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MONOGRÁFICO · SPECIAL ISSUE

VIAJE DEL MUNDO
ENSAYOS EN HONOR A CARLOS MARTÍNEZ SHAW

A TRAVELLING WORLD
ESSAYS IN HONOR OF CARLOS MARTÍNEZ SHAW

CONSULS AND COMMERCE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF MALTA'S CONSULAR SERVICE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SPAIN

LOS CÓNSULES Y EL COMERCIO: EL DESARROLLO DEL SERVICIO CONSULAR DE MALTA EN LA ESPAÑA DEL SIGLO XVIII

Carmel Vassallo¹

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Summary

Merchants in foreign lands trading in alien and occasionally hostile cities naturally banded together and often appointed a spokesman or leader to conduct affairs of common interest with the local authorities. In due course their role was taken over by consuls nominated by sending states and recognized by the receiving states but the transition was not always a smooth one, as is demonstrated by the evolution of Hospitaller Malta's consular network in Early Modern Spain. Indeed, despite burgeoning trade links which resulted in the presence in eighteenth-century Spain of a widespread mercantile diaspora of Maltese traders the latter often had to do with makeshift arrangements for much of the century to defend and promote their interests.

Key Words

Maltese; Consuls; Spain; Diasporas; Traders; Eighteenth Century

Resumen

Los comerciantes en tierras extranjeras que comercian en ciudades hostiles y desconocidas, de manera natural se unían y designaban a un portavoz, o líder, para conducir los asuntos de interés común con las autoridades locales. Poco a poco su papel fue asumido por cónsules designados por los enviados diplomáticos de los Estados, y reconocidos por los países de destino, pero la transición no fue siempre igual, como lo demuestra la evolución de la red consular de la Orden Hospitalaria de Malta en la España de la Edad Moderna. De hecho, a pesar de los florecientes eslabones comerciales que se pueden observar en la España del siglo XVIII en la extendida diáspora mercantil de comerciantes malteses, posteriormente muchos de

1. University of Malta.

ellos tuvieron que hacer frente a acuerdos improvisados durante la mayor parte del siglo para defender y promover sus intereses.

Palabras Clave

Maltés; Cónsules; España; Diásporas; Comerciantes

MALTA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH SPAIN is a long-standing one starting when the Maltese Islands entered the Aragonese sphere of influence after the 1282 revolt against Angevin rule in Sicily known as the Sicilian Vespers². In 1530 Charles v entrusted Malta to the Knights of Saint John and with the benefit of hindsight we know that the Great Siege of 1565 a few decades later marked the climax of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem's *raison d'être* as a bulwark against the Ottoman Empire's onslaught on Christian Europe's southern flank. During the seventeenth century this role was gradually eroded and the onset of the eighteenth century saw the emergence of a new policing role in defense of European trade routes³.

During the sixteenth and the earlier part of the seventeenth centuries Spanish influence had continued to hold sway over the Order, but the latter part of the seventeenth and all of the eighteenth centuries were periods of increasing French prominence. This was due to a variety of reasons. The formal tie with the Spanish Monarchy had been temporarily cut with the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, when the Island of Sicily had been transferred to Duke Victor Amadeo II of Savoy, who became King and thus feudal lord of Malta⁴. Another reason for the decline of Spain's influence in the island had to do with the fact that France increasingly accounted for the largest proportion of the Order's knights and income⁵. The early eighteenth century also marked an important leap forward in France's commercial interests in the Levant which resulted in a more prominent role for Malta as both a staging post of this trade and as a re-distributor of other countries' products⁶.

The declining Spanish presence in the Mediterranean was also the result of Spain's own shifting preoccupations as the Atlantic became the scene for a rekindled interest in her American empire⁷. Occupied as she was with her colonies, the Mediterranean only held what Ruigómez García has referred to as, 'residual interests' to do with dynastic considerations and policies or postures concerned with safeguarding commercial interests under continual threat from predatory corsairs⁸. Though able to come to an agreement with Morocco's Muhammed ibn Abdallah, Spain's monarchy found Algiers too tough a nut to crack and the key to Malta's preferential access to Spain probably lies in the latter's perception of the island as still having a strategic value in the policy of containing the North African threat.

2. Abreviaturas utilizadas: AHN, OM, SJ = Archivo Histórico Nacional, Órdenes Militares, San Juan de Jerusalén; ACM = Archives of the Cathedral, Mdina; AOM = Archives of the Order of Malta; NAM, CM, AO = National Archives of Malta, Consolato di Mare, Atti Originali; NLM = National Library of Malta; ACA, RA = Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, Real Audiencia; ACA, OM, GP = Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, Órdenes Militares, Gran Prior de Cataluña; ACA, TRCC = Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, Tribunal del Real Consulado de Comercio; IMHB = Instituto Municipal d'Historia de Barcelona; NAV = Notarial Archives, Valletta.

3. FONTENAY, 1988, 383.

4. SALVA 1984, 208.

5. ABDILIA, 1972, 182. Paul Chetcuti has claimed that at the end of the eighteenth century France accounted for two thirds of the Order's annual income of around 1.25 million scudi (CHETCUTI, 1968, pp. 3-9).

6. GODECHOT, 1951 *passim*; CARRIERE, 1973, 224; MALLIA MILANES, 1974 and 1978.

7. Most agree with Domínguez Ortiz concerning the importance of America in eighteenth-century diplomacy but consensus seems to stop there (Domínguez Ortiz, 1980, 316). Tedde de Lorca, for example, believes that Spain's intervention in the American War of Independence had mostly to do with perceived economic interests (TEDDE DE LORCA, 1989, 215). Agustín González Enciso, on the other hand, is of the opinion that political goals were still predominant in the eighteenth century (GONZÁLEZ ENCISO, 1988, 8-9).

8. RUIGÓMEZ GARCÍA, 1988.

But the strategic value of the island was not limited to Spain's North African policy. She was also intent that the island should maintain its neutrality vis-a-vis other Christian states. This was clearly demonstrated at the beginning of the century, in 1718, when the Spanish Viceroy, Commander de Lede, suspended the all-important grain shipments from Sicily because the Order was perceived as not being sufficiently neutral⁹. This policy of supporting the Order in Malta, in an effort to deny its use to an enemy or potential enemy was also evident at the end of the eighteenth century, when Godoy sought to prevent the concession of a foothold in the Mediterranean to the Russian Empire, ally of the English, in the 1790s¹⁰.

Allied to these practical political and military considerations, the Spanish Monarchy also held the Order in high esteem because of its glorious crusading past as a brother-in-arms against the infidel¹¹. This was reflected in the honours accorded to the Order's Ambassadors at the court in Madrid. According to Jaime Salva, 'Con arreglo a la etiqueta de la corte, siempre habían gozado los Embajadores de Malta determinadas preeminencias SOBRE los llamados Ministros de República, sin alcanzar, empero, los honores correspondientes a los enviados de testas coronadas'¹². The following were the Order's ambassadors in Madrid during the eighteenth century.

TABLE 1. AMBASSADORS OF THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN IN MADRID DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
Source: Salva 1984, pp. 208–218.

YEAR OF APPOINTMENT	NAME
1717	Comendador Don Pedro Davila y Guzman
1738	Don José de Tapia y Beaumont, Marqués de Claramonte
1742	Bailio Don Francisco de Frías y Haro
1756	Bailio Don Fernando de Aguilera

9. MALLIA, 1976, 81.

10. SCHOP SOLER, 1984, 35–42.

11. In a letter dated 31 October 1762 Grand Master Pinto stated that, 'Gli Negozianti Maltesi godono effettivamente grazie assai singolari nelli regni di Francia, Spagna e Portogallo, concesute loro dalla Real munificenza delli rispettivi Monarchi unicamente perche sono Vassalli della Religione da essi onerata in tutte le circostanze' (cited in MALLIA MILANES 1974, p. 520). This is confirmed for Spain in a letter dated 18 September 1743 from the Marquis de la Ensenada to the Ambassador of Malta in Spain, in which he informs him that the authorities in Cadiz had been informed not to increase the rate of duty payable by the Maltese, 'reglandose a los Aranzales que estubieron establecidos para escusar todo motivo de sentimiento a la religion de San Juan a quien S.M. quiere mantener las señales del amor, y distincion con que siempre la ha tratado' (AHN, OM San Juan, Lengua de Castilla, Asamblea Caja 8042 no. 1). This generally positive attitude must have been reinforced by the direct personal contacts between the Spanish nobility and the Order, which continued until the very end of the century, with young Spanish noblemen doing periods of military service in Malta. But the reverse was also possible. As Nunn and Morales Alvarez have pointed out, foreigners who rendered military services to the Spanish Crown were very highly regarded and received special privileges denied other foreigners (NUNN, 1979, p. 113; MORALES ALVAREZ, 1980, 377). Non-Spanish members of the Order like Baron de Corondelet and Don Santiago de Liniers reached the very top of the administration as Vice-roys in the Americas (MORALES ALVAREZ, 1980, 377). Less well known is the recruitment by the Spanish navy in the eighteenth century of hundreds perhaps even thousands of experienced Maltese seamen in an effort to remedy the chronic shortage of manpower for its expanding fleet (VASSALLO BORG, 1990). The relatively favourable treatment meted out to Maltese merchants in general is probably not unrelated to this latter phenomenon.

12. SALVA, 1984, 209.

YEAR OF APPOINTMENT	NAME
1771	Bailio Don Fernando de Melgarejo y Puigmari
1777	Bailio de Lora, Marques de la Vega de Armijo
1784	Bailio Don Francisco de Sousa

These ambassadors were ordinarily involved with political issues and protocol and had their hands full trying to keep a neutral stance between France and Spain¹³. Only exceptionally did they take a direct interest in matters, such as commerce, which most WOULD have considered below their station as noblemen-at-arms¹⁴.

In addition to the ambassadors, the Order also had a vast network of administrators who looked after its estates and other matters. This financial department, treasury or 'general banker' as Thornton has called it, was primarily responsible for the Order's own affairs, but a lesser known role was that of defending the Maltese traders' commercial interests, acting on their behalf and at times arranging for the transfer of their funds¹⁵. Well before the emergence of an extensive network of consuls abroad Maltese merchants could already count on the support of the *bailios* and *recividores*, as well as the many members of the Order, whose intervention could at times be crucial. Michel Fontenay in fact has shown that network of correspondents was probably unequalled by any known commercial or diplomatic organization at the time or at present, with the possible exception of the network of Papal representatives¹⁶. The only problem was that, setting aside some exceptions, these representatives of the Order were mostly to be found away from the towns on the Southern and Eastern coasts of Spain where Maltese merchants were curving out new markets for themselves and this was to be the main rationale behind the remarkable consular network which was to come into being during the course of the eighteenth century.

1. CONSULS

A general history of the consular function is beyond the scope of this short essay and it will suffice to reiterate Jan Melissen's and Ana Mar Fernandez's assertion that 'The designation 'consul' has been used for a host of different functions'¹⁷. Nevertheless,

13. Refer FONTENAY, 2001.

14. One such exceptional incursion was that by the Marquis de la Vega de Armijo, ambassador at the time of the enactment of the Junta de Comercio's edicts on Maltese traders (SALVA, 1984, p. 221). Erik Thomson, who has studied the matter of the attitude of French and Swedish ambassadors towards trade matters, has shown that while the former considered such matters beneath their station, the latter felt that it was a core activity (THOMSON, 2006).

15. THORNTON, 1836, 3.

16. FONTENAY, 1988, 379.

17. MELISSEN & FERNANDEZ, 2011, p. 226. In a footnote on the same page the authors set out some of the scholars who have recently studied the institution from a commercial, political or legal perspective. Note in particular here Jörg Ulbert and Gérard Le Bouéd's *La fonction consulaire à l'époque moderne. L'affirmation d'une institution économique et politique (1500-1700)*, Rennes, 2006 concerning the function of the consul in the Early Modern Period.

there seems to be broad agreement that before being taken in hand by the state and regulated, consuls had already come into being as a direct response to the needs of foreign merchants abroad. As Platt has pointed out, 'It was a natural development that merchants overseas, trading in alien and occasionally hostile cities, should band together, and that they should then appoint a spokesman or leader to conduct affairs of common interest with the local authorities'¹⁸. For example, several authors have highlighted the important role which the *Consules de Ultramar* had in both the promotion of Catalonia's international trade and the expansion of the Aragonese Crown in the Mediterranean¹⁹. In fact, the existence of Barcelona's overseas consuls may have even preceded the formal establishment of the Consulado de Mar in Barcelona in 1348, or the earlier promulgation, by Jaime I in 1258, of the 'Ordenaciones de Ribera'²⁰. The *Alhondiga*, *Fonduc*, or consular compound was in fact a veritable Catalan enclave with warehouses, accommodation, baths, taverns, markets, and places of worship attended by resident clerics²¹. In a similar fashion, but probably not on such an elaborate scale, the presence of foreign consuls became more and more widespread in Spain itself²².

From the sixteenth century onwards there was a gradual shift in the structure of foreign consular representation within Spain and previously predominant Italian republics like Genoa and Venice declined in importance²³. As the latter lost ground as centres of trade and finance, their place was gradually taken over by France, England, Holland and the Hanseatic States which, from the mid-seventeenth century onwards extended their consular networks in Spain, the Mediterranean and the Muslim states, in keeping with their increasingly vigorous trade in these areas, but also reflecting the long term shift in the Western world's centre of gravity towards the Atlantic. The French, who were the most numerous and active of the foreign merchants in Spain, had consuls in Corunna, Bilbao, Barcelona, Alicante, Malaga, Seville, Cadiz, San Sebastian, San Lucar, Gibraltar, Cartagena, Valencia and other places in the latter years of the seventeenth century²⁴. One exception to this trend of declining fortunes for Mediterranean operators was the case of Malta, whose consular network multiplied at least six fold from two or three at the beginning of the eighteenth century to nineteen by the end of it and is probably one of the best indicators of the nature of the growth of Maltese trading activity in Spain in that century. As Kamen has noted, '...the principal trade centres of Spain could usually be identified by the presence of a foreign consul'²⁵.

18. PLATT, 1971, 5.

19. LÓPEZ DE MENESES, 1956; CAPMANY Y DE MONPALAU, 1961; DUFOURQ, 1966; CARRERÉ, 1967; LALINDE ABADIA, 1979 and others as well as several interesting, but regrettably unpublished, thesis at the University of Barcelona.

20. According to Arcadi García and Max Colmer there was already a Catalan consul in Tyre in the twelfth century but it is not clear what the source of their information is (GARCÍA & COLMER, 1973, p. 522). Carreré has also noted that in the absence of consuls Catalan citizens took it upon themselves to inform Barcelona of important commercial or political news (CARRERÉ, 1967, pp. 58–59).

21. LÓPEZ DE MENESES, 1956, 103–104.

22. ZORN KRAUSE, 1978, 31–36

23. PRADELLES NADAL, 1988, 115–119

24. KAMEN, 1980, 145

25. *Ibidem*.

Consuls for the Maltese had existed from as early as the late fifteenth century and probably even earlier. A letter from Ferdinand the Catholic King to his Sicilian Viceroy Joan de Nusa, dated 5 January 1498, makes reference to the ancient right of the Maltese to have consuls in Sicily to represent their interests, as well as administer civil and criminal justice amongst them²⁶. But the relationship between Malta and Sicily was a special one. In fact in 1697 the Viceroy of Sicily, Pietro Colon, declared ‘...non esser mai stata detta Isola reputata per straniera, avendo sempre goduto il privilegio d’unita, annessa e dipendente del Regno di Sicilia’²⁷. This situation seems to have lasted until 1747, when a new Royal Order put Malta on the same footing as other foreign countries in requiring the royal *placet* or confirmation of their approval.

The coming of the Order of Saint John seems to have resulted in more attention being given to the Island’s ‘diplomatic service’, and this is reflected in the ever-increasing sums of money being spent on the maintenance abroad of ambassadors and other representatives²⁸. The procedure used by the Grandmaster to appoint consuls has been described by Mallia-Milanes in his study on Maltese consuls in Venice during the eighteenth century²⁹. In the first instance, the Grandmaster would remit the *commission consulaire* to the governing body of the receiving state, either directly or through the Order’s authorized agent or receiver residing in that particular city or in the district comprising that city or port. The receiving state would then normally furnish the respective consul with an *exequatur* or *placet*, a document showing that it had recognized his character, and was declaring him free to discharge his duties as consul and to enjoy consular privileges. The *commission consulaire* had no legal significance until the *exequatur* had been granted.

As far as early eighteenth-century Spain is concerned, the Order would seem to have had consuls recognized as such in Cartagena, where Don Pedro Pablo Merizano served from 1703 to 1707³⁰; Alicante where Don Juan Antonio Corsiniani was in office in 1713³¹; and Valencia in 1716³². The choice of the first city, the Spanish Navy’s main base in the Mediterranean, fitted in perfectly with the needs that would have arisen as a consequence of the Order’s joint naval operations with the Spanish Navy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries³³, a military cooperation which continued throughout the eighteenth century³⁴. Alicante on the other

26. ACM (Archive of the Cathedral, Mdina) Mdina Ms. 27 pp. 182–184) in Mifsud 1917 p. 57.

27. AOM 1702, 1971 ff. 267 268 cited in MALLIA-MILANES, 1971, 326.

28. BLOUET, 1981, 106–107

29. MALLIA-MILANES, 1971, 322

30. AHN Estado, Leg 611, Doc 128 s.f. In his application to be confirmed in his post as Consul of Malta in Cartagena dated 21 January 1708, Mitre talks of his predecessor Don Pedro Pablo Merizano’s term of office lasting from 4 July 1703 to 7 February 1707.

31. An unsigned document in AHN Estado, Leg. 619/1 dated 11 April 1713 entitled ‘Extracto sobre Instancia de Don Bartholomé Mitre, Consul de Malta in Cartagena’, speaks of a consul for the Order in Alicante by the name of Juan Antonio Corsiniani.

32. AHN, Estado Leg. 610/2 No. 405 s.f

33. SALVA, 1944.

34. AHN Estado, Leg. 612. A report by the Junta de Extranjeros, dated 2 December 1723, talks of the twice-yearly patrols by the Order’s warships off the Spanish coast. AHN Estado Leg. 610/2 Document 405 dated 23 June 1716 also declares, in order to justify the need for a consul in Malaga that ‘En tiempos pasados no fueron menester en Málaga

hand, though undoubtedly also a port of call for the Order's warships, was already established as a destination for Maltese commercial shipping³⁵. This probably also applied to Valencia, which, together with Cartagena and Alicante, was also cited in a report by the *Consejo de Estado* dated 23 June 1716 as being one of the three places where the 'Maltese Nation' had consuls³⁶. No further information was given on the consul in Valencia. There is, on the other hand, no definite confirmation of a Maltese consul in Barcelona at the outset of the eighteenth century as claimed by Eloy Martín Corrales³⁷. In fact the person who acted on behalf of the Maltese traders in their confrontation with the *Confraria de Sant Julia dels Mercers Botiguers* in the mid 1720s was the Receiver of the Order in Barcelona, Don Anton Ribes. There is indeed no evidence of a Maltese consul in Barcelona until 1743, when Bonaventura Canet was nominated by the Grandmaster, but there is no sign that he was confirmed in his post³⁸. During the course of the first half of the century there is, in fact, no indication that the increasing amount of Maltese trade with Spain was being reflected in a corresponding growth in its consular network, although the Grandmaster was issuing the corresponding *commission consulaire* to appointees in various cities. Up to 1762 the various Grandmasters had issued patents for the cities of Barcelona, Cadiz, Seville, Malaga, Denia, Vinaroz, Campo de Gibraltar, Majorca, Almeria, Algeciras and the Canary Islands³⁹. But there is no record that these were found acceptable to the Spanish authorities and no corresponding *exequatur*, or confirmation, was issued with the possible exception of the one for Malaga⁴⁰.

One of the reasons for this non-recognition lay, partly, in the hard-line policy adopted by the Spanish State in the early part of the century vis-a-vis the appointment of foreign consuls, whereby only renewals of consular posts existing at the time of Charles II were, in principle, being granted⁴¹.

The other major reason lay in the fact that practically all the consular appointees put forward by the Grand Master of the Order were non-Maltese. This went directly against one of the requirements for appointment as a foreign consul, namely, that of being a national of the country making the appointment⁴².

Consules de Malta, porque la Religion no tenia esquadra de Navios, pero de 14 a 15 años, a esta parte la obsten tan quatro Vaxeles suios, en todos los Mares del Mediterraneo, y a la esquadra, es yndispensable tener Consul en Malaga, siendo una de las principales Costas de la Marina de su Magestad.' Fontenay has described the gradual reduction of the number of galleys in the Order's navy following the decision in 1700 to introduce three ships of the line which were subsequently joined by a fourth (FONTENAY, 1991, 114–115). The first campaign took place in 1705. It is probable that Maltese seamen first came into direct contact with the Iberian coast while manning the Order's ships. Serving as a sailor on the Order's warships was apparently not incompatible with trading. In 1751–1752 a company consisting of Giovanni Xicluna, Claudio Salamone, Giovanni Formosa and Salvatore Nocchiero made considerable profits buying and selling in Malta, Malaga, Gibraltar, Cadiz and Lisbon whilst serving on one of the Order's warships patrolling in those waters (NAM, CM, AO, Vol 43 Year 1752).

35. MOIL GONZÁLEZ, 1983 pp. 85, 151, 156, 169, 171 and 218.

36. AHN, Estado Leg. 610/2 No. 405 s.f.

37. MARTÍN CORRALES, 1990, p. 155 fn 40

38. AOM, Ms. 6429

39. *Ibidem*.

40. AHN, Estado Leg. 610/2 No. 405. Año 1716.

41. *Ibidem*.

42. AHN, Estado Leg. 623/2 No. 529. Año 1722

The lack of suitable Maltese candidates was undoubtedly the major stumbling block in the expansion of the Maltese consular network in Spain. Bartholomé Mitre's appointment as consul in Cartagena seems to be the only one, with the possible exception of Esteban Fleuri di Vareilles' appointment in Malaga, to have received formal confirmation in his post, a confirmation which, as we shall see later, the Spanish authorities lived to regret.

In 1744 the Junta de Dependencias de Extranjeros, declared; '...Hizose presente que por el reglamento General dado para todas las naciones esta mandado que no se admita ningun Consul, que no sea vasallo, y subdito de la Potencia que le nombra; Y que en repetidas ocasiones ha solicitado la religion de Malta aprobacion de consules en distintas partes de este Reyno y se les ha negado en todas por no aver justificado los requisitos que deven proceder...'⁴³.

In the first half of the eighteenth century there seems to have been a measure of confusion as to what was, or was not, an acceptable consul and this led to a recommendation, by the Junta de Comercio y Dependencias de Extranjeros on 30 July 1763, that the rules and regulations for such appointments be formally set out. This was apparently accepted by the Monarch, who issued a Real Cedula on the 23 June 1765. Rule 2 of the 1765 Real Cedula, stating 'Que hayan de justificar ser Vasallos nativos del Príncipe ô Estado que los nombre, sin que les aproveche tener carta ô Privilegio de connaturalizacion en sus Dominios y no estar domiciliados en alguno de los de España...', had already become accepted practice as part of the apparently tougher stance adopted by the Monarchy towards foreigners in general and foreign representatives in particular, an attitude to which the Bartholomé Mitre affair which we set out below may have contributed⁴⁴.

Bartholomé Mitre, a merchant, was appointed consul in the city of Cartagena and its port to succeed Pedro Pablo Merizano, the previous consul who had died on 7 February 1707⁴⁵. The post was apparently handed down from one member of the family to another, because Merizano had been Mitre's uncle on his mother's side and at some time in the past Don Jaume Mitre, his father, an innkeeper in the Plaza de Carnicerias, had also occupied the post of Maltese consul. The father had apparently been born in Malta, but Bartholomé himself was born in Cartagena while his father was serving as consul there. Bartholomé also had a brother, Pedro, who was the captain of a Maltese ship. Bartholomé Mitre's appointment as consul of Malta in Cartagena was confirmed by Madrid on 24 August 1711.

Just a few months after his confirmation he appealed to the Consejo de Estado concerning what he considered an infringement of his rights as a consul in requiring him to contribute towards a tax levied in Cartagena. The local authorities had apparently confiscated an item of clothing of his as payment. The Consejo de Estado sent instructions to the Governor of Cartagena that Mitre's property be returned

43. AHN, Estado Leg. 607/2 No. 933 Año 1744. As late as 1768 the Grand Master was not aware of this rule, according to a letter from his Spanish secretary Lores to Melgarejo dated 15 March 1768 (AHN, OM, SJJ Asamblea Caja 8048/1).

44. AHN, Estado 643 No. 1140 Año 1765.

45. AHN, Estado 611. No. 180 Año 1712.

to him and that in future the exemptions to which he was entitled to by virtue of his consular office be respected⁴⁶.

The municipal authorities were unsure as to what exemptions they were supposed to grant, particularly because Mitre's predecessor had contributed to local taxes like any other citizen and Mitre himself had been born and bred in Cartagena, so they asked for a ruling. The Consejo wrote to the Governor asking him to investigate.

On 26 June 1713 he answered that he felt that the consul of the Order should be exempted from having to contribute to local taxes or provide accommodation for troops. In any case, according to the Governor, the municipal authorities of Cartagena had failed to provide documentary evidence that Maltese consuls had ever paid taxes in the past⁴⁷. Up to here at least, Mitre still seemed to have had the upper hand.

On 16 and 19 July 1713 the matter passed into the hands of the Consejo de Guerra de Justicia, which was of the opinion, contrary to what had been expressed by the Governor of Cartagena, that there was no reason why Mitre, a subject of his Majesty and a merchant, should not fall under civil jurisdiction. The members of the Consejo de Guerra de Justicia declared that '...el officio de Consul consistía en ser un Agente para solicitar que se administrase Justicia a los de su Nación, y no podia, ni debia permitirsele otra cosa...'⁴⁸. The matter was evidently turning to wider issues.

Earlier in the proceedings, in August 1712, Mitre had been asked to choose between the benefits of being the consul of the Order or being a subject of the Spanish Monarch and he had chosen the former, undoubtedly moved by the desire to secure the attendant tax and other exemptions. But his insistence was apparently starting to annoy officials, who were appalled by his willingness to so lightly give up his status as a subject of the King.

On 23 October 1713, the Consejo de Guerra declared that '...no puede ni deve permitirse y mucho menos el desacato de asentar autenticamente que renuncia el onor de Basallo de su Mg. por ser dependiente del Ministerio de Malta, cuya osadia le hace indigno de uno y otro y debe obligar a dar providencia para que si la Religion de San Juan quiere tener Consules en España los embie desde Malta como lo practican las Naciones Amigas en virtud de capitulos de Paz...'⁴⁹.

The finale came on 11 April 1714 and it had grave consequences for both the Order and Mitre himself. In its declaration the Consejo de Estado said that '...atendiendo todas estas circunstancias no corresponda ninguna, â que la Religion de Malta, deba tener Consules en los puertos de España, pues ni respecto del principio, ni respecto del fin, parece haver motibo justo para que la religion de San Juan pretenda los referidos consules; no respecto del principio, por que el modo de el es por trato de paces entre soberanos ô por otra conbencion, ô contrato entre los mismos y este ni le ha havido con la Religion de San Juan, ni parece capaz pueda haverle;

46. PARRON SALAS, 1990, 43

47. AHN, Estado 619/1 Año 1713-1714

48. *Ibidem*.

49. *Ibidem*.

Ni tampoco respecto del fin por no ser la Religión de San Juan Nacion que necesite Consul que instruya a sus Peregrinos ô Comerciantes, ântes bien es un agregado de todas las Naciones y su Instituto estraño de todo genero de Comercio. Por cuyos motibos es de parecer la Junta se debe negar a la religión de San Juan el que pueda tener persona con nombre de Consul en los puertos de España...⁵⁰.

Nevertheless, although it was recommending against the appointment of consuls by the Order, it was not ruling out some form of representation; 'Y en caso que suponga necesidad de tener persona en los Puertos para los arribos de los Navios de la Religion, abasto de ellos, ô socorro de sus indibiduos, esta la puede tener con el nombre de factor, ô procurador, ô sindlco ô el que pareciese competente, no siendo el de consul pero que el que fuese haya de ser sin esencion ninguna...'⁵¹.

The last words, and the harshest, were reserved for Mitre, 'En quanto al particular de Don Bartolomé Mitre que con repetido desacierto antepuso el imagina-do interes de Consul de Malta al glorioso veneficio del nombre de Vassalo de Su Magestad, se deberá hacer saver al Ministro de Malta, y al gran Maestre elijan ôtro para sus dependencias en Cartajena por tener este exclusion por motibos que Su Magestad tiene para ello...'⁵².

I have quoted at length from the original documents to show clearly how the Mitre affair seems to have had a very negative impact on Malta's budding consular service and the Order was to find it increasingly difficult in subsequent decades to fill vacancies even in existing consular posts, let alone places where a consul had not existed previously.

On the one hand, the level of Maltese trade in the opening half of the eighteenth century was not yet sufficiently high to enable the Order to draw upon an existing pool of established Maltese nationals who might carry on consular duties alongside their normal business. That would only happen in the latter part of the century. Nor could the order justify sending and paying for full-time consuls because, once again, the volume of trade did not warrant it, as was made clear in a letter written by the Bailio Don Pedro Dávila y Guzmán in support of Marebeuf's appointment to the consular post of Alicante in 1723 in which he talked of '...reducirse el Cortissimo Comercio de aquella Isla, con estos Reynos, á muy pocas Embarcaciones y era muy corto el producto y util que dejaban a los Consules, con que por consecuencia no se podian mantener con los derechos tan limitados, y fuera preciso que la Religion los señalase crecidos salaries para mantenerse decorosamente, a lo que no alcanzaban sus Rentas...'⁵³.

The only other options left to the Order were to engage a Spaniard, highly unlikely in view of the Mitre experience over local taxes, dues, etc. or a foreigner, as in the case of Marabeuf for Alicante. Although Alicante was one of the handful of old-established consular posts, the Spanish authorities did not seem disposed to be flexible, as they may have been in the past in the case of Juan Bautista Corsimiani,

50. AHN, Estado Leg. 619/1 dated 11 April 1714

51. *Ibidem*.

52. *Ibidem*.

53. AHN, Estado Leg 612 Año 1723

for example, a Genoese gentleman who had at one time been consul in Alicante of Genoa, Malta, Florence and the Duchy of Savoy all at the same time, according to a declaration by Don Esteban Fleuri de Vareylles in 1716⁵⁴.

Between 1715 and 1761 there exists correspondence relating to attempts to obtain confirmation for the following consular appointees:

TABLE 2. MALTESE CONSULS SEEKING CONFIRMATION OF THEIR APPOINTMENTS 1715–1761
Source: Refer text.

YEAR	NAME	ATTRIBUTES	CONSULAR POST
1716	Esteban Fleuri de Vareylles	French (?)	Malaga
1722	Luis Robin	Non Spanish	Cadiz
1723	Francisco Marebeuf	Subject of Malta but not native of it	Alicante
1723	Bernardo Polart	Maltese grandparents	Denia
1733	Damian Valentini Rosique	Habit of the Order of Saint John	Malaga
1744	Jeronimo Masa	Genoese but with Spanish naturalization	Malaga

All of the above seem to have been rejected citing, usually, the Mitre affair. The attempt by Fleuri de Vareylles⁵⁵ and Marebeuf⁵⁶ to support their case by citing the Order's naval contribution to the Spanish Crown, tenure in the family of the post of consul for 16 years as in the case of Robin⁵⁷, reputed Maltese ancestry as in Polart's case⁵⁸, belonging to the Order as in Rosique's case⁵⁹ or the fact that ambassadorial, consular, agent or other similar posts were not open to native Maltese as claimed by Marebeuf⁶⁰ were not enough to move the authorities. Their official ruling was always clear and unequivocal: consular posts could not be occupied by Spaniards or nationals of states other than the state whom the consul represented. In practice one suspects that there must have been exceptions. Nevertheless, in general, it would seem as if the gradually increasing number of Maltese merchants had to rely upon agents or representatives who lacked official status in the receiving country. It is uncertain to what extent these posts attracted candidates in view of the Order's reluctance to pay for such services, as we saw above, or the absence of tax exemptions or such like from local authorities. This lack may have been compensated, in

54. AHN, Estado Leg. 610/2 No. 405. Año 1716

55. *Ibidem*.

56. AHN, Estado Leg. 612. Año 1723

57. AHN, Estado Leg. 623/2 No. 529. Año 1722

58. AHN, Estado Leg. 612. Año 1723

59. AHN, Estado Leg. 639 Año 1733

60. AHN, Estado Leg. 612 Año 1723

part, by recourse to the Order's Receivers or other officials, but, as Michel Fontenay has demonstrated the Order's overseas representatives were thinnest on the ground exactly in those areas, namely the Kingdom of Valencia, Murcia and Andalusia, where we know, with the benefit of hindsight, that the Maltese were curving out new markets for themselves⁶¹.

2. THE SECOND HALF OF THE CENTURY

Confirmation of the change in the official attitude towards the Order's consular appointments came in 1762, with the confirmation of the appointment as consul for the Kingdom of Valencia of Juan Bautista Gavarri. The *commission consulaire*, dated 30 November 1761, was accompanied by a covering letter stating arguments in favour of the application as was customary, as well as a wealth of detail on Gavarri himself. It stated; 'Que la Religion de San Juan establecida en Malta, se compone de nobles de todas las naciones Catholicas, y assi se ha reputado la Ysla por Patria comun... Que los Naturales de aquella Ysla son Marineros, texedores, y Hortelanos, y que assi se vé quan pocos se hallan extablecidos fuera...'⁶².

The same arguments were being put forward as had been put forward, and found lacking, earlier in the century. So what had happened in the intervening period that had caused the Spanish authorities to completely change their position? The answer, or so the official explanation would have it, lay in events immediately after the signing of the Treaty of Aachen in 1748: 'En el año de 1749, despues de hecha Paz con la Ynglaterra, solicitaron algunos Consules de esta Nacion la Real aprovacion sin Justificar todo lo prevenido en el citado Reglamento, y se les despacho á Consultas de la Junta, dispensandoseles lo que les faltaba, para que no se dilatase el darles la Real aprovacion al principio de la Paz, y assi se han dado varias aprovaciones Reales, y entre otras á Consultas de la Junta de 30 de Abril de 1746, 15 de Abril, y 21 de Mayo de 1761 á Don Luis Roquin el ser Vasallo nativo de Holanda para servir el Consulado de aquella Nacion en Barcelona, sin embargo de haversele negado dos veces por este motivo, á Don Miguel Pavis, el estar casado con Española para exercer el de Napoles en Cartagena y a Don Matheo Schiacchi para el de Cadiz de la propia Nacion, sin embargo de estar casado con Española, y con 22 años de residencia en estos Dominios, pagando los derechos como cualquier Vasallo de S.M...'⁶³.

The Junta then referred to the international character of the Order and the lack of suitable Maltese candidates and, perhaps most importantly, the precedents noted above, and recommended confirmation of Don Juan Baptista Gavarri as consul in Valencia, on condition that this did not constitute a precedent. But within a year the Junta de Comercio y Dependencias de Etranjeros disregarded its own

61. FONTENAY, 1988, 379

62. AHN Estado Leg. 615. Año 1762

63. *Ibidem*.

recommendation and confirmed another person, Don Carlos María Dodero as consul for the Maltese in Cadiz.

The approval of Carlos María Dodero as consul in Cadiz in fact constitutes definite confirmation of the volte-face in the official position vis-a-vis Maltese consular appointments. It was undoubtedly greatly helped by the precedent set by the Gavarri appointment in Valencia, but of no less importance must have been the personal qualities of Dodero himself, especially his services during the recent war with the English. Dodero was declared to be ‘...sugeto mui a proposito para dicho ôfficio de Consul pues tiene un genio, muy afable, ôbsequioso, i atento ... Nacional italiano, comerciante transeunte, Catholico, Apostolico Romano, de Estado soltero, i de haver venido a este Reyno unicamente por razon de Comercio, i que esta actualmente, empleado en él, con Casa de Negocio, sin tener en modo alguno, bienes raizes, en estos Reynos, ni en su Nombre, ni en el de Vasallos de S.M. hai cerca de Doce años que esta en esta Plaza, en cuio tiempo ha ido, i buelto a Italia su Patria, sin saverse que haia exercido, ôtros officios ô Cargos Publicos, ni honorificos en modo alguno, ni que goza Pastos, ô Comunidades, que son propios de los vecinos’⁶⁴. We are also told he was consul of Ragusa but perhaps more importantly, and in sharp contrast to Mitre at the beginning of the century, he also had that most prized of qualities, proven loyalty to the Crown, as the Junta pointed out; ‘La Junta, Señor, ha tenido presente, que ademas de las buenas calidades, que dize el Governador de Cadiz, concurren en Don Carlos Dodero, hizo este Interesado el especial servicio en la Guerra pasada de ofrecer al expresado Governador, y tener promptos, como los tuvo, quinientos hombres malteses y Raguseos para defender aquella Plaza, en caso de que la atacasen los Yngleses...’⁶⁵. It is difficult to imagine a candidate more acceptable to the authorities and the Junta promptly recommended his confirmation.

Other appointees during the rest of the century had, more or less, the same non-Maltese and commercial background as Dodero. In addition to the consuls we also have occasional mention of the appointment of vice-consuls, particularly in the turbulent period immediately before and after the 1771 legislation that affected the Maltese. The earliest dates to 1765 and refers to Juan Pedro Vinau Vice-Consul for Malta in Denia⁶⁶. There were others in Jerez and Ayamonte in 1768, and Cadiz prior to 1777⁶⁷.

Vinau’s case is particularly interesting because it throws light on how practice could at times differ considerably from theory in at least two aspects. First of all, there was the matter of Vinau’s own appointment as vice-consul by Juan Bautista Gavarri, Consul for Malta in the City and Kingdom of Valencia. Though it is impossible to exclude some subsequent change in Gavarri’s powers, his original appointment by the Grandmaster in 1762 had specifically excluded the power to appoint vice-consuls. The Junta had also specifically denied Gavarri this power, but

64. AHN, Estado Leg. 624. s.f. 1763–1764.

65. *Ibidem*.

66. AHN, Estado Leg. 643 Año 1765.

67. Don Martin de Espinosa y Algeciras in Jérez and Don Joseph Morera in Ayamonte (NLM, Libr Ms. 6429, ff 53–54) and Juan Bautista Brachieri in Cadiz (AHN, Estado, Leg. 636/2 Año 1777).

nevertheless recommended Vinau's acceptance. The other interesting matter to highlight from the Vinau case is the appointment of consuls by parties other than the Grandmaster of the Order, as is evident from the Governor's report on the suitability of the appointee, which claimed that there was already a Consul for Malta in Denia by the name of Juan Diego, appointed by the Duke of Medinaceli. The Junta, after consultation with the King, took immediate steps to have the Captain General of Valencia oblige Diego to cease in his functions, reminding him that the exercise of the office of consul or vice consul was not permissible without Royal approval⁶⁸.

In addition to consuls and vice-consuls, there also existed the figure of the Agent, the formula recommended by the Consejo de Estado earlier in the century to cater for the Order's needs, but we do not have much information concerning the selection process for these. Apart from Josef Mifsud, appointed Agente General in the 1770s and whose case we shall be looking at in detail later on, we only have information concerning one other agent, namely Joachim Bosch y Barcelo. From the file relating to his confirmation as consul in Mahon in 1784, we gather that he had served the Maltese as agent for twenty years before his appointment as consul. This admittedly isolated example would tend to support our view that in the absence of officially recognized consuls the Maltese may have relied on a network of unofficial agents or factors⁶⁹.

3. THE COMING OF AGE OF THE MALTESE MERCHANT DIASPORA

In the latter quarter of the century we start encountering signs of the coming of age of the Maltese merchant presence in Spain in the shape of the appointment of consuls from amongst the ranks of the Maltese merchants themselves, of Maltese as consuls for other nations and most tellingly of a Consul - General in Madrid.

The first Maltese consul appointed after the Mitre affair was probably Michele Pastorfido, who received the Grandmaster's *commission consulaire*, or patent, for Almeria on 12 June 1758⁷⁰. He was probably the father of Ramon Pastorfido, who was appointed Maltese consul in Almeria on 19 May 1796 and declared having been born in Spain of a Maltese father⁷¹.

More information is available concerning Juan Francisco Caruana, confirmed as Maltese consul in Alicante in 1792. In a letter dated 30 January 1782, the Governor of Alicante informed the Junta as follows: '...puedo asegurar a V.E. que el referido Don Juan Francisco; es de un Genio amable, de apreciables circunstancias, y de un procedimiento honrado. Que es vasallo de dicho Gran Maestre natural de Malta, y Catholico Apostolico Romano sin domicilio en estos Reynos aunque se halla algunos años establecido en esta Plaza, no constandome tampoco que haya obtenido carta de naturaleza y sigue no ha exersido oficios algunos de Justicia ni otros publicos;

68. AHN, Estado Leg. 643 No. 1106

69. AHN, Estado Leg. 631 Año 1784

70. AOM, Ms. 6429

71. AHN, Estado Leg. 628/1 Año 1795

haviendo contribuido con aquellas cargas que responden los der comercio: que no tiene bienes rahizes algunos en estos Dominios y esta casado con Española habra nueve años: Que es extranjero, Transeunte, y como tal se encuentra alistado en las Matriculas. Que vino á estos Reinos por razon de su Comercio en el que actualmente se ocupa por su propia Persona en el ramo de por mayor⁷². And thus from the ranks of 'sailors, weavers and gardeners', who had previously been disqualified from holding consular positions, sprang a man whom a senior official considered of sufficient status and means to occupy a consular past.

Towards the latter part of the eighteenth century and the opening decade of the nineteenth, there is another indicator of the coming of age of the Maltese commercial community, the appointment of members of this community as consuls for others nations. We have encountered a couple such cases. The first we know about relates to Ramon Pastorfido, who was in fact born in Baza but was the son of a Maltese merchant⁷³. He was Catholic and a taxpayer of middling means who had inherited some immovable property in Baza but kept house in Almeria. We are also told that he was single and of an agreeable disposition. He was appointed Vice-Consul of Portugal in Almeria in 1795 and Consul for Malta in the same city a year later⁷⁴. It is probable that the Michele Pastorfido appointed consul of Malta in Almeria in 1758 was a relative, perhaps his father⁷⁵. We have information concerning at least one other Maltese vice-consul for a foreign country, Don Francisco Amayra, who is listed as Vice-Consul for Germany, Naples and Tuscany in Vinaroz in 1807⁷⁶.

In contrast to the case of Caruana referred to earlier, the appointment by the Grandmaster of Benito Sacco to the post of consul in Barcelona might be cited as an example of a totally unacceptable candidate and must make us wonder concerning the process whereby the Grandmaster in Malta selected his consuls, particularly for a post as important as Barcelona. As we have mentioned elsewhere it seems that the Order's Receiver in Barcelona was the one to represent Maltese interests in the earlier part of the century, but there may have been a system of official or unofficial commercial agents. *Corredors d'Orella* like Ferrusola, Canet, Malet, Peramas and the Burgés brothers were particularly prominent but the acting Comandante General de Cataluña in fact declared that he was not aware that there had ever been a consul in Barcelona other than Don Onofre Gloria⁷⁷, who had been confirmed in his post on 28 August 1769⁷⁸. Chosen from amongst a number of people who had expressed an interest in the post because of the excellent reports the Grand Master had had on him, Gloria's own tenure had not been entirely smooth either⁷⁹. In

72. AHN, Estado Leg. 631 Año 1782

73. AHN, Estado Leg. 628/1 Año 1795

74. AOM, Ms 6429

75. *Ibidem*.

76. *Almanak Mercantil*, 1807, 329

77. AHN, Estado Leg. 632/ 2 Año 1794

78. ACA, RA, Registro 564, Acordadas Año 1769, ff 329–329 v. There is in fact mention of the appointment of Bruno Peramas in 1756 but there is no record of his confirmation (AOM Ms. 6429).

79. NLM Ms. 1211 Sexto Registro de cartas del Exmo y Serenyn.º Frey Don Manuel Pinto de Fonseca Gran Maestre del Sagrado Militar Orden de San Juan de Jerusalem..., p 97. Letter from Grand Master Pinto to Onofre Gloria of 20 June 1769.

fact, after complaints by prominent Maltese merchants Camilleri and Cini⁸⁰ concerning the departure of Maltese merchants without paying the tax due, Gloria was told, in no uncertain terms, not to issue passports as that was the prerogative of the Receiver⁸¹. Gloria's term of office had been a long one, lasting until 1793 when he went bankrupt. When that happened, Grand Master Rohan instructed the Order's Receiver Frey Don Salvador Xatmar to arrange for the removal of the Order's coat of arms from Gloria's front door, as well as the withdrawal of his consular appointment⁸². Asked about the need for a replacement, Xatmar advised the Grand Master that he felt a Maltese person should be appointed but he also forwarded information concerning several other applicants for the post⁸³. In his letter dated 10 October 1793, Grand Master Rohan answered that he felt there was no suitable Maltese candidate in Malta, but that he felt Gabriel Company, *Corredor de Cambios* in Barcelona, might be appropriate and that if Xatmar felt he was suitable he would arrange for the usual patent to be issued⁸⁴.

We are unaware what finally decided the Grand Master to pick on Benito Sacco but it was an unfortunate choice. The acting *Comandante General* described Sacco as follows: 'Don Benito Sacco es como de 40 años, de buen genio, pero no de sobresalientes circunstancias, pues los demás Consules indican sentimientos de que se les ponga por compañero, y sus acreedores tienen dificultades para cobrar lo que les debe: Que es natural de Malta, Vasallo del Gran Maestre, Catolico de Religion, y hara como 19 años que esta casado con otra Maltesa que reside en aquella Ysla de donde ha 15 que vino él comerciando en Algodon, y a donde bolbio hara 8 con motivo de negocios, aunque por poco tiempo; que no se sabe haya egercido oficio de Justicia, ni otros publicos ni que tenga bienes raices en estos Reynos, y paga matricula á la Ciudad como avecindado en ella, donde tiene tambien dos hijos empleados en una Fabrica de Yndianas: Que al principio hizo progresos en el citado Comercio de Algodon, que egerce por mayor, ò sin tienda abierta, y despues ha decaido su credito, no lograndole particular su conducta, pues se acompaña con gente de poca estimacion, reduciendose su actual modo de vivir, á la parte que tiene en la Fabrica, conocida por los nombres de Josef Guiol, y Pujolar (la que tampoco goza buena opinion) y hace ademas por si, negocios muy arriesgados, hallandose con algunos acreedores que desean verle rico, para cobrarse de cantidades no cortas que les debe'⁸⁵.

Support for this official perception of Sacco comes from other sources. He was the defendant in three commercial court cases over debt recovery⁸⁶. He also appears

80. ACA, OM, Gran Prior (GP) Leg. 1016 Letras de Cambio y Correspondencia del Gran Maestre a los Recibidores del Gran Priorato de Cataluña. Letter from Grand Master Pinto to Cavalier Don Antonio Magarola of 7 January 1772.

81. NLM, Ms 1211, f 231. Letter from Grand Master Pinto to Onofre Gloria of 8 January 1772.

82. ACA, OM, GP, Leg. 612. Letter from Grand Master Rohan to Don Salvador Xatmar of 27 June 1793

83. *Ibidem*. Letter from Xatmar to Grand Master Rohan dated 8 September 1793 cited in a letter from Rohan to Xatmar of 10 October 1793.

84. ACA, OM, GP, Leg. 612. Letter from Grand Master Rohan to Xatmar of 10 October 1793.

85. AHN, Estado Leg. 632/2 Año 1794.

86. ACA, TRCC, Pleito No. 13847 Jose Roger c/- Benito Saco y Jose Ponselli Año 1784; No. 63. Don Juan Bautista Domenech c/- Benito Sacco sobre cantidad de L. 115 Año 1790 and No. 6190. Don Pablo Molins y Cia c/- Benito Sacco sobre cantidad de L. 3,104.9.4 Año 1799.

as both an occasional supplier of cotton, and an occasional client of Indiana manufacturers Magin Puyadas and Francisco Ribas in the 1790s, for amounts mostly below L 500⁸⁷. He does not seem to appear in the Catastro at any stage and we can probably accept the official view of him as fairly accurate. As a consequence, the Junta agreed with the *Comandante General*'s recommendation that Sacco not be confirmed in his post, but stopped short of arguing against the appointment of any consul, even though the *Comandante General* had claimed that the Order's Receiver in Barcelona '...es el más eficaz Agente y Protector de todos los de su Nación que recurren a el en los asuntos que les interesan'⁸⁸.

We do not know the outcome of the Sacco affair, but there is confirmation that a new consul, Giuseppe de Soquet was appointed to the Barcelona post on 7 January 1796 so we can assume that the Grand Master withdrew Sacco's appointment⁸⁹. Nevertheless, this set-back seems to have reflected badly on Sacco alone and not the rest of the Maltese merchant community. Confirmation of this is to be found in the appointment of a Consul General in Madrid which must be considered the climax of the process which had brought about a five-fold increase in the size of the Maltese consular network in Spain as a consequence of the importance of ever-increasing Spanish-Maltese trade relations. It must not be forgotten that the Order had its Ambassador in Madrid to look after its political and diplomatic needs, and Receivers, Priors and Procurators to look after its administrative and military procurement needs elsewhere. The consular network was purely a function of commercial requirements. Consul General Josef Mifsud was confirmed as Consul General of Malta in 1789, but we have to go back in time in order to put this appointment in its proper perspective. More specifically, we have to go back to 1771 and the outbreak of the crisis which had threatened the very existence of the Maltese trading community in the whole of Spain.

4. THE CRISIS OF 1771 AND THE APPOINTMENT OF THE AGENTE GENERAL

As early as 1768 the Receiver of the Order in Madrid, who was probably entrusted with the more mundane 'consular' duties in the capital, had recommended the appointment of an 'Encargado de los negocios de Comercio y Marina' and in response the Grand Master had agreed wholeheartedly, undertaking to select a suitable person⁹⁰. But nothing seems to have happened, because when Melgarejo informed Malta of the publication of the January 1771 laws, he said 'la necesidad de Agente general no dudo que la han de comprender ahora, como ha mucho tiempo

87. ИМНВ Fondo Comercial B 119 Magin Pujadas y Cia., Llibre dels que debuen a la Fabrica... 1792 - 1797 and B. 125 Llibre de Caja de Francisco Ribas y Cia., Años 1789-1795.

88. АНН, Estado Leg. 632/2, Año 1794

89. АОМ, Ms. 6429

90. NLM, Libr 1211. Letter on 9 April 1768 from Receiver Melgarejo in Madrid to Grand Master Pinto. Letter from Grand Master to Melgarejo of 20 June 1768.

lo insinuo V.S.I. Espero determinaran nombrarlo en esta ocasion asignandole sueldo correspondiente y una vez establecido se pensara tambien a darle las facultades necesarias, para que use de los medios, que se sirven los otros, para lograr las mismas ventajas⁹¹.

This letter must have crossed in the mail the one written on 16 May 1771 to Melgarejo in which he is told ‘...y porque hemos conocido conveniente que haya Agente General del Comercio, y que por su mano corran todos los negocios, os damos la facultad de nombrar para este Empleo sujeto de vuestra confianza, capaz e inteligente a quien assignareis la paga, que os parezca correspondiente avisando su importe para que esta plaza pague en nuestro Común Tesoro su equivalente... Luego que avreis nombrado sugeto para el Empleo de Agente, pasara el aviso a todos los Consules para que estos lo participan a nuestros Nacionales a fin de que en todas sus dependencias unos y otros recurran al dicho Agente general para que este de los pasos que convengan⁹².

Malgarejo was therefore entrusted with deciding on a suitable candidate for what, in current terms, would be called a commercial or trade attaché, or as had earlier been referred to most accurately as ‘Encargado de los negocios de Comercio y Marina’⁹³. He picked Juan Bautista Gavarri, Consul for Malta in Valencia in 1762, but who at some stage had moved to Madrid and was mentioned in a list as a *Comerciante de Cambio* and consul for the Maltese nation with residence and business at Calle de Fuencarral⁹⁴.

But a consul resident in Madrid was of little use to the Maltese merchants in Valencia and in 1767 he was replaced. In a letter to Melgarejo in June of 1767 the Grand Master had said : ‘Permaneciendo siempre en esta Corte Don Juan Bautista Gavarri nuestro Consul de Valencia hace, que los Naturales de estas nuestras Islas, necesitando de algun pronto recurso, no tienen sugeto de quien valerse, para que los dirija y asista, con grave perjuicio de su comercio en aquella Plaza; y siendo esto muy contra nuestras intenciones nos hemos resuelto a nombrar para aquel Empleo a Don Juan Bautista Mocholi practico de Comercio, y en quien concurren todas las qualidades necesarias sobre todo la de aver servido su abuelo de Consul 45 años con satisfaccion de nuestros antecesores y nuestra. Por este mi despacho remitimos la Patente al Comendador Catala Nuestro Procurador en Valencia ... Para evitar embarazos, y competencias os encargamos de comunicar nuestra resolucion a Gavarri; y pareciendos necesario retirar la Patente que tiene, sirviendos por este efecto de vuestra acostumbrada prudencia...’⁹⁵. Melgarejo must have carried out the task entrusted to him with such tact and diplomacy that Gavarri does not seem to have retained any grudges and apparently accepted the post of Agente General, despite the difficulties which he must have known awaited him in the attempt to

91. AHN, OM, SJJ, Caja 8048. Letter from Melgarejo of 22 April 1771.

92. NLM, Libr. 1211. Letter to Malgarejo from Grand Master of 16 May 1771.

93. A precedent for such an appointment already existed in Spain. The French had had an ‘agent de la marine et du commerce’ for many years (RAMBERT, 1959, 271–272).

94. AHN, Estado Leg. 629/1 List of 14 April 1764.

95. NLM, Libr. 1211. Letter to Melgarejo from Grand Master Pinto of 22 June 1767.

repeal the 1771 laws. On Gavarrí's death, late in 1774 or early in 1775, Melgarejo informed Malta and allowed Gavarrí's son to carry on acting as Agent General while he awaited instructions.

Instructions concerning a replacement for Gavarrí came in a letter dated 22 April 1775. After ratifying his decision to use Gavarrí's son in the interim, the Grand Master's Spanish Secretary Comendador Frey Francisco Ramiro, told Melgarejo: '...pero me manda prebenir a V. Ex. en su nombre, que ha tenido dibersas representaciones del mayor numero, ô se pueden llamar de todos los comerciantes Malteses a fin de que fuese servido nombrar por tal empleo a Don Josef Mifsud, Maltes, al presente en esta ysla, pero domiciliado, y casado en esa corte con Española. Desea S.A. Eminentissima complazer e estos Nacionales para quitar muchísimos descontentos, que abria de qualquiera otra nominación ... El dicho Mifsud se ha mantenido aqui en su permanencia con conducta, se presenta con propiedad, y parece que es inteligente en asuntos de comercio...'⁹⁶. He added that Mifsud was honest and had good judgement.

When Mifsud was appointed Consul General 14 years later, the *Comandante General* of Madrid sent the customary report in which he declared that there had not previously been a Consul General for Malta in Madrid. Concerning Mifsud the report said: '...es sugeto de recomendables circunstancias, por su juicio, conducta, talentos, y buenas costumbres, de un genio amable y prudente; Que su edad es como de 50 años, vasallo del Gran Maestre, natural de la Ciudad de Malta, Caballero de esta Orden y de consiguiente Catolico. Que esta domiciliado en esta Corte de catorce años a esta parte, a donde vino e exercer el empleo de Agente General de Malta, con Nombramiento del Gran Maestre antecesor al actual, y que por ascenso le há promovido a tal Consul General: Que no ha exercido oficios de Justicia, y que ha contribuido como los demás avecindados: Que no tiene bienes raices, ni esta empleado en el comercio, ni lo exerce en manera alguna: Que esta casado 22 años hace con Española de notoria calidad: Que tiene casa abierta en esta corte, y en ella su residencia, y que es regular esté numerado en las Matriculas que el Rey ha mandado se hagan todos los años: pero que no ha podido saber si precisamente tiene carta de naturaleza en estos Reynos...'⁹⁷. According to a separate sheet in the same file, the 'Española de notoria calidad' referred to in the text was the niece of the Mariscal de Campo Don Gaspar Bracho, former Governor of Tarragona.

We get some idea of the activities that the Consul General was involved in from an account rendered on 3 July 1791 for expenses incurred in the execution of his duties during the previous year, and which Mifsud was seeking reimbursement for from the business community in Malta: the Consul and Agent General spent a total of 8,726 *reales de vellon* of which 1,774 *reales*, or around 20% of the total, went towards mailing charges and stationery; 2,400 *reales*, or around 27%, constituted his salary; and the remaining 4,552 *reales*, around 52%, went towards expenses incurred

96. AHN, OM, SJJ, Caja 8049. Anno 1775. Letter from Don Francisco Ramiro to Ambassador Melgarejo of 22 April 1775.

97. AHN, Estado Leg. 644. Año 1789.

in ‘...regalos por fiestas de Navidad, a los señores y Yndividuos de estos consejos, Agente Fiscal, pajes, y porteros que son de tabla...’⁹⁸. Mifsud obviously understood only too well the need to maintain the wheels of government properly lubricated

Mifsud was still in office on 15 December 1797, when he is mentioned in a letter by Antonio Magarola, Receiver of the Order in Catalonia⁹⁹. He is referred to as ‘...el primero por antigüedad...’ in a undated loose document containing a list of consuls in Madrid, so he must have had a long career¹⁰⁰. Mifsud’s term of office coincided with the last quarter of the century when the level of Maltese trade in Spain reached its zenith, and it is probable that the man who owed his appointment to the pressure of the Maltese mercantile class, was paid by them, and was Maltese like them was a better instrument of the articulation and defense of their interests in the Court of Madrid than had been individuals like the Frenchman Gavarri in Valencia, where the Maltese had been locked in battle against the French merchants who were trying to counteract the inroads the Maltese were making into what had been their near monopoly of the retailing of cloth. As, I have shown elsewhere the conflict of interests confronting the French consul for the Maltese had become very evident and the Maltese business community had taken the initiative of organizing themselves and electing one of their own to represent their threatened interests¹⁰¹.

In this context it is understandable that Maltese merchants eventually lobbied the Grand Master to ensure that the most important consular post of all, that of Consul General in Madrid with responsibility for all consuls in Spain, should go to one of their own. The Maltese merchant class had come a long way. It had acquired a well defined notion of its own interests and how to set about defending them. It had become a class not just in itself but for itself.

TABLE 3. LIST OF MALTESE CONSULAR APPOINTMENTS IN SPAIN DURING THE COURSE OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Note: ordered alphabetically according to locality and within these chronologically.

Source: NLM Arch 6429 ‘Consoli fuori di Malta ed in Malta’ except where asterisked. In the latter case the sources are various files in AHN Estado.

LOCALITY	NAME	YEAR OF APPOINTMENT
AIGECIRAS	Pietro Paolo Prat	1734
ALICANTE	Francesco Marabeuf	1722 & 1744
	Marco Marabeuf	1750
	Giovanni Francesco Caruana	1781
	Francesco Saverio Soler	1785

98. NAV Notario Michel Angelo Portelli. Signatura L2/1013, of 27 September 1791.

99. ACA, OM, Gran Priorato 807. Copiador de Cartas Antonio Magarola, Recibidor del Priorato de Cathaluña, 23 November 1770 hasta 31 Mayo 1798, 15 December 1797.

100. AHN, Estado Leg. 626 No.32. Relacion de Consules

101. VASSALLO, 1997, 36.

LOCALITY	NAME	YEAR OF APPOINTMENT
ALICANTE	Ignazio Barela	1794
	Giovanni Francesco Caruana	1797
ALMERIA	Giovanni Battista Pavia	1712
	Lorenzo Vazquez Mondragon	1752
	Michele Pastorfido	1758
	Raimondo Pastorfido	1796
BARCELONA	Giuseppe Serresola	?
	Bonaventura Canet	1743
	Brunone Peremas	1756
	Onofrio Gloria	1769
	Benedetto Sacco	1793
	Giuseppe de Boquet	1796
CADIZ	Luis Robin	1722*
	Francesco Cardon	1742
	Antonio Sanchez de Celis	1757
	Donato Giovanni Batista Reburato	1759
	Carlo María Doderò	1759
	Giovanni Battista Brachieri	1776
CANARY ISLANDS	Francesco Casalon	1749
	Enrico Casalon	1765
	Don Filippo Piar	1768
CARTAGENA	Pedro Pablo Merizano	1703*
	Bartolomé Mitre	1711*
	Taddeo Alvarez Ocampo	1743
	Giovanni Stefano Astrecarena	1744
	Giovanni Giacomo Lion	1772
	Giovanni Luigi Auran	1777
DENIA	Giuseppe Pollart	1729
	Giovanni Gay	1757

LOCALITY	NAME	YEAR OF APPOINTMENT
FERROL	Pietro Emanuele García de Quintana	1775
GIBRALTAR	Don Pietro Aldineo	1723
	Bartolomeo Dannino	1763
CAMPO DE GIBRALTAR	Pietro Giovanni Machado	1753
MADRID	Juan Bautista Gavarri (Agente General)	1771*
	Joseph Mifsud (Agente General) (Consul General)	1775; 1789*
MAHON	Joachin Bosch y Barcelo	1784*
MAJORCA	Girolano Massa	1742
	Giacchino Bosch y Barcelo	1766
	Andrea Mugnerot	1795
	Nicolo Mugnerot	1797
MALAGA	Stefano Fleuri de Vareilles	1708
	Damiano Valentino Rosique	1730
	Genesio Rosique	1760
	Antonio Plake	1762
	Salvadore Ximenez del Campo	1785
	Francesco la Sala	1788
	Michele Desdier	1795
MOTRIL	Nicolo Doran	1729
SEVIILE	Giovanni Battista Reburato	1730 & 1760
	Giovanni Aycardo	1759
VALENCIA	Cristoforo de Tarazona	1740
	Giovanni Batista Gavarri	1761
	Giovanni Batista Mocholi	1767
VINAROS	Giovanni Lastan	1729

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