

THE ISLAND ORDER STATE ON MALTA, AND ITS HARBOUR c.1530–c.1624

Joan Abela & Emanuel Buttigieg

In Hospitaller historiography, the Rhodian phase (1306/09-1522) is often discussed in terms of the development of an ‘Island Order State’ (henceforth IOS),¹ that is, the coming together of the international Order of St John and the island of Rhodes (and other Aegean outposts) led to the formation of a unique political structure in late medieval Europe. A key characteristic of this IOS was its dependence on outside sources for its needs, in particular, to replenish its ruling caste of knights who all came from outside Rhodes. On the other hand, the IOS shared many similarities with other polities, in that it had to deal with issues that any state was faced with, ranging from religious affairs to questions related to urban development, defence, and the economy. Yet in all these spheres the IOS often had to be innovative as it dealt with its own particular challenges, not least the constant factor of being on the frontier with the

¹ The classic ‘order state’ is considered to have been created in Prussia by the Teutonic order. According to Anthony Luttrell, the origin of the phrase ‘island order state’ to discuss Hospitaller Rhodes seems uncertain. It was used in A. Luttrell, *The Hospitaller State on Rhodes and its Western Provinces: 1306-1462*, Aldershot 1999, ix. In the context of Rhodes — and in particular Malta — it is a historiographical category of analysis that is still in relative infancy but which holds a lot of potential for thinking creatively about how the Order functioned as a state when its headquarters was located on these two islands; see A. Luttrell, ‘The Island Order State on Rhodes’, in *Islands and Military Orders, c.1291-c.1798*, eds. E. Buttigieg and S. Phillips, Farnham 2013, 19-28.

Muslim enemy.² Given the utility of this IOS approach it is surprising that it has not been applied to Hospitaller Malta (1530-1798). This paper, therefore, proposes to look at Malta's 'long sixteenth-century' through this historiographical lens and to do so from two particular angles: the economic and the ritualistic, focusing on the years from c.1530 to c.1624. The first date is linked to the arrival of the Order of St John in Malta, while the second date denotes Grand Master Antoine de Paule's *possesso* of Birgu (aka Vittoriosa), the first of its kind for that city.³ This event may be taken as a convenient marker of a shift occurring in the evolving dynamics of the harbour area: the political centre had shifted to Valletta, but Birgu and other parts of the harbour continued to be at the heart of the economic, maritime, and ritualistic activity of the IOS. This period — 1530-1624 — also falls within the parameters of the age defined by Frédéric Mauro as that of the rapid growth of the Mediterranean ports as 'dynamic socio-economic enterprises', that is, the development of ever more sophisticated economic enterprises, structures, and players, as will be discussed here.⁴

A Physical and Conceptual Framework

The physical features of the Mediterranean Sea influenced the course of conflict and competition between rival forces and, almost consistently, major naval engagements were part of amphibious campaigns which sought to acquire or defend possessions of islands, bases, or ports that were along the major sea lanes of communication.⁵ Aside from its central position in the Mediterranean, Malta could boast having excellent

² Luttrell 2013 19-20.

³ The *possesso* ritual by a new grand master was first carried out in Mdina in 1530; see D. Mallia, 'The Magistral *Possesso* of Mdina: A Study of a Hospitaller Ritual in Early Modern Malta, 1530-1798', Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Malta 2015.

⁴ F. Mauro, 'Les ports comme entreprise économique. La dynamique socio économique', in *I porti come impresa economica*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchia, Prato 1988, 751-777, as quoted in A. Williams, 'Island Ports and Hospitallers, 1421-1631', in Buttigieg and Phillips, 65.

⁵ J.H. Pryor, *Geography, Technology and War — Studies in the Maritime History of the Mediterranean 649-1571*, Cambridge 1988, Preface, p. xiv.

harbours, which were quite uncommon in this inland sea.⁶ What we today call 'Grand Harbour' was known in early modern times as the *Real Porto di Malta* or *Porto Generale*;⁷ in his book, Giovanni Francesco Abela referred to it simply as *Marsa*.⁸ This important physical feature had always attracted the attention of reigning powers who struggled incessantly to obtain hegemony.⁹

The sixteenth century can be classified as a period of transition in European history which was characterized by a number of changes on the economic, social, religious, and political level. In the long run, such changes were to challenge traditional and established ways of thought and action.¹⁰ Although Malta was slow in shedding its medieval character, events taking place in the wider European context ultimately affected the island's society. During this century, a significant change took place in the Mediterranean which resulted in the loss of primacy of the Italian maritime republics and the decline of the Hanseatic League.¹¹ This void was replaced by the Habsburg-Ottoman struggle for supremacy in the Central Mediterranean¹² and by the rise of new

⁶ A detailed description of Maltese ports dated 1568 is conserved in the manuscript section of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. Lat. 833, ff. 137-221; another copy exists in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris (MS. Ital. 898). Extracts from this description have been reproduced in *Sopra i porti di mare, III, Sicilia e Malta*, ed. G. Simoncini, in the series *Ambiente (l') storico – Studi di storia urbana e del territorio*, v, Florence 1997, Appendix, 280-287.

⁷ J. Muscat, *Maltese Ports (1400-1800)*, Malta 2002, 2.

⁸ G.F. Abela, *Della Descrittione di Malta*, Malta, 1647; Facsimile edition 1984, 8.

⁹ C. Dalli, "'Greek', 'Arab' and 'Norman' Conquests in the Making of Maltese History", *Storja 2003-2004*, 2004. This paper discusses the influence of what he terms 'the concept of conquest' over the way in which medieval Maltese history has traditionally been written.

¹⁰ H.G. Koenigsberger, G.L. Mosse, and G.Q. Bowler, *Europe in the Sixteenth Century, A General History of Europe*, London and New York 1989, 1.

¹¹ M. Ressel, 'The Hanseatics in Southern Europe: Structure and Payment of German Long-Distance Shipping, 1630-1700', in *Law, Labour and Empire: Comparative Perspectives on Seafarers, c.1500-1800*, eds. M. Fusaro, et al., Basingstoke 2015, 143.

¹² D. Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean*, London 2011, 411-413; M. Greene, 'Resurgent Islam: 1500-1700' in *The Mediterranean in History*, ed. D. Abulafia, London 2003, 235-236; M. Kunt and C. Woodhead eds., *Süleyman the Magnificent and His Age*, London and New York, 1995.

economic powers like England.¹³ The sixteenth century was also marked by the Habsburg-Valois rivalry,¹⁴ which intensified in view of close Franco-Ottoman relations.¹⁵

Hence, the sixteenth century was a period of trauma, transition, adaptation, and new beginnings for the Order of St John; Malta, and in particular its harbour, were at the heart of these experiences. Malta had been ceded to the Order by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1530; however, the island remained closely connected to Sicily since the Order fitted in with the expansionist ambitions of the viceroys of Spanish Sicily into North Africa.¹⁶ In pursuing its ideal of a perpetual holy war against Islam, the Order was always ready to sail alongside other Christian forces in joint efforts against the Ottoman threat.¹⁷ Over the years the presence of the Order on Malta instigated a fundamental transformation of the harbour landscape from one of barren emptiness, save for the small medieval outpost of Birgu, to a mighty fortified conurbation. The Convent or headquarters of the Order was first transferred to Birgu and subsequently to Valletta. Here the Rhodian IOS model — that had evolved into a ‘mobile state’ while the Order was homeless between 1523 and 1530 — found new soil in which to dig its roots and re-emerge.

¹³ M. Fusaro, *Political Economies of Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean: The Decline of Venice and the Rise of England 1450-1700*, Cambridge 2015.

¹⁴ H.G. Koenigsberger et al.; Greene 2003, 220.

¹⁵ Abulafia 2011, 420-423; F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols., trans. S. Reynolds, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London 1995, i, 921; J.F. Guilmartin, Jr., *Gunpowder and Galleys — Changing Technology and Mediterranean Warfare at Sea in the Sixteenth Century*, London 1974, 124.

¹⁶ Braudel, i, 117; A. Williams, ‘Constitutional Development of the Order of St John in Malta 1530-1798’, in *Hospitaller Malta, 1530-1798: Studies on Early Modern Malta and the Order of St John*, ed. V. Mallia-Milanes, Malta 1993, 289.

¹⁷ S. Bono, ‘Naval Exploits and Privateering’, in Mallia-Milanes 1993, 353. For a list of the major operations by the galley squadron of the Order from 1600 to 1669, see C. Cassar and D. Cutajar, ‘Malta’s Role in Mediterranean Affairs: 1530-1699’, in Mid-Med Bank ed. *Malta: Studies of Its Heritage and History*, Malta 1986, 52, 58.

One way to approach this Hospitaller-Maltese¹⁸ IOS is through its economic operations. In general, not much attention has been paid to economic activities taking place in and around the harbour area during the first decades of the Order's presence. This vacuum is mainly due to the fact that everyday economic activities are hard to gather from chancery documents and one's attention needs to turn to other sources. The following discussion aims to target this lacuna by exploiting notarial primary sources, thus showing how notarial evidence helps to fill in whole gaps and provide interesting insights into the everyday life of a port city. While there is much information about the Rhodian economy, far more material has survived for Malta, much of which, however, still awaits investigation.¹⁹

Another way in which to approach the IOS is through an investigation of ritual and public celebrations, particularly those centred on the harbour waters which could be witnessed by large numbers of people. This is an aspect which has not really featured in studies about Hospitaller Rhodes, possibly because historiographical interest has been focused on other areas such as the military operations of the Order, as well as because of archival limitations in relation to this subject; nevertheless, it was an essential component of the IOS. The amalgamation, on Malta, of the natural and the man-made landscape created an impressive 'floating stage' upon which the Order could project power and magnificence. One can even speak of the development of a 'Theatre State'.²⁰

¹⁸ The term 'Hospitaller-Maltese' Island Order State is being used here to reflect the fact that the Order was based on Malta and this had an impact on its shape and workings. It also emphasizes the fact that the Maltese were not excluded from the running of their island by the coming of the Order (as traditional narratives have tended to emphasize) but that instead the Order could operate here precisely because it co-opted elements of the population at various levels of governance (political, economic, and others). Admittedly, Maltese were not present at the very top of the political structure, but the Island Order State (in Rhodes and in Malta) could only function with the support of at least part of its population.

¹⁹ On the economy of Hospitaller Rhodes, see, for instance, A.M. Kasdagli, 'Hospitaller Small Change: An Archaeological Perspective' in Buttigieg and Phillips, 203-214.

²⁰ cf. E. Buttigieg, 'The Hospitallers and the Grand Harbour of Malta: Culture and Conflict', in *The Military Orders: Culture and Conflict*, eds. J. Schenk and M. Carr, 6/1, London 2017, 177-186.

This paper shall highlight the challenges facing sixteenth-century Malta in its novel role as the headquarters of the Order of St John. It will seek to provide an insight into the methods adopted by operators in the credit market and the way in which trade was organized. The aim is to open a window on life in a port city (Birgu) that over the course of the sixteenth century shed its medieval character and experienced a meteoric rise in its trading activities owing to the presence of the Order. At the same time, this study will also seek to explore how ‘culture’ (in the sense of splendid ritual) and ‘conflict’ (in the form of the language of incessant war against Islam) came together on occasions like the funerals of grand masters or the launching of new sea vessels to create set-pieces which reinforced the Order’s confidence in its own purpose and impressed onlookers.

The geography of the Maltese Islands is a combination of insulation and smallness; their history is a combination of isolation and connectivity. Isolation is almost always a matter of degree: the sea isolated Malta but was also its medium of constant connectivity.²¹ Furthermore, given the islands’ small size where it is almost impossible to be anywhere out of sight of the sea, Ayse Devrim Atauz has suggested that the discussion about differences between ‘coastal’ and ‘inland’ areas does not readily apply to Malta, as everywhere could be in almost direct contact with the sea.²² Such a claim is debatable, but there is no doubt that the fact of being a small island — or an archipelago to be more precise — in a particular geographical location, meant that the population on Malta had to interact — willingly or not — with the sea and all that it brought with it.²³

The act of receiving the island as a fief from Charles V projected the Order as now being obliged to pay homage to whoever held the crown of Sicily. Nonetheless, the Hospitallers were very keen on promoting their neutral status due to their heavy dependence on the benevolent actions of

²¹ E. Buttigieg, ‘The Maltese Islands and the Religious Culture of the Hospitallers: Isolation and Connectivity c.1540s-c.1690s’, in Buttigieg and Phillips, 41.

²² A. Devrim Atauz, *Eight Thousand Years of Maltese Maritime History. Trade, Piracy, and Naval Warfare in the Central Mediterranean*, Gainesville FL 2008, 1-2.

²³ F. Theuma, ‘Motley Lots on Liminal Islands of an Order’, in *The Maltese Islands and the Sea*, ed. T. Gambin, Malta 2015, 34.

European kings, within whose territories their widespread estates were located and from which they derived key resources.²⁴ They knew that in such a delicate situation they had to tread very carefully in their diplomatic relations. In fact, 'while the Island Order State might be largely independent in political terms, it could not survive without men, money, and supplies from its priories in its Western hinterland, which were an essential element in its system'.²⁵ Within this complex political scenario, Malta's strategic location on the central axis of the Mediterranean and the use of its harbour by the Hospitallers and by the Spanish as a naval base,²⁶ accelerated the island's significance within the wider Mediterranean context: Braudel's assessment is that the coast of Naples and Sicily together with Malta were 'Italy's maritime front against the Turks'.²⁷ Ships calling at Maltese ports in the later medieval period had done so primarily to serve the limited local needs.²⁸ The establishment of the Order on the island brought with it a new social and economic reality, and this not only through the various reforms embedded in the numerous statutes and ordinances, but even as regards new exigencies which developed as a result of the daily needs of a naval power and a growing population. To quote Luttrell — who was writing about Rhodes — for the Hospitaller-Maltese State to survive, the collaboration of at least some influential sectors of the local population was essential:

²⁴ A. Williams, 'Sacra Militia, the Order of St John: Crusade, Corsairing and Trade in Rhodes and Malta 1460-1631', in *Trade and Cultural Exchange in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Braudel's Maritime Legacy*, eds. M. Fusaro, C. Heywood, M.S. Omri, London and New York, 2010, 150. M. Morales Sánchez-Tembleque, 'El Gran Priorato de Castilla y León y su relación con Malta: El vincula jurisdiccional (siglos XVI y XVII)', in *España, Malta y el Mediterráneo. Las Relaciones Hispano-Maltesas Durante La Edad Moderna*, eds. D. Muñoz Navarro, F.J. Ibáñez Castejón, C. Vassallo Borg, Malta 2016, 7-38; see, in particular, Table 1 on p. 31 for insightful quantitative data on income derived from the priories of the Order in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

²⁵ Luttrell 2013, 20.

²⁶ Braudel, ii, 850.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 849.

²⁸ M. Aloisio, 'Maritime activity between Malta, Sicily and North Africa in the Late Middle Ages', in Gambin 2015, 21.

A wide range of practices and institutions were created to settle the island's countryside, to build up its commerce and to generate incomes from pilgrims and from piracy, all this being managed in such a way that Rhodes could make some contribution to its own food supply and defence.²⁹

Some qualifications are needed to elements of this statement. In terms of commerce and food supply, the accent in Maltese agriculture was on the production of cotton as a cash crop, a factor already evident in the sixteenth century and which reached a high level of sophistication in the eighteenth century.³⁰ With regards to pilgrimage to the island as a source of income, while Malta probably never equalled Rhodes in this respect — since Rhodes was an important and obvious stepping stone for Christian pilgrims going to the Holy Land — Malta did have its own Pauline cult. The Order brought this under its tutelage and it became another element that drew visitors (and hence income) to the island.³¹ Finally, what Luttrell calls 'piracy' ought to be described — at least in the case of Malta — as 'corsairing', a licensed and regulated sector of the maritime economy. A whole range of activities from financiers to slave traders developed with and around corsairing.³² By the end of the sixteenth century, corsairing flourished to such an extent that it became one of the main economic activities on the island. This increase was also reflected in the ever-growing number of disputes and litigation related to it, which were being filed at the Law Courts. Consequently, on 17 June 1605, Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt set up the *Tribunale degli Armamenti* which was a prize court intended to settle disputes relating to corsairing and to adjudicate on the legality of captures at sea.³³ It is

²⁹ Luttrell 2013, 20.

³⁰ Theuma, 42-43.

³¹ W. Zammit, 'Grand Master Aloph de Wignacourt's Foundation for St Paul's Grotto, 1619', in *The Cult of St Paul in the Christian Churches and in the Maltese Tradition*, ed. J. Azzopardi, Malta 2006, 219-235.

³² C. Vassallo, *The Malta Chamber of Commerce 1848-1979: An Outline History of Maltese Trade*, Malta 1998, 9; Theuma, 37-40.

³³ One of the main functions of this tribunal was to inspect ships and report on the suitability of applicants to sail as privateers. P. Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary*, London 1970, 124. On the working of this tribunal with regards to claims put forward by Greek merchants refer to M. Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants*, Princeton 2010.

interesting to note that the Order did not automatically or immediately transfer all the aspects of the Rhodes model to the Maltese context. A case in point is the establishment of a commercial maritime tribunal which, although it had functioned in Rhodes under the name of the *Balio di Commercio*,³⁴ had to wait until the end of the seventeenth century to be instituted in Malta under the name of *Consolato del Mare*.³⁵

In order to accommodate its navy, the Order took over the only existing Castle-by-the-Sea, namely St Angelo and its suburb of Birgu, and invested various resources to turn Birgu into a port city that could adequately act as its headquarters. Although prior to the arrival of the Order, Birgu was already established as the island's centre for commercial maritime activities, it lacked any significant social links or assets. Immediately on their arrival, the Hospitallers sought to give Birgu a new set of functions, amongst which was the establishment of an additional town council known as an *Università*. For the Order this represented a continuation of the patronage of municipal civic institutions that were designed to give a voice to the local population, but one that was in synch with the views of the Order: in Rhodes, the Latin and Greek populations had their representative officials. The Birgu council was independent of the existing town councils of Mdina and Gozo and it was set up to cater for the needs of the newly developing urban area surrounding the harbour. The Birgu *Università*, conveniently situated in Malta's main harbour was highly influenced by the Order whose members established their residences and auberges there; it eventually enjoyed greater power than the other two *Universitas*.³⁶ In this instance, an element of the Rhodian IOS was seamlessly introduced and adapted to Malta. The superiority of the Birgu *Università* to the other *Universitas* may be perceived even in the way it established certain standards which had to be followed by the other two councils. For instance, on 14 October 1564 it informed the town council of Mdina that,

³⁴ A. Mifsud, 'I nostri consoli e le arti ed i mestieri in Malta', *Archivum Melitense*, 3/2 (1917), 36-82, 42.

³⁵ For a study of the laws which regulated the functions of the *Consolato di Mare* of Malta, cf. R. Zeno, *Il Consolato di Mare di Malta*, Naples 1936.

³⁶ C. Cassar, *Society, Culture and Identity in Early Modern Malta*, Malta 2000, 36-37.

with the grand master's consent, it was sending a *catapan* to standardize the Maltese *tumulo*.³⁷

Just as happened on Rhodes, the presence of the Order on Malta brought about a significant increase of both economic activity and population which, in both cases, was sustained through a steady flow of immigrants and settlers.³⁸ In fact, one of the most radical transformations which the year 1530 brought to the small hamlet of Birgu was that of having to host a large influx of new residents which was disproportionate to its size. Apart from the retinue of around 3,500 which accompanied the Order to Malta (including some 500 Rhodiots), many foreigners were attracted to start operating from Malta owing to the added sense of security which the fleet of the Order ensured through its policing of the surrounding waters. The presence of the Order at Birgu also served as a pull factor to various Maltese from different strata of society.³⁹ The population of the port area reached 8,856 in 1590, 17,528 (including Hospitallers) in 1614, 18,691 (including Hospitallers) in 1617, and 18,491 (excluding Hospitallers) in 1632.⁴⁰ The harbour area became a focus of activity, constantly exchanging and dispatching goods, services, and people, a process which necessitated a network of communications between the island and various other centres of trade.⁴¹ Consequently, the Order, which was an international Order, managed to create a heterogeneous environment and, over the course of time, developed and strengthened relations with other European nations. This setting created a situation which proved to be healthy for conducting economic activities and slowly started the process of transforming a heavily agrarian-based economy to one which had a solid maritime inclination.

The continuously increasing number of Birgu residents also led to an overflow that created or provided for the growth of other settlements like L-Isla (aka Senglea) and Bormla (aka Cospicua).⁴² Notarial acts are

³⁷ National Library Malta (NLM), Univ. 202, f. 180.

³⁸ Williams 2013, 66-67.

³⁹ S. Fiorini, 'Demographical Aspects of Birgu up to 1800', in *Birgu – A Maltese Maritime City*, eds. L. Bugeja, M. Buhagiar, and S. Fiorini, Malta 1993, 236.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 246-247.

⁴¹ Cassar 2000, 64.

⁴² According to Dusina's report (1575), the town had by this time a population of 1,200; see *ibid.*, 124.

of particular importance in this respect since they indicate that by the late 1550s Bormla was already a flourishing suburb. This is evident, for instance, in a contract dated 1 July 1558,⁴³ wherein Nicolò Ferri Faber leased a shop in Bormla to Domenico Scembri from Birkirkara, who most probably came in search of a better future in Birgu. In this act it is stated that the shop was situated between two other shops, which is a sign of a growing market potential. The rent was 3 *scudi* per annum, which contrasts with the 8.5 *scudi* that Giovanni Mantha from Trapani had to pay for the lease of a shop in the prime area of Birgu.⁴⁴

The ever-increasing demand for property in the harbour area stimulated business and created a fertile market for property owners who spotted an opportunity to speculate and make a hefty profit. The market value of houses differed and depended mostly on the size and location of the property. In 1545 the knight Frà Alonso Maldonato had to fork out the not inconsiderable sum of 70 gold ducats for what seems to have been a rather large house in Birgu.⁴⁵ Already by 1531 the housing situation in Birgu had become critical and confused enough for Grand Master Philip Villiers de L'Isle Adam (r. 1521-1534) to find it necessary to enact a law by which a tribunal known as the *Officium Commissariorum Domorum* was appointed to fix and determine the fair rent not only of houses but also of shops.⁴⁶ However, even though these measures were taken, it seems that exorbitant prices were still being charged in respect of the Rhodiot community. In fact, after receiving complaints from this community, Grand Master Juan d'Homedes (r.1536-1553) changed the composition of the tribunal and, while confirming the two knights who acted as commissioners, he substituted the three Maltese citizens by two jurats, one of whom was to be Maltese and the other Greek or Frank. Later on, the next ordinance regulating housing, dated 26 May 1548, stipulated amongst other things that the

⁴³ NAV (Notarial Archives Valletta), MS 514/1, n.f., (1 Jul. 1558).

⁴⁴ NAV, R4/1, ff. 139v-140r (30 Dec. 1557).

⁴⁵ NAV, R376/11, ff. 745v-747v (11 May 1545).

⁴⁶ The tribunal for the regulation of houses was presided over by two knights and three Maltese residents of Birgu; see S.R. Borg Cardona, 'The Officio delle Case and the Housing Laws of the earlier Grand Masters 1531-1569', *The Law Journal*, 3, 1951, 39-41; M. Spiteri, 'Social Relations in Valletta: Preliminary Studies of Property Disputes recorded in the *Officium Commissariorum Domorum*', *Arkiwoju*, 6, 2015, 3-14.

tenant had the right to resist eviction.⁴⁷ The landlord did not have the right to expel the tenant merely because a third party offered to pay a higher rent. This reflects a situation where demand exceeded supply, to a point where landlords could not but follow the law which rules a sellers' market and raise the rent of their houses.⁴⁸ The rapid rise in population figures soon started to worry the Hospitaller government. Consequently, in 1555, Grand Master Claude de la Sengle (r. 1553-1557) published his *Bandi e Commandamenti* in which he ordered all foreigners⁴⁹ who were not traders to be expelled from the island. This law is to be seen in the light of the great difficulties which the Order was facing to provide an ever-growing population with the necessary food supplies, apart from other problems related to the defence of the island in case of a siege.

Ritual

Aside from the mundane economic aspects highlighted above, which were driving the urban transformation of the harbour area during the course of the sixteenth century, other factors also contributed to this alteration. Among these elements was ritual, which constituted an essential prop for the successful functioning of an early modern State, including the Hospitaller-Maltese IOS.⁵⁰ Here again the transfer of the Rhodes experience to Malta and its adaptation to the new setting is evident.⁵¹ For instance, the theatrical dimension of the IOS on Rhodes can be seen in Pierre d'Aubusson's funeral (1503): the sword stained with the blood of the 1480 siege was placed upon his bier, his corpse was carried into the palace, and people flocked to see him.⁵² Just a few years later,

⁴⁷ NLM, AOM (Archive of the Order of Malta) 287, f. lvi.

⁴⁸ Refer to NAV, MS 514/1, n.f. (7 May 1558) as an example.

⁴⁹ The term 'foreigner' in this context excludes members of the Order and those of the Rhodiote community who came to Malta with it.

⁵⁰ cf. E. Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 1997. I. Fenlon, *The Ceremonial City: History, Memory and Myth in Renaissance Venice*, New Haven and London 2007.

⁵¹ cf. Luttrell 2013, 27-28; Williams 2013, 65.

⁵² Id., 'Sad Stories of the Death of Kings: Last Illnesses and Funerary Rites of the Grand Master of the Order of St John from Aubusson to the Cottoners', in *The Military Orders: History and Heritage*, ed. V. Mallia-Milanes, 3, Aldershot 2008, 57.

there is a similarly theatrically sophisticated example from the early years of the Order in Malta. When Grand Master l'Isle Adam died in 1534, his corpse was embalmed, with his heart placed in an urn and deposited in a church in Rabat, outside Mdina. In the early hours of the morning, his corpse was taken down to a small church in Marsa, commonly referred to as Ta' Ċeppuna.⁵³ From there the corpse was taken to Birgu by black-draped boat. On Birgu's quay it was welcomed by a multitude carrying lit torches and solemnly taken into St Angelo for people to pay their last respects. Mass was celebrated in St Lawrence church while the corpse was buried in St Angelo.⁵⁴ The word 'theatrical' is here used on purpose; it is not theatre in the sense of going to see a play on stage, but the State as theatre where a variety of spaces function as stages for the performance of spectacles which calibrated the relationship between rulers and subjects in the IOS of the Hospitallers.⁵⁵ This recalls the ideas of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his classic and much discussed study of nineteenth-century Bali, out of which he coined the term 'Theatre State' where 'power served pomp, not pomp power'.⁵⁶ While the model of the 'Theatre State' cannot be transposed to Hospitaller Malta (because politics and pomp were equally important, rather than one dominating the other), it provides some interesting bearings within which to formulate ideas. Malta as the Hospitallers' IOS had — and was perceived to have — the naval-military capability for both offensive and defensive actions, even if on a small scale. Nevertheless, the Order clearly felt — like all other early modern states — that splendid rituals and imposing settings for these were essential to its sustenance.

First Birgu and eventually the rest of the harbour would come to provide the stage for the theatrical dimension of the IOS. At the Birgu quayside one had the main arsenal of the Order; eventually, another

⁵³ T. Gambin, 'Islands of the Middle Sea: An Archaeology of a Coastline', in *Evolución paleoambiental de los puertos y fundaderos antiguos en el Mediterráneo occidental*, eds. L. De Maria and R. Turchetti, Alicante 2003, 139.

⁵⁴ G. Bosio, *Dell'istoria della Sacra Religione di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano*, Rome, 1594–1602; 2nd ed. 1629, iii, 34.

⁵⁵ cf. V.A. Cremona, 'Spectacle and "Civil Liturgies" in Malta during the time of the Knights of St John', in *The Renaissance Theatre, Texts Performance and Design*, ed. C. Cairns, ii, *Design, Image and Acting*, Aldershot 1999, 41–60.

⁵⁶ C. Geertz, *Negara. The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, Princeton 1980, 13.

maritime node developed on the Valletta quayside. The Birgu quayside, known as the *Molo di S. Lorenzo* and later as the *Marina Grande*, consisted of a stretch of land from Fort St Angelo to the church of St Lawrence. This is where the Hospitallers developed their first arsenal and from where already in 1535 they were able to launch a new galley.⁵⁷ On the other side, on the Valletta waterfront, there was a hub of activity congregating around the Neptune fountain, inaugurated in 1615 by Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt. As originally conceived, the fortifications of Valletta had no opening onto the harbour; the grand master who followed de Valette, Pietro del Monte (r. 1568-1572) was just as committed to Valletta and he oversaw, in 1571, the transfer of the Convent from Birgu to Valletta, in a lavish waterborne pageant. Grand Master del Monte ordered the opening of a gateway in the fortifications to create a direct link between Valletta's heart and its waterfront and which became known as *Porta del Monte* or *Porta della Marina*. The fountain provided an easily accessible source of drinking water to vessels. Later still, other grand masters, such as Jean Paul de Lascaris Castellar (r. 1636-1657) continued developing the infrastructure of the Valletta waterfront in particular and the harbour in general.⁵⁸

Although this paper centres on the economy and ritual, another essential element that needs to be referred to at this stage is defence, in particular the development of fortifications.⁵⁹ In Rhodes, just as in Malta, the Order invested in both 'stone and wooden walls', that is fortifications on land and vessels at sea to safeguard its territories.⁶⁰ Fostering a sense of security was essential for the population to grow and for the economy

⁵⁷ D. De Lucca, 'Waterfronts of Valletta and of Birgu: Projects by the Order of St John', *Treasures of Malta*, 4/3, 1998, 43-91; P. MacDougall, 'The Naval Arsenals of the Knights of St John', in *De Triremibus: Festschrift in Honour of Joseph Muscat*, eds. T. Cortis and T. Gambin, Malta 2005, 496; J. Calleja, T. Gambin, and E. Magro Conti, 'Merchant and Trade Facilities in Malta's Grand Harbour', in *Atlas Mercator. Merchants Routes and Trade Cities in the Mediterranean*, eds. L. de Maria and A. Toro, Rome 2008, 19-74.

⁵⁸ J. Bonnici and M. Cassar, *The Malta Grand Harbour and its Dockyard*, Malta 1994, 16-17; De Lucca, 43-91; Calleja, Gambin, and Magro Conti, 19-74.

⁵⁹ Luttrell 2013, 24-25. Williams 2013, 66.

⁶⁰ A. Williams, "'Stone or Wooden Walls?'" The Problems of Land and Sea Defence in the Islands of Rhodes (1421-1522) and Malta (1530-1631)', in Cortis and Gambin, 415-426.

to prosper. Conversely, Hospitaller ritual generally had a militaristic tone to it, emphasizing the Order's role as a Christian militia engaged in perpetual holy war against Islam. The fortifying of Birgu began immediately in 1530, with L'Isle Adam ordering a wall to be built enclosing it, flanked by small bastions.⁶¹ This was but the first step in a very long process stretching over the whole of the 268 years of the Order's stay in Malta that would see the rise of an intensive defensive system across the harbour and the islands more generally.⁶² While these high walls were intended to keep the enemy out, to emphasize Hospitaller Malta's role as Catholic Europe's southernmost frontier, they could not keep out ideas and wider influences. In effect, between 1530 and 1624, a cosmopolitan society developed in the harbour, one in which different cultures mingled, but not always in a harmonious manner.⁶³ All of this was the result of the powerful transformative effect which the Order had on Malta; in turn, having Malta as its headquarters also influenced the wider workings of the Order. The latter is a subject which is yet to be explored, but a telling example is provided by developments in the Order's priory of Barletta in these years. This priory, part of the Italian langue, was situated in the Salento peninsula on the Ionian coast, in the province of Taranto in the region of Apulia, Italy's heel. Like all priories, Barletta consisted of a series of commanderies. Originally, the commandery of Brindisi was the most important one within this priory but, once the Order was in Malta, Brindisi lost its primacy to the commandery of Maruggio. This was because Maruggio was on the western side of Apulia, hence 'facing' Malta, the new convent, making this commandery more immediately linked to the headquarters. While the commandery of Brindisi was the original magistral commandery

⁶¹ A. Ganado, 'The Representation of Birgu and Fort St Angelo in Old Maps and Views', in Bugeja et al., ii, 549-550.

⁶² S. Spiteri, *Fortresses of the Knights*, Malta 2001; id., *The Art of Fortress Building in Hospitaller Malta*, Malta 2008.

⁶³ C. Dalli, 'Conniving Connectivities', in *Georgio Scala and the Moorish Slaves. The Inquisition Malta 1598*, ed. Dionisius A. Agius, Malta 2013, 235-251; F. Ciappara, "'The Date Palm and the Olive Tree': Safeguarding the Catholic Frontier in Malta (c.1595-c.1605)", in *ibid.*, 253-279. See also Isaac Land, 'Blog 35: A Cosmopolitan Bronze Age Port?', *The Coastal History Blog*, <http://porttowns.port.ac.uk/blog35/> accessed 15 Feb. 2016.

within the priory of Barletta, in 1556 Maruggio was declared a magistral commandery, henceforth known as the Magistral Commandery of Maruggio and Brindisi.⁶⁴ This change in nomenclature was indicative of the changing administrative dynamics within the priory of Barletta which in turn reflected the changed circumstances of the Order being in Malta, rather than in Rhodes.

Activities in the Harbour, c.1530-c.1624

Commerce

The first part of this paper sought to outline a physical and conceptual framework within which to understand the IOS on Malta and its harbour between c.1530 and c.1624; this framework shall now serve to understand a series of select case-studies illustrating the workings of the IOS. As has been shown in another study dealing with economic activities taking place in and around the port in the early years of Hospitaller rule,⁶⁵ the establishment of the Order generated myriad new economic opportunities which ultimately saw not only the local population flock to Birgu, but also served as a pull factor to foreigners. As Maria Fusaro argues, the presence of foreign commercial operators is 'usually a good sign in times of expansion of the host economy, as foreigners' activities can facilitate access to new markets and provide expertise'.⁶⁶ This is well attested in documents related to Rhodiote merchants who settled in Malta with the coming of the knights.⁶⁷ These seem to have integrated well with both the local established merchant community and even with other foreign merchants; a case in point of cooperation between local

⁶⁴ R. Borg, 'The State of the Hospitaller Commandery of San Giovanni Battista di Maruggio in the first half of the Eighteenth Century', Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Malta 2011, 18-23.

⁶⁵ J. Abela, 'Port Activities in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Malta', Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Malta 2007.

⁶⁶ Fusaro, 196.

⁶⁷ Fiorini states that at times Rhodiots were described as 'Greek', although there are clear instances of Greek surnames prior to the arrival of the knights; see Fiorini, 233. Amongst other examples, confirmation of this statement is found in NAV, R225/17, f. 14r, (3 Sep. 1560), which describes the Rhodiote Angelo Metaxi as 'Grecus habitatoris de questa nova civitatis Melite'.

established merchants and Greeks is the Abela family who was already established as a seafaring family prior to the coming of the knights and then forged links with the newcomers.⁶⁸ This community provided an important stimulus for economic activity on the island, especially since it had close contacts with other Greek and Latin Rhodiots who had settled elsewhere in the Mediterranean.⁶⁹ In fact, various Rhodiote merchants had established themselves in Sicily and from notarial documents it becomes clear that they kept regular contact with Malta, a situation that reflected the 213-year tie between the Hospitallers and the Rhodiote community.⁷⁰

Maltese merchants made use of various services offered by resident Rhodiote notaries and these were not restricted to the drawing up of deeds. Notarial acts attest that, when the need arose, local businessmen placed total trust in them and gave them the right to act as their procurators⁷¹ or legal and judicial representatives, thus representing them in various cases concerning disputes or litigation. A case in point is a procurator agreement drawn up on 26 January 1543 wherein Oliviero Burlo from Birgu appointed Notary Bartolomeo Selvaggi de Via, a Rhodiote notary resident and practising in Malta,⁷² as his procurator. The latter had to recover the sum of 100 ducats as per contract found in the acts of another Rhodiote notary, Vincenzo Bonaventura de Bonetiis.⁷³ Testimony to the meteoric rise in commercial activity in Birgu and its environs are a multitude of notarial acts which reveal that even an island

⁶⁸ Fiorini, 224.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 230. Many of those who left Rhodes after the Ottoman victory were not Greeks but Latins who had good motives for avoiding Ottoman rule and settled elsewhere in the West; see A. Luttrell, 'The Rhodian Background of the Order of Saint John in Malta', in *The Order's Early Legacy in Malta*, ed. J. Azzopardi, Malta 1989, 5.

⁷⁰ Abela 2007, 139-142.

⁷¹ A procurator instrument is equivalent to today's power of attorney.

⁷² Selvaggi de Via worked in the tribunal of the *Castellania*; he probably held the same post in Rhodes; refer to A. Luttrell, 'Malta and Rhodes: Hospitallers and Islanders', in Mallia Milanese 1993, 260. Extant copies of some of his notebooks entitled *Notarium: Magna Curia Castellania* are found at the NAV. Unfortunately, to date, these are still not classified in the inventory.

⁷³ NAV, R 224/1, f. 433v (26 Jan. 1543).

as small as Malta could serve as a rendezvous to an international mix of merchants. It is worth noting that

[t]he equivalent of the modern businessman was the merchant, but he was not what we mean by the word merchant. Specialisation had not yet developed to the degree that characterizes industrial societies, and a merchant was very often the head of a manufacturing enterprise, a money lender, and a trader, all at the same time.⁷⁴

The individuals encountered in the notarial documents studied here reflected this rainbow of characteristics as outlined by Carlo M. Cipolla. They operated from and to the sheltered harbour of Birgu, which offered some of the same services available in established financial centres, although of course on a much smaller scale.⁷⁵ When analysing the representation of financial instruments in notarial acts, it is evident that the financial infrastructure available in mid-sixteenth century Malta was crucial in moulding the spirit of entrepreneurship on an island which, prior to the coming of the Hospitallers, was more limited in its trading activities.⁷⁶

A particular maritime economic sector was corsairing. By the end of the fifteenth century, the Ottomans had managed to conquer the great city of Constantinople (1453) and then proceeded to overrun the Balkan Peninsula; in 1522 they wrested Rhodes from the Hospitallers. It was during Süleyman's reign (1520-1566) that the Ottoman empire reached the height of its power, stretching from the doorstep of Austria to the Persian Gulf and the shores of the Arabian Sea.⁷⁷ The success of the Ottoman expansion during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was marked by a reactivation of the ideology of the 'just war' against 'the infidel'.⁷⁸ This struggle between the Cross and the Crescent translated

⁷⁴ C.M. Cipolla, *Before the Industrial Revolution, European Society and Economy, 1000-1700*, 3rd edition, New York and London 1994, 53.

⁷⁵ For a detailed study of commercial activities taking place in Birgu as mirrored in notarial primary sources, cf. Abela 2007.

⁷⁶ J. Abela, 'Some Early Forms of Financial Instruments found in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Malta', *Storja 2008*, 2008, 30-46.

⁷⁷ S. Spiteri, *The Great Siege – Knights vs Turks MDLXV*, Malta 2005, 33.

⁷⁸ M. Fontenay & A. Tenenti, 'Course et Piraterie Méditerranéennes de la fin du Moyen-Age au début du XIX^{ème} Siècle', in *Course et Piraterie: Etudes présentées à la Commission Internationale D'Histoire Maritime à l'occasion de son XV^e colloque*

itself into corsairing activity which provided business opportunities for investment which formed an integral part of the economic system.⁷⁹ Corsairing was perceived as another form of economic enterprise and, as Robert Lopez points out, corsairs had to be businessmen as well as fighters.⁸⁰

In Rhodes, the Order encouraged corsairing activities, particularly from the end of the fifteenth century. The operations of these Rhodes-based corsairs brought in booty, including foodstuffs and slaves, all of which provided useful income to the Order's treasury. Ann Williams cites what she describes as an 'unusually explicit case' in the council on 11 December 1503 that gives an indication that the Order was involved in corsairing:

Frà Juan D'Ayala was to fit out the barque *Santa Maria*. The Order supplied sails and artillery, and fifty men with supplies for four months. Ayala contributed fifty more men and powder for the guns. The booty would be divided into three parts. The first two parts were split inequitably: The Order took three parts and Ayala one. The crew was given the third part. There was no indication of the barque's exact mission or its results.⁸¹

Hence, the IOS on Rhodes extended its influence over this particular economic sector, taxing and regulating it, an approach it would repeat in Malta where corsairing was already active prior to the arrival of the Order. In fact, commercial and corsairing activities flowed through the Maltese ports through the participation of many of the leading local families. These included important political figures, such as the de Navas, who were galley-captains or owned their own galleys⁸² and were

international pendant le XIVe Congrès Interantional de Sciences historiques San Francisco, août, 1975, ed. M. Mollat, 2 vols., Paris 1975, i, 117.

⁷⁹ V. Mallia-Milanes, *Venice and Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798 – Aspects of a Relationship*, Malta 1992, Preface, xix; J.H. Pryor, *Geography, Technology and War – Studies in the Maritime History of the Mediterranean 649-1571*, Cambridge 1988, 154.

⁸⁰ R.S. Lopez and I.W. Raymond, *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World, Illustrative Documents translated with Introduction and Notes*, New York 1990, 221.

⁸¹ Williams 2013, 67-68.

⁸² Fontenay & Tenenti, i, 87. During the medieval period, Malta served as a base for corsair vessels and these, often recruited Maltese personnel for their expeditions; see

licensed to attack Muslim shipping in the days of direct Sicilian rule. In effect 'the crown's policy of delegating the defences of the archipelago to its galley-captains led to the establishment of a military aristocracy on Malta who were also financiers and organizers of corsairing ventures'.⁸³

The arrival of the Order served to greatly enhance corsairing expeditions and to organize the *corso* into a more efficient and profitable economic activity which attracted a much higher percentage of foreign investment. As already mentioned above, Grand Master Wignacourt established the *Tribunale degli Armamenti* in 1605 'as a court to regulate corsairing so the Order could be sure of getting the profits. A licence had to be obtained and 10% of the profits were to be returned to the Treasury. The licence recorded the condition of the ship and its armaments, and on its return, the booty was shared with the ship's master, his crew and his creditors'.⁸⁴

In 1697 the Order established an institution with an even wider maritime-economic remit, the *Consolato del Mare* with 'jurisdiction over all commercial enterprises at sea, following the example of similar courts set up much earlier in other parts of the Mediterranean'.⁸⁵ The judicial apparatus is a necessary element in the running of an effective State, hence the IOS's continued interest in developing such structures. To return to actual corsairing activity originating from Malta, Anne Brogini has estimated that, between 1585 and 1635, there were 387 corsairing enterprises based in Malta's harbour; though a significant

P. Cassar, 'The Maltese Corsairs and the Order of St John of Jerusalem', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 46/2, 1960, 137-141.

⁸³ M. Aloisio, 'The Maltese *Corso* in the Fifteenth Century', *Medieval Encounters*, 9/2-3, 2003, 193.

⁸⁴ Williams 2013, 72.

⁸⁵ L. Gauci, 'A Majorcan Captain's Adventures as a "Maltese" Corsair in the 1770s: Rum, Coffee and a Silver Watch', in *Proceedings of History Week 2013 – Second Colloquium on Spanish-Maltese History*, eds. Joan Abela, Emanuel Buttigieg, and Carmel Vassallo, Malta 2015, 110-111; see also S. Vella, 'The Consolato del Mare of Malta. A Study of an Institution (1697-1725)', Unpublished BA (Hons.) dissertation, University of Malta 1998; C. Vassallo, ed., *Consolati Di Mare and Chambers of Commerce*, Malta 2000; J. Abela, 'Sailors' Legal Rights in a Mediterranean Hub: The Case of Malta', in M. Fusaro et al., 2015, 61-78.

figure, Ann Williams believes this number to be an underestimate, particularly for the period before 1605.⁸⁶

Owing to the steady increase in the number of vessels operating from Malta, a constant stream of slave-captives flowed into the island⁸⁷ since prizes brought back very often included slaves who were normally sold by public auction. According to Peter Earle, only Leghorn, in the Christian Mediterranean, had a prize and slave market that could rival Malta's.⁸⁸ These two countries were Christendom's Algiers, with their 'bagnios, their slave markets and their sordid transactions'.⁸⁹ The establishment of a prize market also served to attract various merchants of diverse ethnic origins and to place Malta at the forefront of human trafficking. The Order's short presence in Tripoli from 1530 to 1551, coupled with Malta's strategic position in the central axis of the Mediterranean, were among the main ingredients that helped to build the necessary bridges linking Muslim and Christian merchants. The reciprocal benefits generated through the transfer and redemption of slaves saw Muslim ships being allowed to import and export merchandise from the island, thus ensuring a good return for round trips and lucrative benefits for all those involved. During the second half of the sixteenth century, Malta's prominent role in corsairing activities and its pretensions to autonomy, accelerated its role as a rendezvous for adventurers. According to Braudel, 'In the sixteenth century, all states, despite their disagreements, were deeply committed to the law of nations and supposed to respect it. But the cities of corsairs had been known totally to disregard international law.'⁹⁰

Pomp and Circumstance

From the outset of the establishment of the Order in Malta, this military-religious institution appreciated the potential of its harbour.⁹¹ It

⁸⁶ A. Brogini, *Malte, Frontière de Chrétienté (1530-1670)*, Rome 2006, 258, 296; Williams, 2013, 72 and note 39.

⁸⁷ G. Wettinger, *Slavery in the Islands of Malta and Gozo ca. 1000-1812*, Malta 2002, 25.

⁸⁸ Earle, 178.

⁸⁹ Braudel, ii, 867.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 870-871.

⁹¹ Muscat, 2-5.

appreciated — indeed it greatly augmented — the potential for economic/military activities; the discussion above highlighted aspects of these in the period *c.*1530-*c.*1624. The Order also appreciated another function that the harbour could perform as a space for rituals through which it could engage with varied audiences, those same merchants, mariners, slaves, Rhodiots, Maltese, men, and women that participated in the economic/military life of the island. They all inhabited shared, overlapping, spaces which could serve multiple functions. Though the Order may never have explicitly stated its appreciation of the ritualistic potential of the harbour, its actions from the beginning evince a clear understanding of this particular dimension. This can be seen, for instance, in the case of grand masters who were elected while away from Malta, hence necessitating their travel to the island and the organization of an adequate welcome. Frà Pierino del Ponte (r.1534-1535), elected on 26 August 1534 to succeed l'Isle Adam, arrived in Malta on 10 November. At the time of his election, he was in Calabria, serving as the bailiff of Santa Eufemia, so three galleys of the Order were sent to bring him over. When del Ponte embarked on the galleys, he was saluted by the thunder of their artillery, as well as the music of trumpets and other instruments. People apparently lined the Calabrian coastline to watch this spectacle, as they did in the harbour of Messina, where the galleys called, before coming to Malta. He came ashore over a bridge that had been prepared for the occasion, which was covered in rich silks and had on it war trophies and his coat of arms, all the while being in the public eye.⁹² A similar procedure was observed in the case of two other subsequent masters, Frà Juan de Omedes (r.1536-1553) and Frà Claude de la Sengle (r.1553-1557). Omedes had to come from Barcelona and a dispute arose between him and the council in Malta, since the latter had asked him to hire one or two vessels to bring him over because the Order's navy was not available at that moment. Once a mutually-satisfactory arrangement for his transport to Malta had been made, the grand master arrived in January 1538. Once again, a lavish bridge⁹³ was the centre-piece of the

⁹² Bosio 1629, iii, 137-138.

⁹³ Technically a bridge spans a piece of land. In English a device which facilitates boarding/alighting is called a brow or a gangway, however, in this paper 'bridge' is used to denote a device for boarding/alighting from boats. This is

preparations made to receive the much-awaited leader; members of the Order and the population flocked to receive him.⁹⁴ La Sengle arrived in Malta in January 1554 and received a spectacular welcome: guns from all the walls and castles, as well as from all the vessels in the harbour fired salutes as he disembarked on a magnificent bridge, all covered in rich yellow and black silks (these being the colours of La Sengle's coat of arms) and decorated with war trophies. Amusingly, the bridge was in the shape of a sea shell, an element represented in La Sengle's coat of arms. Members of the Order and the people flocked to greet him.⁹⁵

The use of these temporary but nevertheless elaborate bridges by the Order recalled a wider European Renaissance fashion for the use of 'triumphal bridges'. This trend originated in the fifteenth century when it was believed that the remains of a bridge (dubbed the *Pons Triumphalis*) at the Tiber bend near the church of Santo Spirito in Sassia had been a key part of the *Via Triumphalis* over which Roman leaders returning in triumph passed.⁹⁶ That was, of course, made of stone, while the bridges used by the Order in Malta's harbour were made of wood and other temporary materials, but the concept was the same. The whole sea voyage of a grand master coming to take over his Order and his IOS was depicted in triumphal terms (even if dangers and blunders could still occur, such as when the vessel that Omedes was on nearly risked being shipwrecked off Minorca).⁹⁷ The arrival in the harbour among the saluting guns and the final 'journey' over the *pons triumphalis* indicated the culmination of a process and the beginning of another, that is, his administration of the Order and his reign over Malta. The extensive use of triumphal bridges – and of the better-known triumphal arches – during early modern times, had Roman roots but displayed an ability and wish to adapt classical models to contemporary needs and tastes. During such ritualistic events, temporary structures – such as bridges – were combined with permanent structures – such as fortifications which,

because in the documents the word used was 'ponte' (bridge) and also for the sake of clarity.

⁹⁴ Bosio, 1629, iii, 167, 175.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 346-347; NLM, AOM 88, ff. 185r-v, 1553-1554, 'cum toto populo expectantes'.

⁹⁶ D.R. Marshall, 'Triumphal Arch', in *The Classical Tradition*, eds. A. Grafton, G.W. Most, and S. Settis, Cambridge, Mass. and London 2010, 954-956.

⁹⁷ Bosio, 1629, iii, 174.

as noted above, were steadily increasing, to create a memorable spectacle. Such events necessitated the provisioning of various materials – notably wood – as well as expensive materials, such as silks to which regular reference was made. One would also have needed artisans of a certain skill and labourers to carry out these works in a timely manner. It is at this juncture that the present discussion about the state and rituals overlaps with the earlier discussion about economic activity; further research into notarial documents may well shed precious light on such arrangements. Events such as the arrival of a new grand master were political occasions, underlined by economic dynamics; but they were also occasions for entertainment. Take, for instance, the jousts organized in the harbour by Gian Andrea Doria (1539-1606) in 1560. A large Christian navy was harboured in Malta en route to attack Ottoman Tripoli (in the end the actual target was the island of Djerba, which would turn out to be a major disaster for Christian naval forces). This navy was beset by various problems, not least disease, which carried off hundreds of its crew. To raise morale, Doria organized two jousts, one of which at sea, by having various galleys tied together to create a jousting field; one must admire the technical abilities of those involved in such an enterprise, which must have been quite a spectacle to behold. Grand Master Jean de Valette (r. 1557-1568) may have been impressed by the spectacle but, according to Bosio, he was dismayed by the almost riotous celebrations and he remarked the foolishness of celebrating before any actual victory.⁹⁸ The flip-side to spectacular celebrations was spectacular punishments, for which again the harbour of Malta could provide a perfect setting. In 1536 the Order, having captured the notorious renegade corsair Memi Liparoto, had him and his colleagues hanged at Rinella at the entrance/exit to the harbour, for all the world to see.⁹⁹ Hence, just as in economic terms the pre-1565 years were much more energetic than previously thought, so the ritual scene was dynamic; splendid rituals of various forms would continue to be organized in subsequent years, with the sixteenth century laying the foundations for the increasing sophistication of the IOS's organization.

Spectacular rituals in Malta's harbour in the years between 1565 and 1624 included, among others, de Valette's funeral in 1568, the move of

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 416.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

the Convent from Birgu to Valletta in 1571, and the transfer in 1587 of the icon of Our Lady of Damascus from the Greek church in Birgu to the new Greek church in Valletta. The move of this icon was part of a wider transfer of significant objects and important administrative functions from the 'old' city to the new one, which was indicative of the shift in the centre of gravity.¹⁰⁰ The election to the magistracy of de Paule in March 1623 can be seen as a turning point in terms of how the IOS was organized, as well as in the area of rituals; these changes, in turn, had an impact on the dynamics of the harbour area, including the status of Birgu. Back on 13 November 1530, Grand Master L'Isle Adam had ceremoniously entered the city of Mdina in a ritual known as a *possesso*; this became, in a sense, a prototype for later, similar events, even if, it has been observed, the evidence for grand masters taking possession of Mdina between 1530 and 1623 is scarce.¹⁰¹ It is with de Paule, in 1623, that we have definitive evidence for a *possesso* of Mdina, after the original one of 1530. Moreover, on 20 April 1623, de Paule and his council decided that henceforth its records had to be organized in two sections: the *Libri Conciliorum* dealing with the internal affairs of the Order and the *Libri Conciliorum Status* dealing with the affairs of the state, covering a wide range of issues including political, military, and diplomatic matters.¹⁰² Henceforth, there was to be a greater distinction between the Order as a religious institute run by its grand master and council, and Malta as the basis of the IOS, governed by the grand master as prince. Furthermore, not only did de Paule ceremoniously enter Mdina, he also established a second ritual, the *possesso* of Birgu, which he carried out on 9 June 1624.¹⁰³ In so doing, he was making a statement asserting the unity between the two shores of the harbour, Valletta, the Convent, and Birgu, the seat of the Order's navy. A physical, legal, and conceptual framework for the harbour of Malta for the following decades can be said to have been established.

¹⁰⁰ These are discussed in Buttigieg 2017, 177-186.

¹⁰¹ Mallia, 30-31.

¹⁰² J. Mizzi, A. Zammit Gabarretta, and V. Borg, *Catalogue of the Records of the Order of St John of Jerusalem in the Royal Malta Library*, iii, Part 1, Archives 255-260, Malta 1960, 1.

¹⁰³ NLM AOM 218, ff. 38r-39r, 9 June 1624.

Conclusion

The sixteenth century is fascinating because of the momentous changes that Malta — and its harbour area in particular — underwent. All too often, aside from the focus on the Great Siege and the subsequent foundation of Valletta, this century tends to get relegated to the role of a conduit leading to the achievements of the following two centuries. This paper has argued that this century is worth focusing upon for its own merits and as an important building block of the Hospitaller IOS, rather than as a simple conduit. By combining a socio-economic approach with a politico-ritual perspective, this paper has sought to shed light on the developing IOS in Malta. The *Porto Generale* of Malta was a hive of naval-military and economic activity, as well as an ideal stage for rituals. The establishment of the Order in Malta stimulated economic activity on a hitherto unknown scale. Such dynamic activity in the harbour area created a vibrant economy based on trade and the island witnessed an ever-increasing number of merchants and adventurers who, although at times having different religious and ethnic backgrounds, had the same common goal of making money. All of this unfolded within the wider framework of Malta being the new Hospitaller IOS. Between 1530 and 1624, Malta's harbour experienced a radical transformation, which was symptomatic of wider regional developments, but also had its uniqueness; the sum of all this helped to render the IOS and its harbour a truly dynamic socio-economic and cultural enterprise.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Paraphrasing Mauro 1988, as quoted in Williams 2013, 65.