

Extracts from the History:

From the 973-year history of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem – established in 1048 in Jerusalem by our predecessors – a lot of noble traditions of the chivalric life and spirit are still valid. Already in the Middle Ages the Knighthood Ceremony was considered very mysterious to the people, filled with ancient symbolic meaning. Knighthood has been conferred in the accolade which is the central act in the ceremony. Entry into Knighthood was highly ritualised, in the old times it started with ritual bathing as a symbol of purification followed by the Watch of Arms. The Knights wore 3 colours during their investiture: white vesture symbolising purity, covered by a red robe for the nobility, the cap for the fraternity, and black shoes and trousers, symbolising the death. The Sword, Spurs and Shield were the symbols of Knighthood - nowadays the Shield is being replaced by the 8-pointed neck-cross on red ribbon.

The Oath of Knighthood was an expression of loyalty, honesty and sincerity. Anyone who broke the Oath was seen as to have committed a crime. The Knight had to swear to defend to his uttermost the needy: the weak, the ill, the poor, the orphan, the widow, the oppressed and persecuted. From the beginning to the present time the same knightly virtues and humanist values had to be respected and followed by the knights to uphold the ancient and noble traditions, to become one with the ideals and objectives of the Order, and participating actively in the main activity of our Knightly Order: the humanitarian work, helping the needy. According to the rules the Postulants gain admission to the Order under their merits and human qualities, on the recommendation of two Knights or Dames, who are the Godfathers or the Godmothers of the Candidate.

As it is known the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem was established in the Holy Land, (today Israel), in 1048, where we held an investiture in 2018 in the historic city of knights – Acre, at the medieval Fortress of the Knights, built on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The event was co-organised by the KMFAP Grand Priory for the Holy Land and the Hungarian Grand Priory to renew our activity in Israel, by returning to the roots and birthplace of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem.

Here on the Maltese Islands, in the middle of the Mediterranean, the knights of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem lived and worked between 1530-1798, following their long stay in Rhodes for 212 years (1310-1522), from where they were expelled by the Turks. In Malta, they established a new capital La Valletta and an independent, modern and well-functioning state that existed 268 glorious years.

In 2018, we celebrated an important anniversary: the 970 years (1048-2018) of establishment of a hospitaller-monastic community in Jerusalem, the future Order of Saint John of Jerusalem.

In 2018, we also remembered a sad historic event, being decisive for the existence of the Order and the life of the knights: the 220th anniversary of the end of the presence of the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem in Malta (1798-2018). The invasion of Malta by the Army of Napoleon in 1798 put an end to the 268 glorious years of the independent and autonomous state of the Knights of Saint John, which was never restored, and the lost territories were never returned to the Knights despite the stipulations of the Treaty of Amiens, signed in 1802 between the French and British, as a peace treaty, that expired in 1803. Thus, the knights had to leave Malta, captured by the French Army. Some knights, exiled in Russia after the invasion of Malta by Napoleon, accused a group of several high-ranking knights and other intellectuals, including Pierre-Jean-Louis-Ovide Doublet (1749-1824), with betrayal of the Order of St John. (He was the head of the Order of St John's secretariat in Malta, having direct access to all official documents, public or private, including the correspondence with all the European potentates. He was a witness of the last days of the Order and the knights in Malta and the invasion by Napoleon's army. Doublet stayed in Malta during the French occupation, serving as Secretary General to the Commission of Government installed by Napoleon and later becoming Commissioner of Malta. He was exiled to France when the island became a British Dominion in 1800. So, his highly-detailed memoirs are a mine of information, that he started to write in 1805 – after the death of Grand Master Ferdinand Hompesch - and were published only in 1883. Any discussion of the 1798 taking of Malta, the subsequent siege must begin bearing in mind a fundamental event of the 10 years preceding the occupation of Malta by France: on 30 July 1791, it was declared the denationalisation of every French citizen affiliated to a chivalric order established outside France. Malta since 1530 had been the home of the Order of Knights of St John, a chivalric order, the 2/3 of the members of which were French and exceedingly wealthy by 1789.)