IN FRONTERIA BARBARORUM:
WAITING FOR THE TURKS ON LATE MEDIEVAL MALTA

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The objective of this communication is to focus on the ground-level repercussions of Turkish expansion in the Mediterranean. It offers a case-study of the Maltese islands as an outpost of the Sicilian kingdom and Roman Christianity, an archipelago upon which geography and the movement of empires had bestowed a particular character. In the 1480s that outpost was once again reminded, if that were in any way necessary, of the bitter consequences intrinsically implied in a frontline existence. The decade started critically in 1480 with the Turkish siege of Rhodes and the occupation of Otranto. It had taken the Porte only a generation to transform the vast open space east of Malta into a Turkish sea.

The movement for an anti-Turkish League, launched soon after Mohammed II's conquest of the old Byzantine capital in 1453, had only served to reveal yet again the inherent political weaknesses of the Italian powers. The Venetians, in the interests of their far-flung Levantine empire, which was directly threatened by irreversible Turkish encroachment, sought peace with the Turk immediately after 1453. Their truce of April 1454 with Mohammed II enabled them to preserve their territories and their privileged position at the new Turkish capital. The Turks took advantage of it to conquer new Balkan territories: the Duchy of Athens and the kingdom of Serbia in 1458, the Morea in 1460, Bosnia, Moldavia and Wallachia in 1463.

Venetian apprehension, reflected in their part in the revolt of the Peloponnesus in 1464-5, was matched by Genoa's frustrating sense of helplessness as most of its possessions were taken away in the two decades following 1453. The Serenissima had to turn to other European powers for help: all of a sudden its very existence seemed at stake. Plans for a crusade with Matthias Corvinus of Hungary and Skanderbeg of Albania came to nothing. By 1469 the Turks had taken Croatia; a year later Negropont became Turkish.

Southern Italy and Sicily were as much threatened by the Turks as the Venetian commonwealth. King Ferrante of Naples, confirming his perfidious reputation, made professions of friendship to Mohammed II, exchanging gifts
and ambassadors. Strangely reassured by these secret dealings, Ferrante thrust his kingdom in a precarious Italian policy, participating in Rome’s alliance against Lorenzo de’ Medici, who had just overcome the Pazzi conspiracy at home. In December 1479 Lorenzo went on his own to Naples; in a desperate last-ditch effort he threatened to bring the French into Italy. This was not to be for the next fourteen years. Still, the threat was very much based on a realistic assessment of French claims and ambitions. It convinced Ferrante to sign peace in April 1480, but not before exacting his price: Siena. Ferrante looked as if he would soon become master of the whole of Tuscany. At that very moment, disturbing news arrived that the Turks were heading for Apulia.

Turkish pressure in the eastern Mediterranean had continued relentlessly with the siege of Scutari in 1474 and that of Lepanto a year later. By the late 1470s the Turks were ravaging the Adriatic seaboard of the Italian peninsula, threatening the Venetian terra firma as well as papal territories and the Kingdom of Naples. They laid waste Aquilea and the Friuli, coming dangerously near to Venice itself in the Piave valley. Imprisoned in a pervading sense of isolation, the Venetians purchased peace from the Turk by surrendering the strategic city of Scutari in January 1479. Putting aside all professions of good neighbourliness, Ferrante of Naples refused to give the Turk a safe port in his kingdom to be used against Venice. The king of Naples soon fell victim of his own double game.

The Turks turned to pluck out that thorn in their sides, Hospitaller Rhodes under Master Peter of Aubusson. From December 1479 onwards Rhodes and the other Hospitaller islands were practically under siege. In July 1480, while the siege of Rhodes reached its climax with huge losses on both sides, and Europe’s attention was fixed on that defiant island, Mohammed’s grand vizier Ahmed Pasha landed with his army at Otranto. While the siege of Rhodes was raised on August 17, the Turks concentrated their efforts on the Adriatic city, taking it the day after. Otranto became a formidable Turkish base for the invasion of Europe. It is well known that the West looked upon Mohammed II’s death at the end of April or the beginning of May 1481 as a sign of divine intervention; by then a large army was already awaiting orders near Scutari.

The internal conflicts between different pretenders to the Ottoman throne, notably Bayazet and Jem, gave the Christian states some breath. Given the political turmoil of the Turkish state following Mohammed II’s death, the army at Otranto could no longer hold the place. Neapolitan forces managed to liberate it in September 1481. The Turkish occupation of Otranto left behind it a deep legacy of fear and mistrust: the Turks had actually won a foothold on Italy, and there were rumours that this had not been without Venetian - and even Florentine-

encouragement. Perhaps no other European state was as lucky as Rhodes, who managed to obtain an invaluable hostage in Prince Jem, the bitter rival of Bayazet for the Ottoman throne. Bayazet was only too pleased to have his brother out of the way. He signed a peace treaty with the Hospital in December 1482 and even provided the Order with 35,000 Venetian ducats annually to pay for Jem’s upkeep in France.

The Aragonese vicereigny of Sicily could never hope to strike such an arrangement with the Porte. The long Sicilian coastlines were a headache for any defensive military strategist; they seemed to invite incursions, if not outright invasions. The kingdom’s feudal classes, on whom feudal recruitment was based, were in theory held responsible for its defence. However, feudal lords had lost their hold over the state, not least because ever since the 1390s the Crown had promoted leadership from among the urban populations against them. It was rather too much to expect the feudal classes to be effective in the defence of Sicily now. Royal captains-at-arms, appointed to organize defences but also to enjoy incomes, could only poorly fill in the gaps in this archaic method of feudal recruitment.

The fears of an imminent Turkish invasion in the early 1470s were exploited by preachers of Paul II’s crusade in different parts of Sicily: religious imagery of the Virgin Mary was contrasted with the rapacity and sexual violence of the Turks. People were worked up into such a frenzy that in 1474, a year of widespread dearth and famine, a wave of anti-Jewish pogroms swept various Sicilian towns, including Palermo, Messina, Sciacca, Noto and Modica, on or near the marian feasts of August 15 and September 8. Mass anxiety and panic were ventilated in the ruthless slaughter and destruction of judayce. Crusading enthusiasm, fanned by the pangs of hunger and the fears of the coming infidel, inspired the Sicilians with a zealous impatience to stage their own crusade.

The situation continued to worsen in the late 1470s with the Ottoman victories in the Balkans and the systematic terror inflicted along the Italian coasts. By May 1479 the Count of Adernò and President of the Kingdom, Giovanni Moncada, had ordered the military mobilization of the whole island. The alarming sack of the Lipari islands by a pirate fleet, which carried many natives into slavery, only served to heighten the anxiety. In spring 1480 it could not be known for sure where the Turks were heading. Sicily was placed in a state of emergency and in June the Count of Geraci was appointed by Viceroy Gaspar De Spes Captain General of the kingdom, with extensive powers of jurisdiction cum potestate gladii. All feudal lords, municipal authorities, captains-at-arms and royal officials of the kingdom were to obey him.
The Maltese islands had grown used to these relatively abnormal circumstances, even if an attack on the scale of that of 1429 never recurred for the rest of the century. Malta's recognition as an outpost of Sicily was coupled with a fatalistic sense of isolation: *omni jornu sta in periculu, a capitulum of 1460 pointed out, tantu di Mori, comu di altra generazioni di la mundu, la quali insola essendu, quod Deus avertat, oppressa seu presa, serria grandi obstaculu di quello Regno.* This proves that the Maltese were conscious of playing an active role in the kingdom's defence from this outpost, and that they could draw political profit from this fact in peacetime. Even Rome helped with the grant of indulgences to those who contributed to the fortification of the town of Malta, recognising its vulnerability.  

Alarming news concerning threats of invasion arrived in September 1462. It was reported that the proposed capture of the town and island of Malta had already been discussed in the royal chamber of the King of Tunis. In February 1475 the town-council discussed measures in view of an impending Genoese attack. The town-council also ensured that the town and its suburb would have a sufficient reserve of wheat, and that the island's manpower would not be depleted through recruitment for corsairing. In August of the same year the town-council again discussed measures *per la necessitati di la nova di li Genuini* which imply that a state of emergency had come into being: victuals, wives and belongings were to be placed behind the shelter of the city walls; unknown quantities of gun powder and lances were to be paid for.

The frontline dividing the Christian states, including Sicily, from the Turks had receded to the central Mediterranean area where the Maltese islands could easily be used as a stepping stone by a Turkish armada for the invasion of Sicily. It is a faithful reflection of Sicilian weakness that the kingdom did not take the necessary measures to fortify its outpost, even if the islands were recognised as such. A viceregal provision of July 1472 for the repair of the town walls declared *como li mura di quissa chitati in alcuni parti su venuti a ruina et in dui oy tri lokhi in totum caduti et sbandati et haviriano bisognu di riparar per conservacioni et defenza di la dicta chitati et insula la quali sta vicina et in frontispicio di Barbaria di la quali di facili patria sustiniri danno et invasions non sensa deservizio di la maestati di la signori Re.* For some obscure reason, such a seemingly vital provision took more than five years before it was presented and read in the town council. The subject was subsequently discussed in November 1477. Three months later it was decided to do repair works at the *castrum maris.*

In one of the capitoli presented to the Sicilian Viceroy by the Maltese representative Antonius de Guyvara sometime between 22 December 1479 and 27 January 1480 the Maltese town authorities complained to the Viceroy *perki est quasi notorio et fama devulgata per quistu Regnu lu Gran Turcu fa fari una grossa armata per invadiri dictu Regnu supra la quali armata veni nostra maledittu Maltisi Antoniu Fantinu volenti marinaru dispostu difari omni mali et credimo sia accusi actento lu dettu Antoniu si partio di iza per certu dicirmu, etfattu permission'! di invadiri etfarili haviri quisti Insult, mictendoli in fantasia dichiri et credimo sia accusi actento lu dettu Antoniu si partio di iza per certu dicirmu, etfattu permission'! di invadiri etfarili haviri quisti Insult, mictendoli in fantasia dichiri et credimo sia accusi actento lu dettu Antoniu si partio di iza per certu dicirmu, etfattu permission'! di invadiri etfarili haviri quisti*.

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1 Capitoli of 2.i.1460: Univ. 3, doc. 10.
4 Town-council meeting of 15.ii.1475: Univ. 11, f. 311v; Wettinger, *Acta luratorum*, no. 587.
5 Proclamation of 15.ii.1475: Univ. 11, f. 313; Wettinger, *Acta luratorum*, no. 593.
6 Proclamation of 17.iii.1475: Univ. 11, f. 313v; Wettinger, *Acta luratorum*, no. 613.
7 Town council meeting of 17.vii.1475: Univ. 11, f. 342; Wettinger, *Acta luratorum*, no. 613.
11 The town-council meeting of 22.xi.1479 was still discussing the acceptance by Antonius de Guyvara to go on the mission to Palermo, and how much to pay him for this: Univ. 11, f. 410; Wettinger, *Acta luratorum*, no. 750. The capitoli were presented before 27 January 1480, when they were issued with their formal responses by the royal chancery. Copy in MCM ACM Misc. 34, ff. 249-53.
12 MCM ACM Misc. 34, ff. 251v.
The Maltese authorities had easily identifiable motives for not wanting a royal commissioner like Ferrarini in town; and it might also be added that they were exploiting the threat of invasion to get what they wanted. However, that threat was real, not imaginary; that much is shown by the fact that the Viceroy acceded to their demand, and by the viceregal decree of January 1480 that all the Maltese who were in Sicily and had their domicile in Malta were to return home for the islands' defence.13 More over, there was certainly truth in their remark that they were remote from the kingdom, and that in this crisis they could not expect help or aid from anybody except God, and for themselves to prevail and do every effort to maintain the faith and then the flag of loyalty and the Crown of His Sacred Royal Majesty.14 The remark does not just express a geographical reality; it also conveys a haunting sense of isolation.

By March 1480 work on the reconstruction or repair of the town walls and ditches, ordered by the viceroy,15 could be resumed under the supervision of Octavianus de Ravello or, in his absence, Petrus Busutil.16 In the context of the state of emergency declared throughout the Sicilian kingdom, it is understandable that the Maltese town-council received viceregal instructions *quad fuant fossata a l'angara* (that the work on the town's ditches had to be done by forced and unpaid work). It was even proposed to obtain the Bishop's licence to work on Sundays and feastsdays.17 However, this injunction for forced labour met with apparently widespread resistance among the populace, resulting in a tumult. That this unrest was not localised is shown by the proposals of some of the town-councillors, who hoped to quell the disturbance by meeting with representatives from the parishes. Others wanted to write to the Sicilian authorities that this unrest was not localised. That much is shown by the fact that the Viceroy prevailed and did every effort to maintain first the faith and then the flag of loyalty and the Crown of His Sacred Royal Majesty.18 The remark does not just express a geographical reality; it also conveys a haunting sense of isolation.

On 28 July 1480, while the Turkish siege of Rhodes reached its climax, the town council on Malta discussed a piece of alarming news sent to them by the Viceroy on 19 July from Palermo: *comu parti di la armata di lu Turcu fu stina conferirisi in quista insola.* Most referred to the need to purchase between two and five thousand *salmi* of wheat. An experienced *homu di armi* who would organize the defence was needed, together with the necessary military equipment to withstand a siege. Some suggested that the captain-at-arms should be accompanied by fifty or one hundred experienced soldiers. Most agreed that village people were to bring their belongings and victuals into town, although Nardus Calavà proposed that the *biduini ki su a li marini* were to take their belongings and victuals to the villages nearest town.

There was general consensus that the *burgu di taverni, putiti et casi a la fruntera di la chitati* (that is, the Rabat) was to be demolished for the town's safety; and that the absentee landlords deriving incomes from Malta were to come or send their agents with weapons for the island's defence. Social distinctions were to be overruled: *gintilhomini* were to take their place with the other people, while the numerous clergymen present, including the Bishop's vicar Don Lanceas Desguanes, professed their readiness to help. Don Herricus de Burdino suggested that all canons of the cathedral were to keep horses. Petrus Caruana went so far as to suggest that if the viceroy did not send aid, they should be given licence to leave the island.19

It could not have been that easy to pull down a whole part of Rabat, however convincing the needs of defence, without somehow disagreeing on which parts to leave standing. This much was obvious during the town-council meeting of 14 August 1480, which discussed the demolition of churches, homes, shops and taverns to create a clear line of fire for the town's cannon.20 By November the demolition work was already in progress, because the owners of the remaining shops beneath the town walls were ordered to vacate them before February.21

A few days later the council met again to discuss an offer by Alvardo de Nava to employ an armed ship and two armed caravelles in the defence of the islands; it was decided to pay him three ounces of Sicily or else in kind (*unu boy tri pecuri uno crestatu dae cantara di pani et una bucti di vinu*) for every day of service.22 The day after the town-council met again to discuss yesterday's decision to employ Alvardo de Nava's vessels *quando casiss esse quod clasis Turchi...*
The corvée was requested to write to the viceroy to instruct Alvarus de Nava, whom they wanted as captain-at-arms, to employ his armed vessels in the islands’ defence at royal expense for six or seven months.23

For all the town-councillors’ insistence that Alvaro de Nava be appointed to the captaincy-at-arms, his experience was utilized in a much higher royal office, that of Captain-General of the Galleys.24 The Maltese captaincy-at-arms was assigned to Julianus Mundu, who on 17 September attended a town-council meeting which discussed, among other things, the offer by a monk to make gunpowder for the town. This was apparently turned down as the gunpowder could be procured at one-fourth the sum payable to the monk (twelve ounces).25 By mid-October 1480 those liable under feudal law for military service had been placed under arms.26

The corvée work undoubtedly went on in spite of absentees.27 The roster of villagers supervising the corvée on the town walls was organized on a fortnightly basis from the end of October 1480 onwards, with Nardus de Burdin appointed to supervise these commissarios.28 In December 1480 the town-council was still however discussing the purchase of gunpowder.29 In fact, it was only in February 1481 that the town council’s envoys, Simon de Mazzara and Nicolaus de Caxaro, were selected to purchase the necessary armaments with the sum of 200 ounces.

The Maltese were surely aware of the Turkish presence at Otranto; the viceroy informed the town authorities in November 1480 that the Turks were in Apulia. He instructed them to take the necessary defensive measures by taxing the people, including churchmen and those normally exempt.30 Any piece of news must have found eager listeners. In April 1481 it was still not known whether the Venetians would join the anti-Turkish league, because they cited that as a condition for purchasing armaments from Sicily.31 It is not known when the islands first learned about Mohammed II’s death; probably this was not before summer. In any case, preparations for the expected invasion went on, with the purchase of wheat for the castrum maris. At the same time, the vice-castellan Johannes Garcia purchased munitions in Messina for the same fortress.32

In the last week of April 1481 the corvée work on the town walls was suspended for eight days et hoc solum per metiri il ortura: nature imposed its own rhythm on the war effort.33 The eight-day suspension of the corvée had only just expired when the town-council instructed every donkey-owner to take his beast to the work site to help collecting stone for cannon balls.34 The corvée was extended to mid-June and the demolition of the nearest part of the Rabat went on.35

The regular contribution of absentee landlords was always an issue in peacetime, as evidenced from the capitoli, let alone when there were threats of invasion. The town-council did not overlook for one moment the part feudal lords were expected to play in the islands’ defence. It was one of Johannes de la Chabica’s main points in July 1480 that the feudal lords should come or send their armed agents.36 Antonius Laureri reminded the council in September ki si digia haviri la quarta parte di li renditi di li feudatarii, and there is an undated (but probably contemporary) town-council meeting which discussed exclusively this matter. It was suggested that those living abroad were to be forced to contribute towards the repair of the town walls since they retrieved their incomes from the islands. However, no declaration to that effect could actually force the

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23 Town Council meeting of 19.viii.1480: Univ. II, f. 441v; Wettinger, Acta juraturn, no. 776
24 August 1481: MCM ACM Misc. 28 f. 190. He was exempted from the collecta for the town walls; cf Town Council meeting of 16.ix.1481: Univ. II, f. 507; Wettinger, Acta juraturn, no. 859.
26 G. Wettinger, ‘The castrum maris and its suburb of Birgu during the Late Middle Ages’, in Birgu - A Maltese Maritime City (Malta, 1993) 44 and n. 111 referring to the nobleman Angilu Vaccaru.
27 An undated town-council meeting in Univ. II, f. 454 includes a discussion si videatur caele tum fallorum angarese. Fines were imposed on absentees, their collector getting one grano per fine: Univ. II, f. 456v; Wettinger, Acta juraturn, nos. 796 and 801.
29 Town-council meeting of 18.xii.1480: Univ. II, f. 466v; Wettinger, Acta juraturn, no. 813. Cf.: also the receipt of over one contaro and 14 rotula of saltpetre in two barrels and three contara and 80 rotula of gunpowder in five quartarii on 15.iii.1481: Univ. II, f. 477v; Wettinger, Acta juraturn, no. 824.
30 MCM ACM Misc. 28 f. 200.
31 Town-council meeting of 7.iv.1481: Univ. II, f. 477v; Wettinger, Acta juraturn, no. 826.
absentee landlords to contribute their share. This not withstanding a viceregal decree of 24 April 1481 that all people who had their domicile in the islands were to return there immediately. In fact, it was for this end that the decree also established a general moratorium of one year on debts.37

The political conflict which engulfed the Ottoman leadership after May 1481 created a lull which only came to an end in 1484; a three-year truce between Aragon and Tunis signed in April 1483 could at least help concentrate energies and resources against the resurgent Turks.38 On Malta the situation remained relatively abnormal: viceregal decrees in March and April 1482 instructed the imposition of taxes on all social strata, overriding all normal exemptions, and churchmen were expressly ordered to pay half the expenses in the munition and repair of the town walls.39 In November 700 lances were bought from Palermo upon viceregal instructions.40 In mid-1483 the viceroy ordered the castellan Johannes de Nava to purchase two cannons for the town of Malta; the town-council retorted that they were too poor to pay for them.41 In actual fact, the main threat that summer was not the Turks, but a possible outbreak of plague.42

Probably few people could foresee the dark threat which would be lurking over the Maltese islands for the next four years or so. In July 1484 there were already rumours of ‘the army of the Grand Turk’ and the viceroys insisted on the regular payment of the Birgu garrison.43 Between December 1484 and January 1485 Sicily and other islands were once again placed on the alert for an impending Turkish attack. The castellan de Nava was in Sicily with his galley procuring

37 A. Mifsud, ‘L’Approvigionamento e l’Università di Malta nelle passate Dominazioni’, Archivum Maltesense III. 5-6 (1918) 233.
39 ACM Misc. 28 f. 137; ACM Misc. 2 f. 70.
41 Town-council meeting of 20.vi.1483: Univ. II. f. 524”; Wettinger, Acta luratrum, no. 927.
42 3.vii.1483: Three deputies were appointed to guard against plague with full powers: Univ. II. f. 543; Town-council meeting of 6.vii.1483 also mentioned this possibility of an outbreak of plague: Univ. II. f. 543”; Wettinger, Acta luratrum, no. 929-930.

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bonbardi et altri artiglieri for the castle’s use.44 He was also assigned the considerable sum of four hundred ounces for repairing and equipping the Maltese castrum maris, fifty ounces of which were to be given to him immediately, bypassing the normal treasury procedures.45

The situation was serious enough to warrant a visit by the viceroy in person. On 21 January 1485 viceroys Ramon de Sancta Pau and Johannes de Valguarnera informed Nicolas de Leofantis, the treasurer of the Sicilian kingdom, of Valguarnera’s firm resolve to go per grandi servizii di la sacra regia Majestati et beneficiu di quisto regno in la chita et insula di Malta, per ordinari quillo sarru necessaria in defensioni di lo dicto regno di la armata di lo gran turco, di la quali si dubita non vegna ad invadiri lo regno preditto.46 On 12 March 1485 Valguarnera was still in Catania, from where he instructed the payment of 5 ounces and ten cantara of biscuit to de Nava’s galley which would soon be joining his comitiva.47 During his visit in late March Early April 1485 Valguarnera was escorted by the new captain-at-arms for Malta, Andrea de Tudisco, as well as the galley of Johannes de Nava.48 By contrast with the preparations in the Malta castle,49 the castellan of Pantalliera, Alvarus de Nava, and his garrison complained to viceroy Sancta Pau that they had not even received their salary that year.50

It is most unfortunate that the minutes of town-council meetings for the vital period from late July 1483 down to October 1498 have not survived.51 The

46 G. Pipitone Federico, ‘La Sicilia e la guerra d’Otranto 1470-1484’, Archivio Storico Siciliano n.s.a. 11 (1887) 71-132, doc. 1 wrongly dates the letter 21.i.1484; the 11th Indiction fell between 1484-5 so it must have been 21.I.1485.
47 Pipitone Federico, doc. 6 wrongly dated 1484. The other galley was that belonging to Joanna Salvo Spinafora, who was duly compensated for his services: ibid, doc. 9 of 27.iv.1485.
48 A viceregal letter of 26.iv.1483 instructed the royal treasurer to pay de Nava 16 ounces 18 taras and 20 cantara of biscuit to defray the latter’s expenses in escorting the viceroy; cfr. Pipitone Federico, doc. 2.
49 Munitions were bought in January and March (Wettinger, ‘The castrum maris’, 44), and also in April 1485 (Pipitone Federico, doc. 7 of 28.iv.1485).
51 The minutes of the town-council meeting of 10.ix.1486 record a discussion about the purchase of 1,000 salme of wheat for the town. The minutes survived in ACM Misc. 34, f. 18. Wettinger, Acta luratrum, no. 933.
immediate reaction to the sacking of Birgu by twelve Turkish ships in June 1488 can therefore be gauged only from indirect evidence. In his *Anales de la Corona de Aragon*, Zurita noted how twelve Turkish vessels were able to wreak havoc in Malta ‘owing to the feeble resistance which [they] found in the city of Malta’. They entered Birgu, captured eighty persons, stole what cotton and cloth they found, and then sacked the place. Thence they proceeded to sack Gozo and Pantelleria.\(^5^2\)

Throughout the long period of war-scare which had preceded the 1488 assault, military preparations were supposedly carried out with a major invasion in mind. When the hour of proof arrived, the islands’ defences could not even withstand a minor *razzia*. The ships sent by the Sicilian authorities in aid of Malta and Gozo, equipped with crews of bandits and delinquents\(^5^3\), could not have arrived on time, or else they were ineffective.

The whole episode reflected the Maltese islands’ strategically-defined vulnerability as poorly-defended outposts of the Sicilian kingdom. The intermittent and poorly-financed military efforts of a whole decade were reckoned without a realistic grasp of the whole situation, and failed. Sicilian towns could hardly have reason to feel better on the matter. In 1488 both Palermo and Messina were left to defend themselves. Given the limited resources made available in Sicily for the islands’ protection, they were hardly defendible. Malta and Gozo could certainly not finance their own defence against the mighty Turks, even with the establishment of an annual contribution from feudal incomes (three out of every twenty ounces, that is fifteen per cent) as a result of 1488. The events of the 1480s had only served to underline this problem and render it even more acute. Birgu’s town walls had to wait the defenders of Rhodes.

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