

Hospitallers in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary

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The choice of topic and the relevance of the research project

The primary goal of this dissertation is to reveal the major characteristics of the history of the Hospital of St. John in Hungary from its appearance in the mid-twelfth century up to the end of Angevin rule (1387). The starting point of the research is obvious, but the choice of the end date was suggested by the fundamental changes which took place from the last decade of the fourteenth century. These changes concerned not only the Order of the Hospital as an ecclesiastical body but also the structure of Hungarian society as a whole at the beginning of the reign of King Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387–1437).

Present-day scholarly needs spring from the enormous hiatus in research on (medieval) church history after the Second World War because scholars of the period adopted a different agenda. This dearth of research affected particularly studies on the military-religious orders and this situation is demonstrated by the fact that the last scholarly Hungarian monograph on the Templars was published in 1912 (by Ferenc Patek) and on the Hospitallers in 1925–1928 (by Ede Reiszig). A few articles and some popular works have come out since then, but these were backed by no new research on primary sources. Croatian scholars, primarily Lelja Dobronić, made several attempts in the 1980s to correct the arrears of many decades of work, but in the end she failed in several respects. Besides various misunderstandings originating either from Reiszig or lying with herself, she drew a one-sided picture on the Order. She studied the activity of the Order in the region of present-day Croatia, which is only one half of the former Hungarian–Slavonian priory of the Hospital (which covered present-day Hungary, Croatia, Romania, and part of Slovenia). Undoubtedly, the territorial distribution of the preceptories indicates a certain preference for Slavonia from the fourteenth century onwards, but it is still ahistorical to approach this issue according to the borders of modern states. Similar research problems arose in the case of other religious orders and it turned out that only detailed, critical research can resolve funda-

mental questions such as the actual numbers of houses of religious orders in medieval Hungary.

One problem with the early monographs (from Georgius Pray to Ede Reiszig) is that they do not meet modern scholarly standards, although many scholarly works (especially source editions) have stood the test of time. Re-thinking the questions about the Hospitallers is motivated by the fact that the exploitation of new sources and using new methods may yield more exact and reliable results, which will eventually channel students of the field towards contemporary international standards. Accordingly, a thorough revision of Ede Reiszig's work on the Hospitallers in Hungary is not justified by the eight decades that have elapsed so far. The historiography of the Hospitallers has also been burdened with a serious conceptual problem for a long time. In contrast to the Western European context, Hungarian – and many Central European – (Latin) written sources often use the term *crucifer* instead of the appropriate *frater hospitalis, miles Templi*, conceivably with reference to the cross depicted on their habits. This led to confusion, as many scholars treated the houses and the landed properties of other orders of similar status (e. g., the Order of St. Anthony, the Order of the Holy Spirit, and so on) as belonging to the Hospital, and vice versa. On the basis of this perception and by a close reading of primary sources as well as by the clarification of the notions and denominations applied in the primary sources, Karl-Georg Boroviczény, a German hematologist of Hungarian origin discovered or, in fact, singled out (in the late 1960s), a formerly unknown religious institution, the Order of Hospitaller Canons Regular of St. Stephen, founded by the Hungarian King Géza II around the mid-twelfth century. The members of this order were also called *cruciferi* in contemporary sources – they even used this expression in the inscriptions of their own charters – but they had nothing in common with either the crusaders or with the Hospital of St. John. Mainstream Hungarian scholarship accepted Boroviczény's ideas but failed to draw the necessary conclusions, namely, that the history (settling down, presence, activity, role) of the Hospitallers in the Hungarian kingdom should be fundamentally reconsidered.

Partly on the initiative of Karl-Georg Boroviczeny, I began my own research on the Hospitallers settled in this part of Latin Christendom. The basis of my doctoral research is a database of primary sources which is the outcome of a survey of thousands of published and unpublished charters. Besides the source editions, I consulted the medieval holdings of the National Archives of Hungary and I also collected relevant materials from the archives and libraries in Sopron, Zagreb, Zadar, Paris, Poitiers, and London. In addition, one of the most important phases of the collecting procedure was research conducted in the central archives of the Hospital, presently kept in Malta. I managed to research both its microfilm copy in the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library (Collegeville, USA) and the original collection which is deposited in the National Library of Malta (Valletta). In terms of numbers: 1,200 charters were utilized in some way during the analysis, out of which some 950 documents pertain directly or indirectly to the history of the Hospital.

This dissertation is rather positivist in nature, but the premises demanded the rigorous observance of the old imperative: *ad fontes*. As a conscious methodologi-

cal decision, I trust that only a work grounded in positivism can establish a solid basis for further discussion of various problems/questions raised by modern scholarship. That is, the clear determination of the corpus of primary sources had to be the first step toward providing a satisfactory basis for re-constructing the history of the Hospital in medieval Hungary. It should be emphasized that the sources at my disposal are inadequate for an entire reconstruction. Moreover, begrudging the situation of Western scholars of the field, I have to acknowledge that on the basis of the primary sources at my disposal numerous areas of the life of the Priory cannot be subjected to investigation. Thus, the choice of topics in the dissertation at times does not reflect current historiographical trends but has been done under duress. The reader has to settle for the mere possibility of raising questions or applying analogies instead of reconstructing intensive contours. One has to be careful with the application of analogies, since, in the absence of a solid and palpable basis, the analogies easily can mislead us by muting regional characteristics or deviances. For instance, most of the written sources produced by the kingdom's central governmental organs vanished during the 150 years of Turkish occupation. The extent of the destruction of the sources will never be fully known to scholars and it is difficult for Western researchers to understand its gravity. This loss of records concerns not only the number of the sources, but the fact that almost entire types of documents were lost, such as official or private letters sent to the Hungarian kings, many drafts of legal documents, accounts of the *magister tawarnicorum* or, later, of the Master of the Treasury.

In addition to this, I am fully aware (and have tried to act accordingly) that there are different themes in the (re)writing of the history of the Hospitaller Hungarian-Slavonian Priory. As a direct consequence of this state of research, the core of this dissertation aims at reconstructing the history of the Hungarian-Slavonian Priory. Nonetheless, while analyzing and evaluating the facts and train of events, I also endeavored to reflect upon both the overall history of the Hospital and on several aspects of Hungarian society from the twelfth through the fourteenth century. This approach was a prerequisite for exploiting recent achievements of mainstream contemporary scholarship focusing on the history of the Order as well as new fields of interest concerning Hungarian social history. As for the former, it is important to emphasize that the last three decades have seen an enormous advance in research projects launched on the history of the Hospitallers. Hungarian scholarship, however, still seems to overlook the new trends and results in that field (admittedly, tribute should be paid to the exceptions). This can be explained by the language barrier and the often irksome difficulties in accessing recent publications. This dissertation attempts to correct arrears in research partly by briefly surveying relevant mainstream ideas as well by pointing out the links between the Hungarian Priory and the Order as a network of priories and preceptories. In addition, an attempt was made to present and evaluate all the specific activities of the Order as well as the local characteristics of the Priory.

As for Hungarian historiography, it is noteworthy that manifest progress can be seen in the perception of Hungarian history in general as well as various fields of social history during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Fundamental

changes can be observed in regard to the interpretation of the turn of the thirteenth century and the Angevin period as a whole. This change concerns not only social but also economic history and the history of religious ideas, which altogether requires a different approach in many respects. The renaissance of institutional history should also be noted, in the first instance, research projects focusing on a particular Hungarian legal entity – the place of authentication (*locus credibilis*). In the case of all possible points of intersection, I created a background of mainstream scholarly thoughts against which the activity/role of the Hospitallers can be more accurately judged. The present thesis, however, does not undertake the burden of terminating scholarly debates lying outside the central topic of the Hospitallers, even though it attempts to contribute to the resolution of unsettled problems. Nor had I presumed to conduct missing basic research in several areas, but I tried to point out the fields which still await extensive unearthing of primary sources.

The structure of the dissertation

The elaboration of the dissertation aims at reflecting the research situation described above. The thesis targets a three-fold objective: (1) a critical confrontation of the research issues in the international scholarship and Hungarian research, including the situation with the sources; (2) to establish the “backbone” of the history of the Order including the reconstruction of the network of the administrative units; (3) to present several topics which show important characteristics of the Hospitallers when the sources at our disposal allow us to perform the discussion in adequate depth. In addition, these are the themes which can be regarded as indicators of regional characteristics, thus making them suitable for comparative research with international scholarship.

Accordingly, CHAPTER I presents the historiography of both international and regional studies on the Hospital. Besides it being a mandatory element of such a genre, it has particular significance in this case since Western and Eastern readers rarely have appropriate information concerning publications of the “far side”. A similar statement can be formulated concerning the short presentation of the overall history of the Order in CHAPTER II. It is not only an indispensable element of such a reconstruction, but it also provides an opportunity for readers to grasp basic, reliable information about the Order with special emphasis to its structure. Experts may skip this part of the dissertation, but it is useful for those who have hitherto relied upon a picture of the Hospital deduced from outdated and often awkward summaries. The overall approach of the dissertation embraces a three-fold correlation of the general and regional history of the Order with the political, social, and ecclesiastical history of medieval Hungary.

CHAPTERS III and IV constitute the historical “backbone” of the history of the Hungarian-Slavonian Priory from the mid-twelfth century up to the 1380s. These chapters embrace the questions of the settling of the brethren, the spread and distribution of the preceptories through time (illustrated on maps), the aftermath of the dissolution of the Templars, and the local characteristics of the order.

CHAPTER V is prosopographical in nature and the most international unit of the dissertation. Thus, it expresses the international and centralized nature of the Order and sheds some light on the mobility of the major officials of the Order. Continuing down this path, CHAPTER VI is a repertory aiming at an institutional reconstruction of the preceptories primarily through a survey of their personnel. Its basic form is a catalogue with microhistories of the preceptories of the Priory.

Due to their significance, two circles of questions are discussed in separate chapters. Since one of the original and long-lasting purposes of the administrative units of the Order was their fund-raising activity, the estate management of the Priory is presented separately (CHAPTER VII). Similarly, the unique activity of the Hospitallers in medieval Hungary in some of their preceptories serving as places of authentication (*loca credibilia*) in the administration of private legal affairs, along with the use of seals in the priory, rendered in a separate chapter (CHAPTER VIII).

The dissertation closes with conclusions and a bibliography of the works cited in the thesis. To facilitate the explication of my ideas and results I have attached various appendices to the main corpus of the dissertation. The first is the list of the primary sources (archive number/signature, date, issuer, form of existence, place of publication and/or calendar). The table contains a reduced amount of information since it aims to facilitate the access/retrieval of the documents and not present the full *apparatus criticus* of the sources. For the same purpose, a *Diplomatarium* is to be found in the APPENDIX. It is chiefly a selection of unpublished primary sources. In addition, there are also charters which have already been edited but contain serious mistakes or extensive omissions. In some cases I have incorporated important texts which were edited in publications not easily accessible for potential readers. There are also a few documents to which I made many references in the text of the dissertation, therefore I found useful to put the whole text at the reader's disposal. For the time being, the *Diplomatarium* has a rather illustrative function as I inserted into the text of the dissertation all those passages which required (extensive) literal citation.

An integral part of CHAPTER VIII is a catalogue of the seals used by the Hungarian Priory in the period under query and even beyond. There are also some comparative visual materials included in APPENDIX C; while APPENDICES D and E contain additional tables and figures referring to and elucidating different parts of the dissertation. The opus concludes with a gazetteer which lists the toponyms cited throughout the dissertation in alphabetical order.

The objective of this dissertation is (1) to produce a basic work on the Hospitallers in medieval Hungary based on the most comprehensive source base possible; (2) to survey the correlations among the overall and regional history of the Hospital along with relevant segments of the history of the Hungarian kingdom. Last but not least, I present conclusions on the role played by the Hospitallers in Hungary and on their perceptible interaction with the social environment of medieval Hungary in the period under query.