

them from place to place. It is true that other congregations of religious evolved in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but none of them initially showed the features of a true order. Either the monks, wherever they were, pretended to be where they were not, so that a Cluniac monk at an overseas priory was treated as if he was within the walls of a virtual abbey, located at Cluny in Burgundy, or there was a confederation of independent abbeys, like the Cistercian ones.

The chief reason for the precocity of the Military Orders was that they were institutions that had to focus not on some geographically convenient location within Europe but on the eastern fringe of Christendom. Their headquarters were therefore dependent on resources that were being generated a long way away from them. The early stage at which they began to evolve intermediate government suggests that they had been forced to delegate. There was no obvious model for them to follow, and their provincial representatives had to work out through trial and error a means of controlling scattered dependencies. The first Hospitaller provincial chapter can be found meeting in 1123, and by the 1160s the terms of the relationship between the local houses and the provincial heads in both orders was becoming clear.²² The structures the Hospitallers and Templars were establishing were to be the models for later religious orders, including those of the Franciscans and Dominicans.

The brothers in the East must always have been conscious of a western hinterland that was a source not only of income and supplies, but also of fresh blood and possibly new ideas.²³ Most of them had been born and raised in Europe and many of them would return there for a period of service or for good. As members of religious orders they were dependent on, and ultimately answerable to, the popes in Italy; and committed as they were to the defence of the settlements in the east and, in the case of the Hospital, to the care of pilgrims, they knew that the flow to them of resources was subject to the moods of western rulers and to the arbitrary nature of political developments in the west. It is not surprising that their leaders took the trouble to correspond regularly and informatively with European rulers,²⁴ but they were usually impotent in the face of events over which they had little control.

Master Hugh Revel of the Hospital wrote bitterly in 1268 of the dire effects European political disturbances were having on his order's income. He described how an unauthorized armed contribution made by Philip of Egly, the Hospitaller prior of France, to Charles of Anjou's cause in southern Italy, had swallowed up the order's revenues in Italy and Apulia and had left the priory of France itself deeply in debt. Hospitaller properties in Sicily and Tuscany had been devastated. Elsewhere, civil war in England had drastically reduced the value of its priory's *responsions*, the levy on the order's houses that helped fund the central convent. The Iberian Peninsula had contributed nothing except some mules, and the priories of Auvergne and St Gilles and the bailiwick of Germany had sent less than expected.²⁵

It was essential, as we shall see, that some of the most able brothers be put into positions of responsibility in the West. But in spite of the wars and periods of insecurity, life in rural and even urban communities in Europe must have been less stressful than that of the brothers in the East and it may have been the case that the norms of religious community existence could be followed more closely in relatively peaceful locations in France and Italy. It cannot be denied that against one contemporary measure of success—a reputation for holiness—the Templar and Hospitaller communities in the Levant performed poorly. Both orders were credited with remarkably few saints in an age when in the eyes of the faithful heaven was filling up with men and women belonging to the new religious orders. And, of the three holy men associated with the Temple—Everard of Barres, Bevignate, and Gerland²⁶—and (after putting to one side those saints who were fabricated or appropriated from elsewhere) the four in the modern calendar of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta—the founder Gerard, Ubaldesca, Toscana, and Hugh of Genoa²⁷—only three, or possibly four, were full members of their respective orders, and only two of those who were order members appear to have served in the East. Of course, it may have been that the cults of brothers once known in the Levant for their piety were forgotten once their graves could no longer be visited.²⁸ Who now hears of St William, a local Latin bishop, or St Eudes, a count of Nevers, whose tombs were healing shrines in Acre in the thirteenth century?²⁹

But although the evidence is slight, life in the European houses could have provided the brothers and sisters with more intellectual and spiritual stimulus than was possible in the threatened convents on the frontiers. It came to be believed that the Hospitaller priest Hugh's record of prayerful service to the sick in Genoa demonstrated that while the brothers in the East fought the Muslims, their *confrères* in the West supported them by engaging in their own spiritual battles "against invisible enemies."³⁰