

# **Wine, Women & Song: Female members of the Order**

**Charles Savona-Ventura**

---

## **Abstract**

The *Ordre de Saint Lazare* saw their origins in the Outremer as a Chivalric Military and Hospitaller Order in the wake of the First Crusade during the early decades of the twelfth century. It adopted a military role to combat and protect the Outremer from the Islamic threat. Despite the military role adopted by this monastic communities, the Order seemingly originally had provision to include female members who eventually adopted a purely contemplative charisma scattered in the Outremer and through Christian Europe. The European nunneries of the order of Saint Lazarus persisted until the turmoil brought about by the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The twentieth century has seen the Order becoming more open and inclusive with the admission of regular female members within their ranks.

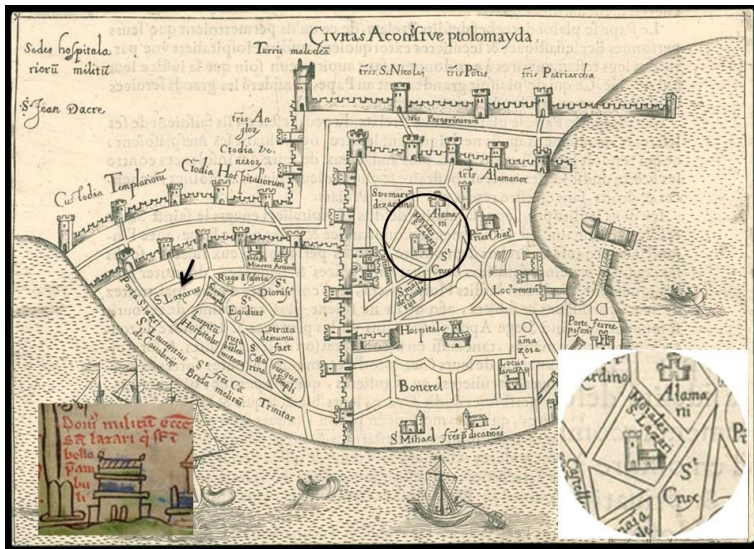
## **Introduction**

The hospitaller military orders established after the First Crusade in the Outremer are generally associated with male monk warriors and clerics who managed hospitaller establishments. However, these establishments were not a purely male domain. Services were also required to provide care for female pilgrims and chronic sick women, and both the Hospitaller Order of St John and the Order of the Templar knights had a female element to their organization. Eventually even the Teutonic Order incorporated a female component in its organization. A similar female element was necessary in the *hospitali infirmorum sancti Lazari de Jerusalem* established with the specific aim of caring for victims of leprosy.

## **The establishments in the Outremer**

The account of Salah al-Din's assault on the City of Jerusalem written by Er-noul states that the assault was directed in the region between the hospital for male lepers near St Stephen's Gate (*Bab al-'Amud*) and that for women lepers behind David's Gate (*Bab al-Khalil*). Er-noul served as

the squire of Balian d' Ibelin, the Latin leader who negotiated the surrender of Jerusalem to Salah-al-Din.<sup>1</sup> It is very likely that the female establishment reserved for lepers sited behind David's Gate was managed by women attendant members of the Order of St Lazarus. The female services designated *Moniales Sancti Lazari* were eventually also established in Acre after the expulsion of the Order from Jerusalem by Salah al-Din [*vide infra* Crusader map Acre]. The Order of St. Lazarus may have also had another establishment managed by a convent of sisters near Jericho.<sup>2</sup>



**Crusader Acre**<sup>3</sup>

[Inserts show details of the *Domus militum* and the *Moniales Sancti Lazari*]

<sup>1</sup> H. Dajani-Shakeel. Some Medieval accounts of Salah al-Din's recovery of Jerusalem OAI-Quds). In: H. Nashabe. *Studia Palaestina: Studies in honour of Constantine K. Zurayk*. Beirut: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> *Provinciale Omnium Ecclesiarum*. Rome: Vico Peregrini, 1543.

<sup>3</sup> Petrus Vesconte, *Civitas Acon Sive Ptolomayda*, 17<sup>th</sup> century (after an original from 1320), Jewish National Library with inset of the *Domus militum sancti Lazari* as depicted by Matthew Paris: Ms 26, fol. IIIv. Cambridge: Corpus Christi College.

In addition, a convent of sisters of St Lazarus managed by an abbess was extant in Bethania, the legendary town of Lazarus. This convent was extant by 867 AD when it is mentioned by Bernard the Wise in his pilgrim travelogue.<sup>4</sup> This convent is further mentioned by the 12<sup>th</sup> century chronicler William of Tyre who records that Baldwin “had an elder sister named Sibylla, born of the same mother. She was raised in the convent of St Lazarus at Bethany by Lady Ivetta, the abbess of the convent, who was her father's maternal aunt”.<sup>5</sup> It appears however that the convent followed the Rule of St. Benedict rather than the Rule of St. Augustine adopted by 1255 by the *fratres Sancti Lazari extra muros Jerusalem leprosis*. In 1256, Pope Alexander IV conferred the nunnery with all its possessions to the Order of St John on condition that provisions were made for the contemporary Abbess Philippa and her nuns. This transfer was repealed five years later by Pope Urban IV.<sup>6</sup>

Another female Convent of St Lazarus in the Outremer was that established in Cyprus. In 1310, Bernardus Faxie [or Fayssa] from Narbonne left a legacy for the “*Infirmis Sancti Lazari*” following a plea made in 1297 by Pope Boniface VIII who granted an indulgence to anyone who contributed to the building of a St Lazarus leprosarium “for the reception

---

<sup>4</sup> *The Voyage of Bernard the Wise AD 867*. In: T. Wright (ed.): *Early travels in Palestine*. New York: Dover Publ., 2003 (originally published: H.G. Bohn, London, 1848), p.28

<sup>5</sup> William of Tyre. *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum*, XXIII, 1, *Patrologia Latina* 201, p.890-92. In: J. Brundage (translator): *The Crusades: A Documentary History*, Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1962, pp.148-150. A document relating to this Convent may be that kept in the National Malta Library. *Donations, Emptiones Aliaequae Bonorum acquisitiones in Regio Hierusalem favore Hospitalis Sti. Joannis Hierosolimitani (1122-1169)* AOM 2, 15. (Raimundus du Puy et loeta Abbatisa S. Lazari Bethaniae, 1157).

<sup>6</sup> Guilelmus, Abp. of Tyre, ca. 1130 - ca. 1190. *Guillaume de Tyr et ses continuateurs, texte francais du XIIIe siecle*. (Revised and annotated by M. Paulin. Paris: Firmin Didot, 1879-80, Book 12 - source: Medieval Sourcebook at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/GuillammeTyr2.html> - accessed 14<sup>th</sup> June 2005)

of paupers and the infirm” on Cyprus.<sup>7</sup> The edifice supported by this legacy was built in Nicosia. It was eventually destined to become a Benedictine nunnery better known as the Church of Notre Dame de Tyre under the direction of Margaret d’Ibelin. Margaret d’Ibelin was the sister of Balian II d’Ibelin, brother-in-law to Henry II King of Jerusalem and Cyprus. The Monastery of Notre Dame de Tyre was particularly favoured by Henry II who had donated 18,000 *besants* to rebuild the monastery after its damage by earthquake.<sup>8</sup>

### European establishments

The Order of St Lazarus was also responsible for other institutions in Europe, including a number that were managed by *priorissae & soribus leprosarum* of the Order.<sup>9</sup> In France, a convent dedicated to St Lazarus was to be found in La Saussaie sited in Chevilly-Larue, a commune in the southern suburbs of Paris, France. It is located 9.3 km from the centre of Paris.<sup>10</sup> This establishment was set up by Letters Patent of Louis VII of France in 1161 in an effort to care for leprosy women cared.<sup>11</sup> The establishment was initially endowed with the revenue of a tenth of the Paris import wine tax due to the French king.<sup>12</sup> Philip Augustus confirmed the previous privileges in 1182 and in 1208 gave further rights and

---

<sup>7</sup> C. Désimoni. *Actes génois de Famagouste*. Revue de l’Orient Latin, 1896, No. CCCLVII. As reported in: C. Enlart. *L’Art Gothique et la Renaissance en Chypre*. Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1899, vol.1, p.75.

<sup>8</sup> G. Hill. *A History of Cyprus*. Cambridge: University press, 2010, Vol. 2, p.247

<sup>9</sup> In 1245: “*Ludovicus Rex, priorissae & soribus leprosarum de Salceis, ...*” In 1395: Clement V refers to the “*priorissae & conventui domus leprosarum de Salceis....*”

<sup>10</sup> S. Warneke. In: W.M. Johnston, C. Klienhenz [eds.]. *Encyclopaedia of Monasticism*. London: Routledge, 2000, p.1171

<sup>11</sup> M. Felibien. *Histoire de la Ville de Paris*. Paris: Guillaume Desprz et Jean Desessartz, 1725, pp.916-918.

<sup>12</sup> This was confirmed by King Philippe Auguste in 1182. *Charters et Diplomes relatifs à l’Histoire de France publiés par les Soins de l’Académie des inscription et Belles-Lettres*. Paris: Imprimerie National, 1916, Doc. 67, pp.87-88

[available at

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k114540f/f2.item.r=saussaie>]

privileges including the right to receive on the death of the king the entire gold and silver seals, all the linen, the mules and horses, and all the horses used for his funeral including the harnesses. These rights were maintained with alternate payment of 2500 livres being made by Charles VI to recover the horses after the death of his father in 1380. Like the rest of the Order, these nuns followed the Augustinian Rule until about 1515 when they changed to the Rule of St. Benedict. In 1245, Louis IX with the approval of Innocent IV in 1246 gave permission for the house to maintain thirteen healthy nuns. The establishment was placed under the protection of the Holy See by Clement IV in 1265.<sup>13</sup>

Another establishment to care for female lepers was established by Henri II of England in the Forêt de Rouvray close to Rouen in Normandy endowing it with the Pavilly estate. The monastery of St Julian was apparently restricted to women of noble birth. In 1321, the house apparently refused the admission of Theomassa de St Leonard for not being of noble heritage.<sup>14</sup> An Abbey of St Lazarus was also extant in Cambrai in the Hauts-de-France region. This was set up to care for lepers in 1116 by Bishop Burchard, the Sire of Oisy, and Jean de Montmirail. The nuns were known as the Dames de S. Ladre.<sup>15</sup> The administrative links between these French establishments and the Order of St Lazarus have however not been definitely confirmed.

A definite link between the *fratres Sancti Lazari extra muros Jerusalem leprosis* and a convent of nuns is confirmed by the established houses in Switzerland – Seedorf and Gfenn. The preceptory of Seedorf is the oldest monastery in the Uri canton being established in 1107 by Arnold von

---

<sup>13</sup> P.E.G. de Sibert. *Histoire des Ordres Royaux, Hospitaliers-Militaires de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel et de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem*. Paris: Imprimerie Royal, 1772, pp.55—58; Felibien, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> *Histoire de la ville de Rouen: divisée en six parties*. Louis du Souillet, Rouen, 1731, Vol. 2, pp.121-124 [accessible at: <https://books.google.com.mt/books?id=sxRcAAAAcAAJ&printsec>]

<sup>15</sup> Jean le Carpentier. *Histoire Genealogique Des Pais-Bas ou Histoire de Cambray et du Cambresis*. Leide, 1664, Part V, Chap. XV, p.519

Brienz after supposedly having received an apparition from the Virgin Mary. This initiated the foundations for the Order of St. Lazarus in Switzerland. The monastery was visited by King Baudouin IV in 1184. In circa 1287 a move was made to incorporate a sisterhood of the Order of St. Lazarus within this preceptory. By 1327, the preceptory at Seedorf was being spoken of as “a convent of women”, though it continued to be managed by a master. In 1295, the master of the Seedorf preceptory was Commendator Frater Bertoldus. The maintenance of the monastery depended on the income from land produce and rents in the Uri valley, from Hasle, Bauen or Stuhlsazze.<sup>16</sup> In the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, a compilation of regulations “*Dei Regein des Heiligen Ordens S. Lazari*” was drawn up by Siegfried von Schlatt, these including regulations dating before 1187 referring to the house in Jerusalem, regulations dating to 1240-1291 during the Acre period, and regulations dating to 1314/1331 when the Seedorf community became a nunnery.<sup>17</sup> Because of the political turmoil of the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Master General of the Order of St. Lazarus in Boigny, France F. Petrus de Ruaux in 1413 sent letter patents to the “*supérieurs des maisons de St Lazare de Séedorf & de Gfenn*” to allow them to invest a knight to occupy the post of *Praeceptorem seu Provisorem dictarum domorum de Gevenne & de Sedorff*”.<sup>18</sup> In 1418, the Commander of Steedorf Joanno Schwarber, together with the Abbess of Seedorf Lady Agnes of Eichlinger and the Abbess of Gfenn Lady Catherine Beykling, set out to organize the preceptories under his jurisdiction and

---

<sup>16</sup> P.G. Morel. *Aelteste Urkunden des St. Lazarus Spitalis zu Seedoef im Lande Uri: 1243-1518*. Der Geschichtsfeund: Mittheilungen des hisorischen Vereins der funf Orte Luzern, Uri, Schwyz, unterwalden and Zug., 1856, 12: pp.2-17

<sup>17</sup> Siefried von Schlatt. *Dei Regein des Heiligen Ordens S. Lazari*. Manuscript held in the archives of the Monastery at Seedorf, Switzerland. Transcribed by: G. Gall Morel. *Die altesten statuten fur die Lazaritenkloster Seedorf*. Der Geschichtsfeund: Mittheilungen des hisorischen Vereins der funf Orte Luzern, Uri, Schwyz, unterwalden and Zug., 1847, 4: pp.119-158

<sup>18</sup> Pierre des Ruaux, Master general. *Letters Patent addressed to the superiors of the houses of St. Lazarus at Gfenn and Seedorf dated 10<sup>th</sup> December 1413*. Transcribed in: G. de Sibert. *Historire des Ordres Royaux, Hospitaliers-Militaires de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel et de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem*. Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1772, doc. 18

drew up a new set of the Order's statutes, rules and customs. The original manuscript is still available in the Archives of the Seedorf Monastery.<sup>19</sup> Schwarber continued to manage the two preceptories until his death in 1443.<sup>20</sup> The sisters admitted in the convents at Seedorf and Gfenn appear to have been of noble origin and in 1185 included: Madeleine de Hertinstein, Sibyl de Greuk, Hemme de Rootembach, Ite de Hochemburg, Marina Im-Hoff Bluomfelden, Helen Zum-Brennen de Leuvestein, Veronica de Baldeck, Madeleine de Ellgow, Marina de Kiburg, and Hemme Arnoldine de Spiringen. There were in addition 21 knights of the Order resident in Seedorf.<sup>21</sup>

Another establishment belonging to the Order of St Lazarus in Switzerland was the Gfenn preceptory was founded in the first quarter 13<sup>th</sup> century on the eastern edge of the community Dübendorf in the Swiss canton of Zurich by Vogt Rudolf III of Rapperswill, believed to have in 1217 made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The first mention of the "pious brethren of the hospital of St. Lazarus in the Gfenn" comes from a document dated to 1250. The original monastery for brothers of the Order is last mentioned in 1326, but the establishment persisted and by 1368 was still serving as a monastery for the sisters of the Order of St. Lazarus under the direction of Bertha von Hüenenberg. In 1420, the preceptory housed fourteen sisters and seven assistants.

---

<sup>19</sup> *Statuta nona F. Joanno Schwarber Commandatore dominorium Seedorf, Anno 1418.* Manuscript held in the archives of the Monastery at Seedorf, Switzerland

<sup>20</sup> Schwander also pressed to increase the holdings of the monastery and during the period 1421-1423, he was successful in obtaining a number of substantial seigniorial rights from the Zurich chapter; while in 1443 he personally endowed the sum of five gold florins to the Seedorf Church to ensure the celebration of three masses for his soul every four years. In 1449, Pope Nicholas V authorized the houses at Uri to recover their alienated or usurped property. de Sibert, *op. cit.*, pp.153, 188, 201-203

<sup>21</sup> de Sibert, *op. cit.*, pp.266-274

A third Lazarite establishment in Switzerland that may have housed female members of the Order was sited in Schlatt, a district in Bad Krozingen located 15 km south of Freiburg in the upper Rhine valley in the border triangle between Germany, France and Switzerland. The "*Fratres ordinis s. Lazarus in Slatte*" was co-founded in 1271 by the knight Werner von Staufen, who probably participated in a crusade, and the bailiff of the monastery of St. Trudpert in Munster.<sup>22</sup> The adjoining Church was originally dedicated to St Apollinaris of Ravenna but was consecrated later to St. Sebastian was built in 1275 and eventually enlarged in 1603. Sited in a traditional spa region, the Convent of St. Lazarus also owned a bathhouse, leprosarium and mill. Because of financial difficulties, these holdings were sold by the Order to the Order of St. John in 1362. The deed of the sale suggests that by this time the convent was housing both brothers and sisters of the Order.<sup>23</sup>

The Lazarite houses in Central Europe received a major setback with the religious turmoil arising from the 16<sup>th</sup> century schism within Western Christianity that gave rise to the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation movements. The Seedorf preceptory was located in the Canton of Uri which remained allied to the Catholic movement. The last responsible commander of the Swiss preceptories in 1516 was John

---

<sup>22</sup> The convent has now disappeared but remnants of the original church remains in the basements of the tower and the choir arch wall of the renovated church. The choir, the sacristy and the bell storey of the tower probably date from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The church is surrounded by the former cemetery whose surrounding wall is partially preserved, tucked away on the southeast edge of the village, called at the foot of a hill, "Schlatterberg" or "Lazaritenberg", at the east end of Lazaritenstraße. To the north rises the "Lazarus source", whose water flows as "Schlatter Bächle" westward. <sup>21</sup> This arises on the steep southwest slope of the mountain Schlatter and is considered the strongest surface water source of upper Oberrheinebene. Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was local custom, to bathe the new-born in the Schlatter source and then invoke the protection of St Apollinaris in the church.

<sup>23</sup> St. Sebastian (Schlatt). *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2015, [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/St.\\_Sebastian\\_%28Schlatt%29](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Sebastian_%28Schlatt%29) accessed 24<sup>th</sup> May 2015



Koiller of Wintherlour. After his death the nuns in Seedorf and Gfenn remained without a commander until their extinction. However, the house was slowly depleted of members as a result of the plague and the effects of the Reformation, and the death of the Abbess Lady Apollinia Scheitern in 1526 led to the monastery being closed down. The buildings, consisting of a small church, a hospital, a sister's house and brother's house, and associated land holdings fell in the hands of the Uri Canton authorities. The property was transferred to the nuns of the Order of St. Benedict by Papal Bull of Paul IV of 1559.<sup>24</sup> The Benedictine nuns under the direction of Abbess Sr. Anna Margaret of Locarno were transferred to Seedorf from the Monastery of Claro in the canton Ticino.<sup>25</sup>

The Gfenn preceptory similarly saw a decline in fortune. The start of the Old Zurich War which resulted in a conflict between Zurich and the rest of the VII-Oertigen Confederation in 1440 led to a deterioration in the fortunes of the preceptory. By 1525, the monastery housed only two sisters. Following the early 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformation movement, the Canton of Zurich adopted the Lutheran movement and the Zurich Senate accepted the principle of secularization of religious houses promoted by Zwingli in 1523. This led to the dissolution of this Gfenn monastery. In 1527, the monastery was sold to the bailiff Heinrich Escher of Greifensee. The convent building served as a business house until 1783 and was subsequently converted into a farmhouse, the church converted into the barn.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> de Sibert, *op. cit.*, pp.82-85

<sup>25</sup> The present monastery was rebuilt in the end of the 17th century and the present church consecrated in 1727. The chapel is of a simple design with the altarpiece depicting a painting of the "Raising of St. Lazarus". The sidewalls were also decorated by paintings reflecting the history associated with the monastery especially the post-reformation period. Helmi Gasser. *Das Kloster St. Lazarus in Seedorf UR*. Bern: Gesellschaft fur Schweizerische, 1987. *Kunstgeschichte*, Bern, 1987; Johannes Maria Muhllechner. *Das Kloster Sankt Lazarus Seedorf und die Lazariterregeln von 1314*. Prague: GEMI, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Gasser, *op. cit.*; Muhllechner, *op.cit.*



**Female sister of the Order of St Lazarus** (*artistic impression*)

### **Modern developments**

It appears that by the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Order of St Lazarus was no longer housing female members in its surviving establishments. In Italy, the Order in 1572 was fully amalgamated with the Order of St. Maurice under the hereditary grand mastership of the Dukes of Savoy. The statutes of this new Order did not cater for female members. In France, the Order in 1608 was re-organized and administratively amalgamated with the newly established Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel to serve primarily as an honorific Order awarded by the French King. The statutory regulations similarly do not cater for any female members.

The French Revolution and its aftermath left the Order with a headship crisis after the French King withdrew his Royal Protection in 1831. The Order, having been set up by papal brief, remained under the jurisdiction of the Holy See subservient to the last 18<sup>th</sup> century statutes that excluded female members. The 1905 papal bull *De Equestribus Pontificis Ordinibus* defining the Pontifical Orders required a review of the statutes of the

Order of St Lazarus.<sup>27</sup> The new statutes published in 1913 again failed to consider the possibility of female members.<sup>28</sup> The situation was revised in the subsequent statutory revision in 1929. In Article X, the possibility of having dames as companion members of the Order was introduced. As affiliates of the Order, the companion dames were however excluded from participating in the Chapter General and in the administration of the Order.<sup>29</sup> The first female members of the Order under the 1929 provisions included<sup>30</sup>:

- Dame of Justice Enriqueta de Borbón y Parade (\*1885 †1967 ad.1929), 4<sup>th</sup> Duchess of Seville, spouse to grand master Francisco de Borbón y de la Torre.
- Dame Fanny Mathilde Bertrand, née Chateauminois (ad.1929), mother to Paul Bertrand.
- Dame Hélène Munroe-Ridgway (†1934 ad.1929), chevalier de la Légion d'honneur.
- Germaine Otzenberger-Detaille, née Detaille, Dame (\*1886 †1980 ad.1929).
- Dame Dona Juan Pfaff, Claraso, von Lorentz y de Daudi née Bertrand y Paréras, Bellever y Agullo (ad.1929).
- Dame Laura Shannon (ad.1929).

---

<sup>27</sup> Pope Pius X. *De Equestribus Pontificis Ordinibus S. Silvestri, Militiae aurate et Militiae Iesu Christi....* (7.ii.1905).

<sup>28</sup> de Jandriac. Les chevaliers Hospitaliers de Saint Lazare de Jerusalem et de Notre Dame de la Merci. *Rivista Araldica*, November 1913, XI(11), p.679-68.

<sup>29</sup> *Ordre de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem: Statuts including Règlement spéciales concernant les insignes et les uniforme de l'Ordre de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem.* In: Journal Officiel d'Annonces judiciaires et legales. 1929, +8pp., Paris.

<sup>30</sup> *Liste comprend les noms des membres et affilies de l'Ordre de Saint Lazare.* Paris: MHOSLJ, c.1930, p.22.



**Group photograph including dame members of the Order  
Hôtel d'Iéna: 1933**

A statutory reorganization carried out in 1935 enabled the admitted dames to enjoy the same status as the knights of the Order.<sup>31</sup> The 1948 statutory revision which forms the basis of the modern statute of the Order states that: 'In memory of the sisters of the ancient hospitals of St. Lazarus those ladies who satisfy the requirements of the relevant decrees may be admitted as Dames of the Order of St. Lazarus'.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> *Orden Militar Hospitalaria y Soberana de San Lazaro de Jerusalem. Ordenanzas*. Partly transcribed in: *Hidalguia* 1953, 1(3), pp.585-587

<sup>32</sup> *Orden Militar Hospitalaria de San Lázaro de Jerusalem: Ordenanzas Generales 1948*. Madrid: MHOSLJ, 1948; *An English Translation of the Fundamental Constitution of the Order, As Promulgated by the 44th Grand Master, The Duke of Seville, in 1948*. Malta: MHOSLJ, 1972.



**1970s Group photograph including dame members of the Order**



**2018 Group photograph including female members of the Order**