

# The Maltiadi

Alla maghna, uliedi, u Malta hanina  
*My children, God is with us & Malta is merciful*

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## **Prelude**

In ancient times when men were barely young  
Grew legends of green islands in the sea  
Blessed by the goddesses fertility  
From fishy bays to fields of breezy corn

Finding their fading pastures waste & worn  
A pagan tribe glimpse land from Sicily  
& sailing south achieve prosperity -  
The isles of Malta from Europa shorn.

### Calypso

This is a story I must tell  
Tho a very famous tayle  
& Homer sings it more than well -  
After the Trojan fortress fell  
Leaving behind that smoking shell  
King Oddyseus set sail.

With his adventures well begun  
This hardy Ithican crew  
Came to the Island of the Sun  
Where powerful Hyperion  
Kept happy cattle fat upon  
Grassy Sicilian dew

*"Tho starvation does threaten us,  
Keep from the great Sun God's herd,"*  
Extracting his crew' promises  
Deep-sleeping mused Oddyseus  
But the hungry Eurylochus  
Urged them not to keep their word

Men cut many a cow's thick throat  
On the roasted haunches feast  
The scent wafted toward the boat,  
Whose captain woke from dreamy float

As Hyperion dawn did coat  
With the roses of the east

Odyssey raced up the hill  
Where he saw he was too late  
Amid carcasses of the kill  
His comrades had all ate their fill  
Rebuking them, with sayer-skill  
Saw Harpies above their fate

The Sun God suffer'd soul distraught  
& flew to high Olympus  
There gave great Zeus his good report  
& bloody retribution sought,  
The Cloud King leant his full support,  
Punishing Odyssey.

They saw his swift-sail'd galley part  
The plain of the wine-dark waves  
Zeus cast a blinding thunder-dart  
To blow that little ship apart  
Where all but one gave up their heart  
In the ghostly deep-sea graves.

Only Odyssey survives  
Clinging to a broken mast  
Weeping for all his comrade's lives  
Weeps for their weanlings & their wives  
For sure his grieving mind arrives  
Peering on his happy past

An island forms from memory  
Where the forest falcons fly  
*"My beloved Penelope*

*Telemachus perch'd on our knee,"*  
How soon the salt of that sad sea  
Swell'd with all those tears he cry

Skin scorching in the Sun God's rays  
Dark swallowing eye-diamonds  
He drifted for nine thirsty days  
Then on the tenth, to his amaze,  
He saw the most tranquil of bays  
Amid three verdant islands

Fate wash'd him neath a cliff so sheer  
Where Calypso had her cave  
Tho beautiful she did appear  
Formidable was she in fear  
Not man nor god would to her near  
Even Hercules the brave.

Tho tranquil was her high recess  
The cave was far from quiet,  
Her maids chatted in gentillesse  
The song birds wooed the cypresses  
& sang all day did their goddess  
Where the red vines ran riot.

She took this shipwreck to her lair  
With kindness him did cover  
Her maids a fine banquet prepare  
Sweet wine & honey would they share  
Before the nymph fell for his stare  
& took him for a lover.

Her maids prepar'd the wooing rooms  
The middle ones of seven

Incense of *Celandine* illumines  
Pristine honeycomb catacombs  
Woosy on *Peach Blossom* perfumes  
Oddyseus felt heaven

## Part 2

She was a very ardent dame  
Til the dawning of the sun  
& tho the night was full of flame  
With kisses blissful as they came  
Oddyseus was full of shame  
When the whirl of passion done

& he did wander when the day  
Lit the red, sea-girdl'd sands  
Sat on the rocks of Ramla bay  
Our captive wheeled the hours away  
Haunted by love so far away  
With his head held in his hands

Oddyseus wept for his wife  
Far across the rolling sea  
How once they shared a perfect life  
Before the bloody Trojan strife  
Had like a surgeon with a knife  
Severed their tranquility

& in the distance he saw land  
Like a shield upon the sea  
Where fisherboats sail'd off the strand  
Rushing along surf-beaten sand  
He shouted loud & waved wild hand

At the shores of Sicily

The siren heard his soul's anguish,  
But quick-witted Calypso,  
Fill'd far-off chequer'd nets with fish  
Many a fine & tasty dish,  
So they would never want to wish  
To try the seas of Gozo

& any other boats that pass'd  
Close in the Maltese Channel  
She sent a zephyr to the mast  
To take its sail & trail it fast  
For other climes, until at last  
The Nymph had won her battle

*"For me thou art too powerful,"*  
Odyssey objected,  
*"Do you not find me beautiful,"*  
Calypso purr'd, *"Tis no trouble*  
*To turn you to an immortal*  
*By age never afflicted!*

*& you shall live & love with me*  
*On this green & easy isle,*  
*Our wonderful eternity*  
*Sooth'd by a deep, romantic sea,*  
*Few men gain immortality,"*  
Whisper'd she, with sultry smile!

*"Tho this is rare what ye intend,*  
*Thine offer I must refuse,*  
*Spurning a life in sweet suspend,*  
*For I would wish that life to end*

*Without my true-love & my friend,  
Tis my good wife I would choose."*

So lonely lived Oddyseus  
Thro' a life of lust & tears,  
His lover grew vainglorious  
His loving grew laborious  
Him ice & she sartorious  
Thro' the swirl of seven years

For seven years this was his doom  
As Calypso's hopeless spouse  
By day, while she work'd at the loom  
Down by the bay he sunk in gloom  
Til nightfall & that womby room  
In her carnal cavern-house

The gods met, wisdom to impart  
On misty-topp'd Olympus  
Teary Athene shrill did start,  
*"A man has been too long apart  
From the soft harbour of his heart,  
Please release Oddyseus."*

So the sacred council clashes  
Til Zeus pass'd his wise judgement,  
*"Before this man turns to ashes  
Let him touch that to him precious,"*  
To the nymph with flashing lashes  
Fleet-sandall'd messenger sent.

With honour went happy Hermes,  
To converse with Calypso,  
When golden sandals caught the breeze

He skimm'd over unending seas  
Until a vision him did please,  
Misty archipelago!

### Part 3

The lady of the lovely locks  
Was weaving with precision,  
Her prisoner wept on the rocks  
Hermes slipp'd by him, sly as fox,  
The Star-Mermaid show'd her deep shocks  
At the Cloud King's decision

They shared rosy ambrosia  
"Ye gods," began Calypso,  
"Will not let man be my lover,  
*I would have loved him forever,  
Must he go over the water?"*  
"Yes he must!" "Then he shall go."

As to Olympus flew Hermes  
Calypso drew to the sea  
& gently touch'd her captive's knees,  
But she had long since ceas'd to please  
He shrivell'd back, "*Be at your ease,  
For you are free to leave me,*

*& I shall help ye leave this place  
But why did my love ye spurn?"*  
"Tho ye have ever youthful face  
& shine so gentle in thy grace,  
My never-fading wishes race

*To the day of my return."*

She placed a bronze axe in his hand  
With handle of olive-wood,  
For seven years her lust had spann'd  
But such was her dreadful demand  
She never let him tread inland  
Where the stony temples stood.

He saw table mountains tower  
Over lush, green valley floor,  
Where Calypso used her power  
To summon a morning shower  
Soon a blanket of fresh flower  
Lined the highway to the shore

Odysseyus stood on high ground  
Surveying this sweet vista  
The jade seas on all sides surround  
The trees rustled with breezy sound  
& as that Grecian freedom found  
He thank'd the nymph & kiss'd her.

The goddess blush'd, then led them on  
Down to dramatic Dwejra,  
Where skiffy sea-mews breed upon  
The rocky cliffs, where sable shone  
The night-black fungus - now them gone  
Down to a happy harbour.

It was a place where dolphins play  
Fed by the heavy ocean  
That swept in thro a tall archway  
Neath cliffs that kept the storms at bay

With forest thick on sandy fray  
Where birds sang with emotion.

Into the trees the freeman tore  
With the full force of a gale  
There cut down twenty trunks or more  
Then bound them with Ithican lore  
& as the boat the waters bore  
Sea-nymph knitted him a sail.

Heavy-hearted grew Calypso,  
Sad moment of their prising,  
*"This fragrant clothing I bestow,  
Two skins with wine & water flow,  
A sack of corn, a ball of dough  
& sweet-meats appetizing."*

Taken with such solemnity  
Her goddess-tears kiss water,  
*"Farewell man-king, take to the sea,  
I give thee back thy liberty,"*  
*"Farewell sweet nymph, Atlas must be  
Proud to call thee his daughter,"*

As that trim-ship slipp'd to the sands  
Pleasant bouyancy was found,  
Calypso a cool breeze commands  
& waves him off with weary hands  
Now over fish our hero stands  
Sailing their spangling playground.

The boat drifted thro the archway  
Onto wide ocean's expanse,  
Now far from shore & surfy spray

He looked his last on Ramla Bay  
Where lovers on Valentine's Day  
Shall share the moment's romance.

### Proverbs

#### **Friends & Family**

Better quarelling with mothers  
Than offending neighbours

Prefer hundreds of foes  
Before false friendship

Lives without honest amity  
Houses without doors

Friendship invoking carefree laughter  
Also provokes tears

Between frightening fraternal quarreling  
Refrain from interference

When offspring earns profit  
Houses deepen foundations

Austere children return home  
Pamper'd children dissappear

## **Love & Marriage**

Wherever the heart loves  
The legs walk

Sharing almond-kisses without embracing  
Flowers without fragrance

Lovely girls use looks  
Ugly girls, mirrors

Marriage blends bitter barrels  
With sweet honey-licks

From marriage without lovemaking  
Sorrowful lifetimes prosper

Ugly husbands soon hated  
Lovely husbands, stalked

Illicit carnal kisses command  
Shallow sacramental love

## **Life & Death**

All existence a chain  
Everybody needs everybody

Life's idiosyncracies surpass task-masters  
Acknowledge expensive mistakes

If oil-lamps contain fuel  
Sick men recover

When accounting for lives  
Endings outrank beginnings

Old folk approach death  
Death chooses youth

Both king & beggar  
Equal before death

As corpses rot away  
Grief diminishes daily

### **Work & Play**

From toil & sweat  
Grows comfortable rest

When making good beginnings  
Future workload halv'd

Those offering advance payment  
Recieve bad work

Hunger eggs on everybody  
Slothfulness eats stones

Tho' roses may enrapture  
Bread maintains life

Better an idle day  
Than profitless work

Tho laziness fosters luck  
Procrastination denies success

### **Rich & Poor**

Better honest, tatter'd peasant  
Than bitter-tongued aristocrat

Those who offer charity  
Never waste money

Having estates at Buleben  
Commands global respect

Rent rises before us  
Awaiting daily work

Money employed invites interest  
Money saved, theives

Wealth produces many friends  
Poverty only solitude

As Malta accepts corn  
Impoverishment needs alms

### **This & That**

To destoy irritating cobwebs

Kill thread-spinning spiders

Those who 'never' fart  
Emit them silently

Never cook succulent sauce  
Before catching calamari

Prior to renting houses  
Investigate neighbouring families

Those never experiencing evil  
Oblivious to goodness

When liars escape dripstones  
By waterspouts ensared

Sellers have single eyes,  
Buyers one hundred

### **Heaven & Hell**

Omnipresent diety hears everything  
Even secretive hearts

Correcting misdirection & indiscretion  
Godhead's sole preserve

Only divinity offers individuals  
Our lives deserving

Ears are never dirtier

Than confessional fathers'

Those befriending grinning devils  
Soon sinning sleeplessly

Whenever devils assist money-making  
Wealth swiftly dissipates

Devils sometimes obtain shares  
In smooth-running affairs

### **The Falcons of Malta**

For we are the Maltese Falcons  
& we fly across the sea,  
Every one of us an island  
Like our very own country,  
& though we nest on many peaks,  
From Java to the Balkans,  
Each one of us is proud to sing,  
*"We are the Maltese Falcons!"*

The first of us left green Gozo,  
When the East attack'd our shores,  
The woman whisked to slavery  
& the men chain'd to their oars,  
Now Arab children share our blood,  
The sultan seraglio  
Fill'd with seductive concubines,  
First of us to leave Gozo.

When Malta met Napoleon,  
Half-Eagle & half-Vulture,  
Two thousand of us left our homes  
To wend thro his adventure,  
They fought beneath the Pyramids  
& formed the Maltese Legion,  
Where many loved Egyptian wives  
Long beyond Napoleon

Then one or two flew oer the waves  
To visit their relations  
Speaking highly of Africa  
& all its prosp'rous nations,  
*"This is the nineteenth century  
& the world has freed the slaves,"*  
So for better hunting hoping  
One or two flew oer the waves.

More Falcons follow'd on the breeze  
Soon one or two was twenty  
Tunisia took thousands more  
& Tripoli knew plenty,  
Soon elegant Algeria  
Welcom'd in the good Maltese  
In whose well-fed & happy wake  
Falcons follow'd on the breeze

We hovered over Barbary  
Like a desert caravan  
Fending off the dark sahara  
From Gibralta to Sudan,  
Thro Manastir & Misurath  
Slitea & Benghazi

Swift & hardy Maltese Falcons,  
Hover'd over Barbary

Making nests in many nations  
Further on we Falcons flew  
Some found old Constantinople  
Some found Smyrna, some Corfu,  
But Turkey proved a hostile land  
For Christ's high congregations  
& so we flew to build anew  
Our nests in many nations

From the Statue of Liberty  
Detroit & San Francisco  
We spread across America  
Yon the vast Atlantic flow,  
Tho Falcons few we safely flew  
Around that eagle country  
Where all relax beneath the watch  
Kept always by Liberty

But for ev'ry succesful guest  
There is one that's bound to fail  
Some of us flew south to Brazil  
& theirs a sorrowful taylor,  
The wild birds of the Amazon  
Soon attack'd us in our nests  
& as we wept we wish'd to be  
The succesful Maltese guest

For wherever we Falcons roam  
Cross the globe's eternal spin  
We seem to find good hunting grounds  
Feeding us & all our kin,

For we are quite industrious  
& can call a rock a home  
Happy to drink God's precious rain  
Wherever we Falons roam

E'en when the Berlin's Eagles swarm  
With the Hawks of Italy  
Boulders from sharp talons dropping  
On our homeland in the sea,  
& so many of us were slain  
Three long years we faced the storm  
Our fine nests were turn'd to craters  
When the Berlin Eagles swarm

Thro that long night of dark & drum  
Fought we Falcons of Malta  
Whether from home or peaks abroad  
From combat did not falter,  
Then on the day of victory  
When the Dove of Peace did come  
We thank'd God that we had survived  
The long night of dark & drum

Now in the aftermath of war  
Sorry grew our hunting ground  
So many of us swept the skies  
Til a richer field was found,  
Some flew to chilly Canada  
Some the hilly Cotes D'Azor  
Helping to rebuild the future  
In the aftermath of war

& as we hold our islands dear  
Once we loved the English kings

Both coupl'd by adversity  
Huddl'd 'neath soft, loving wings,  
Our females join'd their fiancées  
Tho the climate cool & queer  
Who soon, from Portsmouth to London,  
Grew to hold those islands dear.

But being islanders at heart,  
Stunn'd by sun & sooth'd by sea  
There was a place perfect for us  
They call '*The Lucky Country,*'  
Tho friends of the Falcon Empire  
From her troubles set apart  
So to Australia we flock'd  
Being islanders at heart.

There the Maltese Falcons blossom  
In the land of Kangaroos  
With hunting plenty bountiful  
Than the fields of Gozo Shrews,  
There we converse with Koala  
& party with the Possom  
For wherever good creatures dwell  
Do Maltese Falcons blossom.

Then burning with our native pride  
We reclaim'd our nation's throne  
No more would foreign Falcons call  
Tow'ring Ta' Zuta their own,  
& ever since, with happy heart,  
From those nests we made world wide  
We return'd via Valetta  
Burning with our native pride

For we are the Maltese Falcons  
From the green fields of Gozo  
The mellow magic of Malta  
The sea-coves of Comino,  
& tho our blood flows thro the world  
From Java to the Balkans  
Each one of us still knows our song,  
*"We are the Maltese Falcons!"*

### **The Seige of Malta**

Launch'd forward with a single-minded goal  
The Sultan's arm reach'd for the Maltese thorn  
Beaching his high renown upon the stone  
& waited for the day when she would fall,  
Waited as thousands fought & gave their all,  
Brave Saracens, each one a soldier born  
Baring the Crescent of the Golden Horn  
To plant them on Saint Elmo's carnage-wall.

But not for nothing is a native rais'd  
On sacred soil soak'd in ancestral blood  
By Christ's Knights Maltese fought on every side  
Facing furious battle full unphazed  
Til on the batter'd ramparts freemen stood  
Cursing that fleeing fleet with tearful pride.

The Peacock of the world rose from his throne  
Wishing our land-lock'd sea a Turkish pond,  
*"The fish of Malta is the stepping stone  
To Sicily & to the world beyond,  
That obscure rock  
Insults us & our queen,  
Then from their viper-dock we drive the Nazarene.*

*My finest force I shall employ,"  
Added Allah's deputy,  
"These sons of dogs ever destroy,  
Tho they earn'd my clemency  
When I was young & full of joy  
Thro my first victory,  
& I allow'd them honour after Rhodes -  
But no more shall we suffer their marauds.*

*Our scimitars their throats shall slit,  
Now men, prepare my fleet!"  
Seeking credit, yearning merit,  
Gen'ral's kiss jewell'd feet,  
Leave the divan, then plan the heathen's ultimate defeat.*

## **Istanbul**

**1564**

## **II**

Grave news flies to Grandmaster De Valette  
The day of armageddon clamours near,  
Yet from the fray his faith shall never fret,  
To him the infidel inspires no fear;  
*"Prepare the walls,*

*Cancel every corso!"*  
The clang of cannoballs rang thro Saint Angelo.

Across the world the summons sent  
By ship & sweat-stain'd horsemen.  
*"Brave knights fly back to the Convent  
& fight beside our brethren!"*  
Soon many-a-foreign accent  
With one voice sang, "Amen,"  
As men, determined to die on Malta,  
Renewed their vows at the Sacred Altar.

Outside, in strangest summer rain,  
Four thousand strong Maltese  
Shall march & train with men from Spain,  
As on the ocean breeze  
Soft scent of Turkish incense wafted slowly overseas.

**Birgu**  
**May**  
**1565**

### III

From watchtowers the warning cannon ring,  
The Sultan's fleet arrives as a vast fan,  
With livestock & the still-green crops of spring  
Many to Birgu & Mdina ran;  
Dead beast & dung  
Poison'd the Marsa wells,  
Songs of devotion sung as witches flung their spells.

That amarda sail'd round Gozo,  
To show that the sea was closed,

Then at the Marsascirroco  
Made anchorage unopposed,  
As skiffs ferried his war-cargo  
Their old commander dozed,  
Untroubl'd by the course of coming days,  
Sure on him, soon, the Sultan should heap praise.

Dreams were woken by Mustapha,  
First sword of the army,  
*"My young Pasha, what's the matter?"*  
Yawn'd adm'ral Piali,  
*"This is no time for sleeping, we must seek the victory."*

### **Marsaxlokk**

**19th May**

**1565**

### **IV**

Scimitars glinting in a seering sun  
The darlings of great Suliman advance  
Cannon announcing that his seige begun,  
Has on the Sciberras took lethal stance;  
To aid the fleet  
First Saint Elmo must fall,  
Then its capture repeat beneath the Birgu wall.

Begins the thunderstorm of fire  
Oer a starry, sandstone fort,  
Best bombadeers of an empire  
Such brutal destruction wrought  
So much, defenders, doom & dire,  
The safer shore now sought -

*"Impossible!"* the Sacred Council sigh,  
*"Go back to battle & for Malta die."*

Toni Bajada took his knife,  
Pistol & poisson-dart,  
*"God bless your life,"* whisper'd his wife,  
Kissing him as they part,  
Then watch'd him ride toward the guns with sad, stonecutter's heart.

**Mdina**  
**May 26th**  
**1565**

V

The angel of death, yellow arms spread wide,  
Welcom'd the waving blades of Islam in,  
How many in her wild inferno died  
Whom, as they did, mused would they ever win;  
Inflammable,  
Those loose robes blazed with flame,  
As fort 'untenable' still struggles to their shame.

For thirty days that crumbling star  
Shone brighter than crescent moon  
Tho defenders relentless are  
Slain by snipers with impune  
& those who fill'd the three-fold bar  
Soon limbs & bowels strewn -  
Replaced by fresh christians every night,  
Skiffing the harbour eager for the fight.

The Turk now stronger efforts made,

& cut that artery,  
Thro enfilade & escalade  
& gunfire from the sea,  
Rubble & gaping breaches pave the way to victory!

**Fort Saint Elmo**

**June 21st**

**1565**

**VI**

Dawn lifted rosy wave-breaks to the shore  
& lit a sickly moment of slaughter  
For stubborn struggles, say the laws of war,  
May never be allow'd normal quater;  
The Knights prepare  
To make their final stand,  
One cripp'l'd in his chair, tho sword still in his hand.

Breachward the Janissaries pour'd,  
Pride of the Sultan's power,  
Putting all inside to the sword  
But not one Knight would cower,  
For still the Maltese lion roar'd  
For one long murd'rous hour,  
Until its throat was cut, then stone-dead fell -  
Mustapha stepp'd into that groaning hell,

*"So small a son has cost us dear,  
Then what price the father?"*

More shots men hear, them very near  
Five knights fled thro water,  
Guided by Toni Bajada safely cross the Harbour.

**Birgu**  
**June 22nd**

**VII**

Piali sail'd the Sultan's precious fleet,  
All settl'd in the Marsamuscetto,  
Men toiling in the fierce midsummer heat  
When sweat streams down & every labour slow;  
Soon fierce disease  
Adds to all the slaughter,  
Spread by the filthy fleas spawn'd in the dirty water.

Full many vantage points were found  
Round Birgu & Senglea  
From whence the Turkish gunners pound,  
*"God help us!" & "Ostia!"*  
& every cannonade was crown'd  
By trumpet, shield & spear -  
Minute-by-minute, through that hot July,  
The smoke of battle blotted out the sky.

& when the foe tried to destroy  
The deep creek pallisades  
The knights employ their handsome boy,  
Bajada's crack team wades  
Into the sea, their shark-like knives put paid to all those raids.

**Grand Harbour**  
**July**  
**1565**

**VIII**

From Norman halls to this majestic ville,  
A city rose to rival those of Rome,  
Where as the Kinghts offer their line of steel  
The Maltese now defend their hearth & home;  
A lanteen bridge  
Links them to Senglea  
As on the smoking ridge more Sapahi appear.

& charge like an electric shock,  
Sanguinary the slaughter,  
On knife-point pois'd to run amok  
All thro the Knight's headquarters,  
Tward Armageddon tick'd the clock,  
Mothers, sons & daughters  
Rush'd forth to join the menfolk in the fight,  
Yoked to the swords of Rhodes, each one a knight.

They heard the sound in Sicily  
& pray'd for De Valette,  
Tho seventy his energy  
Many-a-Muslim met,  
A sea-rock in a raging storm, the scourge of Mahomet.

**Birgu**  
**August 2nd**  
**1565**

**IX**

By boat & tower came the next assault,  
The Port of Castille reeling neath the blow  
& all seem'd lost, but for that thunderbolt  
The gods upon our mortal minds bestow;

Hospital horse  
Roll'd down Mdina's ramp  
Set on a killer course to burn the muslim camp.

As every able-bodied Turk  
Rush'd toward the walls in waves,  
The christians perform'd such work  
On their wounded & their slaves  
That thro the smoke of battle's murk  
A road of error paves -  
When verged on perfect triumph Pasha hears  
*"Relief is sent,"* fulfilling all his fears.

He march'd his army back to base,  
Of enemy no sign,  
His fuming face wick with disgrace,  
Neck-heckles, shiver-spine,  
*"Where are these men from Sicily, the victory was mine!"*

**Marsa**  
**August 7th**  
**1565**

**X**

As mines explode in animosity  
Toni Bajoda shot up in his bed,  
Tho' wounded he discover'd energy,  
Men from the sacred infirmary led;  
All gallant friends,  
Tho most could barely stand,  
Upon their strength depends the future of the land.

Knight shields fill'd-up walls warp'd by mine,

Courageous Callachio  
Join'd by the Maltese at the line  
With equal corragio,  
Toni took toll of twenty-nine,  
His knife well-loved the foe,  
So much an arquebusier took aim,  
& sent shot flying in a flash of flame.

Tho wounded, in a world of pain,  
Toni would not falter,  
Round his knife's fane still heap'd his slain,  
Sacrificial altar -  
Til muslim bleeding white no monarch dared fight for Malta.

**Senglea**  
**August 18th**  
**1565**

## XI

One hundred days of daily hearing, "*When?*"  
Sicily's Viceroy sends vital relief,  
Below Mellieha disembarks his men,  
Mustapha stroked his beard in disbelief;  
*"How many ride?"*  
*"Nigh twenty thousand sire,*  
*Combing the countryside!" "The army may retire."*

All thro the night the camp was struck -  
As the Maltese heard them yell  
For more attackers them mistook,

Standing ready to repel,  
Then saw to sea the foe had snook,  
So rang triumphant bell,  
Amplified across the purple clover,  
*"The infidel has fled, the siege over!"*

Come dawn the bells were still ringing,  
Folk stepp'd outside the wall,  
Some dance, some sing, some tear-shedding  
On bleeding knees did fall,  
As all about black bodies burst, cursed by the murd'rous maul.

**Birgu**  
**September 8th**  
**1565**

## **XII**

Mustapha heard the news he had been fool'd,  
Just six thousand form'd Sicily's relief,  
Piali's caution was soon over-ruled,  
*"Land ten thousand & meet us up the coast!"*  
How felt the Turk  
When forced back onto land  
For more of war'd black work, with peace so close at hand?

Dispirited once brave men are,  
Heads filling with dying fear,  
Hard galloping down from Naxxar  
Swerve the fresh-faced Chevalier,  
Men from Mdina & Mgarr  
Now on his flank appear,  
Enough to finalise his rising doubt,  
Cohesion turns to rabble turns to rout.

Some with his friends, some limping lone,  
Crawl to the coastal crack,  
Shelves of sandstone bare blood & bone,  
Christ-sword plunged in their back,  
The Turks plunge toward safety to a shrill, "...& dont come back!"

**Saint Paul's Bay**  
**September 8th**  
**1565**

**XIII**

The troubadors descended from the ben,  
With them was human artistry allied,  
Singing of arms & empires & the men  
Whom battles fought & emperors defied;  
How Christendom  
Triumph'd oer the Crescent -  
From Europe's old kingdoms gold-gratitudes were sent.

Auberges of Auvergne & France,  
Aragon & Germany  
Castille, Portugal & Provence  
Pour wealth into the kitty  
Fortune enough to help finance  
A fortified city,  
Join'd forever with its founding father,  
*'Humillima Civitas Valettae.'*

She told the story to her child  
Brave Knights the fight inspire,

As rubble piled more Junkers filed  
To drop their rain of fire,  
But they both sat unflinchingly like bodies on a pyre.

**Valetta**  
**1942**

**The**  
**Maltese Cross**

*"To honour her brave people I award the George Cross to the Island Fortress of Malta to bear witness to a Heroism & Devotion that will long be famous in history."*

**King George VI**

**I**

Hitler receiv'd his conquering idol,  
A dazzle of banners & manoeuvres!  
Impress'd his hero with a mock battle,  
*"How like the Spartans march these fine soldiers!"*  
Mussolini  
By marching overawed,  
Lusting, now, for glory, & conquest by the sword.

Der Fuhrer shows his mind's mystique  
Oer supper's conversation,  
*"The British Empire has grown weak,*  
*So come, my sister nation,*  
*Together we shall climb the peak*  
*Of our proper station,*  
*Forcing the course of history's censor,*

*Steal Victory thro all the pomp of war."*

Il Duce donn'd his sleeping robe,  
    *"My friend I must retire,"*  
Thick fingers probe the spinning globe,  
    Rest on his heart's desire...  
The pirate isle of Malta to protect his black empire.

**Berlin**  
**November**  
**1937**

## II

Graver & graver came the news from France,  
& now more grave, the word from Italy,  
Whose fascist jackal joins the bloody dance  
Of international hostility;  
His famous fleet,  
Neath air-force fabulous,  
Are placed at Hitler's feet, the world incredulous!

None more so than the shrewd Maltese  
Who knew this day was coming,  
Who saw the bombers on the breeze  
& heard their beelike humming,  
First taste of their deadly disease,  
Dropp'd with devil-drumming  
As overhead those screaming eagles pass  
Trailing rubble & flailing flying glass.

Up in revenge three planes ascend,  
Faith, Charity & Hope,  
Lives to defend, lines to extend  
Beyond the coastal scope,  
Returning good & blooded, many sense that they may cope.

**Luqa**  
**June 11th**  
**1940**

## III

The Generalissimo took supper,

Settl'd in his leather with Chianti,  
Imagined he sat with Calphurnia  
'Fore pouring over maps & strategy;  
His brilliance  
Unecho'd in the field,  
The Valletta defence offers a meagre yield.

Wily Britain builds strength in stealth -  
East of Cyrenaica  
The forces of the Commonwealth  
Cross Egypt's ancyent border,  
In fiery line & perfect health  
To claim an Uttica -  
From Bardia & dune-sunk lunar sands  
Push Italy's panic-stricken warbands.

Pride-swallowing Mussolini  
Neath Hitler's stern voice squirms,  
*"Fuhrer! help me! my grand army  
Rack'd with retreat & worms!"*  
*"Of course my friend, but in the end it must be on my terms."*

**Rome**  
**December**  
**1940**

#### IV

As when muskets ended the age of swords  
From henceforth oceans controll'd from the air,  
When swooping hawks patrol the old whale-roads,  
Drop lethal loads on all who venture there;

Illustrious,  
The Axis lust to sink,  
Now batter'd furious, but one blow from the brink,

She limps into the Grand Harbour  
& sleeps a sitting target,  
Regia Aeronautica  
For the coup de grace was set  
But as they reach the arena  
By hell-let-loose were met -  
Attack after ack-ack attack was made  
More brave, more foolish than the Light Brigade.

The heart of these hostilities  
Was pounded long & hard  
The Three Cities fatalities  
Spread round the wreck'd dock-yard -  
What took the Turks three months to raze by one night equal scarr'd.

**Senglea**  
**16th Jan**  
**1941**

V

Rommel took first step on the Afric sand,  
All about servants of the fiasco  
Load ships, evacuation nigh at hand,  
Arms strewn as if by Trasimene's flow;  
He cock'd his cap  
& crack'd a riding whip,  
*"Somevon get me a map, I vant to take a trip."*

His plane flew lofty on the tour  
Of hot, simmering Syrte,  
Sang the nomadic troubadour,  
*"What beauty & how ghastly!"*  
Italians flee 'long the shore  
Yon mud-baked Benghazi,  
*"We shall form a fresh defence line down there!"*  
With that they whipt back westward thro the air.

Between palm-leaf lined boulevards  
Parades the Werhmacht grey  
Like picture-cards ev'ry ten yards  
& what a hand to play  
When his aces, the panzers, have arrived to join the fray.

**Tripoli**  
**February 14<sup>th</sup>**  
**1941**

**VI**

Mussolini blames his woes on Malta,  
*"Allow this hornet's nest no hour of rest,*  
*This unsinkable aircraft carrier*  
*????????????????????*  
*She is a knife*  
*At our lines of supply,*  
*Her people full of life, then they will have to die."*

The Maltese met Il Duce's rage  
Determin'd on liberty,  
Prisoners in an island-cage  
They dug themselves to safety,

A second neolithic age  
For faith's first family  
Living life in a limestone catacomb,  
Prayer & candles lighting up the gloom.

Fighting for their little contree  
They help'd a global cause,  
Tween Italy & Tripoli  
Attack'd the Axis stores  
With submarines & wellingtons & all the wrack of wars.

**Mediterranean**  
**November**  
**1941**

**VII**

On a day suffocating & stormy,  
Resplendant bloom'd the Rose of Jericho  
Crush'd beneath the grinding machinery  
Of Afrikans advancing row by row;  
Led by Rommel,  
Darling of the masses,  
To conquer the Kanal & claim the Caucasus.

With flair & flourish he attack'd  
Over hard & calcin'd earth,  
Battle's hot, corrosive impact  
His to steer by right of birth,  
At last Tobruk captured intact,  
Much blood spilt for it's worth,

A port from which a warring conqueror  
Could drive the British out of Afrika.

To Alamein the Eighth withdraw,  
Shoring her defences,  
Mid Cairo's war th'embassadour  
Urns his secret papers,  
The fleet, from Alexandria, flees for safer harbours.

**Egypt**  
**August 7th**  
**1942**

### VIII

There was no spring in Malta, forty-two,  
For what grows on an active volcano?  
When fresh water was but the dusty dew  
Blown in by the sense-seizing Sirrocco;  
No food to spare,  
When pets gaurded by guns,  
When just the prickly pear replaced the sunken tonnes,

When sirens sound incessantly  
& rampant typhus fever,  
When fighters came from Italy  
& no-one dared relieve her  
With rats wining their liberty  
Even the believer  
Grew weary at the hunger & the stench  
Til mass restored her heart with stoic wrench.

How long can an island nation  
Bide her tongue & suffer?  
Both starvation & salvation  
On the future hover -  
But without arks of oil & flour she must soon surrender!

**Malta**  
**August**  
**1942**

**IX**

The world is at arms, the world is ablaze,  
Nigh ev'ry human forced to choose a side,  
What days are these? These are darkest of days,  
Stripping a soul of dignity & pride;  
The battle lines  
To breaking point pull'd taut,  
Der Fuhrer's grand designs to be or be distraught?

Rommel drove North of Quattara,  
His iron-clad caravans  
Rode the ridge Alem el Halfa  
As the Somuan Shermans  
Send their shells from sandy shelter,  
Wreak havoc with his plans;  
He paus'd, the pale moon growing paler still,  
From the warm south came sandstorms thick & shrill.

Dust settles on a grey terrain,  
Litter'd with armour'd hulk,  
He glanced in pain thro lists of slain,

*"A tanker has been sunk..."*

He took the news heart-sighing, *"Call it off!"* & left to sulk.

**Jabel Kalakh**  
**September 3<sup>rd</sup>**  
**1942**

**X**

The convoy pass'd the safety of the straits,  
Sailors survey'd the scene as once did Scott,  
But his soiree was not left to the fates,  
That tranquil sea tempest of shell & shot;  
No man dared bunk  
The plan steam'd on & on,  
As ship-by-ship was sunk twixt Skerki & Cape Bon.

The harbours were lined with children,  
Mingling with crying farmers,  
Out of nervous conversation  
Cheers rang out for *Port Chalmers*,  
The *Stars of Melbourne & Brisbane*,  
With their shatter'd armours -  
Survivors of the keystone of the war,  
Then the *Rochester Castle* made them four!

Ships slip into the Grand Harbour  
Towing vital tanker,  
All of Malta knew Maria  
Saved them & did thank her,  
As refuel'd submarines scent an Axis ship & sank her.

**Mediterranean**

**September 15th**

**1942**

**XI**

From nettle-danger flowers safely drawn  
With Monty on the roads to Tripoli  
The Maltese felt them less & less alone  
As day-by-day was nearing victory;  
Valiant light  
Brave Malta saved the world  
When Hitler's evil might was at Valetta hurl'd.

That once more yearn'd their homes to raze,  
In an action of sheer spite  
The heavens, for eleven days,  
Full of sound & fire-sprite,  
When spitfire its design displays  
Lord of the azure height,  
So many Axis pilots by them slain,  
They never would return in force again.

With winter comes increas'd rations,  
& mail from overseas,  
Latest fashions, famous passions  
Sets people at their ease,  
Small semblance of normality & sweet-fill'd christmas trees.

**Malta**

**December**

**1942**

## XII

Rommel retreats into Tunisia,  
Romantic lands of Hannibal's Carthage  
Fought for by Roman, Vandal & Berber,  
Inspiring war, beautiful war to wage;  
Then takes his last  
Glance over Africa,  
The vital days are pass'd, now to face Der Fuhrer.

Neath lion-sun of Africa  
Arab maidens sing goodbyes  
To a fabulous flotilla  
Form'd to ferry the Allies  
To the sands of Sicilia  
Neath luscious sommerskies  
& overwhelm the unprepared beaches  
Of the stunn'd, co-axial defenders.

From the blue waters of the Nile  
To swelt'ring Tripoli,  
Mile-after-mile of Afric trial,  
The surge thro Sicily,  
The Eighth army has finally set foot in Italy.

**Calabria**  
**September 3<sup>rd</sup>**  
**1943**

## XIII

Languor usurps the last coragio,

A fair share of the fighting has been fought,  
No faith to summon Jupiter Stator,  
The men of Italy to peace resort;  
Their admiral  
Surrenders up the fleet  
The news spreads like a bull kicking from street-to-street.

*"The war with Italy has pass'd!"*  
The Maltese celebrated,  
Sweet respite from their fighting fast  
When eggs were golden-plated,  
So peace had come to them at last -  
But not yet abated,  
The war refused to leave their shores so soon  
A Junker pass'd across the silver moon.

Before more damage it could cause  
He was shot from the sky,  
In brutal wars loose are men's laws,  
No need to ponder why  
The lynch mob raced to meet him, bubbling vengeance to apply.

**Gozo**  
**September 10<sup>th</sup>**  
**1943**

### **FIGHTING FRANCE**

Of all the famous episodes  
That frame the Maltese story  
The days that she defied the french  
Most timeless in her glory

For in the garden of the world  
She's but a little flower  
But as Goliath faced the sling  
She struck a superpower

But first how did the French happen  
To find themselves on Malta?  
They came with goddess liberty  
& nobody could halt her

Their leader was Napoleon  
From whose flagship *Orient*,  
A formal request for water  
To Grandmaster Hompsech sent

To provision such a vast fleet  
The Hospitallers declined  
For every Knight could well make out  
The truth in that Frenchman's mind

Who now found the perfect excuse  
To deploy his fighting force  
& sent forwards his Grand Armee;  
Cannon, infantry & horse!

Landing at Marsaxlokk, Gozo,  
San Julians & Saint Pauls,  
Soon one-by-one the island's forts  
To the French invader falls.

The Tricolour was everywhere  
Urging on the peasantry,  
*"Cast off the shackles of the Knights,  
& embrace thy liberty!"*

Soon all the island was conquer'd  
But for massive Valetta  
Whose great walls stood so majestic  
No army them could better

Yet Malta was an old, soft fruit  
& a worm did work inside  
Three hundred French Knights of Saint John  
Felt a surge in native pride

They urged the German Grandmaster  
To accept the Order's fate,  
*"Sire, offer him an armistice  
Before it is all too late!"*

Then came Maltese nobility,  
Lawyers, businessmen & priests,  
*"Not one Maltese desires battle  
Should disturb our summer feasts!"*

For Hompsech this was tragic news  
War without the brave Maltese  
Would see his fossil-fortress fall  
To anyone as they please.

So Hompsech sign'd his soul away  
To the tall French deputy,  
When thirty centuries of knights  
Were condemn'd to memory.

Now to the *Orient* was sent  
A maltese delegation  
Who offerr'd young Napoleon

Their full co-operation

For all Malta was overjoy'd  
To share the revolution,  
Willing to lay their lives before  
A modern constitution.

Napoleon dallied to shore  
Inspecting his victory,  
Impress'd that such a place was won  
Without one casualty.

He visited the Grand Palace  
Where brooding Hompsech waited,  
A shadow of the great Valette  
By prophesie befated

For if a German, it was said,  
Should ever be Grandmaster,  
The sacred Order of Saint John  
Forever forced from Malta.

*"You have three days," the consul said,  
Then you must leave forever  
& never hope to return here  
From Malta ye must sever."*

The Grandmaster held head in hands  
Murmur'd prayers to Saint John,  
Weeping for his life's privilege  
That in an instant was gone

& the splinter of the True Cross  
All he was allow'd to own

With the hand of John the Baptists  
Stripp'd of gems right to the bone.

Then with his loyal knights set sail,  
Robb'd of all their pride & wealth,  
*"This may be sad,"* pale Hompsech said,  
*"But at least we have our health."*

How many Maltese flock'd the shore  
To watch that fleet dissappear  
& when it slipp'd below the line  
They gave such a happy cheer!

That happy cheer soon turns to sighs  
By sunset the poor Maltese  
Felt the full force of Napoleon  
& his alien decrees

Who abolishes nobility  
Bans slavery by edict,  
then took the strongest Maltese men  
On a campaign to Egypt.

In the hold of his great flagship  
Put the Order's gold & plate  
Meant to buy a French victory -  
But this would not be their fate

He left behind theivish Vaubois  
To govern these fine islands,  
How soon his pockets were stuff'd up  
With all our precious diamonds

& the people were inflicted

With all the Gaulish manners,  
They made us wear the strange cockade  
& bow before their banners

The French soldiers were roguish brutes  
Many a lass deflower  
Taxing hard-working peasantry  
& strip the church of power

Then word spread round those wilting isles  
Of a far-off happy day  
*"Britain defeats Napoleon  
At Bloody Aboukir Bay!*

*& sent his flagship to the deep  
With all of the Order's gold!"*  
So from the windpipe of Malta  
The French have loosen'd their hold.

Then more news rush'd across the waves  
To make all the Maltese smile,  
*"Nelson defeats Napoleon  
At the Battle of the Nile!"*

The news rattl'd the shrewd Vaubois,  
*"To maintain the Grand Armee  
We must enter all the churches  
& sell off their property."*

& so began the legend-time  
When the peaceful Maltese folk  
Pick'd up their pitchforks, wiped their brows  
& prepared to shred the yoke.

For of the famous episodes  
That frame the Maltese story  
The days that she defied the french  
Most timeless in her glory

& in the garden of the world  
She may be a wee flower  
But as goliath faced the sling  
She struck a superpower

They watch'd as a beloved Damsk  
Was taken from Mdina  
& offer'd to the populace  
& to the highest bidder

This was a moments' catalyst  
*"How dare you?!"* the Maltese cry  
& with a mob hard at their heels  
For their safety Frenchmen fly

The reach Rabat's Franciscan church  
Order'd thought tried to employ  
Captain Masson drew his sharp sword  
& slapp'd a clap-happy boy

In that moment the crowd enraged  
& dragged him to a window  
Flung that Frenchman from a great height  
To the pool of blood below.

The insurrection had begun  
The churchbells started ringing  
The messengers rode round & round  
What wonders were they bringing

*"The Maltese rise, are you Maltese,"*  
That lion-heart was reveal'd,  
& wherever they found Frenchmen  
Chased them all from town & field.

& those that managed to survive  
Those death-roads to Valetta  
Told Vaubois to prepare for seige  
For death was now their debtor

*"& Mdina's arm'd garrison  
Has been slaughter'd to a man  
With Malta's patria rising,  
We must flee here while we can!"*

*"Non!" said Vaubois, "Napoleon  
Shall slay this peasant rabble  
Valetta far too fortified  
For them ever to trouble."*

Yet even as he spoke those words  
Rocky countryside was comb'd  
Til government provisional  
From the visionaries form'd

Caruana, Vilali, Borg  
Became the nation's leaders,  
& one & all the Maltese call  
*"Now does the nation need us!"*

For each was proud & proud to die  
Upon the soil of Malta  
So they could freely plough the fields

& worship at the altar

& so they fought & died that year  
Until the French defeated  
Sent back to Gaul, this episode  
By them never repeated

& so began the amity  
Twyx British & Maltese  
That lasts as long as nations can  
Sail vessels overseas

### THE MALTESE TONGUE

Since the butterflies of Babel  
Have settl'd upon men's tongue  
They spread their wings, pass fluttering  
Tho his poetry & song

Some are yellow, with latin stripes  
Some Polska-dot phonetics  
Some blue with oriental hue  
& some of them semetic

Some of these last first found Malta  
Thirty centuries ago  
& soon were gathering nectar

Wherever fair flowers grow

Then came the latin, latin wings  
To Gaudos & Melite  
But with Romans remain'd aloof  
In their gardens & villa

Then came the Grecian flutterwings  
& in these gardens mated  
Soon latin colours were phased out  
As destiny had fated

These butterflies were friendlier  
& dallied with the locals  
& soon the Maltese butterfly  
Splash'd with a Grecian vocal

From far-off floral Araby  
Flew beautiful buuterflies  
Impressing the wings of Malta  
With their colours & their size

Soon the pastel, punic palette  
Flush'd with vivid arabic  
That even as I sing this song  
Its patterns still endemic

From catterpillar, chrysalis,  
From chrysalis, imago,  
Then hatch'd the furry butterfly,  
Dialectic arabo!

This is the firm foundation stone  
Modern Maltese founded on

Stewing like a rabbit casserole  
In a cauldron lexicon.

