

HISTORY OF THE ORDER OF KING SAINT STEPHEN

FROM ITS ORIGINS TO THE PRESENT DAY

by

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Abstract: This study demonstrates that the ensemble of hospitaller houses established by King Saint Stephen forms the antecedent of the first Hungarian-founded monastic order, the *Cruciferi Sancti Stephani Regis*, established by King Géza II, and that this order constituted an independent order in the Middle Ages.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Order of King Saint Stephen (*Cruciferi Sancti Stephani Regis*, or *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani*, or *Cruciferi Sancti Regis*) is less known and poorly documented compared to other medieval ecclesiastical chivalric orders. This may be related to the fact that medieval Hungarian church history was long considered a neglected area in domestic historiography. The history of ecclesiastical institutions was typically written by historians from among their members, with the aim of showcasing a glorious past rather than scientific historiography. Although scientific ecclesiastical historical research began between the two World Wars, the Second World War and the subsequent political situation halted this process for decades, and only the social and political changes starting in the 1980s gave it new momentum.¹ However, the chivalric orders that once operated in Hungary did not become a focal point of interest. Another problem in reconstructing the history of the Order of King Saint Stephen is that researchers until recently attributed the hospitaller houses and monasteries now recognized as belonging to the Stephanites to the Order of Saint John. Zsolt Hunyadi attributes this to a conceptual problem where medieval sources used the terms *cruciferi* and *crucesignati* inconsistently, and the term *crucifer* was mistakenly applied to Johannites or Templars, even in the case of members and monasteries of the Antonite, Stephanite, or Holy Spirit orders. Another cause of misidentification is that modern historians, due to the shortcomings of János Tomkó Marvanich, a bishop in Bosnia who studied the history of the Hungarian-Slavonian Johannite province, based their understanding on the estates listed in the decrees of the 1629 Synod of Nagyszombat. Considering that the Order of King Saint Stephen was no longer functioning at that time, the Stephanite monasteries, hospitaller houses, and estates were also attributed to the Johannites.²

¹ László Kosztka: *A középkori magyar egyházra vonatkozó történeti kutatások az utóbbi évtizedekben, 1948-1988* (Historical Studies in the Last Decades on the Mediaeval Hungarian Church). Aetas 1993:1 p.65-68.

² Zsolt Hunyadi: *Szent János ispotályos testvérei: A jobanniták Magyarországon. A 12. század*. In: Máltai tanulmányok (The Hospitaller brothers of St. John: The Johannites in Hungary. The 12th century In: Maltese Studies) 2019.01-02. p.6-7.

Boroviczény explains the misunderstanding by noting that Queen Euphrosyne, wife of the order's founder, King Géza II, donated the church and hospital dedicated to King Saint Stephen in Székesfehérvár, along with its estates, to the Johannites.³

As a result, in 19th-20th century historical works, including those by Ede Reiszig, János Jerney, Nándor Knauz, and József Török, the hospitaller houses in Esztergom and Felhévíz are presented as Johannite institutions. It should be mentioned, however, that in the first half of the 18th century, Abbot Odó Kopitk (1692-1755) of the Benedictine order prepared a plan for the establishment of the Order of King Saint Stephen, based on its historical background, which he also sent to the papal and imperial courts in Vienna. It still needs to be clarified what knowledge he had regarding the medieval history of the Stephanites. In the 20th century, the research of György Györffy and Károly György Boroviczény brought a breakthrough in uncovering the history of the order. Recently, studies on the Stephanites have been published by Norbert C. Tóth, Krisztina Tóth, and Orsolya Falus, but no one has yet undertaken to write a comprehensive history of the order. The authors of this study are not historians but members of the Order of King Saint Stephen, who wish to highlight further research opportunities by presenting the current results and shortcomings.

1. HOSPITALLER HOUSES FOUNDED BY KING SAINT STEPHEN

1.1. OPENING PILGRIMAGE ROUTES FROM 1017-1018 AND ESTABLISHING HOSPITALLER HOUSES IN ROME, JERUSALEM, RAVENNA, AND CONSTANTINOPLE

Every religion has sacred places where believers feel a heightened presence of the deity and embark on holy pilgrimages (*peregrinatio sacra*) to experience this. Among Christian pilgrimage sites, the Holy Land has had special significance from the beginning, as the location of Jesus' birth, life, death, and glorification. According to *Eusebius'* ecclesiastical history, it was customary to visit ancient Palestine, primarily Jerusalem and Bethlehem, as early as the 3rd century.

³ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefániták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order. Bulletin of Medical History) 133-140 (1991-1992) p.7.

From the 4th century, itineraries containing detailed descriptions of pilgrimages were preserved, one of the most significant being the report by the Gallic abbess, *Aetheria* (*Peregrinatio ad loca sancta*). In his *letter to Marcellus*, *Saint Jerome* mentions that pilgrims came in large numbers from all over the known world to the holy sites.⁴

In the 4th–7th centuries, pilgrimages to the Holy Land became widespread but were restricted on land by the migration of peoples and by the Arab conquests by sea. The resurgence of mass pilgrimages coincided with the establishment of the Hungarian state. The strengthening of the newly formed Christian country, which included the former territory of Pannonia, made it possible for the pilgrimage routes connecting Western Europe with the Holy Land to become passable again. However, the route was slightly modified following the changes in power centers. According to the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, prepared for early Christians, the route ran along the southern bank of the Drava in southern Pannonia, turning towards Sirmium at Eszék. The early medieval route ran along the Danube. From the account written by *Rodulfus Glaber*, a monk of Dijon and later of Cluny, in 1044, it is known that the safe route through Hungary led many nobles and commoners to Jerusalem. Györffy considers the opening of these pilgrimage routes as a turning point, making Hungary, through King Saint Stephen's act, „a decisive factor in Europe.”⁵

To facilitate the journey of the pilgrims, King Saint Stephen, according to legends, founded four pilgrimage houses: in Constantinople and Jerusalem connected to the Holy Sepulchre, in Rome for pilgrims to the apostles' tombs, and according to a 13th-century tradition, in Ravenna. The known documents only partially support this, and further scientific research is needed for their verification.

Regarding the foundation in Constantinople, our current knowledge is based exclusively on the Greater legend (*Legenda maior*)⁶ of King Saint Stephen, which states that „*He did not deprive even the royal city, Constantinople, of his beneficent gifts, donating a church built with wonderful art with all its belongings.*” („*Ipsam quoque regiam urbem Constantinopolim beneficiorum munere non privavit, qui ecclesiam mirifici operis constructam cum omnibus necessariis suis donavit.*”)⁷

⁴ Sándor Bálint–Gábor Barna: *Búcsújáró magyarok. A magyarországi búcsújárás története és néprajza.* (Hungarian pilgrims. The history and ethnography of pilgrimages in Hungary.) Szent István Társulat 1994, p.16–18.

⁵ György Györffy: *István király és műve.* (King Stephen and his Work.) Balassi Kiadó Budapest, 2000, p. 293–295.

⁶ *Legenda maior Sancti Stephani.* An unknown clerical author wrote it around 1096, during the reign of King Coloman. Its sources: oral tradition, King Saint Stephen's Admonitions and laws, as well as the legend of Saint Zoerard and Saint Benedict. Latin: www.thelatinlibrary.com

⁷ *Legenda maior Sancti Stephani.* In: *Árpád-kori legendák és intelmek* (Legends and admonitions of the Arpad Era). Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, p. 29.

In his work, Györfly outlines several theories about possible locations. One presumption is that King Stephen's church should be sought where, a century later, Ladislaus' daughter, Piroška (*Prisca/Irene of Hungary*, 1088–1134), founded a monastery dedicated to the Pantokrator with a hospital, hospice, and three churches. However, Piroška did not live to see the completion of the construction, and the founding charter (1136) does not refer to such an antecedent.

The other theory, although more plausible, is also not confirmed. Pope Honorius III, in two bulls (1216 and January 29, 1218), quotes a Greek charter of Béla III,⁸ stating that among other things, he donated the Church of Saint Julian near Constantinople with its hostel and belongings, as well as the churches of Saint Jonah and others, to the Saint Theodosius Lavra in Jerusalem. Considering that Béla III could only donate a monastery under his own patronage, if he possessed this by right of inheritance from the Hungarian kings, only an earlier foundation by Saint Stephen can be considered. The location of the Saint Julian Monastery is currently unknown, but the term „*apud*” suggests it was near the city.⁹

We also learn from the Greater legend that King Saint Stephen „*founded a monastic cloister in Jerusalem, in the city where Christ dwelt according to His human nature, enriching it with farms and vineyards providing ample daily sustenance.*”¹⁰

The foundation in Jerusalem is linked to the persecution of Christians under al-Hakim (*al-Hākim bi-Amr Allāh*, 985–1021), known as the insane caliph. In 1009, all churches in Jerusalem were demolished, leading to the idea of a crusade in the Christian world at that time. Al-Hakim allowed free religious practice from 1017, but the rebuilding of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the return of the exiled Christians had to wait until 1027, following an agreement between the Emir of Aleppo and the Byzantine Emperor, Constantine VIII. During this period, the first hospitaller house or pilgrim house was founded in honor of Saint John the Baptist, from which the Order of Saint John emerged in the 12th century. This process included the foundation of a monastery by the Hungarian king.¹¹ It is related to this that a Hungarian lady named Petronilla bought houses in Jerusalem for the purpose of establishing a

⁸ 1216-Pressutti, *Regesta Honorii papae* No. 72. , 1218- Pressutti, *Regesta Honorii papae* No. 1037; Theiner, *Mon. Hung.* I. 10 : „Ad haec vobis auctoritate presentium indulgemus, ut cum Greci usque ad haec tempora decimas solvere miniine consueverint, laboribus vestrorum, quos propriis manibus aut sumptibus colitis de possessionibus habitis ante Concilium Generale, vei de vestrorum animalium nutrimentis, nullus a vobis decimas exigere vei extorquere presuniat”.

⁹ György Györfly: *István király és műve.* (King Stephen and his Work.). ...cf. p.302-303.

¹⁰ *Legenda maior Sancti Stephani*, p. 28. „*Construxit enim in ipsa conuersionis Christi secundum humanitatem civitate Ierusalem monachorum cenobium, prediis ditavit et vineis, ad victum cottidianum copiant ministrantibus*”- www.thelatinlibrary.com

¹¹ György Györfly: *István király és műve.* (King Stephen and his Work.). ...cf. p. 303.

hospice. The document confirming this lists among the witnesses to the contract Cosmas, the Hungarian hermit, his companion Boniface, and the Hungarian Simon.¹²

„Anno ab incarnatione Domini MCXXXV, indictione XIII. Petrus, Sancti Sepulcri Prior, cetisque fratrum eiusdem loci canonicorum domum, quae fuit Bernardi Bituricensis, et aliam, quae fuit Villelmi drugomanni, predictae domui contiguam, Petronille, mulieri Ungarice, CCCXL bisentiis vendiderunt in hospitalem domum sue genti, ut ipsa eas tamquam proprio censu emptas sibi, ut dictum est, sueque genti venditas eternaliter possideat. Quod si ipsa vel ejus successorum Ungarici, necessitate qualibet ingruente, prefatas domos in posterum vendere vel invadiare voluerint, Priori et canonicis Sancti Sepulcri venales et invadiandas offerant; si vero Prior et Canonici easdem domos ita ut alii emere noluerint, cuicumque voluerint sine contradictione vendant et invadiant. Prenominata autem mulier prebendam quatuor hominum de refectorio Sancti Sepulcri accipiebat cotidie; sed pro salute anime sue, sicut soror Ecclesiae necessitati fratrum providens, partem prebendarum remisit, ita ut deinceps duabus contenta prebendis, una unius canonici et altera unius servientis, permaneat.

Facta est autem huius carte inscriptio, domino Willelmo Sancte Iherosolimitane Ecclesiae Patriarchatu presidente, Fulcone nobilissimo Rege regnante. Huius rei testes sunt:

Rogerus, Ramathensis Episcopus

Anselmus, Bethleemita Episcopus

Aeardus, Prior Templi Domini

Arnaldus, Prior Montis Syon

Henricus, Prior Montis Oliveti

Robertus, Abbas Vallis Josaphat

Cosmas Ungaricus, heremita

Bonifacius, socius eius

Symeon Ungaricus, Archidiaconus

Roardus, Vice-Comes

Raimondus, Magister Hospitalis

Rainaldus de Ponz, et complures alii

Quicumque hanc conventionem infirmare vel violare temptaverit, apud Deum et homines anathema sit.”

¹² Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefaniták, egy középkori magyar ispótyhos rend történetéről.* Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). ...cf. p. 9.; Wenzel G. (1857–1878) Cod.dipl. Arpadianus continuatus 1:52f

The motherhouse of the hospitaller order founded by King Géza II around 1150 could have been this Hungarian hospice in Jerusalem with the churches of Our Lady and King Saint Stephen attached to it.¹³

The establishment of a pilgrimage house in Ravenna is not mentioned in either the Greater legend or the Hartvik legend,¹⁴ however, the circumstances suggest that it could have been a foundation by King Saint Stephen. According to Györffy, the fact that Ravenna played the same role on the route to Rome as Constantinople did on the way to Jerusalem, and that Pope Sylvester II signed the founding charter of the Archdiocese of Esztergom in Ravenna in 1001, might justify the establishment of a hospice in Ravenna. The document - published in a book in 1603,¹⁵ stating that King Stephen, on the advice of Bishop Gellért, founded a monastery in Ravenna dedicated to Saint Peter of the Chains (San Pietro di Vincoli) and supported it with 25 marks of silver annually, is considered a forgery. The forger used an authentic document in which King Andrew II (1205-1235) and his son, Prince Béla (later King Béla IV), confirmed King Stephen's foundation in 1233.¹⁶ King Andrew II issued the document renewing the donation of 25 marks when he himself visited Ravenna. Despite the fact that Pope Lucius III, in a bull issued in 1181, confirming the estates of the monastery, does not mention the foundation by King Saint Stephen, Györffy considers it possible that, according to an agreement between King Stephen and the Archbishop of Ravenna, Hungarian pilgrims could stay at the Saint Peter Monastery and, therefore, the abbey received financial support. The annual 25 marks of silver stipulated in the document could have served to renew this right.¹⁷

The Greater legend provides a detailed account of the construction of the pilgrimage house in Rome: *"In the head of the world, in Rome, he established a congregation of twelve canons in the name of the first martyr Stephen, richly endowed with all its belongings, and a settlement surrounded by a stone wall with houses and inns for those Hungarians who visit the threshold of the blessed Peter, the prince of the apostles, for prayer."* (*"In capite quoque mundi, Roma sub titulo protomartyris Stephani XII. canonicorum congregationes cunctis pertinentiis habundanter statuit et*

¹³ György Györffy: *István király és műve*. (King Stephen and his Work.). ...cf. p. 303.

¹⁴ Bishop Hartvik before 1116, at the command of King Coloman, united the Greater and the Lesser legends and supplemented them with additions

¹⁵ *Italicarum et Ravennatum historiarum libri XI. Venetiis, 1603.*, reissued: *Thesaurus antiquitatum et historiarum Italiae*. Opera et studio Jo. G. Graevii. Cum praef. P. Burmanni. Tom. VII. pars. I. Lugduni Batavorum, 1722. 249. column

¹⁶ Fejér Cod. d. III/2. 364. I.

¹⁷ György Györffy: *István király és műve*. (King Stephen and his Work.). ...cf. p. 303-304.

maceriam in circuitu lapide muratam cum domibus et hospitiiis Ungarorum orationis causa beati principis apostolorum, Petri limina querentium.”¹⁸

According to his biography and other 11th-century Vatican documents, King Saint Stephen received a small church built in the 8th century in honor of Saint Stephen the Protomartyr, located on the southern side of the Saint Peter’s Basilica (Santo Stefano Minore, Santo Stefano degli Ungari)¹⁹ from Pope Sylvester II or one of his successors and expanded it into a provostry. During his research, Györffy found two plans of the old buildings. One was made in 1557 by engineer Tiberio Alfarano during the construction of the new Saint Peter’s Basilica, marking the former pilgrimage house („f^{ca}) with the inscription “Monasterium Sancti Stephani Minoris...” on the floorplan and the other is a bird’s-eye view drawing by DuPérac-Lafreri. The buildings founded by King Saint Stephen were demolished in 1776 during the construction of the sacristy of the Saint Peter’s Basilica, incorporating seven columns from the house.²⁰



Fig. 1: This plaque, visible on the arch connecting St. Peter’s Basilica to the sacristy, commemorates the Roman pilgrimage house built by King St. Stephen for Hungarian pilgrims (Photo by József Vincze)

Fig. 2: The plaque located in the sacristy corridor of St. Peter’s Basilica (Image source: www.kulhonimagyarok.hu)

¹⁸ Legenda maior Sancti Stephani p. 28–29. Latin: www.latinlibrary.com

¹⁹ www.vaticannews.va/hu/vilag/news/2018-05/interju-tortenesz-molnar-antal-roma-kapolna-2018-05-30.html ; www.vaticannews.va/hu/egyhasz/news/2020-08/a-romai-szent-istvan-zarandokhaz-alapitasa-2-reszo.html

²⁰ György Györffy: *István király és műve*. (King Stephen and his Work.). ...cf. p. 304–305; Florio Banfi: *Magyar emlékek Itáliában*. (Hungarian Relics in Italy) 2005. Szeged. p. 231–232.

Since the commemorative plaque shown in *Figure 1* is located in an area closed to the public, there was a demand for a commemorative plaque that is accessible and suitably commemorates King Stephen's pilgrimage house in Rome. On October 8, 2000, in the millennium year of the coronation of King Saint Stephen, Cardinal Dr. László Paskai, Archbishop of Esztergom, unveiled a marble commemorative plaque in the corridor leading to the sacristy of Saint Peter's Basilica (*Figure 2*). Given that markets, dining, and lodging facilities were provided for travelers near the castles along the pilgrimage routes,²¹ the question of foundations by King Saint Stephen might arise elsewhere as well.

2. HISTORY AND ACTIVITIES OF THE CRUCIFERI SANCTI STEPHANI REGIS

2.1. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ORDER

The first Hungarian-founded monastic order, named the "Crusaders of King Saint Stephen," was founded around 1150 by King Géza II (1141–1162). The idea of a community organized on the model of chivalric orders was probably inspired by the passing crusaders. By the mid-12th century, the royal army in its armament, ecclesiastical and secular ceremonies, and external appearances had assimilated to the western model of knightly combat. The knighting of Géza II before the Battle of the Leitha (1146) can be considered a full knight-ing ceremony.²² The appearance of the crusading monastic orders in Hungary also dates to this period. Among the members of the army led by Louis VII (1137–1180) on their way to the Second Crusade were Johannite and Templar knights, and as a result of the mutually positive impression, both orders established provinces in Hungary.²³ The friendly relationship that developed between the two rulers, the strengthening of chivalric culture and values, and

²¹ László Józsa: *A kórházi ápolás kialakulása a 11–14. századi Magyarországon*. (The establishment of hospital care systems in 11th–14th century Hungary) in: Debreceni Szemle 2008. Vol.16. 1st Issue. p.12.

²² László Veszprémi: *Lovagvilág Magyarországon*. (The World of Chivalry in Hungary.) Argumentum Kiadó, 2008. p. 147.

²³ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefániták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). ...cf. p. 8.

the acquaintance with the chivalric orders may have led Géza II to the decision to create a uniquely Hungarian order as well.

The bull issued by Pope Alexander III, which established the order, has not yet been found. Boroviczény places its presumed date of origin between July 1161 and May 31, 1162 (the death of Géza II). He supports his theory by noting that Géza II entered into a concordat with Pope Alexander III after July 14, 1161, so the bull recognizing the Stephanites could only have been issued after this. Pope Urban III's confirmatory bull „*Religiosa loca*” issued in 1187 (*Figure 3*), which approves the order and grants it privileges,²⁴ is kept in the Primatial Archives of Esztergom.²⁵

The name, nature, and privileges of the order are recorded in papal bulls. Based on the inscriptions, Boroviczény states that they referred to themselves as the “*Ordo Cruciferorum Sancti Regis Stephani de Strigonio*”, in English, the “*Order of the Crusaders of King Saint Stephen of Esztergom*.”

Géza II established a church and a hospitaller house in Jerusalem in honor of the Virgin Mary and King Saint Stephen around 1150 when founding the crusading convent. It still needs to be proven whether there was continuity between the previously mentioned pilgrimage house associated with King Saint Stephen, the houses purchased by Petronilla, and Géza II's foundation. To support the motherhouse, he donated estates in Abony (*Obon*) near Esztergom (later called *S. Stephanus Rex de Strigonio*, *S. Rex*, *Szentkirály*), where a monastery was also built. Around 1169, Cardinal Manfred, apostolic legate, authorized the use of the Augustinian rule for the Esztergom monastery and hospital. Based on the bull, the order was exempt, directly subordinate to the Pope, and exempt from paying church tithes, but in return, it had to pay the Pope one ounce of gold annually.²⁶

²⁴ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefaniták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). ...cf. p. 9.

²⁵ Eccl. Vetus No.3; Monum. Strigon. I. 132

²⁶ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefaniták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). ...cf. p. 9–13.

2.1.1. Papal Bull of 1187 by Pope Urban III

This papal bull was issued just before the Battle of Hattin (July 4, 1187) and approximately three months before the fall of Jerusalem (October 2, 1187). The issuance of the bull likely reflects the foresight of the Holy See regarding the developments of events in the Holy Land.

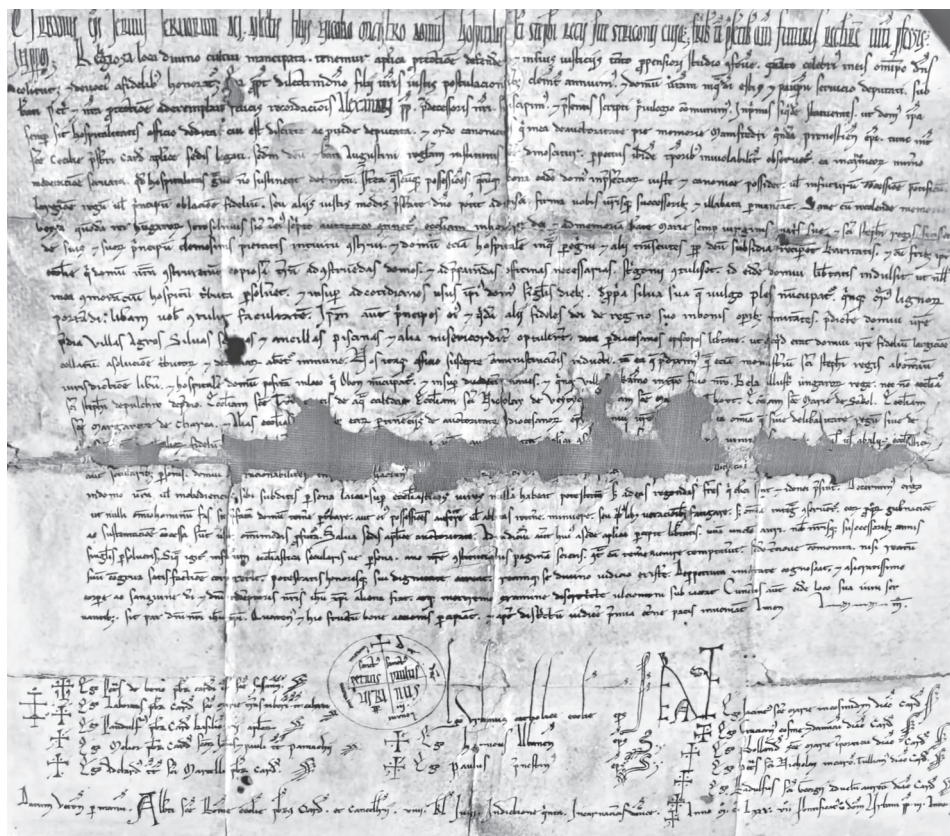


Fig. 3: The Bull of Pope Urban III (1187), Esztergom Primate Archives

The original text of the bull in Latin

Urbanus episcopus servus servorum Dei, dilectis filiis Nicolao magistro Domus Hospitalis Sancti Stephani Regis, site Strigoni, eiusque fratribus tam praesentibus quam futuris, regularem vitam professis. In perpetuum.

Religiosa loca Divino cultui mancipata, tenemur apostolica protectione defendere et in sui iusticiis tanto propensiori studio confovere, quanto

celebrius in sui Omnipotens Dominus colitur et devocius ac fidelibus honoratur. Eia propter dilecti in Domino filii, vestris iustis postulationibus clementer annuimus et domum vestram, in qua Dei estis et pauperum sevicio deputati, sub beati Petri et nostra protectione ad exemplar felicitis recordationis Alexandri papae predecessoris nostri, suscipimus et praesentis scripti privilegio communimus.

Inprimis siquidem statuentes ut Domus ipsa semper sit hospitalitatis officio dedita cui est discrete ac provide deputata. Et ordo canonicus qui in ea de auctoritate pia memoriae Manfredi, quondam prenestiensis episcopi, tunc inter Sanctae Ceciliae presbiteri cardinalis, apostolicae sedis legati, Deum et beatum Augustini regulam institutus esse dinoscitur, perpetuis ibidem temporibus iviolabiliter observetur. Ea in canonicorum numero moderatione servata. Quod hospitalitas grave non sustineat detrimentum. Praeterea quascunque possessiones, quaecunque bona eadem Domus in praesetiarum iusta et canonicae possidet, vel in futurum concessione pontificum, largicione regnum vel principum, seu aliis iustis modis praestante Domino poteri adipisci, firma vobis vestrisque successoribus et illibata permaneant. Sane cum recolende memoriae Geyza quondam rex Hungarorum, Hierosolymis sicut in eius autentico scripto continetur, ecclesiam in honor Dei et ad memoriam Beatae Mariae semper virginis matris suae et Sancti Stephani Regis fecisset de suis et suorum principum elemosis pietatis intuitu construit et Domum etiam Hospitalem, in qua peregrini et alii transeuntes propter Deum subsidia reciperent caritatis. Et cum fratribus ipsis ecclesiae, qui domum vestram construxerant, copiosam terram ad construendas Domus et ad preparandas officinas necessarias Strigonii contulisset. Id eidem domui libertatis indulsit, ut nullus in ea commorantium Hospitum tributa persolveret. Et insuper ad quotidianos usus ipsius Domus singulis diebus de propria silva sua, que vulgo Ples nuncupatur, quinque currus lignorum portandi liberam vobis contulit facultatem. Ipsum autem principes eius et quidam alii fideles Dei de regno suo in bonis operibus imitantes, praedictae Domui vestre predia, villas, agros, silvas, servos et ancillas, piscina et alia misericorditer optulerunt.

Data per diocesanos episcopos libertate, ut quidquid erat Domui vestre fidelium largicione collatum ac solutione tributorum et decimarum haberetur immune. Nos itaque officio susceptae administrationis inducti tam ea, que praediximus, quam etiam monasterium Sancti Stephani Regis ab omnium iurisdictione liberum et Hospitalem Domum, positam in loco, qui Obon nuncupatur. Et insuper duodecim naves et quinque villas ab carissimo in Christo filio nostro Bela illustri Hungarorum rege. Nec non ecclesiam Sancti Stephani de Pulchro, de praedio, ecclesiam Sanctae Trinitatis de Aqua Calida, ecclesiam Sancti Nicolai de Veytic, ecclesiam Sanctae Mariae de Thovt, ecclesiam Sancti Mariae de Sokol, ecclesiam Sanctae Margharetae de Charca. Et alias ecclesias cum quibuslibet earum pertinentiis de auctoritate diocesanorum

episcoporum Domui vestre concessas et alia omnia quae sine de liberalitate regnum, sine de concessione episcoporum, vel aliorum fidelium rationabiliter possidetis.

Vobis et Domui vestre auctoritate Apostolica confirmamus, cum omnibus immunitatibus seu ac regibus episcopis. Vel ab aliis ecclesiasticis aut ... secularibus ... personis ... Domui ... vestre ... rationabiliter ... in ... hactenus ... obser ...
 (*lacuna magna!*) in Domo vestra, vel in obedientiis sibi subditis persona laica super ecclesiasticos viros nullam habeat potestatem, sed ad eas regendas fratres, qui clerici sint et idonei praesint. Decernimus ergo ut nulli omnino hominum fas sit prefatam Domum temere perturbare, aut eius possessiones auferre, vel ablatas retinere, minuere, seu quilibet vexationibus fatigare. Sed ad omnia integre conserventur eorum, pro quorum gubernatione ac sustentatione concessa sunt usibus omnimodis profutura. Salva Sedis Apostolicae auctoritate. Ad iudicium autem huius ab Sede Apostolica percepte libertatis, unam unicam auri nobis nostrisque successoribus annis singulis persolvetis. Si que igitur in futurum ecclesiastica secularisque persona, hanc nostrae constitutionis paginam sciens, contra eam temere venire temptaverit, secundo, tertioque commonita, nisi reatum suum congrua satisfactione correxerit, potestatis honorisque sui dignitate careat, reamque se Divino iudicio existere. De perpetrata iniquitate cognoscat aliena fiat, atque in extremo examine districtae ultioni subiaceat. Cunctis autem eidem loco sua iura servantibus sit pax Domini nostri Iesu Christi. Quatenus et hic fructum bone actionis percipiant et apud districtum iudicem premia eternae pacis invenient.

Amen. Amen.

Sequitur bulla scripta, in cuius medio legitur: S.Petrus S.Paulus Urbanus pp. III.
Cum epigraphe: Ad Te Domine levavi animam meam.

Infra bullam:

+Ego Urbanus Catholicae Ecclesiae episcopus

(*cum monogrammate*)

+Ego Henricus Albanensis episcopus

+Ego Paulus Prenestinus episcopus

A sinistris:

+Ego Petrus de Bono presbiter cardinalis tituli S.Susanne

+Ego Laborans presbiter Cardinalis S.Mariae trans Tiberius tituli Callixti

+Ego Pandulfus presbiter cardinalis Basilicae XII Apostolorum

+Ego Melior presbiter Card. Sanctorum Joannis et Pauli tituli Pemachii

+Ego Afelardus tituli Sancti Marcelli presbiter Card.

A dextris:

+Ego Jacintus S.Mariae in Cosmedia diaconus Card.

+Ego Gracianus Cosme et Damiani diaconus Card.

+Ego Bollandus S.Mariae in Porticu diaconus Card.

+Ego Petrus S.Nicolai in carcere Tullianus diaconus Card.

+Ego Radulfus S.Georgii ad Velum Aurem diaconus Card.

Datum Verone per manus Alberti Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae presbiteri cardinalis et Cancellarii.

VIII. kalendas Julii. Incarnationis Dominicae +Anno M.C.LXXX.VII.
Pontificatus vero Domini

Urbani papae III. Anno II.

The Bull in English

1. Usual Greeting

Urban, Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God, to our beloved sons: Nicholas, Master of the Hospitaller House of King Saint Stephen in Esztergom, and the brethren, both present and future, who live according to the rule. Forever.

2. Justification of the Letter

We hold that monastic places dedicated to the honor of God should be protected by apostolic defense and supported with all the more benevolent effort based on Divine justice, as they honor the Almighty Lord more solemnly and are more devoutly cherished by the faithful.

3. Decree

Therefore, beloved sons in the Lord, we kindly approve your rightful request and receive your House, in which you are dedicated to the service of the poor, under the protection of Saint Peter and Ours, following the example of our predecessor, Pope Alexander of blessed memory, and grant you this privilege in the present document.

4. Confirmation of the Order

First of all, we ordain that the House always be dedicated to the hospitaller service, for which it is wisely and prudently ordained. And the canonical order, which was founded in that house - by the authority of Manfred of blessed memory, former Bishop of Palestrina, Cardinal-Presbyter of Saint Cecilia, and Legate of the Apostolic See - according to the rule of God and blessed Augustine, shall be preserved therein forever and unscathed. The restriction regarding the number of canons must be observed so that the arduous hospitaller service does not suffer harm.

5. Property Relations, Tax Exemption

Moreover, whatever property, goods, or possessions the House rightfully and lawfully possesses now, or may rightfully obtain in the future with the

approval of the Pope - through the generosity of kings or princes, from the donation of the faithful, or by other lawful means - may be strengthened and remain unscathed by us and our successors. When the highly esteemed memory of King Géza, once the King of the Hungarians, built a church in Jerusalem - as stated in His authentic writing - in honor of God, in memory of the ever-virgin Mary, His mother, and King Saint Stephen, He, moved by piety, also built a hospitaller house with his princely alms, in which pilgrims and other strangers received shelter for the love of God. And when He gave ample land in Esztergom for the construction of your house and the necessary facilities - for the brothers of this church who built your house - He granted freedom to the House so that no guest staying there would pay taxes. Additionally, we permit you to freely take five wagons of firewood daily for the House's daily needs from your own forest called Pilis in the common language. Furthermore, we permit that all nobles and other God-fearing persons in His (the King's) realm, imitating His generous benevolence, who have offered estates, farms, and villages, plowlands, forests, servants, and maidservants (i.e., nurses, female attendants - transl.), fish ponds, or other donations for the benefit of your House, with the free consent of your Diocesan Bishops, be exempt from all tax and tithe obligations for what the zeal of the faithful has granted to your House. Therefore, we, driven by our assumed service obligation, declare that all we have listed, both the monastery and the pilgrimage house named after King Saint Stephen and exempted from all superior jurisdiction, located in the place called Abony, as well as the twelve ships and five villages donated by our beloved son in Christ, the glorious King Béla of Hungary, and the estates belonging to the church at the tomb of King Saint Stephen, the Holy Trinity church in Budafelhévíz, the Saint Nicholas church in Vejte, the Virgin Mary churches in Tótvár and Szokol, as well as the Saint Margaret church in Karcsa, and any other churches withdrawn from the jurisdiction of diocesan bishops, transferred to your House with their belongings, and all other benefits and properties donated to you or your House by the faithful, be exempt from all royal or episcopal authorities and confirmed by our Apostolic authority... a specified number of persons... supervise... (The document fold causes a few words to be missing here. This section likely sets the number of canons to ensure the order's hospitaller, aiding work is not hindered by too many dependents. The fold may have occurred during the Tatar invasion, after which it was preserved in its current form, according to copies - transl.)

6. Legal Status

We ordain that no secular person shall exercise any power over those living in your House or the ecclesiastical and secular persons who owe you obedience, but only the governing brethren who are clerics and suitable for leadership. Furthermore, we ordain that no one shall dare to disturb, damage, seize, or

occupy your property or render it unusable in any way, but these goods shall remain in full and unharmed possession and under the control of those to whom they were transferred, donated for their maintenance, future use, and benefit, respecting the authority of the Apostolic See. As a lawful recognition of this privilege received from the Apostolic See, you are obliged to pay us and our successors one ounce of gold each year.

7. Curses, Punishment

And thus, if any ecclesiastical or secular person in the future, knowing this present decree, heedlessly attempts to act against it, and after the second and third admonition is unwilling to amend their sinful and wrongful conduct, let them be deprived of all power, office, and dignity, and know that for their committed sin, they must answer before the divine judgment. Furthermore, being forbidden to partake in the Body and Blood of our Lord and God, our Savior Jesus Christ, they shall undergo a special punishment on the Last Judgment.

8. Good Wishes, Ultimate Reward

But with those who serve His truth in this House, may the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be! Until you receive the fruit of your good deed from the Eternal Judge and attain your reward in eternal peace. Amen. Amen.

In the rota: Saint Peter, Saint Paul, Pope Urban III,

The Pope's motto around: To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

9. Signatures:

I, Urban, Bishop of the Catholic Church

+ I, Henry, Bishop of Albano

+ I, Paul, Bishop of Palestrina

+ I, Peter (de Bono) of Saint Susanna + I, Hyacinth, Cardinal-Deacon of S. Maria in Cosmedin

+ I, Laborans, Cardinal-Presbyter of Santa Maria in Trastevere + I, Garician, Cardinal-Deacon of Saints Cosmas and Damian

+ I, Pandulfus, Cardinal-Presbyter of the Twelve Apostles + I, Bollandus, Cardinal-Deacon of S. Maria in Porticu

+ I, Melior, Cardinal-Presbyter of Saints John and Paul + I, Peter, Cardinal-Deacon of Saint Nicholas (in Carcere)

+ I, Adelard, Cardinal-Presbyter of Saint Marcellus + I, Radulf, Cardinal-Deacon of Saint George

10. Dating

Issued in Verona by the hand of Albert, Cardinal-Presbyter of the Holy Roman Church and Chancellor, on June 24, in the 5th indiction, in the year 1187 of the Incarnation of the Lord, in the second year of Pope Urban III's pontificate.

(Translated to Hungarian by: Dr. Károly Kerekes, retired Cistercian abbot, Dr. Máté Gárdonyi, parish priest, theology teacher, László Munkácsy-Kovács, former CSR candidate. Verified by: Dr. Csaba Ferencz, CSR, Grandmaster.)²⁷

Regarding this, it is also worth mentioning Pope Urban IV's bull „*Religiosa loca*” issued in 1262, which is the customary centennial confirmation of Pope Alexander III's bull.²⁸ The text of the bull reveals that except for some current formulations and rewordings, it completely matches the first known bull by Pope Urban III from 1187. By comparing the two sources, we can conclude that Pope Alexander III issued the bull when recognizing the Order with its center in Jerusalem. If the centennial confirmation was made exactly to the year, then the previously mentioned probable date of issuance of the bull can be further narrowed to 1162. On the other hand, we can assume that in 1262 the original bull by Pope Alexander III was still known. It is unlikely that Pope Urban IV issued the centennial confirmation based on the bull responding to the situation in the Holy Land in 1187, while Pope Alexander III's bull was already missing at that time. However, this assumption is weakened by the fact that the same section of the text is missing due to damage, just as it is not visible in Pope Urban III's bull.

A significant source is also the 1192 Liber Censuum listing churches depending solely on the Pope, which includes the Johannite hospice in Székesfehérvár, the French abbey in Somogyvár, and the Stephanite hospice in Esztergom from Hungary.²⁹

Several hundred authentic documents prove the existence of the houses in Esztergom and Budafelhévíz between 1222 and 1353, and 1278 and 1348 respectively. None of them indicates any association with another order. Several documents verify the connection between the two houses.³⁰ However, the lists of the Johannite houses in Hungary do not include the church, hospice, or house in Esztergom or Hévíz.³¹

²⁷ Annex 1, Chapter VI of the Statutes of the Order of King St. Stephen

²⁸ E MSS Heuenesi Tom B. al. R. Pag. 149-150.

²⁹ In the „Liber censuum eccl. Romanae a. 1192. conscripto”, compiled by Cardinal Cencius (later Pope Innocent III), there is the following entry for the papal chamber: „In archiepiscopatu Strigoniensi. Hospitale S. Stephani unam unciam auri, quae dicitur Obon” (l. Muratori: Antiq. Italicae. V. Mediolani, 1741. column No. 874.).

³⁰ Clemens PP. Regibus et reginis Hungariae et Poloniae procuratores cardinalis Guilielmi commendatur- Ex Reg. Orig. An. II. secr. Ep. 73- 76.

³¹ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefániták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). ...cf. p. 10.

Many authentic documents also prove the order's activities in Transylvania and the existence of the „church and monastery” of the *Cruciferi Sancti Regis* in Egyházfalú near Torda (now part of Torda) from the 12th century, presumably until the Reformation.³²

2.2. FOLLOWING THE RULE OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

Every monastic and chivalric order has principles and rules that members must follow, governing their relationships with each other and the outside world, and regulating the order's operation on both individual and communal levels in everyday life. The collection of these rules, arranged in proper order, is called a “regula” for monastic orders founded before the 16th century.³³ Without a regula, orders cannot be discussed. The European development of regulas can be divided into several stages, including their establishment in Hungary. However, it is important to mention that the monastic lifestyle and the first rules related to it can be traced back to the desert hermits of Egypt.

From the 10th century to the Renaissance, the major orders applied the Benedictine, Augustinian, and Franciscan rules. The *Fourth Lateran Council* in 1215 prohibited the foundation of new orders due to the increasing number of orders and rules and stipulated that any new community had to adopt one of the major rules (*Article 13*). The canonical orders (*ordo canonicus*) followed the Augustinian rule, most monastic orders (*ordo monasticus*) followed the Benedictine rule, and the rule of Basil (Saint Basil the Great) was mostly followed by southern Italian monasteries.³⁴ The Franciscan rule emerged in the 13th century, around the same time as the establishment of the Franciscan Order.

The Augustinian canonical orders allowed more freedom compared to monastic orders as they provided a regulated order for the secular clergy. *Ordo canonicus* or regular canons are office-holding priests who form a community according to rules and aspire to a monastic lifestyle. In Hungary, five Augustinian regular canonical orders are known and listed here: the Canons Regular of the South Transdanubia, the Canons Regular of the Holy Sepulchre, the Antonites, the Holy Spirit Hospitallers, and the Stephanites as a hospitaller crusader canonical order.³⁵ The bull issued by Pope Urban III in 1187 also mentions that the *Cruciferi Sancti Stephani Regis* follow the rule of Saint Augustine,

³² Balázs Orbán: *Torda város és környéke*. (Torda Town and Its Surroundings.) Budapest, 1889, p.106.

³³ Magyar Katolikus Lexikon (<https://lexikon.katolikus.hu> - regula)

³⁴ Mária Puskely: *Keresztény szerzetesség II.* (Christian monasticism II.)

³⁵ Magyar Katolikus Lexikon (<https://lexikon.katolikus.hu> - Ágostonrendi kanonokok); www.augustinianorder.org

which was authorized by Cardinal Manfred in 1169 after the bull of Pope Alexander III.³⁶ The mention of the regula in various documents provides a reference point for distinguishing between the Stephanites and the Johannites, as the Johannites follow the rule of Saint Benedict.

Summary of the Rule of Saint Augustine:

Short Introduction

- love each other • live accordingly

Principles of Common Life

- be of one heart and one soul • share everything with each other • be humble • be in agreement

Specific Components of Monastic Life

- pray unceasingly • fast • listen to the Word of the Lord during meals
- be disciplined and understanding • be simple • be as you ought to be • admonish each other with brotherly love • share your clothes • look out for the common good • when you are sick (expectations related to individuals and the community) • serve each other joyfully • forgive each other • command and obey with love • be humble • be in agreement

Review in the Form of a Closing Prayer

- be lovers of spiritual beauty

Short Practical Summary

- check your behavior³⁷

In the Order of King Saint Stephen, the currently effective Regula Minor and Maior are Stephanite adaptations of the above points.

2.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DOUBLE CROSS SYMBOL

The double cross is a symbol of King Saint Stephen's connections with Byzantium and the Holy Land, as he maintained close relations with the Byzantine emperor and collected relics. A significant tradition about the reverence for the double cross by King Stephen and Prince Emeric is preserved in a legend written by the 15th-century Polish canon Jan Długosz about the origin of

³⁶ Krisztina Tóth: *Az esztergomi Szent István Keresztes Konvent biteleshelyi működése az Árpád-korban* (The Authenticity Function of the Esztergom Saint Stephen's Crusader Convent during the Árpád Era), *Századok* 2008. p. 375.

³⁷ <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/rule-of-st-augustine-11909> ; www.premontrei.hu/konstitucio-es-regula

the Holy Cross Monastery in Lysa Gora. This legend not only mentions the relic of the cross but also includes Prince Emeric's passion for hunting, which ultimately leads to his death, and the stag featured in Hungarian origin myths. These elements suggest Hungarian influence in the formation of the legend.

Additionally, the Russian Chronicles recorded in 1152 that King Géza II, leading a campaign to Russia, wore a cross given to him by King Saint Stephen, which contained a small piece of the True Cross.

Regarding the origin of the double cross, it is most likely that Byzantine Emperor Basil II gifted King Stephen a reliquary in the shape of a double cross containing a piece of the True Cross. The treasury of the Esztergom Basilica also houses a similar Byzantine reliquary (*stauroteka*). Although the double cross already appears on King Saint Stephen's denar, it first appears as a heraldic motif on the coins of King Béla III. The atmosphere in Hungary upon the return of Béla III from Byzantium makes it unlikely that he would use the emblem of a rival superpower as the country's coat of arms, which, since the East-West Schism, might have appeared as a "heretical" symbol in the eyes of the Latin clergy. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the double cross had earlier domestic traditions. During King Stephen's time, the Western and Eastern churches were still united, so there was no obstacle to it becoming a royal emblem; this could have been King Stephen's relic of the cross, whose double-cross-shaped holder was also worn by Béla III's father, King Géza II, symbolizing the reconciliation with Byzantium and the opening of the pilgrimage route to Jerusalem.³⁸

2.4. ACTIVITIES OF THE ORDER DURING THE ÁRPÁD ERA

Based on the bull confirming the foundation and the processed documents so far, we have information about the Order's hospitaller and notarial activities. However, considering their name and the circumstances of their origin, a defensive function can also be assumed. Further research may attempt to verify military activities.

Here, it is worth mentioning the letter dated August 29, 1220, by Pope Honorius III, sent to the Chapter of Spalato (today Split).³⁹ It includes the following designation: „... *fratrem Hospitalis Sancti Regis Stephani de ordine Cruciferorum*...”. So, in the letter, the Stephanites are not only referred to as an order but as a crusader order, which implies the „*hospitalis et militaris*” nature.

³⁸ György Györffy: *István király és műve*. (King Stephen and his Work.). ...cf. p. 305–308.

³⁹ Fejér III.; I. 292

In this context, *András Borosy* mentions in his study that in 1298, Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303) excommunicated the hospitallers of Esztergom through Abbot Jacob of Zirc because they demolished a church in the Diocese of Veszprém (1298. Fejér VI/2.176. and 1298. HO V. 86.). According to the previously mentioned document, three crusaders from Esztergom demolished a village named Saint Andrew near Buda, while according to the latter document, the hospitaller master and the friars demolished the church of Saint Andrew in Abony in the Diocese of Veszprém. These actions depict the Stephanites of Esztergom as having a more military nature. According to an undated document, probably from after 1299, the convents of the Templars and Hospitallers in Esztergom jointly verified that Hunt, son of Peter, sold his land (Mon. Strig. n. 473.). The signatories of the document were: Thomas, the preceptor of the Templar house (domus) and the monks (cum fratribus); Durandus, the prior of the Holy Cross Hospitaller house with the monks (cum fratribus); and the crusader convent of the Saint King in Esztergom. The latter is the Stephanite house of Esztergom. These documents, along with the aforementioned ones from 1298, suggest that the Stephanites of Esztergom were already considered a chivalric order based on their actions and were mentioned together with the Templars.⁴⁰

Also relevant is a detail from the confirmatory bull issued by Pope Urban III in 1187, which mentions 12 ships: „...*Et insuper duodecim naves*, ...”. This is also included in the bull of Pope Urban IV in 1262. This raises the question of why a mere hospitaller order needed 12 ships, which were included in papal bulls in the 12th and 13th centuries.

According to the bull issued by Pope Clement VI on May 4, 1343,⁴¹ the houses in Esztergom and Budafelrhévíz had a hierarchical relationship. The master leading the Esztergom house was also the governor of the Buda house, and accordingly, the prior of the Budafelrhévíz house was subordinate to the master of the Esztergom house. The papal bulls and a notarial document jointly issued in 1302 list the prior and house of Felhévíz after the master of Esztergom. They appear in reversed order only in a will made in 1355, which Boroviczény explains by stating that the Holy Trinity is a higher-ranking title than King Saint Stephen.⁴²

⁴⁰ András Borosy: *Hadtörténeti Közlemények* (Military History Bulletins), Vol. 34. Issue No.2. (1987) p. 231.

⁴¹ Theiner A. (1859) *Vet. mon. bist. Hungariam sacram illustr.* 1:649

⁴² Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefániták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről.* Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). ...cf. p. 13.

2.4.1. *Hospitaller Activities*

In Western Christianity, hospitaller houses carried out social tasks alongside healing until the end of the Middle Ages. Among the Western Christian missionaries and monks arriving in Hungary from the 10th century onwards were doctors and those knowledgeable in healing. Since papal decree had not yet prohibited clergy from engaging in medical or surgical activities, they also participated in patient care. The first monastic hospitals were established in the 11th century in Pannonhalma, Pécsvárad, Bakonybél, and Esztergom. Seventeen hospitaller sites are known from the 11th century, most of which were built along the two pilgrimage routes. In the 12th century, with the arrival of newly settled orders, the territorial distribution changed, and new hospitals were established in the central and peripheral parts of the country. Domestic institutions could care for 6–20 patients simultaneously, and secular employees also assisted the monks' work.⁴³ The Stephanites' hospitaller houses in Hungary were part of this network, and the Jerusalem and Acre houses built in the Holy Land served this purpose.

2.4.1.1. *Presence of the Stephanites in the Holy Land*

We have little knowledge of the early period of the chivalric order's history due to the scarcity of written records. Based on the available sources, it is likely that their service, as described in the bulls, was performed in the hospitaller houses of Esztergom and Jerusalem, and later Acre. The order's presence in the Holy Land began with its foundation. From Pope Urban III's bull, we know that King Géza II built a church in Jerusalem „*in honor of God, in memory of the ever-virgin Mary, His mother, and King Saint Stephen*” and established a hospital for pilgrims and other newcomers.

No further written documents have surfaced regarding the Jerusalem house. According to Boroviczény, this may be because literacy in Hungary began to spread during the reign of Béla III (ruled 1172–1196) after he established the royal chancellery (*cancellaria regis*) in 1181. A few years later, in 1187, with Jerusalem falling into Arab hands, the Stephanite house likely perished. Boroviczény, following Joshua Praver, identified the location of the monastery between the Tower of Goliath and the Damascus Gate, near the former side gate named after Saint Lazarus, close to the Franciscan monastery. Referring to Tobler, he places the location of the house purchased by Petronilla in 1135 to

⁴³ László Józsa: *A kórházi ápolás kialakulása a 11–14. századi Magyarországon* (The Development of Hospital Care in 11th–14th Century Hungary)...cf. p.10–15. and Orsolya Falus: *The “Hungaricum” of the Crusader Orders: the Order of St Stephen.*, *Journal on European History of Law* Vol.13/2022. p.130.



Fig. 4: The probable location of the Stephanite convent in the Old City of Jerusalem

the north of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, around the monasteries of Saint Euthymius and Seetnagia (Figure 4).

More sources remain on the existence of the church and convent in Acre. They likely moved to the coastal city along with other crusaders after the fall of Jerusalem (1187) in 1191. Four documents, dating between 1223 and 1286, mention the Stephanite church and house in Acre. According to the documents, in 1223, the order sold its estate in Hetény; in 1279 Újvásár estate; and in 1282 sold its estate in Karcsa to support the functioning of the convent in Acre with the proceeds. In 1286, following the impoverishment caused by the second Mongol invasion (1285), Bánk, the prior of Felhévíz, sold the customs revenue of Hévíz to Simon, the son of the late Sebastian of Kesző, for the same reason. A document specifying the location of the house in Acre has not yet surfaced, but it is assumed to have been in the northern suburb of Montmusard, near the other crusader houses. Their presence there is likely until 1291, the fall of the city.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefaniták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti

2.4.1.2. *Mother House, Church, and Hospitaller House in Esztergom*

The order carried out the basic tasks named in the bull within the country's borders in the hospitaller house in Esztergom, under its direction, with the rector himself being the head of the order. In his research, Boroviczény found more descriptions of two rectors: Göncöl from the Pok genus and Paulus Loanus, who was also a secular priest and doctor. This supports the fact that they not only functioned as social care providers for those in need (widows, orphans, pilgrims, the poor) but also engaged in patient care and healing.⁴⁵

The hospital's location, Abony (later Szentkirály), lay in today's southwestern part of Esztergom. The land donated to the Stephanites by King Géza II around 1150, where they built their mother convent, hospital, and the Romanesque three-nave, twin-towered basilica, originally belonged to the royal estate of the Diocese of Veszprém.⁴⁶

Györffy, based on legends,⁴⁷ assumes that this could have been the palace where Saint Stephen died (August 15, 1038). The presence of ecclesiastical and secular leaders indicates that his death occurred in one of the king's residences.

Since Esztergom and Székesfehérvár are two possible settlements, and the text states that his body was taken to Fehérvár, his death is most likely linked to Esztergom. Györffy also considers it possible that, according to the custom of the time, a church was built on the site of the saint's death, and Géza II renewed Stephen's foundation in Jerusalem in the crusader house dedicated to him.⁴⁸ In 1233, King Andrew II renewed the Bereg agreement in this church.

The church was rebuilt in Gothic style at the end of the 14th century. Despite the Turkish devastation, it remained in such good condition that after the capture of Esztergom (1543), it was converted into a mosque. This eventually led to its destruction; in 1595, the Christian armies besieging Esztergom set it on fire and destroyed it.⁴⁹

Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). 1991-1992, 133-140 cf.

⁴⁵ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefaniták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). 1991-1992, 133-140 cf.

⁴⁶ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefaniták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). 1991-1992, 133-140 cf.

⁴⁷ „Lo, the blessed day has come, the day which His death hath made yet more blessed; aroundaround stood the clergy and the bishops, the fathers, the nobles, the captains of the host, and in great throngs, the servants.”- Hartvik legend

⁴⁸ György Györffy: *István király és műve*. (King Stephen and his Work.). ...cf. p. 380-381.

⁴⁹ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefaniták, egy*

The former convent church and other buildings in Szentkirály are sadly once again underground today, although excavations took place there in 1895, and were described in the First Yearbook of the Archaeological and Historical Society of the Esztergom Region in 1896 (*Az Esztergom-vidéki Régészeti és Történelmi Társulat Első Évkönyve*). One copy of this is kept in the Esztergom Cathedral Library. At that time, the Stephanites were not yet distinguished

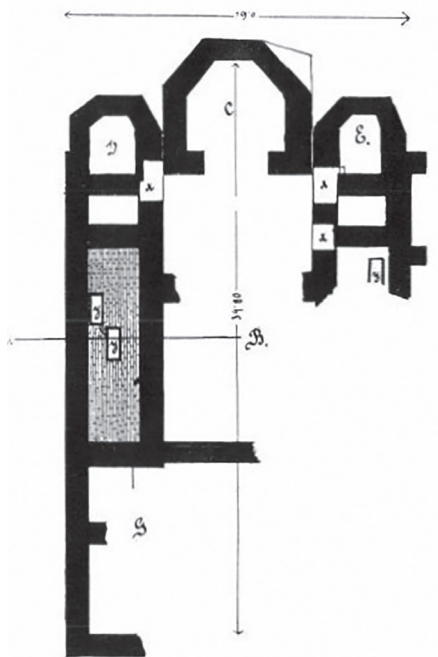


Fig. 5: The reconstructed ground plan of the former Stephanite church in Esztergom

from the Knights of Saint John, so the latter are mentioned in the text.⁵⁰ In 1959, an archaeological field survey was conducted in the Danube Bend, during which many pottery fragments were found, confirming the statement that this

középkori magyar ispóalyos rend történetéről. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). 1991-1992, 133-140 cf.

⁵⁰ *Millenia below our feet*; Zoltán Bencze-Gabriella Fényes-Mónika Kurunczi; Hungarian Archeology; E-journal-2020 Spring, Vol.9, Issue 1., 21-29, <https://doi.org/10.36338/ha.2020.1.4>

area could have been a flourishing settlement in the Middle Ages.⁵¹ No further excavations have been conducted since, and the exposed ruins are not visible. However, in 2024, plans for excavations were once again proposed by the Hungarian State. Since there was no photo documentation in 1895 and no research has been done since, the description of the excavation almost vividly presents the findings to the reader, including walls, graves, glass, and fresco fragments. The ground plan and dimensions of the former Stephanite church can also be reconstructed (*Figure 5 – The excavations at the former Stephanite church in Esztergom, as documented by L. Némethy in 1896 on page 45 of the first yearbook of the Esztergom County Archaeological and Historical Society – Esztergom vidéki Régészeti és Történelmi Társulat*)

2.4.2. Notarial Activities

The institution of authentic places (*locus credibilis authenticus*) is a peculiarity of the Hungarian legal system, which, with the introduction of literacy from the end of the 12th century, carried out the notarial function in Hungary for nearly 700 years. Its development is linked – at the latest – to King Béla III, who was raised in the Byzantine court. Besides mandating literacy and founding the chancery, he also organized the operation of *loci credibiles*. In chapters and convents, clerics and monks knowledgeable in law and literate wrote and edited public and private legal documents and authenticated their content with the seal of the *locus credibilis*. Contracts were always made in the presence of witnesses. Consequently, all members of the chapter or convent issued the documents, often listing the names of the convent leader and members on the documents. The number of documents issued increased so significantly due to King Andrew II's (1205–1235) policy of land donations that establishing legal frameworks became necessary. Approaching Western European practice, King Louis the Great (1342–1382) abolished smaller *loci credibiles* in 1351 and allowed 43 places to continue operating: 15 archiepiscopal and episcopal chapters, 10 collegiate chapters, 11 Benedictine abbeys, 6 Premonstratensian convents, and the convent of the Johannites in Székesfehérvár.

Issuing documents was a significant source of income for *loci credibilis*. According to the law of 1298, the fee for the procedure could be 100 or 112 denars.⁵²

⁵¹ Orsolya Falus: *The „Hungaricum” of the Crusader Orders: The Order of St. Stephen...* cf. p.130.

⁵² Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefaniták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről.* Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). 1991–1992, 133–140 cf.

2.4.2.1. Notarial Activities at the Esztergom Convent

In documents issued in the early 13th century, the Esztergom convent named after King Saint Stephen referred to itself as a chapter and house, later defining itself as a convent.⁵³ The operation of the Esztergom crusader convent was analyzed by Krisztina Tóth in her 2008 study, based on 114 documents issued by the convent.⁵⁴ Although only five documents related to the order's internal affairs have survived, by examining the content of the remaining 109 documents, she was able to reconstruct its notarial activities during the Árpád era.

The varied formulas used in the documents suggest they were produced by several scribes according to multiple formulary books and likely represent only a fraction of the original quantity. The earliest surviving document was issued in 1222, but it is likely there were older documents as well. This fact is supported by a document from around 1220 that mentions the convent's archive. Among the documents preserved in the archive are declarations of legal transactions (*fassio*), reports made on higher orders (*relatio*), and copies of documents issued by the convent or other issuers (*transscriptio*). Most documents were issued for ecclesiastical institutions, primarily the archbishopric and chapter of Esztergom, but a smaller number of documents were written for private individuals in Esztergom, Hont, and Nyitra counties. Private individuals mainly came from neighboring territories to verify their identities, as they knew the parties involved.⁵⁵

The notarial activities could not be separated from the task of preserving documents, but a document from 1220⁵⁶ suggests that the establishment of the convent's archive dates back to an earlier time.

The source material indicates that they not only preserved their documents and copies of documents they issued but also those of other institutions and

⁵³ János Jerney: *A magyarországi káptalanok és konventek, mint bielmés és biteles helyek története* (The History of the Capitulars and Convents in Hungary as Servile and Authenticating Places). Pest, 1855. p. 93.

⁵⁴ Krisztina Tóth: *Az esztergomi Szent István Keresztes Konvent biteleshelyi működése az Árpád-korban* (The Authenticity Function of the Esztergom Saint Stephen's Crusader Convent during the Árpád Era), *Századok* 2008

⁵⁵ Krisztina Tóth: *Az esztergomi Szent István Keresztes Konvent biteleshelyi működése az Árpád-korban* (The Authenticity Function of the Esztergom Saint Stephen's Crusader Convent during the Árpád Era). ...cf. p. 389-393.

⁵⁶ Originating from a document dated around 1220, Nicholas, the Palatine, issued a chirograph confirming a settlement between the Abbot of Pannonhalma and the serfs of Somogy Castle. One copy of this chirograph was placed in the custody of the Abbot of Pannonhalma, while the other was deposited in the archive (camera) of the Order of King Saint Stephen at Esztergom. - The 'Árpád-kori Új Okmánytár' Volumes I-XII are made available by Gusztáv Wenzel. Pest-Bp. 1860-1874. I. 168.

private individuals.⁵⁷ Boroviczény estimates at least eight members in the Esztergom house, which aligns with the written requirement from 1492 – that was probably already valid earlier – that the issuance of an authentic document required the presence of 7–10 monks. Among the members of the order were both Hungarian and foreign individuals. Since they often had to deal with cases involving people who did not speak Latin, it can be assumed that the majority were Hungarian.⁵⁸

According to the documents, most of the convent's properties were located in Esztergom County, south of the Danube. The confirmation of the properties received from King Béla III is detailed in the document issued by Pope Urban III in 1187. According to the bull, their possessions included the monastery and pilgrimage house in Abony, twelve ships and five villages, the estate belonging to the church at the tomb of King Saint Stephen, the Holy Trinity church in Budafelhévíz, the Saint Nicholas church in Vejte, the Virgin Mary churches in Tótvár and Szokoli, and the Saint Margaret church in Karcsa.⁵⁹

2.4.2.2. *Notarial Activities at the Budafelhévíz Convent*

From the 13th century, the Holy Trinity convent in Budafelhévíz, also linked to the Stephanites, engaged in notarial activities. According to Boroviczény, the Stephanite house was built next to their church after the Mongol invasion when King Béla IV made Buda his seat to have an authentic place nearby.

Felhévíz (Forum Geysa, Hévíz, Budafelhévíz, Calida aqua) was originally a market town probably founded by King Géza I (1074 – 1077). Between 1245 and 1439, it appeared in sources as an independent priory. Its earliest surviving notarial document dates from 1278, and the last from 1348. Excavations were conducted in 1906 at the assumed site of the convent near the Buda end of the Margaret Bridge, bounded by Török Street, Margit Boulevard and Zsigmond Street.

During the archaeological excavations, a 13th-century transitional style, single-nave, cross-vaulted, single-tower monastic church with a polygonal apse,

⁵⁷ Krisztina Tóth: *Az esztergomi Szent István Keresztes Konvent biteleshelyi működése az Árpád-korban* (The Authenticity Function of the Esztergom Saint Stephen's Crusader Convent during the Árpád Era). ...cf.p.393.

⁵⁸ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefaniták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). ...cf. p. 16.

⁵⁹ Krisztina Tóth: *Az esztergomi Szent István Keresztes Konvent biteleshelyi működése az Árpád-korban* (The Authenticity Function of the Esztergom Saint Stephen's Crusader Convent during the Árpád Era). ...cf. p. 389–393.

spanning 11 meters, was associated with the Knights of Saint John. The monastery's properties included Hévíz village, arable land and meadows in the outskirts of Óbuda, the Kövesdmál vineyard in Buda, hot springs, and a bath. According to Boroviczény, the siege of Buda by Thomas Szécsi during the civil war of 1440 led to the destruction of the church and monastery and ended the Stephanite presence.⁶⁰

The 1906 excavations were not comprehensive due to ongoing construction at the time. Based on the remnants, the church existed before the Stephanites moved there, and in 1445 it was transformed into a collegiate chapter. The church was accompanied by a chapter row and a cemetery enclosed by a wall to the north.

From May to October 2019, during the expansion of the Buda Hospital of the Hospitaller Order of St. John of God, extensive archaeological excavations were conducted under the leadership of Zoltán Bencze, Gabriella Fényes, and Mónika Kurunczi, resulting in the discovery of further remains of buildings from the medieval settlement of Felhévíz.⁶¹



Fig. 6: Early medieval wall remains beneath a late medieval house (photo by Gabriella Fényes)

Fig. 7: Medieval well (photo by Péter Komjáthy)

⁶⁰ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefániták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order). ...cf. p. 13.

⁶¹ *Millenia below our feet*; Zoltán Bencze-Gabriella Fényes-Mónika Kurunczi; Hungarian Archeology; E-journal-2020 Spring, Vol.9, Issue 1., 21–29, <https://doi.org/10.36338/ha.2020.1.4>



Fig. 8: A ceramic money box from the cellar of a late medieval house, containing coins of Matthias Corvinus (photo by Bence Tihanyi)

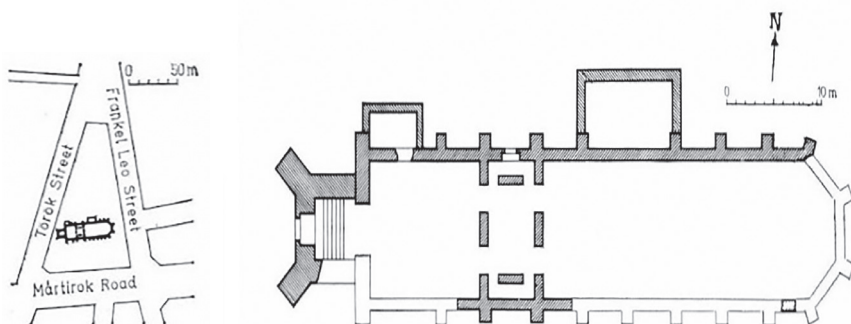


Fig. 9: The ground plan reconstruction of the former Stephanite Holy Trinity Church in Hévíz, based on the excavations of Géza Supka (1906). As presented by László Gerevich in „The Art of Buda and Pest in the Middle Ages” (Bp. 1971, p. 24)

(Fig. 6-9: *Millenia below our feet*; Zoltán Bencze-Gabriella Fényes-Mónika Kurunczi; *Hungarian Archeology*; E-journal-2020 Spring, Vol.9, Issue 1., 21–29, <https://doi.org/10.36338/ha.2020.1.4>)

2.4.2.3. Seals Used by the Order

The authenticity of documents issued in the Middle Ages was confirmed by the seals attached to or impressed upon them. The doctrine of canonical law concerning authentic seals became established in Hungary during the reign of King Géza II, but the harmony between canonical and Hungarian legal concepts was only fully achieved by the 14th century. Until the second half of the 13th century, no distinction was made between the authenticity of ecclesiastical and secular seals.⁶² Accordingly, the houses in Esztergom and Felhévíz also had seals, with two variations known in the case of the Esztergom convent. The similarity between the seals of the two houses reflects the unity of the Buda and Esztergom convents. In his description, Knausz cites a 1372 letter from Pope Gregory XI to support this: „...*pro parte — magistri et conventus Cruciferorum ecclesiarum s. Regis Stephani et sancte Trinitatis de Aquis calidis nobis fuit expositum, quod quamvis ipsi sigillum commune, prout alia capitula et conventus Regni tui Ungariae habent, habere consueverint ab antiquo.*” The connection between the two convents and the subordination of Felhévíz explains the unusual case that the seal of the Buda convent bears the inscription „*SANCTI REGIS HUNGARIE*” instead of „*Sancte Trinitatis.*” However, the inscriptions and coat of arms on the seals were different. The outer circle of the Esztergom seal bears the inscription „*+ SIGILLUM CAPITULI DOMUS HOSPITALIS SANCTI STEPHANI REGIS STRIGONIENSIS,*” while the inner circle has the elements „*SCS. (sanctus) REX.*” The inscription on the seal of the Felhévíz house reads: „*+ S. FRATRIS. DOMUS. HOSPITALIS. SCI. REGIS. HUNGARIE.*”⁶³

The seal of the Esztergom house is almond-shaped (mandorla), with a full, enthroned, leaf-crowned figure in the center, holding a scepter with a lily end in his right hand and a globe with a straight cross in his left. The seal was destroyed during the Mongol invasion, so around 1245, they made a new seal that was the same shape and depicted King Saint Stephen enthroned. The similarity of the seal image to the front of King Béla IV's seal used after the Mongol invasion indicates French influence and close ties with the royal court.⁶⁴

Replacements and changes due to the wear or loss of seals were also noted in documents. The replacement of the Esztergom convent's seal around 1332 is

⁶² Bernát Lajos Kumorovitz: *Az autentikus pecsét.* (The authentic seal). In: Turul. A Magyar Heraldikai és Genealogiai Társaság Közlönye (Journal of the Hungarian Heraldic and Genealogical Society). 1936.p. 50-60.

⁶³ Nándor Knausz: *A jánoslovak Esztergomban* (The Knights of St. John in Esztergom). Magyar Sion 3 (Hungarian Sion 3). (1865) p. 724-727.

⁶⁴ Krisztina Tóth: *Az esztergomi Szent István Keresztes Konvent bitelesbelyi működése az Árpád-korban* (The Authenticity Function of the Esztergom Saint Stephen's Crusader Convent during the Árpád Era). ...cf.p. 395.

mentioned in two documents. Comparing the new seal with the old one, it is clear that the seal's shape was not changed.

The seal of the Felhévíz house is round. The seal image shows a full, standing, hooded monk with an uncovered head, placing his right hand on his chest and holding an open book in his left hand.⁶⁵

The marginalization of the Stephanite convents may be related to the innovations introduced in judiciary matters by the Angevin kings, which also affected the use of seals. Since the rulers strengthened central judiciary over county judiciary, court authentic places were also established at royal seats to handle the increased tasks. Many disputes arose regarding the authenticity of



Fig. 10-12: Károly-György Boroviczény: *Orvostörténeti Tanulmányok – Bulletin of Medical History* – p. 133-140, 1991-1992

documents issued in mixed cases, mostly concerning those issued by smaller convents. Consequently, in 1351, the operation rights of smaller authentic places were revoked, and their seals were invalidated. The measures did not yield results, so in 1353, the king requested the review of the authentic seals, and only those who were given back their seals could continue operating.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefaniták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. *Orvostörténeti Közlemények* (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). 1991-1992, 133-140 cf.

⁶⁶ Bernát Lajos Kumorovitz: *Az autentikus pecsét*. (The authentic seal). ...cf. p. 61-62.

2.4.3. *Spread of the Order in Hungary*

Pope Urban IV's bull (1262) confirming the foundation lists the monastery and pilgrimage house in Abony, along with their twelve ships and five villages, and mentions the Budafelhévíz church, the Saint Nicholas church in Vejte, the Virgin Mary churches in Tovt and Szokol, and the Saint Margaret church in Karcsa as belonging to the order. Among these, only the church in Karcsa still stands, which currently belongs to the Reformed Church.

Based on the surviving documents, it can be established that both the hospitaller and notarial activities were significant during the Árpád era (1000–1301). Despite the losses caused by the Mongol invasion, they remained operational. Their esteemed status is also reflected in the fact that in 1222, King Andrew II entrusted them with one copy of the Golden Bull.⁶⁷

Boroviczény summarized the properties acquired by the Stephanites based on data from Györffy and Reiszig. In addition to the previously listed houses and churches, their properties in the 12th – 13th centuries included the Saint Margaret church in Billén (1187), the Saint John church in Csiffár (Cifáre)/Bars County) (1235), the Saint John church in Csuraszombat (1187), vineyards in Dág (Esztergom County) (1181), an estate in Ebed (Esztergom County) (1191), vineyards in Epöl (Esztergom County) (1270), an estate in Hetény (Hetin)/Komárom County) (1223), an estate in Kesztlőc (Esztergom County) (1259), vineyards in Kirva (Esztergom County) (1255), the Saint Cross church in Korév (Zemplén County, the old name of Tokaji ferry) (1187), an estate in Ogan (Esztergom County) (1181), Széplak (later Szentistván/ Esztergom County) (1181), a manor and ships in Szentistván (Esztergom County) (1181), an estate in Tapolcsány (1259), the Saint Andrew church in Tarcál (Zemplén County) (1187), the Saint George church in Tát (Esztergom County) (1259), the Saint Cross church in Telki (now Mocsod/ Komárom County) (1194), the Saint Cross church in Tokaj (Zemplén County) (1187), an estate in Tokod (Esztergom County) (1181), an estate in Újvásár (now Pusztanagymagyar/ Pozsony County) (1279), and the Saint Thomas church in Zsidódpuszt (Esztergom County) (1187). This list does not include Transylvanian properties mentioned by Balázs Orbán in his book *„Torda város és környéke“* (The City of Torda and its Surroundings).

Among the above-mentioned settlements, the locations of Csuraszombat, Szokol, Tapolcsány, Tót, and Vejte are unknown.

In the 14th–15th centuries, three more settlements came under the Stephanites' influence, acquiring a property in Keresztes (Sikenica/Hont County)

⁶⁷ Orsolya Falus: *The “Hungaricum” of the Crusader Orders: the Order of St Stephen...*cf. p.137.

(1307), a property in Rakonca (Dólné Rykynice)/Hont County) (1331), and a house in Visegrád (Pest County) (1412).⁶⁸

2.5. THE OPERATION OF THE ORDER FROM THE 14TH CENTURY UNTIL ITS DISSOLUTION

Based on the processed documents, the 13th century is considered the hey-day of the order. There are no known changes in the first half of the 14th century; some suggest they participated in the Battle of Rozgony (1312) on the side of King Charles Robert (Caroberto). However, from the mid-14th century, with the cessation of their notarial activities (1353), significantly fewer documents are associated with them. During the plague epidemic that spread between 1347 and 1349, one-third of Hungary's population perished, and the disease undoubtedly reached the order members as well, contributing to their decrease in numbers and the withdrawal of their seal. Since issuing documents was an important source of income, the absence of this further weakened their chances of survival.⁶⁹

The last known notarial document of the Felhévíz house (1348) was issued by the last independent prior of Felhévíz, Ivan. In a document dated 1355, Jacob and, in a document from 1356, Cardinal William were listed as the masters of the Esztergom house and the (titular) priors of the Felhévíz house. By 1359, John, son of Luke, no longer appeared as prior but as „*officialis cruciferorum Aquarum Calidarum*.”⁷⁰ The later bishop of Győr, John Héderváry, was also the prior of the Felhévíz convent, and in a document dated 1386, he is mentioned as „*relatio magistri Iohannis de Hederbvar magistri cruciferorum de Calidis Aquis*.”⁷¹ In

⁶⁸ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefániták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). ...cf. p. 17–18.

⁶⁹ Zsolt Hunyadi: *Szent János ispotályos testvérei: A jobanniták Magyarországon. A 12. század*. In: Máltai tanulmányok (The Hospitaller brothers of St. John: The Johannites in Hungary. The 12th century In: Maltese Studies) p. 48. and Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefániták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). ...cf. p. 32.

⁷⁰ Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefániták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order.). ...cf. p. 37.

⁷¹ Zsolt Hunyadi: *The Hospitallers in the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary c.1150–1387*. Department of Medieval Studies Central European University. Budapest, 2010. p. 90.

1438, Ladislaus Chetneky (1397-1447) was referred to as the „*Gubernátor Magistratus Crucigerorum de calidis aquis*.”

Boroviczény, following Knauz, explains the governor (gubernator) title by suggesting that Chetneky was not a member of the order but received the title and associated income as a privilege from King Sigismund, as similar complaints were made by the Johannites at the time. The last known document mentioning the Stephanites was issued on January 13, 1439, by Judge Stephen Báthori in Buda, resolving a matter concerning the customs of Kakat and Szentkirály between the Stephanites and the Esztergom chapter.

During the period of civil war between the supporters of King Wladyslaw I (1424-1444) and Queen Elizabeth (Queen of Hungary 1437-1439, and regent 1439-1442) between the death of King Albert (1439) and the accession of Matthias (1458-1490), Thomas Széchi, supporting Queen Elizabeth, besieged Buda and also attacked and set fire to Felhévíz. According to Boroviczény, this may have marked the end of the Stephanites' presence in Budafelhévíz. As a consequence, Pope Eugene IV allowed the transformation of the Felhévíz crusader convent into a collegiate chapter in 1445. Sources from 1457 mention a provostry and collegiate chapter in connection with the Felhévíz benefices, no longer mentioning the crusaders.⁷² The circumstances of the Stephanites' presence in Budafelhévíz and Esztergom in the 16th century and the order's destruction are unknown based on the documents uncovered so far and require further research. Knauz, agreeing with Jerney's findings, places the decline of the Esztergom convent around the time of the Esztergom chapter's relocation to Nagyszombat (1543). Knauz dates the cessation of the Budafelhévíz convent to an earlier time, noting that by 1500, it was certainly in the possession of the Bishop of Veszprém based on parliamentary permission. Given the connection between the two convents, Knauz suggests that the Esztergom convent may have also been in foreign hands but existed in name without knights even after the defeat at Mohács. It can be considered certain that the order's operation ceased at the latest with the Turkish conquest.⁷³

⁷² Károly György Boroviczény: *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Tanulmányok a stefániták, egy középkori magyar ispotályos rend történetéről*. Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani. Studies on the Stephanites: The history of a medieval Hungarian Hospitaller order). ...cf. p. 36-38.

⁷³ Nándor Knauz: *A jánoslovagok Esztergomban* (The Knights of St. John in Esztergom). ...cf. p. 722.

3. THE SPIRITUAL REVIVAL OF THE ORDER OF KING SAINT STEPHEN

During the half-millennium period of Hungary's loss of sovereignty, the Crusaders of King Saint Stephen did not operate. However, the foundation laid by King Saint Stephen, the establishment of the chivalric order by King Géza II, and the activities of the Stephanites were not forgotten during this long period. The desire and intention to restart after the Turkish occupation were expressed by the Church. Odó (Oddo) Koptik (Koptick), a benedictine monk from Salzburg working to curb Protestantism, came to Hungary in 1739 to the monastery of Pannonhalma and then received the title of benedictine abbot of Celldömölk. At the request of the Hungarian chancery in Vienna, he prepared plans for the establishment of a Hungarian noble academy based on the model of the German chivalric academy.⁷⁴ During his research, he encountered traces of the chivalric order named after King Saint Stephen. Inspired by this, he conceived the idea of founding a chivalric order whose members would work for the glory of God and the nation and promote the veneration of the Holy King.⁷⁵ During his stay in Rome, he gained the pope's approval for his plan to revive the Order of King Saint Stephen.⁷⁶ The concept of a chivalric order promoting the cult of the Holy King also pleased Maria Theresa, but she implemented it in the form of a secular chivalric order that rewarded civil merits.⁷⁷

The clerical part of the Cruciferi included the canons of Esztergom, and therefore the empress also established an honorary title and badge for the canons of the archdiocese. This is why it is often believed today that the modern Order of King Saint Stephen is related to Maria Theresa's foundation. However, the modern Order of King Saint Stephen, which considers the Cruciferi Sancti Stephani Regis, the original foundation of King Saint Stephen, and the foundation related to King Géza II as its predecessor, has no connection to Maria Theresa's foundation or the associated honors.

⁷⁴ Gábor Tüskés-Éva Knapp: *A barokk és a felvilágosodás között*. (Between Baroque and Enlightenment) In: Történelmi Szemle (Historical Review) 1995. p. 70-71.

⁷⁵ P. István Cser-Palkovits (OSJ): *A Szent István-Lovagrend története*. (The History of The Order of King Saint Stephen) In: Jel. 1996. p. 25.

⁷⁶ Gábor Tüskés-Éva Knapp: *A barokk és a felvilágosodás között*. (Between Baroque and Enlightenment) In: Történelmi Szemle (Historical Review) 1995. p. 71.

⁷⁷ In 1996, an article titled „The History of the Order of King Saint Stephen“ by István Cser-Palkovits OSJ appeared in *Jel*. This is a highly sophisticated and excellent presentation of the foundig of the Order under Queen Maria Theresia (1740-1780), but but it has no connection to this.

The renewal of the *Cruciferi Sancti Stephani Regis*'s operation after more than four hundred years of interruption is a special task. Only the Archbishop of Esztergom and the Archdiocese of Esztergom-Budapest could consider contributing to the renewal preparations, and based on the positive decision of Cardinal László Paskai, the Order of King Saint Stephen could begin its operation on August 20, 1993, in the Archdiocese of Esztergom-Budapest as an ecclesiastical private association (*Fig. 13*). The Ministry of Human Resources registered it in the register of ecclesiastical legal entities recognized by the Hungarian State under number 00001/2012-46 as an internal ecclesiastical legal entity in the sense of current civil law.

The current Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest became the chief patron of the Order, also its ecclesiastical superior, and like any chivalric order, the Stephanites' fundamental task is the defense of the Church, the defense and proclamation of Christianity, and the service of God's glory - with a special focus on continuing the spirituality and spirit of the ancient *Cruciferi Sancti Regis*. During the re-establishment of the Order of King Saint Stephen, Cardinal Dr. László Paskai, Archbishop of Esztergom and the chief patron of the Order, invited the internationally renowned canon lawyer Dr. Péter Erdő to develop the legal framework of the Order. Cardinal Dr. Péter Erdő, who now serves as Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, succeeding Cardinal Paskai, is currently the chief patron of the Order.

This was followed by the creation of conditions and the restoration of full operation, aiming to follow the Gospel lifestyle according to the Rule of Saint Augustine as closely as possible. After one of his pilgrimages to Fatima, Cardinal László Paskai said: „*Let the mission of the Order be to obtain grace for the entire Hungarian nation.*”

When the Order of King Saint Stephen was relaunched, it was necessary to protect its name from false secular usage. In 1989, an irregular organization was formed without adhering to any ecclesiastical or chivalric regulations. According to the position of the Archbishop of Esztergom expressed in a letter in December 1991, the Supreme Court annulled the registration of this organization due to irregularities, and the social organization was legally dissolved.

The Order of King Saint Stephen traces its spiritual and historical roots back to the „crusaders” of the pilgrim and hospitaller houses established by King Saint Stephen. These „crusaders” were transformed into a chivalric order by King Géza II and with the approval of Pope Alexander III.

In addition to helping the needy, pilgrims, and engaging in patient care, the Order likely also participated militarily in the defense of Christianity. After the final fall of Jerusalem, its center of operation became Esztergom, and always followed the Rule of Saint Augustine.

Given the long, forced interruption of operation due to circumstances beyond the control of the predecessors, the current Order of King Saint Stephen continues the

original spirit but is not the legal successor of this old institution. Therefore, by the authority of the ecclesiastical authority, the Order of King Saint Stephen uses the names Cruciferi Sancti Stephani Regis, Order of King Saint Stephen (Crusader), the Nursing and Military Order of the Cross of Saint Stephen of Esztergom and Jerusalem, the Crusaders of Saint Stephen, Cruciferi Sancti Regis, the Stephanite Order, and the Stephanites.

The Order is a voluntarily established ecclesiastical legal entity with self-governance, operating within the legal framework of the Catholic Church (ecclesiastical private association) to achieve and cultivate the goals defined in its Statutes, such as maintaining Christian roots, effectively participating in re-evangelization, and defending the Church and the faith, primarily with the most dangerous weapon today: the weapon of words and unwavering steadfastness. But most importantly, it requires authentic individuals, which today's knights should strive to become if they wish to be worthy of their predecessors. The Order's operation is not limited to Hungary; it has members in numerous countries in Europe and the United States.

The Order currently has 84 members and consists of the following Groups:

1. Central Group (current territory of Hungary)
2. Transylvanian Group, also including members living in Partium (today Romania)
3. Northern Group (today Slovakia)
3. Southern Group (today Serbia)
4. North American Group
5. and the developing Western Hungarian Group

In close alignment with the Gospel, the Order operates according to the guidelines of the Holy King, considering all the Hungarian peculiarities that the predecessors also took into account. The Admonitions of King Saint Stephen enshrine timeless principles.

The members of the Order strive to consistently live by these principles. One such principle is: *"All men are born with an equal status."* Today, this is also included in the Declaration of Human Rights and the U.S. Constitution, and in Hungary it was a royal decree, an almost constitutional principle, as early as 1015. Thus, the Order cannot recognize differences between people, and it also upholds the continuation of the King Saint Stephen principle: *"Nothing raises you up except humility, and nothing brings you down except pride and hatred."* (Admonitions)

Both priests and married individuals can become members of the order. It is hoped that the monastic branch of the order will also be restarted. A fundamental requirement is a blameless life. The grand master of the order must be Catholic, but it is characteristic that, if they accept the principles of the Order, Calvinist or Lutheran brothers can also join and become members of the Protestant Class.

The badge of the Order is the apostolic double cross that splits at the top. King Saint Stephen himself wore a double cross on which a splinter of the Holy Cross was embedded. This relic was still present during the time of King Andrew III. A double cross can be assembled from three straight pieces, symbolizing the unity of God, the Holy Trinity. At the same time, a double cross consists of seven half-straight lines, representing the seven-branched candlestick, the seven stars, the seven churches, and the seven sacraments. Ultimately, with its thirteen peaks, the double cross signifies the Last Supper and the Eucharist. Each peak corresponds to a knightly virtue, which is also included in the Statutes. Members live by these virtues according to the Rule of Saint Augustine. They commit to practicing knightly virtues and living according to the Rule of Augustine and the Order's Statutes. The *Regula Maior* applies to members who have taken perpetual or celibate vows and establishes the possibility of a closed communal lifestyle, with appropriate modifications compared to the *Regula Minor*. The *Regula Minor* applies to the majority of the members. The *Regula*, consisting of 22 chapters, like the Stephanites' other guiding spiritual directive, the Admonitions, is detailed in the Order's Statutes.

All members of the Order take a vow to submit to the ecclesiastical authority of the Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest. A beautiful fruit of ecumenism is that the Protestant members of the Order also take this vow. The vow similarly extends to members living outside the current borders of Hungary.

The Order's candidacy has two stages: aspirant and member. Those who meet the requirements in these stages can become knights, and among the knights, one can become a master. The grand master is entrusted by the order. The lifestyle requirements consist of daily prayers and the practice of knightly virtues. The greatest knightly virtue is love. Members of the order participate in annual retreats and pilgrimages.

The titular church of the Order of King Saint Stephen is the Saint Stephen's Basilica in Budapest. Thus, they participate organically in the life of the Basilica, institutionally appearing at every major celebration. One of their flags is always next to the Holy Right (*Fig. 14*). The main feast of the order is August 20, the day of King Saint Stephen. Naturally, they participate in the solemn mass and the procession. Otherwise, the current organizational structure and operation of the order are detailed in the Statutes.

Only the specific forms have changed somewhat over the past thousand years; therefore, Christian knighthood remains not only important, relevant, and modern but also an essential element of the future.

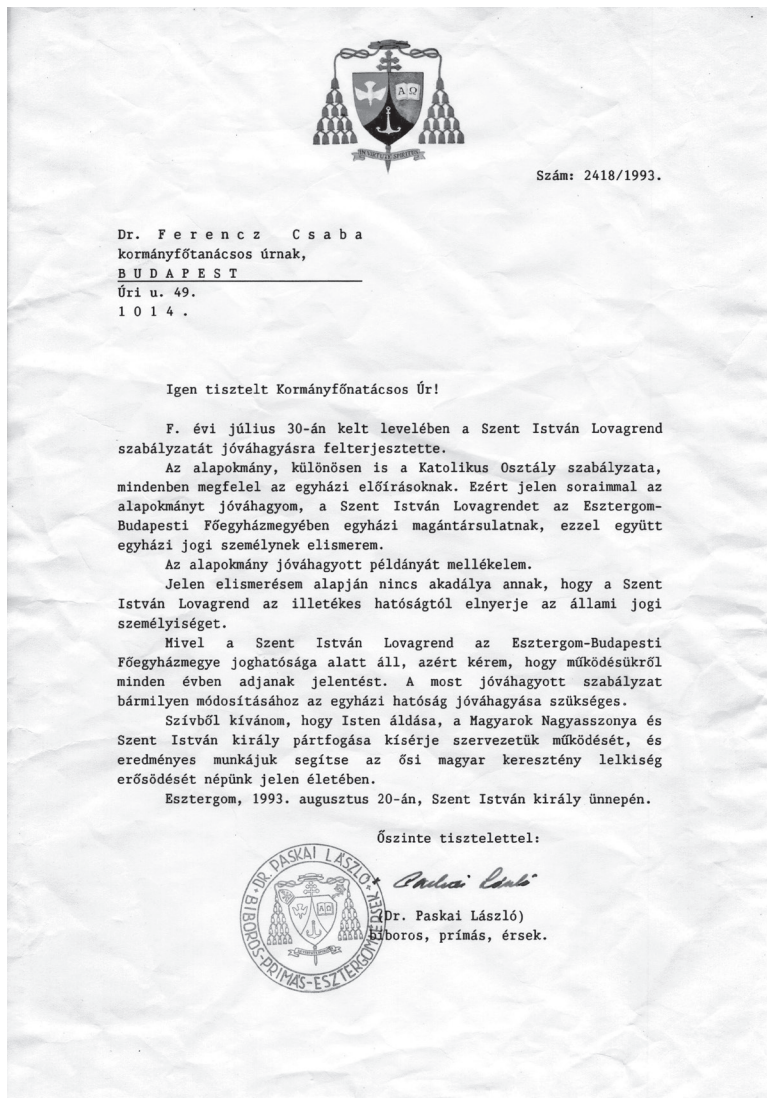


Fig. 13 The archiepiscopal approval of the Order of King Saint Stephen by His Eminence, Cardinal László Paskai, Primate of Hungary

Translation of the archiepiscopal approval
of the Order of (King) St. Stephen:

To Dr. Csaba Ferencz, Government Chief Advisor,
Budapest, Üri u. 49. 1014

Number: 2418/1993

Honorable Mr. Government Chief Advisor,

In your letter dated July 30, 1993, you submitted the Regulations of the Order of Saint Stephen for approval. The Statutes, especially the Regulations of the Catholic Department, fully comply with ecclesiastical requirements. Therefore, with these lines, I hereby approve the Statutes, and recognize the Order of Saint Stephen as a private association in the Church within the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Esztergom-Budapest, and thereby also as an ecclesiastical legal entity.

I enclose the approved copy of the Statutes. Based on this recognition, there is no obstacle to the Order of Saint Stephen obtaining state legal status from the competent authority.

Since the Order of Saint Stephen falls under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Esztergom-Budapest, I request that the Order report on their activities annually. Any modifications to the newly approved regulations will require ecclesiastical approval.

I sincerely wish that God's blessing, the patronage of Our Lady of Hungary, and King Saint Stephen accompany your organization's activities, and may your successful work strengthen the ancient Hungarian Christian spirituality in the life of our people.

Esztergom, August 20, 1993, on the Feast of King Saint Stephen.

With sincere respect,

Dr. László Paskai

Cardinal, Primate of Hungary, Archbishop

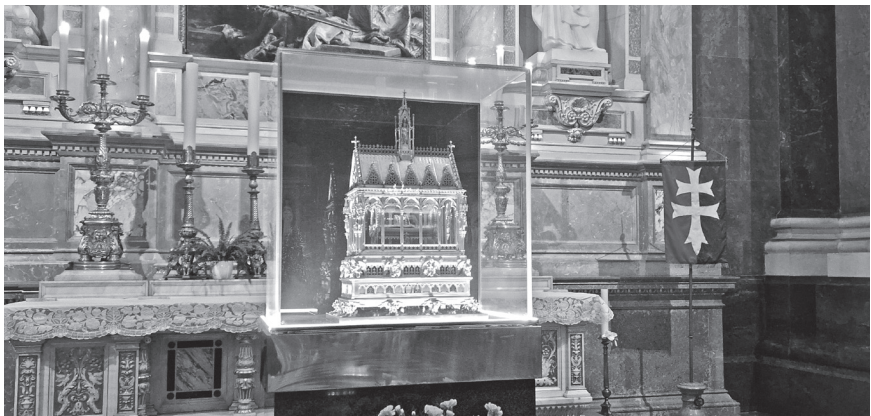


Fig. 14: The titular church of the Order of King Saint Stephen is the Saint Stephen's Basilica in Budapest. Their flag always stands next to the Holy Right relic of Saint Stephen (see on the right side). (The Order's own photograph)



Fig. 15: The current Patron of the Order of King Saint Stephen has been since 2003 His Eminence Cardinal Péter Erdő, the Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, and Primate of Hungary. In the above photograph, Cardinal Erdő delivers a welcome address at the charity concert held under his patronage, organized by the Order of King Saint Stephen at Saint Stephen's Basilica in Budapest. On the right stands Csaba Ferencz CSR, the Emeritus Grand Master of the Order. (MTI Photo: László Beliczay)



Fig. 16: The Order celebrated the 30th anniversary of its revival with a solemn mass on the day of the Order's Te Deum, October 8, 2023 in St. Stephen's Basilica, Budapest. The concelebrated Holy Mass was presided by Dr. Levente Balázs Martos, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Esztergom-Budapest. The fraternal orders were also represented at this celebration. (The Order's own photograph)

CONCLUSION

Taking advantage of the easing of Christian persecution in the Holy Land, King Saint Stephen established pilgrim hospitals with monastic communities in 1017-18. This not only facilitated pilgrimages from Hungary to Rome but also reopened the pilgrimage route to Jerusalem for Christian Europe. This foundation flourished, and around 1150, King Géza II founded the chivalric order named after King Saint Stephen, *Cruciferi Sancti Stephani Regis*, which was approved and placed under the jurisdiction of the Holy See by Pope Alexander III's bull in 1161-62.

Due to the permanent fall of Jerusalem, the Stephanites' center was moved to Esztergom by order of Pope Urban III, reaffirmed by Pope Urban IV in 1262. Besides hospitaller and military activities, the *Cruciferi Sancti Regis* also engaged in extensive notarial activities not only around Esztergom with the support of the Árpád dynasty rulers but throughout Hungary (including the Upper Hungary region and Transylvania).

Following the administrative reorganizations after the extinction of the Árpád dynasty, the *Cruciferi* lost its notarial jurisdiction, which weakened the Order, and the number of surviving documents associated with the Order greatly diminished. The actual sovereignty of Hungary, as well as the operation of the Stephanite Order, ceased due to the Ottoman-Islamic conquests. However, the memory of the Order lived on, and in the 1700s, there were considerations to revive the Stephanite Order, which were thwarted by other royal intentions.

After the restoration of Hungary's sovereignty in 1990-91, the Archdiocese of Esztergom-Budapest considered the possibility of re-establishing the Stephanite Order. Based on the positive decision of Cardinal Dr. László Paskai, the *Order of King Saint Stephen (Cruciferi Sancti Stephani Regis)* commenced operations on August 20, 1993, as a private association in the Church, continuing the spirituality and ethos of the old Order.
