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The Hospitaller Grand Master, the Convent and the General Chapter: Power and consensus in the late Middle Ages

The study examines the changing balance in the leadership of a military-religious order: the Hospitallers' general chapter, its role of counterbalancing the power of the Grand Master, and the transformation of this decision-making body in the late Middle Ages. By the fifteenth century two important changes had been introduced. From the middle of the century, convening the general chapter was included in the regulations of the Order, moreover, these meetings became grounds of the constant political conflicts within the Order. The influence of certain tongues (*linguae*) changed significantly over time, and the new power balance was represented at these meetings. In this new "context", the "affiliation" of the Hungarian–Slavonian priory can also be reassessed.

Keywords: Hospitallers, general chapter, Grand Master, Convent



Even today, the public perception of the military-religious orders maintains that they were soldiers of Christ, acting as an extension of the papacy and, at times, as a kind of private army of the pope. It is hardly disputable that medieval popes had considerable influence over the activities of these orders, but this certainly it did not mean daily intervention, rather a sort of control over these bodies. At the same time, however, the role of the head of the catholic Church was quite tangible: in the founding of the order, in the granting of privileges, and in the confirmation (*confirmatio*) and possible deposition (*depositio*) of the elected (*electus*) leader of the order, the (grand) master.

Research on the Hospitallers in Hungary over the past decades has addressed issues related to the organizational structure and functioning of the military-religious order in many respects.¹ Simultaneously, these reviews either briefly assessed the overall characteristics of the order or only undertook to examine specific issues, such as the affiliation of the Hungarian–

¹ Recently summarized in HUNYADI – RIBI 2023.

Slavonian priory.² The following short study attempts to bring into the discourse considerations that have already been explored by international historiography but have received less attention in Central Europe, especially with a focus on power and consensus.

Both the Hospitallers (1113) and the Templars (1119/20) belonged to the reform orders that emerged at the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and most church historians, accepting their monastic characteristics, emphasize that their structure and operation were mostly comparable to that of orders of canons regular. It has been long assumed that the brethren of St. John the Baptist adopted the institution of general chapters from the Cistercians,³ with some potential Templar mediation. However, a closer examination of the chain of events suggests that the Hospitallers had priority in this field. Beyond the Cistercian model, from the moment of their foundation, the military-religious orders were forced to operate from a distance of several thousand kilometers between the main theater of their activities, the Holy Land, and their European estates, which provided their financial backing and human resources.⁴ As we have recently pointed out, the organization of provinces was a novelty of the twelfth-century monastic reform of the military-religious orders. The Hospitaller priories (*prioratus*) and the Templar provinces (*provinciae*) effectively linked the centers of the orders with the administrative units located at huge geographical distances with the preceptories. The first Hospitaller provincial chapter took place in 1123,⁵ but it did not bring together the entire newly independent (1114) institution to a common forum, although the first provincial official is known from here.⁶ The first general chapter was convened only decades later, in 1176/77, by Josbert, the Hospitaller (grand) master,⁷ but the participation of European brethren of the order only became regular in the 1180s.⁸ The question arises: how did they maintain contact during the intervening half-century? It was mostly the Master of the Order who visited the European provinces from Jerusalem from time to time to recruit new members, to improve the profitability of the preceptories, and often to carry out diplomatic missions. The Templars took the lead in this, as the order's leader set out on his journey as early as 1128/9,⁹ while the first Hospitaller "visitations" did not take place until 1140 and 1157 respectively.¹⁰

The Hospitaller Master could therefore maintain contact with provincial leaders either personally or through the order's leadership, and from the

² See: HUNYADI 2025.

³ HUNYADI – RIBI 2023. p. 23.

⁴ RILEY-SMITH 2010. p. 47.

⁵ FOREY 1992. p. 155; RILEY-SMITH 2007. p. 276–277.

⁶ RILEY-SMITH 2008a. p. 5.

⁷ "... *de comuni et concordi voluntate et assensu fratrum tocius mei presentis capituli generalis.*" Cartulaire nr. 494. See: BURGTORF 2008. p. 52; RILEY-SMITH 2012. p. 76.

⁸ RILEY-SMITH 2008b. p. 135.

⁹ Also in 1138–1139, and in 1149. RILEY-SMITH 2008a. p. 5.

¹⁰ RILEY-SMITH 2008a. p. 5.

1180s onwards, the general chapter provided an opportunity for meetings, which the latter attended with some regularity. It is important to note, however, that around this time, during the office of Cast de Murols (1171–1172), a new organizational form, the grand priory, also appeared in the structure of the Order.¹¹ A thorough analysis of the development and functioning of the grand priories is still owed to historiography, as several researchers on the subject have already pointed out.¹² It is unclear why these particular priories were given a common superior, while others in the same region were exempt from the supervision of superiors who, for lack of a better term, could be considered middle-rank managers. Some believe that this served to collect taxes more efficiently,¹³ but scholars of the field are yet to provide convincing evidence. However, there is a strong consensus that the 1206 general chapter convened in Margat, Syria, and the statutes compiled there were an important milestone in the formation and stabilization of the Hospitallers' hierarchy.¹⁴ Even if, according to the opinion of the Hospitaller grand master and the Convent in 1299, Afonso of Portugal (1203–1206) lost his mastership by convening the general chapter outside the Kingdom of Jerusalem.¹⁵ The lesson to be learned from these events is even more important: the grand master came into open conflict with the leaders of his own order. The members of the central Convent refused to obey the presumably autocratic leader, whereupon Afonso resigned in September 1206 and returned to Europe.¹⁶ It was not the first time when the serious tension between the (grand) master and the Convent came to light at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The first open conflict between the leadership flared up during the tenure of Gilbert of Assailly (1163–1169/71). The grand master, preparing for a crusade against Egypt, nearly bankrupted his own Order. Gilbert resigned, but the Convent did not accept his resignation, arguing that the grand master's resignation was only valid if approved by the pope.¹⁷ Bearing it in mind, the statutes of Margat can be interpreted in a very specific way. While we are apparently witnessing the consolidation of the Order's constitution, in reality its leadership began to increase its own weight and that of the general chapter, laying the foundations for a long-term process that created a system of checks and balances against the power of the grand master.

For a long time, there was no need to touch these measures, as partly evidenced by the fact that after Margat, no general chapter was convened until the early 1260s.¹⁸ This was despite the fact that the Order faced serious crises:

¹¹ RILEY-SMITH 2008b, p. 134.

¹² LUTTRELL 1995, p. 22.

¹³ SIRE 1994, p. 104.

¹⁴ TIPTON 1968, p. 295; BURGTORF 2008, p. 81, 118; BONNEAUD 2013, p. 302; LUTTRELL 2014, p. 200.

¹⁵ Cartulaire nr. 4462. See BURGTORF 2008, p. 117.

¹⁶ LUTTRELL 2014, p. 200–201.

¹⁷ MURRAY 2015, p. 19.

¹⁸ BURGTORF 2008, p. 184.

the tragic battle of Gaza¹⁹ or the War of St. Sabbas,²⁰ in which the military-religious orders were also involved. At the same time, between 1262 and 1270, the Hospitaller general chapter was convened almost annually, and by the end of the century a total of 13 general assemblies had been held.²¹ Moreover, the statutes of the 1262 general chapter were of comparable significance and had long-term consequences to those of Margat.²² The winds of change proved to be particularly strong. By the end of the decade, a new, regionally organized institutional order began to take shape: the system of tongues (*linguae, langues, nationes*).

Our first tangible evidence of the existence of the tongues dates from 1268,²³ but it would be an exaggeration to suggest that we know the exact origins and development of the institution, although it was certainly in operation by 1283.²⁴ For a long time, research placed the formation of the seven tongues to the very end of the thirteenth century (1293–1297) or the beginning of the fourteenth century,²⁵ and interpreted it in the Hospitaller institutional system mostly as an organic continuation of the grand priories.²⁶ Despite differing opinions, there was agreement that the representatives of the individual regional units (*pillerii*)—who were also responsible for organizing accommodation (*auberge, hospitia*) and care (*stagia*) for those staying in the central unit—became members of the Convent. This process had already begun during the Cyprus period (1291–1309), but it was only completed in Rhodes,²⁷ where these auberges still stand. It is striking from the outset that three of the seven tongues represented preceptories located in the Kingdom of France, but this situation can be easily explained by the fact that the representation system was established in proportion to the number of administrative units. The three “French” tongues accounted for 42–51% of the Order’s membership, and from the end of the thirteenth century, Provençal masters were elected to lead the order for nearly eight decades.²⁸

At the same time, it is quite possible that the reforms of the Order, that began in the 1260s, accelerated, partly due to the gradual loss of the Holy Land. A clear sign of this is that the Convent demanded an increasingly serious say in the decisions of the Order, and even in the election of the grand master. In modern terminology, this could basically be described as lobbying, which presumably reflected the current or changing balance of power. Perhaps this explains such phenomenon, for example, that the German tongue (*Lingua Alemanie*) and its representative appeared to be particularly influential in the

¹⁹ LOTAN 2012.

²⁰ SARNOWSKY 2012.

²¹ BRONSTEIN 2005. p. 62, 79, 142; RILEY-SMITH 2008b. p. 142.

²² CACHIA 2009. p. 62.

²³ Cartulaire nr. 3308; SIRE 1994. p. 101.

²⁴ RILEY-SMITH 2012. p. 129.

²⁵ BORCHARDT 2021. p. 206.

²⁶ TIPTON 1968. p. 294; FOREY 1992. p. 158; O’MALLEY 2005. p. 12; BORCHARDT 2021. p. 206

²⁷ BRINCAT 2001. p. 261.

²⁸ SIRE 1994. p. 36; O’MALLEY 2005. p. 318.

activities of the Convent at the end of the thirteenth century,²⁹ but by the 1340s it had been almost completely disappeared,³⁰ and it was not until the 1420s that it regained its importance in the leadership of the Order.³¹

The fact that general chapters were held annually in Cyprus in the early fourteenth century clearly indicates changes in the leadership and perhaps in the Order as a whole. The only meeting convened by the grand master on 1 August 1300 in Avignon was vetoed by the members of the Convent on the basis that the Master could only take such an initiative with their consent.³² A few years later, in 1309, the Order's headquarters moved from Cyprus to Rhodes, and Grand Master Foulques de Vilaret (1305–1317/19) spent the funds—originally intended for a crusade proclaimed by the pope—on the conquest of the island, which had previously been under Greek rule. The first general chapter was held in the new center in 1310³³ and the brethren of the Order met annually until 1314, but after that, no further meetings were held for a decade (until 1324). The grand master, who was believed to be autocratic, not only clashed with the Convent on several occasions, but the Hospitaller high officers also organized a coup against him and they even elected an anti-master. However, Pope John XXII (1316–1334) did not confirm the “anti-master” in office and considered Foulques to be the legitimate master, but, sensing the tension within the Order, he reinstated him to office only so that he could resign “of his own accord.”³⁴

Personal conflicts within the Order, the increasingly distant hope of recovering the Holy Land (*recuperatio Terre Sancte*), the Avignon papacy, and the dissolution of the Templars caused serious internal tensions among the Hospitallers. The Order made serious efforts to contribute to the revival of the crusader ideal and regularly sent envoys to the papal court to improve their reputation.³⁵ The “inheritance” of the Templar preceptories reorganized land ownership and income in several regions, prompting the Hospitallers to establish new priories. Moreover, at one of the reconvened general chapters (1337),³⁶ it was decided that the consequences of the takeover of Templar property would be assessed through visitations. In the course of this procedure, for example, the English prior spent 121 days on visitation in 1338, roughly three days per house, and prepared a detailed report on the general, and above all the financial situation of the priory.³⁷ The basic duty of the prior was to visit the preceptories of their own priory, initially on an annual basis,

²⁹ SIRE 1994. p. 105; LUTTRELL 1995. p. 28.

³⁰ TIPTON 1968. p. 296; SIRE 1994. p. 195–196.

³¹ VALENTINI 1936. p. 135; SARNOWSKY 1995. p. 54–55; SARNOWSKY 2001. p. 147; SARNOWSKY 2007. p. 152.

³² BURGTORF 2008. p. 113, 131.

³³ BURGTORF 2008. p. 147.

³⁴ SIRE 1994. p. 29.

³⁵ TOMMASI 2015. For parallel situation with the Templars, see: BORCHARDT 2015.

³⁶ BURGTORF 2008. p. 147.

³⁷ FOREY 1992. p. 167; O'MALLEY 2005. p. 60.

during which they also regularly presided over the provincial chapter.³⁸ From the second half of the fourteenth century, the prioral visitations typically took place every 3–4 years, and consequently the provincial chapters were also convened less frequently.³⁹

The latter frequency seems to have been followed by the general chapters in the first half of the fourteenth century: between 1324 and 1344, the Order held seven general assemblies. After that, however, the operation of this institution dramatically slowed down: after a hiatus of nearly a quarter of a century, the brethren of the Order gathered in 1367 and then in 1379/80, with the latter chapter already taking place in the spirit of the Schism. During the Great Western Schism, the Order convened only four general chapters, if we include the general assembly convened by the “anti-master” Riccardo Caracciolo near Naples (1384).⁴⁰ This does not mean, of course, that the Order’s leadership did not discuss important issues between general chapters, as evidenced by the question of the affiliation of the Hungarian–Slavonian priory and the appointment of priors.⁴¹ After the Schism was resolved, a total of 22 general chapters were convened between 1422 and 1522, on an increasingly regular basis, every 3–6 years on average.⁴² The system also became uniform, apart from two Roman detours (1446, 1466/7),⁴³ that all general chapters were held in Rhodes. Nonetheless, both Roman councils proved to be particularly important in the late medieval history of the Order. The decision was established here to hold general chapters at regular intervals, and it was also here that the power struggle between the tongues had been renewed.⁴⁴ The most important consequence was a change in the voting ratios within the Convent. Moreover, from this period onwards, the importance of visitations in the European provinces of the Order increased,⁴⁵ and the debate over the Hungarian–Slavonian province continued to rage.⁴⁶

At this point of the reconstruction, however, fundamental questions arise: what determined which priory belonged to which tongue, and what was the significance of the grouping? From the point of view of administration and the collection of taxes, it was irrelevant, since the provincial leaders, and in most cases the preceptors, were appointed by the grand master and the general chapter. The majority of the taxes ultimately went to the Order’s treasury, regardless of which region paid the given sum. It was also irrelevant which tongue a given priory belonged to, because the taxation meant not a predetermined amount which the provinces might have divided into several

³⁸ BRONSTEIN 2005. p. 9.

³⁹ SARNOWSKY 2007. p. 154; HUNYADI – RIBI 2023. p. 67.

⁴⁰ 1383, 1384, 1410, 1420. SARNOWSKY 1996. p. 268; HUNYADI – RIBI 2023. p. 90.

⁴¹ HUNYADI – RIBI 2023. p. 88.

⁴² SARNOWSKY 1996. p. 268; BURGTORF 2008. p. 147.

⁴³ VALENTINI 1936; SIRE 1994. p. 36; SARNOWSKY 1995. p. 54.

⁴⁴ SIRE 1994. p. 121; LUTTRELL 1995. p. 35; SARNOWSKY 1995. p. 50, 55; SARNOWSKY 1996. p. 63; BONNEAUD 2013. p. 309.

⁴⁵ SARNOWSKY 2007. p. 153–154.

⁴⁶ HUNYADI – RIBI 2023. p. 178, 198.

larger or smaller parts.⁴⁷ When levying taxes on the Order's units, the profitability of each priory was individually taken into account, and the final amount was determined on this basis. In contrast, it is clear that from the first third of the fourteenth century onwards, the proportion of the Order's decision-making power represented by members of the Convent speaking their own tongue became increasingly important. After 1373, when 78 years of Provençal continuity in the office of Grand Master came to an end, a serious power struggle began in order to increase influence of the non-French tongues in the Order's leadership. From this perspective, the debate about the Hungarian–Slavonian priory also appears in a different light. I would not separate the interpretation of the Italian correspondence from 1466 discovered by András Ribí from the struggle over voting ratios in the leadership of the Order.⁴⁸ I would also rephrase my own previous wording, namely which tongue the Hungarian–Slavonian province “joined”.⁴⁹ It would be more accurate to ask, “where the priory was counted”. Because no matter how little tax the province paid, it could have had a significant impact on the balance of power in votes and the election of the Grand Master, regardless of whether they were represented in person or by procurators at the general chapters.

The “affiliation” of the Hungarian–Slavonian (Vrana) priory in the Rhodian copybooks:

1330–1365	<i>Lingua Italie</i>
1374–1386	<i>Lingua Italie</i>
1389–1400	<i>Lingua Alamanie</i>
1401–1438	<i>Lingua Italie</i>
1437–1445 – 1446	<i>Lingua Italie</i>
1447–1459	<i>Lingua Alamanie</i>
1460–1466	<i>Lingua Italie</i>
1467–1471	<i>Lingua Alamanie</i>
1472–1510	<i>Lingua Italie</i>

In light of the above, I am convinced that although the Hospitallers of the Hungarian priory distanced themselves from the Rhodes headquarters in many respects,⁵⁰ they remained part of the Order as a whole in terms of canon law. I have recently explained my arguments in details.⁵¹

Contra fratres conventuales

Returning to the examination of the Order's leadership, it may serve as a starting point that over the past eight centuries, some 80 Hospitaller Grand Masters have been in office, and a few “anti-masters” and *locumtenentes* have

⁴⁷ HUNYADI – RIBI 2023. p. 28.

⁴⁸ HUNYADI – RIBI 2023. p. 153.

⁴⁹ HUNYADI – RIBI 2023. p. 29.

⁵⁰ HUNYADI – RIBI 2023. p. 150–153.

⁵¹ HUNYADI 2025.

ensured the continuity of the office of *magnus magister*. Papal intervention also occurred several times during the Order's Holy Land period (c. 1099–1291). The first anomaly mentioned above already hampered the Order's activities during the tenure of Master Gilbert d'Assailly (1163–1169/71). As mentioned above, the master prepared the Hospitallers for the Crusade against Egypt with such vehemence that the Order was almost bankrupted.⁵² Looking more closely at the events, it seems that the core of the conflict developed between the Master and the Order's leadership, as well as the Order's highest decision-making body, the Hospitaller General Chapter. The latter did not accept Gilbert's first resignation⁵³ and even insisted that it would only be valid if approved by both the general chapter and the pope. It was Pope Alexander III (1159–1181) who finally accepted the resignation, but the master elect in 1172 had to promise to respect the old customs and statutes of the Hospital and to take the advice of the general chapter into account when making important decisions.⁵⁴ Alexander III also urged the Hospitallers to return to their original activity: caring for the poor and needy, clearly referring to the military role of the Order, but this could only take place under the leadership of the next master.⁵⁵

However, even the pope was unable to stop militarization,⁵⁶ as clearly indicated by the fact that in 1187, in the tragic Battle of Hattin, which led to the fall of Jerusalem, not only the leader of the Templars but also the Hospitaller grand master, Roger de Moulins (1177–1187) fell.⁵⁷ Until 1190, Ermengol de Aspa served as acting Grand Master (*provisor*)⁵⁸ until a new leader was elected in Acre, in the new capital of the Christians.

Gilbert d'Assailly's conflict was reminiscent of the clash between Afonso de Portugal (1203–1206), the most prominent master of the early thirteenth century, and the leaders of the Order. During his short term of office, one of the most important Hospitaller general chapters took place, where the aforementioned statutes of Margat (1206) were enacted.⁵⁹ The leaders of the Convent refused to obey the presumably autocratic leader, whereupon Afonso resigned in September 1206 and boarded a ship.⁶⁰ According to the *Cronica magistrorum defunctorum*, which survives from the late Middle Ages, the 66-year-old retired master, who was on good terms with Sancho, the Portuguese ruler (1185–1211), was poisoned by his fellow Hospitaller brethren—according to the chronicler.⁶¹

⁵² MURRAY 2015. p. 19.

⁵³ MURRAY 2015. p. 20.

⁵⁴ FOREY 1992. p. 163.

⁵⁵ RILEY-SMITH 2012. p. 36.

⁵⁶ FOREY 1984. p. 87–88; GARCÍA-GUIJARRO 1999. p. 293–302; RILEY-SMITH 2012. p. 27–37.

⁵⁷ RILEY-SMITH 2010. p. 23–24.

⁵⁸ LUTTRELL 2005. p. 15–19; RILEY-SMITH 2012. p. 43.

⁵⁹ KING 1934. p. 41–52.

⁶⁰ LUTTRELL 2014. p. 200–201.

⁶¹ DUGDALE 1830. p. 796.

The grand masterhips of Guillaume Châteauneuf (1241–1258) and Nicholas Lorgne (1277/78–1285) brought about a new type of conflict. Guillaume was taken prisoner in the Battle of Gaza in 1244, and until his release in 1250, the Order was ruled by a designated lieutenant and, at times, by the Grand Preceptor.⁶² The Grand Master's prolonged inability to perform his duties created a new "constitutional" situation, and by 1262 at the latest, the Hospitallers had addressed such situations at the level of the Order's legislation, laying down the rules for substitution.⁶³ A few decades later, Grand Master Nicholas Lorgne was forced to resign, presumably due to the loss of the last Hospitaller castles, above all Margat, although he continued to serve as acting Grand Master until his elected successor arrived in the Holy Land.⁶⁴

The beginning of the Order's Rhodian period (1308/9–1522/3) also brought a serious test of strength for the brethren of St. John. In the first decade of the century, the Grand Master, the above-mentioned Foulques de Vilaret (1305–1317/19), moved the Order's headquarters from Cyprus to Rhodes,⁶⁵ and although Foulques used the funds intended by the pope originally for the planned Crusade, he nevertheless created such a serious financial situation for the Hospitallers that the Order groaned under its weight for decades.⁶⁶ The presumably strong-willed Grand Master not only generated conflicts, but his own fellow members organized an armed rebellion against him⁶⁷ and even elected Maurice de Pagnac (1317–1319) as anti-master.⁶⁸ However, Pope John XXII (1316–1334) did not confirm the elderly "anti-grand master" in office and he still considered Foulques to be the legitimate leader, but—clearly identifying the tension within the Order—he reinstated him to office only so that he himself could return the position. Foulques, incidentally, remained in Italy as a member of the Order, but his conflict with his fellow members characterized the rest of his life.⁶⁹

The relative calm that had prevailed in the Order's leadership for several decades was broken by the Great Western Schism (1378–1417) as mentioned above, and it brought about not only the reign of several Grand Masters, but also the parallel rule of several popes. The Schism divided the Order: some provinces remained loyal to Avignon, while others obeyed Rome.⁷⁰ As a clear sign of this, Pope Urban VI confirmed Riccardo Caracciolo (1383–1395) as "anti-master", to whom the English and Italian tongues obeyed, including the

⁶² BURGTORF 2008. p. 112, 244, 443, 677; GORIDIS 2015. p. 289; LOTAN 2020. p. 76.

⁶³ § 10/1262. Cartulaire nr. 3039; KING 1934. p. 56. Cf. BURGTORF 2008. p. 244; RILEY-SMITH 2012. p. 128.

⁶⁴ RILEY-SMITH 2012. p. 210, 212.

⁶⁵ LUTTRELL 1985. p. 273–281; LUTTRELL 1996. p. 75–91; LUTTRELL 1998. p. 595–622; BURGTORF 2008. p. 156, 159; BORCHARDT 2011. 192.

⁶⁶ LUTTRELL 1997. p. 752; LUTTRELL 1999. p. 18–19; NICHOLSON 2001. p. 80; LUTTRELL 2002. p. 279; BRONSTEIN 2005. p. 86, 97–100, 119, 123, 144; CACHIA 2009. p. 62–63.

⁶⁷ SIRE 1994. p. 29.

⁶⁸ DELAVILLE LE ROULX 1913. p. 12–13; BURGTORF 2008. p. 417, 516.

⁶⁹ BURGTORF 2008. p. 512–517.

⁷⁰ DAILEADER 2009. p. 108–111; ROLLO-KOSTER 2022. p. 44.

majority of the Hungarian–Slavonian priory.⁷¹ Obedience was made tangible above all by appearances at general chapters, appointments by the Grand Master, and the payment of taxes levied by the Order. The other “party”, led by Grand Master Juan Fernandez de Heredia (1376–1396) supported the pope of Avignon, and the Grand Master even kept his seat there, which caused serious tension among the members of the Convent operating in Rhodes.⁷² After the deaths of Caracciolo and Heredia, the duality ceased with the Grand Mastership of Philibert de Naillac (1396–1421), but the unity within the Order was only restored after the Council of Pisa (1409).⁷³

However, tensions within the Order’s leadership resurfaced in the mid-fifteenth century. During the Grand Mastership of Jean de Lastic (1437–1454), the regulation of the Turcopolier’s power caused tension within the leadership.⁷⁴ During the Grand Mastership of Ramón Pére Zacosta (1461–1467) a serious power struggle developed between the head of the Order and the senior officials (*pillerii*) who were to be appointed or were awaiting appointment at the general chapter convened in the autumn of 1462. Until the inauguration of Grand Master Pierre d’Aubusson (1476–1503), there were minor and major frictions between the leaders of the Order and the current master, but these did not escalate into a serious crisis.⁷⁵ The hero of the (first) Ottoman siege of Rhodes in 1480 was the longest-serving Grand Master of the Order: he died in 1503 at the age of 80.⁷⁶ By this time, the previous “interregnum” of several months in the leadership of the Order had been reduced to three days, meaning that the successor to the deceased Grand Master was elected within a very short time.⁷⁷

Hopefully, the above overview showed that the institutional norms of power and consensus have developed over a long period of time and have been refined by the brethren of the Order of St. John. The checks and balances of the Order’s leadership served to maintain a fragile balance between the Grand Master, the Convent, the general chapter, and sometimes papal influence. Despite fluctuations, the practice of power sharing properly functioned in the long run.

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⁷¹ SIRE 1994, p. 167.

⁷² SARNOWSKY 1996. p. 268, 272; VANN 2006. p. 38.

⁷³ LUTTRELL 1975. p. 305.

⁷⁴ SARNOWSKY 1995. p. 62.

⁷⁵ SARNOWSKY 1996. p. 272; SARNOWSKY 2001. p. 157; BONNEAUD 2017. p. 143.

⁷⁶ SARNOWSKY 2001. p. 167.

⁷⁷ SARNOWSKY 1996. p. 272.

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