

MALTESE HISTORY

B. The Order's Naval Establishments

Form 3

Unit B.1 - The Order's Navy and Arsenal (Shipyard)

1. The Order's Navy

The Order's fleet in the 16th and 17th centuries consisted of **galleons** (square sailing ships) and **galleys** (smaller ships using oars and lateen sails). The number of galleys in the Order's fleet varied at different times. From 3 in 1530 it rose to 8 in 1686. In the 18th century the number of galleys declined because the Order introduced a new form of ship (*navi* or *vascelli* for vessel) in its fleet. The new vessels were built in France in 1704 and paid by Grandmaster **Ramon Perellos** (1697-1720). The largest of them, the *San Giovanni* flagship, was armed with some 50 guns and had a crew of 453 men.

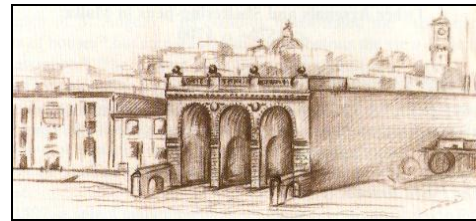


A. _____

By the 1790s the fleet had declined to 1 vessel, 4 galleys and 3 frigates. The number of ships depended on two factors: (1) the amount of money the Order had at that time; (2) the profits it stole from the Muslims. A new galley cost some 7,400 *scudi* and a sum of money every year for its upkeep.

Some ships' food items have survived in the Order's archives: biscuits, dairy cheese, sardines, tuna, sugar, dried prunes, pepper, soap, cooking oil, broad beans, bread, almonds, barley, flour, small beans, peas, butter, bulls, hens, eggs, hazelnuts, salted cod, sheep, fresh meat, lentils, fire-wood. The crew was entitled to a daily ration of food, each according to his rank. Water for the ships was supplied from two large marble water-spouts in Valletta connected to Wignacourt's **aqueduct**.

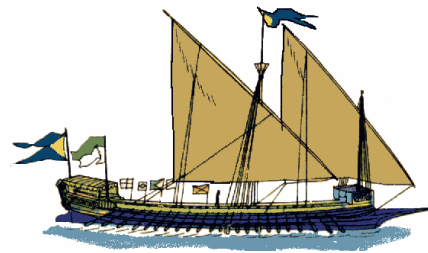
The highest two officers of the Order's navy were the **Admiral** and the **Captain-General of the Galleys**. The crew was made up of officers, a clerk, a surgeon, a pilot, a slave master (*agozzino*), a master gunner, a handyman, a carpenter, an oars keeper, a caulker (*calafato*), some gunners, soldiers, *buonavogli* and slaves.



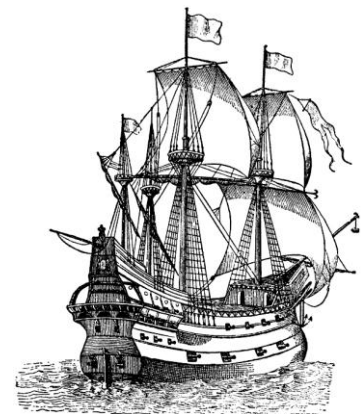
B. _____

2. The Order's shipyard or dockyard

The first galley **arsenal** or **dockyard** was built in 1597 at the **Cottonera Marina**. In 1654 another dock was constructed at the Valletta ditch, just beneath the Upper Barracca Gardens. The Birgu dockyard was enlarged in the 1680s to be able to repair larger galleys. The Valletta yard was closed down in 1685. The upkeep of the galleys and the arsenal were a constant expense for the Order. The golden age of the Order's dockyard was the period 1600-1740. When the fleet of the Order declined after 1740, so did the dockyard. The 18th century the shipyard started to close down when there was not enough work. But the Order's shipyard was kept open when the British took over the islands in 1800. The British Civil Commissioner **Alexander Ball** remarked that Malta possessed 'a small but complete shipyard'.



C. _____



D. _____

Unit B.1 - The Order's Navy and Arsenal



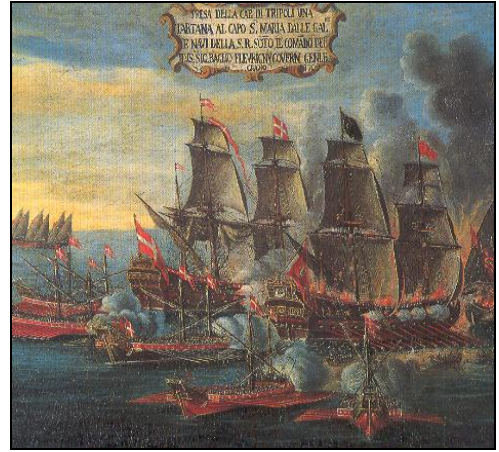
Source E



Source F



Source G



Source H

1. Match these Hospitaller **captains of the galleys** shown in sources E, F and G with the dates given: 1600, 1680, 1760. (3)
2. Describe **two** main differences between **galleys** and **vessels** used by the Knights.
 - (a) _____
 - (b) _____ (2)
3. The new **vessels** were bought in the early ____ th century when _____ was Grand Master (2)
4. Why was the Birgu shipyard enlarged in the 1680s?
_____ (1)
5. Why did the fleet of the Order declined in the 18th century?
_____ (1)
6. How did the Maltese see the Order's navy and shipyard? Why?
_____ (2)
7. Mention **four** types of people who worked on the Order's ships.
_____ (2)
8. How were the **two** Knights that took charge of the Order's navy called?
_____ (2)
9. What opinion did the British have of the Order's shipyard in 1800?
_____ (1)
10. Write brief captions to sources E, F, G and H in Unit B.1. (4)

(Total marks = 20)

Unit B.2 - The *Corso* by the Knights and the Maltese

1. How was corsairing in Malta organized by the Knights?

The *corso* was another world for piracy between Christians and Muslims in the Mediterranean. It was considered an honourable and profitable trade. But it was also a risky one because **corsairs** could be captured as slaves, disabled or killed when fighting at sea. For this reason corsair ships were blessed by a priest and the crew received the Holy Communion before leaving Grand Harbour.

The *corso* was an organized business protected and encouraged by the Knights. In 1608 Grandmaster **Alof de Wignacourt** set up the *Tribunale degli Armamenti* to set up regulations about the *corso*. Everyone in Malta could take part in the *corso*: **Knights, Maltese** and **foreigners**. Corsair vessels based in Malta could use the Order's flag against the payment of a small fee. This gave the corsairs legal protection against arrest by other Christian states. In turn the Order collected a tax of 10% from all stolen goods.

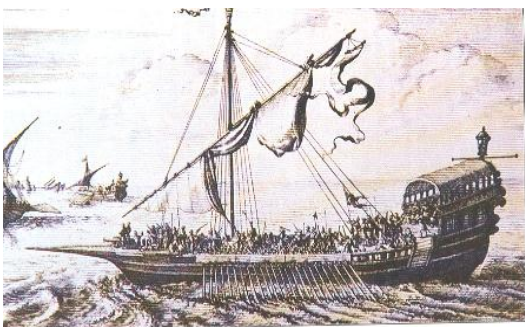
Malta was not the only port engaged in corsairing. The main Muslim corsair centres were **Tripoli, Tunis** and **Algiers**. The main Christian corsair centres were the towns of **Marseilles, Toulon, Messina, Naples** and **Leghorn**. Corsairs used several types of ships to carry out their trade: the quarantine registers mention the *vascello* (vessel), the *brigantino*, the *galeotto*, and the *tartana*, as the most common vessels used.

The Maltese *corso* flourished mostly during the early 17th century. In about 1650 there were 30 corsair vessels based in Malta's harbour. In 1647 the Maltese corsairs were ordered to stay 10 miles away from the coast of Palestine. In 1697 this restriction was increased to 50 miles. By that time France, Holland and England started trading with the Turks. France pressured the Knights to stop Maltese corsairs from attacking Turkish ships. In the early 1700s the Turks started using French and Greek ships to carry their merchandise. This resulted in a sharp drop in the number of Maltese corsair ships in the **Levant** (Eastern Mediterranean). Maltese corsairs were left to attack Muslim ships on the North African coast where the booty was less profitable.

2. How did the Order's navy challenge the Turkish fleet in the Mediterranean?

After the Great Siege of 1565, the Turkish fleet was heavily defeated at the **Battle of Lepanto (1571)** by a Christian fleet made up of Spanish, Venetian, Papal and Hospitaller galleys. In the 17th century the Ottoman Turks remained powerful enough to capture the island of **Candia** (Crete) from the Venetians after a long war, known as the **War of Candia** (1645-1669). Ottoman power started to decline when they lost the **Siege of Vienna (1683)** and most of **Hungary** in 1699 to the Austrian Habsburgs. The last time that the Turkish fleet was seen close to the Maltese Islands was in 1708 and in 1722. They noticed that the fortifications were too strong to risk an attack on the islands.

The Order's fleet fought a number of successful battles against the Turks during the **War of Candia (1645-1669)** and during the **Turkish-Venetian War of 1715-1718**. In the 18th century the Order won some naval battles against North African corsairs capturing 20 vessels and 1,500 slaves. But these spoils were not enough to pay for the Order's naval expenses. By that time the Order had already started borrowing money to meet the cost of the fleet. To make matters worse, after 1740 naval battles fought between the Knights and the Turks became even rarer and the prizes taken were even fewer still.



A. A Barbary corsair galley



B.



C.

Unit B.2 - The Corso by the Knights and the Maltese

1. People engaged in the *corso* were called _____ while people engaged in piracy were called _____. (1)
2. Explain the difference between **corsairing** and **piracy**?
_____ (2)
3. When, how and why did the Order's Government made laws to regulate the *corso*?
 - (a) When? (give the year) _____ (1)
 - (b) How? _____ (1)
 - (c) Why? _____ (1)
4. How did the Order:
 - (a) protect the Maltese corsairs?
_____ (1)
 - (b) acquire profit from the *corso*?
_____ (1)
5. Identify **two** reasons why the Maltese *corso* brought less profits to the Order and to the Maltese in the 18th century?
 - (a) _____
 - (b) _____ (2)
6. Find **three** instances of wars or naval battles when the Order's fleet took part against the Turks in the Mediterranean.
 - (a) _____
 - (b) _____
 - (c) _____ (3)
7. Mention **four** things that were usually stolen from Muslim ships by Maltese corsairs?
_____ (2)
8. Mention **one** good thing and **one** bad thing that resulted from the *corso*. (2)
 - (a) _____
 - (b) _____ (2)
9. Write brief captions to describe sources B and C in Unit B.2. (3)

(Total Marks = 20)

Unit B.3 Source Question on the Order's Navy

Read the following extracts and then answer the questions below.

Source A. 'At the dawn of the 18th century, the Order introduced – much later than other navies, including the Barbary adversaries – the ship-of-the-line or the *vascello*, of larger dimensions than the galley, and able to carry a larger number (fifty and over) of heavy cannon on its sides. The frigate was a sailing vessel, too, but of smaller dimensions in respect to the *vascello*, with fewer than fifty cannon, and the corvette with fewer than twenty. For the galleys the annual period of activity was generally limited to the 'good season', from April to November; the sailing ships could sail throughout the year.'

Source B. 'At the dawn of the 18th century the Order's navy underwent a structural change for the better. The project of instituting a squadron of ships-of-the-line – already attempted in 1655 by Grandmaster Lascaris but abandoned as a result of his death – was taken up again. On the strength of the recommendations made on 17 January 1701 by a special seven-men commission, appointed the year before by Grandmaster Ramon Perellos, the new vessel squadron was instituted. It was approved by the Papal brief, which authorized its financing through new imposts on the Order's European estates. At the same time it was decided to reduce the galley squadron from eight to six. Two ships-of-the-line were constructed at Toulon, another two at Malta. The four of them were already serviceable on 1 April 1705. the following year they were joined by the fifth, the Order having restructured a Tunisian vessel seized in the waters of the Levant.'

Sources taken from S. Bono, 'Naval Exploits and Privateering' in *Hospitaller Malta*, editor V. Mallia-Milanes, Malta, 1993.

1. Why do you think they galley's **good season** was limited from April to November?
_____ (2)
2. Why could the *vascelli* sail throughout the year? _____ (2)

3. Why did the introduction of the new vessel squadron need the approval of the Pope?
_____ (2)
4. From source A mention **two** differences between the galley and the vessel.
_____ (2)
5. Why not all of the ships-of-the-line constructed in Malta?
_____ (1)
6. Do you agree with the author of source B that the Order's navy underwent a structural change for the better? Why?

_____ (3)
7. Explain what is meant by 'imposts on the Order's European estates?'
_____ (2)
8. Who was Grandmaster when the new vessels were constructed? _____ (1)
9. How were the Order's ships-of-the-line increased from four to five in 1706?
_____ (1)
9. Which of these statements are TRUE or FALSE.
 - (a) The chief adversaries of the Knights in the 18th century were the Barbary States. _____ (1)
 - (b) In the 16th and 17th centuries the Order's navy consisted mainly of galleys. _____ (1)
 - (c) The first vessels were constructed at the time of Grandmaster Lascaris in 1655. _____ (1)
 - (d) The new vessels made the upkeep of the Order's navy more expensive than before. _____ (1)

(Total marks = 20)

Unit B.4 - The Order's Navy, Arsenal and the *Corso*

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

SEC PAPER 2A

On the Order as a seafaring force and on the organization of the *Corso*

1. Assess the contribution of corsairing to the Maltese economy during the first 150 years of the Order's rule. (SEC 1992)
2. 'The Order's naval squadron was renowned for its many exploits in the Mediterranean? It was also important for creating a wide array of jobs for the Maltese.' Enlarge and comment upon this statement. (SEC 1997)
3. The Knights of St John were basically a maritime and seafaring Order. Say how this affected the economy of the Maltese Islands. Refer to at least two important events involving the Order and the Maltese at sea. (Annual Paper 2007)

SEC PAPER 2B

On the Order as a seafaring force and on the organization of the *Corso*

1. Corsairing was an important industry for the Maltese Islands as these lacked natural resources.
 - (a) Say what is meant by 'corsairing'?
 - (b) Give reasons why it became an important industry.
 - (c) Show how it was regulated.
 - (d) Explain why it declined during the 18th century. (SEC 1997) (Marks: 4, 4, 6, 6)