Milites Christi
in the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary: a historiographical overview

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The overall objective of the following survey is to outline the achievements of East-Central European scholarship after the Second World War, with special regard to the medieval kingdom of Hungary.¹

Presenting and evaluating the post-war historiography of the military-religious orders in Hungary, one cannot, and certainly, should not skip the serious hiatus in the literature of church history in the “region.” The “region”, principally, is meant to be Hungary, but as the topic concerns the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, the survey should also include, to a certain extent, present-day Croatia, Slovenia, Romania and Slovakia. It is not my objective to appraise the historiography of these Eastern European countries, but rather my intention is to display the major trends. Accordingly, emphasis should be given to the fact that the post-war Communist regimes, in effect from 1949, undermined medieval studies in general, and church history in particular. All pre-war projects were split by the early ’50s and this process also effected the edition of primary (Latin) written sources as well. There was no way to obtain an academic degree by compiling high-quality source editions, and this fact hindered both directly and indirectly new research projects in any field of medieval studies. This mostly affected the edition of medieval charters. The exception that proves the rule, was the attempt by Elemér Mályusz to publish the charter-calendars of the Sigismund Era (1387–1437) from 1951 but which remains unfinished.² The first comprehensive enter-

¹ An earlier version of the present paper was delivered at the conference entitled Medio siglo de estudios sobre las Cruzadas y las Órdenes militares, 1951–2001 held by the Universidad de Zaragoza (Facultad de Huesca) in Teruel.

prise is the compilation of the documents of the Angevin period (1301–1387) from 1990 onwards.³

It was the works of Ágoston Boltiszár,⁴ János Strázsay,⁵ Antal Karcşú,⁶ Ivan Kukuljević,⁷ Frigyes Pesty,⁸ Ferenc Patek,⁹ and Ede Reiszig¹⁰ that first surveyed and summarised the history of the military orders in the region with scholarly rigor. Their research was facilitated by the simultaneous formation of the medieval collection of the National Archives of Hungary, and by the more and more extensive source editions that began in the first third of the nineteenth century.¹¹

The common feature of these works – i.e. of pre-war titles – is, on the one hand, that they reflected upon international literature but, on the other hand, most of them are full of conceptual problems and misunderstandings. In contrast to the Western European situation, Hungarian – and many Central European – (Latin) written sources very often use the term crucifer instead of the appropriate miles Templi, frater hospitalis, and so on. It led to confusion – many scholars treated the houses and the landed properties of other orders, for instance the Order of St. Anthony or that of the Holy Spirit as belonging to the Hospital or the Temple, and vice versa. Moreover, there was no attempt to analyse the nuclei of these orders through their administrative units, that is through the commanderies or preceptories. Finally, prior to World War II “national history-writing” shifted the balance towards the autonomy of these orders, and thus almost disregarded their centralised nature and/or international characteristics.

After World War II, a radical decline in the studies of the military orders set in. Certainly, the missing research could not correct the many mistakes of earlier scholars. Instead, the very few works bequeathed several problems from the outdated studies. It was the general situation until the late 1960s when Karl-Georg Boroviczény, a German haematologist of Hungarian origin (not accidentally,
a modern Maltese "knight"), studied the history of the military orders in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, compiled an annotated bibliography and wrote a study that was presented in Hungary in 1970 but published only in 1990.\textsuperscript{12} Boroviczény's work proved to be very important. First of all, he reinforced the demand for new research projects concerning the military-religious orders. Moreover, his survey aimed at collecting all the primary written sources published up to the end of the 1960s. What is more, by close reading the primary sources and by the clarification of the notions and denominations applied in these charters, Boroviczény discovered or, in fact, separated a hitherto unknown religious institution, the Order of Hospitaller Canons Regular of St. Stephen, founded by the Hungarian King Géza II around the mid-twelfth century.\textsuperscript{13} The members of this order were also called \textit{cruciferi} in contemporary sources, – they used this expression even in the inscriptions of their own charters – but they had nothing in common either with the Crusaders or with the Hospital of St. John. The ideas of Boroviczény, however, were neglected and disregarded for almost two decades – basically for two reasons. First, he lived in Germany which made it difficult to keep "daily contacts" with mainstream Hungarian scholars. But the fact that he was not a professional historian proved the most problematic issue. Most Hungarian historians refused his ideas merely because he was an enthusiastic amateur. The reception of his suggestions has changed since 1990.

Undoubtedly, the most neglected topic was the history of the Templars in the region. This situation, however, is not self-evident. Their presence was shorter than that of the Hospitallers but, on the other hand, it was much longer than the one and a half-decade presence of the Teutonic Order in Transylvania (Barcaság/Burzenland). The first post-war study of the Templars that meets modern scholarly standards was published in the journal of the Zadar division of the Yugoslav (present-day Croatian) Academy of Sciences which dedicated a whole volume in 1971 to Vrana, the medieval headquarters of the Templars and Hospitallers on the Dalmatian coast.\textsuperscript{14} In addition to these minor studies from the 1980s, the Croatian Lelja Dobronic,\textsuperscript{15} published two monographs and several articles on

\textsuperscript{12} K.-G. Boroviczény, \textit{Kommentierte Bibliographie der Kreuzherren- und Hospitalorden, sowie deren Krankenhaus- und Bädergründungen in Ungarn in der Zeit der Arpaden (X. bis XIII. Jahrhundert)} (manuscript) Freiburg 1970.


\textsuperscript{15} L. Dobronic, "Posjedi srednjovekovnih viteskih redova u okolici Zagreba," [The estates of the medieval military orders in the vicinity of Zagreb] in \textit{Gunsčina Zbornika,} Zagreb
the military-religious orders in present-day Croatia. She might have corrected the errors and imperfections of the nineteenth-century authors (Ivan Kukuljević, Frigyes Pesty, and Ferenc Patek), but she almost completely ignored Hungarian sources, that is the written sources preserved or published in Hungary. Also, she applied and combined unverifiable archeological ideas, thus further confusing the picture of the Hungarian-Slavonian province of the Templars.

More recently, Miha Kosi, a young Slovenian scholar published comprehensive studies (in 1994 and 1995) on the history of the Templars in present-day Slovenia summing up the literature published until that time. Unfortunately, Hungarian scholarship still lack a scholarly monograph on the topic. The main reason for this situation is that the majority of medieval Templar sites are to be found outside the borders of present-day Hungary. On the initiative of Karl-Georg Boroviczény, a research group was established at the University of Szeged at the beginning of the 1990s for studying church history with special regard to military-religious orders. As a member of this research group, Balázs Stossek took up the history of the Hungarian-Slavonian province of the Templars. Stossek’s works aim at providing a thorough investigation of the primary sources and the secondary literature in a doctoral dissertation. Moreover, with the help of foreign studies – e.g. that of Karl Borchardt – he is trying to place this province of the Order in the broader (Central-) European framework.

Parallel to the academic works, translations of popular works on the Templars have been published in the region. Needless to say, these popular works, often


full of delirious ideas, add nothing to scholarly advancement. Among these are the recent monographs of Paul Piers Read on the Templars, even though scholars would have preferred other works, for instance, that of Alain Demurger and/or Helen Nicholson. Fortunately research on the Hospitallers provides a rosier picture. There seems to be a newfound interest among members of the modern Maltese Orders to pursue the history of the order. Following Ede Reiszig’s scholarly achievements of the 1920s, several works have been published since 1959 by Miklós István Tóth, Karl-Georg Boroviczény, Martin von Walterskirchen, Antal Radvánszky and Szabolcs de Vajay. All these works were published in Western European countries, thus they did not have a commensurate impact in Central Europe. The very few exceptions are the popular works by Imre Marjai published in 1990, and the joint publication of László Legeza and József Török in 1999. These studies – published in Hungarian or German – were usually summaries of former secondary works, and they yield no new insights.

Simultaneously with the studies of the Croatian Lelja Dobronic, Hungarian lay scholarship also “discovered” the importance of the topic at the end of the
1970s. The work of László Hársing and Károly Kozák\(^\text{30}\) aimed at providing a modern summary for a wider audience, though Kozák's work of 1982 explicitly targeted the scholarly world, and it was published in the Hungarian *Acta Archaeologica* in French.\(^\text{31}\) As an archeologist, he combined history and art history without any sort of source criticism in his "catalogue." Although he mentioned the Canons Regular of St. Stephen quoting Boroviczény's idea, he completely confused the data referring to the different orders.

When evaluating the work of Lelja Dobronić, one can say, she treated Hospitallers like Templars. However, it is worth noting that she was the first scholar from the region who consulted the Central Archives of the Hospital (Malta) from the perspective of the Hungarian-Slavonian Priory of the Order. Slovenian scholars also studied the history of the Hospitallers in their region during the last two decades (Joze Mlinarič and Miha Kosi),\(^\text{32}\) but they mostly relied upon Dobronić's works.

As a member of the afore-mentioned research group at the University of Szeged I started investigating the history of the Hospitallers in the medieval kingdom of Hungary in 1994. My objective has been to produce a comprehensive work on the history of the Order in East-Central Europe based on all the available primary sources with reference to the Order, and to provide a fundamental criticism of the former studies. I published my results thus far in minor articles\(^\text{33}\)

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mostly in English – and I am about to submit my doctoral thesis, on the topic soon. Certainly, my work is facilitated by the fact that Karl Borchardt and Anthony Luttrel have been working on the history of the Province of Alamania – and other similar topics – for years.34

The most fruitful topic in the region is the history of the Teutonic Order in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, namely in Transylvania (1211–1225 and also for a short while during the reign of King Sigismund (1387–1437).35 Although this topic has often been researched by Hungarian, German and Romanian scholars, the peak of studies can be dated from 1970 onwards. In the course of a decade some ten studies were published by Gábor Adriányi,36 Adolf Armbruster,37 Horst Glassl,38 Harald Zimmermann,39 and others. Their works were explicitly dedi-
cated to the presence of the Teutonic knights in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. Certainly, there are many other works touching upon the problem from different angles, but the mere list of them would exceed the frames of this brief summary. After a decade in a “standby state”, from the beginning of the 1990s, several remarkable articles and chapters of monographs have appeared by, for instance, Gábor Frank, László Pósán, Adrian Rusu, Horst Klusch, and others. Their works share some important characteristics. The professional one is that most of the primary sources of the topic were edited and published decades or — in some cases — almost a century ago. Moreover, as it very often happens, there are characteristics of ideological and political character. By now, these supra-professional “elements” became, more or less, visible but scholars still must be aware of these above described historiographical features. The most recent studies are rather intensive in nature as they claim for the reevaluation of prevailing ideas instead of incorporating new sources.

By summing up, it is not surprising that much has changed since the decline of the communist regimes. From the very beginning of the 1990s, church history regained its former luster making it possible to launch new projects in the field. Both established and young scholars initiated or began new studies of the history of the military-religious orders as well as that of the Crusades. Numerous articles, monographs and theses indicate the regained importance of the topic. Moreover, the recent publications meet modern scholarly standards and they have mostly been published in (major) foreign languages. Until we lack modern and reliable scholarly works concerning the above surveyed region, it is not possible to produce appropriate comparative works for the West either. Hopefully, the majority of the above listed recent works provide a revised basis or starting point for “exploring” a part of Europe which once was regarded to be a part of Latin Christendom.


