A brief history of the Grand Priory of Sweden of the Paris Obedience: A personal view

Kent H Harrskog [1] and Jerker Westdahl [2]

Abstract

The jurisdiction in Sweden of the 'Paris Obedience' branch of Order of Saint Lazarus together with 15 other jurisdictions elected Prince Charles-Philippe d'Orléans, the Duke of Anjou, as Grand Master at a Chapter General in Toronto in 2004. This was after an initially unconstitutional meeting where members of the 'Malta Obedience' attempted, via a coup d'état, to elect then serving Grand Master of the 'Malta Obedience'. The subsequent history over the next two decades is described leading to the formal unification of the two jurisdictions representing the Order in Sweden in 2021. Later in Lignières, France in May 2024, there was also a reunion between the 'Paris Obedience' under Prince Sixte-Henry of Bourbon-Parme and the 'Malta Obedience' under Don Francisco de Borbon Graf von Hardenberg.

Keywords

Order of St Lazarus, Sweden, unification, Paris Obedience, Malta Obedience

[1] H.E. Chev. Lt.Gen. Kent H. Harrskog GCLJ GCMLJ served as Grand Prior of Sweden (2002-2022) and Grand Prior Emeritus (2022 --). He further served as former President of the Grand Magistral Council of the Paris Obedience. He is a Fellow of the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences; Associate Fellow of the Experimental Test Pilots Association, Lancaster, California; Former Commanding General of Joint Forces in Southern Sweden; and Former Chief of the Air Force and the Air Staff.

[2] H.E. Chev. Lt. Col Jerker Westdahl GCLJ KMLJ served as Grand Marshal (2016-2020). His is now a retired Officer of the Swedish Army and former Vice-President of the Swedish Veterans Federation (2015-2023).

Introduction

At the time of Kent H Harrskog's admission to the Order in the late 90's, the Order of Saint Lazarus was, in Sweden, represented by two branches, generally referred to as the Paris Obedience and the Malta Obedience. The relations between the branches in Sweden were good and members were regularly invited to each other's investitures. In 2002, Harrskog was appointed Grand Prior of the Grand Priory of Sweden after the previous Grand Prior predecessor Ulf Alfredson GCLJ GOMLJ. This appointment was confirmed by the Grand Master of the Paris Obedience François de Cossé, 13th Duke of Brissac (GM 1986-2004; emeritus 2004-2021).[3]

Chapter General of the Paris Obedience – Toronto 2004

In 2004, the Grand Master invited all the Knights and Dames of the Paris Obedience to a Chapter General to be held in Toronto. The main item on the agenda was the election of a new Grand Master of the Paris Obedience, since the Count de Brissac had decided to resign in view of his age. Two potential candidates were proposed – the Duke of Seville H.E. Don Francisco de Paula Enrique de Borbón y Escasany serving as Grand Master of the Malta Obedience, and the Duke of Anjou Prince Charles-Philippe d'Orléans. During the meeting, it became evident that a significant number of attendees of the American and Canadian delegations included an unknown number of members belonging to the Malta Obedience branch who were vying for the election of the Duke of Seville. This was obviously a planned *coup d'etat.* Members from the English Grand Priory were very critical and outspoken.

The jurisdictions from France, England, Ireland, the Netherlands, Italy, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Croatia, New Zealand and a small group from the USA, constituting the majority of the

[3] The 12th Duke of Brissac, Pierre de Cossé, had also served as Grand Master of the Paris Obedience (GM 1969-1986; Emeritus 1986-1993).

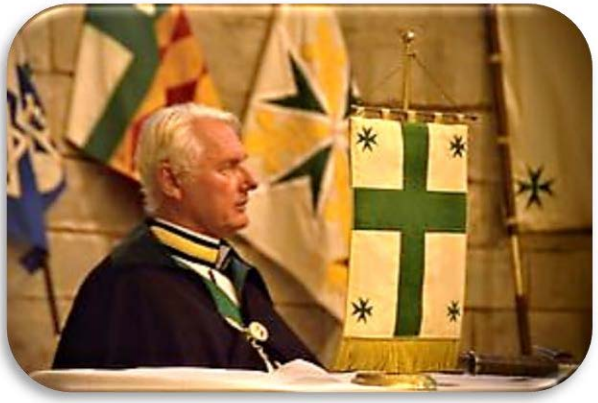
jurisdictions present, declared the proceedings unconstitutional and continued the Chapter General meeting (initially with Kent H Harrskog as chairman) in another conference room within the same hotel. This meeting formally elected Charles-Philippe d'Orléans, the Duke of Anjou, as the new Grand Master of the 'Paris Obedience'. The 'Paris Obedience' jurisdictions from the USA, Canada, Scotland, Germany, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Brazil and Australia chose not to remain members within the 'Paris Obedience'. The above described events surrounding the Toronto Chapter General left no option other than to accept that the legacy of Brissac's 'Paris Obedience' was now legally held by the group led by the Duke of Anjou as the Grand Master.

Duke of Anjou Charles-Philippe d'Orléans

Subsequent divisions

The Duke of Anjou Charles-Philippe d'Orléans served as Grand Master until 2010 when he unexpectedly resigned his post during a meeting in Budapest. Since the meeting in Budapest was not a Chapter General, no new Grand Master could be elected and the Anglican bishop Rt Revd. Richard Garrard took over the management as Administrator General until a new Grand Master

could be chosen.[4] HRH Prince Sixte-Henry de Bourbon-Parme was officially elected by a Chapter General held on the 10th of September 2015 in Aigues-Mortes, France and was installed as Grand Master in Jerusalem on the 19th of October 2015 in the Church of Saint Vincent de Paul in the Old City.[5]



H.R.H. Prince Sixte-Henry de Bourbon-Parme

During the leadership of the Duke of Anjou, some jurisdictions left the 'Paris Obedience' to join the 'Malta Obedience'. As a result of discontent with the management of the Grand Chancellor Philippe Piccapietra, an increasing number of jurisdictions opted to

[4] In the interim, the Grand Magistry, without calling a Chapter General, appointed Jan Count Dobrzenský z Dobrzenicz, previously serving as Grand Prior of the Czech jurisdiction, as the new Grand Master. This group led by Count Dobrzenský is generally referred to as the *Orléans Obedience*. G.M. Count Dobrzenský, in September 2023, was succeeded as Grand Master by the Count of Dreux Prince François d'Orléans. See: Order of Saint Lazarus (listed in the Statutes of 1910). *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia* (Wikipedia Foundation Ltd, U.S.A., 6.viii.2025), accessed 15.viii.2025.

[5] The group is generally referred to as the *Jerusalem Obedience* to differentiate it from the Orléans Obedience which continued to be led by G.M. Count Dobrzenský. See: Order of Saint Lazarus (listed in the Statutes of 1910). *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia* (Wikipedia Foundation Ltd, U.S.A., 6.viii.2025), accessed 15.viii.2025.

leave the organization to join the 'Malta Obedience', now led by the Marquis de Almazan H.E. Carlos Géreda y de Borbón, who had succeeded the Duke of Seville as Grand Master. These departures dwindled the membership base significantly leaving only the Grand Priory of Norway, the Grand Priory of Sweden, and the Priory of the United States. By 2019, it became very clear the Grand Chancellor had undertaken some serious financial irregularities. Because of this, the remaining jurisdictions formed the "Temporarily Independent Grand Priories of Norway, Sweden and the United States", with the purpose that each jurisdiction should negotiate with their local counterparts in the original 'Malta Obedience', now led by Grand Master Francisco de Borbón y Hardenberg. During this period, because of the absence of a Grand Master, neither investitures nor promotions were made.

Final unification

The issue of approaching the other Grand Priory branch of the Malta Obedience in Sweden was put forward in late 2019. The originally Paris Obedience Grand Prior, H.E. Chev Kent Harrskog contacted his counterpart from the 'Malta Obedience', Chev. Anders Ekman. A preliminary meeting was held in Gothenburg on 9 December, 2020, with subsequent meetings being held on 28 January, 2021 (Stockholm), 24 February, 2021 (Gothenburg), and 13 August, 2021 (Gothenburg). The meetings were attended by Chevs Kent Harrskog (Grand Prior), Peter Löwegren (Hospitaller) and Jerker Westdahl (Treasurer) representing the 'Paris Obedience' branch, and Chevs Anders Ekman (Grand Prior), Jan Salestrand (former Grand Prior who attended two meetings), John Björklund (then Prior who attended two meetings) and Jan Lofjärd (then Chancellor and now Prior who attended one meeting). Following the meeting in February 2021, a Letter of Intent was signed by the respective two Grand Priors representing the 'Paris and Malta Obedience'. A copy is attached as well as an English translation [see Appendix]. This clearly shows how the merger of the two Grand Priories would be implemented. During the spring and summer of

2021, each individual member of 'Paris Obedience' who wanted to join the proposed merger with the 'Malta Obedience' was asked to sign a formal Petition to Join. These were then sent through the Chancellor, Chev. Jan Lofjärd, to the Grand Chancellor of the Order. All of them were accepted by the newly acknowledged Grand Master Francisco de Borbón y Hardenberg.

H.E. Chev. Anders Ekman and H.E. Chev. Kent Harrskog signing the Letter of Intent 24.ii.2021 (© Jerker Westdahl)

The merger necessitated a reorganization of the jurisdiction. The new members of the 'Malta Obedience' were distributed among the existing Commanderies and the dormant Commandery, '*Sankta Gertrud*' in Skåne, was revived. A total of 97 members joined the merger. Among these were six former members of the 'Paris Obedience' leadership. These were: Kent Harrskog - Former President of the Grand Magistral Council and Grand Prior of Sweden, now *emeritus*; James Parry – Former Grand Secretary; Mark von Baumgarten – Former President of the Constitutional Council; Peter Löwegren – Former Member and later President of the Constitutional Council, now *emeritus*; Jerker Westdahl –

Former Grand Marshal (now *emeritus*); and Johan Sohlberg – Grand Treasurer *emeritus*.

The merger was completed in the fall of 2021 with an extraordinary Annual General Meeting held on 11 September in Gothenburg. At that time, some of the members from the former 'Paris Obedience' were elected to the Board of the united Jurisdiction. Chev. Peter Löwegren became Hospitaller and Dame Cecilia Magnusson became Secretary. In addition, Chev. Kent Harrskog was co-opted as Senior Advisor, while Chev. Jerker Westdahl as Deputy Treasurer. On 20 November, 2021, the first joint investiture was carried out in Gothenburg, where a new member from 'Paris Obedience' was also admitted to the Order and one was promoted. The Paris Obedience group did not come empty-handed. They brought competence, and a considerable amount of money. In December, 2021, approximately SEK 1,700,000 (= €154,513) was transferred from the previous Paris Obedience Grand Priory to the new joint Grand Priory's Treasury. Of these funds, approximately SEK 1,500,000 (= €136,335) were dedicated to hospitaller funds. This financial contribution exceeded the assets of the old Grand Priory from the 'Malta Obedience' by a very large margin. This gave the new merged Grand Priory a stable economy as a good foundation for our continued important work. In addition, the Paris Obedience group brought an ongoing fully financed charity program in West Africa started by Chevalier Ulf Alfredson as Grand Prior and led by the Hospitallers Bishop *Emerita* Christina Odenberg and Peter Löwegren. Both have made a number of rather exhausting trips to our small hospital in Fullabantang, Gambia. A similar arrangement was made with the members from Norway, while those in the U.S. went their own way.

The group, led by Kent Harrskog, was also influential in enticing the former *Jerusalem-Paris Obedience* Grand Master, H.R.H. Prince Sixte-Henry de Bourbon-Parme to join the Order led

by Grand Master Francisco de Borbón y Hardenberg, which took place on 4 May, 2024, in Lignières, France. [6]

Conclusion

The divided branches of the Order of Saint Lazarus in Sweden have finally united into one jurisdiction within one international Order. The events described above are now a part of the jurisdiction's history. United, the jurisdiction can achieve very much more for people in need. Let us go forward towards the future under the motto *Atavis et Armis*!

Appendix: Letter of Intent for unification 24.ii.2021 - Translation[7]

1. This Letter of Intent is intended to serve as a basis for a decision on the merger between the two branches of the Order, Malta Obedience, hereinafter referred to as M.O. and Paris Obedience, hereinafter referred to as P.O. This basis shall be presented at the respective annual meeting for approval and decision.
2. As soon as the approval of the annual meeting is obtained, the merger shall commence. It must be determined which "legal body" shall be used for the purpose. Initially, the finances shall be merged with the exception of the P.O.'s hospital funds which must be kept separate before the respective donors approve the change. It is appropriate that the assets are transferred when new donations come to our aid and more information is brought about the changes. The balance sheets of the respective branch shall be audited by a representative from the other branch. The end date for this shall be 1 October at the

[6] Chevs. Kent H Harrskog, Peter Löwegren, and Jerker Westdahl have striven towards a complete formal reunification between the branch led by Grand Master Prince Sixte-Henri de Bourbon-Parme and that by Grand Master Francisco de Borbón y Hardenberg. This was achieved in 2024 in Lignières, France. See: Sixte Henri de Bourbone Parme and Francisco de Borbon Graf von Hardenberg. *Accord de Reunification.* (04.v.2024). Malta: Torri ta' Lanzun MHOSLJ Archives; Christian d'Andlau-Hombourg and Alain Julet. *Accord de Réunification – Modalités Pratiques (04.v.2024).* Malta: Torri ta' Lanzun MHOSLJ Archives.

[7] Translation by Chev. Jerker Westdahl.

latest. The ambition is that the merger of M..O and P.O. will be completed by December 31, 2021.

3. In connection with the merger, P.O. members swear an oath of allegiance to Don Francisco de Borbon and receive brevets. P.O.'s former members shall enter the new Priory with the same rank and with their Crosses of Merit. However, some rank adjustments may be made. Insignia and mantles shall be replaced at a time to be determined later.
4. Former Grand Prior from P.O. and Hospitaller from P.O. will initially be members of the Board of the Grand Prior. These shall be appointed for a three-year period at the annual general meeting of M.O. The Treasurer from P.O. shall be appointed Vice-Treasurer and Vice-Secretary in the same way.
5. Commandery affiliation for new members. Launching of the Commandery of St Gertrude, with the Commandery banner from P.O., including a Commander from P.O. and a "Commandery-Sponsor" and temporary Commandery Marshal from M.O. The rest of the Officers shall be appointed by the new Commander. Members of the P.O. are distributed according to the place of residence, but they can choose another Commandery if desired.
6. Information to members of both OSLJ Obediences will be provided immediately after the signing of this document. After each Annual General Meeting, information shall be sent to the new members with attachments: OSLJ-MO's statutes, both Swedish and international, organization within Sweden and internationally, rules for promotion, rules for awards, etc.

   Logos, websites, etc. will be coordinated with the M.O.

   Local meetings with the participation of both Grand Priors from each Obedience shall be organized. Time and place for the Solemn Assembly with Investiture shall be determined later.

   A joint committee shall be established with the purpose of determining the details of the merger.

Gothenburg, February 24, 2021

Anders Ekman	Kent Harrskog
Grand Prior OSLJ-MO	Grand Prior OSLJ-PO

Letter of Intent

1. Denna avsiktsförklaring är tänkt att fungera som underlag för beslut om samgående mellan Ordens två Storpriorat i Sverige, Malta Obedience, i fortsättningen benämnt MO och Paris Obedience, i fortsättningen benämnt PO. Detta underlag skall presenteras vid PO årsmöte för godkännande och beslut.

2. Så snart årsmötets godkännande föreligger påbörjas sammanslagningen. Ambitionen är att vi ska kunna verka som en organisation den 1 juli. Initialt sammanläggs ekonomierna med undantag för PO´s hospitalitmedel som måste hållas åtskilda innan respektive donatorer godkänner förändringen. Lämpligen förs tillgångarna över när nya donationer kommer oss till del och det lättare kan informeras om förändringarna. Respektive grens balansräkningar skall revideras av representant från andra grenen. Slutdatum för detta senast 31 oktober. Ambitionen är att sammanslagningen av MO och PO skall vara avslutad senast 31 december 2021. PO medlemmar betalar medlemsavgift till MO fr.o.m 2022.

3. I samband med sammanslagningen svär PO´s medlemmar trohetsed till Don Francisco de Borbon Graf von Hardenberg och erhåller brevets. PO tidigare medlemmar går in med samma grad och med sina meritkors i det nya prioratet. Vissa OLJ förs till graden CLJ. Insignier och mantlar byts ut vid tillfälle som bestäms senare.

4. Tidigare storprior från PO samt Hospitaliten från PO kommer initialt att ingå i Ordensrådet. Dessa utses för en treårsperiod vid årsstämman för MO. Skattmästare från PO utses till biträdande Skattmästare och annan medlem ur PO utses till Sekreterare på samma sätt.

5. Kommanderitillhörighet för nya medlemmar.
   Igångsättande av Kommanderiet S:ta Gertrud i Skåne, med Kommanderifana från PO.
   Kommendator från PO och en "Kommanderi-fadder" samt tillfällig Kommanderi-Marskalk från MO. Resten av Ämbetsmännen utses av den nya Kommendatorn. Medlemmar i PO fördelas enligt bostadsort, men var och en kan välja annat Kommanderi/Delegation om så önskas.

6. Information till medlemmar i de båda grenarna görs omgående efter detta dokuments undertecknande. Efter årsmöte i PO översänds information till POs medlemmarna med bilagor; OSLJ-MO´s stadgar, både de svenska och internationella, organisation inom Sverige och internationellt, regler för befordran, regler för utmärkelsetecken, mm.
   Logotyper, hemsidor etc. samordnas till MO.

7. Lokala möten med deltagande av de båda Storpriorerna ska organiseras. Tidpunkt och plats för Högtidssammankomst med Investitur bestäms senare.

8. Gemensam kommitté upprättas med syfte att bestämma detaljerna för sammanslagningen.

Göteborg 24 februari 2021

Anders Ekman
Storprior OSLJ-MO

Kent Harrskog
Storprior OSLJ-PO