

The Hospitaller Commanderies in the Langue of Provence (1634-1754)

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to give a general overview of the physical, administrative, and financial state of the Hospitaller commanderies in Provence, France, entering into further detail on the commandery of Beaulieu as a case study. The Hospitaller commandery reflected its geographical, economic, and political context and environment. Natural calamities as well as war were reflected in the daily life of the commandery since these affected its property, and disrupted the collection of rents and other sources of income, one-third of which had normally to be forwarded to the Common Treasury in Malta in the form of the statutory responsions. Today nothing remains of Beaulieu, after it was completely submerged by the river Real Martin on 6 July 1827, when a violent storm hit the area. After almost two hundred years since this tragedy, this place is now forgotten even by the people now residing in its once neighbouring towns and villages.

KEYWORDS: *Archives of Malta, Provence, Beaulieu, commandery*

Introduction

The Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem existed before the First Crusade was launched in 1095.¹ Its emergence was the product of the profound religious revival in the West that generated a reformed papacy, a monastic renewal based on Cluny, lay movements for the support of charity and hospitals, and the First Crusade.² Through the latter, the notion of war as a religious service was introduced. The Order of the Hospital, on the other hand, started to adapt to the new situation and gradually acquired castles and other military responsibilities, though these did not at first involve its own professed brethren in fighting.³ Since the Latin conquest of the Holy Land, the Hospital

1 David Nicolle, *Knight Hospitaller*, (Oxford: Osprey Military, 2001), p. 3.

2 A. Luttrell, 'From Jerusalem to Malta: the Hospital's character and evolution', *Peregrinations: Acta et documenta*, (Malta and Perugia: Accademia Internazionale Melitense, 2000), p.1.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

was treated as a separate entity, receiving gifts in its own right.⁴ It was the beneficiary of innumerable donations throughout Latin Christendom.⁵ By 1113 it had already received extensive properties in Italy, Spain, and southern France.⁶ These properties were to supply the Military Orders (the Templars, the Teutonic and the Hospitallers) in the Holy Land with the resources required to maintain them as armed and provisioned fighting forces.⁷ Funds were, of course, assets which the Orders were granted through various arrangements, and it was sometimes specifically earmarked for use in the Holy Land. Among the richer donors of money were kings, princes, counts and other landowners.⁸

The present paper is intended to render as clear a picture as possible of the administration and state of a Hospitaller property. Along the years both the Order of the Hospital and thus its property had to adapt to different and changing circumstances. For a better understanding of the dominant themes discussed in this paper, the introduction has been dedicated to the medieval genesis and subsequent development of the settlement stemming from the early contacts between the Langue of Provence and the Hospitallers. The focus is on the Commandery of Beaulieu, addressing the physical set-up of the commandery and its members, and the changes they went through over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In addition, particular attention has been given to the commandery's financial development, in contrast with a few other commanderies forming part of the Langue of Provence. The paper concludes with a brief account of the state of France, with special attention to Provence in the late eighteenth century, leading to the French Revolution and the confiscation of the Priory of St. Gilles and its commanderies. This research was based on prioral visits and *miglioramenti* regarding the commandery of Beaulieu between 1634 and 1754. These documents are to be found in the archives of the Order of St John at the National Library of Malta in Valletta.

The commanderies: An overview

Land, both urban and rural, was the Order's main source of revenue in the form of rent, payable in cash, or kind, or both.⁹ Another source of income was cattle, for which the Order possessed a number of privileges. One of the Order's most intensive activities in Europe was milling, primarily grain. Further sources of income included banking and money lending.¹⁰ Military Orders possessed stronghouses where money could be kept securely and deposited.

4 Riley-Smith, *The Knights of St. John in Jerusalem and Cyprus 1050-1310*, (Great Britain, 1967), p. 38.

5 H.J.A. Sire, *The Knights of Malta*, (New Haven and London, 2001), p.101.

6 Riley-Smith, p. 40.

7 D. Selwood, *Knights of the Cloister*, (Great Britain, 1999), p. 169.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 180.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

These European properties, held by Military Orders, provided an important link between East and West, which was also used by those in need of eastern products. They enabled the Military Orders to pass on information and to offer assistance to pilgrims. There was a realization among donors that the European houses of the Order were part of an organisation with a broader aim. These lands had to create wealth for their own survival as much as for provisioning the Holy Land.¹¹ However, the greater part of the money raised in Europe remained in Europe, since only one-third of the income of the estate, known as *responsions*, was sent to *Outremer*.¹² Once the Order of the Temple was suppressed in 1312, most of their property in Europe passed on to the Hospitallers, who had to adjust their way of administering their new possessions and have them integrated with the old.

Lands were organized in commanderies, priories and provinces that recruited men and sent them to *Outremer*.¹³ For both Templars and Hospitallers, the commandery was the basic unit of administration. By 1160 there had already appeared the priories of Saint Gilles, Messina, Castile-Leon, Portugal, and England, and the Castellany of Emposta, which ranked as a priory. The Rule envisaged a centralised system in which the European estates paid a proportion of their revenues and produce, the *responsions*, to the central government.¹⁴ In the thirteenth century the priories themselves were grouped into larger units, called *Tongues* or *Langues*, areas, as the name implies, defined by linguistic practice.¹⁵

The commandery had many functions to perform: it was a centre of liturgical life, it managed estates to create surplus wealth, it recruited and trained brethren, and housed them in their old age. In certain places, commanderies also included hospices, hospitals, and parishes and played a part in local society, maintaining contact with, and securing support from, the public as a whole. A commandery was awarded to a knight of the rank of capitular bailiff for five years, during which the commander was expected to reside within its limits.¹⁶ The responsibilities of a commander covered the wellbeing of a broad range of people, as well as the maintenance of buildings, and general leadership as head of the house, together with collecting rents and forwarding *responsions*.¹⁷ He exercised power over labourers, artisans, herdsmen, and others employed to ensure the smooth running of the Order's houses and land.¹⁸ The peasants on the fields were nothing but vassals under his jurisdiction. The way in which commanderies were administered revealed the Order's desire to project, concomitantly, both religious and secular public images. The

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

¹² A. Hoppen, 'The finances of the Order of St John in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *European Studies Review*, 3:2, (1973), pp. 103-19.

¹³ Luttrell, p. 4.

¹⁴ Riley-Smith, p. 45.

¹⁵ Selwood, p. 145.

¹⁶ M. Camilleri, 'The Historical Development of the Hospitaller Commandery of San Giovanni di Monopoli', (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Malta, 2007), p. 13.

¹⁷ Selwood, p. 160.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

religious image was projected through the services offered at the hospices and chapels, while the secular image was reflected through the practice of managing properties in a way that sought to maximise profit.¹⁹

Every commander was expected to carry out improvements, or *miglioramenti*, to the commandery, an exercise which would eventually lead him to a promotion or a more rewarding commandery. The commander had to restore any damaged structures and rebuild, at his expense, any edifices which were in a state of ruin. The commandery acted also as a spiritual centre of the Order's life, and therefore the commander was responsible to look after the daily religious needs, including the decoration of the church, reliquaries, books and other items needed for the divine cult. Since not all commanders were willing to do so, the statutes of the Order defined the extent of restoration that had to be made.²⁰

The Langues represented the different nations constituting the Order. Their origins went back to the fourteenth century, when the Order's landed possessions increased due to those inherited from the Templars, and therefore it was felt necessary to reorganise the priories. The first langue to be formed was that of Provence, followed by those of Auvergne, France, Italy, Aragon, England (which was suppressed in 1540 by Henry VIII, reintroduced by Mary Tudor, and confiscated once and for all by Elizabeth I), Germany, and Castille. The langues covered all the lands possessed by the Order in Europe. The Langue of Provence finds its origins in the Priory of Saint Gilles, the first priory formed in the West by the Hospitallers since the beginning of the twelfth century.

The Order and Provence

In the early twelfth century, Frà Gerard wanted to obtain houses for the Hospital in Europe, apart from those already founded. He departed from Jerusalem in 1101 together with a few other brethren, who had vowed to help him in his new mission. The first place they stopped at was the town of Saint Gilles in France. It was situated in the country of Languedoc in the diocese of Nîmes, near the River Rhône, and not far from the sea, where there was a very good port from where ships departed, and were further secured by the River Rhône. Taking into account these considerations, a house of the Order was established in the town of Saint Gilles, and land bought at the outskirts of the city.²¹

This city originated thanks to a hermit named Saint Gilles, who at the beginning of the seventh century had chosen to retire in the diocese of Nîmes, in a place known as *La Vallée Flavienne*. He founded a monastery which became very popular, and therefore a city was built bearing the name of Saint

19 S. Mercieca, 'Aspects of the Hospitaller Commandery 1631-1798' (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Malta, 1993), p. 69.

20 Ibid.

21 J. Raybaud, *Histoire des Grands Prieurs*, ed. Abate Nicolas G., Nîmes, 1904, p. 17.

Gilles.²² The saint's tomb in the monastery became a place of pilgrimage and a stop on the road that stretched from Arles to Santiago de Compostela.²³ Therefore, the town in the Middle Ages became a major commercial centre.²⁴ Due to the advantageous geographical location of this city, a hospital was also built, where French pilgrims could lodge before embarking from its port to the Holy Land. This hospital was to be under the dependence of the one already established in Jerusalem. For this reason it was called 'the Hospital of Jerusalem which is near Saint Gilles' – *Hospitale Hierusalem quod apud Sanctum Egidium habetur*, or, *Scochium Egidium habetur*.²⁵

This new hospital was secured once a few brethren were allowed to take care of it, and were given a few rules to maintain it. Some nobles from Languedoc joined the Order as new brethren.²⁶ Different nobles in Languedoc and Gasconne gave a variety of donations to Frà Gerard, especially churches and lands.²⁷ From the Pyrenees to the Alps, the officials at Saint-Gilles were responsible for setting up a network that ran the length and breadth of Occitania. It not only developed the coast, but exploited the hinterland, too. Already by 1123, there was mention of a Pentecostal chapter in the region of Saint-Gilles.²⁸ After 1312, much of the Templar property was vested in the Order of the Hospital. By 1315, the Langue of Provence had therefore to adapt itself to the task of having to sustain and manage all these estates, and was therefore split into two zones of management: the eastern part was managed by the Grand Priory of Saint-Gilles, the western one by the newly created Grand Priory of Toulouse.²⁹

Owing to the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) and the Black Death of 1348-1350, life on the commanderies in the Grand Priory of Saint-Gilles was deeply affected in a negative manner. Moreover, the fate of the Order's commanderies in Southern France reflected the devastation that the Wars of Religion (1562-1598) inflicted on ecclesiastical property. At Saint-Gilles the church and prioral palace were sacked, and the Priors withdrew to Arles across the Rhone, where the peace had not been disturbed.³⁰ The religious wars struck the Languedoc again in the seventeenth century, and the palace of Saint-Gilles was destroyed by the Calvinists in 1622. The prioral residence was therefore moved definitively to Arles, where the commandery of Trinquetteville was rebuilt on the river-front by Melchior Cossa (Prior of Saint-Gilles 1475-1510).³¹ Due to all these events, almost all the commanderies forming part of Provence had to adapt and change accordingly in order to continue functioning, and thus still providing the Order with enough revenue. Arles

22 Ibid.

23 <http://www.languedoc-france.info/030418_stgilles.htm> (May 2011)

24 Raybaud, p. 17.

25 Ibid., p. 18.

26 Ibid., p. 20.

27 Ibid., p. 22.

28 Ibid., p. 57.

29 Selwood, p. 145.

30 Sire, p. 122.

31 Ibid., p. 123.

adopted the emblem of the eight-pointed cross. The annual chapter of the Grand Priory of Saint-Gilles was held on the first Sunday of the month of May. On the eve of the French Revolution of 1789 there were around 53 commanderies in the priory of Saint-Gilles.³²

Life on the commanderies in Provence

At commandery level the first brothers lived as a true religious community according to the rule. However, later, due to changes and adaptations needed, as mentioned above, manpower was concentrated on certain sites and some commanderies were held in plurality, while others were rented out to lay farmers or were occupied by single brothers who, after a career distinguished perhaps by long service in the East, lived on them as country gentlemen.³³ On the other hand, the idea of a commandery, together with all the buildings and properties, remained the same. At the centre of the commandery itself there was a conventual building, often the original manorial lord's house, with a chapel and a few other buildings attached, from which a large estate or scattered group of estates were ran. The size of commanderies varied from one another, depending on the amount of land, production, and management involved.³⁴ Most of the time, commanderies varied in size due to their geographical positions and social activity in their location.

According to what was noted by Benoit Beaucage during his study on the priorial visits from 1338 to the fifteenth century, there was a transformation in the Hospitaller commanderies of southeastern France. The principal differences observed included the following: the majority of houses and rural centres were either ruined or destroyed; production, which was once abundant, had practically disappeared by the fifteenth century; and finally, the Hospitaller community diminished.³⁵ During the Crusades (1095-1291), commanders were in charge of recruiting and training brethren. In addition, it was extremely important to send all the necessary sources – both in cash and in kind – collected as part of their revenue from their commandery, to the Convent in the East, in order to finance their good cause against the infidel. Once the Crusades were over by 1291, however, the commanderies assumed a different ambience and adapted themselves accordingly. The Commander was more interested in assuring a good revenue which would have permitted him to live according to his rank, whilst contributing to the expenses of the Order through the responsions.³⁶ After the economic crisis of the second half of the fourteenth century and the resulting depression, the Hospitallers had to change and transform themselves to adapt to different structural and determining conditions.

32 Ibid., p. 113.

33 Riley-Smith, p. 75.

34 Ibid., p. 74.

35 B. Beaucage, 'L'organisation du travail dans les commanderies du prieuré de Provence en 1338', in *La Commanderie, institution des ordres militaires dans l'Occident médiéval*, (Paris, 2002), p. 107.

36 Ibid., p. 108.

The majority of the people who lived on Hospitaller estates in the south-east of France were farmers, employed for an indefinite period on the commanderies. These workers organized themselves as teams or groups, according to the commandery's sources and the work required of them. They were paid an annual salary and resided in one of the Order's lodgings, where they received food and clothing.³⁷ Together with these people, there were also those residing in rented houses. In addition, there were others who received a salary for providing certain services, especially in the Commander's house, or had different administrative tasks, or even rendered service to the Order's church.³⁸ The community of the brethren residing in the Grand Priory of Saint Gilles were very well nourished. They ate white bread and drank wine produced on their own commanderies.³⁹

For all those who cultivated wheat on the commanderies of the Langue of Provence, the Hospitallers provided a permanent lodging, food, clothes, and footwear. The farmers received a permanent ration of wheat mixed with other cereals, such as oats, and a small amount of money. The latter was granted in order to improve the quality of cheese, eggs, and wine.⁴⁰ With this money, the farmers could better feed their cows and hens, and buy the necessary equipment to improve the quality of grapes. The daily activities for labourers varied from one commandery to another. Women were in charge of hoeing, which used to take place in the spring. Mowing was the responsibility of men.⁴¹ In almost all Hospitaller property in the Langue of Provence vines were cultivated, except for the commanderies of Orange, Venterol, and Calissane, due to their cold climate. This activity provided for much of the revenue of the Langue of Provence.⁴² Both men and women were employed to look after this useful commodity. However, on the commandery of Beaulieu, things were a little different. The member of Bormettes, making part of this commandery, had specialised people engaged specifically to collect grapes. On Solliès, another member of the same commandery, they also used cattle to help them during harvest time. For example, on one day men worked on the vineyard, the next day cattle were used for transportation.⁴³ A tough task, common in Provence, concerned the removal of certain vines which would have died or were destroyed during the winter. This consisted in extracting the vine from its soil and drying it in order to be used as wood for the fireplace. This was especially common in the commanderies placed in the mountainous area, or else near the river Rhone, and the area starting from Beaulieu up to Valence, due to the cold climate in winter. It was generally the task of women to collect

37 Ibid., p. 110.

38 Ibid., p. 112.

39 N. Coulet, 'La vie quotidienne dans les commanderies du prieuré de Saint-Gilles de l'Ordre de l'Hôpital d'après l'enquête pontificale de 1373', in *La Commanderie, institution des ordres militaires dans l'Occident médiéval*, (Paris, 2002), p. 148.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., p. 113.

43 Ibid., p. 114.

grapes; men would then transport them to the grape press, although sometimes cattle were used for this purpose.⁴⁴

The Commandery of Beaulieu

The Hospitaller Commandery of Beaulieu was found in an area in Toulon, the canton and commune of Solliès-Pont.⁴⁵ The word Beaulieu literally means “beautiful place”. Today it no longer exists, and therefore does not feature on any modern map of France. In fact, on 6 July 1827 a violent storm hit the area of Montferrat, and as a result the waters of the rivers Nartuby and Real Martin increased both in volume and strength. Once they reached the valley of Gapeau, they were so powerful that the village of Beaulieu was completely submerged.⁴⁶ Today nothing remains of Beaulieu, and if it were not for a commemorative plaque placed near the old bridge in the neighbouring village of Trans by its Mayor in May 1828, Beaulieu would have been completely obliterated from memory.

The Commandery of Beaulieu had to change and adapt itself along the centuries from the first years of its foundation. A church was donated to the monastery of Notre Dame des Accoules in Marseille by the bishop of Toulon, Déodat, in 1031.⁴⁷ It was then donated in 1050 to the nuns of Saint Sauveur (whose monastery was founded in 410 by Jean Cassien), in Marseille by Stéphanie, countesse of Marseille.⁴⁸ Beaulieu then became a Hospitaller Commandery. This was first documented in 1235 by the monks of Chartreux de Montrieux.⁴⁹ However, no other documentation was found on how and when exactly Beaulieu passed on to the Hospitallers. At the time, the Commander of Beaulieu possessed a house in Solliès.⁵⁰

In the middle of the twelfth century, the counts of Provence granted the Order of the Temple different lands. Raymond-Berenger III further enriched their territory with the lands of Sauvebonne and Solliès in order to create vast farms. At the time, the role of the domain of Grand-Beaulieu was to breed horses, sheep and deer. There was also the cultivation of wheat, oats, forage, vineyards, olive trees, and trees to be used for their wood. This domain in fact served for agricultural exploitation. Built on the ruins of a Roman cemetery, it was further complemented with buildings, granaries, stables, forges, a bakery, a mill, pottery and irrigation systems.⁵¹ All this lay under the patronage of the Templars' Commandery of Hyères.⁵² With their suppression in 1312, this domain, together with its members and properties, passed over to the Hos-

44 Ibid., p. 115.

45 Boyer R., *La chartreuse de Montrieux aux XII-XIIIème siècles*, (Marseille, J. Lafitte, 1980), 2 vol., p. 143.

46 transenprovence.over-blog.com/article-18930396.html (May 2011)

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 <<http://www.museedeleau.com/article.php?identifiant=0060>>

52 Ibid.

pitallers' Commandery of Beaulieu in 1380.⁵³ As recorded in both the prioral visits and *miglioramenti*, up to the eighteenth century, there were still a few chapels and other buildings that were recorded by Commissioners as being part of the commandery but which had once been in possession of the Order of the Temple.

According to what was reported in the prioral visit of 1634, the Hospitaler estates of Beaulieu consisted of the commandery and its five members.⁵⁴ These were Solliès (consisting of Montaigne de Borimar, better known as Valcros), Cogolin, Flassance (better known as Peyrisol), Hyères, and Saint Christophe. According to the Commissioners, the latter had only recently become a member of the Commandery of Beaulieu in 1634. It had been donated as a gift to the Order by Commander de la Minardie.⁵⁵

By the eighteenth century, the Commandery of Beaulieu continued to adapt itself and experienced an increase in its members. In reality, they had already been part of the Commandery, but were so small that they were under the jurisdiction of other members. Valcros, which a hundred years earlier had made part of Solliès, now became a separate member on its own. Among these new members there was also Brignoles, which had earlier on been part of the member of St. Christophe. There were also the member of L'Hospitalet (known as Bourmette), and finally Sauvebonne. Both members were created out of the member of Hyères.⁵⁶ Within the next twenty-five years, the commandery continued to expand, as new members were added to it. The *miglioramento* report of 1754 observes that the commandery was also composed of two other new members, Toulon and La Garde les Toulon.⁵⁷ These two members had been lost and forgotten for around two centuries due to various catastrophes and wars that had taken place in this territory. As a result of these upheavals, various documents had gone missing. However, Frère Michel de Manotolieu, during his time as Commander of Beaulieu, tried to do a thorough research in order to gain back information on various lands and properties that had once been part of his commandery.⁵⁸

The area covering the Commandery of Beaulieu was often involved in various wars and sieges. In addition, the area was affected during different centuries by plague, especially in 1720, when 90,000 people living in the region of Provence died. Moreover, the population was further devastated by natural disasters, especially flooding and fire.⁵⁹ All these events made it very difficult for the Commandery to sustain its functionality with ease. Meas-

53 Ibid.

54 The Prioral visit of 1634 was held by Frère Léon de Fonslan, Commander of La Croix which forms part of the Langue of Auvergne, and Frère Volland de Yoult, Commander of Gap.

55 AOM 5259, fol. 161v.

56 AOM 5275, fol. 63r.

57 The *Miglioramento* of 1754 was held by the Receiver and Commander of L'Aignac, Frère Jean Joseph Gabriel de Gignac, and Francois Gabriel de Farente La Brurjere. AOM 5291, 16, fol. iv.

58 AOM 5291, fol. 6v.

59 <http://www.ville-lafarledede.fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=106> (May 2011)

ures had to be taken to provide for the difficulties mentioned above, which not only provided a change in the people's lives but also a loss in the Commandery's revenue, and sometimes even physical adaptability in the state of the Commandery itself.

The administration of a commandery reflected the medieval feudal system of land tenure. The commander was given the land under certain obligations, but in actual fact he was virtually an absolute ruler on his estate. He alone was responsible for its administration. The peasants employed on his fields were nothing more than *coloni* or vassals under his direct jurisdiction.⁶⁰ By the seventeenth century, the solemn possession of the commandery, the concept of residence and the requirements of amelioration attached to the administration of the commandery came to reflect the need to satisfy both the ecclesiastical and the secular image of the Order.⁶¹

The documents consulted show clearly that between 1634 and 1754, the state and the income of the Commandery of Beaulieu and its members improved. Buildings, lands and other valubles that needed urgent maintenance, as recorded during the first prioral visit of 1634 archived in Malta, were repaired by successive commanders. This is also reflected in the other prioral visits and *miglioramenti* that came after. In addition, the commanders spent money to embellish their commandery and its churches by commissioning artists and buying new ornaments needed to improve its condition and appearance.

Spiritual duties were closely associated with the commander's care of the church. His first concern was the custody of this holy place. He had to see that this was in a good physical state by making the necessary repairs and restorations.⁶² The holding of religious services was the commander's responsibility. He was obliged to provide all the necessary religious services to the community living on his estates and look after their daily religious needs. He had also to furnish the commandery's churches with the necessary items needed for the divine cult. The quality of sacred objects was to be determined by the revenue of the commandery.⁶³ The Commanders of Beaulieu sought to meet all these needs. Since there was no parish priest in Beaulieu, the commander requested the services of the parish priest of Solliès to celebrate mass every Sunday, not only in the commandery's chapel at Beaulieu, but also in the parish church dedicated to St. John the Baptist which did not fall under the commandery's jurisdiction.⁶⁴

No commandery stood on its own, in complete isolation. Commander de Forbin in 1634 had accustomed the inhabitants of Solliès to have a Missa Cantata celebrated every first Sunday of the month. On the other hand, the inhabitants needed the commander's permission to baptise their cattle on the titular feast of St. Michael, even though this parish church did not appertain

60 Mercieca, p. 69.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., p. 118.

63 Ibid., p. 119.

64 AOM 5259, fol.163r.

to the commandery.⁶⁵ At St Christophe, the commanders provided the services of a priest in order to celebrate mass on the titular's feast day, that commanded great devotion from the inhabitants.⁶⁶ In fact, Hospitaller churches were bound to celebrate all the solemn festivities in the Catholic calendar.⁶⁷ The internal festivities of the Order were also to be celebrated, besides the normal feasts prescribed by the Roman liturgy. The feast of the nativity of the Virgin, the day of Malta's victory over the Turks in 1565, was one of the major feasts.⁶⁸ The feast to be celebrated with the greatest solemnity was of course the nativity of St John the Baptist. On that day, a procession was organised by all the Order's churches. The commanders were bound to provide fireworks, using petards and artillery.⁶⁹

The relationship between the commanders and the inhabitants of the commandery and its members was not always the same. It depended both on the commander in question and the member, on whether it was a small village or a town, and also on the jurisdiction. For example, in the town of Solliès, the bourgeois did not adapt themselves to the intrusion of the Order and the Commander, and there were various disputes between the Commander and the Mayor of the town. One thing observed was that disputes were always referred to the law court at Aix. This seems to imply with near certainty that there was no court in the villages and towns that formed part of the Commandery. In other smaller villages, such as St Christophe, where the people had no protection whatsoever, the inhabitants were always grateful to the commander and the commissioners in charge of the prioral visits and *miglioramenti* for providing the necessary maintenance to the lands and their locality, and for providing them with employment.

The Provençal commanderies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

In early modern times, the economy of practically every country depended on the state of the land. In the Provence region the weather, including the frequency of natural disasters, played a significant role. It determined the possible upward or downward fluctuation of the commandery's revenue. The geographic position of certain commanderies forming part of the Grand Priory of St. Gilles, such as Beaulieu, Toulon, and other cities in the Cote d'Azur, meant that many were frequently devastated by flooding, due to which the land and therefore the commandery's revenue suffered a lot. As already commented above, in fact, Beaulieu was wiped off the map in the nineteenth century.

With regard to the wheat harvest, after the increase in harvesting during the first half of the seventeenth century, it seems that between 1670-1690 there was a form of stabilisation. However, from 1695 to 1700 there was a decrease,

65 AOM 5291, 16 fol.6r.

66 AOM 5292, 11 fol.9r.

67 Mercieca, p. 120.

68 Mercieca.

69 Ibid.

till the years 1725-1730, that is, until the prices tended to increase again.⁷⁰ The climatic circumstances did not improve things. The catastrophic winter of 1709 hit badly those that cultivated olive trees.⁷¹ The provincial population seems to have got older by the end of the seventeenth century. This was due to the fact that between 1660 and 1669, there were a lot of infantility, deaths, together with very few marriages and therefore there were few births and more than half of the heads of the families were forty-five years of age.⁷²

By the late seventeenth century, the condition of the agricultural population in Provence started to change slowly. After 1690 (till 1725) it seems that the landowners did no longer have the means to continue their work.⁷³ During the reign of Louis XIV, the land did not give too much profit and therefore France tended to seek money elsewhere, through shipping and the sea. Industries and commerce, together with wars with Spain, were a stimulus.⁷⁴ In 1720, Provence was hit by plague, especially Marseille. Between 1720 and 1722, around 90,000 people died. All the western parts of Provence were hit by the plague. Once the plague was over, as often happened, there was a boom in marriages.⁷⁵

The income generated by the Hospitaller commandery of Beaulieu came from the lands, mills, and the rent from the buildings it possessed in the various members. In addition, there was also a form of taxation imposed on the community of the place where the commandery stood. As for the expenditure, like all other commanderies the commandery of Beaulieu had to pay responsions, that is, one third of the whole revenue to the Order's Common Treasury. As audited in both the prioral visits and *miglioramenti* referred to, it is very clear that although Hospitaller lands were immune from both diocesan and secular jurisdictions, there were certain taxes imposed by the King of France that the commandery had to pay. Besides these expenses, the Commander had to spend an amount of money in order to improve the state of his Commandery, and pay for services. No commandery had the same revenue. Each and every member had its own difficulties, and therefore its own income and expenses according to the lands and property provided.

The main income of the chief member, Beaulieu, came solely from the product cultivated on its lands. In addition, there was the income from the renting of lands, together with charges imposed on the community for the use of the mill. Unfortunately the seventeenth-century *miglioramenti* do not enter into specific detail as to how much income was generated by each and every element. On the contrary, the total revenue of each member is provided. From 1634 up to 1754 there was a net improvement in the revenue of the Commandery, amounting to 2686:40:7 livres. Its revenue always increased except in 1729, which – as pointed out previously – could be a consequence

70 Philip Wolff, *Histoire de la Provence*, (Toulouse, 1969), p. 315.

71 Wolff, p. 316.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., p. 317.

74 Ibid., p. 338.

75 Ibid., p. 360.

of the plague which hit the area at the time.⁷⁶ The more they spent on trying to improve their Commandery meant that less income was left to them. On the other hand, however, once the revenue of the Commandery increases, the bigger the chances that the Commanders in charge would gain an extra profit. After 120 years, Commander Michel de Montolieu in 1754 had gained 1524:82:91 livres more from Commander Albert de Forbin in 1634.⁷⁷

The commanderies under the French crown were the richest. By the end of the eighteenth century, the three French langues (France, Provence, Auvergne), when combined, generated 50% of the income that the Order derived from the commanderies. By the end of the eighteenth century:

**10% of French commanderies (all three langues)
had an income of less than 10,000 livres**

- 25% = 10,000 to 20,000livres
- 30% = 20,000 to 30,000livres
- 15% = 30,000 to 40,000livres
- 10% = 40,000 to 50,000livres
- 6% = 50,000 to 60,000livres
- 2% = 60,000 to 70,000livres
- 2% = more than 70,000livres⁷⁸

In his study, G. Gangeux identified the difference in the amount of revenue created by the following commanderies in the Priory of Saint Gilles, listed in Table 1.0, between the beginning and the end of the eighteenth century.⁷⁹ As shown, all these commanderies in 1784 showed a net improvement over that of 1702, and according to Blondy's study referred to above, the majority enter into the 25% to 30% bracket.

Commandery	Revenue in 1702	Revenue in 1784
Beaulieu	5,800 livres	17,409 livres
Marseille	13,945 livres	31,490 livres
Aix-en-Provence	8,924 livres	29,418 livres
Astros	5,900 livres	12,200 livres
Puimoisson	6,145 livres	12,300 livres
Comps sur Artuby	5,175 livres	11,280 livres
Joucas	2,035 livres	5,140 livres
Avignon	10,267 livres	31,700 livres
Roquebilière	2,218 livres	3,127 livres

**TABLE 1.0 THE DIFFERENCE IN REVENUE OF SOME
COMMANDERIES BETWEEN 1702-1784.**

⁷⁶ AOM 5259, 5291, 5292

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Alain Blondy, *L'Ordre de Malte, miroir brisé de la noblesse française des XVII^e et XIII^e siècles, Etat et société en France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles: mélanges offerts à Yves Durand*, Jean-Pierre Bardet et al. (eds.), (2000), pp.103-20:111, n.46-48.

⁷⁹ G. Gangeaux, 'Economie et société en France méridionale aux XVIII^e et XVIII^e siècles. Les grands prieurés de Saint Gilles et de Toulouse de l'ordre de Malte', Paris, 1970, in *La Provence et l'Ordre de Malte*, Palais de Bourse, (Marseille, 1981), pp. 52-56.

Apart from cash revenue, commanderies provided the Order with other produce and resources, which were also quite significant. The locality's climate was ideal, in fact, for the cultivation of olive trees and vineyards. In addition, other fruit trees, like oranges, lemons, figs, peaches and plums were also cultivated. To all this could be added the presence of forests on various commanderies, which provided the Treasury with good and strong pine and oak wood, ideal for the construction of fortifications, ships and other structures.

The Order of the Hospital was a privileged institution, owing its prolonged survival to the patronage that popes and monarchs had extended to it since its foundation. Patronage, of course, protected Hospitaller property, but it also placed the Hospitallers in a vulnerable position; the brethren had to be submissive to both pope and monarchs granting them privileges.⁸⁰ It was very difficult for the Hospitallers, who were called to secular courts, to keep away from political life, as they relied too heavily on secular authorities for the protection of their vast landed estates, and indeed their very own institution. The Hospital could not remain untouched by political affairs: should the Order attempt to stand aside and decline to accommodate their patrons or to put its resources at their disposal, the same lords could easily destroy it.⁸¹

In the late eighteenth century the Order in France was very well administered. The priors performed their duties with a dedication that would show up during the French Revolution of 1789. The Order retained lawyers to protect its interests and printed reports on the management of its affairs.⁸² On the eve of the Revolution, the Order gave signs of vigour and renewal, improving its administration, adding to its commanderies and priories, and adapting itself to the new implications of the age. Montesquieu had written that:

This Order is the most respectable we have in the Universe, and which contributed to maintain the honour and bravery of all other nations.⁸³

It had become the finest officers' academy for the fleets and armies in Europe. Above all, the showpiece of the Order was the island of Malta itself. Magnificently defended, sumptuously built, efficiently regulated, and astonishingly prosperous, eighteenth-century Malta was a prodigy state. Patrick Brydone, on visiting Malta claimed that 'We found ourselves in a new world [...] the streets were crowded with well-dressed people.'⁸⁴

The demographic and economic problems of eighteenth-century France proved hostile to the Ancien Régime. The Treaty of Paris of 1763, which concluded the Seven Years War with Britain, deprived France of her colonial Em-

80 Mercieca, p. 208.

81 Camilleri, p. 107.

82 Ibid., p. 134.

83 The complete works of M. de Montesquieu, (London: T. Evans, 1777), 4 vols., Letter XLIX, 26 December 1754, 'C'est l'Ordre peut-être le plus respectable qu'il y ait dans l'univers, et celui qui contribue le plus à entretenir l'honneur et la bravoure de toutes les nations où il est répandu.'

84 P. Brydone, *A tour through Sicily and Malta in a series of letters to William Beckford*, (London, 1773), pp. 178-179.

pire in Canada, the West Indies, India and Louisiana, and in the process removed an important social and economic escape valve for a France which was becoming overpopulated for a limited economic base. Furthermore, prosperity, tax revenue, and the stability of the regime became highly dependent upon trade with America and Europe itself, which was in turn highly vulnerable to disruption by unrest at home or by war.⁸⁵ Government indebtedness was perhaps inevitable for a regime which built the Palace of Versailles. Expensive naval projects became worm-eaten and sank. All this, together with the funding of the American War of Independence (1775-1783) had to be financed by a very narrow tax base, principally the peasantry.⁸⁶ The year 1789 saw in France the collapse of the Ancien Régime and the beginning of a new political order.⁸⁷ The condition of poverty among the urban and rural poor, the *sans culottes* and the peasantry, made them both desperate for bread and resentful of the burdens of taxation imposed by the regime. The bourgeoisie were resentful at the taxation from which the privileged orders were exempt, and, eager for the power and status to which their numbers and wealth entitled them, sparked off the process by challenging the regime at the Estates General in May 1789.⁸⁸

Provence too reveals a brutal crisis, which at certain points was catastrophic. Although the price of wheat was stable, there was a big destruction of olive trees due to the difficult winter of 1788-89. This caused a rise in the price of oil, no work among the farmers, and misery in general.⁸⁹ All this, together with taxes on food and wheat, caused havoc among the village people. Revolutionary propaganda started in Marseille and Toulon on the 23rd of March, and soon other cities did the same, among them Solliès and Hyères.⁹⁰ In the cities, very soon, anti-noble movements were formed. There was a devastation of lands and the landowners had to give up their rights to the peasants. The provincial revolt was not planned. It started very spontaneously, thus explaining its rapid propagation.⁹¹ Provence and the Languedoc presented the same scenario as in the rest of France, with its religious and political factions, its economic and social antagonism, together with opposition between the cities and the villages.⁹²

The Order in France was represented by three (out of eight) Langues, and the Piliers (heads of each Langue) held important offices within the Order: the Pilier of the Langue of Provence was the Grand Commander, and administered the finances as well as the arsenal and the artillery; the Pilier of the Langue of Auvergne was the Grand Marshal who was responsible for the Order's armed forces; while the Pilier of the Langue of France was the Grand

85 W. Simpson and M. Jones, *Europe 1783-1914*, (London, 2000), p. 18.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

89 Wolff, p. 400.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 401.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 402.

92 P. Wolff, *Histoire du Languedoc*, (Toulouse, 1967), p. 438.

Hospitaller who administered the Order's hospices.⁹³ As the majority of the Knights were recruited in France, the larger part of the Order's revenues came from its property in that kingdom: six Grand Priors, four Bailiwicks, two hundred and nineteen commanderies and two religious communities.⁹⁴ When the Estates-General were summoned in France in 1789, Grandmaster de Rohan was concerned to dissociate the Order, as a sovereign and independent body, from the classes on whose privilege a fierce attack was foreseen. It was due to the decisions taken by the National Constituent Assembly and the Legislative Assembly, that the Order suffered its fatal blow.⁹⁵ On the 4th of August 1789 tithes were abolished and thus an important source of income for the Knights came to an end. When in September 1789 it was decided to place the property of the Church at the disposal of the nation, the Order became aware of the consequences that this implied.⁹⁶

All those who occupied an important position in the economy of France at the time were mobilized by the Order to intervene on its behalf before the Assembly.⁹⁷ It was argued that the Order of Malta was necessary for the safety of maritime routes and therefore contributed to the prosperity of French commerce. Secondly, if, following the decisions of the Assembly, the Order lost its revenue from France, it would favour any power which would choose to make good its losses. The threat was obvious. Thirdly, if this was the case, the commerce of Marseille would be destroyed, and that of Bordeaux greatly shaken.⁹⁸ In July 1791 the knights were stripped of their French citizenship and declared subjects of Malta, but were left in possession of their commanderies.⁹⁹ The beginning of the end came in August 1792, when the King was imprisoned. The Priory of St. Gilles, after being confiscated in 1789, was sold as national property.¹⁰⁰ In October of the same year, that is 1792, a new law confiscated the entire property of the Order in France, valued at one hundred and twelve million livres. Three fifths of the revenue that the Order had drawn from its European estates was thus wiped out, and the Knights of the French Langues left penniless.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

It is clear that the Commandery was a very important element for the Order of the Hospital. From the very days of its foundation, the Commandery was in a way the heart of this Order. Money raised thanks to the Commandery was the

93 A. Blondy, 'Malta and France 1789-1798; The Art of Communicating a Crisis', in *Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798*, ed. V. Mallia-Milanes (Malta, 1993), p. 660.

94 Blondy (1993), p. 661.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 663.

96 *Ibid.* F. Ciappara, 'La peur de la Révolution française à Malte', *Annales historique de la Révolution française*, 341, (2005), pp. 53-68.

97 Blondy (1993), p. 664.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 663.

99 Sire, p. 136.

100 <http://www.saint-gilles35.fr/histoire_de_saint_gilles.asp> (May 2011)

101 Sire, p. 234.

backbone of the Order's strength and status as a supranational ecclesiastical institution independent from the jurisdiction of the sovereign states.¹⁰² The Order of the Hospital, from the eleventh century onwards adapted in various ways to the different circumstances presented to it along the centuries. Even though Commanders were faced with plagues, floods, wars and other problems due to natural causes, they still did their best to improve the state of their Commandery. Thanks to the fact that changes were made both in itself as an institution, and to its management of the Commandery, the Order of the Hospital had outlived all the other military orders that had sprung into existence at the call of the First Crusade against the infidels. The Order had also survived the shock of the Protestant Reformation and the loss of Rhodes, because it still enjoyed powerful patronage and the fruit of its property in Europe.

As a military institution, however, it did not survive the French Revolution. The Order's Treasury was bankrupt, and therefore could no longer finance its naval activity or the building of new fortifications against the French threat. In addition, the Ottoman Turks were no longer a serious threat to Christendom as they had been in earlier centuries. The Order of the Hospital created prosperity during its stay in Rhodes and Malta, adapting to the needs of the islands and the people. In Malta, it spent vast sums of money on developing and securing its harbours, improved its navy, built various fortresses and churches, commissioned various artists, improved health on the island, and introduced a range of new industries. By 1798, forty per cent of Malta's population lived not in remote villages, but in the group of towns that the Order had laid out or developed close to the harbours. All this was in large part thanks to the revenues created from its commanderies in Europe. Dispossessed of territory and wealth, the Order ceased to function as a military organisation. Once again there was a pressing need for adaptability, this time by looking back in order to move forward: in retreat, the Order returned to its roots as a charitable organisation, and today still works closely with international relief organisations.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 110.