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Class of 2006

“Rise and Fall of the Knights Templar: From Power to Persecution”

History (major)

May 2006-10-24

With gratitude to E. Kurlander, K. Reiter, P. Steeves, and M. McNicholas

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Senior Research Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for HY 499
Stetson University
6th December, 2005

Abstract

Created around 1230 CE, the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon were created in order to protect pilgrims on their journey through the new Christian kingdom in Palestine. Starting out as a small group, these warrior monks soon grew in power and prestige under the benefaction of St. Bernard and were charged with the protection of the Catholic Church by Pope Innocent II. Along with this favour bestowed upon them, the Templars quickly accumulated a great amount of wealth and territory across Europe. However, their power base was always in the Holy Land. The capture by Muslims of the city of Acre, the final Christian stronghold in Palestine, deprived them of this power base. Following this they were free to the predations of ambitious secular rulers, such as Philip IV of France. Philip, anxious to establish his authority and to acquire more revenue producing lands, was able to bring charges against the Templars accusing them of heresy which led to the eventual arrest and disbandment of the Knights Templar. The loss of their power base left the Templars vulnerable to condemnation by the society at large and, as such, they were unable to protect themselves, or be protected by others, when they came under threat.

The Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon were created after the First Crusade and the establishment of a Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem, sometime between 14th January and 13th September 1120 CE, in order to protect pilgrims on their way through the Holy Land.¹ Over time these warrior monks became a major force in the Christian World as they commanded large tracts of land in the East as well as possessing great wealth from donations and payments from nobles in the West. They were immune to secular rule as they answered solely to the Pope and through him to Christ himself. Their vast wealth enabled them to become power brokers in Christendom. Also, because their preceptories² from England to Jerusalem were needed to protect the Templar wealth, it was convenient for local kings and nobles to store their own wealth in the preceptories; thus the Templars established an early banking system. The fact that Templar holdings were spread throughout Christendom enabled them to start one of the first currency exchange systems whereby one could deposit money in Paris, and then later, while on Crusade, could take out money in the local currency. All of this was done for a fee, and as a result the Templar wealth grew. However, after the loss of Acre and the Holy Land in 1291 CE the Templars would soon come under attack. At dawn on Friday 13th October 1307 Philip IV of France ordered that all Templars within his domains be arrested and accused them of heresy, worshipping idols and forsaking Christ. The French Pope Clement V soon decreed that all Templars should be brought in for questioning by the Inquisition and officially disbanded the order.³ Under torture many Templars confessed to the charges against them and in March 1314 the final Grand Master of the Knights Templar, Jaques de Molay, was led to an island in the Seine in the middle

¹ Malcolm Barber The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1994 p. 9

² Templar holdings

³ Peter Partner The Murdered Magicians: The Templars and Their Myth. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1982 pp. 59-60

of Paris where he was required to confess his heresy in public or be burned as a relapsed heretic. His reply to the accusations against him:

“‘It is right’ he said ‘that on such a terrible day, and in the last moments of my life, that I should reveal all the iniquity of lies, and that I should let truth triumph; and so I declare, before heaven and earth, and I avow, even if it be to my eternal shame, that I have committed the greatest of all crimes. ... But this is my crime: that I have agreed to the accusations brought with so much malice against an Order which truth forces me to recognize today as innocent. I gave the declaration demanded of me only to escape torture and suffering and to move to pity those who made me suffer. I know the torments endured by those who had the courage to revoke such confessions, but the terrible spectacle before me cannot make me confirm a first lie by a second. In such a wretched state I renounce life willingly; it is already only too hateful to me. What use to me are such sad days, when I have only earned them by lies.’”⁴

Molay and his fellow Templars were promptly burned to death by Philip IV without the consent of the Pope. Legend has it that while he was on the pyre, Molay cursed both Philip IV and Clement V. Guillaume de Nangis transcribed Jaques de Molays comments while he was on the pyre on that fateful day. “‘God knows who is in the wrong and had sinned. Soon misfortune will come to those who have condemned us: God will avenge our death.’ ‘Gentlemen,’ he said, ‘make no mistake, all those who are against us will have to suffer because of us. In that belief I wish to die.’”⁵ Both Philip IV and Clement V were dead within the year.

The major question facing historians is what factors led up to the disbandment of the Knights Templar. Some, such as Malcolm Barber and Evelyn Lord have concluded that the fall of the Templars was a direct result of the actions of people and organisations at the time that were external to the Templar Order. This view has it that Philip IV’s actions regarding his accusations against the Templars of Heresy and the subsequent trials as well as the confiscations of their lands and possessions by the Hospitallers brought down the Templars from their pillar of grace. According to Barber; “the Order of the Temple appeared to be an integral part of the body politic of Latin Christendom, indispensable in the fight against the infidel, in the servicing of

⁴ Stephen Howarth [The Knights Templar](#). Fairfield, Pennsylvania: Fairfield Graphics, 1982 pp. 16-17

⁵ Alain Demurger [The Last Templar: The Tragedy of Jaques de Molay Last Grand Master of the Temple](#). Trans. Antonia Nevill. London, England: Profile Books 2004 p. 198

the crusades, and in financing popes and monarchs.”⁶ According to this view, the Templars are still a vibrant and powerful society up to the time of their demise. Their troubles began when Philip IV came to the throne, “...Philip IV’s inheritance had not been untroubled. He began the reign with a huge burden of debt from his father’s failed crusade against Aragon in 1284-5 and, from the 1290’s, wars against England and Flanders added to the financial pressures, so that despite the monarchy’s large resources there was always an urgent need to raise ever larger sums of money.”⁷ In order to finance his wars and other projects, Philip needed to find a source of revenue that was close at hand and would bring in large amounts of wealth. “There are therefore obvious financial reasons for the sudden arrest of the Templars in France, for as bankers they possessed considerable liquid assets, and as landowners, fixed and movable properties in every region of France from Normandy to Provence.”⁸

Others, such as Peter Partner, hold the view that the loss of the Templar power base in the Holy Land had weakened and crippled the Order to the point that it was slowly rotting from within and that events would have led to the end of the Templars, even without Philip IV and other external sources. Partner’s view holds it that the people of the time had lost their faith in the Templars as a result of the loss of Acre and of the Holy Land for good. “The Latin Catholic world had always believed that the just judgement of God is mediated through history, and often directly declared through the issue of battle.”⁹ As such the continual defeats of the Christian knights and Templars in the Holy Land by the Muslim Turks seemed to establish that God had removed his blessing from the Crusades. Partner refers to this process as “alienation,” whereby the cohesive knightly class that had fought in the Crusades

⁶ Barber The New Knighthood p. 280

⁷ Barber The New Knighthood p. 297-298

⁸ Barber The New Knighthood p. 298

⁹ Partner The Murdered Magicians p.33

began to dissolve and the ideal of chivalry began to shift towards a solitary journey, as expressed in the grail romances and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*.¹⁰ However, Christendom still needed an explanation for the loss of Outremer¹¹ and someone to blame. "It had been a commonplace of crusading tradition that God would sustain his people against the pagans. If he had ceased to do so, it was natural to look for scapegoats among the clerical class, and within that class the most vulnerable was the small section of the clergy which also had military status: the Military Orders."¹² The different internal and external crises caused great strain on the Templar Order and forced many to question its reason for existence and whether or not it should continue to exist if its *raison d'être* had been lost and it was more profitable to benefit from the Templar demise than to see it continue and be tied to it in debt.

The availability of primary sources for this time period is, of course, rather limited. As such I will have to rely on sources that have been translated and published by other historians and scholars. However, while the quantity may be low the quality of the sources is fairly high. Not only is the actual Rule of the order available, but there are many records showing grants of land and donations to the Templars as well as other records of their financial services, property and descriptions of their military action in Outremer. In addition there are also many letters between nobles concerning the Templars, in particular we have the correspondence between Philip IV of France and Clement V. We also have the accusations against the Order and depositions of the Templars in addition to the papal bull *Vox in excelso* and *Ad providam*, dating from 22nd March and 2nd May 1312 CE respectively, which officially disbanded the order. Alongside the secondary works of historians, these sources seem to imply that the political and financial motives of secular rulers spelled the end for the Knights

¹⁰ Partner, *The Murdered Magicians* p. 39-40

¹¹ French designation for the Holy Land

¹² Partner, *The Murdered Magicians* p. 41

Templar. They were caught in the wrong place at the wrong time and as such were at the mercy of forces that they could not control. To look at these forces I will first give a background of Templar history in order to see where they came from and how they got to the position they found themselves in 1291 CE after the fall of Acre. I will then explore their relationships with both the Roman Catholic Church and with the secular nobles by going into their religious, financial and political positions. Next, I will look at Philip IV of France, his relationship with the church as well as his financial and religious positions. Finally, I will look at the events surrounding the demise of the Templars and how the various forces shaped how things would turn out.

Background

The story of the Crusades is one of the most interesting tales from throughout history. The first Crusade started with religious zeal at its core as Christian soldiers strove to push the Moslems from the Holy Land and to capture Jerusalem for Christianity. The Seljuk Turks, who controlled the area, had been at war with the Byzantine Empire and by 1095 CE, were beginning to stretch the army of Emperor Alexius Comnenus. Urban II was elected to the Holy See in 1088 CE and by this time he had managed to pacify relations with secular rulers that had been turbulent under Gregory VII. Urban had also revoked the excommunication of the Emperor Alexius and was eager to improve relationships between the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Greek Orthodox Church in the East; this would be especially true if it meant that the Byzantines would be recognising the authority of Rome and trying to curry its favour.¹³ On his way through France, Urban II stopped at Clermont where, he announced, he would make a great and rousing speech. It was there on Tuesday 28th

¹³ John J. Robinson Born in Blood: The Knights Templar in the Crusade. New York, New York: M Evans and Company, 1991 pp. 8-9

November 1095 that he made his call for a Crusade to free the Holy Land and promised eternal salvation for all those who went and fell in battle, fighting for their Lord in Christ.¹⁴ As a result of Urban's speech 15,000 soldiers were approaching Byzantium by the end of May in 1096 and were pushing on towards Jerusalem.¹⁵ The Crusaders finally arrived at the walls of Jerusalem on 7th June 1099 after a long hard drive through Moslem territory and an eight month siege of Antioch. By the time they had reached Jerusalem the Crusaders had become veterans of siege warfare and were skilled in the arts of war. As such they were ready to take Jerusalem and it fell after 5 weeks on Friday 15th July 1099, "tradition says it was at midday, the hour of the Crucifixion."¹⁶ Along with the city of Jerusalem, the Crusaders gained control of the Temple Mount and the al-Aqsa mosque, a building which would soon become headquarters to one of the most intriguing and influential organisations to be formed at this time, The Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, or the Knights Templar.

After the victories of the First Crusade, the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem was formed, first under Godfrey of Bouillion and then under his brother who reigned as Baldwin I. Pilgrims flocked to the Holy Land, also known as Outremer, in order to see those places sacred to Christianity. However, there were still many areas controlled by the Seljuk Turks through which Pilgrims had to pass on their way to Jerusalem. This caused a problem as the Moslems frequently raided passing caravans travelling through their lands. "The Church of St. George at Lydda was only six miles from Jaffa, but was very vulnerable to sorties of the Egyptians from Ascalon. 'And there are many springs here; travellers rest by the water but with great fear, for it is a deserted place and nearby is the town of Ascalon from which Saracens sally forth and

¹⁴ Howarth pp. 26-27

¹⁵ Howarth p. 30

¹⁶ Howarth p. 40

kill travellers on these roads. There is a great fear too going up from that place into the hills.”¹⁷ In 1118 CE several knights took monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience along a dedication to protection Pilgrims in the Holy Land. They were given residence by King Baldwin II in his palace near the Temple of the Lord in the al-Aqsa Mosque, which was believed to be on the site of the Temple of Solomon, from which the Knights Templar took their name.¹⁸ While the later Hospital of St. John, the Hospitalers, was at first primarily monastic and dedicated to caring for the sick and infirm Pilgrims, the Templars were primarily militaristic and dedicated to fighting the Seljuk Turks. They were headed by Hugh de Payens from Champagne and probably included a total of eight or nine warrior monks to protect the Holy Land. “Eight or nine men to police an empire: it was not many. But every one was a knight and a leader; and while the monks of the Hospital were pure and simple, this handful of knights determined both to give themselves to Christ, *and to remain fighting men.*”¹⁹

Despite their humble beginnings the Templars quickly established relations with various European nobles and maintained a steady income from the Church. “They had, as well, regular if modest incomes: a charter of the Holy Sepulchre of 1160 records that the Templars exchanged an annual allowance of 150 *besants* that they had been accustomed to receive from the canons for three *casilia.*”²⁰ They were associated with the Count of Anjou during his pilgrimage in 1120 CE and then in 1125 BCE, Hugh, the Count of Champagne, joined the order to the acclaim of St. Bernard of the Cistercians.²¹ In 1126 CE Hugh de Payens wrote to St. Bernard complaining that; “...the brothers of the Temple ‘desired to obtain apostolic

¹⁷ Barber The New Knighthood p. 3

¹⁸ Barber The New Knighthood p. 7

¹⁹ Horton p. 43

²⁰ Barber The New Knighthood p. 11

²¹ Barber The New Knighthood p. 11

confirmation and to have a certain rule of life”²² At Troyes in 1129 the Knights Templar were officially recognised by the Holy See and were granted the first Rule of their order.²³ This rule called for a movement away from secular life and the removal of loyalty to secular kings and for a life wholly devoted to Christ. It opens:

“We speak firstly to all those who secretly despise their own will and desire with a pure heart to serve the sovereign king as a knight and with studious care desire to wear, and wear permanently, the very noble armour of obedience. And therefore we admonish you, who until now have led the lives of secular knights, in which Jesus Christ was not the cause, but which you embraced for human favour only, to follow those whom God has chosen from the mass of perdition and whom he has ordered through his gracious mercy to defend the Holy Church, and that you hasten to join them forever.”²⁴

Religion

From their outset as a monastic-military order the Knights Templar was regarded as a religious organisation that was responsible solely to the Pope. As such the Vatican granted them various rights and privileges that would enable it to be a powerful force in Christendom. On 29th March 1139, Pope Innocent II issued the Papal Bull *Omne Datum Optimum*. This declaration would provide the basic rights of the Templars and establish their place among the religious orders. “...although you are reckoned by your name to be knights of the Temple, you have been appointed by the Lord defenders of the Catholic Church and attackers of the enemies of Christ.”²⁵ In effect, this formed the Templars into the militant arm of the Catholic Church. They were expected to protect the Holy Land from infidel Moslems and “...labour without fear in fighting the enemies of the cross, calling on the name of Christ.”²⁶ The Knights Templar were to be the defenders of the faith and would lead the defence of Outremer and Christianity against its enemies in this world. “The order regarded itself, and was

²² Barber *The New Knighthood* p. 12

²³ Barber, *The New Knighthood* p.14

²⁴ *The Rule of the Templars: The French Text of the Rule of the Order of the Knights Templar* Trans. J. M. Upton Ward. Woodbridge, England: Boydell Press 1992 p. 1

²⁵ “Omne Datum Optimum” (29 March 1139) *The Templars: Selected Sources* Trans. Malcolm Barber, Keith Bate. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press 2002 p. 60

²⁶ “Omne Datum Optimum” p. 60

regarded by others, as the defenders of Christendom; if not the sole defender, then certainly the most important.”²⁷ However, not everyone was happy with this new concept of fighting monks. Secular and religious orders had always been kept separate and many held the view that these two orders in life should always be kept apart from one another.²⁸ Around 1145 the Archdeacon of Huntingdon gave the following description of Henry of Blois, the new Bishop of Winchester, “a certain new monster composed from purity and corruption, namely a monk and a knight.”²⁹ In a letter written to the Templars around 1128, the brotherhood is warned about its activities and possible temptations that they may face in their chosen service to God; “...he [the devil] purposely attempts to corrupt the accomplishment of things he tempts you with anger and hatred when you kill, with greed when you strip your victims.”³⁰ This was a society in which the monastic orders were generally inward looking and retrospective, as opposed to the Templars which had a very strong secular link in their very real battles against Moslems rather than being a clerical fought that fought a spiritual war against evil. The letter warns the Templars that they must earn their place in the Kingdom of God and must do so in a peaceful state of mind that leads to the reflection upon ones life. “...While this may have been sound advice for members of a more usual contemplative order, it could be objected that the nature of the Templars’ occupation necessarily involved them in the cares of the world, diverting them from such internal self-examination.”³¹ Another problem for the Knights Templar was the resentment they accumulated from the regular clergy. In the *Omne Datum Optimum* bull of 1128, “Innocent gave the Templars the keys to the Church, the keys to the

²⁷ Helen J. Nicholson *The Knights Templar: A New History* Stroud, England: Sutton Publishing 2001 pp. 47-48

²⁸ Barber *The New Knighthood* p.41

²⁹ Barber *The New Knighthood* p.41

³⁰ “Letter of Hugh ‘Peccator’” (circa. 1128) *The Templars: Selected Sources* Trans. Malcolm Barber, Keith Bate. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press 2002 p. 56

³¹ Barber *The New Knighthood* p. 43

kingdom; and had it been possible, he might have given them the keys to heaven itself.”³² In it, the Templars were granted freedom from tithes normally due to the clergy, as well as the freedom to confer brotherhood on any layman and the freedom to ordain their own priests.³³ Also, in areas under excommunication, “Templar priests and fundraisers would rely on papal privilege to break the interdict, open their churches, collect money, administer the sacraments to men and women in the Templar brotherhoods, and bury the dead in their own graveyards.”³⁴ These activities by the Templars undermined the authority of the local clergy because they could discount the only weapon that the clergy had and could take money from a local parish that would normally have gone to that parish’s priest.

Despite these early misgivings about their order from those who held a traditional view of the role of the clergy the Templars were able to prosper and became very wealthy with estates all across Christendom as well as vast amounts of liquid assets. They were the Papacy’s military strong arm and yielded enormous influence over the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the rest of Christendom. However, complaints from bishops and parish priests did not go away and the Papacy was wary of its creation. On 13th September 1207, Pope Innocent III issued a Papal bull that denounced the Templar practice of raising funds by opening churches under interdiction, celebrating mass and giving the sacraments.³⁵ It also accuses the Order of “employing demonic doctrines, they impose the sign of the cross on the breast of any ruffian, laden with the weight of his sins, who attends their sermons; and they assert that whoever is willing to pay two or three pence a year to join a Templar

³² Howarth p. 80

³³ Partner [The Murdered Magicians](#) p. 11

³⁴ Partner [The Murdered Magicians](#) p. 12

³⁵ Partner [The Murdered Magicians](#) p. 30

confraternity will never be denied Christian burial, even if he is excommunicate.”³⁶

Essentially the Knights Templar were still continuing to flout their privileges and their practices and policies were running contrary to those of the regular clergy and even those of the Papacy itself. This was especially important when it came to excommunication as this was the ultimate weapon the Pope and the clergy held to keep lay people in line. By admitting even excommunicates into their order and granting them all of the privileges of a Christian, the Templars were undermining the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. The problem of the Templars abusing their privilege became so bad that Pope Clement IV while chastising the Order and its Grand Master for its “...recalcitrance in protecting the former Templar Marshal Stephen de Sissy, referred to the envy caused among the Bishops by Templar privileges, and told the Grand Master not to provoke the pope further by his ‘insolence’, lest papal protection be removed and the order forced to answer for its breaches of church law.”³⁷ However, these threats do not seem to have been carried out and the Templar Order maintained its privileges and gained more in the years following until the loss of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and the fall of Acre in 1291.³⁸ The Knights Templar had been formed as a monastic order whose sole purpose was to fight the Moslems and to protect Outremer and the Holy Kingdom in the name of Christ. With Christ on their side and supporting them they could not falter to be a divine force in the world that answered only to God himself and his lieutenant on earth. As long as they were successful and had the backing of Christ they were viewed as the greatest force in Christendom. However, what would happen if they lost the backing of Christ? Religious doctrine at the time decreed that the armies of Satan

³⁶ Papal Bull of 13th September 1207, quoted in Partner [The Murdered Magicians](#) p. 30

³⁷ Reference to “Les Registres de Clement IV (Paris, ed E. Jordan) no. 836. CF Bulst-Thiele, [SDMTHM](#), p. 245 in Partner [The Murdered Magicians](#) pp. 30-31

³⁸ Partner [The Murdered Magicians](#) p. 31

could never defeat the armies of Christ. The loss of the Holy Land put into question whether or not the Templars, as well as others fighting in Palestine, had the backing of Christ. People and the Clergy lost their faith in a Crusade against the infidel and instead focused on events at home and crusades against other Christians. As a poem from a French monk at the time recalls; “Then it really is foolish to fight the Turks, now that Jesus Christ no longer opposes them. They have vanquished the Franks and Tartars and Armenians and Persians, and they continue to do so. And daily they impose new defeats upon us: for God, who used to watch on our behalf is now asleep, and Muhammad [Bafometz] puts forth his power to support the Sultan.”³⁹ With the loss of their *raison d’etre* the Knights Templar suddenly found themselves in a weakened position in which they were vulnerable to secular powers.

Economics

Due to their monastic-military status, the Order of the Knights Templar was regarded as a religious organisation that was responsible solely to the Pope and completely independent of secular. As such the Vatican granted them various rights and privileges that would enable it to be a powerful force in Christendom. On 29th March 1139, Pope Innocent II issued the Papal Bull *Omne Datum Optimum*. This declaration would provide the basic rights of the Templars and establish their place among the religious orders and accumulate its wealth. For example the bull gives Templars the right to take from their enemies what ever possessions they wish and guarantees to them that their own properties and any and all possessions that they obtain shall continue to be theirs and under Papal protection “for all time to come.”⁴⁰ This, in theory, gave the Templars protection from secular authorities appropriating Templar

³⁹ Quoted in Partner [The Murdered Magicians](#) pp. 34-35

⁴⁰ “Omne Datum Optimum” p. 61

assets. In addition, Innocent II also makes this statement; "...we prohibit and altogether forbid that any ecclesiastical or secular person should dare to demand fealties, homage, oaths or other safeguards, which are commonly used by seculars, from the master or brothers of this same house."⁴¹ This is another privilege that guarantees Templar autonomy in effect makes them responsible to no-one but God, or his lieutenant on earth. Still further on in the bull, The Knights Templar were granted freedom from tithes and taxes on their property by secular rulers and governments. However, despite their monastic and clerical side, the Templars were primarily a military organisation that was responsible for the defence for the defence of the Holy Land and was expected to take a major role in such pursuits. "The Knights of the Temple at Jerusalem, new Maccabees in this time of Grace, denying worldly desires and abandoning personal possessions, have taken up Christ's cross and followed Him. It is through them that God has freed the Eastern Church from the filth of the pagans and defeated the enemies of the Christian faith."⁴² This passage from the Papal Bull "Milites Templi" issued by Celestine II in 1144 gives the secular role of the Templars as the monastic arm that ventures out into the world in order to fight for Christ against those pagans who threaten Christian lands. However, in order to pursue their established goal of protecting Christ's kingdom the Templars would need a source of wealth, as they had none of their own. Celestine II provided for the Order by making a request of the clergy to whom "Milites Templi" had been addressed. "Since their own resources are insufficient for carrying out to the full this most holy and pious task, we exhort your fraternity by these present letters that you might encourage the people that God has entrusted to you to make contributions in order to supply their needs."⁴³ As

⁴¹ "Omne Datum Optimum" p. 61

⁴² "Milites Templi" (9 January 1144) The Templars: Selected Sources Trans. Malcolm Barber, Keith Bate. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press 2002 pp. 64-65

⁴³ "Milites Templi" p. 65

such, the nobility and any other wealthy person within Christendom were encouraged to make donations unto the Knights Templar so that the Order would be able to sustain itself. Celestine also gave those who were considering making a donation an incentive to do so; “Indeed, whoever helps them out of his own resources, accumulated through God, and becomes a member of this most holy brotherhood, granting it benefices annually, strong in the merits of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, we will grant him an indulgence of the seventh part of any penance imposed upon him.”⁴⁴ In short, any person who was willing to make a contribution to Order of the Knights Templar was guaranteed forgiveness of their sins as their money would be going towards Christ’s personal fighting force. An example of this is the will of Alfonso I, King of Aragon and Navarre. In it he pledges to the Templars, as well as the Hospitallers, his “whole kingdom as well as the lordship” including “my horse and all my arms.” At the end of his will Alfonso states his reasons for the provisions in his will; “All the things I do for the soul of my father and my mother, and for the remission of all my sins so that I may enjoy eternal life.”⁴⁵

The Templars’ role as the leading militaristic force in the defence of Terre Sancte would come from the rights and privileges bestowed upon them by the papacy and from methods of income that the secular princes had available to them. The Church was an international organisation that owned lands across Europe and Outremer and as such was able to raise larger sums of money on a permanent basis than rulers of local areas.⁴⁶ In addition, as William of Tyre noted at the time; “there is not now a region of the Christian world which has not conferred a portion of its

⁴⁴ “Milites Templi” p. 65

⁴⁵ “The will of Alfonso I, King of Aragon and Navarre” (October 1131) The Templars: Selected Sources Trans. Malcolm Barber, Keith Bate. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press 2002 pp. 161-162

⁴⁶ Alan Forey The Military Orders: From the Twelfth to Early Fourteenth Centuries Toronto, Canada: Toronto University Press 1992 p.98

wealth on these brothers [the Templars].”⁴⁷ Not only were the military orders able to procure more wealth from throughout Christendom than a single ruler could muster but they also owned substantial portions of the land under the same rulers that they held free from the taxation and jurisdiction of the secular government. In addition to this regular supply of wealth the Templars were also able to obtain more through their military activities. For example, in 1154 they captured Nasr, the son of the Egyptian vizier, Abbas. The Templars ransomed their captive and were able to procure 60,000 dinars for him. They also received tribute payments from various Islamic factions such as the Assassins who paid them 2000 dinars a year in the early 1170’s.⁴⁸ The extent of their holdings allowed the Templars to be able to supply political leaders of the time with a source of money that they were able to obtain through request or force. In May 1250 Louis IX of France needed money in order to pay the ransom for the Count of Poitiers. To solve this he sent his follower de Joinville to procure the money from the Templar galleys. “Then spoke brother Renaud of Vichier, who was Marshal of the Temple, and he said this: ‘Sire, let us set to one side this quarrel between the Lord of Joinville and our commander; for indeed, as our commander says, we could not advance any of this money without being forsworn. And as to what the seneschal advises, viz., that if we will not lend you the money, you had better take it – why, he says nothing that is very outrageous, and you must do as you think best; and if you do take what is ours here in Egypt, why, we have so much of what is yours at Acre, that you can easily indemnify us.’”⁴⁹ Written in 1309, this memoir seems to indicate a trend in French fiscal policy.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Forey p. 98

⁴⁸ Forey p. 99

⁴⁹ Joinville “Joinville’s Chronicle” Memoirs of the Crusades Trans. Sir Frank Marzials London, England: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd. 1933 p. 230

The Templars also had another source of revenue. After the relaxation of the Church's prohibition on usury the Templars found themselves in a beneficial situation. The large amounts of knights taking up the cross generated a need for large sums of money to be transferred between Europe and the Outremer. "The Knights Templar, as a monastic order, provided an international network capable of moving valuables as well as credits from one end of Europe to the Holy Land. Moreover, as men of God they had the trust of those who used them."⁵⁰ The Templars were in a perfect position to provide this service because of the holdings throughout Christendom. Monastic orders had traditionally been used as repositories for documents and precious objects by both the clergy and the laity and so it was an easy transition to for them to provide financial services and act as "banks" in the Christian world.⁵¹ People travelling to Terre Sancte were able to deposit their money in a Western Templar preceptory, such as those in London or Paris, and were then issued a code or some other form of identification. Upon their arrival in Outremer, they would then be able to visit any holding of the Order of the Temple and present their credentials; at which time they would be able to withdraw their money. Naturally, the Templars charged a fee for this service.⁵²

However things were not all rosy for the Templars. While they did continue to accumulate wealth there was a general view that they held too much money. "The Templars in particular were seen as not simply greedy but miserly."⁵³ This general view led to a resentment of the Templars as people who were hungry for wealth and were reluctant to help their fellow Christians in their time of need. As such, this would lead to a weakening of the Order in the public eye and would cause people to

⁵⁰ Scott B. MacDonald and Albert L. Gastmann A History of Credit and Power in the Western World New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction 2001 p. 68

⁵¹ Barber The New Knighthood p. 266

⁵² Barber The New Knighthood pp. 266-277

⁵³ Nicholson p. 181

be willing to turn a blind eye to the Templars in their hour of need. Their accumulation of wealth would also be a major factor in subsequent events when Philippe IV “le bel” of France would be in need of large sums of money. As a satirist mentioned in the mid-thirteenth century:

The Templars are most doughty men
And they certainly know how to look after their own interests;
But they are too fond of pennies.
When prices are high
They sell their wheat
More willingly than they give it to their dependants.⁵⁴

Politics

In accordance with their role as their military arm of the Catholic Church in Terre Sancte; The Templars with their strong financial position played a prominent role in the politics of the Crusades. It became quite common for Brother Templars to be seen around the courts of Europe and in the Kingdom of Jerusalem as well as in the Vatican serving as chamberlains, emissaries, treasurers or judge-delegates.⁵⁵ In these roles the Order was able to spread its influence throughout Christendom. In July of 1220 AD Pope Honorius III entrusted a Templar and a Hospitaller with transporting his financial contribution for the Fifth Crusade to Egypt because “there was no one he could trust better.”⁵⁶ Under John I and Henry III of England the Templars in that country, as elsewhere, gained prominent positions with the royal households. Under John the Templar Brother Roger came to oversee all trade tariffs within England in addition to his regular duties as an almoner. After the death of John and the ascension of his young son Henry III the responsibility of the members of the Order within the English royal household grew, for example Brother Geoffrey was entrusted with complete control of Henry’s wardrobe, including his personal finances, and became

⁵⁴ “Sur les états de monde” Quoted in Nicholson p. 181

⁵⁵ Nicholson p. 161

⁵⁶ Nicholson p. 161

the main minister to Henry.⁵⁷ In their new role as political ministers they had to deal with affairs of state and as such were involved in political disputes. This would be particularly evident in the Kingdom of Jerusalem when it faced problems of succession.

Conflict arose with the death of Baldwin IV, the Christian King of Jerusalem, who died from leprosy. Baldwin had wanted his succession to be decided by the Pope, the Holy Roman Emperor and the Kings of England and France.⁵⁸ However, Baldwin IV's sister Sibylle and her husband Guy de Lusignan managed to seize the throne. "Le maître du Temple, Gérard de Ridefort, a joué un rôle décisive dans ce coup d'État."⁵⁹ (The Master of the Temple, Gérard de Ridefort, played a decisive role in the coup d'état) Ridefort's role was to force the Master of the Hospitallers, Roger des Moulins, to unlock the jewels required for the coronation. Without his interference Guy and Sibylle would not have been able to be coronated properly and would not have been able to take control of the country. This event caused a split within the aristocratic levels of the Kingdom of Jerusalem with Guy de Lusignan, Sibylle and the Templars on one side and the local barons with Raymond of Tripoli and the Hospitallers on the other.⁶⁰ The major problem basically involved the people involved. As Alain Demurger called him; Gérard de Ridefort was "le mauvais génie du Temple."⁶¹ Ridefort had a rather forceful and militaristic personality and Guy de Lusignan was more than willing to listen to him. In 1186 Ridefort persuaded Lusignan to force Raymond of Tripoli, the man who was supposed to be regent under the terms of the will of Baldwin IV, to agree to a treaty. However, Raymond was not interested and instead sought a peace treaty with Saladin. Ridefort's response was to march on

⁵⁷ Nicholson pp. 161-162

⁵⁸ Barber *The New Knighthood* p. 110

⁵⁹ Alain Demurger *Vie et mort de l'ordre du Temple* Paris, France: Éditions du seuil 1985 p. 119.

⁶⁰ Barber *The New Knighthood* p. 110

⁶¹ Demurger *Vie et mort de l'ordre du Temple* p. 114

Raymond of Tripoli's domains and attempt to take them by force. However, he was intercepted by Balian of Ibelin who attempted to arbitrate between the factions and forge a coalition.⁶² Saladin's son, al-Afdal, was under a treaty with Raymond of Tripoli at this time and required passage through Raymond's land. Raymond agreed on the condition no person or property was damaged in any way. He then informed the other people at his castle, such as Ridefort, of the fact that al-Afdal would be passing through his property. Immediately, Gérard de Ridefort sent word to the nearest Templar garrison at Caco for them to accompany an expedition against al-Afdal. At the Springs of Cresson near Nazareth the Christian party of 140 came across a Muslim army of 7,000. Roger des Moulins, the Master of the Hospitallers, pleaded with Ridefort to retreat. However, Ridefort accused Moulins of cowardice and ordered a charge. Ridefort and two other Templars were the only survivors.⁶³ This loss wiped out a major of the Christian army in Outremer with the loss of 47 Templars and a large number of Hospitallers including their Grand Master, Roger de Moulins. It was a significant loss of essential personnel and was a direct consequence of Ridefort's actions. Such was the defeat at the Springs of Cresson that the compiler of the Lyon manuscript said of it; "This was the beginning of the loss of the kingdom."⁶⁴

After this defeat the Christian forces gathered at Sephoria, where there was plenty of water, in order to wait out the expected invasion that Saladin was planning. By the end of June 1187, Saladin had begun his invasion and Raymond of Tripoli, despite the fact that his city of Tiberias had been taken, urged Guy de Lusignan to keep the army where it was because they could not prevail against the strength of Saladin's forces. An account of Ridefort's advice to Lusignan was composed in 1232 at the monastery of Corbie:

⁶² Barber The New Knighthood p. 111

⁶³ Barber The New Knighthood pp. 111-112

⁶⁴ Quoted in Barber The New Knighthood p. 112

“Lord, do not believe the advice of the count [Tripoli]. For he is a traitor, and you well know that he has no love for you, and wishes you to be shamed, and that you should lose the kingdom. But I counsel you to start out immediately, and we with you, and thereby overcome Saladin. For this is the first crisis that you have faced in your reign. If you do not leave this pasturage, Saladin will come and attack you here. And if you retreat from his attack the shame and reproach will be very great.”⁶⁵

Lusignan acted upon Ridefort’s advice and took the army on the march in search of Saladin’s army.

The Christian forces eventually encountered Saladin’s army in the dry heights of the Horns of Hattin. At Hattin, Lusignan’s parched army suffered a disastrous defeat at the hands of Saladin with the army being wiped out and Guy de Lusignan and Gerard de Ridefort being taken prisoner along with a number of Templars and Hospitallers. The moment of victory is recorded by Ibn al-Athīr, an eminent Islamic historian of the time;

“I was told that al-Malik al-Afdal, Saladin’s son said: ‘I was at my father Saladin’s side during that battle, the first that I saw with mine own eyes. The Frankish King had retreated to the hill with his band, and from there he led a furious charge against the Muslims facing him, forcing them back upon my father. I saw that he was alarmed and distraught, and he tugged at his beard as he went forth crying: “Away with the Devil’s lie!” The Muslims turned to counter-attack and drove the Franks up the hill. When I saw the Franks retreating before the Muslim onslaught I cried out for joy: “We have conquered them!” But they returned the charge with undiminished ardour and drove our army back toward my father. His response was the same as before, and the Muslims counter-attacked and drove the Franks back to the hill. Again I cried: “We have beaten them!” but my father turned to me and said: “Be quiet; we shall not have beaten them until that tent falls!” As he spoke the tent fell, and the Sultan dismounted and prostrated himself in thanks to God, weeping for joy.’”⁶⁶

While many of the captured nobles were held for ransom and then released upon payment, Saladin had a different fate for the members of the military-monastic orders. He allowed members of his clerical staff who had never killed before to get a start on it by hacking away at the necks of the Templars and the Hospitallers because they

⁶⁵ Quoted in Barber *The New Knighthood* p. 112

⁶⁶ Ibn al-Athīr “The Battle of Hittīn” *Arab Historians of the Crusades* Ed. Francesco Gabrieli; Los Angeles, California: University of California Press 1978 p. 123

represented Christian aggression.⁶⁷ The loss at the Horns of Hattin resulted in the loss of the majority of armed forces that the Kingdom of Jerusalem could muster as well as the loss of the relic of the True Cross, which was paraded before the army as a symbol that God was on their side.⁶⁸ With its loss, the rest of the Holy land was open to Saladin to conquer. The city of Acre fell the next week and Jerusalem remained in Christian hands until October when it fell along with the Templar headquarters within the al-Aqsa mosque. Upon entering the city, Saladin had the cross taken down and beaten with sticks prior to the purifying of the Islamic holy places within the city.⁶⁹

“Hattin so shocked Christian opinion that pious promises and conscience-salving monetary donations were at last replaced by the armies of the Third Crusade.”⁷⁰ Despite attempts by Philip II “Augustus” of France and Richard I “Coeur de Leon” and many others to regain the Holy land it would never be reclaimed. The Knights Templar had forever lost their power base in Jerusalem. While Acre was recaptured in 1191 and it extended the life of the Christian Kingdom for a little longer it would be lost permanently 100 years later in 1291. During this time the Order was questioned about its motives and accused of hindering the crusades for their own gain by the Count of Artois. His claim was that that they were lagging in a conquest of Egypt because it was not profitable.⁷¹ In 1237 William de Montferrat, the Preceptor of the Temple at Antioch, broke a truce with Turcoman tribes against the explicit wishes of Prince Bohemond IV of Antioch. Montferrat took a small force of knights within to attack the castle at Darbasq where captive Christians inside the stronghold begged him to leave. He ignored them and commenced his assault only to be annihilated by

⁶⁷ Demurger Vie et mort de l'ordre du Temple pp. 122-123

⁶⁸ Robert Payne The Dream and the Tomb: A History of the Crusades New York, New York: Stein and Day 1984 pp. 197-205

⁶⁹ Quoted in Barber The New Knighthood p. 116

⁷⁰ Quoted in Barber The New Knighthood p. 117

⁷¹ Malcolm Barber The Trial of the Templars Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press 1978 p. 13

the Moslem cavalry.⁷² Again, they were accused of being traitors when the Last Grand Master in Outremer, Guillaume de Beaujeu, considered accepting peace terms from the Egyptian Sultan Qalawun shortly before the final fall of Acre.⁷³ In 681/1282 a truce was signed between our Lord al-Malik al-Mansūr (Qalawū) and his son al-Malik as-Salih ‘Alā’ ad-Dunya wa’ d-Din ‘Ali on the one hand and the Grand Master *frère* William of Beaujeu, Grand Master of the Order of the Temple in Acre and the Litoral, and all the Templars in Tortosa on the other. Peace was to last for ten years, entire, continuous and consecutive, and ten months, beginning on Wednesday 5 muharram 681 from the Muhammad’s *hijra*, corresponding to 15 nisān 1593 of the era of Alexander son of Philip the Greek/15 April 1282.”⁷⁴ In short the people had lost their faith in the Knights Templar as they saw their actions under Gérard de Ridefort as having led to the loss of the Holy Land and their subsequent actions as being self-serving and greedy.

Philippe IV “le bel”

Before one can study the trial and suppression of the Knights Templar it is first necessary to look at one of the major figures in those events. Philip IV “the Fair” of France is one of the most interesting characters of the time. He rarely gave speeches in public or issued personal documents, instead he tended to rely on his advisors.⁷⁵ This sometimes gave cause for people to label him a non-entity and to blame his advisors to all of his strict policies. This culminated in Bishop Bernard of Saissant who made a comment about Philip in which he compared him to an owl: “the

⁷² Steven Runciman A History of the Crusades Volume III: The Kingdom of Acre Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press 1954 p. 208

⁷³ Barber The Trial of the Templars p. 13

⁷⁴ Ibn ‘Abd Az-Zahir “Qalawūn’s Treaty with the Templars at Tortosa” Arab Historians of the Crusades Ed. Francesco Gabrieli; Los Angeles, California: University of California Press 1978 p. 323

⁷⁵ Joseph R. Strayer The Reign of Philip the Fair Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University press 1980 p. X

Handsomest of birds which is worth absolutely nothing ... such is our king of France, who is the handsomest man in the world and who can do nothing except to stare at men.”⁷⁶ The result of this was that Bernard was required to appear before the king escorted by an armed guard and the confiscation of all of his possessions by the crown.⁷⁷ One of his ministers, William of Nogaret described Philip as; “...of the race of kings of France who all, since the time of King Pepin, have been religious, fervent champions of the faith, vigorous defenders of the Holy Mother Church...he never gets angry, he hates no one; he loves everybody.”⁷⁸ Quite different to always allowing his ministers to speak for him, Philip was always aware of his rights as the king of France and constantly strove to enhance these rights and improve his prestige. This would be seen in his attempts to monies needed for his campaigns and to assert his rights over those of the Church. “Philip had an acute, probably too acute, sense of his royal dignity. He would not make stirring speeches to crowds or engage in debates with emissaries of popes and kings, but he was determined to preserve his rights and to secure the acknowledgement of his sovereignty throughout the realm.”⁷⁹ While he may have been extremely pious and godly man, this was not on account of his unflinching belief in the Church or its hierarchy. “He believed himself charged with a divine mission, inspired by God. This king appears to have been not an unprincipled weakling, but rather a fanatic believer in the dogma of the supreme authority of the kings of France.”⁸⁰ To Philip his secular authority was just as important to him as his religion and at times was his religion. As such he was studious in upholding his

⁷⁶ Quoted in Strayer p. 3

⁷⁷ Strayer pp. 264-267

⁷⁸ Quoted in Charles Victor Langlois “Philip the Fair: The Unknown King” Philip the Fair and Boniface VIII: State vs. Papacy Ed. Charles T. Wood New York, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc. 1967 p. 85

⁷⁹ Strayer p. X

⁸⁰ Robert Fawtier “Philip the Fair: A Worshipper of Monarchical Authority” Philip the Fair and Boniface VIII: State vs. Papacy Ed. Charles T. Wood New York, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc. 1967 p.90

authority at all costs and did so through a legal and governmental system that was common at the time in order to fight for the cause that he believed in. “The king of France, worshiper of the monarchical religion, worshiper of the Christian religion, could tolerate no attack on either one. The dogma of the first was furnished him by his counsellors, legists nourished on the maxims of Roman law for whom the will of the prince was law, and a law almost semidivine.”⁸¹

Philip IV inherited the financial system of his father and grandfather whereby taxes came in from the lease of lands, tolls, market dues and the profit of justice. In order to obtain the exact amounts that he was owed and that he received that amount Philip hired baillis and seneschals whose objective was to administer the various areas assigned to them, called a bailliage or a sénéchaussée, and to prepare reports of revenues on a yearly basis.⁸² On the administrative side Philip had the wages of his officials to pay as well as the upkeep of his holdings and the general cost associated with travel and running the kingdom.⁸³ Once his money was accounted for and his liabilities had been paid Philip needed somewhere to store his money. The logical place to store it was at the Temple in Paris where the Templars had experience in handling finances and kept a careful record of the deposits made to them and regularly balanced the accounts on the dates of major religious holidays of Christianity such as Candlemas, Michaelmas and Easter.⁸⁴

The problem for Philip was that; “He was living within his means, but he was not living exclusively on income from the domain.”⁸⁵ Due to his Crusade in Aragon, Philip received a tenth from the Church that amounted to 260,000lt a year that was a regular income until 1292. Without this grant from the Church Philip would have

⁸¹ Fawtier pp. 89-90

⁸² Strayer p. 142

⁸³ Strayer p. 143

⁸⁴ Strayer pp. 143-144

⁸⁵ Strayer p. 147

been running a steady deficit and he saw the need for a new financial system after 1292 that would enable him to set up his own treasury rather than using the Temple, to whom he owed money.⁸⁶ He began to appoint officials who specialised in finance to look into his revenues and took on two new advisors, named Biche and Mouche, who were finance experts. In 1292 he imposed a sales tax on towns throughout France and expelled the Jews from his domains so that he would be better able to take an income from money lending. In addition he doubled property taxes on the laity and requested that the French Church should renew and increase its grant to him. Pope Boniface VIII issued the bull *Clericis laicos* in which he denounced Philip IV's request, however Philip managed to pressure the Pope into withdrawing his bull and received a renewed double tenth from the clergy in 1298.⁸⁷ Philip also attempted to obtain money through loans from creditors as well as from his officials. In 1292 he had taken out "200,000lt from Biche, Mouche, and other Italians, 630,000lt from rich burghers, and 50,000lt from prelates and royal officials."⁸⁸ In 1296 Philip tried another way to get hold of money. He debased and overvalued the currency so that by the end of the year he had already accumulated an extra 101,435lt because, despite the reduced amount of silver in the coinage, he was able to maintain wages at their previous rate.⁸⁹ However, despite Philip's different attempts to get a hold of money he was still generally short of what he needed and constantly needed to rely on the Church. "There were no satisfactory substitutes for general taxation. One-shot operations, such as the expulsion of the Jews or the attack on the Temple, gave only temporary relief."⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Strayer p. 147

⁸⁷ Strayer pp. 148-149

⁸⁸ Strayer p. 150

⁸⁹ Strayer p. 152

⁹⁰ Strayer p. 154

On Christmas Day 1294 the Cardinals of Rome elected a new Pope to replace Celestine V who had abdicated on 13th December. They elected an Italian Cardinal named Benedict Caetani who became Boniface VIII upon his inauguration. He was elected because of Italian fears that under Celestine V the papacy seemed to be too much under the control of the Angevin Kings of France. However the Colonna family, several of them were Cardinals, would come to regret their choice.⁹¹ “Boniface’s nepotism was more flagrant than that of any other pope of his age, because he started as a member of a middling Campagna family; to make such a family into great magnates during one pontificate the most drastic measures were necessary, which could not easily be concealed.”⁹² Boniface regularly gave preference to his family in terms of land and wealth as well as special privileges. The traditional Roman Colonna family were not happy with this and would accuse the pope of attempting to cause grievances within their family. On 10th May 1297 Boniface issued the papal bull *excelso throno* which in effect excommunicated all of the Colonna cardinals. In addition he also called for a crusade against the Colonna family.⁹³ Philip IV would be able to use this conflict to further his own desires in putting pressure on Boniface VIII.

Philip IV’s policy regarding the Church generally coincided with his financial needs. He wanted to be able to call on the French clergy to help with the defence of the realm in both financial and personnel aspects. In addition he wanted to consolidate the courts so that he would have some say over both secular and ecclesiastical jurisdictions. He also wished to reform the clerics of the Church who had abused their personal privileges and to maintain some control over land that was donated to the

⁹¹ Peter Partner The Lands of St. Peter Los Angeles, California: University of California Press 1972 pp. 286-287

⁹² Partner The Lands of St. Peter p. 287

⁹³ Partner The Lands of St. Peter pp. 288-289

Church.⁹⁴ However, the basis for his struggles with the Church stemmed from whether or not he had jurisdiction over various regions that he had recently acquired, such as Chartrés and Poitiers. The bishops of these provinces claimed that, because Philip IV had not held the land long and that they had never sworn allegiance to him, the Church had complete jurisdiction with those territories and as such the clergy there could not be brought before the king's court. Philip's response was: "no territory in the realm is exempt from the king's jurisdiction; all those in the realm who have rights of justice hold them from the king, directly or indirectly."⁹⁵

In 1296 Philip sent a request to the French clergy asking for grant after the war for Aquitaine in return for privileges that would be granted to the Church. Before the French clergy could respond, Pope Boniface VIII issued the papal bull *Clericis laicos* which forbade the clergy from making donations to secular governments. On 17th August 1296 Philip banned the export of war materials and money from France, hindering the papacy from transferring goods to Aragon and cementing a treaty. In response Boniface issued another bull, *Ineffabilis amor*, in which he denounced Philip IV and threatened to join forces with the enemies of France.⁹⁶ Despite being condemned by the pope, Philip had the government on his side; two papers were written, *Disputation inter clericum et militem* and *Antequam essent clerici*, in which the authors support the position of the king and recognised that he had the rights to suspend the transport of money and to make requests of the clergy. "The trouble, he says, is that the Church is following the wrong policy; it should be helping, not threatening, the king."⁹⁷ In 1303 the French army was defeated at Courtrai and Philip was in need of money to finance a war of vengeance. He turned to the French clergy

⁹⁴ Strayer p. 238

⁹⁵ Strayer p. 243

⁹⁶ Strayer pp. 251-252

⁹⁷ Strayer p. 253

and asked them for a grant in order to subsidise this new war. The response of the French clergy was to ask for a great number of concessions that would give them a say in the governance of Philip's realm. Philip gave up some rights regarding land acquired by the Church; however, he maintained his jurisdiction over the temporal activities of the clergy.⁹⁸ However, despite petty differences and disputes, Philip IV and Boniface VIII are still able to work together without the conflict between them escalating too much.

The event that drove them to open hostility occurred in the newly acquired Southern regions of France where both the crown and the Church held little sway. Throughout the preceding century, the area of Languedoc had been the seat of the Gnostic Albigensian heresy and had been in constant conflict with both the Church and the Christian rulers of Europe.⁹⁹ Both Philip and the pope were anxious to consolidate their hold on the region and when Bernard Saissant, the bishop of Pamiers, made his owl comment about Philip there was instant conflict over whether the laity had jurisdiction over the secular lives of the clergy. Philip had Bernard and all of his possessions seized and his ordered before the king accused of treason, but eventually released him. However, in response to this Boniface VIII issued the bull *Ausculta fili* in which he revoked all of Philip's privileges, including his grants, but stopped short of excommunication. However he did not chastise Philip specifically about Bernard of Saissant.¹⁰⁰ Philip had his minister, Pierre Flote, to fight against the pope's declaration and to summarize the version the version of the published throughout France so that it was toned down and more favourable to Philip. On 10th April 1302 Flote held a meeting with the various barons and town representatives

⁹⁸ Strayer p. 257

⁹⁹ Shirley, Janet *The Song of the Cathar Wars: A History of the Albigensian Crusade* Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing 1996 pp. 3-4

¹⁰⁰ Strayer p. 262-267

from throughout France. In this meeting he informed those gathered that: “Boniface says that the king is subject to him in temporal matters; he considers the king his vassal, as is provided by his summons of the French clergy to Rome to reform the kingdom. The king will redress legitimate grievances when and as he wishes; meanwhile, he asks your support.”¹⁰¹

The papal bull *Unum Sanctum* was issued on 18th November 1302 and clarified the accusations against Philip laid out in *Ausculta fili*. It restated the known principles of canon law and then gave the claim that “the Roman curia had final appellate jurisdiction in temporal affairs.”¹⁰² This bull represented Boniface’s final attempt to exert his authority over secular rulers and put pressure on Philip IV. However, on 12th March 1303 Philip’s minister Nogaret “accused the pope of having been wrongfully elected and of being guilty of heresy, simony, and other (as yet unspecified) crimes.”¹⁰³ As a result of this, Philip and his ministers aligned themselves with the Colonna family in Italy and others who felt hard done by the current pontificate and formulated a plan to remove Boniface from the throne of Peter. With the bull *Super Petri solio* Boniface finally excommunicated Philip IV and declared that he no longer held authority over his realm. Shortly thereafter in September 1303, Nogaret and several leading members of the Colonna family gained entrance to the papal residence at Anagni where Boniface was staying and took the pope hostage. Pope Boniface VIII was humiliated by this event and was sent into a state of shock from which he had not recovered when he died on 11th October 1303.¹⁰⁴ This, in effect, ended Philip’s major conflicts with the Church as the next two popes,

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Strayer p. 271 from a letter sent by the French clergy to the pope

¹⁰² Strayer p. 274

¹⁰³ Strayer p. 275

¹⁰⁴ Strayer pp. 275-279

Benedict XI and Clement V, would be more willing to accommodate Philip and other secular rulers in their mandates for the Church.

The Church was not the only group that Philip IV ‘the Fair’ of France controlled. In addition to his relationships with Christian rulers and organisation, Philip was also actively engaged in talks and alliances with non-Christian groups. There are two letters written to Philip by the ilkhans Arḡun and Öljeitü, 1289 and 1305 respectively, in which the terms of an alliance are ironed out.¹⁰⁵ Arḡun promises to help Philip in his fight with the Seljuk Turks and in fact promises that after they have conquered the land “nous vous donnerons Jérusalem.” (we will give you Jerusalem)¹⁰⁶ The letter of Öljeitü to Philip talks about the established connections between the two rulers and their families: “Vous tous, sultans du people franc, comment vous échapperait-il que, depuis les temps anciens, vous liant d’amitié avec notre bon arrière-grand-père, bon grand-père, bon et bon père frère aîné.” You, King of the Franks, how would it escape you that since ancient times, you have had a binding friendship with our good great grandfather, good grandfather, good father and good elder brother.¹⁰⁷ It goes on “Nous sommes arrives à un accord mutual, et depuis le pays des Chinois, où le soleil se lève, jusqu’à la mer de Talu, états se joignant, nous avons fait relier entre elles nos stations de poste.” We should arrive at a mutual agreement with China, where the Sun rises towards the Sea of Talu, and re-establish communications with them.¹⁰⁸ As these letters show, Philip was actively engaged in making deals with non-Christian peoples in order to pursue his own desires or those

¹⁰⁵ These letters were originally in the Mongolian spoken by the Ilkhan and translated into French by and published through the Harvard-Yenching Institute Scripta Mongolica Monograph Series I. The translations into English are mine.

¹⁰⁶ “Lettre d’Arḡun à Philippe le Bel” Les Lettres de 1289 et 1305 des ilkhan Arḡun et Öljeitü à Phillippe le Bel Ed. Antoine Mostaert and Francis Woodman Cleaves. Cambridge, Massachusett: Harvard University Press 1962 p. 17

¹⁰⁷ “Lettre d’Öljeitü à Philippe le Bel” Les Lettres de 1289 et 1305 des ilkhan Arḡun et Öljeitü à Phillippe le Bel Ed. Antoine Mostaert and Francis Woodman Cleaves. Cambridge, Massachusett: Harvard University Press 1962 p. 56

¹⁰⁸ “Lettre d’Öljeitü à Phillippe le Bel”

of Christendom in general since his deal may have been able to restore Jerusalem to Christian control. Interestingly, one of the accusations against the Templars would be collusion with and coming to alliances with the enemies of Christ.

Trial

“Since the Master of the knights of the Temple, and with him several preceptors of the same Order from your kingdom and others, having heard, so they said, how their reputation has suffered repeatedly at your hands in the eyes of us and some other temporal lords in relation to the already mentioned deed, have sought with great resistance, not just once, but on several occasions that we seek out the truth of the accusations laid against them (unjustly as they said); if they were to be found innocent, as they claimed, we should absolve them, but if they were to be found guilty, which they believed not to be the case, we should condemn them.”¹⁰⁹ Such begins the darkest period for the Templar Knights when Pope Clement V gave his approval for Philip IV of France to arrest the Templars and to begin an investigation of the Order, which was not to survive innocent or not. During the reign of Clement V there was a movement towards a new crusade in order to regain control of the Holy Land. The military orders had been criticised since the loss of Outremer and many did not wish to see the groups that had lost the land in the first place lead the way, especially with the Templars and the rumours about some of their activities. As such Clement V had proposed the idea of merging the Templars with the Hospitallers.¹¹⁰ However, Jacques de Molay, the Master of the Templars rejected this idea saying that “...it seems to me that it would not be honourable to unite such ancient Orders that have achieved such positive results in the Holy Land and elsewhere, since it is to be

¹⁰⁹ “Letter of Clement V to Philip IV (24th August 1307) The Templars: Selected Sources Trans. Malcolm Barber, Keith Bate. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press 2002 p. 243

¹¹⁰ Barber The Trial of the Templars pp. 14-16

feared that the opposite of what they have achieved so far may then occur, as innovation rarely or never fails to produce grave dangers.”¹¹¹ As such, Molay believed that the opinion towards the Templars was, in general, favourable and did not see a reason for them to change their ways. However he failed to take into account those such as Pierre Dubois who believed that “it will be expedient to destroy the Order of the Templars completely, and for the needs of justice to annihilate it totally.”¹¹²

At dawn on Friday 13th October 1307, Philip’s order to have all Templars arrested went into affect. Throughout France almost every Templar was arrested and had to face the charges laid against them by both the government and the Roman Catholic Church. Though there are questions about whether Philip was acting for the Church as “Philip’s claim to have consulted the pope concealed the fact that Clement had not been asked or even advised about the matter of the actual arrests.”¹¹³ Also, the fact that Clement V, in 1308, claimed that he did not believe the accusations against the Templars suggests questions about the intensity with which the French government was arrest and investigating the Templars.¹¹⁴ The *Articles of Accusation* against the Templars from 12th August 1308 accuse them of various heresies against Christ and God himself. For example, they are accused of believing that; “Christ crucified, is not the true God.” Instead they viewed him as a “false prophet.” As a result of this, they are accused of spitting and trampling upon the cross, especially around Easter in order to show their contempt of “Christ and the orthodox faith.” They are also accused of sodomy and in proper conduct. In place of Christ they are supposed to have “adored a certain cat” as well as worshipping idols and human

¹¹¹ “The reply of James of Molay to Pope Clement V concerning the proposal the Orders of the Temple and the Hospital” *The Templars:Selected Sources* Trans. Malcolm Barber, Keith Bate. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press 2002 p. 235

¹¹² Pierre Dubois “De Recuperatione Tere Sancte” Quoted in: Barber *The Trial of the Templars* p. 16

¹¹³ Barber *The Trial of the Templars* p. 47

¹¹⁴ Barber *The Trial of the Templars* p. 48

heads.¹¹⁵ In addition to these charges of heresy, the Templars also faced secular complaints against them. “Item, that it was authorised by them [the Templars] that they should procure increase and profit to the said Order in whatever way they could by legal or illegal means. Item, that it was not reckoned a sin to commit perjury on this account.”¹¹⁶ These accusations were drawn up as the result of various witnesses who claimed to have been in the order and to have seen the crimes firsthand. “The first witness to appear, the Templar priest Jean de Folliaco, set the pace on his opening day by affirming that during his reception ceremony he had been threatened with harsh imprisonment if he refused to deny Christ. In fact – as he tells us in his testimony – he was a recent recruit, having been received into the Order in the Paris Temple three years earlier by the treasurer. He is also thought to be one of the spies infiltrated in the Order by Philip the Fair.”¹¹⁷ While this comment is interesting in itself, it is not certain that Philip planted spies to give false evidence, it is also possible that Philip’s “most cruel torture had overcome all resistance.”¹¹⁸

However, not all evidence against the Templars came from new recruits who would have known little about the inner workings of the order. Senior members of the Order, including de Molay, would testify that they had denied Christ and the cross against their will but all generally completely denied the accusations of sodomy.¹¹⁹ While these are the statements, the factuality of them can be countered by the fact that those Templars that were arrested did receive torture prior to their dispositions in court. “It is not difficult to imagine the fear and panic of the victims, many of whom

¹¹⁵ “The Articles of Accusation” (12th August 1308) Appendix A Barber The Trial of the Templars pp. 248-252

¹¹⁶ “The Articles of Accusation”

¹¹⁷ Edward Burman Supremely Abominable Crimes: The Trial of the Knights Templar London, England: Allison and Busby 1994 p. 62

¹¹⁸ G. Mollat The Popes at Avignon Tans. Janet Love Edinburgh, Scotland: Thomas Nelson and Sons 1963 p. 234

¹¹⁹ “Depositions of the Templars at Paris” The Templars: Selected Sources Trans. Malcolm Barber, Keith Bate. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press 2002 pp. 251-256

had been wrenched from quiet, rural preceptories, and pitched into harsh captivity.”¹²⁰ Not all of the Templars automatically confessed to their supposed crimes. Four Templars denied these allegations right to the end while Raimbaud de Caron, the Preceptor of Cyprus “at first claimed that he had never heard or known anything bad or shameful against the Order, but on a second appearance, presumably after torture, made a full confession.”¹²¹ As such, Philip was busy working to get the evidence that he needed in order to have the Order disbanded so that he would be able to take control of their lands.

However, Clement V would not allow Philip IV to get all of his demands. He saw Philip’s actions as an attack on the papacy and, while sympathetic to the Order, finally drew a line in front of Philip’s movements against the Throne of St. Peter. In order to do this he was willing to concede Philip’s accusations against the Templars because he had other more pressing interests on his mind and he was “fully prepared to sacrifice the Order for these greater objectives with the consequence that from this time it became little more than a pawn in the continuing conflict between pope and monarch.”¹²² On 22nd November 1307 he issued the bull *Pastoralis praeeminentia*, in which he announced his intention of taking charge of the trial against the Templars. He ordered that Templar property all over Christendom be seized so that he could order a full inquisition into their activities. Clement ordered that a hearing should be convened at Clermont between the 4th and 10th of June 1309 during which time the depositions of the Templars would be heard on a diocesan level. During this inquiry sixty nine Templars were heard with forty confessing to the accusations and twenty

¹²⁰ Barber [The Trial of the Templars](#) p. 53

¹²¹ Barber [The Trial of the Templars](#) p. 55

¹²² Barber [The Trial of the Templars](#) p. 73

nine denying them.¹²³ In addition to this, Clement had his French clergy set up a commission in Paris that lasted from November 1309 until June 1311. During this time they again took the deposition of Jaques de Molay on two occasions. On the first occasion in which he stated that “he thought it difficult for him to be able to mount a fitting defence, since he was the prisoner of the lords pope and king, possessing nothing beyond what was granted him, not even four denarii to spend on the said defence or on other things.”¹²⁴ On the second, his response to the accusation was that “he believed fully in one God and in the Trinity of persons and in other things pertaining to the Catholic faith, and that there was one God and one religion and one baptism and one Church, and when the soul was separated from the body then it became clear who was good and who was bad, and each of us would know the truth about what is being done at the moment.”¹²⁵ This defiance of his previous confession to the ministers at the French trial seems to challenge the factuality of Philip’s charges or at the very least recommends the need for more in depth look at the specific accusations against the Order in general as well as its many brothers as Molay’s request for a defence shows. However, “a defender could only be ‘for the purpose of defending the errors’. The Church must not delay by proceeding through judicial means in these circumstances, but should proceed by way of provision, and peremptorily cast out the Order because it is in mortal danger to the body of the faithful.”¹²⁶ As such, the arguments of Philip were recognised as valid and the defence of the Order was over.

¹²³ “Episcopal Inquiry at Clermont” (4th – 10th June 1309) The Templars: Selected Sources Trans. Malcolm Barber, Keith Bate. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press 2002 pp. 272 -286

¹²⁴ “Proceedings of the Papal Commission at Paris” (November 1309 to June 1311) The Templars: Selected Sources Trans. Malcolm Barber, Keith Bate. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press 2002 p. 287

¹²⁵ “Proceedings of the Papal Commission at Paris” p. 287

¹²⁶ Barber The Trial of the Templars p. 152

After this the Order was found guilty and those Templars who went back on their initial confessions under torture were considered relapsed heretics to be burned at the stake. On 22nd March 1312 issued *Vox in excelso* which officially suppressed the Templar Order. “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.”¹²⁷ With the disbandment of the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, Clement decreed that their property “should become forever that of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, of the Hospital itself and of our beloved sons the master and brothers of the Hospital, in the name of the Hospital and Order of these same men who as athletes of the Lord expose themselves to the danger of death for the defence of the faith, bearing heavy and perilous losses in lands overseas.”¹²⁸ The arguments of Philip put Clement the V on the defensive and represented a threat to his power. As such he was in no position to defend the Templars as Philip pursued his goal of obtaining their wealth in order to bolster his economy through his accusations against them.

Conclusion

Since their inception, the Knights Templar had been one of the more prominent and influential organisations active during the crusading period. Their economic and political growth had been founded upon the crusading ideal in which the cross was taken up by those who were willing to fight for Christ against his

¹²⁷ “Papal Bull, “Vox in excelso” (22 March 1312) *The Templars:Selected Sources* Trans. Malcolm Barber, Keith Bate. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press 2002 p. 318

¹²⁸ “Papal Bull, “Ad providam” *The Templars:Selected Sources* Trans. Malcolm Barber, Keith Bate. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press 2002 p. 320

enemies and in return receive wealth in this life and eternal salvation afterwards. However, as the flow of Christian victories stagnated, the belief Christians in the Templar cause also began to ebb away. After the catastrophe at the Horns of Hattin on 4th July 1187 and the loss of the True Cross as well as a mounting tide of Islamic victory, the Templars and the other military orders came in for criticism over their conduct and motives and their place beyond the reach of others began to erode. After the loss of Acre, the last bastion of Outremer, in 1291, the Templars no longer had an established base for their political and economic power. As such, they would be vulnerable to the predations of Philip IV when he needed money and was attempting to establish his authority over the Church. While still in possession of great wealth they were no longer in the favoured position that they had endured in their earlier years. As such, there were few who would be rushing to save them when they were under attack.

“The Temple was less enterprising and less fortunate. It had always aroused more enmity than the Hospital. It was wealthier. It had long been the chief banker and money-lender in the East, successful at a profession which does not inspire affection. Its policy had always been notoriously selfish and irresponsible. Gallantly though its knights had always fought in times of war, their financial activities had brought them into close contact with the Moslems. Many of them had Moslem friends and took an interest in Moslem religion and learning. There were rumours that behind its castle walls the Order studied a strange esoteric philosophy and indulged in ceremonies that were tainted with heresy. There were said to be initiation rites that were both blasphemous and indecent; and there were whispers of orgies for the practice of unnatural vices. It would be unwise to dismiss these rumours as the unfounded invention of the enemies. There was probably just enough substance in them to suggest the line the line along which the order could be most convincingly attacked.”¹²⁹

The accusations against the Knights Templar regarding lack of Christian religious zeal show that the Order was distant from its stated goal of constant warfare against the enemies of Christ, the Moslems, and was actively engaged in trade and communications with non-Christian Eastern peoples. While there may be some truth in the accusations, the Templars were not the only organisation that engaged in

¹²⁹ Runciman pp. 435-436

friendly relations with non-Christians or had lost their crusading zeal. Secular rulers, such as Philip IV himself, routinely conducted talks and made treaties with those outside of Christendom. In the end, “whatever Philip may have convinced himself about the extent of their alleged depravity, there can be no doubt that a desire to control their lands and banking deposits was a central reason for their arrest.”¹³⁰ As such, despite whatever internal factors and problems that the Knights Templar may have been experiencing at the time, there can be no doubt that the actions taken by Philip IV of France in order to attempt to satisfy his political and economic needs brought about the fall of the Templar Order.

¹³⁰ Malcolm Barber The Two Cities: Medieval Europe, 1050 – 1320 London, England: Routledge 1992 p. 302

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