

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910459573803321
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Titolo	Nobility, faith and masculinity : the Hospitaller Knights of Malta, c. 1580-c. 1700 // Emanuel Buttigieg
Pubbl/distr/stampa	London : , : Continuum, , 2011
ISBN	1-4725-9976-4 1-4411-7867-8 1-283-11664-2 9786613116642 1-4411-0243-4
Edizione	[1st ed.]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (337 p.)
Disciplina	271.7912
Soggetti	Masculinity Nobility Electronic books.
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references (pages 251-308) and index.
Nota di contenuto	Introduction -- 1. Becoming a Hospitaller -- 2. Hospitaller Ranks: Hierarchy, Patriarchy and Age -- 3. Religious Identity, Beliefs and Practices -- 4. The Body, Chastity and Sexuality -- 5. Violence and Punishments -- Conclusion: Towards a Cultural History of the Order of Malta -- Epilogue -- Appendix: Popes, Grand Masters, Bishops and Inquisitors c.1580-c.1700 -- Bibliography -- Index
Sommario/riassunto	This is an important study of elite European noblemen who joined the Order of Malta. The Order - functioning in parallel with the convents that absorbed the surplus daughters of the nobility - provided a highly respectable outlet for sons not earmarked for marriage. The process of becoming a Hospitaller was a semi-structured one, involving clear-cut (if flexible) social and financial requirements on the part of the candidate, and a mixture of formal and informal socialization into the ways of the Order. Once enrolled, a Hospitaller became part of a very hierarchical and ethnically mixed organisation, within which he could seek offices and status. This process was delineated by a complex interaction of internal factors - hierarchy, patriarchy and age - set

within external mechanisms such as papal patronage and interference. This book is innovative in its methodology, drawing on a wide range of sources and applying historiographical approaches not previously brought to bear on the Order
