MALTA'S ROLE IN MEDITERRANEAN AFFAIRS: 1530–1699

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The Captain-General Charles de Fayson Saint ley's capture of Bechir Hoggir of Algiers – 10th January, 1647. A painting by Nicolo Nasoni in the corridor of Magistral Palace, Valletta.
A galleon of the late 16th Century; the date '1565' in a modern intrusion. (Zabbar Sanctuary Museum)
The Gran Caracca Sant'Anna, the mammoth flagship of the Order brought from Rhodes and broken up in 1548. (Zabbar Sanctuary Museum).
The magistral galley 'San Giovanni' storm-tossed off the south coast of Crete – 9th February, 1704. (An ex-voto in Zakbar Sanctuary, Museum).
Entry into Malta in 1661 of Fra Fabrizio Ruffo with two of the four captured galleys in the naval encounter off Stamphalia – Painting by Nicolò Nasoni in the corridor of Magistral Palace, Valletta.
The five-strong galley Squadron of the Order attacking the “Sultana” galleon during the 1644 ‘caruana’. Painting attributed to Nicolo Nasoni (1691–1773). (Norman House, Mdina).
Naval action off the Anatolian coast where the Ottoman fleet operated under the protection of land-batteries. (An ex-voto in Zabbar Sanctuary Museum).
Captain-General Fra Giovanni Battista Spinola in action against heavily-armed Algerian Vessels in 1700. A painting by Nicolò Nasoni in the corridor of Magistral Palace, Valletta.
The centrality of the Maltese Islands – very nearly at the geographical centre of the Mediterranean – has in the past rarely corresponded with any significant role in the affairs of the region. Such an apparent contradiction stems from the nature of communications between Mediterranean communities before the advent of those technological innovations that began to impinge on world affairs from the latter decades of the 19th Century.

Prior to that technological advance, shipping had been the principal means of keeping Mediterranean communities in touch through the pursuit of trade, migration and the upheavals brought about by wars. Yet for most of the time, shipping conducted its mediating role unspectacularly and even – one may say – anonymously. Only in the course of the 19th Century was the notion of a closed-season for shipping (generally running from mid-November to mid-March) gradually abandoned, and then only by the larger craft. We still tend to lose sight of the fact that until well into the 18th Century, the vast majority of shipping kept to well-defined coastal lanes, hugging determinedly to the shores, afraid to trust itself to the wide open expanses, associated in folk memory with the treachery of the sea.

If we now try to locate Malta in this kind of marine topography, we find that it lies ‘off the beaten track’, away from the coast-hugging trade routes. Thus most of Malta’s cultural tradition tended to develop in relative isolation – witness the phenomenon of isolated flourish of Chalcolithic Malta (the Temple Culture of 4000 B.C. to 2500 B.C.). Renowned personages, as likely as not, reached it when storm-driven off their course – as St. Paul2 and possibly Ulysses. The Carthaginians, even while their armies were threatening Rome itself during the Second Punic War, never attempted to recover Malta, although very likely the Punic inhabitants would have welcomed them as fellow-nationals. In the course of the 9th Century A.D., the Arabs almost overlooked Malta at the very height of their supremacy in the Mediterranean; they ultimately turned to capture it in a kind of after-thought, or mopping-up operation, 50 years after swooping on Crete, 25 years after conquering Sicily – although in net geographical terms, Malta lay much nearer to N. Africa.

Events were able to take this determinate course because, at the time, the geography that really counted was the one established by the lanes of communication – and these in effect by-passed the Maltese Islands. As a consequence of this situation, Malta came to be nearer to Europe, simply because it happened to lie nearer to the communication-lane running along the southern coast of Europe. Its old and intimate ties with Sicily are an inevitable corollary to the same situation. So we may indeed say that for most of its past, Mediterranean history flowed along the channels of communication delineated by the trade-routes – for trade was sure to follow the quickest, the easiest and the safest routes.

The Order in Malta

Yet the old isolation of Malta melted into thin air when in 1530 the Order of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John were granted the Maltese Islands –
originally together with the fortress of Tripoli — as a fief on so generous terms that the Order's establishment turned the country into a sovereign state in all senses of the word. The Order represented then a concentration of international capital, coupled to an incredible reserve of human resource, that acted as an irresistible magnet from the moment it settled in the country.

It derived its wealth from far-flung possessions in most countries of W. Europe, farmed on an annual basis in such a way as to share the income with the professed members of the same Order. As a rule, the latter were recruits from among the cadet sons of European gentry and aristocracy who saw in the Order an honourable future, spiced with the attraction that adventures of a military organisation in constant risky action could offer.

The chief instrument of action was the Order's fleet of galleys that had perpetuated the crusading tradition established in the Holy Land through its annual caruane — the famous yearly cruises through the East Mediterranean, or along the coast of North Africa — usually planned to take place from May to September, in search of Muslim shipping. These sea-faring caruane had replaced the old military campaigns of the Crusaders in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, a change forced on the Knights after their expulsion from Acre in 1291.

The Order appears to have had some shipping of its own as far back as 1165, but their occupation of Rhodes in 1310 necessitated that they develop their naval force as fully as they could, that soon it became a potent and aggressive weapon which came to cause considerable embarrassment to the fast-growing Ottoman Empire. So much so, that in 1522 the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent decided to expunge this thorn from his side. After a hard-fought siege of six months, he forced the Order to sue for peace, granting honourable and generous terms which enabled the Knights to evacuate Rhodes with all their belongings and with all who chose to follow them.

When the Order reached Malta, the striking force of their fleet consisted of their old flagship, the Gran Caracca Sant'Anna and three galleys — the San Giovanni, the Aquila and the Santa Maria Vittoriosa. The Sant'Anna was one of the mammoth ships of the time, very large, but slow and unwieldy in maneuvering — already superseded by vessels of more manageable proportions; it was also proving too costly to maintain and so in 1548 it was decided to break it up.

Financial stringency, brought about by loss of property in Europe due to the Protestant Reformation, hindered the efforts of the Order from equipping itself with a proper fleet. On top of everything else, a hurricane that hit Malta on the night of October, 23, 1555, caused not only considerable damage to buildings but wrecked the fleet of four galleys — the San Giovanni, San Michele, Santa Fede and the San Claudio — causing also the death of 600 men, mostly crewmen and rowers.

The general crisis impeded the Comun Tesoro from fitting out another fleet. To the Order's assistance came Philip II of Spain — always a generous benefactor — who helped it by granting two galleys, while others were fitted out by the Prior of France. The Pope was able to assist too by surrendering a number of convicts to row in the newly acquired galleys.

A re-organisation of responsibilities permitted the creation in 1553 of a more efficient system of command. Hitherto, the Pilier of the Langue of Italy held the office of Admiral of the Fleet — a risky arrangement as the post of Pilier was awarded strictly on seniority. The Venerable Council sorted out the problem by creating a new office — that of Captain General of the Galleys — to which could be appointed any knight with the necessary nautical experience to handle such an important operational command. In fact all naval appointments — the command of each individual galley as well as the post of Captain General of the Galleys — were made and changed every two years, often at the end of an active season, that is in September or October. This rule hit even those commanders who had conducted themselves brilliantly during their spell of responsibility. The reputation enjoyed by the naval commanders of the Order was indeed striking and widespread; even the sober Montaigne — writing before 1580 — in dealing with the topic of educating the young men of his time, advised: 'I could wish our youth instead of spending their time in less profitable travels and less honourable studies, would devote one half of it watching naval warfare under some good captain-commander of Rhodes.'

The licensing of privateers for the corso followed
an independent procedure, issued on the authority of the Grand Master, although even the Comun Tesoro continued to fit out for the corso other vessels held by the Order. Fiscal responsibility lay at the root of this cleavage of authority between the respective jurisdictions, of the Comun Tesoro administering the Purse of the whole Order, and the magistracy of the Grand Master responsible for most of the administrative burdens incurred in governing the Maltese Islands. The old Municipal authority was the other lay body co-responsible for certain aspects of Maltese administration.

It was normal for Grand Masters to equip vessels for the corso and later on – as we shall see – even fitted out galleys on their own authority and at their own expense to participate in the caruane; also to join operations under the Captain General. In 1558 due to the stringency of the Order’s financial standing, the Chapter General confirmed temporarily upon Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette the administration of the Order’s assets, stipulating however, that the Order’s fleet of five galleys and a galleon be kept fully armed and in trim fighting condition.

At the unsuccessful attempt of 1560 to reconquer Tripoli, jointly undertaken by the Spanish and the Order’s Fleet, the latter had participated with five galleys. A little later, the number of active galleys was reduced to three due to a great dearth of rowers, without whom the galleys could not be fitted out. This basic difficulty remained a source of recurring worry throughout the 17th Century and no doubt helped to render the galley obsolete as a fighting-ship by the beginning of the 18th century, except for the Order who somehow managed to keep a number of them till the 1790s.
Operating the Galley-Squadron

The disciplined organisation of the Order’s naval squadron was vastly admired, rendering it exceptionally adaptable for regular military operations – as was proved during the successive Candia campaigns undertaken between 1645 and 1669 – rather than for the hurly-burly chance encounters of the corso. Yet, its restricted size precluded it from undertaking major operations on its own, although in general it combined so well with other fleets engaged on large-scale assaults, that its services were earnestly solicited and remained much appreciated. Emperor Charles V, followed by Philip II of Spain, frequently requested and obtained the co-operation of the Order’s squadron for difficult operations in N. Africa, such as the 1535 operation at La Golette against Barbarossa, the brilliant corsair admiral who had taken Tunis and was threatening Tripoli, then held by the Knights. On this occasion the Order had despatched its whole fleet, consisting of the Gran Caraccia, three galleys and eighteen smaller craft with 2000 armed men on board.

Six years later, in 1541, the Grand Bailiff George Schilling took four galleys – the San Giovanni, Santa Caterina, Santa Croce and the Santa Petronilla – to join the Emperor’s expeditionary force against Algiers. Then in 1560, all the five galleys of the Order participated in the intended operations against Tripoli (retaken by the Ottoman fleet in 1551) under the ill-starred Duke of Medina Celi. Again in 1563, the Order sent all its five galleys to join the Spanish fleet in its assault on Penon de Veles. The Order thus played its part fully in the great war raging throughout most of the 16th century in the Mediterranean between the two super-powers of the era – the Ottoman Empire of Suleiman the Magnificent on the Muslim side, and Hapsburg Spain of Charles V and Philip II on the Christian side.

Even the 1565 Great Siege of Malta has to be viewed as one of the crucial events in that clash of mentalities, that during the 16th century manifested itself as a power-struggle in the guise of a war of religions. The participants on both sides in these bloody events – that from our modern viewpoint appear desultory, desperate, compounded by a dull fanaticism and often enough spiced by ‘unworthy motives – themselves entertained no doubts that they were fighting for an ideology and a way of life. It poised them the kind of choice that left no room for waverers, one and all had to stand by their culture, beliefs and traditions, or else renegade. But there was no middle course. The burden of the times was one of great heroism and unspeakable barbarity, with people rushing to certain death, while others were reduced to slavery.

In the crucial weeks before the Great Siege, the Order had kept communications with the Spanish Viceroy in Sicily open until the very last moment; two of the Galleys – one under the command of Grand Master La Valette’s nephew – narrowly missed capture by the Turkish Armada converging on Malta.9 The two galleys with other shipping gave invaluable service by conveying to the besieged garrison in the Borgo the reinforcements known as the Piccolo Soccorso (28th June) which arrived in the nick of time to bolster morale after the fall of St. Elmo, and the Gran Soccorso of 7th September that effectively forced the Ottoman armada to raise the Siege and withdraw in haste.

Strategic considerations compelled the Grand Master to erect a new fortress-city in an impregnable position overlooking the two major harbours of Malta – on a tongue of land previously known as Xaghret Mawwija or Mount Sceberras; the tip of the peninsula was an old guard-post of the Maltese militia force ever since the early part of the 15th century, known as Wardija (from Guardia). An old Maltese prognostication is reputed to have forecasted: iesi zmien eu fel Wardija Kol Seiber Raba iesua uquja (A time will come when in Wardija, every span of field will be worth an ounce).10

The first stone was ceremoniously laid on March 28, 1566, priority being given to the erection of fortifications. The original plan to level the unevenness of the central ridge had to be abandoned, but progress was rapid, so much so that the Order was able to move its administrative offices from the Borgo to Valletta on March 18th, 1571.

The immense surge in activities, generated both by the foundation of Valletta and by the Order’s presence with its fleet and its manifold interests, made the island one of the busiest centres in the Mediterranean. The flow of people in and out of Malta reached unprecedented proportions and served to create a cosmopolitan air that impressed
The Gran Caracca Sant'Anna, the mammoth flagship of the Order brought from Rhodes and broken up in 1548. (Zebar Sanctuary Museum).
itself on the character of Valletta and helped to enrich the country, especially in the more creative activities. The architectural boom spilled from the new city into all the countryside well before the end of the 16th Century; soon every village in Malta, big and small, could boast of its own parish-church built on so magnificent a scale, often worthy to be taken for a cathedral both in size and in the magnificence of its trappings.

In other words, the definite intention manifested by the Order after 1565 to entrench itself on the island, served to change Malta into one of the centres - albeit a minor one - of Mediterranean power. Its political role further increased in importance during the course of the 17th Century when the peculiar development of Mediterranean politics permitted the Order to sting repeatedly the Sublime Porte without the latter being able to react suitable, although all this was to follow after 1581 when it had become clear to everyone that both the Ottoman and the Spanish empires were in manifest decline.

How can one measure the relative weight exerted on Mediterranean affairs by the Order during the late 16th and 17th Century? If one is to judge by the naval effort that the minor states of the region were able to mount, it would appear that the Order compares favourably with such powers as the Papal States, the Duchy of Tuscany, the Republic of Genoa, and the Kingdoms of both Naples and Sicily. Thus during the War of Candia - 1645-1669 - the Order participated in most annual campaigns with six or seven galleys. The Papal States never exceeded five galleys, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany five, Naples at times contributed five galleys but most times four only, while Sicily fitted and sent four galleys solely in 1667.

So if we are to apply the above criterium, then it is legitimate to conclude that at least on the plane of action the Order was not exactly a negligible power in the Mediterranean milieu of the 17th Century. One can better understand the healthy respect the Sublime Porte entertained for the Order right to the end. While the Order was not able to bring large forces into play, it more than compensated by the reckless indefatigability of its effort, making its Muslim foes treat it with circumspection, while such ambiguous allies as the Venetians were forced to court its assistance.

Even so, it is surprising to realise that all this could be achieved from a country with a population-base of only 30,000 (1590). It was rendered possible simply because human mobility had become a very significant demographic feature. 

A passenger-list for the year running from September, 1588 to August, 1589 gives the total of arrivals in Malta for that year as 940 (Knights were not included in the list), – that is, over 3% of the population – a fact which adds strength to the proposition that the relative constitution of Malta's population was comparable to one of the more cosmopolitan centres in the Mediterranean.

Most of this human traffic was conveyed by means of small boats run by Maltese padroni who made frequent trips to Syracuse, Pozzallo, Scicli, Licata, Modica, Messina, Girgenti, Marsala and Palermo. Less frequent links by heavier shipping were kept with Reggio, Naples, Rome and Marseilles. The passengers' surnames and their places of origin reveal that most hailed from Sicily, but included a large proportion of what to-day we would recognise as returned migrants. For, in fact, the general political circumstances - ever since the 12th Century - had made the Maltese Commune a remote extension of Sicily, sharing very much the same culture and comparable loyalties, with linguistic divergences apparently counting for little. One meets with no detectable feeling of apartness, with Maltese moving to Sicilian communes with the same unconcerned ease that Sicilians moved into the Maltese commune.

After 1565, with the surge of activities and the bustle engendered by the Order's presence, this traffic was directed primarily into Malta. (A reversal of tendency occurred in 1593-1594 after a plague outbreak, and also during periods of grain shortages). It enabled the Order to maintain its vast construction programmes and to man and fit its fleet. In fact the above-mentioned passenger-list has preserved names of immigrants who declared their intention to serve on the galleys, while others wanted to carry out various crafts and professions, such as silversmiths, physicians and upholsterers, apart from numerous grain and wine-merchants. In two instances the new arrivals declared with disarming candour that they came to Malta to seek adventure. Clearly it was an exciting place to be in.
The element of adventure would have been constituted by the *corsi* and the *carruane* of the Order's galleys that enjoyed a redoubtable reputation in spite of occasional reverses. The most memorable of these setbacks is associated with the name of Fra Jean Francois de Saint Clement, who assumed the post of *Capitano Generale* in the autumn of 1569.\(^{13}\) The Order had just been called upon to give its due contribution to the naval effort of the Holy League, assembled under the leadership of Gian Andrea Doria, intended to intervene to relieve the Turkish stranglehold on Famagusta - the last Venetian fortress-port in Cyprus.

**Reverses and Set-Backs**

De Saint Clement sailed with four galleys on June 26, 1570 and made for Palermo where the allies were meeting. Unfortunately one of his galley-commanders - Fra Salvatore La Batta - died on the way and de Saint Clement, over-ruling the protests of his other commanders, resolved to return to Malta, ostensibly to report La Batta's death to Grand Master del Monte. Later, it was alleged that he seized the chance to convey to Malta a large consignment of wine and goods acquired in Sicily for the Langue of Aragon, Catalunya and Navarre of which de Saint Clement was the *Conservatore* (Comptroller of supplies). He was later charged that he had been forewarned of the presence in the neighbourhood of 20 galleottes of Eujd 'Ali - a future Kapudan Pasha of the Ottoman Fleet, but as yet a dreaded corsair-captain of Algiers and a worthy successor to Barbarossa (Khair ad-Din) and Dragut.

De Saint Clement persisted in his intentions, dismissing all protests, leaving Licata on July 14th, and on the dawn of the following day, the four galleys reached the vicinity of Gozo. With the light arrived too the galleottes of Eujd'Ali who chased them the whole day. A strong wind at first assisted the galleys but towards evening it dropped. In the ensuing panic the four galleys got separated with two of them hopefully heading for the open sea. Thus they could be tackled singly, falling an easy prey to the galleottes, with the exception of the plucky *Santa Maria della Vittoria* (also known as *Padrona*) captained by Fra Pietro de Monteauban Voguedemar.

De Saint Clement himself managed to escape to Girgenti, but over 1,000 men (including 80 knights) fell prisoners to the jubilant Eujd'Ali. The Order missed in a special way the swift, newly-built *Capitana*, ordered from the Marseilles arsenal, but in fact the whole affair raised a furious outcry in Malta. De Saint Clement prudently stayed away in Sicily at first, but then returned to Malta with letters of recommendations, including one from Pope Pius V. Little they availed him, as he was promptly arrested, tried and condemned to lose his habit, his property and his life on the technical charge of abandoning the standard of the Order.

(It had been cleverly preserved by a *sotto-scrivano* named Michele Calli - a fact which damned de Saint Clement further). The pilot of the *Capitana* - the heroic Orlando Magri - was likewise implicated in the same hasty retreat and condemned to death too - an ignominious fate for two brave men who during the Great Siege had distinguished themselves by fearless conduct.

The de Saint Clement debacle scarred deeply the pride of the Order and led to a rush of regulations to preclude those conditions that had led to the disaster. When the Chapter General of the Order met 27 years later, the memory still rankled and led to the resolution *che le galere non portino mercantie alla partenza per Luoghi di Cristiani*, essendo trovate mercantie appartenenti a religiosi sarà confiscata al Tesoro, et essendo de secolari al fisco del Gran Maestro...(Galleys will not carry merchandise when sailing to Christian parts; if such goods are discovered, they shall be appropriated to the Treasury if belonging to professed brothers, and to the Grand Master’s purse if belonging to laymen).\(^{14}\)

It should be recalled that resolutions carried by the Chapter-General could only be repealed by another Chapter-General that took decades to be convened.

The incident serves to throw great light on the perils which both the Maltese Islands, as well as most Christian shipping, stood in on account of the challenge posed by the Ottoman fleet and still more by that of their more audacious allies - the pirates of the Barbary coast. Maltese shores continued to be exposed to their *razzias* well into the 17th Century, although less invitingly than had been prior to 1530. A sudden incursion of Barbary pirates took place on Gozo as late as October 18th.
1583 when some 70 country workers were taken and carried into slavery. Gozo was particularly exposed to such attacks and its security continued to cause concern well into the 17th Century. The last significant harassment of the type occurred on the 14th July 1614 with a landing at Marsascala in Malta, when the area around Zejtun was pillaged and devastated by a fleet of 60 Ottoman galleys.

De Saint Clement’s loss of the galleys could hardly have come at a worse time for the Knights. At the behest of Pope Pius V, most of the Christian states of the Mediterranean mounted an effort to check the naval hegemony enjoyed by the Ottoman fleets. Dynastic pique kept the French out of this force of combination of the Spanish and Venetian fleets, which was decisive in the Gulf of Lepanto, and Don Juan and his allies decided to attack without further delay. The clash was tremendous – one of the great, momentous events of Mediterranean history, not so much strategically, as psychologically. The Ottoman fleet was decisively defeated, although the Christian allies fared unevenly. The tiny squadron of the Order found itself placed on the left flank of the Christian side together with the Genoese who indulged in a doubtful manoeuvre that left the Knights facing the sole Ottoman force to escape almost intact – the nearly 30 galleys-strong fleet of their old enemy Eujd’Ali. Fate could not have been more cruel, for the desperate Eujd’Ali stopped in his flight and surrounded the isolated flagship of his hated enemy. Some of the worse fighting of the day took place on board the Santa Maria della Vittoria, overwhelmed by the hordes that swept upon it from all sides. Its crew were butchered almost to a man and for a time the galley itself fell into its foes’ hands. Eujd’Ali tied the Order’s flagship to his galleys to tow it away, triumphantly carrying off the revered Standard of the Order.

The Christian allies reacted in time to retrieve the flagship but only three of its crew were found to be still alive, although badly cut and bruised, including, by a pure miracle, Giustiniani himself. The wave of rejoicing at the decisive nature of the Christian victory – only some 30 Ottoman ships were able to make their escape – was, at least in Malta and among the Knights, tinged with considerable sadness. Two of the very best of the captured galleys were ceded to the Order, and the Grand Master granted pensions to the numerous relatives of those who sacrificed their life on the Capitana on that famous dramatic day.

As had often happened in the past, and was to be repeated in the following century, the Christian side allowed the opportunity of pushing home their victory to slip through their fingers. Thus the Ottoman rulers were able to launch another fleet in a couple of years, but in actual fact their naval supremacy was never again to be regained. Peace was made with Spain in 1581 and with it, the two super-powers of the Mediterranean world, whose fleets had dominated the region throughout the 16th century, retracted their talons, with Spain tending even to fade away.

The 17th Century Mediterranean

In the new political map of the Mediterranean, the smaller states now came into their own and were able to play a more meaningful and significant role in the affairs of the region. This development took place in the vacuum left by the gradual decay of Ottoman authority and the near-disappearance of Spanish interest in the Mediterranean. It was destined to last almost a century, when greater French involvement inevitably attracted British competition. When the British fleet occupied Gibraltar in 1704, a big naval power was again present in the
Old altarpiece of Sarria Church, having the character of an 'ex-voto' and depicting the naval Encounter of Lepanto (1571); the Coat-of-Arms belongs to Grandmaster Verdalle (1582-1595). The painting is attributable to a Sicilian artist (late 16th Century). (Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta).
Mediterranean, and it was the turn of the smaller powers to fade. But the intervening century gave the lesser states a chance and a breathing space which they quickly exploited. Among them the Knights of Malta were to play a political role far above the geographical limitations of their base, using their small and disciplined navy as an effective instrument. As the Order dug itself deeper in Malta, it developed with increasing energy and zest its dreaded fleet, undeterred by the string of disasters that had so recently touched it. The celebrity of its various corso – feats has served to cloud the judgement of historians camouflaging the fact that in the deployment of its galleys-fleet the Order was following a logical – even if uncompromising – anti-Ottoman policy that the events of the 17th Century were largely to justify. As other lesser states came round to the same point of view, the Order was able to increase its prestige, making its weight felt by hitting its giant foe where it hurt most – in its trading interest. It proved so effective that by about 1670, the Sublime Porte was wondering and asking 'Is France as powerful as Malta?'

However odd that might seem to us, the Ottoman dignitaries had every reason to express surprise; they were reacting from a series of catastrophic shocks culminating in the Candia war of 1645–1669. In spite of the human loss exacted by an ugly outbreak of the plague in 1592–93, so accellerated was the demographic growth of the Maltese Islands in the first decades of the 17th Century – through natural causes and immigration – that by 1614 it had climbed to above 41,000 (38,429 in Malta, 2,655 in Gozo) one-fourth of which were concentrated in Valletta, and in the 'Three Cities' across the harbour. Among other things, it meant that a steadier base was available to man both the galleys and the vessels engaged in the corso – and precisely these were the decades during which the Order threw all its weight into the attack.

It has usually been assumed that the 'decay' of the Order had set in early in the 17th Century. In so far as the original ideals of the Order had lost their charisma, it is true that one detects a sensible change after the 1581 peace concluded between the Ottoman and Spanish empires. In contrast with the dramatic events of the 16th century, religious motives became a mere ostensible cause for going to war in the following century. While no major war was to be fought in the Mediterranean until 1798, yet a keen sense of rivalry persisted – a residue of old antipathies – that lingered on for another century, although mercenary and political considerations loomed larger and larger. As the century progressed, the political aspect came more to the forefront, triumphing with the Venetian conquest of Morea, sanctioned by the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699. On the other side of the fence, the Ottoman power showed dour resilience throughout these years of decay, a prisoner of its own parasitic social attitude, bolstered by intermittent genocide and bloody repressions.

At the start of the 17th Century, all this could not be seen clearly and indeed there was at the time little to suggest that Ottoman might had weakened very appreciably. For most of the century, but especially in its first three decades, the Maltese islands lived in constant fear of some sudden descent of the Ottoman fleet, or of its more energetic allies on the Barbary coast. In fact the majority of Malta’s massive fortifications and its coastal towers were erected during the 17th Century as a direct result of these well-founded fears. The isle of Gozo was felt to be the most exposed to these raids, as the disastrous 1551 razzia, as well as the 1583 incursion, had convincingly shown.

Great alarm followed for a few days after 30th September, 1598 when over 40 enemy galleys were sighted off Capo Passero. Emergency measures, including the call-up of the reserve militia, followed in 1603, 1610, 1614, 1615, 1618, 1620 and 1629. A small fleet of Barbary vessels appeared off the Grand Harbour’s entrance in 1619 and actually engaged Fort St. Elmo in an exchange of artillery.

These fears reached an insistent pitch just before 1645 when a huge Ottoman armada was being fitted out in Constantinople; all the Christian powers in the Mediterranean were convinced that it was intended to assault Malta. While the Island mobilised and steeled itself to meet the onslaught, the Ottoman fleet made straight for Candia (Crete) where it caught the Venetians at La Canea napping. Among the defensive measures devised at the time by the Knights, they had procured a thick iron-chain, referred to as La Catena, which would be slung across the mouth of the Grand Harbour from Ricasoli Point to St. Elmo, thus effectively preventing the infiltration of shipping into the harbour – a
serious trade-disrupting measure resorted to only in times of great danger. We find it recorded on only few occasions of unusual alarm; 27th May 1627, 27th May 1643, 22nd June 1644 and 1st June 1671.

Thus we get an impression of a country raked by constant fears of a sudden attack; no one could have possibly yearned for the arrival of Spring when large scale shipping recommenced. That all these fears were not idle was soon proved by the Turkish incursion of 6th July 1614. Two hours before dawn, a fleet of 60 vessels – including 52 galleys – under the command of Khalil Pasha attempted to enter Marsaxlokk harbour in the southernmost part of Malta, but were repulsed by the guns of Fort San Luciano. The fleet then managed to put ashore 5,000 soldiers in the still unguarded St. Thomas Bay. While the country-people fled in understandable alarm to the security of the nearby fortified towns of Senglea and Vittoriosa, the invading force split into two columns, one making for the region of Fort San Luciano, while the larger body directed itself to the deserted village of Zejtun which was burnt and sacked.

Meanwhile the defensive arrangements sprung into action and a hastily summoned section of the militia cavalry rashly rode out to meet the enemy headlong. There were some minor losses on both sides, that counselled the defenders to be more circumspect in later skirmishes – intended primarily to control further ravages – and to be content with containing the enemy force, soon withdrawn losing a number of dead and 50 others taken prisoners. The fleet put in briefly at Mellieha Bay on 12th June for some obscure reason before sailing away. The scare served to reinforce efforts to fortify the coastal areas as well as Valletta, soon to be further protected by the addition of an outer line of fortifications.

The offensive capability of the Order consisted of its own squadron of galleys that also enabled it to convey a large troop of fighting-men anywhere in the Mediterranean within a short time. The Order was thus splendidly equipped to pursue its traditional policy of confrontation vis-a-vis Ottoman imperial interests to the bitter end, in a kind of coda to the 16th Century giant clash between Spain and the Ottoman Turks. The Order’s war took the form

The Captain-General Charles de Fayson Saint ley’s capture of Bechir Hoggir of Algiers – 10th January, 1647. A painting by Nicolò Nasoni in the corridor of Magistral Palace, Valletta.
that the size and nature of its armament permitted, namely, raiding on Muslim shipping and on isolated garrisons in N. Africa and along the Greek coast. They often operated in concert with the galley-fleets of other minor powers, such as the Duchy of Tuscany, the Sicilian realm and the Papal States. They were equally prompt to provide assistance to Christian states at war with the Ottoman Empire, especially to Venice.

Venice’s relations with the Order are so ambiguous and complicated, marked by ups an sudden downs, that they need a fuller treatment than can be attempted here. Historians, as Alberto Tenenti, have dealt singularly unfairly with the Order, holding it unilaterally responsible for losses suffered by Venetian shipping. In fact the wrangle between Venice and the Order dragged on for years and was ‘resolved’ by a Papal Brief of 1641, although it would be truer to say that the War of Candia ‘killed’ the issue. The real— but unstated— reasons behind Venetian complaints was the overt blackmailing tactics resorted to by the Sublime Porte who presumed that the Venetians could and should keep the Order’s bellicose activities under restraint.

Most historians have strangely and unfairly ignored not only the Order’s genuine efforts to avoid disquisitions with the Republic of St. Mark, but also the loyal support readily granted in all the troubles the Venetians had with Ottoman might during the 16th & 17th centuries. The Knights proved in fact to be both the most constant as well as the keenest of Venice’s allies. As to their responsibilities vis-a-vis Venetian shipping interests in the hurly-burly of post 1580 Mediterranean politics, the archival documentation available in Malta shows that the Order took extreme care not to give offence to fellow Christian states, in particular to the Venetians. All this was happening in a political scenario that had in fact transformed the 16th Century Mediterranean dominated by the big power-blocks into one where the smaller states were coming more and more into their own—each intent on taking initiatives of its own and on defending its respective interests as best as it could. For the first-half of the 17th Century (as well as earlier), Venetian policy sought by and large to accommodate the Sublime Porte; it cannot be said that in the end it helped the Serenissima very much.

Friction and clashes of interest between the lesser centres of Mediterranean powers were of course unavoidable. A spirit of rivalry animated them—often taking the strange form of quarrels over precedence and not infrequently bringing to a calamitous end, well-planned and costly campaigns and alliances, as we shall have occasion to note. In this sense, the Practica (operational orders) issued by Grand Master Martino Garzes to his galley-commanders on the eve of the annual carvana of 1597, is a revealing document: ‘Farete la vostra partenza e tirarrete a comun largo per la Barberia e Candia se vi parerà di fare l’accuata in Barberia, le farette; o vero tirarrete di lungo verso Alessandria, Damiate o dove vi parerà meglio con il parere del Capitan Diego de Britto, delli Piloti, et marinari e secondo li tempi, gli avvisi e la lingua che anderette; attendente a bushes la buona ventura per far se sarà possibile alcuni bottino di vasselli, persone et robbe di infedeli senza molestare ne visitare li vasselli Veneziani anchore avessino robbe di contrabando, ma sopra li vasselli Cristiani, suditi et tributari del Turco et altri vasselli persone et robbe di infedeli senza molestare ne visitar li vasselli Cristiani che non abbino salvacoundotto della Santità de! Papa o l’altri principi maggiori Cristiani. Trovando infedeli Turchi, mori e giudei, robbe loro pigliarete come robbe di contrabando senza però dannificare nelle persone, nelle robbe di Cristiani in modo alcuno’. (Proceed on your cruise making in the general direction of the Barbary coast and Candia; if it appears advisable to water in Barbary, do so too; otherwise keep on in the general direction of Alexandria, Damiate and where you think best, taking the advice of Capitan Diego de Britto, of the Pilots and seamen, choosing your course according to the weather, and to notices and rumours picked along; be alert to exploit every good chance of taking as booty vessels, persons and goods belonging to infidels without molesting or boarding Venetians ships even if they have on board contraband goods; but, you may board, Christian shipping belonging to subjects or to tributaries of the Turk and other Christian vessels if they do not have a safe-conduct issued by his Holiness the Pope, or by any other of the major Christian sovereigns. When you come across Turkish infidels, moors or Jews, or their goods, you will appropriate them as contraband goods, but without causing damage in any way to persons and goods of Christians).
The general intention was to prey upon Muslim— in particular upon Ottoman—trading interests, being the easiest to hit as well as the most lucrative. Yet it was the policy of raiding and assaulting military garrisons scattered along the coast that hurt Ottoman pride most, debilitating further as it did the myth of its much-vaunted invincibility. In military terms the significance of sacking these coastal strongholds meant little, mere pin-prickings, but in the heavy, still emotionally-charged atmosphere rent by religious antagonism, the impression was electrifying, akin to the psychological sensationalism which modern terrorists have re-discovered.

Seen in this perspective the tiny state of Malta with its cosmopolitan milieu was inflicting the most humiliating snubbings to Ottoman dignity, most of all in the period running from 1585 to 1645, until the Sublime Porte decided it had had enough and turned upon the Venetians to oust them from Candia, thus initiating a new phase of East-West rivalry.

Major Operations: 1600–1644

A number of effective dents were inflicted by either the Order’s galleys, or by a coalition of the smaller Christian states that invariably included the Malta-based Knights. One of the more notable was the sack of the ribad of Hammamet (then called Maometta) effected by the Order’s galleys on August 13th, 1602. A repeat performance on August 4th, 1606, with the galleys of Sicily and Genoa, achieved its original objective, but a considerable loss was incurred when at the critical moment of re-embarking, the force was counter-attacked by the cavalry of the Pasha of Tunis.

On May 5th, 1603, a sizeable flotilla of the Order—five galleys, four sailingships, four frigates and a tartana loaded with provisions, made for the West coast of the Peloponese. Once landed, the striking force stormed and took the citadels of Patras and Lepanto. The instructions emphasised that they were to seize the stored grain reportedly held there, as there was a desperate shortage in Malta, where the entire needs had to be imported from Sicily. Hopes of finding significant grain stores soon turned to disappointment. A detachment of 200 cavalry and 800 infantryman had mounted the action which on the military plane was one of the most substantial victories obtained by the Order’s arms; almost 400 enemy soldiers were taken including the Aga—for the loss of two knights and ten soldiers.

In 1611 an intended attack on Navarino failed to materialise, but the Captain General improvised an attack on Corinth which achieved its aim. It was followed later in the same year with a landing on the Island of Kerkenna, just off the Tunisian coast—a partially successful raid in which had participated 5 galleys of the Order, 12 of Naples, 10 of Genoa and 7 of Sicily.

Even the Anatolian mainland was not immune from the attacks of the Order’s naval squadron. On April 30th, 1613, the force stormed the fortifications of Fogie, in the Gulf of Smyrna; although they penetrated the outer defences, the assault on the citadel failed. The sang-froid exhibited by the Order’s detachment on this particular occasion appears to have caused a considerable ruffle of tempers in the Sublime Porte, for the 1614 Ottoman incursion on Malta must have been at least in part prompted as a retaliation for the effrontery of the Fogie exploit. In 1617 the ships of a successful corsair known as Sansone were traced to Sousse harbour and there set on fire and destroyed.

But a successful expedition to Santa Maura (island of Levkas) in June 1625 had a disastrous sequel. On the way back, the Order’s fleet ran into six galleys from Bizerta engaged in raiding the Sicilian coast. The Bizerta galleys pretended to flee but turned back and caught the four galleys of the Knights unaware at Murro di Porco (some manuscripts call the place Mosso di Porco); the Bizerta squadron managed to capture and carry away two of the Order’s galleys: the ‘S. Francesco’ and the ‘S. Giovanni’.

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Three raids on the strongly-defended port of Tripoli are recorded in 1600 (unsuccessful), in 1639 (two ships were burnt in the harbour) \(^\text{29}\) and another abortive raid in 1642. Another risk-fraught operation against corsair-shipping was brilliantly brought off in August 1640 in a raid on the anchorage off the fortress of la Golette. \(^\text{30}\) In this perilous but coolly-executed mission, the Order’s six galleys approached the anchored enemy fleet in line and each towed away one large prize-vessel while the fortress’ guns blazed at them incessantly.

Possibly the most heroic exploit is the episode associated with the shipwreck, during a severe gale, of three galleys of the Order – The Capitana, S. Michele and S. Giorgio which occurred on April 8th, 1606 on the island of Cimbalo (modern Zembra) off the North of Tunisia. \(^\text{31}\) The Captain-General, Fra Bernardo Spelletta, took immediate action to save his men, who stood also in dire danger of being carried away into slavery. He ordered the force of 600 men to dig in on a nearby eminence, dragging a number of canons from the wrecked galleys to defend the make-shift ‘redoubt’. Not a minute too soon; for no sooner had the wind abated from its fury than a host of armed Moors descended on the island and surrounded the stoutly-defended ‘redoubt’. With little food, less water and insufficient munition, the entrenched defenders repulsed repeated attacks for 15 days, in fact until relief arrived in the shape of a galley despatched by the Viceroy of Sicily.

The scale and incessant nature of the Knights’ offensive operations – to which we ought to add the cumulative effect of their constant depredation on
Muslim shipping on the high seas excluded from this account—caused acute embarrassment in the Diwan and seriously disrupted sea trade, travel and communications. One remains rather surprised that the Sublime Porte took so little direct action to punish the Knights and to redress the balance, even during the rule of the energetic Koprulu viziers. Perhaps an answer should be sought in the reputation gained by the Knights over their centuries-old quarrel with the Ottoman dynasty. The Great Siege of 1565 might not have been the militarily overwhelming event many assumed it to be, but on the psychological level, it had bitten deep, leaving an indelible impression on the Ottoman Turks. So much so that when on September 28th, 1644, the Order’s naval squadron attacked and captured the huge and fabulously rich galleon (the so called ‘Sultana’), reputedly carrying one of the Sultan’s wives with her child, it was felt to be the ultimate gesture of defiance and effrontery which the Sublime Porte would not be expected to stomach without an incredible loss of face.

Suddenly the arsenals of Constantinople became beehives of activity and a huge fleet was soon collected. While all Mediterranean powers held their breath and waited for the blow to fall on Malta, the big armada made its way directly to a nearer goal—Candia—it being in the judgement of the Diwan, an ostensibly easier prey than tiny, plucky Malta.

### TABLE I

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The five-strong galley Squadron of the Order attacking the "Sultana" galleon during the 1644 'caruana'. Painting attributed to Nicolò Nasoni (1691–1773). (Norman House, Mdina).

War of Candia: 1645–1669.

The Ottoman effort (1645–1669) to wrest Crete from the Venetians was an act of *force majeure* against a weaker opponent and in no way contradicts the general downward trend of Ottoman power. The Candia affair made little strategic sense, for its 1669 conquest in no way compares with the conquest of the same island by the Arabs in 827 – an event that had effectively paralysed Byzantine trade and threatened to choke off its maritime vitality as well.

Crete had originally passed into Venetian hands after the treacherous 4th Crusade (1204), becoming a rich human and material source, as well as a flourishing emporium for Venetian mercantilism, that had in the course of the 16th century well-nigh withered, due largely to the abrogation of privileged treatment in the Ottoman-dominated Levant. The Venetian presence in Candia, to judge from surface
appearances, seemed to offend Ottoman pride as it was alleged that Crete was serving as a convenient haven for Christian corsairs; particularly resented were the intermittent assaults on coastal garrisons and the depredation to shipping carried out under the banner of the Order.

Venetian merchants had long been known to harbour resentment against the Order. It is said that some of them actually rejoiced on hearing the news of the fall of St. Elmo during the 1565 Siege. On August 10th, 1583, the Guardia di Candia (galley squadron of Crete) had impounded two galleys of the Order at Cape Spatha – sopra Perigotto a Capo Spada, and all sorts of wrangles with Venetian mercantile interests dragged on till the very eve of the War of Candia. Even the 1597 Pratica of Grand Master Garzes, previously quoted, instanced out that the Venetians were about to discover that their Venice to a picture of old and tense relations between the Venetians of all nations, warning the Order's commanders against interfering with Venetian shipping whatever the eventualty. All of this builds up to a picture of old and tense relations between Venice and the Order. But the war was to change all that; the Venetians were about to discover that their most steadfast allies in the hour of need were to be none other than the Knights of Malta.

At the height of their military might, it would have taken the Ottoman armies perhaps a year to expel the Venetians from their two main fortresses in Crete. In the changed circumstances of the 17th Century, it was to take them 25 years. Their chief failure consisted in their inability to provide adequate naval support to their armies besieging the fortress of Candia (Iraklion), after initially suprising the other major Venetian garrison in Crete – that of La Canea (Khania) – at the very outset of the war. The naval superiority of the Venetians and their allies was so pronounced that the Ottoman army in Crete often found itself cut off from Constantinople and frequently had to do without having any of its stores and ammunition replenished for months on end.

Given this degree of naval superiority, the Venetians should have prevailed – at least on paper. That they ultimately failed to do so, is to be attributed to two main causes. First of all, the deployment of artillery was becoming more and more a matter of increasing sophistication; the Ottoman generals appear to have put their trust in heavy pieces of artillery, enabling them to out-gun their opponents on given occasions especially when their foes' galleys attempted to approach land. Thus for technical reasons, the Christian naval force could never match the Ottoman land-based artillery, preventing them from translating their sea-superiority into any kind of solid advantage in the crucial land-encounter around Candia. It meant that the Venetians and their allies had unlimited opportunity of protracting the defence of the beleaguered garrison by supplying all its needs, but ultimately were unable to prevent the final outcome.

Then too, the Christian side was racked by incredible bickering over matters of pure precedence, even when face to face with the enemy. The Order in a special way proved to be extraordinarily sensitive about these matters, and at one time the Venerable Council withdrew its galleys rather than concede an inch in matters of precedence.

The Venetians were often left in the lurch by all their Christian allies – including the galley-squadron of the Order which went to such extremes as that of deserting the Candia war theatre in 1664 and 1665 precisely because of the Knights' resentment over matters of precedence. Sometimes this mutual bickering between the Christian powers even reached flash-point – as happened in the course of the running quarrel between the Order and the Republic of Genoa, starting in 1655 and dragging on even beyond 1661. At one time, on September 20th, 1658, the Order's fleet were given specific instructions to engage in combat any Genoese ship refusing to salute the Order's standard. The Papal court itself, although often appealed to, found itself helpless and unable to compose these thorny issues.

Yet the records of the spring-summer campaigns in Candia, between 1645 and 1669, are eloquent testimony that the Knights of Malta were the most assiduous and reliable allies of the Venetians. The intervention of the allied Christian forces took the form of an annual cruise by the combined fleets of the Holy League that early each summer sailed to the Ionian islands to effect an encounter with the Venetian naval force. The combined fleet then sailed from Candia to replenish the Venetian garrison and to attempt to devise ways of raising the Siege.

Although the intervention of the allied Christian fleet caused considerable worry to Ottoman land and sea forces – so much so that the Ottoman fleet
invariable retreated to the protection afforded by coastal batteries — yet they were unable to break the military stalemate. In spite of this lack of success, the tactics of the Holy League remained unchanged to 1655, sometimes yielding deceptively significant results, as in the campaign of 1652.35 The Venetians had as their sole ally for the year, the Order’s squadron of seven galleys under the command of the dashing Bailiff Baldassar de Demandolx. Off the Venetian-held isle of Tine’ they surprised and pounced upon a detachment of 25 Ottoman galleys that had made off in great haste as soon as they had sighted the combined contingent of Venice and the Knights. They would certainly have succeeded in eluding their foe, had not the faster galleys of the Order managed to shoot ahead and catch up with the splendid galley of Ibrahim Kara’ Batak Bey of Malvasia, who was himself captured with his full complement of spahi guards. The Order’s squadron was back in Malta by the end of September, feted and sung over — but in military terms the year’s campaign had been as sterile as the previous ones.

In 1656, the Venetians realised they had to change their tactics. Once more flanked by their faithful ally, the six-galley strong squadron of the Order under the command of Fra Gregorio Caraffa they resolved to attempt the blockade of the Dardanelles channel to prevent the Ottoman fleet from sailing across the Aegean. The plan was as bold as it was risky, for the Ottoman fleet was certain to challenge the blockading fleet. In fact the Kapudan Pasha filtered his considerable fleet into the Aegean on June 23rd; it consisted of 70 galleys, 9 galleases and 28 frigates who for a time held tenaciously to the Anatolian coast under the umbrella shelter of the shore-batteries and the Dardanelles forts. The Venetian commander, Lorenzo Marcella, sailed off his large naval force with 24 galleys, 7 galleases and 28 merchant ships, apart from the 6 galleys of the Order.36

The Kapudan Pasha was forced to attempt running the blockade, and on June 26th, ordered his fleet to move out against the numerically inferior fleets of Venice and the Order, to recoil almost immediately from the accurate artillery barrage that met it. The heavy, slower galleases found themselves in deeper trouble and in attempting to help them out, the galleys got into each other’s way. A lighter contingent of the Venetian-Maltese fleet under the command of Caraffa seized the chance provided and swooped upon the melee, making such thorough work that only 14 Ottoman galleys, including the flagship, managed to reach the protection of the umbrella barrage of the Anatolian fort.

The six Maltese galleys operated like clock-work — it is under such conditions that training and discipline count. At one point, their zest and impetus made them overshoot the enemy line and five of them ran themselves aground. The remaining floating galley — the ‘San Pietro’ under Gabriel Davet de Maretz — pulled free the other five and dashed off to capture one of the heavy galleases. Another of the Ottoman galleases was taken by the new galley ‘Lascara’ under the ubiquitous Baldassar de Demandolx. Apart from these, six enemy galleys were captured in all by the Order’s squadron, four of them by the ‘Capitana’ under Fra Carlo Gattolo. The total losses suffered by the Order were 2 knights and 40 others between crewmen and rowers indicating a very poor degree of combatability by the Ottoman Fleet.

This little known brilliant naval action became known as the battle of the Dardanelles, in the course of which 7,000 Christian slaves were freed, but the Venetian commander-in-chief lost his life
when his flagship approached too close to the shore and within range of the fort's guns.

The naval superiority of the Western powers was proved to be so preponderant that it was never again challenged. Way back in 1571, it had taken a formidable League of Spain, Venice, Genoa, the Papal States, Tuscany and the Knights of Malta to inflict a defeat on Ottoman naval might; less than a century later, a chance combination of Venice's and the Order's fleets proved enough to inflict one of the worse humiliations ever on the Sublime Porte. At one point, it looked feasible for Venice to wind up the war of Candia, provided it ensured that no supplies reach the Ottoman armies in Crete. Three attempts by an Ottoman force to break out of the Venetian blockade of the Dardanelles were defeated during 1657, but in 1658 an Ottoman flotilla eluded the Venetian fleet and the Ottoman fortress at La Canea was duly provisioned. Too late in the day – in the following campaign – the Venetians decided to mount an assault on La Canea, and accordingly on August 24th, 1660, a landing was effected in the nearby Suda Bay, under the order of Francesco Morosini who was later to win such fame in Morea. The attempt failed and by the end of the season the Ottoman force in Crete was sufficiently recovered to renew its attack on the Venetian fortress of Candia. Clearly Venice could not match the manpower and financial resources of the Ottoman Empire.

In 1661, a chance encounter with 36 Ottoman galleys led to another naval encounter off Stamphalia. The Ottoman fleet scattered in all directions, but with their customary keenness, the Order's galleys, under Fra Fabrizio Ruffo, boarded and captured four of the fleeing galleys. Up to then the Order had participated in every single campaign since the start of the war of Candia; but in 1663, quarrels about precedence reached a new pitch of hectic quarrelling. The Captain-General of the Order's squadron maintained that his 'Capitana' should be placed to the right of the Venetian flagship as it had apparently become usual in the many years of fighting side by side. The Venetian commander was not able to concede the point – no doubt, not to cause offence to his other allies – upon which reply the Order's squadron promptly sailed off.

The Grand Master and the Venerable Council confirmed the stand taken by their Captain-General, the Count Wratislau de Mittrowitz, so much so that no galleys were sent to co-operate with the Venetians at Candia in 1664 and again in 1665 – the only break in the 25-year-old war. It was during this intermission that the Order undertook a military operation in partnership with a French squadron. In July 1664, the Order sent its galleys to join up with another 8 French galleys sent under the Duc de Beaufort on a punitive raid upon Gigeri (Gegel) on the Algerian coast. The French, who on most occasions chose to remain aloof from Mediterranean affairs, were suddenly to get involved even in the Candia war – a phase that was not destined to last very long. Yet in both the Gigeri and Candia involvements, the French elected to co-ordinate military matters closely with the Knights of Malta, so much so that in October 1668 they were using the island as a forwarding base. The Gigeri affair, although of little eventual significance, proved tactically a brilliantly conducted operation. It seems to have encouraged the French to take seriously the eventuality of future joint actions with the Knights of Malta. Guided by the ambitions of Mazarin and enticed by grandiose projects, as that propounded by the philosopher Leibnitz, the France of Louis XIV shifted from its traditional pro-Ottoman policy and inserted both its fleet and its political weight in the affairs of the Mediterranean.

It so happened that this twist of French policy occurred when the war of Candia was reaching its final, crucial stage, involving once more most of the Mediterranean powers. In 1668 another effort was concerted to enforce a blockade of the Ottoman forces on the island of Crete and prevent provision from reaching the Ottoman army. Both the Papal fleet and the galleys of the Order recommenced their collaboration with the Venetians; the 8 galleys despatched from Naples and Palermo opted to participate autonomously due to the usual wrangling over precedence.

A hare-brained scheme was put afoot to foment rebellion among the Ottomansoldiery by manipulating the figure of the Dominican friar Tommaso Ottomano, son of Sultan Ibrahim and a brother of the reigning Sultan Mehmet IV, who as a child had fallen prisoner in the hands of the Order when its galleys captured the 'Sultana' galleon in
1644. All this scheming came to nothing when the Ottoman navy ran the gauntlet of the allies' blockade and managed to land supplies surreptitiously on the East coast of Crete. Disheartened, the Western allies lifted the useless blockade and on August 26th 1668 sailed away from Crete.

The Venetian defence of the fortress of Candia was now in a desperate situation as a besieging force hemmed it round with a ring of fortified batteries. Yet the decision of the French to intervene militarily offered a new glimmer of hope. The same Duc de Beaufort, who had already led the French at Gigeri in 1664, sailed to Malta in 1668, bringing with him 30 galleys and 8000 men. He left Malta on November 6th, 1668 together with the Order's seven galleys and a Maltese foot regiment of 400 men and 60 knights who were able to enter the fortress of Candia on December 1st. The fleets returned again in the following summer, orchestrating a heavy bombardment of Ottoman emplacements around Candia in which participated the Venetian, the French, the Papal and the Order's vessels, the Ottoman army replying with another of its own.

That huge duel decided the fate of Candia. The heavy artillery of the Ottoman besiegers determined the day by taking a heavy toll of the allied shipping. The Duc of Beaufort lost his life unaccountably in a skirmish, and his successor, the Duc de Novailles, decided unilaterally that he had had enough — after his flagship was hit and almost blown from under him. To no avail were the remonstances and desperate protestations of Vincenzo Rospigliosi — the Papal Captain-General and also a Knight of St. John — and of Clemente Accarigi, Captain-General of the Order. When the French sailed away, there was nothing to do for the other two auxiliary fleets, but to collect the troops previously landed and sail away — on August 22nd 1669 — leaving Candia to its fate.39

Entry into Malta in 1661 of Fra Fabrizio Russo with two of the four captured galleys in the naval encounter off Stamphalia — Painting by Nicolò Nasini in the corridor of Magistral Palace, Valletta.
Abandoned by his allies and with the enemy pressing nearer than ever, the gallant Francesco Morosini, the Venetian general, resorted to manipulating with admirable adroitness the few cards still left in his hands. He managed to persuade his Ottoman counter-part to grant him honourable terms and thus concluded the capitulation of the fortress of Candia.

Crete thus fell to the Turks who were to hold it till the early years of this century. Yet it had proved an expensive victory, serving to bring out in the open the numerous weaknesses of the Ottoman Empire, most of all its helplessness to put on any credible form of naval defence. Before the century was out, this Achilles’ heel was to cause further loss of face and contributed in no small way to the humiliating terms of Karlowitz (1699).

The Candia campaigns established the military reputation of the Knights of Malta, now considered as one of the most effective maritime powers in the Mediterranean. Their performance throughout the protracted War had heightened their prestige and standing, for what they lacked in numbers, they more than made up by the hard training, discipline, infective keenness and boundless enthusiasm. With the grandmastership of the Cotoner brothers and Gregorio Caraffa, the Order’s government in Malta reached the apogee of its international prestige.

### TABLE II

*Order’s participation in the War of Candia*

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**Demography of the Maltese Islands**

With the termination of the war of Candia, the Order’s naval squadron found itself again free to organise their annual *caruane* in the more traditional mode of hunting Muslim shipping and merchandise, that is, augmenting the rhythm of the *corso*, which during 1645 – 1669 had been indefatigably pursued by licensed privateers.

The much-vaunted exploits of the *corso* had numerous critics, even in the Papal court, where voices often raised the question about the wisdom of such provocation. But if anyone in Malta felt the justice of such criticism, he must have judged it advisable to keep his doubts private. Still, due to the course taken by events, the Order thought it wiser to retract its annual *caruane* from the Aegean area where the risks had become higher after the fall of Candia (1669). Henceforth, the main hunting-ground lay much nearer home, often in home waters and directed mostly against the Barbary pirates infesting the Central and Western Mediterranean. The new character of the *corso* was to become even more pronounced in the course of the 18th Century, forcing the Barbary corsairs to direct their main privateering effort to the Atlantic.

The prosperity of the Maltese islands increased throughout the 17th century as evinced by the continued expansion of the population which followed a more even course after 1614, although it was to be subjected to a severe downward check due to the outbreak of the plague in 1676. The plague in fact wrought its greatest havoc inside Valletta and the Three Cities where well over a third of the population lived.

Dal Pozzo reports the figures of a census taken of Valletta in 1676, just before the Plague outbreak – 12,144 consisting of 2700 households. Referring to statistics kept by the *Cancelleria*, he gives the total of plague-victims as 8569 – a conservative estimate that other sources inflate by 50%. Yet all accounts agree in giving a frightful share of this toll to the inhabitants of Valletta and the Three Cities where apparently 20% of the the population were laid low; some sources are even more pessimistic. By comparison, the countryside fared lightly, so much so that Mdina and Gozo escaped unscathed. The plague dealt a serious check to the demographic growth of the Maltese Islands, although it
did not take long for the population to resume its even rate of expansion. Table III summarises the known demographic situation between 1590 and 1740 – thus exceeding the range of the period under study, due to the lack of complete figures from the mid-17th century to the mid-18th century.

The relative internal security obtaining in the country had stimulated a demographic increase in rural areas too. This process of expansion and resettlement which at first affected solely the Island of Malta, was marked by certain anomalous features. By 1632 the long-deserted northern parts (north of the Victoria Lines) were, by and large, extensively resettled; in the rest of the country, the smaller hamlets continued to decay and disappear, their population drained away to the larger rural centres that swelled and developed rapidly, both in size and in such institutions as their parish-organisations.

Yet by 1632, Gozo still appeared largely unaffected by this wave of resettlement. It seems to have been hit towards mid-century, with settled village populations cropping up all over Gozo. By 1667 most of the village nuclei were already active and viable, continuing to grow at a fast rate in the course of the 17th century.

The accelerated rate of demographic increase in the Maltese islands especially during the first three-quarters of the 17th Century – as well as the more modest rise registered in the 16th Century – is all the more remarkable when assessed against the backdrop of general population stagnation and actual decline in European countries and in Mediterranean lands.

Thus, for the 143 years running between 1570 and 1713, Sicily’s population remained pegged around the 1,000,000 figure with periods of actual decline between 1636 and 1681. The population of the Naples region suffered a dramatic drop from 540,090 households in 1595 to 394,721 in 1669. In general the population of Europe began to soar in earnest only after 1750. There can be no doubt that the Maltese demographic performance – especially in the 17th Century – was truly exceptional.

**TABLE III**

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Maltese Islands</th>
<th>Valetta</th>
<th>Three Cities</th>
<th>Gozo</th>
<th>Order</th>
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<td>6,500 (c)</td>
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<td>12,144</td>
<td>4,438</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(in 1667)</td>
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<td>7,438</td>
<td>5,700</td>
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<td>66,364 (d)</td>
<td>17,529</td>
<td>13,901</td>
<td>7,929 (d)</td>
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</table>

(a) The gross population of the Maltese Islands for 1617 is also known: 43,798 including 2,835 for Gozo.
(b) The 1632 figure for Gozo has probably been transmitted corruptedly; it is more likely to have been 2,884.
(c) As reported in NLM Univ. 2 f. 214 but the figure appears to be certainly suspicious. In general the figures for 1670 appear unreliable.
(d) Does NOT include figures for (i) Mdina/Rabat Parish; (ii) the Order and its famiglieri; (iii) Zebug in Gozo and Comino.

**War in Morea: 1683-1699**

The naval operations of the Order were also disrupted by the 1676 plague outbreak, particularly as the crews and the rowers of the galleys paid a heavy price. In fact the caravans of 1677 was undertaken after much hesitation, and then only with reduced complements. Both the country and the efficiency of the galley-squadron had barely time to recover from this disaster when the next major clash with the Ottoman Empire arrived following the ill-advised attempt of the Vizier Kara Mustafa to besiege Vienna in 1683 – an undertaking that ended in a dismal disaster when the Polish king Jan Sobieski surprised and routed the huge Ottoman army encamped around Vienna.
### TABLE IV

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>1590</th>
<th>1614</th>
<th>1632</th>
<th>1658 (a)</th>
<th>1670</th>
<th>1680</th>
<th>1736-40</th>
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(a) 1658 figures do not include 482 friars and nuns living in monasteries and convents.
(b) Includes 145 parishioners of the Greek Parish at Vittorioosa in 1630, and 50 for 1680.
(c) 1736 figures for Rabat and Mdina are not known; figures given here are for 1745.
(d) 1736 figure for Zebbug, Gozo is not known; figure given is for 1728.

The Sublime Porte was faced with its worse crisis when consequent upon the 1683 route, an anti-Ottoman alliance materialised between the Hapsburg Empire, Poland, the Republic of Venice and the Papal States. Significantly the Knights of Malta were warmly invited to join the alliance by all the parties involved. Had it not been for the ravages caused by the plague, it is more than likely that the Order would have played a more prominent role in the series of campaigns that were to follow annually until the Peace of Karlowitz was signed in 1699.
This page in the history of Malta, and of the Order, has been neglected possibly more than the war of Candia. The main events of the 1683-1699 war taking place in the Mediterranean were determined by the Turco-Venetian confrontation for the control of Morea (the Peloponnesian peninsula), the Ionian and the Aegean islands, as well as part of the Dalmatian coast. The naval detachments of the Order had to shoulder heavy responsibilities in the subsequent amphibious assaults on garrisons around the coast and islands of Dalmatia, Greece and the Aegean area. The control of these coordinated operations was in the hands of the Venetian commander (later elected Doge) Francesco Morosini who had eagerly grasped the opportunity presented by this War to carry out a radiant rivincita for the 1669 loss of Candia.

Early in the summer of 1684, the Order despatched its first detachment to join the Venetians at Corfú; it consisted of a flotilla of 7 galleys and three other vessels with a regiment of 1000 foot-soldiers under the command of Giovanni Battista Brancaccio. Five Papal galleys and four from the Duchy of Tuscany were the other allies in the campaign. Their objective was the most important Ottoman naval base on the Western coast of the Balkans – the island of Santa Maura (Levkas), duly besieged and which capitulated on August 7th, 1684, followed by the nearby mainland fortress of Prevesa on September 21st. The same coalition returned to the attack the following year, capturing Corone (modern Koroni) in Morea on August 11th 1685. So signal was the contribution given by the Order in the course of this second campaign,44 that the Venetians allowed to the Order’s squadron one-fourth of the considerable booty taken. The two campaigns had liquidated the Ottoman strong-holds on the Ionian sea and opened Morea to Venetian infiltration which proceeded in the following years.

At this time the Knights had added another galley to their Squadron which stretched their capabilities to the limit; in fact they often encountered difficulties to equip the 8th galley. In the campaign of 1686, all the eight galleys participated in the operation which saw the fall of the two citadels at Navarino by June 16th, followed in quick succession by the capture of Modone (Methoni) on July 7th, and Napoli in Romania (Neapolis) on the July 29th. Some very ugly fighting had to be faced in this campaign with the Maltese contingent losing 19 knights and 200 men.45

During the campaign which followed – that of 1687 – Morosini was able to reduce, Patras the chief port in Morea, and thus obtained a good hold over a considerable part of the Peloponese. The Order’s squadron participated in the conquest of Castelnuovo on the Dalmatian coast; under the command of the Count of Herbestein, it lent invaluable help, losing 10 knights, on account of the stiff resistance put up by the Ottoman garrison, finally forced to yield on September 19th, 1687.46

An attack on Negroponte (the island of Eubea) in the campaign of 1688 proved abortive, and for a time the Western allies lost that impetus that had carried them to expel the Turks from most of the shores of the Adriatic and the Ionian. Campaigning was recommenced in earnest during 1690 when a number of Ottoman strongholds fell, especially Malvasia (Monemvasia) in S.E. Morea which more or less completed the conquest of the Peloponese. The fall of Valona later in the same year removed the last effective Ottoman garrison on the Adriatic, allowing the war to be waged in the Aegean.47

The fight against the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean was strictly conditioned by Venetian interests, since Venice was bearing the brunt of the fighting, as well as the considerable costs. But while Venice’s other western allies – the Papal states, Tuscany and Genoa – gradually lost interest in the war, the Knights maintained unaltered the level of their intervention sharing the successes as well as the failures. One such failure was the 1692 attack on Crete, the former Venetian bastions, now baulked the Venetians themselves.48 But they surprised and captured Scio on September 15th, 1694 in which enterprise the Order’s galleys were under Franz Sigismund Count of Thunn,49 Captain General from 1693 to 1697. The event caused great anger in the Sultan’s Divan, so much so that the Ottoman navy was severely commanded to retrieve Scio. The Kapudan Pasha at the time happened to be Hussein Pasha – better known as Mezzomorto – an incredibly patient leader, worthy successor to the proverbial Fabius Cunctator and a superb tactician who specialised in wearing down and exasperating his opponents.

The wily Ottoman admiral was all too aware of
his fleet’s net inferiority and refused to risk it in a direct encounter. Instead, keeping a calm head, he awaited the usual seasonal withdrawal of the Ponentini (Western fleets), following which he had little trouble to re-occupy Scio. In 1695, the two opposing fleets met briefly off the Spalmadores islands, when Mezzamorto’s Fabian tactics ensured that his fleet — although badly out-gunned — suffered only slight damage. On September 22nd 1696, Mezzomorto had to take a heavier risk off Corinth, then under a severe Venetian attack; again his prudence averted a head-on clash which his opponents were desperately seeking.

1697 and 1698 were to tax Mezzomorto’s resources of elusiveness but he passed the test with flying colours. In the summer of 1697 the Venetians attempted again to blockade the Dardanelles, as they had done in 1656. Mezzomorto thwarted their designs; in the running battle between the isles of Imbros and Tenedos, he kept his fleet sufficiently out of range to exasperate his more sanguine foes, who, try as they could, were unable to come to grips with him. The next year too, the Venetians and their allies returned to the Dardanelles; once more Mezzomorto proved predictably and irritatingly unobliging, in effect winning this duel of wits, by not allowing his stronger opponent to score. The Treaty of Karlowitz signed on February 21st, 1699 brought to an end these general hostilities. Surely no one was more relieved than the wily Mezzomorto who was thus able to postpone indefinitely a show-down with destiny.

**The Big Powers in the Mediterranean**

The Treaty of Karlowitz concluded that interesting phase of Mediterranean history – an interregnum of the lesser powers that had held since the 1580’s. The outbreak of the Spanish War of Succession (1701–1713) marked a new era during which the big nations entrenched themselves permanently in the Mediterranean; thus all the local powers lost the effectiveness of their autonomy.

The actual provisions of the Treaty of Karlowitz proved disastrous for the Ottoman Empire, who had to surrender Morea and parts of the Dalmation coast to the Venetians. Both the Austrians and the newly arisen Russia of Peter the Great were also able to make considerable in-roads into the European part of the Ottoman Empire, which, for a time, appeared on the brink of dissolution.

Yet history was about to prove more considerate to Ottoman imperial existence, for the rivalry of the big powers, now firmly entrenched in the Mediterranean scene, ensured that either one of the big rivals – France or Britain – would exercise its whole-hearted influence to prevent precisely that dissolution from taking place – a cancerous situation that was to continue to fester until 1918.

Almost immediately the expansion of the Hapsburg Empire into the Balkans aroused French envy. Thus after the next round of wars, the Sublime Porte was able to recoup most of its losses at the Peace of Passarowitz (1718), most of all at the expense of Venice who lost the majority of its 1699 gains. This cutting down to size of the Venetian republic was symptomatic of the new age dominated by the big powers. The 17th century interregnum of the lesser states simply melted away, supplanted by a new reality in which the super-powers of the time – France, Britain, Austrian and Russia – in order to extend their influence, played on the chessboard of Europe that now came to incorporate the Mediterranean region too. The lesser states lost their faculty of initiative and, like the government of the Order on tiny Malta, were reduced to client-states or emasculated as neutrals by the Treaty of Utrech (1713).

**The French:** Previously we noted how the French were drawn by Mazarin’s designs into a more active Mediterranean policy, starting with the 1664 intervention against Gigeri, followed in 1668 by their participation in the War of Candia. The Sicilian troubles of 1672 enabled the French Admiral Duquesne to intervene by defeating a combined Spanish-Dutch fleet under the brilliant Ruyter. Another attack on Algiers itself followed in 1682–1683. Behind this accretion of interest in Mediterranean affairs there were also plans for substantial French expansion in the region propounded by the philosopher Leibnitz who, 125 years ahead of Bonaparte, instigated Louis XIV to occupy Egypt, not to mention the more grandiose overtures later suggested by Innocent XI.

**The British:** The Order’s presence in Malta, in a way, appeared to secure a safe base for the French if
The need for it was ever to be felt - as Bonaparte recalled in his own good time. But no sooner did French interest in the Mediterranean become clear, than the British took steps to counteract it. Way back in 1620, Capt. Mansell had sailed the British navy into the Mediterranean to settle scores with the pirates in Algiers. Cromwell’s navy under the determined Blake entered the Mediterranean repeatedly, first in 1650 in pursuit of the of Prince Rupert and the Dutch, again in 1652 – 1653 and 1654; on the latter occasion Blake operated against the Duke of Guise who had designs on Naples. On 5th April of the same year, Blake burnt nine galleys belonging to corsairs at Porto Farina (near Tunis).

The British navy returned once more to the Mediterranean to undertake action against Spain in 1656 – 1658, while in 1694 Russel conducted another campaign against the French. On August 4th 1704, Admiral Rooke occupied the Rock of Gibraltar whose strategic value was earlier discovered by Blake. The event gave the British a solid footing in the Mediterranean, presaging the course of things to come, and encompassing the destiny of Malta as well.

Russia: At this juncture too was awakened Russian interest in the Mediterranean, impinging also on Maltese events. In July 1696, Peter the Great had occupied the town of Azov on the Black Sea from the Tartar tributaries of the Ottoman Empire. He then proceeded to build a naval base at Taganrog. Whether to seek technical advice for his new arsenal, or as a kind of sounding the long-term possibility of an alliance against the common foe, the Tsar sent a delegation to Malta headed by his cousin the Generalissimo Michael Boris Petrovitch Svenevetief, Lieutenant of Wiatska, ceremoniously received by Grand Master Perellos on 18 May, 1698 and to whom was conferred the Cross of Honour.

But Russia’s Mediterranean hopes received a temporary set-back. The energetic Tsar’s designs were baulked after his debacle at Pruth (1711), forcing him to come to terms with the Sublime Porte, which meant the handing back of Azov. Still the experience proved a useful one for the Russians; they had discovered the easiest way to reach the Mediterranean, a policy which Catherine II and most of her successors were to pursue with determination.

Thus by the beginning of the 18th Century, the big nations had already installed themselves as Mediterranean powers, or were well on the way to reach its shores. The era of the autonomous lesser states that had characterised the 17th Century
interregnum had fizzled into nothing. The Maltese sovereignty of the Knights of St. John was to survive for another century, largely thanks to the reputation gained in the previous two centuries – an increasingly exotic spectacle bereft of that dynamism forged only in the world of action.

The Organisation of the Order's Galley-Squadron

The galley-squadron was the main constituent of the Order's fleet at all times, even though other vessels were fitted out including a lighter form of the galley – a galleone of around 1500 salme (314.75 ton). The Order maintained also a galleon right from the start of its stay in Malta – a practice soon imitated by the Grand Master who fitted another galleon, both armed for the corso.

Throughout the 16th century, the number of galleys varied from two to five. The decision to arm five galleys on a permanent basis for the caruanes was decided upon during 1584–1585. The proposal to arm a sixth galley was first made by the Grand Master to the Council on July 12th, 1627, while the seventh galley – the Lascara – participated for the first time in the Candia campaign of 1652. The eight galley – called Ottava – was being considered in 1684, at the beginning of the Morea War, but was only fitted out in 1686. The difficulties encountered to keep all eight galleys in fit fighting shape indicated that the Order had overstretched its naval potential, forcing it to face up to its limitation; thus, in December 1692, it was resolved to discontinue arming the Ottava. Yet the Order persisted in maintaining its squadron of galleys well into the 18th century, being very likely the last Mediterranean power to employ these costly and obsolete vessels as an integral part of its navy.

Complements: A feature of the the big galleys used in Mediterranean warfare during the 16th and 17th century was the enourmous complements they carried, not infrequently approaching 500 men, sometimes reaching even the 600 mark. Apart from a nucleus of about 25 knights and serving-brothers, each galley of the Order carried a mixed complement of sailors, rowers and homini d'armamento (armed men). The Capitana, as a rule, carried more men than other galleys including some 30 knights; its complement of both sailors and ‘armed men’ varied with time. In 1618 the Capitana carried a crew of 180 together with 160 ‘armed men’. In 1657, all the seven galleys of the Order had a complement of 1248 ‘armed men’ between them – an average of 180 each. During the 1664 and 1665 caruanes, when the galley-squadron abstained from participating in the Candia campaigns, the number of ‘armed men’ was drastically reduced to 120 for the Capitana, and 100 for each of the other galleys. But in 1685, at the start of the Morea war, when amphibian actions became the characteristic tactic of the campaigns, the complement for ‘armed men’ was sharply increased to 230 for the Capitana and 200 for each of the other galleys, apart from a detachment of 28 grenadiers (granetieri).

Unfortunately, information about rowers is more sparse. From the 1579 report of Archbishop Torres – at the time when the Order was fitting out three rather than four galleys – we learn that there were 277 bonavogli (paid volunteers), 216 forzati (convicts) and 200 slaves; it works out at 230 rowers per galley (for a Squadron of three), although the larger galleys of the 17th century required more rowers at the benches. Torres also listed only 460 sailors, suggesting again a rather low figure per galley if a Squadron of four was going to be armed. Available sources seem to indicate that up to the War of Candia (1644), each galley carried approximate complements of about 280 rowers, 130 crewmen, 120 “armed men” and some 20 knights – in all 550 men. These numbers were augmented in later years according to the needs of the time, most of all in the detachment of “armed men”.

Some rules: A number of rules regulated this mixed mass of turbulent men. No one under the age of 20 years was allowed on board the galleys – a rule that applied for the professed members of the Order as well. However on December 28th, 1662 the Council brought down their age-limit to 19 as the rule was causing difficulties for members to qualify for one of the commende since each was first expected to participate in four caruanes. Another rule stipulated that all the ‘armed men’ had to be trained musketeers, while the rest of the crew were expected to be adept with the arquebus (archibugieri). In 1691 a new regulation was issued banning all types of smoking on the galleys.

Wages: The upkeep of the squadron must have
cost a hefty sum of money to the Comun Tesoro (with the exception of the Lascara paid for from the Grand Master’s purse). All the crew, the ‘armed men’ and the bonavogli had to be paid. What kind of remuneration did they receive? Unlike the crews and ‘armed men’ employed on vessels licensed for the corso (expected to share in the profits), all the men sailing with the galleys – apart from the slaves and the forzati – were assured of a regular wage as well as an issue of daily rations. The lowest paid of all were the bonavogli who from 1614 used to receive a mere 22 tari per month, raised by a further 6 tari on January 7th, 1669 – apart from their rations. The Chapter General of 1631 had authorised an annual expenditure of 35,000 scudi to meet the wages of the crews, which varied sharply according to the competence and the individual’s responsibilities. The Piloto of the Capitana received a remuneration of 15 scudi monthly, while his two assistants and the Piloti of the other galleys appear to have been entitled to 10 scudi per month (1650). The various comiti and compagni (mates) were paid 3 scudi per month in 1616, raised to 5 scudi monthly by 1650.

The chief carpenter of the squadron serving on the Capitana in 1608 – a certain Gio Maria Grec – claimed 4 scudi monthly for himself, one scudo above the wages of his counterparts in the other galleys. The barbers too became entitled to 3 scudi monthly after threatening some sort of union action in 1608; their representation was granted with the proviso of cutting the hair of all men on board – as previously they had reserved their attention to knights only, these being in the habit of tipping them. Although we have little direct knowledge of the wages of the ‘armed men’, it is known that the caporali used to receive $\frac{3}{2}$ scudi per month, suggesting that their wages were comparable to those of the crew. The medico-in-chief of the galleys was in a class of his own, drawing 300 scudi per annum (1647) although it is not clear what his assistants on the other galleys received.

These wages were paid apart from the rations issued to the men even when serving ashore. In fact there seems also to have been some procedure to grant sailors sick-leave ashore, an arrangement that permitted the men to draw both their regular wages and their rations. A fair number of pensions – known as piaze morte – that incorporated the issue of rations were awarded from time to time to retired members of the galley-crews or to their families if their head happened to die on active service.

Victualling: The provisioning of the galleys posed several serious problems on account of the large concentration of men out at sea without ever touching land for the entire length of the caruane. The staple food for crews and rowers, in common with other navies, consisted of ship’s biscuit (biscotto) prepared in the Order’s ovens in Valletta, but, from the latter part of the 17th Century, supplied through the Order’s ovens in Augusta, Sicily. If the Squadron happened to stay away at sea too long, the Comun Tesoro used to hire transport – usually a tartana – to despatch a fresher supply of biscotto.

Although there was an injunction against carrying both ice-boxes and some sort of portable oven (1684) to provide fresh bread, yet one source actually stipulated ‘che alla ciurma di terra e mare si dia un giorno pane et un giorno biscotto . . . eccetto agli ammalati’ (to rowers whether on land or on the sea is to be issued bread one day, ship’s biscuit on the other . . . except to the sick). It is clear that a fair amount of cooking took place on the galleys for the rowers’ daily rations included minestra di frumento (barley soup) to which used to be added oil and vinegar while afloat.

The galleys were also permitted to carry live...
cattle, ciascun galera porti 8 testi di bestiami, 4 grosse e 4 vitelli, 6 grosse e 10 montoni la Capitana, e 40 ciascuna galera singiglia; 69 (each galley may carry 8 heads of cattle, 4 large and 4 calves; or 6 large and 10 sheep for the Capitana, and 40 sheep for each other galley). These were unlikely to last out some 2² months for 500 men; it is in fact clear that the crews' ingenuity assured that each galley also managed to carry various chicken-coops and rabbit-hutches.

Yet life could not have been comfortable; overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions were notorious features of the galleys, although the Order appeared to have effected considerable ameliorations for the men on board, so that its recruitment of bonavogli never slackened; at times their number even exceeding that of the slaves as the 1579 Torres report bears out. A number of brave attempts to maintain at least a minimum degree of comfort were made. Among the various instructions, one is intended to provide tavole per mangiar la gente di capo (tables for the crew to eat upon) an arrangement that in the circumstances must have been a make-shift affair.

The group of knights and serving-brothers – called caravanisti – were supplied with better fare and standards. Thus in 1669 the Comun Tesoro made provision to give to each galley a complete silver dinner-service – uno stato d'argenteria per servizio delle galere, an arrangement that incidentally helps us to deduce that the Capitana carried 30 knights, while each of the other galleys had a complement of 20 knights. The whole silver-service cost the Comun Tesoro a pretty penny – 22,000 scudi – an expenditure which the ideas about social standing and status no doubt justified. It must be remembered too that the fantastic mortality rate incurred by this elite group could not have made the prospects of joining such a risk-fraught adventure very attractive.

One happy discovery made about life on the Order’s galleys during the 17th century was the implication that on board there must have been quite a lot of music-playing and singing. In 1605, a certain Pietro Blasio demanded to be paid il soldo di musico per il tempo che è stato con le galere, (demands his wages as musico for all the times he was with the galleys). The text suggests that Pietro Blasio must have been some sort of accomplished virtuoso. But there was also musical entertainment of a more popular character, as a 1665 provision for the wages of li musici delle ciaramelle (bagpipe players) which were fixed at 4 scudi each per month, apart from the rations, while the leader got a scudo extra. These bagpipe players had to be hired from Sicily and their terms of employment stipulated “that they were under obligation to teach other people on the galleys”.73

There was, of course, music for the more ceremonial occasion; the players were simply referred to by the name of their instrument – clarino or trombeta. But it appears that in 1641 the use of trumpet-flourishes was done away with. It was apparently sadly missed in the intense wrangling over precedence that followed during the war of Candia. In fact at the request of the commanders, il concerto di trombetti was re-instated on 11th April 1663 on the eve of the joint operations with the French against Gigeri.74 But no doubt what the Capitano-Generale had really in mind was the smart figure he was going to cut when his Capitana next encountered its Venetian and Genoese counterparts.

As soon as the galleys returned to their home-port in early autumn after the year’s cruise, the galleys were duly anchored in the Grand Harbour, four alongside the marina of the Borgo (Dockyard Creek), and three off-shore the Isola (French Creek). Only some 60 men, half rowers and half crew, were left on board each galley,75 for their maintenance was immediately taken in hand.

The picture we get of the Order’s naval squadron is that its large galleys were ran on very disciplined lines, hard trained, with all their vital necessities well organised. Very reasonable arrangements were made to secure superior standards of service and sanitation than was current at the time. The mere fact that the Order was able to continue to fit out galleys for most of the 18th century – when practically everyone else had given them up – indicated that it was still able to find crews, rowers and other people to serve on them. The various rules and provisions we have been outlining are ample proof that the Order had never ceased to perfect regulations on the organisation of its galley-squadron, profiting from its long experience with these vessels.
A 1633 doodle of a galley of the Order showing crewmen engaged at various tasks. (From folio of register for 1597-1598).

Doodle of a late sixteenth century frigate. From front folio of register for 1599-1600.
Drawing of two gentlemen, of the early seventeenth century, presumably clerks for the Patents Office. (From register for 1632–1633).
NOTES

1. The Odyssey, chap. 5; said of Ogygia usually identified with one of the Maltese Islands.
8. NLM Arch. 299 f. 50v (Oct. 17, 1558); G. Bosio, ibid. vol. III, p. 401.
12. Topic discussed by C. Cassar: Communications and Human Mobility in 16th Cent. Malta, read at the 1982 Historical seminar & still unpublished.
14. NLM Arch. 293, f. 108 v.
20. NLM Arch. 450, ff. 256v-257.
21. NLM Lib. 746, f. 4; NLM Arch. 454, f. 256; Dal Pozzo, ibid. vol. I pp. 461 seq.
32. F. Braudel, ibid. vol. 11 part 3, section 2, chapter 3.
34. NLM Arch. 260 ff. 14v; NLM Lib. 746, f. 35.
38. NLM Arch. 261, ff. 4–5v; Dal Pozzo vol. II, pp. 312–321.
40. Vide for example the Pratica of April 11, 1764 – NLM Arch. 272 ff. 1v–2 “… stabilirete la vostra crociera in questo canale a Ponente e levante dell’Isola traversando in Sicilia secondo che il tempo ve lo permetterà …”
Census for 1614: NLM Arch. 6385 ff. 120–121, NLM Univ. 2 f. 40; NLM Libr. 670. ff. 6–7.
Census for 1632: W. Porter – Knights of Malta, (1884 London) p. 287; NLM Univ. 2 f. 108 gives figure of 56,100 incorporating crews and rowers. See also NLM Libr. 162, ff. 125–127.
Census for 1658: NLM Univ. 2 ff. 165–166.
Census for 1670: NLM Univ. 2 ff. 213–214.
Census for 1680: NLM Univ. 2 ff. 246–246v.
For 1728 Zebbug (Gozo) figure and for 1745 Rabat and Mdina figures, vide A.A.M. Status Animarum.
47. NLM Arch. 263, ff. 73–75.
48. NLM Arch. 263, ff. 123v–128.
49. NLM Arch. 264, ff. 31–35, 39–45.
50. NLM Arch. 6389 tomo XIV unpaginated; also NLM Arch. 502, f. 110.
52. NLM Arch. 263, f. 128 (Dec. 11, 1692).
53. NLM Lib. 746, f. 29 (Nov. 12, 1618).
54. NLM Arch. 260, f. 1 (April 11, 1657). The figures for the crew are also given: 205 for the Capitana, 172 for the S. Pietro and Sta. Maria, 174 for the S. Giovanni, 175 for the Sta. Maria del Rosario and S. Giuseppe, and 176 for the S. Gregorio.
55. NLM Arch. 262, ff. 191v (March 22, 1685).
57. Chapter General of 1631 under heading 'Ordinazioni per le Galere'.

58. NLM Arch. 263, f. 81 (Feb. 10, 1691).
59. NLM Arch. 261, f. 116 (Jan. 7, 1669).
60. NLM Arch. 117, ff. 114v–115 (July 8, 1650).
61. NLM Arch. 663, f. 280v (May 4, 1616).
62. Ibid. f. 112 (Dec. 20, 1608).
63. Ibid. f. 108v (Nov. 29, 1608).
64. Ibid. f. 230v (Feb. 22, 1614).
65. Ibid. f. 231 (April 12, 1614).
66. Ibid. f. 19v (July 9, 1605).
67. NLM Arch. 645, p. 67 (1669).
68. NLM Lib. 746, f. 38v (1680).
69. Ibid. f. 35 (Nov. 6, 1660).
70. Ibid. f. 37v.
71. NLM Arch. 645, p. 63 (Oct. 1669).
72. NLM Arch. 663A, f. 24v (1605).
73. NLM Arch. 261, f. 14 (Feb. 6, 1665).
74. NLM Arch. 260 ff. 150–150v (1663).
75. One of the Ordinazioni of the 1631 Chapter General.