Chapter 7

The Hospitaller Sisters in Frisia

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Introduction

Although Frisia is not among the best-known Hospitaller settlement areas of Europe,¹ the Order of Saint John was amply represented in this narrow but long strip of autonomous coastal lands along the North Sea, and in about 1300 there were no less than 21 separate houses with a community of brothers. Many of these commanderies housed a community of sisters. In the fifteenth century the presence of *sorores* can be attested for at least 14 of these settlements, while for seven other houses there is no evidence that sisters did not live there. This strong representation of Frisian women in the Order of Saint John has so far escaped the attention of the experts. The surveys of Riley-Smith and Forey do not mention Frisia while Tommasi, in his paper on the double and mixed convents of the military orders, only mentions a single Frisian convent or religious house.² This is due in part to the unfamiliarity of Hospitaller scholars with the German and Dutch historiography.³ It is also the case that the Frisian Hospitaller sisters appeared even less frequently in the documents than their female colleagues elsewhere. Virtually all the houses in which they resided were ruled, until their dissolution, by men. Only in the house at Warffum was their emancipation so far advanced in the sixteenth century that it could be described in the visitation report of 1540 as a nunnery managed by a prioress. However, despite the limited and relatively late 'visibility' of the Frisian sisters of Saint John, the sources suggest that they made up the majority of the population of the Frisian houses early in the Order's Frisian history.

¹ The Frisians spoke their own language, had their own laws and also cherished a shared tribal consciousness. In political respects, however, their habitat was fragmented, largely as a result of its geophysical structure: 'Friesen, Friesland', in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 5 (Stuttgart and Weimar 1999), cols 970–76; B. H. Slicher van Bath, 'The Economic and Social Conditions in the Frisian districts from 900 to 1500', *A.A.G. Bijdragen*, 13 (1965), 97–133.

² Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Knights of St John in Jerusalem and Cyprus c. 1050–1310* (London, 1967), p. 241; Forey, Chapter 2; idem, *The Military Orders. From the Twelfth to the Early Fourteenth Centuries* (London, 1992); Tommasi, Chapter 3, p. 83.

³ It is regrettable that Johanna Maria van Winter in the introduction to her *Sources Concerning the Hospitallers of St John in the Netherlands, 14th–18th Centuries* (Leiden, 1998), focused on Utrecht and Holland and excluded virtually all works on the Frisian houses.

We will consider below whether the Frisian houses should be called double convents, that is houses with both male and female communities, or women's convents under male direction. In any case, the figure of 21 gains significance if we remember that it amounts to a quarter of all the religious houses founded in Frisian lands in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, leaving aside the establishments of the mendicant orders. In about 1300 the entire religious landscape of Frisia consisted of some 82 institutions. Five of them were populated by Augustinian canons, 15 were Benedictine, 14 belonged to the Order of Cîteaux and 24 to that of Prémontré. The Hospital apart, the remaining two houses belonged to the Teutonic Order, whose organization strongly resembled that of the Order of Saint John. The majority of these 82 convents housed a community of women. The total number of women's convents cannot be determined exactly, but was probably around 50. If we keep to that figure for the sake of convenience, and if we really can establish that the 21 Hospitaller houses in Frisia each accommodated a community of sisters, we must conclude that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Order of Saint John had under its protection two-fifths of the houses to which women could go if they wished to live a religious life. That is a remarkable fact, not least because the Order of Saint John was not noted as a haven of refuge for women.⁴

Why did the Frisian Hospitallers open the doors of their houses to women religious or, considering the question from another viewpoint, why did so many Frisian women choose a spiritual life under the protection of Saint John? These questions are easier to ask than to answer. In this article I hope at least to take a step towards an answer by considering how the convents in question were organized and what changes in their structure occurred over the course of time. I will also take the occasional glance at the situation in the neighbouring double convents and women's convents of the other orders, in the conviction that the regional superiors of the Order of Saint John did not organize their Frisian houses in consultation with the central leadership in Acre or Rhodes. They seem rather to have responded to social pressure from their surroundings, based on local customs and expectations. The aim of this article is, therefore, not only a better understanding of the organizational flexibility of the Hospitallers in a unique, non-feudal region but also to throw more light on the development of female religious life general.

A serious handicap is the lack of sources. Many of the archives of the Frisian houses of Saint John did not survive the turmoil of the Reformation period. Particularly for the East Frisian convents and those that lay in the Frisian part of the County of Oldenburg, little written material has survived, a result of their early

⁴ The Rule of the Hospitallers made no mention of *sorores*. Forey, Chapter 2, p. 52, finds that in general no single military order had 'more than a handful' of women's houses. In 1237 Pope Gregory IX could even state that it was not the practice of the Order of the Saint John to have houses for women: 'in ordine Hospitalis ipsius non consueverit fieri collegium dominarum': *CH*, no. 2167. See Nicholson, Chapter 6, p. 163.

dissolution.⁵ All that has come down to us are a few dozen charters from the large and relatively well-endowed Saint John's convents in what is the present-day Dutch province of Groningen, most of which date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; only a few texts are older than 1400. There are also the well-known visitation reports from 1495 and 1540, although these contain few details for the Frisian houses.⁶ This subject requires a cautious, retrospective approach with a great deal of support from comparison and reasoning.

Central to this survey are the best-documented houses, Warffum, Wijtwerd and Oosterwierum, located north and east of the city of Groningen. Their composition and development will be considered below. Then an effort will be made to position the scattered data from the other Frisian commanderies within the overall picture.

The Series of Foundations

Two charters from 1317 and 1319 mentioned almost all the Frisian Saint John's settlements that appeared in later documents. That of 1317 was related to the Hospitaller house of Sneek (*Snake*), which was situated in the Friesland west of the river Lauwers, within the Diocese of Utrecht,⁷ and was the only house that was subject to Saint Catherine's convent at Utrecht. The charter of 1319 listed a total of 20 in the Frisian areas in the Dioceses of Münster, Bremen and Osnabrück.⁸ Together these 21 houses formed an apparently unique administrative area, which did not come under the authority of its own Frisian superior but was subject to the Commander of Steinfurt in Westphalia, who therefore in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries occasionally bore the title of *magister* or *balivus domorum per Westphalam et Ostfriesland* (the Master or *Balier* of the houses in Westphalia and East Frisia).⁹

⁵ See Heinrich Reimers, *Die Säkularisation der Klöster in Ostfriesland* (Aurich, 1906), and Hermann Goens, *Die Einziehung der Kirchengüter während der Reformationszeit im evangelischen Gebiet des Herzogtums Oldenburg* (Oldenburg, 1927).

⁶ The list of 1367 does not mention the Frisian houses: Karl Borchardt, 'Urban Commanderies in Germany', in *La Commanderie: Institution des Ordres Militaires dans l'Occident médiéval*, ed. Anthony Luttrell and Léon Pressouyre (Paris, 2002), pp. 297–305: here pp. 297–8; *idem*, 'Soll-Zahlen zum Personalstand der Deutschen Johanniter vom Jahre 1367', *Revue Mabillon*, 75 (2003).

⁷ *Groot Placaat en Charterboek van Vriesland*, 1, ed. G. F. thoe Schwartzenberg en Hohenlansberg (Leeuwarden, 1768), pp. 157–9.

⁸ *Ostfriesisches Urkundenbuch*, ed. E. Friedländer, 1 (Emden, 1878), no. 48; *Oorkondenboek van Groningen en Drenthe*, ed. P. J. Blok et al., 1 (Groningen, 1896), no. 264.

⁹ In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries these Frisian houses were represented by a *commissarius Frisiae* who was commander of one of them and, as such, more representative of Frisian interests as *primus inter pares* vis-à-vis the Commander of Steinfurt, who as master of the houses in Westphalia and (East) Frisia sometimes also bore the title of *Friesische Meister* (master of Frisia): G. F. Noordhuis, *De Johanniters in Stad en Lande: Geschiedenis*

These houses are shown on the map (fig. 7.1).¹⁰ The list of 1319 starts with Warffum, Wijtwerd, Oosterwierum (*Aesterwerum*) and Goldhoorn or Finsterwolde (*Fynserwald*) in the Ommelanden, which lay within the area of the modern Dutch province of Groningen. Then come Dünebroek or Wymeer (*Wymaria*) on the present-day German-Dutch border, Jemgum (*Gemmegum*) on the west bank of the Ems, Hesel (*Holse*), Hasselt (*Harsle*) and Boekzetel (*Bowkesete*), east of the Ems estuary, and Abbingwehr (*Abbyngearve*) in Emsingo. Then we travel east, to the houses of Burmönken (*Bure*) and Tjüchermönken (*Thyuchen*), close to each other at Wittmund, the house of Havermönken (*Hove*) north of Varel, which vanished in 1511 in the newly formed Jade estuary, and the commanderies of Witleke (*Wyckleesen*) and Langewick (*Langewisch*) in the Butjadingen part of Rüstringen, which were likewise washed away but later rebuilt at Roddens and Inte.¹¹ Then the compiler of the list turns back west through the south, over Bredehorn (*Vredehorna*) in Ammerland, Burlage (*Buyrle*) in Overledingerland, Bokesesch (*Bokeseske*) in Saterland, and Langholt and Muhde (*Lethemuda*), also in Overledingerland.¹² Several of these houses of Saint John were later combined. After 1319 only three new commanderies were founded: Oosterwijtwerd in Fivelgo, Heiselhusen in Emsingo and Strückhausen in the Bremen Stadland on the lower Weser.

Due to a lack of sources, we are poorly informed about the founding of the houses mentioned in 1317 and 1319. The oldest reliable date for the existence of a Frisian Hospitaller commandery is 1284, the year in which the Bishop of Münster bought and transferred a portion of the Frisian goods of the Benedictine Abbey of Werden to the Commander of Steinfurt for his houses in Warffum and Jemgum. But because the same Steinfurt commander was asked in 1276 to help resolve a serious conflict between the Bishop of Münster and four Frisian *terrae*, he must have controlled all interests in this area at the time. Although many older authors assumed a connection with Frisian participation in the thirteenth-century crusades,¹³ historians of the Order made no positive statement on the subject until recently. The year 1270 has been cited as the earliest date for the Hospitallers' presence in the Frisian lands.¹⁴

van de Johanniters in de provincie Groningen (13de–17de eeuw) (Warffum, 1990), pp. 24–5.

¹⁰ For the identification of these houses, see Enno Schöningh, *Der Johanniterorden in Ostfriesland* (Aurich, 1973), p. 14.

¹¹ On these commanderies in Oldenburg Frisia, see W. Hayen, 'Die Johanniter in Oldenburg', *Oldenburgisches Jahrbuch*, 4 (1895), 1–36: here p. 6; Ludolf Ammermann, 'Witleke, Langewische, Roddens, Inte. Ein Beitrag zur Entstehung der Johanniterkommenden Roddens und Inte', *Oldenburger Jahrbuch*, 72 (1972), 23–37; R. Schäfer, 'Die Johanniterhäuser in der Grafschaft Oldenburg um 1500', in *Johanniter im Nordwesten: Zur Geschichte des Johanniterordens im nordwestlichen Niedersachsen*, ed. E. Koolman and U. Elerd (Oldenburg, 1999), pp. 23–32.

¹² Only for the last does the list lack logic: Bokesesch should have been named before the houses of Burlage and Langholt, which were situated close to each other and later united.

¹³ For example Hayen, pp. 4–5.

¹⁴ Schöningh, pp. 11–13; Noordhuis, p. 22.

In connection with the crusades, that year would match the reports about the assistance that Ommeland and East Frisian crusaders were said to have offered to the French King Louis at Tunis. But their expedition was only the last in a whole Frisian series, which undoubtedly reached its highpoint in the Fifth Crusade of 1217 to 1221.¹⁵

That some Frisian houses of the military orders were indeed established before the middle of the thirteenth century can be deduced from a record of 1243 mentioning a house of the Teutonic Order at Nes in Westerlauwers Friesland. Because the nearby Hospitaller house of Sneek was founded at a more central location, a location also much better endowed than that of Nes, there is reason to assume that it was founded at least at the same time if not earlier.¹⁶ This would move the *datum ante quem* to the start of the 1240s. It has also been established that a number of the Frisian commanderies under Steinfurt were established before 1240.¹⁷ In that year, Brother Hendrik of Steinfurt, who was at the time in charge of the Order of Saint John's affairs in the Diocese of Utrecht, put the title *prior Steverdie et [F]risie* on his seal. This official description shows that his administrative district by then consisted of the Steinfurt commandery and a group of houses and possessions in Friesland. It is difficult to say exactly which houses belonged to this group, but the core probably consisted of the relatively well-endowed commanderies of Warffum, Wijtwerd, Oosterwierum, Jemgum and Abbingwehr.

The enthusiasm for the crusades propagated in the Frisian lands by preachers such as Oliver of Cologne (d. 1227) and Jan of Xanten undoubtedly played an important role in the bestowal of grants on the Hospitallers. Over the course of time, crusade vows could be commuted into gifts to the military orders. Yet this was presumably not the only reason why the Hospitallers were favoured. Heidrun Wiesenmüller recently showed that, of the older Benedictine convents in East Friesland, at least one – Bredehorn – was transferred to the Order of Saint John.¹⁸ Bredehorn figures in the *Dialogus miraculorum* of the Cistercian monk Caesarius of Heisterbach as a Benedictine convent,¹⁹ while in 1319 the convent stood on the records as a Hospitaller house. As the story in question must have been recorded

¹⁵ On Frisia and the crusades in general, see Herbert Brassat, *Die Teilnahme der Friesen an den Kreuzzügen ultra mare* (Berlin, 1970).

¹⁶ Johannes A. Mol, 'De Johanniters fan Snits: nammen, komôf en karriêres', *Fryske Nammen*, 10 (1996), 117–54: here 125.

¹⁷ *Idem*, 'The Beginnings of the Military Orders in Frisia', in *MO*, 2, pp. 307–17: here pp. 311–12.

¹⁸ Heidrun Wiesenmüller, 'Die ersten Klosterbewohner von Bredehorn. Benediktiner und Johanniter zwischen Weser und Ems', *Emder Jahrbuch*, 77 (1997), 41–51: here 42.

¹⁹ Caesarius regularly accompanied his father-abbot on the abbot's visitations to the north, thus amassing the material for his stories: J. J. van Moolenbroek, 'Caesarius van Heisterbach op reis in Friesland en Groningen, De "Dialogus miraculorum" (1219–1223) als historische bron', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 98 (1985), 513–39: here 514–17, 520.

when Caesarius was writing in 1220, Bredehorn must have changed orders between 1220 and 1319. Bredehorn was not the only Frisian Benedictine convent that changed to another order in the thirteenth century. In 1216 the East Frisian Benedictine double monastery of Meerhusen (*Merosa*) asked the Cistercian general chapter for admittance into that Order, with the result that it was split into a women's and a men's convent, of which the latter began in 1228 to serve as a Cistercian abbey under the name *Schola Dei* or Ihlow.²⁰ The same happened in the years 1247–59 to the Benedictine monastery of Menterwolde in the Ommelanden.²¹ There, too, the men and women were physically separated before they were allowed into the Order of Cîteaux. In short, in this period different Benedictine communities in the Frisian lands sought to link up with a well-organized order. Economic motives undoubtedly played an important role in this. Wiesenmüller suggested in addition that the ample privileges of the Cistercians and the Hospitallers exercised a force of attraction on the non-exempt Benedictine communities.²²

Fratres et Sorores: the Composition of the Convents

Bredehorn and the Benedictine double monasteries confront us immediately with the problem of the composition of the Hospitaller convents. Caesarius' story about the time spent in purgatory by a sister who was seduced by a cleric in a grange of her convent, became pregnant and died in childbirth, states that she was a nun in a Frisian cloister of the Benedictine Order, called Bredehorn: 'sanctimonialis in quodam clauastro Frisiae nigri ordinis, quod Bredehorn vocatur'.²³ Because *sanctimonialis* generally indicates a choir-nun,²⁴ it may be concluded from this passage that the house of Bredehorn originally accommodated a community of religious women devoted to the singing of the canonical hours.

The document of 1319 referred to houses and convents (*domus et conventus*) as if to suggest that a conventual community was linked with every house. That *conventus* must be considered as plural in this text is evident not only from the words used, for example, *aliam [literam] habent conventus*, but also from the content. The document was drawn up by five arbitrators to settle a protracted argument about the mutual rights and duties of the Commander of Steinfurt on the one hand and, on

²⁰ Hajo van Lengen, 'Geschichte und Bedeutung des Zisterzienser-Klosters Ihlow', in *Res Frisicae: Beiträge zur ostfriesischen Verfassungs-, Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte* (Aurich, 1978), 86–101: here 87–8.

²¹ A. Willebrands, 'De St.-Benedictus abdij te Menterwold', *Cîteaux in de Nederlanden*, 7 (1956), 215–23: here 215–17.

²² Wiesenmüller, pp. 47–51.

²³ Caesarius von Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. J. Strange, 2 vols (Cologne, 1851), dist. XII, cap. 26, pp. 337–8.

²⁴ W. Nolet and P. C. Boeren, *Kerkelijke instellingen in de middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam, 1951), p. 399.

the other, the commanders and the convents of 20 Hospitaller houses in Friesland.²⁵ The most important decisions of the three clerical and two lay arbitrators were that the Commander of Steinfurt might demand no *exactiones* from the persons whom the Frisian commanders admit into their houses; and that the Commander of Steinfurt should grant to the brothers of each of the houses of St John in Frisia the right to elect their own commander, with the proviso that the election should always follow a canonical procedure involving the *maior pars* of the brothers.

But who made up the population of these convents? At first sight, the assignment to brothers alone of the right to elect a commander creates the assumption that these were communities of men. Judging solely from the appearances of the Frisian Hospitallers and their houses in the surviving texts of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, this might appear to have been the case. The Commandery of Warffum, for example, was represented in Hamburg in 1290 by the *fratres cruce signati de Verfum in Frisia*. More than 100 years later, in 1399, a legal transaction for the commandery was concluded by the *fratres Syeko, commendator, Uteko, cellerarius, totusque conventus in pratis Werphum*.²⁶ In 1456 there were charters issued on behalf of the convent on a similar matter: 'heer Hendrick commelduer, heer Jacob, prior, Popko, kelner, unde gemene oldermans unde brothers des cloesters to Werphum'.²⁷ The title *heer* (sir) was reserved for priests, while the term *oldermans* is a Middle-Dutch translation of the Latin *seniores*.

Yet we know from the visitation reports of 1495 and 1540 of the Priory of *Alamania*²⁸ that there was in fact a house of Hospitaller sisters at Warffum, with many literate sisters who wore the habit and the cross of the Order.²⁹ In 1495 it was said to be a house under the management of a priest who was the commander with two chaplains and a population of about 60 professed nuns who read and sang all the canonical hours. In 1540 the administration was in the hands of a prioress while in the whole chapter there were no less than 80 professed nuns who wore the habit and cross. It was further said of them that, on their admittance, a dowry (*dos*) was paid by

²⁵ Mol, 'Beginnings', pp. 314–16. The remaining Frisian house, Sneek, was subject to Saint Catherine's convent of Utrecht rather than the Commander of Steinfurt.

²⁶ Rijksarchief in Groningen (RAGr), Archief klooster Wiltwerd, inv. no. 5 (reg. 19).

²⁷ RAGr., Archief klooster Selwerd, inv. no. 1 (cartulary), fol. 119.

²⁸ For the background of the Priory of *Alamania* and its relations to the *Balien* of Westphalia and Utrecht, see Anthony Luttrell, 'The Hospitaller Province of *Alamania*', in *Ritterorden und Region – politische, soziale und wirtschaftliche Verbindungen im Mittelalter*, ed. Z. H. Nowak, *Ordines militares colloquia Torunensia Historica*, 8 (Torun, 1995), pp. 21–42.

²⁹ Van Winter, *Sources*, p. 477 (1495): 'Werffung, in quo est preceptor frater Rodulphus the Lage, qui habet secum duos cappellanos ordinis sancti Johannis, et circa sexaginta moniales ordinis sancti Johannis, que legunt et cantant omnes horas canonicas'; pp. 520–21: 'preceptoris the Vorffen, ubi resident virgines moniales ordinis sancti Johannis'. The visitation bull was addressed to the 'religiosa domina Geburgia priorissa dicte preceptorie, cum toto capitullo virginum monialium in numero circa octuaginta, portantes mantellum et crucem dicti ordinis santi Johannis'.

their relatives, according to their means.³⁰ The male element was then represented by the priest-brother Herman van Deventer. Because he was no longer called commander it might appear that he had officially lost this status, yet in many documents dated before 1540 Brother Herman van Deventer was entitled Commander of Warffum, as was his successor.³¹

It is very clear that from approximately 1500 their official documents showed the sisters as increasingly active for their convent, and so to the outside world they appeared to be involved in the decision-making process for legal transactions. Reference to a charter from 1533 will suffice as illustration. In it a legal question was settled by 'Hermannus van Deventer, commenduyr, heer Ebele, curatus tot Stisquart, her Luytken Ennynge, her Otto Moer, heer Henrick Rosendal, ordenspresters, juffer Gebbe Nannynge, priorinne, myt den gemenen convente tot Warffum'.³² Mentioned along with the commander and four priest-brothers, including the pastor of Stitswerd, were the prioress and convent of sisters. In later documents we sometimes find the *suppriorinne* mentioned, with a *kellersche* or female cellarer, and the *senioerschen*, or senior sisters. In short, as time passed, there slowly emerged from the written documents the contours of a complete convent of sisters with a relatively small contingent of priests and *conversi*.

Precisely the same development can be traced for Wijtwerd. In 1304, 1347 and 1402 the community of this commandery was presented to the outside world as consisting of the 'preceptor casu quo commendator et fratres domus hospitalis sancti Johannis Jerosolimitani in Witwerth'.³³ The first mention of sisters came only in 1455, but from the description it can also be surmised that they were part of the convent community. Literally, this involved the commander and the 'ghemene convents broedere unde susterre des huses to Wijtwerth' (all the people of the convent of brothers and sisters of the house of Wijtwerd).³⁴ The visitation report of 1495 presented more details of the composition of the convent. It comprised, along with the commander and a chaplain, 15 women of the Order, *mulieres ordinis sancti Johannis*, who read and sang all the canonical hours.³⁵ In 1537 it was reported of two *jufferen* that they were *geprofessyde susteren*, that is, professed sisters, nuns who had taken full religious vows.³⁶ Three years later, the house of Wijtwerd was said to

³⁰ 'Dixit eciam pro quando recipiuntur virgines, parentes earum solvunt dotem secundum possibilitatem et quod peccunie exponuntur in censibus vel in aliis redditibus': *ibid.*, p. 522.

³¹ Among others, in 1508, 1514, 1531 and 1533. In 1545 he was apparently succeeded as commander by Brother Henricus Rosendael: Noordhuis, pp. 60–61.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³³ *Oorkondenboek Groningen and Drenthe*, nos 223, 403; RAGr., Archief klooster Wijtwerd, inv. no. 2.

³⁴ RAGr, Archief klooster Selwerd, inv. no. 1, fol. 118v (27 November 1455). Compare similar expressions in charters of 1464 and 1482: Noordhuis, p. 31.

³⁵ *Sources*, ed. Van Winter, p. 477.

³⁶ RAGr, Archief klooster Wijtwerd, inv. no. 23 (24 August 1537).

Fig. 7.2 Folio from a Book of Hours written in the vernacular by the Hospitaller sisters of Wijnward, 1505

accommodate religious *virgines* under the direction of a prioress, who worked with Brother Wolter de Gruningen who was *ipsius domus sacerdos et administrator* (priest and administrator of the house).³⁷ We know from other documents that the latter bore the title of commander. The visitors did not mention the number of nuns, only stating that there were fewer than in Warffum. They wore the cross and habit of the Order and were said to follow the same way of life as the sisters of Warffum. They also had the reputation of being chaste and very religious (*caste et religiosissime ... prout est fama*). According to tradition, the last nun of Wijtwerd, which was secularized in 1594, wore a cross on the right shoulder of her habit.³⁸ Also at Wijtwerd the female office holders such as the cellarer were only mentioned in the documents at the end of the sixteenth century.³⁹

If the sisters at Wijtwerd indeed participated fully in the convent in 1455, 1495 and 1540, we can then ask whether they were also implicitly included in earlier lists in which no sisters were mentioned but in which there was reference to otherwise unspecified 'members of the convent in general'. For example, in another charter from 1455 the following persons appeared: *heer* Johannes, commander and priest; *heer* Alle, pastor at Maarhusen; brother Auteko, cellarer; brother Poppeke, master smith; brother Johannes, shoemaker; brother Eppen, grange master at Wijtwerd; *heer* Lubbert, prior; brother Gheert Smit, cellarer; brother Haerd, grange master at Ernstheem, *en de gemene conventualen van Wijtwerd*.⁴⁰ A comparison of this list with the other from the same year shows that only the priests and other male *fratres* are listed by name. Although it is not certain that these nine comprised the total male population, it is conceivable. The nine comprised three priests (a commander, a pastor and a prior), and six lay brothers⁴¹ (two cellarers, two grange masters, a

³⁷ Van Winter, *Sources*, pp. 523, 526. For the rest, a total of 60 people are mentioned as having to be fed daily from the income of the house, apart from guests, passing beggars, soldiers and seasonal labourers who made a claim on the generosity of the sisters. This seems to indicate that the house, along with the community of choir-nuns, the resident servants and a small number of lay brothers and corrodians, also accommodated a number of lay sisters.

³⁸ F. Mijleman, 'Ommelands eer', in A. Pathuis, 'Het handschrift "Ommelands eer" van pater Franciscus Mijleman SJ. Missionaris der Ommelanden', *Archief voor de Geschiedenis van de Katholieke Kerk in Nederland*, 7 (1965), 1–110; here 61.

³⁹ Noordhuis, p. 44.

⁴⁰ RAGr, Archiefklooster Selwerd, inv. no. 1 (cartulary), reg. 149 (24 November 1455).

⁴¹ I am aware that the term lay brother is ambiguous, especially in a military order context, since technically all non-ordained brothers, including knights and sergeants, were lay. I use it here, however, in the sense of *conversus*, as it was applied to the lay brothers in the Cistercian, Premonstratensian and other monastic and canonical orders of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. See Michael Toepfer, *Die Konversen der Zisterzienser* (Berlin, 1983); Louis J. Lekai, *Cistercians. Ideals and Reality* (Kent, Ohio, 1977), chapter XXI, 'Lay-Brotherhood'; and T. J. Gerits, 'Betekenis en spiritualiteit van de lekebroeders in de middeleeuwse observantie van Prémontré', in *Gedenboek Orde van Prémontré 1121–1971* (Averbode, 1971), pp. 179–81. In the Frisian documents the Hospitaller *conversi*, who seem

smith and a shoemaker). It could be assumed that the three priests, the cellarers and the grange masters were listed only because of their official duties in the legal transaction, and that other brothers who did not hold office were omitted, but the inclusion of the smith and the shoemaker indicates that this was not the case. The same approach was adopted in an earlier document from 1430.⁴² First the *heren* (the priests) and brothers (lay brothers) were listed, each by name and office. Then came the group designation 'ende the meyne conventeslude to Wytwerth' (and all the members of the convent of Wijtwerd). In view of the information about the convent populations of 1495 and 1540, one must conclude that, in these cases, only the sisters could have been meant by the term *meyne conventeslude*.

Aside from the prominent presence of lay brothers as shown in these documents from 1430 and 1455, of which more will be said below, the title of *prior* given to *heer* Lubbert in 1455 is intriguing. Was he the leader of a separate conventual community of brothers not identified by name who were, as such, perhaps also responsible for the performance of the choir prayers, or was he simply the senior priest apart from the commander? It is important to ask this question. If the former were the case, Wijtwerd would have been a standard double monastery⁴³ with two separate communities, of which the male community was directed by a prior and the female by a prioress. The second case would be that of a woman's convent under male direction. Although there is no hard evidence to prove it, everything points to the second case. The second time that a prior is mentioned at Wijtwerd, in 1499, the commandery had the same small number of priest-brothers as in 1455: a transaction was concluded by the Commander *heer* Rodolphus Horenken, the Prior Gherardus, *heer* Tamme pastor of Maarhusen, and (brother) Hermen master baker with 'unsen gemenen capittelaren, preesteren, geleerden ende ungeleerden, bynnen ende buten, die stemmen mogen in onse convente';⁴⁴ that is, with all chapter members, priests, educated and uneducated, in residence or living away, who together have the right to vote in our convent. This situation fully corresponds with the inventory of 1495 when, apart from the commander, only one resident priest-brother was found at Wijtwerd. This priest can have been none other than the Prior Gherardus.⁴⁵ *Heer* Tamme was still part of the convent in 1495, true enough, but he was presumably

to have been accepted as fully professed brothers, were mostly called *broeders* or *fratres*, sometimes with the addition *laici*. See, however, a charter of 1320 from the Commandery of Sneek in which five *fratres conversi* are listed by name: Johannes A. Mol, *De Friese huizen van de Duitse Orde. Nes, Steenkerk en Schoten en hun plaats in het middeleeuwse Friese kloosterlandschap* (Leeuwarden, 1991), p. 254.

⁴² RAGr, Archief klooster Wijtwerd, inv. no. 12 (12 March 1430).

⁴³ St. Hilpisch, *Die Doppelklöster: Entstehung und Organisation* (Münster, 1928), p. 1.

⁴⁴ RAGr, Archief klooster Wijtwerd, inv. no. 1 (11 August 1499).

⁴⁵ He is in all likelihood the same as *Prior Gheert* and *heer Gherdt Kremer, stadtholder des conventes toe Wijtwarden*, who occur respectively in the documents in 1504 and 1506: RAGr., Archief klooster Wijtwerd, inv. nos 109, 110.

absent from the roll call at the visitation because, as pastor of Maarhusen, he lived away.⁴⁶

All things considered, we can conclude that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and very likely in the fourteenth century as well, Warffum and Wijtwerd were not standard double monasteries with a male community, but women's convents in which choir prayer was sung by communities of nuns. These women's convents were under male leadership and had a contingent of lay brothers that gradually declined in number before the end of the fifteenth century.

Convents of Lay Sisters⁴⁷

Thus far, the picture is relatively clear. In 1495 and earlier there were at least two Hospitaller convents of choir-nuns in Frisia. They performed the same tasks as the convent of sisters of the Teutonic Order at Steenkerk in Westerlauwers Friesland, which as an *onderconvent* or sub-convent formed a unity with the neighbouring men's house of the same Order in Nes, and which, in about 1375, accommodated learned nuns of 'good parentage who could sing and recite the seven canonical hours and who prayed for the salvation of the good, that is well-to-do, deceased in the land'.⁴⁸ Steenkerk closed in the first half of the fifteenth century due to its poverty.

'Singing nuns' seem to have been present in the Hospitaller house of Sneek.⁴⁹ There is at least one persuasive indication that in the early-fifteenth century the convent on the *Mons S. Johannis* of Sneek housed a praying community of sisters along with a large number of priest-brothers and lay brothers. A 1432 charter spoke of a *soror ordinis Sancti Johannis*, Eelke Mauringhe by name, who lived in the *monasterium* of the Order of Saint John in Sneek and for whom a parcel of land of some size was transferred to this monastery.⁵⁰ The family of Sister Eelke challenged the Hospitallers over the ownership of that land, so that three village pastors from

⁴⁶ We find the same composition on 19 July 1510, when Wijtwerd was represented by *heer* Wolter upten Dijck, commander, *heer* Johan Snelle, priest, *heer* Lambert Hagedoerne, brother Herman *baker* and in addition by the convent members at Wijtwerd: RAGr., Archief Hoge Justitiekamer, reg. 55.

⁴⁷ 'Lay sister' is, like 'lay brother', a term with different meanings. As will become clear in the following pages, I use the term here to designate a *conversa* or sister who did not master Latin, often – but not always – as a result of an entry at later age, and who could not participate in choir prayer. Lay sisters therefore have to be distinguished from choir-nuns. We meet them in all monastical and canonical orders, mostly entrusted with domestic tasks, more or less as a female counterpart, although not as numerous, of the *conversi*. As for the 'classical' women's monasteries, there is not much information available on their status, social background, function and numbers.

⁴⁸ For further details of this convent, see Mol, *Friese huizen*, pp. 66–70.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Compare however Tommasi, Chapter 3, p. 83.

⁵⁰ Mol, *Friese huizen*, pp. 256–7.

the area had to serve as arbitrators to rule in the case. That it was not Eelke's intention to live in a men's monastery as a *consoror* or *familiaris* but actually to serve God as a nun in a women's community can be deduced not only from the size of her *dos* but also from her statement to the arbitrators that she wanted to renounce the world and stay in the *monasterium*, and thereto dedicated her goods, body and soul to God and Saint John. At that time the community of sisters at Sneek could no longer have been very large. By 1495 there were no longer any nuns at Sneek, so it may be assumed that the brothers had allowed the sisters' convent to die out in the interval by refusing admission to any new novices.

That the 1495 visitation report no longer mentioned sisters in the Frisian houses, except at Warffum and Wijtwerd, should thus not trouble us with regard to Sneek. It does however create a problem for most of the other Hospitaller settlements in Frisia. There are many reports about Frisian *sorores* that do not tally with the inventory made in 1495. Going through them briefly in chronological order, we come first to Abbingwehr in Emsingo, which in 1540 was called the richest house of the Order in East Friesland.⁵¹ In 1402 brothers and sisters of Saint John were mentioned there.⁵² That the sisters there were considered as conventuals is evident from a document of ten years later, in which a local nobleman transferred a piece of meadow to the commander and conventuals of Abbingwehr, with the stipulation that the commander and the brothers and sisters could rule that land henceforth wholly as their own property.⁵³ It is also clear from various other fifteenth-century documents that these sisters were among the conventuals of the house.⁵⁴ As we will see further on, sisters lived in Abbingwehr until the dissolution of the house by the Count of East Friesland in 1528. They were not led by a prioress but by a *suster moder*,⁵⁵ a *mater* or mother, in precisely the same way as at the sisters' convent at Steenkerk, belonging to the Teutonic Order in Westerlauwers Friesland, which had been reorganized in 1491 and had accommodated only lay sisters since that time.⁵⁶

⁵¹ *Melior aliarum domorum*: Schöningh, p. 125.

⁵² *Den broderen ende zusteren to Abbingeweer of zunte Johannis leven: Ostfriesisches Urkundenbuch*, 1, no. 188.

⁵³ 'dans ex hoc prefatie fratribus et sororibus et domino Nyttardo commendatori hereditatem possidendi, vendendi seu alienandi ... plenariam potestatem': *ibid.*, no. 232 (11 November 1412).

⁵⁴ See, for example, the details of the goods-lists of 1437 from the grange of Miedelsum, naming various parcels of land that were contributed by named sisters: *ibid.*, no. 469; and the statement of 'soror Encka the Grimassum, conventualis in loco prenominato', in 1457: *ibid.*, no. 674.

⁵⁵ Named in a 1526 letter of complaint in which a local pastor stated that 'broder Sunke and the suster moder met dy andere conventiskynderen' were well aware that he had enriched the convent with a considerable number of gifts in money and kind: Staatsarchiv Aurich, Rep. 1, no. 773.

⁵⁶ Mol, *Friese huizen*, pp. 138–40.

Another early report of sisters in a Frisian Hospitaller house related to the Commandery of Strückhausen, in the Bremen Stadland on the west bank of the Weser estuary. In 1423 the Hospitaller priest-brother Hilderyck made a statement on his deathbed regarding the foundation of a convent.⁵⁷ Before a large number of witnesses he said that, on his initiative and by permission of the parishioners, a certain property complex together with the ruined parish church of Strückhausen⁵⁸ should be transferred to God, Mary and Saint John the Baptist for use by and maintenance of 'synen olden closterbroderen unde susteren ... de dat cruce dregen sunte Johannes ordens to Struckhusen, to godesdenste unde sunte Johannes unde to erer vodynge unde kledynge unde allen armen luden de ere alemysen begherende synt' (his former cloister brothers and sisters ... who bore the cross of the Order of Saint John at Strückhausen, so that they could serve God and Saint John and to provide their food and clothing and enable them to give alms to the poor). He stipulated that this property should forever remain in the hands of the *kloester* of Saint John's Order in Strückhausen. In other words, Strückhausen was considered by its founder as a convent, in which religious practice was maintained by brothers and sisters and where alms were provided for many poor people.

Similar fifteenth-century statements exist about brothers and sisters as residents of a convent at Havermönken (alias *thon Hovon*), Heiselhusen, Jemgum and Muhde. The first-mentioned house was said in 1443 to be a convent. Notably, it was not run by a commander but by a *provest* or *prepositus* named Volquerd. He transferred, with the permission of 'alle unser brodere unde susters thon Hovon' (all our brothers and sisters of Havermönken) a property of the convent to the Count of Oldenburg in order to obtain better protection for their house, in return for an annual interest in butter. The transaction was validated with the seal of the 'domus sancti Johannis de Hovon' (the house of Saint John of Havermönken).⁵⁹ Heiselhusen, on the west coast of Emsingo, was originally a grange of the Commandery of Goldhoorn at Finsterwolde in Groningerland. The settlement was declared to be an independent house by the *Balier* of Westphalia in 1446 at a meeting of all Frisian commanders. The intention was to put an end to discord between the commander and the convent of Goldhoorn on the one hand and, on the other, 'her Acke ende de ghemene broders ende susters des huses to Heseldahusen' (Father Acke and all the brothers and sisters of the house of Heiselhusen).⁶⁰ If Heiselhusen, originally a dependent house, already had a mixed population, then it may be assumed that this was the case at the motherhouse of Goldhoorn as well. For Jemgum, a 1477 report on the ownership of

⁵⁷ *Oldenburgisches Urkundenbuch*, ed. D. Kohl and G. Rütthning, 8 vols (Oldenburg, 1914–35), 2, no. 672.

⁵⁸ The church, according to a report in 1396, had indeed originally been dedicated to Saint John. It is not clear whether Hospitallers had been connected with it before its destruction in relation to a feud: *ibid.*, 2, no. 516.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 783.

⁶⁰ *Ostfriesisches Urkundenbuch*, 1, no. 573.

a certain parcel of land indicated that it was given to the convent by a certain sister Oeka, who had evidently been admitted there as a widow at a late age.⁶¹ At the time of the visitation of 1540 the building complex of the Commandery of Jemgum was uninhabitable due to war damage. The commander was traditionally obliged to maintain two other priests and six sisters, but there was no longer a commander. Only a priest-brother and two elderly sisters lived at the Jemgum grange of Holtgaste with its related parish church.⁶²

In Muhde on the Ems, which was named as a convent in so many words in 1439,⁶³ there were both brothers and sisters in 1490, when the priest-brother Herman Grone of Muhde left not only a bequest for requiem masses to be read by his fellow brothers but two tuns of Hamburg beer for the 'sisters and brothers' of the house as well. According to the visitation report of 1540, Muhde was usually inhabited by a commander, two priest-brothers and six sisters.⁶⁴ The visitors found only one priest and five old sisters with the commander. This community was assisted by ten labourers on the farm and six maids to take care of the sisters in the house.

For the other houses, the earliest information about the presence of sisters dates from the sixteenth century. Between 12 and 15 sisters were said to have lived in the Commandery of Dünebroek before the Reformation.⁶⁵ In a document of 1510 the commander, brothers and sisters of Dünebroek declared that they had always been good and loyal subjects of the Bishop of Münster and always would be. In 1540 eight old sisters still lived there along with the commander. They were assisted by four maids in the house and four labourers on the farm.⁶⁶ During the visitation the commander said that their number had once been higher. We may assume from this that the house of Oosterwiltwerd in Groningen, which had split off from Dünebroek in the fifteenth century, had been incorporated into the commandery of Oosterwierum in 1476 and had then been designated as both a *klooster* and convent, had also accommodated sisters.⁶⁷

Although the house of Oosterwierum was on record in 1495 as a commandery with six priest-brothers in addition to the priest commander, it did indeed harbour sisters in the decades thereafter.⁶⁸ In 1528 at least two sisters who had fled from Abbingwehr lived there: Wibbe Molners and Margarete Hinrekink.⁶⁹ The visitors of 1540 established that a priest-commander resided in Oosterwierum with 12

⁶¹ Ibid., no. 897.

⁶² 'Item habet allodium sive grangiam Holtgast ... in qua continue residet unus sacerdos cum duabus antiquis sororibus': Schöningh, p. 122.

⁶³ *Ostfriesisches Urkundenbuch*, 1, no. 508.

⁶⁴ Schöningh, p. 120.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 36.

⁶⁶ 'Item habet octo antiquas moniales et antiquo tempo erant plures': *ibid.*, p. 116.

⁶⁷ Noordhuis, pp. 70, 115–16.

⁶⁸ *Sources*, ed. Van Winter, p. 477.

⁶⁹ Noordhuis, p. 56.

sisters who were not obliged to sing the canonical hours because they were not literate.⁷⁰ That these lay sisters were considered as members of the convent can be deduced from a document of 1516 in which Oosterwierum was represented by the Commander *heer* Clawes, the Prior *heer* Johan of Renen, the priest-brother Geert van den Dam and further on the *preesteren ende gemene conventualen*. The priest-brothers were listed alongside the conventuals, who obviously included other unnamed brothers; otherwise it would have made little sense to report them separately.

To complete the picture, there are data about Bokelesch and Hasselt. In Saterland in 1549, Bokelesch had a composition of personnel similar to that at Dünebroek.⁷¹ The commander and priest-brother *heer* Gheerdt admitted that his small convent was inhabited only by himself, a lay brother and ten *sorores*: Rycke, Gheeske, yet another Rycke, Hylle, Wybbecke, the physically handicapped (*pauper*) Talcke, Styne, Aleke, Anna and Wobbecke. The two brothers and ten sisters were served by nine labourers and maids, likewise named by name. 'We are all poor, and servants of all the poor', said the commander in a pious cry of distress at the conclusion of the registration, in order to prevent his house from being too heavily taxed by the Count of Oldenburg. Times were hard, of course, in the middle of the sixteenth century. This certainly applied also to the Commanderies of Hasselt and Burmönken, which were confiscated in 1528 and leased by Count Enno II of East Friesland to tenant farmers. According to the eyewitness testimony in 1566 of an old sister from Abbingwehr, Commander Berend Buther of Hasselt at that time married his concubine, a convent sister who was under his protection. Presumably, the exiled *begine* (beguine) of Hasselt, who received a sum of 12 Emden guilders in 1545 from Countess Anna in order to return to her fatherland, was the last member of the convent.⁷²

From all this evidence it appears that, apart from Warffum, Wijtwerd and possibly Sneek, most Frisian houses contained a number of priest-brothers and lay brothers, alongside a female population of either sisters or others whose status was not immediately apparent from their descriptions. For them only the designations *sorores*, *virgines* or *moniales* have come down to us. Only in relation to the sisters of Oosterwierum was it stated, in 1540, that they were unlettered lay sisters (*sorores laicae, indocte*). For some we know that they wore a cross on their habit. Regarding their material contributions we can clearly read between the lines that an admission gift was expected of them. In many sources, the institutions where they stayed were called monasteries or convents, each with a community of conventuals. Many texts pointed out that these sisters were considered to be part of the community by people

⁷⁰ 'Ubi residet comendator sacerdos cum duodecim virginibus monialibus laicis, quia non tenentur divina officia cantare horas canonicas, nam sunt indocte': *Sources*, ed. Van Winter, p. 531.

⁷¹ *Oldenburgisches Urkundenbuch*, 4, no. 873.

⁷² Schönningh, pp. 52–3.

in the area with whom their superiors concluded legal transactions. However, the foreign visitors who in 1495 gathered information about the Frisian houses in Steinfurt on behalf of the Order, but without paying a personal visit to them, did *not* consider such sisters, who did not have a command of Latin and so were unable to sing the canonical hours, to be fully professed members of the Order, and therefore left them unreported. The visitors evidently did this with the approval of the Commander of Steinfurt. In their eyes, the lay sisters did not have a fully professed status and were indeed not permitted such status. The report gives the impression that, outside Warffum and Wijtwerd, Hospitaller life in Frisia was a man's affair and was intended to stay that way.

The Reformation of Oosterwierum (1480) and Abbingwehr (1499)

The notion of masculine predominance did not penetrate deeply into the circle of Frisian Hospitaller houses until the years 1480–82 when the Commandery of Oosterwierum was subject to a *reformatio* or reorganization on the orders of the *Balier* of Westphalia and with the approval of the Frisian commanders.⁷³ A few informative documents about this *reformatio* have been preserved. The most important is an undated charter in which Bernt von Schedelich, *Balier* of Westphalia and Commander of Steinfurt, together with the convent of Steinfurt, laid down that the house of Oosterwierum would be reformed so that its residents would follow the rules and statutes of the Order in the same way as the houses in Strasbourg and Cologne. The first and most important consequence would be that 'the professed virgins and women of the Order living there at the moment will be sent to another house and that Oosterwierum will be a house of men of the Order from now on'.⁷⁴ The *Balier* could not call on priest-brothers from his own circle of commanderies to implement this proposal, so the management of the operation was put in the hands of Arnd Zekelhorn, pastor of the village of Haren situated just south of the city of Groningen. This outsider would be able to wear the habit of Saint John and would be admitted into the Order. He also had to assure himself of the support of two priest-brothers with experience in observing the way of life that was now to be enforced, who should preferably come from Cologne. This appears in a confirmation charter of 18 July 1486 drawn up by Schedelich's successor, Herbolt von Snetlage, evidently to boost the reorganization then underway. That the original instructions should be dated around 1480 can be deduced from two other documents. The first is a surviving letter, dated 25 May 1481, from the burgomasters and council of the city

⁷³ On the following, see also Noordhuis, pp. 47–50.

⁷⁴ J. G. C. Joosting, 'Onuitgegeven pauselijke bullen verleend aan de Hospitaalbroeders van den H. Johannes te Jeruzalem', *Nederlandsch Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, new series, 1 (1902), 275–313: here 309–12.

of Groningen to their colleagues of Cologne, in which they ask them to ensure that two persons from the Hospitaller convent of Cologne are sent to the Hospitaller houses in the Ommelanden in Groningen 'to teach them the reformation'.⁷⁵ The second document is a transumpt or copy of authentic copies of a number of papal bulls in favour of the Order of Saint John. It was preserved in the archive of Oosterwierum but had been written in Cologne and, at the request of Hupert von Heinsberg, Commander of Cologne, it was confirmed on 15 June 1480 in his own Commandery of Cologne by the deacon of Saint Martin's church of Kerpen in the presence of several witnesses.⁷⁶ The transumpt shows every sign of having been especially composed to be of service in the reform work of the two above-mentioned brothers who were sent from Cologne to Oosterwierum. This impression appears to be confirmed by the fact that the transumpt is provided with many marginalia such as *perutilis* (very useful) and *de sororibus nostri ordinis vide Sixtum* (see Sixtus on the sisters of our Order). In the latter case, the marginal note refers to a text included in the transumpt of a bull of Sixtus IV, dated 23 July 1475, in which this pope gave permission to a certain Alessandra de Alfani of Florence to form the Hospitaller hermitages founded in her native city into a monastery and also to found men's and women's convents in the Florentine region. This bull was also the most recent in the collection. Evidently the brothers, leaving Cologne for Oosterwierum and having previously had little to do with sisters of the Order, wanted to use this document to familiarize themselves with the measures they would have to take in regard to the Frisian sisters.

Little was said about the existing situation in Oosterwierum and about what should be improved there, but a letter of 22 September 1482 written by Bernt von Schedelich, *Balier* of Westphalia and Commander of Steinfurt, informed the Commander and brothers of Oosterwierum, evidently already reformed, how they should deal with lay brothers and lay sisters from then on.⁷⁷ He told them that in the recent past at the regional chapter of the Frisian houses in Jemgum, and with the support of all the commanders of Frisia, he had decided that the Frisian commanders should no longer admit lay brothers or lay sisters to the Order by granting them the cross; that lay brothers and lay sisters should no longer profess by taking the vows of the order (*professionem ordinis nostri*) but should make only vows of chastity and obedience, and that lay conventuals must wear a habit distinguishing them from the fully professed conventuals.⁷⁸ Thenceforth they should live under a separate statute

⁷⁵ *Omme sie die reformacien to leren*: Stadtarchiv Köln, Briefeängänge 25 May 1481.

⁷⁶ RAGr, Archief klooster Oosterwierum, inv. no. 1.

⁷⁷ Joosting, 312–13.

⁷⁸ 'Statuimus et ordinavimus, quod extunc et inantea nulles commendatorum terre Frisie aliquos vel aliquas reciperet in fratres vel sorores laicos vel laicas, eis ordinem et crucem conferendo; sed si quos vel quas reciperet, eos vel eas reciperet sub habitus distincto ad obedienciam et castitatem non ad professionem ordinis nostri ... Intelleximus preterea quandam consuetudinem ymmo pocius corruptelam et omni juri contrariam omnique

of obedience, in chastity. Further, lay brothers could no longer be admitted to the house chapter together with the *fratres et sacerdotes et clerici* with the right to vote; they should not play any role in leadership and must always be obedient. The *Balier* did write that he would not forbid the chapter members from inviting lay brothers to their meetings in order to obtain advice from them or to charge them with a particular task. Also instructive was his concluding announcement that he had taken all these measures because he wanted with all his heart to promote the reformation of the commandery, and also because the abbots of the nearby Abbeys of Aduard (Cistercian), Rottum (Benedictine), Termunten (Cistercian) and Wittewierum (Premonstratensian) had likewise decided no longer to admit lay conventuals to their chapters.

It follows that the Frisian commanders had previously admitted both lay brothers and lay sisters into the Order, allowed them to take the Hospitallers' vows and given them the cross. Until 1480 the Frisian *fratres laici* and *sorores laicae* had been considered fully professed members of the Order of Saint John by their own community and by the people in the surrounding area. It can also be deduced that the lay brothers had had access to the chapter of their house and were thus involved in important policy decisions that had to be taken, for example in the choice of a new commander. That this was actually the case is evident from the already-mentioned forms of representation for Warffum and Wijtwerd, by which various lay brothers were appointed, along with the priest commander and several other priest-brothers, to positions such as cellarer and grange master and also as ordinary craftsmen.

The prominent position the lay brothers held was related to their significance in the convent economy, which until the middle of the fifteenth century was based on self-sufficiency. The running of the agrarian economy in virtually all Frisian convents rested with the lay brothers. The position of the Frisian Hospitallers and the brothers of the Teutonic Order was in this respect no different from that of the Frisian Benedictines, Augustinian canons, Cistercians and Premonstratensians. If the convents of the other orders could offer lay brothers the status of professed members, then those of the military and hospital orders could not be left behind. In the Hospitaller houses the equivalent of *monachi conversi* must have played such a leading role that some of their convents even took their names from them: *Burmönken*, *Tjüchermönken*, *Havermönken*, *Warfumer monniken* and *Oosterwierumer monniken*. They were after all the people who had long projected the image of the house to the outside world. In this, they served the convent not only with their managerial capacities and manpower but also by enriching it through gifts on their admission to the Order. This was also one more reason for them to claim the

reformacioni dissonam, quod fratres laici, quibus maneat necessitas obsequendi non auctoritas imperandi, admittantur ad capitulum, hebetes vocem in capitulo ut ceteri fratres et sacerdotes et clerici; quam quidem consuetudinem penitus et omnino reprobamus, cassamus et annullamus': *ibid.*

right to vote.⁷⁹ It was only in the course of the fifteenth century, when the economic structure of many convents began to change, for example through the increased leasing of convent lands, and when among diverse orders there was developing a reform movement which showed itself to be wary of large and thus undisciplined lay brother populations, that the authorities within these orders wished to restrict the rights of lay brothers. Thus it was no coincidence that in 1482 the *Balier* referred to similar measures that had already been taken by colleagues in neighbouring convents or other orders.

The fact that after about 1480, fewer and fewer lay brothers were named in the documents, could lead us to deduce that after 1480 the exclusion of lay brothers from the chapters of Hospitaller houses in Frisia was taken seriously, which reduced their status from fully professed members of the Order to that of associated *fratres* and *sorores* with only the duty of obedience. They were not entirely absent, but did not come to the fore as often as they had during the first half of the fifteenth century. In any case, it is known that one lay brother from Wijtwerd took no vows on his admission in 1489 except the vow of obedience.⁸⁰

No further report has survived to illustrate the success of the reform measures at Oosterwierum. That the Order's provincial leadership was serious about transforming the Frisian houses with their pluriform population of priest-brothers, lay brothers, choir-nuns and lay sisters into convents in which prayer was provided by priest-brothers or nuns only, can be deduced from a reorganization decision relating to the Commandery of Abbingwehr. On 10 November 1499 Herbolt von Snetlage, Commander of Steinfurt, still serving as *Balier*, and the chapter of his house decided to incorporate the Order's houses of Hasselt, Hesel and Boekzetel in East Friesland into the house of Abbingwehr. He did this specifically to strengthen the latter house economically so that, from then on, the Commander of Abbingwehr 'sal holden vijf ordensheren tot eme, oer ghetyde tsamen indt koer tho lezene alle daghe, ende dessulven ghelyken mysze, vesper und complete tho syghene dagelix' (will keep five priests of the Order by him, who shall daily read their hours together in the choir and likewise sing mass, vespers and complines every day).⁸¹ A step in this direction had already been made before 1493 through the incorporation of the Commandery of Heiselhusen into the Commandery of Abbingwehr. From that date Heiselhusen contributed towards the material support of Abbingwehr as a subsidiary house available for lease.⁸²

⁷⁹ Noordhuis, p. 69; Mol, *Friese huizen*, pp. 85–7.

⁸⁰ Noordhuis, p. 45. For the definition of 'lay brother' used in this chapter, see above, p. 189, n. 41.

⁸¹ *Ostfriesisches Urkundenbuch*, 2, no. 1646.

⁸² Heiselhusen is mentioned as a leased-out grange in a charter of 1493: Schöningh, p. 40.

Female Votes in the Chapter Before and After 1480

Nevertheless, the lay sisters did not disappear from Oosterwierum, Abbingwehr or the former commanderies that were incorporated at Abbingwehr. In 1495, true enough, the two houses had a small community of four to five priest-brothers who had to sing the canonical hours and who also, without lay brothers, thenceforth formed the house chapter. These priest-brothers were allowed to elect a new commander after one had died.⁸³ Each house, however, still accommodated a community of sisters. And it still cost the chapters of these houses some effort not to present these sisters as fully-professed conventuals to the outside Frisian world. In a document of 1516 relating to Oosterwierum there appeared, along with the commander, prior and one of the priest-brothers mentioned by name, a reference to the 'preesteren ende gemene conventuales de Oosterwerum sunte Johannes orden' (priests and all the members of the convent of Saint John's Order at Oosterwierum). Whether or not the sisters were represented in the house's chapter is a separate question. Evidently, lay sisters could form part of the convent without having a full vote in the chapter. It is possible that they were consulted in Oosterwierum over the choice of a new commander but only priest-brothers were eligible to vote. On the other hand, in the nunnery of Wijtwerd in this period the fully-professed or choir sisters did have the right to vote, as can be surmised from a reference in the document of 1499 to the ordinary chapter members who had the right to vote in the convent. The situation was made entirely clear in a document of 1517 concerning the election of a commander. The choice was then in the hands of a resident priest-brother, a priest-brother alias the pastor of Maarhusen, who lived outside the house, the already-named *conversus* Brother Hermen baker, and further 'den gemeynen conventsluyden des hilligen huses Wijtwerd' (all the members of the convent of the holy house of Wijtwerd).⁸⁴ As apart from the three brothers mentioned there were only professed sisters in the convent, the group of *conventsluyden* must have been the professed sisters. This means that in 1517 the professed singing nuns played a part in deciding who would be commander. Without doubt, they already had the right to elect their own prioress.

Whether they had had that right for a long time is difficult to say. The fact that the sisters of Warffum and Wijtwerd appear only in the representative councils of their convent after about 1450 suggests that an emancipation process was under way. There is no further evidence as to whether the sisters of the Hospitaller houses in Frisia had a voice in the choice of a new male superior. The documents of the Teutonic Order's houses of Nes and Schoten in Westerlauwers Friesland, which likewise had choir-nuns and lay sisters among their conventuals, suggest that the *sorores* there could exercise no direct influence on the election, except perhaps

⁸³ 'Et moriente comandatore sacerdotes conventuales alium eligunt, quem baiulivus confirmat': 1540: *Sources*, ed. Van Winter, p. 531.

⁸⁴ RAGr., Archief klooster Wijtwerd, inv. no. 115.

through their *confessor*.⁸⁵ It was exclusively the brothers who elected the new commander or prior.

But in the comparable double monasteries or nunneries of other orders nearby the picture was varied. Fifteen kilometres south of Warffum in the Benedictine double monastery of Selwerd, which had a composition virtually identical to that of Warffum and Wijtwerd, the choir-nuns had been involved in the choice of a new abbot at least since 1318.⁸⁶ On 2 June of that year, the prior, cellarers and other officeholders as well as the whole convent took part in electing a new abbot, whom they then presented to the Bishop of Münster for confirmation. The election took place *per formam compromissi*, that is, in steps, by proxy. Named among the 14 convent members involved along with the prior and five lay brother officeholders (*celerarii nostri et conversi*) were the Prioress Hildware, the sub-prioress Teta and the *sorores et moniales nostre* Ava, Frouweka, Renilde, Walgerde and Ghertrude.⁸⁷

More than a century later, at the Premonstratensian double monastery of Langen in Emsingo, not far from Abbingwehr, the sisters were among the voters in the election of a new *prepositus*.⁸⁸ Although he accepted this call to service, the elected party, until then pastor of the nearby parish of Twixlum, was unhappy with his election because he feared the unrest of the female convent members.⁸⁹ In the Premonstratensian women's Priory of Monnikebajum in Westerlauwers Friesland, which had originally formed a single house with the men's Abbey of Mariëndal at Lidlum, the nuns had only recently won the right to vote. In a papal bull of 1464 it was explicitly confirmed that the prioress and her convent had obtained the right from the former Abbot of Lidlum to elect a new prior themselves from among the canons of Lidlum.⁹⁰ In both Langen and Monnikebajum this involved 'singing

⁸⁵ Mol, *Friese huizen*, pp. 67, 89. The documents cited here date from 1350, 1395, 1397 and 1404. What is remarkable is that in 1350 the brothers of Schoten, subordinate to Nes, were permitted to admit people of both sexes to the convent with the permission of, among others, their *familia* as well as the guardians of their own convent (*discreti advocati*).

⁸⁶ *Oorkondenboek of Groningen and Drenthe*, 1, no. 261. Compare Renée Nip, 'De bewoners van het Groninger benedictijnerklooster Selwerd', *Driemaandelijks Bladen*, 41 (1989), 33–58: here 38.

⁸⁷ 'Quibus ab omnibus nobis de capitulo et conventu fuit collata potestas, ut de novo abbate deberent monasterio concorditer providere': *ibid.*

⁸⁸ 'Notum sit ... quod ... conventuales utriusque sexus in Langhen uniformiter elegerunt venerabilem dominum Aytatum the Hlert, curatum in Twixlum, in eorum prelatum et pastorem': *Ostfriesisches Urkundenbuch*, 1, no. 621 (c. 1450).

⁸⁹ According to a chronicle-like note in the cartulary of Langen, brother Aytatus informed the abbot of Prémontré that he had accepted his election with reluctance: 'eo quod mulier et quies nunquam habitant sub eodem tectu': *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Repertorium Germanicum, Verzeichnis: VIII: Verzeichnis der in den Registern und Kameralakten Pius' II vorkommenden Personen, Kirchen und Orte des Deutschen Reiches, seiner Diözesen und Territorien 1458–1464*; 1: Text (Berlin 1993), no. 374. Possibly emancipation here grew out of the increasing economic independence of the priory: when the direct exploitation of the convent's lands with the help of lay brothers of the men's abbey was

nuns'. When the nuns of Warffum and Wijtwerd acquired similar rights at the same time or a little later, it is probable that the same had not yet occurred for the *sorores laicae* in the other Hospitaller houses. The 1482 reformation document for Oosterwierum said only that the lay brothers had previously been admitted to the chapter; the lay sisters were not mentioned.

Low-Budget Convents for Women?

The nunneries of Warffum and Wijtwerd aside, the many convents of lay sisters discussed above do not fit well in the existing picture of the Hospitaller women's convents. The well-known houses of Sigena (Aragon), Pisa and Perugia (Italy), Beaulieu and Fieux (France) and Buckland (England), have generally been regarded by scholars as convents of enclosed nuns. These sisters could not be female counterparts of the knights and sergeant-brothers who populated the Order's commanderies insofar as the men's main task was to support the war in the Holy Land and, later, on Rhodes with manpower, although both male and female houses supported the war with money. In organization and structure the sisters' houses scarcely differed from the countless traditional women's convents populated elsewhere by Benedictine, Cistercian, Premonstratensian, Augustinian and Dominican nuns. At best, one could say that they came under a somewhat more moderate regime. Most nuns entered at an early age, had to pay a dowry and were trained to perform their liturgical task. They usually had a Hospitaller *confessor* and were assisted by Hospitaller brothers in managing secular matters. In a certain sense, their connection with the Order of Saint John was, however, a coincidence. It was often royal and noble initiatives as well as sizeable material endowments that had decided the Hospitaller brothers to create space for these houses. Perhaps because the original Rule did not provide for the admission of choir sisters, additional regulations were drawn up for one of the first of these women's convents, that at Sigena. These regulations showed many similarities with that of the canonesses regular of Saint Augustine.

Warffum and Wijtwerd may have been modelled on Sigena (although this is doubtful), but in any case a different structure had to be found for the other Frisian communities. As was clear from the reform decision of 1480, the status of *donat* was to apply to the lay sisters resident there: they had to lead a chaste and devout life, wear a suitable habit and take a vow of obedience to the commander, but they did not have to profess the *tria substantialia* or the eternal vows. Although this did not make them religious persons in canon law, in daily life they themselves and everyone around them considered them to be such. The success of this practice, measured by

abandoned in favour of leasing them out, the property was divided between Lidlum and Monnikebajum.

the number of their convents, is intriguing. How could the Order of Saint John admit so many lay sisters into its midst, and why did so many women in Frisia choose a life as lay sister with the Hospitallers?

The first element that needs explaining is the cloister-like character of the Frisian military order settlements in general. This was closely bound up with the fact that no knightly culture developed in Frisian lands; that can, in turn, be explained by the fact that warriors in these fertile but boggy districts were not able to fight on horseback in heavy armour.⁹¹ Furthermore, none of the foreign lords who had obtained comital rights to the Frisian lands in the twelfth and thirteen centuries, that is the Bishops of Utrecht, Münster and Bremen, and the Counts of Holland and Oldenburg, had succeeded in converting these into a territorial dominion. As no feudalization occurred, the indigenous elite was able to organize a kind of semi-communal administration in each region or *terra*.⁹² For the allodial nobles there was therefore no reason to embrace the knightly ideal of vassalage. They were proud of the freedom that they believed Charlemagne had bestowed upon them as reward for defending the empire against the Normans.⁹³ Thus, in about 1240, the well-known encyclopaedist Bartholomaeus Anglicus could write of the Frisians that they were not subject to a lord and rejected *militares dignitates*, knightly office, by definition. There were therefore no knights in the Frisian commanderies.

The second consideration is that the Hospitaller houses that housed lay sisters, that is *conversae*, as well as brothers were the last of the cloister-like institutions that arose in the countryside of Frisia in the thirteenth century.⁹⁴ The wave of foundations of indigenous monasteries was sparked in the middle of the twelfth century. With the support of the Frisian elite, reform-minded Benedictines, Augustinian canons, Cistercians and Premonstratensians had added one convent after another to their filiation. Among them, the first and oldest convents were the best endowed. They arose in the middle of the old districts along the coast and there they held fertile domains on the clay soil. The later and newer houses were founded on the edges of these regions or in the peat districts in the south and had to be satisfied with less rich estates. Due to the Frisians' enthusiasm for participating in the crusades, which was strongly encouraged by the leaders of the many newly founded monasteries, the Hospital and the Teutonic Order played a successful part

⁹¹ Johannes A. Mol, 'Frisian Fighters and the Crusade', *Crusades*, 1 (2002), 89–110; on the non-knightly situation in Frisia and its impact on the Hospitallers, see Mol, *Friese huizen*, pp. 89–91.

⁹² This situation would continue into the second half of the fifteenth century, when the Frisian lands were gobbled up one after the other by neighbouring territorial states.

⁹³ Almuth Salomon, *Friesische Geschichtsbilder: Historische ereignisse und kollektives Gedächtnis im mittelalterlichen Friesland* (Aurich, 2000).

⁹⁴ Johannes A. Mol, 'Bemiddelaars voor het Hiernamaals. Kloosterlingen in middeleeuws Frisia', in *Hel en hemel. De middeleeuwen in het Noorden*, ed. E. Knol et al. (Groningen, 2001), pp. 152–65: here pp. 153–5.

in this wave of foundations. But the best places were already occupied, and so most of their houses were located in the less fertile reclaimed areas in the peat and sand districts. Only Sneek, Warffum and Wijtwerd had favourable agricultural locations; in about 1500 they had the most numerous and the finest estates of all the Frisian Hospitaller settlements.

These relatively rich convents were therefore populated by choir-nuns while the poorer houses accommodated mainly lay sisters along with a few priest-brothers and lay brothers. The consequence of this pattern for the development of the female religious life in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries has not yet been well analysed. 'As abundant as the stars in the heavens' wrote the chronicler Jacques de Vitry (1160–1240) of the Cistercian nunneries that arose in his time.⁹⁵ He could have written the same about the women's convents of the Benedictines, Premonstratensians and Dominicans. Since about 1100 virtually all the orders had seen a large influx of women into their convents. The travelling preachers of that time, propagating their concept of the *vita apostolica* (the apostolic life), generated at least as much religious enthusiasm among women as among men. Until recently this female influx was studied separately, order by order, which could create the impression that the orders were confronted with the problem of the *cura monialium* one after the other. It is now quite clear that this was not the case; they faced this influx at the same time and their reactions were in many ways similar.

One similarity lay in the conditions imposed on women's convents before they were admitted to their respective orders. In the initial phase these communities, which very often developed in the neighbourhood of, and in communication with, a recently founded men's monastery, did not yet consist of educated nuns capable of being well trained. Most aspirant sisters already had a worldly life behind them. They were widows or they were still married but had the permission of their husband to enter the convent. They were *conversae* in the original sense of the word, women converted at a later age who, as such, could normally only be admitted as a lay sister. The first reaction of the orders, particularly the new or reform-minded among them, was to admit such *conversae* in large numbers, whether these women were rich or poor, and to found convents for them alongside and under the protection of the men's abbeys. In the long term, these orders always aimed at making convents of choir-sisters that could be economically independent. This aim was strongly encouraged by the higher church authorities who, fearing the problems that could arise from an uncontrolled multiplication of unenclosed women's communities, recognized only one form of religious life for women, that of the enclosed community of prayer, entirely apart, away from the world. However, such communities, with a large number of economically inactive women, could exist only if they commanded sufficient interest-bearing funds in the form of large

⁹⁵ Brigitte Degler-Spengler 'Zahlreich wie die Sterne des Himmels. Zisterzienser, Dominikaner und Franziskaner vor dem Problem der Inkorporation von Frauenklöstern', *Rottenburger Jahrbuch für Kirchengeschichte*, 4 (1985), 37–50: here 38 ff.

holdings in land. They were therefore relatively costly enterprises.⁹⁶ In practice, their capital could be maintained only if every nun provided a dowry on admission, and this evidently led to the sisters being selected largely by their social status. In the long term, this condition in itself clearly set a limit to the growth of the number of women's convents, which is evident from an assessment of the expansion and structure of the women's convents throughout western Europe at the end of the thirteenth century.⁹⁷

When the wave of foundations ended in about 1280, four out of five women's convents had an elitist population. The number of women's convents would presumably therefore have been much greater if a formula had been available that allowed a more active economic contribution from the women who entered the convents.⁹⁸ Such a formula was developed only in the course of the thirteenth century, and was authorized only after much hesitation and resistance by the Church authorities. A compilation of rules of life that were practised in beguinages and beguine houses offered clear guidelines to men and women who wanted to lead a religious life in the world. This was realized in the third rule of Saint Francis, which proved very useful for women wishing to live in a religious community without paying a large entrance fee. It permitted these so-called tertiaries both to retain their possessions, which could revert to their families upon death, and to provide for their own maintenance through, for example, spinning and weaving or other work for money. As *conversae*, they had time for such work because they did not have to spend half the day singing the canonical hours. They merely attended a short office in the vernacular that left them enough time free for work. To found such sister houses required only a small part of the investment needed for a traditional women's convent. No wonder that, from the second half of the fourteenth century, everywhere in the Low Countries 'third order' or 'tertiary' convents rose out of the ground like mushrooms, most of them in an urban context in which they offered women from the middle class every opportunity to lead a secure, cloister-like existence. In the Diocese of Utrecht alone, no less than 166 came into being in the period from 1375 to 1525, a number estimated as four times as many as the number of existing

⁹⁶ This was also the case for men's convents, but these, with their great reservoir of lay brothers, could exploit their holdings more profitably by working them themselves.

⁹⁷ See the recent survey by Bruce L. Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890–1215* (Ithaca NY, 1997), with the English language literature that he cites. Venarde dated the end of the wave of foundations at about 1215, which was a consequence of restricting his focus to England and France. Had he also considered the Netherlands and, for example, the Rhine region, he would certainly have had to move his end date a half century forward. The present assessment demonstrates that an integration of the Anglo-American, French, German and Dutch historiography is urgently needed in the area of the history of religious women.

⁹⁸ I am building here on the basic idea formulated in Brigitte Degler-Spengler, 'Die religiöse Frauenbewegung des Mittelalters. Konversen – Nonnen – Beginen', *Rottenburger Jahrbuch für Kirchengeschichte*, 3 (1984), 75–88.

traditional women's convents that had arisen in the same area in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁹⁹

Economically speaking, these tertiary houses were low-budget institutions in which women outside aristocratic circles could lead an acceptable form of religious life. The 'admission costs' could be kept low because the sisters were able to use a large part of their time for the house in an economically productive way. There was apparently something similar in the Hospitaller communities of lay sisters in Friesland. These houses could be founded and continue to exist in large numbers thanks to the lay status of their residents, because the lay sisters as well as lay brothers were expected to contribute to the convents' economies. It remains questionable whether we should assume, with Schöningh, that the Hospitaller sisters in Frisia were active in the milking of cows: he talks of a contribution to the *Milchwirtschaft*. Yet several of these houses had *sorores* present in the agrarian dependencies of the commanderies.¹⁰⁰ We also know that *wand* or textiles were produced in Abbingwehr and Wijtwerd.¹⁰¹ Presumably the lay sisters, unlike the nuns in Warffum or Wijtwerd, had to perform manual labour to guarantee sufficient income to the convent. Indeed, virtually no 'third order' convents were founded in the fifteenth century in the areas where the Hospitallers had their settlements for lay sisters. Evidently the Hospitallers had long been providing for lay sisters' needs.

The question remains as to why the Hospitallers were the only order in this region to allow this formula.¹⁰² I think that, precisely because they had few women's convents in their order and also because their superiors had little experience of supporting such communities, they had more of a free hand in Frisia than the Benedictines, Cistercians, Premonstratensians and Augustinian canons. All over Europe these orders were intensely involved with the *cura monialium* (the care of nuns), but even though their abbeys and priories in Frisia also had their own regional tradition, they could not entirely ignore the guidelines that their general chapters prescribed for them with regard to the founding of women's houses. Within the Order of Saint John, in contrast, the *Bailie* of Frisia was already an accepted maverick on account of the knightless, cloister-like character of its settlements. The priest-brothers there enjoyed an extensive degree of autonomy. If the lay sisters had to be classed as donats and not as fully professed members of the Order, even though in practice their role within the Order was similar to that of fully professed sisters,

⁹⁹ Koen Goudriaan, 'De Derde Orde van Sint Franciscus in het bisdom Utrecht. Een voorstudie', *Jaarboek voor Middeleeuwse Geschiedenis*, 1 (1998), 205–61: here 239–41.

¹⁰⁰ In Heiselhusen and Jemgum (Holtgaste).

¹⁰¹ See for example the notice of two payments with *wande* in a register of Abbinwehr: '4 Grasen inna Saedlond cofft van Ennen Ubbana to Uttum vor want unde ghelt; 4 Grasen cofft van mester Haien to Grimessum beatelt mit gheld unde wande': *Ostfriesisches Urkundenbuch*, 1, no. 469 (1437).

¹⁰² The Teutonic Order may also have possessed a house with a community of lay sisters in this region.

the *Balier* of Steinfurt did not need to be concerned. As long as the Frisian houses simply paid their responsions, he could give an excellent account of himself to his superiors in Southern Germany and Rhodes.

From *Se Beauden* (c. 1347), *Saint of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem*

Paulette L. Horvath-Lackert

Between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries, numerous orders of monks and canons were founded. The problems encountered by women in entering these orders are well known, initially as having to enter and later in remaining within them. The fact that the majority of the military orders were founded a female branch underlines the distinctiveness of the Hospitaliers, who had some female houses and during the fourteenth century gave a saint to France: Saint Flore or Flor of Bampton in Quercy. This woman became the subject of a *vita*, a holy biography, of good quality. More than a hundred miracles were ascribed to her during the medieval period and although her official cult dates only from the sixteenth century, it is named locally from its beginnings. Nevertheless, it was not until 1945 that the relevant primary sources were published by Clotilde Bruneau.¹ Scattered legends and anecdotes or even falsehoods about Saint Flore continue to circulate today. This study will consider the historiographical tradition first. It will then study the documents from three angles. What do they teach us about relations between the Hospitaliers and the house of Beauden? This Hospitalier sister died in 1347; what type of sanctity did she represent? Finally, the collection of miracles, drawn up in the third quarter of the fifteenth century, offers an opportunity to study devotional practices in the late Middle Ages.

The history of the devotion of Saint Flore was authoritatively set out by the editing of her *vita* in 1945. To summarise, the Latin *vita* of Flore written by her confessor (V 7 and 8) was long long ago. It was translated in the fifteenth century and concluded with a collection of miracles, all in the diocese of Quercy. This translation was last noted in 1722. When, in the sixteenth century, the Jesuit Hollanders were conducting their researches for the *Acta Sanctarum*, they found nothing for this

¹ Editors' note: this article has been translated from French by Helen E. Nicholson.

Author's note: I thank Anne-Cécile Limal for involving me in this collective volume of current scholarship.

² Clotilde Bruneau, 'Vie & miracles de sainte Flore', *Archivum Historiarum*, vol. 13 (1945), 1-49. Following Bruneau, I refer to the chapters corresponding to the *vita* and to the miracles by the letters V and M respectively, followed by the chapter number in the original.

³ For all this see Bruneau's introduction.