Throughout the Near East courtyards were an almost mandatory feature in domestic buildings. In the crowded neighbourhoods of Frankish towns, internal courtyards or attached courtyards surrounded by high walls were considered essential (Figure 60). In urban and rural houses there was almost always some open space, however small, to serve one or more domestic functions. Many of even the smallest houses in Acre built on elongated plots had small courtyards set back behind a front room, and larger houses occasionally had more than one. The courtyard might be merely a quiet place for relaxation, protected from the harsh effects of the Middle Eastern climate. It might be a private place used to carry out certain household activities, a plot on which to grow fruit and vegetables and raise some livestock, or simply an open area representing a transition between public and private space. In many cases the Franks adopted *per se* the traditional Near Eastern courtyard-house design for their town houses, and the courtyard was a frequent feature of village houses, farms and rural estate administrative centres. The monastic courtyard design was adapted for use by the Military Orders in their large urban complexes such as those of Acre and Jerusalem and in their castles, where it provided a defended space that could be used for training and for various domestic activities. As with cloisters, it was as much a symbolic feature as a functional one, demonstrating the insular nature of monastic life.1

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1 The courtyard seems to have been the pivot around which a particular type of architecture was developed by the Hospitallers. The layout and design of their buildings are, among the Military Orders, the most regular in design. If we compare for example the courtyards of three different types of Hospitaller buildings we find a similarity that suggests a model such as has been so far unsuccessfully sought by those wishing to identify distinctions between Hospitaller and Templar architecture. (The possibility of identifying distinct architecture of the two principal Military Orders has been raised in the past, but it was based mainly on a few poorly defended theories such as the preferred use of round towers by the Templars.) The Hospitaller buildings at Rhodes and Acre, the castle of Belvoir (and to a degree, the castle of Crac...
Th e importance of the courtyard in the climatic, political and social environment of the region was not lost on the Frankish settlers although not all of these factors had the same degree of significance for Frankish society as they had in Islam. A fundamental role of the courtyard for Muslim society was in protecting the privacy of the family, in particular of the women and children. Although this was perhaps a less central theme in house design for the Frankish settlers, the need for a domestic environment protected from the extremes of Middle Eastern weather and secure from the threat of robbers was perhaps a more urgent consideration than it had been in the West.² A central courtyard in a house, particularly when the outer walls of the house were almost windowless, would create a more pleasant microclimate

des Chevaliers) and the manor house at Aqua Bella all share the same basic layout: a central courtyard, a staircase rising on arches and half arches to domestic quarters on the upper level and, in Belvoir and Aqua Bella, a balcony on one side overlooking the courtyard.