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The spread and influence of crusading ideology in Bohemia and Poland**

Abstract: This article investigates the transmission and influence of the idea of crusade in Bohemia and Poland, pivotal in shaping East Central Europe's religious, cultural, and political landscape during the Middle Ages. Exploring cultural exchanges, political alliances, and ecclesiastical influences, it reveals the mechanisms of this ideology's dissemination and absorption in the Piast realm. It examines the nuanced transformation in attitudes and policies following the reception of the idea of crusade, contributing to a deeper understanding of the interplay between ideology and regional dynastic dynamics and its enduring impact on the Christian world.

Keywords: idea of crusade; holy war; Poland; Bohemia

Słowa kluczowe: idea krucjaty; święta wojna; Polska; Czechy

The impact of the medieval holy wars on the world and East Central Europe was transformative and enduring. These holy wars expanded the Christian world both spiritually and geographically, with their cultural significance resonating beyond

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their immediate temporal and spatial contexts. The emergence of the idea of crusade resulted from the convergence of circumstances in the eleventh-century Europe and followed a long evolution of the Christian attitude to violence. As a distinct ideology, the idea of crusade fused legal and theological concepts of holy war, just war and pilgrimage. Over time, it laid the groundwork for the development of the concept of crusade.

The crusade is understood as a manifestation of a holy war. It was waged against those perceived as external or internal foes of Christendom, aiming at the recovery of Christian property or the defence of the Church and Christian people. The concept of the Crusade emerged as a synthesis of developing older ideas. It revealed itself through institutions such as the vow, the taking of the cross, and the indulgence. Medieval piety and devotion characterised crusading as an act of selfless Christian love, in direct obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ. This idealism bridged the gap between spiritual renewal, as postulated by the eleventh-century Church reform movement, and the theological justification for war provided by the canonists. Crusading primarily resulted from the Church's acceptance of violence and the evolution of the holy war concept and its ideology within Christian intellectual thought. During the eleventh century, successive popes drew their justification for Christian participation in war from the ideas of Augustine of Hippo. Augustine, credited with formulating a new Christian response to war, accepted the inevitability of war and stipulated three principles for its legitimate conduct. Firstly, a legitimate authority must declare the war; secondly, it must be undertaken with the right intention, namely, the restoration of justice; and thirdly, it must be fought for a just cause, such as redressing wrongdoing.

The crusade marked a critical juncture in the church reform movement, amidst conflicts with both ecclesiastical and secular adversaries, sought support from the knighthood of the Christian West. Pope Urban II's public statement to the faithful in 1095, which called them to aid the Christian East, was not understood by the pope's audience in entirely altruistic terms¹.

Pope Urban II's call to crusade, while unconventional, was not entirely novel. Urban, having previously focused on the Spanish Reconquest, argues Jonathan Riley-Smith viewed his proposal as a moderate, albeit ambitious, iteration of concepts well-debated within the church leadership. What set this call apart was the novel approach of declaring a holy war where participants were considered pilgrims and

¹ See J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, London 1986, p. 1.

were offered indulgences – a concept not previously enacted by a pope. Although it is often said that Urban synthesised these ideas in a new way, it is important to recognise that the component of fighting in Christ's name developed significantly in the minds of the crusaders as they journeyed to Jerusalem. It was only in the years after the crusade that a unified and consistent theory of crusading fully emerged².

The development of the theoretical framework for crusading is widely considered to have taken shape around the 1140s. By this period, the foundational principles of crusading had been reinforced through the contributions of influential figures like Pope Innocent II, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Gratian. Gratian, drawing on themes already common in crusade propaganda, effectively established that the Church, and especially the popes, had the authoritative power to legitimise holy wars invoking the divine sanction³.

This article aims to examine the transmission and consequent influence of the idea of crusade from Bohemia to the Piast realm, a process pivotal in shaping the religious, cultural, and political landscape of East Central Europe during the Middle Ages. It explores into the multifaceted ways in which this ideology, born out of the complex matrix of religious fervour and political aspiration, traversed geographical and cultural borders, subsequently moulding a collective consciousness and approaches towards the sanctified warfare. By exploring the intricate network of cultural exchanges, political alliances, and ecclesiastical influences, the article aims to reveal the mechanisms through which this ideology was disseminated and embraced in the Piast realm. Furthermore, this investigation seeks to unravel the nuanced transformation in attitudes and policies that ensued, both in response to and as a result of the absorption of the idea of crusade. Ultimately, this article aims to contribute a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between ideology and regional dynastic dynamics, shedding light on how crusading zeal transcended its original confines to leave an indelible mark on East Central Europe and the broader Christian world.

From the conclusion of the First Crusade, Bohemia and Poland were significantly influenced by the crusading ideology. In the years following the fall of Jerusalem to the armed pilgrimage initiated by Urban II in 1095, the Poles actively engaged in forceful propagation of the Faith amongst their pagan neighbours, including the Sudovians, Pomeranians, and Prussians. A particularly salient instance of this was the Piast conquest of Pomerania between 1102 and 1138, which led to the successful imposition of Christianity in the region. There is no existing evidence to suggest

² *Ibidem*, p. 30.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

that the papacy formally endorsed these military actions by granting indulgences to the Poles for their holy war against the Pomeranians. Nonetheless, it is likely that, inspired by biblical precedents, particularly those in the Old Testament, the Piast dynasty might have believed that their mission was divinely sanctioned, as evidenced by the successes. This belief in divine favour may have played a crucial role in their sustained efforts and ultimate victory. The Church swiftly acknowledged the expansion of Christendom achieved by the Polish conquest of Pomerania, as demonstrated by the papacy's decision to establish numerous episcopal sees in the region. Indeed, the Church was the primary beneficiary of the Polish conquest of Pomerania, reaping rewards both spiritual, in terms of expanding the Christian faith, and temporal, through the acquisition of new territories and influence. This symbiotic relationship between the crusading efforts of secular powers like the Piast dynasty and the ecclesiastical ambitions of the leading Church figures highlights a key theme: the crusades served as a conduit for both religious and political expansion, with each domain reinforcing and legitimising the other. The intertwining of these two spheres – the spiritual and the temporal – was a defining characteristic of the crusading movement, particularly evident in the context of the Polish campaigns north to the realm of the Piasts⁴.

The anonymous author of 'Gesta principum Polonorum,' a work composed in Latin between 1112 and 1118 and commissioned by the Piast court, presents a compelling narrative of the conquest of Pomerania. This account aligns the Piast dynasty's military actions with the Augustinian principles of just war, namely just cause, right intention, and legitimate authority. According to this theory, the Pomeranian campaign was a justified response to the pillaging raids and incursions conducted by the Pomeranians into Polish territories. Thus, the wars waged against the pagan Pomeranians were portrayed not as acts of aggression, but as necessary measures to redress the wrongs inflicted upon Poland⁵.

In keeping with the Augustinian principles, the author emphasises that the Poles, under the leadership of Boleslaw III, engaged in these military actions with the intention of restoring peace. The implication is that the Polish response was not moti-

⁴ See generally D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *Poland, Holy War, and the Piast Monarchy, 1100–1230*, Turnhout 2014.

⁵ D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *Gallus Anonymus*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, eds. G. Dunphy, C. Bratu, 2009 (An Online Edition), pp. 659–660, <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopedia-of-the-medieval-chronicle> [accessed: 3.01.2024].

vated by a desire for conquest or revenge, but rather by a need to establish stability and order in the face of external aggression. The 'Gesta principum Polonorum' positions the Polish dynasty's military efforts as morally and ethically sound, underpinned by a legitimate cause: the defence of the realm and the redress of grievances.

Furthermore, the legitimacy of these actions is reinforced by the figure of Bolesław III, who, as the ruler of Poland, possessed the authority to wage war in defence of his realm. The depiction of Bolesław III's leadership aligns with the Augustinian criterion of legitimate authority, affirming that the military campaign was not a rogue operation but a state-sanctioned effort to protect and preserve the integrity of the Polish monarchy⁶.

The 'Gesta principum Polonorum' thus serves not only as a historical record but also as a justification of the Piast dynasty's military campaigns, framed within the doctrine of just war. This perspective highlights the interplay between political objectives and religious or ethical justifications for warfare. The text suggests that the Piast court was acutely aware of the importance of framing their military actions within the context of Christian ideology, morality and ethics, a strategy that not only legitimised their actions in the eyes of their contemporaries but also aligned them with the broader narrative of Christian rulers acting as defenders of the faith and arbiters of justice⁷.

The 1095 crusade appeal of Pope Urban II meet with a limited response from the dynasts of the Piast and Přemyslid monarchies, but the participation of Poles and Czechs in the holy wars of Christianity in the twelfth century followed the patterns adopted from Western Europe. The motivation of their participants combined deep religiosity and fervour of faith with a desire for conquest and political pragmatism. Unlike its Western counterparts, however, in East Central Europe, where Christianity was slowly growing in influence since the tenth century, the call to participate in the crusades did not become a popular movement. Such a limited reaction to the Pope's appeal to free the Holy Land from the hands of infidels naturally reflected the progress of Christianity in Central and Eastern Europe. The new religion took over the dynasty and elites relatively quickly, while for the rest of the population the process was to take hundreds of years. Through their participation in the holy wars, Slavic neophyte dynasts fulfilled their desire to become truly Christian rulers.

⁶ Cf. *Ipse quidem cum paganis bella gerit licita, Sed nos contra christianos germus illicita: Gesta Principum Polonorum*, ed. J.M. Bak, trans. P.W. Knoll, F. Schaer, Budapest–New York 2003, III:11, pp. 242–243.

⁷ D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *Poland, Holy War*.

The processes that brought to the idea of crusade to influence East Central Europe should be considered in the context of the formation of Europe as an advanced cultural area of the community of its inhabitants. The spread of Christianity became the means of the diffusion of the idea of crusade, at the same time binding the continent and offering new institutional models. The processes of Christianisation resulted in adapting patterns of organising society and creating systems of cultural values connecting the continent. Between the introduction of Christianity to Poland in 966 and the death of Bolesław III Wrymouth in 1138, the Piast monarchy not only existed as a Christian realm but was incorporated as an integral part of Christendom in the consciousness of Western European societies and institutions such as the papacy and the empire. The sequence of Wrymouth's Pomeranian conquest and the initiation of the mission of Otto of Bamberg by this Piast, in order to Christianise the Pomeranians, was associated with the processes of Christianisation of the Piast subjects and the influence of the idea of holy wars.

Jonathan Riley-Smith argues that the Crusades were a manifestation of Christian idealism, which induced Christians to participate in crusades not only for the love of God but for the love of their neighbour⁸. Taking up the cross was a meritorious act. Carl Erdmann suggests that fundamental to the understanding of the rise of the crusading movement is examination of the reform movement of the eleventh century and its animators. Erdmann shows that the postulators of the Gregorian reforms, who sought to reform societies according to the ideals of monasticism, brought about a renewal of religiosity in the minds and hearts of Christians. Such notions of Christian love of one's neighbour found expression not only in charitable activities through the formation of hospitaller and monastic fraternities, but also through participation in the crusading movement⁹. In his encyclical *Quantum praedecessores* of December 1145, Pope Eugenius III (1145–1153) emphasised that those who responded to the appeal of Urban II in Clermont and went on the First Crusade were ignited by fervour of love¹⁰. Can the same be said of the Polish crusaders?

⁸ J. Riley-Smith, *Crusading as an Act of Love*, History 65 (1980), pp. 177–192. General bibliography – *Der Johanniterorden, der Malteserorden. Der ritterliche Orden des hl. Johannes vom Spital zu Jerusalem. Seine Geschichte, seine Aufgaben*, vol. 3, ed. A. Wienand, Köln 1988; *Zakon Maltański w Polsce*, ed. S.K. Kuczyński, Warszawa 2000.

⁹ C. Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*, trans. M.W. Baldwin, W. Goffart, Princeton 1977.

¹⁰ *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina*, ed. J.P. Migne, vol. 180, Paris 1844–1855, col. 1064.

The question of the factors that motivated the crusaders is not new. The same question was asked by the authors of the narrative histories of the First Crusade. The earliest commentators were, of course, propagandists of the idea of crusade. Guibert of Nogent explained the motives of the crusaders as follows:

We see nations moved by the inspiration of God... The highest offices of government, the lordships of castles or cities were despised; the most beautiful wives became as loathsome as something putrid; the lure of every jewel, welcome once to both sexes as security, was spurned. These men were driven by the sudden determination of totally changed minds to do what no mortal had ever been able to urge by command or achieve by persuasion... What can this universal response be except an expression of that plain goodness which moves the hearts of the most numerous peoples to seek one and the same thing?¹¹

It is true, of course, that with such a proliferation of people involved in the Crusades, the variety of motivations was as great as there will always be in any group of people. This point is well illustrated by the story included in the *Historia Hierosolymitan* by Albert of Aachen, in which the author points to the example of Saint Ambrose. Taking the form of a crusader, the Saint appeared to an Italian priest and asked him why the appeal of Pope Urban II met with such a great response. The priest replied that he was worried because different people gave differing explanations for the motivations behind this pilgrimage. A number of them believe that the impulse to undertake this journey is divinely inspired, stirred by the hand of God and the Lord Jesus Christ himself. In contrast, there are those who argue that the French nobility and a significant portion of the populace have embarked on this pilgrimage for more trivial reasons. This perspective suggests that such foolishness is the root cause of the numerous difficulties and failures encountered by many pilgrims, not just in the Kingdom of Hungary but across other realms as well. Consequently, these critics believe that success is unattainable for the pilgrimage under these circumstances¹².

Does the fear among crusading participants meant that contemporaries were already divided in their opinions about the motives of the earliest crusaders? The debate continues today, and historians of the crusading movement sooner or later

¹¹ *Historia quae dicitur Gesta Dei per Francos*, ed. venerabili Domno Guiberto, abbate monasterii Sanctae Mariae Novigenti, [in:] *Recueil des historiens des croisades I, Historiens occidentaux*, vol. 4, Paris 1879, pp. 113–263; pp. 124–125. English translation in J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade*, pp. 150–151.

¹² Alberti Aquensis *Historia Hierosolymitana*, [in:] *Recueil des historiens des croisades I, Historiens occidentaux*, vol. 4, Paris 1879, pp. 265–713; pp. 415–416. English translation in J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade*, p. 39.

ponder the question of what prompted people to take up the cross. We have a similar problem with the question of how we can trace the spread of idea of crusade.

The spread of the idea of the crusade in East Central Europe through the institutionalisation of the crusade movement, and in particular through the creation of the military religious orders such as the Knights Hospitallers¹³. The first Christian fraternities, which in time transformed into military religious orders, had emerged in the Holy Land to care for pilgrims by running hospitals and distributing alms even before the First Crusade. As a result of the creation of Latin states in the Holy Land, and mainly due to the formation of the Templars, the Knights Hospitallers also accepted the task of armed struggle against the enemies of Christ. The spread of the idea of a crusade, according to Jonathan Riley-Smith, caused outposts of this congregation to appear in Western Europe within two decades after the First Crusade¹⁴. The houses and commanderies of the Knights Hospitallers served as the financial and recruitment foundation for the Order. A significant portion of their income was primarily allocated to support the Order's activities in the Holy Land. Over time, European institutions adopted hospitality and pastoral work. By their mere existence, these institutions became tangible representations of the propagation of the concept of waging holy war against the enemies of the faith.

The early sources regarding the Knights Hospitallers in Poland and Pomerania provide valuable insights into the administrative connections within the Order. Specifically, the institutions in Messina and Saint Gilles, pivotal in managing the European structures of the Order, played a crucial role in administratively linking the Polish and Pomeranian commanderies with those in the Czech lands. This interconnection is significant, as it demonstrates the expansive and well-coordinated nature of the Order's European network. Furthermore, the emergence of the Knights Hospitallers' houses in Bohemia and Poland is historically situated in the period post the Second Crusade (1147–1149) and most certainly before the demise of Henry Duke of Sandomierz, in 1166. Henry was a notable benefactor of the Order, and his death marks a significant point in the timeline of the Order's expansion in this region. The establishment of these houses during this period highlights the Order's strategic expansion in Eastern

¹³ The major work on the beginning of the Order of the Knights Hospitaller is still that of J. Riley-Smith, *The Knights of Saint John in Jerusalem and Cyprus: c. 1050–1310*, London–New York 1967. See also H. Nicholson, *The Knights Hospitaller*, Woodbridge 2001; A. Forey, *Military orders and crusades*, vol. 1, Aldershot 1994.

¹⁴ J. Riley-Smith, *The Origin of the Comandery in the Hospital and the Temple*, [in:] *La Commanderie: institution des ordres militaires dans l'Occident médiéval*, eds. A. Luttrell, L. Pressouyre, Paris 2002, pp. 9–18.

Europe following the Crusades¹⁵. The growth in the number of these religious institutions was not merely an expansion in quantity but also led to a significant structural evolution within the Order. This growth necessitated the formation of separate territorial priories, indicating a shift towards more localised management of the Order's sprawling network. By the beginning of the 1180s, the Knights Hospitallers in the Přemyslid state, under the management of a prior who concurrently held the office of preceptor over the brethren from Poland and Pomerania, exemplify this structural evolution. This dual role of the prior not only signifies the administrative efficiency but also hints at the potential recruitment pathways of the Knights Hospitallers coming to Poland. The implication here is that these knights may have been recruited from regions under the prior's jurisdiction, reflecting a strategic approach to expanding the Order's influence and presence in Eastern Europe¹⁶.

Several years prior, Marek Smoliński proposed an intriguing hypothesis regarding the foundation of the Hospitallers in Zagość by Henry of Sandomierz. He posited that this establishment was not an isolated event but rather a natural consequence of the political dynamics prevalent in the region, particularly influenced by the political sway of the Bohemian and Moravian princes. Central to this argument is the role of the political alliance that linked the Moravian princes with Kazimierz the Just, the successor and brother of Henry of Sandomierz. This alliance, according to Smoliński, played a pivotal role in shaping the decision to establish the foundation.

Expanding upon this argument, it can be inferred that the political landscape of the time was intricately connected with the religious and philanthropic activities. The establishment of the Hospitaller foundation in Zagość under Henry of Sandomierz was likely a strategic move, influenced by the broader political objectives and alliances within the region. The collaboration between the Moravian princes and Kazimierz the Just, particularly in the context of their alliance, suggests a concerted effort to expand their influence and consolidate power, which in turn facilitated the establishment of such religious institutions.

¹⁵ D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *Henryk of Sandomierz*, [in:] *The Crusades. An Encyclopedia*, ed. A.V. Murray, Santa Barbara 2006, pp. 577–578.

¹⁶ From a document issued in 1181, it is known that there was a priory of the Knights Hospitaller in Bohemia with prior Bernard, who in the following years also became the superior of the Knights Hospitaller in Poland and Pomerania. *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris regni Bohemiae*, ed. G. Friedrich, vol. 1, Pragae 1904, no. 293; no. 298. See L. Jan, *Die Johanniter in Böhmen: Bild des Lebens*, [in:] *Vergangenheit und Gegenwart der Ritterorden. Die Rezeption der Idee und die Wirklichkeit*, eds. R. Czaja, Z.H. Nowak, Toruń 2001, pp. 183–196; p. 184.

Moreover, the involvement of influential political figures such as the Bohemian and Moravian princes indicates that the establishment of the Hospitaller foundation was more than just a mere act of piety; it was also a maneuver in the chessboard of regional politics. The foundation likely served multiple purposes, including strengthening political ties, asserting influence in the region, and perhaps even as a gesture of goodwill among the allied princes¹⁷. Marek Smoliński's hypothesis, despite facing criticism particularly concerning the evidence of Romanesque influences at the Zagość convent, presents a compelling argument. This criticism focuses on the apparent lack of clear Romanesque architectural or cultural elements in the Zagość establishment. However, considering the policy of the Knights Hospitallers regarding the acceptance of donations, Smoliński's proposal appears to be logically sound¹⁸.

Supporting Smoliński's stance, I agree with Gerard Labuda's belief that the knights of the Order were indeed brought to Zagość from Bohemia and Moravia¹⁹. This assertion is bolstered by historical evidence indicating that Bohemia and Moravia were pivotal regions for the Order's initial establishments in the late 1050s. The transportation of the Hospitallers to Bohemia is intricately linked to Vladislav II of Bohemia's involvement in the Second Crusade²⁰. This move was likely influenced

¹⁷ M. Smoliński, *Geneza joannitów zagojskich w świetle początków zakonu w Niemczech, Czechach i na Morawach oraz związków rodzinnych Kazimierza Sprawiedliwego*, [in:] *Biskupi, lennicy, żeglarze*, ed. B. Śliwiński, Gdańsk 1996, pp. 225–251.

¹⁸ B. Kłassa, *Kazimierz Sprawiedliwy a joannici. Uwagi polemiczne*, *Studia Historyczne* 43 (2000), no. 1, pp. 145–161; J. Dobosz, *Monarcha i możni wobec Kościoła w Polsce do początku XIII wieku*, Poznań 2002, p. 359. Cf. M. Starnawska, *Między Jerozolimą a Łukowem: zakony krzyżowe na ziemiach polskich w średniowieczu*, Warszawa 1999, p. 26; M. Smoliński, *W obronie hipotezy o czesko-morawskim pochodzeniu joannitów zagojskich*, [in:] *Kopijnicy, szyprowie, tenutariusze*, ed. B. Śliwiński, Gdańsk–Koszalin 2002, pp. 409–430.

¹⁹ Cf. G. Labuda, *Fragmety dziejów Słowiańszczyzny zachodniej*, Poznań 2002, pp. 286–287 (footnote: 65).

²⁰ Vladislav II in 1140–1172 was Duke and between 1158–1171 King of Bohemia. The participation of Vladislav II in the Second Crusade has extensive literature on the subject, see, for example: K. Borchardt, *Spendenaufufe der Johanniter aus dem 13. Jahrhundert*, *Zeitschrift für bayerische Landesgeschichte* 56 (1993), pp. 1–61; p. 14; M. Starnawska, *Między Jerozolimą a Łukowem*, p. 26; M. Smoliński, *Joannici w polityce książąt polskich i pomorskich: od połowy XII wieku do pierwszego ćwierćwiecza XIV wieku*, Gdańsk 2008, pp. 35–37. Ibidem, a discussion of the literature on the subject. Frederick I in 1158, at the request of the master of the Knights Hospitallers Raymund de Puy, confirmed the privileges of the Hospital in the empire. *Cartulaire général de l'Ordre des Hospitaliers de S. Jean de Jérusalem: 1100–1310*, p. 270.

by the widespread patronage of Crusader orders initiated by Frederick I Barbarossa. Additionally, this strategic shift may have been part of a broader diplomatic tactic involving the papacy and the empire²¹. It is important to note that while the first official documents for the Knights Hospitallers in Bohemia are dated to 1158, I am inclined to believe that their presence in the region predates these records. They likely formed the core of what would become the Prague house. This early establishment in the Přemyslid state is crucial in understanding the subsequent expansion of the Order into Polish territories, specifically to Zagość and Pomerania.

In essence, the controversy surrounding the evidence of Romanesque influences does not significantly undermine the plausibility of Smoliński's hypothesis. The historical context of the Order's activities, particularly their expansion strategy and the political dynamics of the era, lend credence to the notion that Zagość's establishment was a calculated move aligned with the broader objectives of the Hospitallers. This perspective, supported by the policies of the Order and the regional political alliances, provides a nuanced understanding of the Order's expansion into Eastern Europe, highlighting the complex interplay between religious motivations, political alliances, and strategic territorial expansion.

The prevailing theory among Polish historians, influenced by the date of Henry of Sandomierz's death, posits that the Knights Hospitallers arrived in Poland before 1166, establishing their presence in Zagość along the Nida river²². This timing is primarily based on the testamentary nature of the foundation document, suggesting that Henry had committed to this foundation earlier, likely during his crusade to the Holy Land. However, it is essential to recognise that Henry's personal religious motives were not the sole factors at play. The contemporary political landscape significantly impacted the introduction of the Knights Hospitallers to Zagość and the establishment of other crusading order houses in Poland. Delving deeper into the reasons behind Henry's decision to involve the Hospitallers, Marek Smoliński's interpretation offers a compelling angle. He proposes that the Prince's action was, perhaps, influenced by the alliance forged by his brother, Kazimierz the Just, with the princes from Znojmo²³. This perspective sheds light on the broader strategic

²¹ *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris regni Bohemiae*, vol. 1, no. 245 and 246.

²² The date of death of Henry of Sandomierz was also discussed by T. Wasilewski, *Data zgonu biskupa krakowskiego Mateusza i księcia sandomierskiego Henryka – 18 października 1165 roku*, [in:] *Christianitas et cultura Europae. Księga jubileuszowa profesora Jerzego Kłoczowskiego*, ed. H. Gabski, Lublin 1998, pp. 587–592.

²³ M. Smoliński, *Geneza joannitów zagojskich*, pp. 225–251.

implications of the decision, suggesting it was not merely a religious or philanthropic gesture but also a calculated political move.

A particularly intriguing aspect of this proposal is the implication that bringing the Knights Hospitallers to Poland was part of a larger strategy to align Henry closer to a political faction. This faction, emerging in the early 1160s, was actively seeking diplomatic solutions to foster an agreement between the Piast dynasty and Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (1152–1190)²⁴. Such a move would indicate a strategic alignment with forces seeking to balance the regional power dynamics.

In the broader context of the mid-twelfth-century political landscape, the introduction of the Knights Hospitallers to Polish territories takes on a new dimension. Following the establishment of their outpost in Zagość, it is plausible to surmise that the Order expanded their activities to accept donations in regions like Wielkopolska (Greater Poland), Kujavia, Pomerania, and Silesia. This expansion, therefore, can be viewed not only as a religious or charitable endeavour but also as a strategic alignment with the prevailing political currents of the time. Such an expansion would serve the dual purpose of enhancing the Order's religious and humanitarian missions while simultaneously embedding them within the fabric of regional politics, thereby increasing their influence and presence in key strategic areas.

Revisiting the Czech influence on the Hospitallers' settlement in Poland, it is crucial to recognise that the Czech foundations for the Order preceded the establishment of the Knights Hospitallers in Zagość. This precedence is evidenced by two undated documents attributed to Vladislav II of Bohemia²⁵. In these documents, Vladislav II conferred upon the Knights Hospitallers the church of St Mary in Prague, complete with its emoluments and privileges. This foundation played a pivotal role, as it provided the material foundation that enabled the Knights Hospitallers to establish their first outposts in East Central Europe.

The significance of the Czech foundations extends beyond the mere establishment of properties. They catalysed the creation of a network of commanderies and monastic estates across Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. This network later expanded into Poland, indicating a strategic and well-planned expansion of the Order's influ-

²⁴ Idem, *Okoliczności i cel polityczny małżeństwa Kazimierza Sprawiedliwego z Heleną Znojemską*, [in:] *Caesar et duces Poloniae. Szkice z dziejów stosunków polsko-niemieckich w drugiej połowie XII wieku (1146–1191)*, ed. M. Smoliński, Gdańsk 2006, pp. 53–78.

²⁵ *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris regni Bohemiae*, vol. 1, no. 245 and 246. Probably after 1158, because the papal sanction of the foundation is addressed to Vladislav II of Bohemia as king – *Ibidem*, no. 298.

ence and presence in the region. The Czech foundations, therefore, were not only foundational in a material sense but also in their role as a springboard for further expansion.

One of these undated documents also sheds light on a historical meeting between the Bohemian ruler and the Master of the Hospital, Raymund de Puy. During this meeting, Vladislav II was offered hospitality by the Knights Hospitallers at Krak des Chevaliers during his stay in the Holy Land²⁶. This encounter highlights the interconnectedness of the European and Holy Land activities of the Order. It also suggests a level of mutual respect and collaboration between the Hospitallers and the ruling elite of the time, further underlining the Order's strategic importance in both religious and political spheres. The Czech influence on the Hospitallers' settlement in Poland is complex. It not only provided a material and logistical foundation for the Order's expansion into East Central Europe but also symbolised the deep connections between the Order and the political elite. This relationship facilitated the establishment and expansion of the Order's influence, reinforcing their role as a significant player in the religious, political, and social landscape of the region. The Czech foundations, therefore, were instrumental in shaping the trajectory of the Knights Hospitallers' presence and activities in Poland and beyond.

Around 1186, the Knights of St John received a significant donation from Henry Břetislav, the Bishop of Prague and nephew of King Vladislav II. This donation was not merely a display of generosity but was deeply rooted in a family tradition of supporting the Order²⁷. Henry Břetislav's decision was influenced by the narratives and experiences of his father, Duke Henry of Bohemia. Henry, who died around 1169 and had participated in the Second Crusade alongside his brother Vladislav II, had a personal connection with the Order as he became a confrere during the Crusade.

This familial link to the Order played a pivotal role in shaping the Bishop's decision to transfer several properties in Bohemia to the Order of the Hospital in the 1280s. The actions of the Czech dynasts, including the Bishop, were not only driven by their devout religiosity but also by the prevailing influence favouring the Order under Emperor Frederick I. This influence reflects a broader pattern where political

²⁶ Ibidem, no. 313; I. Hlaváček, *Zwei Miszellen zur Geschichte der Ritterorden in den böhmischen Landern*, [in:] *Die Rolle der Ritterorden in der mittelalterlichen Kultur*, ed. Z.H. Nowak, Toruń 1985, pp. 207–212; p. 207; L. Jan, *Die Johanniter in Böhmen: Bild des Lebens*, p. 184. See also M. Gładysz, *Zapomniani krzyżowcy. Polska wobec ruchu krucjatowego w XII–XIII wieku*, Warszawa 2002, p. 53.

²⁷ *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris regni Bohemiae*, vol. 1, no. 313; L. Jan, *Die Johanniter in Bohmen: Bild des Lebens*, p. 185.

and religious motivations intertwined, leading to the expansion and consolidation of the Order's holdings and influence in the region²⁸.

The influence of the Bohemian King Vladislav II and his family extended significantly within the nobility and Czech knights, serving as a model for their engagement with the Knights Hospitallers. This influence is evident in various records, including that of the knight Peter, castellan in Dřevíč. Before embarking on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, a journey he undertook sometime before 1188, Peter made vows in the presence of the Bishop and the Chapter of Prague to Bernard, the prior of the Prague convent of the Knights Hospitallers²⁹. Peter's commitment to the Order was not an isolated act but rather had a ripple effect within his family. Following his foundation, Peter's wife, mother, aunt, and niece also adopted the habit, illustrating the profound impact of individual decisions on wider family circles in terms of religious affiliations and commitments³⁰. This pattern of familial involvement indicates a broader social phenomenon where noble families collectively embraced religious orders, thereby reinforcing their influence and status within society. Furthermore, a document from 1186 by Fridrich Bedřich, issued for the Knights Hospitallers in Usk, provides further insight into the nobility's support for the Order. This document records the donation of a village by Wilhelm and Oldrych, sons of Hroznata Kędzierzawy. Such donations were not merely acts of piety but also reflected a strategic alignment with the influential religious and military Order, which was gaining prominence in the region³¹.

Considering the burgeoning popularity of the Knights Hospitallers in the Přemyslid state, it is reasonable to explore whether their prominence in Bohemia influenced the establishment of their houses in Polish territories. This inquiry particularly pertains to the establishment of the Order's first Polish outpost in Zagość,

²⁸ M. Smoliński, *Joannici w polityce książąt polskich i pomorskich*, p. 41.

²⁹ *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris regni Bohemiae*, vol. 1, no. 278 and 319.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, no. 333; M.R. Pauk, *Działalność fundacyjna możnowładztwa czeskiego i jej uwarunkowania społeczne (XI–XIII wiek)*, Kraków 2000, pp. 67–68; L. Jan, *Die Johanniter in Böhmen: Bild des Lebens*, p. 185.

³¹ *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris Moraviae*, vol. 1, ed. A. Boczek, Olomucci 1836, no. 341. See also M.R. Pauk, *Działalność fundacyjna możnowładztwa czeskiego*, pp. 85–95; W. Iwańczak, *Hroznata – możnowładca, pielgrzym, fundator klasztoru*, [in:] *Klasztor w społeczeństwie średniowiecznym i nowożytnym. Materiały z międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej zorganizowanej w Turawie w dniach 8–11 V 1996 przez Instytut Historii Uniwersytetu Opolskiego i Instytut Historyczny Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego*, eds. M. Derwich, A. Pobóg-Lenartowicz, Wrocław 1996, pp. 355–362; p. 356.

located in Małopolska (Lesser Poland). Marek Smoliński's interpretation attributes the introduction of the Knights Hospitallers to Małopolska to the political sway exerted by the Czech and Moravian princes. Crucial in this context is the impact of the political alliance linking the Moravian princes with Kazimierz the Just, the successor and brother of Henry of Sandomierz³². Smoliński's perspective suggests that the spread of the Knights Hospitallers into Polish territories was not merely a religious or charitable expansion but also a consequence of intricate political manoeuvres and alliances within the region. The involvement of significant political figures such as Kazimierz the Just indicates that the establishment of the Order in Małopolska was, in part, a strategic move aligned with broader political objectives and alliances.

On the other hand, Maria Starnawska presents a contrasting view. She posits that the introduction of the Knights Hospitallers to Poland, facilitated by a pilgrim to the Holy Land, is a straightforward matter that requires no further elucidation. Starnawska's argument suggests that the expansion of the Order into Poland was primarily driven by religious motivations and the inherent nature of pilgrimages during that era, rather than being influenced by complex political dynamics³³. These differing viewpoints highlight a key debate in understanding the spread of the Knights Hospitallers in Eastern Europe. While Smoliński emphasises the political influences and alliances that may have facilitated the Order's expansion, Starnawska focuses on the more straightforward religious and pilgrim-based explanations. This dichotomy raises important questions about the interplay of politics, religion, and social movements in the medieval period, particularly in the context of influential religious orders like the Knights Hospitallers. The establishment of the Order in Zagość, therefore, can be seen not just as a singular event but as a part of a broader narrative that intertwines the political ambitions of regional powers with the religious fervour and dynamics of the time.

The foundation document of Henry of Sandomierz reveals that the prince had long intended to establish a foundation for the benefit of the Order of the Knights Hospitallers. However, distracted by the vanities of everyday life, he was unable to fulfil this promise. This situation mirrors the early interactions of King Vladislav II of Bohemia with the Knights Hospitallers, as documented evidence shows that his initial interest in the Order did not immediately translate into tangible support or

³² M. Smoliński, *Okoliczności i cel polityczny*, p. 78; Idem, *Geneza joannitów zagojskich*, pp. 225–251; Idem, *W obronie hipotezy*, pp. 409–430.

³³ M. Starnawska, *Między Jerozolimą a Łukowem*, p. 26.

specific actions on behalf of the Order³⁴. The case of the Zagość foundation in Poland further elucidates this pattern. Historical records indicate that the foundation's initiation occurred before Henry's death in 1166 and was likely continued by his successor, Kazimierz the Just. This continuity suggests a sustained, albeit gradual, commitment to the establishment and support of the Order in this region³⁵. However, delving into these historical events requires navigating a realm of hypotheses, largely due to the limited and occasionally ambiguous nature of the available source material. Historians are often challenged to interpret scant evidence, leading to varying conclusions about the motivations and actions of historical figures like Henry of Sandomierz and Vladislav II. These interpretations play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the historical process of the Order's establishment and expansion. In this context, the foundation of the Knights Hospitallers in Zagość becomes a focal point for understanding the complex interplay of personal intentions, political circumstances, and the gradual nature of support for religious orders in medieval Europe. The involvement of figures such as Henry of Sandomierz and his successor Kazimierz the Just in this process reflects the nuanced and often protracted nature of establishing religious foundations during this era.

Despite certain reservations, I would like to propose a reconsideration of the timeline concerning Henry of Sandomierz's pilgrimage. The Polish annals and Jan Długosz suggest the years 1154 or 1155 as the period of the prince's journey to Jerusalem. However, I am inclined towards the theory that places Henry of Sandomierz's pilgrimage during the Second Crusade, around 1147–1148, with his return to Poland through Ruthenia alongside Vladislav II of Bohemia³⁶. This hypothesis, recently suggested by Mikołaj Gładysz, has faced criticism. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that other prevailing theories, despite their firm rooting in the notes of Polish annals, also lack robust justification. While the widely accepted date of 1154 might be accurate, there remains a possibility that Henry was the unidentified 'king of Poles' mentioned in accounts of the Second Crusade in 1146. The year 1154, as recorded by the annals and Jan Długosz, could instead refer to the date of the Zagość foundation or the issuing of the diploma for the Knights Hospitallers.

³⁴ *Codex diplomaticus Poloniae*, ed. J. Bartoszewicz, vol. 3, Warszawa 1858, pp. 4–5. See Z. Kozłowska-Budkowa, *Repertorium polskich dokumentów doby piastowskiej*, vol. 1, Kraków 2006, no. 62, pp. 127–128.

³⁵ J. Dobosz, *Działalność fundacyjna Kazimierza Sprawiedliwego*, Poznań–Gniezno 1995, pp. 102–104.

³⁶ W. Bernhardt, *Konrad III*, vol. 2, Leipzig 1883, p. 642. Cf. M. Gładysz, *Zapomniani krzyżowcy*, pp. 99–106.

It is essential to note that, like all theories on this subject, this hypothesis is not directly supported by extant sources. The pilgrimage of Henry of Sandomierz to the Holy Land, including his potential engagement in conflicts against the ‘enemies of the holy faith,’ might have been an independent initiative, akin to the later expeditions of Jaksa of Miechów, Albert the Bear in the 1150s, and Henry the Lion in the 1170s³⁷. If Henry did journey to Jerusalem in 1147, parallel to Vladislav II of Bohemia, it is plausible that in the subsequent two decades – a period marked by the establishment of the Knights Hospitallers’ first residences in Germany, Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary – Henry of Sandomierz founded his own establishment in Zagość, mirroring the actions of Vladislav II of Bohemia.

The formation of Knights Hospitaller communities in Europe, which began after the First Crusade, provides insights into the interaction between these religious orders and local populations. Unlike the Templars, the brothers of the Knights Hospitallers in Saint Gilles, notably in the 1120s, adhered closely to the prayers and customs mandated by their monastic rule. This adherence is indicative of the balance they sought between their religious obligations and integration with local communities³⁸. For the establishment of a Knights Hospitaller community, certain infrastructural prerequisites were essential. These included buildings for a cloister, living quarters, a church, and a cemetery³⁹. Crucially, the donation of an existing church was often necessary for the foundation of a new community, provided there was an opportunity for the monks to construct one⁴⁰. However, it is important to

³⁷ M. Starnawska, *Między Jerozolimą a Łukowem*, p. 26.

³⁸ In 1113, the pope allowed the Hospitallers to elect their master. *Papsturkunden für Templer und Johanniter. Vorarbeiten zum Oriens Pontificus II*, ed. R. Hiestand, Göttingen 1984, p. 196. Regarding the requirements of the Knights Hospitaller concerning life in the religious community of this congregation, see J. Riley-Smith, *The Knights of Saint John*, pp. 347–348.

³⁹ On the policy of religious authorities regarding the monastic rule see J. Burgtorf, *The Central Convent of Hospitallers and Templars: History, Organization, and Personnel (1099/1120–1310)*, Leiden–Boston 2008, pp. 27–82.

⁴⁰ H. Nicholson, *Women in Templar and Hospitaller Commanderies*, [in:] *La Commanderie: institution des ordres militaires dans l’Occident medieval*, eds. A. Luttrell, L. Pressouyre, Paris 2002, pp. 125–134 [here, pp. 129–130]. On the role of women in the Military Orders, and in particular regarding the Knights Hospitallers, see A. Forey, *Women and the Military Orders in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, [in:] *Hospitaller Women in the Middle Ages*, eds. A. Luttrell, H. Nicholson, Ashgate 2006. However, it should be noted that receiving patronage over the church did not mean the establishment of a commandery. The Knights Hospitallers received patronage over churches in Europe perhaps as early as 1108. *Cartulaire général de l’Ordre des Hospitaliers de S. Jean de Jerusalem: 1100–1310*, pp. 18–19 and 22–23.

note that the donation of property, be it a church, hospital, or castle, did not automatically grant permission for the Knights Hospitallers to settle⁴¹. Such decisions were complex, often burdened by the potential financial strain they could impose on the early revenues of the estate. During this period, the primary functions of religious institutions in Europe included the recruitment of knights and providing financial support to the motherhouse in Jerusalem.

The European structure of the Order hinged on the prior of the Order residing in Saint Gilles and possibly Messina. This prior acted as the provincial head for the Hospitallers in Europe and oversaw all the houses. The first provincial synod of the Hospitallers' house of Saint Gilles, recorded as early as 1123, highlights the administrative complexities inherent in establishing these communities⁴². The Knights Hospitallers faced administrative challenges, partly due to the policies of the Order's authorities. Typically, the provincial in Saint Gilles would dispatch one or two experienced brothers to form the core of a new community. This practice was more restrictive than that of the Templars, who often founded houses with the expectation of recruiting locally. The Order maintained strict control over the operational aspects of their institutions, particularly in adhering to the religious liturgy modelled on the Jerusalem motherhouse, as noted by Cristina Dondi⁴³. Despite these centralised controls, the Knights Hospitallers' houses in regions like Poland and Pomerania exhibited considerable autonomy, as evidenced by historical documents. This autonomy indicates a level of adaptation and flexibility in the Order's practices, allowing these peripheral houses to integrate more effectively into their local contexts while still maintaining the core principles and customs of the Order. This balance between central control and local autonomy was a defining characteristic of the Knights Hospitallers' expansion and establishment across Europe.

Transitioning to the involvement of Henry of Sandomierz in bringing the Hospitallers to Poland, it is noteworthy to consider the return journey of Vladislav II Přemyslid from the Second Crusade in 1148 via Ruthenia⁴⁴. Mikołaj Gładysz suggests an interesting hypothesis that the Czech ruler made his way back through the territory of the Piast state in the company of Henry of Sandomierz, who was also returning from the

⁴¹ *Cartulaire général de l'Ordre des Hospitaliers de S. Jean de Jérusalem: 1100–1310*, p. 260. See J. Riley-Smith, *The Origin of the Comandery in the Hospital and the Temple*, p. 11.

⁴² J. Riley-Smith, *The Origin of the Comandery in the Hospital and the Temple*, p. 12.

⁴³ C. Dondi, *The Liturgy of the Canons regular of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem: a Study and a Catalogue of the Manuscript Sources*, Turnhout 2004, pp. 45–46.

⁴⁴ *Vincentii Pragensis Annales*, [in:] MGH SS, Hannover 1861, pp. 658–683; p. 663.

same crusade. This shared journey likely facilitated Vladislav II's safe passage through Poland due to the collegial and familial relations between the rulers⁴⁵. Henry's brothers – Bolesław the Curly, Mieszko the Old, and Kazimierz the Just – each played a role in sustaining Henry's legacy with the Knights Hospitallers. Mieszko the Old introduced the Order to Poznań in the 1180s, and Kazimierz the Just expanded the foundation in Zagość in the 1170s. Among Henry's brothers, only Kazimierz the Just, through his marriage to Helena of Znojmo in the 1160s, maintained close ties with regions where the Knights Hospitallers' residences were established earlier. This connection suggests a blend of personal and political motivations behind Henry's donation to the Order, possibly influenced by his brother Kazimierz's political relations. Significantly, by 1182, the Knights Hospitallers had extended its reach to encompass both Poland and Bohemia. This expansion points to the personal reasons behind Henry's donation, possibly influenced by his brother's political connections. Regarding the Czech influence in this process, Silesia emerged as a crucial region in Poland with a high concentration of foundations for the Knights Hospitaller⁴⁶. These establishments likely predated those in Zagość and may have been influenced by Czech and Moravian dynasts under Frederick I Barbarossa's influence, including figures like Vladislav II, Sobiesław II, Fridrich Bedřich, and Conrad III Otto. The patterns observed in these early foundations of the Knights Hospitaller in East Central Europe suggest a strong correlation with rulers who exhibited a pro-Emperor stance. This context indicates that the establishment of the Zagość outpost likely followed a similar pattern, influenced by the political and familial connections of the time. Thus, the introduction and expansion of the Knights Hospitaller in Poland, particularly in regions like Silesia and Zagość, can be viewed as a confluence of personal, familial, and political factors, reflecting the complex interplay of regional power dynamics and the strategic positioning of religious orders within this framework.

The recent hypotheses focusing on Czech influence in the development of the Knights Hospitallers highlight the notable role of Henry of Sandomierz among the Piasts. His close association with Bolesław IV the Curly, culminating in his death alongside Bolesław during an expedition against the Prussian tribes in 1166, sup-

⁴⁵ M. Gładysz, *Zapomniani krzyżowcy*, pp. 65–66 and 104–105.

⁴⁶ See D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, review: Marek Smoliński. *Joannicy w polityce książąt polskich i pomorskich. Od połowy XII do pierwszego ćwierćwiecza XIV wieku [The Hospitallers and Their Involvement in the Politics of Rulers of Poland and Pomerania. 1150–1315]*. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2009. Pp. 379. ISBN 978-83-7326-519-6, *The Crusades* 9 (2010), pp. 225–226.

ports the notion that Henry likely aligned with his older brother's domestic and international policies. This alignment raises the question of whether the consent of the Piast Juniors to allow the return of Władysław II the Exile's sons to Poland indicated a desire to reconcile disputed relations with the empire. It is plausible to consider that this reconciliation was a strategy to establish connections with religious congregations, such as the Hospital of St John, which enjoyed support from both Barbarossa and the Přemyslids.

The influence of crusading ideology in Bohemia and Poland during the medieval period was profound, reshaping the religious, cultural, and political landscapes. The Crusade, intertwining the concepts of holy war, just war, and pilgrimage, emerged as a powerful force in East Central Europe. More than a religious expression, it served as a political mechanism to expand Christendom and consolidate political authority. In Poland, the Piast dynasty, and their Bohemian counterparts, melded religious zeal with pragmatic political aims in adopting and adapting crusading ideology. The Piast-led conquests and Christianisation efforts in regions like Pomerania exemplify this integration of spiritual and temporal ambitions. Chronicles and literary works of the era, such as the 'Gesta principum Polonorum,' frame these campaigns within the Christian ethos of just war, as theorised by Augustine of Hippo. This alignment with religious doctrine legitimised the military actions of rulers like Bolesław III, highlighting the intersection of political goals and religious justifications.

The spread of crusading ideology also correlated with the broader Europeanisation processes, assimilating Western cultural and religious norms into these regions. Religious institutions like the Knights Hospitallers played a dual role as centres of spiritual life and agents of cultural and ideological transmission. The interactions between the Piast and Přemyslid dynasties and the Knights Hospitallers, evident in the establishment of commanderies and religious foundations, underscored the transnational character of the crusading movement and its role in fostering a pan-European Christian identity. The motives driving Bohemian and Polish rulers and knights to participate in the Crusades were multifaceted, blending deep religious conviction with political and social aspirations. Contemporary accounts reveal a range of motivations from genuine piety to worldly ambitions, reflecting the complex nature of these crusading endeavours.

Overall, the Crusades represented a significant cultural and ideological phenomenon in Europe, resonating strongly in regions like Bohemia and Poland. Their legacy in these areas is indicative of the enduring influence of the Crusades on European civilisation, shaping its religious, political, and cultural landscape for centuries.

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