

The internationalization of the Order in the 1930's on the example of Germany

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Abstract

The interwar period was to see an active reorganization drive being taken by the leaders of the Order of Saint Lazarus in France. This drive led to an internationalization process spreading the Order's membership throughout most of Europe, including Germany, and the Americas.

Keywords

Order of St Lazarus, internationalization, Germany

Introduction

The 1930s probably represents one of the most important periods in the modern history of the Order of Saint Lazarus. Contemporary documentary sources pertaining to the period between 1830 and 1910 are virtually non-existent and perhaps it will never be possible to reconstruct the history of the Order during this period. The various past attempts made at elucidating the history during this phase are often based in interpretations and are not academically convincing. Even Paul Bertrand's membership lists of the 1960s have not yet been conclusively proven.¹

Yet, it appears indisputable that in the year 1910 a number of persons convened in Paris to establish a Green Cross Association under the terms of French civil law. Did this event mark a "second resurrection of Lazarus," as sometimes alleged in academic papers? If the Order never

¹ Paul Bertrand de la Grassière. *L'Ordre militaire et hospitalier de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem: Son histoire - son action* (Paris : Peyronnet et Cle, 1960), 81-105.

vanished, why did it take Paul Bertrand three decades to unveil the identities of members? The word honesty emerges in the historical exploration. This essay aims to make a contribution by taking a closer look as to how a small group of somehow rather dubious gentlemen in France organized themselves to gradually take a global dimension involving a number of honourable members from various countries. The focal point of this analysis will be Germany since original sources are recorded in state archives of the country.

The resurrection – 1910/11

Around 1910/1911, an association was founded in France known as *Chevaliers Hospitaliers de Saint Lazare de Jerusalem et de Notre Dame de la Merci*. The published statutes mention only one class of membership and the motto *Atavis et Armis* (Article 16).² In subsequent years, the association's name was shortened without mentioning any longer the *Notre Dame* – whether the 1911 *de la Merci* or the 18th century *de Mont Carmel*.

The assembled French individuals were not unfamiliar figures and crop up in diverse contexts. Some were members of the *Order of the Militia of Jesus Christ*. This association - not to be confused with the Order of Christ – was formed at the end of the 19th century, mainly by Zouave veterans of the Papal Army. Within a few years, this association styled itself an “Order” and repeatedly sought contact with the Order of Dominicans – a reminiscence of the short time *Militia of the Faith of Jesus Christ* which had been merged with the Third Order of St. Dominic in the Middle Ages. However, the Dominicans refused to cooperate, and the

² The statue of the *Chevaliers Hospitaliers de Saint Lazare de Jerusalem et de Notre Dame de la Merci* was published in : de Jandriac. Les chevaliers Hospitaliers de Saint Lazare de Jerusalem et de Notre Dame de la Merci. *Rivista Araldica* 11 (xi.1913), 679-683.

Order of the Militia of Jesus Christ turned to the Melkite Patriarch to serve as Grand Master (or later Protector). After the death of the patriarch, the Pope did not allow his successor to take up the office again.³

Another association that appears regularly during this period in relation to the *Chevaliers Hospitaliers de Saint Lazare de Jerusalem* was the *Soci t  Heraldiq  de France* with the associated *Soci t  Arch ologique de France*. From 1911 onwards, the newsletters published by these associations – the *Bulletin Historique* and the *La Science Historique* (published after the First World War) – regularly featured lists of new members of the Order of Saint Lazarus.⁴ Members mentioned therein are key figures in the later developments within the Order of Saint Lazarus : Fernand de l' glise de Ferrier de Felix, Paul Bertrand, Paul Bugnot, Charles Otzenberger and Paul Watrin. The priest Jan Tanski died in 1913. Three of these personages should be considered in more detail.

Charles Otzenberger: His contributions to the Order's expansion were substantial and also connected with his role as the Honorary Consul of the Dominican Republic. Remarkably, the President of the Dominican Republic receiving the Grand Cross of the Order almost concurrently to when Otzenberger assumed this office. During the Vichy France Regime, he seems to have collaborated with the German occupying



³ Alberto di Montenuovo. L'Ordine della Milizia di Ges  Cristo. *Rivista Araldica* 16 (1916), 364-367.

⁴ *La Bulletin historique, arch ologique et h raldique* 1/2 (1911), 24 and 5/6 (1911), 73.

force.⁵ He later acquired the title of a Count supposedly from Naples-Sicily or Montenegro. Yet, Naples had amalgamated into the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies two centuries earlier; while the Kingdom of Montenegro, which lasted merely eight years (1910-1918), had been defunct for a quarter-century, although its king Nicholas I still lived. Notably, titles and decorations of the former kingdom were sold for a fee by Fritz Hahn and Hans Moser.

Comte Frédéric Guigue de Champvans: Later known as Marquis de Farémont, born as Fritz Hahn in Vienna, lived in Paris and Berlin. Despite of being an author on orders and heraldry ⁶, his own biography is rather obscure. His name appears to be mixture of two families, some adopted, some assumed. The German title merchant Hans Moser supported him to archive a papal knighthood.⁷ He was convicted in Paris for trading titles and orders. He also sold memberships of the Pontifical Tiberian Academy prompting investigations by the Dresden police and involvement of German embassies in Paris and the Holy See. The Vatican clarified that the academy had lost its "pontifical" title years ago and rendering it dissolved.⁸ *L'Osservatore Romano* issued a warning against an individual,

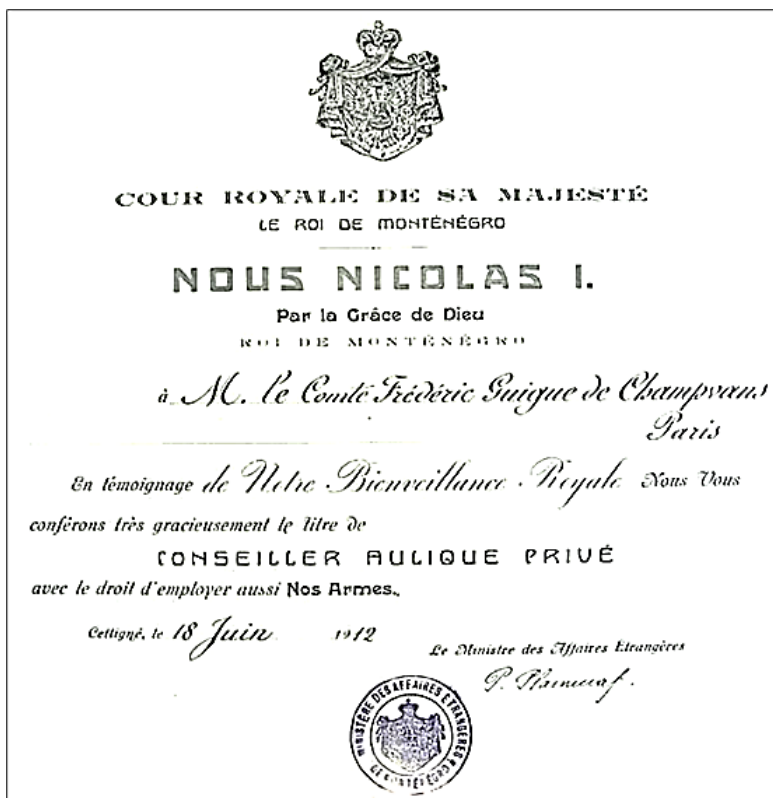
⁵ Letter dated 25.viii.1948 from Ludwig Graf Strachwitz to the Princely Chancellery (General Clössner), State Archives Sigmaringen, FAS DS 70 T 1 Nr. 113.

⁶ Frédéric, Comte de Guigue de Champvans de Farémont. *Histoire et législation des ordres de chevalerie, marques d'honneur, médailles et anciens ordres du Saint-Siège* (Paris: Institut historique et héraldique de France, 1932-1933), 2 volumes.

⁷ See for example: Bruno Dumons. La " romanisation " des élites catholiques françaises au xixe siècle. Ordres et décorations du Saint-Siège. In: Bruno Dumons, Gilles Pollet. *La Fabrique De L'Honneur. Les médailles et les décorations en France, XIXe-XXe siècles* (Rennes, 2009), 85-97. Available : <https://books.openedition.org/pur/137238?lang=en>

⁸ The records can be found in the Federal Archives, R 105183.

posing as a count or marquis, who seems to sell titles.⁹ He also assumed the role of "representative and attaché" of the Order of Saint Lazarus. Following the initiation of criminal proceedings in the summer of 1932, Otzenberger appears to have replaced him as Magistral Delegate.



Permit awarded to Fritz Hahn by King Nicolas I in 1912

Hans Moser: Born in Berlin, he lived in Spain for a while claiming to belong to the Rothschild-family and styled himself as Baron. He appeared as President of the Berlin Chapter of the Order of Saint Lazarus. He was

⁹ *L'Osservatore Romano* (25/26.ii.1935).

one of the most important title dealers during the 1910 to 1930s. The Spanish publication *Hidalguia* named him as one of the founders of the Order of Saint Lazarus without however presenting any concrete evidence. So, it is not clear if he was involved in the revival or just involved in recruiting members. He was not ever listed among the members of the Order, not even in the *Bulletin Heraldique* where his name appears several times.¹⁰ Later publications of the Order distance themselves from Moser or simply state that he had founded an Order with the same name at about the same time as the revival. The lack of plausibility must be mentioned, as he was brought to trial together with Fritz Hahn for the same offences.

The Internationalization process

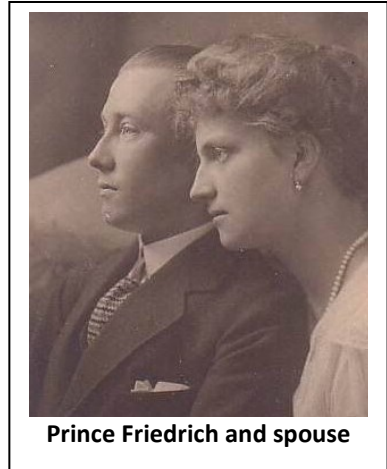
Returning to the chronological narrative, the year 1929 marked a turning point of the internationalisation process. Until then, the membership of the Order stayed relatively small consisting nearly only of French members. During the year, the first American members were admitted, some holding papal titles and orders. In Spain, the Duke of Seville (*iure uxoris*), Francisco de Borbón y de la Torre, was invested and appointed Capitular of Spain. His elevation to Lieutenant of the Grand Master, was a breakthrough. In the following years, the Order

¹⁰ The reference to Hans Moser, which was also mentioned by Conte Zeininger and Marques de Villarreal de Alava in their articles in *Hidalguia* 3 (1953), 501-532 and 533-615, seems to refer to the *Revista de Historia y Henealogia Española* (1914), 174-176. This reports that, among many other titles, Moser founded a false Order of St. John and served as President of the Chapter of the Order of St. Lazarus and Our Lady of Mercy. See also among others: Aldo della Quaglia. Hans Josef Moser o Juan Maria Moser-Rothschild o el Baron Juan Maria Moser de Veiga (1878-1928). Famoso Falsario y Tracicante de Honores. *Cuadernos de Ayala* 70 (2017), 3-14.

experienced rapid growth.¹¹ According to Paul Bertrand's history of the Order completed in the end of 1931, there already existed Delegations in Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, the Dominican Republic, and Hungary; Chapters in Spain, Mexico and the USA; the association under French law, *de facto* Grand Priory; and Grand Priories in Germany and Italy.¹²

Developments in Germany

The situation in Germany can be easily reconstructed, as original sources have been preserved.¹³ On 27 December 1931, the **Prince Friedrich of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen**, having recently been admitted, was appointed Prince Grand Prior. The appointment diploma was signed by the Duke of Seville and also by the Marquis de Farémont acting as Magistral Delegate.¹⁴ His wife, a Princess of Saxony by birth, and his



brother, Franz Joseph, also became members. The Prince's head of cabinet, Franz Freiherr von Hallberg, received the green cross on

¹¹ If not explicitly mentioned the following information about investitures or the forms of national organisations are published in: Paul Bertrand [editor]. *La Vie Chevaleresque, vol. 1 (1933-34), vol. 2 (1935-36), vol. 3 (1937-39), vol. 4 (1940)*.

¹² Paul Bertrand. *Histoire des Chevaliers-Hospitaliers de Saint-Lazare* (Paris, 1932), 190.

¹³ The documents are held in the Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv) in Berlin and in the State Archive (Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Staatsarchiv Sigmaringen) in Sigmaringen.

¹⁴ *Diploma dated 27 Dec 1931*, State Archives Sigmaringen, FAS DS 70 T 1 Nr. 113

Christmas Eve. The Princess was also awarded the Lauretian Cross - an award the Marquis de Farémont was actually allowed to procure. Communication with the Marquis de Farémont abruptly ceased in late summer, coinciding with the police investigations. The Duke of Seville and Charles Otzenberger, but not the Marquis de Farémont, were each awarded the Cross of Honour 1st Class, the highest grade of the Princely House Order of Hohenzollern, in gratitude.

But the focal point in Germany shifted to a new figure. In mid-March 1933, **Georg Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz** was invested as Knight Grand Cross. In a letter to Prince Friedrich, whose position was more ceremonial, Duke Georg not only announced his appointment but also outlined a programme. He expressed his commitment to propagate the Order in Germany, aiming to "awaken and unfold" the ideals of old Catholic chivalry and true loyalty to the Holy Church.¹⁵

On 25 November 1933, Duke Georg reported a correspondence with Otzenberger. The hope was expressed from Paris that French and German knights could contribute to peace. It's worth noting that during this time, Adolf Hitler had been Chancellor of the Reich for a few months. Duke Georg conveyed that there were only 10-12 knights in Germany at that moment, and the Chancellery of the Order sought to increase their numbers. This could also happen by decreasing the admission fee which ranged between 5,000 and 15,000 Francs depending on the rank or category of justice or grace.¹⁶ The "co-operation of influential and patriotic personalities" needed to be gained. Interestingly, the Order had reserved the right to exceptionally invest non-Catholics, provided they

¹⁵ *Letter dated 21 Mar 1933, Mecklenburg to Hohenzollern, State Archives Sigmaringen, FAS HS 1-80 T 12 R 53, Nr. 101.*

¹⁶ Federal Archives, R 53/94 Bd. 1. According to the current value this would be €1,580-4,742.

paid homage to the Pope.¹⁷ The admittance of other denominations was gradually changed in 1949 and 1962.¹⁸

The first investiture in a public setting occurred in Berlin on 14 June 1934. Reverend Nikolaus Maier was invested, with Bishop Nikolaus Bares of Berlin, a member of the Order, presiding over the pontifical mass. The choice of such a high-profile event for a priest without a prominent position remains unclear. It may have been for publicity reasons or in the hope of attracting additional individuals for admission. This possibly included the Bishop of Osnabrück, Wilhelm Berning, Mecklenburg's senior pastor, whose diploma was signed just a few weeks later.¹⁹ Similar to other countries, there are no reports of any activities in Germany for the subsequent years other than the admittance of a few new members. Worth of note is Conrad Gröber, the Archbishop of Freiburg.²⁰

The Order's situation in Germany faced challenges as the National Socialists took charge in 1933, leading to a gradual reorganization of the state. The political developments impacted the Order, evident in the discussion relating to insignia, a topic initiated by Bishop Berning, who was also a Prussian State Councillor. Stricter laws on orders prohibited the wearing of insignia resembling state decorations. Furthermore, a license was required for ecclesiastical or foreign insignia, with penalties extending to imprisonment. The Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz argued broadly basing the argument on the fact that since the Order of Saint

¹⁷ *Letter 25 Nov 1933, Mecklenburg to Hohenzollern*, Federal Archives, 53/89

¹⁸ The statues of 26 May 1949 (here Art. 25) were published and are recorded in the Federal Archives B 311/230. The decree of 28 July 1962 was published in *La Croix de Sinople* 2 (1963), 3ff.

¹⁹ *Diploma dated 18 Jul 1934*, Diocesan Archives Osnabrück, U2 1934 Juli 18

²⁰ *Letter dated 3 Dec 1935, Mecklenburg to Hohenzollern*, State Archives Sigmaringen, FAS HS 1-80 T 12 R 53, Nr. 116.

Lazarus had once been recognised by the Holy See, the Grand Master held the right to still confer its decorations. If this was not so, then the Order of the Holy Sepulchre and the Order of Malta would be likewise affected.²¹ A member of the *Accademia Araldica* in Rome, later opposing the Order of Saint Lazarus regularly, enquired about how to deal with the ban on wearing “so-called independent orders of chivalry”.²² As a result, the Order of Malta had also to refrain from wearing insignia in Germany.²³

This was compounded when, in 1932, the Vatican had it made clear in the correspondence with the German Embassy, that they did not recognise the Order of St Lazarus. The Order of Malta also reported complaints against the Lazarites in Germany and the sale of insignia in France.²⁴ A public statement was published in April 1935 in *L'Osservatore Romano* where the Holy See asserted that only the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus was recognised as having a historic continuity and that the “Boigny” group did not hold any canonical status, but that the Order of Mount Carmel did.²⁵ Incidentally, the Auxiliar Bishop of Barcelona *inter alia* repeated these statements in Spain a few years later.²⁶ Nonetheless, Archbishop Gröber joined the Order a few months later.

²¹ Letter dated 31 Dec 1935, Mecklenburg to Hohenzollern, State Archives Sigmaringen, *ibid*.

²² State Archives Sigmaringen, FAS DS 70 T 1 Nr. 113.

²³ German Association of the Order of Malta. *The Order of Malta in Germany*, (Haar/Munich 2011), 70.

²⁴ Federal Archives, R 105183

²⁵ *L'Osservatore Romano*, 15/16.iv.1935. There also seems to appear the dispute whether only the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was recognized as canonical order and not the secularised Order of St Lazarus.

²⁶ *Boletín Oficial del Obispado Barcelona* 9 (1942), 459-461.

The abdication of Hohenzollern as Grand Prior does not appear to have been influenced by this statement. He participated in the election of the Grand Master in December, but resigned shortly afterwards. As his Head of Cabinet, Baron Hallberg, noted that the prince will “maintain his position” until the Order “received official recognition by various governments”.²⁷ Consequently, in the following years, the Duke of Mecklenburg took over the Order's affairs exclusively. He was also aware of the Order's fortunes abroad. He was furthermore able to report that there was no longer a chancellery in Paris in 1948, as the Order – specifically Charles Otzenberger – had become aligned with the Vichy France under General Pétain.²⁸

The correspondence provides several interesting pieces of information.

- 1) According to Baron Hallberg, Prince Hohenzollern had already resigned from office before the war. Nevertheless, Otzenberger, in November 1938, referred to the prince as Grand Prior when reporting about the investiture of the Romanian king, a member of the Hohenzollern family.²⁹ He was again named Grand Prior in the April 1950 issue of *La Croix de Sinople*.³⁰
- 2) The connection between the Order and the family was known, but apparently not his resignation. For example, Prince Friedrich

²⁷ Letter dated 2 Mar 1936 to Zeininger, State Archives Sigmaringen, FAS DS 70 T 1 Nr. 113. The entire correspondence indicates clearly that "recognition" refers to state sanctioning as a knightly order, not registration as a charitable organisation.

²⁸ Letter dated 25 Aug 1948 from Ludwig Graf Strachwitz to the Princely Chancellery (General Clössner), State Archives Sigmaringen, FAS DS 70 T 1 Nr. 113.

²⁹ Letter dated 19 Nov 1938 from Otzenberger to Hohenzollern, *ibid*.

³⁰ *La Croix Sinople* 3 (1950), 4 (without pagination).

Christian of Saxony, in 1948, still gave the advice to contact his brother-in-law.³¹

- 3) Mecklenburg was still the Order's central point of contact in Germany at the beginning of the 1950s, suggesting that the Order was still somehow present after the end of the Second World War.

International growth

Intensive growth can be observed on a worldwide scale during the same period. In South America, dictatorial heads of state at the time were usually awarded the Grand Cross. Charles Otzenberger was very likely the driving force here due to his close economic ties to the continent. Among these awardees one can include: Rafael Trujillo Molina (Dominican Republic, 1933), Tiburcio Carias Andino (Honduras, 1934), Getulio Vargas (Brazil, 1936, with the Archbishop of Cuiabá invested in 1934), Jorge Ubico Castañeda (Guatemala, 1937), Juan Demostenes Arosemana (Panama, 1937), Agustin Pedro Justo (Argentina, 1938), and Oscar Benavides (Peru, 1939). These awards, however, do not mean that national organisations were created in all these countries, although this did occur in limited cases (namely Argentina and the Dominican Republic).

In spring of 1934, two additional delegations were established, one for the Baltic States and one in Canada (under the Austrian Consul General and politician Thomas Guerin). In addition, a Grand Bailiwick in Mexico under the Marqués de Guadalupe Gallardo was also set up.³² The Italian Grand Priory also grew with Marquese Adriano Colocci Vespucci and the Cardinal Major Penitentiary Lorenzo Lauri being admitted. Prince Gian

³¹ *Letter dated 16 Feb 1951 from Zimmermann to Oehmichen*, State Archives Sigmaringen, FAS DS 70 T 1 Nr. 113.

³² Leone Castelli. *La Estafa de San Lazaro* (Mexico: Geno Latino, 1944) mentions that the Marquis protested against his appointment as he never agreed. However, see subsequent article in this issue.

Giacomo Borghese became the Prince Grand Prior. During the year, a Grand Priory of Poland and a Delegation of Switzerland was also created, alongside with the Grand Priory of Acre.³³

By this time, the list of members outside France was longer than that within the home country. The year 1935 led to a new international structure and the strengthening of existing jurisdictions. A Grand Prior of Brazil was set up in early 1935. Maurice van Vollenhoven, former Dutch envoy in Belgium and Spain, married to Princess Maria Christine of Bourbon, was admitted thus laying the foundation for the Grand Priory in the Netherlands. Meanwhile, the Grand Priory of Poland was led by Count Jan Zamoyski, the husband of an Infanta of Spain.

The end of that year saw the opening of a new development in the structure of the Order: the Chapter General. Comte d'Évora in 2023 presented an interesting genealogy linking the Borbón family to the historical order.³⁴ The Duke of Sevilla's father was one of the competing persons claiming the right of succession to the French throne. Paul Watrin

³³ It is noteworthy to mention that H.B. Cyril IX, the Melkite patriarch, was not ever mentioned in *La Vie Chevaleresque*. In contrast, another Melkite ecclesiastical, Bishop Gregoire Haggiar, is listed as Spiritual Grand Prior of the Order. Born in Lebanon in 1875, Haggiar was appointed Eparch of Acre in 1901, based in Haifa, and remained so until his death in 1940. He was never elevated to Archbishop as he was titled in the Order's publications. His successor became the later Patriarch Maximox V Hakim who served as Spiritual Protector to the Order, an office established after his ascension to the patriarchal throne.

³⁴ Comte d'Évora. *Reflexions on the choice of a Spanish Borbón to lead the Order in the 20th century*. Lecture: Sancti Lazari Ordinis Academia Internationalis, Academic Meeting, Gotha, Germany, 28th July 2023.

was one of those supporting the claims of the Spanish Borbón family branch.³⁵

It did however require some strategic manoeuvres to enable the election of Francisco de Borbón, a Spanish citizen although living partly in France, to become head of a French-origin association. To overcome this, the Order founded a Spanish association which statutes mandated that the president bears the title “Grand Master”. On 31 July, he was elected under the terms of this association's statutes.³⁶ The Vatican's comments against the Order published just a few months before did not seem to play any role in the discussions.

In 1936, a delegate for San Marino was appointed, and the first members in Great Britain emerged. Francisco Franco was admitted at the beginning of 1937, along with Grand Duke Cyril of Russia, the King of Romania (nominally, practically one year later), and the Tsar of Bulgaria. The Grand Priory of Bohemia was established with Prince Karl VI Schwarzenberg as delegate. The first investitures in Cuba, Ireland, Lithuania, Puerto Rico, and Slovakia followed in 1938. In the USA, the Papal Marquis George MacDonald became the new Grand Bailiff.

The year 1939 was a time of consolidation and recruitment of new members in the now existing structures. The invasion of Poland by Hitler Germany in September of the same year and the resulting conflagration led to the Second World War. The Order's office in Paris was affected, and *La Vie Chevaleresque* was published for a final issue in the spring of 1940.

³⁵ Paul Watrin. *La Tradition Monarchique*. (Paris, 1920). This book seems to be the publications of his doctoral thesis and played a role towards the contemporary legitimism.

³⁶ The statutes and the election protocol are reprinted in *Hidalguia* 3 (1953), pp. 585-587.

At last, the Order was the first time for centuries able to show its Hospitaller side, at least in France. At the end of the war in 1945, the Order was faced with another new beginning.³⁷

Conclusion

In just a few years, the Order successfully built a broad membership base, including several cardinals, numerous bishops, politicians, and highly decorated personalities worldwide. Despite rather dubious involved persons in the beginning, the Order evolved through the 20th century to become what is today.

To this day, the canonical status and authenticity of the Order remains controversial. Various considerations have been put forward, all of which are not necessarily academically convincing since definite documentary proof is lacking. This also includes the role of the Spanish king in the assumption of the office of Grand Master by the Duke of Seville, to which José María de Montells y Galán refers.³⁸ Was there a rehabilitation of the obscure beginning by involving Jean des Courtils de Bessy, the seventh hereditary commander of the Commandery de la Motte des Courtils, in spite of the fact that hereditary commanderies had been more or less abolished more 150 years previously? Many unanswered questions relating to the history of the Order persist. Historiography, when performed honestly and using an academic approach, may in the future reveal how many resurrections of Lazarus truly occurred.

³⁷ The publication of *La Croix de Sinople* published between 1948 and 1954 was recently discovered in the National Library of France and may shed new light on the early post-war years.

³⁸