Admission of Minors to the Order of St Lazarus

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Abstract

In common with other Chivalric Orders, the minimum statutory age of admission to the Order of St Lazarus was originally identified as being around the legal age of maturity at sixteen years of age, this being significantly augmented to thirty years of age. Despite the formal statutes and regulations, admissions of individuals in their minority years did occasionally take place.

Keywords

Order of St Lazarus, admissions, minority age

Introduction

The 'coming of age' is considered to be the transition age at which a young person is considered to formally mature from being a child to becoming an adult. The specific age at which this transition takes place varies between societies, as does the nature of the change. It can be a simple legal convention or can be part of a ritual or spiritual event. The age of majority, therefore, is the threshold of legal adulthood as recognized or declared in law, reflecting the moment when the person ceases to be considered a minor, and assumes legal control over his person, actions and decisions, thus terminating the control and legal responsibilities of his parents or guardian. During the 1700s in France, the age of adulthood was generally considered to be 14 for boys and 12 for girls. This definition, however, was more complex, and full legal adulthood for contracting purposes was often considered around the age of 25 years, especially in the nobility. The 'coming of age' was therefore a complex factor in eighteenth-century France, with societal expectations and legal frameworks creating a spectrum of the age at which one was

considered an "adult" rather than having a definite legally fixed age. Notwithstanding the definition of maturity, active Chivalric Orders had provisions for admission at a relatively young age even before reaching legal adulthood. These Orders of Chivalry frequently accepted noble youth and children of noble families into the Order's lay or religious branches, with the expectation that they would be trained and prepared for future roles within the Order. Admission of minors was often contingent upon gaining the approval of family and the Order's authorities, and these early entries served as a form of junior membership or apprenticeship.

The Order of St John of Malta

While specific explicit policies relating to the admission of minors may not always be documented in detail, there are historical references that illustrate the practices of the Order of St John of Malta regarding their admissions, including early admission of young members. These references and the broader historical context support the practice of admitting young individuals sometimes before they reached full legal age. Knights took their solemn vows at the age of twenty-one. The terms of admission of minors within this Order have been summarised by the British historian Henry J.A. Sire.

> *"The traditional way of admission was as a 'Knight of Majority', entering the novitiate at the age of between sixteen and twenty. The reception of twelve-year-old boys as Pages of the Grand Master increased in the sixteenth century, and in 1612 their number was raised from eight to sixteen. Admission of even younger children 'in Minority' by special dispensation also increased, and the Chapter-General of 1631 authorised a hundred Bulls of Minority to be granted, requiring double the reception fees of the Knights of Minority and Pages. This proved so popular that the privilege was extended indefinitely, those who entered by it rapidly outnumbering the other two classes. Pages and Knights of Minority enjoyed seniority from the date of their reception, but had to perform at the normal age the same novitiate and other duties as the rest."* [1]

[1] H.J.A. Sire. *The Knights of Malta* (New Haven, U.S.A.: Yale University Press, 1994), p.83.

The Order of St Lazarus

The statutory admission process within the United Orders of St Lazarus of Jerusalem and Our Lady of Mount Carmel was first defined in the newly promulgated 1649 statutes of the Order. These clearly restrict admission to individuals considered to be in their minority age:

> *'Personne ne sera receu en quelque condition que ce soit :*
> *… Qui n'aye atteint l'aage de 16 ans, sain de corps & d'esprit, capiable de porter les armes.'* [2]

Events and circumstances in the following decades led to changes in attitudes towards admission policies. One important event was the decision by King Louis XV in 1757 to appoint the three-year-old Louis-Auguste de France, Duc de Berry (*1754 †1793), to the post of *Grande-Maître & Chef Général* of the combined Orders; while retaining for himself the title of *Souverain Chef, Fondateur & Protecteur*. Louis-Philippe Phélypeaux, Comte de Saint-Florentin (*1705 †1777), was also admitted in 1757 and appointed as *Administrateur* to help manage the Orders. The appointment of the Duc de Berry as Grand Master during his minority years would certainly have influence on the admission of members in their minority years.

Another important mid-eighteenth-century development potentially influencing the admission criteria to the Orders was the establishment of the *École Royale Militaire* by Louis XV in 1750. The first students were admitted to the *École* in May, 1753. To honour the graduates, Louis XV decreed that those completing the course of studies were to be admitted as *Chevaliers Novice* of the combined *Ordre de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel and S. Lazarus* by way of special dispensation and given the cross of minority of the Order. The first *Chevaliers Novice* admissions from the

[2] L.P.C.D.M. *Mémoires, règles et statuts, cérémonies et privilèges des Ordres Militaires de Notre Dame du Mont Carmel et de S. Lazare de Jérusalem* (Paris : Antoine Cellier, 1649), p.83.

École were made in 1759.[3] The *Ecole Royale Militaire* originally admitted boys of noble birth aged eight to eleven years old. The aim was to give them an eight-year course leading to commissions as Lieutenants.[4] In 1757, a series of reforms were introduced aiming to limit admission to the Order of Saint Lazarus to one hundred professed Knights chosen from among the gentlemen of the most ancient nobility in the kingdom. The minimum entry age was set at thirty years, though this could be reduced to the age of twenty-five years if the serving Grand Master thought the individual was meritorious. At the same time, Article XV considered the admission of graduates of the *École Royale Militaire* to the Order even though they had not yet reached thirty years of age. Admission to the eight-year course at the *École Royale Militaire* was set at the age of eight to thirteen years for orphans and the age of eight to eleven years for those who had a surviving parent.[5] The age at graduation would have been at a minimum of 16 years. These latter members were to wear the small cross form of the insignia.[6]

> *Article 3 : Aucunes personnes ne pourront pareillement être reçues dans les dits Ordres, qu'à l'âge de trente ans accomplis ; et si, par des considérations particulières et relatives à l'avantage de la religion, et au bien du service de Sa Majesté, le Grand Maître jugeait à propos de conférer plutôt ces Ordres à quelques personnes, l'intention de Sa Majesté est qu'il ne le puisse faire au-dessous de l'âge de vingt-cinq ans accomplis, sans qu'il puisse pareillement être accordé de dispenses sur cet article, et ce,*

[3] Fleur Brincat. L'École Royale Militaire and the Ordre de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel. *Acta Historiae Sancti Lazari Ordinis*, 1 (2016), pp.37-55.

[4] Richard A. Preston. *Harmon Memorial Lecture – Perspectives in the History of Military Education and Professionalism*. U.S.A. Air Force, 1980), p.4, available https://www.usafa.edu/app/uploads/Harmon22.pdf [accessed 31.viii.2025].

[5] *Mémoire instructif sur ce que les parents doivent observer pour proposer leurs enfants pour l' École royale militaire et pour le Collège royal de La Flèche* (Paris: Impr. Royale, 1764), +2pp., Art. 15.

[6] Louis XV. *Règlement du 15 juin 1757*. Transcribed in : Garden de Saint-Ange. *Code des ordres de chevalerie du royaume, dédié au Roi* (Paris : Belin-Le Prieur & Delaunay, 1819), pp.412-423 ; R. Laulan. La fondation de l'École Royale Militaire et Madame de Pompadour. *Revue d'histoire modern et contemporaine* 21(2) (1974), pp.285-297.

nonobstant tous statuts, règlements et usages des dits Ordres à ce contraires … .

Article 15 : Veut néanmoins Sa Majesté que ceux des gentilshommes qui auront été élevés dans l'École Royale Militaire, et qu'elle jugera à propos d'admettre dans les dits Ordres, puissent y être reçus en satisfaisant à l'article 1er du présent règlement, quoiqu'ils n'eussent pas l'âge prescrit par l'article 3 d'icelui, et que le nombre de cent Chevaliers, auquel elle veut que les dits Ordres soient réduits à l'avenir, se trouvât rempli ; son intention étant qu'il puisse être excédé en faveur des dits gentilshommes seulement qu'elle jugera à propos d'y admettre. Veut pareillement que ceux d'entre eux que Sa Majesté ou le Grand-Maître jugeront à propos de recevoir dans les dits Ordres, soient exempts du droit de passage et tous autres droits, lorsqu'ils seront reçus dans les dits Ordres : son intention est au surplus, que jusqu'à ce qu'ils aient l'âge de trente ans accomplis, ils ne puissent porter que la petite Croix des dits Ordres à quatre branches, attachée à la boutonnière avec un ruban de la couleur de celui des dits Ordres ; et même lorsqu'ils auront atteint le dit âge de trente ans, ils ne pourront porter la grande Croix et cordon des dits Ordres ; sans en avoir obtenu la permission du Grand Maître…..

Further amendments to the regulations were made during the Grand Magistry of Louis-Stanislas-Xavier, Comte de Provence (*1755 †1824, appointed GM in 1773). The reviewed regulations promulgated in 1778 confirmed the thirty-year age limit for admission to the senior Order of St Lazarus.[7] Further regulations were promulgated to address the graduates of the *École Royale Militaire* and the admission to the junior Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. These regulations formally separated the two Orders, with the junior Order being awarded to the three most meritorious graduates. Graduates of the *École Royale Militaire* were to be admitted to the senior Order of St Lazarus should they distinguish

[7] Louis-Stanislas-Xavier, Comte de Provence. *Règlement du 3 décembre, 1778*. Transcribed in : Garden de Saint-Ange, 1819, *op. cit.,* pp.432-439.

themselves in battle. In these circumstances, both insignia could be worn together.[8]

> *Article 1 : L'Ordre de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel, faisant partie de ceux qui sont réunis sous la même Grand-Maîtrise, sera destiné à l'avenir aux seuls élèves de l'École Royale Militaire, que seront jugés dignes d'être admis dans cet Ordre. …*
> *Article 5 : Lorsqu'un élève de l'École Royale Militaire, Chevalier de l'Ordre de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel, se sera distingué à la guerre par quelque action d'éclat, qui, en réunissant les succès dus à la valeur et à l'intelligence, aura procuré quelque avantage important; le Grand-Maître, sur l'attestation du Général de l'Armée, et du Secrétaire d'État de la guerre, en se réservant toutefois le droit de juger du mérité de l'action, le recevra sur-le-champ et sans autre preuve, Chevalier de l'Ordre de Saint-Lazare; et la réunion des Croix des deux Ordres, qui ne pourra avoir lieu que dans ce seul cas, offrira la preuve honorable du service qu'il aura rendu à l'État.*

Admission during the minority years

The regulations of the two Orders appear to completely ignore the possibility of admissions of individuals who had yet to reach their legal age of maturity. This may be taken to suggest that such admissions were not considered – with the exception, of course, of the appointment made by Louis XV in 1757 of three-year-old Louis-Auguste de France, Duc de Berry, to the post of Grand Master. However, a review of the admissions registered throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries suggests that there were occasions when individuals were admitted to the Orders before reaching their legal age of maturity.

The list of admissions to the Orders of St Lazarus of Jerusalem and Our Lady of Mount Carmel referred to in this work is that collated and published by Henry-Melchior de Langle and Jean-Louis de Treourret de

[8] Louis XVI. *Règlement en faveur des Eleves de l'Ecole Royale Militaire du 21 janvier 1779*. Transcribed in: Garden de Saint-Ange. *Code des ordres de chevalerie du royaume, dédié au Roi* (Paris : Belin-Le Prieur & Delaunay, 1819), pp. 440-442.

Kerstrat in 1992.[9] The period 1610 to 1736 reflects the admissions recorded by Arthur de Marsy in 1875. [10] Later admissions up to 1788 were collated from several other sources.[11] This list is not a complete one since one does occasionally come across individuals whose biographical information confirms them to have been admitted members to the Orders, but are not listed.

The list does identify 104 admissions referred to as graduates of the *École Militare Royalle* (*élève de l' École Royale Militaire*) admitted during the period 1759 to 1787. The list is far from complete, missing out on a number of individuals including Vincent-Marie Viénot de Vaublanc.[12] The median age of these admissions was 17 years. Two individuals reported as being admitted were aged under 14 years. These included Joseph-Joachim-Basile-Regis de Builiotti(*15.vi.1754 †1844, adm. 1764) and Alexandre-Henri Nepveu de Bellefillw (*10.xii.1777 †1858, adm. 1785).[13]

The list also registers a number of individuals who reportedly were admitted as *Page des Orders* (10 admissions during the period 1610-1619). Unfortunately, only one of the listed individuals, Alexandre-François de Caponi, has had his date of birth identified. He was 12 years of age at admission (*1598, adm. 15.ii.1610). Another group of admissions

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[9] Henry-Melchior de Langle and Jean-Louis de Treourret de Kerstrat. *Les Ordres de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem et de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel aux XVII^e^ et XVIII^e^ siècles* (Paris : Publications LTK, 1991).

[10] Arthur de Marsy. *Liste des Chevaliers de l'Ordre de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem et de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel de 1610 á 1736 publiée d'après les Registres de l'Ordre* (Paris : J.-B. Dumoulin, 1875), +89pp.

[11] See : H-M de Langle & J-L de Treourret de Kerstrat, 1991, *op.cit*., pp.8-13.

[12] In his memoirs, Vincent-Marie Viénot de Vaublanc (*1815 †1845, adm. ~1773-1774) reports that during a Chapter General held in the chapel at Versailles, the Grand Master admitted twenty Novice Knights aged 17-18 years during Viénot de Vaublanc's time at the *École*. See: Vincent-Marie Viénot de Vaublanc. *Mémoires de M. Le Comte De Vaublanc avec avant-propos et notes, par M. Fs. Barriére* (Paris : Firmin Didot Frères, Fils et Co., 1857), p.56.

[13] Alexandre-Henri Nepveu de Bellefillw, admitted at 8 years of age, may have been mistaken with his brother Jacques-Daniel (*3.ix.1768 †1843) who would have been 17 years of age in 1785.

are listed as *Élève de l'Ordre* (7 admissions during the period 1701 to 1716). It has been possible to identify the dates of births of four individuals showing a median age of 15.5 years [range 14-16 years]. Three individuals were registered as being admitted as *Chevalier Novice* during the period 1766 to 1769. The age at admission of the two identified individuals was 17 years. A final group of twenty-six admissions are specifically registered as *Admis de Minorite* during the period 1711-1759. The date of birth of this group of admissions was only identified in nine individuals showing a median age at admission of seven years [range 1 to 14 years].

It would therefore appear that at least nine individuals were admitted before their legal age of maturity, i.e. 14 years. These were admitted either as *Page des Orders* during the 17th century, or as minors during the 18th century. Like the graduates of the *École Militare Royalle,* the other admissions registered as *Chevalier Novice* and *Élève de l'Ordre* were admitted after the legal age of maturity.

Five individuals admitted during their minority years particularly stand out. Claude Denis de Dorat de Chameulles (*15.vii.1729) was received into the Order of St Lazarus as a Knight of Justice at the age of 18 months on 19 September, 1730, through provisions made by the Grand Master, the Duke of Orleans. He succeeded his father, Claude Dorat de Chameulles [*1696, †1771; adm. 1720], as Commander of Saint-Louis de Juvisy and as Secretary General of the Order presumably after his death in 1771. Claude Denis married in 1766 Marie Françoise de Maupassant.[14] He was responsible for the publication of two lists of members of the Order dated 1759 and 1774.[15]

[14] H-M de Lange & J.L. de Treourret de Kerstrat, 1992, *op. cit*., admission note 1730/23, p.251; admission note 1720/17, p.211; *Almanach Royale, année MDCCXLIII* (Paris : de Houry, 1743), p.108.

[15] C.-D. Dorat de Chameulles. *Liste de MM. les Chevaliers, Commandeurs et Officiers des Ordres Royaux, Militaires et Hospitaliers de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel et de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem ...* (Paris : Vve Delatour , 1759); C.-D. Dorat de Chameulles. *Liste de MM. les Chevaliers, Commandeurs et Officiers des Ordres Royaux, Militaires et*

The second individual of note is Gabriel Nicolas Sylvain de Meuron de Montaignac Estansannes [*2.ix.1721, †17.vi.1793; adm. 6.v.1725] admitted at four years of age. In 1745, he married Albertine de Gaucourt, Dame de Cluys en Berry. He served as Captain of the Cavalry in the Queen's Regiment, Lieutenant-General of the King's armies and as Lieutenant of the King in the government of Haut and Bas-Berry.[16]

The other three individuals were admitted at the age of seven years. They were all to eventually be appointed as hereditary Commanders of Commandries set up by members of their family. Antione François Paul La Loere [*1710, adm. 10.xi.1717] is said to be co-founder with Jacques Chotelle de Montroy (ad.1717) of the hereditary *Commanderie du Mont Saint-Bernard* founded in 1717. Adrien de Bailleul [*1704, †1749; adm. 18.xii.1711] was eventually appointed the hereditary Commander of the *Commanderie de St François de Bailleul-sous-Beamont-en-Caux* which had been set up in 1710 by his uncle, François de Bailleul (ad.1702), Curate of Sainte Marie de Vattetot.[17] Jean Baptiste François Courtils de Bessy, Seignior of Vattetot and of Fontenay [*1704, †1771; adm. 18.xii.1711], served as Captain in the Béarn Regiment and was eventually appointed the hereditary Commander of the *Commanderie de La Motte-des-Courtils* which had been set up in 1701 by his father, Jean Baptiste des Courtils de La Motte (†1730; ad.1697).

Hereditary Commanderies, called 'Gradual, Masculine and Perpetual Commanderies', were established in an act that received royal approval on 9 December, 1693. With this act, members of the Order were permitted to establish a family property (or donation of funds) as a Commandery after agreement of the Grand Master and Council. The

Hospitaliers de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel et de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem ... (Paris : P.-F. Gueffier, 1774).

[16] Gabriel de Montaignac. *https://man8rove.com/fr/profile/w6pmm6nwm-gabriel-de-montaignac* [accessed 01.ix.2025]

[17] Adrien de Bailleul. https://gw.geneanet.org/wailly?lang=en&p=adrien&n=de+bailleul&oc=2

Founder Knights were regarded as *Commandeur Fondateur*. These Commanderies could be established with the hereditary right of succession and subsequent knighthood in the Order of St Lazarus provided the would-be knight conformed to the requirements established by the Statutes. The inheritance of the hereditary Commanderies was eventually defined by the reforms made by Louis XV on the 15 June, 1757, who decreed that the holdings associated with the hereditary Commanderies were to be returned to the family after the death of the founder without the heir having assumed automatic rights to become Chevaliers of the Orders without possessing the necessary requirements, and/or without having reached the required age.[18]

Conclusion

The evidence clearly confirms that while the statutes and regulations made no definite provisions for the admission on individuals during their minority years, the Grand Master did on occasion admit individuals of a young age well ahead of the age of legal maturity and well ahead of the stipulated age of admission defined in 1757 as a minimum of thirty years. These early admissions would have certainly provided eventual advantages within the administrative hierarchy of the Order.

[18] Louis XV. *Réglement du 15 juin, 1757* (section 6). In: G. de Saint-Ange, 1819, *op. cit.,* pp.408-411.

Appendix – List of individuals admitted during their minority years

A. Recu Page des Orders		Admission	DoB	Age
CAPONI [de]	Alexandre-François	1610	1598	12
ROUERE [or ROUET] [de]	N…..	1610		
BOUDIERES [de]	Claude	1610		
CASTELNAU [de]	Jacques	1610		
MONTAGNE de SAINT GENAIS [de]	Geoffroy	1610		
BELIN de LA SALLE	Louis	1610		
IGNY de RIZAUCOURT [de]	Charles	1610		
DESLANDES de BOUTANCOURT	Emmanuel	1614		
VAUTOURNEULT [de]	Bellanger	1615		
JOVES de FLANCOURT	Adrien	1619		
B. Élève de l'Ordre		**Admission**	**DoB**	**Age**
CHABANNES [de]	François Antoine	1701	1686	15
SIMIANES de GORDES [de]	François	1704		
AILLY [d']	Philippe	1704	1688	16
ROCHECHOUART de FONTAINE-BAUDEAU [de]	Louis Joseph	1705	1689	16
LA ROCHEFOUCAULD de MAUMONT	Jean	1705		
GALLUCIO de L' HOSPITAL [de]	Paul François	1711	1697	14
MONTMORENCY [de]	Alexandre Joseph	1716		
C. Chevalier Novice		**Admission**	**DoB**	**Age**
BERNARD de COURVILLE	Anne Etienne	1766	1749	17
REVIERS de MAUNY [de]	Jacques Vincent François	1769	1752	17
VALLES [de]	Christophe	1769		

D. Admis de minorite		Admission	DoB	Age
BAILLEUL [de]	Adrien	1711	1704	7
COURTILS de BESSY [de]	Jean Baptiste François	1711	1704	7
SURIN de TILLECOURT [de]	Henri Augustin	1716		
RANCHIN de MONTARAN [de]	Jean François	1716	1705	11
ROULLIN de LAUNAI [de]	Charles Pierre	1717		
LA LOERE	Antione François Paul	1717	1710	7
DELAY de LA GARDE [de]	François Pierre	1719		
DUCHEMIN de LA VAUCELLE [de]	Etienne Luc	1720		
PETIT de PASSY [de]	Claude	1720		
FOUCHER de CIRCE [de]	Gabriel Henri	1720	1709	11
SAINT GERMAIN	Philippe Henri Anne	1721		
GANEAU [de]	François Charles	1721		
GROUCHES [de]	Jacques Etienne	1721	1707	14
LA PORTE de LIRONDE	Louis Hugues	1721		
PICON de SAINT MERRY [de]	Louis René	1722		
CLAVERIE de BANIERES [de]	Henri	1723		
MELUN [de]	Jean Alexandre Théodore	1723	1710	13
RANCHER de LA FERRIERE [de]	François Michel	1724		

LESQUEN de LA VILLEMENEUST [de]	Charles	1724		
MEURON de MONTAIGNAC ESTANSANNES [de]	Gabriel	1725	1721	4
BAR de BILLERON [de]	Jean Charles	1727		
SARIAC [de]	Jean Jacques Nicolas	1728		
LAURENCIN de BEAUFORT [de]	Jean Martin	1729		
TREMAULT [de]	Henri	1730		
DORAT de CHAMEULLES [de]	Claude Denis	1730	1729	1
THEBAULT de BOISGNOREL [de]	N…..	1759		