The Sovereign Order of St John of Jerusalem
(Knights of Malta)

International Grand Priory World Headquarters - Malta
SUMMARY OF HISTORY

Office of the Grand Prior International O. S. J.,
66 Stuart Str., Gzira,
MALTA
1975

Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum

Jerusalem 1048-1291, Cyprus 1292-1310, Rhodes 1311-1523, Malta 1530-1798, Russia 1798-1907, U.S.A. 1908, Malta 1964.

The Order of Saint John of Jerusalem (1113), afterwards called of Cyprus (1292), of Rhodes (1311) and of Malta (1539) had as well established itself at St. Petersburg, with the erection of the Latin/Catholic and Russian/Orthodox Priories of Russia, which had taken place on January 4-15, 1797. The International Treaty had been endorsed by H. I. M. the Tsar Paul I and by H. H. the Prince Sovereign Grand Master of the Order, Emmanuel Prince de Rohan Polduc and ratified on 28-8-1797 in Malta and on 29-11-1797 in St Petersburg, with the qualification of "in perpetuity" by H. I. M. the Tsar, acting for Himself and His Imperial Successors. His Holiness Pius VI had already directed an appeal to the Tsar and Emperor of All the Russias for the salvation of European civilization, an aspect of which had been represented by the O. S. J. On 12-6-1798 the then Grand Master of the Order capitulated to the French and on 26-8-1798, having the fall of Malta become known, the Knights of the Grand Priory of Russia together with Knights of other Langues and other Grand Priories and
Priories of the Order met in St Petersburg. On that historical day, by means of a special ballot, they declared the decadency of Grand Master Ferdinand von Hompesch and they considered themselves liberated from their vows of obedience towards him, inviting as well the remaining Grand Priories and Priories to express their solidarity with their move and in their decision to confide the protection of the Order to the Protector of the Order H. I. M. the Tsar Paul I, who on 10-9-1798 received in His Imperial Presence the qualified Dignitaries of the Order proclaiming His decision to maintain the O. S. J. in the integrity and in the dignity of its institutions, privileges and honours. The Polish Priory associated itself to the above decision and manifest on 3-10-1798 and on the following 23rd of the month the German Priory followed suit, both Priories endorsing the proclamation of 10-9-1798 and the establishment of the Order in St Petersburg, while the French Knights themselves, dispersed because of the suppressions of the Order in France, could not express their solidarity except individually.

On 7-10-1798 the Knights present and assembled in St. Petersburg, jointly with the Knights of the Grand Priories of Russia, the Priory of Germany and the Polish Priory and as well on behalf of those Knights who could not be present proclaimed and elected H. I. M. the Tsar Paul I as the 70th Grand Master of the O. S. J. Paul I formally accepted office on the 7th of November.

On 6-7-1799 following an invitation by the Tsar and by the Emperor of the Sacred Roman Empire Francis II, Ferdinand Count von Hompesch signed the act of abdication recommending the sorts of the Order to the 70th Grand Master Paul I, Emperor and Autocrat of all the Russians. On the 21st of the same month the Tsar instituted the Hereditary Commanderies of the Order in Russia, which constituted of two Grand Priories (one Catholic, the other Orthodox), consisted of 249 Knights of various classes, grades and nationalities (Ukaz nr. 19044).

After the death of Paul I, His Successors guaranteed the existence and continuity of the Order. Tsar Alexander I did not renounce His quality, Tsar Nicholas I restored the two chapels (the Catholic and the Orthodox) in the "Palais de Matte" in St Petersburg, Tsars Alexander II and Alexander III confirmed the right of wearing the Order's insignia to hereditary Knights. On the death of Alexander II in March 1881, the Crown of the Grand Master of the O. S. J. was carried in a place of high honour in the funeral processions. Tsar Nicholas II authorized numerous members of His Family to accept the dignity of Bailiff Gr. Cr. and authorized as well the "Corps de Pages" to wear the Eight-Pointed Maltese Cross of the Order.

On 10-1-1908 became officially constituted the Order's Priory of America, the constituent act being endorsed by H. I. H. Grand Duke Alexander Michailovic, Prince Peter Troubetzkoi, Prince Michael Khilkov, Count Alexander Bouturiln, Baron de Rosen; Russian Ambassador in the U.S.A., Charles Magnum Tower U.S. Ambassador in Russia, Austria and Germany, Hethelbert Watts, General Consul of the U.S.A. in St Petersburg, Baron Hengelmuller von Hengervar, Austrian Ambassador in the U.S.A. and many other eminent personalities.

Five years later, on 1st September 1913, at 1600 hours the Sovereign Council of the O. S. J. elected Grand Duke Alexander Michailovic 71st Grand Master of the Order and Grand Prior of Europe and America. Grand Duke Alexander accepted office obtaining the assent of H. I. M. the Tsar Emperor of all Russians. The year 1928 witnessed the reconstitution of the Russian Grand Priory under the same Grand Duke Alexander, after it had been scattered as late as the 15th April 1917 the day on which the Russian Imperial Family was under arrest, by the hands of the Bolsheviks. In 1934 H. I. H. Grand duke Cyrill, Head of the House of Romanoff, confirmed by a complementary act the admission into the Order a French Baron who had been previously admitted by decree of Tsar Nicholas II.

The Langue of Malta of the O. S. J. emerged in 1964 following some of the most important stipulations of the Treaty of Amiens which had been signed by the four Big Powers. (Chapter X, art. 3). The Langue of Malta soon made itself felt in the O. S. J. world, and in Malta itself, at a time when unfortunately the Order had already started suffering from the chronic disease of internal upheavals caused by defective leadership. The Langue of Malta became so active that all existing Priories, and Knights at large, turned their eyes on Malta for a way-out to salvation. The Langue of Malta organized the first ever European Festconvents, organized cultural competitions on a national scale, followed a vast philanthropic programme, brought in new knights from foreign countries, and showed the true way for the future of the O. S. J.

As a natural consequence, in November 1971, when most of the Priories, and Knights at large, of the Order had lost hopes, they appealed to Malta to make a formidable step
forward to remedy the situation, extending their continued support to its leadership and thus the International Grand Priory of the O. S. J., alias the International Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Knights of Malta, emerged compact, purposeful and independent with International H. Q. in Malta. Since then, this O. S. J. International acquired the Protection of various Heads of Name and Arms of Sovereign Houses and other Princes of ancient and not so ancient Royal Families.

To-day it is spread in different countries throughout the world and embraces Grand Priories, Commanderies Hereditary Knights and Knights at large defined “groemio Ordinis”.

As its name implies, the Order is truly international in its nature and so it does not seek recognition from any particular state and its Supreme Council is internationally composed. It is really ecumenical not only in Christianity but as well in the Jovannite world. In fact, the Order embraces not only Roman Catholics, but Knights and Ladies pertaining to the different Christian denominations. Solemn investitures are regularly held both in Catholic and in other Christian Churches.

We would like to bring to a close this summary of history applying to the Jovannite World what is said about the Assisi Man. So it is said that St. Francis once heard a voice calling him – “Don't you see that my church is falling down!...Try to build it up for me!” and thereupon Francis set up to collect stones to build up the falling church. This is the same with St. John. We all realise that the body of St. John is a torn body. This Order has already heard the mysterious voice calling – “Don't you see that my body is falling down! Try to build it up for me!”, and as the Assisi Man did, we have already taken the necessary steps and we have grafted new wood on the old wood, and we have saved ourselves from internal ruin, and now we have started the second phase, i.e. that of collecting the strewn stones to bring them together to heal the torn body of St. John.

We must not demand miracles, but we demand hard work and sacrifices since nothing good may come out unless it is the product of a sacrifice. We do in fact, realise that some Jovannites tend to get into battle with other Jovannite denominations and they even sling at each other the un-chivalric mud of discontinuity, illegality, etc. This un-chivalric and insane attitude is ridiculous because every kingdom in itself divided shall be desolated and one upon the other shall its houses fall into ruin, and, if St. John continues on the unsavoury attitude, it will surely cause the fall of all chivalry in every corner of the world.

We have heard the “voice” and must not bear the guilt of inactivity. Various Heads of Sovereign Houses have graciously extended Their Royal Protection to render wholeness to this O. S. J. International in its chivalric and sacred endeavour. So be it - One for all, and all for one. Non Nobis

References

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Axts of Notary Public Dr. P. Pullicino LLD., of Valetta.

* We possess an innumerable number of other references but we have taken these at random.
Our most cordial thanks must go to the following Most Distinguished Personnages: - The different Heads of Sovereign Houses for the Sovereign Protection so graciously conceded; The various Prince Grand Masters of International Orders for Their effective Patronage; The late Prince Kyrl Feodorovich de Vassilchikov-Shismarev, Comte de Rohan-Chandor for his 'Special Blessing'. Our heartfelt sympathies to Comtesse de Rohan-Chandor; *

The Presidents of the various International Chivalric Association, for their attention and continued help.

* Prince Kyrl died in Portugal on May 12, 1975, after suffering mortal injuries during civil upheavels.

On 31.12.1976 H. l. H. Dmitrij Dmitrevic Grand Duke of Russia, Tsar of the Imperial House of Moscow recognized the decadency of the Order through Malta thence to St. Petersburg, thence to the US.A. and again to Malta (1964) confirming as well its autonomy and independence. Furthermore H. l. H. conceded His Imperial Protection, concludes with the O. S. J. a “Reciprocal Convention” between the O. S. J. and Moscovite St. Georges and accepted His election by O.SJ. Sovereign Council to the office of H.M.E.H. the Prince Grand Master of the O. S. J. H. l. H. took His Oath of Office according to Constitutions. All this registered in notary announcements in Valletta, Malta.