

# Images of the Other: Venice's Perception of the Knights of Malta

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The present chapter focuses on the hostile perception which the Republic of Venice entertained of the Hospitaller Order of St John in early modern times. Though Venice and the Hospital (as the Order was generally known) shared several similarities, the two differed in at least one basic area – their relation with the Muslim infidel. The Hospital considered itself permanently at war with him; the Adriatic Republic owed its survival to its cordial relations with the Ottoman Porte. It was precisely this difference which shaped and nourished Venice's sense of otherness where the Knights of St John were concerned. In the Hospital's attitude towards Islam – the Turk in the Levant and the Barbary corsair operating from North Africa – Venice saw a strong and dangerous element of otherness. The Knights' *raison d'être* defied vital Venetian interests. In an endeavour to understand the situation, the chapter traces the possible causes of this mutual feeling of animosity between the two and discusses its long-term consequences, which tended to become increasingly evident in Venice's periodical confiscation of the extensive lands which the Hospital owned in the Veneto, the decline of the Maltese corso, and the impact of Hospitaller and Maltese privateering on the daily life of Levantine Venetians. In the early 1750s, both institutions began to draw close to a rapprochement.



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The hostile perception which Venice generally entertained of the Knights Hospitallers on Rhodes and Malta was not an attitude which the Republic secretly assumed and secretly endeavoured with much effort to disguise. It was a public image, based as much on rumours and appearances as on solid empirical evidence of real performance. In 1497, two years before he was to meet his heroic death at the battle for Zonchio, north of Modon, Andrea Loredan, the experienced Venetian naval commander, defined Hospitaller Rhodes 'protrectress of corsairs'<sup>1</sup>. During the Turkish siege of Rhodes of 1522 Venice, already feeling 'squeezed' between what were fast becoming two gigantic empires<sup>2</sup> – the Spanish and the Ottoman – watched inertly and unresponsively the collapse of 'Christendom's strongest bulwark' in the East, the one 'nearest the confines

of the Ottoman Empire'. She even closed her ports in Crete and Cyprus to the Knights of St John and denied, for reasons of state, those 'noble and courageous adventurers' who, on their own initiative, had volunteered to offer their services, the opportunity of going to the aid of the Hospitallers. In 1565 the Venetians were reported to have rejoiced at the fall of Malta's Fort St Elmo to the Turkish besiegers on 23 June <sup>3</sup>. In the 1580s, when Venice and the Order of Malta were in a state of near warfare on account of alleged Hospitaller piracy in the Levant, the Venetian Senate, relieving its feelings of frustration, dubbed the Knights 'corsairs parading crosses' <sup>4</sup>. This feeling of animosity was mutually acknowledged. In the 1660s Monsignor Galeazzo Marescotti, the Apostolic Delegate and Roman Inquisitor on Malta, called Venice 'the Order's worst enemy' <sup>5</sup>, and in 1716, in one of his regular dispatches to the Senate written shortly after an uncomfortable four-month sojourn on the central-Mediterranean island, Giacomo Capello, the Venetian resident minister in Naples and an accurate observer of manners, confessed that in Hospitaller Malta the very term 'Venetian' was as revolting as it was repulsive <sup>6</sup>. All these are neat expressions of what is today called *l'imaginaire social*, the collective memory or imagination, inherited ideas 'of everyday social life', transmitted from one generation to another. Several similar instances can be cited.

## SHARED SIMILIARITIES

To what extent, and for what reasons, did the Venetians see the Knights of Malta as unlike themselves? In the constitution, personality, and performance of the Hospital (as the Order of the Knights of St John was generally known), what was, or appeared, so alien to the Venetians? Otherness has been defined as the quality of being different in appearance or character from what is familiar, expected, or generally accepted <sup>7</sup>. In fundamental respects Venice and the Hospital shared a number of similarities. Both were traditionally Catholic, aristocratic institutions; at different levels, both were naval and maritime powers; both held extensive domains on the European mainland; both believed in the elective principle which they employed at all levels of their administration; by early modern times, both had adopted the principle of unarmed political neutrality, the value of which they recognized with almost religious scruple; both were deeply concerned with their powerless means, other than protest, to protect their territorial integrity from the insensitive foreign intruder or the hegemonic ambitions of a restlessly ruthless neighbour; like the rest of Europe, both feared the expanding ambitions of the Ottoman Empire; both depended almost entirely on the art of diplomacy in foreign policy; both looked at the past for inspiration, finding it legitimately difficult to adapt to 'the new' or 'the present'; both had strong original ties with the East – Venice through her intimate relations with Byzantium <sup>8</sup>, the Hospital by birth and adolescence in the Holy Land. But, in the context of Venice's perception of the Knights of Malta, with which the present chapter is chiefly concerned, a third quality of being distinct from the mainstream comes into operation, other, that is, than appearance or character identified in the definition. There were profound differences between the two in both principle and attitude when it came to their relations with a third party – the Muslim infidel. The image of this common factor was a determining force which shaped and coloured Venice's sense of otherness. Here, in Venice's eyes, the Hospitaller was different. His intentions were different. His interests, his goals, and the

methods he employed to achieve them, were different and dangerous. The basic problem to address here is: why the difference? why the strong element of otherness in the Hospitaller? It is the historian's task not only, as Robert Darnton suggests <sup>9</sup>, to 'capture otherness', but, in Peter Burke's words <sup>10</sup>, to render its particularly essential qualities and constituent features 'both visible and intelligible'.

### THE HOSPITAL'S RAISON D'ÊTRE ...

When the Hospital was set up in Jerusalem in the late 11th century, on the eve of the First Crusade, its purpose was to care for the sick and the poor and offer western pilgrims, journeying to the 'holy places', medical attention, food, and a temporary roof over their heads – in brief, the quintessence of the 'self-denial' of Christianity. In the midst of surrounding hostile territories, this spirit of hospitality gradually began, of necessity, to assume the complementary task of protecting the same devout people 'from the dangers of the road', to render the routes often used by pilgrims safe from infidel Muslim tribes. Both tasks were aspects of the same act of Christian charity. The Hospitallers' military function, like that of other Orders of chivalry, evolved in response to the urgent contemporary need to defend the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem <sup>11</sup>. These military responsibilities appear to have already been assumed by the 1130s <sup>12</sup>. By the end of the 13th century, the Hospitallers, like the Templars, began to develop what Alan Forey defines as 'sizeable fleets of their own' <sup>13</sup>. The Knights' permanent eviction from the Holy Land, after Acre (the last Christian citadel) fell to the Muslims in 1291, rendered their *raison d'être* dangerously anachronistic <sup>14</sup>. Circumstances, however, conditioned the change in character of their future mission. As, with hindsight, there would be no way of their ever returning to defend the 'holy places' and the Latin Kingdom, the scope of this defence, now more than ever, began to assume infinitely wider proportions to include the whole of Christian Europe, in the hope of sustaining political relevance. The Muslim infidel was Christendom's common enemy; an incessant war had therefore to be waged against him anywhere in Christendom's defence. By endeavouring to maintain and indeed nourish this sense of their indispensability as much for the papacy as for any other Christian kingdom or principality, they would, unlike the Templars in the early 14th century, not only justify their vast landownership, which had been the subject of widely persistent criticism <sup>15</sup>; they would continue to secure patronage and international recognition. Over the centuries, down to the French revolution of 1789, they owed their survival as much to the revenues (*responiones*) they earned from their vast estates in Europe as to the political protection generously extended to them by the great European powers.

### IN DEFIANCE OF VENETIAN INTERESTS

The Hospital, aggressive and enterprising, considered itself permanently at war with the infidel. The Turk in the Levant and the Muslim corsair operating from Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, or anywhere else along the Barbary coast were its declared enemy. Either on their own through their regular statutory caravans or cruises throughout the Mediterranean, east and west, or with allies in formal war, the Hospitallers would tirelessly strive to seek him out, capture his ships, seize his merchandise, and carry his men into slavery. This professed

attitude, and indeed the whole relentless endeavour to keep the idea of the crusade alive, defied Venice's paramount and overriding interests – political and economic. The Muslim Turk had traditionally been Venice's foremost trading partner. Growing increasingly economically dependent on him, especially after the Ottoman conquest of Syria and Egypt, the Republic never hesitated to ally herself with him and pledge to defend his interests. For these reasons, the Hospital's physical presence at the heart of Venice's *Stato da Mar* was not required. It was believed to pose a direct challenge to the peaceful realization of the Republic's objectives – first through the Knights' possession of Rhodes<sup>16</sup> and of several other adjacent Dodecanese islands from 1310 to 1522 and, after 1530, through their persistent privateering warfare in the eastern Mediterranean, plundering coasts and threatening seaborne trade.

### ELEMENTS OF OTHERNESS

Venice's past, marked by the heavy and humiliating losses she had suffered 'in the early years with the Turks', dictated the extra caution she felt she had to adopt in her approach to the Porte. Her maritime possessions in the eastern Mediterranean, her merchants, and her native subjects on the islands were 'particularly vulnerable', always exposed to Turkish reprisals. This position is neatly summarized by Giovanni Botero in his precious collection of *Relationi universali*, published originally in the 1590s<sup>17</sup>:

The Venetians have a common boundary with the Turk, on sea and on land, for many hundreds of miles; and they maintain themselves against him rather with the arts of peace than of war: with fortifying their places well, with avoiding the expense and the danger of war, with negotiations and with presents, finally with doing everything to avoid coming to blows, preserving only liberty and the State.

For Venice, this was a major element which goes a long way to make her perception of Hospitaller otherness more intelligible, but it was one which the Republic indiscriminately and collectively entertained of all the maritime and commercial activities of the *ponentini* in the eastern Mediterranean, in the Ionian sea, in the Aegean – from the Barbary corsairs to the Maltese, from the Spaniards and the Florentines to the Corsicans, the French, the Dutch, and the English<sup>18</sup>. In the havoc they caused, they were hardly different from the fearless Uskok pirates harassing the Adriatic. In this sense, the Hospitallers were not much different, in Venice's eyes, from western corsairs. However, there was another element, this time pertaining distinctly to the Knights of Malta. The Hospital was an exempt Order of the universal Latin Church and very closely bound to the papacy. It built its own churches. It had its own clergy. It owned extensive lands across Europe, including the Veneto, and yet it owed no allegiance to either secular sovereignty or to diocesan authority. It was accountable only to the pope and to the pope alone. In sharp contrast, Venice was traditionally distrustful of the 'two-dimensional character' of the papacy and the papal court. Rarely had the pope inspired too much confidence in the Adriatic Republic, both in his temporal capacity as a sovereign prince with suspicious territorial ambitions and as spiritual leader of the universal Latin Church, nourishing equally irritating ideas (especially after Trent) on ecclesiastical discipline and rigid religious orthodoxy. There was thus a col-

lision of interests, principles, and values, one that helps to explain Venice's feeling of aversion towards the 'papal prince' and the logical extension of this sense of repugnance to the institution of the Knights of Malta whose ultimate head he was <sup>19</sup>.

The Venetians saw the Knights of Malta as unlike themselves for other reasons too. There were other differences which were sufficiently significant to inspire a clash of cultures as much as to sustain a clash of interests. One such pertained to orthodoxy; the other to nobility. While the Hospital, a Christian European microcosm *par excellence*, professed a strong, unwavering adherence to religious orthodoxy, the Adriatic Republic boldly promoted, to a very remarkable extent, religious toleration both in its metropolis and its mainland and maritime empires. It was a political expedient, no doubt, granted out of social and economic necessity. Nevertheless, there was space in Venice for differences of opinion and belief, for freedom of thought and personal liberty. There was room not only for Galileo at the University of Padua, but also for Greeks and Jews practically anywhere, for Muslim Turks, Lutheran Germans, and English Nonconformists <sup>20</sup>. Persecution of the heretic had never been a convincingly consistent policy with the Venetians. Indeed, when, at remote intervals, the Serenissima felt constrained by the force of circumstances reluctantly to resort to the practice, the latter was left unhindered to follow a naturally erratic course <sup>21</sup>. No wonder that Venice's detachment from orthodox attitudes invited suspicion and at times hostility of the Catholic States, whose world-view consorted so ill with her republican values and with those of her traditional Muslim ally. Within this broad context, it is ironic that on 13 August 1597 the Senate approved a decree to exclude the *papalisti* – those Venetian patricians who held close ties with the papal court <sup>22</sup> – from any discussions conducted by the Council of Ten on issues concerning the Religion of Malta. The fearsome *Dieci*, as they were known, were a powerful group of 'wise men' responsible for the integrity and security of the Venetian State. The exclusion of the *papalisti* had been traditional practice whenever Venetian policy towards Rome was debated. What was novel about the law of 1597 was the addition, allegedly for security purposes, of the Order of Malta in the list of highly confidential matters <sup>23</sup>.

On the other hand, Venice's noble merchant contrasted as sharply with the Hospital's noble pirate. Reception in the Order was governed by a set of stringent rules. Being of noble birth was one such rigorous requisite. The Italian Langue, one of the eight national divisions constituting the Order of St John, demanded proofs of four quarters of feudal nobility (father, mother, paternal, and maternal grandparents); the French required eight, and the Germans sixteen. Legitimate descendency was to be assiduously investigated, and clear, irrefutable evidence was sought of the candidate's physical, mental, and moral health. There would have to be no trace that any member of the families being subjected to secret scrutiny had ever participated in what the statutes called 'vile, mechanical arts', while convincing proofs were required that the postulant's family had always lived *more nobilium*, off revenues from their estates, and refrained from any commercial activity. In Europe, 'the natural order,' writes Ugo Tucci, 'required an aristocracy inseparable from the possession of land, castles, and private jurisdictions' <sup>24</sup>. Not so with the Venetians. Although by the 16th century 'the progressive detachment of the nobility from trade' was evolving into a firmly 'pronounced' trend <sup>25</sup>, its involvement in trade and commerce was still considered to be 'the chief distinguishing mark' of the Venetian patriciate <sup>26</sup>. Venetian law 'continued to accord full civic dignity to the merchant' <sup>30</sup>.



Fig. 1  
A 16th century map of the eastern Mediterranean (detail).

## CONSEQUENCES OF OTHERNESS

### The *sequestro*

Throughout the early modern period, Venice's perception of the Knights of Malta had its own consequences whose impact was felt both from afar, by the Hospital's Common Treasury at the Convent, first in Birgu and later in Valletta, and from nearer home, in the everyday life of the individual Knights who belonged to the Grand Priory of Venice<sup>28</sup>. The first serious consequence was reflected in the *sequestro*, or the Republic's periodical confiscation of all Hospitaller property geographically lying on Venetian territory. The decree which rendered this measure legal had to pass through Senate. Ever since the Knights had settled on Malta, it was enacted so often that to impose the *sequestro* had almost become habitual practice for the Venetians. Between 1536 and 1741, the *sequestro* was imposed eleven times – seven in the 16th century, three in the 17th, and once in the 18th<sup>29</sup> – and every time, or so it was claimed, it was precipitated by the Knights' (or their Maltese subjects') piratical activity in the Levant. Intended to contain Hospitaller and Maltese privateering in the Levant, the seizure of the Knights' lands and revenues, lying within easy grasp of the Signory, proved in practice to be a clumsy precaution. In the short term, it was ineffective and provocative<sup>30</sup>. On two occasions, the consequences were far greater than



**Fig. 2**  
A 16th century map of the eastern Mediterranean (detail).

the mere confiscation of property or the revenues accruing from it. In 1584 and 1741 the Venetians and the Knights of Malta found themselves in a state of near warfare. On both occasions, the *sequestro* decree was accompanied by other resolutions. In 1584 these included the dismissal of all Hospitallers on the pay list of the Republic, their immediate expulsion from Venice, and the interdiction of trade and all other forms of correspondence between the two States. The Knights of Malta and their native islanders would be treated anywhere as enemy corsairs. In 1741, in addition to the *sequestro*, the Senate ordered the indiscriminate sinking of all vessels flying the eight-pointed Hospitaller Cross. To these measures, the Grandmaster and his Venerable Council reacted as violently. In August 1584, barely one month after the *sequestro* decree had received Senate's approval, Grandmaster Hugues de Loubenx de Verdalle instructed the Captain-General of the Galleys to sail out in search of Venetian ships and to have them conducted to Malta by fair or foul means. Bartholomeo dal Pozzo, the 17th-century official historiographer of the Order, claims that no Venetian ship felt secure from plunder, while the Hospitaller galleys never missed the slightest opportunity to inspect and ransack any Venetian vessel that sailed their way, seizing all infidels and infidel goods on board. On the other hand, he says, the Republic proceeded most rigorously against all Hospitallers and Maltese privateers whom storms and other mishaps dragged into Venetian ports. In 1742 Grandmaster Emanuel Pinto secured the passage of the *Decreto contro i Veneziani* through his State

Council. The decree withheld the application of any member of the Venetian patriciate to join the Order as long as the *sequestro* remained in force. It also instructed Hospitaller galleys and Maltese privateers to extend to all ships flying the banner of St Mark's the same treatment they themselves received from the Venetians <sup>31</sup>.

Though scarce, the relevant documentation that has survived the *sequestro* of 1741 provides sufficient insight into the methods which Venice adopted to confiscate Hospitaller property over the years. The *Cinque Savii alla Mercanzia*, or the Venetian magistracy of trade, was the body entrusted with the task of maintaining effective control over the actual execution of the *sequestro*, acting in concert with the rectors and other State representatives to avoid the possibility of any fraudulent practices in the confiscation of Hospitaller funds.

In theory the *sequestro* should have been a very simple exercise. Every Hospitaller commandery (making up the Grand Priory of Venice) was statutorily bound to channel one-third of its net income to the receiver, who, in turn, after having had his final statements of account approved at the prioral chapter, would forward them to the Common Treasury in Malta. If the Venetian authorities confiscated these *responsiones* at the receiver end, all would have been straightforward. But the system employed by the Republic in 1741, and on many other previous occasions, was different and complicated. The Senate preferred to go to the roots of Hospitaller revenues: the smallest estate holder who owed the Hospital rents in cash, or kind, or both. The *sequestro* had developed over the years into a systematic search for the Hospitallers' real sources of income, and this method offered the Republic, ever deeply suspicious of the Knights of Malta, the opportunity of gaining a more realistic perspective of the scattered nature of their holdings in the Veneto, of assessing the true extent of Venetian land owned by the Hospitallers, and what proportion of the revenue produced by these ecclesiastical estates on Venetian soil was channelled into foreign hands – perhaps even to reward the enemies of the Republic.

### **Decline of the Maltese corso**

It would appear that the most significant long-term consequence of Venice's perception of otherness where the Hospitallers were concerned can be traced in the broad perspective of the history of the Mediterranean. The Venetians constituted at least one other powerful force of change whose influence had been as crucial in the general development and decline of the Maltese *corso* as that traditionally attributed to France and Rome <sup>32</sup>. The Republic succeeded in drawing the papacy, not its best of friends, into its own scheme to render the Knights of Malta incapable of resistance. It also succeeded in gradually restricting the Knights' traditional corsairing rights in the Levant. A few classic examples will suffice. On 31 October 1586, when relations between Venice and Valletta were exceptionally strained, Cardinal Girolamo Rusticucci, papal Secretary of State, sent Grandmaster Verdalle an 'advice' which the Maltese chronicler and conventual chaplain of the Order defined as 'irritating in the extreme' and a 'most damaging papal resolution', too prejudicial to Hospitaller interests. The Pope had ordained, reads the Cardinal's advice, that all vessels proceeding from Christian ports to Ottoman lands or vice versa could henceforth trade in all sorts of merchandise, excepting only contraband goods, with no hindrance or interference. Thus, by a stroke of the papal pen, the Order's galleys and Maltese privateers flying the Hospitaller Cross were forbidden to capture or molest 'any vessel navigating

Levantine waters, whether belonging to Turks or Jews when charged in Christian ports'. In July 1587 these injunctions were extended further, this time in order to protect all Levantine Jews, their ships, and their trade in legitimate commodities. The Hospitaller's reluctant submission to the pressure of papal sanctions is best seen in the amendments which the Grandmaster and his Venerable Council were forced to make to the conditions inserted in their letters patent to corsairs in order to conform to the new papal ordinances. 'It is obvious,' claimed the Order, 'that His Holiness has been moved by the aversion which the Venetians, with sinister information, have generated under the guise of their seeming zeal for the universal benefit of Christianity'<sup>33</sup>. On another occasion, in 1714, to avoid the escalation of a similar Venetian-Hospitaller crisis, Grandmaster Ramon Perellos felt constrained to proclaim, albeit reluctantly, the Adriatic, north of Otranto and Capo Santa Maria, and its approaches, out of bounds for the eight-pointed Cross<sup>34</sup>.

### Levantine Venetians

Ironically, the Levantine Venetians were among the worst hit both by the Republic's perception of Hospitaller otherness and by the uneasy atmosphere of mutual animosity that such an attitude persistently generated. The records of the way they had been generally treated on the central Mediterranean island provides ample evidence of this<sup>35</sup>. Malta was a widely renowned base for corsairing operations in the Mediterranean, strategically convenient and highly efficient; its economy had long been geared to the *corso* and other related industries, including a prosperous slave market. Venetian subjects living on Corfu or Zante, Cephalonia or Santa Maura, Cerigo or Cerigotto often proceeded to the island to seek compensation for what they often claimed to have been illegitimate seizure of their vessel, their men, and their merchandise either by corsairs under cover of the Hospitaller Cross or, more often, by privateers operating from Malta under license issued by resident *chargés d'affaires* representing the interests of Spain, Tuscany, Monaco, or Sardinia. Cases concerning prizes made under cover of such flags were heard before these *chargés d'affaires*, who were always professed, high-ranking members of the Order. They heard evidence and gave verdicts. None of the local tribunals, nor the papal court at Rome, could claim jurisdiction over such litigation. Appeals from judgements reached at these courts could be lodged directly to Paris, Turin, or Madrid. The actual execution of the final verdict would again have its own intentionally long-drawn-out story – indeed a far cry from the hopes and aspirations which must have motivated these Venetians when they had originally decided to leave their home in the Levant and sail west in search of a fair hearing and a fairer compensation. Dimitrio Francopulo, Giorguizzo Ulimà, and Steffano Conduri, Lucca Cannonà, Giorgio Xidia, and Anastasio Valsamachi, Anthimo Calichiopolo, Gregorio Collegà, Zaffiri Gunari, and Antonio Cafale – these were among the several Venetian subjects who had fallen prey not only to the indiscriminate privateering operations in the eastern Mediterranean; they had also fallen victims of a legal system where 'no statutes regulat[ed] proceedings, where no deadlines exist[ed], and where everything depend[ed] on the Minister's caprice'<sup>36</sup>.

### DRAWING CLOSE TO A RAPPROCHEMENT

Would not such unpleasant and shocking conditions, prevailing on early modern Malta under Hospitaller rule, justify the deeply ingrained image of the Knights in Venice's psy-

che? This may only in part be true. In part it was equally irrefutable that the Republic's sense of political direction, in this case dictated by unpalatable perceptions of otherness, had long denied its subjects the diplomatic facilities on the island which it had been for centuries offering Venetians elsewhere in Europe and beyond – the cultivated services of a resident minister to look after their needs and keep the administrative and other constituted bodies at home constantly and adequately informed of developments. It was well over two hundred years after the Knights had settled on Malta that Venice began to realize with urgency the need of having a permanent ministry set up in Valletta. The old image appears to have begun to break down, from whatever cause. Indeed, in December 1754 Massimiliano Buzzaccarini Gonzaga, a Hospitaller Grand Cross from Padua, was accredited Venice's resident *Uomo della Repubblica* at the Grandmaster's court in Valletta <sup>37</sup>. His long ministry, vibrant and vigilant, spanning over two decades, witnessed the gradual, at times almost imperceptible, transformation of the *Serenissima's* capacity to discover and employ new ways and means to exploit the island's strategic potential. It was a slow, painful process of becoming belatedly aware of new conditions and of adapting oneself fully to the determining forces of social reality. For two hundred years and over, Venice's Hospitaller image, conditioned by its own political and economic realities, had been permitted to stand firmly in the way of normal change and natural development, although it should be observed that her perceived differences, blighting the relationship, had in practice failed to distort the traditionally small, regular flow of trade between the two centres and the Republic's quest for naval and military support from the Hospitallers whenever Venice found herself at war with the Porte. In the mid-18th century this psychological barrier of otherness began to collapse. The scale of Hospitaller and Maltese privateering activity in the Levant had diminished considerably and all endeavours at bringing it back to life in the last quarter of the century met with little success. In the 1760s a lucrative bilateral trade agreement was reached and renewed twenty years later. New efforts were made on the part of Venice towards general peace with the North African cantons, resulting effectively in treaties with Algiers and Tunis in 1763, with Tripoli in 1764, and with Morocco in 1765. In the 1780s, in a desperate attempt to revive the wrath and splendour of the Lion of St Mark, the Venetian admiral Angelo Emo triumphantly purged the formidable Barbary coast from the hordes of Muslim pirates – an achievement accomplished, against all expectations <sup>38</sup>, only by the admiral's full exploitation of Malta as a first-class naval base for his fleet. Emo died on the island on 1 March 1792. The grand solemnity of the funeral service which the Order accorded him before his noble corpse was transferred to the Adriatic city, and the monument that was erected to his memory at the church of Our Lady of Victories in Valletta, symbolized the tone of the new relationship <sup>39</sup>. The change had become visible and impressive. There can be little doubt that Buzzaccarini Gonzaga's vigorous ministry, together with the other related consular services available on Malta, played a pivotal role in these developments, not least by offering Venice a secure and direct source of much needed intelligence to help her shape her central Mediterranean policy, ironically a few decades before both institutions – the Republic and the Hospital – would succumb to the more powerful and irresistible force of the ideas, customs, habits, and armies of enlightened revolutionary France <sup>40</sup>.



## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See M. Sanuto, *I Diarii*, R. Fulin et al. (eds.), 58 vols, Venice 1879-1903, i, 770. See also, for this occasion, A. Tenenti, *I corsari in Mediterraneo all'inizio del Cinquecento*, "Rivista storica italiana", 1960, lxxii, pp. 234-287.
- <sup>2</sup> See F.C. Lane, *Naval actions and fleet organization, 1499-1502*, in Hale J.R. (ed.), *Renaissance Venice*, London 1974, p. 167; W.H. McNeill, *Venice: The Hinge of Europe 1081-1797*, Chicago - London 1974, p. 46.
- <sup>3</sup> For Venice and the two sieges, V. Mallia-Milanes, *Corsairs Parading Crosses: the Hospitallers and Venice, 1530-1798*, in M. Barber (ed.), *The Military Orders: Fighting for the Faith and Caring for the Sick*, Aldershot 1994, p. 104.
- <sup>4</sup> See A. Tenenti, *Piracy and the Decline of Venice, 1580-1615*, trans. B. Pullan, London 1967, p. 39. For the relations between Venice and Malta in early modern times, V. Mallia-Milanes, *Venice and Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798: Aspects of a Relationship*, Malta 1992; for the history of the Order of St John on Malta, V. Mallia-Milanes (ed.), *Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798: Studies on Early Modern Malta and the Order of St John of Jerusalem*, Malta 1993.
- <sup>5</sup> See E. Schermerhorn, *Malta of the Knights*, Surrey 1929, p. 201.
- <sup>6</sup> Archivio di Stato, Venice (ASV) [Venice State Archive], *Senato, Dispacci da Giacomo Capello, Residente per la Serenissima*, Napoli, 27 May 1716. For Capello's account of early 18th-century Malta, V. Mallia-Milanes ed., *Descrittione di Malta, Anno 1716: A Venetian Account*, Malta 1988. Manuscript copies of the original document are found in Venice – in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana and the archives of the Museo Civico Correr.
- <sup>7</sup> See, for example, *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, Cambridge 1995, *sub voce*.
- <sup>8</sup> See, for example, D.M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A study in diplomatic and cultural relations*, Cambridge 1988; McNeill, *Venice cit.*, *passim*, but especially ch. 2.
- <sup>9</sup> See R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, New York 1984, p. 4.
- <sup>10</sup> See P. Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History*, Oxford 1997, p. 193.
- <sup>11</sup> See, for example, H. Nicholson, *Templars, Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights: Images of the Military Orders, 1128-1291*, Leicester 1993, p. 2.
- <sup>12</sup> See A. Forey, *The Military Orders 1120-1312*, in J. Riley-Smith (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, Oxford 1995, p. 186.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.
- <sup>14</sup> See Nicholson, ch. 7, *The implication of the military orders in the loss of Acre, May 1291*, 125-28. Also J. Riley-Smith, *The Knights of St John in Jerusalem and Cyprus, c. 1050-1310*, London 1967, pp. 475-76.
- <sup>15</sup> The subject is approached with great scholarship by Helen Nicholson in her already cited *Templars, Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights*.
- <sup>16</sup> In 1234 Venice had unsuccessfully tried to take Rhodes. See A.T. Luttrell, *Venice and the Knight Hospitallers of Rhodes to the 14th Century*, "Papers of the British School at Rome", 1958, xxvi, p. 196.
- <sup>17</sup> The quote is from the Venice edition of 1640, cited after W.J. Bouwsma, *Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation*, London 1968, pp. 110-111.
- <sup>18</sup> Tenenti, *Piracy and the Decline of Venice cit.*, *passim*.
- <sup>19</sup> This argument is discussed more fully in Mallia-Milanes, *Corsairs Parading Crosses cit.*, pp. 105-106.
- <sup>20</sup> See, for example, B. Pullan, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice 1550-1670*, Totowa (NJ) 1983, p. 3.
- <sup>21</sup> On the subject, Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty cit.*, *passim*.
- <sup>22</sup> See P.F. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press 1540-1605*, Princeton (NJ) 1977, pp. 29-30; E. Besta, *Il Senato Veneziano* (Venice 1899), 214-18; D.E. Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate: Reality versus Myth*, Urbana 1986, pp. 184, 186, 216, 217, 219.
- <sup>23</sup> For the law of 1597, A. Sagredo, *Leggi venete intorno agli ecclesiastici sino al secolo XVIII*, "Archivio storico italiano", 3rd ser., 1865, i, 2, especially p. 104; also A. Papadopoli (ed.), *Leggi venete intorno agli ecclesiastici sino al secolo XVIII*, Venice 1864, p. 32.

- <sup>24</sup> U. Tucci, *The Psychology of the Venetian Merchant in the Sixteenth Century*, in Hale J.R. (ed.), *Renaissance Venice*, London 1974, p. 346.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.
- <sup>28</sup> For a brief bibliography on the Grand Priory of Venice, Mallia-Milanes, *Venice and Hospitaller Malta* cit., p. 13, n. 77.
- <sup>29</sup> The *sequestro* was imposed in each of the following years – 1536, 1553, 1554, 1575, 1576, 1584, 1592, 1641, 1643, 1678, and 1741. See Mallia-Milanes, *Venice and Hospitaller Malta* cit., *passim*.
- <sup>30</sup> For a discussion of this point, Mallia-Milanes, *Corsairs parading Crosses* cit., pp. 107-110.
- <sup>31</sup> For both occasions, *ibid.*, p. 107.
- <sup>32</sup> See, for example, R.E. Cavaliero, *The Decline of the Maltese Corso in the 18th Century: A Study in Maritime History*, “Melita Historica”, 1959, iv, 2, 224-238; P. Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary*, London 1970.
- <sup>33</sup> See Mallia-Milanes, *Venice and Hospitaller Malta* cit., pp. 89-91.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 167-168.
- <sup>35</sup> Idem, *Poised between hope and infinite despair: Venetians in the port of 18th-century Malta*, in C. Villain-Gandossi, L. Durteste, S. Busuttill (eds.), *Méditerranée, Mer Ouverte. Actes du Colloque de Marseille (21-23 septembre 1995)*, Malta 1997, i, pp. 227-236.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.
- <sup>37</sup> The author is currently preparing a critical edition of Buzzaccarini Gonzaga’s correspondence.
- <sup>38</sup> See R. Cessi, *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia*, Milan - Messina 1968, ii, pp. 267-280.
- <sup>39</sup> On Angelo Emo and Malta, V. Bonello, *La morte e i funerali di Angelo Emo a Malta*, “Archivio storico di Malta”, n.s., 1937, viii, 3, pp. 361-370; V. Mallia-Milanes, *The Buona Unione: an episode in Veneto-Maltese relations the late 18th century*, “Journal of the Faculty of Arts (University of Malta)”, 1971, iv, 4, pp. 309-326.
- <sup>40</sup> See V. Mallia-Milanes, *Guardando la loro uscita dalla storia”: Venezia e l’Ordine Ospedaliero di S. Giovanni alla fine del Settecento*, “Studi Veneziani”, n.s., 2002, xliii, pp. 389-398.



## SOURCES

Two excerpts from: *Descrittione di Malta, Anno 1716. A Venetian Account*, V. Mallia-Milanes (ed.), Malta 1988, lines 134-45 and 912-25. The account was written by Giacomo Capello, the Venetian resident minister in Naples, shortly after having spent four uncomfortable months on the island:

1

Una volta il corso si faceva dalli Cavallieri, che armavano bastimenti, il che non è più loro permesso; perciò sono subntrate genti vilissime e forse in buona parte fachini di Malta; costoro uniscono carattadori, che mai mancano, e così armano; fanno il corso sopra tutti, e particolarmente sopra Greci, non perdonando alle chiese quando sbarcano; et alle volte hanno asportato sino gl’Ogli-Santi, e vendutuli in Malta per balsami, veniendosi da tabernacoli e vesti sacre in comedia. Da ciò nasce che tutti muoiono miserabili. Li poveri Cristiani spogliati vanno à Malta; fanno liti, ma le perdono tutte, ò per le protettioni alli corsari, ò perchè vengono giudicati da stessi carattadori. Si appellano però a Roma, e di là escono le sentenze contro li corsari, che havendo molto disperso restano miserabili.

At one time the corso was practised by the Knights, who used to arm and man ships for the purpose; which practice is now no longer permissible; instead, they have been replaced by the vilest rascals and perhaps a good part ruffians of Malta. These people are joined by shareholders, who are always available; and so they fit out. They practise the corso against everybody, and particularly against the Greeks, sparing not even the churches when they disembark; and at times they even carried away the Holy Oils and had them sold in Malta for balsam, ridiculing tabernacles and sacred vestments. This is the reason why all [these victims] die in misery. The poor, despoiled Christians proceed to Malta; they bring the action to court, but lose everything, either because of the invulnerability corsairs enjoy [on the island], or else because they are judged by the same shareholders. Thereupon they appeal to Rome from whence judgements emanate against the corsairs, but having squandered so much on the proceedings, they [none the less] spend the rest of their lives in misery.

2

Non si può tacere una cosa orrida a sentirsi circa la protezione a corsari, e corsari li più scelerati; ve ne fù uno a mio tempo di nome Magrinè maiorchino reo convinto d'haver con bandiera maltese fatto il corso sopra Christiani greci, d'haverne cucciti in sacchi, e gettati in mare, havere ad altri legato, e stretto il capo di maniera, che il cranio siasi diviso dalla testa, e tutto ciò perchè confessassero, o dassetto denari, e con altre crudeltà inaudite; al suo ritorno a Malta fù preso e condannato alla forca; cosa ben rara colà; con le protettioni li fù tramuttata la sentenza, et obligato bacciare la forca; fù poi rimesso alla galera in vita, poi a carcere perpetuo, poi a servire per tre anni sopra li vascelli della Religione. Quando io partij si era a questo, ma s'attendea un'altra commutatione di servire un'anno solo, et esser liberato; così tornerà al corso, e tanto più avido, quanto che le protettioni gl'hanno assiuata la borsa, calcolandosi habbi speso oltre 2 mila cecchini.

One cannot but unveil what is most dreadful to learn about the vulnerability enjoyed by corsairs, by the most villainous corsairs. There was one such when I was there, Magrinè by name, from Majorca. Covered by the Maltese flag [i.e. the Hospitaller Cross], this corsair was known to have pillaged Greek Christians; to have had them bound in sacks and thrown overboard; to have had the heads of others tied up and squeezed in such a way that the cranium was separated from the brains; and all this to make them confess, or for the sake of money. On his return to Malta he was seized and condemned to the gallows – a very rare thing over there [in Malta]. With the help of protectors, his sentence was transmuted, and he was forced to kiss the gallows instead; then he was sentenced to hard work for life on the galleys' rowing-bench; then for a perpetual imprisonment; then to serve for three years on the Religion's vessels. When I left [the island] he was still serving this sentence. But even this punishment was later to be commuted into one year only and he would be set free. Thus he returned to the corso, more avaricious than ever before, the cost of protection having emptied his purse. He was estimated to have spent over two thousand zecchini [on protection].

3

An excerpt from: Richard Knolles, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes*, from the first beginning of that Nation to the rising of the Ottoman Familie; with the notable expeditions of the Christian Princes against them, London 1603, p. 1010. Knolles was a schoolmaster from Kent, England. Comprehensive and widely popular, the book has been described as 'unashamedly compilatory'. In this extract, Knolles provides insights into the motives why the Sultan in 1590 had been counselled to direct his attention Hospitaller Malta.

For that the Gallies of Malta did daily great hurt, as well unto the Turkes merchants, as unto such as for devotion sake travelled by sea unto Mecha. And that therefore the War was tither to be trasferred, not only for religious sake and to assecure the passage tither from the incur-sions of the Maltese but also in revenge of the old and late injuries by them done; and espe-cially to blot out the infamie and disgrace which the Great Sultan Solyman had incurred, at such time as he had in vaine besieged that island and to requite the losse by him there sus-tained. Beside that, they [ i.e. the Sultan's advisers] also alledged the common complaints of the subjects: for that there were many which pitously lamented the miserie and calamitie, some of their friends, some their kinsfolke, whom they knew to live in most wofull servitude with those knights [Hospitallers], and whom they most earnestly desired to have now set at lib-ertie: complaining his subjects to have been so farre from suffering of any such things from those knights in the time of his ancestors, as that contrariwise they themselves were by them driven out of the island of Rhodes, the strongest bulwarke of the Christian commonweale toward the East. Being moreover worthie also to be chastised, for that they had helpen the rebellious Moores with all kind of munition, and had themselves attempted to have surprised



**SEE PLATES 8-9**

Modon.



