



*The Sash and Breast Star of the Royal Order of the Lion*

### ***The Equestrian Heritage of the Royal House of Rwanda***

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#### **The Royal Order of the Lion (Intare)**

The first of the orders of knighthood in the European mold to exist in Rwanda was the Royal Order of the Lion (*Intare* in Kinyarwandan), founded by H. M. Mwami Charles Mutara III Rudahigwa (1913-1959) in the year of his death, at a time when he was engaged in Westernizing the local chivalric traditions of the kingdom.

There had existed among the Tutsi *abami* (kings), prior to the foundation of the Royal Order of the Lion of Rwanda, centuries of tradition and practice in connection with royal distinctions granted for outstanding acts on behalf of the Rwandan kingdom. These distinctions were, in fact, perfectly comparable to those awarded by practically all the monarchies of the world at that time.

As Charles Mutara III Rudahigwa was the first Catholic king of Rwanda, the details of the foundation of the Royal Order of the Lion were communicated to the Vatican, and

were thereupon duly registered. This move corresponded perfectly with the Order's profile as a Catholic order of knighthood, founded by a monarch who had converted to the faith in 1943. This was further demonstrated by its bestowal upon His Holiness, Pope Pius XII in 1950, via letters patent, which grant was accompanied by its traditional insignia, a lion's pelt. In the past, royal Rwandan ancestral practice and custom had dictated that distinguished warriors should be invested with a collar of iron, and then immediately decorated with a lion's pelt, as well.

His Holiness replied by bestowing upon Mutara III the title of *Very Christian Majesty*, or *Most Christian Majesty*, as in the case of the King of France. However, this concession of title was more to be attributed to the Rwandan king's devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, than to the Rwandan knighthood awarded to the Pope. According to all evidence, Mutara III Rudahigwa wished to constitute his own equestrian patrimony, based on Rwandan royal practice and tradition, comparable to that of the Belgian colonial power that then dominated his kingdom, and yet independent of it. Political difficulties, however, as well as his sudden death on July 25, 1959, sadly derailed these plans for a renovation of the kingdom's system of distinctions.

Nevertheless, Mutara III distinguished with the Royal Order of the Lion of Rwanda a number of leading figures of the day, including King Baudoin of Belgium, Father Alexis Kagame, and the Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia. His half-brother and successor, H. M. King Jean-Baptiste Kigeli V Ndahindurwa, has bestowed this order on a number of European nobles, members of royal houses, and individuals of notable achievement, all of whom have distinguished themselves in their support for the Royal House of Rwanda.

The insignia of this order of knighthood consists of a circular breast star, comprised of golden rays, charged in its center by a red oval with a lion rampant dexter in gold. The sash medal hangs from a depiction of the traditional crown of the *mwami*, with the sash itself being comprised of one red and two blue stripes. In 2007, H. M. King Kigeli requested that the Vatican register all of the orders of his royal house, which was done by the Governato, presided over by the Cardinal Prefect of Vatican City, at that time Cardinal Szoka.

Created as an Order of State, the Royal Order of the Lion was completely ignored by the Belgian authorities who exercised power in the protectorate of Rwanda. It is currently awarded by King Kigeli in his role as Head-of-State-in-Exile, and its bestowal also grants personal nobility to the recipient.

The Lion symbolizes the warrior spirit, with the related qualities of dominion, sovereignty, and an unequaled bravery in the face of adversity. It is a metaphor for courage, and for the determination not to submit to anything, or to anyone.



*The Sash and Breast Star of the Royal Order of the Crested Crane*

### **The Royal Order of the Crested Crane (Usumbere)**

Another of the tribal distinctions that was Westernized by King Mutara III was the torque bracelet, or *impotore*, bestowed on those members of the Royal Guard who had performed heroic deeds before the enemy, amassing at least seven kills. Mutara envisioned the transformation of this ancient distinction into a new order, that of the Crested Crane, but his sudden death in 1959 meant that its reorganization by means of royal decree was delayed indefinitely.

King Kigeli V, cognizant of the desires of his brother, effectively reorganized this order in 1997, granting the Grand Cross of the Royal Order of the Crested Crane to his faithful Chancellor, His Excellency, Boniface Benzinge. The bestowals of this order

have not been at all wide, and it is reserved for those who have realized considerable achievements in the service of the Kingdom of Rwanda, and of the Royal House of Nyinginya.

The crested crane (*usumbere*) is the national bird of Rwanda. It also figures as one of the supporters in the Royal Arms of the Kings of Rwanda. It is an elegant animal, of rare beauty. Its most salient characteristics are its plumage, and the colors that it displays. The feathers of its body are gray, the wings are white, but with separate feathers of various colors. Its facial coloring is white, with an inflatable sac beneath its comb, and a tuft of golden feathers on its head.

In heraldic language, the created crane is a symbol of vigilance and majesty. It may also be a happy allegory of a future restoration of the monarchy in Rwanda, a sign of national traditions, as well as of the vigilance which must be exercised to preserve the precious gift of peace.

The Royal Order of the Crested Crane is granted in two categories, or grades: Grand Cross and Commander, normally to nobles created by His Majesty, and is of an hereditary character. The insignia is a breast star of eight blue points, charged with a white circle bearing the figure of a crested crane in its natural colors, and three stars of gold, representing the three ethnic groups of the country (Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa). In turn, this is charged with a border of red, in which are inscribed in golden letters ORDER OF CRESTED CRANE RWANDA, all on a sunburst of undulating silver rays. In the intersections of its arms is to be found the royal cipher ("K") in gold. Its sash is of yellow silk moiré, with red borders, charged in its center with another band of blue around the edges.



*The Sash and Breast Star of the Royal Order of the Crown*

### **The Royal Order of the Crown (*Ikamba*)**

The Royal Order of the Crown, second in importance among those that form the patrimony of the Royal House of Rwanda, is the inheritor of the tradition of the burning of the javelin, a ceremony with which the greatest warrior, a true national hero, was honored for having killed at least twenty enemies in combat. This distinction granted its honoree the right to be treated as a member of the family of the reigning king, a category that was similar to the Western noble rank of duke. The hero in question (“he who takes the crown,” in Christian terms), could actually wear the crown of the *mwami* when such was not being used by the monarch, thus demonstrating the confidence that was reposed in him.

The Royal Order of the Crown (*Ikamba*, in the native idiom), was envisioned by Mutara III in 1950, and formally instituted by his successor, Kigeli V, in 1959. Nevertheless, in connection with the occasion of the State Visit of King Baudoin of the Belgians to Rwanda in 1950, Mutara III made him a gift of a miniature of the Crown of Rwanda, made by hand, a gift which is considered a physical antecedent of the Order, and which served as a prelude to its official institution a bit later. It is granted in three ranks: Grand Collar, Grand Cross, and Commander. It has been granted in the class of

Grand Collar to members of distinguished royal houses, among them to Don Duarte de Braganza, Head of the Royal House of Portugal.

Its insignia is a navy blue cross of Malta edged in white, charged in its center with a white circle with a golden image of the Crown of Rwanda in its center. In the intersections of the arms stands the initial “K,” for Kigeli. The color of the sash is sky blue, with white fringes along its borders. The Order confers personal nobility to its recipient, if he/she had not previously held noble rank.



*The Sash and Breast Star of the Royal Order of the Drum*

### ***The Royal Order of the Drum (Kalinga)***

Lastly, there is the Royal Order of the Drum (*Kalinga*), the highest honor granted by the Royal House of Rwanda. As with the Royal Order of the Crown, this order was designed by King Mutara III, and finally established by King Kigeli V in 1959. The drum is the royal symbol of the *abami* (kings), and holds extraordinary importance in the symbolic universe of the entire region of the Great Lakes of East Africa. To it are attributed magical powers, and it is associated with the exercise of temporal power by

the person of the *mwami* himself.

The Royal Order of the Drum is granted in two classes: Grand Collar and Commander, although the Grand Collar may also be granted as a Grand Cross, this being considered a Grand Collar of Second Class. Its insignia is a blue Maltese cross, charged with a circle of the same, edged in gold, charged with a drum in gold. In the intersections of the arms of the cross alternate a golden lion and a golden crested crane. The Grand Crosses carry a sash of blue moiré, edged with white. The intersections of the insignia of a Grand Collar bear, in alternating fashion, the drum and the royal cipher.