

## **Introduction – The Accademia Internazionale Melitense in Fort Sant'Angelo**

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Having held the office of Receiver of the Common Treasure – and the related office of Conservator of the Magistral Residences – for a long time, I had already coped with certain issues that, although not exactly falling within the Order's institutional objectives, were nevertheless related to them, as they concerned specially the safeguard of the historic and cultural heritages.

Among these issues, two were of crucial importance: the first one concerned the preservation of books and documents, and was solved when we had the opportunity to set up a large library in Magione Castle, that could host the existing books, and also had room for the books and documents that might become part of the Order's assets as donations from illustrious families. The second and more complicated issue concerned the preservation of the historic records kept in the archives of the Order's Embassies, National Associations and Delegations, which for the most part were meant to be under the exclusive custody of the holders of the respective offices as long as they were in such office, then they would remain with the family documents without any assurance of protection. In fact, over the past two centuries this situation caused the loss of any record of the many activities carried out by the Order in the world, no trace of which remains in the existing archives; and while a few mementoes remain in the minds of older people, it is more or less impossible to trace the documentation. It seemed that, in spite of attempts made, no final solution could be found to this problem.

For a long time I tried to promote initiatives to solve this problem, but shortage of funds only allowed me to channel every possible information into the “International Review” that, opportunely renewed in 1991, has become a testimony of activities throughout the nineties for future historians. In fact, important information on the initiatives carried out by the Order and on its evolution in the closing years of the past Millennium can be found only in the Review. A limited source but, for want of something better, sufficiently effective until future possibilities could present themselves in the already foreseeable future.

The final solution to the problem appeared to me when, after the signature of the preliminary agreement with the Maltese Government for the concession of Fort St. Angelo in the early nineties, I became Extraordinary Commissioner for the restoration works in 1995. As soon as the works were started, and their first phase completed with the restoration of the Chapel of St. Anne, the Magistral Palace and its surroundings, I tried to find a seat within the Magistral Palace to establish an International Academy. The Academy was intended to have, among other purposes, that of cataloguing and documenting past and contemporary facts and events of the Order, and of achieving a better qualification of the Order's diplomatic service through the creation of an international reference archive and the opportunity to provide training courses for future officials.

I therefore drafted the preliminary Statute that was approved by His Most Eminent Highness and led to the decree that in 1998 provided for the foundation of the Accademia Internazionale Melitense based in Fort St. Angelo. The preliminary Statute was then revised in December 1999\* and is intended to provide for further improvements, and to give an opportunity for all the Order's cultural initiatives in the world to be integrated into common plans and large projects, to be implemented with the co-operation of other States and concerning issues of mutual interest.

This volume, dedicated to the Convention on “The arrival of the Knights of St. John in Malta” is printed today, almost a decade after the concession of Fort St. Angelo by the Maltese Government to the Order. This is the first Convention being organised by our Academy to collect and spread opinions and facts connected with the life of the Order of St. John. As the first Rector of the Accademia Internazionale Melitense, I am extremely pleased to present this volume, which is the first one being published in the series entitled “Peregrinationes”, instituted in order to circulate the proceedings of the activities which take place on the initiative of the Accademia Internazionale Melitense. I also wish to thank Prof. Paolo Caucci von Saucken, Comm. Fra' John Edward Critien, and the publisher, Mr. Franco Benucci, for their valuable collaboration and for having patiently endured the laborious task of editing and publishing this book made possible through the generous contribution of the Banca dell'Umbria.

I take this opportunity to make an appeal to all the high officers of the Order, the Grand Priors, the Priors, the Regents, the Presidents of National Associations and the Heads of the Order's Institutions, asking them to support the initiatives that will follow in the wake of the purest historical and cultural traditions of the Order.

I am happy to have been able to give a new lease of life to Fort St. Angelo, thanks to the project for the Accademia Internazionale Melitense, a new lease of life deeply rooted in the past and determinedly going forward with objectives that have already been defined under the enlightened guidance of H.M.E.H. the Prince and Grand Master Fra' Andrew Bertie.

I pray the Holy Virgin of Filermo and Saint John the Baptist to guide the steps of those who will be called to serve this new institution. May they always be at their side during the difficult journey along the cultural and scientific routes of the world.