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# MEDIEVAL INQUISITION IN MALTA 1433 – 1561

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## A. INQUISITION FOR THE SUPPRESSION OF HERESY

### Detection and Punishment of Heretics

**I**NQUISITION is the name given to ecclesiastical jurisdiction dealing, both in the Middle Ages and in later times, with the detection and punishment of heretics and of all persons guilty of any offence against Catholic orthodoxy. The word 'Inquisition' was probably used in the above sense for the first time in 844, when Emperor Charles II advised the bishops to inquire into the errors of the people and correct them.

In its historical significance, the word 'Inquisition' has very close links with a tribunal which in the past engendered great fear, even in those who had no doubts of its fairness. It was every inquisitor's duty to look out for heretics in order to correct and punish them.

The first form of punishment for heresy was *excommunication*, which was a purely spiritual penalty. The Fathers of the Church in general condemned physical punishments. But, once the Roman Empire had become Christian, a heretic began to be regarded by the authorities as guilty of treason. A heretic tore apart the political body which identified itself with the body of Christ: the Church. Penalties, such as confiscation of goods and even death, began to be inflicted, though the Church still held to its original attitudes.

### ABBREVIATIONS:

AGOP: Archivum Generale Ordinis Paedicatorum (Romae)

AIM: Archivus of the Inquisition, Cathedral Museum, Mdina

AO: Acta Originalia

Arch.: Archives of the Order of Malta at the National Library, Malta.

CEM: Curia Episcopalis Melitensis

Lib.: Library Manuscripts at the National Library, Malta

NLM: National Library of Malta

It happened then that the medieval Catharist movement was feared as threatening not only the faith but also the very institutions of society. As a result of this, the Church's judgement changed, and the ecclesiastical authorities began to seek the help of the secular power.

From the twelfth century onwards, very often, severe punishments were meted out on those who went astray. Harsher punishments followed for those who persisted in their heresies. At times, the culprits were even condemned to capital punishment.

There were different types of Inquisitions quite distinct from each other. The main types were: a) Medieval Inquisition, b) Spanish Inquisition, and c) Roman Inquisition.<sup>1</sup>

### Variations of Medieval Inquisition

The Medieval Inquisition became an organized system, during the reign of Pope Lucius III. In 1184, he founded the *Episcopal Inquisition* which required aid from secular rulers, denunciation of heretics by the faithful, half-yearly diocesan visitations, and strong measures against supporters of heresy. However, it was not successful.

During the same period, the Pope began to delegate an ecclesiastic by conferring on him full powers against heretics of a certain place for a determined particular period. This is known in history as the *Legatine Inquisition*. The Inquisitors, delegated by the pope, stayed in their office for as long as it was necessary, but never for a long period. Towards the end of the twelfth century, canon law was evolving rapidly. As a result of this, under Pope Innocent III (1198 – 1216), heretics began to be judged according to a particular legislation. Cistercian monks were officially entrusted with the duty of detecting heretics; but these monks were never called 'Inquisitors'. Once again, this Inquisition proved unsuccessful.

The Inquisition as such came into being when Emperor Frederick II appointed some officials, called inquisitors, to detect heresy throughout the Empire. Pope Gregory IX, suspicious of Frederick's political ambitions, declared such investigations to be in the realm of the Church, and chose papal inquisitors instead. In 1231, this Pope established a reformed legislation against heretics. The penalties of death, banishment, or confiscation of property were so clearly formulated as to be henceforth incontestable. The inquisitors became absolutely independent of the bishop, and subject to

1. For a general idea, see A. H. Verril, *The Inquisition* (London 1931); Mariano D'Alatri, *E l'Inquisizione? Tabù e Realtà sul Tribunale della Fede* (Rome 1959).

FR. DOMINIC BARTHALU, a Dominican Prior of St. Mary of the Grotto at Rabat and Pro-Inquisitor for Malta and Gozo for the Medieval Inquisition.



GRAND MASTER JUAN D'HOMEDES who decided to institute some kind of Inquisition in Malta in 1553.



BISHOP DOMINIC CUBELLES. The last Pro-Inquisitor of Medieval Inquisition and the first Inquisitor of the Roman Inquisition.



the pope himself. Thus, the *Monastic Inquisition* was created. The Inquisition Tribunal was mainly entrusted to Dominican friars, who were the first to be called 'Inquisitors'. The Franciscans Conventual were inquisitors in Tuscany, in a large territory of the Venetian dependencies, and in some parts of Latium.<sup>3</sup>

## B. THE INFLUENCE OF SICILIAN INQUISITION

### Earliest Vague Facts

The earliest vague historical facts about the Inquisition Tribunal in Malta have connections with the Medieval Inquisition and with the Dominican friars. But very little is known about actions taken against heretics, though it is a fact that the Tribunal depended on that of Sicily.

The Medieval Inquisition was present for about 130 years in Malta and prepared the way for a better-organized inquisitorial tribunal. When the Medieval Inquisition was re-established and entrusted to Dominican or Franciscan Conventual friars, the islands of Malta and Gozo were ruled by the Aragonese and the Castilians and were dependencies of Sicily. For this reason, the Sicilian Tribunal of the Holy Inquisition occasionally exercised its authority in Malta through a 'Commissioner'. But, for the period of about sixty years of Monastic Inquisition presided over by Dominican friars, very little is known of those Commissioners who represented the Sicilian Inquisitor. No documentary evidence exists that a commissioner for Malta was assigned on a long-term basis. Moreover, it is improbable that he resided permanently in Malta.

### 1433 – 1503: Pro-Inquisitors of Malta

Although the commissioners responsible for inquisitorial proceedings in Malta were occasionally called 'Inquisitors', their authority never exceeded that of a Pro-Inquisitor. As a matter of fact, the commissioner in Malta carried out his inquisitorial duties as a Deputy Inquisitor. He made use of his authority *instead* of the Inquisitor General in Sicily. It is presumed that a Pro-Inquisitor was appointed whenever inquiries or investigations regarding the faith were deemed necessary.

The presence of the first known Pro-Inquisitor, who was invested with

2. Çf. C. Reviglio Della Veneria, *L'Inquisizione Medioevale ed il Processo Inquisitorio*, 2 ed. (Torino 1951); H. Ch. Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (New York 1956).

authority over Malta coincided with the visit of King Alphonsus I of Spain. In 1432 the King stopped for a short stay in Malta, on his way back from an expedition against the Sovereign of Tunis. The King honoured the noble family Inguanez by accepting to be their guest in their house at Mdina.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after this visit, in 1433, Friar Matthew of Malta was chosen as a Pro-Inquisitor, or Regional Inquisitor, for the Maltese Islands.<sup>4</sup> Probably, he was the Augustinian Friar Matheus Zurki, a Master in Theology.<sup>5</sup>

Towards 1450, the Dominicans opened their first friary in Malta, annexed to the small church of St Mary of the Grotto in Rabat.<sup>6</sup> Since 1448, the Dominican Fr. Salvo Cassetta, from Palermo, had been in charge of the Sicilian Inquisition Tribunal. For 14 years (1448–1462), he served as inquisitor for the diocese of Palermo only. However, from 1462 to 1476, Cassetta was made Inquisitor for all Sicily and Malta. It is not known, however, whether he had any delegate in the island for inquisitorial investigations. Between 1474 and 1476, having been chosen for a higher office, Cassetta presided over the Inquisition Tribunal through his delegates.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, during his term as Inquisitor, no trace of any delegate in Malta, has so far been discovered.

On 20 February 1475, Fr. Philip de Barberiis, a Dominican friar, a Master in Theology, was appointed by the Holy See as an Inquisitor against heretical depravity, with jurisdiction over a very vast territory. His domain spread over all the two kingdoms of Sicily and Sardinia, and over Malta.<sup>8</sup> In 1481, when Malta still depended on de Barberiis, King Ferdinand obliged Bishop John Paternò, the Ordinary for Malta and Gozo, to contribute to the support of the Inquisition Tribunal. In the same time year, however, a very troubled period began for Inquisitor de Barberiis. On being suspected of heresy, he lost his post as Inquisitor. Still, in 1482, after an imprisonment of almost a year, he was declared innocent.<sup>9</sup> Though born in Sicily, de

3. G. F. Abela, *Della Descrittione di Malta* (Malta 1647), 424–425.

4. Regia Cancelleria Palermo, 1433, f. 122; 1434, f. 199; Abela, 558–559; M. A. Coniglione, *La Provincia Domenicana di Sicilia* (Catania 1937), 295.

5. G. Wettinger-M. Fsadni, *Peter Caxaro's Cantilena* (Malta 1968), 29–30.

6. M. Fsadni, *Our Lady of the Grotto: Priory, Church, and Sanctuary* (Malta 1980), 6.

7. Coniglione, 47–50.

8. AGOP, IV, 3, f. 101; I express my gratitude to Fr. Stephen Forte, O. P. who allowed me to consult and publish transcripts collected by him from the General Archives of the Dominicans in Rome. I also thank Fr. Michael Fsadni, O.P., who helped me in all that referred to Maltese Dominicans and granted me permission to consult other transcripts collected by Fr. Daniel Callus, O.P., from the General Archives of the Dominicans.

9. Coniglione, 69–70; Abela, 559.

Barberis may have been of Maltese origin. The Latinized form of 'de Barberis' derives from 'Barbara': a family name still common in Malta.<sup>10</sup> If this is correct he seems to have been the only Inquisitor of Maltese origin. No documents testify to de Barberis's presence at any time in Malta. Besides, it is not known whether he had any delegate or Pro-Inquisitor for the Maltese Islands.

After that, for five years between 1481 and 1486, Honofrius Cassetta, the nephew of the above-mentioned Salvo Cassetta, presided over the Sicilian Tribunal, with authority over Malta.<sup>11</sup>

### 1485 – 1486: Dominic Barthalu, A Pro-Inquisitor for Malta

Between 1485 and 1486 the Prior of the Dominican Friary of St Mary of the Grotto at Rabat was Dominic Barthalu or Barthalo.<sup>12</sup> In 1486, this Maltese Dominican exercised a delegated power, with the title of Pro-Inquisitor for Malta and Gozo. He is referred to as 'Inquisitor for the town and island of Malta under de Reda, Inquisitor for the whole Sicilian Kingdom'.<sup>13</sup> Barthalu was in charge of the Inquisition in Malta for just a short time. In 1486 he imprisoned, within the building of the Rabat Dominican Priory, three Jews suspected of heresy.<sup>14</sup>

Today, no trace survives of the prison-like cells attached to this Dominican Priory. The prison could not be anything else except one or two well-locked chambers with iron bars in the windows. It is presumed that they were not dissimilar from that cell which, up till quite recently, still

10. Abela; further information was to be found in an inscription in marble that once existed in the Dominican Priory at Birgu. It read: *Magister Philippus de Barberis, alias Barbara, Melitensis, a Syxto IV Inquisitor anno 1475, tandem constitutus a Ferdinando Rege Aragonum in toto Regno Siciliae, et ultra Sardiniae, Corsicae, Melitae, Gauli, anno 1481*: M. Fsadni, *Id-Dumnikani fir-Rabat u l-Birgu* (Malta 1974), 113. But the above inscription did not furnish any new fact. It totally depends on Abela, and did not exist in the first cloister of Birgu. It is not completely reliable.

11. Coniglione, 69.

12. Fsadni, *L-Ewwel Dumnikani f'Malta* (Malta 1965), 78.

13. G. Wettinger, *The Jews of Malta in the Late Middle Ages* (Malta 1985), 84; Abela, 559. Once again in the cloister of the Dominican Priory at Birgu, another inscription reminded us of this well-known Dominican. It read: *Pater Magister Dominicus Bartolo, Melitensis, Ordinis Praedicatorum, Inquisitor huius Insulae, qui huius virtute patriam decoravit, anno 1492*: Fsadni, *Id-Dumnikani fir-Rabat u fil-Birgu*, 113. But the inscription depends on Abela (p 559). The year '1492' is not correct. The inscription was to be found in the second rebuilding of that Dominican Priory.

14. Wettinger, 85.

existed in the same priory for the temporal confinement of some insubordinate friar.

Bearing in mind that Barthalu lived in the Rabat Priory just for 1485 and 1486, it can be inferred that he was delegated as Pro-Inquisitor for one particular instance.<sup>15</sup>

Not later than 1486, Giacomo Reda from Trapani was chosen as an Inquisitor General for Sicily and Malta. He kept that office up to 1503. In 1489, Giacomo Manso is mentioned as another Inquisitor General for Sicily and Malta, with the same powers as Reda. For the first time two inquisitors, the Dominicans Reda and Manso, were invested with joint power. On account of that, they were forbidden from taking action against heretics, without or against each other. They presided together between 1489 and 1497.<sup>16</sup>

### Side Effects of the Spanish Inquisition on Malta

Up to the period of Inquisitor General Reda, the Master General of the Dominicans used to appoint the inquisitors for Sicily and its dependencies. But the beginning of the sixteenth century marked the end of the Medieval Inquisition in Sicily which happened on account of a tribunal that was to dishonour the Church.

In 1478 Pope Sixtus IV gave his consent to the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition. The tribunal was first organized in the Spanish town of Seville, with the Dominican Tommaso Torquemada as the first Grand Inquisitor. The Church had been led into error because the Sovereigns of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, had insisted on setting up that tribunal without declaring that it was meant to be a political tool against Jews and Muslims. It was a melancholy contrast to the general leniency of the Medieval Inquisition (with the exception of that of Southern France). The kings of Spain and the inquisitors themselves were often reproached by popes and other Church authorities for their exaggerated, cruel, and ruthless penalties.<sup>17</sup>

For some years there had been no change in Sicily. Although there had been vigorous attempts from 1488 onwards to introduce the Spanish Inquisition, Sicily and its inquisitors offered a bold resistance and nothing changed in Malta up to the end of the fifteenth century. Besides, from 17

15. Barthalu lived for long years in Sicily: AGOP, IV, 11, f. 105.

16. Coniglione, 42–43.

17. H. Ch. Lea, *History of the Inquisition in Spain* (New York 1887).

January 1497, the Dominicans Andrea Cattano from Lentini and Blandino de Accardo from Noto had some connections with Malta, when they were chosen as assessors of the Inquisitors-General Manso and Reda. After Manso's death, the Master General of the Dominicans appointed Tommaso Schifaldo as an Inquisitor General with the same authority as Reda.<sup>18</sup>

From the very first years of the sixteenth century, the Spanish Inquisition prevailed over ecclesiastical matters in Sicily. The Medieval Inquisition was given a definite blow when Reginaldo Montoro, Bishop of Cefalù, on 20 July 1503, officially organized the Spanish Inquisition. It was the end for the Medieval Inquisition. The Dominican officials were compelled to hand over all archival material to the Spanish Inquisition.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, though we have consulted the scanty information about Maltese Dominicans who dwelled in the two priories of Rabat and Birgu, through the first sixty years of the sixteenth century, there is no evidence of any friar being engaged in inquisitorial activity.<sup>20</sup>

Besides, the Spanish Inquisition had no direct influence over Malta and its dependencies. Vague facts induce us to presume that the diocesan bishops of Malta for a period of about sixty years inquired, examined, and tried heretics. But, during that last period of the Medieval Inquisition, the bishops were not called inquisitors. The first forty years of the sixteenth century were a very dark period of transition. The Maltese bishops' presence at the consecration of several Sicilian churches; their signatures in deeds published abroad; the castles, palaces, and rural possessions owned by them in Sicily; their offices in the Royal Court in Rome; the occurrence of their deaths in some Italian city; the appointment of vicars to substitute them for long periods in their See; all these provide most evident proof that the bishops of Malta, too, did not abide by the law of residence.<sup>21</sup>

### C. BISHOPS AS PRO-INQUISITORS OF MALTA

#### **Prior to the coming of the Knights**

The population of Malta was too small to attract the interest of the Church. In the new situation of the Medieval Inquisition, it would have been

18. Coniglione, 302.

19. *Ibid.*

20. AGOP, IV, 3, ff. 88r – 123v; 29, f. 69.

21. Arthur Bonnici, *History of the Church in Malta* (Malta 1967), I, 78.

considered unthinkable to designate a learned priest or friar and entrust him with the difficult task of an Inquisitor General in an island of not more than 20,000 inhabitants.

Nevertheless, the Bishop, even without any express deputation as Inquisitor, was bound to teach and defend Catholic Orthodoxy. At least one bishop formed a tribunal similar to that of the medieval style and this makes one presume that the Medieval Inquisition survived with great hesitation and unsuccessfully for at least forty years, through the bishops of Malta. There could not be any success or diligence since the bishops did not find anyone who efficaciously convinced them to reside in the island. We are not even quite sure about the names of the bishops, and we have no definite knowledge about the nature of their pastoral work in Malta. It remains totally hidden whether they did anything to instruct the Maltese in the Catholic Faith or to defend orthodoxy from any occasional error among them.

The following were the bishops, and indirectly Pro-Inquisitors, until Malta was granted as a fief to the Order of St John:

1. 1506: Bandinello De Saulis who was then transferred to Heraclea, and later created cardinal.<sup>22</sup>
2. 1509 – 1512: Bernardino of Bologna who, after leaving the diocese, was nominated Bishop of Majorca and Messina.<sup>23</sup>
3. 1512: Giovanni Pajades who died shortly after his nomination and never came to Malta.<sup>24</sup>
4. 1514 – 1515: Giovanni De Sepulveda who soon renounced the bishopric.<sup>25</sup>
5. 1516 – 1523: Bernardo Catagnano who, in 1516, renounced the bishopric in favour of Cardinal Raphael Riario; the latter, in 1519, renounced it in favour of Cardinal Andrea Della Valle. It was renounced again in favour of Bonifacio Catagnano (1520 – 1523).<sup>26</sup>
6. 1523 – 1538: Gerolamo Ghinucci who was the last bishop to be absent from the diocese for a long number of years.<sup>27</sup>

22. G. Gulik-C. Eubel, *Hierarchia Catholica* 2 ed. (Munster 1923), II, 51 – 52.

23. Ibid. G. F. Abela-G.A. Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata* (Malta 1780), II, 51 – 52.

24. Gulik-Eubel 51 – 52; Abela-Ciantar, 52.

25. Gulik-Eubel 51 – 52, Abela-Ciantar, 52 – 53.

26. Gulik-Eubel, 244; Abela-Ciantar, 52 – 54.

27. Gulik-Eubel, 244; Abela-Ciantar, 57 – 58; Bonnici, I, 72 – 74, 78.

However, not one of them had any interest in Malta. None of the above can be called a responsible Pro-Inquisitor of Malta. Notwithstanding this, they were the only persons through whom the Medieval Inquisition continued to have an official representative. A vicar general or a delegate was permanently in charge of the diocese and any eventual error against the Catholic Faith was denounced in front of the bishop's representative in Malta.

An enormous quantity of documents was always jealously kept in the diocesan Curia of Malta. The original papers, which can still be consulted, are of great importance because they contain references to all the problems of a small island. Forty-one huge manuscript volumes open to us the ecclesiastical situation in Malta between 1400 and 1561. Today, all these documents are preserved in the Cathedral Archives at Mdina. Their reading is far from simple, with the result that most historians might feel discouraged in front of them, though this is just one of the many problems. It is by no means easy to find facts or denunciations that refer to errors against the Christian Faith. Most documents refer to marriage contracts; petitions for a divorce; problems of nuns in cloistered monasteries; land administration; and frequent jurisdictional dissensions with the civil authority. In this dull period for the Church, on account of the local bishops' absence, most of the formal written petitions were addressed to the Vicar General of Malta and Gozo. Proceedings handled by an occasional Pro-Inquisitor, as in the case of the above-mentioned Barthalu, were incorporated of these archives. This is another hint that what once fell under the influence of Sicilian Inquisition, had to be submitted to the bishop's Curia in Malta.<sup>28</sup>

### **Bishop Domenico Cubelles, Last Pro-Inquisitor and First Inquisitor**

In 1530 a new era began for Malta and its dependencies when these islands were given in fief by Emperor Charles V to the Order of St John. Though this was to be a difficult period of uncertainty, when the Maltese had no right to say a word in the choosing of their bishop, they undoubtedly passed through a positive change. Quite frequently, throughout the Order's era, Malta was not satisfied on account of a succession of foreign pastors, interrupted just once by Balthasar Cagliares, a bishop of great merits. Nevertheless, Malta enjoyed the benefit of resident bishops, though some of them were away for years. Little is known about the German Bishop Balthasar Walkirk, who died in 1530, the year of his nomination, and

28. CEM, AO, MSS. 1-41 (1400-1561).

never even came to Malta. Bishop Tommaso Bosio (1538 – 1539) could have proved a fervent pastor and a zealous Pro-Inquisitor; but he died too soon, and had no time to develop his talents.<sup>29</sup>

The successor of Bosio, Domenico Cubelles (1540 – 1566), during his long term as Bishop of Malta, was the last official representative of a Medieval Inquisitor. As an authorized guardian of the Catholic Faith, he continued to safeguard it against heretics. He was never nominated as Inquisitor of the Medieval Tribunal, though he often used his own courts of law in defence of the Catholic Faith. However, he can be considered the last Pro-Inquisitor of the Medieval Inquisition.

During the first years of Cubelles, a French priest named Francesco Gesualdo, founder of the Confraternity of Good Christians and a teacher with a considerable number of followers, became tainted with Lutheranism and began sharing his ideas with a limited number of followers.

In 1545 Bishop Cubelles started his investigations about them. Their errors were denounced in details by witnesses. The best known among Gesualdo's followers was Matteo Falson, Captain of the Rod of Mdina and one of the wealthiest inhabitants of Malta. His son, called Matteo as well, is even more famous, and soon became a legendary figure in the fantastic story of witchcraft in Malta. The lawyer Pietro Cumbo was another outstanding figure who followed the steps of Gesualdo.

At first the Bishop of Malta called them one by one but, after questioning, they were dismissed and left completely free. From the official information gathered, the bishop did not convince himself that the case was really a very serious one. He still nourished hope in them. Because of this, after a paternal warning, all of them were left free.

Shortly after, the Bishop sadly noticed that his leniency had had a negative effect. Fresh reports that reached the Bishop and Grand Master D' Homedes forced the ecclesiastical and civil authorities of Malta to act energetically and severely without sparing those who did not sufficiently demonstrate signs of repentance.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Knights' Controverted Commission**

Facts are not clear enough, especially about Gesualdo's case. Worries and anxieties were uttered about him, not only by the Bishop but also by the Grand Master. Since Cubelles had no papal brief that empowered him to

29. S. Salelles, *De Materiis Tribunalium S. Inquisitionis* (Rome 1651), prol. 10, 46, nn. 15 – 16.

30. AIM, Mem, 12, ff. 16v – 17v.

proceed as Inquisitor, Juan D'Homedes, in his qualification as head of the Order and highest dignity in Malta, decided, not later than 1546, to set up some kind of Inquisition on the island. He chose a commission whose members were the Conventional Chaplain of St Lawrence at Birgu and three knights. The Grand Master legally invested them with the power of handling cases connected with errors against the Catholic Faith. It is not known who had authorized the Grand Master to take that important decision. At that time, the Conventual Chaplain was Matteo Castillo, a theologian very well known for his learning. The three knights of the Commission were Fra Cristoforo de Acugna (a Portuguese knight), Fra Francesco Nibbia (an Italian who officially received denunciations against some very dangerous heretics), and Fra Gehan de Condè (a Spanish knight popularly called 'Bandieras'). It was their duty to invigilate over all the inhabitants of Malta, and they were bound to inform the bishop's vicar in case of any suspected person. Gesualdo and some of his followers were charged in front of the knight Fra Francesco Nibbia. Later on Notary Jacopo Baldacchino had to do some important declarations about this case. Baldacchino did not denounce Gesualdo to the bishop, but to Nibbia. This notary had become aware of Gesualdo's errors when he had attended his school at Mdina. Grand Master D'Homedes imprisoned Gesualdo and, for some time, kept him locked up in the dungeons of Castel St Angelo at Birgu.<sup>31</sup>

The Holy Office never assented to the proceedings by the knights. Some thirty years later, Notary Baldacchino testified again against these heretics in front of Inquisitor Pietro Dusina. This prelate asked him why, in a matter of faith, he had denounced heretics to the Grand Master's Commission, and not to the bishop. Baldacchino replied: 'I presented myself in front of the Grand Master because I did not know whether the bishop resided in Malta at that time.'<sup>32</sup> Probably no one had told him that in such a case he could have gone to the bishop's vicar.

The declaration of Notary Jacopo Baldacchino furnishes written evidence that the tribunal instituted by D'Homedes was established at least by 1546, and not at the beginning of 1553, as referred to by the well-known Sebastiano Salelles. Besides, these facts demonstrate that the same Salelles is incorrect in stating that the Order's Commission had hardly done anything beneficial in inquisitorial proceedings. To this can be added that

31. *Ibid.*, f.18r-v; Salelles, 48, n. 26.

32. *Ibid.*

Baldacchino's declaration and Salelles' information about the case both imply that Bishop Cubelles was absent from Malta at that time.<sup>33</sup>

### **A Death Sentence**

After his release from civil prison, Gesualdo resumed his teaching tainted with Lutheranism. Another priest, Andrea Axac, a school teacher, followed him with ardent conviction and they boldly and openly declared that priests should be free to marry. In fact, two priests that adhered to Gesualdo's teachings, notwithstanding their vow of celibacy, got married in an ostentatious public form.

Gesualdo and some of his followers were imprisoned again, this time by the Bishop of Malta. Cubelles found Gesualdo guilty and impenitent. All the errors of Gesualdo and his followers are described in detail. It is a voluminous case against twenty-eight persons. Gesualdo was condemned to be burned at the stake: he was handed over to the secular arm and executed in public. During the same period it is said that another heretic, Petit by name, met the same fate. Suspects at that time were both Maltese and foreigners. Heretical opinions continued to find some favour among the more educated inhabitants of Malta.<sup>34</sup>

Cubelles, however, was quite mild with all the other accomplices of Gesualdo. Matteo Falson and his son were forbidden to leave the island. Cubelles nourished some hope that the capital sentence inflicted to Gesualdo could serve as a severe warning to all the inhabitants of Malta.<sup>35</sup> Later on, whenever problems associated with the faith emerged, Bishop Cubelles continued to feel bound to take the necessary measures. Processes were formed under him in 1553 and 1558 in the same style as that against Gesualdo.<sup>36</sup> The younger Matteo Falson had to be judged and condemned again during the inquisitorships of Pietro Dusina and Pier Santo Umamo. But, then, it was not the period of Medieval Inquisition any more.<sup>37</sup>

### **The End of Medieval Inquisition**

During the last months of 1558, under the grandmastership of Jean de la

33. Salelles, 48, n. 26.

34. Ibid., 33–34; A. P. Vella, *The Tribunal of the Inquisition in Malta*, 11, n. 2; C. Cassar, 'The First Decades of the Inquisition: 1546–1581', in *Hypphen*, IV, n. 6 (1985), 207–208.

35. AIM, Mem. ff. 44v–45r.

36. Cassar, 208.

37. AIM, Mem., 12, ff. 44v–45r; NLM, Lib., 10, ff. 396–410; 1122, f. 1136r–v.

GRAND MASTER  
JEAN DE LA  
VALETTE and the  
Knights, in 1559,  
petitioned the Pope  
to grant them the  
authority to try  
those who go astray  
in their Christian  
belief.



Valette, a certain friar named Angelo of Cremona, most probably a Dominican, settled for a short time in Malta as a counsellor to Bishop Cubelles. While declaring that he had no authority over the knights, Friar Angelo investigated their behaviour. Then, towards the end of that year, Friar Angelo returned to Rome where he handed a report to the Holy Office. As a result of that report, during a general assembly of the Holy Office in Rome, the necessity arose of sending a resident Inquisitor to Malta. The news shocked all the knights. Immediately, on 3 January 1559, Francesco della Motta, an Italian Knight of the Priorate of Venice, was instructed to proceed to Rome with the function of an ambassador to

defend with all his might the knights' cause. First of all, it had never happened that an Inquisitor had been sent to investigate into the orthodox behaviour of the knights. Pope Paul IV had to be convinced that the knights always maintained the Catholic Faith intact. The mere discussion about sending an Inquisitor to inquire into the knights' conduct would be prejudicial to the Order's prestige. According to the knights, an Order so highly esteemed in the military defence against Muslims, has always endeavoured to be much more vigilant against the poisonous teaching of heretics. Disregarding actions against heretics, the knights petitioned the Pope to grant them the authority to try those who go astray in their Christian belief. They nourished the hope that the Pope might invest their Grand Master and the Council with that authority.<sup>38</sup>

That was not the only attempt by the Order. Notwithstanding this, Pope Pius IV, on 21 October 1561, instituted the Inquisition Tribunal in Malta. The first Inquisitor was Bishop Cubelles himself. This move marked the definite end of Medieval Inquisition in Malta. Cubelles was the first one in a long series of sixty-two inquisitors.<sup>39</sup> It was the dawn of the Roman Inquisition which was the result of a re-organization of the Inquisition Tribunal by Pope Paul III in 1542. Its central office was in Rome. The Maltese Tribunal was very often called 'The Holy Office'. All subsequent Inquisitors of Malta were rightly called 'Delegates of the Holy Office in Rome'.

For the sake of accuracy, one has to admit that the Christian Faith in Malta was faithfully and diligently safeguarded and defended by the Roman Inquisition.

38. NLM, Arch., 427, ff. 261v – 262r; cf. B. Dal Pozzo, *Historia della S. Religione di Malta* (Verona 1703), I, 84.

39. Salelles, prol., 41, n. 2.