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## SUMMARY

### THE TWO OLDEST ORDERS OF MERIT

At the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, there were great changes in almost all European countries. This was reflected on the further development of chivalric dynastic orders and led to the creation of orders of military merit. Absolutist monarchies were founded in France, Russia, Prussia and Austria, based on the new concept of ruling. To realise their political goals – the protection and defence of the state, conquest of outside territories, and also the continuity of their rule - European absolutist rulers established permanent armed forces: standing professional armies ready for quick intervention. The standing army was under the command of the monarch, who no longer depended on the will and ambitions of his vassals. This was the main precondition for realising effective political power.

The absolutist rulers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sought ways to tie the army to themselves and to peacefully prolong their rule. By awarding noble titles,

prizes in money and orders to the military commanders, and prize money and medals to the soldiers, they gained authority over the army, and thus also over the state. The army needed constant stimulation, not only when it won battles, but also when it lost, because an exhausted and faint-hearted army could turn against its master. One of the ways to stimulate the army was to reward the bravest and ablest soldiers, because even the soldiers who did not have these qualities were paid. This is how military medals of merit were created, and somewhat later also orders of military merit.

The new orders of merit were no longer exclusive as were the old chivalric orders, which were reserved for the highest members of the aristocracy. By opening access to the order, it stopped being an institution and became a sign; the institution was slowly lost and its sign became the main characteristic of the order.

The first order of merit – the Royal and Military Order of Saint Louis (*l'Ordre royal et militaire de Saint-Louis*), was founded on 5 April 1693 by King Louis XIV (1638-1715) of France in honour of Saint Louis, the patron saint of France. The main condition for being inducted was for the candidate to have given excellent service in the French army or navy in the last ten years. Later that term increased to twenty years. In this way officers who were non-nobles got the chance of becoming members of an order. The order had three degrees: 1. Great Cross, 2. Commander, 3. Knight.

Other European monarchies followed the example of the French Order of Saint Louis.

The Russian Tsar Peter I (1672-1725) founded the Order of St Andrew the Apostle the First-Called on 30 August 1698. It is thought that Tsar Peter I, after returning from a diplomatic mission in Western Europe in 1698, wanted to have a chivalric order modelled on the European orders. Judging from the persons who received the order, at first it was awarded only for exceptional merit for the Russian Empire, for military feats or for civil merit. The order had only one degree, and the number of knights was limited to twelve from Russia and twelve from abroad, a total of twenty-four persons.