
Carmen Depasquale

French Knights and Maltese Inhabitants in the XVIII Century

As Malta is an epitome of all Europe, and an assemblage of the younger brothers, which are commonly the best of its first families, it is certainly one of the best academies for politeness in this part of the globe ... It is curious to observe the effect it produces upon the various people that compose this little medley.¹

This is the impression that the Knights of St John, belonging to different European nations but living together in Malta, left on Patrick Brydone who visited Malta in 1770. Throughout the eighteenth century French Knights outnumbered those of other nationalities. A manuscript of the Bibliothèque nationale de France entitled '*Description de l'île de Malte et tout ce qu'elle contient*' states that as of 28 October, 1710, out of a total of 1904 Knights, conventual chaplains and servants-at-arms, 740, that is almost 40% are French.² Seventy years later, the French Foreign Minister Vergennes, writing to the ambassador of the Order in Paris, in a letter dated November 25, 1780, states that more than half the members of the Order are French.³

In this paper, I intend to restrict as much as possible the term 'Maltese inhabitants' to the native Maltese, rather than to the wider meaning of inhabitants of Malta. I shall therefore leave out all references to the Rule of the Order in so far as it affected Knights in their relationship among themselves, such as when Dolomieu,⁴ a Knight of the Langue of Auvergne says that Malta is a country of "intriguers and schemers", (*un pays où on ne s'occupe que d'intrigues et de bragues*),⁵ an idea echoed by the diarist Abbé Boyer.⁶ Similarly, I shall disregard comments such as the one made by the Comte de Saint-Priest⁷ who describes life in

A Sorbonne graduate with a special interest in the eighteenth century, Dr Depasquale lectures in the Department of French, which she currently heads, at the University of Malta. This is a revised text of her Andrew Vella Annual Memorial lecture delivered at the National Archives, Santo Spirito, Rabat, on 6th December 2001.

Malta as 'lax and lazy' (*molle et oisive*).⁸ He was referring to the time when he was on his caravans in 1753 and it is an obvious reference to the behaviour of the Knights. I shall only make brief references to three Maltese who stand out among others: Count Ciantar, Agius de Soldanis and Mikiel Anton Vassalli, as these three literary men figure prominently in another paper entitled "French influence on the literature of Malta in the eighteenth century".

The printed work *Etat curieux et militaire de l'Ordre de Malte pour l'année 1741*, published anonymously in Malta by a French Knight in 1741, gives some interesting facts about Malta. Statistics include the population of Malta "of all ages and of both sexes": 120,000 - 2000 of whom are ecclesiastics, excluding those of the Order - 2500 slaves, 24 convents, eighteen of which are male communities, six towns, 28 smaller towns, and two universities where one can graduate, (où l'on peut passer bachelier). Out of 2242 Knights, 1038 are French, while 290 professed Knights, conventual chaplains⁹ and servants-at-arms reside in Malta. Of these, 61 belong to the Langue of Provence, 21 to that of Auvergne and 40 to the Langue of France (just over 42%).

Among the conventual chaplains, some were Maltese, but as there was no Maltese Langue, they could only join the Order in this rank after having obtained the certificate of naturalisation from the country of the Langue they intended to join. Requests from Maltese to be naturalised French came mostly from men whose family was of French origin or whose father was in the service of the Order. Thus, Joseph Grognet registered his French naturalisation in 1739. His father, of French origin, was the Grand Master's customs officer. He was educated in France and was received in the Langue of France on 1 August, 1759.¹⁰ Honoré Audouard was French, he married a Maltese woman, settled in Malta, and was chief surgeon of the Grand Master's galleys for over fifty years. His three sons Joseph-Scipion, Jean-Antoine Melchior and Eustache-Eméric obtained French naturalisation. They were conventual chaplains and could obtain benefices.¹¹ Other Maltese conventual chaplains who were naturalised French include Pierre-Paul-Carmin Grech, Gaetano Bruno, Edouard Regnaud, Antoine Blaise, Gaëtan-Gesuald and Jean-Mathieu Dou, Barthélemy-Gaëtan Bouchut, Jacques and Antoine Corogne, Henri Petit, Emmanuel-Marie Abbate and François Rocquer.¹² Three members of the Maltese nobility also sought and obtained French naturalisation: Jean-Marie Ciantar, son of Count Giovanantonio was received in the Langue of

France as conventual chaplain,¹³ as well as the two brothers Paul and Dominique Barbaro.¹⁴

Not all Maltese who asked for French naturalisation did so in order to join the Order. Among them one finds Nicolò Isouard's father and his brothers. Their father Jacques Isouard Xuereb was the Order's agent of the *Chambre de Commerce* of Marseilles.¹⁵ Thomas-Gaëtan-Gabriel Galea obtained his French naturalisation on his request "to fix his residence in France and end his days there".¹⁶ The letters patent in the form of an edict given by Louis XV in June 1765 dispensed the Maltese from the need of obtaining letters of naturalisation in order to enjoy the rights of French citizenship if they wanted to trade in France.¹⁷

Pinto looked favourably upon the Maltese conventual chaplains. He wrote to his ambassador in Paris on 18 August, 1749:

"They serve our Church assiduously, they apply themselves to study and to singing, which our nationals neglect, for on their arrival here, the latter solicit us to go back to France to wait for a commandery to be vacated and thus do not render any service to our Order. We are ashamed of them as almost none of them prepares himself to be a prior on our galleys and vessels... You know that to plead before us and our Venerable Council, one has to wear the habit and speak Italian well; only the Maltese provide us with lawyers,... with auditors, as our nationals disdain these offices and consider them beneath them ..."¹⁸

The author of Libr. 79 also says of the church services at St John's:

"One can be sure that there is hardly any church in Europe where services are carried out better than here."¹⁹

Besides judges, lawyers and auditors, other high ranking Maltese officials of the Order included doctors and surgeons. As one would expect of a Hospitaller Order, the school of medicine in Malta was of a high standard, however the Grand Master often sent his doctors to further their studies in Italy and in France. Georges Imbert, Octave-Gaëtan Delicata, Gaetan Azzopardi, Joseph Demarco, Jean-François Maurin, Emmanuel and Michel Grillet and Jean-Baptiste Locano studied medicine at Montpellier. Having obtained his doctorate in 1749, Locano remained in Montpellier to practise medicine and was honoured by the

Académie royale des sciences which appointed him associate-member in 1751.

Other doctors studied in Paris: Saverio Micallef specialized in ophthalmology, in lithotomy and in obstetrics. Joseph Grillet studied surgery between 1704 and 1706. Antoine Grillet studied under the watchful eye of bailli de Laval-Montmorency.²⁰

Two other members of the Grillet family, Emmanuel and Michel, studied at Montpellier. Michel Angelo Grima had already made a name for himself in Malta and in Florence when, in 1758, he pursued his studies for two years in Paris. He then joined the French army which was fighting the Seven Years War. He authored two works in French, the first one, published in 1760 is entitled: *Mémoire sur la sensibilité des tendons*; the second, published a year later, is entitled *Réflexions sur la mémoire sur la taille latérale de Bromfield*. He dedicated the first work to the Ambassador of the Order in Paris, the bailli de Froullay, to whom he expressed his love for this beautiful language (French) in which he had translated this work from Italian.²¹

It was a French Knight, the bailli de Rességuier,²² who in 1775 established a foundation for the teaching of surgery in Malta and appointed Michelangelo Grima as director of studies.²³

The Grand Master and the Knights constantly came in contact with other Maltese. These included businessmen, tradesmen, craftsmen and artisans as well as servants. A perusal of the wills, *dispropi*, of letters and diaries of some French Knights gives us a very clear insight into how these Maltese were regarded by them.

Let us first consider a few general remarks. A document in the Archives of the National Library of Malta, written in 1761, entitled *Mémoire général sur l'île de Malte*, describes the people as "the best one could find, very attached to the Order and of an excellent constitution [...]. They are good and courageous".²⁴ What about the Maltese sailor? The anonymous author of the book published in 1797, *Malte, Corse, Minorque et Gibraltar*, says of him:

"In general, one is pleased with the Maltese. He is faithful, intelligent, eager, gives a good service, is docile, generous, he lacks nothing. The traveller finds in him the surest safeguard and the best protection. He is clean, graceful in all his movements and has the agility of a bird".²⁵

Were these qualities in the mind of Emperor Charles VI who, writing to

the Grand Master from Vienna on 7 January, 1739, asked for "a few hundred sailors and [...] a certain number of officers" to serve on the Danube? Despuig's answer dated March 11 of the same year informed the Emperor that he was sending three hundred sailors whom he described "d'élite", accompanied by fourteen Knights to command them. A note dated 30 May, 1789 states that an almoner, a doctor and a surgeon would also accompany them. The Order would give double pay to the sailors and the Grand Master paid for their uniform. The Order would also pay the Knights forty scudi per month and one hundred scudi for their uniform.²⁶

Likewise, the Order knew that it could rely on the Maltese soldier. If that were not the case, treatises such as the one entitled *Réflexions sur la défense maritime de Malte* by the bailli de Blacas,²⁷ written in 1761 - the year the Order feared a Turkish attack - would not have been written. In his introduction, the author says:

"A lot of money is necessary for war; the Order does not have it, but it possesses courage as well as faithful subjects".²⁸

Two years before, the same author had presented to the Grand Master a *Projet [...] pour introduire la culture des mûriers dans l'île de Malte et y établir conséquemment un commerce considérable de soie*. He suggested the cultivation of mulberry trees for the production of silk and the manufacture of cotton, calico, dimity, muslin.... He thought that agriculture and manufacture could provide the Maltese with a means of living by their own work, thus preventing Maltese men from leaving the country to look elsewhere for work.

Another French Knight, Chevalier Turgot,²⁹ who had a passion for botany and natural history, was also very keen on the manufacture of cotton, muslin, calico.... In his correspondence with Canon Agius de Soldanis, he updates him with the latest developments in this regard. For example, in his opinion, the machine used in Malta to separate the seed from the cotton was worn out. In another letter, he promised to send him a recipe for extracting oil for burning from cotton seeds. In a letter dated 26 June, 1752, he tells the Canon that he had all that was necessary for the manufacture of cotton and muslin and that "if they want, our island can make great profit out of such manufacture." Six months later, he wrote to the Canon again and insisted on the manufacture of muslin "for the production of very fine cotton stockings that sell well in this country"³⁰ (France). Besides, he who before his departure from the island had a project for the formation of a botanical garden in Malta, was

continually sending from France to chevalier Quinquaran de Beaujeu all sorts of seeds: coffee, cinnamon, Senegal and Siam cotton seeds, all sorts of bulbs, "some of which can be planted in the marshes of Marsa" and of trees. "You see", he tells the Canon in another letter, "although I am far, I continue to work for our island".³¹

Locally produced cotton stockings must have been very much in demand by the Knights, for Commander Dolomieu writing to his friend Chevalier Fay on 4 December, 1795, asked him to procure him stockings.

"Please, ask her also (Marguerite, his servant in Malta) to make me some stockings for I am in dire need of them; I would like white and yellow ribbed ones. It is not important whether they be fine or thick, provided they are strong".³²

Visitors to the island such as Count Borch and Roland de la Platière all mention the manufacture of cotton and silk and of stockings. The author of *Malte, Corse, Minorque et Gibraltar* states that "cotton and its weaving are the first elements of the commerce and industry of the Maltese". He singles out "the manufacture of stockings and of bonnets" as well as the manufacture of cotton sails for the Order's navy. He adds: "This unique manufacture belongs to the Order".³³

The same author, who, in my opinion, is no other than Commander Dolomieu, had this to say of Maltese workmen:

'In Valletta, one finds all the workmen and all the merchandise one needs. Few cities in Europe, with the exception of some big capitals, have such good workmen where labour is so cheap, and where one can find such a great abundance of objects of luxury and of good taste. Filigree works are famous.

'Brass plate is very well worked. Kettles are as light and as well-made as in the Levant. They trade also in clocks [...]. The marble makers are very clever and they work on the pavement of churches.

'They fish for oysters and for sea-dogs. Their skin is sold for up to twenty pence.

'[...] The rubies of Messina are traded by the Greeks in the Levant through the Maltese [...]

'The Maltese take the ashes of the Kalimagnum to Venice, lichen to Sicily and oranges everywhere.

'They trade the catches procured by their privateering against the Barbareques.

'The considerable flow of provisions of all kinds brought into harbour by the great number of ships that visit Malta is of great benefit to merchants whose active intelligence makes profitable use of the slightest needs of foreigners.

'No wonder that such commercial activity necessitated the presence in Malta of companies of speculators who insured against a reasonable rate goods, life and liberty'.³⁴

Commercial speculation was also envisaged by Commander Dolomieu. He was in France and he was going through hard times. On 4 December, 1795, he wrote to his friend, Chevalier de Fay who was in Malta, about establishing the export of lemons from Malta to France and this with the help of his servant Marguerite and her brother-in-law Pierre, while Fay in Malta and himself in France would coordinate this trade and share the profits.³⁵ We know from other letters of his that while he was in Malta, he was not completely alien to commercial activities: he dealt in Maraschino liqueur from Trieste, in wine from Sicily and Cyprus, as well as in coffee, when this commodity formed part of corsairs' seizures from the Turks.

Dolomieu's letters to his friend in Malta reveal his trust and gratitude towards his Maltese acquaintances, especially Marguerite. When he decides to let his house he recommends to Fay that he lets it to the Maltese "who pay better and show more respect." His old uncle is in Malta and he is constantly in his mind. He knows that Marguerite takes good care of him.

'Please tell good Marguerite to be patient with him, I am grateful to her for all she is doing for my uncle, tell her that I shall return to Malta as soon as I can to alleviate her troubles'.³⁶

His affection for this devoted servant is present in most of his letters to Fay, although he is not always punctual in his payment for her

services. He sends her his regards, promises he will never forget the services she has rendered him and says that he would have taken her with him to France but for the fact that she would be annoyed there and that she did not speak French.

Marguerite's brother-in-law Pierre had even paid on Dolomieu's behalf 39 louis which he owed as rent. In a letter to Fay, he refers to this favour:

'As soon as I shall arrive in Paris I shall pass on to you the 39 louis Pierre lent me. Please thank this honest man Pierre heartily and assure him that I shall never forget what he has done for me'.³⁷

Pierre was in fact paid forty louis and then ten more as interest almost ten months later.

Dolomieu was also indebted to a Maltese clock and watchmaker, Salvatore Micallef, to whom he wrote to say that he had no money with which to pay him and that he could sell all the effects he had left with him and get paid from the proceeds. However, the letter does not stop there. Dolomieu writes to a friend, he exchanges news with him. As a matter of fact, Micallef does get paid – six years later!

Dolomieu's was a small debt entered into with a friend. However, the *disproprî* reveal that many Knights were indebted to locals. Some of these made a living as money-lenders. Besides, the conventual chaplain Boyer makes several references in his diary to debts incurred by Knights and to measures undertaken by Ximenes to control this practice – as well as gambling.

A comedy written by chevalier de Sainte-Jay, though fictitious, is a good portrayal of life in Malta in the eighteenth century. The main character, a Commander, not only has a mistress, clearly Maltese, but is indebted to tailors, shoe-makers, confectioners, inn-keepers and a host of other creditors; he falls prey to usurers and has not paid his valet "since time immemorial". The Commander's situation is not unlike that of servant-at-arms Joseph Genest who declares in his will dated 2 March, 1732, that he is indebted to the Treasury, to his tailor, his confectioner, the musician Sammartin; and other persons who hold credit notes.³⁸ Chevalier André de Brun de Mouges also declares that he owes his tailor, Maître François Portelli, "about 8 scudi".³⁹ Knight Amadeo de Cays from Nice owes Anna Maria Aquilina 1052 scudi and 9 tari, and has hypothecated in her favour some furniture and paintings.⁴⁰ Knight François de Beaulieu owes his servant Catherine Savona 20 scudi for

unpaid wages,⁴¹ while Commander Pierre Duperou owes his servant Saverio three months' arrears of pay at the rate of 9 scudi per month.⁴²

In Sainte-Jay's play, the reader is regaled by the portrait of a certain type of woman, presumably Maltese, who takes advantage of her beauty in order to render a service to those men who would rather think that she is in love with them than know that she is taking them for a ride. She therefore accepts their love, money and presents until she meets a Maltese man who proposes to marry her and she decides to change her life. She is a foundling of uncertain parentage: the daughter of a Knight? Maybe. In his *Mémoires*, Count de Saint-Priest also mentions three Maltese sisters "a little fickle but amiable, who received the youths of the island and organized for them card games."⁴³

A project by Chevalier Turgot involving the Maltese did not materialise. In 1763, Chevalier Etienne-François Turgot, brother of Louis XV's Minister of Finance, was appointed Governor of Guyana. It was necessary to populate the colony with the king's subjects and Turgot persuaded Louis XV to make a gratuitous concession of a considerable part of the new colony to the Order of St John. The King had already asked the Grand Master to send some Maltese families there and with this purpose in mind had sent Chevalier Menon to Malta. Turgot's arguments reveal what he thought of the Maltese. He wrote in a *Mémoire*:

"I have always thought that the Maltese were more suited than any other people to establish a colony, especially in a hot climate [...]. They are robust, hard-working, sober, good swimmers, excellent and brave sailors. Their wives are fertile".⁴⁴

In a letter to Minister Choiseul dated 14 June, 1763, he wrote: "I dare assure you that in time of war you can always count on the Maltese, few sailors are as good as them and if you treat them well, they can be very good servants".⁴⁵

Seven months later and a few days after his arrival in Malta, Menon's first impressions of the Maltese are revealed in this letter to Turgot:

"The Maltese travel only for an interest that is actual and easy to calculate. Besides, a few examples of generosity will have a marvellous effect on the workers".⁴⁶

Turgot had already targeted Joseph Farrugia, a surgeon who had studied in Paris under his watchful eye. He thought he would be willing to go to Guyana as "in Malta he was being refused the justice that was due to his talents".⁴⁷

However, Pinto had already written to Turgot on 3 May, 1763 to congratulate him on his appointment and praise him for his project inspired by his zeal and love for the Order, but he also added that his idea of attracting the Maltese to Guyana could not materialise. The reasons given were explained in a *Mémoire* attached to the letter: the Order would not find enough men to send over, as they were being employed in Malta to ensure that the island was safe against a Turkish attack (the threat of such an attack two years before was still fresh).

Moreover, and here we have Pinto's opinion of the islanders, the Maltese were attracted by the sea, not by agriculture, in fact half the island was uncultivated. The Grand Master adds:

"These same Maltese are unable to put up with an absence from their island lasting more than two years and, generally speaking, they are unable to settle anywhere, and particularly in a country unknown to them and so far away that its very distance frightens them".⁴⁸

A search through the list of persons who left from France to Cayenne reveals the name of a certain Giacinte Caussi (Cauchi?) born in Malta on 28 June, 1747. He left for Cayenne on May 3, 1764, having been recommended by Chevalier Menon. The latter stayed in Malta between 3 January and 13 October, 1764, but his mission was far from successful.

What relationship did the Grand Master entertain with the locals?

As a Hospitaller Order, its infirmary was open to the Maltese, which explains why the deputy prior (*sous-prieur*) was a Maltese conventual chaplain.

"He must be Maltese because of the language that is not ordinarily understood by the Priors",⁴⁹ says the author of *Libr. 79*.

The same author describes the ceremony of bleeding performed at the Infirmary on Maundy Thursday in the presence of all the Grand Crosses of the Langue of France:

'They wash the feet of the poor and give to each some alms. The Infirmier... pays for the meal that is given to these poor people: it can cost up to twenty scudi; the treasury distributes fifty scudi to the poor of Bormla. There is a foundation for this purpose'.⁵⁰

As a monastic Order, religious functions at the Conventual Church (as well as in other churches, for instance St Paul's) were conducted with pomp. Music played an important part. The same author writes:

'There are actually two courses in music kept at the expense of the Treasury. The Treasury pays sixty scudi per month. On the feast of St John the Grand Master gives twenty-five scudi to the *maestro di cappella* so that he will distribute them among the musicians that come from the Old City'.⁵¹

Other customs were attached to various feasts. On the feast of Our Lady of Victories on September 8, after the celebration of solemn Mass at St John's, the Grand Master, Grand Crosses and all the Knights walked in procession to the Church of Our Lady of Victories. After public prayers of thanksgiving for the victory over the Turks, the Grand Master's almoner presents the Grand Master with a bowl containing nine purses which he gives to nine girls about to be married chosen by himself. They kiss his hands after receiving the purse.⁵²

A similar custom was entertained by the Confraternity of St Barbara. Sixty scudi were collected from the pay of the Bombardiers and from other charities. They served to endow a poor girl who was chosen by ballot by the bombardiers.

On the feast-day of St Barbara the bride and bridegroom go to the church dedicated to this saint, both kneel before the High Altar and Mass is celebrated. After Holy Communion, the marriage contract is read out and the Commander of the artillery throws the sixty scudi in a bowl in the presence of the Grand Master. These are given as dowry to the bride.⁵³

Similar events are recorded by Boyer in his diary. In celebrating Rohan's election, the three French Auberges organise a dinner for three hundred poor people at the Auberge de France:

"They give each of them soup, a pound of boiled beef, a pound of roasted meat, a loaf of bread, a bottle of wine and four tari".⁵⁴

Boyer gives a long and vivid description of the joy and enthusiasm of the Maltese during the celebration of Rohan's election. He emphasises the "prodigious" attendance of the population that goes to Valletta to acclaim its new ruler. There were fireworks, and illuminations in the auberges, in St Paul's church and in all the houses in which there was a member of the clergy. The poor had easy access to the Grand Master who listened to their requests, comforted them and was generous with them.

For the year 1776, Boyer records Rohan's visit to Balzan on the occasion of the feast of the Annunciation on 25 March. On 12 May, feast of St Philip, patron saint of Zebbug, Rohan paid a visit to Casal Zebbug. It was a year later that Rohan elevated the village to the status of town and called it Città Rohan: that was on 21 July, 1777.

The same diarist quotes from the diary of another Knight, Chevalier de Viguier who records how the feast of St Peter and St Paul was celebrated at Città Notabile in 1738. At Mdina, the Grand Master was presented with a bouquet by the chief Magistrate, then he heard Mass in the company of the bishop and the Cathedral Chapter. Afterwards, he visited the collegiate Church of St. Paul and the grotto where a Te Deum was sung. This was followed by another Te Deum when he then visited the Benedictine nuns. After dinner, at about five in the afternoon, the Grand Master served the poor sick women of the hospital to whom he distributed generous alms. On his way there he threw money to the crowd. His Eminence then went to the lodge from where he could see the horse-races.⁵⁵

Other feasts in which the Grand Master took part were those of St Lawrence in Bourg (Birgu) and of St. Gregory which started with a procession from Casal Neuf (Rahal Gdid).

Boyer regales us with a number of scenes regarding Maltese life between November 1744 and December 1776, and again between 14 and 27 April, 1777. Events, such as the assassination of a Dominican monk; an earthquake lasting just over a minute '*sans aucun accident*' that took place in 28 February, 1775; a fire; a clandestine marriage; the Maltese passion for hunting; the pique between the collegiate of St. Paul and the parish of St Dominic; feasts; celebrations; theatrical representations by a troupe of Maltese; literary compositions by Maltese authors; the behaviour at table of the *giurati*; the Canons of the Cathedral and the Maltese nobility invited by Ximenes on the occasion of his entry into the Old City; all make interesting reading even if one has to take

certain opinions with a pinch of salt. Two important historical events are also covered: the rising of the priests on 9 September, 1775 and the Order's last General Chapter the following year.

Besides the annual feasts and celebrations in honour of a new Grand Master, the Knights feted royal births and marriages, the accession of Kings and Popes to the throne and other events. Among the latter, one can mention the feast organised by the Bailli de Tencin in honour of his uncle who was made a Cardinal. On these occasions, besides the usual illuminations and fireworks, a serenade was composed and a maypole was erected for the amusement of the people. The feast of Calendimaggio, celebrated annually on April 30 in front of the Palace in Valletta, also included a *cantata* or a *componimento drammatico*. The verses in Italian were written by local and Italian poets, many were written by Count Giovanantonio Ciantar. The music was generally, though not always, composed by the local *maestro di cappella*, such as Anfossi or Sammartin. The maypole was also erected on Carnival Monday. The author of Libr. 291 says that:

"Grand Master Vilhena had introduced the habit of abandoning to the people on Carnival Monday a maypole, thereby rendering Carnival more interesting for the people".⁵⁶

In *Malte par un voyageur français*, we find a detailed description of the maypole, the Maltese *kukkanja*:

"A mast 96 feet in height, on top of which are suspended several kinds of provisions: this mast is coated in grease from its foot up to a third of its height. At a signal given by the Grand Master [...] everybody rushes towards the mast, groups are formed, the more agile climb on the shoulder of their friends... and whoever grabs first the flag on top of the mast receives a reward in silver and secures the provisions".⁵⁷

The maypole was sometimes erected at sea, as happened on 12 July, 1770, on the third day of the celebrations in honour of the royal wedding of the future Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. An interesting detail regarding this feast is found in the account of it that Chevalier des Pennes, the French King's ambassador to Malta (*l'homme du roi*, as he was called), gives to the duc de Choiseul in his letter dated 14 July, 1770:

"Fifty thousand people [were present] without counting those who preferred to enjoy the spectacle from the roofs of the buildings or in the boats, the people came in great numbers, most of them came from the countryside and many came from the island of Gozo".⁵⁸

Many French Knights living in Malta spoke and wrote in Italian. Were there any of them interested in Maltese? The answer is found in Canon Agius de Soldanis' introduction to his work *Della Lingua punica presentemente usata dai Maltesi*. He mentions seven Knights by their names, five of them are French. He says that they spoke the language like native Maltese and that their pronunciation and accent did not distinguish them from Maltese nationals. He mentions five other French Knights whom he describes as "literary men", who were all eager to see his Grammar published.⁵⁹ Among these Knights stands out chevalier Turgot whose letters to Agius de Soldanis were always full of encouragement. Another regular correspondent of the canon was bailli Dericard, who had appointed him as his attorney in Malta. Dericard not only complimented Agius de Soldanis on his work but asked him for an extra copy to pass on to M. Bonamy, *ancien pensionnaire de l'Académie des belles-lettres*.

The anonymous Libr. 70 is a *Vocabulaire français-italien-maltais*. Ignazio Saverio Mifsud mentions in his Biblioteca Maltese the French Knight Thezan's *Grammatica Maltese e il suo dizionario* dated 1600, and a grammar cum a Maltese-Italian-French dictionary by a French Knight, François Bardon.⁶⁰

In his guide on Malta, Saint-Priest dedicates a chapter to the Maltese language and even translates into French under the title 'Poésie' three four-line Maltese songs. He reproduces them in Maltese at the end of his book, according to the transcription by the librarian Joachim Navarro.

In conclusion, I would like to make a passing mention of Charles-Antoine Barbaro whom Rohan created Marquis of San Giorgio on 6 September, 1778, author of *Degli avanzi d'alcuni antichissimi edifizii scoperti in Malta l'anno 1768*, dedicated to Rohan and published posthumously by his son in 1794. His museum impressed the visitors who came to Malta, such as Count de Borch, Count de Saint-Priest, Dominique-Vivant Denon and C.S. Sonnini, all of whom recommend that their readers should pay it a visit.

This paper is by no means exhaustive. I have made no mention of Mannarino nor indeed of Nicolò Isouard, to mention but two very well-known Maltese who lived in the eighteenth-century. I have not dwelt on the relationship between the Maltese nobility and the Order nor with the continual conflict concerning the jurisdiction of the Order, the Bishop and the Inquisitor. I have tried to leave politics out. I am not a historian. I have only tried to give as wide a picture as possible of life in Malta in the eighteenth century from writings by French Knights and other documentary sources found in different libraries in Malta and in Paris. All my quotations are a free translation from the original in French, and in rare cases, in Italian.

Notes

¹ P. Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta*, Vol. 1, 338.

² B[ibliothèque] n[ationale de] F[rance], n[ouvelles] a[cquisitions] f[rançaises] 3669, f.579.

³ AOM, 273, f.236 r.: "[...] un Ordre dont la nation française compose la plus nombreuse partie". Cf. M[inistère des] A[ffaires] E[trangères] (Paris), C[orrespondance] P[olitique] Malte, supplement 4, f. 37 v.: "la Religion, dont plus de la moitié des membres sont Français".

⁴ Déodat de Gratet Dolomieu, born on 23 June, 1750, was a Commander of the Langue of Auvergne. He had a turbulent life and died at the age of 51.

⁵ A. Lacroix, *Déodat Dolomieu*, Paris, 1921, t.1, 175.

⁶ NLM Lib. 137, f.92v.: "L'esprit de brigue a autant d'influence ici qu'en avaient les jolies femmes dans les affaires de France sous le règne de Louis XV". Claude-François Boyer, born on 11 July, 1733, was a conventual chaplain of the Langue of Auvergne. He died in Malta on 30 August, 1790.

⁷ François-Emmanuel de Guignard de Saint-Priest was born at Grenoble on March 12, 1735. He was received in the Langue of Auvergne, but married Countess Constance de Ludolf in 1744 to continue the family lineage as his brother had no male heir. He was ambassador of the King of France in Constantinople for 20 years. He died at Saint-Priest, near Lyons, on February 26, 1821.

⁸ Comte de Saint-Priest, *Mémoires, Règnes de Louis XV et de Louis XVI*, Paris, 1929, 17.

⁹ See A. Blondy, 'La France et Malte au XVIIIe siècle: le problème de la double nationalité' in S. Fiorini and V. Mallia-Milanes (eds.) *Malta*,

A case-study in international cross-currents, Malta, 1991, 177. The author states that in 1749 there was a total of 152 conventual chaplains and servants-at-arms in the three French Langues. Of these, 19 were Maltese and 3 of them were Commanders.

¹⁰ AOM, 2095, f.186. See also MAE, CP Malte, supplément 1, no 8, f.55 and *ibid.*, no 66, f.211 v. See also A[rchives] N[ationales] P[rivées] (Paris)], M 902, no 326.

¹¹ MAE, CP Malte, supplément 1, no 11, f.61 and *ibid.*, no 66, f.211r. See also ANP, M 902, no 326.

¹² *Ibid.* f.211r-v.

¹³ ANP, M 902, no 328.

¹⁴ MAE, CP Malte, supplément 1, no 66, f.211r.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* see also MAE, CP Malte, 11, no 84, f. 119r. and *ibid.*, no 88, f.123.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* no 15, f.67r.

¹⁷ On the limitations imposed by this edict see A. Blondy, 'La France et Malte', 175-186; ANP, M 902, no 407 and Arch. 1643, ff.81r-82r.

¹⁸ ANP M 902, no 342, quoted by A. Blondy, 'La France et Malte', 177-178.

¹⁹ NLM Lib. 79, f.471.

²⁰ See AOM 1232, f.510 v. and ff.638r-v.

²¹ See P. Cassar, *Medical History of Malta*, London, 1964 for information contained in this paragraph.

²² Clément-Jérôme-Ignace de Rességuier, born in Toulouse on 23 November, 1724, was a bailli of the Langue of Provence and died in Malta on 22 October, 1797.

²³ NLM Lib. 1146, vol. 2, f.350 and NLM Lib. 137, f.40r.

²⁴ AOM 6519, f.3r. and f.6 v.

²⁵ Anonymous, *Malte, Corse, Minorque et Gibraltar, Malta*, 1797, 146.

²⁶ NLM Misc, 276, no 10.

²⁷ Antoine de Blacas d'Aups, born on 23 April, 1700, was a bailli of the Langue of Provence and died in Malta on 16 May, 1777.

²⁸ NLM Lib. 140, f.200.

²⁹ Etienne-François Turgot was a non-professed Knight of the Langue of France. He was born in Paris on 16 June, 1721 and died in his château near Falaise, on 25 December, 1788.

³⁰ NLM Lib. 146, t. III, f.7v.

³¹ *Ibid.*, f.2.

³² A. Lacroix, t. II, p. 97.

- ³³ Anonyme, *Malte, Corse, Minorque et Gibraltar*, 69.
³⁴ Ibid., 61-71 and Comte de Saint-Priest, *Malte par un voyageur français*, 46, Malta, 1791.
³⁵ A. Lacroix, t. II, 97.
³⁶ Ibid., 44.
³⁷ Ibid., 97.
³⁸ AOM. 931, Pkt. 19, f.39.
³⁹ Ibid., Pkt. 18, f.84, (25 May 1724).
⁴⁰ Ibid., Pkt. 19, f.16, (15 March 1729).
⁴¹ Ibid., Pkt. 17, f.3, (19 October 1702).
⁴² Ibid., Pkt. 21, f.45, (30 August 1752).
⁴³ Comte de Saint-Priest, *Mémoires, Règnes*, 47.
⁴⁴ BnF, n.a.f. 5398, f.157.
⁴⁵ Ibid., f.193.
⁴⁶ Ibid. f.144.
⁴⁷ Ibid., f.144.
⁴⁸ AOM 1578, ff.60r-64 r.
⁴⁹ NLM Libr. 79, f.404.
⁵⁰ Ibid., ff.423-424.
⁵¹ Ibid., f.465.
⁵² Ibid., ff.102-104.
⁵³ Ibid., ff.239-240.
⁵⁴ NLM Lib. 137, f.150r.
⁵⁵ Ibid., f.13v.
⁵⁶ NLM Lib. 291, f.266.
⁵⁷ Comte de Saint-Priest, *Mémoires, Règnes*, 57-58.
⁵⁸ MAE, CP Malte, supplément 1, no 118, f.354.
⁵⁹ Agius de Soldanis, *Della Lingua punica presentemente usata dai Maltesi*, 61-62.
⁶⁰ I.S. Mifsud, *Biblioteca Maltese*, Malta, 1764, 324-325.