

The Impact of the Arrival of the Knights of St John on the Commercial Economy of Malta 1530-1565

Supervisor: Prof Maria Fusaro

Much has been written about various aspects of the long presence of the Knights of the Order of St John on the island of Malta. Nonetheless, throughout this literature there is one noticeable omission - a study of the commercial development of the harbour area during the first decades of the Order's rule. Despite Malta's small size, the presence of the Order of St John (1530 -1798) ensured an inflow of foreign resources which eventually permitted very dense human settlement and an international projection beyond the island's shores which was largely disproportionate to what would normally have occurred in such a small and sterile island. The maritime nature of the Order and the heavy dependence on imports hastened the creation of an efficient maritime communication system. The development of all these economic activities resulted in a prime economic means of generating wealth and served as a pull factor to a large number of enterprising individuals, both local and foreign. Early modern Hospitaller Malta eventually saw the consolidation of an enterprising business class, which, out of sheer necessity, grew accustomed to operating well beyond its narrow confines. In turn, this contributed to the island becoming more open to connectivity with the outside world. Hence, the main aim of this thesis is to explore in detail various economic activities taking place in Malta during this particular period which spans from 1530 to 1565. The year 1565 has been chosen as a marker since during this year there was a break in the normal chain of events due to the turmoil created by the Great Siege. In order to reach this goal the practical functioning of commerce with its agreements and disputes, its currencies, its trading posts and its nodal points shall be analyzed. Furthermore, this thesis strives to show how notarial evidence, together with that derived from records of various tribunals set up on the island at the time, supplement each other and help to fill in gaps. While discussing different methodological approaches to the study of the Mediterranean, the first chapter of this study shall also assess Malta's place within the wider Mediterranean historiographical framework. In so doing it shall adopt a comparative perspective with other larger islands in the

Mediterranean and discuss whether a change in ruler instigated the adoption of new trading patterns which ultimately generated greater mobility to and from the island. Furthermore, this study shall place the various series of primary sources used for its compilation in their proper context, thus allowing the reader to evaluate better the significance of the information provided. The second chapter shall evaluate how the arrival of the Order provided for the setting up of new institutions and for the promulgation of new laws in order to consolidate its authority over the island despite repeated promises to respect and honour ancient rights and privileges. The following three chapters shall each be dedicated to a particular case study which will try to address specific topics that have been largely neglected in Maltese historiography. Thus, starting with an analysis of the grain trade, which was of the utmost importance for a sterile island with an ever-increasing population, it will be followed by another case study which seeks to evaluate the role of women, their legal persona and how this affected their contribution to the island's economic activities. The final chapter will try to establish whether there were any commercial links between Malta, often described as the frontier and bulwark of Christianity, and its neighbouring Ottoman North African territories. If such trade existed, how did merchants, both Christian and Muslim, manage to overcome religious antagonism which should have inhibited the easy flow of trade? The objective of this study shall therefore be to shed much-needed light on economic activities taking place in and around the harbour area during a largely unexplored period in Maltese history. Moreover, it shall seek to provide a better understanding of Mediterranean commercial relations since the Maltese harbour was a point of intersection not only for people of different nationalities, but even for people of different faiths, such as Muslims, Jews and Christians of different denominations. All had one common goal which unified them, that is, trading and making profit out of it.