



The Countryside of Hospitaller Rhodes 1306–1423: Original Texts and English Summaries. Edited by Anthony Luttrell and Gregory O'Malley. Abingdon–Oxford: Routledge, 2019. 324 pp., 4 figures (2 maps and 2 parchment photographs). ISBN: 978-1-1138-73262-9.

Much of the research on Rhodes to-date focuses on the town of Rhodes. This book, however, examines the topics of settlement, population and defence in the Rhodian countryside, covering the years 1306–1423 and so reaching the half-way point of Hospitaller rule on the Aegean island of Rhodes. The 208 documents included, each with a detailed summary in English, originate from the Hospitallers' Rhodian archives. As the editors point out in the introduction, only a small part of these archives reached Malta in 1530. The *Libri Bullarum*, the main series of registers beginning in 1346, has only five extant registers for the years 1348–1381, while for the earlier years between 1306–1346 only nine relevant texts survive. For some years there are more documents, with 49 out of the 208 published documents dated to the years 1347–1352. Only a few volumes are missing from the registers for the years 1381–1423, but as most surviving information was written in the West there is little on the Rhodian countryside. The paucity of extant pre-1346 material from the Rhodian archives obstructs a statistical analysis of surviving texts.

Many of the documents in the registers relevant to the Rhodian countryside are grants of land or confirmations of such grants providing a unique picture of agrarian society, while limited use is made of pieces of Hospitaller legislation, some of their statutes having been promulgated or confirmed on Rhodes. The editors give several caveats; the information to-date on the Rhodian countryside is unsatisfactory, for instance there is no systematic study of the surface remains, excavation information is often left unpublished while recorded archaeological data is not accessible easily. The documents published contain numerous place-names and micro-toponyms. But many of these, written by Latins knowing little if any Greek, have been distorted. In addition, the names of churches may have changed over the centuries and the owners' names may refer to current or previous owners. Where places are described by referring to natural features, however, these can be studied in detailed satellite images available on the internet. A useful survey of monies struck on Hospitaller Rhodes follows the introduction, the editors pointing out that the documents frequently fail to distinguish between ducats and florins from Venice and Florence and the less valuable equivalents struck on Rhodes. They also observe the difficulties attendant on calculating the Rhodian land

measure, the *modiata*, although the Rhodian *rotulus*, a measure for weight, is given as 12 *occie* or 6 *libre* and 8 *once* by the fourteenth century Florentine merchant Francesco Balducci Pegolotti. A glossary of mainly Latin, Greek and French terms found in the documents and the section titled “Countryside” comes next, the editors acknowledging that the definitions are inevitably approximative.

The section titled “Countryside”, discussing the contents of the documents in their historical context, is sub-divided into four parts. The first part titled “Historical Background” outlines the Byzantine past and topography of Rhodes, mentioning classical sites, monasteries and churches, some of which were destroyed during the Byzantine era. Besides the main harbor at Rhodes Town the island had smaller ones at Lindos and Kameiros, while the ancient remains of Rhodes town extended well beyond the perimeter of the Byzantine circuit of walls. Rhodes was mountainous and had good rainfall, with fertile soil yielding olives and suited especially to viticulture. As Byzantium contracted Rhodes became increasingly peripheral, its harbour lying on the east-west shipping lanes between Western Europe, Cyprus and Syria and the north-south route between Egypt and Constantinople. At times Rhodes exported food stuffs to Syria and Constantinople. The *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* described Rhodes as fertile but with few people, many ruined dwellings, towers and monasteries, although some monasteries were still functioning.

Following the Fourth Crusade of 1204 Rhodes was fought over by the Gabalas family, the Greeks of Nicaea, Latins from the principality of the Morea and the Genoese. From circa 1250 onwards Rhodes was ruled by the Greeks of Nicaea, who recovered Constantinople from the Latin in 1261. From the 1270s onwards, however, corsairs seized control of Rhodes at various times. Genoese, Catalan and Venetian interventions on Rhodes followed the dissolution of the Byzantine fleet in 1283 and ships from the Turkish emirates established in western Anatolia after the collapse of the Seljuk sultanate began raiding Rhodes from towards the end of the thirteenth century, although there was no Turkish settlement. During this time, wood, iron and slaves were being transported from Rhodes to Egypt. The German traveler Ludolph von Suchen stated that before 1306 Rhodes, Kos and other places paid the Turks tribute. In discussing Byzantine fortifications, the editors observe that Lindos, Filerimos and Feraklos were fortified, although by 1306 Feraklos lay in ruins. Other castles were fortified and there were fortified villages and watchtowers. No *archontes* are recorded as present on Byzantine Rhodes. John Komnenos Palaiologos, granted Rhodes, Lesbos and some mainland estates by the Nicaean emperors, ruled through local landowners and nominated officials. The Byzantine emperor Andronikos II allegedly granted Rhodes just before 1306 to Andrea Moresco, a Genoese admiral in his service and a *casale* to Andrea’s uncle, the corsair Vignolo de Vignoli, who reached an agreement in 1306 with the Hos-

pitallers to attack and conquer Rhodes. The island was an Orthodox metropolitan bishopric. The great collection of books at the rural monastery of Artemitis was destroyed in 1233 by Nicaean troops and the monks were dispersed. But the church of St George Vardas in south-west Rhodes, rebuilt in the years 1289–1290, probably by a local patron, mentioned Emperor Andronikos II in the foundation inscription, indicating that Byzantine sovereignty was recognized on the eve of the Hospitaller conquest. The editors point out that the instability characterizing thirteenth century Rhodes ended with the Hospitaller conquest, completed in around 1309.

In the second part, titled “Administration and Defence”, the editors underline that the Order’s *raison d’être* was to combat the infidel, taking Rhodes to escape the restrictions it had to endure in the Latin kingdom of Cyprus. To do this it required Western manpower, responsions from the Western properties, a fortified harbour and maintenance of a small war fleet and good relations with the Greeks, who provided *marinarii* for service on the war galleys and an agricultural labour force to produce foodstuffs for Rhodes Town. The main territorial units in the countryside were the castellany, generally attached to a castle and under the command of a castellan, the *casale*, a village or hamlet and its surrounding estates and the *contrata*, an undefined district smaller than the *casale*. The editors observe that the documents of the Order never define the term *casale*, common through the Latin-ruled Mediterranean, but that some of the published documents give *casale* boundaries in detail. Holders of *casalia* had limited jurisdictional powers, being entitled to hold a court but not to dispense high justice. He received a share of the foodstuffs produced by his serfs, who could not marry or leave his lands without his permission, those departing being brought back forcibly. Only Latins could hold *casalia*, and Hospitallers were technically disbarred. But in practice some did hold them in return for providing armed men and at times their horses, money or produce such as wax. Knights of the Order, experienced in managing estates due to their family background and their familiarity in ruling over subject Syrian and Greek populations in Latin Syria and Cyprus, performed this task with the help of tax collectors, notaries and others. Estates, generally described as within a *casale* or a castellany were positioned with respect to adjoining estates, churches, roads, hills or rivers. The relevant terminology for them, *locum*, *contrata* and *territorium*, was not defined precisely, perhaps on purpose.

The Grand Master of the Order, elected for life, could nevertheless act on certain issues only with the consent of the senior members, the so-called Convent of the Order that had its headquarters in Rhodes Town. He nonetheless exercised extensive powers, to appoint personnel to administrative offices, to grant lands and to issue and confirm written contracts involving secular Latins or Greeks. Chapters-General of the Order held on Rhodes passed some statutes on rural landholdings on the

rights of members of the Order to purchase, hold and bequeath such fixed properties as well as moveable ones, including slaves. The Grand Masters retained powers to dispense high and low justice and as regarded the *commerc*, the exaction of customs dues. A statute of 1337 empowered the Grand Master to grant lands on Rhodes and Kos following the advice of the senior brethren of the Order *supra anneam*, that is in between the Chapters-General. After the Grand Master, the most important Hospitaller officers were the Castellan of Rhodes, the Bailiff of Rhodes and the Seneschal of the Grand Master, all of whom had subordinate officers. Among them were the Order's scribes, who being Latins were often unable to transcribe Greek personal or place names properly. Among the rural Greeks the *protos* headed a unit known a *protaria*, exercising authority along with the local elders, the *omotai*.

The castellanies were defensive as well as administrative units, almost always attached to a castle, although their boundaries were not delineated in writing. Castellans could delegate to lieutenants and their duties encompassed internal security, such as guarding Hospitaller brethren incarcerated in the castles under their command. The castellanies increased in number over time, becoming 12 by 1475. The defence of the countryside involved the construction of roads, bridges and fortifications by the rural population and the building and upkeep of castles. Fortified rural structures functioned to resist external raids, to shelter people and as lookout and signaling stations. Besides the Hospitaller brethren, troops included the *sergentes*, infantrymen some of whom were mercenaries, the *servientes*, who manned the castles and had their own lands nearby, and who included Syrian Christians who had followed the Hospitallers after 1291 to Cyprus and then to Rhodes, and the mounted archers known as *turcopuli*. The mounted archers served both in Rhodes town and in the countryside. The latter were commanded by a turcopolier who from 1334 onwards was a conventual bailiff of the English langue, with powers from 1445 onwards if not earlier to visit the *viglocornites* manning the watchtowers and, if necessary, punish them for negligence.

The Hospitallers took over pre-existing Byzantine fortifications like Lindos, Feraklos, Filerimos and other castles, towers and fortified churches spread over the countryside. But they dismantled the extensive Byzantine fortifications at Filerimos, maintaining only the fortified inner castle. A Hospitaller castellan resided there from 1396 onwards. The great earthquake of 1396 destroyed or damaged numerous castles. There may have been walled villages on Rhodes, as shown in Caoursin's manuscript of circa 1481. There were also watchtowers known in Greek as *vigles*, manned on pain of punishment by the inhabitants of the nearby *casalia*. Simple messages sent by fire, smoke or other signaling methods gave warning of shipping movements or approaching danger. Castles or towers built on small offshore islands like Chalki or Alimia required permanent defensive garrisons.

sons. Turkish raids against Rhodes increased from 1389 onwards, but the defences were not severely tested until the Mamluk attacks of the 1440s.

In the third part titled "Settlement, Economy and Society", the editors underline how the order encouraged settlement on Rhodes so as to boost the island's population. The lands on Rhodes taken by the Order could be granted to individual Hospitaller brethren or to others, and many Greeks and their churches kept their properties. In general villages and smaller settlements were expanded but some new ones were founded also. Westerners, mostly Genoese, Provençals, Catalans, other Italians and a few Venetians were offered lands either as fiefs, or leased in return for rental payments, or in emphyteusis or other forms of contract such as the *iuspatronatus*. Slaves included Greeks from continental Greece but also Russians, Armenians and Bulgarians. Persons granted fiefs were exclusively Latins and were obliged to offer military service in return, although at times fiefs were commuted for money payments. Clergy possessing rural properties included the Latin archbishop of Rhodes and Greek deacons and some rural estates became the property of the corporations of Hospitaller brethren known as *langues*. The Order tried to improve agriculture by settling serfs on uninhabited lands and leasing out lands it was unable to cultivate on condition that the leaseholders made improvements like planting vines or building mills. But the repeated outbreaks of plague in 1347, 1358, 1361 and 1410, the great earthquake of 1366 and Turkish raids from 1379 onwards caused depopulation and land to cease being cultivated.

Those working the land were slaves, unfree serfs known as *parici* and free peasants called *francomati*. Slaves belonged to the Order, to individual brethren or to others, and if freed as a reward for their services or out of piety they became 'Roman citizens' or *francomati*, joining the free peasantry. Serfs had a hereditary status, were tied to the land and were burdened with numerous taxes and exactions, but they too could obtain freedom for the same reasons as slaves. The *francomati* were less burdened, paying 20–25% of their agricultural produce to the Order and enjoying freedom of marriage and movement. They had the obligation, however, known as *xyleia*, the transportation of timber to the coast to be used for shipbuilding. Inter-marriage between those of different ethnic or social groups could cause problems. Initially the fourteenth century *Capitula Rodi* decreed that the offspring of a Latin father and a Greek mother were considered free, but subsequently decreed those born in the towns to be *marinariii*, that is liable for galley service. Also decreed free were the children of a Provençal man who had married a Greek *serva*, and who had been christened in a Latin church, but this occurred only by consent of the Grand Master, not because of their father or their Latin faith.

Initially farm produce was not exported for it simply reduced the need for foreign grain, while most leases of rural properties were paid in cash. In 1332

a ban on the export of livestock came into place. Agricultural products included much fruit, olives and olive oil, carobs, grain, wine and honey, this last product being exported to Egypt in the fifteenth century. The Grand Master's extensive estates at Malpasso contained 2,000 fruit trees with a variety of fruit. Livestock bred on Rhodes included mules, donkeys, oxen, pigs, sheep and goats. Fowl included chicken and falcons. There were many deer, and in 1367 King Peter I of Cyprus was hunting them on Rhodes. Asiatic horses were mostly imported from Anatolia, although some were bred on Rhodes, while heavy cavalry horses, imported from the West at considerable expense, were pastured in meadows. Fish caught at sea were sold in Rhodes Town. Sugar cane cultivation was probably introduced from Cyprus and two factories on Rhodes produced high quality sugar. Timber was felled, especially that at the *casale* of Salakos especially reserved for the Order. Among the measures taken by the Order to increase agricultural production was the provision of ploughs to those needing them, like the 50 Armenian families that were to settle on Kos. There were many wind and water mills, some belonging to monasteries, and country dwellers had rights of access to water and irrigation channels. Offshore islands such as Alminia, Chalki and St Nicholas produced cereals, figs, fish and honey transported to Rhodes Town for sale. The daily life and living standards of the rural population resembled those of Crete and Cyprus, at least until 1378, after which absenteeism, corruption and extortions practiced by the Grand Masters caused an increase in poverty.

The administration of justice in rural Rhodes exhibits particular features. The regulations of the fourteenth century *Capitula Rodi* applied only to Rhodes Town, and there were no lawyers or judges outside the town in the various rural castellanies. The holders of fiefs had limited powers of punishment reduced over time. The Latin fief-holder at Lardos had rights of high justice in 1329, but by the mid-fourteenth century these had been reduced to powers of imposing fines in civil and pecuniary cases. The Grand Master, however, had the right to pardon major crimes such as murder. By the close of the fourteenth century a Greek *scribania* or notarial office covered both Rhodes town and the countryside. The office holder, the *conditus Graecorum*, was a Greek appointed by the Grand Master to function as a notary for Greeks in Rhodes town and in the countryside. For complex legal cases the Greeks had recourse to the Greek metropolitan court in Rhodes Town that applied a civil code founded on Roman and Byzantine Law. Greeks could also submit cases before a Latin judge ordinary, as the brothers Crossocopoulos did over a vineyard. They won the case, but this judgement was reversed by another Latin judge ordinary in favour of Anna Stratigissa, their opponent, an appeal judge confirming this reversal. Nicolaos Crossocopoulos then appealed before the Latin archbishop of Rhodes and finally to the Grand Master, in Avignon at the time. The master assigned the case to various professors of civil and canon law who in 1391 passed judgement in Nicholas's favour.

In the fourth part titled “Religious and Cultural Life” the editors first discuss material culture in the countryside. There were two-storey houses near Rhodes Town and at least one *jardinum* with baths and houses attached. Rural houses built of rough stone or mud brick sometimes had a central arch supporting a flat roof. Such houses sometimes formed a village or else were situated in vines and gardens, sometimes enclosed by a wall. Fifteenth century views of rural Rhodes illustrating dispersed habitations indicate a degree of security across the island. Agriculture consisted mainly of viticulture and animal husbandry, the inhabitants being mostly Greeks but including Latins, Syrians and Jews. The Grand Master had broad powers regarding the Greek church in the countryside. He controlled nominations to Greek churches and monasteries, appointing abbots, allowing monks to make bequests, nominating minor Greek clerics and notaries, suspending priests from the celebration of mass and licencing promotions. As elsewhere in the Greek world, Greek priests married and bequeathed their lands to their children, creating priestly dynasties. Generally respected, some were serfs working the land while others were headmen of villages, an office also held by Greek laymen.

The *iuspatronatus*, whereby private churches built and endowed by individuals or families were inherited by successive generations who maintained priests there at their own expense existed on Rhodes throughout the time of Hospitaller rule. So did the *charistikion*, a practice in which monastic properties were granted to private lay persons or institutions, usually on a lifetime basis or for up to three generations. In such cases the founder’s rights, to be mentioned in prayers, to nominate the priest or the abbot and to receive the incomes, were hereditary and passed on to his descendants. The institutions subject to this practice were small on Rhodes. The churches founded by local communities on Nisyros and at Maritza on Rhodes secured the *iuspatronatus*. Monkless monasteries, simple houses for priests or lay persons, sometimes having no monks or nuns in them but members of the founder’s family instead, also existed on Rhodes, like those of Apolakkia and Santa Maura. Some monasteries outside Rhodes Town did house monks, for instance that of the Archangel Michael at Thari and of St Nicholas de Insula on an islet off the north-east coast of Rhodes. There were no nunneries on Rhodes between the years 1306–1423 but monks and nuns may have lived side by side. Women of independent means, often widows, sometimes became nuns, and the *civis* of Rhodes Johannes Jeraqui was authorized in 1445 to support nuns at the *monasterium* attached to the church of the Holy Apostles in the *borgo* of Rhodes Town.

There was considerable church-building on Rhodes from the thirteenth through to the fifteenth centuries, with Latin and Greek-rite churches to be found just outside the walls of Rhodes Town. Small Byzantine style churches were built in the countryside, some on a cross plan and others with apses and a cylindrical dome,

usually single-nave with barrel vaults, in a manner more in keeping with Byzantine tradition than elsewhere in Latin Greece. Latin influences were few, but existed nevertheless. These included the subterranean frescos at Filerimos depicting four knights with the coat-of-arms of the French family of Nantouillet. Regnault de Nantouillet took part in the Cypriot expedition to Cilician Armenia in 1367 and possibly sailed with the fleet that set out from Rhodes in 1365 to attack Alexandria in Egypt. The paintings at St Habbakuk, a Greek church near Paradisi, also show Latin influences. The few pre-1423 Latin foundations in rural Rhodes included a chapel at Villanova castle, a chapel that Brother Juan de Mur, Bailiff of Rhodes, founded outside the castle at Kattavia in 1410 and a hospice Brother Pierre de Pausedieu founded in 1414 at Aphantou. Besides churches and monasteries, the countryside of Rhodes contained numerous classical and post-classical remains that the Constantinopolitan visitor Michael Angelos noticed in 1342, alluding to the ruined cities of Lindos, Ialysos and Kameiros. Grand Master Fernandez de Heredia showed interest in the history of Greece during the 1380s, sponsoring translations of ancient Greek histories.

With the arrival of the Florentine priest Cristoforo Buondelmonti on Rhodes in 1414 the island attracted serious Humanistic interest. Buondelmonti had classical erudition and remained on Rhodes until his death in around 1431. He travelled around Rhodes mentioning the ancient remains, the fertility of the countryside, the castles, churches monasteries and villages. His description and map of Rhodes, incorporated in his book titled *Liber Insularum Archipelagi*, brought the island to the attention of the wider world. The editors discuss Buondelmonti's description in the Appendix following the section titled "Countryside". The manuscript tradition consisting of a shorter and a longer version is described and analysed in some detail, the editors observing the unreliability of the maps included in some of the extant manuscripts, many of which are undated, and the fact that the information on the maps regarding churches, towers castles and other edifices does not always correspond to that in the corresponding manuscripts. The editors point out that neither the texts nor the maps of Buondelmonti yield information indicating that Hospitaller fortifications constructed between the years 1306–1423 were in ruins by around 1419. The book ends with a bibliography listing unpublished and published sources as well as secondary works and an index. All told, this edition of documents regarding the Rhodian countryside is a highly valuable contribution to the history of the Military Orders, of Latin Greece and of the Aegean countryside in the Later Middle Ages.

*Nicholas Coureas (Nicosia)**

* ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8903-8459>