

# THE SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER OF THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM

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OSMTH - Priory of St. James  
*"Origins and Present Work"*  
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# Our History



The Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem (OSMTH) is a modern-day ecumenical Christian knighthood. With its beginnings in 1804, the early 19th century, it does not claim 'direct descent' from the historical medieval Order itself -- the subject to which we will now turn. [Heraldry of Medieval Templar Grand Masters.]

The medieval Knights Templar, best known to us today as the famed warriors of the Crusades, were a devout military religious Order that uniquely combined the roles of knight and monk in a way the

Western medieval world had never seen before. Originally they were known as the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon, or, more simply, as the Knights Templar.

In a famous letter written in the 1130s, *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, St Bernard of Clairvaux elevated the Templar Order above all other Orders of the day, establishing the image of the Templars as a fierce spiritual militia for Christ. He regarded them as a "new species of knighthood, previously unknown in the secular world..." To him, they were a unique combination of knight and monk; to later historians, they were the first military order, soon imitated by the Knights Hospitaller, by several Spanish orders and, by the end of the 12th century, by the Teutonic Knights. As a holy militia fighting for Christ, the Templars were willing to put aside the usual temptations of ordinary secular life for an arduous, dedicated life of service. Ever since then, the legacy of the Templars has been, first and foremost, the concept of service.

The Templars officially originated in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1118 A.D., when nine knights, mainly French, vowed to protect pilgrims on the dangerous roads leading to Jerusalem. These courageous knights gained the favor of King Baldwin II of Jerusalem who granted them part of his palace for their headquarters, which was located in the southeastern part of the Temple Mount, called "Solomon's Temple". Encouraged by King Baldwin II and Warmund of Picquigny, Patriarch of Jerusalem, they were generally seen as complementary to the Hospitallers (recognized as an Order of the Church by the papacy in 1113, but not militarized until the 1130s), who cared for sick and weary pilgrims in their convent in Jerusalem. The Templars' services were welcomed and greatly appreciated. But it is important to realize that at this early juncture when they were based at the Temple Mount area, the Templars were not yet an official monastic Order---the protagonists were seculars imbued with a desire to fulfill the biblical injunction to love thy neighbour, but they were not yet a monastic Order.

During the first nine years of the Order (1119-28), contrary to assumptions often made today, the Templars would not have been wearing their trademark white mantles, as they began wearing them after the church Council of Troyes in 1129 when they were given a religious Rule and a white mantle. The famous Red Cross on their mantle was added later when Pope Eugenius III (1145-53) allowed them to wear it as a symbol of Christian martyrdom.

With only nine knights at their inception, scholars acknowledge that it seems as though no major efforts were made to recruit any new members until around 1128, when most of the original knights had returned to France and the Council of Troyes began (Jan. 1129) and they became officially recognized by the papacy. By the 1170s, there were about 300 knights based in the Kingdom of Jerusalem itself and more in other areas., and by the 1180s, there were at least 600 knights in Jerusalem alone. After 1129, the Order grew exponentially with many thousands of knights and it then became increasingly powerful.

At the Council of Troyes in Champagne, the status of the Templar Order underwent a dramatic change. Thanks to the significant contribution of Bernard of Clairvaux; Matthew of Albano, the papal legate, officially accepted the knights. This recognition was quite extraordinary for the times, as for such a tiny Order of only nine men to get this type of recognition was rather unusual, as many other Orders of the day had to wait much longer to achieve a similar status. At the Council of Troyes, the Templars were given a proper Rule, written in Latin, which ran to 72 clauses. The impetus given by papal approval and the extraordinary publicity generated by the visits of the leaders to France, England and Scotland in the months before the council ensured that the "New Knighthood" would long outlive its founders.

Papal recognition at Troyes was followed by the issue of three key bulls, which established the Temple as a privileged Order under Rome. Omne Datum Optimum (1139) consolidated the Order's growing material base by allowing spoils taken in battle to be retained for the furtherance of the holy war, placing donations directly under papal protection, and granting exemption from payment of tithes. It also strengthened the structure of the Order by making all members answerable to the Master and by adding a new class of Templar priests to the existing organization of knights and sergeants.

The Templars could now possess their own oratories, where they could hear divine office and bury their dead. Milites Templi (1144) ordered the clergy to protect the Templars and encouraged the faithful to contribute to their cause, while at the same time allowing the Templars to make their own collections once a year, even in areas under interdict. Militia Dei (1145) consolidated the Order's independence of the local clerical hierarchy by giving the Templars the right to take tithes and burial fees and to bury their dead in their own cemeteries.

As these privileges indicate, during the 1130s, the fledgling Order had attracted increasing numbers of major donors, for it proved to be especially popular with that sector of the French aristocracy, which held castles and estates and could mobilize vassals, albeit on a modest scale.

In fact, the scale of this sudden, unprecedented rise was extraordinary, something hardly seen before or since. The rulers of Aragon and Portugal, confronted directly with the problems of warfare on a volatile frontier, realized their military value more quickly than most others.

The Templars began to accumulate a substantial landed base in the West, not only in Francia, Provence, Iberia and England, where they were first known, but also in Italy, Germany and Dalmatia and, with the Latin conquests of Cyprus from 1191 and of the Morea from 1204, in those regions as well. By the late 13th century they may have had as many as 870 castles, preceptories and subsidiary houses spread across Latin Christendom. During the 12th and 13th centuries these properties were built into a network of support, which provided men, horses, money and supplies for the Templars in the East.

The development of a role as bankers arose out of these circumstances, for they were well placed to offer credit and change specifically through their holdings in both east and west. It was a short step to move into more general finance, unconnected to crusading activity by the 1290s their house in Paris could offer a deposit bank with a cash desk open on a daily basis and specialist accountancy services of great value to contemporary secular administrations. Thus, the Templars became the bankers to nobles, kings, and Popes as well as to pilgrims on their way to and from Jerusalem and other holy sites.



Our familiar "traveler's check" today is a modern-day example of using a 'letter of credit' –just as the Templars did in the 12th century, in medieval times. The Templar structure was cemented by effective communications including its own Mediterranean shipping. They had many galleys and like the Hospitallers, took part in naval warfare at times, too. They even had their own Admiral by 1301.

Together with the Hospitallers, the Knights Templar became the permanent defenders of the Latin settlements of the East, increasingly entrusted with key castles and fiefs. By the 1180s, there were approximately 600 knights in Jerusalem, Tripoli and Antioch, and perhaps three times that number of sergeants. No major battle took place without their participation. In the 13th century, the Order was the only institution capable of building great castles like Athlit (Pilgrims' Castle) (1217-21) on the coast to the south of Haifa and Safed (early 1240s) dominating the Galilean Hills. Such military and financial power, together with the extensive papal privileges, gave them immense influence in the Latin East and, at times, led to conflict with other institutions.

The Latin Rule of 1129, which had been influenced by a monastic establishment with little experience of practical crusading, soon proved inadequate for such an expanding organization. New sections, written in French, were added, first in the 1160s, when 202 clauses defined the hierarchy of the Order and laid down its military functions and then, within the next twenty years, a further 107 clauses on the discipline of the convent and 158 clauses on the holding of chapters and the penance system. Between 1257 and 1267, 113 clauses set out case histories which could be used as precedents in the administration of penances'. The existence of a version of the Rule in Catalan, dating from after 1268, shows that efforts were made to ensure that its contents were widely understood within the Order. Although the Order never underwent a thorough internal reform, these developments indicate that the Templars were not oblivious to the need to maintain standards.

The Templar Order's administration was structured hierarchically. The Grand Master was based at the Order's headquarters in the Holy Land, along with the other major officers, each of whom had their own staff. The Seneschal was the Grand Master's deputy; in ceremonies he carried the famed beauseant, the Templars' black-and-white banner. Like the Grand Master, the Seneschal had his own staff and horses. The Marshal was the chief military officer, responsible for the individual commanders and the horses, arms, equipment and anything else involving military operations. He also had authority in obtaining and ordering supplies, which was critically important at the time of the Crusades.

The Commander of the Kingdom of Jerusalem was the treasurer of the Order and was in charge of the strong room. He shared power with the Grand Master in a way that prevented either from having too much control over funds. The Draper issued clothes and bed linen and could distribute gifts made to the order. He was not only keeper of the famed white mantles but also ensured that every brother was dressed appropriately. These four, along with the Grand Master, were the major officers of the Order, although there seems to have been some local variation where needed. Under these main officers were other Templar commanders with specific regional responsibilities, such as the commanders of the cities of Jerusalem.

Various officials called bailies governed daily administration of the Order's regional houses, and the officer in charge was called the baili. So, the Templar Order consisted of members in a variety of positions performing many different functions. It even hired some assistants from outside the Order, and, contrary to popular belief, only a minority of members were actually full-fledged Knights.

The loss of Acre in 1291 and the Mamluk conquest of Palestine and Syria have often been seen as a turning-point in Templar history, for the Order was apparently left without a specific role in a society still profoundly imbued with the idea of its own organic unity. Indeed, the failure of the military orders to prevent the advance of Islam had attracted criticism since at least the 1230s with the loss of the Christian hold on the mainland, opponents were provided with a specific focus for their attacks. The more constructive of these critics advocated a union of the Temple and the Hospital as the first step in a thorough reassessment of their activities, although the Orders themselves showed little enthusiasm for such schemes. There was, however, no suggestion that either order be abolished. In fact, the Templars continued to pursue the holy war with some vigor from their base in Cyprus for they did not see the events of 1291 as inevitably presaging the decline of crusading.



The attack on them by Philippe IV, King of France, in October 1307, ostensibly on the grounds of "vehement suspicion" of heresy and blasphemy, therefore owes more to the potent combination of a king afflicted by a morbid religiosity on the one hand and an administration in severe financial trouble on the other, than it does to any failings of the Templars. In fact, the Templars (unlike the Hospitallers) had never previously been accused of heresy. In the end, neither the limited intervention by Pope Clement V nor an energetic defense by some Templars, could save the Order, which was suppressed by the papal bull Vox in Excelso in 1312. Its goods and properties were then transferred over to the Hospitallers. Although the Order itself was suppressed, many of the knights fled and went underground, or joined other Orders. Their extraordinary legacy and memory still live on today, nearly nine centuries later.



## Chronology of Some of the Key Medieval Templar Order Events

- 1118** Official beginnings and emergence of the Order of the Temple; nine knights, led by Hugh de Payns, the first Templar Grand Master, present themselves to King Baldwin II in Jerusalem (1118-9)
- 1119** First nine knights remain in the Holy Land (1119-28)
- 1128** By this time, the early Templars return from the Holy Land; beginnings of the Order's unprecedented rise and influence
- 1129** Jan Council of Troyes; Rule of the Templar Order established
- 1130** Bernard of Clairvaux completes In Praise of the New Knighthood
- 1139** Templar Castles in the Holy Land completed Baghras, Darbask, Destroit, La Roche, de Roussel, Port Bonnet

- 1149** Gaza granted to the Templars
- 1153** Death of Bernard of Clairvaux
- 1160** Hierarchical statutes added to the Templar Rule (Mid 1160's)
- 1160** Statutes on daily monastic life, chapter meetings, and penances added to Rule (Late 1160's)
- 1191** Templar headquarters in the Latin East moved to Acre
- 1191** Templars occupy Cyprus (1191-2)
- 1217** Building of Atlit; Pilgrims' Castle, a major Templar fortress in the Holy Land (1217-21)
- 1257** Additional penances added to the Templar Rule (1257-67)
- 1291** Aug Acre falls to the Mamluks; Templars evacuate Atlit and Tortosa
- 1307** Dawn raid and arrests of the Templars in France (Oct 13)
- 1307** Pope orders all Christian kings to arrest the Templars (Oct 27)
- 1308** Templars questioned and imprisoned in various areas
- 1309** Papal commission begins in France (August)
- 1310** Templar trial procedures begin
- 1311** Council of Vienne; Templar Order formally dissolved by Pope's first bull, Vox in excelso, but charges against the order are "not proven"
- 1312** Pope's second bull, Ad providam, transfers Templar property to the Hospitaller Order
- 1314** Last Templar Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, and Preceptor of Normandy, Geoffroi de Charney, burned at the stake. (March)

## **What Does It Mean To Be A Templar?**



To be a Templar is to belong to a worldwide, select group of 6,000 like-minded Knights and Dames world-wide. It is to have an interest in the history and study of an ancient Order which was started by Bernard of Clairvaux in 1118. It successfully defended pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land and fought valiantly for the faith, particularly when outnumbered. Its very success as the original bankers of Europe sowed the seeds of its destruction in 1314 at the hands of two powerful men,

deeply in debt to the Order: King Phillippe IV of France and Pope Clement V.

*"The old order chaneth, yielding place to new, And God fulfills Himself in many ways....."*

**Alfred Lord Tennyson**

*"The Passing of Arthur from "the Idylls of the King"*

### **Present Work**

Today's Order was founded in France in 1705, officially reconstituted in 1804 and recognized as an Order of Chivalry by its patron Napoleon Bonaparte. To follow in the footsteps of the Templars of old, to adhere to and observe their ideals and rituals (as much as possible in today's modern world) is our goal and we do so by:

- Supporting and living in accord with the precepts of Christian Chivalry: with faith, love, courage, charity, justice, wisdom, prudence, temperance, valour, humility and hope.
- Encouraging and promoting Christian humanitarian work at home and internationally, especially in the Holy Land and the Middle East.
- Investigating and emulating the historical ideals of our ancient Order
- Encouraging the development of spiritual and moral strengthening of humankind in accordance to the first great principles of the Order embodied in the motto, Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed Nomini Tu ad gloriam" from Psalm 115 verse 1

## **Knight Templar Facts**

The Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem is an international order of Chivalry with members in over 40 countries worldwide. There are approximately 6,000 members of the Order.

- Knights Templar support a number of domestic and overseas charities.
- Membership is open to Christian men and women of all denominations who have demonstrated a commitment to public service.
- Among the more prominent members of the Knights Templar are members of the European High Aristocracy, Chiefs of Scottish clans, Bishops of the Anglican, Lutheran and Orthodox Churches, diplomats and officials of several countries of the United Nations or of intergovernmental organizations.
- The organization has no connection to the Freemasons.
- The Order does not engage in politics.
- The Order is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) and has been designated in Special Consultative Status to the United Nations.
- The Order has a NATO Priory comprised entirely of senior serving military officers.
- One of the cultural aims of the Order is to represent and defend the values of Christianity. Accordingly, full membership is open to Christians. We recognize that there are many other worthy traditions, and we appreciate and cherish the participation of non-Christian friends and supporters. Associate membership is open to non-Christians through the Fellows of the Order.
- Currently OSMTH enjoys the Religious Protection of His Beatitude the Most Blessed Theodosius, Metropolitan of the United States and Canada and the Royal Patronage of HRH Princess Elisabeth Ysenburg und Budingen, Princess Schleswig-Holstein-Sanderburg-Glücksburg.
- Member Grand Priories – Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, England and Wales, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Mexico, NATO, Norway, Serbia and U.S.A. Autonomous Priories – Association of Scottish Knights Templar and Japan. OSMTH Administered Priory – Belgium.
- Expansion Efforts – Expansion is currently underway in the following countries: Argentina, Australia, Cyprus, Romania, Singapore, South Africa and Korea.

# **THE SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER of the TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM**

## **Vision – Commitment – Actions**

### **OUR VISION**

Today, Knights Templar International looks for a world in which:

- A constructive dialogue between the great religious faiths and the individuals and nations that adhere to them, is conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and peace;
- The holy sites of Christianity and the other great faiths are respected, protected and maintained, and pilgrims can travel to them in safety;
- The dedication, generosity and integrity of all those engaged in providing humanitarian aid are recognized and valued, and air workers carry out their vital work in an ethical manner without fear of discrimination;
- The principles of active charity, courtesy, dedication and honesty inherent in the highest ideals of a code of chivalry and a personal rule of life, are spread wider and wider in society; and
- The contribution of the Knights Templar, medieval and modern, with regard to agriculture, construction, transportation, crafts, medicine, finance, interfaith affairs, diplomacy and philanthropy is both well researched and also widely understood and valued by the public.

### **OUR COMMITMENT**

OSMTH – Knights Templar International aspires to be the modern organization the original Knights Templar might have become, if their historical development had not been broken.

Like other orders of military and monastic origins, whose traditions stem from Jerusalem in the Middle Ages, our membership has long ago put aside swords for purely ceremonial use and turned its attention, as a civil society organization, to charitable, cultural, humanitarian and reconciliation endeavors. In our members today, we look for Christians sufficiently confident in their own beliefs to respect and value the beliefs of those of other faiths and of none.

Today's Templars in OSMTH – Knights Templar International seek, by their collective action and individual personal example, to put into practice in the modern world the highest ideals of the code of chivalry and the personal rule of Christian life inspired by the spiritual father of the medieval Order, St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

Our modern Order also adheres to the Principles by the General Assembly of the Order of the Temple in Paris in 1841 in that:

- Our membership is open to Christians of all denominations and from all social backgrounds;
- We operate as an openly accountable, democratic and non-political organization;
- Our members have a duty to promote the causes of peace and human dignity; and
- Our work in humanitarian aid is undertaken for the benefit of the diverse strands of all humanity.

## OUR ACTIONS

In addition to the local and national activities of each of its constituent Member Grand Priories, OSMTH – Knights Templar International undertakes a range of collective programs around the world.

In choosing and implementing these collective international programs, our modern Order particularly seeks:

- To promote dialogue amongst, and between, the Abrahamic faiths and the other great religions of the world with a view to establishing better understanding and greater tolerance;
- To assist Christian communities around the world, and especially in the Holy Land, whenever their human rights are at risk;
- To build bridges of understanding and support between the Eastern and Western Churches of the Christian faith; and society organizations by our active participation in the programs of disaster relief, humanitarian aid, peace building and sustainable development, that respect the full range of human diversity

