

Presentation of the conference
Charles V and his Grand Chancellor Mercurino di Gattinara.
Malta, Fort St. Angelo 9-11 June 2000

From Peregrinationes II, a publication of the
Accademia Internazionale Melitense

Paolo Caucci von Saucken
University of Perugia
President of the Accademia Internazionale Melitense

On 24 February 1500 in Ghent, in a court in which behaviour and mentality, formed in the decadent atmosphere of the autumn of the Middle Ages, were being merged with the new tendencies which were to herald an abundant Renaissance season, Charles V was born. Fifth of the Holy Roman Empire and first of Spain. He was the son of Philip I the Handsome, King of the Netherlands, and Joan the Mad, Queen of Castile. Two dynasties of great significance for the history of their countries unite to create the foundations of an extraordinary imperial episode. The coordinates to define this are given by his parents' families: Philip was the son of Maximilian I of Austria, Emperor of Germany, and of Mary of Burgundy, daughter of Charles the Bold, whereas Joan was the firstborn of the "Catholic Kings": Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile.

Thus the young heir possessed rights over vast and varied kingdoms, countries and peoples, with different cultures and traditions and with heterogeneous and often even conflicting interests. In the young Charles converge the Germanic world, soon to be shaken by the Protestant revolt, the complex Burgundy, divided into counties, free cities and feuds of mediaeval tradition and Spain, or rather Las Españas, recently united by the Catholic Kings.

The emperor's political education was to be extremely varied. He was nurtured with the elegant theories of Chièvres, the theology of Adrian of Utrecht, the political visions of Ruiz de la Mota, archbishop of Badajoz and of Mercurino di Gattinara from Piedmont, his Grand Chancellor.

The emperor's great work was to be precisely that of unifying these components in an imperial vision in which the defence of the Church's empire as well as that of local freedoms had to find balance and reciprocity. Not an easy task given the enduring hostility of France, the

Protestant heresy rife among the great imperial Electors, the Turkish threat, the vacillations of the Roman Church, the revolts of the comuneros in Spain and the ever-present economic difficulties that even the gold from the new world barely managed to resolve. To celebrate the five-hundredth anniversary of the birth of the emperor in this year 2000 entails an extensive operation covering the religious, political, economic and cultural issues of many European countries. It means entering into the nerve centre of a civilisation which had Charles V as its keystone, amongst a myriad of different situations and, I would also say, amongst different epochs. The emperor was never to abandon his youthful Burgundian dream of seeking personal glory and honour, but he did it with the means and the instruments of the new epoch into which he had consciously stepped. He carried out his work among varying situations and in the narrow frontier between two worlds, one of which still illuminated by the last gleams of the Middle Ages, while the other was coming into being among wars and harsh conflicts. Therefore the conference starting today is one of the numerous celebrations devoted all over Europe to this anniversary. A conference that has chosen a theme closely linked to the history of the splendid island that is hosting us and to the history of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. Our conference proposes to enter into the vicissitudes that linked the Emperor to his Grand Chancellor Mercurino di Gattinara in the concession of the island of Malta to the Knights of St. John.

Starting from this viewpoint we have divided the conference into four essential papers.

The first has been entrusted to Professor Victor Mallia Milanes of the University of Malta who will discuss the specific subject of Charles V's donation to the Order of St. John. A donation which, in our opinion, is perfectly consistent with the foreign policy of Charles V and of his Grand Chancellor. The idea was to construct a military barrier to Turkish expansionism and entrust it to a military, chivalric and religious institution, which since its foundation had given proof of its effectiveness in this battle. A decision that was undoubtedly political and military and in which the choice of the Order of St. John echoes the emperor's youthful education in Burgundy inclined to exalt heroism and the search for glory.

Fundamental for understanding the behaviour of Charles V is his ideological training and the cultural environment in which he was formed. This theme, vital for analysing these events, will be treated in the second paper by Luis de Llera, professor at the University of Genoa. In the time of Luther, Erasmus and Machiavelli, ideological factors were

an essential key for understanding historic events. This was an epoch of great institutional, political, cultural and social changes, an epoch profoundly shaken by the Lutheran reform, with a church that had to be reformed while remaining firmly in the furrow of tradition, a crucial epoch in which the confrontation of ideas acquired perhaps a higher meaning than the immediate interests of individual states.

Linked to this theme is the third paper in the conference, concentrated on the figure of the Grand Chancellor Mercurino di Gattinara and entrusted to Professor Gabriele Morelli of the University of Bergamo. A complex issue which the most illustrious experts on Charles V have been studying, from Karl Brandi to Ramón Menéndez Pidal who saw the emperor's policy as a mediation between the concept of a universal monarchy as it was understood by Mercurino di Gattinara and of a Catholic empire as envisaged by the Spanish counsellor Ruiz de la Mota.

The fourth paper is entrusted to Hugo O' Donnel y Duque de Estrada, director of the Instituto Complutense de la Orden de Malta of the University of Madrid, who will treat the concrete aspects of the bull granting the island to the Knights of St. John, highlighting the codices and other juridical instruments used by the emperor and by Gattinara.

This is a conference that broaches multiple themes and places the concession of Malta within an international political process that is not only determined by the circumstances of the Turkish threat. Starting from that viewpoint, it has been attempted to give the proper emphasis to the cultural and ideological context in which all the international policy was implemented during the difficult and tormented years of the first half of the 16th century.

A conference, finally, which is decisively and coherently following the course initiated by the Accademia Internazionale Melitense in this same Fort St. Angelo six months or so ago when the arrival of the Knights of St. John on the island of Malta was treated.

The two conferences clearly mark the path that the Accademia proposes to take. A path that will be marked, as its rector Don Carlo Marullo di Condojanni has emphasised, by study sessions in the historical, medical and diplomatic fields.

We are constructing an increasingly concrete situation and it will be only possible thanks to a complex synergy of wills and expertise. This prompts us to express our sincere thanks. First of all to His Excellency the President of the Republic of Malta and His Most Eminent Highness

the Prince and Grand Master: their presence urges us to achieve the highest possible quality in our work. Then a greeting and warmest thanks to the illustrious scholars meeting here, to the Rector of the University of Malta with which we are building increasingly close relations, to the Order's Maltese Association for its efficacious collaboration and, last but not least, to the attentive and participant Maltese cultural world meeting here.

To all, the warmest and most heartfelt thanks with the hope that the path taken will be rich in fruitful consequences.