

**'A SPY OF MARQUIS TANUCCI':  
INQUISITOR ANTONIO MARIA LANTE**

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Besides being judges of faith, inquisitors in Malta were also apostolic delegates or nuncios.<sup>1</sup> Their briefs of appointment empowered them to act as the pope's representatives between the Holy See and the Order.<sup>2</sup> Their powers were much circumscribed and they followed minutely the directives sent to them by the cardinal secretaries of state.<sup>3</sup> They did express their own opinion but eventually they had to toe the official line; and on occasions they were presented with a *fait accompli* before forwarding the necessary information.<sup>4</sup> This paper purports to show how Inquisitor Lante tried to follow his own course of action and be an exception to the rule. The archival deposits of the inquisition at the cathedral museum at Mdina give no inkling at all about this matter but the Archivio di Stato of Naples preserves the necessary documents.

I

Mgr Antonio Maria Lante arrived in Malta on 13 April 1771.<sup>5</sup> His predecessor, Inquisitor Mancinforte, had been a staunch supporter of the Holy See and a sworn enemy of the grand master. As this 'liar and hypocrite', as the Order odiously described him, brought the relations between the government and the *Santa Sede* to a breaking-point he was recalled to Rome together with his 'ignorant' and 'fanatic' *uditore*, Abate de Dominicis.<sup>6</sup> Lante was to pacify the two sides. He co-operated fully with Grand Master Ximenes in the suppression of the 'Rising of the Priests' when, on 9 September 1775,<sup>7</sup> a handful of clerics, led by Don Gaetano Mannarino,

1. On this topic, see Frans Ciappara, *The Roman Inquisition in Enlightened Malta*, Malta 2000, 51. See also A. Cauchie and R. Maere, 'Les Instructions Générales aux Nonces des Pays Bas Espagnols (1596-1635)', *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* v (1904), 16-46.
2. For a copy of such a brief see Archive of the Inquisition, Malta (AIM), Processi (Proc.) 29A, f. 2r.
3. That the inquisitor was a mere delegate of his superiors at Rome see Ciappara, *The Roman Inquisition*, 121-9, 162-72.
4. '... affinché non mi segua come nell'affare del Baron Xara, che si è deciso prima che si potessero mandar costà le giustificazioni che mostravano ad evidenza l'aggravi che gli veniva senza necessità cagionato dalla nota ordinazione' – Mgr Salviati to Assessor, 10 Nov. 1755, AIM, Corr. 95, ff. 253r-5v.
5. AIM, Corr. 100, f. 396v.
6. Ciappara, *The Roman Inquisition*, 91-102, 183.
7. F. Laferla, *Una Giustizia Storica – Don Gaetano Mannarino nella luce dei Documenti*, Rome 1926. Ph. Callus, *The Rising of the Priests. Its Implications and Repercussions on Ecclesiastical Immunity*, Malta 1961.

revolted against the Order.<sup>8</sup> He treated the rebels with an iron hand, whose maxims he considered noxious and harmful both to Church and kings.<sup>9</sup> Those *famigliari*<sup>10</sup> of his, including Nicola Debono<sup>11</sup> and Baron Fournier,<sup>12</sup> who were associated with them, had their patents withdrawn. He accused his own *uditore*, Abate Periberti, of being their leader, and, in conjunction with the grand master, had him summoned to Rome to account for his actions. Unfortunately, Ximenes died soon afterwards on 9 November 1775, and three days later, on Sunday morning, the Frenchman Fra Emmanuel de Rohan was elected grand master.<sup>13</sup>

Periberti returned triumphantly to Malta on 9 January 1776.<sup>14</sup> He brought with him a list of instructions from Rome for Lante to execute faithfully.<sup>15</sup> De Rohan was to be urged to stop all legal action which Ximenes had started against the rebels, who were to be pardoned. The account of the rising, which the government had sent to all the courts of Europe,<sup>16</sup> was to be withdrawn as being offensive to the Maltese clergy. Bishop Pellerano, who had been recalled by the pope on the remonstrations of the grand master,<sup>17</sup> was to come back to Malta while all informers against him arrested for Freemasonry.<sup>18</sup> Lante was to comply fully with the wishes both of his *uditore* and of Mgr Gaetano Grech, the vicar general, as well as to see that appeals were made only to Rome and not to the *Tribunale della Monarchia*.<sup>19</sup> The last point of the instructions was ominous. Lante was to watch that in no way the grand master followed the wishes of the consul of Naples.

For the inquisitor's better illumination of this directive, Rome sent him an explicatory letter. In an indirect reference to Tanucci, Naples' foreign minister, the papal secretary of state, Cardinal Pallavicini, expressed his belief that 'someone' was trying to force the grand master to ignore the pope and reform the clergy on his own. This was an 'exorbitant pretension', and de Rohan should rather follow the

8. Ciappara, *The Roman Inquisition*, 185.

9. '... non volere io, in alcun modo, secondare le loro torbide massime, nocive alla chiesa e alle corti', Lante to Tanucci, 19 June 1776, Archivio di Stato, Napoli (ASN), Affari Esteri, fascicolo 711.

10. For these dependants of the Inquisition, see Ciappara, *The Roman Inquisition*, 103-30.

11. AIM, Corr. 62, ff. 97r-v, 139r; AIM, Corr. 100, ff. 454r-v.

12. Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Segreteria di Stato (Malta) 163 (15 April 1777); AIM, Corr. 34, ff. 11r-v; AIM, Corr. 96, ff. 241v-34; AIM, Corr. 101, f. 5r.

13. AIM, Corr. 100, ff. 455v-56r.

14. Ibid., f. 458v. Periberti brought with him an order from Mgr Borgia, the secretary of Propaganda Fide, for Lante to send the thirty volumes Padre Deodato da Varallo, Prefect of the Mission in Tripoli, had dispatched to him since 7 June 1774. They had been owned by a Dutch preacher – AIM, Corr. 96, ff. 227v, 236v; AIM, Corr. 33, f. 147r.

15. See Appendix.

16. *Relazione di quanto è occorso nell'Isola di Malta in congiura della Ribellione di una Truppa di Sacerdoti e Chierici*, Malta 1775.

17. ASN, Affari Esteri fasc. 710, Pellerano to Tanucci, 4.x.1774.

18. In the archive of the inquisition at Mdina there exists a lengthy trial against Freemasons, but none of these had anything to do with the revolt – AIM, Proc. 163, 164.

19. See note 39.



example of Charles III of Spain, who, when king of Naples, had made the concordat of 1741 with the papacy. This was to serve as an example to the grand master who should resist any pressure to promulgate laws independent of the 'visible head of the church'.<sup>20</sup>

De Rohan did not intend to defy Rome.<sup>21</sup> As part of national reconciliation, he reduced the price of corn<sup>22</sup> and burnt the dossiers of the trials against the insurgents. The heads of three of the rebels were removed from St James' Cavalier where they had been exhibited on pikes.<sup>23</sup> But, what is more relevant to our subject, de Rohan objected neither to the repatriation of the bishop nor to the pardoning of the mutineers. It was only the opposition of the Bourbon kings, which made him change his mind.<sup>24</sup> Mgr Pellerano died in Rome while the sentences against the rebels were confirmed. On the reform of the clergy, however, de Rohan did not budge. He defied Tanucci and would proceed together with Rome.<sup>25</sup> 'We never thought', he wrote to de Breteuil, his ambassador to the Holy See, 'of appealing to His Holiness without the knowledge of the Neapolitan court but it is impossible to comply with the directives of its prime minister'.<sup>26</sup>

This victory for the papacy, which had the support of both the Spanish and French governments, was won against the machinations of the inquisitor and his secretary Pinto. They visited de Rohan several times to make him realise how disagreeable it would be to disobey Naples, on whom Malta depended and without whose protection the island could not survive. The grand master seemed convinced by these arguments and, according to Lante, agreed to accept a plan for the reform of the Maltese clergy drawn up by Pinto.<sup>27</sup>

20. '... la esorbitanza della pretensione, per cui evve in Napoli chi vorrebbe determinare l'Eminenza Sua, il grand Maestro, a promulgare, sulla riforma del clero, leggi totalmente sue. Il tanto diverso esempio dello stesso odierno Re di Spagna lasciato in Napoli: esempio reso incontrastabile non meno, che noto al mondo tutto per mezzo del concordato del 1741, fornisce, come ella ben vede, a Sua Eminenza, il grand Maestro, un arma proporzionatissima a resistere alle pressioni, che gli venissero fatte per promulgare in tal materia leggi indipendenti dal capo visibile della chiesa ...', ASN, Affari Esteri fasc. 711, Memoire.

21. AIM, Corr. 100, f. 458r.

22. AIM, Corr. 63, f. 25r.

23. ASN, Affari Esteri fasc. 2803, letter from Gio. Battista Abbate to Tanucci, 16.xi.1775.

24. AIM, Corr. 100, f. 459r.

25. 'La nostra riservata riguardante le idee del Marchese Tanucci di doverne non agire indipendentemente da qualunque partecipazione di Roma per la riforma di questo clero', Pinto to Carignani, 8 Jan. 1776, National Library, Malta (NLM), Archive (Arch.) 1530, f. 49v.

26. Ibid., f. 66v.

27. 'Comme il falloit neanmoins que l'Inquisiteur répondit à Rome, pour lors son secrétaire lui à conseillé politiquement de s'aboucher avec le grand Maître et de rester avec Lui d'accord, qu'il écrirait à Rome que le grand Maître ne voulait rien faire de tout ce que Rome désirait; mais que tout au contraire il proposait un Plan de réforme des abus du clergé de Malte, et qu'il ne voulait absolument se dégoutter avec les cours. Ce Plan de réforme sera produit à votre Excellence; il à été l'ouvrage du secrétaire de l'Inquisiteur', Memoire.

Lante's belief of de Rohan's promises was not altogether unfounded since the Order did consider reforming the clergy without Rome's authorisation. However, like all religious orders the Hospitallers were immediately subject to the pope. There were several estates or commanderies in the Papal States, which the knights could forfeit if they challenged the pope. The Order needed the protection of His Holiness against the European powers so hostile to all religious orders at that time. And the religious character of the Maltese precluded any disobedience to the Holy See.<sup>28</sup> For these various reasons the government drew back from this counsel of despair.

Lante had miscalculated. He had played his cards clumsily and shown his hands prematurely, which proved his undoing. Dr Ambeli, a Roman lawyer and an intimate friend of de Breteuil, informed him that the grand master had reported their conversations to Cardinal Pallavicini.<sup>29</sup> Rome was most worried that Lante had disobeyed her repeated orders not to negotiate any reform of the clergy with the government. However, the inquisitor was to be pitied because, being a good man, he let himself be led astray by his secretary. Pinto, or as the cardinal of state referred to him, the *incognito*, was a regalist, an enemy of the Church, an adventurer without religion and a spy for the court of Naples, for which he was to be exiled.<sup>30</sup>

The grand master was surprised by such animosity and, in a letter to his ambassador at Rome, repeated Lante's contention that Pinto had been earnestly recommended by Clement XIV to Ximenes, who held him in high esteem.<sup>31</sup> Periberti was instead the dangerous man and the secretary of state should warn him to behave well and be more honest and prudent in future.<sup>32</sup> A few days later de Rohan raised

28. NLM, Arch. 1365, f. 515r.

29. 'Mais de Rome même une personne amie de l'ambassadeur de Malte écrivoit à l'Inquisiteur de ne point se fier du grand Maître, Lui assurant, qu'il avoit écrit contre le secrétaire, et qu'il écrivoit toujours à Rome tout le contraire de ce qu'il disoit à l'Inquisiteur à Malte', ASN, Affari Esteri, fasc. 711, Memoire.

30. 'Ho veduto il Sigr. Cardle. Segro. di Stato, e dopo altri varii discorsi ne' quali era amenissimo, ho introdotto il discorso di Lei, e l'ho trovato tanto male prevenuto, che non lo poteva essere peggio, ho nominato Periberti, e qui si è parimente riscaldato a l'ultimo segno, esagerando la di lui buona condotta, e biazimando molto la di Lei, ed avendo io ripreso che per quanto era a mia notizia, come anche dai fatti medesimi io vedeva, che niente si potesse dire contro la di Lei onoratezza, zelo per la S. Sede, e retto fine in tutte le cose, al che mi ha risposto è vero, lo vedo buono, ma non è altro che degno di compassione, perchè si lascia condurre da un segretario pubblico regalista, nemico della cheza, ne altro ho potuto ricavare nel mio discorso, che ho visto, aver turbato assai il Cardle. Ho saputo poi hieri sera per un'altra parte in estrema confidenza, che il Papa era inquietatissimo, ed il maggior, e principal motivo consisteva in non essersi da Lei obbedito, dal che argomento, che non siano state sufficienti, e non abbiano fatto verun colpo le di Lei rappresentanze', ASN, Affari Esteri, fasc. 711, letter inserted in dispatch from Pinto to Tanucci, 24 August 1776.

31. NLM, Arch. 1530, ff. 140r-v.

32. NLM, Arch. 1365, f. 477r.



the stakes. He accused the inquisitor's *uditore* of being in unison with the vicar general and the other undisciplined clergy, for which he demanded his definitive recall. This fitted well with the great wish of Lante, who evicted him from his house – the property of the Holy Office – and asked the government to hasten his departure to Rome.<sup>33</sup>

Pallavicini believed that Periberti's faults had been magnified by the cunning and malignity of Pinto, an impostor and a tramp. The latter, 'taking advantage of the weakness and imbecility of the inquisitor', looked upon Lante's retinue as a batch of criminals, but they included among them innocent and honourable men.<sup>34</sup> Malta's ambassador, who sent this information to the grand master, did not know what would happen because an aura of mystery surrounded the whole matter. However, it was clear that the inquisitor was held in a bad light in Rome and his reputation had been tarnished.<sup>35</sup>

With Pinto's departure from Malta on 21 June 1776 Lante felt lonelier than ever, being 'surrounded not only by enemies but also by traitors'. His was an enviable situation. If he served His Holiness he would earn the indignation of Naples; if he obeyed the king's commands he was condemned by Rome. Besides, 'it is rumoured that these rebels are being helped by me, a minister of the Church ... But I would be ashamed to have anything to do with such kind of people or whoever protects them'. In those unhappy and violent circumstances there was only one step for Lante to take: to ask His Majesty and Tanucci to rescue him from destruction and remove him from Malta 'after six painful years'.<sup>36</sup>

Such royal protection was not undeserved. Lante's father had served the king of Naples, and one of his brothers was his chamberlain. His family possessed fiefs in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and he himself had been governor of Benevento till 1768 when Neapolitan troops occupied the city.<sup>37</sup> He should be regarded, therefore, a subject of the king rather than the pope's. And he had sacrificed himself in Malta to sustain the interests of Naples.

Lante also suggested his successor, Mgr Bonanni. The island was a fief of the king and it was only natural that the inquisitor should be a Neapolitan. Besides, Bonanni was talented and courageous and already knew Malta. He had brought the

stock and pilier to Ximenes,<sup>38</sup> whose procurator he was at Rome against the bishop and the rebellious priests.<sup>39</sup>

## II

By 20 July 1776 Pinto was in Naples.<sup>40</sup> The inquisitor had promised to send him copies of the dispatches he received from Rome as well as news of Malta but, after more than a month and a half, he had received only one letter from Lante. He suspected that his mail was being intercepted or that Rome and de Rohan had availed themselves of his absence to prevail upon the inquisitor. Lante could be easily subdued because he was a fickle and timid man, little versed in court politics and state diplomacy.

Like his master, Pinto was in a vulnerable situation. Several sinister charges were made against him and the number of his enemies increased daily, who tried to have him expelled. The recommendations the inquisitor had provided him with availed him nothing. Following secret instructions from Rome, the nuncio, who had in his service a friend of *uditore* Periberti, would have nothing to do with him despite several attempts. The duke of Gravina would have liked to take him to stay with him but was afraid lest he attracted the hatred of Rome. Without employment, help, and support, Pinto was the unhappiest man in the world. His only hope was Tanucci, 'my father'. But he was living very far from him, having been unable to find at a reasonable rent any nearer residence; he only demanded two small rooms in some royal mansion or some other place near the royal palace. He had served the king with so much zeal and courage that he expected no less from a just monarch and an enlightened minister. He would never believe that any cabal or intrigue, which his enemies contrived, could succeed because a man of state should not destroy whoever had served him.

Pinto would have liked to continue in his post as Lante's secretary, at least to justify his master's disobedience to Rome. But, if this hope could not be fulfilled, he never gave up the idea that the pope's pretensions over Malta were unjust and that this was the right moment to establish firmly the rights of the Crown on the island. His Grand Plan which he devised envisaged a radical definition, and an overall reform, of the relations between Malta and Naples. It only needed a prudent negotiator for the successful execution of the project. The powers would not protest,

33. Ibid., f. 148v.

34. Ibid., ff. 498r-v.

35. Ibid., ff. 518v-19r.

36. ASN, Affari Esteri, fasc. 711, Lante to Tanucci, 4 March 1776. See also another dispatch by Lante to Tanucci, *ibid.*, 20 June, 1776, unnumbered and Gravina to Tanucci, *ibid.*, 24 July 1776.

37. AIM, Corr. 55, f. 76r. For the circumstances of the case, see F. Venturi, *Settecento Riformatore* ii, La Chiesa e la Repubblica dentro i Loro Limiti, 1758-1774, 222. Turin, 228.

38. For Bonanni's arrival in Malta on Saturday, 18 May 1774 and his departure in July, see AIM, Corr. 100, ff. 437v-38v.

39. *Information tres Secrete par Son Excellence Monseigneur le Marquis Tanucci, par le tres humble et tres obeissant Serviteur Antoine Lante, Inquisiteur et Delegat Apostolic a Malte.*

40. NLM, Arch. 1530, f. 192r.

as the plan would have preserved the two attributes, which made the island useful to Europe: its neutrality and security. The Religion would continue to reside in Malta but all jurisdiction was to be exercised by Naples.<sup>41</sup>

An expression of this dependence was to be a visitor to Malta to conduct an enquiry into its affairs. This official could only have been a legate of the *Tribunale della Legazia Apostolica*. This court, also known as *Tribunale della Monarchia*, owed its origin to a bull of Urban II instituting the Norman Count Roger I as his legate in Sicily.<sup>42</sup> Such a tribunal would be a threat both to the secular government and, as Ferdinando Galiani, Tanucci's agent in Paris, put it, the *gioco pesantissimo* of Rome.<sup>43</sup> The inquisitor would have had his authority confined within very narrow limits<sup>44</sup> while the Order could no longer govern once another sovereign exercised his jurisdiction over the island.<sup>45</sup>

The time for such a visit was propitious. Things should not be delayed too long not to give Rome the opportunity to reach any agreement with the grand master, who was so timid that he tried to get hold of anything at any price. De Rohan was isolated, even France being displeased with him. The knights would have preferred Bali Afflitti as their head but crowds went round St John's threatening them with their life if they did not approve their choice. After the election, several of the knights protested in front of the inquisitor that they had cast their vote in fear. However, the people's support was only short-lived:

The Religion is hated particularly by the priests, who are the ones who rule in Malta because of their excessive number and the fanatic confidence that the inhabitants have in them. Rome is loved neither by the Religion nor by the people because she is faithful to none, fleecing, and tyrannizing them both. The knights intrigue against each other and are disordered and disunited. On their part the Maltese are debauched, mean, hypocrite, selfish, unfaithful, and hate being subjected to tribunals.

Pinto offered himself as the visitor's secretary and if Tanucci agreed to honour him with the post he would start for Malta at once to make all the necessary preparations

41 'La neutralité et la seurté de l'Ille sont les seuls motifs qui la rendent interessante à l'Europe. Le premier subsisteroit, la Religion y continuant sa residence avec le nom de souveraine; et ... Naples y exerceroit toute jurisdiction' – ASN, Affari Esteri, fasc. 711, Pinto to Tanucci, 14 August, 1776.

42. AIM, Memorie (Mem.) 28, ff. 75r-90r. S. Fodale, *L'Apostolica Legazia e Altri Studi su Stato e Chiesa*. Messina, 1991. F. Scaduto, *Stato e Chiesa nelle Due Sicilie*, 156-7, Palermo 1969.

43. Archivio Storico per le Provincie Napoletane (1906), 690.

44. NLM, Arch. 1511, f. 54v.

45. NLM, Arch. 1524, ff. 130r-v.

in secret. Everything pointed to a successful issue of the matter. The people and the clergy desired such a visit ardently and would take up arms to receive the visitor.<sup>46</sup>

On 14 August 1776 Pinto wrote once more to Tanucci. Such favourable circumstances for a Grand Plan for Malta would never perhaps present themselves again. He demanded, therefore, another audience to express his plan further:

This is only the summary of a greater plan which I can't better summarise in a letter. I am only a small official with some glimpse of the interests of princes, wishing to educate myself in the grand school of experienced ministers.

But, since the foreign minister ignored the hint, ten days later, on 24 August, Pinto sent another dispatch. Rather than changing his mind in his absence, Lante showed more zeal and courage for the cause of Naples. And besides,

His party increases daily so that almost all the *bailli*, and especially the vice-chancellor together with a great number of knights, declared themselves against the grand master after the revolt.

For all these suggestions Pinto's plan miscarried. Tanucci did toy with the idea of sending 'a visitor to Malta in order to establish a judge of the *Monarchia* and do away with the inquisitor and all the jurisdiction of Rome'. But in the end he recoiled from such a dangerously tangled enterprise.<sup>47</sup> He had not forgotten the 1755 attempt to send Mgr Testa to report on the conditions of the Maltese Church, which had ended in failure.<sup>48</sup> The Order, supported by France and the pope, had stubbornly refused to recognise this Sicilian yoke even though all commerce with Sicily was stopped.<sup>49</sup> To believe, as Pinto claimed, that conditions were now different would be a diplomatic blunder.

46. 'Je puis très positivement assurer Votre Excellence, que le grand Maitre ne s'y opposeroit, qu'apparemment; que la Religion bien foiblement le contesterait; que le Peuple et les Prêtres le désirer ardemment, et prendroient les armes pour le recevoir; et l'Inquisiteur Lante, qui seroit le seul à pouvoir soulever les esprits, pour détourner ce Progé, je me compromets de toute son assistance secrete, pour le faire mieux réoussir', Pinto to Tanucci, undated, ASN, Affari Esteri, fasc. 711.

47. '... l'objet dont V. Ece. ne veut plus qu'il en soit question' – Pinto to Tanucci, 24 Aug. 1776, ASN, Affari Esteri, fasc. 711.

48. Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Secreteria di Stato (Malta), 157, ff. 119-23r.

49. M. Schipa, *Il Regno di Napoli al tempo di Carlo Borbone* ii, 55. Milan, Rome, Naples, 1923.

## III

The prime minister also refused to answer a letter the duke of Gravina had sent him, demanding help for Lante to be promoted to some other post and for Pinto not 'to die of hunger'. Since the two presented themselves as the champions of the rights of Naples in Malta, what was the reason of Tanucci's blunt refusal?

The answer is found in two letters, both dated 8 October 1776, written by Gaetano Centomani. This legal consulter of Naples at Rome and the Order's lawyer revealed the true colours of the two men. In Rome's eyes Lante was a failure who had debunked his ministry in Malta. Being unreliable, he was unworthy of promotion and not even his close relatives would assist him. His secretary, the so-called 'knight' Pinto, was no other than one Martini, a Portuguese who had gone to Malta in 1774. Claiming he was a converted Jew, the government gave him 9 scudi a month as a subsidy and sent him to reside at the monastery of the conventual friars. He was evicted from here for his licentious life but then lived with his concubine until she was put inside the grand master's conservatory. At the time of the 'Rising of the Priests' he presented himself before Ximenes and suggested several 'fraudulent projects to defeat the rebels'.

At that time Lante was without the services of his secretary, Francesco Zacchiroli, who had left not much earlier. The Jew, who spoke and wrote several languages, befriended the inquisitor, who took him in his service, under the name of Giovanni Laurenzi, against the counsel of Count Periberti. The *uditore*, 'an honest and wise knight', was instead ignored and, seeing himself unwanted, resigned. The other members of Lante's 'family', who had accompanied him to Malta, were all sacked. Such support so emboldened the 'dissolute neophyte', as Centomani described Pinto, that he brought his lover out of the monastery.

The pope was about to recall Lante without giving him any other appointment. It was only because of his relatives that no such steps were taken. Instead, the inquisitor was written a strong letter ordering him to discharge the secretary, 'a most wicked person'.

Through his secret agents in Rome, Pinto got wind of this command before it reached Malta and left the island 'voluntarily'. His bad character was now fully exposed. He embarked with a false bill of health (*patente di sanità*) and took his lover with him, whom he declared to be his wife. Before he departed he stole silver and furniture from the *Conservatorio Sagnani*<sup>50</sup> and the inquisitor's palace. He avoided being arrested only because it was feared that in the cross-examination he

50. For this conservatory for girls, also known as *Conservatorio dell'Immacolata Concezione della Beatissima Vergine*, see Ciappara, *The Roman Inquisition*, 53.

would implicate the inquisitor. Lante must have been his accomplice because it was only through his knowledge and intrigue that the secretary could have committed the theft. It was most surprising that the prelate did not see through such wickedness and instead supplied him with letters of recommendation and gave him 100 Sicilian *oncie* besides. Unlike the inquisitor, the nuncio at Naples recognised Pinto for what he was: a vagabond, whom he had known at Avignon. Here ends Centomani's letter: 'Whoever, for a just cause, is abandoned by his own relatives, is unworthy of royal protection before he justifies himself'.

The documents make no further mention of Pinto. But on 4 February 1777 Lante was informed by Cardinal Pallavicini that he had been appointed governor general of Le Marche.<sup>51</sup> He left Malta on 22 July,<sup>52</sup> to be succeeded not, as he had hoped, by Mgr Bonanni but by Mgr Zondadari.<sup>53</sup>

His wish had come true but the attempt of this 'spy of Marquis Tanucci' – as de Breteuil referred to him<sup>54</sup> – to ruffle the murky waters of Malta's international standing and thwart the Holy See's rights on the island failed. The Maltese government did not conduct the reform of the Maltese clergy unilaterally but in conjunction with Rome. The *Motu Proprio*,<sup>55</sup> which contained these reforms, arrived in Malta just before Lante departed and the inquisitor suffered the humiliation of having to deliver it to de Rohan.

It is hardly reasonable to suppose that an inquisitor had his own secret diplomacy working in rivalry with, and often in opposition to, the cardinal secretary of state's; yet this was the situation that developed in Malta at the time of Inquisitor Antonio Lante. It may well seem extraordinary that he carried so much correspondence with Rome in pursuit of one policy<sup>56</sup> while at the same time following a contrary course of action.

51. AIM, Corr. 64, f. 16r.

52. AIM, Mem. 21, f. 2r.

53. AIM, Corr. 101, f. 3v. On 1 June 1776 Mgr Gio. Rota, whose brother was a knight commander, had asked de Rohan to support his candidature – NLM, Arch. 1530, ff. 165r, 171r-v.

54. NLM, Arch. 1365, f. 460v.

55. For a copy see NLM, Arch. 273, ff. 160r-67v.

56. His correspondence with the cardinal secretary of state is preserved in AIM, Corr. 58-64, 100-1.



## Appendix

### Memoire

1. Il étoit prescrit à l'Inquisiteur d'aler de concert avec le nouveau grand maitre pour tacher moyen d'arrêter toute poursuite de la Procédure, qui avoit été commencée dans le magistère de Ximenez contre les pretres rebels qui étoient en prisont et contre une infinité d'autres personnes, qui n'étoient pas encore décrétées à prise de corps.
2. Que l'Inquisiteur obtint du grand maitre l'impunition des pretres chefs de la rébellion, et que sur cette affaire on procurat d'imposer le plus proffond silence.
3. Que l'Inquisiteur engageât le grand maitre à desaprouver, réttirer et suprimér la rélation de la rébellion que Ximenez avoit faite imprimer et qu'il avoit envoyée à toutes les cours, comme injurieuse au clergé de Malte et parconsequent à l'eglise.
4. Que l'Inquisiteur procurasse de porter le grand maitre à donner des emplois à plusieurs des nobles maltois compris et suspêts de la rébellion, pour démentir les listes secrètes des conjurés que Ximenez avoit envoyées à Rome et à d'autres cours.
5. Que l'Inquisiteur agisse d'accord avec le grand maitre pour justifier publiquement l'évêque de Malte, et le faire rettourner à son Diocèse malgré les plaints de Ximenez et des cours de Bourbon à Rome contre de Lui.
6. Que l'Inquisiteur procurasse avec le grand Maitre de faire chasser de Malte le concul de Naples, pour avoir informé contre l'évêque dans le magistère de Ximenez.
7. Que l'Inquisiteur, sous prétexte de francmassonerie, fit arrestêr pëu à pëu toutes les personnes qui pourroient avoir eü parte aux accusations contre l'évêque dans le tems du magistère de Ximenez.
8. Que l'Inquisiteur fusse obligé de donner toute assistance au vicaire général de l'évêque à Malte et de se conformer en tout et par tout suivant la direction de l'abbé Periberti son auditeur et du dit Vicaire général.
9. Que l'Inquisiteur né recousse point aucun appel à la Monarchie de Palerme, et qu'il obtinsse du grand maitre d'en charger également le Prieur de l'eglise de Saint Jean, comme commissaire de la Bule de la Cruciate, à fin-que toutes les appellations fussent faites à Rome et non ailleurs.
10. Que l'Inquisiteur fusse bien attentif auprès du grand maitre, pour ne point le laisser suivre aucune inspiration quae pourroit lui être faite de la parte du Ministre de Naples.