

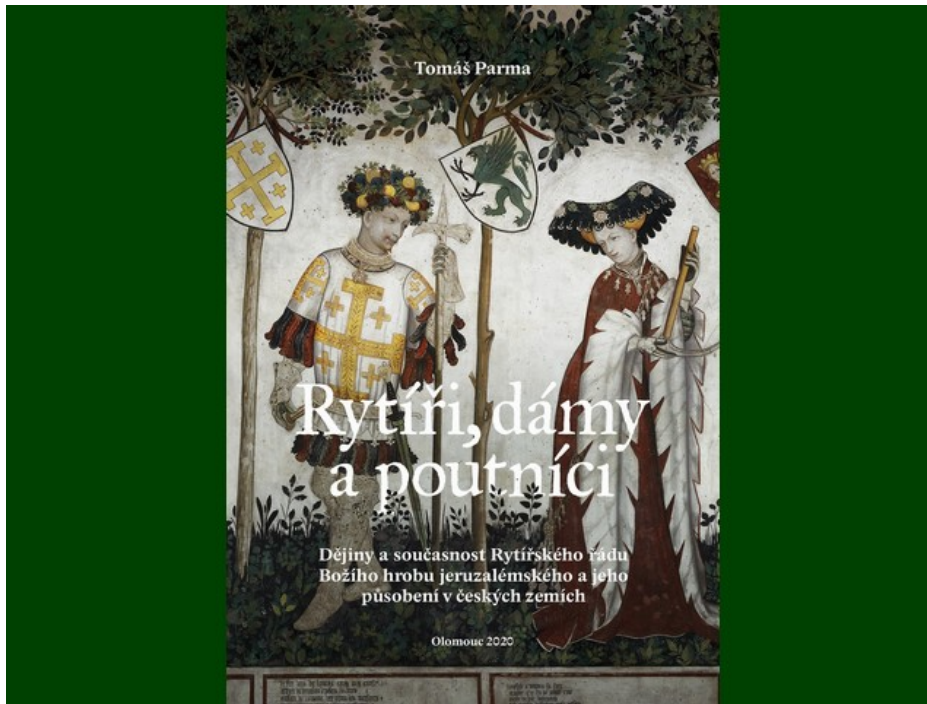


GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

A New Book on the History of the Order

Interview with the author Tomáš Parma



The book "Knights, Dames and pilgrims" is available in Czech from the distributor Kosmas (<https://www.kosmas.cz/knihy/283143/rytiridamy-a-poutnici/>), or from the Magistral Delegation for the Czech Republic (oessh.cze@gmail.com).

You have just published an important book on the history of the Order, in Czech. Many members of the Order will not be able to read it, at least not until it has been translated into English, which is planned according to what you have told us. What is the original contribution of this work?

The book in Czech was a necessity, because in our country there were no reference texts about our Order. We envisaged a little book covering the basics, but more than two years of research and love for the subject eventually led me to write a book of over four hundred pages. I would be delighted if it could be translated into English because the story of the chivalry of the Holy Sepulchre and our Order deserves it: it is a fascinating history, a story that relates our identity as Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre.

Can you tell us what you have discovered about the origins of the Order?

Our image of the history of the Order is far more modest than that of 19th and 20th century historians. The Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre was not founded by Godfrey of Bouillon, during the time of the Crusades, but almost immediately after the fall of the Crusader States in 1291. It was the presence of the Franciscans that made it possible to invest the Knights at the Sepulchre of Christ: first (from 1335) it was Cultura A New Book on the History of the Order the Knights themselves who conferred this dignity, then the Custos of the Holy Land took over. This moment in history is particularly beautiful: when European chivalry was entering a crisis and turning into entertainment or hollow accolades, in the Holy Land an idea of glorious chivalry was developing, linked to Christian virtues, which asked for a commitment to help those who needed it, a chivalry anchored in the central mystery of the Christian faith, that of the death and resurrection of the Saviour. In the 19th century, the

popes, who reestablished the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, created the fundamental link between the patriarchate and the knights of the Holy Sepulchre, which was transformed into a true knightly Order, a community of people with concrete goals and a strong spirituality.

Do you support the theory of Professor Agostino Borromeo, historian and current Lieutenant General of the Order, that the founding of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre was unrelated to the Crusades?

It is my opinion that the Order was not founded during the Crusades, but only afterwards, and I came to this conclusion based on the research of previous historians and Professor Borromeo, with whom I had the pleasure of being able to discuss this. The first Latin kings of Jerusalem founded the chapter of the Canons of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, the cathedral of the Latin Patriarchate, and transformed it into a regular chapter. From this chapter was born the Order of Canons, which continued to live in Europe and its female branch still exists today. But the Canons were not Knights, and one cannot confuse the two, as was often still done in the 20th century. But we cannot say that the Order has no link with the Crusades or with the person of Godfrey of Bouillon: without the phenomenon of the Crusades, without the person of the great Crusader king who became one of the “nine valiants”, we would not have the powerful idea of Christian chivalry, which defends the sacred places of Jerusalem and helps Christians there. This was the original idea, onto which the Franciscans grafted the knighthood of the Holy Sepulchre. Godfrey and the Crusaders are not our founders, but reference persons, bearers of the idea that generated and formed us.

What can be found in the Czech archives on the history of our Order?

For me, that was the biggest surprise of all my research. From our archives, but also from the collections of the Latin Patriarchate and the Custody, I have been able to identify more than 200 Knights of the Holy Sepulchre of Czech origin, starting with the oldest in the 15th century. We have also been able to write the history of the Czechoslovak Lieutenancy, founded in 1929, but which disappeared during the Nazi occupation during the war and especially during 40 years of the totalitarian communist regime. Only after that, the life of the Order in the Czech Republic slowly resumed, heir to such a full past.

Do you have other plans for historical research on the Order?

With my book, the work has just started for me. I think it would be especially useful to revive the International Historical Commission, which existed at the end of the 20th century and which prepared the famous Lateran Symposium in 1996. While writing the book, I realised, and meetings with Prof. Borromeo confirmed this for me, that not enough is known about the history of the Order in the 20th century, about the formation of the first Lieutenancies, their life and successive development. And yet, as we know, the life of the Order happens in the Lieutenancies. It would be a collective work, to write history from that point of view, because it is beyond the realms of possibility for an individual. And this very work carried out together could give a new image of our history because the Order is not an individual, but a fraternity, as our Grand Master teaches us so well in strong continuity with Pope Francis. My dream is to be able to participate in this work, as part of this professional community at the service of the Order.

Interview by François Vayne

(July 2021)