

Famous Portraits Series

Fra Jean Parisot de Valette

49th Grand Master of the Knights' Hospitaller (1557-1568)

Born: 4 February 1495? - Died: 21 August 1568 (Aged 73?)



1. Jean Parisot de Valette wearing the Grand Master's robe by an unknown 16th century artist



2. Jean Parisot de Valette by an unknown 16th century artist



3. Jean Parisot de Valette attributed to Matteo Perez d'Aleccio c.1576-1581



3. Jean Parisot de Valette by Charles-Philippe Larivière (1798-1876) *Salle des Croisades*, Palace of Versailles



5. Jean Parisot de Valette by Jean François Cars (1661-1738) c. 1725



6. Jean Parisot de Valette by Antoine de Favray (1706-1798)

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Image credits:

1. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Bilddatenbank
2. Photo credit: Museum of the Order of St John: <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/jean-de-la-valette-14951568-135565>
3. <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2018/arts-of-the-islamic-world-118223/lot.113.html>
4. <https://gramho.com/explore-hashtag/jeanparisotdevallette>
5. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7d/Jean_La_Valette.jpg, published in Abbé Vertot: *Histoire des Chevaliers Hospitaliers de S. Jean de Jérusalem, appelez depuis les Chevaliers de Rhodes et aujourd'hui les Chevaliers de Malte*
6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Parisot_de_Valette#/media/File:JPDV.jpg

Fra **Jean Parisot de Valette** was born into the noble de Valette family in Quercy, south-western France, which had been an important family for many generations, various members having participated in the Crusades. De Valette joined the Order in the *Langue de Provence* in 1514 when he was around 20 years old and he never returned to his home. He fought during the Great Siege of Rhodes in 1522 and accompanied Grand Master l'Isle Adam on his arrival in Malta in 1530.

In 1538 he was imprisoned in the Gozo prison for four months after attacking a man. In 1541 he was wounded and captured during a naval battle against the Barbary corsairs. He spent a year as a slave on one of the galleys of Turgut Reis until he was freed during an exchange of prisoners. In 1546 he was appointed Governor of Tripoli in North Africa, where he tried to improve the defences of that vulnerable city.

In 1554 he was elected Captain General of the Order's galleys. This was a great honour reserved to the Langue of Provence. In this capacity, he won a name that was conspicuous in that age of great sea captains.

In 1557, the Knights, envisaging that an Ottoman attack against Malta was imminent, elected de Valette as their 49th Grand Master. He immediately started strengthening the defence of Malta. He fought with distinction against the Turks during the Siege of 1565. De Valette became the Order's hero and most illustrious leader. His leadership during siege was one of the factors which led to a victory for the Knights.

After the Great Siege, he commissioned the construction of the new city of Valletta on Mt Sciberras in 1566 and actually laid the first foundation stone of the city himself. The city named after its founder, *Humilissima Civitas Vallettae*, became known as the most aristocratic and impregnable fortress in Europe.

The incident of Dr Joseph (*alias* Matthew) Callus (c.1505-1561) in 1560 sheds light on the autocratic character of de Valette, a common attribute to most secular rulers of the time. Callus was a doctor at Mdina who drew up a petition on behalf of a number of citizens protesting about the usurpation of their rights by the Order. It was addressed to King Philip II of Spain asking him to intercede on their behalf. The petition was intercepted by agents of the Order and was sent to the Grand Master. Callus was accused of treason, tried and hanged in 1561. On the one hand, Callus is seen as a martyr of Maltese patriotism, standing up for the rights of the common people and paying the ultimate price. On the other hand, the Grand Master who condemned him, is yet another hero for the Maltese, the one who defended Malta during the Great Siege and the architect of their new capital city, Valletta.

Further reading:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Parisot_de_Valette
- <https://lancstolevant.wordpress.com/2014/05/24/a-maltese-national-hero-dr-joseph-callus-1505-1561/>
- <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-06-28/local-news/6-little-known-facts-about-jean-de-valette-6736224639>

Questions

1. Why do you think that de Valette joined the Order of St John so early in his life?
2. Trace de Valette's career as a Knight Hospitaller before he was elected Grand Master.
3. Suggest TWO reasons why de Valette was the right person to be elected Grand Master in 1557.
4. List FIVE measures implemented by de Valette when he was elected Grand Master to prepare Malta in the event of an Ottoman attack.
5. Identify FOUR decisions taken by de Valette during the Great Siege which contributed to the victory of the Knights against the Turks.
6. What has been de Valette's legacy for: (a) the Order of St John and (b) for Malta?
7. Which dark side of de Valette's character and rule as Grand Master came to light by the Joseph (*alias* Matthew) Callus affair?
8. Identify FOUR adjectives which best describe de Valette's character and personality and give reasons for your answer.