

Introduction

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The conferences on the Military Orders, held at St John's Gate in London, attract scholars from all over the world. This selection of the papers read in 2005 is, therefore, a guide to the progress of international research, although, as was the case in 2000, the impression it gives that work relating to the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem dominates the field may be misleading. The authors of thirteen of the twenty-seven papers in this collection concentrate on the Hospital, which plays a significant part in at least six others. In comparison, only five are devoted to the Temple and one to the Teutonic Order. Architecture, archaeology and the part which the orders played in Europe are well represented, and it is good to see interesting work being undertaken on the far north and on eastern Europe. Four papers deal specifically with military or naval matters – that there were no more is characteristic of modern scholarship – while another four deal with the spiritual life of the brothers and sisters. Family relationships – a growing field of interest – make an appearance, and the trend for papers on the early modern period continues.

Research on the Portuguese orders, so important in the history of European expansion, is also growing. They were in the process of being secularized, and it would be good in future to be able to read more on the hybrid Iberian orders of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which had become confraternities legitimized by secular Founts of Honours, although their membership continued to entail public obligations relating to the defence of Christendom or the Faith. They were extraordinarily influential, being imitated in foundations in Italy and at second- or third-hand in the non-Catholic Orders of St John and St Mary of the Germans, and in the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre.

Only one paper in this collection deals with the eighteenth century. Research students should be encouraged to work on the history of the Order of St John on Malta, where the archival material is massive; and we badly need research on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where the adaptability shown by the orders needs interpretation. No one has satisfactorily explained how, from 1834 onwards, the government of the Order of Malta managed to preserve its claims to sovereignty, and to succeed in so short a time in persuading its members to renounce the military role they had followed for seven centuries, to readopt the care of the sick as their principal activity, and to rebuild the order's provincial structure on a new basis. The survival of the Teutonic Order, which was almost smothered to death by the Habsburgs, needs more consideration. It is hard to imagine, but it is a fact, that the Age of Steam bred figures like Charles-Martial Allemand-Lavigerie, archbishop of Algiers from 1867 and cardinal from 1882 until his death ten years later, who founded a new, but short-lived military order in 1890, after he had failed to persuade the Order of Malta to establish a new order-state in eastern Africa. The English Order of St John played a role in empire-building which, although differently expressed,

paralleled that of the Portuguese orders in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; and it was able to create out of ancient and, one would have thought, alien traditions a genuinely popular ambulance movement that attracted thousands of not only British but also indigenous volunteers throughout the British empire.

St John's Gate, the gatehouse of the medieval Hospitaller priory, is the headquarters of the Priory of England and the Islands of the Most Venerable Order of St John. We owe much to the order for allowing us to use its premises at no cost to ourselves, to Pamela Willis, the curator of the museum, and Helen Gribble and their team of helpers. A great debt is also owed to Judi Upton-Ward, a scholar who works on the Templars, for editing this volume so efficiently and expeditiously.