

Heraldry and Insignia of the Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem and its members

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Abstract

Controversy has often arisen as to the form and exact shade of green associated with the Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem before the amalgamation with the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the early 17th century. The 20th century developments linked with the internationalization process further complicated the issue related to the correct form of insignia adopted. The documented heraldry and insignia pertaining to the Order, along with historical contemporary documentation, can serve to illuminate these issues.

Keywords

Order of St. Lazarus, heraldry, insignia,

The Cross and Green Colour of the Order

The earliest now known documented references to the green cross of the Order of Saint Lazarus both appear in the same year, in 1314. The first appears in the Statutes for the Order's religious house at Seedorf in the Canton of Uri, Switzerland, the second in the records of a litigation in the archdiocese of Brindisi. The Seedorf statutes, promulgated in 1314 by the then Commander, Frater Siegfried von Schlatt are, in fact, the most ancient statutes of the Order still preserved and are kept at the Sankt Lazarus Kloster at Seedorf, a Benedictine abbey, of which the Very Reverend Abbess, since 1968, is, *ex officio*, a Dame Grand Cross of the Order.

The description in these Statutes relating to the cross of the Order, evidently not written by a pedantic heraldic scholar of the post-Victorian era, is, nonetheless, sufficiently succinct to discern that it describes a Latin

rather than a Greek cross of green colour.¹ This observation is corroborated by the evidence offered by still existing statuary, installed about 1480 in the erstwhile commandery chapel at Saint-Antoine de Grattemont in the diocese of Rouen. The heraldic representations in these images might suggest that, at least in northern France, the blazon of the Order's arms might have been *Argent a couped Latin cross Vert*, that is to say: A green Latin cross, hovering in a silver field (that the actual tinctures of the arms at present appear reversed is a latter-day error and of no consequence).



Heraldic cross in the chapel at Saint-Antoine de Grattemont

On the other hand, the tomb-stone at Boigny of the Grand Master Frater Thomas de Sainville, of 1312, now lost but known from an 18th century engraving, shows him with a Greek cross on the habit [see pg. 51 in this issue]. The equestrian seal of a later successor, Frater Jacques de Besnes, attached to a document from 1384, shows him in armour with a couped Greek Cross on the shield and similar crosses on the horse's caparison. His tomb-stone from 1388 at Boigny, now also lost but known

¹ Siegfried von Schlatt. *Die Regein des Heiligen Orderns S. Lazari*. (Switzerland: Ms. Monastery of Seedorf, 1314/1321). Translated in: Charles Savona-Ventura Charles (editor). *Die Regül deß Heiligen Orderns S. Lazari 1314/1321 zu 1418 - The Rules of the Holy Order of S. Lazarus 1314/1321 to 1418*. (Malta: Sancti Lazari Ordinis Academia Internationalis, 2019).

from another 18th century engraving, shows him vested like his aforementioned predecessor, in a similar habit, adorned with a Greek cross. At shoulder height, he is on either side accompanied by a representation of a shield bearing his arms, on the upper edge crested by a small Greek cross. ²



**Equestrian seal of
Frater Jacques de Besnes**



**Tombstone effigy of
Frater Jacques de Besnes**

² Diagrammatic representation tombstone effigy of Thomas de Sainville (†1312) Jean de Paris (†1349) and Jacques de Besnes (†1384) originally at Boigny, France. *Recueil de mémoires et documents concernant divers Ordres français ou étrangers. Recueil de pièces, extraits, mémoires et documents concernant les Ordres de Saint-Lazare et du Mont-Carmel. I.* (Ms. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits), Clairambault 1316, ff. 17r, 19r, 21r

In any case, the Order's Armorial of 1753 unequivocally supports the Greek cross shape until the adoption of the eight-pointed cross in the second half of the 16th century.³ In this context, it is worth remembering that to our mediæval forbears, the actual shape of a cross was of little or no import.

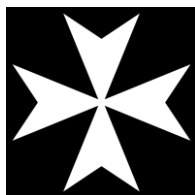
The second reference to the tincture of the Saint Lazarus cross occurs in the acts of a court case in 1314 concerning an alleged armed assault by two Lazarus-brothers on the hospital of Saint Mary-Magdalen at Oria in the archdiocese of Brindisi. Twenty-three witnesses were heard. One of the questions they had to answer was: "Did the suspects wear a green cross on their chests?"⁴

As already intimated above, during the latter part of the 16th century, the cross of the Order of Saint Lazarus changed appearance. During the tenure of office as Grand Master of Frater Jean de Levis, therefore in or after 1565, the simple Greek cross was replaced by a green eight-pointed cross with white borders. Since a dismembered green eight-pointed cross figures in the insignia of the Savoyard order of Saints Maurice & Lazarus, of 1572, one may assume that this development took place between 1565 and 1572. Grand Master de Levis was a Knight of Malta and it is very possible that the new cross of Saint Lazarus was a clever combination aiming to represent both Orders. One must not forget that in 1489 Pope Innocent VIII had amalgamated the Order of Saint Lazarus with that of Saint John of Jerusalem, at that time still based at Rhodes and, in theory, transferred the ownership of all its possessions to the latter. The

³ Claude Dorat de Chameulles, Vincent Thomassin. *Armorial général des Ordres royaux, militaires et hospitaliers de N.-D. du Mont-Carmel et de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem, recherché et recueilly par frère Claude Dorat de Chameulles présenté à MM. les Chanoines réguliers de l'abbaye royale de Saint-Victor de Paris par M. Vincent Thomassin, avocat au parlement, juge-garde armorial desdits Ordres, en 1753* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France – Département des manuscrits, 1753), Français 23135, 96^o.

⁴ Rafael Hyacinthe. *L'Ordre de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem au Moyen Age*. (Bez-et-Esparon: Études & Communication Édition, 2003), 116.

appointment of a Knight of Malta as Grand Master of Saint Lazarus was a sagacious measure on the part of the young King, Charles IX.



White eight-pointed cross of the Order of St. John



Green Greek cross of the Order of St. Lazarus early 16th century



Development of Cross form



Combined green on white eight-pointed cross of St. Lazarus late 16th century

Parenthetically, one might observe that the new Saint Lazarus cross with the white border may have inspired the design of insignia of all French orders of the *Ancien Régime*, beginning with that of the Saint-Esprit, instituted in 1578. In fact, the enamel of the arms of the crosses of both Saint-Esprit and Saint-Michel is green with white borders. This design, including the fleurs-de-lys between the arms of the cross survives to this day in the insignia of the Spanish Order of Don Carlos III, with the difference that the green enamel has given way to blue ditto.

Those versed in heraldry will know that green, in British heraldic terminology called *Vert*, is a fairly rare tincture in armorial achievements. So why is the Saint Lazarus cross actually green? It has been recorded that, on his return from the Holy Land in 1254, King Saint-Louis (IX), having realised the precarious situation of what was left of the Latin Kingdom in the Holy Land, brought with him the Master of Saint Lazarus, Frater Reynaud de Flory, and installed him at Boigny. According to the first printed work on the Order, of 1649, that was also the time when, to show that, undaunted, in spite of everything, they were not lacking in courage, the brethren of Saint Lazarus adopted for their cross the green colour of

renewed hope.⁵ Following the creation of, and amalgamation with, the Order of Our Lady of Mount-Carmel, in 1608, the cross of the joined Orders underwent various modifications, as did the colour of the ribbon, until being restored to green in the latter part of the 18th century.

The inquisitive might ask: Which nuance of green is correct for the Saint Lazarus ribbon? Surviving 18th century ribbons suggest slight differences and we know that Bacqueville, in Paris, supplied rather grass-green ribbons, perpetuated in poor quality, and often without the moiré pattern used, by Toye, Kenning & Spencer in Birmingham. Cejalvo, in Madrid, supplied a much stronger, emerald green, while Jordana, also of Madrid, a more olive shade of green.

So which shade of green is right or, should the question be formulated like this: Is there only one shade of green that is right? Well, the authors of the *Handbook* seemed to think so, quoting a Paton reference and calling it “Islamic Green”, a term that, in the context, and to those belonging to families whose ancestors for centuries fought the infidels to keep them out of Europe, seems rather unfortunate.⁶

In any case, the perception and appreciation of colour is, *per se*, very personal and therefore quite subjective. Careful examination of pre-1950 ribbons, also of various state orders of merit and medals, will show that there are slight differences in colours and even in proportions of stripes, as well as of widths, depending on the supplier and how the respective pieces of insignia were to be mounted.

⁵ *Memoires, Regles et Statuts, Ceremonies et Privileges des Ordres Militaires de Nostre Dame du Mont Carmel et de S. Lazare de Jerusalem*. (Lyon : Antoine Cellier, 1649), 38.

⁶ Richard Pyatt, Michael Ross, Charles Savona-Ventura. *The Handbook of the Order of Saint Lazarus: The Insignia, Decorations, Commemorative Medals, Uniforms, and Heraldry of the Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem in the Twenty-First century*. (Malta: Sancti Lazari Ordinis Academia Internationalis, 2nd edition, 2019), +338pp.

Based on venerable tradition, the answer to the question about the correct shade of green for the Saint Lazarus ribbon is, then, in the humble opinion of the speaker, that as long as the ribbon is undoubtedly green moiré, the actual shade is less important, not because of indifference, but because of a generous interpretation of precedent. After all, there are no fixed shades of the heraldic colours!

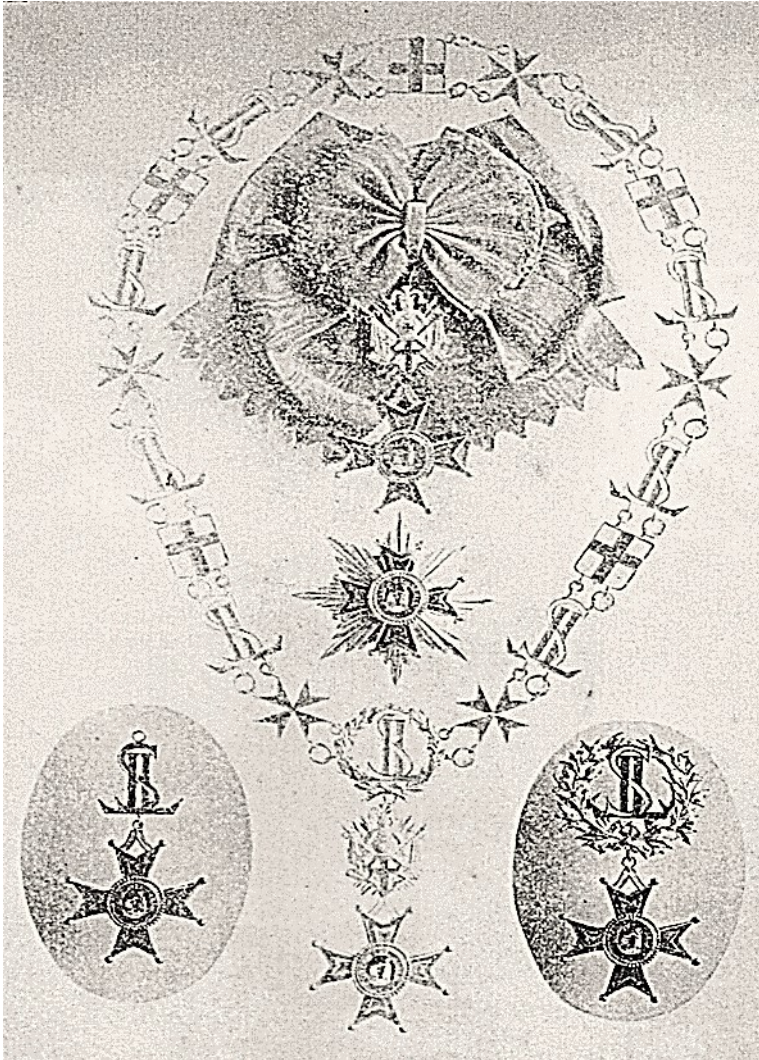
To end this section, it may be of interest to note that also in respect of ribbons of Orders of Knighthood and of Merit, the plain green colour (without any contrasting stripes) is quite rare. Apart from the Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem, there are, in chronological order, the Portuguese Order of São Bento de Aviz, established by King Affonso I in 1162; the Savoyard Ordine dei San Maurizio e San Lazzaro, dating from 1572; the Most Ancient and Most Noble Order of the Thistle, revived by King James VII of Scotland in 1687; and the Haus-Orden der Rautenkrone of the former Kingdom of Saxony, instituted in 1807 by the first King, Friedrich August III. There was also the Swedish Kungliga Vasaorden, instituted in 1772. It is recorded that King Gustaf III, having visited Paris the previous year, felt inspired to follow his predecessor's example of 1748 and adopt for the ribbon of his new order the colour of a further French order, the green of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem. This order is no longer conferred but may be regarded as belonging to the patrimony of the Royal House of Sweden.

20th Century Insignia of the Order

There seems to have been some uncertainty, or at least hesitation, about the appearance of the insignia of the Order in the early part of the 20th century. If one attempts an analysis of the situation at the time, one will find that, in 1932, the *Surintendant Général* of the Order, the Chevalier Charles Otzenberger-Détaille, published a brochure entitled *l'Ordre de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem et son organisation actuelle, par la Délégation Magistrale de l'Ordre*.⁷ From the plate illustrating the insignia,

⁷ Charles Otzenberger-Détaille. *L'Ordre de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem et son organisation actuelle actuelle, par la Délégation Magistrale de l'Ordre*. (Paris: la Délégation Magistrale de l'Ordre, 1932), +22p.

it is clear that the eight-pointed cross has neither the ubiquitous white borders, nor any decoration between the arms.



Insignia: Order of Saint Lazarus, 1932 showing the grand collar, grand cordon and breast shield, dame (right) and ecclesiastical (left) cross

The cross of the knights is suspended from a military trophy, an innovation, no doubt inspired by that on the cross for professed knights and knights of honour and devotion of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and other orders linked to the Holy See. The dame's cross is suspended from a rather oversized cypher consisting of two letters "L", addorsed and interlaced by an "S"; the whole set within a wreath of palm branches. The chaplain's cross is similar but the cypher lacks the wreath. From the text, (p. 20), we learn that there was a Cross of Merit, similar to that of the knights but with the difference that it was bordered white and had the inscription *Pro Meritis*. The information contained in this publication, makes one inclined to assume that the pre-1913 Italian breast plaque in the collection of insignia at the Archival collection at Torri ta' Lanzun in Malta will have provenance other than that of the Grand Chancellery in Paris established three years earlier.⁸

In the description, there is included a curious paragraph, stating that "*Selon les pays, le ruban est vert, noir ou noir bordé de vert, chaque chapitre national pouvant en quelque sorte avoir une couleur spéciale.*" That is to say that "Depending on the country, the ribbon is green or black, or black edged green. Every national chapter may, in some sense, have a special colour." Thankfully, this strange notion seems to have been fairly soon forgotten! If we look at the grand collar depicted on the plate referred to above, we find that this was the model still worn at the beginning of this century by the Duc de Brissac. It would appear that in fact, this was the first 20th century model of the grand collar, as seen in photographs of both Otzenberger and Paul Bertrand in a book by the latter, published in 1932.⁹

Interestingly, an American presentation of the Order, published in 1941 in Los Angeles has an illustration which, by that time was already out of date, shewing the intermediate model of the grand collar, without the grand-magisterial crown, but the cross of the Order is suspended from a

⁸ *Acta Historiae Sancti Lazari Ordinis*, 3 (2019), 88-90.

⁹ Paul Bertrand de la Grassiere. *Histoire des Chevaliers-Hospitaliers de Saint-Lazare*. (Paris, 1932).

fleur-de-lys.¹⁰ This illustration corresponds perfectly to the actual grand collar in our possession that once belonged to Otzenberger. Here the cross has a cypher of an “S” and two “L”s interlaced in a manner that could suggest a fleur-de-lys. A later illustration shows a different interpretation of the cypher, again consisting of an “S” and two “L”s, a precursor to the modern “dollar sign”, more prominent in insignia of Spanish design than those based on French originals.

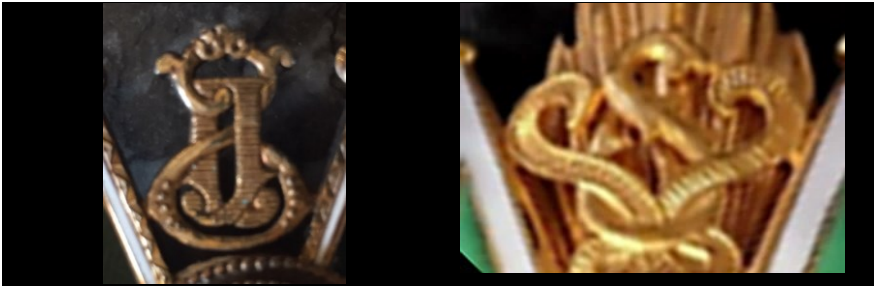


Detail of cross in grand collar owned by Charles Otzenberger -Detaille

A subsequent publication by Otzenberger, of 1936, contains a drawing of a subsequent publication by Otzenberger, of 1936, contains a drawing of

¹⁰ *The Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem - A short history of the most ancient Order of Chivalry, past and present.* (United States of America: The Grand Priory of the Western U.S.A., 1941)

the grand collar, as we know it now, with the grand-magisterial crown.¹¹ The portrait photographs of the Grand Master and his son, taken for the Chapter General of his election and installation, show both wearing this model, with the spiky crown of nine points. Consequently, Otzenberger's grand collar, not having the crown, can then be dated to the short period between 30th January 1932, the date of printing of Bertrand's book, and 15th December 1935, the date of the Chapter General.



Different inter-arms cypher forms

One may speculate about the absence of fleurs-des-lys between the cross arms. One plausible explanation would be avoidance of too close a similarity with the cross of the Spanish *Muy Distinguida Orden de Carlos III*. Be that as it may, Prince Charles-Philippe d'Orléans reintroduced the fleurs-de-lys between the arms of the Saint Lazarus cross for his administration in 2004.

The Grand-Magisterial Crown

In the abbey of Seedorf, referred to at the very beginning, there is a charming 18th century painting depicting the legendary visit to the place by King Baudouin IV, King of Jerusalem. In the centre of the picture, we see the king mounted on a horse kneeling. On his left, the king is accompanied by a page carrying a green cushion with his regalia, an antique crown and a sceptre.

¹¹ Charles Otzenberger-Detaille, Paul Bertrand. *L'Ordre Militaire et Hospitalier de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem*. (Paris : Office Central de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem, 1936).



Painting of King Baudouin IV to Seedorf with detail of crown

The antique crown, although known in the heraldry of several countries as a charge in a shield, is fairly rare as a symbol of rank or status. It is used, for instance, by some old noble families in the Veneto, northern Italy, and also in Sicily and appears, albeit rather embellished, in imperial and royal heraldry in the former Holy Roman Empire and still in Scandinavia. It is used also to ensign the arms of the O Conor Don, the representative of the High-Kings of Ireland in Queen Victoria's grant of supporters. It certainly has a slight eastern flavour; one sometimes sees images of King David playing his harp, wearing an antique crown.

The first appearance of the antique crown in the iconography of the Order of Saint Lazarus seems to be in the Armorial of 1753 where it is unadorned, with nine points, and without a bonnet.¹² Next time it appears, as a vignette, in 1774, it has chased gems and a bonnet with a

¹² Claude Dorat de Chameulles, Vincent Thomassin, *op. cit.*

pearl on top, like a coronet of a Spanish Grandee.¹³ It reappears in this form in the arms of the Duke of Seville as Lieutenant-Grand-Master, later to develop the pearl into an orb surmounted by a cross in the design made for the Chapter General in 1935, where it, without any precedence, suddenly, is crowning a manteau lined with ermine!



1753 armorial



1774 crown

18th century depictions of crown in the Order's iconography

One is not unaware that the full arms of the Sovereign Military Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes, and of Malta, contains both a closed crown, surmounted by an orb carrying an eight-pointed-cross, and an ermine-lined black manteau, but the Order of Malta is, actually, also a sovereign state, albeit quite small, the Order of Saint Lazarus is not !

In addition, there was even a notion that all knights of Saint Lazarus were entitled to display their armorial bearings, superimposing the eight-pointed cross of the Order, interlaced by its grand collar, on this same ermine-lined manteau. The early 20th century promoters of the Order of Saint Lazarus were certainly not bash-full and some of their initiatives provoked a lot of, sometimes unwarranted, criticism. One of these questionable practises was still current in the 1970s, namely that every Knight Grand-Cross was entitled to surround his shield by the grand-collar of the Order, regardless of having being appointed to that superior rank or not. This notion may have been inspired by the fact that, in the latter

¹³ *Liste de MM. les chevaliers, commandeurs et officiers de l'Ordre royal militaire et hospitalier de N.-D. du Mont-Carmel et de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem, suivant l'année de leur promotion.* (Paris : imp. de P. F. Gueffier , 1774).

part of the 18th century, all knights of the Order, apart from ensigning their shield, carrying the chief of religion, with the coronet of a marquis and supporting it on the eight-pointed cross, appear to have had the right to surround their arms with the embellished chaplet from which was suspended their cross of the Order, just like a grand collar. In fairness, everything needs to be put into its correct historical context and we have no right to judge initiatives of nearly a century ago by the standards of the present. There is an old saying : “If you long for the stars, why aim at the tree tops ?”

To revert to the grand-magisterial crown : How many points does it have? In France the “antique crown” (I deliberately use this term not to confuse our English and Scottish readers) has sixteen points, of which nine are visible. In Spain, it would appear, it has twelve, of which seven are visible, and in Britain, it has eight, of which only five are visible. Does the number of visible points actually matter. To an heraldic scholar, it certainly does matter, as much as the differences between continental nobiliary coronets of nine, seven, and five points, denoting, respectively, the nobiliary ranks of counts, barons, and untitled nobles, in decreasing order. But why does it matter? Because the seat of the Grand Master of our Order was established in 1254 by King Saint-Louis at Boigny, in France, not in Britain nor in Spain, and remained there until the confiscation by the revolutionaries in 1791. Consequently, the French antique crown, with nine visible points, is still the correct form for the grand-magisterial crown of the Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem, despite the fact that the Order no longer is based in France.

The colour of the bonnet of the grand-magisterial crown is also contentious. From the engraving of 1774, it seems clear that it was not black and from early 20th illustrations it is clear that it was green. The black bonnet would appear to be the fruit of a typical modern “logical” conclusion : “If the manteau is black, then, of course, the bonnet would be the same colour !” But there is no “of course” about it. Not all heraldic display where there is a manteau and a coronet with a bonnet supposes that the cloth of the former is pulled up into the latter to form a bonnet.

It certainly would not work with a peer's manteau and coronet, either in France or in Britain, where the two pieces of insignia are treated separately in so far that the bonnet of the coronet has an ermine brim and, to make the point, may be displayed without the manteau.

The colour of the Order's mantle.

In this context, one may well also query the colour of the mantle of our Order from the point of view of heraldic tincture regulations : A green cross on black hardly corresponds to the mediæval heraldic concept of optic clarity at a distance. The matter is confused by the widely used term "church cape" although this garment, obviously inspired by a similar one in the Order of Malta, clearly is a cloak to be worn over the uniform, hence the gilded clasp.

There is, however, the 20th century Spanish version of the old choir dress which, according to engravings of the 18th century, evidently was black, with the eight-pointed green cross on the chest, but this was clearly introduced during the tenure of a Knight of Malta as Grand Master, *id est* in the latter part of the 16th century, at a time when heraldry no longer was of importance on the battle field. The colour of the mediæval mantle of the Order would, most probably, have been un-bleached white, made from wool or linen, depending on the climate, like the mantles of all the other crusading orders.

In conclusion, as you will have gathered from this paper, there is still a diverse number of subjects that need to be researched and discovered. It is my fervent desire that this paper may inspire others to raise questions and embark on further academic activity.