



Hospitallers: The History of the Order of St. John

By Jonathan Riley-Smith

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The Hospitallers were a religious order, founded in Jerusalem, devoted both to nursing and to fighting the infidel.

With their fellow knights, the Templars, they played a heroic part in the defence of the Holy Land, defending great castles, such as Krak des Chevaliers, while at the same time providing exemplary nursing care for the poor.

Hospitallers is a narrative, by a leading historian of the crusades, of this remarkable body, the heir of which is the Order of St John.

After the fall of the Holy Land, the knights retreated first to Cyprus and then to Rhodes, which was massively fortified to defy the Turks. Their galleys were a thorn in the flesh to the Ottomans.

Expelled from Rhodes in 1523, they were given Malta by Charles V. Their survival of the Great Siege of 1565 was an epic of heroism that enthralled all Europe.

Driven from Malta by Napoleon, on his way to Egypt in 1798, their history in the first half of the nineteenth century was a chequered one.

Seizing on the need for organised nursing, and sustained by its extraordinary past, the order redefined itself in the middle of the nineteenth century to become the best-known provider of emergency medical care.

The Order of St John continues to provide first aid and nursing for millions of people, in peace and war, in countries throughout the world. Nine hundred years after its foundation, it is still running a hospital in Jerusalem.

‘An outstanding historian of the crusade movement’ **John Gilchrist, *Speculum***

Jonathan Riley-Smith is a leading expert on the history of the crusades. He is Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Cambridge and Librarian of the Order of St John.

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