

Book Review: *Coins Minted by the Knights in Malta* by John Gatt

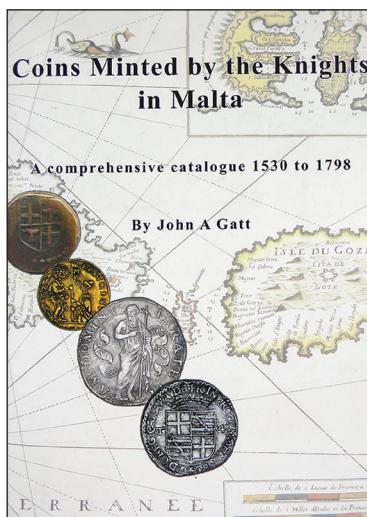
By William VanOrnum

Who are the Knights of Malta? One thing is for sure: this religious order of the Roman Catholic Church has evolved in different ways since the eleventh century, a time of Crusades between antagonists from different lands. The Order began with a Hospitaller orientation, and later changed into an organization that was both military and Hospitaller, protecting pilgrims and providing medical services to them on journeys.¹ The Order gained financial prosperity during the 16th through 18th centuries. After the Order was evicted from Malta in 1798, there was disorganization. From the 19th century to the 21st, the Order has distinguished itself through charitable works, and is recognized by the United Nations. Because of this, food, funds, and medical care can be delivered quickly anywhere in the world. There are 13,500

Knights worldwide and over 80,000 volunteers (Maltesers) who serve the global community through works of charity. (Disclosure: I have been a member of the Order since 2010. The full name of the Order is Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta.)

By dint of his own journeys around the world, John Gatt (himself a native of Malta) presents *Coins Minted by the Knights in Malta: A Comprehensive Catalogue 1530 to 1798* (Melbourne: Waratah Group, 2018). This was not a book written in one's home den with computers and book or forays to local libraries. Gatt, like a good Knight of yore, driven by passion and desire for truth, journeyed from his home in Australia, taking many different numismatic pilgrimages to where he could see, examine, and learn about these coins. He visited museums, archives, coin dealers, and numismatists with private collections. The ring of authenticity resonates from every page of this book; a labor of love and a desire to keep this knowledge alive for future generations.

His book is organized in the following manner. There is a section for each Grandmaster—28 that reigned in Malta, containing summaries of the life and times of each, and the coins minted during their reign. There is a listing of the dates when the coins were minted, the number seen in museums and private hands, the total number, and the average weight and size. Most of the coins are accompanied by full-color photo-



graphs. To help identify the coins, there is a listing of Obverses, Reverses, and Edge types, as well as of every die variety seen, as well as the total number in museums and in private hands. His work here also delineates average weight, average size, and the rotation if milled coinage that is minted by press.

The data base is thorough—over 16,600 different coins (in gold, silver, and copper), with 2,850 varieties listed, 1,380 varieties previously not listed, as well as nine totally new coins. Accompanying this is information on minting processes, die-making, coin rotation, patterns and trial pieces, minting errors, fiduciary coins, foreign counter-marked coins as well as counterfeit coins. His numbering system contains three parts. The first part—01 to 28—are the Grand Masters that ruled during the Order's stay in Malta. The second part is the denomination of 27 different type coins, many familiar, some esoteric: Piccolo, Grano, Tari, Scudo, Zecchino, as well as others. The third part of the classification system is the obverse number, edge type, and reverse number. Edge types are classified as No Edge Applied, Applied Edges, Edge Unknown, and Edge removed or worn out. Reverse dies are noted as well as these suffixes: counter stamped, die clash, double struck, and filled die. Here is an example: 06-6T-02X02: 06 (De Valette), 6T (6 Tari) -02 (Obverse number) X (no applied edge) 02 (Reverse number). A review in *Coins Weekly* has suggested further data to be included.² The photos are large and sharp and red arrows make it easy on the eyes when looking at small details of die varieties and states.

Let's take a look one of the Grandmasters. Here is Gatt's description of the life and times of Grand Master 10, Martin Garzes. He served as the 58th Grand Master, between 8 May, 1595 and 7 February, 1601:

Garzes's election as Grand Master was greatly welcomed by the King of Spain Philip II. So much that he decreed that an increase of grain was to be given to Malta which had suffered during the Verdalle [previous Grandmaster] reign. The King also gave a large amount of money to help with the fortification of Gozo.

Within a short period of time of becoming Grand Master, Garzes successfully stopped the conflicts and disorder between the various Langues³ that had prevailed during the reign of the previous two Grand Masters. His impartiality also helped to improve the Order's international relationships.⁴

Here are photos of three different reverses presented by Gatt:



The arrows on these three coins also point to distinguishing characteristics of die varieties.

Collectors like the colors of copper coins. Witness the specialized studies of early American copper coins. These are in full glory spanning a period of 268 years. Those who collect Early American Cents might note differences in the hues on EAC coppers and those displayed in Gatt's book. Many different hues and colors emerge as copper changes over the years and centuries. I suspect there are numismatists when study the differences in coppers from different lands and epochs. The letter to *The Numismatist* from 1957, referring to early American coppers, perhaps applies to coins of Malta as well:

It is doubtful if anyone now living remembers the original color of large cents, which last fell from the coining presses in 1857. As they dropped into the basket, (to nick their older brothers) they were undoubtedly of a bright copper color and because of their recent molecular disturbance, they were hot. As they cooled, they took on various shades of color, the final result depending on atmospheric conditions as well as the pureness of the metal.⁵

There is an interesting description of minting processes. Gatt notes that the making of dies did not change greatly; they were made of iron and steel and the minting process evolved from hand-hammered dies to machine made coins. There are descriptions and photos of these two manufacturing processes. (Gatt, p. xiv) Every hand-hammered coin had a different rotation. Even when production the milled coins were not standardized the rotation of many early milled coins differed every time the press was reset. In the description and photos of each coin type and die variety, Gatt indicates rotation with arrows representing each side of the coin.

Gatt's book can be a starting point for a numismatic quest to study the 900-year history of the Knights. In the Foreword, Emmanuel Magro Conti suggested past studies. In particular, publications by P.G.H Furse (1864), R. Morris (1884), and E.H. Furse (1885) kept enthusiasm for these coins going after the Order had been suppressed in the beginning of the 19th Century.

Studies from the 20th Century studies by Calleja Schembri (1908) and J.C. Sammut (1977) have offered another retrospective. Students of these coins might find the following auction catalogs to be of interest: Glendening and Company of London in



June 1944, May 1957, February, 1960, and November 1957; as well as Spinks, 1988 and NAC in April 2011.

The Malta Numismatic Society, founded in 2020, includes downloads of important works on its website, mns.mt. These are available to non-members as well as members (who pay a reasonable fee of \$40 to join <https://www.mns.mt>). The book by Morris is online (Coins of the Grandmasters of the Order of Malta), written in English, offers a wealth of historical details. John Gatt provides a short and nicely written account of the symbolism of Maltese crosses on the coin. There is also a recent journal article (Tesserae, no other details provided), "From Rhodes to Malta: The Gold Coins of Grandmaster Phillipe Villiers de Lisle Adan, 1521-24. Books by the Furses, written in French, offer material to those conversant in this language. As a member of the Malta Numismatic Society, John Gatt has helped to develop resources on his website that will amplify the material in his book as well as to encourage research that covers new ground. There is a line catalog where each coin can be viewed full-screen. He has found 178 new varieties as well as two new types of coins. This information is available to owners of the book upon registration on the website, coinsofmalta.com.

The Order of Malta international website (orderofmalta.net/coins/2008) offers photos and descriptions of coinage. These appear to be non-circulating coins including proof coins. The information on the Order's global work in government, humanitarian and medical works, diplomatic activities, press publications, and history may also be found here.

With Gatt's book in front of me, I'm appreciative of his passion, accuracy, and enthusiasm for his specialty. I'll be studying the the rich symbolism and heraldry to understand the message intended by each coin. You know you have a good book when you want to keep taking it off the shelf in order to understand complexities. With this book, John Gatt has initiated new scholarship and deserves even more praise for going beyond his book with a website as well as his leadership in the birth of the Malta Numismatic Society. I hope others will be drawn in to share his enthusiasm.

Notes:

1. orderofmalta.int/history
2. Kampmann, Ursula. "The Coins of the Order of Malta." *Coins Weekly*, September 5, 2018.
3. Langues=languages
4. Gatt, p. 101
5. Letter to the editor, *The Numismatist*, June, 1956. Cited by Warren A. Lapp and Herbert B. Silberman (Eds.), *United States Large Coins*, Lawrence, MA: Quarterman Publications, Inc., 1975, p. 124.

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