

‘The Pope wants to be the Ruin of this Religion’ – The Papacy, France, and the Order of St John in the Seventeenth Century¹

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Abstract: *The relationship between the papacy, France, and the Order of St John in early modern times was characterized by a complex interaction of competing and complementary interests. The papacy and France were the two most important patrons of the Order; the first was the ultimate authority within the Order, whereas the latter provided most of its members and revenue. The Order could not function or exist without the moral and material support of Rome and Paris. At the same time, the Order, as an institution that embodied the patriarchal, noble, and Catholic values of the era, and as a major landowner in Europe, was useful to both the papacy and France. This paper will endeavour to show how the Order and its individual members were affected by, and reacted, to this state of affairs. The early modern papacy never sought the abolishment of the Order but papal patronage of individual Hospitallers and interference in the Order's affairs, created a strong current of opinion within the Order that expressed disenchantment with this situation. A similar pull-and-push dynamic shaped relations with France. This was a state of affairs that created both opportunities and problems for the Order, and its ability to fight for the faith.*

Keywords: *State formation, gift-making, conflict, Christendom, papacy, France, Inquisition, Louis XIV, crusade, Islam.*

Introduction

Yesterday [the Conventual Chaplain] Rigal secretly informed me [Inquisitor Evangelista Carbonesi] that with great haste he was being encouraged to go to France, and he was being offered the enjoyment of the fruits of the Commandery on condition that he swore not to go to Rome, and furthermore Bosio [Vice-Chancellor of the Order] had kept him locked up for more than two hours preaching to him, and often coming to the conclusion, that [‘]the Pope wants to be the ruin of this Religion[!‘], which words [my] most Illustrious Lord cannot, and should not ever be uttered again by this brazen one-eyed [man], who is detested by the entire world, although they cannot show this because of reasons of state.²

¹ A version of this paper was read at the Seventh Quadrennial Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and Latin East (SSCLE), on ‘The papacy and the Crusades’, held at Avignon, 27–31 August 2008.

² B[iblioteca] A[ppostolica] V[aticana], [Fondo] Barb[erini] Lat[ino], MS. 6676, ff. 31^v, 20 May 1613,

This strong-worded statement formed part of the correspondence which the Inquisitor and Apostolic Delegate Evangelista Carbonesi (1608–14) exchanged with Cardinal Scipione Borghese in Rome between December 1612 and June 1613. Frà Giovanni Rigal, a conventual chaplain of the langue of Provence, had felt affronted by a decision taken by the Council of the Order and, as customary in such situations, he had taken his case to the Inquisitor to lodge an appeal with the pope. Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt (1601–22) and his council reacted by throwing Frà Rigal into a horrible prison cell and accusing him of all sort of false (according to Carbonesi) crimes. The inquisitor was concerned that, after this harsh punishment, no one would ever again dare appeal to the Holy See, which could lead to a slackening of the Order's obedience towards the papacy; and herein lay the crux of the matter.

Frà Rigal found himself caught in a power struggle between the authority of the Grand Master and Council in Malta and the potential of the papacy to chip away at that authority. Giacomo Bosio's statement that 'the Pope wants to be the ruin of this Religion!' expressed a widespread and persistent feeling of antipathy among the Hospitallers (and among the Italian brethren in particular) against papal interference in the Order's affairs. Such feelings drove many to seek the protection of France as a counter-balance to the papacy. But France could be as overbearing as the papacy in its demands over the Order. At the same time, the papacy and France were the two most important patrons of the Order in early modern times, a state of affairs that created both opportunities and problems for its administration and its mission of holy war against Islam.

This paper explores this complex three-sided relationship during the seventeenth century, a time during which France's strength in the Mediterranean steadily increased; hence France's influence in the affairs of the Order became greater than before, while the papacy held on to its role as head of the Order. This paper will consider the benefits and opportunities for the Order that stemmed from its relations with France and the papacy, and how the Order maintained such links, in particular by focusing on gift-making practices. At the same time, these same interactions led to conflicts and challenges to the Order's integrity and these had implications for the Order's capacity to wage holy war at sea against Muslim shipping, in particular that of the Ottoman empire.

'Hierì il Rigal mi feci saper secretissimam^e che con molta fretta gli erano attorno, accio senti vadda in Francia, et gli offeriscono gratia delli frutti della Comm.^{da} pur che promitta di non venir a' Roma, et di piu' che il Bosio l'haveva tenuto in camera piu' di due hori predicandoli il med^{mo}, et concludendo spesso, che il Papa vuol essere la ruina di qsta Religione, parole Ill^{mo} S^r che non si possono, ne si devono piu' comportar da questo sfacciato Monoculo, odiato da tuttu il mondo, sebeni per ragioni di stato non lo mostrano.'

State formation and pressures on the Order

The study of 'the state' and its growth has been of major concern to early modern scholarship. The work of such historians as Michael J Braddick, Mark Goldie, and Ulinka Rublack represents a shift from the 'state building' to 'state formation' paradigm.³ This means shifting the emphasis from purposeful actions by rulers to expand institutional powers, to a multi-stranded process of institutional development driven by many forces. Within this new approach of state formation, definitions of the state can vary depending on the focus of one's work. The state can be defined as a coordinated and territorially bounded network of agents exercising political power.⁴ In a similar vein, the state can be viewed as not being exclusively a set of institutions, but rather a network of power relationships, which become institutionalized to a greater or lesser extent over time.⁵ The papacy and France experienced such processes of state formation; the intimate way in which the Order was entangled with them – as an institution of the Catholic Church, as a major landowner and as a corporation of noblemen and aristocrats – meant that as the power of the central authority (king and pope respectively) was augmented, these processes had an impact on the functioning of the Order as an organization and on the lives of individual Hospitallers themselves.

The pope was the ultimate authority within the Order, whereas France provided most of its members and revenue. The Order's links to the papacy were crucial for its continued survival and functioning on the international stage.⁶ A fundamental aspect about the relationship between the Order and the papacy was that the Hospitallers waged war *cum auctoritate Ecclesiae*, that is, on the strength of the authorization vested in the papacy and the Church.⁷ Without this papal clout, the Order as a military entity simply could not function. The papacy extended its ecclesiastical and diplomatic immunity to the Order; the defensive needs of Malta were also brought before the pope, from whom some amount of help was usually

³ M. Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England, c.1550–1700*, Cambridge, 2000. M. Goldie, 'The Unacknowledged Republic: Office holding in Early Modern England', in T. Harris (ed.), *The Politics of the Excluded, c.1500–1850*, Basingstoke, 2001, pp. 153–94. U. Rublack, 'State-formation, gender, and the experience of governance in early modern Württemberg', in U. Rublack (ed.), *Gender in Early Modern German History*, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 200–17.

⁴ Braddick, p. 6.

⁵ S. Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England*, Basingstoke, 2000, p. 19.

⁶ S. Lener, 'Natura e prerogativa del sovrano Militare Ordine Gerosolimitano di Malta', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 4, 1954, pp. 28, 178, 435, 553, 641, 654. On the early modern papacy, see P. Prodi, *The papal prince. One body and two souls: The papal monarchy in early modern Europe*, Cambridge, 1987; A.D. Wright, *The early modern papacy: From the Council of Trent to the French Revolution 1564–1789*, Harlow, 2000; G. Signorotto and M.A. Visceglia (eds), *Court and Politics in Papal Rome, 1492–1700*, Cambridge, 2002; P. Rietbergen, *Power and religion in baroque Rome: Barberini cultural policies*, Leiden, 2006.

⁷ Lener, p. 175. H. Nicholson, *The Knights Hospitaller*, Woodbridge, 2006, pp. 13–17.

granted. Pius V (1566–72) was in fact the single biggest benefactor of the new city of Valletta. Nevertheless the papacy also tended to appropriate Hospitaller properties in Italy as an extension of papal lands to be distributed to its favourites, sometimes even not Hospitallers. The Order's status as an ecclesiastical body was therefore a double-edged sword. On the other hand, over the course of the seventeenth century, France became the dominant power in the Mediterranean, which had important repercussions for the Order's operations against the Ottoman empire.⁸ In fact, in 1668, Inquisitor Angelo Ranuzzi (1666–68) remarked on the Order's extensive dependence on France by pointing out how most of the material for the Order's galleys came from France, that there was a lot of commerce between the two, and more importantly most of the Order's landed wealth was in France.⁹ Consequently, large-scale man-made calamities such as the French Wars of Religion (1562–98) and the civil war known as the *Frondes* (1648–53), severely disrupted the Order's management and finances.¹⁰

Since a majority of seventeenth-century Hospitallers hailed from France, developments therein tended to have a very direct impact on the Order.¹¹ An example of this is to be seen in the interaction between the process of state formation and discourses about the nature of nobility. In seventeenth-century France, the definition of nobility and the relationship between the nobility of the sword and the nobility of the robe were issues of major contention. Honour was considered as the anvil upon which nobility could be delineated, but what constituted an honourable venture was debatable.¹² A

⁸ On the growing importance of France in the Mediterranean, see D. Cutajar and C. Cassar, 'Malta's role in Mediterranean affairs 1530–1699', in Mid-Med Bank Ltd (ed.), *Malta: Studies of its heritage and history*, Malta, 1986, p. 130. P.M. Greene, 'Resurgent Islam: 1500–1700', in D. Abulafia (ed.), *The Mediterranean in history*, London, 2003, pp. 234–8. McCluskey, 'Commerce before crusade? France, the Ottoman Empire and the Barbary pirates (1661–1669)', *French History*, 23, 1, 2009, pp. 1–21. For a survey of the relations between France and the Order during the seventeenth century, see C. Petiet, *Le Roi et le Grand Maître: l'Ordre de Malte et la France au XVIIe siècle*, Paris, 2002. See also Friends of the Maritime Museum Malta (ed.), *Aspects of maritime relations with France through the years*, Malta, 1998.

⁹ BAV, Barb. Lat., MS.5353, f. 36', 1668.

¹⁰ B[iblioteca] dell'A[ccademia] N[azionale] dei L[incei] e C[orsiniana] Rome, MS.39,B.13, f.271', 5 July 1568. HJA Sire, *The Knights of Malta*, New Haven and London, 1994, pp. 51–4. Nicholson, pp. 186, 198–9, 121–2. D.F. Allen, 'The Order of St John and Cromwell's navy, 1649–1660', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 79, 2, 1993, p. 142.

¹¹ J. Riley-Smith, *Hospitallers: The history of the Order of St John*, London, 1999, pp. 72–4.

¹² R. Mettam, 'The French Nobility, 160–1715', in H.M. Scott (ed.), *The European nobilities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (western and southern Europe)*, Vol. I, London and New York, 2007, pp. 130–3. It is important to note that early modern debates about the nature of nobility had their roots in similar medieval discussions on how to define nobility; see M. Keen, *Nobles, knights and men-at-arms in the middle ages*, London, 1996, pp. 187–222. Similar debates were going on in Spain, Portugal and in Italy: I.A.A. Thompson, 'The Nobility in Spain', pp. 194–5; N. Gonçalo Monteiro, 'Nobility and Aristocracy in Ancien Régime Portugal', pp. 266–9; C. Donati, 'The Italian Nobilities', pp. 289–90; all three chapters are found in Scott (ed.), *The European Nobilities*.

number of inter-related factors were generally taken as indicators of nobility: birth and lineage, titles, and coat of arms, income from land, civic privileges, and attire. The military ethos was central to the honour code of the nobility; war, together with government and diplomacy, continued to be the arenas where noblemen could best prove their worth, status and manliness.¹³ Setting aside a son to become a Hospitaller formed an integral part of many noble families' strategies for successful adaptation in the changing circumstances of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Order provided a most honourable solution to the problem of settling 'surplus' male offspring. This in turn signalled the distinct quality of a particular family's nobility.¹⁴

As the powers and structures of the state expanded in early modern Europe, the need for trained personnel also increased.¹⁵ In its original foundation and throughout its history, the Order was not an academy or college designed to meet such states' needs.¹⁶ On the other hand, many princes (particularly the papacy and France) recognized that the Order represented a readily accessible pool of highly trained and experienced human resources. In Malta, the young were exposed to an environment where they learnt the practices of court and camp from elders who, according to Inquisitor Ranuzzi, lived 'in the fashion of the grandees of France'.¹⁷ Many European maritime powers actively sought to recruit Hospitallers into their navies because they valued both their actual skills as well as their social lineage.¹⁸ France, especially under Louis XIV (1638–1715), was keen to recruit Hospitallers and the Order was considered as 'a truly remarkable school of naval combat'.¹⁹ In 1620, Frà François Trigunau of Provence stated that he had been approached by another Hospitaller, Frà de Bossise, about taking under his protection a Flemish sailor who was being sought by the Inquisition. Bossise reasoned with Trigunau

¹³ H.M. Scott and C. Storrs, 'Introduction: The consolidation of noble power in Europe, c.1600–1800', in H.M. Scott (ed.), pp. 7–8, 11, 40–2, 46–7. J. Dewald, *The European Nobility 1400–1800*, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 28, 97. J.R. Hale, *War and society in Renaissance Europe 1450–1620*, Stroud, 1998, pp. 75, 90–97.

¹⁴ A. Spagnoletti, 'Elementi per una storia dell'Ordine di Malta nell'Italia moderna', *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome*, 96, 2, Rome, 1984, p. 1026. C. Donati, *L'idea di nobiltà in Italia: Secolo XIV–XVIII*, Rome, 1988, p. 247. Mettam, pp. 130–3. Thompson, p. 193. Hernández, pp. 170–1.

¹⁵ J.R. Hale, *Renaissance war studies*, London, 1983, pp. 225–46. Braddick, pp. 6, 45. H. Zmora, *Monarchy, aristocracy and the state in Europe 1300–1800*, London, 2001, pp. 3–6.

¹⁶ A. Williams, 'Boys will be boys – The problem of the novitiate in the Order of St John in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries', in T. Cortis, T. Freller, L. Bugeja (eds.), *Melitensium Amor: Festschrift in honour of Dun Ġwann Azzopardi*, Malta, 2002, p.181.

¹⁷ BAV, Barb. Lat., MS.5353, f. 31', 1668, 'all'usanza delle personi grandi nella Francia'.

¹⁸ R.L. Dauber, 'Knights of the Sovereign and Military, Religious and Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta in the national navies of Europe 1300–1600', in P. Alberini (ed.), *Aspetti ed Attualità del Potere Marittimo in Mediterraneo nei Secoli XII–XVI*, Rome, 1999, pp. 209–18.

¹⁹ P. Walden Bamford, 'The Knights of Malta and the King of France, 1665–1700', *French Historical Studies*, 3, 4, 1964, p. 431, 'veritable école de guerre navale'.

that, since this Flemish was a first-rate sailor, he should not lose the chance of getting his services, especially now that he (Trigunau) was on his way to serve the king of France.²⁰ Many followed Trigunau's example and proffered their service to the king: in 1674, about two-thirds of Louis XIV's galleys were under the command of Hospitallers.²¹

The role of gift-making

Ever since the appearance of Marcel Mauss's classic *The Gift*, presents and their significance within processes of state formation and diplomacy have become a key subject of investigation for historians.²² In particular, Natalie Zemon Davis has shown how the 'gift landscape' originally charted by Mauss is, in fact, much more open-ended. In sixteenth-century France the status, meanings and uses of gifts were entangled into a complex web of literary advice, religious change, patronage systems, and increasing commercial exchanges within Europe and with the rest of the world.²³ With regards to Spanish Italy in the seventeenth century – a political and cultural context that always affected the Order – the exchange of presents influenced the wielding of power and contributed to shaping the ruler's political culture.²⁴

Gift-exchange in early modern Europe was a complex process that generated opportunities, as well as problems; gifts created obligations to give, to receive and to reciprocate.²⁵ The Order and individual Hospitallers actively participated in gift-exchange processes that were important in establishing, maintaining and renewing hierarchical relations of power. Thus, the Order sent a regular flow of gifts to the viceroys – and their wives – in Naples and Sicily in a bid to keep them well-disposed towards it. These included sherbet (a cool iced fruit soft drink of Turkish origins), fur-skins, gold rings that had been touched against the relic of St John the Baptist and slave girls (these were intended for the viceregal wives).²⁶ In 1610,

²⁰ C[athedral] A[rchives] M[dina, Malta], A[rchive] [of the] I[nquisition] M[alta], C[riminal] P[roceedings], Vol. 170, Case 122, n.p., 24 March 1620.

²¹ Walden Bamford, pp. 430–1. See also J. Fennis, 'De triremibus semper est disputandum', in T. Cortis and T. Gambin (eds.), *De triremibus: festschrift in honour of Joseph Muscat*, Malta, 2005), pp. 339–52.

²² M. Mauss, 'Essai sur le don: forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés arcaïques', *L'année sociologique*, n.s., 1, 1923–4, pp. 30–186. English trans. by Ian Cunnison in 1969, and superseded by Marcel Mauss, *The gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*, trans. W.D. Halls, New York and London, 1990.

²³ N. Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, Oxford, 2000, p. 13.

²⁴ D. Carriò-Invenizzi, 'Gift and diplomacy in seventeenth-century Spanish Italy', *The Historical Journal*, 51, 4, 2008, p. 882. D. Carriò-Invenizzi, *El gobierno de las imagenes: Ceremonial y mecenazgo en la italia española de la segunda mitad del siglo XVII*, Madrid, 2008.

²⁵ Davis, p. 5.

²⁶ G. Wettinger, *Slavery in the Islands of Malta and Gozo ca. 1000–1812*, Malta, 2002, pp. 274–5.

Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt was asked – via an intermediary – by Cardinal Scipione Borghese to send to him a painting of the *Adoration of the Magi* by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) that was in the Order's possession. The grand master duly obliged.²⁷

Over the course of the seventeenth century, a number of Hospitallers fostered links with Tripoli (in North Africa) through which highly prized Barbary horses could be acquired.²⁸ In 1684, the Prior Frà Gian Battista Brancaccio was striving hard to acquire one such animal for his powerful patron, Don Maffeo Barberini, Prince of Palestrina (1631–85). In return for his efforts, the Prince of Palestrina sent Frà Brancaccio a box of the finest salami from his estates. Frà Brancaccio thanked the prince for this gift and told him how he and his friends had enjoyed the salami and drank to his health.²⁹ Conversely, in 1620, the Order conferred an honorary cross to a French knight on the request of Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642).³⁰ And when Queen Anne of France gave birth to the dauphin, the future Louis XIV, in 1638, the Order sent her as a gift the relic of a finger of St Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary. The queen wrote back stating that she was utterly delighted by this present.³¹

Each year, the Order presented a falcon to the kings of Spain and France as a gift, signalling the Order's gratitude for these princes' assistance. Although the falcon presented to Spain was one of the obligations under which the Order held Malta, the Order – according to Inquisitor Ranuzzi who was writing in 1668 – came to insist that it was not a sign of vassalage but of appreciation. That was why a parallel gift of a falcon to France was introduced.³² The language of gift-exchange – even when these were obligatory – could be adapted to frame a particular act into a more suitable perspective. Since early modern Europe was imbued with a highly codified rhetoric of gift-making, which depended on one's belonging to the right circle of beneficiaries at court, the Hospitallers joined and used such networks to further their own interests. Horsemanship, food, works of art, and relics were channelled into gift exchanges characterized by patronage, nepotism and hierarchical relationships, through which the Order maintained its links with the papacy, France and other powers.

²⁷ M. Buhagiar, 'The treasure of the Knight Hospitallers in 1530. Reflections and art historical considerations', in Accademia Internazionale Melitense (ed.), *Peregrinationes: Acta et documenta*, Malta and Perugia, 2000, p. 47.

²⁸ On the high value ascribed to North African and Arabian horses, see P. Edwards, *Horse and man in early modern England*, London, 2007, pp. 12, 30–2, 110–14.

²⁹ BAV, Barb. Lat., MS. 6698, f. 56^r, 25 February and 28 April 1684.

³⁰ BAV, Barb. Lat., MS. 6676, f. 46^r, 1620.

³¹ N[ational] L[ibrary of] M[alta], A[rchive of the] O[rder of] M[alta] 58, f. 75^r, 14 April 1639. NLM, Libr[ary] MS. 271, f. 27.

³² BAV, Barb. Lat., MS. 6698, f. 36^r, 1668.

Conflicts

The dominant positions of the papacy and France within the Order meant that wider tensions between the two spilled over among Hospitallers, including those in Malta. The conflicts tended to involve the inquisitor as papal representative on the one hand, and French Hospitallers or French visitors on the island on the other. In fact, a theme that ran through seventeenth-century inquisitorial records and correspondence was the problem of the sovereignty of the French flag. In its drive to assert the predominance of the French flag over all others in the Mediterranean, France prohibited the Order and other powers from boarding its vessels to inspect their contents and insisted that any vessel bearing the French flag was only answerable to the king of France.³³ Thus, in January 1600, a multitude of French knights burst into the palace of the inquisitor to secure the release of the captain of a vessel flying the flag of France who had been arrested by the Inquisitor on suspicion of heresy. His liberators argued that ‘he had come in a vessel that carried the flag of the king of France and that those who came under the said flag had to be safe everywhere’.³⁴

Another aspect of Franco-papal conflict in Malta centred on the question of whether the inquisitor could have access to the Holy Infirmary of the Order. The infirmary, an institution that was central to the identity of the Order, was the responsibility of the langue of France and its members were very jealous of their role and authority therein. In 1668 Inquisitor Angelo Ranuzzi recorded that they were so fiercely opposed to him visiting the Infirmary that a patient who was a heretic was refused admission to the Infirmary just to avoid the Inquisitor even making a demand for access to him.³⁵ An anecdote from 1711 further highlights the jealousy with which the Holy Infirmary was guarded by the French:

Every person who wants to enter [the Holy Infirmary] has to leave at the entrance the sign of his office, even the Grand Master. One day in 1711, the Grand Inquisitor, the pope’s ambassador to the Grand Master, during the absence of the Commander De Boccage, Grand Hospitaller, entered the hospital on his own authority and started to interrogate and confess the sick. A young knight jumped on his horse and left hurriedly to go for the Grand Hospitaller, who came as quickly as him, evicted the Inquisitor, then embarked as soon as possible to France, arrived at Versailles, to make Louis XIV himself intervene with the Pope. The King reacted rapidly to

³³ Greene, p. 238. Attitudes similar to those of Louis XIV – seeking French predominance across the Mediterranean and variegated interaction with the Ottoman Empire – were carried forward into the eighteenth century by subsequent French governments; see D. Panzac, *Commerce et navigation dans l’Empire ottoman au XVIIIe siècle*, Istanbul, 1996; *La caravane maritime: marins européens et marchands ottomans en Méditerranée (1680–1830)*, Paris, 2004.

³⁴ C.A.M., A.I.M., C.P., Vol.167, Case 15B, ff.22^r–23^v, 19 January 1600, ‘*era venuto In un vassello che portava la bandera del re de francia et che quelli che venivano sotto detta bandiera doveano esser securi da pertutto*’.

³⁵ BAV, Barb. Lat., MS.5353, f.16^r, 1668.

ensure the safeguarding of the privileges of the Order and the French Langue, of which the Grand Hospitaller is the *Pilier*.³⁶

Such an intervention on the part of Louis XIV fitted in with his policy of curtailing church power in his kingdom, which in turn showed how the French crown had come to regard Malta as an extension of its territory.

Many Hospitallers felt particularly irritated at the way in which different popes admitted various young persons into the Order to the detriment of the position of current members. The venting of such sentiments landed many of them in front of the Inquisitor for speaking against the pope. In 1608, Frà Antonio Centeno was reported as having questioned the decision of the pope to admit two illegitimate knights as if they were legitimate.³⁷ In another example, the German Frà Christiano Hauster Hausen, prior of Dacia, was reported as saying 'It has to be said that when one is elected pope, the devil must take possession of his soul.'³⁸ Frà Christiano said these words in reaction to the fact that some youths who had been enlisted in the Order by the pope had led to substantial disruption in the distribution of commanderies.

The Hospitallers believed that commanderies were meant as means of subsistence in old age. According to the historian of the Order, Frà Bartolomeo dal Pozzo, the Hospitallers, 'having consumed their youth in voyages, spilled their blood, and exposed their life a thousand times' expected to receive their due in terms of security in old age, but often found themselves defrauded of this because of papal misappropriation of commanderies.³⁹ On 18 February 1588, Frà Francois Puget wrote to the Pope to complain about how he had been by-passed for a commandery and asking that all his efforts for the Catholic Faith and the Church be rewarded now that he was an old and poor knight.⁴⁰ In 1624, Inquisitor Onorati Visconti (1624–27) had to deal with an angry mob of Italian Hospitallers who

³⁶ *'Tout personnage se présentant doit déposer à l'entrée les insignes de son rang, le Grand Maître lui-même. Ou un beau jour de 1711, le Grand Inquisiteur, ambassadeur de pape auprès du Grand Maître, en l'absence du Commandeur de Boccage, Grand Hospitalier, pénètre dans l'hôpital de sa propre autorité et se met à interroger et à confesser les maladies. Un jeune chevalier sauté sur son cheval et part à fond de train chercher le Grand Hospitalier, qui revient à la même allure, met l'Inquisiteur à la porte, puis s'embarque au plus tôt pour la France, arrive à Versailles, pour faire intervenir Louis XIV en personne auprès du pape. Le Roi réagit avec promptitude et énergie pour contraindre désormais au respect des privilèges de l'Ordre et de la Langue de France, dont le Grand Hospitalier est le Pilier'*, as quoted in G. Michel de Pierredon, *La vocation hospitalière de l'ordre de Sains-Jean de Jérusalem de Rhodes et de Malte*, Biarritz, 1999, p. 42.

³⁷ CAM, AIM, CP, Vol. 169, Case 96, ff. 1^v, 22 May 1608.

³⁸ CAM, AIM, CP, Vol. 171, Case 209, n.p., 16 October 1656, '*Bisogna dire che quando uno sarà eletto Papa, il Diavolo piglia possesso dell'Anima sua*'.

³⁹ B. dal Pozzo, *Historia della sacra religione militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta*, Verona, 1703–15, p. 343, '*consumata la gioventù in viaggi, e caravane, sparso il sangue, e esposta in mille cimente la vita*'.

⁴⁰ A[rchivio] S[egreto] V[aticano], Segr[eteria di] S[tato] M[alta], MS.2, f.168^r, 18 February 1588.

went to his Palace to vent off their frustration at being continually cheated out of their commanderies by the Pope. These same Hospitallers had also asked the Holy Roman Emperor, and the kings of France and Spain to intervene on their behalf.⁴¹

Ideals of Christendom

The papacy continued to pursue the ideal of a united Christian front against Islam well into the eighteenth century; it persevered in the leadership of Christian Europe against Islam but with mixed success.⁴² In these schemes, the Order of St John was always assigned a prominent role. For instance, the Order played an important part in the War of the Morea (1683–99) which saw an alliance of the Habsburg Empire, Poland, Venice, the Papal States, and the Order ranged against the Ottoman empire.⁴³ Commentators like the prominent Huguenot captain François de la Noue (1531–91) was of the idea that those who were inclined towards war should join the Order to channel their energies in fighting the Turks, the true enemies of Europe.⁴⁴ The Commander Jean Baptiste le Marinier de Cany argued that every Hospitaller had to be a soldier of Christ, always prepared to lay down his life.⁴⁵ Thus, the papacy and the Order remained steadfast in their ideal of a Christendom under siege by Islam, and which consequently had to defend itself militarily.

On the other hand, since the mid-sixteenth century, France had adopted a more pragmatic approach towards Islam and the Ottoman empire in particular. However, in his early years, Louis XIV liked to play with the idea of ‘Christendom’, or at least a version that suited him.⁴⁶ When still 17 years old, he wrote to Grand Master Lascaris telling him how he believed that the Order was an army whose function was to fight the enemies of Christendom and work for the unification of Christian princes. He also emphasized the importance of maintaining the neutrality of Malta’s harbours and that he would not tolerate any discrimination against France. Louis XIV’s particular understanding of Christendom was one which equated this idea with the good of the French realm, since this was the most pre-eminent state

⁴¹ BAV, Barb. Lat., MS. 6689, fff.97^v, 1624.

⁴² Wright, pp. 208, 211.

⁴³ Cutajar and Cassar, pp.121–32. D.H. Pennington, *Europe in the Seventeenth Century*, London and New York, 1989, pp. 422, 437, 445. For a survey of the Ottoman world and its interactions with Europe see D. Goffman, *The Ottoman empire and early modern Europe*, Cambridge, 2002.

⁴⁴ F. de la Noue, *Discours Politique et Militaires*, London, 1588; Paris, 1587, pp. 218, 245. J.R. Hale, ‘Sixteenth-Century Explanations of War and Violence’, *Past and Present*, 51, 1971, p. 21. Hale, *War and Society*, 139.

⁴⁵ NLM, AOM1697, f.4^v, 1670. On the theme of martyrdom in early modern Europe, see B.S. Gregory, *Salvation at stake: Christian martyrdom in early modern Europe*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1999, pp. 67, 109, 123, 157, 177, 221, 280.

⁴⁶ On this subject, see P. Bamford, *Fighting Ships and Prisons: The Mediterranean Galleys of France in the Age of Louis XIV*, Minneapolis, 1973, pp. 299–301.

in Christendom.⁴⁷ Throughout most of the 1660s, the attitude of the French government towards the Ottomans and the Barbary corsairs swayed repeatedly from belligerence to co-operation because of the young king's inexperience and obsession with *gloire*.⁴⁸ Within France itself, the Crown could rely on individual Hospitallers and the Order to support its causes. A number of Hospitallers came to the aid of Catholics in Provence during the Wars of Religion,⁴⁹ while the Order's fleet played a part in the siege of la Rochelle in 1627.⁵⁰

The Order was thus obliged to tread very carefully in its relationship with France and the papacy. In 1662, the Order was placed in an impossible situation: a quarrel between papal and French soldiers in Rome escalated into a full diplomatic incident between Pope Alexander VII (1655–67) and King Louis XIV. Louis temporarily annexed the papal territory of Avignon and the pope so feared an invasion of Rome itself that he asked the Order to aid him militarily. Such a request fitted into ideas – developed by papal authors since the Venetian Interdict of 1606–07 – that outlined how 'Soldiers of the Church' were to defend the papacy from incursions against its jurisdiction by other governments.⁵¹ However, France was just too powerful and important for the Order, so the Pope's request for military assistance was politely turned down.⁵² In the complicated world of seventeenth-century diplomacy, ideas about fraternity within Christendom constituted a politically-correct jargon, but one that was often subservient to national / dynastic concerns.

Conclusion

Despite Bosio's passionate assertion about the Pope wanting to bring about the ruin of the Order, what the papacy wanted was to conserve the Order as a strategic pool of patronage and as an important pawn in its conception of Christendom and

⁴⁷ NLM, AOM1200, ff. 449–50, 8 June 1655. See C.R. Steen, 'The Fate of the Concept of Christendom in the Policy of Louis XIV', *European Studies Review*, 3, 1973, pp. 283–9. D.F. Allen, 'The Order of St John as a 'School for Ambassadors' in Counter-Reformation Europe', in H. Nicholson, (ed.), *The Military Orders: Welfare and Warfare*, Aldershot, 1998, p. 365. See also D. Panzac, *Barbary Corsairs: The end of a legend 1800-1820*, Leiden and Boston, 2005, pp. 21–38, where he discusses privateering, religion, and diplomacy with regards to Europe and the Maghreb in the seventeenth century.

⁴⁸ P. McCluskey, 'Commerce before crusade? France, the Ottoman Empire and the Barbary Pirates (1661–1669)', *French History*, 23, 2009, pp. 20–1.

⁴⁹ C. Testa, *Romegas*, Malta, 2002, pp. 152–3.

⁵⁰ ASV, Segr. Stato, Malta, MS.27A, f. 509^r, c.22 December 1673.

⁵¹ G. Brunelli, *Soldati del Papa: Politica militare e nobiltà nello stato della chiesa (1560–1644)*, Rome, 2003, pp. 118–21.

⁵² P. Piccolomini, *Corrispondenza tra la corte di Roma e l'Inquisitore di Malta durante la Guerra di Candia (1645–69)*, Florence, 1912, pp. 2–4. R. Fioravanti, 'Girolamo Casanate inquisitore generale di Malta (1658–1663)', in Ministero per i beni culturali d'Italia (ed.), *Cavalleria e ordini Cavallereschi in Casanatense*, Rome, 1995, p. 192.

the fight against Islam. France, on the other hand, allowed a certain amount of belligerency against Muslim shipping to continue (drawing distinctions between activities in the Levant and in North African waters), but retained the right to decide what was acceptable and to arbitrate when disputes arose. These, therefore, constituted the parameters within which the papacy and the Order could pursue any notion of crusading in the early modern period. Thus, the maritime dimension to Franco-Hospitaller relations was certainly a dominant aspect, but it was not the only one. As in the case of the papacy, the Order represented an important source of patronage for the French crown, as well as a fount that legitimated the French nobility's claim to pre-eminence.

Insights derived from the historiographies of state formation and gift-making illustrate how an interdisciplinary approach can open up new avenues of investigation, even when a subject is one that has already been extensively dealt with. As French and papal structures and notions of power evolved over the course of the seventeenth century, these impinged on the Order and its operations. Notwithstanding this complicated Franco-Papal tension that so forcefully affected the Order, it was still capable of carrying out its mission to wage war against the Ottoman Empire and Muslims in general throughout the Mediterranean. Early modern processes of state formation, in which gifts, conflicts and conceptions of Christendom all formed part of the discourse and reality of politics, set certain constraints around the Order and its members' activities, but they also provided openings and opportunities.