

THE 'GREAT FEAR' OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION IN MALTA

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Back in 1932 Georges Lefebvre, the doyen of French Revolutionary history, introduced the concept of *La Grande Peur* that gripped France in 1789. This superb exercise in history from below and crowd psychology unravelled the convulsions of the onset of the Revolution. At a time when the harvest had failed and the price of food was soaring it was widely believed that the rich were withholding their corn supplies from the markets. On the political plane the resistance that the third Estate faced made them suspect that the aristocracy was plotting to capture Paris and send brigands and foreigners to subdue the provinces.¹

Malta was not gripped by such universal fear. The people did not start to arm themselves in self-defence and no agrarian revolts are recorded; nor did châteaux go up in flames. But all the same, as can be fully documented by a group of dispatches at the *Archivio di Stato* of Naples, fear was in the air – fear of rebellion or invasion.

I

On 11 August 1789 the French national assembly shook the Order of the Knights of St John to its very foundations, when it abolished the tithes.² The *dîmes* had formed the greater part of the revenues from the commanderies or estates in France. In these calamitous circumstances Grand Master de Rohan, on 25 September, impressed upon the Neapolitan king the Order's services to all Christendom as a secure refuge to navigators and asked him for assistance.³ Ferdinand realised the utility his kingdom derived from its commerce with Malta and ordered Pignatelli, his minister, to observe vigilantly events on the island.⁴

1 G. Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789. Rural Panic in Revolutionary France* (London, 1973).

2 J. M. Thompson, *The French Revolution* (Oxford, 1966), 160.

3 *Archivio di Stato, Napoli, Affari Esteri*, fasc. 739 (25 Sept. 1789).

4 ASN, *Affari Esteri*, fasc. 729 (28 Dec. 1789).

The Order's existence hang in the balance and M. Camus clamoured for its abolition 'with much enthusiasm and zeal'.⁵ But the chambers of commerce of Marseilles and Bordeaux both showed the advantages that France derived from Malta.⁶ Mayer made the same point in the national assembly – even though he claimed that the Order was subject to the pope only in spiritual matters.⁷ *Bailli de Virieu*, the Order's *chargé d'affaires* in Paris, was desperate. To ingratiate themselves with the revolutionaries the French *langues* contributed their share to the *don patriotique* and offered a quarter of their revenues.⁸ De Rohan dispatched letters to Louis XVI, as well as to all the Catholic kings of Europe, especially the pope, asking for their mediation.⁹ He also issued an order prohibiting knights from taking any part in the counter-revolution.¹⁰ Nor did he allow the treasury to lend 200,000 scudi to Marquis de la Lare. This knight of the Order of St Louis from Aix was a sworn enemy of the revolution and a supporter of Count d'Artois, the king's younger brother. He was also a great antagonist of Mirabeau, for which he had run the risk of being lynched by the people.¹¹

The revolution was befriended and anti-revolutionary propaganda suppressed. On the last day of carnival 1790 two masked Italian knights satirised the national

5 E. Schermerhorn, *Malta of the Knights* (London, 1929), 292.

6 Archive of the Inquisition, Malta, Correspondence (Corr.) 101, f. 276r.

7 See his *Considérations Politiques et Commerciales sur la nécessité de maintenir l'Ordre de Malte tel qu'il est* (1790). *Suite aux Considérations Politiques et Commerciales sur la nécessité de maintenir l'Ordre de Malte tel qu'il est. Second Memoire* (1790). *Répons à la Motion de M. Camus* (1790); *Les Intérêts de la France liés à l'Existence de l'Ordre de Malte* (s.d.); *Considérations Politiques et Commerciales sur la nécessité de maintenir l'Ordre Souverain de Malte* (1797).

8 AIM Corr. 101, ff. 272v, 273v-74r. E. Panzavecchia, *L'Ultimo Periodo della Storia di Malta* (Malta, 1835), 302-09. R. Cavaliero, *The Last of the Crusaders* (London, 1960), 181-204.

9 AIM Corr. 101, ff. 280v, 283r.

10 *Ibid.*, f. 322r.

11 *Ibid.*, ff. 287r, 288r.

assembly and the French nation. The Sieneese Sansedoni dressed as a demon with a long tail and with a placard across his shoulders showing 'the devil of liberty'. He rode on a crowned donkey decorated with several white, red and blue ribbons, which also carried a poster: 'Donkey am I but not a savage beast. The devil of liberty has enslaved me'. Another Italian knight, the Florentine Bonsignori, who wore a torn under-dress, held the tail of the devil, while telling him, 'My friend, give me my dress', to which the devil answered, 'You never had one'. The two Hospitallers were both arrested.¹²

However, foreign circumstances proved greater than the interests of tiny Malta. With the attempted escape of the royal family to Varennes the Order, whose revenues had subsidised the enterprise, lost its one sure supporter. And with the invasion of France by enemy forces the Order's chances of survival were annihilated. The deadly blow fell on 19 September 1792, when the Order's lands were confiscated. *Bailli de Foresta*, the Order's *ricevitore* at Marseilles, was dispatched to Paris to protest against this decree.¹³ He came back empty handed but the grand master was still conciliatory. On 22 February 1793 some forty French Hospitallers gathered in the principal square at Valletta in the morning. They intended to go to the house of M. Comeau, the former minister of the French king,¹⁴ to remove the royal coat-of-arms from atop the door of his residence. Once the monarch was dead, they argued, and a republican constitution was in existence the minister could no longer exhibit the royal insignia. The commissioner of police (*maestro scudiere*) persuaded them to return to their homes¹⁵ but the grand master, in compliance with the complaints of the Convention, did remove the disputed coat-of-arms.¹⁶ Nor did de Rohan allow pictures depicting the 'barbarous execution of the unfortunate Louis XVI' be sold to the public¹⁷ – even though he and his council did attend a mass for the soul of Marie-Antoinette.¹⁸

12 ASN Affari Esteri, fasc. 729 (20 Feb. 1790); AIM Corr. 101, ff. 278r-79r, 282v.

13 ASN Affari Esteri, fasc. 6832 (7 Feb. 1793). Corr. 102, ff. 142v-143r.

14 *Ibid.*, ff. 93v, 150v-51r, 156r.

15 *Ibid.*, ff. 61r-v.

16 *Ibid.*, ff. 150v-51r, 156r.

17 ASN Affari Esteri, fasc. 6833, Grimaldi to Acton (15 May 1794).

18 *Ibid.*, Grimaldi to Acton (31 Jan. 1794).

On one thing though the Order stood firm. On 7 March 1793 the *Comité de Salut Public* of the national convention devised a plan for Malta to abandon its 'sterile neutrality' and participate instead in French commerce. By means of this plan, approved by the *Commission des Subsistances et Approvisionnements*, the island was to become a depôt for French grain in return for a French pledge of defence.¹⁹ The Maltese were to be paid within eight days by a French agent but they could also be paid in kind, for instance, fine cloth, colonial products, porcelain, glass, precious stones and other objects. Accompanied by a merchant and two Frenchmen, members of the Club of Marseilles and Nice,²⁰ Foresta arrived at Genoa.²¹ The grand master rejected the plan and issued orders that if the three representatives of the commission, among whose possessions a guillotine was allegedly found, were to come to Malta they would not be allowed to land.²²

But if the Order would not become an ally of France nor would it give open help to its adversaries.²³ In 1795 the knight Ferret arrived in Malta to raise a cavalry regiment for the army of the Prince de Condé. De Rohan and the *Congregazione di Stato* disapproved and those who were enlisted were not allowed to leave the island. One Reno, therefore, a Maltese, was threatened with death if he continued engaging more men; and ships in harbour were prohibited from taking on board more than two

19 '... il piano ultimamente risoluto in Francia dalla iniqua Convenzione di rimpiazzarsi il Foresta coi tre agenti detenuti in Genova, e ordinarsi agli agenti del Comitato nel Levante di comprare a qualunque prezzo i grani della Morea, e dell'Egitto, e di procurarne anche nell'Adriatico, e in Trieste, e depositarli tutti in quest'Isola; mettere a prezzo la vita di tutti i Cavalieri attualmente residenti in Francia, e offrire a Malta ogni sorta di concessione, pegni, e sicurezze per deciderla ad accorciare questo favore alla Repubblica' - *Ibid.*, 10 July 1794 (Grimaldi to Acton). This plan is also recorded by Pierre-Jean-Louis-Ovide Doublet, *Mémoires Historiques sur l'Invasion et l'Occupation de Malte par une Armée Française*, 129-130 (Paris, 1883) and by R. Cavaliero (1960), 202.

20 *Ibid.* (3 July 1794), Grimaldi to Acton. AIM, Corr. 102, f. H4r.

21 ASN Affari Esteri, fasc. 6833 (14 April, 1794).

22 *Ibid.*, (15 May, 1794).

23 For the charges made later by Napoleon that the Order helped France's enemies see W. Hardman, *A History of Malta during the Period of the French and British Occupations, 1798-1815* (London, 1909), 65-6.

Maltese.²⁴ The grand master's good will was also shown the next year when a French frigate was driven into Marsamxett harbour by contrary winds. Against the advice of some knights de Rohan gave the captain all the help he needed to continue his way to Marseilles.²⁵

But the passing of time made the Order's cause hopeless. On 13 July 1796 the Council appointed Fra Giuseppe d'Hannoville as ambassador extraordinary to negotiate with the French the restitution of its property through the mediation of the Spanish monarch.²⁶ Negotiations failed under the pretext that before reaching some form of agreement with the Order, the Directory had first to make peace with the other powers.²⁷

It was not only the loss of its landed estates²⁸ however that impoverished the Order. In those calamitous circumstances several knights returned to Malta, which increased the Treasury's difficulties.²⁹ These émigrés included people like Filipp Marie de Andlau who appealed to the pope for help in his extreme misery. He was assured that in Malta he would not lack 'a table and a house'.³⁰ To raise money the tax on wine was increased in 1793³¹ but something more substantial was needed. For this purpose the council, on Tuesday, 3 November 1795 nominated four grand crosses who, together with the procurators and the secretary of the Treasury, were to suggest the means to improve the financial situation. One of those measures was that postage

24 AIM Corr. 102, ff. 144v-45r.

25 *Ibid.*, ff. 154r-v.

26 *Ibid.*, ff. 163v-164r, 166r-v.

27 *Ibid.*, ff. 170v-171v.

28 *Ibid.*, f. 61v.

29 *Ibid.*, f. 144v.

30 *Ibid.*, f. 116r.

31 *Ibid.*, f. 94v.

was to be paid irrespectively by all,³² the only exception being the inquisitor.³³ The Order tried to economise as much as it could. By 1 September 1796 it had succeeded to diminish its annual expenses by 240,000 Maltese scudi but this was short by 160,000 scudi. It was decided then to increase the responsions of the commanderies of every langue.³⁴

II

When the revolution broke out the government took the necessary military measures to defend the island, especially when it was rumoured, in November 1792, that La Touche was approaching Malta with the navy. *Bailli* du Tillet, who had served in France, and knight commander Thurn were the two generals appointed to direct the defence. The *Corpo dei Cacciatori* was doubled from 500 to 1000; its members made frequent military exercises and were placed along the shore. Soldiers of the *galere* and the *vascelli* were sent to protect castles St Angelo and Ricasoli and the *Reggimenti della Campagna* as well as the *milizie* of the cities were put on the alert. The *vascello San Zaccaria* and the frigate *Santa Elisabetta* supervised the bays and did not let anyone land before being given *libera pratica*. In this way it was possible to keep the country clean of those impious spies who tried to enter stealthily to seduce and plot against public peace. The shipyard, the *polverista* and other strategic places were also kept under close supervision,³⁵ as well as the main doors of the city.³⁶

But, much more than that, steps were taken against 'individuals obsessed with the spirit of dizziness which then reigned in France and neighbouring lands'.³⁷ The chief judge, Grimaldi, was made head of a *Congregazione Criminale di Stato* to

³² *Ibid.*, ff. 149r-v.

³³ *Ibid.*, f. 150r; AIM Corr. 82, ff. 176r-v.

³⁴ These were a percentage of the commandery's revenues a knight commander sent to the treasury in Malta. AIM Corr. 102, f. 166v.

³⁵ ASN Affari Esteri, fasc. 6833 (22 May 1794).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, (11 Sept. 1794).

³⁷ ASN Affari Esteri, fasc. 729 (28 Dec. 1789).

proceed against those tainted with French maxims.³⁸ He was helped by the public prosecutor (*promotor fiscale*) and the commissioner of police³⁹ while De Rohan took him into his confidence and showed him the secret correspondence from Paris.⁴⁰

'Challengers of the peace' were dealt with summarily⁴¹ and exiled.⁴² This applied especially to Frenchmen, even if they had been here for a long time exercising some craft or commerce.⁴³ Three French sergeants of the *Reggimento di Malta* were also deported on 17 August 1794 for the secret meetings they held among themselves. There were no other Frenchmen left except two, who had served in the counter-revolution and were well known as trustworthy persons.⁴⁴ Guillaume Laurier arrived in Malta in July 1794 on a Venetian vessel. He had been expelled from the kingdom of the Two Sicilies on suspicion of being a member of those who had caused turbulence in that kingdom. He was not even allowed to land.⁴⁵

It was not only Frenchmen who were banished, but also any foreigner suspected of being an adherent to revolutionary maxims. Carolina Giardinelli was a perfidious Jacobine⁴⁶, who told some French knights: 'The Neapolitans are no longer bound to obey their king's authority, as it is abusive'.⁴⁷ A Sicilian merchant, Zappalà by name, had the audacity to tell a man, whom he thought harboured revolutionary ideas like him:

³⁸ ASN Affari Esteri, fasc. 6833 (2 Oct. 1794).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Grimaldi to Acton (10 Oct. 1794).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, (16 July 1794).

⁴¹ ASN Affari Esteri, fasc. 6829 (5 Aug. 1792).

⁴² *Ibid.*, (11 Oct. 1792).

⁴³ AS, Affari Esteri, fasc. 6833, Grimaldi to Acton (22 May 1794, 24 July 1794).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, (21 Aug. 1794).

⁴⁵ AIM Corr. 102, f. 116r.

⁴⁶ ASN, Affari Esteri, fasc. 6833 (16 July 1794).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, (3 July 1794).

Europe is in turmoil and as long as there remains a single king it cannot be at peace because it is hard and harmful to submit to a single person.⁴⁸

Expulsion was also the fate of a German lady, Elisabetta Dalmazzo, who wore a hair band displaying the French colours.⁴⁹

Fear gripped the nation. According to Elizabeth Schermerhorn, who gives a vivid description of these suspicions and whispering, every stranger was a spy and stores and houses were searched for hidden arms or documents.

The Auberges, where of old the most incendiary themes had been of booty and pre-eminence and inquisitors and elections, now echoed to heated arguments about the privileged classes and the rights of man; and apoplectic old Balis waxed wroth over the preposterous theorising of youth, and the presumption of youngsters, who had not yet won their Crosses and Commanderies, trying to prove that the Sovereign Military Order was incompatible with the progress of humanity. When a dozen or more French Knights suddenly left the Convent, it was whispered that they had gone to join the Revolutionists.⁵⁰

In 1791 some French Hospitallers came to blows with a group of Italian sailors. It soon started being rumoured that the principal object of the knights was to plunder the public treasury and the houses of the wealthiest Maltese and leave the island. Others believed that, in conjunction with several dissatisfied inhabitants, the French intended to start a revolt.

The same suspicion arose later that year, when in June, Naples sent two warships to guard the central Mediterranean. This event, coupled with an order by the Maltese government to place guns on the forts, made the inhabitants suspect that the island was not fully secure. Perhaps a foreign army would attack it, or it could be a local revolt.⁵¹ And the fear increased in July when a list was made of those persons liable

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, (16 July 1794).

⁴⁹ ASN Affari Esteri, fasc. 6829 (13 Sept 1792).

⁵⁰ Schermerhorn, 297-8.

⁵¹ AIM Corr. 101, f. 316r.

for conscription. An invasion by the English or the Turks was imminent; others imagined 'more deadly events'.⁵²

It was reported in 1794 that revolutionary songs translated from the French into Maltese were being sung in one of the villages. People were arrested but following the most rigorous research and cross-examination it was found that it was no more than a false rumour.⁵³ A little later a peasant of Żebbuġ accused secretly a good family of the same village of sedition. But after the most diligent researches it was found that the charge was false, and the delator confessed his calumny. He was exiled to Gozo; and though his protectors tried to have him sent to some other village the grand master remained firm in his resolve to remove from Malta that 'deadly seed of calumny'.⁵⁴

III

According to Grimaldi the Maltese joyfully welcomed the opportunity to prove their unvaried loyalty to the Religion.⁵⁵ Ever grateful to His Eminence and zealous to be always faithful to the government they offered great sums of money for the defence of the state.⁵⁶ But traitors were not lacking.

When he came to know, therefore, of the 'scandalous conduct' of two Dominicans, Fra Alessandro Grech and Fra Tommaso Vassallo, both resident at the convent of Rabat, he urged the grand master send them to Sicily as punishment. These followers of *padre Levante*, the well-known pernicious subject, had tried to spread their 'impious maxims' to their compatriots. They repeatedly talked against the government of the Order and often predicted the revolt of the Maltese nation, under the pretext of being very vexed and oppressed by the shortage of foodstuffs and free trade (*scala franca*). It would be to the relief and advantage of the Maltese, the two religious claimed, if

⁵² *Ibid.*, f. 319r.

⁵³ ASN Affari Esteri, fasc. 6833 (4 Sept 1794).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, (25 Sept. 1794).

⁵⁵ ASN Affari Esteri, fasc. 6829 (15 Nov. 1792).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, (22 Nov. 1792).

some other country were to intervene on their behalf. Another undesirable religious was the capuchin, fra Giovanni Carlo Rochemont, who was expelled to Rome as a pernicious subject.⁵⁷

A letter dated 19 May 1792 informed the Maltese government that a conspiracy was being hatched in Malta. It was financed by the rich merchants of Burmola and Żejtun who carried on their trade with Barcellona. It was the 'worthy Charles Zammit' who divulged it to de Virieu; and it had been allegedly revealed to him by one Buhagiar, a Maltese merchant from Burmola. The leaders were supposed to be Samuel Caruana, a former public prosecutor dismissed from his post for venality and one Dr Gatt, a lawyer. For the last year the two had exchanged their correspondence with Bazire, vice-president of the *Comité de Surveillance* in Paris every twenty days. In one of these dispatches, dated 25 May 1792, they boasted that soon they would lie down in the shadow of the tree of liberty. The rights of man would establish equality while destroying the Order, the grand master and its council, to the great benefit of the Maltese people who suffered slavery, tyranny and poverty at the hands of their government. The revolutionary song *Ça ira* had been sung under the bastions of St Elmo. The adherents to the revolution increased every day and some 250 people had already joined. These included Paolo Manduca, who lived at the house of Baroness Vincenza, Fournier and all his family, the two patentees of the inquisition, Giorgio Portelli and Giovanni Gatt. Other alleged conspirators were Giorgio Olivier, nephew of the assessor of Bishop Pellerano, one Mallia, printer and canon of Birkirkara, Emanuele Carbone, Giovanni Maria Vella from the parish of St George's, Gozo, Paolo Vella, *attuario* of Bishop Pellerano and Bishop Labini, as well as Giovanni Maria Deguara, captain of the ecclesiastical court.

The inhabitants of Casal Żebbuġ were to be particularly kept in check, as they were almost all adherents of the revolution; and one of them was mentioned by name, a certain Dimech, even he in correspondence with Bazire. The Mannarinos had always been enemies of the state. In the house of Bartolomeo, brother of the 'infamous' Don Gaetano, were found documents 'scandalously referring to the madness of the French'. He had sent his three sons to serve on French ships at Toulon, under the direction of father Dimech (Testaferrata), chaplain on board *Le Tonnant*.⁵⁸ Another adherent of

⁵⁷ ASN, Affari Esteri, fasc. 6833, Grimaldi to Acton (14, 18 August 1794).

⁵⁸ ASN Affari Esteri, fasc. 6829 (15 Nov. 1792). ASN, Affari Esteri, fasc. 6832 (23 Dec. 1792).

the revolution was Grognet, who wore the French cockade in his hat; he escaped to Corfu⁵⁹ on two French frigates, together with other Maltese.⁶⁰

Some twenty knights were supposed to be involved. For this purpose the village of Birkirkara was to be kept under watch, where several of the Hospitallers had their residences. The knights were divided into two parties. The aristocratic party sustained vigorously the Order, which they claimed was so necessary to France, especially because of its commerce. An influential member of the party, besides Pignatelli, was *bailli* de Loras, who struggled daily to increase the number of his followers. On the other hand, the democrats, loving liberty beyond all bounds, could not realise that equality between the classes was incompatible with the existence of the Religion. They had within their ranks 'turbulent spirits who enchanted their hearers with their words' and preferred insipid arguments to sound judgement.

Among these was the revolutionary *bailli* de Ressayre. On 1 August 1789 he wrote a letter to his friend abbé de Beausset, count of St Victor. He congratulated him for having participated in the

most beautiful revolution that has ever been enacted on the world's theatre. The people won again their liberty and were integrated in their rights of which they had been inhumanely deprived.

He desired nothing more than to spend a few days at Marseilles to witness the triumphs that its inhabitants had achieved.

St Priest, another implacable partisan of the national assembly, was 'a most deceitful person, venal, discredited, intimate confidant of Dolomieu'.⁶¹ Latour-Maubourg had served as *aide de campe* of Marquis de La Fayette. His elder brother

⁵⁹ AIM Corr. 102, f. 206r.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 203r-v. At Marseilles, Gaetano Darmanin and another unknown soldier formed part of the National Guard and were both friends of Jourdan, who had destroyed Aries. Jean Baptiste Serofel, who sold cotton goods along the streets of Marseilles and Almie, a merchant of oranges, were also supposed to be involved in the conspiracy - ASN, Affari Esteri fasc. 6829, Grimaldi to Acton (12 July 1792).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, (6 April 1792).

had been one of three deputies sent by the assembly to bring Louis XVI back from Varennes in June 1791.⁶² As soon therefore as this member of a family inimical to its king arrived in Malta from Leghorn, in August 1794, the knights of the three French *langues* not only claimed that he should no longer be a member of the Order but they also presented a petition to the grand master to expel him at once from Malta.⁶³ De Rohan ordered his uncle, *bailli* de Belmont, with whom Maubourg had taken up residence at Floriana, to send him away.⁶⁴ This supporter of a 'blind and silly nation'⁶⁵ left Malta on 17 August 1794.⁶⁶

Another adherent of the pernicious French maxims was Scaruffi, a Modenese novice knight.⁶⁷ According to Inquisitor Carpegna he was a wicked man and a believer in democratic ideas.⁶⁸ When he was in Catania in 1793 he had the temerity to speak against kings. The Viceroy of Sicily reported the matter to his sovereign so that when Scaruffi arrived in Naples he was at once expelled and came to Malta. He left the island on 23 April 1794 after the captain, who had refused to embark him, did so on orders from the grand master. However, the knights on board refused to have anything to do with him during the voyage.⁶⁹

IV

Grimaldi did not believe Zammit's revelations, which he claimed to be neither true nor probable. Having made, on orders from the grand master, the most diligent and secret researches he found that the persons mentioned in the letters were either dead

⁶² Thompson, 210-2, 431.

⁶³ AIM Corr. 102, ff. 120v-21r. ASN, Affari Esteri, fasc. 6833 (7 Aug. 1794).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, (14 Aug. 1794).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, (25 Sept. 1794).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, (21 Aug. 1794).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, (15 Feb. 1794).

⁶⁸ AIM Corr. 102, f. 111r.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 127v-28v.

or else fell under no suspicions at all, being either minors or else of an advanced age. With this invention Zammit perhaps wanted to gain some personal benefit or else distress maliciously the government.⁷⁰ All the same those he mentioned were all kept under close observation.⁷¹ Inquisitor Scotti was not impressed, either by this 'unjust gossip'. He believed there were no grounds for this 'mere invention', which he considered false and unfounded.⁷² His successor Mgr Giulio Carpegna was of the same mind even though:

There are not lacking here, both among the Maltese and the Hospitallers those who look with a favourable eye on the French and their detestable maxims.

So did he write to the cardinal secretary of state on 30 March 1797.⁷³ However, only in June a revolt was discovered⁷⁴ and a year later the great Napoleon made clean sweep of these hated masters of the Maltese and their 'despotic government'.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ ASN Affari Esteri, fasc. 6829 (5 Aug. 1792).

⁷¹ '... les intrigues des scélérats qui ont pu facilement sedurre les principaux auteurs des nos anciens troubles à Malte, où les malveillans, comme il existe dans tous les Etats, pour se menager par leur moyen une retraite sure dans notre isle, où ils puissant se mettre a couvert du desordre qu'ils ont mis dans le royaume et dont ils ne tarderont pas d'être les victimes', *ibid.*, Segreteria de France, Paris 23 juillet 1792.

⁷² AIM Corr. 101, f. 305r.

⁷³ AIM Corr. 102, f. 178r.

⁷⁴ F. Ciappara, 'Vassalli in the Correspondence of Inquisitor Carpegna', *Journal of Maltese Studies, Essays on Mikiel Anton Vassalli* (O. Friggieri, ed.), nos. 23-24 (1993), 47-8.

⁷⁵ 'Remonstrance by the Maltese Deputies to Lord Hobart, 1802', in H. Frenco (ed.), *Maltese Political Development, 1798-1964: A Documentary History* (Malta, 1993), 42.

APPENDIX A

No. 76. Ire. lettre déchiffré, en date de Paris
le 19 mai 1792

La providence vient de nous faire découvrir un complot contre notre Isle dont je m'empresse d'instruire V. A. Eme. à fin ch'Elle conjure l'orage qui se forme chez Elle. Le brave Charles Zammit frère de l'erbier du Palais de V. A. Eme., qui a pendant trois ans dans l'Indes servi le baill de Suffren en qualité de timonier sur son vaisseau, est venus nous confier que le nommé Buhagiar négociant maltais de Bormola qui est à present ici et qui fait tous les ans le voyage d'Espagne, lui a appris qu'il y avait à Malte de propagandistes maltais dont les chefs étaient Samuel Caravana⁷⁶ ancien fiscal e l'avocat Gatt⁷⁷ qui sont en correspondance depuis un an et écrivent tous les vingt jours aux chefs des Jacobins. Que lui Zammit, qui joue ici à dessein le rôle de révolutionnaire pour être instruit de tout le complot venait d'apprendre par un secretaire du Comité de Surveillance son ami, que Vendredi dernier 25 courant, il y avait été lû une lettre de Malte du 13 avril, sans doute d'un de ces deux maltais, où l'on mandait: 'nous faisons tous les jours des nouvelles conquêtes, et dans peu nous espérons nous reposer à l'ombre de l'Arbre de la liberté'. Zammit et Buhagiar croyent que les abitans du casal Zebbug sont presque tous gagnés. Zammit ajoute, qu'il y avait encore qu'on avait chanté l'air favori ça ira sous le bastion de St. Elme;⁷⁸ qu'on soupçonait qu'il

⁷⁶ Remosso dal fiscalato pel motivo consaputo; ma egli fù che sollicitò l'esilio del Zammit per contentarsi di una giovane libertina: Zammit non lo ignora: il tempo e la vigilanza scopriranno la verità sulle assertive del Zammit.

⁷⁷ Esistono due avvocati Gatt sacerdoti; uno, di età decrepita, cadente, uomo inutile inutilissimo; l'altro, ancor giovane, già uomo del St. Officio, d'onde fù poi licenziato pel discontento coll'uditore Branciaglia col quale venne alle mani; Zammit da otto anni che manca da Malta, dovette conoscere questo Gatt giovane di molto; pertanto è a credersi piuttosto che il Zammit intenda parlare del Gatt ora inutile, ma compreso fra i fautori della insurrezione de' Preti Maltese nel 1775: non di meno si veglia costantemente per iscoprire terreno.

⁷⁸ Fù cantata sul bastione di Sta. Lucia che domina il Gran Porto da un giovane Maltese allevato da un suo zio in Marsiglia; come si avvisò sollecitamente col foglio della settimana istessa: già esiliato.

y avait des chevaliers dans ce complot,⁷⁹ et il nous fait espérer de se procurer une copie de la lettre du 13 avril, dans une conférence qu'il doit avoir avec le Sieur Bazire. Le brave Zammit nous a dit encore qu'il y avait plusieurs maltais dans l'Armée des brigands de Marseille qui ont ravagé Aries, où il avait une maison qui a été dévastée, que ces maltais étaient enregistrés dans la garde nationale de Marseille dont un des principaux s'appelle Gaetan Darmanin caporal dans cette garde. Il nous a fait l'éloge en même tems du nommé Beaulieu adjudant du régiment.⁸⁰

APPENDIX B

Sous le No. 77 Lettre de Malte en date du 13 avril 1792 (Autore Samuel Carvana)

1. Porta, che gli amici della rivoluzione di un giorno all'altro crescono.
2. Che ci sono molti cavalieri complici del medesimo capo.⁸¹
3. Che da qualche tempo in qua vedesi arrivare a Malta molta argenteria e danari in casa de' cavalieri, commendatori e Bali.⁸²
4. Gli amici della rivoluzione daranno il pigliaggio al popolo per metterlo nel caso di sollevarlo.
5. Dicendo al popolo che avrà subito gli antichi privilegi, non sarà più molestato d'esiglio, prigione, e galera, ed altri supplici per una cosa di niente.

⁷⁹ Si veglia addosso a tutti; e occorrendo si punirà come a rei di Stato.

⁸⁰ Elogio meritato: questi però da più anni che dal servizio del regimento entrò aiutante della Piazza; dunque il Zammit non parla di data recente, come vuol dar ad intendere.

⁸¹ Qui non si conosce di esserne che Quattro francesi solamente, cioè li due fratelli di l'ay, Ransijat, e Baras, congiunti a pochi Preti Conventuali della nazione istessa; quasi tutta la gioventù francese se ne parti per l'Alemagna.

⁸² Solamente un baule di argenti e gioie sotto il 23 Aprile 1792 marcati B. C. colla corvetta La Stella comandata da Capn. Pietro Brest proveniente da Marsiglia appartenenti ai Croze, e Magnau e fratelli negozianti in Marsiglia e consegnato a Basilio Cassar a loro disposizione: come dichiarò il Cassar sudto.

6. Che dentro il quartiere nuovo sotto St Elmo certi soldati francesi hanno cominciato cantare *ça ira* eee:⁸³ che ci sono complici gli medesimi ufficiali del regimento ed altri francesi accasati a Malta che vanno dentro i casali Zebbug, Nasciar, Bercarcara, Zeitun, Cormi, Rabbato, l'Isola, Bormola, e Borgo, ed anche al Gozo.⁸⁴
7. Gli amici della rivoluzione hanno tutta sicurezza di venir fra poco tempo seder all'ombra dell'albero della libertà.⁸⁵
8. Che la bandiera tricolore sarà piantata per tutta l'Isola di Malta, e gli principali posti saranno occupati quel giorno dai cavalieri da noi conosciuti per amici fedeli della rivoluzione.⁸⁶

Nota Zammit a trascrit de memoir ce précis. Il a vu la lettre; elle est écrite en chiffre ainsi que trois autres reçues précédemment. Cette correspondance n'existe que depuis trois à quatre mois.⁸⁷ Elle parvient par Siracuse. Le projet est d'établir le système de la Monarchie en Sicile sur les bases de la liberté. Caravana est en correspondance avec presque tous les grands

83 Falso di pianta che siasi mai cantato *ça ira* dentro il Quartiere; falso ugualmente la figurate complicità degli ufficiali: ce ne sono delle Quattro nazioni, ne mai è nato minimo sospetto di loro; i Capitani sono tutti professi provetti, li Capitani in secondo, persone conosciute; i Tenenti abohti per economia; il più di quest'articolo può riferirsi alla costante indisposizione Ecclesiastica ben capace d'intraprendere quando potesse; ma la vigilanza del Governo confonde la malizia loro.

84 l'also ugualmente poichè nulla è traspirato da tante persone di luoghi molto qui lontano un dall'altro e si frequentati dai ministri de' Tribunali rispettivi.

85 Su di che si appoggi, non si sa finora.

86 Partita già per l'Almagna quasi tutta la gioventù francese, non rimane in Convento se non la sana parte de' professi e qualche novizio: tutti Aristocratici conosciuti, dal Baras, Ransijat, e dai due fratelli l'ay in poi che per particolare loro strana maniera di pensare si vedevano in un punto appoggiare quella stravaganza: in oggi però facciono ricoperti del rossore corrispondente.

87 Questo articolo fa a calci con quello del no. 76 che assicura l'epoca di tale corrispondenza non di tre a quattro mesi, ma di un anno a questa parte.

seigneurs de Palerme.⁸⁸ Ce sont deux intrigues conduites à la fois. Le député Bazire Jacobin enragé en est le principal agent. Il doit présenter Zammit au Ministre de la Marine pour que lui indique les ports de la Sicile où pourraient relacher les frégates françaises qu'on destinerait à aller porter des secours aux conjurés de Malte lorsque ceux-ci verront approcher le moment de la révolution.⁸⁹

Dans ces circonstances il paraîtra sans doute à V. A. Eme. instant de ne pas perdre un moment pour faire saisir de nuit Samuel Carvana⁹⁰ et l'avocat Gatt, mettre le scelle sur leur papiers, congédier les soldats français suspects⁹¹ et les renvoyer hors de l'Isle, de ne point nommer Zammit absolument, et prendre toutes les autres précautions que la prudence de V. A. Eme. lui suggerera pour conjurer l'orage.

APPENDIX C

Chiffre du no. 79 du 11 juin 1792.

Les enrégés des Comités, surtout Bazire, soupirent toujours après les nouvelles de Malte qu'ils attendent avec impatience d'un courier à l'autre; ces nouvelles, comme je l'ai déjà dit, ne leur parviennent que par Siracuse, où Elles arrivent de notre Isle par des affidés.

88 Falso, poichè si è riscontrata la corrispondenza suddetta, e in questo di non si estende che a due sole persone indifferenti da lui conosciute da Gesuita in quella capitale.

89 Su di ciò si è stabilito non dar loro la pratica, e tenerle ben osservate.

90 È manifesta la indisposizione del Zammit verso del Caravana! I soldati Francesi per altro, che sono al no. di 60, saranno imbarcati per Francia col primo comodo per tutta quiete.

91 Gli avvocati Gatt son due, uno, decrepito invalido; l'altro, ugualmente sacerdote, ma giovane; si attende la replica da risapere qual de' due sia nella scena del Zammit: Io per me tenendo fermo al sistema della presente vigilanza, lascio da parte i particolari rapporti onde Zammit dice tante cose, e confermo nel sentimento di impedir sempre le operazioni premature che in occasione simile arrecano de' seguiti bene spesso perniciosi.

Samuel Caravana recommand toujours à Bazire de brûler ses lettres après les avoir lues, en lui disant qu'il en fait autant des siennes, à fin de ne laisser sans doute aucune trace de cette correspondance.

Au surplus les enragés ne doutent pas du succès de la conjuration qui conduisent les mêmes prêtres qui étaient à la tête de celle qui éclata en 1775 et dont on ne fit pas périr alors les chefs. Ces enragés, dis-je, sont d'autant plus impatients de l'apprendre, qu'ils voient leur fin très prochaine, et aucune autre ressource pour eux que celle d'aller s'établir à Malte. Comme M. du Mourier connaît parfaitement tout ce complot, nous ne doutons que de concert avec les conjurés ils ne reculent le rapport de notre affaires pour attendre l'événement. Cependant nous savons que ce ministre a remis aux comités un mémoire dans le quel il ne leur dissimule pas que pour la sûreté et l'avantage du commerce de la Méditerranée il convient infiniment à la Nation de maintenir la bonne harmonie avec Venise, les Turcs et Malte. Puissent nos lettres arriver au plus tôt à V. A. Eme. pour conjurer à tems cet orage. Elle verra dans les nouvelles publiques que Zammit a remis à l'Assemblée une mémoire à l'appui de celui du ministre, sans paraître en avoir connaissance.. Il nous l'a fait lire auparavant.

V. A. Eme. ne donnera sans doute aucun éveil à Naples sur ceux qui méditent quelque complot à Siracuse contre le gouvernement de la Sicile, jusqu'à ce qu'elle ait pourvu à la sûreté de notre Isle.

APPENDIX D

Chiffre du no. 80. Paris le 18 juin 1792.

Bazire qui tient la correspondance des conjurés d'ici avec ceux de Malte, desolé de n'avoir reçu aucune lettre de cette Isle par le dernier ordinaire, leur a écrit de la manière la plus vive en leur reprochant leur négligence dans la conduite d'une affaire aussi majeure. Elle l'est en effet pour lui et pour tous ses complices, parce qu'ils voyent approcher la fin de leur règne, et nul endroit excepté Malte où ils puissent se mettre à couvert de l'orage prêt à fondre sur eux. En attendant il n'est rien d'atroce qu'ils ne tentent pour ruiner le royaume et se sauver. C'est dans cette idée qu'ils avaient résolu de former un corps de 20,000 hommes sous les murs de Paris choisis parmi tous les Jacobins des départements aux quels ils auraient réuni les sections réfractaires de notre garde nationale, à l'aide des quels ils auraient enlevé le roy et sa famille, l'auraient conduit à Bourdeaux où ils l'auraient gardé en ôtage pour composer avec les émigrés.

Mais le renvoi du ministre Sevrin, qui de son chef et sans l'aveu du roy et de son conseil avait proposé au manège la formation de ce corps, a déconcerté cette intrigue qui s'évanouira encore d'avantage par la proclamation que le roy enverra bientôt dans

tous les départements. J'ai oublié d'ajouter dans la liste des personnes très suspectes à Malte le nommé Dimech neveu d'un prêtre qui avait figuré dans l'insurrection de 1775.

Nota: ce mauvais sujet est présentement à Marseille sous le faux nom de Carolis.⁹²

APPENDIX E

No. 81 Explication du chiffre d'un dépêche daté de Paris le 25 juin 1792

Nous serons dans la plus grande perplexité jusqu'à ce que nous apprenions que V. A. Eme. ait reçu quelqu'une de nos cinq dépêches contenant les détails de complots qui se trament à Malte. Nos craintes sont d'autant plus vives que nos enragés ont reçu jeudi dernier des lettres. J'en ai deux actuellement sous les yeux : l'une d'un chevalier dont je ne sais point encore le nom, adressée à M. de Bellgarde député d'Angoulême en date du 22 mai ; l'autre de Dimech du casal Zebbug à Bazire di 25. Celui-ci dit en substance qu'ils sont jusqu'à présent 250 maltais à la Cité Vallette et à la campagne, tous gens comme il faut, qui peuvent chacun en enrôler cinquante et que les français mariés ainsi que les soldats français du regiment et plus de 20 chevaliers leur sont dévoués qu'eux Dimech et habitans la campagne s'attachent à gagner ceux qui sont au service de l'Ordre, même les matelots, parce qu'ils connaissent les endroits les plus faibles de tous les postes. Ce Dimech demande le plus grand secret, parce qu'habitans une Isle ils seraient tous perdus si quelque chose transpirait;⁹³ et qu'ils espèrent de réussir, au moyen de l'argent dont les Chevaliers peu riches ont besoin. Le Chevalier écrit à son ami qu'au moyen des Droits de l'homme, on établire l'égalité en détruisant l'Ordre, le grand maître et le conseil, et on favorisera le peuple maltais qui

92 È vero, e si sono dati ordini opportuni al ricevitore di Marsiglia di tenergli dietro delle spie, e procurare soprattutto di adescarlo a ripatriarsi.

93 Si attende che da Parigi flicasi quale de' molti Dimech abitanti nel Zebbug sia il corrispondente col Bazire. Esaminate segretamente la condizione, le facultà, e i talenti dei medesimi, si è rilevato di positivo che un solo Dimech vi è nel Zebbug, stafo altre volte in Francia, negoziante di cottoni nominato il Bieda, capace forse di corrispondersi in Francia, ma però poi assunto si delicato, essendo egli uomo da poco. Non dimeno si procurerà scoprirlo colle sue lettere istesse capitandone per la posta.

genait sous l'esclavage, la tyrannie, la pauvreté, et l'orgueil d'un Ordre qui fait commerce d'hommes de toutes couleurs.⁹⁴ J'enverrai bientôt la copie de ces deux lettres. En attendant je joins ici à la hâte celle du chiffre dont ces gens-là se servent. Il faut surveiller Paolo Manduca⁹⁵ qui loge chez la Baronne Vincenza,⁹⁶ suivre le casal Bircarcara où beaucoup de chevaliers ont des maisons.⁹⁷ Gristi chanoine à la Cité vielle peut donner à V. A. Eme. beaucoup de lumières sur les conjurés.⁹⁸ On soupçonne les riches marchands de Barcelonne qui sont à Bormola et au casal Zeitun de fournir l'argent.⁹⁹

94 *Attendesi con impaienza la promessa copia di tale carta per procedere poi conseguentemente.*

95 *Uomo quasi mendico e stupido dissipatore. Tuttavia va ben osservato.*

96 *Morta da più e più anni: prova manifesta che Zammit parla con data molto antica e tutta relativa ai torhidi ecclesiastici del 1775.*

97 *Li due fratelli di Fay e Baras di qualche mese a questa parte vi hanno giardini per comodo a cacciare: sono minutamente osservati. Vi hanno ugualmente de' giardini, il capitano di vascello M. Subirats, il cavallerizzo di S. Emza. M. de Farques, il commendatore Riano Castigliano e il serviente d'Arme Recar tutte persone di sentimenti conosciuti; il secondo e l'ultimo sono persone confidenti del governo e molto veglianti.*

98 *Morto da sette anni decano della Cattedrale.*

99 *Questo poi sarebbe un eccesso di cui il Maltese non è capace in niuna circostanza: spropriarsi delle sicure sostanze per una impresa che non sia di commercio sperimentato proficuo; niuno vi potrà mai indurre i Maltesi; e Maltesi abitanti la campagna che idolatrano quanto posseggono: Incatenata l'Idra della Indipendenza Ecclesiastica, si starà qui di tutto tempo sicuri e tranquilli.*

APPENDIX F

Lettre de M. le Bailli de Ressayé à M. l'Abbé de Beausset, comte de St Victor

Monsieur le Comte,

Je fis, il y a quelques années, un vers un peu d'après Terence, mais qui va parfaitement à la manière dont je suis toujours affecté.

Je suis homme et tout homme a des droits sur mon coeur.

Le sentiment qui exprime ce vers a toujours été la règle de ma conduite, et je m'en trouve bien, je vis à Montfort dans une sécurité qui rien ne trouble, les bons bourgeois et les paysans qui m'entourent sont mes amis, parce qu'ils éprouvent toujours que j'ai été le leur. Un nouveau charme, s'est joint à mille autres, dont ma retraite est embellie, c'est le bruit de ce que se passe à Marseille, et le rôle flatteur que vous y joués. Des intrigues et des bassesses peuvent obtenir la faveur de la Cour; mais celle de la multitude, on ne saurait la devoir qu'à des qualités du premier ordre, et à des grands talents. Je vous félicite du bonheur que vous avez de concourir à la plus belle révolution que se soit faite sur le Théâtre du Monde. Nous voyons déjà le Peuple réintégré dans des droits dont on l'avait inhumement dépouillé, et l'homme rendu à sa dignité. Ce spectacle est trop intéressant et trop beau pour ne s'en point reprocher. Je me propose donc d'aller incessamment passer quelques jours dans votre ville. J'y serai de tout mon coeur le témoin des triomphes qu'obtiennent ses habitans, triomphes que rendaient infailibles leur sagesse et leur courageuse fermeté. Mon état et mon âge me permettent seulement de les admirer; mais ils ne m'interdisent point les honorables marques du Patriotisme.

C'est une parure qui ne mepried jamais. Elle me sera bien précieuse, Monsieur le Comte, si j'ai la satisfaction de la recevoir de vos mains surtout si vous annoncés une vérité que se me fais gloire d'attester ici, c'est que le commandant de Marseille n'est pas a coup sur le moins zélé Citoyen. Je compte être des vôtres le 6 ou le 7 et chercherai bien promptement les moyens des vous témoigner de vive vos les sentiments que vous mérite à tant de titres.

Signé le Bailli de Ressayé

À Montfort le 1^{er} Août 1789