

MŰVELTSÉG ÉS TÁRSADALMI SZEREPEK: ARISZTOKRATÁK
MAGYARORSZÁGON ÉS EURÓPÁBAN

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**Műveltség és társadalmi szerepek:
arisztokraták
Magyarországon és Európában**

**Learning, Intellect and Social Roles:
Aristocrats
in Hungary and Europe**

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ELŐSZÓ

2013 szeptemberében az OTKA pályázat tagjai meghívást kaptak az Eperjesi Egyetemre, a „Műveltség és társadalmi szerepek: a 17–20. századi arisztokrácia műveltsége, művészetet és az oktatás fejlesztését, a birtokok építését, modernizációját támogató tevékenysége” című konferenciára, amelyet a város polgármestere mellett a kassai magyar főkonzul asszony nyitott meg. A 22 előadó közül többen elküldték tanulmányaikat jelen kötetünkbe.

A Debreceni Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kara működésének 100. évfordulóján, 2014 októberében a Kar egy 12 szekcióban tartott előadássorozattal tisztelgett az elődök emléke előtt. A Történelmi Intézet két szekció munkáját szervezte, „Műveltség és társadalmi szerepek: az arisztokrácia változó társadalmi szerepe” címmel. Mindkettő az arisztokrácia kutatásának új elméleti és módszertani irányait kívánta bemutatni, az egyik európai kitekintéssel idegen nyelven, a másik elsősorban a kora újkorra és az újkorra koncentrálna, az intézet határon túli partner intézményei kutatóinak bevonásával, magyar nyelven. Az idegen nyelvű szekció munkáját a Magyar Tudományos Akadémia – Debreceni Egyetem „Magyarország a középkori Európában” **Lendület kutatócsoportja** és annak vezetője, Bárány Attila szervezte, az ő írásaik és neves külföldi vendégeik tanulmányai is szerepelnek a kötetben. A szekciók plenáris előadói Jean-Luc Fray professzor (Université Blaise-Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand) és jómagam voltunk.

Mivel 2013 végén megalakult, s 2014 tavaszán az egyetem szenátusa által is elfogadást nyert a **Nemzetközi Inter-Regionális Társadalomtörténeti és Néprajzi Kutatási Központ**, a most az olvasóközönséghez kerülő kötet a „Műveltség és társadalmi szerepek: arisztokrácia a 17–20. századi Magyarországon” című, az **OTKA által támogatott 83521 azonosító számú pályázat** résztvevői mellett az abban megnevezett egyetemek kutatóinak első közös bemutatkozása is.

Az arisztokrácia fontos, bár állandóan változó, és fő tendenciájában csökkenő szerepet játszott Magyarország politikai, társadalmi, gazdasági és kulturális elitjének történelmében. A főúri réteg azonban soha nem volt egységes, néhány fogalommal egyszerűen megragadható és leírható csoport. Ahogyan változtak a politikai-társadalmi viszonyok, úgy változott és módosult az arisztokrácia helye

és szerepe, még hangsúlyosabbá téve egyébként is meglévő belső differenciáltságot. Az arisztokrácia társadalmi szerepének, tevékenységének összetett és árnyalt vizsgálatát azért is fontos kiemelni, mert a korábbi évtizedekben számos felszínes, megalapozatlan és ideologikus állítás kapcsolódott hozzájuk. A kötetbe tanulmányokat publikáló hazai és külföldi történészek éppen ezért azt kívánják a középpontba állítani, hogy az arisztokrácia tevékenysége, közéleti szerepvállalása hogyan, milyen területeken érvényesült, s ehhez kapcsolódva tudásuk, műveltségük milyen feladatok ellátására, pozíciók birtoklására tette őket alkalmassá.

A Magyar Királyság meghatározó szerepet betöltő társadalmi rétegét alkotta az arisztokrácia, amely az uralkodói hatalomtól fontos feladatokat kapott az ország irányítására és vállalta is a rangjának megfelelő szerepvállalást.

Ahogy Magyarországon belül Erdély külön régiót alkotott, úgy az arisztokrácián belül is sajátos réteget képeztek az erdélyiek. Az erdélyi arisztokraták társadalmi helyzetének, életkörülményeinek, karrierlehetőségeinek a vizsgálata jelenti a vizsgálatok második fő ívét. A 17. században a térség politikai-közigazgatási értelemben a fejedelmi udvar köré szerveződött, s a fejedelmek természetesen saját udvartartással rendelkeztek. Az erdélyi mágnásokat magyarországi társaiknál hagyományosan nagyobb és jelentékenyebb politikai, valamint társadalmi aktivitás jellemezte. Az erdélyi arisztokraták társadalmi szerepvállalásának kiemelkedő területeként jelölhető meg az Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület.

A reformkori és a dualizmus-kori arisztokrácia különösen érzékenyen reagált a hagyomány kontra megújulás dilemmájára, az új jelenségekhez igazodva formálta ki saját társadalmi-közéleti szerepeit, de tudatosan új mintákat is teremtett. A 19–20. századi, átalakuló, modernizálódó Magyarország többször is új kihívások elé állította, társadalmi szerepének újragondolására készítette az arisztokráciát, amelyet a szerzőink tanulmányai a korábbi korszakokhoz hasonlóan alaposan vizsgálnak.

A sokrétű vizsgálatok eredményeit tartalmazó gazdag kötet reményt ad arra, hogy tanulmányai számíthatnak a szakmai közönség mellett az arisztokrácia iránt érdeklődő olvasóközönség figyelmére is.

*Prof. Dr. Orosz István
akadémikus*

FOREWORD

*In September 2013 the members of the OTKA (Hungarian National Research Fund) Research Group of the University of Debrecen were invited to the University of Prešov, to give papers at the conference „**Learning and Social Roles: 17th–20th century Aristocracy and its Culture, Art and Education Patronage and its Support of Agrarian Modernization**”. The conference was opened by the Mayor of Košice and Her Excellence The Chief Consul of Hungary in Košice. Several of the 22 speakers are representing themselves with their papers in the present volume.*

*The volume is the proceedings of the international conference held to address the centennial anniversary of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Debrecen in October 2014. The Faculty aimed to honour the memory of the forefathers in a series of papers, read in 12 sessions. The Institute of History organized two sessions, entitled “Learning, Intellect and Social Roles: the Changing Social Role of the Aristocracy”. Both wished to introduce new theoretical approaches and research methods in the study of aristocracy, which could bring forward new innovative possibilities, one with a European perspective, mainly in the field of medieval studies, in the company of renowned international scholars giving papers in English, German and French languages, the other focusing on the Early Modern and Modern Times, embracing those scholars, who have long been in a fruitful co-operation with the Institute, mainly from Hungarian-language research centres in present-day Slovakia and Romania. The former, foreign-language medieval session was furthered by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences – University of Debrecen „**Lendület**” Research Group „Hungary in Medieval Europe” and its organization was greatly helped by its leader, Attila Bárány. The articles of the research group and the ones of their guest-speakers of research centres from France through Poland to Germany are also to be found in the proceedings. The key-note speakers of the sessions were Professor Jean-Luc Fray (Université Blaise-Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand) and myself.*

*Since upon the initiative of the Institute of History the **International Inter-Regional Social History and Ethnography Research Group** was established at the end of 2013 – which was also acknowledged by the Senate of the University of Debrecen in Spring 2014 –, the volume is the first occasion where its members can introduce themselves to the public. The proceedings is also the fruit of the work of the members of several institutions within the **OTKA project „Culture and Social Roles: Aristocrats in 17th–20th century Hungary”** (registration no. 83521).*

Aristocracy played an important, but continuously changing and in its major tendency decreasing role in the history of European political, social, economic

and cultural elite. However, the higher nobility was never a uniform layer that can be easily grasped and described with a few simple characteristics. As political-social relations were changing, its place and role did alike vary, further deepening its inner, existing differentiation. It is worth highlighting a more complex and balanced investigation of the social role and activity of the aristocracy, since in recent decades it has received many superficial, unfounded and ideological statements. Therefore, the proceedings aim to focus the way and the spheres the aristocracy played an active public role, and in relation to this, what tasks and positions they were to be assigned upon their intellect and learning.

The higher nobility played a decisive role in Europe and was thus allotted important tasks in the government which they duly undertook.

As Transylvania was a separate region within the Kingdom of Hungary, Transylvanian higher nobles had peculiar characteristics within the Hungarian aristocracy. The panel's second focus is the study of the social role, living circumstances, career possibilities of Transylvanian aristocrats. In the 17th century the government and administration of Transylvania was organized around the princely court, the princes had an own household. Transylvanian magnates played a more active and more significant political and social roles than their counterparts in Royal Hungary, as it is to be seen in the workings of the Transylvanian Museum Association.

The aristocracy of the 19th century Reform Period was particularly sensitive towards the dilemma of tradition versus reform. It formed its own social and public roles aligning to the new phenomena, but it also made new patterns. They were to see many challenges in the modernization of 19th–20th century Hungary, and were to re-evaluate their social roles, which are to be presented in the prospective papers here, also giving a deep insight into these issues in earlier periods.

The volume involving the results of manifold investigations leads us to hope that its articles would attract the attention not only of the academic but a wider public.

*Prof. Dr. István Orosz
Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*

**Műveltség és társadalmi szerepek
a középkorban /**

**Learning, Intellect and Social Roles
in the Middle Ages**

MILITARY ORDERS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR THE DEMONSTRATION OF NOBLE STATUS IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

“Nur Häuptlinge, keine Indianer!” (“All chiefs, no Indians!”) is a common phrase in present-day German when it comes to describing hypertrophic structures of administration that give prestigious titles to their personnel, but lack the executive apparatus to fulfil the tasks for which they have originally been created.

In this sense, the commanderies of the military orders in the later Middle Ages might appear at first glance to be utterly dysfunctional structures. Houses of the Teutonic Knights in the West of the Empire were often inhabited by only one older knight bearing the prestigious title of commander, without having, in fact, any knights living under his authority. Even though the revenues of the scattered property that they administered were largely sufficient for the needs of the commander, their contribution to the overall budget of the order was often minimal.

It therefore seems legitimate to ask for what reasons the military orders maintained their network of houses in Western Europe, far away from the areas where they exercised the activities that justified their existence as privileged semi-religious institutions: struggling with Muslim pirates in the Mediterranean in the case of the Knights Hospitaller, and combatting heathen Lithuanians in the case of the Teutonic Knights.

For the history of Central Europe, the Teutonic Knights are of particular importance, and therefore the following argument will be based mainly on their documentation, even though the reasoning could as readily apply to the other military orders. When we look at the documents preserved in the archives of the several houses, and the order’s central administration, the answer to the question seems evident: The commanderies were part of a larger system, in the context of which they did have their importance. The most obvious function appearing in the archival documents was the fact that they provided attractive positions, which the grand master could award to officials who had reached the age of retirement.

Moreover, they also served as local, representative places that served as a reminder of their military order evident and visible to noblemen and urban patrician families aspiring to noble status, even though the theatre of war (where the order earned its merits) was situated far away. This visibility on the local level

was important for the order insofar as it was a crucial prerequisite for the acquisition of new donations and for the defence of old privileges that were theoretically granted in perpetuity, but had to be enforced and renegotiated by every generation anew.

One of the most important social functions that the commanderies fulfilled, however, remained invisible. The ever more restrictive rules, limiting the access to the military orders to those who could prove noble descent for several generations, made the military orders particularly attractive for noble families who felt the need to display and defend noble status. Whether urban elites or rural nobility in financial difficulties, nobody could deny the quality of being a nobleman to someone who could argue that a brother or cousin of his had been admitted to a military order as a knight.

Since the late 1950s, research on the social history of the Teutonic knights has taken notice of the high number of brothers from urban patrician families, especially in the Rhineland and Hassia.¹ This is particularly obvious for the 13th century, but it can be traced back to the end of the Middle Ages. In the early 15th century, Werner of Baldersheim even wrote a letter to the grand master of the order in which he complained that all the houses of the bailiwick of Coblenz were dominated by brothers from urban families who detained all the offices.²

In the Mediterranean, especially in Italy, noblemen often dwelled in cities. When Otto of Freising crossed the Alps with Frederick Barbarossa in 1154/55 he was impressed by, and marvelled about, the fact that the cities of Northern Italy had divided up the whole countryside among themselves, forcing the noblemen to live with them as part of their urban community of citizens, and not disdaining to grant the honour of knighthood to sons of merchants and craftsmen.³ The situation north

¹ Maschke, Erich, "Deutschordensbrüder aus dem städtischen Patriziat", In: *Preussenland und Deutscher Orden. Festschrift für Kurt Forstreuter, zur Vollendung seines 60. Lebensjahres dargebracht von seinen Freunden* (Veröffentlichungen des Göttinger Arbeitskreises 184), Würzburg, 1958, 255–271; cf. Miltzer, Klaus, "Die Aufnahme von Ritterbrüdern in den Deutschen Orden. Ausbildungsstand und Aufnahmevoraussetzungen", In: Zenon Hubert Nowak (ed.), *Das Kriegswesen der Ritterorden im Mittelalter*. Torun, 1991, 7–17.

² Voigt, Johannes, *Geschichte des deutschen Ritterordens in seinen 12 Balleien Deutschland*. I–II, Berlin 1857–1859, vol. 1, 348–350; cf. Eickels, Klaus van, *Die Deutschordensballei Koblenz und ihre wirtschaftliche Entwicklung im Spätmittelalter* (Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens 52), Marburg, 1995, 53–56. The letter does not bear a date, but must have been written in the 1420ies. The original or copy of the letter used by Voigt is lost; the only known excerpt is the quotation given by Voigt.

³ Otto Frisingensis – Rahewinus, *Gesta Friderici*, In: Bernhard von Simson (ed.), *Ottonis et Rahewini Gesta Friderici I imperatoris* (Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum 46), Hannover, 1912³, 116 (lib. 2, cap. 13): *Ex quo fit, ut, tota illa terra inter civitates ferme divisa, singulae ad commanendum secum diocesanos compulerint, vixque aliquis nobilis vel vir magnus tam magno ambitu inveniri queat, qui civitatis suae non sequatur imperium. Consueverunt autem singuli singula territoria ex hac comminandipotestate comitatus suos appellare. Ut etiam ad compri-*

of the Alps was obviously much different, so that “urban” and “bourgeois” could become antonyms of “noble” and “knightly”, but even here certain families of the urban upper class claimed noble status, taking pride in the title “*miles*”, seeking marriage alliances with noble families of the hinterland and showing their affiliation with the regional nobility by organizing and participating in tournaments.⁴

Not all of these were social climbers. In fact, the lower rural nobility and parts of the urban upper class had similar origins, since many patricians counted not only rich merchants, but also officials (*ministeriales*) of the lord of the town among their ancestors. It is therefore not surprising to find brothers from noble urban families of Cologne, Coblenz and other cities of the Rhineland already being admitted to the ranks of the order in the 13th century. From the 14th century onwards, however, the widespread practice of receiving brothers from urban patrician families clearly became a problem, as the statutes of the order became more restrictive of this practice. The main reason for this change seems to have been the major economic and social transformation that resulted from the “crisis of the later Middle Ages”, when climatic change and demographic decline, as well as political instability and social turmoil, fundamentally changed the framework of social interaction in many regions and cities of Europe.

The extent of the “agrarian crisis” of the later Middle Ages has been largely overstated in 20th century historiography and we should certainly refrain from believing that the lower nobility as a whole were threatened by impoverishment on a

mendos vicinos materia non careant, inferioris conditionis iuvenes vel quoslibet contemptibulum etiam mechanicarum artium opifices, quos caeterae gentes ab honestioribus et liberioribus studiis tamquam pestem propellunt, ad militiae cingulum vel dignitatum gradus assumere non dedignantur; however cf. Ehlers, Joachim, *Otto von Freising – ein Intellektueller im Mittelalter. Eine Biographie*. München, 2013, 230, who points out that Otto of Freising has carefully crafted his account in order to convince his readers that the Italian cities had bad habits and that the harsh politics of Frederick I interfering with their autonomy was therefore justified.

⁴ Zotz, Thomas, “Städtisches Rittertum und Bürgertum in Köln um 1200”, In: Lutz Fenske – Werner Rösener – Thomas Zotz – Karl Hauck – Josef Fleckenstein (eds.), *Institutionen, Kultur und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter. Festschrift für Josef Fleckenstein zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, Sigmaringen 1984, 609–638; Idem, “Adel in der Stadt des deutschen Spätmittelalters. Erscheinungsformen und Verhaltensweisen”, = *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* 141, 1993, 22–50; Idem, “Der Stadtadel im spätmittelalterlichen Deutschland und seine Erinnerungskultur”, In: Werner Rösener (ed.), *Adelige und bürgerliche Erinnerungskulturen des Spätmittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit* (Formen der Erinnerung 8), Göttingen 2000, 145–161; also see below note 15; cf. also Elze, Reinhard – Fasoli, Gina (eds.), *Stadtadel und Bürgertum in den italienischen und deutschen Städten des Mittelalters* (Schriften des Italienisch-Deutschen Historischen Instituts in Trient 2), Berlin, 1991; Fleckenstein, Josef, “Vom Stadtadel im spätmittelalterlichen Deutschland”, = *Zeitschrift für siebenbürgische Landeskunde* 3, 1980, 1–13; Hecht, Michael, “Nobiles Urbani”. Konzeptionen von Stadtadel zwischen Diskurs und Praxis in niedersächsischen Städten der Frühen Neuzeit”, = *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 84, 2012, 176–196; Michel, Fritz, “Der Koblenzer Stadtadel im Mittelalter”, = *Mitteilungen der Westdeutschen Gesellschaft für Familienkunde* 16, 1952–1954, 1–20.

large scale in the 14th and 15th centuries.⁵ Still, the rise of the urban elites and the deterioration of terms of trade for the producers of agricultural goods in the later Middle Ages put considerable strain on the lower nobility to prove its status. The lower nobility of the Empire had emerged mainly from the group of *ministeriales*, men of originally unfree legal condition who, had acquired prestige and recognition as noblemen by the aristocratic nature of their military and administrative service in the 12th and 13th centuries. When mercenaries increasingly replaced the feudal host in the 14th century, however, military service on horseback no longer appeared as a privilege of noblemen alone.

Noble status therefore became fragile on the lower fringe of the lesser nobility. Noble lifestyles required means, and families who felt that they could no longer compete would often turn to deficit spending in order to avoid the loss of status and honour implied in turning to active and undisguised participation in gain-seeking activities. Accordingly, marriage alliances with rich urban families of non-noble origin who sought to enhance their status by adopting a noble lifestyle often appeared as a way out of the vicious circle of living beyond one's income and the further financial restrictions brought about by increasing debt. Noble families who refrained from such infringement of the noble code of conduct sought remedy by penalizing marriages between a nobleman and a woman of non-noble origin, without calling into question the principle that noble rank and status was passed on from father to son.

⁵ The theory of an "agrarian crisis" in late medieval Europe has been developed by Wilhelm Abel since the 1930s; Abel, Wilhelm, *Einige Bemerkungen zum Land-Stadtproblem im Spätmittelalter* (Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse 1976, 1), Göttingen, 1976; Idem, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur. Eine Geschichte der Land- und Ernährungswirtschaft Mitteleuropas seit dem hohen Mittelalter*, Hamburg-Berlin, 1978³. Yet, his argument that rural landowners were experiencing impoverishment and debt distress on a large scale lacks a sufficient statistical basis, since serial data are sparse and records of accountancy are often difficult to assess when analysed out of context. One of Abel's most prominent examples (the account rendered by Klaus of Gielsdorf, commander of Coblenz, for the years 1446–1452; Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz Berlin, OBA 11646) is drawn from the archives of the Teutonic Knights, but Abel's reading of the text is based on an obvious misunderstanding; van Eickels, *Die Deutschordensballei Koblenz und ihre wirtschaftliche Entwicklung im Spätmittelalter*, 211–221 and 270–271, against Abel, Wilhelm, *Die Wüstungen des ausgehenden Mittelalters. Ein Beitrag zur Siedlungs- und Agrargeschichte Deutschlands* (Quellen und Forschungen zur Agrargeschichte 1), Stuttgart 1976³, 136–139 and 144–146; cf. Militzer, Klaus, "Auswirkungen der spätmittelalterlichen Agrardepression auf die Deutschordensballeien", In: Udo Arnold (ed.), *Von Akkon bis Wien. Studien zur Deutschordensgeschichte vom 13. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift zum 90. Geburtstag von Althochmeister Marian Tumler am 21. Oktober 1977* (Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens 20), Marburg, 1978, 62–75; Burleigh, Michael, *Prussian society and the German Order. An aristocratic corporation in crisis (c. 1410–1466)*, Cambridge, 1984, 77–80. Moreover, we should not take at face value the terminology of poverty that parts of the lesser nobility adopted in the 15th century; Morsel, Joseph, "Adel in Armut – Armut im Adel? Beobachtungen zur Situation des Adels im Spätmittelalter", In: Otto Gerhard Oexle (ed.), *Armut im Mittelalter* (Vorträge und Forschungen 58), Ostfildern, 2004, 127–164.

Ecclesiastical institutions played a major role in establishing this second layer of aristocratic hierarchy that was based on genealogical descent rather than on rank and titles, which could be conferred to royal favourites or sold to rich social climbers. Noblemen who could trace back their nobility over several generations would feel distinctly more noble than a newcomer, even if the latter had acquired an equal or even higher ranking title, a divide that would formally evolve into the distinction between *noblesse de robe* and *noblesse d'épée* in early modern France.

From the 16th century onwards, documentation abounds that ecclesiastical institutions of high reputation formally restricted access by requiring a "proof of ancestry" ("Ahnenprobe") in order to emphasize their social exclusivity. A candidate had to produce a document stating that reliable testimonies had sworn to him being of noble descent for two, and later even for three or four generations, by naming four, eight or sixteen noble ancestors.⁶

By the end of the Middle Ages, the "proof of ancestry" was well established as a means of excluding the issue of unsuitable marriages for several generations on all scales of the hierarchy. In the early 16th century, the cathedral chapters of Strasbourg and Cologne insisted on pure descent from the high nobility over several generations to a point that Erasmus of Rotterdam remarked sarcastically that they would not admit even Jesus Christ himself to their ranks unless he could produce a dispensation.⁷

⁶ Graf, Klaus, "Ahnenprobe", In: Friedrich Jaeger (ed.), *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit*, vol. 1, Stuttgart 2005–2012, 146–148; cf. Harding, Elizabeth, "Adelsprobe", In: *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns* (2013), [http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/artikel/artikel_45028 – December 18, 2014]; Harding Elizabeth – Hecht, Michael (eds.), *Die Ahnenprobe in der Vormoderne. Selektion Initiation Repräsentation* (Symbolische Kommunikation und Gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme 37), Münster, 2011; as to the flexibility of genealogical construction even in the later Middle Ages cf. Spieß, Karl-Heinz, *Familie und Verwandtschaft im deutschen Hochadel des Spätmittelalters* (13. bis Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts) (Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte. Beihefte 111), Stuttgart, 1993; Brandt, Hartwin – Köhler, Katrin – Siewert, Ulrike (eds.), *Genealogisches Bewusstsein als Legitimation. Inter- und intragenerationelle Auseinandersetzungen sowie die Bedeutung von Verwandtschaft bei Amtswechseln* (Bamberger historische Studien 4), Bamberg, 2009. – As to the concept of "social closure" in sociological research cf. Murphy, Raymond, *Social closure. The theory of monopolization and exclusion*, Oxford, 1988; Mackert, Jürgen, *Die Theorie sozialer Schließung. Tradition – Analysen – Perspektiven*, Wiesbaden, 2004.

⁷ Zimmern, Froben Christoph Graf von, *Zimmerische Chronik*, ed. Karl August Barack, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1881–1882, vol. 3, 129: *Es ist der gebrauch, das kainer zu ainem canonico in solchlich collegium wurt zugelassen, er seie dann ain gebornner fürst, graff oder freiherr; zu dem muß er geschrifftlichen und under zwaier fürsten und zwaier grafen insigln beweisen vierzeh anichen vom vatter und vierzeh von der muetter, die alle fürsten, grafen oder freiherrn seien gewesen, und da er an ainicher ainen person, die münden stands were, felen sollt, so würde er zu der possess nit zugelassen. Das wurt noch diser zeit ganz steif von inen gehalten und ist in iren statuten nit das wenigest, darauf sie alle loben und ain leiblichen aide schweren müessen. Es mag für ein turnier gehalten werden, dieweil der ander sonst abgangen, darin ain ieder*

Such limitation to the higher nobility was rare. Social closure that included the lower nobility of the region (“Stiftsadel”), however, was practised along the same lines by many other cathedral chapters, especially in the Rhineland and Westfalia.⁸

At this point, the social importance of the military orders becomes evident. From the beginning, they had evolved as institutions dominated by the lesser nobility. Even the highest positions were accessible to simple knights of relatively modest extraction. By the end of the Middle Ages the Teutonic Knights explicitly defined their order as the “hospital of the poor (i.e., lesser) nobility of the German Nation” (*des armen Adels Spital deutscher Nation*).⁹ Situated precisely on the border between nobility and non-noble urban elites, the military orders developed a complex system of admission that allowed them to maintain their reputation as a selective institution that could prove beyond doubt the noble quality of a knight brother, while continuing to admit sons of non-noble patrician families in order to strengthen the network of interpersonal relationships, upon which the well-being of their urban commanderies relied.

sein standt und herkommen erweisen müßen. Man sagt, es sei der Erasmus Roterodamus uf ein zeit geen Straßburg kommen, hat man ime als ein fürnemen, berüemten man alles, so namhaft in der statt, besichtigen lassen. Under andern aber ist er in das capitelhaus und den bruederhof geführt worden und bericht aller gelegenheit und gebrauch der domherren und das auch nit ain ieder fürst, graf oder herr, der seins herkommens nit, insonderheit wie dann hieben darvon gemeldet, qualifiziert, angenommen werdt, so soll er in schimpfweis gesagt haben, Christus het (in) das collegium, da sie nit dispensirt, nit angenommen werden megen.

⁸ Graf, Ahnenprobe (see note 6).

⁹ Grünbach, Andreas von, Schreiben des [Deutschmeisters] (*Endris von Grumbach, Meisterdeutschordens in deutschen und welschen Landen*) an Herzog Albrecht [IV. von Bayern] (Horneck, 19.10.1491). Anhang zum Jahrgang 1492, In: Franz von Krenner (ed.), *Baierische Landtags-Handlungen in den Jahren 1429 bis 1513*. 9. Band: Oberländische Landtage im Münchener Landantheile 1489–1505, München 1804, 182–184: *Mir und meinem Orden, als des armen Adels Spital deutscher Nation, begegnet etwas unleidentlichen und schweren Einbruchs vom römischen Stuhle ...* (p. 182); as to the terminology of poverty in late medieval noble discourse cf. Morsel, Adel in Armut – Armut im Adel? Beobachtungen zur Situation des Adels im Spätmittelalter (see note 5). – The Teutonic Knights were perceived accordingly by the general public, so that Sebastian Franck could base his criticism of the military orders on this self-denomination: *Nun merck im anfang war der Ord yederman frey, und ein Spital der armen genant, ytz hat der Adel die armen außgebissen, die gesunden die krancken, die reichen die armen, also daß es nun nit mer der armen, sundern deß Adels spital, nymmer Brüder, sund Teütsch herin und ritter brüder, genent werden. Darzuo ist er so gar nyemand mer frey, daß auch der Adel darumb muß bitten, die andern alle seind außgeschlossen und außbissen, deren keinen man mer darein nimpt, weder bürger, pfaffen noch leyen, ich geschweig eeelüt. Also ist diser spitall kummen von armen, krancken, lamen, dürfftigen (den man alles geben und vermeint hat, da sie an die spital gsamlet haben, und nicht den reichen, jungen, stolzen leüten) biß auf den muotwilligen adel;* Franck, Sebastian, *Chronica, Zeytbuch und geschychtbibel von anbegyn biß inn diß gegenwertig 1531 jar. Darin beide Gottes und der welt lauff hendel art wort werck thun lassen krieges wesen und leben ersehen und begriffen wirt*, Straßburg 1531, f. 473v.

In his letter from the 1420s, Werner of Baldersheim refers to the brothers whom he attacks as “greymantlers”. He thereby refers to the three categories of brothers that were considered full members of the order:

knights – lay brothers of noble origin
 greymantlers – lay brothers of non-noble origin
 priests – brothers of clerical status.

Obviously the knight brothers, distinguished by their white mantle, had the highest rank. Yet the greymantlers and priest brothers were by no means excluded from decision-making and leading positions. The statutes of the order provided that a new grand master be elected by a committee of eight knight brothers, four greymantlers and one priest brother, and the Prussian Annals of Thorun attest that this ruling was still followed when Conrad Zöllner of Rotenstein was elected in 1382.¹⁰ The letter of Walter of Baldersheim from the 1420s shows that even a whole urban commandery of such wealth and importance as Cologne could be entirely run by greymantlers alone.¹¹ Obviously, being a greymantler or priest brother of non-noble origin did not hinder the career of individual brothers, especially in the western Empire.

Nonetheless, the distinction between greymantlers and knight brothers endowed with the white mantle remained important. The origin of greymantlers can be traced back to the “sergeants” (*sarjant brothers*) mentioned in the early customs of the order. In the early decades of the order, they probably differed from the knight brothers in equipment and tasks in combat, but by the 14th century this functional distinction had clearly given way to a differentiation along the lines of social background and origin.¹²

From the mid-13th century onwards, the statutes increasingly stress that only men of noble birth should be admitted as knight brothers. As early as ca. 1340, an addition to the statutes of the Teutonic Knights issued by Dietrich of Altenburg (1335–1341) stated: “We order that from now on no brother shall be given the white mantle unless he is worthy of it, well born to it.” (2. *Ven eisten setten wi, dat men vortme engheinen bruder den witten mantel en geve, he en sijs werdich end wael dartou geboren. / 2. Ouch setzen wir, daz man vurbaz mê keynem bruder den wîzen mantel gebe, er ensie is wirdig und wol dûzu geboren*).¹³

In 1441, grand master Konrad of Ehrlichshausen repeated the ruling and stated more precisely: “We order that, from now on, neither the grand master nor anyone

¹⁰ Jähnig, Bernhart, *Verfassung und Verwaltung des Deutschen Ordens und seiner Herrschaft in Livland* (Schriften der Baltischen Historischen Kommission 16), Berlin, 2011, 130.

¹¹ See above, note 2.

¹² Jähnig, *Verfassung und Verwaltung des Deutschen Ordens* (see note 10), 130 (note 360).

¹³ *Gesetze Dietrichs von Altenburg (1335–1341)*, In: Max Perlbach (ed.), *Die Statuten des Deutschen Ordens*, Halle an der Saale, 1890, 149–151, here 149.

on his behalf shall receive anyone into the order unless he is born from good knighthood and can prove four ancestors, except priest brothers and greymantlers, according to the needs of the house and office.” (5. *Item das ken meister nach ny-mand von seynent wegen keynen vordmeh czu dem orden sulle emphoen, her sei denne von gutter ritterschafft geboren und moge seyne vier anen beweisen, wsge-nomen priesterbruder und gromentler nach notdurfft des hawzes und amptes*).¹⁴

Admitting candidates from a non-noble urban background indiscriminately would have called into question the reputation of the Teutonic Knights as a noble institution; excluding them might have impaired the social network that guaranteed the survival of the order's urban commanderies. Carefully restricting admission as a knight brother to candidates whose noble extraction was beyond doubt, while also offering far-reaching career options to those admitted as greymantlers, was an obvious solution. In the 15th century, proving noble status became increasingly important. Knights from urban families, even if they had been knighted by the emperor himself on the bridge of the Tiber after his coronation, faced exclusion from tournaments organized by the rural nobility. Claims that one or several of their relatives had been admitted to a selective ecclesiastical institution was one of the most convincing arguments when it came to averting such a disgrace.¹⁵ Distinguishing between knights, greymantlers and priests gave the order a certain flexibility to admit (within reason) brothers from the urban upper class. If the family seemed sufficiently noble, they could be admitted as knights and thus enhance the reputation of other family members. In the case of obviously non-noble urban origin, they could nonetheless be admitted as greymantlers.

Over the centuries, the Hospitallers took the lead and pointed the way, which the Teutonic knights had to follow if they did not want to jeopardize their reputation of being selective to a degree that met the evermore rigid socially accepted standards of genealogically defined full noble status. They formally required four proven ancestors of noble status already in the 14th century, a step formally adopted by the Teutonic Knights only in 1441. The German tongue of the Hospitallers decided in 1631 that they would henceforth require sixteen proven ancestors, while the Teutonic Knights gradually passed from four (1441, confirmed by imperial decree in 1567) to eight proven ancestors in 1606 and sixteen proven ancestors in 1671.¹⁶

¹⁴ Gesetze des Hochmeisters Konrad von Ehrlichshausen (1441 April 28), In: Hermann Hildebrand (ed.), *Liv-, Est- und Curländisches Urkundenbuch nebst Regesten*. Band 9: 1426–1443, Riga, 1889, 501–505, Nr. 716.

¹⁵ Zotz, Thomas, “Adel, Bürgertum und Turniere in deutschen Städten vom 13. bis 15. Jahrhundert”, In: Josef Fleckenstein, *Das ritterliche Turnier im Mittelalter. Beiträge zu einer vergleichenden Formen- und Verhaltensgeschichte des Rittertums*, Göttingen 1985, 450–499, here: 435 and 496–498.

¹⁶ Harding, Adelsprobe (see note 6): Hospitallers 14th century and 1631; Graf, Ahnenprobe (see note 6): Teutonic Knights 1606 and 1671. As to the Teutonic Knights in 1441 see above note 14.