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The Service of Chivalries Throughout History in Relation to Pandemics and Wars

Abstract

The first orders of knights were formed in the royal courts in the late Middle Ages. When the ancient eastern Christian centres had all fallen following the conquests of the Seljuk Turks, by the end of the 11th century, Rome and Western Christianity were forced to take action. During the First Crusade, the first ecclesiastical orders were established on the model of monastic orders. Their creation was not a spontaneous process, but a conscious undertaking, for the members of these orders were also capable of performing tasks which an average soldier would not. It was then that the figure of the Christian warrior who fought against the conquering Islam was formed in order to liberate the Holy Land, who later became an example to many.² The Crusades were consecrated as military campaigns by the Church, in which the ideal of the Christian soldier gained heroic character. The new orders uniquely combined military and monastic virtues.³ In this article, we examine the role of the Hospitallers (Johannites), the Templars, the Order of the German Knights and the Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in the light of the circumstances in which they were formed and their role in today's armed and pandemic conflicts.

Keywords: knighthood, participation, war, pandemic

Middle Ages, evolution of knighthood

Knights (miles) appeared first in the medieval western Christian Europe as armoured escorts of the kings. They were mostly noblemen, wealthy landowners, or belonged to the ruling class as they were the ones who could afford to finance a heavy-armoured horseman (keeping horses, armoury, staff). According to the medieval tradition,

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² ELLENBLUM 2007.

³ NICOLLE–HOOK 1996; LILIE 1993; HAZARD 1977.

a person could become a knight by way of inheritance, although later a kind of feudal agreement allowed for ascending to this notable social layer, too. In these cases, a knight was granted a land in return for his military service. However, the title of knighthood was neither inheritable nor conferrable, it was only knowledge arising from educational process that could result in this title.⁴ From the 15th century, there are examples of situations that the king conferred the title of knighthood upon some members of the Parliament.⁵

Chivalry lifestyle meant a special way of living in the Middle Ages.⁶ Its unique culture, easily remarkable distinctive features (belt, armour, shield decorated with the symbol, coat of arms, motto of the family, sword, etc.), customs and the even now well-known joust all contributed to its special rank. In case of wars, knights constituted a significant part of the ruler's military power within the troops of ironclad heavy cavalry. They were individual warriors with outstanding qualification who primarily participated in hand-to-hand combat.⁷ No footsoldier or archer could dare a knight. They formed an independent unit and they did not cooperate with other ranks of warriors. The only method to attack was to front the enemy in compliance with every rule of chivalry. While combating, their foremost goal was to capture the enemy for whom they could later demand ransom.

Evolution of knighthood in Hungary

Similarly to her adjoining country-parts comprised of other nations, medieval Hungary used to be a multinational state complex. Taken into consideration that it was only the royal court that had the personnel and financial background to organise a royal household, it was only the royal court that could establish the feudal chivalry culture.⁸ The construction of medieval Hungarian royal headquarters like Esztergom started during the reign of Béla III (1172–1196) which could pave the way for knighthood and was later followed by Buda during the reign of Béla IV or Visegrád during the reign of Róbert Károly. However, the economic and military centres based on lordly estates could be regarded as centres of knighthood merely from the early 15th century. It must be noted, though, that the Hungarian royal courts were internationally recognised in these decades, moreover, they served as meeting fora for several rulers.

Relationship between health care and the church

The church delegated the task of taking care of the sick people to the bishops as early as the 3rd century A.D., resulting in the establishment of hospitals in different parts of the Roman Empire. The first real hospital was founded by bishop St. Vazul

⁴ BLOCH 2002: 317–320.

⁵ GYŰRKI 2008: 28.

⁶ CHRISTOPH 2007: 3–7.

⁷ BARBER 2005: 14–17.

⁸ KEEN 1984: 10.

(379 A.D.), whereas the first hospital devoted especially to patients suffering from leprosy can be associated with St. Otmár, the abbot of Szentgallen (720 A.D.). The bishop managed to operate hospitals in the bishopric seats, and this task was mandated to the monasteries or monks in the countryside in the Middle Ages.⁹ As for Hungary, the first hospitals were built next to monasteries, e.g. in Pannonhalma in 999 and in Pécsvárad and Esztergom in 1000.

Caring for the poor and the sick was the obligation of the monasteries and the monks in the Middle Ages, along with the task of providing food for pilgrims and travellers. As time went by, however, they were unable to provide care for those in need, as the wars and the crusades collaterally contributed to the flood of Europe with sick, poor, mutilated and homeless people. Initially, devoted men and women formed monasteries to look after the sick in the bigger and wealthier cities, which later earned independence and started to operate according to their own set of rules. In the upcoming years, more and more of this type emerged. There were nursing different orders of knighthood such as the Knights Templars, the John Knights, the German knights and the Lazarites, and some other, non-knighthood related communities, such as the orders named after St. Antal¹⁰ or the Holy Spirit¹¹ focusing on nursing the poor and the sick founded by Guy de Montpellier in 1190 (*Ordo Hospitalarius SS. Spiritus OSSp*). The rules for nursing were first elaborated by the knights of St. John, and the St. Lazarus knights were well-known for operating a hospital sometimes with more than 3,000 patients suffering from leper and leprosy. Nursing became so deeply-rooted in these organisations that the monks remained the only shelter for sick people well until the modern age. From the 13th century on, the system of civil *hospitium* developed in the cities as well,¹² which worked in close collaboration with the church but gradually went under the authority of the city.

Evolution of religious orders of knights

The members of the first orders of knights did not emerge from monks who had license to combat and shed blood but they were mundane/secular knights who, by understanding their special position, wished to live a non-combat life which was in compliance with monastic rules.¹³ Initially, the task of the knights was the spiritual tending of the pilgrims, treating and curing the sick and yielding armed protection for the pilgrims. However, monks also badly needed protection during the wars. The first religious orders of knights were established during the First Crusade following the pattern of orders, presumably after recapturing Jerusalem.¹⁴ Their efficacy was soon realised by both the church and society, therefore, both of them contributed to their strengthening position by granting donations and privileges.¹⁵ We are unsure about

⁹ TOMKA 2001: 35–36.

¹⁰ TÖRÖK 1861: 336.

¹¹ DIÓS-VICZIÁN 2008: 97.

¹² ADRIÁNYI 2001: 225–226.

¹³ PRUTZ 1977.

¹⁴ ARDAY 2014: 20.

¹⁵ KEEN 2005: 44–63.

the exact date of the formation of the first order of knights, but it can be stated that the first records about the Knights Templars, the Hospitallers and the Order of the Holy Sepulchre appeared between 1098 and 1119.¹⁶

Similarly to the real monks, the members of the religious orders took a triple oath (moral and sexual purity, subservience and poverty), complemented by a fourth one (Catholic belief and protection of pilgrims). In practice, their only difference from the monks was the use of swords. Thus, warriors had to be persuaded to become the protectors of the church and the Christian belief. This was the time for the showing up of knight saints.

The Order of Knights Templar

When Christian troops recaptured Jerusalem in 1099, pilgrimage could start again and it triggered the establishment of institutions that protected the Holy Land on the one hand, and, on the other hand, took care of the sick people.¹⁷ The Christian knights organised Latin kingdoms and Latin patriarchy in the occupied Jerusalem to ensure the settlement of western religious institutions in the region. The clergy of the Holy Sepulchre brought to life the canonical body in 1114 to structure itself, which, in turn brought to life the community of the Knights Templars.¹⁸ It was comprised of 8 French knights and initially operated as a secular body. These knights initially committed themselves to protect the pilgrims travelling between the coast and Jerusalem with their weapons. Later, Baldwin II of Jerusalem settled them on the site of the former Solomon temple and they preserved the memory of it in their name: Knights Templar (*fratres militiae Templi*). The community of *pauperes commilitiones Christi* or "poor knights" made them the richest and the best-known order of knights thanks to their donations and the funds originating in their privileges. They quickly spread in France, England, Spain and other countries of Europe, including Hungary.

In the first decades, they had no elaborated rules and the first records of them were also made relatively late. Their code of rules dating back to 1128 fails to cast light on how they really lived, it mostly revolved around how they should live in general terms. The writing of St. Bernard entitled *De laude novae militiae* [On the Praise of the New Knighthood] (1132–1135),¹⁹ reveals the life of Jerusalem knights in a bit more detailed way. This work provides both encouragement and judgement for them, serves as a guide to how to live the spiritual side of it to successfully combat the inner tension, which was partly caused by the way of clerical life but also justified the validity of the task conferred upon them.²⁰ It points out their significant role in the protection of the local eastern Christian communities and maintaining order at a time when they were frequently and brutally attacked.²¹

¹⁶ NICHOLSON 2019: 69–71.

¹⁷ ADDISON 1852: 5–14.

¹⁸ FÉLEGYHÁZY 1939: 278–284.

¹⁹ BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX 1859: 921–922.

²⁰ TÖRÖK 1999: 315.

²¹ LECLERCQ 1998: 45–50.

The members of the Order could be classified into three groups. The core of the order, or the group of the warriors, was comprised of noble knights who wore white mantels with a red cross on it following a Cistercian pattern and licensed by Pope Eugene III (1145–1153). The priests or the chaplains were responsible for the divine services and they never fought. The armigers (*armigeri*) and the artisans (*famuli*) served as the assistants to the knights and wore a black mantel with a red cross.²²

The members of the Knights Templar followed a double ideal: they were bound by both military (*disciplina militaris*) and monastic (*disciplina regularis*) rules. After the death of Hugues de Payens (1136),²³ the founding father, the privileges were granted to the new Grand Master by Pope Innocent II (1130–1143) in a papal bull starting with the words *Omne datum optimum* (1139),²⁴ which remarkably fostered the spread of the order in Europe. Until that time, they had been subject to the diocesan, but the papal bull granted the right to the order to erect temples and stage burials everywhere where they had own estates. They were also licensed to recruit members irrespective of their origin on condition that the validity of their anointing was beyond any doubt. In the beginning, they accepted estates and founded monasteries all over Europe to ensure the supply in the Holy Land, but later every property obtained from the misbelievers became the property of the order. As a result, the Knights Templar came into huge fortune both in the east and in the west.²⁵ The peak point could be seen in the mid-13th century when King Philip IV of France (1285–1314) initiated the first "show trial" in history against the order following the defeat of the Holy Land and Acre, which resulted in the dissolution of the order and the confiscation of their estates. When the order was disbanded on 3 April 1312, the pope presented their former monasteries and estates to the Knights Hospitaller.

The Knights Hospitaller – The Johannites – Knights of Malta

Although the Order of Saint John, or rather the Knights Hospitaller, regarded as a brother order with the Templars, dates back farther, they followed in the footsteps of the Knights Templar in evolving into an order. Merchants arriving from Amalfi established a monastery in Jerusalem around 1048 where Benedictine monks cared for the sick.

The Knights Hospitaller sprang to life from a group operating a chapel named after St. John the Baptist and a hospital under the auspices of Sancta Maria Latina monastery whose mandate was to nurse sick pilgrims.²⁶

This nursing community, that referred to itself as Johannites after St. John the Baptist, was formed into an independent order by Gerard from Provence relatively soon, and its significance was further highlighted by the first successful crusade.²⁷ Gerard compiled a set of rules that were in compliance with the Rule of Saint Augustine

²² HORROX–BARBER 2002: 34–54.

²³ TÖRÖK 1999: 313–314.

²⁴ ÁLDÁSY 1924a.

²⁵ FRALE 2011.

²⁶ ARDAY 2014: 22–23.

²⁷ VARJASSY–KÖLNEI 2012: 6–11.

consented by Pope Paschal II (1099–1118) to serve as a guidance for people taking care for the sick. They were granted exemption from tithe and the right to appoint their own leaders. The members wore a simple, black mantel decorated with a white cross on the black shoulder. Owing to the papal support, the order could quickly spread both in the Holy Land and in the big European seaside ports where crusaders routinely embarked.

The fight for recapturing the Iberian Peninsula bears similarity to the crusades. On the one hand, it represented a good example of the cooperation of Christian peoples and opened up the possibility of pushing back Islam, and, on the other hand, it ran parallelly with the “big” crusade. It happened in the Iberian peninsula that the Johannites took up arms for the first time after structuring themselves into a knight order from a former nursing unit.²⁸ This transformation took place at a time of Raymond du Puy, the successor of Gerard, who led the order from 1120 to 1160 and it was wholeheartedly supported by three consecutive popes, namely Pope Innocent II (1130–1143), Pope Lucius II (1144–1145) and Pope Eugene III (1145–1153).²⁹ The earliest record of their military activity goes back to 1137.

Their famous bravery manifested later, too. They did not beat a retreat either in 1187 (Jerusalem) or in 1244 (Gaza), at the time of the big defeat of battles, however, both the Grand Master and the knights had been killed in the Battle of Gaza.³⁰ When the last Christian fortification in the Holy Land, Acre, became defeated in 1291, they had to leave the Holy Land. They escaped to Cyprus and, in 1306, they occupied the island of Rhodes which used to be under Byzantine authority and where they could stay until 1522. It was a time when they were also called Knights of Rhodes. They made their way to Malta in 1530 – thus the name Order of Malta – where they could live until the Napoleonic conquest in 1798.

Despite all its military success and transformation, the order did not lose sight of its original devotion, i.e. nursing sick people. Like the Templars, the members of this order were also grouped into three. The knights took part in fights, the priests took pastoral care in the hospitals and served in the church without being entitled to take up arms. The third layer consisted of armigers, artisans, doctors and nurses, the latter two carried out their self-sacrificing, highly professional work in the hospitals. The female side of the order, i.e. the nuns, dealt with nursing female patients in the hospitals. Their uniform undertook some changes. During the crusade, every knight wore a red mantel decorated with a red cross over his ironclad licensed by Pope Alexander IV, and the typical “Malta cross” appeared first only a hundred years later, in the mid-14th century.³¹

As for architecture, huge fortifications represent the former presence of both the Templars and the Johannites, predominantly in the Holy Land. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre provided the pattern for the churches of the monasteries, thus they are mostly circle-shaped.

²⁸ RUNCIMAN 1995: 395.

²⁹ BALANYI 1923: 193–194.

³⁰ ÁLDÁSY 1924b: 107.

³¹ TÖRÖK 1872: 16–17.

The Teutonic Order

The community established to care for injured German knights during the third crusade (119–1191) was strongly supported by Pope Clementine III (1187–1191).³² The objective of this predominantly German community was not only to nurse the sick, but also to convert misbelievers and it was transformed into a knight order based on the rules of the Templars in 1198. The Teutonic Order enjoyed the favour of Emperor Henry VI (1191–1197) and Emperor Frederick II (1220–1250). Both of them considered the order the promoter of German interests, in the beginning only in the Holy Land, but after the fall of the Holy Land, in Europe, too.³³ The German, or rather Teuton knights arrived also in our country under the leadership of Salza Hermann Grand Master (1210–1239) and were settled on the southern border of Transylvania, in Barcaság, by King Andrew II in 1211.³⁴ This territory was supplemented by areas spanning to Havasföld and Sub-Danube in 1222. The order, which was granted entrance to the country in return for complex border protection, could pursue lucrative business activity, and the clerical members could carry out their tasks within the framework of the order.

However, the German knights did not feel satisfied with their autonomy and wished for an own state spreading until the Black Sea. They minted their own money in spite of the fact that the king prohibited it. The priests having settled in Barcaság also took courage and organised an independent clerical executive unit, a deanery, the legal acknowledgment of which was demanded from Rome rather than from the territorially competent pontiff. The Holy See granted it, and Pope Honorius III (1206–1227) took the order into the possession of the Holy See after accepting the feudal tenure offer of the German order. However, the order's location was Hungary, resulting in the fact that this autonomy struggle supported by Rome meant a separation from the Hungarian king. After that, it comes as no surprise that King Andrew II of Hungary, who allowed the order to settle in Hungary, marched out against them and the Knights were expelled by force of arms in 1225. Following this, the Teutonic Order started to march northward with the motto of converting the Prussians and organised an independent state with the centre of Marienburg on the territory of today's Poland.³⁵

Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem

Upon the call of Pope Urban II, a troop of almost 60,000 soldiers entered Jerusalem in spring 1096 following a several-year long vicissitudinary travel and they occupied the city on 15 July 1099. They carried out a massacre whereby they killed about 30,000 Jewish and Muslim people. They had a lot of conflicts when laying down the grounds of the kingdom of Jerusalem as they highly debated the issue whether the recaptured lands should be subject to a clerical principality headed by the patriarch

³² URBAN 2003: 19–35.

³³ WOODHOUSE 1879: 263–272.

³⁴ KRISTÓ 1976: 70.

³⁵ NICOLLE–TURNER 2007.

or a secular kingdom. In the end, a kingdom was formed. However, the first ruler-candidate, Raymond of Toulouse, rejected the possibility. As a result, the title of the first Christian ruler of Jerusalem was earned by Prince Bouillon Gottfried, the founder of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. He did not accept kingship, either, instead, he took the title of *Advocatus Sancti Sepulchri*, meaning the Protector of the Holy Sepulchre. His short ruling terminated in 1100. After his death, the patriarch crowned Baldwin, the lord of Edessa, the "King of the Latins" in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem on 11 November. The new Christian kingdom ensured the primacy of the western Latin Church, however, it failed to bridge the gap between the eastern and western Christianity.

The first records of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre date back to 1103.³⁶ It was both a military and a clerical order from its emergence. Their canons guarded the Sepulchre, whereas its military members protected the pilgrims on the way leading from the coast to Jerusalem. This order was officially recognised by Pope Callistus II in 1122 and became their protector.³⁷ Pope Celestine II issued a papal bull on 10 June 1144, which provided for rendering it subject to the Latin patriarch in Jerusalem and a church was donated to the order in Rome. The patriarch was entitled to dub someone knight and recruit new members in the order by way of taking an oath. However, as the position of the Latin patriarch was vacant from the 13th century till the mid-19th century, the Holy See conferred this right upon *custosa* of the Franciscans in the Holy Land. On 23 July 1847, Pope Pius IX reinstated the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in his *Nulla celebrior* document, and later, in 1868, he reorganised the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. As part of this "resurrection", Pope St. Pius X. conferred the title of Grand Master upon himself and his followers, Pope John XXIII approved the new constitution of the order and Pope John Paul II declared Virgin Mary as the patron saint of the Order.³⁸

The coat of arms of the Order is the Jerusalem cross symbolising the 5 wounds of Jesus and it was first worn by Bouillon Gottfried. The red colour of this coat of arms is the representation of blood shed at the Golgotha. The members of the orders had 2 main tasks. On the one hand, they had to protect the universal Church, the city of Jerusalem, the tomb of Jesus, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the sacred places and relics, and the pilgrims, and, on the other hand, they had to combat the Muslims. The initially small community gradually earned a lot of respect. It was the privilege of noblemen, aristocrats and rulers to take part in the honourable rite at the tomb of Jesus.³⁹

When the Hungarians participated in the fifth crusade under the leadership of Andrew II, he took more knights of the Holy Sepulchre to Hungary and granted them estates. At the end of his kingdom, this order had three monasteries on the Hungarian territory: the provostry named after the Blessed Virgin Mary in Glogonca, Kőrös county, the bienko provostry in Zagreb county and the marchia provostry whose location is not known now. The members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre

³⁶ D'ASSEMANI 1944: 66–68.

³⁷ TRINGER 2013: 43.

³⁸ JEFFERY 1919.

³⁹ TÁPAY-SZABÓ 1932: 9–12.

of Jerusalem used to be known as "sacred soldiers" in Hungary. The oldest known knight of it was provost Frater Nicolaus of Glogonca from the early 14th century, but one of the descendants of the Szinyei Merse family, György Szinyei Merse, the royal courtier, was also a member of it in 1602.

Imre Bercsényi Székési was dubbed knight of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in 1632, and he was the one who made the coat of arms of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre part of the Bercsényi family. The fact that count Miklós Bercsényi, the head general officer of Rákóczi, mentioned first that he was a "sacred soldier" shows a good example of the high importance of the order. We must also recall the name of France Joseph I, too, who was also a member of the order and routinely wore the ribbon and the star of the big cross of the order on his gown when he marched in processions.⁴⁰

In Hungary, the order was initially military and monastic, however, after the Mongol invasion, it completely turned into a military order, then, a hundred years later, into a monastic one. The Hungarian "sacred soldiers" took not only the traditional oath, but they also committed themselves not to make peace with the misbelievers. One of their special tasks was to assist in the exchange of Christian captives from Turkish captivity, thus, they often visited Turkey. Their spiritual attitude can be seen in the records. The records praise their spiritual attitude by saying that they did not forget to tell the canonical prayers about the mystery of the Holy Cross even when they were combating.

The privileges of the Holy Sepulchre were the same as the privileges of the Templars and the Johannites, but by the 16th century, they could achieve significant monastic entitlements, enshrined in the document *Privilegia Equitum Hierosolymitanorum* published by Boniface of Ragusa in 1553.⁴¹

The Order has merely religious and charity purposes and distances itself from every political movement and event. The Order of the Holy Sepulchre supports and develops the religious, cultural and social activity and institution of the Roman Catholic Church in the Holy Land in 40 countries all over the world, with 52 eparchies and 30,000 knights and dames.

Conclusion

Medieval Europe was a rapidly evolving society, with a turbulent history. Chivalry in this time, with its parade, heraldry and gleaming armoured knights was a social ideal that had a profound effect on the history of Medieval and early modern Europe, but it was as much a part of this problem as it was its solution. Chivalry paid tribute to heroic behaviour by knights, and combined such displays of prowess with honour, piety, high-status and attractiveness to women.

With the Crusades they have greatly increased the territory and power of Christian states through their struggles against Islam and paganism in the East and the West.

⁴⁰ TÁPAY-SZABÓ 1932: 53–84.

⁴¹ Jeruzsálemi Szent Sír Lovagrend s. a.

Chivalry symbolises not only the military system of feudalism, but also the principle of a sophisticated society. In addition to the protection of Christian values, today's knightly orders play a significant role in, for example, humanitarian aid and helping the fallen and the sick. Their main mission is to alleviate human suffering and help humanitarian aid in many countries all around the world.

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