BETWEEN MALTA AND ST. PETERSBURG:
THE BALÍ AND TURCOPIELIER
JOHANN BAPTIST ANTON VON FLACHSLANDEN
AND TSAR PAUL I: A RELATION AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS ON EUROPEAN POLITICS

Thomas Freller

This paper does not aim to discuss the multifaceted activities of the Alsatian Knight of St. John Johann Baptist Anton von Flachslanden (1739-1823) as captain general of the Order’s fleet, his support of the Russian fleet in the Russo-Turkish wars or his role as one of the masterminds of the creation of the Anglo-Bavarian langue in 1781/82. In this paper it is intended to focus on Flachslanden’s multifaceted, and sometimes obscure and secretive collaboration with Tsar Paul I – then acting ‘grand master’ of the Order - when after the fall of Malta the Order of St. John was struggling for survival. It is this relation which helps do understand better some motives of Tsar Paul’s often so difficult to read political decisions and moves. All the books and papers previously written on the Order’s history in the late 18th century and on Tsar Paul’s involvement in affairs of the Order have failed to acknowledge the important role of Flachslanden’s in the relations between Russia and the Order.

To put this subject in the proper context of its time one has to look back on Russia’s approach to Malta and the Order of St. John before Tsar Paul’s rule. ‘Rossiya yest’ yevropeyskaya derezhava’ (Russia is a European power) was Tsarina Catherine II’s credo and programme. This was a logic continuation of the policy of Tsar Peter the Great. For Malta and the Order of St. John this proved of special importance.

Even more than Tsar Peter’s plans, Catherine’s foreign policy concentrated on peace with the major Western powers and aggressive moves towards the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Besides perceiving the strategic importance of a Russian fleet in the Mediterranean, the tsarina also became interested in the economic benefits of such an extension of Russian interests. Malta and the Order of St. John played an important role in Catherine’s plan. The island of the knights should serve as a bridgehead for a permanent Russian presence in the Mediterranean. Already in 1698 Tsar Peter had sent delegations and diplomats to Hospitaller Malta to negotiate a Russo-Maltese alliance against the Ottomans. But the grand master of the Order of St John then had refused to get involved in Russia’s struggle for access to the Mediterranean. In the 18th century things got more dynamic. In the 1760s a Russian chargé d’affaires was installed in Malta and the famous fleet of the Order was used by Russian officers as a training basis. In 1768/69 - after the outbreak of the first Russo-Turkish war - in the course of secret negotiations a plan was drawn up for a joint Russo-Maltese naval attack on the Greek mainland then occupied by the Turks.

It was then when Johann Baptist Anton von Flachslanden comes in the picture.
Flachslantern came from an old noble Alsatian family based in Basle since the
eleventh century. His family had long been connected by service of feu
with the families of the duke of Sulzbach and Zweibrücken. After his enrolment into
the Order of St. John Flachslantern in the 1670s had been a successful captain
in the Order’s fleet. On 7 January 1679 he was appointed captain general of the
Order’s galleys and in the next two years achieved considerable successes in the
fight against African corsairs. When Tsarina Catherine II started showing
an interest in the Mediterranean, Flachslantern supported Chevalier (later Count)
Giorgio Giuseppe Maria Valperga di Masino, one of the main pro-Russian voices in the
Order. In summer 1679 Flachslantern was meant to lead the ships of the Order
as the vanguard of Count Alexej Orlov’s Russian fleet. Flachslantern had indeed
worked out a plan for a joint expedition of the fleets of the Order and Russia into
the Dardanelles up to Constantinople.

The captain general had earlier organized a network of spies in the Eastern
Mediterranean to provide the Order and the Russians with information about the
movements of the Turkish troops and fleet and with news about the state of the
defence of the fortresses in the Morea and on the Greek archipelago. On 2 May
1679 a small Russian squadron under admiral Spiridov had visited Malta’s Porto
Grande and negotiations started. However, France intervened and Grand Master
Pinto had to withdraw his support of the Russians although Flachslantern did his
best to help the Russians unofficially. He handed over all his plans, sketches, and
information and guaranteed the service of the Maltese spies. The captain general
also meditated that some nights, among them his friend Joseph de Maisonneuve
and Count Massino, could join the Russian army. In the early 1770s, following the
end of his term as captain general, Flachslantern himself seemed to have joined
the Russian fleet for while. His prominent role in the first Russo-Turkish war (1768-
1774) was mentioned in several publication still during the ball’s lifetime. With
Massino staying in St. Petersburg from 1771 onwards, Flachslantern had excellent
contacts with Russia and most efficient lines of information, which proved of special
importance in the developments in the late 1790s as later discussed in this paper.
Until 1780 Flachslantern mostly lived at the residence of the grand prior of the
German langue in Heitersheim (Badensia) and held the office of general preceptor
of the German grand priory. The German grand prior, Joseph Benedict Count of
Reinach, sent him on several special missions to Ratisbon, Strasbourg, Paris, and
Vienna. In 1781 Flachslantern held the commandery of Dätzingen and Rohrdorf.
In the subsequent years Flachslantern was one of the driving forces to create the
Anglo-Bavarian alliance. As it was obvious that the post of grand prior of Bavaria
was intended for the illegitimate son of Bavarian duke elector Karl Theodor, it was
Flachslantern who, first as turcoflier and then as prior of Neuburg, became the
real power behind the new langue. Flachslantern’s plan to appoint Bavarian
minister of finance however did not work.

But back to the Russian ‘affairs’: The Russian approach to Malta to use the
island as a base for future operations must have brought about the united opposition
of the Mediterranean powers as well as of that of the British. So, even in such a

5. Johann Albert von Itner, Paul der Erste, russischer Kaiser, als Großmeister des Malterordens, Aarau 1808, 7 et seq. Itner who was the chancellor of the German langue knew Flachslantern personally and described him as ‘a man of great talent’.

11. Cf. AOM. MS. 1529, ff. 3r-v (Ratisbon, 7 February 1774), 157v-v (Strasbourg, 20 July 1774), 162v-v (Strasbourg, 1 August 1774); AOM. MS. 582, f. 257r (Strasbourg, 1 September 1775). For Flachslantern’s negotiations concerning the commandery of Rotweil, cf. AOM. MS. 583, f. 271r (September 1779). For his service for the German langue, cf. also AOM. MS. 1532, ff. 10v-101r (1 July 1780).
‘holy war’ against their infidel arch-enemy, which would have perfectly tallied with its statutes, the Order of St. John would not act freely any more. Officially France remained the main protector of the Order’s neutrality. So until the Ancien Régime in France came to its end the Order did not risk an open alliance with Russia. But in the long run Tsarina Catherine’s insistence had paved the way for extremely close Russo-Maltese relations to come when her son Paul became tsar and in November 1798 even was proclaimed ‘grand master’ of the Order. In the general framework of Russian politics at the end of the eighteenth century, this event came as no surprise: ‘In no other period of history, either before or since, was Russia so closely connected with the rest of Europe as she was during the Napoleonic era. That the Greek Orthodox emperor, Paul I, son and successor of Catherine the Great, should become grand master of the Knights of Malta in 1798 was highly unusual but Russia’s expansionist policies and the constant appeals for her intervention by the older European powers gave the framework of her foreign policy the capability to absorb even this.’

Baron Joseph Friedrich von Sulzer, the secretary of the Bavarian chargé d’affaires at the Russian court, wrote to Munich on 24 October 1800: ‘One has to know that the solution of the question of Malta will determine the entire quality of Anglo-Russian relations.’ This could be also well applied to the relations of Russia with the lands of Germany. In the following a sketch is presented how much Tsar Paul interfered into the inner affairs of Germany and Bavaria – whenever he saw ‘his’ beloved Order of St. John in danger. It will also be shown how much he could rely in this matter on turcopilier and prior of Neuburg Flachslanden – and how much this affected global politics.

According to a secret despatch of Sulzer, dated October 1795, Tsarina Catherine II had already had the idea to increase the number of the Russian commanderies after the third partition of Poland. That was probably the real reason for Baili Giulio Litta’s journey to St. Petersburg where he arrived on 6 October 1795. In fact, the idea of a Russian grand priory dates back to 1792-93 and the second partition of Poland. The underlying purpose was to increase influence in Malta which was

13. Paul was proclaimed grand master in St. Petersburg on 27 October 1798 (Russian calendar) by the members of the Russian grand priory; text in von Berg, 236 et seq.
14. Even the knights of St John who were present at the ceremony articulated their criticism. One of the best eyewitness accounts comes from an anonymous knight of St John from Kurland, cf. Friedrich Bienemann (ed.), Aus den Tagen Kaiser Pauls, Aufzeichnungen eines kurischen Edelmanns, Leipzig 1886, 123-127. The anonymous author describes Horneck’s deposition as an illegal act. According to him, it was the ambassador at the Russian court, Baili Lina, who was the driving force in these actions.
more and more being considered an essential post in the Mediterranean for the high-flying strategic and economic policy of Russia. Already here the English and Spanish got suspicious. Sulzer saw Tsar Paul’s Malta policy anything but Romantic. Even Paul’s mysterious death now must appear in a different light. But let us follow the events step by step.

Thanks to Litta’s efforts, on 15 (4 January – Russian calendar) 1797 a convention was signed by the Russian chancellor Alexander Besborodko and the Russian vice-chancellor Prince Alexander Kourakin in the name of the tsar to convert the Polish grand priory until then consisting of one priory with six commanderies into a Russian grand priory with a priory and ten commanderies. In the separate article III it was expressly stipulated that it should form part of the Anglo-Bavarian langue. The old revenues of 120,000 florins were raised to 300,000 florins to be paid by the Russian treasury. The annual dues payable to the common treasury of the Order were 41,000 florins. The main clauses concerning the Anglo-Bavarian langue were that the two grand priories (Bavaria and Russia) were to keep their regulations, possessions, and commanderies separately. Each grand priory was to have a procurator in Malta. Only the dignities of turcophile, prior of England – then held by Flachslanden –, and bailiff of Egle would be shared between the grand

19. On Paul and the Order, cf. also K. Walishewsky, Paul the First of Russia, the Son of Catherine the Great, London 1913 (French version published in 1903), 238-244.


Priorities. The Bavarians were assured that the Russians would pay for some of the costs already incurred in furnishing the auberge of the Anglo-Bavarian language. 23

On 9 February 1797 the Polish Knight Raczyński who was carrying the papers of the conventions was arrested near Ancona by the French. So when Anthony O’Hara, the new Russian chargé d’affaires in Malta arrived on the island in July, he had to bring with him a new copy of the convention which was ratified on 7 August 1797 by the council of the Order. 24 Paul showed himself very pleased with the gift of the cross which had been worn by Grand Master Valette and he accepted most readily the protectorship of the Order, 25 which had already two regularly appointed protectors, the emperor of Germany and the king of the Two Sicilies. The Neapolitan minister Serra-Capriola indicated the consent of his lord but Vienna was not pleased at all. Even the German knights of St. John expressed some concern.

On 7 August 1797 newly elected Grand Master Hompesch wrote to the Bavarian minister of foreign affairs Count Vieregg to inform him officially about the foundation of the Russian grand priory. The convention of 15 (4) January 1797 was ratified by Bavarian Duke Elector Karl Theodor on 30 November 1797. 26 On 28 February 1798 Paul confirmed the duke elector’s ratification, 27 creating the new designation of an Anglo-Bavarian-Russian language. 28 By many of the Bavarian knights this creation was then considered the only logical step to guarantee the survival of the property of the Order in Bavaria, if not in the German lands in general. That Duke Elector Karl Theodor was to die soon afterwards in early 1799 and thereby change the whole situation could not have foreseen in the summer and autumn of 1797. In the summer of 1797 the grand priory of Russia was composed of eight balī grand crosses, 14 commanders, two commander chaplains, 5 knights of justice, and 6 knights of honour. 29

At the end of July 1798 the news of the fall of Malta to the French reached St. Petersburg. On 6 September (26 August) 1798 the grand priory of Russia protested officially against the surrender of Malta. 30 This protest was based on the accounts of Balī Charles Abel de Loras and the forged report of the aged Balī Tigne which had reached St. Petersburg a couple of days earlier. The manifesto of the Russian grand priory accused Hompesch of weakness if not treachery. Because of his behaviour and the handing over of Malta to the French in defiance the statutes of the Order, the Russians stated that they did not recognize Hompesch as grand master any more and that therefore they did not feel any obligations to obey him. Paul’s hand behind this manifesto is only too obvious. 31

The new Bavarian chargé d’affaires Baron von Reichlin, who had arrived in St. Petersburg on 12 May 1798, 32 was present when the knights formulated the protest in the palace of the Order of Malta. Chancellor Besborodko secretly informed Reichlin that Paul intended to conclude an alliance with England and Turkey which would include a clause that Malta had to be returned to the Order and that all possessions of the knights in Germany were to be preserved. 33 On 10 September 1798 (Russian calendar) Paul published a manifesto which declared Hompesch’s deposition and which was subscribed by the knights of the Russian priory, by grand prior Louis Joseph de Bourbon prince of Condé, and the 41 French commanders and knights who had followed him to St. Petersburg, and 13 knights from other European countries. On 23 October it was also accepted by the chapter of the German priory. 34

On 7 November (27 October) the Russian priory assured the right to appoint a new grand master and predictably chose Paul. On the same day Balī Litta was appointed as lieutenant of the grand master and ten more commanderies were


24. On the commission who examined the convention cf. AOM. MS. 2196, ff. 1r-5v. Signed by Balī Montavouix, Balī Frisatti, Balī Marinus de Caseaxere, and Balī Vescovo di Chersonesos (= Kasimir Haefelin).

25. On the sending of the silver crosses of L’Isle Adam and Valette to Paul and the bestowal of the habit of grand cross, cf. AOM. MS. 275, f. 48r-v. On the bestowal of the grand cross on Paul, cf. also Lavigne, 17 et seq.


27. Cf. Gumpenberg, 80. On the incorporation of the Russian priory in the Anglo-
Bavarian language cf. AOM. MS. 277, f. 13v-14v; AOM. MS. 2196, ff. 62r-v, 77r-85r. Signed by Balī Montavouix, Balī Frisatti, Balī Törring, and Balī Ventura.


29. AOM. MS. 2196, f. 54r. On the development of the Russian priory, cf. also AOM. MS. 277, ff. 11r-13v (1 June 1798), 13v-14v (= ‘Nuovo Stabilimento favore della nobilita Greca dell’Impero della Rossia’). For a list of the members of the Russian grand priory in 1 June 1798, cf. AOM. MS. 2196, ff. 53v-54r.


32. In the autumn of 1797 the former Bavarian ambassador in St. Petersburg Count Wickenburg had been replaced by Baron Reichlin-Meldeg.

33. Cf. Müller, 44.

added to the grand priory. On 24 (13) November 1798 Paul accepted the dignity of grand master. A couple of weeks later the official ceremony was held and soon after he assigned to the Russian priory an additional annuity of 216,000 roubles for the creation of new commanderies. St. Petersburg became the Order’s capital. Hompesch’s protests were rather weak and remained mostly unheard. One of his fervent defenders, the Alsatian Knight Charles Joseph Meyer de Knnau, published his Révolution de Malte en 1798 to answer the accusations of the protest of 6 September (26 August) 1798.

Meanwhile in St. Petersburg actions went on. On 10 December (29 November) 1798 the new ‘Grand Master’ Paul I founded a second grand priory of Russia, the so-called Russian Orthodox priory, with Count Nicholas Soltykov as its head. Contrary to its very name, this priory also included Armenian Orthodox and Protestant members. The knights of this priory either had to serve four caravans in Malta or to perform service in the national army. As its founder, Paul reserved for himself the right of the first appointment of the commanders. The commanders had to pay 20 per cent remissions annually. While the Catholic priory of Russia was the destination of many French and some Italian refugees, the Orthodox priory ‘became the prey of the reigning favourites’, as the historian Waliszewsky rightly observed. Paul’s lieutenant, Bail Litta, took things in hand. Without any warrant he appointed Chevalier la Housaye as head of the chancery; his brother Mgr. Paul’s lieutenant, Bail Litta, took things in hand. Without any warrant he appointed Chevalier la Housaye as head of the chancery; his brother Mgr.

35. Cf. Maisonneuve, 22.
36. On the proclamation of Paul as grand master on 7 November (27 October) 1798 by the members of the grand priory of Russia and other knights of the Order in St. Petersburg, cf. ibid, 197 et seq.; the text of the proclamation is published in Böttigelin, iii, 276-279; Pierredon, i, 366 et seq. On 13 (24) November Paul officially accepted the magistracy. Cf. Maisonneuve, 201 et seq.; Pierredon, i, 368 et seq. On Paul’s proclamation as grand master, cf. J. von Littau, Kurzgefaßte Nachricht von Kaiser Pauls I. Erlangung zur Würde eines Großmeisters des Johanniterordens, n. pl. 1802.
39. Maisonneuve, 239 et seq.
41. Detailed lists of the members of the Russian grand priories are given in Sherbowitz Wetzer / Toumanoff, 30 et seq. For lists of the members of the Russian priories, cf. also Archives of the Grand Magistracy, Palazzo di Malta, Rome (subsequently quoted as AGM), LABR, III, ff. 40v-5r.

Lorenzo Litta, archbishop of Thebes, as almoner; and Chevalier de Veltruy as head of the treasury. Things for the Order in Russia became even easier when Mgr. Litta was appointed papal nuncio.

Paul clearly instrumentalized the Order as a vehicle and symbol in fighting European liberalism, democratism, and anarchy. It was felt that some of the old statutes were condemned to lose their significance. The vow of chastity, it was felt in St. Petersburg, should be abolished. Litta himself received a dispensation from Paul to marry a rich Russian noble widow. Only the highest officials of the Order were to remain celibate for the moment. Members were expected to be honest, decent, pure in their morals, impeccably educated, and loyal to monarchic ideas. Obviously the Order of Malta had become a sort of Russian court order. Chancellor Besborodko, Vice-Chancellor Kourakin, and the diplomat Kutaisov – born a Turk! – had received a grand cross and commanderies as well, in clear violation of the statutes of the Order.

On 8 September 1798 the Bavarian ambassador Baron Reichlin – himself a knight of the Bavarian grand priory – had sent an interesting memoir from St. Petersburg which gave a résumé of the actual situation of the Anglo-Bavarian-Russian language. According to Reichlin, the language’s only real option was to follow Russia. Any attempt to insist on a separate Bavarian policy or even to keep the ties with the languages of Castille and Aragon – where the king of Spain had styled himself as acting grand master – would lead to a conflict with Russia. Reichlin knew about the plans to sequester the lands and possessions of the Bavarian grand priory on Duke Elector Karl Theodor’s death and warned against such attempt. A sequesteration would greatly damage Bavaro-Russian relations in general.

Still the positions of the Bavarian grand priory and the Bavarian government concerning the rapid development in Russia in the autumn of 1798 and the following winter were not clear. This was due to Karl Theodor’s sickness and death and the hostile position of his successor Max Joseph and his secular-minded circle of diplomats and ministers. In late autumn the grand priories of Bavaria, Bohemia, and Germany were still hesitating to recognize Paul’s ‘election’. That the Bavarians were especially creating obstacles in this direction infuriated Paul. The background to all this deserves to be explained in greater detail as it is also affected and was affected by politics on a much larger scale.

The delegation the Bavarians had sent to Hompesch in Trieste in the late summer of 1798 was interpreted by the Russians as an affront to the decrees of the chapter of the Russian priory and Paul’s position in general. In fact the Bavarian

45. Cf. Müller, 46. For the impression in St. Petersburg that in the summer and the autumn of 1798 the Bavarian court still treated Hompesch as the real grand master, cf. Cavaliere, 238.
the Alsatian nobleman worked on the German knights to recognize Paul. In December the circle around Hompesch had a definite opinion about Flachslanden. On 10 December 1798 Hompesch’s secretary wrote: ‘Il scelerato Flaxlandia porta con se la rivoluzione...’

But it seems that late in 1798 Haefelin was still in favour of Hompesch or at least he wanted to prevent Paul from taking over the Order completely. Paul started to suspect Haefelin when it became known that the bishop was keeping good contacts with Hompesch’s party in Trieste. In fact a letter by Haefelin of 24 November 1798 discussed how to prevent ‘le trame del Balì di Flachsland ... e Balì Litta’. Haefelin seemed to have worked on a scheme to re-unite the knights in Vienna. He was supported by Balì’s Tauffkirchen and Viereg. On 11 December 1798 Tauffkirchen secretly visited Hompesch in Trieste again. Haefelin also tried to use the experienced diplomat and ‘Austria-expert’ Count Goldstein, ‘amico dell’Ordine di e S. A. Em.’. For Haefelin it was Vienna and Rome which were expected to provide orientation and to be the points of reference in the long run. It is quite apparent that Haefelin was only trying to stay in line with the Curia in all he did that winter. Pius VI had already expressed his disapproval of Hompesch’s ‘disposition’ by a decree of the Russian privity and he had protested strongly when he got to know that Paul had been acclaimed grand master by the knights of Russian grand priory and some knights of other languages who had fled to St. Petersburg. The strong disagreement between Paul and Pius finally led to the expulsion of the papal nuncio. Paul’s so-called accusation was contrary to the instructions of Pius VI – still the nominal head of the Order – that representatives of all the languages were to participate in the election. Even Pius’s successor, Pius VII, continued to deny Paul the title he coveted until his death in March 1801. On his part the Austrian Emperor Franz II was anything but happy with this development but he kept silent because he needed Russia as an ally against France.

47. NL.M. Libr. MS. 421, f. 339r-v.
48. Ibid. f. 341r.
49. Cf. ibid. ff. 338r, 402r; Cf. also letter Flachslanden’s to Hompesch of 3 August 1798, ibid. ff. 260r-v.
51. Von Berg, 249.
The situation for the Bavarian knights worsened when, on 24 November 1798 the representative of their grand priory declared that the Order could not ignore the statutes and condemn Hompesch and the ‘traitors’ of June 1798 without first hearing their case. Moreover a decision over the magistracy of the Order could only be taken by a chapter selected from the representatives of all the languages. For Paul this meant that the Bavarian knights had excluded themselves from the ‘confrères bien intentionnés’. Other rumours did not help to calm Paul. In December 1798 the Austrian diplomat Thugut in St. Petersburg had indicated that if reform-minded Max Joseph von Zweitbrücken succeeded to the Bavarian lands this would mean the end of the Order’s possessions in Bavaria. Needless to say Thugut tried his best to create an atmosphere against Max Joseph who was reputed to be pro-French and who obviously stood in the way of Austria’s secret wish to annex Bavaria.

Contrary to Flachslanden some Bavarian knights still did not seem to have understood the global importance of Paul’s ‘Maltese’ policy and his cholerenic character. Karl Theodor, the great protector of the Anglo-Bavarian langue, was still alive when in early January 1799 some Bavarian Knights protested once more against the forced deposition of Hompesch and the ‘usurpation’ of the magistracy by Paul. The tsar blew up and the Bavarian chargé d’affaires in St. Petersburg, Baron Posch, was recalled. But this was just a small indication of what was to come. Some soft correspondence helped to calm Paul and by late January 1799 the situation had returned to normality. To smoothen things Karl Theodor had even sent instructions to his new chargé d’affaires in St. Petersburg, Baron Reichlin, who had temporarily replaced again the unfortunate Baron Posch – to support the Russian point of view.

This incident, however, must have showed how fragile relations between Bavaria and Russia were and how heavily the tsar reached against any action against his role as the protector and grand master of ‘his’ beloved Order. It is also most surprising to see to what extent that the party in Bavaria which had worked to dispossess the Order in the Bavarian lands had gained ground. The main opponents were still Duke Karl August von Zweitbrücken and, after his death, his son and successor Max Joseph. In 1783 Karl August had written secret instructions and a memoir which stipulated the dispossess of the Bavarian priory and commanderies. Prussia had also been informed about this movement. The main argument was that in these ‘modern’ times no anachronistic institution should form a state within a state and ‘waste’ the national income and resources. Another reason was that the Zweibrücken’s house of Wittelsbach strongly opposed Karl Theodor’s wish to create a lucrative post and income for his illegitimate son Karl August paid for by the Bavarians and the Wittelsbachs. Even Hompesch – who cannot be said to have been very far-sighted – knew about the coming danger. On 1 August 1798, a few days after he had arrived in Trieste, he wrote to Litta in St. Petersburg concerning the possible changes in the Bavarian attitude towards the Order in case of Karl Theodor’s death. Vieregg and Haefelin as well must have watched Reichlin’s pro-Russian performance and attitude with suspicious eyes. In fact, when the declaration of the grand priory related to the accusations against Hompesch and to Paul’s election was sent to St. Petersburg on 5 December 1798, Vieregg added that from then on Reichlin should observe a more neutral attitude, and that, for the sake of the Anglo-Bavarian langue, he should think of both the position of the tsar as well as that of the Austrian emperor.

In addition to the Russians, the Austrian ambassador, Count Cobenzl, was a most important point of reference for Reichlin. That the Bavarian congratulations took a considerable long time to arrive in St. Petersburg angered Paul even more. It was only thanks to his high reputation that he was not expelled from the country, as Reichlin himself wrote to Munich. Reichlin took the situation so seriously that on 20 December 1798 he sent his secretary Baron Sulzer to Munich to explain personally the tense situation in St. Petersburg concerning the Order. Sulzer travelled fast and reached Munich on 6 January 1799 where he was immediately taken to meet the foreign minister Vieregg. Sulzer reported that Besborodko had communicated to him just before he had left namely that among England, Austria, and Russia there was a complete agreement about the Order. England had even indicated that the institution of a new English langue would be possible. It was universally agreed that Hompesch had to abdicate. That the Bavarians were still supporting Hompesch was a scandal and a most dangerous position while they were surrounded by such superpowers as Austria and Russia. Only thanks to the influence of Besborodko and Litta did the furious tsar not send the Bavarian chargé d’affaires home. Any continuation of the previous policy would be regarded as injurious to Russian interests. The Russians demanded that a chapter of the Bavarian grand priory should be convened to express its complete agreement with the measures of Tsar and ‘Grand Master’ Paul. Such a declaration would be confirmed by Karl Theodor and then sent to St. Petersburg. All this did not just smell like blackmail, in fact it was.

60. Cf. ibid., i, 96.
61. Cf. ‘Instruction pour Mr. le Baron de Reichlin (sic), Ministre plénipotentiaire à la cour de Russie’. Quoted from Gumpenberg, 81.
62. Du Moulin-Eckart, i, 96 et seq.
63. Ibid.
64. Hompesch to Baili Litta, Trieste, 1 August 1798, NLM. Libr. MS. 421, ff. 357r-359v, here f. 359r.
65. Cf. Müller, 49.
66. Ibid. 52 et seq.
67. Quoted from ibid. 57.
That the Bavarian grand priory among itself was divided was too obvious. Haeffelin, Count Morawitzky, and their party favoured a neutral line and a policy of balance between Rome, Austria, and, if possible, France and Russia. They wanted— at least for a while — to keep Hompesch as the official grand master. Another group— mostly centred in Munich— wanted to make the destiny of the Bavarian grand priory conform with general Bavarian policy and therefore took as their points of orientation Vienna and St. Petersburg. A third group around Ball Flachslanden— the opportunists, so to say— had decided that only Russia could guarantee them the former prestigious posts and income. But Flachslanden was clever enough not to propose too radical measures. On 23 November 1798 he proposed to Balli Litta that it would be better not to force Hompesch to abdicate for the time being but to appoint a plenipotentiary. This would have the same effect as an abdication but it would conform with the statutes of the Order. In general Flachslanden sided completely with those who maintained that Malta had fallen because of the cowardness of Hompesch and his party.

On 7 January 1799 a cabinet meeting in Munich discussed the pros and cons of a pro-Russian policy. Vieregg rather pragmatically accepted Paul’s usurpation of the office of grand master. The best defender of Hompesch and the line of the pope was Count Goldstein who demanded a commission to investigate the behaviour of the knights in St. Petersburg and how it could come about that a married Non-Catholic sovereign could ever be acclaimed grand master. The meeting resulted in no positive pro-Russian policy. On 10 January 1799 Vieregg sent three letters and two postscripts to Reichlin in St. Petersburg but they contained no compliance to the Russian demands. That this attitude was expected was already indicated by Flachslanden in a letter to Litta of 22 November 1798 which blamed Franz Karl Baron von Hompesch— the minister of finance and the brother of the grand master— for the neutral if not anti-Russian policy of the Bavarians. However, a couple of days later the more pragmatic party around Vieregg more or less managed to have their way: on 26 January 1799 a paper was drawn up in Munich where the duke elector expressed his regrets that the attitude of the Bavarian grand priory had insulted Paul. Karl Theodor added that, although he himself had never interfered in affairs of the Order (sic), he was now going to use his power to make the grand priory follow the Russian line of policy. He even indicated that he intended to convince Hompesch to pass his power and authority to Paul. With these more positive news Sulzer prepared to return to St. Petersburg but bad weather delayed his departure. As such he witnessed Karl Theodor’s death on 12 February 1799 and, to his horror, the quick sequestration of the Bavarian possessions of the Order. A return to St. Petersburg was now out of question since Sulzer knew exactly what reaction this would bring about. Instead he stayed in Munich.

The background of these events needs more explanation. With Karl Theodor’s death a new era of Bavarian politics began. Under the new duke elector Max IV Joseph (or, from 1806, King Max I Joseph) Baron Maximilian Joseph von Montgelas, the minister of state, became the actual ‘hidden’ ruler of Bavaria. In a few years Montgelas gave Bavaria the most modern constitution in Europe. His private memoirs present indeed a good source to understand what actually happened. Montgelas’ concept of a modern national state administered by a centralized secularized government obviously had hardly any room for an Anglo-Bavarian langue.

During his 1795 visit to Munich, Max Joseph had already secretly renewed his old project to dispossess the Order in case of his succession as duke elector of Palatinate-Bavaria. Max Joseph’s approach to politics and government was very different to Karl Theodor’s and certainly aimed less to please the Bavarian nobility. This was especially felt in his ideas concerning the possessions of the Anglo-Bavarian langue whose confiscation would surely fit with the concepts of nationalism and secularism. The new government brought about an upheaval in the restructuring of the cabinet and the exchange of posts. Many of the knights of the Bavarian grand priory who held high government posts, like the Viereggies father and son, Baron Reichlin, and others, had to go. The shrewd Balli Flachslanden survived and Haeffelin’s career even received a new boost, while Baron Franz Karl von Hompesch ‘survived’ Karl Theodor and stayed in power as minister of finance until his death in 1800.

In general the slightly francophile Max IV Joseph and Montgelas tried to avoid a coalition with Austria and to maintain at least a friendly neutrality with France. This policy was even supported by some of the knights of St. John in Bavaria. When Max IV Joseph finally came to power he gave an order, with some slight changes and augmentations, to a commission, headed by the duke of Birkenfeld, a relative of Max Joseph’s, to carry out the old plan of sequestration. According to this commission, the sequestration of the 28 commanderies in Bavaria would bring the sum of 8 million German guilders. On 16 February on Max Joseph’s instructions

68. Quoted from ibid. 59.
69. Cf. ibid. 56.
70. Document of 26 January 1799, partly published in ibid. 64.
72. In 1809 Montgelas became a count.
74. Cf. ibid. 37 et seq., Cf. also De Bryx, 82.
75. Cf. Muller, 95 et seq.
76. Du Moulin-Eckart, I, 97.
the lands of the Order were seized in spite of the repeated warnings of Sulzer, not to touch the Order of Malta in Bavaria. Birkenfeld informed the Grand Prior Karl August von Bretzenheim that the actions against his institution had already started, with the main reason being that from the beginning the Zweibrücken branch of the Wittelsbachs had never consented to the foundation of an Anglo-Bavarian langue. But others - wiser and more far-seeing people, like the new Bavarian minister Montgelas whose star as the leading architect of the 'new Bavaria' was already in the ascendant - were already apprehensive of the consequences. The administration of the possessions and funds of the Order passed to the so-called 'administration of ecclesiastical goods'. Most Bavarian citizens greatly welcomed the dispossessing of the Order. That Flachslanden and the other knights of the langue were stunned with the rapidity of these actions might be explained by their diplomatic vision. For them it was inexcusable that the new Bavarian government would take such a harsh position against Russia. When the sequestration was carried out Flachslanden immediately began subversive agitation and rumours were spread that Max Joseph had been driven to it by private speculation and mean business reasons. The consequences of this action would show that Bavaria was too tied up in the balance of international power to act out such measures without international consent. Obviously the Bavarian court thought that in these troubled and hectic times Tsar Paul, as the nominal head of the Order, would have been too busy with more pressing things to be bothered much about the events in Bavaria. But Max Joseph and his commission did not take into consideration the venge and stamina of the tsar in all matters connected with his 'beloved' Order.

By the end of February 1799 when Reichlin, the Bavarian chargé d'affaires, communicated to Munich that Bali Litta had fallen into disgrace at the Russian court no information about the sequestration in Bavaria had yet been received at St. Petersburg. The actual news reached Russia rather unexpectedly and not even Reichlin was officially informed. To his disappointment, he only got to know about it in an audience with Prince Besborodko who had been told by the Russian minister at the imperial diet at Ratisbon, Baron Bühler. The news had been sent by the knights to St. Petersburg through various unofficial channels, not without exaggeration regarding the harshness and ruthlessness of the Bavarian government against the Order. Paul's furious reaction was easy to foresee. Military actions against Bavaria would not be impossible. On 20 March 1799 Reichlin was officially instructed to leave St. Petersburg within a day. In the meantime Flachslanden had send two memoirs against the Bavarian government to St. Petersburg.

The Austrian minister Thugut's words that the new duke elector would be a 'slave' of France came back to mind. Soon the affair obtained a most serious international dimension. To Thugut's delight, Paul regarded Max Joseph as a serious threat to the conservative order in Europe and the hot-blooded tsar discussed with the Austrians how to end the rule of this 'Chevalier des regicides français' as Max Joseph was called. Bavaria was to be placed under an Austrian commission. The Russian generals Korsakov and Sowarow were already informed about the matter. If these plans had been carried out, Thugut's daring plans to bring Bavaria under direct Austrian power would have come about. That the tsar's enthusiasm for the Order of Malta was an ideal tool to instrumentalize Paul politically had long before been realized by the Austrians. Indeed on 15 February 1799 Thugut had written to Vienna that the interest for the Order of Malta was the only solid subject in St. Petersburg.

That Paul ordered immediately 50,000 men under General Korsakov to attack Bavaria unless the priory was restored - as some modern historians maintain - is, however, not true. What really happened was that Paul ordered the Russian corps which was marching to the Rhine to regard Bavaria as an enemy country. That the Russians would really attack Bavaria did not seem very likely but the duke elector was suspicious of Austria's role. The Bavarian requests to Prussia for its envoy in St. Petersburg, General Tavenzien, to mediate to soften Paul's anger and to make him start once again official negotiations with Bavaria were all in vain. Tavenzien knew Paul only too well to expect that the tsar would be willing to discuss any action against 'his' Order. Baron von Bühler, the Russian envoy in Bavaria, was the only man who managed to speak to Paul in this matter. It was Flachslanden who contacted Bühler to solve the situation. Paul was only willing to normalize Russia's relations with Bavaria when the Order's possessions were restored completely and Bavaria joined the alliance against France. Paul also demanded that a delegation of the Bavarian knights should be sent to St. Petersburg to pay homage to him as grand master of the Order.

81. On the confiscation of the lands of the Order in Bavaria in February 1799 cf. also Walischewsky, 243 et seq.
82. Müller, 65.
83. Cf. ibid. 65 et seq. For the communication between Bühler and the court at St. Petersburg on behalf of the Order of St. John, NLM. Libr. MS. 420, ff. 194e-195r.
84. On Paul's furious reactions to the confiscation of the possession of the Order in Bavaria, cf. Walischewsky, 244.
85. Montgelas, 38.
86. Du Moulin-Eckart, i, 101.
87. Ibid.
89. Montgelas, 38.
In the meantime Flachsladen's intrigues had produced more confusion in Munich. On 22 February 1799 the Prussian envoy at Rastatt, Count Goertz - a good friend of Montgelas's - informed Munich that Bavarian knights had sent memoirs to St. Petersburg which put the Bavarian government in a bad light. In these memoirs it was even maintained that the confiscation of the Order's properties in Bavaria were a direct attack on Paul's honour. Most presumably Goertz had come to know about Flachsladen's writings. In March 1799 the 'Russia-expert' Sulzer was ordered to write a detailed rescript about how to solve the momentary difficulties. It was also discussed whether to send him again to St. Petersburg to calm down the furious tsar.

In Bavaria the situation was indeed precarious. When Max Joseph turned once again to Prussia for help to calm the tsar, the Prussian court expressed its friendship with the Bavarians but did not show any willingness to get involved in the difficult matter. The only solution was to abandon the old policy of neutrality and to support the Austrians against the French. Only with Austria's support could relations with Russia be normalized again, or so it was hoped. By April 1799 the Bavarians were still playing for time in the hope that Austrian diplomatic skill would prevent them from having to return the sequestrated lands to the Order. The 8 million German guilders obtained - so Max Joseph argued - were essential for the Bavarian budget. According to the congress of Rastatt, Bavaria still hoped that Malta might be returned to the Order which would satisfy Paul for the moment. But this did not solve the situation and in May 1799 Montgelas - on the advice of Balt Flachsladen - took matters in hand. The almighty Bavarian minister himself was a strong enemy of the Order which he regarded as a useless institution and would - if one did not stop it - infiltrate the Bavarian government and court as the Jesuits had done. But, for the moment, reasons of state forced Bavaria, as Montgelas clearly saw, to step back. Even during the negotiations in Rastatt things did not turn out in Bavaria's favour. Its position was not helped by some comments made by the Prussian delegate Jacobi that the sequestration of the Order's lands had been done to favour the French Directory.

On 2 May 1799 Montgelas sent the archives of the Bavarian grand priory to Duke Wilhelm von Birkenfeld who was requested to study the documents and decrees to find the best way to re-install the Order in Bavaria with the least cost for the government. As Reichlin's successor in St. Petersburg was chosen another knight of Malta, the already-mentioned François Gabriel De Bray, who had become a good friend of Montgelas. Before De Bray accepted this delicate post, he insisted on receiving the grand cross of the Order of Malta and Bavarian citizenship which were soon obtained because of his friendship with Montgelas and Flachsladen. It is interesting to note that even a clever and experienced man like De Bray was thinking in 1799 that it would be possible to make Paul resign the magistracy. In St. Petersburg De Bray acted also as minister of the Bavarian grand priory.

Max IV Joseph had come to depend on the help of a man he otherwise very much hated: Balt Flachsladen, who had intrigued against him since the days of Zweibrücken. But now the shrewd balt was the best person to submit the Bavarian position to Paul. In fact, in the spring and summer of 1799 Flachsladen's position as the head of the pro-Russian party in Munich had grown so powerful that some even saw him as a possible candidate to replace Montgelas. Surely Paul would have very much liked such a development and even the princess of Baden, who had visited Munich, openly showed her full sympathy for Flachsladen. But it was obvious that Flachsladen's position depended very much on the tsar and Max IV Joseph knew quite well that a one-sided turn to Russia would not be beneficial to Bavaria in the long term. So Flachsladen did not achieve his ambitions.

On 21 May 1799 Max IV Joseph and his councillor Baron von Rechberg reviewed the situation and it was obvious that they could not continue with the sequestration of the lands of the Order. Montgelas could convince Max Joseph to write to Paul to politely justify his previous actions. On 22 May the duke elector in fact wrote to Paul to explain that the sequestration was just the pragmatic consequence of the old plan of 1789-95 when the situation was completely different. The actual sequestration of 16 February 1799 was allegedly only done to check the income and procedure of an institution of which Max Joseph had never been fully informed about by his uncle Karl Theodor and which he had therefore never confirmed. Max Joseph reminded Paul once again that the Zweibrücken branch of the Wittelsbach family had never agreed on the installation of such a new institution in Bavaria. Since Max Joseph himself had never been informed about the details, the 1799 sequestration was just a provisional action. This last sentence was the crucial point which left many options open for the future. The funds of the priory were not touched at all and everything was to be re-installed. This letter followed the suggestions of Baron Bühler to satisfy the wishes of Paul best. In order to keep appearances and the sovereign reputation of Max Joseph, the forced re-installation of the Bavarian grand priory was styled as a new foundation.

In June 1799 Paul had sent a letter to Munich nominating Flachsladen as the official Russian representative in negotiations regarding the Order. On 12 July 1799

90. Cf. ibid.
91. Du Moulin-Eckart, i, 103 et seq.
92. Ibid. 111.
93. Cf. Müller, 78 et seq.
94. Cf. ibid. 71.
95. Ibid. 103.
96. Ibid. 104.
97. Ibid. 177.
98. The gist of the letter is printed in ibid. 108.
99. Cf. excerpts printed in Müller, 82.
Flachslanden, as the plenipotentiary of the new ‘Grand master’ Paul, and Montgelas, as the plenipotentiary of Max Joseph, signed a treaty which re-installed the Bavarian grand priory and the bailiwick of Neuburg, according to the old organization and structures. The former commanders and members of the Anglo-Bavarian langue were to be officially re-installed, while the duke elector had to acknowledge Paul as the new grand master of the Order. The Bavarians even had to abandon all contacts with Hompesch. On the other hand, Paul confirmed Max Joseph as founder of the institution, which meant that he had the right to appoint new holders of commanderies which had become extinct with the sequestration of the possessions of the Anglo-Bavarian langue in Bavaria. Max Joseph had the right to name 18 new candidates. The other negotiations between Flachslanden and Montgelas were finalized with the preliminary convention of 17 July 1799, and not of 29 July as most modern historians wrote. This convention officially stipulated that Max Joseph guaranteed for himself and his successors the re-establishment of the status quo ante as regards the possession and rights of the Order in the duchies of Bavaria, Sulzbach, Neuburg, and in the Upper Palatinate. The old foundation charter of the Anglo-Bavarian langue of 6 August 1781 as well as the charter of 22 April 1782 were to form the basis for a new convention with some slight modifications and additions.

An innovation was the incorporation of the Russian priory and the stipulation that the knights of the Anglo-Bavarian langue in the service of Bavaria or involved in military duties would be paid by the government. The duke elector was made responsible for the re-establishment of the commanderies, while the tsar had to be fully acknowledged as the grand master. The Anglo-Bavarian-Russian langue therefore had to obey the latter’s orders as long as these orders did not clash with the rights of the pope as the spiritual head of the Order. The duke elector, in whose name the convention was issued, was to be acknowledged as the founder of the Anglo-Bavarian langue. Paul guaranteed all open and secret articles and promised to protect the convention against any foreign interference. The separate articles mainly concerned the inheritance of the office of the grand prior. Article XX decreed that this office should always be an endowment reserved for a prince of the duke elector’s family, who, of course, had to be dispensed from the vow of chastity. This office was to be endowed by four commanderies and 50,000 guilders which was a considerable relief for the Bavarian budget. Flachslanden was appointed as his plenipotentiary. This article meant the dispossessions of the count of Bretenheim – the illegitimate son of the late Karl Theodor – who, however, was not ready to give up his old prestigious posts and income so easily and was soon to be involved in serious conflict with Max Joseph and the other Wittelsbachs. Even Prince Kourakin wrote to him from St. Petersburg urging him to resign as grand prior. He was eventually unvariously interdicted from keeping the title of grand prior.

Tsar Paul ratified the new foundation bull on 13 November 1799. On 4 January 1800 a separate clause was added that the grand prior’s income was to be increased by four commanderies. By 7 August 1799 the new list of the commanders of the Bavarian grand priory and the bailiwick of Neuburg was drawn. The four-year-old Karl Theodor, duke of Bavaria, was officially nominated grand prior. Already during the discussions about the re-installation of the grand priory and of the bailiwick of Neuburg in June 1799, De Bray and Montgelas had secretly discussed the future seizure of the property of the Order when time and circumstances allowed it. ‘He who can found institutions can also dissolve them,’ observed Montgelas. What Montgelas also had in mind was that even the Austrians were far from ready to acknowledge Paul officially as the new grand master. Although Montgelas intended to delay the complete restoration of the Order in the lands of Bavaria, Flachslanden was very carefully watching the developments through his agents, even while he was in St. Petersburg. The secretary of the Bavarian chargé d’affaires Sulzer who got to know and to dislike Flachslanden in St. Petersburg in 1800 sent regular warnings about the shrewdness and growing influence of the bault to Munich. Flachslanden had to be kept away from infiltrating Bavarian politics by all means. Sulzer’s warnings found ready ears in Montgelas and Rechberg who did their best to isolate Flachslanden from the court of Munich, although they could not do this very openly as Flachslanden had a most powerful protector in Paul. It was an open secret in the spring of 1799 that Flachslanden had created a strong pro-Russian party

100. Montgelas, 39 et seq.
103. Du Moulin-Eckart, i, 173.
in Munich which was clearly opposed to other pro-Russian or pro-Austrian parties and which would later play an important role in keeping Bavaria independent when the threat of an Austrian annexation re-emerged in the summer of 1799.

In the meantime, on 10 April (30 March) 1799 Paul had set up the sacred council of the Order consisting of the acting lieutenant of the grand master Bali Count Nicholas Soltykov,112 Grand Marshal Bali Hereditary Grand Duke Alexander of Russia, Grand Commander Bali Prince Peter Lapoukin, Grand Hospitaler Bali Count James Sievers, Grand Admiral Bali Johann Lamb, Grand Chancellor Bali Theodor Rostochtin, Grand Bali Johann Baptist von Pfürdt-Blumberg, and Turcoplier Bali Johann Baptist Anton von Flachslanden.113 Only two of these, Flachslanden and Pfürdt-Blumberg, were Catholic and professed in the Order.114 On the international level, on 9 June (28 May) 1799 Paul again asked Bavaria to support Russia and Austria against the French by allowing its troops to join the Russian contingents in central Europe.115 It was proposed that General Korsakov who commanded the Russian troops at the Rhine should join with the Bavarian contingents. Meanwhile Bühler was officially accredited again as Russian envoy in Munich, Max Joseph also felt obliged to promise the Russians a contingent of 20,000 men for the campaign against France.

In summer preparations began for the visit of a delegation of Bavarian knights to pay homage to Paul as had been demanded. It was decided that this delegation would travel together with Duke Wilhelm – Max Joseph’s brother-in-law – and the experienced diplomat Count Rechberg who were to negotiate the marriage of the Churprinz and the Grand Duchess Catherine.116 Montgelas, who still thought of Bavarian neutrality as the best solution to survive in a Europe deeply shaken by the aftermath of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic re-shaping of whole countries and nations, did not cherish the tsar’s idea at all. He knew that the coalition of the leading conservative powers – Prussia, Austria, and Russia – was far from united in its plans to fight France and the new democratic ideals and he therefore still played for time. But it was clear that Bavaria had to do some political ‘sacrifice’. A sort of genius like Flachslanden – or had it already been planned by Montgelas himself in Munich? – helped in the negotiations in St. Petersburg: it was decided that in these negotiations the affairs of the Order could be separated from discussions about the future of Bavaria in Europe. As such things could be developed more calmly.117 Obviously the re-establishment of the Order in Bavaria was less of a sacrifice than becoming embroiled in a costly war with France. As the Bavarians in St. Petersburg showed so much ‘goodwill’ – at least officially – towards the Russian point of view, on 20 June, Paul issued new instructions to his generals and diplomats in central Europe to assume friendly positions towards Bavaria once again.

Finally, however, it came to the situation which Montgelas had striven to avoid so strongly: Bavaria had to join Russia and Austria against France. One consequence of this was that when the Austrian and Bavarian troops were defeated by the French in the summer of 1800, Bavaria became temporarily a French protectorate. Max IV Joseph fled to Amberg. At the same time there was hectic diplomatic correspondence between St. Petersburg and Vienna because Hompesch, who was still residing in Trieste, had protested strongly against his dispossession and the usurpation of the office of grand master by a Russian Orthodox married man. As Trieste then belonged to Austria, Paul – de facto but not de jure grand master of the Order – asked Vienna to silence Hompesch.118 Still in the spring of 1799 there remained the unsolved problem of two persons claiming the office of grand master. In June 1799 rumours from Vienna were circulating that the Austrians intended to force Hompesch to abdicate and to make Paul to resign to install Archduke Johann, Emperor Joseph II’s son, instead. Many Bavarians clearly preferred Paul – if it were up to them – than the disliked Austrian.119 These were only just rumours and Paul put so much pressure on Austria that the emperor forced Hompesch in early July 1799 to resign. On 6 July 1799 Flachslanden wrote to Hompesch’s defender, Charles Joseph Meyer de Knomau, to silence his protests120 and suggesting Hompesch’s abdication. This letter, however, failed in its main purpose. Hompesch had already resigned on the day it was written.121 According to canon law, neither Emperor Franz II nor Tsar Paul could force Hompesch to abdicate without the approval of the Holy See.122 In fact it was only in 1802 that the Curia ratified this abdication.123 Despite Rome’s hesitation, quite soon the grand priories of Germany, Bohemia, Venice, Capua, Barletta, Messina, and Portugal and, after the liberation from the French, the grand priories of Lombardy and Pisa all acknowledged Paul as grand master as did the Bavarians. On the other hand, bowing to pressure from their king, the Spanish priories of Catalonia, Navarra, Aragon, and Castille refused to acknowledge the tsar. The grand priory of Rome too followed the Holy See and refused to accept Paul.124

112. On the nomination of Field Marshal Count Nicolas Soltykov as lieutenant of the grand master, cf. Sherbowitz Wetzor / Toumanoff, 57.
113. Cf. Maisonneuve, 273 et seq.
114. On Flachslanden as turcoplier in 1799 cf. also Cavaliero, 242.
115. Du Moulin-Eckart, i, 113 et seq.
117. Du Moulin-Eckart, i, 114.
118. Ibid. 115.
122. On the protest of the pope in 1798-1799 cf. Sherbowitz Wetzor / Toumanoff, 45 et seq.
123. On the notification of the abdication of Hompesch and the appointment of Bartolomeo Ruspoli as grand master, cf. ibid. 54 et seq.
Just to silence any ‘malcontents’, on 21 (9) August 1799 the chapter of the Order in St. Petersburg informed Bavaria that Hompesch had abdicated. Late that same year Paul, in his capacity as ‘grand master’, communicated the new regulations to the remaining priories and bailiwicks. Article 10 of these regulations is most interesting and clearly shows the instrumentalization of the Order in the new political programme: ‘La guerre présente contre les Français étant réputée guerre contre les infidèles, chaque campagne de six mois sera comptée à ceux qui la feront, comme caravans réguliers.’

When with the preliminary convention of 17 July 1799 the Anglo-Bavarian langue – or better the ‘langue Anglo-Bavaro-Russe’ – was put again on solid juridical ground, a delegation of obedience headed by the duke of Birkenfeld and including Baron Rechberg with Sulzer as secretary, left Munich on 19 August, arriving in St. Petersburg six weeks later. A less obvious reason for this delegation was to make Russia agree to a treaty of protection, a move which was not made out of the free will of the Bavarians but was imposed by Russia. This went clearly against Bavarian neutrality but for the moment Montgelas and Max IV Joseph thought they could not do otherwise. This paper does not allow a deeper account of the background of these developments.

Another delegation, composed of Ball Flachslanden, Count Preising, Count Arco, and the Chevalier De Bray, which as to concentrate only on the affairs of the Order had already left Munich for St. Petersburg on 23 July 1799. The delegates carried with them a pledge of homage on the part of the Bavarian grand priory and the ratified document of the re-installation of the priory. De Bray had been chosen thanks to his friend Montgelas and he left a travel diary which gives a good account of the events. On 5 August the delegation reached Berlin where it had some discussion with members of the Prussian government. On 29 August they arrived at Mita and Flachslanden had an audience with French King Louis XVIII who then was living there in exile. In St. Petersburg the delegation first took up lodging in the Hôtel Apraxin. De Bray proved a most careful observer of Paul’s court: his ‘Mémoire sur la Russie’ was a sharp, critical, and clinical analysis which caused such international interest in Munich that the Russian authorities felt insulted. On 19 February 1800 De Bray left for Bavaria but Paul’s death in March 1801 prevented him from further serious Russian actions. De Bray’s ‘Mémoire’ clearly shows how much the Bavarians knew about Paul’s unbalanced weak-minded character. Indeed his arrogant and undiplomatic attitude towards the other conservative European powers never allowed the anti-French coalition to really work. That Paul allowed himself be acclaimed as grand master of the Order was still a hotly-discussed subject. To Austria, Prussia, France, Spain, and England it did not so much matter that Paul was married and Russian Orthodox. It was his Mediterranean ambitions which caused them headaches. From this point of view alone it was unthinkable that Malta would be returned to an Order whose head was the tsar of Russia. Especially for Austria Paul’s acclamation to the magistracy came a shock, according to De Bray, as there were still many commanderies of the Order in the lands of the Hapsburgs. De Bray simply called Paul’s direct and prominent involvement in the activities of the Order a fantaisie. But the delegation could do nothing else for the moment than arrange matters with Paul as best it could. In his memoir De Bray indicates that in Malta and the old institution of the Order Paul saw the integral symbol of an united conservative Europe against its (or rather, his) enemies: the French Republic and the Turkish empire. Vainglorious and over-ambitious, Paul saw himself in the historical role to lead this mission.

The negotiations in the late summer of 1799 in St. Petersburg also had some effect on the internal organization of the Anglo-Bavarian-Russian langue. It was clear that the Russian accent was growing stronger. The tsar’s son, Grand Duke Constantine, became the new turcopolier, while the grand master’s plenipotentiary was Ball Nicholas Soltikov. It was even decided that the campaigns against France would be the new caravans of the Order. ‘Grand Master’ Paul appointed Count Arco as the Order’s chargé d’affaires in Munich and also receiver of the Bavarian grand priory. Flachslanden, whose homage to the Russian court had its effects, was bestowed with two rich commanderies in the Russian priory. He was also awarded the Alexander Nevski Order. For renouncing the right of succession to the grand priory in favour of the scions of the Wittelsbachs, Flachslanden received an additional pension of 2,400 florins.

125. Quoted from Gumpenberg, 83.
126. Cf. in more detail, Du Moulin-Eckart, i, 174 et seq.
127. Cf. Montgelas, 42; Du Moulin-Eckart, i, 174. A good description of the voyage is given by the eyewitness De Bray, 82-135; De Bray kept a diary of the voyage.
128. Ibid., 86 et seq.
130. De Bray, 98.
131. Ibid., 99.
132. Ibid., 116.
133. Ibid., 118.
136. Von Berg, 250 et seq. This list with Count Arco as receiver of the Bavarian grand priory and Paul’s son Constantine replacing Flachslanden as grand turcopolier was published in Annales de l’Ordre Sousravien de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem, St. Petersburg 1800. Cf. also Pierre-Louis, 31.
Flachslanden’s stay in St. Petersburg was not entirely successful. Before the council met on 21 (9) January 1800 something must have taken place as Bilib Grand Duke Constantine of Russia replaced Flachslanden as turcopolier. In fact Flachslanden’s star then was rapidly sinking. Thanks to his old service in the first Russo-Turkish war and his prominent and helpful role in the Anglo-Bavarian language he used to be invited to dinner every evening by Paul. But all of a sudden this harmonious atmosphere came to an end because of internal intrigues and conflicts. At a meeting of the sacred council of the Order which was presided over by Paul and where Flachslanden was present, the turcopolier made some suggestions to halt Vice-Chancellor de la Houssaye’s programme to change the statutes of the Order. The suggestions against his concepts worried de la Houssaye very much because he felt, perhaps rightly, that Flachslanden was aiming for the post of lieutenant of the grand master and that the turcopolier was aiming to oust him (de la Houssaye). De la Houssaye managed to win Marshal Soltykov and Chancellor Rostopchin over to his side and together they succeeded to convince others that Flachslanden was a dangerous intruder in Russian politics. As a result Paul began to ignore Flachslanden and the entire Bavarian delegation, which soon left for Munich. According to Sulzer, it was Flachslanden’s arrogance and missing ‘tact’ which brought him in conflict with many in the Russian court. But Sulzer was clearly an enemy of the balt and therefore not all of his comments can be taken as genuine.

Meanwhile things were starting to change in the wider European scene. After Napoleon’s acclamation as first consul on 9 November 1799, relations between France and Russia improved slowly but steadily. After the battle of Marengo on 14 June 1800 Napoleon even went so far as to declare – it cannot be determined whether he meant or not that he was ready to hand over Malta to Paul. The island was still besieged by the British and the first consul knew very well that the French defenders in Valletta were in a desperate state and hardly able to hold out much longer. Much more than all the other European powers Napoleon felt, or so he said, that Paul was the most legitimate claimant to Malta. Obviously Napoleon knew that Malta would fall sooner or later to the British, and the island in the hands of the Order (that is, Russia) would be less of a problem than if it fell to the British where it would help their dominance in the Mediterranean. The Russians, of course, knew about these second thoughts of Napoleon and for the moment tried to avoid an open clash with Britain. Therefore negotiations lingered on, until in September 1800 the French surrendered and Malta fell to the British. Still in September it was being discussed that the Russian side should recognize the Rhine as the frontier of France if Napoleon withdrew from Italy, restored Egypt to the Sublime Porte, and passed Malta to Paul as the grand master of the Order.

In the winter of 1799/1800 Paul and the king of Naples had already developed plans to take Malta by force. An important figure was the Neapolitan politician in St. Petersburg the Duke Serra Capriola. Although his main purpose was to convince Russia to help to keep Italy free from the hated Austrians, the question of Malta was also an important point of discussion. In the winter of 1798/99 Paul had already organized a contingent of troops under Prince Wolginsky to be stationed in Malta following the defeat of the French. The chancellor of the German langue Joseph Albert von Ittrn maintains that in 1800 there were already preparations afoot in Kronstadt to establish a small fleet which would stand under the command of the Order of Malta.

According to Serra Capriola, the Italian states and the kingdom of Naples would have nothing against a joint Anglo-Russian army taking over Malta. Paul as the grand master would then become the nominal head of the Maltese islands in the same manner as the Order once ruled the country as a fief-holder of the kings of Spain. Obviously the British and Spanish would have never consented to this and thus further international negotiations on this matter never materialized. But the representatives of the kingdom of the Two Sicilies very much continued to favour Paul. During his first audience with Serra Capriola in St. Petersburg, the duke paid homage to Paul on behalf of the priories of Capua, Barletta, and Messina. Apparently a good job had been done by Baron Italinski, the Russian chargé d’affaires in Naples. Still Paul’s days were counted.

The ‘Russian-expert’ Sulzer reported how following the news of the fall of the island, the ‘Malta-affair’ became a primary subject of discussion in St. Petersburg. Most of the seafaring nations in the Mediterranean were not happy with the thought that Malta would be in the hands of the British. Tsar Paul instead was so sure about the return of Malta to the Order – that is to him as ‘grand master’ – that he ordered the Russian academy of science to feature La Valletta as a city under Russian dominion in its annual Almanach. The British, of course, had other thoughts. The British author Wilkinson who happened to be in Malta in 1801 and 1802 wrote:

138. AGM. Russie, A I, f. 53. Here quoted from Serbowitz Wettor / Toumoff, 35.
139. Cf. von Berg, 255 et seq.; on the fall of Flachslanden in St. Petersburg and the enquiry of Count Panin against the balt, cf. also Müller, 134, fn. 4, 142 et seq.
140. Müller, 109.
141. Cf. Ibid. 114.
142. Cf. Ibid. 121.
143. Cf. Waliszewsky, 364.
144. Even Rohan had tried to use the contacts of the influential figure in Italian and Russian policy. Cf. AOM. MS. 1539, f. 138v.
145. De Bray, 111 et seq.
147. De Bray, 111.
148. Cf. the letters of Sulzer of 24 October, 7 November, and 14 November 1800; quoted from Müller, 123.
149. Cf. Ibid. 124.
150. Ibid.
‘It is easy to see... that, if the Russians had been masters of Malta, England would have reaped the greatest advantages.’ When Paul realized that England did not intend to give up Malta his anger led him to take various offensive measures. He ordered the sequestration of all English ships anchored in Russian harbours. In Kronstadt alone, there were 100 English vessels. At that time England relied heavily on imports of tar, wood, and flax from Russia. All English goods in Russia were sequestrated and all pro-English members of the Russian court and cabinet were asked to leave St. Petersburg. The old plan to conquer India was re-resurrected and it was even rumoured that there was a joint Franco-Russian plan to attack India. Things were taking an extremely dangerous turn for England. A couple of weeks later Paul was dead.

Not only by Flachslanden but also by other pro-Russian diplomats and Knights of St. John, it was believed that Paul’s assassination in March 1801 was not just an internal Russian revolt but somehow connected with English interests. In fact Paul was murdered at a time when France and Russia were drawing closer to each other and the tsar had expressed his intention to Napoleon to transfer Russian trade more to the south. Besides the Black Sea, the Mediterranean therefore remained a main field of interest for Russia and Malta remained central to Russian interest – not only because of its ties with the Order – but also from a global point of view.

After Paul died under mysterious circumstances things started to change rapidly. His son and successor to the throne Alexander I (1801-25) was too much of a rational character to continue the chivalric adventures of his father. He refused the magistracy of the Order and, with the election of Grand Master Tommasi, the Order’s headquarters returned to the old stage of the exploits of the Order: the Mediterranean. Although Russia continued on its way to becoming an European ‘superpower’ – especially after the victory over Napoleon – Alexander focused his politics on continental matters. The British ignored the treaties of Rastatt and Amiens which stipulated that Malta should be returned to the Order and kept the island. This definitely vapidized any hopes of the kings of Sicily, Spain, France, or even Russia of laying their hands on Malta.

With Tsar Paul’s death also Flachslanden’s highflying hopes had come to an end. Still the shrewd ball kept doing well even when in 1806/1808 the possessions of the Order of St. John in the lands of Germany and Bavaria were sequestrated. Flachslanden had deposited large sums from his former income in German and British banks. After he took up residence in the former Jesuit monastery in Neuburg, he converted this building into a most elegant residence with huge gardens, Chinese towers, grottoes, and oriental garden villas. It soon obtained a high reputation as a meeting place for sophisticated conversation and receptions. Flachslanden’s small court and his economic and agricultural activities soon made him one of the leading employers of the region. The ball died in 1823 and was buried in the church of Ried.

How can one summarize the events described in this paper? Apparently in the late 1790s most parts of the pro-Russian party of the Order of St. John had not read the signs of the times. The Russian approach to Malta must have brought about the united opposition of the Mediterranean powers as well as of that of the British. This development was completely ignored by Paul and, whatever his reasons were for accepting the title of grand master, even had he lived longer, there would have been very little hope of regaining Malta. His double role as Tsar of Russia and grand master of the Order would have been an unsurmountable obstacle in allowing the Order to regain sovereignty over the island. On the other hand, having lost Malta and having a Russian grand master and with the chapter general being held in St Petersburg, the Order would soon have ended up as a ‘private’ Order of the Russian court. A character like Flachslanden did not mind that too much as long he would benefit from this situation. For him – a great admirer of the French philosophes – the Order of St. John was clearly not a religious or ideological association but a means to obtain positions, revenues and power. He was therefore symptomatic of a period of transition which had outlived the old feudal, medieval, and Christian institutional and social patterns. In so far the contemporary librarian from Neuburg Anton Förch rightly describes Flachslanden as more ‘materialistic’ than religious. Flachslanden surely felt that a newly-shaped Europe forged by the concept of national states would have prevented the Order from regaining its European possessions anyway. Tsar Alexander’s decision to refuse the title of the grand master and to keep a distance from the Order can therefore be seen as an act of political as well as spiritual modernity. The spirit of the Ancien Régime of which the Order of St John had been such an admired exponent had come to an end.

152. For an eyewitness account of Paul’s furious reaction about England’s refusal to hand over Malta to the Order after the French capitulation in September 1800, cf. Bienemann (ed.), 196 et seq.
156. Ibid. 21.