A Penultimate Crisis
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A Penultimate Crisis

The Order of St. John, Malta and the French Revolution

Matthias Ebejer

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of Arts in the University of Malta for the degree of Bachelors (Hons) in History.

Department of History
University of Malta
May 2012
To my fiancée Deborah

For her constant encouragement and patience.
Preface

The reasons behind the Order’s loss of Malta in 1798

The eighteenth century is a century of change, otherwise known as the century of Enlightenment. This means that only by the end of this century has the age-old medieval line of thought finally come to its demise with the beginning of a chain of revolutions. Throughout Europe these revolutions will place action upon the words of the great philosophes of the age of light. Once France, the first to experience physical change in 1789, was in flames with these ideas of liberty, it was only a matter of time before all Europe sought to follow suit. Malta, ruled by the Prince Grand Master, was no exception. Scottish traveller Brydone wrote the following on the Order of Malta in 1770:

‘This institution, which is a strange compound of the military and the ecclesiastic, has now subsided for near seven hundred years, and though I believe, one of the first-born, has long survived every other child of chivalry.’

The implication was that the institution was doomed soon to die.¹ Cavaliero puts it bluntly that ‘In the growing complexity of European politics, the existence of an international order of chivalry engaged on a crusade, became an anomaly which was difficult to reconcile with a Europe of Governments who had long since tacitly agreed on abandoning wars of religion.’² Though Malta never formally experienced anything on the scale of the Revolution of 1789 in France, it was a microcosm of change. Reform was primarily sought after by the sovereign Order of Malta itself.³ The Chapter General of 1776 was a product of this heartfelt need for reform, prevention of a repetition of


³ Panzavecchia, *L’ultimo Periodo della Storia di Malta* (1835), 108. ‘Si desiderava dai native; una regenerazione politica, un cambiamento dell’antiquato sistema governativo, un nuovo regime piu coerente allo spirito del secolo, ques’era lo scopo a cui miravono i voti ardenti non solo dei Maltesi, ma anche dei piu aculati dei cavalieri dell’Ordine.’
previous insurgencies, and a feeling of fear from what was still to come. The main aspect could be seen in an attempt to the resolution of an internal struggle that took place since the early years of the century between Church and State. In this sense we may view the years of Grand Master de Rohan as a by-product of Enlightened Monarchy and the result of his predecessors, mainly Pinto and Ximenes. His reign on the throne of Malta would thus be oriented towards one goal, the consolidation and integrity of the Order in the age of change and de Rohan can thus only be understood and interpreted in the light of this struggle between the old and the new.

In my study I am focusing on the effects, short and long term, that resulted in the Order’s loss of Malta in 1798 with very little effective resistance. How would these events be traced back to the years of de Rohan and the Revolution? I will attempt to determine if 1798 presented only a military confrontation with Napoleon that the knights avoided to engage in, or if the battle for the Order’s survival had long been lost since the years of the French Revolution. To understand this I will analyse not just the exterior threats to the Order’s survival, but also the interior struggle that rendered the Order incapable of successfully confronting these exterior threats. The traditional account of events hold three main factors that were responsible for the surrender of the islands; all three can be traced back to the above mentioned occasion. The first is the fall of the monarchy in France, which led to the loss of protection the Order was receiving from a foreign ‘great power’. The second is the loss of land and revenue which put the Order in a serious financial crisis. The third is the spread of Revolutionary ideology which led the local population and some knights to rebel against the Order’s government in Malta. I will analyse all three claims and attempt to prove or disprove them through the sources and possibly come out with a revised sequence of events.
Acknowledgments

- First and foremost I would like to thank my tutor; Dr Francis Ciappara. It is mainly thanks to his guidelines that I was able to compile this work.
- I can’t fail to mention the staff at the National Library, Notarial Archives and Archives of the Inquisition, who were always very professional and helpful.
- I would also like to acknowledge Matthieu Camilleri B.A. (Hons.), a former colleague and friend, provided me with a soft copy of the document AIM Correspondence 102, which was not available at the Archives. The document was central to my research.
- Liam Gauci B.A. (Hons.), curator of the National Maritime Museum, for sharing with me his research on the ‘Maltese Corso’.
- Neville Ebejer helped me in my research on the ‘Reggimento di Malta’ and gave me a copy of his unpublished study with the same title.
- Thomas A. Muscat B.Euro. Stud. (Hons.), for his assistance on Franco-Maltese relations.
- Last but not least I would like to acknowledge all my course colleagues for their support and companionship.
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Chapter 1

Power Politics and Foreign Affairs

1. The Order prior to 1775

The Order of knights Hospitaller by far survived in space and time its contemporary Orders born and bred alongside it in the Holy Land, mainly the Order of the Temple and the Teutonic Order. Although exiled from Malta in 1798, the Order survives in purpose as a charitable organisation to this very day. Following the loss of Malta, the Order underwent its umpteenth restructure following crises, in the same way it adapted to the new circumstances after the loss of Acre and the loss of Rhodes respectively. Key to understanding why the Order of the Hospital survived tempest after tempest of tumultuous political turmoil and wars in Europe, is the appreciation of the first raison d'être. The merchants of Amalfi were inspired to set up this new institution which had at heart the care of pilgrims travelling to the Christian shrines of the Holy land. Taking a look at the whole nine centuries of the Order’s existence, one immediately realises that this hospitality, to which the Order earned its name, continues uninterrupted throughout as a central feature of the service offered by the Order to Christendom. Soon enough this branch of hospitality is accompanied by the branch of military protection. Hospitaller history should be understood through the flexibility shown in adapting both branches to the times and needs of European powers and the Papacy. It is to these powers that the Order owes its survival, along with a stroke fortune here and there such as the demise and inheritance from the Order of the Temple. It could have easily been suppressed at any point in time, just like the Order of Temple. In Cavaliero’s words; ‘A small power only functions in a power vacuum or by kind permission of its protectors’. ⁴

It is only when focusing on the importance of great power protection and the Order’s utility to the monarchies of Europe that we can comprehend the weight the eighteenth century had in reshaping the Order back to its original form in the 1080s.

⁴ Cavaliero, x
During the Crusading era, the Order of St John stationed in the Holy land, kept itself as detached as possible from the intrigues of European courts and princes. It cannot be disputed that the lack of unity between the multitudes of European monarchs was one of the key contributors to the failure of the crusading movement in itself. One might argue that the Crusading movement in itself was created by the Papacy in order to try to find a common cause for unity among nations against a collective foe. However, despite the initial success, the Crusading movement failed to achieve this unity, and all Christian forces had to be evacuated from the Holy land after the loss of Acre in 1291. This put in jeopardy the value of all Crusading chivalric Orders, most of which would eventually be dissolved. Nonetheless, the Order never gave up the fight on Islam, by land and by sea, from which base they operated. However, the Knights Hospitaller had to prove their worth in order to continue to attract donors of land and recruits. This task was becoming increasingly more difficult whilst staying away from the various feuds that existed between the European sovereigns and princes. In the Holy Land they had benefitted from relative isolation, which isolation turned into dependency as they hopped from island to island till they settled on Malta. With the acceptance of Malta after an eight-year odyssey, the Order of St John became intertwined in European diplomacy. In all disputes between Christian Powers, the Order had to observe strict neutrality, and safe asylum had to be offered to everyone except the enemies of the Kingdom of Sicily\(^5\), who technically was still the owner of Malta. Eventually this agreement was softened with France’s war with the Empire (1727, 1733). As the Order could not negate haven to its primary protector, it offered anchorage at St Paul’s bay and Marsa Scirocco, which were not included as fortified ports in the initial agreement with the Kingdom of Sicily.\(^6\) Relations with France were given utmost importance in the eighteenth century and would define the character of the Order and how it dealt with coming of the Revolution.

\(^5\) Cavaliero, 47.

\(^6\) Ibid.
2. *International Relations in the Eighteenth Century and the Concept of Neutrality*

Cavaliero compares Malta to a fruit on a tree, ‘One has to let it grow ripe, then cut it down and squeeze the juice.’⁷ All monarchs were aware of this fruit, they differed on when and how to cut it down.

Malta’s autonomy depended upon the multiplicity of services it could render to as many powers as possible, such as free of charge Hospital services for all sailors. These included Protestant as well as Catholic countries and not only those with interest in the Mediterranean.⁸ A far cry from the long-forgotten Crusading movement, the eighteenth century presented the Order with various alliances between the Ottomans and Christians, mainly maritime powers who sought to expand their market into the Levant. The war against the Barbary regencies had to be tackled delicately, and would be harshly disputed by the Christian powers themselves. The knights became victims of a character they had created for themselves.⁹ Venice for example would frequently resolve to sequestrate land, whenever the Order ransacked Ottoman ships with precious cargo to be traded with the *Serenissima*. The Ottoman Empire would in turn hold Venice responsible for any action taken by Christian privateers against its ships, given safe haven at any of Venice’s ports. Therefore Venice would only return the Order’s lands within Venetian territory once proper compensation was given and the perpetrators of such an act brought to justice. The Republic was resolved to safeguard its honour, its subjects and its trading partners.¹⁰ I will return later to the topic of corsairing and its implications on Maltese economy in the next chapter. Eventually by the second half of the eighteenth century, the growing importance of trade passing through Malta to various European ports, led the Venetians to rethink their stand as regards the island. In April 1762 the Venetian Senate decreed that the exemption of tariff payments by Maltese merchants in Venetian ports would establish a trade partnership between the two, which would certainly be beneficial to the Republic.

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⁷ Ibid., 50.
⁸ Ibid., 47.
⁹ Ibid., 28
This would entice the Grand Master to offer a similar concession to Venetian merchants in Maltese ports. However the Grand Master approached this matter delicately as it involved a matter of neutrality. The Order of St John had never accorded France, Spain or other Italian Republics similar terms, though the services it enjoyed from these states was more beneficial than that recently offered by Venice. Had the Grand Master accepted to reciprocate this concession, he would have been bound to offer all the other states similar treatment. Instead of this concession, Grand Master Pinto acceded to the Venetian envoy’s request of ‘naturalisation’ of Venetian merchant families who wished to reside and practice their profession in Malta and would be exempt from paying customs dues as was normally allowed to the Maltese merchant. This treatment had been commonly conceded to various merchants from other countries, and would not put at risk either Malta’s neutrality or profit from mercantile activity in the port.

The French were the primary protagonists in the Order’s foreign matters. They had long been particularly interested in the services Malta granted. Being also a safe asylum for privateers, the island was filled with many seamen who were at loose and could be recruited by the French navy. The only restrictions on recruitment were Maltese sailors, as they were regarded by the Order as too skilled and valuable to grant to anyone else’s services except for its own and recruitment was only allowed during peacetime. The French particularly benefitted also from the use of Malta through the island’s geographical location being half way from their activities in the Levant. Most mariners opted to quarantine in Malta instead of at Marseilles for instance, the former being less arduous yet more efficient. On the other hand France always sold weapons and powder to the Order, even at times when it needed them for its own wars. Although on no occasion did the Order deny this treatment to any other Christian country,

11 Ibid., 234-239.
12 Ibid., 240-242.
13 Ibid., 246.
14 Cavaliero, 47.
15 Ibid., Though an exception had been made for Admiral Hood in 1794, though under very different circumstances.
16 Ibid., 48.
proportionally the French were much more present on the island than any other foreign nationality. This frequently aroused suspicion from the other countries, and the Order repeatedly received protests against this strong attachment to France, mainly from the English.\(^{17}\) Often these suspicions that the Order was violating its neutrality in assistance of French interests were triggered by instances when the Order took part in French-led wars against the Muslims. In 1728, while the French were at war with Tripoli, the Order guarded the coasts of Tunis and Algiers to deter them from taking action against France. The Order kept also a close watch on the Porte. The French were bound by agreement not to fire on Turkish vessels, which might have put them in check had the Turks wanted to deliver armaments and food to the besieged. However, the Order’s fleet took France out of the sensitive diplomatic spot as they acted as a buffer impeding any possible Turkish, Algerian or Tunisian assistance to reach Tripoli.\(^{18}\) Another account of further familiarity between the Order and France took place in 1741 when the French were fighting the Tunisian war. This time France used Malta directly to launch its fleet against Tunis. In recognition for its services, the court of Versailles allowed Maltese corsairs to hoist the French flag whenever they met trouble with the Turkish sultanas so as not be fired upon.\(^{19}\) The apex of this friendship was when Louis XV declared in 1765 that ‘The inhabitants of the islands under the Order of Malta are to be considered citizens of the kingdom of France.’\(^{20}\)

There are many more aspects that tie France and the Order in the eighteenth century, from military to educational and linguistic. However this increasing bond between the two meant that one nation among others would feel that the Order was defying its claim over the islands. Legally the islands of Malta belonged to the Kingdom of Sicily and Naples, given in feud to the Order by Charles V in 1530. However the Order made various claims to its sovereignty over Malta throughout the eighteenth century, mainly through Grand Master Pinto but reflected even in de Rohan’s Chapter

\(^{17}\) Cavaliero, 48.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.

General of 1775. On various occasions had Naples attempted to assert its authority over the Islands through various methods. Nevertheless, both the Papacy and France interceded for the Order, and as long as the Order had one or the other on its side, Naples was incapable of acting physically against the Order’s property. Naples disposed of two powerful methods to put pressure on the Order. The first is the *sequestro,* the act of confiscation of the Order’s property within Neapolitan and Sicilian territory. The second method of making the Order succumb to its demands was much more powerful than the first, as the islands of Malta relied strongly on foodstuffs from Sicily, mainly grain. The Kingdom of Naples would block that shipment and therefore take away these vital provisions. The Order made attempts to have more than one supplier of essential food, but the transportation by sea over long distances meant that Sicily provided the best and most reliable source. The worst fears of the Order were confirmed in 1753 when the Charles III used both methods to put leverage on his claims. It took a year for the situation to be settled, a year which the Maltese population had to survive without the vital foodstuffs from Sicily. Nonetheless, in the end it was both Papal and French intervention that restored the flow of trade. Naples could never have managed to act against the will of the papacy and challenge the ultimate pressure of France. One has to keep this in mind when analysing facts of the later years of the century. The French supremacy declined after the seven years war, France was mainly bankrupt because of its involvement in the American war, and finally the monarchy was abolished with the Revolution. Neapolitan relations with the Papacy had also deteriorated, and as the latter had also lost most of its protectors to a European war over the French Revolution, this had left Naples to act on its claims on Malta once again.

Neapolitan and French foreign policy with regards to Malta differ in one particular way. Whilst France wanted Malta to depend on it, it also wanted that Malta would be strong enough to be capable of defending itself. On the other hand, Neapolitan interests would see Malta weak, dependent and in a state of insecurity, as it would give the Kingdom of the two Sicilies the opportunity to intervene directly in local affairs. This is very clearly indicated by Inquisitor Gallaratti Scotti, when Naples requests that as a
result of its quarrel with the Papacy, the Church Tribunals had to be abolished not only in the Kingdom’s territory but also in Malta. The Inquisitor makes the point that this was not the first time that Naples had made pretensions on the legal and administrative system of the islands, yet in the past they had all failed through the intervention of France and the Holy See.\textsuperscript{23} So it would be clear, according to Inquisitor Gallaratti Scotti, that Naples was taking full advantage of the Revolution in France and its open struggle with Rome to assert its authority over the diocese of Malta and the Order. However, what the Inquisitor does not mention is that even the Grand Master benefitted from this quarrel between the Holy See and Naples. Both Pinto and de Rohan played the two against each other, with the aim of reducing the power of both over the internal administration of Malta. It was quite an entangled situation, when contradicting orders came from Rome and Naples.

Neapolitan intention would be to introduce itself in the administrative system of the islands and exert its dominion and jurisdiction, abolishing the Order’s claim to sovereignty and all Church authority.\textsuperscript{24} Neapolitan Prime minister Tanucci was one of the many who directly attacks the autonomy of Malta.\textsuperscript{25} The Inquisitor also notes his suspicion of the Neapolitan fleet close to these shores during the summer of 1791,\textsuperscript{26} as he and also the population were wary of Neapolitan intentions. The Grand Masters feared that had they allowed the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies to step up its demands on the Order without giving something in return, other monarchies in Europe might attempt to extend their hand over the prized islands through their co-nationals forming part of the Order.\textsuperscript{27} This weary situation was anticipated by knight la Beauvigne in a letter to Paris in 1768.\textsuperscript{28} He claims that if Malta’s sovereignty was lost, it would soon become an accessory to Princes, and sooner or later useless.\textsuperscript{29} Tension had also erupted with

\textsuperscript{23} Archives of the Inquisition of Malta Correspondence (Corr.) 101, f. 297 r.
\textsuperscript{24} AIM, Corr. 101, f. 297 r.
\textsuperscript{25} Ciappara, ‘Malta, Napoli e la Santa Sede nella seconda meta’ del ‘700’, Mediterranea Richerche Storiche, V (2008), 177.
\textsuperscript{26} AIM, Corr. 101, f.316 r.
\textsuperscript{27} Cavaliero, 50.
\textsuperscript{28} Ciappara (2008), 177.
\textsuperscript{29} ‘Abbiamo cambiato mestiere...Altre volte avevamo per nemico il solo Turco, il quale per distruggerci si serviva di cannoni, squadre e truppe...in oggi questo non ci incomoda spesso, ma ne abbiamo un second,
England, due to Grand Master Pinto’s decision to hang a young sailor in front of an English Admiral and his crew, despite the latter’s protests. Further discord erupted on the uncovering of a plot being hatched by British Consul Edward Dodsworth, with implications to the security of the island. He was condemned to death, which sentence was later changed to life imprisonment.

During the eighteenth century, the importance of the Mediterranean grew as several of the monarchies in Europe sought to use this sea to further enhance their power and influence over the rest of the region. Some, like Britain and France were traditionally maritime powers, but others like Austria and Russia and to some extent even Naples were nurturing ambition to become like the former. All of these had their agendas, France and England replaced the diminishing Italian Maritime Republics in trade; however, Naples and more so Russia might have aspired more towards territorial expansion. For Russia in particular, having a powerful navy and with it also a naval base in the Mediterranean, would give impetus to its war against the Porte. Russian interests might be clear to us; however little is known of Russian plans to achieve this goal of having a base in the Mediterranean. We know that Malta was not the only option Russia was considering, there were also the Venetian islands of Corfù, Zante and Cephalonia. When looking at events of 1798 from hindsight, we discover that Russia played a more central part in the Order’s diplomatic relations that the Order itself wanted to admit. When trying to compare Russian interests and aims for the islands with those of France and Naples, one might not manage to see a pattern. The French aimed for supremacy in the island but

che chiamasi il Marchese Tanucci...Tanucci mosse la pretensione che la sovranità' di quest'Isola è del suo Re e non della Santa Ordine. Attacco quanto ingiusto, altrettanto pericoloso, ed in effetti è un dardo scagliato alla nostra distruzione.' Ibid., 177.

30 Ryan, 78.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Even Britain would have been searching a replacement in the Mediterranean for the loss of the island of Minorca in 1783. However British intentions varied from Russian one as a base in the Mediterranean would serve mainly as a trade station rather than a foothold for military expansion.
34 Russia was also backed by Austria in this ordeal.
35 Blondy, 662.
without gaining direct control; the Neapolitans on the other hand wanted a direct control over Malta, and perhaps even oust the Order from the island if need be. Still, one would not manage to draw up so simply a Russian policy. Being Orthodox Christian, Russia would be in a way considered a second rate friend of the Catholic Order just like Britain; this is mainly because they did not fall under Papal authority. Secondly, no one was quite sure where to place Russia amongst the European powers, which made not just the Order put also other monarchs on guard and often approached Russia with caution. One cause united the Order with Russia, and that is the war with the Ottoman Empire. The Order offered its expertise to Russia more than once especially with the setting up of its fleet.

Russian methods changed as Grand Masters and Czars changed, all having their sympathies and policies. We know that Paul I was aiming at the Order’s magistracy, and many other Russian nobles were only too willing to offer their support in return for Crosses of devotion, which perhaps in their eyes might have given them a similar air to the French and Austrian nobility. On the other hand, Russian policy was not clear during the reign of Catherine the Great. Though mutual assistance between the Czarina and Grand Master Pinto seemed to increase, so did suspicion increase proportionally. Classic case scenarios of this relationship were the curious matters concerning the Marquis de Cavalcabo. Sent to Malta as Russian emissary, Cavalcabo could not be appointed ambassador as the Order had a strict rule that all foreign ambassadors had to be knights of the Order. However, Pinto accepted to let him reside in Malta, a decision which would be reversed as soon as de Rohan was elected. He was an enemy of the French, and one of his main aims certainly was to end French hegemony on the island. Though we do not know on whose orders he was acting, and might only assume that he was working for Russia, it is certain that the Order did not gain benefit from his stay. Cavalcabo conspired on various occasions both with members of the Order and even with the Maltese themselves, attempting to stir up a revolt against the Grand Master. Surprisingly enough, Pinto’s respect for the Czarina led him to pardon the conspirator. Cavalcabo still followed closely events of the ‘priests riot’. Though we cannot say he was involved personally, we might be led to think that he had a plan of his own. He was caught amassing arms at his

36 Cavaliero, 147.
37 Ibid, 150.
residence in Floriana to be used in a coup d’état against the newly appointed French Grand Master; the Russian fleet was also believed to be waiting to play its part in the plot. However, the Russian court at St Petersburg disassociated itself from Cavalcabo’s actions and he was exiled from Malta alone and in disgrace. If at the end it was the Czarina that was behind it all, the Russians changed tactics at that point; they would not risk getting caught plotting again and the new Grand Master was no Russian sympathiser like Pinto. The treaty of Kutchuk-Kainadji in 1774 had affirmed Russia as a maritime power, therefore, increasing the need for a base in the Mediterranean. Catherine the Great would persist in gaining Malta not by stirring up revolts, but by trying to win over de Rohan through landed property in Poland. Poland had been a point of many controversies throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, mostly through the dispute over the Ostrog legacy, lands and tithes which were immensely rich and desired. The Order had its eyes on this vastly large and rich country, in which it had almost no lands and revenues, and would befriend the Polish nobility in hope of acquiring commanderies in Poland. Prince Janus of Ostrog had left his lands to the Order of St John after his wife died and in the eventuality that his line would end. This occurred in 1672, and Knight Lubomirski, Grand Marshall of Poland, was appointed Commander of the Ostrog estates, who by Janus’ will, had to be a Pole. However, Lubomirski was given dispensation to marry, which was an exception in the Order’s rule and in this case cost dearly to the cause. With his and his wife’s death, several nobles came forward to claim the Ostrog title and lands. The debâcle hit the Order dearly as it had been deprived of a very valuable foothold in Poland; nonetheless, it would stop at nothing to have the Ostrog estates returned back. Russia, through the influence it had on resolving the matter, would use this cause célèbre as leverage in its relations with the Order. Nevertheless, the Ostrog matter was more a catalyst in helping the relations between Russia and the Order than a blackmailing pawn. Catherine the Great was willing to back up the Order’s claims on

38 Ryan, 79.

39 Ibid.

40 Cavaliero, 158.

41 Ibid.

42 For Poland and the Ostrog lands see Cavaliero, 144-148.
Poland in return for help in the war against the Porte, and agreement was swiftly reached through the able negotiations of Veronese Knight Michael Sagamoso. He was also pivotal in the setting up of an Anglo-Bavarian langue, meaning that the Order of St John still held a firm belief in a “growth policy” and the years 1789 to 1798 revolve around a massive exercise in foreign relations and negotiations, mainly with Russia and France as the main protagonists. The Order existed, however, not just through its alliances with the great powers, but also through its revenues. With the advent of the French Revolution, the two would become intricately woven together, and the Order’s survival definitely depended on its understanding and exploitation of this web of friendships, protection and finances.

3. The Order’s search for a friend 1792-1797

Relations with Revolutionary France were marked by cautious diplomacy and not by the show and use of force. Although France was categorically at war with the Ancien Regime and all its manifestations, relations with the Order were never stretched to embrace the use of arms. However the Order feared the fact that France never ruled out resorting to force if need be.\textsuperscript{43} Malta shared the same fate as the other neutral countries to which the ‘Revolution’ was exported. It was not yet conquered, but was simply there to be taken.\textsuperscript{44} An irreversible loss of character of the Order of St John was noted by all courts of Europe. Alan Blondy even supports the idea that de Rohan himself was holding the Order together in a time of extreme crisis, and with his death the morale of the Order to fight for its existence is lost.\textsuperscript{45} The policies of the Revolution towards Malta seem still very ambiguous. Historians have often chosen to focus on the end result of these policies, attributing the ‘grand finale’ to Bonaparte.

On the 4\textsuperscript{th} of August 1789, all tithes in France were abolished. In September of the same year, it was decreed that all church property would be put at the disposal of the

\textsuperscript{43} Blondy, 659.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
Nation. This would eventually qualify also the knights as clerics and their property sequestrated. Therefore, the Order sought to prove that it was composed of laymen, and that its existence and properties would still prove beneficiary to France without being confiscated. The Grand Master launched a large scale diplomatic and economic campaign, very much similar to modern-day lobbying. He dispatched letters to all the Catholic monarchs of Europe and the Pope, requesting their mediation. He made use of the various knights residing in the courts of Europe, especially Bailli Virieur, who was the Order’s ambassador for France, and was held in esteem by the Assembly. De Rohan also approached the Inquisitor, demanding the latter to make use of his frequent correspondence with Rome, to ask intervention on behalf of the Religion.

The National Assembly was soon assailed with petitions from the major ports of France, demanding that the Order be excluded from the nationalisation of property. Commercial interests in ports like Bordeaux and Marseilles were outlined in these petitions, showing how these would be largely affected had the Order been antagonised by its suppression and ceased to dock in French ports. Their arguments were threefold; the order was necessary for the protection of the French Maritime routes, the Order might favour any other power that offered to make good for its losses, this would lead to the economies of Marseilles and Bordeaux (amongst others) to be greatly shaken. It seems that these petitions were not entirely spontaneous plea by the numerous Chambers of Commerce of the mentioned ports. The printer of these petitions was Veuve d’Houray, the Order’s librarian, although it is undeniable that the French commercialists signed these petitions. News of these petitions gave spirit to the Grand Master that his plan was

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46 Ibid.
48 AIM, Corr. 101, f. 280r.
49 Ibid. f. 283r.
50 AIM, Corr. 101, f. 276r.
51 Blondy, 663.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
succeeding in safeguarding the Order’s interests.\textsuperscript{54} Despite all their efforts and the well orchestrated plans, these petitions gave no apparent results. However, it amounted to a dilemma for the National Assembly with regards to the Order’s privileges. The Assembly was divided on the matter, with Armand Gaston Camus being one of the most ardent in his speeches against the Order, whilst others like Michel Reganault arguing in favour.\textsuperscript{55} There was no apparent solution to the impasse, and at one time the Assembly even considered invading Malta. On the other hand, Reganault’s efforts prevented the situation from getting worse for the Religion.

The year 1791 saw the situation change rapidly from bad to worse. Both the Neapolitans and the British were showing added interest in how Malta would react to the Revolution. In February a squabble between Venetian and French knights coming out of a ball, served as a pretext for Naples to send a squadron of ships to patrol the area. They tried to make believe that their mission was to help the Grand Master in what had been termed an insurrection,\textsuperscript{56} but which in reality was no more than a heated argument between some hot-headed knights. The English fleet was also close by, attempting to establish whether France could still guarantee the neutrality of Malta. Despite all this, the greatest threat came from France. The failure of the King’s flight to Varennes in June, which had been supported and assisted by the Order, marked a new phase of the Revolution. The National Assembly declared ‘There is no King any more in France’,\textsuperscript{57} which in the end would result in the arrest and execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. For seven whole years the Order and France played a diplomatic game of cat and mouse.\textsuperscript{58} Thus while professing its neutrality in 1791, the Order secretly moved closer to Naples. With this move, de Rohan was favouring the lesser evil, expressing his hopes for the success of the counter-revolution and the end of ‘the moral gangrene’.\textsuperscript{59} It was not until Naples committed itself to war in September 1793, that the Grand Master

\textsuperscript{54} AIM, Corr. 101, f. 276r.
\textsuperscript{55} Blondy, 665.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 666.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
committed himself to define his position in relation to the French Republic.\textsuperscript{60} In October
the Grand Master clearly declared that his Order “ought not, could not and would not,
acknowledge...the pretended French Republic”.\textsuperscript{61} This declaration also gave the Grand
Master the opportunity to make a good impression with William Pitt and England.\textsuperscript{62}
Negotiations had been going on since December 1792. In return for adequate British
protection, the Order offered its ports’ facilities. It was in this period of events, in August
1793, that the French port of Toulon was captured by Royalists and handed over to the
British fleet.\textsuperscript{63}

With the Second partition of Poland in 1793, great part of the Order’s of the Grand Priory
of Poland had been absorbed by Russia. This further stressed the importance of relations
with Catherine the Great.\textsuperscript{64} Venetian emissary Antonio Miari mentions how the Order
hoped to replace the French \textit{langues} with the Muscovite ones. However, he continues,
this would prove to be a difficult task to handle as it would infringe the statutes of the
Order. The State Council was far from unanimous on the matter, mostly because Rome
would oppose to a merger “because of the difference of Religion”. Moreover the Empress
had forwarded her criticisms in regards to the Grand Master. She disputed the fact that
the Order had been conducting diplomatic negotiations with France without consulting
the other Powers.

\textsuperscript{60} Mallia-Milanes (1982), 99.

\textsuperscript{61} 10 Oct. 1793, \textit{Ibid.}; Ryan, 320; Panzavecchia, 323-324.

\textsuperscript{62} Mallia-Milanes (1982), 99-100.

\textsuperscript{63} The port of Toulon was recaptured by Bonaparte soon after the Grand Master’s October manifesto.

\textsuperscript{64} For relations with Russia 1793 see Mallia-Milanes (1982), 101-103.
Chapter 2
Property, Finances and Organisation

4. The Character of a Knight of Malta

Malta under the knights in the eighteenth century was a relatively successful and peaceful society compared to its close neighbours, and the knights provided an efficient, though not always popular, method of government which created an environment in which the island prospered. The Order of St John relied mainly on its income from landed property outside its convent, properties that had been donated by the monarchs of Europe in recognition and admiration for the work which the Order did for Christendom. These lands, called commanderies and grouped together in priories within a respective geographical area or langue, would be managed by a knight commander and a third of its income sent to the Treasury. The richer and more productive the land, and the better the organisational skills of the commander, the more income that would be collected from the land, the greater the responson or contribution to the Treasury. A knight commander in theory did not own these riches, they were conceded to him by the Order. It was an unusual vocation that of the knight of Malta, he was not an ordained priest, merely a layman who took minor vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Galiani describes it as ‘un corpo mistico indefinibile in sostanza ed in natura.’ He was not obliged to wear any distinctive clothing outside ceremonial events, apart from the eight-pointed cross. He was free to travel and after the construction of Valletta, the knight no longer lived in isolation from the rest of society in a collachio but could even live outside the auberge in a private house such as any nobleman of his time.

The Order was becoming increasingly rich, and through the quartering system, recruitment of members of the Order was being done from amongst the wealthiest

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65 Cavaliero, ix.
66 Cavaliero, 10.
67 Ciappara (2008), 177.
68 Ibid., 9.
families in Europe. These families would naturally work in partnership with the Order donating even more land, though at times they reserved the option of choosing the commander themselves. In this way one may argue that very little remained of the original appearance of a humble and lowly monk whose reputation had so suddenly spread in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This became intertwined with the religiosity of the knights as many judged and criticised the Order that it was not only earthly from the outside, but lacked also the morality and spirituality from the inside. This accusation I consider to be untrue, as it was mostly unfounded or based on one off cases, made an issue by someone like Lord Brydone, or Doublet whose intentions certainly were political or nationalistic. In an age when chivalry had been quite obsolete, ‘the Knight of Malta provided a readymade type for sentimental novels’ often caught up in intrigue, romance and mundane life. But in reality none was lost of the rigidness of the rule, where those who were caught with breaking their vows were severely punished. In Abbé Vertot’s view, the Order of St John was a bridge between the religious City of God and the secular City of Man.

Holding on to its riches became increasingly difficult for the Order as it attracted a lot of envy as money and power would draw, not just that of the revolutionaries in France who sought to abolish nobility, but also the greed of most of the traditional protectors of the Order. Protestants sequestrated their lands, as did Venetians and Neapolitans. Whenever the occasion arose, on matters of sovereignty and neutrality, they threatened to take away this precious source of income if the Order did not abide with their requests. The more precious was this source of income, the more important the holding on to the commanderies became, and it was a crucial policy for the Order to keep a friendly relationship with the great powers. The Grand Master sent most of his knights out to European courts creating a complex system of public relations with which he was assured to have support when international relations were abysmal, by playing the great powers against each other and using Papal authority to unblock the deadlocks. ‘But as the Turks became allies of the Christians, and the war against the Barbary was progressively

69 Cavaliero, 20.

70 Ibid., 31.

71 Ibid., 11.
whittled down, so the knights became the victims of the ambience they had created for themselves'.

This led to many knights making a career for themselves working with the European monarchs or serving in the Commanderies. They would eventually ignore Malta’s call for reform because it would lead them to change their lavish lifestyle. This was very much the picture of the Order at the Chapter General of 1776.

5. **Deficit, responsions and the Commanderies**

With de Rohan’s election in 1775 things were bound to change as the Order had chosen a man that was reputedly known as a reformer. The main factors that determined this want for reform by the new Grand Master were his personal role in the quelling of the rebellion of the priests and his general dissatisfaction with the affiliations of his predecessors. For this reason he might have felt that the Order needed to re-establish its role vis-a-vis both the European courts and the local population. These were the primary aims of the Chapter General of 1776, which he immediately convened following his election. De Rohan had also been residing in Malta for a long time. This would have made him more sensitive not just to the external issues of the Order but also to understanding the needs of the population. For a start he sanctioned a tariff reduction on daily consumed imported goods. This helped generate better competition and a reduction in prices, which was very much welcomed by the local population. On the whole the standard of living in Malta was high amongst all classes. This can be measured from the indebtedness of the Maltese to the Order, which was relatively small. All classes of Maltese found a constant livelihood in the employments of the Order. The Order also provided many

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73 Panzavecchia, 107.
75 Ryan, 104.
beneficent schemes of social welfare, in addition to the Hospital, all of which were maintained by the Treasury.\textsuperscript{77}

The whole existence of this rested on the income from the Commanderies, which practically equipped the Order with all the necessities of an island state. In particular, the French commanderies were most treasured. A \textit{memoire} on the revenues of the Order in France values them at 2,338,404 \textit{livres}, 17 sols.\textsuperscript{78} An estimate made by J.Brunet brought the figure down to 1,748,992 \textit{livres} in 1778.\textsuperscript{79} Whichever the exact sum might be, it would certainly be a considerable amount, being almost a half of the Order’s revenues.\textsuperscript{80} Nonetheless the financial state of the Order was so neglected that even the highest consideration could not help repair the damage already done.\textsuperscript{81} The islands of Malta lacked the resources to generate wealth, and apart from the \textit{corso}, all the Order’s acquisitions came from the Commanderies. However, de Rohan was informed that this system was having a hitch, as not all the money was reaching the \textit{Commun Tesoro} in Malta from the Commanderies. There were various reasons to this happening, one of which certainly being the lack in commitment of the knights responsible to send these responsibilities. One particular example was the newly established Priory of Poland, on which the Order had invested so much energy. This priory in particular, as mentioned in the previous chapter, had been the cause of a complex diplomatic exercise with Russia and Prussia, and was expected to generate substantial wealth.

The Priory of Poland was composed of six Commanderies with a total capital of 120,000 polish florins and annual revenue of 42,000 florins.\textsuperscript{82} Eight other Polish families proceeded in setting up Commanderies in \textit{ius patronatus}, with an overall total endowment of 1,440,000 polish florins and revenue of 87,000. Responsibilities equalled 24,000 florins from the commanderies and a further 8,200 from the \textit{ius patronatus}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{77} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\footnotetext{78} Blondy, 661. \\
\footnotetext{79} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\footnotetext{80} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\footnotetext{81} Panzavecchia, 110. \\
\footnotetext{82} Cavaliero, 160. \\
\end{footnotes}
lands. Moreover, the Priory was equipped with fifteen knights and 600 soldiers as established by the will of Janus of Ostrog. The Order had made all these acquisitions at virtually no financial cost. Sagramoso had made these deals by awarding demi-crosses and knighthoods, and any other initial expenses were expected to be paid off by the revenues. As profitable as this might have sounded on paper, in practice it was a failure. The knight commanders were less willing to pay their dues to a far away island in the middle of the Mediterranean. Their 4,000 florins quittance fee never reached Malta, and responsions were always late or less than the established.

By 1776 the Order was in debt of 1,813,465 scudi, with an annual interest of 51,157 scudi. The annual deficit was 120,098 scudi. The Order tried to reduce this deficit by a wholesale felling of trees in the French Commanderies; however, this was not a permanent solution as trees were expendable. The natural solution for de Rohan was to convene the Chapter General and agree on how much responsions needed to be raised to meet the debit. But the problem de Rohan ended up facing was worse than financial. The Chapter General had decreed that with an increase in responsions, the Treasury would be able to collect a further half a million scudi a year. In a clear act of insubordination most knights would not allow a decrease in their pay or an increase in taxation. Moreover, monarchs such as Fredrick the Great would not allow more money from the priories within his kingdom to be sent to the Treasury pleading the poverty of the commanderies following two wars, though he himself had taxed them 40% of their responsions. The Priories of Bohemia and Germany did not send the demanded increase. Joseph II went a step further by complaining to Rome for this increased demand, a move which had the support of the Imperial Ambassador at Valletta, Ferdinand Von Hompesch. De Rohan was infuriated and sought to restore order amongst his subordinates by arresting Abbé Boyer, Hompesch’s secretary whom he charged of soliciting the latter. This arrest was

83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 The Priories of Bohemia refuse to pay the added responses see Cavaliero, 166.
contrasted by Joseph II sequestration of lands, to which imposition the Grand Master had
to heed. He released Boyer and promoted Hompesch. This inability to assert his authority
and apply the reforms of the Chapter General created the crisis in the Hospital that
Hompesch himself would inherit when he was elected Grand Master in 1796. The
German langue ended up paying half the responsions demanded by the Chapter General.
This behaviour was typical also in the Polish Priory, as knights wanted to obtain
dispensations to marry to have their own sons installed in their commanderies. The
banker de Rohan had appointed in Warsaw to collect responsions was finding matters so
difficult that he wanted to resign as the arrears grew.\textsuperscript{89} The situation continued to
degenerate; by 1788 only 535 out of 48,000 florins reached Venice from Poland.\textsuperscript{90} The
recipients had scarcely managed to cover the expenses incurred when setting up the
Priory, and all the Order had obtained was the membership of a number of unruly
knights.

More expenses were incurred with the annual refurbishing of fortifications,
weapons and galleys. To make matters worse the Order accepted the annexation of the
minor Order of St Anthony with all its commanderies.\textsuperscript{91} The Order of St John accepted
this burden in the illusionary hope that within roughly a hundred years, the Antonine
revenues would show, by compound interest, a steady annual profit. This implied that the
Order would have to pay pensions to the ex-Antonines; which amounted to 62,000 \textit{livres}.
They also had to pay a further one million \textit{livres} indemnity to the Order of St Lazarus,
whom the Hospitallers had outbid for the annexation of the Antonines. This union cost
the Order 300,000 livres a year until the sequestration of the lands in France in 1792.\textsuperscript{92}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{89} \textit{Ibid}, 167.
\item \textsuperscript{90} \textit{Ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{91} \textit{Ibid}, 44.
\item \textsuperscript{92} \textit{Ibid}.
\end{itemize}
News was reaching Malta of political and economic turmoil in France. Sailors and young novices returning from their homelands described the situation in ports and provinces as brewing up for a storm. Tenants were not paying their rents and the people made little distinction amongst themselves and nobility of the blood. However with the passage of years more news were arriving but nothing worth noting happened. In France, the financial situation deteriorated as the squalor in the streets augmented along with the people’s contempt. Although Louis XVI might have allowed this situation to deteriorate, the Grand Master could not ignore the reports that were reaching him from the French Priories.

One Knight in particular, Bosredon de Ransijat, who was the Secretary for the Treasury and being himself from Auvergne, was very much alive to the situation. Ransijat had introduced a new system of book keeping and accountancy, which he himself invented. This proved to be an invulnerable system of audit. He also printed this balance sheet periodically. This gave him the opportunity to compare how the finances were performing. Ransijat speaks in a later publication of this balance sheet of the difficulty in producing an exact balance by reason of the ‘diversity and multiplicity’ that existed within the Order’s system. ‘The goods of the Order are spread through all the states that follow the Roman religion, where there are maintained a number of caisses particulières-twenty nine in all, directed by a similar number of Receivers.’ These operate from Lisbon to Warsaw- and are charged with the collection of responsions, mortuaries, vacancies, spoglie, and depropriamente and other contributions by the Knights...and both abroad and in Malta there are...foundations and investments entrusted to this Treasury, and lands, ships and houses, all calling for separate books.’

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93 Ryan, 145.
94 Ibid, 146.
95 Ibid, 103.
96 Ibid.
97 Ryan, 103.
meant that the Treasury also exercised the functions of a general bank. A further complication was that the Grand Master had his own Zecca and coined his own money.

In one of his reports to the Council, he clearly verified the fears of the Grand Master that what was happening in France was having drastic consequences on the Treasury. He also demonstrated how this financial crisis was not just a rough patch that was dying out, but was cumulating and becoming ever more a point of concern. His growing alarm led to the formulation of a National Balance Sheet, published in 1789 just before the Revolution. The ‘Bilancio decennale del Comun Tesoro’ was the outcome of ten years of pondering, and was a measure that promoted caution and financial planning. As Bosredon mentions in the introduction to the Report, very few monarchs of Europe ever felt the need to draw up such an elaborate report. Least of all France, which despite the dire situation it was in, failed to take the necessary action in time that, looking in hindsight, might have spared it from a revolution. When in 1787, Calonne had presented accounts in front of the Notables Assembly at Versailles; he had explained the impossibility of knowing exactly where France stood financially. Bailli de Virieu had written to the Grand Master informing him of the summoning of the Notables Assembly telling him that ‘instead of summoning the consultative assembly to give the aid required...[Calonne’s report] might result in grave prejudice to the King’s authority.’ De Virieu had also foreseen that this fault, along with the spirit of liberty which was being promoted in France would have serious consequences on the Order. Calonne paid for his mistake with his removal from position. He was replaced by Necker, who thought that the problem would be solved by increasing the people’s consciousness of the state of affairs. In 1788 he had removed the restriction on the Press, which sent shockwaves to de Rohan who thought that Necker’s move went directly against the primary authority of the State.

98 Ibid., 146.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid, 147.
101 Ibid.
7. The ‘loi spoliateur’.

The first direct blow at the Order came in August 1789, when all the tithes were abolished. The *dîmes* had formed the greater part of the revenues from the commanderies in France. D’Estourmel, the Receiver in Paris, calculated that the Priory of Toulouse had lost 36,000 out of a 40,000 *livres* total revenue with the abolition of the feudal dues. Still the Grand Master took provision not to antagonise the National Assembly, fearing a sequestration of all the commanderies. The Order offered to pay the *don patriotique* to integrate themselves with the revolutionaries, which contribution would total a quarter of the revenues in France. The Grand Master had set up a council to decide whether to give a sum of 600,000 *livres* spontaneously to befriend the Assembly. Eventually this contribution was imposed on the Order by the Assembly, and a quarter of the revenues actually totalled 879,391 *livres*, which would be paid in three annual instalments. D’Estourmel proposed to collect this sum by setting aside half of the annual responsions. By doing this, the *Comun’ Tesoro* in Malta would not be expecting money from France for six months a year. If France had in the past accepted the sovereignty of the Order on Malta, it would no longer accept the sovereignty of the Order’s lands in France.

On the other hand, the secretary of the Treasury Ransijat, went as far as proposing to lend money to the new France, helping it to re-integrate itself financially. He proposed that the Order lend 100,000 *scudi* aimed to silence the criticism on the Order. Ransijat saw all this as part of the reform that was much advocated by the Chapter

102 Ciappara (2002), 137.
103 Cavaliero, 186.
105 AIM, Corr. 101, f. 276r.
106 Cavaliero, 186.
108 Blondy, 665.
109 Cavaliero, 188.
General, and believed that the Order needed to follow on the French example.\(^{110}\) His proposal for the Order to work hand in hand with the Revolution also included the melting of the silverware in the Hospital, to be sent to France.\(^{111}\) Nevertheless, de Rohan did not accept Ransijat’s plan. The Grand Master was becoming more and more suspicious of Ransijat’s intentions. News was reaching him from Rome that the French intended to export the Revolution to Rome by means of the Masonic Lodges.\(^{112}\)

On the other hand, de Rohan did not accept to lend money to various counter-revolutionaries who came to Malta. In July 1790, the Marquis de Roux came to Malta to borrow ‘a few millions on behalf of respectable personages living outside France’.\(^{113}\) The paucity of this country’s riches and the present circumstances soon convinced this agent of the futility of this mission.\(^{114}\) Nor did the Grand Master allow the Treasury to lend 200,000 scudi to the Marquis de la Fare, a renowned supporter of the Duke of Artois.\(^{115}\) De la Fare then sought to borrow this sum from amongst the wealthy families on the island.\(^{116}\) *Commendatore* Fontani Guardamancia was at first willing to lend this sum to de la Fare, but then gave in to pressure from his family.\(^{117}\) Eventually the Marquis showed disposition to borrow money from the *Piazza dei Mercanti*, which according to the Inquisitor, was quite financially abundant.\(^{118}\) Nevertheless, he only managed to acquire a sum of 2,000 Maltese *scudi* with a ten percent interest over four years.\(^{119}\) There are two possible explanations for why the Order did not lend money to assist the Counter-Revolution. We know for certain that the defeat of the Revolution would have been beneficiary to the Order. The Order did not want to antagonise the National Assembly, as

\(^{110}\) *Ibid.*
\(^{111}\) *Ibid.*
\(^{112}\) Cavaliero, 186.
\(^{113}\) Blondy, 665.
\(^{114}\) *Ibid.*
\(^{115}\) Ciappara (2002), 138.
\(^{117}\) *Ibid.*
\(^{118}\) *Ibid.*
\(^{119}\) *Ibid.*
has been demonstrated; the Order had little left in France after the abolition of the tithes. The council disagreed on whether to openly support the Counter-Revolution or to continue hoping that the Assembly would reverse its impositions on the Order. All this happened in view of the rest of Europe considering waging a war on France. I believe a full explanation of the Order’s financial intentions must include the simple fact that the Grand Master thought it better to use such sums locally to support the Treasury, instead of lending it to the Counter-Revolution. In Malta the financial situation was critical. On the 2nd September 1791 the Treasury announced that the Conservatoria had only enough money left to meet current expenses for two months. Another quarter of a million scudi were in France, but needed to be sent to Genoa, and the transfer would roll a loss of 21% on the mentioned sum. Even the Universita’s credit account had been swallowed up in payments for corn. Keeping two frigates and the San Zaccaria at sea would be too costly to do without a loan. Thus the Order negotiated a loan of 200,000 scudi half to be raised in Genoa and half in Malta. It was proposed that another Chapter General be held to meet the new turn of events, which was never held.

Nevertheless, the Grand Master still supported financially the King of France. At the end of 1791 or beginning of 1792, the Order’s receiver d’Estourmel gave Louis XVI or a member of the Royal family the sum of 1,200,000 livres tournois. This sum would help set up a European Congress aimed to suppress the Revolution in France. The Order also partly financed the King’s flight to Varennes. As retaliation to this, the Assembly withdrew the citizenship of all French nationals forming part of any chivalric Order.

120 Cavaliero, 195.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 There is much debate whether it was this sum that financed the flight to Varennes, given to the royal family earlier. It was Doublet who mentioned that d’Estourmel had borrowed 1,200,000 francs, but Bailli de la Tour du Pins affirms it was only 12,000 francs see Cavaliero 195.
124 Blondy, 666.
125 Ciappara (2002), 139.
126 Blondy, 667.
The deadly blow fell on 19th September 1792 with the *loi spoliateur*, when the Order’s lands were confiscated.\(^{127}\) Negotiations to have the property returned failed under the pretext that France had to first make peace with the other European powers.\(^{128}\) This action was followed by a flood of *émigrés*, Knights from the various commanderies in France who sought refuge in Malta. Most of them had lost much of their wealth, but expected to be treated with the lavish lifestyle they were accustomed to. One such knight, Filippo Marie de Andlau, appealed to the Pope for help in his extreme misery.\(^{129}\) He was assured that Malta would not lack a table and a house.\(^{130}\) The decline in the relationship with France hit also the commercial sector. The sharp decline in overseas trade due to the closure of traditional markets, like that of Barcelona, ruined the merchant class.\(^{131}\) Cotton trade, which was the island’s major industry, steadily declined.\(^{132}\)

8. *The Order’s finances 1792-1797*

Grand Master de Rohan was becoming increasingly worried about the Order’s financial situation. Regardless of the safety measures taken at the Chapter General, he could not have taken preventative measures against the suppression of the Order in France. However, it seems that de Rohan was able to reduce the deficit in the years following 1792. He increased the tax on wine in (1793).\(^{133}\) This was not enough to replenish the Treasury, so in 1795 the Grand Master appointed four Grand Crosses whom along with the Secretary of the Treasury and the procurators were to form a council. The aim of this Commission was to seek the means to improve the financial situation.\(^{134}\) One of their

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127 Ciappara (2002), 139.
128 AIM, Corr. 102, ff. 170v-171v.
129 Ciappara (2002), 141.
131 Mallia-Milanes (1992), 289.
132 *Ibid*.
133 AIM, Corr. 102, f. 94v.
134 Ciappara (2002), 141.
proposals was that postage had to be paid by all, excluding the Inquisitor. Furthermore, the Order attempted to negotiate a loan of 400,000 Maltese scudi from the Holy See. By the end of that year, the loss had amounted to 471,784 Maltese scudi. By 1st September 1796 the Order had managed to diminish its annual expenses by 240,000 Maltese scudi, though it was still 160,000 scudi short. Therefore, it was decided that responsibilities from every langue were to be raised. The Grand Master also sent a plea for help to all the knights, asking them to save the Order by contributing spontaneously according to their means. Moreover, the Grand Master had sent the Knight Litta to Russia to seek help from the new Czar Paul I. The Czar, who had since his childhood been an admirer of the Order, accorded to set up a Grand Priory of Russia. This Grand Priory would have ten commanderies with responsibilities fixed at 41,000 florins a year, and would be incorporated in the Anglo-Bavarian langue. The Czar also offered to make up for the arrears of the Priory of Poland, adding to around 96,000 florins. In later articles he also decreed the setup of a further three commanderies and increased the responsibilities to 53,000 florins.

It would seem that by economising, enforcing responsibilities and making some new deals, the Order managed to endure the distress brought by the French Revolution. One curious point comes to mind here; were there any other methods the Order was using to evade bankruptcy? What a historian would immediately think of would be the second most important source of income the Order had apart from the commanderies; the corso. Corsairing had always been a steady source of income, which is one main reason why the Order was so keen on keeping on the island all able Maltese sailors. The crew had to

135 AIM, Corr. 102, ff. 149r-v.
136 Archives of the Order of Malta 274, f. 223v Supplica dell’Ordine al S.Pontefice relativa all’imprestitodi 400,000 scudi Maltesi; Panzavecchia 321-322.
137 J.Bosredon Ransijat accounts in AOM 6406; AOM 274, ff.257v-258v, Relazione dei Commissari Deputati per esaminare le spese pubbliche, 9 December 1795.
138 Ciappara, 142.
139 Ibid.; AIM, Corr. 102, f. 166v.
140 Mallia-Milanes (1982), 93.
141 Cavaliero, 212.
142 Ibid.
contribute a percentage of their spoils to the Order in recognition for the latter’s allowing these raids to take place. During the eighteenth century the *corso* declined, one main reason being the added interest of the European powers in Levantine trade. It is very much plausible that the Order’s corsairing activities were again called upon to help in a time of financial deficiency. It is sure that corsairing continued till the end of the eighteenth century, though it is hard to speak with certainty about quantities. It would certainly have not been beneficiary to the Order to attract attention to its maritime activity, which means one would find no reference of this in official documents and correspondences. However, the notarial archives can shed some light on the topic. Some examples include names like Giorgio Mitrovich, Giovanni Gera and Leopoldo Desira amongst others. Their naval activity dates to the whole period in question; in one case Mitrovich had found Gera dying on the Strofades islands after his *corvette* had been ravaged by a Turkish attack. The case dates to the 19-20th April 1796. Another verification that corsairing might have been used to recover from the Revolution’s blow, was the émigré Flachslanden’s proposal to wage a maritime war on France. He proposed that the Order should send Maltese vessels to attack French Levantine shipping in retaliation for the sequestration of lands. Although the Grand Master dismissed this proposal, it very much proves that a fleet of Maltese ships was readily available and might have been encouraged to sail by the Order.

Further proof that the Order was considering to give new impetus to the *corso* comes from the Ottoman Empire. On 31st July 1796, Spanish Prime Minister Emanuel Godoy wrote to the Grand Master regarding “repeated requests” from the Sultan Selim III for a conclusion of a peace treaty or truce with the Order. There were two main reasons why the Porte wanted to reconcile with its arch-enemy. Sultan Selim himself was a

146 NAV, T.A A.O, File 26 Case 20
147 Cavaliero, 197.
148 For the Ottoman peace treaty proposal see AOM 275, f.24; Mallia-Milanes (1982), 106-109; Godoy’s letter is reproduced in Panzavecchia, 340-342.
reformer, and sought to restore the glory of his Empire, by means of modernising the structure and organisation. Turkey had just concluded a peace treaty with Russia following a ten year war between 1782-1792. One new measure he wanted to introduce was to have embassies in all major capitals of Europe, including Valletta. Secondly the Sultan must have been aware of an attempt by the Order to revive the spirit of the *corsi*.\textsuperscript{149} It is known that in 1796, around 117,000 *scudi* in spoils had been made, as opposed to around 65,600 *scudi* of average annual revenue in the previous years.\textsuperscript{150} The Porte would have hoped that by negotiating a peace treaty it could put an end to the corsairing. However the State Council revoked this proposal, declaring that such truce would make a mockery of the Order’s *raison d’être*.

Whichever means de Rohan used to hold the Order together in a dire financial situation, it is clear that the financial crises alone could not have been the main reason for the loss of Malta. Nevertheless, it created a notch in the system that was to bring the Order down not just from the outside, but also from within.

\ \textsuperscript{149} Illicit corsairing in the Levant and the Adriatic had often caused discord between the Order and foreign powers, especially when Maltese corsairs spoiled Greek merchants, being also of a Christian belief. For further reading on the subject see Molly, Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants, A Maritime History of the Mediterranean* (US, Princeton University Press, 2010).

\textsuperscript{150} A. Luttrell “Eighteenth Century Malta: Prosperity and Problems”, *Hyphen* III, 2 (Malta 1982), 45.
Chapter 3

The Internal Implications of External Threats.

9. *Internal Opposition to Reform.*

On the 13th of November 1775, news from the palace of the Grand Master reached the members of the Order and the people of Malta that Grand Master Ximenes Texada was dead. As was the custom according to the Papal brief of 1295, an election for the new successor was to take place within the third day of the death of a Grand Master.\(^{151}\) The election of de Rohan was a serene and unanimous one.\(^ {152}\) The newly appointed Grand Master was a reformer by character,\(^ {153}\) and was known to be moderate and generous. His election was also very much welcomed by the Maltese, Panzavecchia writes:

‘...il sospirato innalzamento del Bali Fr Emanuel de Rohan al magistero, soffico i dermi della temuta esplosione, e diede incominciamento alla piu prospera, alla piu luminosa, ed alla piu brillante amministrazione. ...ei solo potea conciliare i dominant cavalieri coi dominant vassalli...’ \(^ {154}\)

De Rohan’s French origin had on the other hand antagonised most of the Spanish knights, who were accustomed to having a co-national on the throne.\(^ {155}\) Nevertheless de Rohan soon realised that so much was expected from him, perhaps more than he could cater for. His predecessor Ximenes had asked the Pope to summon the Chapter General, the first since 1631.\(^ {156}\) Pope Pius VI had conceded but Ximenes did not live long enough to summon it. The Chapter General was always a point of controversy, and exposed the

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\(^{151}\) Ryan, 90.

\(^{152}\) *Ibid.*, 91.

\(^{153}\) Cavaliero, 161.

\(^{154}\) Panzavecchia, 93.

\(^{155}\) Cavaliero, 161.

\(^{156}\) Ryan, 91; Cavaliero, 162.
different interests of the members of the Order.157 There was always a risk that the convention would create more disunity amongst the members themselves. Nevertheless, de Rohan was not afraid to discuss reform. In the opening speech he indicated that if action was not promptly taken, the Order might be in danger.158 Reform was also expected from the local elites and most knights, who were inspired by the spirit of the enlightenment.159 The eighteenth century saw the prevalence of legal reform, and de Rohan’s magistracy was no exception. Beccaria’s *Dei Delitti e Delle Pene* inspired a revision of the criminal codes and punishments. This reform performed by enlightened monarchs would not necessarily strive towards a more just society, but rather to create a more centralised authority. In Malta the latest legal reform had been carried out by Emanuel de Vilhena in 1723. By de Rohan’s time this legal code was fifty years old and society had changed. This meant that the population no longer understood the laws by which they were being governed.160 De Rohan immediately set about this task, with the convocation from Naples of the lawyer Giandonato Rogadeo.161 Education was also to be reformed, with the expulsion of the Jesuits leaving a void in the teaching profession. Here again reform was inspired by the works of the various *philosophes* such as John Locke and Rousseau, and their local counterparts like Vassalli, stressing the importance of education in relation to human potential in society. Nevertheless there was disagreement on the extension of education to all classes of society. In 1783, Baron Gaetano Pisani published his *Lettera di un Maltese ad un Cavaliere Gerosilomitan* in which he distinguishes between higher and lower education, the latter to be given by priests to the lower classes.162 In terms of established public schools, the church was contested by the

157 Ryan, 91; Mallia-Milanes (1982), 93.
158 ‘...a Chapter General to always maintain in vigour our laws and to censure, and recall to their duty those who had not followed them...now delay would be a danger.’ Ryan, 92.
159 ‘Si desiderava dai native; una regenerazione politica, un cambiamento dell’antiquato sistema governativo, un nuovo regime più coerente allo spirit del secolo, ques’era lo scopo a cui miravano i voti ardenti non solo dei Maltesi, ma anche dei più aculati dei cavalieri dell’Ordnie.’, Panzavecchia, 108.
161 Ibid., 62; AIM, Corr. 101, f. 9v. The inquisitor believed that the convocation of a foreigner was due to the Grand Master’s mistrust in the Maltese following the riot of 1775.
162 Ibid., 71-85.
state for the education of children, whereas in the past the teaching profession had been reserved mainly to the clerics. Despite this, educational Enlightenment in Malta still took a Catholic course, with the church being still very much in control of the educational formation of both upper and lower classes.

The pinnacle of transformation was to be achieved with the Chapter General, which had to provide the Order with a crucial financial reform. But as soon as the summons was made, conflicts started. De Rohan had aspired to combat a wide range of abuses, thefts, embezzlements and a “ridiculous and prejudicial sense of priorities”.\textsuperscript{163} More radical knights sought to revise government itself and a limitation of its power.\textsuperscript{164} The Grand Master’s power was an autocratic one, which involved only a small body of knights chosen by himself, called the Congregation of State, charged with consulting him on day-to-day administration.\textsuperscript{165} More so, when the Chapter General met, de Rohan’s decisions were being contested often by the ‘Auvergnat Club’. These were a number of French Bailiffs and knights from the tongue of Auvergne who were more conservative and opposed the increase in responsions.\textsuperscript{166} Perhaps the most infamous member of this ‘Auvergnat Club’ was Déodat de Dolomieu, for his attempts to disgrace the Grand Master and damage the Order’s relations with Naples, Russia and France. The ruse started when Joseph II was visiting his brother-in-law in Naples in 1784. Dolomieu spread the rumour that Naples was surrendering the traditional rights of sovereignty on Malta to the Czarina, all with the Order’s approval.\textsuperscript{167} Although the Grand Master immediately denied the rumours, Paris was alarmed.

Dolomieu’s dissatisfaction with the magistracy of de Rohan had been going on since the Chapter General. Having been appointed Lieutenant Marshal, he was responsible of the troops in Malta. One of his responsibilities was the newly raised \textit{Reggimento di Malta}.

\textsuperscript{163} Mallia-Milanes (1982), 93.
\textsuperscript{164} Cavaliero, 162.
\textsuperscript{165} \textit{Ibid.}, 163.
\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Ibid.}, 164-5. One member of the Auvergnat Club was the Secretary of the Treasury Bosredon Ransijat, then a thirty three year old knight. Though crucial for the Grand Master’s financial reforms, his council during the Revoution was often discarded for his earlier engagements with de Rohan at the Chapter General.
\textsuperscript{167} For Dolomieu and the ‘Auvergnat Club’ see Cavaliero 168-172.
This force had been the idea of Ximenes and later approved by de Rohan in the Chapter General. The Regiment was to serve as a ‘foreign legion’ intended to protect the Order against internal enemies.\(^{168}\) The Order’s worries from internal enemies followed the incident of Don Gaetano Mannarino in 1775 and the struggle with the Church. Nevertheless, the setting up of this force had brought a huge disappointment for the Grand Master. The recruitment had been carried out in so careless a manner that it had cost a huge amount to the Treasury. Instead of producing soldiers, the recruitment attracted the worse kind of vagabonds that lurked around the port of Marseilles, Avignon and Corsica. Adding to this disappointment was the constant insubordination of the officers, all of whom were knights, who refused to carry out their daily duties. Duelling was also very common amongst the officers, even though it had been strictly prohibited. The Colonel Commander de Freslon was involved in two duels with his former lieutenants, one of which injured him gravely. Despite this, de Freslon represented the pinnacle of enlightened leadership,\(^{169}\) taking matters in his own hands and having the full backing from de Rohan to implement the necessary reforms. De Freslon’s solutions were two; he discharged the disobedient officers, and recruited Maltese to the ‘foreign regiment’. However, this move deeply angered Dolomieu who declared that he alone had the authority to cancel or confer military commissions, denouncing also the Grand Master who had not supported his role. In 1783 he wrote “I have to fight against the authority of the Grand Master, to defend the rights of my position and put some bounds to the power he wants to arrogate to himself...I have sounded the tocsin against the abuse of magistral power.”\(^{170}\)

The ‘Auvergnat Club’ was now openly disputing the authority of the Grand Master. Perhaps at this stage it would be no longer correct to refer to them as ‘Auvergnat’ as they had been joined by others from within and outside the French langues. A schism

\(^{168}\) For the Order’s ‘foreign legion’ see Ryan, 106-109; Cavaliero, 170.

\(^{169}\) De Freslon believed that a soldier should not be thought only military manoeuvres, but must be educated in the letters or a trade. This attracted a lot of Maltese to the Reggimento who benefitted from a steady wage and a free basic education.

\(^{170}\) Cavaliero, 170; Dolomieu would go on to instigate other knights to rebel against the Grand Master. He would be involved also in de Rohan’s dispute with Bailiff des Pennes. Des Pennes had rebelled when de Rohan had decided to appoint a Bavarian knight for the role of Turcopilier, which role traditionally had been assigned to a Provençal.
had also formed within the French *langues* themselves, with other Auvergnat knights like Loras supporting de Rohan. In fact, Dolomieu denounced the Grand Master for nepotism, claiming that he was building a clique of yes-men like Loras in order to increase his power.\footnote{Ibid., 172.} Dolomieu and Loras would continue to quarrel between them, trying to invoke supporters, and co-involving Rome and Paris in the charade. Loras would eventually be replaced in 1787 by Jean-Ovide Doublet, a Frenchman married to a Maltese woman. Doublet’s allegiance has also been put to question, taking in account that with Napoleon’s take-over he continued to serve with the French provisional government. He wrote down his memoirs of the last days of the Order, often criticising the individuals or the system within the Order. Doublet demonstrates how the Revolution of 1789 only brought out to light the rupture that already existed within the Order. Furthermore, a break also existed with the other echelons of Maltese society, mainly the Catholic Church.

10. *Church-State Relations in the Late Eighteenth Century.*

Before the Order’s arrival in 1530, the only governing body that resided on the island was the *Consiglo Poplare*. Most nobles who formed part of this council would not allow their influence reduced by the new sovereigns. For this reason many opted to emigrate to Sicily. What remained of the once ‘ruling class’ formed the *Universitas*, but this privilege was also absorbed by the Order. Most of the nobles by the late eighteenth century enjoyed only a title of merit, conceded to them by the Order itself.\footnote{Ciappara (2006), 22-23.} This left only the Bishop and the Inquisitor to contest the authority of the Grand Master. All three ruling bodies answered directly to the Holy See in Rome. Though there had always been contestations with the Church over temporal and spiritual matters, relations had worsened during the period of Grand Master Pinto over the matter of ecclesiastical immunity. It is debatable how far reaching was the Church’s influence over the local population and its resulting effect on the discontent with the Order’s rule. More so, when one recalls that the
so called ‘Priests Riot’ was led by a handful of men, mostly clerics and came down to history only because it was partly successful. The church had various tools to mobilise the faithful. The Inquisition was one of the tools, although in political terms it was a separate entity. One other strong tool was preaching. This could take the oral form during mass, and could also be published to be read by the higher echelons of society. Ecclesiastical pastorals and bulls often attacked the separation of Church and State, most notoriously of all the bull In Cœna Domini.\textsuperscript{173}

Enlightenment challenges the dogmatic teaching of the Church, which teaching was not always limited to the spiritual. Papal authority had yet its separate policies, which interests were represented by the Inquisitor. The various practices of the Catholic Church obstructed the autocratic claims of the Magistracy. All churchmen were entitled to a \textit{privilegium fori} which in simple terms gave them legal immunity from the courts of State. Moreover, both the bishop and the inquisitor had patenées, laymen who donated a minimal sum to receive this protection. Furthermore, all priests and patenées were excluded from all duties of military service.\textsuperscript{174} For this reason a centralisation of the authority of the Grand Master was hindered by the curia, which had its separate interests. Therefore, it had been the policy of the Order to ‘cut off the wings’ of both \textit{curie}. Pinto had been the first to attempt such and effort. He had supported the expulsion of the Jesuits from Malta, reduced the \textit{Immunita’ Ecclesiastica} and had attempted to suppress the bull \textit{In Cœna Domini}. De Rohan would eventually attempt again unsuccessfully to suppress the said bull in 1789-90. De Rohan would also attempt to abolish the Office of the Inquisitor from Malta, as had been done in Sicily in 1782.\textsuperscript{175} The Grand Master makes use of the break between Naples and Rome to his advantage. The King of Naples states that once the \textit{Sant’Officio} was abolished in the Two Sicilies, Malta was obliged to do the same in view of its feudal ties. He also published the \textit{Vidit}, a law which required all documents being sent by foreign courts to be signed by the \textit{Avvocato Generale}. Both

\textsuperscript{173} \textit{In Cœna Domini} makes kings depend on Papal approval even on political matters. Most monarchs suppressed this bull, however the Grand Master Pinto had to be more cautious. Apart from the claim, of Sovereign of Malta, entitling himself to autonomous rule, he was also head of a religious Order that existed only through Papal approval. Nevertheless this would not stop Pinto from attacking the bull.; \textit{Ibid.}, 26.

\textsuperscript{174} Ciappara (2006), 30-35.

\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Ibid.}, 27. Ciappara (2008), 185-188.
sides stood their ground, with de Rohan making use of Uditore Giovanni Niccolò Muscat to seek leverage from Naples. Muscat was a local counterpart to Diderot and d’Alembert, becoming intricately woven in the Church-State struggle. His main aim was to turn the Church in a State department, asserting that the eighteenth century was no longer the century of the Church. He was the person responsible behind the publication of the *Vidit*, becoming thus a declared enemy of Rome.\(^\text{176}\) The Holy See would immediately threaten sequestration of the Order’s lands, and worse. Pope Pius VI’s anger at the Order could have accomplished more than what the French Revolutionaries had attempted to achieve; the extinction of the Order.\(^\text{177}\) The Pope’s argument was that that Order could not attack the privileges held by ecclesiastical authorities, when it itself enjoyed much of the same privilege.\(^\text{178}\) De Rohan was forced to withdraw his *Vidit* and remove Muscat from his office. In 1796 the Grand Master would attempt to make amends with the Pope by offering him safe asylum in Malta, after Bonaparte had invaded the Papal States. The same year the Inquisitor had been recalled to Rome and his office terminated. However, the Church survived the Order on Malta, later using the same methods to mobilise an insurrection against the French. The local discontent at the Order was pronounced soon after with the ‘Declaration of Human Rights’ at the Treaty of Amiens. It asserts that the Maltese were ready to ‘die fighting under the bastions of Valletta, should the hated knights return’. Though it is hard to determine who worded these phrases, one could readily believe that if this was the opinion of the upper classes and clergy, they had all the means to impress upon the rest of the locals. This scenario can be analysed in terms of Rousseau’s ‘Social Contract’. Rousseau wrote that in order for the state to be preserved, the sovereign must make a form of agreement with his people. The sovereign must represent their interests, for which reasons he will introduce new laws to safeguard the freedom of his people. Nevertheless, the true power behind his absolute rule is the

\(^{176}\) Muscat declared himself in favour of civil marriage. Moreover, in full spirit of his age he wrote; “La giurisdizione della chiesa non andava al di là dello spirituale... Questo non è più il secolo della Chiesa... Voglio lasciar il vescovo soltanto con il pastorale e la mitra”, Ciappara (2008), 186.

\(^{177}\) Mallia-Milanes (1982), 95; ‘The Pope has been furious in such measure against us, or rather against our Head, that he seriously threatened to mete out to us the treatment which his immediate predecessor had reserved for the Jesuits. In essence it amounts to the assertion of our inexistence.”

\(^{178}\) Panzavecchia, 281.
people, and once the sovereign looses the support of his people, he is doomed to fall. Initially de Rohan’s election was supported by almost all. This gave him the impetus to drive forward his reforms. However, his failure to reach a definite agreement with the church created an opposing force that challenged his supremacy, claiming to represent also the spiritual freedom of the populace. By not managing to consolidate his contract with the people, the Grand Master’s authority was doomed to be dented at the first crisis. This crisis came soon enough with the Revolution of 1789.

11. Fearing the Revolution

In France by 1786, the situation between the monarchy and the subjects was worrying. The population’s fear had augmented and the country was ripe for revolution. The greatest fear of the Third estate was that the aristocracy would attempt to subdue them by withholding the distribution of corn. Rumour also spread out that as the aristocracy feared an open revolt, they would attempt to capture Paris and use a foreign army to suppress the provinces and countryside.

Despite the fact that the situation in Malta was far from serene, and a schism existed within the Order’s ranks, non-conformity with the government was on a much smaller scale. We have no solid proof that there veritably existed a threat to stability on the same scale as France. Neither can we say that discontent was a general feeling amongst everyone on the island. Apart from isolated incidents, the population was not arming itself in preparation for a revolt. On the contrary, the island seemed to be organising its defences to suppress a possible threat of a French invasion. It is debatable whether the local population were still ready to fight for the Order in this eventuality.

What scared mostly the population and the Order was this sense of oblivion of what the future might have in store and uncertainty on how to react to the international crisis. The Inquisitor records public gossiping in 1791 about the threat of an English or Turkish invasion, following the close patrolling of Neapolitan warships to the coasts of Malta,

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180 Ciappara (2002), 137.
and the setting up of cannon on forts (which was routine during the summer months). Further preoccupation arose when a list was made of all persons fit for military duty.181

‘The State Commission, whose aim was to investigate the activities of the tumultuous French Knights...having finished this employment and with nothing else to do, saw it fit to make a description of all the men fit to carry arms in the event of necessity. The execution of this plan...put fear in the minds of the inhabitants of this Island....Some fear an English or Turkish invasion, others fear even worse happenings.182 ‘...they [the population] are afraid of an eventual surprise by any foreign power, or another incident of revolt in the country. But it is clear that neither one nor the other has any base, apart from the simple mindedness and imagination of the people.’183

These military preparations taken by the Grand Master were coupled with the sight of two Neapolitan ships close to the shore, which amplified the anecdotes. Though these rumours were not solidly proven, they were the people’s natural reaction to the precautions the Order took in the eventuality that their fears proved real. The Grand Master received information expressing the possibility that the French navy under La Touche might be approaching the shores.184 He appointed bailli du Tillet and Knight Commander Thurn, both very experienced officers who served in France, to take charge of the defence. They doubled the members of the Corpo dei Cacciatori from 500 to 1000 men and made drill more frequent. Soldiers from the ships were sent to defend St Angelo and Ricasoli and the milizie and Reggimenti della Campagna were mobilised and set on alert.185 The bays were patrolled constantly by the vessels Santa Elisabetta and San Zaccaria, letting no one land before being given the ‘libera pratica’. Sentries were placed at key points such as city gates, the shipyards and the polverista, and curfew was issued. This was a measure to counteract any attempt of foreign agents landing on the island and stirring a revolt,186 under which pretext Malta would be vulnerable to foreign takeover.

181 Ibid, 144.
182 AIM, Corr. 101, f. 319r.
183 Ibid., f. 316r.
184 Ciappara (2002), 142.
185 Ibid.
186 Ibid.
Rumours of a revolt were frequent. In 1791 a group of French knights were involved in a fight with some Italian sailors. A gossip soon turned the story in an attempt by the French knights to plunder the public treasury and the homes of wealthy Maltese and escape, in conjunction with an attempt to stir up a riot.\footnote{AIM, Corr. 101, f. 305r.}

The Church was also playing its part in transmitting news from France to its faithful, mostly news concerning the said institution. The Revolution had begun a systematic spoiling of Church property. As the priests in France would be stripped of their possessions, they would depend on State aid, which help would make them servants of the State.\footnote{Ryan, 174.} It was the first step towards a total secularisation of the Church. Attacks on the \textit{Dames Malthaises},\footnote{The \textit{Dames Mathaises} were the female branch of the Order of St John. Their convent at Toulouse was invaded and they were forced to take a civil oath.} and eventually even on the practice of mass itself followed. It is needless to mention that the Church in Malta feared it would share a similar fate had La Touche really attempted a landing. The Church would attempt to demonise the Republic, adding to the anguish of the simple populace who were far from ‘enlightened’ to understand. A flood of emigrants from France also came to Malta, with their often conflicting, at times even exaggerated, stories of atrocities committed by the new government. Many were bewildered to hear of the invasion of the Tuilleries and the massacre of the King’s guards. Opposing stories were also told of Royalist massacres, harassing the newly acquired liberty of the people of France.

Despite rumours and stories, the Order kept its relations with France ambiguous until late in 1792. Nor did the Grand Master allow any of his knights or subjects to support the anti-revolutionaries\footnote{Ciappara (2002), 138; AIM, Corr. 101, f. 322r.} who were plotting to overthrow the Assembly and re-instate the King. On the contrary, from the years 1789 till 1792 the Order formally befriended the Revolution and acted as an intermediary between France and the rest of Europe’s monarchy. This mediation and fear of reprisals lasted until the declaration of war by most of Europe against France resulting from the execution of the King proved the Order’s preoccupation to be well founded and the eventual sequestration of all the
priories of France. Instead of formally denouncing the National Assembly, the Grand Master appointed a council of various Grand Crosses to assess whether it was viable to contribute to the *don patriotique*.\(^{191}\) Despite the fact that terms were being dictated by France, and the Order not being in the liberty of taking matters in hand, de Rohan still hoped that he might negotiate a return of the former privileges and save it from the impending sequestration of all its commanderies in France. For this reason he persisted in not favouring any side at all, suppressing both loyalist and revolutionary propaganda, attempting the age old strategy of playing the great powers against each other until one would eventually give in. For instance, the Grand Master arrested two Italian Knights, who during the carnival celebrations of 1790 satirised the National Assembly by depicting the ‘devil of liberty’.\(^{192}\)

With the execution of the King, the Order’s relations with France became more ambivalent. De Rohan immediately realised that this was not a diplomatic game, and there was no turning back. Europe’s war with France would go on until one side was completely defeated. Malta couldn’t remain neutral indefinitely. The National Assembly had devised a plan to attract Malta towards a trade partnership with France. The island was to become a French depot in return for military protection. De Rohan was not ready to accept this offer and ordered that representatives from the National Assembly would not be granted permission to disembark.\(^{193}\) The Grand Master was constantly under pressure from members of the Order supporting either side. One such case involved a party of French Knights who gathered at the house of M. Comeau, the former minister to the French King. They requested that the royal coat of arms be removed from the facade of his residence. Once the King was dead and the National Assembly was the new governing body, Comeau could no longer exhibit the royal insignia. The group of knights were calmed by the *maestro scudiero* and returned to their homes without further

\(^{191}\) AIM, Corr. 101, ff. 272v, 273v-74r.

\(^{192}\) Ciappara (2002), 138-139; AIM, Corr. 101, ff. 278r-79r, 82v. The Sienese knight Sansedoni dressed as a demon with a long tail and inscription ‘the devil of liberty’. He also rode on a donkey decorated with the Revolutionary cockades, with another inscription ‘I am a donkey but no savage beast. The devil of liberty enslaved me’. Another Florentine knight Bonsignori wore a torn under-dress, holding the devil’s tail saying ‘My friend gave me my dress’ to which the devil replied ‘You never had one’.

\(^{193}\) Amongst other possessions, the Frenchmen had allegedly brought along a guillotine; AIM, Corr. 102, f. 114r; Ciappara (2002), 140.
incident.\(^{194}\) However, de Rohan did comply in removing the royal insignia. On paper Grand Master also would not allow any Knights or Maltese to leave the island to join the counter-revolutionaries.\(^ {195}\) One Maltese named Reno was threatened with death if he continued enlisting men to the cause. Those who had already been enlisted were not allowed to leave the island. De Rohan took a precaution of not allowing more than two Maltese nationals aboard ships, lest they would attempt to accept money for military service in the European wars.\(^ {196}\) De Rohan was aware however that some knights still managed to depart from Malta to fight the ‘moral gangrene’ in France. Many knights left with the excuse to tend to their families who had lost their possessions. One of these was Vittorio de Rohan, nephew of the Grand Master. Nevertheless, the Grand Master was unofficially more lenient, knowing that should the counter-revolution succeed, the Order would have evaded a crisis, and would be duly repaid for its service. Eventually the Grand Master realised that military confrontation was becoming ever more a reality and would openly side with the monarchies of Europe. Thereon he would allow his knights to join the Duke of Artois. He weakened his stance after being hit by serious paralyses. Harsher precautions had to be taken against those who attempted to introduce Revolutionary principles from within.

One should remember that the Order of St. John was an institution that incorporated members from all social classes. The Order was not exclusively a first or second estate institution, though it was mostly them who benefitted most from the commanderies. It was mainly composed of three groups; the knights who were laymen from the noble families of Europe, the chaplains who were clerics, and the vast majority being Servants at Arms or simple employees who would qualify for the Third Estate such as secretaries, trained soldiers, stable boys and coachmen. All dependants relied on the revenues of the Order and would be struck indiscriminately with the suppression of the Order of St. John. This implies that all the affiliates of the Order, servants or knights, should have in theory opposed the Revolution. There was no way that any of them would benefit from befriending the Revolution as long as they fell under the patronage of the

\(^{194}\) AIM, Corr. 102, ff. 93v, 150v-151r., 156r.; Ciappara (2002), 139.

\(^{195}\) AIM, Corr. 101, ff. 322r, 319 r.

\(^{196}\) *Ibid.*, ff. 144v-145r.
Order. Nevertheless, in some cases they had other motifs to support the ‘French madness’.

12. Local support for the Revolution.

A great section of the Maltese middle class resented the in exclusion from the Order. This would naturally place the Maltese intelligentsia at the heart of the spread of Enlightenment ideals. On the other hand, the majority of the Knights supported the counter-revolution, with the exception of those members in Masonic Lodges, or were educated in progressive military schools like the Soreze. Others like the ‘Auvergnats’ held simply a grudge against the Grand Master. The rest of the illiterate population was mainly dominated by the clergy. This scenario created a widening gap between the members of the Order and the population, with the revolution appealing to those more liberally minded.

Those who appeared suspicious to the Order’s officials were not even granted libera pratica and sent away immediately. Such was the case of Guillaume Laurier who had been expelled from the Two Sicilies on suspicion of having caused turbulence in that kingdom. Other troublemakers who had already been residing in Malta were deported. Three French sergeants of the Reggimento di Malta were banished after being caught meeting secretly. The French were not the only ones under scrutiny, as the population grew suspicious of one another. One female Jacobine, Carolina Giardinelli told some French knights that the Neapolitans were no longer bound to obey their King, as his authority was abusive. Another Sicilian merchant named Zappalà also shared similar thoughts with another man who exchanged his revolutionary beliefs. Both were exiled

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197 Blondy, 661. Nevertheless in the latter years a number of exceptions were made in regards of military ranks and education.
198 Ciappara (2002), 143.
199 Ibid., 143-145.
200 Zappalà told his friend, ‘Europe is in turmoil and as long as there is a single king it cannot be at peace because it is hard and harmful to submit to a single person.’; Ibid., 144.
from Malta. Elizabetta Dalmazzo, a German by birth, also shared the same fate for wearing a hair band with the revolutionary colours.

A good number of supporters of the Revolution were servants of the Church, patentees of either the Bishop or the Inquisitor, or clerics themselves. In one case, two Dominican priests, Fra Alessandro Grech and Fra Tommaso Vassallo, were charged with seditious talk against the Order. They predicted a revolt of the ‘Maltese nation’ against the Order, perhaps with the help of a foreign ally. Another cleric, this time a Capuchin, Fra Giovanni Carlo Rochemont was expelled to Rome under the same accusations.²⁰¹ A more serious plot against the Order was uncovered, to which the plotters boasted they had 250 accomplices. This plot was being financed by the rich merchants of Bormla and Zejtun. These merchants had been carrying out trade with Barcellona, where they might have first made contact with these malicious maxims. The leaders of the plot were a former prosecutor Samuel Caruana and a lawyer Gatt. What might be worth noting is that a good number of the plotters were directly connected to the Church. Some were in fact clerics, patentees of the Inquisitor, members of the ecclesiastical courts or attuario of the Bishop.²⁰² These conspirators were corresponding with Bazire, the vice-president of the Committee of Surveillance in Paris. They wrote in one of the dispatches that soon they would lie down at the shade of the tree of liberty. They also sang the “Ça Ira” under the bastions of St. Elmo, a Revolutionary song which condemned aristocrats to death. The Mannarinos were also suspected of being involved in causing unrest, being siblings of the infamous Don Gaetano. In the house of Don Gaetano’s brother, Bartolomeo, the Order’s officials found documents relating to French affaires. In fact Bartolomeo had sent his three sons to serve on board French ships in Toulon, under the direction of Rev. Dimech (Testaferrata), chaplain on board Le Tonnant.²⁰³ Other Maltese had managed to escape

²⁰¹ Ibid., 146.
²⁰² Conspirators included Giorgio Portelli and Giovanni Gatt were patentees of the Inquisitor, Fournier and his family and Paola Manduca. There was also a certain Giorgio Olivier, nephew of the assessor of Bishop Pellerano, one Mallia, printer and canon of Birkirkara Emanuele Carbone. Giovanni Maria Deguara was captain of the ecclesiastical courts, and Paolo Vella was the attuario to Bishops Pellerano and Labini. There was also a conspirator from Gozo, a certain Giovanni Maria Vella from the parish of St. George.; Ibid.
²⁰³ Ibid.
the island, presumably to join the revolutionaries. A group made it out on board of two French frigates with the help of Grognet.\footnote{AIM, Corr. 102, f. 206r.}

It would be interesting to review the role of the Maltese Church in these attempts to overthrow the government from within or outside. Although the Church could have never supported a French take-over or a Neapolitan one in view of their anti-clericalism, the ecclesiastical authorities were not so happy with the local administration, either. The failed attempt by Don Mannarino and his fellow conspirators had not been forgotten. Moreover, the true motives behind that upheaval had not been entirely solved. The Church had as much reason to despise the Government as the Revolutionaries. The Inquisitor’s days were counted, with or without Napoleon, the latter being just the executioner of a sentence which had been served much earlier with the first writings of the philosophes. The Knights themselves were divided into two clear-cut parties. Bailli de Loras and bailli Pignatelli had been working hard to rally more knights to the aristocratic party, supporting the Grand Master. They wanted to convince the Revolutionaries that as Knights they could not co-exist with the Revolution. However, there was no stopping the tide, as news of French victories was reaching Malta.

\textit{Bailli} Resséquer wrote to a friend in France, congratulating him for participating in the ‘\textit{most beautiful revolution that has ever been enacted on the world’s theatre. The people won again their liberty and were integrated in their rights of which they had been inhumanly deprived.}’\footnote{Ciappara (2002), 147.} Another knight supporter of the Revolution was St Priest, a personal confidant of Dolomieu. Latour-Maubourg had served as aide-du-camp to Marquis Lafayette; his elder brother had been with the delegation that arrested King Louis XIV at Varennes. When this Knight returned to Malta, some French knights presented a petition to de Rohan to have him expelled from Malta and stripped of his knighthood.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 148; AIM, Corr. 102, ff. 120v-121r.} Another supporter of the Revolutionary maxims was the Modenese novice knight Scaruffi. He had spoken against Kings while in Catania, for which seditious talk the Viceroy of Sicily reported him to the Grand Master and expatriated him from the
Kingdom. Nevertheless a French take-over was imminent, as much of the Knights who had left to join the allies against France, were themselves Revolutionaries. Some had been exiled, while others remained to occupy the most powerful roles.

207 AIM, Corr. 102, ff. 111r., 127v-128v.
Epilogue

The Poussielgue Report

Six months before Napoleon came to Malta, he sent an envoy with a secret mission to precede him. This spy named Etienne Poussielgue was to draw up a report of the state of Malta and its knights, in preparation for a French invasion. Poussielgue had to assess the long term effects of the French Revolution, which were de Rohan’s legacy to the new Grand Master Hompesch. During his stay, the spy resided with his cousin who was the Captain of the Port. He was responsible for setting up meetings between Poussielgue and various other individuals, including a meeting with the Grand Master himself. Through these meetings, Poussielgue was able to recreate the general voices and opinions circulating on the island, reporting to his master information about the possible ways to capture Malta. The ‘Poussielgue Report’ is itself an analysis of the same three sectors that I have chosen to analyse in this study. The spy gives detailed information about the Order’s international relations, the Order’s financial situation, and the support or lack of it for the Grand Master and the Order.

Poussielgue starts off his report to Napoleon with details of how many knights resided in Malta, stressing on the fact that more than half of them were French. He constantly points out throughout the letter, that the French Knights were the bulwark of Malta’s resistance, and therefore their surrender would hold the key to the capture of Malta. He also mentions that only 15 to 20 of these knights were in favour of the French Republic, although a small number of these held key roles within the Order. The spy predicts that the rest would put up a sturdy defence of Malta, as they would otherwise be without a home. It was essential that these knights be repatriated in France, with the blessing of the Directory. The Frenchman was certain that the Maltese would not fight for the Order. The rest of the knights from the other langues tended to be somewhat indifferent to the French Revolution. The more affluent Maltese and the merchants secretly despised the Order, the former because they were excluded from the honours of the Order and the latter because they were not allowed to trade with the Barbary States.

This put the merchants at a risk of being captured and taken as slaves, a fate which was worse than death. The Maltese, writes Poussielgue, bear the weight of despotism more than any other people. The Grand Master was among the most absolute rulers in Europe, and had power over justice, imprisoning the Maltese for any small offence. The highest ranking of the Maltese would always be second to the lowliest of the Order’s novices. Nevertheless, the Grand Master had just enough control over the people, and had always been duly informed of any plot being hatched. Poussielgue also mentions the fear that still dwelled amongst the knights and the Maltese people. He tells Napoleon that his presence on the island, along with the occurrence of two French frigates, was enough to arouse suspicion. The Grand Master had put the islands on a state of alarm from the English fleet, but Poussielgue was certain that this was a move to mask Hompesch’s true fear, being that of a French invasion.

The Report also makes mention of the lack of funds, which could soon put an end to the ailing Order. However, the Order was hanging by a thread, as it still managed to reap money from the remaining of its possessions in Europe. Malta was in no way poor, with the report listing amongst others the riches of the Church; however, none of this money could be used to save the Order. Poussielgue suggests that the Directory forces Spain to sequestrate the Order’s lands, to remove the little leverage the Grand Master had in asserting his autonomy. Poussielgue feared that the Grand Master might attempt to negotiate the handing over of the island while he was still in a position to negotiate. England had already attempted to take Malta through negotiations, but all attempts had failed. The Knights and the Maltese were generally antagonistic towards the English. The Neapolitans could have accepted to exchange the sovereignty of Malta for Benevento, something the French could give them as it was formerly a Papal possession. However the greatest threat to the capture of Malta was the Emperor of Russia. He coveted the importance of Malta and would readily seize it to extend his maritime power in the Mediterranean. Secondly, the Tsar had more means to compensate the Grand Master than any other European monarch. Nevertheless, Poussielgue assured Napoleon that, had France opted to negotiate the surrender of Malta instead of taking it by force, they had the best offers to make. The Grand Master could be offered money to pay his debts and another residence, but first he had to be convinced that the Order was doomed to
collapse. For this aim, the French could force the Pope to suppress the Order of St. John, a move which would also be seconded by the other monarchs who desired the Order’s properties within their lands.

An attack would be a risky business had the negotiations failed. Poussielgue outlines that Malta could be defended by just a handful of men, especially if it still benefitted from the expertise of the French Knights. The ports were strongly fortified and had the supplies to resist a siege. The island had to be captured before help from abroad reached the Grand Master, and to do so swiftly, the French had to have a number of men inside the city. Poussielgue had already mentioned that he had three or four high ranking supporters within the Order, but he still suggested to Napoleon to capture Malta through a combination of diplomatic moves and simultaneous surprise attacks.

This chapter from Maltese history comes to an end on the 9th of June 1798, with the beginning of the French invasion. The French Revolution was the penultimate crises, which was followed nine years later with one final crisis. Following the loss of Malta the Order underwent a schism which saw the knights divided. However, one can say that just like a phoenix rising from its ashes, the Order rose once again to rediscover its true calling. The years of Enlightenment and Revolution remained embedded in the Order’s identity, giving it the opportunity to survive, despite the toll that the loss of Malta had left. This legacy of 1789 brought the Order to terms with its raison d’être, dedicating itself entirely to the one service it had never ceased to give; offering love to the sick and the poor.
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(The latest edition of the early modern classic, which has been one of the hallmarks of enlightened legal reform.)

(The chapter goes through the relationship between Malta and the French Republic in stages. With each stage, Blondy describes the deterioration of the Order’s financial situation and its hopes and methods to recover its lost privileges.)

(Callus delves into the real reasons behind the riot of Don Mannarino. Far from being a bread riot, it was the epitome of a power-clash between Church and State. Callus also draws distinctions in the methods used by both Church and State in reporting the incident.)

(This work gives all the details of how the loss of Malta to the armies of Napoleon came about. Cavaliero meticulously describes how the ideological, military, economical and political crises combine together to bring about the Order’s demise.)

(The chapter covers the Church-State clash which was brought about by the question of Ecclesiastical Immunity)

(This book deals with the clash between the Inquisition and the State, in particular through the works of Uditore Gio. Niccolò Muscat.)

(The paper was very helpful in understanding the effect that the French Revolution had on the population and knights of Malta. The paper shows the schism that was created between those who feared and those who welcomed the ideas of the Revolution.)
(An extensive read which analyses Pinto, Ximenes and de Rohan’s magistracies in comparison to European enlightened monarchy. The book delves in the various aspects of Maltese society and gives an overview of the governmental and ecclesiastical response to the Enlightenment movement.)

(The paper lists the relationship the Order of St. John had in the eighteenth century with Naples and Rome, the two authorities that contested the sovereignty of Malta. Ciappara demonstrated the strategy used by Pinto and de Rohan to play both powers against each other.)

(This book gives an overview of the clash between Maltese corsairs and other Christian merchants.)

(This paper was helpful in understanding the main pillars on which the Order’s economy rested, primarily the commanderies and their revenues.)

(Lefebvre captures the fear of the French peasantry when the Revolution was imminent. He describes the loss of order and the preparations for a revolution in stages, and the attempts of the nobility to stop the ‘madness’)

(The paper lists the features of the standard of living in Malta in Malta through the various sectors of society and occupations.)

(The author gives an overview of the Order’s foreign relations in the mentioned dates through the correspondences of the Venetian Minister. The article demonstrates the different intentions that European powers had in regards to Malta.)
(The book makes a good analysis of the use of *sequestro* by foreign states against the Order’s lands.)

(Panzavecchia was one of the very first authors to write about the Order’s impending collapse and the motives behind it. The book reproduces a number of documents and speeches which are crucial to understanding the intrigue that followed the French Revolution.)

(Roche divides his study in three parts; in the first he gives a description of France before the Enlightenment. In the second part he gives an overview of the relationship between the King and his people, and in the third part he studies how Enlightenment changed both society and the role of the Monarchy. I have adopted a similar approach in my analyses of the situation in Malta.)

(The book presents the reader with an overview of the last fifty years of Order’s rule in Malta, drawing constant analyses of the relationship that the Order had with France.)

(This is a translation of the Doublet Memoirs and the Poussielgue report.)

(This book gave me the opportunity to do a comparative analyses of European monarchies with de Rohan’s magistracy, outlining foreign relations and political aspirations.)