

## **The Knights of Malta, 1530-1798: Aspects of military-religious masculinity**

Los caballeros de la Orden de Malta, 1530-1798.  
Aspectos de la masculinidad militar-religiosa

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**Abstract:** The Hospitaller knights of the Order of St John (of Malta) are often represented in heroic poses that easily recall the image of the knight in shining armour. Yet their status was very particular. They were religious knights, but not bound to a monastic cloistered life. They hailed from the cream of European nobility, yet were expected to be loyal to their Order, while often being called to serve European sovereigns. There was a particular ‘Hospitaller gender regime’ which was dictated by the very act of belonging to the Order, but this was a multi-faceted organism. This paper will explore this regime through a study of ideas related to war, masculinity, swords, and military engineers, within the context of the Order of Malta. It will start with a discussion of how the conferment upon an individual of the Hospitaller habit – generally through an elaborate investiture ceremony – marked a point of transition for that individual, from a boy to a man, and a Knight of St John. During this ritual, a number of objects were used to animate this process, most prominent of which was the

sword. Some Hospitallers, then, experienced the reverse procedure, the ritual of being defrocked of their habit as a result of some grave offence. Here again, masculine ideals were exhibited in highlighting one's downfall from grace into infamy. While these procedures were symbolic, they were reflective of the realities experienced by members of the Order. The way Hospitallers related to weapons, swords in particular, said a lot about their cultural make-up. Furthermore, the role of military engineers employed by the Order, and who often were or became members of the institution during their service to the Order, is explored here by way of illustrating the variety of manifestations of masculinity in a noble military-religious-hospitaller institution like the Order of St John.

**Keywords:** Hospitallers, investiture, gender, swords, engineers.

**Resumen:** Los caballeros hospitalarios de la Orden de San Juan de Malta son a menudo representados en poses heroicas que recuerdan fácilmente la imagen de un caballero de brillante armadura. No obstante, su estatus era muy particular. Se trataba de caballeros religiosos, aunque no estaban atados a una vida de encierro monacal. Procedían de entre la élite de la nobleza europea pero se esperaba de ellos que fuesen leales a su orden, si bien es cierto que frecuentemente se ponían al servicio de diversos soberanos europeos. Al mismo tiempo, estos individuos estaban insertos en un determinado 'régimen hospitalario de género' definido por la propia pertenencia a la orden, aunque este se trataba de un organismo con bastantes facetas. Así, el presente artículo ahondará en este régimen a través de un estudio de ideas relacionadas con la guerra, la masculinidad, las espadas y los ingenieros militares, todo dentro del contexto de la Orden de Malta. Comenzará con una discusión acerca de cómo la aceptación de un individuo en la orden –generalmente mediante una elaborada ceremonia de iniciación– marcaba un punto de transición para el mismo, pasando de niño a hombre y caballero de San Juan. Durante este ritual se empleaba un determinado número de objetos, siendo el más importante la espada. Al mismo tiempo, algunos hospitalarios sufrían el proceso inverso, el ritual de expulsión de la orden como consecuencia de una falta grave. También aquí, los ideales masculinos eran empleados para subrayar la caída en desgracia del individuo. Estos procedimientos eran esencialmente simbólicos, pero al mismo tiempo reflejaban las realidades que experimentaban los miembros de la orden. El modo en que los hospitalarios se relacionaban con el armamento, especialmente con las espadas, nos dice mucho acerca de universo cultural. Además, el artículo explora también

el papel jugado por los ingenieros militares empleados por la orden, que al mismo tiempo solían ser también miembros de la misma, como forma de ilustrar las manifestaciones de la masculinidad en una institución noble, religiosa, militar y hospitalaria como la Orden de San Juan.

**Palabras clave:** Hospitalarios, ceremonia de iniciación, género, espadas, ingenieros.

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### Introduction

«With the Habit of a Knight one came to be dressed up as a new man». <sup>1</sup> Thus, according to Fra Jean Baptiste le Marinier de Cany, donning the garment of a Hospitaller was a profoundly transformative experience. Hospitaller knights of the Order of St John (of Malta) are often represented in heroic poses in early modern paintings that recall the enduring image of the knight in shining armour. Yet their status was very particular. They were religious knights, bound by the rules of the Catholic Church, but not to a monastic cloistered life. They hailed from the cream of European nobility, yet were expected to be loyal to their Order, while often being also called to serve European sovereigns. Through war and prayer, they sought to live a life that was both similar to non-Hospitaller noblemen and yet particular to their status as religious knights.

Hence a very particular identity was formed and developed over time, both in a collective manner as an Order, as well as for each individual member. Aristocratic and masculine ideals were built into the hierarchical structures of the Order and into the ways it functioned in such a natural manner that they could elude the eye. It is therefore useful to ‘think institutionally’ to try to draw out the ways in which gender was embedded in the functioning of the institution. Here, power relations, division of labour and seniority mediated the interactions between different ranks and created a particular ‘gender regime’. <sup>2</sup> Such gender regimes are not always internally coherent

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<sup>1</sup> From the Italian translation of Jean Baptiste LE MARINER DE CANY: *Reflexions D'un Chevalier de Malte*, 1689, found in B.S.M.O.M. (Biblioteca Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta), Ms.MAL641MAR, f.24, c.1689, «con l'Abito di Cavaliere viene egli a vestirsi di un nuovo uomo».

<sup>2</sup> Raewyn CONNELL: *The Men and the Boys*, Cambridge, Polity, 2000, pp. 152-163.

and although there is a strong top-down process of socialization, this also occurs in other formal and informal ways. Among such generic ideas that informed early modern – including Hospitaller – mentalities was the widely-accepted assumption that noblemen had an inherent aptitude for military service, although preparation was still necessary.<sup>3</sup> While gender has generally been more closely associated with women, there is now a significant body of literature that acknowledges that gender applies to men as well. There are strong links between gender and religion,<sup>4</sup> while gender permeates and underpins daily life.<sup>5</sup> One’s sense of self is created in relation to one’s social and material environments. Within the Order of Malta, the meanings ascribed to maleness, how this was constructed and challenged, the role of language and the relation to power, all had an impact on the notion and the experience of being a Hospitaller.<sup>6</sup> Many of these ideas can be seen in the elegant portrait of the young Giovanni Carlo de Medici (1611-1663) by Justus Suttermans (1597-1681), now housed at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence [Figure 1]. He was probably about 10 years old in this portrait and the eight-pointed Hospitaller cross was prominently depicted on his chest, its white colour prominent against the bright red and yellow of his lavish outfit. He stands with his right arm in the akimbo position,<sup>7</sup> a typical warrior pose, while his left hand rests on his sheathed sword. On a table next to him there is an open book, identified as Bonaito Lorini’s *Le Fortificazioni* (Venice, 1609) [Figure 2]. The sword and the book on military engineering proclaimed his belonging to a military organisation and the importance of the military arts in his formation as a man.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Hamish M. SCOTT and Christopher STORRS: “Introduction: The consolidation of noble power in Europe, ca. 1600–1800”, in Hamish M. SCOTT (ed.), *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Western and Southern Europe)*, Vol. 1, London, Longman, 2007, pp. 7-8, 11, 40-42, 46-7. Jonathan DEWALD: *The European nobility 1400–1800*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 28, 97. Antonio SPAGNOLETTI: “Onore e spirito nazionale nei soldati italiani al servizio della monarchia spagnola”, in Claudio DONATI and Bernhard R. KROENER (eds.), *Militari e società civile nell’Europa dell’età moderna (secoli XVI–XVIII)*, Bologna: Il mulino, 2007, pp. 212-226.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ursula KING: “Religion and Gender: Embedded patterns, interwoven frameworks”, in Theresa A. MEADE and Merry E.H. WIESNER-HANKS (eds.), *A Companion to Gender History*, Malden, MA and Oxford, Blackwell, 2004, pp. 70-85.

<sup>5</sup> Laura GOWING: *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in early modern London*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 27-8. Teresa A. MEAD and Merry E. WIESNER-HANKS, “Introduction”, in Íd. and Íd. (eds.), op. cit., p. 2. Ruth MAZO KARRAS: “Afterword”, in Natasha R. HODGSON, Katherine J. LEWIS and Matthew M. MESLEY (eds.), *Crusading and Masculinities*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 345-55.

<sup>6</sup> Definition of gender adapted from Alexandra SHEPARD and Gartine WALKER: “Gender, change and periodisation”, *Gender and History*, 20:3 (2008), p. 455.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan SPICER: “The Renaissance elbow”, in Jan N. BREMMER and Herman ROODENBURG (eds.), *A Cultural History of Gesture: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991, pp. 86, 93.

<sup>8</sup> Ludovica SEBREGONDI: “Giusto Suttermans e bottega – Ritratti di Giovan Carlo de Medici”, in *Lungo il tragitto crociato della vita*, Venice, Marsilio, 2000, pp. 160-161.

This paper will seek to explore aspects of military-religious masculinity by looking at notions of Hospitaller masculinity, the function of swords in shaping Hospitaller identities, and the role of military engineers within the Order of Malta.



Figure 1. Giusto Suttermans and workshop, *Giovan Carlo de' Medici* (1622), oil on canvas, 175x117cm, courtesy of the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, inv. 1890, n. 3649.



Figure 2. Detail from Figure 1 showing the hilt of Giovan Carlo de' Medici's sword, and Bonaito Lorini's *Le Fortificazioni* (Venice, 1609), courtesy of the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, inv. 1890, n. 3649.

### The habit makes the knight

In 1582, Fra Hughes Loubens de Verdalle (r.1582-95) became head of the Order; as the new Grand Master, his election occurred in somewhat extraordinary circumstances. He was replacing Fra Jean Levesque de la Cassiere (r.1572-81) whose disciplinarian measures led to an internal revolt that deposed him. Pope Gregory XIII (r.1572–85) severely reprimanded the rebels and reaffirmed la Cassiere in power, but the latter's time in office and in this life soon expired. It was up to Grand Master Verdalle, with strong papal backing, to restore authority and harmony within the Order. He took various measures towards this end, including the production in 1588 of a new, beauti-

fully illustrated edition of the statutes of the Order, the *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem*. Through this, Verdalle was presenting an updated authoritative version of the rules of the Order for all members to read and follow. Each chapter of the *Statuta* is accompanied by an illustrative plate that captures the essence of that particular chapter, and arguably creates the frame of analysis in which it should be read.<sup>9</sup> Two of these images will be discussed here, one that accompanies the chapter dealing with the «reception of brothers» [Figure 3],<sup>10</sup> the other, its inverse image, the «expulsion of brothers» [Figure 4].<sup>11</sup>

Above the image in Figure 3 was a phrase in Latin: «INDVIMINI NOVVM HOMINEM VT CUM HOC AVT IN HOC», that is, «Let us be clothed with the new man with it [or] in it». This recalls St Paul's letter to the Ephesians (Eph 4:22-4) in which he encouraged people to put on a new self in the image of God: a self, characterized by righteousness and holiness. A new man – a Hospitaller in fact – was born as a result of putting on the habit of the Order. Almost 100 years later, Fra de Cany was repeating the same sentiment. The habit does make the man, which is what this scene is all about. Having completed his novitiate, an aspiring Hospitaller went through the investiture ceremony.<sup>12</sup> It would seem that the solemn and elaborate ceremony of early modern times was highly reminiscent of what had happened earlier on, when the Order resided in medieval Jerusalem, Cyprus and Rhodes.<sup>13</sup> The Missal, candles, swords and white garments were critical elements in this ritual. The Knight Grand Cross presiding over the ceremony sits on a chair with feet of lion's paws, a symbol of strength, restraint and self-control.<sup>14</sup> He holds an open Missal on his lap, while with his outstretched arms he is presenting the candidates with their stole. With one hand above the Missal and another resting on his chest, one of the aspirants can be seen taking his oath to God, the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist to live and die for his Order in accordance with his vows and the statutes of the Order, and to be a servant of the sick and the poor.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Emanuel BUTTIGIEG: "Politics and power in Grand Master Verdalle's *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem* (1588)", in Peter EDBURY (ed.), *The Military Orders: Politics and Power, The Military Orders: Politics and Power*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2012, pp. 153-164.

<sup>10</sup> *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem*, Rome, 1588, 'De Receptione Fratrum', pp. 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> *Statuta...*, 'De Sgardio', pp. 90-91.

<sup>12</sup> B.S.M.O.M., Ms.MAL641MAR, f.21, c.1689.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan RILEY-SMITH: *The Knights of St John in Jerusalem and Cyprus 1050-1310*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 1973, pp. 232-233. Ann WILLIAMS: "Boys will be boys – The problem of the novitiate in the Order of St John in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries", in Toni CORTIS, Thomas FRELLER, and Lino BUGEJA (eds.), *Melitensium Amor: Festschrift in honour of Dun Ġwann Azzopardi*, Malta, 2002, pp. 179-184.

<sup>14</sup> Paola RAPELLI: *Simboli del potere e grandi dinastie*, Milan, Mondadori Electa, 2004, pp. 34-39, 62-63.

<sup>15</sup> Giacomo BOSIO: *Gli statuti della sacra religione di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano*, Rome, 1597, p. 103.



Figure 3. 'The Reception of Brothers', 1588, engraving, 18x14cm.  
*Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem*, 4. Acknowledgement: © National  
 Library of Malta.

On the altar in the background-centre of the image are two lit candles; even more prominent is the candle being held almost above the Grand Cross by a young boy, probably a page. The bright flame from this candle symbolised charity, the flame representing God's abundant love for all, and the will of the newly ordained Hospital-



ler to shine in his service.<sup>16</sup> This is an image flooded with light, where darkness is banished and shadows are almost transparent. The candidates are attired in long white tunics and kneel at the feet of the Knight Grand Cross. Behind them are two genuflecting knights who hold spurs in their hands, indicating the chivalrous nature of the Order. Tellingly, these spurs were made of gold and would be placed on the candidate's feet as part of the ceremony to symbolize how a Hospitaller would always despise riches and avarice.<sup>17</sup> An intangible item in this image is the age of those represented, from young unbearded boys to the clean-shaven youths joining the Order, and from the middle-aged fashionably bearded knights with their tight-fitting leggings showing off their muscular thighs<sup>18</sup> to the sober, bearded, bald Knight Grand Cross presiding over the event. This is a masculine world where the allegory of the 'ages of man' is captured and ideals about patriarchal authority proclaimed. The military muscularity of this world is underscored by the presence of various swords, in itself the most significant object in the image. This was blessed during the rite so that God was providing a weapon to the Knight that he should wield for the glory of the most high with faith, hope and charity.<sup>19</sup> Each of the three novices holds a sword by his side, as do other knights present in this scene, but one knight holds his sword unsheathed and upright, clearly proclaiming the warrior ethos of this organisation. In this image the unsheathed sword stands diagonally across from the burning candles and parallels the sword held by the statue of St Paul in the niche above it. This creates a certain compositional balance in the image, but also seems to proclaim the intimate link between war and faith for the Order. The border surrounding this image (not visible in Figure 3) was full of weapons, trophies of war and slaves. This was a holy war against Islam, but it was not the only battle a Hospitaller faced. According to an account of one such Hospitaller investiture, the Grand Cross told the candidate:

Maintain the character of a spiritual Knight in chastity and honour, as our profession and regulations require of you. In virtue of these I now gird this sword on you, for as this belt enables you to carry the weapon firmly at your side, so you should be bound by chastity to extinguish all evil lusts, to keep yourself pure throughout your life, as long as God in his grace shall give you life.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> B.S.M.O.M., Ms.MAL641MAR, f.21, c.1689.

<sup>17</sup> Giacomo BOSIO: *Gli statuti* ..., p. 101.

<sup>18</sup> Katherine B. CRAWFORD: "The politics of promiscuity: Masculinity and Heroic Representation at the Court of Henry IV", *French Historical Studies*, 26:2, (2003), pp. 225-52.

<sup>19</sup> Giacomo BOSIO: *Gli statuti* ..., pp. 98-9. B.S.M.O.M., Ms.MAL641MAR, f.11, c.1689. B.M.R., Ms.67, f.8, 1754.

<sup>20</sup> Emil KRAUS: *The Adventures of Count George Albert of Erbach – A true story*, [trans. Beatrice

An individual knelt as a boy, but would rise as a man and as a Knight of St John. It was thus that a Hospitaller's formal membership of the Order commenced. For some, their career in the Order could end in a similar, but ignoble manner, through a defrocking ceremony as depicted in Figure 4. If the image in Figure 3 was characterised by a high open window, candles, light, and almost translucent shadows, the mood here is very different. The two windows / openings at the back of the image are blocked with sheets; there are no candles and the only source of light seems to be that radiating from the Holy Spirit, who is not here to bless the two kneeling miscreants. Expulsion from the Order was reserved for the gravest of offences, such as murder and cowardice / desertion on the battlefield.<sup>21</sup> The gloom and doom of the situation reflect the seriousness of the acts perpetrated. Very visible at the forefront of the image are the four stoles with their symbols of the Passion of Christ. These were standard religious symbols, but here they must have been intended to underscore the betrayal of the two kneeling individuals, and how they themselves were now going to face their trial and passion. The Latin phrase at the top of the image stated «IN ASPERIS MATVRE», be mature in bitterness. Divested of their Hospitaller habit and immunity, such men were now liable to prosecution – even the death penalty – by the lay tribunals which had jurisdiction over the general population. As if to underscore this, a Hospitaller can be seen with his hand on the back of one of the kneeling figures and he seems to be in the act of starting to lift up that man's stole. A pyramidal hierarchy of power is created visually as the Holy Spirit and Grand Master loom over the two malefactors. If in Figure 3 the donning of the habit constituted the putting on of a new, prestigious masculine persona, through defrocking that individual was stripped of his Hospitaller status and unmanned. He was «separated from [the Order] like a decayed and fetid limb». <sup>22</sup> This is not the muscular, military world represented in Figure 3, but it is a masculine world nevertheless, one of sober authority where the manly virtue of self-control prevails over base, irrational behaviour.

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Princess Henry of Battenberg], London: John Murray, 1890, p. 148. See also Giacomo BOSIO: *Gli statuti* ..., p. 98.

<sup>21</sup> Ann WILLIAMS: "Esgart des Frères: A medieval survival in early modern Malta?", in Maroma CAMILLERI and Theresa VELLA (eds.), *Celebratio Amicitiae: Essays in honour of Giovanni Bonello*, Malta, Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, 2006, pp. 7-12.

<sup>22</sup> N.L.M. (National Library of Malta), A.O.M. (Archive of the Order of Malta) 95, f. 204r, 3 July 1580, «*tanq membru putride et fetidu vicetus et separatus fuit*».



Figure 4. 'On the Expulsion of Brothers', 1588, engraving, 18x14cm. *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem*, 90. Acknowledgement: © National Library of Malta.

While images such as these in the Verdalle *Statuta* represented an ideal vision of Hospitaller identity, including masculinity, they were rituals that Hospitallers really did experience as participants and as spectators. The ranks of the Order were about structuring distinctions between men within a male world that rarely made any reference to women; these were imbued by, and supported a hierarchical and patriarchal

system in which rank, age, and seniority were defining features.<sup>23</sup> Issues of male fraternity, conflict, and control informed relationships among Hospitallers as well as with non-Hospitallers. In such a martial environment, devotion towards saints such as St Michael the Archangel and St George the dragon slayer was a natural element.<sup>24</sup> In the *Statuta*, the portrait of Verdalle is shown flanked by an allegory of Religion and by St George.<sup>25</sup> In Antonio Parisi's celebratory book *L'idea del cavalier gerosolimitano* (1662), the preface is preceded by an image of St George slaying the dragon.<sup>26</sup> Such warrior saints provided confirmation that religion and war were compatible, that religious combat – both internal spiritual battles and physical combat against the enemies of the Church – was legitimate. Again, in *L'idea del cavalier gerosolimitano*, the link between physical and spiritual violence culminated in the person of the protagonist of the book, Fra D. Agostino Grimaldo e Rosso, who died fighting Muslims and hence attained martyrdom.<sup>27</sup> Martyrdom sanctified violence, recalling John 15, 13, that «No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends».<sup>28</sup>

When a novice attained knighthood he was reminded of his spiritual and material duties in ceremonial form which culminated in the solemn investiture ritual. The investiture ceremony followed strict guidelines and seems to have been repeated with precise observance since many sources match accurately, while the presence of ceremonial guides supports this. It is well documented in unpublished manuscripts such as *Riflessioni di un Cavaliere di Malta sopra la grandezza e doveri del suo stato* and the *Cerimoniale del ricevimento e vestizione dei Cavalieri*, both found in the manuscripts section of the National Library of Malta.<sup>29</sup> The existence of detailed guides such as the *Riflessioni* manuscript, which also gave strict instructions on the anointing of the sword, attest to the importance given to the correct use of the sword during a Hospitaller's life, including avoiding its use for personal vendetta. The symbolism used was clearly a reflection of European knightly standards and not unique to the Order since a sword and golden spurs were typical symbols of knighthood representing justice and incorruptibility. The dubbing of a knight was a chivalric gesture with medieval origins

<sup>23</sup> Cf. James R. FARR: *Hands of honour: Artisans and their world in Dijon, 1550–1650*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1988, 125.

<sup>24</sup> N.L.M., A.O.M.1697, ff.4<sup>v</sup>, 1670. N.L.M. Libr. Ms. (Library Manuscript) 1416, n.p., 1689. B.S.M.O.M., Ms.67, f.8, 1754. On the nature of the cult of St George see Sarah RICHES: “St George as a male virgin martyr”, in Samantha J.E RICHES and Sarah SALIH, (eds.), *Gender and Holiness: Men, women and saints in late medieval Europe*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 65–85.

<sup>25</sup> *Statuta*...

<sup>26</sup> Antonio PARISI: *L'Idée del cavalier gerosolimitano mostrata nella vita di Fra D. Agostino Grimaldo e Rosso da un padre carmelitano scalzo della provincia di Santo Alberto in Sicilia*, Messina, 1662.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*. Censor's Note and p. 146.

<sup>28</sup> Jean Marie HIERBERGER (ed.): *The Catholic Bible. Personal Study Edition*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 1497.

<sup>29</sup> N.L.M., Libr. Ms.CCL, ff.80-103, *Riflessioni di un Cavaliere di Malta sopra la grandezza e doveri del suo stato*. N.L.M., Libr. Ms.370, *Cerimoniale del ricevimento e vestizione dei Cavalieri*.

and applied to the military-religious orders during the Crusades. The accolade was a tap on the right shoulder of every novice with the flat of the sword. It is described as the last indignity the postulant must sustain in his knightly career.<sup>30</sup> It was the typical induction ritual for both secular and religious knights, always featuring swords. Regular reference is made to the sword used in the ceremony referring to the two edges and the point representing the three purposes for its use: the defence of the Church, and of the Order, and in executing justice on all who persecute Christ; also the rigidity on one side of the blade represented the need to keep a steady arm against the enemy while the flat and flexible side represented a gentle heart towards the children of Christ.<sup>31</sup> The sword had the practical purpose of being a weapon, but it also had a symbolic capacity to represent ideals such as justice, knighthood, chivalry, faith, and authority. This made swords essential components of individual Hospitallers' manly identity, while the Order as an institution used imagery and public rituals (frequently featuring swords) as reminders of its authority and legitimacy as a sovereign ruler.

### **The «good knight in arms»**

The evolution of the sword as a military tool and as a civilian implement moved alongside the evolution of military technology and social mores, sustaining a development of its own in both practice and design which did not dwindle with the increased use of guns but managed to survive well beyond the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>32</sup> A culture of arms persisted throughout the early modern period where men were brought up using weapons and trained in their use from a young age and used them in the name of civic peace. Even though the proliferation of firearms in the sixteenth century changed the nobleman from an individual champion to a tactician, skill with the sword remained a celebrated ability for a noble courtier. In the fifteenth century, military training was considered vital for knighthood and hence the number of schools of fencing increased. From the sixteenth century, formalised training systems had developed in fencing schools where young gentlemen were sent to learn the martial arts. Such schools gave a young man a more formal and complete military training. Young nobles were sent to training colleges to learn the skills of court and camp required for a person of their rank, from fighting with a sword to diplomacy, mathematics and literature. The Order of Malta did not consider itself as an official training college and en-

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<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth W. SCHERMERHORN: *Malta of the Knights*, London, W. Heinemann, 1929, p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 147.

<sup>32</sup> Sydney ANGLO: "Introduction", in *Íd.* (ed.), *Chivalry in the Renaissance*, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1990, pp. xi-xiii.

trants were expected to be already proficient or at least capable to bear arms on admission.<sup>33</sup>

Before delving into the fighting systems of such a noble, military-religious order, one must consider the wider Hospitaller ethos. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century, these men lived in a world where firearms made it possible to bring down a heavily armoured knight from afar. Furthermore, diplomatic and economic relationships crossed borders more than ever, thereby questioning the idea of crusading and the importance of the nobility in warfare. Treva J. Tucker highlights the surviving concept of individual display on the battlefield.<sup>34</sup> This reflected the reluctance of the noble strata to renounce their significance in battle by preferring older fighting systems, which was also reflected in the Order. Although the sixteenth century witnessed noticeable advancements in battlefield technology, the use of the sword survived in the European military setup. This is in accord with contemporary masters of arms such as Vincentio Saviolo and Ridolfo Capoferro who described fencing as the foundation of the *art militaire* and the sword as the «the foundation of all weapons».<sup>35</sup> This can be confirmed by descriptions of the 1565 Ottoman siege of Malta where Matteo Perez d'Aleccio's images, and descriptions by eyewitnesses such as Balbi de Correggio, and contemporary historian Giacomo Bosio, provide a window onto the fighting systems of the knights. These confirm the continuing prevalence of the sword in battle, alongside other technologies.

The violent scene in Figure 5 reveals a variety of fighting methods which characterised the siege; from cannon to arquebus to edged weapons, down to hand-to-hand combat. There are descriptions such as that of knights sitting on chairs in the breach of Fort St Elmo during its last days of resistance. Ernle Bradford described Fra de Guaras and Captain de Miranda as being too injured to stand but having their two-handed swords by their sides ready to face death.<sup>36</sup> Bosio describes the same situation but using pikes rather than swords.<sup>37</sup> He also described Captain de Miranda and a group of soldiers and knights resisting an attack on St Elmo a few days earlier, using two-handed swords (*spadoni*) among other weapons.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> John R. HALE: *Renaissance War Studies*, London, Hambledon Press, 1983, pp. 225-46. Michael J. BRADDICK: *State Formation in Early Modern England, ca. 1550-1700*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 6, 45. Hillyar ZMORA: *Monarchy, Aristocracy and the State in Europe 1300-1800*, London, Routledge, 2001, pp. 3-6. Ann WILLIAMS: "Boys will be boys...", p. 181.

<sup>34</sup> Treva J. TUCKER: "Eminence over Efficacy: Social Status and Cavalry Service in Sixteenth-Century France", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, xxxii:4 (2001), p. 1057.

<sup>35</sup> Sydney ANGLO: "How to Kill a Man at Your Ease: Fencing Books and the Duelling Ethic", in Íd. (ed.), *Chivalry in the Renaissance*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge 1990, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Ernle BRADFORD: *The Great Siege, Malta 1565*, London, Penguin, 1964, p. 134.

<sup>37</sup> Giacomo BOSIO: *Historia della sacra religione*, Rome, Stamperia Apostolica Vaticana, 1594-1602; Naples 1684; Venice 1695, vol. 3, p. 572.

<sup>38</sup> BOSIO: *Historia ...*, p. 564.



Figure 5. Detail from Matteo Perez d'Aleccio's frescoes depicting the Great Siege of 1565. Grand Master's Palace, Valletta. Photo by Christopher Cachia Zammit; Courtesy of the Grand Master's Palace, Valletta, Heritage Malta.

The prerequisites to become a knight of the Order were strict and only allowed the elite to accede; one had to have noble lineage on both sides of the family. This guaranteed a childhood of preparation to the knightly arts, imbued with the belief that lineage gave them a natural talent for arms: «*che sia atto all'esercito dell'armi*». <sup>39</sup> If noble enough (and rich enough) one could enter into the small group of pages living in the household of the Grand Master where the noble youth could be taught the art of war and religion by the elder knights themselves. This privilege to be a magisterial page made it possible for an individual to enter the Order before the usual novitiate entry age of fifteen. But nobility alone did not suffice. One had to be unmarried, of legitimate birth, free from debt, not branded with infamy, aged between fifteen and thirty, and free from any other religious order. It was assumed that if the applicant was endowed with all such qualities, then a background of noble education was guaranteed. This would have involved the study of the arts, etiquette and the profession of war. Furthermore, it was specified as a prerequisite that one had to be healthy in mind and body and without any impediment in his person: «*Requisito della sanita del corpo, e della mente; che sia ben composto di corpo, ed atto alle fatiche*». <sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> N.L.M., A.O.M. 295, f.59, 1612: *De Receptione Fratrum*.

<sup>40</sup> N.L.M., A.O.M. 1663 *Codice de Rohan*, f.40, 1782: *Del Ricevimento de' Fratelli*.

The novitiate lasted a year, living in the convent city of Birgu, and eventually Valletta. This served to prepare the novice for the lifestyle he chose and to refine the religious, charitable, and military duties one had to perform as a knight of the Order. A prospective knight was formed under the guidance of the Master of the Novices, other senior knights such as the *Cavallerizzo Maggiore* (Master of the Horse), and teachers of languages, mathematics, the arts and martial arts. Particular importance was given to military training which was done in various locations on the island; on land, on fortifications, at sea or specifically at the *casa della scherma* within the convent city itself (at least from 1574).<sup>41</sup> Training in swordsmanship and musketry was obligatory three times a week, along with daily participation in the Holy Sacraments and practicing hospitality at the *Sacra Infermeria* (the hospital of the Order) on specific days.<sup>42</sup> This illustrates the apparently opposing traits of a knight of Malta as both a religious and a warrior, but which they managed to carry out in conjunction. Added to this, the knights managed to keep up with the social requirements of the noble classes. Such traits were clearly described in *Il Cortegiano* (*Book of the Courtier*, 1528) by Baldassare Castiglione, a bestseller manual for the ideal gentleman detailing, among others, how to be physically fit and ready for combat. In this book, the courtier is described as having a cool mind, a good voice along with proper bearing and gestures. At the same time, the courtier is expected to have a warrior spirit, to be athletic, and have good knowledge of the humanities, classics and fine arts:

And so I would have him well built and shapely of limb, and would have him show strength and lightness and suppleness, and know all bodily exercises that befit a man of war; whereof I think the first should be to handle every sort of weapon well on foot and on horse.<sup>43</sup>

His relative, Fra Sabba Castiglione, who was a Knight of Malta, a humanist and an author, felt the need to write the Hospitaller version of *Il Cortigiano* in an attempt to keep the religious military Hospitaller ethos alive. To him, sloth was the worst vice and he was not happy with the ‘modern’ lifestyle of young Hospitallers. *I Ricordi* was first published in 1546 as a manual for the ideal religious knight. In his *Ricordi* he wrote on how a chaste knight should behave around women, how to take care of his finances, how to respect elders, how to offer charity, how to dress, but also how to behave if challenged to a duel and on how to keep fit and maintain military skills. His military experience is evident through his advice on practicality of combat

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<sup>41</sup> N.L.M., A.O.M. 290, f.37r, 1574.

<sup>42</sup> N.L.M., A.O.M. 227a, f.1032, 1652, f.1032, 1651.

<sup>43</sup> Baldassare CASTIGLIONE: *The Book of the Courtier* [trans. Leonard Eckstein Opdycke], New York, Dover Publications, 2003, p. 29.



in battle. The manner of fighting in battle necessitated adaptability and improvisation in order to be able to survive with anything that may come to hand. This fact was stated by Baldassare Castiglione who suggested: «one does not need to be perfect in all things but to have at least a working knowledge of them».<sup>44</sup> This is repeated by Fra Sabba who advised that it was better to be mediocre with a large variety of weapons rather than very good with one or two. He seems to suggest that situations where the knight would fight with weapons of convenience are common:

In short you will enjoy handling averagely every manner of weapon so that when needed you would know how to use all those weapons which not by choice but by fate will be at hand because one knows the good knight in arms when he is worthy with all kinds of weapons.<sup>45</sup>

The Order was, from its beginning, a mixture of European peoples and regardless of Italian or French dominance, it must not be forgotten that other martial styles were present such as German, Spanish and Portuguese. An 18<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript entitled *Progetto per Novizi* suggested that *Langues* (that is, the ethno-linguistic units that made up the Order) should be kept separate during training in order to avoid hostility between people from different cultural backgrounds.<sup>46</sup> This may also show an effort to allow each *Langue* to practice its own fighting style and avoid confusion. The Order's martial practices must have reflected the variety it was characterised by and it is remarkable how they managed to work together. One method of maintaining peace between the nations was through the organisation of regular tournaments. Regarded as a form of early modern sport, they were also an elite masculine social activity while at the same time a method of knightly training. Grand Master Jean de la Cassiere's Chapter General (1574) in fact decreed tournaments to be held every three months: «*che di tre in tre mesi debbiano li Fratelli esercitarsi in un torneo a piedi armati con picca et spade et correre a cavallo la Quintana e all Anello*».<sup>47</sup> Christian Roccati mentions tournaments in the training activities of medieval Hospitallers as being occasional methods of martial practice which complemented the daily training and the continuous military engagements.<sup>48</sup> This was maintained up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as the

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 25.

<sup>45</sup> Sabba CASTIGLIONE: *Ricordi ovvero ammaestramenti di Monsignor Sabba Castiglione Cavalier gerosolomitano, ne quali con prudenti, e christiani discorsi si ragiona di tutte le materie honorate, che si ricercano a' un vero gentil'huomo*, Venice, 1584, 29rv.

<sup>46</sup> N.L.M., Libr. Ms. 1377 *Progetto per Novizi dell'Ordine*, 1753, ff.2-8: *Trattenimenti virtuosi per occupare i Religiosi, e Novizi del sacro Ordine Gerosolimitano conforme al loro Istituto Ecclesiastico, Hospitalario, e Militare, nel corso di tutto l'anno, con utile piacere e buon esempio*.

<sup>47</sup> N.L.M., A.O.M. 290, f.37r, 1574.

<sup>48</sup> Christian ROCCATI: *Gli Ospitalieri e la guerra nel Medioevo: i monaci guerrieri: la storia, le tecniche di combattimento, la leggenda (XII-XV sec.)*, Rimini, Il cerchio iniziative editoriali, 2007, p. 107.

*Progetto per Novizi* instructed to hold regular «*giostre per lingua, tornei, ed altre simili funzioni*» which also included the local militia and nobility.<sup>49</sup> This document seems to be an attempt to formalise a curriculum for the novitiate since it gives guidelines for the training of novices in the three main activities of the Order: the military, spiritual, and hospitaller, as well as the literary, in keeping with the education of a nobleman.<sup>50</sup>

While Elizabeth Schermerhorn described the *Langue* as a training school of the sportsman in warfare,<sup>51</sup> it needs to be reiterated that the Order was not a training college in the same manner as an institution like for instance the *École Militaire* in Paris. Instead, the Order served as a place where men who already possessed at least some basic skills, would continue to see these develop both through training, as well as through active combat. Exercises in arms were done under the supervision of senior knights at the *Auberges* on set days.<sup>52</sup> In the *Progetto per Novizi*, particular reference is made to sloth as the worst of all sins: «Idleness, a stark and stinking receptacle of all evil is an open school of the devil». The document continues that: «The continuous exercise in arms renders the men ready for war. If the art of fighting is not practiced in peacetime it is made difficult and frightening in real engagements».<sup>53</sup> Two hundred years earlier, Fra Sabba Castiglione's *Ricordi* also gave importance to daily training: «I encourage you every morning, after having heard mass and said the office which you are obliged to do, to exercise with weapons».<sup>54</sup>

The sword was also part of the attire and civilian lifestyle of the Hospitallers. In the sixteenth century there was a boom in publications aimed at teaching nobles how to use their swords, which were by then a daily part of their dress, and fencing was an integral part of the gentlemanly arts. This trend continued into the seventeenth century where young nobles were sent to colleges and military academies to train in court and camp in order to uphold their martial status. Incidentally, this caste was the main source of membership for the Hospitaller Order which followed the same trends. It is not surprising that Fra Sabba Castiglione advised young Hospitallers to endeavour in the continuous exercise in arms to keep away from sensual passions and appetites, since such military activity was regarded: «a perfect method of distracting young men from worldly vices».<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, using swords was the ideal act of masculine identity, bearing also the symbolic power of status and authority. These attitudes were developing in parallel with the Hospitallers' stay in Malta. They fit into

<sup>49</sup> N.L.M., Libr. Ms. 1377 *Progetto per Novizi dell'Ordine*, 1753, f.5v.

<sup>50</sup> N.L.M., Libr. Ms. 1377 *Progetto per Novizi dell'Ordine*, 1753, f.5v., «*Occupazioni Ecclesiastiche, Occupazioni Pie ed Ospitalarie, Occupazioni Letterarie, Occupazioni Guerriere*».

<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth W. SCHERMERHORN: *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>52</sup> Emil KRAUS: *op. cit.*, pp. 125-126.

<sup>53</sup> N.L.M., Libr. Ms. 1377 *Progetto per Novizi dell'Ordine*, 1753, ff.4v-5r.

<sup>54</sup> Sabba CASTIGLIONE: *op. cit.*, 29rv: *Ricordo 40. Circa lo esercito corporale*.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem.*, f.200r, *Ricordo 120: Del Capitano d'Armi*.

wider trends due to their noble nature, and they sought to counteract their vow of chastity through martial terms, thus maintaining their masculinity.

During his visit to Malta, the Count of Erbach frequently mentioned the swords carried by knights and visitors. The actual type of sword was not described but each time a sword was mentioned the author gave its origin and an aesthetic description. For example, some German visitors were described as carrying «plain German swords» and Grand Master Aloff de Wignacourt (r.1601-1622) was described as carrying «a strong French sword with a richly chased hilt». <sup>56</sup> Indeed by the time of Erbach's visit in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the carrying of a sword as part of one's dress was well established and was becoming more of a masculine ornament. Richly ornate swords were becoming smaller by the seventeenth century due to the practical reason of carrying them around crowded urban areas and as they grew smaller, they also became more finely decorated. War implements were not exempt from the effects of fashion, as can be witnessed through the intricate suits of armour the Order had in its possession. Armour, however, was only worn occasionally. A sword was a knight's everyday companion, worn even on plain clothes, making it a prominent part of a gentleman's accessories [Figure 6].



Figure 6. The beautifully crafted silver hilt of the rapier of Grand Master Martin de Redin (r.1657-1660) (Mdina Cathedral Museum). Photo by Christopher Cachia Zammit; courtesy of the Mdina Metropolitan Cathedral Museum, Malta.

Swords were key elements in a Hospitaller's masculine identity as they were fundamental for their image as Christian warriors. The symbolic meaning of swords in imagery is vast and based on the sword's Christian and chivalric metaphors of justice,

<sup>56</sup> Emil KRAUS: op. cit., pp. 95, 106, 110.

authority, as well as martyrdom.<sup>57</sup> Many Hospitallers were depicted in portraits holding or wearing swords and sometimes wearing armour which helped assert an image of masculinity and military prestige. These images enforced the Hospitaller identity of chaste Christian warriors which set them apart from other men. A large number of Hospitaller portraits can be viewed throughout Europe and they carry a shared formula of the masculine and the military, using common objects such swords, the eight-pointed Cross of the Order, shields, and occasionally armour. The images range from Grand Masters' portraits to individual knights.<sup>58</sup> It seems a trend was set for both established and aspirant members of the Order to put their image on canvas, including these objects, in order to proclaim their membership. Recalling the portrait of Giovanni Carlo de' Medici [Figures 1 and 2], the symbol of the noble martial spirit and of holy war is underlined by the hand resting lightly on the sword and the open book on military architecture, as if declaring the knight as the last bastion of Christendom.

### Designing bastions in the name of the eight-pointed cross

Ken Alder states that the term '*Ingenieur*' comes from the term '*Ingenium*' referring to 'engine of war', combining the human skills of combat with the machine of war. By 1694 the *Académie Française* fine-tuned the meaning of the term engineer as pertaining to a military man having the skills of drawing and sketching and able to use instruments for the attack and defence of fortification.<sup>59</sup> This description tends to distance us from the image of a warrior in action and his masculine attributions of a combatant soldier. The image of the masculine warrior was constructed around physical-combat capabilities; however technological advances distanced the idea of the warrior, as the classic combatant, from his 'prey'.<sup>60</sup> Masculinity within the context of a state army was, however, still expressed in relation to the officer's role, thus military masculinity, being a socially constructed identity, was shaped in relation to rank, function and corps.<sup>61</sup> In this respect, the military engineer working for the Order of Malta (who in some cases were also ordained members of the Order), did not display strong marks of the warrior-styled masculinity; yet, his masculinity in relation to his role was still heavily displayed in the engineer's portrait. Baldassare Castiglione, in *Il*

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<sup>57</sup> James HALL: *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, Oxford, Westview Press, 1979, p. 294.

<sup>58</sup> See for instance, Robert L. DAUBER and Michael GALEA: *Austrian Knights of Malta. Relations Malta-Austria 1530-1798*, Malta, PEG, 2006, p. 35.

<sup>59</sup> Ken ALDER: *Engineering the Revolution, Arms & Enlightenment in France, 1763-1815*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. 56-57.

<sup>60</sup> Steven TALBOT: "Warrior, War Fighting and the Construction of Masculine Identities", p. 4, <https://tasa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Talbot-Steven.pdf> (last accessed on 06-08-2019).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 7.

*Cortegiano*, proposed that the ideal man would be the one displaying grace and decorum in a society of manly elegance, intelligence and refined spirit of culture; the military engineers employed by the Order (in line with all military men of the time) did not keep back from exhibiting their military regalia in their portraits, including the eight pointed cross of the Order of St John.<sup>62</sup> Other artefacts relating to the military profession were likewise included. For instance, in the portrait of the Order's engineer, the Bailli François René Jacob de Tigné (1716-1801), he poses in full armour (Figure 7), displaying his militant nature. In another portrait he proudly displays his fortification work (Figure 8), while reminding the viewer of the military identity of the Knights of Malta. In a portrait of the Order's last engineer, Fra Antoine Etienne de Tousard, the engineer flaunts his military and masculine identity in his military uniform, again proudly showcasing the Order's cross as his badge of honour.<sup>63</sup>



Figure 7: The Bailli François René Jacob de Tigné in full armour bearing the Order of St John's eight pointed cross. In this painting he directs the attention of the viewer towards what is believed to be Fort St Elmo at the entrance of the Grand Harbour of Malta. This engineer designed large bomb proof barracks for the garrison of the fort in 1762. (Portrait hanging in the Office of the Prime Minister of Malta, Auberge de Castille, Valletta. Courtesy of Heritage Malta).

<sup>62</sup> Francesco FRASCA: "Ideale Cavalleresco ed Etica Militatere nella Sensibilita Barocca della Francia del 'Re Sole'", *The Journal of Baroque Studies*, 3:1 (2015), p. 86.

<sup>63</sup> This particular portrait of Antoine Etienne de Tousard can be found in a private collection in France and is reproduced in Fleur BRINCAT: "The military engineer Frà Antoine Etienne de Tousard (1751-1813): a loyal hospitaller or traitor?", Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Malta, 2014, which is in preparation to be published as a book.



Figure 8. The Bailli François René Jacob de Tigné wearing the eight pointed cross of the Order of St John on his coat and the Golden Cross of Devotion (diamond encrusted) awarded to him by the Order on 11 March 1774, pinned on his waistcoat. The military engineer of the Order is pointing at a bulwark which might be Fort Ricasoli (a fort at the entrance of the Grand Harbour of Malta), a stronghold repaired by himself. (Courtesy: Museum of the Order of St John, London).

The 18<sup>th</sup>-century Bailli François René Jacob de Tigné's male confidence as a military engineer contrasts with the feelings expressed by the 16<sup>th</sup>-century engineer Francesco Laparelli (1521-1570), as captured in a letter he wrote sometime after June 1570. This was at the end of a sojourn in Malta of almost five years in which he had designed and overseen the beginning of the construction of the new city of Valletta. In this letter, Laparelli stated:

In the first place, while I learned something of the science of fortification, I did this in order to be able to participate in sieges as a defender as well as a besieger. I most definitely never intended to make a career out of supervising master masons! I did serve in Florence and then in the Papal States,

working with soldiers and engineers; that is true – and I am glad that I did – but now that the world has proof of my abilities that will suffice. Let me assure you that I will not undertake any more work as an engineer unless I am given the command of a fortress and entrusted with total responsibility for all aspects of its defence.

I was driven entirely by pride: I left Malta because I wanted more fame and less of the hard grind (*più di fumo che di arosto*). That is why I wanted to go: I wanted to go to places where I could hope to find prestigious positions – positions that are worthy of soldiers – positions which in Malta are not available to those who are not Knights.<sup>64</sup>

Laparelli left Malta to join the Catholic forces being assembled to take part in what would become known as the Battle of Lepanto (1571). In a cruel twist of fate, he died of an epidemic that swept the fleet he was on board, before seeing much, if any action.<sup>65</sup> Still, the spirit he expressed in this letter was clear: for a man of war, nothing compared to action on the battlefield. At the same time, whether it was through battle or not, engineers wanted the world to see them as warriors, as men. Although they may not have been frontliners, they designed the frontline; although not artillery masters, they mastered the walls that withstood the fury of the guns.

The inclusion of a book on fortifications in the early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Medici portrait (Figure 2) was not incidental, but rather indicative of the importance of knowledge about the art of war-related architecture. In the words of Schermerhorn «the history of the fortifications of Valletta is the history of the Order in Malta».<sup>66</sup> The safeguarding of the central convent revolved around the indispensable figure of the military engineer. Employing the service of eminent engineers to obtain contemporary designs in military architecture for the construction of impregnable fortifications was heavily embedded within the Order's military policy. Right after the Ottoman siege of Rhodes in 1480, the knights consulted Italian engineers, who were at this time experimenting with novel forms of defence, which became known as the *trace Italienne*.<sup>67</sup> On the island of Rhodes, the Order of St John experimented with innovative designs of pentagonal proto-bastions even before they actually appeared in Ita-

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<sup>64</sup> As quoted in Roger VELLA BONAVIDA: “Capitano Francesco Laparelli and Valletta”, in Joan ABELA, Emanuel BUTTIGIEG and Krystle FARRUGIA (eds.), *Proceedings of History Week 2011*, Malta, Malta Historical Society 2013, p. 29.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 29. Niccolò CAPPONI: *Victory of the West. The Great Christian Muslim Clash at the Battle of Lepanto*, London, Macmillan 2006, 146.

<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth W. SCHERMORHORN: *op. cit.*, pp. 208.

<sup>67</sup> Alison HOPPEN: “Military Engineers in Malta, 1530-1798”, *Annals of Science*, xxxviii, 4, (1981), p. 414.

ly.<sup>68</sup> The pre-eminence of Italian military engineers of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries was not only recognised by the Order of St John because of its many ties to Italy and the fact that one of the Order's eight *Languages* was Italian, but because the Order was constantly abreast with military developments through its aristocratic members. The masculine noble gentry of the early modern period were expected to be well versed in the art of war and military architecture.<sup>69</sup> By the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century there was abundant literature in the form of treatises proposing novel ideas in the art of war and fortification.<sup>70</sup> Italian military engineers were also frequently sought by numerous states well until the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>71</sup> From around the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, French experts eclipsed Italian ones in military engineering, and the Order followed and contributed to this trend. While relations between the Order and France were old, they were consolidated and expanded during Louis XIV's years.<sup>72</sup> From then onwards successive Grand Masters, irrespective of their nationality, maintained their custom of summoning French military engineers to Malta.<sup>73</sup> The legacy of this mixture of architectural influences has been left in stone, and can be easily identified in the typology of fortification design. Most of Malta's fortifications, constructed and improved during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, were heavily influenced by the French Sebastien Le Prestre de Vauban (1633-1707) whose style of fortification was imported by his followers, like the Brigadier René Jacob de Tigné (1664-1730), Charles François Gion de Mondion (1681-1733), and the Bailli François René Jacob de Tigné (1716-1801).<sup>74</sup> These three military engineers, serving in the employ of the King of France prior to their visits to Malta, were all rewarded by membership into this exclusive and privileged institution of noblemen, the Order of St John. The Brigadier René Jacob de Tigné was given the faculty of adding the cross of the Order of St John to his family's heraldry during his first visit to Malta in 1715 at which time he became a member of the Order as a Knight of Grace. The Brigadier extended this privilege by using his influence and good relations with the Order's Grand Master to have his seven-year-old-nephew (François René Jacob de Tigné) admitted into the Order in the same capacity as a Knight of Grace. The

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<sup>68</sup> Konstantin NOSSOV: *The Fortress of Rhodes 1309-1522*, Fortress 96, New York, Osprey Publication, 2010, p. 16

<sup>69</sup> Baldassare CASTIGLIONE: op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>70</sup> Janis LANGINS: *Conserving the Enlightenment: French Military Engineering from Vauban to the Revolution*, Cambridge MS, MIT Press, 2003, p.10.

<sup>71</sup> Stephen C. SPITERI: "The Castles and Fortresses of Rhodes", *Arx Online Journal for Military Architecture and Fortification*, 5 (2008), p. 47, <https://issuu.com/arkitettura/docs/arx-vol5-2008>, (last accessed on 6-08-2019)

<sup>72</sup> Denis DE LUCCA: "French military Engineers in Malta During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries", *Melita Historica*, 8:1 (1980), p. 26.

<sup>73</sup> Fleur BRINCAT: "Two French Military Engineers in Eighteenth Century Malta", *Journal of the Monastic Military Orders*, 4, (2012), p. 90.

<sup>74</sup> Stephen C. SPITERI: "The Art of Fortress Building in Hospitaller Malta", in *Baroque Routes Newsletter*, 7, (2007), p. 4.



future resident engineer of the Order, Frà François René Jacob de Tigné, at some point promoted to Knight of Justice, rose to the highest ranks of the Order of St John, including that of a Bailli Grand Cross and Grand Hospitaller. Despite the family's success within the French army, the privilege of belonging to the military and hospitaller Order of St John is evident not only in the number of portraits showing these men exhibiting the eight pointed cross, which at times was even embossed in their silverware (Figure 9), but also in securing an admission within the Order for the younger members of the family, right up until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, knowing the impact and prestige membership in the Order of St John had on noblemen and military men alike, Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Roccaful (r.1697-1720) made good use of this fact by bestowing the title of Knight of Grace to the Order's French resident engineer Charles François Gion de Mondion who was called back to France in 1719. The Grand Master ensured his permanent stay on the island by rewarding him with the title of Knight of Grace, where the eight pointed cross was reason enough to supplant an ambitious career within the French army and shift loyalty towards an institution of reputable knights.<sup>76</sup>

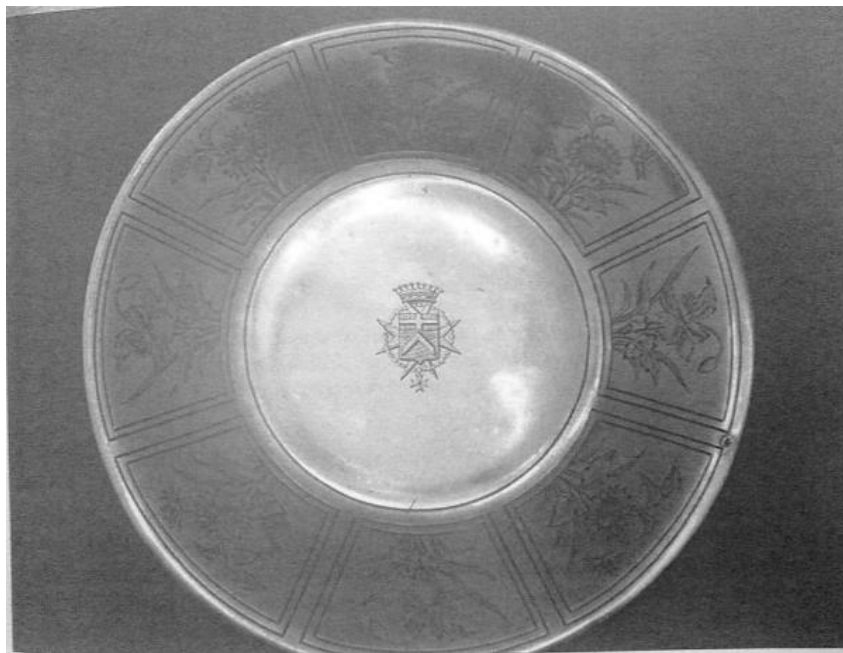


Figure 9. The Jacob de Tigné's heraldic insignia with the cross of the Order of St John and the necklace of the Bailli, embossed in the family's silverware. (Private collection).

<sup>75</sup> Fleur BRINCAT: *Bailli de Tigné: Knight of Malta, Commissioner of Fortifications and Military Engineer (1716-1801)*, Malta, International Institute of Baroque Studies, pp. 60-61, 136-137.

<sup>76</sup> M.A.E. (Ministres des affaires etrangeres), CP Malte Supplement, Vol. 2, f. 156r.

Military engineers were often ‘seconded’ to Malta by other sovereigns and were generally not members of the Order. Nevertheless, they were so crucial to the survival of the Order, that from 1660, the resident military engineer enjoyed a permanent post within the Order’s Congregation of War and Fortification, that is, the body that advised upon military issues. Here, one needs to distinguish between the visiting engineer, who would have been sent for a limited period of time to investigate the defensive status of the island, prepare reports, propose novel bulwarks, and leave behind specific instructions on the construction of fortification works, and the resident military engineer. The latter frequently accompanied the visiting expert<sup>77</sup> and resided on the island to oversee fortification works and follow the advice proposed by the visiting military expert.<sup>78</sup> This allowed the resident engineer little space to work on his own initiative, apart from minor works such as redoubts and entrenchments. Nonetheless, both ranks of military engineers were highly respected and fittingly compensated for their services, which at times including some form of membership within the Order commonly through the rank of Knight of Grace, as outlined above.<sup>79</sup>

Some of the military engineers who were seconded to Malta by other sovereigns included: Baldassare Lanci (1510-1571), Francesco Laparelli (1521-1570), and Pietro Paolo Floriani (1585-1638) who were sent to Malta by the Papacy; Carl Grunenbug (?-1696) who was released by the Viceroy of Sicily; the Count de Pagan (1603-1665) and Louis, Viscount of Arpajon (1601-1679), Louis Nicolas de Clerville (1610-1677), Brigadier René Jacob de Tigné (1664-1730) and the Count of Bourlamaque (1716-1764) who were sent by the King of France. Though these men did not receive a salary from the Order, their journey and living expenses were paid for by the Order, and before leaving the island they were presented with lavish gifts. Some, like Floriani, Grunenbug, and Claude de Colongues and the Brigadier René Jacob de Tigné were given the exclusive honour of admission within the Order of St John in the rank of Knights of Grace, a very prestigious gift in recognition of service.<sup>80</sup> Admission into the Order was not restricted only to the visiting experts; the French resident engineers Médéric Blondel (1628-1698) and Charles François Gion de Mondion were likewise honoured with the title of Knight of Grace. Despite the disparity in ranks between the

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<sup>77</sup> Two such cases were Médéric Blondel who remained on Malta as resident engineer for thirty-nine years (1659-1698) after accompanying the first French military team of engineers in 1645, headed by Blaise François Count de Pagan; and Charles François Gion de Mondion, who in 1715, accompanied the military mission led by the Brigadier René Jacob de Tigné. See also: Alison HOPPEN: *The Fortification of Malta by the Order of St John 1530-1798*, Malta, Mireva, 1999, pp. 285, 289.

<sup>78</sup> Stephen C. SPITERI: *The Art of Fortress Building in Hospitaller Malta*, Malta, Gutenberg Press, 2008, p. 94.

<sup>79</sup> Alison HOPPEN: “Military Engineers...”, pp. 426-429.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 420-423.

visiting (extraordinary) engineer and the resident (ordinary) one, both were shown marks of gratitude. The visiting expert, Brigadier René Jacob de Tigné and later the Bailli François René Jacob de Tigné (nephew of the former) a *de facto* resident engineer, were both awarded the golden Cross of Devotion encrusted with diamonds. Others like the resident engineer Mondion and the subordinate engineer of the military mission (arriving in Malta in 1715) Maigret were given a barrel of silver filled with chocolate and a letter of exchange worth 800 *livres*.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps the most rewarded engineer in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the Bailli François René Jacob de Tigné, who was honoured by having the last stronghold erected by the Order in Malta named after him. This bulwark still stands in memory of his twenty-eight years of military service to his Order.<sup>82</sup>

## Conclusion

In the introduction to a book dealing with holiness and masculinity, published in 2004, Patricia H. Cullum noted:

Some of the papers [in this book] signal interactions between clerical and aristocratic ideals, but we were unfortunately not offered a paper on one of the potentially most fruitful areas for the examination of this topic, the military orders. Indeed, issues of holiness and masculinity underpin the events and ethos of the Crusades, but this is an area that has seen very little research to date.<sup>83</sup>

She went on to note that while invaluable insights into women's roles were provided by works such as *Gendering the Crusades* (2001),<sup>84</sup> there was little focus on masculinity as such. Much work has been published since then, culminating in an edited volume dedicated to the crusades and masculinities published in 2019.<sup>85</sup> The latter contains

<sup>81</sup> Stephen C. SPITERI: *The Art of Fortress Building...*, p. 97.

<sup>82</sup> Fleur BRINCAT: *Bali de Tigné...*, p. 93.

<sup>83</sup> Patricia H. CULLUM: "Introduction: Holiness and Masculinity in Medieval Europe", in Íd. and Katherine J. LEWIS (eds.), *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2004, p. 6.

<sup>84</sup> Susan B. EDGINGTON and Sarah LAMBERT (eds.): *Gendering the Crusades*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2001.

<sup>85</sup> Natasha R. HODGSON, Katherine J. LEWIS and Matthew M. MESLEY (eds.): op. cit. See also Ruth MAZO KARRAS, "Knighthood, Compulsory Heterosexuality, and Sodomy", in Matthew KUEFLER (ed.), *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on 'Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2005, pp. 273-286; Emanuel BUTTIGIEG: *Nobility, Faith and Masculinity. The Hospitaller Knights of Malta, c.1580-c.1700*, London and New York, Continuum, 2011.

some insights on members of the military-religious orders, but is not focused on them. Indeed, the existence of the military-religious orders – the Hospitallers, the Templars and the Teutonic – has been considered a factor that problematises the interactions between clerical and aristocratic ideals of masculinity, not least in relation to the way men at war are conceptualised.<sup>86</sup>

The present study is a contribution to the field of masculinity in the military world from the perspective of men who were Hospitallers, including engineers who generally by virtue of their service to the Order earned their way into the same institution, adding thus further badges of honour to the ones gained in their military careers. We have not dealt much with actual combat, although preparedness for war and being surrounded by a military environment, were clearly dominant features in a Hospitaller's life. This paper has sought to sketch out a framework within which to understand what can be defined as a 'niche masculinity'. And yet, although it may have been a niche one, because Hospitaller knights hailed from the nobility, their masculine model was highly influential by virtue of belonging to the dominant caste of early modern society. From the moment one became associated with the Order – as a page, or as an engineer in its employ – to the investiture ceremony which formally created one a knight, to possibly one's defrocking, to the way one dressed and presented himself in portraits, it becomes clear that talking of a singular Hospitaller masculine model would only end up imposing an artificial construct on the past. Instead, there were a plurality of experiences that characterised the male identities of the men who wore the eight-pointed cross of Malta on their chests, and the repertoire of acts that constituted their masculinity changed over time.<sup>87</sup> There was a particular 'Hospitaller gender regime'<sup>88</sup> which was dictated by the very act of belonging to the Order, but it was a multi-faceted organism, because the Order thrived in paradox. The institution that pleaded with Rome to acquire a relic or to celebrate mass with even more elaborate ritual, was the same which embraced members who would quickly die for each other on a galley, or just as easily kill each other over a prostitute. Violence was pervasive within the Order, yet so was civility. It was an ethic knights understood. They shared a history, pride in their glorious Religion, and a mission in fighting Islam. War – whether actual combat, or as manifested in a sword or a bastion – was the handmaid of the Hospitaller knight.

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<sup>86</sup> Emanuel BUTTIGIEG: "Knighthood, Masculinity and the Other: The Hospitaller Knights of Malta in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", in Heather ELLIS and Jessica MEYER (eds.), *Masculinity and the Other: Historical Perspectives*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, pp. 281-303.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Shifra ARMON: *Masculine Virtue in Early Modern Spain*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2015.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Raewyn CONNELL: op. cit., pp. 152-163.