

THE FIRST HOSPITAL OF THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM

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While planning a short transit visit to Jerusalem, I was determined to try to view the remains of the first hospital of the Order of St. John. All the available guidebooks and maps of Jerusalem consulted failed to definitely point out the site of this hospital. Medieval maps of Jerusalem similarly were not helpful in identifying the site. Some preliminary detective work was necessary to gather as much information pertaining to this site to enable localisation.

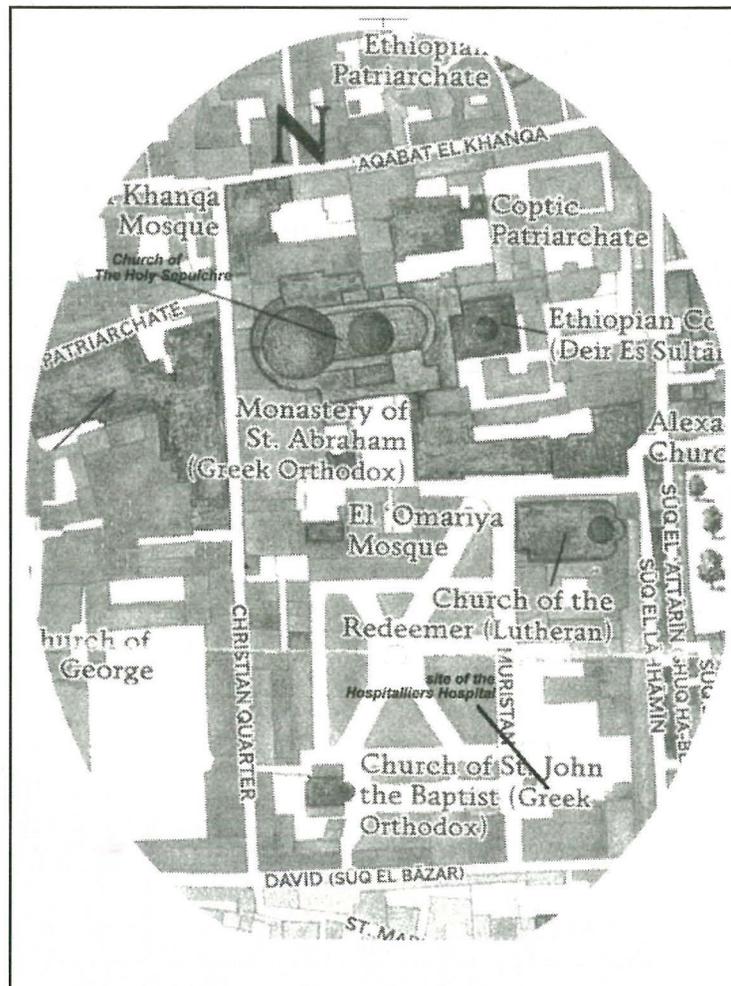
Early History of the Order in Jerusalem

The order of St. John had its origins in Jerusalem about 1050 AD when a group of Amalfi merchants obtained from the Caliph of Egypt Abu Tamin the privilege of building a church, a monastery, and living quarters just "a stone throw from the Holy Sepulchre" in Jerusalem. These buildings were designed for the use of pilgrims to the Holy Land. The date of the institution of the hospital is unknown, but the founder was the monk Brother Gerard who was in charge of the hospital in 1099 when Jerusalem fell to the Crusader Godfrey of Bouillon. The hospital from the first adopted the policy of

receiving all needy patients - Christians, Mohammedans and Jews - irrespective of religion. The holdings of the

mented by Godfrey of Bouillion elected King of Jerusalem. Brother Gerard organised the *Fratres Hospitalarii* into a regularly constituted religious Order under the protection of St. John the Baptist, and thus the members of the Order were named *Knights of St. John* or *Hospitallers*. The Order was formally recognised by Pope Paschall II in 1113. Raymond du Puy, who succeeded Brother Gerard in 1118, further developed the Order and increased its role from a defensive hospitaller one to that of also defending the invalids and pilgrims against the Saracens. The

Christians were driven out of Jerusalem by Sultan Saladin after the battle of Tiberias in



"poor Brethren of the Hospital of St. John", as the order was then known, were aug-

October 1187. The Christian garrison was allowed to leave Jerusalem in three parties: the first conducted by the Templar Knights [an order founded circa 1118 who also ran a hospital in Jerusalem], the second escorted by the Hospitallers, and the third group escorted by the Patriarch and Balian of Ibelin. The Hospitallers were permitted to leave ten of their number in the city to care for their wounded until they were able to travel. Thus ended an approximate hundred and forty years of links of the Hospitallers with the Holy City.(1,2)

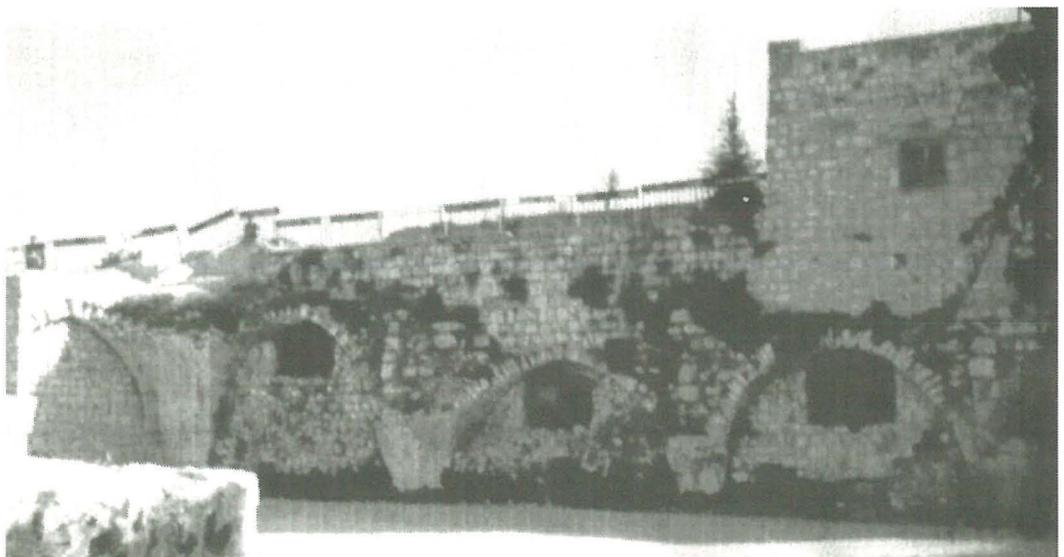
The Hospital of the Order of St. John in Jerusalem

The original hospital was described by several contemporary visitors. The German pilgrim John of Wurzburg who visited Jerusalem circa 1160 wrote that *“Over against the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, on the opposite side of the way towards the south, is a beautiful church built in honor of John the Baptist, annexed to which is a hospital, wherein in various rooms is collected together an enormous multitude of sick people. Both men and women.*

Who are tended and restored to health daily at very great expense. When I was there I learned that the whole number of these sick people amounted to two thousand, of whom sometimes in the course of one day and night more than fifty are carried out dead, while many other fresh ones keep continually arriving. What more can I say? The same house supplies as many people outside it with victuals as it does those inside, in addition to the boundless charity which it daily bestowed upon poor people who beg their bread from door to door and do not lodge in the house, so that the whole sum of its expenses can surely never be calculated even by the managers and stewards thereof. In addition to all these moneys expended upon the sick and upon other poor people, this same house also maintains in its various castles many persons trained to all kinds

of military exercises for the defence of the land of the Christians against the invasion of the Saracens.”(3)

Theodorich visiting Jerusalem before the expulsion in 1187 wrote that *“Here on the south side of the church, stands the Church and Hospital of St. John the Baptist. As for this, no one can credibly tell another how beautiful its buildings are, how abundantly it is supplied with rooms and beds, and other materials for the use of poor and sick people, how rich it is in the means of refreshing the poor, and how devotedly it labors to maintain the needy, unless he has had the opportunity of seeing it with his own eyes. Indeed, we passed through this palace, and were unable by any means to discover the number of sick people lying there; but we saw that the beds numbered more than one thousand. It is not every*

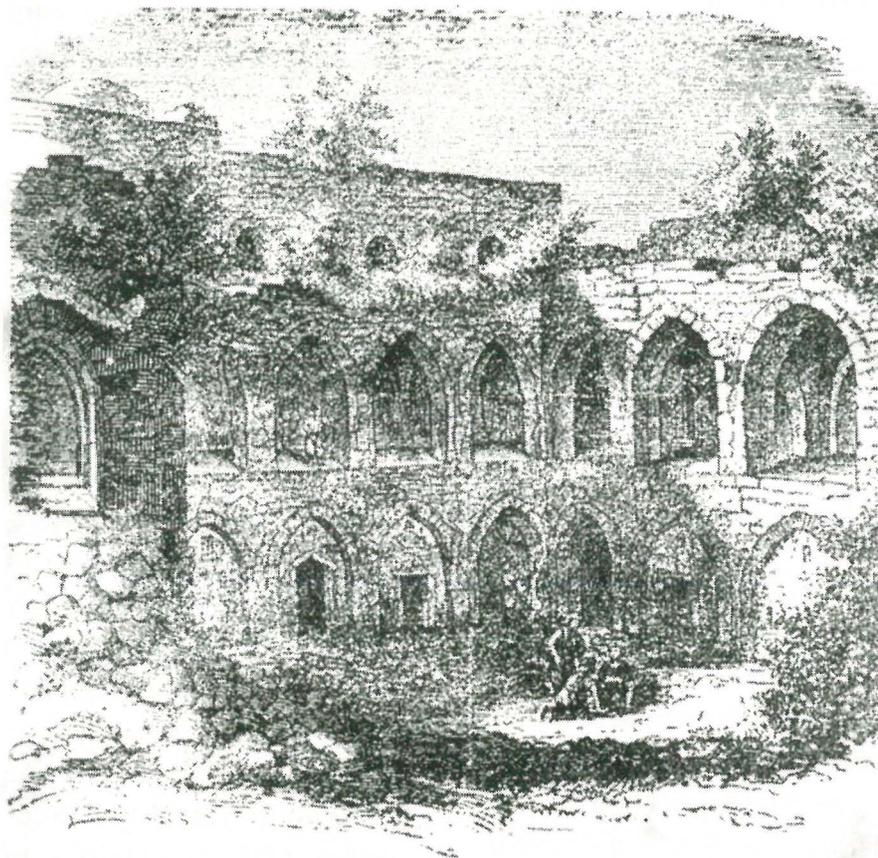


one even of the most powerful kings and despots who could maintain as many people as that house does every day; and no wonder, for, in addition to its possessions in other countries (whose sum total is not easily to be reached), the Hospitallers and the Templars have conquered almost all the cities and villages which once belonged to Judaea, and which were destroyed by Vespasian and Titus, together with all their lands and vineyards; for they have troops stationed throughout the entire country, and castles well fortified against the infidels.”(3)

When Saladin took the Holy City in 1187, he converted the Hospitallers build-

ings to the endowment of the Mosque of Omar. His nephew in 1216 instituted a lunatic asylum in what had been the conventual church, and the area became referred to as the Muristan (1). The Hospital continued to be used for the care of the sick and wounded. Sir John Maundeville in 1322 wrote that “Before the Church of St. Sepulchre, two hundred paces to the south, is the great hospital of St. John, of which the Hospitallers had their foundation. And within the palace of the sick men of that hospital are one hundred and twenty-four pillars of stone; and in the walls of the house, besides the number aforesaid, there are fifty-four pillars that support

the house. From that Hospital, going towards the east, is a very fair church, which is called Our Lady the Great; and after it there is another church, very near, called Our Lady the Latin.” In 1336-41, Ludolph von Suchen wrote that “Near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre once dwelt the brethren of Saint John of Jerusalem, and their palace is now the common hospital for pilgrims. This hospital is so great that 1000 men can easily live therein, and can have everything that they want there by paying for it. It is the custom in this palace or hospital that every pilgrim should pay two Venetian pennies for the use of the hospital. If he sojourn there for a year he pays no more, if he abide but one day he pays no less.”(4)



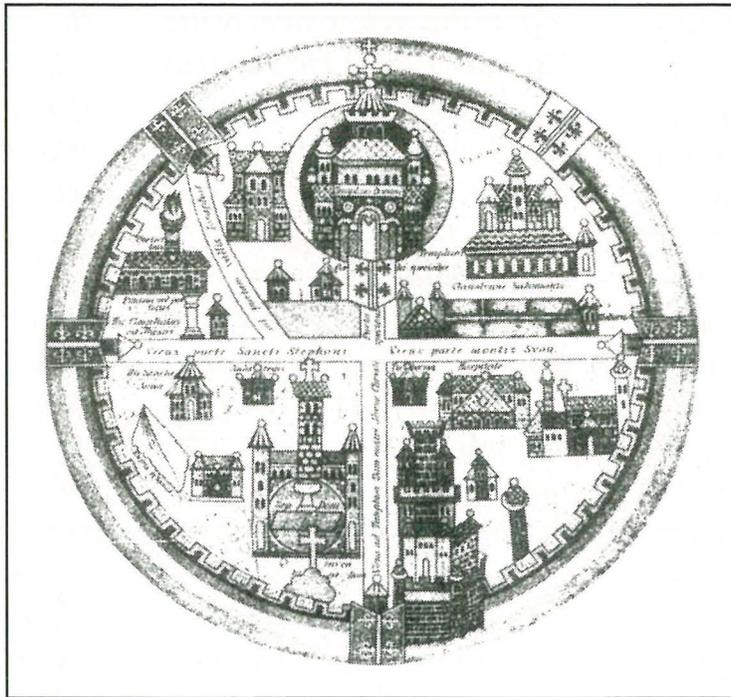
In the nineteenth century, the area was presented by the Sultan of Turkey to Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia who was then the Master of the Johanniterorden, a former branch of the Order. The German Knights built a road through the Muristan from north to south, calling it Prince Frederick William Street, dividing their property from the Greek section. At the entrance in David Street, they erected a gateway bearing the German eagle. On the site of Santa Maria della Latina they built the Lutheran church of the Re-

deemer. The hospital of the Order was situated north of this church, while to the south-east lay the quarters of the Knights. In 1940, the Hospital was described as being in ruins, with only a few massive walls still remaining, with several rows of stone pillars, and the main entrance of the ancient hospital. Some of the foundations had

been excavated and were visible. A diagram of the remains published in 1940 showed the remains of a two-storey angles wall leading to a series of arched corridors and rooms. The majority of the archways in the lower storey were completely sealed up or partially sealed to leave small windows.(1)

The identification of the ruins

The various old descriptions of the site placed the Hospital of the Order of St. John in Jerusalem in the vicinity of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and in close vicinity to the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. The area was known as the Muristan. A review of the modern map of Jerusalem localised the three landmarks - the Church of the Holy Sep-



ulchre, the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, and the Muristan road - in the Christian Quarter and in the centre of the Old Jerusalem.(5)

A visit to the area down Muristan Road past the Church of the Redeemer and a school building was rewarded by the discovery of a modern memorial situated in a small recess barred from the street with an iron gate. This memorial reads *“Here in the Muristan was situated the first hospital of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In 1882 the Grand Priory in the British Realm of the most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem established an ophthalmic hospital in the Holy City in emulation of the humanitarian and charitable efforts of its Medi-*

eval predecessors. For the eleven years from 1949 to 1960 this work was centered in the adjacent properties known as Watson House and Strathearn House. To commemorate these events the most venerable Order owner of this site constructed this garden and inscribed this stone in 1972. Pro Fede Pro Utilitate Hominum

In 1900 the work was moved to a new hospital in the Sheirh Jaweh Quarter of Jerusalem”. No remains which could possibly belong to the old hospital were visible from the road. A doorway close to the memorial led to a yard which, I discovered after enquiry with an Arab-speaking attendant, was used as a school yard. The building next to the memorial was being used as a school. The attendant could not confirm any possible historical medical links to the site but readily gave his permission to enter the grounds. The school yard was bordered in far left-hand corner by a series of four arched single storey structures partially blocked with stone walls leaving open windows in three of the arches. Comparison with 1940 diagrams of the excavations of the first hospital of

the Order confirmed that this wall is what remains of the original hospital of the Knights of St. John in Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem hospital was the first of a series of magnificently built and provisioned hospitals of the Order. After their expulsion from Jerusalem, the Order proceeded to Acre where they converted a building into a hospital and hospice for pilgrims. In 1291 Acre was captured by the Saracens, and the Order lost its hold on the Holy Land. Since the nineteenth century, the Order of St. John has attempted to revive its medical links with its original home-city Jerusalem. In 1859 a hospice was established in Jerusalem at the house of Mustapha Agha Beirakdar. In 1866, a new site for the hospice was erected in the Via Dolorosa. The chief purpose of this hospice was the care of travellers to the Holy Land. In 1882 a piece of ground on Bethlehem Road about eight minutes walk from Jaffa Gate was granted to the British Order for the establishment of a hospice for the gratuitous treatment of the poor. The British Knights decided to devote their hospital to the treatment of eye disease and the Hospice and Ophthalmic Dispensary at Jerusalem

came into existence. This building was partially destroyed during the First World War and rebuilt in 1919.(1)

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