

Anthony Zammit Gabarretta

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO MALTESE HISTORY  
IN THE STATE ARCHIVES OF NAPLES

During my studies in the State Archives of Naples in 1958, I came across a number of interesting documents, which shed much light upon that particular period of Maltese history which covers the last seven decades of the eighteenth century and the first six decades of the last century. These intriguing documents have repeatedly attracted my attention, and in my last visit to these Archives in June 1982, I made it a point to acquire for the National Library of Malta a microfilm copy of the more important documents for the benefit of scholars interested in Maltese history.

The documents, to which I refer, are found in the section containing the records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Bourbon dynasty of the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily — *Fondo Borbonico, Ministero degli Esteri*. On examining these records in June 1982, I found that they form a collection of fifty one bundles, the first of which carries the number 2799 and the last is numbered 2848. As on previous occasions, I found item 2814 missing, but the numbers 2811 and 2838 are followed by 2811 bis and 2838 bis respectively. The papers in each bundle are loose and, as a rule, unnumbered. On the cover of each bundle, the date, to which the papers refer, is recorded. The fifty one bundles have been numbered in chronological order, but the amount of archival material conserved in each bundle varies. An item may include papers corresponding to one year, while others may have papers referring to a span of five, six, seven years — or even more. The material contained in this collection consists mainly of letters exchanged between the Neapolitan consuls in Malta and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Naples from the year 1735, when Charles VII the First Bourbon King ruled Naples and Sicily, up to 1860, when the Bourbon dynasty of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies collapsed. The importance of the information furnished by these documents illustrating a period of particular interest in both Maltese and Sicilian history calls for a special study by scholars possessing a sound knowledge of the events leading to the political upheavals, which definitely changed the course of the history of Malta, as well as that of Sicily, in those hundred twenty-five years. A study of these documents would not only help these scholars to understand more deeply the events in local history with which they are already familiar, but it might induce them to look at those events from another perspective and, consequently, to make a new appraisal of the facts, which history books have repeatedly presented in a definite conventional manner. The Neapolitan consul in Malta writing to the Foreign Minister in Naples might have been seeing the events happening in Malta from a different angle

from that catered to the Maltese reader in books published by English and Maltese writers at a time when Britain ruled Malta.

From a chronological point of view, this long correspondence may be subdivided into three sections:

1. Letters written before the year 1798, during the time when the Knights of St. John ruled Malta. These letters are grouped together in the first seven bundles of the collection, that is, those numbered from 2799 up to 2805. One might note, however, that letters pertaining to this period have somehow found their way in bundles numbered 2806 and 2807 which mainly contain letters written at a later date.

2. Letters written during the period of the insurrection of the Maltese against the French and of the subsequent blockade, that is from 1798 up to 1800. These important letters are found in the three bundles numbered 2806, 2807 and 2808.

3. The third section would include letters written by the Neapolitan Consul in Malta to the Foreign Ministry in Naples from the year 1801 up to 1860. These papers are grouped in the remaining bundles, numbered from 2809 up to 2848.

Among the papers in the first section, one comes across the correspondence which passed between Giovanni Battista Riù and Giovanni Battista Abbate, Consuls of Naples in Malta and the royal court of Naples. The Neapolitan ministers to whom these consuls regularly addressed their letters were: the Marchese de Salas, Marchese Tanucci, Marchese della Sambuca, Marchese Caracciolo, Marchese Demarco and Cavalier Acton.

As one may expect, the subject matter of these letters varies. Consul Riù reports a shipwreck of a vessel from Sorrento on *Tal-Ghallis* reef on December 7, 1744 (1) while Abbate takes pain in tracing criminals escaping capture in Naples by passing over to Malta (2). Marquis Tanucci is kept informed by Consul Abbate of the ships which enter Malta harbour (3) and of naval engagements between vessels of the Order of St. John and those of the Turks and Barbary Corsairs (4). The problem of the successor to Grand Master Pinto is the subject of one of Tanucci's letters to Consul Abbate (5) and the latter takes upon himself the task of reporting, frequently and minutely, to the Neapolitan Minister the gradual deterioration of Grand Master Pinto's health (6). It is interesting to read the comment, which Consul Abbate made, regarding the security measures taken in Malta at the time: *Il Luogotenente Balli dell'Aquila Guedes continua nella sua Reggenza e per suo ordine, sin da due settimane sono, si sono poste in ordine le Batterie di questa Città*

1. Nro. 2799
2. Nro. 2799 - 15.6.1762
3. Nro. 2801 - 15.4.1771, 6.5.1771, 3.6.1771
4. Nro. 2800 - 11.5.1767
5. Nro. 2801 - 19.9.1772
6. Vide: A. Zammit Gabarretta, The last days of Grand Master Pinto, in *The Sunday Times of Malta*, 20.7.1958, p.14

*Valletta, caricate à metraglia e si sono raddoppiate le Guardie delle Porte della Città; si vuole, che questa disposizione sia per precauzione in seguito delli clamori, che si sentono della campagna, sprovista di grano e di altri principali viveri* (7) The election of Grand Master Don Francesco Ximenez de Texada, (8) the difficulties of the newly established University of Malta (9) and the rising of the priests led by Don Gaetano Mannarino (10) claim the attention of Consul Abbate who duly reports to the Neapolitan Court all that was happening in Malta. Among the papers in this section, one comes across an informative report drawn up by the *Giunta del Regno delle Due Sicilie* concerning the rather strained relations, which then existed between Malta and the Royal Court of Naples in civil and ecclesiastical spheres (11). In contrast with these valuable papers, one finds also, jealously conserved in bundle 2802, a considerable number of short letters, expressing Best Wishes and cordial Christmas Greetings to the all-powerful Minister Bernardo Tanucci. It appears that the busy Minister did not even care to tear them up and throw them into the waste paper basket.

The importance of the papers which we have placed in Section Two, is due to the fact that many of them refer to the history of Malta during the French blockade. The period covered by the papers under review, however, does not exactly tally with the dates comprised by this historical event. The papers in item 2806, in fact, are dated from 1791 up to 1802, and those in item 2807 from 1794 to 1814.

In the correspondence grouped in these items, new names of Neapolitan Consuls in Malta appear. Dottor Vincenzo Micallef finds himself occupied in keeping Minister Acton informed with the state of affairs in Malta during the blockade. Cavalier Gregorio Mattei and Giuseppe Romano succeed him in reporting to Naples the reaction of the Maltese public in the first decade of British rule in Malta.

Besides the letters written by the Neapolitan Consuls, one comes across other letters and reports written by persons who played an important role in the historical events of the time. Captain Alexander Ball (12), General Thomas Graham (13), Major General Pigot (14), Colonnello Fardella (15), Dottor Fran-

7. Nro. 2801 - 17.1.1773
8. Nro. 2801 - 1.2.1773
9. Nro. 2801 - 20.9.1773
10. Nro. 2803 - 16.9.1775, 16.10.1775, 18.12.1775, 5.2.1776
11. Nro. 2801 - 21.7.1768
12. Nro. 2806-11.10.1799, May Report 1800, 5.7.1800, 14.9.1800, 23.10.1800,
13. Nro. 2806 - La Gudea 22.1.1800, 19.5.1800
14. Nro. 2806 - 5.9.1800
15. Nro. 2806 - 9.7.1800

cesco Pace (16), Archpriest Saverio Cassar (17) — all have something to say, or to report upon to the Royal Court of Naples during those eventful months when the Maltese were struggling to get rid of the Republican French garrison, which Napoleon had left behind him, on their Island, on his way to Egypt (18). The miserable daily life of the Maltese, in beseiged Valletta is vividly described by the Neapolitan Consul Micallef in his report to Naples in 1800 (19), and original documents in this same section shed interesting light upon the conspiracy of the Maltese to capture Valletta by storm in January 1799 (20).

In some instances, these papers offer us comments upon the role played by important persons throughout those difficult years. On the 15th September 1800, Captain Alexander Ball wrote to Cavaliere Acton, Royal Minister of King Ferdinand IV:-

*Eccellenza,  
Sono in debito di passar all'Eccellenza Vostra, succintissima, ma altrettanto vera relazione della condotta di Monsignor Labini, Vescovo di questa Diocesi, e renderla informata dell'universale applausimento di tutta la popolazione sì per la grande pietà ed austerità del prelato, come anche per le grandi limosine, che fa à bisognosi, impiegandovi ben tre quarte parti di sue rendite. Ed è ben arrivato nella passata calamitosa situazione della Valletta a nutrirsi di solo pane ed olio, per dare agli ammalati la poca carne e 'l poco vino o cioccolata, che procacciar potea. Vede benissimo l' Eccellenza Vostra quale affetto e venerazione ha dovuto acquistargli una tale condotta, e quale stima vede conciliargli; talchè inutile sarebbe il tediargli con un più lungo dettaglio" (21).*

The papers, which we have placed in the third section, cover a span of sixty years from 1801 to 1860. Dottor Vincenzo Micallef, who was the Neapolitan Consul during the blockade was succeeded by Cavalier Gregorio Mattei in the first decade of the 19th century. Then, in 1813, the name of Giuseppe Romano appears. He was succeeded in 1822 by Antonio Girardi, who carried on the correspondence up to 1832. From 1832 to 1837, the letters are signed by Giovanni Monticelli, but some letters dated 1836/1839 carry the signature of Gaetano Ordoino, who in a letter of January 13th, 1823 is described by Antonio Girardi as *cancelliere di questo Consolato Generale* (22). In 1837, Con-

16. Nro. 2806 - 1.4.1799
17. Nro. 2806 - 28.12.1798
18. Vide A. Zammit Gabarretta, "Malta in 1799", *The Sunday Times of Malta*, 12.7.1959 p.9; "The French blockaded in Valletta" *The Armed Forces of Malta Journal*, No. 28, April 1978 p.11-12; "Report of Captain Ball on the situation in Malta (1799-1800)", *The Armed Forces of Malta Journal* No. 30, October 1978 p.31-34.
19. Vide A. Zammit Gabarretta, "Una descrizione contemporanea Della Città Valletta nel 1800, *Melita Historica*, vol. II p.239; "Life in beseiged Valletta" *The Sunday Times*, 15.1.1984 p.18.
20. Vide A. Zammit Gabarretta, "Il Capitano Aniello Cafiero e la congiura dei maltesi", *Melita Historica*, vol. III, no.4 p.57-61.
21. Nro. 2806 - 15.9.1800
22. Nro. 2822

sul Giuseppe Ramirez took up the task of continuing the correspondence with the Royal Neapolitan Court. In a few letters, however, dated November and December 1850, the name of G. Folliero de Luna is met with; but it was Cavalier Giuseppe Ramirez who had to put an end to this long series of reports in 1860. That year, on the 7th September, General Garibaldi entered Naples, and King Francis II of Naples was deposed on 21st of the following month.

The letters of these Neapolitan Consuls in Malta were successively addressed to several royal ministers in Naples. One comes across the following names:- il Marchese di Circello, il Duca di Campochiaro, il Principe di Belmonte, il Principe di Villafranca, il Duca Lucchesi Palli, il Principe della Scaletta, il Cavalier de' Medici, il Baron Ferdinando Girardi, il Principe di Cassaro, il Duca di Gualtieri, il Duca di Laurenzano, il Principe di Scilla, Duca di Santa Cristina, il Principe di Cariati, il Marchese Dragonetti, il Marchese Giustino Fortunato, il Commendator Carafa.

The information furnished in these documents written in the first few years of the 19th Century frequently deals with the establishment of British Rule in Malta. One comes across the correspondence exchanged between Ambassador Buzi representing the Order of St. John and Captain Alexander Ball on the question of handing over the island of Malta to that Order in accordance with Article 10 of the Treaty of Amiens, (23) the removal from office of Vincenzo Borg Braret and Emmanuele Gellel, the petition of the Maltese, submitted to his Britannic Majesty on 10th July 1811 asking for a house of representatives *una libera rappresentazione del Popolo o sia Consiglio Popolare ... una costituzione, che riunirà lo spirito del nostro antico, libero e solo legittimo governo con quello della Costituzione Inglese, salva però sempre la Nostra Religione Cattolica* and the subsequent proclamation, issued from the Palace of Valletta on 23th August 1811, regretting "that some weak and inconsiderate persons, deceived under specious pretexts, have suffered themselves to become the Instruments of a few turbulent and factious individuals. They have been seduced to subscribe a paper ... which is in fact a scandalous libel against Government and the vehicle of private malignity". (25)

In 1819, the Neapolitan Consul, Giuseppe Romano, was busy in assisting a considerable number of persons, subjects of the King of Naples but residing in Malta, who were notified to quit this Island and to return to Sicily and Naples. One is impressed by the long list, describing these poor numerous families, which the Consul drew up and sent to the Marchese di Circello (26). One is also impressed by the reports sent to Naples by Consul Antonio Girardi

23. Nro. 2810, ff.34-36
24. Nro. 2808, ff.233-234, 248-249
25. Nro. 2811 - 26.8.1811
26. Nro. 2819 f.n.n.

in which he describes the poverty and misery existing in Malta in the eighteen twenties (27).

The problem which persistently troubled the Neapolitan Consul was the presence in Malta of political refugees exiled from Naples and Sicily. The reports of Consul Girardi, for instance, bear witness to the constant vigilance of that consul on the movements of Gabriele Rossetti (28), Raffaele Poerio (29), Pietro de Luca (30), Benedetto Pugliesi (31), Padre Marrone (32), Conte Bianchi (33), Barone Sambuci (34), Principe Baucina (35), il Principe di San Cataldo (36), the Spaniards Don Michele Carascosa and Saavedra (37), Salvatore Fatta (38), il Tenore Filippo, the comic actor Carlo Leonardis, Salvatore Valone, Natale Ando" and Francesco Ciccognati who came to Malta from the Papal States under the false name of Cappelli (39). The presence of the political refugees in Malta, so near Sicily and Naples, caused a delicate problem of a diplomatic nature which could, in no way, ease the relations between the court of Naples and that of Britain. As far as the Neapolitan Consul in Malta was concerned, all refugees were a constant headache. He had to keep an eye on the conduct of persons hostile to the King of Naples, and on the other hand, he had to see to the needs of those who kept loyal and found themselves on our Island, when fortune was adverse to the Bourbon dynasty in 1849(40). Some papers kept in bundle 2849 of this collection contain interesting references to the last act of this political drama — Garibaldi's expedition to Sicily and the return of the political refugees from Malta to our neighbouring Island (41).

27. Nro. 2821 - 2.9.1822; Nro. 2822-21.7.1824; Nro 2825 - 1.4.18a, 15.10.1828  
 28. Nro. 2821 - 3.1.1823, 4.1.1823, 24.3.1823; Nro. 2822 - 13.1.1823, 2.4.1823, 24.6.1823, 19.9.1823.  
*Vide A. Zammit Gabaretta, "Political exile" from Naples in 1823", in the Sunday Times of Malta, 28.12.1958 p.5; "Il-Poeta Gabriele Rossetti f'Malta". in *Promostila Mill*, 1983, p.103-107*  
 29. Nro. 2822 - 26.6.1823, 19.9.1823; Nro. 2829-5.3.1831  
 30. Nro. 2822 - 5.4.1823, 19.9.1823, 11.2.1824  
 31. Nro. 2822 - 13.1.1823, 11.1.1824  
 32. Nro. 2822 - 13.1.1823, 11.2.1824  
 33. Nro. 2829-5.5.1831  
 34. Nro. 2822 - 13.1.1823  
 35. Nro. 2822 • 24.6.1823  
 36. Nro. 2825 - 25.4.1826, 30.4.1827; Nro. 2828 - 15.1.1829  
 37. Nro. 2825 - 25.4.1826, 30.4.1827, 12.5.1827  
 38. Nro. 2822 • 11.2.1824  
 39. Nro. 2829 - 5.3.1831  
 40. Nro. 2842  
 41. Nro. 2848 - 2.6.1860, 9.6.1860

With the letters written in 1860 by Consul Giuseppe Ramirez, the long correspondence between Malta and Naples came to an end (42).

42. It is with a sense of gratitude that I recall the kind help given me by Dott.ta Jole Mairoleni who in 1957 first introduced me to the precious manuscript\* kept in the State Archive\* of Naples, of which she was in charge at the time. In my last visit to these Archives in June 1982, the Director, Dottor Mario Bionajuto received me with the most refined courtesy. The large premise\* of the State Archive\* had suffered extensive damage in the terrible earthquake, which had shook Naples a few months previously and the precious collections of documents were temporarily placed in the large corridors and in the available rooms, which could not be used. A wooden room, hastily constructed in the courtyard served as a temporary reading hall. Notwithstanding these unfavourable circumstances, Dottor Bionajuto received me with typical Italian cordiality and not only granted to me the needed facilities to consult the manuscripts but he made available for me a separate room, next to his office, where I could study at leisure the manuscripts, which I desired to examine. I consequently, express my thanks to Dottor Bionajuto for his gentle courtesy, which I greatly appreciated.