

The Rise and Fall of the Knights Templar

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The Rise and Fall of the Knights Templar

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Abstract

The Knights Templar, a religious military order with the goal to protect the Christians of the Latin East from those they defined as infidels, quickly gained power and notoriety since their founding in 1118. With the rise of their prominence came the reactions—both positive and negative—of Christians and Muslims in the West and East. Thanks to the Templar's relationship to the Catholic Church and the various Kingdoms of Eastern and Western Christendom, the Templar's were able to continue growing in power and wealth, until their arrest on 13 October 1307 by King Philip IV of France. This Thesis aims to make sense of the many relationships the Templars had throughout their years of operation and how those relationships contributed to their success and their eventual demise by analyzing primary documents related to their rise and fall. By taking into account the works of modern historians along with the works of historians at the time, this Thesis will attempt to fill in the gaps made by many missing or destroyed Templar documents.

Dedication

To the class of 2020. We couldn't have the senior semester we wanted but we did it anyway.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Professor Conti: your support, input and patience helped me see the light at the end
of the tunnel.

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To all my friends, thank you for listening to my ramblings, for supporting me in everything, for
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Introduction

From the First Crusade in 1095 until the fall of Acre in 1291, Western Christendom's fascination and obsession with the "Holy Land" was intense. With the establishment of the different Kingdoms, principalities and counties in the newly formed Latin East, more and more pilgrims from the West made their way to see the places they heard about in the Bible. With the introduction of so many defenseless travelers in a hostile land, religious military orders were formed in an effort to protect those on their pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the first being the Order of the Temple. As time went on, Military Orders during the Middle Ages were an important facet of religious life in both the East and the West. With the establishment of orders like the Knights Templar, Knights Hospitaller, and Teutonic Knights, all of Christendom was protected from infidels and heretics. Due to the importance of such military orders, it was only natural that they collected wealth and power.

Of the three mentioned orders, the Knights Templar became one of the most powerful and influential orders to base themselves in the Latin East. Along with this power and influence, however, came opposition. Throughout the lifetime of the Templars, there were those who stood against them, from Christian leaders and officials to those who were their enemies. It was thanks to the relationships they curated in both the East and the West that the Templars gained the power and influence it had. The Templars were able to It was through these relationships, however, that the Templars also met their end.

Due to the mystery behind the Templars, there have been many throughout the years that have looked into the Order's history. Part of this intrigue is due to the fact that the eventual trial

that led to the dissolve of the Order saw many of its official documents lost. Modern historians like Malcolm Barber and Helen Nicholson have greatly contributed to the research of the Templars. Through Malcolm Barber's books, *The Trial of the Templars* and *The New Knighthood*, he focuses on the Templar's trials in order to understand why the Templars were targeted and how the trials broke down the relationships the Templars had curated throughout their years of operation. Helen Nicholson's book *The Knights Templar* is a much more generalized view of the history of the Templars, leaning more towards their foundations in the East and the military advances the Order had there. In order to understand who the Templars were and the lead up to their eventual demise, it's important to look at both in order to more effectively understand.

Chapter One: The Origins of The Knights Templar

From the beginning of the 12th century, at the time of the First Crusade, several religious-military orders were birthed to meet the needs of Christians in the foreign and hostile land of Palestine. One of the most famous Orders to be founded during this time was the Order of The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, commonly known as the Knights Templar, established in 1118-1119. This Order gained significance quickly and lost it just as quick. Because of the questionable disbandment, many myths and mistruths have been spread and many are being researched and clarified today by scholars. While it is interesting to look at such myths, it is also important to look at the historical reality of the Templars and understand who exactly they were and what they stood for. The best way to do this, is to start at the beginning.

William of Tyre and Michael the Syrian on Origins

Even though the Order of the Temple of Solomon became quite famous, the origins of the Templars are still somewhat foggy. The Order was recognized officially after the Council of Troyes in 1128 with approval of the “Primitive Rule of The Templars” written by Bernard of Clairvaux. In this text the Cistercian monk writes that the order had been in operation for 9 years prior. this is certainly true, although the actual account of the founding of the Templars is unknown. This is partly because the issues discussed during the Council “cannot be told or

recounted,”¹ leaving us relatively in the dark. There is, however, some evidence in the form of myths and stories. A couple versions of this evidence comes from William of Tyre (c. 1130-1186) and Michael the Syrian (c. 1126-1199), two historians. While both claim to know of the beginnings of the Knights Templar, the writings of both these scholars must be taken with a grain of salt, as their information comes many years after the alleged beginning of the Templars. Despite this, both of these sources have specific similarities that could indicate a reliable story.

The first of these two that can be looked at is the *Historia* by William of Tyre. William was born in Jerusalem around 1130, two years after the official recognition of the Knights Templar, and spent about 20 years in Europe (Paris, Orléans, and Bologna) studying liberal arts, theology and civil law before returning to the East.² While William did interview many people who witnessed the feats and arguable wrongdoings of the Templars, there is no sure way to know if he did, in fact, talk to relevant people about the beginnings of the Knights Templar, as a great majority of them had been dead for a while by the time he started writing.³ Despite this, William discussed the origins of the Order. According to him, the Knights had been founded in 1118 by Hugh of Payns and Godfrey of Saint-Omer,⁴ almost ten years before being official sanctioned by the Catholic Church. He goes on to say that:

“Some noblemen of knightly rank, devoted to God, pious and God-fearing, placed themselves in the hands of the lord patriarch for the service of Christ, professing the wish

¹ Bernard of Clairvaux, and Hugh de Payens. “The Primitive Rule of The Templars,” n.d.

² Malcolm Barber, and Keith Bate. *The Templars*. Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2002, p. 25

³ Malcolm Barber, and Keith Bate. *The Templars*. p. 25

⁴ Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens, 2 vols., Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis 63 and 63A (Turnhout, 1986), 12.7, pp. 553-5, translated by Malcolm Barber, and Keith Bate. *The Templars*. Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2002. pp. 25-7

to live perpetually in the manner of regular canons in chastity, and obedience, without personal belongings.”⁵

Through this, William suggests that these “noblemen of knightly rank” travelled to Jerusalem in order to become monks, or something similar, in the Holy Land. This version of the beginning of the Knights Templar also suggests that these knights were not the ones with the idea to act as ‘Holy Knights’. It was not until the Patriarch of Jerusalem at the time, Warmund of Picquigny, assigned them to protect the roads of the Holy Land and look out for and protect pilgrims from those wishing to harm them.⁶ This suggestion by William portrays the knights who started the Templars as servants of God, only fighting at the suggestion of the Patriarch of Jerusalem. He shows that these men truly wished to devote themselves to God as they took up the lives of monks, not knights.

Michael of Syria talks of a similar origin. Michael was born c. 1126, only a couple years before William of Tyre. As he served as the Patriarch of Antioch, he wrote his Chronicle that encompassed the history of the world from the creation to his own time-period as was common during this time. Both the histories of Michael and William show many similarities, but despite the parallels, there were some discrepancies. Michael, instead of establishing that the men who wished to serve God were “noblemen of knightly rank”⁷, says it was only “a [singular] Frenchman” and some of his followers.⁸ Without establishing that this ‘Frenchman’ and those who accompanied him were noble, Michael says that their goal was to become monks and serve as men of God, nothing more. Unlike William’s account, the initial ‘Frenchman’, who Michael

⁵ William of Tyre, *Chronique*, Malcolm Barber, *The Templars*, pp. 25-7

⁶ William of Tyre, *Chronique*, Malcolm Barber, *The Templars*, pp. 25-7

⁷ *Chronique de Michel Le Syrien. Patriarche Jacobie d’Anitoché (1166-99)*, ed. And tr. J.-B. Chabot, vol. 3 (Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1905), 15.11, pp. 201-3, quoted in Malcolm Barber, and Keith Bate. *The Templars*. Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2002. Pp. 27-9

⁸ *Chronique de Michel Le Syrien*, Malcolm Barber, and Keith Bate. *The Templars*, p. 27-9

does confirm to be Hugh of Paynes, did not go to the Patriarch of Jerusalem in order to become a monk, which suggests that Michael believed Hugh of Paynes truly only wished to save his soul as well as stay a knight. Similar William's account, however, Michael says:

“When the king and his barons saw that they had achieved remarkable things in the war and had been of use to the city during their three-year service, they advised the man to serve in the army with his thirty knights and defend the place against brigands rather than to become a monk in the hope of saving only his own soul,”⁹

The two different accounts don't shed much light on the true origins of the Templars. The similarities, however, are strong enough to assume that either the leaders of Jerusalem during William's suggested year of 1118 truly asked Hugh of Paynes to use his history of knighthood as a way to protect the people and visitors of Jerusalem. This was either truth or it was a widely accepted myth within the Order itself that became so well known that it was accepted as the truth.

The Original Number of the Templars

An interesting aspect of both William of Tyre's and Michael the Syrian's accounts are the different numbers that they each say the Order started out with. In William's account, he says that there were only 9 knights for first 9 years of operation (pre-Council of Troyes). Michael, on the other hand, states that Hugh of Paynes brought 30 knights with him to Jerusalem, all of which were going to become monks. While Michael's account was interesting in itself, William's claim seems to hold more intrigue. The peculiarity of having only 9 knights over 9 years appears as somewhat 'sacred' when looking through a Medieval lens.

⁹ *Chronique de Michel Le Syrien*, Malcolm Barber, and Keith Bate. *The Templars*, p. 27-9

Early medieval theologians looked at the numbers within the Bible to try and find some sort of meaning. One of the numbers that stands out in their studies is the number 3, as it was also a number that held much weight in antiquity. In Ancient Greece, the number 3 is seen in the myth of Atalanta with the 3 golden apples, while in Ancient Egypt, the number 3 is seen with their gods and the “triad of the family: male, female and child.”¹⁰ Three is seen as the magic number in many cultures throughout time, with Medieval Christendom being no exception. In Christianity, 3 is important as it represents the Holy Trinity: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Early Christian writers who studied the Bible took this into account and later found:

“imitations of the Trinity in the 3 gifts of the magi, Peter’s 3-fold denial, in the 3 days between death and resurrection, in the 3 figures of the transfiguration and crucifixion, the 3 at Gethsemane awakened 3 times, the 3 temptations of Christ, and the 3 appearances of Christ to his disciples after his death.”¹¹

The significance behind the repeated instances of the number three relate to the number 9 in a couple different ways. The first way is that 9 is 3 squared, making it 3 multiplied by 3, three separate times. Following this logic, 9 is borderline holy. The reason that William of Tyre retold this version of the Templar’s “creation myth” could be because he wanted to portray the Knights Templar as exceptionally holy people and an exceptionally holy organization.

Another interpretation of the number 9 repeated in the origins of the Knights Templar has a much less holy meaning. The number 9 can also be seen as an imperfect or incomplete number as it is one shy of the number 10. By saying the Knights Templar were associated with the number 9, William of Tyre could be saying that the Templars themselves were “all-but complete

¹⁰ Vincent F. Hopper. *Medieval Number Symbolism*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1938 p. 70

¹¹ Vincent F. Hopper. *Medieval Number Symbolism*. 1938 p. 70

or all-but-perfect.”¹² William of Tyre didn’t believe the Templars were perfect in any way. He believed they were prideful, as seen in the loss of Ascalon to the Egyptians. According to him, the city was lost because the Templars were more focused on “seizing most of the booty [and] had prevented the rest of the army from exploiting a breach in the walls.”¹³ By assigning this number to the Templars, William could indeed be stating that the Templars were not as perfect as they wanted to be seen.

The Church and the Templars

Despite the many speculations on the origins of the Templars before the Council of Troyes, there are sources that help us understand who the Templars were and what they were supposed to represent. The best source for such a topic is Bernard of Clairvaux’s “Primitive Rule of the Templars”. Bernard of Clairvaux was instructed via the Council of Troyes to write up a Rule for the Templars to officially indoctrinate them as an official Military Order of the Catholic Church. Bernard’s decision to be the one to write the rule for the Templars stems greatly from his relationship with Hugh de Paynes.

Bernard’s rule incorporates the one for the Cistercian Order, an order of monks which he helped establish. Because of this, the two orders are closely tied to each other, despite the few differences in their rules. Unlike the rule for the monks, the rule for the Templars accommodated for the knight lifestyle. Bernard and Hugh de Paynes understood that knights needed to have more food than their monk counterparts and changed the rule to make it so. Another aspect of the rule that was changed was the vow of silence. One of the many rules of monasticism is to practice

¹² Vincent F. Hopper. *Medieval Number Symbolism*. p. 11

¹³ Malcolm Barber, and Keith Bate. *The Templars*. Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press 2002, p. 9

silence, as nothing good comes from speaking, as according to their lines of thought. While the Templars agreed with this, it is hard for a Military Order situated in enemy territory to fully practice this vow of silence. To reflect this, the rule says:

“When the brothers come out of the compline they have no permission to speak openly except in an emergency... But if by chance, as they come out of compline, the knighthood or the house has a serious problem which must be solved before morning, we intend that the Master or a party of elder brothers who govern the Order under the Master, may speak appropriately... ‘Life and death are in the power of the tongue.’ And during that conversation we altogether prohibit idle words and wicked bursts of laughter,”¹⁴

This version of the rule establishes that in cases of emergency, within the Temple, or during war, talking is permitted. This version still has the same core of the original, which prohibits talking as idle talking can lead to sin, as according to Catholic monks.

One of the main reasons why the Knights Templar became as powerful as it did was through the support of the church. Along with its rule written by a very prominent Catholic figure, the Templars acquired support from the Pope himself. After the founding of the Templars, Pope Innocent II put forth this Papal bull entitled “Omne Datum Optimum” which laid out the privileges that the Templars held.

The first subject that Pope Innocent II addresses in his bull is the Templar’s authority in the Latin East. He praises them for their bravery and willingness to lay down their lives for their brothers, then says:

¹⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Latin Rule of the Templars*

“We exhort you all in the Lord, and for the remission of your sins, we enjoin on you and your servants by the authority of God and of Saint Peter, prince of the apostles, that in the defence of the Catholic Church and to snatch from their filth the one that is under the tyranny of the pagans, you labour without fear in fighting the enemies of the cross, calling on the name of Christ.”¹⁵

This privilege given to the Templars by the allowed them the possibility to work under only the authority of God. By saying this, the Pope is letting the Templars work under their own devices, allowing them freedom to make their decisions within the Holy Land as a unit. Along with this, Pope Innocent II goes on to say that the Templars have privileges to whatever spoils they receive in combat. He says that with the authority of God, the Templars are allowed to take and use whatever items they take, and no one has the authority to take said spoils from them against their will.¹⁶ Just like the privilege before, this privilege allowed the Templars a lot of freedom. Along with an allowance from the church, the Templars were able to collect money in other ways. This financial freedom allowed the Templars’ power and significance grow significantly.

The Templars and Knighthood

Knighthood wasn’t new to the European world. It was a position steeped in tradition and was seen almost everywhere by the 11th century. The form of knighthood employed by the Templars however, had never been seen before.

¹⁵ *Papsturkunden für Templar und Johanniter*, ed. R. Hiestand. Vorarbeiten zum Oriens Pontificius, vol. 1. Abhandlungen und Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, 77 (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1972), no. 3, pp. 204-10 quoted in Malcolm Barber, and Keith Bate. *The Templars*. Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press 2002, p. 60

¹⁶ *Papsturkunden für Templar und Johanniter*, Malcolm Barber and Keith Bate, *The Templars*, p. 60

In order to become a knight, one traditionally had to be the vassal of a lord. Vassalage was practiced by all levels of society, but depending on what social class one was, the benefits of vassalage varied. For serfs, the benefit for the subordinate was protection, while the benefit for the lord was worked land and food. For the upper classes, however, the benefits of vassalage were much higher. If one belonged to a higher class, the benefit of becoming a lord's vassal—or a lord's "man" as it was simplified—ranged from protection, to land, to power.¹⁷ For the lord, the benefit was also much higher. Vassals who fell under the classification of knight were required to fight for their lord no matter what. It was through this system that Europe had seen knights. They were the workers of a higher man who often was the worker of another higher man and so on. They were to listen to their lord's orders and their lord would care for them in turn.

This is what separated the Knights Templar to secular knights. The Knights Templar weren't vassals, per se. They still served a lord—in their case, God—but were wholly left to their own devices. The Templars were able to exercise more freedom than other traditional knights. Of course, the Templars still had to answer to Kings and the Pope, but only because they were seen as mouthpieces of God, or God's chosen servants. Otherwise, the Templars operated as an independent body. This led to much conflict between them and visiting crusaders, which will be explored further in the following chapter.

The other knightly aspect that separated the Templars from secular knights were physical possessions. Knights were the lowest form of nobility, but they were still considered noble. The Knights Templar, on the other hand, were monks who lived every aspect of their lives in poverty. With the introduction of the Knights Templar, the traditional view of knighthood shifted, especially with St. Bernard's "In Praise of the New Knighthood." This document was a letter

¹⁷ Bloch, Marc, Koziol, G. Feudal Society. London: Routledge, 2014. <https://doi-org.jcu.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9781315772165>, pp.155-156

from Bernard to Hugh de Paynes after Hugh's several letters asking Bernard to exonerate the Knights Templar (CITE). Bernard does this and condemns those knights not fighting for God in the process. This document opens with Bernard praising this new knighthood. He praises that they not only face a war "against flesh and blood," but also "against a spiritual army of evil in the heavens."¹⁸ This first chapter goes on to encourage the existing knights within the Order of the Temple and even goes on to explain that:

"If [a Christian] fights for a good reason, the issue of his fight can never be evil; and likewise the results can never be considered good if the reason were evil and the intentions perverse. If you happen to be killed while you are seeking only to kill another, you die a murderer. If you succeed, and by your will to overcome and to conquer you perchance kill a man, you live a murderer."¹⁹

which, in turn, clears all knights within the holy orders from sin when it comes to fighting those that the Church would deem as heretics or heathens. This consequentially calls knights who fight without a holy or just reason murderers and men of sin. In this quote, Bernard doesn't just call secular knights who kill without a good reason murders, he also holds members of the Knights Templar to the same standard. According to him, all men—secular or religious—who kill with ill intent are murders. Despite this, Bernard still holds the Templars to a higher regard than secular knights and goes further into depth about this statement. He condemns 'worldly knights' and their extravagance, comparing their "bits and spurs [adorned] with gold and silver precious stones"²⁰ to the extravagant dresses and finery of women. By saying this, Bernard adds that decorating themselves with such finery and wealth limits what they could do as knights, once

¹⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, and Conrad Greenia. "Bernard, In Praise of the New Knighthood." <https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/344bern2.html>.

¹⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux, and Conrad Greenia. "Bernard, In Praise of the New Knighthood."

²⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux, and Conrad Greenia. "Bernard, In Praise of the New Knighthood."

again holding the Knights Templar above any other form of knighthood. This document ultimately describes the view many adopted of the Knights Templar. Bernard viewed them as men fighting for Christ and in turn saved from being judged on their battles. The Knights fought for God and thus killed in order to protect the people the Holy Land and not for their own gain. This view could also be seen as a way to recruit more people to join the order. It was important to those within Christendom to be free of sin and for knights, what better way to do that than by joining a holy military order? Knights who joined could still use the skills they had been cultivating all their lives for Christ, thus letting them use their skills for a just cause.

Chapter Two: The Knights in the East

Thanks to their privileged relationship with both the Church and the kings of Jerusalem, the Knights Templar became a legitimized religious order ready to serve all of Christendom in the East. In order to do the job that they wanted to do, however, the Templars needed to first establish themselves as a force to be reckoned with. Establishing themselves came with editing their rule to better put together their warrior lifestyle and ascetic-spiritual nature, having a working relationship with Crusaders from the West, as well as understanding the cultural and political atmosphere of the existing societies.

Establishing Themselves in the East

The road to establishing themselves in the East was expedited for the Templars thanks to the Catholic Church. With its support, and especially after the Council of Troyes in 1129 and Pope Innocent II's bull *Omne datum optimum* of 1138, the Templars were legitimized as a religious order operating in direct connection to the Papacy, making it a viable option for people in both the east and west to donate to. People gave the Templars anything they could, from items like food to money to land.

During this time, indulgences were still commonplace. This encouraged people to give as much as they could to the Church. Consequently, the Templars gained from this as well. In an effort to save their souls from sin, many donations were given to the Templars as well as other churches, religious orders, and monasteries. In the deeply detailed Obituary belonged to the

Church of la Trinité, a Templar base, in the region of Champagne, the many donations given to the Templars by the church's members as homage for their death are recorded. One can see the many different donations given on a daily basis:

“Jan. 5 Death of Alberea, buried in the cloister of the Sainte Trinité, next to Robert, her nephew for whose souls Hugh, son of the said woman and dean of this church, gave to this church for the souls of himself and his sister Adelaide, as well as the aforementioned, the *trecensum* he possessed at Courcelles, namely 9 quarters of corn.”²¹

This excerpt shows that not only individuals, but also entire families donated to the Templars for their “souls”. This isn't the only example of an indulgence being accepted by the Templars.

There was a countless amount of people who donated to them—from items like food and money as seen in this example, to castles.

While donations of food and money were beneficial, it was donations of land and castles that helped the Templars set up bases all over both the Holy Land and Europe. Land donations were common, especially from noble families. Both in the West and the East, the Templars accepted land as a donation from anyone. An example of this can be seen still in the Obituary of the Temple at Reims, with land donated on January 20 of an unspecified year.²²

“Death of Hugh the cleric, son of Ralph of Rethel. He gave to this church an eighth part of two houses for the annual celebration of his anniversary Mass, to be received after the death of his father. Death of Reginald of Vichiers, 19th Master of the Templars—may his soul rest in peace. Death of Artaud of Nogent. He gave to the house of the Temple the

²¹ *Obituaire de la Commanderie du Temple de Reims*, ed E. de Barthélemy in *Mélanges historiques. Collection des Documents inédits*, vol 4 (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1882), pp. 313-32 translated by Malcolm Barber, and Keith Bate. *The Templars*. Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press 2002, pp. 134-5

²² The years of the excerpt of this Obituary span from the 1160s to 1307 of which only 42 pages survived. The specific year is hard to tell because the Obituary details the anniversary of deaths as well as current death. The excerpt can approximately be dated in the early to mid 1200's.

land in front of the gate of the Temple at Reims, which he had bought from Philip of Tours-sur-Marne and his heirs for 4 *livres* in Reims money.”²³

This excerpt shows two instances of donation from two separate members of the church, Hugh the Cleric and Artaud of Nogent. The first donation shows a small endowment of land given by Hugh the Cleric. The second shows the donation of land by Artaud of Nogent, who gave the Templars land in front of their own property. Both of these donations can show that the accumulation of all these different small parcels of land truly gave the Templars a financial edge which in turn allowed for their power to grow. With the money and property that was donated to them, the Templars were able to support themselves financially in their endeavors in the East.

These donations in Champagne were among the smallest examples of land given in Europe. In the Iberian Peninsula, land was donated to the Templars as a way to keep the order there to help fight against invading forces. Examples of this can be seen with donations of land in Barcelona and Portugal. The rulers of Barcelona gave the Templars over seven different castles as both a way to pay homage to the holy warriors and as a way to give them advantage against the invading Muslims. This effort to keep the Templars in Iberia was short lived, however, as the Templars believed it best if they remained fighting in the East, as was their primary directive.²⁴

Of the many donations they received, none were more important than the castles they received in the Holy Land. The first of these castle donations happened in the 1130s with land in the Amanus mountains.²⁵ From the 1130s on, the Templars both received and bought castles in the East, amassing much power in the area. Their presence in the East grew with the amount of

²³ *Obituaire de la Commanderie du temple de Reims*, Barber, *The Templars*, p. 137

²⁴ *Cartulaire general de l'Ordre du Temple 1119?-1150. Recueil des chartes et des bulles relatives à l'Ordre du Temple*, ed. Marquis d'Albon (Paris, Champion, 1913), no. xxxiii, p. 25, translated by Malcolm Barber, and Keith Bate. *The Templars*. Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press 2002, pp. 93-95

²⁵ Helen Nicholson, *The Knights Templar: A New History*. Sutton Publishing Limited, 2004, p. 54

castles they received. One of these many donations was the castle of Ahamant awarded to the Templars by King Amalric of Jerusalem on January 17, 1166. The purpose of giving such a castle to the Templars was strategy. By giving the Templars this castle, it gave the order an advantage against approaching enemies. Along with giving the Templars a vantage point against any approaching enemies, the castles in the East also allowed the Templars to protect incoming pilgrims.

These weren't the only functions of castles, however. The castles that the Templars ran served as centers of religious life and served very well as such. Just like their monastic brothers in the West, the Templars also practiced collective isolation from the rest of the world. The center of the castle, being the most isolated and protected, would serve as the chapel, while the surrounding walls would house lay-people and mercenaries.²⁶ Of course, the castle served as a protective barrier for everyone against attackers and served as military bases across the East.

Along with these bases, it was important to edit the rule composed for the Templars by Bernard of Clairvaux. While the first rule helped establish the Templars as a religious order, it wasn't a rule that could help a military order survive on the battlefield. It wasn't until 1165 did the Templars make changes to the pre-existing Latin Rule made up during the Council of Troyes. This new rule, called the French Rule, was written in French as a way to help members who couldn't understand Latin. The French Rule added several sections, all of which helping the Templars when it came to warfare, as the previous Latin Rule was inadequate when it came to establishing a hierarchy, regulations, and conduct of the military order.²⁷

²⁶ Helen Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, p. 61

²⁷ *La Règle du Temple*, ed. H. de Curzon. Société de l'Histoire de France (Paris, Librairie Renouard, 1886), clauses 148-68, pp. 115-27. Tr. J. Upton-Ward, *The Rule of the Templars. The French Text of the Rule of the Order of Knights Templar* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1992), pp. 56-60 (with modifications by the retranslator), quoted in Malcolm Barber, and Keith Bate. *The Templars*. Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press 2002, pp. 67-73

The first new section to be added was on “How the Brothers Should Make Camp”. As the title suggests, this section describes the way the Templars were to make camp while on the road. Along with this, it establishes the hierarchy of the Templars. Unlike the Latin Rule, the Templars under the French Rule know now who they need to answer to when doing a task such as this.

Along with these new additions, the French Rule also makes it easier for the brothers of the Templars when it comes to fasting. Fasting was a large part of the Latin Rule for the Templars. This is so because the original rule for the Templars took largely from the rule for Cistercian monks. In order to show their devotion to God as holy men, monks would fast for long periods of time. For the Templars, regular and long fasting periods wasn’t as viable as it was for monks. Monks usually lived lives away from other people, safe within the walls of their monasteries. It was a monk’s duty to pray, do some physical labor, and be present within their community. For a brother of the Templars, it was much different. It was their duty to fight for the pilgrims of the Holy Land. The physical labor that a brother of the Templars had to endure was warfare, not the farm work of a monk. Fasting could prove disastrous.

The French Rule slightly changes the fasting rule when it came to war camps. This new rule says:

“The servings of meat for two brothers of the convent should be such that what is left by two brothers may sustain two paupers. And from two brothers’ servings those of three turcoples may be made up; and from two turcoples’ those of three sergeants.”²⁸

This alteration to the Rule allowed for the brothers more, which allowed for more strength in battle. Such a diet also allowed for the brothers to save as much supplies as possible. With the

²⁸ *La Règle du Temple*, Barber, *The Templars*, The French Rule p. 69

possibility of being stuck on the road for a long time without the option of buying more supplies, it was important for the Templars to specifically ration out their meals for the sake of survival.

Along with this, the new rule allowed for the Templars to establish discipline and order in their ranks. Survival was key for the Templars. Being surrounded by enemies with the chance of being consistently attacked, it was important to know exactly what needed to be done and when. To move swiftly as one unit against an enemy was their key for victory. To implement such order into the Rule made sure that every brother could follow their orders no matter what.

The Relationship between the Templars and the Crusaders

In order to fully establish themselves as a force in the East, the Templars had to rely on their relationships in the West. One of the most important relationships that the Templars had to establish, and nurture was the one between them and the Crusaders. As the “points of contact” for the Crusaders, it was crucial for the Templars to protect these newcomers as they traveled to the East, lead them through the political and physical battlefield, and—if necessary—finance them along the way.

The Templar’s first true chance to do just this was during the crusade of King Louis VIII in 1145, otherwise known as the Second Crusade. This was a very high-profile crusade as not only was the King of the Franks, King Louis VII, joining his men on this crusade, so was the German King, Conrad III.²⁹ With the support of prominent church figures like Bernard of Clairvaux, many people decided to join in and fight for the Holy Land.

Thanks to the relationship between the Templars and Bernard of Clairvaux, many men decided to not only become crusaders, but to pledge themselves to the Knights Templar and stay

²⁹ Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 66

in the Holy Land indefinitely. This influx in men was a huge help to the existing brothers of the Temple. Such a large crusade with such important people required more help.

The journey for the Crusaders was long and dangerous and helped show the Templars' worth as both advisors and warriors. Travelling with King Louis VII was 130 new brothers and an unknown number of existing brothers, but, according to Malcolm Barber, "it seems unlikely that there would have been fewer sergeants or serving brothers accompanying them."³⁰ As the Templars and the French Crusaders travelled together, it was clear that Crusaders lack of organization was going to be their downfall. Thanks to the Templars' organization, however, the Crusaders managed to make it to their final destination.

All along the way, the French crusaders exhibited their disorganization. The crusaders were prone to starting fights with locals as they passed through villages, as seen in Worms on the 29th of June of 1145. Here, a fight broke out "between the citizens and the crusaders, and a Frenchman was killed."³¹ This lack of discipline continued to be portrayed by the French Crusaders as they made their way through Europe and into Asia Minor. The Crusaders were frivolous with their supplies and when they needed it the most, they were forced to turn to the Templars for help.

After settling their travel terms with the Byzantines and making their way towards Jerusalem, word of the German's defeat at the hands of the Turks came. In an effort to retreat and regroup, the Germans met up with the French and all marched together towards their final destination. As they marched, they were plagued with a lack of resources and a lack of places to

³⁰ Barber, *The New Knighthood*, p. 66

³¹ Jonathan Phillips, *The Second Crusade: Extending the Frontiers of Christendom*, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 186

stock up. When they did pass places to gather resources, it was sold at highly inflated prices. It came to the point that “The most destitute deserted and stayed behind.”³²

After a debacle at Mt. Cadmus, the Turks saw the weakening state of the Crusaders and pestered them relentlessly. King Louis VII, “seeing the need for discipline...he encouraged everyone to establish common fraternity with the Templars.”³³ The Crusaders were all put under the command of a Templar commander in groups of fifty. The Templars showed through this their prowess and experience in fighting the Turks. By adding this new organization and discipline, in Barber’s words, the Templars allowed for their new units “to provide a focal point for the various sections of the army within the column,” and allowed the army to act “as a body when any manoeuvre was undertaken.”³⁴

By allowing the Templars to take control like this, their rules were consequentially put on the men in each new unit. The Templars passed on knowledge of the Turks’ military strategy as well as instilled some much-needed discipline that allowed the army to stay collected and uniform—something that was detrimental to their survival. This move to allow the Templars to take control over King Louis VII’s army was unprecedented. While King Louis VII wasn’t known for being a strong leader, with the help of the Templars, he was able to impose more order as well as establish a beneficial relationship with the Templars.

This relationship between the King of France and the Templars continued throughout the Second Crusade. At the beginning, the Master of the Paris Chapter of the Templars, Everard des Barres, served as one of Louis’ advisors. Louis trusted the Templars enough to even turn to them

³² Phillips, *The Second Crusade*, p. 196

³³ Phillips, *The Second Crusade*, p. 202

³⁴ Barber, *The New Knighthood*, p. 67

for financial support after arriving in Antioch. The loan was so much that it had “brought [the Order] close to bankruptcy.”³⁵

The Second Crusades brought with it scrutiny as well as praise. Thanks to their new high profile and importance, the Templars were put directly in the public eye. With the outcome of the Second Crusade, it wasn't a favorable place to be. After the failure and defeat at Damascus, the Templars were targeted and blamed. An anonymous Würzburg annalist said “The attack would have succeeded had it not been for the ‘greed, deceit, and envy’ of the Templars, who had accepted a massive bribe to give secret aid to the besieged.”³⁶ The reputation of the Templars had been wounded and their supporters' reputations along with it.

Above all who supported the Templars, Bernard of Clairvaux was affected the most. At the beginning of the Second Crusade, Bernard travelled all around France and Germany, preaching the importance of such a Crusade at the behest of Pope Eugenius III. Thanks to his sermons and speeches, Bernard was a great help to the Templars when it came to recruitment. After the failure, Bernard turned from “optimistic enthusiasm” towards a “bitter, almost morbid attitude.”³⁷ He became disappointed and frustrated with the outcome and called for more crusades to save the Holy Land, but he passed away before he could see it.

The Relationship Between the Templars and the People of the East

Although the relationship between the Crusaders and the Templars was the one to nurture, the more important relationship was that between the Templars and the already existing

³⁵ Barber, *The New Knighthood*, p. 67

³⁶ Barber, *The New Knighthood*, p. 69

³⁷ Wagner, Maria L. Ruby. “The Impact of the Second Crusade on the Angelology and Eschatology of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux.” *Journal of Religious History* 37, no. 3 (September 2013), p. 328

populace, which was also a very important aspect of the Templars' way of life overall.

Understanding the population, its culture, and its politics was important for the survival of all parties under the Templars' watch.

The Templars had created a pretty fearsome reputation in the East among the populations they fought against. As Helen Nicholson has highlighted, their Muslim adversaries “regarded the military Order in general as a terrible menace to Islam,” and often referred to them as “rebels, demons, evil men, with their castles built on inaccessible crags which were the lairs of wild beasts.”³⁸ This relationship between Muslim peoples and the Templars fostered much hostility between the two. An example of this can be seen with the capture of Templar knights after their defeat at the Battle of Hattin on July 4th, 1187:

“...when Saladin's army destroyed the army of the kingdom of Jerusalem and captured King Guy and the leading nobles, Saladin bought the Templars and Hospitallers who had been taken prisoner and had every one of them executed. Muslim holy men and theologians lined up to have the honour of executing one of these outstanding enemies of their faith.”³⁹

This excerpt from Helen Nicholson's work shows just how feared the Templars were when it came to battle. The Templars were formidable warriors of Christ and dedicated their lives to fighting against what they believed to be pagans. Because of their mindset—often times called fanatical mindset—they were determined to take down as many Muslims as possible.

Despite this attitude towards Muslims, the Templars knew the importance of truces and alliances. In order to survive in the East, the Templars often times had to find truces and alliances with Muslims. The political landscape changed so frequently in the East that by the

³⁸ Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, p. 54

³⁹ Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, p. 54

time a letter asking for help reached the West, the situation would have flipped itself on its head. Because of how fast the situation would change and how slowly the West would react, the Templars were forced to look closer for allies.

The Templars made several alliances and truces throughout their time in the Latin East, though most occurred towards the later years of their operation. One of the truces that led to controversy in the West was the Templar's truce with Damascus in 1243. This truce was put in place as the Templar had "hoped to build a castle near Jerusalem to help protect the newly recovered territory."⁴⁰ As a way to make sure that they wouldn't be attacked by any adversaries, the truce with Damascus was needed. The truce with Damascus, however, led to repercussions in both the East and the West. In the East, the sultan of Egypt saw this truce as a threat and set out to attack the Templars and Damascus aided by the Khwarismian Turks. When the Templars asked the West for help, the West replied with a condemnation of their alliance with Damascus, saying that it was the reason for the disaster. Nicholson writes of the attitude the West had towards this decision, saying, "The Templars had received Muslims within their own house and allowed them to carry on their superstitious rites under their roof. Their defeat was God's judgement on them."⁴¹ This behavior was held against the Templars, especially towards the final years of their operation.

Besides the truce with Damascus, the Templars also held truces and hired Muslim warriors and mercenaries to help fight against their adversaries. Of these mercenaries was an Arab-Syrian warrior named Usāmah ibn Munqidh. The Templars allowed Usāmah to pray within their walls whenever he was in Jerusalem, but this didn't stop the Templars from fighting feirly against him when they were on opposing sides. This behavior shows that the Templars and the

⁴⁰ Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, p. 77

⁴¹ Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, p. 79

Muslims held deep respect for each other as warriors. Being able to make an alliance when the time calls for it shows that both parties knew that their survival meant understanding and compromising with each other.

One Muslim group that the Templars weren't keen on allying themselves with was a group called the Assassins. William of Tyre describes the Assassins extensively in his work, saying:

“In the province of Tyre, i.e. Phoenicia, near the diocese of Tortosa, lives a certain people, numbering some 60,000 or more, as I have often heard said, who possess ten castles, each with surrounding villages. It is their custom to choose and appoint their leader according to merit and not according to birth, but they reject all other titles of respect and call him simply the Old Man. They are used to being so subjected and obedient to him that no order of their leader is too harsh, too difficult, or too dangerous to make them hesitate to carry it out.”⁴²

Here, William describes them as being mysterious and powerful. He later goes on to say that the goal of this group is to rid the land of various nobles who don't agree with them—be it the person in question is hated or feared. Such a group was interesting to the Templars in many ways. Firstly, the Assassins was a secretive group that targeted Islamic political leaders. Secondly, the Assassins owned many castles just outside Christian land. Both of these facts could have led for a great alliance between the two, but that didn't come to fruition.

The Assassins tried to pledge themselves to Christendom in 1173 under King Amalric of Jerusalem.⁴³ The Old Man of the Mountain—the leader of the Assassins—sent down an envoy

⁴² Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique*, ed. Huygens, 20.29, 30, pp. 953-5, translated by Malcolm Barber, and Keith Bate. The Templars. Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press 2002, p. 74

⁴³ Barber, *The New Knighthood*, p. 101

saying that the group “would join with the faith of Christ and be baptized,” as according to William.⁴⁴ Amalric was ready to accept this as the added land and forces and sent back the ambassador, a man named Abdullah, with a royal escort. Instead of making it back to the Old Man of the Mountain, the envoy was ambushed by a group of Templars and the ambassador was killed.

William of Tyre blames this murder on the Templar’s greed. The Assassins, as a form of “protection” paid the Templars an “annual tribute of 2,000 *besants*”⁴⁵ and with the acceptance of them as Christians, they would be released from such payment. This could very well explain why the Templars went to such extremes to not go through with the alliance, but there could be other explanations, as William of Tyre writes harshly of the Templars. The money the Assassins had been paying them would have been replaced by the King of Jerusalem, taking greed out of the picture. As warriors against infidels, it is possible that the Templars didn’t believe that the Assassins were telling the complete truth or going to keep their word. With their experience in the East and the people inhabiting it, this could be a possibility.

As a consequence, this murder kept the Assassins at odds with the Templars. This can be seen towards the end of the Templar’s operation in 1251 when an Assassin envoy arrived with the goal to blackmail King Louis IX. According to Barber:

“[They claimed] that Louis should pay tribute to the Assassins, as others did. The envoys alleged that the Emperor of Germany, the King of Hungary, and the Sultan of Cairo, were allowed to live only because they paid tribute to the Old Man of the Mountain.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique*, Barber, *The Templars*, p. 75

⁴⁵ Barber, *The New Knighthood*, p. 103

⁴⁶ Barber, *The New Knighthood*, p. 153

This was quickly dissolved when King Louis IX had the envoy come back the next day only to be confronted by both the Master of the Templars and the Master of the Hospitallers. It was enough to intimidate the Assassins away for a while.

Another group in the East that the Templars sometimes allied themselves with—and were very much in competition with— was the other religious military group that also called the Latin East their home: The Knights Hospitaller. Founded by a lay Benedictine brother known as the Blessed Gerard (d. 1120) around the same time as the Templars, the Hospitallers were among the first order to employ “fighting monks.” Originally, the Hospitallers had organized themselves as a hospital dedicated to care for the sick, but after the introduction of the Templars and seeing the need for more holy knights, the Hospitallers too became a Military Order. Both had very similar goals in the beginning, but ultimately evolved into two separate entities with their own reputations in the East. Because of both of their reputations, both orders were involved in many conflicts within the East. While during some conflicts the two orders aligned on separate sides, both knew that their survival depended on their cooperation—especially during uncertain times. Their relationship will be explored more with the chapter to come.

Chapter Three: The Trials and the Fall of the Templars

The Fall of Acre in 1291

Though the Templars suffered many losses throughout the Order's lifetime, the Fall of Acre in 1291 was the most damaging. After the loss of Jerusalem in 1187, the Templars moved their main base of operations to Acre. They poured money into the city, making it a well defended haven for Christians in the East. Because of its defense and its proximity to the sea, Crusaders and pilgrims from the West made Acre their landing point.

Although it was a Christian city, truces were made to allow for Muslims to conduct business within the walls. This truce was between Acre and Qalawun, the Mamluk sultan, in 1289. Under the truce, "Muslim peasants and merchants could safely trade within the city."⁴⁷ Such treaties were common, as stated in the previous chapter. It was important for Christians and Muslims to cooperate for the sake of survival. Visitors from the West, however, didn't understand or uphold such treaties. This can be seen in Acre between the years of 1289 and 1291. It was during this time that visiting Christian soldiers "attacked and killed a number of defenseless Muslims and even some bearded Christian Syrians whom they thought were Muslims."⁴⁸

Due to the Christian's ignorance in the politics of the East, war was unavoidable. Upon hearing the news, Qalawun asked the city of Acre for an explanation and upon receiving one that was unsatisfactory, he vowed revenge. He put together an army and after Qalawun's untimely

⁴⁷ Bird, Jessalynn, Edward Peters, and James M. Powells, eds. *Crusade and Christendom: Annotated Documents in Translation from Innocent III to the Fall of Acre, 1187-1291*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, p. 474

⁴⁸ Jessalyn Bird, *Crusade and Christendom*, p. 474

death, his son and successor, al-Malik al-Ashraf, marched towards Acre. This assault on Acre was inevitable, but not unknown. As al-Malik al-Ashraf set off with his army, he sent a letter addressed to the Master of the Temple, William of Beaujeu, saying:

“Greetings and our good will! Because you have been a true man, so we send you advance notice of our intentions, and give you to understand that we are coming into your parts to right the wrongs that have been done. Therefore, we do not want the community of Acre to send us any letter or presents [regarding this matter], for we will by no means receive them.”⁴⁹

Though the letter, al-Malik al-Ashraf’s motive can be seen. While he respects the Templars enough to send a written warning of his army’s arrival, he makes it clear how serious the crimes committed were to him and his late father. This seriousness is further proven when the city of Acre sent diplomats to try and negotiate with him. The result was their imprisonment and death.

On 15 April 1291, the Mamluk army started their assault on Acre. There to record all of the events of the siege was an anonymous writer that went by the name of “the Templar of Tyre”. There is no evidence to suggest that he was actually a Templar, instead he says he was scribe for William of Beaujeu. Through his writings, he “seems to have been of knightly rank and a close and trusted adviser” of William of Beaujeu, putting him directly on the front lines of battle.⁵⁰ The Templar of Tyre describes the Mamluk attack on Acre in great detail, highlighting the challenges of facing an enemy that vastly outnumbered the forces of Acre. According to him, the Mamluks came to Acre with some “70,000 horsemen and over 150,000 footsoldiers.”⁵¹ To put that into perspective, the total population of Acre at the time was about 30 to 40,000 people.

⁴⁹ The Templar of Tyre, *The Fall of Acre*, Jessalyn Bird et al, *Crusade and Christendom*, p.474

⁵⁰ Jessalyn Bird, et al, *Crusade and Christendom*, p. 473

⁵¹ Jessalyn Bird, et al, *Crusade and Christendom*, p. 474

The combined forces of the Templars, the Hospitallers, secular knights, and armed crusaders only consisted of “700-800 horsemen and about 13,000 footsoldiers.”⁵² Such odds proved to be detrimental to the Templars.

The Mamluks were near impossible to defeat. They surrounded the city, blocking off exits with the sheer number of soldiers they had. The Templar of Tyre describes the other Templars were afraid that if they went out to fight the Mamluks at the entrances of the city, the Mamluks would overwhelm them. The Templar of Tyre next says:

“So in the end, the Muslims advanced to the edge of the fosse, as I have told you, and the men on horseback each carried four or five *buches* on the necks of their horses, and threw them down behind the screens. And when night came, they put them in front of the screens, and bound a cord on top, and the pile became like a wall that no engine could harm...The stones merely rebounded into the fosse.”⁵³

As the Templar of Tyre shows, the Mamluk’s defenses against any sort of offence, barring the Templars and any other warriors of Acre from clearing out the enemy from their advantage point. From their advantage, the Mamluks were able to take out many of Acre’s forces. The *bushes*, which were various kinds of wood piled up, gave the Mamluk’s cover and allowed them to rapidly shoot at the forces of Acre with a type of rapid-shoot crossbow called *carabohas*.

The Templars had a difficult time getting an advantage against the Mamluks. One plan was to stage an attack on the *buches* that hid the Mamluks so well. This attack, however, was not a success. According to the Templar of Tyre, when the man who was meant to throw the Greek Fire that was meant to burn the *buches* that defended a siege engine missed. The group engaged with the enemy there and managed to defeat a good number, but they were caught in a Mamluk

⁵² Jessalyn Bird, et al, *Crusade and Christendom*, p. 474

⁵³ The Templar of Tyre, The Fall of Acre, Jessalyn Bird et al, *Crusade and Christendom*, p. 476

camp and lost “eighteen horsemen that night, both brethren of the Temple and secular knights.”⁵⁴ Another such attempt to gain the upper hand was a surprise attack out of the Gate of Saint Anthony. According to the Templar of Tyre, the attack was so secretive that “no one knew of it until the command, ‘To horse!’ was given.”⁵⁵ Though the attack was supposed to be a surprise, the Mamluks were prepared. Their lines were illuminated by torches and they were able to see the attack coming. Along with that, the force outside the Gate of Saint Anthony was comprised of 10,000 men⁵⁶, easily outnumbering and overwhelming the Templars and their compatriots, forcing a retreat.

Even with the reinforcements of King Henry from Cyprus wasn't able to save Acre. A ceasefire was called after the arrival of King Henry where the messengers from Acre asked the sultan for mercy. In return, the sultan said, according to the Templar of Tyre:

“I will give you this much grace, that you cede me the bare stones [of the city] alone, and carry off everything else, and go forth and leave the place. I will do this for your king, who has come here and who is a youth, just as I might have been. But I will do nothing more for you.”⁵⁷

Unfortunately, the meeting between Acre and the sultan didn't end with peace. A siege weapon belonging to Acre accidentally went off during the negotiations and came very close to the tent they were all speaking in. This resulted in the battle continuing.

By this time, the city had already suffered many damages. Several of the towers of every sector of Acre had taken heavy damage. The Tower of the King, a town in the Templar's sector of the city, had suffered a lot of damage that forced the Templars that were manning it out in

⁵⁴ The Templar of Tyre, *The Fall of Acre*, Jessalyn Bird et al, *Crusade and Christendom* p. 477

⁵⁵ The Templar of Tyre, *The Fall of Acre*, Jessalyn Bird et al, *Crusade and Christendom* p. 478

⁵⁶ The Templar of Tyre, *The Fall of Acre*, Jessalyn Bird et al, *Crusade and Christendom* p. 478

⁵⁷ The Templar of Tyre, *The Fall of Acre*, Jessalyn Bird et al, *Crusade and Christendom* p. 479

order to save themselves. Due to the retreat, the Mamluks were able to take control over the tower. It was here that the Templars suffered major loss. According to the Templar of Tyre, a couple days after the fall of the Tower of the King, the enemy started drumming loudly. Realizing that this signaled an incoming attack of sorts, he gathered “ten or twelve brethren”⁵⁸, including both Templars and secular knights and went towards the Gate of Saint Anthony.

It was there that the Master of the Temple made his final stand, flanked by the Master of the Hospital and some Knights of Cyprus. At the Gate, the small force was met by forces that greatly outnumbered them. As he was turning to give orders, William of Beaujeu was struck by a javelin and killed. The death of the Master was devastating for the Templars. With moral at an all-time low, the forces of Acre retreated to their respective sectors to make their final stands. Knowing that they were overwhelmed, the Templars, according to Abu l-Mahasin—a Mamluk soldier, “begged for their lives, which the sultan granted them.”⁵⁹ The Templars used this as their opportunity to take the majority of the loot they kept in Acre and move it onto a ship, where only the Grand Commander, Theobald Gaudin, and a small number of Templars—including the Templar of Tyre—set off for Sidon.

The fall of Acre was a huge hit for the Templars. Not only did the Master of the Temple, William de Beaujeu, fall in battle, but so did the Marshall, Peter of Sevrey, and the rest of the Templars who had remained in Acre. The fall of Acre led to the abandonment and ultimate loss of all the Latin strongholds in the East. After reaching Sidon, the Templars had decided it was best to leave their castles and head for the Hospitaller stronghold in Cyprus.

The loss of the East wasn’t easy news for leaders in the West. After the fall of Acre, Pope Nicholas “called provincial councils to meet in February 1292 to consider how the Holy Land

⁵⁸ The Templar of Tyre, The Fall of Acre, Jessalyn Bird et al, *Crusade and Christendom* p. 480

⁵⁹ Abu l-Mahasin, On the Fall of Acre, Jessalyn Bird, et al, *Crusade and Christendom*, p. 489

could be recovered.”⁶⁰ Among the subjects in this meeting was whether or not the several Military Orders that had established themselves in the East should be unified. This topic was agreed upon among the clergy who met as an effort to “ensure that they used their resources more efficiently.”⁶¹ This decision never went through, however, as Pope Nicholas died on March 1292, before he could hear of any decisions.

Losing the East affected the Templars greatly. Not only did they lose all of their strongholds in the east, they also lost a lot of men. Despite the major loss, however, the picture of the Templars in Western Christendom hadn't shifted to the negative. In fact, attitudes towards the Templars were at an all-time high, thanks to the ongoing animosity towards friars. This made what was about to happen all the worse.

The Templars and King Philip IV

After the fall of Acre, the Templars were desperate to raise funds and supporters in order to attempt another crusade to retake the Holy Land. In order to do this, the newly elected Master of the Temple, Jacques de Molay, traveled to the West to gain the support of English king, Edward I and French king, Philip IV. Unfortunately for de Molay, such support couldn't be given. King Edward I, though he wanted to go on a crusade to the East, was otherwise occupied by war with the French as well as internal rebellion in Scotland. De Molay then turned to the French, a longtime supporter of the Templars.

The French monarchy had a long history with the Templars and crusading. Many of King Philip IV the Fair's descendants fought in the East alongside the Templars. Not only that,

⁶⁰ Helen Nicholson, *The Knights Templar: A New History*. Sutton Publishing Limited, 2004, p. 198

⁶¹ Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, p. 198

but the Templars served the French Monarchy in matters not related to war. For years, the Templars' base in France served as an extension of the royal treasury. Philip IV, after hearing the Templars' want to launch a new crusade couldn't have been more enthusiastic to follow in his ancestors' footsteps. It was through this enthusiasm that Philip demanded that "he must play a leading role in the crusade and France must have first place in the expedition."⁶² This demand, of course, wasn't received well by other potential crusaders across Europe and thus, made any planning hard.

Besides, the French Monarchy had other, more expensive things to take care of at home. The French Monarchy was in a financially tough spot. The many wars they were involved in were hard for them to fund, to say the least. The many taxes the monarchy had put on the towns were expensive—expensive enough to cause unrest. In an effort to appease such unrest, Philip decided that in order to collect the necessary funds, he would have to employ certain taxation techniques.

Throughout his reign, Philip had tried using many different ways to collect funds to have a financial stable kingdom, but most of the methods he used didn't succeed for long. He taxed the churches, which caused outrage among the clergy. Pope Boniface VIII had issued a papal bull in 1296, directly forbidding secular rulers from taxing the Church without the express permission of the pope. This resulted in Philip forbidding the French Clergy from sending any money to Rome. This opposition led to Philip and his advisors to turn to less than truthful ways to get what they wanted.

Before analyzing the actions of King Philip IV, it is important that his personality is understood. Philip was described as being a handsome man who was "a good knight and

⁶² Helen Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, p. 203

hunter.”⁶³ He, like his father and his grandfather before him, took his responsibilities seriously, which included a loyal follower in faith. This led to him making several important decisions based on religion, including the punishment of his daughter-in-law who were accused of committing adultery. The issue with understanding the true personality of Philip is that most of his actions were filtered through several ministers. This small group of men included Peter Flote, William of Nogaret, and Enguerrand of Marigny. Through them, the King’s policy was both executed and formulated. There are many examples of these ministers executing policy without the express knowledge or support of the King, one such quote coming from a monk, Ives of Saint-Denis. The monk “blamed exceptional currency alterations and heavy taxation”⁶⁴ on the advisors, saying it was “more on the advice of his counsellors than on the instigation of the king himself.”⁶⁵

Besides their execution and creation of policy, Philip’s ministers were clever when it came to taking down those who opposed the French Monarchy. Their methods can be first seen with Pope Boniface VIII. After the issuing of the papal bull that forbade the taxation of the Church, Philip and his ministers knew that he needed such a powerful opposer out of his way. To do this, Philip’s advisors accused the pope of heresy. The accusation of heresy during this time was quite common, especially if it was against a political foe.⁶⁶ The reason it was so popular was because such an accusation was not easy to brush off. The entire western world feared heresy, believing it to be the one cause for all the bad things happening in their world. It was the goal of Christians to find and be rid of heresy no matter what. The accusation of a pope was no different

⁶³ Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 39

⁶⁴ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, p. 41

⁶⁵ Ives de Saint-Denis, *Chronicon*, in RHG, vol. 21, p. 205, quoted in Malcolm Barber, *the Trial of the Templars*, p. 41

⁶⁶ Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, p. 207

than anyone else. Boniface's enemies—who happened to be supported by Philip—came and arrested him just as he was about to excommunicate Philip. This action led to a crisis in the church, which then led to the migration of the Papal court from Rome to France with the election of Pope Clement V.

This wasn't the only less than legal interaction Philip and his ministers had. Still in need of funds to help correct their financial situation, Philip had taken to targeting groups of people that weren't of any consequence in order to gain their money. Of the groups he and his ministers targeted were the Lombard bankers and the Jews. Both groups were taxed heavily before they were arrested, and all of their property seized for the crown. In the case of the Jews, they were forced to "reveal the details of their financial contracts, and then, on about 22 July 1306 all the Jews were arrested, and their property seized, and they were expelled from the kingdom."⁶⁷

How does this all relate to the Templars? Well, it is evident that these methods were also used in their case. Like the Lombards and the Jews, the Templars were involved in the finances of France, but on an even higher level. Like the Lombards, the French crown took out loans from the Templars to help fund whatever they needed. At one point, the Templar base in Paris was synonymous with the royal treasury.⁶⁸ So, why were the Templars targeted? Why, after all the support the Templars gave the crown and vice versa, were they charged at all? During this time period, the Templars weren't seen in a negative light, despite the loss of the Holy Land. The Templars were still seen by people across Europe as holy and pious knights.

The reasoning behind targeting the Templars relates to everything happening in Western Christendom at this time. King Philip IV's need for money was a major driving factor in targeting such a rich organization. The election of Pope Clement V and his move from Rome to

⁶⁷ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, p. 53

⁶⁸ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, p. 53

France was another factor. Unlike other popes, Clement could easily be swayed. The fact that the Templars depended on the support of both the papacy and the French monarchy was the final huge factor. Thanks to Philip's power over the pope and the Templars, there wasn't much that could stop him from destroying the Order.

In 1307, charges against the Templars were made by Esquiu de Floyran of Béziers, prior of Montfaucon. His charges had four accusations:

“the Templars denied Christ at their reception and spat on the cross; they were told at their reception that they could have sex with one another because they could not have sex with women; they kissed their receptor on the base of the spine, the navel and the mouth; and they worshipped an idol.”⁶⁹

There was shock and disbelief all around Christendom when these charges were first created and even more when they were all taken seriously by King Philip IV. Of course, there can be many different explanations for why the King of France took such an outrageous accusation so seriously. The first could be Philip's seriousness over religion. If a religious order was charged of heresy, it was his duty to see such a charge all the way through. The other, more plausible reason given the previous evidence was that this accusation was Philip's chance to acquire the money he so desperately needed.

On September 14th, 1307, the French King instructed officials to secretly make preparations for the arrest of the Templars. Along with this, officials were also to start secretly watching the Templars and make secret investigations to help the trial that was to come. Arrests of the Templars happened in France on Friday, October 13th, 1307, with no warning whatsoever. Templars all over France were arrested and immediately imprisoned, isolated, and tortured

⁶⁹ Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, p. 215

before their official date in front of inquisitors.⁷⁰ Philip knew that in order to have any sort of case against the Templars, he needed confessions, which brought forth the torture of imprisoned Templars. Not all Templars who were arrested in France were knights, which made the threat of torture even worse. It was here that most confessions popped up. Due to the excessive amount of torture conducted against Templars, the confessions that were being heard weren't true confessions, they were only said to get the torture to stop.

Before long, many officers of the Temple, including the Master Jacques de Molay, confessed to all the accusations. Disbelief of the arrest of the Templars was everywhere. No one in Western Christendom could ever believe that the Templars could have been accused for such crimes, but the confessions of the heads of the Temple brought forth. Outrage. The propaganda put forth by Philip's ministers was also something that helped people believe the accusations. The ministers purposefully charged the Templars through misunderstandings and suspicion. One such misunderstanding was the charge of worshipping an idol—more specifically venerating a bearded man. The Templars, of course, didn't worship idols as was charged, but instead, like many orders during the Medieval period, venerated the heads of two female saints. This charge could be a purposeful confusion between the Hospitallers and the Templars, as the Hospitallers were known to venerate the head of John the Baptist.⁷¹ Despite the propaganda put forth by Philip's ministers, Pope Clement V still didn't believe the charges. He became the only hope the Templars had for any salvation. Little did those imprisoned know that this faith was severely misplaced.

⁷⁰ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, p. 68

⁷¹ Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, p 205

The Pope and the Templars

After the arrests of October 13th, none was more surprised than Pope Clement V. What King Philip IV did wasn't just shocking because of who was charged, but because of the legality of it all. Philip, in an effort for the arrests to appear legal, had said that his actions were with the support of the Pope. This, of course, was less than true. Philip had said that he was acting under the authority of the Inquisitor of Paris, William of Paris, which alluded to the support of the Pope, but the Pope rejected that his support had been given several times. Such action taken by a secular ruler without the permission of the pope was seen to Clement as "a frontal assault on the authority" of the pope and what he represented.

This stuck the Pope in a difficult place. He couldn't go back on what had already transpired, as the arrests had been technically made under the authority of William of Paris, which made everything technically legal. In order to gain some resemblance of control, Clement issued the papal bull *Pastoralis praeeminentiae* on November 22, 1307. This bull officially entered Clement as a "central role and effectively prevented the hasty end to the proceedings which Philip would have preferred."⁷² Instead of saving the rest of the Templars from arrest, the bull encouraged the arrest of Templars all over Europe. Along with this, Clement solidified the charges made against the Templars, saying that he had been aware of rumors since the beginning of his reign in 1305.⁷³ The goal here, however, was not to get rid of the Order, it was to greatly reform it, as had been talked about before by past popes.

Once the Pope gained control over the trial proceedings at the end of 1307, Clement sent out cardinals to personally assess whether the confessions given by the Templars were true. The

⁷² Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, p. 89

⁷³ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, p. 90

first visit in the spring of 1308 resulted in the absolute belief of the charges, but Clement wasn't convinced as none of the cardinals had heard directly from any of the imprisoned Templars, only from royal officials. The agents were then sent back to Paris where they were given access to several Templars, including the Master, Jacques de Molay. Here, an allegedly very dramatic scene played out:

“When the grand master was asked whether his confession was the truth, he said if all the inhabitants of Paris, rich and poor, were assembled, they would see a much greater error. There then followed the scene in which Molay is supposed to have torn off his clothing to show the physical evidence of torture and then to have asserted that the whole Order was without sin.”⁷⁴

While the dramatics can't entirely be proven, this much is true: Jacques de Molay had rebuked his confession. This led to a long and drawn out trial spanning several years. Pope Clement V and King Philip IV went back and forth regarding who had the power over these proceedings. Because of the power Philip had, Clement couldn't do much. He couldn't take the Templar property back, nor could he save those who were arrested and kept in Paris. What he could do was protect those who were innocent.

A meeting between Clement and Philip became the turning point of the tensions between the two powers. After hearing the argument that the Templars were heretics who needed to be punished quickly for the sake of God, Clement retorted by saying that the trial would continue in a fair manner.⁷⁵ He would not do anything until all of the imprisoned Templars were handed over to him. This, however, led to more delays in the case. The French did not want to do this and give up what power they had over the case. As a result, Philip and his ministers turned to threats,

⁷⁴ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, p. 92

⁷⁵ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, p. 112

saying that the pope was acting “half-heartedly” against heresy and thus, was in league with the Templars. According to the French, if nothing was to be done, then the monarchy would take the case into its own hands, as every other Catholic ruler should.⁷⁶ The pope was not intimidated and held his view.

The French monarchy finally gave the Pope 72 Templars and the Papal inquiries were given. The same men who had confessed in front of French officials confessed to the same charges to the Church. The Templars that Philip had sent over, however, were specifically chosen to confess in front of the Pope. This didn't stop the Pope from believing in what was said. In Chinon on August 17-20 in 1308, the last of the Templars that had been sent over were interrogated. As seen in the Chinon parchment, the document that recorded the court proceedings, most of the men brought in front of the Pope maintained their confessions, including Jacques de Molay.⁷⁷

The Pope's actions during this trial was an important step in solidifying the power of the papacy. While Philip and his ministers aimed for Clement to do what they wanted through intimidation and disobedience, Clement was able to stand his ground and assert his authority over a secular ruler. This was even more seen with the decisions to acquit those Templars that confessed. This move shows that the pope didn't truly believe that the Templars were guilty of the crimes the French had accused them of, but neither did he believe they were completely innocent.⁷⁸ He understood that the confessions given to the French inquisitor were too contradictory to be taken seriously and granted the Templars he met with absolution, as he

⁷⁶ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*.

⁷⁷ Frale, Barbara. “The Chinon chart: Papal absolution to the last Templar, Master Jacques de Molay” *Journal of Medieval History* # 30:2 (2004): pp.109-134. 109 134, DOI: [10.1016/j.jmedhist.2004.03.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmedhist.2004.03.004)

⁷⁸ Barbara Frale, “The Chinon chart, *Journal of Medieval History*”

believed that all the Templars needed was reform to remedy bad habits, not to be put to death and condemned for heresy.

The End of the Templars

The trial didn't stop there, however. It was two years after in 1310 that everything came to a head. Several Templars had come forward in an attempt to defend the Order, to the dismay of Philip. In order to put an end to the trial and finally collect what he wanted to from the Order, Philip, through the Archbishop of Sens, put several Templars to death by burning. Out of the 87 Templars who had offered to defend the Order in previous years, 84 went back to their original confession.⁷⁹

Seeing that the trials all over Europe were getting no where and not wanting to risk the wrath of Philip IV, Pope Clement V issued the papal bulls *Vox in excelso* and *Ad providum* in March and May 1312 respectively. The first bull was the decision to disband the Order of the Temple ruled:

“Therefore, with a sad heart, not by definitive sentence but by apostolic provision or ordinance, we suppress, with the approval of the sacred council, the Order of the Templars, and its rule, habit and name, by an inviolable and perpetual decree, and we entirely forbid that anyone from now on enter the Order, or receive or wear its habit, or presume to behave as a Templar.”⁸⁰

This was done due to the gradually worsening image of the Templars. Despite the many who had said that the claims against the Order were false, it didn't stop the French Monarchy from

⁷⁹ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, p. 193

⁸⁰ *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. N.P. Tanner, vol. 1 (London, Sheed and Ward, 1990), pp. 336-43, quoted in Malcolm Barber, *The Templars*, p. 309

spreading propaganda against them. The people of France now despised the Templars. They believed them to be heretics who needed to be punished for their crimes against god. Through Philip's ministers, the Templars were now seen as people tainted by those they claimed to have fought. The secrecy of the Order of the Temple had been flipped to see them as heretics who practiced magic against Christendom.

The accusations put against the Knights Templar were all false, but due to the power of Philip IV the Fair and the pressure he put on the Pope, the Knights Templar were disbanded on May 2, 1312 with the papal bull *Ad providam*. In France, where the prosecution of the Templars was taken the most seriously, any Templar who had escaped was tracked down and then imprisoned. In places like England, however, there wasn't much of a rush to arrest any of the remaining Templars. Some of the members of the Order managed to escape prosecution and fully disappear into the world. There are some instances of Templars going to work as ambassadors, like Bernard des Fons who became the ambassador for the Muslim ruler of Tunis, and others getting jobs thanks to their new reputation as magicians, though the one instance of a Templar going to work as a necromancer wasn't a story of success.⁸¹ The properties outside of France that belonged to the Templars were transferred to the Hospitallers, while the properties the Templars possessed in France was transferred to the French King, giving Philip what he wanted in the end, albeit much later than he expected it.

⁸¹ Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, p. 238

Conclusions

It's hard to say what would have happened to the Templars had King Philip IV not targeted them for their property and wealth. Up until October 13, 1307, the numbers of the Templars were on the rise. The panic and confusion surrounding the arrest of so many Templars in France can attest to how out of the blue the accusations against the Templars were. Without such an event, the Templars would have still struggled to return to the Holy Land in the way they wanted. Even if Philip had not accepted the accusations leveled against the Order, the Templar's dependence on the support of the Kings of Europe was too much for them to successfully continue to fight in the way they wanted. There were too many wars and other expensive events happening at the time for any of the Kingdoms to fully give their financial support. On top of that, the interest in the Holy Land after the fall of Acre was at an all-time low. It would have taken a long time for the Templars to get any support. Along with the lack of financial support and interest, talks over the need for so many Military Orders had resurfaced after the Fall of Acre. The Church had intentions of merging the Templars with the other Military Orders in order to consolidate and better regulate their property and spending. It is possible that this could have been the end of the Templars if they had time.

Yet, none of that took place. The Templars were ultimately dissolved and their property and wealth distributed between the Knights Hospitaller, the Kingdoms of Europe. King Philip IV was able to absorb the property and wealth of the Templars within France, ultimately gaining what he wanted, just much later than he expected. Thanks to this, many of the documents have been lost or destroyed, as mentioned throughout this thesis.

Despite being disbanded, the Knights Templar didn't completely disappear. Historians throughout the Middle Ages until present day find the case of the Templars to be quite interesting. The mysterious circumstances of the Order's disbandment were hard to decipher due to the loss of many Templar documents during the trial and the transition into Royal or Hospitaller hands. As more documents come to light, more and more information on what truly transpired between the Templars and Western Christendom.

Historians weren't the only ones that kept the Templars alive, however. The Knights Templar continued on in popular culture, being featured prominently in Medieval literature and making appearances in other forms of media in the present. These warped views of the Knights Templar have introduced misconceptions, however. In various works, the Templars have been portrayed in very damaging ways, when their Order and the circumstances surrounding their Order was much more complex. It's important through historical work that the true image of the Knight Templar works its way into popular culture as an effort to expose the masses to a very interesting and true mystery.

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