

BAILLI DE FROULLAY, KNIGHT, SAILOR AND DIPLOMAT

Carmen Depasquale

Louis-Gabriel de Froullay, born in 1694, was one of five sons of Philippe-Charles, marquis de Froullay, comte de Montfleaux and of Marie-Anne de Mégaudais de Marolles. He was barely three years old when his father, who was the King's lieutenant in the government of Bas Maine and the *comté* of Laval, died on May 7, 1697, aged thirty-four. His brother, Charles-François, who inherited his father's titles, was the father of the future marquise de Créquy, Renée-Caroline de Froullay, born on October 19, 1714. The marquise's letters to Senac de Meilan, annotated by the famous nineteenth century writer and literary critic Sainte-Beuve, were published under the title *Lettres inédites de Madame de Créquy* (Paris, 1856). Another brother, Charles-Louis de Froullay, was consecrated Bishop of Le Mans on February 25, 1724. Another literary figure in this family is the comtesse de Tessé, born Marie-Charlotte de Béthune-Charost. She was married to René-Marie de Froullay, marquis of Tessé and of Lavardin.

Louis-Gabriel de Froullay was received in the Langue of France (Priory of Aquitaine) in 1710. Having been made Knight Grand Cross on September 1, 1728, he was appointed general of the galleys on October 19 of the same year and confirmed in this post on August 12, 1730. In March 1741, he was appointed ambassador of the Order in Paris, succeeding the bailli de Mesmes. He died in Paris on August 26, 1766, aged seventy-four.

Two letters that the bailli de Froullay wrote to a close friend of his, another Knight of Malta who lived in Paris and had not taken his vows, chevalier Blaise-Marie Daydie, help us to form a clear picture of the life in Malta and at sea of a relatively young Knight. These letters are dated July 6 and August 4, 1729.¹ The bailli de Froullay was then thirty-five years old and was general of the galleys. He begins his first letter by telling his friend that he returned to Malta from a previous campaign at sea on June 28 and that he will be sailing again on the July 10.² He informs his friend that he has to undertake two more voyages of thirty to thirty-five days each, which he has preferred to a single voyage of two months, the Grand Master having allowed him the choice.

It is to be emphasised that Froullay was writing to a very intimate friend. In fact, the letter is also a short treatise on friendship, for in it the writer differentiates between friends and intimate friends. The latter share each other's opinions, ideas,

1. H. Bonhomme, *Correspondance inédite du chevalier Daydie, faisant suite aux lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé*, Paris 1874, 324-40.. The quotations are a free translation of the original in French.
2. Cf. Archive of the Order of Malta [*Arch*]. 268, f. 124 r. Instructions to bailli de Froullay as general of the galleys to sail 'as soon as the weather will permit' are dated July 7, 1729.

ideals, principles, manners, judgement, moods and tastes. As a matter of fact, although he has met other Knights worthy of his friendship, he cannot share with them his innermost thoughts and worries. In Malta, he has found himself 'in a new world', without anyone to rely on or to comfort his dejected spirit. Thus, he appreciates the charm of true friendship even more. Philosophy too has come to his aid. These letters to such an intimate friend are therefore characterised by their sincerity.

What does Froullay say about Malta?

Here, I have no pleasure ..., it is important to carry on, for I feel that the country is more difficult than we thought. There are some real gentlemen, some of them are very kind. So are the young Knights who willingly meet at the General's house³ ... It is very inconvenient to have at home seventy guardsmen and fifty valets and to have ten men accompany me whenever I go out; and then, in a small country everyone knows what you are doing, everyone repeats what you have said, and you are fortunate if it stops at that!

In his second letter he says that in Malta he misses the good company and the pleasures that he used to enjoy in Paris, however he appreciates the calm and tranquillity that time for reflection has afforded him.

My days pass without my doing or saying any evil, I fulfill my duties scrupulously, I am much less moody, impatient and vivacious than I used to be. That is not to say that I am succeeding here, for the country is extremely difficult, but I have the satisfaction of working gladly and in good faith to do what is good.

In spite of his vow of chastity, the bailli de Froullay had a mistress in Paris. After his departure she was unfaithful to him. Notwithstanding his hurt, he reacted philosophically to this situation. After all, he did not expect her to act otherwise, once he was 'five hundred leagues away for two years.' Moreover, his white hair warned him 'that it is time to renounce to such blessings.' He felt that, being past the age of passion and desire, he would remain her friend but would not, for the rest of his life, have another mistress.

3. As bailli de Froullay is general of the galleys, he is referring to himself.

As he writes his second letter in Lampedusa, the subject of life at sea takes priority over others. He writes:

We have just arrived from the coast of Barbary. We have been without ice, without fruit, without herbs, without vegetables, for the past twenty-four days. For a few days we were left with only a little water, and it was quite bad ... We gave chase to two or three small Turkish boats, but as they sailed close to the coast, we could not take anything. I was seasick only once, in spite of the stormy sea, and I can withstand fatigue well. I wake up every morning at daybreak and, almost every night, I am awakened several times ... We are twenty-five on my galley and our *riveditore* is seriously ill. He is occupying the lower cabin and we are all sleeping on the level of the stern. May I remind you that we are sailing by the African coast and in the hot season.

Froullay shares a secret with his friend: the Grand Master would like him to remain general of the galleys for the following two years. If he accepts, he tells his friend, 'that would lead me to a great fortune ..., there is some discomfort, the expense is considerable ..., with my revenue I can provide for the expense ..., but the 8000 francs I owe chevalier de Rochepierre would then only be repaid in 1733. Let me know if that can be done. I do not owe a penny in Malta ...' One can surmise that the money he owed chevalier de Rochepierre was necessary for him to accept his first mandate as general of the galleys.

Another letter by the bailli de Froullay allows us a glimpse into another aspect of his personality. It was written around 1733 in answer to the letter he received from a certain Khalil, of Turkish origin. Khalil had served as captain of the *Reale* under the command of the bailli. Written in flowery language, Khalil's letter was full of praise for 'the excessive kindness' the bailli had extended to him.⁴ This letter is perhaps the best proof of Froullay's humane nature: 'your kindness is like the sea in its immensity. Your illustrious name is always on our tongue. We beg you to honour us with a letter which for us will be more valuable than a collection of precious stones.'

The bailli's kindness stands out in his answer.

I wish that my friendship were as useful to you as it is sincere. If I could not be of any use, I have at least the consolation of rendering justice to your merit. I have made it known to everyone how, ignoring your own safety, you fought an unequal

4. For the text in French of these two letters, see H. Bonhomme, *op. cit.*, 340-3.

combat, how valourously you sustained it and how steadfastly you bore your disgrace ...⁵ I wish that you will soon return to your country. The valour of the Knights is well known there; let also their generosity be known and loved. You can never forget the generosity of our worthy Grand Master nor any of the other rare qualities you see in him and that you experience every day ...

Can one consider this episode in the bailli's career as an example of how the Knights treated their captives of a certain rank?

Froullay's success as general of the galleys was matched by his success as a diplomat. Twelve years after he was appointed ambassador of the Order in Paris, a dispute arose between the Order and the King of the Two Sicilies. The latter had ordered the Bishop of Syracuse to pay a visit to the Church in Malta and enjoined the Order to receive his envoy with all the honours that were due to him. While the King insisted on his rights, the Order stood by its sovereignty. All Europe showed an interest in this dispute and the Grand Master chose his ambassador in Paris to lead the negotiations which ensued. In his meetings with Louis XV and his ministers, Froullay put forward arguments in favour of the Order's position and explained in what way the King of the Two Sicilies was overstepping his rights. Froullay was successful in winning over Louis XV to the cause of the Order. The French King instructed his ambassador to the Holy See, Cardinal de Tencin, as well as Mr. Ossun, his ambassador in Naples to act on behalf of the Order. The bailli de Froullay encouraged all the ambassadors of the Order in various European cities to follow his example in rallying the support of European sovereigns in favour of the Order. Only Madrid did not respond. Although Naples remained obstinate, Froullay's efforts resulted in that both the King of France and the Pope intervened and put forward proposals to the King of Naples. In the end, the latter gave in, commerce between Malta and Naples was re-established and the possessions of the Order which had been seized were returned. According to the bailli de Tencin, who wrote an account of the incident, 'the bailli de Froullay could not bring to a better end the important role that he has so advantageously and so gloriously fulfilled in this great affair.'⁶

5. It is not unlikely that Khalil was one of the 178 Turks who had been taken slaves on March 24, 1729 when the French knight Scipion de Raymond Deaulx, commanding the *San Vincenzo*, attacked the Algerian vessel *La Gazelle* near Lampedusa and captured it after a fight that lasted twelve hours. *La Gazelle* had 357 Turks on it, but only 178 survived, 34 of whom were wounded (*Arch.* 268, ff. 113 v.-117 r.). Bailli de Froullay mentions the capture of *La Gazelle* in his letter of July 6, 1729 to Daydie.
6. National Library of Malta, Library Manuscript [*Libr.*] 232, f. 241. A free translation from the original in French.

Froullay scored another diplomatic success when the Grand Master entrusted him with a mission to the court of Frederick II of Prussia. Froullay went to Berlin to ask Frederick II to return to the Order the commanderies in Silesia which the King had taken possession of when Silesia fell into his hands. The King of Prussia acceded to the Order's request, with one exception, namely that of retaining the commandery of Lossen for his chamberlain, Count Falckenhayn. In fact, in a letter dated July 22, 1755 he wrote to the Grand Master:

The bailli de Froullay, ambassador of the Order of St. John at the Court of France, acquitted himself of the mission with which you entrusted him with his usual skill when he came to see me at Nesell ... with regard to the arrangements that have to be made concerning the commandery at Lossen, as well as to the other requests that your Order thinks it can make regarding the other commanderies in Silesia.⁷

Froullay's friend, chevalier Daydie, is not at all surprised at the Grand Master's choice of bailli de Froullay as emissary to Frederick II. In his letter to Froullay dated June 4, 1753, Daydie tells him that the Order had very good reasons to send him on this difficult mission, as he possessed 'the precious gift of pleasing Kings.' Daydie had already called him, in a letter dated November 28, 1747, 'a very capable and a very esteemed ambassador.'

Contemporary French writers are also full of praise for bailli de Froullay. In his *Mémoires*, the duc de Luynes comments on the fact that the bailli accompanied Louis XV to Marly, a favour granted only to the ambassadors of Spain and Naples 'as ambassadors of the family.' Voltaire had a very high opinion both of Froullay and of his bosom friend chevalier Daydie. He speaks of them in his letters. Writing to Nicolas Thieriot he refers to them as 'these two illustrious Knights without fear and without reproach' and adds: 'How proud I am to have as my protectors the two most virtuous men of the Kingdom.' In other letters to the same correspondent he refers to them as 'loyal' and 'pious'. Moreover, when in another letter to Thieriot, Voltaire speaks of a new play he has begun to write, *Adelaide de Guesclin*, he says about his main character: 'I have imagined Sire de Courcy as a very wealthy man, the like of whom I scarcely see at Court, a very loyal Knight, like one would say, chevalier Daydie or de Froullay.'⁸

The generosity of bailli de Froullay is witnessed by abbé Boyer, author of *Libr.* 137. In this work Boyer speaks of another manuscript entitled *Monumenta*

7. *Arch.* 57, f. 250. A free translation from the original in French.
8. A free translation of Best D629 and D380 respectively, in Voltaire, *Correspondance*, ed. Theodore Besterman, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, 1975-1993, 13 vols.

MEMOIRE
SUR LA SENSIBILITÉ
DES
TENDONS,

*Prononcé en Italien à l'Académie des
Apatistes.*

DEDIE

A MONSIEUR

LE BAILLI DE FROULLAY,
AMBASSADEUR DE MALTE,

Par M. GRIMA, Maître en Chirurgie, &
Chirurgien Pensionnaire de l'Ordre de
Malte, Membre de l'Académie des Apatistes,
& de l'Académie de Botanique
& d'Histoire Naturelle de Corone.

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A PARIS.

M. DCC. LX



Rhodi, which he describes as 'a manuscript ... that contains all the tombstones of the Grand Masters from the beginning of the Order up to the loss of Rhodes ... with inscriptions, mottos and epitaphs.' In 1745, bailli de Froullay gave this 'precious work' as a gift to Grand Master Pinto who 'deposited it in the secret archives of the Chancellery, where it is still preserved.'⁹

When in June 1765, at Versailles, Louis XV issued the

Letters Patent in the form of an edict decreeing that the inhabitants of the islands under the domination of the Order of Malta will be regarded as *regnicoles* in the Kingdom of France, in that they can establish themselves there, acquire movable and immovable property, rents of all kinds and dispose of them *inter vivos* as well as by will,

it is bailli de Froullay who, in a letter dated October 1, 1765, explains their full significance to Pinto¹⁰.

Another connection between bailli de Froullay and the Maltese is very interesting. It takes the form of a dedication that precedes the work of a Maltese doctor who, in 1760, published in Paris a thesis entitled *Mémoire sur la sensibilité des tendons*. The author is the surgeon Michael Angelo Grima who had studied in Italy and in France. He dedicates his thesis to ambassador Froullay and conveys to him his personal gratitude. Grima expresses delicate sentiments towards his protector as well as his love for the French language. Grima writes:

The only proof that I can give of the gratitude which I feel for my Sovereign for the kindness with which he honours me, is by multiplying and putting before the person who represents him the proofs of the progress of my studies. If this dissertation which I have first written in Italian, and which I then delivered in the presence of the *Accademici Apatisti* of Florence, with whom I have the honour to be associated, and which I have just translated into French, in order to obtain a better knowledge

9. *Libr. 137, f. 1.* A free translation from the original in French.

10. Vide Archives nationales de France (Paris) [AN], M 902, pièce n° 407. Froullay explains that the Maltese will have the right to inherit their parents but not to possess benefices or offices for which they have to obtain from the King special letters which will enable them to possess them. They are however dispensed from obtaining letters of naturalisation in order to benefit from the rights of citizenship relating to commerce. On the same subject see also A. Blondy, 'La France et Malte au XVIIIe siècle: le problème de la double nationalité' in *Malta: A case study in international cross-currents*, eds. S. Fiorini, V. Mallia-Milanes, Malta, 1991, 175-82.

of this beautiful language; if this dissertation, I repeat, has the honour of pleasing Your Excellency, all my wishes will be fulfilled. My Lord, your brilliance encompasses everything, apart from your military and political valour which you have displayed on so many different occasions, you have embraced all the branches of human knowledge, persuaded that it is only by cultivating the letters and the arts that one really becomes worthy of protecting them.¹¹

Bailli de Froullay is a fine example of a most worthy member of the Order of St. John. His weakness as a young man is proof enough of how difficult it was for a man of the world to keep his vow of chastity. However, as he rose through the ranks of the Order, he became more aware of the Rule and his behaviour drew upon him the love and respect of all who had the good fortune to know him, be it his intimate friend chevalier Daydie, an enemy turned friend called Khalil, Kings, or protégés like Michel Angelo Grima.

11. A free translation from the original in French.