

## Grandmasters' armour on show in Paris

Lisa Gwen Baldacchino



**Grandmaster Jean Parisot de Valette's ceremonial sword and dagger which were looted by Napoleon Bonaparte are being showcased in Paris with items from the Palace Armoury in Valletta.**

La Valette's notorious sword and dagger, plundered by Napoleon Bonaparte as war spoils, forms part of a major armoury exhibition under way in Paris along with two-thirds of the artefacts that form part of Malta's national collection.

The exhibition is being held at the Musée de l'Armée, also known as the Hôtel des Invalides, Napoleon's burial place and one of the top armour museums in the world. The museum is a top attraction in Paris, drawing as many as one million visitors per year.

A refectory at the Invalides was fully restored and inaugurated specifically for the event, which will run until January. Some 60 individual pieces of armour have been flown abroad together with 18 paintings, said Michael Stroud, curator of the Palace Armoury, Heritage Malta (HM).

Indeed, those visiting the Armoury in Valletta over the coming months will find a very scanty main showcase, as some of the most important items on permanent display have been included in the Paris exhibition.

Among the more prestigious items are components of the La Valette armour; the full armour believed to have belonged to Jean Jacques de Verdelin as well as that thought to have belonged to Grand Master Martino Garzes; the parade armour of Alof de Wignacourt and the portrait of

the same Grandmaster by Leonello Spada, which has been placed on the easel upon which Jean Diminque Ingre's painting of an enthroned Napoleon is customarily placed.

Other paintings on show are the Beheading of St John by Mattias Stomer and another of St John the Baptist wearing the Order's habit by Mattia Preti.

Preparations for the exhibition had been underway for a whole year, said Pierre Bonello, HM senior executive for exhibitions and design.

The items were flown to Frankfurt and then escorted overland by incognito security officers to Paris. On arrival in France, it took a whole week to be set up.

Mr Stroud, Mr Bonello and metal conservator Robert Cassar were present throughout the process to ensure it went smoothly.

The costs were largely borne by the French government and by the Musée de l'Armée while the Malta Tourism Authority and Go sponsored the exhibition catalogue.

HM took the exhibition as an opportunity to restore and conserve some of the items prior to putting them on show.

The exhibition was inaugurated by Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi and by the French Minister of Defence, Hervé Morin, on October 20 and will be open for public viewing until next January.

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## Comments

L. Bonnici (1 week, 2 days ago)

Contrary to what everyone is saying I believe it's better for "our" artifacts to stay in Paris. They are far safer and better looked after in France than they would be over here! We simply don't have the money and resources to look after such things!!

Besides are you forgetting that la Vallette was French? And if France had to give us back our beloved sword and dagger they would have to give everything back to everyone. What about other great museums around Europe, in Germany, UK, etc?? If everyone had to start asking back their artifacts, great museums will be emptied in no time and a number of international conflicts will be stirred up!

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Joe Morana (1 week, 2 days ago)

The Maltese Government should never have sanctioned this Exhibit unless an iron-clad guarantee was tendered by the French Government that all items belonging to the Maltese people are returned, including the sword and the dagger!

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I Galea (1 week, 2 days ago)

Dear French Ambassador,

please tell your government to take the example of Italy and take the honorable step of returning to us what Napoleon STOLE from Malta.

Please note that those who keep stolen things are considered as aiding and abetting the thief.

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n cutajar (1 week, 2 days ago)

The french guides at the museum tell the tourists that the sword and dagger were given to Napoleon as gifts!!! I bet even the treasure at the bottom of Aboukir bay was a gift to the french.

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Ian Restall (1 week, 2 days ago)

The French Government should do the honourable thing and send the art effects that were plundered by Napoleon back to Malta. A further compensation for the delay in returning them back is also long overdue.

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Charles Agius (1 week, 2 days ago)

No ifs or buts. These belong to us Maltese - return the looted items.

It's the duty of our MPs to see that these items are returned safely to us without delay. The french have enjoyed them enough.

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