The Practical and Symbolic Dimensions of Edged Weapons for the Hospitallers, in Particular Swords, 1530-1798

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in Hospitaller Studies presented to the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Malta. June 2014
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In Memory of my Father

Ray Davies
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4.05.2011
They also placed on his bier the same javelin, namely the gilded pole-arm that he used in the siege, which was all stained with Turkish blood, and next to this they placed his sword.

(Translated from Giacomo Bosio, *Historia* (Venice, 1695) vol.2, 567 describing Master d’Aubusson’s funeral in Rhodes, 1503)

The theme of this dissertation stems from my interest in the European martial arts, triggered by a fairly modern revival of the study of the fight techniques of medieval and early modern Europeans. The sword, being a central element for the Hospitaller Order was a common side-arm in early modern Europe. Interest in the martial arts of the knights brings certain aspects of history back to life where a sword is used again for its original purpose, albeit in a controlled and non-lethal environment. As a physiotherapist, my knowledge on human movement helped me look at this facet of history from a different angle. Studying objects from the past, like Hospitaller swords from the angle of a practitioner (through the practice of historical fencing) helps give insights to the characteristics of the weapons and the persons who wielded them. This form of historical study turned out to be multifaceted, including the study of the objects themselves, Hospitaller swords, in their various forms. Some of them were purely ceremonial while others were actual weapons designed to pierce flesh. This also necessitated research in the fields of metallurgy, weapons classification and museum conservation. The swords’ use in their social form as icons of freedom, masculinity, justice and nobility led to another facet of the study: their social history through the study of objects used in the past. This aspect of the symbolism of swords is closer to the grassroots of Hospitaller society, reflecting in its own way a slowly changing early modern Europe. The symbolism of swords proved to be challenging to cover in such a short study because of the wide spectrum of the Order’s religious and chivalric nature as well as the nobility of its members. Thus, the studying of visual art as evidence involved using pictures as subjects of metaphoric study but also as visual windows into the past where anything from fashion trends to fighting techniques involving swords complemented textual research. The symbolic power of a sword also led to the investigation of the literary functions of the sword as a concept with various representations and meanings where the sword was used as a metaphor, to inspire, swear upon or make peace. The attempt to study so many facets of a historical object has uncovered a vast range of dimensions which for convenience’s sake can be grouped into the practical and symbolic, but in reality fan out into multiple levels many of which have been explored here.
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# CONTENTS

**PREFACE** ................................................................................................. i  
**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** ............................................................................. ii  
**LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES** .......................................................... vi

Chapter One: **UNSHEATHING THE SWORD** ........................................ 1  
1.1 Introduction ......................................................................................... 1  
1.2 Background and Context .................................................................... 4  
1.3 Historiography ................................................................................... 6  
1.4 Conclusion .......................................................................................... 13

Chapter Two: **THE MILITARY DIMENSION** ...................................... 14  
2.1 Introduction ........................................................................................ 14  
2.2 The Sword’s Role in the Hospitaller War Machine ............................. 14  
2.2.1 Military Propaganda ....................................................................... 15  
2.2.2 Tools of War ................................................................................... 17  
2.2.3 Military Stockpiles ......................................................................... 23  
2.3 Military Training ................................................................................ 26  
2.3.1 Tournaments .................................................................................. 28  
2.3.2 Regular Training at the Auberges .................................................. 30  
2.3.3 Rules and Guides for Regular Training ......................................... 31  
2.3.4 Fencing Masters Employed by the Order ...................................... 33  
2.3.5 The Early Modern Hospitaller Fighting Ethic ................................. 34  
2.4 Fighting Systems of the Order ............................................................ 36  
2.4.1 The Hospitaller’s Fighting Repertoire ......................................... 37  
2.5 Conclusion .......................................................................................... 43
Chapter Three: **THE CIVILIAN DIMENSION** ................................................................. 44

3.1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 44

3.2 Martial Culture and Fashion in Early Modern Europe ........................................... 44

3.2.1 Battle and Personal Combat – Swordplay as Sport ............................................. 45

3.2.2 Literature and Prose ............................................................................................. 47

3.2.3 Fashion and Gentlemen’s Accessories ................................................................ 49

3.2.4 Personal Property: Spoils of the Knights ............................................................ 52

3.2.5 Swords in Images ................................................................................................. 53

3.3 Weapon Legislation and Law Enforcement ............................................................ 56

3.4 Knightly Duelling and Brawling ............................................................................. 58

3.4.1 The Modern Duel and the Elites ......................................................................... 58

3.4.2 Legislation on Duels ............................................................................................ 61

3.4.3 Castiglione’s Advice on Duels ........................................................................... 63

3.5 Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 65

Chapter Four: **SWORDS AS GIFTS AND SWORDS IN RITUALS** .............................. 66

4.1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 66

4.2 Gifts .......................................................................................................................... 67

4.2.1 The Sword of the Religion ................................................................................. 67

4.2.2 The Crusader King’s Sword .............................................................................. 71

4.2.3 De Valette’s Battle-sword .................................................................................. 71

4.2.4 De Redin’s Rapier .............................................................................................. 76

4.2.5 The Papal Stock and Pilier .............................................................................. 78

4.3 Rituals ...................................................................................................................... 83

4.3.1 The Investiture Ceremony ............................................................................... 83

4.3.2 Victory Day Celebrations .................................................................................. 86

4.3.3 The *Possesso* Ceremonies ............................................................................. 89

4.4 Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 93

**CONCLUSION** ......................................................................................................... 95
APPENDICES................................................................................................................. 98

Appendix 1A: Images of martial exercises described in Ricordo 40 of Sabba di Castiglione’s Ricordi ........................................................................................................... 98

Appendix 1B: Table of martial exercises described in Ricordo 40 of Sabba di Castiglione’s Ricordi ........................................................................................................ 106

Appendix 2: Poems dedicated to the sword from d’Alessandro’s regole di cavalcare, della professione di spade, ed altri esercizi d’armi ................................................. 107

GLOSSARY ...................................................................................................................... 108

BIBLIOGRAPHY .............................................................................................................. 110
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

2.1 LEFT: Portrait of Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt (in the Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta) posing in full-body armour and wearing what seems like a rapier which may be a dress sword with little military use. RIGHT: Allegory of Malta (in Palazzo Alfieri, Rome) holding what seems to be a jewelled side-sword.

2.2 The first illustration of the Statuta Hospitallis Hierusalem (1588), showing the pontiff giving a side-sword and the Hospitaller war-habit to Grand Master Cardinal Verdalle.

2.3 Detail of d’Aleccio’s print of the piccolo soccorso showing two soldiers holding two-handed swords.

2.4 Detail of d’Aleccio’s print of the assault on the post of Castille showing a long sword lying in the foreground and the musketeers carrying side-swords.

2.5 The only two long-swords currently at the Palace Armoury in the Palace of the President of Malta, Valletta.

2.6 LEFT: Detail of d’Aleccio’s print of the assault on the post of Castille and, RIGHT: Detail of d’Aleccio’s fresco of the assault on the post of Castille both showing de Valette holding a pike.

2.7 Detail of d’Aleccio’s fresco of the assault on the Isola showing close quarters fighting.

2.8 Detail of d’Aleccio’s print of l’assedio e batteria di S.Ermo showing a skirmish between Turks and Hospitallers.

2.9 Seventeenth century swept hilt rapiers at the Grand Master’s Palace armoury.

2.10 Detail of the sixteenth century side-sword (otherwise referred to as an early rapier) allegedly belonging to Grand Master de Valette at St. Lawrence Parish Museum, Vittoriosa.

2.11 Image of a typical seventeenth-century fencing school (of the University of Leiden) showing various military activities.

2.12 Covers of the two sixteenth-century fencing manuals (di Grassi and Agrippa) found in the National Library, Valletta.

2.13 Illustration from Johan Jacob von Wallhausen’s, Ritterkunst (Frankfurt, 1616), 108-109 revealing the variety of combat situations that could be encountered on the battlefield.

3.1 A plate from the English translation of l’Abbat’s fencing treatise, 1734 (BELOW), showing a more modern ‘civilian’ fencing compared to the older styles of di Grassi, 1570 (ABOVE-LEFT) and Agrippa, 1553 (ABOVE-RIGHT). All three manuals are found in the NLM.
Three late eighteenth-century images showing Hospitallers in uniform and in civilian clothes but all wearing a small sword and most of them also carrying a walking stick. TOP-LEFT: from the Vinkhuizen collection, TOP-RIGHT: by Zimelli, and BOTTOM: by Favray.

The tenth illustration of the *Statuta Hospitalis Heirusalem* (1588), in the chapter of *Locations* (p.174) showing a knight in civilian clothes and carrying a swept-hilt rapier (LEFT: close-up).

1550, Unknown artist, Frà Leone Strozzi (1515–1554), Museum of the Order of St John, London.

Allegorical image by Vulson (1648) lauding the medieval judicial duel while condemning the modern duel.

The hilt of the Sword of the Religion.

Marble plaque dated 1779 found below de Valette’s sword and hat describing them as *Ensis et Galerus*.

Close-up of the Sword found in Birgu showing the rosary engraving in the blade.

De Valette’s Sword and Hat *in situ* at the St. Lawrence Parish Museum.

The silver hilt of de Redin's rapier (above) and the accompanying metal plaque (below) with the Latin inscription.

The Stock given to Grand Master Ferdinand von Hompesch.

LEFT: portrait of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena (detail) from the Palace of the President of Malta, Valletta (formerly the Grand Master’s Palace) showing the papal stock held by a page, and; RIGHT: Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena’s funerary Monument (detail) at St. John’s co-Cathedral, Valletta showing the papal stock held by a cherub.

Illustration of the stock and pilier given to Grand Master Pinto.

Image of the Investiture Ceremony showing various swords with different symbolic meanings.


Favray’s painting (detail) of l’Isle Adam’s possessio of Mdina in 1530.

Images of martial exercises described in *Ricordo* 40 of Sabba di Castiglione’s *Ricordi*. 
Tables

| 3.1 | A list of weapons found in knights’ *spropriamenti*, wills and spoils in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. | 53 |
| App.1B | Table of martial exercises described in *Ricordo 40* of Sabba di Castiglione’s *Ricordi*. | 106 |
Chapter One
UNSHEATHING THE SWORD

1.1 Introduction

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines a sword as a ‘weapon used for thrusting or striking and that it is now used as part of a ceremonial dress’.¹ It further defines the word ‘sword’ to literally mean military power, violence or destruction.² The sword carries a high symbolic value representing nobility and strength. Its image and name is used for a huge number of modern day expressions, professions, contexts, and associations.

The sword is portrayed as the most elegant and noble of edged weapons. It is heavily romanticized symbolically and linguistically but remains a horrible tool, designed to injure and kill. Today attitudes have dampened the horror it can inflict through imagery in movies, iconography and metaphors.³ In the Middle Ages the sword was worn as a symbol of nobility, while in the Renaissance it became a fashion item representing the wearer's freedom and honour.⁴ Thus it evolved from an elitist weapon owned by knights, to a popular civilian side-arm. Although the sword’s military importance dwindled, its symbolism persisted.

By the time the Hospitaller Order of St. John came to Malta, the sword possessed a multileveled importance in society. References to the sword are found in various Hospitaller sources, ranging from the Order’s archives, unpublished manuscripts and published treatises, and various forms of imagery. This study seeks to expound the different dimensions a sword had for a Hospitaller in Malta between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. During this time the Order witnessed changes in the use and perception of the sword, but some parameters and attitudes remained. Just like the two edges of a blade, the sword’s function in the early modern world can be balanced between the practical and the symbolic where the practical face of the sword seems to have been the most volatile. The evolution of the sword as a military tool moved alongside the evolution of military technology and sustained an interesting development of its own in both fighting techniques and sword design which did

¹ OED online, [From http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/sword?q=sword ].
² Phrases in which the sword is used include: ’Fall on one's sword’: assume responsibility or blame on behalf of other people, especially by resigning from a position; ’He who lives by the sword dies by the sword’: a proverb meaning that those who commit violent acts must expect to suffer violence themselves; ’Put to the sword’: to kill, especially in war; ’The sword of justice’: judicial authority.
³ Mike Loades, Swords and Swordsmen (Barnsley, Pen and Sword Military, 2010), xiv-xvi.
not dwindle with the increased use of guns.

Although nurturing a seemingly archaic Crusader concept, the Hospitallers in Malta were an integral part of the early modern European elite. This noble status was intimately tied to the use of the sword, regarded as the ‘queen of weapons’. The social aspect of the sword brings about the division of its practical character into two branches: the sword as a military tool and as a civilian accessory. First, a look into the military characteristics of the sword for the Hospitallers is necessary to see its role in the Order (Chapter 2). This weapon enjoys most of the descriptive limelight in sources of a military nature. The most intriguing dimension was the actual use of the sword. In other words, in such a famous military order with such a high martial reputation, the question arises whether the actual use of the sword was superior to other contemporary military setups. Basically, was it superior martial training or a better organization that made the Hospitallers such an exclusive military force? Famous fight manuals have been found in the National Library in Valletta by di Grassi, Agrippa and Labat which suggest ownership by knights. Frà Sabha di Castiglione’s Ricordi also offers some advice on military training for the ideal Hospitaller. These sources suggest that the military excellence the Order enjoyed may well have been through discipline as well as a variety of schools of thought on the art of war.

The martial culture in early modern Europe reflects the use of swords not only in the battlefield but in everyday life. This leads to the second practical dimension of the Hospitaller sword: its civilian use (Chapter 3). Sources show urban weapon laws for the brethren to control their use in the convent city, just like any other contemporary European city. The study of civil aspects of brethren such as debts, wills and laws on public order reveal the importance given to swords and the way in which they were treated differently to other weapons. A major civilian phenomenon in early modern Europe was the formal duelling culture. This complements the evolution of sword design into the side-sword, rapier, and eighteenth-century small-sword revealing a weapon becoming more civilian in nature and less martial, surviving the superior presence of firearms on the battlefield and finding a

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5 Giuseppe d’Alessandro, Opera di D Giuseppe d’Alessandro duca di Peschiolanciano divisa in cinque libri ne’quali si tratta delle regole di cavalcare, delle professione di spada, ed altri esercizi d’armi, con figure di briglie, torni, e bisce, ed altro à ciò appartenente (Napoli, 1723), 284.
7 Frà Sabha di Castiglione, Ricordi (Venezia, 1584), 28-29.
8 Stephen Spiteri, Armoiry of the Knights (Malta, BDL Books, 2003), 72.
9 For laws against gambling with weapons see; NLM, AOM 295, f.110. For the special treatment given to swords in the spoglio see; Codice del sacro Ordine Gerosolimitano De Rohan ‘1782’ 147 and Frà Giovanni Maria Caravita, ‘Trattato dell’offizio del ricevitore, e de’ procuratori del comun tesoro, fuor di convento, e straordinari’ (Valletta, 1763), 43; while for exceptions given to swords in urban weapons laws see NLM, AOM 92, f.71.
niche on the street.  

During the early modern period the image of the sword played an important part in the Hospitaller mind (Chapter 4). It had a heavily chivalric origin, coined along the medieval concept of knighthood, where the sword became a religious icon and a symbol of nobility.  

The study will reveal how the sword, in all its symbolic forms played centre stage in Hospitaller imagery from l’Isle Adam’s *possesso* of Mdina in the 1530s to the honorific sword bestowed on Grand Master Hompesch only weeks before the French debacle.  

It is not in paintings, portraits, and monuments alone that the sword played centre stage. The symbolic capacity of the sword representing justice, knighthood, chivalry, faith, and authority is seen in numerous Hospitaller activities and publications. The Order, being an adjunct of the Catholic Church, used all possible means to utilise post-Trent Baroque imagery in its art. Through its social activities the Order used considerable symbolic weight (frequently using swords) to remind its watchers of its authority and legitimacy as a sovereign ruler. Two main symbolic themes are identified: the giving of gifts, and the symbolic use in public rituals like the knight’s investiture ceremony. Two examples of diplomatic gifts in the form of swords include King Philip II’s gift to de Valette and the honorific stock and piliers given to four Grand Masters by the eighteenth-century Popes. The activity of gift making in early modern Europe was a complex diplomatic activity with hidden meanings and obligations, revealing a complex landscape of relationships between states. In the case of the Mediterranean Spanish feudatory states the gift had strong connotations of patronage and fidelity. The Hospitallers were well accustomed to this diplomatic custom since their origins in the Holy Land, where gifts given by thankful nobles were the primary income of the Order. Swords are seen to be used as relics and special gifts at every level of the Hospitaller network.

11 Loades, 123.  
14 Such as the sword imagery in the *Statuta Hospitalis Heirusalem*, 1588.  
1.2 Background and Context

In European iconography swords represent power, nobility, Christianity and military prowess. Collections of weapons such as the palace armoury projected a strong image of the Order as an efficient military organization. Similarly, the personal weapons of the individual knights, with their adornments and decorations, were a badge of military aptitude and status. The question is raised as to why the sword gained such a symbolic superiority over other weapons. Projectile weapons such as arrows and guns of any kind give a safe feeling of killing in warfare, almost impersonal, while a knife or dagger gives a more visceral and brutal impression. The sword somehow seems to find the way in between, in it being close enough to represent ‘noble’ fighting where the enemy may be looked in the eye but still maintains a certain distance to maintain a level of nobility in the method of killing. Another reason a sword may be looked at as so noble is that it is designed solely for war. It is a specific tool made for warfare or duelling, requiring a great deal of technique to operate effectively. Other weapons belonging to more common soldiery usually had multipurpose uses: knives and axes could be used for multiple tasks, spears, arrows and guns for hunting, and so on. The sword, however, was the most expensive to make and the least flexible where its sole use was as a martial tool.

Recent works on Hospitaller symbolism, particularly of the military kind include Navarro’s dissertation on the decorative designs in Hospitaller armour. Spiteri’s work on the Palace Armoury reveals the Order’s use of its armoury as a showpiece of power. A study of contemporary publications such as a manuscript describing the investiture ceremony reveals the use of swords in important rituals of the Order. Others show the powerful military Hospitaller imagery using swords to symbolize power such as Verdalle’s Statuta Hospitalis Heirusalem. Hospital imagery is abundant with weapons and reference to a number of images such as the frescoes of the 1565 Siege by d’Aleccio helps reveal the importance given to swords. Other symbolic functions of swords include the Great Siege celebrations as shown in Cassar’s article, and the ceremonial handing over of Pinto’s rapier to the Prior during his funeral as Tabone reveals in her study.

21 NLM, Libr. Ms.CCL f 80-103, ‘Riflessioni di un Cavaliere di Malta sopra la grandezza e doveri del suo stato’.
22 Statuta Hospitalis Heirusalem (Rome, 1588).
The practical aspect of the sword for the Hospitaller is somewhat more challenging to examine due to the lack of modern day studies about the Order’s martial training. While the literature is abundant on the Order’s fortification and siege tactics as well as the maritime-military aspect, the day-to-day training of the individual knights is somewhat less studied. Three publications served as stepping stones in this search for the practical dimensions of the Hospitallers’ weapons. Anglo’s *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe* is written with the European martial arts in mind and sheds light on the obscure subject of military training within European society during the Renaissance.\(^{25}\) It serves as an excellent backdrop to what was happening in Europe with regards to the bearing and use of arms. Buttigieg’s *Nobility, Faith and Masculinity* portrays a cultural view of the Knights in Malta and includes useful sections on pages and novices, the contemporary view on the body and violence showing the sword from a psycho-social viewpoint.\(^{26}\) Spiteri’s *Armoury of the Knights* is written with the Palace Armoury as its main subject; written by a military historian, it delves beyond the setup of weapons storage. Large sections of the book give insights on the use of the weapons themselves, the training needed, and their use as symbols and many references to primary sources.\(^{27}\) These publications provided the first trails into the primary sources with references to the Order’s military training schedule found in the AOM and in contemporary publications such as Sabba di Castiglione’s *Ricordi*.\(^{28}\) Other aspects including *spogli* records of deceased knights serve to see the special treatment given to their personal weapons (mostly swords).\(^{29}\) Facts including novices being obliged to bring their own swords and exceptions to weapons restrictions for brethren when in the convent city also attest to swords being treated differently to other weapons.\(^{30}\)

Swords were a daily occurrence among the elite in medieval and early modern Europe and were used both in the civilian and the military world and the Hospitallers followed the same trends. This study will aim to analyze the social aspect of wearing a sword in public in Hospitaller Malta as a fashion accessory, a self-defense tool and a culture icon representing the nobility. The sword was also part of the Order’s military arsenal, although as a personal tool it was an ever present item from the beginning to the end of the Hospitaller military career.

Linked to the Hospitaller sword is the subject of military training. A main question in this study is where the Hospitallers received their reputedly superior military training.

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\(^{27}\) Spiteri (2003), 84.  
\(^{28}\) Frà Sabba di Castiglione, 28-29.  
\(^{29}\) Caravita, 43.  
\(^{30}\) Spiteri (2003), 23, 72.
from. This leads to the question of who gave the training. Was it elder Hospitaller knights or employed master fencers?\textsuperscript{31} The question on military training in the Order will reveal details such as the requirement to train three times a week with weapons and the use of the \textit{caravana} as part of the training of a knight.\textsuperscript{32} To do this guideline publications were accessed such as Castiglione’s \textit{Ricordi} in line with Bosio’s and dal Pozzo’s histories.\textsuperscript{33} Associated to this are the different fencing treatises found in the National Library of Malta (NLM) and written by world famous fencing masters which may have been used in the Hospitaller’s training.\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{1.3 Historiography}

The military and civilian uses of swords were affected by the changing practices in warfare in early modern Europe which influenced Hospitaller martial practices. The concept of a military revolution occurring in the sixteenth century is a controversial topic for military historians and occurs in the period of the Order’s establishment in Malta. The activity of war did indeed go through tremendous changes in this period both through technological advances and subsequent new tactics.\textsuperscript{35} Wars became more industrial and waged on a much larger scale, hence becoming more expensive and complicated.\textsuperscript{36} The development of new fortification systems to withstand the new firepower of cannon completely changed the fighting styles of sieges.\textsuperscript{37} Such developments may give the impression that medieval fighting systems based on chivalric principles became obsolete by the sixteenth century which would mean that the Order, whose fabric was based on such principles, should have expired, which it did not. Parrott argues that the military revolution did not happen in such a drastic way, rather it occurred over a period of one or two centuries, where older military powers such as Habsburg Spain (and the Order) managed to maintain notable success.\textsuperscript{38} Military changes still affected the very grassroots of the European military fabric and the supremacy of the noble knight was checked, giving way to the professional soldier.\textsuperscript{39} One of the main factors for this change was the cheaper and deadlier gun which changed the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} NLM, AOM 290, f.37, 1574.
\item \textsuperscript{32} NLM, AOM 227a, f.1032, 1652. \textit{Codice del sacro militare Ordine Gerosolimitano De Rohan}, 1782, 315.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Frà Sabba di Castiglione, 28-29.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Agrippa (1604), di Grassi (1570), Labat (1696 & 1701).
\item \textsuperscript{37} Spiteri (2003), 38-39.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Parrot, 3.
\end{itemize}
military system, becoming the attribute of a profession rather than of a class. However, the use of edged weapons continued to be of importance on the battlefield. This can be seen in the various images and descriptions of the siege in Malta of 1565 as well as in armoury inventories up to the eighteenth century.

The chosen method for identifying edged weapons used in battle during the knights’ stay in Malta is to study contemporary descriptions of their military engagements. For this purpose, the Siege of 1565 was identified as a case-study because of the variety of sources describing it. Similar studies of military activities of the Order in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would give a clearer picture on the use of swords and edged weapons. Complementing historical accounts, the type of weapons stored in the armouries of the Order reflect the military gear used in battle throughout its three centuries of residence in Malta. Such a study, carried out by Spiteri, has revealed to be quite complex since an armoury is more than a military store: it is a public showpiece used for military propaganda as well as a repository for outdated military gear, also used as showpieces.

What made a sword was not only its design but its use, which depended on the skill of its bearer, in turn depending on his origins and military training. The term military training covers a vast range of disciplines from fortifications to human resources down to personal combat skills which is what is examined here. How Hospitaller knights trained for war and what made them first-rate combatants are all factors contributing to the practical characteristics of Hospitaller swords as implements of warfare.

The medieval knight was considered by Ramon Lull (1276) as the temporal counterpart of the clergy and was obliged to joust, do tournaments and exercise in arms. But in the Renaissance the knight evolved into the Courtier where such activities became social accomplishments rather than military since the effectiveness of the mounted knight in war diminished. Nevertheless the culture of arms persisted throughout the early modern period where men were brought up using weapons and trained in their use from a young age and used them in the name of civic peace. In the fifteenth century military training was considered vital for knighthood and hence the number of schools of fencing increased along

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41 Both the d’Aleccio frescoes and written accounts by Bosio and Balbi reveal swords being used during the siege of 1565: Giacomo Bosio, Historia della sacra religione (Venice, 1695), vol. 3, 564, 672, 796; Francisco Balbi de Correggio, The Siege of Malta 1565 [trans. Ernle Bradford] (London, Penguin, 1965), 67, 108; and Lochhead & Cilia, 84, 89. For an example of an eighteenth century edged weapons order estimate see NLM, AOM 267, f.173-176, 1722.
43 Anglo, ‘Introduction’ (1990), i-ii.
44 Tlusty, 44.
with printed fight books, while the earliest known fight manual (the I.33 manuscript, Royal Armories, Leeds, UK) depicts the main character in the illustrations as a monk suggesting the idea of religious warriors. Famed Renaissance authors, remembered for their ‘how-to’ manuals such as Machiavelli and Baldassare Castiglione both made it clear that the martial arts were building blocks of an early modern gentleman. But details on what people trained in are not clear since up to the sixteenth century documentation is scarce. The sixteenth century saw a new generation of fencing publications like Pietro Monte’s which shed light on the practical military training an early modern knight/courtier was expected to undergo. Monte was a Renaissance man, friends with Leonardo de Vinci and was frequently quoted in Baldassare Castiglione’s Book of the Courtier as the best master of the time. Mid-sixteenth-century masters such as Agrippa and di Grassi, revealed a more modern style than Monte and were more technical and scientific. The general attitude to physical activity also changed in the Renaissance, turning physical exercise from preparation for war to a form of general education and recreation, hence the mention of other activities such as tennis and ball games by Castiglione with no practical warlike uses. The proliferation of firearms in the sixteenth century changed war from a show of individual skill to mass tactics. The exercise of arms however remained the main activity for a noble courtier and skill with the sword remained the most celebrated ability. In fact, use of the rapier and the duelling tradition became the predominant ‘sport’ for the higher classes from the sixteenth century right up to the eighteenth century where the Age of Reason, which managed to curb other war-like forms of exercise, did not diminish fighting with the sword. This marked a move into civilian sword-fighting, where fencing theorists overlooked the military function of a sword, concentrating on the demand for civilian duels with a more specific weapon, the rapier. However, masters like di Grassi (whose manual is found in the NLM) still referred to the military scene stating that: ‘the sword was the last weapon of refuge for both footman

45 Loades, 129.
46 Christian Roccati, Gli Ospitalieri e la guerra nel Medioevo: i monaci guerrieri : la storia, le tecniche di combattimento, la leggenda (XII-XV sec.), (Italy, Il cerchio iniziative editoriali, 2007), 158.
47 Baldassare Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier [Trans. Leonard Eckstein Opdycke] (New York, Dover Publications, 2003), 25: ‘the principal and true profession of the courtier ought to be of arms’ ‘must exercise them at all times and places’. Nicolo Machiavelli, The Prince (Wordsworth, 1993), 111-112: ‘That which concerns a Prince on the subject of the art of War…. as regards action, he ought above all things to keep his men well organised and drilled, to follow incessantly the chase, by which he accustoms his body to hardships.’
53 Cauchi Inglott, Frederick, ‘Notes on the origins of the sequential military drill commands documented in the manuscript “Regole per la lingua Maltese”’, Sacra Militia, 5 (2006), 66.
55 McClelland, 87, 138.
and horseman’.  

The attitudes to the sword are reflected in Giuseppe Moriscato Pallavicini’s work (1670) on the origins of sword fighting which reveals both the social aspect of using a sword as well as the new fencing style which gave more importance to skill than to strength. Although sword fighting was becoming more fashionable in the civilian setting, early modern men were very much aware that facing a sword was always facing death and its use could mean becoming a murderer. These high stakes were precisely what gave the sword such importance to masculinity in early modern Europe. Wakasa’s study on the use of swords in English literature reveals how the invasion of Italian fencing styles in sixteenth-century England reflects the dominance of the rapier in the civilian setting as a weapon for personal combat. The English master George Silver complained the Italian rapier was too weak to be used in war, but in skilled hands ‘it was deadly on the street, courtyard and forest glade’. The use of swords in everyday life seems to be a phenomenon of the Renaissance.

Oakeshott describes how the thin bladed rapier most probably evolved from the spada de ropera (today described as a side-sword) or dress-sword which was exactly what it described; a sword to be worn with civil dress. He further specifies that fighting methods with such a sword differed from fight systems for battle. Simply put, the civilian style tended to be more duel oriented against similar weapons, eventually developing strict rules of engagement, while the battle system was still pragmatic and flexible, to be used against any weapon and hence both systems needed different training. This civilian style survived into the eighteenth century and evolved into the French-influenced small-sword where fencing was an elegant part of the gentlemanly arts. Loades describes the images of the English translation of Labat’s (or l’Abbat) treatise, showing finely dressed fighters using small-swords with flexible practice blades, hinting at modern fencing.

What happened between the dress-sword and the small-sword is an evolution of a civilian fight culture also seen in Hospitaller Malta. Even the puritan Frà Sabba di Castiglione could not leave out the sword among vital items one needed when travelling. It would have been very unrealistic of him to advise a Hospitaller to travel in early modern

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56 Anglo (2000), 91.
57 Tlusty, 116.
59 Anglo, ‘How to Kill a Man at Your Ease: Fencing Books and the Duelling Ethic’ (1990), 9.
60 Ewart Oakeshott, A Knight and His Weapons (Dufour Editions, 1997), 72.
61 Anglo (2000), 280.
62 A copy of the French original is found in the NLM but has no images.
63 See Figure 3.1. Loades, 340.
64 Frà Sabba di Castiglione, 80’, Ricordo 79: Circa il far viaggio: the sword is mentioned among the most important items to take when travelling along with servants, good horses, a cape, a hat, seasonal boots, portable sun dial, writing implements and horse shoes.
Europe unarmed since a weapon and the skill to use it was the only method of defence one had when threatened. Indeed Frà Sabba’s contemporaries such as George Hale and Baldassare Castiglione also defended the argument of self defence using side-arms but what varied was which class held this right since Baldassare Castiglione assumed only nobles reserved the right while Hale suggested everybody did.\textsuperscript{65} Indeed it is evident that weapons were used by all classes because of the need for self-defence being across the board. A clear example is revealed in Tlusty’s work on German townsmen’s life which, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was characterised by a culture of arms where free-men of all ranks carried side-arms.\textsuperscript{66}

Free-men of most classes carried weapons in most of Europe but nobles always had an advantage and enjoyed exemptions when it came to weapons laws. Most laws in fact were not intended to ban weapons but to control excesses such as long sword-blades, large weapons or firearms.\textsuperscript{67} It is clear from Caravaggio’s adventures that Rome had strict weapon laws and swords could only be carried in public by nobles or with a license, since in fact the artist was arrested in 1598 for carrying an unlicensed sword.\textsuperscript{68} Laws varied from city to city but it is generally seen that carrying weapons in medieval times was more restricted while in the Renaissance, when swords became fashionable, the laws were relaxed and other restrictions were made such as type of weapon and blade-length. Swords and daggers were generally allowed but axes, maces and loaded guns were less tolerated, much similar to the laws for Hospitallers in Malta.\textsuperscript{69}

The main social characteristic of civilian swords is the early modern phenomenon of duelling, which was very much part of the Hospitaller way of life (Section 3.4). Bryson classified duels into three: the state duel (described as ancient), the judicial duel (described as medieval), and the duel of honour (described as modern). Examples of classical state duels are the duel between Achilles and Hector in The Iliad and David and Goliath of the Bible where two champions duelled for the fate of a nation or army. The medieval judicial duel was permitted to all freemen to resolve litigations.\textsuperscript{70} It flourished in the ninth and tenth centuries but by the eleventh century there was already an attempt at control where at least in Italy any duel made without the consent of the local lord was deemed illegal.\textsuperscript{71} The duel of honour was described by Bryson as the ‘modern’ duel and concentrated mainly on personal

\textsuperscript{65} Anglo (2000), 35.
\textsuperscript{66} Tlusty, 265.
\textsuperscript{67} Anglo (2000), 36.
\textsuperscript{69} Tlusty, 61-32. For laws in Hospitaller Malta refer to chapter 3, section 3.3.
\textsuperscript{70} Frederick R Bryson, \textit{The Sixteenth-Century Italian Duel} (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1938), xiv-xv.
\textsuperscript{71} Bryson, xvii
insults. Therefore the main reason for a modern duel was to defend one’s honour, failure of which would lead to loss of status. Tournaments were predecessors of the duel of honour in helping funnel violent traits of the upper classes and only when tournaments and judicial duels declined did popularity of individual duels of honour escalate to fill the lacuna. Thus, Quint concludes that even though the duel already existed, it was the Italian Renaissance that invented the modern duel. The church was always opposed to all types of duels but they continued to occur into the early modern age since religion was overshadowed by chivalry and ‘national’ pride. Apart from the Church, most states condemned duelling as it reflected failed centralised control where duellists took justice into their own hands rather than using the law. The main arguments in favour of the duel as a kind of civilised violence in ceremonial form were that it avoided mass bloodshed by funneling the violence to two representatives and offered immediate vindication. In the sixteenth century, the duel became the prerogative of the upper classes and represented a right the nobility found hard to give up; a reflection of them struggling against the authority of early modern states. Anglo views the propagation of duelling in the Renaissance under a very negative light stating: ‘in this duelling ethic and craze we see the most dramatic transformation of chivalry with courage, honour and individual deeds of arms metamorphosed into bullying, dishonour and psychopathological egoism’. Quint gives a softer approach stating the duel survived the civilising process of the early modern world through the aristocratic culture that embraced politeness but never fully agreed to be civilised. The duel held out in distinguishing the way a gentleman fights from the everyday violence of lower classes and reflected mutual respect of the aggressors, fair play and the means of honourable reconciliation. In later centuries, duels did not remain limited to only the aristocratic classes but were practiced by all free men in defence of their honour.

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The most important repository for this study was the Archive of the Order (AOM) while further material was also found in the manuscripts and publication sections. Some

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72 Bryson, xx.
73 Tlusty, 106.
74 Bryson xxii.
76 Bryson, xxv-xxviii.
77 Quint, 232. Tlusty, 115.
79 Tlusty, 105.
80 Anglo, ‘How to Kill a man at your Ease: Fencing Books and the Duelling Ethic’ (1990), 12.
81 Quint, 265.
82 Tlusty, 90
publications were by members of the Order (such as Frà Sabba di Castiglione) but other authors such as Baldassare Castiglione also gave a contribution to the general noble warrior ethos and had to be consulted. Other publications found in the National Library of Malta of interest are fencing treatises contemporary to the Order’s stay in Malta. These gave an interesting insight on the knights’ training and fighting styles, for example in the sixteenth century only Italian treatises can be found while in the eighteenth the only treatises found are French. This change of influence follows the same trend the Order took in its fortification designs. The imagery of the Order also had to be studied in its different forms. For this purpose (using insights from art history and exhibition catalogue publications) Hospitaller imagery was analyzed. Among the numerous works looked at are d’Aleccio’s frescoes of the 1565 siege, numerous Hospitaller portraits, statues and monuments, as well as publications such as Verdalle’s book of statutes.

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1.4 Conclusion

The use of swords in the Hospitaller world is a multifaceted affair with equally significant practical and symbolic functions. Both aspects revolved around the military and civilian worlds which, in the Hospitaller milieu, were intertwined. The brethren’s integration with Europe’s civilian populations made them employ similar martial habits making their actions a reflection of the European nobility. The sources in the archives of the Order reveal similar manifestations of swords to the European trends discussed above. Their application to the Hospitaller world has been uncomplicated, even though it is a generally overlooked subject in modern historiography which seems to concentrate on more political and monumental Hospitaller facets, such as diplomacy and fortifications. Specific secondary literature is therefore sparse, making the search in the primary sources widespread where small allusions are found scattered in the sea of bureaucracy characteristic of the Order’s records. Swords as objects constitute rich historical evidence which merit as much attention as written sources since vision also has a history and swords, in both their visual representations and as objects in themselves play a central role.  

The sword is both a material object and a literary metaphor. In this study swords are looked at as both objects and concepts, which are ultimately different facets of the same thing. The material study of swords includes both design and function; that is the object itself with all its design variations and its uses which involve practical fighting techniques and ceremony. The study of the concept is intertwined within the symbolisms and the social implications of using swords in early modern times coupled with the metaphoric weight of justice, chivalry, and faith. This means of study follows the model described by Jordanova which stresses that historical theory must be combined with historical practice through working with other forms of historical evidence such as the visual arts and objects, in this case, swords.

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87 Jordanova, 7.
Chapter Two
THE MILITARY DIMENSION

2.1 Introduction
The Order’s military setup in Malta was the result of a militia evolving from the Crusades in
the Holy Land into an island Order-State on Rhodes. This evolution was conditioned by a
number of factors including regional socio-political changes, technological advances in
offensive and defensive systems and a blend of European fighting styles. The study of the
military dimension of edged weapons for the Order from an institutional perspective
considers both its role within early modern warfare and the human skill it achieved. The
time-line chosen for such a study cannot be too narrow as the sources tend to be spread over
generations. Therefore the Maltese occupancy period was chosen in order to maintain a
benchmark which coincides with the evolution of modern warfare in the early modern world.

2.2 The Sword’s Role in the Hospitaller War Machine
Tucker’s study of French cavalrmen in the sixteenth century reveals a surviving concept of
individual display in the early modern battlefield, revealing the importance of prestige over
efficacy.¹ This may be seen as resistance by the noble military strata to renounce their
significance on the battlefield and hence keeping to older, nobler fighting systems. This
conservative attitude is reflected in the Order as witnessed in the accounts of Count George
of Erbach during a visit to the Palace armoury in the seventeenth century.² A look into the
weaponry used during the 1565 siege described by reliable sources such as d’Aleccio’s
frescoes, the diary of eyewitness Balbi de Correggio and Giacomo Bosio's Historia, give a
clearer picture of the use of edged weapons and firearms.

¹ Treva J. Tucker, ‘Eminence over Efficacy: Social Status and Cavalry Service in Sixteenth-Century
² Kraus, 131: ‘but there exists with us an old tradition that lance and sword, but not firearms, become a true
knight’.
2.2.1 Military Propaganda

The exposition of weapons to represent the Order’s military career is evident in the Palace armoury, which apart from having a functional purpose served as a showpiece. Such use is seen in the Count of Erbach’s visit to the armoury where the brethren took pride in showing it to him. He witnessed the same expression of military arms when exposed to the rassegna, where 150 brethren paraded with their weapons on display. Erbach described the armoury as adorned with paintings of notable knights featuring swords and older weapons in the form of trophies-of-arms (the likes of which can be seen in the Palace today). The frescoes of d’Aleccio portray other mediums the Order used to promote its military dimension where the artist used swords in the allegorical figures placed in between the scenes which are in turn heavily animated by images of swords. Other images involving swords include the painting in Palazzo Alfieri in Rome, where a female allegory of Malta is shown holding a sword reflecting the Order’s religious and military functions (Figure 2.1). Other mediums portraying swords to symbolize military force and spiritual legitimacy include official documents, like the Statuta Hospitalis Heirusalem (1588) which is rich in imagery of edged weapons (Figure 2.2). Other Hospitaller images incorporated swords to symbolize religious aspects like martyrdom such as the frescoes of Hospitaller Saints on the vault of St John’s co-Cathedral by Preti.

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3 Spiteri (2003), 75.
4 Kraus, 127-130.
5 Kraus, 132-133.
6 Spiteri (2003), 76.
9 Statuta Hospitalis Heirusalem (Rome, 1588), (cover page) Decorem et Fortitudinem Domini (Figure 2.2) the first image of the book shows Grand Master Verdalle receiving the habit of the Order and a side-sword from the Pope, (f.4) De Receptione Fratrum (Figure 4.9) reveals numerous swords used in the investiture ceremony (discussed in chapter 4), (f.18) De Ecclesia showing knights in procession towards the church with sheathed swords, (f.40) De Comuni Aerario showing non-Hospitaller militia bearing swords and being paid for their services, (f.76) De Concilio et Iudiciis showing an allegorical sword borne by the statue of justice in the background, (f.130) De Officio Fratrum shows a large variety of weaponry used in a siege including swords, pole-arms and fire-arms, (f.144) De Commendis et Administrationibus shows a knight receiving a commandery from the Grand Master wearing a rapier and a Palace guard in the background holding a halberd, (f.168) De Contractibus et Alienationibus depicts two knights wearing swords and finalizing a contract, (f.174) De Locationibus (Figure 3.3) shows a knight wearing a finely decorated rapier talking to the Grand Master.
Figure 2.1  LEFT: Portrait of Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt (in the Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta) posing in full-body armour and wearing what seems like a rapier which may be a dress sword with little military use.
RIGHT: Allegory of Malta (in Palazzo Alfieri, Rome) holding what seems to be a jewelled side-sword (note the lack of a knuckle guard) similar to de Valette’s gift-sword (Figure 4.1), however this may be an artist’s impression since it is a conceptual painting, unlike the Wignacourt portrait (Bruno, 2000).

Figure 2.2  The first illustration of the Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem (1588), showing the pontiff giving a side-sword and the Hospitaller war-habit to Grand Master Cardinal Verdalle. Note the guards in the background holding halberds, typical weapons used by guards.
2.2.2 Tools of War

Sitting on chairs on the breach of fort St. Elmo during its last days of resistance, Bradford described Frà de Guaras and Captain de Miranda as being too injured to stand but having their two-handed swords by their sides ready to face their death.\(^\text{11}\) This is a popular historian’s description of a scene of the siege involving two long-swords. However it is poorly referenced and cannot be confirmed, although it fits into the scene described by reliable sources like Bosio who described the injured Captain de Miranda and a group of soldiers and knights resisting an attack on St. Elmo a few days before using two-handed swords (spadoni) among other weapons.\(^\text{12}\) In the St. Elmo standoff Bosio described the same seated Captain de Miranda as having used a pike (picca) rather than a long-sword which still reveals the use of an edged weapon.\(^\text{13}\) Other signs of the use of long-swords in the siege are described by Spiteri who argued that the Order employed professional Italian and Spanish soldiers among whom were swordsmen specialized in the two-handed sword and were usually paid more than normal.\(^\text{14}\) These soldiers, bearing their large weapons can be seen in the small relief force in d’Aleccio’s engravings of the siege published in Rome in 1582 (Figure 2.3) but are not seen in his frescoes at the Magisterial Palace in Valletta. Spiteri also described long-swords stacked behind the defenders, in the plate depicting the assault on the Post of Castile, ready to be used in close quarters.\(^\text{15}\) Again, these swords are not seen in the frescoes in Valletta (in the print they are seen at the bottom right of the engraving (Figure 2.4)).

\(^{12}\) Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 564.
\(^{13}\) Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 572.
\(^{14}\) Spiteri (2003), 56.
\(^{15}\) Spiteri (2003), 250.
Figure 2.3  Detail of d’Aleccio’s print of the *piccolo soccorso* showing two soldiers holding two-handed swords, from Matteo Perez d’Aleccio, *I veri Ritratti della Guerra e Dell’Assedio dati alla Isola di Malta dall’Armata Turchesa l’anno 1565* (Rome 1582), f.7.

Figure 2.4  Detail of d’Aleccio’s print of the assault on the post of Castille showing a long sword lying in the foreground and the musketeers carrying side-swords, from d’Aleccio, f.10.
Similarly, d’Aleccio fails to reproduce a long-sword held by the page of Grand Master de Valette on the frescoes, clearly seen in the engravings.\(^\text{16}\) The engravings and frescoes never show de Valette wielding a sword. He is rather seen holding a pike and a baton while his page (holding a long-sword in the engraving) is crouched to his right (Figure 2.6). This action illustrates the situation described by Bosio when the Grand Master rallied the defenders to defend the dilapidated post of Castille armed with a pike and with his sword sheathed at his side.\(^\text{17}\) This situation is also confirmed by Balbi de Correggio who described exactly the same action but failed to mention the sheathed sword.\(^\text{18}\) This act was lauded in many descriptions of the siege as one of the highlights but not all matched in what weapon was used. The version of Gentile di Vendome gives a different description with de Valette inciting all to fight with a sword in hand rather than a pike.\(^\text{19}\) This description is the least reliable since Vendome was not in Malta at the time and the sword could have been a romantic addition. The eighteenth-century account of Abbe de Vertot also describes de

\(^{16}\) See images reproduced in: Ian Lochhead & Daniel Cilia, 138-139.

\(^{17}\) Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 638: ‘havendo preso incontanente di mano de’ Paggi suoi la sua celata (helmet), in capo se la pose, e dando subito di mano alla picca (pike); ancorche disarmato all’hora si trovasse, havendo solamente la goletta posta (neck armour), e lo stocco (sword) cinto; a gran passi, anzi al maggior corso.....maneggiando valorosamente la picca fra gli altri difensori...’

\(^{18}\) Balbi de Correggio, 144.

\(^{19}\) George Cassar, ’Maltese heroism as depicted in literature on the Great Siege of Malta of 1565’, *Sacra Militia*, 3 (2004), 59.
Valette as wielding a half-pike which continues to confirm it most probably was not a sword.\textsuperscript{20}

![Image](https://example.com/image.png)

\textbf{Figure 2.6} \textit{LEFT:} Detail of d’Aleccio’s print of the assault on the post of Castille showing de Valette holding a pike while his page holds a long-sword, from d’Aleccio, f.10. \textit{RIGHT:} Detail of d’Aleccio’s fresco of the assault on the post of Castille showing de Valette also holding a pike but no sword in his page’s hands, from the Palace of the President of Malta, Valletta (formerly the Grand Master’s Palace).

The account of Francisco Balbi de Correggio appears to be reliable since it was written in the same lifetime of the siege. It sets a few scenes describing swords used in close-quarter situations, particularly the use of the sword and shield. One scene described Marshal de Robles leading two hundred Spanish soldiers into battle armed with swords and shields, while another described Don Ascanio della Corna, one of the leaders of the relief force ‘wielding a sword stained to the hilt with blood’.\textsuperscript{21} The same scene may be read in Bosio’s \textit{Historia} where the soldiers are described as ‘\textit{armati solamente di spade, e di rotelle’}.\textsuperscript{22} The sword and shield combination may be seen borne by many Hospitaller fighters in d’Aleccio’s images (Figures 2.7 and 2.8) where the shield is always small and round and the sword very similar to the reputed side-sword of de Valette in Birgu (Figure

\textsuperscript{20} Abbe' de Vertot, \textit{Histoire des chevaliers hospitaliers de S. Jean de Jerusalem} (Paris, 1726), [\textit{The history of the Knights of Malta} (Dublin, 1818), vol. 3, 212].

\textsuperscript{21} Balbi de Correggio, 108, 186.

\textsuperscript{22} Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 672.
The same combination was also seemingly used by Maltese fighters in Balbi’s account, which highlighted an individual Maltese swordsman (Luqa Briffa) who: ‘had such dexterity with his sword’. Regarding the sword and buckler combination used by Maltese soldiers, it is not clear what kind of sword they used. In d’Aleccio the swords all seem like sixteenth-century side-swords which would make most practical sense while contemporary accounts do not go into detail on what type of sword was used and used the generic term spada. On the other hand, Abbe de Vertot in the eighteenth century specifically described the Maltese in the same incident as using sabres which may have been a reflection of military swords used in the eighteenth century. D’Aleccio’s images are very detailed in revealing the combination of firearms and edged weapons used during the siege, where cannon is seen used for long range, handguns and bows for medium range and edged weapons for close range (Figure 2.8). A particularly violent scene shows the carnage of the assault of St. Michael where one may see all forms being used including handguns, daggers as well as desperate hand-to-hand combat (Figure 2.7).

23 Balbi de Correggio, 108 (also describes four Maltese soldiers fighting with sword and shield on an attack made near the Post of Bormla), 67 (describing a Maltese Swordsman called Luqa Briffa who captured Turks alive by disarming them with his sword).
24 Since by that time the most common sword used in battles was the sabre and straight edged blades such as the rapier were for civilian use. Vertot, vol. 3, 179.
25 See images reproduced in: Lochhead & Cilia, 80-85.
Figure 2.8 Detail of d’Aleccio’s print of l’assedio e batteria di S. Ermo showing a skirmish between Turks and Hospitallers armed with swords and round shields, from d’Aleccio, f.4.

The use of the word sword (spada) in Balbi and Bosio’s accounts may refer to any variation of the weapon. Similarly, d’Aleccio seemed to use one kind of sword in all the images. The edged weapons described by both Balbi and Bosio and illustrated by d’Aleccio are all typical close quarter weapons used in sixteenth-century battles. Conversely the pike, long-sword, and sword and shield were all included in Frà Sabba di Castiglione’s suggested repertoire of physical training.26 The use of such weapons was also described by Bosio in different periods such as a reference in 1567 to a galley fight describing swords and round shields (spade e rotelle) used also at sea.27 In his description of the siege of Rhodes in 1522 he revealed a large number of specialist long-swordsmen brought from Candia aligned for a general inspection (mostra).28

The mostra offers another opportunity revealing what edged weapons knights used for battle. The Order frequently performed inspections of arms for knights residing on the island to have updated information on its armed resources in case of attack. The regular inspection was referred to as a rassegna while before hostilities it was called a mostra such as the one mentioned in 1522. La Cassiere’s Chapter General in 1574 ordered a general inspection twice a year.29 This was maintained until the end of the Order’s rule in Malta and was included in the Codice de Rohan (1782) specifying that all knights and sergeants-at-arms had to present themselves fully armed outside their Langue every first Sunday of the

26 Frà Sabba di Castiglione, 29rv, Ricordo 40, circa lo esercito corporale.
27 Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 796.
28 Bosio (1695), vol. 2, 644: ‘...armati d’arme bianche; alcuni de’ quali portavano spadoni da due mani, alcuni archibugi, e altro archi...’.
29 NLM, AOM 290, f.37r, 1574.
month. The same rassegna was also imposed on all paid sailors and militia in the navy of the Order every month. A similar inspection also appears in Erbach’s account, describing one hundred and fifty knights in full armour and carrying ‘powerful long-swords and two daggers in their belts’. The use of long-swords in the seventeenth century in which Erbach’s narrative (published in 1887) is set seems outdated. On the other hand a mostra in 1643 of the German Langue revealed each knight as having a sword (spada) in his personal armaments, revealing its continued military use although what type of sword it was is unclear.

2.2.3 Military Stockpiles

The use of edged weapons as military paraphernalia is evident in order lists such as a list of armaments needed during de Vilhena’s reign in 1722: including bayonets, halberds, pikes, and spontoons. The lack of swords present in this period may be due to the fact that by then, their practical use on the battlefield was much less and had become more personal side-arms than military tools, however a large element of pole-arms is still present, which were eventually also replaced by the deadliest blade and gun combination: the bayonet. Other armaments lists studied by Spiteri have revealed the presence of swords in the eighteenth century such as the report written by Mondion in 1714 who among large amounts of firearms included 20,000 long sharp swords (èpèes longues et tranchantes) and 10,000 halberds, pikes and spontoons. Contemporary accounts of what military gear actually lay in the armoury are also provided through Spiteri’s research such as a detailed account of a French traveller in 1679 who described 19,000 pikes and 24,000 swords. This large amount of weaponry was present at this time due to a large weapons consignment the Order had made in 1669 after the Turkish threat felt due to the fall of Candia the same year. A similar description is shown in Erbach’s visit to Malta in about 1617 where the Count described the Palace armoury as being well stocked with lances and halberds ‘several rows deep’, and containing ‘great cupboards containing swords, rapiers and daggers of every possible shape and kind’. It is noteworthy how in this text the author identifies rapiers separately suggesting more than one type of sword in stock. The presence of rapiers may suggest

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30 NLM, AOM 1663 Codice de Rohan, f.315, 1782: Dell’Ufficio Dei Fratelli.
31 NLM, AOM 1663 Codice de Rohan, f.439, 1782: Delle Galere e Vascelli.
32 Kraus, 133.
33 Spiteri (2003), 58.
34 NLM, AOM 267, f.173-176, 1722
36 Spiteri (2003), 91.
37 Spiteri (2003), 88.
38 Kraus, 127.
civilian weaponry in the collection since a rapier is usually described as the long slender bladed weapon mainly used for civilian dress; however one must be wary of translations, especially English descriptions which tend to group most swept hilt swords as rapiers, including the heavier more military side-swords. 39 The statutes of the Order do indeed suggest that the armoury should not have contained civilian swords were, at least from the reign of la Sengle in the 1550s, swords and daggers of deceased knights were to be sold at auction while all other weapons fell under the possession of the Order. 40

Figure 2.9 Seventeenth century swept hilt rapiers at the Grand Master’s Palace armoury. Dimensions vary. Most of these have narrow blades which suggest civilian use, but they bear the eight pointed cross of the Order which means they may belong to the institution (Photo courtesy of Chris Cachia Zammit).

40 NLM, AOM 1663 Codice de Rohan, f.147, 1782: Del Tesoro.
The Palace armoury in Valletta has a wide selection of swept-hilt rapiers (Figure 2.9) and only two long-swords (Figure 2.5), while it has no side-swords (like de Valette’s sword shown above). It has a variety of other swords including Venetian schiavonas (an Italian basket-hilt battle-sword), sabres and some eighteenth-century small-swords. Rapiers and small-swords are regarded as civilian weapons while the long-swords, schiavonas and sabres in the collection may have played a military role. Rapiers and small-swords may still have been present on the battlefield as side-arms of musketeers or officers; but it remains a fact that their slender blades were not sturdy enough to withstand blows from heavier weapons since they were designed for fighting against a similarly long and slender-bladed weapon. Incidentally, the large selection of pole-arms reveals an undeniable practical and military dimension where the sheer number and variety reflects the importance of lengthy edged weapons in sieges, galley embarkations and musket formations. Their use is undisputedly seen recurrently in d’Aleccio’s images. The small amount of daggers present does not reflect the simple weapon’s versatile use as a secondary weapon to a sword or in singular use and can be viewed in d’Aleccio’s images on nearly every Hospitaller’s belt (Figure 2.3).
2.3 Military Training

Although the early modern world was characterised by advancement in battlefield technology via the evolution of firearms, the use of the sword survived in the Hospitaller military setup. This is in accord to the sixteenth-century master of arms Vincenzo Saviolo’s statement that fencing was the foundation of the *art militaire* or Capoferro’s assertion that the sword was the ‘queen, the foundation of all weapons’.\(^{41}\) What follows is an attempt to achieve a clearer view of the aspects of a Hospitaller’s martial training in terms of personal combat skills with particular interest to edged weapons.

From the sixteenth century, formalised training systems started to develop in fencing schools where young gentlemen were sent to learn the martial arts. Such schools gave a young knight a more formal and complete military training (Figure 2.11).\(^ {42}\) Young nobles were sent to training colleges to learn the skills of court and camp required for a person of their rank, from fighting with a sword to diplomacy, mathematics and literature.\(^ {43}\) The Order was not considered to be such a college and entrants were expected to be already proficient or at least capable to bear arms on admission.\(^ {44}\) This is reflected in biographies of Hospitaller knights like von Rechberg who in 1780 was sent to an academy for cadets and in 1781 to a Benedictine school before entering the Order as a page.\(^ {45}\) Such an early start in a noble child’s education meant that entrants may have already been introduced to training with a sword before joining the Order but there must have been a training system in the Order itself for particularly young entrants as well as to train senior brethren. De Lucca reveals how Jesuits in Europe played a leading role in such noble colleges where all martial subjects from mathematics to siege warfare to fencing were taught, some specifically training students in *Esercizi Cavallareschi*.\(^ {46}\) Their presence in Malta in the *Collegium Melitense*, the academy of Fortification Mathematics and in the running of the *Camerata* hints at their involvement in military training, however neither de Lucca nor the primary sources reveal such activity by Jesuits in Malta.

\(^{41}\) Anglo, ‘How to Kill a Man at Your Ease: Fencing Books and the Duelling Ethic’ (1990), 9.

\(^{42}\) Anglo (2000), 14.

\(^{43}\) Buttigieg, 37.

\(^{44}\) Buttigieg, 20.


\(^{46}\) Denis De Lucca, *Jesuits and Fortifications* (Leiden, Brill, 2012), 76, 88, 94.
Figure 2.11 Image of a typical seventeenth-century fencing school (of the University of Leiden) showing various military activities including horse vaulting, shooting and fencing with long-swords and side-swords, Anglo (2000), 15.

There is no specific information in the Archives of the Order on the level of martial experience required from Hospitaller postulants apart from the pre-requisite that they had to be of good physical and mental health and capable to bear arms.47 Schermerhorn describes applicants as having been examined to see if their health and physical fitness were satisfactory.48 This may be confirmed from Wignacourt’s Chapter General of 1612 where it was specified that an applicant had to be healthy in mind and body and without any disability or impediment in his person and ‘sia atto all’esercito dell’armi’.49 This requisite is echoed in various other sources from the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries such as the admissions guide book of the Langue of Auvergne which concentrates on proofs of nobility with no reference to physical military training apart from point 15 in folio 61 which states the applicant had to be ‘healthy, strong and robust in order to render service to the Religion’.50 Sources as late as the Codice de Rohan (1782) also include this pre-requisite quoted from the statutes of l’Isle Adam: ‘requisito della sanita del corpo, e della mente’

47 Buttigieg, 20.
48 ‘…for he who would lead a soldier’s life must be strong, hardy and well formed’. Elizabeth W Schermerhorn, Malta of the Knights (London, W. Heinemann, 1929), 18.
49 NLM, AOM 295, f.59, 1612: De Receptione Fratrum
50 NLM, AOM 2256 Modelle pour servir a la reception des Fratres, f.61, 1755.
specifying that a knight had to be ‘ben composto di corpo, ed atto alle fatiche’. These pre-requisites follow the trend set by Baldassare Castiglione who set a criterion on the physical characteristics of the early modern knight and specified the need for knowledge in the use of weapons. The requirement of nobility in order to join the higher ranks of the Order seems to have been the only standard needed to guarantee the applicants had martial abilities since in early modern culture, all noble men received martial training as a rule.

Apart from ability to use a sword, it seems to have been a requirement to own one. From the thirteenth century knights were expected to arm themselves and were sent back unless they proved ownership of the necessary military equipment. This trend is found in the seventeenth century where a basic requirement was to own a sword and an arquebus among other military equipment and armour. This requirement complemented with the Order’s ability to sustain itself through reliance on its rich members and patrons although Spiteri confirms that the Order still had to arm its other military units and used its own weapons to train novices.

2.3.1 Tournaments

The medieval tournament gives a general impression of mounted knights in armour clashing with lances or duelling on foot. This is not so inaccurate since the tournament was a medieval sport for the nobility, an imitation of war at times of peace to exhaust warlike energy, and a form of military training. The concept of sport in early modern Europe changed from a predominantly military exercise to a form of public spectacle characterised by non-warlike forms of exercise such as ball-games and tennis. This type of activity still included the knightly tournament which decreased in its military practicality after the importance of the mounted knight on the battlefield diminished. Tournaments remained popular after the sixteenth century as public spectacles and means to gain the support of crowds or political allies and were held on special occasions such as yearly festivities or peace treaties. These activities were always strictly controlled by regulations to curb the potential violence arising from the mock fights and the mixture of diverse factions, and were

51 NLM, AOM 1663 Codice de Rohan, f.40, 1782: Del Ricevimento de’ Fratelli.
52 Baldassare Castiglione, 29: ‘And so I would have him well built and shapely of limb, and would have him show strength and lightness and suppleness, and know all bodily exercises that befit a man of war; whereof I think the first should be to handle every sort of weapon well on foot and on horse...’
53 Spiteri (2008), 103.
54 Spiteri (2003), 23.
55 Spiteri (2003), 84. NLM, AOM 227a, f.1032, 1651: breakages of weapons during training had to be paid for by the novices themselves.
56 McClelland, 39.
57 McClelland, 80.
59 McClelland, 101
usually combined with other festivities such as banquets and pageants.\textsuperscript{60} 

Roccati mentions tournaments in the training activities of medieval Hospitallers as being occasional methods of martial practice which complemented the daily training and the continuous military engagements.\textsuperscript{61} The type of tournament early modern Hospitallers engaged in is not entirely clear, however they would have followed the general trend where in the sixteenth century, foot combats using field battle armour were preferred to the earlier mounted jousts.\textsuperscript{62} This may be the reason for the small amount of jousting armour present in the Palace Armoury even though there is a considerable number of reinforced helmets and cuirasses with lance rests indicative of jousting although such reinforcements could also have been made for protection from projectiles.\textsuperscript{63} However the presence of lance rests especially in seventeenth-century armour remains suggestive of jousting activity.

The Progetto per Novizi manuscript mentions a number of public activities and specifies ‘giostre per lingua, tornei, ed altre simili funzioni’ to be done in the carnival period, a clear indication of jousting and tournaments being suggested even in the mid-eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{64} This is congruent with the only known description of a tournament in Hospitaller Malta, where Bosio describes a ‘bellissimo torneo a piedi, di picca, e di stocco’ during the carnival celebrations of 1535.\textsuperscript{65} This is a very valuable reference since it confirms that the knights organised tournaments as public spectacles from the very beginning of their sojourn in Malta, that they seemed to prefer foot tournaments than mounted jousts, and reveals details of the weapons used; namely swords and pole-arms. This reflects the military necessities of the Order at the time, where mounted battle was obsolete and siege or marine combat was the norm, hence the preference to foot combat training with close quarter weapons. Such tournament activity as part of the Order’s martial curriculum is also hinted in Bosio’s Statuti publication where he quotes la Cassiere’s decree that prizes should be given for target practice with crossbows and arquebuses every two months: \textsuperscript{66} This gives a more in-house training connotation than a public display like the carnival tournament. La Cassiere’s 1574 chapter general specifically decreed tournaments to be held every three months.\textsuperscript{67} This gives further details in what a Hospitaller tournament included; namely the

\textsuperscript{61} Roccati, 107. 
\textsuperscript{64} NLM, Libr. Ms. 1377 Progetto per Novizi dell’Ordine, 1753, f.5v. 
\textsuperscript{65} Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 140. 
\textsuperscript{66} Giacomo Bosio, Gli Statuti Della Sacra Religione di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano (Rome, 1589), 183: Dell officio dei Fratelli. 
\textsuperscript{67} NLM, AOM 290, f.37r, 1574: ‘che di tre in tre mesi debbiano li Fratelli esercitarsi in un torneo a piedi armati con pica et spade et correre a cavallo la Quintana e all anello…’. Bartolomeo dal Pozzo, Historia della sacra Religione Militare di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta (Verona, 1715), vol.1, 99.
pike and sword mentioned in Bosio’s account but also the mounted *Quintana* and *Anello* which were more Renaissance sports evolved from the medieval joust albeit based on actual training for mounted combat.

It is clear from the sources above that tournaments and possibly jousts were regular activities in the Hospitaller’s calendar of activities serving multiple roles. Firstly, that of military training in techniques still used in the battlefields of the day and secondly, as a public spectacle. The *Progetto per Novizi* for example specifies that in June, the Grand Master should hold a public tournament in Mdina during the feast of St. Peter and St. Paul, where the participation of secular gentlemen was also allowed as long as they were ‘razionali’, clearly to involve the Maltese gentry. A main role such tournaments had was to distract the knights from illegal and immoral activities brought by idleness. This is why they were held during festivities like carnival or the feast of St. Peter and St. Paul. This fact is also mentioned in Bosio’s short account of the 1535 tournament where the Grand Master is quoted as promoting the tournament as a means to avoid immoral activity his knights would have otherwise undertaken during the carnival.

2.3.2 Regular Training at the Auberges

Schermerhorn described the Auberge of each Langue as ‘a training school of the sportsman in warfare, the athletic club where military spirit was nourished on criticism and example’. Very limited information on this was found in the primary sources, even though Spiteri states that the Auberges served as military centres were knights underwent military exercises and assembled for the *mostra* or *rassegna*. Schermerhorn goes further to describe the posts each Langue held on the fortifications of Valletta used also as training grounds for military exercises although there is no written or pictorial evidence of such activities. That regular training was expected from each knight however can be proved in the numerous references of such rules in the statutes. The *Liber Conciliorum* of 1652 confirms that novices were obliged to train three times a week if they were to be professed. The *Progetto per Novizi* manuscript also stated that training in sword, dagger, pike, and firearms was to be done regularly. Roccati establishes that the Order guaranteed continuous military training since

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68 NLM, Libr. Ms. 1377 *Progetto per Novizi dell’Ordine*, 1753, f.6r: ‘per esercitare li nazionali...alli gentiluomini suoi vassalli, li stuzzicrebbe ad esercitarsi nella arme ed aver buoni cavalli a gara’.
69 Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 140: ‘Laudo nondimeno il tornare e il giostrare. E gli essorto’ ch’in ogni sorte di cavalereschi e virtuosi esercizi, per fuggire l’otio continuamente esercitare si volessero’. (Otio translated from Latin reads ‘idleness’, the Italian version being *Ozio*).
70 Schermerhorn. 72.
71 Spiteri (2008), 121.
72 Schermerhorn, 69.
73 NLM, AOM 227a, f.1032, 1652.
74 NLM, Libr. Ms. 1377 *Progetto per Novizi dell’Ordine*, 1753, f.4v-5r.
its members were free from worldly administrative and family worries and the knights were exposed to fighting techniques and tactics from veteran knights. Specific mention of such regular training is scarce, even more so when looking at professed knights. The only source found mentioning this is the Count of Erbach’s account describing exercises in arms being done at the Auberges in set days with particular reference to the knights of Auvergne and Provence who gave this particular importance and trained more than the prescribed hours.

It is in Frà Sabba di Castiglione’s Ricordi that it is suggested to train daily with weapons and other forms of physical exercise, however there is no reference to where such training should be done. One must also keep in mind another location used for training with the sword, which was the scuola di scherma set up at least after 1574. Such paucity of detail on where such exercises actually took place may reflect a leniency and informal attitude to military training in professed knights, however it may also be that such training was taken for granted as a regular activity of an early modern courtier and even more so of a Hospitaller knight residing in convent.

### 2.3.3 Rules and Guides for Regular Training

A printed manual for military training of a Hospitaller knight has yet not been found. Known manuals such as the Istruzioni has no mention of military training whatsoever. While Frà Sabba di Castiglione’s famed Ricordi has only two ricordi dedicated to the exercise of arms and military activities. The Order seems to have started to print specific military manuals in the seventeenth century however most, such as the fascinating Regole per la lingua Maltese, were aimed at the Order’s militia rather than the knights themselves. Other sources investigated such as the Traite des exercises militaries propres aux troupes de Malte (1777) proved to be a similar manual where the only instruction given to knights was how to give drills and commands to platoons of infantry. This late eighteenth-century manuscript reflects the reduction of importance of the sword in battle since the only times it is mentioned are on how to salute with it. This reflects the form an eighteenth-century knight took, that is of a commanding officer. Further military drill manuals are found such as the

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75 Roccati, 105.
76 Kraus, 125-126.
77 Frà Sabba’ di Castiglione, 29rv: Ricordo 40, Circa lo esercito corporale: ‘I encourage you every morning, after having heard mass and said the office which you are obliged to do, to exercise with weapons’.
78 Spiteri (2003), 84.
79 Istruzioni sopra gli Obblighi più principali de Cavalieri di Malta (Malta, 1758).
80 Frà Sabba’ di Castiglione, 28v-29v: Ricordo 39, Circa la militia & Ricordo 40, Circa lo esercito corporale.
81 Cauchi Inglett (2006), 63-70.
82 NLM, Libr Ms. CXII Traite des exercises militaries propres aux troupes de Malte, Frà de Rabastens, 1777.
Ordinanze ed Esercizi Militari (1776) and Regolamenti Militari per lo servigio particolare del Reggimento di Malta (1776) found in the Smitmer library catalogue (1781). Another manual found at the Malta Maritime Museum (Vittoriosa) involves the Order’s naval squadron and includes similar maneuvers for marine drills revealing a similar need to publish manuals for the Order’s marine arm. A search in two other library catalogues (of Frà Saintjay and of the Camerata) in the NLM has revealed a limited number of military manuals, among them two French fencing treatises by Labat dated 1696 and 1701. Another manual in Saintjay’s catalogue is titled Les Devoirs Militaires des Officiers d’Infanterie et Cavalerie, again more of an officer’s manual than a practical fight book. The Camerata catalogue is rich in all the subjects pertaining to the education of a gentleman including history, religion, geometry, prose, and languages but is limited in manuals of military activities. In fact, out of the published fencing manuals found in the NLM, only the one by Labat was listed. But there are in the published collection of the library other fencing manuals, two of which were best sellers of their time: namely treatises by Camillo Agrippa and Giacomo di Grassi (Figure 2.12). These are sixteenth-century treatises with preference to the early Italian rapier (today referred to as a side-sword) and incline towards civilian fighting but with some reference to practical warlike training. Another publication is a large volume written by an Italian, d’Alessandro with various instructions on gentlemanly activities including sections on swordsmanship and horsemanship. It involves romantic poems dedicated to the sword and to the ideal swordsman, a section with descriptions of famous swordsmen, and a section with practical fencing instructions. It also carries the stamp of the Camerata library. All four publications by Agrippa, di Grassi, Labat, and d’Alessandro are registered in the Order’s library catalogue (1762) which proves they were obtained during the Order’s stay in Malta, promoting further the possibility that they were used by knights for personal instruction.

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83 Frà Francesco Paolo de Smitmer, Catalogo della biblioteca del Sagro Militar Ordine di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano oggi detto di Malta (Malta, 1781), 157.
85 NLM, Libr Ms. 510 Saintjay catalogue, 1714. NLM Libr Ms. 266 Camerata catalogue. Labat (found in the NLM and bears Frà Saintjay’s signature).
86 NLM, Libr Ms. 510 Saintjay catalogue, 1714, f.140.
88 D’Alessandro (1723).
89 NLM, Libr. Ms. 603 vol.1, 6r (Agrippa), 9v (d’Alessandro), 301v (di Grassi, 1570), 367v (Labat).
2.3.4 **Fencing Masters Employed by the Order**

Fencing masters under the employ of the Order have been mentioned in passing in a number of sources. Burlamacchi’s reference to *maîtres d’armes* employed to train the brethren does not seem backed by any source and he may be referring to senior knights serving as teachers in medieval times. However Schermerhorn’s mention of a fencing master employed in Grand Master de Paul’s palace at San Anton is backed by an NLM manuscript. Spiteri has found numerous references to fencing masters being employed by the Order in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, where the name of Master Francesco Picconi was discovered under the pay role of the treasury and he states that by the seventeenth century the Order employed two fencing masters to train its brethren. The earliest reference to a fencing master found in the archives to date is in the Chapter General of 1574 where it was decreed to employ a *maestro di scherma* to train brethren in all sorts of weapons. The eighteenth century manuscript *Progetto per Novizi* similarly mentions a *maestro d’armi* (master of arms)

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91 Schermerhorn, 149.
92 Spiteri (2003), 84.
93 NLM, AOM 290, f.37r, 1574: ‘Che si tenga continuamente un Maestro di scrima per insegnar li Frati e Frati servienti d’armi et addestrarli a manegiar ogni sorta d’armi et essere tenuto all salario honesto dal tesoro’.
as one of the principal teachers to be employed specifying he should teach fighting with sword and pole-arms, and shooting with rifle and pistol. Fencing masters (or masters of arms) started publishing their works in the thirteenth century and increased substantially in the sixteenth century due to the proliferation of printing where the early modern gentleman sought their skills as part of the gentlemanly arts. Baldassare Castiglione made numerous references to the famous master Pietro Monte in his Book of the Courtier describing him as the best example of a perfect gentleman. ‘Best seller’ fight books such as the two in the NLM belonging to very well-known Italian masters of the sixteenth century (Agrippa and di Grassi) most certainly influenced the Order. Similar to military engineers, masters of arms travelled all over Europe offering their services, and the Order must have benefitted from their services. The trend of Italian military influence in the sixteenth century followed by a French influence in the eighteenth is reflected also in the fencing treatises found in the library. It is important to note is that master of arms (maestro d’armi) and fencing master (maestro di scherma) refer to a similar if not the same professional, who contrary to modern fencing was not limited to teaching sword fighting alone, rather as can be seen in the 1574 chapter general and the progetto per Novizi manuscripts, taught how to fight with all weapons including firearms. The same variety in teaching may be seen in the fencing treatises of Agrippa and Di Grassi themselves, where although they do not include projectiles, they cover a wide range of edged weapons.

2.3.5 The Early Modern Hospitaller Fighting Ethic

The military superiority of the knights of the Order must have been due to a number of factors, paramount of which were excellent equipment and excellent physical ability due to regular training. Knights of religious orders were not like a professional army, but rather militias that lacked mass discipline, who due to their vows of obedience, were superior to secular militias. Militias’ importance decreased with the invention of modern standing armies which were easier to control, however they survived to the eighteenth century. The modernisation of warfare was reflected in the Order which always felt the importance to

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94 NLM, Libr. Ms. 1377 Progetto per Novizi dell’Ordine, 1753, 5r.
95 McClelland, 47.
96 Baldassare Castiglione, 34.
98 Di Grassi (1570) and Agrippa (1604) were Italian while Labat (1696 & 1701) was French. All three well known fencing treatises found in the national library reflected the trend of a shift of military influence from Italy to France.
99 Loades, 129.
100 Burlamacchi, 61.
102 Tlusty, 276.
maintain a corps of troops to counteract its limited manpower. This necessitated martial training which was undertaken by the knights themselves as seen in the 1574 Chapter General specifying military training for the village militias. The same was applied to the Order’s main offensive asset, the navy, where the 

Codice de Rohan

specified that sailors had to train in both ‘armi bianche’ (bladed weapons) and firearms every month. The militia and standing army setup did not diminish the importance the Order gave to the physical training of its knights, which were always considered as the elite of the corps. Sources such as the Ricordi of Sabba di Castiglione show specific instructions on military training and physical exercise where the knight was instructed to train every morning in combat and be knowledgeable in horse riding and marine navigation. Other sources in the NLM confirm this martial ethic during the eighteenth century such as the treatise by d’Alessandro (1723) which, like Castiglione, promoted the use of the sword and horse riding. The anonymous manuscript Progetto per Novizi (1753) also gives details on regular military activities involving the local population as militia. It promoted the setting up of military academies in fencing, shooting, and riding. Publications on martial training such as Labat’s fencing manual or d’Alessandro’s book found in Frà Saintjay’s and the Camerata library catalogues reveal the presence of theory and relevance to the instruction of a knight in the martial arts. The presence of such sources in the NLM therefore hints at an element of martial training with the sword from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

The multinational nature of the Order begs the question on which particular style the knights followed, since fencing styles varied from country to country. From a mixture of German and Italian influence in the medieval period, the Renaissance saw, like all else, a large Italian influence. The sixteenth century fencing treatises found in the NLM in fact are both Italian. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a gradual increase in French influence, which is reflected in the fencing styles of the Order whose French Langues were responsible for the military. In the seventeenth century, France was the largest military

103 NLM, AOM 1663, f.37r, 1574.
104 NLM, AOM 1663 Codice de Rohan, f.439, 1782: Delle Galere e Vascelli.
105 Frà Sabba’ di Castiglione, 29rv.
106 D’Alessandro (1723).
107 NLM, Libr. Ms. 1377 Progetto per Novizi dell’Ordine, 1753.
108 NLM 510: Frà Saintjay’s catalogue contains numerous military books such as Les devoirs militaires des officiers d’infanterie et cavalerie enseignant le management des armes les evolutions de l’infanterie et de la cavalerie par l’oir de la frontier or la conduit de mars ou l’homme de guerre (f.140). The collection also contains Labat’s fencing treatise in (f.142). NLM 266: Labat’s treatise is also found in the Camerata catalogue.
109 Agrippa and di Grassi (sixteenth century), Labat (early eighteenth century).
110 D’Alessandro, 760-769: illustrates various postures of different sword guards such as the Neapolitan or Spanish guards
112 The Langue of Provence (Grand Commander) and the Langue of Auvergne (Marshal).
power in Europe with the largest professional army and this influenced the Order. Moreover in 1645 three military engineers were sent to Malta by the King of France for their services and advice.\textsuperscript{113} In addition, Kraus wrote about the Count of Erbach witnessing the French knights taking more pride and effort in their military training during the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{114} In fact the only comprehensive seventeenth and eighteenth century fencing manuals found in the NLM are the French treatises by Labat (1696 and 1701), manifesting this French influence. Baldassare Castiglione describes the military prowess of the French even in a century of Italian dominance; referring to Italians excelling in riding, jousting and tilting, while the French in tournaments and all arts of defence.\textsuperscript{115} However the Order was, from its beginnings a complete mixture of European races and regardless of Italian or French dominance, it must not be forgotten that other martial styles were present such as the German and Spanish. The Order’s martial practices must have reflected the variety it was characterised by and it is remarkable how they managed to work together. Perhaps a clue may be the manuscript \textit{Progetto per Novizi} where a section clearly shows advice on keeping Langues separate during training academies in order to avoid hostility between the nations.\textsuperscript{116} This may also show an effort to allow each langue to practice its own fighting style and avoid confusion.

\section*{2.4 Fighting Systems of the Order}

A deeper study of the fighting techniques of the knights is necessary to get a comprehensive picture of the military dimension of their edged weapons. This is no simple task due to the diversity of techniques it brought from mainland Europe, conglomerated into one practical dimension. Recent interest in this subject was shown by Burlamacchi who highlighted the paucity of information on the military training of the knights. He argued that the skill needed for the knights to be such an outstanding combat corps requested ‘time, discipline, assiduity and excellent instructors’ with many hours spent on physical exercise and military instruction.\textsuperscript{117} Forey similarly reveals the lack of knowledge on the military training and exercises of military orders in times of peace.\textsuperscript{118} A study of the fighting systems of the Order in medieval times has revealed even larger difficulties due to lack of documentation. Roccati

\textsuperscript{113} Cauchi Inglott (2006), 63-64.
\textsuperscript{114} Kraus, 125.
\textsuperscript{115} Baldassare Castiglione, 30.
\textsuperscript{116} NLM, Libr. Ms. 1377 \textit{Progetto per Novizi dell’Ordine}, 1753, 6r.
\textsuperscript{117} Burlamacchi, 60.
attempts this by studying renowned medieval fight books which are assumed to have influenced the Hospitaller the same way they did any other combatant of the time. He supports this by comparing these techniques to contemporary Hospitaller imagery, historical texts and narrations describing their military engagements and famous weapons collections to hypothesize on the medieval Hospitaller fight system. The study is detailed but inconclusive yet it verifies the existence of a system which enabled the Hospitaller knight to excel on the field. Combined with his faith and discipline, the Hospitaller could operate in military formations, but he was still an individual trained to operate as an independent unit. Early modern Hospitaller fighting systems have been found from primary sources. The main sources found are Frà Sabba di Castiglione’s Hospitaller manual, manuscripts such as the Progetto per Novizi, and various fencing manuals found in the National Library of Malta (NLM), along with information retrieved from the Order’s archives.

2.4.1 The Hospitaller’s Fighting Repertoire

The specific fencing styles of the Hospitaller knights may be too varied to put together into one specific style. But it is possible to elicit conclusions from various sources including publications and manuscripts at the NLM, images such as the d’Aleccio prints, and contemporary descriptions of battles such as the 1565 siege by Bosio and Balbi. This attempt was done by Roccati following similar lines however it was done without access to Hospitaller archives and tackled the medieval period which was poorer in written sources. Knightly skills from such a period were typical of a medieval knight where the basic skills of a Templar for example were with the shield and sword or mace (more effective against plate armour), and the lance (when on horseback). Roccati recognises the fighting repertoire of the Hospitaller knights to be similar; being shield and mace or sword and the lance.

Like Roccati, the citation of visual sources like d’Aleccio’s images prove to be useful references since they give an excellent visual window of the fight systems of the knights in the mid-sixteenth century. The use of pike and sword and round shield combinations are seen for close quarters fighting, along with pikes for medium range and handheld firearms for long range. Nearly all figures are depicted with what looks like a side-sword at their side while the soccorso piccolo print (Figure 2.3) reveals two-handed swordsmen and another figure bearing a halberd. Other weapons seen are daggers such as

119 Roccati, 125.
120 Stoddert, The Art of Chivalry, 14.
121 Barber, 190.
122 Roccati, 108.
the *assalto all’isola* fresco (Figure 2.7) showing knights fighting in close quarters. The swords in the prints are more detailed than the frescoes and can be recognised as being mid-sixteenth-century side-swords, shown complete with knuckle guards and short handles. They are wide-bladed, unlike the slender rapiers prevalent in the palace armoury in Valletta and more like de Valette’s battle sword in Birgu. The descriptions of the siege by Balbi and Bosio coincide with the images drawn by d’Aleccio, where the most commonly described close quarter fighting was done with sword and round shield (*spade e rotelle*), two-handed swords (*spadoni*), and pikes (*picca*).

Although Abbe de Vertot’s account of the siege was done two centuries later he described an interesting combat setup where in between every three soldiers was placed a knight ‘in order to sustain and encourage them’, all armed with half-pikes. This reflects many facets of the Hospitaller fighting system, where the superior training, armour as well as the persona of a knight served to physically and psychologically support the common troops, while the knight was armed exactly like the rest (here described with half-pikes). This is seen in d’Aleccio who portrays all fighters similarly clad but this is most probably an artist’s impression to add more effect and identify the Order’s forces. In Bosio and Balbi (described above), the same weapons combinations are described to be used by knights, soldiers, and Maltese militia without distinction.

Hospitaller manuals by Frà Sabba di Castiglione (published in 1546 and reprinted 26 times by 1613) and Frà de Cany provide many guidelines for a Hospitaller’s daily life and give few details on physical martial training. The practice of martial training is evident through other sources identified above but what needs yet to be distinguished is the specific training methods and fighting styles followed. The illustration of a sixteenth-century fencing school (Figure 2.11) gives a clear indication on the variety of exercises a knight was expected to practice. Baldassare Castiglione described Pietro Monte as the best teacher in the use of weapons but also in wrestling, vaulting, riding and jousting. One of the most famous fight books of the century, Achille Marozzo’s *Opera Nova* was like Monte, still of the old-school: pragmatic and practical for use in battle however it has sections which give instructions for civilian duelling marking the beginning of a trend in civilian fighting. The following schools of thought spearheaded by Agrippa’s (1553) and di Grassi’s (1570) works were more scientific and although still used warlike weapons such as the heavy side-sword,

123 Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 564 (double handed sword), Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 572, 638 (pikes), Balbi de Correggio, 108, Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 672, 796 (sword and round shield).
125 Buttigieg, 26.
127 Baldassare Castiglione, 34; Monte was a master at arms in the court of the duke of Urbino and possibly also the captain of his army, there are similarities with a soldier in the pay of Venice who lost an eye in battle and an uncanny resemblance to Grand Master Pietro del Monte who also lost an eye in battle but he lived much later and cannot be the same person.
128 McClelland, 51-52.
pole-arms, etc moved to a more specified form of duel combat. But their practicality was still more than later manuals which concentrated fully on the rapier duel. Both manuals found in the NLM are of a small portable size with worn leather bound covers indicating frequent use. A later publication found in the NLM is Labat’s fencing treatise which is also of a very small pocket size and has a closer connection to the Order since it is signed by the knight Frà Saintjay and is listed in his catalogue which suggests personal usage.\textsuperscript{129} The d’Alessandro publication is a very large volume and seems more conceptual in its teachings as it covers a broad spectrum of the life of a gentleman in the fashion of Baldassare Castiglione’s \textit{Book of the Courtier}. It does however have interesting prints of suggested stances when fighting with swords and pole-arms and identifies between Neapolitan, Spanish, foreign (forestiero), and Turkish styles (see Appendix 1A).\textsuperscript{130}

The manner of fighting in battle necessitated adaptability and a general use of weapons in order to be able to survive with anything that may come to hand. This fact was stated by many authors like Baldassare Castiglione who suggested that ‘one does not need to be perfect in all things but to have at least a working knowledge of them with loyalty and courage’.\textsuperscript{131} This is repeated by his Hospitaller cousin, Frà Sabba who advised that it was better to be mediocre with a large variety of weapons rather than very good with one or two. He seems to suggest that situations where the knight would fight with weapons of convenience are common ‘le qui non per elettione ma per sorte vi verranno alle mani’.\textsuperscript{132} This makes practical sense and is the complete opposite of civilian duels which are very weapon specific. This practicality is reflected in the Order’s employment of fencing masters to train knights in all kinds of combat; ‘\textit{Che si tenga continuamente un Maestro di scrima per insegnar li frati e frati servienti d’armi et addestrarli a manegiar ogni sorta d’armi}’.\textsuperscript{133} The practical fighting style was maintained simply due to the necessity of combat in an uncontrolled environment, as can be clearly illustrated in the seventeenth-century treatise by von Wallhausen titled ‘knight art’ (Figure 2.13).\textsuperscript{134}

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\textsuperscript{129} Labat (1696 & 1701).
\textsuperscript{130} D’Alessandro, 755-769.
\textsuperscript{131} Baldassare Castiglione, 25.
\textsuperscript{132} Frà Sabba di Castiglione, 29v.
\textsuperscript{133} NLM, AOM 290, f.37r, 1574
\textsuperscript{134} Johan Jacob von Wallhausen, \textit{Ritterkunst} (Frankfurt, 1616), 108-109.
Frà Sabba di Castiglione’s *Ricordi* has proved to be the most detailed written evidence found with regards to the Hospitaller’s fighting repertoire since his *Ricordo* 39 and 40 both give a lot of detail in this respect. Both descriptions, when compared to the other publications on the martial arts found in the NLM give a much clearer picture.

*Ricordo* 39, Regarding the Militia:

Since our militia is rather maritime and naval than land-bound, it seems to me to be quite the way, even necessary to know how to swim well, and if not with other weapons, at least with the sword and shield, and so have knowledge and practice of the navigation map and compass, so that if you find yourself at sea without the help of the sailors you would know where to go and with what wind, and besides this the cosmography, for its use, and the way of the map to have a more particular cognition of the signs of the sea, harbours, islands, the reefs, and similar other things, whose ability to understand would do you honour, and very useful in the dangers, and fortunes of the sea, and even though in your militia riding is not very necessary, unless for anything which might happen, and for having the title of knighthood, I would praise very much knowing how to ride, and understanding of horses competently. But you will be wary to ride disruptful horses that buck, and are short tempered, because they are always dangerous.\(^{135}\)

This section reflects the skills expected from a Hospitaller knight, similar to the ones described in Baldassare Castiglione’s book. However, it is much more specific to the Hospitaller environment since he specified the need to know how to swim and operate on the

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\(^{135}\) Translated from Frà Sabba di Castiglione, *Ricordo 39, Circa la militia*, 28v.
sea due to the Order’s marine nature. Like Baldassare and d’Alessandro, he suggests knowledge of horses as part of the basic skill of a knight which is in common with the maintenance of mounted military exercises by the Order. The skill of mounted fighting is briefly mentioned in Agrippa’s treatise who admits his lack of knowledge on the subject leaving its instruction to others. In this section Castiglione notes that at least minimal knowledge is needed in the sword and shield (spada e scudo) which is indicative that this weapon combination was the most basic form for the Order in the sixteenth century, in accordance to what was seen in d’Aleccio’s frescoes and Balbi and Bosio’s accounts.

Ricordo 40, Regarding Physical Exercise:
I encourage you every morning, after having heard mass and said the office which you are obliged to do, to exercise with weapons such as swords and large bucklers (spada e brocchieri grandi), sword and square shield (spada e targia), sword and round shield (spada e rotella), sword and cape (spada e cappa), and because you are big in stature, two-handed swords (spade di due mani), pike (di picca), pole axe (azza), mace (mazza). You will enjoy throwing the spear (parte sana), the javelin (il dardo), shoot the crossbow (tirar di ballestra), musket (schioppo), and the Turkish bow (arco Turcesco). You will enjoy wrestling (giuocare alla lotta), to run, to jump a hurdle (saltare a un salto), grappling with daggers (alle prese con pugnali) and other short weapons so you can use them when cornered. And all these exercises you can do so at a good pace so that in all needs they can serve you and help you. In short you will enjoy to handle averagely every manner of weapon so that when needed you would know how to use all those weapons which not by choice but by fate will be at hand because then one knows the good knight in arms when he is worthy with all kinds of weapons needed.

Ricordo 40 gives a much more detailed list of martial skills expected from a Hospitaller knight. These seem to follow the repertoire advised by the fencing treatises in the NLM even though it predates them (Castiglione’s Ricordi first published in 1554). This means the treatises in possession of the Order compliment the advice given by Frà Sabba di Castiglione while he seems to follow the guidelines set by Baldassare Castiglione (1528) when it comes to physical exercise and general skills, and fencing masters such as Achille Marozzo (1536) when it comes to weapons handling. For example Baldassare specifies that:

One must know all bodily exercises that befit a man of war and handle all sorts of weapons both on foot and on horse and be especially familiar with weapons used among gentlemen both in war and in duels, and it is good to know how to wrestle as it is of great help in

136 Schermerhorn, 21 (riding lessons for the novices); NLM, Libr. Ms. 1377 Progetto per Novizi dell’Ordine, 1753, f.5r (riding instructors employed with the Order); NLM, AOM 290, f.37r, 1574 (the holding of regular mounted exercises such as the Quintana and Anello).
137 Agrippa, 62.
138 Translated from Frà Sabba di Castiglione, Ricordo 40. Circa lo esercito corporale, 29rv.
139 Achille Marozzo, Opera Nova (Modena, 1536).
weapons used on foot... Also to excel in other exercises which may come useful in war such as running, swimming, leaping stone throwing and horse vaulting.\textsuperscript{140}

Appendices 1A and 1B show the martial exercises described in Ricordo\textsuperscript{40} compared to famous contemporary publications which may have influenced Frà Sabba di Castiglione, where Marozzo matches with more than half of them and are in similar order. The treatises in the NLM also match with quite a large number of the martial skills while more general sources such as Bosio and Balbi’s accounts of the siege, d’Aleccio’s frescoes and certain archives occasionally mention some of the skills listed. The table (1B) indicates a certain influence from the publications while the presence of some of the skills in the Order’s archives and accounts supports that they were actually practiced by the knights. The Progetto per Novizi manuscript reveals many facets of martial training and some detail on specific skills. This manuscript, written in the eighteenth century still mentions training with sword, dagger, pole-arms and the newly developed bayonet. It also mentions marksmanship, riding skills, cavalry and marine drills.\textsuperscript{141} Such skills are in accordance with contemporary publications such as Labat’s treatise which is specific to the sword and d’Alessandro’s book which mentions sword and dagger and pole-arms.\textsuperscript{142} Bayonets were not used with early muskets due to their heavy weight, therefore a musketeer had to be accompanied by a pike-man and usually the shooter carried a sword as a sidearm for close quarters fighting (Figure 2.4). By the eighteenth century muskets were light enough to be used with a bayonet for close quarters fighting therefore eliminating the need for a pike-man and diminishing further the importance of a sword as a side arm.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{140} Baldassare Castiglione, 29-30.
\textsuperscript{141} NLM, Libr. Ms. 1377 Progetto per Novizi dell’Ordine, 1753, 4v-6v.
\textsuperscript{142} Labat (1696 & 1701). D’Alessandro, 763.
\textsuperscript{143} Cauchi Inglott (2006), 70.
2.5 Conclusion

The military dimension of a weapon is a reflection of the primary function it was created for. A weapon such as a sword is ultimately created for the inhumane scope of killing which is not something to laud but the status a sword enjoys among edged weapons has led to give it underlying meanings and symbolisms. This chapter has dealt with the practical functions of bladed weapons as tools used in early modern warfare, mainly as close quarters side-arms used as a last resort. Swords were part of a set of military equipment which apart from carrying a certain status, were limited on the battlefield especially after the proliferation of firearms. The sword's importance in the Hospitaller's repertoire had decreased up to a point where it had minimal military significance, especially against more effective firearms and new generation close combat weapons such as the bayonet. Skill with the sword itself is an impalpable facet which merits deep study since a sword's effectiveness depended on the skill of its user and thus it is crucial to investigate such skills in relation to the swords themselves. This has revealed a lacuna in the historiography of the Order but various clues to the practice of fencing (in terms of the arts of defence not the modern sport) in the Hospitaller context have proved encouraging while it has been noted that there may not have been a set system; rather a fusion of styles and skills from all over Europe which led to the unique coalition the Order is noted for. This must have necessitated discipline to control and avoid sliding into chaotic practices and through such, the Order managed to reap the benefits of the variety it possessed to reach levels of collective skill of superior levels.
3.1 Introduction

In the opening to his book, Loades stated that the sword did not solely contribute to the military history of the early modern world but also played a part in its social history.\(^1\) In fact, the use of arms in medieval and early modern Europe was a daily occurrence and not only applied to warfare. The apparent lawlessness of the pre-modern era, where a state-run police force as we know it was not yet common practice may have contributed to a culture of personal self-defence. Tlusty revealed that there was a culture of bearing arms in all classes which was not limited to nobles.\(^2\) Regardless of this, nobles were always at an advantage and were exempt from many weapon restrictions.\(^3\) Leading trend setting monarchs like England’s Henry VIII and German Emperor Maximilian I were both keen on the exercise of arms and in turn influenced their courtiers.\(^4\) Thus men were brought up from a young age to bear arms and to use them in the name of civic peace.\(^5\) This resulted in fencing becoming an honourable early modern activity.\(^6\) The Order, as part of the noble framework of Europe was very susceptible to such trends and had to balance the violent traits of the military with the civilian. It had the hard task of funneling the violent traits of its members into productive activities (such as corsairing) and away from the disruptive violence of civilian combat.

3.2 Martial Culture and Fashion in Early Modern Europe

Early sixteenth-century fencing masters such as Pietro Monte shed some light on the practical importance of the knowledge of arms but generally, knights were expected to acquire their skills from their elders.\(^7\) By the sixteenth century, Baldassare Castiglione established that the prime occupation of a courtier, descendant of the medieval knight, was

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\(^1\) Loades, xvi.
\(^2\) Tlusty, 1.
\(^3\) Anglo (2000), 36.
\(^4\) Anglo, ‘How to Kill a Man at Your Ease: Fencing Books and the Dueling Ethic’ (1990), 9.
\(^5\) Tlusty, 44.
\(^6\) Gaiani (1619) stated ‘no one can deny that the art of using the sword and dagger, armi da cavalliere, is worthy of great honour’, Anglo, ‘How to Kill a Man at Your Ease: Fencing Books and the Dueling Ethic’ (1990), 12.
\(^7\) Anglo (2000), 17.
that of arms. This trend reflected the early modern continuation of the militant upper classes where fencing became more rational and elegant hence remaining the prerogative of nobles. Fighting methods became more controlled and following Renaissance trends, more codified, hence the establishment of fencing schools in universities and cities in Europe aimed at the elite where a century before they were multi-classed and generally frowned upon for instilling violence. Even the Jesuits seem to have integrated fencing in the curriculums of their colleges all over Europe which reveals a more pragmatic albeit militant Catholic Church.

The sixteenth century reveals a boom in publications aimed at teaching nobles on how to use their swords, which were by then a daily part of their dress, since fencing had become part of the gentlemanly arts. This trend continued into the seventeenth century where young nobles were sent to colleges and military academies to train in court and camp in order to maintain their martial status. Incidentally this caste was the main source of membership for the Hospitaller Order which followed the same trends. It is not surprising that Frà Sabba di Castiglione advised young Hospitallers to endeavour in the continuous exercise in arms in order to keep away from sensual passions and appetites, since such military activity was regarded a perfect method of distracting young men from worldly vices. Furthermore, using swords was an ideal act of masculine identity apart from bearing also symbolic power of status and authority. These attitudes were developing in parallel to the Hospitallers’ stay in Malta. They fit into this wider violent trend since they were noble and sought to counteract their vow of chastity through martial terms to maintain their masculinity.

3.2.1 Battle and Personal Combat – Swordplay as Sport

The Order, being made up of military men was a unique mélange of military and civic trends where the brethren had to follow strict rules but enjoyed privileges over the civilian population, especially in Malta. The knights in early modern Malta lived in this time of dual fighting styles (civilian and military) where one sees the evolution of both systems, becoming totally different by the eighteenth century. This is suggested by the fencing treatises found in the NLM (Section 2.4.1). Di Grassi warned that such skills should not be

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8 Baldassare Castiglione, 25.
10 De Lucca, 88.
12 Buttigieg, 37.
14 Tlusty, 6-10.
15 See section 3.3.
employed in brawls and frays but applied to nobler activities of war for one’s country, honour of women, and conquering of hosts and armies. But the English translator of di Grassi explicitly writes that: ‘it is most useful for defence of one’s person and honour’, a clear application to civilian duelling. Later masters like del’Agocchie and Saviolo openly promoted their art for use in personal combat while they still warned against the use of arms for self advantage and only for defence. The late seventeenth-century treatise in the NLM by Labat is explicitly civilian in style. Post-sixteenth century fencing masters began concentrating solely on the civilian style of fencing and failed to apply their individualistic fencing skills to the battlefield. To counter this, the seventeenth century saw the proliferation of military schools such as the one of Nassau-Dillemburg in 1617 which taught all aspects of warfare from fortifications to use of bladed weapons leading to the manual of Wallhausen (see figure 2.13), who went back to the practicality of combat like Monte.

The Humanism of the Renaissance turned bodily exercises (including swordplay) into an objective activity we today see as sport. This was enhanced in the Baroque with the increased evolution of fencing from an art into a scientific form using geometry, space and time (Agrippa’s treatise being a perfect example). Like Shakespeare showed in his Romeo and Juliet duels, fencing in particular had evolved from a purely muscular activity to a carefully calculated pursuit depending on method rather than intuition and using tools of high quality (rapiers). The same kind of rapiers are found in large amounts in the Palace armoury in Valletta, which do not seem to have any practical military function but are more typical of personal civilian combat. From the sixteenth century, duelling with the rapier became a new sport for the elite, viewed as a post-renaissance gladiatorial combat which although illegal continued to flourish. To excel in the use of arms was already a primary skill expected from a courtier as suggested by authors like Castiglione. Most of these skills were not only applied to deadly combat (war or duel) but also to ‘sporting’ activities such as tournaments, aimed to entertain and to show one’s talent.

16 Di Grassi (1570), 3', Ai Lettori.
17 Giacomo di Grassi, His True Art of Defence (London, 1594), f.4*, ‘An advertisement to the courteous reader’.
19 Agrippa (1604). Labat (1696 & 1701).
21 McClelland, 4.
22 Loades, 286.
23 William Shakespeare, ‘Romeo and Juliet Act 2 Scene 4’, The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Geddes & Grosset, Scotland 2008, 175: ‘He fights as you sing pricksong, keeps time, distance, and proportion; rests me his minim rest, one, two, and the third in your bosom: the very butcher of a silk button, a duelist, a duelist; a gentleman of the very first house, of the first and second cause. Ah, the immortal passado! The punto reverse!’. McClelland, 133.
24 McClelland, 87.
25 See section 2.3.1.
Figure 3.1 A plate from the English translation of l’Abbat’s fencing treatise, 1734 (BELOW), retrieved on 5 April 2014 from http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12135/12135-h/12135-h.htm, showing a more modern ‘civilian’ fencing compared to the older styles of di Grassi, 1570 (ABOVE-LEFT) and Agrippa, 1553 (ABOVE-RIGHT). All three manuals are found in the NLM. Note the use of the cut as well as the thrust by di Grassi and although Agrippa shows a typical lunge but using the unarmed hand to defend, L’Abbat’s lunge is longer and looks more ‘modern’ while the unarmed hand is used less.

3.2.2 Literature and Prose

The symbolism of the sword in early modern literature needs to be acknowledged in order to give a holistic view of the non-military characteristics of swords in Hospitaller lives. The religious symbolism of swords was widely established and a religious military order was sure to have ridden the same trend as it fitted perfectly with its raison d’être.26 Apart from religious symbolism, the sword also entered the world of secular prose. The most commonly

studied author is Shakespeare who seems to have had a good knowledge of swords and
frequently included them in his plays.\(^{27}\) What is notable is that most of the descriptions of
swords and sword fights by Shakespeare referred to the new style of civilian fighting and
frequently mentioned duels. By the late sixteenth century one may see the increased
popularity of the duelling rapier at least in England since it is mentioned twenty nine times
in Shakespeare’s works but only mentioned once in the works of the earlier renowned
English author, Christopher Marlowe.\(^{28}\) This follows the trend of popularity of the civilian
sword in all aspects of early modern life.

Courtly guides such as Baldassare Castiglione’s \textit{Courtier} give numerous allusions to
swords as the principal weapons for the nobility. The Order followed these guides and had a
numerous collection of international and local courtly guides of its own like the publications
by Frà Sabha di Castiglione and Frà de Cany.\(^{29}\) Apart from the practical guides to swordplay
(discussed in section 2.4.1), Sabha di Castiglione also refers to the spiritual sword and uses it
in his similies to charity and the word of God.\(^{30}\) The voluminous publication by
d’Alessandro also found in the NLM is a similar courtly guide from the eighteenth century
and concentrates on the equine and martial aspects of a gentleman. It involves romantic
poems dedicated to the sword and to the ideal swordsman (Appendix 2), a long section with
descriptions of famous Italian swordsmen and a short section with practical fencing
instructions.\(^{31}\) It carries the stamp of the Camerata library which verifies it was available to
Hospitallers. The poem in Appendix 2B refers to the control and skill required from a good
fencer while the epilogue to the sword (Appendix 2A) is a romantic poem to the sword as a
noble weapon lauding its popular chivalrous characteristics.

Whether the fencing manuals found in the NLM were actually used by individual
knights for personal or military instruction is difficult to answer. The small size and wear
they have may suggest they were regularly used outside the library. The Agrippa treatise is in
a particularly bad condition while the Labat treatise is very small and is actually two
treatises bound into one. The cover of the Labat treatise has Frà Saintjay’s name handwritten
in the inside of the front cover and is registered in both Saintjay’s and the Camerata
catalogues.\(^{32}\) All three manuals are listed in the Order’s library catalogues dated 1762
proving they were property of the Order and therefore available for use by knights.\(^{33}\)

\(^{28}\) Wakasa, 6.
\(^{29}\) Buttigieg, 26.
\(^{30}\) Frà Sabha di Castiglione, 92: the sword of charity, 168: the sword of the word of God.
\(^{31}\) D’Alessandro, 287, 755-769.
\(^{33}\) NLM, Libr. Ms. 603 vol.1, 6’ Agrippa, 9’ d’Alessandro, 301’ di Grassi (1570), 367’ Labat.
3.2.3 Fashion and Gentlemen’s Accessories

During his visit to Malta, the Count of Erbach frequently mentioned the swords carried by knights and visitors. The actual type of sword was not described but each time a sword was mentioned the author gave its origin and an aesthetic description. For example one of the German visitors referred to his Florentine sword, while other Germans within the group were described as carrying ‘plain German swords’ and the Grand Master Wignacourt was described as carrying ‘a strong French sword with a richly chased hilt’. Indeed by the time of Erbach’s visit, the carrying of a sword as part of one’s dress was well established and was becoming more of a masculine ornament. Richly ornate swords by the seventeenth century were becoming smaller due to the practical reasons of carrying them around crowded urban areas and as they grew smaller, the more finely decorated they became. War implements were not exempt from the effects of fashion, as can be witnessed through the intricate suits of armour the Order had in its possession, however armour was only worn occasionally while a sword was a knight’s everyday companion making it a prominent part of a gentleman’s accessories.

For the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Oakeshott classifies swords into military and non-military. This reflects how rapiers and small-swords represented the diminishing influence of swords on the battlefield becoming articles of fashion. The de Valette sword in Vittoriosa (Figure 2.10) is the earliest form of early-rapier in Malta (sixteenth century) and could be used both as a military and a civilian weapon. Spiteri states it is too plain to belong to a Grand Master when compared to portraits of swords of contemporary gentlemen. However, closer inspection reveals a sword of a very high quality with a rosary decoration engraved into the blade. Moreover its austere features may well match the character of its implied owner. There are many seventeenth-century rapiers in the Palace armoury in Valletta but only two eighteenth-century small-swords (espadins) remain since many were usually sold at auction after the death of their owner. In fact they are mentioned in nearly all the spoils of knights in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although the small-sword had become a form of masculine jewellery, it was still a weapon and Oakeshott described it as the most elegant and deadly hand-held weapon ever.

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34 Kraus, 133.
35 Kraus, 95, 106, 110.
36 Wakasa, 184.
37 Oakeshott (2000), 236.
40 Spiteri (2003), 247.
41 Spiteri (2003), 246-247.
devised by man and was a much more efficient killing instrument than its predecessors.\textsuperscript{42} This was due to its needle sharp point and its fighting style which was aimed at the deadly thrust rather than the surface-damaging cut. Although the small-sword is seen to have marked a clear break between swords for town-wear and for military use, images of eighteenth-century knights occupying officers posts in what was becoming a Hospitaller standing army are shown wearing small-swords (Figure 3.2).\textsuperscript{43} This reveals the fine line between the military and the civilian since a military man retained the practice of carrying a sword in the eighteenth century while the small-sword remained to be carried in uniform and was merely ornamental apart from the occasional need for self-defence or duel. By this time swordplay had clearly transformed from a practical warlike exercise to a fashionable activity for men of higher rank.\textsuperscript{44} Furthermore, Tlusty describes how due to increasing restrictions, walking sticks gradually replaced swords in the late eighteenth century while only the upper classes and the military retained the right to carry a sword.\textsuperscript{45} The Hospitallers being both noble and military men may have retained the habit of carrying swords and therefore this shift may not have occurred in Hospitaller Malta, yet Spiteri’s research on spoils does reveal a few decorated walking sticks in the eighteenth century which suggests a following of international trends.\textsuperscript{46} Nevertheless, a sword at a man’s side was not merely decorative but was also a public marker of a man’s honour and reputation.\textsuperscript{47} It is for this reason that non-noble Hospitallers such as Preti and Caravaggio seemed so keen on showing their right to carry a sword.

\textsuperscript{42} Oakeshott (2000), 25.
\textsuperscript{43} Spiteri (2003), 161.
\textsuperscript{44} Wakasa, 9.
\textsuperscript{45} Tlusty, 125.
\textsuperscript{46} Spiteri (2003), 359.
\textsuperscript{47} Tlusty, 124.
Figure 3.2  Three late eighteenth-century images showing Hospitallers in uniform and in civilian clothes but all wearing a small sword and most of them also carrying a walking stick. TOP-LEFT: from the Vinkhuizen collection, TOP-RIGHT: by Zimelli, and BOTTOM: by Favray. All images retrieved online in the public domain.
3.2.4 Personal Property: Spoils of the Knights

The importance given to a knight’s personal sword is clear in the way it was treated after his death. The *Codice de Rohan* quotes an edict from la Sengle’s time (1553-1557) stating that any weapons belonging to deceased brothers both in and outside the convent belonged to the Order except swords and daggers, which were to be sold at auction. Intriguingly, walking sticks also seem to have had special treatment and were to be collected by the Marshal. Caravita’s treatise on the treasury also mentioned this detail and stated that personal swords of deceased knights were to be sold in a public auction while all other weapons went directly to the public armoury. Spiteri’s research on the armoury has revealed that a knight’s weapons were stored separately from other militia weapons to avoid pilfering of expensive equipment. Due to the vow of poverty, a knight’s property belonged to the Order and everything (except for a set fraction) went to the convent after his death. The fact that swords were not kept by the Order explains why there are so few richly decorated personal swords in the Palace Armoury and reveals a certain respect to such a weapon with an aversion to leaving it in an armoury to be used by the common soldiery or novices. It may also be realistic to assume that the Order found it more profitable to sell such expensive weapons than to keep them while some were given away in wills. One in particular lies next to the sword of de Redin in the Mdina Cathedral museum (Figure 4.5) and was bequeathed to the cathedral by the Prior of Navarre.

Table 3.1 is a list of edged weapons and walking sticks taken from Spiteri’s list in his book on the Armoury. They include weapons found in spoils, wills and *sropriamenti* of knights from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. What is revealed is the large number of decorated swords, usually with gold or silver which may have been sold at auction, explaining their absence from the Palace armoury, yet one must not ignore the fact that some may have been pilfered. The list also reveals a large variety of weapons but the majority is always swords however it is only a sample and entries with dubious dates have been left out therefore caution must be taken not to take it as representative, rather it is safer to take it as a random sample. Variances in language and general terms given to swords

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48 NLM, AOM 1663, 1782, *Codice del sacro militare Ordine Gerosolimitano, De Rohan*, 147; *Del Tesoro, delle armi trovate negli spogli dei fratelli*.
49 Caravita, 43.
50 Spiteri (2003), 79.
51 Spiteri (2008), 123.
52 ACM 81, f.29v, 1692.
53 Spiteri (2003), 359. Spoils were made by the Receiver and involved an inventory of a knight’s property after his death. Wills and *sropriamenti* were made while the knight was still alive and one listed what he would want to pass on while the other was an inventory (like the spoils) made before a knight went on campaign in case of death.
54 59 finely decorated and 45 ordinary in the seventeenth century, while 37 finely decorated and 27 ordinary in the eighteenth century.
make it difficult to ascertain exactly what kind of swords they were. Yet one may see that in the seventeenth century there seems to be fifty-nine swords described as espada, espees, epees, or spade which, assuming from the period may have been rapiers while there were twenty-five espadins, spadini or spatini which may have been small-swords. Other items included smaller amounts of daggers, maces, Turkish scimitars, pole-arms, walking sticks, only two bayonets and one sabre. In the eighteenth century one still sees a majority of swords with forty-one espadas, espees, epees, or spade (possibly rapiers) and twelve espadins or spadino (possibly small-swords). There are also daggers, Turkish ‘cortelli’, pole-arms and four bayonets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>17th century</th>
<th>18th century</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 espadas</td>
<td>2 espadas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 espees</td>
<td>11 espees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 epees</td>
<td>14 epees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 spade</td>
<td>14 spade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 espadins</td>
<td>11 espadins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 spadini</td>
<td>1 spadino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 spatini</td>
<td>2 pugnali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sabres</td>
<td>3 cortelli turci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 mazza</td>
<td>4 bayonets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 pugnali</td>
<td>2 pole-arms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 stilettos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 bayonets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 scimitars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pole-arms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sticks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 A list of weapons found in knights’ spropriamenti, wills and spoils in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Taken from Spiteri (2003), 359.

3.2.5 Swords in Images

Swords were key elements in a Hospitaller’s masculine identity as they were fundamental for their image as Christian warriors. The symbolic meaning of swords in imagery is vast and based on the sword’s Christian and chivalric metaphors of justice, authority as well as martyrdom. Caravaggio’s beheading of St. John shows a sword lying on the floor while the

55 The swords are presented the way they were written with no attempt at correction.
56 Buttigieg, 164.
executor finished the job with a knife, symbolising the martyrdom of the patron Saint of the Order. Images in the Statuta Hospitalis Heirusalem give hints at the difference between civilian and military swords within the Order. The second cover-image (Figure 2.2) shows Grand Master Verdalle receiving a side-sword typically used in battle in the sixteenth century, while the tenth image (Figure 3.3) reveals a knight (identified by the Order’s cross) in civilian clothes during an audience with the Grand Master wearing a finely decorated swept hilt rapier, most definitely for civilian not military use. Such details reveal the marriage of the civilian and military in the Order existed, the same as it did in the rest of Europe.

Figure 3.3 The tenth illustration of the Statuta Hospitalis Heirusalem (1588), in the chapter of Locations (p.174) showing a knight in civilian clothes and carrying a swept-hilt rapier (LEFT: close-up).

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59 Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem (Rome, 1588), 174.
Many Hospitallers were depicted in portraits holding or wearing swords and sometimes wearing armour which helped assert an image of masculinity and military prestige. These images enforced the Hospitaller identity of chaste Christian warriors which set them apart from other men. A large number of Hospitaller portraits can be viewed throughout Europe but they carry a common formula of the masculine and the military, using common objects such as a sword, the cross of the Order, a shield, and occasionally armour. The images range from Grand Masters’ portraits to individual knights. It seems a trend was set for both established and aspirant members of the Order to put their image on canvas with these objects in order to endorse their membership. Images such as Wignacourt’s impressive portrait (Figure 2.1) have survived their protagonists, allowing us to have windows into their lives. Below is an example of a typical portrait of a sixteenth-century Hospitaller revealing the common characteristics of sword, shield and armour.

![Figure 3.4](image)

1550, Unknown artist, Frà Leone Strozzi (1515–1554), Museum of the Order of St John, London.

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60 Buttigieg, 138-139.
61 See also images of l’Isle Adam (figure 4.11), and Vilhena (figure 4.7) for other portraits of Grand Masters of the Order, each showing different swords depending on epoch and context.
The two most notable Hospitaller artists are undoubtedly Michelangelo Merisi de Caravaggio and Matia Preti. Both were honorary knights of the Order in Malta in the seventeenth century and had a fascination with bladed weapons, portraying them frequently in their works. Both men were painters and not military men yet they fit into the civilian dimension of Hospitallers and swords since they both illustrated the appeal of weapons and most certainly owned some. They made efforts to be seen with a sword and used them to signify their belonging to the knightly class while, in Caravaggio’s case, also knew how to use them. It is known that Cravaggio was a swordsman from his engagements in duels and brawls which frequently got him into trouble and he took pride in wearing his sword in public.62

3.3 Weapon Legislation and Law Enforcement

Malta reflected the trends in Europe through the weapons legislation the Order introduced, which was usually done in response to a need for control of civilian violence. One sees similar control measures to Europe where firearms were particularly frowned upon and could not be carried in public unless with a special license. The carrying of any weapons in Auberges was prohibited and the ban on duels was extended to habitual duel grounds such as the outskirts and bastions of Valletta.63 In a 1568 decree knights were only allowed a sword and dagger when off militia duty while firearms were kept in the Armeria Pubblica. In 1569 another decree stated the sword had to be sheathed.64 Caravaggio experienced such impositions when in Rome but in Malta he gained the right to carry a sword due to his knighthood of Magistral Obedience which although lesser in rank than the noble knighthood of Justice, still had its prestige.65

Similar to the blade-length impositions in England, a 1574 Chapter General imposed the length of four palms to any swords carried in public.66 In 1612, a law was passed to control brethren from taking weapons in the Auberges.67 This is given more explicitly in the Rohan code where it is stated that all weapons (swords and daggers mentioned specifically) were to be left outside when meeting for chapters, councils and other official meetings.68 One may see an extension to this law during interim periods of government after the death of

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63 Buttigieg, 165.
64 Spiteri (2003), 72.
65 Sciberras, 29. Stone, 577.
66 NLM, AOM 290, f.37, 1574, Chapter General
67 NLM, AOM 295, f.110v, 1612, Chapter General: ‘chi no portino armi nella lingue e collitti’
68 NLM, AOM 1663, 1782, Codice del sacro militare Ordine Gerosolimitano, De Rohan, f.268: Del Consiglio
a Grand Master where temporary bans on weapons seem to have been enforced during the
election process to diminish chances of violent encounters. A decree in 1568 imposed
restrictions on weapons carried in the convent (Birgu) exempting knights who were allowed
to carry a sword and a dagger. The need to impose such a law at this time may reflect the
post siege period where Malta was still exiting a military emergency and the presence of
heavily armed men in the convent was dangerous for civic peace. Regulations and
punishments for knights who gambled their weapons or habits also existed. This shows
how swords together with the habit, symbolised membership, and were treated with respect
by the Order.

Malta had a peculiar setup because of its four-part authority: the Grand Master, the
Inquisitor, the Bishop and to a limited extent: the Università. This makes the study of
weapons legislation complicated and factors such as whom fell under one law and who was
exempt from another cloud the general picture. It is clear at least that the Master Esquire
(Mastro Scudiere) was in charge of policing the knights themselves. He was explicitly
ordered to arrest any knight bearing weapons after de Valette’s death in 1568 while his
policing duties and power to infer punishments are described in the treatise: Remarques sur
l’office de Maitre Ecuyer. On the other hand, both Cavaliero and Hunt describe Caravaggio
being arrested by another official (a Grand Viscount) after his brawl in Malta. The Grand
Viscount (Gran Visconte) was a senior police official (sometimes Maltese) who was
responsible for the good behaviour of everyone except the knights. This setup is not so
alien to modern day practice since while the civilian population of a country are under the
jurisdiction of the police force, military personnel are regulated by internal military police
both when in their home country and abroad. Caravaggio was not arrested by the Master
Esquire, but by the civilian police (Grand Viscount) which confirms he did not have the full
rights of a knight of justice.

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69 As was decreed after the death of Grand Master de Valette in 1568. NLM, AOM 92, f.90-91, 1568.
70 NLM, AOM 92, f.71-72, 1568: ‘Ordinazione ebe li frati di Convento non portino alter armi ebe spade
e pugnale’.
71 NLM, AOM 295, de Prohibitionibus, f.110, 1612: ‘contro chi gioca l’armi o le vesti’, it is specified that
any who gambled their weapons or habit lost one year’s seniority.
73 NLM, AOM 1689, 17th century, Remarques sur l’office de Maitre Ecuyer.
74 Cavaliero, 61. Hunt, 119.
75 Cavaliero, 38.
3.4 Knightly Duelling and Brawling

Anglo opens his edited work on chivalry in the Renaissance describing the duel as a psychosocial malaise of the elite, a manifestation of the crisis of the aristocracy and a ritualisation of the brutality of the ruling class who were feeling increasingly insecure in the social changes of the early modern world.\(^{76}\) It was a form of defiance to the centralisation of government and an affirmation of their obsolete values. The dueling craze of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a progression from the medieval judicial duels and increased due to the trend of swords being worn in everyday life.\(^{77}\) The rapier became the primary duelling weapon relegating long-sword fencing to a kind of sport or martial art while duelling with guns was generally seen as dishonourable and the sword as a symbol of nobility was preferred.\(^{78}\) The military revolution contributed to the duel since it made the armoured knight obsolete and offered less occasions for the gentleman soldier to distinguish himself in single combat.\(^{79}\) Furthermore, the duelling ground was more honourably appealing since in the battlefield one could die randomly while the duel set a standard for honourable fighting offering single combat on equal terms.\(^{80}\) Before analyzing the negative and positive effects of early modern duels, one must define the duel from any other forms of violence:

A duel was defined as a physical combat deliberately planned with the mutual consent of the two parties and fought for vindication from an alleged offense, for glory, or because of excessive hatred. Consent is on both sides and not on just the aggressor and there is agreement on weapons, place and time but the duel may still happen on impulse provided there is an accepted challenge with specified weapons. The duel replaces a suit of law in being physical and based on chance or skill.\(^{81}\)

3.4.1 The Modern Duel and the Elites

Medieval duels used a variety of weapons and armour and were made in closed lists, but after the sixteenth century the sword was preferred and by the end of the century duelling without armour on the street with only a sword was the norm; an activity considered dishonourable by early sixteenth-century masters like Pietro Monte.\(^{82}\) This attitude seems to have endured at least in what was idealized, as depicted in an allegorical image by Vulson (1648) where the armoured duel is promoted as honourable and just and the unarmoured

\(^{76}\) Anglo, ‘How to Kill a Man at Your Ease: Fencing Books and the Dueling Ethic’ (1990), 2.
\(^{77}\) Loades, 245.
\(^{78}\) Tlusty, 107-109.
\(^{79}\) Quint, 231.
\(^{80}\) Quint, 232, 242.
\(^{81}\) Bryson, 233-234.
\(^{82}\) Anglo, ‘How to Kill a Man at Your Ease: Fencing Books and the Dueling Ethic’ (1990), 4.
The duel, therefore, evolved from combat on horseback and armour to the less formal fencing with the rapier in civilian clothes which gave even non-military nobles a chance to assert their membership in a military class. Although less formal than the judicial duels, the modern duel had rules such as the need to issue a warning and based on agreed-upon regulations therefore formalising a fight. This could mean the difference between manslaughter and murder where without such measures any instant fight was regarded as a brawl.

Figure 3.5 Allegorical image by Vulson (1648) lauding the medieval judicial duel while condemning the modern duel. Anglo (2000), 277.

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84 Quint, 231.
85 Tusty, 106.
The sword was common to every nation and was the most generally used weapon. It was seen as the only weapon which showed the skill of its user; being ornamental as well as offensively and defensively practical, it was considered the quintessential duelling tool. It fitted well with the noble implications of honour in a duel but above else it was also the most easily procured weapon since by the sixteenth century, nearly everyone carried one. With the evolution of the lighter more portable rapier, came the proliferation of ‘modern’ duell-oriented fencing styles in the sixteenth century. The Italian method prevailed and influenced others such as the Dutch, French and German while the Spanish remained distinct. It was, as Anglo put it, the Italian master who turned rough personal combat into the ‘art of fence’ and reduced everything to rules. Warlike sports died down in the Enlightenment but duelling continued, echoing gladiatorial fights but still expressing the decorum of self control. The era of the knights in Malta coincided with the duelling age in Europe. The Order was seen by contemporaries as a means for restless (noble) youths to channel their violence in a fight against ‘true’ enemies, thus avoiding them getting hostile with each other. The success of this ‘violence valve’ is questionable since the Order’s archives are rich in cases of violence between Hospitallers from personal confrontations to group ‘nationalistic’ fights. In Hospitaller terms violence was not always dysfunctional since the Order was based on a fusion of religion and war where the line between accepted and unauthorized violence was very thin. Violence was a masculine prerogative and was an integral (though not condoned) aspect of masculine expression in knighthood. The duel served to uphold a Hospitaller’s honour, reputation and status the same way it served men in the rest of Europe. The frequency of duels seems no less than the mainland, especially since Malta was always full of Hospitallers of all ranks with a right to carry a sword easily used in fights set against a backdrop of drinking and gambling which seem to have been the staple activities of many idle Hospitallers. Patrick Brydone erroneously wrote in 1773 that duels in Malta were legal albeit well controlled; nonetheless his account reveals that at this time duels in Malta were still evident enough for a foreign visitor to notice. Furthermore, the amount of legislation against duelling in Malta reveals that it constituted a major problem. This is understandable since the knights were warriors prepared to defend their honour with

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86 Bryson, 53.
87 Anglo, ‘How to Kill a Man at Your Ease: Fencing Books and the Dueling Ethic’ (1990), 5.
88 Anglo, ‘How to Kill a Man at Your Ease: Fencing Books and the Dueling Ethic’ (1990), 8.
89 McClelland, 138.
90 Hale, 22.
92 Buttigieg, 161-165.
93 Bonello, 69.
The motives Hospitallers had for duelling are rarely revealed though some notion of national rivalry seemed to prevail. Bosio for example notes such a duel which escalated to disastrous proportions. A duel between a French knight and an Italian gentleman in 1533 resulted in the death of the Frenchman but also led to a large scale armed conflict between the French and the Italian Langues where even firearms were used and as Bosio put it, the brethren risked tearing each other to pieces and resulted in the Grand Master expelling a dozen knights from the Order. Another ‘national’ duel was one of the last to be recorded in Malta (1790) where an Italian knight, Frà Mazzacarne killed a French captain, Segond, in a spontaneous duel with a sword while the Frenchman was armed only with an umbrella. The Italian knight was defrocked and handed over to the civil courts.

### 3.4.2 Legislation on Duels

It is clear that the Order followed the guidelines set by the church in condemning duels with increased ardour after the Council of Trent in 1563 where by the end of the sixteenth century the duel was completely forbidden by both secular and ecclesiastic law, punishable with excommunication. The Order made duels illegal at least since the Mastership of Zacosta (1461-1467) where it was dictated that a knight assisting a duel lost his seniority and spent two months in the tower, while in 1534 the *Stabilimenta Militum* also included censures for duelling. The Inquisition also took part in the charging of knights and censored banned books like when in 1609, one of the books registered to have been burned was a Neapolitan duelling manual, most probably Muzio’s *Il Duello* (1550). The same book was found in the possession of another knight in 1648 and confiscated by the Inquisition.

Further laws against duelling followed such as la Cassiere’s edict for the challenger to be expelled from the Order and the extended banishment of duels outside Valletta and on the city walls as well as applying the same punishments to brawls. The Chapter General of 1631 also confirmed a decree against duelling while la Cassiere’s bans were printed in the 1676 Statuti. In the eighteenth century, Vilhena (1722-1736) further refined the laws against duelling where participants were to be tried under martial law without formalities and under torture and if found guilty condemned to death, their bodies to remain hung on the gallows.

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94 Bonello, 72.
95 Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 122.
96 NLM, AOM 6410, f.90, 1790, *Scritture relative alla causa del cavaliere Luigi Mazzacarne*.
97 Bryson, 133. Bonello, 70. Buttigieg, 165.
98 Bonello, 70.
99 Bonello, 81, 71.
100 Buttigieg, 118.
101 *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem* (Rome, 1588), 190.
In 1787 the Council published the *Ordinazioni* which also prohibited duels.\(^{102}\) The Order seems to have followed the European trend of being stricter with its common soldiers since a military law for the *regimento di Malta* stated any soldier causing any member of the Order to grab the guard of the sword would be hanged.\(^{103}\) However the Order seems to have made efforts not to give its knights too many privileges and made sure they would not use them to bully the rest of the population as is shown in the trial and sentencing of Frà Mazzacarne (1790) for killing a civilian in an unfair duel.\(^{104}\) This was in line with the updated statutes of the *Codice de Rohan* a few years before where any knight who killed a knight or civilian *a tradimento* with sword and dagger (specifically mentioned) or any other weapon would be de-frocked and handed over to the civil courts.\(^{105}\) The *Codice* summarises a number of edicts passed in the previous centuries but the fact that they were still deemed important in the late eighteenth century meant that duelling was still a problem to be controlled.\(^{106}\)

On the other hand, the duel was seen as a rational form of controlled violence and any attempt the Order made to regulate it was contradictory since the elders of the Order formed part of the same warrior culture that defended honour by any means while at the same time they needed to control the social fabric from rupturing through mass violence like Bosio described in 1533.\(^{107}\) Among its attempts to avoid disruptive violence the order organized tournaments and physical exercises to avoid the knights wasting energy on bad habits but even these were strictly controlled since most exercises were violent in themselves. When exercising in arms, Langues were kept separate to avoid national rivalry and during tournaments and jousts four commissioners were elected from four nations to act as judges and harshly punish any participants who acted hostile as well as stop any brawls that may arise.\(^{108}\)

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102 Bonello, 70-72.
103 NLM, AOM 273, f.245\(^v\), 1780, De Rohan.
104 NLM, AOM 6410, f.90, 1790.
105 NLM, AOM 1663, 1782, *Codice del sacro militare Ordine Gerosolimitano, De Rohan*, 406: *Delle Proibizioni*. (For this law, the Codice quotes from various Masters' statutes including De Corneillan-1350s, Zacosta-1460s, La Sengle-1550s, and Del Monte-1560s).
106 NLM, AOM 1663, 1782, *Codice del sacro militare Ordine Gerosolimitano, De Rohan*, 408-409: *Delle Proibizioni*. Rohan, contro i tumultuanti: any knight or novice involved in an armed riot would be confined to 3 years in the guva and 6 years in the castello. La Cassiere, contro coloro che provengano a duello, o l’accettano, ed i complici: anyone who wasted the health of his soul at duelling would be defrocked and if anyone is killed will be handed over to the Secular courts. 409 cont.: The following point specified that duels outside Valletta were also considered illegal (this clearly made to combat a legal loophole in duelling legislation).
107 Buttigieg, 167.
108 NLM, Libr. Ms. 1377, Progetto per Novizi dell’Ordine, 1753, 6\(^r\).
3.4.3 Castiglione’s Advice on Duels

Baldassare Castiglione argued that the gentleman was to be knowledgeable in weapons used both in war and duels. He further explained that ‘if one is too eager to fight without the most urgent causes he merits punishment even if successful. But when in a duel one must not show cowardice and always show readiness and daring’. What is stated here is a public promotion of duelling albeit with reserve and prudence. This is typical of the literature of the time which although condemning duelling, still allowed a gentleman a loophole to fight for his honour if forced to. This created a difficult grey area in legislation on duelling. Nowhere was it more difficult than in the Order, since it was a religious order of the Church (which outwardly condemned duels) and a noble militia with all the cultural baggage such a group of elite warriors brought. Baldassare’s cousin Frà Sabba di Castiglione must have had a very difficult time when advising on how to manage a duel as a Hospitaller himself and had to tread a very narrow line to avoid his work being banned like Muzio’s Duello.

Frà Sabba mentions the subject of duelling twice in his Ricordi. Once in Ricordo 38, Circa il fuggire l’otio and another longer argument in Ricordo 120, Del Capitano d’Armi. Both mention duels in different contexts where the first one refers to personal duels of honour while the second speaks about the more accepted classical state duel but with direct applications to the individual duel. In the period Frà Sabba was writing, duelling had not degraded into the violent craze it did in the seventeenth century while duels of state or even authorised judicial duels were still existent albeit uncommon. Therefore his teachings on the subject of duelling were very much in context of the period he lived in.

Ricordo 38, Regarding avoiding idleness:

And yet I believe it would not be of little merit to our Lord God, or of little praise to the men of the world, that you had some understanding and knowledge of the reasons for the duel, because happening the need, as a religious knight you could style, stow, and compose with effective and live reasons many differences, quarrels and armed fights, which each of them madly, with the risk and expense of the body and worse, of the soul are committed only for the ignorance of the presumptuous people who do not know the duel, neither do they know how and when it is permissible to duel, and granted; I remind you so much for reading and studying some breaths of the authors of any authentic ancient and modern, Latin and vernacular, who wrote on the duel especially M Paris de Puteo noble Neapolitan.

Otio, as translated from Latin means to be at leisure (i.e. wasting time) and was condemned as inviting bad habits. The fact that he included this passage on duelling in
this section fits with the Order’s attitude of ‘keeping busy’ to avoid bad habits such as gambling and duelling. What is remarkable is that although his advice is to avoid armed fights he insinuated times when a duel would be permissible and to support this he advised to read the available literature on the laws of duelling where he specifically mentioned an established author on the subject.\textsuperscript{112} It seems he, like other contemporary authors of his time, condemned the duel but admitted its need in extreme cases and referred specifically to publications on judicial duels, avoiding the still new and controversial subject of personal duels of honour.

\textit{Ricordo} 120, About the Captain at arms:

And if you ask me, if by herald or trumpet I were solemnly presented with the glove of the day [duel] what would you have me do? I will tell you that you first have to seek the advice of time, then with the captains of his army, and being that his purpose having live and effective reasons in persuading them to do it, accept it boldly in the name of our Lord God. But if it should seem to him or his captains not the time to accept it, refuse, because you could refuse without receiving blame: because the wise and valiant captain must first think about winning and not fighting, and if having to fight it, must not fight to the petition and will of the enemy, but to his own, which will be, as I said above ruled by occasion, or necessity. But if by chance another captain provoked him to single combat, and you were to ask me what must he do, I will tell you that being at the salary of others, whether by an emperor, a king, or a republic, no one can oblige this battle without licence of his superior, to whom his person is obliged while the expedition lasts. But when a captain is absolute and free, I say that if a private knight legitimately sought to correct a lawsuit by another knight with a duel, he cannot refuse under reproach of cowardice, because the office of the knight is to fight. Likewise the infantryman, being challenged by another infantryman his equal, with just cause to duel cannot escape it without notice of cowardice, because of his profession of fighting: I believe, however, that the captain-general, whose action and profession is to win and not to fight personally, unless necessary for victory, without any load on his honour can refuse the duel, while when accepting would be failing the attitude of a wise captain. And if a Captain-General was obliged to duel this would be a great inconvenience.\textsuperscript{113}

This passage has a number of points regarding the outlook on duelling by a puritan yet practical Hospitaller. The subject of duelling is here discussed within a military context of how a knight, soldier, or commander should deal with an invitation to a duel when on campaign (i.e. under the martial law of an army). He advised first to allow time to pass until the challenger sought other ways to settle the dispute but then advised that any duel, while under military command had to have the consent of the commanders of the army, and if not allowed by the commanders, the duel could be refused without loss of honour since at that

\textit{continuo il fuggirete, come nemico capital d’ogni virtù.}

\textsuperscript{112} Paris de Puteo (a.k.a. Paride del Pozzo) lived in the fifteenth century and was Inquisitor general and auditor general in the Kingdom of Naples. He wrote a number of law treatises including a detailed treatise on the judicial duel. Ennio Cortese, ‘Dal Pozzo, Paride’, \textit{Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani}, volume 32, 1986, retrieved on 18 Friday 2014 from \url{http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/paride-dal-pozzo_(Dizionario-Biografico/}.

\textsuperscript{113} Translated from Frà Sabba di Castiglione, \textit{Ricordo 120, Del Capitano d’Armi}, 203'-204'.

64
time the knight was in total obedience and service to his commander. But he then quickly moved on to how a military man (knight or soldier) should manage a duel when off duty (absolute and free) where he stated that a knight or soldier cannot refuse such a challenge since his occupation was that of arms, except if that knight was a captain-general where in that case, being responsible for so many lives, he had a right to refuse a duel. This passage seems to oblige military men to accept a duel when challenged even though the Order made duelling illegal a hundred years before. This is in direct opposition to the Order’s statutes but it seems that Frà Sabba wished to include such practical advice due to the high probability a Hospitaller had of being involved in a duel at some point in his life. He did this by infiltrating the argument of how to accept or refuse a duel into a setup of an army or militia, which in the Order’s case was a permanent situation since the knights were members of a permanent militia and owed obedience to their Grand Master.

3.5 Conclusion

The Order was composed of lay men who took religious vows and whose principal occupation was that of war. Regardless of being in a perpetual state of war, its members found themselves for most of their lives as warriors in a civilian setting where they had to interact with the daily activities of the general population and were influenced by their civilian peers. The Hospitallers did not live a separate life from the world and followed the same trends in fashion and culture which, rather than being shunned, were merged into their religious life creating a delicate balance between the religious, the military and the civilian.

The Order as an institution reveals a lot about the social aspects of armed civilian Hospitallers mainly through its legislation against excessive weapons use and violence such as brawls and duels. Being a religious organisation, it was obliged to follow the edicts of the Catholic Church and under the watchful eye of the Inquisition struggled to maintain a balance in a very volatile situation of multi-national groups of young men within its ranks with all the social problems such a setup brought. Cracks in this balance occurred through occasional violent outbreaks and what seems to have been a continuous occurrence of personal violence and duels right up until the Order’s departure from the island.
Chapter Four
SWORDS AS GIFTS AND SWORDS IN RITUALS

4.1 Introduction
Aside from being symbols of knighthood, swords were used in texts, images and monuments as civic representations of authority and justice. The sword is also a Christian symbol of martyrdom and of St. Paul where the shape of the medieval Crusader sword became a symbolic representation of the crucifix itself which welded the weapon to Christianity and its defence. Another Christian symbol included the seven swords of sorrow attributed to Our Lady of Sorrows, commonly represented by seven swords radiating outward from her breast, symbolising her seven sorrows. The sword, as a symbol of the sorrow of the Virgin, was later simplified to a single jewelled hilt that pierced her breast. Such strong symbolic meanings made the sword a metaphoric tool to be used not just in prose and art but applied also to more worldly activities such as diplomacy and public manifestations.

Many countries in Europe cherish a symbolic sword representing a celebrated person like William Wallace in Scotland or Charlemagne in France, where incidentally another iconic sword lies: the ‘Sword of the Religion’ which was de Valette’s accolade given to him by King Philip II of Spain after the siege of Malta in 1565. The Order subsequently used this sword in many rituals and it was venerated as a relic among the Order’s most precious treasures. This sword represents two strong dimensions: it was a political gift from one ruler to another and a public icon used in rituals. The Order’s use of a sword as a symbol in public rituals was common practice in Europe like the ceremonial ‘bearing swords’ in the English dynasty from the fourteenth century to this day, Charlemagne’s sword Joyeuse used in France’s coronation ceremonies, and the sword of England’s Henry V publicly revered during his funeral in 1422. The Order used swords in many of its ceremonies such as the investitures, the possesso of the towns of Mdina and Birgu and the great siege celebrations. According to Jordanova some objects such as portraits, relics and icons have enough

1 Hall, 294-295.
5 Loades, 125, 161.
significance to embody attributes and people. Through this, objects such as the swords mentioned here acquired active lives, power and were esteemed.

Public religious devotion in the Order seems to have increased after the Council of Trent giving rise to a situation where civic and religious ceremonies combined in order to send bilateral messages to the population. A ritual is described in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as ‘a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order; a collective, symbolic and repetitive action’. The Order had various forms of rituals such as the investiture ceremony (private) and the posessio ceremonies (public). These were collective ceremonies involving swords used in symbolic form. State funerals for heads of state constitute another form of public ritual and are to this day accompanied by a military presence. Research on Hospitaller funerals has revealed that it was exactly the same state of affairs with the Order’s Grand Masters. Swords were used in these ceremonies, as representations of the deceased Grand Master.

4.2 Gifts

The Hospitaller Order was very active in exchanging gifts and knew how to exploit them to further its own diplomacy. Gifts were given at all levels of the Hospitaller hierarchy and varied from livestock, food, relics, works of art, and of course swords. Some sword-gifts were produced for the specific purpose of gift-giving while others were practical weapons which were given by their owner.

4.2.1 The Sword of the Religion

The most notable of all Hospitaller swords is unquestionably what is commonly referred to as the ‘sword of the religion’. It currently resides at the Louvre in Paris with its matching dagger after Napoleon Bonaparte took possession of them both in 1798. The sword appears to be a typical sixteenth-century early rapier but the rich gilding and decorations reveal an

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6 Jordanova, 5.
7 Cassar (2011), 70.
8 OED online, [From http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/ritual?q=ritual].
obvious ceremonial function (Figure 4.1). According to Reneudeau, the sword bears a strong resemblance to four other precious gift swords given to European monarchs by the Habsburgs and most probably came out of the same workshop, following a trend of weapons gift exchange during the sixteenth century. The sword was given to de Valette in 1566 to honour his victory in the siege of Malta in 1565. A letter written in Spanish and dated June 1566 can be found in the Liber Conciliorum from Philip II highlighting the donation of this gift to de Valette. The Grand Master would have found difficulty in not accepting such a gift from what was technically his feudal lord. This gift, although in recognition of an impressive military achievement, was typical of Habsburg Spain and may have had loyalty issues attached to it. It is interesting to note how de Valette refused a gift given to him in the same period also in recognition for the siege from the Pope (his immediate superior) who offered him the Cardinal’s hat. This refusal may have been made to avoid the obligations a title of cardinal would have imposed. Philip II’s sword was given as a military symbol and fitted perfectly in the Habsburgs’ strategy of using the Order’s military resources in distant Malta as a shield against Ottoman expansion. De Valette seems to have turned this gift around, astutely removing it off his shoulders when he decreed that it was to be given to the Order and to Malta as a reminder of their victory against the Ottomans. The Notizia describing this decree stated that it was to be carried in procession by the most honoured page every 8th September and was to be kept with the Order’s most precious treasures. From 1566, the sword was used in every yearly celebration of the ‘great siege’ on the 8 of September, where it was publicly exhibited in procession like a relic. It was used in other public representations of the Order’s authority such as the possesso ceremonies Grand Masters made on their election to the towns of Mdina and Birgu. It was also used during

12 Reneudeau, 262.
13 NLM, AOM 91, f.163r, 1566. Translation: His Majesty the king, sends his sword to VS most Illustrious, in signal of the past victory; for he with his valour and effort, showed himself to be one of the most leading knights and great captains of the Christian community. And so for this reason, and because his majesty wishes, so that the whole world would know the great satisfaction to which he holds the person of VS most Illustrious, I command for his part that the sword be presented in public’.
14 Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 720.
15 Bradford, 226.
16 NLM, Libr. Ms.XVII, f.252, Notizia della spade e pugnale che Filippo II nel 1566 mando a La Valletta. Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 767: ‘E però ordinò, che quella Regia Spada, e Pugnale con la sua cintura; riporti follerò nel Tolo delle dieci chiavi, fra le cose più pregiate e care della Religione; e che ogni anno nella solenne Proccisione, che come di sopra detto habbiamo, era stato ordinato dal General Capitolo, che far si dovesse nella Festa della Natività dell’istessa Vergine sacratissima si portasse pubblicamente per Trofèo; rinouando anco ogni anno in tal manierala grata,e perpetua memoria, che questa Religione debbe conservare della generosità, e magnanima bonità di tanto Re. Il che si è poi inviolabilmente osservato di far ogni anno; portando la detta Spada, e Pugnale in mano, dinanzi al Gran Maestro, à capo scoperto; uno dei Nobilissimi Paggi Suoi, che ordinariamente vuol essere il più favorito, e Figliuolo di qualche Principe, o gran Signore’.
18 NLM, AOM 260, f.184v, 1663 (Nicolo Cottoner’s possesso of Mdina). Anthony Zammit Gabaretta, ‘Solemn Entrance of Grand Master Frà Raimundus de Perellos Rocafull into the city of Vittoriosa and its
the funeral of Grand Master de Valette himself.\textsuperscript{19} It seems the ageing Grand Master handled the gift of this sword so well that he turned it not only into a symbol of the Order’s military achievements, but an icon of the Order in Malta, immortalising his name as the hero of the Great Siege in steel.

Walsham describes a relic as a material object that relates to a particular individual or event, where it can be used as an instrument of legitimation of authority as well as a material manifestation of the act of remembrance.\textsuperscript{20} Philip II’s gift-sword’s use as remembrance of both de Valette during his funeral, the victory of the 1565 siege in the 8 September celebrations and as a symbol of the successive Grand Masters’ authority during their \textit{possesso} ceremonies effectively fit it into Walsham’s definition. Philip II’s gift-sword may not be regarded as a religious relic in the strict sense since it was not attributed to a saint or holy person such as is described in the OED.\textsuperscript{21} It however follows in the tradition of other well known swords in inspiring public memory of their famous owners.\textsuperscript{22} The sword fits into Buhagiar’s description of Hospitaller relics; in being of prime political and religious prestige, used for gift making and public ritual, treasured with reverence and exposed for the public on particular feast days where its use in rituals was applied with great pageantry.\textsuperscript{23} The question of whether a weapon of a non-holy person may be described as a relic is not the scope of this study. It is the importance given to such a weapon by an institution such as the Order for over two hundred years which gives weight to such an argument.

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\textsuperscript{19} NLM, AOM 92, f.90-91, 1568.


\textsuperscript{21} ‘a part of a deceased holy person’s body or belongings kept as an object of reverence’. OED online, [From \url{http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/relic?q=relic}].

\textsuperscript{22} Loades, xvi-xvii, such as swords belonging to famous public figures including King Henry V of England, Emperor Maximilian I of the HRE, and King Henry IV of France among others.

Figure 4.1 The hilt of the Sword of the Religion (Taken by Daniel Cilia, Flair Magazine, The Malta Independent on Sunday, 22 March, 2009).
4.2.2 The Crusader King’s Sword

A lesser known gift-sword was presented to the Order while it was still in Rhodes and is mentioned in Bosio’s *Historia*. It predated the gift given by the King of Spain in 1566 and was given by another great patron of the Order, France. This illustrates the diplomatic relations the Order had with powerful states in Europe. According to Bosio, this sword was given by King Louis XII to Master d’Amboise in 1503 during a diplomatic visit. It is described in Bosio as the sword St. Louis IX used in his Crusades and was accompanied by a piece of the True Cross. The Order, however does not seem to have treated this sword with more respect it showed to any of its other gifts and relics, since Bosio again described this sword in his *Historia* as one of the gifts given by the Order to the head of a Christian coalition force, the Viceroy of Sicily Juan de la Cerda in 1559 on the occasion of the Order’s participation in the invasion of Tripoli that year against Dragut. It seems this gift was again accompanied by a piece of the True Cross of Christ. Contrary to Philip II’s sword which reached iconic status this sword was treated as one of the many diplomatic gifts the Order constantly exchanged as part of its diplomatic relations and it stayed in the Order’s possession for only fifty six years. Due to the lack of documentation on this sword, a description or image of it is lacking but based on its assumed ownership by the Crusader Saint-King of France, it must have been a typical thirteenth-century sword used by knights during the High Middle Ages.

4.2.3 De Valette’s Battle-sword

Another Hospitaller sword is shrouded in further mystery, but its location is well known as it is still in Malta. Information about its origins is very scarce and it merits mentioning because of its strong tradition in local collective memory. It is the presumed personal battle-sword of de Valette donated to the chapel of Our Lady of Damascus in Birgu (Vittoriosa) at the end of the siege of 1565. It currently lies within the same chapel which is now annexed to the church museum (previously the Oratory of St. Joseph) and is displayed with a hat traditionally also associated with the Grand Master. A search through the Order’s archives (specifically the *Liber Conciliorum* of 1565 to 1566) reveals nothing and even Bosio fails to mention it in his *Historia*. Other texts on the great siege such as Balbi di Correggio’s account also do not mention it. Many modern references to the sword seem to be based on tradition and are not backed by historical evidence, such as Schermerhorn’s *Malta of the Knights*.  

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24 Bosio (1695), vol.2, 575.  
25 Bosio (1695), vol. 3, 413.  
26 Balbi de Correggio (1965).  
27 Schermerhorn, 66. See also Vito Borgia, *Our Lady of Damascus. The Story of an Icon* (London,
The sword itself is a sixteenth-century battle sword (a form of early rapier, commonly referred to as a side-sword) and is similar to ones produced in Saxony. The width of the blade suggests it is made for battle rather than civilian use (Figure 4.4) and the lack of decoration apart from a rosary engraved on the blade are highly suggestive that it could have belonged to a Hospitaller. The hat of the Grand Master is commonly seen in portraits and described in ceremonies as a symbol of the Magistracy and, like the stock and pilier, seems like a fitting combination to be given as a gift. A visit to the site reveals a strong local pride connected to the two items and they form the centre piece of the museum with a lot of signage describing them as de Valette’s relics. The sword and hat are placed inside a cabinet in the chapel of Our Lady of Damascus and seem to lie in their original place, at least since 1779 when the chapel was restored by Grand Master de Rohan. This is proven by a marble plaque located directly under them dated 1779 describing the restoration of the chapel which had fallen into disrepair and it specifically describes it as the site in which de Valette ‘willingly and joyfully’ hung his sword and hat as thanksgiving to Our Lady for the victory in 1565 (Figure 4.2). Although a search in the Liber Conciliorum Status of the years 1778 to 1780 for any mention of this restoration proved futile, the plaque itself, erected during the Order’s reign in Malta is very suggestive of their authenticity.

29 The Magistral Hat can be seen in various Grand Master portraits such as of Cottoner (Preti), de Redin (Preti) and Ximenez (Favray) and in Bernardo Giustiniani’s Historie Cronoligiche dell’ Origine degli Ordini Militari (Venice, 1692), p.264.
Considering the lack of written evidence, there are many points in favour to the authenticity of the sword particularly the marble plaque itself which seems genuine and specifically mentions the sword and the date de Valette donated it. The site in which it is placed looks untouched and makes historical sense since the chapel is near the church of St. Lawrence and a stone’s throw away from the main town square, both central locations used in the Great Siege, making the chapel a convenient site for the Grand Master to meditate and pray. De Valette had lived in Rhodes and may have felt at home praying in the Greek chapel of the famous Icon from Damascus. The Grand Master’s dedication to Our Lady is evident through his decree to commemorate the victory of the siege every 8 September in her honour where he ‘gave’ his Philip II gift-sword to be used for this occasion, an act he may have similarly done with his personal sword inside the Greek chapel a year before. The sword itself fits in the right time period and is perfect for a Hospitaller knight in being simply decorated but of a very high quality (Figure 4.3). Finally, the presence of numerous ex-votos in the chapel itself seem to back this theory, especially since there are three other swords on display (two French bayonets and a Japanese katana left as a war trophy) described as ex-
votos in thanksgiving for surviving the Second World War.\textsuperscript{30} These reveal a tradition of *ex-votos* in this chapel possibly following the footsteps of de Valette. A deeper search in the Order’s archives as well as the notarial and parish archives to search for a possible contract binding the Grand Master’s donation may reveal more information, although the accumulated visual evidence and the collective local memory towards this ‘relic’ all play in favour of its authenticity. It is however very strange that such an important object was not transported to Valletta along with most of the Order’s important possessions including the Icon of Our Lady itself. Moreover the lack of written evidence of this *ex-voto* will be a continuous doubting factor in its authenticity especially since the Order tended to be meticulous in its documentation. Regardless, the sword itself holds an enduring power to create a monumental collective memory to a person, who may be seen as a ‘national hero’ even if he was not Maltese.

Figure 4.3 Close-up of the Sword found in Birgu showing the rosary engraving in the blade (Courtesy of the Malta Historical Fencing Association).

\textsuperscript{30} This information is based on the captions of the items on display in the St. Lawrence Parish Museum, Vittoriosa.
Figure 4.4 De Valette’s Sword and Hat *in situ* at the St. Lawrence Parish Museum (Courtesy of the Malta Historical Fencing Association).
4.2.4 De Redin’s Rapier

The act of presenting one’s sword to an altar was repeated by at least one Grand Master: Martin de Redin in the mid-seventeenth century. The Grand Master presented his rapier to the altar of St. Paul in the Mdina Cathedral during his *possesso* in 1657. This is the only documented donation of a Grand Master’s sword to the church and the sword itself is on display in the Mdina Cathedral museum. The sword is an elegant late seventeenth-century rapier with an exquisitely decorated silver hilt and a Toledo blade; a surely fitting dress-sword for a Grand Master (Figure 4.5). It is unknown whether he actually used the sword at all or it was ordered purposely for the event. Whatever the case, the actual donation of a sword to a local entity is very rare and must have been regarded as a great honour, since in the seventeenth century a sword was still a very personal item. A small metal plaque accompanies the sword with a Latin description identifying it as de Redin’s, giving a date and the occasion during which the sword was given to the church, specifically the Grand Master’s *possesso* ceremony of Mdina on 8 November 1657 (Figure 4.5). The Cathedral archives describe the sword as being given to the altar of St. Paul as a gift during the ‘act of Possession of his Principality’. It demonstrates a perfect example of a sword being used as a gift from one local ruling entity to another in seventeenth-century Malta. Whether the sword itself was given as a personal *ex-voto* by the Grand Master is doubtful since there is no reference to a vow being made and the term *ex-voto* was coined later in the eighteenth century. It is probable that the sword was a diplomatic gift from the newly elected Grand Master to the Bishop of Malta, as the Order’s archives confirm the sword was given specifically to the Bishop as a symbol of the Order’s commitment to defend the Catholic faith, the Church of St. Paul and Malta and further specifies the Grand Master’s request for the sword to be hung in public as reminder of this vow. The description in the Order’s archives fails to describe the donation as being given to the altar of St. Paul but inclines it more to be a gift to the Bishop. The sword is accompanied by another rapier with a very similar silver hilt but with a unique wavy blade. According to the accompanying plaque and cathedral records it was similarly donated to the cathedral by the Grand Prior of Navarre in 1691, described as ‘bequeathed before his death’.

31 The maker’s name and origin are engraved on the blade: *Oiraldo Ruiz en Toledo.*
32 ACM 81, f.29v, 1657.
33 OED online, [From http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/sword?q=sword].
34 NLM, AOM 260, f.20, 1657.
35 ACM 81, f.29v, 1692.
Figure 4.5  The silver hilt of de Redin's rapier (above) and the accompanying metal plaque (below) with the Latin inscription (Mdina Cathedral Museum).
4.2.5 The Papal Stock and Pilier

Another symbolic sword given as a gift to the Order was given by the Popes to the Grand Masters of the Order in recognition of their role as defenders of the faith. It is the honorary papal stock which was part of a set requested by the reigning pontiff, who blessed it every Christmas Eve until given to a chosen monarch or ruler. This honour was first given to Grand Master Vilhena in 1725. A total of four stocks and piliers were given to four Grand Masters of the Order, all during the eighteenth century. The gift included a large, heavily decorated double handed sword (Figure 4.6) and a decorated hat with the symbol of the Holy Spirit. This gift, with its heavy patronage implications dating from the fourteenth century, was given to a Grand Master of the Order for the first time in the eighteenth century. It seems noteworthy that during this time, the rate of their bestowals to European rulers diminished to a point where they were only given to four Grand Masters and two secular monarchs in the eighteenth century. This may reflect the times, since Europe was going through changes due to the Enlightenment, where the Catholic Church is seen to have a decreased international stance. Hence it may be that the pontiffs deemed it fitting that they bestow such honorary gifts to their subject, the Religious Military Order of Malta, whose Grand Masters bore an increasingly princely and sovereign posture. This gift may have borne two meanings: the papacy seeking support from the Order in an increasingly ‘secularized’ Europe, and as a reminder to the increasingly princely Grand Masters that they were still subjects of the Pope.

The first three Grand Masters made sure they received the gift from the pontiffs publicly with pomp and ceremony and a number of relazioni were published describing the ceremonies. The last stock was given in haste in 1798 to Hompesch, weeks before the arrival of Napoleon. It seems Hompesch took it with him when he left Malta and it lies in the Order’s current headquarters in Rome. The lack of any published relazioni on the handing over ceremony to Hompesch reveals the turbulent times the Order was going through during its last days in Malta, where it seems there was no time or disposition for public ceremonies and the only proof of this gift to the Grand Master is a papal letter which accompanied it and

36 Plaisse, 23-32.
40 Critien, 204-206.
documented in the last folios of Hompesch’s *Liber Conciliorum Status.*

![Image of sword](image)

Figure 4.6 The Stock given to Grand Master Ferdinand von Hompesch (Courtesy of Frà John Critien).

The ceremonies for the bestowal of the papal stock and pilier to four Grand Masters of the Order in the eighteenth century are rich in Baroque pageantry and ritual involving a sword as a centre piece. Only three Grand Masters are documented to have managed a ceremony since the last one, Hompesch was not allowed the time to do so due to the momentous arrival of Napoleon only weeks after he received the gift. A study of the details of the actual ceremonies that took place reveals the importance given to such a gift by the Order.

The archival information on the occasion of the sword given to Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena in 1725 is very rich since it was the first time such a gift was given to a Master of the Order. Due to this the Council had to elect a special commission to draw up a ceremonial for the handing over of the gifts from the papal representative to the Grand Master. This four page report is seen in the first pages of the *Liber Conciliorum Status* of de Vilhena where it is immediately followed by a detailed *relazione* of the event.  

De Vilhena made sure he publicised this gift by putting the items on public display for three days, depicting them in his official portrait and including them in his funerary monument in St. John’s Conventual Church (Figure 4.7).  

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41 NLM, AOM 275, f.71r, 1798, *Plurima Semper.*  
42 NLM, AOM 268, f.1r-3r, 1725, *Commissione.* NLM, AOM 268, f.3v-15r, 1725, *Relazione.*  
43 Plaisse, 31. Schermerhorn, 149.
The relazione reveals the Order indulging in public ritual with a foreign visitor (the Papal representative) making a public spectacle of the visit with fireworks, cannon and military parades. The sword and hat are described as being carried by a noble relative of the Ablegate (the title given to the papal representative) in a procession to the conventual church. During the function, the sword is given to the Prior who, after a speech hands it to the Grand Master. It is then taken ceremoniously back to the Palace by the Commander of the Bodyguard (or Palace Guards).

The same gift was given to Grand Masters Pinto in 1747 and Ximenez in 1774 but seem to have been less publicised although both occasions are documented in published relazioni to mark the occasions. Both Grand Masters seem to have not found the same need

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44 Relazione. Relazione della solenne funzione fatta in Malta in congiuntura della presentazione dello Stocco, e Cappello Benedetti fatta di commissione di nostro Sig. Papa Benedetto XIII all Emm Gran Mstro Frà Don Anonio Manoel de Vilhena, Paris 1725.
45 NLM, AOM 268, f.3'-15', 1725, Relazione.
46 Relazione di quello che si e` praticato in occasione di avere la Santita di Nostro Signore PP Benedetto XIV mandato lo Stocco, ed il Pileo Benedetti a sua altezza eminentissima il Grand Maestro Frà AD Emmanuele Pinto`, Rome 1747. NLM, AOM 273, f.30', 1774, Relazione. Relazione della solenne funzione
as their predecessor de Vilhena to immortalize their stocks and piliers in any of their portraits or monuments; however the public rituals of their bestowment followed the same protocol. In fact the published relazioni of both Pinto and Ximenez are very similar. All three relazioni (of Vilhena, Pinto, and Ximenez) also included illustrations of the papal stock and pilier (Figure 4.8). These illustrations give an idea on how the sword actually looked like and it can be observed that they followed the same style as the sword given to Hompesch, now at the Magisterial Palace in Rome (Figure 4.6). The stocks were always heavily decorated two-handed swords and followed the same style since the fifteenth century, much like the honorary bearing swords used by other states such as England, Venice and Florence.

The sword given to Hompesch was given under very different circumstances. There was no visiting Ablegate and no public ritual. The ceremony was done in private in the presence of the last Inquisitor of Malta in May 1798, just five weeks before Napoleon’s arrival. There is no published relazione and the only proof of such a ceremony is Inquisitor Carpegna’s letter to the pope in the Inquisitor’s archives and the letter sent with the gift by the pope in December 1797 documented in the last pages of Hompesch’s Liber Conciliorum Status in May 1798. The next stock and pilier recorded to be given was in 1825 by Pope Leo XII to the son of the King of France, the Duke of Angouleme and was the last stock and pilier to be given by a pope, reflecting the changing of the times, where the need to bestow a weapon as a symbol of defence of the faith was no longer relevant. It is poignant how the Order was given this papal honour as defender of the faith at the end of its long military career when the honour itself dated back to the fourteenth century.

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fatta in Malta in congiuntura della presentazione dello Stocco, e Pileo Benedetti spediti dal Sommo Pontefice Clemente XIV felicemente regnante a sua altezza FD Francesco Ximenez de Texada, Malta 1774.

48 Critien, 206.
49 NLM, AOM 275, f.71ª, 1798, Plurima Semper.
Figure 4.8 Illustration of the stock and pilier given to Grand Master Pinto, taken from: Relazione di quello che si e’ praticato in occasione di avere la Santità di Nostro Signore PP Benedetto XIV mandato lo Stocco, ed il Pileo Benedetti a sua altezza eminentissima il Grand Maestro Frà AD Emmanuele Pinto, Rome 1747.
4.3 Rituals

Most of the public activities a Hospitaller went through during his career involved some sort of ritual where the use of swords was common. When used, the weapons always carried the typical symbolic meanings of a sword, but their nature and importance varied. At times, the type of sword used did not appear to be central, such as in the investiture ceremony. At other times, the actual sword was the whole focus of the ritual such as the papal stock and pilier ceremonies where the sword was the protagonist. The sword given to de Valette by Philip II was used as a centre piece in numerous ceremonies such as the possessio, the victory celebrations of 8 September, and de Valette’s funeral.

4.3.1 The Investiture Ceremony

The investiture ceremony of a Hospitaller knight is well documented in various sources related to the Order including unpublished manuscripts. There are also a good number of published sources which describe the ceremony highlighting the symbolism given to the sword. In the Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem (1588) the ceremony is illustrated in the title page of the chapter on the reception of brothers where it shows various symbolisms (Figure 4.9). It is also described in the Count of Erbach’s visit to Malta where the ceremony matches perfectly with the instructions in the manuscripts and the Istruzioni publication which suggests that either the book was written based on primary sources or was a genuine eyewitness description of an actual ceremony.

The Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem illustration shows three novices kneeling in front of the Dante (a Knight Grand Cross chosen to lead the ceremony) who is giving them a belt representing the control required over their physical vices, highlighting their vow of celibacy. The belt is needed to support their sword which represents their vow of obedience and service to the Order. The novices are shown wearing a flowing robe without a belt representing their liberty from religious and marital ties, while in the background another young knight holds an ignited candle representing the virtue of charity. Other symbols in the illustration include a knight kneeling behind the novices wearing a sheathed sword and holding spurs (A, figure 4.9), ready to put them on the applicants’ feet which, apart from

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51 NLM, Libr. Ms.CCL, f.80-103, Riflessioni di un Cavaliere di Malta sopra la grandezza e doveri del suo stato. NLM, Libr. Ms.370, Cerimoniale di ricevimento e vestizione dei Cavalieri.
52 Istruzioni (1758), 74-79.
53 Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem (Rome, 1588), 4.
54 Kraus, 141-151.
55 Istruzioni (1758), 76.
56 Istruzioni (1758), 74.
being symbols of knighthood, represented the energy with which the new knights were expected to perform their vows. A total of seven swords are shown in the illustration, each bearing different meanings. The sword held upright by one of the knights (B, figure 4.9) represents a part of the ceremony where the applicants raise their unsheathed swords aloft three times in a symbol of intimidation to the enemies of the faith. It is also vaguely similar to the gift sword of Philip II given to de Valette in shape (although the nature of the image makes it difficult to tell due to the lack of detail) and it may be in reference to the similar act of brandishing the sword by the Grand Master in the victory day celebrations. Both the Istruzioni and Erbach publications described the clean naked blade as a symbol of hope, justice and charity to be used by the knight in defence of the weak and against the enemies of the Order and the Church. The knight is instructed to sheath his sword and never to unsheathe it unless for the mentioned reasons, and to keep it always clean, in representation of the purity of spirit he must maintain, free from any vice and to love all virtues and honour, wherein the four cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance are mentioned. The three novices are shown each wearing a sword on his left (C, figure 4.9) where according to the Istruzioni is worn so that the right arm can use it for the above mentioned functions in obedience to the Order. Opposite the knight holding the spurs and sheathed sword, to the right is another senior knight with the cross clearly visible on his cloak in the initial act of unsheathing his sword with his right arm (D, figure 4.9). The Erbach account also describes the Dante ordering the applicants to sheath their swords as a symbol of obedience. The other sword is held by a statue of St. Paul on the top left corner of the illustration (E, figure 4.9). This is a representation of the spiritual sword in contrast to the other knightly material swords. Such an aspect of a sword was of vital importance to a religious knight, who according to St. Bernard of Clairvaux was to balance his life between the two in the war against evil, using one against the physical enemies of the church and the other against the devil and vices.

The investiture ceremony followed strict guidelines and seems to have been repeated with precise observance since many sources seem to match accurately, while the presence of ceremonial guides supports this. It is clear that the symbolism used was not mere ceremony and the Order gave importance to the metaphors mentioned above. The fact that the ceremony was done publicly with the Dante describing the meanings of such symbolisms

57 Kraus, 151.
58 Reneudeau, 261. Schermerhorn, 61.
59 Istruzioni (1758), 76-78.
60 Istruzioni (1758), 76.
61 Kraus, 148.
62 Basile, 113.
63 NLM, Libr. Ms.370, Cerimoniale del ricevimento e vestizione dei Cavalieri.
clearly, gave the rite more weight since the applicant accepted the terms of membership publicly. Moreover, the presence of detailed guides such as manuscript CCL (Riflessioni) which also gives strict instructions on the anointing of the sword attest to the importance given to the correct use of the sword during a Hospitaller’s life, including avoiding its use for personal vendetta.\textsuperscript{64}

The symbolism used was clearly a reflection of European knightly standards and not unique to the Order since a sword and golden spurs were typical symbols of knighthood representing justice and incorruptibility.\textsuperscript{65} The dubbing of a knight was of a chivalric nature with medieval origins and applied to the Religious Military Orders during the Crusades. The accolade, as described by Schermerhorn was a tap on the right shoulder of every novice with the flat of the sword found in both Erbach and the Istruzioni is described as the last indignity the applicant must sustain.\textsuperscript{66} It was the typical induction ritual for both secular and religious knights.\textsuperscript{67} Both Schermerhorn and Kraus give numerous similes to the sword used in the ceremony referring to the two edges and the point representing the three purposes for its use: the defence of the Church and of the Order and in executing justice on all who persecute Christ; also the rigidity on one side of the blade represented the need to keep a steady arm against the enemy while the flat and flexible side representing a gentle heart towards the children of Christ.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{64} NLM, Libr. Ms.CCL, f.80-103, \textit{Riflessioni di un Cavaliere di Malta sopra la grandezza e doveri del suo stato}; f.80, della benedizione del sacerdote sopra la persona, e spada del cavaliere; f.91, dei sentimenti che deve inspirare al cavaliere il modo che si usa di darli la spada; f.96, presentimenti, ne quail il Cavaliere deve servirsì della sua spada; f.99, dell’utilità spiritual che il Cavaliere trate dal buon uso delle sue armi; f.100, il cavaliere deve guardarsi d’impegnare la sua spada nelle sue vendetta personali; f.103, del modo di ungere la spada all cavaliere, e di darli l’ordine di cavalleria al onore di San Giorgio.
\textsuperscript{65} Scalini, 171.
\textsuperscript{66} Schermerhorn, 23.
\textsuperscript{68} Schermerhorn, 23. Kraus, 147.
4.3.2 Victory Day Celebrations

A well documented public ritual involving a sword centre-piece is the 8 September celebrations during the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary which after 1565, the Order celebrated as Victory Day. This festival was a typical civic public ritual in conjunction with a religious feast in order to give out multiple messages, including the Order’s primacy within the local community and its legitimacy as defender of the faith. The origin of the festivities may be traced back to Grand Master de Valette’s decree on receiving Philip II’s sword and

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69 Cassar (2011), 70.
dagger. This decree clearly describes how de Valette wished to immortalize the victory by combining it with the religious feast and the gift given to him by his feudatory lord. Reneudeau refers to a manuscript in the Royal Spanish Archives describing the ceremonies organized for the reception of the sword and mentions the act of the Grand Masters in brandishing the sword publicly in the conventual church during the victory celebrations; a ritual meant to confirm the Order’s legitimacy of authority in Malta. The ritual is romantically recreated in Schermerhorn’s book where the sword is described as being carried in procession by a page. It is also described as being brandished by the Grand Master and held aloft during the reading of the Gospel, in imitation, according to Schermerhorn to the investiture ceremony where the postulant does so to symbolize his dedication to fight for the Order and the faith. She describes other symbols and relics used during the ceremony where the sword may be seen to be a civic relic symbolizing the victory, while the exposition of the holy icon of Our Lady of Philermos seems to represent the holy significance of the celebrations. This ritual is discussed in Cassar’s evaluation of the celebrations based on Inquisitor Gori Pannellini’s account of 1645, but can also be seen in a step by step account in the Order’s archives for 1657. These sources show that the combined civic and religious festivities served to keep the spirit of de Valette’s victory alive so as to assert the Order’s authority and popularity.

Visually, the use of the sword carried by a page during the celebrations may be seen in one of the illustrations of the Vinkhuizen collection (Figure 4.10), the source of which is unsure and may well be the work of famed uniforms illustrator Quinto Cenni. In fact the sword in the image, although matching in concept (in having jewelled hilts and being carried by a page with its matching dagger) is totally different from the original and seems to have been drawn using the artist’s imagination. However, the image may well be from an earlier more contemporary source since it does not have Cenni’s signature (who usually signed all his illustrations) and is captioned in French rather than Italian; moreover, Vinkhuizen was noted for accumulating old prints from seventeenth-century sources to his collection. Another clue to the source of the image which is accompanied by many other pictures of

70 NLM, Libr. Ms.XVII, f.252, Notizia della spada e pugnale che Filippo II nel 1566 mandò a La Valletta.
71 Reneudeau, 261.
72 Schermerhorn, 61.
73 Cassar (2011), 69, 75. NLM, AOM 260, f.15, 1657.
knights also captioned in French and seemingly drawn by the same hand is another image in the same collection which shows a title page of a publication in French dated 1647. Another very similar image shows a standard bearer of the Order along with a page bearing the same uniform and posture as the Vinkhuizen image and bearing the sword and dagger (Figure 4.10). This image is confirmed to be the work of Francesco Zimelli and dated 1790 and the similarities between the two are so great that one must have influenced the other.

From the available sources including Zimelli’s 1790 image, it may be deduced that the ritual was repeated yearly and maintained throughout the Order’s stay in Malta, although Carmel Testa reveals that at least one year it had to be postponed during the abnormal situation caused by the coup against Grand Master la Cassiere led by Romegas in 1581. The papal nuncio Cardinal Gaspar Visconti arrived in Malta on the 8 September to control the situation in the name of the Pope and when asked whether Romegas should carry the sword of de Valette in the procession in la Cassiere’s absence, he decided to postpone the ceremony in order to avoid precedents. This lays further testament to how the carrying of such a celebrated sword enhanced the bearer’s legitimacy to authority.


78 Carmel Testa, Romegas (Malta, Midsea Books, 2002), 196.
4.3.3 The Possesso Ceremonies

De Valette’s sword was used in other public ceremonies by the Grand Masters of the Order with the same intentions as the victory day celebrations: to establish the legitimacy of their authority as princes of Malta. Each new Grand Master made sure he made his presence publicly shown in practically all the urban areas in Malta through *possesso* ceremonies which occurred in Mdina and Birgu. This act of using a famed sword in civic activities was not uncommon among European monarchies. As discussed, a sword is a symbol of justice and authority and ceremonial swords were commonly used as symbols of the ruler’s legitimate authority. These swords are referred to as bearing swords and are usually larger than normal with a purely ritual use and some are still used in modern times, such as the five swords of state of the United Kingdom which are carried in coronation processions. Bearing swords were sometimes given by a monarch as a gift to cities to symbolize the bestowal of his authority where they would be called ‘civic swords’. Such an example is an ornate sword.
given by King Henry IV of England to the Mayor of Dublin in 1403 giving him the right to have it carried in front of him in procession.\textsuperscript{79} This is a very similar situation to the gift of Philip II to de Valette which was similarly used in processions symbolizing the Order’s authority over their island state. The \textit{possesso} ceremony was a symbolic assumption of power by the new Grand Master from the local authorities during which he made a vow to uphold their rights and was held by practically every Grand Master in Malta starting from l’Isle Adam.\textsuperscript{80} Such a civic ritual described by Duvugnaud as a ‘civil liturgy’ was used as an instrument of domination by the Order over its subjects and local authorities including the church, the \textit{Universita’} and the nobles.\textsuperscript{81} This was achieved by using grand spectacle and symbols, one of which, after 1566 was the sword of de Valette. Other symbols were carried by other participants of the procession, for example while the sword of the religion (de Valette’s sword) was carried by the \textit{Cavallerizzo Maggiore}, the Bishop followed carrying a cross, while the highest Maltese authority called the \textit{Capitano della Verga} carried a pike.\textsuperscript{82} A commonality in all symbolic Hospitaller swords is that they follow the tradition that a bearing sword is always held upright (with the point up) while the conventional display position of a sword is always with the point down.\textsuperscript{83}

The numerous sources in the archives of the Order reveal a step by step ritual which was repeated almost identically each time. In one of the \textit{possessi} it has been described how Grand Master de Redin decided to bestow a gift to the Bishop in the form of another sword, symbolizing his promise to defend the state he was taking possession of.\textsuperscript{84} This act does not seem to have been repeated by other Grand Masters while in Raphael Cottoner’s \textit{possesso} of Mdina in 1660 there is no reference to any sword used in the ritual at all.\textsuperscript{85} However, after the short lived reign of his brother, Nicolo Cottoner’s \textit{possesso} of Mdina did indeed include the de Valette sword in 1663.\textsuperscript{86} By the late seventeenth century the \textit{possessi} included even more pageantry such as is described in Perellos’ \textit{possesso} of Mdina and Vittoriosa in 1697, while the sword of de Valette was a constant and central item in the ceremonies.\textsuperscript{87} In all occasions, the sword was borne by the \textit{Cavallerizzo Maggiore} who walked in front of the Grand Master. In the Mdina \textit{possesso}, the same knight is described as being followed by the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Loades, 161.
\item Zammit Gabaretta, 146.
\item Cremona, 56.
\item Cremona, 46.
\item Most pictorial depictions on pommels of swords are seen correctly with the point down. See figs. 4.4, 4.8(B), 4.9, 4.10, 4.11, 4.12 for Hospitaller swords held in the upright ceremonial manner. Ewart Oakeshott, \textit{The Sword in the Age of Chivalry} (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1994), 23.
\item ACM 81, f.29\textsuperscript{v}, 1657. NLM, AOM 260, f.20, 1657.
\item NLM, AOM 260, f.82, 1660.
\item NLM, AOM 260, f.184\textsuperscript{r}, 1663.
\item Cremona, 46. NLM, Libr. Ms.II, f.94\textsuperscript{r}, \textit{Il Primo ingresso di Perellos nella citta Notabile}, f.105, \textit{Il Primo ingresso di Perellos nella citta Vittoriosa}.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Maestro Scudiere. This is interesting to note since the Cavallerizzo Maggiore (Master of the Horse) was the third most important household officer in the Grand Master’s Palace and was in charge of the horses and carriages of the Grand Master and the training of pages. Thus the bearer of the sword in the possesso ceremony contrasts heavily with the bearer of the sword during the victory celebrations who was (as decreed by de Valette himself) a page. The fact that an officer of the Grand Master’s household and not a member of the council was in charge of carrying such an important sword ‘of state’ during the possesso bears witness to the importance given to the sword in symbolizing the authority of the Grand Master as a prince rather than head of a religious order. In effect, it was carried by the Master of the Horse of the Grand Master’s household mimicking the protocol of European monarchs. The possesso ceremony seems to have been more important than the victory celebrations, at least in a socio-political way since it was the first public show of authority by the new Grand Master. A possible illustration of this is the fact that the sword was carried by a knight in the possesso but by a page in the victory celebrations where the main aim was to rally the population under a common goal with the Order as its ruler. The possesso ceremony was illustrated by Antoine de Favray in the eighteenth century where the painter shows the first possesso of Mdina by Grand Master l’Isle Adam in 1530 (Figure 4.11). In this painting, Favray shows many symbols discussed above even though the sword of de Valette could not be included since l’Isle Adam preceded that date. However a knight (identified by the Order’s cross hanging from his neck) standing right behind the Grand Master is shown brandishing an unsheathed sword held upright, apparently in ceremonial form. The sword depicted is not historically accurate to the sixteenth century since it is an eighteenth-century small-sword but it seems to represent the sword of the religion held by the Cavalerizzo Maggiore in each possesso after the siege. Another weapon is shown in the picture seen hanging on the side of a Maltese noble kissing the Grand Master’s hand. It is a sheathed rapier and its owner is on his knees in front of the Grand Master, symbolizing the peaceful surrender of authority to the Order.

89 Buttigieg, 44.
90 NLM, Libr. Ms.XVII, f.252, Notizia della spade e pugnale che Filippo II nel 1566 mando a La Valletta.
92 Cassar (2011), 75.
4.4 Conclusion

The power of the image of the sword has revealed to be of importance to the chivalric Order of St. John and was used in most of its dimensions. This seems to have been done reflecting symbolism used by the secular powers of Europe; however there remains the possibility that the Order used swords more frequently in their symbolism due to their religious-chivalric nature. The many roles a sword can play have been discussed, including gift making and use in public rituals. The scene of international gift giving was a complex one and the sword as a gift was given to the Order numerous times from different quarters, including the three largest patrons of the Order: the Kings of Spain and France and the Popes. Other swords were given internally in the form of gifts given by the Grand Masters themselves to their own island-state such as Philip II’s sword, de Valette’s personal sword, and de Redin’s sword. Public ritual has been described as a civil liturgy made by the ruling group to assert their authority over their subjects and other ruling factions, where swords where utilised in various forms. In rituals, the sword was used as both a religious and civic relic due to its chivalric and religious symbolism inherited from the Crusades. Three types of public ritual in Hospitaller Malta may be identified where swords have been used. The Investiture and possessio ceremonies were both semi-public (i.e. a public procession and a private mass) but were both centred on an individual, i.e. attributed to the novice in the first and the new Grand Master in the second. The Victory Day celebrations were an all-out public spectacle used in the form of a feast and with clear uses of remembrance and political influence over the spectators. Here the de Valette sword’s reliquary powers are seen as a centre piece in the proceedings, used to assert the Order’s legitimate authority and its raison d’être as defender of the faith. The papal stock and pilier bestowment ceremony also took on a public role but held an international gift exchange factor, where the Order seems to have followed strict protocols with diplomatic etiquette being of primary importance. Even though the local public spectacle served the same function as the Victory Day celebrations, the stock and pilier celebrations were not as ‘domestic’ since they were meant to be also for a more international audience, hence the publication of relazioni in multiple languages and in different countries. In general, the type of swords used in imagery and ritual seems not to have been of importance to the Order. Otherwise, one may see a variety of swords used in public rituals and not always in context, especially when reproduced in artistic representations. For example in Favray’s painting of l’Isle Adam one sees an eighteenth-century small sword in a sixteenth-century context which confirms the painting was not done

94 Cremona, 43.
95 Apart from where a specific sword was the subject of the ritual itself such as the de Valette sword or the papal stock and pilier.
contemporaneous to the event and the weaponry illustrated was from the time of the painting. Most of the swords used in ritual would have been of a symbolic nature and rarely used in practical terms, but some were indeed real weapons. For example the sword given by de Redin may have had a practical function as an elaborate personal side-arm, while others such as de Valette’s battle sword and the relic of St. Louis were purely practical in nature. It is unclear if the swords used in the investiture ceremonies were ceremonial or practical. The de Valette sword (of Philip II) and the papal stocks on the other hand, were purely ceremonial swords and were never made with the intention to be used as weapons. This shows that even in a time where a sword was still a valid weapon, it was also manufactured and used intentionally for its secondary role: as a strong ceremonial symbol.
CONCLUSION

There exists with us an old tradition that lance and sword, not firearms, become a true knight. Nowadays it is always said that the wars of nations are decided by firearms but we do not like them, and many of the Brethren even maintain that the long range at which firearms can be used will be the death-blow to our Order.¹

The visit of the Count of Erbach to the Grand Master’s palace armoury in the seventeenth century may be of dubious veracity but the resultant prose is reflective of the points demonstrated in this exercise. It primarily reveals the romantic attitude to edged weapons but also the Order sustaining its chivalric ideals in both symbolic and practical terms reflected in its edged weapons. The lifetime practice of arms involving edged weapons was vital for a knight in an age when a common person could be trained to fire a gun and used as an effective unit in battle in a considerably short time. It is in the various attitudes to swords and the lifestyle set around their use that this study has delved into, against the backdrop of early modern Hospitaller Malta.

This dissertation has brought together and contextualized a fragmented historiography on aspects of the sword in Hospitaller life. For instance, research on the symbolism of swords as part of the study of Hospitaller politics or art is common, while duelling is tackled in social studies of Hospitaller life.² The study of the material weapon is found in discussions about the armoury; on the other hand, other aspects such as the practical techniques in the use of the weapon have revealed to be poorly researched.³ The Archives of the Order (AOM) as well as the manuscript and publication collections (NLM) hold a vast range of sources on all the dimensions discussed in this dissertation but these are scattered, found under different titles. It has been shown here that an analysis of both practical and symbolic aspects can reveal a clearer picture of an intimate part of Hospitaller martial history which is less monumental than fortifications or diplomacy and more linked to the self, that is, how individual Hospitallers lived (and died) by (and through) this simple yet meaningful weapon.

The sword holds a strong sway in history. It is the perfect fusion of form and function and has the power to thrill and appal in equal measure. It is as strong a symbol today as it was in the past, representing freedom and honour. As a weapon, the sword is an

¹ Kraus, 131.
² Such as A. Williams’ description of swords used symbolically in Grand Masters’ funerals (2008) or G. Bonello’s research on duelling in Malta (2002).
³ A major reference is S. Spiteri’s work on the Palace Armoury (2003) while leading research on the martial arts of Early Modern Europe can be seen in S. Anglo’s The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe (2000).
extension of the arm and, thus more personal than a gun. It was the peak of weapons technology of its age, even in its simplicity; its creation and use was associated with a large amount of effort. While its symbolism is acknowledged, modern history seems to have ignored the fight techniques: the true meaning and function of the sword. In fight manuals, words and images were used to convey the techniques to a reader, creating a system where, like music, a sequence of movements could be read. Swords need to be looked at as the historical objects they are, holding a vast historical baggage. The only mainstream exposure to the practical sword one gets in the modern world is what is recreated in theatre or cinema, which is not always realistic, while modern fencing is the art of defence, pruned down to a sport with points and rules. With the popularity of sport fencing, older sword-fighting systems were regarded as clumsier and less refined. Martial arts are commonly associated with eastern cultures due to the historical amnesia about the fighting techniques of the west, as well as modern society’s interest in eastern arts. The general impression is that the western edged weapons and their techniques were cruder than the eastern, which they evidently were not. Eastern martial arts simply continued to be practiced while western martial arts abandoned the sword in favour of the gun in the name of progress. Today, historical fencing studies have revived this interest and the manuscripts and fight manuals of old have been accessed again, after being ignored for some two hundred years.

The characteristics of a sword are far more than metallurgy and design; its soul lies in the hand that wields it and technique is what transforms it from a piece of metal to an efficient weapon. The use of the sword for the knightly values of justice is another facet of the weapon’s ‘soul’ and has turned it into a symbol of such. The Hospitallers used the sword, both as a tool and as a symbol. It was kept at the Hospitaller’s side until the very end of the Order’s military function. It made the sword its standard, symbolising the old crusader ethos of defending the faith: the ‘sword of the religion’, literally and symbolically so. The practical use was interlinked to the symbolic importance which was evident throughout the years of the Order in Malta.

The sword found another niche where it was utilised beyond the seventeenth century: the civilian setting. In a world with different values than the modern day, where honour was as important as life itself and life was a much shorter and unstable experience than today, the use of the sword as a tool of self-defence and legitimation established its survival as a personal sidearm and duelling tool. The latter was frowned upon by secular and religious powers as it sapped the social control they sought, but it survived nonetheless through the elite’s struggle with modernisation, maintaining individualism and elitism among supporters of the ancien régime. It is fascinating how the Order, representing both the nobility and the Church managed to balance so many conflicting ideals. The sword here serves to illustrate such a precarious balance: the sword borne by a knight in battle in an age of mercenaries and
professional soldiers, held in the hands of a knight on the street in defence of his honour, or used as a diplomatic tool and religious or civic relic.

This dissertation has explored a vast field of research spanning across the board of historical study; from archival research to hands-on analysis, thus necessitating a multi-disciplinary approach to a historic object which revealed to be of a physical, metaphoric, and conceptual nature. This approach has touched multiple facets of Hospitaller Malta including politics, art, symbolism, military and social history. The fact that so many aspects of Hospitaller life have been encountered proves how important edged weapons were to a Hospitaller knight and therefore merit further attention.

No direct instruction manual has as yet been discovered on how a knight had to use his sword and there seems to be no definite Hospitaller fencing style. On the social side, the sword has been shown to have played an important role in a Hospitaller’s life and was used in both dress and defence, while legislation on weapons and duels has revealed it had a strong presence which needed to be controlled. These conclusions are based on a comprehensive scan of sources but deeper investigation of the individual fields, for example military training, the novitiate, social mores and conditions are yet to be made.

Like many other Hospitaller aspects, the attitude and use of edged weapons for the Order have revealed to be a microcosm of an early modern elite Europe, where importance to established noble practices met a slow but steady process of modernisation. The focus on edged weapons has revealed this clash in the fields of military activity, social conditions and political habits. The Order, being a conglomeration of European noble masculinity may have been more aware of such martial and chivalric aspects than the average early modern person, offering a clearer view of such facets. This allows a ripe setting to study the practical and symbolic dimensions of swords and other edged weapons in a slowly changing world.
APPENDICES

Appendix 1A – Images of martial exercises described in *Ricordo 40* of Sabba di Castiglione’s *Ricordi*

The data is being presented here in such a way as to facilitate comparison between the technical terms, places where they are mentioned and their images. For a tabular presentation of the data see Appendix 1B.

The following pages show numbered illustrations of the martial exercises (apart from Sword and Dagger) listed in Appendix 1B and described in Sabba di Castiglione’s *Ricordo 40* (f.29rv). The illustrations are taken from four publications by Marozzo (1536), Agrippa (1604), di Grassi (1570), d’Alessandro (1723), the last three found in the National Library of Malta.

1. **Sword and large buckler**

   Contemporary publications which may have influenced S.Castiglione: Marozzo f.25v.

   Mentioned in fencing treatises at the NLM: Di Grassi f.64.6

   Mentioned in Hospitaller primary sources: N.A.

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Marozzo f.25v

Di Grassi f.64

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2. **Sword and square shield**

Contemporary publications which may have influenced S.Castiglione: Marozzo f.31^v

Mentioned in fencing treatises at the NLM: Di Grassi f.70.

Mentioned in Hospitaller primary sources: N.A.

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![Image](Marozzo_f.31v)

![Image](Di_Grassi_f.70)
3. **Sword and round shield**

Contemporary publications which may have influenced S.Castiglione: Marozzo f.29r

Mentioned in fencing treatises at the NLM: Agrippa f.57; Di Grassi f.79.

Mentioned in Hospitaller primary sources: D’Aleccio (Figure 2.7); Balbi di Correggio, 108; Bosio vol. 3, 672, 796; d’Alessandro f.765.

![Marozzo f.29r](image1)

![Agrippa f.57v](image2)

![Di Grassi f.79](image3)

![D’Alessandro f.765](image4)
4. **Sword and cape**
Contemporary publications which may have influenced S.Castiglione: Marozzo f.20°.
Mentioned in fencing treatises at the NLM: Agrippa f.52; di Grassi f.53.
Mentioned in Hospitaller primary sources: N.A.

![Marozzo f.20°](image1)
![Di Grassi f.53](image2)
![Agrippa f.52](image3)
5. **Two-handed Sword**

Contemporary publications which may have influenced S. Castiglione: Marozzo f.54r.

Mentioned in fencing treatises at the NLM: Agrippa f.61v; di Grassi f.97.

Mentioned in Hospitaller primary sources: d’Aleccio (Figure 2.3); Bosio vol. 3, 564; d’Alessandro f.783.
6. **Pike**

Contemporary publications which may have influenced S. Castiglione: Marozzo f.85r.

Mentioned in fencing treatises at the NLM: di Grassi f.112.

Mentioned in Hospitaller primary sources: d’Aleccio (Figure 2.6); Bosio, vol. 3, 140; Balbi de Correggio, 144; Bosio vol. 3, 572, 638; NLM, AOM 290, f.37v, 1574 Chapter General; d’Alessandro f.785.

![Marozzo f.85r](image1.png)

![D’Alessandro f.785](image2.png)

![Di Grassi f.112](image3.png)
9. Spear
Contemporary publications which may have influenced S.Castiglione: Marozzo f.83r.
Mentioned in fencing treatises at the NLM: N.A.
Mentioned in Hospitaller primary sources: N.A.

17. Dagger Fighting/Grappling
Contemporary publications which may have influenced S.Castiglione: Marozzo f.126v.
Mentioned in fencing treatises at the NLM: N.A.
Mentioned in Hospitaller primary sources: d’Aleccio (Figure 2.7); NLM, Libr. Ms. 1377
Progetto per Novizi dell’Ordine, f.4v
Sword and Dagger

Contemporary publications which may have influenced S. Castiglione: Marozzo, f. 15r

Mentioned in fencing treatises at the NLM: di Grassi, f. 41; Agrippa, f. 14v

Mentioned in Hospitaller primary sources: NLM, Libr. Ms. 1377 Progetto per Novizi dell’Ordine.
### Appendix 1B – Table of martial exercises described in *Ricordo* 40 of Sabba di Castiglione’s *Ricordi*

The data presented in Appendix 1A with accompanying images is being repeated here in tabular form for ease of reference and comparative purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Martial Exercises described in <em>Ricordo</em> 40</th>
<th>Contemporary publications which may have influenced S. Castiglione</th>
<th>Mentioned in Fencing treatises at the NLM</th>
<th>Mentioned in Hospitaller primary sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sword and large buckler</td>
<td>Marozzo f.25(^v)</td>
<td>Di Grassi f.64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sword and square shield</td>
<td>Marozzo f.31(^v)</td>
<td>Di Grassi f.70</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Sword and round shield</td>
<td>Marozzo f.29(^v)</td>
<td>Agrippa f.57(^v)</td>
<td>D’Aleccio (Figure 2.7)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Di Grassi f.79</td>
<td>Balbi di Correggio, 108 Bosio vol. 3,</td>
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<td>672, 796</td>
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<td>D’Alessandro f.765</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Sword and cape</td>
<td>Marozzo f.20(^v)</td>
<td>Agrippa f.52</td>
<td>D’Aleccio (Figure 2.3)</td>
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<td>Di Grassi f.53</td>
<td>Bosio vol. 3, 564</td>
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<td>D’Alessandro f.783</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Two handed sword</td>
<td>Marozzo f.54(^v)</td>
<td>Agrippa f.61(^v)</td>
<td>D’Aleccio (Figure 2.6)</td>
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<td>Di Grassi f.97</td>
<td>Bosio, vol. 3, 140</td>
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<td>Balbi de Correggio, 144</td>
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<td>Bosio vol. 3, 572, 638</td>
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<td>NLM, AOM 290, f.37(^v), 1574 Chapter General</td>
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<td>D’Alessandro f.785</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Pike</td>
<td>Marozzo f.85(^v)</td>
<td>Di Grassi f.112</td>
<td></td>
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<td>7. Pole axe</td>
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<td>8. Mace</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Spear</td>
<td>Marozzo f.83(^v)</td>
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<td>10. Javelin</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Crossbow</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Musket</td>
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<td>D’Aleccio (Figure 2.4, 2.6, 2.7)</td>
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<td>NLM, Libr. Ms. 1377 <em>Progetto per Novizi dell’Ordine</em>, f.4(^v)</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Turkish bow</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Wrestling</td>
<td>B. Castiglione, 29</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Running</td>
<td>B. Castiglione, 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Hurdles</td>
<td>B. Castiglione, 30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Dagger fighting / grappling</td>
<td>Marozzo f.126(^v)</td>
<td></td>
<td>D’Aleccio (Figure 2.7)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>NLM, Libr. Ms. 1377 <em>Progetto per Novizi dell’Ordine</em>, f.4(^v)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the sources in the table are found in the NLM apart from Marozzo which when compared with the other sources matches most with the martial exercises (first column) found in S. Castiglione’s *Ricordo* 40.
Appendix 2 - Poems dedicated to the sword from d'Alessandro's regole di cavalcare, della professione di spade, ed altri esercizi d'armi

2A. Alla Spada

Gran regina de l’Armi, Arme Fatale
    Ottima in Guerra, e necessaria in Pace
    Ogni mal Parlator per te si tace,
    Ne temeraria penna in te prevale
L’eccelsa tua virtù’, sempre letale
    A chi desia ciò` che ad altrui dispiace,
    Sovviene a` chi non ha voglia rapace
    E` l giusto Pugnator rende immortale
Dell’ Innocenza protettrice invitta,
    Inimica del’ Odio, e del livore,
    Sempre l’ Invidia su d ate trafitta,
L’Inquila’ s’abbaglia al tuo splendore,
    E la ragion mai su d ate sconfitta,
    Percio` vinto e` l’oblio` dal tuo valore.1

2B. Epilogo il piu sostantiale d’un buon Schermitore

Ecco il buon Schermitor tutto in se stesso,
    Intento, e cauto a` riparar se stesso,
    Con se fatto Balestra, e poi di se stesso,
    Il colpo scaglia, e poi torna in se stesso.
Riflettendo al Nemico, ed a` se stesso,
    Ben sa` l’altrui misura, e di se stesso,
    Ridotto in Guardia per guardar se stesso,
    Si lascia in tempo, e scanza ben se stesso.
Con spade appropriate per se stesso,
    Molti giochi propone; e fra` se stesso
    Pensando unqua trascura di se stesso,
Ne` mai troppo sidando di se stesso,
    Senza ragione arrischia egli se stesso,
    Ch` assai piu` la ragion val di se stesso.2

2 D’Alessandro, 287.
GLOSSARY

The terminology used for swords is based on modern descriptions, which may differ in some cases to the way they were described in the past. Language variances also pose a challenge as weapons were given different descriptions in various languages. For example the sixteenth-century Englishman did not describe the side-sword as such, rather it would be described as a rapier, a derivative from the Spanish term *spada da ropera*. The term side-sword is a modern description of the early thicker-bladed rapiers used also for battle. This glossary includes a description of the main weapons mentioned in the text along with other terms associated with the Order.

**Long-Sword**: In this study, the term given to the wide bladed cruciform shaped hand-and-a-half or ‘bastard’ sword, an early modern offshoot of the medieval long-sword but slightly longer and with a longer hand-grip so as to be used with both hands.

**Two-Handed Sword** (Italian: *Spadone*, Spanish: *Montante*): A two-handed sword, much larger than the long-sword which was used in battles by specialised swordsmen and were particularly useful to break pike formations or generally disrupt an attacking line.

**Side-Sword**: A versatile one-handed sword suitable for the variety of situations encountered on a battlefield, utilising both the cut and the thrust and strong enough to tackle different weapons. It is sometimes described as an early rapier and most common in the sixteenth century.

**Rapier**: A civilian sword, descended from the Spanish *Spada de Ropera* which was more inclined to duelling against sword of similar dimensions. Although still able to cut, it is more suitable for thrusting. It reached its pinnacle in the seventeenth century.

**Small-Sword**: A French evolution from the duelling Rapier, more refined, shorter and totally dedicated to the thrust; more common in the eighteenth century.

**Pole-Arms**: Any edged weapon attached to a wooden pole. These included a large variety and were generally used in formations against cavalry, in sieges as well as by guards as effective tools for crowd control. Pole-arms seem to have survived longer than swords on the battlefield and examples of eighteenth century pole-arms but were gradually replaced by the bayonet.

**Fencing**: The science of arms, commonly referred to as the art of defence. Contrary to the modern term which refers to the Olympic sport of fencing, this study uses the term in its original sense representing the martial arts involved in self-defence. *Scherma* in Italian is derived from the word *schermo* which also signifies defending.

**Knight**: Coined from Carolingian times, referring to an equestrian warrior who gradually joined the superior levels of society and evolved chivalric codes of conduct in close ties to Christian values of Justice and Charity.
**Courtier:** The early modern term defining any respected member of a prince’s court. A term used for higher and lower nobility generally referring to members of the upper class and may be viewed as the early modern version of the medieval knight.

**The Order:** The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta, otherwise referred to as the ‘Order of Malta’ and sometimes the less reliable ‘Order of St. John’ (since other military orders use this name), is referred to simply as ‘The Order’ in this text for convenience.

**Hospitaller:** A term used to describe any member of the Order of Malta since its primary function was of Hospitality which was maintained throughout its existence.

**Convent:** The term given to the Order’s headquarters which, in the Maltese phase was Valletta, thus becoming a convent city (like Vittoriosa and Rhodes before it).

**Novice:** In this text is referred to a trainee Hospitaller who, after the reforms of the Council of Trent was obliged to remain in convent for a stipulated amount of time and had to pass certain standards before being accepted into the Order.

**Caravana:** A period of six months’ service in the Order’s navy which was obligatory before a Hospitaller progressed and gained office. Each Hospitaller had to complete four caravane.
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**Online Resources**

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