

THE HOUSE OF ARAGON AND MALTA: 1282-1412*

By ANTHONY LUTTRELL

MALTA and Gozo, two small and barren islands lying between Sicily and Africa at the very centre of the Mediterranean, were for many centuries dependent on Sicily, if only because their rocky soil and limited water supply meant that the population had to import foodstuffs. The Norman, Hohenstaufen and Angevin rulers of Sicily all considered that it would have been dangerous to allow Malta to be controlled by a hostile power. The Maltese were influenced in many ways by their successive conquerors, but the isolation and smallness of the islands helped them to preserve their own characteristics; their Christian heritage survived centuries of Muslim occupation just as their African language subsequently endured through centuries of European rule. In 1282 Malta and Gozo were governed by the Angevin Kings of Sicily, and they enjoyed a small measure of prosperity as a commercial outpost of Genoese and other traders. Following the conquest of Sicily by King Pere of Aragon, the Maltese recognized the new regime. When Charles of Anjou, King of Naples, attempted to use Malta as a base for the recovery of Sicily, the Aragonese Admiral Ruggiero Lauria inflicted a decisive defeat on the Angevin fleet in a great battle fought in the harbour at Malta on 8 July 1283.¹

The importance of Malta and Gozo was purely strategic, since they were of little value for their products or as commercial outposts. They exported small quantities of cotton, but their food supplies were insufficient; they suffered from Muslim razzias; and they were ruthlessly ex-

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¹ There is no satisfactory history of medieval Malta, and what has been written is often seriously confused. Much of the detail in G. ABELA, *Malta illustrata*, expanded edition by G. CIANTAR, 2 vols. (Malta, 1772-1780), is inaccurate. P. DE JOVE Y HEVIA, *Indagaciones acerca de la dominacion de Espana en Malta de 1285 a 1530* (Madrid, 1863), is brief and outdated. The fundamental works are still the articles and documents published by A. MIFSUD, in *Archivum Melitense*, ii-iv (1914-1920), and by R. VALENTINI, in *Archivio Storico di Malta*, v-xiii (1934-1942); see also G. WETTINGER-M. FSADNI, *Peter Caxaro's Cantilena: a Poem in Medieval Maltese* (Malta, 1968). The royal registers in the Archivo de la Corona de Aragon at Barcelona contain rather little material concerning Malta, but the sources for Sicilian history, both published and unpublished, are rich in references.

ploited by the Sicilian magnates, to whom the islands were periodically granted.² Malta had a good harbour which served as a refuge both for the corsairs who brought in certain profits and for shipping blown off its route. It was a port-of-call for vessels trading to Tunisia and elsewhere in North Africa, but it did not lie on any major sea-lane, since shipping sailing from the Western Mediterranean towards the markets of Egypt, Asia and Byzantium normally followed a more northern route, passing from Sicilian ports directly to Coron in Greece, to Crete or to Cyprus, while the Venetians bound for Spain, the Atlantic or North Africa usually sailed along the north coast of Sicily. In fact, neither the Genoese nor the Venetian showed any consistent interest in Malta during this period; Venice was often allied to the Aragonese Crown, and the Genoese presumably realized that it would be hard to retain Malta while the Aragonese controlled Sicily.³ For the Aragonese Crown and its mercantile subjects in Barcelona and the other ports who built up an economic and dynastic hegemony stretching from Aragon, Valencia and Catalunya to Mallorca, Sardinia and Sicily, Malta and Gozo lay just beyond the fringe of their Western Mediterranean commonwealth; and while Catalan trade in North Africa was of paramount importance, Malta was not a significant port on Catalan routes to Tunis.⁴ Nor was it a stepping-stone to the East where, in any case, Aragonese interests were always secondary. The Aragonese were concerned with places like Cyprus or Athens which offered a prestige attraction and might be useful pawns in the diplomatic game, but the crown was never prepared to expend financial or naval resources on them.⁵ The visionary Mallorquin Ramon Lull, writing soon after 1300, suggested that Malta should be used as a crusading base from which Christian merchants could be prevented from trading illegally with the Muslims,⁶ but the Aragonese rulers were realists for whom Malta was for long periods no more than a frontier station of minor importance on the eastern margin of their Mediterranean empire; their chief concern was that it should not be in enemy hands.

In the years immediately following their conquest of Sicily, the Aragon-

² On the economic-geographical background, see B. BLOUET, *The Story of Malta* (London, 1967), with a select bibliography.

³ Details in A. LUTTRELL, 'Venetians at Medieval Malta', *Melita Historica*, iii, no. 1 (1960), 74-76.

⁴ See C. DUFOURCQ, *L'Espagne catalane et le Maghrib aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles* (Paris, 1966).

⁵ This thesis is argued in A. LUTTRELL, 'La Corona de Aragon y la Grecia catalana: 1379-1392', *Anuario de estudios medievales* (forthcoming).

⁶ Text in A. GOTTRON, *Ramon Lull's Kreuzzugsideen* (Berlin-Leipzig, 1912), 86.

ese did however appreciate the importance of Malta for the retention of Sicily itself and for their influence in North Africa. Ramon Muntaner, who was governor of the island of Gerba off the coast of Tunisia, described how the Aragonese manifested their joy when in 1283 they received rumours that the *castrum* at Malta had fallen; Muntaner wrote: 'the castle is most royal and fine, and the castle and the island stand well to the island of Sicily as the stone suits the ring.'⁷ The bulk of the Maltese population went over to the Aragonese at a time when the future of the Kingdom of Sicily was still in doubt, perhaps partly as a result of Angevin oppression and taxation, partly because the Maltese depended on grain supplies from Sicily. On 9 December 1282 Pere of Aragon had nominated a notary for the island of Malta; on 23 January he intervened to protect a Genoese merchant there. By this time Malta and Gozo had asked Pere for help, and the Angevin governor Dionigi de Barba was acting as Justiciar of Malta for Pere. On 27 January the Aragonese king excused himself for not sending prompt aid on the grounds that his fleet needed repairs and that there was no immediate danger; he confirmed the privileges of the Maltese; and he granted facilities for grain to be sent from Sicily to Malta. In February and March Pere was negotiating with Matteo del Poggio for the submission of the *castrum*, which was considered impregnable. On 12 April Pere wrote from Messina to Manfredi Lancia, his new Captain and Justiciar in Malta and Gozo, and on 19 April he granted a privilege to the men of both islands at their request; Malta and Gozo were to be perpetually incorporated into the royal *demanium et dominium*, as they had been by a privilege of the Emperor Frederick of Hohenstaufen which dated to the period of the emperor's youth before 1198 and which was issued jointly in his name and that of his mother Constança of Aragon.⁸

In the summer of 1283 the garrison of the *castrum* by the sea in the grand harbour at Malta was relieved by the Angevin fleet, which thus threatened Pere's position in Sicily and his supply-lines from North Africa. Ruggiero Lauria arrived in time to prevent the complete loss of the island by his victory of 8 July 1283, his men fighting to the cry 'Arago! Arago! via sus! via sus!' Malta and Gozo were reconquered. The inhabitants received Lauria well, giving him money, jewels and provisions, and he left behind three hundred *homens de Cathalans* for their defence, since he was unable to take the castle without siege-engines.⁹ The Castle

⁷ *Chronik des edlen en Ramon Muntaner*, ed. K. LANZ (Stuttgart, 1844), cap. 100.

⁸ Texts in G. SILVESTRI, *De rebus regni Siciliae* (Palermo, 1882), 316-319, 418-419, 422-423, 436-439, 611-612; appendice, 19, 134, 141; cf. VALENTINI, vi. 26-31; viii. 35-36.

⁹ MUNTANER, caps. 81-84; further details and references in M. AMARI, *La guerra*

itself continued to resist, and the Angevins were concerned to provision it at least until February 1284.¹⁰ Meanwhile the Aragonese were building up a hegemony based on the possession of Sicily, their influence in North Africa, and their control of the islands lying in between. The conquest of Malta was completed by Manfredi Lancia, Captain of Malta and a kinsman of Ruggiero Lauria; Lauria himself captured and acquired titles to Gerba and Kerkena, establishing a kind of maritime principality between Sicily and Africa.¹¹ These developments did not pass unchallenged. An Angevin fleet from Calabria landed on Malta in the spring of 1287, recaptured the *castrum*, and then attacked Augusta in Sicily.¹² At Avignon on 16 June 1290 Charles of Anjou, King of Naples, recognized the ancient claims to the County of Malta of a certain Andreolo, who declared himself ready to attack the island; this was probably the sea-captain Andreolo de Mari of Genoa, and Charles perhaps hoped for Genoese support in the enterprise.¹³ In fact, Andreolo soon went over to the Aragonese, and by October 1292 he had been recognized as Count of Malta by Jaume of Aragon, King of Sicily, who was well aware of the island's importance. In 1287 Jaume insisted that whatever conditions were agreed for a peace with the Angevins, he should continue to hold not only Sicily but also Malta, Gozo, Pantelleria, the Lipari islands and the joint Sicul-Catalan fonduk at Tunis; and he repeated this insistence in 1290. A few years later, at Barcelona on 27 and 28 October 1292, having become King of Aragon as well as of Sicily, Jaume gave orders for the strengthening of the garrison and castle at Malta.¹⁴

The whole situation in the Western Mediterranean became confused in 1296 after Jaume of Aragon had renounced the Sicilian Crown and his younger brother Federigo had, to Jaume's annoyance, been elected King of Sicily. For a while Malta was in danger from Jaume and also from Ruggiero Lauria who retained control of Gerba. On 25 March 1296 Federigo appointed Lauria Admiral of Sicily, but he soon abandoned Federigo and

del Vespro Siciliano, ii (Milano, 1886), 13-18; DUFOURCQ, 263, wrongly dates the battle to 1284 and gives *Conrado* Lancia.

¹⁰ Eleven letters (September 1283 to February 1284) in V. LAURENZA, in *Archivio Storico di Malta*, v (1934), 157-168, and R. MOSCATI, *ibid.*, vii (1936), 507-508. VALENTINI, vi. 31, wrongly dates that of 21 November 1283 to 1284; in fact, the *castrum* probably fell early in 1284.

¹¹ Cf. DUFOURCQ, 259-268 *et passim*.

¹² Text of 15 May 1287 in MOSCATI, 508-509.

¹³ Text in LAURENZA, 168-169; cf. VALENTINI, vii. 38-40.

¹⁴ Texts in G. LA MANTIA, *Codice diplomatico dei re aragonesi di Sicilia*, 2 vols. (Palermo, 1917-1956), i. 364-365, 466-467; ii (ed. A. DE STEFANO-F. GIUNTA), 309, 317-318.

on 2 April 1297 Jaume reappointed him Admiral of Aragon.¹⁵ Malta and Gozo were attacked and devastated by an Aragonese fleet, apparently in 1297,¹⁶ a move which had no clear motive but served as a demonstration to Federigo of Aragonese sea-power. Ruggiero Lauria subsequently fought for the Angevins as well, and on 22 April 1300 Charles of Anjou King of Naples, who had already made Lauria Admiral of Naples, invested him and his heirs in perpetuity with the County of Malta;¹⁷ on Lauria's death in January 1305 the claim passed to his son Rogeró, but his rule at Gerba was ineffective and short-lived.¹⁸

The position of Malta and Gozo with respect to the Aragonese Crown was altered when Jaume of Aragon renounced the Kingdom of Sicily. For some eighty years the islands were governed by the Kings of Sicily, but these kings were still members of the house of Aragon, and Sicily continued dynastically, politically and economically to form part of the commonwealth dominated from Barcelona; despite moments of tension, the islands thus remained within the union of the dominions of the Crown of Aragon.¹⁹ In fact, on 7 October 1345 the King of Sicily authorized the Catalan consul at Messina to nominate a vice-consul at Malta and Gozo.²⁰ Politically, the Sicilian Kings continued the practice of granting out the islands as a county. After Ruggiero Lauria's revolt against King Federigo in 1297, the islands were confiscated from Lauria, and they reverted to the royal *curia*. In 1300 Federigo considered enfeoffing the *castrum* at Malta to the Genoese,²¹ but subsequently the islands were, apparently, conceded to Luchina Aragona, from whom they passed to her husband Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada; and in 1320 they returned to the crown when King Federigo exchanged them for Augusta and other places which were granted to Moncada.²² Malta and Gozo were later granted to Guglielmo,

¹⁵ DUFOURCQ, 341, 408-409.

¹⁶ The attack was described in a protest of Federigo dated Palermo, 13 February 1298: text in H. FINKE, *Acta Aragonensia*, iii (Berlin, 1923), 68-70.

¹⁷ Text in LAURENZA, 169-171; numerous authors follow ABELA, i, 732, in confusing Lauria with Ruggiero de Flor.

¹⁸ MUNTANER, cap. 248; cf. DUFOURCQ, 430-432, 579.

¹⁹ Cf. A. LUTTRELL, 'Malta and the Aragonese Crown: 1282-1530', *Journal of the Faculty of Arts: Royal Malta University*, iii, no. 1 (1965), which treats the present topic more generally and from the point of view of Malta rather than from that of the Aragonese Crown. See also the bibliography in S. TRAMONTANA, 'La Spagna catalana nel Mediterraneo e in Sicilia', *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 50 (1966).

²⁰ Text in A. CAPMANY Y MONPALAU, *Memorias historicas sobre la marina, comercio y artes de la antigua ciudad de Barcelona*, revised edition, ii part 1 (Barcelona, 1962), 232.

²¹ Text in *Liber Iurium Reipublicae Genuensis*, ii (Torino, 1867), 415-418.

²² References in V. D'ALESSANDRO, *Politica e società nella Sicilia aragonese*

the younger son of King Federigo. Then in September 1330 the king confirmed an act by which Guglielmo ceded the islands to his half-brother Alfonso Federigo d'Aragona, the king's natural son; he was to enjoy the *jurisdictio criminalis* and the *merum et mixtum imperium*. On the death of Alfonso Federigo, which occurred by August 1349 at the latest, Malta passed to his eldest son Pietro Federigo, Lord of Salona in Greece, where he resided. In March 1350, however, Pietro Federigo d'Aragona was accused by the Venetians of piracy; subsequently he was deprived of his Greek titles, and by 1355 he was dead.²³ He also lost Malta and Gozo which, at their inhabitants' request, were reincorporated into the royal *demanium* by an act of King Ludovico dated 7 October 1350. By this time a clear pattern had emerged: the crown conceded Malta and Gozo to powerful Sicilian magnates or to royal cadets; the population, anxious to escape exploitation by greedy counts, petitioned for reincorporation into the royal *demanium*; the crown granted this request in perpetuity, but subsequently in a moment of weakness granted out the county once again. The counts had certain powers, such as the nomination of Captains and Justiciars and the exercise of the *merum et mixtum imperium*, but the islands were still part of the Kingdom of Sicily; their *universitates* continued to enjoy their privileges, the Crown and the Admiral of Sicily continued to impose taxes and exercise certain powers in the islands, and ecclesiastically Malta continued to suffer from the interdicts imposed by the Papacy on the Kingdom of Sicily.²⁴

This pattern of Siculo-Aragonese rule at Malta was threatened when in 1356 the troops of Jeanne Anjou, Queen of Naples, captured Messina and Palermo. On 30 March 1357 Jeanne issued a diploma enfeoffing her powerful favourite the Florentine Niccolò Acciaiuoli, Grand Seneschal of the Kingdom of Naples, with the County of Malta and Gozo; every year on the feast of Pentecost he was to provide 'the service of one black slave, dressed in crimson cloth and bathed the night before...' The Neapolitans were soon expelled from Sicily itself and the danger passed, though the claim to Malta was inherited by Niccolò's son Angelo Acciaiuoli, who was still using the title when he drew up his will in 1391.²⁵ The men of

(Palermo, 1963), 25, 54-56, 58 note 81, 67. The idea that Giovanni, son of King Federigo, was made Count of Malta seems to originate in ABELA, i, 732-733.

²³ Texts in A. RUBIO I LLUCH, *Diplomatari di l'Orient català: 1301-1409* (Barcelona, 1947), 253, 298-299, 482-485; cf. R.-J. LOENERTZ, in *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, xxv (1955), 174-175. Alfonso Federigo was still count in 1335 (partial text in MIFSUD, iii, 277 note 1).

²⁴ VALENTINI, vii, 46-51.

²⁵ Texts in J. BUCHON, *Nouvelles recherches historiques sur la principauté*

Malta maintained their allegiance, and in January 1357 Federigo addressed a letter to Giacomo de Peregrino his Captain, Justiciar and Castellan in the islands.²⁶ Yet the threat had been real enough, and the Acciaiuoli were no friends to the Aragonese Crown which suffered severely from their activities in Greece where Nerio Acciaiuoli, another son of Niccolò, became Lord of Corinth and the greatest enemy of the Catalans who were established at Thebes and Athens.²⁷ Meanwhile on 29 December 1360 King Federigo of Sicily granted the County of Malta and Gozo to Guido Ventimiglia, Captain of Trapani. Guido did not go there, however, and in 1362 he died.²⁸ The county returned to the royal *demanium*, but on 4 May 1366 it was enfeoffed in perpetuity to Manfredi Chiaramonte, Admiral of Sicily. Malta was already in revolt, and on 5 May the king conceded Terranova in Sicily to Chiaramonte *usque ad acquisitionem insularum Meliveti et Gauditii*.²⁹ In 1371 the Genoese took advantage of these troubles, sending ten galleys to sack Malta which they considered a refuge of corsairs.³⁰ During 1372 the *castrum* was reconquered, and in November King Federigo visited Malta in person to settle the rebellion.³¹ On 31 January 1376 Federigo appointed another of his own kinsmen, Giovanni Federigo d'Aragona, as Captain of Malta, enjoining him to go there in person.³²

Federigo died on 27 July 1377 leaving the Kingdom of Sicily to his daughter Maria. One party of magnates recognized her as their Queen, but King Pere of Aragon also had claims to the kingdom and there ensued a long period of civil strife, which was complicated by the schism in the Roman church. Malta was naturally involved in these struggles. The

française de Morée, ii(Paris, 1843), 138-143, 163, 204-214; cf. VALENTINI, vii. 51-53.

²⁶ Text in G. COSENTINO, *Codice diplomatico di Federico III di Aragona, re di Sicilia: 1355-1377*, i(Palermo, 1855), 322-323.

²⁷ LOENERTZ, 134, 137, 143, 152-155, 194-195.

²⁸ Details in D'ALESSANDRO, 97 note 39, 99 note 51.

²⁹ Text in A. INVEGES, *Carthago Sicula*, in J. GRAEVIUS, *Thesaurus Antiquitatum* ... xii(Leyden, 1725), 176. A variation on the second document written in Sicilian (dated Malta, 12 April 1369!) is printed by E. GENTILE, in *Archivio Storico di Malta*, viii(1937), 392-393. VALENTINI, vii. 54-58, attributes the six-year revolt to the perpetual infeudation of May 1366, but it was apparently already under way by then.

³⁰ U. FOGLIETTA, *Dell'istorie di Genova* (Genova, 1597), 305.

³¹ VALENTINI, vii. 55.

³² Texts in Rubio, 442-444; cf. LOENERTZ, 178. References to three sisters of the house of Aragon established in Malta (eg. ABELA, ii. 261-263, 380-381, 468-472; MIFSUD, iii. 276) should apparently be to members of the Alagona family (VALENTINI, vii. 447 note 115).

Aragonese Crown had already shown a tentative interest in the island several years earlier. In June 1370 Eleonora of Sicily, a sister of Federigo who had become Queen of Aragon, wrote to her brother claiming the dowry of her sister Bianca of Sicily, who had married the Count of Ampurias; she suggested that, since the money was not forthcoming, Federigo should make over to the Aragonese Crown either the Duchies of Neopatras and Athens, or all the incomes and rights of Malta and Gozo until the dowry should be paid.³³

In his will Federigo left the County of Malta to his natural son Guglielmo,³⁴ but this provision seems not to have had effect. After Federigo's death, Pere of Aragon asserted his rights over Malta and Gozo by confirming, in documents of 1 and 18 September 1380, the claims to the County of Ludovico Federigo d'Aragona, Count of Salona, whose support in Greece he was anxious to ensure. Ludovico Federigo who was a nephew of Pietro Federigo d'Aragona who had been dispossessed of the county in 1350, remained in Greece where he died in 1382, his Greek claims and titles passing to his wife Helena Cantacuzena; he had no influence upon events in Malta, and neither his widow nor their daughter Maria seems to have claimed the County of Malta.³⁵ Meanwhile the young Queen Maria was abducted from Sicily and taken to Spain, where she was married to Martí whose father, Martí Duke of Montblanch, was a son of Pere of Aragon; Pere's claims to Sicily were transferred to the young couple. Effective control in Sicily passed to four great magnates, the *quattro vicari* – Artale Alagona, Manfredi Chiaramonte, Francesco Ventimiglia and Guglielmo Peralta – who divided the kingdom into spheres of influence and presided over a sort of controlled anarchy. Malta apparently came under the domination of Manfredi Chiaramonte, the most powerful of the *vicari*. At Chiaramonte's request a notarial copy of a royal document recognizing his claims to Malta was made on 15 June 1380;³⁶ he continued to entitle himself count, and in 1388 he led an expedition which seized the Tunisian island of Gerba, possibly using Malta as a base.³⁷ In Manfredi's will, dated 8 September 1390, he was styled *Comes Meliveti* and,

³³ Text in RUBIO, 413-415.

³⁴ According to G. ZURITA, *Anales de la Corona de Aragon*, ii(Zaragoza, 1610), 370.

³⁵ Texts in RUBIO, 480-485, 501; cf. LOENERTZ, 177; D. NICOLI, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus): ca. 1100-1460* (Washington, 1968), 160-163.

³⁶ Cited GENTILE, 393 note 2. For what follows, see the general background in D'ALESSANDRO and F. GIUNTA, *Aragonesi e catalani nel Mediterraneo*, i(Palermo, 1953); but these works provide no treatment of the history of Malta.

³⁷ Details in VALENTINI, vii. 56-59.

under certain rather complicated conditions, he provided for the *comitatus* of Malta and the *insula* of Gozo to pass, as her dowry, to his eldest daughter Elisabetta Chiaramonte, wife of Niccolò Peralta.³⁸

In March 1392 Martí of Aragon, Duke of Montblanc, arrived in Sicily to assert the joint claims of his son Martí and of Maria of Sicily. He aimed to reassert Aragonese predominance in the island and to reverse the long process by which power had passed from the crown to the barons, a programme which was not really completed until 1397. During those five years Malta remained at the mercy of the magnates. The Duke of Montblanc repeatedly tried to influence certain barons by granting them the County of Malta. Thus, at Barcelona on 12 November 1391, he had already approved various proposals sent by Giacomo Alagona from Sicily; *inter alia* he confirmed the possession of Malta by Giovanna Alagona, Giacomo's niece, on condition that she married *cum consilio* of the crown.³⁹ This agreement apparently remained a dead letter, for at a time when the Chiaramonte were being declared rebels, the Duke of Montblanc confiscated Malta and Gozo from Andrea Chiaramonte, to whom they must have passed after the death of his father Manfredi during the first half of 1391, and granted them on 2 April 1392 to Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada, a firm supporter of the Aragonese. In July 1393 this concession was revoked by Martí the Elder who on 5 July granted the islands to Artale Alagona, the nephew of Artale Alagona the late *vicario*, who was resisting the Aragonese at Aci, in an attempt to pacify him; Moncada was to be recompensed with lands in Sicily. By 16 July Moncada's son had reached Malta in a royal galley, and by 24 July he had handed the island over to Alagona's officials. This arrangement broke down at once when Alagona refused to surrender Aci and other lands in Sicily, and on 25 July the Duke of Montblanc instructed Orlando di Castro, Alagona's lieutenant in Malta, that the islands had reverted to the crown and that he was to consider himself a royal official; the duke also released Alagona's vassals in Malta from their allegiance to him. There were similar negotiations in 1394, and a royal document of 31 July once again confirmed Alagona as Count of Malta.⁴⁰ On 12 August 1394 Martí the Elder ordered that Moncada be

³⁸ Text in G. PIPITONE-FEDERICO, 'Il testamento di Manfredi Chiaramonte', in *Miscellanea di archeologia, storia e filologia dedicata al Prof. Antonio Salinas* (Palermo, 1907), 332-339.

³⁹ Text in D'ALESSANDRO, 327-329.

⁴⁰ Details in I. LA LUMIA, 'I quattro vicari', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, III ser., v. parte 2 (1867), 145, 176-177, 181-182, 205; MIFSUD, iii. 280-281; VALENTINI, vii. 59-61; GIUNTA, i. 200-201; D'ALESSANDRO, 135-137. The details of this complex story are still confused.

given the fief of Campetro in exchange for Malta.⁴¹ Martí continued to recognize Alagona's title,⁴² and a visitor to Gozo and Malta in June 1394 reported that both islands were under Alagona's rule.⁴³ Towards the end of 1394 the Duke of Montblanc sent Raimondo Abella, to whom he had confided two galleys *in corso*, to recover Malta and Gozo from Alagona who had raised the islands in revolt against the crown, and to set up a new administration;⁴⁴ again there was no success.

The Aragonese only slowly overcame opposition from the Sicilian barons. Artale Alagona's forces still held out at Aci in Sicily and in Malta, and in 1396 he attacked the Sicilian coast with two galleys which he had apparently armed at Malta, where he seems to have gone. He hoped to rescue his wife and a son from Aci, but having failed to do so he submitted to the Duke of Montblanc and was restored to the County of Malta, only to revolt again a few days later.⁴⁵ Once again Malta and Gozo were confiscated by the crown and on 13 December 1396 they were granted as a marquisate to Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada.⁴⁶ By January 1397 Moncada too was in revolt in Sicily,⁴⁷ though he was recognized as Marquis of Malta — *lu Magnificu Markisi di Malta* — in royal documents of February and March.⁴⁸ Moncada himself wrote, as Marquis of Malta, from Agrigento on 6 April to the Captain and people of Malta that he was sending envoys to receive their homage, and from Augusta on 5 June calling upon the men of Malta, from whom he had received a delegation, to serve and obey him.⁴⁹ Then on 16 November 1397 he was formally deprived of Malta and Gozo, which once again had suffered from their use as a centre of baronial

⁴¹ Text in F. GUARDIONE, in *Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale*, i(1904), 90-91.

⁴² Texts of 22 and 25 August in GUARDIONE, 95-97.

⁴³ 'Relation du pèlerinage à Jérusalem de Nicolas de Martoni, notaire italien: 1394-1395', ed. L. LEGRAND, *Revue de l'Orient latin*, iii(1895), 578-579.

⁴⁴ Documents of 15 December 1394 (cited LA LUMIA, 205) and 23 May 1395 (text in ABELA, ii. 390).

⁴⁵ ZURITA, ii. 422. At some point before 4 May 1396, the Duke had sent a royal galley under Bertrando Lancia to Malta *super quibusdam tractatis factis super reductione castri Iacii* (cited LUTTRELL, *Melita Historica*, iii, no. 1, 77 note 12).

⁴⁶ According to ZURITA, ii. 422v.

⁴⁷ D'ALESSANDRO, 152 note 127.

⁴⁸ Texts in G. BECCARIA, in *Archivio Storico Siciliano*, xiii(1888), 361-363, and G. LAGUMINA, *ibid.*, xvi(1891), 327, 331.

⁴⁹ Texts in MIFSUD, iii. 289-290, giving dates as 'agringenti VI. aprilis [4a inis 1396]', and 'Auguste V. iunii v Inis' [which gives 1396]; the first year was supplied from a copy and is impossible. VALENTINI, vii. 63, citing the manuscript, gives 6 April 1396 and 5 June 1397. Probably both documents date to 1397, but doubts remain.

resistance to Aragonese pretensions in Sicily.⁵⁰

The Maltese were in a desperate state after decades of exploitation by the rebellious counts who had ruined the islands, confiscated many lands and oppressed the population. The *universitates* therefore petitioned the crown that the islands should return to the royal *demanium*. Some Maltese had in fact resisted the baronial rebels, and Martí King of Sicily pardoned the islands. At Siracusa on 16 November 1397 they were reincorporated into the *demanium* and entered a period of direct royal government, and in February 1398 they were freed from paying various royal duties and taxes. At the same time a number of crown supporters who had suffered under Alagona and Moncada were rewarded with crown lands; one confiscated fief was granted in February 1398 to *Arnaldus Gueraldus civis civitatis Barchinone*. The effect of these concessions on the royal incomes, out of which the castles at Malta and Gozo had to be maintained, was so serious that in November 1399 they were revoked. The taxation imposed by Martí was heavy, but it was designed to provide for the defence of the islands against corsairs and razzias.⁵¹ The royal documents were still, incidentally, being issued in the names of the two Martí and of Maria *omnes tres cosedentes, conregentes et conregnantes*, though Martí the Elder became King of Aragon and departed for Spain following the death of his brother King Joan of Aragon in 1396. Martí the Younger was left to rule in Sicily under a form of *conreggenza*, which allowed his father to keep a strict control over Sicilian affairs even after he left the island. Malta and Gozo were in reality being governed by the King of Aragon.

During most of the fourteenth century, however, influences from Spain were rather limited. A number of the three hundred Catalans left on Malta and Gozo by Ruggiero Lauria in 1283 may have settled there. There was some Catalan economic activity in the islands, but it is doubtful whether the Catalans ever nominated the vice-consul at Malta and Gozo whom they were authorized to appoint in 1345. In 1356 a certain Joan Marserio, Catalan, was travelling from Sicily to reside in Malta and conduct business on the island of Lampedusa.⁵² A typical visit was one due to take place in 1362 when Francesco Ros planned to travel from Cagliari in Sardinia to Malta to receive from Arnaldo Cicera, an inhabitant of Malta, three pieces of cloth which a certain Bernardo Girdali of Cagliari had bequeathed to his brother Francesco.⁵³ Amau Gerau of Barcelona was

⁵⁰ Text cited in VALENTINI, vii. 61-62.

⁵¹ Texts and details in *ibid.*, v. 13-20, 37-54; vii. 61-65, 406-415; xiii. 15-20, 35-36.

⁵² Document of 1356 cited in COSENTINO, 246.

⁵³ Document (at Cagliari) cited in VALENTINI, vii. 53.

granted a fief in Malta in 1398, but he may not have resided there. The Gerau Desguanes whom King Martí sent to collect taxes in Malta in 1405, and who was appointed Castellan of the castle by the sea,⁵⁴ had possibly come directly from Catalunya to settle in Malta; the family did not appear in Malta before about 1400, but *Antonius de Isguanes* was one of the six major landholders in Malta in 1408.⁵⁵ The Desguanes do not seem to have been settled in Sicily, but most of the other Maltese notables with Catalan names belonged to families long established there.

In the ecclesiastical sphere the king had the right to present candidates for election to episcopal sees within the Kingdom of Sicily. From 1393 onwards Martí the Elder was attempting to install his own candidates, a process complicated by the schism in the Roman church, for while the followers of the Avignonese Popes were pro-Aragonese the Romanist clergy supported the baronial rebels. The candidates proposed by the king were mainly Sicilians whose chief interest was probably in those goods of the Maltese diocese which lay in Sicily; and when the king proposed Giovanni de Pino in 1393 some of the canons of Malta were actually resident in Catania. On 16 August 1408 King Martí did grant Miquel de Letras the goods of the Maltese bishopric to be held *in commendam*,⁵⁶ and by January 1410 Martí the Elder, King of Aragon, who had succeeded his son as King of Sicily, had appointed a royal confessor, the Franciscan Joan Eximeno of Mallorca, to administer the see of Malta for life, *veents que la esgleya de Malta, per tal com era destituida de idoneu pastor, era mal servida*.⁵⁷ It is unlikely that either Miquel de Letras or Joan Eximeno went to Malta before 1412, and in general very few Spaniards received benefices in the Maltese church.

Malta and Gozo were basically a part, though a rather special part, of the Kingdom of Sicily. The islands lay within the dominions of the Aragonese Crown, but on the margin of the interests of its rulers in Spain; they were ruled by a branch of the house of Aragon but not directly controlled by the Aragonese Crown, except during the periods after 1282 and 1392 when the rulers of Aragon were directly concerned with Sicily and thus

⁵⁴ Texts of 1398 and 1405 in *ibid.*, v. 43-46; viii. 73; cf. viii. 412-415.

⁵⁵ Text in R. GREGORIO, *Biblioteca Scriptorum* ... ii (Palermo, 1792), 498.

⁵⁶ Texts in B. FIORINI, 'Il comm. Abela e la cronologia episcopale di Malta', *G. F. Abela: Essays in his Honour by Members of the Malta Historical Society* ... (Malta, 1961) 106-109. *Nicolaus Boneti*, OFM, created bishop in November 1342, may have been a Catalan; even if he reached Malta his tenure was extremely brief as he died before October 1343 (*ibid.*, 94, 105 note 70).

⁵⁷ Text in A. RUBIO I LLUCH, *Documents per l'Historia de la cultura catalana migeval*, i (Barcelona, 1908), 446.

with Malta. After the death of Martí the Younger in 1409 the *universitates* of Malta and Gozo sent an embassy to Martí the Elder which presented their complaints but emphasized their attachment to the crown. When Martí the Elder died in 1410 without an evident heir, the regency in Sicily was disputed between Queen Bianca, the widow of Martí the Younger, and Bernat Cabrera, the Grand Justiciar, who secured control of Gozo and threatened Malta. However, Francesco Gatto held Malta as Captain for Queen Bianca, and on 24 June 1411 she gave him permission to reduce Gozo to obedience *per la inclita casa di Aragona*.⁵⁸ The Maltese recognized the new King of Aragon and Sicily, Fernando de Antequera, who was elected at Caspe in 1412, and the articles they sent to their king in 1416 looked back to the time of Martí, when Malta was *reducta a la sou naturali signuri, zo esti a la sacra casa di Aragona*.⁵⁹ The new dynasty, with its very different Italian and Mediterranean ambitions, brought Malta and Gozo much more closely into contact with the Aragonese Crown, whose policies were a decisive factor in the fortunes of the islands in the fifteenth century. It was really only after 1412 that Catalan and Aragonese influences became strong at Malta.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Text of 1409 and other details in VALENTINI, vii. 419-428; viii. 73-79.

⁵⁹ Text in S. GIAMBRUNO - L. GENUARDI, *Capitoli inediti delle città demaniali di Sicilia* (Palermo, 1918), 366-367.

⁶⁰ According at least to the evidence available. Without much more detailed work it is impossible to tell whether settlers with Spanish names come directly from Spain or belonged to families long established in Sicily. For example the *Jaymucio Catalano* who held lands in Gozo before 1372 may have been a Sicilian and not (as VALENTINI, xiii. 13 note 44, claimed) a 'prova della espansione catalana in queste isole'. The conclusions of this preliminary sketch may well be modified by further research, especially among the sources in Spain which have often remained unknown, even when in print, to students of Maltese history.

CHOICE

*It cannot be seen
But if you ever want to experience it
All you need is closing your eyes
As firmly as you possibly can
And then you'll see nothing
But you will get to know better
What it is really like
If with closed eyes you move
To the end of the landing
And take the step forward.*

*Then opening your eyes wont keep you
From rolling all the way down
Where darkness will grow darkness
As you roll down
For your choice
You have made it.*

BERNARD MALLIA, S.J.

MASSIVE

*Put on hard massiveness
Massive Massaccio
Knit bushy eyebrows
And you'll be Moses like
Do not relax I promise
I wont hit you
For you have made your mind
No condescension
To human words*

*I only have to stand back
Throwing my head one side
And - when I like - the other
Serene and serious
Just connoisseuring
Your classic art.*

HEYTHROP

BERNARD MALLIA, S.J.