

DISPENSING "LIGHT" IN MALTA and MEDITERRANEAN

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Mediterranean Pass

In the late 1890's, a zealous Mason was Consul at the United States Consulate on the island of Malta. He was Brother and Sir Knight John W. Worthington, 32^o, a Knight Templar and an ardent supporter of the Mystic Shrine.

In his "official report", dated from the United States Consulate at Malta on October 15, 1891, Worthington gives an update titled: "THE ELECTRIC LIGHT IN MALTA." He describes the island of Malta as prosperous and thriving -- and that a British electrical engineer prepared a report "including a statement of the comparative cost of lighting the principal towns of Malta by gas and electricity." Worthington goes on to say, "No contract has yet been given out for the lighting of Malta by electricity, and it has occurred to me that possibly some of our American manufacturers of electrical plants might see an opening here for their enterprise." The report was signed "John Worthington, Consul." A supplementary report gave some interesting background data which said that the manufacture of gas in England is cheaper than that of electricity and this is due to the fact that there is a market for the sale of residuum in England which does not exist in Malta.

Whoever "created" or "instigated" the idea of providing sojourning Masons and Shriners the wallet-sized "Mediterranean Pass" is unknown. It is known that Dr. Walter M. Fleming, 33^o, and Past Commander of Columbian Commandery #1 of Knights Templar in New York City had "Mediterranean Pass number 1"...to match his Mecca Shrine dues-card #1. And the other co-Founder of the Mystic Shrine: William J. Billy Florence, 33^o and a regular member of Pittsburgh Commandery #1 of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania had "Mediterranean Pass number 2," to match his dues-card in Mecca Shrine Temple. After that, the Mediterranean Passes ceased to have "numbers" assigned to them. Brother, Sir Knight and Noble, King David Kalakaua, King of Hawaii who was likewise a 33^o, and a Past Commander of his Honolulu Commandery #1 of K.T., received a "Mediterranean Pass" card when he joined the Shrine in San Francisco, California just a few days before his death. Each bore the signature of Brother, Sir Knight and Noble John W. Worthington which stated his position as "U.S. Consul." Worthington issued himself a Mediterranean Pass as he did for Brother, Sir Knight and Noble Sam Briggs, 33^o, a Past Commander of his Commandery in Cleveland, Ohio. A facsimile of Briggs' card appears at the top of this Presentation. I am indebted to the Recorder of the Shrine Center in Cleveland, Ohio for digging into the Temple's vault/safe and making me a photocopy of that document.



The so-called "Mediterranean Pass" cards were eventually abandoned upon the orders of Brother, Sir Knight and Noble William B. Melish, 33^o, and later-to-be the M.E. Grand Master of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the U.S.A.

When Melish became Imperial Potentate of Shriners International, the Body was nearly "bankrupt" (to use Melish's word). He ordered an "audit." Melish was known to be a "peevish" man prone to fits of temper at times; yet, he was a quiet gentleman on most other occasions. He was an astute businessman. However, he was "all-business" and even his contemporaries considered him to be a man who lacked any sense of humor, whatsoever.

An investigation, headed by Melish, determined that the "Mediterranean Pass" was probably designed by a Persian sailor. Melish consulted Arabic-scholars who found it to have several errors and discrepancies. Very few examples still exist today, and most are prized more for their value as an "Artistic curiosity" than as a crude, primitive "passport" of sorts. In any event: Some Masons and Shriners DID stop in MALTA and were issued their "Mediterranean Pass" by Worthington (for a "fee"). Prior to the audit, Noble John Worthington was allowed an annual stipend out of the Imperial Treasury of the Imperial Council A.A.O.N.M.S. (now Shriners International) of \$500 per year for "entertaining visiting Masons and Shriners when they visited Malta".

Worthington admitted to the Imperial Council of The Shrine, that although seeing a Mason or Shriner in Malta in those days was rare, it was not at all uncommon. In a journey almost reminiscent of Fr. Christian Rosenkreutz centuries earlier, most Masons/Shriners traveling anywhere near Malta were en-route to Jerusalem and rest of The Holy Land for historic or religious interests or for sight-seeing pilgrimages.

Melish scoffed at "Temples in the East" (meaning Shrine Temples in the Eastern hemisphere). Obviously, Melish was correct. He felt that Worthington was perpetuating sort of a slush-fund and ordered that the printing of the "Mediterranean Pass" be ceased. It is somewhat unfortunate that Melish took so stern an action, because Jerusalem DID have its share of Masonic Bodies at the time. Whether the so-called "Mediterranean Pass" gave any American Brother any extra "vouching power" or credence is entirely unknown.

For us, as Masonic Scholars, it is interesting to see an example (whether legitimate or a jolly prank) of a "Masonic Passport." For those who call it a mere 'prank'... I would remind them that the "Mediterranean Pass" certificate WAS ISSUED BY A UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE, circa the year 1891. Even then, if it were a baseless-prank, that man (Worthington) would have had further repercussions. While its authenticity may have been shoddy, I believe the man had "good intentions". In the book "Good Government" published in 1984-1895, it states:

"John Worthington, a man of sterling qualities of head and heart, who has ever displayed a true interest in the welfare of this people, has often contributed interesting descriptive letters and sketches of these Islands in the United States press, and has done much to make their commercial concerns known in the country which he has so well and truly represented."

John Worthington was appointed Consul at Malta by President Chester A. Arthur in 1884; and served with credit through three (3) Presidential Administrations.

The news journal "Public Opinion" stated:

"We heartily wish the worthy United States consul and Mrs. Worthington 'God Speed' in their voyage across the Atlantic; and we are sure that all those who have enjoyed the pleasure of their acquaintance will at all times be most glad to hear of their happiness and prosperity in their own native land, where, we trust, Mr. Worthington's talents and the services he has rendered to his country will not fail to secure him promotion to some higher and more conspicuous office."

Even if John Worthington had a jolly nature and enjoyed vast friendships and the finer pleasures of life, it is readily apparent, that he had a serious-side, too. He apparently authored several articles including: "Excavations in Malta", published by "The American



Journal of Archaeology and of the History of the Fine Arts." For a man with such intellect, impeccable credentials, and countless people willing to 'vouch for his character,' it seems rather UNLIKELY THAT HE KNOWINGLY PERPETUATED A HOAX with the issuance of the Masonic/Shrine "Mediterranean Pass." It must have had a tiny grain of validity to it, at the bare minimum. A 'joker/prankster' might devise a hoax; but a well-read, well-versed academic such as John Worthington doesn't fit that profile. Not only did he have his Masonic reputation to uphold, he also had his U.S. Government job to uphold which would have been terminated if he were peddling false credentials. Plus, he was residing in the VERY PLACE where the "Pass" was utilized....Malta and The Holy Land Region. To me, it seems strange that his few critics consisted mostly of one American Shriner (Melish) who was stingy about the money Worthington received as an annual stipend.

Scholars today can only dream the "What ifs." My main thought is, "What if the 'Mediterranean Pass' continued being issued in the subsequent decades?" It would have either gained credence via usage or it would have died-out if it served no purpose.

Personally, I believe it may have been a crude, primitive certificate...but still valid and accepted among those who bore the 'Passes' and those who saw the 'Passes.'

The Masonic/Shrine "Mediterranean Pass" should not be confused with the preliminary ceremony "Knight of Saint Paul and the Mediterranean Pass," which is conferred prior to the Masonic 'Order of Malta' in the American York Rite system. Nor should it be confused with the "Jewish Pass" which Masonic historian Ray Denslow defined as "the Pass required of those who traversed the Jewish dominions of Judah and Benjamin. Most military passes are given with cuts of the sword." Denslow also notes, "Passports are written evidence of authority to travel from one place to another. These are still essential in this modern age." That remains quite true even in this 21st Century.

I am much more impressed with Brother and Dr. Albert Mackey's commentary on Knights of the Mediterranean Pass. Mackey notes how this was, "ORIGINALLY AN HONORARY DEGREE" conferred in Encampments of Knights Templar. Its meetings were called 'Councils' and it was "founded about the year 1367 in consequence of certain events which occurred to the Knights of Malta." The Saracens ambushed the Knights of Malta as the knights were midway across the bridge crossing the ancient Aufidio River/Offanto River. A long and bloody battle ensued with 1,500 dead Saracens encumbering the bridge...and the river was literally stained by their blood. Mackey further says: "In commemoration of this event and as a reward for their valor, the victorious Knights of Malta had free permission to pass and re-pass in all the coasts of The Mediterranean Sea without danger of molestation, whence the name of the degree is derived." Mackey further states he (Mackey) had a ritual of the degree: "which was in the handwriting of Dr. Moses Holbrook, The Sovereign Grand Commander of The Southern Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite." Mackey further elaborates on the Masonic Order of Knight of Malta, in which he noted that "the original Order had no secrets."

One of the great aspects of The Mediterranean (in addition to its beautiful scenery) is its natural resources, including its fisheries. Without that industry, many people would have starved over the centuries. I find it significant that while serving as U.S. Consul at Malta, Bro.: and Noble John Worthington issued the following message to the U.S. State Department, in his Official Dispatch #142: "The Governor of Malta ...expresses the hope that the information (found) in the reports enclosed...will be of interest to all concerned here."

The fish question is a very serious one, as year by year the supply has been falling off and the prices increasing, until now the poorer classes of Maltese can seldom afford to indulge in the food that ought to be the cheapest and best in these markets." I only mention Worthington's statement, here in this Presentation, because it shows compassion and a "serious" concern. Logic holds that a man so sincerely concerned about serious issues and who truly cares about the poorer classes of people is not inclined to produce things of folly or fable. Therefore, I consider Worthington's intentions equally virtuous with regard to the Masonic/Shrine 'Mediterranean Pass.' If done in 'jest,' his antics would have quickly been discovered; and for a man so inclined toward the 'serious': it would be out-of-character for him to perpetuate a falsehood.



One interesting thing about Worthington's Official Dispatch to the U.S. State Department #142, written at the United States Consulate in Malta on August 23, 1885: Many of Worthington's concerns over excess catching of fish, and the ramifications of shortages in the food-supply are still relevant in today's world. The man may have been well ahead-of-his-time.

It should be remembered that The Mediterranean--in ancient times, as well as occasionally even in today's 21st Century--was an important water-route for merchants and travelers. It allowed for trade and cultural exchanges between the Peoples of the region. Back then, (and now) the Seas and Oceans have their share of pirates, unscrupulous fishermen, smugglers, and voyagers of dubious character. I firmly believe that a man such as Brother, Sir Knight and Noble John Worthington felt his issuance of Masonic/Shrine 'Mediterranean Pass' credentials (whether legitimate or shoddily put together) served a "need" to identity and "vouch for" a good person's credibility.

In today's world: **this story reminds us to cherish and protect our Masonic dues-cards and our Nebraska College S.R.I.C.F. dues-cards.** They ARE legitimately issued credentials. **They are a modern type of "fraternal passport".** The cards/certificates ARE our "proof" of membership via association. **Valid proof of "good standing" enables us to attend our meetings and/or visit other groups in officially recognized Amity with our own.** Keep your dues-card in your billfold (and to paraphrase an old television commercial): "Don't leave home without it."

Sources / Exhibits / Recommended Readings:

- Exact Facsimile of "The Mediterranean Pass issued to Sam Briggs by John Worthington; Consulate serving the United States Consulate in Malta. Issued circa year 1891.
- "Good Government." Volume 14, page 9 . Published July 15, 1894. "Consular Systems Compared."
- "United States consular reports: Reports of the Consuls of the United States" Published by U.S. Bureau of Foreign Commerce, year 1891. Page 273 of this Report.
- "Official Dispatch to the U.S. State Department #142 from John Worthington, Consul at Malta written to The U.S. Secretary of State, dated August 23, 1885." Re: Excess fishing -- and implications/ramifications resulting therefrom.
- "A Templar Encyclopedia" prepared by Sir Knight Ray V. Denslow, 33^o and a Knight Templar for The Grand Commandery of Missouri of Knights Templar. Year 1951. Re: "Jewish Pass" and "Passports."
- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Dr. Albert G. Mackey, 33^o, and a Knight Templar. Re; "Knight of the Mediterranean Pass" and its relation to the American Masonic 'Order of Malta.'
- OBITUARY: from "The Mercury" Newspaper published at Richfield Springs, New York: --- John Worthington, age 68. Died Feb. 9, 1909 at family home at Cooperstown, New York. Cause: Heart Disease. Notation that, "W.W. Corcoran, banker and philanthropist of Washington DC supplied the necessary funds for the transportation of the body to Washington DC, and its interment in Oak Hill Cemetery."



About the Author:

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He is a Regular Member of The Allied Masonic Degrees; Grand College of Rites; St. David Conclave of The Red Cross of Constantine; Shawnee County Kansas Square and Compass Club; and Holyrood Council #61 of Knight Masons (Nebraska).

