

EARLY MALTESE POPULAR ATTITUDES TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN

by

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Despite the exceptional richness of Malta's archives during early modern times, it is still very difficult to discover from reliable sources what the Maltese people really thought about their government and about the lay and ecclesiastical elite which ruled over them. Even now, after decades of something approaching free speech (in normal times), the islanders are far from being outspoken on such topics, particularly so if they are well educated and lined-up for advancement. In the sixteenth century, of course, there was no thought of freedom of speech; in Malta as elsewhere persecution and repression were the order of the day, circumspection and prudence the highest of virtues.

The historian therefore can only record the facts that come his way and make his rather paltry comments on them — either purely factual and insufficiently enlightening statements or value judgements inevitably somewhat subjective. He has no sixteenth century, or later, literature of dissent to fall back on in order to discover the real feelings of the people, no political pamphlets giving any but the official view, no local Hansard recording the speeches of the opposition: apparently, there was no opposition to speak of. This partly accounts for the paucity and superficiality of such remarks on popular ideas and attitudes in Malta as have been made for the whole period of the rule of the Order of St. John (1).

In fact, however, during the last two centuries of the Order's stay it had two constant, and generally outspoken, critics — the bishop and the inquisitor. The bishop was, in all but one case, a foreigner and usually a former member of the Order of St. John, but on his appointment to the bishopric he generally became an opponent of the policies of the Grand Master. The inquisitor, appointed both to extirpate heresy, witchcraft and other crimes and to act as Papal Nuncio, was invariably a foreigner and

1. The inquisitor's correspondence with his superiors in Rome is preserved only in part in the Inquisitors' Archives at the Cathedral Museum, Mdina: A.P. Vella, *The Tribunal of the Inquisition in Malta* "Royal University of Malta Historical Studies" (Malta, 1964), pp. 57-61. On these and the foreign sources, see Alessandro Bonnici, 'L'Inquisizione di Malta, 1561-1798 riflessioni critiche circa il materiale edito e inedito', *Melita Historica*, V, No. 1 (1968). For the Inquisitors' advice to their successors, see the registers of 'Memorie' at Mdina.

usually an important and ambitious member of the Roman Curia. He never spent more than a very few years in Malta and was never reluctant to state his opinion on the affairs of the day to his successors in Malta or his superiors in Rome. One can thus listen in to a string of comments on the policies of the local government for the whole of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the main problem being to separate the live issues from those which were merely of academic interest, since all were prone to repeat, and still formally to regard as vital, matters which had been largely dormant for generations.

In spite of this, it is hardly ever possible to probe any deeper. Neither the bishop nor the inquisitor was likely ever to reveal the sources of his information or the way he influenced or manipulated the political sentiments of the people. This leaves a large part of the story untold in view of the foreign extraction of both bishop and inquisitor.

One particular source, however has long been available to historians because of its inclusion in the large unpublished collection of historical sources called *Stromata Melitensium*, readily accessible to the public at least for the last one hundred and fifty years at the Public Library, Valletta (2). It has been used already by such historians as G.A. Vassallo (3) and, after him, by those who have used his *Storia di Malta raccontata in Compendio* as their own main, largely unacknowledged, source (4). It gives a good idea of the political leanings of one of the prominent personalities of Malta who lived during the first half of the seventeenth century, and of his interpretation of the people's attitude towards the Order of St. John and the ruling class in Malta for the whole hundred years that followed the establishment of the new regime in 1530. As will be seen, its main value does not lie in its factual information on the administration of Malta so much as in the light it sheds on the political loyalties of the people. Its use up to now by historians has, therefore, been largely incorrect as well as frequently insufficiently critical (5).

2. R(oyal) M(alta) L(ibrary), Valletta, Libr. Mss. 1-24. The history of this library has still to be written, cf. E.R. Leopardi, 'The Public Library of Malta during the Protectorate', *The Malta Year Book*, 1958. It is essential to know when particular books or manuscripts were acquired and made accessible to the public — information vital to the proper understanding of Maltese cultural life.
3. G.A. Vassallo, *Storia di Malta raccontata in Compendio* (Malta, 1890, first published in 1854), p. 552.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 392, on Matthew Callus; P.P. Castagna, *Li Storja ta Malta bil Gzejjer Tahha*, II, p. 217; G. Faure, *Li Storja ta Malta u Ghaudex bil Gzejjer Tahhom u l-Grajjiet li saru fihom*, III (1914), p. 274.
5. From this judgement one must exclude G. Gatt, 'Il-Verità dwar Matthew Callus', *It-Torċa*, 21.i.1973 to 1.iv.1973. Gatt is very critical of the veracity of the historical facts adduced by the writer of the 'Relazione' but does not examine the value of the document as a source of information on the attitudes of the Maltese and their leaders towards the Order, especially around 1633-36 when it was written.

In addition to the copy already mentioned (6), there is another version in the Cathedral Archives at Mdina (7). Neither text is an original or a completely reliable copy. The first, here referred to as Text A, has had its text improved in accordance with eighteenth century Italian linguistic usage, but it is otherwise reliable except for a serious omission or two, apparently involuntary, which makes that particular part incomprehensible. The second copy, here referred to as Text B, preserves the spelling and diction of the original but contains a few ludicrous misreadings, such as 'contra di certe' for 'contradicendo', and 'casali' for 'corsali'. Text A is entitled *Copia/di una relazione sopra lo stato, dazii ed altre/notizie Curiose dell'Isole di Malta/scritta da... (sic)/circa l'anno del Signore/1622*. Text B has, instead, this marginal entry: *Lettera del Vicario Bartolo nel 1616*. Both descriptions are incorrect, as are both dates given. Fortunately, as G. Gatt has already shown, internal evidence can supply enough information to establish the approximate date of composition (8). Bishop Cagliares is referred to as 'b.m.' — that is, 'of good memory' — indicating that Cagliares was already dead. On the other hand, Grand Master Antoine de Paule was still alive. Cagliares died on 4 August 1633 and de Paule died on 11 June 1636: the 'Relazione' must have been written between those two dates and not in 1622 nor in 1616, much less in 1574 when there happened to be a Vicar Bartolo.

It is much more difficult to determine its authorship. The writer refers to his holding of the office of Vicar General in 1622 during the magistracy of Vasconcellos. He went to Rome on a special mission, departing from Malta on a galley of the Order on 11 November 1594. He once held the post of grammar school-master at Mdina for three years and he makes it abundantly clear that he was of Maltese origin. These details point to only one person who could have been the author: Dun Filippo Borg, or Borgia as he has come to be called, the first provost of the canonry of Birkirkara (9). Not only was he of Maltese origin (that does not really help much), but it can be shown that he held the post of school-master at Mdina in his late teens between October 1583 and November 1585 and had been acting as school-master without pay since 1582, a total period of just about three years (10). He was Vicar General

6. RML, Lib. 5, pp. 563-584.

7. Cath. Mus., Mdina: Cath. Arch. Ms. 59 (*olim* Ms. 80), fols. 42-48v.

8. *Op. cit.*, *It-Torċa*, 4.ii.1973.

9. It is not intended here to give a biography of Dun Filippo Borg; see E.B. Vella, *Storja ta' Birkirkara* (Malta, 1934), pp. 405-406, 412.

10. Petition of *honorabilis* Philippus Borg to the Grand Master, presented to the jurats of Mdina on 22 October 1583, stating that the late Petrus Camilleri, grammar school-master, had placed him in charge of the school during his last infirmity. Several citizens and gentlemen of Mdina and all the parents of the pupils from the villages

in 1622 (11).

Dun Filippo Borg was one of the first great products of the Counter Reformation in Malta. He was, in fact, the first rector of the parish of Birkirkara to be appointed for a whole century whose personal morality and obedience to the dictates of the Church on such matters as celibacy of the clergy were above reproach. He succeeded in 1594 Dun Giuseppe Bellia whose chief distinction was that he had a concubine Paulina who lived in his servant's house at the time of Mgr. Dusina's Visitation in 1575 and another, stouter, one, who lived at Birgu — at whose place Dun Giuseppe spent four days in the week to the great detriment of his parishioners (12). His predecessor Don Matheus Camilleri had been murdered by Don Jacobus Calleya and others, according to *his own son* Ascanio Camilleri, who also alleged that the bishop had promised the rectorship of Birkirkara to the person who first brought him news of the demise of Don Matheus (13). Camilleri's predecessor, Don Joannes Pisano, had been accused of illicit relations with Agatha Spiteri in 1542 and of openly boasting of cuckolding more than ten of his parishioners (14). Don Joannes Pisano was himself *the son* of Don Leonardi Pisano, another

without exception sent their sons to learn grammar and be educated (*ad insegnarse grammatica et..... [instruire] buoni costumi*) at that school. He alleged that a certain Nicolaus Xeberras had been trying by devious methods to obtain the said salary for himself, claiming to have ten pupils; Don Filippo himself had forty. The Grand Master decreed that the salary should be shared between the two of them up to Christmas, when tests of the two teachers and their pupils should determine what further decision should be made: RML, Univ. 14, fols. 448-449v. Xiberras's petition of the same date is in *ibid.*, fols. 447-448. After another petition of Filippo Borg, dated 1 February 1584, it was decreed that the salary should continue to be shared between Borg and Xiberras: *ibid.*, fol. 463v; a decree to that effect was registered on 11 July 1584: *ibid.*, fol. 481v. For Borg's last payment see G. Gatt, 'It-Tagħlim f'Malta', *Is-Sebħ*, 3 July 1957.

11. RML, Libr. Ms. 1368, pp. 46-48. The fact that the writer of the 'Relazione' was a Vicar General in 1622 also incidentally excludes Rev. Petrus Pace from consideration as the real author because he was never Vicar General, though he was schoolmaster in 1595-99.
12. Dusina's diocesan visitation, 1575: RML, Libr. Ms. 643, p. 90; cf. J. Cassar Pullicino, 'Malta in 1575: Social Aspects of an Apostolic Visit', *Melita Historica*, II, No. 1 (1956), p. 35.
13. 'Contra donnum Jacobum Calliam', containing the accusation made by Ascanio Camilleri and his interrogation, dated 12 April 1575, before D. Petrum Dusina 'Utriusque Juris doctor prothonotario delegato et vicario Auostolico', followed by two empty folios: A(rchives of the) I(nquisition in) M(alta), Processi Ib, pages and proceedings unnumbered, towards the end. The murder was alleged to have occurred in August 1557. It is unknown whether the case was proceeded with any further. On Rev. Joannes Matheus Camilleri's previous disputes with the ecclesiastical authorities and his parishioners, see the deeds of Notary Antonio Cassar, N(otarial) A(rchives) V(alletta), R 160/1, fols. 601-604, 614-615; R 160/2 fols. 172v-174v, 273-278, 373v-375, 381v-382v. One presumes that Rev. Joannes Matheus Camilleri and Rev. Matheus Camilleri were one and the same person.
14. Cath. Mus., Mdina, AAM/CEM/RAO, 1541-43, fol-119.

rector of Birkirkara who lived at the turn of the century (15) and who is also known to have had an illegitimate daughter (16).

Things had certainly changed considerably since then (17). Although human frailty naturally continued to make itself felt, discipline was relatively strict. Priests with concubines were decidedly at a disadvantage for advancement, and risked much sterner punishment if they did not change their style of life (18). One would like to think that clerical education had also improved (19). Dun Filippo Borg, certainly, could boast of a regular training in law, since he held the degree of *Juris Utriusque Doctor*, which he must have obtained abroad at one or other of the Italian universities (20). At a tender age he was already teaching in the grammar school of the Old City and was able to point out the progress made by his pupils during the six months they had been in his care, obtaining his regular appointment as a result. It is difficult to compare his cultural education to that of his Maltese contemporary, G.F. Abela, the antiquarian Vice-Chancellor of the Order, but it was definitely less refined and much less sure of itself though he had the advantage of suffering from fewer inhibitions.

The changes which seem to have occurred in the quality of the Maltese clergy between, say, 1550 and 1635 account in part for the transformation that was undoubtedly occurring in their social and political

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15. 'Comparuerunt prefati Perius et Antonia (Farruge alias Gibasal), accusaverunt et accusant ac reum fecerunt et faciunt clericum Johannem Pisano filium dompnj Leonardj Pisano.....', 11 April 1512; *Cath. Mus.*, Mdina, AAM/CEM/RAO, 1511, fol. 29v.
 16. 'Dominicus Gauchi nomine maritali Margarite sue uxoris, filie naturalis quondam Venerabilis domini Leonardi Pisano', 8 July 1537: *Not. Brandano de Caxario, NAV, R 175/2*, fol. 215.
 17. There are no grounds for thinking that Birkirkara was any worse off in this respect than the other parishes of Malta or, indeed, the Cathedral clergy itself; nor were clergymen in Sicily, Spain, Austria or Iceland — not to mention other places — any stricter in their observance of clerical celibacy on the eve of the Protestant Reformation.
 18. Repeated efforts were made during the first half of the sixteenth century to enforce the Church rules of clerical celibacy, but they seem to have been largely ineffective until, at least, much later in the century. Mgr. Dusina does not report more than a couple of cases of the infringement of these regulations, but detailed and searching examination of the extant documentation in several archives is required to settle the matter definitively.
 19. The seminary for the education of the clergy was not set up before the early eighteenth century, but the Jesuits opened their own college in 1592: this must have brought a great improvement in the educational resources of Malta.
 20. Of course, even at earlier periods there were individual priests who enjoyed a higher level of education than the remainder: G. Wettinger — M. Fsadni, *Peter Caxaro's Cantilena: a Poem in Medieval Maltese* (Malta, 1968), p. 29.

status, especially the latter (21). Thus in pre-1530 days the local Maltese clergy seem to have been almost entirely preoccupied with their religious duties and, perhaps, with keeping body and soul together both for themselves and their dependents. Their incursions into politics were few and far between. They had their own *brachium ecclesiasticum* to administer church affairs and they only attended meetings of the town council on the rarest occasions when specially invited, usually only when matters affecting them were on the agenda (22). In the Monroy incident they served as mediators, but took no further part in the affair (23). Occasionally, a Fra Matteo Zurchi of the Augustinians, with his particular reputation for cleverness and wisdom, might be permitted to attend meetings of the town council (24), and even entrusted with a mission to the Sicilian authorities on behalf of the Maltese municipality (25). But the clergy never acted as the leading political class on the island. In Malta as elsewhere they were excluded from civil posts and could not act as representatives of the *casali* on the town council. Political leadership was the special function of the landed gentry, the semi feudal landlords of Mdina and the professional men-of-affairs — the lawyers, notaries and, occasionally, doctors (unless, of course, they were Jews) together with the more substantial property owners in the villages, who represented the latter during sessions of the *consilium generale*, or full council.

In the sixteenth century, the clergy occasionally came to the front as opponents of the Grand Master's administration, especially when they were called upon to contribute towards the upkeep of the town walls (26). They usually appealed to Rome, stating that they were prepared to

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21. Other factors were the increasing importance of such privileges as exemption from militia service and the fact that their power base extended beyond the shores of Malta and Gozo, seeing that the Grand Master always had to settle matters with the Papacy in Rome before he could deal effectively with the local clergy. The early attempts of the island's landed gentry to obtain the support of the Emperor or King of Spain came to nothing, depriving it of the possibility of a similarly extended power structure.
 22. Thus in the debate held in the town council of Mdina on the 14 September 1462, *nobilis* Paulus di Biglera suggested 'quod fiat consilium generale capiendo de quolibet capella quatuor vel sex electos ut supra in quo consilio etiam intervenire habeat brachium ecclesiasticum': RML, Univ. 11, fol. 167.
 23. Documents in A. Mifsud, 'Franchigie Costituzionali Alfonsiane e l'invasione dei Mori del 1429 nella compilazione della Storia di Malta', *Archivum Melitense*, III (1919), p. 332: 'Capituli, condicioni et pacti li quali don Cathaldu Cusburella et don Gregoriu di Bonellu canonici melivetani mandati per la uniuersitati di la chitati et insula di Malta.....'.
 24. Thus he attended meetings on the 21 October 1450, 11 January 1454, 1 February 1454, 12 August 1454: RML, Univ. 11, fols. 83v, 35v, 37v, 45.
 25. Meeting of the town council, 5 March 1450: RML, Univ. 11, fol. 66.
 26. A. Mifsud, 'Papi, Fortificazioni e Tasse nel passato di Malta', *Archivum Melitense*, III (1919), 399-430.

participate on condition that it be shown that no further money could be obtained from normal sources (27). Even in Gargallo's time, the current Church-State dispute concerned mainly church rights, not the rights and privileges of the people and the old municipality vis-a-vis the Grand Master — it was largely a reassertion of church rights which the local church authorities had allowed partly to lapse during the later middle ages, allowing laymen to intervene in the financial administration of the Church (Cathedral, hospital, etc.) as they had been doing at least since the fifteenth century (28). In fact, even in 1579 the officials of the municipality were as offended by the bishop's pretensions as was the Grand Master (29). The clergy themselves had their own private quarrel with the bishop (30).

By the time that Dun Filippo Borg was active a different situation was establishing itself. He was himself not backward in fighting for church privilege, especially where his own position was vitally affected:

In 1622 in the month of April, Bishop Cagliares left to his Vicar Dun Filippo Borg the superintendence of the whole diocese during his absence, and he signed himself in that quality. He was the first Vicar General who took the title of *Reverendissimo* from the year 1623, as in the Registers of the Ecclesiastical Court of the city of Valletta of the month of August, fol. 526... This Vicar claimed the right of precedence over the Archdeacon and the

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27. *Ibid.*, especially pp. 415 et seq. On 22 August 1635 Pope Urban VIII allowed the Grand Master to impose a tax of a tenth on income from urban and rural property in Malta belonging to laymen and to the religious in order to defray expenses on the new fortifications: *ibid.*, p. 421.
28. From the 31 October 1433 lay procurators for the Hospital of Santo Spirito were appointed every year: Cath. Mus., Mdina, Cath. Arch. Ms. 28, pp. 24-26. The appointment of a lay procurator to the Cathedral came before the town council on the 9 July 1477, 11 September 1477, 28 April 1479, 4 November 1516: RML, Univ. 11, fols. 362 sqq, 365rv, 416v sqq, Univ. 12, fols. 147v sqq. On 29 July 1515 Hyeronimus Callus, father of the so-called Matthew Callus, had a day fixed for him to render account, as procurator of the Cathedral, to the Vicar and the Jurats of the town: RML, Univ. 12, fol. 116. On 22 January 1487 two of the jurats, in accordance with the decision of the town council and the provision of the metropolitan vicar and the viceroy — because the vicar general of the bishop of Malta wanted to be present with them — appointed Antonius Gatt Desguanes to the post of yconimum of the Cathedral church 'ad regendum, gubernandum, manutenendum ministrandum bona et redditus bonorum iste ecclesie prout predecessores yconimi dicte ecclesie hactenus melius administraverunt, regerunt.....'. NAV, Not. Giacomo Sabara, R 494/1, fol. 53, under the above date.
29. NAV, Notary Giuseppe Mamo, R 336/8 (1578-79), fol. 592-593v, 620-623v, 631-642, 732-739v, between the dates 9 April 1579 and 22 May 1579 are registered several public documents concerning the quarrel between Bishop Gargallo and the town officials of Mdina.
30. E.W. Schermerhorn, *Malta of the Knights* (London, Heinemann, 1929), pp. 105-6. Cf. 'Eccesso di Monsignor Vescovo Gargallo', in RML, Ms. 17 "Stromatum Melitenisium, Liber III", pp. 268-77.

Chapter [of the Cathedral] and he therefore on 12 March 1622 tried to put it into execution during the procession of St. Gregory, by virtue of a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rights dating back to 1619 on the matter; he was pushed aside by Archdeacon Don Salvatore Guzman to no small scandal [of the public], and when he then tried to bring up the rear, of the procession, taking precedence over the [town's] magistracy, he was again violently pushed aside by the Town Mayor Gregorio Xerri, by Dr. Antonio Cassar, Michele Cumbo and other Jurats. He therefore stopped the procession of Domenica in Albis and excommunicated the said Cassar, who had to go to Rome to obtain absolution (31).

Disputes on precedence were no new thing in the ecclesiastical life of Malta by any means (32), but the establishment by Dun Filippo of the chapter of canons at Birkirkara was a more extraordinary development (33). It was the first one in Malta after the Cathedral Chapter itself, though Gozo had already seen the first decisive steps taken in that direction at the Matrice of the Citadel, Rabat (34). All of the money for the new foundation at Birkirkara came out of the private pocket of Dun Filippo himself.

This particular initiative naturally aroused the suspicions and ire of the Grand Master, Antoine de Paule. On 14 May 1635 de Paule wrote to his ambassador in Rome that Dun Filippo had 'taken possession' of his 'colleggiata'. If the bishop and chapter of the Cathedral did not refrain from giving the new Chapter rights of jurisdictional exemption he would be considerably offended (35). Four days later he wrote again, expressing his surprise that the chapter of canons should have been erected in such a place:

We tell you that by virtue of a Bull of Monsignor Pirovano, accompanied by an Inhibitorial Decree of the Auditor della Camera, not only was the said Procession made secretly, but on the following day (on the occasion of the Rogations) Don Filippo came out accompanied by six canons wearing the Cappa Magna, and he established immediately a tribunal, suppressing the Parish and acting with intolerable presumption, without informing Us of it, or the Bishop or Monsignor Inquisitor. We are disgusted (*stomacato*) by this novelty — carried out when least expected

31. RML, Libr. Ms. 1368, pp. 47-48.

32. The visitation of Rev. Albertus de Nasis, bishop of Nicopolis and Vicar General of the Archbishop of Palermo, in 1528 was intended mainly to inquire into such disputes of precedence plaguing the Maltese Church: Cath. Mus., Mdina, Cath. Arch. Ms. 2, pp. 221 sqq.

33. E.B. Vella, *Storja ta' Birkirkara* (Malta, 1934), pp. 107-125.

34. Alexander Bonnici, 'It-Twaqqif ta' l-Ewwel Kollegġjata f'Ghawdex, Studju Storiku u Guridièu', *Tliet Mija u Hamsin Sena Kollegġjata* (Malta, 1974), 30-38.

35. Gran Master Antoine de Paule to Ambasciatore Grifoni, 14 May 1635: RML, AOM 1414.

in our bare face. If you over there and our agent Rosa do not find a way of punishing such great temerity, we shall remain in a continual sadness seeing this proud and ambitious old man prevailing against Our authority in spite of the decision which you told Us had been taken in Our favour.....

Is it possible that in the vilest and worst village of this island, in a Country Church which (except for its facade) is for the rest a dirty (*sordida*) and neglected cave, without any sign or hope of a canonry, with very weak and badly established revenues for the Canons, there should be so many privileges of attire and exemptions that they would be dangerous (*sovverchi*) in any metropolis of Christendom. Explain therefore to those Padroni over there that on [this] little reef tribunals are multiplying so excessively that at present there are six with a most harmful confusion. We also recommend to you what Monsignor the Bishop is writing to you and we await from your work and that of Agent Rosa some good provision, praying God in the meantime kindly to assist you (36).

It will be seen that the 'Relazione' does not refer to anything of all this, though there cannot be any doubt that the dispute was not unconnected with the other troubles of the time. The mid-1630s were a time of political unrest in Malta (37). Grandiose plans for the erection of the fortifications of what later became known as Floriana were drawn up and suggestions made that the Maltese should be taxed to pay for their construction. When early in the next magistracy a large demonstration of the people of Zejtun took place against the new taxes, headed by the parish priest, the new Grand Master accused Dun Filippo Borg of being behind the agitation. This was denied by the Inquisitor, anxious to protect its 'consultor' or adviser (38). Claims were made that the Maltese people enjoyed a concession from its previous kings of exemption from taxation (39). In 1638 a Maltese citizen named Antonio Sardo actually presented a memorial to the King of Spain in the name of the Maltese inhabitants in which the Grand Master was accused of misgovernment. That is the background to this 'Relazione' (40).

The 'Relazione' is in fact a racy political tract never meant to be published. It was written as the result of a particular request from *Monsignore Illustrissimo e Reverendissimo* — possibly the Inquisitor, Don Fabio Chigi, who had reached Malta in 1634, or the bishop, Mgr. Michele

36. Same to same, 18 May 1635: *ibid.*

37. Well documented in V. Borg, *Fabio Chigi, Apostolic Delegate in Malta* (1634-39) (The Vatican, 1967).

38. *Ibid.*, p. 305; cf. also p. 54.

39. A. Mifsud, 'Papi, Fortificazioni e Tasse nel passato di Malta', *Archivum Melitense*, III (1919), p. 406, claims dating back to 1531.

40. V. Borg, *Fabio Chigi, Apostolic Delegate in Malta* (1634-39), especially pp. 433-34

Balaguer, a Spaniard who became bishop in 1635 but had been in Malta for a long time before that (41). Dun Filippo declared that he would omit what was contained in the ancient writings, sacred and profane, and would therefore start with the Sicilian Vespers. Obviously, right from the start he was concerned mainly with the current disputes with the Grand Master and their historical background, as he understood them and as seen through the eyes of the common populace, not so much those of the scholar or the nobleman, certainly not those of the official historiographer of the Order like Bosio or the erudite and well-born Vice-Chancellor of the Order, Commendatore G.F. Abela (42).

Not surprisingly, the references to Maltese medieval history are scrappy in the extreme and inexact sometimes telescoping events widely separated in time into affairs of a few years or less — as in the muddled references to the redemption of Malta from the power of its *mula* or feudal lord for 30,000 florins, wrongly attributed to the time of King Martin. He obviously mistook the reduction of Malta to the Royal Domain in 1396 for what happened after the troubles of Monroy. One notes, however, his adroit references to the Sicilian rising against the Angevins known as the Sicilian Vespers and the Maltese rising against Monroy: no doubt, he meant, there was a limit beyond which the people could not be driven. He knew some of the circumstances accompanying the introduction of the wine tax in 1419, which was intended to pay for the erection of a tower on Comino island. He also had some information on the privileges of the Maltese municipality in the later middle ages: that Malta shared in all the privileges enjoyed by the town of Messina, just as if it was one of the city-quarters of that Sicilian town (43); Malta had to be free and exempt from all taxes and impositions; the island could not be alienated from the kingdom of Sicily and Aragon whether by way of marriage portion or otherwise, a privilege that was observed until the cession of the island to the Order in 1530 (44). He had picked up these scraps of information from the book of privileges of the municipality which had

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41. *Ibid.*, for Chigi; for Balaguer, see A. Zammit Gabarretta, *The Presentation, Examination and Nomination of the Bishops of Malta in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (Malta, 1961), pp. 29-35.
 42. G.F. Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta, Isola nel Mare Siciliano con le sue Antichità*, (Malta, 1647). On Abela, see E.R. Leopardi and others, *G.F. Abela, Essays in his Honour* (Malta, 1961).
 43. In the capitoli of 2 January 1460 Messina was referred to as 'la quali sempri ha riputato questa cittate ed insula come sua figliola' and that Malta 'esti partj di lu Regnu de Sichilia et reputasj ruga di la dita nobilissima chitati di Missina': R. Valentini, 'Documenti per Servire alla Storia di Malta (1458-66)', *Archivio Storico di Malta*, X, p. 62. Both are mentioned by G.F. Abela, *op. cit.*, p. 429.
 44. Charter of King Alfonsus, dated Valencia, 20 June 1428: *Archivum Melitense*, III pp. 354-360.

been in his possession for the three years he served as school-master (45). It is abundantly clear that he frequently retained only the vaguest impression of the purely historical details and his 'Relazione' would be of little interest if that were all it contained.

In fact, however, it contains much else besides — information which could not be obtained at all from the books and documents which were certainly no longer in his care when he wrote. His 'Relazione' is, in fact, our main source on the popular attitude of the Maltese as distinct from that of their ruling classes to the coming of the Order in 1530 and to its rule over them during subsequent years. It is really the oldest source for the common opinion that there was a clear opposition between the reaction of the 'nobiltà' of Malta and that of the common people, the former rejecting the proposed new rulers while the latter were prepared to accept them (46). It is Dun Filippo Borg, therefore, who is the first to state that 'the people' were displeased with the 'nobility' before the coming of the Order because of their bad treatment (47). For a long time, people had been praying God to send to them 'a master who would ill-treat the nobles as much as the commoners'. The coming of the Order had, in fact, been foretold in a popular saying that 'A plucked sparrowhawk shall come out of the Levant and chase the peregrine falcon away from its nest' (48): after 1530, according to Dun Filippo, the local nobility emigrated to one or other of the towns of Sicily to avoid its rule (49). Another old saying stated that 'The principal men of Malta shall become wretched and vile, and those who had been poor beggars shall become its masters and rulers'. This also came to pass by the establishment of the Order on the island. Dun Filippo had heard all these sayings from his

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45. Several such collections of 'Privileges' have survived: RML, Libr. Mss. 494, 1119, 1120.
46. G.A. Vassallo, *Storia di Malta raccontata in Compendio*, pp. 274-275; P.P. Castagna, *op. cit.*, II, p. 167; G. Faure, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 433-434, 436-440; D. Miede, *Histoire de Malte*, (Malta, 1840), II, 94-115, where he speaks repeatedly of *les Maltais* without sufficiently distinguishing the upper from the other classes. The definitive study — and yet it ignores the lower classes — is: R. Valentini, 'I Cavalieri di S. Giovanni da Rodi a Malta: Trattativi diplomatiche', *Archivum Melitense*, IX, No. 4 (1935), 137-237.
47. Though recent literary works like A. Cremona's *Fidwa tal-Bdiewa* and G. Galea's *Ragel bil-Ghaqal* show an awareness of the social problems of pre-1530 Malta, no serious analysis of them has yet appeared except for R. Valentini, 'Organizzazione municipale e classi sociali in Malta alla fine del secolo XIV', *Archivio Storico di Malta*, VIII (1937), 125-152.
48. It is most unfortunate that this and the other proverbs are given only in an Italian translation.
49. On this and other aspects of the relations of the Maltese with their new rulers in the sixteenth century, see L. Butler, 'The Maltese People and the Order of St. John in the Sixteenth Century', *Annales de l'Ordre Souverain Militaire de Malte*, XXIII, No. 4 (1965), XXIV, Nos. 3, 4, especially XXIV, No. 3, p. 96.

maternal grandmother and other old persons (50). Other sayings included the prophecy that the Order would remain in Malta for about a hundred years, then go to Sardinia where it would come to an end in a puff of smoke, while the Ma'tese, for some unstated reason, would go to the town of Pulici in Sicily (51). The rule of the Order would at first be pleasant and sweet, endearing itself to the Maltese in various ways. Some would enrich themselves during that time of liberality and beneficence; but in the end the Order's rule would become harsh and overbearing, forcing the people into exile to avoid its taxes and other impositions — as was seen to happen everyday, according to him — such that the wretched people were left without anything except their own skin and bones. In fact, influential knights were not lacking who admitted openly that they wanted to 'cut off the seed of the Maltese' from these islands, calling them dogs and other uncomplimentary names.

This sets him off, after a glance at the act of donation, on a long disquisition about the subsequent history of the Order's rule in Malta. The Order began, as foretold, by treating the people well and during the first four magistracies the people lived well and happily. Then followed Grand Master La Valletta, a Gascon knight, who muzzled the people and imposed burdens on them in 1560, helping himself to the municipality's income from customs, the taxes on wine, on the sale and transfer of property and on loans — which paid a tax of 1 in 30 — obtaining some 11,000 scudi in revenue annually. In return he arranged for the payment of the salaries of the town officials to be made by himself, as well as for the handing over to the Università of an annual sum of 600 other scudi. However, not a single penny was returned to the town authorities, a loss of some 40,000 scudi (52). When the public clamour led a respectable Maltese doctor Matteo Callus to write a bold letter to His Catholic

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50. Dun Filippo Borg's maternal grand-parents were Lorenzo Balzan and his wife Madalena, but the latter's maiden surname is unknown: Birkirkara Collegiate Archives, vol. III, pages not numbered, records of the meeting of the Chapter held on 21 September 1642 (information kindly supplied by Canon Vincent Borg). It is nevertheless clear that we are dealing here with a moderately well-off village family, rather similar to that of Dun Filippo's own parents and paternal grand-parents. It is certain that there were no connections with the island's enfeoffed gentry.
51. Malta's previous connections with this town were no stronger than with the other Sicilian towns of the same size: the surname Pulis must have originally been given in Malta or Sicily itself to a family or families originating from Pulici (Polizzi), whether of Latin, Greek, Saracenic or Jewish ethnic origin.
52. G. Gatt, 'Il-Verità dwar Matthew Callus', *It-Torċa*, 18 February 1973. Gatt's criticism at this point is very well informed and effective.

Majesty, he was arrested and strangled in the town square as a rebel (53). After that, no one had the courage to say anything. Grand Master Verdala and the reigning Grand Master did the same at the beginning of their magistracies, so that none dared complain.

In 1594 Bishop Garga'lo and four Knights Grand Cross in opposition to the Grand Master asked Pope Clement VIII to summon them to Rome to hear what they had to say on several matters useful to Religion.

At first the Bishop did not intend to go himself, as he was not named among those summoned to Rome, but he wanted to send me as a special delegate *ad visitandum limina* to give a complete account to the Sacred Congregation of the Cardinals of the Council of Trent of the state of the island both in matters spiritual and in those temporal, seeing that the Cardinal (i.e. Verdala) wanted clerics to perform guard duty, having told His Holiness that the plague which had broken out at about that time had brought about a great scarcity of people such that none remained to do guard duty.

The bishop asked all those who had obtained leave of absence from guard duty from the militia captains on payment of three scudi to report the matter to the church court, and it soon became apparent that there were enough persons to make up all the militia watches (54), and that therefore the Grand Master merely wanted to harm Ecclesiastical rights by false information. The Bishop himself informed the Pope accordingly on the matter.

The author was finally taken to Rome by the bishop as his *Auditore*, leaving Malta on 11 November 1594. The Grand Master sent another party of four Knights Grand Cross, including his own nephew, to present his own point of view. The bishop succeeded in obtaining the revocation of the Grand Master's tax on wine because it had been originally intended to defray the expenses for the erection of a tower on Comino island, an intention that was never carried out (55). The Grand Master, however, died at this time, and the bishop did not reveal the success of his mission to the new Grand Master, who remained in ignorance of it until a copy of the revocation was found among the bishop's own papers at his death. It was this discovery which led to the building eventually of the tower on Comino island (1614).

53. Matteo Callus's real name was Giuseppe, but Dun Filippo's mistake has led to the ludicrous situation of one of Malta's principal national heroes becoming known under a name which is not his own, so that it would be difficult now to refer to him as Dr. Giuseppe Callus and still evoke the same popular recognition he deserves. On Dr. Giuseppe Callus, alias Matteo, see P. Cassar, *Medical History of Malta*, (London, 1964), pp. 17-19, and P. Cassar, 'A Medical Report of the Sixteenth Century from Malta', *Medical History* 18 (1974), 354-359.

54. Each watch consisted of four persons.

55. Capitoli, 6 April 1418. S. Giambruno — L. Genuardi, *Capitoli Inediti delle Città Demaniali di Sicilia*, I, p. 383.

Dun Filippo describes the visit he paid to Grand Master Mendes de Vasconcellos. The newly elected Grand Master told him that he wanted to remove the abuses perpetrated by the captains of the militia. These knights, one of whom lived in each of the major villages, commanded the militia contingent of the surrounding area. They were accused of increasing every year their impositions of straw and capons. While they made their demands on the men, their 'concubines' or housekeepers did the same to the village women, obtaining from them meat, eggs, milk, cheese and other farm products. 'If God grants me time until May, I want to return the wine tax to the Old City because I do not want to continue to do what my predecessors had been doing, keeping it wrongly for myself'. But he did not live that long. The current Grand Master took the view that these were all regalian rights of princes, and declared that he would continue to do what his predecessors had been doing (56).

In his onslaught on the militia captains, Dun Filippo was fighting the Order at the local, parochial, level. During the course of the sixteenth century, the medieval *contestabili*, who represented the villages in the town council of Mdina, lost much or all of their social importance and were also deprived of every shred of 'political' initiative they might once have had on such matters as taxation, angara or corvee services, food, the keeping of law and order. Though they still had to be property owners and could not be priests, they were really chosen by the Grand Master, who passed on his wishes to the electorate through the militia captains, who were, of course, his most faithful and willing servants in all this. Since elections were not secret, it is difficult to imagine the people opposing the Grand Master's choice; even then, the elections were vetted before the new members could take their seats (57). One can say that, in the new circumstances, the only personage in the villages who had any political and social importance comparable to that of the village parish priest was the knight who served as captain of the militia. There is no doubt he was often hated. One was even murdered at about the time of 'Matteo' Callus's execution (58). On the other hand, other militia

56. 'Supplica sopra il contribuire la paglia dalli massari Maltesi alli Signori Capitani delle Parrocchia', 19 September 1609: RML, AOM 456, fol. 307rv;

57. The present writer proposes to write a brief study of a small number of key documents on the choice of the *contestabiles* during the middle years of the sixteenth century in a forthcoming number of this journal.

58. Bando, 30 September 1560, promising a reward of 100 scudi for information concerning the murder of the knight Fra Pietro de Rovere of Provence, Captain of Zurrieq, whose body was found on the 24 September 'apresso S. Leonardo'; if the informant was an accomplice he would be pardoned and receive 50 scudo; in any case the informant's name would be kept secret: RML, Libr. 149, fol. 176. Cr. also G. Gatt, 'Ir-Rewwixta tal-Milizzja taż-Zurrieq' *It-Torċa*, 18 and 25 July 1971, 1 August 1971.

captains seem to have integrated well into the village community. A near contemporary of Dun Filippo, the Knight Commander Fra Giovanni Alentorn, a Catalan, who was the captain of the militia at Birkirkara itself, seems to have taken a close interest in the antiquities of the Maltese countryside and in the traditions of the peasants concerning their past history (59). Such a person would tend to collect around him all those who wanted the Order's patronage, especially for employment or the grant of public land, and who were, perhaps, not on the best terms with the parish priest. After all, the latter also collected chickens and what not from the parishioners — because, after all, the 'Capitana', as Dun Filippo nicknamed the captain's housekeeper, was not really starting anything very novel by her exactions.

One sore point was the common land frequently allotted in severalty to individuals: such grants removed the land from the use of the poor who depended more than anyone else on their grazing rights and the right to gather fire-wood or thistles from such places (60). After Verdala's death these lands were returned to public ownership not only by the will of the Council of the Order but also by decree of Pope Clement (61). Don Filippo claimed that he had persuaded the Grand Master not to make similar grants without the consent of the Pope, but had to overcome the influence of 'the good ministers who stood around him and who are more often the cause that Princes do not do what they should', so that at his next meeting the Grand Master told him:

You have informed me that I cannot do it without the consent of the Pope; and I tell you that my counsellors say that the Pope does not come into the matter. I want to do it because I am master.

Finally, Don Filippo referred to the occasion when the Jurats of Mdina sent a Spanish hermit who lived in the grotto of St. Paul at Rabat, Malta, to Rome to beg Pope Paul V to ask the Cathedral Chapter of Malta to contribute four or five thousand scudi out of its revenues towards the fortifications of the town, without which there would be no Cathedral because there would not be any adequate defences against a

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59. 'Per tradizione intesa dal Signor Commendator Fr. Giovanni Alentorn Cavaliere Catalano che era stato Capitano della Capella di Bercarcara': RML, Libr. 140, fol. 40rv.
60. This was, of course, a very old problem, having frequently appeared in the middle ages. Dun Filippo Borg himself seems to have asked for a small area of public land at Balzan to enlarge a house which had belonged to his ancestors, erecting a building 'which would be an ornament to the village': he needed a portion of the street which was itself wide enough for this to be done without harm to his neighbours. The Jurats, who examined the demand on the site, gave a favourable report, specifying that the land required was seven canne and four palmi in length and two canne six palmi in breadth. RML, AOM 1183, fol. 136rv.
61. Cf. B. Dal Pozzo, *Historia della Sacra Religione militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta* (Venice, 1715), p. 366. Bando e comandamento, 29 June 1636: RML, Libr. Ms. 149, fols. 197-199.

Turkish attack (62). Canon Francesco Vassallo, a lawyer and procurator of the Cathedral, then himself in Rome, asked for a private audience: he told the Pope that the town could be fortified by those who possessed several fiefs and had an income of up to 30,000 scudi. Only if their money did not suffice should the Cathedral Chapter contribute its share. According to Don Filippo, the Pope declared that in the circumstances he would not interfere, and the matter had not been raised again since then. That was how such demands should be answered before the Pope — who would without doubt hear the arguments and see that justice was done to all. 'But who shall he be? We do not have the man!', mused Don Filippo (63).

In conclusion, Don Filippo begged to be forgiven any ill-shaped and barbarous word that offended against the dictates of the Italian language, his intention being acceptable in spite of the weakness of his style. He also declared that he had purposely omitted several matters both not to weary his reader and also because he thought it better to do so. In reality, stylistic flourishes were not lacking from the 'Relazione', with flings that do little to impress the modern reader except to awaken one's marvel at his inventiveness, but must have gone down exceedingly well with the reader attuned to the contemporary baroque style of art and architecture.

In brief, the 'Relazione' is a political diatribe full of not very reliable appeals to historical parallels. It cannot be taken seriously as an account of the sins of commission or omission of the government of the Order, but it is a most important primary source of information on the politics of the writer and perhaps those of the people. On these it is really eloquent, as such writings tend to be even today. It marks the complete eclipse, much to the satisfaction of Don Filippo and, no doubt, of Don Francesco, another lawyer priest, of the medieval political set-up, with the fading away of the local 'nobility' and the rise of the clergy to a status of influence. Don Filippo showed how the latter could fill the political vacuum on the island, taking the lead in the disputes with the Grand Master on the national level and with the militia captains on the parochial one. In the past, clergymen had been for hundreds of years all-powerful as churchmen. From now onwards for three centuries they would be extremely influential as politicians.

62. Cf. A. Mifsud, 'Papi, Fortificazioni e Tasse nel Passato di Malta', p. 419.

63. Eventually, as seen above, the malcontents in Malta sent Antonio Sardo with a memorial to the king of Spain: see note 40 above. Don Filippo's exclamation 'Who shall it be? We do not have the man!' can be taken as corroborative proof of his authorship of the 'Relazione', seeing that he was so strongly suspected of having engineered the Sardo mission.

The 'Relazione'

Con grandissimo affetto ed prontezza incredibile Monsignor Illustrissimo e Reverendissimo (il che da parte mia reputo essermi favore ed (1) gratia (2) partico'are con haverli (3) degnato comandare) (4) procuro come è il (5) dovere, obedire in darle (6) succintamente con quella brevità possibile (7) raguaglio del (8) stato della mia diletta Patria, tralasciando da parte quel che comunemente (9) si dice di essa (10) nelle scritture antiche (11) tanto Sacre quanto profane (12).

Incominciando dal Vespero Siciliano nel quale tempo l'Isola di Malta era subdita alla obediienza della Nazione Francese insieme con la Sicilia dove non ostante che si fece quella strage così memorabile di essa Nazione Francese, li Maltesi pure non solamente s'astenero le mani innoxie del sangue loro ma anco li diedero il passaporto imbarcandoli dal Castello Sant' Angelo con mandarli securi al Paese loro. Ed havendosi li Siciliani dato alla obediienza di Don Pietro Re d'Aragona, l'Isola di Malta anco come unita con la Sicilia sotto il governo di Francesi così restò presso (13) il medesimo governo delli Re di Aragona delli quali il Re Martino havendo collocato una sua figlia naturale ad una Persona titolata de Moncada, l'assegnò Malta ed lochi adiacenti in dote. Il Popolo Maltese non potendo to'erare le Impertinenze di questo Prencipe, quale insino adesso in lingua nostra chiamamo il Mula, il che sona signore (14), con una raccolta di trenta mila fiorini ricattati si diedero (15) al Re di Aragona. Ed un'altra volta il sudetto Re impegnò la sudetta Isola per certi bisogni di guerra che li soprastava dalli Africani a certi Genoesi con la medesima somma, havendo anco venduto tutti li officii di Malta a certe Persone particolare di essa Città. Un'altra volta il Popolo (16) Maltese con la medesima somma si riscattò dall'obbligo del pegno e si rese alla obediienza del Re e (17) Regno di Sicilia ed Aragona.

Allora veduta e considerata questa fedeltà di Maltesi li sono (18) concessi dal Re molti privilegii tra li quali nomina Malta la più pregiata gemma che tiene nella sua corona, e che Malta sia partecipe di tutti privilegii che gode la Città di Messina, ed che sia annoverata come uno delli quarteri di Messina libera ed esente da tutte gabelle ed imposizioni ed che per l'avvenire non si possa in modo veruno disunire dal Regno di Sicilia e di Aragona nec titolo donationis propter nuptias ne meno

This edition is based on Text B, which preserves better the original spelling and diction. Omissions have been supplied and obvious mistakes amended by the use of Text A, but in such cases the reading of B is given in the *Apparatus*. Only the most significant readings of A are given in the *Apparatus* except for the opening paragraph. Punctuation has also been slightly amended.

(1) A *e*. (2) A *grazia*. (3) A *aversi*. (4) A *comandarmi*. (5) A omits *il*. (6) A *dare*. (7) A omits *possibile*. (8) A *dello*. (9) A *comunemente*. (10) A *d'essa*. (11) A *antiche*. (12) A *tanto profane che sacre*. (13) B omits *presso*. (14) B omits *il che sona signore*. (15) A *si riscatti e diedesi*. (16) B omits *Popolo*. (17) B omits *Re e*. (18) A *furono*.

sotto pretesto di qualsivoglia altro-titu'o. Qual privilegio sempre il fù osservato insino il tempo dell'Invittissimo Carlo Quinto Imperatore e Re delle Spagne, come discendente e successore di pre nominato Re, nel cui tempo fù presa l'Isola di Rodi dove risiedeva la Religione Gerosolimitana, quale cacciata da quella Isola restò per molti anni errante, cercando l'oco di residenza (19) finche ebbe la donazione dal Imperatore e come Re di Sicilia di risiedere ed haver in governo l'Isola di Malta Gozzo e Tripoli di Barbaria in titulum feudi sotto alcuni patti e condizioni come si contiene in detta donazione, e la principale condizione dummodo accedat consensus Populi perche l'Imperatore sentendosi obligato a restituire al Popo'o li 60 mila fiorini che importano 30 mila scudi e venne (20) allora la Religione in Siracusa ed incominciò trattare con il Vicere di Sicilia Don Fabritio Pignatelli Duca di Monteleone per haver il possesso dell'Isola e mandò in Malte come Procuratore della Religione per concertare il trattato del possesso con li Giurati ed Università di Malta, al Priore di To'osa, il quale con ampla potestà finalmente fece (21) l'atto dell'accordi con i Jurati.

Il Popolo allora come disgusto dalla nubiltà (22) e maltrattato dalla Nobiltà di subito (23) diede il consenso e rinuncia delli menzionati fiorini (24), contradicendo pero (25) la nobiltà (26), imperocche (27) da molto tempo il Popolo (28) exclamava pregando il Signore (29) chi li mandasse (30) un Padrone che insieme maltrattasse li nobili come l'ignobili anzi li antiqui (31) nostri da longissimo tempo (32) aveano pronosticato (33) la venuta della Religione in Malta sotto questa metafora: 'Verra da levante un sparvere spennato (34) che cacerà il fa'cone peregrino dal suo nido', il che fù (35) verificato, perche dopo la venuta de'la Religione in Malta (36) tutta la nobiltà per non stare sotto l'obedienza della Religione si è partita in diverse Città di Sicilia.

Al principio la Religione doveva esser troppo piacevole e dolce a'li Maltesi carezandoli (37) in diversi modi talmente che molti s'arrichirono con essa Religione allora liberale e dolce (38), ma al fine sarrà tanto dura ed aspera con il Popolo che sarà sforzato (39) fugire da questa Isola per le tante angarii e dazii che li vengono imposti siccome giornalmente

(19) A *abitazione*. (20) B *tenne*. (21) B *fecero*. (22) A *omits dalla nubiltà*. (23) B *omits dalla Nobiltà di subito*. (24) B *omits e rinuncia delli menzionati fiorini*. (25) B *contra di certe*. (26) A *adds: la quale come in tutti i statj suol accadere era però ben affetta alla plebe de lei angariata. Quindi i giurati medesimi furono obligati di fare lo stesso e cessero all'Erario della Religione li 30 mila fiorini che si potevano pretendere già come si disse pagati dagl'Isolani per riscattare il Paese*. (27) A *Poichè*. (28) B *omits il Popolo*. (29) A *Iddio*. (30) A *mandassegli*. (31) A *antichi*. (32) A *omits da longissimo tempo*. (33) A *pronosticavano*. (34) A *omits spennato*. The Turks had 'plucked' Rhodes from the Order of St. John, before it came to Malta. (35) A *adds purtrotppo*. (36) A *omits in Malta*. (37) A *accarezandoli*. (8) A *benefica*. (39) A *forzata*.

si vede, che non si resta al misero Popolo afflitto altro che la pelle e le ossa, e non mancano alcuni Cavaglieri di qualità che dicano pubblicamente, vogliano (40) togliere la semenza di Maltesi da quest'Isola con darle del'a canaglia ed altre simile ingiurie.

Si vede anco adempiuto quel che li antiqui nostri dicevano, 'li Principali di Malta saranno li miserabili ed abietti e quelli che erano poveri mendichi e miserabili (41) diventeranno Governatori e Rettori di essa'.

Al presente solamente resta la verificazione di quel pronostico antiquo che la Religione non starà in Malta più di anni 100 in circa ma che da Malta anderà in Sardegna dove finalmente si riso'verà da se stessa in fumo, e che li Maltesi anderanno in Sicilia a terra di Pulici e questo volgarmente ho sentito dire da mia Nanna materna (42), la quale nella venuta della Religione avea 30 anni e 45 anni fa che morse, che oggi dovrebbe essere di anni 140 in circa e non solamente da lei ma da molti altri vecchi non solamente questo ultimo pronostico ma tutti li altri sopradetti.

Fra tanto il Vicere da Palermo mandò a chiamare a nome del Re tutta la nobiltà, la quale imbarcata sopra certe fuste per la volta di Trapani, andò in Palermo. La Religione venuta da Siracusa senza contraddizione ebbe il possesso di Malta delli Giurati di essa Citta al'i 1530, al mese di Ottobre, e li medesimi Jurati a nome del Popolo rilasciorno alla Religione quelli 60 mila fiorini nella quale era creditore il popolo del Imperatore, il quale concesse la Isola alla Religione con questo che essa pagasse a nome suo detta somma. L'atto della donazione fatto dal Imperatore al'a Religione con li suoi patti e condizioni insieme anco de la relazatione (43) fù estratto dal suo originale l'anno 1622 da Paolo Pontremoli allora Notaro della Corte Vescovile autenticati da me come Vicario allora Generale si mandorno al Vescovo Cagliares di bona memoria allora dimorante (44) in Roma dove litigava con Monsignor Vignacourt e la Religione sopra molti capi, delli quali ebbe Vittoria principalmente sopra l'ospedale, ed il cumulo del'a Carità e di tutto questo deve constare nelli Atti Civili del Sant'Officio di Malta.

Allora la Religione con accarezzare il Popolo durante il Magistero di Fra Filippo Liladam che fù i' primo di Nazione Francese, di fra Perino di Ponte Italiano, che durò 6 mesi, e di fra Joannes de Omedes Spagnolo nominato per antonomasiam Elemosinae largitor, ed appresso di Fra Claudio la Sengla fondatore della torre di S. Michaela alla Senglea (45) il Popolo visse contentissimo (46).

Successe doppo fra Gioan Valletta Gascone; questo fu il primo che

(40) A voler. (41) A omits miserabili. (42) B matura. (43) A rilasciazione. (44) B emanate. (45) A omits alla Senglea. (46) A contento.

cominciò metter il freno ed angariare il Popolo. Alli 1560 mese mano alla doana, alla scisa del vino, e delle compre, permutazioni di beni stabili e censi bullali, nelli quali si paga per ogni onza tari 1, quale gabella importa più di 10 (47) mila scudi l'anno con averne obligato come appare per una lettera di Monsù Sachanvil'e (48) suo Mastro di casa registrata nell'offizio delli Jurati, pagare nomine universitatis il salario del medico fisico e Chirurgico, di Maestro di Schola, il predicatore, la polvere e monizioni e bombardieri della Città, e finalmente li palij che si danno nel curso (49) alla solennità di Santi Pietro e Pau'o, e più 600 scudi l'anno alla Università — dal qual tempo insino oggi mai non (50) si pagò un quatrino, che importano da circa quarantamila scudi, e perche allora di questa azzione mormorava nella Città pubblicamente una persona di qualità di nome Maltese Matteo Callus Medico Fisico salariato d'essa Citta non potendo tolerar quest'azione confidatosi di certi amici ebbe ardire di scrivere una lettera per esser presentata al Re Cattolico ma fuit intercepta e rimandata a Monsignor Va'letta quale (51) un' giorno lo fece come rebelle strangulare in publica piazza per il che nessuno ebbe ardire di parlare. Il medesimo dopo fece Monsignor Verdala ed il Grammaestro presente (52) nel principio delli loro governi per atterrire il Popolo, che nessuno ardisca lamentarse del governo sia come si voglia, altramente sarà punito come Rebelle tutti tre Gasconi (53).

Convien che Vostra Signoria sappia questa imposizione della scisa donde (54) ebbe origine per causa che molti cursali da Barbaria venevano e si nascondevano nell'Isola del Cumino tra Malta e Gozzo, e tutti (55) li Passagieri che venevano da Malta al Gozzo ed è converso (56) si pigliavano schiavi. Perciò la Università di Malta per obviare questo danno supplicò al Re di Sicilia ed Aragona (57) che con buona sua licentia fosse edificato un forte nel Cumino per defensione con impunire (58) la gabella di tre cartucci di vino forastiero per ogni quartara per sustento di questo forte sicche da ogni botte si dovrà fare la esazione per la Università di cartucci 72 che vengono a portare quando quattro scudi, quando quattro e mezzo e quando cinque scudi conforme il valore del vino e qualita di tempi. Il Re diede il suo placet, la Università impose la gabella, e mise mano alla esazione, ma il forte non fu mai fatto da un tempo longissimo più di 200 anni.

Finalmente Monsignor Gargallo Vescovo [di] bona memoria ne'l'anno 1594 e con esso lui 4 Cavalieri della Gran Croce venuti in disparere con il Cardinale Verdala diedero una suplica a PP. Clemente Ottavo e fecero

(47) A 11 mila. (48) A *Salanivelle*. (49) A *nella corsa*. (50) B omits *non*. (51) B omits *quale*. (52) B omits *presente*. (53) A omits *tutti tre Gasconi*. (54) A *come questa imposizione della scisa avesse origine*. (55) A omits *tutti*. (56) A *contra*. (57) B *assagò*. (58) A *imporre*.

istanza di esser chiamati da Sua Beatitudine perchè desideravano informarla di molte cose spettanti all'utile della Religione; si come Sua Beatitudine in effetto per un breve (59) li chiamò. Allora il Vescovo non avea intenzione di andare perchè non era nel numero delli chiamati; voleva pure mandare a me come nuncio speciale ad visitandum lumina e fare una piena relazione alla Sacra Congregazione de Cardinali del Concilio Tridentino del stato dell'Isole tanto nel Spirituale come nel Temporale atteso che pretendeva il Cardinale che li Clerici dovessero fare le guardie con aver esposto a Nostro Signore che per la peste che fu (60) in quel tempo mancava grandissimo numero di Popolo che non vi era rimasto chi facesse le guardie; il Vescovo sentito questo fece nella visita un monitorio per tutta la sua Diocesi che tutti quelli che sono franchi con li Capitani con pagare scudi tre l'anno debbano rivelare (61) in Corte Nostra; fra tempo si fecero molte rivelazioni (62) per le quali apparve che vi erano sufficientissime Persone per fare largamente quattro e quattro le guardie e che non era per altro eccetto (63) per angariare con sinistre informazioni la libertà Ecclesiastica siccome in effetto tali rivelazioni furono portate dal Vescovo e mostrate al Papa.

Ma simi'mente il Vescovo dalli altri 4 della Grancroce si risolse di andare e menarmene seco per auditore, siccome in effetto a'li 11 di Novembre dell'anno 1594 partiti dal porto di Malta con una galera semo andati, havendo il Cardinale doi giorni prima di noi mandato con una sua galera 4 Gran croci tra li quali era il suo Nepote.

Mentre la Ciappella (64) Siniscalco allora per rispondere in favore del Cardinale al'e opposizione delli altri che erano per andare in favore di tutta la Religione dove principalmente tra le altre cose della Religione si pretese la revocazione di questo datio, o sia scisa, come fatta absque beneplacito Sedis Apostolicae (65) quale supplica fu presentato alla Sacra Congregazione del Concilio in lingua volgare. Fù risposto al Vescovo che si faccia in lingua latina perchè così è lo stile, quale fù data da me e dopo presentata a Monsignor Fagnano il vecchio allora Secretario; fatta poi la Relazione della Congregazione Nostro Signore l'ha fatto revocare. Fra tanto fui mandato io dal Vescovo come Assessore Generale della Corte Vescovile ed esso restò insieme con li altri della Gran Croce; ed Nostro Signore destinò a Monsignor Bulalo (66) che veda li conti del Tesoro, essendo morto tra tanto alli 4 di Maggio dell' anno 1595 il Cardinale con aver lasciato più di quattro cento mila scudi in danari contanti doi galere fornite di ogni cosa, absente allora suo Nepote che non potte haver niente come hanno fatto li altri Nepoti di Granmaestri.

(59) A omits *per una breve*. (60) A adds *nata*. (61) A *rivelarsi*. (62) A *rivelazioni*. (63) A *ciò se non*. (64) A *Schiappelle*. (65) B a *Sua Altezza*. (66) A *del Bulalo*.

Venuto il Vescovo a Malta non pa'esò la revocazione [della scisa havendo trovato Granmaestro a Monsignor Fra Martino Garces Spagnolo stato Castellano di Amposta insin tanto che morse Gargallo ed in pigliare il suo dispoglio fù ritrovata nella libreria sua la revocazione] (67). Perciò Monsignor Vignacourt fù consigliato che si volesse possedere iustamente questa scisa dovesse fabricare la torre del Cumino siccome ha fatto.

A Monsignor Vignacourt successe Monsignor Don Luis Mendes Portoghese, quale durò sei mesi bona memoria (68) ed havendo andato per farli reverenza e ra'legrarme della sua electione al Magistero mi disse: Io voglio con l'aggiuto suo Signor Vicario remediare li abusi che li Capitani per le Parrochie angariano li poveri Vassalli accresciendo anno in anno le nove imposizioni della pagla e delli Capuni perche non voglio che quelli tengono concubine alle Parrochie. Il Capitano grava li Uomini e la Capitana (69) le donne, che va per le case domandando carne, ova, latte, formaggi, ed altre di più. Se Dio mi darà vita insino Maggio io voglio restituire la gabella del vino alla Città Vecchia, non voglio fare come li mei predecessori che malamente l'hanno posseduto. Fra tanto venne il Cameriere e li disse che il Priore di Sangilio che fù allora Monsù di Paula Moderno (70) Prencipe lo volea parlare. Mi disse allora: (71) Signor Vicario, in spagnolo, Tornate un' altra volta che parleremo meglio; siccome in effetto sono ritornato. Tutto questo dopo in progressu temporis (72) l'ho detto al istesso Moderno Prencipe, il quale mi rispose: 'Tutte queste cose sono regali (73) di Principi; come hann' fatto li miei predecessori farò anco io', si che per concluderla tre Granmaestri Gasconi incominciorno affligere il Popolo, Valletta incominciò con il poco, Verdala con aggiungere più angarie, havendo imposto alli massari di dare la paglia sei fasci per ogni bove e 4 per ogni vacca, con darli pure tari 1 per carico, Paula duplicò il numero anzi triplicò con levarli il tari per carrico, e la forraina che si solevano dare alla cavallerizza per stima di doi stimatori (74) à ciò deputati; adesso vogliano che si stimi (75) quanto orgio poteva fare quella erba si fosse metita e pistata; in questo modo non li danno la meta di quel che vale perche li pigliano dal orgio tanto a tari 1 grani 10 il tumno con scumputarli la paglia che va in conto del metitore e Pistatore. Veda Vostra Signoria in che miseria è venuta la Religione.

Sicche Monsignor Illustrissimo a questo si può applicare quel proverbio che communemente si dice in Alemagna del modo che intra l'eresie Erasmus innuit, Lutherius irruit, Erasmus parit ova, Lutherius

(67) A omits words in square brackets. (68) A omits *bona memoria*. (69) A marginal entry: *suppongo per le concubine* (70) A *odierno*. (71) A *soggiunse quindi*. (72) A *di tempo*. (73) A *regalie*. (74) A *periti*. (75) A *che tanto si stime*.

excludit pullos, sic Valletta innuit, Verdala annuit, Paula irruit et excludit Pullos: tutti tre Gasconi; in fine con la vocale A (76) la cui pronuncia fa aprire la bocca quasi larghi di bocca e stretti di mano.

Guarda anco a questo proposito il detto del Psalmo Vineam de Egypto transtulisti vindemiant eam omnes qui pretergrediuntur viam exterminavit eam aper de Sy'va singularis ferus despessus (77) est eam. Consideri Vostra Signoria Illustrissima in che stato si ritrovi la povera Malta. Che diro del maneggio di frumenti dal quale il Granmaestro ogn'anno voleva (78) li 30 mila scudi che tiene dal Principato di Malta; altro tanto oro ne cava dal maneggio del grano e che sia vero questo ogn'uno lo dice (79) e lo sa, e se Vostra Signoria Illustrissima me lo comanda (80) lo dirò in voce per non esser proliisso in carta.

Che (81) dirò delli spatii publici levati al povero sotto pretesto di fare la intrata per la Università della Città Notabile e della Vittoriosa acciò servasse per la satisfazione del'e Città e pure è fatto nella Notabile il povero Popolo intuitus l'ha fatto in giorni festivi e di lavoro senza pagamento e le intrate non si sa che li maneggia della Mellecha ed altri spatii, sono restato più di un'anno a defendere il Popolo con dire che questi spatii publici essendo della comunità non si devono dare a quattro e cinque Persone e levarsi al povero ed con allegarli quel che avea fatto Verdala e quel che poi successe dopo questa attione venne in primis la fame e dopo successe per doi anni la peste e dopo la sua morte nel Consiglio di Stato li spatii sono stati restituiti in pristinum statum e non solamente dal Consiglio ma anco da Papa Clemente con dire anco a Sua Eminenza che non lo poteva fare absque consensu Pape, l'avea redotto in termine che non lo voleva più fare, ma li boni ministri suoi che li stanno appresso sono causa più volte che li Principi non faccieno quel che si

(76) A con la vocale A in fine del loro nome. (77) A depastus. (78) B volere. (79) A omits lo dice. (80) A vorrà. (81) This paragraph in A runs: *Che dirò delli spazj publici levati al povero sotto pretesto di fare la intrata per l'Università della Notabile e della Vittoriosa, acciò servisse per lo mantenimento delle Città. Pure non si sà chi maneggia quest'entrate per cui il popolo dovette inutilmente esclamare dicendo con retta ragione che tali spazj publici non dovessero levarsi alla Communità e darsi à poche persone ben viste. Il popolo stesso fu obligato lavorare nell'Ospedate ne' giorni festivi e senza pagamento talche da tante miseri così si afflisse che dopo tali cose venne la fame e poi per due anni la peste; dopo la morte di Verdala nel Consiglio di Stato li spazj sono stati restituiti in pristinum statum e non solo dal Consiglio ma anche da PP. Clemente con dire anco à Sua Eminenza che non lo poteva fare absque consensu Papae.*

Si era così ridotto il Principe in termine di non far più altro ne più concedere questi spazii, ma i buoni ministri ed intimi Consiglieri lo sedussero come suol sempre succedere che questi sieno causa delle male operazioni de Principi. Un giorno trovandomi...

deve, un giorno trovandomi con Sua Eminenza in (82) Sant'Antonio mi disse, Mi avete detto che non lo posso fare senza il consenso del Papa, ed io li dico che li miei Consultori mi dicono che non entra il Papa in questo caso (83); io lo voglio fare perche sono padrone. Io li allegai un esemplare al'ora simile a questo del spatio della comunità nel quale per poterlo tenere fù deputato (34) in Roma e se (85) fù bisogno il (86) consenso Pontificio.

Finalmente per non tediare a Vostra Signoria sopra il fatto di questa pretesa imposizione di dazio riferisco un'esemplare che successe nell'anno 1615 (87) in simil caso al tempo di Papa Paulo V felice recordia (88) la Università della Città Notabile ò siano li Giurati di essa mandorono in Roma a un certo Eremita Spagnolo che stava alla grotta di San Paulo fuor de'le mura (89) per negoziare con il Papa che si degnasse comandare al Capitolo che dai da quattro ò cinque mila scudi della Cattedrale per fortificar la Città Notabile come Madre di tutta l'Isola con allegare questa ragione che tolta la Città non vi sarà più Cattedrale. Il Papa rispose che sia notificato il Capitolo della Cattedrale il cui Procuratore, allora il Dottore (90) e Canonico Don Francesco Vassallo, si ritrovava in Roma; notificato di questo di subito comparve inante Nostro Signore e li rispose in questo modo: 'Beato Padre, per il fortificare la Città di Malta tocca far la spesa a que'li che possedono le intrate di detta Città e che possedono anche molti feghi ed intrate ascendenti alla somma di 30 mila scudi. Faccino prima il debito loro in detta fabrica e se mancherà il Capitolo in subsidium fara il dovere quando Sua Beatitudine vorrà e quanto (91) li comanderà'. Il Papa allora disse (92): 'Da che il fatto va in ta' modo non vogliamo far altro'. Insino oggi mai più si tratto di questo. In tal modo si dovrebbe comparire e rispondere in questo caso coram Santissimo il quale senza fallo sentirà le ragioni e farà comp'imento di giustizia a tutti. Sed quis erit iste, hominem non hebemus. Tutto questo che insino adesso ho riferito a Vostra Signoria Illustrissima l'ho letto dal registro di tutti li privilegi della Città Notabile il quale durò in poter mio per spatio di tre anni mentre che ivi io tenevo la schola salariato della Catedrale del'a Città e del Gran maestro, e se Vostra Signoria troverà qualche parola sconcia o barbara contrò la lingua toscana mi perdoni ed accetti l'animo si ben le forse o la debiltà del mio ingegno manchino.

Averei da dire più cose a questo proposito ma in carta ho pensato esser meglio ed espediente tacerle, accio non sia tedio a Vostra Signoria l'lustrissima con la mia prolixità quale prego Nostro Signore Iddio conservi ad maiora.

(82) A *nella villa di*. (83) A *particolare*. (84) B *disputato*. (85) A *ci*. (86) A *del*. (87) B *omit's nell'anno 1615*. (88) A *memoria*. (89) A *extra moenia* (90) A *Decano*. (91) A *quando*. (92) A *adds il Pontefice*.