

The Gonfanon Beauceant, the banner of the Temple Order.

(also spelled baucant, bauceant, bausent, bauceant, Baussant, beausseant, beauséant etc.)

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Although there are various uses in the banner of the Temple Order, especially in terms of its use as a war flag (vexillum belli) on the battlefield, the official banner of the Order (vexillum Templi), which bears the name “Beauceant” according to the medieval chronicles on the one hand, and the Rule of the Order, on the other hand, suggests various meanings.

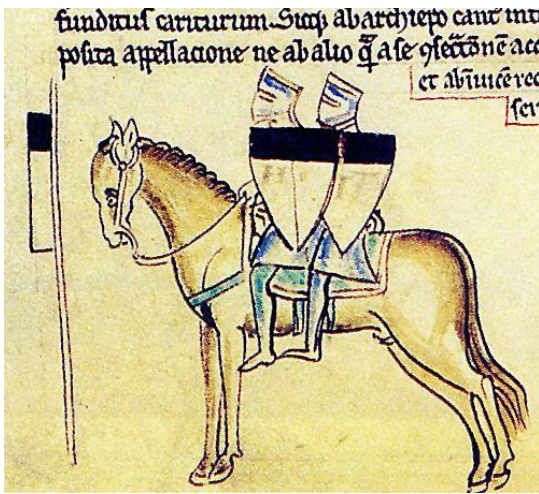


Figure 1 Beauceant as depicted "Chronica Majora I" a manuscript from the Benedictine monk Matthew Paris (1235- 1259)

The 13th century chronicle “Historia Orientalis”¹ written by the then Bishop of Acre, Jacques de Vitry around 1220, mentions the name “gonfanon baucent” and describes its meaning, the black and white colors alleged the Templar's cruelty towards their enemies and their symbolize kindness to their friends.

In the “Chronica Majora”² written and illustrated by the English Benedictine monk Matthew Paris (1235-1259), we find in addition to a description of the official seal of the Order (two mounted knights on a horse) also an accurate heraldic description of the Templars banner silver with a black head (argent a chief sable)(Fig.1). In the second³ and third⁴ part of “Chronica Majora,” the battle flag of the Templars (Vexillum Templi) would be depicted again (Fig. 2; Fig. 4). This time accompanied with the battle

flag of the Hospitaller Order (Vexillum Hospital)

The term “Gonfanon” the word being derived from Old High German⁵: “gund: 'battle'; fano: 'cloth” which means as much as “battle flag”, speaks clear language about its meaning. In its usage it therefore denotes any sign of war in battle. Also it depicts the meaning the position

¹ Vitry, Jacques de, Historia Hierosolymitana part I, Historia Orientalis (ca.1220)

² Paris, Matthew, Chronica Maiora I, Saint Albans, England, ca. 1240–53. Folio 110v, MS 26, Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

Lewis, Suzanne, The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica Majora, Figure 47, p90, 1987.

³ Paris Matthew, Chronica Maiora II, Saint Albans, England, ca. 1240–53. Folio 142r, MS 16II, Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

Lewis, Suzanne, The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica Majora, Figure 153, p239, 1987.

⁴ Paris Matthew, Chronica Maiora III, Saint Albans, England, ca. 1240–53. Folio 130V, MS Royal 14 C VII, British Library, London.

⁵ P.A.F. van Veen en N. van der Sijs, Etymologisch woordenboek: de herkomst van onze woorden, 2e druk, Van Dale Lexicografie, Utrecht/Antwerpen (1997) gonfalon [kerkvaandel] {gonfano(e)n 1401-1450} < frans gonfalon, met dissimilatie uit en naast gonfanon [vaantje, lansvaantje, kerkbanier] < oudhoogduits gundfano, vgl. oudnoors gunnfani [vaandel], van gund, gunt [oorlog] (vgl. brengun) + fano [vlag, banier] (vgl. vaandel).

of the “gonfalonier⁶” who, in battle with a gonfalon, as a beacon for the knights, led the new charge, the banner of the Marshall had to fall.



Figure 2 The warflags of the Hospitallers and the Templars as depicted "Chronica Majora II" a manuscript from the Benedictine monk Matthew Paris (1235- 1259)

The name Baucent, has its origins in old French⁷, where the term was used to indicate a piebald horse, a horse that has a pattern of spots (white) on a pigmented background of hair.

From this perspective, the rectangular banner, that of the master, would be the "baucent gonfanon", in other words "the white and black war flag."

Later reduced in its pronunciation as the French “beau-séant”, meaning "good, and seaten". The term also became used as a rallying cry by the Knights Templar, Beauséant

alla riscossa ("Beauséant to the rescue"), Beauséant a nous (“Beauseant to us”). Together with the meaning of Beauseant, as a rallying cry its interpretation is " Ride good with us / Be well seated (on a horse) with us," clearly indicating and rallying the remaining scattered knights to follow that new risen banner, and proceed on mass with a new charge, this time under the leadership of the Gonfalonier⁸.

Later in a fresco of the 13th century (Fig.3) it would appear that the Templar cross could also be added to a banner⁹ and that the colors could be reversed so that the white would be on top. Even more variations of a Templar banner could occur. For example, there are also notifications and images within other 12th and 13th century manuscripts and frescos¹⁰ (Fig. 5), where may be seen Templars attacking on horseback, whose lance is decorated with a long flame or a three-tailed pin, all white and fitted with the cross pattée.



Figure 3 13th century fresco, church of San Bevignate, Perugia

Since William of Tyre in his chronicle¹¹ refers to "several baucents adorning the ramparts of Jerusalem" as in modern warfare, this can be used to divide several squadrons¹². In this manner, wearing small flags, the flow of the battle was much more visible from a distance. So the Marshall with the Orders Gonfanon Baucant could rally his troops where needed. This notion agrees

⁶ Upton-Ward, The Rule of the Templars, art.178, 1992

⁷ Frédéric Godefroy, Dictionnaire de l'ancien et moyen français, p.612, (1881)

⁸ Definition of gonfalonier: one who bears the gonfalon : standard-bearer specifically : a papal official at Rome who bears the standard of the church or military Order.

⁹ Fresno, church of San Bevignate, Perugia.

¹⁰ Fresno in the Templar chapel at Cressac, France

¹¹ Tyre, Guillaume de, Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum, 1130-1186

¹² Upton-Ward, The Rule of the Templars, art. 161-163 , 1992

with that of the German historian Munter¹³ who, in his Statutes of the Order believes that each squadron (eschielle) had its own banner.



Figure 4 The vexillum of the Hospitallers and the Templars as depicted "Chronica Majora III" a manuscript from the Benedictine monk Matthew Paris (1235- 1259)

This use of several similar banners may be the reason that there is confusion regarding the depiction of the Beauceant. But since the Vexillum Belli¹⁴ (War Banner) of the Templars is clearly described and depicted in the Chonica Majora of Matthew Paris, along with the official seal of the Order, it would be safe to say that this is the one and only version of the Gonfanon Beauceant. All the other are likely squadron banners.

When it comes to the banner of the Order, like a national flag, it was revered with the utmost honor and dignity. Brethren who would lose their habit¹⁵ of the Order, temporarily or otherwise through aggression¹⁶, sleeping with a woman¹⁷, desertion¹⁸, lowering the banner in battle¹⁹, or an unlawful charge²⁰ while bearing the banner, would never again be allowed to take the banner of even to carry it.

The Rule further stipulates that the banner is carried by the Master (which should seldom be the case given his command functions), the Senechal, the Marshall or his assistant and guarded by a knight's brother who must surround him "the better they can;" a brother knight who "did not have to leave the gonfanon for whatever reason," which would subject this knight to severe punishment (as earlier mentioned, the loss of his habit).

In the event that all of the Templars' banners were lost, they were expected to rally to the nearest Hospitaller banner²¹, or any other Christian banner that might be still flying. Only when the last standard was "turned to destruction," was a Templar allowed²² to flee and seek refuge "where God will advise him." During a period of truce in the Holy Land, and thus while having relative peace, the Beauceant was kept in the Master's house. When the Master would be absent, the care of the Beauceant would be in the hands of the Senechal, who would be responsible²³ for the leadership and battle flag in his absence.

In times of war, the battle flag was always taken on an expedition, where it was always guarded. When camp had to be made while traveling, the Beauceant had to appear next to

¹³ Münter, Friedrich, Statutenbuch des Ordens der Tempelherren, Berlin, p.81; 85, 1794

¹⁴ Vitry, Jacques de, Historia Hierosolymitana part I, Historia Orientalis (ca.1220) mentioning the master's baucant gonfanon and the baucant decorated with the vermillion cross of the knights.

¹⁵ Upton-Ward, The Rule of the Templars, art. 478 , 1992

¹⁶ Upton-Ward, The Rule of the Templars, art. 234; 452; 589 , 1992

¹⁷ Upton-Ward, The Rule of the Templars, art. 236; 594 , 1992

¹⁸ Upton-Ward, The Rule of the Templars, art.419-420, art.574 , 1992

¹⁹ Upton-Ward, The Rule of the Templars, art.241, art.611, art.640 , 1992

²⁰ Upton-Ward, The Rule of the Templars, art. 242 , 1992

²¹ Upton-Ward, The Rule of the Templars, art. 167; 421 , 1992

²² Upton-Ward, The Rule of the Templars, art. 168 , 1992

²³ Upton-Ward, The Rule of the Templars, art. 99 , 1992

the Master's round tent and, according to the Rule of the Order, guarded by a knight with the rank of Commander.



Figure 5 fresco in the Templar chapel at Cressac, France

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