

THE 'BUONA UNIONE': AN EPISODE IN
VENETO-MALTESE RELATIONS IN
THE LATE XVIII CENTURY

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ON July 6, 1781 the *Buona Unione*, a relatively small, strongly built, two-masted coasting vessel, or *checcio*, flying a Venetian flag, arrived in the vicinity of Marsamxetto Harbour. It was under the command of the Venetian Captain Girolamo Padella. The vessel, chartered by some Tunisian merchants, had left Alexandria on May 12 with a crew of nine, Padella included, together with eighteen Turkish passengers, destined for Sfax.¹ It was carrying a cargo of two-hundred bales of linen, one-hundred sacks of rice, eight bales of wool and camel fur together with small quantities of other soft goods.² During the trip, on the 20th May, (i.e. eight days from *Buona Unione's* departure from Alexandria) plague broke out on board the vessel. Within nineteen days, four members of the crew and ten passengers breathed their last; the former 'morti in cinque soli giorni di male'; the latter 'morti in tre soli giorni'. They had 'diverse macchiature sparse per il corpo, e cancerenose'.³ The last to die was on the 10th of June. The vessel had tried to anchor first at the Island of Scrico, then on the 15th of June at Sfax itself, but was driven away as neither port had a Lazaretto to purge it from its contagious malady.⁴ At Sfax, strangely enough, 'due marinari mori' joined the crew.⁵

¹ *Archives of the Order of Malta* (A.O.M.), Ms. 273, *Liber Conciliorum Status*, f. 255.

² A.O.M., Ms. 6531, *Registro degli Arrivi di Bastimenti in Quarantena, sub die* July 6, 1781.

³ *Archives of the Inquisitor, Mdina* (A.I.M.), *Lettere alla Segretaria di Stato*, Vol. V, *sub die*, June 14, 1781. ff. IIIv-112v.

⁴ A.O.M., Ms. 273, *Liber Conciliorum Status*, ff. 255-256. Paul Cassar, in his scholarly *Medical History of Malta*, (London, Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1964), includes, in pages 287-288, a passing reference to this incident, apparently based on P. Doublet's *Memoires historiques sur l'invasion et l'occupation de Malte* (Paris, 1883; pp. 73-79). Further investigations reveal that this source contains too many inexact and at times incorrect details.

⁵ A.I.M., *Memorie*, Zondadari, Vol. 1, ff. 211r-212v. On the same day of *Buona Unione's* arrival, another Venetian *polacca*, SS. *Trinità e S. Spiridione*, (Capt.

Malta's unique position, halfway between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean, had many precious advantages to offer, notwithstanding the continuously trade-disrupting presence of corsairing, Barbary or otherwise, infesting its surrounding waters. It offered commercial activity a safe harbour with very favourable, attractive and convenient conditions for sheltering, refitting, provisioning and above all well-organized, thorough quarantine services, let alone the relatively low customs duties. The Maltese Lazaretto was one of the best in the Mediterranean, superior even at times to that of Marseilles. The Bills of Health issued by Maltese Health authorities must have been among the first in all Europe. During the last century of the Order's stay on the Island, Malta was playing a prominent, if not a leading, role as a base for merchandise between East and West and an efficient centre for exchange.⁶

Malta's proximity to northern African ports and the Near East enforced her to be constantly on the alert for any plague outbreaks. Corsairing, with its resultant slavery and prize-cargoes arriving regularly at the Island from Barbary coasts and elsewhere is likely to have contributed substantially to the awareness that strict quarantine regulations were the safest

Crasan Antipa from Cefalonia) entered our harbour. It had a clean Bill of Health, dated June 29, issued by the Venetian Consul in Tunis. Attached to it was the following Declaration: 'Si avisa come il giorno 15 corrente giunse in Sfax un Bastimento veneziano procedente da Alessandria con morbo contagioso per cui li erano morti venti persone tra equipaggio e Pass.ri che per ciò questo Governo la fatto subito scacciare per andare altrove a far la 40.na'. The following day, the Maltese Brig, *SS. Crocifisso e S. Lorenzo*, flying the Order's flag, entered the Maltese Port. It was coming from Tripoli under the command of Capt. Francesco Farrugia, from Senglea. Its clean Bill of Health, issued from the French Consul in Tripoli on June 23, had the following Declaration attached to it: 'Declarons... qu'il est arrivè le 2 du Mois un Batiment venetien venant l'Alexandrie ou il y avait Peste, parti le soir pour Alger sans debarquer des marchandise ni debarquer des Passagiers.' A.O.M., Ms. 6531, *Registro... Quarantena, sub die* July 6, and July 7, 1781.

In A.I.M., *Memorie*, Zondadori, Vol. 1, f.217, we came across this related informative note: 'Articolo di lettera del Protosicillo, o sia Paroco in Tunisi del Patriarca d'Alessandria Eutimio, scritta li 18 Giugno 1781 al Capitan Grassano Antipa Veneziano in Susa, e alli 6 Luglio ancorato in Malta. ... "È qui giunto un Bastimento d'Alessandria Svezzese infatto su' cui gl'erano morti quattro Marinari, ed Undici Mori. Qui il Bej non l'ha ricevuto, e lo cacciato via."'

⁶Cf. My forthcoming paper 'Malta as a Port of Call in the mid-XVIII century: a glimpse at the Quarantine Registers.' See also: Brian Blouet, *The Story of Malta*, (London, Faber & Faber, 1967), Chapter 6, pp.122-140, 'Industry, Trade and Finance'; and Jacques Godechot, 'La France et Malte au XVIII^e Siecle', *Revue historique*, Vol. CCVI (July-Sept. 1951) pp.67-79.

means to ward off the introduction and spread of plague and other dreadful scourges.⁷ Two were the primary motives behind these serious quarantine precautions, namely: to safeguard public health and to protect peaceful commercial intercourse between other nations. There were three classes of Bills of Health: a clean Bill of Health (*patente netta*), a suspected Bill of Health (*patente sospetta*) and a foul Bill of Health (*patente brutta*). The first applied to those vessels coming from ports or cities enjoying perfectly healthy conditions; in the second category were included those vessels coming from ports also enjoying perfectly healthy conditions, 'ma che nelle vicinanze del luogo della procedenza... vi è il male contagioso, o che sia arrivato in quel luogo altro Bastimento prov:te da luogo contagioso, il quale senza la debita quarantena sia stato messo in libera pratica'; the third class applied to vessels simply and solely 'provenienti da luogo dove attualmente ed affettivamente vi è il male contagioso.'⁸ Cassar pertinently points out that 'No regard was paid to personal liberty, property or international commerce, once there was the possibility that disease, especially plague could be introduced into the island.'⁹

No wonder, then, that immediately on the appearance of the *Buona Unione* at Marsamxetto Harbour, the Maltese Health Officials bade the Captain to leave the port at once. Padella adamantly maintained that he could not, and would not leave harbour because of the terribly desperate condition of his crew and passengers. He informed the commissioners that the moment he was aware that there was plague on board his ketch, strict precautions were taken. The hatchway to the ship's hold and passageway, together with that cabin where passengers' belongings were stored, were barred and kept out of bounds. Those who survived had to stay either on deck or quarterdeck. One of the mariners later confessed that those who were indeed lucky enough to have survived were so horribly frightened by the outcome of the plague visitation that they were almost literally stunned into paralysis with the result that 'varj cadaveri non fossero stati gettati in mare'.¹⁰

⁷ Joseph Galea, 'The Quarantine Services and the Lazzaretto of Malta', *Melita Historica* Vol. 4. No. 3 (1966), pp. 184-209; Paul Cassar, *op. cit.* pp. 164-175.

⁸ A.O.M., Ms. 274, *Liber Conciliorum Status*, ff. 100r-101v, 'Chirografo Mag. le relativo alla Quarantena', 6. Nov. 1786; For further details see *Diritto Municipale di Malta*, (Malta, F. Cumbo, 1843) Bk. VII, 'Miscellaneo', Ch. 11, pp. 205-225.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 287.

¹⁰ A.I.M., *Lettere alla Segreteria di Stato*, Vol. V, *sub die* June 14, 1781, ff. 111v-112v.

Following Padella's refusal to leave, Grandmaster de Rohan immediately summoned a meeting of the Health Council in which the past Health Commissioners and the Protomedico participated. It was unanimously agreed that scrupulously meticulous steps should be taken to expel the plague-infected Venetian *checcio* from these waters. The health of the island was in great jeopardy. In case the Captain obstinately refused, then, and only then, would the authorities have to submit 'l'equipaggio a rigidissimo spurgo'. Every living person on board would have to disembark naked, 'pass through' the sea to the Lazaretto where they would be provided with new clothes by their respective consul. As for the *Buona Unione*, all precautions would have to be taken instantly to set it on fire: ketch, cargo and all. Paul Cassar, echoing Doublet, states that the idea of setting the vessel on fire was just one of three proposals the Council of State had proffered with regard to its disposal. The other two alternatives, in the words of the same historian, were:

- (i) to sink the ship in one of the Bays round the coast and to leave it submerged for a certain period of time, until it was purified of its 'contagious miasma'; and afterwards to refloat it and return it to its owners.
- (ii) to disinfect the vessel by opening all apertures to allow a free-circulation of air, the whole operation to be carried out by forty or fifty slaves or convicts.¹¹

Furthermore, the Commissioners petitioned the Grandmaster to provide for an up-to-date compilation of internationally accepted laws of health to be carried out either by amendment or by the introduction of new legislation in order to re-inforce the rather feeble ones then current in Malta.¹² In fact, the Grandmaster and Council nominated and appointed the Balí of Brandenburg, Fra Enrico B.ne de Truches, Balí Fra Antonio Loes and Com.re Fra Gio. Batta Amalfitani, so that, together with the Health Commissioners would undertake the new compilation of Health Laws; and carry out, in perfect execution, both the purging of the crew and passengers and the burning of the vessel with its entire cargo.

Three days after the vessel's arrival here, the Health Commissioners,

¹¹ Paul Cassar, *op. cit.*, p. 288; P. Doublet, *op. cit.*, p. 76. I have so far failed to trace any mention of, or reference to these two other alternatives in the *Libri Conciliorum Status*, the Health Commission's report in the *Registri... Quarantena*, the *Venetian State Archives*, or elsewhere.

¹² A.O.M., Ms. 273, *Liber Conciliorum Status*, f. 256.

accompanied by Antonio Pussieligues, the Consul for the Venetian Republic in Malta, went to speak to Captain Padella and his crew.¹³ Their motive was to try to persuade them to depart, offering them all the necessities they would require in preparation to sail for Tunis or Marseilles where they were sure to be welcomed, considering that at either Port there was a Lazaretto sufficiently equipped for the purpose.¹⁴ Padella and his men answered that if Maltese Port Authorities were to force them away, they were determined to sail to the not-far-away Sicilian shores and wreck the vessel there and swim ashore to save their lives. This, obviously enough, would cause great havoc and harm to the Kingdom of Sicily and the whole of the adjacent Peninsula.¹⁵

The Commission's suggestions, instructions and precautions had, ultimately, to be adhered to. The Health Officials together with the four 'signori del Consiglio Ordinario', then passed to the Lazaretto to choose the safest and most suitable place for both crew and passengers to spend quarantine in.¹⁶

In the presence of the Health Officers, and accompanied by various other 'barche di sanità' in the vicinity of the Lazaretto, all passengers, crew members and captain undressed and plunged themselves more than once into the sea. They were then led into their respective quarantine places, where they were provided with new clothes by the consul of the country whose flag the ketch was flying.¹⁷ Two guardians, Giuseppe Cupidi and Saverio Borg, were assigned to look after them. Meanwhile, it was noticed that one of the passengers, a certain Hag Hsein Betteh by name, from Gerba, could hardly walk; he had his body examined and a suspect carbuncle, clearly and obviously a pestilent symptom, was discovered four fingers' breadth below the inguinal glands above his left

¹³ Antonio Pussieligues had been appointed by Grandmaster Pinto Consul for the Venetians in Malta on the 22nd March 1765.

¹⁴ It is not irrelevant to note here that whereas Marseilles, which suffered a serious outbreak of plague in 1723, had sent observers to Malta to see the quarantine regulations at work, on December 24, 1786, in A.O.M., Ms. 274, *Liber Conciliorum Status*, ff. 105v-110r, 'Regolamento per questo Lazaretto', we come across the following note of information: '... aveva richiesto diversi schiaramenti agli Intendenti della Sanità di Marsiglia, e che in seguito del metodo che si tiene in d.ta Città aveva fatto con qualche cambiamento adattato alle circostanze di questo Lazaretto il Chirografo del tenor seguente...'

¹⁵ A.O.M., Ms. 6531, *Registro... Quarantena, sub die*, July 6, 1781.

¹⁶ For a brief history of the Maltese Lazaretto see: Paul Cassar, *op. cit.*, pp. 298-307. Joseph Galea, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-209.

¹⁷ A.O.M., Ms. 6531, *Registro... Quarantena, sub die* July 6, 1781.

thigh. He had been suffering from it for the past eight days. He was instantly separated from the rest, and placed at the remotest part of the Lazaretto. He was visited daily by the Protomedico. A similar fate touched one of the sailors, Pietro Damianovich from Perasto. He was experiencing an awfully bad headache and complaining of what turned out to be a paraesthesia in the internal aspect of his left thigh. He was similarly treated and looked after. Both were kept under the health-guardianship of Giovanni Borg.¹⁸

The infected vessel was towed carefully by means of a chain into St. Julian's Creek, a tiny harbour some five miles away from the city. For the sole purpose of preventing anybody from entering that Creek, from approaching the ketch, or, worse still, from trying 'to possess himself of any of her cargo that escaped destruction', the Grandmaster ordered certain safety measures to be taken. On land, a force of 150 soldiers, with their Knights-Officers and Officers of lower rank, was on duty; at sea, there was a large display of small, armed rowing-boats (*varie Caicchi e Barche di Guardia*) surrounding the mouth of that Harbour.¹⁹ The *Buona Unione*, together with its cargo, was then set on fire in the presence of the Commissioners and other Health Officers. Everything was reduced to ashes within forty-eight hours.²⁰

On September 19 both crew and passengers, having completed a 'double quarantine' (*doppia quarantena*) which had commenced on August 10, were granted *pratique*, i.e., licence to hold intercourse with port after quarantine. On October 17 Bettah was granted *pratique* too and eleven days later sailed to Tunis on board the Venetian *pollacca* called *Maria Stella Diana e S. Antonio di Padova*, under the command of Captain Antonio Nicolovich from Brazza. This vessel had arrived at Malta on September

¹⁸ *Ibidem*. See also, A.O.M., Ms. 273, *Liber Conciliorum Status*, f. 258, *sub die* August 10, 1781. By the 21st August the Turk's carbuncle was found to have made good progress, his wound skinned over. He was, once again, given new clothes and transferred to another room. He started 'double quarantine' on September 10 under the guardianship of Giovanni Borg. Giuseppe Darmanin, another guardian at the Lazaretto, was to look after the mariner.

¹⁹ A.I.M., *Lettere alla Segreteria di Stato*, Vol. V, *sub die* June 14, 1781, ff. 111v-112v. The *barche di guardia* according to the *Diritto Nuncipale di Malta*, pp. 206-207, '... dovranno... essere ben armate e fornite d'azzarine, e di moschetti a meccio, spontoni, brocchieri, palle, ed altre arme, munizioni, e provvisioni necessarie.'

²⁰ A.I.M., *Lettere alla Segreteria di Stato*, Vol. V, *sub die* June 14, 1781, ff. 111v-112v.

20 via Tunis and Bisetta.²¹ Damianovich left a fortnight later.

Just as in 1644 an unusually violent piratical action of the Order's galleys in the Levant had ushered in the twenty-four-year-long Cretan War, with Venice and Turkey as the main actors,²² so in 1781 thorough Maltese quarantine measures involved the Republic of San Marco in her last great effort for survival against Tunis (1784-1792), before the ultimately fatal Napoleonic blow.

Bey Hamuda of Tunis declared war on Venice on January 17, 1784, on the grounds that the latter had proudly refused to compensate for those damages which the Tunisian merchants had suffered on *Buona Unione* in 1781 when their merchandise had been utterly destroyed in Malta; had ignored the Bey's claim for an annual tribute;²³ and had failed to impress Tunis with Andrea Querini's special mission.²⁴ Querini, the Rear-Admiral of the Venetian fleet, having failed to negotiate peacefully with Hamuda, left Tunis on February 7, 1784. Two days later his relatively small squadron appeared at the Maltese Harbour. It was made up of Querini's *Serena* (vascello, 400 persone d'equipaggio), Capt. Antonio Marin Priuli's *Brillante* (fregata, 220 persone d'equipaggio), Capt. Esivich's *Cupido* (sciabecco, 220 persone d'equipaggio) and Capt. Antonio Sucovich's 'polacco' (10 persone d'equipaggio).²⁵ The squadron put to sea again on February

²¹ A.O.M., Ms 6531, *Registro... Quarantena, sub die* September 20, 1781.

²² B. dal Pozzo, *Historia della S. Religione Militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta*, (Verona, 1703-15), II, pp. 85ff; E. Rossi, *Storia della marina dell'Ordine di S. Giovanni di Gerusalemme, di Rodi e di Malta*, (Roma-Milano, 1926), pp. 68ff; R.C. Anderson, *Naval Wars in the Levant, 1559-1853*, (Liverpool, University Press, 1952), Ch. III, pp. 119-120. For the Cretan War proper see: G. Brusoni, *Historia dell'Ultima guerra tra Venezia e Turchi*, (Venezia, 1673); A. Valeria, *Guerra di Candia*, (Venetia, 1679); A. Guglielmotti, *Storia della marina Pontificia*, (Roma, 1886-1893), VIII, pp. 3-338; R.C. Anderson, *op.cit.*, Ch. IV and V, pp. 121-184.

²³ Roberto Cessi, *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia*, (Milano-Messina, Giuseppe Principato, 1968), II, Ch. VIII 'Agonia Crepuscolare', p. 274. According to Cassar, *op.cit.*, p. 288, and Doublet, *op.cit.*, p. 77, the Bey's claim to the right of an indemnity, equal in value to that of the burnt merchandise, had been initially forwarded to the Grandmaster who rejected it on the grounds that he had acted as any other fair-minded and civilised Government would, 'in the general interests of humanity'. See also: Antonio Battistella, *La Repubblica di Venezia ne' suoi undici secoli di Storia*, (Venezia, Carlo Ferrari, 1921), Ch. XXV, p. 764. The Tunisian merchants were claiming 14,000 zecchini. Salvatore Bono, *I Corsari Barbareschi*, (Torino, R.A.I., 1964), Ch. II, p. 64.

²⁴ R.C. Anderson, *op.cit.*, p. 310.

²⁵ A.O.M., Ms. 6531, *Registro... Quarantena, sub die* February 9, 1784.

27.²⁶ This squadron was the first of a long series of calls at Marsamxetto, or other Maltese harbours, of the Venetian fleet, either on its way to, or on its return from Tunis. The Nineteenth-Century Historian Panzavecchia sums up very neatly the Maltese response to, and the role the Order's experienced naval organisation played during the last Veneto-Tunisian war. 'Le squadre della repubblica di S.Marco,' he writes, 'trovarono adunque nel Porto di Malta un'altra Venezia nel Mediterraneo.'²⁷ The Maltese harbours with their sheltering capabilities, the Arsenal, an establishment, advanced by contemporary European standards, for the construction, maintenance, repair, storage and issue of warlike stores, the finely efficient quarantine service which for years had been attracting ships coming from every port of the Mediterranean world and elsewhere to the detriment of other maritime cities, the Lazaretto with its 'accomodation for passengers, animals and cargo from incoming ships, and its own crematorium and burial ground,'²⁸ and last but in no way least important, the Order's naval force, were, one and all, at the liberal disposal of the Venetian fleet. In fact, not long after the declaration of war, the *S. Giovanni*, *S. Caterina*, and *S. Elizabetta*, ships of war belonging to the Order, were entrusted with the double mission of fighting Barbary vessels and safe-guarding Venetian ships at war with Tunis.²⁹

On January 14, 1785 two Venetian merchantmen, the *Nostra Signora di Scopò* under the command of Capt. Giovanni Zarbarini, and the *SS. Redentore, la Madonna del Carmine e L'Anime del Purgatorio*, captained by Luca Locovich,³⁰ which had sailed from Venice exactly two months before, arrived in Malta, each carrying a cargo of munitions for the Venetian fleet. They had to stay in the Island until their captains received instructions from Admiral Angelo Emo what to do next.³¹ The latter arrived from Sicily

²⁶ *Royal Malta Library* (R.M.L.), Ms. 819, 'Bastimenti di Guerra a Malta, 1765-86', f. 83.

²⁷ F. Panzavecchia, *L'Ultimo Periodo della Storia di Malta sotto il Governo dell'Ordine Gerosolimitano*, (Malta, 1835), p. 267.

²⁸ Lionel Butler, 'The Order of St. John in Malta: An Historical Sketch', *XIII Council of Europe Exhibition: The Order of St. John in Malta*, (Valettea, St. Paul's Press, 1970), p. 40.

²⁹ E. Rossi, *op. cit.*, Pt. I, Ch. VI, p. 91.

³⁰ A.O.M., Ms. 6531, *Registro... Quarantena, sub die*, January 14, 1785.

³¹ *Ibidem*; Inquisitor Zondadari had this brief note to include in his *Memorie*: 'Venuto in questo porto un'altra volta l'Ammiraglio Veneto Emo con una piccola squadra di vascelli. Mandai il mio Segretario a complimentarlo, ed egli mi mandò il Console. Io poi fui a Bordo a fargli visita dove ebbi gli onori fatti agli altri Ministri. Il giorno dopo di mattina venne Egli a farmi visita, e lo trattai di cioc-

on the same day, with two vessels and a fregate, the *Fama*, the *Concordia* and the *Palma*. They were apparently waiting for another four vessels coming from the Adriatic. The rest of Emo's fleet had to remain anchored in Trapani, partly due to the salvage of a broken ship's cargo, and partly to the fact that two-hundred members of the crew were taken ill and were not in a condition to sail. While in harbour the Admiral expected that he should be saluted from the city, in spite of his having simultaneously declined to give the usual salute to the *Religion's* Standard; consequently a section of the Maltese navy refused to give the Venetian Admiral the honours due to his high office.³² On 22nd March Emo was back at Trapani from where he left once more on June 21 to reappear in Malta two days later.³³ The *Serena*, under Vice-Admiral Querini, together with another fregate, sailed from Corfù and joined Emo's fleet in Malta on July 19. During their sojourn here 40 year-old Venetian sailor, Giovanni Fiorenza joined the way of all flesh.³⁴ The *Vittoria*, captained by Benedetto Trevisan, arrived in Malta from Istria, via Corfù, on July 30, also to join the Venetian fleet. During its stay here three members of the crew, 36 year-old Stefano Stella, 40 year-old soldier Damian Salcovich and 28 year-old sailor Giuseppe Zarcon, passed away. Part of the vessel, 'l'albero di Parrocchetta' needed reconstruction.³⁵

The Venetian Senate must have indeed felt very grateful to the Order of St. John and the Maltese for the unending assistance and meticulous attention these two were constantly giving the Venetian fleet. This they did in more ways than one. As has already been pointed out earlier, the protection of Mediterranean sea-borne trade and the safeguarding of the coasts of Malta had always been the leading two of the many positive objectives behind the *raison d'etre* of the Order's remarkable maritime force, in spite of the latter's steady decline in the 18th century.³⁶ Scaring

colata perche cosi aveva fatto Egli. Nel fare queste visite è bene accordar sempre prima col console il trattamento reciproco.' A.I.M., *Memorie*, Zondadari, I, February, 1785, f.LI. For information about Angelo Emo, see: E. Pesenti, *Angelo Emo e la Marina veneta del suo tempo* (Venezia, 1899); R.C. Anderson, *op.cit.*, pp. 308-309.

³² A.I.M., *Lettere alla Segretaria di Stato*, V, Zondadari, f. 160v.

³³ R.C. Anderson, *op.cit.*, p. 311.

³⁴ A.O.M., Ms. 6531, *Registro... Quarantena, sub die*, July 19, 1785.

³⁵ *Ibidem, sub die*, July 30, 1785.

³⁶ Joseph Mizzi, *Catalogue of the Records of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in the Royal Malta Library*, XII, (Malta, R. University Press, 1968), p. 7; Peter Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary* (London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970), pp. 104-7; F. Panzavecchia, *op.cit.*, p. xi.

away Barbary piracy from the Western Mediterranean, to which the Order's corsairing activity was mainly confined by then, must have proved very beneficial to the Venetian struggle against Tunis in the mid and later 1780's. In mid-1785, it was learned from a Ragusan vessel visiting the Harbour that 'sciambecchi Algerini' were close by Maltese territorial waters.³⁷ On February 11, 1785 and March 19, 1786 the *S. Caterina* and the *S. Elizabetta* were both instructed to cruise along the southern coasts of Italy, France, Spain and Sardegna, 'corseggiando contro li legni Barbareschi'.³⁸ On July 9, 1786 two galleys sailed out 'per quindici giorni di Crociera', to protect commerce 'contro li legni nemici in questi mari'.³⁹ The following month the whole galley squadron under Balí Fra Bartolomeo Ruspoli, Captain General of the Order, put to sea on a forty-day cruise 'per fare il corso contri i legni nemici in questi mari, e su le coste d'Italia'.⁴⁰ Very early in September of the same year the *S. Zaccaria* and two frigates were entrusted with a similar mission 'e specialmente in traccia della Squadra Algerina'.⁴¹ This crusading activity on the Order's part must have proved of inestimable value to the Venetian fighting force. Moreover, Malta was supplying Emo's fleet with almost everyday needs. The shipyard gave it a splendid repair base. The warehouses were rarely kept empty. Regular cargoes were entering the Harbour from the Adriatic to meet the needs of the Venetians in Malta. On November 14, 1784, for example, the *Nostra Signora di Scopò* left Venice 'carica con munizione di guerra per la Squadra veneta' in Malta. On January 16, 1785, i.e., two days after its arrival here, 'si sono fatti depositare nella Polverista del Coradino 200 Barrili Polvere per evitare qualche disgrazia.' Accompanying it was the *SS. Redentore e la Madonna del Carmine e L'Anime del Purgatorio*, also laden with 'munizione di guerra per la Squadra veneta'.⁴² On January 23, 1786, under the command of Capt. Marco Antonio Bersatich from Brazza, the Venetian trawler *Madonna del Carmine* entered St. Paul's Creek in the north-eastern coast of Malta, with a cargo of '1200 Barrili in circa vino di ... Brazza per servizio della Squadra Veneta'.⁴³ During the Veneto-Tunisian War, Venetian shipping in Malta reached its peak. The

³⁷ A.I.M., *Lettere alla Segreteria di Stato*, V, Zondadari, *sub die*, August 13, 1785, f. 172v.

³⁸ A.O.M., Ms. 274, *Liber Conciliorum Status*, ff. 48, 68v-69.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 71.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, ff. 71v-72.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, f. 85.

⁴² A.O.M., Ms. 6531, *Registro... Quarantena*, *sub die*, January 14, 1785.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, *sub die*, January 23, 1786.

Maltese, too, must have profited from this. G.A. Vassallo, another Maltese nineteenth-century historian had this to say: 'I Veneti continuarono nella frequenza de' nostri porti, ed il popolo ne profittava sempre. Quella frequenza, onde Malta era in continuo contatto colla Barbaria, fece che Rohan publicasse (1789) nuovi regolamenti sanitarj.'⁴⁴ On the other hand Panzavecchia commented like this:

'Di questa generosa esibizione fatta dall'Ordine all'emula repubblica, i Maltesi furono quei che risentirono i più ampj vantaggi. La dintuma stazione delle Squadre venete in Malta ci fu tramandata dai nostri antichi come l'epocha della splendidezza, del lusso e della profusione. Una gara continua fra questi due governi aristocratici in breve spazio di tempo sollevò le arti languenti, ed ogni specie d'industria, e la porzione laboriosa dell'isola videsi ridotta ad uno stato d'una generale agiatezza.'⁴⁵

Besides, it is very relevant at this junction to quote parts of the *Pancarta delli Dritti che spettano all'Attuario della Sanità ed al Protomedico sopra gli Bastimenti Merchanti che approderanno in questo Porto, ad effetto, di dover purgare la contumacia, o pure scaricare effetti*, issued on June 10, 1783.⁴⁶

- I. Qualunque Bastimento, che farà la quarantena in questo Porto pagherà per diritto di Visita scudi tre, e sono tari venti per l'attuario, e tari sedici per il Protomedico.
- II. Se detto Bastimento dopo alcuni giorni lascia il Guardiano nel Lazaretto, e parte senza terminare la quarantena cominciata pagherà il sopradetto diritto di visita.
- III. Qualunque Bastimento carico con commestibile, il quale domanda di scaricare, e partire, se scarica l'intiero carico, o metà, a colui a chi apparterrà detto commestibile, pagherà il diritto di

⁴⁴ *Storia di Malta*, (Malta, Muscat, 1890), p.605, With reference to the urgent need for new sanitary regulations and laws due to Malta's proximity to the Barbary coasts, I quote part of Inquisitor Zondadari's letter which he wrote to the Segretaria di Stato on July 16, 1785: 'Funeste... sono le notizie di Tripolo portateci da altro Bastimento francese partito di poco da quel Porto e più specialmente dalle lettere scritte da quel Console di Francia, a questo Uomo del Re, Cav. de Caumont. L'epidemia aggiunta alla total mancanza de' viveri, si è poi convertita in vera Peste, per la quale ne' giorni passati morivano di già circa 200 persone al giorno, numero più singolarmente grande in una città come quella di piccola estensione.' A.I.M., *Lettere alla Segretaria di Stato*, V, Zondadari, f.170r.

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, pp.267-268.

⁴⁶ A.O.M., Ms. 274, *Liber Conciliorum Status*, ff.2v-4.

Visita ai sopradetti: Discaricando una piccola porzione, purchè sia del valore di Scudi cinquanta pagherà tari venti al solo Attuario. Facendo però il sopradetto Bastimento la quarantena, allora discaricando tutto, o metà, o pure una porzione, come abbiám detto, e che detto Commestibile non sarà per conto proprio del Capitano dell'istesso Bastimento, pagherà tari venti al solo Attuario; e ciò oltre il diritto, che si suole passare nel mandato, il giorno prima della pratica al Bastimento.

- IV. Da qualunque Bastimento, che si disbarcherà nel Magazzino della Consegna, o nel Lazzaretto cera, tabacco, o Catrame, ed altri simili effetti soggetti alla quarantena uguale a quella delli Bastimenti ogni cinquanta pagherà il giorno della pratica, o prima se mai sarà ripresa tari vento all'Attuario.
- VIII. Un Bastimento, il quale dopo aversi trattenuto in questo Porto diversi giorni senza aver discaricato sorte veruna di mercanzia, e prima di partire domanda un'attestato delli giorni rimasti in detto Porto, oltre l'attestato pagherà tari venti all'Attuario.
- XI. Qualunque Passeg.re, o Marinaro, che da un Bastimento passa su d'un altro per partire in quarantena pagherà tari venti all'Attuario.
- XII. Qualunque effetti, che da un Bastimento si trasportano in un'altro per mandarli altra parte, essendo del valsente di scudi cinquanta pagheranno tari venti all'Attuario.
- XIII. Ritrovandosi in questo Porto qualunque Bastimento da guerra, il Capitano del quale domanderà di pigliare a bordo suo qualche Passeggiere o Marinaro, o sian effetti, dal bordo d'un Bastimento mercante, detto Passeggiere, Marinaro, o pure effetti, non pagheranno nessun diritto. Frattandosi però, che il sud.to Passeggiere o Marinaro ecc. domandano essi di passare a bordo del Bastimento di Guerra per maggior vantaggio loro, pagheranno tari venti all'Attuario.
- XIV. Colui che sarà provisto dell'Impiego di Guardiano della Sanità pagherà tari venti all'Attuario, e da qualunque Guardia, e che farà pagherà al medesimo un tari.
- XV. Qualunque Cadavere, che si spellirà nell Lazzaretto pagherà tari venti all'Attuario, e tari sedici al Protomedico.
- XVI. Qualunque estratto dei Libri si pagherà tari dodici, e qualunque attestato tari otto.

XVII. Per qualunque visita, che il Protomedico farà nella Quarantena a uno, o più Passeg.ri, o sian Marinari d'un Bastimento si pagherà tari otto.

These excerpts from the *Pancarta* give a very limited picture of what specific duties all incoming vessels, of whatever nationality, had to pay for quarantine and other related services rendered to them within the Maltese Port. Unfortunately, no serious research has yet been made on Maltese customs-duties during the Order's rule.

During this war, Venice and Malta, two aristocratic, maritime republics, seemed as close as never before. This is made clear by a letter written by the Grandmaster on September 10, 1785 addressed to Balio Mirelli, the Order's Receiver in Venice, in answer to the latter's of August 6. I quote from de Rohan's letter:⁴⁷

'Compięgato nel foglio dei 6 agosto trovammo con vera sodisfazione copia dell'ufficio passatovi dall'Ecc.mo Senato riguardo all'attenzioni usate alla Squadra Veneta. In questa circostanza ravvisammo le preziose espressioni delle quali si è compiaciuto servirsi nel gradirle. Onde v'incarichiamo di rassegnare al riferito Senato la nostra riconoscenza nella maniera più obbligante e convincente, assicurando cotesto Ser.mo Governo, che tanto noi, che la nostra Religione si fa un pregio, come ha fatto sempre di dare riprove del n.ro particolar ossequio, e premura per tutto ciò, che ridonda in servizio del medesimo.'

Once again Emo arrived in Malta on his way back from Tunisian waters on November 8, 1785, followed by the rest of his fleet. This consisted of the *Fama* (nave, Emo, 550 men), *Palma*, (fregata, Capt. Duodo, 300 men), *Destruzione* (bombarda, Capt. Duplessi, 120 men), and *Cupido* (sciambeco, Capt. Costanzi). The latter, on Emo's orders, helped to transport water to the *Eolo* (vascello, Capt. Basagio, 500 men), which, together with the *Polonia* (bombarda, Capt. Tomasi), had to remain out of harbour for two more days due to bad weather.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ A.O.M., Ms. 1536, *Corrispondenza* (a. 1785), *sub die*, Sept. 10, 1785 'Al V.do Ricevitore Balio Mirelli.' Venezia.

⁴⁸ A.O.M., Ms. 6531, *Registro... Quarantena, sub die*, November 8, 10, 1785. On the latter date we find this note: 'Dalla Fregata, mori un Marinaro Gioacchino Fabrizio veneto da quattro mesi che si ritrova infermo da una caduta sofferta nella stiva della fregata e avendosi per cosato la ragion del torace corse in un sputo di sangue e per qualche tempo ricorrentemente si faceva mostrare accompnato con tosse e febbre...'

Attempts at peace negotiations between Emo and the Tunisian Bey were not carried out directly but through Capt. Pasquale Scarmicchia, from Gibraltar, who acted as intermediary between the two parties. Messages, letters and other documentation were exchanged on board the English vessel *General Boyd*. Bound for Tunis, this arrived in Malta a week or so after Emo, carrying dispatches for him, and returned immediately to Tunis.⁴⁹ *General Boyd* appears again in Malta from Tunis on New Year's Day, 1786. It was carrying 'un fagotto pelli e sei cassetti Datteri per l'Ammiraglio Emo veneziano...'. Scarmicchia 'domandò di lasciare il dispaccio per l'Ammiraglio veneto, disbarcare li pochi effetti e ritornare in Tunisi quando dall'Ammiraglio Emo gli sarà ordinato.'⁵⁰ With ships calling in and out of the Malta Harbour regularly, the whereabouts of the Venetian fleet could be fairly easily known, Emo's lines of attack easily detected. In mid-1785 for example a Ragusan ship pointed out that the Venetian Admiral had 'bombarded' the city of Susa and was about to do the same to the fortress of Anguilla.⁵¹

The *Sirena* and the *Eolo* fitted out and set sail eastward from Malta early in December 1785, entrusted with the sole task of protecting Venetian commerce. The *Concordia* and the *Esploratore* sailed westward, cruising this part of the Mediterranean between Malta and Trapani. On December 15, Emo sailed towards Tunis with his *Fama*, the *Vittoria* and the *Palma*.⁵² The whole Venetian squadron appears once again in Malta on May 24, 1786. It was assigned a forty-day quarantine 'in considerazione che in tutto il Regno di Tunisi e Tripoli la Peste a fatto, e presentamente va facendo gran stragge.'⁵³ It departed from Malta on July 24

⁴⁹ Ibidem, *sub die*, November 27, 1785; R.C. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 312. Too many of Anderson's dates do not correspond exactly to documentary evidence.

⁵⁰ A.O.M., Ms. 6531, *Registro... Quarantena, sub die*, January 1, 1786.

⁵¹ A.I.M., *Lettere alla Segretaria di Stato*, V, Zondadari, *sub die*, August 13, 1785.

⁵² R.C. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

⁵³ Three days later, two soldiers, the Venetian Francesco Zauchi and the Veronese Bartolomeo Zen, died on board the *Fama*, and the *Vittoria* respectively.

The following were the Health Guardians assigned to each of the Venetian ships: Giacomo Calleja (*Fama*), Giov. del Mar (*Eolo*), Francesco Calleja (*Vittoria*), Giov. Batt.a Attard (*Concordia*), Franco Borg (*Palma*), Antonio Attard (*Distruzione*), Stefano Zammit (*Polonia*), Vincenzo Gatt (*Nettuno*) and Saverio Borg (*Esploratore*). A.O.M., Ms. 6531, *Registro... Quarantena, sub die*, May 24, 1786.

From Sfax, prior to their coming to Malta, 'spedi un sciabecco per alcune provisioni nell'Isola di Lampedusa dove praticò con un Bastimento francese, il

'con un guardiano di Sanità a bordo di ciascedun di essi all'eccezione delle due Bombarde.'⁵⁴

They arrived at Biserta on the same day. Two days later the following incident happened:

... essendo tutta la squadra ancorata nella Rada di Biserta uscì da quel Porto una Martengana, benchè con Bandiera Turca equipaggiata con marinari cristiani, e che per ordine dell'Ammiraglio diede fondo a canto la sua nave, e chiamata all'ubbidienza il Cap.n di questa si portò nel suo Caicco sotto la Poppa della nave, e siccome fra i marinari d'esso caicco ritrovavarsi un Maltese di nome Vincenzo Marquet della Floriana... Emo ebbe da lui distinta informazione riguardo la situazione della città e Castelli di Biserta, dopo di che lo rimandò a bordo suo avendoli permesso di proseguire il suo destinato viaggio per Tunisi, da dove dovea ricevere il passaporto per venirsene in Malta, ove giunse il di 12 Agosto con bandiera Genovese.'⁵⁵

The Venetian fleet had to wait in Malta for stores and provisions to arrive from Corfù and money from Leghorn.⁵⁶

Economic factors, coupled with the third Austro-Russo-Turkish crisis, induced the Venetian Senate to recall Emo back to Corfù, substituting him by Tommaso Condulmer who was now entrusted with a substantially different, and by far easier mission: to cruise along the Western Mediterranean, policing the area comprised by Sicily, Sardegna and Tunis, to protect commerce, especially from Tunisian corsairs.⁵⁷

In December 1790 the Grandmaster ordered two frigates which had already been at sea on a crusading business, to help Condulmer 'in tutte le maniere possibile' in his desperate needs near the coast of Cagliari, 'per dare una riprova dell'inalterabile attaccamento, che questo S.o Ordine

qual proveniva di Bengasi, si è anche saputo, che il medesimo sciabecco al suo ritorno da Lampedusa fu spedito in Tripoli, e che colà avea presi diversi provisioni per la Squadra.' A.O.M., Ms.274, *Liber Conciliorum Status*, f. 70.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ A.O.M., Ms.6531, *Registro... Quarantena, sub die*, August 21, 1786; A.O.M., Ms.274, *Liber Conciliorum Status*, f.84; E. Rossi, *op.cit.*, p.91.

⁵⁶ R.C. Anderson, *op.cit.*, pp. 312-3.

⁵⁷ R. Cessi, *op.cit.*, p.278, This nine-year Veneto-Tunisian war cost Venice 1,180,000 ducats. A. Battistella, *op.cit.*, p.768. This change of policy was strongly criticised by a sector of the Venetian Senate as deplorable and very dangerous *vis-a-vis* the turbulent European situation, the Turkish and Russian fleets in the Mediterranean and the Dutch Revolt, let alone the corsairing activity in the same sea.

professa verso la Ser.ma Rep.ca di Venezia.⁵⁸

The following year Emo was entrusted with his original task, his Squadron appearing for the last time in Malta on 1st December 1791, for purposes of repairing damages suffered during its encounter with the Tunisian Fleet at Goletta, and to shelter during the winter months.⁵⁹ During his stay in Malta Emo fell seriously ill. After consultation with the Promedico Lorenzo Thei and Dr. Francesco Gravagna, the Venetian Admiral was taken to Pussieligues's residence at Borgo Vilhena (Floriana) 'per respirare una miglior aria, e ristabilirsi in salute, dopo la lunga e penosa malattia da lui sofferta di fierissima colice.'⁶⁰ The Venetian Consul's house is described by Vincenzo Bonello as '... un casone con giardino, posto in alto, sulla cima di un Bastione che dominava da un estremità all'altra tutto il Gran Porto.'⁶¹ Admiral Angelo Emo died on the 1st March 1792.

Inquisitor Scotti's Report to the Segreteria di Stato reads as follows:

'Ma tre giorni appena, da che erasi colà trasferito, ha cessato di vivere quasi improvvisamente per incuria, ed ignoranza di questo Medico Magistrale Thei, il q.le ad un leggero attacco di polmoneo sopraggiuntogli non seppe apprestare i proporzionati rimedi. Ne deve ammettersi di rilevare, che l'infermo mancò di vita pochi minuti dopo, che il Medico aveva dichiarato, che stava benissimo.'⁶²

Condulmer was at that time in the vicinity of Tunis with a section of the Venetian fleet. The Grandmaster immediately summoned a Council meeting. A Commission was set up to advise the Grand Master and Council 'quali onori si debbano praticare in occasione della morte dell'Ammiraglio Angelo Emo.' The Commission was made up of Rev.do Fra Raimondo Albino Menville, Prior of the Conventual Church, together with three Grand Crosses: Ven.do Marisciallo Fra Carlo de Loras, Ven.do Balí Brandeburgo, Fra. Ferdinando B.ne Hompesch, who was later to succeed de Rohan in the Grandmastership, and Ven.do Balí Fra D.Mariano Cas-

⁵⁸ A.O.M., Ms. 274, *Liber Conciliorum Status*, f. 188v.

⁵⁹ F. Panzavecchia, *op. cit.*, p. 294; R.C. Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 315-317

⁶⁰ A.I.M., *Lettere alla Segreteria di Stato*, IV, f. 12, *sub die*, March 3, 1792.

⁶¹ 'La Morte e i Funerali di Angelo Emo a Malta', *Archivio Storico di Malta*, VIII (1937), p. 363.

⁶² Battistella had this to say about Emo's sudden death: '... corse voce fra il popolo essere la sua morte dovuta a veleno propinatogli dal Condulmer ambizioso di succedergli nel comando supremo; su di che si disputò lungo e non si concluse nulla.' *op. cit.*, p. 767.

caxares.⁶³ What follows is part of the Commissioners' *Relazione*.⁶⁴

... debbano da q.sto S.o Consig.o deputarsi quattro Venerandi Gran Croci delle quattro Nazioni, li quali come rappresentante questo Ven.do Consiglio, dovranno nel giorno destinato per il solenne trasporto trovarsi nella nostra maggior Chiesa Conv.le, e di là con tutto il clero della Sarrìa, dove preso il Cadavere per quella Strada, che si crederà più propria, lo accompagneranno fino a quel luogo nella Marina, dove si sarà stabilito, per farsi la formale consegna del med.mo al Vice Ammiraglio Veneto ... Un distaccamento delle Guardie debba situarsi nella Chiesa della Sarrìa, ed intorno al Cadavere nella Funzione ... Apriranno la Marcia le truppe delle Galere e delle Navi in lutto, cioè con le Bandiere spiegate, e strascinando per terra con li fucili rivoltati, con gli strumenti, e tamburi scordati e coperti di nero, e con gli Officiali in lutto. Quindi il disattaccamento delle Guardie di S.A.E. coprirà il Convoglio funebre, facendo Ala a dritto e sinistra.

Per tutta la strada, dove passerà il Convoglio, sarà schierato a dritta e sinistra il reggimento di Malta ugualmente in lutto, e nel caso del detto reggimento non sarà sufficiente attesa la lunghezza della Strada, si supplirà con distaccamento di altri Corpi, e passato che sarà il Convoglio funebre, le Truppe così schierate si anderanno a riunire, formando la retroguardia. Arrivato il Cadavere nel luogo, le Truppe delle Galere e delle Navi, che avranno aperta la Marcia, si metteranno in Battaglia secondo la loro anzianità, lasciando nel centro un intervallo sufficiente al Reggimento di Malta, ed alle altre Truppe, che formeranno la retroguardia per potersi schierare ugualmente in Battaglia.

Si farà la consegna del Cadavere ... schierate, faranno tre scariche, dopo le quali, Piazza dal solito luogo sotto la Baracca tirerà vent'un colpo di Cannone ...

Both Venice and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem had gone through a long Mediterranean history; both were once great, strong maritime Powers, and both had pursued an almost identical *raison d'etre*; while on the one hand the waning of the Republic of San Marco may be traced back to the late XVth and XVIth centuries when its colonial empire had been severely shaken, till it collapsed, by the steady advance and expansion of the Turkish power in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Levant, and by the oceanic discoveries with their fatal consequences on the role of the

⁶³ A.O.M., Ms. 274, *Liber Conciliorum Status*, ff. 198v-199r.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, ff. 199v-200.

Mediterranean in intercontinental trade; on the other hand, the decline of the Order of the Hospitallers, through the combination of the unstatic nature of its Grandmastership, clearly evident in the evolution from the original *primum inter pares* to the enlightened despotic Pinto of the late XVIII century, the multiple anachronism both of the international composition of its constitution and its professed role in the Holy War, may really be traced back not much later. Emo's death sounded the death-knell of the two aristocratic republics.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ A Peace Treaty was concluded between Venice and Tunis on 18th March 1792, i.e., a fortnight after Emo's death. Venice had to pay Tunis an indemnity of 40,000 zecchini. 'La sola arma capace di ridurre i cantoni barbareschi al ragionevolezza,' writes Roberto Cessi, 'era il denaro... unico serio ostacolo alla pace...' *op.cit.*, p.279. For the text of the Treaty, see: A. Rousseau, *Annales tunisiennes au aperçu historiques sur la Regence de Tunis*, (Paris, 1864), pp. 562-568.