

Ann Williams: Sacra Militia: the Order of St John, crusade, piracy and trade in early modern Malta

The main corpus of the records of the Order of St John are housed in the National Library in Valletta, Malta. The Order remained, until its dissolution in 1798, primarily a religious Order of the Catholic Church. This determined, even in the early modern period, how its records were kept. The chief collections are the Chapters General, held roughly every fifteen years, and the records of the Council of the Grand Master and officials which met frequently, usually from fifteen to twenty times per month. The former was the legislative body of the Order, the latter a body for all matters, administrative and disciplinary. There was no Council of State specifically discussing "high policy" until the 1620s.

A most important source for maritime contracts will be the Notarial Archives which at long last have been rescued from decay and put in an accessible building with hours of admission, and are being catalogued. Two student theses I have examined have shown great possibilities for maritime and trading contracts between the Knights and the Maltese and neighbouring countries from their use.