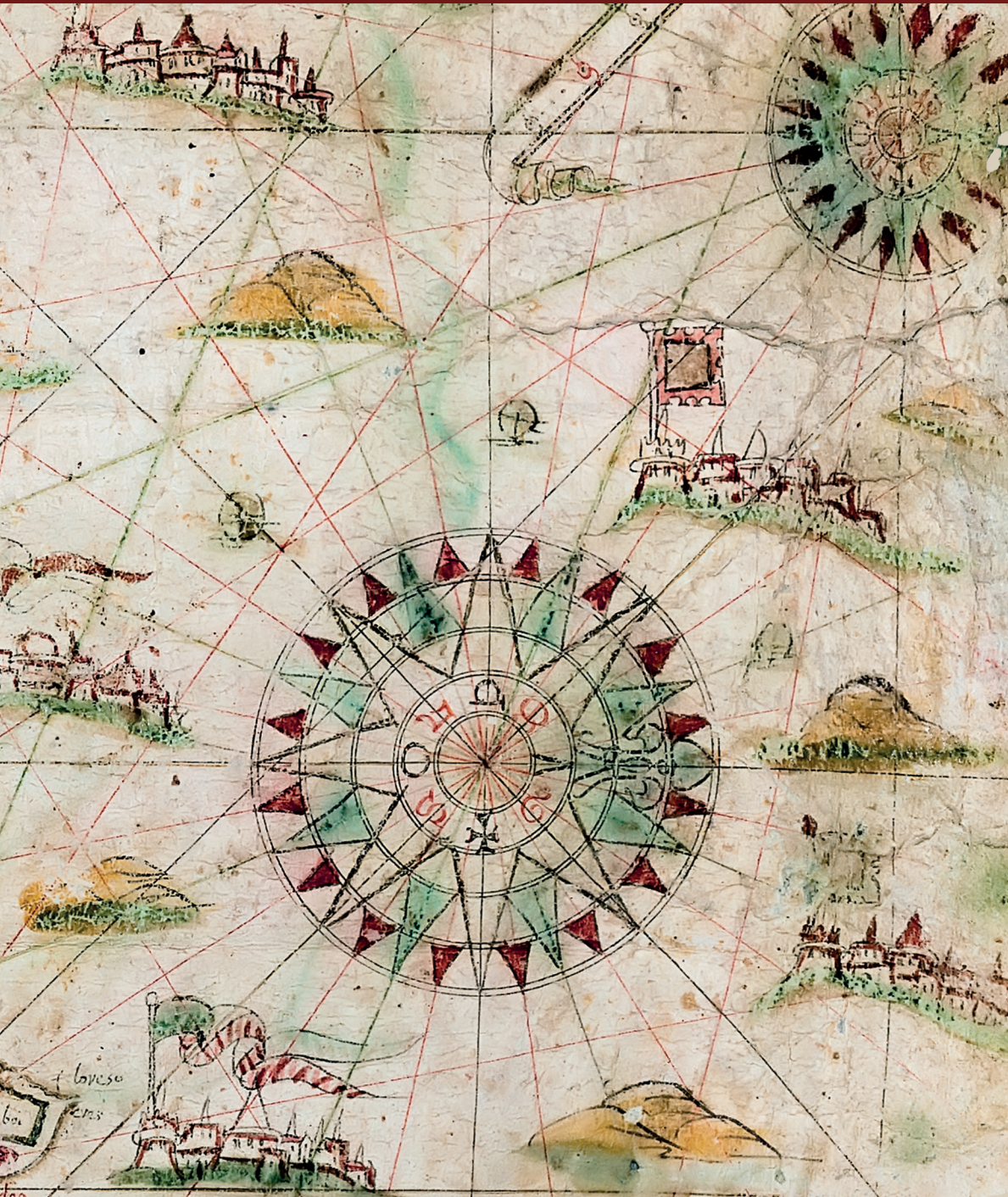


# Hospitaller Malta and the Mediterranean Economy in the Sixteenth Century



HOSPITALLER MALTA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN  
ECONOMY IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY



HOSPITALLER MALTA AND THE  
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IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Joan Abela

THE BOYDELL PRESS

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*To Deborah*  
*For always being there for me*



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## Foreword

As Joan Abela argues cogently in the following pages, the history of early modern Malta can truly be regarded as the epitome of the history of the Mediterranean. This authoritative and lively portrait of Maltese society and economy introduces us to a complex and diverse world in the midst of transformation. It opens exciting new areas of investigation, and is an impressive contribution to the new historiographical approach to Mediterranean history, which focuses on interaction and cross-fertilisation between different customary and legal traditions. Abela's detailed and lucid analysis brings into focus how the establishment of the Hospitaller Order in the Maltese archipelago gave rise to important structural transformations – in terms of administration, the economy and society. For the first time, the maritime economy of Malta is the focus of a sharp and comprehensive analysis which takes all these elements into account and produces a nuanced portrait of the socio-economic development of a heavily militarised society, a distinct frontier world where a crusading mission co-existed with conspicuous consumption and the challenges of provisioning an arid land which was experiencing a veritable demographic boom.

The real protagonist of this book is the population of Malta itself; not the well-known Knights of St John, the offspring of European Catholic nobility, but the local notables, merchants, seafarers and those small-scale entrepreneurs of both sexes who responded to epochal challenges with remarkable resilience and inventiveness. Joan Abela effectively demonstrates how the Maltese population, confronted with the arrival of new 'masters', found ways to negotiate their institutional and social role within this new balance of power; how they successfully took advantage both of the islands' strategic value vis-à-vis the Barbary regencies and of the multi-faceted economic opportunities afforded by the arrival of the Knights. The socio-economic consequences of corsairing activities – the foundation of the Order's existence in the fractured sixteenth-century Mediterranean – are also discussed, but with a particular focus on the ways in which, paradoxically, they gave women a greater capacity for independent action, given the men's constant exposure to the threat of captivity and relative absence from the islands.

This exciting research work builds on the recent opening of Malta's Notarial Archive to scholars and the general public, itself a wonderful story of collaborative endeavour on the part of the community to preserve its historical heritage through the establishment of a private-public partnership. Joan Abela is the true heroine of this story, because it is in great part through her own tireless efforts to preserve and share this heritage that Malta is rediscovering its own rich past.

*Maria Fusaro*  
University of Exeter



## Preface

The complexity and diversity of the Mediterranean Sea and its lands have provided fertile ground for on-going debates on a wide variety of issues, ranging from its unity to its sharp divides, from the importance of human interaction to that of its micro-ecologies. More than half a century of scholarly work and discussion has followed Braudel's monumental work on the Mediterranean,<sup>1</sup> yet there still remains much to explore in order to obtain a clearer picture of how seemingly opposing realities have found ways to function within an environment where politics, religion and the economy are intricately intertwined.<sup>2</sup> This paradox encompasses the different cultures and civilisations that have inhabited this closed space where, simultaneously, they were formally at war and trading with one another.<sup>3</sup>

This book presents a study of Malta, a small but strategically placed island on the central axis of the Mediterranean which in many ways could be considered as the epitome of this contradiction. Malta's central position in the Mediterranean, a few miles from the Sicilian Straits, which were crucial for control of the east–west Mediterranean passage<sup>4</sup> and, after 1530, the presence on the island of the Order of the Knights of St John (1530–1798), made it an active participant in Mediterranean politics and commercial networks. As in the broader context, two opposing realities played a significant part in Malta's economic performance during the early period of Hospitaller rule. One was the Order's major role as a bulwark of Christianity, mainly carried out through its corsairing activities, and the other was its constant trading activity with the 'infidels'. Malta thus lends itself to the use of case studies which are approached with a micro-historical frame to throw light on larger phenomena taking place in the Mediterranean. Through this methodological approach, which delves into what seem to be the petty details of everyday life, this study arrives at

1 F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949, 2nd rev. edn 1966). Later translated by S. Reynolds, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (2 vols, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1995). For a recent reappraisal of this work see M. Fusaro, C. J. Heywood & M. S. Omri (eds), *Trade and Cultural Exchange in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Braudel's Maritime Legacy* (London, 2010).

2 D. Abulafia, *Mediterranean Encounters, Economic, Religious, Political, 1100–1550* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2000), ix.

3 M. Fusaro, 'After Braudel: A Reassessment of Mediterranean History between the Northern Invasion and the Caravane Maritime', in Fusaro et al., *Trade and Cultural Exchange*, 1–22: 1.

4 D. Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (London, 2011), 429.

conclusions which ‘highlight the hiatus between the normative institutional level of history and real life on the ground’.<sup>5</sup> By projecting these conclusions into the wider context we can read beyond the institutional framework of economic transactions and observe them in practice.

Although there is vast literature on various aspects of the long presence of the Knights Hospitaller in Malta, comprehensive study of the commercial development of the harbour area during the first decades of the Knights’ rule is noticeably absent. Despite Malta’s small size, the presence of the Order of St John facilitated an inflow of foreign resources which eventually led to very dense human settlement and an international presence beyond the island’s shores that was disproportionate to what would normally be the case for such a small island. The maritime nature of the Order’s activities, and its heavy dependence on imports, hastened the development of an efficient maritime communication system. All the economic activity generated wealth and was a ‘pull factor’ for a large number of enterprising individuals, both local and foreign.<sup>6</sup> The result was that early modern Hospitaller Malta saw the development of an enterprising business class which, of sheer necessity, grew accustomed to operating well beyond its narrow confines. This in turn contributed to the island’s becoming more open to connection with the outside world.

This book explores in detail the various economic activities that took place in Malta during the period 1530–65. The year 1565 has been chosen as an end point because the Great Siege, which took place between May and September, caused a break in the normal chain of events.<sup>7</sup> By concentrating on this period a portrait can be painted of socio-economic development before the onset of the ‘hyper-militarisation’ activities that followed the Great Siege. This is done through an analysis of the practical functioning of commerce – its agreements and disputes, its currencies, its trading posts and its nodal points. Further, it is shown how notarial evidence and the records of various tribunals set up on the island at the time help to fill in gaping holes in historical enquiry.

The chronological subdivisions adopted in the historiography of other European countries have influenced how historians of Malta have established the island’s own sequential divisions.<sup>8</sup> They have always found the medieval period – in Malta’s case running until 1530 – and the first few decades following the establishment of the

<sup>5</sup> Fusaro, ‘After Braudel’, in Fusaro et al., *Trade and Cultural Exchange*, 1–22: 9.

<sup>6</sup> Trade is not pivotal for economic upsurge; it is not a cause of economic growth, but one of its effects. C. Sabillion, *On the Causes of Economic Growth: The Lessons of History* (New York, 2008), 37–9. For a discussion on various historiographical approaches to economic systems and their effect on trade see L. Halevi, ‘Religion and Cross-Cultural Trade: A Framework for Interdisciplinary Inquiry’, in F. Trivellato, L. Halevi & C. Antunes (eds), *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000–1900* (Oxford, 2014), 24–61.

<sup>7</sup> J. Abela, ‘The Great Siege of 1565: Untold Stories of Daily Life’, in M. Camilleri (ed.), *Besieged* (2 vols, Malta, 2015), vol. 2, 97–115.

<sup>8</sup> A. Luttrell, ‘Approaches to Medieval Malta’, in A. Luttrell, *The Making of Christian Malta, From the Early Middle Ages to 1530* (Aldershot, 2002), paper II: 14. For a discussion on historical divisions see P. Burke, *The Renaissance – Studies in European History* (2nd edn, Basingstoke and New York, 1997).

Hospitaller Order of St John in Malta problematic. This is mostly because of the absence, dearth or inaccessibility of documentary material for the period.<sup>9</sup> This is alleviated only from the late fifteenth century onwards, although the documentation is still relatively sparse in comparison to data relating to the post-siege period. Although the medieval period has benefitted somewhat from a new wave of research,<sup>10</sup> the same cannot be said for the transitional period between the medieval phase and the early modern one of Hospitaller dominion. Most works dealing with the sixteenth century treat the first decades of the Knights' rule as a series of personal reigns of Grand Masters and emphasise particular events such as the Great Siege of 1565 and other complex politico-religious conflicts. While these are essential features of Malta's history, such studies have often neglected social and economic aspects which could provide a sharper picture of Maltese society and shed light on the broader Mediterranean picture.

This lack of interest in the socio-economic side cannot be wholly attributed to the absence of documents. Various primary sources, like notarial deeds, court records and chancery documents, which could have been exploited for such historical enquiry have been overlooked for too long. Historians of Malta have tended to focus on the history of the Knights of St John rather than on the history of a people under the Knights of St John. The result is that a vital question in Maltese historiography still awaits an answer: what were the principal factors shaping Malta's economic and social transition from the late Middle Ages into the early modern era? Does this transition merit focused attention, one which goes beyond the passing references it has received in wider historical work? Can similar economic situations be found in neighbouring Mediterranean countries?

Bearing the latter question in mind, the Introduction provides a critical appraisal of some of the landmark historical works on the Mediterranean produced since the late 1960s. This review is necessary in order to determine whether any of the hypotheses they have put forward can be applied either in whole or in part to Malta, especially with regard to economic development. The chapter invites readers to reconsider issues of economic dependency and backwardness – with which Mediterranean islands have often been associated – in broader terms. It also investigates whether these theories still hold when it is considered that in various regions which have historically been labelled as 'backward' there was commonly a preference to produce niche products over staple goods. The chapter thus sets the tone for the rest of the volume, which aims to re-assess deeply rooted historical beliefs that merit a fresh historical perspective.

Chapter One investigates issues relating to the island's institutional, legal, social and political infrastructure, and at the same time considers whether various changes in these structures affected the running of the economy. The role of the Spanish Crown in securing control over its territories is viewed in juxtaposition to the same

<sup>9</sup> Although the chronological limits of the early modern period are open to debate, in this study the beginning refers to c. 1500 for the Europe in general, while for the Malta it is usually taken as the arrival of the Knights of the Order of St John in 1530. C. Dalli, *Malta, The Medieval Millennium* (Malta, 2006), 13.

<sup>10</sup> Dalli, *Malta, The Medieval Millennium*, 252–6.

role which was subsequently transferred to the Knights of St John. This comparison helps to explore the effects of a change in rulership and the extent to which it ultimately affected economic performance. An important part of the analysis is the focus on the aspirations of the local merchant community, hitherto a silent voice in most studies of the period. In the initial years of their rule, the Knights faced great difficulties in setting up a strong administrative base, and this suited the aspirations of the merchant class, who seized the opportunity to take a more prominent and active role in Maltese society. Such aspirations were not exclusive to Malta but mirrored similar trends in Europe. Each of the following three chapters is dedicated to a specific case study.

The Chapter Two first case study concerns the grain trade, an important sector in the Maltese economy which brought in substantial amounts of revenue which were generated from indirect taxation. Malta's dependence on Sicily for its grain supply was a major concern throughout this period. Moreover, apart from feeding hungry mouths, the Knights knew well that they needed to act cautiously with the local representatives because it was they who held the key to duty-free concessions granted by the Sicilian Viceroy, which were proving hard to hold on to. The sources presented in this chapter have been purposely selected to reflect the great difficulties faced by the grain merchants during the import process. In line with recent trends which focus on materiality and cross-cultural trade, the chapter also examines a very unexplored aspect of local commercial trading networks,<sup>11</sup> juxtaposing the transfer of goods in trusted markets and prohibited ones.<sup>12</sup> The focus is on the clandestine re-export of duty-free grain – an issue which worried the Sicilian authorities. As is discussed in Chapter Four, other merchandise was also exported or imported to and from Muslim territories under the guise of slave ransom procedures.<sup>13</sup> The investigation of these mechanisms helps us to understand how the transfer of goods across cultures affected the development of societies and how, rather than observing dissimilarities, merchants of different religions acted independently of such barriers in a shared business culture. As Leor Halevi explains, 'religious and cultural boundaries cannot be drawn so neatly on maps, as if they were national borders; they are constructs. Commerce between, say, a Catholic from Venice and a Muslim from Istanbul arguably takes place within a shared Mediterranean culture.'<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Halevi argues that the economic significance of peaceful commerce in pre-modern times is debatable and thus one has to consider that most of the trade which was carried out was not only done via peaceful mechanisms but also depended on coercion and violent actions like piracy, plundering and pillaging. Halevi, 'Religion and Cross-Cultural Trade', in Trivellato et al., *Religion and Trade*, 24–61: 28–9.

<sup>12</sup> On networks of trust see F. Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, CT, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> The veiling of trading enterprises under a missionary banner had parallels in other European countries. G. Marocci, 'Trading with the Muslim World: Religious Limits and Proscriptions in the Portuguese Empire (ca. 1480–1570)', in Trivellato et al., *Religion and Trade*, 91–107: 94.

<sup>14</sup> Halevi, 'Religion and Cross-Cultural Trade', in Trivellato et al., *Religion and Trade*, 24–61: 41.

In Chapter Three the second case study evaluates another silent voice in Maltese economic studies: women, their legal persona and how this affected their contribution to the island's economic activities. Notarial acts are a particularly helpful source when comparing the economic performance of local women with that of their Greek counterparts who, as the chapter discusses, came under a separate set of laws promulgated in Rhodes. The sources are examined in the context of legal constraints which were imposed by a male-dominated society that tended to give women sufficient privileges to enable the better functioning of male economic pursuits and interests. A delineation of these limitations at the different stages of a woman's life is essential in order to establish how society sought to profit from the participation of women while at the same time regulating their activities. The law shaped everyday life through regulations on property, dowry, inheritance, marriage and dispute settlements, making legal texts an important source for illuminating the vital processes that dictated women's actions.<sup>15</sup> By means of this focus the way in which women devised means to deal with constraints in a space that was shaped by norms and prohibitions is also portrayed.

Chapter Four, the third and final case study, seeks to establish how commercial links functioned between Malta – often described as the frontier of Christianity – and neighbouring Ottoman North African territories, and how merchants, both Christian and Muslim, managed to overcome the religious antagonisms which inhibited the easy flow of trade. The objective of this study is to shed light on economic activities taking place in and around Malta's harbour area during a largely unexplored period in Maltese history. It also aims to provide a better understanding of commercial relations in the Mediterranean, especially ransom processes, since the Maltese harbour was a point of intersection not just for people of different nationalities, but for people of different faiths, such as Muslims, Jews and Christians of different denominations. All were unified by a common goal – to trade and to make a profit from trade.

<sup>15</sup> T. Kuehn, *Law, Family and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1994), 2.

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shared not only my study space but also my anxieties, my fears, and my elation upon making new discoveries. She was always there to listen assiduously. Indeed, she was not merely a daughter, but above all, a true and loving friend. To her I dedicate this work. Finally, I would like to thank the British Commission for Maritime History for awarding me the Boydell & Brewer Prize which resulted in the publication of this book, and Horwath Malta and the Bank of Valletta plc for part-sponsoring this work to meet financial constraints.



## Abbreviations

### Archival abbreviations

CAM, AO	Cathedral Archives of Mdina, Malta, <i>Acta Orginalia</i>
CAM, CEM	Cathedral Archives of Mdina, Malta, <i>Curia Episcopalis Melitensis</i>
CAM, AIM	Cathedral Archives of Mdina, Malta, Archives of the Inquisition
CAM, Misc.	Cathedral Archives of Mdina, Malta, <i>Miscellanea</i> Collection
NAM, MCC	National Archives of Malta, <i>Magna Curia Castellania</i>
NAM, ACA	National Archives of Malta, <i>Suprema Appellationis Curia et Tribunalis Publicae Audientiae Causae</i>
NAM, CA	National Archives of Malta, <i>Comune Aerarium</i>
NAM, MCC, AO	National Archives of Malta, <i>Magna Curia Castellania</i> , Acta Originalia
NAM, MCC, Reg. AO	National Archives of Malta, <i>Magna Curia Castellania</i> , Registrum Actorum Originalium
NAV	Notarial Archives Valletta
NLM	National Library of Malta
NLM, AOM	National Library of Malta, Archives of the Order of Malta
NLM, AOM, Lib. Bull.	National Library of Malta, Archives of the Order of Malta, <i>Liber Bullarum</i>
NLM, Libr. MS	National Library of Malta, Library Manuscripts Collection
NLM, Univ.	National Library of Malta, <i>Università</i> Manuscripts Collection

### Other abbreviations

<i>ab inc</i>	<i>ab incarnatione</i>
Doc./Docs	document/documents
f./ff.	folio/folios
Fig.	figure
MS	manuscript
n.f.	no folio number
R	Register
v.	verso
vol./vols	volume/volumes

# Notes

## Primary sources

The primary sources consulted for this study derive from four of the main archival depositories in Malta. The main primary source is notarial registers, and these are supplemented with relevant primary documentation from the Cathedral Archives, the records of the *Magna Curia Castellania* housed at the National Archives, and records in the National Library of Malta, which range from municipal records of the town council, to various chancery and other administrative documents.

## References from notarial primary sources

The great majority of notaries exercised their practice in the main centres of activity on the island, usually the town squares of Mdina, Birgu and, after the 1570s, Valletta. As shown in Table 1, prior to the establishment of the Knights Hospitallers in 1530, most notaries had their offices in the inland capital city of Mdina. The arrival of the Order and the subsequent establishment of new cities in the harbour area resulted in an ever-increasing number of notaries practising in the port city of Birgu and, later, Valletta. Thus, for the pre-1530 period the study has focused on notaries practising in Mdina, since documentation is more abundant for that city, while for the first decades of the Order's rule (1530–65), the focus is on notaries practising in Birgu, since this city experienced a major transformation and an increase in commercial activities. Furthermore, Birgu saw the establishment not only of Maltese notaries to address the increasing demand for legal services, but also that of Rhodiote notaries who served both the local and Greek communities, as well as members of the Order. Thus a wider section of society is captured in the acts of these notaries. The selection of notarial acts was also dependent on the state of preservation of the volumes.

Table 1 Notaries practising in the towns 1520–1600

	1520s	1530s	1560s	1580s	1600
Notabile (Mdina)	7	11	6	12	8
Birgu (Vittoriosa)	1	4	7	9	10
Valletta <sup>a</sup>	-	-	3	10	13

<sup>a</sup> Work on the building of Valletta started in 1565 and the knights officially transferred their seat to the new city in 1571.

Source: A. Attard, *Index of Notaries 1465–1894* (Malta, 1979), 6–8, 10–19.

Notaries practising in Malta gathered and bound their registers from 1 September to 31 August, the administrative year corresponding to the Indictional year, following the style of Byzantium.<sup>1</sup> However, they did not adopt a uniform method of dating. Some of them, used the Florentine calendar, known as *ab incarnatione*, which took 25 March as the first day of the year, reflecting the belief that this was the day of Jesus Christ's conception. Thus, an act for 1 January 1534 would be dated 1 January 1533, and so forth up to 24 March; acts for 25 March onwards would be dated by the new year – in our example, 25 March 1534.<sup>2</sup> In this study, contracts with *ab incarnatione* dates are distinguished by the inclusion of *ab inc* after the date – (10.ii.1544 *ab inc*).

Other notaries used what was known as the Roman or papal Indiction, whose first day was either 25 December, better known as *nativitate* referring to Christmas, or else 1 January.<sup>3</sup> All the documents used for this study having this system of dating have recorded the New Year on 1 January. It is to be noted however, that at times, both types of dating feature in a volume of a particular notary. It is believed that this has occurred since very often notaries used to include *Eodem* instead of the date when drawing up contracts. This implies that a particular contract was drawn up on the same date as the one preceding it. At times, one contract can include several folios containing *Eodem* with no definite date. This must have caused some inconvenience, since one would have to go back and scrutinise a number of folios to establish the exact date to which that particular *Eodem* was referring.

Therefore, occasionally, both *Eodem* and the date feature in some contracts. A close inspection of the calligraphy and ink indicates that it is likely that the date was added at a later stage, probably to facilitate the work of those wanting to consult the documents. When such documents were analysed during this study, the dates were reproduced according to that which was added later. The acts of Notary Giuseppe de Guevara, R 224 & MS 778, are an example of such instances. Another observation related to the dating system in notarial acts is the application of religious feasts

<sup>1</sup> G. Wettinger, *Acta Iuratorum et Consilii Civitatis et Insulae Maltae* (Palermo, 1993), 15.

<sup>2</sup> This was not an unusual occurrence, since the French year began on Easter day until 1564, the Venetian year on 1 March until 1522, and the English year on 25 March until 1752. See B. Blackburn and L. Holford-Strevens, *The Oxford Companion to the Year* (Oxford, 1999), 103, 785, 880.

<sup>3</sup> The series of Roman, papal, or pontifical Indictions introduced in the ninth century started from the first day of the civil year, this being 25 December in some cases, 1 January in others. This system was also common in Western Christendom, but in spite of its appellation it was by no means exclusively used in papal documents. The beginning of the year varied at different periods and in different countries. When Julius Caesar reformed the calendar (45 BC), he fixed 1 January as New Year's Day, a characteristic which it seems to have never quite lost, even among those who have chosen a different starting point for civil and legal purposes. The most common of such starting points were 25 March (Feast of the Annunciation, 'Style of the Incarnation') and 25 December (Christmas Day, 'Style of the Nativity'). In Rome and a great part of Italy, it was 25 December, until Pope Gregory XIII reformed the calendar (1582) and fixed 1 January as the first day of the year. However, the beginning of the year for the dating of papal Bulls is still Christmas Day: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03738a.htm> (accessed 9 May 2016). Refer also to Blackburn and Holford-Strevens, *The Oxford Companion to the Year*, 770–1.

serving as time markers when referring to future dates. These often represented stipulated time markers for various obligations, such as, the repayment of a loan.

References from the notarial primary sources are reported thus:

- The main archival repository always precedes the reference to the actual acts;
- The manuscript 'MS' (original) number or the register 'R' (true copy) number is written as in the following examples, NAV, R 4/1 or NAV, MS 514/1;
- The deeds quoted are followed by the folio reference and the date in which the act was drawn;
- The letters n.f. indicate that folios were not enumerated. In this case, reference is denoted by stipulating the date of the deed.

Therefore, a typical example of a notarial register reference is NAV, R 4/1, ff. 17–18v (13.ix.1557) or NAV, MS 514/1, n.f. (13.ix.1557).

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from original manuscripts are the author's own. Wherever possible, place names have been recorded according to their modern names. Thus, Naxar becomes Naxxar, Luca – Luqa, and so on. Words and expressions in Latin or Italian, including weights, measurements, currencies and titles, are written in italics. Whenever a question mark [?] appears in the text, it indicates that the word could not be deciphered. Since abbreviations are a common feature of the documents consulted, especially in the case of titles, hereunder is a list providing a key to abbreviations present in this work.

*Don.* = *Donnus* (an abbreviated form of *Dominus* meaning Master).<sup>4</sup>

*Fra.* = *Frater* (a lay brother).

*Hon.* = *Honorabilis* (a person who is deemed to be worthy of being honoured; often used for those who held property or were prominent merchants).<sup>5</sup>

*Rev.* = *Reverendus* (title of dignity given to ecclesiastics and religious persons).<sup>6</sup>

*Ven.* = *Venerabilis* (used for members of the higher clergy as a sign of high esteem).

*Ma.* = *Magnificus* (used for distinguished persons such as the town mayor, the wartime governor and notaries).<sup>7</sup>

*Mag.* = *Magister* (refers to craftsmen ranging from the town surgeon to the village carpenter)<sup>8</sup>.

*Nob.* = *Nobilis* (title given to a person from the nobility and to fief holders).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> V. Mortilla, *Nuovo Dizionario Siciliano-Italiano* (2nd edn, Palermo, 1853), 310.

<sup>5</sup> Wettinger, *Acta Iuratorum*, 16. Mortilla, *Nuovo Dizionario*, 604.

<sup>6</sup> Mortilla, *Nuovo Dizionario*, 715.

<sup>7</sup> Mortilla, *Nuovo Dizionario*, 305.

<sup>8</sup> Wettinger, *Acta Iuratorum*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Wettinger, *Acta Iuratorum*, 16. Mortilla, *Nuovo Dizionario*, 583.

## Currency

1 <i>uncia</i> <sup>10</sup> or 2 ½ <i>scudi</i>	=	30 <i>tari</i>
1 <i>scudo</i> <sup>11</sup>	=	12 <i>tari</i>
1 <i>tari</i>	=	20 <i>grani</i>
1 <i>grano</i>	=	6 <i>dinari</i> <sup>12</sup> or <i>Piccioli</i>

During the period under study, Sicilian coins used in Malta prior to the arrival of the Order were still in circulation. Consequently, in the documents consulted there is also reference to various other currencies, and one comes across such phrases as *pecunia argentea aquilarum*,<sup>13</sup> *scutis solis boni auri et iusti ponderis vel eorum iusto valore*<sup>14</sup> or *ducati auri*.<sup>15</sup> Wherever possible, any information regarding their equivalent value noted in the corresponding documents has been included in the study.

<sup>10</sup> The *uncia* was not an actual coin; at least until the time of Grand Master Manoel Pinto de Fonseca (1741–73), it was only a unit of account. See H. Calleja Schembri, *Coins and Medals of the Knights of Malta* (London, 1966), 10; A. M. Vassallo, 'Prices of Commodities in Malta and Gozo 1530–1630' (BA Hons dissertation, University of Malta, 1976), 13.

<sup>11</sup> The silver *scudo* was the standard coin and unit of account and was equal to 12 *tari*, and all notarial contracts consulted for this study stipulate that the *scudo* was worth 12 *tari*, 'ad ra[tio]nem tarenorum duodecim singulo scuto' (at the rate of 12 *tari* per *scudo*). NAV, MS 514/1, n.f. (27.vi.1558), to quote an example. According to Joseph Sammut, 'the first coins which appear to have been minted in Malta by the Order of St John, were the gold *zecchini* pieces struck during the brief reign of Grand Master Pietrino del Ponte (1534–35). The *Zecchino*, called by the Maltese either *zekkin* or *skud tad-deheb* [gold *scudo*] was the standard coin for the gold coinage.' J. C. Sammut, *Currency in Malta* (Malta, 2001), 35; see also M. A. Sant, 'Coinage Problems Facing the Order of St John in Malta' (MA dissertation, University of Malta, 1967), 49. At least up to the late 1630s, the Maltese *scudo* maintained a par value with its Sicilian counterpart. Sammut, *Currency in Malta*, 35.

<sup>12</sup> For the first thirty-five years after the Order's arrival in Malta, the only copper piece minted on the island was the *picciolo* or *dinar*, minted by Claude de la Sengle (1553–57). However, his successor Jean de Valette (1557–68) minted a large amount and variety of copper coins; Sant, 'Coinage Problems', 90; Sammut, *Currency in Malta*, 35; S. Fiorini (ed.), *Documentary Sources of Maltese History, Part I: Notarial Documents, No. 1: Notary Giacomo Zabbara R 494/1(I): 1486–1488* (Malta, 1996), xvii.

<sup>13</sup> NAV, R 4/1, fol. 19v (20.x.1557). On 16 May 1529, the town council of Mdina deliberated that the silver *aquile* previously circulating for 1 *tari* 4 *grani* each, should pass current according to their weight. A *bando* dated 2 November 1536 fixed the *aquile* of standard weight at 23 *grani* each, while another *bando* dated 1 February 1537 ordered that the new *aquile* and *tari* should *circulate* without any reference to their weight. Sant, 'Coinage Problems', 297.

<sup>14</sup> NAV, MS 514/1, n.f. (16.v.1558), or NAV, R 224/1, fol. 49v (22.iv.1540).

<sup>15</sup> NAV, R 4/1, fol. 7 (6.x.1557).

## Weights and measures

Vital to the study of any economy are weights and measures adopted in that particular market since these provide a relation between the commodity purchased and its price, while ensuring that both parties in a commercial transaction had the necessary means to assure their proper interests. Weights and measures also shed light on whether taxes imposed on various items were light or heavy. In this study it will be noted that different provinces in Sicily used different weights and measures differing from one another, the Maltese system being very similar to that of Messina. The *tumolo* was the basic measurement used for dry goods such as the different types of grain, while the *quartuccio* was the fundamental unit used for liquid measures. The following are weights and measures used in Malta featuring in this study.<sup>16</sup>

### Measures of capacity

*For wheat, barley and rye*<sup>17</sup>

1 <i>Salma</i> <sup>18</sup>	= 16 <i>Tumoli</i>	= 288.510000 litres
1 <i>Tumolo</i>	= 6 <i>Mondelli</i> <sup>19</sup>	= 18.031875 litres
1 <i>Mondello</i>	= 10 <i>Misure</i>	= 3.005312 litres
1 <i>Misura</i>	= 10 <i>Lumini</i>	= 0.300531 litres
1 <i>Lumino</i>		= 0.030053 litres

*For other cereals (including pulses, seeds and salt)*

1 <i>Salma</i>	= 16 <i>Tumoli</i>	= 334.656000 litres
1 <i>Tumolo</i>	= 6 <i>Mondelli</i>	= 20.916000 litres
1 <i>Mondello</i>		= 3.486000 litres

<sup>16</sup> Weights were made of stone, iron or brass. All weights were inspected, adjusted and sealed by the *catapans*, the officials in charge of weights and measures. Vassallo, 'Prices of Commodities', 25.

<sup>17</sup> All measures and their equivalents quoted from A. Martini, *Manuale di metrologia, ossia misure, pesi e monete in uso attualmente e anticamente presso tutti i popoli* (Turin and Loescher, 1883), 810.

<sup>18</sup> 'The Maltese for *salma* is *modd* worth 4 *wejbiet* and 1 *wejba* worth 4 *tomniet*. The Maltese *tomna* is worth 6 *sighan*. Although the Maltese *siegh* and the Sicilian *mondello*, *munneddu* are not the same fraction of a *tomna*, in Malta the *siegh* was referred to as a *mondello* in various documents.' Fiorini (ed.), *Documentary Sources of Maltese History, Part I, No. 1*, xviii.

<sup>19</sup> According to Anthony Vassallo, the Sicilian dry measure differed from the Maltese mainly in the subdivisions of the *tumolo*, which was sub-divided into four *mondelli*. Vassallo, 'Prices of Commodities', 27.

**Liquid measures<sup>20</sup>***Olive oil<sup>21</sup>*

1 <i>Barile</i>	= 2 <i>Cafisi</i>	= 40.892000 litres
1 <i>Cafiso</i>	= 4 <i>Quarte</i>	= 20.446000 litres
1 <i>Quarta</i>	= 4 <i>Quartucci</i>	= 5.111500 litres
1 <i>Quartuccio</i>	= 4 <i>Terzi</i>	= 1.277875 litres
1 <i>Terzo</i>	= 2 <i>Casbe</i> or $2\frac{1}{2}$ <i>misure</i>	= 0.319469 litres
1 <i>Casba</i>	= $1\frac{1}{2}$ <i>Misura</i>	= 0.159734 litres
1 <i>Misura</i>	= 4 <i>Quartini</i>	= 0.127787 litres
1 <i>Quartino</i>		= 0.031947 litres

All other types of oil were sold according to weight at the equivalent of:

1 <i>Quintale</i> of 100 <i>Rotoli</i>	=	79.378714 kg
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*Wine*

1 <i>Barile<sup>22</sup></i>	= 4 <i>Quartare</i>	= 42.570000 litres
1 <i>Quartara</i>	= $9\frac{1}{2}$ <i>Quartucci</i>	= 10.642500 litres
1 <i>Quartuccio</i>	= 2 <i>Pinte</i>	= 1.120263 litres
1 <i>Pinta</i>		= 0.560132 litres

*Weights<sup>23</sup>*

1 <i>Cantaro</i>	= 100 <i>Rotoli</i>	= 79.378714 kg
1 <i>Rotolo</i>	= 2.5 <i>Libbre</i> (30 ounce)	= 0.793787 kg
1 <i>Libbra</i>	= 12 <i>Oncia</i>	= 0.317515 kg
1 <i>Oncia</i>		= 0.026460 kg

**Measures of length<sup>24</sup>**

1 <i>canna</i> (for cloth)	= 8 <i>palme</i>	= 2.090038 metre
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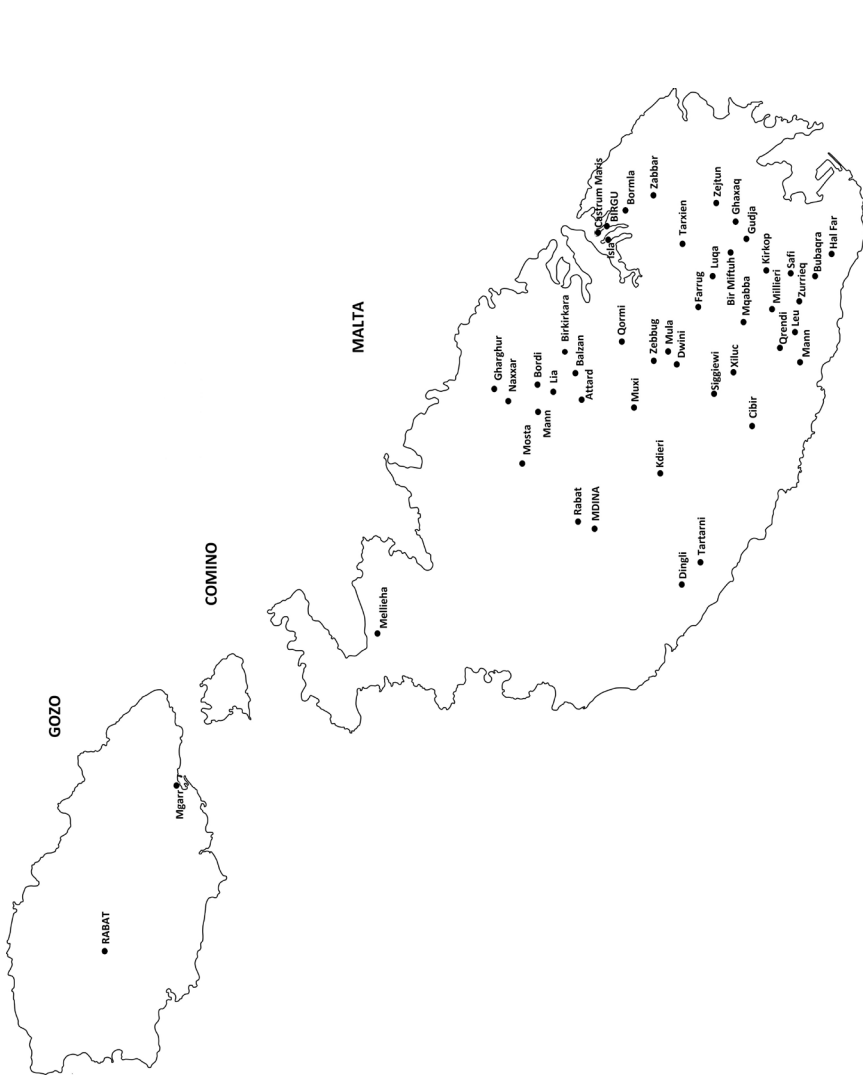
<sup>20</sup> The Maltese system of liquid measure was rather complicated; oil, vinegar, wine and honey were measured by respective *quartuccio*, the fundamental unit of measurement used in this system. Vassallo, 'Prices of Commodities', 38–49.

<sup>21</sup> All measures and their equivalents quoted from Martini, *Manuale di metrologia*, 810–11.

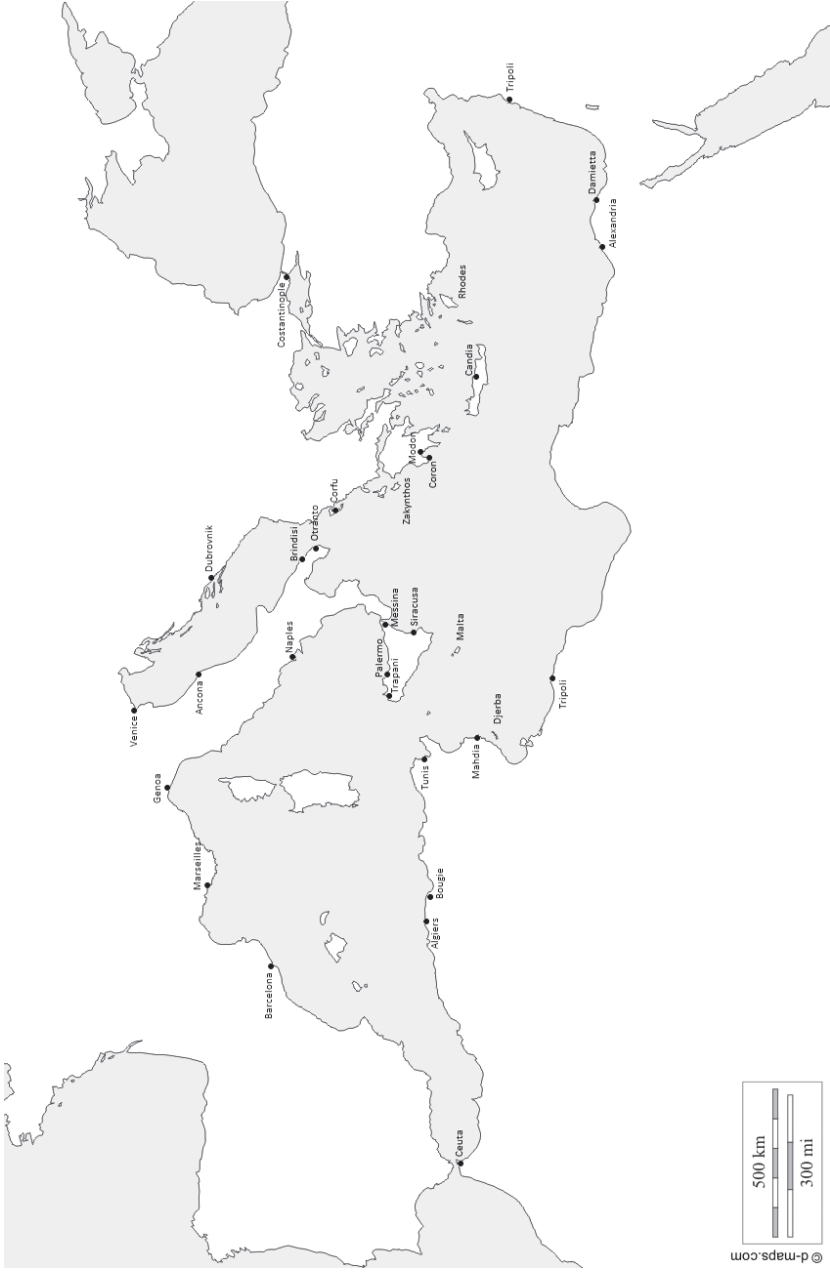
<sup>22</sup> The *barile* was both a measure of standard capacity and a container having a barrel shape. 'A decree issued on many occasions during the sixteenth century ordered that every "*barile*" of wine had to be measured and a sign showing its capacity in *quartari* or in *quartucci* had to be put on it.' Vassallo, 'Prices of Commodities', 45–6. Refer to NLM, Univ. 14, fol. 742 (7.ix.1588).

<sup>23</sup> All weights and their equivalents quoted from Martini, *Manuale di metrologia*, 810–11.

<sup>24</sup> Martini, *Manuale di metrologia*, 810.



Map 1: The Maltese Islands c.1565



Map 2: The Mediterranean Area

# Introduction

## Malta and the Mediterranean context

The sixteenth century is a period of transition in European history, characterised by changes on the economic, social, religious and political level. In the long run, these changes disintegrated the old medieval order and challenged traditional and established ways of thought and action. Although Malta was slow to shed its medieval character, events in the wider European context did ultimately affect the island's society. Among other things, the century witnessed the further westward reach of the Ottoman empire and its establishment as a Mediterranean power.<sup>1</sup> Another significant change was the Italian maritime republics' loss of primacy and the demise of the Hanseatic League,<sup>2</sup> creating a void that was filled by the Habsburg–Ottoman struggle for supremacy in the central Mediterranean<sup>3</sup> and the rise of new economic powers like England.<sup>4</sup> The sixteenth century was also marked by the Habsburg–Valois rivalry,<sup>5</sup> which intensified as a consequence of close Franco-Ottoman relations.<sup>6</sup>

The spread of the Reformation to western and eastern Europe<sup>7</sup> saw religious orders such as the Knights Hospitaller lose substantial income from their estates.<sup>8</sup> An event

<sup>1</sup> M. Kunt & C. Woodhead (eds), *Süleyman the Magnificent and His Age* (London and New York, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> M. Ressel, 'The Hanseatics in Southern Europe: Structure and Payment of German Long-Distance Shipping, 1630–1700', in M. Fusaro, B. Allaire, R. J. Blakemore & T. Vanneste (eds), *Law, Labour and Empire: Comparative Perspectives on Seafarers, c. 1500–1800* (Basingstoke, 2015), 141–57: 143.

<sup>3</sup> D. Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (London, 2011), 411–13. M. Green, 'Resurgent Islam: 1500 – 1700', in D. Abulafia (ed.), *The Mediterranean in History* (2003), 219–49: 235–6. Kunt & Woodhead (eds), *Süleyman the Magnificent*.

<sup>4</sup> M. Fusaro, *Political Economies of Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean: The Decline of Venice and the Rise of England 1450–1700* (Cambridge, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> H. G. Koenigsberger, G. L. Mosse & G. Q. Bowler, *Europe in the Sixteenth Century* (2nd edn, London and New York, 1992), 233–9. Green, 'Resurgent Islam', in Abulafia (ed.), *The Mediterranean in History*, 219–49: 220.

<sup>6</sup> Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, 420–3. F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (2 vols, trans. S. Reynolds, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1995), vol. 2, 921. J. F. Guilmartin Jr., *Gunpowder and Galleys – Changing Technology and Mediterranean Warfare at Sea in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1974), 124.

<sup>7</sup> Koenigsberger et al., *Europe in the Sixteenth Century*, 181.

<sup>8</sup> As happened to the Order's property in Portugal, Naples and Savoy, amongst other places.