The *Jus Patronatus* Commanderies of the Italian Knights Hospitaller in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century

Raymond Gatt [1]

Abstract

The Hospitaller Order of St John needed funds to sustain its charitable and military activities. These funds were obtained through income derived from the management of the Order's landed estates or Commanderies. Further funds were derived from *Jus Patronatus* Commanderies founded and donated through private patronage. These endowments came with several restrictions and constraints.

Keywords

Order of St John; *Jus Patronatus* Commanderies

The Hospitaller Commandery

The motto of the Hospitaller and Military Order of St John, *Tuitio Fidei et Obsequies Pauperum*, coined by Giullaime Caorsin, Vice-Chancellor of the Order in Rhodes in his *Volumen Stabilimentorum* in 1496, describes the two cornerstones of the Order's *forma mentis*. In order to financially sustain both facets, charity and the defence of the Faith, the *Comun Tesoro* disbursed great quantities of funds, whose coffers were in turn replenished by the income accruing from the Order's landed estates. The basic unit was the Commandery; these Commanderies were incorporated into Priories, spread out, in the

[1] Dr. Raymond Gatt is an independent scholar, whose main areas of research include the Sicilian Hospitallers in the seventeenth century, and the interrelationship between the Orders of St Lazarus and St John before and after the *Cum Solerti* Bull. This article on Hospitaller *Jus Patronatus* Commanderies is a slightly amplified form of the section with the same title by the author: Raymond Gatt. *The Hospitaller Grand Priory of Messina in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, U.K.: Routledge, 2024).

seventeenth century, all over Christian Europe. However, the Commandery was not only a source of funds, although arguably this was a most necessary asset. A second important function of the Commandery was as a point of reference, an accessible Hospitaller presence to the grassroots and donors of the Order in Western Europe, far detached from a Convent situated hundreds of miles away, whether in Acre or Cyprus, Rhodes or Malta. The Commandery essentially maintained the continued survival of the Order. It served as a beacon to potential sponsors and patrons of the Order and a reminder of its consequentiality and relevance. It served the function of upholding the resident brethren in a manner compatible with their noble and religious status and rank. The Commandery also catered for the recruitment of new blood that enabled the Order to maintain its human resources at an acceptable level to survive the various belligerent forays it got involved in, over the centuries.[2] At the other end of the spectrum, it served as a respite home for the elderly brethren. Some rich and large Commanderies and Priories also sustained hospitals and hospices at some cost to the Order's purse. The churches and chapels attached to the various Commanderies provided the divine cult both for the residents and the neighbouring communities as well, serving as a continuous reminder of the Hospitaller institution.

The *Compendio (delle Materie contenute nel Codice del Sacro Militare Ordine Gerosolimitano*),[3] printed in 1783, recorded several types of Hospitaller Commanderies. These included the so-called start-ups, the Commanderies of first acquisition, referred to as Commanderies of *Chevissement* in the French vernacular, or Commanderies of *Cabimento* in Italian.[4] The Commandery of *Cabimento* was usually the first

[2] Emanuel Buttigieg, *Nobility, Faith and Masculinity* (Continuum Publications, 2011), p.78.

[3] *Ibid,* p.133.

[4] Sire 106. See : L'Abbé de Vertot, *Histoire des Chevaliers Hospitaliers de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem: Appelés depuis Chevaliers de Rhodes, et aujourd'hui Chevaliers de Malte*, Vol 6 (Paris, Lequien Fils, 1830), '..ni accorder aucune ancienneté pour chevir, sinon par mort, ou aprés que ceux qui ont les anciennetés, seront réellement chevis et pourvus de la Commanderie de leur premier Chevissement,..'. See also in the English translation,

Commandery which was awarded to a new applicant after having endorsed and committed himself to several obligations as set up in the Order's Statutes.[5] This type of Commandery had a small income, as it was usually the first step in the hierarchical ladder for the recipient. A scale higher included those entitled Commanderies of Improvement (*di miglioramento*), which were richer Commanderies and were usually awarded to a knight who had judiciously managed his first Commandery to the Order's benefit. Each Priory had a Commandery of Magisterial Grace, reserved for the use of the Grand Master; it was his sole prerogative to award this to whomsoever he pleased, without the vacant Commandery being submitted to the usual "smutition" in the relevant Langue.[6] Another type was the Commandery of Magisterial Chambers (*Camere Magisteriali*) which enriched the Grand Master's private coffers so that *il Gran Maestro possa più comodamente rappresentar la sua Dignità*. Meanwhile, the Commandery of Prioral Grace was one that a Prior himself could confer to a deserving knight. A Commandery of Recuperation was one that had been reinstated back to the patrimony of the Order by a member of the Order, after having been usurped by an avaricious neighbour, or left to deteriorate and depreciate.[7] This recovery

The History of the Knights of Malta, Vol II, (London: G. Strahan, 1728), p.116, these are described as those of *Chevissement*. He suggests this word comes from an old French word *cheveir*, which means to undertake an enterprise one hopes to go through with. It was used to signify the first Commandery a brother obtained in right of his seniority. Also *Codice del Sacro Militare Ordine Gerosolimitano* (Stamperia del Palazzo, 1782), XXII, Della Significazione delle Parole, defines Cabimento as: *vocabole Francese, da cabire, che significa cose qualcosa, dalle quali altri stimi poter dare buon conto ed e cosi che sichiamo la prima Commenda che si concede al fratello*.

[5] Magri, Notizia *de' Vocaboli Ecclesiastici e de Riti Sacri,* (Rome,1669), p.82. *Cabimentum - nelli Statuti della sacra Religione Gerosolimitana significa la provista di qualche Commenda vacante in persona del Cavaliere più antiano. Vocabolo Franzese antico, derivandosi dal verbo cabire, che significa prendere in consegna qualche bene per darne buon conto'.*

[6] *Smutizione*, translated into the English vernacular as (s)mutition, originated from an old French word which meant 'a naming' or 'pronouncing', and was a process where, after discussion by members of the Langue, the latter nominated the most suitable candidate for the award of a Commandery

[7] *A.O.M. 2129* fol 246v. *'...letta una lettera del Cavaliere Don Vincenzo Crescimanno scritta ad essa Venerabile Lingua, li 10 del presente mese per la quale dimanda facolta*

usually involved years of litigation; but once successful, several benefits accrued to the involved member, including personal use of the profits from the asset during his lifetime, and the waiving of the payment of the annual *responsiones* to the hospitaller treasury. Another type of Commandery was that of *Jus Patronatus*, a patronal endowment that came with several restrictions and constraints.

The *Jus Patronatus* Commandery

The nature of the *Jus Patronatus* Commanderies given to the Hospitallers in the first half of the seventeenth century was distinct and substantially different from those which had been awarded to the Order in the previous centuries.[8] These Commanderies were founded and donated through private patronage[9] in the course of which the Order received a degree of assets but, in turn, renounced certain obligations that bound its members during the process of *smutizione*. Arguably, the most important of these requirements included notarially endorsed evidence of the status of nobility in the four quarters (in the Italian Langue) of one's ancestors; curtailment, albeit temporarily, of the inalienable right of the Order to assign the estate, and acceptance of the faculty of the patron to manage the *Jus Patronatus* estate and even, in certain cases, to allocate his own successor/s.[10] The type and size of assets were also different from the massive estates and terrain that typified earlier donations. *Jus Patronatus* Commanderies consisted of small acreages and collections of a few tenements, rendering a moderate

di poter ricuperar a suoi spese alcuni beni dependenti dalla Comenda di piazza occupati da persone secolari et altri alieni della nostra Religione per goderli vita sua durante come li habba ricuperati tutti.'

[8] C. Astorri, *Il Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta e le sue Commende familiari nel Diritto Italiano* (Roma, 1930), pp.35-37. The bequest of Patronal Commanderies was not equivalent to those given by *fideicommessi*, as they were not donations *per se*. They remained separate from the patrimony of the Order and were at the disposition of both the beneficiary, i.e., Order, and the donor. According to whatever contract was laid down, the donor as well as his progeny could continue to benefit from the bequests during their lifetime until such time as stipulated in the contract and/or the direct family tree became extinguished, when the Order would become the sole beneficiary.

[9] *Ibid*., p.37.

[10] Sire, 106, *op. cit.*

income of a few hundred scudi annually. The assets came entailed with various other obligations as well. The Commanderies of *Jus Patronatus* were essentially quid-pro-quo semi-business transactions, with the Order acquiring hard assets bartered for instant prestige acquired by the patron.

Jus Patronatus endowments were not unique to Sicily. D'Avenia suggests that the conferment of Commanderies through private patronage was a widespread phenomenon in the Order.[11] The Italian Langue of the Order accepted 57 such Commanderies in its territory between 1500 and 1658, and nearly two-thirds of them (32) were donated between 1633 and 1658. This does reflect essentially what was happening in the territory of the Grand Priory of Messina in Sicily. The practice was also not limited to the seventeenth century. As Nasalli Rocca indicates, the previous century also saw a few endowments of such assets to the Order.[12] Furthermore, there were other Military Orders which were also granted similar endowments concurrently to what was happening in Sicily, possibly in competition with the Hospitallers. The Order of Santo Stefano was set up by Cosimo I de Medici, Duke of Tuscany in 1562. It had similar aspirations and mechanisms as the Hospitaller Order, but as Luttrell points out, it lacked the pedigree of the latter. It did attract, however, most noble families of Florence away from the Hospitallers, together with their assets which were donated to the Order of Santo Stefano. To join, pseudo-aristocrats would endow the Order of Santo Stefano with a Commandery of *Jus Patronatus*, which secured for them instant noble status. Commanders could be married, and their sons would inherit the family asset under the same conditions. Contrary to the Statutes of the Hospitallers, four quarters of nobility were not mandatory, and if deficient, could be bought. Despite attracting a smaller amount of prestige, however, the Order of Santo Stefano had amassed, between

[11] Fabrizio D'Avenia (2003), *op. cit*., p.37.

[12] E Nasalli Rocca, 'Le Commende Italiane dell'Ordine di Malta alla fine del sec XVI', *Archivio Storico di Malta*, 1936, p.205. *'intanto possiamo subito rilevare che il numero di esse (Commende) non si modificò sensibilmente; in questo periodo non vi furono eventi degni di particolare rilievo nella storia patrimoniale fondiaria dell'Ordine, almeno per quanto riguarda le Commende Italiane di libera collazione magisteriale, pioché le Commende di riservato Patronato Gentilizio sembra invece abbiano subito un notevole incremento'*

1563 and 1737, no fewer than 675 Commanderies. Between 1600 and 1718, 1983 postulants had professed in the Order of Santo Stefano against 356 in the Hospitaller Order. Most of them came from the Grand Duchy of Florence and other Tuscan cities. If the Tuscan region is excluded, however, at the same time-period of 1600-1718, there was nearly three times the number of Knights which had professed in the Order of Malta than in the Tuscan Order. These figures do, however, indicate the overall haemorrhage of manpower and assets that the Order of Santo Stefano was inflicting to the detriment of the Hospitallers, albeit mainly in Tuscany.

The institution of a *Jus Patronatus* Commandery in the Langue of Italy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries followed a mostly standard pattern, although there were minor variations in the specifics of each foundation. Eventually, the Council of the Order formalised several requirements addressed to potential benefactors, to regulate what was becoming another apparently lucrative means of revenue for the Order.[13] These stipulations, endorsed by the Italian Langue, were formulated in a generic form and addressed to N.N. and tried to cover all eventualities in the donation of Jus Patronatus Commanderies, and plug all potential loopholes that could surface in the future. There were nine criteria which the Order set up to regulate the foundation of an Italian *Jus Patronatus* Commandery in the seventeenth century.

The first condition was approval by the Grand Master and his Council regarding the level of income to be generated by the new foundation. The founder was allowed the privilege of naming the foundation; the choice was usually between the paternal name of the founder or the name of a patron Saint of the Order, most commonly St John the Baptist.

[13] *A.O.M. 2161*, fol. 140r.

Secondly, the founder would enjoy the usufruct of the asset during his lifetime;[14] however, the title of a Commander (*Commendatore*) was not necessarily given.

Thirdly, the founder and his wife (if married) were given the privilege of wearing the linen habit of the Order and the gold eight-pointed cross on the breast, like other members of the Religion.

[14] In almost all cases, the founder was allowed to continue with the administration of his donated asset and also enjoyed its income during his lifetime. However, each contract had its own specific provisos, which typified the uniqueness of each agreement. See *A.O.M. 2129*, fol. 241r. The Commandery Calli in the area (*ricetta*) of Messina was typical of many which were set up by *Jus Patronatus*. The particular Commandery was instituted around June, 1631. *'..sopra la proposta fatta in lingua per parte delli signori Michele et Alwigi Calli li 21 di Maggio prossimo passato per mezzo di un memoriale del tenor seguente cioe Illustrissimo fra Fabritio Cagliola come commissionato delli nobili Michele et Aliosio Calli li espone qualmente per la divotione grande che sempre essi et loro antenati portarono alla Sacra Religione Gerosolimitana et a questa Venerabile Lingua d'Italia desiderano di esser ricevuti in grado di Cavaliero et far professione et morir in essa, e per maggior dimostratione et prova di questo loro affeto funderanno una Commenda di scudi di 300 di rendita per lo stato di Cavallieri nella Citta di Messina perchè hanno limiti in quel Priorato, o in questa Citta di Valetta come li parera piu commodo et sara l'intrata in cosa stabile di prezzo tale che rendera a ragione di cinque per cento offerendosi di fabricare una capella del cui titolo prendera il nome la Comenda. La quale godera prima sua vita durante il sudetto Michele con pagare scudi 12 di responsioni l'anno, et il solito passaggio al comun Tesoro et il motorio et vacante dopo la morte loro, et piacendoli di riceverli sia la recettione con l'anzianità dello stesso giorno , et insieme con tutte le prerogative usci conforme ricevuti et godono li Commendatori Arizzo et scattino permettendoli di portar la croce d'oro del quel tempo insino che faranno la espressa professione essendo il maggiore cioè Michele di età d'anni 16, et l'altro minore di un anno, et si contentano fare le loro caravane et altri servitii che si toccaranno per loro torno, essendo questa loro intentione cioè di servire come prima di loro fecero doi zii materni cioe Il signore Ammiraglio Moleti et Comm. Fra Filippo Moleti et l'avo et bisano paterno nell'assedio di Malta nell'anno della giornata, et poi nell'incontro con la squadra dell'Ucchiali dove l'avo Michele Calli con grandissimo pericolo et honore salvo lo stendardo con butarsi in mare con esso portandolo con salvezza in terra….'.* See also *A.O.M. 6073*, fol. 83r.Fra Blandano d'Arizzo, the founder of the Hospitaller Commandery of St John of Ragusa kept his Commandery and continued to enjoy its revenue until his death when the asset went for "smutition" in the Priory of Messina.

Fourthly, the founder was allowed to establish a family line that would enjoy the Commandery: this was stipulated to be not more than four consecutive generations.[15] Identifying which family line would enjoy the Commandery would be the prerogative of the founder himself. Other contracts had even more fastidious conditions, possibly tailored to the individuality of the contract. When the Malandrini family decided to donate and set up one such foundation, one stipulation, accepted by the Grand Master, was that the Commandery would be administered, in turn, by three brothers, all of whom were Diocesan priests. One after the other, on the death of the eldest sibling, these were to profess in the Order as Conventual Chaplains, with the eldest living brother administering the Commandery. On the death of all the three brothers, the Commandery was to be taken over by the Order for "smutition".[16]

Fifthly, the founder was spared the procurement of the stringent proofs of nobility and the mandatory *caravane* that the other brethren had to undertake before being considered for a Commandery *di Cabimento*. He was asked to observe fealty and obedience to the Grand Master. The founder could dispose of his patrimony and other assets at will, excluding the assets making up the foundation.

Sixthly, the founder was given the concession that should he obtain masculine issue from this present marriage, his son together, with his future wife, would be able to wear the habit of the Order, a prerogative

[15] *A.O.M. 2161*, fol. 140v. The founder could establish a family line that would enjoy the Commandery up to four consecutive generations. It was also up to the founder to choose the family line which would be assigned the Commandery after the death of the incumbent.

[16] *A.O.M. 6254*, fol. 126v., '*LaComenda doveranno godere essi tre fratelli successivamente l'uno dopo l'altro, e morendo alcuno di questi senza giungere a conseguir la Comenda si possi et debbia subrogar un altro in tuo luogo della famiglia loro per dover essere ricevuto in detto grado anche che fosse constituito in ordini fatti in maniera che tre sole persone habbiano a godere loro vita durante detta Comenda successivamente, et finire queste tre vite, l'un dopo l'altro vada alla libera smutizione della Venerabile lingua'*.

that was given to his father and mother.[17] This concession was given on condition that this would count as one of the four successive generations that would be eligible for this. The successor would also be obliged to pay the annual tax and impositions to the Common Treasury that the Commandery was subjected to, but was free to bequeath his other patrimony whichever way he liked.

Seventhly, the founder and his descendants were obliged to pay the annual *responsiones* to the common Treasury. After the death of the holder of the Commandery, the Order was due to receive the annuities from the day of the death of whomsoever possessed the Commandery to the first of May following, under the title of *mortorio*, and from this day to the end of April following, this being a full year, entitled *di vacante*. However, this did not apply on the death of the founder.

Eighthly, should the descendants of the founder enjoying the Commandery decide to undergo the proofs of nobility and present them to the Order, take part in the several *caravane*, and submit to the regular profession like all the other brethren,[18] these would count for their

[17] *A.O.M. 2161*, fol. 140v. The rules even allowed options for uncommon eventualities. The sixth guideline stated that the founder was given the benefit that, finding himself without a successor, be it masculine *or feminine* (my italics, SENSE INCOMPLETE This meant that the Order was accepting the possibility of one of the four successors to be a woman, potentially the patron of the Commandery of the Order. Helen Nicholson (April, 2020) also drew my attention to a similar practice which existed before 1219, where a married couple could become associates of the Order, taking limited vows; when one died, the other (man or wife) would take full vows and enter the Order. See Francesco Tommasi's article 'Uomini e Donne negli Ordini Militari di Terra Santa: per il Problema delle case doppie e miste negli Ordini Giovannita, Templare e Teutonico (secc. XII-XIV)', in *Doppelklöster und andere Formen der Symbiose männlicher und weiblicher Religiosen in Mittelalter*, ed. Kaspar Elm and Michel Parisse (Berlin, 1992).

[18] *A.O.M. 6254*, fol. 146r. On 19 sept., 1656, the secular priest Fra Don Corrado Malandrino, the Patron of the Malandrino Commandery, had sent a memo to the Chancellery of the Order, in which he asked to be exempt from travelling to Malta to undergo his profession because of severe illnesses. His *supplica* was accompanied by a supplementary letter of his caring doctor. '*Il sacerdote Fra Don Corrado Malandrino della Città di Noto supplicando ... che molti mesi si fanno si retrova citato per ordine della VVSS Illma dal Reverendo sacerdote Don Fra Elia Astuto ... si dovesse conferire*

anzianità and would make them eligible to obtain other Commanderies *di Cabimento*, or Bailiwicks, in addition to retaining their Commandery of *Jus Patronatus*.[19]

Ninthly, the founder's descendants, before assuming possession, had to wait for the relevant Magisterial Bull to be issued from the Chancellery. After four successive generations, the Commandery would revert to the common Treasury and undergo *smutizione* in the Langue of Italy, as happened with every Commandery that fell vacant.

Although most founders bartered the donation against a prestigious title in the hierarchy of the Order with its associated privileges, the rank bestowed was not identical in each case. Some founders were given the rank of a Knight of Justice, others that of a Knight of Grace. Ultimately, this decision rested with the higher ranks of the Langue and the Grand Master. The Commandery of Saracena was donated to the Order in 1637 by Don Giacomo Ottaviano. It was to yield an annual income of 200 scudi. The Commandery was made up of territory from the paternal legacy. It was a rich donation, compared to others, as it included 130 *salme* of cultivated land, fifty thousand vines and several gardens. However, unlike Don Blandano d'Arizzi, founder of the Commandery of Ragusa, who was made a Knight of Justice in return for his donation, Don Giacomo Ottaviano was admitted into the Order as a Knight of Grace and was to be made a Commander for life.[20]

The most important issue that made the whole concept of donating a Commandery to the Order agreeable to the donor was the fact that the scheme served as a bypass for some of the major hurdles that were

nell'isola di Malta dovesse fare sua professione conforme tiene obbligatione ... il povero esponente altro desiderio no tiene et perche si retrova malato grave gravissimo non potendo la sua persona fare questo neufraggioso viaggio per esser gravimente infermo che se il povero esponente tante volte facesse questo viaggio e facessa mutatione d'area senza misura datio verra a perdere la vita; ... lo potranno reconoscere dalla occlusa fede authentica fatta del suo prothomedico suo medico curante ...'

[19] *A.O.M., cod. 2161*, fol. 140v.

[20] Giacomo Pace Gravina, *op. cit*., p.141. '*Commendatore a vita*'.

present in professing into the Hospitaller Order of St John. Apart from acting as a high speed conduit into the Order, circumventing the presentation of the mandatory proofs of nobility which a regular candidate had to do before entering its exclusive ranks, in some instances it also bypassed other rites of passage of a Knight in his *cursus honorum*.[21] It avoided the three (and with time, four) six monthly interludes on the galleys: this was necessary in the regular ranks of the Order if one was to be considered a candidate for the conferment of a Commandery. The four interludes, at least 2 years of a Knights' life, together with the dangerous exposure to life and limb, was obligatory, and was factored in the *antianitas* of each member of the Order.[22] The founder of a *Jus Patronatus* Commandery bypassed this hurdle in most instances. This was indeed a fast-track route for hitherto ineligible members of the 'new' Sicilian nobility of the seventeenth century, bypassing statutes and ordinances of the Order in the process. Conversely, patronal endowment must have been a scheme that the Order had to introduce, possibly because of external pressure from the founders themselves, but also perhaps forced by the lean times that parts of Europe were going through at that point. As implied earlier, there must have been also indirect (and direct) rivalry with other military Orders who were head-hunting potential donors by endorsing regulations with less strict mores of nobility and

[21] *A.O.M. 6254*, fol. 4r. The first pre-requisite asked by the founders of the Malandrina Commandery was not for the Order to waive the proofs of Nobility; they had asked the Grand Master to institute just one process for this to be done. This proof of nobility for the elder brother would then apply for the other two younger siblings. They were also to pay their passage fees to the common Treasury as well.

[22] This was essentially a scale of seniority, a ranking order enshrined in the hierarchy of the Order. Seniority was not just a linear scale of time since profession, but also incorporated milestones and hurdles that a member of the Order had to accomplish in the passage of time. This included living a meritorious life, taking part in the four *caravane* that the Council mandated, spending a period of five years in conventual life, etc. See *A.O.M. 1666*, fol. 9: '*Anzianità è effetto della ricezione, ed ai Cavalieri, e Servienti d'Arme ricevuti di età maggiore corre dal dì della presentazione delle loro prove alla Lingua, se sono minori di venti anni, ed hanno già compita l'età di 16 anni, ed otto mesi; altrimenti da questo giorno, purchè però si presentino in Convento prima di compire il ventesimo anno della loro età; altrimenti non lo ricomincieranno a contare, che dal giorno del loro arrivo della grazia.*'

celibacy. In the end, the criteria set out by the Hospitaller Order for these donors late in the seventeenth century approached the middle ground between it and other military Orders.

Once set up, Commanderies of *Jus Patronatus* were managed and assimilated in the Order as other regular Commanderies. The founder, and his descendants who came into possession of the Commandery after his death, were obliged to pay the mandatory disbursements to the common Treasury. These included the annual *responsiones,* the several impositions that the Council had put up in the sixteenth century, as well as the *mortorio* and the *vacante.* If not initially present, the founder had to build and administer a chapel on Commandery land together with the provision for a salaried Diocesan priest. If the Commandery did not include space where a chapel could be built, the obligation included the furnishing and dedication of a side altar in an existing Hospitaller church. This does indicate that, repeatedly, the Hospitallers continued to live the ethos of their institution; the assets donated, apart from furnishing the material gains, had to come combined with the obligation of divine office to cater for the needs particularly of the inhabitants in their territories.

No less than fifteen Commanderies of *Jus Patronatus* were presented to the Order on the Sicilian mainland over a period of forty years, from 1603, when the first patronal Commandery was instituted, up till 1644.[23] After the last patronal Commandery (this was the Commandery of Butera, founded to be managed by the provincial Chaplains of the Order) was set up in 1644, the Priory of Messina was not endowed with other Commanderies, patronal or otherwise. The income from these Commanderies was only moderate and rarely exceeded 300 scudi annually; this can be compared to the annual income of 2250 onze (equivalent to 5625 scudi) of the Grand Priory of Messina in 1676.[24]

[23] Pirri, *op. cit*., pp.943-945. In his *Sacra Sicilia,* printed in 1733, Pirri gives a detailed list of private donations transferred to the Hospitaller Order on the Sicilian mainland. All of them were donated in the first half of the seventeenth century, specifically between 1603 and 1644.

[24] *A.O.M. 2162*, f. 93v.

[25] Rocco Pirro, *op. cit.*, pp.943-945.

Commandery	Founder	Year of foundation	Endowment on foundation
Commenda di Vizzini	Melchiore Cannizzaro	1603	220 scudi + 10 scudi *pro capellano*
Commenda di San Giovanni di Ragusa [1]	Fr. Blandano Arezzo	1626	300 scudi and 10 scudi *pro capellano*
Commenda di S. Stefano di Schiettina	Stefano Schittino	1628	132 onze
Commenda di S. GB di Piazza	Dario Barbarino	1628	
Commenda di Calli	Michele e Aloisio Calli	1631	Capital 2400 onze
Commenda di S. Giov. Batt. and Giacomo detta Saracina di Caltagirone e Bonanno	Giacomo Ottaviano Giovanbattista Bonanno	1637 1637	200 onze 80 onze for a capital of 1600 onze, a villa for 1122 onze and a domus for onze 82.15
Commenda di Giovanni lo Pozzo di Messina		1639	
Commenda di Giovannbattista Salemi di Scicli		1642	
Commenda di Borea di Siracusa	Barone D. Pietro Borea	1641	800 scudi
Commenda di Lucio Martinez di Siracusa		1642	
Commenda di S. Antonio Albigiana di Palermo	Antonio Albigieno	1644	216 scudi

Sicilian commanderies donated through private patronage reserved for knights.

[1] A. Spagnoletti, *Stato, aristocrazie, e Ordine di malta nell'Italia moderna* (Roma 1988), p.83; Bruno d'Aragona, *op. cit.*, p.7.

[25]

Commandery	Founder	Year of foundation	Endowment on foundation
Commenda di Mazzarino	Sac. D. Pietro Cusmano	1633	440 scudi
Commenda di Buttera	Sac. D. Angelo Morrone	1644	

Sicilian commanderies donated through private patronage reserved for Provincial Chaplains and the Sergeants-at-Arms

In 1603, on its foundation, the Commandery of Vizzini was planned to generate an income of 220 scudi annually, with another 10 scudi to be given as a stipend to the Diocesan priest for the availability of divine services in the Commandery chapel. When the Commandery of Ragusa was established in 1626, it was designated to earn 300 scudi annually. In addition to this sum, in a similar pattern to other Commanderies, a salary of 10 scudi was to be given annually to a Diocesan priest to conduct divine services in a newly built chapel which was part of the contract between the founder of the Commandery, Fra Blandano d'Arizzi, and the Order. Similarly, the annual income of the Commandery of Santo Stefano of Schiettina was 132 onze (330 scudi), whereas that of Sant' Antonio of Albigiana of Palermo was 216 scudi.[26] Another Commandery was set up by the Genoese Stefano Scattino (also Schiattino or Schiettino)[27] in the *ricetta* of Palermo, in exchange for professing in the Order without the mandated proofs of nobility of his ancestors.[28] The annual income of this new Commandery was to be 300 scudi, which would accrue from the capital of various leases on houses and other fixed assets which Scattino had in Palermo.[29] Other Commanderies of *Jus Patronatus* followed a similar pattern.

In view of their very moderate income, the relevant *responsiones* paid by *Jus Patronatus* Commanderies to the Convent in the seventeenth century was a very modest modicum of the total revenue generated annually. The same state of affairs remained in the eighteenth century.[30] They ranged from 4 onze paid by the Commandery of San Giovanni

[26] Spagnoletti (1988), *op. cit*., p.83.

[27] Around the early 1620s, and presumably up till 1628 when he had asked to be admitted to the ranks of the Order, Stefano Scattino was a very busy Procurator of the Grand Prior of Messina, La Marra. See *A.O.M. 6124*, fol. 2v.

[28] *A.O.M. 6127*, fol. 3v.: '*per esser io ricevuto per Cavaliero di essa Veneranda Lingua senza obbligo di far prove, et d'haver a goder tutti li honori prerogative et voci come tutti altri Cavalieri*'.

[29] *Ibid*., fol. 4r. The capital included eight pieces of real estate consisting of 4 items listed as 'property', a house, a lease and two others that were unnamed. The annual income from these came to around 301 scudi: this was based on a capital of 3788 scudi.

[30] *A.O.M. 899*, f.125 to f.142.

Barberini of Piazza, and the Commandery of Borea, and 14 onze by the Commandery of La Saracena and Moschiti of Palermo; to 25 onze paid as *responsiones* by the Commandery of Santo Stefano of Palermo, also known as Schiattina. When these sums are compared to the *responsiones* owed by other Commanderies in the Grand Priory of Messina at the same time, there are marked differences. The Commandery of San Giovanni di Rodi of Marsala gave an annual contribution to the Common Treasury of 100 onze; the Commandery of Polizzi 103 onze, the Commandery of The Guilla of Palermo 60 onze, and the Commandery of Santa Maria del Tempio at Caltagirone 53 onze.

The eighteenth century also saw the foundation of other Commanderies of *Jus Patronatus* in the Italian Langue outside Sicily, roughly based on the same principles that were promulgated by the Order in the previous century.

When the Knight Hospitaller Fra Zimenes Caleya was dying in 1717, he left a testament,[31] where he bequeathed all his assets to his nephew Don Alvaro Caleya, Duke of Canossa, in the Emilia-Romagna region of Northern Italy.[32] This went against the statutes and ordinances of the Order,[33] and the Duke, not interested in entering into litigation with the Order, decided to set up a Commandery of *Jus Patronatus*, incorporating all the assets that his uncle had left him which would render an annual income of 150 ducats. To these assets, Don Alvaro Caleya added other assets from his own personal belongings which augmented the income of the Commandery by 255 ducats, totalling the Commandery's income to 405 ducats. The foundation of this Commandery was dated to 30 July, 1721. This foundation came burdened with many conditions, however. The foundation contract stipulated that Don Alvaro would receive the title of Knight of Grace, and that he would continue to enjoy the income of the

[31] '*fatto in articolo di morte*'; this translates from the Latin '*in articulo mortis' - at the moment of death - that is, at the moment when the moribund has the moral certainty that his demise was by then inevitable.*

[32] *A.O.M. 2161*, fol. 125r.

[33] *A.O.M. 1666*, fol. 128: '*Del quinto dei beni mobili possono disporre li Fratelli in punto di morte con licenza del Gran Maestro'.*

Commandery during his lifetime. After his death, the Commandery would be given over to the Order, and the Grand Master would nominate his successor after his death. The contract also indicated that the Order would waive the pending litigation and the costs associated with it. It seemed the reasoning of the Order at this point was, rather than waste time and expense in litigious encounters with Don Caleya over the *spoglio* of his uncle, to look at the bigger picture and accept the donation.

Giovanni Natoli Ruffo, Prince of Sperlinga and Duke of Archirafi[34] proposed a commandery of *jus patronatus* to the Order, in exchange for the rank of Knight of Devotion. He also asked to be given the title of Bailiff and Prior of St Mary of Archirafi which was the new name given to the foundation and also asked to be exempted from the payment of passage fees. After his death the commandery would devolve to his legitimate first-born and for the next successive first-borns for six generations, after which the donation would revert to the Order of St John. The successors however would have to pay the usual passage fees and would also be able to wear the habit of devotion of the Order. Another stipulation entered in the act of foundation was that if he died without issue, the *jus patronatus* of the commandery would go to the first-born of one of his sisters, namely the Princess *della* Scaletta Ruffo, or the Marchioness of Leonvago Buonfiglio.[35]

At the time of foundation on 9 March 1739, the rich assets of the newly erected commandery of Archirafi included the church of the duchy with all its outhouses and sacristy and their furnishings, which amounted to 600 onze. The church also had an annual benefice of 12 onze and the obligation of a perpetual mass. It was also endowed from taxes on the silk produced in the land of Monte Albano of the Principiate, to the tune of 2 tari for every pound. This almost always rendered a sum in excess of a hundred onze annually as could be seen in a related deed. Another asset

[34] The principality of Sperlinga was a fief instituted in 1597, in the city of Sperlinga, province of Enna in Sicily.

[35] *AOM 2161*, fol 170r.

was a place in the Marina di Saboca, known as the *baracca* estimated to render 5000 scudi annually.

Another nobleman, Don Giulio Cesare, Marques of the city of Furli[36] also established a commandery of *jus patronatus* under the name of the Blessed Gherardo.[37] On the death of the founder the commandery was to revert to the eldest professed member of the Order hailing from Furli who also had to be not debted to the Order. The foundation deed stipulated that the commandery had to pay the *responsiones* as well as the Impositions (which came to 20% of the annual income), was the custom and there was also the burden of the *Tasse di Vasselli* which was 2 and a half percent of the net income.[38] The foundation was to be subject to the Order's right of the levies due to the mortuary and vacancy periods, but in lieu of this, a new commander could present to the Common Treasury 2 whole annates of the income of the commandery including the settlement of all debts pertaining to the commandery at the time. It seems the number of commanders from Forli that could inherit the commandery was unlimited, because in the foundation document it was stated that if there were no Professed knights from Forli that could take on the commandery, the income of the latter was to be invested, with the consent of the procurators of the Common Treasury so that the asset would remain profitable. The act of foundation was dated 18 May 1762.[39]

Fra Casamassimi, a commander of the Commandery of St John of Ragusa also set up a commandery of *jus patronatus*, the commandery Casamassimi on the 23 March 1762.[40]

When the Malandrini family decided to donate and set up one such foundation, one stipulation, accepted by the grand master, was that the commandery would be administered, in turn, by three brothers, all of

[36] The city of Furli or Forlì in the district of Romagna in North Italy.
[37] *AOM 2161*, fol 199r.
[38] *Ibid*., fol 199v.
[39] *Ibid*., fol 238r.
[40] *Ibid*.,fol 244r.

whom were diocesan priests.[41] One after the other, on the death of the eldest sibling, these were to profess in the Order as conventual chaplains, with the eldest living brother administering the commandery. On the death of all the three brothers, the commandery was to be taken over by the Order for smutition.

On 19 sept 1656, the secular priest fra Don Corrado Malandrino, the patron of the Malandrino commandery, had sent a memo to the chancellery of the Order, in which he asked to be exempt from travelling to Malta to undergo his profession because of severe illnesses. His *supplica* was accompanied by a supplementary letter of his caring doctor.[42]

Not every attempt at establishing a donation of *jus patronatus* was successful. In 1637, Reverend Don Bernardo Zacco from Modica had expressed a wish to assemble his property together and donate them to the grand priory of Messina as a commandery of *jus patronatus*. It was proposed that the revenue generated from this commandery would be about 80 scudi annually and that the obligation towards the Common Treasury would be 1 scudo a year.[43] In return he had asked the Order to

[41] *AOM 6254*, fol 126v. '*La comende doveranno godere essi tre fratelli successivamente l'uno dopo l'altro, e morendo alcuno di questi senza giungere a conseguir la comende si possi et debbia subrogar un altro in tuo luogo della famiglia loro per dover essere ricevuto in detto grado anche che fosse constituito in ordini fatti in maniera che tre sole persone habbiano a godere loro vita durante detta comenda successivamente, et finire queste tre vite, l'un dopo l'altro vada alla libera smutizione della Venerabile lingua'.*

[42] *AOM 6254*, fol 146r. '*Il sacerdote fra Don Corrado malandrino della citta di Noto supplicando..che molti mesi si fanno si retrova citato per ordine della VVSS Illma dall reverendo sacerdote don fra Elia Astuto ...si dovesse conferire nell'isola di Malta dovesse fare sua professione conforme tiene obbligatione...il povero asponente altro desiderio no tiene et perche si retrova malato garve gravissimo non potendo la sua persona fare questo neufraggioso viaggio per esser gravimente infermo che se il povero esponente tante volte facesse questo viaggio e facessa mutatione d'area senza misura datio verra a perdere la vita;....lo potranno reconoscere dalla occlusa fede authentica fatta dell suo prothomedico suo medico curante...'.*

[43] *A.O.M. 6231*, fol, 19r., '*Desidera professare in grado di Fra Cappellano Conventuale ... fundar una Commenda di scudo 80 l'anno sopra alcuni beni stabili che detto esponente tiene nella città di Modica con goderla sua vita durante et doppo lasciarla alla Ven*

enrol him as a Conventual Chaplain and that his seniority would count as from his first day of profession. The Order was to waive the obligatory proofs of nobility of his lineage. He also expected to continue enjoying his donated patrimony until his death when the Commandery would be given to the Grand Priory of Messina to be assigned by smutition as a Commandery of *Cabimento*.

However, the two Commissioners, Fra Alessandro Orlandini and the Reverend Carini, delegated by the Grand Prior of Messina to review the paperwork, found this to be very deficient, and the proposition was not accepted.[44]

Conclusion

The Hospitaller Order guarded its rich and extensive patrimony of landed assets assiduously and with extreme care. Chapter fourteen of the Statutes of the Order focused essentially on the Commanderies, and their administration, and it laboriously lists the various decrees by successive Grand Masters as each tried to improve the management and supervision of these assets, the result of which would be greater profitability and income to the Order which, in turn, would more easily finance its projected aims and lifestyle of its members. The conferment of these valuable land assets was also an important righte of passage for the brethren to progress up the hierarchical ladder and gave status and much coveted pre-eminence to the individual Knights. Rich assets were usually associated with eminent members of the Order. The award of a Commandery of Grace added prestige to the recipient.

In lean times, the Order was also not averse to accept patronal donations that came tied with several preconditions, an indication that, rather than remaining entrenched in its silo mentality and unaware and

Lingua ... da smutirsi per Cabimento in grado di Frati capellani et Frati servienti … con pagare solamente per recognitione al comun tesoro scudo uno l'anno'.

[44] *Ibid.*, fol, 19r., '*3 di giogno 1637, Fra Alessando Orlandini e Rev. Dot. Carini, Commissari Deputati, ... hanno riferito haver visto et considerato il contenuto in detti memoriali et scritture et dicono che da esse scritture non si può cavar alcuna luce ne construtto circa la pretensione del detto Don Bernardo Zacco il che inteso da detta Ven. lingua tutti N. D. hanno ordinato che non si tratti più del sudetto negocio'*.

disinterested in what was happening outside its Conventual walls, the Order moved on with the times and emulated other Military Orders when necessary.