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Malta Study Center between preservation and digitisation. Documents for architectural historians and researchers

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Malta Study Center between preservation and digitisation. Documents for architectural historians and researchers / Burgassi, Valentina; Bulfone Gransinigh, Federico. - In: STUDI E RICERCHE DI STORIA DELL'ARCHITETTURA. - ISSN 2532-2699. - ELETTRONICO. - 12:(2023), pp. 98-101. [10.17401/sr.12.2022-bulfone.gransinigh-burgassi]

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2977813 since: 2023-04-06T19:59:22Z

*Publisher:*

Caracol

*Published*

DOI:10.17401/sr.12.2022-bulfone.gransinigh-burgassi

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# Studi e ricerche di storia dell'architettura

Rivista dell'Associazione Italiana di Storia dell'Architettura

numero 12, anno 6-2022

NUMERO MONOGRAFICO  
Patrimonializzare il Rinascimento  
Italia e Francia dai Lumi alla Restaurazione

PIANTA DELLA PARTE CENTRALE

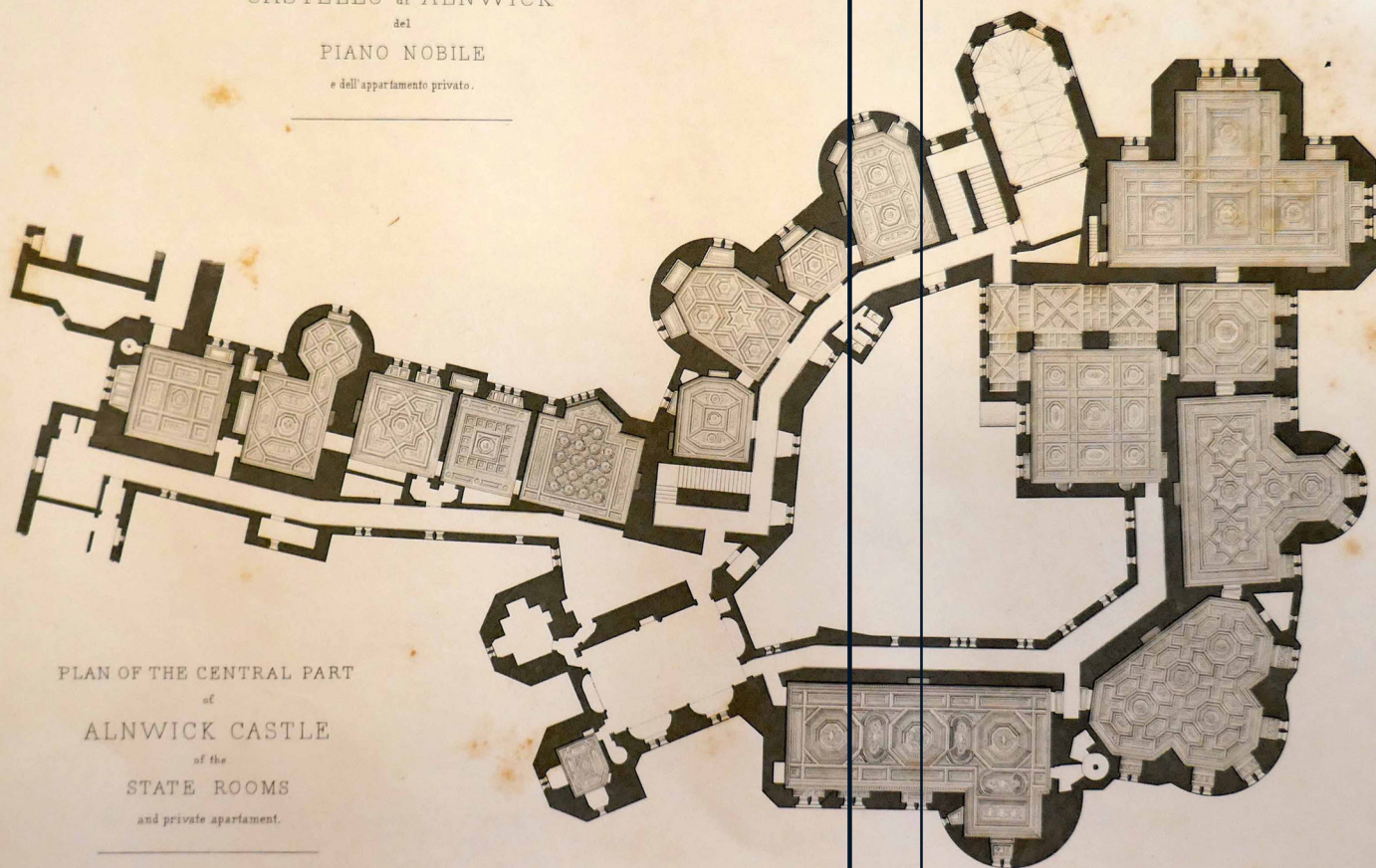
del

CASTELLO di ALNWICK

del

PIANO NOBILE

e dell'appartamento privato.



PLAN OF THE CENTRAL PART

of

ALNWICK CASTLE

of the

STATE ROOMS

and private apartment.

Scala di Piedi Inglese

Scala di Metri



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Edizioni Caracol s.r.l. - via Villareale, 35 - 90141 Palermo

e-mail: [info@edizionicaracol.it](mailto:info@edizionicaracol.it)

ISSN: 2532-2699

ISBN: 978-88-32240-79-5

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## LETTERE DALL'ESTERO

Malta Study Center between preservation and digitisation.  
Documents for architectural historians and researchers

*Interview to Dr. Daniel K. Gullo  
(Malta Study Center, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library)*

**FEDERICO BULFONE GRANSINIGH**  
*Università "G. D'Annunzio" di Chieti-Pescara*

**VALENTINA BURGASSI**  
*Politecnico di Torino*

The historiography on the events of the Sovereign Military Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes, and of Malta (also known as the Order of Malta) during the medieval period is considerable. Prominent historians have devoted themselves to the reconstruction of its characteristics and its administrative structures from its very beginnings, from Jerusalem to Rhodes. The study of the history of the Knights Hospitallers in the Early Modern is, on the other hand, incomplete, both because many documents were lost before the Order's arrival in Malta in 1530 and partly because sources are harder to track down, having been dispersed in State Archives all over Europe. The archives of the Order of Saint John were in fact largely dispersed due to the Napoleonic Suppressions and, the remaining fonds are often not inventoried or difficult to access and dispersed in local archives. Furthermore, the main archives kept in Malta are largely unexplored. The preservation situation of architectural documents and drawings is often dramatic for the collections of the Order of St. John, but also for other fonds of drawings preserved in archives all across Italy. Furthermore, Covid-19 pandemic has aggravated the problems of preserving primary sources, as documents and work of art and architecture: in most cases, archives do not have financial resources to preserve their documents and it is challenging for some institutions to offer the possibility to study on deteriorated primary sources, and even not available for conservation reasons. This is the reason why the Malta Study Center's digitisation activity is particularly valuable.

One of the missions of the HMML's Malta Study Center is to preserve manuscripts, rare printed works, drawings and engravings related to the history of the Order of Saint John. The Center has already digitized more over 16.000 reels of microfilm and 2.5 million digital images from partner archives and libraries, such as National Library of Malta, National Archives of Malta, Cathedral Archives of Mdina, Diocesan Archives of Gozo and of Malta, Notarial Archives of Malta, Catholic University of America, Heritage Malta's Mużew Nazzjonali-Arti and Malta Maritime Museum.

Thanks to this fundamental preserving activity, these digital collections provide researchers to explore the institutional history and the works of art of the Order of Saint John. Malta Study Center also has some agreements with local partners to digitize the private and confraternal archives such as palazzo Falson (Mdina, Malta), Archivum de Piro, archconfraternity of the Holy Rosary and of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, but also partners from all over the world, as the State Archive of Florence and, recently, some other public archives.

Dr. Daniel K. Gullo joined HMML in 2014 and serves as the Joseph S. Micallef Director of the Malta Study Center. He holds BA degrees in History, Spanish

Latin American, and Iberian Studies, and History of Culture from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As Director of the Malta Study Center, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, he is responsible for all aspects of its operations, including digital preservation, cataloging, finance, acquisitions, cataloging, public relations, research, exhibitions, and programming. Since 2014, he has led new innovative digitization projects in Malta and the United States, focusing on previously hidden, inaccessible, and lesser known archival and manuscript collections related to Malta and the Order of Malta. Dr. Gullo currently serves as the Project Director of HMML's National Endowment for the Humanities three-year grant to create new access to online collections through the creation of a new name authority database and cataloging of HMML's digital and microfilm collections. Considering the complexity of studying such a dispersed heritage and the difficulty of approaching the sources, we asked Dr. Gullo a few questions to help us understand how important the work of research centers such as the Malta Study Center is.

**1. Which are the main purposes of the Malta Study Center and what are the main results so far in the field of conservation and dissemination?**

The Malta Study Center was founded in 1973 at the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library to preserve the handwritten cultural heritage of Malta and the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, also known as the Order of Malta. The Malta Study Center also supports international research on Malta and the Order of Saint John by organizing and participating in conferences, workshops, publications, and exhibitions. Since 1973, the Center has partnered with over 70 institutions in Malta, Italy, the United States, and Canada, including state, ecclesiastical, and private collections. The microfilm and digital collections include over 16,000 reels of microfilm and 2.7 million digital images. The objects photographically preserved by the Center include archival material, manuscripts, early printed books, drawings, and prints. The Center's collections provide researchers with a rare opportunity to explore the institutional history of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, the history of Malta, and the complex social, cultural, and legal history of the Mediterranean. Many of these collections are freely accessible online at [www.vhmml.org](http://www.vhmml.org).

**2. A lot of people do not know it, but the Malta Study Center holds a very rich collection of drawings and maps concerning the Order of Saint John. What collections do you preserve and what are the most interesting findings you have achieved?**



Malta Study Center Studio at the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, October 2022





Coat of Arms of the Order of Malta and two putti, illuminated drawing on paper.  
(ASFI, San Giovannino di Cavalieri, Giornale 4, fol. 1r. HMML Project Number ASFI 00200)

Many archives in Malta preserve drawings about fortifications, property, and buildings. These drawings were created as part of land surveys (*cabrei*) commissioned by the Order of Saint John or by other institutions to manage or improve their properties. Secular and ecclesiastical tribunals frequently preserved architectural drawings as part of legal disputes brought before the courts. There is also an extensive history of fortifications in Malta, especially in the archives related to the *Congregazione de guerra* of the Order of Saint John at the National Library of Malta and National Archives of Malta. The Malta Study Center also has digitized over 3000 pre-1815 drawings and prints in Maltese collections. These include some 636 rare and unstudied Renaissance and Baroque drawings from the Cathedral Museum in Mdina, 192 prints and drawings from the Malta Maritime Museum, and over 1000 prints and drawings from MUŻA-Mużew Nazzjonali tal-Arti. Smaller art collections from other archives and museums have also been digitized by the Center. Of particular interest are the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century drawings, especially those of Elisabetta Sirani, Mattia Preti, and Antione de Favray, as well as the over 400 maps from the Albert Ganado Malta Map Collection at MUŻA.

### 3. Last year, the Malta Study Center signed an agreement with the State Archives of Florence for a major project to digitize the fonds of the Priory of Pisa: can you tell us more about this and what are the next expected results in the projects with the Italian archives?

In 2019, members of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem approached the Malta Study Center to preserve the cultural heritage of the Order in Italy. We chose the records of the Priory of Pisa at the State Archive in Florence, as it is one of the oldest and best-preserved archives of the Order in Italy. The State Archives in Florence also has a long history of success with digital projects, making them an ideal partner to establish a methodology that could be used for future work at other Italian sites. Our goal is to digitize the complete archives of the Priory of Pisa, including the women's hospitaller convent of San Giovannino dei Cavalieri and the diplomatic (parchment) fonds. In total, some 203 parchments and 655 volumes will be digitized, including proofs of admission into the Order, land surveys, account books, and legal records. Once Florence is complete, we will begin work at the Grand Priory of Lombardy and Venice. The Venetian project will require time to prepare the collection before digitization, hence the importance of establishing a methodology for Italian Hospitaller archives in Florence. After Venice, we hope to work at the State Archives in Turin, which houses the related records of the Priory of Lombardy not found in Venice. A related project

in the Archive of the Casa Buonarroti in Florence may develop out of the Priory of Pisa project, which would allow us to create access to another important resource of Florentine and Italian early modern cultural history.

#### 4. Much has been done and much is still to be done: what are the next goals for the Malta Study Center on the issue of digitization for the preservation of documents and maps on the Order of Saint John?

Cultural heritage organizations, whether archives, libraries, or museums, increasingly lack the financial resources and necessary staff to maintain their collections due to diminishing financial support. To support these collections, the Malta Study Center will focus on three main projects in addition to the project in Italy. At the National Archives of Malta, we will digitize the prize courts of the Order of Saint John and related maritime tribunal records. These tribunals chart the history of corsair, trade, and maritime activity of early modern Malta and the Mediterranean. Last year we began the monumental digitization of the Archives of the Order of Malta and manuscript collections in the National Library of Malta. This decade-long digitization project will include over 10,000 works when complete. The Center is also in the fifth year of its eight-year France and Malta in the Age of Revolution Project, 1775-1815 project, which focuses on the important but neglected archives and collections pertaining to the crucial period of revolutionary history for the Americas, Europe, and Mediterranean. We hope to continue this project at the Museum of the Order of Saint John in London next year with plans to begin work in France in 2024 or 2025. Much is being done, but more is yet to be done to preserve these essential records of Italian, Mediterranean, and Maltese history.



Pianta della Città Valletta, e suo Borgo della Floriana.  
(Cathedral Museum, Mdina. Inventory number, 1122. HMML  
Project Number CMUS 00490)

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