

EAST CENTRAL EUROPE: BETWEEN THE BALTIC AND THE ADRIATIC

OSTMITTELEUROPA: ZWISCHEN OSTSEE UND ADRIA

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The University of Debrecen
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The Last Year of the Hospitallers' Rule on Rhodes^{*}

ABSTRACT

Early in 1523, the Hospitallers had to leave Rhodes with a small number of ships, after a long siege by the Ottoman forces under Sultan Soliman I. The Hospitaller rule on Rhodes and the Dodecanese had been endangered at least since the middle of the fifteenth century, but the Order had successfully resisted both the sieges by the Mamluks in the 1440s and by the Ottomans in 1480. The paper discusses the perception of a growing danger for Rhodes after the fall of Belgrade (1521) and the measures taken by the Order, based on the surviving registers from the years 1521/1522. While regular administration continued, the new Grand Master fr. Philippe Villiers de l'Isle-Adam who reached Rhodes in September 1521 had to handle the situation. The appeals to the Emperor, the Kings of England and France, the Pope and others set aside, fr. Villiers focussed on strengthening the fortifications, gathering supplies and money and revising the Order's contingent on Rhodes. Internal problems were mostly overcome, but without relief from the Western powers who were at war with each other, the Order finally had to surrender.

Keywords: Hospitallers, Rhodes, siege of 1522, administration, Philippe Villiers de l'Isle Adam

The pre-history of the loss of Rhodes by the Order of St John and the events of the Ottoman siege of Rhodes in 1522 are quite well known.¹ When Selim I had conquered Syria and Egypt in 1516/1517, Rhodes became the focus of his

^{*} Written version of the author's lecture given on 11 July 2025, on the occasion of his Honoris Causa ceremony at the University of Debrecen.

¹ See the papers in: *The 1522 Siege of Rhodes. Causes, Course and Consequences*. Ed. Phillips, Simon David (The Military Religious Orders; History, Sources, and Memory), Abingdon–New York, 2022. Especially Phillips, Simon David, “How Much Did the Hospitallers Know? Information, Misinformation, and Preparation”, In. *Ibid.*, 40–59.; Also: Mager, Mathis, *Krisenerfahrung und Bewältigungsstrategien des Johanniterordens nach der Eroberung von Rhodos 1522*. Münster, 2014. 94–98.; Sarnowsky, Jürgen, *Die Johanniter. Ein geistlicher Ritterorden in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*. München, 2011. 105–106.; Vatin, Nicolas, *L'Ordre de Saint-Jean-de-Jérusalem, l'Empire ottoman et la Méditerranée orientale entre les deux sièges de Rhodes 1480–1522* (Collection Turcica VII). Paris, 1994. 342–360.; Sire, Henry, *The Knights of Malta*. New Haven–London, 1994. 57–59.

attention. The island lay at important maritime routes, and the actions of the brethren disturbed the connections between the Ottoman mainland and the new conquests. After the Sultan had also seized the Holy Places of Islam, therefore he also planned the conquest of Rhodes, but he died at the end of 1520 before he could realize his plans. His son Soliman I continued the policies of his father. On 28 August 1521, Belgrade fell into his hands and within a few years most of Hungary was conquered.

But even before that the Sultan turned against the Hospitallers on Rhodes. On 21 May 1522, a fleet of more than 300 ships sailed from Constantinople in the direction of Rhodes with lots of materials.² At the end of June, a naval blockade was closed around the island, and first contingents landed on Rhodes. The Sultan followed with his land army of about 100 000 men so that the attacks now – different from 1480 when the harbour was the main area of fights – concentrated on the land side of the town. The siege of Rhodes began about 28 July 1522. The Hospitallers had even smaller contingents as in 1480. There were 600 knight brethren, 500 Genoese sailors, 400 mercenaries from Crete and the few thousand inhabitants from town and island. Nevertheless, the town of Rhodes was one of the strongest fortifications of its time. Therefore, even though the intensive battery fire caused a lot of damage and even though there were many efforts to undermine the walls of the town, at the beginning, the Ottomans had little success. Therefore and because of the great number of victims, at the beginning of October, Soliman exchanged the commander of his army.

The Order had hoped for relief by the Western powers. But the Venetian Senate whose ships lay before Crete rather preferred good relationships to the Ottomans and prohibited the intervention of its fleet. It also notified the Sultan that the support which the Order had received from Crete had been sent against its will.³ At the same time the Emperor Charles V and King Francis I France were at war with each other so that Pope Hadrian VI was not able to organise help for the Hospitallers. Since the Sultan also had economic interests in conquering Rhodes, he was not interested in its destruction.⁴ Also, to obviate the arrival of reinforcements from the West, at the beginning of December, Soliman finally suggested an orderly surrender of island and town. At first, Grand Master

² The date according to Vatin, *L'Ordre*, 1994. 343. While the traditional dating is 4 June 1522 Mager, *Krisenerfahrung*, 2014. 94.

³ Mager, *Krisenerfahrung*, 2014. 95–96.

⁴ Mager, *Krisenerfahrung*, 2014. 194. Cf. Vatin, *L'Ordre*, 1994. 329.

and Council declined the offer but when the fighting started again the Order could barely resist anymore. Therefore, on 22 December 1522, there was the final surrender. The inhabitants of the town were nearly completely spared, and on 1 January 1523, the brethren were allowed to leave Rhodes on a few ships with faithful subjects. All other islands and fortifications of the Order fell to the Ottomans even though there was some resistance in the following years.⁵

The written sources which the order could take from Rhodes in 1523, and which are now preserved on Malta are quite good for the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The charters and the acts of the chapters general set aside, there are two series of records, the registers for the internal correspondence, the *Libri Bullarum*, and the notes from the councils, preserved since about 1460, the *Libri consiliorum*.⁶ Other series are completely missing like the registers with the foreign correspondence. Based on these sources, I want to discuss in this paper if the sources from the last of the rule of the Order already reflect the growing threat by the Ottomans or if the regular business of the Order's administration prevails.

In a shorter paper, the mass of materials makes it necessary to concentrate on certain parts of the tradition. On the other hand, they are also gaps in the sources probably caused by the siege or by the transmission of the materials from Rhodes. E. g., we do not have any entries for the year 1520 though there was a chapter general in this year, and similar to the siege of 1480,⁷ the entries

⁵ Vatin, L'Ordre, 1994, 368–371.

⁶ See the survey in: Sarnowsky, Jürgen, *Macht und Herrschaft im Johanniterorden des 15. Jahrhunderts. Verfassung und Verwaltung der Johanniter auf Rhodos (1421–1522)*. Münster, 2001. 11–12. I will use here three reports: Fr. de Bourbon, Jacques, *La grande et merveilleuse et tres cruelle oppugnation de la noble cite de Rhodes prinse nagueres par Sultan Seliman a present grand turcq, ennemy de la tres sainte foy Catholique*. Paris, 1524.; Fontanus, Jacobus, *De bello Rhodio libri Tres [mit Beschreibungen der Inseln Rhodos und Malta]*. Paris–Basel, 1540.; and the report of the Prior of England, fr. Thomas Docray, summary in: *Letters and papers, foreign and domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII.: preserved in the Public Record Office, the British Museum and elsewhere*. Ed. Sherren Brewer, John – Gairdner, James. London, 1862–1932. [hereinafter Letters and papers] Vol 3/2, 2841, p. 1191–1193.

⁷ For 1480 cf. the note of Caoursin: “Quia civitas Rhodi obsidebatur per Turcos et summo conatu oppugnabatur, in tanta rerum perturbacione ac formidine peracta in scriptis non sunt redacta. Sed habita victoria, historia est edita per Guillelmum Caoursin Rhodiorum vicescancellarius [...]” National Library of Malta, Archives of the Order of St. John [hereinafter NLM Arch.], 76, fol. 35(50)r. Mostly there is a double counting; the younger page count is put in brackets behind.

in the *Liber consiliorum* stop during the fights, similar in the other registers.⁸ Therefore, I want to concentrate on the period from March 1521 to the summer 1522.⁹

It is little surprising that many of the entries in the registers show that the brethren supposed the continuity of the rule of the Order on Rhodes even though there were external dangers. In February 1519, fr. Pierre Jean de Bidoux paid his responsions as Preceptor of Kos for five years (1519 to 1523).¹⁰ In December 1521, the priories were informed by the Council and the new Grand Master Philippe Villiers de l'Isle-Adam on the preparations for the chapter general which was scheduled to start on the first sunday of September 1523.¹¹ Furthermore, single brethren were still allowed to leave the convent¹² while others who were cited to come to Rhodes received the permission to lease out their preceptories for two or three years, as it happened e. g. in March 1522 for fr. Jacques de Borbons.¹³ Citations to Rhodes continued like before,¹⁴ also of the priest brethren like in the case of fr. Philibert Delperroj from the Priory of Champagne in October 1521.¹⁵ On the other

⁸ In NLM Arch. 83, after an entry on a quarrel between Genoese of 5 July 1522, fol. 53(62)v–54(63)v, there is a short note from 9 December 1522, fol. 54(63)r, to which I will refer later.

⁹ Therefore, my sources and my basic questions are completely different from Phillips, How Much, 2022, who neither uses NLM Arch. 409 nor Arch. 83.

¹⁰ The receipt in NLM Arch. 407, fol. 155(154)r–v, of 19 February 1519, without the sum; his appoint as first preceptor after 24 years *ibid.*, fol. 153(152)v, of 18 February 1519.

¹¹ The invitations dated 7 December 1521 in NLM Arch. 409, fol. 4r–5r (full text, addressed to the Prior of *Francia*, fr. Pierre de Cluys), fol. 13v (note, to the Prior of Aquitaine, fr. Charles des Ursins), fol. 21r (note, to the Prior of Champagne, fr. Jacques d'Aymer), fol. 31r (note, to the Prior of St. Gilles, fr. Pierre Jean de Bidoux), fol. 54r (Notiz, to the Prior of Auvergne, fr. Ademar du Puy), fol. 97v (note, to the Priors of Capua, fr. Giuliano de Ridolfis, and Messina, fr. Filippo de Provana), fol. 116v (notes, to the Prior of Castile, fr. Don Didaco de Toledo, and the lieutenant Prior of Portugal, fr. Payo Correa), partially with different date: 7 September 1521.

¹² Notes of 8 October 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 1r, and 5 November 1521, *ibid.*, fol. 97v; see also the permit of return for fr. Jean de Semoine dated 8 October 1521, *ibid.*, fol. 20v., or for the Sergeant fr. Pedro Sanudo of 11 March 1522, *ibid.*, fol. 116v.

¹³ Note dated 18 March 1522, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 5r; perhaps this is the author of the report on the siege.

¹⁴ Note of 7 February 1522, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 13v, perhaps identical with one of the exchange partners of September 1521, see below; another example: *ibid.*, fol. 54r, for fr. Jean de Fornous, of 20 March 1522.

¹⁵ Letter of the Grand Master dated 11 October 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 20v.

hand, the elderly Prior of Champagne, fr. Jacques d'Aymer, was allowed to stay in his Priory for lifetime because of his bad health.¹⁶

Also, the filling of offices continued. Thus, in June 1521, fr. Edward Rolz was appointed preceptor of Temple Bruer, after the former preceptor fr. William Cower had died in the Convent on Rhodes.¹⁷ The brethren received at first a preceptory for their provision, and when they had improved their house, they also received a better position, a *melioramentum*. Thus, in July 1521, fr. Jacques Brunet was granted the preceptory of Bourgneuf for his good administration of the former Templar commandery at Angers, but he had to resign his former office first.¹⁸ Others exchanged their offices for some years,¹⁹ while the Grand Master had to intervene against the irregular filling of a preceptory in the Priory of Capua.²⁰ During the last decades of the Order's rule on Rhodes, new capitular bailiwicks (filled in during chapters general) developed in the priories which became stepping stones for higher offices. This continued also in 1521 when fr. Desideré de St. Yalle, the Capitular Bailiff of Manosque in Provence received the *ancianitas*, the rank, to be appointed to the next vacant priory in the langue of Provence, either the Priory of St. Gilles or of Toulouse.²¹ But also the conventual baillifs, the highest officials in the Convent at Rhodes, were granted expectancies, like in July 1521, when the Admiral fr. Bernardino Piosasco de Ayrasca received the *ancianitas* for the higher offices of the Italian langue.²²

¹⁶ His health "[...] non permittit sine vestre vite manifesto periculo vos iter lungam facere [...]", letter of the Grand Master dated 12 December 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 21r.

¹⁷ Charter of the Lieutenant Grand Master and Grand Preceptor fr. Gabriel de Pomerolx of 6 June 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 117r; fr. Rolz had resigned his former office which was given to fr. Nicholas Farfax for provision, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Charter of the Lieutenant Grand Master and Grand Preceptor fr. Gabriel de Pomerolx of 10 July 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 10r, a typical *melioramentum*, with the note concerning an *executoria* to install fr. Jacques to his new office.

¹⁹ Note on the exchange of the preceptories of fr. François de Nocheres and fr. Jean Suriette, dated 26 September 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 13v, relevant from 24 June 1522.

²⁰ Letter of the Grand Master fr. Philippe Villiers de l'Isle-Adam dated 22 March 1522, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 97v–98r; cf. the decision of the Council, Arch. 83, fol. 43(52)r, from the same day.

²¹ Letter of the Grand Master fr. Philippe Villiers de l'Isle-Adam of 7 November 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 30v–31r, partly shortened with established wording from older letters; already as decision of Lieutenant Grand Master and Council in NLM Arch. 83, fol. 7(16)v, dated 24 April 1521.

²² Letter of the Lieutenant Grand Master and Grand Preceptor fr. Gabriel de Pomerolx of 1 July 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 82r.

One important element for organising the supplies for Rhodes where letters of conduct given to merchants from different regions in the Mediterranean, In April 1521 the lieutenant Grand Master and Grand Preceptor fr. Gabriel de Pomerolx issued a letter of conduct for the Syrian Christian Kathen and his sons Fargella and Habrahan, inhabitants of Damiette in Egypt which meanwhile had been conquered by the Ottomans. They would trade both with Christian as well as with Muslim cloth and other goods. They already had proven to be good servants of the Order and fr. Gabriel was hoping even for better.²³ In the same month, another letter of conduct was given for trade with Egypt to Demitri Moratti who was bringing victuals from Damiette to Rhodes on a Genoese ship.²⁴ In July 1521, also a Muslim merchant Alybubach received a letter of conduct by which he was allowed to bring his goods to Rhodes and to leave the island with the things he bought there.²⁵ Thus, the Order was still hoping for relatively well-ordered economic relations in the eastern Mediterranean to organize food stuff for Rhodes.

The Hospitallers had special relations with Genoese merchants. In May 1521, the Genoese citizen Vincenzo Justiniani and his sons received the citizenship of Rhodes town and were appointed familiars of the Order so that they could use the papal and princely privileges of the Hospitallers for their trade. They were freed from the dues on Rhodes and had to be supported by all officials of the Order.²⁶ Thus, in July 1521 Justiniani sent out a ship to trade with Syria and Egypt.²⁷ The supply with grain came mostly via southern Italy earth as it is shown by a letter of the lieutenant Grand Master fr. Gabriel de Pomerolx from June 1521 to the harbour authorities of Apulia. At this point, four ships from Catalonia, Genoa, Naples, and Rhodes brought large quantities of grain to the town of Rhodes which had been bought by the receiver of the Priories of Barletta and Capua, fr. Carolo Pandone, for the supplies of Convent and town.²⁸ Likewise, the merchants from the town of

²³ Letter of the Lieutenant Grand Master of 15 April 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 190r–v.

²⁴ Likewise, dated 26 April 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 190v; exported were *scafides et astadia*, probably smaller pieces of wood.

²⁵ Letter of conduct of the Lieutenant Grand Master for Alybubach, *moro*, of 23 July 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 193v.

²⁶ Open letter of the Lieutenant Grand Master of 15 May 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 191r–v; further letters for Genoese captains dated 19 July 1521 Juli 19, *ibid.*, fol. 194r–v.

²⁷ Letter of conduct of the Lieutenant Grand Master for the Captain Martino Lomelino dated 19 July 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 194v–195r.

²⁸ The measure are cartloads (*currus*), the ships brought 140, 385, 111, and 85 cartloads. The letter subscribed by the vice-chancellor (Bartolomeo Poliziano) dated 4 June 1521 in

Rhodes received letters of conduct,²⁹ and the transport of money and goods from the priories had to be secured, like from England, which sent its responses mostly in silver, gold and cloth to support the Order in the east against “the enemies of the Catholic faith”.³⁰

The order also kept its routines concerning its rule over the Dodecanese and the castle of Saint Peter when e.g. in January 1522 the Sergeant fr. João de Montero was appointed constable for the castle of Saint Peter.³¹ Another constable was appointed in March 1522.³² The castle of Saint Peter was in some respect under the control of the grand bailiff, an office newly created in 1428 for the German langue, insofar as the grand Bailiff could visit the fortifications and the supplies. Thus, in March 1522, the Captain of the castle, the Admiral fr. Bernardino de Ayrasca, was reminded that, some time ago, a list of artillery and ammunition in the castle had been compiled together with the Grand Bailiff. Now, the captain was ordered to revise the inventory together with the lieutenant Grand Bailiff fr. Georg Selin.³³ Since the Grand Master was the formal head of the Greek Orthodox Church on Rhodes, in March 1522, the new Grand Master fr. Philippe Villiers de l'Isle-Adam appointed a new head for the monastery of St. Nicholas in the suburbs of Rhodes which had been for a long time been in secular hands, Moyes Comito, who already lived according to the rule of St. Basil.³⁴ Also in March 1522, the Grand Master gave his smith in the Grand Master's palace, who was also his familiar,

favour of the captains Miquel Inclusa from Catalonia, Martino Botta from Genua, Sebastiano de Surrenta from Naples, und Alonso Pardal from Rhodos is intended to prove the legality of the exports from Apulia, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 192v–193r.

²⁹ Letter of conduct of the Grand Master fr. Philippe Villiers de l'Isle-Adam dated 29 October 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 197r–v.

³⁰ “[...] Ex fructibus prioratus nostri Anglie et preceptoriarum ipsius quolibet anno habeamus portionem quandam pro sustentatione huius religionis in Oriente contra inimicos sacrosancte fidei chatolice”, in a letter to the authorities in the town of Messina of 16 October 1521, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 197v–198r.

³¹ Letter of the Grand Master dated 29 January 1522, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 189v.

³² Letter of the Grand Master to fr. Bernadino de Ayrasca, Admiral and Captain of the Castle of Saint Peter, to the lieutenant Grand Bailiff, fr. Georg Selin (?), and the Castellan of Rhodos, of 9 March 1522, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 200r.

³³ Letter of the Grand Master to the Admiral and Captain of 9 March 1522, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 200r–v.

³⁴ The spelling of the name is problematic, appears as *caloyerus laycus ordinis sancti Baseli*, letter of the Grand Master dated 22 February 1522, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 200v–201v.

a certain piece of land at the walls of Rhodes.³⁵ Another topic of letters in the last months of the Order's rule on Rhodes were manumissions of its subjects.³⁶

These charters and letters mostly from the *Liber Bullarum* of 1521/1522 show that the Order to continue its routines of the rule over Rhodes. Nevertheless, they were well aware of the threat by the Ottomans as already shows the invitation to the first chapter general under fr. Philippe Villiers de l'Isle-Adam.³⁷ The letter allows the possibility to assemble earlier if this would be necessary due to the developments. The young Sultan [Soliman I] would be in high spirit because of his victory over the Hungarian king [at Belgrade] and would prepare more and more ships for war while keeping his army in arms.³⁸ Therefore at the chapter general measures for reinforcements should be decided to protect Christianity and to secure the success of the Order. After they had received the letter, the priors should convoke provincial chapters and inform the brethren about the situation so that these could furnish themselves with weapons and would be ready to come to the Convent if cited to Rhodes. The priors or their lieutenants should be personally present at the chapter general which would decide in regular mode.³⁹

The assessment of the situation by the order becomes clear also from letters of the grand masters and the English brethren to king Henry VIII of England which are preserved in a London manuscript. Already in April 1513, Grand Master fr. Guy de Blanchefort reported that the Turks under their new Sultan Selim I would trouble the islands, castles, and towns of the Order by fire and sword while the Christian rulers would fight against each other. Therefore, he asked the king to permit the English brethren to come to

³⁵ The name of the smith is given as Joannes Conti, grant by the Grand Master of 19 March 1522, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 201v–202r.

³⁶ A supplication from Johannes Critico from Kos concerning March 1522 was left to the decision of the Castellan of Rhodes, cf. the letter of the Grand Master to fr. Pierre Jean de Bidoux, Prior of St. Gilles und preceptor of Kos of 24 March, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 204r.

³⁷ See note 11.

³⁸ “Thurcorum tyrannus juvenis et supra modo elatus victoria ab eodem contra serenissimum dominum Hungariae regem [parta] non cessat navigia omnis generis bello apta partim restaurare et re[fortiare], partim nova in magno numero construere, terrestres exercitus veteres in armis manutenere et bivos describere [...]”, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 4r. Fontanus, *De bello*, 1540. 17–18, reports of an exchange of letters between the Sultan and the new Grand Master after the conquest of Belgrade.

³⁹ NLM Arch. 409, fol. 4v.

Rhodes, namely the prior and the bailiff of Egle.⁴⁰ In November 1521, the newly elected Grand Master fr. Philippe Villiers de l'Isle-Adam informed the Lord chancellor Thomas Wolsey, Archbishop of York and Cardinal, on the conquest of Belgrade by the Ottomans. The provinces of Hungary would now be now open and the Order, settled in immediate neighbourhood of the Ottoman Empire, would have to concentrate his forces to be able to resist. Also, the Hospitallers would continue to fortify the walls of the town of Rhodes. Fr. Villiers asked the king to further protect the Order and to intervene in its favour, if necessary.⁴¹

Until June 1522, the Grand Master send at least three other letters to England. In March, he told the king that a spy had received the information that the Sultan would start a larger campaign in April wanting to assault the island with his fleet. Therefore fr. Villiers asked the king as protector and founder of the Order for help. The Grand Master had already requested the brethren in the West to send out ships.⁴² On 17 June, fr. Villiers informed Cardinal Wolsey on the great threat by the Turkish fleet which was already near. The Sultan had sent him letters in which he demanded the surrender of all territories of the Order and was offering war.⁴³ On the other hand, fr. Villiers trusted in the strong fortification of Rhodes and was hoping to defend the town with the help of God. Nevertheless, a long siege could become difficult, therefore he deemed necessary to plan for relief. The Grand Master would bring the people from the countryside into the town of Rhodes but

⁴⁰ London, British Library, Ms. Cotton Otho C IX 36, fol. 12r-v, letter of 10 April 1513; calendar: *Letters and Papers*, Vol. 1, 3874, p. 529. This collection of letters was damaged in a fire, later restored and finally bound together in the manuscript (originally there were separate signatures for its parts). Due to the fire, there are gaps in the texts which make it sometimes difficult to understand the intention of the authors.

⁴¹ London, British Library, Ms. Cotton Otho C IX 36, fol. 46r-v, letter of the Grand Master dated 4 November 1521; calendar in: *Letters and Papers*, Vol. 3/2, 1741, p. 733. Cf. Phillips, *How Much*, 2022. 45.

⁴² London, British Library, Ms. Cotton Otho C IX 36, fol. 47r-v, von 1522 März 19; calendar in: *Letters and Papers*, Vol. 3/2, 2117, p. 904. See again Phillips, *How Much*, 2022. 45. *Letters and Papers*, Vol. 3/2, 2118, p. 904, there is also a longer letter to Wolsey from the same date.

⁴³ According to the Report of the English Prior fr. Thomas Dockray, in a letter which arrived on Rhodes 8 May 1522, the Sultan had already declared his intention to conquer the town of Rhodes, while offering the brethren to protect them and to take them into his service, if they would surrender. The Order only answered that the Sultan would be received by the burst of its artillery fire, cf. the summary of the report in *Letters and Papers*, 3/2, 2841, pp. 1191–1193, p. 1192.

for this also money was needed. Thus, the chancellor was asked to allow the transfer of money and the departure of English brethren to Rhodes, namely of the English Prior fr. Thomas Docray and the Bailiff of Egle, fr. Thomas Newport.⁴⁴ On the same day, the Grand Master turned to Henry VIII, reporting the arrival of the Turkish fleet. He informs him that he had prepared everything for war and also ordered the brethren in Naples and Marseille to recruit support as he had already written to the Prior fr. Thomas Docray who would inform him about the situation. Fr. Docray and fr. Newport should come to Rhodes and be allowed to bring the outstanding money from England to the East.⁴⁵

The Order had strong traditional links with France but this time it received little support. In May 1517, Grand Master fr. Fabrizio del Carretto proposed to King Francis I to initiate a new crusade against the Ottomans. The king would earn himself eternal rewards and secular honours.⁴⁶ Francis did show only little interest in this appeal. In his conflict with the house of Habsburg and during the fights in Italy he was rather looking for a rapprochement to the Ottoman Empire. His policies did not change before and during the siege of 1522.

The Hospitallers had an intensive exchange of information especially with Venetian Crete. We know from the *Diarii* of Marino Sanuto of two letters which fr. Villiers sent to the Doge of Crete at the beginning of May. In these, the Grand Master reported about the movements of the Ottoman fleet. According to him, from the Castle of Saint Peter many ships had been seen which would partly sail to Constantinople, partly into the Black Sea to enter the Danube for an attack on Hungary. Though there were rumours concerning an attack on Rhodes and many ships were assembling, the Grand Master still assumed that there were no intensive preparations for war against Rhodes in Turkey. The Sultan would rather collect his tents close to Adrianople probably to have them brought to Hungary. Thus, in May 1522 the Order obvious-

⁴⁴ London, British Library, Ms. Cotton Otho C IX 36, fol. 48r–v. Letter of the Grand Master of 17 June 1522, calendar in: *Letters and Papers*, 3/2, 2325, p. 984.

⁴⁵ London, British Library, Ms. Cotton Otho C IX 36, fol. 49r–v. From the same date, calendar in: *Letters and Papers*, 3/2, 2324, p. 984.

⁴⁶ According to a document from the Museum of the Order of St. John, London, letter of the Grand Master to the King dated 27 May 1517, online: <https://museumstjohn.org.uk/the-sieges-of-rhodes-print-and-propaganda/> (Accessed on 15 September 2025).

ly expected that the Sultan would turn towards Hungary first.⁴⁷ This changed at the latest at the beginning of June when the coming attack was confirmed by informants of the Order, as fr. Villiers wrote to Crete, and when the order prepared for the arrival of the Sultan and his fleet. In a letter to Zuan Alvise Pixani it is said very optimistically that Rhodes would be defended by 14 000 men, lots of artillery and ammunition and would be well prepared for the attack.⁴⁸ On 26 June 1522, the Grand Master formally informed the government of Crete on the arrival of the Ottoman fleet and the landing of the first contingents. The ship that brought the news to Crete continued journey to the West to ask for help for the Order.⁴⁹ The Venetians were well informed – Sanuto knew even the text of the declaration of war by the Sultan⁵⁰ – but they would not put their good relationship to the Ottomans in danger.

Even though the Hospitallers did not expect an attack on Rhodes at the moment, they were also looking for further support. At the beginning of April 1522, fr. Jean de Yseran was sent to the Roman Curia to discuss measures to secure the Order on Rhodes. The letter of conduct that was made out for him says that the Sultan (*Turcorum tyrannus*) was gathering a great fleet to subdue the neighbouring Christian territories. The Order would be prepared and vigilant to resist the Ottoman power.⁵¹ Nevertheless, there was also some hope to find a peaceful solution with the Ottomans when it was decided at the end of March 1522 to send an ambassador to the Sultan to reach a prolongation of the peace which was once concluded by fr. Pierre d'Aubusson.⁵²

The measures of the Hospitallers when faced with the growing threat against Rhodes can be followed especially by the decisions of the Order's council. During the siege of 1480, the fights mostly concentrated around the towers at the harbour. Therefore, even though there was a regular rotation concerning the responsibility for the towers, the new division of tasks in

⁴⁷ [*I diarii di Marino Sanudo (MCCCCXCVI–MDXXXIII)*]. Vol. I–LVIII. Berchet, Guglielmo – Stefani, Frederico – Barozzi, Nicolò – Fulin, Rinaldo – Allegri, Marco. Venice, 1879–1903. [hereinafter Sanudo] Vol. XXXIII. col. 337, mentions letter of 2–3 May, following a report of the Doge Marco Minio to his brother Francesco. Cf. Vatin, *L'Ordre*, 1994. 345.

⁴⁸ Sanudo Vol. XXXIII. col. 363–364. According to a letter of 8 June.

⁴⁹ Sanudo Vol. XXXIII. col. 389–390. With the copy of a letter of the Grand Master 26 June 1522, arrived on Crete 30 June.

⁵⁰ Sanudo Vol. XXXIII. col. 398–399. See also the version in Fontanus, *De bello*, 1540. 42.

⁵¹ Letter of conduct of the Grand Master for fr. Jean de Yseran of 2 April 1522, NLM Arch. 409, fol. 202v.

⁵² Cf. NLM Arch. 83, fol. 48(57)r, dated 26 March 1522; see Sarnowsky, *Macht*, 2001. 77, n. 164.

March 1521 surely had special importance. At that point, the French langue took over the protection of the Tower of St. Nicholas, the English langue that of the Tower of Naillac, and the langue that of the Tower of the Mills.⁵³ Following a certain event, the authority of the captains of the Order's ships was reinforced,⁵⁴ and at the end of August, two commissioners were appointed to look for repairs in the town and the fortifications.⁵⁵

After the new Grand Master fr. Philippe Villiers de l'Isle-Adam had arrived on Rhodes one measure to strengthen his authority⁵⁶ was that he took over the control over the Order's finances. In December 1521, the former Lieutenant Grand Master and Grand Preceptor fr. Gabriel de Pomerolx as well as the administrators of the treasury asked the Grand Master to take over the administration of the goods of the Order, because these would develop better under his protection. This would also help to resolve the suspicions against the current administrators of the treasury. After Fr. Villiers had received an explanation on the situation, he agreed to take on the task.⁵⁷ Similarly, in the critical years around 1480 fr. Pierre d'Aubusson had taken over the administration of the treasury.⁵⁸ Immediately after this decision, the Grand Master declared that after his election, when he was in France, he had received financial support from the receivers of the six French priories by a sum of 40 000 écus, part of which should now be used for the daily expenditure of the Convent, as much as necessary, and the other part should be kept for future needs.⁵⁹

⁵³ Decision of the Council dated 21 March 1521, NLM Arch. 83, fol. 1(10)v–2(11 r, transcript: <https://www.spaetmittelalter.uni-hamburg.de/hospitallers/sources/1500/Hospitaller1521.03.11.html> (Accessed on 15 September 2025).

⁵⁴ Decision of 14 August 1521, NLM Arch. 83, fol. 19(20)v–20(21)r.

⁵⁵ Note on the deliberations on 31 August 1521, NLM Arch. 83, fol. 22(23)r.

⁵⁶ The first pages of the last *Liber consiliorum* on Rhodes document several conflicts concerning offices, and there were also some bitter altercations like when two brethren from the Priors of Portugal and Castile were hurt and punished by the loss of their *ancianitas* and their habit, until the Grand Master would finally decide, see NLM Arch. 83, fol. 21(22)v–22(23)r, dated 26 August 1521.

⁵⁷ Note on the supplication of Grand Preceptor and procurators and on the response of the Grand Master from 19 December 1521, NLM Arch. 83, fol. 31(40)v, transcript: <https://www.spaetmittelalter.uni-hamburg.de/hospitallers/sources/1500/Hospitaller1521.12.19.html> (Accessed on 15 September 2025).

⁵⁸ Sarnowsky, Macht, 2001. 545.

⁵⁹ NLM Arch. 83, fol. 33(42)r, note dated 20 December 1521.

In February 1522, when there was news on a fleet assembled to attack Rhodes, several decisions were taken in the Council.⁶⁰ Since the commission to look for repairs in the town had expired, two new commissioners were appointed for two months, the Portuguese fr. Antonio de Brito and fr. François de Nuceres from Aquitaine. They were ordered to have repairs made where necessary and to be present themselves during the works.⁶¹ Since the situation also made it necessary to employ a larger work force, at least three quarters of the Muslim slaves which were not serving in the houses should participate at the work at the walls. These had also to be supervised by two brethren of the Order. The “master of the esquires” (*magister scutiferum*)⁶² should appeal both to the brethren as well as to the citizens and inhabitants of Rhodes to give the names and the numbers of their slaves who could take part at the works according to the decision.⁶³ Also, two other brethren should take measures to prevent fires in the town.⁶⁴ The brethren fr. Jean Marini and fr. Nicholas Fairfax received the order together with the Latin and Greek inhabitants to care for the peasants of the island who had to come to Rhodes town in case of an attack on the island.⁶⁵ Two other brethren had to inspect the mills and order repairs or new buildings so that the mills could also be used for the defence of the town.⁶⁶ At the same day a new captain of the Castle of Saint Peter was appointed, fr. Claudio de Sancto Pererio.⁶⁷

A first culmination of the preparations were the musters in May 1522. On 7 May 1522 fr. Dideric del Aquila und the Grand Preceptor fr. Gabriel de Pomerolx as head of the auberge of the Provence were commanded to summon all brothers of the langue of Provence, bailiffs, knights, and sergeants to come personally to the auberge with their offensive and defensive weapons, armour, crossbows, and English bows. The commissioners were ordered to

⁶⁰ “[...] Ex variis partibus habentur nova, quod Turcorum tyrannus Solyman preparat magnam classem maritimam et Constantinopoli publice divulgatur, quod est contra Rhodum, reverendissimus dominus magnus magister et reverendum consilium cupientes providere statui religionis fecerunt ordinationes infrascriptis” NLM Arch. 83, fol. 36(45)r, of 18 February 1522.

⁶¹ NLM Arch. 83, fol. 36(45)r, of 18 February 1522.

⁶² For this office cf. Sarnowsky, Macht, 2001. 281.

⁶³ NLM Arch. 83, fol. 36(45)r–v, for 18 February 1522. Cf. Vatin, L’Ordre, 1994. 345–346.

⁶⁴ NLM Arch. 83, fol. 36(45)v–37(46)r.

⁶⁵ NLM Arch. 83, fol. 37(46)r, decisions of the Council from the same date. Cf. Vatin, L’Ordre, 1994. 346.

⁶⁶ Again NLM Arch. 83, fol. 37(46)r.

⁶⁷ NLM Arch. 83, fol. 37(46)r, for 18 February 1522.

make a list of the brethren who were present in the convent but did not show up to the musters.⁶⁸ The brethren present should swear with their right hand on the cross of their habits that the weapons brought by them were their own. The whole mustering would start after the bells had been rung for the event. All participants of the muster had to be noted down in a list, together with their equipment of weapons. The results of the musters should then be reported to Grand Master and Council.⁶⁹ Similar were the musters of the other langues, organized by the responsible conventual bailiff or his lieutenant and a brother from another langue.⁷⁰ According to the report of the English Prior fr. Thomas Docray at the same time there were also musters for the inhabitants of the town of Rhodes, 3 000–4 000 men, and from the villages of the island of Rhodes, 1 500–2 000 men.⁷¹ Even the contingents from outside and the mercenaries on the ships had to appear for mustering until the end of May.⁷²

In June 1522, the immediate preparations for the war became obvious. Thus, on 17 June fr. Villiers informed the Council that the Turkish fleet had been laying for some days in front of the Isle of Symi but now could be expected daily to arrive at Rhodes and that the Turkish army would land on the island to lay siege on the town of Rhodes. This had been announced by Soliman I in his letter of 1 June 1522, still from Constantinople. Because of the daily expenses to prepare for the siege and for the supplies for the mercenaries additional monies had to be provided, and the treasury had to be transferred to a safer place to be protected from the artillery of the enemy. Thus, it was decided to take out 20 000 ducats and to bring the remaining money and treasures to the sacristy or another safe place inside the town.⁷³ Though the Grand Preceptor fr. Gabriele de Pomerolx, the Turcopolier fr. John Bourgh, and the Chancellor Andrea d'Amaral were of the opinion that the supplies would suffice, the Grand Master organised to get wine from Crete and ordered to cut the grain which was not yet ripe. A brother from Auvergne, fr.

⁶⁸ There were some brethren who tried to leave the island without permit, as three brethren who in consequence lost their habits. Cf. the documents of 17 and 22 March 1522, NLM Arch. 83, fol. 41(50)v–42(51)r.

⁶⁹ NLM Arch. 83, fol. 51(60)r–v, entry of 7 May 1522. Cf. the extensive report on the musters in fr. Jacques de Bourbon, *Oppugnation*, 1524. fol. 5v–6r.

⁷⁰ NLM Arch. 83, fol. 51(60)v–52(61)r.

⁷¹ According to the summary in *Letters und Papers*, 3/2, 2841, p. 1191.

⁷² Cf. the report of fr. Jacques de Bourbon, *Oppugnation*, 1524. fol. 6r.

⁷³ Note on the deliberations of 17 June 1522, NLM Arch. 83, fol. 52(61)v–53(62)r. Cf. Sarnowsky, *Macht*, 2001. 75, n. 152.

Beauloys, could also procure grain from Naples and Greece with his own ship.⁷⁴ The captains of ships passing by were asked to participate at the defence of Rhodes.⁷⁵ Before the arrival of the Turkish army, the Grand Master ordered to clear the forefield of Rhodes town for about three miles.⁷⁶

Two of the last entries in the *Liber consiliorum* of 1521/1522 concern internal quarrels, between the Auvergne and the German langue on a newly erected tower at the Gate of St. George between the parts of the wall to be protected by the two langues,⁷⁷ and between a captain of a Genoese ship and Genoese merchants.⁷⁸ But then the entries in the *Liber consiliorum* stop. Though the Hospitallers were able to defend the town quite a long time, the damages in the walls of the town and the number of victims of the Order were growing. In November 1522, fr. Albergho de Rovani reported in Firenze on the situation on Rhodes. According to him, the Turks had attacked the town fourteen times until 7 November, but had been pushed back, with many victims on both sides. Thus, the Turks had already lost more than 50 000 men, the defenders 2 000, including 200 knights of the Order. The damaged parts of the town walls had been repaired, and the more than 50 Turkish attempts to undermine the walls had no lasting success though the Turkish artillery had inflicted several damages. Many victuals were scarce, especially wine. Fr. Rovani also reports on the alleged treason of the Chancellor, fr. Andrea d'Amaral who is said to have wanted the surrender Rhodes to the Ottomans by letting in Turks through a small gateway.⁷⁹ As a kind of positive outlook, Fr. Rovani took up the miracle narrative of 1480. According to him, during the fights the Ottoman troops had the visitation of St. John the Baptist ap-

⁷⁴ According to fr. Jacques de Bourbon, *Oppugnation*, 1524. fol. 4v, he was successful because of his special skills as seafarer; cf. there also for his acquisition of wine.

⁷⁵ Again following the report of fr. Thomas Dockray. *Letters and papers*, 3/2, 2841, p. 1191. The attitude of the three leading brethren and the measures of the Grand Master also in fr. Jacques de Bourbon, *Oppugnation*, 1524. fol. 4r. For the earlier deployment of mariners cf. Phillips, *How Much*, 2022. 46.

⁷⁶ According to the extract from the letter of the Grand Master to Venice, 26 June 1522. *Sanudo Vol. XXXIII*. col. 385.

⁷⁷ Entry dated 25 June 1522, *NLM Arch.* 83, fol. 53(62)r-v.

⁷⁸ See the negotiations on the quarrel which was caused by the start of the siege on 2 July 1522, *NLM Arch.* 83, fol. 53(62)v-54(63)v.

⁷⁹ According to fr. Thomas Dockray fr. d'Amaral who was disappointed by the election of fr. Villiers as Grand Master, hoping to be elected himself, had already before sent a letter to the Sultan, informing him about damages in the walls and internal strife, *Letters and papers*, 3/2, 2841, p. 1191.

pearing above the walls while the knights saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a pigeon flying to the Church of St. John.⁸⁰

Even though, there was little hope for a successful defence of Rhodes town. Fr. Jacques de Bourbon reports in his history of the siege that the brethren had reckoned to have enough ammunition at least for one year of siege, but even a month before the surrender it was mostly spent, the Grand Master looking for additional supplies.⁸¹ Also, several parts of the walls were severely damaged. The last entry of the last *Liber consiliorum* from Rhodes, probably made after the rejection of the first offer of the Sultan to surrender for free withdrawal, is the indirect admission of defeat. It reports the celebration of the feast of the Immaculate Conception by the Order, Grand Master and Council on 9 December 1522. Human powers would not be enough to defend Rhodes. Therefore, the brethren prayed to St. Mary for help. Vice-chancellor Bartolomeo Poliziano was ordered by Grand Master and Council to put down in writing that the Order would build a special shire for St. Mary if they would keep the town.⁸² But about ten days later the Grand Master finally had to surrender.

In sum, the question if the sources from the last years of the rule of the Order already reflect the growing threat by the Ottomans or if the regular business of the Order's administration prevails, has no clear answer. Obviously, the routines of the Order's administration continued, the preparation of the chapter general, the citations to Rhodes, permits to return to the priories,⁸³ appointments of officials, expectancies for higher offices,⁸⁴ letters of conduct, measures to import supplies for Rhodes and the administration of the Order's territories.⁸⁵ While this was "business as usual", the perception

⁸⁰ Report from Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Carte Stroziane, Filza CCCLXVIII, fol. 212r–v. Edited in: Tsirpanles, Zacharias, "Anekdotē Ekthesē gia ten poliorkia tes Rodoy sta 1522", In: *He Rodos kai hoi Noties Sporades sta chronia ton Ioanniton Hippoton (14os–16os ai.)* (Sylloge historikon meleton). Rhodes, 1991. 136–145. 144–145.

⁸¹ Jacques de Bourbon, Oppugnation, 1524. fol. 4r.

⁸² Entry of 9 December 1522, NLM Arch. 83, 54(63)v. Cf. Sarnowsky, Macht, 2001. 75, n. 152.

⁸³ Cf. Sarnowsky, Macht, 2001. n. 10–15.

⁸⁴ See Sarnowsky, Macht, 2001. n. 17–22.

⁸⁵ Cf. Sarnowsky, Macht, 2001. n. 23–36.

of the Ottoman threat increasingly influenced the actions of the brethren. The correspondence with Henry VIII and Crete and the mission of a brother to the Roman Curia make clear that the knights were aware of the dangers posed by the growing Ottoman power. In the last year of the Order's rule on Rhodes and the Dodecanese there were several attempts to prepare for the Ottoman attack. There was a new distribution of responsibilities concerning the towers at the harbour, and commissioners had to check the walls and to initiate repairs.⁸⁶ With the arrival of the new Grand Master the preparations became more intensive. Fr. Villiers took over the administration of the treasury and supplied money from France for the maintenance of the Convent.⁸⁷ The repair works were furthered by the employment of Muslim slaves who were not working in the households, the evacuation of the population of the countryside was planned, and the mills of the town were reviewed.⁸⁸ Finally at the beginning of May, there were musters of the brethren, the inhabitants and the mercenaries, together with an examination of the provision with arms.⁸⁹ In June, the treasury was protected from attacks, money was taken out, additional supplies were purchased, and messages asking for succour were sent out.⁹⁰ From the letters to Henry VIII, it becomes clear that the Grand Master especially approached the brethren in the priories to send knights, ships, and materials.⁹¹

It is said that the Sultan was only prevented from ending the siege by an Albanian refugee who informed him about the situation in the town, and when the siege continued in November, the circumstances became increasingly difficult for the Order.⁹² The report of fr. Albergho de Rovani and the last entry in the *Liber Consiliorum* make clear that the town could not be successfully defended without external help. Simon Phillips has suggested that the failure of relief by the European powers may have been related to the different tendencies in the Order's reports about its activities in the East. On the one hand, the Order wanted to prove its ability to resist the Muslim at-

⁸⁶ Above Sarnowsky, Macht, 2001. n. 53–55.

⁸⁷ Cf. Sarnowsky, Macht, 2001. n. 57–59.

⁸⁸ See Sarnowsky, Macht, 2001. n. 60–66.

⁸⁹ Sarnowsky, Macht, 2001. n. 68–72.

⁹⁰ Cf. Sarnowsky, Macht, 2001. n. 73–75.

⁹¹ Above Sarnowsky, Macht, 2001. n. 42, 44–45.

⁹² Phillips, *How Much*, 2022. 55. Based on a letter by Ferrerius de Monolita dated 5 February 1523, *Letters and Papers*, 3/2, 2818, p. 1185.

tacks, but on the other hand, it urgently asked for help.⁹³ In their diplomatic endeavours, the Hospitallers suffered from the basic discrepancy that they had to continue their traditional role as defenders of Christianity while it was necessary to give a realistic – or even dramatic – description of their endangered position in the East to receive support. But the non-appearance of relief was rather caused by the wars between the Christian rulers and the different interest of powers like Venice or France.⁹⁴ Therefore, Grand Master fr. Villiers can not be accused to have encountered the siege unprepared. Rather, the Order's response to the Ottoman threat was far more than to continue the administrative routines.

⁹³ Phillips, *How Much*, 2022. 41–45.

⁹⁴ For the non-appearance of relief cf. Fontanus, *De bello*, 1540. 22.

EAST CENTRAL EUROPE: BETWEEN THE BALTIC AND THE ADRIATIC OSTMITTELEUROPA: ZWISCHEN OSTSEE UND ADRIA

Aims and Scope

The East Central Europe: Between the Baltic and the Adriatic (ECE) is a peer-reviewed academic journal published by the Institute of History at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Debrecen. As its title suggests, the journal focuses on the history of Central Europe, covering the region between the Baltic and Adriatic Seas. This region was for centuries a crossroads and meeting point where diverse ethnic groups, religions, traditions, and political entities interacted in unique ways. In addition to studies directly examining the history of the region, the editors welcome methodologically and/or theoretically relevant contributions for the analysis of historical processes.

The journal seeks to create an interdisciplinary platform to facilitate dialogue and disseminate new research on the region, whose findings are often limited in international scholarship due to language barriers and the influence of national narratives. To support this goal, ECE is an open-access journal, published at least once annually, available in both print and online formats.

Zielsetzung

Ostmitteleuropa: Zwischen Ostsee und Adria (ECE) ist eine begutachtete wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift, die vom Historischen Institut der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Debrecen herausgegeben wird. Wie der Titel schon andeutet, konzentriert sich die Zeitschrift auf die Geschichte Mitteleuropas, insbesondere auf das Gebiet zwischen Ostsee und Adria. Diese Region war über Jahrhunderte ein Schnittpunkt und Begegnungsraum, in dem unterschiedliche ethnische Gruppen, Religionen, Traditionen und politische Einheiten auf einzigartige Weise interagierten. Neben Studien, die die Geschichte der Region direkt untersuchen, erwarten die Herausgeber methodisch und/oder theoretisch relevante Beiträge zur Analyse historischer Prozesse.

Die Zeitschrift möchte eine interdisziplinäre Plattform schaffen, um den Dialog zu fördern und neue Forschungsergebnisse über die Region zu verbreiten, deren Ergebnisse aufgrund von Sprachbarrieren und der Prägung durch nationale Narrative international nur begrenzt bekannt sind. Zur Unterstützung dieses Ziels ist ECE eine Open-Access-Zeitschrift, die mindestens einmal jährlich erscheint und sowohl in gedruckter als auch in digitaler Form verfügbar ist.

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