide continued to be perceived as a potential weapon. In 1503 Abu Bakir Darani, a captive in Rhodes, wrote to Bayezid II's son Korkud claiming that Hospitaller "tyranny" over the Orthodox population meant that the island could easily be taken.<sup>91</sup> One of the reasons for the fall of Chios to the Ottomans in 1566 was, according to Stephan Gerlach, the dislike the local population felt for the Genoese.<sup>92</sup>

Apart from such divisions, and perhaps precisely because of them, the region was a very fluid zone with constant movement from one power centre to another. Latins, such as the corsair Zuan Monaco Corsaro<sup>93</sup> and the Venetian master mariner Georgio de Tragurio <sup>94</sup> could move over to the Ottomans while Ottoman subjects could cross to Venetian service, as two "Turks", described as experts in military matters, did in July 1466.<sup>95</sup> Mehmed received information about Rhodes from Antonio Meligato, a Rhodian, and Demetrio Sofian from Negroponte, both of

whom had moved over to the Ottomans and knew the secrets of the city,<sup>96</sup> and from Boezio, an expert in munitions and "a man of astute and sharp intelligence", who had gone over to the Ottomans a long time before and lived in Istanbul where he had a wife and children.<sup>97</sup> A German, he was a man of "tall stature, elegant of aspect, eloquent and of great shrewdness",<sup>98</sup> and was much favoured by the sultan.<sup>99</sup> Boezio was later deployed in Rhodes as an Ottoman agent, popping up "unexpectedly" from an entrenchment and greeting all "as friends" and requesting to be allowed to enter the city.<sup>100</sup>

Such fluidity meant constantly shifting loyalties, such lack of constancy being exemplified by Doxa, the lord of Kalavryta in the Peloponnese, who, according to Sphrantzes, was "loyal neither to the sultan nor to the despots; not even, I believe, to God".<sup>101</sup> Alliances were not regarded as binding, either by the Latins or by the Ottomans, but as arrangements to be disposed of by the Ottomans when they felt either sufficiently strong to move to complete conquest or regarded it as expedient to do so, and to be thrown off by the Latins when they felt sure of strong external support. Local rulers could appeal, depending on circumstances, to Venice or Genoa, to the Papal forces which appeared in the waters of the Aegean under the command of Ludovico Trevisan in 1456 or to Istanbul. They could slip and slide from one side to another in an attempt to maintain a precarious hold on power as the Gattilusi did before finally loosing Lesbos in 1462 when the island was "counted among the countries of Islam", a sancak beyi, kadı, dizdar, subası and sipahis were appointed, and "the clanging and echoing of bells was replaced by the call to prayer".<sup>102</sup>

Along with the internal divisions of the region, the Ottoman pragmatic approach of progressive conquest and a clear understanding of and manipulation of the constantly shifting web of loyalties, one might argue that a further factor in Ottoman success was the policy of implementing soft rather than hard rule. Mehmed certainly had no interest in provoking unnecessary hostility among his very large Orthodox population and the policy of leaving much administration to be run locally or of incorporating the Patriarch into the Ottoman governmental system deflected potential clashes. Philippides has noted that when Mehmed took Athens, "the Orthodox clergy...gained numerous privileges under the sultan, in contrast to the conditions under Latin rule".<sup>103</sup> The Ottomans thus, as Molly Greene notes, "presided lightly over the Mediterranean world",<sup>104</sup> in part perhaps because Ottoman pragmatism and flexibility, quintessential characteristics of the early empire, were reflected in the fluidity of the eastern Mediterranean zone, a world into which Ottoman control thus fitted well.

#### Endnotes

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# *'Melita obsidione liberatur'*: il Grande assedio attraverso le Cinquecentine

# Federica Formiga

È piaciuto a Dio che quest'anno, quando l'Ordine di San Giovanni era sotto il buon governo del bravo e devoto Gran Maestro Jean de La Vallette,<sup>1</sup> il sultano Solimano<sup>2</sup> reputasse di attaccare l'Ordine. Furibondo per il gran danno inflittogli per terra e per mare dalle galere dei cavalieri dell'Ordine, il Sultano levò un immenso esercito contro di loro.

Con queste parole, liberamente tradotte in questa sede, Francesco Balbi da Correggio, archibugiere in servizio nelle truppe spagnole, incomincia la descrizione, in lingua iberica, del Grande assedio di Malta iniziato il 18 maggio del 1565 e conclusosi il 7 settembre dello stesso anno. Il testo del Baldi è tra le prime opere che descrivono il tremendo scontro tra l'Ordine di Malta e l'Impero Ottomano. Si tratta di una fonte diretta perché l'autore, già sessantenne, aveva partecipato di persona alla battaglia della quale lascia una testimonianza puntuale con descrizioni militari, tralasciando però completamente gli aspetti diplomatici. Non era la prima volta che lo schieramento cristiano e ottomano si affrontavano, ma se nel 1522 i cavalieri furono costretti a lasciare Rodi a causa dei turchi, nel 1565 non consentirono al nemico di impossessarsi di Malta. L'isola era strategicamente importante e Solimano non voleva, sebbene ormai settantenne, rinunciare all'idea di allargare il suo impero e Malta rappresentava la base per invadere l'Italia. È noto che la storia ha decretato un finale diverso e l'arte della stampa, ancora una volta, ha assolto la funzione di raccontare quanto accaduto e di celebrare la vittoria e l'Ordine di Malta. In questa sede non si vogliono ripercorre i giorni dell'assedio, pubblicati in diversi luoghi e in anni anche vicini a noi,<sup>3</sup> ma ricostruire bibliograficamente e analizzare i titoli pubblicati nel XVI secolo. Malta nel 1565 e negli anni immediatamente successivi

non disponeva di una tipografia o di botteghe in grado di stampare libri, avvisi, manifesti e opuscoli, però gli autori si servirono dei torchi stranieri per raccontare il tremendo evento.<sup>4</sup> Tra gli scrittori che si occuparono dell'assedio ci furono storiografi, poeti, commentatori; la vicenda ha inoltre trovato testimonianze a stampa in varie lingue poiché i 541 cavalieri, presenti a Malta al momento degli scontri, erano suddivisi in 8 nazioni (di Provenza, di Alvernia, di Francia, d'Italia, d'Inghilterra - un solo cavaliere, di Germania, di Castiglia, d'Aragona) e a tutti premeva far conoscere i risultati dell'impresa e il valore degli eroi.

Il racconto del Balbi venne pubblicato nel 1567 da Iuan de Villenueva ad Alcala de Henares e nel 1568 a Barcellona in una edizione riveduta dall'autore stesso: *La verdadera relacion de todo lo que el anno de M.D.LXV ha succedido en la isla de malta, de antes quelle gaffe l'armada sobre ella de Soliman gran turco* [...]. *Recogida por Francisco Balbi de Correggio en todo el sitio soldado, y en ets a segunda impression por el mismo autor revisa, emendata y ampliada.*<sup>5</sup> Il diario riporta all'inizio un sonetto di quattrodici versi scritti dall'autore e dedicati al lettore ed è introdotto da una prefazione che racconta perché i cavalieri vennero *assediati:* 

[...] l'isola di Malta fosse attaccata con grandi forze dal sultano Solimano, il quale si sentiva oltraggiato per il grave danno a lui causato, per terra e per mare, dalle galere dell'Ordine. Ciò che maggiormente lo amareggiava era il fatto che tutte le imprese contro i domini africani, mosse dal potente Re di Spagna Filippo e da suo padre, l'invitto imperatore Carlo V, fossero coronate da successo, e che sempre le galere della Religione ci avevano partecipato [...]. Né i Cavalieri di San Giovanni si erano mostrati paghi di queste vittore: avevan tentato perfino la conquista dei possedimenti turchi nell'Arcipelago, come Modione e l'isola di Malvasia [battaglia avvenuta ancora nel lontano 1517].<sup>6</sup>

Come gli altri suoi contemporanei il Balbi interpretò lo scontro e la vittoria come un momento epocale per la storia dei cavalieri e di tutto il cristianesimo. Infatti tutti i cronisti e gli storici hanno rivestito di

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un'aurea leggenda l'impresa sostenuta dai cavalieri e lo si può evincere dalla pubblicazione non solo del Balbi, ma, come si approfondirà, anche di altri suoi contemporanei come Giovanni Antonio Viperano, Umberto Foglietta, e da storici a lui successivi che hanno ripreso e ripubblicato la storia di Malta e delle sue imprese belliche.

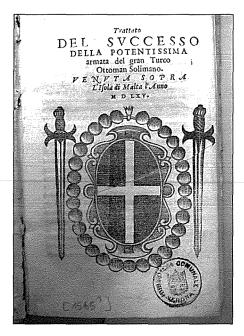
Ai posteri sono però pervenuti non solo libri a stampa, ma anche dei manoscritti di cui in questa sede citiamo Onorato de' Medici che si è occupato del Grande Assedio di Malta dedicandogli alcune pagine negli *Annali Casinensi*. L'autore entrato nella storica Abbazia di Montecassino nel 1571 all'età di 21 anni successe a don Placido Petrucci alla carica di archivista. Nel suo manoscritto (cod. Casin 681-682 QQ.), due volumi in ottavo, oltre a raccontare quanto successo a Montecassino dal 480 fino al 1610, descrive anche molte storie sul Regno di Napoli e sull'Italia. Non poteva quindi mancare una breve relazione (vol. II, parte terza, cc. 483-485) sui fatti maltesi del 1565. Il Medici si servì certamente di fonti scritte per raccontare l'assedio, ma fece anche appello alla memoria della sua adolescenza:

vivissimo, dunque, tra questi ricordi, dovette restare nella memoria di Don Onorato quello del grande assedio di Malta. Egli aveva allora 15 anni, e nelle sale del suo palazzo [...] aveva sentito narrare le eroiche gesta compiute in questa isola dai suoi e dai loro consanguinei, molti dei quali alla fede latina avevano fatto olocausto del loro sangue e della loro vita. Ecco perché, accennando alla presa di Sant'Elmo, e gli ricorda che vi furono ammazzati molti cavalieri, e tra gli altri due fratelli [...].<sup>7</sup>

Rispetto al contenuto fornitoci dagli storici precedentemente nominati il de' Medici non aggiunge nulla di nuovo, ma eguaglia la battaglia di Malta alla guerra di Cipro e a quella di Lepanto, destinando al racconto di questi altri due episodi lo stesso numero di carte riservate all'assedio.<sup>8</sup> Anche il poeta cinquecentesco Giovanni B. Mormile ha lasciato in un suo carme, intitolato *De insigni victoria contra Turcarum rates sub Joanne Austriade oratio ad Deum*, la testimonianza della vittoria dei cavalieri sui turchi scrivendo "nec non qui Meliten studio tutantur et armis, Christicolum genus electum".<sup>9</sup>

Per tornare ai testi a stampa l'importanza di quello del Balbi è essenziale per gli storici perché racconta con precisione le forze militari presenti a Malta e provenienti dai paesi europei che erano, soprattutto spagnoli e italiani; il Gran Maestro si serviva inoltre anche di schiavi, che prestavano servizio volontario sulle galere, e di circa tremila maltesi. Con queste risorse La Vallette aveva pianificato di resistere ad oltranza fino all'arrivo dei soccorsi che sin dall'autunno del 1564, venuto a conoscenza dei piani turchi, aveva iniziato a chiedere a tutta Europa. La Vallette confidava, però sbagliandosi, che l'aiuto non avrebbe tardato ad arrivare perché il ruolo della Sacra Religione gerosolimitana era quello di difesa militare della Cristianità nel Mediterraneo.<sup>10</sup> I torchi ci hanno consegnato alcune delle lettere di La Vallette e si tratta per noi di fonti primarie che rendono l'idea, dove traspare, di quanto critica fosse, fin da subito, la situazione. Le edizioni che propongono la stampa di queste lettere non sono di pregio, ma si tratta di opuscoli, due dei quali meritano però un approfondimento vista anche la questione bibliografica che li caratterizza. Il Trattato del successo della potentissima armata del Gran Turco Ottoman Solimano

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venuta sopra l'isola di Malta l'anno MDLXV, di 56 carte non numerate e non datate, è attribuito a Marino Fracasso, autore della dedica al vescovo di Agria (ora città dell'Ungheria). Il frontespizio presenta una silografia raffigurante le armi dell'Ordine e più precisamente due spade con l'elsa in alto, e fra esse la Croce bianca in campo nero (per il rosso), incorniciato e circondato da una corona di palle terminanti sopra con una fiammella. Di questo testo sono al momento noti due esemplari: uno è conservato alla Biblioteca comunale dell'Archiginnasio di Bologna e l'altro all'Universitaria di Padova il cui frontespizio però recita Il vero successo della potentissima armata di Solimano, imperatore dei turchi, venuta sopra l'isola di Malta l'anno 1565 co 'l nome delli valorosi cavalieri morti nella difesa di detta isola. Entrambi sono senza note tipografiche e si differenziano di poco (corsivo meno tendente al gotico e mancanza di divisioni di parole nel secondo esemplare). Hubert Pernot nel 1910 occupandosi della curatela de Le siège de Malte riferisce che il testo sul successo maltese ci è pervenuto sia con il nome di Pietro di Vendôme sia con quello del Fracasso senza specificare chi sia realmente l'autore e si limita a ristampare le due traduzioni: quella in francese del 1567 e quella in greco del 1571.<sup>11</sup> Inoltre i due testi degli opuscoli sopracitati non differiscono da Della historia di Malta, et successo della guerra seguita tra quei religiosissimi cavalieri et il potentissimo Gran Turco Sulthan Solimano, l'anno MDCXV. Con la descritione dell'isola et alcuni sonetti agionti pubblicato dal Vendôme e considerato il primo libro stampato sull'assedio. Il successo di questo scritto fu tale che dopo la prima pubblicazione a Roma, databile grazie alla dedica al 4 settembre 1565 e per questo ritenuta la prima edizione sullo scontro, venne riproposto nel 1567 in francese (Deux veritables discours l'un contenant le faiet entier de toute la guerre de Malte et l'autre declairant au vray les choses exploietées  $[...]^{12}$  e in greco nel 1571 (Biblionsyn Theō periechon tēs Maltas poliorkian) per opera di Antoine Achèlis, che dichiara di essersi avvalso per la traduzione del testo attribuito al Fracasso. Siamo quindi in presenza di due testi uguali con due autori e dedicatari diversi.<sup>13</sup> Infatti l'esemplare di Bologna del Trattato è stato indirizzato, come già detto, al vescovo d'Agria, mentre il De Historia è stato pubblicato con una dedica a Monsignor Ippolito d'Este e con le armi di La Vallette sul frontespizio.<sup>14</sup> Dalla lettura delle dediche si evince che i due scrittori non erano pseudonimi, che entrambi conoscevano i loro dedicatari e che il testo ebbe un notevole successo non solo da essere stampato in più sedi, ma anche utilizzato da due autori e/o stampatori diversi. L'ipotesi più probabile è che il Fracasso avesse plagiato il testo del Vendôme, il quale forse essendo di estrazione nobile, era stato il protagonista diretto di quanto raccontato e perché come cavaliere era interessato a fornire le informazioni il più possibile celebrative ed entusiastiche sull'impresa.<sup>15</sup> Francesco Sansovino nella sua Historia universale dell'origine de' turchi<sup>16</sup> attribuisce l'opera al Vandome e dello stesso avviso è Giuseppe Spadaro per il quale il Vendôme è

più dettagliato sia perché sembra conforme al vero quanto egli dice sul modo che ha raccolto il materiale e sul movente dell'opera, mentre nella dedica di Fracasso abbondano adulazioni e considerazioni generali. Se a ciò si aggiunge il fatto che a Bologna si stampa nel 1566 l'opera di Pietro Gentile e questa stessa in traduzione francese l'anno successivo e che lo storico Francesco Sansovino la ristampa nella sua *Historia universale*  senza mettere in dubbio l'attribuzione a lui, non v'è dubbio che Marino Fracasso debba considerarsi il falsario e Pietro Gentile di Vendôme, oriundo probabilmente dalla Francia ma italianizzato come appare dal fatto che scrive in italiano, sia il vero autore dell'opera.<sup>17</sup>

Entrambe le pubblicazioni riportano la lettera di La Vallette a papa Pio IV datata 19 giugno (un mese dopo l'inizio dell'assedio) nella quale il Gran Maestro, dopo aver affermato che doveva stare cauto con le parole, poiché-i-corrieri-potevano-essere-catturati, racconta-come sono riusciti a resistere ai primi assalti del turco, ma che non è merito della loro perizia militare bensì della misericordia di Dio;<sup>18</sup> però "la Cristianità tutta deve essere liberata per sempre da queste crudelissime oppressioni"19 e prevalere definitivamente. Servivano quindi aiuti e in tempi brevi per far fronte alla minaccia sempre più massiccia da parte dei turchi, nonché la benedizione papale che consentisse di resistere ai nemici. Il medesimo opuscolo raccoglie altre due lettere del Gran Maestro: una a don Garcia dei Toledo, generale dell'armata cristiana per Sua Maestà cattolica al quale sollecita l'arrivo dalla Sicilia, che però avverrà solo a pochi giorni dalla conclusione dell'assedio; l'altra invece è indirizzata sempre dal Gran Maestro al capitano d'armata Mesquieta, il quale a sua volta scrive, ai cavalieri che presidiavano, una lettera datata 25 giugno. Il testo si conclude con l'elenco dei cavalieri morti durante l'assedio.<sup>20</sup> Già nell'anno del conflitto venne pubblicato un volume a Parigi dal titolo Copie de plusieurs missives escrites et envoyees de Malte par le Seigneur grand Maistre, & autres Chevaliers de sainct Iehan de Hierusalem, à notre sainct Pere & autres Seigneurs, depuis le unziesme iusques au vint & deuziesme de septembre: portans aduis pas le menu de la honteuse departie de l'armée turquesque, & de l'honorable victoire des fideles & Chevaleureux Chrestiens.<sup>21</sup> Si tratta di 16 carte non numerate che contengono copie di alcune epistole o brevi estratti di lettere del Gran Maestro, di cui una datata 11 settembre e indirizzata al papa al quale dona il successo ormai definitivo sull'armata turca.<sup>22</sup> Il fascicolo riporta anche dei resoconti: Extrait d'une autre lettre, anuoyée du bourg de Malte le trezieme tour dudict mois de septembre e delle altre lettere, come la copia di una uscita da Malta il

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3 settembre e recante l'advis de la maniere par laquelle ladicte isle a estê miraculeusement delivrée du puissant siege des Turqs, avecq le nombre et la forme des affaux, des Chrestiens et turgs morts en iceaux, et de l'artillerie qu'ils ont laisseé: et de tout ce qui est advenu depuis le secours arrivé en l'isle, et depuis de depart de l'armée turquesque.<sup>23</sup> A questa lettera ne segue un'altra del 12 settembre scritta da Saragosse de Secile che si conclude con la dichiarazione che sono morti 313 cavalieri e che non era possibile aggiungere altro dopo il resoconto sull'arrivo a Malta di don Garcia con le forze utili ad allontanare definitivamente il turco. Anche in Italia alla fine del conflitto vennero stampati opuscoli di poche carte riportanti copie di lettere nelle quali si narrava della liberazione. La Copia da una lettera venuta ultimamente da la città di Malta nella quale si nara (!), come quella isola sia miracolosamente liberata dal potentissimo assedio del turco è stata stampata a Roma e ristampata a Bologna per opera di Pellegrino Bonardo<sup>24</sup> e anche di Alessandro Benacci. L'epistola riporta alla c. A3v la firma di Francesco di Juvara, che si prodiga a raccontare anche "quello che di seguito dopo il soccorso dato, e dopo la partita dell'armata nemica".<sup>25</sup> Benacci è stato anche lo stampatore della Copia degli avvisi di tutte le cose notabili della fortificazione di Malta, dopo l'assedio de' Turchi fin'hora, et il potentissimo sforzo dell'armata turchesca [...] e di Tutto il successo prima del duro assedio, et crudelissima oppugnatione fatta da Turchi alle marittime fortezze dell'isola di Malta, e poi della memorabile liberatione di quelle [...]. Il qual successo è stato con diligenza e sotto brevità raccolto da diverse lettere [...] che si sono ritrovate in tali imprese. Di tutti questi testi, coevi all'assedio, sono sopravvissuti pochi esemplari sebbene le numerose ristampe avute negli anni immediatamente successivi. Il quesito che si apre è quello sulla veridicità dei racconti. Infatti gli scritti pubblicati dalla fine dell'assedio si preoccuparono spesso di rivendicare la correttezza di quanto segnalato: Tre mani di veri avisi (!) circa la compita liberatione di Malta. La bona nuova dell'importante et desiderato sbarcamento dello esercito christiano nelle afflitta isola di Malta [...]. L'edizione è quasi certamente databile al 1565, forse pubblicata a Roma, visto che all'interno si legge che le notizie sono arrivate per lettera inviate da Siracusa il 15 settembre e portate a Roma il 22 dello stesso mese; le

quattro carte rassicurano sulla veridicità di quanto pubblicato così come ne L'assedio et la guerra di Malta fatta nell'anno 1565. Fedelmente raccolta da Marino Fracasso, col nome dei cavalieri morti. Il volume, di cinquantadue carte e che raccoglie rime di diversi autori in lode ai cavalieri è stato pubblicato a Novara da Francesco Sesalli nel 1566 ed è stato attribuito a Marino Fracasso, ma ancora una volta l'autore è Pierre Gentil de Vendôme. Molti sono i resoconti nei quali sono citati i nomi dei cavalieri che hanno perso la vita durante l'assedio e dove si evince la necessità di essere fedeli all'accaduto e soprattutto di dare il giusto merito a quanti persero la vita. Lo dimostrano le sette carte dedicate a Il Particulare annotamento del assedio di Malta con li nomi et cognome di cavalieri che sono morti in questo horendo assedio; con il numero de nostri soldati, morti et Turchi.<sup>26</sup> Il luogo di stampa non è noto, ma la data è 1565 come si può facilmente desumere dal contenuto che si ferma al 2 settembre dello stesso anno cioè a pochi giorni dalla felice conclusione dell'assedio.27 Le cinquecentine sopra citate non riportano nessun elemento paratestuale a corredo del testo, ma il Particulare annotamento presenta sul frontespizio uno stemma silografato non attribuibile con due abbreviazioni CO-VA.

Un'altra cinquecentina edita a pochi giorni dall'assedio contiene il breve discorso (12 cc. nn.) stampato ad Anversa da Christophe Plantin di Martin Crova: Brief discours du siege et oppugnation de l'ile de Malte. Contenant l'Histoire de ce qui s'est fait depuis l'arrivée iusques à la retraire & fuyte de l'armée du grand Turc Soliman en l'an M.D.LXV. L'opuscolo riporta la firma dell'autore, la data 19 settembre 1565 e soprattutto l'approvazione di stampa, che invece manca in tutti i testi precedentemente citati.<sup>28</sup> Martin Crova appare tradotto a Norimberga, pubblicato da Wolf Glasen, nel medesimo anno con il titolo Kurtzer ausszug der geschichten, so sich zugetragen heben mit krieksubung unnd belegerung de Insul Malta. Venne stampata molta pubblicistica anche in francese, ma si trattava di brevi opuscoli. I Discours et advertissement de ce qui est advenu a Malthe, depuis le vingtcinquiesme de Iullet iusques au vingtiesme d'Aoust, apparsi a Parigi per i torchi di Jean Dallier nel 1565 testimoniano ancora una volta come tutte le nazioni fossero interessate a quanto avveniva a Malta e che il mezzo migliore per esserne resi edotti era la letteratura di colportage, le brevi narrazioni, i pamphlet, cioè tutto quello che si poteva stampare a modiche spese e in tempi brevi. Si trattava non solo di rendere consapevoli più persone possibili sui successi maltesi, ma anche sulle azioni da parte dei turchi.<sup>29</sup> Infatti venivano stampati poemetti popolari, di pochi versi e facilmente divulgabili come il Successo de l'armata de Solimano ottomano, imperatore de Turchi, nell'impresa dell'isola di Malta; nel quale s'intende tutti gli assalti, & le scaramuccie occorse in detta impresa. Con il numero de tutti gli morti da una parte, e da l'altra;-nuovamente-posta-in-ottava-rima. Il-testo-di-otto-carte-scritte in gotico appare anonimo e senza luogo di stampa. Nel 1884 è stato ristampato dalla società Bibliofila di Torino ed è l'esempio di come anche i poemetti popolari rappresentassero un filone di informazione storica che nel tempo riscosse notevoli successi. I versi si prestavano a cantare e declamare il successo ottenuto soprattutto a partire dagli anni successivi al grande assedio quando la necessità di conoscere e l'interesse per i dettagli militari erano venuti meno. Infatti durante il 1565, come abbiamo avuto modo di esemplificare, apparvero avvisi, copie di lettere, resoconti e discorsi. Il genere ebbe fortuna soprattutto in Francia come emerge dalle ricerche catalografiche e bibliografiche grazie alle quali si segnalano almeno venti pubblicazioni di poche carte e un foglio volante<sup>30</sup> stampati tra Lione e Parigi.<sup>31</sup> Inoltre in Francia il genere del resoconto ebbe fortuna anche nei due anni successivi all'assedio. Non mancavano però esemplificazioni di composizioni in lingua latina e italiana: Poemata in laudem equitum melitensium ex variis auctoribus selecta in gratiam illustrussimi ac praestatissimi viri Petri Avilae hispani stampato, come si evince dalla dedica, a Roma nel 1566 da Giulio Accolti; oppure Ad proceres christianos cohortatio del poeta crotonese Pelusius<sup>32</sup> Janus e fatto stampare nel 1568 a Napoli presso Giovanni de Boy, stampatore nello stesso anno anche delle Odi di Giovann Battista Arcucci, che nel secondo libro dedica l'ottava ode di sessantotto versi alla "post liberatam a gravi Turcarum obsidione". Molti centri tipografici italiani si prodigarono a editare un testo che riguardasse il successo ottenuto dai cavalieri; a Pesaro uscirono infatti nel 1565 i versi del poeta di Casteldurante Baldantonio Solingo la Stanza del Solingo Durantino, in narratione degli gran fatti della guerra di Malta; le vicagioni che mossero il gran turco di armare [...].<sup>33</sup> Dei componimenti in ricordo della battaglia continuarono ad essere prodotti anche a distanza di anni dall'evento e in lingue diverse dal latino, dall'italiano e dal francese: nel 1582 Hippolyto Sans, pubblicò a Valencia per i tipi di Ioan Navarro La Maltea. En que se trata la famosa defensa de la religion de Sant Joan, en la isla de Malta [...]. L'assedio fu quindi anche ispiratore per poeti e cantastorie.

A tale genere letterario si affianca però anche quello storico perché la fama del risultato fu così evidente che molte pubblicazioni di carattere storiografico ricordano, al loro interno, la trama degli eventi e la vittoria ottenuta già a partire del 1566. Alfonso de Ulloa scrisse La historia dell'impresa di Tripoli di Barberia, della presa del Pegnon di Velez della Gomera in Africa et del successo della potentissima armata turchesca, venua sopra l'isola di Malta l'anno 1565 apparsa nel 1566 senza note tipografiche e nel 1569 ripubblicata a Venezia dai torchi degli eredi Sessa con l'aggiunta dell'impresa del Solimano effettuata in Ungheria nel 1566 e con la narrazione della sua morte avvenuta nello stesso anno.<sup>34</sup> L'opera si apre con un avvertimento di Alfonso Ulloa a chi legge: Percioche (!) in questa opera sono scorsi alcuni errori, che nello stamparsi non furono visti, così d'intorno alla locutione, come anco allo stile, & ornamento, che la historia ricerca, m'ha parso dir qui, come noi habbiamo riformato, & ridotto in perfettione non solo detta opera ma ancora fatto imprimere quel che doppo questo à Turchi è avenuto con i nostri Christiani [...]. Et hora le mettiamo in ordine per stamparle ancora in lingua Spagnuola, essendo degne di essere scritte in tutte le lingue  $[\ldots]$ .<sup>35</sup>

Il volume è ricco di apparati testuali finalizzati a glorificare e a ringraziare, a partire proprio dai versi dedicati a papa Paolo IV, al Gran Maestro e a tutti i cavalieri, il medesimo componimento è pubblicato nell'opera del Vendôme. Sempre nel 1566 venne dato alle stampe la *De bello melitensi historia* per opera di Vincenzo Castellani: una quarantina di carte pubblicate a Napoli da Girolamo Concordia. Anche questa pubblicazione non è di pregio, ma il titolo è sicuramente significativo perché l'assedio diventa la storia della battaglia per eccellenza, come se

i cavalieri non avessero mai intrapreso altre imprese. Dal punto di vista paratestuale emergono dei capilettera silografati che rappresentano dei turchi e la dedica all'Excellentissimo adolescenti Francisco Mariae Feltrio Guidonis Ubaldi Urbini principis filio. Con il medesimo titolo dell'opera del Castellani lo storico Giovanni Antonio Viperano, sempre nel 1566, fece stampare a Perugia, dall'officina di Andrea Bresciano, il suo volume, con il permesso di stampa ottenuto dall'inquisitore Nicolò Alessio Perusini.<sup>36</sup> Non ancora paghi di veder pubblicata della storiografia sul Grande assedio nel 1567, Celio Secondo Curione fece stampare a Basilea, per i tipi di Giovanni Oporino, e sempre con il titolo De bello melitensi historia, una nuova edizione arricchita nel contenuto e corredata anche dall'indice.<sup>37</sup> Il lavoro del Curione era stato pubblicato prima, come opuscolo di quaranta carte, a Pesaro dal Concordia nel 1566, poi inserito nella raccolta delle Sarracenicae historiae, che videro la luce appunto a Basilea e l'anno successivo anche a Francoforte. Da tutti questi titoli è facilmente evincibile come i vari autori mettessero in evidenza anche in altri contesti narrativi sempre e comunque l'accaduto a Malta. Anche i protestanti si prodigarono a dare notizia di quanto accaduto nell'isola ed è il caso del pastore Wil Klebitius che il 2 agosto 1565 fece stampare Insulae melitensis, quam alias Maltam vocat, Historia, quaestionibus aliquot Mathematics reddita iucundor [...]. Huic accesserunt ultimae obsidionis brevis commemoratio [...]. Uberto Foglietta nella sua pubblicazione genovese del 1585 De sacro foedere in Selinum dedica invece un capitolo all'Obsedio Melitae, che si ritrova anche nell'altra edizione genovese del 1587 pubblicata da Gerolamo Bartoli. Grazie alla traduzione di Giulio Guastavini il Foglietta venne pubblicato anche alla fine del XVI secolo e precisamante nel 1598 quando a Genova presso il Pavoni apparve la versione in volgare del De sacro foedere.<sup>38</sup> Le traduzioni erano più frequenti di quanto si possa supporre. Girolamo Alessandrini aveva pubblicato il De acerrimo et omnium difficilissimo Turcarum bello, insulam Melitam gesto, anno 1565, commentari sull'assedio e che Natale Conti ripropose sempre a Venezia nel 1566 con il titolo Commentarii Hieronymi Comitis Alexandrini de acerrimo [...]. Quest'ultima edizione ebbe una ristampa a Norimberga per i torchi di Neubero e Gerlatzen, alla quale seguì la traduzione, per i tipi di Sebaldus Mayer nel 1567 a Dillinghen, di Hyeroninus Zober, che la fece pubblicare con il titolo Warhafftige/ volkommene vnnd [und] grundtliche beschreybung derer geschichten, so sich mit der gewaltigen vnd grausamen Kriegsübungen, Belägerung, Scharmützeln vnnd Stürmmen des Türckischen Kriegsvolcks, gegen vnd wider die Insuln Maltam, im Jar 1565. Quest'ultima edizione in gotico è particolarmente pregiata, arricchita dal frontespizio rosso e nero e testimonia che il racconto sull'assedio varcò tutti i confini e, pur allontandosi gli anni dell'attacco, si continuava a citare l'evento commentandolo e riproponendolo al pubblico all'interno di racconti di guerre e battaglie. Francesco Cirni nel 1567 fece stampare i Commentarii ne i quali si descrive la guerra ultima di Francia, la celebratione del Concilio tridentino [...] e l'historia dell'assedio di Malta diligentissimamente raccolta insieme con altre cose notabili; Giulio Accolti fu lo stampatore romano di questo testo che apparve con dedica all'ambasciatore di Filippo II presso Pio V e con i privilegi del re di Francia, dei duchi di Savoia, di Firenze e di Urbino nonché della Repubblica di Genova, con lo stemma dell'Ordine sul frontespizio, in posizione però rovesciata rispetto alla silografia utilizzata nel trattato firmato dal Fracasso al quale abbiamo già fatto accenno. L'edizione del Cirni dedica un centinaio di carte alla vicenda maltese, ma soprattutto si conclude con il ringraziamento a Gesù Cristo per la definitiva estirpazione degli infedeli e degli eretici assegnando il merito dei risultati ottenuti al Concilio di Trento, nonché alle imprese belliche effettuate. Sono gli anni durante i quali l'argomento suscitava vivo interesse e attirava lettori di ogni rango, ai quali si dedicavano anche opere 'dilettevoli' o in rima scritte perché il ricordo non svanisse e tutti gli autori, storici, commentatori e letterati, si prodigavano a trovare mecenati ed editori importanti per garantire successo ai loro scritti.<sup>39</sup>

A qualche anno dall'assedio il genere del commento, pubblicato spesso in lingua latina, era quello che riscuoteva più attenzione in Italia, in Francia e in Germania: nel 1582 Claude de la Grange fece stampare a Ginevra, presso Gabriel Cartier, il *De bello melitensi* [...] commentarius. Poche pagine di commento erano state dedicate all'evento anche dall'agiografo Laurent Surius qualche anno prima, nel 1579, nel suo Commentarius brevis rerum in orbe gestarum stampato



a Colonia. Dagli anni Ottanta del XVI secolo non ci fu storico che nei propri scritti sull'Ordine di Malta non inserisse la vittoria ottenuta dai cavalieri nel 1565 o riproponesse il diario del Balbi o intitolasse, ancora nel xx secolo, i propri testi con Lo assedio di Malta come Carlo Sanminiatelli Zabarella, che nel 1902 presso la tipografia salesiana, fece pubblicare tutta la storia dell'Ordine di Malta scegliendo però come titolo il riferimento allo scontro. Il valore dell'opera del Sanminiatelli non consiste nell'aver riproposto il testo del Balbi, ma nelle quattordici zincotipie tratte probabilmente da Anton Francesco Lucini incisore di sedici lastre, pubblicate a Bologna nel 1581, sui disegni della guerra e dell'assedio dipinti nella sala del Palazzo magistrale a Malta da Matteo Perez d'Aleccio. Quest'ultimo, "artista e per alcuni aspetti visionario, ma nello stesso tempo fotografo-cronista preciso al quale non sfugge il dettaglio più minuto e più importante"40 nel 1582, anno successivo alla conclusione degli affreschi, diede alle stampe anche I veri ritratti della guerra e dell'assedio [...] all'illustrissimo et reverendissimo Ferdinando cardinale dè Medici.

Da questo breve *excursus* possiamo concludere che non ci fu forma artistica che non si sia occupata dell'assedio perché come scrisse Voltaire *Rien n'est plus connu que la siège de Malte*, sebbene la maggior parte delle edizioni riguardanti gli eventi del 1565 siano state pubblicate soprattutto dall'inizio degli scontri fino alla fine del secolo XVI. Dopo la fine del secolo non si riscontra una produzione di rilievo riguardante strettamente il Grande assedio, il cui ricordo è limitato soprattutto ai libri di storia assieme a tanti altri episodi. Fanno eccezione però la ripresa dell'opera del Balbi che nel 1796 venne riproposta con il titolo *Gloriosa defensa de Malta contra el formidable exercito de Soliman II por los caballeros de San Juan de Jerusalem*.<sup>41</sup> L'edizione è dedicata al Gran Maestro Manuel de Rohan il cui busto, affiancato da un turco in catene, è raffigurato in una calcografia all'inizio del testo.

Nei circa 120 testi emersi che sono stati pubblicati nel Cinquecento in lingua latina, italiana, spagnola, tedesca, francese, inglese e greca troviamo un filo rosso conduttore che può essere riassunto nel salmo A Domino factum est istud, et est mirabile in oculis nostris. Haec est dies, quam facit dominus, exultemus, et laetemur in ea<sup>42</sup> riportato già a conclusione del Trattato del successo della potentissima armata del Gran Turco del 1565.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Gran Maestro dal 1557 La Vallette era un abile diplomatico, precedentemente era stato nominato generale della flotta e governatore di Tripoli, si distinse per le sue abilità diplomatiche.

<sup>2</sup> Solimano I noto come il Magnifico era quasi coetano di La Vallette e in pochi anni era diventato il padrone del Mediterraneo cacciando i cavalieri da Rodi nel 1522, disfando l'impero di Ungheria e spingendosi fino alla conquista di Baghdad. Anche Francesco I di Valois aveva cercato aiuto dal Sultano per sconfiggere Carlo V; alla metà del Cinquecento rimaneva solo Malta da conquistare che, assieme all'Ungheria, dove morì nel 1566 a tre anni dalla morte di La Valette, era rimasto tra i suoi insuccessi.

- <sup>3</sup> A titolo esemplificativo si cita Francesco Balbi da Correggio, *Il grande assedio di Malta. Solimano il Magnifico contro i cavalieri di Malta, 1565*, a cura di Andrea Lombardi, Genova, Associazione Italia, 2010.
- <sup>4</sup> Per maggiori approfondimenti sull'arte della stampa a Malta si veda: Federica Formiga, *Il sudore dei torchi a Malta. La tipografia dell'Ordine gerosolimitano* (1642-1798), Pisa-Roma, Fabrizio Serra, 2012, 19-30.
- <sup>5</sup> In occasione del quarto centenario dall'assedio l'edizione di Barcellona stampata da Pedro Reigner, è stata ripubblicata con il titolo *Diario dell'assedio di Malta*. 18 maggio – 8 settembre 1565, Roma, Palombi, 1965.
- <sup>6</sup> Francesco Balbi da Correggio, *Diario dell'assedio all'isola di Malta (18 maggio 17 settembre 1565);* con un profilo storico dell'Ordine dei Malta di Geo Pistarino, a cura della Delegazione Granpriorale di Genova, Genova, [s.n.], 1995, 45.
- <sup>7</sup> Vincenzo Laurenza, *Il Grande assedio di Malta in un manoscritto cassinese del Cinquecento*, Malta, Empire press, 1933, estr. dall'Archvium Melitense, 2, IX (1933), 6.
- <sup>8</sup> La guerra di Cipro e la Battaglia di Lepanto sono descritte nelle carte 492-494.
- <sup>9</sup> Cod. Casin. 680 Q, *Carmina Johannis Mormilis Neapolitani et Monachi Casinensis*, pp. 192-201. "Un'altra relazione manoscritta dell'assedio di Malta è nel Cod. Urb. Lat. 815 a f. 385 e s'intitola 'Cause dell'impresa di Malta del 55 (*sic!*) et tutto il fatto sotto brevità". Laurenza, 7, note 1 e 3.
- <sup>10</sup> "Ricordiamo che il 1° giugno 1560 veniva emessa l'importantissima "Bolla di papa Pio IV a conferma dell'ampliamento dei privilegi dell'ordine di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano con la quale il Pontefice esprimeva all'Ordine tutta la sua gratitudine per l'opera svolta in difesa della Cristianità". Balbi da Correggio (1995), 11.
- <sup>11</sup> Pierre Gentil de Vendôme et Antoine Achélis, *Le siège de Malte par les Turcs en 1565 publié en francais et en grec d'apres les editions de 1567 et de 1571 avec 20 reproductions, par Hubert Pernot*, Paris, Libraire Honoré Champion, 1910, IX.
- <sup>12</sup> Si tratta di 88 carte pubblicate con il privilegio del re a Parigi da Nicolas du Chemin pour Jacques du Puys, librario dell'Università.
- <sup>13</sup> Una copia del testo in greco dell'Achèlis è conservato presso la Biblioteca Nazionale di Atene. Il testo fu pubblicato a Venezia da Cristoforo Zanetti nel 1571, ma non ebbe fortuna bibliografica tanto che scomparve fino al 1906 quando Émile Legrand

nella sua Bibliographie hellènique ou description raisonnée des ouvrages publiés par des Grecs aux XV et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle pubblicata a Parigi, lo definì curioso e rarissimo. Nel 1910 il Pernot lo pubblicò ne Le siège de Malte, ma da allora non ci furono più interessi sull'opera dedicata a Francesco Barozzi, nobile di origine greca, la cui famiglia aveva preso dimora a Creta. L'Achèlis per la traduzione in greco si basò per motivi non ancora chiariti, sull'edizione che è stata falsamente attribuita a Marino Fracasso. Per maggiori approfondimenti si veda Giuseppe Spadaro, "Sulle fonti dell'assedio di Malta di Antonio Achelis", O Eranistes, IV, 21-22(1966), 80 ss.

- <sup>14</sup> Il testo ebbe anche un'edizione bolognese più ampia ad opera di Giovanni Rossi datata 1566 con la dedica sempre a Ippolito d'Este, ma non è pubblicato il sonetto del Fracasso presente invece negli altri testi. Giovanni Calabritto ipotizza che l'edizione del *Trattato* sia frutto del lavoro del tipografo Alessandro Benacci visto che lo stemma dell'ordine, sopra descritto, è il medesimo degli *Avisi novi della città di Malta* [...] stampati dal Benacci a Bologna dopo il 7 settembre del 1565 (data dell'ultimo avviso). Il Benacci e il Rossi furono soci dal 1559 al 1563, poi sciolta la società entrarono forse in concorrenza e mentre il Benacci pubblicava Fracasso il Rossi si occupava di Vendôme. Per maggiori approfondimenti si veda Giovanni Calabritto, "Osservazioni e aggiunte alla bibliografia dell'assedio di Malta", Archivum melitense, IX, 1, (september 1932), 36 e ss.
- <sup>15</sup> Per maggiori approfondimenti si veda H.A. Balbi, "Some pages from a Bibliography of the Order of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem", *Archivum melitense*, 1x, 1, (september 1932), 1-33.
- <sup>16</sup> Historia universale dell'origine de' turchi, Venezia, Salicato, 1582, 415-438.

<sup>17</sup> Spadaro, 86-87.

- <sup>18</sup> Il giorno antecedente alla lettera i cavalieri avevano mietuto qualche successo in quanto avevano ucciso il vecchio corsaro Dragut Raìs, che il primo e il secondo giorno di giugno sbarcò sull'isola in aiuto dei turchi portando tutta la sua esperienza maturata sul campo durante le famose imprese a Napoli e a Reggio Calabria. Dragut nato nel 1485 era stato nominato da Solimano governatore di Tripoli strappata ai cavalieri. Era un abile corsaro, ma era anche un abile stratega in terra e quando arrivò in aiuto dei turchi a Malta era troppo tardi per rimediare gli errori dovuti alle sbagliate scelte militari compiute. Alla morte del Dragut si aggiunse quella del comandante dei Giannizzari e del Maestro generale dell'Ordinanza Turca il cui rango era secondo solo a Mustafà, nipote di Solimano e capo dell'esercito.
- <sup>19</sup> Pierre Gentil de Vendône, Trattato del successo della potentissima armata del Gran Turco Ottoman Solimano venuta sopra l'isola di Malta l'anno MDLXV, s.l., s.n., [1565?], A4v-A5r.
- <sup>20</sup> L'elenco dei morti era anche stampato singolarmente come dimostra Le nombre des chevalliers qui sont morts au siege de Malte [...], Lyon, Per Benoist Rigaud, 1566.
- <sup>21</sup> Paris, pour Dallier Libraire, demourant sur le Pont sainct Michel, à l'enseigne de la Rose Blanche, 1565.
- <sup>22</sup> La lettera al papa è stata stampata a Lione da Benoist Rigaud nel 1565 in francese e anche in italiano da tipografo ignoto.

- <sup>23</sup> I contenuti di queste lettere giravano facilmente e venivano stampate un po' ovunque come l'Advis par lettre du succes des Turcs stampato a fine luglio 1565 a Lione da
   Benoist Rigaud e contenente una lettera proveniente da Siracusa e quella già citata del Gran Maestro al papa datata 19 giugno.
- <sup>24</sup> Pellegrino Bonardo pubblica anche in 4 cc. la Copia sottoscritta d'una lettera di Toledo. Dove narra il gran preparamento de l'Armata de Prencipi Christiani, per andare ad abbassare l'orgoglio al gran Turco. Appresso d'alcune scaramuzze fatte a Malta delle genti morti di l'una et l'altra parte, con le provisioni fatte. Con licenza delli superiori. La lettera è sottoscritta da Cesar Baiani e datata 8 giugno 1565. Conosciamo anche un foglio volante contenente la copia di una Carta que el excelente señor don Garcia de Toledo escrivio dende la Canal de Malta: a los siete de setiembre al correo mayor de Napoles stampata a Siviglia en casa de Alonso de coca sicuramente nel 1565.
- <sup>25</sup> L'importanza di queste informazioni era tale che venivano stampate anche tradotte in altre lingue. Infatti Juvara aveva scritto le due lettere raccolte in un'edizione francese pubblicata da Benoist Rigaud a Lione nel 1565 e 1567 con il titolo Copie d'une lettre n'aguires venue de Malte, laquelle, contient comme celle Isle a esté miraculeusement delivrée de l'espouvantable siege des Turcs [...]. Poche carte (8), ma significative come la Copie d'une lettre fraischement arrivée de Malte par laquelle on peut entendre le nombre et la forme de tous les trescuels et tres horribles assaulx generaux apparse sempre grazie al Dallier nel 1565. Siamo a conoscenza anche dell'edizione italiana, ma non sono noti il luogo di stampa e l'editore. L'elenco di questa tipologia di materiale potrebbe essere molto lungo e poco utile ai nostri fini: si rimanda quindi a Joseph Galea, Bibliography of the great siege of Malta 1565-1965, Malta, [s.n.], [1965], pp. 50 ss.
- <sup>26</sup> L'unico esemplare da me rinvenuto è conservato al British Museum.
- <sup>27</sup> Si veda anche lo Short-title catalogue of printed in Italy and of Italian books printed in other countries from 1465 to 1600, London, British Library, 407.
- <sup>28</sup> Alla c. 12v si legge: Abbrobatio huius libelli. Per legi hanc translationem de i(')ilico in linguam Gallicam, de oppugnatione Insulae de Malta, et insigni victoria Christianorum contra Turcas, et nil continet quod pias aureas offendere potest: sic abque periculo imprimi potest. Ita esta Philippus de Almaraz XXIX octobris M.D.LXV.
- <sup>29</sup> Andrea Volpino da Castel Giuffrido nel 1566 mandò alle stampe a Perugia presso Andrea Brasciano Il successo dell'armata de Solimano Ottomano, Imperatore de Turchi nell'impresa de l'isola di Malta. Nel quale s'intende tutti li assalti, le scaramucce occorse in detta impresa, con il numero de tutti li morti da una parte, e l'altra.
- <sup>30</sup> Discours et advertissement de ce qui est advenu a Malthe, depuis le vingt-cinquiesme de Juillet iusque au vingtiesme d'Aoust, Paris, chez Jehan Dallier, 1565.
- <sup>31</sup> Joseph Galea, 50-64; per le lettere e i resoconti stampati in italiano si veda invece pp. 70-85.
- <sup>32</sup> Nel 1592 del Pelusio venne stampato a Parma da Erasmo Viotti il De Melita turcarum obsidione liberata. Il tipografo Viotti stampò anche nel 1600 i versi di Pomponio Torelli intitolati Recedentobus Turcis a Melita insula.

<sup>33</sup> Ristampato in Archivum melitense, VIII, 3 (1931), 112-177.

- <sup>34</sup> In entrambe le edizioni è dedicato spazio all'assedio di Malta a pertire dalla carta 86r.
- <sup>35</sup> Cfr. p. 14.
- <sup>36</sup> Giovanni Antonio Viperani fu un filosofo e poeta messinese. Fu regio cappellano e storiografo di Filippo II, nonché vescovo di Giovinazzo dal 1589. Non è un caso che il suo testo inizi ricordando Carlo V: "Ioanni Austro caroli V. Imp. F. Si quod unquam bellum gestum est memorabile, hoc profecto mihi dignum videtur publicis monumentis: quod a Turcis totis viribus illatum equites melitenses maiore virtute propulsarunt [...]".
- <sup>37</sup> Caelii Secundi Curionis de bello melitensi historia nova. Item Io. Valetta melitensium principis epistola, summam eiusdem belli complexa. Accessit rerum & verborum in hac historia praecipue memorabilium index, Basilea, per Ioannem Oporinum, 1567.
- <sup>38</sup> Istoria di mons. Uberto Foglietta nobile genovese della sacra lega contra Selim, e d'alcune altre imprese di suoi tempi, cioè dell'impresa del Gerbi, soccorso d'Oram, impresa del Pignon, di Tunigi, & assedio di Malta, fatta in volgare per Giulio Guastavini, In Genua, appresso Gioseffo Pavoni, 1598.
- <sup>39</sup> A titolo esemplificativo si ricordi: La longa e crudelissima guerra di Malta con la gloriosa victoria finalmente ottenuta. Composta con ogni vera particolarità planamente in rima siciliana, In Napoli, Mattia Cancer, 1568 oppure Nicolò Granucci, L'Eremita, la Carcere, e 'l Diporto, opera nella quale si contengono novelle & altre cose morali: con un breve compendio de' fatti più notabili de' Turchi [...], l'origine de' cavalieri Hospitalieri di Gierusalemme [...], In Lucca, appresso Vincenzo Busdraghi, 1569. Chiaramente sono testi nei quali poco viene dedicato all'assedio, ma è comunque il pretesto per dedicarli ad esempio ai singoli cavalieri o nobili ai quali si richiedeva denaro e protezione per la propria attività di scrittori. Lo stesso fece Pompeo Floriani, ingegnere militare maceratese, autore di due discorsi strettamente legati all'assedio e alla preoccupazione che il turco suscitava: Discorso della Goletta et del Forte di Tunisi, pubblicato nel 1574 e Discorso intorno all'isola di Malta e di ciò che potrà succedere tentando il Turco tale impresa stampato a Mecerata nel 1576 e di nuovo a Siena nel 1598. Il figlio di Pompeo nel 1535 fu incaricato di fortificare le mura dell'attuale Floriana. Ringrazio la prof.ssa Rosa Marisa Borraccini per queste indicazioni bibliografiche sui Floriani.
- <sup>40</sup> Lucio Maiorano, Matteo Perez d'Aleccio, pittore ufficiale del Grande Assedio di Malta, [Copertino], Lupo edizioni, 2000, 61.
- <sup>41</sup> L'opera è stata stampata a Madrid dall'Imprenta de Villalprando. Nel 1761 a Lisbona fu pubblicata una *Relaçao da segunda parte de ilha de Malta, suas forças, e cultura, e hum famoso Sino, que lhe puzeraõ os Turcos.*
- 42 Salmi 117, 23-24.



## *'Lectum coniugalem'*: What the bed said about a marriage in the sixteenth century (c.1560 -1580)

Iona Caruana

#### Introduction

"People made things – both materially and immaterially – and things, in turn, 'made' people".<sup>1</sup>

Erin K. Lichtenstein's statement describing the interaction between people and their objects is a significant and to the point assessment of the importance of goods in the individual and popular psyche. The choices one makes in acquiring a particular object and not another are a tool through which one can better analyse the individual, and to a larger extent the society in which that individual lives. This is the premise behind this study, namely looking at objects to understand people and in this instance understanding the dynamics within a marriage.

While delving into notarial contracts of marriage it started to dawn on the present author that there was a lot of information about daily life in the lists of dowry goods which are sometimes apparent in contracts. Through these lists the modern student of history could look at which cookware was used in the early modern kitchen, what an early modern Maltese would have deemed proper seating, which jewels were deemed appropriate for a bride, how clothing signified status and much more. Of all the descriptions without a doubt the most detailed, and by connection the greatest treasure trove for any modern historian, are the descriptions of early modern beds. The notarial contracts in themselves provide a lot of information on early modern marriage and so provide ample space for studying marriage from a number of different viewpoints.

#### **The Sources**

The notarial contracts are held within the notarial archives in Valletta which holds over twenty thousand registers, the earliest of which dates from 1467.<sup>2</sup> The volumes at the notarial archives provide information on different aspects of society. Usually a notary's clients hailed from different social classes as well as different areas of the islands. For the study at hand, the data refers to the period between 1560 and 1580 and looks at the acts of notaries Bartholomeus Axisa,<sup>3</sup> Antonius Cassar,<sup>4</sup> Tommaso Gauci<sup>5</sup> and Julianus Muscat.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst notary Bartholomeus Axisa's clients hailed from around Siggiewi, Julianus Muscat's patrons were mostly based in the city of Mdina. On the other hand, notary Antonius Cassar's archives include parties both from Mdina as well as from other parts of Malta. Arguably, this ensued from this notary's practice of visiting a particular village and drawing up contracts for different individuals in the same place. This can be gleaned from the notes which the notary himself added to contracts, mentioning the place in which the contract was being drawn up. Tommaso Gauci was an inhabitant of Gozo and his contracts can be said to represent the approach taken to contracts in this smaller island of the Maltese archipelago.

Notarial documents allow a glimpse into the life of individuals in sixteenth century Malta. The average Maltese was involved in contracts ranging from the formation of a partnership over the ownership of a donkey,<sup>7</sup> to the sale of large tracts of land. In fact, there seems to have been in the Maltese islands what one could call 'a notarial culture' - for any eventuality there was a contract which could make transactions both easier and less risky for all those involved. It comes as no surprise then that for marriage, one of the most radical changes in any person's life, the early modern Maltese men and women found a solution in drawing up a pre-nuptial contract. This, thus, is one of the reasons why marriage contracts are so widely available for the period under study and in turn the situation provides the student of history with ample material through which to learn about the subject.

Even if it was quite a prevalent custom for those who were getting married to stipulate terms in front of the notary prior to the actual ceremony in church, a number of historians have argued that this can only be true to an extent. Carmel Cassar claims that the custom of stipulating a marriage and a dowry in front of the notary was most prevalent among dwellers of urban areas while peasants tended to have arrangements 'colla parola', or through a verbal agreement, in front of witnesses.<sup>8</sup> Although, this might still have been the case in some instances, the number of marriage contracts for peasant brides and grooms shows that at the very least this trend was changing. Most probably those living in the second half of the sixteenth century felt that drawing up a contract in front of a notary was such a necessary part of marriage as it was a measure with which the parties involved could, to some extent, assuage the risks involved in any marriage. If, for example, the bride's family provided her with a dowry, to which she had a right independently of her husband, then that meant that if her husband died, abandoned her or if the marriage was dissolved, then she could claim back the dowry which could guarantee her a measure of independence.

The importance of notarial contracts is also evident in many places around Europe as can be verified by the number of marriage contracts and historical studies based on the study of these contracts.<sup>9</sup> Linked with marriage contracts is usually the dowry itself, and one reason why the family of the bride seems to appear more in the marriage contracts is that for the bride the notarial contract was probably even more important than for the groom as a measure of protecting her assets. A bride's family usually used the notarial contract as a means of securing their daughter's future wellbeing as well as at times a form of inheritance. Most women did not inherit property and other assets after their parents' death but would instead receive their inheritance in the dowry contract.

The very nature of a woman's legal rights in this period helps to explain this situation. As Thomas Kuehn, in his study of Florentine society, notes:

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Florentine laws paralleled those of many other cities in restricting female inheritance, in the presence of direct male heirs, to dowry. Beyond this, Florence notably retained a form of protective guardianship of women, under the Lombard term *mundualdus*, for just about all civil acts, or by an attorney (*procuratore*) for civil litigation.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, not only was the marriage contract involving the dowry essential for protecting the assets for the bride, but it was also a form of protection of the bride's siblings. In this way the dowry was used as a form of inheritance and so the bride would only have a right to that part of the patrimony which was stipulated within the dowry. Parents could in this way guarantee an inheritance which was as unfragmented as possible for their male offspring. However, the dowry itself could in turn take many forms. Though the bulk of land property was usually reserved for the males of a family, there are instances in the Maltese marriage contracts of brides receiving tracts of land as dowry. This is the case for the marriage between Marietta de Biscon and Leonardus Refalo on 4 August 1573. Here the bride's parents Salvus and Imperia de Biscon conceded as part of the dowry several tracts of land.<sup>11</sup> In fact, usually the dowry consisted of a part in which the family gave the new bride either land or a house, and then another section in which the bride's family provided her with the necessary material goods to set up her new household.

Consider the case of Dominica Magro, daughter of the late Salvus and his wife Catherina Magro. For the marriage on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 1558, to Paulo Cusmano from Żurrieq, the bride's mother who in the absence of her husband was present with a *mundualdus*, Leonardus Magro, gave her daughter quite a varied dowry.<sup>12</sup> This included a tract of land surrounded by a wall and called *tal-Migbid l-Ghajn* which the family of the bride held in lease form for the sum of ten *grani*. Also part of the dowry was a bed, a mattress, a blanket, a commode made with inlaid wood and two *palmas* of silk. The goods included in this contract seem to have been part of a more prevalent custom in which the family of the bride provided her with furniture, bedding and textile goods with which she would furnish her marital bedroom. The options and thus decisions involved in creating the marital bed were varied and reflected the meaning given to both the bed and marriage by early modern Maltese society.

#### The Bed

The marriage contract usually included a section detailing the items included in the dowry and which might also include the trousseau if the family was able to afford the expense. The trousseau was made up of the clothes, linen, and other belongings which the bride would accumulate prior to marriage and which she would take to the household she would set up. The lists of dowry and trousseau goods which appear in marriage contracts provide ample information on not only how early modern people thought about marriage and their houses, but also gives a pretty clear idea of the very way in which early modern houses were set up and how, in essence, they looked. They also point historians in another direction as goods and their availability, or lack of, are pointers to trade patterns and the change of these through time. Ulinka Rublack points out that:

humans create a sense of being not only in relation to other people, work, nature, space, or religion, but through creative exchange with the material world. Objects impart their qualities (say colour, or texture) to us and we relate to them emotionally and think that they represent our tastes, values, wishes, and spirituality, our connection with others and to our past.<sup>13</sup>

What Rublack is referring to here is the ability of goods not only to tell the modern reader of history a lot about past events, but also the ability of these same goods to shape events in the past.

One item which appears particularly frequently in marriage contracts was the bed. The matrimonial bed was an important asset for any new family, so much so that in various parts of Europe it was customary for the priest to bless the bed after the marriage ceremony in church. This is mentioned in Henrietta Leyser's *Medieval Women: A Social History* of Women in England 450-1500 who writes that the blessing of the bed was the final step in the long ritual that was usually part of marriage.<sup>14</sup> Jean-Baptiste Molin and Protais Mutembe also point out that in France there was the custom of blessing the marital bed.<sup>15</sup> Though there is no mention of this practice occurring locally, the importance of the bed for the new union can be perceived through the fact that many families deemed it necessary to stipulate which items would form part of a new bride's bed.

It appears that in most marriage contracts between 1560 and 1580 the bed was usually provided fully furnished, that is with a mattress or mattresses, pillows, sheets and other bed accessories. This situation seems to have been prevalent elsewhere in the Mediterranean as can be glimpsed through the description provided for some Italian regions by Raffaella Sarti:

When we assess the value of these beds that brides brought to their marriages, it should be remembered that they were generally equipped with all the accessories and ready for use. In some Italian regions, they were referred to as *letti compiti* (complete beds), which meant complete with mattresses, sheets, pillows and blankets.<sup>16</sup>

Another historian who also finds a similar situation is Nathalie Zemon Davis, who while studying the Garonne and Ariège region, claims that all brides brought with them to their marriage; 'a bed with feather pillows, sheets of linen and wool, a bedcover, a coffer with lock and key, and two or three dresses of different hues'.<sup>17</sup> This situation, including the fact that the bed was usually a part of the bride's contribution to the marriage, was replicated in the local marriage contracts as can be exemplified by the instance of marriage between Michele Camilleri and Angela Farruge on 11 February 1561. The parents of the bride not only provided their daughter with a house, presumably the one in which she would live after her marriage was celebrated in church, but they also provided her with quite an extensive list of goods which would form

part of her trousseau. Table 1 (below) gives an idea of which goods formed part of the average bride's trousseau.

A new skirt (to be provided prior to marriage)
A woman's cape
Two beds complete with their sheets
One bed spread
Two curtains
Two wall hangings
A bed hanging made in the Maltese manner
Fabric for sheets and pillow covers
Two pillows
Two pillow covers

 Table 1: Goods provided for the dowry of Angela Farruge in the marriage contract of 11 February 1561.<sup>18</sup>

Much importance was given to the furniture and furnishings of the bed chamber. For various societies around Europe, and there is reason to believe this situation was the case for Malta as well, the bed was not only the place for reproduction, birth and death but on a more day to day basis this was probably the place where most of the family would sleep. It is fairly rare to find members of a particular family having their own bed and most families with young children would all sleep in the same bed, a state of affairs which could continue up till the children had grown up enough to form their own families. Sarti discusses the large beds in Tuscan households to point to the fact that most families slept in the one bed within rural Tuscany.<sup>19</sup> When parents gifted their daughters with a bed as part of their trousseau in the period under study within the Maltese islands, most would receive one bed, though there is a good number who like Angela Farruge mentioned above received two beds. Though it seems that for the poorest families the newlyweds and any future offspring would be expected to sleep in the same bed as with Sarti's findings for Florence, a number of Maltese marriages would see a division in sleeping arrangements.

The beds of Maltese brides between 1560 to 1580 seem to have some common characteristics, probably because they were following an older custom. This was so much the case that in certain notarial contracts the notary would point out that the bed, or certain features of it, was made according to Maltese custom. One example where the notary does this is the marriage of Catarina Saura to Andreas Hellul on 23 December 1560.<sup>20</sup> Curiosity as to the physical makeup of the bed can be assuaged through Stanley Fiorini's description of this item:

Beds were made of wood surmounted by a lattice of reeds tied with strings. The contraption was surmounted by a mattress made according to local specifications, as implied by references like *lecta duo de rauba fulcita de uno materacio Juxta usum malte.*<sup>21</sup>

The fact that contracts for this period mention that a bed and bedding were made according to Maltese custom might also be caused by the fact that beds, as with houses, may have been considered part of a woman's domain and in this way the daughter might be inheriting the bed which her mother had originally brought with her as part of her own dowry. However, if the mother of the bride was still alive at her daughter's marriage she might have still needed her bed and did not choose to give it away. These were certainly not considerations for those brides whose mothers had died or were in some way missing from their lives. This was why Costanza Masuni's uncle, for her marriage to Leone Bonavia on 12 October 1577, provided her with a dowry that included half of her late parent's furniture and furnishings including any goods brought by Dionora, her deceased mother, to her marriage.<sup>22</sup>

Whilst some contracts merely mention that a fully furnished bed was to form part of a bride's trousseau other contracts provide detailed descriptions of the trousseau which included in depth descriptions of the bed, the mattress and other bedding. Margerita Torchetto, daughter of Antonio Torchetto and the late Demetria Calamia, married Marius Chutaye on 5 February1565. Here the bride's trousseau consisted of two mattresses filled with wool, a used *pavagliuni* with its *coppi* of white cloth,<sup>23</sup> two pillows with their covers, two pairs of sheets (one of

three *fardes* and the other of two), a new white *farsara*,<sup>24</sup> and another used red *farsara*, two boxes, six serviette, a tablecloth, *pluc di stagno*,<sup>25</sup> a *stamecto* cloth skirt (this was most probably a skirt made of Samite which was a luxurious and heavy silk fabric) and embellished with black silk, as well as a *canna*<sup>26</sup> of used cloth.<sup>27</sup>

Sarti gives a detailed description of a bride's mattress which, as can be seen in the previous examples, especially that of Torchetto, was an essential element to the fully furnished bed mentioned in many contracts.

In Renaissance Italy, for instance, a bed made up as it should have been had a canvas straw mattress over the boards, and over that a mattress, or rather mattresses, given that those who could afford it had more than one and often as many as three or four. Mattresses were usually stuffed with tufts of wool or feathers of low quality. Then came the sheets, generally made of linen, but of coarse canvas in the case of servants and the less well-off. The bedcover was a quilt and a woollen blanket or both. Sargie and celoni were types of bedding that were also used as bedspreads. The bedspread, bolster and pillows were the final touches, which could occasionally be so lavish that governments imposed wealth taxes on them.<sup>28</sup>

From this description it is evident that the beds in the Maltese islands were very similar to those studied by Sarti. Certain elements such as the mattress or at times mattresses can also be used as pointers to a bride's social status. Notice how Margerita Torchetto has two mattresses, both of which filled with wool rather than the cheaper variety mentioned above. Other contracts go into further detail and provide information on what material was used in making the mattress itself. In a contract of consignment of goods on 7 January 1574, there is mention of four mattresses made of fustian and filled with wool which were estimated at fourteen *uncia* and twelve *tareni*.<sup>29</sup> The bride involved in the initial dowry contract was obviously from a well off family and it was deemed necessary for her comfort to receive four mattresses, putting her on a

par with those from the highest echelons in Renaissance Italy mentioned above by Sarti.

Another essential aspect for a bed to be furnished in the expected manner were the sheets and pillows. The very variety available to Maltese brides is certainly witness to the trade links of the Maltese islands, but more significantly this attests to the time and energy dedicated by the bride's family for assembling the trousseau. The reason behind this was probably because the bride's family knew very well that their daughter's trousseau-would-be-used-by-the-groom-and-his-family-as-a-measure through which to assess the bride's, and by connection their own, status. In the same contract of 7 January 1574 mentioned above, the groom had received as part of his wife's dowry four pairs of sheets, with each pair being distinct, so much so that they warranted a physical description within the contract. For example, one pair of these sheets were made of three pieces of finely woven linen joined together, with white lace as a border and fringes of white silk thread and were valued at three uncia and six tareni. Another pair of sheets were made from the same fabric but with a border of white silk lace estimated at 3 uncia 18 tareni. The very detail into which marriage contracts delve in the descriptions of items, such as these sheets, are testimony to the importance given to items as a means of portraying wealth.

An evaluation of the bed, mattresses and bedding of Laurea Chappara, to whom these luxurious goods belonged, gives the modern reader an interesting insight into the marriage itself. Just one pair of this bride's sheets cost more than the entire dowries of some brides appearing in the notarial contracts. This agrees with Cassar's statement that 'Linen and better quality cloth appears to have been a particularly valuable and highly prized asset which marked out the family standing.'<sup>30</sup> This was certainly a bride from the highest levels of Maltese society and one who expected to receive material goods that were on a par with her social status. The comparison between this trousseau and what other authors have found for European brides also points to the fact that the Maltese nobility was on a similar level to those found elsewhere, at least when it came to the expectations for marriage and the dowry.

In fact, other noble brides and their families also seem to have given a lot of thought and invested their resources in preparing and buying sheets. In a contract on 4 November 1573 as part of Perna Rogiles' trousseau, apart from two mattresses filled with wool which were valued at three *uncia* eighteen *tareni*, she also had several different sheets. A pair of sheets were made from thick woven cloth, another pair was of finely woven Alexandrian linen and a further sheet was made from finely woven linen and worked with *intaglio* around the edges.<sup>31</sup> Another contract in which the trousseau features the use of Alexandrian linen–is-that–involving–Augustino–Cumbo,–who–was–consigning–the goods to his daughter Caterina and her husband Antonius Casha.<sup>32</sup> Here the bride received four mattresses filled with white cotton and wool and four pairs of Alexandrian linen sheets.

Alexandrian linen seems to have been highly esteemed in the Maltese Islands and it was the linen preferred for bedding by the nobility. Linen had been an important export for Alexandria since late antiquity,<sup>33</sup> and though linen imported from other countries was starting to appear locally during this period, the vast majority of notarial contracts still mention this linen when it comes to bedding.<sup>34</sup> Linen was also produced locally and together with cotton was 'known to have been regularly exported to Cagliari in Sardinia and to Syracuse in Sicily before 1375.'<sup>35</sup>

The bed was also furnished with blankets, pillows, cushions and bed throw overs as well as, for those more fortunate, the curtains and other accessories associated with a canopy bed. Usually blankets tended to be white as is the case for the trousseau of Perna Rogiles, where there were two white blankets.<sup>36</sup> Caterina Montagnes also had a white blanket worked with lace around the edge and lined on the inside as part of her trousseau, and a similar blanket, though this was embroidered, was provided for Caterina Casha. Even if the custom was for white blankets, this does not seem to have been a hard and fast rule as evidenced by the number of beds with blankets in other colours.

An example of a blanket which was not the typical white, was that provided for Laurea Casha's trousseau. This blanket or throw over was

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of red silk with a border of linen. This combined well with the rest of the bedding which included; a red *farsata*, a curtain of Alexandrian cloth decorated with white lace with *gruppo* (probably some form of tiebacks) to each side and with its *cappello* decorated with white lace and bordered by fringes, a *sponsera* of the same cloth with eight different parts of lace and bordered with lace and a fringe and another curtain worked with fine woven Alexandrian linen and *carmasina* silk worked in strips next to which there were fringes of red and white *carmasina* silk with its *spirneli* (?) worked in lace. All of these were probably the furnishings which were necessary for a four-poster bed. Moreover, the bedding also included eight pillow covers made of finely-woven Alexandrian linen mostly in red and embellished with *carmasina* silk and lace in colours such as red, blue and green for the silk, and white for the lace.

It is true that the bed and necessary bedding and furnishings are a good indicator of the status of the natal family of the bride. This would also change the way that her marital family perceived the bride herself and might even influence her status within her new family. However, another aspect has to be taken into account when looking at the importance of the bed for the early modern household. The modern day reader has to appreciate that early modern houses varied in configuration from what we would consider the norm. The corridor had not yet developed and instead most houses had rooms leading one into another.37 This meant that most bed chambers were located in a space which was used by those going from one room to the next, which would explain the need felt by early modern people to surround their beds with fabrics in such a manner as to be able to enclose themselves within. The bed mentioned above for Laurea was surely of this sort, providing as it were a room within a room. In fact, Sarti discusses the sense of safety which was provided by the bed saying that:

It seems reasonable to suppose that the sense of protection, warmth and comfort derived not only from the fact that it was 'closed', but also from the presence of mattresses, blankets and other bedclothes, which were as varied as the structure of the bed, given that they ranged from straw alone and miserable straw mattresses to an abundance of mattresses and expensive bedspreads.<sup>38</sup>

The bed's ability to provide privacy was also essential because the bedroom was usually the room in which guests were received. This would explain the need for all the splendour displayed in the bedroom, as unlike their modern day counterparts beds could be seen by those visiting a household. Sarti draws attention to early modern France where a bed was 'a luxury item that had to be put on display'. In fact, French women received visitors in what was known as the *Ruelle* in French and the *corsello* in Italian, which was the space between the bed and the bedroom wall.<sup>39</sup> This was also most likely the practice in the Maltese Islands until much later as Antoine de Favray's painting of 1763, *The Visitors*, seems to suggest. Of particular notice here are the bed hangings (*kurtina*gg) and what seems to be a head-board behing the wet nurse and the black domestic servant. In this situation it appears that the norm was that when visiting, guests were escorted into the bedroom.

Thus, in reality the bed was a room unto itself. With the aid of bed linen, curtains, cushions and accessories it provided the early modern family a place within which not only to sleep, but also one in which to feel safe and protected, as well as a place able to welcome guests. This was the place in which a good portion of a family's most important events took place. It was in the bed that the act of reproduction occurred, the bed was also the location for childbirth and for lying-in after childbirth. Any children born to the family would spend their first years sleeping with their parents on the matrimonial bed, and in poorer households might only leave it when starting their own families. The bed was also the place where death was most likely to visit the family, both from natural causes and old age but also through the perils of childbirth.

#### Conclusion

Early modern bedrooms provide an important insight into the daily lives of individuals during this period. Ranging from rich canopy beds adorned with luxurious fabrics and embellishments to more simple beds made up of a single mattress filled with straw. A person's bed in the sixteenth century, therefore, was as good an indicator as any of social status and economic situation. Beds were rooms within a room. This at a time when due to the layout of houses one had to go through the bedroom to reach other rooms. This was especially the case in larger households. On the other hand the bed and sleeping area might even be within the same room as other activities such as cooking in relatively humbler houses.

For any bride the significance of decorating her new bed or bed chamber stemmed not only from a need to impress the groom and her in-laws but also from the fact that in the sixteenth century most visitors were received in the bedroom and might even have a seat on the bed itself, especially in poorer households. The bedroom, as the domain of the female of the house represented a woman's ability to be a good mother and wife and could also be used as a means to influence the opinion of visitors about the same family. An even more thorough study of the bed chambers of early modern women can help us better understand the dynamics within the early modern family and add further sources through which to study this somewhat elusive subject.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Erin K Lichtenstein, 'Identities Through Things: A comment', in *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500-1800*, ed., Paula Findlen (Oxford, 2013), 379.
- <sup>2</sup> The Times of Malta, 19 August 2013.
- <sup>3</sup> Notarial Archives, Valletta [NAV], R32/ 4-13.
- <sup>4</sup> NAV, R160/ 7-17.
- <sup>5</sup> NAV, R287/1-10.
- <sup>6</sup> NAV, R376/41.
- <sup>7</sup> NAV, R287/1, f.7v.
- <sup>8</sup> Carmel Cassar, 'Popular Perceptions and Values in Hospitaller Malta', in *Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798: Studies on Early Modern Malta and the Order of St John of Jerusalem*, ed., V. Mallia Milanes (Malta, 1993, 466.
- <sup>9</sup> An example see Samuel Kline Cohn Jr, 'Marriage in the mountains: the Florentine territorial state, 1348-1500', in *Marriage in Italy 1300-1650*, ed, Trevor Dean and K.J.P. Lowe (Cambridge, 1998), 174-96.
- <sup>10</sup> Thomas Kuehn, 'Daughters, Mothers, Wives, and Widows: Women as Legal Persons', in *Time, Space and Women's Lives in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anne Jackson Schutte, Thomas Kuehn, Silvana Seidel Menchi (Kirksville, 2001), 100.
- <sup>11</sup> NAV, R287/7 part 1, f.633r.
- <sup>12</sup> NAV, R287/1 part 2, f.123 v.
- <sup>13</sup> Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford, 2010), 3.
- <sup>14</sup> Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-*1500, (London, 1996), 108.
- <sup>15</sup> Jean-Baptiste Molin and Protais Mutembe, *Le Rituel du Mariage en France* (Paris, 1974), 28.
- <sup>16</sup> Raffaella Sarti, *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture 1500-1800* (London, 2002), 46.
- <sup>17</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, The Return of Martin Guerre (Cambridge, 1983), 17.
- <sup>18</sup> NAV, R32/6, f.299r.
- <sup>19</sup> Sarti, Europe at Home, 121.

- <sup>21</sup> Stanley Fiorini, 'Malta in 1530', in Mallia-Milanes, Hospitaller Malta, 158-159.
- <sup>22</sup> NAV, R160/17, f.87r.
- <sup>23</sup> These were references to the curtains surrounding a bed.
- <sup>24</sup> This was probably some form of blanket or bed cover.
- <sup>25</sup> Dr Simon Mercieca pointed out that this is a 'hasira' which is a form of curtain made of reeds still used to cover Maltese front doors.
- <sup>26</sup> Canna was a unit of measurement equal to the modern equivalent of 2.064metres.
- <sup>27</sup> NAV, R160/11, part 2, f.209v.
- <sup>28</sup> Sarti, Europe at Home, 120-121.
- <sup>29</sup> NAV, R287/7, f.250v.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> NAV, R32/5, f.148r.

- <sup>30</sup> Carmel Cassar, 'Clothes, Status and Class: Symbols and Reality', in *Costume in Malta: An History of Fabric Form and Fashion*, ed., Nicholas de Piro, Vicki Ann Cremona (Malta, 1998), 54.
- <sup>31</sup> NAV R287/7, part 2, f.170v.
- 32 NAV R32/6, f.63v.
- <sup>33</sup> Christopher Haas, Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict (Baltimore, 1996), 35.
- <sup>34</sup> Malta had been involved in the linen trade since Roman times, and Alexandrian linen was at time transshipped from Malta to Roma. A.J. Warden, *The Linen Trade*, *Ancient and Modern* (Oxford, 1967), 206.
- <sup>35</sup> Joseph C Sammut, 'Historical Notes on Costume in 15th and early 16th century Malta', in De Piro and Cremona, *Costume in Malta*, 22.
- <sup>36</sup> NAV, R287/7, part 2, f.170v.
- <sup>37</sup> Sarti, Europe at Home, 139-140.
- <sup>38</sup> Sarti, Europe at Home, 120.
- <sup>39</sup> Sarti, Europe at Home, 122.

### Gozo After the Siege of Malta: A Study of the Acts of Notary Tomaso Gauci, 1566-68

#### Mariana Grech

Being an island in the Mediterranean sea, Malta absorbed a lot of what, during the centuries, took place in the region. The most prominent example is the command of the Maltese islands by all those people who, at one point or another, dominated the Mediterranean world. In this Malta has always been in the shadow of Sicily but in the sixteenth century Malta steered off this path and began to carve its own history and identity influenced by an Order which was European and Mediterranean. This article seeks to follow the path taken by the Maltese islands, especially Gozo, after the Siege of 1565, through a small window which is opened when studying the notarial acts of Tomaso Gauci, a notary who worked in Gozo in the sixteenth century.

Like most Mediterranean islands, Malta in the late Middle Ages was a 'self-contained world, with its own customs, language and archaic economy'<sup>1</sup> of about 20,000 inhabitants. In 1530 Malta was described as being 'a rock of a soft sand-stone, called tufa, about six or seven leagues long, and three or four broad',<sup>2</sup> that the land was not deep and thus unsuitable for the growing of grain but the island had an abundance of figs, melons and other different fruits. Also, the islanders exported their cotton, cumin and honey in exchange for grain. Jean Quintinus said that Malta was not 'a place that needs a long description'<sup>3</sup> while Fra Paolo del Rosso said that Malta was a 'confined, deserted and savage place.'<sup>4</sup>

In July 1551 Gozo suffered a massive blow when the Ottoman admiral Sinam Pasha and the corsair Dragut crossed over to Gozo, after trying to capture Mdina and failing, with a fleet of 140 galleys.<sup>5</sup> The Gozitans withdrew into the citadel but resistance was hopeless in front of the

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strength of the Ottoman armada and within days, the Gozitans had to surrender. Practically all of the population of Gozo was taken into slavery. This resulted in a total devastation of the island.

#### The Siege of 1565, Gozo and the aftermath

During the early 1560s, reports were rife that the Ottomans were preparing to attack the western Mediterranean. On 18 May 1565 the Turks-were first-sighted off Malta and the first-canon of the harbourfired shots as a signal to the population that the enemy had arrived. The first target was Fort Saint Elmo. It took the Turks over a month to capture this fort and at the end it was reduced to ruins and cost them around 6,000 men, including Dragut.

The Turks then proceeded to attack Fort Saint Michael, Senglea and Birgu. The Turks attacked several times and the Knights managed to somehow keep going. At times both Mustapha Pasha and De Valette led the battle themselves in a bid to keep their troops going.

In September 1565, after three months of fighting, Malta was very close to being defeated and depended on the Spanish-Sicilian relief which was supposed to arrive in Malta. There were talks of abandoning Birgu but De Valette was against this. The defenders of Birgu were now fraught as were the Turks who were seeing all their efforts go in smoke. After the distorted news that 16,000 Christian troops had arrived in Malta reached Mustapha Pasha, when in fact only 8,000, had arrived, he decided to withdraw from Malta and on 8 September the Turkish fleet set sail.

During the Siege of 1565, Gozo was not a target for the attacks and it did not suffer heavy damages and the castle of Gozo was not taken by the Turks. This was very fortunate because Gozo's castle was very weak.

Although Gozo was not attacked in 1565, its people were involved in one way or another in the battle. This island was used as a 'staging post along the lines of communications with Sicily' and was thus helping facilitate the risky crossing to and from Malta.<sup>6</sup> Don Garcia, the person in charge of the Spanish-Sicilian relief force, saw in Gozo an ideal place to help 'screen the approach of his fleet from any Turkish pickers patrolling the seas around the northern parts of Malta.'<sup>7</sup> The fact that Gozo was only partly involved in the siege is attested by the fact that the mother church on the island continued to register baptisms uninterruptedly during the time of the siege.<sup>8</sup> The acts of Tomaso Gauci for the period May to September 1565 only contain a few contracts while as from 29 September 1565 life picks up fairly quickly and deeds are recorded on a regular basis.<sup>9</sup>

#### Gozitan society in the mid-sixteenth century

Life in Gozo was soon re-established after the events of 1551 but it took time for things to settle down again and for life to return to its normal course. By time, the Gozitans began to find their way back to the island as some escaped from captivity and others were ransomed. The wellto-do Gozitans were soon ransomed as they had the means by which to do so.

As the island of Gozo was depopulated, the Maltese people started migrating to their sister island. There are a number of ideas as to what attracted the Maltese to the island of Gozo which was so vulnerable to attacks and which had just witnessed such a sacking, however it seems that the main attraction was the fact that they could easily take over property in Gozo. Probably these Maltese were in pursuit of agricultural land and thus places where they could work. This can be partly supported by the acts of Tomasso Gauci as the Maltese are involved in contracts which are mostly related to agriculture such as the trade in animals. For example on 30 August 1567, Andrea Luchia, a Gozitan, sold 3 oxen, a cow, an ass and 27 animals of cattle amounting to 32 *uncie* 24 *tareni* to Brancatio burg of *casali gregori* Malta *habitator huius terra et insule Gaudisii.*<sup>11</sup>

A very important attraction for Maltese farmers was the fact that there was much land available for leasing in Gozo. There were a number of landowners who had vast estates of land which now had no peasants to work them and thus these provided the Maltese farmers with ample opportunity to obtain land from which they could maybe make a better life for themselves. In the acts under review there are a number of examples with the lender being, in most cases, Gozitan. Some of them include, Joanne Grego, a Gozitan, who on 29 October 1566 leased to Dominico Tumne, a Maltese living in Gozo, one-fourth of a field in the Island of Gozo.<sup>12</sup> Another example is that of *nobile* Guarino Plathamone who on 3 March 1568 leased to Laurentio Mifsud, a Maltese living in Gozo, a farm with its fields and cisterns in Gozo in *gued il melach* (Wied il-Mielaħ) for four years starting on the following first of August.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from land there was also the leasing of houses and even sometimes animals. The leasing of houses is fairly common and there are various instances where houses are leased, sometimes with the lands surrounding them, and frequently with their store rooms. An example of this is a lease given by *honorabile* Joanne Bongebino who leased a house with its store room and kitchen in the castle of Gozo to Hieronymo Grima, a Maltese. This lease was to be for the duration of one year starting on the following November for the price of 1 *uncie* 9 *tareni*.<sup>14</sup>

Aside from the Maltese, there were a number of foreigners, especially from Sicily, who chose to live on the Island of Gozo. In the records studied, a number of people described mostly as '*siculo habitator huius terre et Insule Gaudisii*' are found.

This interaction between the Gozitans, the native population of the island, the Maltese and foreigners who, for various reasons, decided to migrate to this small island, contributed to the initial phases of economic and social reconstruction of Gozo.

#### The Gozitans

The majority of Gozitans who appear in the notarial acts under review are all linked to agriculture and the work of the land. Most of them even appear to be landowners, however, as one goes through the notarial records of Tomaso Gauci, it is clear that there were a number of people belonging to the same family who were involved in a good number of transactions recorded by this notary. The majority of these people belonged to the families of the upper class in Gozo and thus they had more money and land with which to do business. These people were the first to be redeemed from slavery after the attack of 1551 and thus by 1566 they were actively participating in the economic activities which were being revitalized.

All of them appear constantly in the acts under study but the most prominent family is the Plathamone. Persons like Guarino Plathamone, who appears frequently in the acts under review, was one of the jurats in the Gozitan council in 1575. The two members of the Plathamone family who appear most in the acts under study are *nobile* Guarino Plathamone and *magnifico* Antonino Plathamone. They are seen in many instances buying and selling such as when Guarino sold an ass *pili morelli* to *magnifico* Antonino Deguyara for 4 *uncie* 24 *tareni* on 17 February 1557<sup>15</sup>, or when Antonino sold an ass and a mule *pili falbi* to Matheo Refalo for 3 *uncie* 6 *tareni*.<sup>16</sup>

There were also in Gozo people who acted as procurators for those who were still in captivity. Through these procurators, the people who were held captives could still hold on to their lands. These procurators were appointed by the grand master to take care of the interests of the Gozitans who were held in captivity. An example of this is Martino Mule. It was actually his father, Hon. Marcus Mule, who was appointed by the Governor of Gozo to administer the possessions of certain captives. However, *honorabile* Marcus Mule was taken prisoner himself and thus his son, Martino Mule, became the curator of his father taking on all of his responsibilities.<sup>17</sup>

## Agriculture as the basis of the economy of Gozo in the mid-sixteenth century

The economy of Gozo, like that of Malta, was mainly based on agriculture; on the working of the land and the raising of livestock. However there were also other activities mostly related to the sea like trade, corsairing and fishing. Cotton and cumin were the main cash crops and their trade as well as that of textiles also played an important part in the economy of the islands. From the proceeds which resulted from the exportation of these products, the Maltese-imported wheat and other necessities. Gozo also produced wheat, barley, legumes, fruit and wine and the practice of animal husbandry was widespread. Even though the population of Gozo lived in the Castle of Gozo there were farm buildings all along the countryside as well as vineyards and orchards.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, with the arrival of the Knights of St. John the practice of privateering flourished and also began to contribute towards the economy of Malta.

Cereals were the main source of the sustenance of society in the sixteenth century. For small islands like Malta and Gozo this great demand for cereals could not be supplied by the local produce and thus the importation of these necessities was of vital importance. For the Maltese islands the wheat needed from abroad was acquired from Sicily.<sup>19</sup> The agricultural related problems were due to the fact that the islands were small and the soil was of poor quality. These problems were intensified by the siege of 1565 as thousands of Turks were stationed on Malta. They had arrived before the grain harvest was completed and having looted and despoiled all that could be found, they left behind a catastrophe, as was their intention. Moreover, the livestock was used to sustain the defenders or was captured by the Turks.

Having said this, when looking at the acts under study, one can see that the situation in Gozo was different. Here the production seems to have continued in the years following the siege and the records give quite a good number of contracts which deal with the trade in cereals. Small transactions of less than 10 *salme* were most common. For example,

Nob. Guglielmo la Russa sold 1 *salme* barley to Silvestro Zahra on 18 April 1567 for the price of 16 *tareni* payable on the Feast of St John the Baptist.<sup>20</sup> Nob. Guglielmo la Russa was also involved in the bigger transactions. On 20 January 1568 he sold 40 *salme* barley to Hon. Leonardo Pachi of Zebug (Żebuġ) Malta for 76 *uncie* 8 *tareni* at the price of 23 *tareni* per *salma*.<sup>21</sup>

Wheat was only mentioned a few times in these acts and one of the references was in a contract of debt between *honorabile* Joanne Haius and Antonius Danfansino, a Gozitan. In the contract Danfansino stated that he owed Haius 3 *uncie* 21 *tareni* in order to complete a payment for a certain quantity of barley and wheat.<sup>22</sup> After barley the most popular cereal was grain; *frumenti mixti* and *frumenti necti*. Most of the time grain was sold in conjunction with barley such as when on 13 May 1568 Pasquale Grima sold to Mariano Fanchel of Rabbato (Rabat) Malta 2 *salme* barley and 1 *salme frumenti necti*; dried grain, for the price of 3 *uncie*.<sup>23</sup> A similar contract took place on 21 December 1566 when Pasquale Grima affirmed that he owed Antonio Burg 3 *uncie* 3 *tareni* for 2 *salme* barley, 6 *tumini frumenti necti* and 10 *tumini frumenti mixti*.<sup>24</sup>

As one can notice there were many Maltese people who were buying cereals in Gozo. This was presumably to feed the much larger population on Malta especially when keeping in mind the utter devastation of the agricultural lands left by the Turks following the events of 1565. Cereals were also used as a means of payment, in kind, for work. Augustino Circheppo agreed to work for Federico Caruana for one year against a payment of 5 *uncie 3 tareni*, and an amount of mixed wheat.<sup>25</sup> Cereals were also used to pay for leases and *gabella*. This is the case of Dionisio Vella who was given a lease, in *gabella*, a farmhouse with its fields in Gozo by *magnificus* Antonio Plathamone for two years starting on the previous 15 August against a payment of 4 *salme* barley and 1 *salma* grain per annum.<sup>26</sup>

In a world based on agriculture animals and livestock were vital for survival both when alive and also when dead. Beasts of burden were considered to be 'bulky merchandise'<sup>27</sup> and when sold great attention

was given to give an accurate description of their colour, sex and whether they were mules, donkeys, oxen or horses as this could reflect a difference in the price.

The ox seems to have been the main draught animal used for ploughing and 'probably for treading the wheat out of the chaff in preparation for winnowing'.<sup>28</sup> Horses were not as common and were mostly used for transportation. The highest price for a horse was fetched by one *pili sauri* sold by Hon. Raynelio Machnne to Pasquale Grima for the price of 9 *uncie*<sup>29</sup> and another *pili rubei* bought by Joanne Cakie from Jacobo de Albano on 25 Aug 1568 for also 9 *uncie*.<sup>30</sup> The lowest price paid was for a horse *pili falbi* sold for 4 *uncie* 12 *tareni* by Joanne Grima, *Melitensis habitator huius terra et insule Gaudisii*, to Leonardo Vassallo, a Maltese living with Grima.<sup>31</sup> As for oxen, the prices were very similar.

The donkey and its hybrid, the mule were 'indispensable animals in production and transportation'<sup>32</sup> and have been, since time immemorial, associated with hard work. This is especially so in the smaller Mediterranean islands like Pantelleria, Malta and Gozo where these animals were indispensable to the work of the farmer. These smaller central islands came to be 'natural donkey sanctuaries'33 where the donkey developed different individual characteristics. Braudel described the donkey as 'the symbol of everyday life in the Mediterranean'.<sup>34</sup> In Malta and Gozo idioms like 'bhall-hmar tas-sienja' and 'jahdem daqs baghal' came to show both the hard work which donkeys and mules did everyday as well as the close relationship between the Maltese peasant and these beasts.<sup>35</sup> Mules and donkeys were the commonest means of transport available and the Maltese donkey in particular was said to be so good that it did not need horse shoes. Mules were particularly in demand for driving the mills that ground the wheat and barley before the introduction of windmills. In Malta donkeys and mules were reared on a wide scale and managed to gain a respectable reputation abroad, so much so that they were exported, in particular to Sicily.

In the records under review, the donkey and the mule occupy 30% of the whole animal occurrence. The donkeys were pretty cheap especially

when compared to oxen and horses. The highest price at which a donkey was sold was 6 *uncie*. This donkey *pili falbi* was sold by Vincentio Xuerib to Philippo Fenec on 8 November 1566.<sup>36</sup> The least expensive donkey was actually a she-ass *pili ferrantis* which Bendo Cumbo acquired from Mariano Micallef for 1 *uncie* 18 *tareni*.<sup>37</sup> As for mules, the story is a bit different as they tended to keep their price quite high. The maximum amount fetched by a mule was that of 11 *uncie* 20 *tareni* in a contract drawn up on 18 June 1568. Blasio Chilia, a Maltese living in Gozo, sold a mule *pili castagni* to Petro Casha of Birkircara (Birkirkara) for the mentioned price which was to be paid in Christmas.<sup>38</sup> Although the lowest price fetched by a mule was 5 *uncie*, only one other mule fetched a similar price as all the others were sold for more than 7 *uncie*.

As can be expected from an agricultural community, the ownership of cattle was widespread, however according to Godfrey Wettinger, some landowners together with notaries, lawyers, priests and other better-off persons had a pre-eminent status among the dealers in cattle.<sup>39</sup> Though not necessarily the case, Antonio Plathamone was one person which features in two contracts of lease of quite large amounts of cattle. In the first instance he leased out 89 cattle to Federico Caruana. This lease was to be for one year starting on the following 15 August at the price of 6 *tareni* per *pecude*.<sup>40</sup> He also rented out 80 cattle this time to Joannello Spiteri for also one year starting on the following 15 Aug for the same price of 6 *tareni* per *pecude* payable in instalments of one-third.<sup>41</sup>

The importance of animals in the everyday life of the people of the sixteenth century is further emphasised when looking at the dowries. Apart from a number of other things such as property, the newlyweds were frequently given animals from their parents as well. Joanne Grima, son of Pasqualis Grima and the late Agathe, and Vincentia de Nicolachio, daughter of the late Andriotte de Nicolachio and Francine, were given a large number of animals, apart from other things, such as a house and two store houses in the castle. Animals received from the bride's parents included three bulls, two cows, a cow with its young, a she-ass with its young, an ass *pili ferrantis* and another *pili rubei*, two

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mules, five heads of cattle and one pig, another bull *pili rubei aratorem*, and ten more heads of cattle, some of them pregnant.<sup>42</sup>

With agriculture being the basis of the sixteenth-century economy, the major occupation was farming. Landowners and fief-holders considered it degrading to work the land; hence they relied on peasants to do the actual work. Unlike their Sicilian counterparts, where the land was almost entirely owned by the king, the feudal classes and the Church, many peasants in Malta were landholders. The lands of the peasants were small and-mostly-each-peasant-would-not-have-more-than-three-or-four-fields, however this still gave them a superior status to the Sicilian farmers.<sup>43</sup> This superiority was, however, only in terms of landownership as most Maltese lands were of poor quality. The people who did not own land or in the case of Gozo in the 1560s, the Maltese who went to live on the island of Gozo, were able to lease lands from the proprietors. Larger properties were usually let out in smaller portions to farmers themselves. In the records under review this is evident. Sometimes the number of parts in which the field was divided was given in the acts such as in the leasing out of one-fourth of field by Joanne Grego to Dominico Tune for two years.44

One can see transactions between the people who belonged to the more well-off families as well as between the lower classes themselves. Not only lands were leased out but also fountains, gardens, mills, and farmhouses. A case in point is *magnificus* Matheo Falsono Secreto who on 19 October 1566 lent a fountain named *hainhabdum* (Għajn Habdun) to Dego de Joseppi for three years which started on the previous 15 August for 4 *uncie* per year.<sup>45</sup> The leasing of farmhouses, frequently with the surrounding lands was a common occurrence as well. Such an instance is a contract between Joanne Grima and Andreas Gatto. Grima leased out and gave in *gabella* a *locum rusticum* with its fields in Gozo in *ta samar* (Ta' Samar) for one year starting on the day of the drawing up of the contract for the price of 3 *uncie* per year.<sup>46</sup> In another instance, Domenico Greco was leased a locum rusticum with its fields in Gozo, in *guedilhasri* (Wied il-Għasri) for four years. Greco was to pay 13 *salme* and 8 *tumini* of mixed grains per annum for this lease.<sup>47</sup>

The hiring of people to work in the agricultural sector was also quite a common occurrence. Some people were hired for the harvesting period or else for a number of years with the pay usually being a mix of money, cereals as well as food and clothing. Sometimes the wages were very low such as when Raynelio Machnne hired Gozimo de Amore on 18 February 1567 for the period of grain harvesting he agreed to pay him 12 *tareni* for the whole period.<sup>48</sup> However, there were better wages such as the hiring of Francisco Sammut, a Maltese, by Joanne Theobaldo, a Gozitan for three months starting on the day of the drawing up of the contract for the price of 16 *tareni* per month and the necessary drink.<sup>49</sup>

The acts under study contain few references to the sale of textiles and clothes between the local people. The acts under review give the description of a couple of clothing items which are decorated and which seem to have pertained to the upper class of society who saw fashion as a reminder of their social status. The transactions encountered are on a small scale usually with only one item sold. This is the case of a contract drawn up on 27 March 1567. Guarino de Plathamone sold to Josephus Rapa a women's mantle of common cloth, decorated with griffons and with a silver fastening for 6 uncie 16 tareni payable on the following 1 August.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Jacobo Imbrogl of Gudie (Gudia) sold a dress of scarlet cloth decorated with five strips of black velvet and with decorated sleeves to Angelo Tabuni, of Siggiewi but living in Gozo, for 4 uncie.<sup>51</sup> The only exception was a contract of debitum in which Francisco Grima declared that he owed Joanne Sammut of Naxaro (Naxxar) 3 uncie 18 tareni for 12 palme of black coloured cloth.52

With the Maltese islands being surrounded by the Mediterranean, this body of water invariably played a very important part in the life of the islanders. This is especially so with the arrival of the Knights of St John in Malta. During the sixteenth century, the Knights were involved, with other Christian forces, in attacks directed at the Ottoman Empire as well as in the protection of Tripoli. The Knights had their galleys whose characteristics 'rendered it most suitable for the war of corsairs'.<sup>53</sup> Thousands of Maltese people were employed on board these galleys

and sailing ships of the Order doing various kinds of duties.<sup>54</sup> Apart from working with the Order on the ships and in the dockyard, some Maltese had their own ships which they used both for trade as well as for corsairing purposes. The latter was done either through a formal declaration or by the obtaining of letters of marque which authorised privateering expeditions in a private capacity.<sup>55</sup> Privateering expeditions had their base in Malta and these attracted both Maltese and foreigners who practised the *corso* according to rules set out by the Order.

The records under review do not contain much reference to corsairing, however, there is an instance where a short narrative of what happened to Martin Mule who found himself the target of Muslim corsairing. In a contract drawn up on 20 July 1568, Johannes Haius, called galtir, of Gozo reported that a few days before, his partner Martin Mule had left the bay of Marsalfurn (Marsalforn) on a fregata named Santa Maria del Soccorso (del Securso) carrying 15 hinnies of horses and asses, as well as two mules, for the Magnifico Antonio de Mazara, with the licence to export these animals. His final destination was to be Pozzallo but while they were on high sea, they met pirate galleys of the infidel enemy. The patron of the ship escaped with the sailors on board the scaffa of the frigate leaving the frigate with the passengers on board in the bay of Cala di lo Corbo. However, the patron and the crew were captured by the enemy. The court of Gozo, thus, authorised Johannes Hauis to act in order to recover the ship and redeem his partner who was held captive. In the contract, in front of notary Tomaso Gauci, Hauis authorised Joannis Refalo as his procurator with full rights to go to Sicily and do whatever else is necessary in order to try and recover the said ship and to liberate the said Martin Mule from captivity.56

Another aspect of this seafaring side of the Maltese and Gozitans was seen in the sale of ships or shares in ships. One instance was the sale related to the previous contract. This was the sale of one-half of a frigate together with its *fragatina* armed with all the sails and furnishing needed to travel and which was at the time moored in the harbour of Malta by Johannes Haius to Martino Mule on 18 June 1568. This price was that of 103 gold *scudi* and 2 *tareni* which was to be paid in a year from the drawing up of the contract. The sale was done on the condition that whatever income was made through the freight of the ship during this year was taken by Johannes while he was bound to safeguard the price to be paid by Martin Mule, the buyer.<sup>57</sup>

#### Conclusion

Gozo in the mid-sixteenth century, as can be seen from these acts, was trying to rebuild itself from the devastation which fell upon it in 1551. Things moved slowly but steadily and almost fifteen years after this disaster took place, one can see that the daily momentum was being restored. While the siege of Malta of 1565 affected Gozo, in one way or another, normal life resumed fairly quickly.

Gozitan society was based on agriculture and landholding. One can see people from Malta, Gozo and Sicily mingling together and involving themselves in various contracts. The population was divided between the landowning nobility and the peasants. However, these were not cut off from each other and were frequently involved in the different kinds of contracts. These nobles were also involved in the importation of wheat from Sicily and in the *corso* which, when successful, yielded huge profits.

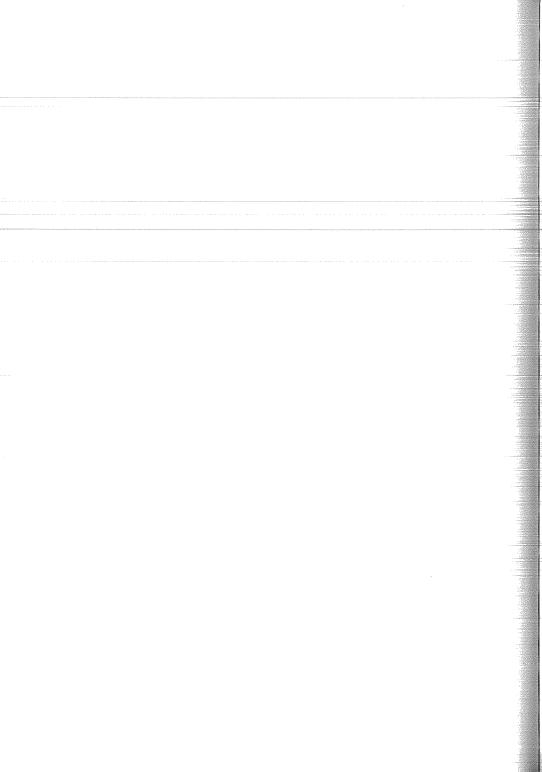
The above shows that notarial records enable the historian to see beyond the main events which took place in the island and help one focus on the lives of specific people in a particular place and time through the contract which they drew up in front of the notary. Furthermore, one is not only able to see the basic procedures but also to find unique events which happened in the lives of these people and which remain unknown until sources like these are tapped.

Beyond the contractual formalities and procedural niceties, one can perceive unique events and circumstances which marked the daily lives of the contractees, and which, if tapped by the historian, provide life and colour to the past rather than lie forgotten on an archival shelf, collecting dust.

#### Endnotes

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- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 425.
- <sup>8</sup> Dominic Cutajar and Carmel, Cassar, 'Malta and the sixteenth century struggle for the Mediterranean', in *The Great Siege 1565, Separating Fact From Fiction* (Malta, 2005), 18.
- <sup>9</sup> Notarial Archives, Valletta [NAV], R287/3.
- <sup>10</sup> Henry Kamen, *The Iron Century: Social change in Europe 1550-1660*, (London, 1971), 134.
- <sup>11</sup> NAV, R287/4, f.221v.
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- <sup>13</sup> NAV, R287/4, f.201r
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- <sup>15</sup> NAV, R287/4, f.99r.
- <sup>16</sup> NAV, R287/4, f.57v (21.11.1566).
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- <sup>18</sup> G. Wettinger, 'Agriculture in Malta in the Late Middle Ages', in *Proceedings of History Week*, 1981, ed. M. Buhagiar (Malta, 1982), 1-48.
- <sup>19</sup> Wettinger, 'Agriculture in Malta', 3.
- <sup>20</sup> NAV, R287/4, f.149r.
- <sup>21</sup> NAV, R287/4, f.117v.
- <sup>22</sup> NAV, R287/4, f.9r (18.09.1566).
- 23 NAV, R287/4, f.179v.
- <sup>24</sup> NAV, R287/4, f.66r.
- <sup>25</sup> NAV, R287/4, 8r (18.09.1566).
- <sup>26</sup> NAV, R287/4, f.142v (24.02.1568).
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- <sup>28</sup> Wettinger, 'Agriculture in Malta', 31.
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- <sup>32</sup> Charles, Dalli, 'The rise and fall of the donkey: the central Mediterranean islands (Malta, Gozo, Pantelleria and Sicily)', unpublished paper, 1.
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- <sup>48</sup> NAV, R287/4, f.91r.
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- <sup>55</sup> Bono, 'Naval exploits', 388-389.
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# The Manoel Theatre Academy of Dramatic Art: 1977-1980

#### Stefan Aquilina

#### Introduction

The Manoel Theatre Academy of Dramatic Art (MTADA) was Malta's first formal theatre and acting school. It was set up in 1977 through a Technical Cooperation Agreement between the British Council, the Ministry for Education, and the Manoel Theatre.<sup>1</sup> The Academy was placed under the direction of Adrian Rendle, a theatre practitioner from England with considerable experience both as an amateur director at the Tower Theatre, an important amateur theatre group in London<sup>2</sup> and as a professional theatre maker with the Theatre Royal Stratford Atte-Bow company and on the London West End. A former teacher at the Webber Douglas and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, amongst others, Rendle also delivered workshops in a number of former British colonies, including Zambia and Uganda.<sup>3</sup> He was soon joined by Peter Cox, who was engaged as a Theatre-in-Education (TIE) Coordinator, aside from also serving as the Academy's Assistant Director.<sup>4</sup>

This essay expounds on the work of the MTADA during its first few years of operation. (Rendle and Cox left the island in 1980.) Two points frame the exposition: (1) the training given at the MTADA and (2) the possibility of an underlying national dimension to the Academy. Sources used include newspaper articles and press releases, archival material at the Manoel Theatre and, most importantly, a set of about fifteen interviews carried out with various former teachers and students of the MTADA. I would like to thank these interviewees for their time and insightful comments, especially Alfred Scalpello, Charles Falzon, Nathalie Schembri, and Margaret Agius, who were kind enough to

share their photographs of various MTADA productions. I would also like to thank Alba Florian Viton and Averil Bonnici, two Theatre Studies graduates, for their help in compiling and transcribing the interviews.

# Technical training at the MTADA

The MTADA offered training in dramatic art to Junior (from 14-17 years) and Senior (18 upwards) classes, across a programme of study that extended over a period of five terms. It initially also ran a separate stage-management course. Two training modes underlined these classes, what I will refer to as 'technical' and 'attitudinal' training. I will discuss the technical training first.

The technical training at the MTADA revolved around workshops in movement, voice, improvisation, interpretation, and rehearsal. Informing these was the Academy's set up as a conventional text-based drama school, with the 'policy of mounting studio productions every six to eight weeks'.<sup>5</sup> This textual emphasis comes as no surprise when one considers that Rendle was particularly proficient in conventional, proscenium-staging of classic texts, like the Greek tragedies and comedies, Shaw, Ibsen, Chekhov, Lorca, and others. The work of the actor was similarly described through a terminology that is synonymous with text-based theatre. For example, in an article in The Times of Malta, Rendle wrote that the art of the actor is 'to carry the spoken word clearly forward, to gain flexibility of expression and full use of the sounds. MTADA recognises this need as much as it continues to recognise the need for good emphasis, inflection and diction in English'.<sup>6</sup> This is corroborated by one of the actors (Michael Tabone), who underlined the following as one of Rendle's principles:

Love the script, fall in love with your script, even sleep with it, know every line, get a photographic memory because that is the very basic. When you know the script, every line, it is only then that you may start to give and to interpret.<sup>7</sup>

This text-based emphasis translated into a studio practice that relied on questioning as a form of actor training. Students were thus trained to create three-dimensional characters and situate these within the broader scene or play, a practice that is clearly suited to a text-based theatre. For example, Josephine Fuller speaks about the 'the way we split it [the character] up and the way we pulled away [its] layers'.8 Consequently, training sessions at the MTADA often took the form of a 'master class', with Rendle asking questions related to the background of the play, the character's biography, the choices he or she makes, the relationships on and off the stage, and so on. Situating the character within its socio-political context was particularly important, as Margaret Agius notes: 'No, I do not recall the tutors doing that, telling us how to speak the lines. They tried much more to put us in the context [of the play]. They would speak to us on that'.9 This is corroborated by Josette Ciappara, who adds that this work on contextualisation would help the students not only to embody the characters but also transmit nuanced meaning about the social environment in which the characters would be situated. She gives the example of John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi. Working on the title role meant that the actress would need 'to enter in this environment with the social background they used to live in [...]. Therefore I would not be interpreting the Duchess, but society, the soul that I would have had to discover in her'. Ciappara goes on to describe a typical MTADA session as follows:

You start saying to yourself: I am understanding this, but not this, why is this happening in this manner? Who is this character? This way you start entering into the unseen text. He [Rendle] would give you a task, telling you that work on that task would be carried out during a particular period of time. [...] 'Here is this speech, you have to work on it and perform it.' Or interpret it rather than perform it. You have to interpret it by that date. You would think that you would be interpreting when in actual fact he would pick on every small intonation, the smallest movement you would do, and ask you questions on that.<sup>10</sup>

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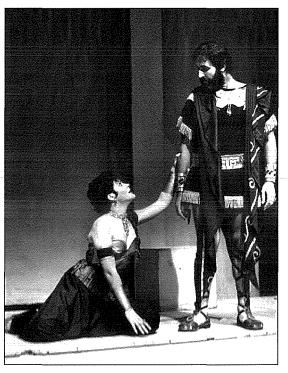
Post-mortem evaluation was particularly valued. In these cases, questioning and probing beneath the surfaces of the script and the production were again the favoured training approach.

The broadest spectrum of theatre practice possible was, however, still attempted within this text-based framework. This was clear in the choice of visiting tutors, who were engaged to give six to eight weeks inputs on particular projects. These tutors included Roger Watkins, David Wylde, Lee Dixon, and Hugh Morrison. The latter was a prominent name in many interviews, and his difference to Rendle was duly noted. Morrison was described as much more physical in his approach, one whose 'theatre was physical before even text and script' (Josephine Fuller)<sup>11</sup>, and who would 'work more on movement, not on the word itself, but more on the cheorographical aspect of the scene' (Lino Mintoff).<sup>12</sup> Stephen Florian believes that it was precisely this wide pedagogical spectrum that contributed to the MTADA's success: 'With all the contrast they [the English tutors] presented to one another, they made the thing run'.<sup>13</sup>

Certain productions carried a clear pedagogical intent. For example, the staging of *Fedra* (1978; Racine's text was translated by Frans Sammut) was conceived as a study of seventeenth-century neoclassical acting. Mario Azzopardi, who directed this piece, described the process as follows:

I researched Racine a lot when we staged *Fedra*. We carried out three or four months work on Racine's system, like the geometrical arrangement of the actors for example. That's how I staged that production, on Racine's notebooks. I would overhaul that if I were to do it now, but the MTADA also had an academic side to it which your students had to take out with them.<sup>14</sup>

The same pedagogical emphasis was evident when the January 1979 intake, which included Michael Tabone and Manuel Cauci, staged as their first acting exercise a shortened version of *The Merchant of Venice*. Tabone described this production as 'grotesque' and 'exaggerated',



Fedra, 1979. Picture courtesy of Josette Ciappara

production styles which on a first level might seem inappropriate for a Shakespearean text. However, the pedagogical formation of the actors took precedence, with Tabone remarking that the 'exaggerated' direction not only helped the students to break their initial inhibitions and to work together as a group, but also to 'relieve the bodies and voices [of tensions]'.<sup>15</sup> This production was also staged by Mario Azzopardi.

# Attitudinal training at the MTADA

Underneath these technical aspects of work was the attitudinal training. This is a term that I borrow from Robert M. Gagnè's study *The Conditions of Learning*. Gagnè defines learning as 'a change in human disposition or capability, which persists over a period of time, and which

is not simply ascribable to processes of growth'.<sup>16</sup> He identified five varieties of what can be learned: intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, verbal information, motor skills, and attitudes. The latter are difficult to measure, and they include such examples as the 'attitude of precision', the 'attitude of carefulness', 'competition', 'compromise', and so on. Gagnè adds that while these attitudes are indeed learned incidentally, there is still a certain expectation that pedagogical contexts like schools contribute to the learning and reinforcement of these and other attitudes.<sup>17</sup> The MTADA can be seen to have partaken in this vision. In fact, the term 'attitudinal' was used by Cox to describe the work of the MTADA when he corresponded with various Secondary Schools. In his own words, the Academy offered 'a thorough grounding in the Art of theatre with a particular emphasis on [the] attitude towards it'.<sup>18</sup> Naturally, there was no particular class that sought to 'teach' precision or group work, but these attitudes underlined the training in a way that they could be picked up by the students. They became part and parcel of the everyday work at the Academy, silent presences but present nonetheless. Commitment was central to this attitude and students were barred from participating in other theatrical projects outside of the Academy. This commitment led Azzopardi to describe the actors taking part in Fedra, i.e. the first intake, as 'a scrupulously loyal cast'.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that Ninette Micallef, one of the more seasoned students, did not quiet agree with this policy. In fact, she had to decline some offers that came her way when she was still at the MTADA, even though she did appreciate the logistical necessity behind such a policy.<sup>20</sup>

The attitudinal training, or perhaps here 'formation' might be a better term to use, carried with it a certain professional inflection. This was stated in the Academy's aims and objectives, reproduced in many of the programmes of the time as to 'develop basic attitudes to acting and production that are professionally aware'.<sup>21</sup> This professional awareness must have demanded attention from the surrounding theatre context which was then still inherently amateur in nature, as Cremona and Schranz wrote some fifteen years later when they reviewed the scene for the *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*: 'Maltese theatre companies [...] have always been amateur. The country is too



Fedra, 1979. Picture courtesy of Josette Ciappara

small to allow anybody to earn an income solely from theatre; thus even the most dedicated actors do theatre in their free time'.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the professional background of Rendle, Cox, and the other visiting practitioners was not only a standard to which the Maltese students could aspire, but also an indication of possible developments in the theatrical scene of the time, as I will discuss shortly. Josette Ciappara remembers this professional-amateur dichotomy as something that was talked about, as terms that were used within the Academy. Professionalism became synonymous with commitment, and Ciappara paraphrases Rendle as having said the following:

Listen dear, you are talking here to someone who is a professional, who came from abroad to give you this professional mentality. You will not be a part-time in theatre. You will either give full commitment or there is no choice. [...] You are expected to attend all rehearsals. You are expected to attend all uncalled rehearsals, and I expect your full commitment. [...] There was no way you could go to a session without knowing the lines. He would say: 'You need to know your lines by tomorrow.' If you go to the session without knowing the lines, Rendle would say: 'Ok, we'll meet another day', and someone else would come in. There was no time for play, there was only time for work and good experience. [...] In this way he would show you that this was not a plaything, a club, but that theatre is something that has to be respected. That the actor has a certain dignity, a certain creativity.<sup>23</sup>

The technical and attitudinal approaches to the training come together in the following statement made by Ninette Micallef. It concerns a comment made on the link between the MTADA and the Manoel Theatre. Technically, Micallef says, the training space at the Manoel was quite limited. The MTADA practiced in one or two rooms, apparently where today is the bar area. The theatre of the Upper Secondary School in Valletta was also used as a rehearsal and a performance space. However, what the space at the Manoel lacked in technical facilities was compensated by the 'theatre vibes' (Stephen Florian)<sup>24</sup> emanating from the building, and the fact that the students felt part of the Manoel Theatre. Micallef continues as follows: 'That I remember very, very fondly. That we were really part of this theatre in a way, [...] the lovely building...it had a soul to it'.<sup>25</sup> Josephine Fuller speaks in a very similar manner:

The real benefit [from the link between the MTADA and the Manoel Theatre] was the fact that you were there. In the sense that spiritually and emotionally and the fact that you were actually in the theatre premises. There was this feeling of belonging to something that was bigger than you. [Interviewer: *The idea of an institution.*] Yes, and the fact that it was at the Manoel with the long standing history behind it was very good. But apart from that the premises no, I don't think there were any real benefits.

[Interviewer: Just the idea of it.] The emotional feeling, the spirituality of it more than anything was  $good.^{26}$ 

What emerges here is that any technical difficulties, in this case related to the space, were compensated by the attitudinal dimension that the MTADA exhibited, in this case through its link with Manoel Theatre. Many interviewees commented further on the advantageous link between the Manoel Theatre and the MTADA. It brought a status that ultimately drew people to the Academy, as Lino Mintoff says: 'It was like giving the carrot, even to those that were interested in doing theatre. The Manoel Theatre was the place to be, performing there meant that you had sort of made it'.<sup>27</sup> Margaret Agius agrees with this, saying that it was an 'honour' to be involved with the Manoel.<sup>28</sup> The fact that the MTADA was the first drama school in Malta also engendered a sense of pride among the first cohorts of students (Josephine Fuller).<sup>29</sup> A loop is evident here, as prestige and status brought responsibility into the picture, which further fed the attitudinal dimension of the training. The students had to respond to the standards associated with the Manoel Theatre, a responsibility which further sharpened the commitment of at least the most sensitive students.

# **Formal and Informal Training Practices**

On average, MTADA sessions were about three hours long, and held on alternate week days. The Junior classes met twice a week. Rehearsals invariably increased when productions drew nearer. Semi-official sessions on improvisation were also held on Saturday. These various sessions comprised the formal and visible training of the MTADA. Rendle, however, was also known to give a lot of informal training, and it is this lengthy training that Alfred Mallia chose to speak about when interviewed. Prior to his engagement at the MTADA, Mallia was starting to make a name for himself as a young character actor. Rendle, in fact, had seen him in the cameo part of an old man in the Atturi Theatre Production of Sławomir Mrożek's *Tango*. His first tasks as an MTADA teacher were the Junior Class productions of Karel and Josef Čapek's *The Insect Play* and Thorton Wilder's *Our Town*. These were followed by two Assistant Director tasks, one with Rendle himself, the other with David Wylde on a production of John Bowen's *The Disorderly Women*. The important difference was that now Mallia was being engaged on lengthier, senior productions. Underlying these formal tasks was a lot of informal contact time with Rendle, at the MTADA premises or even at the Englishman's home in Mdina, where the work would be discussed. Mallia describes the informal training that took place over these four productions as follows:

Rendle would give you space to work, but without leaving you completely to your own devices. He would support you and every now and then he would attend a rehearsal. [...] This was one of Rendle's strongest points. In retrospect, I could say that he was building me up. In the sense that he would take you from one process to another, from one level to another so that you could mature in the way you direct and relate to the students. [...] Till that point, my training with him revolved more on the fact that he would attend my rehearsals, which we would discuss later. [...] Eventually he introduced me to the Seniors, but he did not put me directly in the cauldron, because among the students there were people who were even more experienced than I was. He would tell me, go and rehearse that character, go through this part, one on one. Sometimes he would tell me, 'Listen, today you take the rehearsal, you carry out the run through.' In this way, even the actors started seeing me as Rendle's assistant.<sup>30</sup>

It was only after this training process, spread over two years, that Mallia was given the responsibility to direct with the Senior Class a full production of Ronald Miller's *Abelard and Heloise*, in October 1978.

Far from a short training programme in direction and actor pedagogy, Mallia's training with Rendle reads as a long-term project that aims at longevity. Such a long-term process of work underlines Rendle's vision for the MTADA. More than quick results, he fully understood that the creation of a solid drama school could only take place over a protracted period of time, which is why he sought to plant roots while allowing

these the time to germinate properly: 'The only thing [possible] was to plan a programme of work based on the simplest professional structure and let the aims of training establish some roots'.<sup>31</sup> To create a sound foundation, he chose practitioners with different skills and theatrical inclinations, and these choices further enhanced the variety of the Academy's tuition. Alfred Mallia was not the only practitioner that Rendle pooled from the Atturi Theatre Productions. Godwin Scerri, one of the leading actors of that company, was also engaged to teach the Junior classes. He was perhaps the most formally trained of the Maltese staff, as he was a 1971 graduate of the Central School of Speech and Drama.<sup>32</sup> Albert Marshall and Mario Azzopardi were engaged to teach the Senior Classes. They were very different directors and teachers. Marshall had directed a number of productions for Atturi, but his name was more synonymous with avant-garde productions such as his staging of Il-Faust. Mario Azzopardi, on his part, was immersed in a socially committed theatre. Karmenu Aquilina's position as an MTADA teacher was secured on the strength of his annual passion play productions at the village of Gharghur.<sup>33</sup> Aquilina worked with the Junior Classes and as a producer of Theatre-in-Education (TIE) sessions.

# The Search for a National Theatre Company

Beyond these various training practices (technical and attitudinal, formal and informal), the MTADA played a wider role that linked it directly to the socio-political context of the time. As a starting point to this part, I would like to draw attention to the following two sources. First, I will refer to two similar statements made in separate interviews. Josephine Fuller says that Rendle 'really tried to build something but, like I said, we really didn't know what'.<sup>34</sup> The ambivalent word 'something' surfaces again in another interview, this time with Stephen Florian: 'In terms of what the school was made of, even though it was giving results, I think it was a potpourri of events trying to settle into something'.<sup>35</sup> It is on this 'something' that I would like to expound, by calling upon a second source. A newspaper article was published in the *Times of Malta* in January 1980, at a time when the MTADA was

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suspended over a dispute related to whether the Maltese staff should be given complimentary tickets to attend the students' performances. *The Times* correspondent wrote about the broader dimension of the MTADA. He quoted Malta's then Prime Minister (Duminku Mintoff) as having said in Parliament that 'in the field of theatre culture we have not even started to walk' ('f'dik li hi kultura teatrali ghadna lanqas biss bdejna nimxu'). The correspondent underlined MTADA's contribution to this field and, therefore, questioned its closure: 'How can we expect the up-and-coming generation to take culture seriously if the Government's Academy of Drama set up in 1977 has now closed down for reasons which are not clear at all?'<sup>36</sup> Taking my cue from these two sources, I will argue that the MTADA was envisaged as a platform to create such a 'theatre culture' or 'theatre scene', one that, crucially, aspired to the national consciousness prevalent at the time.

It is, of course, both presumptuous and incorrect to say that there was no theatre scene before the 1977 opening of the MTADA. After all, theatre practice in Malta had by then already witnessed some important milestone events and productions, practices which as a common denominator all exhibited a desire to supersede the practice of *teatrin*. These included, amongst others: the festivals of Greek dramas held at the Ta' Giorni theatre in the 1960s; the development of the more physical idioms adopted by research groups like Pamela Ash's Clique, Theatre Workshop, and Henri Dogg; the more in-your-face evenings of *Xsenuru?*; Francis Ebejer's productions of his modern texts; and the formation in 1974 of Karmen Azzopardi's and Paul Naudi's Atturi Theatre Productions, and its development as Malta's closest attempt to a repertoire company. However, what was missing was a full-time theatre context, and I would like to suggest that it is specifically this void that the MTADA was set up to eventually fill.

In those years of pre-European funding, the only way in which such a professional attempt could even be conceived was through Governmental backing, which lent the Academy a marked national dimension. Some indications point in this direction. First, there is the surrounding political context. For example, the following statement made by one of the first-intake students (Lino Mintoff), though historically incorrect, is very revealing: 'When the opportunity came up, after the change in Government, the MTADA was set up'.<sup>37</sup> This is incorrect because the change in Government occurred in 1971, with the MLP winning again the 1976 elections. The MTADA was set up a year later, but what Mintoff does here is to link the MTADA with the Labour Government of the time, a Government which was responsible for the setting up of several national bodies and institutions like Sea Malta (in 1973), Air Malta and Tele Malta (both in 1974).<sup>38</sup> Situated as it was at the tail-end of the 1970s, and in such a strong institutionalised context, it is not difficult to associate a national dimension to the MTADA, especially when one considers the strong links which it had with the Ministry for Education.

This link between the MTADA and the Ministry for Education can be discerned from the correspondences between the two, letters which the Manoel Theatre has scrupulously archived more than any other documents related to the Academy's operations. In one letter to Dr Philip Muscat, the then Minister for Education, Rendle expressed his satisfaction on having the MTADA linked to national educational programmes: 'I am glad that the MTADA programme of acting exercises in training can be made part of [the] feature which happily combines with the use of the New Lyceum and the enrichment courses'.<sup>39</sup> He saw this link as an opportunity to secure employment both for his staff as well as for the graduating students. It is also through the channel of the Ministry for Education that Rendle asked for more human resources, especially needed to take the Junior classes, and for more training space. In fact, his conclusion to a May 1977 correspondence reads as follows: 'Without permanent premises (plus the availability of a practice theatre) and approval for both technical and academic expenditure the Drama training course will be severely impeded'.40

The second indication is provided by the cultural rather than the political context. Post-independence Malta was marked by an active search for what might constitute the national identity of the Maltese people.<sup>41</sup> This was corroborated by Lino Mintoff, who described this search as a national movement:

These were progressive years. We were trying to find our identity, because we were always [following] what the foreigners would do for example. We were trying to find out what we could do, what distinguishes us from others. [...] This movement was taking place not only in theatre but also in other realities like literature, and in the organisation of things.<sup>42</sup>

The MTADA contributed to this movement with its choice of repertoire. Many texts in English were staged, but an attempt was made to balance these with various Maltese translations of classics (including *Cavalleria Rusticana, Blood Wedding, Jubilee, Lower Depths, Roots,* and other). The intention was also to stage original works in Maltese, 'where viable'<sup>43</sup>, but this proposition had to wait at least some years to come to fruition. The choice to stage works in Maltese, however, intertwined the MTADA in the broader national movement that identified language as an ideal indicator to mark the emerging's nation collective identity.<sup>44</sup> Rendle fully supported Maltese productions. His reasoning was that the people with whom he was working, both at tutor and student levels, were to be given the time to mature in order for them to then claim ownership of the local theatrical scene. As Josette Ciappara says, Rendle could often be heard saying: 'Listen this is your theatre. It is your responsibility'.<sup>45</sup>

The third indication is offered by the first and second intake of students, who joined the MTADA in March and in September 1977 respectively. These groups were a mixed batch. Some were clearly beginners, with little or no theatrical experience. The MTADA was, therefore, their very first step into a theatrical career. These included personalities like Josette Ciappara, Josephine Fuller, and Nathalie Schembri. However, other students were seasoned actors with much more experience, people like Joe Quattromani, Alfred Scalpello, Lina Galea Cumbo, Ninette Micallef, and Lino Mintoff. The latter, for example, says that 'we [seasoned actors] were already acting, and we were already known to work for the general public'.<sup>46</sup> Running across the MTADA of those years, but especially within these more experienced actors, was a mute understanding that the Academy was indeed serving as a launching

pad for a possible full-time, perhaps national, theatre company. Being a member of the MTADA meant a better chance for that which, even today, many practitioners still aspire to, i.e. full-time employment as a performer.

Consequently, Lino Mintoff spoke about the training offered at the MTADA by using terms like 'formal' and 'official'. He hoped that his previous experience would be substantiated by 'the official uniform education' of the MTADA because as actors they had already taken interest-and-informed-themselves, through-reading-and-face-to-face encounters, with what was happening on the continent. However, these experiences were not formalised or recurrent enough, and 'the MTADA had sort of given us the formal status, [...] some formal recognition of the technique we had'. The Academy thus served as a rubber stamp, a mark of status that one had indeed gone through the 'professional' training, given by professional practitioners and built on professional continental models, and which ultimately differentiated one from more amateur and amateurish contexts: 'You were legitimizing that which we were doing. [...] [The MTADA] eventually gave us a framework'.<sup>47</sup> In this context the combination of young and seasoned actors would have been conducive to create a strong and self-sufficient company, one that would exhibit actors of different ages and with different acting registers.

The formation of actors is, however, only one facet operating within any theatre scene. No theatre scene can flourish without a dynamic audience, and the MTADA gave this its proper attention through its various outreach programmes. The short-lived Mobile Theatre Project was among these. Directed by Mario Azzopardi, the Project consisted of touring productions by a group of MTADA graduates in various local towns and villages. In May 1979 they presented *L-Erwieh tal-Qiegha*. The project was intended to 'substitute the obsolete form of *teatrin* which still plagues the mentality of most theatre-goers'.<sup>48</sup> Excerpts of some plays were also presented during the TV show *Metronomu*, while serious dramas like *Hedda Gabler* and *Saturday, Sunday, Monday* were also filmed for television. These television production featured both MTADA graduates as well as teachers.<sup>49</sup>



Hedda Gabler, 1978. Picture courtesy of Charles Falzon. L-R: Charles Falzon, Marthese Brincat, Monica Fenech

Theatre-in-Education (TIE) productions were an integral part of this outreach, if not its main feature. TIE had three objectives. First, it contributed to the national educational curriculum because plays staged featured in 'O' and 'A' Level syllabi. These included projects revolving around the dramas of Oreste Calleja and William Shakespeare.<sup>50</sup> Other projects included, among many others, extracts from or full productions of Bernard Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*,<sup>51</sup> Arnold Wesker's *Roots*<sup>52</sup> and a production based on a Japanese documentary called *Minemata*.<sup>53</sup>

Second, TIE productions provided another acting and training outlet. Josephine Fuller says:

TIE obviously taught us a lot because audience reaction and audience participation when it comes to children is very different, so you have to be very flexible and even change an ending if you have to. [TIE experiences] were great [...] like I said because children are such an honest audience and it teaches you a lot of how much you can actually get back. I think everybody should go through a TIE program because it really gives you a lot back that you wouldn't normally get if you did something for an adult audience. [...] I think it plays a very important part in theatre training.<sup>54</sup>

The third objective was a long-term one, and TIE sessions served as a locus to 'create' a future audience, one that would be more theatrically sensitive after having encountered good theatre at an early age. In this sense, Ninette Micallef explains that the MTADA played a socio-cultural rather than a political role because, more than staging political pieces, it brought theatre to the schools, and in this way it could 'change people's perspectives on certain things'.<sup>55</sup> In other words, it is through TIE that the understanding and practice of theatre as a full-time profession was to be promulgated: 'the only way that acting can come to mean a responsible job rather than a part-time interest is if the educational aspect is taken seriously enough to create a permanent company that services the TIE programmes'.<sup>56</sup>

# Conclusion

In my conclusion, I would like to assess the MTADA's merits as well as any particular difficulties met during its first years of operation. The success of the MTADA is best seen in its graduating students, many of whom became active players on the theatre scene of the 1980s and after. These former students contributed to the growth and development of theatre in Malta. Among these one finds practitioners like Margaret Agius, who underlines how it was the Academy that had brought her to the attention of groups like the MADC, Atturi Theatre Productions, and, especially, Koperatturi. Therefore, the MTADA was also a scouting place, with theatre directors and producers being invited to witness first hand possible actors for them to engage. As one drama critic wrote while reviewing the aforementioned television production of *Hedda Gabler*, 'the services of MTADA in the past few years have added a wealth to the acting capacity that was available'.<sup>57</sup> A number of practitioners involved in the more politically oriented work of the 1980s were also former MTADA students. Michael Tabone speaks about these practitioners and their link to the Academy in the following terms: 'MTADA, I think, gave most of the actors and even directors some of those ideas [on socio-political theatre]. Because they used to tell us to read and to do your research. It was a mind opening experience'.<sup>58</sup> Some members of A-teatru, like Stephen Florian and Dominic Said, were former MTADA students.<sup>59</sup> One should also add practitioners like Anthony Bezzina and Joe Quattromani, who opened their own theatre and performance schools. Another name worth mentioning is that of Josette Ciappara, who not only contributed significantly to the development in Malta of Theatre-in-Education, but also served as the Director of the Malta Drama Centre M.A. Borg in Blata I-Bajda.<sup>60</sup>

The MTADA was also responsible for broadening the repertoire of the Maltese stage, with Paul Xuereb writing in his review of Bertolt Brecht's production of *Il-Mara Twajba ta' Setzwan (The Good Woman* of Setzwan), directed by Albert Marshall, that '[o]nce more we stand indebted to MTADA for presenting another major play to which Malta has so far been a stranger'.<sup>61</sup> Other plays which were rarely ever produced before or since include: *The Insect Play* (Karel and Josef Čapek), *The Life and Death of Almost Everybody* (David Campton), *The White Devil* (John Webster), *The Revenger's Tragedy* (Thomas Middleton), *Tartuffe* (Molière), *Tiger at the Gates* (Jean Giraudoux/Christopher Fry), *Black Comedy* (Peter Shaffer), *Ring Around the Moon* (Jean Anouilh/ Christopher Fry), *The Mask and the Face* (Luigi Chiarelli/C.B. Fernald), *John Gabriel Borkman* (Henrik Ibsen), and others.

The actual actor training given, however, is where the crux of the matter lies, and it seems that the MTADA did form its actors in the attitudinal training but less so in the more technical aspects of the actor's craft. This emerges from the interviews carried out, with only Ninette Micallef signalling technique as consequential of her MTADA training: 'that's why I wanted to join, to improve my technique. [...] Yes, it was always interesting and refreshing to work with new directors. [...] Mainly



Hobson's Choice, 1978. Picture courtesy of Alfred Scalpello. L-R: Josette Ciappara, Alfred Scalpello, Chales Wyatt

I improved my technical skills rather than anything else'.<sup>62</sup> More attitudinal answers to the question 'What did the MTADA give you?' included 'the joy of discovery', 'confidence', 'a new sort of discipline in theatre', 'seriousness in our work', 'passion for theatre', and, in two separate cases, 'strength of character'. In fact, when processed through the lens of some thirty or forty years of performance work, a number of interviewees did remark in retrospect on the lack of depth in the technical training. It was only a starting point, described in one case, by Michael Tabone, as 'the abc. At least you know that these things existed [...]. At the MTADA I learnt the very basics, maybe it was the kindergarten level for me'.<sup>63</sup>

The MTADA's overall structure as a part-time, evening school meant that the training always fell short when compared to continental models like RADA and the Webber Douglas. One former student remarked that any success she might have had in her roles was achieved intuitively rather than through technical know-how, a characteristic of amateur practice in general within which the MTADA was situated and from which at the end of the day it could not break free. Stephen Florian adds that the Academy was also limited in terms of resources: 'Ok, we had a bundle of rooms as a drama school, but did we have a gym to train stunts for example? No. Were there any proper spaces? No. They were all rehearsal rooms basically and they were used in such a way'.<sup>64</sup> Voice work seems to have been a particular problem. For example, one reviewer for the December 1978 production of The Inspector General, directed by Albert Marshall, commented on the diction, which was 'far from clear'. He added that '[i]t would seem that diction and voice production is one field where the Academy could do much more'.65 This was confirmed by another reviewer, who commented on the same production that '[c]lear diction seems to be a major hurdle for most of the actors and MTADA should remedy this in future productions'.66 At the time the MTADA did engage a certain Mary Field for speech and voice tuition, but her classes seem to have been restricted to Saturday morning sessions at her own place in Sliema.

Still, the achievements of the MTADA during the 'Rendle years', discussed here as the contribution to the national issue, the formation of future practitioners, the attitudinal training, and the broadening of the repertoire, should not be underestimated, nor should they go unnoticed by contemporary scholarly analysis as well as today's training contexts and schools. In a way, the MTADA paved the ground for future developments in actor training by creating an awareness that acting is a skill that can be trained and, therefore, systematically developed, an awareness which, arguably, paved the ground for the Theatre and Drama schools in operation today.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Ylenia Carabott, 'L-Istorja tat-Twaqqif taċ-Ċentru Tad-Drama', in *M'Hemmx Bżonn* Siparju, Mario Azzopardi (ed.) Ċentru tad-Drama M.A. Borg (Malta 2012), 61-2.
- <sup>2</sup> Alfred Mallia, 'Drama Schools and Drama Training', *The Manoel. Journal of the Manoel Theatre*, II, 1 (2000), 40-6.
- <sup>3</sup> MTADA, Performance Programme of Jubilee and Black Comedy, 1977.
- <sup>4</sup> Times of Malta, 9 June 1978.
- <sup>5</sup> Times of Malta, 9 June 1978.
- <sup>6</sup> The Sunday Times, 19 August 1979.
- <sup>7</sup> Interview with Alba Florian Viton, 14 October 2013.
- <sup>8</sup> Interview with Alba Florian Viton, 18 October 2013.
- <sup>-9</sup> Interview with the author, 1 October 2013.
- <sup>10</sup> Interview with the author, 3 October 2013
- <sup>11</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>12</sup> Interview with Alba Florian Viton, 10 October 2013.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with Alba Florian Viton, 15 October 2013.
- <sup>14</sup> Interview with the author, September 2013.
- <sup>15</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>16</sup> Robert M. Gagnè, *The Conditions of Learning* (New York, 1977), 3.
- <sup>17</sup> ibid., 232.
- <sup>18</sup> Manoel Theatre Archives 798: 40, 'Correspondence with all Senior Schools Government and Private', Peter Cox, 11 December 1978.
- <sup>19</sup> Times of Malta, 24 December 1978.
- <sup>20</sup> Interview with Alba Florian Viton, 1 November 2013.
- <sup>21</sup> MTADA, Performance Programme of Cavalleria Rusticana and Bodas de Sangre, 1979.
- <sup>22</sup> Vicki Ann Cremona and John J. Schranz, 'Malta' in World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre Europe, ed., Don Rubin, Peter Nagy, Philippe Rouyer (London 1994), 585.
- <sup>23</sup> Interview with the author.
- <sup>24</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>25</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>26</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>28</sup> Interview with the author.
- <sup>29</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>30</sup> Interview with the author, 4 November 2014.
- <sup>31</sup> The Sunday Times, 19 August 1979.
- <sup>32</sup> Interview with the author, 2 February 2013.
- <sup>33</sup> Interview with the author, 13 February 2013.
- <sup>34</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>35</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>36</sup> The Times, 21 January 1980.

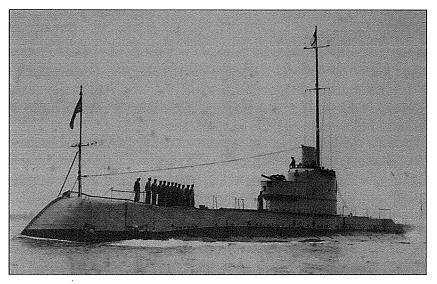
- <sup>37</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>38</sup> Desmond Zammit Marmarà, *L-Almanakk tal-Partit Laburista* (Malta, 2005), 89, 221, 325.
- <sup>39</sup> Manoel Theatre Archives 798: 61, 'Correspondence with Dr Muscat on the Enrichment Courses', Adrian Rendle, 20 November 1979.
- <sup>40</sup> Manoel Theatre Archive 798: 7.
- <sup>41</sup> Oliver Friggieri, L-Istorja tal-Poezija Maltija (Malta, 2001), 82.
- <sup>42</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>43</sup> The Sunday Times, 19 August 1979.
- <sup>44</sup> Oliver Friggieri, Il-Kuxjenza Nazzjonali Maltija. Lejn Definizzjoni Storika-Kulturali (Malta, 1995), 99.
- <sup>45</sup> Interview with author.
- <sup>46</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- 47 Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>48</sup> The Times of Malta, 12 May 1979.
- <sup>49</sup> The Times of Malta, 18 February 1980 and The Sunday Times, 9 March 1980.
- <sup>50</sup> The Times of Malta, 3 October 1979 and 28 September 1978 respectively.
- <sup>51</sup> MTADA undated programme.
- <sup>52</sup> The Sunday Times, 18 November 1979.
- <sup>53</sup> The Times of Malta, 28 September 1978. The TIE work carried out by the MTADA during these years was much more extensive, and it deserves its own independent study. For a brief introduction to this work see Carabott, 70-2.
- <sup>54</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- 55 Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>56</sup> Education Division 46/47:1, Volume 1, 'The Manoel Theatre Academy of Dramatic Art, quoted in Alfred Mallia, *Classroom drama in Malta: the key to creativity* (University of Malta, unpublished MA thesis, 2002), 41.
- <sup>57</sup> Times of Malta, 17 February 1980.
- <sup>58</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>59</sup> The Times, 17 November 1982.
- <sup>60</sup> Carabott 75.
- <sup>61</sup> The Sunday Times, 22 July 1979.
- <sup>62</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>63</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>64</sup> Interview with Florian Viton.
- <sup>65</sup> The Sunday Times, 17 December 1978.
- <sup>66</sup> The Times, 20 December 1978.

# HMS *Olympus*: A Tale of Tragedy and Heroics

# Timothy Gambin

This paper is based on the annual Andrew Vella Memorial Lecture delivered in December 2013. Through it I hope to do honour to his memory as well as to the memory of the young men who served on board the submarines that operated from Malta during World War II. What we have here is a tale of loss and discovery, tragedy and heroism - a tale that has remained relatively unknown - but one that certainly deserves to be told. It is not solely about a submarine but just as importantly, it is also about the brave young men that served on her. In fact, the vessel and her crew are inextricably linked for one cannot exist without the other.

HMS *Olympus* was built by Beardmore Shipyards on the Clyde River in Glasgow where numerous other warships had been constructed.



An early photo of the HMS Olympus (private collection).

The *Olympus* was down in 1927, launched in 1928 and subsequently commissioned in 1930. She was part of the O or Odin Class submarine, the first submarine to be designed and built after World War One.<sup>1</sup> This class of submarine measured 84 meters in length and nine meters at the beam. It had a displacement of 1700 tons on the surface and 2030 tons submerged.

Of the six vessels in this class built for the Royal Navy, one, the *Odin* was built at Chatham. For the record, HMS *Odin* was lost off Taranto with all hands on deck in 1940.<sup>2</sup> The other boats were built to moderately different specifications - two were for the Australian Navy and three destined to the Chilean Navy. Those designated for the Australian navy were meant to conduct long distance patrols in the Pacific. However, the financial crisis of the late 1920s - early 1930s meant that the O Class submarines returned to the Royal Navy spending her inter-war years as part of the 4th flotilla operating out of Hong Kong. In the main, she was involved in anti-piracy patrols in the south China Sea.

In a letter to the Commander of the post-war HMS *Olympus* (S-12 commissioned in 1962) a submariner from the original HMS *Olympus* describes life on board the submarine during this period as having been good with the crew excelling in most sports including football. Their sporting achilles heel was, ironically, water polo. Very often, naval vessels would compete against each other in numerous sporting disciplines. He ends his letter by commending the Commander to remember that the original *Olympus* was 'always a Happy Ship [and] you must keep her [the new one] that way'.<sup>3</sup> But the relative peace of the mid-1930s was brought to an abrupt end.

Whilst off the Dutch East Indies, the crew learnt of the declaration of war and its first main task was to search for German raiders. Patrols became longer with some lasting up to 66 days. One of the major engagements undertaken by the *Olympus* in the early phases of the war was a chase of the *Graf Spee*, one of Germany's largest and most powerful battleships. This action took place in cold waters of the southern American continent as far south as the Antarctic. One must keep in mind that throughout this operation most of the crew was still fitted in tropical uniforms issued for hot weather.<sup>4</sup> A series of mechanical faults blamed by the crew on lubricants that were possibly supplied (in South America) as part of a plot to sabotage the British submarine.

These faults proved very costly as *Olympus* was forced to limp into Durban harbour in South Africa for a self-refit. Besides the cold crew-members serving on board in this period also had to endure minimal rations made up of ships' biscuit with weevils and corned beef. A long-standing navy joke was that the weevils provided extra protein.

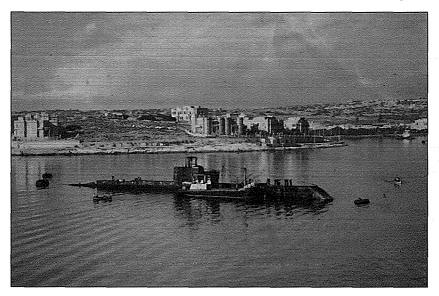
Repairs were readied and Olympus steamed to Colombo in Sri Lanka where she met with a number of other submarines to form a flotilla that was bound for the Mediterranean. Once through the Suez Canal the flotilla made it to Port Said but was eventually split up into two groups - one headed to Beirut, Lebanon and the other to Malta. The latter group consisted of the Olympus, Otis, Odin and Perseus. Of these, Olympus went straight to Dock Number 1 in Cospicua for repairs and maintenance whereas the others started their missions patrolling the Mediterranean. Whilst in dock the crew were housed in Fort St Angelo. It is not surprising that they described life in war torn Malta as grim! Works progressed well but just as these were nearing completion she took a direct hit causing severe damage to her steering gear. The navy believed that she would never be fit to sail again. However, to everyone's amazement she was once again repaired and deemed fit for action. During the subsequent sea trials she undertook an unintentional dive to 720 feet, which confirmed the integrity of the repaired hull.<sup>5</sup>

Following this unexpectedly long stop in Malta, the crew was relieved to head westwards towards Gibraltar. Close to its destination the *Olympus* quite literally scraped past an Italian submarine with crewmembers recounting how they heard their Italian counterparts exclaiming '*MAMMA MIA*'. When the submarine's stint in Gibraltar ended and before leaving for England the captain of the 'chummy' submarine (*Otis*) informed both crews that there was "no room for sickness and dodgers".<sup>6</sup> He also told the young submariners that venereal disease would be considered as a self-inflicted wound.

Back in England *Olympus* underwent yet another major refit. By this time the British government's borrowing machine was in full swing. Between November 27 and December 6 1941 - Peterborough organised Warship Week with the aim of raising £425,000 in order to adopt the *Olympus*. Just over £400,000 were raised, equivalent to approximately 16 million sterling in today's money.<sup>7</sup>

Refit completed, a handful of new crewmembers and Peterborough as its sponsor, *Olympus* was redeployed to the Mediterranean Sea. She was mainly involved in storage runs taking much needed supplies such as fuel (through a newly enlarged hatch), ammunition - such as torpedoes, medicines and the all-important mail in and out of Malta. Referred to as the magic carpet service, submarines also ferried Special Forces from Malta to Sicily and southern Italy to destroy infrastructure such as railway lines, bridges and power lines. Occasionally agents were dropped off in North Africa.<sup>8</sup>

In early 1941, it was decided to move 10th flotilla to the safety of Alexandria. Too many submarines had suffered in Malta including the



HMS Olympus at the Lazaretto submarine base (private collection).

*P36* and *P39* which were both destroyed. Their crewmembers survived as they had been inside the shelters. Such a precious (human) resource could not be allowed to stand idle. These experienced submariners were ordered back to Britain to man the first newly completed U-Class submarines at Barrow in Furness.

This is where the fate of the various crews comes together for it was on the *Olympus* that the survivors were to make their way home. In order to accommodate the extra personnel from the P36 and P39, areas cleared for storage were set up with improvised hammocks as were other spaces vacated through the removal of copper ballast ingots. Of note is the fact that on board the *Olympus* were no less than three submarine captains Dymott, the vessel's own, Marriott of the *P39* and Edmonds of the *P36* comprising quite a concentration of highly qualified personnel.<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, a crewmember from the P39, an individual by the name of Horton, was prevented from joining his fellow crewmembers. This because he was considered to be an excellent welder - his skills being too valuable to a naval base under siege. He is said to have shed tears on the dockside when the *Olympus* set sail with his fellow crewmembers on board.

Leaving the harbour in the dark on the morning of 8 May 1942 she is recorded to have headed eastwards so as to avoid mines that were systematically laid across the approaches to Grand Harbour. A couple of hours later a large bang was heard by those on board and crewmembers automatically assumed that their vessel was under attack and scrambled to dive the submarine. Despite the obvious confusion on board it soon became evident that the submarine was taking water and there was little that could be done to save her. The crew, in typical British style, calmly existed the hatches and stood on the deck. Some of them attempted to attract attention by signaling Malta (which was still blacked out) with a torch as the distress signals on the periscope had failed to ignite. A proper signaling light was also available but this too did not function. In desperation an attempt was made to fire the gun but the shell got jammed. Some thought was given to removing cordite from the cartridges in order to ignite this on the deck. However, this idea was dismissed as it would have taken too much time and time was something that these men did not have. Within a few minutes water started splashing over the sides and all men were instructed to abandon ship and jump overboard. Looking back, one of nine survivors recalls how the *Olympus* sank gracefully 'on her last dive' under the waves. She took with her between 10 and 20 men from the *P39* as these were trapped in the battery section of the vessel.

Initial shouts of men looking for their friends died down and the menbegan to swim back towards the island in silence. Ironically it was the enemy planes conducting an early-morning raid that guided them towards Malta. Members of this loose group of swimmers occasionally called out to each other but eventually they swam in silence. They also died in silence with only one or two crying out before raising their arms and allowing themselves to sink below the surface. At one point a crewmember spotted a floating mine and swam towards it so as to use the device as an aid. Spotting the danger and the irrational behaviour of this individual other crewmembers shouted at the man not to touch the object. Thankfully, the man was persuaded and tragedy was averted - or at least delayed.

One survivor, W.G. Wright, describes how thoughts of his daughter asking why she grew up without a father gave him the impetus to carry on. He swam on his back using systematic breathing to keep him going physically. The sea was a cool 10.5 degrees Celsius - he remembers this detail because as a mechanic on board one of his duties was to measure the temperature of the water intake into the engine. Very cold and suffering from exhaustion Wright heroically made it to the beach only to nearly drown in a few feet of water. Another crewmember, Talbot, made it to shore only to collapse and die just as he had made it to safety.<sup>10</sup> Two soldiers waded ankle-deep into the water to help Wright to his feet. Over 40 years later Wright wrote, 'I had never swum a mile before in my life but this time I had to swim seven and it took five hours'.<sup>11</sup> He collapsed only to come to in hospital, probably that in Mtarfa. He quickly learned that only nine men were accounted for - seven in hospital and two back at base.<sup>12</sup> An individual by the name of Farley was washed up on the shore with his Davis Escape Set still on. He was picked up and resuscitated by some Maltese people who subsequently looked after him for a few days.<sup>13</sup> Some rescue vessels made their way out to the site of the incident but only five bodies were recovered.<sup>14</sup> These are all buried in the Kalkara naval cemetery. The rest all perished at sea.

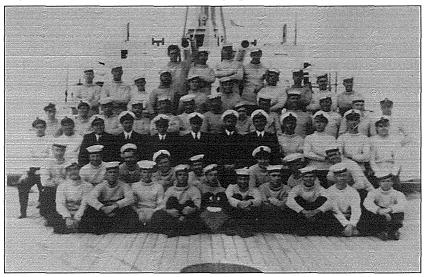
One of the survivors, a man by the name of Hiscock - the very same person-who had tried swimming towards the mine, kept muttering, 'you reap what you sow' to Wright. This was a snide reference to the latter's service on HMS *Rorqual* a mine-laying submarine. Such a reaction could only have been a reflection of the shock, guilt and bitterness that were pent up inside of this individual. It is also reflective of the superstition that is so common among seafarers. One survivor refused to serve on another submarine and was eventually posted to HMS *Fiji*. He perished when this light cruiser was lost during the Battle for Crete.

The food provided in Mtarfa was so bad that the survivors preferred to go back to base in the heavily bombed Lazaretto. One of the main reasons that victuals were so much better at the Lazaretto was because a variety of farm animals were kept there (especially pigs).<sup>15</sup> Eventually, the survivors were dropped off semi-naked at the bridge and had to walk barefoot back to base where they clothed themselves from what was referred to as dead man's store. Following a period in Malta the survivors made their way back to England on HMS *Welshman*.

# **The Discovery**

Over the past decade, the University of Malta, together with the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, has been carrying out a systematic survey of the seabed off Malta and Gozo. Using state of the art remote sensing equipment, large tracts of seabed are searched and mapped. Objects of interest are noted and included in the country's database of historic artefacts. Should the resources be available, subsequent visits to such 'targets' are organised to gather more data including video and photographs. The strategy of this long-term project is to map the entire seabed for which Malta is responsible. The project is not specifically aimed at locating any specific wreck or remains that may be present on the seabed. However, once targets are located and verified research is conducted into its possible identity.

During the course of one such survey a singular target stood out as a potential submarine. The site was subsequently re-surveyed using higher frequency sonar (900 KHz) thus obtaining an image of much-higher resolution. This enabled the confirmation of the object as a submarine, which was not registered on local nautical charts. Given the fact that we were aware of the loss of the *Olympus* outside the harbour and that the measurements from the sonar images matched those of this submarine we were almost sure that this was indeed the HMS *Olympus*. However, we could not be certain as to the identity of the submarine and therefore had to wait till the deployment of a remote operated vehicle (ROV) on the site in order to obtain images and video which confirmed, beyond any doubt that this was indeed the *Olympus*.



Group photo of HMS Olympus crew members taken before the outbreak of war (private collection).

The submarine lies upright in 115 meters of water and on a seabed that is made up of sandy mud. Except for the damage caused by the mine explosion on the starboard side she is in extraordinarily good condition. Her gun is intact and indeed pointing upwards as described in the eyewitness accounts. Hatches are open confirming that the crew got out of the submarine in a conventional manner. Furthermore, her radio mast is almost intact. Subsequent visits to the submarine were made to the side in order to obtain high-resolution images and footage that may eventually form part of a documentary that will pay homage to this remarkable vessel and its heroic crew.

# Acknowledgements

One person in particular who has been extremely helpful with my research on the *Olympus* - Mr Stephen Evans. I must thank him for giving me access to his dossier of information which he had gathered over two decades ago - a dossier that includes many documents I have used to put together this story. These include letters and correspondence from Wright, one of the survivors of this saga. Joseph Stephen Bonanno has also been keenly researching the *Olympus* story and together we plan to write and publish more on this subject. Last but not least I would like to thank the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, the Aurora Trust and UFILM, who have all contributed to the putting together of this story.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> A. S. Evans, *Beneath the Waves A History of HM Submarine Losses* (Pen & Sword Books: Barnsley, 1986) Kindle Edition: Location 3809.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid. 5440.
- <sup>3</sup> Information taken from letter written by Mr James Fulthrope to the Commander of the HMS *Olympus* S-12 Richard Channon written by a former submariner in October 1969.
- <sup>4</sup> Ministry of Information for the Admiralty (1945) His Majesty's Submarines (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office): 30.
- <sup>5</sup> Letter of J. Fulthrope to Commander Channon
- 6 Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> 'Peterborough's Generosity and the HMS Olympus' published in the Peterborough Telegraph on Friday 30 November 2012 and accessed on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2015 at http://www.peterboroughtoday.co.uk/news/features/news-features/ peterborough-s-generosity-and-the-hms-olympus-1-4541701

- <sup>8</sup> T. Spooner, *Supreme Gallantry Malta's Role in the Allied Victory 1939-1945* (London: John Murray, 1986), 204.
- 9 Evans, Beneath the Waves, Location 7058.
- <sup>10</sup> Letter written by W.G. Wright to Mr Stephen Evans in December 1986. Mr S. Evans was then researching the possible location of HMS *Olympus*.
- <sup>11</sup> Letter written by W.G. Wright to Mr Stephen Evans in February 1986.
- <sup>12</sup> Most of this information is taken from W.G. Wrights account as published in Evans, *Beneath the Waves*.
- <sup>13</sup> Letter written by W.G. Wright to the Director of the Royal Navy Submarine Museum dated 19<sup>th</sup> April 1981.
- <sup>14</sup> F. R. Galea, *Call Out: A War Time Diary of Air/Sea Rescue Operations at Malta* (Malta: Bieb Bieb, 1986).
- <sup>15</sup> Spooner, Supreme Gallantry, 31.

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## M.ED.

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## PH.D.

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- 2) Austin Benici: 'The Supremacy of the Constitution of Malta'

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- 3) Edric Micallef Figallo: 'The Nationalist Political Movement and Legislation Under the 1921 Self-Government Constitution'
- Krista Spiteri Colombo: 'Legislation Relevant to the University of Malta: 1839 to date'

## S.TH.L.

1) Stefan Galea: 'The Eastern Catholic Churches: A Historical and Local Perspective'

M.A. in Mediterranean Historical Studies

1) James Sultana: 'The Image of Cyprus in Sanudo's Diarii'

Università degli studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia – corso di laurea di scienze e beni culturali

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## 2012

LL.D.

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- Farrugia, Corinne: 'Community involvement and interaction with relation to heritage sites: Relationship between small heritage sites and the Cospicua community'
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- 4) Magro, Peter: 'A Deleuzian/Guattarian reading of art A Level teaching'

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- 4) Magro, Janica: 'Patri Pelaģju: kittieb Malti tas-seklu 18'
- 5) Mallia, Gabriella: 'Ir-Rapprezentazzjoni tal-Irgulija fir-Rakkont Fl-Isem tal-Missier (u tal-Iben) ta' Immanuel Mifsud'
- 6) Xuereb, Raisa: 'Dizzjunarju Storiku tal-Malti bbażat fuq it-'Taghlim Nisrani' tar-Reverendu Franciscu Wzzino'

#### M.SC. STRATEGIC INNOVATION & FUTURE CREATION

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- 2) Cauchi Inglott, Frederick: 'Military defence matters and the congregazione della guerra regarding the protection of hospitaller Malta'
- 3) Mifsud, Kurt: 'The republic of Ragusa and hospitaller Malta: mercantile shipping to an Order-state in the Eighteen century'

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- 2) Sheehy, Daniel Joseph: 'Exploring commonalities and triggers that influence revolution'

#### M.A. MALTESE STUDIES

1) Galea, Vincent: 'Social reality and local community: an empirical investigation of St. Paul's Bay and environs'

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1) Mifsud, Davinia: 'Dissertation History from below: a study of everyday life in Gozo through the documents of Notary Ferdinando Ciappara' 

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#### M.A. MALTESE

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#### 2013

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- 3) Privitelli, Giulia: 'The parish church of St. Catherine of Alexandria in Żejtun: an architectural appraisal'

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## B.ED. (HONS)

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#### PH.D.

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- 2) Vella, Edgar: 'Relics and reliquaries in the diocese of Malta during the baroque period 1600-1798'
- 3) Xuereb, Charles: 'France in the Maltese collective memory: an analysis of the perceptions and interpretations of the uprising against the French (1798) and their place in the national memory as perpetuated by the media to modern times'

#### M.A. CONFLICT RESOLUTION & MED. SECURITY

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## 2014

## B.A. (HONS) HIST.

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- 2) Atzori, Simone: 'A comparative study of two historical moments in nineteenth century Malta: the 1830s and the 1870s'
- 3) Borg, John Paul: 'Mintoff and Gozo'
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- 5) Camilleri, David: 'A study in local history since 1800: Qormi'
- 6) Cassar, Francesca: 'Tales from the stage aspects of Hospitaller forms of cultural entertainment (1530-1798)'
- 7) Curmi, Jamie: 'Enrico Mizzi and the Partito Democratico Nazionalista'
- 8) Curmi, Luca: 'The attack on Gozo of 1551 and its effect on the population'
- 9) Micallef, Pierre: 'Tobacco manufacture trade and labour in Malta (1850-1914)'
- 10) Pace, Nickolas: 'Life and death in mid-sixteenth century Malta a study of the Acts of Notary Brandano Caxaro, NAV MS 719/1'

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- 2) Davies, Franco: 'The Practical and Symbolic Dimensions of Edged Weapons for the Hospitallers, in Particular Swords (1530-1798)'
- 3) Gatt, Ray: 'The Hospitaller commandery of San Giovanni Battista of Ragusa in the 17th and the 18th centuries its state and development'

## PH.D.

1) Buhagiar Keith: 'Water management technology as a contributing factor in the development of the rural landscape of the Maltese archipelago: making a case for the late medieval period'

## B.A. (HONS) CMS.

1) Camilleri, Vanessa: 'Libya's 2011 revolution and the failed Mediterranean migratory crisis: a historical overview'

## B.E.&A. (HONS)

- 1) Caruana, Charlot: 'Architecture for the moving image the evolution of cinematic spaces in 20th century Malta'
- 2) Cauchi, Martina: 'Stratigraphic analysis of historic buildings / understanding structural systems'
- 3) Vella, Juliet: 'Palazzo Ferreria survivor of political disputes, cultural upheavals and socio-economic developments of 19th and 20th century Malta'

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## M.SC. CONSERVATION TECH.

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## M.A. GEOG.

1) Formosa, Andrew: 'Urban primacy for Gozo a case study of its capital Victoria'

#### B.A. (HONS) ART

1) Meli, Sylvana: 'Lost buildings and urban areas of the Order of St John in Valletta'

## M.A. THEATRE STUD.

1) Spiteri, Stephanie: 'The history and development of Pantomime in Malta'

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#### 2009

- Bruno, Brunella. Roman and Byzantine Malta: Trade and Economy.
  Georgette Cutajar and Peter John Hudson (trans.), Malta 2009.
  Manduca, John and Joseph C. Sammut. The Pens That Felled the Mighty: 100 Years of British Cartoons on Malta, Malta, 2009.
- Cini, Charles, Ian Colin Lochhead, Daniel Cilia. The Siege of Malta 1565: Matteo Perez d'Aleccio's Frescoes in the Grand Master's Palace, Valletta, Malta, 2009.
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#### 2010

- Freller, Thomas. Malta: the Order of St John, Malta, 2010.
- Fiorini, Stanley. Tristia ex Melitogaudo Revisited: Objections, Clarifications, Confirmations, Malta, 2010.
- Azzopardi, John and Pace Anthony, ed. San Pawl f'Malta u l-Formazzjoni ta' Identità ta' Nazzjon - St Paul in Malta and the Shaping of a Nation's Identity, Malta, 2010.
- Micallef Eynaud, Maurice H. Malta During the British era, 1800-1964: Governship, Militaria, Commerce, Royalty - visits and residence, Malta, 2010.
- Ciappara, Frans. The Maltese Catholic Enlightenment, Malta, 2010.
- De Giorgio, Cynthia. The Conventual Church of the Knights of Malta: Splendour, History and the Art of St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta, 2010.
- Chesney, Alexander George. *Historical Records of the Maltese Corps of the British Army*. UK (facsimile edition). 2010.

#### 2011

- Attard, Robert and Azzopardi, Romina. Daily Life in Eighteenth-Century Malta, Malta, 2011.
- Buttigieg, Emanuel. Nobility, Faith and Masculinity: The Hospitaller Knights of Malta, London and New York, 2011.
- Marconi, Nicoletta, (ed.). Valletta: città, architettura e costruzione sotto il segno della fede e della guerra, Rome, 2011.

Montebello, Mark. Malta's Philosophy & Philosophers, Malta, 2011.

Morana, Martin. Bejn Kliem u Storja: Glossarju Enciklopediku Dwar Tradizzjonijiet -Toponimi - Termini Storici Maltin, Malta, 2011.

Porter, Whitworth. A History of the Fortress of Malta, Malta, 2011.

Ruby, Christabel D., (ed.). Maltese Nationality Law: Jus Saguinis, Jus Soli, Multiple Citizenship, Crown Colony, History of British Nationality Law, Malta, 2011.

Xuereb, Paul. The Manoel Theatre: A Short History, Malta, 2011.

#### 2012

Borg, Lino, Cassar, Joseph P. Micallef-Grimaud, Aldo (1925-2010), Malta, 2012.

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Ciappara, Frans. Parish priest and Confraternity: Conflict at the Parish Church of St Catherine's in Zejtun, Malta, 1769-1801, Malta, 2012.

Dauber, Robert L. Frà Johann Josef, Frà Ferdinand and Frà Karl Leopold von Herberstein. Knights and Sea Captains of Malta. Michael Galea, (trans.), Malta, 2012.

Farrugia, Aleks, (ed.). Dom Mintoff (1916-2012): l-Arkitett ta' Malta Hielsa. 2012, Malta, 2012.

Frendo, Henry J., (ed.). Landmarks in Maltese Constitutional History: 1849-1974, Malta, 2012.

Ganado, Albert, Schirò, Joseph and Micallef Attard, Claude. *The Brocktorff Mapmakers*, Malta, 2012.

Grech, Josef. Duminku Mintoff u Malta fi Žmienu: Il-Grajja ta' Personaģģ Kbir fl-Istorja Politika Maltija, (1916-2012), Malta, 2012.

- Grech, Sergio, (ed.). Duminku Mintoff Bejn Storja u Miti: Ġabra ta' Kitbiet, Malta, 2012.
- Guido, Sante, Mantella, Giuseppe and Formica, Enrico. *Mattia Preti, 1613-2013: The Masterpieces in the Churches of Malta*, Malta, 2012.

Heritage Malta. Fort St Angelo Heritage Experience, Malta, 2012.

Heritage Malta. Henry Mayo Bateman, (1887-1970): The Man Who Loved Gozo, Malta, 2012.

- Muscat, James and Muscat, Jonathan. Fortifications of the Knights Hospitallers in Mellieha, Malta, 2012.
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- Schembri Bonaci, Giuseppe and Moulden, Sarah. Antonio Sciortino and the British Academy of Fine Arts in Rome, Malta, 2012.

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- Zammit Marmarà, Desmond. *Paul Boffa: Malta's First Labour Prime Minister*. Schranz, Anne (translator), Malta, 2012.
- Zammit, Winston L., Xuereb, Philip and Gauci, Mario. Santa Liena: 175 Sena tal-Vara: Studji ta' Storja, Apprezzament Artistiku u Komparattiv Dwar l-Istatwa Processjonali Meqjuma fil-Bażilika Kolleggjata ta' Birkirkara, Malta, 2012.

## 2013

Attard, David J. The Maltese Legal System, Malta, 2013.

- Buttigieg Emanuel and Simon Phillips, (eds.). Islands and Military Orders, c.1291-c.1798, Farnham, 2013.
- Camilleri, Maroma, Mamo, Oliver, Sciberras, Anselm and Sciberras, Joanne.
   Tuitio Fidei et Obsequium Pauperum: the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, (1113-2013), Malta, 2013.
- Cassar, Michael. Malta Tugs: Commercial Towage in Maltese Harbours (1856-2012), Malta, 2013.
- Consiglio, John A. L-Istorja Bankarja ta' Malta, Malta, 2013.
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- Grech, Josef. Mintoff u Sant, Malta, 2013.
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- Massa, Daniel. PSI Kingmaker: life, thought and adventures of Peter Serracino Inglott, Malta, 2013.
- Mifsud Bonnici, Karmenu and Meilaq, Sammy. *Mintoff Ghada: Mintoff, Malta u l-Unjoni Ewropea*, Malta, 2013.
- Mintoff, Dominic. Malta ssofri, ma ċċedix, 1916-2012, Malta, 2013.
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- Mintoff, Dominic. Il-Principji Fundamentali tal-Partit tal-Haddiema, Malta, 2012.
- Mintoff, Dominic. Britain, Malta and the socialist international, 1916-2012, Malta, 2013.

#### 2014

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- Abela, Tony. Malta's Early Warning System During World War II, Malta, 2014.
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- Borg Cardona, Anna. Musical Instruments of the Maltese Islands: History, Folkways and Traditions, Malta, 2014.
- Camilleri, J.J. Malta Li Għext Fiha: it-Tifkiriet ta J.J. Camilleri, 1928-2012, Malta, 2012.

Farrugia, Michaela and Sultana, Gwann, (ed.). *Għawdex: 150 Sena Djocesi: 1864-2014*, Malta, 2014.

Fenech Adami, Edward. Eddie: My Journey, Malta, 2014.

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Galea, Malcolm and Friggieri, Joseph. Id-Dlam Taht it-Teatru. Malcolm Galea. Kwadri Minn Wirja, Malta, 2014.

Grech, Sergio. In-Nisġa tal-Indipendenza: Minn Rakkonti ta' Victor Ragonesi, Malta, 2014.

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Massa, Ariadne, (ed.). Malta: 50 years of Independence, 1964-2014, Malta, 2014.

Refalo, Michael. The Maltese Nineteenth-Century Notary and His Archives, Malta, 2014.

Xuereb Grech, Claire. L-Elf Lewn ta' Mintoff, Malta, 2014.

## Notes on Contributors

Victor Mallia-Milanes is Professor of History at the University of Malta and has written extensively on the Order of St John and early modern Malta and the Mediterranean. In addition to numerous articles he is also the author of Venice and Hospitaller Malta, 1530-1798: Aspects of a Relationship (1992) and In the Service of the Venetian Republic: Massimiliano Buzzaccarini Gonzaga's Letters from Malta to Venice's Magistracy of Trade, 1754-1776 (2008), and has edited Hospitaller Malta, 1530-1798: Studies on Early Modern Malta and the Order of St John of Jerusalem (1992) and The Military Orders, Volume 3: History and Heritage (2008).

Kate Fleet is Director of the Skilliter Centre for Ottoman Studies and Fellow of Newnham College, University of Cambridge, specializing in the social and economic history of the Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish republic. She is author, co-author and editor of several works including Ottoman Economic Practices in Periods of Transformation: The Cases of Crete and Bulgaria (with Svetla Ianeva, 2014), The Cambridge History of Turkey, Volumes I: Byzantium to Turkey, 1071-1453 (editor, 2009) and II: The Ottoman Empire as a World Power, 1453-1603 (edited with Suraiya Faroqhi, 2012) and European and Islamic Trade in the Early Ottoman State (1999).

**Federica Formiga** is Assistant Professor in Archival, Bibliography and Library Science at the University of Verona. Her research interests lie in the study of historical books and documents, the history of publishing in Verona, printed engravings in Milan and the history of printing in Malta under the Order of St John. She is the author of *Il sudore dei torchi a Malta. La tipografia dell'ordine gerosolimitano* (1642-1798) (2012), and *I Merlo. Tipografi veronesi fra Sei e Settecento. Documenti e annali* (2009).

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