

Legacy of the Knights Templar

Author: Sir Knight Shelby L Chandler, II, PC, Chairman
Grand Commandery of Virginia: Archives & History Committee

Editor: Sir Knight Raymon W. Bacchus, Chairman
Grand Commandery of Virginia: Leadership & Education Committee

Presenter: Sir Knight Dennis M. Haas, Right Eminent Grand Commander
Grand Commandery of Knights Templar in Virginia

ORCID # 0000-0001-8232-9464

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It was on October 13, 1307, that Philip Le Bel (the Fair), King of France, ordered the arrest of Templar Grand Master Jacques DeMolay and all Knight Templars, along with the confiscation of their wealth and property for the purpose of wiping out his personal debt to them and to acquire both their political and financial clout. He received permission to make such an arrest from Clement V, a French pope whom Philip controlled and later held at Avignon. The French King was assisted and supported in this endeavor by the Order of St. John (Knights Hospitaller), who were jealous of the Templar's success.

Unfortunately for Philip, these French Templars appeared to have been forewarned of this plot, as DeMolay and much of the leadership went out to meet their adversaries. In doing such, it delayed the King's forces from reaching the Templar headquarters in time to claim the Order's wealth. The vast Templar treasure residing at the Paris Preceptory, disappeared the night before, along with the Templar fleet previously harbored at La Rochelle and Templars elsewhere in the world were able to escape the atrocities that befell these French Templars and their own Grand Master. Let us review the results of the Templar's flight in other nations:

France: Those Templars who survived were taken to the Tower of Chinon, where they were "*brutally tortured until they confessed to false charges, which included homosexuality, heresy, financial corruption, devil worshipping, fraud, spitting on the cross and more*"¹. After seven years of imprisonment and abuse, Grand Master DeMolay and other Templar leaders were brought before a panel of theologians and French Cardinals and were initially condemned to life imprisonment. This sentencing changed in a moment of courage when an exhausted and injured venerable DeMolay recanted his forced statement of guilt, and said:

"I think it only right that at so solemn a moment when my life has so little time to run, I should reveal the deception which has been practiced and speak for the truth. Before heaven and earth and all of you here as my witnesses, I admit that I am guilty of the grossest iniquity. But the iniquity is that I have lied in admitting the disgusting charges laid against the order. I declare, and I must declare, that the order is innocent. Its purity and saintliness are beyond question. I have indeed confessed that the order is guilty, but I have done so only to save myself from

¹ (Balestrieri 2017)

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terrible tortures by saying what my enemies wished me to say. Other knights who have retracted their confessions have been led to the stake, yet the thought of dying is not so awful that I shall confess to foul crimes which have never been committed. Life is offered to me but at the price of infamy. At such price, life is not worth having. I do not grieve that I must die if life can be bought only by piling one lie upon another."²

For the embarrassment of this recantation, the church inquisition turned DeMolay over to the French King, who then ordered DeMolay to be slowly burned at the stake along with Geoffroi de Charney and two other Templar officers who likewise recanted. While burning on the burning pyre, DeMolay cursed Pope Clement V and King Philip by declaring (while in agony) that within a year and a day, Clement V and Philip IV would stand with him before God in judgment and that Philip's bloodline would reign in France no more. Prophetically, Clement and Philip would in fact die within that timeline and shortly thereafter, Philip's Capetian dynasty came to an end in 1328 as each of Philip's childless sons would each become King of France and then die.³

The downfall of the Knights Templar would have seemed complete in France. However, all the major goals set by King Phillippe had also failed. From his initial desire to control the chivalric orders of Hospitallers & Templars and be proclaimed "Rex Bellator" (mostly a ploy to steal their great wealth), to his October 13th plot to confiscate the treasures of the preceptory in Paris, which disappeared into history. The true victors were the Knights of St. John, who kept their Order from Philip whilst not only ridding themselves of their only competition, but also obtaining most of the Templar real estate by allying with the French King.

Germany: Following 1307, when the Knights Templar were being rounded up in France in a "surprise arrest", a German council assembled in Mainz to pass judgment on the fate of the Order. Led by their commander, Hugues Sauvage, these German Templars, who had time to organize, burst into this German court fully armed and armored and demanded to be present for the trial. Naturally, they were found innocent and released, or as reported, "*An extraordinary miracle manifested the judgement of God in their favour: the fire which consumed them*

² (Plemmons 2014)

³ (Bradbury 2007)

spared their white habits and their red crosses”.⁴ Those in other countries who could not organize in time were convicted and killed. Eventually, with the banning of the Order by the Papacy, these German knights or “*ritters*” (riders) would either move their affiliation to the Teutonic Knights or the Knights of St. John (Hospitallers) or separate and return home.

Portugal: King Denis of Portugal refused to pursue and persecute the Templar knights but would instead come to their defense. He chose to parley with the new pope to ensure their safety. The new Pope agreed to permit these knights to remain intact, so long as they became a local order under the king and that they must rename their Order and would no longer have the protection of the Vatican. So, the Templar Knights in Portugal agreed to take an obligation to the Portuguese king and would reconstitute themselves as the Military Order of Christ or Knights of Christ in 1319.⁵ This Order becomes of great importance because it is they who would become those famous navigators of the Age of Discovery, such as Prince Henry the Navigator, the Grand Master of the Order who mapped new trade routes in the north Atlantic, Ferdinand Magellan, whose ship was the first to sail around the world, Vasco da Gama, who is the first European to sail to India, Pedro Cabral who discovers Brazil, and of course Bartolomeu Perestrello who was head of the Order and father-in-law to Christopher Columbus⁶. One reason Columbus’ ships brandished the Templar cross on their sails was because of these Portuguese knight-navigators.

Switzerland: Although much research is still needed, historians Alan Butler and Stephen Daphoe report that many Templars fled persecution in France to what is now Switzerland at about the time of that nation’s creation. Some documentations of the Battle of Morgarten reports that in 1315, a peasant force of fifteen-hundred Swiss militia was able to defeat the full force of five-thousand well-trained Austrian knights and foot soldiers with the help of “*foreign knights in white mantles*”.⁷ Interestingly enough, these historians report other factors in this belief of Templar lineage, such as the Swiss people’s religious tolerance; how like the Templars, they have excelled in farming, engineering and banking; and the fact that their flag appears as the reverse coloring of the Templar’s mantle, not to mention the martial skills of the Swiss Guards.

⁴ (Raynouard 1813)

⁵ (Government of Portugal 2023)

⁶ (Encyclopedia Britannica 2005)

⁷ (Butler and Dafoe 1998)

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England: At first, King Edward II of England, having grown up among Templar Knights, refused to believe in their guilt and permitted these Templars to live unmolested, so other knights briefly found sanctuary. But following multiple threats of war by the French King (and his father-in-law), along with pressure from the Pope, King Edward disbanded the Order and made a few arrests for show.⁸ Eventually, individual Templars were permitted to join the Hospitallers, join the Cistercian Order, or to retire to regular life as pensioned lay members of society. Most of the Templar property in England went to these Knights of St. John⁹ and little else came of any threat of punishment because without a foothold in the Holy Land, there seemed to be no further need for the Knights Templar. However, with the loss of knighthood or noble titles to pass on to their children, there appeared in 1381 to be an organized kingdom-wide protest where rioters, adorned with attire resembling Templar colors, executed many English officials and Hospitaller knights, while torching all property of the Knights of St. John, with exclusion of real-estate once held as “*Tierre Templare*” (Templar lands), to which they removed the furniture and furnishings within, only to destroy those items and not the property itself.¹⁰

Scotland: Being well-trained masters of warfare, Templars found for themselves a safe haven in Scotland. With the most likely Scottish leader, Sir Robert Bruce, excommunicated by the Pope and while the Scots struggle for their freedom against the English, fugitive Templar Knights were welcomed. As such, the papal bull ending the Templar Order was never proclaimed in Scotland and French Templars elected to fund and support William Wallace’s exploits against the English in hopes that Scottish freedom would ensure their safety.¹¹ Later, Robert Bruce raised an army to end the English rule in Scotland and both forces met at what would become the Battle of Bannockburn. The courage of the Scotsmen during this battle was the makings of legend as they fought bravely. But they were outnumbered, facing superior weaponry and while they had the courage and determination, they lacked sufficient number of armored knights to counter the English assault.

It is at this darkest moment when all seemed lost, that sixty-three mounted knights charged onto the battlefield, not wearing any mantle or coat of arms, but flying a singular white

⁸ (Haag 2014)

⁹ (Page and Round 1907)

¹⁰ (Robinson 1989)

¹¹ (Armstrong 2002)

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and black banner: the Beauceant or battle flag of the Knights Templar. Leading these Templar Knights was one, Sir William Sinclair, also known as the “Fighting Bishop of Dunkeld” and who was the younger brother to Sir Henry Sinclair, who while armed and mounted, remained in close proximity to Robert Bruce during the battle. It should also be reported that Henry’s sons, William and John, were also present as Templars, and would later be two of the knights who took a vow to escort Bruce’s heart to the Holy Land but would instead die in Spain fighting the Moors.¹²

In victory, Robert Bruce would go on to sign the Declaration of Arbroath, proclaiming freedom for Scotland and liberties for the Scots, then he would be crowned King Robert I of Scotland and would establish the Royal Order of Scotland among the Scottish peerage who supported him, with himself as Grand Master. It is said for their decisive actions at Bannockburn, King Robert rewarded all Knights Templar in Scotland by establishing them as the Order of St. Andrew du Chardon (of the Thistle), with Henry Sinclair as the hereditary Grand Master of all Templars in Scotland.¹³ This lineage would be the very same family who allegedly lead the journey to America (a hundred years before Columbus) and who then built Rosslyn Chapel. Some believe that it was during this period that Templary and Masonry became linked as one.

It should also be said that the first Templar Grand Master, Hugues de Payens, upon establishing the Order under the Pope in 1124, met with his wife, Catherine St. Clair (Sinclair), and they sailed from France to Scotland to meet with her Scottish family. It is here that Henri St Clair, First Earl of Roslin and King David I of Scotland, provided the Templars their very first land grant at Balantrodoch, just outside of Rosslyn. It is here that the Knights Templar construct their very first Preceptory outside of the Holy Lands and after the Battle of Bannockburn, it became their final haven of operations. In 1441, King James II confirms this family to be the hereditary Grand Master of all Masons in Scotland, which is again reinforced between 1598 and 1601 through the Schaw and Sinclair Statutes of Masonry and again at the creation of the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1736, when William Sinclair entered at the beginning of the first meeting to sign away his hereditary rights (and those of his children) to be “Grand Master of all Masons in Scotland”, to which he becomes the first elected Grand Master of the new Grand Lodge.¹⁴

¹² (Rosslyn Chapel 2023)

¹³ (Sinclair 2002)

¹⁴ (Laurie 1859)

Open Seas: As stated earlier, just before their arrests, Grand Master DeMolay (along with other Templar leaders) delayed King Philips' forces by leaving the preceptory to meet them along the road. By the time the King's forces were able to get to the preceptory, the treasure was gone. It was carted out of the preceptory to the Templar fleet at La Rochelle, where eighteen Templar ships sailed away, their destination is unknown, although speculations persist as to where they went. Of course, the Knights Templar not only had the largest commercial fleet in the world during that period, but they were also known as the most proficient navigators (as proven by the Portuguese branch of Templars) and had the greatest military armada of their time as well.¹⁵ It is important to note, that in some Masonic workings, they speak of lore explaining how upon becoming a Mason, you will become "*brother to pirates and corsairs*".

Although there is no real evidence to the relations between Templars and Masons, what is known was that the Templars fleet would display their fleet banner, depicting the skull and two femur bones of John the Baptist (alluding to the Templars discovery of this set of artifacts) upon a red field. In their pride, this banner becomes known to them as "*le Jolie Rouge*" which in French means "*the Pretty Red*".¹⁶ This is important to note because upon every nation turning on the Templars, every knight within the fleet became men with no country and without a safe port in Christendom. In their forced exile, these sea-going knights became privateers in order to survive and it is believed that they became the first sea-venturing pirates of Europe, with some stories later reporting of Templar raids against Vatican enterprises on the open sea. The link with Templarism would weaken over the coming generations, but a variant of the Templars' naval flag of "*Le Jolie Rouge*", while still preferred with a red field among French pirates, would be traded for the black-fielded banner of "*The Jolly Rogers*" among English ones, with the femur bones eventually traded for crossed-swords.¹⁷

¹⁵ (Tangredi 2023)

¹⁶ (Childress 2003)

¹⁷ (World History Encyclopedia 2023)

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