

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

My search

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When District Grand Prior Alan approached me, to present this paper I fully understood the perils of standing here this evening and giving my opinions on the subject at hand, particularly in the presence of the august body seated here before me.

I quote:

'Belbo was less easily impressed. When asked, at the end of a late evening drinking session, how he recognised a lunatic, he was in no doubt. For him, everything proves everything else. The lunatic is all idée fixe, and whatever he comes across confirms his lunacy. You know him by the liberties he takes with common sense, by his flashes of inspiration, and by the fact that sooner or later he brings up the Templars.'

*Foucault's Pendulum
Umberto Eco*

Gentlemen, I shall now bring up the Templars.

This talk is not concerned with the history of the Knights Templar. It is an attempt to depict them, as they were, warts and all. Neither is it in any chronological order, it draws from examples throughout the 200 years of their history.

We all understand that the term "Templars" though not the correct usage, refers to members of The Order of the Temple so you will forgive me if I, hereafter, refer to them as Templars.

The History of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem now known as the Knights of Malta is well documented. They always considered their archives to be their most valuable possession and documentary evidence of their 900 years of history is at present held in Malta.

In contrast, the archives of the Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon, relating to the period whilst they were serving in the Outremer are to all intents and purposes non-existent. However, the documented 900 years of history that the Hospitallers have amassed has without doubt been overwhelmed by the mythical history of the Templars.

The door to antiquity however, is opening, albeit ever so slowly. The Vatican, Universities, Cathedrals, Abbeys and civil bodies are all finding information appertaining to the Templars. I envisage that in the next ten to twenty years you will see a vast improvement in knowledge concerning the history of the Templars

I am dependent upon the information supplied by learned historians and academics such as Malcolm Barber, Keith Bate, Robert Cooper, Alan Foray, Helen Nicholson, Peter Partner, Dominic Selwood, Desmond Seward, and many others who have worked tirelessly in translating from the Latin, French and Spanish, the information that has come available from the Archives in the Vatican and other sources.

The first point that I would like to bring to your attention is that the Knights Templar and other Military Orders were a creation arising from the crusades, to put it quite bluntly, no crusades, no requirement for Military Orders.

Pope Urban II, who claimed the idea was his, said he saw an ideal opportunity to utilise the energy that was being used by Christian Soldiery in fighting for gain and to transfer that energy to fighting for the Church, thus providing the opportunity for men of action to obtain the salvation of their souls.

The example of the Templars and Hospitallers led to the introduction of many other similar Orders. The Teutonic Knights (The Order of St. Mary of the Teutons) founded in 1198 were fighting in the Baltic area and in the Balkans, as well as in Palestine. On the Iberian Peninsula, fighting the Moors, were the smaller Orders of Santiago, Calatrava and Alcantara together with the Portuguese Knights of Christ and, not to be forgotten, the leper Green Cross Knights of the Order of St. Lazarus.

I first became interested in the Templars while stationed at RAF Henlow. I used to visit the Hitchin Public Library where, quite by chance, I came upon an article referring to a Temple Dinsley which was thought to lie a few miles south of the town. I was particularly interested in the fact that the last Grand Master James de Molay, the last Visitor Himbert Peraut and Henry III had all stayed there. I will return to Dinsley later.

As already stated the Templars in the Holy Land (Outremer), left no archives, Professor Barbour, Reading University, is of the opinion that they were destroyed whilst the Templars were under attack in Cyprus. It is fortunate for us that the Vatican

is increasingly releasing historical information regarding their involvement with the Order.

The most recent being that the then Pope had issued a statement in 1314, that the Templars had been cleared of any wrongdoing, the information subsequently being hidden away no doubt to save embarrassment. Cartularies, letters, bills of lading, taxation, and place names all help to increase our knowledge. The Templars in the Iberian Peninsula left quite a large amount of material which is housed in the University at Barcelona. I, like many others, am indebted to Alan Forey for his work on these archives.

I imagine you all know the version of the potted history that generally prevails of the poor knights who banded together to protect pilgrims in the holy land, round about the years 1118 or 1119. Some put the number at nine, others suggest over 30. I am of the opinion that they would have accomplished very little with 30 and considerably less with nine.

How, why, or when they started has never particularly interested me. If you are interested in this phase of their development, could I suggest you examine the works of William of Tyre (early 1180s), Michael the Syrian (early 1190s) and Walter Map (between 1181 and 1193). These three are the earliest writings on the foundation of the Templars, although written at least sixty years after the event.

The fact that Hugh of Payens appeared at the Council of Troyes in 1127, backed by the most prominent churchman of his time, the Cistercian Abbot, Bernard of Clairvaux (later St. Bernard), it is significant to me, that this was the point in time when the order became a legal entity under the Church of Rome. They were definitely the first Military Order, I know the Hospitallers claim greater antiquity but their military “wing” came later.

In January 1129, after the council were given an explanation of the manner in which the Templars, had conducted themselves up to that date, by Hugh of Payens. Much discussion took place in the Council resulting in the promulgation of the “Latin” rule under which the Templars were to live and work As there were 147 of these rules I think you will agree that now is not an appropriate time to discuss them. Suffice to say there were some objectors and detractors to many of the rules.

The Templars were ordinary men of their time. You cannot begin to understand people until you attempt to understand their thinking at that time.

Temple Brothers were usually from the lower ranks of the knights or were not of the knightly class. They rarely left any records of their existence. We do know however, that they were deeply religious, that they were devoted to the Omnipotent Father, his Son Jesus Christ, and Christ's Mother the Blessed Virgin Mary, the patroness and Mother of the Order for whom they would gladly die, in defence of their religion, thus assuring themselves a Martyr's place in heaven.

St. Bernard thought of these new Knights as military Cistercians, Brother Knights wore a white hooded habit like Cistercian monks, while other Brethren wore a brown habit similar to lay brothers. On active service, the habit was replaced by a cloak over chain mail. Silence was the order of the day, even during refectory, where sign language was used. Simplicity in their every day life even showed itself in their weapons, plainest of swords and saddles, no gold or silver adornment, attendance at matins was strict, a simple service was used, using psalms and prayers that could be easily memorised by men who in the main could not read.

At their two meals daily, the Bible was read to them, especially the Books of Joshua and of the Maccabees. They found inspiration in the exploits of Judas Maccabaues and his men in the reconquest of the Holy Land from the Muslims.

Hugh returned to Palestine, and started setting up a system of preceptories in the front line states, Jerusalem, Antioch, Tripoli in the Outremer, and Castile-Leon, Aragon, and Portugal in Iberia. Each preceptory was ruled by a Master who was responsible to the Grand Master in Jerusalem

By the early 13th century, they had preceptories in France, Italy, Germany, and England. (Scotland and Ireland came under the jurisdiction of England). By mid 13th Century, the governing hierarchy of the Order had stabilised to the following.

Grand Master

Seneschal, his deputy

Marshal, Supreme Military Official

Commander of the land and realm of Jerusalem,

Treasurer and in charge of the navy and estate management.

Commander of the City of Jerusalem,

Hospitaller.

Drapier, Quartermaster.

Gonfanonier, Standard Bearer

Turcopolier, Light Cavalry Commander

Important decisions were taken by the General Chapter. Unless the Grand Master was present in person Provincial Masters exercised his rights in their own country. Provincial Marshals were responsible to the Grand Marshal.

In March 1139, Pope Innocent II issued the bull 'Omne Datum Optimum' laying out the fundamental papal privileges of the order. This was followed in 1144 by the bull '*Milites Templi*' in which Pope Celestine II gave the Templars the name of 'the new Maccabees' and granted an indulgence, of a seventh part of a penance imposed, to any person who helped the Templars. In 1145, Pope Eugenius III gave them the right to recruit priests anywhere and at any time in the bull '*Militia Dei*'. The latter two bulls strengthened the position of the Order within the Church of Rome.

By 1165 the "Latin" Rule, sadly needed updating, and so the "French" Rule, which particularly emphasised the Army in the field, added further rules taking the total up to well over 300. The Rule can be readily divided into three parts, simply put, the Latin dealing with their monastic duties, the French part 1 with military matters, and the French part 2 with other ecclesiastical matters. I am of the opinion that the old railway acts in Britain followed their example, 'if something happens that is wrong, make a new rule'

So I am confident that I can say without fear of contradiction, that the Templars were well on their way to becoming a major factor both in the church and in the holy land. The income from the various grants of land and buildings were starting to make a difference.

Their grants and their wealth came from Western Europe, France being the main contributor then Iberia, followed by Italy and England. Individual donations from the Kings of Aragon and Castile and the Count of Flanders were also received. Scotland's contributions were insignificant, we were a poor country and the exchange rate with England was abysmal. The grants in Scotland were small by comparison.

By the mid thirteenth century the Templars had between 30 and 40 significant Castles and other buildings in Syria and Palestine.

There were between 600 and 700 Knights manning these along with an unknown number of fighting Sergeants, Squires, Turcoples, mercenaries, and servants. Numbers in the latter group can only be guessed.

Records regarding the castle at Safad gives us a clue as to possible numbers. The peacetime garrison of 1700 men consisted of 50 Knights, (plus 50 Squires?), 30 Sergeants, 50 Turcoples, 300 Crossbowmen, 820 ancillary workers and 400 slaves. In time of war a further 500 fighting men of various ranks were added. The number of horses required to keep the garrison ready for war would be say 350. I suggest that it would be reasonably accurate to consider a total fighting force of approximately 5000 scattered over the holy land. Add to that 10,000 workers, 5000 slaves and say 6000 horses, the supply logistics and the revenue required becomes a massive problem.

These supplies had to come from somewhere, the ideal place was that stretch of the Mediterranean coast from Barcelona to Nice known as South Central Occitania (from Occitan the medieval language of the area). Here were plenty of ports, a rich in agriculture hinterland, a religious populace who favoured the military orders. A ready supply of minor nobility and freemen to swell the ranks of the Knight Brothers as well as the Lay Brothers in times of war.

To get these supplies of Men, horses, food and other materials, from Western Europe to the Outremer was a mammoth task. Cargo ships were used. It is very difficult to assess the extent of the Templar Navy, they were, as was the Hospitallers attempting to re-invent themselves into a maritime force. During the twelfth century, a considerable number of ships charters are put forward. The last charter mentioned was in 1300. Early in 13th century, possibly 1207, they started building their own fleet, Barber states “ A fleet of Mediterranean ships of unknown size”. According to Domnic Selwood, two main types were built, the cargo ship with a crew of 100 capable of carrying 1000 passengers, and Galleys with a lateen sail on a raked mainmast, the main propulsion were oarsmen.

They used specialist horse transports, loaded via stern doors and caulked during the passage, capable of carrying forty horses, forty foot-soldiers and their

arms, and thirty oarsmen. They discharged their mounted knights and soldiers straight on to the beach. The forerunners of the Tank Landing Craft perhaps !

Taken from various records at Marseille, regarding the use of the port by the Templars; we find the following mentioned, Brother William of Capmeillier the commendatore navium (Master of Marines). The Sergeant-commander of the Vault of Acre. (chief storekeeper at Acre) A Master of Passages based at Marseille (Movements Controller). The ship 'The Good Adventure' bound for Acre. 'The Rose' also plied between Marseille and Acre. There is also a mention of two ships Captains, Sergeant Brother Vassayl and Sergeant Brother Roger of Flor, the latter commanded 'The Falcon'. In Toulon we still have the fortified harbour built to guard their ships. the 'Carriero del Temple'.

In 1224 King Henry III of England hired 'The Great Ship' of the Templars in Spain commanded by Brother Thomas and operating in the Bay of Biscay. They also exported wine from La Rochelle, more than possibly by chartered ships.

Fighting ability,

Siege of Ascalon 1153

There are many different explanations as to what happened at Ascalon, some not very favourable to the Templars, however there is one eye witness account which states.

After the wall of Ascalon was breached, the Master of the Templars, Bernard of Tremblay (1152-3) and his troop broke into the city and made their way to the centre where they made a stand. However the streets were narrow, the walls were high, and they received no support from the rest of the Christian forces who did not follow them into the breach. They were surrounded and crushed by the enemy. Their beheaded bodies were hung from the city walls. Three days later the Christians made another assault and captured the city.

Hattin 1187

The impact of the Templars upon the morale of the Muslims was enormous. After the defeat of the Christian army, Saladin purchased all the Templar and Hospital captives whom he described as 'rebels, demons, evil men. Their castles as lairs of wild beasts' and had them executed. Declaring "I will cleanse the lands of these two impure orders".

Acre 1291

The last battle, the Military orders 'Dunkirk'

Again they were glorious in defeat.

Turning our attention back to Ocitannia, you will recall, it was the most southern part of France. You will see from the map I have provided, the profusion of principal preceptories in that part of the country. Taking as an example the Preceptory of St. Eulalia and its six satellites.

From the Inventory of Stock, we find 1,725 sheep, 160 Goats, 24 Pigs, 146 Cattle, 35 Horses, and 8 Donkeys. Items they possessed three saddles, a spare girth strap, 4 Hare snares, the Knight responsible for all this was known as the Commander of Animals. They had a plentiful supply of tools, a large mill.

There were at least 16 Knight Brothers, an unknown number of Sergeant Brothers, Servants and Slaves. A well equipped Church. The tower of the original Commandery still stands, incorporated as part of the present farmhouse on the site.

Iberia, I am a bit undecided about Iberia, as to whom the KT were fighting for, Rome or the King. Definitely the charter granted by Ramon Berenguar IV was extremely generous, and set up the pattern of future dealings by the monarchs in Iberia with the Templars.

They became in effect the front line of Christendom in Spain and Portugal, which still have many examples of both the Moors and the Templars

England, In London we have the Temple Church, faithfully restored after the blitz, and well worth a visit. Garway in Herefordshire is another fine example, and there are many other sites in reasonable condition.

At the beginning I mentioned, Dinsley in Hertfordshire. This was the biggest Preceptory outside London. It seems to have been an important meeting place, amongst the many visitors mentioned in 1290 are Robert Daken, preceptor of Scotland, Robert le Scrop from Scotland, Robert de Gloucester preceptor of Ireland, Thomas of Toulouse preceptor of London. Arrested in 1308 were Henry Paul, Service 4 years, Richard Peitvyn 42 years, Henry de Wicklow 16 years and Robert de la Wold 18 years. Archaeologists started work on the Dinsley project in the year 2000 and

discovered the ruined foundations of the preceptory in the grounds of a girls private school.

Scotland, there are no visible remains of the Templars ever being here. No monument that can compare with the great border abbeys of the Premonstratensians, Cistercians, Augustinians, or the Knights of St. John with the remains of their preceptory at Torphichen.

Templars are first mentioned in Scotland by Ailred of Rievaulx, according to him King David used them as his advisors.

The only other written historical records refer to Brian le Jay (Falkirk), Walter of Clifton and William of Middleton (Holyrood trial).

There is also the meagre and sometimes misleading statements of Augustus Hay and Spottiswood.

To conclude, the history of the Templars is a compelling story. I can find no evidence that they were corrupt or that the Order was in decline. I would suggest that both the Templars and Hospitallers fought literally to the last man at Acre without help from the European powers.

A 'what if' comes to mind, what if the European monarchs had supported the Orders at Acre, would Outremer have been lost to the Muslims? I wonder.

Whilst in Cyprus the fight against the Mamelukes was still ongoing. James of Molay appealed for assistance several times to no avail, in fact he was in Paris seeking support when he was arrested.

Were the Templars 'surplus to requirements', as has been suggested. I cannot see this, as the fight against the Muslims in Southern Europe continued for at least another three hundred years.

One has only to recall that the Muslims reached the gates of Vienna before they were stopped. In the Mediterranean the Hospitallers who had re-invented themselves as a maritime power, effectively protected France and Italy. The Iberian peninsula continued as before, with the Christian orders opposing the Moors in an attempt to re-conquer the southern part.

Although Philip the Fair had brought about the suppression and the end of the Templars, the spirit they had inspired still lived on in other Orders and quite possibly

many former Templars joined them. For example the King of Portugal formed the 'The Knights of Christ' and many former Templars joined this Order

Without doubt the king of France's greed was the driving force behind his decision to end the order, his subsequent actions prove this and here I quote Helen Nicholson.

'Philip IV as well as persecuting the Templars, he arrested Pope Boniface VIII, persecuted the Jews and the Lombard Bankers, burned a religious woman Marguerite Porete at the stake in 1310 for writing a book, which three respected religious men had approved as non-heretical. He prosecuted the Bishop Guichard of Tries, and the lovers of his daughter in law. Those he attacked were accused of heresy, or sorcery and unnatural vices. His actions point to a deliberate policy against anyone whose demise could assist his financial situation or make him appear the most Christian King in Europe.'

The monies he extracted from the Hospitallers prove this.

He committed a great disservice to the men who still lived a religious life, and were still willing to lay down their lives for the Christian values they held. The number of pseudo orders, including our own, who strive to achieve the sense of Christian duty that these ancient knights symbolised, is a testament to their memory.

I close with what I consider the finest epitaph ever given to the Templars. It was delivered by Pope Innocent II in his Bull 'Omni Datum Optimum' dated 1139 where he quoted from the Gospel of St John Chapter 15 Verse 13, "greater love has no man than this, that a man lays down his life for his friends".

Gentlemen, thank you for your attention.

Glossary

Apocrypha	Biblical or related writings not forming part of the accepted canon of scripture. ... hidden away
Cistercian	A monk of an Order founded in 1098 as a stricter branch of the Benedictines
Maccabees	The members or followers of the family of the Jewish leader Judas
Maccabaues	In full The Books of the Maccabees, four books of Jewish history and theology of which the first and second are in the Apocrypha and feature Judas Maccabaeus.
Myth	Widely held but mistaken belief
Outremer	A name applied to the French crusader states, including Armenia, Antioch, Tripoli and Jerusalem. An area approximately 500 miles long by 100 miles wide.
Turcoples	Mercenary or Native Auxiliary light Cavalry
Tucopolier	Knight in charge of the Turcoples and Sergeants

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