

The Development of the Armorial Display of
the Grand Cross and the Rosary
by the Knights of the Order of St. John
c. 1480 – c. 1750

JOHN JOSEPH FITZPATRICK KENNEDY
Knight of Magistral Grace in Obedience, S.M.O.M.,
M.A., Ph.D. (Tor.), F.R.S.A.I., F.R.H.S.C., A.I.H.,

**1. The Origin of the Dignity of
'Knight (of the) Grand Cross' of the Order of St. John,
and of the Custom of Displaying the Cross on Armour**

The custom of displaying an image of the “Grand Cross” of the Order of St. John behind the shield of the arms of those knights entitled to wear the cross itself on their clothing appears to have its origins in the aftermath of the Great Siege of Malta in 1565, though as with other such customs in the Order, it had earlier roots.¹ If the Abbé de Vertot (1732) and Francesco Bonazzi (1837) are to be believed, the dignity of Knight (of the) Grand Cross itself was created in the aftermath of the Great Siege of Rhodes in 1480, as an honour for those who had been especially active in its defence.² Some form of the eight-pointed Cross of the Order had been in use by the Knights of St. John as a badge of their status since the thirteenth century, evolving from an earlier Cross Moline. Its straight-sided version came to be

¹ See J. J. F. KENNEDY, “The Emergence of Some Heraldic Customs in the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Cyprus, Rhodes and Malta”, *The Coat of Arms*, N.S. Vol XI, No. 171, Autumn, 1995, pp. 110-125; *IDEM*, *The Development of the Chief of Religion in the Order*

² René D’AUBERT D’AUBEUF, Abbé de Vertot, *Histoire des Chevaliers Hospitaliers de S. Jean de Jérusalem* (Amsterdam, 1732), Vol. 5, pp. 439-48, in *Catalogue des Grand Croix, Baillifs, Commandeurs, Chevaliers, ... qui en 1480 se trouverent à la defense de Rhodes*. See also Francesco BONAZZI, *Elenco di Cavalieri del S. M. Ordine de S. Giovanni di Gerusalemme* (Bologna 1887-1907, repr. 1969), pp. 128 et seq. *Ser 1480 se trouverent à la defense de Rhodes*. See also Francesco BONAZZI, *Elenco di Cavalieri del S. M. Ordine de S. Giovanni di Gerusalemme*, (Bologna original 1887-1907, repr. 1969), p. 128 ff.

called the 'Maltese Cross' when the Knights of St. John moved to Malta in 1530.



Fig. 1. Grand Master Pierre d'Aubusson in Chapter.
 Note both the Grand Crosses on the Bailiffs' robes and
 the Pater Noster beads each officer is fingering.

As was the case of the right to display on the knight's arms proper the 'Chief of Religion' (that is, the *arms* of the Order), the right to display a Grand Cross belonged *ex officio* to High Dignitaries of the Order, though it was also awarded to knights below that administrative level. According to Dr. Helen Nicholson,

The posts of conventual bailiffs, capitular bailiffs, and provincial priors were only open to knights. By the early modern period, these offices carried the honour of “Grand Cross”, whereas lesser offices, such as commanders, held only the “Little Cross”. There were also **bailiffs of honour**, who received the Grand Cross as a mark of esteem, but who had no authority in the Order.³

The status of ‘bailiff of honour’ with the right to wear the larger version of the Order’s cross seems to have originated as an honour granted to certain knights after the Great Siege of Rhodes in 1480, under the leadership of Grand Master Pierre d’Aubusson. Both Vertot and Bonazzi mention that various knights and serving Brothers were awarded the Grand Cross after the successful conclusion of that siege. The practice of wearing such a cross on their textile vestments was soon adopted by the High Dignitaries of the Order (e.g. the Grand Commander, the Marshal, the Hospitaller, etc. various Grand Priors, Conventual Bailiffs, the Commanders of Kos/Lango, Captains of St. Peter’s Castle at Bodrum, etc.).⁴

³ In Julia TOFFOLO, *Image of a Knight: Portrait Prints and Drawings of Knights of St. John in the Museum of the Order of St. John*, (Over Wallop, Hampshire, 1988), p. 44, Pl. 99.

⁴ See Jean-Bernard DE VAIVRE et Laurent VISSIÈRE, ‘Affin que vous mon intention des ystories que je vueil, et des lieux ou seront’. *Essai sur le manuscrit de dédicace des oeuvres de Guillaume Caoursin à Pierre d’Aubusson (v. 1483)*, Société de l’Histoire et du Patrimoine de l’Ordre de Malte, Paris, 27, 2012, pp. 44-45. Note the prominence of the eight-pointed crosses on the robes of the Bailiffs and Grand Master d’Aubusson as well as the string of Pater Noster beads ending in tassels that all members of the Chapter are fingering. The two breastplates illustrated are from the Odelscalchi Collection in the Museum di Palazzo Venezia, Rome. The breastplate with the smaller cross dates to c. 1570-1580, while the breastplate with the large cross dates to c. 1610. See *Gentilhuomini Christiani e Religiosi Cavalieri* ed. Tomasso RICARDI DE NETRO and Luisa Clotilde GENTILE, *Electra* (Milan, 2000), pp. 120-121. The portrait of Leone Strozzi shows him in an ornate suit of armour charged on the breastplate with the Grand Cross. The Strozzi were a notable family of Florence. Strozzi (1515-1554) had entered the Order in 1530 as a youth of 15. In 1536 at 21 years of age, Leone served as Captain General of the Galleys. It was likely after this that Strozzi became Prior of Capua in the Langue of Italy. His father, Filippo the Younger, having been killed fighting against Cosimo de Medici at Montemurlo (1538), Leon with his brother, Piero sought refuge in France at the court of Marie de Medici. Piero became a Marshal of France, while Leone became a Captain General of the French Galleys. Leone died at the Siege of Scarlino, in Tuscany, during the unsuccessful defence of the Republic of Siena in 1554. The

Thanks to the illuminations in Caoursin's account of the Siege, we can get a glimpse of a Council meeting (**Fig. 1**), c. 1483.



Fig. 2. Portrait of Frà Leone Strozzi, Prior of Capua and Captain General of the Galleys, c. 1550-1560.
Note the Grand Cross on his breastplate

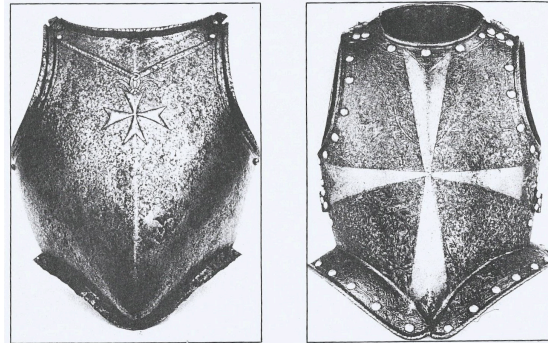


Fig. 3. Two breastplates from the Odaleschi Collection illustrating the difference between the Little Cross of Commanders (left) and the Grand Cross (right).

If the successful defense of Rhodes permitted Grand Master d'Aubusson to award the Grand Cross to various knights, his successors continued the practice. After the loss of Rhodes in 1522, Grand Master Villiers de l'Isle-Adam wandered with the knights for seven years before settling on the island of Malta. It was probably only after 1530, when the Order took possession of Malta, that the Grand Cross Knights began to distinguish themselves from ordinary knights and commanders by having a large eight pointed cross of the Order etched on their breastplates, though the exact date this occurred is not clear to me. The first illustration I have discovered of this practice is that of Frà Leone Strozzi (v. 1515-1554), who had, at twenty-one years of age, been Captain General of the Galleys

portrait likely dates from before between 1550-1560. Whether as Captain General of the Galleys of the Order (which he was again in 1552-1553) or Prior of Capua, Leone was entitled to the Grand Cross. The illustration is found in R. DAUBER, *Die Marine des Johanniter-Malteser-Ritter-Ordens*, Graz, 1989, p. 236, with no attribution to an artist. See also *The New Century Italian Renaissance Encyclopedia*, ed. Catherine B. AVERY, (New York, 1972) p. 899, for background on the Strozzi family.

in the Order in 1536-37, and again in 1552-53, as well being as Captain General of the Galleys of France in the latter year. (Fig. 2) The custom of Knights Grand Cross displaying a large cross on their breastplate, however, continued, as we can see from a variety of breastplates preserved from the sixteenth century. (Fig. 3)

2. The Development of the Postscutal Display of the Cross as the Armorial Insigne of the Dignity of Knight Grand Cross

The display of the Grand Cross within the armorial achievement of the Knights, however — usually behind the shield or cartouche — is the custom of interest here. The earliest examples of this heraldic custom that I have found are on the portraits of two Knights, Frà Paulo Avogadro (from Piedmont) and Frà Giovanni Battista Montalto (from Sicily), both dating from c. 1565-1575. (Figs. 4 and 5)



Fig. 4. (left) Portrait of Frà Paolo Avogadro, 1565/9. *He died defending Fort St. Elmo in 1565. Note the achievement in the upper right hand corner with the Grand Cross set behind the shield in the postscutal position.*

Fig. 5 (right) Portrait of Giovanni Battista Montalto, *who also died at Fort St. Elmo in 1565. Note in the upper left hand corner the achievement with both the Grand Cross and the Chaplet of the Rosary intersecting the tips of the Grand Cross. c. 1565-1570.*

I must here caution the reader that the set of examples presented in this article is a relatively limited one, and I cannot claim to have given a definitive account of the development of the practice in question. Nor am I aware of any earlier attempt to trace the origins of this practice in print on which I might have built. What follows should therefore be seen as a preliminary sketch of the development of the custom in question, subject to revision if either earlier or significantly different examples come to light.

We know that both Avogadro and Montalto fought during the Great Siege of Malta in 1565. Both appear to have died at Fort St. Elmo. Both portraits illustrate the grand cross behind the cartouche or shield. In the Avogadro portrait, only the grand cross is shown.⁵ In the Montalto portrait, however, the grand cross appears behind the shield and is surrounded by the 'chaplet' of the Rosary. It is also notable that it bears a chief, *Gules charged with a cross moline argent* (not the strictly-defined 'chief of [the] Religion', representing the arms of the Order: *Gules a cross throughout argent*).⁶

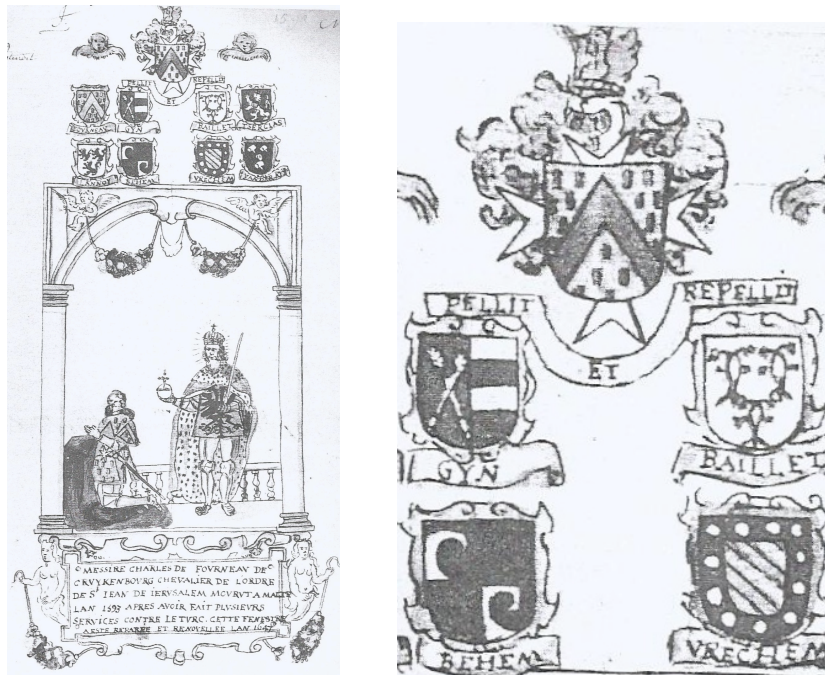


Fig. 6. Drawing (and detail) for a stained glass window commemorating Charles de Fourneau de Cruquembourg (d. 1587) in the Chapel of Ternat.
Note the Grand Cross behind the shield in the uppermost achievement.

Thus, from about 1569, both ways of showing the Grand Cross (with and without the Chaplet of the Rosary) are found. I do not completely understand the reason for this difference in display. But, as I

⁵ See Tomasso RICARDI DE NETRO and Luisa Clotilde GENTILE (eds.), *Gentilhuomini Cristiani e Religiosi Cavaliere*, ed. (Milan, 2000), p. 42, and Sir Hannibal SCICLUNA, *The Church of St. John in Valletta: its history, architecture and monuments with a brief history of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem from its inception to the present day* (Rome, 1959), Pl. XVIII. This portrait is now in the Magistral Palace in Rome.

⁶ SCICLUNA, *Church of St. John in Valletta*, *loc. cit.*

hope to show, the most common use was simply to display the Grand Cross behind the shield or cartouche, perhaps simply because it was easier to render artistically. Nevertheless, the use of the Grand Cross with the Chaplet of the Rosary – surrounding, overlying, or intertwined with the edges of its eight points, and terminating in a pendant Cross of Malta – became very fashionable during the Seventeenth Century.⁷

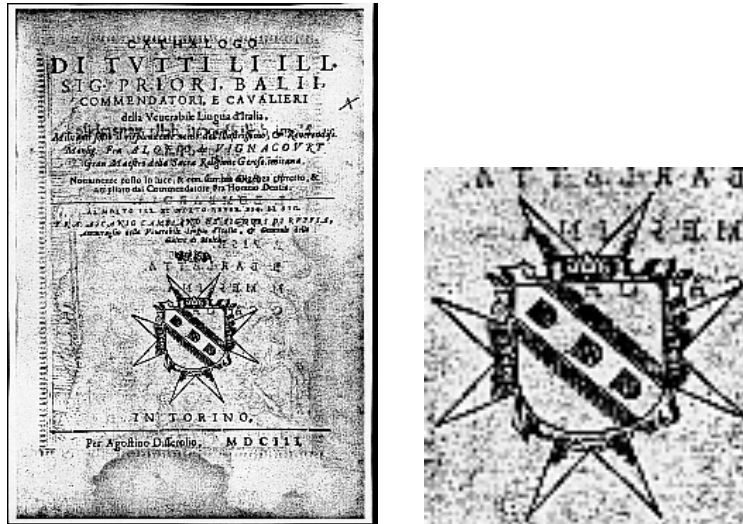


Fig. 7. Frontispiece (and detail) from Frà Horatio Dentis's *Cathalogo di tutti li Ill.mi Sig.ri priori, bailii, commendatory e cavalieri della Venerabile Lingua d'Italia* (Torino, 1603). It shows the arms of Frà Ascanio Cambiano di Ruffa, Admiral of the Order, with the Grand Cross behind his shield.

In addition to the two portraits noted above, I have found a cartoon for a stained glass window for Frà Charles de Fourneau de Cruquembourg (c. 1574) (**Fig. 6**),⁸ the frontispiece for a book depicting the arms of Frà Ascanio Cambiano di Ruffia, Admiral of the Order, titular Prior of Hungary and Bailiff of Venosa from 1603 (**Fig. 7**),⁹ and another portrait of Frà Girolamo Avogadro, Commander of Lucca, a Knight Grand Cross and Admiral of the Order in 1581 (c.1606) (**Fig. 8**),¹⁰ all of which show only the

⁷ Marleen FORRIER (ed.), *L'Ordre de Malte dans les Pays Bas Méridionaux (XIIe-XVIIe Siècles)*, (Bruxelles, 1993), p. 113

⁸ *Gentilhuomini Christiani e Religiosi Cavalieri*, p. 80, illustration no. 44

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49, Pl. 4

⁹ SCICLUNA, *Church of St. John in Valletta*, gives a complete black and white photographic catalogue of the funeral slabs that form the floor of the Church of St. John at Valletta.

Grand Cross behind the shield or its framing cartouche. No chaplet of the Rosary appears in any of them.



Fig. 8. Portrait of Frà Gerolamo Avogadro, former Admiral of the Order, c. 1606.
Note his armorial achievement with the Grand Cross behind the shield.

I suggested above that the heraldic custom appears frequently only after the Siege of Malta in 1565. The knights who had survived this incredible ordeal were indeed proud to display the Grand Cross behind their heraldic achievements. We must recall that practically everyone in Valletta suffered some wounds, even the brave Maltese men and women who sought shelter at Birgu and Senglea. By using this display, the Knights Grand Cross could show their part in the success of the Order in thwarting the plan of Suleiman the Magnificent to conquer the western Mediterranean.

Despite the changes in artistic conventions and styles in heraldry, this simple pattern persisted in Malta, where of the 380 funeral slabs decorating the floor of the Conventual Co-Catherdral of St. John in Valletta, most after the Great Siege display only this pattern, even though elsewhere on seals, in illuminations, in bookplates and other art forms of the same knights, they may have used the Chaplet of the Rosary around their Grand Cross.

3. The Origins of the Custom of Displaying the Grand Cross with the Rosary

In the crypt below the choir of the same church we find the tombstone of Grand Master Philippe de Villiers de L'Isle-Adam (d. 1534). Originally, this tombstone and carved figure was placed in Fort Saint Angelo in the chapel of St. Anne (alleged mother of the Virgin Mary) in 1535. The full-figure funeral sculpture of the Grand Master shows him with his hands folded over one another above a sword and pendant from the fingers of his right

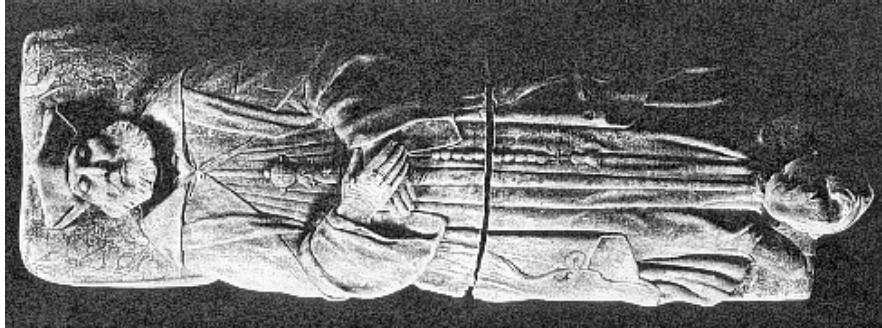


Fig. 9. (left) The sepulchral figure depicting Grand Master Philippe de Villiers de L'Isle-Adam (1535), by Antonello Gaggini (1478-1537). Note the Grand Master's hands folded over the sword and also the string of his Pater Noster beads.

hand is a string of *Pater Noster* beads (i.e. a string of ten beads with a small Eight-pointed Cross at the terminal point). (**Fig. 9**)¹¹

Grand Master de Villiers had formerly been the Grand Prior of France (1520-1521). He was from an illustrious noble family of Beauvais. He was, I believe, truly one of the greatest of the Grand Masters, and had suffered much both in losing Rhodes and afterwards. De Villiers had nonetheless held the Order together, always a step ahead of the plague, until he somewhat reluctantly re-established it on Malta in 1530. He commissioned and bequeathed numerous religious artifacts for the use of the Order, one illumination of which (**Fig. 10**) shows his devotion to Christ.¹²

¹¹ See *De Rhodes à Malte* (Paris, 2004), pp. 50 and 53. The front of the funeral monument for Grand Master de Villiers by Gaggini is shown in the first, while in the second a plaster cast of the relining figure of the Grand Master de Villiers now at Versailles is shown.

¹² The illustrated MS, showing G. M. de Villiers de l'Île-Adam attending Christ's entry into Jerusalem (Matt 21:8-11), is from London, British Library MS. Add. 18143, fol. 3v. See Jonathan RILEY-SMITH, *Hospitallers: The History of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem* (London, 1999), p. 104.



Fig. 10. Miniature of Christ entering Jerusalem on the back of a donkey.

Note Grand Master de Villiers de l'Ile-Adam praying in the lower left hand corner. One of many illustrations commissioned by de Villiers illustrating his veneration of the Lord.

The arms on the façade of his funeral monument take the form: *Quarterly, 1st and 4th, the Religion (i.e., the arms of the Order, gules a cross argent) , with his own arms in the second and third quarters. On either side of the shield are two strings of Pater Noster beads, headed at the top by the eight pointed cross and below with a tassel. This carving was removed from Fort Saint Angelo to the Crypt of the Co-Cathedral in 1577 by Grand Master Jean l'Évesque de La Cassière and placed in its present location. Nevertheless, we know it was completed by Antonello Cagini/Gaggini (1478-1537) in 1535. (Fig. 13)*

Grand Master de Villiers could scarcely have been ignorant of the approbation of the Rosary given by Pope Leo X in 1520, while he was still Grand Prior of France. The appearance on his funeral monument of the *Pater Noster* beads would, I believe, have set in motion the beginning of the use of the Chaplet of the Rosary by various Grand Cross Knights of the Order.

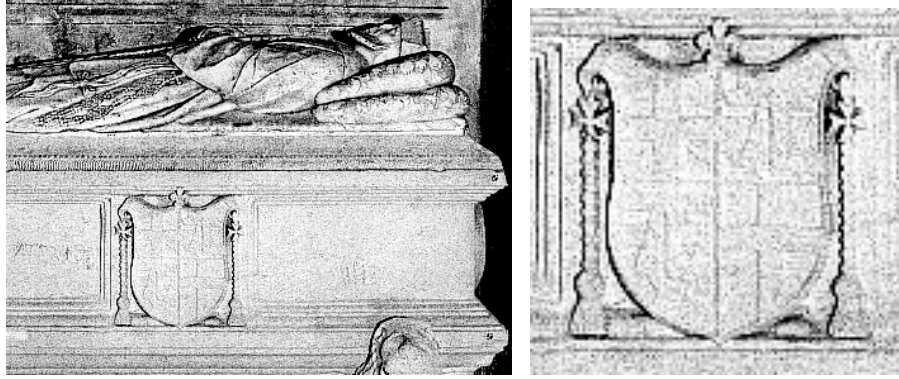


Fig. 11. Tomb front of Grand Master de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam,
 showing the arms of the Order quartered by those of Villiers.
*Note the two strings of Pater Noster beads on either side of the ornate shield.
 Each string of beads is headed with a Maltese cross and ends in a tassel.*



**Fig. 12. (left) Tombstone of
 Grand Master Claude de La
 Sengle (d. 1557**

*Note the change in the
 disposition of the beads,
 which are now arranged in a
 circllet or chaplet and end
 in a tassel.*



**Fig. 13. Bronze Lectern in the
 Co-Cathedral of St. John in
 Valletta, 1557.**

*Note that the eagle has charged on
 its breast the arms of Frà François
 de Lorraine, Grand Prior of
 France, surrounded with the
 chaplet of beads from which is
 suspended the cross of the Order.
 There is no Cross behind the
 shield.*

However, the string of *Pater Noster* beads on either side of the shield on the front of the tomb of Grand Master de Villiers can also be found in Caoursin's illustrations of Grand Master Pierre d'Aubusson (see Fig. 1 above). Already in the Holy Land, E. J. King draws our attention to the *Usances (or Customs)* of the Order, where article 123 records that 'it is decreed in the Holy House of the Hospital that each brother, who is not a priest, should say every day one hundred and fifty *Pater Nosters*'.¹³ (Fig. 14) Most knights, being Canons not monks, were not able, given their active forms of charitable life, either in the Hospital or in defense of the Holy Land or the Religion, to read the 150 Psalms daily, as some of the more cloistered Benedictine and Cistercian monks did. Some Psalms were read aloud for them by five clerics at Compline according to Tom License.¹⁴ (Fig. 15)¹⁵ But, because the Hospitallers lived an active Canonical life of service, saying the *Pater Nosters* was a commonplace in their daily routine, which allowed them to seek God's help and peace in their various duties, conforming to the seven canonical hours. This gives us the motive for the use of the *Pater Noster* beads on the front of de Villier's tomb as well as in the hands of Grand Master d'Aubusson and the Conventual Bailiffs of Fig. 1, from 1483 on.

However, on the tombstone of Grand Master Claude de La Sengle (Fig. 13), Grand Master in Malta (1553-1557), we note a significant alteration. Grand Master de La Sengle was also from the Beauvais area, near Beaumont-sur-Oise, and had been both a Bailiff of the Order, and its Ambassador to Rome. De La Sengle's tomb, however, shows his shield with the arms of the Religion in 1st and 4th quarters and his own arms in 2nd and 3rd quarters, surrounded by a Chaplet of beads, terminating in a tassel, which may well indicate the transformation by this time of the recitation of the *Pater Nosters* to that of the increasingly popular Rosary.¹⁶

¹³ E. J. KING, *The Rules, Statutes and Customs of the Hospitallers 1099-1310*, (London, 1934), p. 195.

¹⁴ Tom LICENSE, "The Military Orders as Monastic Orders", *Crusades* 5 (2006), p. 48

¹⁵ E. J. KING, *The Seals of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem* (London, 1932), Pl. XIII, opp. p. 74. See also, *La sigillographie dans l'Ordre de Saint Jean de Jérusalem (Ordre de Malte)*, Société Héraldique Pictave (Niort, 2000), p. 104, for a written description of the seal of Henri d'Angoulême, later Grand Prior of France; it bore a chaplet of the Rosary around his arms.

¹⁶ SCICLUNA, *op. cit.*, Plate CCCI, no. 378.

Exactly this arrangement is found on the bronze lectern in the shape of an Eagle in the right side of the Sanctuary at the Co-Cathedral of St. John in Valletta. The eagle figure is charged on the breast with the arms of the Grand Prior of France, Frà François de Lorraine (1549-1563). Lorraine had been a formidable and pugnacious Captain General of the Galleys in 1556, and had donated this beautiful lectern, dated to 1557, to the Church (**Fig. 13**). It is also repeated on the seals of two other Grand Priors of France: that of Henri, Count of Angoulême, Grand Prior from 1573 to 1586, made c. 1575; and that of Charles d'Orléans, Grand Prior from 1587 to 1589, made c. 1590 (**Fig. 14**).¹⁷



Fig. 14. Seal of Frà Charles d'Orléans, Grand Prior of France, c. 1590.

Note the chaplet of the Rosary with pendant cross surrounding the shield, and the absence of a Grand Cross beneath the shield.

In all these arrangements only the Chaplet of beads was set around the shield, and no image of the Grand Cross was set behind the shield, though all these dignitaries were *ex officio* Grand Crosses. Let us be aware of the dates, which range from 1557 to 1590. Finally, a Bull issued by Pope Pius IV a month before the Great Siege of Malta in 1565 granted a plenary indulgence to all those who contributed toward the construction of the new fortress in Malta, on which the Arms of the Order are surrounded by a Chaplet of beads (**Fig. 16**).¹⁸ There are still later examples of the use of the Rosary beads alone surrounding the arms of various Knights, as well in a variety of seals.

By 1663, when Père Claude de Menestrier, S. J., explained the practice in his *Méthode du Blason*, surrounding a shield of arms with a Chaplet of the Rosary had come to indicate that the user was not a priest, but a layman, who occupied a religious office (e.g. that of a Grand Prior in

¹⁷ Dominic CUTAJAR, *Malta, History and Works of Art of St. John's Church, Valetta*, (Valletta, 1989), p. 20.

¹⁸ Albert GANADO, *Valetta, Città Nuova: A Map History (1566-1600)*, (Malta, 2003), p. 109, Pl. 41. For Menestrier's explanation of the display of the Pater Noster Beads in achievements see C. F. MENESTRIER, S.J., *La Methode du Blason* (Paris, 1683; repr. Guy Trédaniel, Éditions de la Maisne, Paris, 1976), p. 58.

the Order of St. John).¹⁹ We might be tempted from the examples above, from the *Pater Noster* beads on Grand Master de Villier's tomb front, through tomb slab of Grand Master de La Sengle, the lectern of Grand Prior de Lorraine and the seals of Grand Priors the Count of Angouleme and Orléans, to see a development of a French tradition. After all, with the exception of de La Sengle, every one of the knights in question had been a Grand Prior of France.



Fig. 15. Bull of Pope Pius IV from a month before the Great Siege of Malta.
*An ovoid shield of the arms of the Order is set on the right,
 surrounded by a chaplet of beads terminating only in a tiny tassel.*

However, the portrait of Frà Giovanni Battista Montalto cited earlier, painted c. 1565-1570, should give us pause to consider whether it was exclusively a French custom. Montalto's arms may be blazoned: *Party per pale, dexter Paly of Eight, Gules and Argent; sinister Sable, a lion rampant Or, beneath a chief Gules, charged with a cross moline Argent*. Bonazzi informs us that Montalto came from the family of the Barons of Buccheri of Naples.²⁰ (21) This chief was used by a wide variety of knights, commanders, and priests to indicate a connection with the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, and is distinct from the so-called Chief of Religion, which was used only by

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

²⁰ BONAZZI, *Elenco di Cavalieri*.

Conventual Bailiffs. Montalto was, however, a Grand Cross, perhaps because he paid the ultimate sacrifice in the defense of Fort St. Elmo.



Fig. 16. (left)
Achievement of Frà
Raimundo de Veri on a
Cannon (c. 1600)
outside the Co-
Cathedral of St. John in
Valletta.

Note the Grand Cross
behind the shield,
surrounded by the chaplet
of beads, supporting a cross
of the Order.



Fig. 17. (left) Engraved Portrait of Frà Joachim de Montaigu, Grand Prior of Toulouse.

Note his achievement below with both the chaplet of beads and the Grand Cross behind his shield. (Note also the cross suspended from a ribbon over his left shoulder.)

The same pattern, however, is also found on a cannon (now placed near the front of the Co-Cathedral of St. John) in Valletta, donated for the defense of Malta by the Bailiff of Mallorca, Frà Ramón de Veri. This cannon is dated to c. 1600 (**Fig. 16**).²¹ (22) De Veri had been Bailiff of Negroponte in 1576 and became Bailiff of Mallorca in 1585, and later became Grand Prior of Catalunya from 1602 to 1609. His arms may be blazoned: *Azure, three crescents inverted, 2 and 1, Or.* On the Cannon they are displayed with the Grand Cross behind the shield, and surrounded by a Chaplet of the Rosary, with the Cross of Malta pendant at the bottom. The use of all three insignia in this pattern would soon become common throughout Catholic Europe.

Some of the earliest and most beautiful examples from France are to be found upon the engraved portrait of Frà Joachim de Montaigu, Grand Prior of Toulouse, dated 1622 (**Fig. 17**), and on the medal of Noel Brulart de Sillery, a Bailiff (1615) and former Ambassador of the Order to the French Court (1614-1617), dated 1632. The latter shows a handsome portrait on the obverse, and a lovely achievement of his arms with the Chief of Religion,

²¹ TOFFOLO, *Image of a Knight*, p. 39, no. 82

the Grand Cross and the Chaplet of the Rosary with the pendant Cross of Malta (Fig. 18).²²



Fig. 18. Medal of Noel Brulart de Sillery, Bailiff Grand Cross and Ambassador of the Order to France, 1614-17.

Note the Grand Cross behind the shield surrounded by the chaplet of the Rosary.

What was to be the classic arrangement of the Order's insignia by the Knights Grand Cross of St. John became still more popular after the appearance in 1654 of Goussencourt's *Le Martyrologe des Chevaliers de S. Jean de Jérusalem* (Fig. 20).²³ This rare and remarkable book celebrated those knights who had died in defense of their faith against "the Turks". This work is it not notable as a piece of critical history, but rather as a kind of hagiographic legendary.

De Goussencourt, a Parisian member of the Celestine Order (a now extinct branch of the Benedictines), tended to idealize and piously exaggerate the lives and deaths of some of the Order's knights. Nonetheless, his work clearly seems to have been very influential artistically in France, setting the style of heraldic display by the Knights Grand Cross for several centuries. And, because France was by the *Grand Siècle* such a cultural pace-setter throughout Europe, this form of the achievement of the Grand Crosses became a common standard model within the Order as a whole. Though we should note that its arrangement

²² Mark JONES, *A Catalogue of French Medals in the British Museum, Volume Two: 1600-1672* (London, 1988); p. 284, no. 322 for Brulart de Sillery's medal.

²³ Both examples are from Père Matthieu DE GOUSSENCOURT, *Le Martyrologe des Chevaliers de S. Jean de Jérusalem* (Paris, 1654).

was not completely fixed: in surviving examples sometimes the Chaplet surrounds the Grand Cross, in others, lies behind the Chaplet, while yet in others the Rosary intertwines with tips of the eight-pointed Grand Cross, with no apparent consistency.

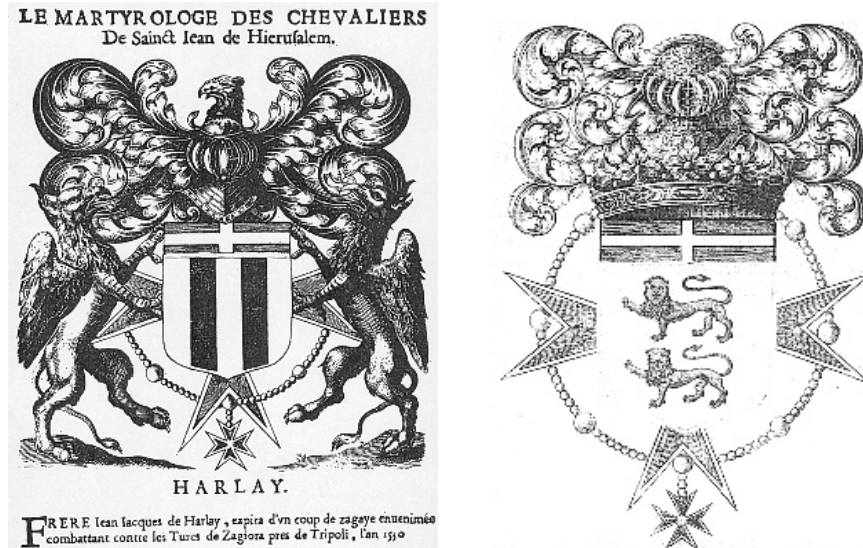


Fig. 19a, b. Two illustrations from de Goussancourt's *Le Martyrologe des Chevaliers de S. Jean de Jérusalem*. The representation in this work of the insignia in the achievements of the Order's martyrs became a popular model for Grand Crosses of Malta, making the combination of the Rosary with the the cross increasingly common. Note that the chaplet of beads is punctuated by larger beads, and can be displayed either beneath the ends of the Grand Cross (right) or entwined with its points (left).

3. The Origins and Significance of the Rosary as a Form of Armorial Insigne

This brings me to the questions of when and why the Chaplet of the Rosary came to be associated with the Grand Cross in the armorial display of the knights of that rank. Before attempting to answer that question, however, something should be said about the origin of the object itself, of the names 'rosary' and 'chaplet' eventually given to it, and of the traditions of devotion it came to embody.²⁴

²⁴ On the history of the Rosary, see Herbert THURSTON and Andrew SHIPMAN, 'The Rosary', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 13. (New York, 1912). <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13184b.htm>>. Accessed 3 Dec. 2014. See also John D. MILLER, *Beads and Prayers: the Rosary in history and devotion* (London, 2002), which gives a lucid and entertaining history of the development of the Rosary.

Recent historians have given us a reasonably clear understanding of how many streams of prayer in Catholic Christendom flowed together into the confluence that became the Rosary. In the early medieval period, the literate clergy prayed the Psalter of 150 Psalms in Latin, in unity with ancient Hebrew tradition, in three groups of fifty Psalms daily. Laymen and women, rarely literate in Latin, substituted fifty Pater Nosters, three times daily, as we saw with the Customs of the Hospitallers in the Holy Land.

The string of beads to which the name 'rosary' came to be attached had been invented to assist in keeping track of the number of *Pater Nosters* that had been completed during the course of such a devotion. An early form of it had itself been introduced by 1075, and as the prayer most commonly recited in this manner was the Lord's Prayer, known to contemporaries as the *Pater Noster* or 'Our Father', the name most commonly given to such chaplets from at least the twelfth century to the sixteenth was that of '*Pater Noster*'.

Thus, it was not just in the Order of St. John, but also among the pious, ordinary laity that we find the string of ten beads being used on tombstones, in engravings and illuminated mss. Guilds established for the manufacture of such prayer beads could be found in Paris and London, and in the latter the street where they were made is still called 'Pater Noster Row'. We have seen them depicted above as well in Fig. 1. Other examples from grave slabs could be multiplied, but it was a common motif in the period.

The first of the two words that came later to be attached to the string of prayer-beads was *Chapelet*, attested in Old French from c. 1200 and in Middle English from 1375. It was a general word for a 'garland' worn on the head, particularly one composed of flowers of some sort. In ecclesiastical contexts it was applied especially to the crown of roses with which images of the Blessed Virgin Mary were crowned in many settings, alluded to the symbolic associations of the rose with as the fruitful 'Rose of Sharon' and the 'Rose without thorns'. 'Rosary' and its French cognate *rosaire* (derived from the Classical Latin *rosarium* 'a rose garden') were merely more specific designations for a chaplet composed of roses, first attested in ecclesiastical Latin and then, in the fifteenth century, in the English and French vernaculars.

Both 'chaplet' and 'rosary' and their cognates also came to be used as designations for the devotional practice with which the string of prayer-beads came to be particularly associated. By the twelfth century, a very popular devotion to the Blessed Virgin had arisen among laypeople,

known as the 'Psalter of the Blessed Virgin'. In this devotion the layperson said one *Pater Noster* followed by ten (or a single 'decade' of) *Ave Marias*: a salutation to the Mother of Jesus, often followed by genuflections, prostrations, and such other physical gestures as outstretched hands and arms and bowing). The original form of the *Ave Maria* prayer was: 'Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb'. The name 'Jesus' was added at the end of that sentence between 1407-15, and a second sentence was added later in the fifteenth century as a result of developments in popular piety: 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now and at the hour of our death, Amen'.²⁵ (27) The modern practice of saying the Lesser Doxology ('Glory Be to the Father...') at the end of each decade of 'Hail Marys' was finally introduced in the sixteenth century.

Despite these changes in pious practice, the beads long continued to be referred to as *Pater Noster* beads, and often only had ten beads (for a decade of *Ave Marias*) with perhaps an extra one (or a cross or tassel) for the initial *Pater Noster*. However, between the mid-fifteenth and the early sixteenth century, this traditional string of beads was increasingly replaced by one with a larger number of beads in a more complex arrangement, sometimes divided into five or more 'decades', and normally strung in a roughly circular form, thus taking the form of the chaplet or rosary used to crown the object of the devotion. The use of this elaborate 'chaplet' or 'rosary' of beads was related to the introduction of a series of reflective prayers on the various Mysteries (i.e. the Joyful, the Sorrowful and the Glorious) in the Life of Christ and his Mother, and the name 'rosary', like that of 'chaplet', was extended to this cycle of prayers.

Thus, the modern form of the rosary, both as a chaplet of *beads* and as a chaplet of *prayers*, crystallized not long before its image first appeared in the achievements of the Knights Grand Cross of the Order of St. John.

Images of the rosary in its original form as a chaplet of roses had also become more prominent in the century before the first appearance of the chaplet of beads in the achievements of the Grand Cross knights of St. John. An elaborate set of paintings and woodcarvings represented the theme of 'Mary in the Rose Bower', as the fruitful mother of Jesus. Among these were 'The Virgin in the Rose Bower' painted by Stephen Lochner c.

²⁵ MILLER, *Beads and Prayers*, pp. 4 and 96



Fig. 20. Stefan Lochner's painting, *The Virgin in the Rose Bower*, c. 1451-2. This theme, often found after 1425 in Gothic painting, shows the Virgin with the Christ Child surrounded by white and red roses and angels and playing medieval musical instruments, at just the period when the *Psalter of the Blessed Virgin*, was gaining in popularity in the pious practices of Cologne.

1450 (**Fig. 21**)²⁶(28) and Martin Schongauer's 'Madonna of the Rose Bower' of c. 1473 (**Fig. 22**), as well as in the magnificent woodcarving of Tilman Riemenschneider, entitled 'Maria in Rosenkranz' (i.e. 'in the Crown of Roses'), made c. 1521 - 1524 (**Fig. 23**).²⁷

²⁶ Julien CHAPUIS, *Stephan Lochner: Image Making in Fifteenth-Century Cologne*, (Turnhout, Belgium, 2004), pp. 88-94, Pl. 52. The theme of the "Virgin and Child in the Rose Garden" can be found as early as 1404 in the *Goldenes Rössl*, a golden statue made in Paris as a gift of Isabeau of Bavaria for her husband Charles VI of France (for which, see pp. 91-92).

²⁷ Stephen KEMPERDICK, *Martin Schongauer eine Monographie* (Petersburg, 2004), p. 167, Pl. 45, "Madonna im Roenhagen" at the Colmar Dominican Church. See also Hanwernfried MUTH, Toni SCHNEIDERS, *Tilman Reimanschnieider und seine Werke*, Würzburg, 1980, plate 129 and p. 124. The large medallions appear to illustrate the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary. This lindenwood carving used to be in the pilgrim church of St. Mary in the Vineyard, near Volkach, Austria. Reimanschnieder's own



Fig. 21. (left) Martin Schongauer's *Madonna in Rosenhag* (1473), now in the Dominican Church at Colmar. It continues the fruitful theme of the abundant blessings associated with praying the Rosary.

Fig. 22. (right) Tilman Riemenschneider's lindenwood carving of the Virgin and Child within a rose-garland. It is punctuated by five beads bearing images of the Five Joyful Mysteries.

It should be noted that Riemenschneider's Maria is missing her crown, which was once held by the two angels over her head — perhaps in allusion to both Lochner's and Schongauer's paintings employing this *motif*. In the month of May, throughout medieval Christendom, many women would wear a garland of roses (or other flowers) to not only signify their devotion to Mary as the Mother of Christ, but also to celebrate Mary's gracious fertility, which brought to humanity its Redeemer and all the fertile gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Among the earliest references to the emergent Rosary as the chaplet of prayers we know today are the written works of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Carthusians. The Carthusian hermit Heinrich Eggar (d. 1408) commended a Psalter in honour of the Virgin, with a Rosary in the

tombstone shows him with a string of Pater Noster beads in his hands! (see p. 9 in this book).

form of one *Pater Noster* followed by ten *Ave Marias*, and the Carthusian hermit Dominic of Prussia (1384-1460) was the first known to have added the name of Jesus after the phrase, 'the fruit of thy womb', at some time between 1407 and 1415. Even this early Carthusian practice, however, had antecedents among the Cistercian nuns of St Thomas at Kyll, near Trier, dating from around 1300.²⁸

Between 1468 and 1470 Alain de la Roche, a French Dominican of Douai, promoted the use of the chaplet of beads of the nascent Rosary among the members of his 'Confraternity of the Psalter of the Glorious Virgin Mary'. By 1475 this form of popular piety also gave rise to a Confraternity founded by Jacob Sprenger in Cologne, which won both the support of Emperor Frederick III and the approval of the papal legate to the Holy Roman Empire, Alexander di Forli, in 1476. In 1506, Richard Pynson, an early English printer, printed a text drawn from popular French sources that described the manner in which the Rosary was to be said. Finally, in 1520, Pope Leo X gave the practice of praying the Rosary official approval as an appropriate form of lay piety.²⁹

It is likely that this wave of pre-Reformation popular Catholic piety stimulated the further evolution of the simple chaplet of beads, sometimes separated by a larger bead for the *Pater Nosters*, and that this would account for the differences in its appearance on the tomb monuments of Grand Masters de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and de La Sengle seen above. The traditional string of ten beads with one for the *Pater Noster* could still be used in the newer forms of the devotion, and continued to be employed at the time of Grand Master de Villier's death in 1534. By the death of Grand Master de La Sengle in 1557, however, the popularity of the chaplet of the Rosary had been firmly established, and is accordingly found surrounding his arms.

By 1559, Pope Pius V gave to the Dominican Order's Master General special control over Rosary Confraternities throughout Europe. This solidified the popular connections between the Dominicans and the recitation of the Rosary. By 1569, the same Pope specially urged Catholic Christians to pray the Rosary for the success of the Holy League that he was creating to face the threat of Turkish Expansion in the Mediterranean.³⁰

²⁸ Miller, *Beads and Prayers*, p. 4

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 97-106

³⁰ Don Juan of Austria was the natural son of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and half brother of King Philip of Spain. At 24 years of age, Pope Pius V (Michele Ghislieri, 1504-1572) commissioned him as Captain General of the Holy League (an

(32) This ultimately resulted in the Battle of Lepanto on 7 October 1571, in which a Christian fleet under the command of Don Juan of Austria, and including the galleys of the Order of St. John, dealt a resounding defeat to the Ottoman fleet. For obvious reasons, the success of the Holy League at Lepanto led Pius V in 1572 to declare the date of the victory the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

We can see the burgeoning popularity of the Rosary in the representations of the Grand Priors of France cited above, as well between 1557 and 1590. However, between 1565 and roughly 1600, the Rosary was combined with the Grand Cross (in the Montalto and de Veri examples above). After that date, it became a classic artistic expression, as we saw in the examples of Grand Prior of Toulouse de Montaigu and Ambassador and Bailiff Brulart de Sillery, but especially after the very artistically influential illustrations of Mathieu de Goussencourt. Nevertheless, only about thirty of the roughly 380 examples of armorial achievements in the funeral slabs in the Co-Cathedral of St. John of Valletta show this classic form. The vast majority of examples in the Co-Cathedral of St. John of Valletta, simply show the arms with the Grand Cross behind the shield or Cartouche! We should also note that where the chaplet of the Rosary appears, the number of decades changes over time and is not always consistent, since even in our own time the Rosary continues to grow and develop.

To conclude, I shall cite two illustrations that show that the Grand Cross of Malta could be used either *with* or *without* the Chaplet of the Rosary. The first is an engraving of Jacques de Souvré, Grand Prior of France (1667-1675) (**Fig. 24**),³¹ which shows the former arrangement handsomely. The second displays the arms of Philipp Wilhelm, Count of Nesselrode-Reichenstein, Grand Prior of Germany (1727-1753), without the Chaplet — which was in fact the most common form of display (**Fig. 25**).³²

alliance of Mediterranean Catholic powers which were often antagonistic to one another) to oppose the Turkish fleet of Suleiman the Magnificent. Don Juan proved to be a tactful diplomat, who held the Holy League together and a worthy admiral who won the battle at Lepanto in 1571. See Helen NICHOLSON, *The Knights Hospitaller, A Brief History* (Oxford, 2001), p. 79

³¹ TOFFOLO, *Image of a Knight*, p. 44, Pl. 99

³² J. Siebmacher's *Wappenbuch, Die Wappen des Bistumer und Klöster*, (Neustadt an der Aisch, 1976; repr. of Gustav A. SEYLER, *Die Wappen des Bistumer und Klöster*, [Nuremberg, 1875]) pp. 25-27, Tafel 51.



Fig. 24. Engraved portrait of Frà Jacques de Souvré, Grand Prior of France (1667-70).

Note the Grand Cross on his breastplate and below on the armorial achievement, behind his shield, surrounded by the chaplet of the Rosary supporting a cross of the Order, and surmounted with the coronet of a French marquis.

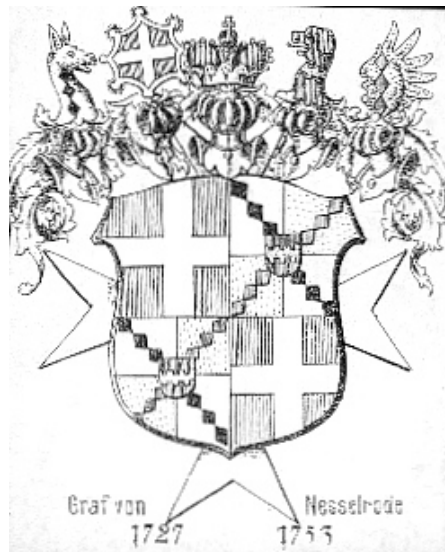
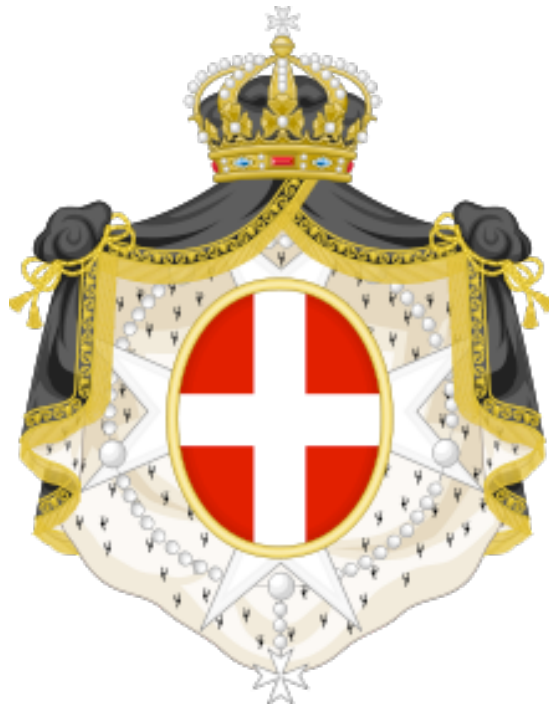


Fig. 25. The Armorial Achievement of Philipp Wilhelm, Count of Nesselrode, Grand Prior of Germany (1727-1753).
This shows the more common fashion of displaying a Grand Cross, without any chaplet of the Rosary.

English summary: *In this article — the latest in a series he has published tracing the origins and development of the distinctive armorial practices of the knights of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, Rhodes, and Malta — Dr. Kennedy examines the history of the practice adopted by those knights entitled either by their office or by their honorific dignity of ‘bailiff of honour’ (created soon after the Siege of Rhodes of 1480) of displaying the ‘grand’ or large version of the distinctive eight-pointed cross of the Order behind the escutcheon or image of the shield of their personal arms in armorial achievements — either alone, or in combination with a ‘chaplet’ of the Rosary, from which a smaller representation of the cross came to be suspended. He also traces the earlier development of the association of the Rosary with the Order in other contexts. He shows that the practices of displaying both the cross and the chaplet in armorial contexts date from shortly after the Great Siege of Malta of 1565, and that they were firmly established soon after 1654, both alone and in combination.*

Sommaire français: *Dans cet article — le plus récent d’une série qui trace les origines et le développement des pratiques armoriales distinctives des chevaliers de l’Ordre de l’Hôpital de Saint Jean de Jérusalem, de Rhodes, et de Malte — le docteur Kennedy examine l’histoire de la pratique adoptée par les chevaliers permis, soit par leur office, soit par leur dignité honorifique de ‘Bailli d’honneur’ (établie après le Siège de Rhodes de 1480) de mettre la version ‘grande’ de la croix distinctive de huit points de leur Ordre derrière l’écu de leurs armes personnelles — qu’elle soit seule ou accompagnée d’un chaplet du rosaire (dont une petite version de la croix de l’Ordre était de plus en plus fréquemment suspendue). Il montre que les deux pratiques datent de juste après le Grand Siège de Malte de 1565, et qu’elles furent toutes les deux bien établies après 1654.*



*The Armorial Achievement of the Office of
Prince Grand Master of the Order today,
showing the Combination of Cross and Rosary*