



## THE MEDIEVAL TOWN OF RHODES BASED ON JOHANNES HEDEBORG'S MANUSCRIPT (1854).

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper an attempt is made to present the medieval town of Rhodes based on the information released by the Swedish doctor and history researcher Johannes Hedeberg in his five volume work, kept in the Library of the Archaeological Institute of Dodecanese and entitled: "Geschichte der Insel Rhodos, von der Urzeit bis auf die heutigen Tage nebst einer historischen Übersicht der Völker, Griechen, Römer, Araber, Franken und Türkern, welche die Insel beherrscht haben, mit einer Sammlung vieler Inscriptionen so wie vieler Abbildungen von Monumenten besonders aus dem Mittelalter" ("History of the island of Rhodes from the Early period until today, along with a historical analysis of the Greek, Roman, Arab, Frankish and Turkish peoples, who dominated the island with a collection of many pictures of monuments particularly of the medieval period"). A lot of information is given helping to reconstruct the picture of the medieval town of Rhodes mentioned by other travellers of that period, which will lead to drawing comparative conclusions.

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**KEYWORDS:** Street of the Knights, Church of Saint John, Palace of Grand Master, Inn, Saint John's lodge, Church of Franciscans

### INTRODUCTION

Nicolas de Martoni, a fourteenth-century traveller, passing through Rhodes during the year 1394 describes the medieval town of Rhodes as follows: "... and this is a city divided into that of the Castrum and of the church of Saint John and into that of the Borgo with high walls and high and thick towers" (Legrand 1895,583; Kollias

1991,82). The clear picture of the bilateral division of the medieval town, as it is outlined by De Martoni replaces the nineteenth century feeling of sadness, which overwhelms every traveller in the case of the loss of the magnificent and of the grandeur of the past represented by the ruined palaces and houses (Hedenborg 1854, 5). This feeling of sadness regarding the medieval

picture of the town of Rhodes and what causes it are described in detail in Johannes Hedenborg's manuscript "The History of Rhodes."

Johannes Hedenborg (1800-1870), a doctor and history researcher, after long journeys to Europe, Asia and Africa chose to live the rest of his life on the island of Rhodes. He ceaselessly collected the material of a work which covered five volumes enriched with numerous tables entitled: "History of the Island of Rhodes, from Antiquity until Today with Historical Review of the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Franks and Turks who ruled the Island with a Collection of Many Inscriptions and Illustrations of Monuments and particularly of the Middle Ages." The work is written in German and Johannes Hedenborg had planned to publish it in Germany. In 1880, however, V.Guerin, another traveller, republished his book for the second time in Paris and he mentions that Johannes Hedenborg had in the meantime died without having his work published (Papamanolis 1982, 32). Thus, the manuscript is kept today in the library of the Archaeological Institute of Dodecanese.

The part referring to the medieval town of Rhodes included in volume IV of the chapter entitled: "Today's Town of Rhodes and Memories from the time of the Knights."

### **HEDELBORG'S DESCRIPTIONS OF THE MEDIEVAL TOWN OF RHODES**

Johannes Hedenborg gives the following picture of the medieval town of Rhodes, which he describes as ruined: "The streets of the medieval town are filthy. In the squares and in the corners of the streets there are huge heaps of rubbish. And in this filth dogs (Hedenborg 1854,8) seek their food. The past and the modern mingle in such a way that they remind of a tale from the 'One Thousand and One nights.' The grey Middle Ages are depicted by the imposing ruins, next to which stand the poor huts of the Turks (Hedenborg 1854, 8-9). In the large palaces of the Knights and in the houses Turks were installed, like annoying owls, the

poorest of who have put up their shacks. The remains of the buildings collapse every day. Because the residents of the large houses do not have the will, nor the means to restore them, they demolish them and sell the worked stones. In this way houses and palaces are destroyed completely every year leaving not a single trace behind them. Therefore, huts and poor shops are erected near the ruins of the palaces of the Knights forming the picture of today's population. For these reasons it is difficult to follow the period of the Knights rule in Rhodes" (Hedenborg 1854, 23-25).

The same view regarding the situation of the medieval town during the Turkish occupation is showed by Flandin, who visited Rhodes in 1844. He writes, that the Palace of the Grand Master is ruined, Saint John's Church has no bell-tower and the other churches are also ruined. The priories and the Inns of foreign languages bear traces of cannon balls. Every building has signs of the battle which lasted more than six months (Flandin 1844, 284-285).

However, in this confused picture of the medieval town during the 19th century Johannes Hedenborg distinguishes and describes certain coats-of-arms of the Knights' occupation. The first thing a traveller comes across when coming out of the port is a row of coffee-shops along the pier supported against the high strong walls. Here the Turks sit on wooden balconies and enjoy the morning sun (Hedenborg 1854, 9). The central axis in the interior of the medieval town constitutes the Street of the Knights, which is the widest and the most beautiful street that all tourists visit even if their stay lasts only a few hours (Hedenborg 1854, 11-14).

### **THE MEDIEVAL TOWN'S BUILDINGS IN THE 19th CENTURY**

The Church of Saint John is in ruins as is the case of most of the buildings of the medieval town. Only the metal roof slabs protect it from total collapse (Fig. 1). Besides, it has been converted into a Mosque (Hedenborg 1854, 11-

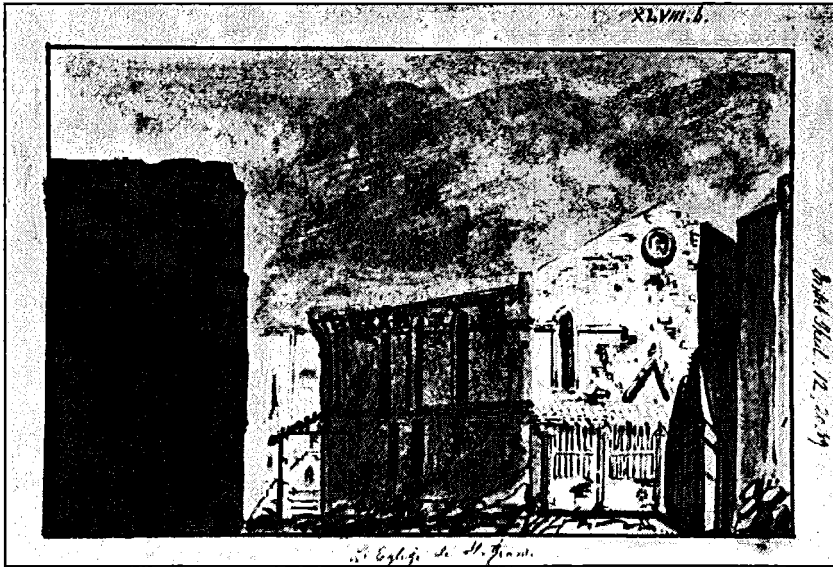


Fig. 1. Saint John's church

14). However, over the gate of the northern side Hedenborg points out three coats-of-arms, of the Pope, of the Order and of the Grand Master Villeneuve (1319-1346), as in the same place of the church there is also the coat-of-arms of the Grand Master Cornelian (1353-1355). In this Temple the Grand Masters and the knights were also buried. The tombstones and the tomb monuments are broken and destroyed.

The Belgian traveller Rottiers visited Rhodes in 1826. From him Hedenborg took certain designs and incorporated them in his work. He, too, described Saint John's church. His attention is focused on two interceptions, north and south of the church, which were what had remained from the tombs of Pierre d'Aubusson (1476-1503) and of Emery d'Amboise (1503-1512). He mentions, that the tombs of the two Grand Masters was violated by the janissaries, when they entered the town after the siege (early 1523), while the inscriptions have been destroyed. In the centre of the church there is the tomb of Fabrizio Carretto (1513-1521), which is wholly covered with rugs and straw mats on which the Muslims kneel during their prayer.

The state of the monument was considered by Rottiers to be fair and so he believed that the building was the only one which escaped destruction (Roitriers 1830, 298-302). On the floor he detected coats-of-arms, among which are those of Roger de Pins (1355-1365), of Philibert de Naillac (1396-1421) and others which were unknown (Rottiers 1830, 298-302). However, referring to the drawing of the painter who accompanied him, he pointed out that the interior of Saint John's church corresponded to the era of the Knights a short while before it was converted into a mosque.

On the right of Saint John's Church is the Palace of the Grand Master which constituted such a strong fortification that it could resist even the siege. The whole palace, however, is in ruins now. Only the outside walls stand upright. A part of the western side came down in the earthquake of 25th February 1851. The large and wide yard is covered in its most part by ruins and fallen pillars. The domes and the chambers have fallen apart. The numerous coats-of-arms which decorated the walls have disappeared or are covered by ruins. The coats-of-arms of

D'Aubusson (1476-1503) and of Carretto (1513-1521) are the only ones which were saved. The great cisterns in the rooms found in the yard are used as cereal stores. The palace of the Grand Master, while there were still in it rooms in it, was partly used as a prison.

Johannes Hedenborg's description of the Saint John's lodge follows. The movement of deism, which was so intensely fought by the Pope with the spread of the Enlightenment in Europe, had started with the Knights of Saint John. According to Johannes Hedenborg, eight Christians of Latin denomination created the lodge of Deism. It is strange, that this lodge is situated very near to Saint John's Church. On the left and right of the building only some bases of pillars have been salvaged and it appears that it consisted of bows, which had access to all the sides not only to Saint John's church but also to the Grand Master's Palace. It seems that the lodge was annexed to the church of Saint John itself, as the old inhabitants stated (Hedenborg 1854, 19-21). Rottiers describes his visit to the Saint John's lodge as follows: "In this place the priests of Zeus Saviour were installed in the past. It was an asylum which gave hospitality to distinguished foreign visitors and to consulars of different countries which were associated with Rhodes and who enjoyed great honours during their stay in Rhodes." Saint John's lodge must have been completed by Helion de Villeneuve (1319-1346). The Knights gathered there on Sunday and then returned to the Palace of the Grand Master to pay their respects to the Grand Master before accompanying him to the holy Mass. The lodge had suffered great damage during the last siege and since then it has gradually disintegrated. In a few years there would be nothing left. Fortunately a part of the dome has been salvaged which helps us to form an impression of how it was (Rottiers 1830, 284-289).

In the Street of the Knights Johannes Hedenborg detected another three buildings, the Inn of England, the Inn of France and the Inn of

Spain. As regards the first Inn there is some confusion, since according to Rottiers' opinion the Inn of England is a building which bears the coat-of arms of De Carretto (1513-1521) and the date 1519. There is some doubt, as to whether the building was restored by De Caretto (1513-1521). However, he ascertains that what has been written regarding the buildings of the Knights and the fortifications of Rhodes is so much confused that without a precise dating no accurate conclusions can be made (Hedenborg 1854, 28).

It is known, however, that the Inn of the Tongue of England stands in the south-eastern part of Museum square. In the northern site the traveller Rottiers had in 1826 seen four coats-of-arms on the walls, which he depicted in his book and which are: that of the Royal House of England, the coat-of-arms of John Kendal and of two more unknown Knights. The existence of the coats-of-arms of the royal English firm with that of the leader of the Tongue of England, John Kendal, and the escutcheon of the Grand Master are indications which identify the building as the Inn of England (Kollias 1991, 130; Gerola 1914 274-276).

In the Street of the Knights there is also the Inn of France. On its exterior it presents the view of a palace, whereas in its interior was connected to different premises during the Turkish occupation. However, Johannes Hedenborg concluded that the form of the building suggested, that it constitute one building as it is seen from the inscriptions under the coat-of-arms: "pour la maison, pour l'Oratoire, pour Philerme". Among the coats-of-arms those of D'Aubusson (1476-1503), D'Amboise (1503-1512) and L'Isle-Adam (1521-1522) can be distinguished (Hedenborg 1854, 29).

Rottiers describes the interior of the Inn of France the beauty of jewels in a particular place denoted, that this had been a reception chamber of the priore of France. He also states that the Turk, who inhabited it in those times, posed many questions. It is remarkable, that he

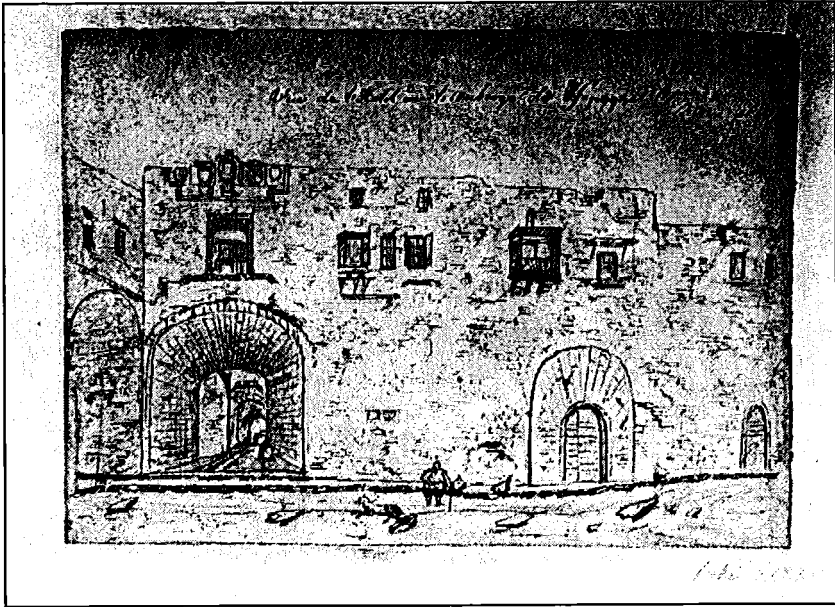


Fig. 2. Inn of Spain

mentions that the balconies or the arches made of wood with shuttered windows had changed the frontages and for this reason he asked his painter to paint them as they were during the Knights period (Rottiers 1830, 318-319). Johannes Hedenborg placed the Inn of France in another location. This building had already been ruined in 1851 and the only place salvaged was the southern part with the three coats-of-arms. In the year 1851 the whole building was demolished and from its ruins, a clock-tower was erected.

In the Street of the Knights the Inn of Spain is also located (Fig. 2). With the exception of the frontage with the coats-of-arms, the largest part of the building is destroyed and demolished (Hedenborg 1854, 31). The Inn of the Tongue of Spain is situated opposite the Inn of the Provence in the southern part of the Street of the Knights. High up on the passage leading to the road crossing the building from North to South, there were seven coats-of-arms in a cruciform frame (now kept in the Archaeological Museum of

Constantinople). In the top row and in the middle, the escutcheons of Castille, of Aragon and of Granada, unified into one coat-of-arms which was surrounded by the coat-of-arms of Portugal on the left and by that of Navarre on the right. The presence of the escutcheons of Castille, Aragon, Granada, Navarre and Portugal within the same frame is a serious indication that this was probably the building of the Inn of the Tongue of Spain (Kollias 1991, 136; Gerola 1914, 284-285).

Regarding the hospital, which was built by Fluvian for the care of the sick Knights, Johannes Hedenborg expresses weakness in defining its place (Hedenborg 1854, 26-27). It is known, however, that the New Hospital is identified with the same coat-of-arms, as the building which houses the Archaeological Museum. As regards its medical services, the time of its construction and its owners two inscriptions engraved on marble give us all the details. The first, in Latin, fixed in the wall on the outside side of the arch of the Hospital's chapel, on the eastern entrance

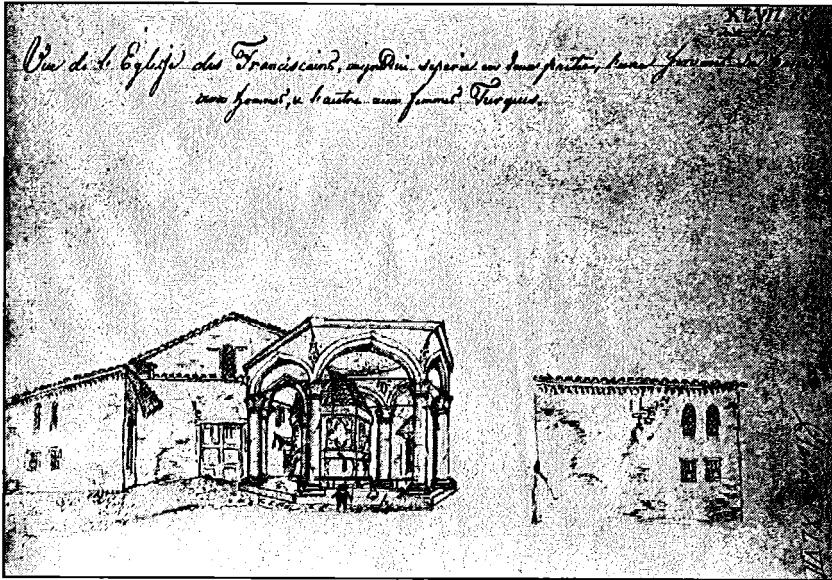


Fig. 3. Church of Franciscans

and under two relief angels on marble, holding between them the coat-of-arms of the Grand Master Antony Fluvian (1421-1437). In this inscription it is stated that the above Grand Master donated 10.000 gold florins towards the construction of the New Hospital and that its construction began on 15th July 1440. The second inscription states in French that Pierre Clouet, an officer of the Order of the Knights, was the one who completed it in 1489 (Kollias 1991, 120-122; Gerola 1914, 287-294). Johannes Hedenborg believed, that this building was used in the period of Turkish occupation as barracks and he describes it as follows: "The ground floor is modified with domed buildings and on the first floor and on the upper floor there were corridors led to by a wide staircase. The domed constructions on the floor below are large and wide and are used like the inside yard as a store for charcoal. The spaces on the first floor are large and well-aired but are abandoned and empty because merchants do not rent them. Above the door there was once a large and beautiful coat-of-arms, whose position is vacant today. A fanatic

Pasha destroyed it, because the travellers stood in front of the building to design it" (Hedenborg 1854, 26-27).

The next monument, which Johannes Hedenborg mentions, is the Church of Franciscans (Fig. 3), which was situated near a fountain and had been converted into Turkish baths. It was divided into two parts, one for men and one for women. Most of the Grand Masters were buried here. Among them the Grand Master Juliac (1373-1377) had been buried here, whose sarcophagus had been transferred to a narrow street and was used as a water reservoir by the Turks to wash in before praying. In the women's section there were more tombstones, which had been destroyed and only one of them preserved a part of the inscription which had not been damaged (Hedenborg 1854). But it is well known, that the Grand Masters were buried in the Church of Saint Antony and the Church of Saint John. The same monument is described by Rottiers in a similar way and assures its use during the Turkish rule as well as the appalling condition in which it stands today (Rottiers

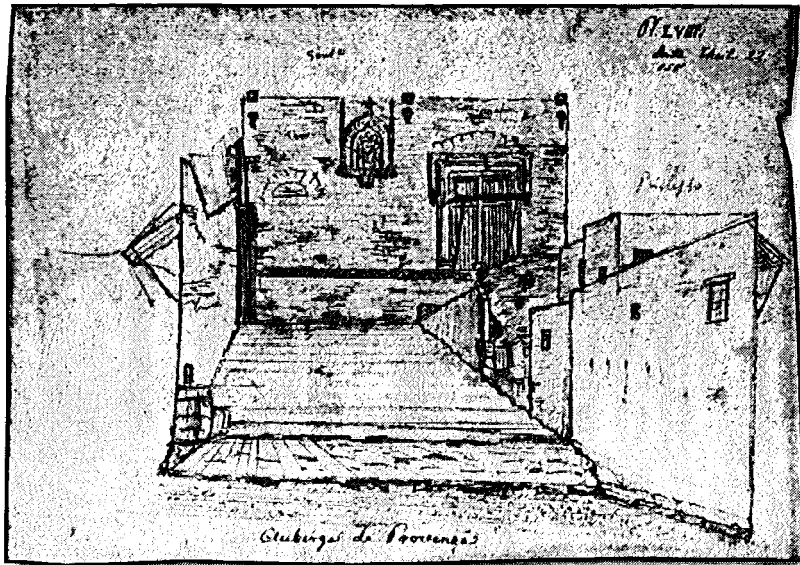


Fig. 4. Inn of Provence

1830, 245; Gabriel 1921, 14-15; Gabriel 1923, 213).

Finally, Johannes Hedenborg makes reference to the last Inn in the history of the Knights of Saint John, the Inn of the Tongue of the Provence (Fig. 4). He believes, that this building was not found in the Street of the Knights but east of the town, near the Jewish district. This was a wonderful palace, which was built all expenses paid by the Grand Priory of Saint Gilles, Charles A. Aleman de la Roche Chinard, in the period of the Grand Master D'Amboise (1503-1512). From this beautiful building only a part of the frontage has been salvaged, a wide staircase, which leads to the upper floor and a part of the arched floor. The marble frame of the window is decorated with crucifixes and lilies and on the frontage there is Gothic writing; two Knights are depicted holding the coat-of-arms of the Grand Master D'Amboise (1503-1512). There was also a marble slab on which an angel was depicted holding the coat-of-arms of D'Amboise (1503-1512) in his left hand and in the right the coat-

of-arms of the Order. During Turkish rule fishermen were settled in the domes, mended their nets and sold fish. In the upper floor there were stores with cereals (Hedenborg 1854, 22). Therefore, it is believed that the Inn of the Tongue of Provence is located well up on high in the northern side of the Street of the Knights and is only some tens of metres away from the Palace of the Grand Master. Above the gate, in a cruciform frame there is the royal coat-of-arms of France, of the Knightly Order, of the Grand Master F. Del Carretto (1513- 1521) and of F.de Flota (Kollias 1991, 134; Gerola 1914, 274-287).

The picture of the medieval town during the Hospitallers period (1309-1522) is quite different from that of the medieval town at the time of Hedenborg. Following the conquest of Rhodes town the Hospitallers immediately strengthened its Byzantine kastron. Such work continued throughout the century and must have been expensive, even if captives or slaves provided labour. The safety of the whole island and the Hospital's control of it, depended on the

town's ability to withstand assault and siege. The St. John's Hospitallers Order settled in a large part of the island, giving also motives to new settlers. Therefore, latin merchants, a latin bureaucracy, the latin Church and other western institutions were established in the area (Luttrell 1999, 236; Tsirpanles 1995, 94). Urban Greeks included priests, merchants, artisans and seamen, some of who were burgenses and played a leading part in municipal government (Luttrell 1992, 273-274).

What has survived from the civilization created by the Hospitallers in Rhodes? Almost nothing. Three major earthquakes shook Rhodes around the middle of the 19th century in 1851, 1856 and in 1863, which seemed to have caused extensive damages in the medieval town. Extensive damages were also caused in the western part of the medieval town by a strong explosion in 1856 when lightning struck on the

gunpowder stored in the basement of St. John's Collachium (Kollias 1992, 85, n. 35). Hedenborg mentions specifically that the streets and neighbourhoods were transformed into heaps of dust and stones. Today's medieval town of Rhodes is the result of the good restoration work carried out during the Italian occupation in Rhodes (1912-1943/45) (Santoro 1996, 211-251). Consequently, Johannes Hedenborg created his own Rhodes perhaps to avoid the accusation which weighed down on the writers of Travel Literature that they restrict themselves to the description of materials, of morals, of laws, of the character of the inhabitants of the areas they toured without entering the personal story of the traveller. As if it were possible for a man who for a certain reason was attracted to far away places, to seem indifferent to whatever refers to the senses (Hatzipanayioti 1996, 671).

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