

Rediscovering the archival history of the Order of Saint John: the proofs of admission of the Langue of Italy (c.15th-c.18th)

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The archives of the Order: the *status quaestionis*

Au milieu de tant de vicissitudes, il n'est pas sans intérêt de s'enquérir du sort subi par les archives de l'Hôpital [...]. Les documents, en effet, sont dispersés dans les dépôts de l'Europe, tantôt isolés en petits groupes, tantôt réunis en nombre considérable dans une même archive; quelques fonds, d'autre part, ont échappé aux investigations les plus minutieuses et semblent absolument perdus.²

Thus wrote Joseph Delaville Le Roulx (1855-1911), French historian and author of the *Cartulaire général de l'Ordre des Hospitaliers de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem*, a 4-volume investigation on the fragmented archives of the Order of Saint John in the first centuries of its activities (up to 1310). Although based on a superseded methodology and therefore outdated, the *Cartulaire* marked a turning point in the field of Hospitaller studies. It shed new light on many forgotten records scattered all over Europe, thereby providing a wide range of sources to scholars even up to this day. The *Cartulaire* shows that there is, even now, a need for a deeper

1. This paper is part of a broader, ongoing research project, the roots of which are in the author's PhD dissertation in Archival and Library Science (*Un'istituzione millenaria attraverso i suoi Archivi. I processi di ammissione dell'Ordine ospedaliero di San Giovanni secc. XVI-XIX*, Sapienza University of Rome, 2018) and the cataloguing work carried out as archivist and post-doctoral fellow of the Malta Study Center at the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML, 2018-2020). Abbreviations: AdeP = Archivum de Piro (Valletta); AOM = Archives of the Order of Malta (Valletta); ASFi = Archivio di Stato di Firenze; ASMOM = Archivi Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta (Rome); ASR = Archivio di Stato di Roma; BAV = Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana; BnF = Bibliothèque Nationale de France; BSMOM = Biblioteca Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta (Rome); CGOH = *Cartulaire général de l'Ordre des Hospitaliers de S. Jean de Jérusalem*; NLM = National Library of Malta. The English translation of the original sources has been done by the author. The archival reference codes of the records preserved at the Magistral Archives in Rome dates to the reorganisation made between 2014 and 2018. I am grateful to Dr Emanuel Buttigieg, Dr Daniel K. Gullo, and Dr Adrian Scerri for reading the text and providing suggestions.
2. Joseph Delaville Le Roulx, *Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers de S. Jean de Jérusalem*, vol. 1, Paris, E. Leroux, 1894, p. XII, Introduction.

and multifarious understanding of the institutional nature of the Order and the history of its documents: a story too long forgotten.

This paper will present the preliminary results achieved in the rediscovery of the documentary history of the Order in the early modern age, with a focus on the Italian and Maltese archival scenario.³ It will also provide an overview of the methodology designed for cataloguing and making accessible this huge and fragmented documentary legacy through the case study of the proofs of admission into the Order. There has been a strong focus on the military and cultural history of the Order of Saint John; by contrast, the history of its archives, the institutional dynamics between centre and periphery,⁴ and the workings of the different *officia* running the central convent and the priories,⁵ especially for the Early Modern period, are still a little-known story.⁶ The scientific literature on the topic is fragmented or focuses only on the local context. Valid contributions, some of them dated, paved the way for more research and threw new light on this overshadowed pathway but a systematic investigation is still lacking.⁷ Moreover,

3. The scientific literature for the archives of the Order in Italy is limited and fragmented. A very important contribution is the conference proceedings *Gli Archivi per la storia del Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta, Atti del III Convegno Internazionale di Studi Melitensi, Taranto 18-21 ottobre 2001*, edited by Cosimo Damiano Fonseca and Cosimo D'Angela, Taranto, Centro Studi Melitensi, 2005.
4. On the relations between centre and periphery and the lack of research on this phenomenon in relation to the Order, see Giuliana Albini, "La ricchezza dell'Ordine di San Giovanni (secoli XII-XIV)", in Anna Esposito and Andreas Rehberg (eds.), *Gli ordini ospedalieri tra centro e periferia*, Rome, Viella, 2007, p. 101-136. For a comparative approach, see Andreas Rehberg, "Una categoria di ordini religiosi poco studiata", Anna Esposito and Andreas Rehberg (eds.), *Gli ordini ospedalieri...*, *op. cit.*, p. 7-70.
5. For a recent, systematic and comparative study of the central institutions and offices of the Order in the Middle Ages, see Jochen Burgdorf, *The Central Convent of Hospitallers and Templars. History, Organization, and Personnel (1099/1120-1310)*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2008. The periphery still lacks this kind of investigation, but there are some useful works, for instance: Alan J. Forey, "The Careers of Templar and Hospitaller Office-Holders in Western Europe during the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries", in Philippe Josserand, Luís Oliveira and Damien Carraz (eds.), *Élites et ordres militaires au Moyen Âge. Rencontre autour d'Alain Demurger*, Madrid, Collection de la Casa de Velázquez, 2015, p. 201-214 and, more broadly, Damien Carraz, Anthony Luttrell and Helen Nicholson's works.
6. For the Order's institutional history with a focus on Church-State relations see Francesco Russo, *Un ordine, una città, una diocesi. La giurisdizione ecclesiastica nel principato monastico di Malta in età moderna (1523-1722)*, Rome, Aracne, 2017.
7. Some of the essential works related to the central archives in Malta include Louis de Mas-Latrie, "Notice sur les archives de Malte à Cité La Valette", *Archives des missions scientifiques*, n° 6-1, 1857, p. 1-240; Joseph Delaville Le Roulx, "Les archives, la bibliothèque et le trésor de l'Ordre de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem à Malte", *Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome*, n° 32, 1883, p. 3-287; *id.*, *Cartulaire général...*, *op. cit.*; Hannibal Scicluna, "Some important documents of the Archives of the Sovereign Military Order of St. John of Jerusalem and of Malta", *Archivum Melitense*, n° 1, 1912, p. 3-28; Alfred Mifsud, "Appunti sugli Archivi di Malta", *Archivum Melitense*, n° 2, 1913, p. 9-67; Giuseppe Gatt, "Gli archivi di Malta durante il periodo della occupazione francese e i primi anni della dominazione inglese", *Archivio storico di Malta*, n° 9, 1937-1938, p. 412-418; Andrée Scufflaire, "Les archives de l'Ordre de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem ou de Malte à Malte", *Bulletin de la Commission Royale d'Histoire*, n° 129, 1963, p. 69-74; Anthony Luttrell, "The Hospitallers' Historical Activities: 1291-1400", *Annales de l'Ordre Souverain Mili-*

there is a need for a comparative approach which considers the significant archival transformations of the Early Modern period, such as: the birth of the Modern States and the process of centralization; the development of international diplomacy and the rise of resident ambassadors; the changing nature of archival repositories and chanceries from the “secret archive of the prince/the inaccessible treasure” to a modern structured archive as a result of a complex state bureaucracy.⁸

In the Early Modern political scenario, the Order of Saint John, based in Malta from 1530 to 1798, passed through a crucial metamorphosis. The Order strived to achieve full political and diocesan sovereignty on the archipelago and become a modern state at a par with what was happening in Western Europe.⁹ This long process was the result of the progressive adaptation to changing circumstances and consolidated during the 18th century with the “monarchisation de l’Ordre”, as defined by Alain Blondy.¹⁰ However, for the Order this also meant going through an institutional crisis triggered partly by the French factions in the convent at the end of the 18th century. In this long age of transformations, chancery, archives and documentary procedures played an essential role in controlling properties, membership, defending privileges and rights, and reshaping identity.

This research is grounded on two main questions. The first looks at the institutional workings that gave life to the documents, the record-making and the record-keeping systems, focusing on the archival procedures; the second aims at exploring the dynamics which influenced the fate of these records after their massive dispersion at the end of the 18th century. The arrival of the French in Malta in 1798 and the suppression of the religious orders in Europe led to a very complex

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- taire de Malte*, n° 24, 1966, p. 126-129; *id.*, “The Hospitallers’ historical activities: 1400-1530”, *Annales de l’Ordre Souverain Militaire de Malte*, n° 25, 1967, p. 145-150; *id.*, “The Hospitallers’ Historical Activities: 1530-1630”, *Annales de l’Ordre Souverain Militaire de Malte*, n° 26, 1968, p. 57-69; *id.*, “Notes on the chancery of the Hospitallers of Rhodes: 1314-1332”, *Byzantion*, n° 40, 1970, p. 408-420; *id.*, “The Hospitallers’ Early Written Records”, in John France and William G. Zajac (eds.), *The Crusades and their Sources: Essays presented to Bernard Hamilton*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1998, p. 136-137; Karl Borchardt, Anthony Luttrell and Ekhard Schöffler, *Documents concerning Cyprus from the Hospital’s Rhodian archives: 1409-1459*, Nicosia, Cyprus Research Centre, 2011; Karl Borchardt (ed.), *Documents Concerning Central Europe from the Hospital’s Rhodian Archives, 1314-1428*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2020. Particularly important for the chancery and the Early Modern age, Maroma Camilleri, “Una delle officine più importanti del nostro Sagr’Ordine. The Chancery of the Order of St. John”, in Charles Farrugia (ed.), *Guardians of memory. Essays in remembrance of Hella Jean Bartolo Winston*, Malta, National Archives of Malta, 2008, p. 157-192; *id.*, “The archives of the Order of St. John at the National Library of Malta”, in Liudmila Mikhailovna Gavrilova (ed.), *Treasures of the Order of Malta. Nine centuries in the service of Faith and Charity*, Moscow, Kremlin, 2012, p. 58-65; *id.*, “The Archives of the Order of Malta. AOM 6520-6577: A Case of ‘Irrespect des Fonds?’”, in John Azzopardi (ed.), *Scientia et Religio. Studies in memory of Fr. George Aquilina OFM (1939-2012)*. Scholar, archivist and franciscan friar, Malta, Wignacourt Museum Publication, 2014, p. 39-54.
8. For a comparative historical approach in different political settings, see Filippo de Vivo, Andrea Guidi and Alessandro Silvestri, “Archival Transformations in Early Modern European History”, *European History Quarterly*, n° 46-3, 2016, p. 421-434 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691416648257>).
9. Francesco Russo, *Un Ordine...*, *op. cit.*, p. 25-44.
10. Alain Blondy, *L’Ordre de Malte au XVIII^e siècle. Des dernières splendeurs à la ruine*, Saint-Denis, Bouchène, 2002, p. 29.

and mostly unexplored archival pattern in which it is easy to get lost. To tackle this issue, this investigation has been steered by three guiding principles. First, the centre-periphery relationship, in particular between the central convent in Malta and the Langue of Italy. This was one of the formal subdivisions of members and properties of the Order according to geographic and linguistic criteria, but it was also a connecting body between the convent and the Italian periphery. Second, this connection is explored through the case study of the admission process.¹¹ This was a highly formalised procedure that generated peculiar archival processes involving different parties inside and outside the Order and could be considered as the back-bone of the institution. Third, a new perspective was necessary, and this was provided through the largely unexplored archival repository at the Magistral Archives, at the current headquarters of the Order, in Rome. It offered a unique opportunity for a better understanding of the fabric that made up the Hospitaller archival tapestry.¹²

A plural nobility: the Italian case¹³

Studying the admission process of the Order of St John means exploring two core aspects of its identity: the religious and the noble. The Order works as a laboratory to investigate differences and convergences of the European nobility,¹⁴ wherein Italy offers an interesting and perhaps singular case. The topic has been enriched during the past thirty years with many essential contributions on which this research is based.¹⁵ There is no dearth of relevant historiography which has tried to fill the gap in Hospitaller studies, but it is still fragmented.¹⁶

11. Although the admission process was studied as a whole, including also chaplains and servants of arms, this paper only focuses on the proofs of nobility for the admission of the Knights.
12. For the history of investigation into the history of Magistral Archives in Rome, see Valeria Vanesio's master thesis (*Trent'anni di diplomazia (1721-1749): i rapporti del Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta con la Santa Sede nei documenti degli Archivi Magistrali*, Sapienza University of Rome, 2014), which brought to light the existence of different archives. See also Valeria Vanesio, "Il valore inestimabile delle carte. L'archivio del Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta e la sua storia: un primo esperimento di ricostruzione", in Valeria Maria Leonardi (ed.), *Collectanea Bibliothecae Magistralis*, n° 2, 2014 (available at <https://www.orderofmalta.int/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Collectanea-II.pdf> and an overview of the rediscovered archives here: <https://www.orderofmalta.int/it/governo/biblioteca-magistrale/>). On the basis of the author's master thesis, a reorganisation of the historical fonds of the Magistral Archives, together with an archival guide for internal use, were carried out between 2014 and 2017, under the auspices of H.E. Frà Emmanuel Rousseau and Ms. Valeria Maria Leonardi of the Conservatoria Magistrale.
13. The expression is in Aurelio Musi, "Prefazione", in Alessandro Cont, *Giovin Signori. Gli apprendisti del gran mondo nel Settecento Italiano*, Rome, Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 2017, p. 1.
14. Manuel Rivero Rodriguez, "Nobleza, Cristiandad y Monarquía", in Manuel Rivero Rodriguez (ed.), *Nobleza hispana, nobleza cristiana: la Orden de San Juan*, Madrid, Ediciones Polifemo, 2009, p. 9-49.
15. For Italy, works by Fabrizio D'Avenia, Claudio Donati, Erminia Irace, Giacomo Pace Gravina and Angelantonio Spagnoletti.
16. For a detailed discussion about the gap in Hospitaller studies, see Fabrizio D'Avenia, "I processi di nobiltà degli ordini militari. Modelli aristocratici e mobilità sociale", in Manuel Rivero Rodriguez (ed.), *Nobleza hispana, nobleza Cristiana...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 1087-1126; *id.*, "Gli or-

From the 16th up to the 18th century, the Order of St John had to face the growing heterogeneity of the European nobility and maintain its role as a transnational structure and certifying body. Particularly in Italy, the Order dealt with a peculiar social phenomenon which was both shaped by and, in turn, shaping different political realities and noble traditions. According to Angelantonio Spagnoletti, at the dawn of the 16th century, political fragmentation and the coexistence of different feudal systems gave birth to a territorial and dynastic mosaic with blurred boundaries. As the century wore on, imperial policy was aimed at stabilising northern and central Italy while hostilities against the Ottomans led to the convergence of national and dynastic interests in Naples through the glorification of the military function of nobility.¹⁷ As Claudio Donati stated, distinguishing between the traditional nobility of blood, mostly identified and recognised through the possession of fief and title, and the urban aristocracy, which legitimised itself through the certified participation in the government of the municipality, was not an easy task.¹⁸ Moreover, in the 17th century, beside the *nobilità genuina* (nobility of blood) and the urban aristocracy, another phenomenon was slowly growing in the hands of princes and states: the ennoblement of officials of the government and, later, jurists, men of letters, and soldiers through a system of merits and seniority. For this reason, the nobility of blood felt the need to distinguish their category and reshape their boundaries and values.¹⁹ A book by a jurist and man of letters, the cardinal Giovanni Battista de Luca (1614-1683), offers a glimpse into 17th-century noble society and seeks a distinction with regards to the admission into the Order:

*Non basta quella nobiltà, la quale si dice semplice, o legale, ma vi si ricerca quella nobiltà maggiore, e più qualificata, la quale a differenza dell'ordinaria, e della legale, dà giuristi vien chiamata generosa.*²⁰

dini militari nella Monarchia Spagnola: una lunga latitanza storiografica”, in Cinzia Cremonini and Elena Riva (eds.), *Il Seicento allo specchio. Le forme del potere nell'Italia spagnola: uomini, libri, strutture*, Rome, Bulzoni, 2011, p. 79-94. For the Langue of Italy, see Angelantonio Spagnoletti, “Per una introduzione alla storiografia sulla Lingua d'Italia dell'Ordine di San Giovanni di Gerusalemme in età moderna” at the *Seminario Internacional para el estudio de las Órdenes Militares* in 2002 (<http://www.moderna.i.h.csic.es/oomm/Malta-Italia.htm>) and Anthony Luttrell, “Gli ospedalieri italiani: storia e storiografia”, *Studi Melitensi*, n° 6, 1998, p. 73-88. For a broader investigation on Hospitaller historiography, see Alain Demurger, “Histoire de l'historiographie des ordres militaires-religieux de 1500 à nos jours”, in Nicole Bériou and Philippe Josserand (eds.), *Prier et combattre. Dictionnaire européen des ordres militaires au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Fayard, 2009, p. 22-46.

17. Angelantonio Spagnoletti, *Le dinastie italiane nella prima età moderna*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003, p. 15-37.
18. Claudio Donati, “Le nobiltà italiane tra Medioevo ed età moderna. Aspetti e problemi”, in Francesco Salvestrini (ed.), *L'Italia alla fine del Medioevo. I caratteri originali nel quadro europeo*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2006, vol. I, p. 75-94.
19. Domenico Ligresti, “Cavaliere giostrante e cavaliere combattente. L'armi della nobiltà nella Sicilia degli Austrias”, in Manuel Rivero Rodriguez (ed.), *Nobleza hispana, Nobleza cristiana...*, *op. cit.*, p. 53-89.
20. Giovanni Battista de Luca, *Il dottor volgare ovvero il compendio di tutta la legge civile, canonica, feudale e municipale nelle cose più ricevute in pratica*, Rome, impr. Giuseppe Corvo, 1673, vol. 14, *De' Regolari*, chap. 46, p. 367.

To prove this, the following were necessary:

*Primieramente l'uso delle armi conosciute da tempo immemorabile, di tutte le fameglie de i quattro lati, cioè di padre, di madre, di avia paterna, di avia materna; et ancora, che da tempo immemorabile, tutte le suddette fameglie siano vissute in stato nobile, sicche non vi sia memoria di arte vile, e mecanica.*²¹

The rise of the *homines novi*, especially in the northern and central Italian courts, also led to a new social mobility around the traditional nobility. Therefore, the nobility of the 18th century seemed to be homogenous but was in fact multifaceted. This variety depended not only on the political fragmentation of the country but also on the processes of adaptation and transformation of European societies.²² In 1785, with these words, Giandonato Rogadeo (1718-1784), Italian jurist, summarised the thorny issues of the definition of nobility, the essential requirement for being a knight, the admission procedure, and the *consuetudo loci*, with a particular focus on the multifaceted Italian scenario:

*Si crede che la prova di nobiltà sia una prova facile a conoscersi, non avvertendo, che la nobiltà, per essere cosa incorporale, non cade sotto i nostri sensi, e debbe col lume della ragione giudicarsi secondo il sistema e polizia de' tempi e delle regioni, disanimarsi co' netti principi delle leggi, e della umana ragione.*²³

The lack of flexibility on the part of the aristocracy to adapt to a new society and the spreading of the revolutionary ideals shattered the social and political balances. This marked a permanent fracture in the history of the European nobility but did not, however, determine its end. As Labatut said, the spirit of being a courtier did not die on 14 July 1789.²⁴

Throughout the early modern age, the nobility, “a palimpsest of convergence and variety”,²⁵ somehow sought reciprocal recognition beyond social, political and geographical borders by referring and aspiring to the Hospitaller model. The mutual recognition and certification process between the Order of Saint John and the Italian nobles can be identified in three different levels. First, the relation between the Order and the different Italian states; second, the networks between the knights, through the politics of the local priory, and the local noble families; third, the Order and the individual aspirant who, thanks to his family background and contacts with the local powers, was the core of this network. It was the formalisation of this “universal” model which led the knights to re-discuss and reinforce the admission requirements starting from the middle of the 16th century. This provided an international framework and a shared and formalised aristocratic consciousness.²⁶

21. Giovanni Battista de Luca, *Il dottor volgare...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, *Delle Preminenze*, chap. 9, p. 156.

22. Aurelio Musi, “Prefazione”, *art. cit.*, p. 1.

23. Giandonato Rogadeo, *Del Ricevimento de' Cavalieri e degli altri fratelli dell'insigne Ordine gerosolimitano della Veneranda Lingua d'Italia*, Naples, presso Vincenzo Orsino, 1785, p. IV (preface).

24. Jean Pierre Labatut, *Le nobiltà europee*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1982, p. 206-207.

25. Emanuel Buttigieg, *Nobility, Faith, Masculinity. The Hospitaller Knights of Malta c.1580-c.1700*, London, Continuum, 2011, p. 13.

26. Erminia Irace, *La nobiltà bifronte. Identità e coscienza aristocratica a Perugia tra XVI e XVII secolo*,

Genesis of an Italian Hospitaller: an overview

E perché in Italia si fa più conto delle scritture, che della deposizione dei testimoni, fu per speciale ordinazione determinato che la prima commissione, che s'ha da spedire, sia a due commissari per riconoscere sommariamente dette scritture e riferire se siano sufficienti per la prova.²⁷

These instructions, recorded in one of the many 17th and 18th century 'manuals' for the admission process into the Order of Saint John, point out the central role of the documents submitted by the aspirant Hospitaller to the Langue of Italy. It is important to stress that these instructions highlight the strong documentary tradition of the Italian peninsula. The political powers of the certifying authorities were made use of by the Hospital in confirming an aspirant's noble status. The Hospitaller commission in charge of verifying these records had to face a remarkable variety of certifying bodies, documentary typologies, and local traditions. This phase was one of the most important stages of the admission process and surely the most challenging: it was the merging point between the local authorities and the Hospitaller institutions which led to the periodical search for a political balance.

The Early Modern procedure of admission was the result of a long process of consolidation of rules and practice. The turning point of this process was the 15th century, in particular during the government of the Grand Masters Philibert de Naillac (1340-1421) and Antoni de Fluvián (-1437). In the new legislation, more importance was given to the lineage of the aspirant, who had to be *gentil homme de nom et d'armes, et de leal mariage* and he had to present himself to the assembly of the local priory or to the Provincial chapter. In 1454, Grand Masters Jacques de Milly (-1461) introduced financial and other penalties (such as the loss of office in case of perjury) and confirmed that the brothers who unlawfully entered the Order would be demoted from the rank of knight to the one of servant at arms, for which no nobility was required but only legitimacy of birth. Moreover, Grand Master Pierre d'Aubusson (1423-1503), within the 1489 reform of the statutes, reinforced the law and included the obligation for the aspirants to prove their nobility within a period of two years in the priory where their place of birth was located; they then had to submit the proof to the convent. Thus, a formal investigation of the aspirants' nobility was henceforth needed.²⁸

Milan, Unicopli, 1995, p. 39; Angelantonio Spagnoletti, *Stato, aristocrazia e ordine di Malta nell'Italia moderna*, Rome, École française de Rome, 1988, p. 175.

27. Archives of the Order of Malta (AOM) 1687, *Istruzioni per coloro che desiderano far prove di nobiltà, legittimità per esser ricevuti nel Sagr'Ordine Gerosolimitano*, [early 18th century], p. 28. Archival description available in HMML Reading Room at <https://w3id.org/vhmmml/readingRoom/view/221291>.

28. Anne Brogini and Germain Butaud, "Prouver sa noblesse de nom et d'armes. Fonctionnement et enjeux des procès provençaux de l'ordre de Malte (xv^e-xviii^e siècles)", in Anne Brogini, Germain Butaud, Maria Ghazali and Jean-Pierre Pantalacci (eds.), "Nobles et chevaliers en Europe et en Méditerranée", *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, n° 97/2, 2018, p. 50. The original quoted statute in French is from Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), ms. fr. 17255, f. 100r. On the admission procedure in the 15th century, see Pierre Bonneaud, "Regulations concerning reception of Hospitaller *militēs* in the first half of the fifteenth century", in Judith Upton-Ward (ed.), *The Military Orders*, vol. IV: *On Land and by Sea*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008, p. 201-206.

In the early part of the 16th century, Grand Master Philippe Villiers de l'Isle Adam (1464-1534) ordered that nobody with health or physical problems could be admitted. The Provincial chapter or the prioral assembly were in charge of verifying their physical status and the documents (*instrumenta*) had to be sent to the convent.²⁹ Grand Master de la Sengle (1494-1557) also introduced a strong religious connotation by pointing out that aspirants could not be Jewish or Muslim. Most importantly from the standpoint of the procedure, he ordered that the proofs of nobility had to be examined by a commission appointed by the Provincial chapter or the assembly and then submitted to the same chapter for additional examination.³⁰ The existence of only a few documents dated before the middle of the 16th century could have depended on different factors. The nature of the documentary evidence required could have been different and limited in scope, when compared to the dossier submitted after the tightening of the rules in the second half of the sixteenth and beginning of the 17th century, as explained later. Moreover, this was still an ongoing process to be consolidated and assimilated by the periphery which, as stated by D'Avenia, did not lack abuses in adherence to the law.³¹

D'Avenia identifies the proofs of the Langue of Aragon and the Langue of Castille and Portugal as the most ancient ones, respectively dated to 1514 and 1525: these documents testify the practice of an appointed commission to collect secret proofs in addition to the evidence submitted by the aspirant. This procedure could have been influenced by the Castilian military orders which adopted the use of secret proofs (*informaciones*) at the beginning of the 16th century. Supposedly, because of the Spanish domination, the Sicilian priory of Messina transposed this practice into the Langue of Italy: in the earliest proofs preserved in Palermo, dated 1543, the commissioners and a notary were in charge of interviewing local witnesses about the candidate's nobility and officially record the information.³² This practice, the creation of secret proofs, ended up becoming the general rule for the Order through the 1555 Chapter general, a decision which was driven by the Langue of Italy.³³ The Italian Knights also submitted a proposal (*ruolo*) to the 1558 Chapter general: to verify fame and glory of the families and, most of all, the aspirant's *vivere more nobilium*, the proofs and the examination had to be done in the place where the aspirant lived, not the one from which he originated.³⁴ The place of origin was only essential to determine to which Langue and Priory the aspirant belonged: this is the concept of the geographical and jurisdictional borders (*limites*), introduced for the admission procedure in 1555.³⁵

29. *Statuta domus Hospitalis Hierusalem*, Rome, apud Antonium Bladum, 1556, ff. 10v-11v.

30. *Statuta domus Hospitalis Hierusalem*, Rome, apud Antonium Bladum, 1556, ff. 9v-10r and f. 11r.

31. Fabrizio D'Avenia, "I processi di nobiltà...", art. cit., p. 1091.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 1091-1094; for the Castilian Orders, see primarily Francisco Fernández Izquierdo, *La Orden militar de Calatrava en el siglo XVI. Infraestructura institucional. Sociología y prosopografía de sus caballeros*, Madrid, CSIC, 1992.

33. AOM 288, f. 12r; Claudio Donati, *L'idea di nobiltà...*, op. cit., p. 247-248; Fabrizio D'Avenia, "I processi di nobiltà...", art. cit., p. 1095.

34. AOM 288, f. 64r.

35. *Statuta domus Hospitalis Hierusalem*, Rome, apud Antonium Bladum, 1556, f. 11r.

The proof of nobility of Giacomo Romano (1554) for the Priory of Messina includes the interview of local witnesses made by a commission of two knights and a local notary. It does not seem that the witnesses made their presentations in secret: after all, this procedure became official only in 1555. There was still no official approval of the Provincial chapter but it was stated that the aspirant submitted original documents and coats of arms of his families, personally verified by them and the notary.³⁶ These documents were not, at this point, included or fully transcribed in the volume,³⁷ as that was a procedure that would happen at a later stage (*collazione*). It seems that the presentation in person by the candidate and the only examination of the records by commissioners in person with the certification of the notary provided enough evidence for proving his nobility. Through this example, it is possible to observe the procedure in its early stages, trying to define the borders of the investigation. As will be explained hereunder, this volume once belonged to the archive of the Langue of Italy and it is, at the moment, the oldest Sicilian proof of nobility sent to Malta.³⁸

The proof of Roberto Ponzoni (1556),³⁹ the oldest preserved in the archive of the Priory of Rome, offers an interesting case study and some insights after the 1555 Chapter general. First, it shows the use of graces and exceptions granted by the Grand Master and the Council or by the Langue: Ponzoni originated from Cremona, which is located within the jurisdictional borders of the Priory of Lombardy. For this reason, the aspirant was granted a special permission to prove his nobility in the Priory of Rome, with a commission directly chosen by the central government in Malta (*grazia di limiti* and *grazia dei commissari in partibus*). Thus, Ponzoni's volume includes the appointment of the commission by the Grand Master and the oath of the commissioners during the prioral assembly, in the presence of the secretary who also was a notary. The oath was recorded in the volume and reveals an important detail: the commissioners officially declared and committed themselves to follow the new rules of the 1555 Chapter general, which meant providing official and secret proofs (*prove ordinarie* and *prove segrete*) by interviewing select witnesses (*testes fide dignos*). This declaration testifies that the new rules issued in 1555 were a turning point to formalise the

36. Archivi Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta (ASMOM), Rome, Archivi aggregati, Priorato di Messina, Prove di ammissione, V.1 (38), ff. 10v-11r.

37. The proofs of nobility are preserved in the form of volumes collecting all the documents of the process.

38. Before the present study and the cataloguing work done with the Malta Study Center, D'Avenia correctly argued that it was not clear why the oldest proof of the priory of Messina preserved in Malta dated to 1557-1558 (AOM 4601) when the first ones preserved in the prioral archive dated to the 1540s (Fabrizio D'Avenia, "I processi di nobiltà...", art. cit., p. 1095, n. 25). It is now possible to identify Giacomo Romano's volume (1554) as the oldest preserved by the Langue for the Priory of Messina.

39. ASMOM, Priorato di Roma, Prove di ammissione, III.378. The 1672 inventory of the Priory of Rome confirms that this is the most ancient volume preserved in the archive of the priory; it is possible to see the match between the inventory and old archival reference code on the verso of the last folio of the volume, *mazzo primo, numero primo, scanzia E* (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), Vat. Lat. 12160, p. 157).

admission procedure. For a better understanding of the post-1555 documentary practices, one can look at the description of the aspirant's presentation to disclose the most important information. On 22 April 1556, Roberto Ponzoni personally introduced himself to the commission and the notary to submit a substantial amount of official records proving his nobility (*cum plurima privilegia, et infra-scripta concessiones et rescripta antiquissima in publicam et authenticam formam*). Even if the witnesses' interviews and the examination of the records seemed to be enough for the process at the time (as it was for Giacomo Romano's case), the commissioners, apparently on behalf of the aspirant, required the inclusion of the certified copy of all of these records inside the volume as an additional proof (*ut magis elucescat veritas*).⁴⁰ Among the records preserved at the Magistral Archives, a more structured procedure can be found in the proofs of nobility from the 1570s, therefore after the 1558 Chapter general. In these volumes, the questionnaire used to interview the witnesses follows a more rigid pattern and the documents are publicly read, revised and approved by the local priory and later sealed and sent to the Langue.⁴¹

The tightening of the statutes at the end of the 16th century originated from a long process of conventual reforms which revitalised the Order during the first century of its permanence in Malta. The decisions of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the frictions internal to the Order, and the adaptation to a new context reshaped the institution. Between 1555 and 1575, the admission of Italian knights were numerically considerable: important military events like the Great Siege (1565) and the battle of Lepanto (1571) replenished the Order's ranks, not without a certain level of flexibility in the admission requirements. At the same time, the birth of new military and dynastic orders (which created a certain level of competition), the revival of the spirit of crusade, and the dynastic strategies of the noble families in Europe had an important impact on modelling and reinforcing the admission requirements at the end of the century.⁴²

40. ASMOM, Priorato di Roma, Prove di ammissione, III.378, f. 3v. and f. 16r.

41. ASMOM, Archivi aggregati, Priorato di Pisa, Prove di ammissione, II.1(13); ASMOM, Archivi aggregati, Priorato di Lombardia, Prove di ammissione, III.1(2). Claudio Donati reached the same conclusions by examining other proofs from the 1570s (Claudio Donati, *L'idea di nobiltà...*, *op. cit.*, p. 256). The earliest reference which testifies to the use of sealing and writing a letter to the convent before the expedition is in the 1520-1522 Provençal Provincial chapters, see Anne Brogini and Germain Butaud, "Prouver sa noblesse de nom et d'armes...", *art. cit.*, p. 52.

42. On the flexibility of the entry requirements, see Claudio Donati, *L'idea di nobiltà...*, *op. cit.*, p. 249. For the context, see Emanuel Buttigieg, *Nobility, Faith and Masculinity...*, *op. cit.*, chapters 1 and 2; Francesco Russo, *Un Ordine, una città...*, *op. cit.*, p. 104-125; Anne Brogini, *Une noblesse en Méditerranée. Le couvent des Hospitaliers dans la première modernité*, Aix-en-Provence, Publication Université Provence, 2017, p. 24-25; Angelantonio Spagnoletti, "L'Ordine di Malta e la Sicilia", in Luciano Buono and Giacomo Pace Gravina (eds.), *La Sicilia dei cavalieri. Le istituzioni dell'Ordine di Malta in età moderna (1530-1826)*, Rome, Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta, 2003, p. 24-25; Angelantonio Spagnoletti, "Le prove di nobiltà dei cavalieri gerosolimitani. Una fonte per la storia dell'Italia moderna", in Josepha Costa Restagno (ed.), *I Cavalieri di San Giovanni in Liguria e nell'Italia settentrionale: quadri regionali, uomini e documenti*, Genoa-Albenga, Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri, 2009, p. 677-691. Also, Gentile and Merlotti point out that more rigid requirements were also established by dynastic orders like

The tightening of rules and requirements reached its peak with the 1598 Chapter general.⁴³ From the standpoint of procedure, a standardised questionnaire in 22 points to interview the witnesses was formalised and two hundred years of nobility for each family were necessary. Especially for the Langue of Italy, which progressively adopted documentary evidence as the most important element, more details were required for the genealogical trees and the coats of arms. Moreover, in 1603, particular attention was given to the nature and provenance of the documents: the official records submitted had to be issued by certified authorities and preserved in the archives of these institutions.⁴⁴ A valid example is the proof of Ugolino Grifoni from the Priory of Pisa which includes the 1598 questionnaire and a clear explanation of the provenance of the documents from the municipal and duke's archives (*non solo delle Tratte ma ancora delle Riformagioni et Archivio Ducale di Sua Altezza Serenissima*).⁴⁵ The profile and role of the commissioners and the notaries were even more defined: they were obliged to check the originals and compare them with the certified copies submitted by the aspirant (*collazione*).⁴⁶

The 1631 Chapter general definitely codified the admission regulations by focusing on the concept of class separation in the towns of origin and the expulsion from the Order in case of impurity even after admission. This was symptomatic of the political and social situation of the Italian nobility, in particular in southern Italy. As stated by Angelantonio Spagnoletti, the Italian nobility was going through a process of inclusion of new nobles, including those of mercantile origins (which was forbidden by the Order with a few exceptions).⁴⁷ This phenomenon could easily have led to the diluting of pure nobility of blood, thus the need of the Order to strictly redefine the requirements. Between 1631 and 1776, no Chapters general were held. This legislative gap gave birth to treatises and works exploring

Santo Stefano and Santi Maurizio e Lazzaro. See Luisa Clotilde Gentile, "Le prove di nobiltà dei cavalieri piemontesi. Una fonte sui rapporti tra aristocrazie locali e strutture dell'Ordine di Malta", in Josepha Costa Restagno (ed.), *I Cavalieri di San Giovanni...*, *op. cit.*, p. 389-390; Andrea Merlotti, "Prima sudditi, poi cavalieri: i nobili piemontesi e l'Ordine di Malta alla fine dell'antico regime", and "I cavalieri di Malta nel Piemonte moderno", both in Tomaso Ricardi di Netro and Luisa Clotilde Gentile (eds.), *Gentilhuomini Cristiani e Religiosi Cavalieri. Nove secoli dell'Ordine di Malta in Piemonte*, Milan, Electa, 2000, p. 21-28 and p. 42-44.

43. AOM 293, ff. 158v-160v.

44. Claudio Donati, *L'idea di nobiltà...*, *op. cit.*, p. 251; Fabrizio D'Avenia, "I processi di nobiltà...", *art. cit.*, p. 1096. The suggested reduction of the 200 years to 150, in 1612 and 1631, was not accepted.

45. ASMOM, Archivi aggregati, Priorato di Pisa, II.1 (12), c. 16v.

46. AOM 294, c. 70r. The documents usually required were the aspirant's certificate of baptism, the certificate of marriage of his parents and ancestors, and genealogical records, HMML, Special Collections, HMML 00436, *Istruzione per coloro che desiderano di far prove di nobiltà di legittimità per essere ricevuti nel sacro Ordine Gerosolimitano*, [18th century], 15v-16r. Available at the permanent link: <https://w3id.org/vhmmml/readingRoom/view/502186>. The receipt of payment of the entrance fee (tassa di passaggio) was also included.

47. *Statuti della Sacra Religione di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano, con le ordinationi dell'ultimo capitolo generale celebrato nell'anno 1631*, in Borgo Nuovo, appresso lo stampatore camerale, 1674, p. 14-15; Angelantonio Spagnoletti, *Stato, aristocrazia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 136-137.

the institutional nature of the Order.⁴⁸ The legal literature produced by the Hospitallers during this period was symptomatic of the Order's stasis; an undercurrent, reacting against the static legislative bodies resulting from the growing power of the Grand Master between 1631 and 1776. In 1644, the *Tribunale della purità* was established with the aim of checking dubious proofs and looking into situations where documentation seemed lacking.⁴⁹ Between the 17th and 18th centuries, the procedure became even more complex and a series of 'manuals of procedure' were created to guide commissioners and aspirants through a complicated path. The volumes of the proofs now included histories of the families (*memorie genealogiche*), additional evidence (*prove suppletive*), graces and dispensations from the rule (which gave birth to diverse procedural combinations),⁵⁰ coats of arms and genealogical trees, the extract of approval of the Provincial chapter and, when still bound within the volume, the final report of the Langue of Italy.

The 1776 Chapter general held by the Grand Master Emanuel de Rohan (1725-1797) finally introduced the proof of the *Titoli Primordiali* (definitely approved in 1778), dossiers proving the nobility of families never received into the Order.⁵¹ The formal acceptance from the Langue of this dossier was a *conditio sine qua non* to start the admission process: one example is the admission of Carlo Ancaiani. Nobody from one of his noble families, Aureli, had ever been admitted into the Order before 1787. A third volume originating from the examination of the Langue,⁵² as well as a certified copy of the documents, was included in the specimen of the priory and in the exemplar of the Langue.⁵³

Through this *excursus*, it is possible to understand that the profile of the ideal Hospitaller was not carved into stone.⁵⁴ The search for a periodical redefinition

48. For the 17th century, see in particular Emanuel Buttigieg and Rachel Caruana, "La fleur de la chrétienté. L'ordre de Malte et la noblesse européenne au XVII^e siècle", in Anne Brogini, Germain Butaud, Maria Ghazali and Jean-Pierre Pantalacci (eds.), *Nobles et chevaliers en Europe et en Méditerranée*, *op. cit.*, p. 73-88.

49. AOM 114, cc. 196r-197v. The reports issued by the tribunal start from 1695 (AOM 2241). On the foundation of the Tribunal, see Claudio Donati, *L'idea di nobiltà...*, *op. cit.*, p. 265; Emanuel Buttigieg, *Nobility, Faith...*, *op. cit.*, p. 25; Emanuel Buttigieg and Rachel Caruana, "La fleur de la chrétienté...", art. cit., p. 8; Fabrizio D'Avenia, *Nobiltà allo specchio...*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

50. It is not possible to provide a full range of the graces and dispensations made available by the Order for the admission procedure here. What is important to point out is that, even if rarely, a third volume could have originated. This is the case of Tommaso del Bene for the Priory of Pisa (ASMOM, Priorato di Roma, Prove di ammissione, III.64) whose maternal ancestors hailed from Perugia, within the Priory of Rome. A specific commission was sent from Rome to Perugia and a third volume including the proofs for the maternal families was created and preserved in the archive of the Priory of Rome. Only the final report was sent to Pisa and it is today bound with the specimen of the priory (Archivio Storico di Firenze (ASFi), Corporazioni religiose soppresse, Religione dei cavalieri, filza 280) while a third exemplar was sent to the Langue in Malta (AOM 4058).

51. Fabrizio D'Avenia, *Nobiltà allo specchio...*, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

52. ASMOM, Priorato di Roma, Prove di ammissione, III.253.

53. See the next paragraph.

54. A very interesting overview of these transformations since the origins of the Order is provided by Luigi Michele de Palma, *Il Frate Cavaliere. Il tipo ideale del Giovannita fra medioevo ed età moderna*, Bari, Ecumenica Editrice, 2015.

influenced by internal and external factors was an ongoing process. Although events in the 18th century led to a strong institutional fracture for the Order, this process did not end in 1798. After the loss of Malta, a new balance between a long tradition and the new European scenario was needed: the new admissions were the lifeblood to reconstruct the Order from its ashes. An unpublished 1804 *mémoire* offers a glimpse into the convent and outlines the portrait of the 19th-century Hospitaller. In illustrating the ideal *cursus honorum* of a knight, the anonymous writer points out that to become a high-ranking Hospitaller, a deep knowledge of the Order was essential, especially for those who lived outside the convent and could not be fond of an institution which they did not know and understand.⁵⁵ A full recovery of the Order's constitutional nature, history and memory was urgently needed.

It is through the correspondence of the convent and the few Hospitallers who actively participated in giving new life to the Order that one can delve into the activities behind the scenes.⁵⁶ The admission process could have played again a primary role to raise consciousness and interest in the Hospitaller dimension starting from the Eternal City, Rome:

*Ieri mattina in questo Palazzo della Religione fece la sua professione il Cavaliere Filippo Ciccolini e la funzione fu edificantissima a tutti quelli che v'erano presenti. Ho stimato bene d'invitarvi tutti i nostri Cavalieri anche di devozione per renderla più clamorosa, e risvegliare così l'idea della nostra Religione, che anche in questa città era quasi sopita; infatti ci ha prodotto il suo effetto, e Roma ha inteso con piacere risvegliarsi la memoria del nostro Ordine.*⁵⁷

Navigating through lost memories: the (re)discovered archive of the Langue of Italy⁵⁸

The foundation of the Langues between the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th centuries was part of a program of conventual reform that also aimed at involving the western provinces in the government of the Order.⁵⁹ Each Langue

55. Catholic University of America (Washington), Rare Books and Special Collections, Malta Saliba, ms. 61B, *Memoria per le ricezioni dei cavalieri gerosolimitani stante la presente posizione dell'Ordine*, 1804, f. 1r. (available in HMML Reading Room at the permanent link: <https://w3id.org/vhmmml/readingRoom/view/500352>).

56. The admission process and the activities and archival history of the convent, studied for the author's PhD dissertation, will be the subject of a forthcoming study.

57. ASMOM, fondo A, fald. 146, fascicolo 6, cartolaro 1. Anonymous letter from Rome to the vice-chancellor Amabile Vella dated 14 May 1819.

58. Preliminary observations in Valentina Burgassi and Valeria Vanesio, "L'Albergia della Lingua d'Italia a Malta. L'avventurosa storia di un palazzo e delle sue carte (secoli XVI-XIX)", *Nuovi Annali della scuola speciale per archivisti e bibliotecari*, n° 31, 2017, p. 163-190.

59. For different hypotheses and dates about their origin, see Johnathan Riley Smith, *The Knights of St. John in Jerusalem and Cyprus 1050-1310*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 230, p. 276, p. 283-286; Henry J. Sire, *The Knights of Malta*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994, p. 36; Charles L. Tipton, "The 1330 Chapter General of the Knights Hospitallers at Montpelier", *Traditio*, n° 24, 1968, p. 293-308.

represented the periphery and was based in its own *Auberge* or *Albergia*,⁶⁰ a building where the brothers could meet, discuss, and live together. During the permanence of the convent in Rhodes, the Auberges progressively became influential centres of power until they evolved in Malta “into an important national center of sociability and solidarity, where important social and military issues pertaining particularly to the langue or to the Convent in general were carefully analyzed and discussed”.⁶¹ As stated by Anne Brogini, the Convent became the sounding board of the social and political situations in Europe.⁶² Within the walls of each Auberge, different matters were discussed by the assembly of the Langue. These included politics and diplomacy between the centre and the periphery, the appointment to titles and dignities (*smutizione*),⁶³ the selection of members for the caravans, the mandatory training of the Hospitallers on the galleys,⁶⁴ the *cabrevatio bonorum* and related procedures for controlling and managing properties⁶⁵ and finally, the admission process.

An overview of the life of the Langues and the history of their buildings was provided by Giuseppe Darmanin Demajo and Elizabeth Schermerhorn at the beginning of the 20th century but a lot remains to be explored.⁶⁶ The archives of the Langues, briefly addressed by Darmanin Demajo and Alfred Mifsud,⁶⁷ are

60. *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem*, Rome, Ex typographia Titi & Pauli de Dianis, 1588, p. 201 (available in HMML Reading Room at <https://w3id.org/vhmmml/readingRoom/view/500902>).

61. Victor Mallia-Milanes, “The Hospitaller Auberge. A national centre of power-politics, sociability and solidarity on Early Modern Malta”, in *60th anniversary of the Malta Historical Society: a commemoration*, Malta, Malta Historical Society, 2010, p. 163-174.

62. Anne Brogini, *Une noblesse en Méditerranée...*, *op. cit.*, p. 17-19.

63. *Compendio delle materie contenute nel codice del Sacro Militare Ordine Gerosolimitano*, Malta, Stamperia del Palazzo di S.A.E. per Frà Giovanni Mallia Suo Stampatore, 1783; Francesco Russo, *Un Ordine, una città...*, *op. cit.*, p. 511.

64. *Codice del Sacro Militare Ordine Gerosolimitano*, Malta, Stamperia del Palazzo di Sua Altezza Eminentissima per Frà Giovanni Mallia suo stampatore, 1782, p. 452.

65. The *cabrevatio bonorum* was the main procedure to control and manage the peripheral properties of the Order and required the commanders to produce a land survey every 25 years, including notarial records, legal documents and official measurements and plans of the properties. Every 5 years, a further check-up of the state of the commandery with related mandatory improvements was required. It was called *processo dei miglioramenti* (*improvements*). See for instance, Lorenzo Bartolini Salimbeni, “I Cabrei e i Processi di Miglioramento dell’Ordine di Malta: una fonte per la storia dell’architettura fra XVI e XVIII secolo”, in *Architettura, storia e documenti*, Rome, Edizioni Marsilio, 1987; Elena Bellomo, “The Cabrei of the Order of Malta as an archaeological source. Some notes on Piedmont”, in Matthias Piana and Christer Carlsson (eds.), *Archaeology and Architecture of the Military Orders. New studies*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2014.

66. Victor Mallia-Milanes, “The Hospitaller Auberge...”, *art. cit.*, p. 169. For Darmanin Demajo’s work see “Le albergie delle Lingue iberiche e le loro chiese nazionali”, *Archivio storico di Malta*, n° 3-1/4, 1932, p. 70-114; *id.*, “L’Albergia della Lingua d’Alemagna”, *Archivio storico di Malta*, n° 4-2/4, 1934, p. 65-96; *id.*, “L’Albergia di Francia e la chiesa della Madonna di Liesse”, *Archivio storico di Malta*, n° 2-2/3, 1931, p. 57-75; *id.*, “L’Albergia della Lingua d’Alvernia e la cappella d’Alvernia in S. Giovanni”, *Archivio storico di Malta*, n° 2-4, 1931, p. 201-209; *id.*, “Storia dell’Albergia della Lingua d’Italia”, *Archivio storico di Malta*, n° 1, 1930, p. 261-306; *id.*, “Memorie storiche delle albergie dei cavalieri francesi dell’Ordine militare di San Giovanni”, *Archivum Melitense*, n° 8-2, 1930, p. 51-65. And Elizabeth W. Schermerhorn, *Malta of the Knights*, Kingswood-Surrey, Heinemann, 1929.

67. Alfred Mifsud, “Appunti sugli Archivi di Malta...”, *art. cit.*, p. 19.

today mostly dispersed and partly destroyed. The first dismemberment of the archive of the Langue of Italy happened in 1798, when the French Republican government established the separation of the records certifying properties from the documents once belonging to the Hospitaller chancery, the treasury and the Langues to be sent to the Commission of Government. At the same time, many of them were either used for artillery cartridges or dispersed on the antique market. Late in the early 20th century, Mifsud himself as royal librarian acquired some of the records of the Langue of Italy, today kept at the National Library of Malta.⁶⁸ Looking at the actual scenario, some questions arise: are the other records of the Langue of Italy still existent? Where are they preserved today? How is it possible to understand the identity, function and role of the Langue without reconstructing the related archival and administrative processes? The study of the admission procedure, through the records held at the Magistral Archives, can throw new light on the matter.

The genesis of the Magistral Archives is quite complex and has only recently been investigated. A few records once belonging to Antonio Bosio (c. 1575-1629), agent of the Order in Rome and famous Christian archaeologist who donated the palace to the knights in 1629, can be considered the first archival core of the Magistral Archives.⁶⁹ The executor of his will, Frà Carlo Aldobrandini (born in 1578), Hospitaller ambassador to the Holy See in 1629-1631 and in 1635-1638, took care of the recovery and/or sale of Bosio's invaluable collections and properties, and of recuperating the records related to the Order. Some of these documents were kept in Aldobrandini's private archive.⁷⁰ From 1631, the Magistral Palace became the seat of the Embassy of the Order to the Holy See, even if some of the resident ambassadors did not live there. According to the Hospitaller statutes, each ambassador was obliged to deliver the documents produced during his mandate

68. Alfred Mifsud, "Appunti sugli Archivi di Malta...", art. cit., p. 19-30. About the sale of some records of the Order, see also Giuseppe Gatt, "Gli archivi di Malta...", art. cit., p. 412-413. An overview on the changes of seats in Maroma Camilleri, "The archives of the Order of St. John at the National Library of Malta", in Ljudmila Mikhailovna Gavrilova (ed.), *Treasures of the Order of Malta...*, op. cit., p. 60-61.

69. He inherited the palace from his uncle Giacomo Bosio (1544-1627). ASR, fondo 30 notai capitolini, notaio Bonincontrus, ufficio 18, 1 October 1622 (Giacomo Bosio's will), ff. 493r-515r and 26 March 1622 (Giacomo Bosio's Inventory), cc. 375r-399v.; ASR, 30 notai capitolini, ufficio 19, notaio Tranquillo Pizzuti, Testamenti, 5 September 1629 (Antonio Bosio's will), c. 185v. First published in Antonio Valeri, *Cenni Biografici di Antonio Bosio. Con documenti inediti (1900)*, Rome, Unione Cooperativa Editrice, 1900, p. 52 and p. 55.

70. For a very recent and complete study of Bosio's activity and collections, see Chiara Cecalupo, *Antonio Bosio, la Roma Sotterranea e i primi collezionisti di antichità cristiane*, Rome, Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 2020, and about his records in the Aldobrandini's private archive, Chiara Cecalupo, "L'archivio e la biblioteca di Antonio Bosio, erudito, archeologo e collezionista: dispersione e salvezza di un archivio privato del Seicento romano", in Giorgio Dell'Oro and Marco Lanzini (eds.), *Archivi riemersi, archivi dispersi e riuso della documentazione. Atti del seminario "Conservazione, dispersione e riuso della documentazione d'archivio" (Brescia, 13 dicembre 2017)*, Brescia, Archivio di Stato di Brescia, 2019, p. 137-147. The mentioned Aldobrandini's archive is the one today preserved in Castelmartini (Larciano, Pistoia) by private owners: <http://www.san.beniculturali.it/web/san/dettaglio-complesso-documentario?step=dettaglio&codiSanCompl=san.cat.complArch.79212&idSogc=&id=79212>.

to his successor and send a copy to the chancery of the Convent.⁷¹ It is not easy to establish how regularly this happened in practice since the diplomatic records from the 16th century to the middle of the 17th at Magistral Archives are quite fragmented and incomplete. But it has been possible to identify the archive of the Embassy as an independent archival core, even if the archive of the *Ricetta di Roma*, the local financial office, and the archive of the Priory of Rome were preserved in the same place.⁷² In 1834, the central convent of the Order moved to the Magistral Palace in Rome along with its archives. These were the documents that had been generated during the temporary stay of the Order in Sicily (1800-1826) and Ferrara (1826-1834) after the loss of Malta. Sadly, a lot of rearrangement according to outdated criteria took place which led to the fragmentation of the original archives and the merging of records of different provenance together. This unfortunate state of events lasted until the middle of the 20th century. A new reconstruction and identification was needed.⁷³

The historical section of the proofs of admission preserved in Rome offers an incredible variety of records from the 16th to the 19th century.⁷⁴ The 910 volumes include not only the proofs of the Priory of Rome, naturally preserved there and once part of the archive of the Priory, but also the ones produced by the other six Italian priories (Lombardy, Venice, Pisa, Capua, Barletta and Messina). All of these volumes were mixed with the modern records of admission and many of them not even recorded in any list. The activities of census, study, reorganisation and analytical archival description carried out on this material and on the collection of 456 family trees (physically separated from the original volumes without any identification link) revealed a completely different archival pattern. On one hand, the analysis of the old archival reference codes allowed an understanding of the provenance of these records, shedding new light on the various interventions carried out on the series during the centuries. On the other hand, a deep investigation of different case studies offered the opportunity to reconstruct the admission process and the institutional dynamics. The results achieved through this study and, most of all, the comparative analysis with the Italian proof of admission and other records of the National Library of Malta revealed substantial and essential information on other series preserved at the Magistral Archives, until now never explored.

Aside from the ones of the Priory of Rome, the existence of the proofs of admission belonging to the other six priories and dated after 1798 at the Magistral Archives is justified by the merging in 1834 of the archives of the central

71. “Ambasciatori, finita la carica, devono consegnar le sentenze, privilegi ai successori per inventario, e di questo mandar copia alla cancelleria”, in *Compendio delle materie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

72. NLM, AOM 1333, 495r.-502r.; ASMOM, serie GM, fald. 16, fasc. Fra A. Manoel de Villhena 1722, sottofasc. Registro dell’Em. Sig. Gran Maestro Manoel dalli 13 luglio alli 26 dicembre 1722, Rome 25 August 1722.

73. See Valeria Vanesio, *L’Archivio dell’Ambasciata...*, *op. cit.*, and *id.*, *Il valore inestimabile...*, *op. cit.*

74. The date range for this study is from 16th century (when the first dates proofs are available), to 1839, the foundation date of the Grand Priory of Lombardy and Venice and of the Grand Priory of Naples and Sicily, which absorbed the ancient priories of Lombardy, Venice, Capua, Barletta and Messina. For the dates see Henry J. A. Sire, *The Knights of Malta...*, *op. cit.*, p. 158. The Grand Priory of Rome had already been absorbed by the Priory of Pisa in 1816.

government generated after the loss of Malta. But why is a substantial amount of the volumes and genealogical trees of Lombardy, Venice, Pisa, Capua, Barletta and Messina, dated before 1798, kept there? Looking at the physical features of both the volumes and the collection of genealogical trees, two leads emerge. First, several handwritten purchase notes (in *scudi*), usually found on the front cover; secondly, the same paperboard binding for most parts of the volumes. This evidence would suggest that the volumes could have been bought by the Order after the suppression of the religious orders and the related dispersion of records in the hands of other institutions and on the antique market. Moreover, the common paperboard cover could have been the result of two possible interventions: the origin of these records from one unique particular archive or the re-binding of purchased records after the acquisition from different places of provenance, probably the prioral archives in Italy. The issue of their provenance is further clouded by the fact that for the priory of Capua, Barletta and, especially, Rome, it is common to find two volumes for each aspirant, both preserved at the Magistral Archives.

The records of the Priory of Rome in particular offer a very good case study. The two copies of the 18th-century proofs of nobility are in many cases bound one in parchment, and the other in leather. For instance, there are two volumes concerning the application of the aspirant Carlo Ancaiani.⁷⁵ The leather volume includes a purchase note, *scudi* 5, on the front cover and contains all the documents submitted and created by the parties involved in the process of admission discussed before. The parchment volume seems to be a certified copy of the whole process. But a closer look also disclosed another piece of essential information. Both volumes are originals, bearing the official wax seals of the knight commissioners in the final report.⁷⁶ Each report was created and issued as a double original to certify the authenticity of the procedure in both volumes. This raises the question of why the priory of Rome should preserve two volumes (albeit not identical) in the same place. The difference between the two specimens is the final report issued by the assembly of the Langue of Italy bound in the parchment exemplar. This reiterates the fact that one copy of the proofs had to be sent to the convent, in particular to the Langue of Italy, to be fully verified and approved (or rejected), and the Langue's report was then sent to the local priory. Logically, the Langue's final report should be solely preserved within the priory.

A closer examination of some exemplars of the Priory of Capua provided additional evidence in unravelling this riddle. It is possible to identify two distinct groups of volumes with different archival reference codes. The first one includes volumes, bound either in parchment or in paperboard, with an archival reference code of the type *Scanzia n. 1, Cassa 1, n. 104*.⁷⁷ For the second group, almost always bound in paperboard, the archival reference code is different, for example *S. 5, n. 7*. This last group also includes a parchment label (when still preserved)

75. ASMOM, Priorato di Roma, Prove di ammissione, III.255; ASMOM, Priorato di Roma, Prove di ammissione, III.254 (old archival reference code, n.9).

76. ASMOM, Priorato di Roma, Prove di ammissione, III.254, not foliated.

77. ASMOM, Archivi aggregati, Priorato di Capua, Prove di ammissione, VI.1 (3), Giuseppe Brancaccio (1631).

dangling from the lower edge of the front cover with a second archival reference code, *Capua Sculco n. 14*.⁷⁸ At first glance it is clear that the proofs of the same priory, at least for Capua, have different archival provenance. To prove this hypothesis, another case study offers new ground for analysis: the proofs of nobility of Orazio Carmignano (1622). Two specimens for the same aspirant are preserved at the Magistral Archives: one bound in parchment including the old archival reference code *Scanzia I, Cassa I, n. 86*;⁷⁹ and the second bound in paperboard including the old archival reference code, *C.I, n. 37*, and the purchase note *scudi 6*.⁸⁰ The initial assumption was that some of these volumes were possibly once part of the archives of the priories in Italy. Indeed, some important letters dated 1803, 1858 and 1938-1939, testify that the Order acquired a substantial number of ancient records once preserved in the archives of the Priors of Capua and Barletta and today kept at the Magistral Archives.⁸¹ It is possible to assume that the first group of records of the Priory of Capua (in this instance, *Scanzia n. I, Cassa I, n. 104* and *Scanzia I, Cassa I, n. 86*) probably belonged to the acquired records of the priory located in Naples. Moreover, this typology is also common to some documents for the Priory of Barletta. This is the case of Francesco Maria Pagano (1696), *Scanzia I, Cassa 2, n. 79*,⁸² of which a second copy is also preserved but with the archival reference code of the second group, *P 2, n. 2*, and the purchase note, *scudi 3*.⁸³ The common archival reference code between Barletta and Capua probably depends on the reunion of the knights of the two priories in a unique Provincial chapter in Naples, where the records were preserved.⁸⁴ However, the letters about the acquisitions only partially proved the initial theory. Yet the existence of this second group of records still needed to be justified.

Further comparative analysis revealed that the typology of archival reference code of the second group is also common to the volumes of the other priories. The archival reference codes are all written by the same hand.⁸⁵ The proofs of nobility

78. ASMOM, Archivi aggregati, Priorato di Capua, Prove di ammissione, VI.1 (118), Bonaventura Giovanni Sculco (1793).

79. ASMOM, Archivi Aggregati, Priorato di Capua, Prove di ammissione, VI.1.5.

80. ASMOM, Archivi Aggregati, Priorato di Capua, Prove di ammissione, VI.1.6. Other old archival reference codes refer to later activities of rearrangement made after the records reached the Magistral Archives.

81. ASMOM, fondo GM, fald. 50 "Fra Tommasi da Cortona, 1803. Rilegata", letter of 14 July 1803; ASMOM, fondo A, fald. 247 C, fasc. E; ASMOM, fondo A, fald. 247 A, sottofasc. 1; ASMOM, fondo A, fald. 247 B. In Valeria Vanesio, *Il valore inestimabile...*, *op. cit.*, p. 38 and p. 68.

82. ASMOM, Archivi Aggregati, Priorato di Barletta, Prove di ammissione, IV.1.22.

83. ASMOM, Archivi Aggregati, Priorato di Barletta, Prove di ammissione, IV.1.24.

84. Further investigations are currently ongoing at the State Archive of Naples where part of the surviving proofs of nobility are still kept. Another section is preserved by the actual Gran Priorato di Napoli e Sicilia, which is currently not accessible.

85. ASMOM, Archivi aggregati, Priorato di Venezia, Prove di ammissione, I.1 (5), Pompeo Tassis (1590); ASMOM, Archivi aggregati, Priorato di Lombardia, Prove di ammissione, III.1 (14), Francesco Saluzzo (1766); ASMOM, Archivi aggregati, Priorato di Barletta, Prove di ammissione, IV.1 (3), Giovanni Battista Carignano (1730); ASMOM, Archivi aggregati, Priorato di Messina, Prove di ammissione, V.1 (46), Giuseppe Milo (1768); ASMOM, Archivi aggregati, Priorato di Pisa, Prove di ammissione, II.1 (15), Vincenzo Maria Baldassarre Vettori (1760); ASMOM, Priorato di Roma, Prove di ammissione, III.55, Pietro Angelotti (1698).

of Scipione Bargagli⁸⁶ for the Priory of Pisa provide further confirmation. First of all, the purchase note, *scudi 6*, and the archival reference code of the second group of records is recorded on the front cover, *B.2, n. 10*, even if it is possible to notice some erasures testifying activities of rearrangement: the original archival reference code was *B.1, n. 41*. Secondly, on the verso of the last folio, traces of folding and seals are visible and testify that, according to the procedure, the dossier was folded and sealed (and only bound at a later stage) to be sent to the Langue in Malta. Moreover, a shipping address is also recorded: *Serenissimo Domino Fratere Antonio de Paula Dei gratia Sacre Domus Hospitalis Sancti Joannis Hierosolimitani Magno Magistro [...] Domus Venerando Consilio et Venerande Lingue Italie – Melita*. This volume seems to belong to the archive of the Langue, even if preserved at the Magistral Archives. To dispel any doubt, the analysis of the proofs of nobility in the archive of the Priory of Pisa, today at the State Archive of Florence, revealed that the original dossiers were bound together in one volume according to the year of admission so there is no individual volume for each aspirant. In addition, the copy of Scipione Bargagli's dossier belonging to the archive of the priory is bound in a regular manner and preserved in Florence.⁸⁷ This data provides confirmation that the Bargagli's volume preserved at the Magistral Archive cannot be the volume once belonging to the Priory of Pisa.

Even if the case studies discussed are only a fragment of the analysis carried out, they offer an intriguing and very complex scenario. The discovery of three indexes⁸⁸ at the Magistral Archives marked a turning point in the investigation. These registers include proofs of nobility, land surveys, accounts, correspondence and other documents which once formed the archive of the Langue held in Malta up to 1798. The purchase note on the Index n. 1, *Comprato per scudi 17.6*, suggests that these indexes were probably bought on the antique market together with other material now at the Magistral Archive. The archival reference codes recorded on the indexes and the second group of proofs of admission at Magistral Archives were congruent. It also confirmed their provenance: the archive of the Langue.⁸⁹ So, the writ concerning Scipione Bargagli's proofs at the Magistral Archives⁹⁰ matches with the archival reference code recorded in the Index n. 5 at the line *B.1, n. 41*.⁹¹ This holds for the other case studies perused. This picture also

86. ASMOM, Archivi aggregati, Priorato di Pisa, Prove di nobiltà, II.1 (25), Bargagli Scipione (1626).

87. ASFi, Corporazioni religiose soppresse dal governo francese, Religione dei cavalieri 132, 28.

88. ASMOM, Strumenti di corredo e ricerca, n. 1 (*Indice delli miglioramenti e cabrei di tutte le commende che si contengono nei sette priorati della Veneranda Lingua d'Italia [...]*, 1784); ASMOM, Strumenti di corredo e ricerca, n. 5 (*Indice dei cognomi de' Cavalieri della Veneranda Lingua d'Italia, le prove de' quali si conservano in quest'Archivio diviso ne' sette Priorati [...]*, 1740); ASMOM, Strumenti di corredo e ricerca, n. 6 (*Indice alfabetico per cognome de' Cappellani, e Serventi d'armi ricevuti nella Veneranda Lingua d'Italia [...]*, 1741).

89. Giuseppe Darmanin Demajo, "Storia dell'Albergia...", art. cit., p. 294. Demajo suggested the dispersion of records in Europe but without quoting any source.

90. ASMOM, Archivi aggregati, Priorato di Pisa, Prove di nobiltà, II.1 (25), Bargagli Scipione (1626).

91. ASMOM, Strumenti di corredo e ricerca, n. 5, not foliated (*Indice dei cognomi de' Cavalieri della Veneranda Lingua d'Italia, le prove de' quali si conservano in quest'Archivio diviso ne' sette Priorati [...]*, 1740).

explains the address to Malta on the last folio. The dispatching of the volume to Malta, sometimes with a covering letter to the Admiral as the head of the Langue of Italy, is also testified in the 'manuals of instructions' to compile the proofs. The prioral assembly or the provincial chapter had to fold and seal the dossier and give it to the aspirant with the related letter for the convent and the Langue. The aspirant was required to reach the convent in Malta to deliver the sealed document and start his novitiate.⁹²

These results also provide substantial evidence to identify other volumes of the Langue of Italy now at the Magistral Archives.⁹³ Unfortunately, not all the old archival reference codes and original bindings are preserved, which prevents the archivist from identifying each and every volume. The physical characteristics are not reliable either, especially for the Priory of Rome. The bindings (leather or parchment) cannot be used as the only criterion of differentiation. Large numbers of leather bound volumes at the Magistral Archives led to the conclusion that this was singular for documents of the Priory of Rome appertaining to the Langue of Italy. However, during research at the National Library of Malta a number of parchment bound volumes were encountered. One example is the proof of Antonio Domenico Bussi (1670)⁹⁴ of which another specimen is preserved in the archive of the Priory of Rome at the Magistral Archives, again bound in parchment.⁹⁵ Moreover, 16th- and 17th-century Roman volumes have different bindings and external features from the 18th-century proofs. An in-depth comparison was made with the only two known inventories of the archive of the Priory of Rome, dated respectively 1672⁹⁶ and 1798-1805,⁹⁷ that led to the identification of many of the 16th- and 17th-century volumes belonging to the original prioral archive. However, the lack of data on many other volumes did not allow a clear identification of all the volumes according to their provenance.⁹⁸

92. AdeP, box AB2, bundle 1, *Istruzione per coloro che desiderano far prove di nobiltà, di legittimità per esser ricevuti nel Sacro Ordine Gerosolimitano*, [18th century?], p. 32. Available in HMML Reading Room at the permanent link: <https://w3id.org/vhmmml/readingRoom/view/209313>.

93. For instance, it has been possible to identify some of the land surveys (*cabrei*), visits and improvements (*miglioramenti*) of the Langue of Italy. One example is the land survey of the Commandery of San Luca in Perugia that includes the purchase note and the old archival reference matching with the Index n. 1 of the Langue of Italy (ASMOM, Priorato di Roma, Cabrei e miglioramenti, San Luca di Perugia, 5.3).

94. AOM 4016.

95. ASMOM, Priorato di Roma, Prove di ammissione, III.97.

96. BAV, Vat. Lat. 12160, *Inventario di Bolle, Brevi, Processi, Cabrei, et altre scritture esistenti nell'Archivio del Venerabile Priorato di Roma della Sacra Religione Gerosolimitana fatto d'ordine dell'Em.o e Rever.mo Signor Cardinal Sigismondo Chigi Gran Priore e della Venerabile Assemblée come per decreto emanato sotto li 24 giugno 1672, da me Fra' Giovan Paolo Tamantini Segretario e Cancelliere di detto Gran Priorato*. This finding aid is quoted in the catalogue *Memorie Melitensi nelle collezioni della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, edited by Giovanni Morello, Rome, Edizioni Benincasa, 1987, p. 61. I am grateful to Dr Roger Vella Bonavita for bringing it to my attention.

97. ASMOM, Strumenti di corredo e ricerca, n. 4, *Registro generale o sia descrizione di tutte le Carte Libri e scritture che sono in questo Archivio del Gran Priorato di Roma (1798-1805)*.

98. It should be noted that the archival series of all the Roman proofs of nobility forms part of the archive of the Priory of Rome and the proofs of the other priories now form part of the acquired materials, called *Archivi Aggregati*. Decisions were made in liaison with the Conservatoria Ma-

Through the indexes it has been possible to expand the borders of this research. Primarily, this discovery led to a completely different understanding of the role of the Magistral Archives as a magnetic pole of records, offering new insight in the life of the central convent after 1798. Secondly, the indexes allowed the identification of the documentary typologies produced by the Langue for a virtual reconstruction of its archive.⁹⁹ Indeed, the discovery of part of the Langue's records and indexes in Rome led to the identification of documents of the Langue which hitherto had suffered the indignity of being classified according to artificial 19th-century sections. Finally, the existence of this archive illustrates the core of the activities of the Langue, its semi-independence in governing many affairs and procedures, and the redefinition of its role and functions as a vibrant body within the Hospitaller administration and politics. To sum up, it is possible to definitely state that part of the records of the Langue of Italy left the island in the 19th century and reached the 'new' Convent of the Order in Italy. But how and why it happened and who were the protagonists of this adventure is another story.¹⁰⁰

In the heart of the Mediterranean: cataloguing the Langue of Italy at the National Library of Malta

What remains of the archive of the Langue of Italy in Malta, was, until now, a largely forgotten story and in need of proper investigation. To reconstruct the original archival framework and, most of all, to properly catalogue these records, the perspective of the Magistral Archives was important, but a deep study of the deliberations of the Langue was also essential. The deliberations of the assembly of the Langue¹⁰¹ provide invaluable insights into the life and workings of this institution and, most of all, preserve unknown stories of early-modern Italy through the lens of the Order. Moreover, they disclose valuable information about its record-making and record-keeping system. During almost three centuries in Malta, many were the activities of reform and rearrangement of the documents of the Langue. Two Knight commissioners were in charge of the archive, the *procuratore anziano* and the *procuratore fiernaldo*, who periodically provided a full report of the operations and contents of the archive to the assembly.¹⁰² In particular, the 18th century saw the increase of the number of documents and related

gistrale but without adding further subdivisions since the provenance is not always recognisable for each volume and further investigations in other related holding institutions, especially the National Library of Malta, are still in progress.

99. The other documents of the Langue in Malta were identified through the description of the rooms and of the contents of the *armaria* in the index n. 1, see ASMOM, Strumenti di corredo e ricerca, n. 1, ff. 421r-455r. Also in Valentina Burgassi and Valeria Vanesio, "L'Albergia della Lingua...", art. cit., p. 174-175.

100. The investigation of the life of the Convent and its archives after 1798 was studied by the author for the PhD dissertation and it is subject of a forthcoming publication.

101. NLM, Series 14, subseries 4. Archival description available on HMML Reading Room.

102. Giuseppe Darmanin Demajo, "Storia dell'Albergia...", art. cit., p. 294. *Anziano* and *fiernaldo* mean senior and junior according to the seniority (*antianitas*) in the Order, respectively.

activities of reorganisation. Thus, a series of archival operations were made and the three mentioned indexes were created.¹⁰³ Indexes, documentary typologies and old archival reference codes confirmed the identity of the other records of the Langue at the National Library.¹⁰⁴

The proofs of nobility and the genealogical trees at the Magistral Archives offered a unique testing ground to build a solid methodology for the archival description of these unique volumes,¹⁰⁵ according to the descriptive standards ISAD(G)¹⁰⁶ and ISAAR(CPF).¹⁰⁷ Describing the proofs of the National Library in the multifarious platform of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, HMML Reading Room, which connects circa 89,940 diverse documents (archival and library material) from 30 different countries in the world, offers huge potential but also challenges.¹⁰⁸ First, the different standards adopted, DACS¹⁰⁹ and RDA,¹¹⁰ required adapting the information to different fields and, especially for RDA, safeguarding contents, contexts and relationships.¹¹¹ Second, the original documents, written in Italian and Latin and including specific terminology related to the sphere of the Order,¹¹² needed to be catalogued and standardised in English without losing any essential information. Third, the construction of a set of authority records¹¹³ for the Italian proofs of nobility and for other documents of the

103. AOM 2141, Deliberazioni della Lingua d'Italia (1737-1741), ff. 169v.-170v. and ff. 147r.-147v.: proposal for the creation of the index n. 5 (ASMOM, Strumenti di corredo e ricerca, n. 5); AOM 2142, Deliberazioni della Lingua d'Italia (1742-1748), cc. 221v-222r: mention to the index n. 6 (ASMOM, Strumenti di corredo e ricerca, n. 6); AOM 2153, Deliberazioni della Lingua d'Italia (1782-1783), cc. 193v-194v and 195r-v: proposal for the creation of the index n. 1 (ASMOM, Strumenti di corredo e ricerca, n. 1).

104. Valentina Burgassi and Valeria Vanesio, "L'Albergia della Lingua...", art. cit., p. 174, n. 43.

105. Preliminary remarks in Valeria Vanesio, "I processi nobiliari del sovrano militare Ordine di Malta. Un'istituzione internazionale attraverso le sue carte", *Nobiltà. Rivista di Araldica, Genealogia, Ordini cavallereschi*, n° 22-125, 2015, p. 229-238; Valeria Vanesio, "Gli alberi genealogici e le prove di nobiltà dell'Ordine di Malta. Note metodologiche per la valorizzazione", *Nobiltà. Rivista di Araldica, Genealogia, Ordini cavallereschi*, n° 24-137, 2017, p. 179-188.

106. International Standard of Archival Description (General). Available at <https://www.ica.org/en/isadg-general-international-standard-archival-description-second-edition>.

107. International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families. Available at <https://www.ica.org/en/isaar-cpf-international-standard-archival-authority-record-corporate-bodies-persons-and-families-2nd>.

108. HMML Reading Room: <https://www.vhmmml.org/readingRoom/>. The cataloguing work of the AOM has been conducted, among other projects, between 2018 and 2020 under the supervision of Dr. Daniel K. Gullo, Joseph S. Micallef Director of the Malta Study Center at HMML, totalling 4253 records.

109. Describing Archives. A Content Standard. Available at <https://www2.archivists.org/groups/technical-subcommittee-on-describing-archives-a-content-standard-dacs/describing-archives-a-content-standard-dacs-second>.

110. Resource Description & Access. <https://www.rdatoolkit.org>.

111. Federico Valacchi, "Things in the World. The integration process of archival descriptions in intercultural systems", *JLIS.it*, n° 7-2, 2016, p. 333-369.

112. For the specific terminology of the Order of which an official translation does not exist (for e.g., *smutizione*), an explanation in English has been provided and the original term was preserved in brackets to be searchable in the platform.

113. Multilingual Archival Terminology Database at <http://www.ciscra.org/mat/mat/term/84>.

Order, including the authorised headings for people, organisations, families, and places, presented additional challenges but also led to the first methodological guidelines for future projects.¹¹⁴ Finally, one last consideration is needed. HMML Reading Room is a digital library hosting an incredible variety of archival and library materials. It is not built according to the traditional archival databases which represent the hierarchy of the fonds through a defined archival structure to be navigated only “vertically”. HMML Reading Room gives the opportunity of building complex and tridimensional networks of relations. In particular the use of authority files and controlled vocabularies in the fields as access points enhance a “transversal” search of the collections according to different coordinates. Dismembered archives can be reconstructed through the archival creator:¹¹⁵ all the records once issued and preserved by the creator in a defined repository (or more than one) can be found. This is one of the most important features of the platform: searching in thousands of collections and virtually reconnecting dispersed records scattered all over the world.

A brief overview of the archival description is offered through the proof of nobility of the previously mentioned Antonio Domenico Bussi.¹¹⁶ The first section provides location and hierarchy of the archive up to the subseries level and the archival reference code of the described object. The standardised fields *country*, *city*, *repository*,¹¹⁷ *collection*, *series* and *subseries* work as a link connecting different records preserved in the same place (for eg., Malta or Valletta) or collection (AOM). Thanks to the research done, it is possible to identify the archival creator who was involved in the creation and preservation of the records: the Langue of Italy with its dates of existence. The fields *Scope and contents*, *Historical note*, and *Custodial history* are essential to guide the user through the contents of the particular series or subseries, a brief description of the historical context and the archival creator’s functions, and a summary of the complex custodial history of the documents. The authorised headings of the name of the creator and other institutions involved in the admission process, in this case the Priory of Rome, are recorded as associated names and provide the connections to other records in which they are also involved. At the same time, subjects headings and genre, fields that are standardised and searchable, play an essential role in providing consistent and cross-referenced information in the platform. In addition, even if genealogical trees and coats of arms work as official documents in the process

114. HMML is currently developing the project Resources for Description of Manuscripts from Understudied Christian and Islamic Traditions, financed by the National Endowment for Humanities. The project also includes the creation of the HMML Authority File (HAF), an open access database to create and share the authority records related to the HMML collections, including the Malta Study Center. See <https://hmml.org/research/resources-for-access-authority/>.

115. Multilingual Archival Terminology Database at <http://www.ciscra.org/mat/mat/term/129/245>.

116. AOM 4016. Available in HMML Reading Room at <https://w3id.org/vhmmml/readingRoom/view/210310>.

117. The fields *country*, *city* and *repository* are standardised according to the rules of the Library of Congress and the Virtual International Authority File, as indicated by the flags near the names. See respectively <https://id.loc.gov/> and <http://viaf.org>.

of admission,¹¹⁸ their existence is recorded in the field *features*, regulated by the controlled vocabularies.¹¹⁹

The next sections are *Object Description*, and *Content Item*. The first one gives us information about the physical description of the item, like support, binding, extent, century, dates and language. The second is the core of the description. It includes the information about the individual document, the standard title, the original title (if existent), the date, and the language. But the most important fields are again the associated names. The authorised headings of the name of the aspirant, *Bussi, Antonio Domenico, 1650-1719*, and the names of the four noble families Bussi, Muti, Baglioni, and Conti di Marsciano are searchable. In this way, it is possible to not only identify the other specimens of proofs of nobility produced by Antonio Domenico, but also the one preserved at the National Library (if recorded in the platform), as well as to find all of the documents related to him and his families.¹²⁰ Thanks to the associated names, it is possible to recognise and record the authorised headings of all of the families included in the volume and make them searchable. Moreover, the branch of the family involved is specified by the place-name.

Although this research is a work in progress, the potential of reconstructing dispersed records and recreating the networks of powers between the Order and the aristocracy, the connections among families and the role of the individual knight in this scenario is huge. On a broader level, this research aims to work as the starting point to link up the fragments of the Hospitaller archival tapestry and build knowledge of the Order's lost memories and forgotten aspects of its history. A long history that, after 1798, the surviving knights were trying to defend by recovering their documents, guarantee of their existence, rights and privileges but also the bricks to rebuild the administrative system. Like Gaetano Bruno (-1808) wrote in one of his letters dated 1801 to the *Lingua della Bassa Italia*, saving the Hospitaller archives means saving the remains of an order which, once it lost its territorial and institutional stability, was trying to reconstruct and legitimise itself in the eyes of Europe, finding a new home in its archives.¹²¹

118. In the case of the collection of genealogical trees at the Magistral Archives the approach was different. The genealogical trees were separated from the original volume and each one forms an individual document. For this reason, they were described as an archival unit.

119. HMML Reading Room is based on the controlled vocabularies provided by the Library of Congress. See <https://www.loc.gov/librarians/controlled-vocabularies/>.

120. For example, by clicking on the family name *Bussi (Family: Viterbo, Italy)*, the search gives 2 results, Antonio Domenico Bussi's proof and the the volume of Domenico Bussi, another knight of the same family admitted to the Order in 1711 (AOM 4017, available at <https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/210311>).

121. Gaetano Bruno, member of the Order who saved many of the records on the island, wrote that in the artillery warehouse "*molti processi di prove di Cavalieri Italiani ivi trasportati dai Francesi per farne de' cartocci*" and said that he had the "*consolazione di mettere anche in salvo questi avvanzi delle nostre rovine*". ASMOM, fondo CT, fald. 243, Appuntamenti della Veneranda Lingua della Bassa Italia, p. 11-12. As emerged from the meetings of the Langue of Italy at the beginning of the 19th century, the Langue defined itself as *Lingua della bassa Italia*.