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Opinion

From documents from the middle of the nineteenth century, which are preserved in the original, it can be concluded that the then reigning Royal House of Bourbon of the kingdom of the Two Sicilies recognised the Militare Ordine del Collare di Sant'Agata (MOC) as being on par with their own dynastic orders, and considered it being a part of the patrimony of the Paternò dynasty.

The history of MOC before 1850 is unknown, as far as documentary evidence is concerned. There are strong indications that the order, as we know it, began as a dynastic order attached to the Paternò family well before 1850. According to family traditions, the origins of the order are medieval. However, these traditions cannot, as yet, be verified on the basis of written sources.

These traditions concern a chivalric brotherhood, or order, of Balearic origin, associated with Saint Agata. Hypothetically, the tradition may originate in the documented fact that King Alfonso III, in 1289, initiated a process of granting lands and rights to a certain number of knights on Menorca, an island that had recently been conquered from the Muslims. The knights were requested to reside in the fortress of Saint Agata. The knightly lordships were hereditary and can be demonstrated to have survived for several centuries. It should be regarded as possible, although it cannot be proved, that the brotherhood mentioned in the family tradition consisted of these knights, or of some of them.

The later development has rather reinforced the position of the House of Paternò, as the Head of the dynasty has had his position as *fons honorum* and a subject of international law recognised.

MOC should therefore be designated a legitimate dynastic order (family order). As such a dynastic order, it must from a historical point of view be regarded as equivalent to other legitimate dynastic orders, e.g. those belonging to the Royal House of Bourbon of the Two Sicilies and other former reigning royal or princely dynasties.

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