



MELITENSIA

THE MALTA STUDY CENTER AT THE HILL MUSEUM & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY

SPRING/SUMMER 2005

The Latin word Melitensia denotes "things pertaining to Malta," and it is most frequently used in the world of rare books and manuscripts to describe written collections of the history and culture of the island of Malta.

This newsletter reports the activities of the Malta Study Center, and features information about the history of the Knights of Malta and the history and culture of the country of Malta itself.

We welcome your comments and your communication about others who might share an interest in this core program of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library.

Preservation to Begin at the Grand Magistry in Rome

A new partnership between the Grand Magistry of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML) will ensure the digitization and preservation of the archives of the Priory of Rome that pre-date 1904. Beginning this Spring, HMML will digitally image the archives of the Priory of Rome, the visitations to the Order's European properties, the minutes of the Sovereign Council's meetings after 1798, diplomatic correspondence between the Grand Master and the Order's ambassadors to the papal court, and the Order's most important genealogical documents, the patents of nobility.

"This project will create an extraordinary opportunity for historians around the world. The patents of nobility alone will be of tremendous interest to anyone studying the history of European noble families. These are the documents required to prove that one was of noble and legitimate birth before being received into the Order," says Dr. Theresa Vann, the Joseph S. Micallef Curator of the Malta Study Center. "They are a goldmine."

As early as 1262, the Order mandated that Knights had to be legitimately born of noble or knightly lineage. In the 1350s the Order required proof of noble descent through both the father and the mother. This rule was reaffirmed in

1420, and by 1428 applicants had to prove four generations of nobility in the male line. In 1433 the statutes reaffirmed that the prospective Knight had to be of noble lineage. Bastards of a count or a greater lord could be admitted after an inquiry into the birth. Prospective Knights submitted the proofs of nobility to their native languages (or tongues) in the Order.

The Malta Study Center already has microfilms of 3,349 proofs of nobility from the Archives of the Order of Malta in the National Library of Malta in Valletta. The proofs held by the Grand Magistry will be an important addition to the collection.

"Historians will find the correspondence between the Grand Masters and their ambassadors in Rome of great interest because it traces the Knights' evolving diplomatic positions," says Fr. Columba Stewart, O.S.B., Executive Director of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library. "Because the ambassadors also served as spies for the Order, there is a great deal of previously confidential information that will be accessible through *Vivarium*, HMML's digital image website."

HMML will train local people in Rome in the capture of digital images and metadata, and will provide the necessary equipment. The photographs will be

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taken in full color and at high resolution using a system refined at HMML's sites in the Middle East. The images and accompanying metadata will be transferred onsite to DVDs. One copy of the DVDs will remain in Rome, and another will be sent to HMML for incorporation into HMML's electronic catalogue and into *Vivarium* at www.hmml.org/vivarium.

Archival copies will be kept in multiple media and locations, and upgraded with

emerging technology as necessary. The Grand Magistry may use the original high-quality images for its own purposes. HMML will provide free access online to sample images from each manuscript to the general public, and access to complete manuscripts upon application and payment of a service fee. HMML will also provide educational material about the Order, the Grand Magistry, its library and its archives.

THE CURATOR'S JOURNAL

Reflections From Malta

Theresa M. Vann



Dr. Theresa Vann reading a 15th-century volume of the *Liber bullarum* at the National Library of Malta in Valletta.

(Photo credit: Chris Sant Fournier, *Sunday Times of Malta*)

Dr. Theresa M. Vann, the Joseph S. Micallef Curator at the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML), was awarded a Fulbright Scholar grant to lecture at the University of Malta, in Msida, Malta during the 2004-05 academic year. She taught two classes at the University of Malta on finding aids and education programs, and consulted with the University on the creation of a diploma program in archival organization. She spent her mornings at the National Library reading documents in the archives of the Knights of Malta pertaining to the 1480 Ottoman siege of Rhodes, in preparation for a book. Reproduced below is one of Dr. Vann's reports on her activities.

It's warm and sunny as I write this by the marina in Msida. I see in my emails that today it is -40° F in Minnesota. It is hard to believe now that it can get that cold. Nobody in Malta can conceive of a Minnesota winter. It never snows in Malta and there's no such thing as a white Christmas. Here, winters are chilly and rainy. The Maltese bundle up in heavy winter coats, pull on winter boots, and hunch their shoulders to face the winter temperatures of about 40° F. They think I'm making it up when I tell them how cold it is in Minnesota, and how the ice on the lake gets so thick people can drive trucks on it.

Last Saturday was the second meeting of my practicum class at the National Archives. This class is an experiment, done with the willing cooperation of the National Archives, the Division of Library and Information Studies (Centre for Communication Technology) of the University of Malta, and twenty-five adult students. My colleagues at the university and the director of the National Archives have been discussing the creation of a diploma course in archives, to link up with the already existing program in library studies. This course is a visible expression of the cooperation between the two institutions. It is also an attempt to gauge the popularity of a program in archival studies. The response has been enthusiastic, and the general consensus is that we've started moving in a direction that we should continue to follow.

In preparing the course, I drew upon the experiences of the Malta Study Center over the past thirty years in preserving the historical archives of Malta and Gozo. I also incorporated problems and situations specific to archives in the Maltese islands. The resulting class sessions show clearly the difference between archival theory and actual practice.

Saturday's class was a good example of this gap. I began the class with an hour-long lecture on archival preservation and some of the hazards to archival materials. I touched on some threats to Maltese archives, such as heat, humidity, and insects. Every student had something to contribute about insect control in libraries: how they managed insects; how their grandparents dealt with infestations; which insects ate what; and which were more dangerous to books, insects that flew or insects that crawled. American archivists can't imagine the challenges faced by Maltese archivists, who have limited resources at their disposal. Then Charles Farrugia, the director of the archives, caught my eye. It was time for the fifteen-minute break before the actual practicum. I suggested that we share insecticide recipes over coffee.

The practicum was to process passport applications from 1947 by removing rusting pins, recording control numbers on loose papers, and attaching photographs to the applications. Charles described to the class how the applications had been stored in piles in Fort St. Elmo, and then transferred to the National Archives in garbage bags. The work was engrossing, and the students found applications of people they knew. Malta is like a small town of 400,000 people.

When I arrived in Malta, I felt like two different people: Dr. Vann, Fulbright Scholar, a respected guest; and Theresa, a hapless foreigner who can't work the local appliances,

doesn't know how to cook Maltese food, and mispronounces Maltese words. Over time, these two personas disappeared as I became more used to living in Malta and more comfortable with my role here. I owe much to my colleagues here, who helped me through the period of adjustment and patiently guided me through any difficulty. The warm welcome and support I received helped me to feel at home.

My affiliation with HMML has opened many doors for me as well. The thirty-year project in the Maltese islands has created strong ties between Collegetown and Malta. In the course of visiting libraries and archives here, I've met professional archivists who began their career as microfilm camera operators for the HMML microfilming project. I have also learned about changes that have occurred since HMML first filmed the ecclesiastical archives and the archives of the Knights of Malta. Some microfilmed collections are now inaccessible. Other microfilmed collections have new owners who are unaware of the preservation work that the Malta Study Center did on their materials. And, happily, some collections that were inaccessible thirty years ago have become accessible.

One such collection is the Banca Giuratale, which is part of the National Archives of Malta. The Banca Giuratale are the records of the law courts of the Knights of Malta. The British took over the records and added to them through the 19th century. Today they range

from 1530 until the mid-19th century, and they number around 7000 volumes. The building they are housed in was closed for ten years, and it has only recently been reopened. More and more researchers are becoming aware of the rich details of Mediterranean life revealed by the court cases and legal inventories. However, only the first ten volumes of this collection have been microfilmed.

I have been talking with representatives of libraries that would like to work with the Malta Study Center to preserve their materials. It would be premature to talk about specific projects at this stage, but the new archives bill, which is making its way through Parliament, will free the National Archives from governmental red tape and make it easier to undertake preservation projects. I have also been speaking with many people about digitization. A digital library, such as HMML's *Vivarium*, is a new concept and the owners of the materials are concerned about the implications of providing on-line access. All I can do at this stage is explain how it works and how people have been using it.

So much has changed in Malta since the Malta project began thirty years ago. I am amazed at how much was accomplished in that time. However, there is still more preservation work to be done in the islands. I hope my stay will lay the foundations for a new generation of preservation work and cooperation.

New Book Acquisition Fund Helps Meet NEH Challenge

Now your gift to a new book acquisition fund at HMML will help ensure success in meeting the terms of a major challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). In January 2004, the NEH awarded HMML a challenge grant of \$450,000 to help endow the Malta Study Center. To assist in meeting the challenge, HMML will create a new fund for the acquisition of manuscripts, rare books, facsimiles and research materials related to Malta.

"Our goal is to acquire the materials that researchers need in order to use the collection," says Dr. Theresa Vann, the Joseph S. Micallef Curator of the Malta Study Center. "Every year we use up our book budget just keeping up with the new publications in the United States, Europe, and Malta. There are old and rare books about Malta and the Knights of the Hospital that researchers need to consult as well. Unfortunately, to acquire them we have to compete with private collectors who have more money than we do. The possibility of annually acquiring new rare books and manuscripts ensures that HMML not only has the world's most important collection of Malta materials, but also its most complete."

The new fund established for the Malta Study Center will be matched on a 1-to-1 basis by up to \$50,000 with monies to be received from the NEH grant. A gift of \$1,000, for example, will be matched by a corresponding designation of the NEH grant, to help ensure that the fund grows to sufficient size to make a significant impact on the Center's acquisition activities.

The award letter from the NEH noted, "This is a high honor: yours is one of only three universities to receive such an award in this application cycle.... Your proposal was reviewed by research librarians, scholars in your field, and experts in long-term planning for the humanities. These evaluators were especially impressed with the international significance of the.... Malta Study Center.... They lauded Saint John's University for undertaking the Herculean but vitally important task of preserving the documented history of Malta."

To meet the terms of the NEH challenge, HMML must raise \$1.8 million by July 2007. Success in raising these funds will establish a permanent financial base for the Malta Study Center, allowing

HMML to endow the position of the curator, to provide research funds for users of the collection (including a program of internships, workshops, seminars and symposia), and to endow an acquisition fund.

The Malta Study Center, which was established at Saint John's over 30 years ago, has a microfilm collection of more than 16,000 documents and dossiers of documents from Malta covering the periods of the 12th to the 20th centuries. It contains material relating to the humanities, art, music, religions and the social, economic, military and medical history of Western Europe and the Middle East during the medieval and early modern periods. Many of these materials likely would have been lost had it not been for the initiative of HMML's program of systematic microfilming of fragile manuscripts and other records. Principal holdings of the Center include the Archives of the Knights of Malta, the Archives of the Cathedral Museum in Mdina, the Archives of the Inquisition, ecclesiastical records of the dioceses of Malta and Gozo, and musical compositions.

YOU CAN HELP OUR MISSION

THE MALTA STUDY CENTER

Your generosity is key to the success of the HMML's mission to preserve, to study and to teach.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Director's Circle.....	\$2,500 & Above	Contributor	\$150+
Millennium Club	\$1,000+	Member	\$65 & Above
Sponsor	\$500+	Student	\$30

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I understand my gift may be used to match the NEH Challenge Grant.

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Please return this form with your gift along with any address corrections to:
The Malta Study Center, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, P.O. Box 7300, Colledgeville, MN 56321

Major Collections Combined To Form New HMML

Saint John's University recently announced the formation of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML), combining a number of major collections of manuscripts, rare books, art and *The Saint John's Bible*. This development extends the mission of the Manuscript Library, and reinforces the emphasis on preserving intellectual and artistic traditions formative of religious culture.

In 1965, Saint John's University took a bold and visionary step with the creation of a new library dedicated to the preservation of priceless manuscripts held in European monasteries and libraries. The holdings of what came to be known as the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library have grown to number more than 90,000 manuscripts on microfilm, nearly 30 million pages. Over the years HMML filmed collections, from Sweden to Ethiopia, Germany to Malta. Two years ago, a major Eastern Mediterranean initiative began in Lebanon and will soon add manuscripts from Syria and Turkey. Such growth speaks powerfully to the importance of HMML's mission in a part of the world beset by great turmoil and uncertainty.

At the same time HMML was growing, Saint John's received the gift of the *Arca Artium* collection from Frank Kacmarcik, building upon its existing collections of rare books and art. In recent years, *The Saint John's Bible* has become an important project of Saint John's University and of the Abbey. It seems natural that these various entities, dedicated as they are to art, culture, and the spiritual imagination, be organized as one. Accordingly, the Saint John's Board of Regents

approved new statutes of operation and a new name for HMML. The acronym HMML remains: it is now the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library. "It is hoped that the new name will maintain the identity we have built since 1965, while suggesting at the same time a welcoming space for visitors to view displays from our art, rare book and manuscript collections and from *The Saint John's Bible*," said HMML Executive Director Fr. Columba Stewart, O.S.B.

The unique focus of its collections sets HMML apart and makes it pre-eminent in the field. Whether manuscript, printed book, or work of art, each piece in the collection reveals how various cultures express their religious, artistic, and intellectual experience. The collection now ranges from rare books, to original lithographs by Picasso and Chagall on religious subjects, to abstract works meant to inspire spiritual reflection, to a new illuminated Bible for the modern era. "Bringing together all of these collections in HMML is a profoundly Benedictine undertaking," Stewart said. "For 1,500 years Benedictines have been committed to glorifying God by creating, caring for, and preserving books, art and architecture of enduring quality and beauty."

The commitment to manuscript preservation remains central to the new HMML. HMML is operating more preservation sites now than ever before in its history, and that number will increase this year. Clearly, HMML's movement into digital imaging of its collection will create even greater opportunities for access to manuscripts and the legacies they preserve.



THE MALTA STUDY CENTER
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