A rare publication by Grand Master Hompesch’s head of secretariat

In 1812, Joe Sokolnik published The Doublet Memoirs and the 'Poussonnac Report' in a book titled Malta Surrounded - An Eyewitness Account of Napoleon’s Invasion in 1798.

In his introduction, Sokolnik wrote that some Monks, exiled in Rome after the invasion of Malta by Napoleon, accused a group of several high-ranking people, including Jean-Louis-Michel Douillet, of betraying the Order of St John.

Douillet, born in France in 1749, had become the head of the Order’s secretariat in Malta, having direct access to all official documents, public or private, including the correspondence with all the European potentates. His memoirs, published in 1865, are a mine of information.

Louis de Bonaparte, a French king who went into exile after 1794, endorsed the accusation of Doublet’s betrayal. In his book Ancien et Modern Malta, published in London in 1808, and reissued twice with the date 1809, followed by a French translation published in Paris in 1808 by Marcis de Foria (de Fieschi), a member of the Académie de Rouen.

On the other hand, an opposite view is given by Dominique Miege, the French consul in Malta, who passed away in 1797 (Francisco Santillae). Miege wrote the foreword to Scicluna’s publication.

Although the book is anonymous, the copy I possess has on the title page old ink the identity of the author: "Attribué à Jean-Jacques Miege.

Douillet, son of Jean-Louis and Miege categorically rebutted the accusations of Bonaparte and others. He wrote that many knights, including himself, were capable of ever betraying the Order, and he examined what he believed were the real causes that led to the Order’s downfall.

During his long stay in Malta, Miege endeavoured to obtain as much extant information as possible, and, as Mgr Louis Camillo wrote in his Histoire de Malte in mano de’ Santilleau, near the Carmelite church, he died, widower, on February 4, 1794.

Douillet, son of Jean-Louis and Jeanne Desire, was born on August 25, 1749. He arrived in Malta in 1779. He married a Maltese woman, Elisabeth Magri, on April 17, 1818. In 1798 the couple and their six children lived in a small house in Strada Zucca, Valletta, near the Carmelite church. He died, widower, on February 4, 1794.

Douillet summed up his sentiments very appropriately when he wrote: "My heart was torn between reason, honour and necessity." The same difficult predicament faced most of his French colleagues and companions.

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