
An Introduction to State Orders of Chivalry in the Nordic Nations

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Abstract: *The most famous orders of chivalry in the world belong to the great European powers such as Great Britain and Spain. The Nordic nations also have such orders of chivalry, although they are probably relatively unknown to the people living outside Northern Europe. In this article, I hope to be able to give the non-Nordic resident an introduction to the most central Nordic state-ruled orders of chivalry. I will emphasize the knightships in the three Scandinavian monarchies Denmark, Norway and Sweden, but I will also mention some aspects of the knightships of the territories of these nations and the two Nordic republics Iceland and Finland.*

1. Introduction

The Viking Age was the golden age of Northern Europe. At that time, the Scandinavian monarchies were some of the most powerful nations in Europe. After these nations were Christianized around the year 900/1000 AD, the nation's warrior fort became part of history. The nations of the north quickly became part of Europe's peripheral outpost. A collection of small, rather poor monarchies. This meant that orders of chivalry were something that came relatively late to the Nordic nations. Although the monarchs who ruled over the nations often received orders of chivalry from other nations, even no orders of chivalry they ruled over.

It is important to keep in mind that in the period 1387-1523 all the Nordic nations and territories were united under the Kalmar Union and it can therefore be said that orders that existed during this

period were valid in all the Nordic kingdoms. From 1523 to 1814, Norway and Denmark were in union and the Danish orders were also to be regarded as Norwegian, while Norway from 1814 to 1905 was in union with Sweden and for a period the Swedish orders were also to be regarded as Norwegian. The Republic of Finland was in the period 1323 to 1809 a part of the Kingdom of Sweden and Swedish orders of chivalry applied during that period. After 1809 and until 1918, Finland was part of Russia and Russian orders prevailed. It was not until 1918 that Finland became an independent nation while Iceland was a part of Norway until 1814 and Denmark until 1944.

The Norwegian, Swedish and royal families, together with the British, still use the old tradition of a "Royal Family Portrait-Order". A very peculiar little order which is given only to female members of the family and involves an order with a small portrait of the reigning monarch. It is issued as long as the monarch lives to close female family members. I will not discuss these orders of chivalry further in this article.

2. Danish orders of chivalry

Today, Denmark has two orders of chivalry. They are both subject to the Danish monarch, Her Majesty Queen Margrethe II. This is The Order of the Dannebrog and the Order of the Elephant. The oldest of the two is the Order of the Elephant. Although not world famous, it is one of Europe's oldest orders of chivalry. It was founded by King Christian I in 1457, re-established in 1580 and reformed in 1693. This order of chivalry is historic in that way that it admitted women from it was founded in 1473. King Christian I of Denmark was at the moment the order was founded married to Queen Dorothea and she was the first woman to receive the order.

The Order of the Elephant may have been inspired by the Order of the Swan, established in 1440 and was approved by Pope Sixtus

IV in 1474. Denmark's reigning monarch is the master of the order, but the order is used by the Danish government as well and is therefore subject to an own department of the Danish Royal Court. Not surprisingly, the sign of the Order is an elephant. The order also uses a white tower as a symbol and the grand cross is decorated with a white cross on a red background. People who have received the Grand Cross of the order have their coats of arms painted on plates that are hung on the walls in Frederiksborg Castle Church.

The Order of Dannebrog was founded by His Majesty King Christian V in 1671. The legendary history of the order includes Christian V's claim that he renewed an order founded in 1219 by King Valdemar II. However, this is disputed and probably not true. Until 1951, only men could receive the order, but from 1951, the order can also be given to women. The order consists of a white-enamelled gold or silver cross with a red border, a royal crown, and the monogram of the reigning monarch. The order is mainly used for decorating deserving Danish citizens, and is awarded only after the queen's decision. Like the Order of the Elephant people who have received the Grand Cross of the order have their coats of arms painted on plates that are hung on the walls in Frederiksborg Castle Church.

Although Denmark has only two active orders, the nation has had several orders that are no longer active. Several of these unique orders of chivalry are worthy of an alone, but here they are only briefly mentioned. The Order of the Armed Arm was established by King Christian IV in 1616 and is regarded as a predecessor of the Order of the Dannebrog. The order died out in 1634. Ordenen de l'Union Parfaite was a Danish, French named order of chivalry, established in 1732 by Queen Sophie. The order was abolished in 1770 when the queen died. The Order of Mathilde was established in 1771 but when Queen Mathilde, to whom the orders were dedicated, was found guilty of infidelity and exiled, the order was abolished as early as the following year in 1772. The Order of King Christian VII was established in 1774 and died out in 1796.

3. Norwegian Orders of Chivalry

Norway has the first system of orders of chivalry for the Nordic kingdoms. As mentioned, the Danish mayors were Norwegian mayors until 1814, while the Swedish mayors were Norwegian from 1814 to 1847. There was a long discussion from the 1820s about whether Norway should have its own independent order of chivalry that was separate from Sweden. . King Oscar I of Sweden and Norway was thought by this was a god idea and in 1847 basic king therefore and special Norwegian own order of chivalry, St. Olav's order.

With the exception of royals and heads of state, the Order of St. Olav is today awarded only to Norwegians. The order is named after the Norwegian holy and eternal king, Olav the Holy, and is divided into five classes. His Majesty the King is the Grand Master of the Order. The sign of the Order is a Maltese cross in white enamelled gold. In the middle is a bright red globe surrounded by a blue and white ring. On the front of the globe is the national Norwegian lion in gold and on the back is King Oscar I's motto, "Law and Truth".

The union between Norway and Sweden was characterized by problems and many Norwegians felt that order of St. Olav was of lower purity than several Swedish orders. The order of the Norwegian Lion therefore established by King Oscar II in 1904 with the intention of giving Norway an order that in status and rank could be equivalent to the Swedish Royal Order of the Seraphim and the Danish Order of the Elephant. Both the star of the Order and the sign of the Order had the Norwegian lion with the ax in the version from 1844, as the central motif. The medallion hung in a chain of gold with alternating Norwegian lions in gold and royal monograms in gold and enamel.

The order could be given to royals, heads of states and Norwegians who held key positions or rendered outstanding services to the fatherland. The number of ordinary knights should never exceed twelve. The number of appointments nevertheless never exceeded eleven. These was King Oscar II of Sweden-Norway, Crown Prince Gustaf of Sweden-Norway, the Norwegian Swedish Prince`s Carl, Eugen, Gustaf Adolf, Wilhelm and Erik, Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany, Emperor Francis I of Austria-Hungary, King Christian IX of Denmark and President ÉmileLoubetof France. Following the dissolution of the union between Norway and Sweden the following year in 1905 King Haakon VII chose not to continue with the order. However, it was not officially repealed until 1952.

For a long time there was a need for an order in Norway that could be given to foreigners, as the order of St. Olav's could only be given to Norwegians, besides heads of state and other royals. Nothing was done about this problem for a long time. It was not until King Olav V that a new order was established in 1985. In 1985 King Olav established the Norwegian Royal Order of Merit. The order of chivalry is awarded to foreign citizens and Norwegian citizens who are permanently resident abroad for particularly meritorious work for Norwegian interests. The king is the grand master of the order who is divided into five classes: The band of the order is royal blue and the symbol is an Olav-cross with King Olav's crowned monogram. Together with the Norwegian Royal Order of Merit, the Order of St. Olav is the only two active state orders of chivalry that are in use in Norway today.

4. Swedish Orders of Chivalry

Throughout its history, Sweden has had a rather messy system for their orders of chivalry. The first traces of a separate Swedish order dates from 1497, when the Kalmar monarch Hans is said to have distributed special chains to a number of Swedish knights. We know nothing about this order of chivalry other than that it has

existed. It was not until 1561, when Sweden had again become an independent kingdom after the break with the Kalmar Union, that they got their first own order. This resulted in a rather special tradition. The order of the savior became the first of several orders that were only awarded to the monarch and therefore did not survive after the monarch's death. The order of the savior was therefore valid from 1561 until King Erik XIV's death in 1577. There are indications that King Erik wanted to make his order a great order and there are letters written by the king in which he expresses a desire to give the order to the King of France, but this never happened.

In 1578, the King establishes The Order of Angus Dei. This did not survive the king either and was never distributed to anyone but the monarch and therefore died out when King John III in 1592. The order of Jehovah then becomes the next royal order. It was established in 1606 under King Karl IX. He gave the order to himself, his son and the Swedes' next king Gustav II Adolf and his brother Duke Johan of Östergötland. No one else got the order and it died out. An attempt was made to revive the order in 1778 as a separate order of merit for Swedish priests, but the priests did not support this and it was therefore never distributed. In 1653, Queen Kristina founded the Order of the Amaranth, which was awarded to an unknown number of heads of state and friends of the Queen. The order cease after the Queen's abdication in 1654. The Order of the Amaranth re-emerged as a private order of chivalry in Sweden in 1760 and still exists. The order of the name of Jesus originated in 1656 under King Karl X. It was awarded to some royals during the king's lifetime, but died out after the king's death in 1660.

Then followed a long period without Orders of Chivalry who are active in Sweden. In the 1740s, the Swedish government got tired of the messy system of orders. The Kings council therefore joined forces with the king, Frederik I, to create a completely new system for Orders of Chivalry in Sweden. This resulted in success and in

1748 three different Orders of Chivalry was established in Sweden. These are the Order of the Seraphim, the Order of the North Star and the Order of the Sword. These orders are still active with the monarch as supreme leader.

The Order of Vaasa was established in 1772, it is still active. In 1774, the Order of the Silver Feather is established by Princess Lovisa Ulrika. She gives the order to a total of 22 people, who are relatives and good friends of hers. It no longer exists. The Order of Carl XIII was established in 1811 and is a royal protected order that is awarded to Freemasons. The order is active, but strongly debated. In 1975, the socialist Swedish government manages to adopt a sharp reduction in distributions of Swedish orders. In the next period up to the 2000s, orders are almost never distributed in Sweden. Almost exclusively to royals. Throughout the 2000s, the desire to get the orders back in their old glory increases. The Swedish government appoints a committee in 2018 to investigate how to revive the Swedish orders. This work is still ongoing.

5. Orders of Chivalry in the Nordic Republics and territories

The territory of Åland, inhabited by Swedes, but officially ruled by Finland with partial independence, has no orders of chivalry. The same applies to the Danish territories of the Faro Islands and Greenland. Greenland have a merit medal, called the *Nersornaat*, but this cannot be considered an order of chivalry. The two Nordic republics of Iceland and Finland, on the other hand, have their own orders of chivalry.

Iceland has one order of chivalry and it was established by the Danish king Christian X in 1921. This is the Order of the Falcon. When Iceland declared itself an independent republic in 1944, they chose to continue the order, but they changed its appearance somewhat. In the old medals and crosses where a crown, this was removed after 1944. While the king was the Grand Master of the

order until 1944, it is now the President of Iceland who has that role. The Order of the Falcon is awarded to Icelanders and foreign citizens for their services to Iceland and the humanity. The symbol is a white cross with a medallion showing a silver falcon on a blue background.

Finland operates with three orders of chivalry. The Order of the Cross of Liberty was founded shortly after independence from Russia in 1918, The Order of the White Rose of Finland was founded the next year in 1919 and The Order of the Lion of Finland was founded during the Second World War in 1941. The President of Finland is the grand master of all orders. Order of the Cross of Liberty is a white cross, decorated with the old Nordic symbol of a “fylfot”, similar to a swastika. The centre medallion is a white rose. The Order of the White Rose of Finland is not surprisingly a white rose on a gold background while The Order of the Lion of Finland is decorated with the lion in silver on a red background.

6. Conclusion

As you can read in this article, there is a long and complicated history of state orders of chivalry in the Nordic nations. All the way from the establishing of the Order of the Elephant in 1457 until the Norwegian Royal Order of Merit in 1985. Yet there is so much to tell about each order and its unique history. Something I hope to do in further articles in the future. The knighthoods have almost always been living well in all the Nordic nations, even though Sweden is lagging behind, there is no doubt that there is a future for the order there as well, following increased interest in recent decades.

7. Sources

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