© Office of the Grand Archivist & Historian

Military & Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem

Malta, 2015
The presence of lepers in Hungary is mentioned in the documented life of the early 11th century St Gerardus, Bishop of Chanad which states that “All distressed persons he took under his particular care, and treated the sick with uncommon tenderness. He embraced lepers and persons afflicted with other loathsome diseases with the greatest joy and affection; often laid them in his own bed, and had their sores dressed in his own chamber.” 1 The presence of leper communities in Hungary – _puteus leprosorum_ [well of lepers] or _silvula leprosorum_ [forest of the lepers] – is attested to by documents dated to the late 11th century such as the _Book of Laws_ promulgated by the King St. Ladislas [reign 1077-1095] 2, and the Estate Registry at the Bishopric of Veszprém; while a 1162 Royal Charter of the Árpad King Stephen III (reign 1162-1172), recorded by archivist Abberg Bakonybél, mentions the _silvula leprosorum_ sited near the town of Dorogh, about 20 km south of the city of Strigonia [modern-day Esztergom]. This Charter was re-confirmed in 1181 by King Bela III (reign 1174-1196). 3 The 1181 Charter is often taken as the date when the Order of Saint Lazarus was established in Hungary. The historical record suggests that Hungarian members of the Order of Saint Lazarus, together with the other Crusader Orders, could have participated in the Fifth Crusade in the Kingdom of Jerusalem led by King Andras II in 1217-1218 (reign 1205-1235). 4


3 A brief history of the Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem in Hungary (11th – 18th centuries). Typed note possibly written by Béla Tóth Director of Archives in Budapest dated 1997 in Torri ta’ Lanzun Archives, Malta, +5p. [subsequently referred to as: _A brief history ……_. (1997), _op. cit._]

King Stephen III – King Bela III – King Andras II – King Bela IV

1598 Map of Strigonium

5 Illuminated manuscript from: Chronicon pictum, Marci de Kalt, Chronica de gestis Hungarorum
6 Antique map - two views of Esztergom (Hungary) by Braun & Hogenberg after G. Hoefnagel's son, 1595.
Estate donations in Hungary were given to the Order of Saint Lazarus during the early 13th century. In 1230, the Order acquired land holdings in Strigonia together with a leprosarium, a house and a church. This enabled the Order to establish the Commandery of Strigonia managed after 1233 by the Magister Saint Lazari di Strigano. During the Mongol siege of the town of Esztergom in 1241, the Chancellery and hospital of the Order were damaged. The Order furthermore owned land and a church in the nearby village of Dorogh; besides further property in Eger where it ran a leprosarium, two hospitals and owned three churches and in Nitra [today sited in Slovakia]. By the mid-13th century partly as a result of the Royal Estates Repatriation Actions and partly because of the Mongolian invasion, the Order lost some of its estates in Hungary. In 1228, King Andras II authorized his son Béla (eventually King Béla IV - reign 1235-1270) to revise the previous "needless and fruitless" donations in the whole territory of the kingdom. This led to protestations being made by the Order to Pope Gregory IX in 1235-36 who responded with the Bulla Belan, regem Hungariae regat et hortatur,... issued at Vitebro on the 16th January 1236 wherein the pope requested King Bela IV to restore the confiscated Order’s lands.

In response to this appeal, the confiscated lands were restored to the Order, however in later decades (1256 and 1264) King Béla IV again disposed of the Order’s estates in the Strigona region by selling them to the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem. In 1272, an amicable agreement was signed between the Strigonia convent of Saint Lazarus and the Order of Hospitaller Canons Regular of St Stephen both assuming joint ownership of the hospital in Budafelhévíz on the North side of the Danube River [close to Margaret Bridge, in Buda].

---

7 Strigonia-Esztergom was the capital of Hungary from the 10th till the mid-13th century when King Béla IV of Hungary moved the royal seat to Buda. It lies in Komárom-Esztergom County, on the right bank of the river Danube about 46 km north-west of the modern capital Budapest. At that time, it was an important station on the inland pilgrim route to the Holy Land.


Stephanites was a religious institution set up in honor of King St Stephen I of Hungary by King Géza II of Hungary (1141–1162). The hospital in Budafelhévíz was demolished during the 1440 siege but reverted to ownership by the Order of Saint Lazarus in Buda in 1445.  

In the aftermath of the 1312 Battle of Rozgony (today Rozhanovce) fought between King Charles I of Hungary and the family of Palatine Amade Aba, the Order of Saint Lazarus in Hungary was placed in 1330 under the special protection of the Hungarian Palatine Johannes Drugeth known as Robur et Augmentum Fidei Catholicae Romanae Ecclesiae in Regno Hungariae. According to a Royal Charter dated 1335 promulgated by the Angevin King Karoly Robert I (reign 1308-1342), the Order build a leprosarium in the new Hungarian capital of Buda. The Buda leprosarium was located near to the Royal Castle on the western side of the hill near to the former monastery of St. Lawrence (now a suburban district of Kriszrinaváros – Christineville). The Order of St. Lazarus in 1355 also built a chapel dedicated to the saint in the vicinity of the leprosarium. According to the attesting 1355 Royal Charter, the chapel was located in the village of Logod (now destroyed and commemorated by Logodi Street in the locality). The remains of this chapel can be viewed at Bugát Street close to Logodi Street. During the time of King Ladislav I in 1441, the chapel became known as the Church of Saint Lazarus. It continued to function until the Turkish occupation of Buda in 1541. Its destruction probably occurred during the 1686 siege of the Buda fortress.


Map of Buda dated 1541

Ruins of the Church of St. Lazarus off Bugát Street, Budapest [1939]
In 1377, the Master General of the Order in Boigny Jean de Paris appointed Dominique de Sainroy who resided in Strigonia (Esztergom) to the post of Hungarian Vicaire general. De Sainroy was appointed on condition that he paid four marks of fine silver annually to the central house at Boigny, attended the annual chapter general held in France during Pentecost, and to maintain a priest nominated by the master-general for the service of the commandery. The knights of the Order also took part in the campaigns of King Zsigmond (1382-1437) against the Ottomans. In 1396, Zsigmond led the combined armies of Christendom against the Turks, who had taken advantage of the temporary helplessness of Hungary to extend their dominion to the banks of the Danube. This Last Crusade, preached by Pope Boniface IX, was very popular in Hungary. The nobles flocked in thousands to the royal standard, and were reinforced by volunteers from nearly every part of Europe, the most important contingent being that of the French led by John the Fearless, son of Philip II, Duke of Burgundy. Zsigmond set out with 90,000 men and a flotilla of 70 galleys. After capturing Vidin, he camped before the fortress of Nicopolis. The Christian forces were however defeated by Sultan Bayezid I in September 1396. Most of the Crusader army was destroyed or captured; a small portion including Zsigmond escaped; about 3,000 prisoners were executed.

In the 15th century, the Order acquired further properties in the form of land holdings, buildings and hospitals (leprosaria) all over the country. Besides the holdings in the region of Strigonia and Buda, the Order established leprosaria in Szebeny in Southern Hungary; Brassó, Beszterce, and Nagyvárad in the region of Buda; and Bártfa (now Bardejov) and Lôcse (now Levoca) in modern-day Slovakia. In 1404, a judicial charter of King Sigismund [reign 1387-1437] records a lawsuit between Michael, a member of the Order of Saint Lazarus, and the nuns of Margaret Island, the Chapter of Strigonia and the Order of Saint Elizabeth regarding a frontier outrage.

King Zsigmond of Hungary during the battle of Nicopolis in 1396. Painting by Ferenc Lohr - Main hall of the Castle of Vaja

14 *A brief history .......* (1997), *op. cit.*
15 *A brief history .......* (1997), *op. cit.*
The Kingdom of Hungary, which at the time spanned the area from Croatia in the west to Transylvania in the east, continued to be gravely threatened by Ottoman advances. After a series of inconclusive wars over the course of 176 years, the kingdom finally crumbled in the Battle of Mohács of 1526, after which most of it was either occupied or brought under Ottoman suzerainty. The Moslem occupation of Hungary restricted the Order’s possessions and the Order lost most of its eastern possessions. It however maintained a presence in the western part of the country which had remained under the Habsburg Empire. The Landesmeister of Hungary continued to attend the meetings at Boigny in France, including those held in 1521 and 1558.

---

17 In attendance during this Chapter held by Master General Claude de Mareul were the commanders of Écarlate, Saint Catherine de Monrevault, Mount Soissons, Saint Thomas de Fontenay, Mount Meulan, Saint Lazare de Gournay, Saint Anthony de Grattemont, La Lande-Daron, Montlioust, Strigonia, Conflans, Ville-Dieu, Meslin and Chinon. Listed in: De Sibert (1772), *op. cit.*, p.264
After the Ottoman invasion of Austria failed in 1683, the Habsburgs went on the offensive against the Turks. By the end of the 17th century, they managed to conquer the remainder of the historical Kingdom of Hungary and the principality of Transylvania. For a while in 1686, the capital Buda was again free, with European help. After the departure of the Ottomans, the Habsburgs dominated the Hungarian Kingdom. After the expulsion of Turks from Carpathian Basin in 1683, the Order re-established itself in Hungary. In 1710 Knights of the Order founded a hospital named "Lazarethum" in Tabán, where infectious patients were treated until the end of the 18th century. Together with the Missionary Society of the Order of the Sisters of Charity and the St. Lazarus Missionary Society, the Order of St. Lazarus set up the Society of the Holy Greens with the aim of caring for the poor and sick. The Order’s fortunes in Hungary apparently declined during the 18th century and very little reference being made to Hungarian knights during this period except for the admission of two Hungarian knights in 1722 – Benio Vilmos and 1767 – Count Dessewffy Janos.

In 1781, King Joseph II of Austria and Hungary dissolved all Holy Orders. However, this restriction did not influence the activities of the Society of Holy Greens which continued to work in other countries. In 1870, a few Lazarists recommenced their mission in Hungary, notably Nandor Medits, Kálmán Galambos and Júzsef Lollok. Because of this work, H.I.H. Prince Joseph in 1903 placed his hunting palace at Piliscsaba at the disposal of the Society. From that point on mission stations and hospices were built, one after the other, all over the country on behalf of the Order: 1903 - Budapest, Gát street: church and mission station; 1909 - Budapest, 26 Nagyboldogasszony Street: mission station. The World War I briefly interrupted this process, but in 1920 the Administrator General of the Order converted the Hungarian mission stations into Vice-Province, and in 1926 he established an independent province of the Order and the new houses were built again in Budapest, Ménési str.: Central Headquarters of the Order; Szob: an Education Center; Lakócsa in County Somog: Mission Station; Budapest, Csepel-Királyerdő: Mission Station and Hospice; and Budapest, Csepel-Szabótelep: Mission Station and Hospice.

---


20 Béla Toth (1996), op. cit.
An attempt was made to formally revive the Order in Hungary with a knighthood being conferred on Baron Jean-Médée de Montagnac-Veoreos (1930), Count Emil von Csudnay (1930), Urkovich Béla (1932), and Prof. Tapay Szabolcs Laszlo (1933). Attempts were made after the Second World War to reorganize the Order in Hungary but the advent of a communist regime in 1949 put stop to this organization. Communist decrees prohibited all Knightly Orders and Missionary Societies from carrying out their activities. Their buildings were nationalized and their members persecuted or expelled from the country. The Grand Priory of Hungary in Exile was formally re-established with the admission of Dr. Bela Kezdy Vaserhelyi de Kezc to the Order in 1962 and his appointment as delegate for the jurisdiction in 1962. In the following year further individuals were admitted to the jurisdiction.

- Dr. Béla Kezdy Vaserhelyi de Kezc [1962; born 1905, died 01/12/2000]
- Dr. Geza Charles Paikert [1962]
- Madame Geza Paikert néé Comtesse Ilona Kuun de Osdola [1962]
- Jean Bartha [1962]
- Comte Aladar Zichy [1963/4]
- Madame Margit de Matuska [1963/4]
- Wimos Nagy [1963/4]
- Zolant Pan Kezdy Vasarhelyi de Kezd [1963/4].
- Colonel Andreas de Jarmy de Szolnok [1963/4]
- Colonel Geza de Hanzslinszky-Chull [1963/4]
- Derzo de Pongracz [1963/4]
- Andor Nagy [1963/4]

---

23 In 1972 was serving as Grand Registrar of the Order besides Head of the National Jurisdiction. Saint Lazarus Newsletter, May 2001, 18:p.15
With the increase in membership, the jurisdiction was by 1972 elevated to a Priory \(^{24}\) and by 1977 to a Grand Priory. \(^{25}\) It was working towards donating aid to Hungarians during the communist regime. A close cooperation was established with the Jesuit Fathers so that in 1995 the National Spiritual Protector was the head of the Jesuit Order in Hungary Fr. Dr. Nemesszeghy Ervin SJ ChLJ. The members of the Order in exile during the communist regime supported a home for retarded children in Taiwan managed by the Jesuit Father members of the jurisdiction. A member of the jurisdiction Chev. Dr. Buzady KLJ and his spouse, a dentist, had done volunteer work in this establishment. \(^{26}\) In 1983, the membership of the Grand Priory numbered 79 of which thirty members were stationed in Hungary while the remaining 49 members were scattered over 11 countries with the largest group being in North America, 12 in Germany, and 7 in Taiwan. Most members were aged more than 60 years. The group of members stationed in Munich under the leadership of Dr. Buzady were particularly successful in their hospital work assisting refugee families and the continuing support to the Missionary Hospital and the Hungarian-established Home for retarded Children in Taiwan. Similar endeavours were forthcoming from the members stationed in North America. \(^{27}\)

After the fall of communism in Hungary and the establishment of the Third Republic in 1989, the national jurisdiction in Hungary was formally re-established. A chapel named, St. Lazarus Chapel, was equipped in a hospital in Salgótarján besides supporting the returning Hungarian refugees from Rumania. \(^{28}\) In 1995, the long-standing leader of the jurisdiction H.E. Chev. Dr. Béla Kezdy Vaserhelyi de Kezc KM, KCM, GCLJ, KMLJ, KMW was appointed Grand Prior emeritus [GM Decree 7/1995]; while H.E. Dame Countess Astrid Bolza-Kezdy DGCLJ, DMLJ, SCRJ was appointed to the post of Grand Prior [GM decree 8/1995]. The sub-jurisdiction Commandery of

\(^{24}\) Report of the Grand Magisterial Council held in Liege, 3\(^{rd}\) and 4\(^{th}\) June 1972. MHOSLJ, Malta, 1972, p.7


\(^{26}\) Report of the GMC in held Malta..., 1977, op. cit.. p.12

Szent István in Budapest under the direction of Chev. Dr. Allan Inovius KCLJ was working to help the elderly and homeless in Budapest, besides supporting a scheme to sponsor hospital beds, the Szent István Scount Movement and organizing first-aid training programmes. In 1996, Chev. Inovius was appointed Grand Prior [GM decree 13/1996; Grand Prior emeritus GM decree 18/1999]. In 1999, the jurisdiction set up the MHOSLJ Charity of Hungary. In 2010, Dame Countess Éva Nyáry DGCLJ-J, DMLJ, SMLJ, PSLJ was appointed to the post of Grand Prior. On the 6th August 2012, The Youth and Children's Mission of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem was inaugurated by a delegation of five members of the Order, headed by the Countess Nyáry. This is a project that will allow children from less privileged backgrounds to participate in sports, spiritual growth, and local cultural activities in a summer camp atmosphere on the banks of the majestic Danube. Examples of activities that children will be able to discover include bike and water tours, sport competitions, bath and museum visits, horse riding and fishing. An ongoing youth community, the Scout Team of Saint Lazarus was also founded at this inaugural camp. The Scout Team will allow children who have attended the camp to maintain contact and continue their activities together in the future.

Countess Éva Nyáry

29 Saint Lazarus Newsletter, December 196, 9:p.5, 8-9; May 1997, 10:p.2-3; April 1999, 14:p.13-14. The other officials of the jurisdiction in 1996 included H.E. Dr. Tibor Buzadi – Prior of the Grand Priory who was also appointed a member of the Reunification Commission representing the Malta Obedience.