

MALTESE HISTORY

F. The French Occupation

Form 3

Unit F.1 – The French in Malta: the French Invasion of Malta

1. Why did France invade and the capture the Islands in 1798?

- ✓ The strategic position and the impressive network of Malta's fortifications.
- ✓ **Napoleon Bonaparte** wanted to take Malta before another great power did so (Britain or Russia).
- ✓ Napoleon was informed that the Maltese were unhappy and fed up under the Knights.
- ✓ Napoleon had a secret plan to take the islands on his way to Egypt.

2. What was the situation in Malta at that time?

- ✓ Grand Master **Hompesch** (1797-8) had a weak character. Many French Knights were secretly plotting with the French.
- ✓ The Council of the Order was uncertain about what to do in case the French attacked Malta.
- ✓ Most Knights had lost the courage to fight a siege against a trained army like the French.

3. How were the islands conquered by the French in June 1798?

- ✓ The French fleet appeared outside the Grand Harbour on 9th June.
- ✓ Napoleon asked to enter into Grand Harbour with the fleet to get fresh water.
- ✓ The Order refused because it did not want to take sides in the war between France and the allies.
- ✓ Napoleon started the invasion of the islands. French soldiers landed at Marsaxlokk, Sliema, Mellieha and Gozo. By noon of Sunday 10th June the islands were in French hands.
- ✓ That evening a group of Maltese leaders told the Grand Master to stop fighting to avoid more useless bloodshed.
- ✓ On 11th June the Grand Master signed an armistice which surrendered the islands to the French.
- ✓ On 12th June the French landed in Gozo. Fort Chambray and the Citadel surrendered to the French after a few days. Meanwhile Napoleon went through the streets of Valletta on foot greeted by the cheers of the people.
- ✓ On 13th June the Grand Master, the Inquisitor and most of the Knights left Malta. The French Knights who left the Order were allowed to stay.

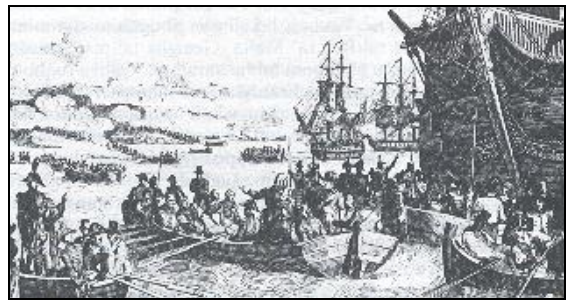


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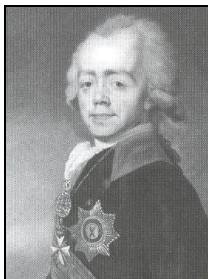


Some of the French invading vessels entering the Grand Harbour. From a contemporary anonymous engraving.

2



3



4



5



6

Unit F.2 - The French in Malta: Napoleon's Reforms

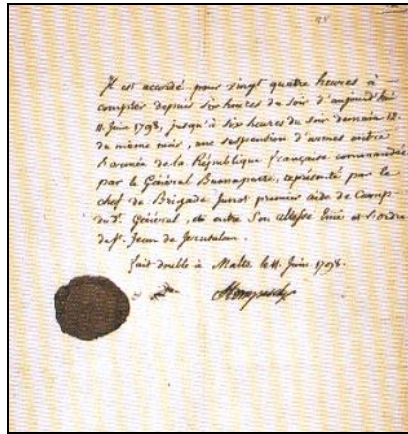
4. Changes in Malta brought about by Napoleon

Napoleon spent only a few days in Malta - from 12 to 19 June. He made his headquarters at **Palazzo Parisio** (today the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building next to Auberge de Castile in Valletta). From there he issued a number of decrees, grouped in four categories (see table below). His reforms were based on the principles of the French Revolution. But the French did not have enough time to put these reforms to practice. Less than three months after Napoleon had left Malta, the Maltese rose in revolt against their new masters.

| Social | Administrative | Educational | Church-State Relations |
|--|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Equality before the law *Noble titles abolished *Abolition of slavery *Freedom of the press *Freedom of conscience *Release of political prisoners *Jews were permitted to have a synagogue | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *The Order's property was taken over by the French Government *National Guard set up *A French-Maltese Government Commission *Malta was divided in 12 Municipalities (districts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Primary schools in the main towns and villages *60 students sent to study in France *Scientific subjects were to be taught at the <i>Polytechnique</i> (the former University) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Religious Orders were to keep only one convent *Church property was taken over by the Government *The Inquisitor's Court was closed and the Inquisitor ordered to leave. *Court appeals to the Roman Curia were stopped. |



Napoleon Bonaparte 1



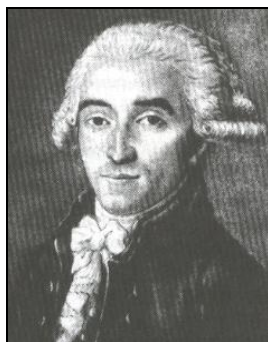
The Order's capitulation document 2



Napoleon's proclamation 3



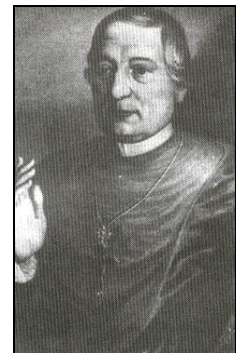
General Vaubois 4



Reynaud d'Angelis 5



Bosredon Ransijat 6



Mons. F.S. Caruana 7

Unit F.1 – F.2 – The French Invasion and Capitulation of Malta

1. Write **true** or **false** to these statements:

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| a | Napoleon invaded Malta on his way to India. | |
| b | Napoleon wanted to turn Malta into a naval base for the French fleet. | |
| c | The French had the secret support of some of the French Knights. | |
| e | The Maltese refused to support the Knights against the French. | |
| f | Malta fell to the French between the 9 th and the 12 th of June 1798. | |

(5)

2. Look at the picture sources in Unit F.1.

(a) Name the persons of source 1: _____ and source 4: _____ (2)

(b) What event do sources 2, 3, 5 and 6 describe?

_____ (2)

3. Look at the sources in Unit F.2. Match column A with Column B.

| | | Source No. | | |
|---|---------------------------|------------|--|--|
| A | Napoleon Bonaparte | 1 | | one of the French Commissioners. |
| B | Claude-Henri Vaubois | 4 | | ex-secretary of Grand Master Hompesch |
| C | Reynaud de Angelis | 5 | | a Maltese member in the French Commission. |
| D | Bosredon de Ransijat | 6 | | the French General who took over Malta. |
| E | Francesco Saverio Caruana | 7 | | the only French Governor of Malta. |

4. (a) Source 2 is a hasty hand-written document signed by Grand Master Hompesch. What do you think was the subject matter of this document?

_____ (1)

(b) Why was it hastily written? _____

_____ (1)

5. Source 3 in Unit F.2 is a printed document published in Malta by Napoleon. What information do you think was included in this document and why was it sent to France?

 _____ (1, 1)

6. Read the information given in the table in Unit F.2 and say what is your impression about Napoleon's reforms in Malta.

 _____ (2)

(Total 20 marks)

Unit F.3 – Government by the French Commission

5. Why did the Maltese revolt against the French?

When Napoleon left on 19th June some 300 Maltese joined the French army and went with him to Egypt. After Napoleon's departure, the **French Commission of Government** was headed by **General Claude-Henri Vaubois**. He at once started to put into force some of Napoleon's reforms. But the way changes were handled made the village people unhappy under the new French Government. It was from this section of the people that the **revolt** against the French was to come about. Some causes of the revolt were:

- On 14th July the French made the Maltese take part in the commemoration of the fall of the Bastille.
- Although Napoleon had abolished censorship, there was no real **freedom of the press**. The only newspaper was the *Journal de Malta*, owned by the Government.
- The Government did not pay the wages for the families of those Maltese who joined Napoleon's army in Egypt.
- People whose property was damaged during the fighting were not given compensation.
- The Government stopped giving pensions and charity to paupers.
- The interest rate at the Monte di Pietà was raised from 4% to 6%.
- Money in the Maltese bank (*Massa Frumentaria*) was taken by the French Government.
- Silver-ware left by the Knights in the Palace was melted to make coins.

The Maltese soon realized that the French Government was short of money. To make up for this loss, the French decided to raise taxes and take over some of the treasures found in the churches. These fears triggered (started) the Maltese revolt on 2nd September 1798.



1. Commemoration of Bastille Day, 14th July 1798



2. Proclamation urging the people to take part during the Bastille Day celebrations

Unit F.4 – The Revolt of the Maltese against the French

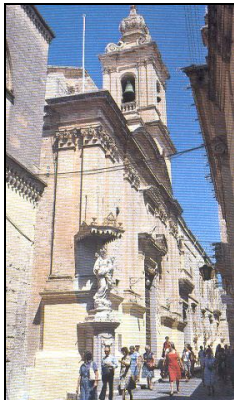
6. What exactly happened during the early days of September 1798?

On 2nd September the Commissioner **Reynaud de Angelis** sent Officer **Masson** with a group of French soldiers to despoil churches at Rabat and Mdina. The Maltese were informed about this and they hid the treasures in the house of Notary **Manwel Vitale** before the French arrived. The French ended up roaming the streets of Rabat insulting the Maltese. The rebels captured and threw the three French officers from the balcony of a French sympathizer. The French garrison in Mdina closed the gates of Mdina and asked for more troops from Valletta. The Maltese then chose Manwel Vitale as their general and attacked the French garrison in Mdina. The following day they entered Mdina from a secret tunnel beneath the fortifications and took the French garrison by surprise. Some 20 French soldiers and two Maltese lost their life in the fight.

The news of what was happening in Mdina spread quickly throughout the island. Thousands of Maltese peasants armed with muskets, pistols and agricultural tools gathered outside at *Porte des Bombes*. Their aim was to block the French from sending soldiers to Mdina. By this time the French had already lost control of the countryside. **Mons. Francesco Saverio Caruana**, the Maltese member in the French Government resigned and joined the Maltese rebels. He was appointed General and had his headquarters at *Casa Leone* in Sta Venera. Another leading Maltese, Vincenzo Borg Brared organized the people of Birkirkara against the French.

On 3rd September the Gozitans, learning what had happened in Malta, rose in revolt too. **Dun Saverio Cassar**, parish priest of Rabat was chosen as leader. The *Banca Giuratale* at Rabat was made their headquarters and the French garrison was blocked in the Citadel. On 28th September 1798 the French garrison surrendered to the British who escorted them safely to Valletta. The following day the British gave the Citadel to the Gozitans. They Gozitans then set up a provisional government, declared King **Ferdinand IV of Naples** as their sovereign and governed the island in his name.

On 5th September Gen. Vaubois prepared his troops for a long blockade within the harbour towns. He sent letters to France Government asking for help. The French garrison consisted out 4,000 soldiers stationed in the main harbour forts. The French had 640 canons which had been left by the Knights which he could against the Maltese.



1 Carmelite Church, Mdina



2 The Maltese Revolt at Rabat



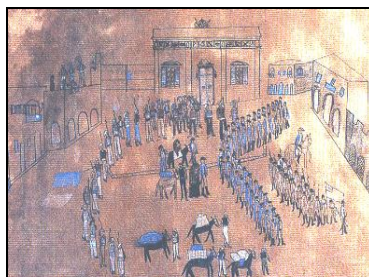
3 Portes de Bombes at the time of the French



4 Manwel Vitale



5 V. Borg Brared



6 The French surrender of Gozo



7 Dun Saver Cassar

Unit F.3 & F.4 Government by the French and the Maltese Revolt

1. How did the French Commission of Government try to solve the problem of shortage of money?

Give **two** examples.

_____ (2)

2. Read carefully Unit F.3 and then identify the **two** measures that caused the greatest discontent among the Maltese.

_____ (2)

3. Why there was not real freedom of the press under the French?

_____ (1)

4. How did the French lose the control of the countryside by early September 1798?

_____ (1)

5. What was General Vaubois forced to do as a result of this loss?

_____ (1)

6. Look at sources 1 and 2 in Unit 6.3. Which common event do they represent?

_____ (1)

7. Explain briefly the part played by these people in the Revolt of the Maltese against the French.

(1) Manwel Vitale: _____

(2) Officer Masson: _____

(3) Dun Saver Cassar: _____

(4) Vincenzo Borg Brared: _____

(5) Ferdinand IV: _____

(6) F.S. Caruana: _____
_____ (12)

(Total = 20 marks)

Unit F.5 - The Maltese side of the Blockade

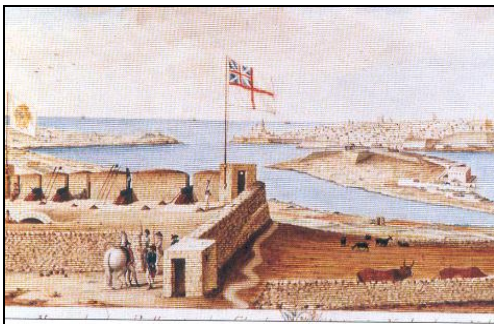
7. The Maltese side of the Blockade

On 3rd September the Maltese set up a National Assembly at the *Banca Giuratale* to govern the islands and to continue the blockade against the French. The Maltese chosen leaders organized the Maltese into fighting regiments. They set up cannon batteries around the harbours to stop the French from bringing in soldiers, weapons and food supplies. The Assembly chose colours of Mдина (red white) as the Maltese national flag. It appointed a number of officials to govern the islands: a Commander-in-Chief, an ambassador to the Court of **Ferdinand IV of Naples**, the ruler of Malta, a government secretary, an artillery officer, an inspector of the coastal towers and officers responsible to buy, store and distribute grain among the villagers.

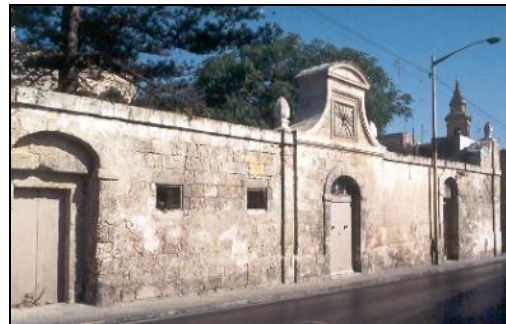
The National Assembly gave shelter and food for thousands of Maltese refugees that were expelled from the harbour towns by the French. In the winter of 1799 there followed a **bad harvest** because many peasants left their fields to give a helping hand in the organizing the blockade. A **fever epidemic** killed hundreds of Maltese. The hospitals of *Santo Spirito* and **Sawra Hospital** at Rabat became overcrowded with patients. Temporary hospitals had to be set up in the villages and in some of the convents.

The Maltese were not strong enough to force the French surrender without foreign help. They thus asked for help from the King of Naples. At that time the British were allies of King Ferdinand. The British Admiral **Horatio Nelson** came to Malta to assess the situation. He sailed to Malta with some Portuguese ships to block the main harbours. While Nelson was in Malta, the French surrendered the Citadel of Gozo (28th Sept. 1798). Before he left, Nelson appointed **Capt. Alexander Ball** as his representative. Ball was to advise the Maltese during the blockade. The Maltese appointed Ball as President of the **National Congress**. He kept his headquarters at **San Anton Palace**. From there he helped the Maltese in the government of the islands.

During the blockade the King of Naples sent soldiers, money and grain to the Maltese. In 1799 and in 1800 respectively, two British commanders General **Thomas Graham** and Major-General **Henry Pigot** came to Malta with hundreds of British infantry soldiers. The British Government was strengthening its hold on the Maltese Islands. The remaining obstacle to this control was the presence of the French garrison in the harbour towns.



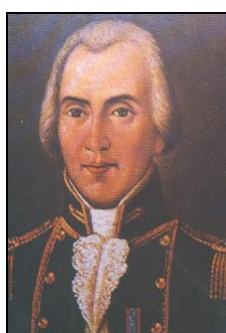
1 *A Maltese battery overlooking M'Xett*



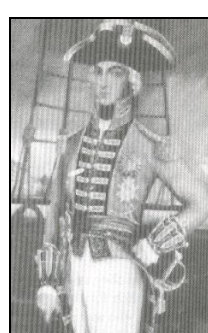
2 *Santo Spirito Hospital at Rabat*



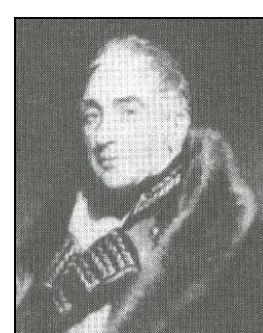
3 *Admiral Nelson*



4 *Alexander Ball*



5 *Admiral de Real*



6 *General Graham*

Unit F.6 - The French side of the Blockade

8. The French side of the Blockade

General Vaubois sent out thousands of Maltese from the harbour cities so that food supplies could last longer. By the time the blockade ended only 7,000 Maltese were left from the original 40,000 inhabitants.

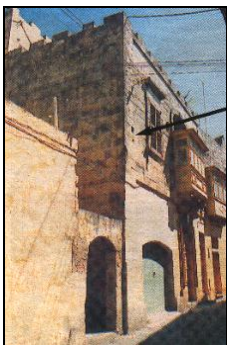
On 5th September 1798 the French attacked the village of Zabbar. The plan was to encircle the village, cut it from outside help and steal as much food as they could. But the French found the village completely deserted. When they went into the narrow streets, the villagers attacked them from the windows and roofs that the buildings. It was the last time n the French tried to break the blockade.

In December 1798 a small group of Maltese patriots in Valletta planned to open the gates to let in some 200 armed villagers. The leaders of the plot were **Dun Mikiel Xerri** (1738-99), **Guliero Lorenzi** and **Matthew Pulis** (a quarantine office). But the French guards at Marsamxett heard noises on the night of 12th January 1798 and spread the alarm. The plotters were caught and 40 of them were executed by a firing squad at the Palace Square - Dun Mikeil Xerri and Lorenzi were among the victims.

When Napoleon returned to France from Egypt the relief of Malta was given top priority. But the ships that left Toulon for Malta were caught by the British. From then onwards no relief forces or supplies were sent from France. The French garrison in Malta was left on its own. In the summer of 1800 life for the French garrison became desperate. Governor Vaubois had to introduce food rationing. Bosredon de Ransijat wrote in his diary:

'Apart from the donkeys, mules and horses which continued to be slaughtered and eaten as before, the greater part of the dogs and cats as well as a quantity of rats followed their fate. The latest hunt, made quite recently, for those animals in the military bakery netted 55 of those frightful rodents. It was solely in this locality that one could hope to find them, being bigger than those found in other places.'

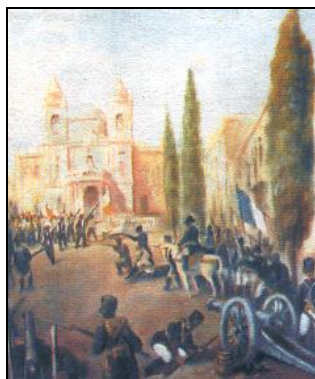
Vaubois knew that the stored food would last only until the end of September. Without no relief force in sight, he signed the capitulation of the islands to the British commanders on 5th October 1800. The Maltese leaders were left out from the negotiations about the conditions of the surrender of Malta. The French garrison was escorted to Toulon on board British ships.



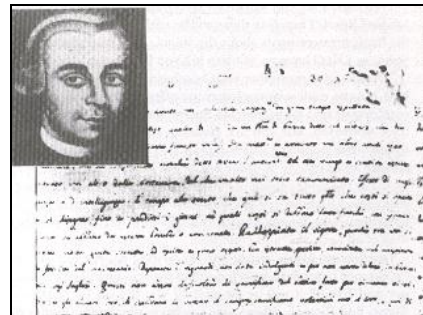
1 *A Żabbar house with a canon ball*



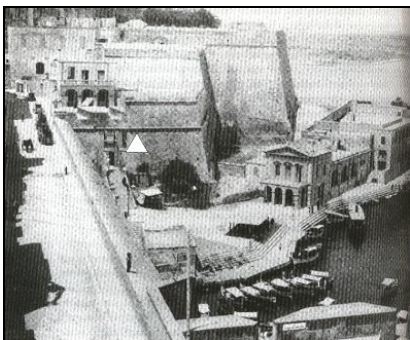
2



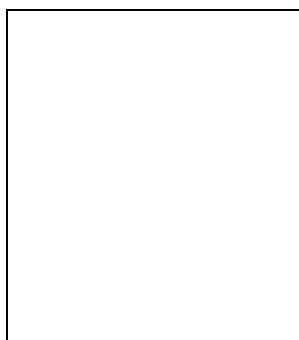
3 *The battle of Zabbar*



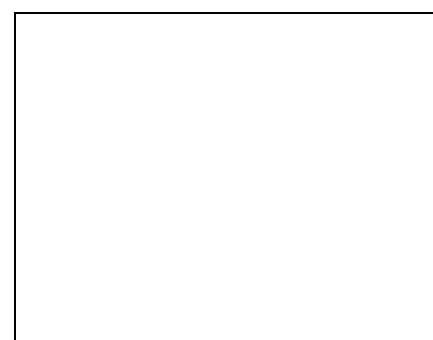
4 *One of Dun Mikiel Xerri's conspiracy letter*



5 *Where the conspiracy was discovered*



6 *The French on board British ships*



7 *The capitulation in Palace Square*

Unit F.5 & F.6 - The Maltese and the French Side of the Blockade

1. How did the Maltese govern the islands during the blockade? Identify **two** features.

(2)

2. Identify and list **two** problems that the Maltese had to face during the French blockade.

(2)

3. (a) Which **two** foreign powers helped the Maltese during the blockade?

(2)

(b) What kind of help did they give to the Maltese?

(2)

4. Look at the sources 1, 2 and 3 in Unit F.5 about the events that took place at Żabbar in 1798. Describe, in about two sentences, what happened on that day.

(4)

5. Sources 3 to 6 show foreign military leaders who helped the Maltese against the French. Match column A with column B.

| | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|--|--|
| A | Horatio Nelson | | Portuguese admiral who helped the Maltese. |
| B | Nizza de Real | | British Admiral who sent help to Malta. |
| C | Thomas Graham and Henry Pigot | | helped the Maltese in the blockade. |
| D | Captain Alexander Ball | | British commanders stationed in Malta. |

(4)

6. Identify **two** problems which the French had to face during the blockade.

(2)

7. Do you think the French would have surrendered Malta without foreign help? Give a reason for your answer.

(2)

Unit F.7 – SEC Source Question on Malta under the French

The following extract includes some instructions by Major General Sir Henry Pigot regarding the negotiations for the French surrender. Read it carefully and then answer all the questions below.

‘Instructions to Brigadier-General Graham treating with General Vaubois for the surrender of La Valletta: You are to insist as long as possible upon the garrison remaining prisoners of war until regularly exchanged...you may agree to their being at once transported to France, giving them parole, however, not to bear arms against His Majesty, or his allies, until they shall be exchanged for an equal number of such prisoners as may be in possession of the French.

Should the garrison surrender on the last mentioned conditions, such a number are to be put immediately on board ships...the remainder are to be accommodated on shore in what may be considered the most convenient situation, but you will endeavour to stipulate their arms should be given up, on a promise on our part to restore them when they are to sail for France.

Those on shore will receive provisions from us for the first few days till an arrangement can be made for their supplying themselves. Those on board will receive the ship’s provisions.

If the French General should wish to stipulate that no Maltese should be allowed to enter the place till the French are gone, it should be confined to no armed Maltese...If medicines or medical assistance is required, it should of course be granted to them.

No arrangement is to be entered with the enemy’s garrison that can in any manner prove an obstacle to the re-establishment of the Order of the Knights of St John...as Sovereign of the Island.

All plans and writings which have any relation to the place and its fortifications are to be faithfully delivered up.

All the cannon, ammunition, and public property of every kind must be given up without any reserve.’

- 1.1 In which month and year did this event take place? _____ (2)
- 1.2 What was the nationality of (a) Graham? _____ and (b) Pigot? _____ (2)
- 1.3 Where did the capitulation of the French take place? _____ (1)
- 1.4 What does the source say about the treatment of the French garrison after its surrender to the British? Give **two** examples. _____ (2)
_____ (2)
- 1.5 Why did the British want to get rid of the French prisoners as soon as possible? _____ (2)
- 1.6 What does the source say about the Maltese in the negotiations? Give a reason why this was so? _____ (1,2)

- 1.7.1 How is the Order of St John mentioned in the source? _____ (1)

- 1.7.2 Did this arrangement take place? State why? _____ (2)

1.8 Say why you agree or disagree with Pigot's instructions.

(1,2)

(Total 20 marks)

Unit F.8 – Malta under the French

Read carefully the following essay titles and answer any ONE in about 200 to 300 words.

Essay carry 20 marks each.

PAPER 2A

On the period of French occupation (1798-1800)

1. Why were different sections of the Maltese population antagonized by French 'reforms' in 1798?
2. What were the main changes which Napoleon and the French tried to make in the life of the Maltese? Why did different sections of the Maltese resist such changes? (Marks: 10, 10)
3. Account for the positive reforms of the French administration. Why did other unpopular measures lead to the Maltese Revolt? (Annual Paper 2009) (Marks: 8, 12)
4. Why did the French occupation of Malta last for only two years? (Annual Paper, 2010)

PAPER 2B

On the period of French occupation (1798-1800)

1. In 1798 Napoleon Bonaparte captured Malta and drove away the Order of St John. Trace what happened in the first six days from the French arrival to the departure of Napoleon for Egypt. (SEC 1998)
2. Explain what happened during the French rule in Malta (1798-1800) in each of these events:
 - (a) The French take over from the Order.
 - (b) Reforms affecting Maltese religious affairs.
 - (c) The organization of the uprising of the Maltese against the French. (SEC 2009) (Marks: 4, 8, 8)