

TEMPLARS

Founded in 1119 to protect pilgrims who flocked to the Holy Land after the First Crusade of 1095, the Knights Templars (or Poor Knights of Christ) of the Temple of Solomon were, with the Hospitalers and Teutonic Knights, one of the three great military orders of medieval Christianity. Vowed to poverty, chastity, and obedience, as well as to the Benedictine rule for monasticism, the Knights were "to fight with a pious mind for the supreme and true King." They gained immunity from excommunication by bishops and parish priests. Backed by the anti-Jewish fanatic Bernard of Clairvaux, the most influential clergyman in mid-twelfth-century Europe, they adopted a Rule, copies of which exist, giving vast powers to the Grand Master, who did on occasion have to consult the Chapters. No copy has ever been found of their alleged "Secret Rule." Special chaplains under the Grand Master served the order, which married men could enter if they bequeathed it half their property. Through bequests and profits from interest charged on loans and from letters of credit for pilgrims, the Templars became the richest of the orders.

The Templars in the Levant.

Rashness on the part of Templars helped provoke defeats, and also led to the recapture of Jerusalem in 1187 by Saladin, who ordered the execution of all Templars and Hospitalers he had captured. The Templars expended much of their blood and treasure in an attempt to hold a few fortresses against the Saracen onslaught. During the Third Crusade in 1190, they tended to side with the sodomitical Richard the Lionhearted against his rival Philip Augustus of France. "First to attack and last to retreat," the Templars heroically saved the Fifth Crusade (1228-1229) from annihilation in Egypt. They did not cooperate with Frederick II of Hohenstaufen during the Sixth Crusade (1227-1230), and except in the most dire crises, regularly opposed their rivals the Hospitalers, helping to fragment further

the feudal Kingdom of Jerusalem, already rent by factions and quarrels among Italian merchants from rival cities. In the disaster of 1244 at Gaza only 18 of the 300 Templars and 16 of the 200 Hospitalers, and neither Grand Master, survived the slaughter by the Saracens. The Seventh Crusade led by Louis IX was captured in Egypt in 1250. After his ransom the King went on to the Holy Land but his best efforts failed to restore the situation. The few Templars from Palestine who survived the fall in 1291 of the last Christian outpost there, Acre, during the siege of which the Grand Master was slain, sailed for their new headquarters on Cyprus.

The Dissolution of the Order. The order of the Templars, of whom there were about 4,000 in Europe, half of these in France, did not long survive the loss of the Holy Land. They had become the greatest international bankers in Europe. The Paris Temple became the principal money market where popes and kings deposited their funds, which the Templars loaned out at interest, rivaling the Lombard bankers and circumventing canon law prohibitions against usury. Philip IV the Fair (Philippe Le Bel) went deeply into debt to the Templars, who sided with him in his quarrel with Pope Boniface VIII (r. 1290-1303), whom the king had arrested at Anagni in 1302. Having taxed the clergy, robbed and expelled Jews and Lombards, and debased the coinage, Philip began to plot the despoiling of the Templars as early as 1305. Having obtained the election of his French puppet Clement V as pope, he struck through venal informers who denounced the Templars for heresy, blasphemy, and sodomy.

Popular suspicion had for half a century attributed strange events to the Templars' secret midnight meetings. In spite of papal procrastination and professions of disbelief in the charges, Philip had the Grand Inquisitor of France proceed. In August 1307 Philip had the suspected Templars arrested, including Jacques de Molay, then Grand Master, who had come

from Cyprus to consult about a crusade. Tortured first by royal officials, then if need arose by the papal inquisition, 36 Templars died under torment in Paris alone. Of the 138 examined in Paris, 123 confessed to spitting on or at the cross at the rites when they joined the order. The Grand Master confessed to spitting on the crucifix and denying Christ. When papal opposition collapsed, Templars were arrested in England, Aragon, Castile, and Sicily, but the Pope assumed control and summoned a general council to decide the case. When the public trial began in 1310, many Templars withdrew their confessions, trusting in the pope—in vain. As relapsed heretics 67 were consigned to the flames. In all about 120 died in Paris.

In 1312 Clement abolished the order, transferring its property to the Hospitalers. At last Jacques de Molay revived his courage and repudiated his confession, whereupon he was burnt along with the Preceptor of the order in Normandy, in front of Notre Dame de Paris. This horrible trial confirmed the precedent for burning heretics, blasphemers, and sodomites—something the scholastic philosophers had been preaching for a century—and sealed it with the approval of the mightiest authorities. It was the forerunner of the witchcraft trials with their atrocious cruelty and rivaled that of Joan of Arc as the most dramatic trial in medieval France.

Among the chief accusations leveled at the Templars by Philip IV in 1307 when he issued the order to arrest them was that initiates to the Order kissed its receptors on the buttocks, stomach, navel, spine, and mouth and were enjoined to commit sodomy. In spite of the most exquisite tortures, which included roasting the feet until the bones fell from their sockets, only two or three of the accused Templars confessed to committing sodomy, which they either regarded as more heinous than blasphemy and heresy or believed themselves innocent of committing, though many more confessed to the

other two offenses. Some seventy said that they had been ordered to commit sodomy but denied having done so. Scholarly opinion is about equally divided as to whether recruits had to perform the *osculum infame* (infamous kiss), i.e., rimming the arsehole of their superiors at the secret midnight initiation rituals. No one can deny that in the minds of these tortured heroes, sodomy was a worse sin to confess than heresy and blasphemy, a view cultivated by the scholastic philosophers Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas during the thirteenth century. Franciscans and Dominicans, enemies of the order and leaders of the Inquisition, helped in the prosecution and propaganda. More than ever since the fall of the Roman Empire, a Catholic secular power, the Capetian monarchy, already inured by its bloodthirsty campaigns against the Albigensians, was exploiting the supposed ties between demonic powers and heretics, blasphemers, and sodomites—against whom the Christian clergy had for so long warned. This was a momentous precedent for Hitler in the twentieth century, but a more immediate one for the torture and murder of Philip's son-in-law Edward II of England in 1327, engineered by Philip's daughter Isabella.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978; Alain Demurger, *Vie et mort de l'ordre du Temple, 1118–1314*, Paris: Seuil, 1985; Peter Partner, *The Murdered Magicians: The Templars and Their Myth*, London: Oxford University Press, 1982.

William A. Percy

TENNYSON, ALFRED, LORD (1809–1892)

English poet laureate. The son of a country rector, Tennyson began writing poetry at the age of eight. In 1830 he published his first significant book, *Poems Chiefly Lyrical*. Three years later occurred what was probably the most important event of his life: the death of his close