

The Teutonic Order

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The Teutonic Order, otherwise known as the Order of the Knights of the Hospital of St. Mary of the Teutons in Jerusalem, was one of the many military Orders that existed in Europe and the Near East after the twelfth century and, although no longer having any military or political importance, continues in places in and around central Europe. The military Orders were lay orders, and were founded for a peaceable cause: to protect Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land. This later expanded into crusading to bring new lands into the Christian sphere of influence. Knights of most military orders took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and the Orders were technically only answerable to the Pope. The Teutonic Order, with the Templars and the Hospitallers, was one of the most well known military Orders, whose fighting arm was called the Teutonic Knights. This essay will discuss the origins, structures and aims of the Teutonic Order, how it became military, the areas where it operated and owned lands, its conversion of the Prussians, its amalgamations with other Orders and its final decline.

The Teutonic Order was founded as a small hospital in the city of Acre in the kingdom of Jerusalem by a group of German crusaders besieging the city in AD1190. It was a largely German Order, but (according to [www: An Historical Perspective](#)) members were not restricted to the German nobility. According to Udo Arnold, it received its name because the crusading founders wished to reconquer Jerusalem, and the name of the hospital did not have any connection with the older German hospital in Jerusalem. The crusaders set up a field hospital made from sails from their ships, and after Acre was conquered, King Guy of Jerusalem awarded the Teutonic Order a portion of a tower in Acre and later built a hospital, a chapel and some dwellings. The Duke of Staufen, Frederick of Swabia, put his chaplain in charge of the organisation, and it was soon transformed into a religious order.

The Teutonic Order had its headquarters at Acre until the city fell to the Muslims in 1291, when it was moved to Venice. In 1309, the Order again moved its headquarters, this time to Marienburg in Prussia.

In the following decades, Henry VI of Germany (son of Frederick I) and Frederick II of Germany (later Holy Roman Emperor) gave their support to the Order, as did many other nobles from around Europe. In 1196, Pope Celestine III took the German hospital under his protection.

Sometime between 1196 and 1198 the Staufen party, one of the hospital's German patrons, decided to expand into the Holy Land, and so in 1198, when the hospital was the only German settlement in the area, it was transformed into an order of knighthood. It was modelled on the Templars' code of knighthood and medical care. In 1199, Pope Innocent III issued a bull confirming that the Teutonics would wear the Templars' white robe, but with a black cross to differentiate between them. The Order was to use the Rule of the Hospitallers when caring for the sick, but according to [www.Buzz01 p1](#); "within a few years, the order concentrated more on the military than on the charitable" In all other business, the Order would conduct itself by following the Templar Rule, that of the provisions of knighthood and medical care.

The Teutonic Order was comprised of three main groups: knights, priests and other brothers (lay brothers and sisters). A large number of other people assisted the Order. There were secular knights who served the Order without payment, squires and sergeants-at-arms. There were footsoldiers who seem to have been mostly coerced from the local populations, and domestic sister-aids who took religious vows. Artisans and labourers worked for wages or without payment, and many serfs and slaves were owned by the Order. Members of the Teutonic Order could be found all over the Near East and Europe, but most of these were monastic, or at least not fighting men. Military service was required only on the frontier areas of the Teutonic lands, ie the Holy Land.

The main objective of the Teutonic Knights was to convert the heathens to Christianity and to increase the holdings of the Christian Church; They did this mainly in the areas around the Holy Land and the Baltic Sea. According to U. Arnold, they went about this by the "acquisition of possessions on the Christian frontier, [and] subjugation of the neighbouring pagans" As they advanced into new territories, the Teutonic Order built their houses in strategic positions (such as near roads, or in important ports) for the purpose of stimulating Christianity.

The Teutonic Order gradually expanded their lands into a huge area. Over the centuries, the Order gained properties in Styria, Thuringia, Prague, Vienna, Hesse, Franconia, Bavaria, parts of Greece, Burzenland, Italy, Sicily and the Low Countries. Some of these acquisitions were purchased by the Teutonics, but most were the result of gifts made by the Pope and various kings and nobles of differing nationalities.

In 1229, Pope Gregory IX instructed the Teutonic Knights to convert the Prusiskai (Prussians), giving the Order the incentive that any lands conquered would become theirs with minimal conditions. In 1230, a leader of the Teutonic Knights, Hermann Balke advanced into Prussia on the south-east corner of the Baltic Sea, and in 1234, the Pope took control of Prussia and leased it to the Teutonic Order: "...by 1283 all the peoples in Prussia had been attacked and exterminated so that not one was left who did not bow to the Roman Church" (Nicholson, p3). According to Udo Arnold, Prussia was one of the Teutonic Knights' most spectacular successes, where it built up an independent state. The Teutonics were eventually ousted from Prussia when the Prussians revolted in 1454, reclaiming the western parts of Prussia, including the headquarters of the Order at Marienburg.

In addition to the Templars, the Hospitallers and the Teutonics, there were many other smaller military Orders around Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Sometimes these smaller Orders merged with each other or with one of the large Orders. This happened twice with the Teutonic Order; in 1235 the Dobriner Order was incorporated into the Teutonics, and in 1237, the Teutonic Order and the Livonian Swordbrothers combined. This strengthened the Teutonic Order's position in the Baltic region when the Teutonic Order was at the height of its power.

In 1410, the main army of the Teutonic Knights was crushed by Lithuania and Poland in the battle at Tannenberg. This resulted in the Order becoming bankrupt and losing a significant portion of its military and political capabilities. When, in 1525, Grand Master Albrecht von Brandenburg converted to Lutheranism, the Teutonic Order ceased to be a crusading entity. The Order occasionally participated militarily in

European affairs after 1525 but the number and wealth of the Order deteriorated. Now the Order is only a care-giving organisation. It has no military or political importance, but continues to exist in parts of central Europe.

The Teutonic Order was a military Order founded in 1190 that had many powerful patrons and was a smaller version of the Templars and Hospitallers. There were three main groups in the Order and their main objective was to convert heathens and to increase the holdings of the Christian Church. The Order had far-flung holdings, including in Prussia, which it conquered in 1234. The Order merged with two other military Orders during its prime, but the Order eventually deteriorated into a non-military organisation.

Bibliography

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