



# **REGISTER OF RECOGNIZED CHIVALRIC ORDERS OPERATING IN HUNGARY**

REGISTER OF  
ORDERS OF CHIVALRY

2021

# HUNGARIAN COMMISSION OF ORDERS OF CHIVALRY

## REGISTER

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## INTRODUCTION

It is almost a thousand years since the historical uniqueness of the Holy Land started the operation of the first knightly communities. Shortly after their formation, these orders became an indispensable support of the Christian presence. The Knights Hospitaller maintained hospitals, the Templars provided protection for the pilgrims, and the Lazarists cared for the lepers. Over time, their cult gained support that anticipated the appearance of these communities in Europe.

Even before 1291, equestrian centers were established in many European countries. The Order of St. John was the first to appear in Christian Hungary in the middle of the 12th century. We have our first written record of the Order of Templars from 1169, the Order of St. Lazarus from 1181, and the Teutonic Order from 1211. In addition to their social role, they also provided significant military support to the Hungarian kings, and therefore, following Western examples, they were granted various privileges in Hungary.

Over time, their character and role in society became a European curiosity in which, beyond historical necessity, faith, courage, and humility gave the essence of the ideas of chivalry. In addition to following the recommendations of the Gospel, members of these orders were required to follow strict standards in order to achieve the most elevated, exemplary way of life.<sup>1</sup> This is why, when studying the history of knightly orders, we can meet historical figures starting with Prince Godfrey of Bouillon who have not only established a millennial interest in these orders, but have also set an example for future generations.

In addition to the ecclesiastical orders, secular, dynastic orders linked to a specific monarchy appeared in the 14th century. The first dynastic order in the world was the Order of St. George established in 1326 by King Charles Robert of Hungary. A similar dynastic knighthood was the Order of the Dragon founded in 1408 by Sigismund of Luxembourg, King of Hungary. None of these early Hungarian-founded orders exists today, just as several ecclesiastical knighthoods have ceased to exist, changed, or merged with other orders over the centuries.<sup>2</sup>

Knowledge of these changes is essential when examining today's orders. Since, regardless of the decline of monarchies, these communities have become one of the most prestigious forms of social organisation in contemporary Europe, the interpretation of the law relating to chivalric communities has also become important. This need has led to the creation of the

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<sup>1</sup> There are still orders of chivalry where certain classes are required to take a vow of evangelical counsels.

<sup>2</sup> The *Cruciferi Sancti Regis Stephani* was another Hungarian-founded order established by King Géza II and later approved by Pope Urban III, but ceased its activity after 1439.



## HISTORY OF THE COMMISSION

The fifth session of the International Congress of Genealogical and Heraldic Sciences was held in Stockholm in 1960, under the patronage of Royal Prince Bertil of Sweden. It was here that a decision was made to set up the International Commission for Orders of Chivalry (ICOC), whose main task was to formulate criteria for the authenticity of the Orders of Chivalry. This report was adopted by the Congress held in Edinburgh in 1962, which earned such a great recognition among the attending scholars that - on the proposal of the President of the International Academy of Heraldry - a unanimous decision was taken on the autonomous and permanent status of the ICOC.

The ICOC then met in The Hague (1964), Paris (1966), and Brussels (1967), and after the Vienna and Munich meetings in 1970 a new report was issued summarizing not only the chivalric orders but also the nobility organizations. Additional categories were set up until the Dublin meeting in 2002, when the register took its present form. The headquarters of the ICOC are now in Bologna, with a secretariat in San Marino.<sup>3</sup>



Image: International Commission for Orders of Chivalry, with Count Pier Felice degli Uberti, Chairman of the Committee, in the first row.

In 2018, the need arose for starting an ICOC sub-commission in Hungary. The decision on founding was made in 2019 at the Alcobaça Monastery in Portugal, during an international meeting organized by the Royal House of Portugal and attended by high-ranking church leaders as well as members of several European monarchies. Mr. Szilárd F. Kökényessy was asked to organize the Hungarian commission and carry out further preparations. He held consultations on procedural and professional issues during the 3rd International Colloquium on Nobility in Madrid (2019), Bologna and Vienna (2020), then in Budapest (2021).

The Hungarian Commission for Orders of Chivalry publishes reports in Hungarian and English, in which it lists and describes the authentic chivalric and merit orders, award systems, and nobility organizations operating in Hungary. It carries out its activities with the involvement of experts in the fields of heraldry, genealogy, phaleristics, legal history and ecclesiastical law.

**Founder:** Count Pier Felice degli Uberti

**Patron:** H.I.R.H. Joseph Karl von Habsburg-Lothringen

**Commission members:** Szilárd F. Kökényessy (Chairman), Baron Antal Liphay and Dr. Imre Vejkey.

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<sup>3</sup> Register of Orders of Chivalry 2016. 5-15.



## ABOUT CHIVALRIC ORDERS

Szilárd F. Kökényessy

Across Europe, there are currently 99 knightly communities (in addition to the orders led by the monarchs) that have been recognized by international aristocratic and chivalric organizations.<sup>4</sup> Their number is constantly decreasing, as a new order of chivalry can only be founded by a ruler on a throne. The status and recognition of knightly orders can be determined in an accurate way by ecclesiastical law and legal history. The most important principles can be summarized below:

**1. FOUNDATION:** A chivalric order can only be founded by a ruler (Pope, emperor, king or ruling prince) in power, a person who at the moment of foundation has sovereign status. A private person cannot establish an order, even if he is a member of a former ruling family, and even a dethroned ruler cannot establish a new order if he no longer exercises his sovereign status.

**2. LEADERSHIP:** The chivalric order may be headed by the sovereign who founded the order, or by a confirmed person (grandmaster) appointed by him. Depending on the statutes of each order, the new leader takes the office by inheritance or by appointment, possibly by election, but in each case in accordance with the will of the representative of the sovereign power (active or former) who established the order.<sup>5</sup>

**3. TERMINATION:** If a knighthood has ceased to exist centuries earlier in history (or has not functioned for a long time), even a ruler in power cannot re-establish it. There is no accepted procedure whereby an order is "revived from its rest" or "resumes operation with bishop's permission". An example of this is the many imitative Templar Order, which are all based on a fictitious narrative, as these new organizations use the names and insignia of a long ago extinct knight order without authorization. Since these communities were founded not by a sovereign ruler, they are not entitled to use the knights order expression in their name.

In the absence of *fons honorum* (source of honor), no organization can be considered an order of knights. The characteristic of the subjective legal interpretation is that, in disregard of the rules, it claims something that is neither historically nor legally correct. The consequence of this is the popularity of so-called imitation orders, which have in common that they begin to operate by reference to fictitious historical facts and sources of law. In the exterior they use chivalrous appearances (similar attire and decorations) and often claim that they are a different branch. Such organizations also operate in Hungary, and many of them refer to international recognition, while being mostly related only to other similarly imitating orders.

Authentic knightly orders always operate on the basis of *fons honorum*, respecting the systems of rules adopted by ecclesiastical law and European aristocratic circles, thus preserving the recognition and centuries-old traditions of their order.

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<sup>4</sup> Register of Orders of Chivalry 2016. 20-42.

<sup>5</sup> Thus for example, the Grand Master of the Order of Malta is elected by the Sovereign Council, but the original source of authority is the Pope of Rome, who oversees the Order's activities through a delegated Cardinal.



# PRINCIPLES INVOLVED IN ASSESSING THE VALIDITY OF ORDERS OF CHIVALRY

International Commission for Orders of Chivalry<sup>6</sup>

- 1) Every independent State has the right to create its own orders or decorations of merit and establish, at will, their particular rules. But it must be made clear that only the higher degrees of these modern state orders can be deemed of knightly rank, provided they are conferred by the Crown or by the "pro tempore" ruler of some traditional State.
- 2) The dynastic (or family or house) orders which belong *jure sanguinis* to a sovereign house (that is to those ruling or ex-ruling houses whose sovereign rank was internationally recognised at the time of the Congress of Vienna in 1814 or later) retain their full historical chivalric, nobiliary and social validity, notwithstanding all political changes. It is therefore considered *ultra vires* of any republican State to interfere, by legislation or administrative practice, with the princely dynastic family or house orders. That they might not enjoy official recognition by the new government does not affect their traditional validity or their accepted status in international heraldic, chivalric and nobiliary circles.
- 3) It is generally admitted by jurists that such ex-sovereigns who have not abdicated have positions different from those of pretenders and that in their lifetime they retain their full rights as "fons honorum" even in respect of those orders of which they remain Grand Masters which would be classed, otherwise, as state and merit orders.
- 4) Although, at one time - many centuries ago - private persons of high standing could and did create some independent orders of knighthood, some among which came, in due course, to gain considerable prestige and obtain formal validity from the Church and the Crown, such rights of creation of orders have long since fallen into desuetude and, nowadays, orders of chivalry as we understand the term must always stem from or be - by longstanding uninterrupted tradition - under the protection of heads or of houses of recognised sovereign rank.
- 5) The recognition of orders by states or supranational organisations which themselves do not have chivalric orders of their own, and in whose constitutions no provisions are made for the recognition of knightly and nobiliary institutions, cannot be accepted as constituting validation by sovereignties, since these particular sovereignties have renounced the exercise of heraldic jurisdiction. The international "status" of an order of knighthood rests, in fact, on the rights of fons honorum, which, according to tradition, must belong to the authority by which this particular order is granted, protected or recognised.
- 6) The only recognised order with the style of "Sovereign" existing nowadays is that of St John of Jerusalem, called of Rhodes, called of Malta, whose international headquarters were transferred to Rome in 1834, and whose international diplomatic "status" as an independent non-territorial power is recognised officially by the Holy See and by many other Governments.

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<sup>6</sup> Register of Orders of Chivalry 2016.19.



# REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

Hungarian Commission for Orders of Chivalry

The Hungarian Commission for Orders of Chivalry examines the authentic orders of knights and merits, award systems, and nobility organizations operating in Hungary, and issues a periodic activity report. On the basis of the Edinburgh principles adopted in 1962 and the additions adopted in Washington in 1984, this report includes all orders which are operating in Hungary in accordance with the rules of legal history and canon law.<sup>7</sup>

In order to clearly identify the knightly orders, the names of the leaders of all active orders in Hungary, which still grant membership, will also appear after the Grand Master's name. The Hungarian Commission for Orders of Chivalry wishes to assist in the identification of the organisation, since there are several organisations in Hungary with similar names, which cannot be considered to be of knightly rank.

Recognised chivalric orders already included in the register of the ICOC may apply for inclusion in the report of the national commission on an individual basis, if the local branch was included in the central register of the multinational order. For other organizations, the commission shall take a decision on admission within three months.

## INDEPENDENT ORDERS

### 1. **THE SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER of SAINT JOHN of JERUSALEM, CALLED OF RHODOES, CALLED OF MALTA**

FOUNDED: 1099 / 1113. Blessed Gérard under the authority of Godefroi de Bouillon, sanctioned by Pope Pascal II 1113.

Sovereign entity in international law.

Ribbon: Black (Order of Merit Military Division: Red and white; Order of Merit Civil Division: White and red).

Grand Master: Fra' Marco Luzzago (elected in 2020)<sup>8</sup>

Hungarian leader: **Kristóf Szabadhegyi**

## SEMI-INDEPENDENT ORDERS

### 1. **THE EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM**

FOUNDED: 1847/1868.<sup>9</sup>

Subject to international law. Protecting Authority: The Holy See.

Ribbon: Black (Order of the Cross of Merit: White and red; The Palms of Jerusalem: Black).

Grand Master: cardinal Fernando Filoni (elected in 2019)

Hungarian leader: **Dr. Béla Jungbert**

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<sup>7</sup> Register of Orders of Chivalry 2016. 7.

<sup>8</sup> The Grand Master's Deputy will hold the same office as the Grand Master and is expected to remain in office for one year.

<sup>9</sup> It is an order of knighthood restructured by Pope Pius IX in 1868 after the restoration of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (1847).



## 2. **BAILIWICK OF BRANDENBURG OF THE KNIGHTLY ORDER OF SAINT JOHN IN PRUSSIA**

FOUNDED: 1382/1852<sup>10</sup>

Subject to international law. Protecting Authority: The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Ribbon: Black

Grand Master: H.R.H. Prince Oskar of Prussia (Herrenmeister) (elected in 1999)

Hungarian leader: **István Tomcsányi de Tomcsány**

## 3. **ORDER OF VITÉZ**

FOUNDED: 1920 - Horthy Miklós, governor of Hungary, on the basis of a Prime Ministerial Decree (6650/1920.)<sup>11</sup>

Ribbon: Blue

Grand Master: H.I.R.H. Joseph Karl von Habsburg-Lothringen (elected in 2017)

### DYNASTIC ORDERS

#### 1. **CONSTANTINIAN SAINT GEORGE**

FOUNDED: 1699 - Confirmation of transfer to Francesco Farnese, Duke of Parma, Piacenza and Castro, by Bull SINCERAE FIDEI of Pope Innocent XII.

Ribbon: light blue

Grand Master: Charles of Bourbon Two Sicilies (elected in 2008)

Hungarian leader: **Dr. Zsolt Semjén**

### ORDER OF MERIT, AWARD SYSTEMS AND SUCCESSORS OF CHIVALRIC ORDERS

#### 1. **ORDER OF SAINT STEPHEN OF HUNGARY**

FOUNDED: 1764/2011

The Order of Merit, renewed by the Hungarian Parliament, donated by President **János Áder** (elected in 2012) on the proposal of the Prime Minister of Hungary.<sup>12</sup>

Hungary's highest state award.

Ribbon: red-green

#### 2. **ORDER OF VITÉZ**

FOUNDED: 1920/1945 - Horthy Miklós de Nagybánya, governor of Hungary<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Chivalric order with autonomous status from 1382, which was re-founded by IV. King Frederick William of Prussia in 1852 (with the help of the still living knights inaugurated before 1818)

<sup>11</sup> It was donated during the Kingdom of Hungary until 1945. According to its Statutes, the Order was hereditary.

<sup>12</sup> Renovation of the Order of Merit which was established in 1764 in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy under the name "Order of St. Stephen the Apostle" by Queen Maria Theresa of Habsburg.

<sup>13</sup> Awarded in emigration from 1945, following the traditions of the organization founded by Governor Miklós Horthy. It is an organisation under the gracious patronage of the former Hungarian royal house.





Ribbon: Blue

Grand Master: H.I.R.H. Joseph Karl von Habsburg-Lothringen (elected in 2017)

Hungarian Leader **Dr. Ádám Berniczei-Roykó**

## OTHER NOBILIARY BODIES

### 1. **MAGYAR TÖRTÉNELMI CSALÁDOK EGYESÜLETE**

FOUNDED: 1995 - baron János Gudenus, count János Nyáry, baron Ferenc Apor

International recognition: Commission d'Information et de Liaison des Associations Nobles d'Europe (CILANE), headquarters in Paris (1959).

Leader: **count Pál Zichy de Zich and Vázsonykő** (elected in 2020)

Budapest, August 4, 2021.