

AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER OF JEAN DE LA VALETTE¹

In the Library of the "Grand Priory in the British Realm of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem" at St. John's Gate, Clerkenwell, London, may be seen a number of manuscripts of interest for the students of Mediterranean history, and particularly of the history of Malta. The document which is reproduced here below relates to the sixteenth century and is of considerable value for it illustrates the continuing concern of the Grand Master Jean de la Valette (1557-1568) over the possibility of another Turkish assault on Malta. The memory of the Great Siege of 1565 was still fresh in men's minds, and the Grand Master of the Order of St. John had reason to expect the new Turkish Sultan Selim II (1566-1574) might try to succeed where his predecessor had failed.

An attempt has been made to reproduce this document exactly, including peculiarities of spelling. Certain abbreviations, however, for the sake of clarity have been expanded. A translation of this letter has also been provided.

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Monseigneur ² les ordinaires advis qui nous viennent de jour a autre et de bon lieu comme le Turq faict une tres puissante armee en deliberation de nous retourner assiéger a ce printemps sont cause que nous retrouvans encore foibles du passe et ayans a prevenir les dangers qui nous menassent j'ay comme le devoir et l'honneur me commandent advise de recourir de bonne heure al'aide et secours des Princes chrestiens et mesmes a leur Matez ³ ausquelles pour la singuliere esperance que j'ay en leur bonte et grandeur et voyant qu'elles ont tousjours monstre nous avoir en speciale recommandation et que ceste religion a este principalement soustenue de la couronne de France en ses plus grandes necessitez je leur despeche presentement et en dilligence le sieur de Gieu mareschal de ceste Religion personne digne et qui a grande cognoissance de nos affaires Pour entre autres choses leur faire entendre et a vous Monseigneur l'estat de nos moiens et les necessitez qui nous pressent et comme les forces de l'ennemy sont deux fois plus grandes qu'elles n'ont acoustume d'estre ayant delibere de faire tous ses effortz contre nous pour essayer de nous ruynier a ce coup et d'autant Monseigneur qu'il vous a pleu nous faire ce honneur de nous prendre en vostre protection et que je prevoy de grandes inconveniens et ne nous pourvoir preserver si nous ne sommes secourus, comme vous dira si vous plaist le Sieur de Gieu. Je vous supplie tres humblement Monsiegnieur apres l'avoir entendu de luy donner telle creance comme a moy mesme et l'assister de vostre faveur et autorite en toutes les tres humbles requestes qu'il fera de nostre part pour le bien et conservation de ceste Religion a ce que leurs Matez et messieurs du conseil n'en facent difficulte et que nous ayons de quoy re-

sister a l'ennemy et eschapper ceste annee veu qu'elle n'importe pas seulement a nous mais a la chrestiente comme vous scaurez trop plus sagement mectre en consideration et oultre l'honneur qui'il en rev iendra a leurs Matez ceste religion sera a jamais tenue de vous en faire honneur et tres humble service comme je feray particulierement ou il vous pla'ra me commander me recommandant tres humblement a vostre bonne grace je supplie le Createur vous donner Monseigneur en tres bonne sante tres heureuse et longue vye de Malte ce 3 Novembre 1567 *

Vostre tres humble serviteur
Le grand me de l'hospital
St Jean de Hierusalem
F. JEHAN DE VALETTE

(Translation)

Monseigneur: The news which we receive from day to day from a good source warns us that the Turks are organizing a very powerful army with the intention of besieging us again next spring because, after what has passed, we are still weak; and as we have to prepare to meet the dangers which threaten us I am impelled by both duty and honour to plead in time for the help of the Christian princes and even to their Majesties to whom, for the special faith I have in their goodness and magnanimity, and seeing that they have always shown that they hold us in special esteem and that this "Religion" is principally upheld by the French crown in its greatest necessities. I now send them with all speed the *Sieur de Gieu*, marshal of this "Religion" and a worthy person and who has great knowledge of our affairs. Among other matters he will make known to you Monseigneur the state of our means of defence and of our pressing needs and of how the forces of the enemy are twice as strong as they are usually because they have decided to do their utmost against us in order to ruin us this time, and moreover, Monseigneur, since it has pleased you to do us the honour to take us under your protection, and as I foresee great trouble against which we cannot hope to preserve ourselves unless we are aided, and as the *Sieur de Gieu* will tell you, if it please you, I most humbly implore you Monseigneur, after having heard him, to give him such credence as if to myself and to help him by your favour and authority in all the most humble requests which he will in our behalf for the good and the preservation of this "Religion" so that their Majesties and the gentlemen of the Council may make no difficulty and so that we may have the means of resisting the enemy and to escape this year seeing that it does not concern us only but Christendom as you will be able more clearly to judge, and besides the honour which will come to their Majesties, this "Religion" will always hold itself in duty bound to do you honour and very humble service as I will especially do where it shall please you to command me and, recommending myself most humbly to your good grace, I implore the Creator to bestow on you, Monseigneur, very good health and a very long and happy life. At Malta this 3 of November 1567.

Your very humble servant
The Grand Master of the Hospital
St. John of Jerusalem
F. JEHAN DE VALETTE

NOTES

1. At the top of the letter and written obviously in a different hand from the text of the letter itself appears the date: 3 Novemb., 1567, Malta, and also the following:

"Le grand Maistre Jean de Valette mande au Duc d'Anjou que le Turc veut revenir devant Malte et le prie dassister leur d. Religion envers leurs Majestez pour avoir du secours"

I am grateful to Miss D.B. Edmonds, Curator of the collections at Clerkenwell, for courtesies extended to me while I was carrying on research in London.

2. "Monseigneur" refers to the King's brother, the Duke of Anjou, who became king of France in 1574 and ruled until 1589.
2. The reference here is to King Charles IX of France (1560-1574) and his mother, the famous Catherine de' Medici.
1. The request for aid arrived at a most unpropitious time, for a civil war between Catholics and Huguenots had broken out in France in September.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS (continued from page 70)

- A. LUTTRELL, *Interessi fiorentini nell'economia e nella politica dei Cavalieri Ospedalieri di Rodi nel Trecento*. In "Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: Lettere, Storia e Filosofia" — Serie II, Vol. XXVIII (1959), Fasc. III-IV, pp. 317-326.

This study deals with an insufficiently explored aspect of the Order's economic history. It is based, as Mr. Luttrell says in a footnote, on the documents of the Order preserved in Malta. This specialised topic, i.e. the influence of Florentine and other bankers on the Order's policy and activities in the 14th Century, is well handled by the author and there is a wealth of bibliographical references for those interested in the wider aspects of the subject. Two important related problems, which the author mentions in his last footnote, remain unanswered, and Mr. Luttrell suggests that, rather than in the Malta Archives, their solution has to be sought in Florentine sources.

Mr. Luttrell, who contributes an interesting study on *The Venetians at Medieval Malta* in the present issue of "Melita Historica", has published various articles on the Order of St. John in the 14th Century. As they are not easy to trace, the following titles are given here as an addition to the known bibliography of the Order, i.e. *Actividades económicas de los Hospitalarios de Rodas en el Mediterraneo occidental durante el siglo XIV*, in 'Actas del VI Congreso de la Historia de la Corona de Aragón' (Barcellona, 1960); *Venice and the Knights Hospitallers of Rhodes in the Fourteenth Century*, in "Papers of the British School at Rome" XXVI (1958), pp. 198-201; *A Fourteenth Century List of the Barons of Achaia (1377?)*, in "Byzantinische Zeitschrift", LI, (1958).

J.C.P.

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