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CHAPTER 1

The Foundation of the Order, 1190–1215

In 1187, the forces of the kingdom of Jerusalem suffered a crushing defeat on the slopes of an Iron Age fort called the Horns of Hattin, above Lake Tiberias. With the destruction of the Christian field army, the path was open for the Muslim forces under Saladin to seize control of Jerusalem and the other cities of the kingdom. Within months, only the city of Tyre remained in Christian hands.

In the West, the arrival of this news provoked outrage and disbelief. Pope Urban III is said to have died from the shock.¹ Nine days later his successor, Pope Gregory VIII, proclaimed a new crusade with a single objective: the reconquest of Jerusalem.² The response to this appeal was vast. Major armies were raised in Germany, the Angevin Empire and Capetian France. Several further contingents departed from other provinces such as Sicily and Hungary and travelled independently. Among these great expeditions was a smaller naval force that had been raised from the cities of Bremen and Lübeck.³ The intentions of this contingent are outlined in the chronicle *Narratio Itineris Navalis ad Terram Sanctam*:

In the year of our Lord 1187 when the Promised Land had been laid waste by Saladin, king of Egypt, when the cities had been captured, when their inhabitants had been imprisoned or killed, a trumpet call, [which] spread widely over the boundaries of the Christians with the indulgence of apostolic authority, moved countless people to the recovery of the lamentable disaster.⁴

Armed with this intent, these forces departed from Bremen on 23 April 1189

¹ *La Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr: 1187–1197*, ed. M. R. Morgan (Paris, 1982), p. 55.

² Gregory VIII, *PL*, vol. 202, col. 1539D–1542D; J. S. C. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History*, 2nd edn (London, 2005), p. 137.

³ For an account of their journey see *Narratio Itineris Navalis ad Terram Sanctam*, in *MGH SRGNS*, vol. 5, pp. 179–196.

⁴ ‘Anno siquidem dominice incarnationis MCLXXXVII a Salahadino rege Egypti destructa terra promissionis, captis urbibus captivatis vel necatis incolis predicationis tuba cum indulgentia apostolice auctoritatis late per Christianorum terminos evagata ad restaurationem miserabilis cladis innumerabilem movit populum’; *Narratio Itineris Navalis ad Terram Sanctam*, p. 179.

and arrived at the siege of Acre in September of the same year.⁵ According to the chronicle quoted above, this fleet included 12,000 men and 50 ships (referred to as cogs), which Saladin is said to have described as ‘towers on the sea’.⁶ The kings of England and France arrived subsequently as did the remnants of the German crusading army, which had broken up after the death of its leader, Emperor Frederick I, in Armenia.⁷ At Acre, the Christian armies were opposed by both the defenders of the city and Saladin’s field army, which was situated at ‘Toron de Saladin’.⁸ Amidst the turmoil of the siege, the crusaders from Bremen and Lübeck established the small hospital which was to become the Teutonic Order.⁹

The Order was therefore a child of the Third Crusade and, like a child, it drew its identity from the ideas and influences that were present during its childhood. The most pervasive and enduring of these was the determination to retake Jerusalem. This overriding imperative became a major feature of the brethren’s policy and this is reflected in the source *De Primordiis Ordinis Theutonici Narratio*, which details the foundation of the first hospital. This brief chronicle was written c.1244 by a brother of the Order and states that:¹⁰

They were called by the principal name of the Hospital of St Mary of the Teutons in Jerusalem with the hope and faith that with the return of the land to the Christian faith, the principal house of the same Order might be made in the city of Jerusalem.¹¹

Similar sentiments can be found in the prologue to the Order’s statutes, which was composed c.1264, probably by the chapter of leading brethren in the Levant:

This Order, signifying both the heavenly and the earthly knighthood, is the foremost for it has promised to avenge the dishonouring of God and his cross and to fight so that the Holy Land, which the infidels subjected to their rule, shall belong to the Christians.¹²

⁵ *Narratio Itineris Navalis ad Terram Sanctam*, p. 179; *La Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr*, pp. 90–91.

⁶ *La Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr*, p. 90; *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, in *Chronicles and Memorials of the Reign of Richard I*, ed. W. Stubbs, RS, 38, vol. 1 (London, 1864), pp. 64–65.

⁷ Frederick I died on 10 June 1190.

⁸ *La Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr*, pp. 90–91.

⁹ The use of the cogs’ sails as the material with which the German Hospital was created can be found in *De Primordiis Ordinis Theutonici Narratio*, in *Scriptores Rerum Prussicarum: Des Geschichtsquellen der Preussischen Vorzeit*, ed. T. Hirsch, M. Töppen and E. Strehle, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1861), p. 220.

¹⁰ For discussion of this chronicle see Arnold, ‘Entstehung und Frühzeit des Deutschen Ordens’, p. 89.

¹¹ ‘Principali nomine hospitale sancte Marie Theutonicorum in Jerusalem nuncuparunt ea spe et fiducia, ut terra christiano cultui restituta in civitate Jerusalem domus fieret eiusdem ordinis principalis, mater caput pariter et magistra’; *De Primordiis Ordinis Theutonici Narratio*, p. 221.

¹² ‘Dise ritterschaft ist ouch bezeichnet bie der himelischen unde irdischen ritterschaft unde ist die

This passage was repeated in later editions of the statutes that were created in the fourteenth century, demonstrating the persistence of this idea.¹³ Moreover, each member of the Order was expected to make a personal commitment to this goal at the time of his admission to the brotherhood because his vow contained a promise to defend the Holy Land.¹⁴ This common theme, which can be found in these fundamental statements of intent, serves as a recurring echo of the Third Crusade's determination to retake the Holy Land.¹⁵

The impact of these ideas can also be seen in the imagery employed by the Teutonic Knights and their supporters. Throughout their sojourn in the Holy Land and for long afterwards the brethren drew comparisons between their own struggles and those of the Old Testament warriors who had fought to protect the Promised Land. Like the Templars and Hospitallers, the Teutonic Knights compared their endeavours to those of the Israelites and the Maccabees.¹⁶ With such allusions the brethren could style themselves as a new generation of defenders of the Holy Land. The Third Crusade itself was imbued with such ideas and the crusade encyclical *Audita Tremendi* stated that Christians should imitate the Maccabees in their quest to regain the city of Jerusalem.¹⁷ In the wake of the expedition a number of warriors, including Richard I of England and the Count of Flanders, were depicted in these terms.¹⁸ Given that the Teutonic Knights were a creation of the Third Crusade it is not surprising that they adopted the same role models, just as they had accepted the same vocation. Accordingly, in 1212 the king of Armenia described them as, 'successors of the Maccabees'.¹⁹ The papacy

vorderste, wande sie gelobet hat, daz sie Gotes vermênisse unde sines crûces wollen rechen unde vehten umbe daz heilige lant, daz der christen sîn sal, daz die heidene under sich hânt betwungen'; *SDO*, p. 24. Translation taken from Sterns, 'The Statutes of the Teutonic Knights', p. 203.

¹³ *SDO*, p. 24.

¹⁴ *SDO*, p. 127.

¹⁵ See also U. Arnold, 'Eight Hundred Years of the Teutonic Order', in *MO*, vol. 1, p. 224.

¹⁶ The Maccabees were a Jewish family whose deeds are recorded in the Apocrypha to the Bible. In the medieval period contemporaries considered the books of the Maccabees to be fully canonical and they were included in the Bible under the title *Libri Historici Novissimi*. The Maccabean realm was established in the second century BC around the city of Jerusalem, which the Maccabees defended against a range of foes. For a history of the Maccabean struggle see B. Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaeus: The Jewish Struggle against the Seleucids* (Cambridge, 1989). For an example of comparisons between the military orders and Maccabees see *Papsturkunden für Templer und Johanniter*, ed. R. Hiestand (Göttingen, 1972), p. 215.

¹⁷ Gregory VIII, *PL*, vol. 202, cols. 1539D–1542D.

¹⁸ *Historia de Expeditione Friderici Imperatoris*, in *MGH SRGNS*, vol. 5, p. 86; *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, pp. 251, 422; *Genealogiae Comitum Flandriae*, *PL*, vol. 209, col. 976.

¹⁹ 'Vicem Machabeorum', *TOT*, no. 46. Fischer has argued that the earliest comparison between the Order and the Maccabees was made in 1221 by Pope Honorius; however this charter demonstrates that this was not the case. See M. Fischer, 'Biblical Heroes and the Uses of Literature', in *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier: 1150–1500*, ed. A. V. Murray (Aldershot, 2001), p. 270. See also M. Fischer, 'The Books of the Maccabees and the Teutonic Order', *Crusades*, 4 (2005), pp. 59–71.

subsequently made similar comparisons in a number of charters issued in the 1220s.²⁰ The Order began to present itself in this way and the prologue to the Order's statutes contains an allusion to the Maccabees.²¹ Later historians of the Order such as Peter von Dusburg – described by Forstreuter as a 'semi-official chronicler of the Order' – continually made allusions to the Maccabees in his *Cronica Terre Prussie*.²² Fischer claims that he mentions the Maccabees twenty-five times in his work.²³ Thus his chronicle, although it is focused on the wars of the Baltic, contains much of the imagery of the crusades to the Holy Land. Ideas of this kind provide a mere handful of examples of the ways in which Jerusalem became both the political goal and the ideological talisman of the Order throughout the early years of its existence and even into the fourteenth century.

The events of 1190 witnessed the creation of the Teutonic Hospital and clearly had a profound effect on the character of the subsequent order; even so it was many years before it would acquire its military function. This transformation occurred during the crusade launched by Emperor Frederick I's son and successor, Henry VI. Henry took the cross on Good Friday 1195 and funded his expedition with vast sums of money extracted from the Greeks.²⁴ He actively promoted the recruitment of the crusade although he was unable to embark for the East in person. The army's objective, like those that had gone before it, was to continue the work of reconquest that had been begun by the armies of the Third Crusade.²⁵

The main imperial army landed at Acre on 22 September 1197 and proceeded north to capture the city of Beirut. It then began to besiege the castle of Toron – situated to the east of Tyre – but this operation was abandoned when news arrived of the death of Henry VI on 28 September 1197 and the leaders were forced to return home.²⁶ In March 1198, prior to the departure of the army from the Levant, the crusade commanders suggested that the Teutonic Hospital should be militarised.²⁷ They then sought the approval of the barons of the kingdom of Jerusalem, who concurred with this decision. In this way the Teutonic Hospital became a military order. To give this new institution a viable organisational framework and to support this new vocation these magnates decided that the brethren should be given

²⁰ Pope Honorius III, 1221: *TOT*, no. 321. Pope Honorius III, 1223: *TOT*, no. 389. Pope Gregory IX, 1230: *TOT*, no. 72.

²¹ *SDO*, p. 25.

²² 'Halbamtliche Chronist des Ordens', in Forstreuter, *Der Deutsche Orden am Mittelmeer*, p. 51.

²³ Fischer, 'Biblical Heroes', p. 270.

²⁴ Much of the following account of Henry VI's crusade has been derived from E. N. Johnson, 'The Crusades of Frederick Barbarossa and Henry VI', in *HOC*, vol. 2, pp. 118–122.

²⁵ *MGH Leges Const.*, vol. 1, no. 365.

²⁶ For discussion of the fall of Toron see M. Piana, *Burgen und Städte der Kreuzzugszeit* (Petersburg, 2008), pp. 398–407.

²⁷ *De Primordiis Ordinis Theutonicis Narratio*, p. 223; Johnson, 'The Crusades of Frederick Barbarossa and Henry VI', pp. 87–122. For further discussion of the militarisation see Favreau, *Studien zur Frühgeschichte des Deutschen Ordens*, pp. 61–62.

the rule of the Templars for matters concerning its military personnel and the rule of the Hospitallers for the care of the sick and poor. Seemingly, the intention was to incorporate the most efficacious elements from the regulations of these older establishments.²⁸ This ceremony was then performed in the palace of the Templars in Acre and Pope Innocent III confirmed the act in 1199.²⁹

Through this process, the Order acquired a mandate to wage holy warfare but it still lacked the strength to pursue this objective on any significant scale. Fortunately for the Teutonic Order, the same patrons who had advocated its creation and militarisation were prepared to fund the growth of its infrastructure. In this way, the Order owed its material and institutional development chiefly to three groups: the German empire, the papacy and the magnates of the Holy Land.

The Empire

The assistance offered to the Order from the German empire came from all levels of society and each group brought their own advantages and agendas. For the Hohenstaufen emperors, the support given to the Teutonic Knights seems to have been one element in a wider effort to increase their influence over the eastern Mediterranean. As has been shown, in the space of seven years, the emperors launched two major crusades into the eastern Mediterranean. They coupled this military assistance with a determined effort to gain authority in this region and during Henry VI's campaign the imperial chancellor endowed the rulers of Cilician Armenia and Cyprus with imperial crowns.³⁰ The Armenians had requested this coronation in May 1194 when Leon II sent messengers to meet Henry in Lombardy. The Cypriots had similarly sent emissaries to Henry VI in the same year. Their acceptance of these crowns signified their vassal status to the German empire. Significantly, King Aimery of Cyprus was also the king of Jerusalem and although, as Mayer has shown, he ruled the two kingdoms separately, it is not likely that he could have pursued imperial policy in Cyprus whilst completely ignoring it in Jerusalem.³¹ For the Christians in the Levant, the patronage of the emperor connected them to the most powerful political and military institution in Christendom. Certainly, they would have been aware of the potential benefits of such a benefactor because in previous decades the Latin East had flourished

²⁸ *De Primordiis Ordinis Theutonici Narratio*, p. 223. Previously the Order had been regulated through reasonable customs (*racionabiles consuetudines*). See *TOT*, no. 296. For discussion see *AZM*, p. 48.

²⁹ *TOT*, no. 297; *Die Register Innocenz' III*, ed. O. Hageneder and A. Haidaher, vol. 1 (1964), p. 823; *CDOT*, no. 4; Potthast, vol. 1, no. 606.

³⁰ *La Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr*, p. 195.

³¹ Aimery was king of Cyprus 1194–1205; king of Jerusalem 1197–1205. H. E. Mayer, *The Crusades*, trans. J. Gillingham, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1990), p. 240; Forstreuter, *Der Deutsche Orden am Mittelmeer*, p. 59.

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