

SOLEMN ENTRANCE OF GRAND MASTER
FRA RAIMUNDUS DE PERELLOS
E ROCAFULL INTO THE CITY OF VITTORIOSA
AND ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

By

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At the sitting of the Council held in the Magisterial Palace of Valletta on the 9th August 1697, Grand Master Raymond de Perellos communicated his intention of celebrating his solemn entrance into the City of Vittoriosa the following day (1). Six months previously (2), on the 7th February of that year, he had been elected to rule as Grand Master of the Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem, a title which brought with it the dignity of absolute Prince of these Islands, in conformity with the cession of Malta to the Order of St. John by Emperor Charles V in 1530 (3).

Grand Master Raymond de Perellos was now formally taking possession of one of the main cities of his domain. This was the meaning of his solemn entrance into Vittoriosa in August 1697, to which ceremony he cordially invited in full Council (4) all the Venerable Grand Crosses and Councillors to assist him and honour him with their presence at this historical ceremony.

Historical Background:

To appreciate fully the historical meaning of such an occasion, one has to bear in mind the close relations of the Borgo and the Order of St. John in the first years of their stay in Malta. Here, in the early hours of the morning of that fateful Wednesday, 26th October 1530, landed the aged Grand Master L'Isle Adam with his retinue (5), and fixed his seat of government at the Castello, that guarded the Grand Harbour. On his arrival, "accompanied by all the Grand Crosses and his Council, the Grand Master went immediately to the Church of St. Lawrence, the parish church of the Borgo, to render infinite thanks to God. This Church was taken over by the Order to celebrate therein Divine Service" (6). From that day, indeed, the Church of St. Lawrence served as the Conventual Church of the Order till the building of St. John's.

The first Grand Master elected in Malta, Petrinus de Ponte, was absent from the Island at the time of his election on the 26th August, 1534 (7). He arrived on the 10th November to rule as Grand Master, and his entry into the Borgo befitted the occasion. After stepping ashore, on a bridge richly decked with trophies, he was conducted to the Church of St. Lawrence where he

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- (1) R.M.L. Arch. Order of St. John, vol. 264 f. 148.
(2) " " " " vol. 132 f. 141v.
(3) " " " " vol. 70. Ms. Deed of Cession, 1530.
(4) " " " " vol. 264. f. 148.
(5) Bosio *Dell'Istoria della Sacra Rel.* parte III Lib. v., p. 89.
(6) *Ibid.*
(7) R.M.L. Arch. Order of St. John, vol. 85 f. 119v.

solemnly swore to observe the statutes of the Order, and received homage from both knights and people (8). Desiderius de Santa Jalla, the next Grand Master never had the occasion of being welcomed in Malta (9). Within a year of his election he died abroad, and was succeeded by Joannes de Homedes on 20th October, 1536 (10). It was not, however, before 1538 that De Homedes came to Malta to take over his new duties. On Monday, 21st January, 1538, after Vespers, he entered the harbour in great pomp with an escort of four galleys. Lieutenant Pellequin and the Venerable Council welcomed him and conducted him to the Church of St. Lawrence where, after giving thanks to God, he took the prescribed Oath and received homage. After the ceremony, he was taken to his Palace at Castello Sant'Angelo, amidst the universal joy of the Convent who had been for so long bereft of the presence of their Grand Master (11).

Such a ceremony was repeated on Tuesday 2nd January, 1554 (12), when the newly elected Fra Claudius de la Sengle returned to Malta. In the "Liber Conciliorum," one may still read how the Grand Master was welcomed at the Borgo by the Prior of the Conventual Church "pontificalibus indutus" and by the rest of the Council "a quibus magno cum gaudio ac letitia exceptus ac in templum divi Laurentii ductus fuit, ubi ad maius altare genuflexus, appositis ambabus manibus super volumine stabilimentorum praestitit juramentum."

The next two Grand Masters, Joannes de Valletta and Petrus de Monte, were conducted on the very day of their election to the Conventual Church to take the usual solemn oath. Thus on 21st August, 1557 the newly elected La Vallette was taken shoulder high by the Knights of the Order and brought before the High Altar of the Church for the customary ceremony of taking oath and receiving homage (13). Petrus de Monte, the last Grand Master to reside at Borgo, was conducted in great pomp from the Magisterial Palace to the Conventual Church on the day of his election on 28th August, 1568, and there for the last time a newly elected Grand Master repeated the formula: "Io, Maestro dello Spedale di Gerusalemme, faccio solenne giuramento a Dio, alla gloriosa Vergine Maria, e a S. Giovanni Battista nostro Padrone, d'osservare gli stabilimenti, le buone e antiche consuetudini della Religione nostra, e che tratterò, farò e eseguirò le faccende della Religione, co'l consiglio de Venerandi Baglivi, Priori e Antiani del Consiglio, e così Iddio m'aiuti." (14)

With the transfer of the seat of residence of the Order from Vittoriosa to Valletta, the ceremony of taking the Oath was held in the new Conventual Church of St. John. The custom, however, of going to their original place of residence to take formal possession of Vittoriosa and intone a "Te Deum" in the Church of St. Lawrence was preserved by later Grand Masters. Hence in the volumes of the Councils of State of the Order are still preserved the solemn entries of various Grand Masters into the City of Vittoriosa — a cere-

(8) Bosio *op. cit.* parte III lib. vii, p. 138.

(9) R.M.L. Arch. Order of St. John, vol. 86 f. 11v.

(10) R.M.L. Arch. Order of St. John, vol. 86 f. 40v.

(11) Bosio *op. cit.* parte III lib. ix. p. 175.

(12) R.M.L. Arch. Order of St. John, vol. 88 f. clxxix.; Cl. de la Sengle elected 11th September 1553 *cf.* R.M.L. Arch. Order of St. John, vol. 88 f. 162r.

(13) Bosio *op. cit.* parte III lib. xix p. 391-2.

(14) *Ibid.*, parte III lib. xxxviii p. 823.

mony which gradually developed and increased in pomp and splendour; and since the Bishop of Malta and the Inquisitor themselves took part, we find recorded certain prescribed rules of etiquette which were to be observed throughout the ceremony (15).

Perellos's Entry:

It was, perhaps, the intention of the newly elected Fra Raimondo de Perellos to make his solemn entry into Vittoriosa an occasion of exceptional splendour. This may have been his aim in choosing the 10th August for the occasion, when the City would be celebrating the feast of St. Lawrence in the newly erected Church. According to the comment registered in the *Liber Conciliorum Status* 1693-99: "La funzione invero riusci pomposa e magnifica più d'ogni altra per il passato" (16).

On the appointed day His Eminence Fra Raimondo de Perellos came out of his palace at Valletta at about half past four in the afternoon, accompanied by almost all the Venerable Grand Crosses and Knights. At the Marina there had been prepared a special gondola decked with red damask and lace of gold. Into this stepped the Grand Master and the more important Officials of the Order: the remaining Grand Crosses and Knights followed in other ferry boats, some of which were adorned with curtains and cushions.

As the gondola crossed the harbour it was saluted with salvoes of artillery from the vessels of the Order and other ships that happened to be in port. The cannons from Castello St. Angelo, Fort St. Michael and the City of Vittoriosa gave their salute to the passing Prince. The garrison of St. Angelo and that of Senglea together with soldiers of the regiment of Casal Zejtun lined up all along the shores of Senglea and Vittoriosa. These in their full dress with breastplates and pikes gave a brilliant salute as the Grand Master passed by.

Fra Faimondo stepped ashore just in front of the convent of the Carmelite Friars, on a bridge adorned with carpets and tapestries. The booming of the cannons from the City and a quantity of petards gave the signal of his landing. The Grand Master then led the way towards the Convent. There, Mgr. Tommaso Ruffo, the Inquisitor, came out to welcome and express his greetings to the newly elected Prince. At the door of the Church, the Inquisitor blessed with holy water first His Eminence, then the bystanders. After a short prayer the Master of Ceremonies informed the Grand Master that the Bishop with his Reverend Chapter and Clergy were waiting for him just outside the City.

His Eminence therefore put on his magisterial Cap and made for the City together with Mgr. Ruffo and the Venerable Officials of the Order, preceded by a great number of knights and people. Just before the Grand Master, there walked the *Maestro Scudiere* and the *Cavallarizzo Maggiore*, who held aloft, raised to view, the Sword of Honour which His Majesty King Philip II of Spain had presented to Grand Master La Vallette for his victory against the common enemy of Christendom.

(15) R.M.L. Arch. Order of St. John, vol. 267 f. 85. *Possesso di Marcantonio Zondadari in Vittoria: Cerimoniale concertato per questa funzione tra l'Emnza. Sua, Mons. Ingre., Vescovo e Prior della Chiesa.*

(16) R.M.L. Arch. Order of St. John, vol. 264 f. 149v.

On coming to the gate of the City, His Eminence knelt down to kiss the Cross which the bishop, Mgr. Cocco Palmeri, who was waiting for him, presented The "Giurato Anziano" of the Università then offered the usual bouquet and two silver Keys, one of which was gilded, to the Grand Master who received them in token of actual possession of the City, And here again were repeated the salutes of artillery and petards from the regiment of soldiers and from the City, while a procession was formed for the solemn entrance in the town.

The Clergy, the Chapter of the Cathedral and the Bishop made their way towards the Church of the City, while on both sides of the Street walked the Knights and the other officials of the Order. Just behind the Bishop, in front of His Eminence came the *Maestro Scudiere* and the *Cavallerizzo* in the manner described above. Lastly walked Fra Raimondo de Perellos beneath a rich canopy held by the *Giurati* themselves. The people welcomed joyously their new Prince, whose generosity was taxed on this occasion: for his *Ricevitore* continually threw quantities of silver coins to the applauding, happy multitude.

In this way, the cortege proceeded through the City, whose streets were decked with tapestry and damask. Many paintings of His Eminence and beautiful inscriptions with words of welcome, expressing the joy of the citizens could be seen hanging from balconies and windows. On arriving at the Square, the Governor of the City came forward to welcome the new Prince while the garrison of the city gave the salute. In the middle of the square there was erected a superb triumphal arch with three gates. High up in the middle, the armorial bearings of the new Grand Master were placed, on each side of which there were erected four symbolical statues representing Justice, Peace, Charity and Abundance. On the two side gates there stood the Arms of the *Università* of the City.

On coming to the Church, the Bishop blessed His Eminence and the congregation with holy water and afterwards they proceeded to the High Altar. After the intoning of the "Te Deum", the Grand Master went to his magisterial throne adorned with a rich canopy on the side of the Gospel. There he knelt till the singing was over, while the Bishop and his assistants together with the Cathedral Chapter stood on the other side of the altar. After the "Te Deum" and the ritual prayers, the Bishop took the Holy Relics of St. Lawrence from the Altar and presented them to His Eminence who kissed them with all due reverence.

When the ceremony was over, Fra Raimondò de Perellos was conducted **out of the Church** by the Bishop and His Chapter. There the people were waiting to applaud again the Grand Master — and, perhaps, to receive the silver coins which the *Ricevitore* of His Eminence lavishly gave them.

After refreshments offered by the Governor of the City, the Grand Master and his train again embarked in the gondola to return to his palace at Valletta.