

# Analysis of the knights templar history essay



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In 1118, a knight from the Champagne region of France named Hugh de Payens along with eight of his knight brothers including Godfrey of Saint-Omer in Picardy proposed to King Baldwin II that they form a lay community or withdraw into the monastery to save their souls. Instead, King Baldwin II persuaded Hugh de Payens and his brothers to save their souls by protecting pilgrims on the roads of France from thieves and murderers as they travel to the Holy City of Jerusalem. (Haag, 95-96) On behalf of himself and the eight other knights, Hugh de Payens made a request to King Baldwin II for “ permission to establish themselves as a new religious order”. They had made vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to the Patriarch of Jerusalem. They had nowhere to live so they asked for, and were granted, living quarters for their new order in the temple area part of the royal palace. This temple area was the former mosque al-Aqsa, said to have been built on the site of the original Temple of Solomon. It is from this location that the group of knights took its name: The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon. Over the years they would have many different names such as the Order of the Temple, the Knights of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, and many others, including the one that many call them today, the Knights Templar. (Robinson, 66)

In January 1120, at the Council of Nablus, the nine members of the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ were formally introduced to the nobles and religious leaders from all over the lands of Outremer, which is the area of modern day Israel and some surrounding countries. Later that year, they got the attention of a powerful visitor to Outremer, Fulk of Anjou, eventual King of Jerusalem. When Fulk of Anjou returned home, he granted them an annual

revenue. Along with an allowance they were receiving from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, French nobles added their own allowance in part for protection. Even with all these donations and allowances they received, it all added up to very little income. Dressing only in clothes that were donated to them, each individual knight was quite destitute. The white tunic became their uniform at the Council of Troyes in 1129 with a red cross added around 1147 during the start of the Second Crusade. The seal of the Knights Templar depicting two knights sharing a single horse is a symbol of their impoverished beginning. (Haag, 96-97)

In the first nine years of their existence, the new order did very little, and if they took on any new members, there is no record of it. This changed when King Baldwin II wrote a letter to Bernard asking that Bernard use his power with Pope Honarius II to obtain sanction from the papacy and to establish a Rule for the life and conduct of the members of the new order of the Knights Templar. Bernard (later St. Bernard), who some called a "Second Pope", was an abbot of Clairvaux, accomplished this task brilliantly. (Robinson, 66)

Grand Master, the title of the most prominent knight, was given to Hugh de Payens. (Baigent, Leigh, and Henry, 67)

At the start, the order seemed to have been little more than a private club around Champagne as all of the founding Templar Knights were from Champagne. The pope selected the city of Troyes, Champagne's capital, as a central location for a council to meet as they review any requests that the Knights Templar will have. Having been given land in the city of Troyes, the Knights Templar established their first headquarters in Europe there. This was one of many gifts that the Templar Knights received from not only the

church, but also wealthy nobles throughout Europe, allowing them to become wealthy and powerful as the years passed. . (Robinson, 66)

As legend has it, the original nine knights were searching for ancient treasures or documents, possibly buried beneath the Temple of Solomon. These items include The Ark of the Covenant and The Holy Grail. Some people have even said that while looking in the area around where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, the Templar Knights found many documents. This is one explanation of how the Knights Templar became so powerful and wealthy. (Picknett & Prince, 100) In the early part of the 1100's, many kings and other nobles throughout Europe gave large amounts of land, castles, and other wealth to the Knights Templar, as the knights took on many new members and grew to be quite large and powerful. In 1139, Pope Innocent II even issues a papal bull saying that the Knights Templar was a permanent order in the church, defenders of the church, and answered to no one but the Pope himself. In the later parts of the twelfth century, the Knights Templar fought in the Crusades, defeating and losing to Saladin, and losing their headquarters in Jerusalem. They then establish a new one at the city of Acre. In the thirteenth century, the Knights Templar receives more land from nobles as they fight alongside them in many battles, including several more Crusades. They fight everyone that is not Christian including the Arab Muslims, Mongols, and Turks. In 1291, Acre is captured; Christian control of Jerusalem was lost, and the Knights Templar evacuate and move their headquarters to Cyprus. (Nicholson, 145-147)

The order of the Templar Knights came to an end in the early 14th century. Being closely tied to the Crusades, the Templar Knights lost a lot of favor

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after fighting for and losing the Holy Land. By 1306, thinking that they were and unruly and arrogant bunch, and that they were a “stronger and better organized force than he could muster, firmly established throughout France”, King Philippe IV of France (Philip the Fair) was anxious to rid his territory of the Knights Templar. To top it off, King Philippe IV owed the Knights Templar money so the king found a way to rid himself of that debt and rid himself of the Knights Templar. He accused them of heresy, a convenient excuse during this era. (Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln, 74)

King Philippe IV developed his plans carefully. Through the voluntary confession of an alleged renegade knight and from spies that the king had used to infiltrate the order; a list of charges were brought together. One official confession read: “When being inducted into the order, initiates were required to deny Christ, spit on the cross, and place obscene kisses about the body of their receptor”. There were other accusations such as worshipping an idol called Baphomet, which looked like a human head with a long beard, and also having to indulge other members of the order in homosexual relations if they requested. (Haag, 218) Armed with these charges, Philippe could at last do what he had wanted to do for some time; and when he did, it was sudden, swift, efficient, and lethal. King Philippe IV distributed sealed, secret orders to his men throughout the country. These orders were to be opened everywhere at the same time and put into action at once. On the morning of Friday, October 13th, 1307, it was ordered all over France, that all Knights Templar were to be arrested and held by the king’s men, and any personal belongings or wealth be taken from them. (This is where it is thought that Friday the 13th was bad luck for most

people.) Although Philippe's used the element of surprise, he had not found what his primary interest was, and that was their immense wealth. Shortly before the arrests, The Grand Master of the Knights Templar, Jacques de Molay, with some sort of advanced warning, rounded up many of the order's books and rules and had them burned so their secrets would not get out. Jacques de Molay then sent a letter to all Templar headquarters in France stating that no information about the order was to be made public. It has been speculated that word had gotten out about what was about to happen to the Templar Knights. When the knights were arrested, they went peacefully with the king's men. Also, there is evidence of the Templar Knights loading several ships with the Templar treasure the night before the arrests were made, and these ships seemed to have vanished without a trace. Legend has it that the treasures that the Templar Knight escaped with were none other than the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy Grail. (Baigent, Leigh, and Henry, 75-76)

The day after the arrests were made, news spread to Pope Clement V about the arrests and torture that was taking place. He was infuriated at this and viewed this as an attack on the Papacy and the Catholic Church. Little could be done though, as the pope sent two cardinals to retrieve the Templar property from the king, only to be turned away by the king's men. Rather than risking a royal coup, much like the one that nearly killed Pope Boniface several years earlier, the pope finally gave in. On November 22, 1307, he issued a bull asking " all the kings and princes of Christendom to arrest the Templars in their lands and to hold their property for safe keeping for the church". (Haag, 225)

Outside of France, the Knights Templar seemed to have escaped most of the persecution. The knights in England were first defended by King Edward II (King Philippe's son-in-law), but eventually were arrested after King Edward II gave in to pressure from the pope and King Philippe. Most got light sentences and were not put to death. In Scotland, the order was never officially dissolved and they even fought with Robert the Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn. In Germany, many assimilated themselves into society to avoid any persecution and in Portugal, the order was cleared of any wrongdoing and they changed their name to the Knights of Christ. (Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln, 77-78)

With the Templar Knights having been arrested, the king and his men began to torture the knights, trying to extract confessions from them for the so called heresy that they have committed. Many of the men that were arrested were not battle hardened knights. They included artisans, farmers, and servants that helped the order. These people would quickly give in to the torture that was going on. The Templar Knights that were arrested had always known the risk of being caught, tortured, and/or executed. These knights eventually gave in to the torture that they had to endure. Many of the tortures were extreme. Many of the Templar Knights faced the rack: a device to where they could pull each arm and leg in separate directions, until the joints in the body would dislocate. Others had their hands tied together and hung up from a beam. The soles of their feet were then rubbed with fat, and then placed over a fire. (Haag, 223)

In 1312, the pope finally gave in to the king and officially dissolved the order of the Knights Templar. After 2 years of torture, investigations, and trials, the

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Grand Master of the Knights Templar, Jacques de Molay, and the Templar preceptor of Normandy, Geoffroi de Charney, were found guilty of their crimes and they were “slow roasted” over a fire for several hours. As they were roasting away, they continued to shout out the innocence of the order. Some say that as Jacques de Molay was being burned, he called for a curse on King Philippe and Pope Clement V, saying that they would both meet him in death within the next year and have their judgment before God. They did indeed both die within that year’s time with King Philippe dying in a hunting accident and Pope Clement V dying from unknown reasons. (Robinson, 142-143)

The Knights Templar played an important role in protecting people as they made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but that was just the beginning for them. For several hundred years, they fought in several crusades, protecting Christians from non Christians, and becoming quite wealthy and powerful. Unfortunately for them, the Knights Templar had to deal with a king that got quite jealous of their wealth and power and wanted it for himself, and his actions ultimately lead to the demise of the Knights Templar. Even today there is speculation that the Knights Templar escaped with their treasure to such places as Britain, Scotland, and even into North America. The legend continues to grow with movies such as The DaVinci Code, a movie about finding the Holy Grail, Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark and Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, both dealing with finding the lost treasures that the Knights Templar was supposed to have searched for and found. In National Treasure, a lost Masonic treasure is found. The present



day Freemasons are the descendents of the Knights Templar, using mysterious rituals and having many secrets only known to its members.