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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
