

Grand Masters in the *Cinquecento*: their Persona & Death

Giovanni Bonello

The manuscript records of the Order of Malta understandably turn out to be rather stingy with information about the health and psychological profile of individuals. Unless illness, (e.g. insanity), hampered the proper discharge of their official functions, health remained a matter of eminently private domain. Similarly, the printed histories, foremost among all Giacomo Bosio's truly monumental and detailed chronicle of the Order from its foundation in Palestine to the year 1571, have very little about the medical problems and the passing away of dignitaries, including Grand Masters.

Of course, this reticence or restraint were not peculiarities of 'Maltese' recorders and historians. A 'non-subjective' approach to chronicle responded closely to the ethos of the age. Why write history? The scope was to teach, in a manner faithful to truth and to theology, and to mould the spirit through learning, abstracting from personal interpolation and researches that pandered to purely subjective curiosity. One could say that, to this limited extent, history then respected privacy more than it does today.

History had to be 'edifying' and orthodox, but could subordinately, show off the erudition of the author. It had no function to charter any 'sentimental journey' through time. It only dealt with great events, leaders, cities, achievements, always in a quasi-religious, epic, didactic dimension. What the historian recounted would only find justification in ethical utility, by conveying an overt, or at least implied, moral message. Bosio, and after him, Bartolomeo dal Pozzo, were to prove no exceptions.

In the light of the above, the ailments of Grand Masters, their dietary habits, their personality quirks and their medical treatments hardly had an important role to play. Most exceptionally does one find some details like e.g., those about the apoplectic stroke suffered by Fra Antoine Conflans during the Easter banquet hosted by Grand Master Raphael Cottoner, almost immediately after the knight was elected Hospitaller: "Monsieur Conflans got a stiff right hand after he had carried (taken) his first glass. When he moved his left (hand) his whole body became rigid. So he had to be carried to a separate room. The Grand Master was shocked, but the grand crosses kept on eating. The grand Hospitaller, who had suffered a stroke, died the following night ... As is customary, on Easter Tuesday the Hospitaller's corpse was wrapped in a sack and placed in a shabby wooden coffin. He was buried without great ceremonies in St John's church".

I will focus on four of the first ten Grand Masters during the Malta period of the Order's rule: 1530 to 1601, working on what information I could cull from the meagre left-overs of the archives and the histories. The other six could form the subject of a future study.

When **Philippe Villiers de l'Isle Adam** arrived in Malta in 1530 he was 71 (or 66 according to other sources) years old. He carried the physical and psychological burden of the loss of Rhodes to the Turks, and of eight years frustrating exile and peregrinations through Europe where he, his homeless knights and huge retinue of loyal Rhodians were reduced to pacifying and begging the princes of Europe to save the Order on the verge of disbandment and extinction.

L'Isle Adam, a great leader with considerable charisma, manifested a conflicting personality, easy to move to tears, easy to exact the ultimate vendetta. He experienced little compunction in having the Chancellor of the Order, Andre do Amaral, the Portuguese who had unsuccessfully contested him as a candidate for the Grand Mastership, beheaded, drawn and quartered, on a flimsy charge of treason during the siege of Rhodes².

Giovanni Bonello LL.D.
European Court of Human Rights, Strasbourg, France



Grand Master Philippe Villiers de l'Isle Adam

But in Candia, after the retreat from Rhodes, seeing the terrible plight of the 4000 who had followed him, he addressed them *con pietose e amorevoli parole*, not only as their prince but as their *pietissimo padre*. They all crowded to kiss his hands. L'Isle Adam, hitherto deemed *acerbo e duro*, broke into tears³.

During one of his stops, a plague epidemic burst out in Messina, and this killed many of his followers, including three knights. He left *quell' infetta città* to perform quarantine elsewhere, before he would be admitted to Rome⁴. Eventually he travelled to Marseilles, where he was seen to linger too long. The knights, impatient at the delay "suspected that, through old age he was getting fatigued and having had enough of so many toils and troubles, he had given up and had determined to remain in France to rest"⁵.

He did not. In Rome, in 1527, he addressed the homeless knights, referring to himself as "I, a miserable, weary and breathless old man, after so many efforts spent in vain, may prove to be the last Grand Master". At this point he broke down, burst into tears, and could not go on⁶.

The health problems of those following L'Isle Adam did not abate. First in Viterbo, then in Corneto (Tarquinia) his group *"dalla peste miseramente travagliato e infetto"* and weakened by war, famine and the *aria corrotta e malsana* of the Roman shore, was reduced to extremity. The number of the *ammorbati* surpassed by far that of the uninfected⁷.

In 1528, l'Isle Adam fell gravely ill in Lyons, on the eve of attending the General Assembly convened in Nice. He could

not go on with his programme, hit by a *pericolosa e grave infermita che lungamente lo travaglio e impedito lo tenne*⁸.

The old Grand Master finally passed away in Malta, four years after the Order had taken possession of the island. The archives and Bosio give a few details. The coup de grace came when he learnt that the renowned corsair Barbarossa had been sighted off Messina. The fear of a siege of an island still so unprepared to withstand it "added to the other troubles that the Grand Master suffered in so advanced an age, and the fury of the excessive heat that in that season (August) reigns in that island, caused him so much discomfort and anxiety that he was unable to sleep at night or rest by day".

Believing that the malaise was due to the distemper of the atmosphere in St Angelo, he travelled to Notabile where, on Sunday, August 16, he started being wracked by a fever so high that on Friday August 21, he passed away "leaving his Order and his people *colmi di infinito dolore*".

His corpse was opened up and embalmed. His heart "in accordance with the usage of great French personalities" was put in a decorous urn and interred in the Franciscan convent in Rabat. The mourners carried the body to the little church in the garden of Marsa, then placed it on the barge of the *Caracca* wholly draped in black cloth, on to the marina in Birgu, surrounded by many torches. The following day the clergy, the knights and the people, accompanied the corpse to the great hall in St Angelo. There they exposed his remains on a table clothed in black velvet, and there it stayed for the whole day, *con gran lacrime e devotione*; everyone kissed his hands⁹.

How old was l'Isle Adam when he passed away? Bosio says 75, but H.J.A. Sire has him born in 1464, and that would make him 70 years old when he died¹⁰.

After a seventeen-years-long rule by Juan D'Homedes, the Order elected the Frenchman **Claude de la Sengle**. He had already distinguished himself as Hospitaller - head of the French langue and responsible for the medical services of the Order. In the Jerba expedition of 1550 he had erected a huge tent - *grande e lunga* - "to serve as hospital and here, with great charity and not insignificant cost to himself and the Order, treated his own men and the mercenaries"¹¹.

La Sengle comes across as not one to disguise his vanity and ostentation. To land in Malta he used "a magnificent and artistic pontoon, all covered in rich silken drapery in his colours - yellow and gold - adorned with trophies and liveries, built in the shape of a silver sea shell or scallop" (his coat of arms)¹².

He is remembered as the first Grand Master to don the round biretta, like that used by laymen, while his predecessors had always worn the old magistral one, similar to that of ecclesiastics, though in black velvet, with only three peaks and one crease behind¹³.

Bosio describes him "as prone as he was to sudden anger, so also was he to calm himself and to pardon with great ease"¹⁴. He felt perturbed and immensely anxious at the wars between Christian kings: "not a little vexed and sorrowful" that, so busy were they fighting each other, no help could be expected of them should Malta be attacked by the Turks¹⁵.

The *Moretto* affair further dejected him: Captain Moretto, from Nice, hijacked a galley in Civitavecchia, was captured and

imprisoned in Malta. Spain and Savoy twisted the Grand Master's arm for his liberation; France and the Pope pressurised La Sengle for his extradition in chains. "This was the greatest agony, that such a sad incident consumed and wasted this good old man"¹⁶.

In 1557, La Sengle, "over and above his ordinary indisposition" was "struck down by a catarrh that, overflowing into his stomach, tormented him enormously and continually for three whole days". Feeling better, on August 18, he insisted on going to hear mass in the chapel of the Marsa gardens, and after that had himself carried to Notabile, "where, suffering more oppression from his illness, asked for confession and communion". But the priest failed to arrive on time. "For the catarrh grew in him and, contrary to the beliefs and expectations of all, he suddenly suffocated and died, on August 18, 1557, aged 63."

The historian adds that his sudden death evoked plenty of consternation in the Order, and grief among all good souls. His heart and viscera were buried in the Carmelite convent near Boschetto. The following evening the mourners carried his corpse to St Angelo and next day, with *honorevole pompa funebre*, to the church of St Laurence; after the solemn function there ended, they buried him in the chapel of St Angelo. His epitaph says "He died, as he did all other things, swiftly". Bosio calls him *buonissimo religioso* and an expert administrator.

He left the Order no liabilities and a rich estate - among others, 60,000 scudi in cash and a good hoard of jewellery, silver objects and *altri mobili* (furniture or moveables?). Sudden death prevented him from drawing up his will. However the Council, in a totally exceptional manner, having heard from his friends that he had intended to contribute to the dowry of his niece Miss la Sengle, daughter of his brother Roland, and to endow in his own name a chapel in St Angelo, woke up in a giving mood; both wishes, though not binding, were graciously fulfilled¹⁷.

Jean de Valette, the Grand Master who followed La Sengle deservedly attracted massive attention from historians. His epic virtues are well known, less so his sad decline.

L'Abbe de Brantome described de Valette as "a very handsome man, tall, calm, unemotional, speaking several languages fluently: Italian, Spanish, Greek, Arabic and Turkish..."¹⁸.

Another highly contradictory temperament, capable of great generosity and greater meanness, of compassion and ferocity, of humility and satanic pride. He had spent some time in slavery, an experience that generally marked the victim for life.

De Valette's temper landed him at least twice in the criminal courts. When 44 years old, the Council charged him with resorting to violence *maximo scandalo* against a non-member of the Order. The penalty inflicted was particularly severe: four months underground in the Gozo guva and two years banishment to Tripoli¹⁹. Then, an act of arrogance: keeping a black person as a slave when he was not liable to servitude. The Council subjected de Valette to a criminal investigation²⁰.

January 1560 saw a great increase in sickness and infirmities in the armed forces. The *Sacra Infermeria* could take no more mercenaries and soldiers. All the beds were 'doubled' (probably means two or more patients to a bed, a common usage in

hospitals outside Malta those days), every room and corridor put to use. But the numbers kept swelling and the fear grew that soon all soldiers *s'infettassero e s'ammorbassero*. De Valette took a drastic step. He cleared Birkirkara of all its inhabitants, billeting them in other villages. He requisitioned their houses and beds to give them to the diseased soldiers, distributing all the medicines and assistance possible.

But on the ships many started dying of *petecchie* and other contagious and pestiferous illnesses. De Valette advised that all the seamen be landed and their vessels be thoroughly scoured and disinfected with vinegar; he handed out clothes and blankets so the patients could change and protect themselves from the cold.

This epidemic strained the Order's finances to breaking point. Most of the medicaments were at its charge. "It seemed that the poor island of Malta, that year performed miracles, in that never was there a dearth of chickens, eggs, apples, citrus fruit, fruits, vegetables and other *rinfrascamenti*, that the island produced abundantly". In this crisis, de Valette showed himself "very religious and charitable", visiting, consoling and often serving poor patients with his own hands²¹.

The battle for St Elmo and its dreadful loss (the first phase of the Great Siege) caused the Grand Master untold anxiety. He spent whole nights at his window in Birgu, watching St Elmo, "pining in pain and compassion for his men, finding no balm for his hurt except when he saw or heard an arquebus fired against the enemy by one of ours"²².

De Valette would follow the "painful tragedy" of the siege of St Elmo from the windows of his palace in Birgu "with that affliction, that sadness, that pain that can only be imagined". When St Elmo fell, he could not find the heart to look on the Turkish flags waving on it. He not only avoided the windows, but changed his room. Then he moved to the auberge d'Italie and later to the house of Commendator Saquenville. Here, "to prop his afflicted and pained spirit" he called a public meeting of the Council, "showing on the outside the usual serenity of visage, the usual fearlessness and fortitude"²³.

He responded to the Turkish butchery of all the survivors in the captured fort "with a soul full of indignation and a craving for vendetta". He ordered that all Turks captured henceforth be diligently interrogated and then "without any mercy at all, be killed and cut to pieces". The order extended to Mdina, and resulted in almost a killing per day. This gave great satisfaction to the Maltese population, angered by the savagery the Turks had shown in St Elmo²⁴.

A streak of barbaric cruelty must have simmered latent in de Valette's spirit. This came to life when the Turks decapitated the corpses of the knights who died in St Elmo, and drifted their bodies on wooden crosses towards St Angelo. "His retaliation" writes a Victorian chronicler, "was as savage and unworthy of a Christian soldier as was the original deed; nay, more so, for Mustafa had contented himself with mangling the insensible corpses of his foe, whilst La Valette, in the angry excitement of the moment, caused all his Turkish prisoners to be decapitated and their heads to be fired from the guns of St Angelo into the Ottoman camp ... this event casts a shadow over the fair name of otherwise so illustrious a hero which history regrets to record"²⁵.



Grand Master Jean de Valette

The death of Henri, de Valette's beloved nephew, again put the Grand Master to the test. "He was a young man of most handsome stature, wearing beautiful armour and rich clothes". In other words, a prime target for shots. A sniper hit him and he fell in the ditch. After hours of vain attempts to recover the body, using a rope with a noose, a spear and a hook, the rescuers finally assured a grip on his leg, and he was dragged inside with great effort. This to avoid his corpse being stripped naked by the Turks and paraded in triumph.

De Valette heard of the death of the one "as dear to him as a son, and whom he considered the stick on which to lean in his old age, with a most generous and unforgettable fortitude"²⁶.

The Grand Master ended badly, but not fatally, wounded in a leg by a stone splinter in the post of Castille. He had the injury bandaged and covered with a taffeta stocking, and hobbled around for many days. "This notwithstanding, dissembling his pain, he went around, giving all the necessary directions"²⁷. He put his injury to advantage by taking it to the hospital, crammed with wounded soldiers. He showed them his maimed leg, bragging that, though he urgently needed to rest and to be treated in bed, he still made an effort to get along. All the patients exited the infirmary, saving those about to die²⁸.

The siege over, de Valette took care to distribute prizes, pensions, honours, promotions, recommendations to all those who deserved them. Special attention he devoted to those who war had crippled. On them he lavished monies liberally, so they could return to their home countries; to the ill and the wounded he wanted the greatest solicitude shown, ordering that they be

cured and treated with the utmost diligence and charity, particularly the *avventurieri* (volunteers and mercenaries) who had come to the relief of Malta with the two *soccorsi*. He requested to have all their names, billeting them in the homes of private persons, as the infirmary overflowed and could take no more. De Valette enquired about their health and progress "at all hours" making sure the nurses "abundantly and mercifully" took care of them²⁹.

A contemporary of de Valette who must have known him well as he too was a front-line fighter in the siege, drew a thumbnail sketch of the star warrior, just after the end of the hostilities: "a good Christian, as brave as he is wise, and a good leader ... In 1556 his age was 67; he is tall and well made, of commanding presence and he carries well his dignity of Grand Master. His disposition is rather sad, but, for his age he is very robust, as we have seen during the past trouble. He is very devout, has a good memory, wisdom, intelligence and has gained much experience from his career on land and sea. He is moderate and patient and knows many languages. Above all he loves justice and he enjoys the favour of all Christian princes"³⁰.

Sadly, paranoia, anxiety and disillusion clouded de Valette's last years. After the euphoria of the victorious lifting of the siege subsided, he started seeing enemies, treason, conspiracies, everywhere. He bravely and recklessly undertook the building of Valletta, paying the price of the gnawing anxiety of being unable to cover the costs. He resorted to wholesale looting of the holy relics of the Order, snatching gold chains from the necks of anyone he met, melting his table silver and selling the precious gifts he had received after the siege. The dreadful threat of a return of the Turks with a larger armada never receded, at a time when what fortifications there had once been, were now virtually rubble dumps, and manpower dauntingly depleted.

All this he could perhaps have taken, but not the vicious criticism against him and his rule that started doing the rounds, at first stealthily, then outspokenly. He was even accused of cowardice! He had all his critics imprisoned and he also imprisoned those who criticised the imprisonments. He set up commissions to discover, even by the use of torture, who the anonymous purveyors of libel were. Balbi had described him as 'sad' in times of glory. Now he turned positively depressive and melancholy.

What dealt him the last cruel blow was the murder, on July 31, 1568, of a young woman, very likely his illegitimate daughter. He had held Isabella Guasconi in baptism "because of a personal obligation" - (the statutes forbade knights acknowledging illegitimate offspring, and they circumvented this ban by standing as godfathers). This *bellissima giovinetta* married a Florentine, Stefano Bonacorsi. Claiming she was cheating on him, he murdered her, absconding immediately with all her jewellery and precious objects.

De Valette lost his mind in grief. He convened the Council in a matter with which the Council had nothing to do - neither the criminal nor the victim were members of the Order. This episode perturbed him profoundly "*sentì un cordoglio grandissimo*"³¹. He never recovered. Within a couple of days he was seriously ill and three weeks later he died.

After Isabella's murder, de Valette needed desperately some

distraction to push back his overwhelming sadness. He went to St Paul's Bay, hunting for partridges with falcons. "The sun shone so *ardente e piccante*, that neither hats nor umbrellas could prevent it going through his brain and addling his mind. Next morning, wanting to hear mass in the palace chapel, he was suddenly attacked by a *fiero e terribil accidente*, that hurled him to the floor. Having been straightened and carried to a bed, the faint receded, but a double *terzana*, took over and for four or five days so increased in fury, that the doctors started fearing for his life. Then the fever changed to a simple *terzana* and mitigated its rigour, so that it gave hope of a substantial recovery and health".

In this condition, news reached him that the Turkish fleet had attacked Calabria and headed for Malta. The Grand Master summoned the elders to his bed chamber. He explained his state of health, delegated all his powers to the Council, and asked to be taken to the new city (Valletta) to be close to where things were happening.

On August 5, he seemed to be recovering sufficiently and asked permission to dispose of some slaves. Five days later he appointed Claude de Glandaves as his lieutenant and plenipotentiary, realizing that his illness would not be short. He granted a general amnesty to all knights who had been convicted and deprived of the habit.

Though hopes for his recovery increased, on August 16 he was assailed by "a continuous and slow fever, which, working malignantly on the inside, was hardly perceptible on the outside". He now understood that his malady was mortal and sent for his confessor, although he had just confessed when he has struck. He got up from bed and knelt on a prie-dieu, "covered with velvet cushions" Bosio hastens to add. He received the Eucharist, then returned to bed "full of spiritual comfort and restored with corporal food", giving himself up to his doctors, as he entertained no further hopes for recovery.

He then made his last will, leaving the 'disposable portion' to his new church of Our Lady of Victory in Valletta, which he had ordered to be built, and to his family and persons he loved, the rest, to the Order. He called the Councillors, embraced them all and asked forgiveness for any failing. He appealed to his nephew Cornisson "to accept God's will and not to be saddened by his death".

A multitude of sinister omens gave warning of his imminent

death. A mysterious and deafening noise was heard in the sky "horrid ... like a great concert of arquebus guns". A large school of dolphins ran aground in Marsaxlokk. Then all his pets died together: his red parrot of which he was extremely fond, so red it looked like a ruby; his griffin, a personal gift from the King of France, and his lioness, so tame she often slept in his bedroom. The griffin and the lion stood as his heraldic symbols on his coat of arms. With all these portentous signs, the end was inevitable.

De Valette asked for extreme unction, and for a crucifix which contained a fragment of the *vera crux*. He kissed it repeatedly, all the time imploring the mercy of God, in between *sospiri e sussulti*. Without ever losing consciousness, he turned his eyes to heaven and said "*Elas, mon Dieu, envoie moy un de tes bons Anges, qui m'assiste en ceste extremite*". Uttering *Giesu Maria* he died on August 21, three hours after sunrise, exactly on the anniversary of his election as Grand Master³².

After the ritual cutting open and embalming, the body was dressed in the long robe and the *manto di punta*, and laid in the main hall of the St Angelo palace, on a funeral couch draped in black velvet with gold braid, close to the solid gold sword and dagger sent to him by Philip of Spain after the siege, now in the Louvre. Many torches lit the *cataletto*. "An infinite multitude of people came to pay their last respects, as he was by those loved like a true father". Most moved of all appeared some old Rhodian and Maltese women to whom he had daily given alms. They tore out their hair and beat their breasts, raising a *lamento compassionevole*³³.

In 1582 another Frenchman succeeded La Cassiere: **Hugh de Loubeux Verdalle**, who also had to suffer his fair share of insubordination and revolt. He obtained a *Breve* from the Pope that invested him with strong disciplinary powers over knights "who disturbed the peace and invented novelties" (*perturbatori della pace et inventori di novita*) - including the authority to demote from office, and even expel from the Order, any member he chose to deem *inquieta*.

"Hence started growing the odium of the Order against him: while he was defending the authority of the Grand Mastership with vigour, to avoid the pitfalls of the past (La Cassiere), in fact he was providing the occasion for the birth of new factions and the re-awakening of internal discords, in consequence of which he suffered uninterrupted troubles in Malta and

Table 1: List of the first ten Grand Masters of the Order of St John during the Malta period.

Grand Master	Died	Aged	Psychosomatic concomitant
L'Isle Adam	1534	75 (70)	Fear of new Turkish attack
Del Ponte	1535	73	Scolding by Pope and murder of Gallies
St Jalle	1536	'extremely old'	Excitement of election
D'Homedes	1553	80	<i>Nil</i>
La Sengle	1557	63	The <i>Moretto</i> affair
De Valette	1568	74	Murder of (his?) daughter
Di Monte	1572	76	<i>Nil</i>
La Cassiere	1581	78	Humiliation of deposition and anxiety of reinstatement
Verdalle	1595	64	Insubordination and disordered government
Grazes	1601	75	<i>Nil</i>

interminable persecution in Rome, that, after the honour of being appointed Cardinal, he finally ended his life full of worry and interior resentment³⁴.

Verdalle had previously faced problems both with the criminal courts and with the Inquisition. In 1577 he got involved in a violent brawl for which the Council put him on trial; shortly later the elders began a new enquiry against him for seditious speech³⁵. The Inquisition investigated him for heresy³⁶, a sound debut to his career as cardinal of Holy Mother Church.

A serious disposition to the gout further compounded Verdalle's misery. "*Il male della podagra*" which had been tormenting him for years, by 1590 increased in intensity³⁷. This ailment proved determining in shaping the Palace in Valletta, which he enlarged and embellished: "suffering greatly from the gout, he built the spacious circular staircase (*scala a lumaca*) to enable him to go up (the low steps) with greater ease". In his last years he was totally immobilised (*impotente al moto*). In the city his footmen carried him by sedan chair, and in the Palace, to get some exercise, they pushed him on an armchair which rested "over four circular bearings that turned in every direction"³⁸.

His last days came in 1595 "afflicted for many years by the painful spikes of the gout and of the *chiragra* (gout of the fingers), that had cost him the use of his legs and of his arms, his spirits had lately been agitated by finding himself so persistently troubled by his own knights, and on seeing the state of depression the Order had fallen into."

"Wherefore on Holy Thursday, March 23, having been in Church all morning for the religious functions, he returned to the Palace and threw himself on bed; a malignant fever that persisted in the fourth-tenth (*nel quarto decimo*) assailed him"; he drew up his will and delivered a long address to the Councillors.

On his birthday, April 13, he showed signs of recovery which persisted for a month; the doctors declared him out of danger. After dinner, on May 4, "he was surprised by such a strong attack that he instantly relapsed, "surrounded by his proteges the Capuchins", he passed away on the feast of the Ascension of Our Lord, aged 64.

His body, as usual cut up and embalmed, was placed on view in the main hall of the Palace over a majestic coffin, wearing his Cardinal's habit with the great cape and the deacon's mitre, his sword on one side and the Cardinal's hat on the other - as had been done when another Cardinal Grand Master, D'Aubusson, had died in Rhodes. Four knights in black guarded the corners of the bier, holding banners with the arms of the Order and of Verdalle. Of two great platforms covered with crimson velvet, on each side of the hall, one displayed his Cardinal's vestments, the other the armours he used in war, both on foot and on horseback, and his overcoat in gold cloth³⁹.

One observation that surprised me when researching this feature was the unexpected importance given in the *cinquecento* to the influence of psychosomatic agents over illnesses and death. Of the first ten Grand Masters examined, only three died from old age and natural causes (Table 1). The other seven had death provoked or hastened by emotional and psychological considerations, or so the written chronicles assert. With l'Isle Adam it was the terror of a new Turkish attack, with del Ponte,

a searing reprimand by the Pope and the murder of the papal messenger in his presence, with the geriatric St Jalle, the excitement of being elected Grand Master, with La Sengle the catch-22 situation he found himself in following the Moretto affair. De Vallette collapsed at the news of the murder of his (?) daughter. With La Cassiere the killer blow came with his deposition as Grand Master and the anxieties about his reinstatement. The insubordination of the knights and the disordered governance of the Order are debited as having precipitated the death of Verdalle. I believe a long time had to elapse before medicine reasserted the baleful contribution of psychosomatic factors to illness and death.

A final note of some clinical interest. Defying today's popular perceptions of mortality at an early age in the sixteenth century, nine of our ten Grand Masters lived to an average age of 73.8 years. This is excluding the tenth, St Jalle, who died "extremely old"; had his age at death been factored in, that would have pushed up the average higher still.

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