



DARIUS VON GÜTTNER-SPORZYŃSKI (MELBOURNE)

EVOLUTION AND ADAPTATION: THE ORDER OF SAINT JOHN IN WAR AND PEACE¹

The Order of Saint John is the last surviving military religious order established in the Holy Land. Remarkably its historical governance structure, ethos, and mission have survived largely intact.² The Order's origins date back to the middle of the eleventh century when a hospice for pilgrims run by the religious community of Saint Mary of the Latins was established. The creation of the hospice responded to an urgent need as testified by the chronicler William of Tyre who explained "there was no one to offer a roof to our unfortunate people,

¹ This brief study of the history of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta incorporates ideas and opinions shared by many historians of the military religious orders and the Hospitallers in particular. See for example, A. Luttrell, *From Jerusalem to Malta: The Hospital's Character and Evolution*, in: *Peregrinations: Acta et Documenta*, Malta 2000, pp. 13–22; V. Mallia-Milanes, *A Pilgrimage of Faith, War, and Charity: The Order of the Hospital from Jerusalem to Malta*, in: *Religion, ritual and mythology: aspects of identity formation in Europe*, ed. J. Carvalho, Pisa 2006, pp. 83–96; H. Nicholson, *The Knights Hospitaller*, Woodbridge 2001. The ideas in this study have been presented in various forms and stages of development at the conferences of the London Centre for the Study of the Crusades, the Military Religious Orders and the Latin East, the Polish-Czech Medievalists conferences in Gniezno, biennial conferences of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, and biennial conferences of the Australasian Association for European History.

² Among the military religious orders which originated in the Holy Land the Teutonic Order is also still in existence. In its present form it is a religious order of the Church and its military function is a relic of the past. The most comprehensive outline of the emergence of the military religious orders can be found in A. Forey, *The military orders from the twelfth to the early fourteenth centuries*, Toronto 1992. For a discussion of the characteristics of military religious orders see J. Riley-Smith, *Towards a History of Military-Religious Orders*, in: *The Hospitallers, the Mediterranean and Europe. Festschrift for Anthony Luttrell*, ed. K. Borchardt, N. Jaspert, H. J. Nicholson, Aldershot 2007, pp. 269–284.

ground down and ill to the limits of their endurance”.³ Throughout its history its hospitaller works were central to the Order’s mission even when role expanded to defence of the Faith and acquiring sovereign power over island states, first Rhodes (1309–1523) and then Malta (1530–1798).

In this article I consider the evolution and adaptation of the Hospitallers over nearly a millennium. Evolution and adaptation are constant, intertwined themes in the Order’s history from its humble beginnings in Jerusalem to the worldwide relief efforts of the present day. In order to understand the Order’s success and longevity I examine the adaptation of the Order’s mission of hospitaller works the Order’s evolution in step with changing political requirements and moral priorities. The Order’s survival – through war and peace – was largely due to its consistent appeal to the nobility and its aspirants as donors, promoters and members. Some of Order’s members found the Order an exclusive club which confirmed social status, some as a means by which to achieve it, and others a vehicle through which they could undertake the charitable works which underpin the Christian faith. The history of the Order of Saint John is, in the words of Victor Mallia-Milanes, “a pilgrimage of faith, war and charity”.⁴

ORIGINS

The establishment of a hospitaller confraternity in Jerusalem met the dire needs of Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land and was also an expression of the religious revival in Europe which postulated to “infuse secular life with monastic values.”⁵ These reforms a strengthened the papacy, produced new monastic orders and promoted the idea that the laity should be involved in benevolent actions to support those less fortunate. Contemporary reforms enabled the adaptation of religious life to the demands of the world, with emphasis placed on service to others.⁶

³ *Willelmi Tyrensis Archiepiscopi Chronicon* (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis 63–63A), Turnhout 1986, pp. 814–817, Bk 818, chs 814–815. William of Tyre presented an account of the establishment of the church, monastery and hospital for men and women to support Christian pilgrims of the Latin rite. C. Morris, *The Sepulchre of Christ and the Medieval West: From the Beginning to 1600*, New York 2005, p. 213. William maintained that the hospice was dedicated to Saint John the Almoner. His account was written over a hundred years after the establishment of the hospice and is consider inaccurate. Scholars maintain that the hospital was dedicated to Saint John the Baptist at its foundation which took place before 1070.

⁴ Mallia-Milanes, *A Pilgrimage of Faith* (as n. 1), p. 83.

⁵ J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, London 1986, p. 2. Also in Luttrell, *From Jerusalem to Malta* (as n. 1), pp. 13–22.

⁶ J. W. Brodman, *Rule and Identity: The Case of the Military Orders*, The Catholic Historical Re-

In the middle of the eleventh century Jerusalem with its cluster of holy sites was the location where these ideals were put into practical expression. A hospice for pilgrims was established, in the vicinity of the Holy Sepulchre founded by the religious community of Saint Mary of the Latins. In time this community became the nucleus of the Jerusalem hospitaller confraternity serving the “poor of Christ”, achieved independent from of its founding house and more prominent after the First Crusade. It adopted Saint John the Baptist as its heavenly patron and took inspiration from the Gospel’s “the last shall be first, and the first last” (Matt 19:30). The community encouraged its members to welcome Christ through serving the poor, the sick, and exhausted pilgrims.⁷ The confraternity became known as the Hospitallers and their practical service was as innovative as it was radical.⁸ They served the poor and sick not only to secure their salvation, but because it benefited the person cared for. To them, the person cared for represented the person of Christ.⁹ The Hospitallers’ reverence for the unfortunate, observed Jonathan Riley-Smith, foreshadowed the ideas of Saint Francis a century later.¹⁰

The establishment of Latin rule in Jerusalem in 1099 brought an increase in pilgrims to the Holy City and the Hospital expanded largely through the support of donations received from grateful recipients of the Hospitallers’ care. The Hospital was at that time part of a network of religious communities located in Jerusalem around the Holy Sepulchre. In time these were to evolve into the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre and the Knights Templar.¹¹

The growth of the Hospital of Saint John was overseen by its first leader and possibly its founder, Gerard (d. 1120).¹² On the request of Gerard as *institutor ac prepositus Hierosolimitani Xenodochii* the work of the Hospital was recognised by Pope Paschal II (1099–1118) in the bull *Pie postulatio voluntatis* 15 February 1113 through which the confraternity of the Hospital of Saint John was ac-

view 87 (2001), pp. 383–400, here 395; T. S. Miller, *The Knights of Saint John and the Hospitals of the Latin West*, *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 53 (1978), pp. 709–733, here 717.

⁷ Matt 19:30: *But many [that are] first shall be last; and the last [shall be] first*; Matt 20:16: *So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.*

⁸ Nicholson (as n. 1), p. 3.

⁹ J. Riley-Smith, *The Knights of Saint John in Jerusalem and Cyprus: c. 1050–1310*, London–New York 1967, pp. 17–59; idem, *The Sovereign Military Order of Malta: A Short History*, London 2001, p. 2.

¹⁰ Idem, *Hospitallers: The History of the Order of Saint John*, London 1999, p. 21.

¹¹ Luttrell, *From Jerusalem to Malta* (as n. 1), p. 15.

¹² R. Hiestand, *Die Anfänge der Johanniter*, in: *Die geistlichen Ritterorden Europas*, ed. J. Fleckenstein, M. Hellmann, Sigmaringen 1980, pp. 31–80, here 54. Gerard is venerated by the Order of Malta as blessed but has never been recognised by the Catholic Church as such. A. Luttrell, *The Order’s Early Legacy in Malta*, Valletta 1989, p. 45.

corded the status of religious order.¹³ The Pope allowed its members to elect their own leader and placed the Order of the Hospital under the protection of the Holy See.¹⁴ The Hospital's Rule was strongly influenced by Augustinian principles and was devised by the second Master, Raymond du Puy (d. c. 1160) and confirmed by Pope Eugenius III (1145–1153). The Rule emphasised an active social role for the brethren and regulated the liturgical life of the Hospitallers: prayers adherence to divine office, meals, and accommodation. The Hospitallers became professed religious bound by the three monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and pledged of obedience to their master. Successive papal privileges (1135–1154) granted the Hospital a range of liberties, including some tithe exemptions and the grant of indulgences to its benefactors. In addition to these concessions the papacy reaffirmed the composition of the Hospital by lay brethren and priests and emphasised the underlying objectives of the future Order: *obsequium pauperum* – service to the poor and, later *tuitio fidei* – defence of the Faith.¹⁵

HOSPITAL IN JERUSALEM

The hospital maintained by the Order of Saint John in Jerusalem took care of the poor whatever their religion, nationality or sex.¹⁶ It is also likely that the practices, medical care, and diet of the hospital utilised the medical practices of the Levant.¹⁷ The hospital had separate wards for men and women, with one ward devoted to obstetrics. The physicians of the hospital visited the sick twice a day to check the medical condition and after diagnosing the nature of their ailment, offered medicines or diet to alleviate the infirmity. At a time when only the richest in Eu-

¹³ *Cartulaire général de l'Ordre des Hospitaliers de S. Jean de Jérusalem: 1100–1310*, ed. J. M. A. Delaville Le Roulx, 4 vols., Paris 1894–1906, here vol. 1, p. 30.

¹⁴ Morris (as n. 3), p. 214.

¹⁵ For example, in 1154 Pope Anastasius IV's *Christiane Fidei Religio* established the Hospital as an exempt order of the Church. *Cartulaire général* (as n. 13), vol. 1, pp. nos 130, 226. The issuing of this bull led to an appeal from the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem. J. Riley-Smith, *Templars and Hospitallers as professed religious in the Holy Land* (The Conway lectures in medieval studies), Notre Dame 2010, p. 22.

¹⁶ Riley-Smith, *Hospitallers* (as n. 10), p. 21. Justification for this was found directly in the Gospels: *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* (Lk 23:34); *Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you.* (Lk 6:35).

¹⁷ A detailed description of the Hospital's charitable works in the Jerusalem hospital can be found in an account by an anonymous author who stayed there in the 1180's. B. Z. Kedar, *A Twelfth-Century Description of the Jerusalem Hospital*, in: *The Military Orders*, vol. 2: *Welfare and Warfare*, ed. H. J. Nicholson, Aldershot 1998, pp. 3–13; Riley-Smith, *Hospitallers* (as n. 10), pp. 25–30.

rope had their own beds, the patients in the Hospital of Saint John had separate beds and the babies, cots. The beds had feather mattresses and coverlets. The bedclothes were changed every fortnight and twice a week barbers washed the feet of the sick with hot water and dried their feet with soft towels.¹⁸

Astonished pilgrims reported the success of the Hospital and praised its works. John of Würzburg wrote that annexed to the church of Saint John the Baptist there was: a hospital, wherein in various rooms are collected together an enormous multitude of sick people. Both men and women. Who are tended and restored to health daily.¹⁹

In addition to offering medical care the Order provided shelter to the homeless poor, including abandoned infants. After the fall of Jerusalem in 1187 and the expulsion of the Hospitallers the Order continued its hospitaller function at each location the Order settled; a hospital was established in Acre, in Limassol on Cyprus, and later in Rhodes and Malta.²⁰ As in Jerusalem, these hospitals brought a high standard of care relative to their era and served their local populations and pilgrims.²¹ The hospitaller ethos was maintained by its houses called commanderies or preceptories and an elaborate network of properties was established across Europe reflecting the generosity of local elites who had begun supporting and geographically extending the aims of the Order. The houses of the Hospital were managed by a commander or preceptor and were typically small hospitaller communities of Hospitaller brethren and their servants.²² Under the protection of the Holy See the Hospital's commanderies were exempt from the interference of local bishops. Thanks to their benefactors the commanderies established their own estates, built churches, and proclaimed their commitment to "our lords the sick and to the poor of Christ" by maintaining hospitals, hospices and poorhouses and re-

¹⁸ P. D. Mitchell, *Medicine in the Crusades: warfare, wounds and the medieval surgeon*, Cambridge–New York 2004, pp. 47–107, 180–181; S. Edgington, *Medical care in the Hospital of St John in Jerusalem*, in: *The Military Orders* (as n. 17), pp. 27–33; Riley-Smith, *Hospitallers* (as n. 10), pp. 19–30.

¹⁹ Description of the Holy Land by John of Würzburg, in: *The library of the Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society*, New York 1971, p. 44; A. Williams, *Xenodochium to Sacred Infirmary: the Changing Role of the Hospital of the Order of St John 1522–1631*, in: *The Military Orders, I: Fighting for the Faith and Caring for the Sick*, ed. M. Barber, Aldershot 1994, pp. 97–102.

²⁰ A. Luttrell, *The Hospitaller State on Rhodes and its Western Provinces, 1306–1462* (Variorum Collected Studies Series), Aldershot 1999, pp. x, 66–68; Nicholson (as n. 1), pp. 89–92.

²¹ Miller, *The Knights of Saint John* (as n. 6), pp. 709–733.

²² Riley-Smith, *The Knights of Saint John* (as n. 9), pp. 344–347.

mitted a portion of their income for the upkeep of the central Convent of the Order.²³ As early as 1123 the commanderies were grouped into regional priories.²⁴

DEFENCE OF CHRISTENDOM

In the early 12th century persistent threat of violence faced by Christian pilgrims travelling through the Holy Land diverted the brethren of the Hospital to the task of providing safe passage via military protection.²⁵ It is not known when the Order first became involved in military functions, but the grant of Beit-Jibrin, near Ascalon in 1136, and of a number of other frontier castles including Krak Des Chevaliers over the next ten years indicates that the Hospital was actively engaged in defence of the Faith and building sophisticated military structures.

The defence of Christian travellers was understood as an expression of love of one's neighbour. Jonathan Riley-Smith argues that Christian ideals of active works of charity, hospital and pastoral care and the crusades as a whole were the manifestation of Christian love through service by sprang from the same root.²⁶ This form of adaptation to the needs of the time and the emergence of the military aspect of the Order had a profound impact on its ethos and brought acclaim and criticism (a similar response was given to the formation of the Knights Templar). Critics included the Pope, who in 1178 reminded the Hospital of its pacific purpose.²⁷ The continued and constant threat to the safety of pilgrims however, soon quietened official disapproval and from the middle of the twelfth century military activities overshadowed hospitaller work.²⁸

²³ K. Miltzer, *Die Rolle der Spitaler bei den Ritterorden*, in: *Funktions- und Strukturwandel spatmittelalterlicher Hospitaler im europaischen Vergleich* (Geschichtliche Landeskunde 56), hrsg. v. M. Matheus, Stuttgart 2005, pp. 213–242.

²⁴ A provincial chapter meeting of commanders of a priory was held in Saint Gilles in 1123. J. Riley-Smith, *The Origin of the Comandery in the Hospital and the Temple*, in: *La Commanderie: institution des ordres militaires dans l'Occident medieval*, ed. A. Luttrell, L. o. Pressouyre, Paris 2002, pp. 9–18, here 9–10.

²⁵ A. Forey, *The Militarisation of the Hospital of St John*, *Studia Monastica* 26 (1984), pp. 75–89; Hiestand (as n. 12), p. 68.

²⁶ J. Riley-Smith, *Crusading as an Act of Love*, in: *Medieval Religion: New Approaches*, ed. C. H. Ber- man, New York 2005, pp. 49–65, here 64–65.

²⁷ In 1178 the Pope reminded the Hospitallers that their primary obligation lay in their charitable activities. *Cartulaire general* (as n. 13), pp. i, 527. Also in Riley-Smith, *The Knights of Saint John* (as n. 9), pp. 60–84.

²⁸ Forey, *The Militarisation* (as n. 25), p. 88.

A assumption of a military role by the Hospital necessitated specialisation among its brethren in order to better facilitate the dual functions of hospitaller care and bearing arms.²⁹ Separate classes of knight-brothers, serving brothers and chaplains were instituted, and aristocratic structures developed under which the knight-brothers dominated.³⁰ The changes within the Hospital were an extension of processes shepherded by the Church elsewhere and were consistent with similar developments taking place within the European knighthood.³¹ Through these new structures the mandate of love of God and love of one's neighbour was communicated by the Church in a way understood by the knighthood in terms of their obligations to their feudal lord and their family. The knights expressed their dedication to God through military action in protection of the defenceless.³² The Hospital's military activities were therefore another act of charity. At this time the white octagonal cross (symbol of the eight Beatitudes) was adopted as the Hospital's emblem, today widely recognised as the Maltese cross.³³

The effectiveness and prowess of the Order's knights brought considerable renown to the Hospitallers. Powerful crusader patrons such as Godfrey of Bouillon and King Baldwin I of Jerusalem made substantial donations and across Europe, from Spain to Poland, the Order received a variety of benefices. These became essential to the operation of the Order as it derived its manpower and income from the estates in continental Europe, and by the thirteenth century it was dependent on donations tenable through the patronage of powerful families.

The Order administered the European benefices via a sophisticated administrative structure of provincial priories and subordinated commanderies. By 1160 there were six and by 1312 twenty nine (after the Order of the Temple was dissolved and its property was transferred to the Hospitallers).

²⁹ Riley-Smith, *Hospitallers* (as n. 10), pp. 30–37.

³⁰ A. Luttrell, *The Hospitallers' Early Written Records*, in: *The Crusades and Their Sources: Essays Presented to Bernard Hamilton*, ed. J. France, W. G. Zajac, Aldershot 1998, pp. 150–151. Also Riley-Smith, *Hospitallers* (as n. 10), p. 61.

³¹ Riley-Smith, *Crusading as an Act of Love* (as n. 26), p. 64.

³² J. Riley-Smith, *What were the Crusades?*, London 1977, p. 55.

³³ Matt 5:3–10: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

ORDER OF SAINT JOHN IN POLAND

In Central Europe, Hospitaller commanderies, preceptories and houses were established following the Second Crusade. In the Piast realm the first commandery was founded before 1166 in Zagość after the safe return of a Piast prince, Henry Duke of Sandomierz who led a Polish contingent to the Holy Land in 1146.³⁴ Henry of Sandomierz recorded in the undated charter which confirmed the commandery's foundation:

*For although the vanities of this world prevented me, a sinner, to fulfil a vow undertaken long ago to build a church to the glory of God and the honour of Saint John the Baptist [...] I am fulfilling this vow now [...].*³⁵

The settlement of the Hospitallers in Poland heralded a wider trend in the Order's engagement in territories distant from the Holy Land. These were intended by the Order's leadership were presumably to provide support to the mission of the Order's central through the recruitment of knights, the reception of donations, and a general increase in the wealth of the Order.³⁶

STRUCTURE

From its first decades it is likely that the Order had an international structure which at first was a network of scattered convents answerable to Jerusalem.³⁷ By the fourteenth century the Order had become a supranational organisation and

³⁴ I argue elsewhere that it is more probable that Henry of Sandomierz lead the Polish contingent to the Holy Land in 1146 (rather than 1154). I argue this was a part of a coordinated Piast participation in the Second Crusade encompassing Mieszko III who commanded Polish troops during the Wendish Crusade (July–August 1147) and Bolesław IV's expedition against the Prussians (November–December 1147).

³⁵ *Codex diplomaticus Poloniae*, 4 vols., ed. L. Rzyszczeński, A. Muczowski, J. Bartoszewicz, Warszawa 1847–1858, here vol. 3, pp. charter no 4, 4–5: *Porro quia Ecclesiam in honorem Divi et Beati Joannis Baptistae in aliquo praenominatorum locorum, iam dudum me constructurum devoveram, quod tamen vanitatibus huius socculi detentus dum facere potui, peccator non feci; ad hoc votum complendum [...].*

³⁶ Houses of the Order were established in Poland in: Zagość (established 1147–1166), Lubiszew, Niemojewko, Poznań (1187), Stargard Szczeciński (established 1181–1187), Starogard Gdański (1150–1200), Kościan, Czarnocin, Skarszewy, Sławno (before 1180), Strzegom (about 1203), Kłodzko (before 1200), Grobniki (before 1200), Tyniec (1170–1189). M. Starnawska, *Między Jerozolimą a Łukowem. Zakony krzyżowe na ziemiach polskich w średniowieczu*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 25–54. For an overview of the history of the Hospitaller houses in Poland see J. Baranowski et al., *Zakon Maltański w Polsce*, Warszawa 2000.

³⁷ Riley-Smith, *Hospitallers* (as n. 10), p. 60.

the knights were grouped according to the languages they spoke. There were seven *Tongues*, each composed of priories and commanderies. These administrative units were responsible for the recruitment and training of knights, management of the Order's estates in Europe, and performed local hospitaller responsibilities. At the peak of the organisation was the Grand Master, elected for life from the professed knight-brothers, and bound by the Rule and Statutes of the Order.³⁸ The Grand Master was advised by the Council, composed of high officers drawn from the different *Tongues*.

The knight-brothers increasingly distanced themselves from others in the Order and the community tasks they performed, and from about the fourteenth century a candidate who was to be admitted as a knight-brother was required to prove his noble ancestry.³⁹ It was at this time that the Order consolidated its reputation as a prestigious institution and membership carried considerable cache for the individual and his kin. In earlier generations knight-brothers helped facilitate the rise in social standing of their family, and from the fourteenth century membership of the Order declared established noble status, as the legion of grand portraits featuring the Order's insignia attest.⁴⁰

The knights-brothers were considered particularly reliable and trustworthy because of the duality of their vocation (military and religious) and thus played an important role in the service of popes and kings who employed them in treasury, military and diplomatic services. The presence of knights at European courts reinforced the prestige of the Order and secured and extended their economic privileges. The Order also provided courtiers, minor nobility and younger sons with an attractive career path.⁴¹ The military apprenticeship on Rhodes and later on Malta was highly valued by those seeking to enter the knightly profession.

The Hospitaller convents for women in England, France, Italy and Spain were later also considered highly prestigious due to their insistence on proofs of noble

³⁸ Early governance of the Order is discussed in A. Forey, *Constitutional Conflict and Change in the Hospital of St John During the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 33 (1982), pp. 15–29.

³⁹ Through both parents, although the requirements varied between priories reflecting their national traditions. A. Luttrell, *The Hospitallers in Cyprus, Rhodes, Greece and the West: 1291–1440*, London 1978, pp. xiv, 511. Cf. J. Burgtorf, *The central convent of Hospitallers and Templars: history, organization, and personnel (1099/1120–1310)* (*History of Warfare* 50), Leiden 2008, pp. 35–40.

⁴⁰ Nicholson (as n. 1), pp. 82–83.

⁴¹ One of the many examples of a courtier, general and politician is Juan Fernandez de Heredia, who rose through the ranks of the Hospitallers and courts of Europe to become Grand Master in 1377, cf. Nicholson (as n. 1), p. 107.

ancestry.⁴² Women were admitted to the Order from its inception and the first hospice in Jerusalem included sisters, probably elderly widows. In 1338 almost one-third of the Hospitallers in England were women.⁴³ Women's roles were limited to those ascribed by churchmen of the day, namely retreat and prayer, however, they also managed the Order's estates.⁴⁴

AFTER THE END OF THE LATIN EAST: RHODES AND MALTA

After the fall of Acre in 1291, the Hospitallers retreated to Cyprus and between 1306 and 1309 successfully invaded the nominally Byzantine island of Rhodes and established an independent state there.

The Order survived a major crisis in the fourteenth century when European monarchs wavered in their support for international military religious orders culminating in the dissolution of the Order of the Temple in 1312. This period coincided with the establishment of the Order's sovereign rule on Rhodes and the real threat of Muslim expansion. The Order responded by renewing its commitment to its military vocation and adopted a new military strategy centred on a strong navy. The Order's success at keeping Muslim and corsair forces in check over the next two centuries is well recognised and was a key factor in keeping the Mediterranean and its trade routes under the control of Christian Europe. The Order therefore played an important role in the era of burgeoning trade facilitated by the Italian city-states; as military protector of Christian interests, the harrier of Muslim ones, and also as a banker and trading post.⁴⁵

The emergence of a more demarcated noble estate across Europe provided for the regulation of the Order's membership and the requirement for admission into the Order requiring formal proofs of nobility was introduced. The Order began to mint its own money, to maintain diplomatic relations with other states, and to raise taxes, thus assuming the vestiges of sovereignty. The functional sovereignty of the Order today dates from this time.⁴⁶

The knights were energetic masters of their island state. The Order encouraged trade, invested heavily in impressive defences, and extended patronage of the arts.

⁴² Ibid., p. 84.

⁴³ M. Struckmeyer, *The Sisters of the Order of St John at Minchin Buckland*, in: *Hospitaller women in the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Luttrell, H. J. Nicholson, Aldershot 2006, pp. 89–112, here 189.

⁴⁴ Nicholson (as n. 1), p. 84; Riley-Smith, *Templars and Hospitallers* (as n. 15), pp. 40–42.

⁴⁵ Luttrell, *The Hospitallers* (as n. 39), pp. xiv, passim.

⁴⁶ G. I. A. D. Draper, *Functional Sovereignty and the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Malta*, *Annales de l'Ordre Souverain Militaire de Malte* 32 (1974), passim.

Whilst the hospitaller vocation took second place it provided care to pilgrims who called at Rhodes and was supported by a hospital of significant size.

The Order was expelled from Rhodes by the Ottomans after a six-month siege in 1522. In 1530 the Hospitallers secured a new island base on Malta, and reproduced the “successful Rhodian island order state”⁴⁷ with the Order continuing the challenging mission of being at the vanguard of any Western Christian initiative against Islam. Malta was transformed into a fortress and kept the forces of the Ottoman Empire in check, withstanding even the great Turkish siege of 1565. The Hospitallers’ naval forces took part in patrolling the Mediterranean and participated in a many great naval battles with the victory at Lepanto in 1571 the most famous example. In Malta the Knights conducted an extensive building program and created a new capital, the town of Valletta as a model Hospitaller town. Under the Order’s patronage a new hospital called the Sacred Infirmary was built. A school of anatomy and surgery was established in 1676 and a university founded in 1769.

The expulsion from Rhodes was traumatic for the Order but did not affect its structure, operation or mission which continued uninterrupted in Malta. The political and social upheaval of the late eighteenth century and in particular the French Revolution wrought great changes and the Order was deeply shaken. The French Republic appropriated the assets of the Order’s French priories which formed a significant portion of its financial base, and in 1798 Napoleon Bonaparte took Malta after the Knights capitulated. By the late eighteenth century the Order appeared to have become a retirement club for elderly nobles whose chief concern was elaborate rituals, garb, and past glories. The following decades were a time of confusion and instability. In 1799 the government of the Order was seized by the non-Catholic Emperor Paul I of Russia and he proclaimed himself its Grand Master.

RENEWAL

The Order’s revival kindled in the first half of the nineteenth century when the hospitaller activities were reviewed as the primary objective of the Order. This was also possible because the Order’s structure was revised and its membership extended to those who were not able or not prepared to take monastic vows. This new

⁴⁷ Luttrell, *From Jerusalem to Malta* (as n. 1), pp. 14–16; idem, *Malta and Rhodes: Hospitallers and Islanders*, in: *Hospitaller Malta 1530–1798: Studies on Early Modern Malta and the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem*, ed. V. Mallia-Milanes, Valetta 1993, passim.

membership class of associates (known as *confreres* and *consœurs*) were grouped into a number of national associations.

From the middle of the nineteenth century the Order's membership returned to involvement in local and international relief activities utilising the Order's unique status as an independent and sovereign entity. For example, in 1834 it established a hospice and hospital in Rome, in 1876 it re-established hospitaller work in the Holy Land, and it was actively involved in relief work after of the earthquakes in San Francisco (1906) and Messina (1908).

Hospitaller and welfare activities were undertaken on a considerable scale during both world wars and for all parties involved in the conflicts. For example, a hospital operated in Warsaw between 1939 and 1944 took care of both Polish and German casualties. Most recently, the Order provides major relief action (health care, water, sanitation and shelter) in more than 120 countries.

Today the Order is recognised as a sovereign entity by over 104 states and since 1994, is a Permanent Observer at the United Nations.⁴⁸ It has about 13,500 members worldwide, the majority of whom are lay members (without noble descent). The traditions of the Order, its prestige, mystique, and emphasis on hands-on community service and religious observance continue to be attractive today. Membership is growing, mostly in the national associations of the New World, in the United States and Australia. Membership is still considered to be exclusive; typically successful professionals, with the medical profession particularly well represented. The Order's activities are supported by thousands of volunteers who are largely ordinary people working in their local communities.

The success of the Order's assistance lies not only in the high medical competence of the staff and fundraising, but also in utilisation of the network of local partnerships developed through the resources of the Order's diplomatic missions and the parishes of the Catholic Church. These contacts enable the rapid delivery of aid without dependence on local government bureaucracy or resources.

The Hospitaller tradition endures today not only in the Order of Malta (known officially as the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta) but also in the works of the protestant orders of Saint John which operate in the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany and Britain.⁴⁹ To-

⁴⁸ Resolution of the UN General Assembly, no 48/265, 24 August 1994. U. N. Organisation, *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Supplement No 8*, Vol. 2005 (Repertory of Practice of United Nations 30 May).

⁴⁹ Queen Victoria regulated the Order's legal position in Great Britain in the Royal Charter (dated 14 May 1888). The Order was given the style of the "Grand Priory of the Order of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem in England" with the Queen as Sovereign Head. Although the establishment of the British Grand Priory was not recognized by the Order of Malta, the

gether they form the Alliance of the Orders of Saint John, and acknowledge their common roots in the Hospital in Jerusalem. Christian values underpin their approach to their humanitarian works. The most recognised activity of the protestant orders are the Saint John Ambulance services found worldwide.¹⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

The Order was formed to care for thousands of exhausted sick pilgrims who were reaching Jerusalem from the eleventh century. Its military vocation developed as an extension of care of the sick, and by the thirteenth century had matured into the primary focus of the Order, ensuring its prestige, influence and economic viability. By the fifteenth century the Order had reinvented its military strategy from encastled knights in the Latin East to naval power of the Mediterranean, and as “defender of the Faith” ensured and participated in the worldly success of Christian merchants. The Order survived major upheavals which threatened its existence and which forced the relocation of the Order’s base on multiple occasions.

The revolutionary upheaval of the eighteenth century saw the loss of significant territorial and economic assets, and coincided with the stagnation and almost ruin of the Order. The order’s military mission lost its relevance when Britain took over on the role of naval watchdog and the Ottoman Turks were enmeshed in European alliances. The Order secured its revival when it returned to the primacy of its original hospitaller mission and its membership widened beyond the religious with noble proofs.

The Order of Saint John is an example of organisational adaptation over a millennium. Throughout its history it has attracted members and finances by fitting its purpose – service to the poor and defence of the faith – to the geopolitical and spiritual reality in which it found itself.

The need to aid the poor and sick is as pressing as ever making the Order’s purpose highly relevant. However, it is the effectiveness with which the Order presently undertakes its mission which makes it very much a dynamic institution of the present, and not merely a quaint relic of the past. As its founder Gerard, foresaw in the 1070s, this “institution will last until God pleases to raise up people who are willing to make suffering lighter and poverty more bearable.”⁵¹

Charter stated that it was the “Sixth or English Language of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem.”

⁵⁰ J. Riley-Smith, *Introduction*, in: *The Military Orders, III: History and Heritage*, ed. V. Malia-Milanes 2008, pp. XXI–XXII.

⁵¹ Address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to The Knights of The Sovereign Military Order Of Malta, The Vatican, Thursday, 19 October 2000.

