

Monks



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The Knights Templar, a military order of monks answerable only to the Pope himself, were founded in 1118. Their primary responsibility, at least initially, was to provide protection to Christians making pilgrimages to the Holy Land. They rose in power, both religious and secular, to become one of the richest and most powerful entities in Christendom. By the time of their disbandment in 1307, this highly secretive organization controlled vast wealth, a fleet of merchant ships, and castles and estates spanning the entire Mediterranean area. When the crusaders captured Jerusalem from the Muslims in 1099, the Church encouraged all faithful Christians to visit that holy city in order to affirm their faith. The area, however, was still subject to sporadic attacks from various non-Christian factions. A small group of knights, led by Hugh de Payens, vowed to protect the pilgrims. The group was granted quasi-official status by King Baldwin II of Jerusalem, who allowed them quarters in a wing of the royal palace near the Temple of Solomon. It is from this initial posting that the order derived its name. They took the standard vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and were bound to the rules of the Augustinian order.

Upton-Ward 1 The order languished in near-anonymity for several years, despite generous contributions from various European personages. In 1126, Count Hugh

of Champagne, having donated his estates to Bernard of Clairvaux for use in building a monastery for the Cistercian order, arrived in Jerusalem to join the Templars. This action indirectly obligated Bernard to support the newly chosen advocacy of his benefactor. He wrote to the count, "If, for God's work, you have changed yourself from count to knight and from rich to poor, I congratulate you." Howarth 49

In the year 1126, King Baldwin found two reasons for wanting official recognition of the order. First, he had, perhaps prematurely, bestowed upon Hugh de Payens the title of Master of the Temple. Second, the king had the opportunity to launch an attack on the city of Damascus, but he needed more knights. Papal recognition would allow open recruiting in Europe for the order. King Baldwin sent a letter to Bernard of Clairvaux, the order's primary patron, later known as Saint Bernard, asking him to petition the Pope for official recognition of the order. Howarth 50-51

The King's letter was hand-carried to Bernard by two loyal and trusted knights, Andrew de Montbard, maternally related to Bernard, and Gondemare. Upon their arrival at Clairvaux, the two knights presented Bernard with Baldwin's letter, which came right to the point.

Upton-Ward 3 "The brothers Templar, whom God has raised up for the defence of our province and to whom he has accorded special protection, desire to receive apostolic

approval and also their own Rule of life ... Since we know well the weight of your intercession with God and also with His Vicar and with the other princes of Europe, we give into your care this two-fold mission, whose success will be very welcome to us. Let the constitution of the Templars be such as is suitable for men who live in the clash and tumult of war, and yet of a kind which will be acceptable to the Christian princes, of whom they have been the valuable auxiliaries. So far as in you lies and if God pleases, strive to bring this matter to a speedy and successful issue." qtd. in Howarth 50-51 Bernard realized at once the genius of the proposal to combine religious and military endeavors.

Through such organizations, the borders of Christendom could be extended and fortified. He immediately granted his approval of the plan and pledged his full support. He petitioned Pope Honorius II for a special council to consider the matter, and he notified Hugh of his actions.

Howarth 51 The Council of Troyes convened on January 13, 1128, a bitterly cold Saint Hilary's Day, for the primary purpose of considering the request of the Knights Templar.

Despite the delays of written communications, Hugh de Payens, accompanied by several brother knights, arrived from the Holy Land in time to attend the meetings of the Council. Howarth 51 William of Tyre wrote an account

of the events: " Nine years after the founding of this order, the knights were still in secular garb. They wore such garments as the people, for salvation of their souls, bestowed upon them. During this ninth year, a council was held at Troyes in France. There were present the archbishops of Rheims and Sens, with their suffragans; the bishop of Albano, the Pope's legate; the abbots of Citeaux, Clairvaux, Potigny; and many others. At this council, by order of Pope Honorius and of Stephen, patriarch of Jerusalem, a rule was drawn up for this order and a habit of white assigned them." qtd. in Burman/Templars 27 Although referred to in William's account by the generic title Abbott of Clairvaux, Bernard, in actuality controlled the proceedings of the council. There was little doubt Bernard's request would be met with approval; he was well known for his successes in reforming monastic life. He was held in the utmost respect by religious and lay leaders alike; in many circles he was referred to as the second pope. In fact, many of the popes were supplied by the mendicant orders. Robinson 66-67 At a time when monks were more highly regarded than priests, and considered closer to God because of their ascetic life-styles, Bernard said, " The people cannot look up to the priests, because the people are better than priests." Robinson 67 Bernard's offer to personally assist in the formulation of the Rules of the order was gratefully accepted by all. Bernard

based his Rule of the Templars on that of his own Cistercian order, which was itself based on the older Benedictine Rule.

Robinson 67 The Rule of the Templars was a strict and complex system of 686 written laws, meant to cover every possible aspect of daily life. As an example, Rule 25, On Bowls and Drinking Vessels, states: Because of the shortage of bowls, the brothers will eat in pairs, so that one may study the other more closely, and so that neither austerity nor secret abstinence is introduced into the communal meal. And it seems just to us that each brother should have the same ration of wine in his cup. qtd. in Upton-Ward 26 In 1139, Pope Innocent II issued a Bull, titled *Omne Datum Optimum*, declaring that the Knights Templar were under the direct and sole control of the Pope.

This freed the Knights to operate throughout Christendom and the Levant unencumbered by local ecclesiastical and secular rulers. This unprecedented autonomy was due, in no small part, to the personal petition of the new Grand Master, Robert the Burgundian. While Hugh had been an excellent warrior, Robert was an ideal administrator who understood politics. Howarth 80 The Order was authorized to have chaplain brothers, who were authorized to hear the confessions of their fellow brothers, and thereby absolve them of their sins. There were, however, five specific crimes for which granting of absolution was

reserved by the Pope. These were: " the killing of a Christianman or woman,; violently attacking another brother; attacking a member of another order or a priest; renouncing holy orders in order to be received as a brother; and entering the order by simony." Upton-Ward 5 It was also during the mastership of Robert that the Rules were translated from Latin into French. Church documents were normally in Latin only, but since most of the Knights were soldiers rather than educated clerics, they were unable to read Latin. In 1147, the Knights were authorized to wear a red cross upon their white mantles, despite rule 18, which forbade any decorations on their clothing. Upton-Ward 12 As the Knights Templar gained political and economic strength, they found themselves involved in many aspects of secular life. They established the first truly international banking service; travelers not wanting to travel with large sums could deposit their monies at any Temple and collect a like amount at their destination. Burman/Templars 85 The Templars were the primary bankers for the Holy See. Since the order was a papal creation which was administered directly by the Pope himself, their significance as papal bankers is understandable. Less obvious is the Templars' function as royal bankers for several of Europe's royal houses. The two greatest Temples outside the Levant were located in Paris and London. These two

Temples offered a full range of financial services to the royal houses, including collecting taxes, controlling debts and administering pension funds. Burman/Templars 87-88 The treasury of the King of France was kept safely within the vault of the Temple of Paris. Sinclair 36 The Templars owned a great fleet of merchant ships with which to convey all manner of goods, e. g., pepper and cotton, as well as pilgrims, between Europe and the Holy Land. People wanting to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but lacking the resources to do so, were allowed to assign rights to their houses and property, upon their death, to the Templars in exchange for passage on a Templar ship. To avoid accusations of usury, this procedure was legitimized by the papal bull *Quantum Praedecessores*, issued by Pope Eugenius II in 1145. Burman/Templars 75-78 The Holy Land was divided into four Crusader States: Jerusalem, Antioch, Tripoli and Edessa. Shifting alliances, complicated by the plotting of independent Arab emirates, posed a complicated and often confusing backdrop for the Knights' military operations. Their first action was in the northern sector of the Principality of Antioch. They captured the March of Amanus, which formed a natural barrier between the city of Amanus and Asia Minor. Burman/Templars 50 The Knights Templar frequently fought side-by-side with their counter-parts, the

Knights Hospitaller, another military order, founded to provide shelter to sick, wounded or destitute pilgrims.

Together, these two warrior orders afforded the Holy Land a formidable fighting force. Although some histories allude to a deep and bitter rivalry between the two, it is more likely that they cooperated well during the battles, keeping any such pettiness for the monotonous weeks between actions.

Upton-Ward 6-7 The first military action of the Templars was in the northern sector of the Holy Land. In 1131, they captured the March of Amanus in Antioch. It was a natural barrier between the city and Asia Minor, which afforded control of two roads into Antioch. The same year, King Fulk, Baldwin's successor, travelled to the site and granted ownership to the Templars. Burman/Templars 52 Control of the various areas of the Holy Land see-sawed back and forth between the Crusaders and the Arabs, with neither side enjoying a decisive victory. Then the balance of power began to change with the rise of the great Arab leader Salah-ad-Din Yusuf ibn-Aiyub, known to westerners as Saladin. Descended from a long line of military heroes, he was born in 1138 in Baalbek, Syria, where his father was military governor. He began to develop his warrior skills by accompanying his father and uncles on various campaigns. Burman/Templars 98 Saladin's rise to power was rapid and successful. His adherence to

the orthodox Sunni faith caused him to initiate dramatic changes in his Shi-ite army. Upon his ultimate rise to the position of Sultan, he declared a 'jihad', or holy war, against the Crusaders. This intense re-focusing of the Moslem effort began a gradual shift in power. Christian strongholds fell in increasing numbers, creating a domino effect. By the middle of 1187, Saladin had captured Acre, Nablus, Jaffa, Toron, Sidon, Beirut and Ascalon. Jerusalem fell on 2 October, 1187. Burman/Templars 108 The fall of Jerusalem was a disaster from which the Crusades never recovered. Among Saladin's prisoners were the King of Jerusalem and Raynald de Chatillon, commander of the fortress at Moab. After entertaining the two in his tent, Saladin had Raynald killed. The King saw his fellow prisoner executed and thought he was surely next, but Saladin had him brought back into his tent and told him, "It is not the habit of kings to kill kings." Saladin's victory was complete. Payne 223-4 In the disarray that followed, the orders began to disperse. The Hospitallers removed their headquarters, first to Rhodes and then to Malta; and, with the ultimate fall of Acre in 1291, the Templars lost their base of operations and relocated to Cyprus. In effect, the orders had lost their original reason for existence.

Upton-Ward 9 As the Knights had their political patrons, so had their enemies. In 1305, Philip IV of France, known

as Philip the Fair, seized control of the Holy See and relocated the papacy to Avignon. From there, he initiated a series of papal decrees, ostensibly issued by Pope Clement V, a puppet pope under his absolute control. Eyeing the vast fortunes and resources of the Templars, he conceived a plot of treachery against them. Since he also controlled the Inquisition in France, he had no difficulty leveling a whole laundry list of horrible, but absurd and largely unsupportable, crimes against the Knights.

Burman/Inquisition 95 The role of the Inquisition, under the auspices of Chief Inquisitor Guillaume of Paris, was to obtain confessions and conduct trials. On Friday the 13th of September, 1307, the warrant was issued for the arrest of the Knights and seizure of their property. Many of the Temples were 'tipped off' by the local sheriffs about the impending sweep, but Grand Master Jacques de Molay and his associates were arrested in their bed clothes.

The interrogations, aimed at soliciting evidence of any wrongdoing with which to prove the allegations against the order, dragged on for years. Ultimately, the Grand Master, along with other high-ranking Templars, were executed by burning in March, 1314, on an island in the Seine.

Howarth 17 The years between the arrest of Templars and the order's final dissolution afforded plenty of time for

knights on the lam to become absorbed by the underground. Knights in England were never pursued, due largely to a rift between the King and the Church, and many were thought to have participated in the war between Scotland and England, on the side of Robert the Bruce. Robinson 150-51 The vast fleet of Templar merchant ships was never found. There is no record of the 18 Templar ships which had been based at La Rochelle on the French coast, nor any of the various Templar ships normally anchored in the Thames or other English seaports.

There is some speculation that the Barbary Pirates, who gained worldwide notoriety by plundering European shipping well into the 19th century, were founded by seagoing Templars with revenge on their minds. Many of the order's ships were galleys, which were particularly suited for piracy. Robinson 165 One of the more mysterious tenets of the Freemasons can be found in the initiation of a Master Mason. The initiate is told his degree "will make you a brother to pirates and corsairs." Robinson 165-66 In 1813, a merchant ship, captained by a Freemason, was captured and boarded by pirates. In desperation, the captain rendered the Grand Hailing Sign of Distress of a Master Mason. The pirate captain apparently recognized the secret sign and allowed the merchant ship to proceed unharmed. Robinson 166 The destruction of the

Knights Templar by Philip the Fair was due to what he saw as wealth, arrogance, greed and secrecy on the part of the order. Even Philip's lawyer admitted "perhaps not all of them had sinned." It took more than suspicion of guilt to bring about the downfall of such a powerful entity as the Knights Templar. The final blow, however, was probably three-fold: a general unpopularity of the order among the European aristocracy, due in part to jealousy; a chronic shortage in the French treasury, despite heavy taxation; and Master de Molay's refusal to consider a merger of the Templars with the Hospitallers, as suggested by the Pope. The fact remains, however, that no evidence of heresy was ever found.

Burman/Templars 180 An order founded by nine knights in Jerusalem came to amass great wealth and power, which speaks well of their integrity and discretion. They became the "shock troops" of the Holy See. When they lost their original mission of protecting pilgrims upon the fall of Jerusalem, their downfall became inevitable.

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