

THE ORDER OF MALTA INCORPORATING THE DOUBLE-HEADED EAGLE
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Above: Reverse side: 15 Tari Order of Malta coin. Year 1798
(Notice: The Crowned Double-Headed Eagle of Lagash)



(Above front side of the same 15 Tari Order of Malta coin. Year 1798)
(Notice the shoulder military epauletts bearing a clear facial image of a Lion head)



In general, The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta, is the world's oldest surviving order of chivalry. Although its earliest knights protected pilgrims en-route to The Holy Land {as did the Knights Templar}, the Knights of Saint John were essentially a Hospital Corps tending the sick, wounded and dying. Very seldom did the Order of Malta incorporate symbols of the old Holy Roman Empire. On occasion, it used partial depictions and hints of influences, but it was quite unusual to see a full-blown depiction in totality of any given symbol of the Roman Empire. It prided itself on being "Sovereign." That fact alone, makes the above illustrations so significant.

On occasion, the Order used a headless Eagle on its currency. However, a Crowned Double-Headed Eagle was a real rarity for that Order. Plus, their Double Headed Eagle held 'crosses' in its beaks, and empty talons {as if in flight } which was in stark contrast to anything depicted by Holy Roman Empire countries which often had the talons clutching tools of warfare or symbols of temporal power. The above 15 Tari coin minted in 1798 was issued for one year only!!! Its motto on the reverse is: "HOSPITAL. ET S. SEP. HIER." The word Hospital is self-explanatory. Hieronymus is the Greek and Latin name for the given name of "Jerome" which means "sacred place". Hieronymus is often associated with "Jerusalem" --- birthplace of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem {which over centuries, evolved into the colloquialism "Order of Malta."}

The Grand Master of the Order of Malta in 1798 was Ferdinand Joseph Hermann Freiherr von Hompesch zu Bolheim. He was born in Germany in 1744 and died in 1805. He was the only German to hold the high office of Grand Master. He was admitted to the Knights Hospitaller at the age 14, for which he received a dispensation from The Holy See, serving as a page to the then-Grand Master Manuel Pinto de Fonseca.

One side note that is quite pertinent: In the year 1577, the German Bailiwick of Brandenburg became Lutheran, but continued to pay its financial contribution to the Order of Malta until the branch was turned into a "merit Order" by the King of Prussia, as the "Johanniter Orden." This Johanniter Orden was restored as the Prussian Order of Knights Hospitaller in the year 1852.

Hompesch made overtures to "unite the Protestant branch of the Order", but his efforts fell through due to opposition by the German Knights. He has the unfortunate distinction of losing the island of Malta due to conquest by France by Napoleon Bonaparte. Hompesche stubbornly refused to believe that the French would attack; and secondly, the Order of Malta had a long-standing "rule" of "prohibiting knights to raise weapons against other Christians" {although some of them had skirmishes with other Christians ---even fellow knights--- throughout various periods of time}. Hompesche was overwhelmed. Had he simply used his existing men and supplies and fortified the island of Malta, he could have held-off Napoleon who was under strict orders not to continue on his Egyptian Expedition if Malta resisted. Only a short time after the defeat at Malta, British forces swarmed the region with brute force, sinking at least two French warships.

Hompesche in his early life was quite successful at diplomacy; but he was a hapless failure as a military commander. He was succeeded as Grand Master of the Order of Malta by Russia's Paul I, on a de facto basis.

In any event, Hompesch's ecumenical outreach should not be underestimated. History, in general, may have taken a drastically different turn had he succeeded in unifying the Protestant Order and the Catholic Orders of Malta. Plus in 1798, the Double-Headed Eagle of Lagash was already widely used in Masonic circles of what eventually became the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

Demoralized by defeat, Hompesch resigned as Grand Master on July 6, 1799 and briefly relocated in Slovenia. In 1804, he moved to Montpelier, France, and died one year later of asthma --penniless.



The modern Catholic Order of Malta continues to this day, mainly engaging in charitable and medical-assistance endeavors. Its motto continues to be: "Defense of the faith and assistance to the poor." Its current Grand Master, Matthew Festing was born in Northumberland, England. According to the modern Grand Priory of England, the Order has had a presence in England "from the time of the First Crusade, long before the foundation of the English Langue in the early years of the 14th-Century"

Ironically, the Catholic Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta gave special honors to England's King Edward VIII, who was a 33^o Mason in the Ancient and Accepted Rite (Scottish Rite) as well as a Knight Templar. King Edward VII was also Grand Master of Masons in England. He was particularly active within the British version of the Protestant Order of Malta styled in England as "The Venerable Order of Saint John."

In a highly unusual flip-flop of quibbling over legitimacy of which "Order" was "authentic" --- King Edward VII was bestowed high honors by the Catholic Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta (S.M.O.M.), including the honorary cross of a "Bailliff Grand Cross of the {Catholic} Order of Malta in 1882; he wore it during a visit to Malta after his ascension to the Throne.

In a final vindication of sorts the British "Venerable Order of Saint John" in the year 1963 signed a Concordant and is finally recognized as a worthy 'cousin' of their organization. Both organizations do not {as of yet } officially recognize our Masonic "Order of Malta" as presented within a lawfully constituted Commandery of Knights Templar Masons. We can only hope and pray that, given enough time, another breakthrough WILL someday occur. Too often, people put 'labels' on people, places, things and sometimes these categories develop into 'stereotypes' which may be 'accurate' or 'inaccurate.'

For far too many years, Freemasonry has been subject to preconceived biases by outsiders ... but once they "associate a 'name' with a 'face', our Fraternity takes on a more human complexion; and people are more favorably receptive to us. We must emulate the welcome-mat extended to King Edward VII. We must strive to let our good reputations overcome the ignorance and rumor-mongering of critics. Many Freemasons already are members of the Venerable Order, so such an advancement of another future 'Concordant' acknowledging recognition of our Masonic Order of Malta on the same equal footing as the other chivalric groups is, by comparison, not a such huge leap --- but a rather only a small step which is left to achieve.

Scholars in our present day can only imagine the missed opportunities and lost time of valued friendships and dialogue if the various Orders had reunited sooner. Furthermore, many possibilities for full recognition still exist among all of the aforementioned groups. Incredible amounts of Harmony could have been cemented, if such a cordial relationship had taken place in Ferdinand Hompesch's lifetime. So, in many ways, Grand Master Hompesch was "ahead of his time" in extending the hand of friendship. Let us hope that future opportunities of cooperation won't be missed ---nor wasted.

Sources / References / Exhibits /Recommended Readings:

- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Dr. Albert G. Mackey, M.D., 33^o and a Knight Templar.
- Archives of The Supreme Council 33^o Southern Jurisdiction.
- Archives of The Grand Priory of England -- British Association of The Sovereign Military Hospitaller order of Saint John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta. Ian Scott, Grand Prior {Installed October 2011}.
- Chiefa Coins Database with World Rulers: Order of Malta Coins
- Archives of The Masonic Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, Canada.
- EXHIBIT: Photo of a year 1798 Order of Malta 15 Tari coin, bearing the image of The Grand Master and The Double-Headed Eagle. Metal: Silver. Diameter: 40.50 mm.



- Macoy's Masonic Manual by Robert Macoy, 33^o and a Knight Templar. Fifteenth Edition. New York. Published in New York, Year 1861 by Clark, Austin, Maynard & Company located at 3 Park Row & 3 Ann Street, New York, New York. "A Pocket Companion for the Initiated".

About the Author:

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