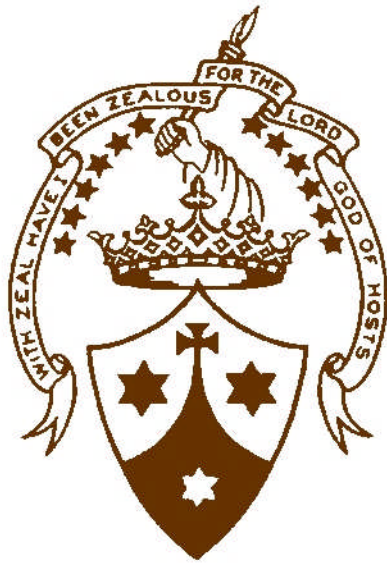


SYMBOLISM OF THE CARMELITE CREST



The makeup of the Carmelite crest appeared for the first time towards the end of the 15th century, in 1499, on the cover of a book about the life of St. Albert, Carmelite. The design there is that of a "vexillum", (an ensign, a standard, a flag). This changed as time went on until it became the coat of arms, as we now know it. There never has been an official explanation of the crest but there are various interpretations. In what follows we will present the most plausible interpretation in accordance with the most recent documents of the Order.

In the shield we have chosen there are five distinguishing features:

A mountain

A mountain painted in brown, with rounded sides, its tip reaching to the sky. It refers to Mount Carmel, the Carmelites' place of origin. Mount Carmel is situated in Haifa in Israel. In the 9th century BC the prophet Elijah lived there. In the same place, towards the end of the 12th century some hermits, inspired by the memory of Elijah, gathered there, with a desire "to live a life in allegiance of Jesus Christ". (*Carmelite Rule* no.2).

Three stars

Three stars each with six points, one coloured silver at the centre of the mountain, and the other two coloured gold placed symmetrically in the heavens, coloured white, on either side of the mountain. The lower star represents Carmelites still on the way to the top of Mount Carmel, while the other two stars higher up, represent Carmelites who have ended their journey "by reaching the top of the holy Mountain". (*Carmelite Missal*, 1980, Opening Prayer on the Solemnity of the Bl. Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel).

SYMBOLISM OF THE CARMELITE CREST

A crown

The crown of gold represents the Kingdom of God. He is the Sovereign Lord of Carmel. Carmelites, indeed, endeavour to serve God faithfully with a pure heart and a stout conscience (cf. *Carmelite Rule* no. 2). They see their vocation as a calling "to implant and strengthen the Kingdom of Christ in souls and to spread it to the four corners of the earth" (*Carmelite Constitutions* no. 5). In offering this service to God, Carmelites take their inspiration from Elijah the Prophet and Mary the Virgin. (cf. *Carmelite Constitutions* no. 25)

An arm and a hand bearing a fiery sword and a banner bearing a biblical text

The Elijan origin of the Order is symbolised by the arm of Elijah holding the fiery sword and the banner bearing the words "*Zelo zelatus sum pro Domino Deo exercituum*" (I am on fire with zeal for the Lord God of hosts [I Kg 19:10]). The hand and the sword, moreover, are an indication of the fiery passion which Elijah had for the one true and absolute God whose word "burned like a torch" (Eccl. 48:1). For Carmelites Elijah is "the solitary prophet who nurtured his thirst for the one and only God, and lived in his presence" (*Carmelite Constitutions* no. 26). Like him, they carry "the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God" (*Carmelite Rule* no. 19).

Twelve stars

The Marian nature of the Order is symbolised by the twelve stars which recall the apparition of the "woman clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Apoc 12:1). In the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, Carmelites find "the perfect image of all that they want and hope to be" (*Carmelite Constitutions* no. 27). For them, Mary is Patron, Mother and Sister (cf. *Carmelite Constitutions* no. 27) and they are "the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel" (*Carmelite Constitutions* no. 6).

Additional symbols

In various Provinces of the Order, as far back as the 17th century, a cross was added at the top of the mountain: examples of these would be the Province of Castile in Spain (and the Discalced Carmelites since the 17th century). The Province of Sicily put the Cross of the Holy Land in the crest. In other instances one can find on one side of the mountain a lily and on the other side a palm tree, symbols which represent St. Albert of Trapani and St. Angelo - the first two saints of the Order.

Reference: <http://www.ocarm.org/eng/scudoeng.htm>