

HOUSES IN MERCHANTS STREET, VALLETTA

by

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Merchants Street, stretching from the *Auberge d'Italie* at one end to the *Infermeria* or old hospital at the other, is one of the busiest thoroughfares of Valletta. Every morning the street between St. John Street and Old Theatre Street is crowded with buyers at the stalls set up by vendors of every description of goods. At the left hand of the corner formed by Merchants Street and St. Lucia Street is what may be termed the cereal and potato exchange where brokers transact a considerable volume of business with exporters of potatoes and importers of cereals, whilst the opposite side of the road is occupied by importers of provisions and foodstuffs and their brokers. Near the *Monte di Pietà* (1) gold and jewellery changes hands, and the Valletta Market is only about fifty yards away. All these factors combine to make the street a hive of activity during the forenoon.

At the head of Merchants Street, or *Strada San Giacomo* as it was known during the rule of the Order, opposite the *Auberge d'Italie*, stands the *Palazzo Parisio* at present used as the General Post Office.

The site was originally occupied by two houses, one belonging to Chev. Fra Michel Fonterme dit la Chiesa and the other by Francesco This. These were purchased by the Bali of Manosca, Comm. Fra Giovanni di Ventimiglia, of the Langue of Provence, and formed part of an usufruct which he instituted in 1608 in favour of those members of his family who at any time might be serving in the Order (2). In 1717 these two houses were given by the Ventimiglia family to Donna Maria Sceberras in exchange for two houses in Kingsway (3).

On the death of Donna Maria the houses were inherited by her son, Monsignor Domenico Sceberras, Titular Bishop of Epifania, who demolished the two Ventimiglia houses and on the site erected the present palace with its simple but elegant architecture.

The mural decorations were executed by the Maltese decorator, Antonaci Grech, known as Naci (4).

The Bishop died on July 25, 1744, and the property then passed to his sister, Donna Margherita Muscati. Later we find the palace in possession of Donna Margherita's son, Don Paolo Muscati, from whom it was inherited by Anna Muscati who married the penniless Cavalier Don Domenico Parisio of Reggio, Calabria.

Palazzo Parisio was the property of Chev. Paolo Parisio Muscati, the youngest son of Donna Anna, in 1798 when Malta capitulated to the French. Napoleon Bonaparte landed on June 13 and took up his quarters at the *Banca Giuratale* in Merchants Street, but, finding this far from comfortable, next day moved to *Palazzo Parisio* which, it is presumed, was either requisitioned or

(1) Government pawning office.

(2) Records of Notary Ascanio Scaglia of 27 September 1608.

(3) Records of Notary Pietro Paolo Natale of 8 July 1717.

(4) The writer is indebted for this information to Chev. Vincenzo Bonello.

put at his disposal by Chev. Paolo. Napoleon resided here from the 14th to the 20th June before proceeding to the conquest of Egypt.

When the Maltese revolted against their new masters on September 2, 1798, Chev. Paolo Parisio Muscati joined the insurgents and headed the Naxxar volunteers throughout the campaign which culminated in the capitulation of the French forces on September 4, 1800.

On November 26, 1800, Sir Ralph Abercrombie, commanding the expedition to Egypt, called at Malta on board H.M.S. Diadem and like Napoleon lodged at *Palazzo Parisio* up to the 20th December (5). At the battle of Alexandria, on March 21, 1801, Abercrombie was mortally wounded at the moment of victory, and succumbed to his wounds on the 28th of the same month. His body was brought to Malta on board the frigate "Flora," and after lying in state was interred at Fort St. Elmo.

Chev. Paolo Parisio Muscati, who continued to take an active part in Maltese affairs, was among the first recipients of knighthood when the Order of St. Michael and St. George was created, and he was raised to the dignity of Grand Cross of this Order in 1836.

From the 25th January to the 14th May 1841 Lord Lynedock, who as General Graham had taken an active part in the blockade of the French, resided at *Palazzo Parisio* which had been put at his disposal by his friend, Chev. Paolo.

Chev. Parisio, now Sir Paolo Parisio, died on December 10, 1841, was accorded a state funeral and buried at the "ta' Gesù" Church, Valletta.

After the death of Paolo Parisio the old palace passed through varied vicissitudes until it was taken over by the Government for use as a General Post Office (6).

The top storey of the palace was completed after World War I to house the Audit Office.

During the Second World War the premises were partly destroyed by enemy action. In the repairs that followed the exterior was left unaltered, though it seems that it was not found possible to restore the mural decorations.

Passing the *Casa Dorell* (No. 10 Merchants Street) a superb example of typically Maltese architecture, we come to the striking building now occupied by the Medical and Health Department, once the "Castellania" or Civil and Criminal Tribunals of the Order.

The site was originally purchased by Grand Master Jean Levesque de la Cassiere who here erected the first palace which was considered sumptuous for its time (7).

The President or "Castellan" of these tribunals was nominated by the Grand Master from one of the seven langues of the Religion and held office for the term of two years. When passing through the streets of Valletta this official was followed by a page bearing a rod as a sign of his jurisdiction.

Many were the duties which the Castellan had to attend to. As president

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- (5) Anderson Aeneas, A journal of the Forces on a Secret Expedition. London, Wilson & Co. 1802, p. 140.
 (6) Records of Notary F. S. Camilleri of 24.3.1887, 27.1.1891 and 28.3.1891.
 (7) Repertorio de Decreti Lett. G. J. Compendio Istorico Cronologico de Gran Maestri.

of the tribunal he had to see that justice was impartially administered, and if any of his ministers did not exercise his office properly he was to report him to the Grand Master. However, he had power to punish the Visconti (8) and other minor officials. It was also his duty to keep a record of the arrival and departure of foreigners and to ascertain that the Gran Visconte and his captains regularly carried out the night round. Together with the Judge of the Civil Court, the Castellan attended public audience on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The presence of the Castellan was required at the processions from the Conventual Church on St. Mark's Day, the Rogations, Corpus Christi and the feasts of St. John, the Immaculate Conception and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin. Further, together with the Giurati, it was his duty to distribute the prizes or "pali" to the winners of the horse races held on the feast days of St. John and St. Rocco; his decision at these races was final. He was also to assist in the compilation of criminal proceedings and was to administer the oath to advocates, notaries and jurats of Valletta before their taking office and also to all doctors of medicine after having received their warrant. He was, however, debarred from imprisoning or setting free any person. (9) It will thus be seen that the duties of the "Castellan" were many and varied and his post was far from being a sinecure.

The Captain of the city of Vittoriosa was the perpetual Vice Castellan and held jurisdiction over the three cities of Vittoriosa, Cospicua and Senglea.

Grand Master Emmanuel Pinto demolished the old building of the *Castellania* built by La Cassiere and remodelled and embellished it in the florid style of the period. The work was commenced in 1757 under architect Francesco Zerafa and completed in 1760 by architect Giuseppe Bonnici; the chapel was consecrated on November 15, 1760, by Monsignor Constans (10).

On the façade are two marble figures, Justice and Truth, below which was the epigraph "Judicium Justitia Judicat" whilst over the portal, lavishly decorated with Pinto's crescents, can still be seen the inscription composed by Bali Fra Marcantonio Trento (11) reading:—

D.O.M.
EMMANUEL PINTO M. M. ET PRINCEPS
HUNC UTRIVSQUE JUSTITIAE LOCUM
VETUSTATE PROPE LABENTEM,
AD TERRORUM POTIUS, QUAM AD POENAM
A FUNDAMENTIS AERE PROPRIO RENOVAVIT
AUXIT, ORNAVIT. ANNO DOM.
MDCCLVIII

After the Law Courts were moved to the Auberge d'Auvergne part of the palace of the *Castellania* was converted into a Secondary School for girls until the Public Health Department (now the Medical & Health Department) was constituted by Sir Gerald (later Lord) Strickland on the 10th April 1895

(8) The *Visconti* were the Police Officers. The *Gran Visconte* was the Chief of Police.

(9) *Costituzioni di Malta 1509-1681* "Dell'Officio del Castellano della Grande Corte della Castellania" R.M.L. Ms. 740.

(10) G. Darmanin Demajo in "Archivio Storico di Malta" Vol. III p. 207 note 13.

(11) Ciantar, Giovan Antonio, "Malta Illustrata" Vol. I Lib. I Not. I, XXXVI p. 69.

(12). Up to this time the Medical Officer was not attached to any department; he had his office at the Palace and acted as medical advisor to the Government (13).

The house at the corner of Merchants Street with St. Lucia Street (now No. 36 Merchants Street) was originally the house of Sir Oliver Starquey, Bali of Aquila and Latin Secretary to Grand Master La Valette. In 1606 Bali Cagnolo, as executor of Starquey's will, in an act of foundation (14), directed that a mass be celebrated on the first of each month for the repose of the soul of the said Starquey.

This house passed to Tommaso and Vina Cosavi (15) in 1644 and from these to Gregorio Mamo.

It was bought by the Assembly of Conventual Chaplains on March 5, 1690 for Sc. 3,005 (16) at a public sale of the Holy Office (17).

No. 46 Merchants Street is the *Monte di Pietà e Redenzione*.

This palace, from 1577 to 1721, housed the *Banca Giuratale* (18) and was exchanged with the Treasury for the house opposite on July 30, 1721 (19). The premises were then used as the office for the sale of the "spogli" or spoils of deceased knights until August 14, 1749, when they were assigned to the Jewish neophyte Giuseppe Cohen who had revealed to Emmanuel Pinto a conspiracy of the Turkish slaves to assassinate the Grand Master and seize control of the Island. The building was made over to the said Cohen and to his descendants in the male and female line, failing which it was to revert to the Treasury (20). It would seem, however, that later an annuity was granted to the Cohen family in lieu of the use of this palace as in 1773, during the grandmastership of Francisco Ximenes de Texada, the premises were remodelled as they are at present to house the *Monte di Pietà*.

The *Monte di Pietà* had its origin on January 15, 1598, when Comm. Fra Manuel de Couros (or Quiros) of the Priory of Portugal, moved by religious and Christian piety, petitioned Grand Master Martino Garzes and obtained permission to donate the sum of Sc.2,000 for the purpose of establishing a fund in order "to suppress the infamous usury daily practised by slaves and Jews who charged a *tari* per month for every *scudo* lent on pledges" this rate of interest being equal in a year to the sum originally advanced, the pledges generally remaining in the possession of the lender (21).

At the request of Comm. Couros, the fund was instituted under the title of "Monte di Sant'Anna"; this was later changed to "Monte di Pietà."

In the original deed of foundation it was stipulated that the yearly rate of

(12) Government Notice No. 73 of 1895.

(13) Prof. A. V. Bernard in "Times of Malta" 4 September 1940.

(14) Records of Not. Ascanio Scaglia of 20 January 1606.

(15) Records of Not. Francesco Imbroli of 11 January 1644

(16) One Maltese *scudo* is equivalent to 1s/8d. 12 *scudi* = £1.

(17) *Repertorio di tutti i beni stabili dell'Università della Valletta* — R.M.L. Treas. A. 178 fol. 74.

(18) *Liber Conciliorum* An. 1718-21 R.M.L. Arch. 140 fol. 161.

(19) Records of Not. Giuseppe Callus of 30 July 1721.

(20) *Distinto Ragguaglio della temeraria sedizione ordita l'anno 1749 contro l'Isola di Malta da Mustafa prima Bassa di Rodi ed ora schiavo in quella.* — National Museum Library Ms.

(21) R.M.L. Ms. 404.

interest on the money advanced should be two grains per *scudo* and that one year was to be allowed for the redemption of pledges. When this period expired the object pawned was to be sold by public auction, any surplus realised being repaid to the pledger. It was further stipulated that a rich senior Knight Commander of the Order was to be appointed president and that one of the richest jurats of Valletta was to be appointed commissioner; each of these keeping one of the keys of the chest in which the pledges were kept.

Up to April 11, 1720, money was only advanced on gold, silver and jewellery but on this date Grand Master Marc'Antonio Zondadari authorised the commissioners of the *Monte* to advance money on draperies, and decreed that the rate of interest be reduced from 4% to 3% (22).

From 1597 to 1699 this institution carried out its transactoins with the original capital of Sc.2,000 but, with the growth of the population, it soon became evident that this capital was insufficient to meet the demand. Grand Master Perellos, anxious to help this worthy institution to increase its transactions, in 1699, assigned the sum of Sc.500 to the fund of the *Monte* (23) and again, on the 8 October 1699, further assigned to it the sum of Sc. 4,872 without interest. The latter sum represented one half of a treasure amounting to Sc. 9,744 in gold coins which was found in a copper urn during the demolition of a house bought by the Cathedral Church. The Grand Master immediately laid claim to the whole treasure; however, the Bishop also put in a claim for one half of the money asserting that the treasure had been found on property belonging to the Cathedral. The case was submitted to Rome and Pope Innocent XII decided that the Grand Master should have one half whilst the other half was to go to the Bishop (24).

On September 12, 1712, the funds of the institution were further augmented when Giuseppe Scipione Camilleri bequeathed to the *Monte* several tenements in Valletta. The greater part of these were sold and realised Sc. 16,816 (25).

Grand Master Zondadari, on April 12 and June 25, 1720, directed the *Università* (26) of Valletta to furnish the *Monte* with a capital of Sc. 16,000 without interest, and by an order dated March 1, 1721, directed the *Università* to supply the *Monte* with a capital of Sc. 2,000 at an interest of 3%. On March 3, 1724, Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena decreed that the sum of Sc. 2,020 then deposited in the chest of the "Gran Corte della Castellania" be transferred to the *Monte*.

At this time the books showed that the institution had disbursed Sc. 43,943 on pawns of gold, silver and jewellery, Sc. 13,870 on wearing apparel, having only Sc. 401 left in cash in hand, making a total of Sc. 58, 213. One can easily perceive that the cash in hand at this epoch was inadequate to meet the daily transactions. Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena therefore ordered the *Università* to pay the *Monte* a further Sc. 22,000 in January 1726 and Sc. 9,400 in March, July and October of the same year.

(22) Decree of 12 April 1720 signed by Bali Fra Emmanuel Pinto, Vice Chancellor.

(23) Records of Not. Aloysio dello Re of the 16 May 1699.

(24) Vincenzo Grech "Foundation & History Monte di Pietà" R.M.L. Ms. 404.

(25) Dr. R. C. Xerri — "Origini e Progresso del Monte di Pietà e Redenzione" R.M.L. Ms. 404.

(26) Municipal body.

When the *Monte di Sant'Anna* had its modest beginning it was housed in the *Banca Giuratale* in Valletta; it was later transferred to the palace of the *Castellania* and in 1773 it was finally moved to the palace which it now occupies and which had been bought from the Treasury for Sc. 5,465. An adjacent house was taken on perpetual emphyteusis from the heirs of Baron Diego Antonio Galea at a yearly rent of Sc. 124 and added to the house acquired from the Treasury. Still another house, which was taken on perpetual lease from the Nunnery of St. Ursola at a yearly rent of Sc. 237, was added to the Monte.

Grand Master Emanuel de Rohan, by a decree dated June 23, 1787, authorised the consolidation of the funds of the *Monte di Pietà* with those of an equally national institution, the *Monte della Redenzione degli Schiavi*, the latter institution having larger funds in landed property than it actually required.

The "*Monte della Redenzione degli Schiavi*" had its origin in the year 1607 when it was founded by Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt.

Preaching the lenten sermons in the Conventual Church of St. John, the Capuchin Friar, Father Raffaele da Malta, vividly depicted the miserable plight of the Christian slaves in Moslem hands, and represented what a worthy object their ransom would be in the eyes of the Lord, induced many pious persons to offer alms and help. A committee for the collection of alms was constituted consisting of Comm. Fra Michel de Alentorn, Chev. Fra Raymond de Guzon, Chev. Fra Gaetano Casati, Comm. Strumfeder, Dr. Giacomo Muscat, Notary Francesco Imbroglia and the Father Guardian of the Capuchin Friary at Floriana (27). The funds collected by these were very limited, and the foundation would have been able to do but little for the liberation of the unfortunate slaves had it not been for the generosity of a charitable lady, Caterina widow of Hector Vitale, known as "*Speziala*" (28) who, in her will, appointed the "*Monte della Redenzione degli Schiavi*" as her universal heir whilst also leaving one fifth of her property to the Nunnery of St. Mary of the Magdalenes (29).

By the sale of part of this property, and with a capital of Sc. 6,000 which came to the *Monte di Redenzione* through the will of Gio. Domenico Felici (30), this institution was enabled to commence operations in earnest.

✓ Caterina Vitale died in Syracuse where she had gone for a change of air and on her instructions her body was brought to Malta in 1619 and interred at the Carmelite Church, Valletta (31).

A few years after the death of Caterina, the system of collecting alms was abolished and the administration was restricted to four persons, a knight, a civilian, a receiver (also a knight) and a secretary. This lasted until 1660 after which the administration was entrusted to three knights, one a Grand Cross as president. Up to 1690 the meetings of this commission were held in the vestry of St. John's Conventual Church, but after this date they were held in the house of the president, who was nominated by the Grand Master.

(27) *Cabreo del Vend. Monte della Redenzione degli Schiavi* R.M.L. Treas.B.309.

(28) Dal Pozzo, Bartolomeo, *Historia della Sacra Religione di Malta*, Vol. I, page 533.

(29) Records of Not. Simeone de Lucia of 28 March 1618.

(30) Records of Not. Lorenzo Grima of 5 September 1625.

(31) Dr. R. C. Xerri, *op. cit.*

In the early days of the institution, in order not to allow the Moslems to take undue advantage of the foundation, the ransom paid for a Maltese slave was fixed at Sc. 70 but later it was augmented to Sc. 120 and from 1707 to 1787 it was fixed at not more than Sc. 150; however, after this it rose to Sc. 500 plus expenses for repatriation.

After the consolidation of the funds of the *Monte di Pietà* with those of the *Monte della Redenzione degli Schiavi*, the new title of the institution was "Monte di Pietà e Redenzione" and the administration was conducted by a Knight Grand Cross, as president, and a commission consisting of four knights and four Maltese gentlemen. The first commission of the new institution consisted of Bali Fra Agnace d'Argote, as president, and Comm. Fra Francesco d'Andrea, Comm. Fra Antoine, Baron de Neveu, Chev. Fra Francois Marie Siffrene Daurel, Chev. Fra Jacques Bannuls de Montferrete, one jurat pro tempore of the Università of Valletta, Marquis Enrico Testaferrata, Baron Gaetano Pisani and Baron Calcedonio Azzopardi (32).

On their arrival, the French approved of the *Monte* and ordered it to continue its functions (33); however, on the insurrection of the Maltese against the Republican government the French stripped the *Monte* of every article, money and pawns, which at that moment amounted to Sc. 443,484 (over £36,957) (34) on the pretext of the need of subsidising the troops and inhabitants during the blockade, promising that the French Republic would repay this amount when things settled down.

One of the first cares of the British Government was the re-establishment of this useful institution and Sir Alexander Ball ordered its reopening on October 10, 1800 (35), the local Treasury advancing £4,000 whilst money was received on loan from the inhabitants at 4% and later 3%.

The cessation of slavery put to an end the old charge for ransoms and the revenues of the *Monte di Redenzione* were devoted to the payment of interest and to the extinction of loans.

The *Monte di Pietà* still functions today and still achieves the worthy object of its founder — the helping of those in temporary need.

Opposite the *Monte di Pietà e Redenzione* stands the ancient "Banca dei Giurati" later also known as the "Palazzo della Citta." Today this building houses the Public Registry Office.

This house originally belonged to Dr. Gio. Batta Piotto (36) who sold it to Michele Ducos for Sc. 3,200 (37). The Treasury, however, on July 16, 1665, exercised its right of pre-emption requiring the said house for a public purpose.

On January 13, 1668, the premises were let to Comm. Fra Gio. Francesco Ricasoli (38), a florentine knight, whose zeal for the Religion is commemorated

(32) *Cabreo Originale del Vendo. Monte della Redenzione degli Schiavi*, R.M.L. Treas. B. 309.

(33) *Registre des Deliberations de la Commission du Gouvernement des Iles de Malte et du Gozo — Fructidor an VI (21 Aug. 1798)* R.M.L. Arch. 6523c p. 17.

(34) Vincenzo Grech, *op. cit.*

(35) Government Notice of October 1, 1800.

(36) *Repertorio di tutti i beni stabili dell'Università della Valletta — R.M.L. Treas. A. 178 fol. 76t.*

(37) Records of Notary Aloysio dello Re of 27 June, 1665.

(38) *Libro Beni Stabili del Tesoro "B"* R.M.L. Treas. A. 1, fo: 32.

by Fort Ricasoli.

When the foundation stone of the new Cottoner Fortifications was laid on August 28, 1670, Comm. Ricasoli donated Sc. 30,000 towards the building of these fortifications. He was called before the Council by Grand Master Nicholas Cottoner and thanked for his generous and pious deed. It was ordained that the money donated was to be applied to the fortification of the *Punta d'Orso* which was henceforth known as Fort Ricasoli (39).

After Ricasoli's death on July 26, 1673, the palace was let to the Bali of St. Eufemia, Fra Gio. Batta Ansidei, from September 11, 1673, to June 24, 1685, and from May 1, 1687 to April 30, 1692, to Comm. Fra Paolo Emilio Argeli, a Bolognese knight who had been captain of the Grand Master's galley in 1672. On June 27, 1692, it was let to Aloysia widow of Gio. Batta Dorel (40).

We find that on July 30, 1721, these premises were exchanged by the Treasury with the *Università* for the building opposite, and the *Banca dei Giurati* was then transferred to the building under review (41).

From the earliest days Malta was governed by an autonomous commune known as the "Università" which had its seat at the Città Notabile or Mdina as it is known to this day. After the coming of the Knights there were three "Università" and consequently three "Banche Giuratali," one in Mdina, another in Valletta and the third in Gozo. The "Giurati," as the executive members of the Università were called, were presided over, in Notabile (Mdina), by the "Capitano della Verga" or Captain of the Rod, so called because he was followed by a page bearing a rod of office; to the local inhabitants this official was known as the "Hakem." The *Capitano della Verga* had pre-eminence over the Giurati at all functions in the Cathedral and elsewhere, and when the Bishop celebrated pontifical mass, it was his privilege to pour water on to the Bishop's hands at the "lavabo" (42). The *Giurati* of the Università of Valletta and the three cities round the Grand Harbour were presided over by a Seneschal Bali (Siniscalco).

It was the charge of the *Giurati* to provide corn and other provisions for the population under a system of complete monopoly, thus ensuring the price of bread in times of abundance or scarcity of corn.

As the population increased in numbers the *Università* was required to buy greater quantities of corn, and to meet this extra outlay, it raised loans under an administration termed "Massa Frumentaria" (great store of wheat). As a small interest of 3% was assured the Maltese eagerly invested their money in these loans. The capital of the *Massa Frumentaria* is still in the hands of the local government and today amounts to £79,000, the interest on which is still duly paid at the Treasury in the month of March.

The Grand Masters, perceiving the influence which the *Giurati* had on the people, whilst steadily curtailing their powers, were prodigal in granting them privileges and favours. The Italian Grand Master Zondadari granted the jurats the privilege of wearing the "Toga Senatoria" or senatorial toga of black damask with a tight red sleeve somewhat loose at one of the ends, called

(39) Dal Pozzo, Bartolomeo, *op. cit.* Vol. II page 890.

(40) *Libro Beni Stabili del Tesoro "B"*, R.M.L. Treas. A. 1 fo. 32.

(41) Records of Notary Giuseppe Callus of 30 July 1721.

(42) Ciantar, Giovanantonio, *op. cit.* Vol. I, Lib. 1, Not. V.

chaperon by the French. They were also allowed the privilege of the "currile" (magisterial chairs) in municipal churches and other places when the Grand Master made an appearance. Zondadari further granted the *Giurati* of Notabile the privilege of being preceded by a silver mace when in a body (43).

The building in Merchants Street, used as the *Banca Giuratale*, was reconstructed and embellished by Zondadari, an event commemorated by a tablet over the front door reading:—

MARCUS ANTONIUS ZONDADARIUS M.M.
HAS AEDES COMMODIOREM FORMAM REDACTAS
PUBLICIS MELITAE NEGOTIIS
ET PUBLICAE PIETATI APERUIT
ANNO DNI. MDCCXXI

From its beginnings at Borgo we find that the Council of the *Università* for the cities grouped round the Grand Harbour included, besides the Castellan and the three officers of Public Health (*Sanità*), two *cattapani* (44), two consuls for goldsmiths and silversmiths, two consuls for tailors, two for carpenters, three for cobblers and saddlers, one for caulkers, one for the millers and one and sometimes two for the masons. This would indicate that the arts and crafts had a say in communal matters very much on the lines of the Livered Companies of the City of London (45).

Grand Master Lascaris, on March 13, 1647, assigned the precedence of the Consuls as follows:— (1) Goldsmiths, (2) Locksmiths, (3) Tailors, (4) Cobblers, (5) Carpenters. On June 1, 1708, the Consuls for Barbers, Cutlers and Tinsmiths were added to the above. In the Vilhena Codex, Tit. XIII on the *Università*, among the voters in the Popular Council with the feudatories, Capitano della Verga, jurats, judges, and constables for the villages, one notes besides the *Consoli del Mare*, the Chancellor and the *Cattapani* of Notabile and Valletta, the five Consuls of the arts and crafts mentioned by Lascaris (46).

The palace in Merchants Street also housed the "Consolato del Mare," a commercial tribunal for maritime commerce.

At one time maritime questions regarding Malta were regulated by the *Consolato del Mare* at Messina; however, on September 1, 1697, Grand Master Perellos organised the *Consolato del Mare* in Malta on the model of that of Messina and Barcelona. He legislated that every year the Grand Master was to nominate four merchants, expert in maritime affairs, who under the name of Consuls would administer justice from the 1st September onwards. These four consuls were increased to six by Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena on September 1, 1722, and again reduced to four by Rohan on May 26, 1784 (47). In these Consuls we see the Judges of Her Majesty's Commercial Court of today.

(43) *Ibid.* Vol. I., Not. I XXXV.

(44) The *Cattapani* were officials attached to the *Università* whose duty it was to check weights and measures for foodstuffs. It was a very honourable office.

(45) Mifsud, Mons. Alfred, *I nostri Consoli e le Arti ed i Mestieri in Malta*, Tip. Critien p. 23.

(46) *Leggi e Costituzioni Prammaticali Renuovate de S.E. Fra D. Antonio Manoel de Vilhena* — Malta 1724, Tit. XIII — XIII page 52.

(47) Mifsud, Mons. A. *op. cit.* p. 30.

During the French Occupation the *Università* continued its functions regarding the Corn Monopoly and on the 30 Prairial (18 June) 1798 Napoleon issued the following order:— “The establishment named the *Università* for the supply of corn to the Island is to remain separated from the ancient administration to date from the 1st Messidor (19 June) and the Government Commissary is charged to organise it in such manner as not to give any anxiety to the Republic regarding the supplies of the Island” (48). As we have already seen Napoleon slept in this building on the night of the 13/14 June 1798 before moving to *Palazzo Parisio*.

Sir Thomas Maitland, the British Governor of Malta, by a proclamation dated January 24, 1822, announced the suppression of the *Università*, which was to take place on July 1, 1822 (49), on which date the commerce of grain of every kind was to be thrown open in the Islands. Though the corn monopoly was abolished the “Government Grain Concern” was established with a view to ensuring the maintenance of a reserve stock of wheat in order to guard the inhabitants against scarcity or exorbitant prices. The Government thus became a sort of merchant having its own brokers, a certain Mr. Ninian Douglas and his son Benjamin. The office of the Grain Department was established in the Banca Giuratale, and from here this concern carried on its operations until it was definitely suppressed on July 27, 1830.

In 1841 the British Packet Office was moved to this building until it was transferred to the site of the present General Post Office, and the Public Registry was then housed in this palace.

At the corner of Merchants Street with Old Theatre Street stands the *Casa Bellott* (50), which was donated to the Assembly of Conventual Chaplains by Chev. Fra Carlo Bellott senior. The Assembly of Conventual Chaplains demolished this house in 1745-47, and rebuilt it in its present form, viz. 3 houses, 4 mezzaninos, 7 shops and 2 stores.

Leaving Archbishop Street, on the right we find the Jesuit Church and the large block of the “Collegio del Gesù” or Jesuit College. Opposite this is a house, No. 179 Merchants Street, completely destroyed by enemy action during the Second World War and now rebuilt, which came to the *Monte della Redenzione degli Schiavi* through the succession of Caterina Vitale. (51)

House No. 173 in the same street belonged to the “Collegio del Gesù” and was known as the *Casa Zoitana* (52). Adjoining this house is the *Casa Albergotti* (Nos. 170/172 Merchants Street) which belonged to the foundation of the Tuscan family of that name. By a Government decree dated March 12, 1824, the premises were handed back to Chev. Tomaso Albergotti, who was to enjoy the property on condition that a certificate was produced every year attesting that he was still living. By a decree of February 4, 1835, the Albergottis were

(48) *Registre des Deliberations de la Commission du Gouvernement des Iles de Malte et du Gozo, 30 Prairial an VI (18 June 1798) R.M.L. Arch. 6523a.*

(49) Proclamation No. IX of the 24 January 1822.

(50) *Cabreo Assemblea Vol. IV. R.M.L. Treas. B. 295 fo. 30v.*

(51) *Cabreo Originale del Monte della Redenzione degli Schiavi R.M.L. Treas. B. 309.*

(52) *Urbani Vol. III 1808-1814, R.M.L. Treas. B. 107 fo. 24.*

allowed to sell the property and invest the proceeds in Tuscany (53).

In 1886 these premises were owned by Giovanni di Niccolo Pappaffy, a Greek gentleman, who was born in Salonica and who settled down in Malta in 1810. Mr. Pappaffy bequeathed the property, together with a capital of £10,000, to the people of Malta stipulating that the income was to be utilised in helping poor young men, between the ages of 18 and 24, to emigrate (54). Giovanni di Niccolo Pappaffy died in Malta on February 16, 1886, and was interred at "ta' Braxia" Cemetery.

The *Rosselli-Massa* house stands at the corner of Merchants Street with St. Christopher Street (No. 167 Merchants Street) and on the facade can still be seen the Rosselli arms with the initials P.R. and A.M. This house once belonged to Pietro Rosselli and Aloysia Massa. In her will (55) Aloysia Massa directed that she and her husband, Don Pietro, were to be buried in the Chapel of St. Pietro in Vincoli at the Jesuit Church, Valletta, in which chapel the Rosselli arms are conspicuous. She also willed that the feast day of St. Pietro in Vincoli was to be celebrated with due solemnity in this chapel. All the property was bequeathed to works of charity including that of providing a dowry to spinsters of the Rosselli-Massa families who wished to contract marriage or take the veil.

Opposite the Infermeria or Hospital of the Order was a large house called *Camerata* where some knights led a pious life and at fixed hours in the morning and at night betook themselves to their chapel to pray and meditate.

The *Camerata* was erected in 1593 during the Grandmastership of Cardinal Lubenx de Verdalle, and the saintly Father Giobattista Carminata, a Jesuit who was then preaching in Malta, greatly helped in establishing this institution (56). The first director of this establishment was the Prior of Navarre, Fra Bernardo de Spelletta, who shortly after was appointed General of the Galleys. The other founders and directors were Comm. Fra Cataliano Casati, later Prior of Lombardy, Fra Jacques Cordon d'Evieux, later Marshal of the Order, Fra Maximilien d'Ampons, later Bali of Morea, Fra Gio Paolo Lascaris Castellar, later Grand Master, Fra Pompeo Rospigliosi, uncle of Pope Clement IX, later Bali of Cremona, Fra Lanfranco Ciba, later Admiral of the Order and many others (57).

On December 3, 1629, the Council approved a project for setting up the *Camerata* as an official residence for French, Spanish and Italian knights on probation, each langue having separate quarters; a few years later, however, it was decided to use Fort St. Angelo for this purpose (58).

During the last years of the rule of Grand Master Lascaris the pious union of knights declined and the premises were in a very dilapidated state, but they were restored to their pristine state through the zeal of eight knights who

✓ (53) Libro Maestro, Beni Urbani, Valletta Lib. II 1829-1843 R M.L. Treas. B. 131 fo. 80. B. 131 fo. 80.

(54) Records of Notary Achille Micallef of 18 April 1879 and 28 November 1883.

(55) Records of Notary Giacinto Cauchi of 24 June 1682.

(56) Ciantar, Giovanantonio, *op. cit.* Lib. I, Not. I, XXVIII.

(57) Dal Pozzo, Bartolomeo, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 482.

(58) Mifsud, Mons. Alfred, *Knights of the Venerable Tongue of England*, Malta Herald, Malta 1914, p. 137.

obtained the necessary funds from the Treasury on condition of repayment at the rate of Sc. 500 per annum (59).

Later, the Camerata was known as the "Lingeria" and served for the storage of the linen necessary for the Hospital.

This house was demolished in the early eighties and it was rebuilt with machine cut stones from the factory of Bishop Casolani (60). Until lately it was used as Royal Naval Barracks.

Chev. Vincenzo Bonello has informed the writer that there was a very fine chapel at the Camerata with seats of inlaid wood, and silk tapestry; the altar piece was by Mattia Preti and represented the Agony of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemani. It is very probable that this painting is the one now in the St. Ursola Church, Valletta.

The block next to the Camerata is the *Maddalena*.

Grand Master Verdalle, in 1583, instituted in Malta the nuns of St. Ursola and converted the palace at Borgo for their reception. The nuns were assigned a grant of money and an allowance of wheat and oil to be supplied by the Treasury in proportion to their numbers. The Chapter General of the Order held in 1583 also decreed that the new nunnery was to receive a share of all prizes made by the fleet of the Religion, equal to that of the Castellan and of other officials of the Castellania. Some nuns from the convent of St. Mary Ara Coeli in Syracuse were brought over to govern the new institution (61). As the sisters professed to the form established for brother chaplains, the Prioress or Mother Superior was allowed to wear a knight's badge, the full cross, whilst the sisters wore a donat's badge or demi-cross. In 1593 all the nuns were allowed to wear the full cross.

By a Brief of Pope Gregory XIII of June 1, 1585, the convent and inmates were placed under the immediate jurisdiction of the Grand Master and of the Prior of the Conventual Church. By this same Brief the Grand Master was given instructions to "collect poor and abandoned young women whose virtue was in danger and place them in the same nunnery, but in a place apart from the nuns" there to remain until they either professed or were given in marriage.

In 1595 the nunnery was transferred to Valletta in the building which had been prepared for them by Verdalle. The branch establishment occupied by the young women was transferred, in 1609, to a building in the neighbourhood of Fort St. Elmo still known today as "St. Mary Magdalen of the Penitents" or "Maddalena" (62).

As the Magdalenes were now separated from the nunnery of St. Ursola, special revenues had to be provided for this institution, and for this purpose the Treasury sanctioned an annual grant of Sc. 200. In 1612 the proceeds of a duty of four *tarì* on every cask of imported wine was also allotted to the convent of the Maddalena. These revenues were further augmented by the bequeathing of the fifth part of the estates of all prostitutes, whose wills were made illegal and invalid unless they contained that contribution towards the nunnery (63).

(59) Ciantar, Giovanantonio, *op. cit.* Lib. I., Not. I, XXVIII.

(60) Zammit, Sir Them., *Valletta*, Malta, Empire Press, p. 34.

(61) Dal Pozzo, Bartolomeo, *op. cit.* Vol. I., p. 240.

(62) Dal Pozzo, Bartolomeo, *ibid* Vol. I., p. 376; R.M.L. Ms. 409.

(63) Brief of Pope Clement VIII of the 16 November 1612.

When the property of a certain Girolama Ciantar, yielding a yearly rental of Sc. 500 was incorporated to the foundation, the revenue from all sources amounted to Sc. 2,000 by which 66 nuns under the habit and rule of St. Claire were maintained.

On the French occupation of Valletta in 1798, the Republican government converted the Magdalen Asylum into a hospital for the civilian population so that the *Infermeria* could be cleared and used as a military hospital. All monastic institutions were dissolved and their endowments seized, the inmates being given the liberty to return to the world or to their homes (64); however, few of the Magdalenes availed themselves of the permission to return to their families and fewer to the world. The majority of the inmates were received into the Convent of St. Catherine, an institution originally created in 1606 for the reception of "daughters of scandalous and licentious women" and was hence called "Il Ricettacolo per le Orfane della Misericordia."

In 1829 Pope Pius VIII granted the British Government permission to incorporate the funds of this institution with those for the support of a "House of Industry" which was to be established at the *Maddalena* (65), and in which one room was to be allotted for the reception of such fallen women as might present themselves for admission. These never exceeded six in number and were employed in sewing and patching bedding and clothing for the use of the children. The Royal Commission of 1836 suppressed this institution and the few penitents still there were transferred, on November 1, 1848, to the Ospizio in Floriana under the care of the Sisters of Charity, which order had been introduced into Malta by the Archbishop at the request of the Governor, Richard More O'Ferrall.

As soon as the sick in the convent of St. Mary Magdalen were transferred to the Central Hospital in Floriana, the premises were converted into a House of Industry for children of both sexes, and the Hospital for Women was converted into a Hospital for Incurables as in former days.

Up to the beginning of World War II, when the premises were practically destroyed by a German parachute mine, the *Maddalena* was used as an Orphan Asylum for children of both sexes.

Chev. V. Bonello has also informed the writer that the Church of the "Maddalena" is an excellent architectural example of the baroque, and that the altar piece is by Filippo Paladini.

Opposite the *Maddalena* was the Hospital for Women, more commonly known as the *Hospital for Incurables*. This had its origin in the charity and religious fervour of a certain Caterina Scappi, known as "Senese" as she was born in Siena, who at the beginning of the 17th century commenced to practice her piety by erecting this hospital, for which purpose she had bought a house situated near the cemetery of the *Infermeria* from the executors of the "Nibbia Foundation" (66). For this house Caterina paid Sc. 1747.7.3 which sum was allocated to the Church of Santa Maria della Pietà which had been built and

(64) R.M.L. Ms. 409.

(65) Brief of Pope Pius VIII of 22 November 1829.

(66) *Cabreo dei Beni Spettanti allo Spedale delle Donne Incurabili* — R.M.L. Treas. B. 307 p. 3.

founded by Comm. Fra Giorgio Nibbia (67).

By the dispositions of her will, Caterina Scappi nominated Comm. Fra Giulio Cesare Accarigi and Fra Ottavio Bandinelli, both Sienese knights, as her executors and stipulated that the Grand Master was always to nominate two Sienese knights as protectors of the Hospital (68).

In the year 1655 Caterina Scappi, the pious woman who had done so much for the poor incurable women, died and was interred in the Carmelite Church, Valletta. The protectors of the institution then nominated her niece to take her place as "Spedaliera" or matron of the hospital. The Grand Hospitaller, however, objected to this pretending that only he had the right to make such nomination. A commission appointed to examine this contention decided that the Grand Hospitaller had no rights or pre-eminence on the said hospital. The Grand Hospitaller did not submit to this ruling, pointing out to the Council that by the second ordinance "de Hospytalitate" the keeping of incurables outside the Infermeria had been abolished. Time showed the evil of this disposition and Grand Master de Redin instructed the Prior of the Conventual Church to re-examine the whole question. On November 11, 1659, agreement was finally reached, and the Hospital for Incurable Women or "Casetta," as it was often called, was re-established, the Grand Hospitaller reserving the right that he or his lieutenants could visit the hospital, at any time, to see that the patients were properly tended.

The "Casetta" has been completely demolished and no trace of the premises can be seen today.

(67) Records of Notary Ascanio Scaglia of 15 February 1625.

(68) Records of Notary Pietro Vella of 20 June 1643.

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