

A CAPTAIN OF THE PORT OF MALTA AND A GRAND VIZIER OF CONSTANTINOPLE

THEIR FORTUNES AND FRIENDSHIPS

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The fate of Malta has always been determined by the sea encircling it. Situated in the centre of the Mediterranean, at the crossroads of trade routes, the Island has always been the abode of seafaring men. The surrounding waters are the life blood of the Island; trade and prosperity have always reached Malta by way of the sea and the salient events in its history are linked with naval occasions. Saint Paul's shipwreck in the year 60, brought Christianity to Malta and earned for the Island a chapter in the Bible. The great naval battle fought on the 9 June 1283, at the mouth of the Grand Harbour, between the Aragonese fleet under Admiral de Loria and the French fleet under Admiral Carner, decided the fate of the Angevin Kingdom of Sicily and brought about its downfall. The Order of the Knights of St. John reached the zenith of its power and influence in Malta chiefly by the exploits of its navy against its Moslem enemy and in defence of Christian trade and commerce.

Malta figured in the Napoleonic era on account of the naval events which took place around it. Both Napoleon and Nelson realised the strategic value of the Island, situated as it is in the heart of the Middle Sea. The importance of Malta as a naval base was acknowledged by the Sea Powers of all ages and its value was well proved in the First and also in the Second World Wars, indeed we have it on the authority of none less than Churchill that were it not for Malta, the Mediterranean Sea would have been lost for the Allied Cause. It is also well known that the stranglehold of the Island on the enemy sea communications in the Mediterranean, had undermined the Axis power in North Africa and cut short by many months the course of the war in Europe.

Nature has decreed that the destiny of Malta should for ever be linked with the sea surrounding it. That sea has influenced the outlook of the Maltese people and moulded their character. As a nation the Maltese thrive by the sea and they take to it as naturally as the ducks take to water; they are well versed in the lore of sea and their sailors are renowned for their prowess, whilst their ability as men of the sea, has been recognised from time immemorial; perhaps they have acquired it from their forebears, the Phoenicians, who were the first to open maritime trade around the seaboard of the Mediterranean and in their fast sailing craft sailed forth out of the Strait of Gibraltar and ventured into the then unchartered Atlantic Ocean.

The Maltese have always carried the tradition of excellent sailors and experienced navigators. Some of them became famous for their legendary feats of daring, like Arrigo Pistore, a renowned naval commander, the hammer of the Pisans, who in 1222 was made Grand Admiral of the Fleet of the Kingdom of

Sicily and given the title of Count of Malta by Emperor Fredrick II (1). In the Middle Ages the Maltese corsairs struck terror in the heart of Muslim traders and ransacked towns of the North African littoral.

The Maltese crews serving on board the galleys of the Order had the reputation of being indomitable, they were famous for their furious onslaughts that swept all resistance and carried them to victory. Much of the fame earned by the galleys of the Knights was due the valour of the Maltese navigators and crew. In 1681 Captain de Viviers of the French Royal Navy, was instructed to draw a confidential report on the galleys of Malta; amongst other things he observed that "the Maltese galleys were among the best of their kind . . . they were strong and well equipped and their crews well fed and cared for. The officers were not so good, for they were changed too often, and the real leaders were the NCOS, who had permanent appointments. Their sailors were much better than the Turks . . ." (2) Houel, in his well known work (3), wrote in 1787 "The Maltese cannoneers are the best in the world; it is partly due to their skill that the vessels of the Order owe their success in combat". Those navigators, NCOS and sailors distinguished themselves in the battle of Lepanto, when the Ottoman Empire lost its naval supremacy for ever.

Nelson recognised the value of Maltese sailors and made it a point to recruit as many of them as possible; indeed that recruitment of Maltese sailors for service with the British fleet, was one of the reasons brought forward by Napoleon to invade Malta in 1798.

When Cleopatra's needle, that huge obelisk now adorning the Thames embankment in London, was being carried from Egypt to England, a fierce storm cut loose the raft on which the obelisk was loaded, it drifted helpless amongst the billowing waves and was given up for lost together with its crew of six Maltese sailors; they however succeeded to ride the storm and by a skilful feat of navigation, they saved the raft with its precious load (4).

Towards the middle of the last century, the headlines of the world press were caught by a Maltese sailor, Joseph Rogers by name, whose heroic action saved many lives. When his ship went aground in a storm and was being battered and broken on the rocks in the raging seas, he bravely swam ashore and, at the risk of his life, he carried a line by means of which many passengers and crew reached their safety on the mainland (5).

A hundred years ago, the felukas and the schooners of Malta and the Gozo boats were a common feature of maritime trade in the Mediterranean; they provided an excellent school for the many sailors and master mariners who served in merchant ships throughout the whole world, Maltese seamen could be met with and for that matter are still found, in all the major ports of call.

The excellent harbours of Malta and the inherent love of the sea of its inhabitants, figure prominently in all the works of foreign authors who wrote

(1) "L'Arte" No. 47. Anno 11. Malta 7 August, 1844.

(2) Archives Nationales. B9. Marine. 509.

(3) "Voyage Pittoresque Aux Iles de Sicilie et de Malte". 1787.

(4) Sir T. Zammit, "Hrejjeġ, Stejjer u Kitba Ohra". Book 1, 1958.

(5) "Wrecked in Sight of Home". Published by Blackie & Son Ltd., London. N.D.

about Malta and the Maltese people. Diodorus Siculus, who lived in the time of Augustus, wrote in his "*Bibliotheca Historica*": "The Island (Malta) is one of the colonies founded by the Phoenicians who extending their trade as far as the Western Ocean, made it a station or harbour of refuge on account of its excellent ports and its position in the middle of the Mediterranean". The Roman orator Cicero, in one of his orations makes reference to a famous temple on one of the promontories inside the Grand Harbour, which was revered by storm-tossed mariners who brought to it rich votive offerings (6).

Since then writers have recorded in prose and verse the prowess of the mariners of Malta. There is hardly a book about the Island which does not mention the seafaring trait in the Maltese character and the bravery of its sailors. Visitors and travellers have described the ways in which Malta derives wealth, prestige and benefits from the sea. They have related how life in Malta is influenced by the sea which holds bright fortunes for hardy and daring seamen. While most of the writers described these features objectively, one of them, Friar Leander, wrote about the fortunes of one particularly adventurous character, a man of the sea of Malta, to illustrate the dazzling career open to enterprising Maltese.

The Reverend Father Leander of St. Cecilia, a friar of the Order of Discalced Carmelites was one of the missionaries of the Church of Rome, who in the first half of the eighteenth century went forth into the East to study the possibility of a full scale campaign for the propagation of the Catholic faith amongst the various minorities scattered in that part of the Turkish Empire. In this respect one may perhaps mention that a citizen of ours, the Jesuit Father Domenic Magri, was one of those missionaries; he travelled to Lebanon and wrote an entertaining account of his travels (7).

Friar Leander was a prominent member of his Order. He was a man of culture, prudence and experience; he advanced in the hierarchy of the Roman Curia that entrusted him with the execution of delicate missions.

Father Leander was born on the 2nd of February 1704 in Broglio, near Ventimiglia, and professed in the Order of the Discalced Carmelites in Rome on the 21st November 1725 (8). He must have been an outstanding young man because he soon drew upon himself the attention of his Superiors. In 1732 he was sent on a mission to Mount Carmel in Palestine where he remained till 1734; he was then recalled to Rome for another briefing. Next year, 1735, he was sent to Baghdad in Misopotamia where he worked for ten years spreading the truth of the Gospel and promoting friendship and understanding by his example and piety. He returned to Europe in 1745, but he was not be allowed to rest from his labours. Evidently his successes had impressed the Authorities in Rome, and early in the year 1748 he was approached by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith and entrusted with yet another

(6) In Verrem. iv, 46.

(7) "Breve Racconto Del Viaggio Al Monte Libano". Roma. Nella Stamperia di Nicola Angelo Tinassi. 1655.

(8) "Bio-Bibliographia Missionaria Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatorum". Romae. Apud Curiam Generalitiam. 1941. Pg. 194, and "Nomenclator Missionariorum Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatorum". Romae, Apud Curiam Generalitiam. p. 244.

mission. This time he was sent to Babylon and given authority to found missions in Mosul, Mardin, Orfa and Diarbequir. He arrived in Babylon on the 5th February 1748 and working his way through the other towns, he finally reached Diarbequir on the 17th November of that year. His activities were mostly carried out from Mosul where he established his headquarters and from where he frequently visited the other places to meet his proselytes.

In 1750 Friar Leander returned to Rome to report on the result of his activities; his report earmarked him for promotion and in 1758 he was elected Prior of St. Theresa Priory in Cospicua, Malta, a post which at that time carried with it much honour and responsibility. The Prior of St. Theresa was the Head of an influential religious community inside the Three Cities, and his office brought him in close contact with the Grand Master of the Order of St. John, with the Bishop of Malta and with the Inquisitor.

When Friar Leander came to Malta, the Island was under the rule of Grand Master Emanuel Pinto, that proud and illustrious Prince who had assumed the titles and prerogatives of a reigning sovereign. His long reign was marked by ambitious expressions in all spheres of activity in his domain. It was an age of gracious living, fine arts, pomp and ceremonial. The influence of the Order was high in international diplomacy and the Maltese flag was honoured and respected in ports and on the high seas, whilst the Ambassadors of the Grand Master were cordially received by the Crowned Heads of Europe.

Before he arrived in Malta, Friar Leander had already made a name as a traveller and author. He had published in Rome, his series of three books on his wanderings in the East. The first book on Palestine was published in 1753, the second and the third on Persia and Mesopotamia respectively, appeared in 1757 (9). He had written these books in the years between his return to Rome from Mosul in 1750 and his promotion to Malta in 1758. He was not a man to pass those years in idleness; he availed himself of his leisure to write about persons and things, and to record events and occasions he met with during his travels.

Leander's books contain a mine of information on the countries he visited and the people he mixed with. His style is elaborate and profuse, in conformity with the literary fashion of his time. He was very meticulous in his observations and evidently he took great pains to gather information from all sources; he had a good knowledge of the geography, government and social affairs of the countries he described; very often he expands in details which appear futile, but in reality they weave a colourful background to his narration. He enlivens his writing by elaborate descriptions and brisk dialogue to produce a pleasant and dramatic effect.

Friar Leander was well acquainted with the social, political and religious trends of his age, about which he wrote with authority and understanding. One

(9) "Palestina, Ovvero Primo Viaggio di Fr. Leonardo di S. Cecilia. Carmelitano Scalzo". Roma. Nella Stamperia di Angelo Rotilj. (1753).
 "Persia, Ovvero Secondo Viaggio di Fr. Leonardo di S. Cecilia. Carmelitano Scalzo". Roma, Nella Stamperia di Angelo Rotilj. (1757).
 "Mesopotamia, Ovvero Terzo Viaggio di Fr. Leonardo di S. Cecilia Carmelitano Scalzo". Roma. Nella Stamperia di Angelo Rotilj. (1757).

may reasonably suppose that the Friar had visited Malta before he came here in 1758 as Prior of St. Theresa. His account of the Island, in his second book, is clear and masterly. Most probably he had stopped at Malta on his way to and from his several missions; at any rate he evinces a lively interest in the affairs of our Island.

The story with a Malta background, related by Friar Leander, opens in page 165 of his book on Persia. It reads more like a romantic adventure than a record of events. It concerns two men, one Topel Osman, Grand Vizier and trusted friend of the Sultan, the other Signor Arnaud, Captain of the Port of Malta, at the time of Grand Master Ramon Perellos, about the year 1713.

Their episode also serves to disprove the mistaken idea that there was only hatred between Christian and Moslem, and that they were not capable of nourishing some sense of friendliness and mutual respect.

At that time the Turkish Empire was at the height of its power and fame; besides the North African littoral, it dominated the whole of the Near and most of the Middle East; it drew wealth and strength from the far flung territories under its rule. Many provinces paid tribute in gold, or in produce or in slaves. The latter were selected young boys and girls, the more fortunate of whom were brought up in the Grand Serraglio, the Palace of the Sultan in Constantinople.

At the palace the young slaves were bred in a life of luxury and refinement, but were not allowed to sap their energies by sensuous living. They were given a good education, they were taught comportment and correct behaviour; they were trained in the arts of war and they were instructed in the subtleties of diplomacy. Small wonder that many of those boys and girls made brilliant careers. The girls often blossomed as wives of exalted Officers of the State, and the boys reached the high rank of General, Admiral, Governor of Province, or Minister. Some of them even became close friends or advisers of the Grand Seigneur himself (10).

Topal Osman was born in Georgia, that rich country on the shores of the Black Sea which is now a republic of the Soviets, but at the time of our story was a province of the Turkish Empire. The Georgians are a race of hardy people, they contributed to their Masters in Constantinople much wealth in men and material. Osman arrived as a boy in the Turkish Capital; he was sent there by his people as a slave in tribute to the Sultan. At first he was admitted as an errand boy for service in the Imperial Palace, but after some time the young Georgian caught the eye of his Imperial Master, who observed the gay exuberance of the youth and was pleased with him and accepted him as one of his "*Ic-Agâ*".

The Turkish "*Ic-Agâ*" were comparable more or less to Christian page boys, only each "*Ic-Agâ*" had a particular duty to perform in the service of the Sultan. The young Georgian was assigned the duty of looking after the Sultan's turban and holding it for his Master on Cerimonial occasions. After some years of carrying out his duties towards the precious turban with meticulous care to the satisfaction of the Head wearing it, Osman was promoted to the Office of "*Capigi-Bascia*".

(10) "The Grande Turke" by Fairfax Downey, London, Stanley Paul & Co. 1929.

The "*Capigi-Bascias*" were high officials of the Imperial Court whose duty brought cold comfort to those who happened to fall foul of the Sultan's pleasure. They were entrusted with the unenviable task of taking a silk cord to those whom the Grand Seigneur wished to be eliminated. The presentation of the silk cord was deemed to be a token of imperial grace allowing the unfortunate individual the choice of hang himself or to have his head chopped off!

In the execution of his honourable duty, Osman received instructions to go to Cairo, to present the silk cord to one of the Beys of that city. He embarked on a ship for Egypt, but on the way the ship was attacked by a pirate galleon and a fierce battle ensued.

Osman fought bravely and received several wounds until he was hit by a cannon ball which fractured his leg and caused a serious injury. He never fully recovered from that injury but remained lame, for which reason he was afterwards nicknamed Osman Topal, that is Osman the lame. The pirates, who evidently were Christians, emerged victorious, they took possession of Osman's ship and made slaves all passengers and crew. They afterwards set course to the Island of Malta with the intention of disposing of their booty on the local slave market.

Those were turbulent times in the Mediterranean, but nevertheless they were colourful and heroic. It was the age of pirates and privateers, corsairs and buccaners who roved the seas in search of fortune. Seawolves, Christians and Moslems alike, sought their prey wherever it was to be found and attacked, came hell and high water (11). Their methods were fierce and sometimes villainous, but there was a romantic flavour in their enterprise. The head of the tiller, the grapnel, the hilt of the scimitar and the butt of the arquebuse directed their life and energy, and bloodshed and strife filled the atmosphere in which they lived and breathed. Whatever the odds, they never failed to fight the battle when it came their way, they were never dismayed by difficulties however big, and no danger however grave, had the power to daunt their spirit (12).

Piracy was then a very lucrative business and the Mediterranean with its hidden coves and lonely bays, offered great possibilities for such an enterprise. The Maltese who as a nation are naturally addicted to the sea, did not allow themselves to be edged out of that business, on the contrary they armed fast galleys, sturdy brigantines and light tartans with which they scouraged the Inland Sea spreading terror in the Infidel by their daring exploits. Their successes encouraged others to follow suits, and towards the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, a large scale privateering developed in Malta, giving rise to the *Corso* (13), that maritime enterprise by means of which large fortunes were made.

It is stated that roughly half the able bodied male population of the Island were occupied directly or indirectly in the *Corso*. Armed with letters patent and bills of piracy from the Grand Master, authorizing them to prey on Moslem

(11) "Sea-Wolves Of The Mediterranean" by E. Hamilton Currey. London, John Murray & Co. 1910.

(12) "The Barbary Corsairs" by Stanley Lane-Poole. London, Fisher Unwin & Co. 1890.

(13) Roderick Cavallero. "The Last of the Crusaders". Hollis & Carter. London. Page 81.

craft, Maltese privateers sailed out of the Grand Harbour on their adventurous prowling along the Barbary coast. They dealt lightning blows raiding enemy territory, or attacking Moslem vessels. Those privateers were intrepid and violent and they spread terror and havoc wherever they approached. Those who survived returned home laden with rich booty and carrying slaves that fetched big money.

The dreaded Maltese corsairs brought terror and destruction to such an extent that the Sublime Porte of Constantinople deemed it impellant to take action. Knowing that the French were sensitive about their trading posts in the Levant, the Sultan threatened to sequester their goods bonded in those posts, unless the French Court persuaded the Grand Master to keep his Maltese subjects out of the Levant. Likewise, in 1714, the Venetian Republic closed the Adriatic to Maltese privateers on the pretext that they were obstructing the development of good relations between the Most Serene Republic and the Sublime Porte.

A modern author writing about Malta under the Grand Masters had this to say relative to the *Corso*: (14) "The profits of the *Corso* had gone to the enrichment of the immense churches, of cathedral size, that sprang up in the seventeenth and eighteenth century to dominate the sprawling and pullulating *casales* that dotted the Island. A generation of Maltese architects had followed Cassar to build and embellish with decorations of great wealth the fanes of the people. The profits of trade could be seen in the dress of the merchants' wives who had the latest French fashions sent from France, and in the solid affluent building of town and country houses. The splendour and prosperity of Malta stamped the people with a fierce national pride and a spirit of independence vastly in contrast to that of their neighbours on all points of the compass" (15).

The capture of slaves and cargo were disposed of in Malta. If any question arose or any litigation started, it was taken to the local Prize Court — *Consolato Del Mare* — which decided amongst other matters, questions arising from privateering and distribution of spoils (16).

The slaves were sold mostly in Malta though some of them were bought by Knights or by foreign visitors and traders who took them away for service in other countries. Those slaves who remained were, generally speaking, not ill treated by their owners, and because it was not easy for them to escape from the Island, they were allowed a measure of liberty and were given facilities to ransom themselves and buy their freedom, but Topal Osman did not know about those favourable conditions; he was much afraid of what could be in store for him; most probably like many other infidels, the Bearer of the Silk Cord was imbued with false ideas about the manners of Christian behaviour and he was terrified of the harsh lot awaiting him under the yoke of the stern defenders of the Christian Faith.

When the pirate ship entered the Grand Harbour, it went through the usual formalities: first it was boarded by the Quarantine Authorities to ascertain

(14) Roderick Cavallero. "The Decline of the Maltese Corso". *Melita Historica*. Vol. II, 1959, p. 224.

(15) Roderick Cavallero. "The Last of the Crusaders". o.c. page 89.

(16) Riniero Zeno. "Il Consolato Di Mare Di Malta". Casa Editrice Dott. Eugenio Jovene, Napoli. 1986.



whether there was any infectious disease on board, and after being admitted to pratique, the Captain of the Port went on board to enquire about the ports of origin and the nature of cargo.

The Captain of the Port was an official named Mr. Arnaud. The Arnaud family was French in origin and had gone to Malta from Marseilles. The Arnauds had settled in the Island for some time and had assumed nationality and rose high in the service of the Order. Their descendants still live there. It seems that Captain Arnaud was a kindly gentleman whose appearance inspired confidence so much so that Topal Osman, although a slave on board the ship, was encouraged to approach him and solicit his attention. Evidently the Captain did not show resentment and Osman anxiously made a hurried proposition.

"My Lord!", he entreated, "Buy me for your slave and I assure you, you will not regret having done so".

The Captain of the Port was not a little surprised; it was far from usual for a slave to address a high official and almost unheard from such a man to make a proposal to his superiors. Nevertheless Mr. Arnaud was intrigued and he asked the slave where he had come from and why was he insisting on becoming his bondman.

Osman who was well trained in good behaviour replied: "My Lord, today you see me a slave in chains and as such you have all the reasons to doubt my promise, but I pray you to have pity on me and take me as your slave, and I assure you that you will never regret your good action".

Mr. Arnaud was impressed not so much by the promise as by the meek manner and intelligent words of the slave; he felt pity towards the unfortunate man so much that he acquired him and had him transferred to another ship where he left him under the care of a good surgeon who was instructed to look after the injury which Osman had sustained in his leg and treat the other wounds as well. At that time all arrivals in Malta from the East were subject to quarantine restrictions; most of them were kept in isolation at the Quarantine station for a period of forty days, but few were allowed to spend their quarantine period on board a ship anchored away from shore, as was the case with Osman.

On the expiration of the isolation period, Mr. Arnaud took Osman to his home and treated him with kindness. The Turk proved to be an honest, courteous and intelligent slave who soon endeared himself to all the members of the Arnaud family. He was young and useful in the household, but although he was obedient and respectful there was something in him which distinguished him from ordinary slaves so much so that the Captain became interested and curious to know the identity of his slave.

One day Captain Arnaud called Osman into his room and insisted on knowing who he really was. At first the slave was reluctant to reveal his identity, but on being pressed to state the truth, he confided to his master that he was in the service of the Sultan, who had sent him to Cairo on an important mission. It was, he said, a stroke of really bad luck when his ship was intercepted and attacked by the Christian pirates; they had not only made him a slave, but had also ruined his chances, for had he accomplished his mission, his fortune would have been definitely established.

The Captain was most sympathetic, he was really sorry for the ill luck that

had befallen on Osman and wished he could do something to alleviate his misfortune. Encouraged by his master's sympathy, and relying on his benevolence, Osman dared to make a suggestion. He said: "My Master, should you help me to go to Cairo to accomplish the task entrusted to me by my Sultan, I will prove the truth of what I told you and it would be my pleasant duty to show my gratitude for your help".

Captain Arnaud was a kind man, but he was also a shrewd one; he did not dismiss Osman's story without a thought, on the contrary he reflected on the fantastic tale, and it occurred to him that there might be something real in what he heard and it would be worth his while to help Osman to achieve his ambition.

In his capacity of Captain of the Port, Mr. Arnaud had many opportunities to secure a sea passage for Osman. He arranged with the skipper of a ship that was sailing to Damietta, to take Osman with him and he paid for the passage and made sure that Osman would receive due consideration whilst on board.

Most probably the ship on which Osman sailed was French or Venetian, because at that time, the early eighteenth century, France and Venice had established trade relations with Turkey and although the enmity between Christian and Moslem was still much in evidence, yet it was not so intolerant as to disregard the profits and advantages of trade and commerce between the two sides.

On arrival at the port of Damietta on the Nile delta, Osman disembarked and presented himself to the Aga or Governor of the town, to whom he proved his identity. He was received with all respects as befits the emissary of the Grand Turk, but in the excitement of regaining his freedom, Topal Osman did not forget his erstwhile master in Malta; on the contrary, he wished to show him some evidence of his gratitude. He therefore borrowed one thousand sequins from the Aga, which sum together with an expensive fur coat, he entrusted to the skipper of the ship, with instructions to deliver to Mr. Arnaud when the ship returned to Malta. Moreover the grateful Turk sent note to Mr. Arnaud explaining that the gift was only a small token of gratitude and that in due course he hoped to show his gratefulness in a much more tangible form.

From Damietta, Osman proceeded to Cairo, where his arrival brought not a little consternation to the Bey whose head had been singled out by the Sultan. Topal Osman accomplished his mission so tactfully and so creditably that he earned the admiration of those High Officers of the State who had escaped the whim of their Overlord in Constantinople, and who still basked in the sunshine of the land of the Pharaohs.

Osman returned to Constantinople in 1715. Evidently this time he made sure to escape the attention of the Christian corsairs, and on reaching the Sublime Porte he was well received by the Sultan who showered gifts on him, and created him "*Pashà of two Tails*", that is Pashà of the highest order. After such a proof of the Sultan's favour, Osman's future was made. He entered the inner circle of the Court Councillors and being a man of character and intelligence, he gained the confidence of his Sovereign. In fact after a few years, he was raised to the exalted position of Grand Vizier.

The office of Grand Vizier was the highest and most honourable in the

service of the Turkish Empire, the Grand Vizier being the chief Minister of the Grand Seigneur, on behalf of whom he carried out the affairs of state; he enjoyed the complete trust and full support of the Sultan and as a result he wielded great power and took far-reaching decisions; he often formulated the policies of the Empire, his word was law and his wish was a command.

If the story of the friendship between the Turkish Pashà and the Maltese Captain of the Port had ended here, it would have provided an interesting example of the humanity and generosity of which is capable the heart of righteous men, even when they belong to enemy countries; but the story had a sequel with far reaching effects. It even influenced the general policy of the Sublime Porte towards Christian nationalities and brought about what may be considered as a change of heart in those at the helm of Turkish affairs. The results were so unusual as to engage further the attention of Friar Leander who had a flair for assessing the value of facts related by him. He did not merely write about personalities and events met with during his travels, but he was careful to give an appraisal of their merit and to record any particular fact or occurrence for which they were responsible. For this reason Friar Leander followed up the friendly relations between Topal Osman in Constantinople and Captain Arnaud in Malta, and described in detail their happy relations.

Notwithstanding the pressing cares of his high office and the worries of administration, the Grand Vizier did not forget his old friend in Malta. It may be that during his sojourn in the Island, he had pondered on the futility of war between nations and had reflected about the blessings of peace and understanding between peoples; being a man of intelligence he might have even considered how profitable it could be to all the Governments, if the energies of men were directed to peaceful pursuits instead of warlike preparations, and he realised that it would be beneficial for all concerned if peoples and nations approached each other with outstretched hands instead of with drawn swords. These considerations might have actuated the Grand Vizier to remain favourably disposed towards the Europeans throughout his life. "*Egli ha conservato la gratitudine verso gli Europei, tutto il tempo che ha vissuto*", writes Friar Leander.

The Grand Vizier sent a message to his friend Captain Arnaud, giving him news of his good fortune, and inviting him to go to Constantinople and take his son with him. An invitation from the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire was not a matter of everyday occurrence; it was a chance of a lifetime and Captain Arnaud could not but be very surprised with it. He certainly had never dreamed of such an exceptional honour, and he was not a man to lose an opportunity like that; needless to say he accepted the invitation with keen anticipation.

It was not difficult for Captain Arnaud to book a passage to Constantinople. There was a flourishing trade between France and Turkey and ships under the flag of France often called at the port of Malta on their way to Constantinople. The Captain of the Port could easily arrange a trip on one of those ships; it is therefore reasonable to assume that Captain Arnaud and his son sailed for Constantinople on a French ship which would also afford protection against the Turkish and Christian corsairs. The Captain being a wise and practical man, did not go empty handed; he bought in Malta twelve young and healthy Turkish

slaves whom he took with him as a present to the Grand Vizier, to whom he also offered some singing canaries in gilded cages. All these particulars are recorded by Friar Leander who evidently did not allow any detail, however small, to escape his attention.

On arrival at Constantinople, Captain Arnaud sought an audience with the Grand Vizier which was immediately granted. The visitor from Malta and his son were invited to a reception at the home of the Grand Vizier, and when they entered the "*divan*", that great man himself rose to greet them with open arms and embrace them, to the great amazement of the high dignitaries who were present. Such a cordial reception could not but cause surprise amongst those staunch followers of the Prophet, in the eyes of some of whom, the shrewd Grand Vizier read displeasure or resentment. It was unthinkable for them that the highest Minister of the Sultan should rise from his seat to embrace an infidel. Friar Leander writes, "*Il fatto non lasciò poco scandalizzati quei Signori Turchi, che un Grand Vizier alzasse in piedi e abbracciasse uno tra loro riputato infedele*".

Topal Osman lost no time in explaining to those present his debt towards Captain Arnaud who had befriended him in his misfortune. He made it quite plain that were it not for the help and assistance received from the benevolent Captain of Malta, he might still be a slave in that Island and certainly he would not have risen so high in the Sultan's favour and reached the high office which he was enjoying.

"My Lords", said Topal Osman, "do not take it amiss if I honour this man in whom you see only an infidel, for I assure you, it would be hard to find a better friend than him even amongst the followers of our great Prophet Mohammed. Should fate ever bring me face to face with a Muslim as virtuous as this man from Malta, I would equally honour him and keep him in high esteem".

The Grand Vizier's words had a sobering effect on his guests, who accepted the Maltese Captain and his son as their friends and showed them not a little courtesy. During their stay in Constantinople, the two gentlemen from Malta received all deference and respect; as the guests of the Grand Vizier, they were free to go about as they wished, and found practically all doors open to them; their host saw to it that they enjoyed all comforts and amenities.

The Grand Vizier tried to persuade Captain Arnaud to leave his son in Constantinople under his care and patronage. That lad would have acquired fame and fortune with the help of his powerful protector, but Captain Arnaud did not cherish the idea of leaving his son behind him, and the boy evidently was not inclined to remain alone in a strange town.

When the time arrived for the two friends to separate, they did so with a sincere demonstration of loyalty and friendship. The Grand Vizier as befitted his status of power and authority, not only issued safe conduct for the two passengers for Malta, but he also overwhelmed them with expensive gifts. He gave each of them large sums of money, precious stones and fine silks, and, not satisfied with all this, he gave them permission to load two ships with grain for Malta. This must have been an extraordinary act of generosity which remained memorable and as such became known to the meticulous narrator of

those events. Grain is a commodity which is always welcome to Malta, and most probably Topal Osman during his stay in the Island had become aware of the ever present need of such an indispensable commodity. He might even have heard the popular saying: "*Malta qatt ma rroftat qamh!*"

After his departure from Constantinople, Mr. Arnaud, the Captain of the Port of Malta, disappears from the scene; his name does not appear again in Friar Leander's narration, but the name of Topal Osman occurs again and again. His personality must have impressed the author of the book to such an extent as to make him follow the career of that extraordinary Turk. This man must have been a person of rare qualities, he certainly entertained views and opinions which, to say the least, were not unacceptable by the Christians. He remained well disposed towards them throughout his life, which unluckily came to a sad end by the fortunes of war.

The Ottoman Empire had extended far and wide; it had subdued the whole of the Near and Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula became subject to Turkish rule, but Persia resisted invasion and opposed Turkish influence and penetration. A state of tension developed between the two countries, which on various occasions flared into open hostilities. In 1731, Persia invaded that province of the Turkish Empire now known as Iraq, and laid siege to Babylon, that famous capital of the ancient Babylonian Empire situated in the Euphrates Valley.

The Commander of the Persian army was Tamas-Koli-Kan, a famous general whose exploits had, on more occasions than one, humbled the proud armies of Turkey. The Sultan was alarmed at the reverses suffered by his forces and wished to deal a shattering blow to his enemies, for which reason he gathered a force of 200,000 men whom he placed under the command of his Grand Vizier, the Pashà Topal Osman.

Topal Osman led his army in a rapid advance into Mesopotamia and established his headquarters in Niniveh, which was two days distance from Babylon. There he rested his men and at the same time he laid his plans for a full scale attack on the Persian Army. He also found means to communicate with Ahmet Pashà, the Governor of Babylon. Meanwhile conditions in the besieged city were becoming desperate; hunger and disease were undermining its defence, and Ahmet Pashà wished to urge Topal Osman to take immediate action for the relief of the beleaguered city. He sent a message with a runner who succeeded to evade the besieging Persian army and reached Topal Osman.

On hearing the plight of the besieged garrison, the Turkish Commander decided to open the attack. He sent a message by means of a homing pigeon promising to give battle on the following Sunday morning and instructing the defender of Babylon, Ahmet Pashà, to sally forth from the City and attack with all his forces, so that the enemy will be crushed between two fronts.

The Persian General Tamas-Koli-Kan, however was not a man to be taken by surprise; being unaware of the intention of his opponent, he marched his army along the bank of the river Tigris and by a lightning move, he brought his legions right in front of the Turkish camp causing amazement and consternation in the ranks of Osman's army. In the confusion that ensued, some elements of the Turkish army lost heart and began to withdraw, others moved to follow suit, and were it not for the courage of the leader, the redoubtable

Topal Osman, a general retreat would have developed into a terrible rout, but he immediately took a firm stand, he ordered all his captians to halt their men and immediately gave the signal for a general attack on the Persians. The latter after a long march were tired and unprepared for the attack and after a fierce battle that lasted more than three hours, the Persians were defeated and Topal Osman remained victorious. At the same time Ahmet Pashà the defender of Babylon, sallied forth and attacked the units of the Persian army that were still besieging the city and destroyed them with fire and sword.

On Tuesday Topal Osman entered victorious in Babylon; he had won a resounding victory and relieved the town, but he had not destroyed his redoubtable foe, the Persian Tamas-Koli-Kan. That resourceful general had escaped with the remanents of his beaten army and took refuge in Amadan, a small town near the border of Persia, that could be reached only through a narrow pass between the Caucasus Mountains. The Grand Vizier sent four Pashàs in pursuit, but instead of forcing the pass, they preferred to close it with their men and wait until reinforcements arrived from Babylon.

Meanwhile the Persian general was hurriedly reforming his army; he enlisted new men, gathered old soldiers and pressed into his service all horsemen on whom he could lay his hands. In twenty-six days, he had under his command another big army and was again ready for combat; he was a crafty man as well as a good strategist, and was ready to cheat the enemy as well as fight him. He sent a trusted man disguised as a Turkish carrier, who went in a round-about way over the mountains, with a message purporting to come from Topal Osman advising the four Pashàs to keep watching the Persians and promising them reinforcements that were already on their way to help them vanquish the Persian hordes. Following the false carrier, the wily Tamas-Koli-Kan sent 400 selected men disguised as Turkish janissaries, who traversed the mountains and having reached the road from Babylon, they marched along that way as if they were Turkish reinforcements coming from Topal Osman.

The four Pashàs guarding the pass were elated when in the distance they saw a column of soldiers coming from the direction of Babylon. They blessed Topal Osman for sending his reinforcements so quickly; but at that very moment, the Persian general erupted with all his might and charged along the pass with his hordes. The army of the Pashàs could not stand the impact and withdrew with the intention to make a stand on joining the presumed reinforcements; but the latter gave them a hot reception and cut them to pieces.

The Persian general lost no time, but pressed forward in great haste towards Babylon hoping to reach that city before the news of the Pashàs defeat arrived. In this he was also successful, and after two days and nights of hard marching, he reached the banks of the river Tigris on the outskirts of Babylon. One or two beduins had eluded the Persians and entered the city bringing news of Tamas-Koli-Kan's rapid advance, but nobody paid any attention to them and they were sent to prison for their pains. The Turkish generals were still celebrating their victory and the soldiers were enjoying the delights of Babylon. It was inconceivable for them that Tamas-Koli-Kan could raise a new army and approach Babylon so soon after his crushing defeat; but their confidence was

shattered when the guards on the watch-towers over the bastions observed the advancing Persian army and sounded the alarm.

The Grand Vizier decided to give battle without delay; he ordered his army out of the walls and attacked furiously, but Tamas-Koli-Kan had dug in on the banks of the river and had his troops entrenched behind the sand dunes, where they sustained the furious onslaughts; then when the Turkish forces had exhausted themselves, the Persians counterattacked with all their might, and after two hours of fierce fighting, Turkish resistance began to crack and in a final effort the Persians vanquished the Ottoman army. The Grand Vizier endeavoured by every means to rally his forces, but his guards had lost their courage and in the terrible slaughter that ensued, he was left to his fate. The fearless Topal Osman did not concede defeat, he continued to fight fiercely and even when surrounded on all sides by his enemies, he did not waver, but wielded his sword with all his might until he was pierced by a lance and killed in action. His head was cut and carried to the Persian general as a token of victory.

Thus came to an end the life of a very remarkable man, a man of vast experience whose outlook was far in advance of his time. He had sympathy and understanding and was capable of rising above national prejudice, and extending the hand of friendship to men of goodwill irrespective of their race or creed.

CONCLUSION:

The story related by Friar Leander has its moral in that it proves that the fortunes of most of the men of Malta are usually linked with the sea, from which one may deduce that the Island has always played her part in the affairs of the Mediterranean. He also demonstrated that it is not impossible for men of goodwill to understand each other and to extend the hand of friendship even if they belong to opposite camps as was the case of the Captain of the Port of Malta and the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire.