



Antonius Manoel de Vilhena – Grand Master of the Order of St. John (1722-1736)

(The Palace Valletta)

ANTONIUS MANOEL de VILHENA

Grand Master of the Order of St. John (1722-1736)

by John M. Calleja

(What makes greatness is starting something that lives after you) - Roger W. Sockman.

What a relevant thought, which becomes Grand Master Antonius de Vilhena so superbly. De Vilhena, born in 1663 was the 23rd Grand Master who reigned in Malta and one of three Portuguese who occupied that chair.

He followed the Italian Marc Antonio Zondadari (1720-1722) and was succeeded by Ramon Despuig (1736-1741), a Spaniard.

Prior to his election as Grand Master in 1722, he occupied a number of important posts within the Order, including, Colonel of the Militia, Commissioner of the Navy in 1698, Commissioner of War in 1701, becoming the Grand Chancellor in 1713.

He strongly believed that the Maltese Islands deserved the best, and he delivered the very best.

Duty and responsibility were never ignored by de Vilhena, although his dream to embellish the territory under his command, and to make it safer for the Order, and the population, was always given top priority.

During the two hundred and sixty eight years that the Order was in Malta, all the twenty eight Grand Masters contributed to a large extent, and in various ways to embellish, as well as defend the Island.

They built beautiful palaces, auberges and towers, constructed fortifications, water cisterns and supply systems, as well as roadways and various infrastructural projects, many of which are still in being.

The various Palaces and Auberges, still serve the President, the Prime Minister and various Ministers as offices. San Anton is H.E. the President's official residence. Malta's House of Representatives and the Prime Minister's official residence are also accommodated in such palaces.

These major projects were built and completed, notwithstanding the fact that enemy attacks were regular and frequent.

It is claimed that de Vilhena was a popular hero and rightly so. He was a tower of strength when defending the Maltese Islands under his command and many of his decisions and major projects, a number of them funded personally by himself, helped to provide much needed work, besides improving the Island's defences and infrastructure. In addition, he also made it possible for a reduction in customs

to Pg.7



17th February 1938 Definitive KGV Malta 6d.

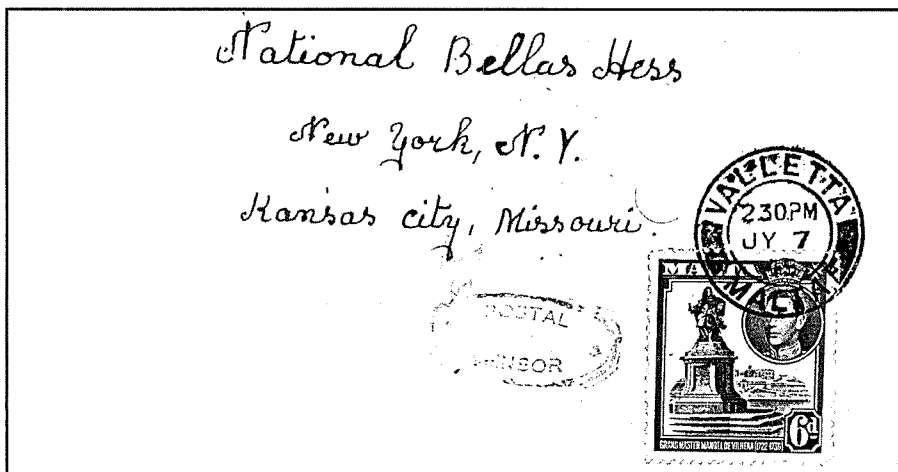
Designs: Waterlow and Sons using the medallion portrait of King George VI by Bertram Park.
 Printer: Waterlow and Sons by the process-recess. Watermark Crown Script
 CA printing upwards. Gum arabic. Perforations 12.5 line.
 Plates: 2.; 2.2;
 Imprint central bottom margin. Last day of sales and quantities sold not known.



Plate 2



Plate 2.2



1938 Def: 6d. tied by Valletta/Malta, dated 7 Jy 45 to Missouri USA,
 having Postal Censor cachet (USA).

from Pg.5

duty, which was reflected in better market prices.

It is on record, that he was the first person who encouraged transhipment of cargo in Malta, by reducing taxes and customs duty on such trade.

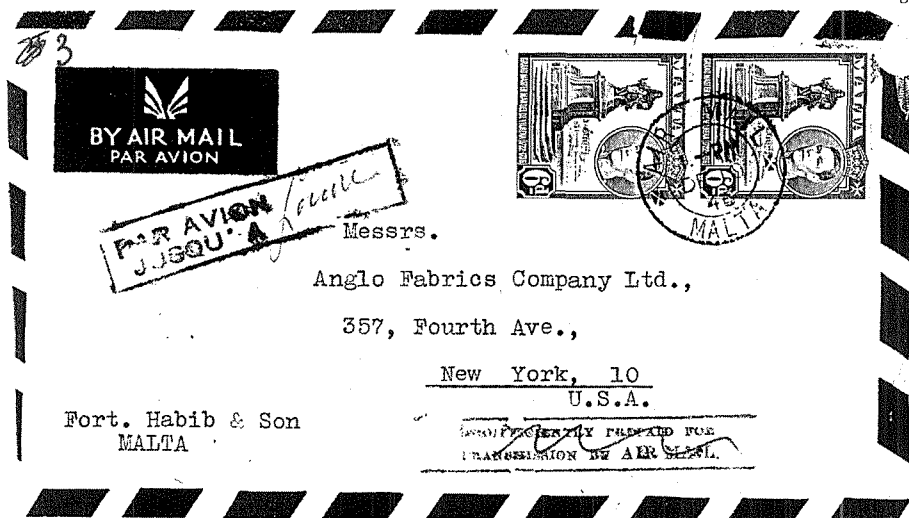
Furthermore in an effort to bring peace to the Mediterranean and Europe, he initiated efforts for a Peace Treaty to be negotiated with the Turkish Empire. However, in 1722, de Vilhena started negotiations with the Sultan of Turkey and in a letter referring to this, wrote:

*"Our Order is not instituted for the purpose of ranging the seas to make captives, but to cruise with its armaments to protect the navigation of Christian vessels, and it only attacks those who obstruct commerce and who, wishing to make captives, deserve to be reduced to slavery. I have nothing so much at heart as to release the Mussulman slaves from their chains and if the intentions of His Highness are the same, I am ready to negotiate for the reciprocal liberty of the captives either by exchange or ransom, according to the received custom between princes. His Highness has, therefore, only to declare his intentions which I will omit nothing to render effectual."*¹

Regrettably, although some of his recommendations were acceptable, notwithstanding his efforts, the proposed peace treaty did not materialize.

His story is full of epics of the Order, the Order's major adversary, and of all that was happening in Europe, especially in countries surrounding the Mediterranean that could reflect or effect the Maltese Islands' well being.

to Pg.13



1938 Def. 6d. x2, tied by Air Mail/Malta dated Dec 1, 1946 to New York having
PAR AVION JUSQU'A Londre



Messrs.

Tovarna Emajlirane posode,

CELJE
JUGOSLAVIA

1938 Def: 6d. rate to Yugoslavia tied by Air Mail/Malta 3 Jy 1947.



Messrs. Tovarna Emajlirane Posode,

CELJE,
YUGOSLAVIA.

1938 Def: 10d. rate to Yugoslavia, tied by GPO/Malta dated Nov 13 1947.



25th November 1948. 1938 K.G. VI.

Definitive – overprint

SELF-GOVERNMENT 1947.

Printer: Waterlow and Sons.

Process: typography. Colour of overprint block, sans serif capitals.

Watermark, Multiple Crown Script CA, printing upwards. Gum Arabic, perforation 12-5 line.

Plates: 2., 2.2, 3.2, 4.2, 5.2, 5.3.

Imprint Central bottom margin.

Last day of sales 22nd January 1956. Quantities overprinted, and sold, not known.



Plate 2.2



Plate 3.2



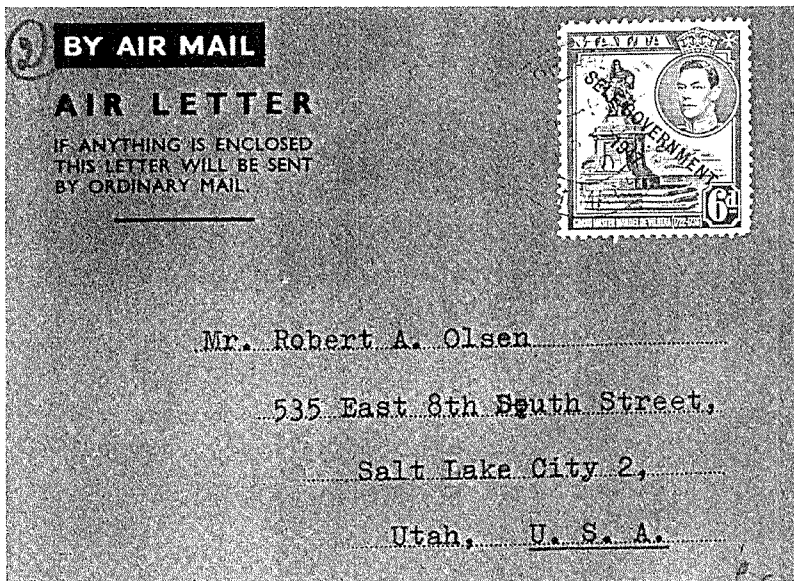
Plate 4.2



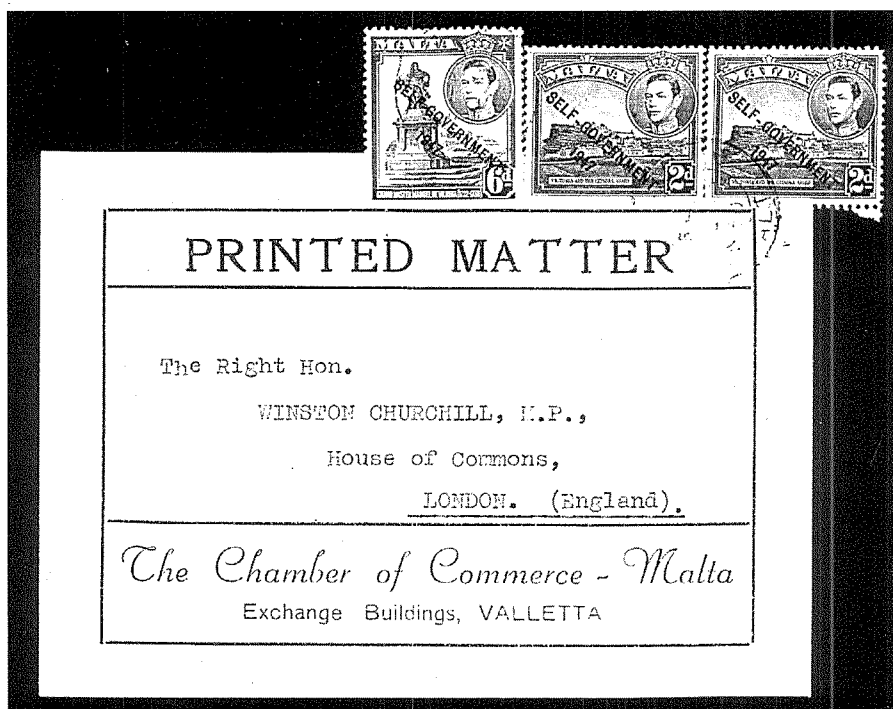
Plate 5.3



F.D.C. 4 - 10/- cancelled Valletta Malta 25th November 1948.



Air Mail Letter rate 6d. to USA. Cancelled Air Mail/Malta 6 Dec 1940, very late date of use.



10d. rate on Printed Matter Material addressed to "The Right Hon Winston Churchill MP", London.

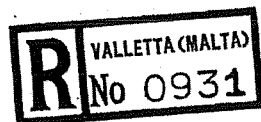
If undelivered please return

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MESSRS. SMITH & HERBERT LTD.

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PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL



8 ½d rate to London cancelled by Valletta / Malta, unusual handstamp
"By Air Mail - Par Avion" probably a private hand stamp used by Messrs. Brockdorff

His statue is considered by many to be one of the finest of its kind in Malta. It was only fitting that this statue was included in the 17th February 1938 definitive (King George VI) set, as the 6d stamp in olive green and scarlet. This set was re-issued on the 25th November 1947 (New Constitution - overprinted - "Self Government 1947"). Copies of these stamps appear on page 6 - 12.

The stamp and postage as are known today were non-existent during his time but letters were still exchanged; these were mainly correspondence of official nature from and to the Order in Malta, as well as a limited amount of exchanges on Trade.

Copies of some of de Vilhena's correspondence and documents from Dr. A. Bonnici's collection are being reproduced. These are:-

a) one original signed letter dated 30th May 1729 (page 21).

b) a decree dated 30th April 1730, showing de Vilhena's wafer seal and signed by his compatriot the Vice Chancellor - Manoel Pinto De Fonseca, who later also became a Grand Master (1741-1773) (page 22).

c) Petition to de Vilhena from Prior Francis Tauffer (page 26).

Chev. Joseph C. Sammut and Felice Restelli in their book "The Coinage of the Knights in Malta" said:

"The Grand Mastership of Antonius Manoel de Vilhena (1722-36) marks an era in which the art of mintage in Malta reached an artistic level of high merit. The gold and silver coins of this reign are remarkable for their artistic merit and workmanship. The new gold Twelve and Ten Zecchini denominations were most probably never struck in any quantity for real currency, but were issued either for gifts or distribution during special ceremonies. In many respects they should be considered to be two of the rarest coins of the Order. The Four Zecchini pieces of his reign are also very artistic. Some of the earlier varieties which bear only the Manoel arms quartered with those of the Order command high prices on the rare occasions when they turn up.

Apart from introducing the Twelve and Ten Zecchini in gold, De Vilhena made a complete alteration in the silver coinage. He was the first to strike the Two Scudi, Sixteen Tari, One Scudo and Eight Tari denominations.

Eight Tari pieces are very rare to find as these coins were quickly withdrawn in 1728 after the Grand Master was informed that they had been either mistakenly or fraudulently struck from the same die used for one type of gold Four Zecchini pieces and because of this they were promptly gilded by swindlers and passed as old coins. The earlier issues which bear no value on the reverse are perceptibly rarer but all varieties and dates of this denomination are very rare.

As regards inscriptions and legends adopted by De Vilhena, the coinage of this period is predominated by the use of the Grand Master's name surrounding his perruqued bust on the obverse and the full titles "MAGNVS MAGISTER HOSPITALIS SANCTI SEPVLCRI HIER VSALEM" in several contracted forms



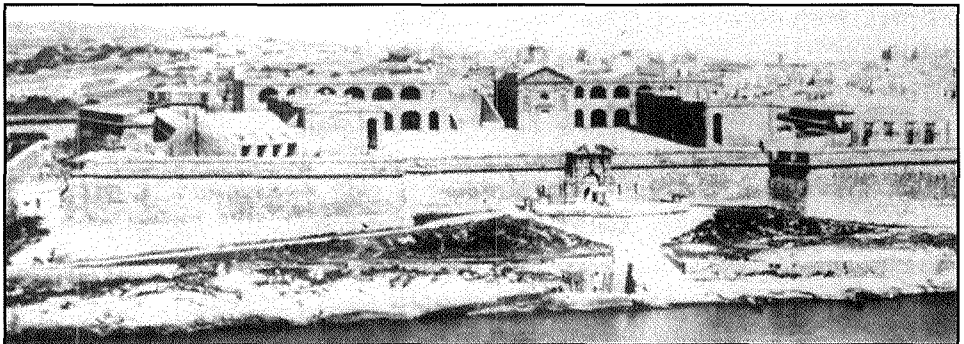
12 Zecchini, Antonio Manoel de Vilhena
(1722-36)

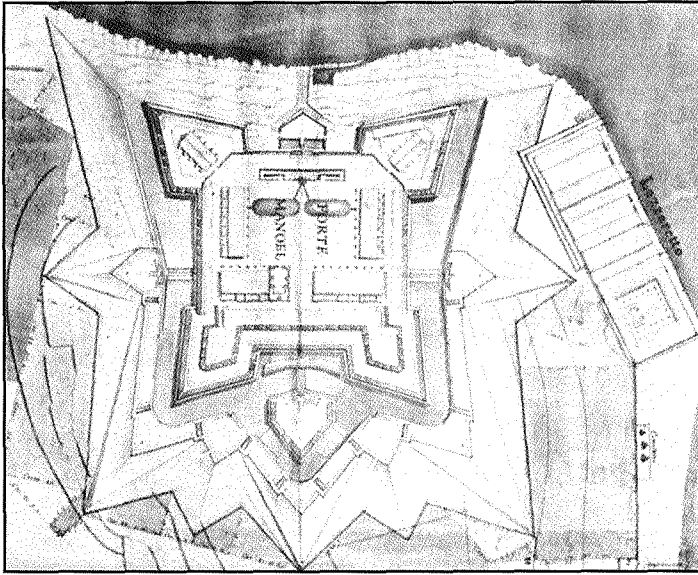


10 Zecchini, Antonio Manoel de Vilhena³
(1722-36)

around the arms of the Grand Master on the reverse. A new motto “ONVS MEVM LEVE EST” (My burden is light. Matt. xi, 29) was used for the first time on the reverse of the silver Two Tari.”²

Immediately upon his election to Grand Master, he set in motion a number of projects, his main aim was to repair fortifications and build new ones. At the same time he also approved other projects which were of direct benefit to the population, especially the poor.





Plan of Fort Manoel

Major buildings in Floriana, as well as granaries, windmills in various locations, rehabilitation work in Mdina including a new gate for the old city, were taken in hand, all aimed to stabilise and improve the life of the community.

Within a year of his appointment, on 14th September 1723, to be exact, the foundation stone of Fort Manoel on the little island formerly known as “Bishops Island – and Lazaretto Island”, in Marsamxett harbour was laid.

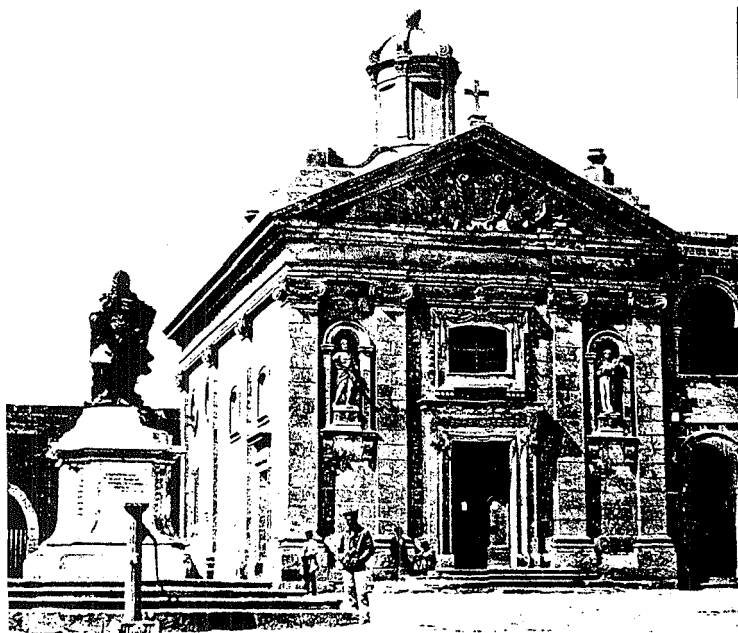
The work was completed in 1726. Many considered this fort to be the best ever built in Malta up to that time; however, a few did criticize de Vilhena for building a fortress on such a beautiful little island in the harbour. It looks like even then, environmentalists were already around!

Manoel Island as it is now known, was named HMS Phoenicia during the 1939-45 war.

Within the walls of these fortifications a small church was also built and in its vicinity de Vilhena’s statue was placed on its plinth.

The statue was always considered as one of Malta’s finest but it has now become better known for two reasons. Firstly for the number of times it has been moved and secondly for the restoration work carried out on it.

The second restoration was finally completed and the statue was put back in its present place in Pope John XXIII Square, Floriana, last April. It is understood that apart from the bronze statue itself, the pedestal and lettering were also restored, whilst measures were taken to reduce the harmful effects of humidity on the statue by isolating it from the pedestal.



G.M.A. Manoel de Vilhena's statue on the original site at Fort-Manoel³



G.M.A. Manoel de Vilhena's statue at Piazza Tezorerija, Valletta (2nd. site)³

One sincerely hopes that it has now reached its final resting place.

It is quite possible that the number of moves this statue had to endure could gain it an entry to the Guinness Book of Records!!

As mentioned above, it was first placed at Manoel Island; de Vilhena's successors believed that the man deserved more recognition, and that his statue should be moved to the centre of Piazza Tezorerija in Valletta, where it would be admired, and better appreciated. It was ceremoniously moved and there it stood - until!

During the British rule in the nineteenth century, Britain was celebrating in grand style, Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee (1837-1901, the longest reigning



G.M.A. Manoel de Vilhena's statue at The Mall, Floriana (3rd. site)

monarch). Arrangements were also made in Malta to honour such a unique occasion, and amongst other celebrations, it was decided, that a statue of the Queen be commissioned. After lengthy deliberations, the die was cast – that there is no better place to honour such an illustrious Royal Lady than the very place where de Vilhena's statue stood, in front of the Bibljoteka.

One problem was solved, but as it sometimes happens when decisions are taken, other problems arise. Where should 'de Vilhena's' statue be placed?

In 1890 a bright young Officer finally proposed that consideration should be given to place de Vilhena's statue at Floriana - right in front of the entrance to The Mall, a garden built by the French Grand Master Jean Paul De Lascaris Castellar, one of his predecessors in the year 1656, as a place of recreation for the knights, and there it stood, until well into the twentieth century!!

In 1964 Malta gained its independence and as time went by, consideration was being given to the building of a monument to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Independence in September 1989.

Appropriate places in Valletta itself, as well as in the surrounding area were targeted, but monuments had already been erected on these sites.

The decision to move de Vilhena's monument to make space for the one being



G.M.A. Manoel de Vilhena's statue at
site no.4 Pope John XXIII Square
Floriana

completed for the 25th Anniversary of Malta's Independence was taken, and de Vilhena was hastily removed, and put in storage for sometime, when the first, not so successful restoration took place.

One can understand and possibly justify the choice of this particular site being selected for the Independence monument, as after all it was precisely in that area that Malta was declared independent on 21st September 1964. Similarly, de Vilhena's statue also deserves to remain in the city to which he contributed, so much so, that for some time it was known as "Borgo Vilhena".

After some soul searching and various areas being considered, it was finally decided that the statue deserves to remain in Floriana, not so far away from The Mall - in Pope John XXIII Square.

During their short sojourn in Malta, the French must have been very busy with other matters, so much so, that the statue of de Vilhena was overlooked and kept its place.

In August 1724, just two years after succeeding Grand Master Zondadari, he started a foundation, in order to have additional funds available to help in the building and maintenance of Fort Manoel, as well as funding the garrison's expense.

In fact, the Foundation acquired property in various parts of Malta and Gozo on which they built different types of small houses, with the rent derived from the subsequent leases, going into the foundation's coffers.

Funds from the foundation were also invested in a site in Cottonera, so that it could be converted into a dockyard. This was used for many years for both repair work, and the building of new vessels.

During de Vilhena's reign the highlight of the building activity centered around the building of a Theatre, which was commenced in March 1731, and completed a year later.

Originally it was named "Public Theatre", however, it was later changed to "Theatre Royal" until in 1866 this was rightfully re-named as "The Manoel Theatre", a deserving tribute to G.M. Antonius Manoel de Vilhena.

Following the completion of the Royal Opera House in 1866, the Manoel Theatre was considered rather small and left unused for many years. During this period it was used to accommodate poor people, who used it mainly as their sleeping quarters. Eventually it was cleaned and used as a Cinema and a Dance Hall. The last war saw the destruction of The Opera House, and the authorities decided to have the Manoel Theatre completely re-decorated and refurbished. It was then reopened in 1960.

Here it must be emphasised that the Grand Masters in general, and de Vilhena in particular, not only ordered and financed the structural buildings, but also invited some of Europe's leading artists (painters, sculptors) to work in Malta.

These persons who were assisted by local talent, who in turn learnt their trade

from their masters, contributed in no small way to make Malta proud of its artistic achievements.

In recent years, tourists from every part of the globe, spend hours admiring Malta's heritage, which at times may not have been given all the attention it deserves.

The list of edifices and treasures to Malta bequeathed by de Vilhena is unending, but he is best remembered for:

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Palazzo Vilhena as built by
G.M.Manoel de Vilhena



Mdina's Gate as built
by G.M.Manoel de Vilhena

Letter with the Grandmaster's signature

Essendo vacata la Commenda di S^{ta} Maria Maddalena del Corvo
 posta in detto Stato felicissimo di P^a A, per rinunzia fattane dal
 V^o Prior Vaini, che la godeva, l'ho conferita, in virtù di Breve Pon-
 tificio, al Com^{le} fr. Mario Cenoli mio Seg^{ro}, in luogo di quella gli sa-
 rebbe toccata di giustizia, per turno di sua anzianità. Siccome con-
 ciò ho dato al medesimo Com^{le} un attestato della di sopra considera-
 zione esigono gli ajdai, e rilevanti servizj, mi rende, ed anche i suoi
 speciali meriti personali, così mi riprometto, che intercedendogli l'ob-
 bo con incomparabile bontà, nelle mie soddisfazioni, e nei vantaggi della
 mia Obbedienza, compiacerassi secondare le istanze vivissime mi avango
 a porgerle, acciò si degni favorire coll'alto suo padronio gli affari
 dello stesso Com^{le}, e della detta Commenda, nelle occorrenze, che di
 Pietro Fogliani suo Vassallo, a cui ne viene appoggiata l'ammini-
 strazione, prenderà l'ardire d'implorare le di lei benignissime gra-
 zie. Mi do intanto anche l'onore di supplicarla a condonarmi colla
 stessa generosità questo nuovo incomodo, e ricercandole una divota
 protesta delle copiosissime obbligazioni le professo, e del vivo mio deside-
 rio di frequentem^{te} godere la sorte di ubbidirla, a pet^{to} bacio afferm^{te}
 le mani.

Malta 30 Maggio 1779.

di P^a A

Affer^{te} Serv^{to} Il Gr^o M^{ro}.
 Manoel

Letter to Antonio Farnese Eight Duke of Parma, brother of the seventh
 Duke Francesco (1679-1731).

With Antonio ended the direct Male line of the Farnese family.

In this letter G.M. Manoel informs the Duke Antonio Farnese that he had transferred to his loyal
 and faithful secretary Fra Mario Cenoli, the "Commenda" of Santa Maria Madalena del Corvo,
 which had lately been given to him by the Venerable Prior Vaini.⁹

Aug 26. 1825

22

essequito dall' Em.^{ma} Ill.^{ma} sotto il dì 14 del corrente mese
di Settembre, in vigor del quale viene obbligatoria la presente. Sargato da qua-
lunque difetto ed esenzione dall' obbligo, come di magg.^{re} età,
si ricorrerà alla Ven. Assemblea de' Ill.^{mi} fin appellarsi
per la solita approvazione. L'innanzi detto non viene dis-
cussione già fondata l'intenzione del riferito D.^{no} Ill.^{mo} de-
cente, colla buona di tutti si requisiti, quali devono concor-
re nella sua persona, per il fine prefissosi. Eglie ben vi-
sibile che la Sede di Bassafiume, di Bassata Oliviero, et suo Ma-
gistero del profeta Ill.^{mo} hanno per altro quanto rispetto al-
trifante, cognita in questa parte non si vede autentica, ben-
che sottoscritta da J. Adorno. L'urto della legge della na-
scita del med.^{mo} Bassafiume, nondimeno il testimone di
Rogierio deposedo nell'atto del R. Consiglio di Legittimità
incontrabile del D.^{no} Oliviero, ben di più ne facemmo
proprio paragona delle iscrizioni del mentovato C.
Bened. con altri. Sede medesima si iscritta dallo
stesso autentica, ed esistente nella stessa Corte. Riconale
di queste diocesi, esultanti dall'illustre D.^{no} R. e de.
fatti originali. Dal R. Consiglio dei R. stato libero del riferito
testimone, e capicorno, oltremodo non poterti più dubita-
re della verità delle p.^{re} Sede di Bassafiume dell'istuo
Magistero del R. R. in quanto uident.^{re} Le due accenna-
te iscrizioni in tutta consimili, e fatte di una stessa
mano. Di ogni modo, affinché queste Ven. lingue le-
gittime sicure, siamo di ventim.^{te} che non obbliga

[illegible]

+ M^{re} Com. J^o de Barros: M. de Novil.
+ M^{re} Com. Fr^o Antonio-Febo: o. no.

24

A circular, textured object, possibly a coin or a piece of paper, with a dark, irregular border. The surface is grainy and shows some faint, illegible markings.

Il Commandatore Fra Giovanni M. de Hobili, and Il Cavaliere Fra Antonio Cedronio sent to G.M. Antonius Manoel De Vilhena.

The Procuratori expressed their satisfaction in this respect.

25



Fr. Antonius Manoel de Vilheha Dei Gratia.
 Sacrae Romae Aposolicae S. Joannis Hierosol^{ymae} et Militaris Ord. S. Fr.
 Sepulchri Domⁱⁿⁱ Mag^{istri} humilis, pauperumque Jesu X^{risti} Castros.
 nudis, et singulis gentes n^{ost}ras l^{ib}ras visuris, lecturis, et audituris sal^um.
 Notum facimus, et in verbo veritatis attestamus, qualiter infr^{ascripto}
 Secretum extractum fuit ex Libro Concilliorum in Cancell^{aria} n^{ost}ra con-
 servato, in quo Similia, notari, et registrari solent. Quos quidem
 in hanc publicam formam extrahi, et redig^{ere} jussimus, ut ubique
 tam in Civ^{itate} quam extra eadem plena, et indubitata fides adhibea-
 tur. Cujus Tenor est, qui Segr^{atus} V^{er}o.

Die XX. M^{ensis} Junij. 1735. Perlecto Supplicii libello Fr^{atris} Francisci
 Tauffer V^{icarii} Prior. Bohemiae, Capellani, et Conventus S. Mariae
 Pragae. Prioris una cum Pyrographo Vend. Procurum Civ^{itatis} erarij.
 Quorum Tenor est, qui Segr^{atus} V^{er}o.

Em^{enda} Segr^{atus}

[illegible]

In nomine domini Amen.
Nella V^a Camera li 18. giugno 1795. Fr. J. Juan de Cuzco.
Sec. v^o del Com. Tavora = Mag. e Popolo a Fierlem.
Portigantur Preces nre v^{re} Concilio. Pat. in Cal. p.
De XVIII Junij 1795. Fr. J. B. Baabanus de signis Audi.
mae et Gmus Pius Mag. Mag. et vend. Condictum audita
etiam in qua via Secunatoris Fr. J. Prior. e. Proemio in altera supplicia
Stello ad eundem effectum contenta, ne non vine. Rebenatione v^{re} Lari. q. d.
e. Alomanico di XI. S. omneque elegiti edila, cupido. Priori Iacopo petitem
facultatem dispensandi favore Agnos. Pleq. sed. Allumna tuc, iuxta tenorem
quandiserti Synagoga cum suffrag. Fr. nem. dis. concesserunt et videlicet
Cavica ita se habet veritas. Ades in sigis rei testimonium Bulla nra Mag. h. vnt
Cena nigra pararentibus est impresse. Pat. in Carta nra Fr. J. A. Off. Cam.
Ab. 1795.
Regist. in Cancelleria.
Fr. Joannes de Tavora
L. S. Vice-Cancel.

Acta et publicata hac Bulla Magistralis Talvis apertis in Evidentia
 Magni Principis Pragae die 12. Aprilis anno Domini 1775.
 Er. Kib. Schutzbeth de Schützwerth.
 Cancellarius.
 Nos parvens copia Bullae Magistralis Testamento pie in Domino defuncti
 Fr. Francisci Thomae Tauffer sacri Cid. S. C. Joannis Hieron. de Ellami
 conventualis conventus et Ecclesiae S. de Mariae sub. admod. Praet. et
 Inflat. et Emendat. in Evidentia apertis in omnibus et quoad
 omnia plenè concordet portione manet. Subscriptum et sigilli. Quia
 et applicand. idem indubiam facit. Datum Pragae die 12. April. 1775.
 Er. Kib. Schutzbeth de Schützwerth.
 U. et D. C. sacri et Equestris Ordinis S. C. Joannis Hieron.
 Magni Principis Pragae Cancellarius.
 (L.S.)

God profens copia sua suo mibi exhibita et debite
 collationis publicatione de verbo ad verbum correspondet
 Vt offerri pro fide publica requisitus Testor. Actum Pragae
 die 12. April. 1775. Jo. Maria Romanus II.

Joannes Mathias Esch Auctoritate Imperiali
 Regius Notarius Publicus Juratus, nec
 Regius Antiqua Metropoleos Pragensis Comitis
 in fidem publicam requisitus.



The headquarters of the Order and the church of Santa Maria della Catena in Prague.

Translation of Petition⁸

“Fra Don Antonius Manoel de Vilhena, by the grace of God, Master of the Holy Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem and of the Military Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Our Lord, and Custodian of the poor of Jesus Christ.

Greetings to all and each who will see, read, and hear these our letters.

We make known, and testify truthfully, that the following Decree has been extracted from the record book of the Councils preserved in our Chancery wherein such documents are kept and registered, therewith we order to be extracted in this public form, so that everywhere, both at Court of Laws or out of it, it will be accepted fully and beyond any doubt. The Decree is as follows:-

20th June 1735

Having examined the petition (request) of **Fra Francis Tauffer, Chaplain of the Venerable Priorate of Bohemia and Prior of the Convent of Our Lady in Prague** and the written statement of the Venerable Procurators of the Common Treasury.

These two statements (petition + statement) are as follows:-

Your Eminence,

The Prior of the Convent of St. Mary della Catena in Prague, Fra Francis Tauffer, Conventional Chaplain of the Venerable Great Priorate of Bohemia, most humble servant and obedient religious of Your Eminence, humbly submits that he has been chosen to build a College for Alumni for twelve Chaplains of Obedience; the expenses will be covered from some property donated to the aforementioned Convent. The petitioner has already built a house for the same (Chaplains), but so far, it has not been declared as such, because of lack of fund. To keep decently the Alumni and the running of the College as the collections so far were not enough.

Hence, the Petitioner is willing to provide from his own funds, to bring to completion such a pious work (foundation), useful for the Parish Churches of the above mentioned Venerable Great Priorate, which will be better cared for, because they will be taken care of by the above-mentioned Alumni, who will be Religious of this Holy Order, and who will be well prepared. He humbly asks (begs of) Your Eminence for the due and opportune permission, to be able to dispose, in favour of the above-mentioned College, of all his property - movable and immovable - which he actually owns independently of the Holy Religion, and of other property, which in future he might own, all of which will be to the benefit of the same (Religion) of Divine Cult and of the Churches of the above-mentioned Venerable Great Priorate.

With the hope of being granted from you knowing the generosity and disposition of Your Eminence.

I remain your most very obedient servant

(s) Master of the Hospital of Jerusalem.

This petition must be made known to the Venerable Procurators of Our Common Treasury.

Given from the Palace on 10th June 1735.

J(oannes) B(aptista) Balsanus de Vign.

Auditor.

Your Eminence,

The College, which is mentioned in the written petition of the Priest Fra Francis Tauffer, will be useful and advantageous for the Service of God, and useful to the service of the Priorate of Bohemia, and to Religion of Your Eminence. Therefore we agree that the movable and immovable property which the above-mentioned priest actually owns, and will in future own, be used, during his life, and after his death as well, for the benefit of the afore-said College, in the name of our Religion. This is all which is to be recommended to Your Eminence so that you grant the request.

We salute you in Your Room today, 18th June 1735.

(s) Fra Don Juan de Prego

Secretary to the Common Treasury = Master of the Hospital of Jerusalem

This petition should be presented to our Venerable Council.

Given from the Palace today 18th June 1735

(s) Fra J.B. Balsanus de Vign.

Auditor

_____ the Grand Master and the Venerable Council, having heard also the other petition of the Procurator of the Venerable Priorate of Bohemia given for the same purpose and examined the verdict of the Venerable Language of Germany, published (made known publicly) on 20th October last, wherein it is requested to be given, to the said Prior Tauffer the faculty (power) as requested to dispose (use) in favour of the above-mentioned College in conformity with the written statement as enclosed with their vote, **unanimously** agreed to be granted.

And because the documents are genuine we hereby authenticate our Magistial Bull with our black seal impressed on these letters.

Given from our Convent on 20th of the month of June, Year 1735.

(s) Fra Lothus de Tavona

(L.S.) Vice Chancellor.

The Magisterial Bull was read and made public (and put on show) in the Residence of the Great Priorate of Prague on 19th April A.D. 1745.

(s) Ernest Norbert Schutzbreth de Schutzwerth

Chancellor

This present Magisterial Bull, contained in the last will of late Fra Francis Adam Tauffer, who passed away in the Lord, Conventual Chaplain of the Holy Order of

St. John of Jerusalem and Prior of the Convent and Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of Catena in nearby Ebenfurth, is a full true copy and signed in my handwriting and authenticated with my seal impressed on it: I swear to be true.

Given in Prague on 19th April 1745

(s) Ernest Norbert Schutzbrith de Scutzwert

(L.S.) _____ Chancellor of the Great Priorate of Bohemia

Joannes Matthaeus, Sworn Regius Notary Public by Imperial Authority, Old Royal Metropolis of Prague

(L.S.) Chancellor

As required for public faith.

from Pg.20

- Manoel Island / Fort Manoel;
- the Manoel Theatre - one of the oldest in Europe;
- rebuilding of Mdina and turning it into a baroque city;
- the rebuilding of Palazzo Vilhena in Mdina where the bronze medallion over the main door has been recently restored;
- the Lion Fountain at St. Anne's Square Floriana bearing his Coat of Arms;
- the statue in his honour in Floriana.

It is not surprising that Malta is on many occasions described as the "Gem of the Mediterranean" and there is no doubt that this is mostly due to the valuable treasures which the Order of St. John built or donated.

Here it is not possible to mention all that was achieved during de Vilhena's fourteen year reign as Grand Master.

However it is worth mentioning that major works successfully undertaken during his time are still visible as a reminder of his contribution towards Malta's heritage.

He passed away on 12th December 1736 and is buried in the Ardente Chapel in St. John Co-Cathedral, Valletta where his memorial can be seen.

Acknowledgements:-

1. Fredrick H. Ryan The House of the Temple.
2. The coinage of the Knights in Malta. Sammut & Restelli.
3. Coins – reproduced from currency in Malta. Central Bank of Malta.
4. Photos of the statue at the original site at Manoel Island and at Pjazza Tezorerija Valletta, 2nd site by the courtesy of Prof. Margaret Harker and Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti.
5. All other photos by the courtesy of Mr Kevin Casha.
6. Original letter, Decree and documents, Dr. A. Bonnici.
7. K.G.VI, 6d. plate blocks and covers ,Anthony Fenech and Dr. A. Bonnici.
8. Translation by Father Gabriel Grech O.C.D.
9. Translation by Mr. E. Micallef.