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SUMMARY

THE CHIVALRIC ORDER OF SAINT MARK OF THE REPUBLIC OF VENICE

The Republic of Venice existed from the ninth century to 1797. It was a maritime power on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean Sea and the Adriatic Sea.

The Apennine Peninsula was devastated and plundered after the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476. The population fled to safer regions and gradually organised and formed city-states. Venice developed from the refugee settlements on the islands of the Venice Lagoon. The Republic of Venice grew into the leading maritime power of this part of the world during the Middle Ages. It reached the peak of its power in the 15th century. With more than 200,000 inhabitants, it was a centre of world trade and the largest world port.

When the Croats came to the eastern Adriatic shore, the struggle for predominance in that region began against the then great maritime power, Venice. In the 13th century the Venetians conquered all the coastal towns of Istria, and in 1409 Venice bought from Ladislav of Naples his “right to Dalmatia” for 100,000 ducats. However, from the early 16th century the Ottoman Turks gradually took territories in Dalmatia from Venice. After a decade of bloody land and sea battles, Venice lost almost all of Dalmatia. The final expulsion of the Ottomans began in 1714 and ended in the Treaty of Passarowitz

in 1718, and Venice re-established its power on the eastern Adriatic coast. This lasted until Napoleon's conquest in 1797, after which the Republic of Venice no longer existed.

In the 15th century Venice founded the Chivalric Order of Saint Mark. It was awarded in two versions, according to the importance of the recipient: members of the Venetian patriciate and other high-ranking individuals received it from the Senate or the Grand Council, while other less important recipients received the order from the Doge.

The order awarded by the Doge as a "public and honorary mark for actions of marked value" was a forked cross enamelled in white and blue with the Lion of Saint Mark in the centre; it hung round the neck on a luxuriously embroidered ribbon. It could be a gold (which gave the right to an extra one-month pay yearly bonus) or a silver order (with a half-month bonus pay). When the Grand Council or Senate awarded the order, the recipient got not only the cross but also a gold medal showing the winged Lion of Saint Mark on the obverse. The medal hung on a gold necklace.

The Chivalric Order of Saint Mark was extinguished on 12 May 1797 with the fall of the Venetian Republic.

The order was renewed in 1976 as the "International Society of the Knights of Saint Mark", which engaged in philanthropic and charity work. Later the society changed its name to Society of the Knights of Saint Mark.