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*Malta at the Crossroads of Europe: An Islands Agency in the Age of An
Empire*

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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Candidate for Bachelor of Arts Degree
and Renée Crown University Honors
Spring 2020

Honors Thesis in History

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Abstract

Malta is an island country in the Mediterranean that sits in between the island of Sicily and Northern Africa. In 1798 Napoleon conquered the island, and in response the Maltese led an insurrection against the French occupiers. This fight aligned the Maltese with the British, and traditional narratives about Maltese history imply that the Maltese handed themselves over to the British afterwards. In truth, the Maltese became a British territory by asking that their rights and privileges be recognized in return for recognizing the British ruler as their sovereign. Their rights were not upheld and the island existed in a quasi-autocratic state of limbo from 1800-1810 before becoming a British Colony.

The thesis examines the period through the lens of Vincenzo Borg, a Maltese leader in the insurrection against the French. Borg advocated for British rule, and later faced despotic punishment by Captain Alexander Ball, the British civil administrator of the island. Borg represents the compact between the Maltese and the British. The thesis examines traditionally ignored archival sources to demonstrate the complexity of British colonial rule, which heavily involved destroying civil and political liberties.

Executive Summary

Malta is an island country in the Mediterranean that sits in between the island of Sicily and Northern Africa. Since the time of the Romans outsiders have ruled the island. Beginning in the middle of the 16th Century the island was ruled by the Order of St. John, a Catholic organization of knights. In 1798 Napoleon conquered the island, and in response the Maltese led an insurrection against the French occupiers.

The fight against the French in 1798 aligned the Maltese with the British, and traditional narratives about Maltese history imply that the Maltese handed themselves over to the British. In truth, the Maltese were amicable to the British, and expected their civil liberties and political rights to be upheld in a British regime. Instead, the island existed in a quasi-autocratic state of limbo from 1800-1810 before becoming a British Colony.

The thesis examines the specific case of Vincenzo Borg, a Maltese leader in the insurrection against the French. Borg advocated for British rule, and later faced despotic punishment by Captain Alexander Ball, the British civil administrator of the island. Borg represents the contract developed between the British and the Maltese. In the same way that Borg advocated for British rule, the Maltese agreed that if they submitted to British rule they would retain their ancient rights and privileges. The privileges were not recognized. The aforementioned rights included a popular assembly, voice in government, and fair trials. Later, the Maltese would also claim that the King of the United Kingdom is their sovereign, that the King may cede the islands only back to the Maltese, that the King should allow religious freedom on the island, and that there should be a recognition of the rule of law.

This thesis examines traditionally ignored archival sources and documentation in order to reveal the complexity of British Colonial rule in the early nineteenth century. Historically, examinations of colonialism focus on settler colonialism and the creation of empire in Asia and Africa to illuminate the impact of extractive labor and slavery in the global context. The examination of Malta, a relatively poorly known area of British occupation, demonstrates that even in less extreme cases of colonization the British operated by manipulating their subjects into submission and destroying their civil liberties and political rights. This offers an insight to the unseen histories of European colonization.

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Introduction

Sixty miles south of Sicily an island rises out of the Mediterranean. An approach from the sea reveals a rocky coast laden with cliffs. From the air the entire island fits in a plane window. Once on the ground it is massive; the major civilizations of the last 3000 years have left their mark around every turn.

Malta is now a sovereign state, but from the Neolithic age onward outsiders have occupied the island.¹ In 1428 the Maltese paid 30,000 Florins to Alfonso V of Aragon in order to ensure that the island would only be under the direct rule of the crown and not become a fief.² Charles V brought the Knights of St. John to Malta when he gave them the right to use the island and ignored the pact of 1428. The Knights quickly absorbed any power on the island relative to their interest once they arrived, but were hesitant to settle on the island.³ After the Great Siege by the Ottomans in 1565 the Order was content to stay on the Island and became the Maltese' link to the larger Christian powers in Europe through the Knights' presence.⁴

The Order of St. John was organized into *langues*, the knights' kingdoms of origin, and much of their wealth and influence came from those connections. By the 1790s the order became a relic of Early Modern Europe. In 1792 the collapse of the French Bourbon monarchy resulted in a major loss of wealth for the order. A majority of the knights were French and lost their holdings in France during the revolution. During

1. Brian Blouet, *The Story of Malta* (London: Faber, 1967), 28.

2. Ibid, 56.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid, 85. The Great Siege of 1565 proved essential to the Maltese, and as Blouet hypothesizes in *The Story of Malta*, it's unlikely that if the Knights of St. John had lost the siege Malta would have much more than a "deserted battlefield."

the revolutionary and Napoleonic campaigns, France's advance into "the Rhineland, Switzerland and Italy" also resulted in the seizure of the Orders holdings there as well as taxes on knights' estates in "Spain, Portugal, and the two Sicilies."⁵ When Napoleon arrived in 1798 the authority over the orders holdings and the governance of the island officially transitioned from the Knights of St. John to the French.⁶ The island was important enough to Napoleon as a Mediterranean stronghold that he told a British ambassador "he would rather see the English in a Parisian suburb than Malta."⁷ Under French rule the island was forced into becoming a French style republic⁸, and burdened with new taxes that paid for what the order had maintained before.⁹

During the occupation of Malta by the French, the Maltese reached out to the Kingdom of the two Sicilies and to Admiral Nelson for support, and the campaign against the French on the island began.¹⁰ The British became involved in Malta only as a consequence of the islanders' struggle against the French. The British kept it as a protectorate while they saw how the remainder of the Napoleonic War unfolded.¹¹ The island's importance grew as the British recognized its use as a strategic naval outpost to maintain supremacy in the Mediterranean.¹² In 1813 Malta was finally brought under the control of the British crown, which made it a colony. It appointed a governor, Sir

5. Desmond Gregory, *Malta, Britain, and the European Powers, 1793-1815* (Madison: London; Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1996), 35.
6. Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 3.

7. Blouet, 164.

8. Carmel Testa, *The French in Malta*, (Valletta: Midsea, 1997), 103.

9. Ibid, 158.

10. Dobie, 3.

11. Blouet, 163.

12. Ibid, 166.

Thomas Maitland.¹³ Malta remained a colony for 150 years until 1964, when it finally gained independence after millennia of occupation.

When I first visited the island in February of 2018, Malta's history intrigued me. From what I could gather, the war museums, cathedrals and British nationals presented a collective history of Malta that suggested ease and collaboration. They suggested that the Maltese had welcomed the British onto the island and folded themselves into the British Empire without issue. This version of history did not seem to resemble the modern narrative I learned from the native Maltese. In the latter half of my week there, I met an Australian expatriate whose family was originally from Malta. He described the issues of Maltese identity in the modern context of neo-colonization as English speaking tourists and the money of Russian oligarch's overcame the island. These issues were the same ones I thought would come about when an island is forced into an empire that is culturally incongruous to it, but it did not show in the narrative presented to me while I was on the island.

This thesis analyzes Malta as a case study to explore the complicated history of colonization and conquest. Unlike modern European colonies of the 19th century that European states such as England and France took by force in Africa and Asia, the story of Maltese "colonization" is more complex. The British involvement in Africa and Asia was defined by pure extraction of resources and a clear racial hierarchy between the British and their non-white subjects. Malta differs as a quasi-European state, having an involved history with European states through the Order of St. John. During the British Protectorate period the Maltese were even able to petition the British government in a pamphlet, "The Appeals of the Nobility and People of Malta to the justice, public faith

13. Blouet, 173.

and policy of the British Government for the fulfilment [sic] of the Conditions upon which they gave up their island to the King, namely, their ancient rights, under a free constitution.”

This thesis questions and reexamines the British narrative of Maltese colonization. Why was this British narrative of an easy conquest and smooth transition from French to British control constructed? Malta was not a traditional colony, did that impact how this story was told? How much agency did the Maltese have in constructing this narrative, and in framing their position within Europe? Or was Malta’s role in the Mediterranean and Europe limited by outside powers and nobility? Have historians more recently considered the agency of the Maltese people in the telling of the islands past? How has the overwhelmingly pro-British narrative informed current events on the island as corruption and scandal from outside powers move onto the island?

Sources

In order to investigate this period further I have delved into research from several archives. From Syracuse University’s Special Collections there are documents from the period, including *Relazione* between Malta and the Pope, *Recherches sur l’Ordre de Malte, et examen d’une question relative aux français ci-devant membres de cet ordre*, a French examination of the Knights of St. John, and *Histoire de Malte*, the history of Malta, by M. Miegé. All three offer context towards Malta’s standing in Early Modern and Modern Europe. Also from Syracuse University “The appeals of the nobility and people of Malta to the justice, public faith and policy of the British Government for the fulfillment of the conditions upon which they gave up their island to the King, namely, their ancient rights, under a free constitution,” an appeal written on behalf of the Maltese

to the British government, offers a window into the Maltese perspective of their colonization by the British.

The Kew National Archives in London holds the bureaucratic perspective of Malta's colonization. The documents are the correspondence and records from the various administrators and representatives of the British state, and detail the specific events that occurred on the island. Specifically, the Colonial Office collection from 1800-1811 holds the correspondence of the civil and military governors, British nobles, dignitaries and various officers of the state with references to the Maltese as their own people with distinct rights. The War Office collections have the military perspective surrounding the island, and offers context to the Napoleonic wars happening during the period.

The Maltese National Archives offer insight into the Maltese, French, and the Knights of St. John's perspectives during the period. The specific catalogues in the Maltese National Archive include the Chief Secretary to Government, and Public Secretary and Treasurer collections. These collections show the relationships between the British protectorate's civil and military governments and the people of Malta. In the Maltese National Library the first newspaper printed in Malta, *Journal de Malte*, offers insight to the French's regime in the island.

Historiography

The continued colonization of Malta over the last 3000 years, from the Phoenicians through the British, has made Malta the center of study for a variety of topics. Its position in the center of the Mediterranean lends it to naval and military

history, and the aforementioned 3000 years of colonization gives opportunities for specific studies of the various colonizing civilizations.

In academic publications ranging from 1925-2009 the transition of power from the French to the British is primarily about the colonizing power. In the case of the two papers, from 1925 and 1948 respectively, they are written from the perspective of the colonizing power, Britain. “The Constitution of Malta,” a paper by C.J. Colombos Esq., is a memo about the Maltese Constitution in 1821. In providing context for it he describes the British acquisition of Malta. He states that, “...the Maltese voluntarily placed themselves under the protection and sovereignty of the British Crown....”¹⁴ The statement is only a partial truth. The same claim is made in a 1948 paper “Malta and Self-Government” by J.D. Krivine of the Empire Information Section of the Office of Information. In providing context for Maltese Self-Government Krivine states, “The Maltese in fact, a century-and-a-half ago, came into the British Commonwealth at their own request. It was at the time of Napoleon, and they sent a deputation to London to explain their reasons, Lord Nelson at first not quite seeing their value to Britain.”¹⁵ Krivine posits that the Maltese themselves made the sole demand to be part of the Commonwealth. Both early 20th century accounts leave out the Maltese’ autonomy in dealing with the British, and only assert them as a people who welcomed the British.

Two more recent papers, one from 1996 and another from 2009, also mostly neglect the Maltese’ position in the transition of powers from the French to the British. In the 1996 paper, “Settlement patterns in the Maltese Islands: from early colonization to pre-Independence,” Louis F. Cassar provides context for settlement by giving a

14. C.J. Colombos, “The Constituion of Malta,” *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 7, no.1 (1925): 91

15. J.D. Krivine, "Malta and Self-Government," *World Affairs* 111, no. 2 (1948): 113.

summary history of the Maltese islands. In it he says “It was the Order’s efforts in fortifying and further developing Malta’s strategic natural harbours [sic] into a fortified coastal settlements which attracted, for a short span, the French and then the British, to the islands.” He goes on, “To a naval power such as Britain, the geographic position of the Maltese islands was invaluable...For the locals , the situation also proved convenient, since they were not particularly enthused about having their affairs managed by the Order.”¹⁶ The section does provide more autonomy for the Maltese people, but the summary asserts that the British took the island. In “Forming a European Heritage: The Role of Malta” from 2009, John E. Turnbridge does not describe the Maltese’ autonomy during the transition from the British to the French either. He states in a list of the various controlling powers over Malta, “[the] French, who under Napoleon ejected the Knights; and [the] British, who under Nelson assisted in driving out the French in 1800, were persuaded by the Maltese to take political control.”¹⁷ Turnbridge provides the Maltese more autonomy than the earlier 20th century examples, but still fails to accurately portray the Maltese’ part in the transition of power.

Two histories from the 1960s, “Malta, Migration’s Microcosm,” a 1964 article, and “The Story of Malta,” a narrative history of Malta from 1967, and one from 1996, “Malta, Britain, and the European Powers, 1793-1815,” describe the transition from the French to the British in Maltese history with Maltese involvement. “Malta: Migration’s Microcosm” states fairly simply in describing the context of the transition that “However, an insurrection of the Maltese in the same year brought the French rule to an

16. Louis F. Cassar, “Settlement Patterns in the Maltese Islands: From Early Colonization to Pre-Independence,” *GeoJournal* 41, no. 2 (1997): 141.

17. John E. Turnbridge, “Forging a European Heritage: The Role of Malta,” *Geographische Zeitschrift* 97, no. 1 (2009): 13.

abrupt end and the Maltese cast their lot with the British.”¹⁸ While pithy, the statement summarizes the period without diminishing the Maltese’ involvement.

“The Story of Malta,” a much longer monograph, provides more context to the history. In it Brian Blouet states “Having acquired Malta almost by accident, for British involvement had been an opportunist reaction precipitated by the Maltese uprising, the new masters of the islands were not quite certain what to do with their possession.”¹⁹ Blouet’s portrayal of the British acquiring Malta as an afterthought offers the most autonomy to the Maltese, as they started the insurrection against the French and the British hopped on as supporters.

In “Malta, Britain, and the European Powers, 1793-1815,” Desmond Gregory describes the Maltese’ uprising against the French in further context. He says, after describing the hardships of the Maltese under the French, “It needed therefore a few sparks only to start a raging fire of revolt in September 1798.” He goes on, “They were provided by news that Nelson had successfully destroyed the French fleet and by a rumor that the British had sunk a Spanish squadron off its base at Cadiz... Finally came the news of the attempted sale of contents of a Carmelite church at Rabat.”²⁰ This detailed telling of the Maltese position against the French provides them with even more autonomy.

The portrayal of the Maltese in their own history has been lackluster, as their actions as a people in the transition from the French to the British have been mostly overlooked when the period is described outside of a narrative history. This could be

18. “Malta, Migration's Microcosm,” *The International Migration Digest* 1, no. 2 (1964): 211.

19. Blouet, 162.

20. Gregory, 57.

because it takes up more lines to describe the history more accurately, or could be that the history is not well known.²¹

Methodology

This thesis attempts to provide the narrative of the Maltese people and the British protectorate government that worked with them during the transition to British rule. This is in response to the Maltese' accomplishments being overlooked in other histories of the period, but also to make it more well known. The Maltese have traditionally been viewed through the lens of those who governed them, whether crusaders or colonial empires. My project aims to restore Maltese identity and its agency during the rise of the British Empire. For the purpose of this thesis the Maltese are defined as the people who lived on the island that were not members of the Order of St. John, French military leaders, or British military or civil leaders. This cross section of the population encapsulates the people that these events happened to. They include the native Maltese who descend from the island, and other people who made their lives on the island outside of the Knights, the French, or the British.

21. Many times when this period of history is referenced in articles, papers, and monographs, it is often only a small mention. That may be why less historical accuracy is stressed in the few short sentences that it is included, though that does not forgive the historical inaccuracy,

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Chapter 1

This chapter will delve into the period of Maltese history at the crossroads of Early Modern and Modern European history. The Order of St. John, which occupied the island from the 16th century onwards, quickly became outdated by the 18th century as competition among developing nation states eclipsed religious orders in both political power and influence. On the eve of the 19th century Malta found itself caught in the crossfire between Republican France and the United Kingdom. The French under the command of Napoleon invaded the island in 1798 appearing to liberating the Maltese while in fact becoming conquerors as their rule continued. In this context the Maltese called upon the British to liberate them.

A combination of primary and secondary sources will be used to describe the events on the isle. The primary sources, War Office and Colonial Office records from The National Archives in London, provide insight into the choices made by the British military and its personnel. The secondary sources, “The Story of Malta,” “Malta, Britain, and the European Powers,” and “The French in Malta: 1798-1800,” are narrative histories of varying scope about Malta. They provide general information about the island and context for the time period, as well as other primary source documents translated into English.

The Maltese Under the Knights of St. John

In 1428, the Maltese paid 30,000 florins to Alfonso V of Aragon so that the isle would be directly subject to the crown of Aragon, and not a separate fiefdom.²² This vast sum of money supposedly guaranteed the Maltese some autonomy from the crown of Aragon, but when the Order of St. John began looking for a new home it was offered to them by Charles V in 1524.²³ By the 26th of October 1530 the Order of St. John took the Emperor Charles V suggestion and moved to Malta.²⁴ Upon the Order's arrival the Grand Master of the order at the time, L'Isle-Adam, went to Mdina, the ancient capital of Malta, to ensure the firm transfer of power on the island. Once he reached the city gate he was asked whether the Order would uphold the rights and privileges of the Maltese, and after confirming that he was given the keys to the city.²⁵ The island folded into the control of the Order.

The knights of the Order brought unwanted attention to the island, most notably the threat of the Ottomans but also that of pirates. In 1565 the Ottomans launched a full invasion of the island, known as the Great Siege.²⁶ The siege was a stepping-stone for the Ottomans to reach further West into Europe, as Malta rests between the Eastern and Western halves of the Mediterranean. The attacking force made up of Ottomans and North Africans most likely numbered 20,000 men, whereas only 4,000 knights and 5,000 Maltese made up the defenses of the island.²⁷ The victory in the siege underneath the leadership of Grand Master Jean de Valette, for whom the city of Valletta is named, cemented the Order in Malta.²⁸

22. Brian Blouet, *The Story of Malta* (London: Faber, 1967), 56.

23. Ibid, 55.

24. Ibid, 56.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid, 68.

27. Ibid, 82, 83.

28. Ibid, 85.

As a result the Order invested in the island's fortifications and its infrastructure to meet the needs of the knights, which spurred its growth.²⁹ When the Order first came to the island the population was about 20,000, and by the 1790s the population had reached 100,000.³⁰ The newly secured the island allowed for investment, which would go into the Maltese economy. This created industry on the island to maintain the knights' military apparatus.³¹

As the Order declined over time, so did the Maltese's relationship with it. The Maltese were tied to the order's political decisions, and eventually in 1777 Grand Master de Rohan abolished the *Consiglio Popolare*, the Maltese general assembly. The assembly's purpose original purpose was to veto actions of the king of Sicily if they affected Malta, but by the 18th century it amounted to nothing.³²

The French Invasion

With the commencement of the French Revolution and collapse of the Bourbon Monarchy in 1792, the Order lost much of its wealth and therefore most of its means to benefit the Maltese. Historically the Order had been mostly French, and by the 18th century the knights maintained a strong relationship and relied on them heavily.³³ In return the Order held Malta against any rival powers.³⁴

The French Revolutionary Wars saw France fighting the British on their Atlantic and Mediterranean fronts. To push back against the British, Napoleon devised a strategy

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid, 89, 92.

31. Ibid 122.

32. Desmond Gregory, *Malta, Britain, and the European Powers, 1793-1815* (Madison: London; Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1996), 38.

33. Blouet, 54, 154.

34. Ibid.

to take Mediterranean islands and make a connection to the Red Sea, so that he could attack India.³⁵ Malta fell in his path.

The French began their invasion of Malta at midnight on the 10th of June, 1798 with a direct order from Napoleon.³⁶ The end of the Knights of St. John and the transition to French rule was quick. According to Carmel Testa, many Maltese members of the middle class did not like the likely outcome of a battle between the French forces, which were over 40,000 strong, and the weakened order, though some others admired French republicanism.³⁷

Other Maltese had different inclinations about the French invasion. The Porte des Bombes, the main gate through the defenses of Valletta, was under the charge of François d'Andelart, a French member of the Order. When the French were spotted heading toward the gate d'Andelart gave the order to light lanterns so the Maltese defenders could see the enemy. The Maltese soldiers under d'Andelart quickly realized that the order was meant to assist the French in seeing the fortifications and the defenders, so they killed him. As soon as the enemy came into range they began firing upon them.³⁸

After very little fighting, The Grand Master of the Knights, Ferdinand von Hompesch, gave in to the French on the 11th of June 1798, asking for an armistice so terms of surrender could be drawn up.³⁹ On the 12th of June 1798 the terms of surrender were drawn and among them Article 7 of the convention guaranteed the rights of the Maltese people.

35. Carmel Testa, *The French in Malta: 1798-1800* (Valletta: Midsea Books, 1997), 2.

36. *Ibid*, 43.

37. *Ibid*, 43, 60.

38. *Ibid*, 65.

39. *Ibid*, 72.

The inhabitants of the islands of Malta and Gozo shall continue to enjoy, as in the past, the free exercise of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Religion. They shall retain the property and the privileges which they possess; no extra ordinary taxes shall be levied.⁴⁰

With the convention of surrender agreed to, the Order of St. John no longer controlled Malta, Gozo, or Comino. The populace were under French rule.⁴¹

On the 13th of June 1798 the Government of the Maltese islands was created. In essence, Napoleon would appoint a commission that would run the government and have a municipal government beneath them, to which Maltese were appointed.⁴² The Maltese appointed to the municipal government were specifically chosen, according to Testa, as "...persons of standing in Maltese society and who were also more or less in sympathy with French Republicanism."⁴³

The French Republican Government

The French republican government appeared to liberate the Maltese from the Order of St. John by allowing them to retain their rights and participate in government. This quickly changed. French officials soon began looting church properties. General Vaubois tolerated this, as it was the means of obtaining currency to pay the French troops and retain their loyalty.⁴⁴ Vaubois would later note that the looting of the Mdina Cathedral was one of the main causes of the later Maltese insurrection against the French.⁴⁵

40. Ibid, 77.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid, 103-104.

43. Ibid, 105.

44. Ibid, 119.

45. Ibid, 138, note 64.

The absence of the Order also created a different problem on the island. The Order had traditionally paid for the upkeep of military installations, streets, and public places. Now this burden fell upon the French republican government on the island, and therefore upon the Maltese to pick up the expenses through greater tax burdens.⁴⁶

As the summer of 1798 went on tensions continued to grow. On August 6 a pamphlet was left in Cospiscua. It stated that the Maltese had been tricked by the French and demanded that the Maltese members of the National Guard be paid, that the gold and silver taken from cathedrals be accounted for, and that the Maltese should protect their silver and gold against the French.⁴⁷ A few days later a satirical poem was left in Valletta that said, “Beware Maltese, we want to warn you about the French leech which has grown old in the art of looting and is sucking the blood of the rich and poor alike.”⁴⁸ The French noticed this, and one letter to the executive directory states, “certain movements of fanatics are ready to rise on account of the suppression of the some of the convents, foundations, and benefices, in accordance with Napoleon [sic] orders.”⁴⁹

The Maltese Insurrection

The tensions reached a boiling point by late summer. Church property was about to be auctioned off on September 2nd 1798. According to Testa, a crowd in Rabat, the town outside the city of Mdina, gathered to protest the auction. Lazarre Masson, the French captain in charge of Mdina, was unsettled by the large crowds and decided to go into the crowd to try and create calm, two soldiers accompanied him. A stone was

46. Ibid, 158.

47. Ibid, 244.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

thrown at him, so he began waving his sword and as a result was cornered in an alley and then killed by the crowd. One soldier narrowly escaped back to the garrison of Mdina to report this.⁵⁰

The bells of St. Paul's church in Rabat began to ring. The insurrection began.⁵¹

Inside the garrison the French soldiers learned of what happened to Masson and began preparing their defenses while sending a messenger to Vaubois.⁵² That same day Vincenzo Borg, a cotton merchant, went in to Rabat for business. He saw the revolt and rushed back to his home of Birkikara to prepare its defenses. He realized that the revolt was more than a violent protest, but the beginnings of an uprising against the French. He headed back to his in Birkikara to raise their defenses and cemented himself as a leader in the insurrection.⁵³

British Involvement

As the insurrection went on, the Maltese needed allies. The French were trapped in Valletta, but in order to hold the siege help from a larger power would be needed. On the 17th of September 1798 two Portuguese ships arrived and began a blockade of the French until the British joined.⁵⁴ On 25 October 1798 the British arrived.⁵⁵

In the 1790s Britain had had little contact with Malta. According to Desmond Gregory, an anonymous report from 1792 received by Lord Grenville, the British foreign secretary, outlined that Malta would be useful as a port in the Mediterranean and

50. Ibid, 260.

51. Ibid, 261,

52. Ibid, 263.

53. Ibid, 265.

54. Ibid 347-348.

55. Ibid, 382.

that Britain would be the best great power to take it under its wing.⁵⁶ The report was ignored, and occasionally taking Malta was considered but it was not acted upon before the French invaded.⁵⁷ The Maltese' appeal reached the British Admiral Nelson and he provided assistance, though the British government and King George III had no intention of obtaining Malta.⁵⁸

The blockade continued, and in February of 1799 Admiral Nelson appointed Captain Alexander Ball to lead the forces on and around the island.⁵⁹ Ball writes in a letter dated 15 December 1798 that “the Maltese, perceiving the necessity of having a Chief to reside constantly with them petitioned his Sicilian Majesty and Lord Nelson to give me that appointment.”⁶⁰ Ball also notes that “The Maltese are extremely attached to the English...[and] they have frequently expres[f]ed their wish to be under the sovereignty of Great Britain and promised that they would defend the island with their own troops, provided they were paid the expense of two full British regiments.”⁶¹ Ball's presence would seem to reinforce the British support for the Maltese cause.

Surrender

The French capitulated on 5 September 1800.⁶² Among the Articles of Capitulation, Article VIII mentions the Maltese directly. It states “All individuals, of whatever nation they may be, inhabitants of the Isle of Malta or others, shall not be troubled, disquieted, or molested for their political opinions, nor for any acts done

56. Gregory, 59.

57. Ibid, 66.

58. Ibid.

59. The National Archives (TNA): WO 1/291, 15 December 1799.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Testa, *The French in Malta: 1798-1800*, 817.

during the time that Malta was in the power of the French Government.”⁶³ This protection of the Maltese acts as a kind of rule of law, as is addressed in a note to the article that states that, they “shall be treated with Justice and Humanity and shall enjoy the full protection of the laws.”⁶⁴

British Presence

Immediately after the Maltese were liberated from the French the British took control of the island. General Abrecromby immediately noted the importance of the island as a military station. In a letter to Henry Dundas, the secretary of state for war, dated 9 December 1800, Abrecromby describes Malta as potentially “the most complete in His Majesty’s possession,” with what he calls “the [M]arvelous [H]arbo[u]r which is capricious and perfectly safe, is perhaps the best port in the Mediterranean.”⁶⁵

Captain Ball immediately advocated for the island to have both military and civil governance. He states in a letter dated 25 December 1800:

Major General Pigot has informed me that this Island is to be considered purely Military, and that you do not intend to appoint a civil governor independent of a military commander. I am extremely apprehensive that this measure [will] create disgust and distrust among the Maltese, which may be productive of tenious [sic] consequences. They were becoming so happy and attached under the present form of government, but so essential a change in it may alter their sentiment very materially...⁶⁶

Ball’s concern is that they do not want a repeat of the Republican French Government with military rule in the new British government. Ball’s advocacy for a civil command

63. The National Archives (TNA): WO 1/291, 216.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid, 255.

66. Ibid, 263.

values the Maltese' agency. In order for any British presence to be successful the Maltese must be appeased.

Ball repeats his request again on 24 January 1801 that Malta should have a civil governorship. He expresses, on behalf of the Maltese, that a civil governor is necessary.⁶⁷ Ball also expresses interest in filling the role himself, stating "I have continued to act here as civil governor and I offered Major General Pigot to remain here so long as he thought my serious services useful."⁶⁸ Ball's appeals for a civil governor work, although Charles Cameron is appointed Civil Governor in 1801 instead of Ball.⁶⁹

Conclusion

A unique set of circumstances led Malta to these crossroads. The decaying Order of St. John, and its strategic importance in the Mediterranean made it a key target for Napoleon. By happenstance the British, who were not previously interested in the island, found a foothold there. These circumstances brought the Maltese to the status of a quasi-territory, the nature of which was to be fought out on the island over the course of the next decade.

67. The National Archives (TNA): CO 158/1, 24 January 1801.

68. Ibid.

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Chapter 2: The Appeals of Vincenzo Borg

This chapter examines “The Appeals of Vincenzo Borg,” a pamphlet published in 1810, printed by Henry Reynell, and delivered to both Houses of Parliament in the instance that the justice the pamphlet seeks from the Colonial Ministry is deferred to them.⁷⁰ Vincenzo Borg was one of the leaders of the Maltese insurrection, and one of the first Maltese to work closely with Captain Alexander Ball.

The document seeks to combat a letter that decries Borg’s character to William Windham in 1807 by Ball, the late British civil governor of Malta. The pamphlet uses Borg as a case study to demonstrate how Ball ruled the island as a despot, and uses Borg as an example of Maltese patriotism. In this appeal, it becomes evident that the Maltese hoped to demonstrate loyalty to Britain while retaining the ancient political rights of the Maltese.

The pamphlet is largely a testimonial, divided into 8 parts. According to the pamphlet all of the documents it includes, outside of the introduction and conclusion, are documents previously “...forwarded from Malta to the British Government, in the hope and expectation of obtaining redress.”⁷¹ It presents its case for justice by presenting the case study of Vincenzo Borg, addressing his character and actions.⁷² Through this structure the authors of the pamphlet, the nobles of Malta, communicate their view that the Maltese should have their ancient rights restored under the power of the British

70. The National Archives (TNA): CO 158/17, pp 280-281.

71. *Ibid*, 285.

72. *Ibid*, 285-286.

crown. The narrative in the documents they present, in their words, “...will be abundantly confirmed by the documents which follow [sic].”⁷³

The Character of Vincenzo Borg

Vincenzo Borg was originally the owner of several cotton plantations and a large exporter of cotton to Spain.⁷⁴ After the French occupation began its attack on the religious institutions of Malta, the alleged despotism of the British regime became unbearable. As a result the Maltese began planning a revolt in complete secrecy.⁷⁵ At the commencement of the revolt Borg was among those at *Città-Vechia*, Mdina, the city in which the insurrection began when the French removed valuables from a cathedral to take them to auction.⁷⁶

During the Maltese’ war against the French, Borg was a “constant *advocate* [sic] for putting [Malta] under the protection of Great Britain.”⁷⁷ The pamphlet makes special note that “As soon as Captain Ball landed, Vincenzo Borg hoisted the British standard on his batteries.”⁷⁸ Upon the capitulation of the French in Valletta Borg convinced the Maltese army into lowering their arms to the British.⁷⁹ In turn Ball and the other British officers “entered into a solemn engagement, in his Majesty’s name, with the Maltese, to put them in possession of their *ancient rights* [sic].”⁸⁰ It was “...on this express *condition* [sic] the whole nation acknowledged his Britannic Majesty as their sovereign

73. Ibid, 289.

74. Ibid, 289. It is unclear how many plantations he owned as the document only references their existence in the plural tense.

75. Ibid, 289-291.

76. Ibid, 290

77. Ibid, 293.

78. Ibid, 292.

79. Ibid, 293.

10. Ibid.

by acclamation.”⁸¹ This compact solidifies Borg at the center of Malta’s want for recognized rights under a power.

Letters from Sir Alexander Ball to Vincenzo Borg

Vincenzo Borg’s support of the British forces is further demonstrated in an officer’s testimonial to his character. A number of letters from Ball to Borg are presented chronologically, detailing their official relationship from the perspective of what Ball has written.

In a letter dated from the 15th of January 1799, Ball writes to Borg, “Your letter has given me the greatest satisfaction, as it proves your strenuous endeavors to finish gloriously what you have so well begun.”⁸² The letter references a conspiracy that Borg discovered and brought to the attention of Ball, as well as Borg’s ongoing efforts to fight the French and involve the British. Ball finishes the letter by writing “I shall feel the greatest pleasure in making you an early visit after our success, to assure you personally that.”⁸³ A letter from two days later, January 17th, 1799, Ball writes, “I have a great deal to say to you, which I cannot write. I anchored here expressly to keep up a personal communication with you.”⁸⁴ Ball recognizes Borg as a leader, and the letters codify that.

Borg’s faith in the British is reassured in Ball’s letter from February 9th, 1799. Ball writes at length over the fate of Malta, whether it is to fold in to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies or join the United Kingdom in some capacity. Ball writes:

I am of opinion, that we must not wound the feelings nor infringe the rights of the King of the Two Sicilies—we must act with delicacy. If, at

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid, 306.

83. Ibid, 307.

84. Ibid.

the end of the war, the Maltese and the English are well attached to each other, you may be sure that it will be the interest of the King of Sicily to give up his right for ever [sic]. In a letter which I have this day written to Lord Nelson, I explained myself very strongly on the advantage the King of Sicily would derive from having a friendly nation so near him, with a maritime for his support, which will be a guarantee for the good behavior of the Sicilians.⁸⁵

This level of detail provided to a foreign national strengthens the partnership between Ball and Borg at the time. Ball's impressions about the future of Malta suggests that the British see the Maltese as a potentially cooperative power, not the subjects of British conquest. It suggests that he believes that the Maltese and British will be "well attached," and his repetition of that thought to Borg would suggest a hope for the Maltese to retain their ancient rights.⁸⁶ In Ball's view, the Maltese are in an allegiance with the British through their mutual dislike of France. Malta is thus an ally to the British, not a subject.

Affidavit of the Eminent Services of Vincenzo Borg

Next the editors present an affidavit of Borg's actions during the insurrection against the French. He was present in the rebellion from the beginning at Città-Vechia, the old city of Mdina.⁸⁷ Throughout the insurrection Borg was integral to the Maltese' fight, organizing the defenses of Harhar,⁸⁸ a district inside his home of Birkirkara, as well as funding his battalion at great personal expense and through connections with the nobility.⁸⁹ These deeds were attested to by 287 people in the presence of a notary, of

85. Ibid, 310.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid, 315.

88. Ibid, 319.

89. Ibid, 320-321.

which 90 were nobility, gentry, or clergy, 156 were heads of families in Birkirkara, as well as 41 individuals.⁹⁰

Ball formally recognized Borg on a number of occasions as well. On March the 20th 1799 Ball named Borg a joint “...Guardian of the Port and Head of the Health-office” in the port of St. Paul, Marsa Scirocca, and “Valletta, when it shall be conquered.”⁹¹ On the first of November 1800 Ball named Borg “Our Lieutenant for Casal Birkicara [sic]” in return for his “faithful attachment to [his] country.”⁹²

The document makes specific note of this recognition. It frames Borg’s actions in the context the recognition of the Maltese’ ancient rights. If Borg, later on when Ball turned on him, claimed the ancient rights that Borg himself made sure were granted when the British took possession of Malta, then he would he would be a “criminal in the eyes of Sir Alexander Ball.” If Borg gave up the ancient rights he fought for, he would be “a traitor to his country.”⁹³

Rights of the Maltese

The pamphlet then lists the ancient rights of the Maltese it has previously referenced. It establishes that historically, Malta’s self-governing population created laws and operated under them, and that the Emperor Charles V recognized these rights when he placed Malta under the control of the Order of St. John. The pamphlet explicitly states that the “Maltese should enjoy their ancient privileges.”⁹⁴ For a time the rights of the Maltese were respected, but gradually the Order began corrupting the

90. Ibid, 326.

91. Ibid, 329.

92. Ibid, 330.

93. Ibid, 332.

94. Ibid, 333-334.

Consiglio Popolare, the popular council, one of the most important rights of the Maltese, and in 1775 abolished it.⁹⁵

The Maltese' ancient rights were ignored again when Captain Ball abolished the council in 1800.⁹⁶ There was hope among the Maltese that a different form of government from Britain would come, and that their ancient rights would be respected. If not upheld in totality then at least the rights would exist in some form.⁹⁷ A different form did not come.

In instructions for an 1806 appeal to the British government through John Richards, esquire, the Maltese state “that there is internal, incontrovertible evidence to be found in the code of laws by which are governed, as it establishes an *absolute power over life and property in the hands of him who governs* [sic].”⁹⁸ This is in reference to Ball’s reinstatement of the Code of Rohan, “in which no limitation is put to the power of the grand-master.”⁹⁹ The Maltese’ direct concerns over Ball’s despotism dealt with a number of rights, including their lack of freedom to petition the government, their wish for an independent judiciary, an abolishment of torture and extortion, an expansion of privacy, and an end to banishment from the island.¹⁰⁰

These concerns are placed immediately before the “Declaration of Rights of the Inhabitants of The Islands of Malta and Gozo,” dated April 15th, 1807. In the preamble the authors state directly that they wish to claim “...our native rights and privileges...and of fixing a constitution of government.”¹⁰¹ Among the rights the

95. Ibid, 334.

96. Ibid.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid, 336

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid, 337-338.

101. Ibid, 339.

Maltese claim to have in the document is that the King of the United Kingdom is their sovereign, that the King may cede the islands only back to the Maltese, that the King will allow religious freedom on the island, and that there will be a recognition of the rule of law.¹⁰²

In another excerpt, from “The Memorial of the Maltese Deputies,” dated October 22nd 1801, the account of several Deputies of Malta who visited the throne of the King is presented. In the account it states the following:

“...[W]e wished to become subjects of the King, and enjoy all the advantages of free subjects, under a monarch who is the father of all his people, rather than to claim and maintain our own entire independence; but we never supposed, nor can now for a moment conceive, that, in violation of all laws, divine and human, we should be forcibly treated by our auxiliary allies, like a conquered nation or as vile slaves, sold for a political consideration, and whatever horrible calamity may ensure, the nation never will submit.”¹⁰³

The Maltese positioned themselves as allies to Britain, and in return their one request, their rights and privileges, which are similar to those of British subjects, are denied.

The poor treatment repeats itself in a letter dated 11th December 1800 from General Vaubois from the next pages.

“We made them free; they were governed by their own magistrates, without our interference and we guided them like children, when unfortunately new instructions arrived from France; and, having persuaded ourselves that we could treat them as a conquered nation, we made new regulations. The consequence was, that the whole country rose in an instant.”¹⁰⁴

The Maltese pursuit of their ancient rights, as demonstrated in the document, has been their concern throughout the last 20 years. The inclusion of Vaubois letter serves as a reminder to the British that the Maltese’ primary concern is to retain the rights, and that

102. Ibid, 340-342.

103. Ibid, 347.

104. Ibid, 350.

the vehicle to achieve those rights rests in becoming a proper subject of the British crown.

Vincenzo Borg and Malta

The next section connects Borg and the greater Maltese struggle. The document was originally a speech from Ball to Borg in 1804, delivered in French but translated for Borg in 1809.¹⁰⁵ Upon the surrender of Valletta, according to Captain Ball, Borg asked for the office of *Segreto*.¹⁰⁶ Ball rejected his request, instead offering him a lower office, to which Ball claims Borg began creating disturbances afterwards as a sign of his displeasure.¹⁰⁷ Borg directly rebuts this account in the document stating that, “I never asked for the office of *Segreto* [sic], nor any other office.”¹⁰⁸

The document continues in a question and answer format where Borg rebuts each of Ball’s claims about him. A number of further accusations are made against Borg, each of which is immediately rebutted. Some are ridiculous, including one that Borg frequently met with the locotenenti to deliver secret plots where in fact Ball “...caused them to meet at my house, and then accused me of assembling them.”¹⁰⁹ These accusations levied by Ball did not have to hold to any particular standard, as with his powers as civil governor the “...accuser and the judge...” were one person.¹¹⁰

As a result Borg was sentenced to a year in prison and two years confined in his town.¹¹¹ In the words of the editors:

105. Ibid, 365.

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid, 366.

108. Ibid, 367.

109. Ibid, 373-374.

110. Ibid, 378.

111. Ibid.

Thus, upon general assertions of the accuser and the judge in one person, unsupported by any proof whatsoever, a ruthless tyrant, actuated by jealousy, envy, and malice, regardless of the calls of justice, gratitude, or humanity; disgracing the high office he holds, condemned a man, [unguilty] of any crime, to whom the King owes the possession of Malta and the attachment of the people; tore him from his family, imprisoned him for a year in Valetta, and two years confined him in his native town; forbade him all intercourse with other men, causing the to avoid him as a serpent, not through fear of his venom, but of the fangs of *the tyrant*; deprived him of offices he had a thousand times merited by his services; ruined his plantations and his commerce; took from him his magazines; and withheld the money due to him.¹¹²

Ball's betrayal of Borg is his betrayal of Malta. Borg delivered Malta to Britain, the power it wanted to be part of, and in turn Ball mistreats him. The request made to Ball was to respect the rights of the Maltese, and he has failed in doing so with his treatment of Vincenzo Borg.

Closing Demands

The editors of the document end the pamphlet by emphasizing that Vincenzo Borg is one of many who were wronged by the despotism of Ball.¹¹³ Borg is likely the most prominent of the wronged, as an initial leader of the insurrection against the French, and his actions directly contributed to Malta's possession by the British. In the end, they ask for their ancient rights to be returned to them, and they demand "free representation of the people...whenever our rights are found to be injured," an independent judiciary, a free press, and trial by jury.¹¹⁴

Historiography

112. Ibid, 378-379.

113. Ibid, 393-394.

114. Ibid, 397.

The pamphlet is an edited piece of political literature, and as such should not be taken at face value. The document recognizes this from the beginning, and throughout the pamphlet its examples are internally consistent within it.

Throughout the document it is referenced again and again that the Maltese, specifically Borg, were amicable to the British. Borg himself is described as, “...perfectly English [in that] He equally abhors Jacobinism and tyranny.”¹¹⁵ The Maltese led an insurrection against the French largely by themselves, and through the actions of Vincenzo Borg Malta was essentially delivered to the British.¹¹⁶ Given the multiplicity of accounts provided it is likely not far from the truth that Borg was a key figure in the transition to British power.

Regarding Captain Ball’s despotism, this may be exaggerated. Other sources, not collected or published by the editors, corroborate the despotism. Borg writes in a letter dated 30th May 1806, “...no one dares risk to write to England, because it would be accounted to them a great crime, and particular by if any one ventured to write to your Excellency. There are many spies on this account employed by Sig. Ball, but in despite of the treason I will show the truth.”¹¹⁷ Borg also writes to William Eton to describe the goings on of the island after Eton left, and mentions the hardship Ball has created, writing, “He has made the Maltese begin to hate the English because he propagates the belief that he acts by order of the court.”¹¹⁸ William Eton was a rival of Ball’s, contending to be the next civil governor after Ball.¹¹⁹

115. Ibid, 294.

116. Ibid, 293.

117. TNA: CO 158/12, piece 1.

118. Ibid.

119. TNA: CO 158/13, pp 19.

According to Ball, Eton used Borg to create disarray. Upon Eton's departure from the island in 1802 "Borg's character and conduct began to exhibit themselves in a light very different from that in which I had formerly seen them."¹²⁰ Borg had apparently made efforts to make an expectation for a change in the government, and so dissent against the judges.¹²¹ This falls in line with some of the accusations mentioned earlier that were levied against Borg. Even if true, the fact that Ball controlled the courts negates anything Borg could exert on the judiciary.

The status of the Maltese' ancient rights not being upheld is also apparent. Ball's ability to single out Borg, even if it was justified in his perspective, is evidence of his powers as a despot. Malta's status as a part of the British Empire, which is as either a conquest or a subordinate power, is dependent on the power of the Empire being exerted in a systematic way over the island, especially regarding individuals. Ball's individual power over the courts specifically supports his despotism and positions Malta as a conquest instead of a subordinate power.

Purpose

The pamphlet is meant to convince the King of the United Kingdom, or the Houses of Parliament, or the Colonial Ministry, of the importance of the Maltese struggle. This is done by combining Vincenzo Borg's unfortunate and, according to the editors, undeserving punishment, with the political status of Malta.

At this point in Malta's history it is firmly underneath British rule, after the two previously despotic regimes the Order of St. John and the French Republicans. There is

120. Ibid, 21.

121. Ibid, 22-24.

an apparent want for political status for the Maltese. The Maltese make their intentions known by explicitly stating that when they are treated as a conquered nation they will respond forcefully to protect their rights.¹²² Vincenzo Borg is a singular example of the Maltese patriotism they wish to inspire, and his case with its awkward legal standing is equivalent to that of the island as a whole. The emerging status of Malta and Britain, as either a subordinate power and a great power, or that of a conquest and a conqueror, are key issues in the case of Vincenzo Borg. As Borg is to choose between upholding his ancient rights or accepting the reality of despotism, Malta is to choose between fighting for their ancient rights or caving to despotism a third time.

Borg's specific standing as someone who welcomed the British presence from the beginning lets the editors make two claims. They first claim that Borg was mistreated by Ball's despotism allows them to claim that Malta should exist with its ancient rights in the context of the British Empire underneath the King. The specific rights they ask for, representation in the *Consiglio Popolare*, an independent court system, a free press, and trial by jury, all have equivalent rights in England.¹²³ They all also were not given to Borg throughout his ordeal. The actions against Borg by Ball act as a springboard to illuminate why they want those rights. With the grant of the aforementioned ancient rights Malta would attain a different status, that of the subordinate power. If not, then they would remain the conquered one.

122. TNA: CO 158/17, pp 347, 350.

123. Ibid, 397.

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The National Archives (TNA): CO 158 War and Colonial Department and Colonial

Office: Malta, Original Correspondence

Chapter 3

This chapter will examine the Appeals of the Nobility and People of Malta written in 1811. The appeals were written after and reference the Appeals of Vincenzo Borg, but these appeals pertain to the Code of Rohan and reveal how British despotism expanded from their implementation. The complaints listed in the appeal are written by British nobles and include the Maltese Appeals made in the Appeals of Vincenzo Borg. By including mainly British authors to describe the Maltese' plight the Appeal serves to elevate their claim as a nation under British sovereignty that deserves greater rights.

Case of the Maltese etc. with an Historical Memoir

The first section of the appeal is written by the editor to relay the direct qualms of the Maltese. Specifically, the Maltese agreement with the British forces during the capitulation of the French is brought forward. The key to the British occupation in Malta rests on the fact that "...stipulations subsequently confirmed by proclamation, in His Majesty's name:-viz. that their liberties should be preserved ("not annihilated;") such was the condition of their allegiance.-They did not stipulate for despotic rule."¹²⁴ The despotic rule mentioned includes the Code of Rohan, a code adopted by the British government over the Maltese.¹²⁵ The Code includes sections that create restrictions on the courts, censorship of books, the allowance of torture and secret imprisonment.¹²⁶

124. Joseph Hume, "The appeals of the nobility and people of Malta to the justice, public faith and policy of the British Government for the fulfillment of the conditions upon which they gave up their island to the King, namely, their ancient rights, under a free constitution," (London: Printed by Henry Reynell, 1811), 10.

125. Ibid.

126. Ibid, 44-47.

The installation of the Code of Rohan betrayed the original agreement with the Maltese. These stipulations were not met, according to the author, as the original relationship between the British and the Maltese was as “...friends, allies, and protectors,” and with the capitulation of the French the British “joyfully acceded to their fair and honorable terms.”¹²⁷ Those terms had the “express conditions that [the British] should preserve to the people of Malta and Gozo all their rights, privileges, and immunities, as enjoyed by them before.”¹²⁸ Those rights included the “*Coniglio Popolare*, or assembly of national representatives,” and a constitution to govern the island.¹²⁹

The rights were not preserved. The Code of Rohan creates a large enough precedent that the author remarks that “with such an example before [potential allies], what nation will hereafter court our alliance?”¹³⁰ The author further points out the hypocrisy of the situation, writing, “...we, who are so enamoured of our own Magna Charta,” that the British should understand the Maltese’ desire for a more just constitution.¹³¹

Observations, etc. by Counsellor J.J. Dillon

The second section of the Appeal is written about the value of Malta. The context of the island and its populace is explored to demonstrate the ridiculousness of their particular political situation.

127. Ibid, 17.

128. Ibid, 28.

129. Ibid, 26.

130. Ibid, 13.

131. Ibid, 34.

The value of Malta during a “time of peace...to promote in a very considerable degree the commercial interests of Great Britain,” is immediately brought up by the author, a Counselor.¹³² He advocates for the Maltese to have a constitution based government to demonstrate to other nations the British government’s commitment to the island.¹³³

This shows itself as a reflection of what the author describes about the Maltese character. The specifics of the French capitulation, specifically the Maltese “compliance with the wishes of the British officers...strongly denote the valour, and at the same time the tractability of the Maltese character.”¹³⁴ The character was originally shared by the British actions towards the islands, as at first the British “appeared before the island not to make *war upon the Maltese* [sic] but to drive out the common foe, whom they also sought to expel.”¹³⁵

The betrayal of the Maltese’ trust is again repeated by the author, noting Alexander Ball’s reintroduction of the Code of Rohan.¹³⁶ The reintroduction of the code resulted in the governor of Malta becoming a “sole legislator and final judge of his enactments; and no checks according to the existing system in that island are imposed on any improper use of such unlimited authority-Can such a state of things be acceptable to a people like the Maltese?”¹³⁷ The despotism introduced by the Code is against what the Maltese agreed to in the first place, as the author notes “We are occupants only by permission of the Maltese, and under a most solemn pledge not hitherto redeemed.”¹³⁸

132. Ibid, 52.

133. Ibid, 54-55.

134. Ibid, 57.

135. Ibid, 59.

136. Ibid, 64.

137. Ibid, 66.

138. Ibid, 70.

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Conclusion

The history of Malta has been traditionally told from the perspective of the island's rulers, whether the Order of St. John, the Napoleonic French, or the British. This thesis has sought to provide a new lens to view Malta's history by arguing the importance of highlighting Maltese agency. Specifically, during the British Protectorate period from 1800-1810, when the Maltese were in a quasi-autocratic state of limbo underneath a civil and military governor with few recognized liberties, the documents I have analyzed reveal the extent of tensions between British administrators and Maltese representatives. These tensions, in turn, overturn previously held notions about British occupation in Malta.

The events of the first decade of the 19th Century are best described through the Maltese man Vincenzo Borg. Borg is one of the main reasons that Malta became a protectorate with the British. His leadership during the insurrection against the French saw him advocating for British involvement in the fight against the French and British rule over the isle.¹³⁹ At the same time, his ferocity against the French, in his eyes a tyrannical force, and their refusal to respect the rights of the Maltese speaks to the Maltese' desire for recognition of their rights.

Under the British protectorate Borg became a martyr for the cause of Maltese agency. Imprisoned by Captain Ball, Borg's circumstances were exactly that of the Maltese. They were stuck in a system where their rights were not recognized even though they ceded their island to Britain.

By 1811 various pamphlets reached Lieutenant General Hildebrand Oakes, the combined civil and military governor after Ball's passing. Among them were the appeals

139. The National Archives (TNA): CO 158/17, pp 293.

of Vincenzo Borg and the “The Appeals of the Nobility and the People of Malta...”¹⁴⁰
 The pamphlets were indicative of some unrest on the island, and it spurred the British to finally reckon with the status of Malta.¹⁴¹ By 1812 a Commission of Enquiry was set up to determine what the status of Malta should be.¹⁴²

The Commission was first reminded the primary reason for the British presence on the isle was for military purposes. The Maltese could only receive so many liberties, as the military effectiveness of Malta could be affected negatively with too free a populace.¹⁴³ The commission concluded that most systems on the island would not be overhauled, as implanting an British government would be counterproductive to quelling the Maltese.¹⁴⁴ Recommended changes from the commission did include making the judicial system more transparent, banning torture, and the civil commissioner’s powers were deemed to be too far reaching.¹⁴⁵ This met most of the demands raised in the pamphlets, while securing the island of Malta for the British as a fortress.

This response from the government in England was largely brought on by the actions of the Maltese. Benevolence did not bestow rights upon Malta. A concerted effort to secure their rights in various forms from 1798 until 1812 finally gave them recognition, in addition to protection, from a great power. Vincenzo Borg, the man who became a leader during the insurrection, and whose cause which was championed by many more Maltese when he was imprisoned, brought this to fruition. His compact that gave the British the island after the capitulation of the French, that the British would

140. Desmond Gregory, *Malta, Britain, and the European Powers, 1793-1815* (Madison: London; Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1996), 176.

141. *Ibid*, 180

142. *Ibid*, 181.

143. *Ibid*.

144. *Ibid*, 184-185.

145. *Ibid*, 184-186.

recognize the Maltese' ancient rights and that the Maltese would recognize the Britannic Majesty as their sovereign was finally fulfilled.¹⁴⁶

This case reveals larger ideas about British colonization and expansion. By examining traditionally ignored archival sources and documentation, this thesis attempts to reveal the complexity of British rule in the early nineteenth century. Historically, scholars have focused on settler colonialism and empire building in Asia and Africa to highlight the effects of extractive labor and slavery in a global context. By examining Malta, a generally ignored area of British rule in the Mediterranean, this thesis shows that even in less extreme conditions of colonization, British colonial rule operated by manipulating their subjects into submission and destroying their civil liberties and political rights. From the perspective of the Maltese, this story is just one example of the unheard histories of European conquest and colonization.

146. TNA, 293.

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