

MALTESE HISTORY

E. The Decline of the Order of St John In the 18th Century

Form 3

Unit E.1 - Malta in the 18th Century: Prosperity and Problems, Part 1

1. How was the Hospitaller Order of St John organized internally?

The Hospitaller Order was an aristocratic religious congregation bound by vows and governed by a Grand Master elected for life. The number of Knights varied between 250 and 350, divided into five languages: French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and German. The Order had landed estates in Catholic Europe. These estates provided an annual income of money that supported the Order's headquarters in Malta. The **Grand Master** was subject to the Statutes and to the **Chapter-General** of the Order; the latter was convoked only once between 1631 and 1776. On the Maltese the Grand Master ruled as a despotic prince. His powers were limited only the Pope. The Maltese had no say in the government. The Grand Master was helped by a group of Knight **Grand Crosses**. They met in the **Great Council** to discuss matters of state and issue decrees. The Maltese nobles and professional classes were represented in the *università* of Mdina, Valletta and Gozo (a sort of local council). There they elected the **Captain of the Rod** (or Hakem) and the **Jurats** (Magistrates).

2. Where the Maltese happy with the Order's Government in the late 18th century?

By the 18th century the Order's rule over the Maltese became increasingly absolute, despotic and over-centralised. The common people, largely illiterate were largely submissive. The nobles kept friendly relations with the Knights and quite often nobles occupied the higher offices in the government and the Church. The **Bishop** and the **Inquisitor** were never Maltese. In 1775, with debts standing high, with poor harvests in Sicily and a the high price of grain, a small, discontented, poorly organised group from the lower clergy organized a revolt. The rebel leaders led by **Dun Gaetano Mannarino** expected a general insurrection by the people. But despite their initial success in taking Fort St Elmo, no one rose to support them. This event became known as the **Revolt of the Priests**.

By the late 18th century many of the literate Maltese became tired of the Knights. They knew of what was happening in Revolutionary France were men claimed rights and freedoms. They hoped the French might bring these to Malta too. But the government of Knights was benevolently despotic and in some ways efficient. There were grievances and complaints but life was seldom intolerable. The Order lost its hold on Malta because it was unable to change its character to meet the new demands of a changing world. Grand Master de Rohan, for example, refused to appoint Maltese nobles as Knights and the Maltese were excluded from any part in the decisions taken by the Order's government.

3. What were the new outside problems for the Order in the late 18th century?

The insoluble problems for the Order lay outside the island and beyond its control. The *philosophes* and the ideas of the **French Revolution** certainly had some effect on the Maltese and the French Knights in particular. But in the end it was the confiscation of the Order's French estates in 1792 that marked a final, decisive and, irrevocable disaster. By that time the Order had become an **anachronism** (outdated). It had lost much of its crusading ideal. The holy war against Islam had nearly been forgotten. The fall of the *Ancien Regime* in France and in other parts of Europe brought about the Order's downfall too.



Source A. An aristocratic banquet in 18th century Malta.



Source B A gold coin of GM de Vilhena.

Unit E.2 - Malta in the 18th Century: Prosperity and Problems, Part 2

1. How did the Order run the Maltese economy in the 18th century

The Order kept a small navy, an arsenal and a work-force of some 2,000 Muslim slaves. Commercially and politically 18th century Malta depended upon French commerce in the eastern Mediterranean. The bulk of merchant ships entering harbour were French. In the 1780s, the finance minister **Bosredon de Ransijat**, had managed to restore the finances of the Order, after the heavy debts incurred during **Grand Master Pinto** (1741-73).

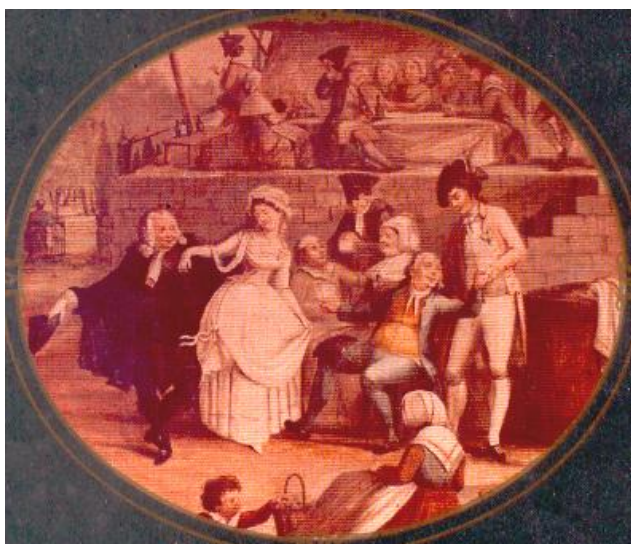
The Maltese were governed with considerable success. The Order fed and defended a large and growing population. Most food items were imported, money came from abroad; many Maltese found employment with the Order; grain was imported from Sicily free of duty; agriculture and cotton production flourished, Maltese merchants were engaged in commerce or in the *corso*. The Order offered excellent dockyard and quarantine facilities, warehouses for transit trade and low tariffs on trade. For much of the century the *corso* was in serious decline. It could not by itself have sustained the Maltese economy.

The astonishing rise in population (60,000 in 1700; 100,000 in 1798) forced the Order to expand food production during the 17th century. Rocky land was turned into fields and terraces for cultivation, marshes were drained and irrigation was regulated. In the 18th century the cultivation and export of **cotton** brought into the island more money than the Order's foreign estates. Raw cotton was spun at home as a cottage industry by women and children. Maltese merchants sold it abroad, in Marseilles and Barcelona.

2. How was the standard of living of the Maltese in the late 18th century?

The **standard of living** of the common people is difficult to gauge. Eye witness accounts of foreign visitors observed that the country people lived on a frugal diet, walked barefoot, and sometimes prostituted their daughters. Valletta swarmed with street beggars. As elsewhere in the Mediterranean, the Maltese peasants lived close to the bone and were hard-hit at moments of crisis when the poor had to eat barley-bread and carobs. Yet the population continued to rise at a remarkable rate and there was no systematic emigration. But in times of prosperity, the island contained numerous foreigners made up of Knights, mercenary soldiers, sailors, galley-convicts, slaves and merchants. In the 18th century Valletta became a **cosmopolitan** (international) city, an administrative and a cultural centre. The **Three Cities** were its industrial suburbs. The quality of urban life had reached a high degree of sophistication on a European scale.

The countryside was less affluent, cut off from the capital and less directly dependent on the Knights. It was the towns people who were directly employment by the Order. Wealth in town and village could be observed in private palaces and houses, in the quality and quantity of their furniture, their gold, silver and artisan products, in richly decorated parish churches and countryside chapels. For most people material life was well provided for, judging by the standards of the 18th century Mediterranean world.



Source C (left) Source D (right): Two 18th century paintings showing village life in 18th century Malta.

Unit E.1 – E.2 Malta in the 18th Century: Prosperity and Problems

1. How did the Grand Masters rule over the Maltese?

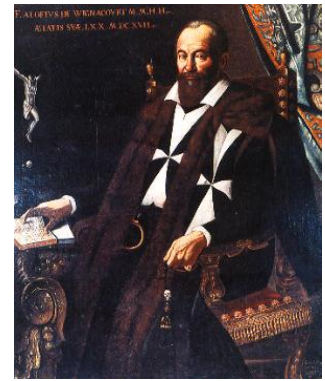
_____ (1)

2. What was the **Chapter General** of the Order?

_____ (1)

3. How did the Order provide the money needed for the Maltese economy?

_____ (2)



*Grandmaster Wignacourt
(1601-1622)*

4. How did the Order provide employment for the Maltese?

_____ (2)

5. Explain the importance of the cotton industry in 18th-century Malta.

_____ (2)

6. Identify **two** reasons why the Maltese became discontented under the Order during the last quarter of the 18th century?

_____ (3)

7. List **three** reasons which you think caused the decline of the Order in 18th-century Malta.

_____ (3)

8. Write **true** or **false** to these statements. (6)

a	The supreme head of the Order was the Pope.	
b	The Grand Master ruled with the help of the Chapter-General of the Order.	
c	The Grand Master often quarrelled with the Bishop and the Inquisitor.	
d	The French Revolution caused a lot of trouble to the Order.	
e	The population of Malta increased considerably under the Knights.	
f	In the 18 th century the Order accepted Maltese nobles to become Knights..	

(Total = 20 marks)

Unit E.3 - The Decline of the Order: the Conspiracy of the Slaves, 1749

1. Mustafa Pasha, the leader and organizer of the plot

Mustafa Pasha was brought to Malta as a captive slave. As an Ottoman prince, he was treated with great cordiality. He soon started plotting against the Order. He was permitted to live in a house near *Porta Reale*. **Grandmaster Pinto** received a formal request from the King of France for his release. Slaves who went to see him he promised them freedom. It was during a meeting of the Muslim community of slaves that the plot against the Order was planned in great detail.

2. The plan of the conspirators

The feast of St Peter and St Paul (*l-Imnarja*, 29th June) was celebrated by a lavish banquet at the Palace. After lunch the palace was practically left in the hands of the guards and the many slaves employed in the kitchens and stables. The plan was as follows: A small group of slaves were to stab the Grandmaster in his sleep. About 100 palace slaves would then rush upstairs and overpower the guards. The slaves would then free the other slaves in the Slave Prisons. Another group were to assault Fort St Elmo. The **Beys** (Ottoman Governors) of Tunis, Tripoli and Algiers would come to their aid. With foreign help, Valletta and the whole island would easily have fallen in Muslim hands.

3. The discovery of the plot

An unforeseen event wrecked the whole plan at the last moment. **Giuseppe Cohen**, a Jew, had a coffee shop in Valletta. Three of the conspirators were involved in a quarrel in his coffee shop. Later that night Cohen reported to the Grandmaster what he had heard. The three plotters were arrested and tortured on the rack. The leaders of the plot were discovered but since Mustafa Pasha was protected by the King of France, he was arrested. Thirty eight leaders of the plot were tortured, tried and executed. The prisoners were carried in an open mule-driven cart to the execution place at Floriana (near Hotel Phoenicia) and in the middle of Grand Harbour. The lifeless shattered corpses were then quartered and beheaded. Some of the plotters asked to be baptized at the last moment. Eight slaves, who were not deeply involved in the plot, were branded on their forehead with the letter R (for *ribelli*) and sent on the galleys for life. In the end, the plotters were left on their own, since no help was sent from the Muslim states of North Africa.

4. The consequences of the conspiracy

The Grandmaster reported the plot to its ambassadors in European Courts. Cohen and his family were given an annual grant of 300 *scudi* and a fully-furnished house in Merchants' Street. The Università of Valletta granted him another 200 *scudi* annually. Soon after the plot, the laws that restricted the movement of slaves were tightened and added by new ones. All slaves and freed slaves staying in the islands had to sleep in the slave prisons. No slaves could go out of the city-gates, board a boat, go to the countryside or approach the coast unless accompanied by his master. All fortifications were forbidden to slaves. They were forbidden to carry arms in public. The captains of the Order's ships were stopped from employing slaves as domestic servants. Slaves were not allowed to carry keys of government stores. They could not gather in streets, in public places or in private houses. They could gather in their mosque for religious functions only.

Source: *The Life and Times of Grandmaster Pinto*, Carmel Testa, Malta 1989, pp. 120-127.



A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Unit E.4 - The Decline of the Order in the 18th Century
Source: *The Rising of the Priests* by Rev. Philip Callus, Malta, 1961, pp. 17-27, 48-52.

I. The Causes

The agitation . . . subsided with the election of **Ximenes** in 1773. He gave assurances to the people that he would reduce the cost of living. But faced with an empty **Treasury** . . . he rushed reforms by an unwise austerity policy. In issued an edict forbidding the hunting of hares to allow them to breed and ensure cheap meat for the people. This measure caused . . . protests from the farmers and some of the clergy. The **Bishop, Mgr. Pellerano**, complained about the harm done to his estates by the great number of hares. The Grandmaster granted him permission to hunt in his possessions. . . . Some clergymen began to avail themselves of this permission. Ximenes protested against this practice. In the end the edict was repealed in July, 1774. But the quarrel between the Order and the clergy did not die out. A group of clergymen from all the parishes met before the palace and presented a petition to the Bishop. They demanded the calling of a **Chapter General** in order to safeguard ecclesiastical immunity and the dignity of the clergy.

Ximenes became more unpopular when he took drastic steps to reduce government expenditure. He dismissed all foreign professors from the University and reduced the number of courses. He abolished certain government offices and reduced the salaries of others. The price of corn was raised causing much discontent and misery among the people. At the beginning of May 1775 Mgr. Pellerano left Malta, never to return. The triumph of the Order over the Bishop exasperated both clergy and people and increased the prevailing tension.

2. An account of the rising

Soon a revolt was being planned in the Island. It was planned to take place on the night of the 8th September, timed to escape the attention of the authorities. The leaders of the plot counted on the support of many people, but on the agreed day only a few turned up. But **Don Gaetan Mannarino** decided to carry on. The band consisted of some priests . . . clerics and laymen. One group of thirteen assailed Fort St Elmo. The guards were taken by surprise and unarmed. The other group succeeded in capturing St James Cavalier. The flag of the Order was lowered and the banner of St Paul was hoisted instead.

Ximenes immediately called the **Council of State** to suppress the rising. From time to time the rebels fired shots from St Elmo. The Council send the Vicar General to find out what were the demands of the rebels. They agreed to put their demands in writing. But the Council of the Order decided to recapture the fortress. The rebels fired some shots at the assailants before the fort fell into the hands of the knights. Fort St Elmo was captured by the Knights after a few shots fired by the rebels. All the rebels then dispersed and surrendered. Of the 28 clergymen who were involved in the uprising, 10 of them did not turn up on the appointed day and 6 fled from Fort St Elmo or St James Cavalier and 12 who remained at their posts to the last, including their leader Dun Gaetan Mannarino.

3. The trial of the rebels

The rebels were imprisoned in kept in Fort St Elmo. Their trial was held in the same fort in October 1775. There were seven clergymen in all. The five others, all laymen, were tried in the **Court of the Castellania**. The trial went on after the Grandmaster's death on November 4, 1775. The new Grand Master **Emmanuel de Rohan** was more disposed to clemency. Soon after his election he removed the skulls of the three rebels from the corners of St James Cavalier. The leaders of the uprising (Dun G Mannarino and Cleric Giuseppe Dimech) were sentenced to life imprisonment. The other rebels were exiled or set free.



A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

Unit E.3 - E4 - The Conspiracy of the Slaves and The Rising of the Priests

1. The Conspiracy of the Slaves took place in (1729, 1739, 1749, 1779) (1)
2. At that time the Grand Master was (*Perellos, Pinto, Ximenes, de Rohan*) (1)
3. The conspiracy was planned by a Turkish nobleman named (*Osman, Selim, Mehmet, Mustafa*). (1)
4. Two of these punishments were inflicted to the leaders of the slave plotters. Underline the correct answers. (*exile, life imprisonment, torture, execution, row on the galleys*) (2)
1. Where exactly did the Priests' Revolt take place? _____ (1)
2. Who was the Grand Master at that time? _____ (1)
3. Who was the leader of the revolt? _____ (1)
4. What happened to him after the revolt? _____ (1)
5. (a) How was the state of the Maltese economy at the time of the revolt?
_____ (1)
- (b) Why was Grand Master Pinto partly responsible for this state of affairs?
_____ (1)
6. How did Grandmaster Ximenes try to improve the economic situation?
_____ (1)
7. Why were the clergy and the peasants discontented at the time of the revolt?

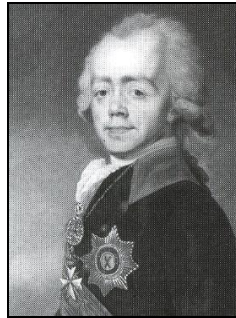
_____ (2)
8. (a) Who was Bishop of Malta at that time? _____ (1)
- (b) Why did the Bishop become involved in the hunting issue?
_____ (1)
9. Why did the Revolt of the Priest fail in its main objective?
_____ (1)
10. (a) Identify **two** problems which the new Grand Master de Rohan had to solve?

_____ (2)
- (b) Which problem did he manage to solve quite successfully by 1788?
_____ (1)

(Total marks = 20)

Unit E.5 - The Decline of the Order in the 18th Century

The Order of St John and the French Revolution, 1789-1798



A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

1. What kind of influence did the French Revolution have in Malta?

- the principles of the French Revolution: **liberty, equality, fraternity**.
- the writings of the Enlightenment among the Knights and the Maltese upper and middle classes.
- most Knights escaped from France and joined the **émigrés** (exiled nobles) against the Revolution.

2. Measures taken in Revolutionary France against the Order.

- August 1789: the **tithes** were abolished.
- September 1789: the property of the Church was confiscated. But the property of the Order was spared.
- June 1791: the Order gave money to help King Louis XVI escape to Belgium.
- January 1792: two young Knights insulted French officers in Genoa.
- July 1792: the Assembly withdrew the French **citizenship** to French Knights of the Order.
- August 1792: the Order condemned the attack upon the **Tuileries**, the deposition and the imprisonment of the King by the National Assembly.
- August 1792: the Order's ambassador in Paris escaped to Savoy.
- September 1792: the Assembly **confiscated** the Order's lands in France and sold them by auction.
- November 1792: the National Assembly debated the invasion of Malta.
- January 1793: the execution of Louis XVI caused a 'deep and painful commotion' in Malta and in Europe. The Order abandoned its previous neutrality and joined the European Coalition against the Revolution. The Grand Master prohibited the French fleet to hoist the *tricolor*., refused to acknowledge the new French Republic and to accept the French ambassador.

2. The final crisis - The French invasion of Malta

The end of the **Reign of Terror** (1794) and the French victories in Italy (1796-97) turned some of the Maltese patriots and some of the French Knights in favour of the Revolution. **Grand Master Hompesch**, was loved by the Maltese but had a weak personality. Faced with the problem of bankruptcy, the Order had to turn to another Great Power for support. When the Order concluded a treaty of friendship and assistance with **Russia** in 1797, the French Government ordered **General Napoleon Bonaparte** to take Malta from the Order on his way to conquer **Egypt**.



Source D

Unit E.5 - The Order of St John and the French Revolution, 1789-1798

1. How did France support the Order in the 18th century?
_____ (2)
2. How did the Order help France during the 18th century?
_____ (2)
3. Why did the French Revolution turn against the Order?
_____ (2)
4. Identify **two** measures taken by the Revolution against the Order?
_____ (1)
_____ (1)
5. What effect did these measures bring upon the Order and upon the Maltese?
_____ (1)
_____ (1)
6. (a) Which European power offered to help the Order? _____ (1)
(b) Why was this power so much interested in Malta?
_____ (1)
7. What decision did the French Government take to counteract this development?
_____ (1)
8. Identify the **two** fateful events that took place in Malta between 9th and 11th June 1798.

_____ (2)
9. Evidence show that the Maltese were divided about the future of the Order in Malta in 1798?
(a) Who remained loyal to the Order and why? _____ (2)

(b) Who sided with the French and why? _____ (2)

10. Who was in charge of the French expedition against the Knights?
_____ (1)

(Total marks = 20)

Unit E.6 - The SEC Source Question on the Decline of the Order

Read carefully the following source and then answer all the questions.

'The first founders of our **Sacred Religion** judged it indispensable to call frequently a **Chapter General** to maintain in vigour our laws and to censure, and recall to their duty, those who had not followed him. Just reasons prevented recent grand masters from following so useful a practice from which came our good conditions. The reasons are removed and now delay would be a danger.

His Eminence **Ximenes**, seeing the abuses which had been introduced in many branches of our administration and principally in that Religious Discipline to which we are bound, on the occasion of representations made to him by the **Venerable Chamber**, moved to call the Chapter General.

I have no other merit than in following the good intention of my predecessor. With great satisfaction, I see realised the desire of our **Brethren** who in general have endeavoured for many years to put into practice our wise rules. The sentiments of these true Religious allow me to hope that with the same zeal they will be able to put aside personal interest and seek only the benefit and success of our Sacred Religion and the security of this **Fortress**.

By means of our rules and our statutes we will remove any abuses which may have been introduced into our administration, and in reminding our Brethren of the three virtues – poverty, chastity, and obedience – which they have promised God, **Holy Church** and our great protector **St John the Baptist**, they would follow, we will reach the happy end set before us in this Chapter General.'

Source: Michael Galea, *Grand Master Emanuel de Rohan (1775-1797)*

1.1 To what the following terms in the source refer to?

- (a) Sacred Religion (line 1) _____ (1)
- (b) Chapter General (line 1) _____ (2)
- (c) Brethren (line 9) _____ (1)
- (d) Fortress (line 12) _____ (1)
- (e) Holy Church (line 15) _____ (1)

1.2.1 Who was De Rohan's immediate predecessor? _____ (1)

1.2.2 What problem did he encounter when he was Grand Master?
_____ (2)

1.3.1 Who was De Rohan's immediate successor? _____ (1)

1.3.2 What problem did he encounter during his last years as Grand Master?
_____ (2)

1.4 Mention **two** ways in which the Knights did **not** follow the Order's rules by De Rohan's time.

_____ (2)

1.5 Mention **two** reforms which De Rohan enacted during his rule.

_____ (2)

1.6 Mention **one** other problem that hit the Order when his successor was Grand Master.
_____ (2)

(Total 20 marks)

Unit E.7 – The Decline of the Order of St John in the 18th Century

Read carefully the following essay titles and answer any ONE in about 200 to 300 words.
Essays carry 20 marks each.

PAPER 2A

On the decline of the Order in the 18th century

1. Grandmaster Manuel Pinto is said to have died 'unwept, unhonoured and unsung.' What prompted some historians to pass this judgement on the Grandmaster? Do you think that he deserved it? (SEC 1998)
2. Give a general assessment of Grandmaster Ximenes's proposed reforms.
3. Grandmaster Ximenes failed to solve Malta's economic illness but his successor, de Rohan, was successful, at least till the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. Why? (SEC 1996)
4. Discuss how the outbreak of the French Revolution hastened the end of the Order of St John in Malta.
5. Between 1749 and 1775 the Order of St John had to face two major local crises. What were these crises and what was the Order's reaction to them? (Annual Paper, 2009) **(Marks 10, 10)**

PAPER 2B

On the decline of the Order in the 18th century

1. (a) Why did the Order of St John decline during the second half of the 18th century?
(b) How did this decline affect (i) the Order itself and (ii) the Maltese populace?
(Marks: 10, 5, 5)
2. Describe one of the following events and say why it happened:
(a) the Plot of the Slaves (1749) or (b) the Rising of the Priests (1775) (SEC 1997)
3. Grandmaster Ximenes's reign is chiefly remembered for the Revolt of the Priests.
(a) Why did it break out?
(b) What actually happened during the revolt?
(c) What were its results? (SEC 1996) **(Marks: 8, 6, 6)**