

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR AND THEIR ASSOCIATION TO FREEMASONRY

Origins of the Knights Templar

After Christian fighters captured Jerusalem during the First Crusade, groups of pilgrims from across Western Europe began visiting the Holy Land. Many were killed while crossing through Muslim-controlled territory during their journey. Around 1118, a French knight named Hugues de Payens founded a military and monastic order along with eight relatives and acquaintances, calling it the Poor Knights of the Temple of King Solomon (later known as the Knights Templar). With the support of Baldwin II, the king of Jerusalem, they set up headquarters on the sacred Temple Mount in Jerusalem and pledged to protect Christian visitors to the city and travelers throughout the Holy Land.

In 1129 at the Council of Troyes, the knights received the formal endorsement of the Catholic Church and support from Bernard of Clairvaux, a prominent abbot and spiritual leader within the church. New recruits and donations began pouring in from across Europe. While the Templars themselves took vows of poverty, the order began to accrue wealth and land. It was also around this time that the knights adopted an austere code of conduct and their signature style of dress: white habits emblazoned with a red cross.



The conflict between the French King and the Knights Templar

In the late 12th century, Muslim soldiers retook Jerusalem and turned the tide of the Crusades, forcing the Knights Templar to relocate several times. In the decades that followed, Europeans' support of military campaigns in the Holy Land began to dwindle and by 1303, the Knights had lost their foothold in the Muslim world and established a base of operations in Paris.

With the death of Pope Benedict XI in 1304, there was a year's interregnum occasioned by disputes between French and Italian cardinals. Raymond Bertrand de Got was elected Pope Clement V in June 1305; Bertrand was neither Italian nor a cardinal, and he was considered by many to be beholden to the French King, Phillip IV. The contemporary chronicler Giovanni Villani reported that Bertrand had bound himself to King Philip by a formal agreement made before his elevation to Pope. This report was further reinforced when Bertrand chose to hold his papal coronation in the city of Lyon, immediately elevated nine French clergy to cardinal, and later moved the entire seat of papal authority from Rome to Avignon. Further evidence is found in Clement's reversal of his predecessor's Papal Bull, [*Clericis Laicos*](#), which opened the way for the King of France to tax church properties.

Meanwhile, the French king had become greatly indebted in his attempts to finance his military campaigns against the English in Aquitaine. Phillip IV had borrowed huge sums of "money at interest" from the Jewish community, which he could not do from fellow Christians since this was considered the sin of usury and forbidden by the Church. Realizing that he could not repay this huge sum, he embarked on a nefarious scheme – and on 22 July 1306, he exiled the entire Jewish community from France, allowing them to take only what they could carry on their backs. He then confiscated all of their properties, monies, and holdings and immediately canceled his debt to them.

While this solved his immediate problem, it soon became apparent that he would need additional monies to continue his military campaigns. The King had had financial dealings with the Templars for a period of time and soon turned to this new source of revenue.

The early banking system of the Knights Templar

As previously mentioned, the Knights Templar had accumulated a great deal of wealth and land both during and after the Crusades. While individual Templars were bound by vows of poverty, the Order used these assets to establish an informal banking system in Medieval Europe. The roads at the time were fraught with danger, but a merchant could enter a Temple, exchange his hard currency for Templar Script and redeem the same with a Temple at his destination, thus eliminating the danger of robbery en route.

Thus King Phillip turned to this new source of revenue and had soon accrued a huge debt. As he had previously done with the merchants of Lombardy and the Jewish community, the French King Philip IV resolved to bring down the Order, since the Templars were beginning to request repayment and had denied the indebted ruler additional loans.

The Fall of the Knights Templar

Serious charges had been made several years prior by a discredited and ousted Templar against the Order, and with the Pope in his pocket, Phillip grabbed upon these charges to bring down the Templars. While almost all historians agree that these charges were false, this did not deter the King from taking this chance to erase his debt to them. On October 13, 1307, (Black Friday the 13th) scores of French Templars were arrested along with the Order's Grand Master, Jacques de Molay. Charged with a host of false offenses ranging from heresy, devil worship, fraud, and financial corruption, the men were brutally tortured; many, including de Molay, confessed under this barbaric duress. King Philip then cajoled Pope Clement V, to launch his own inquiry, bringing the full force of the dreaded Catholic Inquisition to bear. In 1310, dozens of Templars were burned at the stake in Paris for recanting their earlier confessions acquired under duress; Jacques de Molay would suffer the same punishment in 1314. Under pressure from Philip, Pope Clement dissolved the Knights Templar in 1312, although it is rumored that many escaped to other countries, especially England and Scotland.

The Knights Templar Curse

Thus on March 18th of 1314, Jacques de Molay, Templar Grand Master, and Geoffroi de Charney, Master of Normandy were burned at the stake, refusing all offers of pardon for retraction, and bearing their torment with a composure which won for them the reputation of martyrs among the people, who reverently collected their ashes as relics. It is reputed the last words spoken by Demolay were a curse of God's judgment on both the Pope and King Phillip for this travesty of injustice. Whether this is true or not, after a little over a month, Pope Clement V died of a disease thought to be lupus, and eight months later Philip IV, at the age of forty-six, died in a hunting accident.



Jacques De Molay



Templars at the Stake

The Knights Templar and Freemasonry

The story of de Molay's brave defiance of his inquisitors has been incorporated in various forms into Masonic lore; most notably in the form of the youth group for young men aged 12 to 21, sponsored by Freemasonry. Named after the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, [DeMolay International](#), also known as "The Order of DeMolay," was founded in Kansas City in 1919 by Freemason Frank S. Land.

In addition, the modern Masonic [Knights Templar](#) is an international philanthropic and chivalric order affiliated with Freemasonry. Unlike the initial degrees conferred in a Masonic Lodge, which only require a belief in a Supreme Being regardless of religious affiliation, the Knights Templar is one of several additional Masonic Orders in which membership is open only to Freemasons who promise to support the Christian religion.