

## A CONVENIENT CLEARING-HOUSE FOR FRANCE: MALTA AND LEVANTINE FRENCH COMMERCE: 1723-38\*

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By the early decades of the eighteenth century, France held a very strong position of influence in Malta vis-à-vis the powers of Western Europe. French Mediterranean commerce had acquired high stakes in Malta which was increasingly seen as indispensable for the commerce of France with the Levant and Barbary. This quasi-natural link between Malta and French Levantine interests at this time was clearly recognised by the French themselves, and it found utterance later on in the century when the Order was threatened by the Revolutionary era. In 1790, "a Languedocian gentleman" wrote:

All political bonds bind us to Malta, and to its present organisation; its geographical position will always be imposante; ... its Knights are armed for the common cause; Malta cannot become a colony of a single power without upsetting the balance which all cabinets of Europe have an equal interest to maintain. It must be in the hands of a neutral state...; it is the key to the waters of the Levant... With Malta cete Puissance [Russia] could dominate the Mediterranean and the Levant and ruin French trade.

The existence of an Order which protects her (France's) commerce, that ever active nerve of a state, is far more necessary to France than to the other confédérés<sup>1</sup>.

Another mémoire of that time repeated the same point:

...The order of Malta is the only Sovereign that can suit all the powers interested in the commerce of the Levant... The position of Malta is such that two vessels cruising to the east of the Island, up to Sicily, and two vessels to the west, up to Barbary, would intercept all the commerce of the

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\* With slight changes, this is the final chapter of the author's unpublished B.A. (Hons.) thesis which he submitted at the then Royal University of Malta, in 1972, in part fulfilment of the degree requirements: "Aspects of the Relations between Malta and France during the Grandmastership of Vilhena 1722-36." The thesis was chosen for publishing in 1976, but it never was because the History Department and its dynamic Head, Rev. Fr Andrew Vella, O.P. both suffered a fatal stroke. <sup>1</sup> Joseph Abdilla, a history graduate and a former history teacher, is assistant head of Carlo Diacono Junior Lyceum, Zejtun.

Mediterranean and of the Levant<sup>2</sup>.

The French historian Jacques Godechot has also convincingly shown that in his conquest of Malta Napoleon was not so much driven by his youthful idealism for emulating Alexander the Great, as by a compelling necessity to safeguard this "key to the Levant" for France<sup>3</sup>. Decades before Godechot, Paul Masson has also argued that to understand fully the keen competition for the possession of Malta at the beginning of the nineteenth century, "the role of her port in the (commercial) wars of the eighteenth century" must first be grasped. "The neutrality of the Order was quite friendly to France and Malta rendered inestimable services to our (French) commerce"<sup>4</sup>.

This article aims mainly to emphasise that these commercial services were not only sought in the second half of the eighteenth century, as the published material seems to indicate, but even in the early decades. The years of Vilhena's grandmastership (1722-36) actually coincided roughly with a very decisive era in the emergence of French commercial preeminence in the Levant. In consequence Malta was increasingly used by French vessels trading with the Levant and North Africa.

To trade successfully with the Ottoman lands in the Mediterranean basin, a lot depended on a country's standing with the Porte. The outstanding position France held at Constantinople was a fact of European diplomacy ever since the sixteenth century. Kheireddin Barbarossa had granted Marseilles the right of entry into Algerian ports in 1520, but actually it was the 1535 friendship treaty between France and the Sultan which gave a strong impetus to the eastern Mediterranean commerce of France<sup>5</sup>. Then the May 1604 treaty between Henry IV and Achmet II confirmed French Levantine preeminence. All nations, except Venice and the English, had to fly the French flag to trade with the Ottoman empire. The beginning of Louis XIV rule, however, marked a bad period for the relations between France and Constantinople. The other European potential rivals, especially the English, Dutch, Livornese and later even the Genoese, succeeded in ousting the French from their important position. Even Colbert's commercial companies were not much successful in redressing the balance.

The situation improved somewhat with the Capitulations' renewal in June 1673, after eight years of negotiations. The concessions were limited and the rupture in Franco-Porte relations widened further by the wars of Louis XIV. In 1697 Louis even abandoned his Turkish allies in his war against

the League of Augsburg and signed the Ryswick Treaty without them. It was the English who were playing the tune at the Porte and in the Levant. French Levantine interests appeared doomed, especially with the Ottoman defeat at Belgrade in 1717 without France lifting a finger. But, towards the end of Marquis de Bonnac's embassy to the Porte (1716-23), France's position at Constantinople improved steadily. Then, following the successful mediation of the next French ambassador Villeneuve in the Russo-Turkish war and his decisive part in the Belgrade Treaty of 1739, the Capitulations were renewed in 1740<sup>6</sup>.

This reconsolidation of the French position in the Levant was accompanied by the noticeable decline of the principal rivals. The English, who had established their fourth consulate at Salonica as recently as 1719, did not remain a menace by the early 1730's. In 1715 they had some twenty trading-houses in Smyrna and each year four big ships visited them regularly. In 1735 only three houses remained and the same was true for Aleppo. By 1715 even the Dutch had already fallen to third place in Levantine trade, ousted from all the *échelles* by the French, who by 1735 completely took over the Dutch cloth eastern market. The Venetians were also passing under the protection of French consuls in almost all of the main Levantine *échelles*. Venice itself, once dominant in the Levant, was visibly in decline.

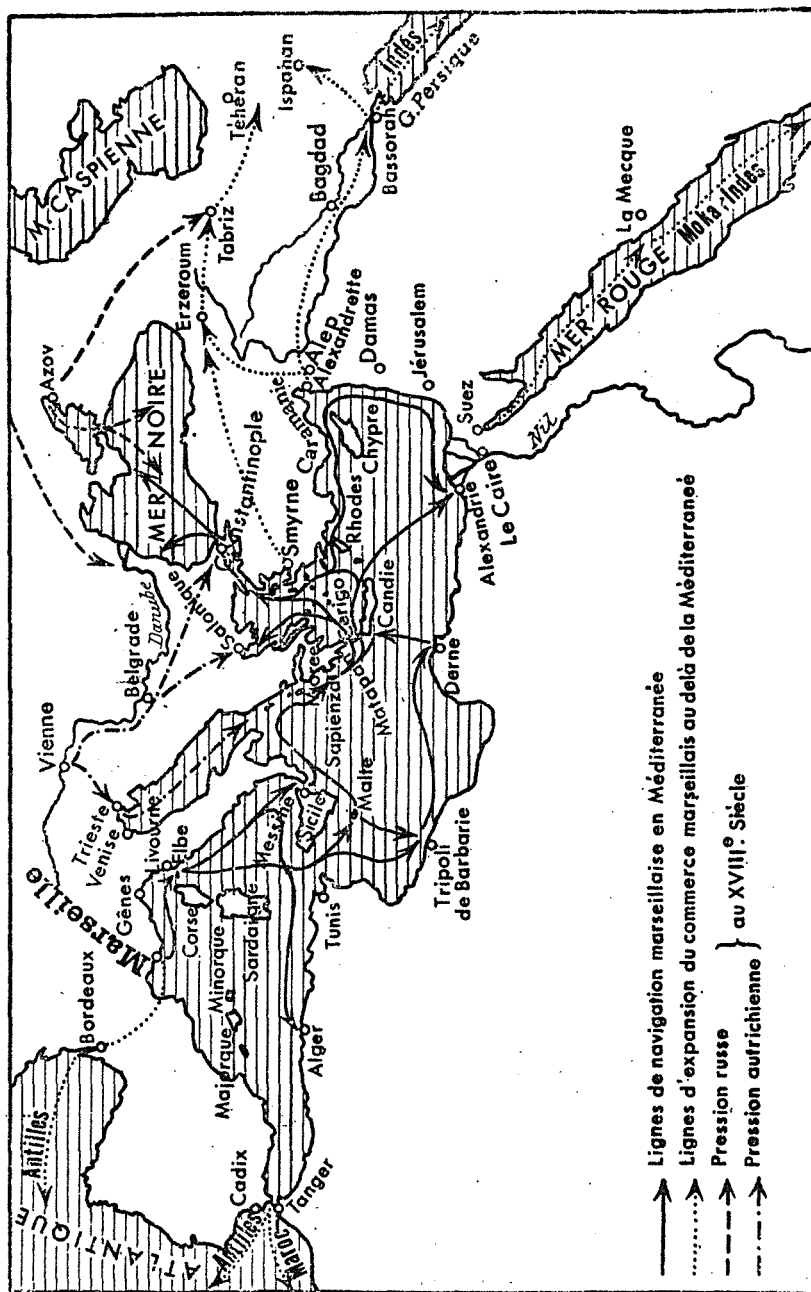
France, therefore, predominated in the Levant by the early 1730's, a fact which was mirrored also in the increased French activity in Malta's harbour during Vilhena's years. In fact, in 1723, the French Minister of Marine, Comte de Maurepas, already insisted with the Grand Master that "there is no place in Europe where France has more need of a consul than in Malta because of the great number of French vessels that call there..."<sup>7</sup>.

Malta itself had long been developing as a convenient clearing-house, especially since the second half of the seventeenth century. Grand Master Lascaris had begun fronting the Grand Harbour with spacious warehouses. He built the wharf off a tunnel which still bears his name. Succeeding Grand Masters, Nicholas Cotoner, Gregorio Carafa and Ramon Perellos, continued the building and expansion of the stores. Vilhena himself expanded the storage facilities by building up the Floriana front of the Grand Harbour. Besides, at Marsamscetto, Malta also provided excellent quarantine facilities which were of the best in the Mediterranean. Enjoying these advantages in the middle of a frequented trade route, Malta was increasingly looked upon as a sure entrepot centre, notably by French merchants. Strictly speaking,

this development belongs more to the second half of the century, especially, after the election of Pinto to the magistracy<sup>8</sup>, but it did not happen overnight. In 1713 Grand Master Perellos had been presented with a project for the setting-up of a Maltese company of six merchants to establish close trade with France (9). By the early years of the century, the Order had already established relations with the French *Compagnie d'Afrique*<sup>10</sup>. In 1728, under Vilhena, a French Knight, Chevalier Choiseul, wrote from Dijon to Bailly de Mesmes, the Order's ambassador in France, forwarding two projects for the Grand Master's consideration. One envisaged the formation of a 12-vessel squadron, provided by European Christian powers but based in Malta, against the Barbary corsairs. The other project proposed making Malta a general entrepot for Levantine commerce. Three commercial companies would be formed under the protection of the Emperor, the French King and the English crown, as well as the Dutch Republic, with their centre in Malta<sup>11</sup>. This was obviously too grand and idyllic to be practicable. Vilhena simply answered that times were not propitious<sup>12</sup>.

By 1728, France, however, needed no such castles in the air. It was already making almost exclusive use of Malta's commercial facilities. Malta held an important place in the Mediterranean trade itinerary of French vessels. Like the English, French merchants could use the free port of Leghorn and Genoa's harbour<sup>13</sup>. They could also enter Messina's free port in Sicily. But, situated in an area where Barbary pirates were usually very active, Messina was besides subject to Sicilian and Italian political vicissitudes. So, the availability of a 'neutral' Malta, hundreds of miles closer than Marseilles to the African coast and the Levant, was jealously appraised. Moreover, though the route from Marseilles to the east was shorter through Messina's strait, that through the Malta channel was preferred because of the protection afforded there. Like another Candia in the crossroads of the central Mediterranean, in Malta French vessels could gather, repair, careen and victual at will.

During war years, Malta was especially valued. For instance, when the *petite guerre* between France and Tripoli was concluded on 9 June 1729, the French Court was to deliver two brigantines to the Order in recognition for help rendered. But, realising that the North African Regencies would charge France of helping their enemies, King Louis XV eventually donated a self-portrait to Vilhena<sup>14</sup>. During the first Seven Years' War (1741-48), in a single month of 1744, 28 French vessels coming from the Levant were



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seized by the English Admiral Matthews; the cause: Marseilles' Chamber of Commerce did not manage to forewarn the captains to wait in Malta<sup>15</sup>. When during the Polish Succession War the Grand Harbour was declared officially closed to French armed vessels, the Foreign Secretary Chauvelin could well accuse the Order of wanting to wage war on France<sup>16</sup>. Such was Malta's indispensability in the French ministers' evaluations.

Unfortunately, however, the quarantine registers are the only locally available means to substantiate statistically Malta's true place in French Mediterranean commerce, since the registers of the French consulate here had been transported to France. The quarantine registers do not offer a complete picture of the total shipping touching at Malta. But they are a fairly good source for the ships coming from the Levant and Barbary. All vessels coming from the ports of those areas, or which simply had some contacts with vessels in those quarters, were obliged for quarantine. Consequently, its registers offer a more or less good record, though by no means complete, of the number of French vessels that used Malta on their way from the eastern to western waters. The only extant register covering the years under review (1723-38) is Ms. 820 of the Royal Malta Library, labelled as "Registro degl'Affari concernenti alla Sanità"<sup>17</sup>. The entries are registered fairly regularly, though gaps of 15 to 22 days without any entry, though not frequent, are not rare. Besides, in 1729 in almost seven weeks only three entries are registered<sup>18</sup>.

Despite these obvious limitations, the information in the manuscript is very revealing. From the table of the annual total entries for 1723-38, the proportion of French vessels using Malta is immediately striking. The French total is almost always above 65% of global total. The high percentage of French entries, ranging from 86% to 65% of total<sup>19</sup>, arouses some misgivings regarding the genuine nature of the entries. But no plausible criteria can be imagined for their supposedly selective or inflated nature. The fact that most of the vessels referred to in correspondence are generally found listed in the register is in favour of its inclusiveness. The intense French presence in the register substantiates what has already been affirmed earlier on, namely, that Vilhena's magistracy coincided with a very decisive and formative moment in French commercial activity in Levantine and North African waters, an activity mirrored clearly in local harbours<sup>20</sup>.

The figures in Table 1 show that the annual average number of French entries for 1723-38 is eighty-eight, a very significant steep increase from the

	French	Dutch	English	Genoese	Greek	Imperial	Maltese	Neapolitan	Ragusian	Venetian	Others**	Total	French % of Total
*1723	90		1		1		4				8	104	86
1724	125		2				5			4	12	148	84
1725	144		9	1	1		5	1		1	16	178	81
1726	85		5		1		3	3		1	8	106	80
1727	71		2			3	1	4		1	12	94	75
1728	84 <sup>a</sup>	1	4		1	11	2				12	115	73
1729	129 <sup>b</sup>	2	3			16	1				9	160	80
1730	86	1	4			25	3			3	6 <sup>c</sup>	128	67
1731	74		1			13	1				5	94	78
1732	56		2			11				2	9	80	70
1733	44	1	3			8	2			1	9	68	65
1734	71 <sup>c</sup>	1	8		2	5	5			1	14	107	65
1735	64 <sup>a</sup>	2	8		2		8			3	8	95	66
1736	68 <sup>d</sup>	3	9 <sup>d</sup>	1	2		2			1	10 <sup>f</sup>	96	71
1737	98	2	16 <sup>c</sup>						1	2	15	134	73
1738	131	3	15				6				11	166	79

TABLE 1 — Annual Total Entries Registered for 1723-1738

\* 1723 begins as from 22nd May.

\*\* These include entries flying the flags of the Order or the Grand Master, or the Tuscan, Sardinian, and Spanish flags, or else they may be prize.

<sup>a</sup> Three are armed vessels.

<sup>b</sup> Eight are armed vessels.

<sup>c</sup> Two are armed vessels.

<sup>d</sup> One is an armed vessel.

<sup>e</sup> Two of these fly the Swedish flag.

<sup>f</sup> A galley squadron of the Order is not included.

last years of the previous century. An examination of the entries for the years 1681 to 1693, registered in the only seventeenth-century quarantine register available, gives the following salient figures<sup>21</sup>:

Year	1681	1682	1683	1684	1685	1686	1687	1688	1689	1690	1691	1692	1693
Total	61	60	78	67	49	45	60	77	43	61	87	67	59
French	11	24	17	15	13	20	33	31	20	34	28	17	21
English		1	3	15	7	4	5	5	1	1			

TABLE 2 — *Entries Registered for 1681-93*

The proportion of English to French entries for these thirteen years is only 1:6, while for 1723 to 1738 it is 1:17. The estimated proportion for the eighteenth century would be one English vessel to ten or fifteen French<sup>22</sup>. The average yearly entries for 1681-93 are only 22, a far cry from the 88 for 1723-38.

Since similar figures are lacking for the intermediate period of 1694 to 1722, the leap from 22 to 88 appears too sudden. The increase was presumably progressive over those 29 years. Besides, those years were bedevilled by wars up to the first decade of the century. For the second half of the eighteenth century, the annual average would be over 62 entries, if an estimate can be drawn from the five-years' samples examined by Godechot<sup>23</sup>. It is clear that the era more or less coinciding with Vilhena's grandmastership is in this sense a watershed between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries<sup>24</sup>.

If the annual French entries are analysed monthly (see Table 3), it becomes obvious that, at least during the reviewed years, French vessels coming from the Levant or Barbary used Malta more in winter and autumn than in summer<sup>25, 26</sup>.

However, though Malta was generally used more as a wintering place by western-bound French shipping, in practice, like all Mediterranean shipping, they did not follow a constant calendar. Though winter and spring were unpopular sailing seasons because of the stormy Mediterranean weather, it was news of the whereabouts of corsairs or the exigencies of commerce which actually regulated the departures. Hence, sometimes French vessels were caught in a gregalata in Maltese waters. On 18 November 1724 a French pollacca on its way from Tripoli of Barbary to Scio and Smyrna,



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1723					3	5	8	12	17	9	10	13
1724	26	6	11	3	9	3	5	8	4	24	17	3
1725	49	10	4	2	6	11	6	13	24	10	5	3
1726	2	15	16	5	10	7	7	5	7	4	4	3
1727	2	11	4	5	7	2	5	3	5	7	11	6
1728	2	10	10	4	3	1		2	2	2	23	16
1729	20	7	1	28	4	4		7	2	10	13	23
1730	14	1	4	10	8	4	4	3	8	2	13	13
1731	22	11	8	8	1	7	1		1	4	3	4
1732	14	3	2	5	3	1	5	2	4	2	7	6
1733	5	3	8	7	2	1	2	2		4	3	6
1734	11	3	15	8	3	5		5		8	8	2
1735	10	3	8	7	5	5	1	1	2	10	3	4
1736	3	3	1	10	5	5	3	4	3	14	8	8
1737	6	13	7	7	7	2	3	10	5	16	7	11
1738	9	11	19	14	7	5	12	8	11	18	9	7

TABLE 3 — *Monthly French Entries registered for 1723-38*

with 234 Negroes slaves on board, was thrust aground at Miggiaro in Gozo and wrecked<sup>27</sup>. Sanitary precautions were implemented immediately: the negro slaves were transferred to Marsamscetto<sup>28</sup>. In February 1725, a French martingale foundered near Malta<sup>29</sup>, and in December a pinca battered by bad weather was forced to Malta on its way from Tunis<sup>30</sup>. Another French pollacca coming from Napoli of Romalia (Neapolis) with some 23 Turks ran aground at Marfa in November 1729<sup>31</sup>. On 22 February 1733, a French vessel coming from Saida ran aground in Mellieha Gulf. Its merchandise destined for Marseilles was suspect because of plague reports in Saida. It could not be admitted into the Lazzaretto. But Bailly de Boccage, the *homme du roi* in Malta, protested to the Grand Master because a 1% duty was

exacted on the transfer of the merchandise on to another French vessel. According to Vilhena, "that duty was always exacted, with the difference that it was 6. and 1/3%. We have reduced it to 1% in order to facilitate commerce." Vilhena was prepared to concede that right for this instance if the King desired it, but not to renounce it<sup>32</sup>. The court did not appear to have pressed the matter any further<sup>33</sup>.

As for the cargoes aboard the French vessels registered for quarantine, it is difficult to be exact, simply because Ms. 820 itself rarely gives detailed figures. As can be expected, the cargo varied immensely from bulls to rams, wool and spun cotton to linen and hides, cheese to tobacco, wax to tallow, carpets, honey and a variety of other commodities. Sometimes the merchandise, or part of it, is registered as belonging to Maltese merchants<sup>34</sup>. But the large majority of French vessels coming from the eastern Mediterranean carried cargoes of wheat whose destination, however, is rarely stated, though it can be assumed that normally it was bound for Provence, especially Marseilles. In fact, during the 1720's and 1730's the Levant and Barbary were almost exclusively the sole source of wheat arriving at Marseilles, as Table 4 illustrates<sup>35</sup>.

At times, this Levantine wheat brought by French vessels helped to alleviate scarcity in Malta, as well as in France itself. At the beginning of the century, Grand Master Perellos, unable to have wheat supplies from Sicily, had forced several French vessels to leave their wheat cargoes in Malta<sup>36</sup>. In 1728-29, mainly owing to a bad harvest failure in Sicily<sup>37</sup>, Vilhena was complaining of a grain dearth in the Islands. "More than a thousand salme of grain" were bought from French merchant vessels early in 1728<sup>38</sup>.

In June he wrote to the Order's agent at Palermo that, with the Sicilian ministers refusing to issue the usual *tratte*, there was only a two-months' provision left in Malta<sup>39</sup>. On 25 July he wrote that the people were "almost destitute, and by now would have experienced an extreme scarcity were it not that we succeeded in authoritatively taking some quantities of grain from some vessels coming from the Levant bound for France"<sup>40</sup>. Vilhena wanted Maurepas to help Malta in this contingency. But Provence itself was suffering from a similar wheat shortage, and the King, though reported to be "touched by reports that the Maltese are finding it difficult to get wheat", could not offer any significant assistance<sup>41</sup>. It was in January 1730 that he gave his permission allowing French ships to leave their wheat cargoes in Malta, though they were expected to return immediately to the Levant to bring new consignments for France<sup>42</sup>.

	Espagne	Levant et Barbarie	Pièmont et Savoie	Italie	Hollande	Nord
1725		3.568	305			
1726		14.727				
1727		16.52				
1728	25	26.65	10			
1729		11.982				
1730		951		30		
1731		9.29				
1732		420				
1733		3.058				
1734						
1735		10				
1736		200				
1737		55.221				
1738		1.52				
1739	497	29.784				
1740		32.703				
1741	105	81.435				
1742	30.331	50.451		24.829	466	



TABLE 4: Sources of Wheat for Marseilles

Similar difficulties for wheat supplies were to arise again during the Polish Succession War when Malta was not only suffering from wheat shortage, but risked losing Sicilian supplies because of the ease with which French armed ships were allowed in harbour<sup>43</sup>. In Paris De Mesmes had to contact some merchants of the Compagnie d'Afrique for terms to transport suggested wheat supplies from southern Brittany and North Africa<sup>44</sup>. But ultimately prospects of supplies from Cape Negre came to nothing, because

owing to a bad harvest the Company found it impossible to meet its commitments with Marseilles itself<sup>45</sup>. However, purchases of wheat and rice were effected from French merchants touching at Malta<sup>46</sup>.

Another important commercial commodity, besides wheat, was certainly cotton. An old staple crop of great importance for the farmers' subsistence, cotton, particularly spun cotton, became by the eighteenth century the Islands' chief export. Much of the crop found its way to Marseilles and its Chamber of Commerce often lodged numerous complaints against abuses committed by Maltese merchants. By a special licence, these were allowed to export their cotton to Marseilles without paying the customary 20% duty imposed on all foreign imports. The Maltese, however, used to buy noticeable quantities of Levantine cotton wool, and then they sold it at Marseilles as if it were locally grown in Malta, thus avoiding the 20% duty. Despite repeated complaints, this abuse persisted. By 1753 such illegal cotton exports increased tenfold, exceeding 1,500 bales, weighing about 4,000 quintals or 100 kilos<sup>47</sup>.

The Marseilles Chamber of Commerce often protested also against the inferior quality of spun cotton from Malta, not matching the stamp on the bales. Trying to avoid this discredit, Vilhena, "having always to heart the good of our subjects", on 29 December 1733 issued a bando ordering strict inspection of spun cotton packed for export. Bales not found marked by the official superintendent were to be confiscated<sup>48</sup>. In April 1735, a similar bando decreed that spun cotton bales were henceforth to be tied with a single band in the middle to facilitate inspection. All bales tied otherwise were liable to confiscation<sup>49</sup>. However, it was difficult to eradicate abuses, and complaints from Marseilles did not stop<sup>50</sup>.

These incidents apart, commercial relations between Malta and France were generally amicable during the period under study. Besides the friendly facilities French ships had in the Island, a fairly large French mercantile community established itself mostly in the harbour area. A dip through the marriage register of the Parish of Porto Salvo in Valletta may serve of some indication. From 1700 to 1740, the male partners of over 75 marriages are specified as of French parentage, mostly from Provence — a fact significant in itself<sup>51</sup>. Several of these locally-settled Frenchmen often requested the Admiralty of Marseilles for permission to trade under the French flag. The royal declaration of 21 October 1727 decreed that:

In foreign countries, French vessels cannot be addressed but to Frenchmen settled there and born in the Kingdom. Those married there to

foreign wives cannot have any addressed to them.

In 1729 Vilhena wrote for an exemption from this decree in favour of Frenchmen naturalised in Malta. The Marine Minister, Count de Maurepas, replied that the King would have liked to treat Malta differently from other foreign countries, but

It is not to the benefit of the commerce of his subjects, who require His Majesty to prevent the abuse of his flag, to allow indefinitely to all Frenchmen now settled in Malta and married to foreign wives to have French vessels addressed to them<sup>52</sup>.

The King agreed to grant the privilege to a limited and selected number of Frenchmen in Malta, though he was still frugal in granting such dispensations. He "did not want to increase the number of Frenchmen settled and married in Malta who had the permission to sail with his flag"<sup>53</sup>. Unable to obtain a general exemption, Vilhena himself presented individual merchants. Messieurs Aillaud and Prepaud, for instance, were granted the French flag early in 1730. Two other French merchants, however, Nicolas Guerin and Joseph Mestre, had to wait over a year for such permission; then only Guerin actually obtained it in September 1731<sup>54</sup>. Similar demands to the French King were to continue beyond Vilhena's grandmastership<sup>55</sup>.

By Vilhena's death on 10 December 1736, it was unmistakably clear that the use France was making of Malta in her Levantine commercial interests was bound to increase. After Vilhena, French omnipresence in the Island was increasingly manifest. In 1750 Pinto could well write:

It is equally well known to the whole world that France is able to profit more than any other country from the Order's services, and that Malta renders her those services with zeal. In the Island of Malta France has advantages which grudge the Order with the enemies of that crown, who say of Malta's harbours that they are always neutral and are never neutral...<sup>56</sup>

By 1791 it was asserted that the Levantines regarded the French "as the proprietors of the Island"<sup>57</sup>. The loss of Malta in 1800, after the brilliant coup of Napoleon in 1798, meant therefore a lot for France. The early nineteenth-century French consul in Malta, Monsieur Miège, seems to have expressed the general French sorrow when he wrote: "Undoubtedly, it is allowed to a Frenchman to regret the loss of an Island whose position rendered her mistress of the commerce between East and West..."<sup>58</sup>.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Rapports Politiques de l'Ordre de Malte avec la France et la nécessité de maintenir les Traités respectifs entre ces deux Puissances, par un gentil-homme Languedocien [MacCarthy-Levignac], (1790), pp. 13-16.

<sup>2</sup>Essence de l'Ordre de Malte. Extrait des Mémoires de M. le Chev. de [Mayer], publiés en 1879, 1790, 1791, 1792. Pour la défense de l'Ordre en France, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup>J. Godechot, "La France et Malte au XVIIIe siècle", *Revue Historique*, vol. CCVI (July-Sept. 1951), pp. 67-79.

Following the French conquest, the Citoyen Capitaine Honoré de Brès enumerated the advantages France expected to derive from the taking of Malta. *Inter alia* he writes: "In giving the Island commodious ports and a fortunate position, nature appears to have destined her to be the key to the Levant and the arbiter of the Mediterranean": *Recherches historiques et politiques sur Malte* (Paris: Cramer, an VII [1798], p. 96. In the book *The Policy and Interests of Great Britain with Respect to Malta, summarily considered* (London: J. Hatchard, 1805), Malta's commercial importance for France is also given prominence in the considerations of the conquest.

<sup>4</sup>P. Masson, *Histoire du commerce français dans le Levant au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1911), p. 320.

<sup>5</sup>For details of this summary reconstruction see E. Levasseur, *Histoire du Commerce de la France*. Vol. I: *Avant 1789* (Paris: A. Rousseau, 1911); Masson, *op.cit.*; R. Paris, *Histoire du Commerce de Marseille*. Vol. V: *De 1660 à 1789 le Levant* (Paris: Plon, 1957). The February 1535 treaty and others are reproduced in J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*. Vol I: *A Documentary Record: 1535-1914* (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand, 1956).

<sup>6</sup>R. Romano, *Commerce et Prix du Blé à Marseille au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: A. Colin, 1956), p. 30, says that Marseilles' commercial life experienced the beginning of "a new century" towards 1725. However, for the wheat trade Romano puts 1741 as the decisive year: pp. 38-43.

<sup>7</sup>AOM 1219, *Mémoire*, in De Mesmes' letter to G. M., pp. 597-601, 24.5.1723. On this important matter of the appointment of a French consul in Malta and on the difference between the consul and the *homme du roi*, see the author's thesis, pp. 226-36.

<sup>8</sup>Godechot, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>9</sup>A. Mifsud, "L'Approvvigionamento e l'Università di Malta nelle passate Dominazioni", *Archivum Melitense*, vol. III, no. 5 (July 1918), p. 193.

<sup>10</sup>Romano, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup>AOM 1220, pp. 146-49, Choiseul to De Mesmes, 5.5.1728.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 222, De Mesmes to Grand Master (G.M.), 22.8.1728.

<sup>13</sup>Masson, *op.cit.*, p. 384.

<sup>14</sup>AOM 1220, pp. 565-66, De Mesmes to G.M., 4.6.1729; p. 622, 21.7.1729. The portrait took long in coming: AOM 1221, p. 419, 18.6.1732. It was reported finished in August 1732: *ibid.*, p. 472, 9.8.1732. See the author's article, "The Story behind a Portrait. An episode in 18th century Franco-Maltese relations", *The Sunday Times of Malta*, 1.10.1972; p. 10.

These services for the protection of Marseillan commerce were remembered later on in the century. The Marseilles' Chamber of Commerce brought them to the notice of the Revolutionaries in the National Assembly in the "Observations de la Chambre de Commerce de Marseille sur diverses Questions qui lui ont été faits par un Député de l'Assemblée Nationale relativement au Decret de cette Assemblée concernant les Biens de l'Ordre de Malthe". It said that, "The board of trade at Marseilles will never forget the services rendered to France by the Order of Malta in 1728, when the state of Tripoly had the insolence to declare war against the French Nation" - translated after Louis de Boisgelin, *Ancient and Modern Malta* (London: Richard Philips, 1805), vol. I, p. xlii.

<sup>15</sup>Paris, *op. cit.*, p. 184; see also pp. 168-69, 186-87.

<sup>16</sup>AOM 1221, p. 886, De Mesmes to G.M., 16.12.1733.

<sup>17</sup>It largely consists of a "Registro dei Bastimenti, Mercanti, e Passeggieri ammessi alla quarantena, e di diversi altri Affari concernenti alla Sanità, Principiato alli 22 maggio 1723," till September 1739. Only this part of the manuscript is paginated: 447 pp. Sanitary Commissioner was Cavaliere de Margou. The year 1739 is not included here; but from September to December is registered in AOM 6527.

<sup>18</sup>RML ms. 820, pp. 184-85, 1 July to 20 August included. These 'gaps' can be explained as usual secretarial slips, or as a true representation of the facts — and, therefore, no gaps at all.

<sup>19</sup>The 86% is for 1723 whose registration begins only on 22 May. It would most probably have been higher had the whole year been registered. On the other hand, it must be observed that in 1723 several French vessels coming from the ports of Provence entered for quarantine, which was not usual, because of the plague raging there since 1720. It was only on 30 June 1723 that a royal order put an end to the exceptional quarantine measures prevailing in Marseilles: Masson, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

<sup>20</sup>According to M.A.Sant, "Vilhena's accession as Grand Master in 1722 ushered in an era during which foreign currencies found in the Island a most fertile field." He also says that during Vilhena's last years gold pieces from the Barbary states were circulating here: "Coinage Problems Facing the Order of St. John in Malta" (unpublished M.A. thesis, presented to the Royal University of Malta, 1967, p. 318 and p. 321).

<sup>21</sup>AOM 6526, Arrivi di Bastimenti posti in Quarantena 1654-94. The year 1694 is only covered up to 20 April. English vessels are included for comparison. The nationality of the entries is not always specified, which is a serious handicap to an accurate estimate. The volume itself is very disorganised, without any ordered chronology and

the pagination is unsystematical. In 1681 it is only on 15 August that the first specified French entry is listed — the 36th for the year. But from internal evidence, from comparison of type of ship, name and captain, it can be deduced that, for instance, the entry for 22 June, a tartana named *Il Salvatore del Mondo*, is French, though not specified. So is that for 24 October, and the entries of 30 Nov. 1681 / 2 April 1682; 30 Sept. / 29 Aug. 1682. All French vessels registered as coming from western ports are excluded from Table 2.

<sup>22</sup>R. Cavaliero, *The Last of the Crusaders. The Knights of St. John in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1960) p. 48. He does not give any sources for his estimate.

<sup>23</sup>Godechot, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-74. He gives the following figures: for 1764 - 48 entries, 1770 - 57, 1775 - 75, 1780 - 18 (which he considers exceptional), 1788 - 44.

<sup>24</sup>The above figures can be compared with the following data: In 1670 some 50 to 60 vessels have been estimated to have left annually from French ports for the Levant, together with some 20 boats from Candia or the Morea. About 1683, the number was 90 departures annually. But at about 1720, the yearly average soared to 263 departures and from 1722 to 1742 the average remained around 270. In the second half of the century it oscillated between 240 and 300 departures annually: Paris, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>25</sup>Unlike Table 1, Table 2 does not include French vessels registered as coming from western ports; nor does it include the armed vessels. It covers only the mercantile ships coming from Levantine or N. African waters.

<sup>26</sup>Since 1723 is only partially covered, it has been ignored in estimating a monthly average for 1723-38. So, the total entries for each month of each year were divided by 15. The exclusion of 1723 figures does not affect the ultimate result except by a margin of one or even less here and there.

<sup>27</sup>RML ms. 820, p. 48, 22.11.1724.

<sup>28</sup>AOM 1485, to Gozo Governor, 18 and 19.11.1724. In 1725 Maurepas complained to Vilhena for keeping 40 Negroes and two Tripolitan merchants as security for the payment of the custom duties for the negro slaves' transfer. The Marine Minister held that the Grand Master had no right to exact such duties because the Negroes were not destined for Malta and were under the French flag. He protested also that the 6% duty demanded was higher than usual and not proportionate to the cost price of the Negroes which was said to be about 40 to 50 piastras : AOM 1202, ff. 310r-13v, Maurepas to G.M., 29.8.1725.

<sup>29</sup>RML *op. cit.*, p. 63, 8.2.1725.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 90, 8.12.1725.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 191, 5.11.1729.

<sup>32</sup>AOM 1566, pp. 2054-56, To De Mesmes, 12.3.1733. RML, *op. cit.*, p. 275, 4.5.1733.

<sup>33</sup>AOM 1221, p. 721, De Mesmes to G.M., 19.4.1733; p. 804, 10.8.1733.

<sup>34</sup>See for instance: RML ms. 820, p. 30, 11.5.1724; p. 34, 20.7.1724; p. 64, 18.2.1725;



p. 109, 7.8.1726.

<sup>35</sup>The table is part of one provided by Romano's study, *op. cit.*, p. 134: "Tabl. 13 — Arrivages de Blé dans 'les Ports de Mer et Bureaux de Terre de la Direction de Marseille.' Répartis selon l'Origine." The whole table covers from 1725 to 1779. The years after 1738 are included here for comparison. The above quantities are in "charges de 240 livres poids de marc", i.e. about 120 kilos: *ibid.*, p. 14; pp. 43-44.

<sup>36</sup>AOM 1561, p. 773, To Com. D'Aubignos, Receiver at Marseilles, 10.3.1707; p. 890, To M. Simon, 25.8.1710.

<sup>37</sup>D. Mark Smith, *A History of Sicily. Modern Sicily after 1713* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), p. 278. He describes how wheat export from Sicily was becoming increasingly difficult because of a few brokers who were unscrupulously manipulating the grain market: pp. 271-73.

<sup>38</sup>AOM 1489, To D. Galea Feriolo, Licata, 22.7.1728. AOM 1490, To B. de Spinola, Genova, 14.2.1729. AOM 1231, ff. 281r-82v, Chev. Doppede to G.M., 24.3.1729.

<sup>39</sup>AOM 1490, To Gioacchino Napoli, Palermo, 1.6.1729.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.7.1729. In a letter from Aix, it was observed to the G.M. that it was hard to believe that he had held up twenty vessels with wheat destined for Marseilles, "while we are reduced to little short of famine": AOM 1231, f. 399v, 16.7. 1729. Incidentally this explains the unusually high figure of 28 French entries for April 1729: see Table 3, under April.

<sup>41</sup>AOM 1202, f. 438r, Maurepas to G.M., 8.10.1729.

<sup>42</sup>AOM 1203, ff. 3r-4v, Same to Same, 25.1.1730.

<sup>43</sup>AOM 1567, p. 2255, To De Mesmes, 16.3.1734; p. 2307, 24.6.1734.

<sup>44</sup>AOM 1222, p. 178, De Mesmes to G.M., 6.8.1734.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 259, Same to Same, 13.12.1734. AOM 1567, p. 2401. To M. Simon, 31.12.1734.

<sup>46</sup>AOM 1491, To Com. Petrucci, Lighorn, 29.5.1734. AOM 1567, pp. 2473-74, To M. Simon, 7.6.1735.

<sup>47</sup>Masson, *op. cit.*, p. 390. See John Debono, "The Cotton Trade of Malta 175-1800", *Archivum. The Journal of Maltese Historical Research*; ed. V. Mallia-Milanes and A. Sammut (Malta: Midsea Books, 1981), Nr. 1, pp. 94-125.

<sup>48</sup>RML ms. 429, Bandi, vol. I, f. 256 r+v.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, f. 284r, 2.4.1735.

<sup>50</sup>AOM 1222, pp. 491-92, De Mesmes to G.M., 14.2.1736; p. 535, 9.5.1736.

<sup>51</sup>RML, *Indici di Sponsalizi... di Porto Salvo...*, vol.I, pp. 680-925; vol. II, pp. 1-166. Only the specified French partners were added, though if those whose surnames testified to their French nationality were included, the number would well be over 75.

Ersilio Michel refers to a series of documents which covers this period and deal with marriages between French and Maltese nationals: "Documenti Maltesi dell'Amiragliato di Marsiglia," *Archivio Storico di Malta*, vol. IV, anno IV (1934), pp. 143-44.

The Inquisitor has this to say on the activities of northern and Baltic ships in

Malta: "On the shores and in the ports of the Island also disembark English and Dutch vessels, from the Baltic sea and from other parts of the North, full of heretical sailors, soldiers and merchants, who sometimes carry with them preachers of their sects and once disembarked they use their wicked rites and the Calvinistic suppers...": ATM, Memoire: Stoppani, vol. I, f. 5r, "Istruzione a Mons. Stoppani destinato Inquisitore di Malta."

<sup>52</sup>AOM 1202, ff. 429r-30r, Maurepas to G.M., 4.10.1729. AOM 1220, p. 696, De Mesmes to G.M., 12.10.1729.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 933, Maurepas to De Mesmes, 5.10.1730.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp 880-81, De Mesmes to G.M., 16.7.1730; pp. 916-17, 17.9.1730. AOM 1221, pp. 11-12, Same to Same, 20.1.1731; p. 175 Louis to G.M., 4.9.1731.

<sup>55</sup>On the related but different issue of the double nationality, see Alain Blondy, "La France et Malte au XVIIIème siècle: Le Probleme de la Double Nationalité", Malta. A Case Study in International Cross-Currents; ed. S. Fiorini and V. Mallia-Milanes (Malta: Univ. Publications, 1991), pp. 175-86.

<sup>56</sup>Godechot, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>58</sup>M. Miège, Histoire de Malte (Paris: Paulin, 1840), vol. I, p. 35.