

Maltese Falcons - Grand Masters Letters to the King of the Two Sicilies

By
Alfred Bonnici

Malta was donated to the Hospitallers by King Charles V of Spain in 1530, after the fall of Rhodes on 21 December 1522, when Suleyman the Magnificent allowed them to leave Rhodes on the 1st January 1523 with full Military Honours, led by the G.M. Philippe de Villiers de l'Isle Adam, taking all their belongings- Archives, work of art etc, accompanied by some three hundred Rhodiots - Latin and Greek.

They stayed in Europe for eight years, when Pope Clement VII established their Convent at Viterbo where they had their magistral palace, a conventual church, a hospital and the auberges for the Langues.

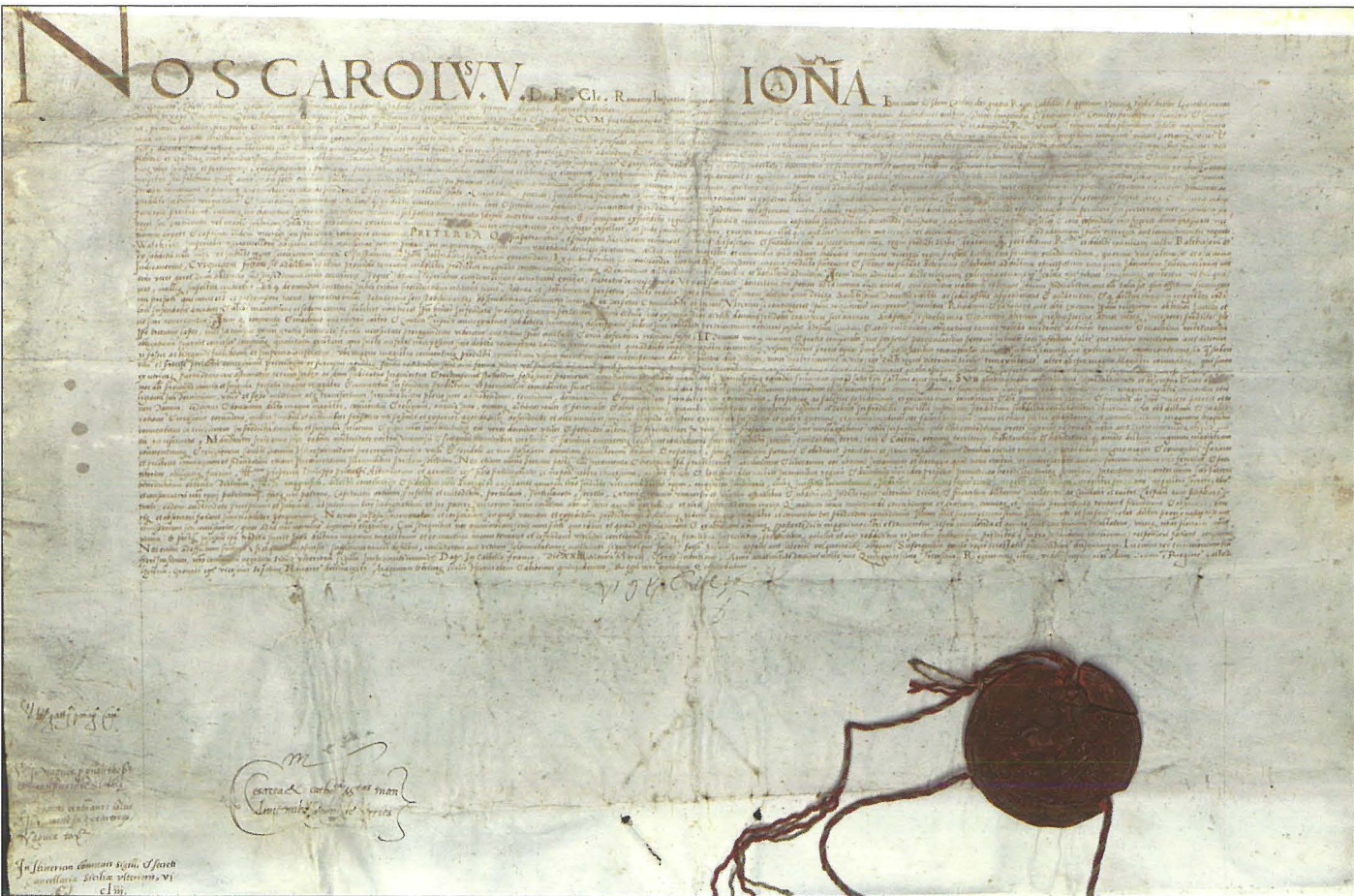
In 1527 plague forced them out of Viterbo sailing to Corneto and on to Nice, and this delay (1523-27) may be attributed in part to forces independent of the Order's crisis. There were three major problems confronting Christendom at this particular point in time:

- the first was the internecine warfare provoked by the enmity which Charles V and Francis I entertained for each other, with the Pope and most of the minor princes getting unavoidably embroiled in the conflict. It turned Italy into the battlefield of Europe.
- the second was the Lutheran revolt.
- the third factor was the challenge offered by the formidable power of an expanding Ottoman Empire. On 28-29 August 1521, Belgrade, the outer wall of Christendom' was treacherously forced into surrender by the young sultan's large and well equipped army on its first campaign. The battle of the Mohacs stretched the Ottoman front to the very domains of the Habsburg Austria. In 1529 Vienna under siege.

Towards the end of this period they actively considered the idea of re conquering Rhodes.

The Viceroy in Sicily had found the cost of defending Malta from frequent pirate attacks, very high and it is said that Ettore Pignatelli, Charles V's Viceroy in Sicily was in favour of donating Malta to the Hospitallers as this would indeed be to his own defence advantage.

On 22 February 1530, celebrating his thirtieth birthday, Charles V was crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in Bologna, and within a month on 23 March, no doubt pushed by the Pope to do this he signed the donation deed at Castelfranco.



courtesy of the National Library

The Order had accepted Charles's grant as a perpetual fief in return for the annual gift of (a falcon) on All Saints Day.

However it was Six not One falcon to be given to the Viceroy of Sicily.

Probably this wrong statement that only ONE falcon was to be given to the Viceroy of Sicily started when W Porter published "History of the Knights of Malta. (1858) and the cession document was translated into English. .

This English translation was printed and circulated Officially quite recently in which it is stated:

"so that they may hereafter hold them in feudal tenure from us as Kings of both Sicilies.....under the sole acknowledgment of a hawk or falcon, which, every year, on the festival of All Saints, shall be presented..... into the hands of the Viceroy....."

All those of my age group who were thought Maltese History through Mgr S Laspina's book "Outlines of Maltese History", p 73, learnt that "on the day of All Saints, present a falcon to the Viceroy of Sicily in the name of the Order.*

Consequently all Maltese Historians accepted this as a fact

As recent as October 2015 Giulio Perricone from Palermo in his article "Collegamenti marittimi con le Scorradore dell Ordine di Malta con le Feluche e i Vapori del Regno delle due Sicilie e delle messaggerie francesi (1789-1894)" in "I servizi postali marittime in Sicilia dai velieri del sec.XIV ai piroscafi del sec. XIX" put together by Vincenzo Fardella de Qernfort, page 43, states: "ogni anno un falcone ammaestrato doveva essere portato al vicere di Sicilia."

This misconception is still current among us to day, as nobody checked the original document which says clearly "sex falchoms"



Moreover these six falcons are clearly mentioned in all the letters sent to the Viceroy by successive Grand Masters as is being shown

Letter from GM. D.Ramon.Despuig.
(17 November 1738) sending "Seij alconej"

In el acto de mostrarme a los V. A. de S. M.
con la carta de demostracion de Seij alconej
que presentava en mi nombre el Bayl.
fr. D. Eitor Mamuli, de las mejores que en
la plaza de este año se han podido sacar
aqui, se uerro ala experimentada gene-
rosidad de V. E. para que por favorecer-
me, se sirva concurrir con sus oficios
afin de que tan corto don de mi humil-
de obsequio encuentre la real aceptacion
y granhdad; asi lo expreso de la fuerza de
V. E. como que me facilite sus preceptos,
para mostrarme con la ejecucion agras-
decido a los fauores que me dispensa
V. E. suya vida, q. Dios md. a Malta
17. de Nov. de 1738.

Como C.
Ca. J.
Blind. V. E. su m. Serv.
El Gran Maestro.
Despuig

Letter from GM. Manoel Pinto de Fonseca
(30 Nov 1741) sending “Su’s alionej”

El Barão Sr. Don Cesar Marulli
me ha querido presentarme a V. Mag.
en mi nombre Sus alionej de los me-
jores que se han producido en este
año en esta Isla, pequeña de mos-
tración de mi reverente animo que
me alienta a recibir la experien-
cia de que el benigno de V. M. se sir-
ve admitirla con agrado.
Dios guarde a S. R. L. Perrnade
V. Mag. como la Christianidad ha
menester. Malta 30. de Noviembre
de 1741.

S. R. Mag.

Humilde servidor de V. M.
que sus reales manos besa
El Gran Maestro.
D. D. Manoel Pinto de Fonseca.

Letter from GM Pinto
(6 December 1760) sending "Seijalconej"

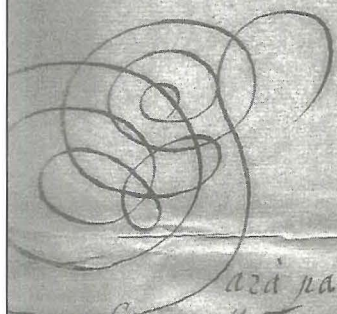
Debiendo presentar a S. M. que Dios q.
el Ven. Bay. Fr. D. Lator Marulli mi
Ministro en esta Real Corte, en mi nom-
bre Seijalconej no deixo de encomen-
dar a V. C. que es tan favorecedor mio
la benigna aceptación de este mi
vnilde obsequio a su Real grandez,
que me promete la misma, y el afec-
tuoso influxo de V. C. de que vivo
tan seguro, como obligado por tan
preciosos motivos a su servicio, y pto
dejevo de que Dios q. a V. C. m. d.
Malta 6: de Dic. de 1760.

Como
Ex: Señor.
B. M. de V. C. m. d. Señ.
El Gran Maestre.
Pinto.

Marques Janici.

Letter from GM D.Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca
(22 October 1764) sending "Sei Falconi"

Sacra Real Maesta



Per parte della Real Grandezza di Vostra
Sacra Maesta il gradire Sei Falconi che avrà
l'onore di presentarle in mio nome il nobile D.
Innocenzo Cignatelli. Spero che la somma Clemenza
di Vostra Sacra Real Maesta si degnera ricevere
graziosamente questa ossequiosa dimostranza della
mia infinita venerazione. E mentre la supplico di
continuare il suo Real Patrocinio a me ed a questa
mia Religione fo alla Sacra Real Maesta Vostra
umilissimo inchino
Malta 22 Ore 1764.
Di Vostra Sacra Real Maesta

Umilissimo e Devotissimo Servo
Il Gran Maestro dello Spedale e del S.^{mo} Sepolcro di S. Ferlemm
D. D. Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca

Letter from GM Emanuel de Rohan
(6 December 1786) sending "Sei Falconi"

Avrà l'onore il Balì fra Pasquale Gaetani
d'Amagona mio Ministro Plenipotenziario di presentare
a Vostra Sacra Real Maestà in mio nome Sei
Falconi costante testimonianza dell'ossequiosa mia
venerazione verso della Sacra Maestà Vostra. Ed in
atto di Supplicare riverentemente la Sua Real
Clemenza di gradirla, e di rimaner persuasa che la mia
Religione, ed io non altro desideriamo, che di meritare
la continuazione delle Grazie benignissime, e Real
Patrocinio di Vostra Sacra Maestà faccio alla
Medesima profondissimo inchino.

tra Sacra Real Maestà Matta 6. Dicembre 1786

Umilissimo, e Divotissimo Servo
tro dell'Ospedale, del S. Sepolcro di Gerusalemme, ed di S. Antonio Veneto

J. Emanuel de Rohan

Letter from GM Emanuel de Rohan
(17 November 1793) sending "Sei Falconi"

Il Pate Fr. Giuseppe Francone Ministro Plenipotenziario
avrà l'onore di presentare a Vostra Real Maestà Sei Falconi
in mio nome, e di supplicarla di ricevere questo rispettosissimo
atto in contrasegno della mia somma venerazione verso della
Sagra Real Maestà Vostra. E mentre Supplico altresì la Sua
Real Clemenza degnarsi di gradirlo, e di rimaner persuasa che
la mia Religione, ed io non altro desideriamo, che di meritari
la continuazione delle benignissime grazie, e Real Potente
Protezione di Vostra Sagra Real Maestà, le faccio profondissim
in chino

Vostra Sagra Real Maestà

Malta 17. Novembre 1793.

Umilissimo e Devotissimo Servo.
Maestro dell'Arma, del S. Sepolcro di Gerusalemme, e di S. Antonio Viense
Emanuel de Rohan