

# The Hospitaller Order Of Saint Lazarus



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## Introduction

World Leprosy Day has is annually designated to the last Sunday of the month of January. Founded by Raoul Follereau in 1954, this Day has been commemorated every year in over 140 countries in an effort to bring about an awareness of the disease and its sufferers. Leprosy, also referred to as Hansen's Disease, is a chronic infectious disease of human beings that primarily affects the skin, mucous membranes, and nerves. The disease is caused by a rod-shaped bacillus, *Mycobacterium leprae*, which is similar to the bacillus that causes tuberculosis. The leprosy bacillus was definitely identified in 1874 by the Norwegian physician Gerhard Henrik Armauer Hansen. In 2004, the number of leprosy sufferers under treatment in the world was around 460,000. Twelve percent of these were children. Today, diagnosis and treatment of leprosy is easy. Essential work is being carried out to integrate leprosy services into existing general health services. This is especially important for those communities who are at particular risk for developing leprosy, which are often the poorest of the poor and under-served.

Full control of leprosy has eluded the world community, mainly in some parts of Angola, Brazil, India, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nepal, and United Republic of Tanzania. These countries have intensified their leprosy control activities through international help. Access to information, diagnosis and treatment with multidrug therapy is essential. The World Health Organization today provides treatment free of charge. Information campaigns about leprosy in high-risk areas are

further crucial so that patients and their families, who were historically ostracized from their communities, are encouraged to come forward and receive treatment. The disease has a deep-rooted part of the human psyche, with both mystical and physical meanings.

## Early History of Leprosy

Leprosy has tormented humans since the dawn of history; leaving lasting imprints on religion, literature, and art. We know nothing certain about the origins of leprosy, but it definitely had long been rampant in the Eastern Mediterranean lands.

**Medieval view of a leper**  
[source: Wellcome Institute Library,  
London]



This chronic debilitating infection was well known in Egypt, as evidenced by the 16<sup>th</sup> century BC Ebers Papyrus. The great Roman poet Titus Lucretius Carus [99-55 BC] attributed the disease aetiology to the waters of the Nile, while the Roman physician Claudius Galen [AD 131-201] attributed the disease to the unsanitary diet of

the people. The disease was spread to Judea by population migration during the exodus, and further spread by the Phoenician trade links to Syria and the countries with which they had commercial relations, hence the name "*Phœnician*

*disease*" given it by Hippocrates of Cos [c.460-c.370 BC]. The campaigns of the Roman armies also helped propagate the disease to Western Europe, the first mention of the disease in Rome coinciding with the return of Pompey's troops from Asia Minor in 62 BC. Sufferers from the disease were generally abhorred and condemned to a life of seclusion from the community.

In both the Old and New Testaments the name leprosy is given to a number of physical conditions; the words leprous or leprosy appear no less than fifty-four times. These conditions were considered a punishment from God for sin and the victim was said to be in a state of *tsara'ath*, or defilement. This Hebrew term was later translated as *lepros*, from which came the word leprosy. The Leviticus of the Old Testament [13:1-23, 45-46] gives detailed instructions regarding the recognition of an infectious skin lesion and a non-infectious lesion, while it paints a chilling image of the ancient fears associated with the disease. "Anyone with a contagious skin-disease will wear torn clothing and disordered hair; and will cover the upper lip and shout, 'unclean, unclean'. As long as the disease lasts, such a person will be unclean and, being unclean, will live alone and live outside the camp". The stigma associated with lepers was retained even during the early years of Christianity. Classical physicians looked at lepers with revulsion, and priests considered them depraved. Aretaeus of Cappadocia, a physician of the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD wrote: "When in such a state who would not flee - who would not turn away from them, even a father, a son, or a brother? There is danger also from communication of the ailment."

While leprosy had been introduced into Europe by at least the first century BC, increasing contact with the scourge of leprosy by European pilgrims occurred after the fourth century AD when the conversion of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine the Great [emperor AD 306-337] and his mother's St. Helena influence generated an interest in the Holy Land, and transformed Jerusalem into a magnet of Christian pilgrimage. The Church continued to look upon

lepers as bodily and morally unclean individuals regulating in their regard in the Council of Ancyra in AD 314; however in the late fourth century the Bishop of Caesarean St. Basil the Great established a leprosarium in the maritime city of Ptolemais [now Acre] to care for these unfortunates. These services were gradually expanded by further establishments set up in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth. In 638 AD, the Christian dominance of the Holy Land came to an end and the region fell under Islamic hegemony for more than four hundred years; events that decreased the flow of pilgrims until the turn of the millennium. The revived flow of pilgrims necessitated the setting up of hospice services in Jerusalem aimed at giving succor to the sick and long-term hospice to the victims of leprosy. These efforts saw the re-emergence of the Basilian Order to care for lepers and the establishment of hospice services under Benedictine Rule.

## The Origins of the Order of St. Lazarus

In 1093, Jerusalem fell under Seljuk dominion, whose fanaticism and maltreatment of Christian pilgrims served as the instant tinder for the conflagration of the successful First Crusade led by Godfrey of Bouillon. The Latin conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 led to the re-organization of the two Hospitaller Orders that had been active in the Holy City. These both adopted the Augustinian Rule. The Benedictine hospice became the regular religious Order of St. John the Baptist; while the Basilian brethren responsible for the care of the lepers became the regular religious Order of St. Lazarus and became known as the Lazarites. The Order of St. Lazarus re-established its leprosarium infirmary on the outer face of the northwestern wall of Jerusalem just off the patriarch's quarter. The two newly reformed Hospitaller Orders – the Order of St. John and the Order of St. Lazarus - initially shared the same Master – Gerard, le Fondateur. After his death in 1120, the Rector of the Hospital of St. John Boyant Roger (1120 - 1131) was appointed Master of the Hospitallers of St. Lazarus; while Raymond du Puy was appointed Master of the Hospitallers of St. John (1120-1158/60). Boyant was succeeded by the relatively unknown masters – Jean (?1153-?1153), Barthélémy (?1153-?1154), and Itier (?1154-?1155). Around 1155, Hughes de St.-Pol was appointed Master. He was succeeded by the incumbent Master of the Hospitallers of St. John Raymond du Puy in 1157.

The Lazarite leprosarium was run by a master, almost invariably a priest, who was assisted by nursing brothers and sisters. The patients were also regarded as brothers or sisters of the house that sheltered them, and obeyed the common rule that united them with their religious guardians. As full members, the inmates thus had a say in the management of their affairs. The inmates of the leprosarium were condemned to perpetual seclusion from the outside world. Such was the degree of seclusion imposed on lepers that the third Lateran Council of 1179 found it necessary to condemn the stiffness

of some ecclesiastics who would not allow lepers to have churches to themselves, though they were not admitted into the public congregations. The Council directed that in all places where lepers live in community, they may have a church, a churchyard, and a priest for their spiritual needs.



**16<sup>th</sup> century view of the Lepers' Hospice in Jerusalem**

*[source: Franciscus Halma, 1717]*

The Order of St. Lazarus continued to expand its holdings in the Holy Land, both in Jerusalem and further afield establishing by 1115 further houses in Tiberias, Nablus and Ascalon, and later in Acre and possibly Caesarea. The Order further expanded its holdings in Western Europe, the expansion starting with the conferment of the Château of Boigny near Orleans by King Louis VII of France in 1154. This example was followed by Henry II of England, and by Hohenstauffen Emperor Frederick II who also granted commanderies to the Order in their respective countries. These European holdings served to finance the Order's mission in the Holy Land. After the fall of the Holy City and the increasing dominion of the Holy Land by the Islamic forces, the Order in 1253 transferred its headquarters to France with the consent of Pope Alexander IV and King St. Louis IX of France who entrusted the port of Aigues-Mortes to its protection and presented it with a house in Paris. In the

meantime, it retained its hospital and presence in Acre until the final fall of this city in 1291. The increasing European presence by the Order led to the establishment of further leper hospitals [known as lazar-cotes or lazarettos] in France, Spain, Italy, England, Scotland, Germany, Hungary and Switzerland. By the middle of the fourteenth century, the Order possessed over three hundred establishments in various countries of Western Europe. In 1265, Pope Clement IV gave further importance to the endeavors of the Order when he obliged the secular clergy to confine all lepers irrespective of sex and status - men or women, clerics or laymen, religious or secular - in the houses of the Order.

In 1123, because of the increasing treat of invasion, the two hospitaller Orders of St. John and of St. Lazarus assumed an added military function and instituted a class of military brethren. While, its military role was never to assume the same importance as in the Orders of St. John and of the Temple [established in 1118], the knights of the Order of St. Lazarus did contribute to the defense of the Holy Land. A few non-leper brethren were included in the Order as knights, while the leprous knights almost certainly took up arms whenever necessary. There were also lay brethren-sergeants, recruited from commoners suffering from leprosy. A detachment of the Order may have fought at the Battle of

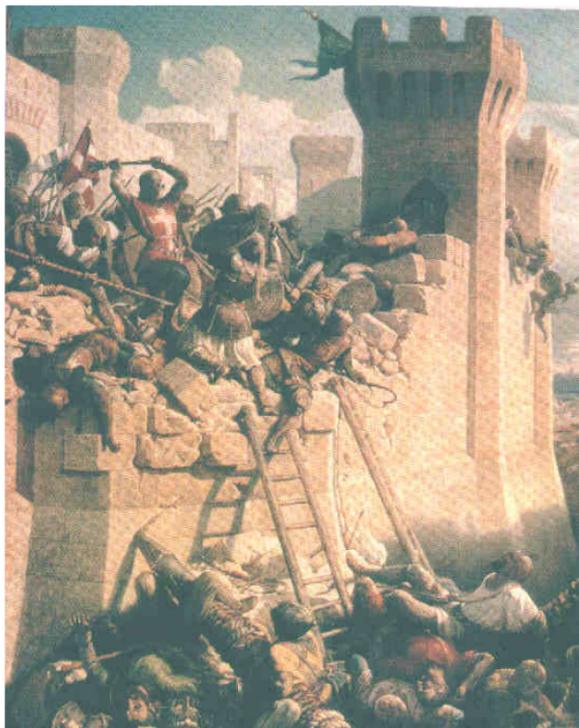
*Knight of Saint Lazarus  
14<sup>th</sup> century*



Hattin in 1187. Their presence is mentioned without further detail at the disastrous Battle of Gaza against the Khwarizmians at La Forbie in October 1244 where the Order suffered heavy losses. In 1253 the Order made an ill-fated foray against the Moslems in Ramleh and was saved from utter destruction only

by the intervention of Louis IX of France. The military brethren also fought valiantly in the final siege of Acre in 1291.

The Christians dominion of the Holy City came to an end after the Christian forces were driven out of Jerusalem by Sultan Saladin after the battle of Tiberias in October 1187. The Order of St. Lazarus transferred its headquarters to Acre where it was granted sovereignty over the Tower of Lazarus in the northern suburb of Montmusard. In April 1291, the Saracen army under the leadership of Sultan Khalid laid siege to Acre. The five military religious Orders joined forces under the control of William de Beaujeu, Master of the Temple. The Christian garrison was made up of about 14000 infantry and 700 knights, of whom more than a half belonged to the Orders. The majority of the knights belonged to the Order of the Temple [about 240 Templars] and the Order of St. John [about 140 Hospitallers]. The other three military Orders could provide only about 50 knights [25 Knights of St. Lazarus, 15 Teutonic Knights, and 10 Knights of St. Thomas]. The Knights of St. Lazarus joined the Knights of the Temple in the fourth sector of the ramparts. In spite of the bravery of the defending forces, the last Latin stronghold fell to the Saracen onslaught. All the military brethren of the Order of St. Lazarus present at Acre were killed during the defence.



## The Order in Western Europe

The scourge of leprosy to pilgrims to the Holy Land had required the establishment of dedicated hospices or lazarettos for sufferers. These lazarettos were managed by members of the Order of Saint Lazarus who added on a military arm to the Order to protect the inmates and contributed to the defence of the Holy Land until the expulsion of the Christian forces in 1291. In the interim, the Order of Saint Lazarus expanded its holdings and activities to various European countries where several lazarettos were established.

After the fall of Acre and the expulsion of all Christians from the Holy Land in 1291, the Order permanently moved its headquarters to France, where it came under the protection of the Royal House. In the face of national intrigues that were to see the persecution of the Templar Order, Pope John XXII in 1318 granted the Order of St. Lazarus exemption from local ecclesiastical authority, making the Order dependant on the Holy See. In 1489, Pope Innocent VIII in an effort to bring about a more rational use of existing resources in anticipation of the launch of a new crusade tried to amalgamate the Order of St. Lazarus with that of St. John now stationed in Rhodes. The Papal Bull was met with resistance by the French knights of St. Lazarus who continued to retain their independence. In 1493, the French Boigny Commandery elected a new head, François d'Amboise, who assumed the title of Grandmaster General of St. Lazarus. The subsequent popes refused to recognize the Order's independence until in 1564, Pope Pius IV recognized the newly-appointed Grandmaster of the Order of St. Lazarus Michel de Seure as Commander of Boigny. The Commandery was furthermore recognized as the "seat of the knights of St. Lazarus here and beyond the seas". It adopted the motto *ATAVIS ET ARMIS*, still in use by the Order today. While accepting de Seure as Commander, the Pope did not formally accord him the title of Grandmaster and confirmed the title of "Master-General" of St. Lazarus to the Prior of Capua, Jeannot de Castillon (Giannotto Castiglione).



**Galley ship flying the standard of the Order of St. Lazarus at Battle of Lepanto**

*[detail from painting "Madonna della Flotta" by A. Riccio; Malta Maritime Museum]*

The French knights however continued to resist the election of the Duke of Savoy as Head of the Order and persuaded King Henry III of France to support the French Order's independence. This was to lead to a schism that resulted into two main branches of the Order: the Italian branch of the Order which was subsequently amalgamated with the new Savoyard Order of St. Maurice and the French branch of the Order which for a time was amalgamated with the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. This latter Order was to become dormant and lose its connection with St Lazarus in the later years (circa 1787) after the turmoil of the French Revolution. The Order of St. Lazarus continued in their military role maintaining a squadron of galley ships that waged war against the Moslem threat, participating in the decisive Battle of Lepanto in 1571.

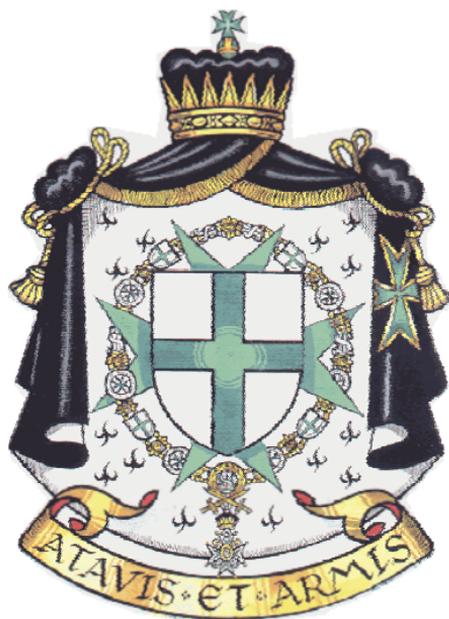
The French branch retained its independence and Royal support until the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The French Revolution set the wheels for the loss of the Royal patronage it had enjoyed in the previous centuries. The Order saw the confiscation of all its property in France and the suppression of its activities in that country. The 43<sup>rd</sup> Grandmaster, the Duke of Provence, left France and continued to manage the Order's affairs in the several hospices and Commanderies in other European lands. He also admitted a number of new knights into the Order, among whom were several European Princes and nobles. Following the death of the Grandmaster, the Order's members established a Council of Officers to ensure the continuing governance of the Order without Royal Magistracy, thus reverting to the situation prior to 1720. The Council of Officers further sought and obtained the Spiritual Protection of the Catholic Patriarch of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem (between 1098 and 1187, the Order had been under the spiritual patronage of the Latin Patriarchs of Jerusalem). This gave the Order a degree of high patronage from one of its original 'fountains of honour', and continued to survive through its hereditary Commanderies in Spain and in other parts of Europe.

The Order of St Lazarus was to receive Royal patronage again in 1935 when H.R.H. Francisco de Paula de Borbón y de la Torre, Duke of Seville and Grandee of Spain was appointed the 44<sup>th</sup> Grandmaster of the Order, with the sanction of his second cousin King Alonso XIII of Spain. Thus the Order reverted to the Grand Magistracy of the Bourbons, this time the Princes of Spain. The Grandmaster was succeeded to the post by his son Francisco Enrique de Borbon y de Borbon. The 45<sup>th</sup> Grandmaster was unable to dedicate himself satisfactorily to the Order's affairs because of his military duties in Spain. The management of the Order was thus delegated to an Administrator General Pierre Timoleon de Crosse Brissac, who in 1969 led a splinter group that was to become known as the "Paris Obedience" whose headquarters were located at the old Lazarite castle of Boigny. In view of the administrative problems, the Chapter-General of the Order in 1967 appointed Prince Charles-Philippe d'Orleans, Duke of

Nemours, Vendome and Alencon as the 46<sup>th</sup> Grandmaster - with the consent of the Count of Paris, traditional Head of the French Royal House - and awarded the title of 'Grandmaster Emeritus' to Francisco de Borbon. The French Prince established Boigny in France as the Titular Seat of the Order and Malta as the Administrative seat (Decrees no. 2 and 3 of 1969.) The death of Prince Charles-Philippe in 1970, the failure by Prince Michael of France who was the appointed Co-adjutor to take up the post, and the retirement of Francisco de Borbon from his military duties enabled the latter to be appointed as 47<sup>th</sup> Grandmaster. He was succeeded by his son Francisco de Paula de Borbon y Escasany, Duke of Seville, after his death in 1995, the latter being appointed the 48<sup>th</sup> Grandmaster by a Chapter-General of the Order. Because the administrative seat or Grand Chancery of the main branch of the Order was formally inaugurated in Malta in 1973, this branch was to become known as the "Malta Obedience". Meanwhile, the Titular Seat moved to Madrid, Spain.

In spite of certain internal conflicts that caused various administrative schisms, the members of the various Obediences have consistently been dedicated and effective fundraisers for significant humanitarian causes. Ambulance Corps other voluntary corps have been established in Europe, USA, Canada, and Australia. They have obtained substantial donations from their own membership as well as successfully acquiring large grants from the European Union and the German government that have been put to good use in Eastern Europe. Leading members of the Lazarus Hilfswerk, the German charitable arm of Saint Lazarus that has been the primary instrument in obtaining government and E.U. funding, have been received by Pope John Paul II in private audience when His Holiness thanked them for the extensive Polish relief operations. The Order continues with its philanthropic activities on a worldwide scale. The Order of St. Lazarus continues to support several Leprosy Treatment Centers around the world where staff and volunteers care for those suffering from Leprosy. In addition, the Order supports research programs to enable the development of further therapeutic options against this infection. Through its Green

Cross Organization, the Order supports volunteer groups to provide service and assistance to sick and needy, and provides First Aid Training and Voluntary First Aid Special Events Services. It also runs Crime Prevention and Leadership Programs.



**Arms of the Malta Obedience branch of the Order**

## The Order in Malta

The Military and Hospitaller Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem established a presence in Malta in the 1960s through the agency of Scottish Lt. Colonel, Robert Gayre of Gayre and Nigg, Baron of Lochoreshire. After 1961, Robert Gayre was to spearhead an expansion of the Order into the English-speaking world. The Order was thus divided into Provinces, subsequently termed Jurisdictions. Constitutional reforms were made to allow non-Catholic Christians to join the Order. The Order thus became ecumenical in outlook and in essence, following upon the trend set by the Vatican Council II. The British-Malta cultural and political links enabled the Order to be established in Malta in 1966 by the abovementioned (late) Robert Gayre. The first members of the Order in Malta included Sir Hannibal P. Scicluna, Colonel J.V. Abela, and Chev. Elias Zammit, Chev. Anthony Miceli-Farrugia, Prof. Dr. J.V. Zammit-Maempel and Chev. Robert Biasini dei Conti Stagno Navarra. Colonel Gayre subsequently purchased a fortified building in Malta known as Castel Lanzun that he donated for the use of the Order. This was duly restored and refurbished by donations from the European jurisdictions and beyond to eventually be converted into the administrative seat of the Order. In 1969, a Grand Magistral Council of the Order was held in Malta. The Order subsequently transferred the Grand Chancellery to Malta in 1973, the 47<sup>th</sup> Grandmaster being present for the inauguration.

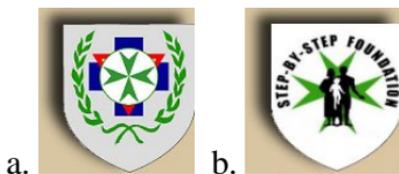
Malta continues to play an important role on the international scene of the Order. The Grand Chancery of the Malta Obedience continues to be sited in Malta (albeit not at Castel Lanzun). In Malta, the Order has always been committed to carrying out charitable works and projects for the care of the poor, the sick, the elderly, and the very young. Maltese Knights and Dames of the Order have in the past helped the small leper community in Malta, and have also contributed to the fight against the disease in countries, such as in Egypt and Kenya, where the problem of leprosy remains prevalent. A

‘Leprosy Fund’ used to be built up each year for distribution to Caritas and elsewhere. In November 2004, two philanthropic groups were affiliated to the Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands, namely the local Jurisdiction allegiant to the abovementioned French Prince who is at present designate Grandmaster and who has signified his Royal consent to be the new Fons Honorum. These voluntary groups include the *Special Rescue Group – St. Lazarus Corps* who are trained to deliver assistance to people in distress during individual or national emergencies; and the *Step-by-Step Foundation* that assists in the therapy of children suffering from impaired cerebral function. Some officers of these two dedicated groups have joined the Order. There is a keen attitude among several Members of the Order in Malta, especially the recent recruits, to achieve targets of charitable works and to make a mark during 2005. In the first quarter of this year a Commandery is being set up in Gozo. World Leprosy Day will remain an important date in the reformed Maltese Grand Priory’s calendar.



### ***Jurisdiction Flags***

- a. *Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands*
- b. *Commandery of Gozo*
- c. *Commandery of the Castello*



### ***Affiliated voluntary groups***

- a. *Special Rescue Group – St. Lazarus Corps*
- b. *Step-by-Step Foundation*



*The Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus* is an account of the history of an Order that was originally set up in Jerusalem with the brief of furnishing succour to the sufferers of leprosy. Increasing Muslim aggression required these hospitaller monks to become also “monks of war”; and were to play a crucial role in the defence of the Holy Land and the Crusades. The Order retained its existence even after the Christian World was expelled from the Holy Land. Its fortunes have seesawed throughout the centuries, but the members of the Order have managed to maintain an existence to the present day. This book briefly reviews the history of this lesser known Crusader Order from its initiation to the present times. It further charts the development of the Order in the Maltese Islands. This work serves to put in to perspective the traditional *raison d’etre* which the present-day Order has and thus facilitate the appreciation of the Order’s activities in the modern world.

