

THE ROWERS ON THE ORDER'S GALLEYS (c. 1600-1650)

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The main driving power of the galleys was supplied by the rowing element known as the *ciurma*. To say simply that the life of these rowers was hard would be to understate the facts as are best described by people who had actually served in this capacity. The French Huguenot Jean Marteilie de Bergerac was condemned to the galleys after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and thus describes the galley rowers' lives:

[The galley slaves] are chained six to a bench, these are four foot wide covered with sacking stuffed with wool, over which are laid sheepskins that reach down to the deck. The officer in charge of the galley slaves stays aft with the Captain from whom he receives his orders. There are also two under-officers, one amidships and one at the prow. Both of these are armed with whips with which they flog the naked bodies of the slaves. When the Captain gives the order to row, the officer gives the signal with a silver whistle which hangs on a cord round his neck; the signal is repeated by the under-officers, and very soon all fifty oars strike the water as one. Picture to yourself six men chained to a bench naked as they were born, one foot on the stretcher, the other lifted and placed against the bench in front of him, supporting in their hands a vastly heavy oar and stretching their bodies backwards while their arms are extended to push the loom of the oar clear of the backs of those in front of them ...¹

1. Quoted after E. Bradford, *The Great Siege – Malta 1565*, Penguin 1964, 33-4. Marteilie's *Memoirs of a Protestant* was translated by Oliver Goldsmith, New Edition 1895. Bradford makes the mistake of saying that Marteilie's enslavement was *some half century* after Grand Master Jean de Valette was taken in captivity. Actually, de Valette was a galley slave in 1541-2 whilst Marteilie was enslaved after 1685. However, material conditions on the galleys hardly varied. According to Sir Harry Luke, *Malta, An Account and Appreciation*, London 1968, 78-9, who also cites the same description given by Bradford, Marteilie 'was condemned to the galleys as a Huguenot in 1707 but none the less contrived to live to the age of ninety-five.' An abridged edition of Marteilie's work has also been published, entitled *Galley Slave*, London 1957. Even when one makes allowances for exaggeration on Marteilie's part to show how ill-treated he had been by fellow Christians – cf. P.W. Bamford, *Fighting Ships and Prisons*, Minneapolis 1973, 194 and 229 – the fact still remains that galley-slaves suffered immensely.

Late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Venetian naval administrators provide further information regarding the sufferings of galley rowers, including a high mortality rate of 60 per cent. Food was scanty, dress was of 'vile quality' and the treatment of illnesses was almost non-existent, though a hospital for Venetian *ciurmi* was eventually set up at Zara. Rowers suffered immensely from frost-bite, thus necessitating frequent amputations. A 1609 report attributes most of these sufferings 'to the constant lack of awnings to shelter them from the foul weather'.²

Numbers

On the galleys of the Order of St John, this human machinery was quite extensive in numbers and consisted of slaves, convicts and volunteer oarsmen known as *buonavoglie*. The eighteenth century witnessed the addition of another type of rower known as *Marinaro da Remo*, literally 'sailor of the oar', but this accretion is beyond the parameters of this study. According to the population estimates of 1632, there were in that year 357 *buonavoglie* and 175 convicts together with 1284 slaves serving on board the six galleys of the Order.³ In 1637, the number of rowers on the flagship, the *Capitana*, amounted to 374 personnel divided into 284 slaves and condemned men together with 90 *buonavoglie*. The other galleys carried less rowers but the number still amounted to 280 subdivided into 210 slaves and convicts combined, plus 70 *buonavoglie*.⁴ It seems that these figures were strictly adhered to. A break-up of the numbers of the *ciurma* on the galleys in 1632 shows that, if anything, some galleys were overmanned. To quote one example, the galley *San Antonio* carried 322 rowers when the stipulated number was 280. On the other hand, the *Capitana*, *Padrona*, *San Carlo*, *San Giovanni* and *San Paolo* only carried four, eight, one, five and thirteen extra rowers respectively on board.⁵ One must here assume that some extra rowers on board were needed to take the place of those who died or who were incapacitated for some reason or other during the course of a voyage.

These numbers of different types of rowers is not always the reflection of a practice accepted by the navies of all the other Mediterranean states. The Venetians had only six *buonavoglie* on board each galley whilst, in 1611, the Papal squadron had 130 *buonavoglie* distributed among five galleys, a number which would not have sufficed for even two galleys of the Order. Moreover, in times of peace, the Venetians used only convicts to row their galleys, though prisoners-of-war and

slaves were put to the oars in wartime because of the need of more manpower. In 1721, Venice decided that only convicts were to row the republic's galleys in future.⁶

An oarsman aboard a galley has been calculated to produce only a peak power output of about one-eighth horse-power.⁷ Thus, when galleys increased in size, the number of rowers had to be increased disproportionately. It is true that, during the period under consideration, galleys were rowed *a scaloccio*, that is five or six rowers pulling on the same oar; but the fact remains that when one compares the size of a *ciurma* of the seventeenth century with its counterpart of the previous century, the great difference in numbers does not reflect the difference in sizes of the vessels of the two centuries. It was calculated in 1529 that the increase in the size of galleys by fifty per cent necessitated a hundred per cent increase in the number of rowers needed to maintain an acceptable dash speed.⁸ The size of the *ciurma* of an average Mediterranean galley in 1564 was 164 rowers, a number which was increased to 174 in 1571,⁹ though all *ciurmi* were increased to 200 for the Battle of Lepanto.¹⁰ At Lepanto, the reinforced *ciurmi* of the three Maltese galleys present amounted to 900 men,¹¹ which suggests slightly larger galleys being used by the Knights. Spanish *ciurmi* of 1587 were still only 177 in number¹² and those of Venetian galleys numbered 192 between 1593 and 1610¹³ but those of the Papal squadron amounted to an average of 300 in 1611,¹⁴ which compares favourably with the Order's own average of 300-plus for 1632.¹⁵ The shift to rowing *a scaloccio* reduced the need for experienced oarsmen; only the man farthest inboard had to be a skilled rower for it was he who feathered the oar and set the pace. The other oarsmen were 'trained' for their work. For this reason, galley squadrons, including the Order's vessels, which depended mainly upon forced labour for rowing, welcomed the new change.

Slaves

The main source of rowers were Muslim prisoners taken by the Order's navy itself or by the Maltese corsair fleet. The Order used the strongest of these prisoners to row on the galleys. At the same time, care had to be taken of such men since a

2. A. Tenenti, *Piracy and the Decline of Venice*, London 1967, English translation by J. and B. Pullan, 113-4. Tenenti quotes reports to the Venetian Senate by Nicolò Dona (1599), Filippo Pasqualigo (1607) and Giust'Antonio Belegno (1609).
3. National Library of Malta Manuscript (Library) 162, ff. 127r-v.
4. National Library of Malta, Archive of the Order (AOM) 737, f. 87r, 20 July 1637. These figures remained constant at least till 1644. Cf. AOM 738, ff. 2v-3r, 27 July 1644.
5. Library 162, f. 127v.

6. M. Nani Mocenigo, *Storia della Marina Veneziana da Lepanto alla Caduta della Repubblica*, Rome 1935, 42. A. Guglielmotti, *Storia della Marina Pontificia*, Rome 1886-93, Vol. 7, 209.
7. W.L. Rodgers, *Naval Warfare under Oars 4th to 6th Centuries*, Annapolis, Maryland 1939, 251-28.
8. R.C. Anderson, *Oared Fighting Ships*, London 1962, 67.
9. J.F. Guilmarin, *Gunpowder and Galleys*, Cambridge 1974, 197, 226.
10. Ibid., 226; Guglielmotti, Vol. 6, 203.
11. Guglielmotti, Vol. 6, 203.
12. Guilmarin, 293.
13. Tenenti, 115, 125.
14. Guglielmotti, Vol. 7, 28 and 209.
15. Library 162, ff. 127r-v.

dead or maimed slave was of no use. 'Slaves cost money, and it seems unlikely that they would be allowed to starve or die of exposure unnecessarily.'¹⁶ The gaoler in charge of a galley's rowers had to make sure that these slaves gave of their very best without, however, impairing their usefulness. On various occasions, gaolers were fined for maltreating or even causing the death of slaves, or for facilitating their escape through negligence or non-observance of the rules. When a slave died or escaped as the result of negligence, the guilty party usually had to pay his price to the Order or furnish another slave to take his place.¹⁷ Such information does not corroborate Sir Godfrey Fisher's statement that at Malta 'the treatment of galley-slaves was peculiarly inhuman.'¹⁸ Probably, the Knights treated their slaves no better and no worse than other masters.

Some slaves were priced higher than others. Thus in 1628 a gaoler was fined 500 *zecchini* because the escaped slave in question was a Janissary,¹⁹ but another gaoler was only fined 100 *zecchini* for the death of another slave.²⁰ No slave could be taken off a galley unless by permission of the Commission of the Galleys²¹ and all officers, including the Captain-General and the Captains of the galleys, were forbidden to use galley slaves for their own private work.²² The Order had the right of requisitioning slaves from private owners to serve on board the galleys in times of need. These owners had no right to be paid the price of their slaves as compensation, even if they died during service, but were allowed the minute payments given to galley slaves, who were also fed and clothed at the expense of the Order.²³

On the other hand, those who helped to prevent slaves from escaping were usually rewarded. Such a case occurred in 1630 when eight slaves, four of them from the *Capitana* and the galley *Santa Rosalia* and the other four privately owned, were prevented from escaping in a skiff by nine Maltese, including a father and his six sons, who were awarded a sum of eighty *scudi* for their pains. This expense was borne by all the parties concerned who were two private slave owners, the Order's Treasury, and the two gaolers of the two galleys.²⁴ In 1642, Gio. Maria Farrugia, a sailor of the *Capitana*, was awarded six *scudi* recompense for helping to save the lives of about seventy slaves when the *Capitana* was wrecked off Cape Passero.²⁵

By his action, Farrugia saved the Order the expense of providing such a number of slaves to row in the wrecked *Capitana*'s replacement, thus saving the Order a great deal of expense and worry. Actually, six *scudi* seem to have made up a rather miserly sum unless, of course, the same amount had been awarded to many other persons who had helped in this operation. Moreover, the Order itself took steps to prevent the flight of slaves from the island. When in harbour, galley slaves had to be conducted to the slave prison in Valletta within twenty-four hours; thirty were left on board each galley for ordinary service.²⁶ When the galleys were away from Malta, a well-armed frigate was to be on continual guard at Rinella Creek. When the galleys were in harbour, one galley was to be kept always on the alert and to take over these guard duties, in summer and in winter. The galleys guarded the harbour by turn.²⁷

It seems that Malta developed what one might term an international slave market. Such a conclusion results from a letter written by King Charles II of England to Grand Master Nicholas Cotoner in 1673 in which the English monarch asked to be exempted from paying export dues on slaves bought at Malta. Charles asserted that this privilege was already being accorded to the sovereigns of France and Spain and so he expected similar privileged treatment for England.²⁸

Convicts

Convicts were sometimes sentenced to serve their penalty rowing on board the galleys, which constituted the 'hard labour' part of their sentences. Some of these rowers were recruited from the islands themselves.²⁹ Usually, a convict condemned to the galleys by the local courts of Justice was also specified the name of the particular galley to which he was assigned by the Court Order and the prisoners were then handed over to the gaoler concerned, or to his deputy, who was also informed of the condemned prisoners' sentences.³⁰ However, convicts sent to serve their sentence aboard a galley could have their sentences changed to penal servitude on land as was the case with Hieronymus Vella who was transferred from the galley *San Placido* to prison ashore in 1598.³¹ In the same year, Vincentio Caridi and

16. P. Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary*, London 1970, 81.

17. AOM 663,664,665, *Camera d'Audienza*, *passim*.

18. G. Fisher, *Barbary Legend: War, Trade and Piracy in North Africa 1415-1830*, Oxford 1957, 164.

19. AOM 664, f. 147r, 11 March 1628.

20. AOM 664, f. 148r, 11 March 1628.

21. AOM 108, f. 108v, 16 July 1625.

22. AOM 293, Chapter-General (Ch.G.) 1598, f. 109r, *Ordinatione* (Ord.) 74 *Galere*; AOM 294, Ch.G. 1604, f. 123r, *Ord.* 89 *Galere*; AOM 296, Ch.G. 1631, f. 146, *Ord.* 99 *Galere*.

23. AOM 663, ff. 76r-v, 1 September 1607.

24. AOM 664, ff. 171r-v, 2 March 1630.

25. AOM 665, f. 140r, 17 May 1642.

26. AOM 293, Ch.G. 1598, f. 108r, *Ord.* 60 *Galere*; AOM 294, Ch.G. 1604, f. 122r, *Ord.* 76 *Galere*; AOM 296, Ch.G. 1631, f. 145v, *Ord.* 86 *Galere*.

27. AOM 100, f. 248r, 9 August 1602.

28. Fisher, 164; W. Porter, *A History of the Knights of Malta*, London 1883, 336-7; A. Mifsud, *Knights Hospitallers of the Venerable Tongue of England in Malta*, Malta 1916, 251; AOM 1207, not paginated, letter dated 19 February 1673. Porter gives an English translation of the letter but Mifsud has published the original Latin text.

29. Archives of the Superior Courts of Justice (ASC), *Magna Curiae Castellaniae* (MCC), *Registrum Actorum Criminalium* (RAC), *Volume Unico*, *passim*.

30. *Ibid.*, *passim*.

31. *Ibid.*, 25 May 1598.

Antonio Maldonado were imprisoned but it was stipulated that they were not to be sent on the galleys.³² Sometimes, contingents of convicts from other states were sent to serve their sentences on the Order's galleys. In 1591, the Order made efforts to try and obtain two hundred convicts from the Papal States,³³ and followed this up with another effort in 1595.³⁴ The galley convicts not only comprised those convicted by secular courts, but also prisoners condemned by ecclesiastical authorities as well.³⁵

Naturally, the Order sought convicts who were young and had a longish sentence to carry out. Thus in 1625 we find Chevalier Luigi Megalotti being told to send convicts to Malta provided they were between the ages of eighteen and forty and had a prison sentence of at least six years' duration.³⁶ Probably, this stipulation was only for convicts brought to Malta from abroad because of the expense and trouble involved to ferry them to the island. There does not seem to have been any such stipulations regarding Maltese convicts and these, in fact, did serve out sentences ranging from life to as little as two years. Thus, in 1597, Petro Grec and Franciscus Ricardo were given a life sentence whilst Tufano de Arrigo and Silvestro Calaras were sentenced to five and four years respectively.³⁷ In 1599, Baptista de Natale received a ten-year sentence but Christophanus de Francisco was sentenced for a term of only two years.³⁸ This does not mean that galley convicts received uniform length of sentences in all countries. In 1545, the Venetians decided that a man sentenced to less than eighteen months could not be sent to the galleys and that the maximum sentence that could be meted out in this respect was twelve years. Moreover, a death sentence could also be commuted to ten years rowing service. Another decision involved the rowers who were the 'bench companions' of an escaped convict: they were given a life sentence and had their noses amputated.³⁹ As already stated, in Malta there was no maximum to a galley sentence and there seems to be no evidence regarding such extra harsh treatment accorded to

32. Ibid., 4 August 1598.

33. AOM 445, ff. 131r-v, 12 January 1591.

34. AOM 449, f. 268r, 18 December 1595. In the instructions given to the Captain of the galley San Placido, Fra Honofrio Copones, there is written: 'Procurando ancora con il nostro Religioso Fra Emilio Pucci, Generale delle Galere di Nostro Signore di havere alcuni forzati habili a vogare, e che con detta fragata, o altra migliore comodità vi siano consignati.' Cf. AOM 1377, ff. 292r-293r, 15 December 1595, Grand Master to Emilio Pucci.

35. The following are two examples: AOM 663, f. 86r, 27 October 1607, where it is stated that the Spaniard Michele Danza had been condemned to the galleys by an inquisitor; AOM 665, f. 91v, 20 July 1640, wherein one finds Giovanni Garnier, a Frenchman, being given a life sentence on the galleys by the inquisitor of Avignon.

36. AOM 1404, unpaginated, 30 April 1625.

37. ASC, MCC, RAC, 18 and 23 October 1597, 9 and 10 July 1597 respectively.

38. Ibid., 6 February and 31 March 1599 respectively.

39. Nani Mocenigo, 42-3.

an escaped convict's companions, though penalties were inflicted on whoever helped such people, or any rower, to escape.

The Maltese Courts of Justice could, in fact, inflict the punishment of conviction to row on the galleys for a number of offences. Sentences varied according to the gravity of the offence committed. Thus, in this category, there were included fraudulent bankruptcy, violent rape (but not simple rape), pandering by married men, duplicity, theft, and duels that did not result in a death. The drawing of arms entailed a punishment of two years on the galleys; insults by words and deeds were punishable by a ten-year sentence which was extended to life if the offence was committed a second time. This last punishment was also meted out for attempted murder.⁴⁰

It seems that conviction to the galleys was also inflicted as punishment for crimes involving adultery and contempt of Court. In 1599, Constantino Miraglia from Valletta and Antonina Seychell from Vittoriosa were ordered by the Court not to meet or talk together and to keep away from each other's respective place of residence, that is, away from Valletta and Vittoriosa. Disobedience entailed condemnation to the galleys for Miraglia and exile for Seychell. However, in March 1599, Miraglia's wife, Isabella, alleged that these orders had been broken and so she petitioned for justice to take its course.⁴¹

On the termination of their sentences, galley convicts were released, usually after petitioning for their freedom when they stated the grounds for their request.⁴² If a convict terminated his sentence during a voyage, he was forced to continue his service till his galley returned to Malta, after which he was released and paid for the extra service he had performed.⁴³ Sometimes, liberty was granted to prisoners because they were too old or feeble to be of any use on the galleys.⁴⁴

However, penalties were inflicted on those responsible for the escape of condemned men, especially if they happened to have had life sentences imposed on them. One such case occurred in 1610 when Chevalier Fra Carlo di Gaillarbois Marconville was fined a hundred *scudi* because a man condemned for life on the galleys had escaped from his house. The knight's plea that the convict in question was too old and too feeble to row was not accepted.⁴⁵ In 1608, the Captain of the galley *San Luigi*, Chevalier Arteman de Than, was declared responsible for the escape of a convict working out his life sentence. He was condemned to supply the Order with a slave to substitute the escaped convict.⁴⁶

39. Nani Mocenigo, 42-3.

40. P. Debono, *Sommario della Storia della Legislazione in Malta*, Malta 1897, 235-6.

41. ASC, MCC, RAC, 15 March 1599.

42. AOM 663, f. 31v, 14 January 1606, contains one such example.

43. AOM 667, f. 38v, 11 January 1659.

44. AOM 663, f. 86r, 27 October 1607.

45. AOM 663, f. 160r, 9 October 1610.

46. AOM 663, f. 107v, 29 November 1608. The escape of the prisoner had taken place in Barcelona two years previously.

It seems that men condemned to the galleys were not always forced to carry out their sentences if they could produce someone else to take their places. One such case occurred in 1621 when Pasquale Besina, condemned to row on the galleys for ten years, petitioned to be allowed to supply a slave to row in his stead. The petition was accepted on condition that, if the slave provided died of illness before the expiration of the ten years in question, Besina was to supply a second slave who would continue to row on the galleys for perpetuity. Moreover, Besina was to give a pledge not to leave Malta during the accorded period of ten years.⁴⁷ A similar case occurred in 1640 when Giovanni Garnier, already mentioned above, pleaded that he was unfit to row. He was allowed to provide a slave to take his place but had to undertake not to leave Malta during the next six years.⁴⁸

Buonavoglie

The *buonavoglie*, unlike the other two types of oarsmen, were actually freemen who volunteered to row on the galleys. They were usually debtors who, paid a lump sum when they signed on, had their minute salary withheld until its book value had accumulated sufficiently to repay the original sum advanced. Once this debt was repaid, *buonavoglie* were free to leave the service, during which period they were treated like slaves but were normally unchained and armed when the galleys were hard-pressed in action.⁴⁹ This does not mean that a *buonavoglia* was treated as an honourable person by the people at large. In fact, to be called a *buonavoglia* was an insult, and a grave one at that. In 1596, a soldier of the galley *Santa Croce*, Joannellus Soaramueza, complained at the Courts of Justice that Vincenza Ferraro had insulted him and his wife by telling her that she was the wife of a whipped *buonavoglia*. The fact that the soldier took such a case to Court indicates the contempt felt for the *buonavoglie* by the population at large.⁵⁰

Apparently, *buonavoglie* were sometimes cajoled into service by methods reminiscent of the press-gang. Sir Harry Luke quotes Captain Pantera Pantera in describing one such method 'adopted by the rulers of the Two Sicilies, who opened gaming houses staffed with skilful touts, who lent money to lure young gamblers. Naturally these lost their money, and engaged themselves as *buone voglie* in acquittal of what they believed to be debts of honour.'⁵¹ However, even though the Order of St John was always in need of such rowers, there is no evidence to suggest that such methods were practised in Malta.

Sometimes, men who were not fit for the arduous task of rowing were engaged as *buonavoglie*. The result was that these people either remained in service and were paid for doing nothing or else they had to be discharged when they were still debtors to the Order. Therefore, in 1596 it was decided that, henceforth, new *buonavoglie* had to be over twenty years old and had to satisfy the Captains and the squadron's *Riveditore* as to their ability and strength to row.⁵² This decree was again emphasised in 1625 and it was made clear that no agreement was to be reached with a *buonavoglia* unless the *Riveditore* was completely satisfied with the new recruit.⁵³

In 1614, the salary of the *buonavoglie* was raised to twenty-two *tari* a month,⁵⁴ but by 1637 they were being paid less: eighteen *tari* monthly.⁵⁵ In 1650, that rate was still in force⁵⁶ but in 1669, the *buonavoglie*'s salaries were raised by six *tari* monthly.⁵⁷ In 1644, the sum to be expended on the salaries of the *buonavoglie* was calculated to be 8057 *scudi* yearly which was the same amount accorded in 1637, always taking into account that the full complement of *buonavoglie* on the six galleys was supposed to be 440 men.⁵⁸ Moreover, the maximum that could be advanced in one sum was thirty *scudi*, and this could only be carried out on the advice of the Captain, who was to sign such a payment, otherwise the Treasury was

52. AOM 99, ff. 119v-120v; AOM 1759, f. 415r; AOM 1760, f. 355r; all 7 December 1596: 'Item perchè sogliono accordar nelle galere alcuni bonavoglia giovani che non sono atti a vogare al remo e tirare il soldo di continuo senza servire, et in questo mezzo ben spesso cascano ammalati di sorte che di necessità bisogna licentiarli per inutile. Pertanto ti ricorda che più non si possa accordar alcun buonavoglia che non sia di anni venti ad altro e che li signori Capitani et Riveditori li facciano visitare se sono sani e tatti a vogare accio la Religione non resti defraudata.' It has already been noted that the Order preferred galley-convicts to be in the 18-40 years age bracket. Cf. AOM 1404, unpaginated, 30 April 1625. The office of *Riveditore* was instituted in 1541 in order to have an auditor in the galley squadron to look after the interests of the Treasury in accordance with the instructions he was given. He was always a knight and, in a sense, he was also a purveyor. For an exposition of his duties cf. J.F. Grima, *The Galley-Squadron of the Order of St John: Its Organisation between 1596 and 1645*, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Malta 1975, 196-201.

53. AOM 108, f. 112v, 2 August 1625.

54. AOM 105, f. 73r; AOM 1759, f. 415v; AOM 1760, f. 355v; all 17 July 1614.

55. AOM 737, f. 88r, 20 July 1637: 'N.o 17. Salario di buonavoglie. Di più s'obliga pagare di mese in mese il salario conforme al presentente tengono assignato a 90 buonavoglie della Galera Capitana e a 70 per chiascuna privata a tt. 18 il mese per uno, o quel più che hanno al mese ...'

56. Library 162, f. 108v.

57. AOM 261, f. 117r, 7 January 1669.

58. AOM 738, f. 2v, 27 July 1644: 'Et anco di dare in capo all'anno scudi otto milacinquante sette p. il soldo dalli bonavoglie di tutte le sei Galere, ...'

47. AOM 664, f. 44v, 24 November 1621.

48. AOM 665, ff. 91r-v, 20 July 1640.

49. G. Wetinger, 'The Galley-convicts and Buonavoglie in Malta during the Rule of the Order', *Journal of the Faculty of Arts*, Vol. III, 1965, 29-37; AOM 665, ff. 206r-v, 209v, both 14 January 1645; Library 110, ff. 16r-v.

50. ASC, MCC, RAC, 1 July 1596. The exact words were: 'ella era moglie di buonavoglia frustato'.

51. Luke, 79. Pantera's book, published in Rome in 1614, is entitled *L'Armata Navale*.

not bound to honour the payment in question.⁵⁹ Such a sum would keep a man in bondage for almost two and a half years, since 5 *scudi* 5 *tari* was deducted from their pay every year for a change of clothing.⁶⁰

The *buonavoglie* were recruited from Malta itself and from overseas. In the decrees granting discharges, one sometimes finds the locality where the oarsman in question hailed from,⁶¹ one such example being Giovanni Mamo of Qormi, Malta.⁶² It is a fact that quite a number of the surnames of the *buonavoglie* do not sound Maltese and that the Order made efforts to recruit *buonavoglie* from abroad on a number of occasions. In 1601, the orders to Captain-General Jacques de Blot Viviers for a voyage to Syracuse, Messina and Naples included the provision of *buonavoglie* for the galleys,⁶³ an order repeated to Captain-General Ascanio Cambiano in his voyage to Sicily in 1604.⁶⁴ In 1605, Captain-General Don Bernardo de Speletta was ordered to pick up from Naples *buonavoglie* who had already been recruited for the Order⁶⁵ whilst, in 1606, an agent of the Order was to recruit about one hundred and fifty *buonavoglie* to be picked up by the galleys on their return trip from Spain and France.⁶⁶ In 1625, the Grand Master wrote to thank Receiver Don Carlo Valdina for having recruited seventy *buonavoglie* for the galleys of the Order.⁶⁷ Sometimes, foreign-born *buonavoglie* settled in Malta after marrying local girls. Such *buonavoglie* include Vito de Bono and Francesco Perone, from Trapani and Messina, who both married women from Luqa in 1599 and 1631 respectively.⁶⁸

When the galleys were in Maltese harbours, *buonavoglie* were allowed shore leave. Married *buonavoglie* were allowed to sleep in their own homes whilst others were required to return to their galleys by sunset. At any rate, married *buonavoglie* could not leave their homes and wander about during the hours of darkness. Penalties

59. AOM 109, f. 108r, 16 July 1625: 'Alli buonavoglie non si anticipi il loro soldo più di scudi trenta, e questo non si faccia se non con il parere delli proprii Capitani, che devono conoscere il merito di ciascuno con poliza sottoscritta di man loro, altrimenti non si faccia buono il pagamento.'

60. Library 162, ff. 108r-v.

61. AOM 663, 664, 665, *Camera d'Audienza, passim*.

62. AOM 664, f. 288v, 17 November 1636.

63. AOM 454, f. 258v, 12 February 1601: '... procurarete di far buona quantità di buonavoglie ...' The Captain-General was the overall commander of the galley squadron.

64. AOM 455, f. 256r, 15 November 1604: 'Attendendo sempre a far di bonavoglie per armamento di dette galere.'

65. AOM 455, f. 261r, 20 January 1605: '... procurando con ogni diligenza arrivai a Napoli, dove imbarcando le bonavoglie che per conto nostro si sono fatti in quella città ...'

66. AOM 1385, not paginated, 16 December 1606, letter from the Grand Master to Receiver Capece.

67. AOM 1404, not paginated, 6 September 1625, letter from the Grand Master to Receiver Valdina.

68. G. Micallef, *Hal Luqa: Niesha u Grajjietha*, Malta 1975, 40.

for transgression were harsh and amounted up to three years rowing on the galleys, chained and without any payment.⁶⁹ Disregard of this law does not seem to have been infrequent, and such transgression sometimes also included further charges, including that of violence. In 1596, Stephano Casullo of the *Santa Croce* and Michael Rogeris of the *Padrona* were both accused of not returning to their respective galleys for the night. Casullo was found in a square at Cospicua whilst Rogeris was discovered sleeping at Valletta.⁷⁰ The accusations brought against Ottavio Berrizola of the *San Giovanni* and Constantius de Ancona of the *Santa Croce* were even more serious. In 1597, they were accused of even missing the voyages of their respective galleys by remaining ashore.⁷¹ Worse still were the accusations of theft by *buonavoglie* ashore. In 1598, the oarsman Christophanus de Francisco Antonio of the *San Giovanni* was accused of breaking and entering a shop in Vittoriosa and, in company with another *buonavoglia* Joseph de Deo of the same galley, he was charged with stealing four *scudi* worth of goods to the detriment of Matteo Gatt. In 1599, Christophanus was sentenced to row as a convict on the galleys for two years.⁷² In 1596, Leonardo de Domenico of the *Padrona* was alleged to have stolen from a square in Valletta and Mario Sacco of the *Santa Fede* was accused of theft in November, whilst in 1598, two *buonavoglie* of the *San Giovanni* stole various objects from a house at Attard.⁷³ Even more serious were cases of robbery with violence, which was the charge levelled at Melchiorre Deroso of the *San Placido*. It seems that Deroso, with two accomplices, had forcibly entered a house and wounded the plaintiff.⁷⁴ Brawling had its place too and, in 1595, an oarsman of the *Capitana* named Carolus de Medina was accused of a stabbing incident in a Valletta tavern. In 1597, this same *buonavoglia* complained that he had been attacked and injured by Thomas Cosbor in the streets of Valletta.⁷⁵ In 1649, the Order decided to take stricter measures and decided that any *buonavoglie* not on their ship or found wandering about after the second *Ave Maria* were to be punished without any trial.⁷⁶

Severe penalties were also envisaged against whoever helped a *buonavoglia* to escape but rewards were given to people who recaptured such runaways. Rewards amounted to five *scudi* whilst punishments involved the payment of the escaped *buonavoglia's* debt with the Treasury and also conviction to up to ten years rowing

69. Library 149, *Bandi*, p. 67, 9 December 1637.

70. ASC, MCC, RAC, 23 March 1596 and 10 December 1596.

71. *Ibid.*, 14 January 1597 and 6 March 1597.

72. *Ibid.*, 16 October 1598, 5 November 1598 and 31 March 1599.

73. *Ibid.*, 26 November 1596, 10 December 1596 and 10 October 1598.

74. *Ibid.*, 12 December 1596.

75. *Ibid.*, 13 December 1595 and 26 September 1597.

76. Library 149, *Bandi*, p. 69, 28 April 1649.

on the galleys.⁷⁷ Sometimes, *buonavoglie* escaped and took refuge in churches by invoking the right of sanctuary but, in 1644, a Papal Brief of Urban VIII gave permission to the Order to re-capture the *buonavoglie* from the church in question if the galleys were going to depart.⁷⁸

When a *buonavoglia* had paid off his debts to the Order, he was granted his release, usually after a petition. Petitions were sometimes also made by men still in debt but who were no longer fit to row because of old age, illness, or some other cause. A number of these men were also given their release.⁷⁹ Sometimes, the Order did not accede to such petitions. In 1637, Nimico Cassar, a *buonavoglia* on board the galley *Santa Ubaldesca*, was granted his freedom only after working for a whole month ashore.⁸⁰ In 1633, Tomaso Causero of the galley *San Giovanni* was given his freedom after paying his outstanding debt to the Treasury,⁸¹ with the same treatment being accorded in 1638 to Vincentio Bartolo of the galley *San Pietro*.⁸² But in 1644, Francesco di Donna of the galley *San Lorenzo* had to pay forty *scudi* to enable three other *buonavoglie* to take his place,⁸³ whilst in 1645 Giovanni di Chiara of the galley *San Giuseppe* had to find two *buonavoglie* to replace him before he was set at liberty.⁸⁴ Sometimes, however, it seems that *buonavoglie* obtained their freedom by illicit means. A case in point is the fate of Giulio Muscat of Luqa in 1598. Muscat fell in company with an unnamed *buonavoglia* from whom he borrowed four *scudi*. After passing the evening together, Muscat got drunk and woke up the next morning to find himself chained in the place of the *buonavoglia* on board the galley *San Filippo*. Efforts to obtain his release proved fruitless.⁸⁵ The attitude of the authorities seems to suggest that they did not really care about such goings-on as long as the interests of the state were not impaired.

On the other hand, certain services could win a *buonavoglia* his freedom. In 1623, Vincenzo Tempera and Giovanni de Nicolacci were set free because they had been promised their liberty for carrying the victims of a contagious disease to the *Isolotto*, where they had also tended the sick, thus putting their own lives in jeopardy.⁸⁶ The year 1645 seems to have been a lean year for the numbers of

buonavoglie on the Order's galleys because more than thirty-six of them were discharged during the course of that year.⁸⁷ No one could be discharged during the three months preceding the termination of the term of duty of a Captain, who was bound to hand over to his successor as many *buonavoglie* as he had found on the galley excepting, of course, those who had died or had been freed by decree of the Grand Master or the Treasury.⁸⁸

Dangers

Whilst it is true that it was uneconomical to allow a rower to die of maltreatment or exposure, it is a fact that such men could very easily be killed or wounded when the galleys were in action, more so because they were shackled to their places and could not really move about to take adequate cover. In the attack on Susa in 1619, two rowers were killed and four were wounded. The dead included a *buonavoglia* whilst two of the wounded were maimed for life.⁸⁹ At Santa Maura in 1625, nine rowers died; this figure was made up of two *buonavoglie*, one convict and six slaves.⁹⁰ During the sea-fight against a Turkish *Soltana* in 1644, *buonavoglie* were freed to help because the galleys were hard-pressed and two of them died in action.⁹¹

Food, Clothes and Treatment

A rower's bread portion was to have a total weight of forty ounces divided into three loaves.⁹² Bread was to be of good quality and had to be obtained from the bakery of the Order. However, each galley could be allowed to order its own supplies from one particular baker, as had been the practice during the magistracy of Grand Master Hughes Loubenx de Verdalle (1581-95). One of the four commissioners of the galleys, together with the *Riveditore*, was to assume responsibility for the distribution of bread when the galleys were in harbour and to ensure that it conformed to the stipulated conditions.⁹³ When ship's biscuit was distributed in place of bread, each rower was given one *rotolo*.⁹⁴

Every year, each rower was given a change of garments. His issue included a cape, a woollen vest, trousers, shirt, cap and shoes for winter together with cloth, cap and shoes for summer.⁹⁵ Each week, these issues were checked by the gaoler

77. Ibid., pp. 71 and 68-9, 16 October 1641 and 28 April 1649.

78. AOM 220, f. 321r; AOM 257, ff. 179r-v; both dated 27 August 1644. The Papal Brief was dated 28 July 1644.

79. AOM 663.664.665, *Camera d'Audienza*, *passim*.

80. AOM 665, f. 9r, 16 May 1637.

81. AOM 664, f. 196v, 10 September 1633.

82. AOM 665, f. 44r, 14 August 1638.

83. AOM 665, f. 199r, 22 November 1644.

84. AOM 665, f. 202r, 4 January 1645.

85. Micallef, 46-7.

86. AOM 664, f. 79v, 20 November 1623: 'Vincenzo Tempera e Giovanni de Nicolacci bonavoglie domandano che gli sia data libertà, e che gli sia relassato il lor debito che tengono con la Religione con se gli fù promesso dalli SS.ri Commissarij Deputati per il sospetto del detto male all'Isolotto, et ivi governarli si come in effetto fuero.'

87. AOM 665, ff. 202r-230r, *passim*.

88. AOM 294, Ch.G. 1604, f. 122v, *Ord. 79 Galere*; AOM 296, Ch.G. 1631, f. 145r, *Ord. Galere*.

89. AOM 1768, ff. 67r-v.

90. Ibid., ff. 138r-139r.

91. AOM 665, ff. 206r-v and 209v, 14 January 1645.

92. AOM 110, ff. 182r-v; AOM 222, f. 188r; both 28 June 1632.

93. AOM 1759, f. 416r; AOM 1760, f. 356r; both 30 November 1631.

94. AOM 737, f. 88v, 20 July 1637; AOM 738, f. 3r, 27 July 1644.

95. AOM 737, f. 88r, 20 July 1637.

helped by the purser of the galley.⁹⁶ Moreover, each member of the *ciurma* received cooked food worth one *grano* daily.⁹⁷ The three types of rowers could not be distinguished from each other by their garments or 'uniform', so they were allowed different distinguishing marks of servitude. Convicts had to have their beards and heads completely shaved but the slaves were allowed a tuft of hair on the crowns of their heads. *Buonavoglie* also had their heads completely shaved but they were allowed to grow a moustache.⁹⁸ Incidentally, these signs of servitude helped to combat lice infestation which was responsible for typhus epidemics in all navies.⁹⁹

Members of the Order were prohibited from maltreating in any way either members of the crew or the rowers. For the former offence, the offenders could be severely punished, including being sentenced to at least three months in the *guva*. If someone had a grievance against a rower, he could not take the law in his own hands but had to report the matter either to the Captain-General or the galley Captain, who would then take the necessary action.¹⁰⁰

96. AOM 293, Ch.G. 1598, f. 107v, *Ord. 54 Galere*; AOM 294, Ch.G. 1604, f. 121v, *Ord. Galere*; AOM 296, Ch.G. 1631, f. 145r, *Ord. 80 Galere*.

97. AOM 737, ff. 87r-v, 20 July 1637.

98. Pantera, 130-2.

99. P. Cassar, *Medical History of Malta*, London 1964, 120.

100. AOM 293, Ch.G. 1598, *Ord. 46 Galere*; AOM 294, Ch.G. 1604, f. 121r, *Ord. 58 Galere*; AOM 296, Ch.G. 1631, f. 144r, *Ord. 68 Galere*.