MALTESE PILOTAGE

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Pilot service was formed in a most respectable body of great value to the Port and its interest.
Customs Department, E 1, 1880

The aim of this paper is to consider pilotage in Malta in the light of a historical background involving the ships of the Order of St John and the formal establishment of pilotage under British rule. There was a clear-cut distinction between the services offered by local pilots who accompanied the warships of the Order of St John and those who offered their services in helping captains entering or departing from Grand Harbour in Malta. The British authorities in Malta were anxious to regulate the pilot service in Malta which, initially, started as a private concern by a few pilots but developed into a well-established department catering for all merchant ships, a service which, subsequently, was to reach a British standard of efficiency.

Historical background
Maltese pilots owe their expertise to a long tradition of seamanship which they have practised for many centuries. To evaluate the conduct of Maltese pilots, it is necessary to survey the historical background of this art. Local pilots were employed on the galleys and other warships of the Order of St John since 1530 when the Knights settled in Malta after they had already made a name for themselves in the Mediterranean Sea.

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The galleys of the Order of St John normally followed coastal navigation, keeping the land in sight. The galleys were not able to withstand rough seas, so pilots ensured that, at the least sign of climatic turbulence, captains would dart into the nearest safe place. The system of crossing great spaces of open sea, known as travelling a golfo lasciato, was practised on rare occasions. Sailing for twelve hours and keeping a steady course in any direction, the Mediterranean galleys were able to reach land through navigation by coastal pilots with a system quite different from that employed when sailing on the oceans.

One cannot over-emphasize the importance of local pilots engaged on the Order’s galleys. A galley Captain, and even the Captain-General of the galley squadron himself, when confronted by navigation problems or a forthcoming sea-battle, would convene on the Capitana (or flagship) all high-ranking officers and the pilots for a council at sea. In fact, a white and red pennant hoisted at the standard staff of the Capitana signified that all pilots were to assemble for such a council. However, although held in high esteem, it was the pilots who were to personally answer for any mishaps, and not the General of the galley squadron.

The expertise of local pilots was greatly appreciated in operations throughout the Mediterranean, especially when the Order’s galley squadron was operating near the Barbary coasts which always presented certain navigation difficulties. In fact, Maltese corsairs employed pilots on their galleons when they operated round the Barbary coasts and normally paid them, over and above their agreed salary, two per cent of all prizes taken.

Pilots were never forced by a captain or owner of a ship to sail through dangerous places or to change course from that normally practised by expert navigators. They were personally responsible for all damages when losing a ship through ignorance or negligence. Pilots proved to have been maliciously responsible for losses, had to pay for all damages and were condemned to row in the galleys for five years or more, according to the extent of damages committed. A pilot could not leave his ship before or during a voyage; he was the last man to leave when all sailors abandoned a ship. Normally, a pilot employed on a galley did not handle weapons but kept all the time to the steering bench to be in control of all movements of the galley. Although Maltese pilots honourably proved their mettle, from time to time the Order of St John also sought the services of good pilots from France.

The chroniclers of the Order of St John never deemed it necessary to dedicate much attention to the endeavours of Maltese personnel employed on the ships of the Knights but, sometimes, the exploits of certain Maltese pilots did attract their attention. In 1534, the ships of the Order attacked and captured a great Muslim galleon near Salonica. The Maltese pilots Paolo d’Avola, Tommeo Cassia and Antonio Baldacchino were greatly praised for their efforts and were also handsomely rewarded. The local pilot Cayla played an important part in subduing a garbo in 1555. The 1560 Christian disaster near Djerba proved to be a setback for Spanish ambitions in North Africa. On that occasion Tommeo Cassia, the chief Maltese pilot of the Order, proved to be the best one in the whole Christian fleet.

During the 1565 Great Siege of Malta, it was Maltese pilots who maintained communications with Sicily. Bartolomeo Habela, an expert Maltese pilot, managed to take a message to Sicily safely. In the same period, Habela succeeded in landing at Ghajn Tuffieha and proceeded to Mdina, avoiding all the time the Turkish guards. Padron Orlando Magro, another Maltese pilot, was unfortunately captured in the Maltese channel in 1565 while trying to arrange the landing of the expedition headed by Don Garcia.

In 1644 the General of the galley squadron, Gabriele de Boisboudran, successfully attacked and subdued a great Muslim galleon known as the Sultana or flagship. Unfortunately, Boisboudran was killed in action, thus overshadowing the victorious outcome of the day. On the same occasion, Narducci, the Maltese chief pilot of the galley squadron who had vast experience at sea, was hit in a shoulder blade and later died of his wound in Malta. His death proved to be a great loss for the Maltese galley squadron.

3. Archives of the Order in Malta (AOM) 1768; 2; Dal Pozzo (1703), 1, 107.
4. National Library of Malta Manuscript (NLM) 110, signet no. 27.
5. NLM 1299, f. 10v.
6. National Archives of Malta (NAM), Rollo della galeotta Nostra Signora del SSno Rosario e San Vincenzo; Rollo della galeotta L’Immacolata Concezione 1722; Rollo del SSno Crocifisso e l’Immacolata Concezione 1722; Rollo della galeota commandata da Capitano Angelo Sarto Nicolli 1722.
7. Del Diritto Municipale di Malta, Malta 1784, 202, 203.
9. AOM 1759, f. 384v.
11. Ibid., 359.
15. Bosio, III, 615, 630.
Maltese galley pilots were expected to have a good knowledge of the coasts round the Mediterranean especially those of the Barbary regencies. They had to calculate the depth of the waters and, more than anything else, they were expected to know the best places where to find and replenish the galleys' drinking water supplies and where to acquire the necessary brushwood for cooking purposes. They were able to describe beaches, ports, bays and their environs while they were provided with good portolans at the bows and at the stern of galleys. The galley squadron of the Order had its Piloto Reale (chief pilot) who, whenever the Capitana remained in harbour and the rest of the squadron sailed to Sicily or elsewhere, had to embark on the senior galley or the Padrona which was the second-in-command.

With the introduction of third rates by the Order at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the pilots were expected to be well-versed in trigonometry and the use of navigational instruments to ensure the course and guide with certainty the ship to its destination. They were nearly always at the helm and were to keep the Captain informed about the course, contrary winds and favourable tides. Pilots were classified as first and second class pilots and their mates together with one chief, or Piloto Reale, in the ships-of-the-line squadron. Pilots were expected to be literate, to know the basics of mathematics, the up-keep of log-books and to discuss their problems with other pilots. They were to keep an eye on the behaviour of young pilot apprentices and select the best for future service on the ships of the Order. The youngsters were also instructed in drawing so that they would be able to produce maps and diagrams of coasts and ports.

By 1724, all pilots engaged on great merchant ships were to be approved and confirmed by the officers pro tempore of the Consolato di Mare after being examined by four experienced Captains or mates and registered at the office of the Consolato. The De Rohan Code required pilots to be examined by two veteran pilots and by two Captains or mates in preference to the two officers of the Consolato.

Pilots were to take charge of ships while departing from or entering a harbour, had to be vigilant during the voyage, to impart orders to boatswains as regards the anchor, setting or reefing a sail, tacking and changing course after consulting with the captain or his mate. Pilots were to be completely trust-worthy. It was a common belief that, after God, the success of a journey depended on pilots. Quite often, more than one pilot were employed on ships to make good for the imperfection of nautical instruments.

A pilot on a galley was allowed five scudi to procure compasses, hour-glasses and two navigational pennants. A pennant, pennello or windsock, was flown on the central longitudinal timber of the carrosse or poop cabin; sometimes, it was flown at the side of one of the balconies near the carrosse. Its purpose was to help the pilot determine the wind direction. He was expected to carry his own sea charts and maps but navigational instruments were normally provided by the Order. Local pilots were relatively well paid when at sea but their salaries were greatly diminished while on land.

During the eighteenth century, most of the third rates left Grand Harbour towed by their own tenders or by the galleys and there was hardly any need for a land pilot. Galleys entered and departed from harbour under oars and were kept well under control. In fact, there was no real need for a Maltese land pilot in this century because the approaches to Grand Harbour were well-known to all the local pilots working on the ships of the Order.

The Harbour Area
Malta's Grand Harbour was once described as 'one of the most capacious and finest in the universe'. More attention will be focussed on this harbour than on others which did not attain as much importance through the ages. Grand Harbour was, and in some respects still is, the centre of all seaborne trade of the Maltese Islands. Marsamxett Harbour attained importance during the time of the Knights of St John as a quarantine station. Marsaxlokk and St Paul's Bay were known for their safe anchorages. Gozo also had its safe havens at Mgarr, Marsalforn and Xlendi. Such places necessitated the service of a pilot on only rare occasions.

24. NMM I f. 133.
26. J. Fennis, Treue des langue des galeres, Tubingen 1995, 1418, mentions the 'pennello della spilliera'.
27. NLM 318, 164 part II: Editio Politico di Navigazione Mercantile Austriaca, Trieste 1802, 71; at the National Maritime Museum of Malta one can view an eighteenth century collection of navigational instruments.
28. NMM I f. 244; AOM 1739, f. 517.
29. NLM 223, s.v. Pahinggag, but it does not mention the coastal pilot.
The entry into the Grand Harbour, just a quarter of a mile wide, is regarded as quite narrow but there was a strong castle on either side.\(^{30}\) Maybe this condition necessitated pilotage services in the nineteenth century when maritime traffic entering the harbour increased considerably. The harbour was, and still is, affected badly by the north-easterly wind or *gregale*.\(^{31}\) The building of the breakwater in 1903, intended as a protection for the British fleet against the *gregale* and torpedo attacks,\(^{32}\) made the work for local pilots less problematic.\(^{33}\) The lighthouse on Fort St Elmo, at the entrance of the harbour, was erected in the seventeenth century to guide ships into Grand and Marsamxett harbours.\(^{34}\)

The main large areas of Grand Harbour and Marsamxett were far too exposed to the elements and consequently, during the eighteenth century, warships and mercantile shippings were badly buffeted. The berthing of ships was confined to the creeks where they found safety and deep waters for anchorages. Grand Harbour is almost two miles deep and extends to the Marsa area where one was able to find good drinking water for the ships’ supplies. There are perfectly safe anchorages in five creeks or ports which could accommodate a good number of ships.

The approaches to Grand Harbour do not present any particular dangers except for one shoal at its mouth, normally indicated by a buoy.\(^{35}\) Ships were usually greeted a mile off the entrance to harbour indicated by the farewell buoy. Ships longer than 300 feet presented some difficulties for entry through the breakwater. In recent years, some aircraft carriers had to remain outside the harbour because of bad weather conditions but not because they could not get past the breakwater. No tides or currents ever affect adversely the waters of Grand Harbour.\(^{36}\) However, it has been noticed that, sometimes, there is a difference of twenty inches (c. 50 centimetres) in the sea level during March/April of each year.

Pilots, like all ordinary seamen the world over, believe in the sayings and signs of good or bad weather. Red skies in the evening indicate fine weather;

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31. NAM, GOV 01.2/1, 62.
34. For information about the St Elmo lighthouse cf. NAM, Customs Department (CD), C 1, 378; *idem*, E 1, 432; *idem*, E 3, dated 31 viii.1886; NAM, C.S.G. 01 Vol II, dated 26 xii.1851; *Malta Government Gazette* (MGG) 1853, Supplement dated 10 xi.1853.
36. The currents and swell in Grand Harbour can sometimes create trouble. In 1996, the *St Elmo* was manoeuvring in Dockyard Creek when, for some unknown reason, she went out of control and created serious danger for the great number of small boats moored in the creek.
when the horizon looks clear to N.W. and foul to S.E. it’s a fisherman’s night; the appearance of a rainbow in the morning means bad weather expected but, if at night, fair weather is in sight; when distant terrestrial objects appear extraordinarily clear and near and stars appear very numerous and bright just before night, one expects bad weather.

From October to March, one expects southerly winds with drizzling rain. When a moderate wind at S.S.E. turns suddenly to N.W.W. (the opposite point of the compass), it blows violently and does great damage. Hardened seamen have learned the following sayings over long years of sailing: when sun sets in clear - easterly wind, no fear; when sun sets under a bank - westerly wind you need not want; wind blows cold - likely to hold; easterly wind right - abates at night.37

Organisation

The harbour service in Malta developed over a great number of years as the traffic increased considerably with foreign steamers visiting Malta frequently, especially in the nineteenth century.38 There were no hard and fixed rules for the privately-organised body of local pilots who offered their services to foreign Captains entering Grand Harbour. It seems that, up to 1814, the British authorities in Malta did not interfere in the service.39 As a matter of fact, the local pilots organised themselves as a private concern in about 1810. They applied the same principles of apprenticeship as those practised at the time of the Order of St John, namely, a father to son relationship and tuition.

As children, they started to work in the pilot boats under the eyes of their fathers or older relatives who were also pilots or boatmen of the pilot service.40 When vacancies occurred, they became supernumerary boatmen. In the meantime, when their services were not required in the pilot boats, they sought work elsewhere in merchant ships, men-of-war, as gondolamen and in yachts. Such supernumerary boatmen were retained on the books of the pilot service, hoping that one day they would be absorbed on the fixed list whenever a vacancy or opportunity occurred. Thus the pilot service was formed in a most respectable body of great value to the harbour and its interest. Such a calling of an arduous and responsible character was handed down from father to son for a great number of years, a service that required great experience that was only obtained by constant practice from an early age.41

There was a certain amount of control on pilots, maybe reminiscent of the times of the Order of St John.42 When necessary, even fishermen were expected to offer their assistance to ships entering Grand Harbour. Such people were regarded as coastal pilots as they would have accumulated, over the years, a sixth sense in tracing hidden dangers below the surface of the sea, especially near the coasts, together with an ability to forecast weather conditions, sometimes three days in advance.43 Up till 1919, local fishermen were subjected to similar conditions; to render their assistance to conduct a vessel into harbour in the absence of pilots.44 Most probably, Maltese pilots did not have much competition and suffered little from an uncontrollable concurrence of a great number of members of the same category. During World War II, many pilots were unemployed and had to find another job. No ships were coming to Malta and, when a convoy arrived, the few pilots attending to their work risked losing their lives through enemy action.45 A few pilot boats were hit during air-raids on the harbour area, especially in 1942.46

During the nineteenth century, Grand Harbour was frequented by British warships and the naval authorities preferred naval and not local pilots to direct their ships into harbour. The Royal Navy was endowed with a great number of buoys which were laid down for the exclusive use of H.M. ships.47 Pilots were not permitted to shackle the cables of merchant ships or yachts to the buoys belonging to H.M. Dockyard without permission from the Admiralty Harbour Master. They were expected to report to the Collector of Customs any mishandling of buoys or beacons in the harbour or along the coast.48 Permission was granted to anchor yachts in naval waters off L-Isla Point only as a privilege and when employing a local pilot for mooring purposes.49 There was a clear-cut distinction between naval and local pilots. Concurrently, one would find a naval pilot directing ships to naval buoys

41. NAM, CD, E 1, 470; NAM, PS 01/3 dated 7.iii.1809 mentions the employment of pilots in Maltese Harbours.

42. Del Dritto ..., 202; NAM, CD, E 1, 474; the 1880 report states clearly that the Government was to look after and control the pilot service.


44. PL 1883, article 230p.

45. Zahra, 243.

46. NAM, CB, 31.xii.1941, 108.

47. PL 1853, 26; MGG 1897, notice 43.

48. MGG 1897, notice 43, items 15, 21, 22.

49. NAM, Customs House (CH), Vol. XI, 155; most of the time, British officers were using yachts.


38. NAM, CD, C 2, 285, 419 for a comparative study of ships' arrivals.


40. NAM, CD, F 33, 114; for the first time one comes across a reference to apprentices in 1921.
and civil pilots in charge of passenger and cargo ships entering or departing from Grand Harbour. But naval requirements were given priority over all other harbour civil traffic. Old pilots still recall the days, for example, that when a submarine entered harbour all civil traffic had to stop. Whenever a red flag was hoisted at the Customs House or at the Palace Tower (known locally as the Turretta), it signified that a man-of-war was entering or leaving harbour. Under such circumstances, pilots could not allow any ship to move in or out of harbour.30

By 1852, the traffic of passenger and cargo ships had reached unprecedented levels. There were 1866 sailing ships and 275 steamers that entered Grand Harbour that year, an average of six ships daily.51 The Crimean War, which broke out two years later, necessitated the movement of hundreds of war and supply ships that visited Malta on their way to the Black Sea.52 Malta became the principal coaling centre of the Mediterranean. Pilots and pilottage had to be well-organized to cope with the increased traffic, especially in Grand Harbour.

The Customs Department recorded a series of shipping lists for various years. The 1877 list shows how, by that year, the number of vessels that touched Malta increased considerably when compared with the figures recorded for previous years. Out of a total of 3866 vessels that entered Maltese harbours, 1729 were sailing ships. The gross tonnage carried by steamers was 1,994,627 while that for sailing ships was 189,702. The opening of the Suez Canal increased the traffic passing near Malta which became a principal coaling station in the Mediterranean. The great majority of small sailing ships touching Malta hailed from Italy and from the North African countries.53

The local pilots constituted their union in 1877, one of the first to be organized in Malta. In 1880, they contributed for the erection of a niche dedicated to St Lawrence at Birgu.54 In the same year, a report submitted by the Port Department to the governor of Malta for the improvement of the pilot service reiterated that

the time has now arrived for recognizing the Body of Pilots as a corporation and that their customs and regulations hitherto

as it were recognized by courtesy should be recognized by the Government as those of a Society forming part of an important section of the community; as in the Watermen’s Company in the Thames and similar Pilot associations in the United Kingdom and Colonial empire this society appears to the committee to be deserving and worthy of the protection and support of the Government.55

For the first time, in 1883, pilots and boatmen were referred to as a body in the Police Laws.56 Up to 1895, all remunerations, pensions, uniforms, pilot boats and other necessities were paid for from the fees received. The following year all expenses were to be paid from the general revenue.57 Unfortunately, the pilot service on 28 September 1894 was declared to be lagging behind the times and most unsatisfactory.58 The Collector of Customs submitted to His Excellency the Governor, on 31 January 1895, a scheme for the re-organisation of the pilot service in Malta.59 On 4 November 1895, Count Strickland had already presented certain proposals to be discussed at the Government Council. New regulations for local pilots were proposed and approved. For the first time, someone suggested that pilots should operate with a power boat but, for some unknown reason, they continued using the traditional Maltese dghajsa.60 The new regulations might have improved the service and the majority of pilots on the active list would have gladly accepted the new regulations if it were not for three or four ringleaders who induced others to resist change. Unfortunately, this minority found encouragement from certain political quarters.61

In 1907, the government appointed a certain Mr Bianchi to survey the pilot service for one year. His terms of reference included the establishment of the number of pilots required with every boat carrying two pilots, and with the service becoming a government concern as opposed to a private one run by an association.62 Previously, there was an attempt by the Admiralty to manage the pilotage service as distinct from that employed by the navy. The Pilots’ Association protested vehemently, opposing the intransigent measures proposed by the Admiralty. On the other hand, the British authorities in

50. MGG 1897, notice 43, article 15.
51. Ibid., 1853, 90 gives the tonnage for 1852; NAM, CD, A 17, 191-1854 mentions the merchant steam vessels touching at Malta during the year 1853.
52. Lateria, II, 163.
53. NAM, CD, E 1, see Shipping List for 1877.
54. Zahra, 240.
55. NAM, CD, E 1, 474.
56. PL 1883, article 230a; and idem, 1919, article 299.
57. NAM, CD, F 10, 78, 80; MGG 1895, 937.
58. NAM, CD, F 10, f. 77v.
59. Ibid., D 9, 392.
60. MGG 1897, notice 43, 97.
61. NAM, CD, D 11, 14.
Malta controlled all the tug boat services and, consequently, the pilots had to comply with certain proposals. A local pilot manoeuvring a mercantile vessel to a mooring place in harbour aided by an Admiralty tug boat was not in a position to interfere. The masters of the tug and of the vessel were considered to be in charge, so long as the tug was actually alongside.63

The local political scene of the period did not help the pilots' endeavours to attain their goals; they were not united with a common objective. By 1921, the Pilots' Association64 was represented in the Maltese Trade Union Council and, while the pilots were subjected to government administration,65 they still ran their own closed-shop department.66

The Police Laws of 1853 delineated, for the first time, some rules and regulations for the pilot service in Grand Harbour, including the tariffs payable to pilot boats.67 On 7 December 1848, the Customs authorities had declared that the pilot regulations were all actually in use but were not yet sanctioned by any legal authority.68 The 1885 edition of the Police Laws, as amended by the Council of Government on 20 February 1889 chapter XXIIa, dedicated eighteen articles and a tariff of fares regulating the local pilot service.69

Government notice number 43 published on 20 February 1897 laid down new regulations for the pilot service in Malta. Pilotage in Malta was not compulsory and, consequently, a pilot had to wait for a request by the master of a vessel before ascending the side of a ship. Malta was regarded as a British fortress in the Mediterranean and the British authorities retained the power of imposing pilotage service when necessary. Pilots were not permitted to move a vessel from one berth to another without permission from the Collector of Customs, except in sudden changes of weather endangering its safety. They were reminded also to observe the rule of the road as laid down by the Board or Trade and to use the steam whistle as little as possible. Every pilot was expected to send up a warning signal to any vessel running into danger. Removing a vessel from one harbour into another was permitted. The 1897 regulations were the first real attempt to establish in Malta well-defined rules of behaviour and the modality of the pilot service.70 The 1919 edition of the Police Laws amended slightly the previous pilot regulations and maintained the same tariff of fares.71

Recruitment
An old pilot recalled the days when five local pilots were brothers. The Zahra family is still remembered as having been a pillar in the Maltese pilotage department.72 Similar situations prevailed elsewhere and certain 'dynasties' controlled the pilotage of their countries. After all, even the 1883 Police Laws required that only persons connected with the body of pilots was to be employed.73 So a system developed whereby recommendations played an important role in recruiting personnel for the pilot body.74 Yet no pilot or boatman was to allow the presence, for any reason whatsoever, of anyone without the approval of the superintendent of Ports.75 It seems that certain pilots and boatmen, by permission of the Collector of Customs, were allowed to absent themselves for years to follow other jobs and to send other pilots and boatmen to undertake their turns of service through private agreements regarding the allocation of due fees which were shared accordingly. On 10 March 1897, the Collector of Customs reminded the pilot body about the latest published regulations. This objectionable practice was no longer tolerated: pilots who were unable to carry out their duties regularly were required to quit the service.76

In 1895, the pilot body officially consisted of one chief pilot, fifteen first class and thirty second class pilots together with thirty boatmen77 but the number varied according to the exigencies of the service. By 1897, this figure was deemed excessive78 though it was admitted by the official side that several pilots and boatmen died during the previous years while others were deemed unfit for further service. Yet, all vacancies were not to be filled because there were enough pilots to cope with the current maritime traffic.79 In 1897, there was the case of a boatman who had been absent from duty.

63. MGG 1933, notice 251, 506.
64. NAM, CD, F33, 292.
65. Ibid., 114.
66. NAM, CD, F 10, ff. 77 and 78.
67. PL 1885, 26, 28.
68. NAM, CD, C 2, 517, 518.
69. PL 1883, XVI et seq.
70. MGG 1897, notice 43, 97.
71. MGG, notice 251, 1933, 502; PL 1919, 63, 65, 77.
72. Information kindly provided by Lorenzo Zahra.
73. PL 1883, XVII as amended by 230p.
74. Interviews with pilots and mooring men showed that recommendations were still valid at present.
75. PL 1883, XVII; NAM, CD, C 2, 518.
76. NAM, CH, vol. XI, 634.
77. NAM, CD, E 1, 470; MGG 1895, 937.
78. NAM, CD, F 10, f. 78.
79. NAM, CH, Vol. XI, 634; NAM, CD, D 11, 263, 419; idem., E 1, 471; at present the pilot body consisted of 18 pilots and 19 mooring men.
through illness, for eight years. The Customs authorities were not happy with such a situation and suggested that this man, and other pilots with similar cases, should be liable to enforced retirement after the publication of the findings of a proper medical board. The Collector of Customs was empowered to enforce the retirement of any pilot or boatman mentally or physically incapacitated or on attaining the age of 65 years.

In 1894, the Customs Department suggested that first-class pilots should act only as pilots and were not to row with the rest of the boat crew except under very exceptional circumstances. It was expected that relieving the first-class pilot from the menial work undertaken by all pilots, and by providing him with a decent uniform, would help to improve the pilots’ service. Consequently, the inclusion in each pilot boat of at least one man bearing a comparatively smart appearance and possessing some knowledge of the English and Italian languages might, to some extent, earn the respect of those he may contact by reason of his official position. Therefore, there were first and second-class pilots with the chief pilot being approved by the Collector of Customs. Till 1897, the chief pilot was chosen by the pilots themselves. Pilots were appointed by the Superintendent of Ports from among supernumerary pilots who were also appointed by him according to the result of an examination conducted by a board consisting of three members appointed by the Head of the Government, one of whom was invariably the Superintendent of Ports. The examination of a pilot entitled him for a second mate’s certificate, equivalent to a master mariner.

The educational background of some local pilots left much to be desired. Pilots had to depend on memory for the discharge of their duties and mistakes often took place. In 1881, the Collector of Customs proposed that pilots had to possess some knowledge of English to be eligible for a licence, a suggestion that was never implemented and was omitted in the

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80. NAM. CD, D 8, 348; idem, D 11 218, 219.
81. MGG, 1897, notice 43.
82. NAM. CD, F 10, f. 81.
83. MGG, 1897, notice 43.
84. NAM. CD, E 3, f. 11v.
85. PL 1883, XVII as amended by 230i, k, l; T. Cacace, Codice dei Marin, Naples 1842, 144.
86. MGG, 1897, notice 43, 97; Cacace, 144: ‘At present a newly-employed pilot has to train six months in exercise and pilotage after an interview and starts on small ships first, according to their tonnage. A mooring man or rimarciator starts his career working for two years on a dojhoja and after an interview by a captain might get a job.’
87. NAM. CD, F 10, f. 83.
88. Ibid., D 8, 346
1889 regulations. Another proposal required pilots to serve for five years in a pilot boat as boatmen before being eligible for a licence. The 1880 proposals for the pilot service suggested that half this five-year period could be service on warships, yachts or merchant ships. However, no steps were taken to provide candidates with opportunities to undergo regular practical courses at sea.

There was an insistence to subject pilots to an examination before being granted a licence. The objectionable system of uneducated, and sometimes illiterate, pilots maintaining full control of their association was unbearable. There was hardly any difference between pilots and boatmen as regards their education background with the only difference being in the distribution of fees. By 1880, agents of shipping companies were complaining with the Customs Department about the standard of local pilots, though the remarks against the pilot service were of a general nature and no single pilot was mentioned by name. Because of these complaints, the pilots introduced the system of asking masters of ships for certificates of their work, testifying to their satisfactory behaviour when applicable. In 1880, the committee set up to examine the pilot service surveyed 556 such certificates which testified to the pilots having the highest degree of efficiency, responsibility, honesty and exemplary conduct.

The Collector of Customs proposed that all pilots who were to be retained in the service should be required to undergo an oral and practical examination on the following lines: the rule of the road; colours; marks on the lead line; use of the lead; use of the compass; how to take bearings; how to manage a ship under canvas or under steam; the duties of the pilots; the regulations of the pilot service; English and Italian conversation. Those who satisfied the above examination were promoted to first class pilot.

Government Notice no 43 of 1897 required pilots to be between 21 and 40 years old to be considered for a certificate. The Collector of Customs had the power to discharge any pilot or boatman who, by reason of disease or other causes, became mentally and physically incapacitated for the service or who attained the age of 65. The Collector of Customs, in his

90. Ibid, F 1, 471; some pilots were quite proficient in spoken English, French and probably Italian, see also: NAM, CD, D 8, 345, 346.
91. NAM, CD, E 3, 13v; Cacace, 144 to compare conditions with Italian pilots.
92. Ibid., f. 79.
93. NAM, CD, E 1, 471, 473.
94. NAM, CD, F 10, 428; Hutchinson, 135, for his idea of pilots’ qualifications.
95. MGG 1897, notice 43, 97; there was a pilot who continued to serve even in his seventies.

report on Pilotage in Malta dated 27 December 1894, had requested that pilots and boatmen should be liable to compulsory retirement at the age of 65. Formerly, no retirement allowance was issued to pilots or boatmen but the accepted practice was to recommend his/her successor/s who then paid a portion of his/her fees to the retiring individual/s or to one or more members of their families. Naturally, the law never sanctioned this method of selection of new personnel but it was a practice that persisted for many years. The 1921 proposals for a reform in the pilot service settled the pension question. Pilots helped their mates who had to retire before the proposition of the Government-provided pension. Three pilots who had not taken part in a strike in 1919 were at first denied the compassionate retiring allowance due to them according to the old regulations by the chief pilot who acted on behalf of the other pilots. The allowance was subsequently enforced through an action in the Courts of Law. The proposed reform of 1894, regarding the required number of pilots, suggested that while five boats with their crews were kept in active service, another five would be retained as a back-up force while five would be off duty. That meant that only fifteen pilots were required daily and they were on duty for two out of three days. Formerly, they had only been on duty for about six days every month and sought other odd jobs on the other days.

Up to 1853 the Maltese body of pilots did not include a chief pilot who was first mentioned only in 1883. A chief pilot maintained good order and discipline among the body of pilots, ensured the proper performance of the service and the receipt and distribution of the rates due to pilots and boatmen, and reported all abuses to the Superintendent of Ports. Every Saturday, the chief pilot prepared a list of pilot boats with the names of pilots and boatmen on duty the following week and submitted it for the approval of the Collector of Customs.

96. Ibid, notice 43, 97.
97. NAM, CD, F 10, ff. 78v and 80; for the pension scheme see idem, f. 81v.
98. NAM, CD, F 33, 114, 132.
100. NAM, CD, F 10, f. 81.
101. PL, 1853, 6 et seq; there was no mention of a chief pilot then.
102. NAM, CD, C 2, 523; idem, F 33, 92 mentions the case of Lorenzo Zahra who applied for an appointment in the pilot service. See also PL, 1883, XVI as amended by 230b.
103. NAM, CD, F 15, 179; idem, F 33, 114 and MGG 1897, notice 43, 97 articles 4, 25, 28 for the various duties of a chief pilot. ‘At present a chief pilot is elected by the pilots, a post of great responsibility and he is expected to handle difficult cases involving, for example, the handling of great ships’.
A boatman working on a pilot boat required a licence from the Superintendent of Ports who did not grant such licences to seamen who deserted their duties until the lapse of three months from the date of their desertion and unless it was proved to his satisfaction that the person applying for the licence was competent in the trade. A long list of 80 deserters compiled on 11 October 1855 displays the names of those who were not to be employed on the public service. Normally a boatman started off in the pilot service as an extra or supernumerary member and, eventually, he would be appointed boatman. There were cases when a boatman had to wait four years before being absorbed in the pilot service but other luckier ones were appointed after one year. No boatman of a pilot boat could refuse or neglect to tender his assistance, when required, at the fixed price tariff.

Pilots always complained that their remuneration was not relative to the dangers they faced in the course of their duties. In 1853 pilotage fees were paid by tonnage. A pilot boat, always manned by at least four men, engaged with vessels of 100 tons or less was allowed a fee of 8 shillings; fees increased up to £1.5 shillings when engaged with ships of 351 or more tons burthen. A pilot boat employed with a vessel leaving harbour was paid half the above-mentioned fares but the transfer of a ship from one harbour to another, or to change her berth, attracted two thirds of the fares. Pilots employed on board vessels in quarantine were allowed 1 shilling 8 pence a day together with their food, or 2 shillings and 8 pence without food.

The tariff of fares paid to pilots in the last decades of the 19th century remained the same as those authorised in 1853. Moreover, vessels which required the pilots to lay out an anchor in the pilot's boat paid an extra five shillings to the above fares. A vessel which did not take a pilot but required the services of a boat for securing hawser or other work connected with mooring the vessel, paid six shillings. Pilots were not allowed to accept any higher rate than that established in the tariff. The crew members of a pilot boat who conducted the vessel into harbour were bound to assist at her mooring. A master of a ship, or his agent, was to pay the fare - as soon as pratique was granted or when the necessary clearances were obtained - at the office of the chief pilot. Out of the rates paid by steam vessels or by sailing vessels of more than 150 tons burthen, two shillings were deducted and distributed among the pilots. A further sixpence was deducted for the remuneration of the chief pilot and the balance was divided equally among the pilots and boatmen at the end of each week. In 1919, these rates were still being paid for local pilotage services although there was an abortive attempt to amend them in 1889. So pilotage fees remained unaltered at least from 1853 to 1919. It has been alleged that, by the turn of the twentieth century, only ships of 150 tons and over used a pilot and, consequently, there was less work for local pilots than expected from the great maritime traffic entering or leaving the harbours. There was an attempt to extend pilotage services to vessels which regularly frequented Grand Harbour, especially Italian shipping but the pilot service remained voluntary and the official tariff included the fees for vessels with 100 tons or less burthen if they required a pilot.

The government estimates for 1896 allowed the following salaries for the pilot body:

- Chief Pilot: £72 annually;
- Pilot first class: £50 increasing to a maximum of £60 annually;
- Pilot second class: £40 increasing to a maximum of £48 annually;
- Boatmen: £24 increasing to a maximum of £36 annually.

The twenty three boatmen who in 1895 were included in the pilot body were receiving 1 shilling 8 pence daily. The two pilots employed at the Palace Tower were paid £56 and £46 annually, respectively. However, boatmen were also entitled to good conduct allowance. In 1892, the Collector

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104. PL 1853, 26, article 196; idem 1883, 50.
105. Ibid., 27, article 197.
106. NAM PS, 0113, August 1808; idem, 30-3-1809; NAM, CD, A 18, 11-10-1855. While one finds a whole list of 80 Maltese deserters, English deserters were published one or two at a time in the official documents.
107. NAM, CD, D 8, 229.
108. PL 1853, 27, article 203.
109. NAM, CD, D 13, 434; idem, D 16, 45.
110. PL 1854, 37.
111. NAM, CD, F 10, f. 315; idem, D 17, 340.
112. PL 1883, XVI, XVIII.
113. PL 1919, 77; NAM, CD, MS 4, 65.
114. NAM, CD, C 2, 518 for 1848 says that the tariff for pilotage was made up by pilots and owners of ships or agents "some years ago." NAM, CD, E 1, 475; PL 1853, see tariff; idem, 1919, 77.
115. Ibid., D 13, 286, sometimes pilots claimed for expenses in connection with attendance at courts-martial.
116. Ibid., F 10, 79v; idem, F 33, 132; it is interesting to note how the chief pilot calculated the weekly money earned by pilots through a system of shares. MGG 1895, 937.
117. MGG 1895, 935.
118. NAM, CD, C 2, 26, 532; MGG 1853, Supplement 1787, 10-11-1853.
of Customs proposed the names of six senior boatmen to be allotted, between them, an additional sixpence daily. Two of them, Francis Farrugia and Antonio Caruana, had been appointed as boatmen in 1859 and they had worked for 33 years before being awarded the good conduct allowance. The others had worked for 27, 26 and 22 years before getting the extra pay.\(^{119}\)

In 1909 the SS *Carola* started to operate regularly to and from Malta and her master proposed the payment of just four shillings for the services of two pilots each time for mooring and unmooring. The pilots were not ready to accept such arrangements because the 4 men regularly manning a pilot boat were entitled to a total of 12 shillings for mooring and unmooring such a vessel.\(^{120}\)

### Social status

There always existed a variety of good, bad, and indifferent pilots yet their respectable character on the whole entitled them to be treated with respect and encouragement.\(^{121}\) Local pilots were treated as if they belonged to a class of people who attained a good social status. Their career was reckoned as a trade, as a pilot was equivalent to a mate or captain and a present day mooring man may be compared with the status of an engine driver or a coxswain. Apparently in 1880 there was an attempt by master mariners to amalgamate with the pilot body. Such a move was not possible without great detriment to the pilot service.\(^{122}\) Pilots were relatively well paid according to the living standards prevalent in the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1920, pilotage fees amounted to £4299 when there were 14 pilots, 12 boatmen, 6 apprentices and a chief pilot. Although difficulties were encountered by the shipping companies in the 1920s, the salaries of the local pilots were far from flourishing, due to the abnormal rise of the cost of living in those times.\(^{123}\)

All pilots and boatmen in service were expected to behave respectfully and civilly to their employers and towards all officers of H.M. ships or of the civil government of Malta.\(^{124}\) Before uniforms were introduced, pilots used to be well-dressed with bowler hats and, sometimes, butterfly ties on their shirts. A picture of the period shows quite a tubby pilot, with bushy moustache and smoking a big cigar.\(^{125}\) Old people living in Birgu recall the days when pilots strolled along the marina smoking a pipe with a golden cover or with unusually huge cigars in their mouths after disembarking from a ship.\(^{126}\)

Local pilots were required to wear a uniform when on duty, a ribbon with 'Pilot' written on it surrounding the hat and, on the right arm, a badge bearing the licence number issued by the Superintendent of Ports.\(^{127}\) Maybe the badge also included an international emblem.\(^{128}\) In 1894, the Collector of Customs complained about pilots who went on board important steamers without uniform or any distinctive badge.\(^{129}\) For unknown reasons, the previous regulations referring to the uniform to be worn by pilots were omitted in later regulations. The Customs authorities insisted on the pilots wearing some type of uniform, maybe a dark serge suit, and a distinguishing badge.\(^{130}\) In 1897, the Collector of Customs requested £6 to provide uniforms for the two pilots of the P&O steamers. It was hoped that this step would induce others to follow this example at their own expense till a reorganisation would come in force.\(^{131}\) The Customs Collector insisted on uniform-wearing so that pilots would be easily recognised by masters of vessels as officials of the Customs Department. In 1892, the Collector remarked: 'There have been instances in which masters, having refused to reply to questions put to them by the pilots in the execution of their duty, were afterwards acquitted by the magistrate on the allegation that the pilot had no official sign by which he could be recognised.'\(^{132}\)

### At Work

In 1848 one pilot boat, by turn, was retained on watch duties outside the harbour day and night and advised to approach cautiously any vessel within three miles of the Maltese coast, always keeping to windward.\(^{133}\) Pilots worked on a twenty four hour shift and their turn of duty was signalled by

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119. NAM, CD, D 8, 228, 229.
120. Ibid., D 17, 579; *Idem*, F 24, 266.
121. Hutchinson, 137.
122. NAM, CD, E 1, 472.
123. Ibid., F 33, 114, 132.
124. MGG 1897, notice 43, 97.
126. Information kindly provided by the late John Scemondi of Birgu, a member of the Society of Christian Doctrine.
127. MGG 1895, 937; *Idem*, 1893, notice 204.
128. Ibid., notice 43, 1897, 97; Zabra, 240.
129. NAM, CD, F 10, f. 777: 'Although pilots are provided with a uniform yet it is hardly ever used.
130. Mr Thornton was one of the few pilots who always wore the uniform while on duty'.
131. Ibid., D 8, 346.
132. Ibid., D 11, 14; *Idem*, F 33, 114.
133. Ibid., D 8, 346; even corn merchants had to wear a badge and a uniform reflecting the British influence on local people; cf. NAM, CD, D 17, 24-2-1909.
134. Ibid., C 2, 519.
gunfire at noon, relieving those previously on duty. In 1897, there used to be three boats with their pilots near the mouth of the harbour or at Ricasoli ready to take in any vessel approaching Grand Harbour while three other boats were ready in reserve within the port. By 1917, there used to be six pilots standing by at the breakwater or Ricasoli. While the breakwater was still under construction in 1903, pilots were instructed to desist from landing on the Ricasoli foreshore and not to secure their boats to the landing place at the St Elmo foreshore. Sometimes, the duty pilots at the mouth of the harbour were pelted with stones by soldiers from the Ricasoli bastion though such incidents were rare. There was a time when pilots slept at the breakwater to be ready for any incoming traffic.

The duty pilots, constantly at their post both by day and night, endured many hardships, particularly in rough weather when waiting outside the harbour for the arrival of vessels. On 13 January 1908, the master of SS Ramses reported that he had not been afforded pilot service. On the night in question, the sea was too rough for the pilots to wait at the mouth of the harbour and they had moored in the vicinity of Customs House. Consequently, they could not see the signal or hear the siren indicating the approaching SS Ramses. They were subsequently informed about the vessel’s presence by Castille when the message was relayed to the Customs House. The pilots immediately proceeded as far as the end of the breakwater but could not go near the ship as she was still a great distance from the harbour. One must remember that pilots were still using the dghajsa or rowing boat and not a power launch.

By 1924, all pilots were still being kept on duty on the Ricasoli breakwater pier. The shipping agents suggested that half should stay at the breakwater to pilot incoming ships with the others being stationed at Customs House to service the outgoing vessels. Pilots on duty could not skip their turn to attend to services required privately by British officers and their yachts. A weekly service roster for pilots was drawn up commencing each Saturday at noon.

Pilotage in Malta was never compulsory and ship captains were sometimes reluctant to employ pilots to save money, being conscious of their own capabilities and because the approaches to the harbour were relatively safe. On the other hand, pilots were obliged to offer their services. Normally hovering near the mouth of Grand Harbour waiting for any vessel requiring their services, the Maltese pilots could easily see the pilot jack hoisted by any ship and they would row out to the farewell buoy, almost a mile away from the breakwater. Before the pilots could approach a vessel, they had to watch out for the red flag hoisted at the Palace Tower or displayed from the Customs House which indicated that a Royal Navy warship was approaching or leaving harbour and these sea-craft were accorded priority over all other civil maritime traffic. The signalmen on the Palace Tower were also responsible for hoisting a red flag whenever they were informed of approaching rough weather.

Notwithstanding the precautions taken regarding the priority accorded to British warships over all other ships’ movements in or outside the Grand Harbour entrance, misunderstandings still occurred, with consequent embarrassment to the British naval authorities and the Customs Department. On 17 February 1909, the SS Paros left harbour without a pilot while HMS Andromeda signalled that she was approaching the harbour. Customs House was informed accordingly and sent a fast pinnace to warn the master that a British warship was entering harbour. The master replied that the warship was not yet visible and proceeded on his course. A full enquiry about the master’s behaviour was prenoted to be held when the Paros returned to Malta.

Apparently, due to the steady increase of maritime traffic to Grand Harbour in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a petition by Giuseppe Calamatta, the sole pilot then at the Palace Tower, requested the appointment of a second pilot to assist him. On 13 April 1872, Calamatta was reported in connection with misunderstandings with the master of Peonah. Calamatta declared that he did not see the signals made by the Peonah and that the
The pilot jack: the flag consisted of the Union Jack within a white border (cf. page 157).

The last pilot boat – the P.10 – preserved at the National Maritime Museum of Malta at Birgu (cf. page 166).

Carmelo Cauchi's ex-voto at the Zabbar Sanctuary Museum (cf. pages 170 & 172).

distinguishing pennant at the Palace Tower may have been mistaken by the steamer as an answering pennant. Apparently, Calamatta was rather inattentive, perhaps kept a bad lookout, and ignored signals from vessels. Calamatta was admonished to be more attentive. A signals pilot was also kept on Selmun Tower in the northern part of Malta. Apparently, pilot Enrico Bartolo was unable to continue in his job owing to bad conditions which affected his health.

The 1933 harbour regulations reveal that signals had attained a higher level of security in deciphering messages to ships entering Grand Harbour with visual flag and light signals being displayed on Castille Tower, Customs House, Palace Tower and Fort St Angelo. These new methods facilitated the work of the pilots, especially with regard to the priority given to warships when entering or leaving Grand Harbour.

A ship was first approached by a pilot boat, then by the health officers’ craft and later by that of the Customs officials. Relatively speaking, the approaches to the mouth of Grand Harbour were and still are quite safe from submerged dangers, so the local pilots on the local dghajsa travelled short distances out of harbour. Whenever there was the least danger for pilots approaching a ship’s side and its ladder, they themselves decided (together with the boatmen) whether to accept or decline a request for their services. Old pilots still recall the days when they still employed the dghajsa and approached a steamer to leeward. They preferred to be swept away by the swell of the sea rather than face the swell which might push them against the hull of a ship, thus damaging their boat/s.

No boat was allowed to approach a vessel, except that of the pilot, before receiving pratique. Therefore, the first contact with a ship entering Grand Harbour was effected by a pilot. Pilots were, therefore, in a favourable position to recommend their favourite shipchandlers, bumboatmen, washerwomen and others who normally offered similar services to ships in harbour. However, such attempts by pilots to perhaps earn something over and above their normal fees were prohibited by the 1848 regulations.

151. NAM, CD, E 2, 316; idem, E 4, 91; for more documents about the Calamatta case, cf. NAM, CSG 10, “I hereby certify that during the time”, et seq. The ms is unpaginated, so the first line of the relevant folio is being quoted instead.

152. NAM, PS, 04/1, 108.

153. MGG 1933, notice 251, 303.

154. PL, 1919, 50.

155. NAM, CPE, 386, article 281.

156. NAM, CD, C 2, 523.
When necessary, pilots diverted ships to Marsamxett Harbour due to quarantine exigencies. A ship subjected to quarantine was to hoist a yellow flag by day and a lighted lantern by night. Certain special cases involving ships with cholera were kept outside the harbour by the pilots on duty. In 1848, when a master declared that on board there was sickness, or perhaps a death case, his ship was to remain outside the harbour. When the sea was rough, he was to enter quarantine harbour and kept separated from other ships till the Captain of the Port proceeded with the normal precautionary measures. In 1893, the steamers *Floria* and *Transatlantique* employed their own men for mooring and unmooring while quarantine restrictions were still in force. The pilot body thus suffered financial losses and asked permission for the suspension of this practice.

There was a case of a suspect vessel which the pilot refused to board even though he was ordered to do so by the chief pilot. The pilot offered to accompany the steamer in his boat but the master of the vessel refused and proceeded to Algiers. The pilot himself reported the incident but he was suspended from his duties for a month. A duty pilot boarded *SS Lady Salisbury* on 25 September 1890 when the vessel was carrying a suspicious case of bad health. He landed at the Lazzaretto, was disinfected and released but the Customs Department retained that the pilot was supposed to have been subjected to a period of at least ten days quarantine at the Lazzaretto. When a pilot was subjected to quarantine periods, he lost income even though he was paid the food rations for the period he remained at the Lazzaretto.

The Customs authorities complained about the lack of qualifications of certain pilots resulting with considerable inconvenience being experienced especially in connection with the quarantine service. It was almost impossible for some pilots to remember the names of all the ports against which quarantine was imposed unless they were able to read the instructions issued by the Department and/or to confront the said instructions with the replies given by masters of vessels if they were not able to take note of those replies.

While one pilot was on deck to direct a ship into harbour, the other pilot and two boatmen were secured alongside. The Austro-Hungarian *Kalman Kiraly* was near the mouth of the harbour on 3 August 1895. The pilot refused to board the vessel but offered to pilot it from his boat. Although such a procedure was possible, yet the chief pilot wanted to ascertain that it was the master who had consented to such an action.

On boarding a vessel, the pilot presented his licence for inspection by the master as well as a copy of the Maltese regulations when required. A yellow flag was hoisted at the foremost till the vessel was allowed pratique by the boarding officer after which it would be hauled down. The pilot was to enquire whether the crew had any serious diseases, or to enquire whether there were more than three barrels of gunpowder or other combustible material on board. If a ship carried such material, the master was required to extinguish all fires, except the steam furnaces, and hoist a red flag at the mainmast before entering Grand Harbour.

When a master declared that there was some disease or death on board through small-pox or another contagious disease, he was directed immediately to the quarantine harbour at Marsamxett. The pilot displayed a yellow flag on the forepart of his boat to warn off other boats while accompanying suspect vessels into Marsamxett. Any pilot who failed to report serious diseases declared by masters was liable to immediate dismissal.

The pilot service in Malta was aimed at steamer rather than to help the relatively small sailing merchantmen. Sailing vessels of 150 tons found it quite easy to enter Grand Harbour which was frequented by many Greek and Italian schooners during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Such vessels did not require the service of a pilot. Service personnel, however, used yachts which never paid any port dues but quite often required pilot service.

Local pilots never faced any really great dangers when meeting vessels outside Grand Harbour. Occasionally, there were heavy seas but pilots could easily reach land if hazardous situations developed. During dark nights and
during fogs they were to use the lead. The sea currents and swells affecting Grand Harbour before the building of the breakwater were a headache for local pilots who kept their ships off the rocks of Imgerbeb Point on the Valletta side and ensured that they would not be carried straight on the rocks below the Sirena at L-Isla (Senglea). Otherwise, pilots were expected to observe the rule of the road when in charge of a vessel underway and to avoid unnecessary usage of the steam whistle. Occasionally, local pilots were called to handle merchantmen, like colliers, hired by the Admiralty in Malta. Other similar hired transport required by the naval authorities had to pay pilotage fees. An enclosed certificate of payment would be delivered by the pilot to the Customs House. There existed also a system whereby a merchant ship which required the services of H.M. Dockyard had to be first handled by a local pilot up to Senglea Point; after that, it was boarded by a naval pilot who delivered it to its assigned drydock in French Creek. Most probably, towing a vessel into harbour by the pilot was permissible although the towing line or hawser sometimes presented dangers to the pilot boat and its occupants. A caricature of the period shows a tubby Maltese pilot sitting on the back-bench of his boat with both hands holding fast to the low side washboards and the two boatmen gripping their oars which were held high over the water. The tow line was fastened to the high, broad fore stempost of the boat. Although the picture represents the frolic caricature of a well-dressed Maltese pilot in an unusual posture, yet there is a lot of truth in its message.

While the first pilot was obliged to give instructions from the bridge of a vessel, the second pilot was responsible for mooring it at the place assigned by the chief pilot. Occasionally, the boatmen did the job assigned to the second pilot though this was against local regulations. Such a breach of duty would not be left unobserved. The agent of the Adrià Company, on 20 August 1908, reported pilot Giuseppe Cutajar who entrusted his two boatmen with the work of mooring SS Carola because he happened to be unwell at the time. The pilot was reprimanded for making this arrangement without first consulting the chief pilot. A pilot ended his services to a particular ship when she was berthed safely. Once berthed, a pilot or a master was not to change or shift its position in harbour, except because of danger from sudden weather changes, without the permission of the Collector of Customs. The dghajsa Maltese pilots employed the local dghajsa or passenger boat from the commencement of their service in Grand Harbour in 1810. Early in the 20th century they probably also utilized the much heavier fuzzu for pilotage. In 1880, it was suggested that a sailing cutter or a steam launch be used by pilots instead of the dghajsa. The Customs Department disagreed because such vessels were not really required for the harbour service but it did suggest that the dghajsa or pilot boat be increased in length by fifteen inches. It was maintained that, since pilots had to sleep in boats, a launch was not suitable because of the tight compartments. If a lifeboat was found to be more practical, the pilots were ready to build one. One must emphasize the fact that, up till 1895, the pilots and boatmen provided the boats themselves and paid for their maintenance from their own pilotage fees. In 1894, the Customs authorities declared that the pilot boats 'have not got a smart appearance and should be substituted by steam launches.' Yet the pilots continued their service by utilising the humble Maltese dghajsa. The first pilot launch was introduced in harbour only after World War II and its initial cost and maintenance expenses devoted on the Customs Department.

The present-day Maltese dghajsa conveys an almost complete picture of the pilot boat because it evolved on the same lines of those of the passenger boat, known locally as the dghajsa tal-pass. The 21-feet long dghajsa is a carvel-built, double-ended open boat with high stumps fore and aft, low in the water and with its sheer rising abruptly at the bows but somewhat less at the stern. It is equipped to take four oars and a fifth thole-pin that is hardly ever used. Up to the first decades of the 20th century, such sea-craft

172. MGG 1897, notice 43.
173. Ibid., Hutchinson, 136, 139.
174. NAM, CD, D 14, 539.
175. Ibid., D 8, 229.
176. Information kindly provided by the local pilot body.
177. Hutchinson, 135.
178. Lloyd, unpaginated.
179. NAM, CD, D 14, 426; idem, D 17 248.
180. MGG 1897, notice 43, 87.
181. Communication kindly provided by the local pilots.
182. NAM, CD, E 1, 474.
183. MGG 1897, 937.
184. NAM, CD, F 10, f. 77v.
185. NAM, CH, vol. XI, 589; information also provided by local pilots.
were equipped to take a sprit rig and a jib when necessary and when sailing out of Grand Harbour.

Generally speaking, pilot boats were more strongly constructed when compared with their counterparts employed in ferrying passengers in harbour. The pilot *dghajsa* was sometimes subjected to great stresses when pilots had to meet ships away from the sheltered waters of Grand Harbour, so pilots and boatmen accordingly modified their boats, at least up to 1895, when the construction of new boats and all maintenance work (which amounted to £80 for that year) were paid from the general revenue collected by the Customs Department. 187

By the first decades of the 19th century, the Maltese pilots were most probably utilizing the strong and heavy *dghajsa* sometimes referred to as the *ferilla*. The boat had all the characteristics of a normal *dghajsa* with, perhaps, the application of stronger timbers and the employment of red deal instead of the white deal normally used for passenger boat construction. The slightly short and curved fore and aft stemposts were characteristics of the period. Maybe the first pilot boats retained the same colour schemes of passenger boats but it has not been possible to trace pictorially any early nineteenth century pilot boat; perhaps there were no distinguishing marks then in use.

The Maltese pilot boats operating in Grand Harbour during the last quarter of the nineteenth century were more strongly-built than their predecessors. The short, curved fore and aft stems were retained but were much stronger and wider than others. The gunwale was broader than that in use on a normal *dghajsa* and there was a mast bench at the bows. The traditional low washboards were retained though they served no practical purpose. That was the period when the words ‘Pilot Boat’ were painted in bold capital letters on the bows of the boat 188 that was painted in a dark green or grey colour from the water line to the sheer strake; below the water line the boat was normally given a dark brown or black finish. The *tappiera* or sheer strake was either varnished or painted brown. These boats were never decorated, unlike passenger boats. A unique model of a pilot boat can be viewed at the National Maritime Museum of Malta at Birgu.

The contemporary pilot boat, in use up to within living memory, was a normal *dghajsa* or passenger boat constructed stronger than others with flat frames, known locally as *canella*, for better resistance at sea. Modern pilot boats were painted dark blue from the waterline up to the *tappiera*,

187. MGG 1895, 937.
188. MGG. 1895, notice 204; PL 1883, XVII as amended by 230s.
or sheer strake, which was normally varnished or painted white. There was one case when, for an unknown reason, a pilot boat had its stem sternpost cut off very short. Some boats included the letter ‘P’ on the bows but others showed the letter and its licence number. A dark colour, and sometimes black paint, was normally applied to such boats from their water level downwards because local boatmen believed that the white colour attracted great fish and they feared their attacks since pilot boats normally operated outside Grand Harbour. The National Maritime Museum has preserved the last pilot boat which was provided with a strong cross timber at the stern where a small outboard motor was fitted. Although a powered launch was available for the pilots, they continued to use the dghajsa occasionally.

Old pilots still recall the days when a luzzu was sometimes adopted by the pilot body instead of the dghajsa, though this practice was infrequent. The luzzu was introduced in Malta by the end of the nineteenth century and adopted as a fishing craft.\(^{189}\) It was a double-ended, carvel-built open boat initially projected to take four thole pins. It was much heavier and sturdier than the dghajsa and was an excellent craft for employment outside Grand Harbour. The luzzu was provided with all the accessories for a sprit rig and was modified to take an inboard motor in the 1920s. Rowing a luzzu required a greater effort by the rowers than rowing a dghajsa. Most probably a luzzu was operated on rough days outside the Harbour when utilising a dghajsa was not practical.

It seems that the number of pilot boats was relatively great and, in 1894, there were 28 on the general service. The number of boats was determined from time to time by the Collector of Customs. While one boat was reserved for the service of the P&O steamers which normally berthed at Marsamxett, the other 27 pilot boats operated in Grand Harbour with 54 pilots and 54 boatmen to handle them.\(^{190}\)

Pilot boats had to be strong enough to handle a ship’s anchor when necessary\(^{191}\) or to tow, in or out of harbour, any ship requiring that service.\(^{192}\) Consequently, boats had to be certified on oath by a boubbuilder as to their strength and the dimensions required for such purposes.\(^{193}\) Obviously, pilot boats only towed small ships, not huge steamers, and probably only up to

c.1850. When towing vessels into or out of harbours, pilots and boatmen were prohibited from making any unnecessary noise or shouting.\(^{194}\)

The 1848 regulations for the pilot service required each pilot boat to be manned by four persons, namely a pilot holder of a permit, an assistant pilot and two able-bodied boatmen.\(^{195}\) The Police Laws of 1853 required every pilot boat to have at least four boatmen.\(^{196}\) By 1883, the regulations required each boat to be propelled by four oars and manned by two pilots and two boatmen. Therefore, the pilots were expected to row together with the boatmen when necessary.\(^{197}\) On 30 January 1904, the agents of SS Carola reported the pilots for not providing their boat with four men when mooring the ship. The pilots were severely reprimanded and promised to be more careful but they still lost the payment of their fees.\(^{188}\) By 1894, a pilot boat was manned by a first class pilot exempt from rowing duties except in emergencies, a second class pilot and two boatmen.\(^{199}\)

A duly-registered pilot boat in 1848 was to be provided with good oars, tarred lines for towing operations, a white flag marked with a licence number and a lantern duly marked with the same licence number of the boat. The flag was always to be kept flying when the boat was employed during the day and the lantern was to be displayed in a conspicuous part of the boat throughout the night.\(^{200}\) Such boats and all requisite gear was supplied and maintained by the pilots and the boatmen.\(^{201}\) The 1893 regulations required the pilot boats to carry a spare oar and a staff eight feet long at the stern to display the white flag with the number of the pilot boat.\(^{202}\) In 1921 each pilot boat was estimated to cost £20 sterling.\(^{203}\)

An interesting and notable fact is that the P&O company sent one of her ships weekly to Malta, up to the 1870s, when Messina started to attract the attention of that company.\(^{204}\) A pilot boat used to attend exclusively to P&O steamers as they berthed in Marsamxett Harbour, their normal mooring place. One supernumerary pilot boat was allocated to P&O steamers and

\(^{190}\) NMG 1897, notice 43; NAM, CD, F 10, 798.
\(^{191}\) Pl. 1883, 66.
\(^{192}\) NAM, CD, C 2, 520, 522.
\(^{193}\) Pl. 1853, 26.
\(^{194}\) NAM, CD, C 2, 522.
\(^{195}\) Ibid., C 2, 518.
\(^{196}\) Pl. 1853, 26.
\(^{197}\) Pl. 1883, XVII as amended 230q; MG 1893 notice 204.
\(^{198}\) NAM, CD, D 15, 248.
\(^{199}\) Ibid., F 10, 80.
\(^{200}\) Ibid., C 2, 518.
\(^{201}\) Pl. 1883, XVII as amended by 230r.
\(^{202}\) MG 1890, notice 204.
\(^{203}\) NAM, CD, F 33, 114.
\(^{204}\) Lakesha, I, 273.
worked separately from all the others. Yet all fees earned were subjected to the same deductions as those earned in the general service. There were agents who wanted to choose preferred pilots to service their ships. But it was maintained that such a 'Hire Pilot System' was very injurious to the large majority of pilots and it was discontinued. Pilots found it more feasible to work by turn and, anyhow, whenever a pilot worked for one agent, his piloting fees still went to the general fund of the pilot body. The distribution of duties among the pilots was established by regulations and assigned by the chief pilot, and it was deemed inadvisable to extend the P&O case to other companies.

Occasionally, unfortunate incidents involving the P&O pilots did occur. On 25 November 1904, the P&O steamer SS Java remained off harbour for a long time. The Grand Harbour pilots went alongside offering to pilot it into Marsamxett. Her master refused as he wanted the services of the P&O pilots. He continued to whistle and burn lights in the night. When the Grand Harbour pilots approached the Java for a second time, the master accepted their services. The P&O pilots reported for work at Marsamxett at 3 a.m., because the Java had been expected to arrive off the Harbour at daybreak. The normal piloting fees were paid to the Grand Harbour pilots. The P&O Company was allowed to continue with the special services of a pilot as the company had their moorings in Marsamxett Harbour where there were no other pilots on duty. The P&O pilot was henceforth obliged to be on the lookout for a vessel of the company a whole night and sometimes even for 24 hours.

Incidents at sea
Brydone refers to 'The old pilot (who) had a lot of stories to recount as regards the ships...' and Maltese pilots were not an exception. Sometimes, dangers emanated from inconsiderate and inexperienced pilots who embarrassed the port authorities from time to time. The larger ships entering Grand Harbour, especially when it was congested with traffic round British warships, caused headaches for the local pilots. They were bound by regulations to avoid all occasions of misconduct, drunkenness on duty, insubordination, negligence, illegal acts, absence without leave and making or being privy to the making of any false or fraudulent statements. As already stated, pilots and boatmen were duty bound to assist any ship requiring their service. In December 1859, a Maltese ship arrived in harbour after a voyage where bad and tempestuous weather was experienced. The captain required assistance because the crew members were unable to work due to downright exhaustion and fatigue. The pilot body rendered the assistance required and did not leave the vessel till it was regularly admitted to pratique. Apparently, there was a breach of the regulations because the pilots had somehow delayed the services required by the ship. Giuseppe Busuttil and 26 other pilots and boatmen were arrested and condemned to four days imprisonment or a penalty of ten shillings. They signed a petition which was sent to the Governor of Malta, Sir John Gaspard Le Marchant, and they were pardoned though it was explained to them that, in future, no deviation or any supposed toleration by the Department was to be admitted as an excuse for breaching the law.

Boatman Saverio Mifsud wrote to the Chief Secretary of Government on 12 October 1848 about the misconduct of Captain Reid, the master of the English schooner Brenda. At about 07.30 a.m. Mifsud went on board to receive some money due to him by the master when the schooner was already exiting the harbour on its way to Constantinople. Mifsud was requested to assist and, when the schooner arrived near the farewell buoy outside the harbour, Mifsud asked again for his payment while his boat was alongside and the schooner's boat was tied to the ship. The master told him to go to the devil and Mifsud tried to get into the boat but the master pulled him by the collar and prevented him from doing so. The boat which had helped the schooner out of harbour pulled away when the master refused to pay. Mifsud watched out for an opportunity to escape. When the master went forward, Mifsud jumped into the schooner's tender which was alongside the vessel, cut the painter which secured the boat to the vessel, and pulled away as fast as he could. When he was about a mile and a half from the mouth of the harbour, the other boat assisted Mifsud and the two boats went straight to the Marine Police and reported the incident. The schooner's tender was kept in the custody of the police for further investigation.

Sometimes, a pilot's advice went unheeded. The Austro-Hungarian SS Kelen Kiraly entered Grand Harbour on 17 February 1896. The pilot

205. NAM, CD, D 14, 544; idem, F 10, 799; MGG 1897, notice 43.
206. NAM, CD, E 1, 473.
207. Ibid., D 14, 265.
208. NAM, CD, D 15, 472; idem, E 1, 309.
210. Hutchinson, 137.
211. PL, 1883, XVI as amended by 230c; MGG 1897, notice 43, articles 27, 29, 30, 31, 33.
212. NAM, Petitions, B3257.
213. NAM, CD, C 2, 400.
informed the master that he was prohibited from dropping anchor wherever he liked unless the steamer was directed by a pilot. The master refused the services of the pilot, anchored in a prohibited zone, and was reported to the Customs Department.\textsuperscript{214}

Sometimes, Maltese pilots were involved in embarrassing situations resulting from the priority accorded to British warships entering or leaving harbour. \textit{HMS Ramillies} was leaving harbour at 08.53 a.m. on 17 April 1896 and, as expected under such circumstances, the signalman on the Palace Tower hoisted a red flag. In the meantime \textit{SS Falernian}, which had been boarded by a pilot and was abreast Dragut Point, reached the mouth of the harbour. The pilot did not and could not see the red flag from the place he was assigned. The \textit{Falernian} entered while the \textit{Ramillies} was leaving harbour. The master of the steamer was summoned and reprimanded while the pilot was suspended for fifteen days from his duties. On that occasion, no notice had been given to the port officer that the \textit{Ramillies} was due to leave harbour.\textsuperscript{215}

The \textit{SS Beethoven} entered quarantine harbour, or Marsamxett, directed by a pilot on 1 November 1896. Apparently, the ship hit a wooden buoy near the propellor causing some damages and the pilot neglected to inform the master about it. An account of the damages was submitted to the Customs Department but no steps could be taken as, meanwhile, the ship had departed. The master, \textit{prima facie}, was right and the chief pilot was of the opinion that damages were caused due to negligence on the part of the pilot. Messrs. O.F. Gollcher and sons, the agents of the ship, refused to pay the pilot fees. At the time, fees were not received by the government but by the pilots themselves and they were able to take steps to recover the fees due to them.\textsuperscript{216}

In the seventeenth century, Fournier remarked that pilots expected help from God and from Our Lady.\textsuperscript{217} Maltese seamen showed their trust in God, in the Virgin Mary and in other saints through the hundreds of \textit{ex-voto} paintings still hanging \textit{in situ} in many Maltese sanctuaries.\textsuperscript{218} In his long career as a pilot, Carmelo Cauchi experienced various hazards during the execution of his duties. He expressed his gratitude to Our Lady of Graces at

\textsuperscript{214} NAM, CH, vol. XI, 171.
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 236.
\textsuperscript{216} NAM, CH, vol. XI, 467.
\textsuperscript{217} Fournier, 123.
Zabbar by painting his own ex-voto in 1959. He had commenced his career in the first decades of the twentieth century when the pilot boat or ngħajsa was the only means to approach vessels entering Grand Harbour. He declared that he had faced real dangers of death on a number of occasions. He injured his knees and right arm and, on another occasion, broke his left arm while utilising the side ladders of steamers. Yet he completed his service as a pilot and lived up to 1990 when he passed away at the age of 92 years.219

Reported shipwrecks that occurred round the Maltese Islands did not involve local pilots. A Dutch brig, of 112 tons burthen and manned by a master and six crew, was running into harbour on the lee shore. Unfortunately, she missed the stages in the act of tacking and went ashore under the Jews Sally Port.220 On 30 October 1846, the Neapolitan mystic San Pasquale with nine crew members and a master was wrecked on the north coast of Gozo near Dahlet Qorrot. It was coming from Catania with a load of cotton seed. Every one was saved and the marine police ensured that they were admitted to pratique.221

The Italian tartana Sara Mule, of 21 tons burthen and five crew, went down in a N.N.E. squall at Maddlena Point on 4 February 1878, close to St George’s Bay. Fortunately, all men were assisted and saved by the British servicemen stationed in the vicinity.222

On 14 January 1880, a Greek schooner was totally wrecked during the night at Mgarr, Gozo, but all hands were saved. The schooner Ali Parauri with a cargo of cotton seed was forced by heavy weather to ‘lie to’ in the Comino Channel but drifted near the head of the breakwater at Mgarr and was in danger of striking it. An anchor was lowered but it started to drag and, consequently, a second one was laid out although with great difficulty. The crew was advised by the coast guards to land under the lee of the breakwater. The second anchor did not hold, the schooner drifted broadside on the end of the breakwater and became ‘bilged’, after which she drifted on the beach and became a total wreck. The usual precautions were taken to protect the property and the revenue.223

A pilot moored the SS City of Calcutta on 19 April 1895 but she subsequently fouled an arm of the Admiralty moorings in Grand Harbour.

The correspondence between the naval authorities and the agents of the City of Calcutta treated the question about responsibility which rested with the master of the vessel and not with the pilot service.224 The agents of the SS Marco Minghetti reported, on 9 August 1905, that the ship never received the necessary assistance from the pilot service. With the strong wind that was blowing, the pilots declared that it would have been unsafe for the pilot’s boat to secure a hawser of the Marco Minghetti to the bow chain of another vessel. The hawser was secured to the shore with the master’s consent but it was carried away by the ship as it was steaming outwards. The pilot had been ready with another hawser to render every assistance within his means.225 After leaving her berth on 16 April 1906 the SS J.M. Smith ran ashore at the coal wharf causing slight damages to the mole.226

It seems that pilot boats were affected by careless crews of fast service boats that operated in Grand Harbour. On the 14 January 1897, a pilot boat was badly damaged by the crew of the cutter of HMS Camperdown. The pilot body applied on various occasions to the Customs Office for information as to the steps taken and about the relative compensation. The pilots explained that they were not in a position to repair the boat with the limited means at their disposal.227

On 25 February 1890, pilot boat no. 4 rescued some fishermen from imminent danger of drowning and the crew was awarded ten shillings per head.228 The P&O steamer Sutley left Marsaxlokk Harbour at 9.30 p.m. on 8 June 1895 and collided with a sailing boat with three British servicemen on board when she was a mile and a quarter away from harbour. The pilot boat in attendance with the steamer saved Captain Pike only; the other two were not found. Sutley continued on her course.229 Pilot boat no. 27, together with a sanitary gondola, was near Marsa when on 12 January 1901 a service gig with six men and some women on it capsized. Fortunately, everyone was saved by the crews of the pilot boat and of the sanitary gondola.230

Certain pilots were not always found to be up to the expected and required standard of behaviour. A few incidents reported officially by the Customs

219. Thanks to Paul Xuereb who kindly provided this information.
220. NAM, CD, C 1, 132.
221. Ibid., C 2, 207, 208.
222. Ibid., E 1, 347.
223. NAM, CD, E 1, 431.
224. Ibid., D 9, 522.
225. Ibid., D 16, 107, 108.
226. Ibid., 264.
227. NAM, CD, D 11, 121.
228. Ibid., MS 4, 151.
230. Ibid., 823.
Department helps to evaluate better the behaviour of the great majority of pilots over the past 150 years of service. On 26 September 1893, a pilot was reported for unwarrantable conduct. Most probably, he would have been punished by immediate dismissal but the captain of the vessel involved in the incident wrote from England and no legal steps were possible. Three pilots were reported for disregarding orders given by the chief pilot to relieve one of the pilots on duty who was taken ill on Monday 5 February 1894. A board was appointed to enquire into the matter.

During the year 1900, four incidents involving the pilot service were officially reported to the Customs Department. On 14 March 1900, the Paronia was hired as a transport ship for the imperial government. The pilot involved in the case of the Paronia was handling such a vessel for the first time. He noticed the red flag hoisted on the Palace Tower and he thought that it referred to the Paronia but it was actually denoting the movement of a British warship near the mouth of the harbour. Consequently, he had to get to his appointed moorings on the Valletta side close to Imgerbeb Point, which necessitated his keeping the ship a little more to the eastward of mid-channel for the purpose of anchoring and thus had sufficient cable for the proper berthing of the vessel. The necessary instructions were issued with a view to preventing a similar occurrence.

The SS Salisbury entered Marsamxett Harbour on 3 September 1900 subject to quarantine. The pilot, through a misunderstanding, went on board. The Customs Department decided that the expenses for the pilot’s maintenance were not to be charged to the ship. Sometimes, pilots were reported for insubordination, incompetence, negligence or for being drunk at the time of reporting for duty. Such offences were punished by suspending the offenders from their duties. It should be noted that the government was not responsible for anything the pilots did or omitted to do in the performance of their duties.