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INTRODUCTION

The Templars were a military religious Order, founded in the Holy Land in 1119. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries they acquired extensive property both in the crusader states in Palestine and Syria and in the west, especially in France, and they were granted far-reaching ecclesiastical and jurisdictional privileges both by the popes to whom they were immediately responsible, and by the secular monarchs in whose lands their members resided. They also functioned as bankers on a large scale, a position facilitated by the international nature of their organisation. But most of all they bore a large share of the responsibility for the military defence of the crusader states in the east, to which they owed their origin and on account of which they had become so famous and powerful. However, in 1291, the Christian settlers of the east were driven out of Palestine by the Mameluks of Egypt, and the Templars were cut adrift from the main purpose of their existence.

Suddenly, in the early hours of Friday 13 October 1307, the brothers of this Order residing in France were arrested by the officials of King Philip IV in the name of the Inquisition, and their property was taken over by royal representatives. They were charged with serious heresies encompassing the denial of Christ and spitting on the crucifix, indecent kissing and homosexuality, and idol worship, carried on in secret receptions and chapter meetings of the Order. In October and November, the captured Templars, including Jacques de Molay, the Grand Master, and Hugues de Pairaud, the Visitor, almost unanimously confessed their guilt. Torture was freely used upon many of the prisoners. Molay then repeated his confession before a public assembly of theologians from the University of Paris. For his part King Philip wrote to the other monarchs of Christendom urging them to follow his lead and to arrest the Templars in their own lands, for the confessions had proved them to be manifest heretics.

The reigning pope, Clement V, at first saw the arrests as a direct affront to his authority, for the Templars were responsible to the papacy, and although, the previous summer, there had been discussions between the pope and the king concerning the condition of the Order, Clement

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had not actually authorised the arrests. However, after his initial anger, he was forced to accept the situation and, instead of resisting, endeavoured to put himself in charge. On 22 November 1307 he issued the bull *Pastoralis praeeminentiae*, which ordered all the monarchs of Christendom to arrest the Templars and sequester their lands in the name of the papacy. This bull initiated proceedings in England, Iberia, Germany, Italy and Cyprus. Two cardinals were then sent to Paris to interview the leaders of the Order personally. But, once in front of the papal representatives, Molay and Pairaud revoked their confessions and urged the rest of the Templars to do the same.

By now the pope had become highly suspicious of the whole affair and, early in 1308, he suspended the inquisitorial proceedings. Philip IV and his ministers were obliged to spend the next six months in an attempt to force the pope to reopen the trial, both by the marshalling of public and theological opinion in France, and by the implicit threat of physical violence against the pope himself. This campaign culminated in a meeting between the pope and the king at Poitiers in May and June of 1308, in which, after much debate, the pope finally agreed to set up two kinds of inquiry: one by a papal commission into the Order itself, and another consisting of a series of provincial councils, held at diocesan level, to investigate the guilt or innocence of individual Templars. Furthermore, a general council of the Church was arranged, to be held at Vienne in October 1310, to make a final decision in the matter. Meanwhile, three cardinals were sent to Chinon to hear the depositions of the leaders of the Order who were imprisoned there, only to find that they had reverted to their original confessions.

The episcopal inquiries, which were largely dominated by bishops closely associated with the French monarchy, seem to have begun work in 1309, and it appears that in most cases the Templars repeated their confessions, once again under pressure from extensive torture. The papal commission investigating the Order as a whole did not begin its sittings until November 1309. Initially it appeared that the familiar pattern of confessions would be followed, but at first falteringly and then with gathering momentum, the brothers, led by two able Templar priests, Pierre de Bologna and Renaud de Provins, began to mount a defence of their Order and their way of life before the commission. By early May 1310 almost six hundred Templars had agreed to defend the Order, denying the validity of previous confessions whether made before the inquisitors in 1307 or the bishops in 1309. Pope Clement, seeing that no immediate end to the proceedings seemed in prospect, postponed the Council of Vienne for a year until October 1311. It was to crush this increasingly confident Templar defence that Philip IV took drastic action. The Archbishop of Sens, a royal nominee, reopened his episcopal inquiry

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against individual Templars within his diocese and, finding fifty-four of them guilty of being relapsed heretics, handed them over to the secular authorities. On 12 May 1310 the fifty-four Templars were burnt at the stake in a field outside Paris. Of the two leading defenders, Pierre de Bologna mysteriously disappeared, and Renaud de Provins was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment by the Council of Sens. With the exception of a few brave individuals, the burnings effectively silenced the defence, and many Templars returned to their confessions. The hearings of the papal commission eventually petered out in June 1311.

In the summer of 1311 the pope collected together the evidence sent from France, as well as the material slowly coming in from the other countries where proceedings had taken place. In essence only in France and in those regions under French domination or influence were there substantial confessions from Templars. In October the Council of Vienne at last opened, and the pope pressed for the suppression (although not the condemnation) of the Order on the grounds that it was now too defamed to carry on. Resistance among the fathers at the council was however considerable, and the pope, pressed by the military presence of the King of France, only achieved his will by imposing silence on the council to be broken only under pain of excommunication. The bull *Vox in excelso* of 22 March 1312 suppressed the Order, and *Ad providam* of 2 May granted its property to the other great Military Order, the Hospital. Soon after, Philip IV extracted a huge sum of money from the Hospitallers in compensation for his costs in bringing the Templars to trial. As for the individual Templars, in some cases they had to submit to heavy penances including perpetual imprisonment, and in others, where they had admitted nothing, they were sent to monasteries of other Orders to spin out the rest of their lives. The leaders eventually came before the papal representatives on 18 March 1314 and were sentenced to perpetual imprisonment. Hugues de Pairaud and Geoffroi de Gonneville, the Preceptor of Aquitaine, accepted their fate in silence, but Jacques de Molay and Geoffroi de Charney, the Preceptor of Normandy, loudly protested their innocence and asserted that the Order was pure and holy. At once, the king ordered that they be condemned as relapsed heretics and, on the same evening, they were burnt at the stake on the Ile des Javiaux in the Seine.

The aim of this book is to trace in detail the course of these events, to examine the motivation of the chief participants, and to assess the extent to which the charges brought against the Order were justified.

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I
THE PARTICIPANTS

THE ORDER OF THE TEMPLE

The great period of crusading endeavour spanned the two centuries between 1095 and 1291, the high middle ages of thrusting population growth, great economic expansion, dynamic social change, political consolidation and blossoming cultural achievement. Men certainly still talked of undertaking a crusade as late as the sixteenth century, but it was during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that it existed as a vital and living concept which touched the lives of almost everybody in western Christendom. During this time the Christians of the west underwent a whole range of reactions towards this most emotive of rallying cries, from the exaltation and excitement of the capture of Jerusalem by the First Crusade to the growing bitterness and disillusion of the thirteenth century when so many crusading efforts ended in defeat and failure. The Military Order of the Knights of the Temple of Solomon was essentially a creation of these two centuries, shaped and formed by the early crusading enthusiasm which carried it to great heights of fame, wealth and power, but finally pulled down, humiliated and suppressed as the crusading ideal became muddied and twisted by misuse and constant failure.

In the years that followed the capture of Jerusalem in 1099, the Franks gradually consolidated their territories, but they were always short of men, for many of the original crusaders returned to the west, while the crusader states never attracted sufficient new settlers to defend their lands adequately. As a result, pilgrims, who came each year to visit the shrines of Palestine, were often attacked by brigands and Moslem raiders, for the crusaders were unable to spare men to protect them.[1] It was this situation which led to the foundation of the Order of the Temple. Its modest beginnings in 1119 are described by William, Archbishop of Tyre:

> In the same year, certain noble men of knightly rank, devoted to God, religious and God-fearing, professed the wish to live in chastity, obedience and without property in perpetuity, binding themselves in the hands of the lord patriarch to the service of Christ in the manner of regular canons. Among these, the first and most important were the venerable men, Hugues de Payns and Godefroi de Saint-Omer. Since they

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did not have a church, nor a settled place to live, the king conceded a temporary dwelling to them in his palace, which he had below the Temple of the Lord, to the south side. The canons of the Temple of the Lord, under certain conditions, conceded a courtyard which they had near the same place, to be used for the functions of the Order. Moreover, the lord king [Baldwin II] with his nobles, as well as the lord patriarch with his prelates, gave to them certain benefices from their own demesnes, some in perpetuity, some on a temporary basis, from which they could be fed and clothed. The first element of their profession, enjoined on them for the remission of their sins by the lord patriarch and the other bishops, was 'that they should protect the roads and routes to the utmost of their ability against the ambushes of thieves and attackers, especially in regard to the safety of pilgrims'.[2]

They gathered about nine companions, as well as gaining the support of important visiting crusaders like Hugh, Count of Champagne, and Fulk V, Count of Anjou, but they did not achieve wider fame until the Council of Troyes in 1129, which gave the Templars official recognition and commissioned Bernard of Clairvaux to draw up a Rule systematising their early observances.[3]

The Rule contains seventy-two articles which created the Order's basic structure. There were initially two main classes: knights and sergeants or serving brothers. Entrants had to be old enough to bear arms, so there were no oblates as in more conventional Orders.[4] There were to be no associated houses for women, for 'it is very dangerous to join sisters, since the ancient enemy has driven many from the right path to Paradise by the society of women'.[5] The total rejection of women was symbolised by white. 'To all professed knights both in winter and summer we concede white vestments, if they can be obtained, that those who have placed behind them the dark life should know themselves to be united to their Creator in purity and whiteness. What is whiteness but perfect chastity? Chastity is the security of the conscience and the health of the body.'[6] The sergeants or serving brothers wore a black or brown mantle, reflecting their more lowly social station.[7] Married brothers were allowed affiliation to the Order, but they were not permitted to wear the white habit. At their death their property was left to the brethren, and the wife was to receive a portion for her maintenance. However, she must leave the property itself, since brothers who had 'promised chastity to God' should not remain in the same house as women.[8] Since the Templars were not ordained, they at first employed outside priests as chaplains, but during the twelfth century, a separate class of brother priests was formed.[9] Like other great monastic Orders, the Temple was allowed property: 'Therefore, justly we judge, since you are called knights of the Temple. . .that you should have houses, lands and retainers and possess serfs, and justly rule them, and the customary service ought to be specially rendered to you.'[10]

The Templars who had been present at the Council of Troyes had pre-

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pared the way with an energetic and successful recruiting campaign in France and England, most of them, like Godefroi de Saint-Omer, leaving for their homelands with this aim in mind. Hugues de Payns himself travelled through Champagne, Anjou, Normandy and Flanders, and he visited England and Scotland.[11] Apart from new recruits, the Order also began to receive pious grants in the form of land, grants which established for it a solid economic foundation in the west, especially in France, and confirmed the initial character of the Order as being primarily French. However, within a comparatively short time the idea of a Military Order also established itself in Languedoc and in the Iberian peninsula, where the proximity of the Moslem enemy kept the crusading movement in the forefront of people's minds. The potency of this ideal of 'fighting monks' in the twelfth century is illustrated by the addition of military functions to the Order of the Hospital, which had been established in the east as a charitable foundation since at least the 1070s,[12] and the creation of new Orders in imitation, in Spain and Portugal, where between 1164 and 1170, the Orders of Calatrava, Santiago and Alcántara were established, while in 1198, the Order of the Teutonic Knights was officially confirmed by Pope Innocent III.

The expansion of the Temple was given immense impetus by its close association with Bernard of Clairvaux. In the early 1130s he responded to a request of Hugues de Payns by writing a tract justifying the concept of a fighting monk. In a sense, his purpose in writing 'In Praise of the New Knighthood' was to sell the idea of what he calls 'a new type of knighthood' to western Christendom.[13] The Templar was 'a fearless knight, safe from all sides, who, as the body is covered with iron, so is the soul by the defence of the faith. Without doubt, fortified by both arms, he fears neither demon nor man. Nor indeed is he afraid of death, he who had desired death.' Motivation was what mattered. 'If the cause of the fighting is good, the consequence of the fighting cannot be evil, just as the end will not be judged good when the cause is not good, and it has arisen from an unjust intention.' This sharp contrast could be demonstrated by looking at the secular knights of the time, engaged in their vexatious wars. 'You cover your horses with silks, and I do not know what hanging rags cover your breastplates; you paint your banners, shields and saddles; you decorate your bridles and spurs all over with gold and silver and precious stones, and with such pomp you hasten to death with shameful fury and impudent foolishness. Are these knightly insignia, or are they rather ornaments for women?' The causes of their wars were trivial and frivolous, moved by the irrationality of temper or the appetite for vain glory, or the desire for earthly possessions. The Templars did not adorn themselves, but took no heed of their appearance, for they were often unwashed, their

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hair covered with dust, and their faces burnt by the sun. They did not carry swords without reason, for their purpose was to smite evil-doers, for when they killed a malefactor, 'it is not homicide, but malicide'. Because their motive was pure, they knew no fear, throwing themselves upon their enemies, whatever the odds, as if these enemies were so many sheep.

St Bernard characteristically catches the mental attitudes and mood of the first half of the twelfth century. Men with little education and no aptitude for the contemplative life of the more traditional Orders, men whose main skill was fighting, were attracted by the combination of frequent action and potential salvation which the Templars had to offer. The Templars embodied many of the deeply held beliefs and attitudes, indeed instincts, which had motivated men to undertake the risks of the First Crusade. In a sense, they were the living justification of the crusade, and while western Christians retained their faith in the righteousness of the crusades, they were eager to back the Military Orders with land and money, and even their own lives. But such success had its own built-in dangers. If Christians needed a personification of the crusade in the form of a tangible Order on which they could lavish support, they were also in equal need of a scapegoat on which they could concentrate their anger when the ideal of the crusade became tarnished. The Templars were irrevocably tied to the crusading movement, and their fortunes rose and fell with that movement.

The papacy too greeted the new Order with enthusiasm. Three bulls issued between 1139 and 1145 defined the position of the Order towards the papacy and the secular clergy. *Omne datum optimum* of 29 March 1139 approved the Templar Rule and took the Order and its houses under papal protection; it granted the Order free disposal of the spoils taken from the infidel, permitted a chaplain in each house, allowed oratories for the use of members and for burials, and gave the leaders the right to expel unworthy or useless members; it forbade the election of an outsider as Master, or the changing of the statutes, except with the consent of the Master and chapter, or homage to be exacted from members of the Order or tithes to be taken from the Order. *Milites Templi* of 9 January 1144 awarded indulgences to benefactors of the Temple and permitted the divine office to be celebrated in a region under interdict when the collectors of the Order were there. *Milicia Dei* of 7 April 1145 allowed the Order to build its own chapels and to bury its dead in their churchyards.[14]

The growth of the Military Orders was part of a wider monastic revival which found particular expression in the Carthusian and the Cistercian Orders. The First Crusade made an important contribution to the climate of religious enthusiasm, in which society as a whole

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participated, and helped to generate the right atmosphere for the expansion of these Orders. It is not surprising that eventually the crusades should produce Orders of their own. By the middle of the twelfth century their material success was very evident. The Temple acquired estates with their serfs, their animals, their mills, their wine-presses; they acquired moorlands with their sheep; they acquired liquid capital. Very soon the numbers of fighting knights were relatively small in relation to the large body of officials, bailiffs, craftsmen, servants and benefactors who had either joined the Order or become associated with it. The European estates of the Templars became a vast supply organisation for the crusade in the east, providing men and regular contributions called responsions. Very soon the Order also began to finance lay crusaders. The assumption of this banking role was natural, for monasteries had traditionally guarded valuables and been able to lend money. The Templars had the added advantage of owning numerous strongholds in the west and in the crusader states, in which cash, bonds and deeds could be stored, and when it was necessary to move the money armed men were available. During the Second Crusade, the Templars lent Louis VII the large sum of 30,000 *solidi*, and when Philip II left for crusade in 1190, he arranged that during his absence the receipts from the royal demesne should be deposited at the Templars' house in Paris.[15]

During the twelfth century the Templars therefore developed into an international corporation, administering estates and handling large sums of money belonging to the crowned heads and leading lords of Christendom. But most of all they had become identified with the defence of Outremer. In 1172, Theoderich, a pilgrim visiting Jerusalem, described this with naive awe. 'It is not easy for anyone to gain an idea of the power and wealth of the Templars – for they and the Hospitallers have taken possession of almost all the cities and villages with which Judaea was once enriched. . .and have built castles everywhere and filled them with garrisons, besides the very many and, indeed, numberless estates which they are known to possess in other lands.'[16] It seemed natural that, in that same year, the Angevin King Henry II should entrust to the care of the Templars money deposited in expiation for the murder of Becket, which was to pay for the support of two hundred knights in the Holy Land for a year. Again, in the king's testament of 1182, the Templars and the Hospitallers were granted 5,000 silver marks each, while the Grand Masters were to be the joint custodians of another 5,000 marks for the general defence of Jerusalem.[17]

The responsibilities of the Military Orders became even more extensive in the thirteenth century, for weak or absentee kings wielded little power, while after the mid-century the upper baronage of Outremer

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found it increasingly difficult to maintain the expensive castles needed for defence.[18] Only the Military Orders had resources great enough to fulfil this function adequately. In 1217-18, for instance, the Templars built the huge Pilgrim's Castle ('Athlith) on the coast between Haifa and Caesarea, and in 1240 began to rebuild Safed in Galilee.[19]

The Templars achieved equal fame as warriors; it was largely owing to the skill of the contingent of Templars which accompanied Louis VII on the Second Crusade in 1147-8 that he was able to reach the Holy Land at all.[20] Seventy years later, Jacques de Vitry, Bishop of Acre, could say of them: 'At the will and command of their leader, they proceed to battle, not in an impetuous or disorderly fashion, but prudently and with all caution, being the first to go forward, the last to retreat. . .which is why they became so dreaded by the enemies of the faith of Christ, that one used to pursue a thousand and two, ten thousand.'[21] The Moslems too appreciated their value to the Christian cause. Ibn al-Athir, who was a close observer of Saladin's career, described the Templars and the Hospitallers as 'the fiery heart of the Frankish forces'.[22] After the victory over the Franks at Hattin in 1187, the usually merciful Saladin ordered the decapitation of captured Templars and Hospitallers because they were 'more vigorous in the war than all the rest of the Franks' and he wished to deliver the people from their wickedness.[23]

The growth of the Order was reflected in the Rule. It seems that from about the 1140s the Rule was translated into French and new clauses were later added to cope with particular situations. The French Rule outlines the hierarchical structure of command with the Grand Master at its head and the Seneschal as his deputy. The Order's possessions were divided into provinces. Ten are mentioned in the Rule: Jerusalem, Tripoli, Antioch, France, England, Poitou, Anjou, Portugal, Apulia and Hungary. Each had its own Master and commander who headed a local hierarchy of commanders or preceptors of individual houses. During the thirteenth century a new post was created, second only to the Grand Master himself, that of Visitor of the Order, who was, for practical purposes, the commander of the Templar possessions in the west.[24] The Grand Master wielded immense power, for the brothers owed him absolute obedience. Most of the important decisions were taken in chapter-meetings, but it appears that the composition of the chapter was very largely at the discretion of the Grand Master, for only the Seneschal had the automatic right of attendance. At the death of a Grand Master a special chapter had to be held in which his successor was elected in accordance with detailed and complicated rules.[25]

The chapter-general held at Jerusalem dealt with weighty matters,

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but weekly chapter-meetings, which were compulsory for the brothers, were held in local preceptories. General business was dealt with at these chapters, and offenders were also disciplined in accordance with the penal enactments of the Rule. This often involved only minor penances, but more serious offences like simony, treason, heresy, sodomy or the revelation of secrets of the chapter were reserved for higher authority.[26] The weekly chapter was also empowered to admit postulants to the Order. If a majority of the brethren agreed, the candidate was brought into chapter, and, having confirmed his desire to join, was examined by two or three senior brothers. 'They should ask of him if he has a woman, wife or fiancée, and if he has ever made vow or promise to another Order; and if he has a debt to any man. . .which he cannot pay, and if he is healthy of body, if he has not any hidden malady, if he is anybody's serf.' The candidate was then brought before the Master or the presiding officer and admonished:

> Good brother, you ask a very great thing, for of our Order you only see the surface which is the outside. For the surface is that you see we have beautiful horses and harness and eat and drink well and have beautiful clothes, and it seems to you as if you would be much to your ease there. But you do not know the harsh commandments which are within: for it is a hard thing that you, who are master of yourself, should make yourself serf of another.

The candidate then vowed obedience, chastity and poverty, and to follow the good usage and customs of the house, and promised to strive to help conquer the Holy Land. He was then admitted to the Order, the mantle was placed on his shoulder, and with a psalm and prayers, each brother came forward and kissed him on the mouth.[27]

However, while a small band of ragged idealists can be absorbed into society without disruption, an Order which had grown as large as that of the Temple could not exist long before coming into conflict with other vested interests, especially when papal privilege, popular esteem and economic success began to encourage an independence of mind, even an arrogance. The papal privileges made the Temple independent of the local clergy and theoretically of the secular powers, a situation much resented by William of Tyre.

> When they had kept to their proper purpose for a long time, fulfilling their profession discreetly enough, they withdrew themselves from the lord patriarch of Jerusalem, from whom they had received the institution of their Order and first benefices, neglecting 'humility which is known to be the guardian of all the virtues, and indeed spontaneously sits in a place from which it cannot fall', and denying him the obedience which their predecessors had shown. To the churches of God they caused great vexation, taking from them their tithes and first-fruits, and disturbing them in their possessions without just cause.[28]

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