

## **The Hospitallers on Rhodes and their Bohemian Priory in the Middle Ages**

Karl Borchardt, November 2014

Holy war is a much debated topic these days, and warfare against Muslims a major issue in international politics since the last quarter of the twentieth century. Seen against this background, it is no surprise that medieval warfare against Muslims has become a popular subject for present-day historians. Studies on the crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries abound, and so do studies on the Hospitallers, the Templars and the Teutonic Order. These three great military-religious orders, and a number of lesser ones such as Saint Thomas or Saint Lazarus, were founded during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Jerusalem or in the Holy Land with the sole purpose of organising support from Latin Europe for the defence of the east. For this noble goal the military-religious orders collected alms, - a business called the *questia* -, and in this way they were similar to the mendicant orders of the thirteenth century, the Dominicans and the Franciscans. But contrary to the mendicant orders the military-religious orders never had a theological or moral problem with accepting properties, i. e. manors and estates, houses, hospitals and castles. The reason was that such possessions were supposed to produce surpluses for defending Christians against the enemies of the faith. When after the loss of Jerusalem to Saladin in 1187 it became clear that donations alone were not enough to secure continuous support for the defence of Latin Christendom, the military-religious orders even began to buy manors and estates, houses, hospitals and castles in the west. In this way, first through donations and later also through purchases, all three great military-religious orders acquired quite a number of possessions almost all over Latin Europe, including of course Bohemia and Moravia. To secure the efficient management of these possessions, they developed a three-layered administrative structure, (1) the headquarters, (2) regional officers, and (3) local officers. The supreme head of the order was called master, the local officers were the preceptors or commanders, the regional officers had a variety of different titles, among the Hospitallers usually prior.

This structure was an innovation. In fact, the whole concept of a somehow centralised order with a specific headquarters was an innovation, and it was not fully developed until the thirteenth century when the general councils of 1215 and 1274 forbade the formation of new orders. The monastic or religious order was also a peculiarity of the Latin Christians and is not found among orthodox or oriental churches. So far monastic and other religious houses

had sent members to other places, but the new foundations were usually independent, controlled in the same way as the mother house by the local bishop. In the tenth and eleventh centuries many bishops were considered to be inept by church reformers. Mother houses such as Cluny or Cîteaux tried to control daughter convents by visitations and by regular chapter meetings in the mother house. In this way they wanted to ensure strict adherence to the same rule, the same statutes and the same *consuetudines*. The papacy began to support this by granting exemption from episcopal jurisdiction to such monastic or religious communities. In a way the military-religious orders followed the example of the Cluniacs and especially the Cistercians. They clearly wanted to adhere to the same rule, the same statutes and the same *consuetudines* throughout Latin Christendom. Yet in other ways their situation was different because they did not start with convents in the west. All their knights and sergeants, *milites* and *servientes*, were in the Holy Land or on other frontiers fighting the Muslims or other enemies of the faith. So they could not adopt the principle of filiation to control their establishments in the west. Furthermore the *questia*, the collecting of alms, was traditionally organized by dioceses. For these two reasons the military-religious orders had to start with geographical administrative units, an idea soon to be copied by for example the Premonstratensians and the mendicant orders, Dominicans and Franciscans.

The Hospitallers were the first and the most important military religious order to acquire possessions in Bohemia and Moravia from the middle of the twelfth century onwards, mostly by royal and noble donations in Prague and elsewhere. From the 1180s onwards there was a Bohemian priory of the Hospital. Most donations were made until the 1270s, especially from two great noble families, the Bawor of Strakonitz / Strakonice and the Markwartinger / Markvartici. The prior of Bohemia also controlled Hospitaller possessions in Moravia, quite naturally so, as they were usually ruled by the same Přemyslid prince. The Bohemian priory, however, also included possessions in Austria, Styria and Carinthia to the south and in Silesia and Poland to the north. This can be explained by political factors, Přemyslid expansionism in the thirteenth century, and by logistics, as people and supplies from all over eastern central Europe would have to reach the Adriatic in order to be sent to the Holy Land. As late as in the 1230s the Bohemian prior was called *magister* of Moravia, and he was in charge of houses as far away as in Pomerania, because from the Baltic roads went through Moravia and Vienna to Styria and Venice. The overland-routes through Hungary to Constantinople and further on to the Holy Land were not longer possible after the Third Crusade of 1188/91. Hungary was therefore a separate Hospitaller priory to the south-east of Bohemia, in the same way as

Germany to the north-west of Bohemia. All western priories had to pay moneys called *responsiones* to the eastern headquarters, at first probably a third of their revenues, later on a fixed amount of florins according to their relative wealth. In 1317 when Pope John XXII intervened with financial problems of the Hospitallers the *responsiones* were 1000 florins for Bohemia and 1000 florins as well for Germany; Hungary was governed at this time by the prior of Rome who owed 8000 florins for his two priories. The figures for the other priors are almost always well above 5000 florins, and this shows how relatively unimportant both Germany and Bohemia were for the Hospitaller master and convent on Rhodes. The bulk of their western *responsiones* came from France, Italy, Spain and England.

The major advantage of the Hospitallers was that their early prestige and attraction rested on the hospital they ran for Latin pilgrims near the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Fighting enemies of the faith was only their second task. The Hospitallers adopted this vocation only in the middle of the twelfth century because the Templars, stationed since 1120 on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, were extremely successful with this. The Templars had been founded exclusively as a militia to protect Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land. They never ran hospitals. Both Hospitallers and Templars were attractive primarily for the knightly classes of France and other parts of western Europe, the dominating force behind the crusades. Strangely enough, Italy was somewhat less generous with endowments, perhaps because the Italian merchants often preferred trade to war. The Teutonic Order was founded only after 1187, when Jerusalem had been lost and the Hohenstaufen emperors Henry VI and his son Frederick II wanted to have a separate military-religious order for the Empire.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century the situation of the Bohemian priory changed dramatically. The background is twofold, the end of Přemyslid dynasty in Bohemia and the loss of the Holy Land to the Muslims in the east. All three great military-religious orders had to leave Acre in 1291. The headquarters of the Teutonic Order was moved first to Venice and then, in 1309, to Marienburg in Prussia. On the Baltic the Teutonic Knights carried on fighting against pagan enemies of the Christian faith, until the conversion of Lithuania after 1386 rendered this less and less convincing for gathering support from Latin Christians. Finally, Prussia was turned into a secular Lutheran duchy in 1525. The Hospitallers were less aspiring but in the long run more successful. They decided to fight the Muslims by sea in the Mediterranean. For this purpose they conquered Rhodes between 1306 and 1309. The Aegean island of Rhodes controlled two important sea-routes. One ran from Italy to the Levant and

was mainly used by western merchants and pilgrims. The other one ran from the Black Sea through the Aegean to Egypt. It was important for the trade with young slaves from the Eurasian steppe regions and the Caucasus who were usually bought by Mamluk officers, the ruling class in Egypt, who trained and educated such slaves to become their successors. When in 1522 the Hospitallers lost Rhodes to the Ottoman Turks, their headquarters was established on Malta in 1530 where it remained until 1798. The Templars were the least fortunate of the three great military-religious orders after 1291. Pope Clement V suppressed the Templars in 1312 and awarded their possessions to the Hospitallers. On the whole the Hospitallers were quite successful in actually getting the Templar properties, although sometimes rulers and/or nobles defied papal authority in this respect. Brandenburg nobles were forced to give in by Margrave Waldemar in 1318 and to hand over Templar houses such as Tempelhof, Lietzen, Quartschen and Zielenzig to the Hospitallers. But in Bohemia King John of Luxemburg was faced with opposition by Henry of Leipa / Lípa and other nobles and had to compromise: John was recognized as king but had to accept that Templar possessions remained in noble hands and that the regional Hospitaller prior for Bohemia would henceforth be a member of the Czech aristocracy, a Löwenberg / Lemberk, Zwierzetitz / Zviřetic, Wartemberg / Vartmberg, Neuhaus / Hradec, Rosenberg / Rozmberk, Sternberg / Šternberk, Michelsberg / Michalovic, Waldstein / Valdštejn or Schwamberg / Švamberk. Under King John Berthold of Henneberg in Franconia was the last German Hospitaller to be prior of Bohemia, the last one in a long series that had started in the 1250s and had produced several important royal councillors under Přemysl Ottokar II and Wenceslas II, among the Hermann of Hohenlohe in Franconia. The Bohemian and Moravian Hospitallers did not get the Moravian Templar commanderies at Čejkovice / Scheckwitz and at Jamolice / Gamolitz with its castle at Tempelštejn / Tempelstein and the recently purchased colonization territories around Wsetin / Vsetín. The prior Berthold of Henneberg sold the Templar house in Prague immediately, in 1313, to Dominican nuns. Solely the manor at Aurzinowes / Uhříněves near Prague could be kept by the Hospitallers in virtue of Clement V's 1312 decree. And at the same time the Bohemian priory lost many possessions in Poland, as the Hospitallers supported John of Luxemburg against Władysław Lokietek who in 1320 was crowned as Polish king.

From the early fourteenth century onwards the history of the Bohemian priory of the Hospital is primarily regional and local, *Landesgeschichte* as it is called in German. The Hospitallers shared the fate of the other religious institutions in the lands of the *corona regni Bohemiae*. Emperor Charles IV managed to secure the appointment of some of his favourites as

commanders and even of Duke Ziemowit of Teschen / Těšín / Cieszyn as prior in 1372. The emperor's son Wenceslas IV was less successful with the prior Markold of Wrutitz / Vrutice in 1391. During the papal schism after 1378 the Luxemburg family supported the popes in Rome, the Habsburg dukes of Austria those in Avignon. As a consequence, Mailberg and the other possessions in Austria, Styria and Carinthia became more and more detached from the Bohemian priory, although even in the fifteenth century Emperor Frederick III (r. 1440-1493) was not influential enough to secure a formal and full separation. During the Hussite wars after 1419 the Bohemian prior was forced to leave Prague and to retreat to the order's stronghold of Strakonitz / Strakonice in the south-western part of Bohemia. Yet the anti-Utraquist and later on anti-Lutheran part of the Czech nobles continued to control the priory and their sons usually served as commanders. Only after the battle of Bílá hora in 1620 the Habsburgs regained control of the Hospitaller priory for the court aristocracy.

For all this regional and local sources abound. Charters, estate inventories and other documents are in the archives, manuscripts and printed books in the libraries. Churches, castles and other buildings are studied by archaeologists, the fields, pasturages and forests by historical geographers (see the collective volume *Die geistlichen Ritterorden in Mitteleuropa. Mittelalter*, ed. Karl Borchardt and Libor Jan, 2011, German and Czech publication).

Throughout the later Middle Ages and the early modern period there continued to be priors and prioral chapters. In order to try and understand how this organisational structure worked it might be a good idea to collect and edit the charters issued by the priors and on the prioral chapters where they met with their commanders. Many studies have been published recently on the Hospitallers and other military-religious orders in Bohemia and Moravia by Libor Jan from Brno and others. Methodologically interesting is a book by Maria Starnawska, *Między Jerozolimą a Łukowem, Between Jerusalem and Łukow* (1999), which deals with all Jerusalem-centred orders in Poland, all *crucigeri* or *cruciferi* as they were called rather indiscriminately in the local and regional sources, not only military-religious orders but also non-fighting orders such as the canons of the Holy Sepulchre. For Poland such a book has been possible. If you would like to do that for France, you would need fifty years and a team of at least half a dozen collaborators.

Despite this regionalisation the Bohemian priory continued to be part of a somewhat centralised "international" military-religious order. Therefore the history of the Bohemian priory cannot be done exclusively from a regional or local point of view. There are interesting

charters issued by the Rhodian master in the Prague archives of the Bohemian priory which would deserve an edition. And there are sources concerning the history of the Bohemian priory in the central Hospitaller archive. This archive is today still on Malta, although the headquarters of the order is now in Rome, but the sources there only concern the period after 1798. In Malta one even finds sources from Rhodes prior to 1522. This can be explained by the fact that in 1522 Rhodes was not conquered and pillaged but surrendered on terms after a long siege. These terms permitted the Hospitallers to save their lives and to take a lot of their treasures with them, including some relics and parts of their chancery documents and books. The chancery material included several original charters issued to the master and convent during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Furthermore it included the annual registers of the Rhodian chancery from 1346 onwards and the minutes of the master's council from 1459 onwards. The registers are section II and the minutes section V of the *Archivum Ordinis Melitensis* in what is now the National Library of Malta at La Valletta. The registers or *libri bullarum* are 318 volumes to 1798, among them 97 from Rhodes. The minutes are 179 volumes to 1798, among them 18 from Rhodes (neither section so far being calendared in the Records of the Order of St. John, ed. Antonio Zammit Gabaretta and others, 1964ss.). The minutes are arranged in chronological order. This means that it is almost impossible to look for Bohemian entries; one can only find some more or less by chance. The more important registers, however, not only cover a longer period of time but are also arranged geographically according to priories. Usually entries for Germany, Bohemia and Denmark are to be found in one and the same section. So it is possible to look for documents concerning Bohemia. For the years from 1346 to 1428 I have prepared an edition of all documents concerning central Europe. This includes not only those in the section on Germany and Bohemia but also a few texts in other sections which mention Germans or Bohemians, although I cannot guarantee that I got all relevant entries. The total number is about 380, and a quarter of them concern the Bohemian priory with Moravia, Silesia and Austria.

The material usually concerns appointments, payments and licences. As examples you can see here two documents issued in 1384 by the Roman master Riccardo Caracciolo on a chapter general convened by him in Naples for his supporters against the Avignonese master Juan Fernandez de Heredia. The texts confirm Duke Ziemowit of Teschen as prior of Bohemia and cancel a pension he had had to pay to Hesso Schlegelholz, a German Hospitaller on Rhodes (whose earlier appointment to be prior of Bohemia had been invalidated in turn for this pension). The registers are abbreviated copies of original charters issued by the Hospitaller

chancery on Rhodes and handed out to Hospitaller officers and sometimes other ecclesiastical or lay recipients. Almost all of these originals are no longer extant, probably because they were of importance only to the recipients personally and perhaps to their immediate heirs but could be destroyed afterwards as they had no long-term value. The appointments were in fact mostly confirmations of appointments made by the prior or the annual prioral chapter. They are either for ten years or, when the appointee had proved to be effective, for life. The prior was in fact elected by the prioral chapter after agreement had been achieved among the commanders and other regionally influential people. So the priory was always a candidate of the royal court and / or of the leading Czech nobility. Appointments for simple commanders were rare in the Rhodian registers, only when the appointee thought it advisable for some personal or political reason to obtain a confirmation for his appointment from the Rhodian master. Exceptions were the appointments to prioral and magisterial chambers. According to general regulations both the master on Rhodes and the prior in each western priory had the right to appoint the commanders in four commanderies of the respective priory. This enabled both the master and the prior to bypass the order's oligarchy at Work and to reward services immediately. These magisterial and prioral chambers might change, but at least it was possible for both the prior and the master to appoint four persons to four commanderies. For Bohemia and for Germany this rather general regulation was fairly unimportant as far as the master was concerned. As there were almost no brethren from central Europe on Rhodes, there was neither a necessity nor a chance to reward services with a *camera magistralis*. Any appointee had to promise to pay his responsions. And there are some receipts that the responsions had actually been paid. The licences usually concerned travelling to and from Rhodes, sometimes also travelling to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage. As there were almost no Bohemian knights on Rhodes, the licences can be discarded here.

These sources from Rhodes now on Malta highlight the fact that even for the period after around 1300 and in as remote a priory as Bohemia the headquarters retained some sort of importance. From the early modern period there are also reports about visitations which the master from time to time commissioned to be executed in all priories. Furthermore, there are proofs of nobility which had to be handed in to the prior or sometimes also the master to be admitted as a future knight into the order. And there are *meglioramenti*, detailed inventories for commanderies with which the commander had to prove that his administration had been successful and that he was qualified for advancement in the order. From time to time the headquarters sent visitors to the priories. Their reports are extant for 1494/95 in Germany

(studied by Walter Gerd Rödel, *Das Großpriorat Deutschland*, 1972) but not for Bohemia. From time to time the popes would order enquêtes on the Hospitaller possessions, Benedict XII in 1338 and Gregory XII in 1373. Contrary to the visitations the enquêtes were made by non-Hospitallers with the aim of checking whether the order still did its best to support fighting against the Muslims in the eastern Mediterranean. The 1338 enquêtes are extant for Provence and England but not for Bohemia and Germany. The 1373 enquêtes are extant for many parts of France and a few other scattered dioceses all over Latin Europe, among them Osnabrück and Minden in Germany (recently edited by Anthony Luttrell and myself, *Deutsches Archiv* 69, 2013) and the archdiocese of Prague in Bohemia (edited by Václav Novotný, 1900). This enquête includes detailed reports on eleven houses: (1) in Prague, *in pede pontis civitatis Pragensis*, (2) *in Dub alias in Swietla*, (3) *in Ploskowitz*, (4) *in Manyetin*, (5) *in Strakonitz*, (6) *in Zittauia* (in Lusatia, but to the diocese of Prague), (7) *in Iuueni Boleslauia s. Viti*, and (8) *ibidem s. Iohannis Baptiste*, (9) *in Pieczina*, (10) *in Hersfeld* (Hirschfeld near Zittau), (11) *in Glacz*. Only two of these commanderies were fourteenth-century foundations, St. Veit at Jungbunzlau and Pičín, formed around newly donated churches. Moravia and Silesia are missing, as the enquête was done by commissioners for the dioceses of Olmütz / Olomouc and Breslau / Wrocław respectively, not by the commissioners for Prague.

All this is evidence for the elaborate administrative structure of the Hospitallers which existed already in the Middle Ages throughout Latin Europe. Taken together, the three-layered hierarchy of offices, the regulations concerning appointments, payments of responsions and other dues, the licences for travelling, the visitations all prove the importance of the Hospitallers and other medieval military-religious orders for the spread of administrative skills among *milites*. In my view this was more important than organizing warfare against enemies of the faith, a task which lost much of its importance after the late thirteenth century. Yet the military-religious orders continued to propagate ideals of economic efficiency among the nobility, a class that is not usually credited with having been instrumental for royal or civic bureaucracies (see Karl Borchardt, "The Military-Religious Orders: A Medieval 'School for Administrators'?" in: *The Military Orders*, vol. 5: Politics and Power, ed. Peter W. Edbury, Farnham 2012, pp. 3-20). Yet without such skills the nobility would probably not have survived the late medieval economic and social changes and would not have continued to dominate European societies well into the nineteenth century.