



MELITENSIA

THE MALTA STUDY CENTER AT THE HILL MONASTIC MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY

SUMMER AND FALL 2002

The Latin word Melitensia denotes "things pertaining to Malta," and it is most frequently used in the world of rare books and manuscripts to describe written collections of the history and culture of the island of Malta.

This newsletter reports the activities of the Malta Study Center, and features information about the history of the Knights of Malta and the history and culture of the country of Malta itself.

We welcome your comments and your communication about others who might share an interest in this core program of the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library.

The Castles of the Order

Theresa M. Vann

Many students walk into medieval history classes thinking that castles were where knights and ladies lived, usually in great luxury and harassed only by the occasional dragon. Part of my job is to disillusion students by telling them castles were not homes or palaces. Instead, they were instruments of war, military installations that served as a visible reminder of the lord's power in the district. Castles might defend the surrounding area, but the castle's personnel also collected the taxes and enforced the local laws.

Although the Order of St John began as a Hospitaller order that took care of the sick in its Jerusalem hospital, by the mid-twelfth century the Hospitallers, like the Templars, had assumed military responsibilities in the Latin East. As a military religious order, the Hospitallers devoted a substantial portion of their resources to building and maintaining castles. The history of Hospitaller castles is not just a history of war, of knights and deeds of derring-do; it also reveals the changes that the Order underwent over time. Today, visitors to the Eastern Mediterranean find the remains of many Hospitaller castles and fortifications. The following are a few examples of Hospitaller fortifications still extant today:

The Crak des Chevaliers (Hisn al-Akrad)

The Hospitaller castle of Crak des

Chevaliers is one of the best preserved crusader castles. The Crak lay on the eastern boundaries of the Crusader kingdom of Tripoli, where it had been built on the site of an earlier Kurdish fortress. Count Raymond of Tripoli gave the castle to the Order of the Hospital in 1142, and confirmed this gift in 1144. The Hospitallers colonized the valley under the shadow of the castle, which contained rich and fertile estates that supported the Crak and provided income for the Order. The castle became a major military presence in the area. When Saladin surveyed the castle after his victory at Hattin in 1187, he decided not to besiege it, permitting the Hospitallers to remain in the region.

By the first half of the thirteenth century the Crak had a garrison of 2,000 soldiers and was an important administrative center for the Order. The castellan of the Crak had the same status as a prior in the Order, ranking after the master in the witness list of charters, and his household at the Crak rivaled that of the master in Acre. It contained a treasury and a scriptorium, showing that the castellan collected tithes and kept records. The Crak also exacted tribute from the surrounding countryside and tolls upon the movement of goods and travelers. When the Sultan Baybars came to power, he realized that the way to reduce this powerful castle was to weaken its financial status. Gradually, he deprived the Crak of its



Belvoir Castle, Israel



Lindos Castle, Rhodes

tributes and lands. The Hospitallers, isolated from the rest of the Christian holdings in the Latin East, surrendered the castle to Baybars in February 1271.

Belvoir

Belvoir overlooks the Jordan Valley and controlled one of the main transportation routes in the Kingdom of Jerusalem. The castle was built by Fulk of Anjou and his wife, Melisende, between 1131 and 1143. Belvoir's appearance is distinctive. It is a concentric castle, meaning that the inner and the outer bailey are exactly symmetrical, built out of black stone with white limestone facing. The Hospitallers bought it in 1168, and surrendered it to Saladin in 1188, after the defeat of the Latin armies at the battle of Hattin. Belvoir remained in Muslim hands, but decayed after it lost its strategic importance.

Lindos

The castle of Lindos is located on the second most important harbor on the island of Rhodes. It was built to defend both the island and the city of Rhodes, serving as a watch castle and as a place of refuge for the Greek inhabitants during raids. The Hospitallers hired mercenaries to garrison the castle. Like the castle of St. Peter (which was built on the mausoleum of Halicarnassus), the Hospitallers built it on the site of ancient antiquities. Today the Greek government is excavating the temple of Athena that originally stood on the site where the Hospitallers built their castle.

Wignacourt tower

This tower, which overlooks St. Paul's Bay on the north shore of Malta, was one of a series of coastal watchtowers that Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt built at his own expense in the early 17th century. Before the arrival of the knights on Malta, the Maltese had mounted nightly guards to watch for raiders. The watchtowers provided a fortified shelter for the guards, who numbered between three and ten. The chain of watchtowers along the coast enabled the guards to signal to Valletta if they sighted enemy ships.

Additional Reading

Anthony Luttrell, "Lindos and the Defense of Rhodes," *The Hospitallers of Rhodes and their Mediterranean World*, (Aldershot: Variorum, 1992).
Alison Hoppen, *The Fortification of Malta by the Order of St. John, 1530-1798* (Edinburgh, 1979).
Denys Pringle, *Secular Buildings in the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. An Archaeological Gazetteer*. (Cambridge, 1997)
Hugh Kennedy, *Crusader Castles*. Cambridge, 1994.

The Board of Overseers of the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library established *The Friends of the Malta Study Center* at its meeting on June 24, 2002. The Library Board, recognizing that the activities of the Center have increased dramatically in recent years, created the *Friends* to promote the future development of the Center. The Board of Overseers also recognized Joseph S. Micallef, naming him Founder Emeritus for his tireless work to promote the Malta Study Center and for his distinguished service to the Board.

On 15 October 2003, Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, will confer an honorary doctorate upon His Most Eminent Highness Frá Andrew

Bertie, Grand Master of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. The University cited the longstanding relationship between the Knights of the Hospital and the Benedictines, which dates from the twelfth century and continues today through Frá Bertie's Benedictine education and teaching career. More recently, through the work of the Malta Study Center of the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, the Benedictine monks of Saint John's Abbey have sponsored the preservation and filming of the Archives of the Knights of Malta, located in the National Library of Malta in Valletta. The conferring of the degree upon Frá Bertie will also commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Malta Filming Project.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Recent Acquisitions

Books

Eugene Flandin, *Histoire des chevaliers de Rhodes : depuis la creation de l'ordre a Jerusalem jusqu'a sa capitulation a Rhodes* (Tours: A. Mame, 1873).

Susan Edgington and Sarah Lambert, eds. *Gendering the Crusades*. (University of Wales, 2000).

Publications Received

Monographs

Melitenium Amor. Festschrift in honor of Dun Gwann Azzopardi. Edited by Toni Cortis, Thomas Freller, and Lino Bugeja (Malta, 2002). Gift of Mgr. John Azzopardi.

Aline P'Nina Tayar. *How shall we sing? A Mediterranean Journey Through a Jewish Family*. (Picador, 2000). Gift of the author.

Offprints

D. F. Allen, "Anti-Jesuit Rioting by Knights of St. John during the Malta Carnival of 1639," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 65 (1996): 3-30.

Idem, "New Light on Malta during the Peace of Amiens, 1801-1803." *The British Library Journal* 20 (1994): 174-183.

Axel Ehlers, "The Crusade of the Teutonic Knights against Lithuania Reconsidered," in *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier, 1150-1500*, ed. Alan V. Murray (Ashgate, 2001), pp. 21-44.

Philippe Josserand, "Entre Orient et Occident: L'Ordre du Temple dans le contexte castillan du regne d'Alphonse X," *Alicante* 2 (2000-2001): 131-150.

Idem, "La figure du commandeur dans les prieurés castillans et léonais du Temple et de l'Hôpital: une approche prosopographique (fin XII^e – milieu XIV^e siècle)," in *Ordens Militares: Guerra, religião, poder e cultura – Actas do III Encontro sobre Ordens Militares*. Vol. 1 (Lisbon, 1999), pp. 149-178.

Idem, "Les ordres militaires et le service curial dans le royaume de Castile (1252-1369)," *Les serviteurs de l'État au Moyen Âge. Actes du XXIX^e congrès de la SHMESP* (Pau, 1998), pp. 7583.

Idem, "Un maître politique: Fernán Rodríguez de Valbuena, prieur de l'Hôpital en Castille au début du XIV^e siècle," *Revista da Faculdade de Letras – História*, Series II, vol. 15 (Porto, 1998), pp. 1313-1344.

The Malta Study Center contains over 13,000 microfilms of archival material from the island of Malta. Every issue of Melitensia will briefly highlight one collection from the archives.



Eighteenth-century document, from the archives of one of the French langues.

The Archives of the Knights of Malta. Section 15, The Proofs of Nobility

One of the most popular collections in the Malta Study Center is the Proofs of Nobility of the Knights of Malta. The center receives many inquiries from people who are researching their family trees or who happened to find their surname listed on the webpages. The “proofs,” so called because prospective members had to prove their legitimate noble birth prior to admission to the order, contain valuable information about the genealogy of European families. The oldest proofs in Section 15 date from 1522. In 1550 Grand Master Homedes required all applicants to submit proofs of nobility. While some proofs may contain family trees (some of the German proofs include elaborately-drawn genealogies complete with coats of arms) the proofs themselves narrate both sides of the family history of the prospective knight.

The Order mandated as early as 1262 that knights had to be legitimately born of noble or knightly lineage. In the 1350s the Order required proof of noble descent through both the father and the mother. This rule was reaffirmed in 1420, and by 1428 applicants had to prove four generations of nobility in the male line. In 1433 the statutes reaffirmed that the prospective knight had to be of noble lineage. Bastards of a count or a greater lord could be admitted after an inquiry into the birth. Prospective knights submitted the proofs of nobility to their native langues, or tongues, in the order. Some of the female convents also demanded proofs of nobility, although these do not appear in the main archives.

Different nations within the Order established different standards for proofs of nobility, and these standards reflect the different social and political situations across Europe. Meetings of the Chapters General between 1598 and 1631 con-

firmed national rules and imposed strict regulations of the types of documents that could be submitted as proof. The German langue, which was the most restrictive of all the Hospitaller langues, required 16 quarters of nobility (4 generations of noble birth) and barred any illegitimate sons. Even so, this was less stringent than the membership requirements for the Teutonic Knights, who required 32 quarters of nobility. In comparison, the French Hospitaller langues required eight quarters, and the Spanish and Portuguese langues required four quarters. The Iberian langues, however, excluded the descendents of Jews, Muslims, or heretics condemned by the Inquisition, effectively eliminating nobles whose ancestors, either Jewish or Muslim, converted to Christianity either before or during the expulsions of 1492 and 1503. The Italian langues required proof of 200 years of noble descent, but recognized various definitions of nobility and accepted papal dispensations.

The langues defined nobility in very particular ways because in pre-modern Europe members of the middle class could attain noble status by holding royal or municipal office, becoming a lawyer, or by purchase. In Italy, wealthy merchants, such as the Medici family, attained noble and even royal status after several generations. Other langues, especially the German langue, excluded descent from these “middle class” nobles, but the Italian langue, reflecting the society of the Renaissance city-states, accepted members of urban patriarchates.

The Malta Study Center has microfilms of 3349 proofs of nobility from the Order’s archives in Malta. These do not represent all the proofs of nobility submitted to the Order during the period 1522 and 1798, since many proofs probably remained in the archives of the local priories. The proofs are organized by langue and priory. Most of the proofs of nobility (2,049) come from the French

priorities. The Italian langue has proofs from a variety of ranks: 952 knights, 11 conventual chaplains, and 136 servants at arms. There are 165 proofs of Spanish knights and 38 conventual chaplains. There are only 17 proofs of German knights, and none of English knights.

The catalogue of the proofs is available on the website. All the records are entered in the HMML online database (<http://www.hmml.org/manusearch/searchform.asp>). To locate a proof of nobility, a researcher needs to know the name of the person and any variant spelling. Enter the name (usually just the last name) in the Title field of the search form of the online catalogue. Alternately,

with the exception of the Italian knights, the researcher can browse the lists of names by langue and priory at <http://www.hmml.org/centers/malta/knights/sect15/sect15.html>. Note that it can take a long time to download the entire file, and the proofs are not listed by alphabetical or chronological order on these pages.

It is possible to order microfilm copies or printouts from the microfilm. All orders must be placed in writing (email or fax) and include the source number or shelf mark. Prices vary according to quantity or services desired. For more information, consult the HMML website at <http://www.hmml.org/intro/inquiry.html>.

CHRONICLE OF THE MALTA STUDY CENTER

At the thirty-seventh international Congress of Medieval Studies held at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan, the Malta Study Center sponsored a panel entitled The Inner Life of the Religious Military Orders. During the panel Mark Dupuy, of the Georgia State University, presented "Behavior Unbecoming Their Station? Interpreting Monastic Violence in the Order of St. John: An Overview," and Susan Alstatt, an independent scholar, presented "Building the New Jerusalem: The German Order as Patrons and Practitioners of the Arts."

Curator's Activities

Theresa Vann, the curator of the Malta Study Center, published "Private Murders and Public Retribution: Castilian Foral Law and the Blood Feud." *Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of*

Medieval Canon Law, edited by Kenneth Pennington (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2001): 799-814. She presented "The Militia of Mdina, 1350-1500," at the Thirty-seventh International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, May 5, 2002. At the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, England, in July she presented a paper entitled "Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Exchanges between the Hospitallers of Rhodes and their European Priors."

On September 22, 2002 she presented the Malta Study Center at the Malta Day celebrations, hosted by Chev. Joseph S. Micallef, Honorary Consul, at the St. Paul Town and Country Club.

Although the Malta Study Center contains the archives of the Knights of Malta from the National Library in Valletta, the Order has other archives and research centers located throughout Europe. Melitensia welcomes the opportunity to inform its readers about these other research centers and collections.

Hospitallers in the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary

Cruciferi domus hospitalis per Hungariam et Slavoniam, that is, “crusaders of the House of the Hospital in Hungary and Slavonia,” was how medieval charters referred to the professed monks of the Order of the Hospital who established their provinces east of the River Elbe, even though, technically, they were not crusaders at all. Who were these men, where did they come from, and what purposes made them settle in Central Europe, at the easternmost edge of the Latin West?

The Hospitallers first arrived in Hungary, Austria, and Bohemia around the mid-twelfth century, probably at the request of Queen Euphrosine, wife of King Géza II of Hungary (1141-1162) who, along with her daughter, practiced the virtue of charity. Characteristically, during the Middle Ages in Central Europe, long-lasting royal support was essential to the development of the military-religious orders because they lacked support from private donors. In the case of the Hospitallers in Hungary, royal generosity helped to establish some twenty commanderies by the end of the thirteenth century. After the acquisition of the houses of the dissolved Order of the Temple, this number reached three dozens. However, by the beginning of the fifteenth century the numbers decreased and membership slackened.

The composition of the leadership of the Hungarian-Slavonian Priory and that of the personnel of the commanderies clearly shows that this province was an integral part of the international network of the Order. Until the end of the thirteenth century, the common feature of the Hungarian-Slavonian priors was their supposedly foreign, admittedly non-identifiable, or rather obscure, origin. Presumably, most of them came from

France and, later, from Italy. Their origins became more apparent during the rule of the Neapolitan Angevin king, Charles Robert, in the early fourteenth century. At least two dozen Hospitallers of Italian origin can be identified in Hungary between 1315 and the 1340s. Most remarkable of them are perhaps the Italian Gagnanas or the Provençal Cornutis and Beaumonts. From the late fourteenth century onwards, on the basis of an agreement enacted in 1373, the priors were elected alternately from the Langues (*linguae*) of Italy and Provence. It seems that disregarding the period of the Great Schism (1378-1418), the agreement was in operation well into the fifteenth century.

As for the local administration, the high officials of the commanderies - commanders, priors and *custodes* - were also foreign, presumably French and Italian, until the end of the 1370s. This is particularly interesting in the view of the fact that nine commanderies acted as places of authentication (*loca creditibilia*). These were peculiar institutions that, similar to public notaries in Western Europe, issued charters to testify private legal transactions under their authentic seal upon the request of the parties involved. It seems that the native Hospitallers and those settled in Hungary preferred “the pen to the sword,” although they also fought against the infidel, especially the Ottoman Turks on the Balkans, and they were involved in other Hospitaller activities as well by running a few hospitals and baths for the needy in the region.

Despite the many losses of medieval documents - chiefly due to wars, especially against the infidel -, there are still more than one thousand extant charters to be found in archives that refer to the Hospitallers in Hungary. Most of these documents are in the custody of the medieval collection of the National Archives of Hungary (Budapest), but a

good number of these materials are kept in the Central Archives of the Order of Malta in the National Library of Malta (Valletta). For many scholars of the field, however, the most convenient way for consulting these, largely unpublished written sources leads to the Malta Center of the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library (Collegetown, USA) where one can find the microfilm copy of the Hospitaller charters from Valletta.

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Hunyadi, Zsolt. "Research Resources for Medievalists in Hungary," In *Issues and Resources for the Study of Medieval Central Europe*. eds. János M. Bak and Péter Banyó, Budapest-Cambridge, Mass.: CEU-CARA, 2001, pp. 111-139.

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