The members of the order participated in all the principal battles during the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslims. They suffered a severe defeat at Alarcos (1195) against the Almohads, which almost caused their disappearance as an institution. However, they contributed decisively to the Christian victory at Las Navas de Tolosa (1212), and formed a substantial part of the Christian army under Ferdinand III of Castile that, between 1230 and 1248, managed to incorporate the whole of northern Andalusia into Castile. They were also active in the major campaigns against the Marinids in the XIV century, in particular at the battle of Salado (1340), and in the conquest of Granada by the “Catholic Monarchs,” Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile, toward the end of the fifteenth century.

Their presence outside the Iberian Peninsula was of minor importance, although we have knowledge of a convent of Calatrava in the 1250s situated in Tyman in Poland, on the left bank of the Vistula River. In any case, the efficiency of the freires on the battlefield did not depend as much on their number (which probably never amounted to more than 300 knights) as on their quality. They were skilled professionals in warfare, and embodied the purest spirit of the crusade; they were also capable of mobilizing numerous laypeople under their banners, who took advantage of the indulgences and spiritual privileges the papacy bestowed on crusaders. Some of these laypeople may even have been affiliated with the order, that is, linked to it by both spiritual and material ties.

Like the rest of the military orders, Calatrava underwent a fairly obvious transformation process. In its first century of existence, it was a militia with clear monastic connections that acted as a faithful collaborator of the Castilian monarchy in its military and colonizing plans. From the middle of the thirteenth century, an irreversible process of secularization began to occur as a consequence of two circumstances: on the one hand, the freires became increasingly tied to the noble lineages of the kingdom; on the other, the monarchy demonstrated a greater interest in intervening in the control of the institution. Both these factors contributed to a weakening of the original monastic character of the order, which was converted into a mere institution of nobles, identified with the interests of the important aristocratic dynasties and, consequently, not always loyal to the king.

Given these developments, the control of the office of grand master became a matter of constant concern, for different reasons, both to the important noble families and to the monarchy. All this contributed to the outbreak of internal crises, which were especially intense during the entire fifteenth century, as was evident during the periods of office of the grand masters Enrique de Villena, Luis González de Guzmán, and Pedro Girón. These crises, combined with the intervention of the freires in civil conflicts, were used to justify the acquisition of the office of grand master by the Crown in 1489. At that time, the militia was showing signs of becoming decidedly secular, as demonstrated by the relaxation of the monastic vows of the freires, which was legitimized by the Cistercian general chapter and the papacy. The members of the Order of Calatrava (along with those of the other military orders) were transferred to the responsibility of the Council of Military Orders, a government department integrated into the political structure of the monarchy. Their resources were utilized by the monarchy, and the order finally became an honorific corporation, suppressed by the liberal governments of the nineteenth century. From that time a series of complex vicissitudes permitted the order’s intermittent appearance on the social scene; today it belongs to a restored and honorific Council of Orders presided over by a member of the Spanish royal family.

Order of Santiago (Philippoe Josserand)


The Order of Santiago (St. James) was the most powerful of the Iberian military religious orders, originating as a confraternity of knights founded by King Ferdinand II of León in Cáceres in August 1170 in order to protect the southern part of his kingdom against the Muslim Almohads.
Despite later medieval legends that dated the order as far back as the mythical battle of Clavijo won by King Ramiro I of Asturias (d. 890) against the Moors, the birth of this institution within the context of the reconquista of Iberia from the Muslims in the second half of the twelfth century. The appearance of a confraternity under the leadership of its master Pedro Fernández followed the pattern of other militias such as the hermandad (confraternity) of Belchite, founded by King Alfonso I half a century before in Aragon, or the more recent hermandad of Ávila in Castile, which eventually merged with the Order of Santiago.

The members of the new confraternity were known as the Brethren of Cáceres until January 1171. In that year they came to an agreement with Pedro Gudesteiz, archbishop of Santiago de Compostela, who became a member of the community as an honorary brother and in return took over the confraternity’s administrative functions. In this post he remained for some time, although his tenure was relatively short. In 1172, the brethren chose St. James (Sp. Santiago) as their patron and protector, whose fame helped them obtain donations. In 1173 Master Pedro Fernández obtained a bull of protection from the papacy for the community. He probably presented Pope Alexander III with the first version of the rule of Santiago, which received papal approval two years later in July 1175. According to this rule, the membership of the order consisted of knight brethren, who were dedicated to fighting against the Muslims, and clerics, who followed the Rule of St. Augustine and most probably came from the Galician monastery of Loyo. Both clerics and knights bore the insignia of a red cross in the shape of a sword. These two parallel communities were under the authority of a master, who was elected from among the knights and governed the whole order with the assent of the general chapter. This institutional structure was inspired by the orders of the Temple and the Hospital, but also by the Order of Calatrava, founded in Castile in 1138.

The founder of the order, Ferdinand II of León, wanted to use the new militia to protect the southern border of his realm, which was threatened by Almohad incursions. Master Pedro Fernández tried quite different aims: with the encouragement of the local chapter, both he and his brethren tried to give his order a dimension that would not be restricted to León. In 1171 King Alfonso VIII of Castile granted it the castles of Mora and Oreja, whose location to the south and east of Toledo gave them a key role in the defense of that city. From Alfonso I Henriques, king of Portugal, the order received the castles of Monsanto (1171) and Abrantes (1185) and was thus brought into the defense of the line of the river Tagus (Sp. Tajo). The expansion of the order beyond León can be seen from a confirmation by Pope Lucius III (1184), which mentions possessions in León, Portugal, and Castile, as well as Aragon, France, and Italy. The order thus turned into an international organization, which, even though most of its activity was focused on the Iberian Peninsula, still extended as far as the Holy Land, where the brethren were repeatedly asked to settle.

The Iberian Peninsula, however, remained the main theater of operations for the Order of Santiago, whose brethren, during the first fifty years of its existence, were busy fighting the Almohads under the direction of the various Hispanic kings. Against these powerful enemies, they first had to defend the line of the Tagus from Palmela and Alcácer do Sal in the west, to Uélvs, where the order officially settled after being granted the city by Alfonso VIII of Castile in 1174. The task was far from easy, and, in such a difficult context of division between the Christian realms, the order had to give up certain places: Cáceres (1174), Alcácer (1191), and even Montánchez, Trejillo, and Santa Cruz (1196), during the great Almohad offensive that occurred after the Castilian defeat at Alarcos. Despite their difficult situation, the brethren succeeded in preserving most of their estates in La Mancha by resisting the Muslim attacks of 1197 against Alarcón and Uélvs. From such bases, it was possible for them to continue fighting and progressively resume offensive action until the great victory of Las Navas de Tolosa (16 July 1212), which opened the south of the peninsula to the Christian kingdoms.

The determination of the brethren of Santiago was instrumental in enabling Iberian Christendom to take advantage of the Almohad collapse. The order fought on every front. In Portugal its members decisively contributed in 1217 to the seizure of Alcácer, where they established their provincial seat, before participating in the integration of the Campo de Montiel and the towns of the Guadiana Valley into the kingdoms of Castile and León. They assisted in the conquest of the Taifa kingdom of Valencia, where King James I of Aragon was supported by Rodrigo Bueso, the commander of Montalbán. During the submission of the southern part of al-Andalus that took place during the reigns of Ferdinand III of Castile and Alfonso III of Portugal, the Santiagoists relentlessly supported the monarchies until the mid-thirteenth century, as shown by the involvement of the master Pelayo Pérez Correa, who actively participated in the capture of Seville in 1248 and in the submission of the Algarve the next year.

Thanks to such military activity, the Order of Santiago underwent a great expansion from the second quarter of the thirteenth century. Numerous donations built up a near continuous line of castles from the Tagus to the Guadiana Valley. During the reign of Ferdinand II (d. 1214), the brethren of Santiago were able to grant the office of master to Pelayo Pérez Correa, who in turn was able to give the order a dimension that would not be restricted to León. In 1217 King Alfonso VIII of Castile granted the order the castles of Mora and Oreja, whose location to the south and east of Toledo gave them a key role in the defense of that city. From Alfonso I Henriques, king of Portugal, the order received the castles of Monsanto (1171) and Abrantes (1185) and was thus brought into the defense of the line of the river Tagus (Sp. Tajo). The expansion of the order beyond León can be seen from a confirmation by Pope Lucius III (1184), which mentions possessions in León, Portugal, and Castile, as well as Aragon, France, and Italy. The order thus turned into an international organization, which, even though most of its activity was focused on the Iberian Peninsula, still extended as far as the Holy Land, where the brethren were repeatedly asked to settle.

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modern period, initially in 1874 by the first Spanish Republic, and definitively in 1931 after the abolition of the monarchy.

**Order of Mountjoy** (Nikolas Jaspert)

The military Order of Mountjoy (Sp. Montegaudio) was most probably established in 1173 by a Galician nobleman named Rodrigo Álvarez de Sarria and transferred to Aragon (Alfambra) shortly thereafter.

Rodrigo had professed in the Order of Santiago, but was allowed to found an order of stricter observance by the papal legate, Cardinal Hyacinth (later pope as Celestine III). From the 1170s the brethren followed a modified form of Cistercian observance, and the order, its possessions, and its denomination (after the site of Mons Gaudii close to Jerusalem) were confirmed by Pope Alexander III in May of 1180. The order was particularly fostered by King Alfonso II of Aragon, who hoped to gain assistance in securing recently conquered areas in southern Aragon. From 1177 the institution’s spiritual center was considered to be in the Holy Land, where it received donations from King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem and other magnates. The order also acquired assets in Italy, but despite its title, its economic and administrative headquarters always remained on the Iberian Peninsula, particularly in Aragon. After its founder’s death (probably in 1188), the order was amalgamated with the redemptionist Hospital of the Holy Redeemer of Térmel and henceforth committed itself to devoting a quarter of its revenues to the redemption of Christian captives. The brethren’s Aragonese possessions were incorporated by the Templars in 1196, while a dissident group led by Rodrigo González established itself in the castle of Montfrague (Monfragüe) on the river Tagus. It was known as the Order of Montfrague, and was ultimately amalgamated with the Order of Calatrava in 1221.

**Order of Avis** (Philippe Josserand)

A Portuguese military religious order, originally known as the Order of Évora. The first definite information about the order dates from 1176; it did not adopt the name of Avis until 1215.

The claims of medieval chroniclers that date the foundation of the order to the mid-twelfth century are unfounded. The conclusions of Rui Pinto de Azevedo are now held to be the most authoritative: he demonstrated that the origins of the order should be situated in Évora, and should be placed between March 1175 and April 1176 (Azevedo, *As origens da ordem de Évora ou de Avis*). At this time King Afonso I Henriques of Portugal, thanks to a truce with the Almohads, was attempting to elaborate a defensive strategy that would ensure the advanced positions of his kingdom against al-Andalus in the Alto Alentejo region (mod. central Portugal). In 1211 the brethren of Évora were given the fortress of Avis, from which they took their new name a few years later. It is unclear why the brethren left their original Benedictine obedience in 1187 and sought association with the Castilian Order of Calatrava, which followed the Cistercian rule. This new dependence was evident in the prerogatives given to the master of Calatrava: he had rights of visitation over the Order of Avis and was also allowed to govern the institution whenever a vacancy in its mastership occurred, which he did until the mid-fourteenth century.

The Order of Avis was composed of knight brethren and clerics. They wore a scapular, which from 1404 bore a green cross on the left side. Under the aegis of its master, the institution gradually gained strength during the first part of the thirteenth century. Supported by the Portuguese monarchy, the brethren were active in the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors, acquiring lands in the process. By the late thirteenth century these properties were organized in a network of no fewer than twenty-five commanderies: the richest of these were concentrated on the left bank of the river Tagus (Port. Tejo) near Avis, and also further south in the newly conquered areas, where the brethren had settled in Évora, Alandroal, Juromenha, Noudar, and Albeira.

Such extensive land-ownership alarmed the Portuguese monarchy, which felt threatened by the potential power of the order. In the reign of King Dinis (1279–1325), royal policy toward Avis changed radically: the king put an end to donations and began supporting urban oligarchies and Muslim minorities in jurisdicinal disputes, even in the town of Avis itself, thus deliberately harming the order’s interests. The masters of Avis were increasingly selected from among the king’s followers, or even his relatives. This can be seen in the case of the Infante John (Port. João), a natural son of King Peter I who was made the master of the order in 1364 at the age of seven, twenty years before ascending the throne of Portugal.

John became king after a two-year civil war, an event that could only reinforce royal interference in the order. After defeating his Castilian rival in 1385 in the battle of Aljubarrota, John I tried to maintain control by appointing a faithful follower, Fernão Rodrigues de Sequeira, as master of Avis. When the latter died in 1433, John decided that a master of royal blood would be best able to control the order, and appointed his own son, the Infante Fernão (Ferdinand). This master had to relinquish his position just before his death (1443) after being captured in Tânger. His successor was Pedro, his own nephew and son of Infante Pedro, the regent of the kingdom. Despite a period of exile, Pedro succeeded in keeping his office until his death in 1466. The mastership was then given to the Infante John, the elder son of King Afonso V; he remained master after ascending the throne in 1481. Nine years later, John II gave the mastership to his heir, the Infante Afonso, Duke of Bragança, and then to his father’s own natural son, Jorge, his own natural son. The latter paved the way for the eventual absorption of the order by the Portuguese Crown, which occurred in 1550.

**Order of Alcântara** (Philippe Josserand)

A Portuguese military religious order, originally founded in the kingdom of León in the later twelfth century. Alcântara undoubtedly remains the least well-known of all the military orders of the Iberian Peninsula. There are relatively few scholarly studies on the order, a fact traditionally attributed to the scarcity of original sources as a result of the disappearance of its major archives during Spain’s struggle for independence in the Napoleonic Wars of the early nineteenth century. Nevertheless, recent efforts to assemble the documentary sources about the order have given rise to new historiographical interpretations; these have above all illuminated the origins of the institutions, which had previously been both obscure and controversial.

It can now be stated that the Order of Alcântara originated as a confraternity of knights who had settled in the convent of San Julián del Pereiro, located near the banks of the river Coa, in the region of Beira Alta (mod. Portugal). The first mention of the community dates from January 1176, when King Ferdinand II of León made a grant of the lands of Raigadas and the benefice of Alcântara to his illegitimate son, the infante Sancho. The latter, together with his cousin, the infante Pedro, would later be made the masters of the order. Alcântara became a military-religious order in 1181, when King Sancho II confirmed the possession of Alcântara to the infante Fernão, who was described in the document as the founder of the house. In all likelihood the confraternity had been founded a little earlier (ten years before at most), but definitely not in 1156, as long claimed by Portuguese scholars who based their conclusions on a forgery that was published in the early nineteenth century by the Castilian chronicler Bernardo de Brito.

The community gained papal approval from Alexander III in December 1176. However, it was slow to develop into a military order in the strict meaning of the term; it was only in 1183 that a bull of Pope Lucius III revealed a more complex and clearly militarized organization for the first time. After adopting the Cistercian rule, the new Leonese institution initially agreed to subordinate itself to the powerful Castilian Order of Calatrava (by 1187). However, this relationship soon gave rise to tensions, which were linked to the political rivalry between the kingdoms of Castile and León. These were settled in 1218, thanks to an agreement that
committed the brethren of San Julián to obey Calatrava, whose master was allowed regular rights of visitation. In exchange, they received the right to take part in the election of the monarch of Aragon and also were given the possessions of the Castilian order in the kingdom of León. These included the fortress of Alcántara on the river Tagus, from which they took their name in 1218.

From this time the Order of Alcántara, consisting of knight brethren and clerics under the authority of a master elected by the former group, had a growing significance in the north-west of Iberia from the Muslims, particularly after the union of the crowns of Castile and León in 1230. After the seizes of Alange and Mérida by King Alfonso IX of León (1230), the order was constantly involved in fighting in the region of Extremadura. It remained closely associated with the campaigns of King Ferdinand III, who granted it various donations in Extremadura, where most of its property was situated, but also in Andalusia and even in the region of Murcia. In the course of its involvement in the reconquest, the order developed a policy of repopulation on the lands it was given, especially in Extremadura. This policy enabled it to grant numerous privileges (Sp. _fueros_) to its village communities, which came to be loosely organized in a system of commanderies.

The growing income of Alcántara meant that from the mid-thirteenth century it aroused the envy of competing seigneurial institutions, such as the dioceses of Coria and Badajoz or the Order of the Temple of the city of Badajoz. The order was formally constituted in the general chapter of Ayllón in 1291. However, this attempt to inaugurate a general chapter in the order was constantly involved in fighting in the region of Extremadura. It remained closely associated with the campaigns of King Ferdinand III, who granted it various donations in Extremadura, where most of its property was situated, but also in Andalusia and even in the region of Murcia. In the course of its involvement in the reconquest, the order developed a policy of repopulation on the lands it was given, especially in Extremadura. This policy enabled it to grant numerous privileges (Sp. _fueros_) to its village communities, which came to be loosely organized in a system of commanderies.

The Trastámara dynasty, who seized the Castilian throne in 1369, exploited the difficulties of the papacy during the Great Schism (1378–1417) to obtain from Pope Clement VII the right to nominate the masters of the Iberian military orders. In 1408 Fernando de Antequera, then acting as regent of Castile in the name of his nephew John II, even managed to have his twelve-year-old son Sancho elected as master of Alcántara. Such interference was not necessarily negative; indeed, Sancho became famous, thanks to an ambitious reform project that was inaugurated at the general chapter of Ayllón in 1411. However, this attempt to restore (at least partially) the original religious observance remained as fruitless as previous attempts during the fourteenth century. In fact, from the second quarter of the fifteenth century, the order was repeatedly involved in internal struggles that largely reflected contemporary conflicts between monarchy and higher nobility concerning the control of the apparatchik of government.

The masters and brethren of Alcántara were much involved in these wars. Several dignitaries even fought for the highest office of the order, as did Juan and Gutierre de Sotomayor in the reign of John II, or Alonso de Monroy and Juan de Zúñiga in the 1470s. The latter prevailed in 1479, thanks to the support of the "Catholic Monarchs," Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon, who were determined not to let the nobility control such an important source of income and power. In 1491, they obtained a bull from Pope Innocent VIII giving them the right to govern the Order of Alcántara whenever there was a vacancy in the mastership. From then on, they maintained pressure on Zúñiga who, in June 1494, agreed to renounce his office in favor of the lifetime enjoyment of the riches of the order. When Zúñiga died in 1504, the Catholic Monarchs, who had meanwhile been recognized as governors of the order until their deaths, took possession of all of the resources of the institution.

Like its other Iberian counterparts, the Order of Alcántara was thus fundamentally altered. Even before 1252, when Pope Hadrian VI permanently united the estates of the military orders to the Spanish Crown, these institutions had lost most of their independence and became little more than closed noble corporations. Shattered by the French invasion in the early fourteenth century and granted the freedom of the city by the abolition of the laws on mortmain property in 1834 by the government of Juan Álvarez Mendizábal (1790–1853), the Order of Alcántara was abolished in 1874 by the first Spanish Republic, along with the other Spanish orders. Reestablished after the restoration of the Spanish monarchy, it was suppressed again in 1931. It now survives as a noble society with a purely honorific character.

**Order of St. George of Alfama** (Luis García-Guiljarro Ramos)


Military religious order in the Crown of Aragon, founded in 1201 and incorporated into the Order of Montesa in 1400.

The conquest of the town of Tortosa from the Muslims in 1148 brought the lower Ebro Valley under the control of the Christians of Aragon, but the stretch of coast north of the Ebro delta remained uninhabited in the second half of the twelfth century and was an easy prey to Muslim naval raids. The area between the mountains and the sea was barren and so had not been affected by post-1148 resettlement of southern Catalonia. The existing military orders did not show any interest in the area. For those reasons King Peter II of Aragon decided to found there a new institution that would combine prayer, assistance to travelers, and defense against Muslim pirates. The royal privilege of 1201 granted to the new order, which received the symbolic name of St. George, the territory of Alfama, a coastal area between the Gulf of Sant Jordi on the northern side of the Ebro delta and the Cala Gestell facing the Coll de Balaguera about 20 kilometers (12 1/2 mi.) to the north. A castle was built in the following years on the seaward side whose construction was unearthed in 1988.

The Order of St. George of Alfama did not go much further from these small beginnings. It never managed to control many territories beyond the coastal region. In the thirteenth century only two commanderies were established to control disputed areas. Established to control disputes in the district of Bujalaroz in eastern Catalonia, which in 1229 was sold to the Hospital monastery of Sigüenza to pay off pressing debts (an early sign of continuous economic problems), and Alcarrás near Lleida (Lerida). Several grants in the kingdom of Valencia and the church and castle of Riquer in eastern Catalonia were put under the rule of commandery in the fourteenth century. Some of the donations in Valencia, as well as minor ones in Mallorca, Menorca, and Sardinia, came as a result of military contributions of the order to campaigns of the kings of Aragon. The order’s modest domains produced meagre rents, which held back the development of the institution, and its eager quest for alms showed the insufficient amounts of other types of rents; an alms collecter was even sent to France and England in 1368. The limited types of landed properties showed the order’s lack of appeal in the Aragonese territories, despite firm support from the Aragonese kings, and professed members were few: only six brethren in the 1370s.

The foundation did not grow firm institutional roots either. Papal confirmation was delayed until 1377, and a proper internal structure took time to develop. The office of master did not appear until 1355, and the king appointed its holders in the second half of the fourteenth century, a clear indication of the leading role of the Crown, but also of the feeble character of the order. Religious life followed the Rule of St. Augustine, but this set of regulations was limited to six brethren in the 1370s.

The Crusades
vanished as an independent institution, but the plain red cross of Alfama survived and became the distinctive sign of the joint order.

Order of Montesa (Luis Garcia-Guijarro Ramos)

A military religious order established in 1317 in the kingdom of Valencia by agreement of the pope and the Aragonese Crown. The Order of Montesa was founded as a consequence of the dissolution of the Order of the Templars in 1312. It did not prove possible to transfer the Templars’ domains in the Crown of Aragon to the Order of the Hospital of St. John, as had been desired by Pope Clement V. King James II of Aragon was opposed to the strengthening of the already considerable power of the Hospitallers in his realms. After lengthy negotiations, Pope John XXII largely complied with the king’s wishes in 1317. The monarch had to abandon the idea of a great Aragonese order backed by Templar and Hospitaller properties in favor of a more limited project confined to the kingdom of Valencia. The Hospitallers were ready to contribute to this plan with their Valencian territories (except for the commanderies of Torrente and the houses of Valencia) in exchange for the Templar domains in Aragon and Catalonia. As the central headquarters of the future order, the king offered the village and castle of Montesa on the extreme southern border of the kingdom, facing possible Muslim attacks from Granada. The new institution was modeled on the lines of the Order of Calatrava, and it was linked to the Morimond filiation of the Cistercian Order through the monastery of Santes Creus in Catalonia. The new foundation was not realized until July 1319, due to all sorts of difficulties with Calatravans and Hospitallers alike. The initial stages were difficult, but the firm support of the Crown was a decisive asset for success. The general chapter held at San Mateo in 1330 might be considered the end of the formation period. The number of brethren had risen to forty. A network of commanderies was given final form; the share of the master of the order within the bailiwick of Cervera, situated in the north of the kingdom near the king’s court and not on the frontier. Although theoretically linked to the papacy, the Order of Montesa was a monarchical foundation, and as such it was an unrelenting supporter of the Aragonese Crown in internal conflicts and external projects of expansion. King Peter IV was able to rely on the members of the order against the rebels of the Unión (a noble fraternity whose aim was to defend aristocratic privileges) and in the wars against Castile. King John I found them at his side when the Doria and Arborea families rebelled in Sardinia. King Alfonso V received important help from the order in his Neapolitan campaigns. This tradition of support to the monarchy continued under the Habsburg dynasty, and the Crown always guaranteed the strength of the order. When in 1400 the small Order of St. George of Alfama became unfeasible as an independent institution, the king had it incorporated in Montesa. The plain red Greek cross of Alfama was added to the white clothing of the Montesans knights from that time onward.

Montesa was the only order in the Spanish kingdoms not to be absorbed by the Crown at the time of the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile. As an Aragonese institution, it posed more difficulties to incorporation than its Castilian counterparts. King Philip II of Spain managed to integrate Montesa into the institutions of the Crown in 1587. The order lingered on into the nineteenth century, when its status was reduced to that of an order of merit. Previously it had central headquarters had been transferred to the city of Valencia after an earthquake had destroyed the castle of Montesa in 1748. Nature had forced a move at a time when it had long ceased to have any significance as a frontier stronghold against the Muslims.

Other orders

Canons of the Holy Sepulchre (Klaus-Peter Kirstein)

The religious Order of Canons of the Holy Sepulchre (Lat. Ordo Canonicorum regularium Sancti Sepulchri Hierosolymitani) goes back to the cathedral chapter established after the First Crusade (1096–1099) by Godfrey of Bouillon at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Under the direction of a prior, the chapter assisted the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem in the administration of his archdiocese and the performance of the liturgy. In 1114 the patriarch Arnulf of Cheyces reformed the chapter, which initially was heavily involved in the disputes concerning the organization of the Latin Church of Jerusalem and its relationship to the monarchy of Palestine. From this time it followed the Rule of St. Augustine and constitutions modeled on French centers of reform and based its liturgy on usages that, though also corresponding to native Greek Orthodox customs, took local idiosyncrasies into consideration.

The spiritual life of the canons was characterized by their guardianship of Christendom’s most holy sites and the incumbent liturgical duties. The popes gave them the specific duty of placing the Lord’s Passion and the triumph of the Cross at the center of the liturgy and ecclesiastical life. In Jerusalem, the canons provided pastoral care for their parishioners in the city, saying Mass at the parish altar in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and administering the sacraments there. They are also known to have instructed Jews and Muslims who intended to convert to Christianity. The canons also carried out pastoral duties in their Palestinian and Syrian dependencies, in the episcopal churches of Tyre (mod. Sour, Lebanon), Jaffa (mod. Tel Aviv-Yafo, Israel), and Nablus, and in the churches and chapels on their estates, notably at Merga Mahomert (mod. al-Bira, West Bank) and Parva Sa (mod. al-Quba, West Bank). The chapter also trained its own clergy. In its scriptorium, manuscripts of all kinds were produced, and theological texts like Ambrose’s Hexameron and Augustine’s Tractates on the Gospel of John were copied. It must also be assumed that the canons participated in the architectural modification of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, as well as the establishment of pictorial programs and inscriptions in it.

The chapter had additional responsibilities that were only rarely performed by Western spiritual institutions. These included dealing with non-Christians and Christians of other denominations, looking after a never-ending stream of pilgrims and crusaders, and participation in the country’s defense. The canons were—more or less—capable of coordinating these functions. Even in the first years after the conquest of the Holy City, the canons, in conjunction with the patriarchs, employed knights to carry out the military service owed to the king by the chapter and patriarch, without, however, turning them into a military order comparable with the Templars or Hospitallers. As early as 1112, the chapter combined with other spiritual institutions to form communities in prayer, for example, in Italy, France, Poland, Germany, and Spain.

The status of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the patriarch’s titular church, the burial site of the kings of Jerusalem, the repository of important relics, and (from 1131 to 1186) the coronation venue, all helped the canons to attain a leading position within the church and in relations to the monarchy of Palestine. From this time it followed the Rule of St. Augustine and constitutions modeled on French centers of reform and based its liturgy on usages that, though also corresponding to native Greek Orthodox customs, took local idiosyncrasies into consideration.
Another development in the order went back to the middle of the fifteenth century, when Dutch branches of the cloister of Denkendorf in Württemberg started a profound process of renewal (novitiate). Their most important results of this were the Female Branch of the order, which still exist in Belgium, England, southwestern Germany, and the Netherlands, conserving the tradition of the cathedral chapter of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem from 1099.

**Order of the Holy Sepulchre** (Klaus-Peter Kirstein)

The Order of the Holy Sepulchre (Lat. Ordo Equestris Sancti Sepulcri) is a lay association whose organization and objectives have often changed during the course of its history. It originated as a lay order or association of knights, and was thus quite different in character from religious knightly orders such as the Templars or Hospitallers.

The origins of the order go back to the fourteenth century, when it became customary for noble Western pilgrims to be knighted at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem or to ask for a renewal of an earlier ceremony of knighting. It was undoubtedly influenced by the revival of pilgrimage and the idea of recovery of the Holy Land after the fall of Acre (mod. ‘Akko, Israel) to the Mamluks in 1291. The first attested knighting ceremony dates from 1332/1336. In contrast to the forms of knighting (dubbing) common at this time in western Europe, the ceremony at the Holy Sepulchre distinguished itself through the special holiness of the place where it was carried out. As part of its obligations, the new knight also undertook to take the cross in the case of a future crusade.

In 1312, following the departure of the Franks and the end of the Latin patriarchate of Jerusalem, Pope Clement VI entrusted the Franciscans of Mount Zion with the mission of representing the papacy in the Holy Land. But this religious community was only officially recognized by the Turks in 1333, when the king of Naples got the Sultan to agree (upon paying an indemnity of 200,000 gold ducats) that the Franciscans could stay in Palestine and continue to guard the holy places. The prerogative of dubbing knights before the tomb of Christ, in the past exercised by the canons, was thus transferred to the Franciscan custodian, who had the rank of bishop and who alone upheld the presence of the papacy in the Holy Land until 1847, often under adverse conditions. It was a great privilege to receive the spurs of a knight before the tomb of Christ, this being the reward for an exceptional act of piety.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, many pilgrims travelled to Jerusalem to be dubbed knights of the Holy Sepulchre, including such important persons as Frederick, duke of Austria (the future Emperor Frederick III) in 1436. Chronicles from this time report that individual dubbing of knights before the Holy Sepulchre continued over the centuries. In 1806, the Vicomte de Châteaubriand described his own investiture at the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in his Mémoires d’Outre-Tombe. The knights, whose elevation was registered and recorded in a patent, were received into a community that demanded the fulfillment of the usual chivalric obligations plus compliance with religious rules as they are found in the statutes of those fraternities counseled by the mendicant orders. However, the order had no organizational ties; the knights did not assemble in chapters of the order and were not subject to any leadership. Attempts to unite and organize all knights of the Sepulchre, for which evidence can be found from the sixteenth century onward, were to no avail.

It was only in 1868 that a permanent association of all knights of the Holy Sepulchre was established at the instigation of the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem by Pope Pius IX, who gave the association the formal character of a papal order of knights. It was placed under the pope as supreme sovereign, with the Latin patriarch serving as the actual head, and organized in national bailiwicks. The order’s organizational structure was reformed several times during the twentieth century. Its objectives are to promote the Christianization of its members, to defend the religious and the spiritual material support of the activities and facilities of the Roman Catholic Church in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and Jordan. These include the construction and operation of churches, schools, kindergartens, old people’s homes, and hospital wards, and the provision of assistance for the old and infirm. The order is now represented in thirty countries and has about 20,000 members.

**Order of St. Lazarus** (Theresa M. Vann)

An international hospitalier order that assumed military responsibilities. Its origins are obscure, but the Order of St. Lazarus possibly began as a leper hospital outside the walls of Jerusalem, run by Armenian monks following the rule of St. Basil. The earliest charters referring to the order date to 1142, suggesting that it was founded in the 1130s. Like other hospital founders in Outremer, it adopted the Rule of St. Augustine. The first reference to a master appeared in 1153, and was thus the next hundred years only lepers were eligible to become masters. The Lazarites remained in Jerusalem until Saladin captured the city in 1187, and thereafter the order moved to Acre (mod. ‘Akko, Israel). After the fall of Acre (1291), the order’s headquarters were transferred to Boïny in France.

Members of the order originally consisted of clerics, brethren to look after the sick, and the lepers themselves. Leprosy (also known as Hansen’s disease) is a chronic infectious disease that primarily affects the skin, nerve endings, and mucous membranes. Medieval medical practitioners diagnosed several diseases as leprosy, so it is possible that not all of the invalid members of the order suffered from Hansen’s disease. Leprosy, however, was endemic in Outremer and claimed noted victims, among them King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem. Perhaps for this reason, the order enjoyed widespread royal and nobiliary patronage throughout Outremer in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The order’s cartulary, which survives in a fragment of forty documents, dating to between 1130 and 1248, shows that it owned hospitals in Jerusalem and Acre, with some small estates and rental properties in the southern part of the kingdom of Jerusalem. From the mid-thirteenth century onward, the order received donations of lands in France, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Germany, England, and Scotland. The most noted gift was the donation by King Louis VII of France of the castle and fief of Boïny, near Orlean, which become the order’s headquarters after 1291. The Lazarites’ ties to the French monarchy were strengthened when Philip IV the Fair took the order under his protection in 1298.

Information about the order’s transformation from a hospital into a military order is obscure, possibly occurring through the admission of leprous knights from Frankish families in Outremer and from other military orders. Certainly there is evidence for an early association between the Order of St. Lazarus and the Order of the Temple: early Lazarite charters show the Order of the Temple acting as a kind of guarantor for some property transactions, while Templar statutes of 1260 permitted leprous knights to enter the Order of St. Lazarus. The late-twelfth-century law book Livre au roi stipulated that knights and sergeants who contracted leprosy should join the Order of St. Lazarus. It is conceivable that such men carried out military duties, but it also appears that nonleprous knights joined the order to serve in battle.

The evidence for the military responsibilities of the order is ambiguous for the twelfth century. Thirteenth-century chroniclers placed the Lazarites at major battles and reported high casualty rates for the knights of the order. Joinville describes only four survivors of the order’s mounted sortie near Ramla in 1242. Robert of Nantes, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, reported that all the leper knights of the house of St. Lazarus were killed at the battle of La Forbie in 1244. According to the chronicler Matthew Paris, the Lazarite knights participated in the Egyptian campaign of Louis IX of France in 1248–1250, and fought at the battle of Mansurah in 1248. The order’s losses were so extensive in these campaigns that Pope Innocent IV in 1253 opened the office of the master to nonleprous, because all the leper knights had been killed in battle.
Evidently the thirteenth-century papacy considered the Lazarites as a military religious order, but one that lacked the resources commanded by the Hospitals, Templars, or Teutonic Knights. The order received papal privileges permitting its members to collect money and tithes in Europe. In a resurgence of their original mission, Amadeus VIII, duke of Savoy, retired to a hermitage in the woods near Lake Geneva, he was accompanied by six elderly nobles, all experienced knights. As they had changed their profession from war to religion, the group called themselves Knights of St. Maurice (Lat. Sancti Mauritii Milites), after the commander of the Theban Legion. According to tradition, during the Roman Empire the members of the legion had been martyred nearby for their Christian faith.

These hermits did not follow a religious rule or wear a formal religious habit, and their “order” was not formally acknowledged by the church authorities. They were an informal association, more of a religious confraternity than a religious order. Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini recorded no more of this group, which presumably broke up after Amadeus VIII became pope as Felix V in 1439.

In 1432 Duke Emmanuel Philibert of Savoy set up his own Order of St. Maurice, deliberately named to echo his illustrious ancestor's order, with himself as its grand master. In the same year Pope Gregory XIII gave the new order the Italian commanderies of the Order of St. Lazarus. The new foundation was a military-religious order with the function of defending Christendom: it had to maintain two galleys to attack the Turkish and North African pirates that harassed Christian shipping around the Italian coast. Unlike the Order of St. Stephen of Tuscany, the Order of SS Maurice and Lazarus never achieved international notice for its naval activity and soon became effectively no more than a royal order of chivalry.

In 1868 King Victor Emmanuel II of Italy reformed the order to be an order of merit, and the “Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus” was bestowed as a mark of honor: for example, Guglielmo Marconi (d. 1937), the inventor of wireless telegraphy, was created a commander of the order.

The Mercedarian Order, known formally as the Order of Merced or Our Lady of Mercy, began as a redemptorist order in Catalonia following the rule of St. Augustine.

The Mercedarians institutionalized the ransom of captives on the Christian-Muslim frontier in Iberia. Previously, family and friends had redeemed captives on an individual basis or commissioned a royal official called the caçador (from an Arabic word meaning “guide”) to intervene on a captive's behalf. It is unclear whether the early Mercedarians collected alms on behalf of captive's families, or ransomed captives personally. By the late thirteenth century, the Mercedarians raised alms and traveled to Muslim depots to negotiate the redemption of groups of captives as well as specific individuals.

Despite claims by the order’s early historians, the Mercedarians were not a military religious order, nor was the king of Aragon the founder. The earliest evidence for the order’s existence dates from a bequest to Pere Nolasc, the founder of the order, of a sum of money to redeem captives in 1250. Nolasc and his associates received grants of property in Mallorca in 1252 and Gerona in 1254. Pope Gregory IX recognized the Order of Merced in 1235 and gave it the Rule of St. Augustine.

By 1245 the Mercedarians had acquired properties in Catalonia, Aragon, Valencia, Languedoc, and Mallorca. Eventually, the order had properties in Castile and as far south as Seville. These provided a stable income for the order and a base for its ransoming activities. James I, king of Aragon, gave the order its first guidate (safe-conduct) in 1251, which enabled members to travel safely and conduct business on the Christian-Muslim frontier.

The statutes of the military orders of Santiago, the Hospital, and the Temple influenced the first statutes of the order (1272), which has caused the mistaken identification of the Mercedarians as a military order. The early order was a laic brotherhood, whose members administered properties, collected alms, preached, and, on occasion, traveled to ransom captives. It also admitted men and women as confraters (associate members). The master of the Mercedarians was a layman until 1317, when the order became clericalized. Clerics became more influential and gained control of most of the commanderies. A new constitution of 1327, modeled on that of the Dominicans, emphasized a stricter religious life. The master was the order’s spiritual and temporal leader, and made decisions with the chapter about properties, revenues, and discipline. Commanders were responsible for local houses, and traveled to redeem captives. Captives ransomed as an act of Mercedarian charity also agreed to serve the order for a period of time, raising money to ransom other captives.

After the fall of Muslim Granada in 1492, the Order of Merced followed Spanish expansion to the New World, where it founded American provinces. The first female convents were established in the late sixteenth century. The order underwent a major reform in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and still exists today.

**Order of St. Maurice, (Helen Nicholson)**


Originally an association of hermits, founded in 1434, refounded as a military-religious order in 1572 and assigned the property of the Order of St. Lazarus in Italy, forming the Order of SS Maurice and Lazarus.

**Mercedarian Order** (Theresa M. Vann)


**Sword Brethren** (John Lind)


The first military order in the Baltic region, founded in Livonia in 1202 on the model of the Templars and absorbed into the Teutonic Order in 1237. The order's original Latin name was the Fratres Milicie Christi de Livonia ("Brethren of the Knighthood of Christ of Livonia"); the more usual modern name Sword Brethren or Sword Brothers (Ger. Schuetzbrüder) corresponds to the Middle High German designation Svatetrůdě, which derives from the knights' insignia of a sword beneath a red cross, which they wore on their white mantles.

According to the chronicler Henry of Livonia, the initiative for the new order came from the Cistercian Theoderic, a veteran in the Livonian mission. However, its establishment is often attributed to the newly ordained bishop of Livonia, Albert von Buxhövden (1199–1229),...
under whose obedience the order was placed. The foundation has to be seen against the background of the disastrous lack of military resources that had cost the life of the previous bishop, Theoderic (1197–1198). A permanent presence became necessary in order to supplement the unpredictable arrival of seasonal crusaders and garrison the castles that had been built to fight against the unprecedentedly large and powerful army of the Liv. The order was able to establish its second convent and castle, Segewold, close to the Livish stronghold of Treiden (mod. Turaida, Latvia). A third convent was founded around the same time in Nussburg at Wenden deep in Lettish territory. These foundations enabled the order to push on into Estonian territory in 1208 independently of Bishop Albert. It suffered a momentary setback in 1209, when Master Winno was killed in an internal power struggle, but with the election of Volkwin (1209–1237) as its second master, the order quickly managed to reestablish its stability in its leadership.

In the continued struggle for supremacy, both parties appealed to Pope Innocent III, who in October 1210 decreed that in the future the order was to retain one-third of conquered territory. In July 1212 the Sword Brethren received imperial confirmation of this privilege and were also promised free possession of the Estonian provinces of Ungaia and Sakkala. This was undoubtedly a victory for the order, for the order and may be seen as the beginning of its state in Livonia. Bishop Albert received some compensation, when (probably in 1211) the pope authorized his ordination of new bishops in Livonia and soon after refused the order’s request to have the same right in its own territory (1212). However, Innocent III compensated for this in 1213 by confirming the order’s possession of Sakkala and Ungaia and also authorizing Anders Sunesen, archbishop of Lund, to ordain bishops in these provinces. Albert of Buxhövden’s decision to ordain Theoderic as bishop of Estonia (1211) can only be seen as an attempt to curb the order’s designs in Estonia. Yet the advantage gained was soon lost, when Innocent III in 1215 decreed that Theoderic was to be subject only to the pope or his legate to the region, who happened to be Anders Sunesen.

The final effort to subdue the pagan Estonians began in 1215, initially with the order as its driving force. Having defeated the Estonians at Fellin in 1217, the order now dominated both the northern part of Livonia and a large part of Estonia. The threat this posed to the position of Bishop Albert prompted him to appeal in person to King Valdemar II of Denmark for help in 1218, and the king obliges by sending a large army. Despite a setback to Estonia the following year, the Danes managed to conquer the remaining northern provinces of Estonia in the summer of 1219, with the exception of the island of Osel (mod. Saaremaa, Estonia).

The Danish crusade may have come as a surprise to the order, and in 1220 a diplomatic crisis arose when the order raided Harria. The Danes declared that, according to an agreement with the Livonian church, all of Estonia belonged to them and that all church properties had been stolen and handed over to the Danes. Master Volkwin complied and subsequently decided to enter into an agreement with the Danes, which formally divided Estonia between them: the Danes kept the northern provinces, including the still unconquered island of Osel, while the order received the southern provinces. The order had managed to avoid handing over two-thirds of its conquest over to the church in accordance with the ruling of 1210. There was, however, a certain division of opinion within the order as to the wisdom of this. In 1221, the order finally gave in to the pressure of the Danes in the summer of 1222, and the order’s bishop, Berthold of Loccum (1197–1198), was forced to recognize the Danish overlordship not only in Estonia but also in Livonia. This opened new possibilities for the order to throw off its obedience to the bishop and replace it with a link to the distant Danish king and church.

Order Domination

The scene was now set for a complete Danish takeover in the Baltic region, although this domination was to prove short-lived. After the Danes had gained a foothold in Osel and established a stone fortress there, Valdemar II left Estonia in 1222; according to Henry of Livonia, he gave up the royal rights in Sakkala and Ungaia to the order and spiritual rights to Bishop Albert in return for their perpetual fealty. Soon afterward, however, an uprising broke out on Osel, and the Christian forces were unable to hold the fortress. In the following winter the Osilians joined mainlander Estonians in defeating local Danish forces before unleashing a successful attack on Fellin in January 1223. The order was taken by complete surprise and suffered heavy losses as stronghold after stronghold fell, until only the castle in Reval remained in Christian hands.

Organization

The Sword Brethren lived according to the Rule of the Templars. They consisted of three classes: knight brethren, priests, and service brethren. A general assembly of the knight brethren was in principle the highest decision-making body, but in practice the master, elected for life by the assembly, was in charge of the order, with an authority comparable to that of the abbot of a Cistercian monastery. Under him served a vice-master who also deputized for him in his absence. A marshal took care of the order’s military affairs and led it in battle, while a treasurer was in charge of finances. Provincial masters were placed in charge of new castle convents, each of which included a priest and a number of knight brethren, service brethren, and mercenaries. Advocates served as local administrators on the order’s estates and acted as its link to the local population. Also associated with the order were a number of secular vassals who were enfeoffed with lands on its territory. They were mainly recruited from immigrant German nobles, but also, at least in some cases, from among the native nobility.
To make matters worse, Valdemar II and his eldest son were kidnapped in May 1225 by one of his vassals. They remained prisoners for two years, while the Danish Empire collapsed. To survive in Estonia, the order now had to rely on help from the Livonian church. The situation began to stabilize with the recapture of Fellin by the combined forces of the order and Livonian bishops, and the return of Bishop Albert from one of his recruitment tours with a substantial crusader army. By the end of 1224 the insurgents had to surrender. For the order, however, the events of 1225–1226 meant that the balance of power had changed significantly in favor of Bishop Albert and the Livonian church. With the Danes neutralized, the order had to agree to a new division of Estonia with the bishops, so that the order retained little more than one-third of the territory.

Hoping to perpetuate his ascendancy over the order, Bishop Albert in 1224 asked Pope Urban IV to grant him a legate with far-reaching authority. During the summer of 1225, Pope Urban IV appointed Baldwin of Aulne as a legate to the region to settle the conflict with the bishop of Leal, a charge that could have made the order itself a target of crusades.

In a trial at Viterbo during the spring of 1226, the order was largely exonerated. However, the king of Denmark had also begun to lobby for the return of the former Danish provinces. On this point Gregory IX supported the Danes and ordered Revalia, Jeravia, Vironia, and Harria to be given back to the Danish king. To comply would seriously have reduced the power base of the Sword Brethren, and it is doubtful whether they were prepared to do so. In the event, the order did not survive long enough for this to become evident.

Defeat and Unification with the Teutonic Order

During the 1230s the Sword Brethren had begun to direct their attention toward Lithuania, now seen as the greatest threat to Christianity in the Baltic region. This was a sentiment shared by the Russians of Pskov, with whom the order now often allied itself. In the summer of 1226, a substantial number of crusaders had arrived in Riga eager for action. Perhaps against its better judgment, the order was persuaded to organize a raid into Lithuanian territory involving both local forces and Pskovians. At a place called Saule (perhaps mod. Siauliai, Lithuania), the Christian forces suffered a crushing defeat on 22 September 1226. Probably only a tenth of the Christian force survived, and among the casualties were Master Volckwin and at least 47 knight brethren. The existence of the order was not immediately threatened. It still held its castles and had a substantial number of vassals, particularly in the northern parts of Estonia. But it was hardly in a position to raise another army for separate actions, and in the south the order had to fear Lithuanian retaliations.

Consequently, the order had to speed up negotiations that were already in progress concerning a merger with the Teutonic Order. With its bargaining power now reduced by military defeat, the representatives of the order had no choice but to accept the terms of a separate agreement reached between Hermann von Salza, grand master of the Teutonic Order, and Gregory IX to restore the former Danish provinces to Denmark. In May 1237 Pope Gregory announced the incorporation of the Sword Brethren into the Teutonic Order in an agreement between the relevant parties: the order, Hermann von Salza, William of Modena, and the bishops of Riga, Dorpat, and Ösel. Later in the summer the Teutonic Order in Marburg grudgingly accepted the unification, although this was only carried out in practical terms by the end of 1237, after the arrival of the first contingent of Teutonic Knights in Livonia.

Conclusions

Despite its short lifespan, it was the Order of the Sword Brethren that introduced the military religious order as an institution to the Baltic Crusades. Much more than the seasonal crusaders, it was able to fight and keep fighting according to a chosen strategy. Without its introduction, Christianity might not have survived in Livonia, and it was a sign of its initial success that it was taken as a model for the likewise short-lived Knights of Dobrin. Both orders, however, suffered from the lack of a network of estates and houses outside their main region of activity that could provide them with financial resources and a secure basis of recruitment. In that sense it was logical that both were absorbed by the Teutonic Order.
Order of the Sword (Peter W. Edbury)
The Order of the Sword was an order of chivalry founded by King Peter I of Cyprus (1359–1369). With its motto, *C'est pour loiauté maintenir* (To maintain loyalty) it clearly imitated other fourteenth-century chivalric orders from western Europe.
According to the contemporary author Guillaume de Machaut, its foundation dated from before Peter’s accession, but Machaut’s story of its origins is open to doubt. There is no indication that membership of the order was conferred on Cypriot nobles, and in creating his order, Peter was evidently recognizing the need to appeal to Western knights and Western knightly values if he was to gain support in waging war on the Muslims. Not much is known about the function of the order, but by the fifteenth century it would seem that Cypriot kings were investing aristocratic visitors from the West with membership as a way of honoring them at little expense to themselves.

Order of St. Thomas of Acre (Paul Crawford)
A small English military order founded during the Third Crusade (1189–1192) and named after the martyred Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury. Twelfth- and thirteenth-century sources credit the order’s foundation variously to one William, chaplain to Ralph of Diceto; to Hubert Walter, archbishop of Canterbury; or to King Richard I of England; it is possible that all three men were involved. The Order of St. Thomas of Acre originally consisted of a chapel served by Augustinian canons. It performed charitable and devotional duties, including hospital and ransom work, before being militarized by Peter of Roches, bishop of Winchester, probably in 1228. In 1236 Pope Gregory IX instructed it to follow the Rule of the Teutonic Order, with which St. Thomas had been associated since at least 1192, and to carry out both military and hospitaler functions.
The order was never large or powerful enough to play a significant role in the affairs of Outremer; it is mentioned only occasionally by contemporary chroniclers. Despite this, the knights of St. Thomas seem to have acquitted themselves well enough in battle and at times became embroiled in the political squabbles of the Latin East. Although the order had possessions throughout western Europe, most of its holdings were concentrated in England and Ireland, and they were few in number compared to those of the other military orders. It fought a constant but losing battle for resources for much of its existence, partly because Englishmen who wished to join or support a military order usually turned to the Hospitallers or Templars.
After the fall of Acre (mod. ‘Akko, Israel) to the Mamluks in 1291 the Order of St. Thomas retreated to Cyprus and established its headquarters there. In the early fourteenth century tensions apparently arose between the military brethren in the East and the members of the order in England, for whom hospitaler activities were paramount. Ultimately the English chapter appears to have won out. The last mention of a militant officer of St. Thomas in Cyprus occurs in 1367; thereafter its military function seems to have been abandoned entirely, and the order concentrated on charitable and devotional activities in England for most of the next two centuries. The order became increasingly associated with the Mercers’ Company of London, reverted to following the Rule of St. Augustine, and in the early sixteenth century even operated a grammar school in London. In October 1538 it was dissolved on the order of King Henry VIII of England. Its property was confiscated by the Crown, and the Mercers’ Company purchased it for £969. Its archive was ultimately split into three parts, which are now in the Mercers’ Company (London), the British Library, and the Public Record Office.