THE WARSHIPS OF THE
ORDER OF ST JOHN
1530 - 1798

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The history of the ships which roamed all over the Mediterranean under the white cross of the Order of St John, is richly endowed with a record of successes deserving special attention if one wants to discover the secret of so many exploits.

The Knights of St John offered their services in Palestine ensuring hospitality to all European pilgrims visiting the Holy Places. Transport by sea was the quickest, cheapest and safest way of travelling and the Knights had to undertake seafaring activities over and above their military duties. By 1291, at Cyprus, the Knights started to arm some types of ships to counterbalance Muslim corsairs operating in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean. In 1307 the Knights opted to occupy Rhodes where they found the necessary personnel to man their ships.¹

The increasing vitality of Muslim corsairs necessitated a concerted effort by the Knights to arm galleys better to overcome their enemies. The warships of the Order of St John operating in the Eastern Mediterranean proved to be a sting in the back of the Ottoman Emperor;² he could never accept such a situation. While in Rhodes, the Knights were besieged twice; in 1522 they lost that Island for ever. Since they left Palestine, the Knights had made a name for themselves as the primary opponents of Muslim corsairs in the Mediterranean. Their ships at Rhodes were the envy of any other seapower round the Mediterranean but it was at Malta, where they settled in 1530, that they attained their greater laurels and their exploits aimed at their perpetual enemies the Muslims, were exalted in all European Christian countries.

Before considering and describing the warships individually one must examine briefly the administrative framework which supported them. The ships were the normal types which operated in the Mediterranean under both Christian

² By 1564 the naval activities of the Knights in the Levant became unbearable for the Sublime Porte, see J. Graviere, Les Chevaliers de Malte et la Marine de Philippe II (Paris, 1887) 149.
and Muslim flags. Therefore it is imperative to examine the men rather than the ships, the organisation rather than the firing power of vessels to account for the almost complete success rate of the Knights over their Muslim opponents.

The navy of the Order was credited as having one of the best administrative organisations which included planning, provisioning, management, recruitment and distribution of responsibilities attaining a high standard of discipline. Indeed, when one considers that the Knights themselves included in their community some of the best elements of European families it was only to be expected that they would be supported by the latest foreign results in technical and administrative innovations attained elsewhere.

The success of the whole administration of the navy can be attributed to the two congregazioni or committees instituted, one to manage the galley squadron and the other the ships-of-the-line. The congregazioni included high ranking officers of the Order who in their majority were brilliant naval commanders. The two committees were responsible for all political, financial and administrative issues involving all the ships of the Order.

A caravan system was adopted whereby all novices had to undertake four six-monthly cruises in operations at sea or land against Muslim objectives. That type of "national service" ensured the training of all future officers or commanders. As all young novices were engaged in active service the system provided an excellent method for the selection of the fittest. The more motivated young Knights volunteered for further caravans which of course counted for seniority and promotion in the Order. One must also say that the caravan system was an attractive method of keeping lively young Knights busy outside Malta who would otherwise cause a lot of trouble if left idling in Valletta. All caravans completed by a Knight counted in his favour and the system ensured a permanent reserve for the third rates.

The relatively small navy of the Order was highly efficient. The galley squadron consisted of three units in 1530, reached the maximum number of eight in the 1680s and was cut down to four units again by 1750. The ship squadron started in 1701 when it comprised four third rates but by 1780 two of the larger ships were replaced by frigates. The galley squadron lost some of its units on just two occasions in 1570 and 1625 but otherwise they always won 4-7}

7. The galley squadron of the Order consisted of the following units at different times:
   a. the three galleys Santa Croce, San Filippo and San Giovanni on 26 October 1530, see Bosio, G., Historia della Sacra Religione et Illustrissima Militia di San Giovanni (Venice, 1695) vol. iii, 88;
   b. the four galleys San Giovanni, San Michele, Santa Fede, San Claudio, see Bosio, vol. iii, 99;
   c. the five galleys San Giovanni, San Giacomo, San Gabriele, Santa Maria, Corona, see Bosio, vol.iii, 402;
   d. the six galleys San Giovanni, San Pietro, San Carlo, Santa Maria, Santa Rosalia, Sant Antonio, see Dal Pozzo, B., Historia della Sacra Religione di Malta (Vorona, 1703) vol.1, 767;
   e. the seven galleys San Giovanni, Santa Maria, San Nicola, San Pietro, Santa Caterina, Madonna della Grazia, San Francesco, see B. Dal Pozzo, Historia della Sacra Religione Militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta (Venice, 1715) vol.ii, 193;
   f. the eight galleys San Luigi, San Paolo, Magistrale or Tavera, Santa Annuziata, San Pietro, Santa Maria, San Nicola, San Gregorio, see Dal Pozzo, vol.ii, 545. By 1707 the galley squadron was reduced to five units, see NLM AOM 265 ff.129, AOM 273 ff.3 and AOM 1763 f.2; by the end of the eighteenth century the galley squadron consisted of four units, namely the Capitana, the Magistrale, the Vittoria and the San Luigi, see AOM 1934A ff. 13, 14.

8. NLM AOM 1761 ff.13 et seq.

9. Bosio, vol.iii, 387 for the loss of the galley San Giacomo in 1557 and id. 855 et seq gives the Saint Clement disaster. For the incident of the Bizzuta galleys see NLM AOM 1759 ff. 344 et seq.
the day even when facing great odds. The ship squadron never lost a battle at sea when engaged against Muslim warships.

One must consider certain factors when searching for plausible reasons in support of an argument which favours the admission of an almost complete success record for the forces of the Order. Although the Order operated with ships of limited military power it attained excellent results. All attacks aimed at apparently defenceless and peaceful but sometimes well armed Muslim merchant vessels, were well planned; each unit of the squadron knew when to close in on the enemy. The Knight commanders knew their job and whether using the hit and run tactics or surprise attacks the results were always in their favour. When attacking in a crescent formation or in single actions the Knights were obliged to give no quarters even if the odds were three to one against them. That was possible because they operated with good ships and could rely on a safe refuge in the Grand Harbour when necessary.

Strategically, Malta occupies an enviable position in the centre of the Mediterranean. Its geographical nearness to the Muslim world was an advantage to a certain extent and the ships of the Order reaped rich harvests of prizes at sea. But that was only possible due to the strict control exercised by the fighting ships of the Order on the sea round Malta. Friendly harbours situated at most a few hundred kilometers from Malta ensured refuge in dangerous situations. In the Middle Ages when Malta could dispose only of one or two galleys, Muslim raiders landed on the Island quite frequently. On the other hand the strategic value of the position of Malta would have been of little benefit if the Island had not been endowed with deep harbours defended by impregnable fortifications.

The primary laws of logistics suggest that the ideal position of Malta favoured the ships of the Order. The Island, being just eighty kilometers to the South of Sicily, was easily provisioned with food and munitions of war. To the West the ships of the Order would always find friendly harbours and to the East there were always Venetian officials at Corfu or Zante to supply all missing items which the ships of the Order might have required from time to time. The fighting ships of the Order would easily have reached Rhodes independently of any support ships and for cruises not exceeding the duration of four weeks. But for longer operations the Maltese tartana was extensively employed to transport provisions and munitions at fixed rendezvous points. Having a supply of fresh water was a constant problem; it had to be replenished every five or seven days at the latest. But it was done regularly even if the crews had to land on enemy shores to procure it.

A policing role against all Muslim shipping was maintained by the warships of the Order in the Mediterranean Sea. The Knights insisted on the right of search on all ships sailing in all directions of the Mediterranean. It seems that there was a tacit acceptance on the part of Christian shipping although English captains were always against such a practice. It must be pointed out that the fourth vow of the Knights obliged them to fight Muslim forces always and everywhere even when outnumbered by three to one; an exception was made for occasions when they faced the Bizerta galley squadron. One might argue that the Knights were assuming an unpopular practice but at the same time they guaranteed a safe passage to all Christian shipping.

Such warfare on the high seas between the Cross and the Crescent is to be understood as if it was between two belligerent countries. One may consider the corso as practised by the warships of the Order as a commerce - destroying policy, too. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Order was attaining great results from the corso. It was a means of destroying the lifeline of supplies but in a limited way and proving to be very profitable. The corso was a steady source for the procurement of slaves, who were the motor force of the galleys, and of provisions and munitions including timber, iron, nails and lead not to mention guns and all sorts of victuals. When private corsairs applied to fight under the flag of the Order such commerce destroyers scattered far and wide in search of more prey. Limits for the spheres of operations had to be fixed; the Turk lost his hold on the Mediterranean and by 1732 the Order made its last operation in the Levant. The corso had to be concentrated on Barbary shipping.

10 L. DeCaro, Storia dei Gran Maestri e Cavallieri di Malta (Malta, 1853) 43, prefazio IV quotes from Cantu.
11 G.A. Vassallo, Storia di Malta Raccontata in Compendio (Malta, 1854) 188.
13 NLM AOM 1770 ff. 228, 247, 325; AOM 260 f. 9; AOM 261 ff. 144, 149.
14 NLM AOM 1769 ff. 76, 183, 274.
15 It has been observed that whenever the galleys of the Order met English ships at sea they always expected trouble.
16 See 10 supra.
17 NLM AOM 1759 f.223v.
18 Mahan, 7.
Whenever a high ranking officer, a princely personage or an ecclesiastical dignitary had to travel in the Mediterranean the Order was expected to offer the services of the galley squadron. It was a great honour to be accompanied by such vessels although such a journey was extremely uncomfortable and unpleasant because of the appalling conditions in general and particularly of the rowing ciurma. Such escorting duties were also available for the transportation of grain from Sicily to Malta. The Knights never undertook commercial activities; these were left in the hands of Maltese merchants. Malta depended on foreign food supplies and the Knights imported special commodities for their own personal use. Other escorting duties included shipments of shipbuilding timber, the carrying of cash to be paid outside Malta or monies coming into the Island from the vast landed properties which the Order possessed all over Europe.

There were hardly any great differences between the warships of the Order and their Muslim counterparts. The Knights had no secret methods of ship construction or secret weapons. The secrets jealously transmitted from father to son concerned the slight deviations in deciding the middle section of a ship by a master shipbuilder and relative dimensions governing the whole hull. There were definitely two different schools of thought in shipbuilding between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean regions regarding various aspects of the trade including green wood as opposed to well seasoned timber, low or high bows of a galley affecting its behaviour under sail, the number of guns to be carried on the bows and hold space for provisions.

It is interesting to note how well informed the Knights were of the latest developments in ship technology once they appeared in the continent. The Knights adopted the a scaloccio method of rowing on galleys in place of the a sensile. In the evolution of the fighting ship from the carrack to the galleon, the fregata and the vascello culminating in the introduction of the ship-of-the-line in the early eighteenth century, the Order always kept pace with the latest innovations although one can safely say that all the ships of the Order were carvel built and the clinker type of ship or boatbuilding techniques never attracted the attention of local master shipwrights. It is important to stress the fact that the Knights were able to keep in touch with foreign naval technology thanks to the multinational character of the brotherhood, the system of sending local apprentices to study outside Malta and the availability of three excellent arsenali catering for galleys, third rates and merchant ships.

Sixteenth century: Galleys Galore

The transfer of the Order from Rhodes to Malta had to wait for eight long years. The Knights embarked on a fleet of fifty vessels in Rhodes but arrived in the Grand Harbour with a handful of warships and faithful Rhodians who were experienced sailors and craftsmen. But it seems that the Eastern Mediterranean influences never affected the building and the management of the ships of the Order. The same can be said about Venetian technology which does not appear to have attracted the attention of the Knights.

The Order in Malta started its maritime activity with a squadron of three galleys, the old carrack Santa Maria, the new carrack Sant'Anna, a galleon and a few briganlines. A few Knights armed their private galleys and the Order embarked on a programme to strengthen its forces, its prestige and funds. The galleys succeeded in harassing the Muslim world defying Barbarossa, Dragut, Ucciali and the Sublime Porte itself.

When the Ottomans failed to take Malta in 1565 and were humiliated at Lepanto in 1571, the myth of their invincibility on land and sea was shattered.

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20 Bosio vol. iii, 345; AOM 1771 f. 83v.
21 NLM Lib. 413 f. 203; but for further information see Muscat, The Arsenal, 272 et seq.
22 Bosio vol. iii, 417
23 Rossi 82.
24 Arte no. 24, Saturday 7 November 1863.
25 Bosio vol. iii, 89.
forever. The era of the great amassing of galleys was at an end but in the meantime squadrons of galleys were seen everywhere in the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean in the sixteenth century was the scene of almost daily sea battles occurring between the Cross and the Crescent. The Maltese galleys were seen in all parts of the Mediterranean and their appearance on the horizon made all Muslim shipping steer for the nearest shelter.

Amongst the warships operated by the Order of St John in the sixteenth century, the carrack occupied a unique role. The Sant Anna was launched in 1522 at Nice and for two decades was the finest warship in the Mediterranean. It was conceived as a floating fortress although it had a spacious hold for the carriage of merchandise. When describing the Sant Anna one must keep in mind that we are referring to one special type of carrack. Its profile was totally different from other contemporary carracks. The hull was pierced to take fifty great guns which were distributed evenly on the two main gun decks, but it carried a greater number of smaller guns on the remaining decks and especially at the bows and stern. The hull was so strongly built that it was never penetrated by an enemy shot. The huge bows included a ram and above it there was the beakhead decorated with a series of saintly, wooden figures. The high stern dwarfed any other vessel that passed beneath it and it was gorgeously decorated with sculptured and gilded motifs, carried plants in wooden boxes placed on various parts of the balcony and it was adorned with a huge lantern and a number of flags.

The system of lead sheathing applied to that part of its hull below the water level proved its worth. It was so watertight that no sea water ever seeped through its timbers except for rain water that found its way to the well round the main mast. The carrack was equipped with a great stern room and council chamber, a dining room for the Knights, a chapel dedicated to Saint Ann, workshops for the blacksmiths, oven for the preparation of fresh bread and an armoury fitted to equip five hundred soldiers. Its hold was large enough to carry a great number of munitions and fresh water to keep it autonomous for six months at sea.

Sails and masts arrangements of the Sant Anna were quite similar to those of the galleon which was in a well advanced stage of evolution. The carrack carried also the bonadventure mast at the stern together with the normal other two masts and a bowsprit. The fore and main masts were square rigged with the main courses, a top and topgallant sails. The mizzen was equipped with a lateen sail and there was space for a topsail, too. the bonadventure mast carried a lateen sail. The bowsprit was provided with a sprit sail and a sprit topsail. It is understood that notwithstanding its huge hull, the carrack behaved marvellously well under sail.

It was estimated that the Sant Anna could easily withstand the attack of fifty galleys and indeed during its commissions at sea it impressed everyone, friend and foe. Its participation at the assault on Goletta in 1535 was long remembered by those who attacked that Muslim fortress. Andrea Doria highly esteemed its great possibilities as a weapon against enemy objectives.

Apparently Grand Master D’Omedes had other plans and decreed that the carrack was too massive and maintenance costs were prohibitive. In his opinion two galleons were to be built to replace it. The Sant Anna was disarmed in 1540 and was left to rot in the Grand Harbour.

The galleon was replacing the carrack in other countries and perhaps Grand Master D’Omedes was right in his decision to disarm the Sant Anna. The galleon was designed for better speed and manoeuvrability than the carrack. It originated as a transport unit on the ocean but the Order of St John made use of it for the corso, too. Better guns required less space on the batteries and while hitting the enemy from a distance a galleon was provided with an improved set of canvas to offset all tactics intended to outmanoeuvre the opponent.

At a glance one will notice that the galleon was a small version of the carrack. Galleons were built with high sides especially at the bows and the stern intended to discourage galley attacks. Being less unwieldy than a carrack a galleon behaved well under sail but its high sides were sometimes affected badly by strong winds which could drive it off its course. But long years had to pass to obviate such an inconvenience.

The galleon San Giovanni, as drawn by Guidotti who came to Malta in 1592, shows the same features of other galleons operating outside the Mediterranean. One has to accept the rather bizarre details at the stern as the Order insisted on including in the galleon certain touches which were found on the galleys. The carosse type of cabin at the stern was identical to that found on

27 Graviere, Les Chevaliers, 147.
28 Bosio vol. iii. 150.
29 For a picture of the galleon San Giovanni see the frontispiece in NLM Lib. 413 and for further technical details see id., ff. 225 et seq.
the galleys of the Order. The extended timber on the arches carried an escutcheon of the Order most probably showing the white cross on a red background. The lantern was similar to the one carried by a galley Capitana. The cabin extended out of the poop end was termed as a pink stern and was flanked on both sides by balconies which were so fashionable at that period. The rounded tuck at the stern and the tiller fitted on the rudder indicate that the galleon was conceived in the second half of the sixteenth century.

At the bows there was the figurehead representing a rampant lion mounted by a winged figure of a man. The high forecastle was indicative of the fashion of the period and the bowsprit was given a practical use. Beakhead rails were included partly as a decorative motif and also to strengthen that part of the bows while providing a foothold for the sailors while at work on the spitsails.

The profile of the hull of the galleon was to some extent similar to a crescent having highly raised fore and stern castles. The waist was normally low and open to the second battery and it was heavily armed inboards to repel boarders. While it carried thirty great guns on two batteries the galleon was armed also with a number of small guns some of which were aimed at the waist in case it was boarded.

The greater galleons like the San Giovanni were provided with four masts and a bowsprit, a similar arrangement to that found on the carrack. The fore and main masts were rigged with square sails including the main courses, top and topgallant sails. The mizen mast was rigged with a lateen sail and a topsail while the bonadventure mast carried one lateen sail. The bowsprit was provided with sprit and topsprit sails.

While the Order of St John operated with one carrack and one great galleon its main striking force was the galleon squadron. A common sixteenth century galleon was manned by twenty six oars on each side; the Capitana or flagship was slightly longer and operated with twenty eight oars on each side while the Padrona or the second-in-command was provided with twenty seven oars on each side.

A seventeenth century common galleon was about fifty metres long and six metres wide; it was rowed by twenty six oars on each side although one bench on the port side was frequently removed to provide space for cooking purposes. An oar of a galley measured at least ten metres and was twelve centimetres in diameter. Grips were attached to the handle for the benefit of the rowers. Lead was added to the handle so that the whole oar would balance near the thole pin. At the bows it carried five guns and the spur or sperone provided a gangway to facilitate the boarding of enemy ships. At the stern there was the carosse or cabin reserved for the captain and the Knights and all fighting orders were imparted from the spalliera or the platform found just in front of the carosse. It should be noted that the stern cabin was gorgeously decorated with gilded sculpture and it was surmounted by a wooden statue of the galley’s name saint. The space between the bows or rambata and the spalliera was occupied by the ciurma or rowing force who normally counted more than two hundred and fifty men including Muslim slaves, bonavoglia and convicts. Most of the time a galley cruised under sail while the rowing ciurma would rest; their participation was reserved for a chase, an escape, in contrary winds and manoeuvring into action against the enemy. The two lateen sails gave the galley a good sailing rate and when supplemented with the rowing force it sometimes reached a speed of twelve knots.

The fore mast of the early sixteenth century galley was visibly shorter than that found on seventeenth century galleys. One type of main sail on the mainmast was in constant use; Venetian and Muslim common galleys were rigged with one mast for a long time. It seems that Maltese galleys were still rigged with a small foremost up to the first decades of the seventeenth century. It is still rather difficult to trace the exact time when the use of the great foremost sail was introduced. A galley carried four different sizes of sails which were rigged on the great antennas and an extension or spigone was added to fit the greater type of sail for use in fine weather.

It should be noted that during the long years of its evolution the galley underwent various major changes and during the sixteenth century the method of rowing a sensile was replaced by a new way of handling the oars known as a scaloccio. The a sensile method or rowing involved three men sitting on the same bench pulling three oars while the a scaloccio method required three or more rowers sitting on the same bench and pulling the same oar.

32 One can see the difference between the two masts in an ex-voto painting exhibited at the Malta Maritime Museum evoking the Christian victory at Lepanto.
33 J. Fennis, Un Manuel de construction des Galeres 1691 (Amsterdam, 1983) 216 et seq. See also NLM Lib. 413 f.183.
34 Bosio vol. iii, 417.
Constructionally the galley was a frail vessel built with relatively thin wood to lessen the weight and consequently the fatigue on the rowers but on the other hand it required a high standard of carpentry expertise. It should be remembered that the galley was the main fighting unit in the Mediterranean since classical times. Since then the galley had hardly changed as it was projected for the unstable weather conditions of the Mediterranean and was effective only in calm conditions of sea and wind. But men succeeded through trial and error and over centuries of experience to adapt the vessel to the ever changing demands in life affecting social, religious and military conditions. By the sixteenth century the galley attained a perfection of proportions, balance and weight adapted to the number and extension of the oars to make it an almost perfect war machine. The balance of power in the Mediterranean depended essentially on the fleet of galleys operated by either the Muslim or the Christian powers.

The Maltese galley was always painted red above the water level and white below. The Capitana or flagship was painted the same way up to 1625 and it always carried the standard of the Order on a flagpole rigged just in front of the carosse. Although Maltese galleys were built at the Birgu arsenal a good percentage were built in foreign Christian shipyards. While admitting that there was not a special type of galley built for the Knights yet each one that left the Grand Harbour for an operation against Muslim objectives was always fully manned with rowers and with a full crew complement.

A galley was provided with one deck and all activities took place on it. Below deck there was the captain's room at the stern and next to it there was space enough for twelve Knights. Moving forwards to the bows there were the bread store, the great room for victuals, a tavern where wine would be sold from time to time, the powder magazine, the sail and rope store and the space in the bows where coal and brushwood were kept. In an emergency the sail room was utilised for the sick and wounded. In the corsia or the raised passageway between the rowers' benches, were stored all the spare sails, ropes and awnings together with the clothing of the ciurma. Access to the hold below deck was effected by a companion-way on the portside of the spalliera and through six hatches located beneath the rowers' removeable benches. Lead ballast was located on the flat timbers of the galley.  

The galley always carried a caique and a fregatina. The caique was utilised for heavy duties such as the transportation of the crew to or from land, carrying of water supplies and towing duties; sometimes it was armed to attack enemy land fortifications. The fregatina was mostly reserved for the service of the captain and Knights and to carry messages at sea. By 1600 galleys were accompanied by a felucca and a caique.

Some type of cooking was done on a galley because the ciurma were served with a daily bowl of hot minestrone besides the normal bread or biscuit ration. Wine was served on special occasions. Meals for the Knights and crew included meat and fish dishes accompanied with a great variety of commodities. Fresh water was more important than food for the rowers and each galley carried hundreds of water barrels. Every five days the water supply was replenished even if the galley had to approach enemy territories.

A high standard of discipline was maintained always on all Maltese galleys which was reflected in the great number of victories obtained against Muslim objectives. The Turks feared no one on the sea except the red, Maltese galleys.

The galleot was classed as a warship and as a corsairship. It was a smaller version of the galley and very similar to it. The galleot was a double ended open boat, very swift, low in the water, having one mast rigged with a lateen sail and a decorated carosse or stern cabin. It normally carried one gun on the bows and it was not provided with a rambata but the galleot would carry also heavy muskets and perriers.

The Order of St John adopted the galleot as early as 1418 and it remained in service up to 1798. The sixteenth century galleots as found in Malta were slightly greater than the brigantine and were armed by private corsairs as well as by the Order. It seems that Maltese galleots never carried more than eighteen benches of rowers on each side and one mast. One could distinguish a galleot from a brigantine.

35 Dal Pozzo vol.1, 744 and Vassallo 657.
36 Muscat, The Arsenal, 271.
37 NLM Lib. 413 f.182.
from a galley on the horizon by the mast. Muslim galleots carried one mast only but they were armed as a galley as regards the crew force and gunpower.\textsuperscript{44}

The mast of a galleot was easily lowered and such a manoeuvre was intended to confuse the enemy when approaching land or was found expedient when hiding behind high rocks ready to dart out against Muslim merchants. It should be noted that the simple but highly efficient lateen rig permitted fast handling by few members of the crew.

It was customary to refer to the size of a galleot by the number of oars carried on the sides. The range varied between fourteen to eighteen oars fitted on each side of the galleot. Such a criterion might prove to be confusing to the less informed reader when comparing the galleot with the demi galley which carried the same range of oars. The profile of a demi galley was sufficiently distinct from that of a galleot. The smallest in the galleot family carried only ten oars on a side and it was mainly utilised for corsairing.\textsuperscript{45}

Normally a galleot would be given a coat of dark paint such as black or brown so that it would easily be camouflaged against a rocky background. The Order preferred to paint his galleots red which was normally used on the galleys.

It is interesting to note that a galleot was partially decked at the bows and stern; a corsia or passage way ran all along its centre between the benches of the rowers. Like all other lateen rigs the galleot did not carry a figurehead. It was equipped with a caique for the normal carrying of water, brushwood, personnel or when approaching very shallow waters; towing duties pertained to the caique, also.\textsuperscript{46}

Each member of the crew on a galleot had to be a rower, a soldier and a sailor as dictated by the prevailing changing exigencies. Most of the time a galleot moved from one destination to another under sail; the crew would man the oars when chasing or escaping from an enemy.\textsuperscript{46} To lessen the fatigue for the rowers the hull of the galleot was projected with V shape frames. Due to the restricted space on a galleot the crew had to stay in the open without a shelter on their head for the whole duration of an operation or cruise against the enemy. A tent was provided which was only rigged up on rainy days. Restricted quantities of provisions and munitions carried by a galleot necessitated short cruises or operations at sea but in an emergency it could reach land in a few hours.

The role of a galleot was primarily that of a corsair ship but it was utilised also for reconnaissance missions and to link up information between galleys at sea. Although a galleot was never posted in the vanguard in a conflict at sea because of its size and restricted firing power yet it was utilised as a support ship and for small operations near enemy territory. Its shallow draught facilitated operations in shallow waters where galleys or other great ships would not dare to approach.\textsuperscript{47}

### Seventeenth Century: Corso Craze

The Ottomans were suffering from a marked deficiency of good naval officers in the seventeenth century. The two great setbacks which they experienced at Malta and Lepanto rendered them a less fearsome enemy at sea. The Mediterranean was open for more traffic by North European countries. Christian naval powers with the exception of France made their presence felt more in this inland sea than the previous century. It should be remembered that France respected its open or sometimes secret alliances with the Sublime Porte.

Malta became a rendezvous for corsairs; Knights and adventurers operated in the Levant with impunity. Numerous corsairs from other countries organised their ships which they armed in search of Muslim prizes. In the same century the Barbary Regencies especially those of Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers attained a high degree of efficiency in running their corso business. Indeed the seventeenth century was definitely marked with a craze for the corso business.

The same century witnessed several evolutionary changes affecting the ships of the Order. Man strives continuously to obtain better results from his means of communication. Ships were and still are the subject of men's quest for better speeds, security and less expense. By 1680 warships, except galleys, were designed according to well conceived plans and the rule of the thumb was superseded by the introduction of the study of naval architecture. It was a century when the galleon disappeared to make way for the unclassified fregata and vascello. By the middle of the seventeenth century any warship which did not qualify as a galleon was given the nomenclature of fregata. It was rigged with square sails and carried a number of guns on its batteries. There was the vascello

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\textsuperscript{44} Guglielmotti, s.v. Galeotta.

\textsuperscript{45} AGPV vol. xxxiii, 1708 6 Agosto in Etegardi f.40 mentions the use of a caique on a galleot.

\textsuperscript{46} Guglielmotti, s.v. Galeotta.

\textsuperscript{47} NLM AOM 1770 f.285, NLM Lib. 480 f. 13; NLM AOM 1771 f. 729.
which was similar to a *fregata* but on a larger scale and carrying a greater number of guns. By the turn of the century the *vascello* or ship-of-the-line was rated according to the number of guns carried.

The seventeenth century witnessed the introduction of the *petacchio*. That ship first appeared sailing along the North African shores and the Order of St John soon adopted its services. Galleys were rigged with better sail arrangements on the foremost while they attained an *aura* of an unbeatable record of victories over Muslim forces in the Mediterranean.

When describing the seventeenth century warships of the Order one must mention the Flemish galleon built for the Knights in 1617 which was an excellent vessel, the most stately and the strongest war machine that sailed in the Mediterranean at that time. For practical reasons the Order chose to build its last great galleon outside Malta not because of lack of a work force at the Birgu arsenal or mediocre expertise in shipbuilding but most probably because of the endemic shortage of timber on the Island. The galleon was launched at Amsterdam and arrived in Malta on 26 December 1617; its construction was partly financed by Commander Digut who also happened to be its captain on its maiden voyage to Malta. The Treasury of the Order balanced the deficient amount of money from the Digut foundation. It was estimated that the galleon could carry at least four thousand *salme* of grain.

The *Gran Galeone*, as it was popularly known, rendered valuable service to the Order and in the year following its commissioning it proved its worth against three great warships belonging to the Muslim corsair Sansone. After a whole day’s gun fighting the three corsair ships had to retreat. At La Rochelle in 1623 the *Gran Galeone* held the position of *Padrona* or second-in-command when it supported the French forces against the Huguenots. On one occasion it was towed into a firing position by two galleys and it managed to evade the attacks by fireships. The galleon remained at the service of the French king for sixteen months.

Small galleons were built either locally or elsewhere in Christian Mediterranean arsenals. Muslim galleons were not much different and whenever the Knights captured one it was recommissioned into service. A small galleon would probably carry no bonadventure mast on the poop deck and it would be armed with twenty or a lesser number of guns; one stern gun was placed on each side of the rudder.

Comparing it with the great galleon it was much lower in the water, carrying a stern balcony, a lantern and the flag of the Order on the poop. It was equipped with a high forecastle and beyond the waist there were the quarter and poop decks. The bowsprit was provided with a sprit and topsprit sails. The fore and main masts were square rigged while the mizen carried a lateen and a topsail. Extra sails or bonnets were fitted to the lower courses in fine weather. It has been noticed that while the Order of St John operated with one great galleon individual Knights armed small ones for corsairing. One can safely say that by 1650 the galleon faded out of use as better warships were being projected and rated according to the number of guns carried on board.

During the seventeenth century the galleys of the Order were affected by certain modifications but basically they retained the same constructional method of building. The forecast was lengthened and became slightly smaller than the main mast. Middle sections changed according to the development of the method of calculating the principal middle frames of the galley. Such differences became evident when one examines different primary sources dealing with galley construction. By the second half of the seventeenth century a fully rounded middle section was developed which continued to affect later designs. While galleys were undergoing slight modifications the art of gunfounding progressed at a fast pace. Bronze guns were founded in great numbers and with certain standard classifications. A *courtier* or the principal gun on the *rambata* of the galley sometimes reached a calibre of 50 pounds while the lateral guns - the *sacres* and *moyanas* - were 8 and 6 pounders, respectively. Gunnery reached a high standard of performance in an era when corsairing in the Mediterranean was at its zenith. A better firing power found on the bows of Maltese galleys necessitated a sturdier wooden support.

The seventeenth century Maltese galley was somewhat stronger than those of the previous century. On one occasion a common galley of the Order was
fitted outside Malta with a mast which normally was reserved for a foreign capitana.\textsuperscript{54} There was a strong rambato on the bows to support the fire of five guns. The stern was provided with a cabin decorated with panels and partly supported by two gigantes or huge wooden figures of mermaids or other symbols. In front of the cabin there was a tabernacle where navigational instruments were stored when not in use. A common galley was always painted red.\textsuperscript{54}

By the end of the seventeenth century a Maltese capitana was equipped with thirty benches of rowers on each side instead of the normal twenty eight. The addition of two benches led to the lengthening of the galley without involving any great constructive modifications. The change necessitated also a longer slipway at the Birgu galley arsenal and Grand Master Wignacourt authorised its extension.\textsuperscript{55} In 1625 the galley squadron of the Order suffered heavy losses in an action against the corsairs of Bizerta.\textsuperscript{56} After that incident the Capitana of the Order was painted black in imitation of the Capitana of Spain. Sometimes a Capitana was referred to as gallone\textsuperscript{57} meaning, perhaps, a great galley. The Padrona of the Order was rowed by twenty eight oars to each side while a common galley or sensile, still retained twenty six oars to starboard and twenty five to port; one bench was removed to provide space for cooking purposes. A magisterial galley was one which was financed by a grand master.

Up to the last decades of the seventeenth century the galley squadron of the Order was operating with eight units and reached its highest glory.\textsuperscript{58} Subsequently, as the Turks lost their influence in the Eastern regions of the Mediterranean the Maltese galleys took fewer prizes; indeed the corso was declining fast. The galley squadron was badly affected financially and drastic decisions were taken to reduce the number of galleys. The golden age for fabulous profits from the corso ceased as the Turks lost their influence in the Eastern regions of the Mediterranean and soon was adopted by the Barbary Regencies.\textsuperscript{59} It is rather difficult to explain the origin of the nomenclature petacchio but most probably it is an Italian derivation from petacchina a kind of sandal which was very popular in the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{60} The name was given to the smallest type of early sixteenth century auxiliary square rigged ships which accompanied the greater vessels.\textsuperscript{61}

The profile of the petacchio was similar to that of a small galleon and the nomenclature quite often misled less informed people to call it a tartana, a piccotta or a fregata.\textsuperscript{62} The petacchio of the Order carried a forecastle, a quarterdeck and a small poop deck which was covered in the same manner as that of the carosse of a galley. An open balcony ran round the stern and a simple beakhead on the bows housed the bowsprit. It seems that the petacchio was fitted with a jib and a flying jib, a rather dubious arrangement for such a vessel. The fore and main masts were square rigged with main courses and topsails. Most probably topgallant sails could have been added and it was customary to represent square rigged vessels without the topgallant sails in the first half of the seventeenth century; the mizen mast was lateren rigged. Guidotti depicts a petacchio of the Order for the first decades of the seventeenth century.

The artillery of the petacchio consisted of eight or ten small guns with two chasers arranged on the square tucked stern. A few other small arms might have been distributed on the forecastle or the quarter deck but one should note that such a vessel was not a vanguard warship but accompanied the greater ships.\textsuperscript{63}

The petacchio was provided with its own fregatina\textsuperscript{64} or caique for routine tasks such as the loading of drinking water, carrying personnel or for towing

\textsuperscript{54} One can examine a model of a late seventeenth century Maltese galley at the Malta Maritime Museum.

\textsuperscript{55} Castagna vol.ii, 292; Raccolta di varie cose antiche e moderne utili ed interessanti riguardanti Malta e Gozo (Malta, 1843) 177.

\textsuperscript{56} Graviere, Les Dernier, 116; Vassallo 657.

\textsuperscript{57} NLM Lib. 627 passim shows three pictures of Maltese capitanas each one annotated as gallone.

\textsuperscript{58} But in 1574 a Capitana was manned by twenty eight benches on each side, see Dal Pozzo vol.i, 99.

\textsuperscript{59} See note 7 supra.

\textsuperscript{60} Dal Pozzo vol.i, 586, 587.

\textsuperscript{61} Guglielmotti s.v. Petacchio; AOM 1759 f. 365\textsuperscript{s} shows that the Order operated with a petacchio as early as 1626.

\textsuperscript{62} Guglielmotti s.v. Petacchio

\textsuperscript{63} AGPV vol. xxxx, Frater Don Raimundus de Perellos et Rocafull; NAMCons vol. viii, pro et alias Carolus Borg et Vincentii Amaud 1710.

\textsuperscript{64} NLM Lib. 413, 236 shows a unique picture of an early seventeenth century petacchio.
duties. There are a few instances recorded showing that at least Muslim petacchios used oars with sails for better speeds. One small type of petacchio would be twenty one metres long with a beam of eight metres and a hold of three metres high and a tonnage of 800 salme. There was space enough at the stern for a large cabin and a small one just beneath the poop deck.

It seems that the petacchio of the Order was found extremely suitable as a corsair ship in the early decades of the seventeenth century and especially when it operated in the Levant. One should remember also that amongst other roles the vessel was utilised as a cargo ship, spying or reconnoitring missions, scouting and stopping and identifying other vessels.

With the introduction of heavier warships such as the fregata and the vascello of the 1650s, the petacchio disappeared from the Maltese harbours. The nomenclature was perpetuated by other Mediterranean countries although the name was assigned to a different type of petacchio as conceived by the Order.

The seventeenth century galleot was similar to its counterpart of the previous century. There might have been a tendency to build stronger and slightly bigger galleots but the profile remained the same for centuries. One great galleot of the Order in 1665 was provided with eighteen oars on each side while a small one under the command of Guidotti carried just twenty four crew.

Galleots were built in the galley arsenal at Birgu as they followed the same shipbuilding techniques. Privately owned corsair galleots might have been built in local shipyards or bought outside Malta. A galleot was a small galley and the picture left by Guidotti shows it without a rambata, with a carosse at the stern and with its talar or rectangular superstructure to support the oars. Its single mast rigged with a lateen sail carried a burgee of the Order and an unusual standard is seen hoisted at the carosse.

As the galleot was similar to the one operated by Muslim corsairs it was utilised to surprise the enemy. On occasions the galleot of the Order was rigged as a londra to further confuse Muslim shipping. Such tactics were frequently adopted by both Christian and Muslim captains and while at sea no one trusted any ship appearing on the horizon till flags were hoisted and intentions were ascertained.

Besides the other normal roles of corsairing, despatch carrying, spying operations and accompanying greater ships the galleot was employed as a guard ship in the Grand Harbour. It was usually moored near Neptune's Fountain but in foul weather it was moved to Rinella. As a swift vessel the galleot was always ready to intercept any attempts of escape by Muslim slaves from Malta.

**Eighteenth Century: Wooden Walls**

In the eighteenth century France led all other European countries with its advanced technology in shipbuilding. The design of warships which were to become the floating wooden walls of sea powers developed in France where for the first time, they were projected scientifically. The ship-of-the-line was to supersede all other types of warships. The mass production of iron guns facilitated the classification of various sizes of warships which was determined by the number of guns carried.

In 1700, Grand Master Perellos moved formally that the Order of St John should introduce the third rate in the navy. Even as early as 1655 Grand Master Lascaris had proposed that the Order should build a great warship which could resist the rough seas of winter to check the operations of the Barbary corsairs during that season. It was only in 1705 that the squadron of four third rates or vascelli was ready for its first operations at sea against Muslim shipping.

During the eighteenth century the Order also introduced the frigate and the corvette, two other classes of warships smaller than the third rate. Their introduction was necessitated by the reduction of two third rates due to financial difficulties. Yet the ship squadron of the Order won every sea encounter against

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66 NLM AOM 1771 f.94.
67 NLM Lib. 413 f. 236.
68 Dal Pozzo vol. ii, 544.
Muslim ships but the fast decline in *corso* operations resulted in a negative financial balance on the Treasury of the Order. The eighteenth century history of the navy of the Order is characterized by the presence of those wooden walls which were adopted when the religious institution of the Knights was fast approaching new trends of thought and behaviour.

The introduction of the demigalley and the twenty-four-oar galley was another attempt by the Order to reduce the deficit on the annual navy balance sheet. For the first time the chebec featured in the list of ships operated by the Knights and by 1750 the Maltese galley was fitted with a third lateen rigged mast at the stern.

Although certain eighteenth century primary sources found in the archives of the Order refer to fire, mortar and hospital ships there is no proof that such vessels were adopted by the Knights to form part of their navy. The instructions explaining the function of such ships solely were intended to complete the educational curriculum as imparted to all young Knights at the nautical school which formed part of the Jesuits' college in Valletta.

When the warships remained in the Grand Harbour for a long period of time they were visited by eminent persons who happened to be in Malta. The protocol for such visits necessitated the use of the ceremonial barges. It should be noted that during the eighteenth century the Order in Malta and particularly its navy was experiencing notable changes in discipline, religious life and in the combative spirit of its members. One must admit that the hospitality of the Knights was great and in the absence of seafights against the Muslims they opted for a good number of festivities in the Grand Harbour. The Wignacourt gondola, the Vilhena brigantine type of ceremonial barge and the ceremonial *felucca* of the General of the galley squadron were involved all the time in harbour.

The *vascello* or third rate ship-of-the-line as projected by the Order was aimed to counterbalance similar Barbary warships which seem to have gained great notoriety by the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was expected also that the new third rates of the Order would operate in winter, too to suppress the operations of the Barbary corsairs which were aimed at Christian merchant shipping during that season.

The third rates *San Giovanni* and *San Giacomo* were built at Toulon in France by the well known constructor Coulomb while the *San Giuseppe* and *Santa Caterina* were launched from the newly developed ship arsenal located at Senglea, *dietro l'Isola*, on its French Creek side. Although the first attempts by Maltese shipbuilders left much to be desired yet their warships *San Giuseppe* and *Santa Caterina* served the Order for a longer span of years than the two which were built at Toulon. In a few decades Maltese ship constructors adopting French technology attained great expertise and their warships launched from the Senglea arsenal were as good as any other built in the Mediterranean.

The flagship *San Giovanni* was armed with sixty guns on two batteries. Normally such an arrangement included 24 pounders on the first gundeck and 18 pounders on the second; other small guns found on the quarter and poop decks included 12-pounders as well as smaller calibres. The crew of 400 men included officers, sailors and soldiers but excluded the Knights, caravanists and their slaves.

A third rate mounted up to 56 guns on two decks and it was equipped with a forecastle and quarter and poop decks. The first battery, that is the one nearest to the water level, contained twelve gunports with a distance of two hundred and ten centimetres between them except for the stern one which was only six feet apart from the one next to it; each gunport was two feet nine inches wide.

The *San Giorgio*, a third rate which was launched on 12 June 1719, had a length of 43 metres with a beam of 12 metres and a hold of 5½, metres. The normal tonnage for such a warship registered a 900 tons burden which was equivalent to 9,000 *cantara*. When the *San Giorgio* was launched it carried a
ballast of 1,000 cannon balls weighing 36 pounds each. The work on such a third rate was finished in eight months. The crew for a normal third rate amounted to 300 men excluding the Knights, caravanists and their valets.  

The sail arrangement on a third rate included square sails on all masts with a lateen on the mizzen. On the fore and main masts there were main, top and topgallant sails; the bowsprit was rigged with spritsails and jibs. Studding sails were added in fine weather. Each _vascello_ carried its great caique and _a fregatina_ which were very useful when the ship was caught in a calm or for replenishing water, brushwood and food supplies.  

The last third-rate to be built for the Order was the _San Giovanni_. It was designed by Maurin to mount 64 guns and was launched at the beginning of 1798. Grand Master Hompesch attended with all the other magnates of the Order for the launching ceremony. The _San Giovanni_ was expected to be the most elegant vessel ever built in Malta. When Napoleon occupied the Island he left instructions for the completion and commissioning of the _San Giovanni_ before he embarked on his Egyptian expedition.

The eighteenth century square-rigged frigate was a small version of the third-rate but in a class of its own. It was equipped with one main open deck and carried different numbers of guns according to the exigencies of individual squadrons. Small frigates were armed with twelve guns but the greater ones mounted as many as thirty two on the main open and the quarter deck.

A frigate was not classed as a ship-of-the-line but it accompanied the greater warships and amongst other roles it was employed on reconnaissance cruises, carried despatches and was assigned convoy duties. It was swift, active and alert to any occasion that happened. Each frigate carried a caique and a _canot_.

The frigate was built as lightly as possible and was quite low in the water attaining good sailing speeds. French constructors were well known for their frigates and the Order adopted French technology in building most of their ships. The sail arrangement of the frigate was similar to that of a third-rate but on a slightly reduced scale.

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84 NLM Lib. 318 f.201.
85 NLM Lib. 318 passim gives detailed measurements of all masts, spars, sails and rigging; NLM Lib. 223 s.v. _Caico and Fregatina_; NLM 280 f.138.
86 Arte, no. 24 Saturday 7 November 1863.
87 Guglielmotti s.v. _Fregata_; NLM 223 s.v. _Fregata._
88 NLM AOM 273 f. 204.
89 NLM AOM 1839 f. 2.
90 NLM AOM 275 f. 9.
91 NLM AOM 276 f. 35.
93 NLM AOM 269 f. 9.
The two corvettes *Santa Teresa* and *San Francesco di Paola* operated together most of the time.\(^94\) In 1735 an adverse report about the corvette *Santa Teresa* was submitted to the Grand Master; apparently it was slow and unfit for the *corso*.\(^95\) Such a disillusion might have discouraged the Venerable Congregation of the ship squadron to authorise the building of more corvettes except for another one the *Santa Maria della Neve* which was launched in 1783; the Grand Master paid all the expenses incurred in its construction.\(^96\)

During the eighteenth century the galley squadron of the Order was greatly affected by the fast changing political, social, economic and religious conditions of the Knights and their fraternity. The conclusions drawn by Sonnini reflect the spirit of the period. The galleys of the Order were facing a great challenge from the squadron of the third-rates introduced in 1705. The magnates of the Order were questioning the validity of retaining the galleys when ships-of-the-line were more reliable all through the year and when other Mediterranean countries were discarding their galley squadrons.\(^97\) But the galleys constituted the senior service of the navy of the Order and they were retained right up to 1798. The galley squadron was cut down to four units and it maintained its function in a slightly modified way when compared with its seventeenth century exploits.

Galleys were lavishly ornamented especially at the stern, flying many flags and sailing under enormous white and blue striped sails bearing the red Maltese cross on them. The pessimistic appraisal by Sonnini was partly justified as galleys were rendered little adapted for fighting or to stand foul weather. Indeed, the galleys had become an anachronistic weapon when compared with the newly introduced third rate warships.\(^98\)

The outstanding innovation that appeared on the eighteenth century Maltese galleys was the third or *mizzen* mast at the stern. Unfortunately it has not been possible to ascertain the exact date when such a modification was introduced but by the first half of the eighteenth century Maltese galleys were equipped with the third lateen rig. It seems that French galleys adopted the third mast even as early as the first half of the seventeenth century.\(^99\)

By 1790 the exhausted finances of the Order were no longer in a position to support the many weaknesses which were inadvertently introduced on galleys. Indeed, "*Le service de la Religion n'est plus maintenant qu'une affaire de calcul...*" reported one official of the Order in a report submitted to the Grand Master for the reform of the management of the galleys. The commission recommended that the number of personnel should be cut down drastically, the *ciurma* was to be reduced also as it was partly made up of paid Maltese rowers, the biscuit ration was to be cut down to lessen the weight of provisions carried but above all certain sail innovations were recommended to obviate unnecessary expenses.\(^100\)

It was suggested that as the *marabutino*, one of the sails, was rarely found to be useful it should be completely omitted and in its place the *capuccino* or a *pollaccone\(^101\) or a *stay sail* was to be rigged between the main and fore antennas. Another purpose was that by increasing the fore lateen sail by a cloth or two the same results would be obtained; tests were to be started in the summer of 1791. By that year the *mizzen* lateen sail at the stern was hardly ever used.\(^102\)

The short galley with 24 benches to each side was projected in 1791 as a measure to alleviate the exhausted finances of the Order. It was introduced in the navy too late to be considered completely as a practical innovation and as a means to save money. It was treated as an experimental attempt which was never completely tested over a good length of time to obviate defects or to ascertain its beneficial impact on the Treasury.

The 24 bench galley which was launched late in 1791 or early in 1792 was identical to a normal one except for its length. Apart from the difference of four benches the experimental galley was lightly built to lessen the overall weight

\(^94\) NLM AOM 269 f.161r, OAM 274 f. 53.
\(^95\) NLM AOM 269 f. 48r.
\(^96\) NLM AOM 1839 f. 299.
\(^97\) A.V. Laferla, *The Story of Man in Malta* (Malta, 1939) 150; J. Marteilhe, *Memoires d'un Gaierien du XVIIeme Siecle* (Paris, 1982) 314; P.W. Bamford, *Fighting Ships and Prisons* (Minneapolis, 1973) 40, 273, 279, 280, 281, 298; even Muslim powers were reducing their galley squadrons in favour of the greater warships, see NLM Lib. 262 part II, 111.
\(^98\) Laferla, 150; NLM Lib. 627 shows pictures of highly decorated galleys.
\(^99\) J. Humbert, *La Galerie du XVIIeme Siecle* (Grenoble, 1986) 25; inadvertently the author annotated the picture of the DeRohafn Capitana as belonging to Cotoner and dated 1660, there were never any Maltese galleys equipped with their *mizzen mass* prior to the 1740s. A.H.H., *Prins, in Peril on the Sea* (Malta, 1989), pls. 33, 34 show two *ex-voto* paintings from the Tal-Herba Sanctuary Birirkara of Maltese galleys equipped with three masts for the years 1779 and 1793.
\(^100\) NLM AOM 1934A passim gives at length the reports by the commissioners of the Order who recommended drastic reforms for the galley squadron.
\(^101\) NLM AOM 1934A f.18.
\(^102\) NLM AOM 1934A f.18r.
and was visibly shorter than others. Its armament consisted of a 24 pounder *coursier* and two lateral guns with a calibre of 12 pounds. It will be noticed that such naval guns were short and carried a greater volume of metal than those used on land.

The crew included 60 sailors divided in three classes and 250 rowers consisting of 100 convicts, 40 Muslim slaves, 25 *buonavoglie* and 85 Maltese paid rowers. During the second half of the eighteenth century it was very difficult to find enough slaves for the galleys and the employment of Maltese rowers was too expensive for the Treasury of the Order. While submitting suggestions for the commissioning of the new galley it was agreed that the rigging from an old galley would be fitted, adjusting it as necessary. It was emphasised that the 1791 suggestions affecting the biscuits ration involved a reduction of \( \frac{1}{4} \) of the total weight on the galley. It seems that such an experimental galley was not popular and by 1798 it was not even listed amongst the ships taken over by Napoleon when the French invaded Malta.

The eighteenth century witnessed the introduction of the demigalley in the navy of the Order. The demigalley was a small version of the galley and it carried a much reduced number of oars and crew. It was built for the first time in Malta in 1742 when the Order was experiencing serious difficulties in procuring Muslim rowers. There was a continuous pressure on the finances of the Order as fewer Muslim prizes were taken. One may say that the introduction of the demigalley was a clear sign of the decline of the galley squadron.

The first two demigalleys *Sant Anna* and *Sant Ursola* were launched in 1742 and the two operated together accompanying the galleys on various missions. It seems that the demigalleys never gained much popularity although they remained in service up to 1798. In 1795 the Maltese naval architect Maurin designed the two demigalleys *San Pietro* and *San Andrea* for the Papal galley squadron.

When describing a demigalley one must refer to the unique model exhibited at the Malta Maritime Museum. While one may consult a manuscript describing a demigalley in France the only known model of such a vessel is found in Malta.

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103 NLM AOM 1934A ff. 13, 14*, 15*, 15*, 18; NLM AOM 274 f. 209*.
104 NLM AOM 269 ff. 241*, 249*.
105 NLM AOM 269 f. 234* were commissioned for their first *corsa* cruise of fifteen days.
106 NLM AOM 1923 f. 58

It shows the typical sheer profile of a galley. The demigalley carried fourteen oars on each side, each oar being handled by one man. It carried three guns under the *rambata* and was equipped with two lateen rigged masts. The stern was highly decorated with gilded sculptured works and red paint similar to that used on galleys was applied on most of the hull; below the waterlevel the hull was painted white.

The demigalley carried its own caique, manned by eight oars, and another boat. Its crew of 200 men included officers, soldiers, sailors and specialized craftsmen like carpenters, caulkers and coopers. The long, elastic, beech oars together with the sails gave the demigalley great speed in fine weather conditions.

The chebec was introduced into the navy of the Order in the eighteenth century. The vessel appeared for the first time in the Mediterranean in the hands of Muslim powers all along the North African coast. But it achieved its legendary notoriety in the hands of Algerian corsairs. It was originally projected as a mercantile ship but its sailing qualities, its spacious hold and its adaptability even in the winter season led to its being adopted as a warship, too.

Apparently the first chebec of the Order was built in Malta in 1743 and it was employed to carry provisions from Syracuse and Augusta escorted by two galleys. In 1754 four commissioners were appointed by the Grand Master to investigate the possibility of substituting the two guard boats in the Grand Harbour by two chebecs. Their report emphasised that the chebecs would be cheaper to maintain and there would be a considerable drop in expenses as the two ships would be able to carry provisions from Sicily, and could be used even in winter against Muslim corsairs operating near Malta besides playing their normal role as guard ships in the Grand Harbour. The project was approved by the Grand Master and the two chebecs *San Pietro* and *San Paolo* were built. Later in the century a third chebec the *Spirito Santo* was built.

The term "chebec" might have originated from the Italian *stambecco* meaning...
a wild goat. The chebec was designed with a wide beam and concave bows which made the ship an excellent sailer even in winter. The three lateen rigged masts together with the few oars gave the chebec a good speed. It was provided with a highly decorated overhanging stern with a grated deck and the bows were fitted with a sperone or spur and beakhead which was typical of all lateen rigged vessels.

Certain corsair chebecs were armed with as many as twenty four guns with the oarports pierced between them; the smaller merchant chebecs were provided with perhaps four or six guns. The chebec was fitted with a highly cambered deck and the guns were positioned on special platforms to level them with the sea. A corsair chebec would also be armed with several periors or swivel guns. The deck was provided with a huge hatch and a companion way led to the hold.

Amongst other roles the chebec was employed to guard the harbour, was an excellent corsair ship, accompanied the third rates of the Order on several missions and carried provisions especially biscuits to Malta when necessary. It has been noticed that the smaller chebecs with a tonnage varying between 12 and 60 tons carried small crews numbering between six to eleven men. The greater chebecs with over 100 tons burthen were provided with a crew from fourteen to twenty five men. It was argued that the twenty four men required to arm the two guard vessels at the harbour would be enough to man the two proposed chebecs to take their place. By the end of the eighteenth century some chebecs were modified to take a pollacca type of mast and sail arrangement. The pollacca-chebec retained the same hull construction and sheer profile of a chebec but it was provided with square sails on the main and mizzen pole type of masts; a huge jib and a lateen sail were rigged on the fore-mast.

112 Guglielmotti s.v. sciabecco

113 An Algerian chebec carried 36 guns, see NLM Lib. 480 f.23; others carried 20 guns, see NLM Lib. 480 ff. 102, 194. Chebecs were provided with oars NLM Lib. 480 ff. 162, 171, 173 but sometimes they were towed by galleys when necessary, see NLM Lib. 280 ff. 61, 62.

114 NLM AOM 270 f.263; NLM Lib. 280 ff. 11, 16, 19, 21, 22, 25, 35, 49, 60.

115 For the smaller chebecs see NARRP vol.i. ff. 30, 32, 42, 44, 47; for the greater chebecs see NARRP vol.i. pp. 15, 38.

116 NLM AOM 270 f. 263.

117 NLM Lib. 480 f. 22.

The eighteenth century galleot retained basically the same constructional design and sail arrangement. It remained popular with local corsairs and was frequently employed in association with the navy of the Order. Although the galleot was a galley in miniature it did not carry a rambata at the bows and it was equipped with one lateen sail. A galleot always carried a caicque for the normal work required in connection with towing, provision of water, disembarking or embarking personnel and other roles inherent with a ship’s tender. It was quite often confused with other types of lateen rigged small vessels or rather its nomenclature was attributed to a londra, a brigantine, a small chebec, a feluca or a mezzagallera. Amongst other roles the eighteenth century galleot was retained as a guardship in the Grand Harbour, and accompanied other warships of the Order but primarily it was a small corsair ship aimed at harassing small Muslim merchant ships.

In July 1741 Grand Master Pinto paid for the building of two galleots and a tartana to oppose the small vessels of the Barbary corsairs. By 1764 the same Grand Master was still financing the upkeep of the three galleots Santa Caterina as flagship commanded by Francesco di Natale with 151 crew, Santa Maria di Filermo with captain Simeone Gavasso with a crew of 136 and the Sant' Orsula under the command of Pietro Zelalix with a crew of 142 men. It will be noticed that local Maltese corsair galleots carried fewer personnel than those in the service of the Grand Master. A member of the crew had to be a rower, a sailor and a soldier according to the exigencies of the operations at sea. The galleot commanded by Angelo Santo Nicolai was equipped with 15 benches of rowers, sailed to the Barbary coasts flying the flag of the Order and was authorised to operate up to the 11 November 1722. Its crew of 67 included the captain, a lieutenant, two helmsmen, a doctor, a clerk, quartermasters, a spalliere or strokeman, a cook, an agozzino, an ensign, pilots and sailors. It sailed from the bay of St Julian’s on 8 February 1722 and returned on 21 March 1722 with a Muslim prize. On 7 April of the same year it departed from St Julian’s again for...
a second cruise and returned on 28 June towing a Muslim sanmecchino which was loaded with timber. On 20 July it left the Lazzaretto for a third cruise.  

The galleot L’Immacolata Concezione belonging to Captain Tomaso Alferano was a Muslim prize caught by the galleys of the Order and bought by the above captain, reconditioned and commissioned to operate against the Barbary corsairs. Flying the colours of the Order the galleot left the bay of Marsaxlokk, where it was berthed, on 10 February 1722 for the corso against il nostro comun Nemico. It registered a crew of 38 including men from Gozo, Qormi, Żebbuġ, Rabat, Mdina, Zurrieq, Lija, Zabbar and Mqabba apart from the normal personnel recruited from the Three Cities and Valletta. The list includes foreign crew members from Palermo, Catania, Siracusa, Giorgente, Portoferara and Reggio. 

The Maltese corsair galleot Santa Maria e L’Anima del Purgatorio commanded by Alessandro Carbonisi was equipped with 82 crew members in 1784. It operated near the Barbary coasts and on 28 March returned to Malta with a Muslim prize. 

The warships of the Order were quite often supported at sea by auxiliary vessels which transported munitions, provisions and equipment for land operations. Such vessels belonged quite often to Maltese masters and were hired against payment. There were also Maltese merchantships which transported most of the food and war provisions for the Order and for the population of the Island. The Knights hired the services of such merchantships even though sometimes they had to pay exhorbitant fees.

Although, by definition, merchantships were specifically built for the transportation of goods yet sometimes they were armed as warships. The overlapping of roles was inevitable at a time when a padrone of a merchantship would utilise his vessel for the transport of goods and combine that with a more profitable role as a private corsair. The Maltese tartana was the principal transport ship but quite often it was armed for the corso. The same could be said for the pinco, the pollacca, the lateen rigged brigantine and the fregata. The Maltese xprunara was the most popular passenger boat that plied between Malta, Sicily and Naples especially in the eighteenth century. Yet it was utilised as a corsair ship from time to time.

121 NAR Rollo della Galeotta nominata da Cap. Angelo Santo Nicolai, passim.
123 NLM AOM 274 f. 26.
124 Dal Pozzo vol. ii, 676.
125 NARLib is a series of arrival booklets giving extremely interesting details about vessels, cargoes and passengers entering the Grand Harbour for the years 1743 to 1747.
Warships of the Order

A 17th cent. FRIGATE
B 17th cent. MUSLIM GALLEOT
C 18th cent. CHEBEC
D 18th cent. DEMIGALLEY
E 18th cent. FRIGATE
F 18th cent. THIRD RATE
G 18th cent. CAPITANA
H 17th cent. GALLEY
I 17th cent. SMALL GALLEON
J 18th cent. GALLEOT
K 17th cent. GALLEON
L 16th cent. GALLEY
M 16th cent. CARRACK
N 18th cent. CORVETTE
O 17th cent. PETACCHIO