

Three French Grand Masters, Three Sieges:

Rhodes – Malta



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Ivan Zammit**

DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

Student ID/Code: 1900434/1

Student Name & Surname: Ivan Zammit

Course: ITS Higher National Diploma Tour Guiding 2022

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Abstract

The Knights of St John of Jerusalem fought in three sieges between 1480 and 1565 which included the loss of Rhodes to the Ottomans in 1522. Through researching and comparing the personalities of three Grand Masters in the context of the three sieges, a new route for a bespoke tour can be identified. This study provides material for the potential development of a tour which can bring the visitor closer to the reality of siege warfare and the effect it had on the actions and emotions of the Grand Masters who in each case led the defence. Such a tour may be of interest to French tourists since all three of the Grand Masters who led the defence in the Ottoman sieges of Rhodes and Malta happened to be French.

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1. Introduction

For the purpose of this essay it is assumed that the reader is at least familiar with the basic history of the Order and how they came to settle in Malta from Rhodes. However, the period covered by this essay extends back in history to the vow of a sultan. It was after the Ottomans took Constantinople in 1453 that the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II vowed to attack and besiege Rhodes.

At first, the Ottomans were unable to oust the Knights from Rhodes. It was only in a subsequent siege of Rhodes in 1522 that the island was lost to the Ottomans. The destiny of the Order changed again with their victory against the enemy in Malta in 1565, known to the Maltese as 'The Great Siege'. In all three of the above-mentioned sieges, the defence was led by three French Grand Masters.

This study focuses mainly on the characters of the Grand Masters Pierre D'Aubusson, Philippe Villiers de L'Isle Adam and Jean Parisot de La Valette, who led the defence in the three respective sieges.

In order to make a comparison of the three Grand Masters it was necessary to look at a period of history not normally covered by Maltese historians, as observed by Anthony Luttrell. The research highlights that the three Grand Masters had both contrasting and similar elements in their respective characters.

A chapter in the book *The Knights of Malta* by H.J.A. Sire (1996) inspired the writing of this long essay. Sire's chapter on *The Three Sieges* compares the defence in the first and second sieges of Rhodes to that of the subsequent siege of Malta. He makes the point that the period spanning the three sieges '*produced three leaders and three feats of arms worthy of an empire.*'

What further sparked interest is the fact that the three Grand Masters, associated with the respective sieges, all happened to be French. On the other hand, most of the Knights of the Order of St John of Jerusalem were of French origin, including their founder.

Normally a tour designed in Malta, aiming to familiarise the visitor with the history of the Grand Masters, would not go back much further than the arrival of the Order in 1530. The aim of this study is primarily to facilitate the creation of a more specialised tour of Birgu of particular interest to French tourists.

Another objective of the study is to provide French tourists, who have an interest in their collective ancestry, with a specific tour designed around the three French Grand Masters.

In particular, tourists who hail from the regions in which are found the birthplaces of the Grand Masters, namely the French communes of Aubusson and L'Isle Adam (Beauvais) or from the village of Parisot, might also take a special interest in this tour.

The prescribed length of this essay was a limiting factor. This study offers only a postcard view of the subject being researched.

2. Literature Review

A tour of Birgu would normally take one through different layers of history from at least the 13th century. However, the story of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem and the links between the victorious Grand Masters D'Aubusson and La Valette in the sieges of Rhodes in 1480 and of Malta in 1565 is not often heard.

Apart from the many references to D'Aubusson by Bouhours, modern French and Turkish scholars Rossignol and Kasdagli were found to be good sources for this Grand Master.

There are a number of papers and publications by modern Maltese scholars which give information on La Valette and also early accounts of the 1565 siege by contemporaries Bosio and Balbi di Correggio.

In tandem with these two victorious Grand Masters, a comparative study can be made of L'Isle Adam, the defeated Grand Master who lost Rhodes to the Ottomans in 1522. Despite this loss, L'Isle Adam kept the knights from disbanding during the difficult homeless years before Malta became the Order's new base.

Some background material for this particular Grand Master, L'Isle Adam, was found in a French source, *De Rhodes à Malte, Le grand maître Phillipe de Villiers de L'Isle-Adam* which contains chapters by a number of different contributors.

Anthony Luttrell wrote in a 1980 paper *The Hospitallers of Rhodes: Prospectives, Problems, Possibilities* about his difficulty in finding material by Maltese scholars covering the centuries before the Order came to Malta:

'The Hospital has survived as a chivalric or hospitaller Institution; but it has been separated from its own archives on Malta since 1798 and it does not naturally produce historians of its own, while Maltese scholars seem to have ignored the history of the Hospital during the centuries before it reached their own island in 1530.'

Although this strong statement was made over forty years ago there does not seem to have been very much of a change in this situation with regard to the 1522 and 1480 sieges.

Further information was selected from Luttrell's extensive works on the Hospitallers including from his paper *Malta and Rhodes: Hospitallers and Islanders*. Some lesser known information about Grand Master L'Isle Adam before his arrival in Malta was obtained from this source.

Simon Phillips compares the siege of 1565 with its precursors in Rhodes, mostly in relation to strategy, in his paper, *The Shining Virgin Sappers and Silent Night Assaults: Comparisons with the precursors to the 1565 Siege*. In this paper Phillips assesses the reasons why Malta's defence was successful while he points out contrasts and comparisons with the two earlier sieges of Rhodes.

Archaeologist Nathan Badoud, in his paper *Early Explorers of Rhodes 1342-1853*, describes the city the Order left behind which resulted in a powerful nostalgia in the Knights. This makes it easier to understand how nostalgic the Knights felt for the home they lost to the Ottomans.

Aspects of the character of La Valette and L'Isle Adam, are well described by Giovanni Bonello in the Malta Medical Journal in his paper *Grand Masters in the Cinquecento: their Persona* (2003). Bonello provides a valuable insight into the characters of the first ten Grand Masters in Malta. L'Isle Adam and La Valette were the first and sixth Grand Masters of Malta.

Research by Vatin (2004) has delved into the relationship between the Knights of Rhodes and the Ottomans.

3. Methodology

One of the six principles laid down by Tilden in his 1957 publication *Interpreting Our Heritage* was to transmit the whole story instead of only a part. This approach has been used in this study by means of overlapping three layers of actors, eras and places. It is the story of three different persons, being the French Grand Masters and three separate events, being the sieges in two distinct locations, Malta and Rhodes.

The aim is to give a more complete picture of the period under study by putting more emphasis on the human perspective, namely the characters of the Grand Masters, with the strategic and military aspects being the backdrop.

The idea for the tour was prompted by a cultural tour in France on the Hospitallers when they took over a commandery from the Templars (www.decouvertes.fr).

Information was gathered from both primary and secondary sources on the lives of the Grandmasters and their reactions to the events and situations they passed through.

Information for research on the characters of the Grand Masters was obtained from a wide spectrum of sources. This included modern sources such as Giovanni Bonello, Charles Savona-Ventura and older sources from the 17th- 19th century such as Whitworth Porter and Vertot. A written history of the Order by Giacomo Bosio and the eye-witness account of the 1565 siege by Balbi di Correggio were also taken into account.

The research methodology is bibliographic, gathering information mostly from books. Also used were electronic sources in the form of e-books and various websites including those of museums in both Malta and abroad. Information from studies done by Turkish academics was also used.

Local historians rarely mention D'Aubusson who led the defence in the 1480 siege but material on this Grand Master was not lacking from wider sources. A useful source about the Order in Rhodes during his magistracy was found in the book *Pierre D'Aubusson – le Bouclier de la Chrétienté* by Gilles Rossignol.

Another helpful book was *Histoire De P. D'Aubusson – La-Feuillade, Grand-Maître De Rhodes* by the French writer Dominique Bouhours.

However, it must be noted that this Jesuit priest has been criticised by modern historians such as Rossignol. Bouhours went against the tide of

anti-romanticism which was the prevailing attitude to the crusades and crusader history in the 17th Century, as shown in a paper on *Changing perspectives on the Crusades* by Theron, A. & Oliver, E. (2018).

During early internet searches, some valuable information was first encountered on travel marketing websites. This was verified by further searches to find reliable academic sources, confirming and clarifying the information.

The final objective of this study was the creation of a bespoke tour based on the research. In planning this tour there was the need to find features in Birgu offering an entry point where one can link with events relating to the former island home of the Knights in Rhodes.

The setting of Rhodes is distant in both time and place. This presented a challenge in connecting the Rhodes part of the story to the Birgu locations which feature in the tour.

Site visits were done in Birgu and at Fort St Angelo to identify specific locations where explanatory stops could be made along the proposed tour itinerary. See Appendix.

4. Analysis

Of the three French Grand Masters who led the defence in the three sieges, two were victorious – D'Aubusson in 1480 and La Valette in 1565. It is not surprising that a number of parallels can be drawn between the characters of these two Grand Masters.

Although not victorious, L'Isle Adam was a pivotal link between the two islands of Rhodes and Malta. For this reason, the study dedicates a separate chapter entirely to this Grand Master. He suffered the humiliation of loss but did not lose his determination to keep the Order alive.

The characters of the three Grand Masters can also be weighed up against the characters of their counterparts, the two Sultans Mehmed II and Suleiman I.

4.1 Parallels between D'Aubusson and La Valette

Parallels can be drawn between the two victorious Grand Masters which reveal both similar and contrasting elements. Comparisons are made between their origins, attitudes, dispositions and also their public image.

Both these Grand Masters came from ancient noble families. One of D'Aubusson's ancestors was a lieutenant under Charlemagne (Bouhours, 1679).

As for La Valette, some of his ancestors were Knights who fought alongside King Louis IX (Sovereign Military Order of Malta, 2015) during the last crusade of the Levant in the 13th century (Encyclopedia Britannica n/d).

D'Aubusson, being born with a fiery nature, had a love of war spurring him to become a soldier at a young age. (Bouhours, 1679).

One does find a rare criticism of D'Aubusson, being that he went to extremes to publicise his achievements with many inscriptions. His coat of arms appeared in every part of Rhodes. The coats of arms and inscriptions of Pierre D'Aubusson's magistracy are more numerous than of any previous magistracies (Kasdagli, 2007).

However, it is clear that he was deserving of this merit. At the same time, he had a penchant for icons and relics. The relics are one of the threads binding Malta and Rhodes. As for contrasting elements in his character, D'Aubusson was both courageous and modest (Bouhours, 1677).

This Grand Master was highly regarded and even referred to as the 'Tamer of the Ottomans' (Bouhours, 1677). He was also referred to as invincible,

'Invictissime' in Latin (Gullo 2015) and 'The Shield of Christianity' (Rossignol 1991).

On the other hand, La Valette was portrayed as the 'The Shield of Europe' as indicated on his tombstone (Manley 2012). See Figures 1.a and 1.b. This shift in titles possibly reflects the direction of the Order moving from East to West over time.

Rhodes was detached from mainland Europe and compared to Europe, was still firmly rooted in the past and its Eastern connections with the Holy Land. Rhodes was referred to as "Outremer" in Europe. On the other hand, the knights in Rhodes thought of the continent as "Outremer", overseas (Luttrell 1993).

Notwithstanding their own religious devotion, both Grand Masters took strategic and psychological advantage where faith was concerned. This can be seen in the following examples.

The King of France and the Pope promoted a scheme for the sale of indulgences (www.museumstjohn.org.uk) to obtain funds (Vertot 1818) for the defense of Rhodes (Jenks 2018). See Figures 2.a and 2.b

On his part D'Aubusson encouraged the veneration of icons and intensified calls to the Faith in what has been called a propaganda campaign. In this context, together with terror and fatigue, the manifestation of miracles was made more likely. This helped to facilitate the scheme to raise money for the Order (Perreault 2016).

La Valette, apart from being devout himself, made use of religious beliefs to motivate his Knight's prior to battle. In the last General Assembly of the Order, before the Great Siege started (Attard 1992), he told his Knights to renew their vows and stir up a '*contempt for death which alone can render us invincible*' (Bradford, 1961). La Valette's heroic statement is included in '*Exhortations before Battle*', a military dictionary of quotations spanning Joan of Arc to Churchill (Tsouras, P. 2020).

La Valette's character was noted for being one of compassion however ferociousness was also one of his attributes. He was known to be humble but at times he demonstrated '*satanic pride*' (Bonello 2003).

Both D'Aubusson (Mozcar 2008) and La Valette (Cassar 1952) were injured while leading the defence against breaches in the fortification walls of Rhodes and Malta.

Another aspect which they shared was that both these victorious Grand Masters were offered the post of Cardinal under their respective Popes.

After the victory in the siege of 1480, by request of the King of France and as a reward for handing over the Sultan's brother to Rome, D'Aubusson

was made a Cardinal by Pope Innocent VIII (Miranda 2021). He accepted the cardinalship as can be seen on his coat of arms. See Figures 3.a and 3.b.

After the Great Siege of 1565, La Valette refused the offer of Pope Pius IV to be made Cardinal. Some considered his refusal as modesty. Others thought that La Valette did not want to be subservient to the Pope (Vertot 1757).

Generosity was evident in both Grand Masters. D'Aubusson was praised as showing fatherly goodness to the poor and protecting the less fortunate (Bouhours 1679).

La Valette showed great generosity but he also had a craving for vengeance and his meanness was said to be even '*greater than his generosity*' (Bonello 2003). His vengeance was most strongly shown when he ordered the beheading of all Turkish captives in retaliation for atrocities ordered by the Sultan's commander, Mustapha Pasha, after the conquest of Fort St. Elmo. (See Figure 4).

Even in the light of Mustapha's order for the mutilation and grisly display of the corpses of the slaughtered knights, this savage vendetta of La Valette is regarded as unworthy of the Grand Master, defender of Christendom (Bonello 2003).

Any mention of surrender was met by these two Grand Masters with zero tolerance. D'Aubusson used sarcasm and threats against potential deserters while La Valette took measures which were of more drastic.

In the 1480 and 1565 sieges both were faced with a situation where some of the knights or defenders became rebellious when they feared for their lives.

In the case of D'Aubusson, some Spanish and Italian knights who tried to convince him to capitulate were severely reprimanded. He threatened them with hanging and ordered them '*to speak no more of surrender*' (Porter 1858).

La Valette encountered a similar situation when he faced a rebellious Genoese. This man publicly declared his desire to accept the Ottoman offer of money and a free passage for all to Sicily as he did not want to participate in the siege. For this, La Valette had him hung in full view of the enemy (Savona-Ventura 2014).

At one point during the Great Siege, the Post of Castille was under fierce attack and it seemed that Birgu might not hold out much longer. La Valette ordered the relics and other church treasures to be taken for safety to a

strongroom for which only he and the head of each langue held a key (Bosio 1715).

Among the relics was the hand of St John the Baptist which was brought by the knights from Rhodes to Malta (Baker 1888). This relic would have been highly valued by the Ottomans who also followed the cult of the prophet John who is revered in Islam (Khalek 2011).

To avoid any idea of allowing the defenders to retreat inside Fort St Angelo when it seemed that Birgu might fall to the Ottomans, La Valette refused to shelter himself in the fort and had the bridge linking Birgu to the fort destroyed (Desportes 1999). He wanted to make it clear to all that retreat to the fort was not an option. The defenders had either to defend Birgu or die in the attempt but there would be no surrender (Bradford 1961).

Even though both these Grand Masters had all the qualities to be victorious, other external factors contributed to the outcome of the sieges. For example, the victory for La Valette was unintentionally aided by the Sultan, Suleiman I, who put two conflicting Pashas in command, both vying for control. (Bradford 1961)

One of the factors behind the victory of D'Aubusson in Rhodes was that an Ottoman commander told his troops that pillage would be forbidden as the spoils were to be reserved for the Sultan (Creasy 1878). This angered and demotivated the Ottoman soldiers.

4.2 Grand Master L'Isle Adam

During the renaissance period in Europe, the Order was regarded by the European courts as a '*medieval anachronism*' which should be left to become extinct after the fall of Rhodes (Atauz 2004). L'Isle Adam, who has been described as the last Knight of the Middle Ages (Chappey 2004), lost Rhodes to the Ottomans in the siege of 1522.

Yet, this Grand Master stands out for his determination to keep the Order from complete disintegration after they had no option but to leave Rhodes.

Facing capitulation to the Sultan Suleiman I, L'Isle Adam was bound by an obligation to consult the people of the town of Rhodes who chose to capitulate rather than fight to the death (Luttrell 1993). Had it not been for this obligation he might have gone down fighting and the Order would have most likely been lost along with Rhodes.

L'Isle Adam, whose magistracy spanned both Malta and Rhodes, was nostalgic about the magnificent city he left behind and dreamt of reconquering it (Attard 1992).

Rhodes was a centre of power and force as well as being a centre of culture and art (Hazard & Setton 1975). The enclosure and surroundings around this Grand Master's palace in Rhodes were adorned by Greek statues of antiquity (Badoud 2017). Some columns of the Rhodian Church of St John of the Collachium rested on the original Greek column bases (Zoitou 2020).

The names of the abandoned Rhodian forts of St Elmo and St Angelo are aligned with the forts in Malta in relation to their respective positions around the main harbour. See Figure 5. This may have helped the knights orient themselves with their new harbour.

As for the character of this Grand Master, although known to be compassionate and charismatic, he was also capable of a cruel vendetta. He had no qualms when he brutally eliminated a rival election candidate, on an uncertain charge of treason during the 1522 siege. (Bonello 2003)

The loss of Rhodes for L'Isle Adam was surely a sad event for this Grand Master. On leaving the island he ordered the usual flag of his ship with the white cross to be replaced with a flag showing the Virgin Mary with her dead son in her arms, reflecting his distress. (Porter 1858)

However, he never lost hope. If he did, he did not show it (Roger 2004). L'Isle Adam showed compassion towards his loyal Rhodians who stood by him during the siege. He was responsible for feeding the Rhodians who followed him to Malta. They relied on the charity of the Order known as '*the bread of Rhodes*' (Porter 1858).

L'Isle Adam also helped the Rhodian community by protecting them from landlords asking excessive rent prices. He set up a tribunal to regulate the high rents being paid by the Rhodians for their houses and shops in Birgu. (Abela & Buttigieg n/d)

The psychological burden of the loss of Rhodes to the Ottomans took a toll on L'Isle Adam's health (Bonello 2003). Defiance of the Order's code of behaviour and feuds between the French and Italian Knights (Porter 1858) led to L'Isle Adam becoming sad and bitter (Attard 1992). The continuous fear of another attack by the Ottomans probably also contributed to his death (Bonello 2003).

One can note a connection between the Church of St. Anne at Fort St. Angelo and a chapel in the former Church of the Temple in Paris which was commissioned by Grand Master L'Isle Adam (Roger 2004).

L'Isle Adam had the chapel (aediculum) extension in the Church of St. Anne set apart for his burial '*in the name of Jesus*' as the Latin inscription shows. See Figure 6. His body was buried in Malta, however his heart was taken to Paris for burial in the chapel of the Church of the Temple, which he had

ordered to be dedicated to the '*Holy Name of Jesus*' only sixteen days prior to his death (Somogy 2004).

Grand Master L'Isle Adam never managed to satisfy his obsession to reconquer Rhodes. However, the dream of L'Isle Adam did not die with his demise.

It resurfaced three centuries later as a motivating factor in a French plot against the Ottomans in 19th century Greece (Luttrell 1993).

4.3 Comparing the Three Grand Masters

All three Grand Masters were good leaders. Each of them had the experience and memory of living in the noble city of Rhodes (Phillips 2015).

Looking at their history it is clear that some specific characteristics ran through all of them. Among these were presence and discipline. A characteristic that all three Grand Masters had in common was strength of presence.

In the first siege of Rhodes we see that D'Aubusson is '*a man who had a fine presence*' (Sire 1996). During the siege the defenders of Rhodes were encouraged by his presence (Bouhours 1677).

The confidence and courage of the knights was raised when L'Isle Adam came to Rhodes. It was as if he had brought '*an army in his single person*' when he sailed into the harbour of Rhodes from France after his election (Vertot 1728).

It is also said that La Valette had a strong presence (Attard 1992) and was a charismatic leader (Bradford 1961).

All three Grand Masters faced a challenge to enforce discipline among the Knights. It is well known that the Order had a strict code regulating the behaviour of the knights ever since its origins (Micallef 2012).

The observance of the code was corrupted by the upheavals of the 1480 siege. D'Aubusson reformed the statute which controlled the conduct of the knights. He applied strict punishments against blasphemy, unlawful games, and vices. D'Aubusson also brought back restrictions on ornaments and clothing (Phillips 2013). New laws were established to control the luxurious lifestyle of some of the knights which went against their monastic vows (Bouhours 1679).

A similar situation was faced by Grand Master L'Isle Adam. He was nostalgic for the discipline which was still observed by the older knights who followed him to Malta from Rhodes. He tried to improve discipline among the

younger knights and was upset by the novices who spent most of their time duelling in the absence of real combat between sieges (Attard 1992).

Grand Master La Valette, who was also known to be a strict disciplinarian, gained the respect of his fellow knights. Once again, he restored the Order's code of behaviour (Attard 1992). However, following the Great Siege of Malta, La Valette had to enforce discipline on the young knights who came to join the Order after the siege, simply to be associated with the 1565 victory (Zammit 1992).

Similarities and differences were found in the preparations by the Grand Masters when preparing for the respective sieges.

In all three cases, grain had to be stockpiled within the city walls in Rhodes and in Malta. D'Aubusson had the barley and oats gathered. Any green plants and grass had to be spoiled so as not to provide fodder for the horses of the enemy. He took various measures which included the cutting down of trees around the city to be used as timber (Bouhours 1679).

In the description of preparations done by L'Isle Adam it is mentioned that he ordered more supplies of wine along with other measures (Vertot 1728).

Preparations by La Valette included the ferrying of water in thousands of clay water bottles to the harbour forts of St. Angelo, St. Elmo and St. Michael (Bradford 1961).

The outward behaviour of these two Grand Masters was not always the reflection of their inner feelings. Although both the victorious Grand Masters, D'Aubusson and La Valette, had a heroic image of ferociousness and fearlessness, they occasionally showed a softer side to their characters.

When D'Aubusson was unanimously elected Grand Master he was moved to tears when he was carried to the high altar on the shoulders of the chief commanders (Bouhours 1679).

After having lost Rhodes, L'Isle Adam was moved to tears when the Rhodians expressed their loyalty and appreciation towards him as their prince and pious father. This was despite him being sometimes regarded as having a sour and hard nature (Bonello 2003).

Grand Master La Valette was also moved to tears, by the desperate and hopeless situation of the defending knights in the Ottoman attack against Fort St. Elmo (Attard 1992).

When the Ottomans took the outlying fort he could not bear to see the Turkish banners flying over the fort from his palace window. He even opted to change his room to avoid the dreadful sight (Bonello 2003). However, La Valette wisely hid his emotions not to demoralise the defenders (Balbi da Correggio 1568).

For each Grand Master a physical souvenir of sorts endures for the French tourist to appreciate, whether in Malta or after they return home. This enduring legacy is found in items which can still be seen today in various museums in Malta and in France.

Malta still has the hat and the fighting sword of La Valette, while in France one can see at the Louvre the ceremonial sword and dagger presented to him by Philip II of Spain.

Items associated with the other two Grand Masters also have survived to the present day.

A large bronze cannon of the type bombarde-mortier, exhibiting the coat of arms and the name of D'Aubusson as its sponsor, can be found at the Musée De l'Armée at the Hôtel des Invalides in Paris (www.musee-armee.fr).

In the Hall of the Crusades within the Palace of Versailles, one can find the wooden door of the Order's hospital, St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes. This door is adorned with the coat of arms of Grand Master l'Isle Adam (Chappey 2004).

4.4 Relations with the Sultans

The relations between the three Grand Masters and their counterparts, the Sultans, provide fodder for further discussion.

Across the three sieges, the three Grand Masters encountered two Sultans: Mehmed II known as '*The Conqueror*' and Suleiman I, known in the West as '*The Magnificent*' (Clot 2012).

Mehmed II was known to be cunning and courageous while being capable of extraordinary cruelty (Creasy 1878). His hero was another great conqueror, Alexander the Great (Nicolle 2000), with whom he strongly identified (Mansel 1995). Mehmed vowed that he would first conquer Constantinople then would proceed to conquer Rhodes (Bradford 1971).

Before the siege of 1480, D'Aubusson defied Mehmed when he refused to pay the tribute, a form of tax which the Sultan demanded of the Order (Vatin 2004). He delayed payment indefinitely by saying that he had to consult the Pope. This bought the Grand Master time to prepare for the siege that he knew was coming.

The defenders of Rhodes were encouraged by D'Aubusson's defiance and shouted '*This is Mehmed's tribute*' every time a stone was catapulted by their siege engines towards the enemy. Their high spirits were interpreted by D'Aubusson as a good omen (Bouhours 1679).

The Sultan Suleiman I was the great grandson of Mehmed II and the 10th Sultan of the prevailing dynasty. The number ten is considered to be a perfect number according to Islam (Clot 2012).

It is believed that Suleiman's mother was the daughter of the ruler of the Crimean Tartars. Through this maternal lineage, it is possible that the blood of the conqueror Genghis Khan ran through his veins. (Clot 2012) This sultan was known to have a hunger for glory (Yelçe 2009).

Suleiman's duty to honour the oath of his forefathers by ousting the Order from Rhodes outweighed his admiration and respect for the knights. (Attard 1992)

Despite that L'Isle Adam was Suleiman's enemy, the Sultan had great respect towards this Grand Master. A Turkish source refers to the '*robe of honor*' (www.turkishculture.org) which was presented to L'Isle Adam when Suleiman entered the city after conquering Rhodes. (Yelçe 2009)

Even though Suleiman later regarded La Valette as his arch enemy, the Sultan also had admiration for him for bringing back discipline to the Order (Attard 1992).

A French author writing in the 16th century describes how a dying knight might have knelt in front of his sword to pray with the hilt forming a cross (Heptaméron 1558).

As for the Sultan Suleiman, he considered his sword to have special properties as he concluded it to be only invincible when held by his own hand (Marshall 2014). For the Sultan, the proof of this was the disastrous outcome for his soldiers in 1565 when, unlike at Rhodes, he delegated two Pashas and a pirate, Dragut, to lead the siege of Malta.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

French tourists in general, are very interested in the history of the Order due to the participation of their countrymen in the sieges of the Hospitallers since the early crusades. This type of tourism could be aimed at attracting high quality tourists.

An alternative type of tourism which could be developed in Malta is best described in the following anecdote which comes from the local tourism industry (Robert Arrigo & Sons Ltd 2001).

A French tourist, hailing from an area not far from the birthplace of La Valette, just south of the old Auvergne region, would repeatedly book accommodation at the Castille Hotel in Valletta.

This he would do just to experience a connection with the city of La Valette simply because it was built by this French Grand Master (Robert Arrigo & Sons Ltd. 2001).

This suggests that for this type of tourist a specific niche may exist which has the potential to be further developed.

The motivation of tourists who combine travel with an interest in genealogy is comparable to a type of ritual, a pilgrimage (Prinke 2010). Particularly, French tourists would be likely to have a special interest in Malta's connections with this aspect of their past heritage.

One of the initial challenges of this study was finding information from local sources on the 15th-century history of the Order in Rhodes. Most of the information for this period was obtained from sources outside Malta. The research shows that there is adequate material on the subject to enable the design of a specialised tour enhancing the diversity of the current local tour base.

The aim of the proposed tour, bringing the Rhodes-Malta connection to life, can be reached by using the characters of the Grand Masters as a vehicle. By focusing on aspects of the Grand Masters' characters and their human side, the experience of a siege can be made to become vivid for the tourist.

In the past, attempts were made by French tour operators specialising in the Hospitallers to include Malta in a France–Rhodes–Malta itinerary which was being developed. However, the Malta side of this operation was not organised sufficiently enough for the tour to be viable (Robert Arrigo & Sons Ltd. 2021).

One of the challenges of this tour is to take the story further back in time than in the usual off-the-shelf tour of Birgu. One can expect that such a bespoke tour will be restricted to a small number of tourists.

As in some existing niche tours, a brief meeting can be organised with an authority on the subject of the tour for a more in-depth delivery. The question of availability of trained experts for this purpose needs to be better addressed.

It is hoped that this study will further contribute to developing Malta as a high-quality niche tourism destination.

6. Figures



Figure 1.a Tomb of La Valette – Crypt St. Johns Co-Cathedral

This is the inscription on La Valette's tomb in the great crypt of the Cathedral of St. John's. Beside him lies Sir Oliver Starkey, an Englishman, his secretary and faithful friend. The inscription was composed in Latin by Starkey. It reads in translation:

Here lies la Valette, worthy of eternal honour. He who was once the scourge of Africa and Asia, and the shield of Europe, whence he was expelled by his holy arms, is the first to be buried in this beloved city, whose founder he was.

Figure 1.b Latin Inscription on La Valette's Tomb by Sir Oliver Starkey (Manley 2012)

- 13 Indulgence for the Order of St John of Jerusalem in Defense of Rhodes 1479/82 273
- 61 Sixtus IV: Bull: *Catholice fidei defensionem*. Proclaims an Indulgence in Aid of the Order of St John of Jerusalem in Rhodes (26 Mar. 1480 to 22 Apr. 1481).—12 Dec. 1479 273
- 62 Sixtus IV: Bull: *Cunctorum christifidelium*. Extends the Indulgence Campaign to 8 Sept. 1481.—4 May 1480 279
- 63 Sixtus IV: *breve: Quoniam civitas et insula Rhodi*. Suspends All Other Indulgence Campaigns.—1 July 1480 286
- 64 Sixtus IV: Bull: *Tanta est Turcorum rabies*. Offers a Plenary Indulgence.—9 Aug. 1480 287
- 65 Sixtus IV: Bull: *Pastoris eterni*. Renews the Plenary Indulgence Campaign.—1 Sept. 1480 289

Figure 2.a Papal Bull (61) of Pope Sixtus IV for the defence of the Faith (Jenks 2018)

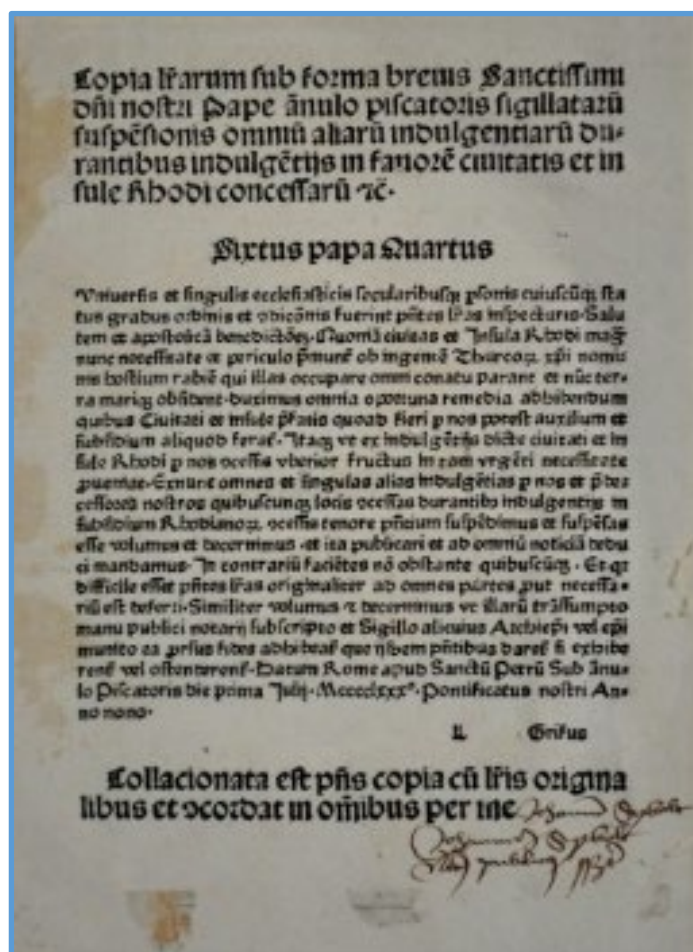


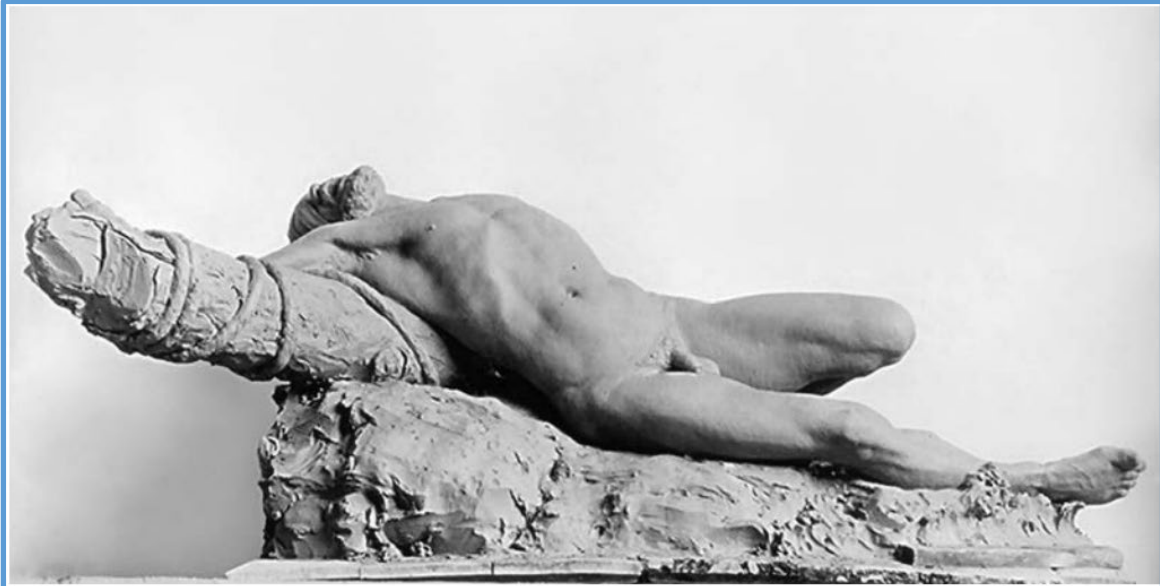
Figure 2.b Pope Sixtus, Letter of Indulgence - Museum of St John, UK



Figure 3.a Coat of Arms of Pierre d'Aubusson at the gate Aghiou Athanasiou in Rhodes



Figure 3.b Fra Petrus D'Aubusson Cardinalis Sancti et Magni Magister Hospitalis Jerusalem (Cranach 1565)



Martyr of Saint Elmo, 1901, Regio Instituto, Ruma

Figure 4. Sculpture by Francesco Saverio Sciortino - Għaqda Każin Banda San Filep

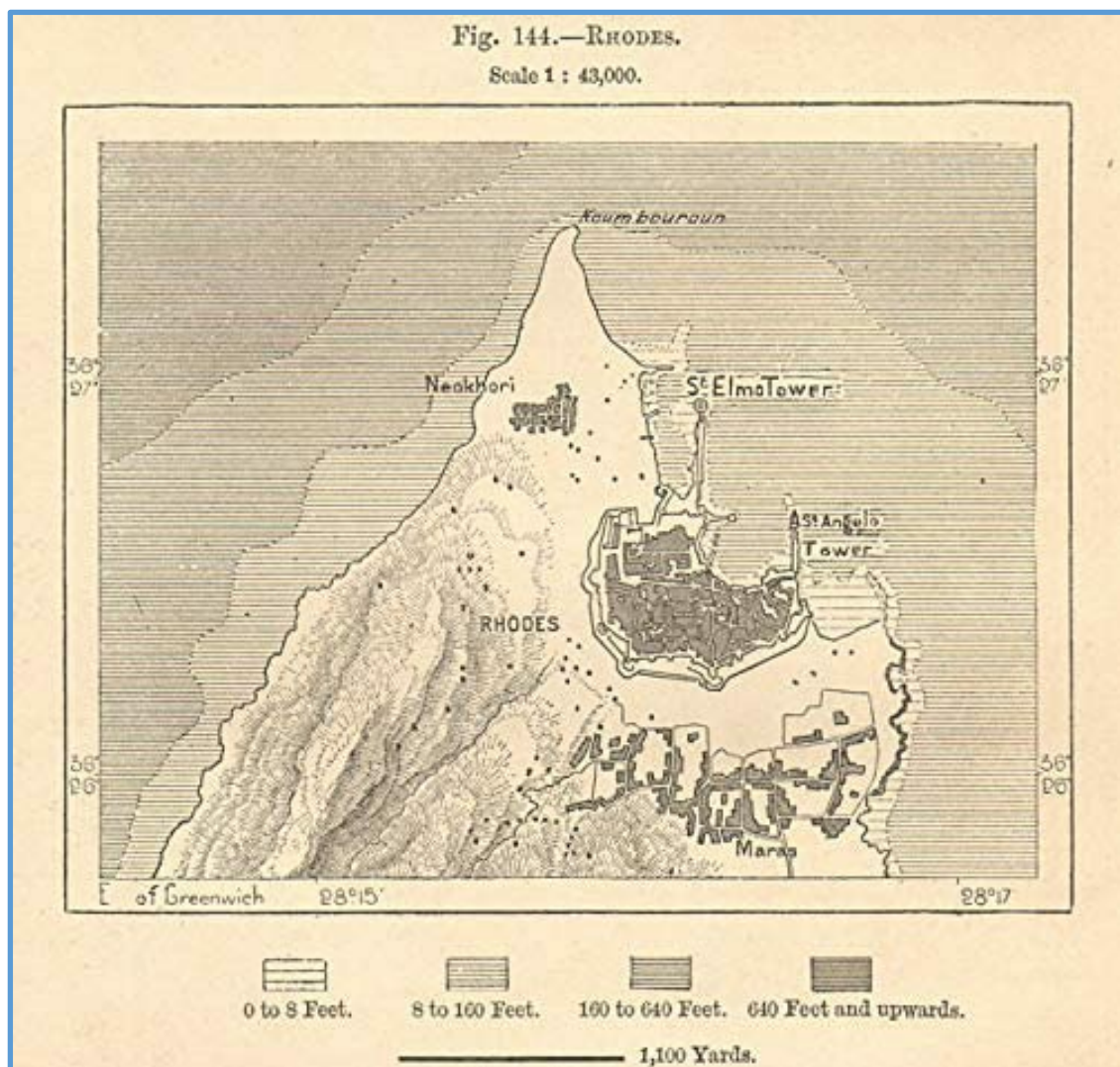


Figure 5. Rhodes town plan. Greece. St Elmo & St Angelo Tower. Sketch map (Reclus 1885)



Figure 6. Inscription in the Church of St Anne which was extended by L'Isle Adam

*FR PHILLIPUS DE L'ISLE ADAM MAGISTER HOSPITALIS MILITIAE.
ORDINUM SUUM LAPSUM. ERIGENS AC DECENNI PEREGRINATIONE FATIGATUM
REPERANS MELITAE CONSEDIT: UBI IESU NOMINI
SACRANDUM AEDICULUM HANC VOLVIT AD SEPUL TURAM.
SEPTUAGINARIO MAIOR OBIT ANNO SALUTIS MDXXXIIII*

'Brother Philip de L'Isle Adam Grandmaster of the Order of St John. Encouraging his Order, which was both conquered and exhausted by a decade's wandering, he brought it to the Island of Malta and settled it down there. There he decided in the name of Jesus that this little chapel would be set apart for his own burial. He died at an age of over 70 years on 22nd August 1534' (Translated from Latin by Joseph Debono)

7. Appendix

Tour Itinerary

Stage 1. Approach to Birgu via Triq il-Kwartieri

An unorthodox way to enter Birgu, probably less crowded most of the time, which will allow the visitor to pause and experience an uncluttered view of the imposing fortifications.

Stage 2. Post of Castille

Comparisons can be made here between D'Aubusson and La Valette who were both injured in a breach of the fortifications during the respective sieges of 1480 and 1565.

Stage 3. The Armoury

Sale of indulgences for funding the defence of Rhodes and Malta and the dual role of the Knights as warrior monks.

Stage 4. Auberge d'Angleterre

Oliver Starkey's plaque provides an entry point for further comparisons between the two victorious Grand Masters, D'Aubusson and La Valette.

Stage 5. The French Auberges

The Auberge of France and the adjacent Auberges of Auvergne and Provence are a fitting location to compare all three French Grand Masters.

Stage 6. Our Lady of Damascus

The remains of a Byzantine church used by the Rhodians with the name showing an unbroken line going all the way back to the days of the Order in the Holy Land.

Stage 7. Plaque with reference to Sinan Pasha

The plaque referring to a raid made by Suleiman's commander-in-chief, the Pasha, is a suitable spot to introduce the Grand Masters' counterparts, the Sultans.

Stage 8. St Lawrence Church

Describing how the Order could have been lost along with Rhodes if it were not for the obligation of L'Isle Adam to consult the people of Rhodes.

Stage 9. Waterfront

L'Isle Adam's arrival in Malta, his sadness and nostalgia for Rhodes and his dream to return and reconquer the island of Rhodes.

Stage 10. Bridge

La Valette ordered a bridge which linked Birgu to Fort St. Angelo to be destroyed to show that there would be no surrender.

Stage 11. Harbour

A viewpoint where one can show similarities in positions of the forts of Rhodes and Malta

Stage 12. Statue of St John the Baptist

The Order of St John of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta as described in the inscription shows again the history of the Knights Hospitaller. L'Isle Adam brought the archives and relics of the Order with him from Rhodes.

Stage 13. St Anne's Church

L'Isle Adam built a chapel extension. His body was buried in the crypt but his heart was buried in a dedicated chapel of the Church of the Temple in Paris.

Stage 14. The Tolo

A strongroom built by L'Isle Adam and used by La Valette to keep the icons and relics safe during the Great Siege of Malta.

Stage 15. The Grandmaster's Palace

When the outlying Fort St Elmo was lost to the Ottomans, La Valette could not bear to see the Ottoman flags flying over the fort. He even changed his room to avoid seeing the dreadful sight. Modern role of the Order

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