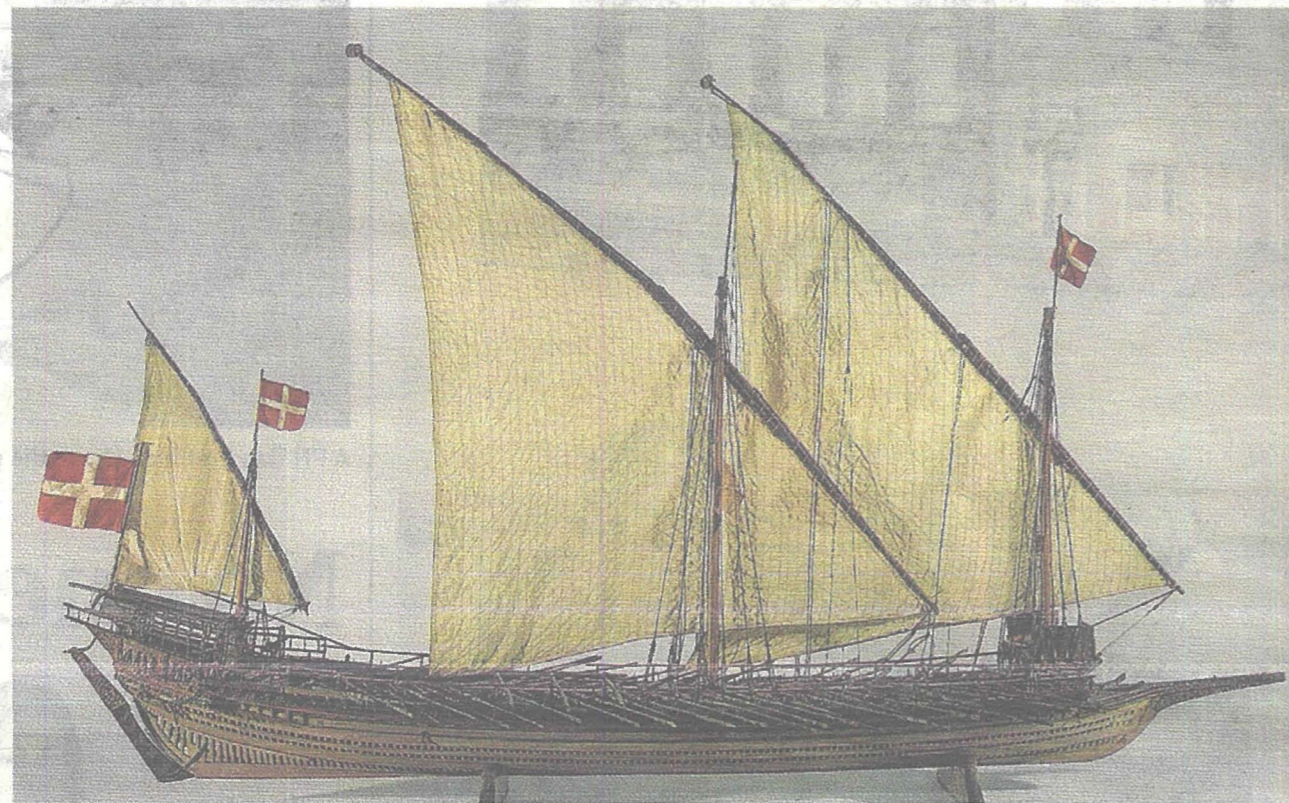


## LIFE AND WELLBEING HISTORY

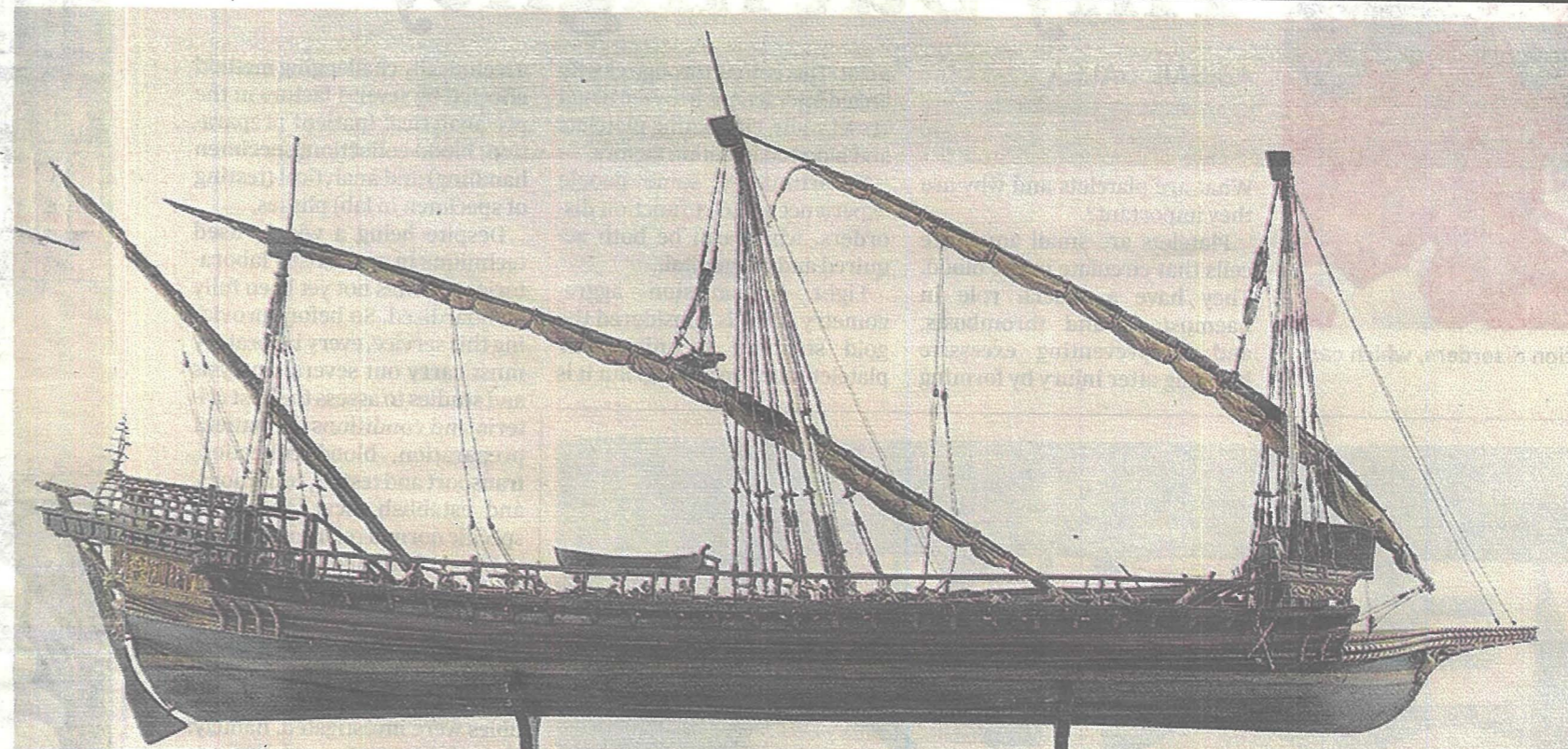
## It happened in July



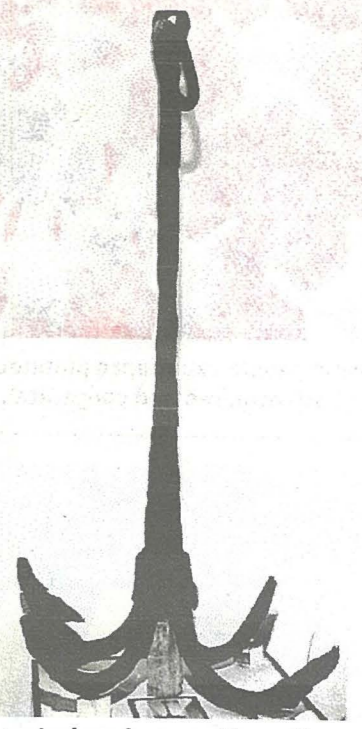
Grand Master Antoine de Paule (1623-36) instituted a galley foundation for the replacement costs of a galley.



A model of a regular galley.



A model of a galley flagship, the *Capitana*.

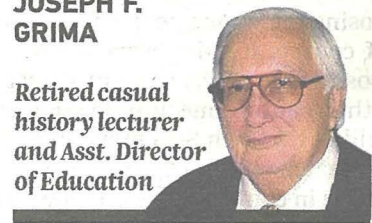


A typical anchor used by galleys exhibited at the Malta Maritime Museum, Vittoriosa. COURTESY: HERITAGE MALTA

# Maintenance of the Order's galley squadron from 1637 to 1649

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It has been categorically stated that the war galley squadron of the Order of St John was "the outward and visible sign of the obligation to engage in continuous war against the infidel". Throughout its 268-year sojourn on the Maltese islands, the size of this squadron varied from as few as three to as many as eight galleys in service.

The Order's Treasury always remained ultimately responsible for the general maintenance of the squadron and all the relevant accounts were handled by Treasury officials, except during a 12-year period, covering the years from 1637 to 1649, when maintenance expenses were administered by members of the Order acting as private contractors. The first such contract was signed and published on July 20, 1637.

By 1637, the Order was realising that the expenses of the galley squadron – six components since 1627 – had become over-inflated. In 1605, the upkeep of a war galley was calculated to be between 18,000 and 20,000

scudi, while it was reckoned that costs had risen to about 24,000 scudi for each war vessel in 1631. It was further estimated that costs had increased by another 2,000 scudi per galley by the year 1637.

The money spent on the squadron represented a very high percentage of the Order of St John's income. During the magistracy of Antoine de Paule (1623-36), there were five galley foundations in being – including one set up by de Paule himself – which meant that replacement costs were borne by these institutions.

During this same grand master's rule, the average yearly income of the Order was about 270,000 scudi, out of which about 125,000 scudi – about 46 per cent – were being spent on the galley squadron.

Although this naval defence budget perhaps constituted too large a percentage of the Order's total expenditure, yet it had many multiplier effects.

Hundreds of Maltese worked directly on the galleys, while others – such as caulkers, blacksmiths, sail-makers, carpenters and rope-makers – were engaged on ancillary services directly concerned with the squadron when refitting, caulking and careening were in progress.

The income of the population in 1632 shows that, out of a

population of about 52,000 souls, no less than 3,080 men were directly engaged on the Order's galleys. Of these, 1,459 slaves and jailbirds were not paid for their services, but they still had to be fed and clothed. The rest earned their living directly from the military and naval service they rendered on board the galleys.

There was the feeling that a private contractor would be in a better position to streamline expenses and spend less than the Order's Treasury.

An example of such economy measures had existed in the papal naval squadron. Between 1611 and 1621, the recurring maintenance expenses of this squadron were farmed out to two successive private contractors who were paid a fixed sum of money and, in return, they supplied the necessary services. However, the papal provider was also the commander of the squadron.

When comparing systems, it was probably realised that the Order was being somewhat inefficient and wasteful, so a better way to maintain the galley squadron was sought.

In May 1637, the knight Fra Antonio Papacoda, the then current captain of the galley *San Nicola*, offered to take care of the maintenance of just one galley for the sum of 20,000 scudi annually, a figure which

compared very favourably with the calculated costs of between 24,000 and 26,000 scudi being spent between 1631 and 1637 on each single galley. The offer was accepted by the Order's Council which, however, made a clear preference for farming out the expenses of the whole squadron altogether instead of just one galley.

**"That the Order saved money from farming out the squadron's maintenance costs is beyond doubt. Both contractors probably also made profit"**

In June 1637, there was a further development: it was made known that Bailiff Fra Don Carlo Valdina – a former captain-general of the squadron – was willing to take over the maintenance expenses of all the squadron. He requested the payment of 20,000 scudi for each galley but asked for 23,000 scudi for the *Capitana* (the flagship) which was larger than the other vessels.

Therefore, this request was for a total of 123,000 scudi annually. Based on the 1631 to 1637 reported costs, this would mean an annual saving of between 24,000 and 36,000 scudi for the Order.

The Order's Council decided to accept the offer and signed a contract with Valdina – drawn up by Notary Michele Ralli – valid for four years with effect from July 20, 1637.

By the end of the four-year period, the Order came to the unsurprising conclusion that substantial pecuniary benefits had accrued from farming out the squadron's expenses.

Therefore, on November 8, 1641, a decision was taken to issue a sort of call for tenders with the ensuing contract to be awarded to whoever offered the best quotation. There do not seem to have been new applicants – or, perhaps, no one bettered Valdina's offer – because, six days later, the Order again entered into a notarial contract with Valdina similar to the one signed in 1637, but this time expiring in 1645.

It seems that, in 1644, there were fears that Valdina might desist from honouring his contractual obligations before the current contract elapsed in 1645. So Grand Master Jean Paul Lascaris Castellar (1636-57) was induced to take over the galley contract, on a private basis, if such an eventuality did occur.

In April 1645, Valdina died and so Lascaris took over by virtue of two conditional contracts he had signed in July and December 1644.

The Lascaris contract remained in force for a further four years, even though it was supposed to be binding for six years, ending in 1651. It was terminated in May 1649 and the upkeep of the Order's war galleys henceforth reverted, as had been the case prior to 1637, to the direct responsibility of the Order's Treasury.

But was this policy of farming out the maintenance of the galley squadron beneficial for the Order or was it detrimental to its monetary interests?

The members of the Order's Council and the procurators of the Common Treasury were convinced that thousands of scudi were being saved every year and the figures already quoted above bear out their contention.

One can point out that, on occasions, differences arose between contractor Valdina and the Treasury. However, despite the various written harangues and memorials, affairs seem to have always been settled amicably. It seems that litigation only occurred during the period covered by the second contract, from 1641 to 1645.

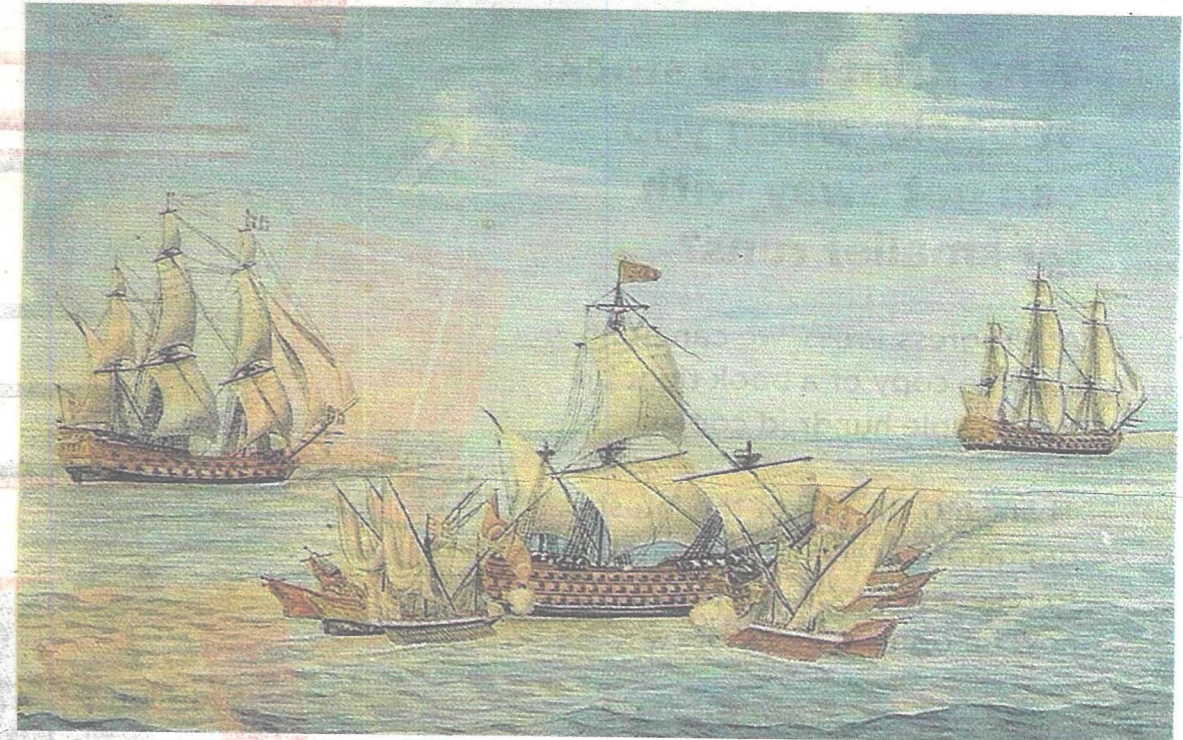
One must note that the Treasury still paid out the same sum of 123,000 scudi as

in the previous four years but prices must have risen, thus leading to litigation. Valdina did not want to incur personal losses, and the already-mentioned fear that he might repudiate his obligations was the probable reason why Lascaris was induced to take over the contract if Valdina relinquished it.

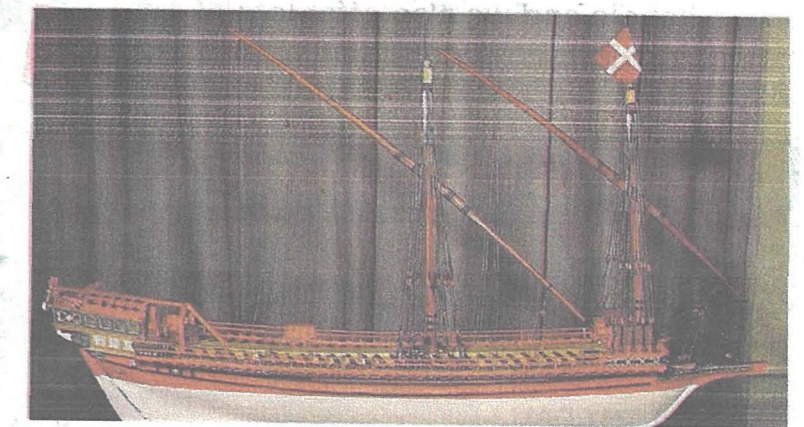
When Valdina died in April 1645, the squadron was not prepared and ready for immediate naval undertakings, but it is impossible to determine whether this was the result of pique or due to ill-health on Valdina's part. Lascaris then took over the contract for the same payment of 123,000 scudi annually.

However, just three years later, in April 1648, Lascaris was complaining of high prices and requested to be relieved of his contractual obligations, but the Order's Council did not comply with his wish. However, a year later, a second similar request was accepted and the grand master's contractual obligations were allowed to lapse.

That the Order saved money from farming out the squadron's maintenance costs is beyond doubt. Both contractors probably also made profit because of them being in a much better position to take immediate advantage of favourable opportunities, unlike a governmental entity



War galleys of the Order capturing a great Ottoman galleon in 1644.



A late 17th-century model of a Maltese galley at the Malta Maritime Museum, Vittoriosa. COURTESY: HERITAGE MALTA