



A SHORT HISTORY OF THE ORDER OF MALTA



Grand Masters of the Order of Malta

1. Fra' Gerard Sasso
c. 1040 - 1120
2. Fra' Raymond du Puy
1120 – c. 1158/60
3. Fra' Auger de Balben
c. 1158/60 – 1162/3
4. Fra' Arnaud de Comps
1162 – 1163
5. Fra' Gilbert de Aissailly
1163 – c.1169/70
6. Fra' Gastone de Murois
c. 1170 – c. 1172
7. Fra' Joubert de Syrie
c. 1172 – 1177
8. Fra' Roger de Moulins
1177 – c. 1187
9. Fra' Ermengard d'Aps
1188 – c. 1190
10. Fra' Garnier de Naplous
1189/90 – 1192
11. Fra' Godefroy de Donion
1193 – 1202
12. Fra' Alfonso of Portugal
1203 – 1206
13. Fra' Geoffrey Le Rat
1206 – 1207

0-300s

33 AD: Jesus Christ is crucified in Jerusalem.

312: Emperor Constantine converts to Catholicism, and the Edict of Milan in 313 grants the toleration of Christianity, which is made the official religion of the empire in 380.

326: Constantine's mother Helena travels to Palestine. There she locates the Holy Sepulchre (the tomb in which Jesus' body was laid), has it restored and builds a church at the site. Pilgrimages start shortly thereafter. Legends assert that she also built a hospital there.

570: Muhammad born in Mecca.

603: Pope Gregory the Great sends the Abbot Probus to Jerusalem to erect a xenodocheum (the Greek word xenodokeo means "to render hospitality") there.

610: Muhammad claims to receive revelations from God, through the archangel Gabriel.

632: Muhammad dies. Conquests start immediately.

638: Muslims take Jerusalem.

400-600's

c. 800: Writing about his pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 870, the Frankish monk Bernard, relays the legend that the Emperor Charlemagne rebuilds the Hospital next the Holy Sepulchre.

c. 1040: Blessed Gerard is born. Sometimes known as Gerard de Sasso, as the city of Sasso in Italy claims to be his birthplace, he is also referred to as Gérard de Martigues, due to a tradition of his place of birth being Martigues, Provence, in France. William of Tyre cites Amalfi as his birthplace. He was a lay brother in the Benedictine Order. Gerard is also sometimes known as Gerard Tenque or Tunc. This is the result of a bad translation made by the 18th century scholar Pierre-Joseph de Haitze, of the Latin adverb of time "tunc".

1054: Great Schism separates the Eastern Church from the Western Church.

1070: Merchants from the Italian country of Amalfi re-build and re-found a hospice for Latin pilgrims in Jerusalem, financed by the wealthy Amalfitan Count Mauro.

1071: The Battle of Manzikert. The Byzantine army under the Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes is defeated by the Muslims under Seljuk Sultan Aps Arslan, leaving Europe in a panic.

1070's: By this time there is a unitary complex of four buildings in Jerusalem located near the south entrance of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. There existed (1) the hospice (or

1000s

14. Fra' Guérin de Montaigu
1207 – c. 1227/8
15. Fra' Bertrand de Thexis
c. 1228 – 1231
16. Fra' Guerin
1236 – c. 1239/40
17. Fra' Bertrand de Comps
1239/40 – 1242
18. Fra' Pierre de Viellebride
1239/40 – 1242
19. Fra' Guillaume de Chateauneuf
1242 – 1258
20. Fra' Hugues de Revel
1258 – 1277
21. Fra' Nicolas de Lorgue
1277 – 1284
22. Fra' Jean de Villiers
1284/5 – c. 1293/4
23. Fra' Odon de Pins
1294 – 1296
24. Fra' Guillaume de Villaret
1296 – 1305
25. Fra' Foulques de Villaret
1305 – 1319
26. Fra' Helion de Villeneuve
1319 – 1346
27. Fra' Dieudonné de Gozon
1346 – 1353
28. Fra' Pierre de Corneillan
1353 – 1355
29. Fra' Roger de Pins
1355 – 1365
30. Fra' Raymond Berenger
1365 – 1374
31. Fra' Robert de Juliac
1374 – 1376
32. Fra' Jean Fernandez de Heredia
1376 – 1396
33. Fra' Riccardo Caracciolo
1383 – 1395
34. Fra' Philibert de Naillac
1396 – 1421
35. Fra' Antonio Fluvian de Riviere
1421 – 1437
36. Fra' Jean de Lastin
1437 – 1454
37. Fra' Jacques de Milly
1454 – 1461
38. Fra' Piero Raimondo Zacosta
1461 – 1467
39. Fra' Giovanni Battista Orsini
1467 – 1476
40. Fra' Pierre d'Aubusson
1476 – 1503

1100s

hospital), (2) the Church of San Giovanni Battista, (3) the Benedictine house for men of Santa Maria dei Latini (It was called St. Mary of the Latins in order to distinguish it from the Greek church of St. Mary in Jerusalem), and (4) the Benedictine house for women of Santa Maria Maddalena (later Santa Maria Maggiore).

1080: Blessed Gerard appointed as rector of the hospice.

1095: On November 27th, at the Council of Clermont in France, Pope Urban II preaches Crusade. "Christians should not rest comfortably in their beds when the holy places associated with the life of Christ were being held by those who did not believe in his divinity."

1097: The 1st Crusade is launched. Initially, there were 70,000 who went on crusade, including 7,000 knights. By 1099, only 12,000 made it to Jerusalem, including 1,300 knights.

1099: On July 15th, Jerusalem falls to the crusaders after a 6 week siege.

1099: Godfrey of Bouillon is offered the crown of Jerusalem. He refuses, saying "No man should wear a crown of gold in the city where our Lord wore a crown of thorns." He uses the title "Defender of the Holy Sepulchre," while his successors use "King of Jerusalem."

1113: On February 15th, Pope Paschal II issues the bull Pie Postulatio Voluntatis establishing the Order as a separate entity from the Benedictine monastery at St. Mary of the Latins.

1120: The Templars are founded in Jerusalem at a church council in Nablus in January of 1120 and are later approved by the Patriarch of Jerusalem.

1120: On September 3rd, Fra' Gerard dies. Fra' Raymond du Puy is made the second superior of the Hospital. He writes a Rule for the Order, and he starts its militarization.

1177: The Order separates the nuns of the Order into their own convents.

1187: The Battle at the Horns of Hattin takes place on July 3rd. Saladin's army defeats 1,500 Hospitaller and Templar knights and 15-18,000 foot soldiers. He executes all prisoners.

1187: On October, 2nd, Jerusalem falls to the Muslims under Saladin.

1191: Acre is captured by the crusaders under King Richard I of England and King Philip II of France during the 3rd Crusade. The Hospitallers move their seat and hospital to Acre.

1230: By this date, the Auberge (meaning "inn" or "hostel") is created at Montmusard, a suburb at Acre, in order to separate the Brothers-at-arms from the Brothers Sergeant-at-arms and Brothers-at-service. This is the start of the separation of the nobility in the Order.

1291: Muslims begin the siege of Acre on April 5th. Acre falls to the Muslims on May 18th.

1291-1308: The Order of St. John moves its seat and hospital to Limassol on Cyprus. From there, not being welcomed, they plan their conquest of Rhodes.

1308: Knights conquer Rhodes and move their seat and hospital there. The Order in Rhodes went from running hospices to true hospitals and undertake advanced medical research and practice. They also change their military from an army to a navy.

1310: Creation of the Langues at Rhodes. On Rhodes, each Langue was given its own Auberge. There are initially seven: Provence, France, Auvergne, Germany, England, Aragon & Italy. The Langue of Castile (1462) & the Anglo-Bavarian Langue (1570) are added later.

1312: The Templars are suppressed and all their properties were given to the Hospitallers.

1300s: Hospitallers take part in the "Corso," legitimized piracy against Turkish shipping.

1480: First Siege of Rhodes by Turkish Muslims. This siege was successfully repelled.

1517: Martin Luther nails his theses to the door of the Church in Wittenburg. The subsequent Protestant Reformation leads to great losses in the holdings of the Order.

1522: Second Siege of Rhodes. On June 24th, a Turkish Armada of over 400 Ships under the command of the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman I, arrives off the Island and begins the siege. On December 18th, the Order surrenders Rhodes, and the Island falls to the Muslims.

1523: On January 1st, the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman I, allows the Hospitallers to sail from Rhodes, leaving with full honors. The Order sails for Catania in Sicily.

1525: King Henry VIII asks to divorce Catherine of Aragon. The Pope denies this request.

1530: On March 23rd, at the request of Pope Clement VII, who was a member of the Order, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V gives to the Order the islands of Malta, Gozo & Comino, as well as the city of Tripoli in North Africa. The Order moves its hospital and seat to Malta.

1540: In April, King Henry VIII dissolves the English Priory of the Hospitallers by an act of Parliament, and siezes all of its land holdings. Several members are martyred.

1551: The city of Tripoli, which had been given to the Order, falls to the Muslims.

1200s

1300s

1400s

1500s

41. Fra' Emery d'Amboise
1503 – 1512
42. Fra' Guy de Blanchefort
1512 – 1513
43. Fra' Fabrizio del Carretto
1513 – 1521
44. Fra' Philippe de Villiers
de l'Isle-Adam
1521 – 1534
45. Fra' Pierino del Ponte
1534 – 1535
46. Fra' Didier de Saint-Jaille
1535 – 1536
47. Fra' Jean de Homedes
1536 – 1553
48. Fra' Claude de la Sengle
1553 – 1557
49. Fra' Jean de La Vallette-Parisot
1557 – 1568
50. Fra' Pierre de Monte
1568 – 1572
51. Fra' Jean l'Evesque de La Cassière
1572 – 1581
52. Fra' Hugues Loubenx de Verdala
1581 – 1595
53. Fra' Martin Garzez
1595 – 1601
54. Fra' Alof de Wignacourt
1601 – 1622
55. Fra' Luis Mendez de Vasconcellos
1622 – 1623
56. Fra' Antoine de Paule
1623 – 1636
57. Fra' Jean-Paul de Lascaris-Castellar
1636 – 1657
58. Fra' Martín de Redín
1657 – 1660
59. Fra' Annet de Clermont-Gessant
1660
60. Fra' Raphael Cotoner
1660 – 1663
61. Fra' Nicolas Cotoner
1663 – 1680
62. Fra' Gregorio Carafa
1680 – 1690
63. Fra' Adrien de Wignacourt
1690 – 1697
64. Fra' Ramon Perellos y Roccaful
1697 – 1720
65. Fra' Marc'Antonio Zondadari
1720 – 1722
66. Fra' Antonio Manoel de Vilhena
1722 – 1736
67. Fra' Raymond Despuig
1736 – 1741

1600s

1700s

1800s

1565: The Great Siege of Malta. Suleiman the Magnificent, the Ottoman Sultan, attempts to take Malta, with 35-40,000 soldiers. The Knights, who numbered around 500, together with approximately 6,000 footsoldiers, withstood the siege and repelled the invaders. This victory became one of the most celebrated events in Europe, to the point that Voltaire said: "Nothing is better known than the siege of Malta."

1571: The Battle of Lepanto takes place on October 7th. The Holy League, led by Don Juan of Austria, fights the Ottoman fleet in a decisive naval battle. The Order mans four galleys at the vanguard of the fleet, led by Marcantonio Collogna in the Capitana. Victory at Lepanto ended the Turkish naval threat. Pope Pius V instituted the feast of Our Lady of Victory in order to commemorate the victory, which he attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

1607: On March 20th, Pope Paul V grants the Grand Master of the Order the title of "His Eminence" and the rank of a cardinal.

1619: Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II confers the title of Prince of the Holy Roman Empire to the Grand Master of the Order, giving him the title of "Prince and Grand Master."

1651: The Order acquires the islands of Saint Barthélemy, Saint Christopher, Saint Croix and Saint Martin in the Caribbean. These were purchased from the French Compagnie des Îles de l'Amérique. In 1665, the four islands were sold to the French West India Company.

1683: The Battle of Vienna takes place. This victory over the Turks was led by King John III Sobieski of Poland, and ended the Turkish threat overland.

1772, 1782 & 1795: The 3 Partitions of Poland – Russia, Austria & Prussia divide up the Kingdom of Poland. The Order suffers great losses in land, as most of its priories there are given to Russia.

1776: The American Revolution begins. 1,800 Maltese and Knights of the Order had enlisted in the French Navy to help the fledgling United States in its War of Independence.

1781: On September 5th, led by the Knight of Malta, François Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse, Marquis of Grasse-Tilly, and with the help of Maltese sailors, the French Navy defeats the British in the Battle of the Chesapeake off the Virginia Capes. With the defeat, the British were unable to supply their troops. Consequently, the British, under Lord Charles Cornwallis, surrender at Yorktown and end of the war for American independence.

1789: The French Revolution begins. The Order loses significant land holdings in France as well as a large number of French Knights, who had made up a large portion of the Order.

1798: Napoleon conquers Genoa, Venice & Malta on his way to Egypt. Napoleon demands that his 300 ships be allowed to enter the port and take on water and supplies. The Grand Master replies that only two foreign ships were allowed to enter at a time. Bonaparte orders a cannon fusillade against Malta. On the morning of June 11th, French soldiers attack. After fierce fighting, the Maltese in the west are forced to surrender. Napoleon opens negotiations with the Knights in the fortress capital of Valletta. Faced with vastly superior French forces and the loss of western Malta, the Grand Master negotiates a surrender.

1798: On June 18th, the Order surrenders Malta and sails for Trieste, a deep-water port city on the Adriatic Sea in northeast Italy.

1798: The knights are dispersed. Those few left in Europe continue to exist and negotiate with European governments for a return to power. The Russian Emperor, Tsar Paul I, gives a large number of knights shelter in Saint Petersburg. There, the refugee knights attempt to elect Paul as their Grand Master. Paul therefore proclaims himself Grand Master of the Order. Known as "The Mad Tsar," he was not Catholic, was not elected, nor was he confirmed by the Pope, so the election was illegal and illegitimate. However, Tsar Paul I became the "de Facto" Grand Master and not "de Jure" Grand Master, and protected the Order's continuity in one of the most dramatic historic and political moments of its long existence.

1799: On July 6th, Grand Master Hompesch sends two letters, one to the Holy Roman Emperor Francis II, the other to Emperor Paul I of Russia, in which he abdicates as Grand Master. He also neglects to send a letter of abdication to the pope as required by canon law, nor did the pope accept his abdication. He then recants this abdication in 1801. He dies in 1804 at Montpellier in France.

1801: Emperor Paul I is murdered. Alexander I, his son, abandons all claims to the Order.

1802: The Treaty of Amiens between the British and the French is signed. It was agreed that Malta was to be given back to the Order, but the British never gave it up. The British delegation was led by Lord Cornwallis, the same man who had fought and lost the American Revolution. This was Lord Cornwallis' revenge for the Order's help to the Americans.

1803: Pope Pius VII intervenes, and Fra' Tommasi is made Grand Master, settling the Russian affair. The Order establishes its seat first in Messina in Sicily, then moves to Catania.

- 68. Fra' Manuel Pinto de Fonseca
1741 – 1773
- 69. Fra' Francisco Ximenes de Texada
1773 – 1775
- 70. Fra' Emmanuel de Rohan-Polduc
1775 – 1797
- 71. Fra' Ferdinand
von Hompesch zu Bolheim
1797 – 1802
- 72. Emperor Paul I of Russia (de facto)
1799 – 1801
- 73. Fra' Giovanni Battista Tommasi
1803 – 1805

Lieutenants of the Grand Magistr

- 1. Fra' Innico Maria Guevara-Suardo
1805-1814
- 2. Fra' André Di Giovanni
1814-1821
- 3. Fra' Antoine Busca
1821-1834
- 4. Fra' Carlo Candida
1834-1845
- 5. Fra' Philippe di Colloredo-Mels
1845-1864
- 6. Fra' Alessandro Borgia
1865-1872
- 7. Fra' Giovanni Battista
Ceschi a Santa Croce
1872-1879

Grand Masters of the Order of Malta

- 74. Fra' Giovanni Battista
Ceschi a Santa Croce
1879 – 1905
- 75. Fra' Galeazzo von Thun und
Hohenstein
1905 – 1931
- 76. Fra' Ludovico Chigi Albani
della Rovere
1931 – 1951
- 77. Fra' Angelo de Mojana di Cologna
1962 – 1988
- 78. Fra' Andrew Willoughby
Ninian Bertie
1988 – 2008
- 79. Fra' Matthew Festing
2008 – 2017
- 80. Fra' Giacomo Dalla Torre
del Tempio di Sanguinetto
2018 - 2020
- 81. Fra' John Dunlap
2023 - present



1900s

1805-1879: With the death of Tommasi, the Order is run by a series of 7 “Lieutenants of the Grand Magistr” until 1879.

1806: Dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire.

1806: The Swedish government offers the island of Gotland to the Order. The offer was rejected since it would have meant the Order renouncing their claim to Malta.

1815: The Congress of Vienna solidifies the British control of Malta.

1826: After Messina and Catania, the Order settles in Ferrara in northern Italy.

1834: Pope Gregory XVI declares that the embassy of the Order to Rome (the Pallazzo Malta) as well as the Casa di Rodi and the Villa Malta on the Aventine Hill were the sovereign territory of the Order of Malta, giving them back a country of their own.

1859: In the second half of the 19th century, the Order’s original mission of medical and social assistance again becomes its main focus, coinciding with the creation of the National Associations, starting with the founding of the German Association.

1875: Founding of the British Association.

1877: Founding of the Italian Association.

1879: Pope Leo XIII intervenes and organizes the election of the Grand Master Fra’ Giovanni Battista Ceschi a Santa Croce, ending the reign of Lieutenants.

1914: Large-scale Hospitaller and charitable works were carried out during World War I including the operation of Hospital Trains and Hospital Ships to help the wounded.

1927: Founding of the American Association in New York City, thus bringing the Order to the United States. Thirteen men from the East Coast were the founding members, and His Eminence, Patrick Cardinal Hayes, Archbishop of New York, was the first Chaplain.

1939: Large-scale Hospitaller and charitable works, including the operation of Hospital Trains for the wounded, were also carried out during World War II.

1951: Founding of the Western Association in San Francisco. In 1951, the Grand Magistr sends a delegation to the western United States. Subsequently, eight men are invested by the Most Reverend John J. Mitty, Archbishop of San Francisco, on June 24th, 1953.

1951: The death of Grand Master Chigi leads to the Cardinal Cannalli controversy. Cannalli tries to take over the Order. Later intervention, first by Pope John XXIII, and subsequently by Pope Paul VI saves the Order. This is in contrast to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, which was successfully taken over by Cannalli.

1953: On January 24th, the Tribunal of Cardinals, which had been appointed by Pope Pius XII, affirms the status of the Order as sovereign and a subject of international law.

1961: On June 24th, Pope John XXIII approves a new Constitutional Charter for the Order which further affirms its status as a sovereign entity and subject of international law.

1961: Cardinal Cannalli dies, ending the controversy.

1962: Fra’ Angelo de Mojana Di Cologna, a Milanese lawyer, is elected Grand Master.

1963: To celebrate the anniversary of his election, Fra’ Angelo accompanies the British Association on pilgrimage to Lourdes. Thereafter he asks all associations to attend the pilgrimage as a work of the Order.

1974: Founding of the Southern Association in the United States, headquartered in Washington, DC. In 1974, there were nine original members and eleven transferees from the American Association. This is later re-named the Federal Association, USA in 1985.

1988: Death of Fra’ Angelo. Fra’ Andrew Bertie is elected Grand Master. Bertie had been the first Knight of Justice to make vows on British soil since the reign of Henry VIII.

Today

Today: Its 13,500 members, 95,000 permanent volunteers and qualified staff of 52,000 employees – most of whom are doctors, nurses and paramedics – form an efficient network that includes everything from emergency relief for refugees and the displaced living through war and conflict, intervention in areas hit by natural disasters, to hospital work, medical care and social services. The Order of Malta’s members are now grouped into 6 Grand Pries, 5 Sub-Pries and 48 National Associations on five continents, heirs to the tradition of the ancient Langues. The Order of Malta is an independent, sovereign object of International Law. It has diplomatic relations with 113 countries and the European Union, Permanent Observer status at the United Nations, and international Cooperation Agreements with over 50 states. It operates hundreds of medical facilities (clinics & hospitals) around the world, and Ambulance Services in over a dozen countries. Programs are now active in 120 countries.