

Chastity, Bachelorhood and Masculinity in Early Modern Europe: the Case of the Hospitaller Knights of St John (c.1520-c.1650)

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ABSTRACT

This chapter engages with gender through an analysis of the historiography of chastity, bachelorhood and masculinity in early modern Europe. We begin with an overview of the ideas and practices related to chastity during the Middle Ages and how these were challenged and upheld as a result of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. From there the discussion moves on to consider a range of bachelorhood models that challenge the assumption – generally premised on the study of Protestant communities – that all men across Europe aspired to be patriarchal heads of households. In those parts of Europe where the Catholic Church retained its presence, men had a range of options to choose from in deciding what sort of life they wanted to lead. One such option – particularly for noblemen – was membership in the military-religious Order of St John the Baptist (of Malta).

The focus of studies dealing with chastity has been primarily on women, but this was a practice that influenced men as much as women. By looking at the Knights of St John, this study provides comparative material against which the experiences of women that have been analysed in many pioneering studies can now be more broadly understood. As part of the discussion of chastity, bachelorhood and masculinity within the Order of St John, this study draws a comparison between Baldassare Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528) and Frà Sabba Castiglione's *Ricordi ovvero ammaestramenti* (1546). Frà Sabba, a Knight of St John, is the lesser-known cousin of the famous Baldassare. Comparing the ideas of these two 16th-century men throws a revealing light on the varieties of manhood in early modern Europe.

The overall aim of this chapter is to show how gender was at the heart of diverse male religious identities. It responds to a historiographical need to study gender in military-religious institutions in order to understand how religious and aristocratic/military ideals of masculinity interacted. In this way, the chapter contributes one further piece to the knowledge of social/religious identities and experiences that characterised early modern Europe.

Dan il-kapitlu jistharreġ it-tema tal-ġens permezz t'analizi tal-istorjografija dwar il-kastità, l-istat ta' għażeb u l-maskulinità fl-Ewropa fil-perjodu modern bikri. Din il-kitba tibda billi tevalwa b'mod ġeneriku l-ideat u l-prattiċi li kellhom x'jaqsmu mal-kastità fil-Medju Evu u kif dawn ġew sfidati u sostnuti bħala riżultat tar-Riforma u l-Kontro-Riforma. Id-diskussjoni tiżvolgi u tqis diversi rġiel li ma kenux miżżewġin u li għaldaqstant imorru kontra l-idea – fil-biċċa l-kbira msawra fuq studji dwar komunitajiet Protestanti – li l-irġiel kollha madwar l-Ewropa kienu jaspiraw li jkunu kapijiet patrijarkali ta' familji. Fl-imkejjien tal-Ewropa fejn il-Knisja Kattolika żammet il-preżenza tagħha,

l-irġiel kellhom numru ta' mudelli li fuqhom setgħu jsawru t-tip ta' ħajja li xtaqu jgħixu. Wāhda minn dawn l-għażliet – b'mod partikolari għall-irġiel nobbli – kienet is-sħubija fi ħdan l-Ordni militari-religjuż ta' San Ġwann il-Battista (ta' Malta).

Studji fuq it-tema tal-kastità ġeneralment harsu iktar lejn in-nisa, minkejja li l-kastità kienet stat li kienet tinfluwenza lill-irġiel daqs kemm kienet tinfluwenza lin-nisa. Minħabba li dan il-kapitlu jhars lejn il-Kavallieri ta' San Ġwann, dan joffri materjal li jista' jintuza sabiex l-esperjenzi tan-nisa fl-imghoddi li diġa ġew mistharġa, jitqiegħdu f'qafas iktar wiesa' u sħiħ. Bħala parti mid-diskussjoni dwar il-kastità, l-istat ta' għażeb u l-maskulinità fi ħdan l-Ordni ta' San Ġwann, dan l-istudju jqabbel xi siltiet mill-ktieb ta' Baldassare Castiglione Il libro del corteggiano (1528) ma' obrajn mill-ktieb ta' Frà Sabba Castiglione Ricordi ovvero ammaestramenti (1546). Frà Sabba, li kien Kavallier ta' San Ġwann, kien ukoll il-kuġin tal-ferm iktar magħruf Baldassare. It-tqabbil ta' l-ideat ta' dawn iż-żewġ kittieba tas-seklu sittax jgħin sabiex jintefa' xaqq ta' dawł fuq il-varjeta ta' stati ta' rġulija fl-Ewropa tal-perjodu modern bikri.

L-għan ewlieni ta' dan il-kapitlu hu li juri kif l-identitajiet maskili u religjużi kienu influwenzati b'mod kbir mill-ġeneru. Fl-istorjografija jinhass il-bżonn li jsehb aktar studju dwar l-ordnijiet militari-religjużi minħabba li dawn jistgħu jkatru t-tagħrif dwar kif ideali religjużi u aristokratiċi/militari kienu jithalltu u jaffettwaw lil xulxin. Dan il-kapitlu, għaldaqstant, iwieġeb sewwasew għal din l-isfida storjografika. B'dan il-mod, din il-kitba tipproponi parti obra tal-mużajk t'identitajiet u esperjenzi soċjali/religjużi li kienu jikkarakterizzaw l-Ewropa fil-perjodu modern bikri, u juri kif studju li jintegra fih analiżi tal-ġens maskil jgħin sabiex ikun jista' jintefa' iżjed dawł fuq dawn l-elementi.

[Malta is an] island inhabited by bachelors, and by youths who have no one to guide them, and who fear nothing, [who hail] from all the nations of the world, and the elderly are not saints¹.

With these words, Mgr Fabio Chigi, Inquisitor and Apostolic Delegate of Malta (1634-1639; Pope Alexander VI, 1655-1667) summed-up the way of life of the Hospitaller Knights of St John in the early 17th century². The origins of the Order of St John go back to the second half of the 11th century, when a hospice was founded in Jerusalem to cater for the needs of pilgrims visiting the Holy City³. Gradually, it expanded from being a nursing institution to become a military and naval one with the aim of fighting Islam and defending Christendom. As a result of this struggle with the forces of Islam, the Order moved its headquarters a number of times, and in 1530 settled in Malta. Its members were laymen who took religious vows; their mission was to serve the poor and defend the faith⁴. By the 16th century, the requirements to join the Order had become increasingly rigid, especially to enter the more important rank of knight, which was reserved for noblemen⁵.

It has been estimated that in 1631 there were 2,058 Hospitallers, almost half of whom were French⁶. Young and old noblemen from diverse cultural backgrounds filled the ranks of knights in the Order of St John; Chigi was well aware of this and of the potential for extensive unruly behaviour within the small confines of Malta. The bachelorhood of the Knights – which was underscored by the vow of chastity they took at their investiture – was a core factor in organising their relationships with each other and with other men and women.

Chastity involves repudiation of an active sexual life, while celibacy involves rejection of marriage⁷. The Latin Church had long upheld chastity, but there was always an undercurrent of criticism against this practice and clerical concubinage was common⁸. With the Reformation, many parts of Europe rejected the link between chastity and religious life, but at the Council of Trent (1545-1547, 1551-1552, 1562-1563) the Catholic Church reaffirmed its validity as a means to leading a temperate existence⁹. In spite of this, chastity remained ambiguous and was understood

in fluid terms across Catholic Europe: studies about nuns in Venice reveal a complex array of sexual and non-sexual relations, and that there was room for a certain amount of negotiation/adaptation with regard to chastity¹⁰. A study of early modern Münster reveals that it took nearly a hundred years for clerical celibacy to be finally enforced¹¹.

The case study of priests and their concubines in Münster emphasizes the importance of looking at men as well as women when trying to unravel the role of gender in the construction of individual and collective religious and social identities. Rosi Braidotti adopts a

working definition of gender ... [that] refers primarily but not exclusively to women. Not only does it include men but it also defines 'women' as a very broad and internally differentiated category that includes differences of class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and age¹².

Braidotti's sub-categories for women (class, ethnicity, and so on) are equally valid for men. As Natalie Zemon Davis argued back in 1976:

... it seems to me that we should be interested in the history of both women and men, that we should not be working only on the subjected sex any more than an historian of class can focus exclusively on peasants. Our goal is to understand the significance of the *sexes*, of gender groups in the historical past¹³.

On the eve of the 21st century, Joan Scott argued that gender had become "routinized", "respectable" and "scientific", thereby losing its ability to challenge historical fixities¹⁴. Nonetheless, she acknowledges that gender can still provide "a critical wedge" within particular historiographies. Without implying full acquiescence with Scott's view of 'gender' being past its sell-by date, this chapter is premised on a belief that gender is a necessary wedge in the reconsideration of Hospitaller historiography. This contribution also takes its cue from Scott's 1986 paper and its appeal for an interpretation of gender that goes beyond a strict family/kin focus to include other social structures¹⁵. The Order of St John – as a military, religious and nursing institution of the Roman Catholic Church – is one such structure and the study of gender therein responds to the need for the literature on Counter-Reformation nuns to be matched in relation to masculinity¹⁶.

The Hospitaller Knights of St John defy any straightforward definition of masculinity. In actual fact, studying them reveals the multiplicity, fluidity and dynamism of gendered identities. Hence this chapter focuses on the men who belonged to this religious institution and who formed a significant but all too often neglected facet of early modern Roman Catholic masculinity; it does so by using the categories of 'celibacy' and 'bachelorhood' to illustrate the variety of patterns in European manhood and how not all men aspired to become patriarchal heads of households. This represents a departure from traditional histories of the Order, which have for the most part ignored gender in their analysis. Admittedly, there is a growing interest in the analysis of gender through the study of the nuns of the Order¹⁷. Nonetheless, given the predominantly male composition of the Order and its military ethos, the lack of consideration given to masculinity is remarkable¹⁸. Most studies on chastity tend to focus on women, but this was a factor that was also central to many men's lives¹⁹. Gender – and in this case more specifically masculinity – serves to throw a revealing light on the nature of relationships between men within an all-male religious organisation that was actively involved in the world.

Medieval Europe came to be dominated by a celibate clergy and the monasteries provided a setting where men formed bonds of brotherhood²⁰. In the volume edited by Dawn M. Hadley on medieval masculinities, there is an emphasis on the "multi-faceted nature of male experience and identity"; how looking at "men as gendered beings" reveals how experiences and identities were situational constructs created through interaction²¹. A theme that runs throughout the volume centres on a perceived opposition between secular and religious masculinity; between warriors who fought and clerics who prayed²². Some argue that both lifestyles entailed a level of stress for

the men who led such lives: the stress of warfare for warriors and of celibacy for clerics²³. The study of medieval clerical and monastic masculinities has centred on the question of whether priests and monks were seen to be less than masculine because of their rejection of the household model of masculinity entailing “impregnating women, protecting dependants, and serving as provider to one’s family”²⁴. In this vein, medieval historians have described the clergy as a ‘third gender’ or ‘emasculine’: as chaste religious men, they did not “impregnate women, protect dependants and provide for a family”, key features of masculinity according to some historians²⁵. On the other hand, many monks and clerics formulated a vision of chastity as the ultimate masculine endeavour because of their ability to master self-control over the body and its natural drives. Such discourses tended to be framed in military terms²⁶. The body was therefore a central site of contestation and interpretation where religious identities were formulaed²⁷.

The late Middle Ages were characterised by extensive debates about clerical celibacy. In his *Institutio Christiani Matrimonii* (1526), Erasmus had argued that although true celibacy was laudable, it was hard to achieve and that marriage was spiritually equal to sacerdotal or monastic celibacy²⁸. Another widely diffused Reformation text was *Il Sommario della Santa Scrittura* (mid-1530s). Penned by an anonymous author, it vehemently criticized forced vocations and monasticism in general²⁹. Although forced monachization is generally associated with women, it was a phenomenon that affected men as well. Such discussions reached their culmination in the Reformation’s outright rejection of ‘emasculinity’ in favour of married, patriarchal pastors³⁰. Under the impact of the ideas of Protestant reformers, a controlled form of sexuality became an essential component of masculinity in 16th-century Germany. Patriarchs were seen to be partners, providers and occasionally villains³¹. A whole generation of ex-monks, including Luther, needed to adjust themselves to a non-celibate life with their wives, which in turn meant a change in relationships among the men themselves³². In England, where the clergy was no longer celibate, chastity was still demanded of the students and fellows of colleges and universities. Nonetheless, some sexual experience was deemed to be useful if a young man was to acquire confidence in his manhood³³. Thus, many engaged in sexual activity in ways deemed to maintain their honour. At the same time, they filed lawsuits against those who slandered them using a language of sexual insult³⁴. Although Protestant societies rejected a life of chastity as a form of masculine expression, they retained and stressed an emphasis on mastery and self-control as essential components of masculinity³⁵.

As in most spheres of contention with the Protestants, the response of the Roman Catholic Church was to reaffirm with increased vigour the validity of its own teachings, in this case the utility of chastity³⁶. Virginity and chastity remained fundamental markers of Catholic societies and politics³⁷. In Protestant England, for instance, the masculinity of wandering Catholic priests was often defined as heroic because they risked their lives for their faith³⁸. In early modern Venice, the celibacy of clerics and nuns was caught in a web of complex relationships and though some engaged in sexual activities, celibacy remained a defining feature of their identity³⁹. Along with continued adherence to chastity, the value of self-control over the passions was also highly desirable. This meant that in spite of increasingly entrenched confessional divisions, certain values managed to cut across Protestant-Catholic differences. A level of restraint in every sphere of life, including sex and violence, was fundamental for a man to be considered a man, whether he was a Protestant or a Catholic⁴⁰.

Throughout early modern Europe, there were high numbers of bachelors: journeymen in Germany, apprentices in France, and arsenal workers in Venice (to name a few), all of whom had limited marriage prospects⁴¹. Merry E. Wiesner argues that German journeymen actually took the prohibition of marriage that was imposed on them by master craftsmen and turned it into a keystone of their group identity⁴². Bachelors were also numerically strong further up the social ladder among

the nobility. In this case, the operations of primogeniture and rules of inheritance that favoured the eldest son meant that younger siblings – both male and female – were precluded from marriage and many were earmarked for positions within the Catholic Church⁴³. On the face of it, these examples would seem to indicate that the marriage-centred model of masculinity – largely derived from the study of Protestant communities – was universally sought after by early modern men. This notion, however, has been challenged and found in need of acclimatization depending on geographic, economic, cultural and religious differences. There were alternative performative arenas to the household where manliness could be satisfactorily established. For instance, *castrati* – men who were surgically adjusted to preserve their singing voices – were early modern celebrities who were highly esteemed. Many *castrati* were still able to have sexual intercourse but they could not father children, a fact that caused various authorities to look into the nature and scope of marriage where procreation was not possible⁴⁴. The masculinity of *castrati* was not dependent on marriage or fatherhood, but on their skill as performers⁴⁵. Another revealing performative arena was that of barber-surgeons in Turin. Many of these chose not to marry but were nonetheless able to ensure the continuity of their workshops. In Italy, where the person of the celibate priest made bachelorhood more respectable than in Protestant territories, figures such as the barber-surgeons were able to stake out a respectable role for themselves in their communities without the need to be married⁴⁶.

For the members of the Order of St John, the hospital and the battlefield were key performative arenas where they established their masculinity. The practice of ‘hospitality’ was at the very heart of the Hospitallers’ original *raison d’être* and it retained its centrality throughout the Order’s history. In Malta this acquired its most practical manifestation in the administration of a sophisticated Holy Infirmary where all Hospitallers, and in particular novices, were to serve the sick⁴⁷. The Holy Infirmary existed for the service of “our Lords the sick and the poor of Christ”⁴⁸. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, the Grand Masters continued to serve the sick at the Holy Infirmary, as well as in their Palace, where they served food to twelve poor men, thus imitating Christ’s washing of the feet of the Apostles⁴⁹. The Order developed a language and iconography of service towards the sick and the poor, in which the Order as whole, and the Grand Master in particular, likened themselves to Christ⁵⁰. In its literature and iconography, the Order never ceased promoting this curative mission, in particular through descriptions and depictions of the Blessed Gerard, founder of the Order as a hospice in Jerusalem.

Alongside this curative dimension, when the Hospitallers battled with Muslims and heretics this constituted the other arena where they could prove their worth. There was a strong emphasis on the firmness and spirituality required of the Hospitallers as ‘Soldiers of Christ’ and as the ‘New Maccabees’⁵¹. The Maccabees were an Old Testament Jewish priestly family who – with the help of God – initiated a revolt against Antiochus IV Epiphanes, King of Syria, through which they were able to re-establish the independence of Israel⁵². The early modern twofold perception of the Maccabees as divinely inspired soldiers and as martyrs appealed to Hospitaller sensibilities. In a set of instructions for Conventual Chaplains, the Maltese Hospitaller Chaplain Frà Fabrizio Cagliola explained how the Order combined in perfect harmony the two functions of hospitality and militia, as the Hospitallers were Soldiers of Christ, who in following the example of the Holy Maccabees, fought to defend the Faith in the belief that “no man hath greater love, than he who lays down his life for his Friends, that is for Catholics”⁵³. This was a functional form of violence that made Christian shipping and the littoral of the Mediterranean safer, while keeping the Hospitallers engaged at sea rather than idle on land⁵⁴. Conversely, illegitimate violence in the form of fights, brawls, duels and revolts recurred again and again among the Hospitallers⁵⁵. Though condemned by the elders of the Order and by the Papacy, such violence – particularly within all-

male group settings and accompanied by food, drink, gambling and blasphemy – was essential to establishing and maintaining a Hospitaller's standing among his peers.

Male companionship was central for Hospitallers, particularly because of the need to prove one's masculinity to one's peers in an all-male Order, and in the absence of family units. It was on the basis of intimate and chaste male comradeship that individual Hospitallers shaped their behaviour when at sea or on land, whether fighting, praying or bantering. The bachelorhood of the Hospitallers was not the poor relation of the household-based model of manhood (husband and father); it was a distinct and positive form of masculinity based on religious knighthood. Chastity was meant to be obligatory for all Hospitallers and whether this was upheld or ignored, it remained a core organising principle for the relations of Hospitallers with each other, and with other men and women. There was a tacit recognition within the Order that while sexual intercourse with women was tolerated, it was essential for the Hospitallers to exercise restraint over their emotions⁵⁶.

The tension inherent in the struggle between celibacy and sex formed the basis of one of the most popular stories within the Order in the 16th and 17th centuries. This was the tale of three French noble Knights (who were brothers) in 12th-century Syria, who became prisoners of the Sultan of Egypt. The Sultan wanted them to convert to Islam. Having failed to convince them through brutality and the arguments of his best theologians, he decided to use his beautiful and learned daughter, Ismeria, to seduce the three Knights into Islam. This was a plot hatched by the devil to lure the Knights through the corrupting power of sex; however, the unwavering faith of the three Knights helped them not only to resist the sexual charms of Ismeria, but also to cause her to convert to Christianity and the four of them were miraculously transported from Egypt to France through the intercession of the Virgin Mary⁵⁷. This story was included in the official histories of the Order and was the subject of a number of paintings, all of which emphasized a language of service, sacrifice and martyrdom for Christ, which the Hospitallers were meant to adopt during battle and in the face of female flesh and lust. The power of self-control, chastity and faith not only saved the three Hospitallers, but also redeemed Ismeria who became devoted to the Virgin Mary. The example of the chaste masculine bravery of the three brothers was put forward for all Hospitallers to emulate.

One of the clearest expositions and defences of chastity as understood by the Roman Catholic Church was penned by the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), as part of his great catechising work *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, which aimed at the conversion of the Chinese. In Chapter Eight, Ricci asserted that while chastity was difficult to uphold, it was also the ultimate test of manhood. Sex, Ricci argued, weakened resolve and determination and he used the example of horse breeding to explain his point: just as an expert on horse rearing keeps his prized horses away from mares so that they will be at their most vigorous when on the battlefield, so those men who choose to serve God refrain from sex in order to be able to channel all their energies into fighting the battles of the Lord. Moreover, celibacy was a convenient state of being for men⁵⁸.

The convenience of celibacy was also recognised and extolled by the Hospitaller Frà Sabba Castiglione in his book *Ricordi ovvero Ammaestramenti* (1546)⁵⁹. In it, Frà Sabba acknowledged that a happy marriage could bring a man bountiful bliss, but he also listed the many disadvantages of the marital state, thereby highlighting the value and benefits of celibacy, particularly the freedom it offered men⁶⁰. Frà Sabba was a younger cousin of the famous Baldassare Castiglione, author of the popular *Il Libro del Corteggiano* (1528). A comparison of some of the ideas contained in the works of these two 16th-century men throws a revealing light on the varieties of manhood in early modern Europe. Treatises on conduct such as these were widespread in *ancien régime* courtly

societies. Significantly, while Baldassare portrayed the court environment as the place where noblemen could establish their standing and prove their worth, Frà Sabba believed that mid-16th-century courts were decadent and ruled by jealousy (depicted as female) who reigned supreme. Men were therefore to avoid modern courtesy⁶¹. At the same time, both authors argued that grace, virtue and modesty were the hallmarks of a true Christian gentleman⁶².

Another point of divergence between the two writers centred on their attitude towards women, and consequently on chastity. Baldassare brings in women as contributors to the balance and harmony at court, in contrast to a more established view of women as personifications of chaos and disorder; at the same time the superior intellect of men is underscored⁶³. On the other hand, Frà Sabba admonished men, and in particular religious knights, to uphold their vow of chastity and defend women, who being weak and defenceless, depended on men to safeguard their honesty. While it was true that the pull of nature to ignore chastity was strong, true knights would be able to preserve it through the help and grace of God⁶⁴.

At the same time Frà Sabba warned the Hospitallers to beware of women and their beauty, lest they fall victim to their charms. A truly beautiful woman was beautiful on the inside, not outside, by virtue of her being modest and this was the quality that men were suppose to appreciate most. Those that thought of women in purely physical terms were “sensuous, frivolous, lascivious, and vain persons, in whom there was no judgement, no discretion, no reason⁶⁵”. With regard to “the beauties of women”, in one of his most witty comments, Frà Sabba said:

Since it often occurs among gentlemen and knights, and in particular among sensual and idle young men, to reason and debate about the beauties of women, and because I know that some will say that a woman to be beautiful, needs to be well-built, well made, while another will say that she needs to be plain, and another small-built, and some will say she ought to be white-skinned, some a red-head, some a brunette, some pale, some livid, and some praise black eyes that resemble mature olives, some those of a chestnut colour, some those that are azure like a sapphire, some like the waters of the sea, and some praise golden hair, some blond, some of the colour of mature hazelnut, and some black, and some red; thus as regards the beauties of women it is hard to judge, because they depend on the various and diverse tastes and appetites of sensuous, frivolous, lascivious, and vain persons, in whom there is no judgement, no discretion, no reason⁶⁶.

Frà Sabba remarked sadly how such discussions amongst gentlemen and knights in which they compared the attributes and qualities of different women often caused divisions amongst these men that degenerated into fights. He therefore advised the vain and light-hearted young men to beware of women, for they were like the sirens who tried to lure Ulysses into disaster⁶⁷. Similarly, the Maltese Hospitaller Chaplain Frà Fabrizio Cagliola admonished all those who had taken the vow of chastity to exercise control over both their thoughts and their actions⁶⁸. And when writing about the vow of chastity and the virtue of temperance in the early 18th century, Frà Marc'Antonio Zondadari recognized that in their daily lives the Hospitallers had to mingle with women, but they had to be on their guard to prevent feelings and temptations from developing⁶⁹.

In the introduction to an edited collection of essays on *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, Patricia H. Cullum lamented the fact that they had not been offered a paper on the military-religious orders, since a study of these contains great potential for the examination of the interaction between clerical and aristocratic ideals of masculinity⁷⁰. This chapter has sought to take up Cullum's call for such an investigation, albeit with a focus on the early modern period (though account is taken of the relevant scholarship on the Middle Ages). The vows of chastity and poverty were promoted by the Order as essential attributes of its military-nursing-religious activities, through which these acquired an aura of nobility and heroism that was much admired by Christian princes⁷¹.

Around 1614, a German Count, George Albert of Erbach, visited Malta and made detailed notes about various aspects of the lives of the Hospitallers, including a description of the investiture ceremony, where a novice formally became a Hospitaller⁷². The novices were clothed in long white garments, had belts around their waists, and bent on one knee before the altar. The celebrant who carried out the ceremony said to them:

Maintain the character of a spiritual Knight in chastity and honour, as our profession and regulations require of you. In virtue of these I now gird this sword on you, for as this belt enables you to carry the weapon firmly at your side, so you should be bound by chastity to extinguish all evil lusts, to keep yourself pure throughout your life, as long as God in his grace shall give you life⁷³.

Significantly, the belt of the Hospitaller acquires a double meaning. Firstly, it is intended to help carry a knight's sword, which arguably constituted his single most important possession. It was through the sword that a Knight of St John was able to carry out his religious vocation of fighting infidels and heretics to defend Christ's Church; those that live by the sword, shall die by the sword, so that this weapon also served as the means through which a Hospitaller might achieve martyrdom. But many Hospitallers also wielded their swords in ventures that were far from being Christian; their involvement in fights and brawls left many wounded or killed because of issues of honour and quarrels over gambling and women⁷⁴. For these reasons, newly received Hospitallers were encouraged to consider their sword-girdle as a kind of chastity belt that was meant to shield them from the snares of the flesh. As a reminder of their religious calling as 'Soldiers of Christ' and 'Servants of His Poor and Sick', after the ceremony was over they went to serve the sick at the Holy Infirmary⁷⁵.

The three categories of analysis utilised in this chapter – celibacy, bachelorhood and masculinity – form a particular (though certainly not the only) conceptual framework that can help to expand the meanings and scope of gender studies in history. Through gender it is possible to reinvigorate the history of the Order of St John by posing a set of questions that have never previously been asked. Though gender may have become "respectable" – as argued by Scott – it has not lost its potential to stir strong emotions and cause historiographical reconsideration. In this study, gender (masculinity in particular) is analysed as part of a matrix involving chastity, bachelorhood, knight-hood and Roman Catholicism. These various elements came together to denote the identity and experience of being a Knight of St John. Their chastity and bachelorhood were important constitutive elements of a form of manhood that did not depend on marriage and a household to prove its worth. It was one of a number of options available to early modern men, and which historians are now starting to rediscover. In turn, by looking at the Knights of St John in terms of a plurality of male models and experiences, this study provides comparative material against which the experiences of women – captured in many pioneering studies – can now be more broadly understood⁷⁶.

What this chapter argues is that gender is useful not only in the study of family and kin networks, but also in investigating non-familial social structures such as the Order of St John, and other religious institutions. A gender oriented or gender sensitive approach to history makes it possible to elucidate and come to terms with the fact that there was no one overarching pattern in European manhood (and by extension womanhood). Instead, there were various options that were moulded by a number of factors, including background, geography and religion. In traditional histories of the Order of St John there has not been a consideration of gender because of the implicit assumption that gender is absent in an all-male organisation. Nevertheless, gender is never absent; on the contrary, it has the potential to provide a more rounded image of human lives in earlier periods. Finally,

through a study “of gender groups in the historical past”⁷⁷, it becomes possible to reach a deeper and more nuanced understanding of behaviour patterns, some of which a person like Inquisitor Fabio Chigi (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) found to be so irksome and reprehensible.

NOTES

- ¹ V. Borg, *Fabio Chigi Apostolic Delegate in Malta (1634-39): An Edition of his Correspondence*, Vatican City 1967, p. 9, “È un isola habitata da scapoli, et da gioventù senza guida, e senza timore, di tutte le nazioni del mondo, et i vecchi non sono santi”.
- ² Archival abbreviations used in this chapter: National Library of Malta [N.L.M.], Archives of the Order of Malta [A.O.M.], Cathedral Archives of Mdina, Malta [C.A.M.], Archive of the Inquisition [A.I.M.], Criminal Proceedings [C.P.]; Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana [B.A.V.], Fondo Barberini Latino [Barb. Lat.]; Archivio Segreto Vaticano [A.S.V.], Segreteria di Stato, Malta [Segr. Stato, Malta]; Biblioteca Magistrale di Roma [B.M.R.]; St John’s Gate, Clerkenwell, London [S.J.G.].
- ³ A. Luttrell, *The Military Orders – Some Definitions*, in K. Elm, C.D. Fonseca (eds.), *Militia Sancti Sepulcri: Idea e Istituzioni: Atti del Colloquio Internazionale tenuto presso la Pontificia Università del Laterano, 10-12 aprile 1996*, Vatican City 1998, pp. 77-88; A. Williams, *The Constitutional Development of the Order of St John in Malta, 1530-1798*, in V. Mallia-Milanes (ed.), *Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798: Studies on Early Modern Malta and the Order of St John of Jerusalem*, Malta 1993, pp. 285-296; J. Riley-Smith, *The Knights of St John in Jerusalem and Cyprus 1050-1310*, London 1967, pp. 17-59.
- ⁴ H.J.A. Sire, *The Knights of Malta*, New Haven - London 1994, p. 212; L. Sandri, *Epoche e tipologie di diffusione dei cavalieri gerosolomitani. Dall’impegno assistenziale a quello sanitario*, in L. Corti, F. Amendolagine, M. Doglioni (eds.), *Lungo il tragitto crociato della vita*, Venice 2000, p. 29; A. Luttrell, H.J. Nicholson, *Introduction: A Survey of Hospitaller Women in the Middle Ages*, in Id. (eds.), *Hospitaller Women in the Middle Ages*, Aldershot 2006, p. 4; J. Riley-Smith, *Towards a History of Military-Religious Orders*, in K. Borchardt, N. Jaspert, H.J. Nicholson (eds.), *The Hospitallers, the Mediterranean and Europe: Festschrift for Anthony Luttrell*, Aldershot 2007, pp. 269-284.
- ⁵ Riley-Smith, *The Knights of St John* cit., p. 237; C. Donati, *L’Idea di Nobiltà in Italia: Secolo XIV-XVIII*, Rome 1988, pp. 250-252. It was also possible to join the Order of St John as a Conventual Chaplain or as a Servant-at-Arms. The requirements to join these two ranks were less rigid and they were open to non-nobles. This chapter focuses primarily on the Knightly ranks.
- ⁶ J. Riley-Smith, *Hospitallers: The History of the Order of St John*, London 1999, p. 74.
- ⁷ J. Gribomont, *Castità*, in G. Pelliccia, G. Rocca (eds.), *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, Rome 1975, vol. 2, pp. 644-648; Ch. Lefebvre, *Castità – Dottrina Canonica Classica*, in Pelliccia, Rocca (eds.), *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione* cit., vol. 2, pp. 662-665; T. Matura, *Celibato*, in Pelliccia, Rocca (eds.), *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione* cit., vol. 2, pp. 738-744.
- ⁸ H.C. Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*, London 1932, p. 1.
- ⁹ N. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, London 1990, vol. 2, p. 755, session 24, *Canons on the Sacrament of Marriage*, 9, 10; Gribomont, *Castità – Antichità* cit., pp. 644-648; Lefebvre, *Castità – Dottrina Canonica Classica* cit., pp. 662-665; Matura, *Celibato* cit., pp. 738-744; U. Rublack, *Reformation Europe*, Cambridge 2005, p. 30; M. Laven, *Sex and Celibacy in Early Modern Venice*, in “The Historical Journal”, 2001, 44, 4, p. 866; S. Laqua, *Concubinage and the Church in Early Modern Münster*, in R. Harris, L. Roper (eds.), *The Art of Survival: Gender and History in Europe, 1450-2000*, Oxford 2006, p. 100.
- ¹⁰ J.G. Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice*, Chicago - London 1999, pp. 135-136; Laven, *Sex and Celibacy* cit., p. 884.
- ¹¹ Laqua, *Concubinage and the Church* cit., p. 100.
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- ¹⁵ Id., *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis*, in “The American Historical Review”, 1986, 91, 5, p. 1068.

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- ²³ J. Murray, *Introduction*, in Id. (ed.), *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, New York - London 1999, p. xi.
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- ⁴⁴ H. Heller, *Anti-Italianism in 16th-Century France*, Toronto - London 2003, pp. 307, 313.
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- ⁴⁶ Cavallo, *Bachelorhood and Masculinity* cit., pp. 376-378.
- ⁴⁷ B.A.V., Barb. Lat., Ms.5036, 3, 1630.
- ⁴⁸ N.L.M., A.O.M.293, f.51^r, 1597, "quae in nro Conventuali Xenodochio et Sacra Infermeria Dnis nris infirmis et Christi pauperibus una cum elemosynaru publica et consueta distributione tam Melitae quam alibi extra continuo praestantur"; A.S.V., Segr. Stato, Malta, Ms.103, f.216^r, Chapter General, 1578, "custode delli poveri di Gesu cristo". S.J.G., Box K23/2(7)-K24/1(8) Merle Collection, K23/6, n.p., 18 January 1633, "Frater Antonius de Paula Dei gratia Sacrae Domus Hospitalis Sancti Iohannis Hierosolymitani et militaris Ordinis Sancti Sepulchri Dominici magister humilis pauperumque Iesu Christi custos".
- ⁴⁹ B.A.V., Barb. Lat., Ms.5036, 3, 1630.
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- ⁵³ B.M.R., Ms.31, 476, 1647, "niuno puo aver maggior carità, che disporre l'Anima, cioe la vita p l'Amici, cioe Cattolici". I.S. Mifsud (ed.), *Le Disaventure Marinesche [del] Comm. Fr. Fabrizio Cagliola (1604-1665), Scrittore Maltese del Seicento*, [Malta, Ms.654, c.1650], Malta 1929, p. 39.
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- ⁵⁵ Instances of Hospitaller violence abound in the archives. A few examples include: N.L.M., A.O.M.95, ff.163^v-164^r, 7 September 1579; ff.249^v-250^r, 22 April 1581; A.O.M.97, ff.64^v, 115^r, 120^r, 1587; A.O.M.98, ff.198^r, 201^r, 1594; C.A.M., A.I.M., C.P. Vol.170, Case 105, n.p., 22 December 1611; C.A.M., A.I.M., C.P., Vol.170, Case 112, n.p., 4 May 1615.
- ⁵⁶ See for instance: N.L.M., A.O.M.93, f.150^r, 8 August 1573; A.O.M.98, f.126^r. C.A.M., A.I.M., C.P., vol. 171, Case 242, n.p., 6 July 1678. See also A. Williams, *Esgart des Frères: A medieval survival in early modern Malta?*, in M.

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- ⁵⁹ D.F. Allen, *The Hospitaller Castiglione's Catholic Synthesis of Warfare, Learning and Lay Piety on the Eve of the Council of Trent*, in K. Borchardt, N. Jaspert, H.J. Nicholson (eds.), *The Hospitallers, the Mediterranean and Europe: Festschrift for Anthony Luttrell*, Aldershot 2007, pp. 255-268.
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- ⁶¹ L. Saracco, *Defining the Gentleman and Gentlewoman in the Italian Renaissance*, in A.K. Isaacs (ed.), *Political Systems and Definitions of Gender Roles*, Pisa 2001, p. 145; Castiglione, *Ricordi* cit., ricordo LXXXI.
- ⁶² Saracco, *Defining the Gentleman and Gentlewoman* cit., p. 149; Castiglione, *Ricordi* cit., ricordo XC.
- ⁶³ Saracco, *Defining the Gentleman and Gentlewoman* cit., pp. 1146-1149.
- ⁶⁴ Castiglione, *Ricordi* cit., ricordo CVI, "e se voi diceste (come alcuni mondani e sensuali) la legge della natura essere inconvincibile, vi risponderò essere vero, per virtù di essa natura, ma non già con l'aiuto e gratia di nostro signor Dio".
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, ricordo CVI, "delle persone sensuali, leggiere, lascive, e vane, nelle quali non è giuditio, ne discretione, ne ragion'alcuna".
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, ricordo CVI, "Perche spesso intraviene fra gentil'huomini e cavalieri, e masimamente tra giovani sensuali e otiosi, ragionar et divisare delle bellezze delle donne, e perche so che alcun dirà che la donna a' dover esser bella, conviene che sia grande, ben fatta, alcun'altro mediocre, e alcun piu' tosto picciola, e chi dirà che la vuol'esser bianca, chi rossa, chi bruna, chi pallida, chi livida, e chi lauda gli occhi negri come matura oliva, chi di colore di castagna, chi azurri come zaffiro, chi come l'acque del mare, e chi commenda li capelli d'oro, chi biondi, chi di colore di avallena matura, e chi negri, e chi rossi; di maniera che delle bellezze della donna mal si puo' guidicare, perche solo dipendono dalli varij e diversi giusti e appetiti delle personi sensuali, leggiere, lascive, e vane, nelle quali non e' giuditio, ne discretione, ne ragion'alcuna".
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