

# THE HOSPITALLERS OF RHODES AND THEIR VOW OF POVERTY IN THE 15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY (1420-1480)

PIERRE BONNEAUD  
INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR  
FRANCE

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## ABSTRACT

All brethren of the Order of the Hospital took the three monastic vows when they were admitted to the Order: personal poverty, chastity and obedience to their Master. The rule of the Hospital (circa 1120) and further early statutes forbade the brethren to hold private property and ordered them to live in the same state of poverty as the members of other regular orders established in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The purpose of this study, after examining the regulations in this respect, is to investigate to what extent the Hospitallers residing at the convent of Rhodes in the fifteenth century were faithful to their vow. At this period Rhodes was the head of the central government of the Order, under its Master, as well as a military stronghold in the Eastern Mediterranean, in face of the Mamluks of Egypt and the rapidly expanding Ottoman Turks. Three to five hundred brethren gathered for long periods of stay at the convent in order to resist any attack. We shall review in detail the ordinances and practices which ruled over this original religious as well as military community. As with most other regular religious orders, the practice of personal poverty had been deeply modified in comparison with the first times. The Hospitallers, at Rhodes as well as in their Western commanderies, were allowed to hold various forms of private property although within certain limits and their life at the convent was far from being ascetic. However after death their property was recovered by the Order<sup>1</sup>.

## KEY WORDS

Rhodes, Convent, Commanderies, Master, Poverty, Personal property, Usufruct, Statutes, *Spolia*.

## CAPITALIA VERBA

Rhodos, Conventus, Praeceptoriae, Magister, Paupertas, Proprii, Usufructus, Stabilimenta, *Spolia*.



In its original home in Palestine, the Order of the Hospital fully lived up to its character and statutes as a vocational charitable order between 1070 and 1180. The stages of this development took place first at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century under the Benedictine rule of the Cluniac monks of Saint Mary of the Latins with the development, under Brother Gerard, of the hospital of Jerusalem, which had been founded fifty years earlier by the merchants of Amalfi. However, around 1100, Brother Gerard and the laymen around him left their Benedictine affiliation to entrust divine services at the Church of John the Baptist, near the hospital, which they had made their own, to the twenty canons of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Shortly afterwards, however, in 1113, all formal links with the canons were broken when Pope Pascal II recognised the independence of the Hospital of Saint John in Jerusalem, placing it directly under his authority and converting it into an international religious order, granting it affiliated hospices in Europe.<sup>2</sup> A year later, the canons of the Holy Sepulchre became a regular order of canons, adopting the rule of Saint Augustine. The next key dates to conclude this very brief summary of the early days of the Hospital are the adoption of a rule with very strong Augustinian inspiration between 1120 and 1124, under the magistracy of Raymond du Puy. This was completed by four articles in 1153, when the whole rule was approved by Pope Eugene III. Faced with Muslim attacks against the Latin principalities of the Levant, and undoubtedly inspired by the example of the religious order of the Temple, founded in Jerusalem in 1120, the Order then gradually took on a military orientation made clear by the mention of brethren at arms under Master Gilbert d'Assailly between 1163 and 1169, and then by the establishment in 1182 of the general chapter of knight-brethren and sergeant-brethren alongside the priest-brethren. This development was recognised by Pope Alexander III in 1179.<sup>3</sup> Although it had become a military order, the Hospital by no means relegated its hospital and charitable vocation to a lower level.<sup>4</sup>

These early developments occurred during the boom or peak in the renewal of monasticism and religious orders. The Benedictines of Cluny were taking over the West, and the Cistercians, recognised by Pascal II in 1100, were contributing new demands for monastic austerity. The establishment of orders of regular canons looking towards the outside world and adopting the rule of Saint Augustine multiplied, notably with the canons of Saint Ruf of Avignon from 1039, the canons

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1. Used abbreviations: ACA, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó; ADHG, Archives Départementales de la Haute-Garonne; AHCB, Arxiu Historic de la Ciutat de Barcelona; AHPB, Arxiu Històric de Protocols de Barcelona; AOM, Archives of the Order of Malta; ASV, Archivio Segreto Vaticano; BNCF, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze.

2. About the early times of the Order see: Demurger, Alain. *Les Hospitaliers de Jerusalem à Rhodes, 1050-1317*. Paris: Tallandier, 2002, 55-61; Luttrell, Anthony, "The Earliest Hospitallers", *Montjoie, Studies in Crusade History in honour of H.E. Mayer*, Benjamin K. Zedar ed. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997; Riley-smith, Jonathan, *The Knights Hospitallers in the Levant, c. 1170-1309*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012: 15-26.

3. Beltjens, Alain. "La papauté et les querelles récurrentes, souvent fratricidas, qui opposaient les Hospitaliers aux Templiers". *Bulletin de l'Histoire et du patrimoine de l'ordre de Malte*, 24 (2011): 7-8.

4. Le Blévec, Daniel. *La part du pauvre, l'assistance dans les pays du Bas Rhone au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle au milieu du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2 vols. Rome: École française de Rome, 2000: I, 85-92.



of Saint Victor in Paris from 1108, and then those of Prémontré from 1120, and the order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, which we have already mentioned. Unlike the Templars, the new order of the Hospital was a closer relative to the movement for canonical piety than it was to the Benedictine monks. But be that as it may, the Rule of the Hospital rested, like that of other religious orders, on an ideal and an apostolic way of life and, in particular, on the promise to observe the three vows of obedience, chastity and poverty.

The purpose of our study is to look at the persistence of the vow of poverty and the degree of respect for the commitment among members of the Order of the Hospital at the end of the Middle Ages. It is necessary to distinguish the collective attitude of the Order towards the poor from that of the individual brethren. The original vocation of the Hospital led it to declare itself in service to the poor, exercised through the practice of alms and in Hospitaller establishments, throughout its history. In their bulls, the Masters declared themselves to be *pauperum Christi custos* and honoured “our lords the sick”. This unceasingly reaffirmed charitable activity, although it shrunk to almost nothing in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in many of the Order’s priories in the West, has been the subject of in-depth studies, particularly by Daniel Le Blévec. We do not intend to revisit this, although it must nevertheless have notably affected the mentality and way of life of members of the Order.<sup>5</sup>

The subject of our curiosity and our research is, instead, the way the brethren of the Hospital were living individually at the end of the Middle Ages in terms of their commitment to lead a life in accordance with apostolic poverty. We have already had the opportunity to deal with this theme concerning the Hospitallers of the Priory of Catalonia during the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and a considerable gap was found between the principle and reality.<sup>6</sup> The brethren and, above all, commanders, often had personal resources that allowed them to live comfortably or even with a degree of opulence. These resources, or at least those that remained, reverted to the Order on the death of their holders.

Today, we would like to complete this initial analysis by examining the behaviour of brethren in the context of their collective life on Rhodes. Here the master and the convent, with a multinational contingent of brethren, became established in 1310 after their expulsion from Acre and Palestine in 1291, followed by a brief period on Cyprus. Accountable only to the Pope, the Hospitallers of Rhodes constituted an *Ordenstaat* in the image of the Teutonic knights in Germany, Poland and what are now the Baltic States—an independent religious principality provided with all the attributes of sovereignty and led by the Master of the Order.<sup>7</sup> Our study is concerned with the sixty years between 1420 and 1480, a period when attacks against Rhodes by the Mamluks of the Sultan of Egypt and, especially, the Ottoman Turks after

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5. In addition to the reference cited above, see also the article by: Le Blévec, Daniel. “Pauvreté”, *Prier et combattre, Dictionnaire européen des ordres militaires au Moyen-Âge*. Paris: Fayard, 2009: 695.

6. Bonneaud, Pierre. *Le prieuré de Catalogne, le couvent de Rhodes et la Couronne d’Aragon, 1415-1447*. Millau: Conservatoire Larzac templier et hospitalier, 2004: 86-98.

7. Luttrell, Anthony. “The Island order State on Rhodes”, *Islands and Military orders, c. 1291-c. 1798*. Farnham-Burlington: Ashgate, 2013: 19-28.



the fall of Constantinople in 1453, required a greater Hospitaller presence in the eastern Mediterranean. The many archives from the time and several works by historians make it possible to look at the behaviour of brethren in terms of their vow of poverty.<sup>8</sup> Before going ahead with this, it may be useful to take a closer look at the rules and guidance given to brethren in this respect.

## 1. Statutory instructions with regard to the vow of poverty to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century

First of all, the legislative corpus included the rule of the Order adopted when Raymond du Puy was master between 1120 and 1153. Despite its brief nature and its age, the rule continued to be considered as fundamental and had to be read to the brethren four times a year. However, the essential duties and regulations were given in to the statutes adopted when the general chapters met at what were initially irregular intervals but, after 1420, became five-year periods. From the general chapter of Margat in 1206 to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a period of over 300 years, we know of fifty general chapters adopting statutes which were widely publicised on Rhodes and in the Order's Western priories and, judging by the number of known copies, appeared not only in Latin but also in various other languages. The Hospital also used the Custom and *Esgards*, or rules drawn from internal judgements to which the brethren were subject. Customs and *Esgards* were also published. The number of these statutes and customs and their diversity meant that several attempts at compilation were necessary, culminating with the recasting of all the texts carried out in 1489 under the leadership of Master Pierre d'Aubusson and Vice-Chancellor Guillaume de Caoursin, at the cost of abandoning a number of them.<sup>9</sup> This compendium, which had the advantage of greater readability thanks to the regrouping of the statutes in four parts and under seventeen different headings, also makes it possible to appreciate the rules and customs which had been judged worthy of preservation at the end of the Middle Ages.

To better guide our analysis we have used the recasting of 1489 published and documented, with the original text of each of the statutes preserved, by Jiri Hasecker and Jürgen Sarnowsky.<sup>10</sup> For the Rule, Customs and *Esgards*, we have also used the texts published by J. Delaville Le Roulx in the *Cartulaire général des*

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8. We will mainly use the archives of the Order in Malta in La Valetta, and the collection of documents from the same archive covering the 1421-1453 period, published by: Tsirpanlis, Zacharias. *Anecdota Eggrapha gia te Rodo kai ti Noties Sporades apo to archeio Joanton Ippoton, 1421-1423*. Rhodes: Ekdose Grapheiou Mesaio nikes Poles Rodou, 1995.

9. Delaville, Joseph. "Les statuts de l'ordre de l'Hôpital de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem". *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 48 (1887): 341-356; Demurger, Alain. *Chevaliers du Christ, les ordres religieux-militaires...*: 84-85; Luttrell, Anthony. "The Hospitallers' Early Statutes". *Revue Mabillon*, 14/75 (2003): 9-22.

10. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum, Die Statuten des Johanniterordens von 1489/93*. Göttingen: V und R Unipress, 2007.



*Hospitaliers de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem*.<sup>11</sup> The Customs and *Esgards* are those that were recompiled by brother Guillaume de Saint-Estène, while living in the Priory of Lombardy and later as commander of Cyprus, who was an eminent jurist between 1287 and 1303. Meanwhile, for the texts not appearing in the 1489 compilation, we have researched the statutes adopted by the general chapters in a manuscript from Perpignan, published by R. Cierbide, for the period 1120 to 1396, in the Hospitaller archives in Toulouse for the period 1396-1449 and manuscripts archived in Malta for the period 1449-1480.<sup>12</sup>

First of all we see that, in this collection of commandments and rules numbering almost one thousand, only about twenty of the statutes and a dozen *esgards* or customs deal with the brethren's commitment to poverty and their connections with the possession of goods or money. The essential points of these often repetitive documents instead concern the organisation of the order, careers, the exercise of the liturgy, the duty of obedience and punishments. In chapter I, the rule of Raymond du Puy imposes on the brethren, who are at the service of the poor, respect for the three monastic vows. The vow of poverty is expressed only in the absolute prohibition demanding that they "live without their own possessions". Another provision of the rule, in Chapter XIII, even declares that any brother who, at his death, has any property of his own may be refused a Christian burial. Chapter II, which says a little more about the way of life that poverty involves, informs the brethren that they cannot expect any more from the Order than the bread and water they have been promised and that their clothes must be humble "because the poor are unclothed and dirty".<sup>13</sup> The requirement for austerity, also found in the rules of other religious orders, is therefore clearly expressed, but later it is not renewed with the same vigour. The 1489 compendium introduced a provision stating that some instructions of the rule were unsuitable for the circumstances of the time, giving permission for them to be broken. However, the three substantial vows, including *vivere sine proprio*, were excluded from all exceptions.<sup>14</sup>

The statute of the general chapter of Margat of 1206 forbade brethren who were not commanders to give, receive, buy, sell or borrow anything in a transaction with a secular person without the agreement of their superior, except for the alms they might receive, which must immediately be passed on to the Master.<sup>15</sup> This statute is doubly interesting: on one hand, it warns brethren who are not commanders against all acquisition of goods or all transactions made on their own initiative, which is

11. Delaville, Joseph. *Cartulaire general de l'ordre des hospitaliers de Saint-Jean de Jerusalem, 1100-1310*, 4 vols. Munich: Omnia-Mikrofilmtchnik-GmbH, 1894-1906: I, 62-68 (doc. n° 70); II, 537-561 (doc. n° 2213).

12. Cierbide, Ricardo. *Edició crítica dels manuscrits catalans inèdits de l'orde de Sant Joan de Jerusalem (segles XIV-XV)*. Barcelona: Fundació Noguera, 2002; ADHG, documents H 13 and H 14; AOM.

13. Delaville, Joseph. *Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers...* 63 (doc. n° 70). 556 (Usage 121: "Cidit comment l'on doit recevoir un frère"); Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 100.

14. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 100: *Dispensatio observantiarum resgule reservatis tribus votis substantialibus ut in suo robore permanentibus*.

15. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 366 (AOM 69. f. 7v).



clearly within the logic of their vow of poverty, and, on the other, for commanders, who are not subject to such a warning, it seems to be understood that their position as commander may or must lead them to carry out transactions, notably receiving money or goods from people outside the order, even if this only concerns the contributions of their vassals and subjects. In this area they were therefore granted a degree of tolerance essential for the proper administration of the assets entrusted to them.

A notably different approach appeared after a statute of the Chapter of Acre in 1262, presided over by Master Hug Revel, who declared that no bailiff (undoubtedly this term must be understood as meaning all bailiffs of the convent, all priors and all commanders) on the point of death may make a will or leave anything to their servants, except for the wages they are owed. However, he may order the payment of his debts.<sup>16</sup> It is undoubtedly to be expected that, deprived of their own property and holding goods acquired from the Order, bailiffs could not make a will, but the statute seems to recognise that they had been able to use borrowed funds. Several later statutes confirm, moreover, that all brethren, and not just bailiffs, could, at their death, use the property they were leaving in order to pay their creditors. For example, a statute of 1293 orders that debts may be paid with the movable goods of deceased brethren, while half the livestock they possessed would go to the commanderie and the other half to the prior.<sup>17</sup> In 1347, it was added that the debts of deceased brethren could be paid from both their movable and immovable property *tam de hospiciis quam de rebus aliis*.<sup>18</sup> Finally, a last specification was provided in 1357: the immovable property of deceased brethren could only be used to settle debts only to the point to which it had been acquired from secular persons and did not form part of the Order's assets.<sup>19</sup> These resolutions therefore establish that, during their lifetime, the brethren of the Hospital were allowed to acquire personal property and to actually dispose of it. Master Foulques de Vilaret, who had conquered Rhodes, had a statute adopted, confirmed in 1332, agreeing that, during their lifetimes, the brethren could own property recovered from secular persons when this property had previously belonged to the Order.<sup>20</sup> Finally, another statute from 1330 compelled sick brethren to provide two brethren of their choice — a priest-brother and a knight or sergeant— with a list of their goods. If the sick man died, the holders of these lists had to pass them on to the dead man's superior. If he did not die, the list had to be given to the person who had made it, and those to whom it had been entrusted were held to absolute secrecy.<sup>21</sup>

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16. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 367 (AOM 69. f. 9r).

17. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 304-305 (AOM. 69, f. 11v [Chapter general at Limassol, Master Jean de Villiers]).

18. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 305 (AOM. 69, f. 18v-19r [Chapter general at Rhodes, Master Dieudonné de Gozon]).

19. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 305 (AOM. 69, f. 21r [Chapter general at Rhodes, Master Roger des Pins]).

20. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 369-370.

21. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 368 (AOM. 69, f. 15r [Chapter general at Montpellier, Master Hélon de Villeneuve]).



What was the nature of this property which the statutes scarcely describe? Was it the brethren' personal property, in contradiction of the rule? The debates caused by the settlement of the debts of the Prior of Catalonia, Guillem de Guimera, who died in 1396, provide the point of view of the Treasurer of Rhodes and the dead man's successor, the new Prior Pere de Vilafranca, on the matter.<sup>22</sup> Thanks to the revenues from his commanderies and his prioral chambers, Guimera had accumulated goods, which he had used for the benefit of his family. On his death, certain promises of gifts he had made to his nephews had not been kept and, moreover, many other creditors, claimed payment of their debts from the Order, invoking the various statutes we have just been examining. The Order's officers charged with deciding the matter first declared that no goods held by a brother who had taken the oath were personal property and that Guimera had improperly pledged the goods of the Hospital without authorisation, as all the brethren's goods belonged to the *Religion*, even though he may have had the use of them. The commanders were usufructuaries of the assets entrusted to them and the income they received from their office was to allow them to ensure the payment of the costs of their commanderies and to make their contribution to the finances of the Order—the *responsions*. All surpluses left by a dead man—his remainder, or *spolia*—were due to the Order and they were demanded immediately, once debts had been paid with the reservations indicated.

The Hospital therefore habitually allowed commanders and brethren to acquire and possess property which was recognised as being at their disposal in life, although it refused to classify this as personal property. The vow of poverty taken by a brother was only completely fulfilled at his death. The masterful study by Anthony Luttrell of the finances of the Commanders of the Hospital after 1306 sheds light on how many officers could become rich during their lives by accumulating *jocalia*—literally precious objects but in fact goods of all kinds: money, livestock, grain and buildings—always on condition that the assets of the commandery entrusted to them, called the *status*, were not in any way diminished.<sup>23</sup>

Through several statutes, the Order tried to surround itself with precautions in order to recover the property and possessions accumulated and made available to the brethren until the time of their death and also to prevent the confusion of these goods with the assets of the commanderies. So, a brother who had bought or acquired goods in another way was not allowed to sell them, give them or pawn them without the authorisation of the Master.<sup>24</sup> In a more personal domain, brethren were forbidden from baptising or freeing slaves and serfs, because the Order's assets would be reduced or affected by such decisions.<sup>25</sup> The *esgards* and

22. ACA. Arxiu del Gran Priorat, 434. We have analysed this tortuous conflict in: Bonneaud, Pierre. *Le prieuré de Catalogne...*: 89-90.

23. Luttrell, Anthony. "The Finances of the Commander in the Hospital after 1306", *La Commanderie. Institution des ordres militaires dans l'Occident médiéval*. Paris: Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2002: 277-306.

24. Cierbide, Ricardo. *Edició crítica dels manuscrits catalans...*: 274, 1295 (Odon des Pins); 366, 1366 (Raymond Bérenger).

25. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 367 (AOM. 69, f. 9r [Chapter general at Acre, 1262, Master Hugues Revel]).



customs issued took up certain prohibitions for the same purpose: brethren had to declare their personal property to the Master and could not acquire or sell new property or pawn the possessions of the commandery without his permission.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, as the time for returning goods held by the brethren into the hands of the Order was their death, many statutes, *esgards* and customs dealt with this subject. A statute of 1288 established the attribution of the goods of dead brethren who had had their commanderies attributed by the Master to a Western priory to the prior concerned, except when this commandery was a magistral chamber.<sup>27</sup> For the goods of deceased brethren *citra marem*—essentially Rhodes and its archipelago or Cyprus—depending on their nature, according to a statute of 1347, these goods could go to the convent church or to the Marshal, the Treasurer or the Master.<sup>28</sup> Any brother who seized part of the goods or harness of a prior, a commander or a dead brother would be stripped of the habit if the goods seized were worth more than one silver mark and would suffer the quarantaine if it was worth less.<sup>29</sup>

So, at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although some brethren undoubtedly had few means, others, thanks above all to the offices they had obtained, lived in comfort far from the apostolic poverty they professed. This, then, was the accepted situation. We now propose to examine aspects of it and its development by concentrating on the Hospitallers assembled in the Rhodes convent around the Master and high officers of the Order.

## 2. The way of life and careers of the brethren of the Hospital in the Rhodes convent

The term convent should not lead us astray. It did not in any way refer to an establishment or a place with a monastic character, but rather the assembly of the multinational community of brethren gathered in Rhodes and even in the Dodecanese islands conquered by the Hospital. These Hospitallers were placed under the authority of the Master and convent bailiffs, high officials each with their own office and representing the “*langues*”. The members of the different Western priories present on Rhodes were in effect grouped into bodies called *langues*, which were corporations initially seven in number, and then eight from 1462, according

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26. Delaville, Joseph. *Cartulaire general de l'ordre des Hospitaliers...*: 538 (docs. n° 7, 8, 9); 540 (doc. n° 29), 546 (doc. n° 80).

27. Cierbide, Ricardo. *Edició crítica dels manuscrits catalans...*: 265 (1288) (Jean de Villiers). What is meant by a magistral chamber is a commandery whose income belonged to the master, who appointed a Commander committed to pay the master a yearly pension.

28. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 306 (AOM. 69, f. 19r [Chapter general at Rhodes, 1347, Master Dieudonné de Gozon]).

29. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 306 (AOM. 69, f. 19r [Chapter general at Rhodes, 1347, Master Dieudonné de Gozon]).





to their origins and their priories.<sup>30</sup> Each *langue* was represented on the Master's Council by a convent bailiff and had its auberge, a meeting point, for debates and collective life.<sup>31</sup> In Rhodes town, the Hospitaller community occupied the area of an old Byzantine castle which was referred to by the name *collachium* and which included the Master's palace, the hospital, the church of Saint John, the auberges of the different *langues* and various houses where the brethren stayed.<sup>32</sup>

The brethren were subject to the rules, customs and instructions of their Order, under the authority of the Master and the high officers who surrounded him and shared his power. Matters were effectively dealt with by a collegiate and oligarchical system of government led by the Master elected for life who could make few decisions without his Council or without submitting to the control of the general chapters which, in principle, met every five years. These chapters made or ratified essential decisions and, for the adoption of statutes, they constituted a true legislative body as the Order's supreme internal authority.<sup>33</sup>

After a difficult period marked by the papal schism and the absence from the convent for almost twenty-five years of the Masters Juan Fernandez de Heredia and Philibert de Naillac, the general chapter of 1420, presided over by Naillac, marked the beginning of a new era. The presence on Rhodes of the brethren of the Order became much greater and was now essential for career development. The number of residents in the convent moved from between 200 and 300 between 1420 and 1440 to 350 in 1462 and 450 in 1478. Rhodes was, in fact, threatened during this period by the Mamluks of the Sultan of Egypt, who first laid siege to the island in 1444, and then, after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, by the Ottoman Turks, who multiplied their incursions before disembarking with great resources in 1480, but without succeeding in this new assault. Ninety per cent of the Hospitallers on Rhodes and the Dodecanese islands were therefore knight-brethren devoted to defending the Order's positions.

After the general chapter of 1420, the six masters who followed lived on Rhodes and did not stray far from it, with the exception of the Catalan Sacosta, who went to Rome, where he died, to attend the general chapter of 1466, which Pope Paul II had

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30. Sarnowsky, Jürgen. "Der Konvent auf Rhodos und die Zungen (lingue) im Johanniterorden (1421-1476)", *Ritterorden und Region: politische, soziale und wirtschaftliche Verbindungen im Mittelalter*. Torun: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 1995. The seven *langues* were those of France, Provence, Auvergne, Spain, Italy, England and Germany. After 1462, the Spanish *langue* was split into two *langues*, on one hand, the *langue* of Aragon, Catalonia and Navarre, and, on the other the *langue* of Castile and Portugal.

31. The convent bailiffs were: the Grand Commander for the *langue* of Provence, the Marshal for that of Auvergne, the Hospitaller for that of France, the Drapier to that of Spain and, after 1462, Aragon, the Admiral for that of Italy, the Turcopolier for that of England, the Grand Bailiff for that of Germany, and then, when the *langue* of Spain was divided into two, the chancellor for the *langue* of Castile-Portugal.

32. Luttrell, Anthony. *Rhodes Town, 1306. 1356*. Rhodes: City of Rhodes Office for the Medieval Town, 2003.

33. Sarnowsky, Jürgen. "The Oligarchy at Work, The Chapters General of the Hospitallers in the XVth Century (1421-1522)", *Autour de la première croisade*, Michel Balard, dir. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996: 267-276.



demanded be held near him.<sup>34</sup> With different personalities and unequal authority, these masters invested in the defence of the island against Muslim assaults, which were all repulsed. In the course of the period we are interested in, they presided over twelve general chapters, producing abundant legislation in all areas concerning the life of the Order, through the adoption of statutes and ordinances. All the brethren assembled together in the convent were closely linked to decision-making. A council, called the Complete Council, allowed the representatives of each *langue* to have their voice heard, not without some argument and uproar. After 1440, the Order suffered a financial crisis and considerable indebtedness, which imposed painful measures on the commanderies and brethren.<sup>35</sup>

It must be stressed that, during this whole period, the port of Rhodes had become an essential crossroads in the West's considerable trade with Egypt and Syria. Paradoxically, the fall of Constantinople, by disturbing the flow of trade with the North from the Aegean Sea and, to an even greater extent, from the Black Sea, led to peaks in traffic with more southerly regions, where Rhodes, considered to be a safe and well-governed place, occupied an excellent location. The Hospitaller brethren therefore rubbed shoulders with numerous merchants and sailors, largely Genoese and Catalans, living or stopping off on Rhodes. This is a quick sketch of the background against which we are going to examine the situation of the Hospitallers of Rhodes with regard to their way of life and the resources available to them.

The general chapters of 1420 and 1428 made the length of time spent at the convent the stated condition for the career development of knight-brethren and, in particular, for obtaining commanderies and higher offices. *Ancianitas*—the rank of seniority determining in which order and at which time each of them could gain access to one of the lucrative offices—was counted from the first time they arrived on Rhodes.<sup>36</sup> When the Master, in most cases, or sometimes the priors, decided to receive a new knight-brother or a sergeant into the order, he was ordered to go to the convent with harness, arms and horse or, failing this, to pay a *passagium* fixed in 1420 at 2,000 *livres tournois* for a knight or 1,500 for a sergeant.<sup>37</sup> For the new knights, the trip to Rhodes therefore represented considerable costs, which were paid by their families.

Sometimes these families granted their members received into the Order, generally younger sons of the line, the part of the paternal inheritance they had a right to, like the grant made in 1442 by the Catalan knight Roger Alamany de

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34. These masters were the Catalans Antoni de Fluvià (1421- 1437) and Pere Ramon Sacosta (1461-1467), the French Jean de Lastic (1437-1454), Jacques de Milly (1454-1461) and Pierre d'Aubusson (1476-1503), from the priory of Auvergne, and the Italian Battista Orsini (1467-1476).

35. Bonneaud, Pierre. "La crise financière des Hospitaliers de Rhodes au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle (1426-1480)". *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 42/2 (2012): 501-534.

36. Bonneaud, Pierre. "Le règle de l'*ancianitas* dans l'ordre de l'Hôpital, le prieuré de Catalogne et la *Castellania de Amposta* aux XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles", *The Hospitallers, the Mediterranean and Europe: Festrict for Anthony Luttrell*, Karl Borchardt, Nikolas Jaspert, Helen J.Nicholson, eds. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007: 221-232.

37. ADHG. H.13 f. 87 [Statute 33 of the general chapter of 1420].



Bellpuig in favour of his son Joan, who was to become a knight of the Hospital.<sup>38</sup> The family aid could also consist of an annual pension, like that of 100 Aragonese florins which the Councillor of Barcelona Pere Destorrent granted his son Francesc until he received his first commandery.<sup>39</sup> The beneficiaries could keep and use these sums until their death, as well as all donations or legacies they received afterwards from close relatives. At the opening of a paternal succession, they had the right to receive the legitimate and generally modest part the law of succession reserved for younger sons.<sup>40</sup> They could also benefit from gifts in wills, but such benefits were rarely granted within families, as legacies formed part of the *spolia* destined for the Order at the death of the beneficiary and would therefore be lost to the lineage.

The Treasurer of Rhodes ensured that the brethren living in the convent were provided for in various ways. Firstly, the auberges received *tabulae* or food expenses, which were then divided between the brethren of the *langue*. In 1466, the total spent on this amounted to eight thousand Rhodes florins.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile *soldee* or salaries were paid to the brethren in the month of September.<sup>42</sup> These amounted to 40 florins for each man on Rhodes, according to a first compilation of the statutes and customs made in 1446 at the instigation of Pope Eugene IV at the time of the general chapter in Rome.<sup>43</sup> This sum is, moreover, confirmed by the account of the Genoese merchant Anselme Adorno, who was received on Rhodes by the Master Batista Orsini in 1471, reporting that each brother “has for himself and his servant an empty house and receives the food allocated to him and forty silver florins to equip himself”.<sup>44</sup> Brethren who were on “caravan” —that is, patrolling on the Order’s galley — or garrisoning the fortresses of the island of Kos or Saint Peter’s Castle in Anatolia —enjoyed the same benefits.<sup>45</sup>

But, beyond the guaranteed minimum, many offices, with remuneration in addition to the benefits we have already mentioned, were allocated to brethren and officers. It can be considered that there were three levels of remuneration and different responsibilities. The lowest category generally covered brethren not provided with commanderies and consisted above all of military duties.<sup>46</sup> We might mention the four captains of the towers ensuring that the port and walls surrounding the town of Rhodes were guarded, each assisted by a lieutenant

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38. AHC.B. Arxiu notarial III, 1 Plec de Testaments 1363-1444. The Hospitaller had to receive 500 Aragonese florins. His two older brothers had also to pay him an alimony each of 20 florins per year until he became a commander.

39. AHPB. Joan Ubach, *Manuale Quartum Decimum* 1441-1444.

40. Bonneaud, Pierre. *Le prieuré de Catalogne...*: 87.

41. AOM. 377, f. 247r; 283, f. 35r.

42. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen, *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 313 (chapitre general de Rome de 1467; BNCF. fondo Magliabechiano, cl. XXXII, 37, f. 89r).

43. AOM. 1698, f. 84r.

44. *Itinéraire d’Anselme Adorno en Terre Sainte (1470-1471)*, eds. Jacques Heers, Georgette de Groer, Jean Adorne. Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1978: 365.

45. AOM. 359, f. 225r-225v; 381, f. 194v.

46. AOM 283, f. 35r-35v.



and having a total of eleven other brethren of the order, with wages consisting of between five and twenty florins a year. On the island of Rhodes, the guards (*custodes*) and captains of four castles received similar salaries, as did those who had been trusted to guard the three castles on Kos, garrisoned by 25 brethren of the order, and those of Nisyros, Kalymnos and Castellorizo. At Saint Peter's Castle in Anatolia, the garrison of 50 brethren was commanded and led by a captain, a higher level duty, and two constables. In addition, 40 brethren were boarding the galley on guard duty, known as "caravan" service.<sup>47</sup> Certain non-military offices should be added, like that of Commander of the Grain (*preceptor granerii*), Cellarer (*preceptor volte*) and that of the Lesser Commanderie (*parvus preceptor*) as well as the offices of Head of the Infirmary of the Hospital and Master of the Convent Stables. Each of these had a lieutenant who was also a Hospitaller. There were, then, at least fifty brethren performing duties whose remuneration, although modest, was added to the benefits and salaries they received in the same way as their fellow brethren.

At a higher level, there were offices whose holders were generally commanders, accompanied by greater responsibilities and remuneration. These included the duties of Captain of Saint Peter's Castle, who very frequently changed; those performed in the financial area by the Treasurer and the Head Keeper of the Treasury (*Conservator generalis*), and those concerning administration, justice and policing on the island of Rhodes, under the authority of the Master, who was its lord. The Chatelain of Rhodes, the Bailiff of the *commercium* and the Bailiff of the Island had jurisdictional, commercial and policing functions involving the enforcement of numerous rights which could result in profit for them. The rarity of legal training ruled Hospitallers out of true judicial duties, such as appeal judge, although there were some exceptions.<sup>48</sup>

But the highest level of office was held by the seven Conventual Bailiffs—eight from 1462—one from each *langue*: high officers who formed part by right of the Master's ordinary council, while members of the second level had access only to the complete council. The general chapter of 1433 had fixed the income received by Conventual Bailiffs at 300 florins a year, but, due to the financial crisis suffered by the Order, at the general chapter of 1466 this sum was reduced to 200 and to 100 for their lieutenants.<sup>49</sup> But these high officers were generally provided with the best commanderies and they therefore enjoyed much greater revenues.

The Master's household was also a source of remunerations or numerous favours. The chief officer there was the Seneschal, a Hospitaller very close to the Master and often a member of his family, who attended the ordinary council by right and controlled all the affairs of the island of Rhodes whose management and revenues belonged to the Master, without the interference of the *langues* and the brethren in the convent. Among the offices close to the Master assigned to the Hospitallers of Rhodes were the Master of the Household, the Master's Treasurer, the Chamberlain

47. AOM. 365, f. 258v.

48. With the exception of brethren Joan of San Marcial (1439-1447) and Michele de Castellacio (1447-1458). Sarnowsky, Jürgen. *Macht und Herrschaft im Johanniter orden des 15. Jahrhunderts, verfassung und verwaltung der Johanniter auf Rhodos (1421-1522)*. Münster: Lit Verlag, Vita Regularis 14, 2001: 665.

49. AOM. 283, f. 35r.



and the *Cubicularius* as well as Squires. Here we are ignoring the career opportunities for the priest-brethren and chaplains because, in 1462, under the authority of the Prior of the church of Saint John of the convent, they represented less than 10% of the authorised manpower—exactly 30 out of a total of 350. Although the Prior was by right one of the members of the ordinary council, the influence and revenues of the priest-brethren, provided with the benefices of their chapels, were considerably less than those of the knights.

Another form of revenue received on Rhodes came from gifts of property that the Master granted, by his own free will, to certain brethren. As lord of the island of Rhodes the Master, in effect, possessed its assets and the revenues it produced, generally in the form of long-lease property rights over land, vineyards, gardens, houses or other assets. The Master frequently granted Hospitallers the enjoyment of certain properties for life, as well as the products and income resulting from them. These could be agricultural manors, *casali*, such as Calamonia, given to the Grand Commander Jean de Claret in 1433, which Jean de Lastic recovered following Claret's death to grant it to the Commander of the Priory of Saint-Gilles, Pierre de Montlausin, in 1445.<sup>50</sup> For his part, the Bailiff of Majorca, Joan de Cardona, received the *casale* of Somides in 1467.<sup>51</sup> With Claret and Cardona it was a case of two influential high officers sitting on the Master's council. Montlausin, meanwhile, later became Prior of Toulouse. But agricultural donations could be more modest and could benefit Hospitallers of medium rank, consisting of vineyards, gardens<sup>52</sup> or houses, on Rhodes or off the island.<sup>53</sup> Although, at the death of the beneficiary, the Master normally recovered these properties to allocate them to other brethren, it was equally normal for him to authorise the free disposal and alienation of the objects of these gifts. So, in 1445, Jean de Lastic authorised the Master of his Household, brother Vicenç de Claramunt, to sell any houses, possessions and goods in Rhodes town that he had acquired or received from the master as gifts.<sup>54</sup>

By these different means, available to them on Rhodes, the brethren enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle and a certain degree of ease. But, above all, they used the convent to obtain commanderies, from which the surplus revenues, once expenses had been deducted, allowed them to achieve a degree of wealth. The rules of seniority (*ancianitas*) within the order had been specified since the general chapter of 1420. Time spent in the convent had become the required condition for obtaining a first

50. Tspirpanlis, Zacharias. *Anecdota Eggrapha gia te Rodo kai ti Noties...*: 267-268, 450-451 (docs. n° 33, 155).

51. AOM. 377, f. 220-221.

52. Tspirpanlis, Zacharias. *Anecdota Eggrapha gia te Rodo kai ti Noties...*: 596-597 (doc. n° 241); AOM 380, f. 210v; 382, f. 197r.

53. Tspirpanlis, Zacharias. *Anecdota Eggrapha gia te Rodo kai ti Noties...*: 398-399, 449-450 (docs. n° 124, 154); AOM 371, f. 81r.

54. Tspirpanlis, Zacharias. *Anecdota Eggrapha gia te Rodo kai ti Noties...*: 449-450 (doc. n° 154).



commanderie, called the *cabimentum*, and then to aspire to a better commanderie, known as a *melioramentum*, always depending on seniority in the convent.<sup>55</sup>

On Rhodes, the brethren developed the habit of meeting at the auberge of their *langue* to have their seniority and rights to commanderies recognised, obviously at the cost of many differences and quarrels.<sup>56</sup> The right to declare their rank in terms of seniority among themselves and by common agreement and to decide their access to offices was gradually recognised, although the Master reserved for himself, or with the agreement of his council, a right to award commanderies by grace and favour, a right later limited by the general chapter of 1462 to one commandery per priory every five years.<sup>57</sup> A Hospitaller could obtain two or even more commanderies by combining the one received for his *cabimentum*, then replaced by the one for his *melioramentum* with one or more received through the grace of the Master.<sup>58</sup> These were commanderies forming part of the 22 Western priories, but the Master and his council also had the authority to award the five commanderies of the Levant: Cyprus (the richest and most prestigious) and those of Kos, Nisyros, Sycaminis and the Morea. Finally, access to the office of prior in the West was normally reserved for conventual bailiffs of the outgoing prior's *langue*. Each prior was four or five commanderies assigned in his priory: his "chambers". In all these cases it became normal for the grant of commanderies and high offices to involve long stays on Rhodes, in accordance with the rules of the order, and, from 1420 onwards, stays on Rhodes of the knight-brethren of the Hospital of all origins became longer and more frequent.

Brethren living on Rhodes who had just obtained a first commanderie generally entrusted its management to a member of their family or, with the Master's agreement, farmed it out. They then tried to climb the ladder allowing access to both the functions of the oligarchy that ran the affairs of the order and, even more importantly, to the revenues of the richest commanderies. There could be a very strong contrast between the little cash available to the holders of small commanderies and the opulence achieved by the holders of high office from the benefices they accumulated. This situation was, moreover, recognised when it was decided in 1450 by the Master Jean de Lastic that commanders living on Rhodes could no longer have their food and their horses' forage paid for by the convent. However, so as not to excessively penalise the holders of low-income commanderies, it was added that

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55. For the operation of complex *ancianitas* rules, that cannot be fully explained here, see: Bonneaud, Pierre. "La règle de l'*ancianitas*..."

56. Bonneaud, Pierre. *Els Hospitalers catalans a la fi de l'Edat mitjana. L'orde de l'Hospital a Catalunya i a la Mediterrània, 1396-1472*. Lleida: Pagès Editors, 2008: 281-307.

57. AOM. 282, f. 114v.

58. Thus, in 1435 the Catalan commander Lluís de Mur headed the commandery of L'Espluga Calba in the priory of Catalonia with those of Aliaga and Castellote in the *Castellania de Amposta* together with the bailiwick of the duchies of Athens and Négrepont (commander of Sycaminis). Then, in 1460, Joan de Cardona headed the rich commanderies of Masdeu, L'Espluga de Francoli and L'Espluga Calba, in the priory of Catalonia with the bailiwick of Mallorca. It is true that these two Hospitallers who belonged to the Catalan high nobility were protégés of King Alfonso V of Aragon, the Magnanimous. See: Bonneaud, Pierre. "Un débouché fréquent pour les cadets des différentes aristocraties catalanes: étude sur 283 chevaliers de l'ordre de l'Hôpital au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle (1396-1472)". *Bulletin de la Société et du patrimoine de l'ordre de Malte*, 22 (2009): 4-35.



those among them who received less than one hundred Rhodes florins a year would receive an extra sum from the Treasury to top their income up to this amount, later reduced at the general chapter of 1467 to sixty florins.<sup>59</sup> The financial crisis of the Order had the effect of subjecting the commanders to these cuts by the Treasury. From 1440 the *responsions* normally representing around a quarter of the income from each commanderie were replaced or increased by *annates*, which meant a rise in contributions to half and even, between 1462 and 1466, to three quarters of the annual income. Although the response to these requirements by the commanders was very mediocre, their revenues were reduced. Despite everything, there were many brethren on Rhodes who had often substantial savings either coming from their families, their commanderies or their offices in the Levant.

### 3. Personal property acquired by the Hospitallers of the convent

What can we say about the use of these savings, and notably about the acquisition of property that they made possible? Brethren frequently brought property: houses, vineyards or gardens, which the Master could then give them permission to freely sell. So, the nephew of Master Jean de Lastic, Guillaume de Lastic, commander of Lyon and the Master's Seneschal, was given permission in 1450 to sell *in perpetuum* several vineyards for 120 Rhodes ducats to a Rhodian wall builder (*murator*). These vines had previously been bought by brother Valérien de Challus, the Seneschal's lieutenant, deceased, from a certain Nicoletta.<sup>60</sup> In 1453, brother Jean Perrini sold houses, gardens and two buildings in the *collachium* of Rhodes for 280 florins to Juan Ram, the Aragonese commander of Aliaga and Villed.<sup>61</sup> Ram then became the Master's Seneschal and subsequently Commander of Cyprus, and he perhaps acquired other possessions in the *collachium*, as Master Orsini, disposing of his remainder almost 20 years later, sold these houses, gardens and other property in the *collachium* to brother Nicolas Figherols for 900 florins —three times the initial purchase price.<sup>62</sup> The pious foundations instituted by the Hospitallers of Rhodes, notably to celebrate masses for the repose of their souls paid for by the revenues of the properties they possessed and which they had set aside for the purpose in their *despropiamentum*, show what these properties may have consisted of. So, in 1431 Raymond Roger of Erill, drapier of the convent and lieutenant to the Master Antoni de Fluvià, set aside the revenues from seven shops or warehouses he owned in the square of the *commercium* of Rhodes for this purpose.<sup>63</sup> Almost sixty years later in 1488, the foundation of Jaume de la Geltrú, Prior of Catalonia and lieutenant to the Master Pierre d'Aubusson, consisted of five

59. Tsirpanlis, Zacharias. *Anecdota Eggrapha gia te Rodo kai ti Noties...*: 573-575 (doc. n° 228).

60. Tsirpanlis, Zacharias. *Anecdota Eggrapha gia te Rodo kai ti Noties...*: 567-571 (doc. n° 226).

61. Tsirpanlis, Zacharias. *Anecdota Eggrapha gia te Rodo kai ti Noties...*: 728-734 (doc. n° 317).

62. AOM. 381, f. 202v-203r.

63. AOM. 53, f. 38v-39v.



shops, two windmills, a building, a vineyard and some land.<sup>64</sup> These two cases involved very high-ranking officers who played a big role in the government of the Order, but many humbler brethren could also accumulate a good number of properties. In 1452, brother Bernard Serp, of the priory of Saint-Gilles, who had spent a long time on the island of Kos, where he had held several offices, had acquired movable and immovable property on Kos including vineyards, fields, houses, a mill, a herd of fat and thin cattle and many movable goods. At his request, Master Jean de Lastic gave brother Bernard permission to sell all his property and receive the proceeds, as he appears to have been an elderly man who wanted to live “honourably and decently” in the Rhodes convent.<sup>65</sup>

Many Hospitallers also owned slaves. In 1436, Fluvià authorised Joan de Vilagut, *Castellán de Amposta*, to free some of his many slaves and, in 1446, Lastic agreed that brother Miquel d’Olzinelles could free his young Russian slave Louis when he was on the way to Alexandria to negotiate a truce with the Mamluks.<sup>66</sup> The existence of slaves owned by the Hospitallers of Rhodes is known to us from the licences granting their freedom issued by the Master at the request of these Hospitallers, sometimes demanding that they continued to provide full-time services.<sup>67</sup> These licences were necessary because of the reduction in the Order’s assets involved as, on the death of the Hospitallers who owned them, the slaves became part of their *spolia* and returned to the ownership of the Treasury until they were freed or resold. In 1439, Master Jean de Lastic sent an emissary to the Genoese authorities on the island of Cyprus who were holding slaves that had belonged to the deceased Hospitaller Manuel de Cabrera. Master Lastic was claiming the return of these slaves in the name of the Treasury which now held Cabrera’s rights.<sup>68</sup>

The number of slaves living on Rhodes at the time of the final departure of the Hospitallers in 1523 was estimated at 3,000 by Master Villiers de l’Ile Adam, but the archives of the Order tell us little about the organisation of a true slave market.<sup>69</sup> Mentions of the slave trade are, however, frequent in the safe-conducts given to merchants, particularly the Catalans and the Genoese, who were authorised to enter the port of Rhodes. Slaves could be disembarked and traded, subject to the payment of the *gabelle* and *commercium* taxes, in the same way as other goods.<sup>70</sup> It is clear that, because of its geographical position and because its port was frequented by merchant and pirate ships, Rhodes was a transit point for the slave trade. We know that in 1455, the ship of the Genoese Pietro Lomelino embarked 74 slaves on Rhodes, who were taken to Syracuse on the account of Catalan merchants.<sup>71</sup>

64. AOM. 53, f. 30r-30v.

65. Tsirpanlis, Zacharias. *Anecdota Eggrapha gia te Rodo kai ti Noties...*: 633-635 (doc. n° 262).

66. AOM. 352 f. 66r; 357, f. 233r.

67. Tsirpanlis, Zacharias. *Anecdota Eggrapha gia te Rodo kai ti Noties...*: 220 (doc. n° 2).

68. Tsirpanlis, Zacharias. *Anecdota Eggrapha gia te Rodo kai ti Noties...*: 368-372 (doc. n° 104).

69. Vatin, Nicolas. *L’ordre de Saint-Jean de Jerusalem, l’empire ottoman et la Méditerranée orientale entre les deux sièges de Rhodes, 1480-1522*. Louvain-Paris: s. n., 1994: 31; Verlinden, Charles. *L’esclavage dans l’Europe médiévale*. Gand: s. n., 1977: II, 975-977.

70. See, among others: AOM. 384, f. 4r; 22v-34r.

71. Heers, Jacques. *Gênes au XVe siècle. Activité économique et problèmes sociaux*. Paris: SEVPEN, 1961: 403.





A good number of slaves remained on the island after having been bought there or were even kept by those who had captured them. The Order used them particularly for work such as construction or repairing fortifications. In 1470, faced with the Turkish threat to the Rhodes archipelago, the Commander of the island of Kos, Jaume de la Geltrú, needed four “caravans” of slaves, including those he already had available, to repair the walls of Naranja castle.<sup>72</sup> We have little information about the way the slaves were acquired by the brethren. Purchase was certainly the most normal method, sometimes between brethren, as shown by the case of brother Antonio de Ubaldo, who lived on Cyprus and bought “certain slaves” from brother Rubinetus Puyisin, of the Priory of France, for a price of forty-seven Rhodes ducats. The purchaser had to pay this sum to the Genoese merchant living on Rhodes, Bartolomeo Doria, who had advanced the funds by means of a bill of exchange.<sup>73</sup>

Officers and brethren living on or passing through Rhodes could also possess various boats or use chartered ships hired from third parties. These were rarely heavy ships, round ships or galleys, but rather lighter vessels of more modest size: *fustas*, *gripariae*, biremes, whaleboats and galiots. We know of about twenty cases concerning ten Catalan, four French, five Italian and two English Hospitallers before 1480, but the true number is certainly higher.<sup>74</sup> The possession of boats was a source of profit, for example when they were charged with carrying out certain kinds of transport, like the whaleboat belonging to Louis de Manhac, Commander of Cyprus, going to Sicily to be loaded with wheat in 1461, or that of the Commander of La Rochelle, Bertrand Jameron, who received a safe-conduct from the Master to go to the West to procure supplies in 1464.<sup>75</sup>

But, when ships were armed, which was generally the case, corsair or piracy operations in the Mediterranean were much more fruitful. Corsair operations, authorised by the Master and exercised against the infidels, were legitimate. We know of a corsairing licence granted by the Master's lieutenant in 1413 to two Hospitallers of the *langue* of France.<sup>76</sup> However, after this we have found no other mention of such licences before the general chapters of Rhodes in 1462 and Rome in 1466. The port of Rhodes drew profit from piracy because those who practised it, very often Catalan and Genoese sailors, were generally authorised by the Master to unload and sell their booty on the Hospitallers' island after paying their *gabelle* and *commercium* taxes. There is no shortage of references to the exercise of piracy by brethren of the Order, or to

72. AOM. 74, f. 47v.

73. Tsirpanlis, Zacharias. *Anecdota Eggrapha gia te Rodo kai ti Noties...*: 689-690 (doc. n° 298). For other forms of acquisition, see also: Tsirpanlis, Zacharias. *Anecdota Eggrapha gia te Rodo kai ti Noties...*: 284-285, 768-771 (docs. n° 47, 340).

74. These were the Catalans Antoni Pere Torelles, Gilabert de Loscos, Joan Claver, Francesc Pallers, Galceran de Toroella, Jaume de la Geltru, Guillem de Castellvi, Jordi Saplana, Galvany Tolsa and Lluís de Caramany, the French Jean de Cavaillon, Jean Dauphin, Bertrand Jameron, Louis de Manhac and Gui de Montarnaud, the Italians Fantino Quirini, Andrea de la Croce, Piero Bombardi, Bernardo Vilandri and Jacobo Spinachi and the English John Langstrother and John Weston.

75. AOM. 371, f. 77v; 374, f. 229r-229v.

76. Luttrell, Anthony. *The Hospitaller State on Rhodes and its western provinces, 1306-1462*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999: VIII, 183.



the disputes the division of the spoils could lead to. In 1443, the Catalan Commander of Granyena, Gilabert de Loscos, had taken all the booty in an operation against the Turks to the great detriment of his two associates, who claimed their share.<sup>77</sup> In 1462, the two brethren Francesc de Boxols and Aymeric Despilles, who were in charge of a galley or trireme belonging to the Prior of Catalonia, Jaume de la Geltrú, complained that the latter did not give them enough of the profits of their activity.<sup>78</sup>

However, the welcome Rhodes reserved for pirates exposed it to many hostile reactions when the pirates attacked Christian embarkations, notably Venetian ones, and, as the Turkish threat worsened, the Order realised it could not expose itself to making enemies other than the Turks in the drift towards piracy. The general chapter of Rhodes in 1462 therefore prohibited brethren from the convent, under penalty of being stripped of the habit, from arming any boat without a licence from the Master or of taking boats from Christians or even from infidels within a protected area between the islands and the Turkish coast.<sup>79</sup> Another provision excluded all Hospitallers with less than five years' residence in the convent from the grant of a licence and even imposed the handing over of a guarantee.<sup>80</sup>

#### 4. The limits of tolerance

Besides the fact that most expenses of the brethren were taken care of by the convent, the remunerated performance of various duties, the receipt of income from commanderies associated with the right to use the surplus once the costs and the *responsions* were paid and, finally, the right to possess property on Rhodes as diverse as houses, livestock, slaves and ships to draw profits and additional revenues clearly show that the community of Hospitallers on Rhodes was far from a model of apostolic austerity. However, the vow of poverty continued to be made in the ceremony admitting new brethren, and the Order did not seem to consider that the rule and the statutes in this matter were being systematically flouted. We shall try to explain why.

Certain limits were imposed on the brethren. Two important statutes were adopted during the rule of Master Antoni de Fluvià at the general chapters of 1428 and 1433, warning against the temptation of profit and of handling of money.<sup>81</sup> The first of them prohibited brethren from practising usury, that is making illicit gains with their money, under penalty, for a commander, of being deprived of his

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77. AOM. 355, f. 144r.

78. AOM. 372, f. 82r-82v.

79. AOM. 282, f. 114v.

80. For Rhodes in the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, see: Vatin, Nicolas. *L'ordre de Saint-Jean de Jerusalem...*: 88-89.

81. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen, *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 379-380 (BNCF. fondo Magliabechiano, cl. XXXII, 37, f. 56r, 1428) and 381 (BNCF. fondo Magliabechiano, cl. XXXII, 37, f. 62r, 1433).



commandery and of not being able to obtain another for ten years, while a simple brother would lose his seniority and his right to a first commandery. The money from the illicit transactions would have to be paid to the Treasury. The second statute was entitled *De hiis qui faciunt mercantias*, or “Concerning those who practice trade”. The subject of the ban was the purchase of all goods with the intention of selling them on, although an exception was allowed for brethren coming to the convent or leaving who had bought cloth for resale in case of need. The reasons set out stated: “According to the Gospel no-one may serve two masters and all members of religious orders must reject the vanities of this world and greed for material goods.” Any guilty brother would suffer quarantine and have his goods confiscated. Half of them would be given to the person who had denounced the guilty brother and the other half given to the Treasury.

These two provisions therefore reminded the Hospitallers of the requirements of the Gospel and their status as members of a religious order when faced with the temptation of profit. They also clearly form part of the strong prohibition by the papacy of the practice of lending at interest, even though formulas practised by the Order, such as bills of exchange or Catalan *censals*, actually allowed licit borrowing at costs comparable to rates of interest. But these prohibitions must also be placed in the context of booming trade of the Eastern Mediterranean in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the role Rhodes played as a crossroads in it. In another study yet to appear, we have been able to identify the prolonged presence on Rhodes of 200 Italian, Catalan or French merchants between 1420 and 1480.<sup>82</sup> These merchants, a large number of whom lent money in various ways to the Treasury of the Order to help it deal with the financial crisis it was going through, were constantly in contact with the brethren of the convent, some of whom came from their own families. There was no shortage of opportunities, then, to use the available funds these brethren enjoyed for trading or for financial operations, as Fluviaà moreover stated in explaining the reasons for the statute forbidding the practice of trade among the Hospitallers. Some brethren could even be associated with lay people in the possession of armed ships, as the Master’s Council decreed in 1467 that a Hospitaller could sell his boat to another brother but that if the purchaser was a layman he had to retain ownership of at least half of it.<sup>83</sup>

In 1450, Pope Nicholas V declared that he had learned that many brethren of the Order on Rhodes were carrying out usurious operations.<sup>84</sup> It appeared that not only the Master and the Treasury were resorting to loans with interest but that certain Hospitallers were privately lending to merchants and even perhaps financing commercial operations with them. The Pope ordered three officers of the convent to prohibit such practices and, in 1478, the general chapter decided on heavy penalties for

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82. Bonneaud, Pierre. “The Influential Trade Community of Western Merchants in Hospitaller Rhodes during the Fifteenth Century (1421-1480)”, *Union in Separation. Trading Diasporas in the Eastern Mediterranean. 1421-1480, International Conference, Heidelberg, 17-19 February 2011*. Heidelberg: forthcoming.

83. AOM. 282, fl. 167r.

84. ASV. reg. vat. 393, f. 102v-103v.



brethren who practised usury.<sup>85</sup> At the 1466 Chapter General in Rome, called by Pope Paul II, in clear defiance of Master Pere Ramon Sacosta and in an effort to put an end to the indebtedness of the order, the bishops of the Curia who the pope had appointed to guide and control the debates had two statutes adopted, one on the austerity of the clothing that must be worn by brethren and the other limiting their rights to go out of the walls of the *collachium*.<sup>86</sup> While none of these statutes referred to the vow of poverty or to the use of the property of the Hospitallers of Rhodes, the Pope fully intended to impose strict conduct more in accordance with religious requirements, and ordered the text of the decisions of the chapter should be read publicly three times a year.<sup>87</sup>

But the real application of the vow of poverty consisted of the absolute ban on making wills, as we have already indicated about the rules and statutes that documented it.<sup>88</sup> This ban allowed the Order to consider that all property that passed into and remained in the hands of the brethren belonged to the *Religion*, even if it had been acquired by them or made available to them. In this way, the text and the form of the vow of poverty, according to which Hospitallers must live without their own property, were respected. It is necessary to examine, firstly, how the return of property to the Order after the death of a brother was handled and, secondly, the measures that were taken to prevent the prior disappearance or diversion of this property.

Property left after death, called the remainder or the *spolia*, was acquired by the Treasury or, in certain cases, by the Master, particularly if the brethren belonged to his Household, held offices on the island of Rhodes or were Commanders of the magistral chambers.<sup>89</sup> There might be considerable sums of money or objects of great value, particularly in the case of masters, high officers or commanders, who were particularly well provided for. There could also be the commander's livestock, slaves, houses, gardens or even ships. The ban on making a will could be partially lifted by the grace of the Master. The different examples found always concern high offices close to the Master, such as Garcia de Torres, Bailiff of the *commercium* and Bailiff of the Duchy of Athens (commanderie of Sycaminis), authorised by Fluvia to dispose of half his movable and immovable property at his death, on the understanding that the immovable property had been acquired by Torres and did not come from the assets of his commanderies.<sup>90</sup> Meanwhile, Master Pere Ramon Sacosta granted Francesc de Boxols, Captain of Saint Peter's Castle, the right to leave one third of his movable property, and granted similar rights to Jaume de la Geltrú, Prior of Catalonia, for all his movable property worth up to 1,000 Venetian ducats,

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85. AOM. 283, f. 167v.

86. AOM. 283, 37r-37v: *De honesto vestita fratrum et de incensu et deambulacione fratrum in conventu Rhodi*. Also: Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen, *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 223-224.

87. AOM 283, f. 142.

88. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen, *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 6-7.

89. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen, *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 306 (AOM. 69, f. 19r, 1347) Conflicts over the allocation of spoils sometimes arose, such as in 1471, when the master Battista Orsini and the Treasury fought over the *spolia* of John Langstrother, Prior of England who was *Seneschal* of the master (AOM. 74, f. 89r-89v).

90. AOM. 348, f. 88r (1428).



as well as Ramon Jou, his Seneschal, for one fifth of his movable property.<sup>91</sup> The intervention of the Pope was event sought when, in 1444, Eugene IV granted Lluís de Mur, who was provided with three commanderies in Catalonia and Aragon and that of Sycaminis in Greece, the right to leave a house he owned in Barcelona and which did not form part of the assets of his commanderies.<sup>92</sup> He could also leave up to 3,000 Aragonese florins of legitimately acquired movable property included in his commanderies to members of his family. It is true that the Pope intervened at the request of the Commander's brother, Dalmau de Mur, Archbishop of Zaragoza and Chancellor of the King of Aragon.

Such exemptions from the ban on making a will were, however, exceptional. Instead, all brethren were invited to make their *despropiamentum*, an act that the general chapter of 1420 had made compulsory before any boarding for voyage.<sup>93</sup> By this means, the deceased could express his last wishes through provisions concerning the settlement of his debts, the fate of his slaves or tolerated gifts to family or servants, without the principle of the Order's rights over the *spolia* being questioned. Through their *despropiamenta*, Hospitallers could also leave goods to the *lanque* they belonged to or to a foundation which, thanks to the revenues from the property, would have masses said for the repose of their souls. In 1422, through his *despropiamentum*, the *Castellán de Amposta*, Gonzalvo de Funes, left his goods for the repairs needed for the Hospitaller fortress of Saint Peter's Castle. But the two commanders in charge of settling his remainder came up against the deceased's creditors, who required the payment of the debts owed to them from the movable goods, as established by the statutes.<sup>94</sup>

This case shows the numerous difficulties found in recovering the property brethren had enjoyed in their lifetimes, notably due to their debts, which would amount to more than they would have left. This was, for example, the case of Master Batista Orsini at his death in 1476.<sup>95</sup> Sometimes the property had been diverted or confiscated by third parties, or even by other Hospitallers close to the deceased. In 1450, the Master had to require the Prior of Catalonia, Gilabert de Loscos, to return eight hundred Aragonese florins which his predecessor, Felip d'Hortal, had given him in his *despropiamentum*.<sup>96</sup> The general chapter of 1471 entrusted two officers with inquiring into the absence of remainder from the Commander of La Rochelle, Bertrand Jammeron, as it was very well known that the commander had been rich and had lived lavishly.<sup>97</sup>

The Hospital often lacked control and was powerless against the use against its own interests of property held by brethren, and even its dissipation due to a lack

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91. AOM. 375, f. 60r-61r (1466).

92. ASV. Reg. Vat. 363, f. 24v-25r.

93. Haesecker, Jiri; Sarnowsky, Jürgen, *Stabilimenta Rhodiorum Militum...*: 375.

94. AOM. 346, f. 85v-86r.

95. Bosio, Giacomo. *Dell'Istoria della sacra religione e illustrissima militia di San Giovanni Gierosolomitani*. Venice: appresso Giacomo Albrizzi, 1629: II, 361.

96. AOM. 362, f. 79v-80r.

97. AOM. 380, f. 152r-153r.



of scruples, desire for money or personal ambition. The statutes established certain safeguards which we have already mentioned: firstly the ban on selling, lending or pawning the goods held by brethren without permission from the Master. Moreover, there are the frequent authorisations giving us knowledge of some of the property in the hands of the brethren on Rhodes. Permission was also necessary if brethren wanted to take care of family business, participate, for example, in successions, or be legal guardians, to prevent them using their property for the benefit of those close to them. Licences granted to brethren to leave the convent were often in given so that they could go to the West and deal with family business, sometimes to receive or also to dispose of family assets.<sup>98</sup> But such precautions were often illusory.

## 5. Conclusion

To make a judgment on the evident mismatch between the brethren of the Hospital, their original vow of poverty and the clear conscience they seemed to enjoy, it is useful to look at the way other religious communities behaved at the end of the Middle Ages. We would first point out that, from their origins, the canons of cathedral chapters had the right to possess their own property and dispose of it freely. Under the prebend system, they divided the revenues from the property of their cathedrals. It is true that they were clerics of the secular Church and did not take the vow of poverty.<sup>99</sup> But among the regular religious orders who were committed to practising apostolic poverty, mismatches had become the norm since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In Benedictine monasteries, the holders of the different offices disposed of the income associated with their duties as they saw fit and, frequently, “in many places an act of division cut the monastery’s property into as many lots as there were members of the house. Each received his part and managed it like a prebend”.<sup>100</sup> In the mendicant orders, where strict poverty had been the emblem, individuals only gave up their own property in theory. Many Dominicans and Franciscans had access to remunerated posts with princes or other influential people, and preferred the comfort of town lodgings to communal life in their friaries.<sup>101</sup> Examples of Dominicans possessing property and being able to dispose of it at their deaths also exist. Already in 1315, the Dominican Jacques de Lausanne, who owned land and other property, had left them to his mother, whom he had made his universal heir.<sup>102</sup> It does not seem that he obtained a papal licence to do

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98. For example, see: AOM. 357, f. 92v-93r; 360, f. 73r-73v; 362, f. 78r; 365, f. 62r; 369, f. 64v.

99. See: Millet, Hélène, *Les chanoines du chapitre cathédral de Laon, 1272-1412*. Rome: École française de Rome, 1982.

100. Rapp, Francis. *L'Église et la vie religieuse en Occident à la fin du Moyen Âge*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1971: 217.

101. Rapp, Francis. *L'Église et la vie religieuse en Occident...: 220-221*.

102. Morard, Martin. “Les testaments des frères: Jacques de Lausanne († 1321), dominicain et propriétaire”, *Économie et religion. L'expérience des ordres mendiants (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Nicole Bériou, Jacques



this, although, faced with the multiplication of the personal possessions of friars in monastic or mendicant orders, authorisations to make wills granted by popes also multiplied.<sup>103</sup>

It can therefore be considered that the possession of property by the Hospitallers forms part of a trend towards general tolerance among all religious orders. However, in terms of the ban on making wills, with the reservations or minimal exceptions we have pointed out, the application of the statutes of the Order was very strict, unlike the practice noted among the friars of mendicant orders. After the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, reform movements initiated by the orders, known as “observances”, became generalised, in a desire to re-establish the apostolic purity of the early days in these orders. This move was not accepted by all of them, leading to internal divisions and even splits. The military orders and the different obediences of Hospitallers remained apart from these movements.<sup>104</sup>

In 1338, Benedict XII had launched a series of inquiries aimed at restoring the order in the Hospital, which was charged with “living in luxury and lax morals and failing in its charitable and military activities”, but this initiative had scant results, as did the papal inquiry ordered by Gregory XIII in 1373.<sup>105</sup> In the following century, the initiatives of two popes reveal the persistence of papal criticism. In 1455, Calixtus III ordered his legate in the Levant, Cardinal Trevisano, to inform the Master and the brethren of the convent of his desire to see a greater role granted to the priest-brethren, as in former times. In his eyes, the influence of the knight-brethren had become harmful and excessive. However, a few months later he cancelled these instructions.<sup>106</sup> We have already mentioned the decisions imposed by Paul II at the general chapter in Rome in 1466 to achieve stricter dress and discipline the movements of the brethren of the convent. But none of these interventions concerned the possession of personal property.

The evidence that this was being allowed elsewhere cannot alone explain the Order's tolerance of a model of life far from the apostolic ideal of poverty. Other reasons must be sought in the Order's mission itself, in the organisation's imperatives or in the identity of its brethren. Unlike the mendicant friars, the Hospital did not exercise the ministry of the word and, unlike monks, its reason for being was not contemplation and the liturgy. While obligations and the rites of devotion clearly had an important place in the lives of all brethren, the liturgy was, above all, the business of the priest-

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Chiffolleau, dirs. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2009: 403-415.

103. Morard, Martin. “Les testaments des frères: Jacques de Lausanne...”: 393-403.

104. On observance movements, see, among others: Rapp, Francis, “Réformes et inertie, II. Le combat pour la stricte observance”, *Histoire générale du christianisme, des origines au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Jean-Robert Armogathe, Pascal Montaubin, Michel-Yves Perrin, dirs. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010: VII, 159-177.

105. Luttrell, Anthony. “The Spiritual Life of the Hospitallers of Rhodes”, *The Hospitaller State on Rhodes and its Western Provinces...: IX*, 89-90.

106. ASV. reg. Vat., 444, f. 23r-25v.



brethren who, although numerous in the priories, were a small minority on Rhodes.<sup>107</sup> Hospital activity, which had practically disappeared in the Western priories in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, became emblematic in the convent. However, under the control of the Hospitaller, it mobilised only a Conventual Bailiff from the langue of France, the Head of the Infirmary and a small group of brethren, while the doctors (mostly Jews) were laymen.<sup>108</sup> In fact, the religious mission of the Hospitallers on Rhodes had become essentially that of fighting the infidels in the name of the Church and the Catholic faith, a mission dramatically reinforced after the threats in the Eastern Mediterranean from the Mamluks from 1426 and then the Ottomans after the accession to the throne of Mehmed II in 1451. Ninety per cent of the Hospitallers on Rhodes were therefore knight-brethren who had to meet the costs of their accommodation, arms and often armed servants suitable for fighting. Beyond their salaries and other benefits paid by the Order to the brethren, the possession or enjoyment of private property could become essential. Brethren who owned armed ships made them available to the Order to take part in the defence when Rhodes was besieged.

We have seen how an important part of the goods the Hospitallers owned privately came from the income from their commanderies, once their expenses and contributions due to the Order, the *responsions*, had been paid. This source of enrichment of the commanders, which only happened with sufficiently prosperous commanderies, hardly seems to fit in with the imperatives of the church but, like the other military orders, the Hospital probably adopted this management system because of its flexibility. With near a thousand commanderies divided among about twenty priories, centralised management of income could hardly be envisaged. The Order found it to be in its interests to allow its commanders a form of self-interest while controlling them in their priories at the provincial chapters, or through the presence of the receivers of the Treasury.

Ultimately, the considerable effort made to settle a large number of knights on Rhodes itself brought them, beyond their quest for commanderies and offices, profit from benefits, comforts and resources in order to make the distance from home, the garrison life in the Levant and their exposure to the risks of war more acceptable. The majority of these brethren were younger sons of knightly lineages or from urban patrician families looking to move into the knightly class. Their behaviour and mentality are close to those of their elder brothers: the Hospital offered them a life of military action and a degree of comfort under the cover of their religious vows. Once they had obtained at Rhodes their first commandery in their priory of origin, they often delegated its administration and the collection of its profits to some close relatives. For the Hospital, it was important to keep the knights living on Rhodes satisfied because princes, who appreciated their military capacities, combined with their membership to the Church and the resources of their commanderies, were often prepared to offer them alternative prospects for profit and careers.

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107. We refer to the article by: Luttrell, Anthony. "The Spiritual Life of the Hospitallers...", which is essential reading.

108. Luttrell, Anthony. "The Hospitallers' Medical Tradition, 1291-1530", *The Hospitaller State on Rhodes and its Western Provinces...*: IX.

