

*Épître à Monsieur  
Grand Maître  
de l'Ordre de Saint-Lazare*

*composed by  
Jean-Baptiste-Louis GRESSET*

Translated by

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with a commentary by

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Grand Prior of the Maltese Islands

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Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands

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50<sup>th</sup> Grand Master of the Military & Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem in October 2018

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## *Preface*

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The Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands and its sub-jurisdiction the Commandery of Gozo welcome Grand Master His Excellency Don Francisco de Borbón Graf von Hardenberg, Conde de Handenberg to the Maltese Islands during his first official visit since his election as the 50<sup>th</sup> Grand Master of the Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem. The 50<sup>th</sup> Grand Master's visit to the Islands recalls other occasions when previous Grand Masters of the Order honoured the Islands with their presence.

A number of 16<sup>th</sup> century Grand Masters of the Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem had probably spent time on the Maltese Islands having been first professed as knights of the Order of Saint John in Malta. This was a period in the Order's history when political machinations between the Holy See and the French King resulted in an agreed administrative link between the French branch of the Order of Saint Lazarus and the Order of Saint John, then stationed in Malta. This link led to a series of professed Knights of Saint John being appointed grand masters of the Order of Saint Lazarus by the reigning French kings with the approval of the reigning Pontiff and the Council of the Order of Saint John. These grand masters include: Jean de Lévis [professed Knight OSJ: 1532; elected GM OSL: 1557]; Michel de Seure de Lumigny [professed Knight OSJ: 1539; elected GM OSL: 1564/1586]; François Salviati [professed Knight OSJ: 1544; elected GM OSL: 1578]; and Armand de Clermont de Chastes [professed Knight OSJ]. Their sojourn on Malta however would probably have predated their appointment to the post of Grand Master of the Order of Saint Lazarus.

In 1969, a decision was made by the Grand Master to move the Grand Chancellery of the International Order from Paris to Malta. The Maltese jurisdiction quickly took the initiative to

propose suitable sites for housing the Grand Chancellery and suggested the soon-to-vacate Admiralty House and the St. John Counterguard. Other buildings, scheduled to be vacated by the British Services, were discussed with the Malta Government Lands Department.<sup>1</sup> On the 11-15<sup>th</sup> May 1973, the *Priory of Malta* hosted a Chapter General and the official visit of the 47<sup>th</sup> Grand Master Prince Francesco Enrique de Borbón who inaugurated *Torri ta' Lanzun* as the Grand Chancellery of the Order establishing Malta as the Administrative seat of the Malta Obedience fraction of the Order. The original purchase of *Torri ta' Lanzun* was made possible through the generosity of LtCol Robert Gayre.<sup>2</sup> The legal transfer and restoration of *Torri ta' Lanzun* was carried out under the professional expertise of notary Dr. J.R. Grech LL.D. BA CLJ and architect Chev Maurice Captur BE&A ArCE KLJ. The restoration was made possible through donation made by various members of the Order, overseas and from Malta.<sup>3</sup>

During the Grand Master's visit, on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 1973, the Priory donated an ambulance to the Hospital of St Catherine of Siena at Attard, Malta. This ambulance had been obtained from the Commandery of Lochore, Scotland through the agency of Messrs. Chalmers and Hardie. The Grand Master made the formal presentation and further invested the Rev. Mothers Columba Camilleri and Celia Bye as officer and member of the Companionate of Merit respectively. A plaque to commemorate the event was unveiled; while the hospital undertook to fly the Flag of St Lazarus on St Lazarus Day (17<sup>th</sup> December) and name a new wing of the hospital after the patron saint of the Order.

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<sup>1</sup> *Archives of the Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands: 1966-1971*. Minute notes dated 5<sup>th</sup> March 1969 and 27<sup>th</sup> February 1971

<sup>2</sup> *Inauguration of the Grand Chancery, Malta; Report on Chapter General held on 11th and 12th May 1973*. MHOSLJ, Malta, p.7; Order of St Lazarus headquarters to be inaugurated. *Times of Malta*, 12th May 1973, p.20

<sup>3</sup> *Inauguration of the Grand Chancery, Malta; Report on Chapter General held on 11th and 12th May 1973*. MHOSLJ, Malta, p.3, 10-11



**Francisco de Borbón flanked by Prince Irakly de Bagration and LtCol Robert Gayre y Gayre: 1973**



### **Unveiling of Commemorative plaque**

St. Catherine's Hospital on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 1973 by the 47<sup>th</sup> Grand Master Prince Francesco Enrique de Borbón and Chev A. Zammit, then Secretary General of the Priory of Malta, onlooking.

On In 14-16<sup>th</sup> September 2001, the *Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands* co-hosted together with the *Commandery of the Castello* a visit by the 48<sup>th</sup> Grand Master-elect, H.R.H. Don Francesco de Borbon y Escasany Duke of Seville who had taken over the leadership of the latter Jurisdiction established as a sub-jurisdiction called *Hereditary Commandery of Lochore in Malta* in 1976 and renamed Commandery of the Castello in 1986. During the visit, the Grand Master-elect visited St Catherine



of Siena Home for the Elderly (previously a general private hospital where his father and predecessor had unveiled a plaque during his visit in May 1973) and made a courtesy visit to the H.E. Guido de Marco President of the Republic of Malta.<sup>4</sup>



**48<sup>th</sup> Grand Master-elect, H.R.H. Don Francesco de Borbon y Escasany Duke of Seville**

At Torri ta' Lanzun, 2001

On the 9-10<sup>th</sup> September 2009, the *Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands* co-hosted, with the *Grand Commandery of the Castello*, the 49<sup>th</sup> Grand Master H.E. Don Carlos Gereda de Borbón during his visit to the Maltese Islands undertaken with the aim of assuming the leadership of the Grand Commandery. The official ceremony, attended by a representative delegation<sup>5</sup> of the Grand Priory led by the Grand Prior Chev. J.R. Pace, took place at *Torri Lanzun* on the 9<sup>th</sup> September. The Grand Priory council members had the opportunity to meet with the Grand Master during a lunch organised on the 10<sup>th</sup> September. The Grand Priory members had the opportunity to meet with the Grand Master during a gala dinner organized jointly with the *Grand Commandery of the Castello* on the 10<sup>th</sup> September. For the occasion, the two jurisdictions presented the Grand Master with a model of a Maltese fishing boat in silver.

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<sup>4</sup> *Saint Lazarus Newsletter*. November 2001, p.3-4,5-6

<sup>5</sup> Delegation included: Chev. Dr. J.R. Pace, Chev. M. Ciavola, Chev. Prof. C. Savona-Ventura, and Mr. C. Cilia.



**Grand Priory Council delegation lunching with GM Don Carlos Gereda de Borbón**

10<sup>th</sup> September 2009

*(left to right)* Fr. T. Moore, Mr. G. Sammut, GP Chev. J.R. Pace, Mr. J. Grixti, GM Don Carlos Gereda de Borbón, Chev. A. Cutajar, Chev. M. Ciavola, Mr. C. Cilia, Chev. J. Spiteri Audibert

In May 2013, His Excellency Grand Master Don Carlos Gereda de Borbón Marquis of Almazán led a high ranking delegation comprising the Grand Executive Council on a visit to Malta to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary since the Order acquired Castello Lanzun as its official headquarters. The anniversary activities, jointly organised by the local jurisdictions, included a reception at the Castello Lanzun hosted by the Grand Commandery of the Castello, where the Grand Master unveiled a commemorative Plaque, and an International Investiture in St. Paul's Anglican Pro-Cathedral at Valletta. New postulants representing the Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands and its sub-jurisdiction the Commandery of Gozo, the Grand Commandery of the Castello, the Delegation of Norway and the Priory of Belgium, were admitted to the Order. Several other members were promoted or awarded meritorious distinctions for services rendered to the Order's charitable work. International Representatives from various jurisdictions attended the formal Investiture in St. Paul's Anglican Pro-Cathedral at Valletta. The Investiture was directed by Chev. Clive Bennington, deputy Grand Marshall of the Order. A religious Service, led by the Chancellor of the Cathedral the Rt. Rev. Simon Godfrey assisted by the Chaplains of the local jurisdictions, preceded the Investiture, and Hymns were sung by a 12-strong Choir led by Dame Marie Therese Vassallo. The homily was delivered by Rev. Fr Peter Chappell, Gozo Commandery Chaplain. The evening before the formal investiture – which was held on Sunday 12th May, - the Postulants attended a Vigil Service in the baroque Madonna tal-Pilar Church at Valletta, led by Senior



Chaplain Rev. Colin Westmarland and the Chaplains of the local jurisdictions. The Investiture was followed by a very well attended and convivial Gala Dinner at the Grand Hotel Excelsior, sited just outside the fortifications of Valletta overlooking the historic Grand Harbour. Don Carlos was presented with a fine table centre of Gozo Lace containing the Maltese Cross and several motifs. During the following days, the General Executive Council held its meeting.



**H.E. the Grand Master  
making his address regarding the 40<sup>th</sup>  
anniversary celebration of the  
acquisition of Torri ta' Lanzun  
[Chev. J. Maidens and Chev. J.R. Pace  
flanking]**



**Grand Master unveiling the  
commemorative plaque in  
Torri ta' Lanzun**

H.E. Don Francisco de Borbon y Graf von Hardenberg is well suited to undertake the rejuvenation of the Order and prepare the Order for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The jurisdiction promises its allegiance and its full support in these endeavours.

19<sup>th</sup> October 2018



*Chevalier de l'ordre de Nôtre Dame de Mont-Carmel,  
et de S.<sup>t</sup> Lazare de Jerusalem.*



*Épître à Monsieur Grand Maître de l'Ordre de Saint-Lazare*  
*composed by Jean-Baptiste-Louis GRESSET*

*COMMENTARY*

*by H.E. the Chev. Charles Savona-Ventura*

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The *Épître à Monsieur* was composed by the eighteenth-century poet and dramatist Jean-Baptiste-Louis GRESSET after King Louis XVI in 1777 appointed him the *historiographe* to the Order of Saint Lazarus. He was further admitted as a Chevalier of the Order of Saint Michael. The epistle is an honorific poem aimed as a eulogy to the Grand Master and the Order of Saint Lazarus. The reigning Grand Master in 1777 was Louis Stanislas Xavier de France, Comte de Provence, eventually King Louis XVIII of France and Navarre 1795-1824. He served as the 43<sup>rd</sup> Grand Master and eventually Protector of the united Orders of St. Lazarus and Our Lady of Mount Carmel during the period 1773-1824. Son of Louis, Dauphin of France and Marie-Josèphe of Saxony, he was born at Versailles on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 1755. Married: 14<sup>th</sup> May 1771 to Marie Josephine Louise of Savoy [born: Turin, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1753; died in exile: Buckinghamshire, England, 13<sup>th</sup> November 1810]. He died in Paris on the 16<sup>th</sup> September





1824.<sup>6</sup> In the late eighteenth century, the Order was enjoying a period of marked prosperity and popularity receiving the support of the French Royal House.

Jean-Baptiste-Louis GRESSET was born in Amiens on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 1709. He was accepted as a Jesuit novice at the age of seventeen and studied at the *Collège Louis le Grand* in Paris. After two years, he was appointed to the post as assistant master in a college at Rouen. He published his first major work *Vert-Vert, histoire d'un perroquet de Nevers* while in Rouen in 1734. This humorous story centres around a parrot who was the delight of a convent because of its prayers and pious ambitions comments. A decision was made to transfer the parrot to another convent. During the passage, the parrot fell among bad companions. It forgets its convent language and starts swearing profanely. It is sent back to its original home in disgrace where it is punished by solitude and plain bread. The parrot repents and reforms. The writing style and the detailed descriptive interactions of the nuns caused the poem to truly stand out. Because of its apparent ridicule of the religious community, the poem was not well received by his Jesuit superiors.



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<sup>6</sup> Anon. (2013). Louis XVIII of France. In: *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. Retrieved 26<sup>th</sup> September 2013 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis\\_XVIII\\_of\\_France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_XVIII_of_France).

On the 30<sup>th</sup> September 1735, Gresset was forced to leave the Order without being ordained priest. He went on to produce further literary works. While resident in Paris, Gresset was in 1748 admitted to the Académie Française. In 1751, he married the daughter of a former mayor of Amiens and settled there. He founded the *Académie d'Amiens* which served to launch his continuing literary activities. During the last twenty-five years of his life, he went through a moral crisis and regretted the frivolity of his youth, which enabled him to produce his most famous poem. He died at Amiens on the 16<sup>th</sup> June 1777. His works included: *Vert-Vert*, *histoire d'un perroquet de Nevers* (1734); *Le Carême impromptu* (1734); *Le Lutrin vivant* (1734); *La Chartreuse* (1734); *Ombres* (1734); *Adieux aux Jésuites* (1735); *Édouard III*, tragedy (22 January 1740); *Sidney*, *drame en vers*, (3 May 1745); *Le Méchant*, *comédie en 5 actes, en vers*, (15 April 1747); *Le Parrain magnifique*, *poème en dix chants* (posthumous 1810). He also published a series of correspondence with Frédéric le Grand.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Gresset, Jean-Baptiste-Louis (1709-1777). Oeuvres complètes (français). 1811]Oeuvres de Gresset. Tome premier [-tome second.]. 1811. Oeuvres de Gresset. Tome premier - tome second Reliure inconnue – 1811





*Fragments d'une Épître à Monsieur  
Grand Maître de l'Ordre de Saint-Lazare*

*Fragments of an Epistle to Monsieur Grand  
Master of the Order of Saint Lazarus*

*Par Jean-Baptiste-Louis GRESSET*

*By Jean-Baptiste-Louis GRESSET  
Translated by Annette Scerri*

*Malgré votre auguste indulgence,  
Je n'aurais point la confiance  
Grand Prince, d'offrir à vos yeux  
Cette foule de vers immense  
Si c'était de ces vers pompeux  
D'une monotone cadence,  
Marchant gravement deux à deux  
Et souvent dans leur consonnance  
Solidairement ennuyeux;  
Ou du genre non moins heureux  
De ces strophes à tout étage  
Si favorables aux vapeurs,  
Et dont se forme le nuage  
De tant de rimes sans couleurs.*

*Despite your august indulgence,  
I would not have the confidence <sup>8</sup>  
Grand Prince, to offer to your eyes  
This multitude of verse  
If it were these pompous verses  
In monotonous pace,  
Marching solemnly two to two  
And often in their unison  
Each in turn bored;  
Not too pleasing  
From these stanzas on any floor  
So favorable to vapors,  
And from which the cloud is formed  
With many colourless rhymes.*

*J'ai cru, prince aimable, immortel,  
Que le ton simple et naturel  
D'une historiette légère  
Au froid bel-esprit actuel  
Assurément bien étrangère,  
Pourrait, Durant quelques moments,  
Vous intéresser et vous plaire  
Dans vos nobles délassements ...*

*I believed, kind, immortal prince  
That the simple and natural tone  
Of a simple story  
On cold-witted spirit  
Certainly very foreign,  
Could, For a few moments,  
Interest you and please you  
In your noble pastimes ...*

*Rendu par vos soins protecteurs  
Aux destins de sa source illustre,  
On Ordre heureux par vos faveurs,*

*Made by your protective care  
For the destiny of its illustrious source,  
An Order rendered happy by your favour,*

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<sup>8</sup> Alternate meaning: "trust"



*Est régénéré dans son lustre.  
 Sur les traces du Grand Henri,  
 Et sur le sublime modèle  
 Du monarque auguste et chéri  
 Qui l'imité et nous le rappelle,  
 Du sceau d'une grandeur nouvelle  
 Vous marquez cet Ordre vanté  
 Que la noble hospitalité,*

*Is regenerated in its sheen.  
 In the footsteps of Grand Henri,  
 And on the outstanding example  
 From the august and beloved monarch  
 Who imitates him and reminds us of him,  
 Seal of a new greatness  
 You honour this vaunted Order  
 What noble hospitality,*

*La religion immortelle,  
 La généreuse humanité,  
 Depuis huit siècles ont guidé  
 Dans toutes les routes du zèle,  
 Et qui, sous un ciel infidèle,  
 Signalant sa fidélité,  
 Aux champs sanglants de la victoire,  
 Défendit toujours avec gloire  
 La croix sainte et la vérité.  
 Déjà sur la trace première  
 De ses plus nobles attributs,  
 Il renouvelé sa carrière,  
 Et marche aux antiques vertus  
 A votre brillante lumière. ...*

*The immortal religion,  
 The generous humanity,  
 Have for eight centuries guided  
 In all the circles of zeal,  
 Which, under an unfaithful sky,  
 Signaling its loyalty,  
 To the bloody fields of victory,  
 With glory always defends  
 The Holy Cross and the truth.  
 Already on the first trace<sup>9</sup>  
 Of his noblest attributes,  
 He renewed his career,  
 And walk to the ancient virtues  
 In your bright light. ...*

*Gresset*



<sup>9</sup> Alternate meaning "paving the way"