

History of the Order from King Charles the Martyr

The early years, 1095-

In 1095 when **Pope Urban II** issued the call for the **First Crusade**, the Western Christian World saw this as a defensive action. Since the early 8th century Europe had been under ceaseless attack from Islamic forces, beginning with the Iberian Peninsula. Not only was most of Christian Spain conquered, but Islamic armies penetrated into the heart of France, only to be halted by Charles Martel in 732. Still, Islamic forces continued to threaten Europe, occupying Sicily, most of Southern Italy, and even besieging Rome in 846 and sacking St. Peter's Basilica. Yet the First Crusade was not directed at Islam itself, but against the Seljuk Turks, who in their conquest of Palestine replaced the previous Arab tolerance of Christian pilgrims with intolerance and violence.

By the end of July, 1099 the First Crusade had achieved its objective of restoring the Holy Places to Christian control. *It was one thing to conquer; now the challenge was to rule.* Immediately two problems confronted the newly created Kingdom of Jerusalem, being one of the worse examples of **feudal fragmentation**. The vassals of the King of Jerusalem were carving out their own feudal estates and becoming more powerful than their suzerain. They were even engaging in conflict among themselves, often hindering efforts to counter any renewed threat from Islam. The second problem was the **lack of a reliable fighting force to defend the conquest**. Once the Crusade was finished, most of the surviving crusaders, having fulfilled their vows, returned home. The Knights Templar would provide the solution by becoming the first international standing army.

The opportunity came in 1118-19, when an idealistic band of knights led by **Hugues de Payens** offered their services *to protect pilgrims in route to the Holy Places*. Organizing themselves into a religious community, vows were made to the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. Baldwin II, King of Jerusalem, provided them with quarters in what had been the al-Aqsa Mosque, thought to be part of Solomon's Temple. They became known as the **Poor Knights of Christ of the Temple of Solomon, or simply the Knights of the Temple**. Perhaps it was the King, who saw in these Poor Knights of Christ, the opportunity to create a fighting force. This was reinforced when the counts of Anjou and Champagne joined the Order.

Now events moved to Europe. If this humble group of knights was to become an effective military force, papal recognition, autonomy, and an economic foundation had to be acquired. Hugues de Payens himself went to Europe on a mission to gain support and recruit new members. More importantly the support of the outstanding church leader of the period was enlisted, **Bernard, the Cistercian abbot of Clairvaux**. In 1128-29 a Council was held at Troyes in Champagne in which The Order of the Temple was recognized and provided with a Rule, drafted under Bernard's guidance. Pope Honorius II approved the recognition, with Hugues de Payens becoming the first Master of the Temple. It was Bernard de Clairvaux, who grasped the historical significance, when he wrote in *Delaude novae militae (In Praise of a New Knighthood)* that a new type of Order had been created, consisting of laymen who blended the knightly and monastic life. These soldier-monks would fight to protect Christian interests.

While Hugues de Payens had been the leader with a mission and a vision, an

individual possessed of administrative talent was needed. That was **Robert de Craon**, who became Master of the Temple c 1136. By his death in 1149, a series of popes had granted privileges that made the Templars an autonomous corporate body, answerable only to the papacy. Papal and royal exemptions allowed the Templars to become economically independent, financing their overseas military endeavors in great part from European donations of land and money. In the process the Templars fashioned the first European-wide system of international banking. Their convents, particularly in London and Paris became “clearing-houses” for the deposit, disbursement and transfer of funds. The system’s reliability for efficiency and honesty attracted church leaders and kings to entrust their funds and valuables to Templar security.

Their independence allowed the Templars to create **an effective fighting force, a naval fleet, and a defensive system of fortresses** in Palestine/Syria. Within the Iberian Peninsula, Templars supported the Reconquista, led by the Spanish and Portuguese kings. At the height of their power in the 13th century the **Order had around 7000 members**, including knights, sergeants-at-arms, non-military-sergeants, brothers, and priests. Their network consisted of some **870 castles, preceptories and convents** spread throughout most of Christian Europe, Palestine and Syria. They inspired both the Hospitallers and the Teutonic Knights to adopt military roles. The Templars served as a model for new military orders established by the rulers within the Iberian Peninsula, such as Calatrava in Castile and Santiago in Leon.

In 1146, **Pope Eugenius III** granted the Templars the privilege of wearing the **Red Cross or Cross Patteé** on their mantles as symbolic of their willingness to shed their blood. Noted for their bravery, determination and discipline, much of the burden for the defense of the Crusader States fell upon them. Described as “lions in battle” thousands of Templars gave their lives as they won everlasting glory in such battles as Cresson, Hattin, La Forbie and Mansurah. Despite their efforts Jerusalem was lost to Saladin in 1187. The Templars established themselves at Acre, following the limited success of the Third Crusade. After the loss of Acre in 1291, the Templars, evacuating their last castles in Palestine/Syria, retreated to the island of Cyprus.



The blame game, 1200-

Who was responsible for the loss of the Crusader States? The Templars may have shared in the blame, due to ineffectual leadership and involvement in politics. But there were more important reasons, such as the failure to establish an effective political order in Palestine and the tendency of the great lords to become embroiled in political intrigue instead of defending the Kingdom against the common enemy. The arrival of new crusaders insisting upon pursuing the Holy War often

upset the balance of power that had been achieved between the Christians and Moslems, thus encouraging a strong Islamic reaction. The problem of leadership was never solved. Even the kings made poor leaders of the Crusades, since their political distrust followed them to Palestine and they, too, had to return to their home kingdoms.

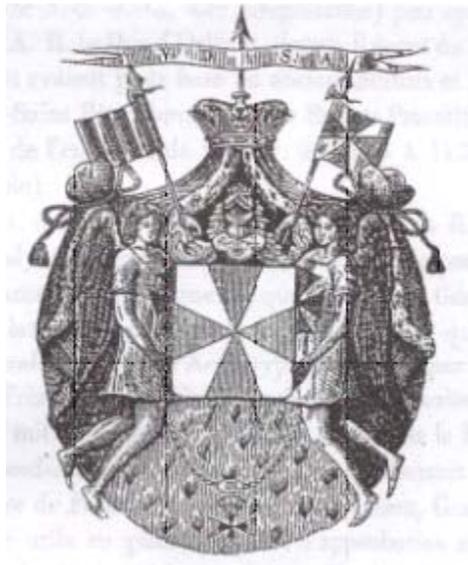
The idealism and moral inspiration of the First Crusade became tarnished and corrupted by greed for political power and wealth. Finally, there was the Islamic reaction that found effective leaders, such as **Saladin**, to lead the counter-attack to the European presence in the Middle East. In short, the odds were not only against the survival of the Crusader States but against the Templars as an enduring fighting force in the Middle East.

By the late 13th century questions were being raised about the effectiveness of the military orders, with proposals being made to unify them. The fall of Acre made the issue more pressing. While both the Hospitallers and the Teutonic Knights found new roles for themselves, the Templars lacked economic resources that were essential for any renewal of their military prowess due to the loss of lands in Palestine and Syria, the decline from patrons of gifts of land and money, the curtailing of their exemptions, and the impact of inflation. Recruitment became more difficult as the Templars became an aging Order. Moreover, the appearance of possessing great wealth became the kiss of death. Rulers, motivated by greed and jealousy, took advantage of the Templars' loss of credibility and respect. Already in the early 14th century English kings had violated the temple of the Templars in London.

Ultimately the fate of the Templars would be decided within France. **Philip IV, King of France**, made the move to challenge the continued existence of the Templars. Taking advantage of rumors of Templar corruption (no doubt

exaggerated) and of a weak and compliant Pope, in 1307, Philip IV ordered the arrest of all Templars in France, including the Master of the Temple, **Jacques de Molay**. **Pope Clement V** ordered an investigation into the charges leveled against the Templars. Under immense political pressure the Pope ordered the arrest of all Templars within Christian Europe and the seizure of their property. In an attempt to resolve the Templar issue, Clement V convoked the Council of Vienne in 1312. The lack of credible incriminating evidence led the majority of the council fathers to conclude that the charges lacked merit. Then the Pope on his own authority issued the Bull, **Vox in excelso**, dissolving the Order. Templars were to be pensioned off and their property turned over to the Hospitallers. *The final act came on March 18, 1314, when Philip IV ordered the execution by fire of Jacques de Molay and Geoffroy de Charnay as relapsed heretics.* Finding courage at the end, they both vigorously denied the charges against the Order.

While the widespread Templar saga had come to an end, for a period of time Templar tradition continued to survive within frontier areas of Christian Europe. After Templars played a significant role in the Scottish victory at Bannockburn on June 24, 1314, **Robert the Bruce** joined the Templars and Hospitallers into a new Order of the Temple and of St. John. In the Iberian Peninsula, new military orders were formed under direct royal control. In Aragon King James II established the Order of Montesa, while in Portugal the Order of Christ was created. Perhaps the last Templars were two men who had survived the fall of Acre. About 1340 they were discovered, married with families, serving a Sultan in Palestine. They were repatriated, provided with pensions, and received with great honor by the papal court.



Restoration of the Order, 1700-

No historical evidence has surfaced to date that suggests the Templars survived as an “underground” order after 1314, either on the continent of Europe or in Scotland. The last Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, remained faithful to his Catholic Church, despite the papal suppression of the Order and persecution by the French Inquisition under the control of Philip IV.

In 1736 **Andrew Michael Ramsay**, a Scottish Freemason and Catholic, delivered a speech to the Masonic Lodge in Paris, insisting that Freemasonry had begun in Palestine among the crusades, particularly the military orders. The result was a frenzy of new rituals, symbols, and myths based on the Crusades and the military orders. When the battle of Culloden in 1746 ended any hope of a Stuart restoration, French Freemasonry began to develop its own identity.

Now a German noble and Freemason, the **Baron Karl von Hund**, revealed his belief that he had discovered a new form of Freemasonry, known as the Strict Observance, directly descendant from the Templars. It was based on Templar survival in the British Isles, particularly in Scotland. This myth of Templar survival became very popular among various Masonic lodges. Meanwhile continental lodges were being influenced by the rationalism of the Enlightenment with many members becoming supporters of revolutionary change directed against absolute monarchy and a social order based on birth and privilege. Then came the French Revolution in 1789, with its promise of a New Order founded on brotherhood, equality and liberty.

Out of the turmoil created by the Revolution, a “child of the Revolution”, **Napoleon Bonaparte**, rose to power, promising to spread the ideals of the Revolution to all of Europe. After conquering most of continental Europe, he had himself proclaimed Emperor. In that same year of **1804**, a new form of Templarism appeared. A “restored” **Ordre du Temple** evolved out of the Chevaliers de la Croix, a rather conservative Masonic lodge in Paris. The founders included **Claude-Mathieu, Radix de Chevillon; a medical doctor, Ledru; and a chiropodist, Fabre-Palaprat**, known as “a leading Masonic figure.” Fabre-Palaprat accepted the office of Grand Master.

At the same time two interesting documents surfaced. One was the **Charter of Transmission**, by which an alleged successor to de Molay, Jean M. Larmenius provided for the “secret” survival of the Knights Templars. This document, written in ciphers, also included in cipher the “signatures” of Grand Masters from Larmenius to Fabre-Palaprat. Conflicting Latin translations only appeared after 1804. The second document was the **Statutes of 1705**, thought to have been written under the direction of Philip, the Duke of Orleans, whom the founders of 1804 claimed as a restorer of the Templars.

For motives of his own, Napoleon Bonaparte approved of this “restoration”, even allowing a grand ceremony in Paris, honoring de Molay and all other Templar martyrs. Napoleon, upon becoming Emperor, created a new nobility. Perhaps he saw these new Templars as serving as a counter-balance to the Masonic lodges, whom he distrusted due to their political radicalism. By 1808, through successful recruitment the new Order had established Pories and Commanderies throughout most of the Grand Empire, including Italy and Switzerland. Ties to its Masonic origins were severed, with this Order of the Temple proclaiming its autonomy and adherence to “the Catholic Apostolic and Roman religion.”

This promising beginning was quickly dashed by Fabre-Palaprat when he revised the Statutes of 1705 to justify assuming absolute power, a schism erupted that lasted until 1814. When unity was finally restored, the Order once again prospered. When constitutional monarchy was established in France, the Order supported the restored Bourbon King, Louis XVIII, and the king in return granted the Templars recognition. When Charles X attempted to restore royal absolutism,

the Templars supported the revolt of 1830 and the return of constitutional monarchy.

Once again Fabre-Palaprat became the source of contention. Earlier he had formed the Johannite Church of the Primitive Christians, based on a spurious version of the Gospel of St. John, and the Levitikon, another document “discovered” by Fabre-Palaprat. When, in 1833, he attempted to impose his Johannite beliefs upon the Templars, the result was once more schism. One faction retained its chivalric traditions and obedience to the Catholic Church. The death of Fabre-Palaprat in 1838 provided another opportunity for unity. This attempt failed when the French palaprien Templars refused to accept the choice of Sir William Sidney-Smith, the British Grand Prior, as Grand Master. Within France, the palaprien Templars continued to choose Regents until they had faded from existence by 1870. Many Templar priories then became autonomous.

Regency, de Sousa Fontes, 1930-

The Templar revival in the 20th century owed its existence to developments within the Grand Priory of Belgium, which had been founded under Fabre-Palaprat in 1825. Factional disputes between Catholic and Masonic members, along with European political developments, resulted in its disappearance. In 1932, several former members established a new Grand Priory, taking the name of The Sovereign and Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem. Hoping to re-establish this Order of the Temple as an international organization, a regency was formed. **Emile-Isaac Vandenberg**, as regent, devoted much of his energy to revitalizing Templar Priories across Europe, including France, Italy, Portugal and Switzerland. Such a promising development was cut short by the Second World War. Viewing the German occupation of Belgium as a danger to Templar survival, Vandenberg made a temporary transfer of the leadership and archives of the Order to the care of the Portuguese Grand Prior, **Antonio Campello de Sousa Fontes**. Once the war had ended, Vandenberg requested the return of the archives. Then de Sousa Fontes took advantage of the sudden death of Vandenberg to assume the title of Regent. Once more there was schism, with some Priories rejecting his leadership. In 1960, **Fernando Campello de Sousa Fontes** succeeded his father, taking the title of **Prince Regent**.



The history of the American Grand Priory began with the Grand Priory of Switzerland. By 1960 **Anton Leuprecht**, the Grand Prior of Switzerland, was receiving Americans into the Swiss Grand Priory. As more Americans became Templars, in 1962 Anton Leuprecht and several American Templars, including **William Y. Pryor**, initiated action to form an American Autonomous Grand Priory.

It was decided to incorporate the American Grand Priory in the State of New Jersey. The seven founders signed the Corporate Charter on June 4, 1962. They were **Crolan W. Edelen, William Y. Pryor, Herschel S. Murphy, Warren S. Hall, Jr., John D. Leet, Lawrence Stratton and George J. Deyo**. The corporate documents were filed on June 13, 1962, with official recognition by the State of New Jersey taking place on June 29 of the same year. Crolan William Edelen became the first Grand Prior.

After the Prince Regent, de Sousa Fontes had recognized the American Grand Priory, in April of 1964 the Grand Prior of the USA asked **Peter II**, the former king of Yugoslavia, to become the Royal Patron of the American Grand Priory. Upon the King's acceptance he was made a Knight Grand Cross. Peter II remained the American Royal Patron until his death on November 4, 1970.

In 1970 the Prince Regent convoked a Convent General of The Sovereign Military Order of The Temple of Jerusalem, with one session to meet in Chicago, Illinois, showing the growing importance of the American Grand Priory. At the Chicago Convent, it was decided that while the Catholic roots of the Order would be honored, the Order would be open to all Christian membership. Nearly 20 years later in 1990, the Prince Regent issued revised Statutes for the Order on his own authority, which allowed him to assume the title of Grand Master and to designate his successor. Once more dispute and division resulted, with Grand Priorities re-affirming or revoking their ties to de Sousa Fontes.



Separation and Unification, 1995-

Under the leadership of two American Grand Priors, **Donald Roderick Perkins** and his successor **James J. Carey**, the American Grand Priory assumed an important role in the international arena of Templar affairs, working towards healing the division among the Grand Priorities, bringing about reform and resolving the divisive issue of the Prince Regent.

In the Fall of 1995 a Templar Grand Convent met in Salzburg, Austria. When the Prince Regent refused to recognize this Convent and to accept a compromise, offering him the title of Prince Regent Emeritus, a consensus was reached to withdraw recognition from his leadership. A Council of Grand Priors was formed to administer the Order, led by **Col. Joseph Esposito**, Grand Prior General of NATO. A second meeting was held at Salzburg in November of 1996 to approve revised statutes and consider candidates for Grand Master. This convent ended in dispute and division.

To retain some semblance of unity and to promote continued reform, the American Grand Priory led the effort to form an International Grand Council with

Major General Sir Roy Redgrave, K.B.E., the British Grand Prior, as Grand Commander. This resulted in the creation of the North Atlantic Obedience of O.S.M.T.H., whose membership included Grand Priorities from the United States, England-Wales, Scotland, Ireland, France, Scandinavia and NATO. Since 1997 the goal of this organization has been to develop practical steps towards a confederation of Templar Grand Priorities, allowing for the election of a Grand Master.

Meanwhile in 1997 the American Grand Priory found a new Royal Patron in **Princess Elisabeth of Ysenberg und Büdingen, Princess of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg**. Since her appointment, Princess Elisabeth has played a significant role in the affairs not only of the American Grand Priory, but of the Atlantic Obedience of Grand Priorities.

Copyright 2000, The Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem, Inc.