

## The Statute Book of Seedorf – the oldest Rules of the Order of St Lazarus

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The Statute Book of Seedorf is the oldest compilation of Rules of the Order of St Lazarus and the only preserved transcript of the Order's rules of the Crusades period. It is remarkable that the book, written down in the years 1314-1321, not only includes the rules for the newer houses in Europe, but also the rule of the mother house in Jerusalem. The Statute Book consists of four texts: the "new laws", the Rule of St Augustine, the Jerusalem-Laws and an appendix by Brother Siegfried, the Commander of Schlatt, which could be seen as part of the new laws.

- *Die nuwn gesezede.*
- *Dis ist die Regele sancta Augustinus.*
- *Dis sint die gesezede des huses von sante Lazeren von ierusalem, von altere har beweret.*
- *Hie gant die gesezede vs, do saste bruoder Sifrit von slatte dis hie zvo.*

### Subsection titles in the Seedorf Statute book

The book starts with a medieval *intitulatio* ("We, Brother Siegfried, Commander of the houses of the Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem in Schlatt, Gfenn and Uri", i.e. Seedorf in Canton of Uri). Siegfried was not a normal Commander, but general Preceptor or land master of the Alemannic Province. The author himself justifies the compilation with an increasing number of new members needing a written version of the rules. Those new members seem to be the Sisters living in the Congregations which became more important at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup>

century. Beside the details about prayer times, the short first part describes the financial support of each Sister (e.g. annual 10 Sw. denarius for robes, p. 121 SB).<sup>1</sup>

The core of the book is a wide treatment of the Rule of St Augustine which was adopted and adapted for each community. The Rule, written about the year A.D. 400, is a brief document divided into eight chapters and serves as an outline for religious life lived in community. The Rule governs chastity, poverty, obedience, detachment from the world, the apportionment of labour, the inferiors, fraternal charity, prayer in common, fasting and abstinence proportionate to the strength of the individual, care of the sick, silence and readings during meals.

These main rules can be found also in the Statute Book (p. 124 ff. SB) and are the basis for the old and new rules of the Order: how should former rich members behave, what to do with poorer ones, how can both groups live together, what to do with the sick, and how to detect what members of different constitutions need. All was focused to avoid lust, to be humble, but not slovenly. Furthermore, we can find the rule that one is only allowed to pray in the church, not at work. The Rule of St Augustine is the basis for the interaction of the members.

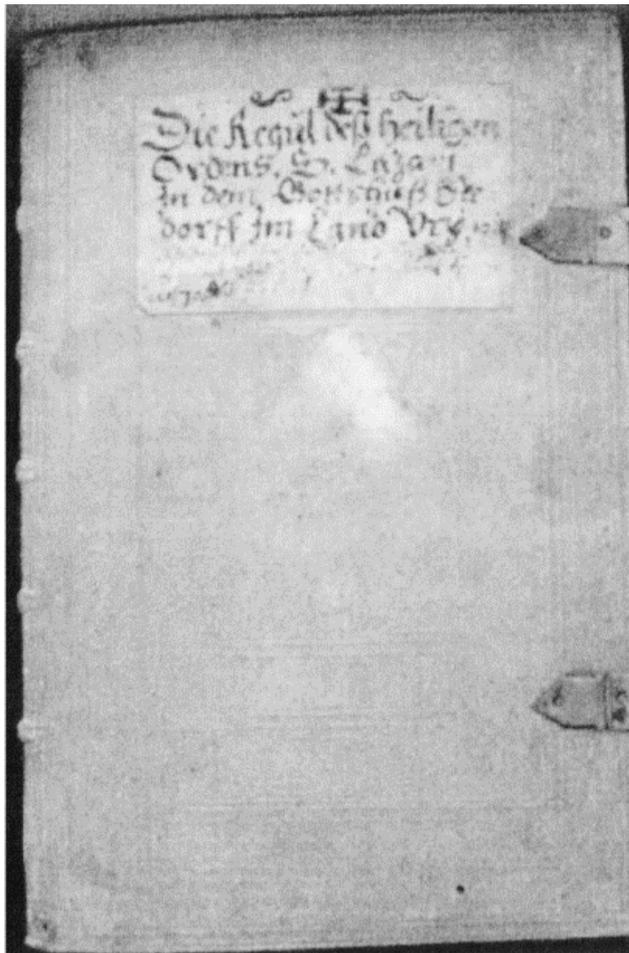
The Lazarite version of the Rule includes: a “report about the beginnings of the house of Jerusalem and its augury”. The writer explains that the reason behind the foundation was the care about lepers who were not accepted in the houses of the Order of St John (“they let them outside with sorrow and misery”) and that King Baldwin

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<sup>1</sup> *Statute Book of Seedorf*. Transcribed in G. Morel (ed.). *Die ältesten Statuten für die Lazaritenklöster Seedorf, im Gfenn, und in Slatte 1314-1321*, in *Der Geschichtsfreund* (Mitteilungen des Historischen Vereins Zentralschweiz), 1847, 4, S. pp.119-158.

Referred to as *SB* in the text

was one of the founders (p. 136 SB). This legend was disproved of in historical research, but the author explains that he just reflects the reports “the ancestors who sailed through the sea to Acre and were highly respectable people” (p. 136 SB). The information about the purpose of the foundation underlines the major view that the house of St Lazarus was constituted a few decades after the first crusade.



Seedorf Statutes cover book

The Hospitallers or the Order of St John and the Teutonic Order accommodated the sick, the poor and pilgrims and had the core mission to protect and support the visitors of the holy places in Outremer. This led to the problem – although not mentioned in the Statute Book – of how to take care of highly infectious sick crusaders and knights. Until 1205, the constituted right of nobility in the Holy Land, the *Livre au Roi*, found a solution. The codex asked leprous noblemen to join the Order of St Lazarus, styled with the French word “Order”, which in fact privileged the participants to take part in the appropriate social life, while experiencing imminent separation from society. The rule of the Knights Templar also pointed out that a sick brother should “leave the house [...] and take the habit of a Brother of Saint Lazarus” but without any force.<sup>2</sup>

The diplomas in the “*fragment cartulaire*” prove that some of the brothers had to donate goods to the Order. Admission was not restricted only to destitute paupers such as the lepers, as alleged by the Statute Book, but included donors as well.<sup>3</sup> The Rule itself exhorted the brothers that those who were poor should receive the same benefits or advantages as any other member. Former rich men should not be arrogant, but happy to join the community with the poor. Elisabeth Sauer stated in the 1930s that outsiders could become affiliated members of the knightly orders, and that donations could transform individuals into brothers who were not living in the convent.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Knight Templars’ Rule*, in H. De Cruzon (ed.), *La Règle du Temple*, Paris. 1886, § 443.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. Reicke. *Das deutsche Spital im Mittelalter 2. Das deutsche Spitalrecht (Kirchenrechtliche Abhandlungen 114)*. Stuttgart 1932, p.277.

A diploma about the investiture of an Armenian monk said that he donates a cistern to the house of St Lazarus and got lifelong right to live in the house and was allowed to wear the robes of the order. cf. A. De Marsy. *Fragment d’un cartulaire d l’Ordre de Saint Lazare en Terre Sainte*, Extrait des Archives de l’Orient latin II, 1882, documents 121-157.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. E. Sauer. *Der Lazariten-Orden und das Statutenbuch von Seedorf*, Freiburg 1930, 30

The following rules can, in a similar way, be found also in the Latin rule of the Teutonic Order. They integrate the Christian chivalry in a biblical-historical context, including the war of the Maccabees. The green colour of Saint Lazarus generally referred to the hope of Christianity. No indication can be found in the book that the green colour has any link to Saladin or a French origin of the fraternity. The colour is rather derived from the olive branch the dove brought to Noah's Ark (p. 139-143 SB).

Of greater importance were the rules for the inner-jurisdiction and the attire. These described in detail the different clothes on which the green Latin – not the eight-pointed – cross was to be fixed and the different materials which were worn during the seasons. Besides, some types of shoe-wear was abolished, e.g. the Cracows, the famous medieval shoes with the long beak. The robe, referring to the Equestrian mantle, was to be made of camel hair, for the church “tailored eclectically”. Tunics were not to be tailored in a profane way; if the fur is worn, it has to come from sheep or goats (p. 138).

The organization of the Order was also fixed: the head was a healthy knight stationed in the Holy Land, who was called the highest Master or Grand Master and had to be confirmed by the Pope (p. 143 SB). It appears that the rules in this regard seem to have changed. In 1253, Pope Innocent IV allowed the Order to elect a non-leprous Head of the house in Jerusalem. Before 1253, the Master in Jerusalem had to be a leper.<sup>5</sup> The Master appointed land masters or Visitators who in turn

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p.10f.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of Pope Innocent IV, dated 18 January 1253, cf. E. Beger. *Les Registres d'Innocent IV*, Paris, 1897, nr. 6204.

appointed the Commander or guardian who managed three or four houses.

If an individual wanted to become a member, he was instructed by a Knight that he was not allowed to possess anything. Afterwards, he was received by the Master, who asked if he possessed anything, was married or had given a spiritual vow. The candidate swore obedience and in upholding the rules in front of the master, was given his vestments, and the Brothers prayed for him (p. 143-145 resp. 145f. SB).

The “laws of the house in Jerusalem conserved for ages” were the rules of the mother house in Jerusalem and were constituted during the first decades after the Order’s foundation. The Rules can be dated to between 1150 and 1187. Some details only for the house in Jerusalem are pointed out (so there must have been other houses in the Holy Land, the first are mentioned around 1150); on the other hand, the headquarters moved to Acre in 1187 after the fall of Jerusalem. The Rule of St Augustine was set up as the spiritual basis for the community of 52 sick members and the same number of healthy servants complemented by priests and guests. If a serving brother was sickened, which was not impossible, because of the risk of infection, he would be accommodated in the hospital and nursed until his death, with the community bearing the costs.

The rules are not detailed as in the appendix to the Order’s adopted Rule of St Augustine. The main duty, to care for the sick, is illustrated in the investiture oath. A new member had to promise “the Lord God and the sick, obedience and chastity” and elevates the sick to the lord’s suffering servant (p. 144f. SB). Furthermore, the prayer times are an important part of the rule. If a brother missed “the times, the holy Christianity set” he was to be punished by being restricted to a meal of

water and bread. When a sick member missed a prayer through the fault of his attending healthy brother, the responsible brother was to be punished.

The “new laws” are based on the rules of the mother house, supplemented with rules for the heads of the houses. A prominent part was the calendar of Lent (the 40 days before Christmas and Easter, the vigils of the high feasts, Fridays), and how the Chapter, that means the whole congregation, assembled every Sunday (p. 122f. SB).

The appendix written down in the year 1314 asks for mercy for those who left the Order and came back humble. It basically sets down the behaviour, especially the moments of kneeling during church services (p. 155-158 SB). Although the house of Seedorf was a long existing monastic order with two convents (for brothers and sisters), the fulfilling of fundamental rules could obviously not be taken for granted. The members were admonished to receive the holy communion seven times a year, and not only the obligatory three times (officially only before 1215). Such participation decreased in the Middle Ages. The IV Lateran Council (1215) therefore decided that everyone must receive “reverently at least at Easter the Sacrament of the Eucharist” (Can. 21). It ends with a warning: who leaves the Order, apostates, goes back to the world and won’t come back penitent should know that he will suffer a miserable death, go to Hell after, and receive the eternal curse in the Last Judgement. Those who stay faithful, right and honest will have a good end, never see Hell and are blessed with the righteous in the Last Judgement (p. 158 SB).

In summary one can say: All the rules underline the strong monastic character of the community in Jerusalem and Seedorf. Details about fasting (nearly half of the year), clothing (restrained, but not worthless)

and the spiritual life (prayer times, biblical reading during the meals) are building the main issues of all different parts of the statue book. Important are the moral modes of behaviours of its members to protect the reputation of the Order. The whole book gives a deep view inside the everyday life and ideally the spiritual basis of the Order.