

BACK GROUND NOTES TO THE MALTA DEGREE ADDRESS

A Brief History of the Order of
the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem

"That Order was originally founded in Jerusalem during the first Crusade, about the year of our Lord 1099, by the association of many pious Knights with the Fratres of St. John's Hospital - an establishment previously founded in 1048 for the relief of Pilgrims proceeding to worship at the Holy Sepulchre....."

As early as the Third Century A.D. it is known that pilgrims journeyed to the Holy City of Jerusalem, where some sort of hospital existed for their wants and indeed, protection. For several centuries after the rise of Islam in the Holy Land the hospital was tolerated and even encouraged.

Between the years 1023-1048 some pious merchants of Amalfi (southern Italy) who were trading with Palestine, either founded a new hospital or, what is more likely, raised the old one to a more prominent position. This older building occupied the site of an even older hospital previously established by Charlemagne 600AD and dedicated to St. John the Almoner. This building was destroyed in 1010 by the fanatical Caliph El-Hakim

The First Crusade took place between 1096-1099 AD. under its leader Godfrey de Bouillon - Duke of Lower Lorraine and his brothers Baldwin and Eustace, together with Robert Duke of Normandy (William the Conqueror's son), Robert Count of Flanders, Stephen Count of Chartres, Raymond IV Count of Toulouse, Hugh of Vermandois, Bohemond Duke of Tarentum and his nephew Tancred.

Prof. Riley-Smith substantiates William, Archbishop of Tyre's account of the foundation of the Hospital written between 1170-1182. "He wrote (William of Tyre), that merchants from Amalfi, having no lodging house in Jerusalem, received from the Fatimid Caliph of Egypt some land in the Christian quarter, next to the church of the Holy Sepulchre. This gift occurred during the 11th Century (1023-1048) before the First Crusade. The Amalfitans built a monastery in honour of Our Lady and provided it with an abbot and monks from Italy. (St. Mary of the Latins)..... But pilgrimages continued to increase, and the plight of the European travellers, who were unprotected in an alien land, led the monastery to build and administer a hospice with its own church, dedicated to St. John the Almoner. This hospice was the original hospital of St. John". Professor Riley-Smith adds, "A hospice perhaps originally founded by Pope Gregory I in 603, provided for Latin pilgrims to Jerusalem in the late ninth century".... There is overwhelming evidence, however, that from the first patron was not St. John the Almoner, but St. John the Baptist. (Les Hospitaliers by Delaville Le Roulx.)

Perhaps William of Tyre's narrative echoed some early dispute about

the initiative of the , already mentioned Analfitan family. We have further evidence from (Vetus Chronican Analphitanum page 198) that Archbishop John of Amalfi made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1060 and was received by the Analfitans, who, had built a male hospital and a female hospital (St. Mary Magdalene). Riley-Smith concludes, "It is hard, however to date the foundation.... Their establishment must have occurred after 1014, when ended the persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem. It has been suggested that it could be no earlier than 1063, the year in which the walls of the Christian quarter in the city were built. (Histoire du commerce by Heyd and Raynauld)... "The hospice of St. John, if not already in existence, must have been functioning before the First Crusade (1095)."'

On the evening of Tuesday 7th June, 1099, the army of the Crusade was encamped before Jerusalem. The Fatimid governor, Iftikhar-ad-Daulah, had expelled the Christian population. Gerard, the administrator of the Hospital had remained behind. His actions to assist the hungry Crusaders earned him a spell of torture resulting afterwards that he could hardly use his limbs. The Hospital Order was recognised as an independent Order by the Pope Paschall II on 15th February 1113. Gerard died on 3rd September 1120. His body was first interred in the Conventual Church in Jerusalem, then to Acre, then to Rhodes. Parts of his body were placed in 1528 in Manosque in France, but alas the French Revolution destroyed the Castle and Church at Manosque.

Tripoli had fallen on 26th April 1289 although a force of Hospitallers under their Marshal Mathew de Clermont had taken part in its defence (40 knights were killed) on 1291 the massive Mamluk armies under al-Ashraf Khalil marched against Acre. The Mamluk army arrived on 5th April 1291. The Templars (240 knights) and Hospitallers (140 knights) were the main organised defense of this fortress. On 4th May, King Henry of Jerusalem arrived with reinforcements from Cyprus. By 16th May troops were withdrawn to the inner walls. Mathew de Clermont distinguished himself with the Templars holding the Gate of St. Anthony against a powerful Muslim attack. On the 18th May the Templar Master William de Beaujeu was mortally wounded. Mathew de Clermont died fighting near the Genoese quarter. The exodus of the Christians began and ended between 20/27th May.

Master John de Villiers of the Hospital gravely wounded (a lance between the shelters) was carried protesting, by his sergeants and pages to a boat and taken to Cyprus. In 1292 a General Chapter was held which decreed Limassol was to be the Order's headquarters. The decision was confirmed by Pope Celestine V (General Chapter 1292). In 1296 the Order began to build a new hospital for pilgrims in the town. The Hospitallers before 1291 already owned several large estates on the island, in particular a castle at Colos and properties in Nicosia and Limassol itself. (*Histoire de l'Ile de Chypre* by Mas-Latrie). Riley-Smith tells us that the Order was not deprived. "It is clear that in the years following 1291 they were trying to cut down their military commitment. Brethren were prevented from coming to Cyprus. A statute of 1292 forbade the reception of knights in most of Europe without

"In 1310 the Island of Rhodes became the property of the Forces of the Order".

Riley-Smith tells us, "Before the end of May 1306 Falk de Villaret (Master of the Hospital) had met a Genoese pirate called Vignolo de Vignoli near Limassol". On 27th May the two men had agreed that Rhodes, Cos and Leros were to belong to the Hospital (Les Hospitaliers by Delaville Le Roulx). On 23rd June a small expeditionary force was dispatched by the Hospitaliers. "There is a possibility that the island had fallen by 1307, although the Hospitaliers may have been engaged in cleaning up operations into 1308 or 1309. Rhodes was captured by 15th August 1309". On September 5th 1307 the Pope issued a Bull confirming the Order's possession of Rhodes "which had, a few years before (in 1307) been strengthened in numbers and enriched by the possessions of the Templars who were at that time suppressed by the cruelty and avarice of Pope Clement V and Philip le Bel, King of France." The Hospital left Cyprus because of the dispute with the King of Cyprus over domestic matters, a constitutional dispute.

Malcom Barber (The Trial of the Templars) tells us that 13th October 1307 King Philip IV of France authorized the arrests and that King Philip was never able to assert unambiguously that the Pope Clement V had actually authorized their actions on 13th October, although they did try by innuendo to suggest that Clement had been a party to the affair.. At Poitiers in May 1308 the Pope strongly denied the authorization.

special commission, only Roman Bishop of Valencia was opposed to the suppression. On 3rd April in a public session, the Papal Bull of 22nd March Vox in Excelso, was read out.

Walter of Hemingborough recorded:

"The pope added though although..... he could not destroy the Order de jure, nevertheless he suppressed the Order from the plenitude of his power, conferring, adding and uniting their lands and possessions to the Hospitallers". The papal decision was embodied in the Bull Ad Providam of 2nd May 1312 that Templar property possessed in 1307 be granted to the Order of the Hospital. The only exceptions were the properties outside France in the lands of the Kings of Castile, Aragon, Portugal and Majorca.

The French had to be paid for certain costs etc. before they would loosen their grip of Templar properties. eg. 21st March 1313 Leonard de Tibertus, Prior of the Hospital at Venice paid the French crown 200,000 livres tournois in compensation. Still in 1316 Leonard de Tibertus was paying Louis X more installments! It was not until 1318 the final quitance was paid (6th March 1318).

In England the King, Edward II, had actually farmed out some of the Templar properties and in August 1312 he had blocked the Hospitals' take over of the Templar's properties. On 28th November 1313, he ordered the official transfer. The barons however still held on to the Templars' property. Pope John XXII sent legates in 1317 to supervise the transfers. In 1322 the Pope sent a letter drawing the Kings attention that the

It took until 1319 for the Pope to induce Robert, King of Naples, to hand over Templar property in Provence. In Cyprus the transactions were completed by November 1313. In Germany and Italy by autumn 1317 the Hospital had taken possession in the dioceses of Magdeberg and Halberstadt and in the Kingdom of Bohemia, but in Hildesheim the Templars had to be evicted by force. Local rulers like Thibaut, Duke of Lorraine and Waldemar, Margrave of Brandenburg took a proportion of the goods before conceding to the Hospital.

"In 1522, the Island of Rhodes was besieged by the Turks, under Emperor Soleyman the First, and after a memorable defence, fell into the hands of the Infidels: the garrison, however was permitted to depart with all the honours of war." From 1523 the Order found refuge in the Island of Candia and elsewhere.

The first siege of Rhodes took place from 23rd May- 17th August 1480 when Meshikh Pasha broke the siege and with the remnants of his army boarded ship and set sail for Phoikos, whence they had come. The second siege of Rhodes was from 26th June 1522-2nd January 1523. Turkish forces under the command of Mustafa Pasha, son-in-law of the Sultan Suleiman with an army of 200,000 and a navy of some 400 ships laid siege on 26th June 1522. Rhodes was defended by 6000-7500 men of whom only 290 were actual Knights Hospitaliers. The siege was the last of its kind.

At dawn on the 1st January 1523 the Knights together with 4-5000 Rhodians "embarked on their ships and set sail for Crete". Sultan Sulehman had losses of 50,000 men and the Christians 2000 men. Rhodes after 213 years had become Muslim. The Knights left for Crete and thence for Italy, where they arrived laden with all their baggage.

It was during the Fourth Crusade, 1195-1229 that Byzantium had fallen and Crete had been sold to the Venetians for cash. Thus Crete began 465 years of Venetian occupation (1294-1669). The Venetians renamed the city of Chandax, Candia. This name of Candia was extended to the whole of the island mistakenly called "Candy" by Shakespeare. (I use the word mistakenly with some measure of license!)

The Grand Master Villiers de L'Isle Adam went to see the Pope to discuss the future of the Hospital Order. Pope Clement VIII, who was a member of the Order, although sympathetic, had no solution. The Order found temporary lodgings in Messina Civitavecchia, then in Viterbo Villefranche and later in Nice. The Grand Master visited the French King, Francis I and next his arched rival the Spanish King Charles V. This rivalry had to be kept under control in the Order because the Langue of Spain and France were very large. The Grand Master tried in vain to enlist both Monarchs' help to retake Rhodes. He even approached King Henry VIII of England in 1528 and although the Grand Master was entertained at St. James Palace, he returned with guns, armour and 20,000 crowns. As early as 1523 Charles

" and in 1530, the Emperor Charles V ceded the Island of Malta to the Order on condition of using all their abilities to repress the ravages of the Moorish rovers, who at that time infested the southern part of the Mediterranean. These periods of our history are designated by the B of R and B of A ."

" The legend of the approach of the knights to this, their final resting-place has given rise to the distinguishing W....s of the Order. The story runs that, on coming to take possession of the island, they approached the shore, rowing their galleys, two men to an oar, the oars in their left hands and their swords in their right hands, singing a psalm in the words - "K of K's and L of L's." The natives of the island, seeing their approach in warlike guise, hailed them through a speaking trumpet, saying in the Arabic tongue; E.S.A. etc.etc."

Elizabeth Schermerhorn describes the above thus:-

"The island of Malta was nothing but barren rock, twenty miles long and twelve wide..... There were about 12,000 inhabitants scattered over the rock who spoke a sort of Moorish. (Dr. T. Zammit, the learned archaeologist of Malta, is inclined to give the Maltese language and blood a Phoenician or Punic pedigree - Arch Melitowse July 1913). on the 26th October 1530, the old fleet from Rhodes, considerably reduced since it left Candia, dropped anchor under Fort St. Angelo, in that inlet of the Grand Harbour still called the Galley Port. The 100 families from Rhodes who had faithfully shared the wanderings

"...the hand and viper refer to the history of St. Paul in connection with the Island of Malta."

Tradition has it that St. Paul, in the year 60AD sailing as a prisoner from Alexandria to stand trial in Rome before the Emperor Nero, was shipwrecked near "a certain shore in a place where two seas met."

It is generally accepted that the shipwreck occurred in the narrow and always turbulent channel where there are difficult currents, between St. Paul's Island (Selmunett) and the mainland on the northern shore of St. Paul's Bay and the traditional spot to which he swam or drifted to safety is marked by a chapel and statue of the Saint erected on the tiny island of Selmunett in 1845.

It is known from the Acts of the Apostles (Chap.28 V.7) that St. Paul was accompanied by St. Luke, remained on the island for three months before continuing his journey to neighbouring Syracuse, and that for the first 3 days he lodged with the chief man of the island called Publius. St. Paul healed his father "of a fever and of a bloody flux".

One of the great religious festivals celebrated on Malta is that of St. Paul's Shipwreck on 10th February. In Malta St. Paul is depicted like St. Patrick, in the act of shaking the snake off his hand. The pleasant legend that the Apostle by that gesture rid Malta's snakes of their poison for ever. (The four varieties of snakes on

"The eight officers sitting there represent the heads of the eight Langues or Tongues into which the Order was divided. These were: Provence, Auvergne, France, Italy, Aragon, England, Germany and Castile. These eight Priors also held the several Offices in the Order of Mareschal, Hospitaller, Admiral, Conservator, Bailie, Turcopolier, Chancellor and Treasurer."

The division into Langues, or tongues, was made by Grand Master Villaret at the time the Knights settled in Rhodes (1309). The Order was first divided into seven divisions in accordance with the territory in which their possessions and revenues lay and the nationality to which they belonged. They were in order of precedence, Provence, Auvergne, France, Italy, Aragon, England and Germany. Aragon was later divided making an eighth Langue of Castile and Leon. No English Auberge was ever built in Valetta owing to the suppression of the Order in England by King Henry VIII on 7th May 1540 and the confiscation of the Commanderies of the Knights by Queen Elizabeth I in 1559, except 174 St. Christopher St., a house bought by the English Knight Sir James Shelley.

In 1631, (Vatican, Barb Lat. 5036) the then Grand Master Paul had little over 2000 in the whole Order:

	Knights	Chaplains	Servants-in-Arms
Provence	272	47	40
Auvergne	142	20	18

The Head of each Langue was called the Pilier and as head of the Auberge had his exclusive position and prerogatives in the hierarchy of the Order.

Provence	- Administrator of the Treasury
Auvergne	- Marshal (Commander of Land forces)
France	- Hospitaller (In charge of infirmary)
Italy	- Admiral (Navy)
Aragon	- Grand Conservator (soldiers pay and Knights allowance)
England	- Turcopiler (Mounted forces and coastguards)
German	- Grand Bailiff (Supervise old fortifications and outposts)
Castille & Leon	- Chancellor (Chancery of the Order)

P.S. At the ceremony of installation of a Knight, he was informed that the four arms of the badge represent the four Christian virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude and the eight parts of the Cross represented the eight Beautitudes which spring from these virtues or the eight Langues. The white of the Cross is emblematical of the purity of life required in those who fight for the defence of the Christian Faith and live for the service of the poor and suffering. The three offices of Hospitality, Religion and Militancy performed by the three categories of the Order of the Knights

The eight-pointed Cross seems to appear first on the wax seal of Grand Master Gavin de Montaigu (1207-1228).

("Seals" by King P32) This eight pointed Cross was included in the arms of the Republic of Amalfi (Delaville de Koulx, "Les Hospitaliers en Terre Sainte" p 37).

Canon Giraud in his "Life of the Blessed Gerard" states that in his day the Hospitallers used an ordinary Latin cross and that Raymond du Puy introduced the eight pointed cross but alas gives no authority for the statement. The Papal Bull of Pope Alexander IV dated 11th August 1259 granted the Hospitalliers this distinctive dress.

Robert Higgins

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