

DOMINIC V. SCERRI

ASPECTS OF ANGLO-MALTESE RELATIONS UNDER THE LATER STUARTS

In this article indicating an evolution in Anglo-Maltese relations in the second half of the seventeenth century, DOMINIC V. SCERRI throws light on a hitherto unexplored page in British naval history and invites further research on this topic. ...*

The English merchant's interest in central Mediterranean Malta owed its mark to various interrelated factors.¹ Equidistant from Gibraltar and Alexandria and midway between Sicily and North Africa, the island offered the Mediterranean merchant and sailor a favourable port-of-call. Intimately related to this attraction were the services available on entering the harbour: quarantine, comparatively low customs-tariffs, facilities for ship repairs and maintenance, warehouses, the presence of ruffians eager to be engaged on merchantmen or on the *corso*, and consular assistance.² The island's potentiality as a purchase market in view of its dependence on all sorts of foreign sources of supply could not have passed unnoticed by the ever vigilant northern trader.

The general movement of the English in the Mediterranean, which can be traced back to the 1570s, was part of an overall shift in the European economic system.³ This made the Mediterranean a highway of commerce for traders, particularly those proceeding from the North Sea, resulting in the economic development of Western ports. The extent of

* FR. DOMINIC V. SCERRI, O.P., is the Rector of St. Albert the Great College in Valletta. The thesis for his B.A. (Hons) degree in history, presented in 1972, was on English Commercial Traffic in the Mediterranean with special regard to Malta, 1650-1700. In 1973 Fr. Scerri contributed a paper to the symposium on "England in the Mediterranean", held at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, on Anglo-Maltese trade relations during the same period.

English commercial expansion in this movement is shown by the establishment of English consulates at Malaga, Alicante, Marseilles, Genoa, Leghorn, Pisa, Gallipoli, Zante, Venice, Tunis and Malta in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.⁴ The maintenance of English ships in the Mediterranean was efficiently helped by the co-operation of English consuls and factories, especially at Leghorn — the great 'Magazine of the Straights' — and at Tunis.⁵ In the case of Malta the fact that the necessity for a residential English consul — John Watts — was felt as early as the 1580s, presupposed the presence of a number of English merchants who had commercial links with the island or were actually resident there.⁶ Interest in Malta at the court of Elisabeth Tudor was, in fact, expressed by official as well as private commercial concerns. Some Englishmen in the Queen's service sought information on the island's resources and defence facilities with a view to correspond with other English agents in the Levant. Has it not been alleged that Elisabeth I had secretly conspired with the Porte to capture Malta?⁷

Perhaps the greatest attraction of Malta to the English Government was the strategic significance of the island's situation in view of the English navy, its potentiality and how best it could be exploited to the advantage of English trade with the Levant and North Africa. It was Charles II's intention to pursue a policy of cordiality towards Malta and the Order of St. John. This policy was followed even perhaps when circumstances demanded otherwise. On April 6, 1668 Roger Fowke, the English consul in Cyprus, complained that the Maltese corsairs had inflicted "damage and losses on the coast of Cyprus to the value of four thousands and five hundred Dollars Ryalls of eight principal money besides other expenses and interests".⁸ Grandmaster Nicholas Cotoner had admitted in his correspondence to Charles II "that Fowke has had manifest wrong and injustice by the Court of Malta and judgement there given against him". Sir Robert Wyseman, Knight Advocate of the King, explained that the Grandmaster's reply was "so far from being in any measure satisfactory... It is plainly perceivable he (Cotoner) intends not any satisfaction for the damage sustained by the said Roger Fowke".⁹ There were, therefore, "just and fair grounds for reprizalls".¹⁰ Charles II refused to act accordingly, as

appears from the letter sent to the Grandmaster:

"But withall, that His Majestie taking into consideration the present state of affairs in Christendome and the increasing power of a common Enemy thereof against whom Maltha is so considerable a Bulwarke, His Majestic is unwilling to grant letters of Reprizall, or proceeds otherwise for Reparation until he finds all other amicable waies and means to fayle, and therefore desiring, that just and speedy satisfaction may be made unto the petitioner."¹¹

It was not until March 1674 that the Grandmaster acceded to the King's petition.¹² Peaceful negotiation had led to a better mutual understanding between the two countries. "My will," Nicholes Cotoner had professed to Charles II in 1668, "has always been inclined towards the unconquerable Monarchs of Great Briain...", and that nothing had been "of greater importance than to please Your Majesty. I lived in such a way as to serve well."¹³

Another example of the same tendency was Charles II's preoccupation with Algerian pirates. These were undermining the otherwise healthy trade relations with the Regencies. On January 17, 1668 Charles II informed the Grandmaster of his intention to send Thomas Allen, an able naval commander, to the Mediterranean to check such pirates from inflicting more damage to traders. The King asked the Grandmaster to accord Allen with all facilities and other requirements on his arrival in Malta.¹⁴

It was also Charles II's policy to keep a definite number of vessels in the Mediterranean with a view to safeguarding trade in the area. An expert "tradesman" would be despatched, among other ports, to Malta to provide the vessels with equipment and other material necessary for their construction.

"Since it seems to us that it is in the interest not only to ourselves, but even to the Christian world as a whole, if we ourselves were to keep a definite number of triremes in the Mediterranean Sea, always ready as a prompt protection of all our neighbours and allies against the frequent Barbary and Turkish attacks, we have consequently ordered two triremes to be built: one at Genoa and another at Leghorn; hence we have ordered a tradesman, skilled in such concerns, to be sent to several places, as well as to the Island of Malta which is under the jurisdiction of Your Highness, in order to make the necessary purchases and to make the preparations for the work, so that they may be well-furnished—".¹⁵

When, in 1674, a naval expedition under the command of Sir John Narbrough was despatched against Tripoli, Charles II recommended the Admiral and his squadron to the "good will of the Most Eminent Prince and Lord Nicholas Cotoner Grandmaster of the Order of Malta" and asked that they be "treated as friends and allies" and be supplied with anything they required "at a fair price".¹⁶ On October 17, 1675 Sir John returned to Malta from Tripoli on the *Henrietta*, accompanied by Captain W. Holden on the *Assistance*, and another six vessels.¹⁷ On this occasion the naval chaplain, the Reverend Henry Teonge, paid tribute to Malta's hospitality. "This City is compassed almost cleane round with sea, which makes severall safe harbours for hundreds of shippes. The people are extreemly courteouse, but especially to the English." He explained that wine could be obtained at 3d a quart, mellons at 1d a piece, cotton socks at 9d a pair, and radishes, cabbages, and cauliflowers for 1d a piece.¹⁸

Bernardo Ravagero, the *Proveditore* of Zante, informed the Venetian Senate on November 13, 1675 that three English frigates of war, the *Henrietta*, *Diamond*, and *Swallow* arrived at Zante, commanded by Sir John Narbrough and that they had to proceed shortly to Malta for food stores and warlike provisions.¹⁹ Previously, Paolo Sarotti, the Venetian Resident in England, had written to the Doge and Senate, admitting his persistent efforts to find out what the English plans were regarding their differences with Tripoli. He had inquired where they proposed to send their fleet, and where this should get its overhauling and maintenance. Sarotti explained that the English had opted for Malta although Samuel Pepys had written to Sir Thomas Clutterbuck and left him to choose between the use of Malta or Little Cephalonia as a base.²⁰ Pepys stated that Malta would be the base for ships of war scattered about the Mediterranean, ready to aid convoys of merchantmen in various ports. They were to unite and go against the Tripolitans and force them to an agreement with England.²¹ Before blockading Tripoli, Sir John Narbrough had instructed that Malta would act as the fleet's rendezvous.²² In the event of a captain being taken sick, he was to send his lieutenant or the next officer to the *Henrietta*; in case of separation, or in the case of vessels "unable to keep the

sea". Malta would be the port-of-call and the meeting place for the re-organization of such vessels.²³ When peace was concluded with Tripoli, Narbrough did not forget the gratitude he had received in Malta. He insisted with the Bey that all slaves — both English and Maltese — were to be immediately released.²⁴

The Marquis de Fleury episode of 1686 provides further evidence of the Grandmaster's readiness to co-operate with the English in matters of controlling the Mediterranean from excessive piratical incursions. Sailing on the *St. John*, some 100 miles off Alexandria, the Marquis encountered the English vessels *Jerusalem*, *John and Francis* and *Anne* on their way to Leghorn. The *Anne* was searched and as everything was in order, she was allowed to sail on. Captain Gilson of the *John and Francis* was forced to change direction and follow Fleury's route. The *Jerusalem* attempted flight but was fired on by the *St. John*, and compelled to surrender. The French pirate's men boarded her and she was soon towed to Malta, "the capital of Christian piracy". The Bassà of Tripoli, who was on the English vessel, his retinue, the cargo and the *Jerusalem* had to undergo quarantine. A detailed inventory was drawn up by M. Cassano Melino, a Maltese notary. Thomas Daniel, the captain of the English vessels was allowed to proceed on his voyage.²⁵ On April 1, 1687 the Grandmaster wrote to Charles II on the question of de Fleury. As a sign of cordiality, the Sacred Council had decided that henceforth Fleury would "not be admitted to the port of Malta", that none of his booty would be returned to him, and that this would be kept in Malta until other English vessels arrived.²⁶ Soon after, the booty was delivered to Captain Killegren.²⁷

In 1688 Henry Fitz-James, the natural son of James II, paid a courtesy call on Grandmaster Caraffa who donated the Prince a cross valued 5,000 scudi. Caraffa hoped that James would re-establish the English Tongue.²⁸ On February 24, 1689 James II wrote to the Grandmaster asking him to accept his son Henry in the Order of St John. This was acceded to shortly afterwards.²⁹

There is no doubt that the English Government and the Royal Navy had been following a clear line of policy with regards to the use of Malta as a base of operations and a centre of communications in the Mediterranean. On August

15, 1693, for example, Nathaniel Lodington had supplied Lord Nottingham, the Secretary of State, with secret intelligence about the state of affairs in Tripoli. He advised the renewal of peace with the Agency and expressed his intention to remain in Malta for further instructions from London.³⁰ In December of the same year, Sir Francis Wheler had departed from the Mediterranean as Commander-in-Chief of a considerable fleet. He was instructed to provide the security of convoys, and to proceed as far as Malta with such merchantmen chartered for that island and others for the Levant.³¹ Malta would serve, he was told, as a base for communications with Whitehall whenever treaties with Tunis, Algiers and Tripoli were to be concluded.³²

By the late seventeenth century, contacts between England and Malta, originally initiated in the 1580s by the English pirate-merchant, had reached a more mature stage of development, to the point of attracting official recognition from London. The English Government had started to appreciate the value and significance of Malta's strategic position and its potentiality as a base for English naval operations in the central Mediterranean.

NOTES:

The following abbreviations have been used:

ADD. MSS.	Additional Manuscripts: British Museum
A.I.M.	Archives of the Inquisition of Malta
A.O.M.	Archives of the Order of Malta
C.S.P.	Calendar of State Papers
P.R.O.	Public Record Office, London
S.P.	State Papers, Public Record Office, London

- 1 For a history of Anglo-Maltese relations during the Order of St John's stay in Malta see my forthcoming paper "Anglo-Maltese Commercial Relations 1650-1700", read at the History Symposium *The British in the Mediterranean* at the Greenwich National Maritime Museum, December 1974 (in the press); A Mifsud, *Knights Hospitallers of the Venerable Tongue of England in Malta* (Malta 1916); M.S. Anderson, "Great Britain and Malta before 1798", *Mariner's Mirror* XL (1954); A.P. Vella, *An Elizabethan-Ottoman Conspiracy* (Malta 1972); *id.*, "A Sixteenth Century Elizabethan Merchant in Malta", *Melita Historica* V, 3 (1970), pp. 197-238; V. Mallia-Milanes, "English Merchants' Initial Contacts with Malta: A Reconsideration", *Melita Historica* VI, 4 (1975), pp. 342-61.
- 2 E. Brockman, *Last Bastion* (London 1961), 165-6. By 1540 an arsenal was erected at Birgu. This was enlarged about 1600 and again some 36 years later. An auxiliary yard was developed in the Grand Harbour during the same time. The Order's ship-building facilities were kept until its expulsion from Malta in 1798. B. Blouet, *The Story*

- of Malta (London 1967), pp. 127-9. In 1753 an act was passed in England prohibiting any goods from the Levant to be landed in England without a clean bill-of-health from the port where they had been laded, unless they had been aired in one of the mentioned lazarettos: Venice, Ancona, Messina, Leghorn, Genoa, Marseilles and Malta. **ADD.MMS.** 38348, f.110. In the Mediterranean lazarettos, the period of quarantine ranged from 95 days to 7 months. *Ibid.* 38349, f.345.
- 3 See F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris 1949).
 - 4 C.S.P. **Domestic 1649-1650**, pp. 11-12; *ibid.*, 1650, pp. 71-2; *ibid.*, 1657-1658, pp. 95-6.
 - 5 *Ibid.*
 - 6 A.O.M. **Quarantine Registers 1650 et seq., passim**. English consuls, like all others, exercised their influence in court cases when Englishmen were involved. Such was the case when consul John Jacob Watts asked for the release of two women belonging to the sect of the Quakers, who were held in Maltese prisons, and who offered the necessary safeguards to conduct them to England. A.I.M. **Corrispondenza** August 20, 1661. See also A.P. Vella, *The Tribunal of the Inquisition in Malta* (R.U.M., 1964), pp. 31-7.
 - 7 See A.P. Vella *An Elizabethan-Ottoman Conspiracy* (R.U.M., 1972).
 - 8 S.P. 86/1, f. 16 ff.
 - 9 *Ibid.*
 - 10 A.O.M. 57, fl. 17-20; *ibid.* 261, fl. 124-5. S.P. 86/1, f.99.
 - 11 *Ibid.*
 - 12 C.S.P. **Domestic, Charles II, Addenda, 1660-1685**, p. 446.
 - 13 A.O.M. 261, fl.127v-129. S.P. 86/1, f.20.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, f.65.
 - 15 A. Mifsud, *op.cit.*, p. 252, n. 1.
 - 16 A.O.M. 57, ff. 24-5. W. Porter, *A History of the Knights of Malta* (London 1858), II, pp. 369-79.
 - 17 A.O.M. 57, ff. 29-32.
 - 18 H. Luke, *Malta* (London 1949), p. 68. W. Porter, *op.cit.*, pp. 373-5.
 - 19 C.S.P. **Venetian 1673-75**, pp. 479-80.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, p. 368.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, pp. 440-41.
 - 22 G.A. Vassallo, *Storia di Malta* (Malta 1890), p. 571. E. Rossi, *Storia della Marina dell'Ordine di S. Giovanni di Gerusalemme, di Rodi e di Malta* (Roma 1926), p. 75.
 - 23 S.P. 86/1, f.65.
 - 24 G.A. Vassallo, *op.cit.*, pp. 571-2. G.N. Letard, *Brevi Nozioni Storiche riguardanti l'Isola di Malta* (Malta 1888), p. 156. Grandmaster Cottoner eventually wrote to Charles II expressing his pleasure and gratitude for the releasing of the Maltese slaves by Narbrough. Charles replied to acknowledge the Grandmaster's letter. W. Porter, *op.cit.*, pp. 376-7.
 - 25 S.P. 86/2, f.5 ff. November 16, 1686.
 - 26 S.P. 86/7, f.73v.
 - 27 S.P. 86/2, f.5 ff.
 - 28 B. Dal Pozzo, *Historia della sacra religione militare di S. Gioavnni Gerosolimitano, detta di Malta* (Verona 1703), II. p. 673.
 - 29 A.O.M. 57, ff.35-41. *Ibid.* 263, f.64.
 - 30 S.P. 86/1, f.91.
 - 31 *Ibid.*, f.89.
 - 32 *Ibid.*, f.91.