

Adaptations in Hospitaller Historiography

An Overview

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Abstract:

Like all trends of human thought and production, historiography is subject to adaptations. Historical writing is performed by human beings living in a particular society, at a certain point in time. Therefore it is obvious that the historian, like any other writer, is influenced by the society of which he forms part, by the environment in which he lives and by the events of his times. He is also influenced by the output of similar historians living in his same country and elsewhere. In other words, historiography is also subject to the trends of the times, and to what the readers expect, since history books, like all books, are intended to sell, and make a profit for the publisher. In this paper, the role of official histories of the Order of the Hospital, commissioned by the Order itself, shall be examined in order to establish if one can trace an adaptation in the concept of history writing of the Order. In this particular case, 'histories' of the Order had to suit the taste of the Order who paid for this travail in order to boost its legitimacy in the eyes of the world.

KEYWORDS: *historiography, historians, Order of Malta, legitimacy*

Historiography has been described as 'how we study history, how we research and write about it, and how we read it.'¹ It is beyond the scope of this work to go in detail into the various theories of historiography. These shall only be dealt with briefly. The *Ars historica*, as probably understood by the Order's historians, followed various rigid canons. In the mid-sixteenth century François Baudouin wrote a *Prologomena* (Paris, 1561) on law and history, explicitly preferring historians to write only about things they saw. Thus historians' accounts would be primary sources and there would be no history outside

¹ R.J. Evans, *In Defence of History*, (London:Granta Books, 2000), p. 1.

eye-witnesses' accounts.² However, Baudouin exhorted historians to write a *historia integra*, a perfect history, that is, a historical account not limited to battles and politics. When writing about the history of the Church, Baudouin warned, one should not give a long dry chronology of the popes, prelates, and heresies. A history should go beyond that.³ As regards the "barbarians", including the Ottomans, Baudouin exhorted historians not to demonize them outright. They too had a history:

If we do not know the history of the Franks, the Angles, the Saxons, the Goths, the Lombards [we cannot understand our own history]. And since our countrymen have often encountered Saracens and Turks, we dare not be ignorant of Saracen and Turkish history. We must not immediately classify as barbarous and condemn as unknown everything that is alien from our customs or from the eloquence of the Romans and Greeks.⁴

An overview of the works of Hospitaller historians will, to my mind, show little appreciation of Baudouin's exhortations, with the possible exception of Abbot Luca Cenni who seems to have been *au courant* with both the classical historiographical literature of ancient Rome as well as that of his own time. This is evident in his work's *proemio*. Yet the brevity of the work, and the fact that it deals almost entirely with the Battle of Lepanto of 7 October, 1571, makes categorical conclusions somewhat dangerous and tricky. Out of the known Hospitaller histories, first-hand accounts of particular events can be found in the works of Frà Mathurin Romegas and Frà Bartolomeo Dal Pozzo.⁵ Yet Romegas did not leave a reputation as a historian at all. His work seems to have been a one-off travail. All the other historians under survey here base themselves on other sources. The historical accounts followed the contemporary attention to narrative. A serious exercise of criticism of these historians must be made 'to convey not merely the structure of the narrative, but also its texture and qualities.'⁶ Furthermore, in undertaking such criticism, one must keep in mind 'the aims of the historians in a particular period, the conventions which shaped their writing, and the ways these changed. [Attention must be paid] to historians' relations to the sources which made their work possible and which partly conditioned it, and also [...] to the question of the particular writer's credibility.'⁷

The dual distinction between primary and secondary sources has been a central preoccupation of the study of historiography. Historical research based on primary sources is an attempt to reconstruct the past from the re-

2 A. Grafton, *What was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.62 *et seq.*

3 Grafton p.105.

4 Quoted by Grafton, p.117.

5 *Relazione della Giornata delle Scorciolare, fra l'Armata Turchesca & Christiana alli Sette d'Ottobre 1571, Ritratata dal Commendatore Romegasso* (Rome, Blado, 1571?)

6 J. Burrow, *A History of Histories. Epics, Chronicles, Romances and Inquiries from Heroditus and Thucydides to the Twentieth Century*, (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p.xvii.

7 Burrow p. xvii.

mains it has left behind. The situation becomes more complicated when dealing with secondary sources. The traditional approach has been to ask who has written the document, and why, and to whom the document is addressed, and why, we check it out for internal consistency and for consistency with other documents relating to the same subject, and if it contains information derived from other sources, we ask where this information comes from.⁸

In other words, such an approach involves source criticism. This dual distinction between primary and secondary sources has come under heavy criticism from postmodernists. Keith Jenkins aptly summarizes the distinction between the postmodern approach and what he calls “the old certainist modernisms.” The latter is primarily concerned with the historian’s objectivity, disinterestedness, the facts, unbiasedness, and truth, while the former is concerned with the readings, positionings, perspectives, constructions, and verisimilitude.⁹ According to Jenkins, postmodernists believe that the past exists only in the modality of its current historiographical representations, the latter being both archives or other historical accounts. Since the past is no more, it only survives in these representations which are *histories* in themselves. Historians therefore *intervene* on these *sources* in order to interpret them. History is thus a verbal artefact, a narrative prose discourse, whose content is as much invented as found. Thus the historian is “an ideologically positioned worker”, looking both towards the “once real events of the past” as well as towards the “narrative *mythoi* common in any social formation.” Postmodernists believe that the past appropriated by historians is never the past itself, but ‘a past evidenced by its remaining and accessible traces and transformed into historiography through a series of theoretically and methodologically disparate procedures.’¹⁰ Thus the historian, according to Jenkins, fabricates history without real foundations beyond the textual.¹¹ Apart from this approach which follows the Marxist and Structural method, one must not, to my mind, fail to mention briefly the French Annales school, among whose most prominent exponents is Fernand Braudel. Braudel has a different view of total history. Braudel believes that time moves at different speeds. In his *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* he identifies three different *times*. The fastest moving one was the top level characterized by political events, the *histoire événementielle*. This is discussed in the third part of his work. The second part of his work deals with the slow-moving social and economic trends which are often imperceptible to contemporaries, while the first part deals with the *longue durée*, the deep waters in which all change is slow, a history of constant repetition, ever-recurring cycles.

Another novel approach to historiography is that advocated by Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie, which approach Evans defines as ‘reading the sources against

8 Burrow p.xvii.

9 K. Jenkins, *On ‘What is History?’*. From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White, (London-New York: Routledge, 2005), p.7.

10 Jenkins p.7.

11 Ibid.

the grain.¹² In his *Montailou – Village Occitan de 1294 à 1324*, the French historian, while working on records of the Holy Inquisition, was more directly concerned with the *incidental* details revealed by heretics on their everyday life than on the Inquisition itself.

Having illustrated in a skeletal way some important trends in historiography, it remains to evaluate the contribution which some Hospitaller historians have made to historical scholarship, to identify the methods they adopted, the sources they used, and if their works are, in postmodernist parlance, histories in their own right.

Hospitaller Historiography

When dealing with the historiography of a particular institution, as in the present case, one has to be extremely cautious. When the historian, commissioned to write the history of the Order of St John, happens to be a member of the same institution or is on the payroll of the same, there is a strong natural tendency to extol the institution's achievements and minimize its flaws or shortcomings. The impartial reader may easily trace this trend, conscious or otherwise, in the historiography of the institution, especially when one compares or contrasts different accounts of one particular event as recorded by members professing allegiance to the institution with those of others who are completely extraneous. Moreover, as will be shown, Hospitaller historiography had a useful political function to perform.

According to G. M. Spiegel: '[R]elatively little attention has been paid to the political utility of medieval historiography, either as a source of political theory or as a determinant of political behaviour. But history [...] was [...] the place where life and logic met, the codification of an intellectual confrontation with reality. And, like law, historiography played an important role in the politics of a traditional society, dependent, as was medieval society, upon the past for legitimacy.'¹³

In other words, it is important to highlight instances where Hospitaller chroniclers viewed and used the past to justify a line of policy. The question of legitimacy was of fundamental importance to the Order, which depended on the principle of privilege for its very survival.

It is difficult to trace substantial differences in approach between histories written by Hospitaller and non-Hospitaller historians or chroniclers. Most historians of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries could be safely placed within one category owing allegiance to the Catholic faith, in an age where the Catholic Counter-Reformation promoted orthodoxy and when dissent was not only frowned upon, but severely punished. Even Protestant writers, although generally critical of the *popish* activities of Catholics, still extol the naval feats of the Order. This is probably owing to the fact that the "us vs.

¹² Evans, p. 84.

¹³ G.M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text. Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 83.

them” (Christians vs. Turks) mentality survived the Protestant Reformation.¹⁴ It seems that Elizabethans generally took the traditional Christian attitude of hostility against the Turks. However, this was in direct contradiction to Martin Luther’s instructions to his followers not to wage war against the Turks, not even to wage any form of resistance, since in so doing one would be opposing the Divine Will. Luther believed that through the Turkish attacks, God punished humanity for its sins.¹⁵ Yet, even during the Ottoman siege of Malta in 1565, Elizabeth I showed some interest in the fate of the island and its inhabitants and asked the Spanish ambassador to keep her informed. She even condemned the presence of the Turkish ambassador at the French Court. The ambassador reported that news of the final victory made her rejoice greatly. After the siege, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker, had ordered thanksgiving prayers to be said in local churches.¹⁶ It is remarkable that the first, continuous printed history of the Order was written by a Swiss Protestant, Heinrich Pantaleon. His *Militaris Ordinis Joannitarum, Rhodiae aut Melitensium Equitum ... Historia Nova* was published in Basel in 1581. It dealt with the origins of the Hospital until his time. Anthony Luttrell holds that Pantaleon did not base himself on original documents but on other published sources. Presumably, Pantaleon was aided by a group of literary-minded Swiss-German Hospitallers who provided him with some learned information on the Order’s history.¹⁷ A Protestant *interest* in the naval activities of the maritime activities of the Order is provided in an epic poem – *The Lepanto* – written by the young King James VI of Scotland and I of England. Written in about 1585 and published in 1591, it shows the battle of Lepanto as an example of epic heroism. Yet this epic is also held to be an allegory about the persecution of Protestants as well as the Protestants’ conflict with the French Catholic League.¹⁸

Historians of the Order in the Pre-Rhodian Period

After the fall of Acre in 1291, the Hospitallers are known to have lost many records. Few records of the period survive in the AOM collection in Valletta. However, traditional accounts of the origin of the Order of the Hospital sur-

14 This mentality was naturally reinforced in Catholic lands. For Venice, see M. Soykut, ‘The Development of the Image ‘Turk’ in Italy through “Della Letteratura de’ Turchi” of Giambattista Donà’, in *Journal of Maltese Studies*, IX (2), (1999), pp.175-203.

15 Soykut, p. 181.

16 E. J. King, *The Grand Priory of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in England. A Short History* (London: Venerable Order of St. John, 1924), p.90. On this point see also: A. Mifsud, *Knights Hospitallers of the Ven. Tongue of England in Malta* (Malta: Malta Herald, 1914), *passim*; E. J. King, H. Luke, *The Knights of Malta in the British Realm* (London: Venerable Order of St John, 1967), *passim*, and G. O’Malley, *The Knights Hospitaller of the British Langue 1460-1565*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), *passim*.

17 A. Luttrell, ‘The Hospitallers’ Historical Activities: 1530-1630’ in *Annales de l’Ordre Souverain Militaire de Malte*, 111, (1968), p. 61.

18 The Catholic League’s aims, whose leaders had been affiliated with Mary Queen of Scots, James’ own mother, was keeping the Protestant Henry of Navarre from the French throne in the event that the Catholic Henry II died childless. See: R. Applebaum, ‘War and Peace in “The Lepanto” of James VI and I’, in *Modern Philology*, February 2000, Vol. XCVII, 3, p. 333.

vived in a series of myths, the *miracula*, which traced the birth of the Hospital to biblical times.¹⁹ These *miracula* were in part contradicted by the celebrated historian Guillaume of Tyre, but since they had received papal approbation, they continued to be copied into many manuscripts and collections of statutes of the Order, together with the chronologies or official lives of the deceased masters.²⁰ Frà Guglielmo di San Stefano, the Order's preceptor in Cyprus, wrote an unpublished treatise where he refuted many legends of the *miracula* and disagreed on certain points with Guillaume of Tyre, but on his death in about 1303 he left no continuous history of the Order.²¹ However, Guglielmo di San Stefano may be termed the first historian of the Hospital.

The fact that the Hospitallers began to become concerned about their own history in the pre-Rhodian period is confirmed by the enactment of the prohibition of anyone, being a member or non-member, from writing any work regarding the history, establishment and privileges of the Order without the express authorization of the Master and Council. This promulgation came into force during the magistracy of Frà Niccolò de Lorgue, the 20th Master, elected in 1278.²² It is reproduced in Title 18 of the *Code de Rohan*.²³ Infringement entailed the loss of three years of the benefits of the commandery or of the pension and imprisonment for three years. In the case of non-members, the priors and their lieutenants were ordered to ensure that the lay magistrates prohibited the printing of the works. It is also interesting to note that, up to this day, this provision forms part of the Order's statutes and was recently confirmed by the present Grand Master Frà Matthew Festing.²⁴ The present Grand Master has recently insisted that the members of his Order 'must be familiar with the rules, history and spirituality of the Order of Malta,

19 A. Luttrell, 'Hospitaller Historiography: Heritage and Heresies' in *The Military Orders, vol. III, History and Heritage* V. Mallia-Milanes (ed.), (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), p. 8.

20 A. Luttrell, 'The Hospitallers' Historical Activities: 1291-1400' in *Annales de l'Ordre Souverain Militaire de Malte*, 1966, Vol IV, 126. One of these chronological lists was published by L. de Mas-Latrie, in *Archives des Missions Scientifiques et Littéraires*, Vol. IV, (Paris, 1857, 25-30). Another of these *vitæ* running up to 1660 still in manuscript form was compiled by a Maltese Hospitaller Frà Fabrizio Cagiola (1604-65), kept in the National Library of Malta as NLM Lib. MS 31. Another copy survives in the same library as NLM Lib. MS 131.

21 Luttrell, 1966, p.127.

22 On Master De Lorgue see L. Rangoni Macchiavelli, 'Frà Nicolò Lorgue' in *Rivista Illustrata dell'Ordine di Malta*, Apr. 1940, pp.1-3.

23 *Codice del Sacro Militare Ordine Gerosolimitano Riordinato Per Comandamento del Sacro Generale Capitolo Celebrato Nell'Anno MDCLXXVI Sotto Gli Auspici Di Sua Altezza Eminentissima il Gran Maestro Fra Emanuele De Rohan*, (Malta, 1782), p.339. Hanno di più ordinato, che verun Religioso di qualsiasi grado, o dignità ardisca di dare alle stampe sotto proprio, o finto nome veruna Istoria della Sagra Religione o componimento sopra li di lei stabilimenti, e privilegi o altra qualsisia opera, che riguardi al Sagro Ordine senza le precedente licenzia dell'Eminentissimo Signor Gran Maestro, e del Venerando Consiglio sotto la pena di incorrersi subito, se sono gli Autori, o Bali, o Commentatori, della perdita di tre annate di frutti dei beni, che amministrano, se Fratelli di tre annate delle pensioni, che godono, e della carcerazione di tre anni in castello. Se poi gli Autori saranno secolari hanno incaricato alli Priori, e loro Luogotenenti di procurare, che i Magistrati locali non permettano l'edizione.

24 Decree of the Sovereign Council No. 58 of the 16 Apr. 2008

in order to understand ever more profoundly its mission in today's times and to find their own place within it.²⁵

This sums up, to my mind, the intention of the Order to prove itself relevant in this day and age by keeping its eyes on its glorious past and on its fundamental tenets of charity and the defence of the faith. Thus this recent exhortation is a concrete example of the adaptation of the use of the Order's history in its present role.

Historians of the Order in the Rhodian Period

In Rhodes, the Order took greater care to protect its documents. Master Frà Juan Fernández de Heredia ordered the compilation of the *Cartulario Magno* in Aragon, to preserve important records from loss or decay. More than for historical purposes, the intention was, perhaps, to facilitate use of these documents in cases of litigation.²⁶ Unlike the Teutonic Order, the Order of the Hospital failed to chronicle its activities properly during the fourteenth century, when it was fully occupied with the colonization and defence of Rhodes.²⁷ However, the Order seemed to attach some importance to the chronologies and vitae of the deceased Masters. The chapter-general celebrated in Rome in 1446 ordered the Chancellor pro tempore to write a biography of each master during his lifetime.²⁸ In the middle of the fifteenth century, Frà Melchior Bandini, who was already Chancellor by 1445, wrote an account of the history of the Order up to his own times. It does not appear that this history has ever been published; it was eventually lost, as Giacomo Bosio, a subsequent historian of the Order, laments in the proemio to the first edition of the first volume of his *Dell'Istoria della S. Religione et Ill.ma Militia di S. Gio. Gerosolimitano*:

Before anyone else attempted to do so, the knight Frà Melchiorre Bandino, being the chancellor of this Order during the magistracy of Grand Master Frà Giovanni di Lastic, wrote the history of the said Religion up to his own times. But of what he has writ-

25 *Membership in the Order of Malta. Regulations and Commentary Promulgated by H.M.E.H., the Prince and Grand Master Fra' Andrew Festing and Approved by the Sovereign Council on February 18, 2011* (Rome: SMOM, 2011), p.36

26 Luttrell 1966, p. 128.

27 Luttrell 1966, p. 129.

28 The Order never accepted the decisions of this Chapter-General although it was confirmed by the Pope. See R.Valentini, 'Un Capitolo Generale degli Ospedalieri Tenuto in Vaticano nel 1446' in *Archivio Storico di Malta*, VII (2), (1936), p.133-68. AOM cod. 1698, f.87r.: *Ad nostre religionis formam perpetuam mortuorum gloriam, viventium disciplinam decernimus, ut de singulis magistris hactenus defunctis vitam, mores, et gesta modernus cancellarius describat, quidquid eorum temporibus boni vel mali acciderit, suis loco designando. Item ceteri qui pro tempore futuro erunt cancellarij viventis magistris nobilitatem, genus, mores, vitia virtutes, et gesta, singula describant, sed viventi magisteri aut alteri ea que de ipso scripserunt, nullatenus aperiant. Cum autem vita decesserit electo prius quam aliis defuncti predecessoris mores vitam et gesta manifestet, sitque aliis deinde inspiciendi facultas quod si viventi magistro cancellarius aut alter ea que de vivente pro tempore describet demonstraverit, sui officij ipso facto privationis penam incurrat.*

ten, little, if anything, remains, having this history been lost to the incomparable detriment of historians.²⁹

Guillaume Caoursin was Vice-Chancellor at Rhodes, although he does not seem to have been a member of the Order. He recodified the Order's statutes and included a brief treatise on the origins of the Hospital. Bosio states that Caoursin's treatise was too brief, as it covered only the period up to Frà Raymond du Puy (1120-1160), successor of the founder of the Order, the Blessed Gerard. Caoursin does not seem to have ever attempted a general history of the Order.³⁰ His *Obsidionis Rhodiæ Urbis Descriptio* was published in 1480, barely four months after the end of the siege. This work ran into several editions, and the 1496 edition published at Ulm contains superb woodcuts showing Hospitaller life and activities.³¹ According to Theresa Vann, 'Caoursin's record of the siege not only fulfilled contemporary humanistic expectations of a chancellor's historical duties, it also followed a long tradition of propagandistic battlefield accounts.'³²

Historians of the Order in the Maltese period

Frà Jean Quintin (1500-61), known as Quintinus, was a member of the commission that visited Malta before 1530, prior to the Order's acceptance of Charles V's offer. In 1536 he published his *Insulae Melitae Descriptio*, which is the first known account of the Maltese islands. He must have written some annotations gleaned from the archives at Malta, which annotations Bosio admits to have consulted.³³ The Chapter General held in Malta in 1555 instructed Frà Antoine Geoffroi, secretary to Grand Master La Sengle, to write the history of the Order, but Geoffroi died the following year, leaving behind him notes on the material he had collected in Malta and Rome. Bosio again claims to have consulted these notes. He also claims that during the sixteenth century Frà Raffaele Salvago, a Genoese, and Frà Nicholas de Blancheline, a Frenchman, made several attempts at writing the history of the Order.³⁴

Anthony Luttrell identifies a manuscript at the Vatican Archives that contains a dialogue written (by 1562) by Frà Giuseppe Cambiano, Hospitaller ambassador to Rome.³⁵ In it, Cambiano converses with two Venetian Hospitallers on the present organization of the Order as well as on the origins and history of the institution. Geoffroi expressly regrets the lack of interest by the Hospitallers themselves in the history of their Order. He tries to soften the reality of this observation by pointing out that members of the Order were

29 1594 edition, p.i.

30 A. Luttrell, 'The Hospitallers' Historical Activities: 1400-1530' in *Annales de l'Ordre Souverain Militaire de Malte*, 1967, Vol. IV, 149

31 The copy consulted by the author is conserved in the Library of the Venerable Order of St John, Clerkenwell, London, kindly made available by the curator Ms Pamela Willis.

32 T.M. Vann: *A Report on the Archives of the Order of Malta*. <<http://web.ceu.hu/medstud/events/ev004/vann.htm>> [3 January 2009]

33 Bosio, Vol. I, 1594, proemio, p.i. See also Luttrell, 1968, p. 58.

34 Luttrell, 1968, p.58 and Bosio, Vol. I, loc. cit.

35 Archivio Vaticano, Misc. Arm. ii, p. 81.

much more prone to doing good deeds than to record them for posterity.³⁶ A manuscript history of the Order, written in the Maltese period and which has survived in various copies, is that written by the Catalan Frà Joan Antoni Foxa or Foxan.³⁷ Luttrell states that Foxan was *appointed* historian of the Order.³⁸ To date, Foxan's work remains unpublished. Giacomo Bosio is the next historian of the Order, whose appointment can be accurately traced in the archives. His *Dell'istoria della S. Religione et Ill.ma Militia di S. Gio. Gerosolimitano* was first published in the official Vatican printing press.³⁹

Frà Salvatore Imbroli, a Maltese, Prior of the Conventual Church, was appointed historiographer of the Order in 1633 with instructions to continue the history from 1571, when Bosio's work grounds abruptly to a halt.⁴⁰ In 1634 Imbroli lost favour with the Grand Master and was replaced by Frà Cesare Megalotti, an Italian. No history of the Order by Megalotti is known to have survived. Imbroli's work was subsequently revised and augmented by his nephew, Frà Carlo Michalleg.⁴¹ Both Imbroli's work and that by Michalleg remain in manuscript form to the present day. In 1636, Frà Gerolamo Marulli published, in Naples, an account of the early years of the Order's history titled *Vite de Gran Maestri della Sacra Religione di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano*.⁴² This work contains no additional information to the existing vitae found in the statutes.

The printing press was introduced in Malta in 1642.⁴³ In 1647, Giovanni Francesco Abela, a Maltese cleric and vice-chancellor of the Order, published his *Della Descrittione di Malta*.⁴⁴ As the title suggests, his focus is more on the island of Malta than on the history of the Order. In fact he states that our intention is not to involve ourselves in the heroic feats of the holy Religion of Malta, which has already been described, or will in future be described by more erudite and sophisticated minds, but only to make known these accounts of this island and its old city.⁴⁵ In 1664, another member of the Order,

36 Extract reproduced in Luttrell, 1968, p. 69.

37 NLM Lib. MS 314 in 2 volumes covering the period until 1523. Luttrell gives references to other copies in Madrid covering the period until 1553 and another copy in London covering the period until 1565, probably completed by another hand, since Foxan died in 1562.

38 Luttrell, 1968, 60, but no references to this appointment are given. I have traced a reference to Foxan's appointment in the proceedings of the Chapter General of 1569 in AOM cod. 289, f. 49r.

39 volumes I, II and III, (Rome 1594 – 1602).

40 Bosio stops his account at the point where he discusses the migration of the convent from Birgu to Valletta.

41 This is the author's own spelling of his surname.

42 Naples, 1636.

43 See W. Zammit, *Printing in Malta (1642-1839)*, Malta, 2008, *passim*.

44 Malta, 1647. The full title is *Della Descrittione di Malta, Isola nel Mare Siciliano con le sue Antichità*. The book also bears another short title, *Malta Illustrata*. On Abela, see: Anon. 'Biografie: Il Commendatore Abela' in *L'Arte*, 15, Anno I, Malta, 22 Jun. 1863, 2-5; A.T. Luttrell, 'Girolamo Manduca and Gian Francesco Abela; tradition and invention in Maltese historiography' in *Melita Historica*, Vol VII, 2, 1977, 105-32; E.R. Leopardi, 'Abela's work throughout three centuries', in *Scientia*, Vol XXI, 4, 1955, 115-161; S.M. Zarb, 'Supplementary Biographical Notes on Comm. Gian Francesco Abela', in *Scientia*, Vol XXI, 4, Malta, 1955, pp. 147-54.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 294.

Frà Ferdinando de Escaño, published in Seville his *Propugnaculum Hierosolymitanum* dedicated to Don Juan of Austria. This work is more concerned with the institutional set-up of the Order than with its origins and historical development. Nevertheless, it appears to have created jurisdictional controversy and Inquisitor Gregorio Salviati successfully blocked an attempt to have it reprinted in Malta in 1756-57.⁴⁶ This work attempted to define and underline the Order's sovereignty, autonomy and freedom of action. Thus it was eyed very suspiciously by the Holy See, which always deemed the Order to be its appendage and subject to its final control.⁴⁷

On 3 August 1668, the Council of the Order appointed Abbot Luca Cenni, of the Regular Canons of San Salvatore, as its official historiographer.⁴⁸ To facilitate his work, he was granted full access to the unpublished works of Imbroil and Micallef.⁴⁹ Cenni's work, which has a *proemio* in which the author discusses the main historiographical currents up to his time, was originally intended as a continuation of Bosio's. It remained unfinished or incomplete.⁵⁰ Frà Fabrizio Cagiola, another Hospitaller historiographer, was a brilliant lawyer.⁵¹ His short account of the lives of the Masters, *Vite de Gran Maestri dal Beato Gerardo (1113) sino a Frà Annetto de Gessan (1660)* is telegraphic and sketchy. It is written in the style of the *vitae* in long, winding sentences stretching through various pages. The Veronese Frà Bartolomeo dal Pozzo published a two-volume history of the Order titled *Historia della Sacra Religione Militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta (i, Verona, 1703; ii, Venezia, 1715)*. This work continues Bosio's account, from 1571 to 1668, and is considered of major historiographical importance.

Although official historians of the Order continued to be appointed after this date, there was no real continuation of the Hospitallers' story.⁵² Subsequent works tended to deal with the Order's early period, with the exception of the Abbè de Vertot whose *Histoire des Chevaliers Hospitaliers de St. Jean de Ierusalem*, published in Paris in 1726, was a bestseller and was translated and published in several editions. Luttrell calls Vertot an 'unscrupulous populizer'.⁵³ Indeed, a close look at his work shows his heavy dependence on Bosio. His approach becomes sketchy after 1570-71, with his later contributions being rather insubstantial and unconvincing.

Sebastiano Paoli, a member of the Congregation of the Clerics of the Mother of God was nominated historiographer of the Order through a mag-

46 W. Zammit, *op. cit.*, p.106.

47 *Ibid.*

48 AOM cod. 261, f.102v.

49 AOM cod. 261, f.189r.

50 Cenni's work dealing with the Battle of Lepanto, has been transcribed and annotated by the author in: 'The Battle of Lepanto, 7 October, 1571. A Critical Annotaed Edition of Luca Cenni's Account', (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Malta, 2010).

51 NLM Lib. MS 31. Another copy exists in the same library with the archival reference NLM Lib. MS 131.

52 Luttrell (1969), p.65.

53 Luttrell (1969), p. 64.

isterial bull dated 10 October 1732.⁵⁴ Paoli produced the *Codice Diplomatico del Sacro Militare Ordine Gerosolimitano Oggi di Malta* published in 1737. Luttrell considers this work important, especially for the pre-1523 period. Paolo Maria Paciaudi (1710-85), a member of the Order of Theatines, was another official historiographer of the Order, appointed in virtue of another magistral bull dated 12 August 1751.⁵⁵ His work covers Hospitaller history to the twelfth century.⁵⁶

In 1754 a member of the Order, Frà François-Zacharie Pourroy de Quissonnas de Lauberivière, published a pamphlet titled *Prospectus d'une Nouvelle Histoire de l'Ordre de Malte Dégagée de la Prolixité de Bosio des Écartes de Vertot et Continué Depuis le Dernier Siège Ou ils l'Avaient Abandonnée Jusqu'à la Presente*, outlining a project to publish a new history that would avoid the prolixity of Bosio's and the lacunae of Vertot's.⁵⁷ Nothing seems to have come out of this initiative.

In 1781, Paolo Antonio Paoli, nephew of Sebastiano Paoli and member of the same Congregation as his uncle, published a history of the foundation of the Order which is reputed to contain new documentation and texts on the early days of the Order, written in a style appreciative of new historical trends.⁵⁸ However, by the time of the Order's departure from Malta in 1798, the continuous official history of the Order still remained a *desideratum*.

After the Order's departure from Malta, the Hospitaller Louis de Boisgelein published his *Ancient and Modern Malta*, which continues the history of the Order up to 1798. However, it is very sketchy and relies heavily on other works. Onorato Bres, another Maltese member of the Order, also published his work after the Order had actually left Malta. His *Malta Antica Illustrata co' Monumenti, e coll'Istoria* (Rome, De Romanis, 1816) does not discuss the history of the Order at all. His work is basically a history of the Island and its monuments and not of the institution itself:

Having been given a new lease of life by the Knights of St John, its (Malta's) history became intertwined with that of this Order which is most precious to Christianity, especially for the protection of European shipping, liberating it from the Barbary pirates, and it is (therefore) useless to repeat what has already been written by Bosio, Naberat, Vertot, and others.⁵⁹

54 E. Nasalli Rocca di Corneliano, 'Il P. Paolo Paciaudi storiografo dell'Ordine di Malta' in *AOSM* (1964) ii, 51. The author refers to a copy of this bull at the Biblioteca Palatina at Padua. However he erroneously refers to Paoli as the first official historian of the Order.

55 Reproduced in toto in Nasalli Rocca di Corneliano, p.51.

56 *Memorie de' Gran Maestri del Sacro Militar Ordine Gerosolimitano*, Parma, 1780.

57 The full title is *Prospectus d'une Nouvelle Histoire de l'Ordre de Malte Dégagée de la Prolixité de Bosio des Écartes de Vertot et Continué Depuis l'Année 1567 d'Après de le Dernier Siège ou ils l'Avainent Abandonnée Jusqu'à à la Present 1754*. Quoted in Luttrell (1968), 64.

58 *Dell'Origine ed Istituto del Sacro Militar Ordine di S. Giovambattista Gerosolimitano, Detto Poi di Rodi, Oggi di Malta. Dissertazione*, (Roma, 1781) and Luttrell, 1968, *loc.cit.*

59 Bres, p.11.

Selection and Appointment of Hospitaller Historiographers

As can be seen from the Council minutes, the choice and nomination of the Order's historiographers was an exercise that appears to have strongly pre-occupied successive masters. One cannot help feeling that this necessity to continuously provide an updated history of the institution was an exercise in adaptability – an adaptation of the past to suit and justify the Order's very presence. The provision of an updated history can thus be seen as a matter of life and death for the Order.

In the case of Paciaudi, Grand Master Pinto himself wrote directly to the historian exhorting him 'that Your Reverence [...] before publishing your work, should call at Malta, where there is already a printing press and thus you will find all that is necessary for the proposed edition [of your work], as well as the security of avoiding all errors with the help of our archives, and perhaps [also] good material for better illustrating our history with your learned writing.'⁶⁰ The selection process usually comprised the nomination of a special commission by the Council. This happened usually after a petition to this effect by the candidate.⁶¹ A number of grand-crosses would be chosen to vet the candidate. The latter was expected to prove his ability not only by submitting copies of his already published works, if any, but also by periodically submitting excerpts of his history for evaluation by the Commissioners. When any one of the Commissioners had to leave Malta or found himself in an impossible position to continue participating in the commission's work, he would be substituted by another senior knight.⁶²

The historians had the facility to consult chancery documents either in the original or in copied versions.⁶³ Bosio was regularly supplied with copies of original documents by his brother Frà Giovanni Ottone, who was vice-chancellor of the Order. He was also given sixteenth-century material collected by Agostino Santa Maura, a scribe in the Treasury.⁶⁴ Similarly, when Imbroli was relieved of his appointment as official historiographer, he was instructed to give to his successor Megalotti all documents in his possession, including his writings as well as some annotations by Bosio.⁶⁵ The unpublished histories by Imbroli and Michallef were also copied to Abbot Cenni when he decided to

⁶⁰ Letter by Pinto to Paciaudi dated 23 July 1756 in AOM cod.1513, f.153v.

⁶¹ Bosio petitioned the Grand Master and council for permission to publish his revised work and a commission of inquiry was duly appointed. See AOM cod.255, 15r. Dal Pozzo, Imbroli and Michallef also petitioned the Council for the same permission. See re Dal Pozzo, AOM cod. 262, f.67v; re Imbroli, AOM cod. 256, f.108r; and re Michallef, AOM cod. 258, f.210r, and AOM cod. 259, f.56v.

⁶² See AOM cod. 257, f.101r, and f.114v, and AOM cod. 261, f.21v, and f.102v.

⁶³ Imbroli was given the facility to borrow one book at a time from the Chancery, leaving due receipt every time. See AOM cod. 256, f.108r.

⁶⁴ Luttrell, (1968) p. 63. Apparently Santa Maura was considered an authority as regards the archives of the Order. On the 7 July 1571, a document prepared by the same was considered as evidence in a lawsuit on one of the commanderies of the order: AOM cod. 93, f.23r: *Schedula facta et subscripta manu Augustini di S. Maura, scribae Communis Erarii, et exhibita Commissariis in causa super Commenda de Torres y Gibut, est admittenda.*

⁶⁵ V. Borg, *Fabio Chigi, Apostolic Delegate in Malta (1634-1639). An Edition of his Official Correspondence*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1967), p.129.

leave Malta and pursue his writing and research in Rome.⁶⁶ The commission censored any part of the work that it considered might place the Order in a bad light. In at least two instances, namely in the case of Dal Pozzo and Imbroll, the Council, on the recommendation of the commission, ordered that the works be deposited in the Chancery and should not be consulted by anyone without its specific permission. Dal Pozzo's work was eventually published years after it was written, while Imbroll's work still remains in manuscript form up to this day. Naturally, publication or copying in any manner was also strictly prohibited. In the case of Abbot Cenni, the manuscript itself shows heavy erasures in another handwriting on some pages.⁶⁷ The suspicionis that the cancelled parts contained some mild criticism to the Order or were otherwise deemed to be detrimental to its prerogatives.⁶⁸ In the case of Imbroll, the Council of the Order decided that a written confutation of the work, exposing its supposed errors, should also be conserved with the incriminated works in the Chancery. The nomination of a historiographer was made by the Grandmaster and Council after the initial vetting. A magistral bull would be issued. The appointment usually contained provision for the remuneration for the appointee, and the refund of any expenses the latter would incur to employ scribes. Free passage to Malta was also offered in the case of historians not residing on the island, since it was considered imperative for the historian to consult the original chancery documents.

Hospitaller Historiography Today

In recent years, interest in the military orders, and particularly the Hospitallers, has been on the increase. As V. Mallia-Milanes has observed, '[I]n fairly recent years the study of the Military Orders has developed into an enormous topic and remains a vital area of historical research; their relevance has withstood the most convulsive impact of the passage of time, with the Hospitallers, in particular, being rightly considered as a powerful force of continuity in European history.'⁶⁹

Such increased interest is evidenced in the number of publications on these institutions, and the setting up of associations and the organization of international conferences.⁷⁰ It is indeed ironic that, notwithstanding such

66 AOM cod. 261, f.189r.

67 NLM Lib. MS 163. See in particular pp. 111, 114, 116, 117, 118, 119, and 136.

68 Use of sophisticated digital software might produce the text of the cancelled parts.

69 V. Mallia-Milanes, 'Editor's Preface' in *The Military Orders*, (Hampshire, Ashgate, 2008), Vol. III, ix.

70 The standard bibliographies on the Order are: F. de Hellwald, *Bibliographie Méthodique de l'Ordre Souverain de St Jean de Jérusalem*, (Rome, 1885); E. Rossi, *Aggiunta alla Bibliographie Méthodique de l'Ordre Souverain de St Jean de Jérusalem di Ferdinand de Hellwald*, (Rome, 1924); J. Mizzi, 'A Bibliography of the Order of St John of Jerusalem (1925-1969)', in *The Order of St John in Malta with an Exhibition of Paintings by Mattia Preti Painter and Knight*, (Malta, Council of Europe, 1970, 108-204; and I. Xuereb, 'A Bibliography of the Order of St John of Jerusalem (1970/2007)', (Unpublished B.A. Hons. dissertation, University of Malta), 2007. Associations and research centres include 'The London Centre for the Study of the Crusades, the Military Orders, and the East Mediterranean Region in the Middle Ages'; the

increased interest, the study of the Order's historiography has attracted only marginal attention, and publications on the subject are indeed rare.⁷¹ The present contribution has attempted to show how Hospitaller historiography has slowly adapted itself over the centuries. Starting as an attempt to justify the existence of the institution by Divine will through the Miracula, over the centuries it slowly evolved to writings by paid historians of some repute, who, as we have seen, were granted enormous privileges and benefits for their travail. The continuous criticism of the Military Orders and the questioning of their very reason for existence since the loss of the Holy Land to the Infidel prompted successive Grand Masters to look for and eventually choose the best authorities capable of writing an opus that would not only be a literary work in itself but would serve as a showcase for the Order's martyrs, saints and military feats. An elaborate system of selection and vetting of proposed historians and continuous monitoring of their work slowly evolved in Hospitaller procedure. In time, offences related to unauthorized Hospitaller historical accounts even became part of the Order's statute books.

One might perhaps moot the point that the very resilience of the Order and its survival, in a modified and *modernized* way, up till today, is due to its ability to treasure its past, and to adapt it to the ever changing circumstances of the world. The lure of chivalry in itself is not enough if the memory is not perpetuated and re-presented in an *appetizing* manner for the readers. The Order was indeed fortunate to have found historians capable of immortalizing its glorious past according to the ever-changing tastes of readers over the centuries.

'Centro Studi Melitensi' at Taranto, the 'Sacra Militia Foundation' in Malta and the 'Accademia Internazionale Melitense' in Malta. Conferences include the four-yearly conference organized by the London association and the annual conference organized by the 'Sacra Militia Foundation' in Malta.

71 A recent pamphlet on Maltese historiography, and therefore not exclusively on Hospitaller historiography, is a print on demand pamphlet in Spanish by Xavier Baro' i Queralt, *La Historiografía Maltesa en la Edad Moderna* (Norderstedt, Grin, 2011).