

The (Not So) Poor Knights of the Temple

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The Knights Templar present historians with an interesting if murky subject. The literature devoted to this military-religious order, though usually quite well-researched, remains steeped in folklore. These legends include all manner of bizarre practices, and links to such divers groups as the infamous Cult of Assassins, the Merovingian dynasty, and the Freemasons.¹ However if we focus our attention on the historical Templars, we find a unique military order which achieved remarkable successes during its existence. These accomplishments included not only military victories, but the creation of an international supply network linking Latin Europe with the lands of Outremer. It allowed the Templars to take advantage of certain political, religious and especially economic realities created by the success of the First Crusade. The formation and evolution of this network, its function, and its makeup are the focus of this study.

The Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon rose quickly to power. In 1119, Hugh de Payens and eight other knights began protecting pilgrims on the treacherous roads of the Holy Land.² King Baldwin of Jerusalem welcomed these pious warrior-monks and granted them lavish quarters on the site of the Temple of Solomon.³ Despite this splendor, the new Order lived by the Rule of St. Augustine, binding them to the Church instead of secular authorities. The Templars toiled and fought in relative obscurity during their first years before receiving enthusiastic support from

¹Readers interested in this aspect of the subject should consult any of the secondary works cited hereafter.

²Peter Partner, *The Knights Templar and their Myth* (Rochester, Vermont, 1989), 3.

³*Ibid.*, 3-4.

the great religious leader, Bernard of Clairvaux. One of Bernard's greatest patrons was Hugh, Count of Champagne, a Templar who had granted the monk the land for his monastery.⁴

In 1128, after some correspondence with Bernard and other church dignitaries, a council met in Troyes to give the Templars official status.⁵ Bernard himself helped draw up the original Templar Rule, based on that of the Cistercian Order.⁶ This Rule combined "those who pray", the first medieval estate with "those who fight"; the second, to produce a religious order dedicated to protecting the faithful and fighting the infidel. Ideally it would confer on its followers harmony between sword and altar. The Templars would become "Knights of Christ."

Establishing the Means

The Council of Troyes coincided with an extensive charitable campaign in Western Europe. The Templars were well-placed to take advantage of the outflow of donations to the Church which occurred in the twelfth century. Within twenty years the Templars had established estates throughout Europe, and were funneling supplies, funds, and men to the Holy Land.

The success of this campaign is more easily understood when one recognizes the changing mentality of crusading Europe. Economically, Europe was in a stage of transition from gift to profit economy.⁷ Attitudes, especially among the nobility, tended to favor a system of reciprocal exchange similar to those documented by anthropologists among traditional societies.⁸ Kings, dukes, and counts showed their appreciation for a cause or person and demonstrated their own generosity by bestowing donations and presents. William Marshall, in the years when he lived by his sword (1160-1180), showered gifts freely upon fellow knights after successful tournaments, even though he was

⁴Stephen Howarth, *The Knights Templar* (New York, 1982), 49.

⁵Partner, *The Knights Templar and their Myth*, 5.

⁶*Ibid.*, 6.

⁷Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, New York, 1978), ch. 1.

⁸*Ibid.*

often in debt to others.⁹ Thus, the aristocratic ethos demanded frequent donation of estates and money without regard of economic return.

The Templars reputation and the cause they defended designated them as a prime target for such gift-giving. They were initially perceived as "poor knights" engaged in a very noble and holy endeavor, which helped to build their patrimony. Bernard embraced the Templars because unlike other knights, they were not barbarous pillagers living in excess, who would later seek absolution from the Church. High ranking nobles and churchmen responded positively to the Templar image as well, even if there was some apprehension about "fighting monks." Warriors saw the Order as a new and better path to salvation. They could take up the sword for Christ and continue as knights, instead of singing and writing in the monastery.

The very first grants preceded the Council of Troyes. Theobald, Count of Blois (also nephew and successor to the Templar Hugh, former Count of Champagne) granted the Order "a house, grange, and meadow, together with one tenement of one carucate, at Barbonne..., as well as conceding to his own vassals the right to make gifts from their own lands."¹⁰ Hugh de Paycens, Grand Master, gave up his own holdings to the Order, and campaigned for more grants. He received lands almost immediately from William Clito, Count of Flanders, as well as holdings in Anjou and Poitou.¹¹ Hugh campaigned in England as well, receiving several grants, including the original London Temple.¹² All of these initial gifts came in 1127-28 as Bernard and Hugh were seeking official recognition.

Early donors to the Order included some of the greatest lords in Christendom. Henry I and Stephen, Kings of England, made substantial gifts to the order, as did Eleanor of Aquitaine.¹³ Lesser European nobles embraced the Templars, and the Order soon established preceptories throughout the West. Perhaps the

⁹Georges Duby, *William Marshall: The Flower of Chivalry* (New York, 1985), 110-1.

¹⁰Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple* (Cambridge, 1994), 13.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 13.

¹²Howarth, *The Knights Templar*, 64.

¹³Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 24-6.

most famous grant was that of Alfonso I of Aragon, who left them one-third of his kingdom.¹⁴ Though the gesture impossible to implement, it strongly illustrates this initial enthusiasm among the nobility.

Poorer laymen expressed generosity towards the Templars also. Donations from the former included sums as low as one *denier*, as well as small estates, horses, armor, and weaponry.¹⁵ Great church dignitaries also made generous gifts. The Archbishop of Reims, and Bishops of Soissons and Angers all made early contributions comprising coin and certain profitable burial rights.¹⁶ In the 1130s, Pope Innocent II donated a mark of gold (a substantial sum) annually, while his Chancellor gave two ounces of gold. Archbishops, bishops, and abbots were encouraged to give a mark of silver.¹⁷

Perhaps nearly as important as grants of land and money were the many privileges and exemptions extended to the Templars. In England, King Stephen exempted the Order from all taxes. This policy was further strengthened by a charter granted by Richard the Lion-Heart in 1189, later renewed by John Lackland, by Henry III, and by Edward I.¹⁸ These privileges included freedom of warren, waste, and regard, as well as the right to impose fines and punishments within their holdings.¹⁹ In Wales these rights led to entire villages coming under the control of the Templars, a process which surely had parallels throughout the West.²⁰

The Church was not to be outdone by the secular magnates in the granting of privileges. Innocent II not only confirmed the Rule of the warrior-monks, he codified their extensive privileges with the papal bulls, *Omne datum optimum, Milites Templi*, and *Militia Dei*.²¹ These granted collection rights to Templars, permission to take tithes, obligations, and burial rights in places

¹⁴Partier, *The Knights Templar and their Myth*, 10.

¹⁵Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 24-5.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁸Howarth, *The Knights Templar*, 237-8.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 238.

²⁰William Rees, *A History of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in Wales and on the Welsh Border* (Cardiff, 1947), 48-51.

²¹Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 58.

where they had oratories, the power to appoint their own chaplains, and exemption from the controls of local bishops.²²

Generous grants of land and coin, tax exemptions, and ecclesiastical privileges were the foundation of a vast economic network which would supply the Templars in the Holy Land. Providing for a permanent fighting presence in the East was an immense and costly enterprise. But this largesse carried a negative cost as well. It led to some tarnishing of the Templar image, the result of jealous accusations and resentment, given unfortunate credence by cases of abuse within the order. These problems long remained secondary, offset by the great task undertaken by the Templars. By the middle of the twelfth century, the situation of the crusader states was becoming more and more critical.

Needs in the East

The Templar presence in the Outremer grew after 1130. They quickly became a prominent fixture on the landscape of the crusader kingdoms, assuming larger and more complex roles. By the close of the twelfth century the Templars were no longer mostly concerned with protecting pilgrims; they were now building castles, mounting campaigns against the Muslims, and advising the King and his barons as well. One estimate of Templar numbers counts "600 knights and 2,000 sergeants on active service in the east"--an enormous standing force at that time.²³ The expenses of such an army were diverse and formidable.

Knights were by definition mounted warriors, and calvary maintenance was a prime concern. This alone must have been a difficult task in the semi-arid crusader kingdoms. In Burgundy, a frontier region for breeding the kind of heavy destriers needed by heavily armored Western warriors, the cost of equipping and maintaining a knight was about 30 manses (750 acres) in 1180, and about 150 manses in 1260.²⁴ Inflation proved nearly as great

²²*Ibid.*, 58-9; Howarth, *The Knights Templar*, 80.

²³Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 2.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 230-1. One manse measured the amount of land a single household farmed for the local lord.

a foe as the infidel. The Order might have begun with second-hand equipment and donated clothing, but as it gained prominence, its need for "state of the art" equipment increased. Templars were not extravagant (indeed their Rule forbade costly ornament), but their list of equipment was "splendid and complete, their living quarters [kept] clean."²⁵ The Rule of the Templars provided strict guidelines, including up to four horses,

iron hose, a helmet or *chapeau de fer*, a sword, a shield, a lance, a Turkish mace, a surcoat, arming jacket, mail shoes, and three knives: a dagger, a bread knife, and a pocketknife. They may have two caparisons, two shirts, two pairs of breeches and two pairs of hose; and a small belt.²⁶

Other statutes within the Rule detailed everything from horseshoes and saddles to tents.

Equipping each knight was only one expense; the Templars also built many stone castles. Some, like 'Alit and Safad were quite extensive. The Templars maintained and garrisoned thirty-two castles in Outremer.²⁷ Rulers in the West appreciated the expense of castles, and recognized the necessity of these great structures in maintaining control over a hostile population. The Templars took care to publicize their achievements.²⁸

The Templars were no longer just protecting pilgrims, and their expense accounts reflected the variety and complexity of their expanded mission in the East. Even though they lived in relative humility as their Rule demanded, their remoteness from the West increased the cost of upkeep. The annual cost for maintaining a knight in Acre was ninety *livres tournois* in 1267.²⁹ The expense of 600 knights was 54,000 *livres tournois*, about twenty-two percent of the annual income of the Royal Dynasty of

²⁵Partner, *The Knights Templar and their Myth*, 14.

²⁶No. 138, *The Rule of the Templars*, translated by J.M. Upton-Ward (Bury St. Edmunds, 1992), 53.

²⁷Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 78.

²⁸Jelen Nicholson, *Templars, Hospitallers, and Teutonic Knights: Images of the Military Orders, 1128-1291* (London 1993), 106.

²⁹Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 232.

France—250,000.³⁰ And this did not include castle maintenance. Defending the faith was indeed an expensive endeavor, yet the Templars never wanted for proper equipment. They were ever-ready to battle the enemies of Christianity, and prospered in doing so.

The Network in the West

The expansion of the Templar's activities required a complex network of funding and supply, more advanced than any known in the West since the days of Rome. These needs were initially met by spontaneous donations and grants, but infrastructure quickly developed to administer Templar holdings and look after their interests.

The extensive, diversified, and sometimes isolated estates of the Order in Western Europe required skillful management. Initially, this system was inspired by the model developed in Cistercian monasteries, with a "mother" house keeping oversight on its "daughter" foundations. This method, however, proved too inefficient for Templar needs.³¹ They instead mirrored the efforts of their rivals, the Hospitalers, focusing on geo-political realities.³² At the base of this system were individual estates awarded to preceptories, local communities living under the authority of a commander. Lines of authority became codified, as each preceptory laid claim to particular parcels of land. The minister or *bailli* of a preceptory saw to its needs, and answered to the Master of the region (such as England or France).

The specific functions of individual *bailli* varied from region to region. England was a prime source of agricultural wealth for the Templars. They profited from grain, fish, and especially wool.³³ The Templar's development of the wool trade mirrored that of their Cistercian cousins, as they were able to capitalize on the profits generated when English wool was made into Flemish cloth. Land acquisitions by the Order in England following the

³⁰Ibid., 232-3.

³¹Ibid., 19-20.

³²Ibid., 20.

³³Howarth, *The Knights Templar*, 239.

original grants illustrates a policy of exploiting this industry.³⁴ They purchased properties along continental land routes whenever possible, as *baillies* sought to "consolidate and rationalise through land transactions and careful management."³⁵ The house in Provins for example, took advantage of the Champagne fairs, the regional center of economic dynamism at that time. The *bailli* quickly established a powerful presence within the town.³⁶ Templars eventually ran some of these profitable fairs.

Specific functions of a preceptory may have depended on geography, but certain activities were practiced in every house. The Western houses recruited for the Templar headquarters in Acre. Sometimes this process became fairly complex. The Order often attempted to acquire the lands of a particular recruit, and sometimes that knight wished to leave his lands to his family. The Templars were usually willing to negotiate. In one instance the younger son of a noble was promised to the Order, with the understanding that if his older brothers all died within six years, he would return to his family fiefs and provide the Templars with a payment of 1,000 *sois* instead.³⁷

The Templar houses also commonly collected additional revenue through privileges and rights. Templars could fine law-breakers, and impose taxes which followed the tenets of local magnates. In one example, the Templars received permission from the Crown to raise taxes in Wales. This area, unused to a heavy fiscal hand, resisted, embroiling all parties in a morass of maneuvering and litigation.³⁸ The Order could also earn income from their ecclesiastical exemptions. Templars might perform burial rights, and through their own priests, administer the sacraments at certain times of the year. They used these rights to form confraternities.³⁹ These groups sought salvation (and enjoyed certain tax-breaks) through providing small annual donations.

³⁴Ibid., 239.

³⁵Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 250.

³⁶Ibid., 262-3.

³⁷Ibid., 261.

³⁸Rees, *A History of the Order*, 48.

³⁹Paracet, *The Knights Templar and their Myth*, 11-2.

The Templar network exhibited a propensity for vertical expansion, exemplified by their activities in the wool-cloth trade, local fairs, and over-land trade routes. It should not be surprising that they soon developed naval capabilities as well. The Order possessed houses in the major Atlantic ports of Dover, Nantes, La Rochelle, and Bordeaux. Their presence in the Mediterranean centered on Marseille, with other key holdings in Italy.⁴⁰ Establishing a fleet was not only vital for supply and communications with Acre, but allowed burgeoning Templar trading enterprises as well.

As with their other activities, the Templars enjoyed certain privileges in maritime commerce. In La Rochelle for example, Eleanor of Aquitaine allowed them to transport "freely and securely, without all customs and all exactions, either by land or by water."⁴¹ In Marseille, the Templars enjoyed similar privileges: the freedom to transport pilgrims and merchants with few if any restrictions.⁴² In the early days, the Order contracted out maritime affairs to individuals (chiefly Italians), but by 1207 they owned their own ships.⁴³ The benefits of transporting for the Templars--guaranteed payment, business, fiscal advantages--must have been tempting to private entrepreneurs. Later, when they owned their own ships, the Order certainly had no problems finding worthy captains. The Templar fleet became so successful that records mention an official of the Order in Marseille called "Master of Passages."⁴⁴

Perhaps the most famous (or infamous) piece of Templar infrastructure was the banking network. The development of effective financial institutions was the final link in the chain which supplied Acre, and shows that the Templars were quick to embrace the realities of the profit economy. Templar banking evolved rapidly, driven by a need to deal with the initial gifts of coin and property the Order received. The fact that the Templars were recognized as the bankers of the French kings by 1147 (a

⁴⁰Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 250-1.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 26.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 237.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 237.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 238.

mere nineteen years after the Council of Troyes) illustrates this process.⁴⁵

The Templars needed banking, and with the growth of the profit economy, so did many others. It should not be surprising that the Brothers became so adept at finance. Who better to trust than the knights of Christ? The Orders Rule specifically prohibited Brothers from placing "a fund of money anywhere except in the treasury," to which only the Treasurer or Master had access.⁴⁶ They swore fealty to no one, and were objective enough to broker to both the Capetians and Angevins simultaneously. The kings, nobility, and merchants of Europe felt secure enough in the Order to deposit jewelry, gold, and silver within the preceptories.⁴⁷

The Order's function as a depository was just the beginning. Their many locations throughout Christendom allowed for the transfer of funds in a primitive credit or checking system.⁴⁸ The Templar network began financing loans for both kings and the Church. The crusade of Louis VII is an early example. The king had spent nearly all of his money by the time he reached Antioch in March of 1148. The Templars offered him assistance and borrowed from local merchants on the security of their possessions.⁴⁹ Later, Louis ordered his regents in France to settle payment with the Temple in Paris. The Capetians continued their financial link with them until King Philip IV brutally suppressed the Order in 1307.

The papacy also found Templar banking useful. Houses of the Order were depositories for important documents, treasures or relics, and funds. After the schism of 1167, the popes turned to the Templars to help finance activities.⁵⁰ The expertise of the Order led to Templar *cibicularii* administering to papal banking from 1163 onwards, including the tabulation of revenues and financing of loans.⁵¹ The importance of this relationship is best

⁴⁵Partner, *The Knights Templar and their Myth*, 11.

⁴⁶No. 335, *The Rule of the Templars*, 94.

⁴⁷Howarth, *The Knights Templar*, 240-1.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 241.

⁴⁹Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 67.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 277-8.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 278.

illustrated by the fact that Templar *embiculatorii* were left alone during the Orders persecution and expulsion.⁵²

The Templar financial institutions continued to grow throughout the Order's existence. By the middle of the thirteenth century, they numbered the growing merchant class among their clientele. These merchants were more concerned with the Templars as financiers, than with their now obsolete claim as "poor knights of Christ."⁵³ Banking had become a necessary adjunct to the exercise of power in Europe, and the Templars led the way. Many still cherished the values associated with the old system of gift exchange, however, and scorned profit as ignoble. The Order's success in finance was vital to their support of the continuing Crusade in the East, yet it also sowed the seeds of their eventual destruction by weakening their old, knightly virtues.

The financial network assumed such an important role in Europe, it is not surprising that Templars became trusted advisors to the greatest lords. The aforementioned relationships with the papacy offer an ecclesiastical example. King Louis VII of France not only looked to the Templars for financial aid during his Crusade, they were his military advisors in the Holy Land as well. They also advised Richard the Lion Heart during the Third Crusade, and acted as his honor guard.⁵⁴ He even traveled disguised as a Templar on his way back to England (but was recognized in Austria).⁵⁵ In London, the King's Council often met at the Temple. It was here the Templar Master attempted to reconcile Henry II and Thomas Becket.⁵⁶ William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke was close friend to the Master of England, Aimery de Sainte-Maure, and assumed the Templar mantle before his death.⁵⁷ The Templars profited by such relationships, which helped to further strengthen all aspects of their network. But the Brothers came to discover that the favor of kings and popes was

⁵²Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars* (Cambridge, 1978), 72.

⁵³Nicholson, *Templars, Hospitallers, and Teutonic Knights*, 75.

⁵⁴Howarth, *The Knights Templar*, 174-7.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 177-8.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 241.

⁵⁷Duby, *William Marshall*, 14-5.

a fickle and dangerous business, when Philip IV of France turned on them and Clement V subsequently abandoned them.

Despite its efficiency, the Templar network in its heyday had both problems and critics. Dignitaries were sometimes accused of being greedy or corrupt, of exploiting their privileges. Local clergy often complained that Templars intruded on their territory, offering discount burials and other holy services.⁵⁸ Some Welshmen complained that Templars let too many burgesses into their fraternal order, thus exempting them from local taxes.⁵⁹ The realities of banking also presented problems. Jean Sire de Joinville, chronicler of St. Louis threatened a Templar treasurer with an axe to receive cash for a loan promised to his lord.⁶⁰ It seems the Master had died in combat, and the Marshal and Commander citing a statute requiring the Masters consent on such transactions, were reluctant to act. The temptation presented by large sums of ready coin must have weighed heavily even on the most pious brothers. The notion of knights dirtying their hands with money aroused hostility, and Europeans found many aspects of banking un-Christian or amoral. They were not ready for all the implications of a profit economy.⁶¹ Templars were often represented as too greedy, too rich, and too proud; in reality they had adapted too quickly to changing economic conditions.

How successful was the Templar network, this great medieval corporation? The Brothers in Acre never lacked equipment and recruits, despite some devastating losses over the years. They built "at least 870 castles, preceptories, and subsidiary houses" and took care of pensioners throughout Europe.⁶² They were wealthy enough to buy the island of Cyprus from King Richard (although were unable to hold on to it).⁶³ A final, if ironic example of the effectiveness of the network occurred after the Templar's demise. The French crown ordered the Hospitallers, who inherited most Templar properties and wealth to pay a sum

⁵⁸Partner, *The Knights Templar and their Myth*, 12.

⁵⁹Rees, *A History of the Order*, 50.

⁶⁰Jean Sire de Joinville, *The History of St. Louis*, translated by Joan Evans (London, 1938), 113-4.

⁶¹Little, *Religious Poverty*, 35-46.

⁶²Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 1-2.

⁶³Howarth, *The Knights Templar*, 173.

of 310,000 *livres tournois* from 1313 to 1318.⁶⁴ Over the course of about 200 years, the Templar network consolidated its holdings to exploit supply and demand while taking advantage of distinct privileges. It provided shipping and even built its own fleet and it developed and harnessed an advanced array of banking institutions, and provided advice and guidance to the first two estates.

The Men of the Network

Who were the men who created and facilitated this vast network? They certainly were not the same sort of illiterate, crude and undoubtedly fanatical men who went off to fight in the East. Yet they contributed to this perception themselves, describing themselves as "simple and ignorant" right up to the time of their suppression.⁶⁵ Templars in the West were often older, established in their region, and skilled at particular functions. Their talents might include literacy, financial knowledge, agricultural expertise, or seamanship. An intriguing dichotomy developed between the fierce warrior-monks who travelled to Acre and the brethren supplying them in Europe.

Hugh de Payens, first Master of the Temple, presents an interesting portrait of the effective administrator. Although the first years of the Order were spent in relative poverty and obscurity, the Master had a plan. His ties to Count Hugh of Champagne as a former vassal, and Bernard of Clairvaux helped to guarantee his ambitions for the Temple. Hugh's initial campaigns in the West around the time of the council of Troyes illustrate a good understanding of the realities of establishing an Order such as the Templars. He appears to have been well-versed in secular and ecclesiastical politics; he was acutely aware of many of the criticisms of the knightly class, and seemed to understand some of the prevailing economic trends. It is perhaps a stretch to state that Hugh and his colleagues completely understood the transition from gift to profit economy, but they were quite aware of certain changes.

⁶⁴Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 231-2.

⁶⁵Partner, *The Knights Templar and their Myth*, 15.

In conception and structure the Templars responded well to the new realities of Crusading Europe. Hugh de Payens had predicted at the onset that, given Church approval, the nobility would enthusiastically support the Templars. He proved to be right and the Order profited from the still potent gift economy, but Hugh also understood the inherent dangers. Several statutes within the original Templar Rule prohibited the personal exchange of gifts, for example.⁶⁶ Hugh's vision and prudent leadership set the precedent for effective administration of Templar preceptories in the West.

The rapidly growing network was closely tied to the lay knighthood.⁶⁷ The Templars undoubtedly offered avenues of upward social mobility to small landowning knights. As its prestige quickly mounted, the Order accorded talented lesser knights new paths to power and influence. In Europe there was often little distinction between the knights proper, who took monastic vows, and fraternities of 'married brothers', who helped administer estates.⁶⁸ These men could continue in a similar lifestyle, while enjoying the benefits of the Order. Sergeants or brothers in service could occupy multiple positions in the network. In England, where the Order was chiefly concerned with agriculture, they were smiths, tanners, shepherds, gardeners, and cowherds.⁶⁹ Such members are comparable to the *conversi*--working lay brothers of the Cistercian monasteries. In the Mediterranean, the mariner Roger of Flor, designated a sergeant by the Order, captained a Templar ship for years.⁷⁰ The rest of the fleet was probably commanded by similar men. The *evitularii* who assisted the papacy undoubtedly trained in monasteries. As time passed, the Order thus came to engage in diverse and complex activities, to attract members from a variety of social backgrounds.

At its upper echelons, the Order displayed an impressive knack for acquiring land and engaging in effective commerce. It is unfortunate that there are not more detailed records of the men

⁶⁶Nas, 44, 82, 85, 128, *The Rule of the Templars*, 30, 40, 51.

⁶⁷Nicholson, *Templars, Hospitallers, and Tentonic Knights*, 56-9.

⁶⁸Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 261.

⁶⁹Howarth, *The Knights Templar*, 235.

⁷⁰Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 240-1.

who enacted these policies. We know about the Grand Masters, who were sometimes illiterate and usually concerned with military operations in Acre. We know something of particular Masters, such as Aimery of England, as well.

The loss of Acre in 1291, the last Christian port of Outremer, signified a new and anxious moment in Templar history. Their *raison d'être* was compromised at a time when the crusading ideal itself had become corrupted. During the Thirteenth Century, kings and popes had used crusades to achieve political and even personal ends. Perhaps the foremost of these was the Albigensian Crusade, in which the barons of Northern France plundered the barons of the South, ostensibly to combat heresy. In this climate, the Templars, now a wealthy, well-armed, independent institution, with a presence throughout Europe, aroused suspicion and jealousy. Were they really dangerous to Europe's rulers? Scholars debate this point and come to different conclusions. Many argue that the Templars were relatively weak militarily by this time, but did commanded vast economic power. Perhaps they could have carved out their own state somewhere, given the time and motivation. But Jacques de Molay, the last Grand Master, was still concerned with mounting a return expedition to the Holy Land when the Order was suddenly suppressed.⁷¹

In 1307, Philip IV of France charged the Templars with a sinister array of crimes, including heresy, worship of idols and demons, and sodomy. With the reluctant assent of the papacy the King arrested every Templar he could find. Torture was used to extort confessions, and the Grand Master, proclaiming his innocence was burned at the stake. The initial reaction to this throughout Europe was shock and disbelief. Various kings, princes, and dukes were happy to devour the remains of Templar holdings, however, once guilty verdicts were followed by Pope Clement V's agreement to ban the Order and distribute its assets.

Perhaps the most intriguing question concerns the true aims and goals of the Order. Did some Knights of the Temple indeed lose faith in the Crusade, and become cynical about their

mission? Considerable evidence shows that their activities, initially, were centered with supplying and financing an ongoing crusading effort Outremer. But by the thirteenth century, their world was changing. Jealous enemies whispered these new, wealthy knights were the military arm of a mysterious esoteric Order called the *Priarre de Sion*, with sinister plans involving the Holy Land and the rightful kings of France.⁷² Although such claims remain suspect and unproven, the rumors weakened support for the Order at a time when the Crusades all seemed to fail. Philip IV's need for money coupled with Templar wealth made them a tempting target.

The Order of the Temple was conceived with an impressive understanding of politics, economics, and religion. As it evolved, it grew into a vast medieval corporation capable of profiting while sustaining an expensive war effort in a distant land. The administrators of the Templar economic network were able to benefit from the lingering aspects of the older gift economy, while adapting and contributing to the growing profit economy. By the beginning of the Fourteenth Century, with the Holy Lands lost, the great and mighty Order of the Temple was suddenly exposed in a glaring, unfriendly, and dangerous light. They had lost Outremer, but continued to generate large profits. A powerful institution of "warrior-monks" whose greatest accomplishment was financial gain, was too startling a paradox to survive in medieval Europe.

⁷¹Partner, *The Knights Templar and their Myth*, 37-8.

⁷²Michael Baigent et al., *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (New York, 1982).