

Apologia Pro Templaris:
**A Historical Investigation into the Founding, Suppression
and Legacy of the Templar Knights**

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I. Introduction

In the year 1340, a German priest named Ludolph of Sudheim was on pilgrimage in the Holy Land and came upon two old men on the shores of the Dead Sea. After inquiring into their identities, he learned they were Templar Knights who had escaped capture when the city of Acre, the last crusader stronghold, fell to the Egyptian Mamluks in 1291. The two knights had lost all contact with Christendom, and to their horror, they learned from the German priest that the entire Templar Order underwent suppression in 1312 on charges of blasphemy, sodomy, and heresy (Barber "The New Knighthood" 1).

While the two elderly knights were allowed to live out their final days in peace, the reality remained that the most powerful religious military order of the crusades had gone from being the champions of the Holy Land to allegedly being one of the vilest of heretics to ever reside in Christendom. While many throughout Europe testified to the order's innocence, the fact remained that the glorious knights of the Temple were forever to carry a legacy of suspicion, defamation, and confusion concerning the true history and actions of the order. Today, a visit to a local *Borders* or *Barnes and Noble* bookstore shows that the history of the Templar Knights remains a popular topic. In general, popular works such as *The Da Vinci Code*, *The Templar Revelation*, and *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, claim that the Templars were an occultist order of mystical warriors, devotees of ancient paganism and proficient in magic, the guardians of such items as the Holy Grail, and the predecessors of the Freemasons. Despite the abundance of critically historical renditions about the Templars, the modern trend today seems to favor the unhistorical, poorly researched works of Templar history, since their sensational claims lead the imagination into a world of secret societies, occultist fantasies and conspiracy theories (Olsen/Miesel 222). Since there is an abundance of misconceptions concerning the history of the Templar Knights, there is a need to defend the Order based on the many historically critical works about them in order to give a balanced and accurate investigation into their history.

With this in mind, my *Apologia Pro Templaris* can begin by giving a brief summary of the areas this paper will cover, with my main purpose being to give a historically critical account of the Templars' foundation, suppression and legacy. The creation of the Templars took place in 1119 and was representative of an age in which an increasingly self-confident Church, strengthened by the Gregorian Reforms, was launching itself into the Crusades abroad. In regard to the foundation of the Templars, I will show that the primary purpose for founding the Order was to provide protection for the increased number of Christian pilgrimages following the capture of Jerusalem in 1099. Alongside the protecting of pilgrims, the Templars were founded because of a need for a permanent military presence in the Holy Land to ensure that the newly established kingdoms of Outremer would stand against Islam.

In addition, I will explore the role St. Bernard of Clairvaux had in composing a monastic rule of life and spirituality for the Order, and provide reasons for his justification of the two-fold identity of the Templars as knights and monks. The philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas also came to factor into the identity of the Templars. St. Thomas' *Summa Theologica*, although written approximately 150 years after the founding of the Templars, reflects the praise that St. Bernard had for the Templars and offers further insights into providing justification for the Order's somewhat objectionable identity as both monks and warriors.

With the foundation of the Templars clearly defined, I will then explore the reasons for the suppression of the Order. Beginning with the early criticisms launched against the Templars, I will explore how the loss of the crusader city of Acre in 1291 marked the beginning of the

Templars' demise. Next, I will argue that the destruction of the Templars resulted primarily from the motives of King Philip IV, who for economic and political reasons sought to destroy the Templars. By analyzing Philip's role, I will also show how the destruction of the Templars is essentially a consequence of the loss of power and prestige of the papacy under Clement V, which found itself unable to defend the Templars against the rapacity of Philip.

Finally, after I have adequately explored the suppression of the Templars, I will show how the identity of the Templars underwent serious distortion due to the fascination of European occultist and Masonic circles in the Templars. In the end, I hope to give an objective and historically critical defense of the Templars in light of the systematic defamation they have undergone.

II. The Founding of the Templars

In 1997, French author Michel Lamy presented a radically new idea regarding the motivation behind the founding of the Templars. In his book, *Les Templiers. Ces Grands Seigneurs aux Blancs Manteaux*, Lamy proposes that the Templars were originally founded because of a grandiose treasure that was buried under the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (Read 305). Lamy claims that the Templars' founder, Hugh of Payns, and the original Templars discovered this ancient treasure since they built their headquarters on the site where the Jewish Temple once stood (Read 305). This theory is also found in other contemporary Templar pseudo-histories like *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* and a bizarre work by Keith Laidler entitled *The Head of God*. Laidler claims that the greatest treasure that the Templars found under the Temple Mount was none other than the embalmed head of Jesus Christ that the Templars worshipped in secrecy (Read 305-6). While these claims lack any credible historical evidence, the idea of the Templars as medieval treasure hunters has not been without believing audience as the recent movie *National Treasure* demonstrates. For Lamy, Laidler, and others, the Templars somehow dug through many layers of solid stone to find some of the world's most sought after treasures, such as the original seven-branched candelabra that Titus seized during the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Shroud of Turin to name a few (Read 304). These wild stories of a supposed buried treasure at the Temple Mount have become a popular theory as to the original reason for the founding of the Templars.

However, a historically critical investigation into their founding paints a very different picture. The creation of the Templar Order resulted from the desire of the monarchs and religious figures in the newly created Latin Kingdoms in the Middle East and in Europe to have a fighting force that would protect the pilgrim routes and ensure a permanent military presence in these newly conquered lands. In addition to these two reasons, justifications for the founding of Templars are present in the spiritual writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux and in the philosophical work of St. Thomas Aquinas.

In the year 1095, Pope Urban II addressed the Christian populace of the French city of Clermont and urged them to "take up arms to aid their brethren in the east, who were allegedly being harassed, tortured and killed by a new race of barbarians called the Seljuk Turks" (Barber "New" 2). The preaching of a holy war against Islam resulted in numerous nobles, knights and peasants in Christendom attempting to reclaim the Holy Land for Christ. The climax of the First Crusade came with the capture of the holy city of Jerusalem in 1099. The crusaders "gave thanks to God for their extraordinary victory and celebrated Mass at the holiest shrine of their religion, the tomb from which Jesus, the living Temple of the New Covenant, had risen from the dead" (Read 83). The ecstatic jubilation that the crusaders felt after Jerusalem's capture and the restoration of Christ's presence in the city was short lived. The vast majority of the crusaders "returned to Europe bearing tales of depravation and danger, miracle and victory" (Nicholson 17) creating an exodus from the newly conquered lands. Fulcher of Chartres, one of the earliest

clerical settlers in Jerusalem wrote, “only three hundred knights and three hundred foot soldiers remained in the vicinity of Jerusalem by 1100. This is not enough to protect the country” (qtd. in Nicholson 17-18). The absence of military personnel in Jerusalem and other crusader cities was creating substantial problems for safe passage in the Holy Land.

A. The Protection of Pilgrims

Most of the travelers in the Holy Land were pilgrims visiting the holy sites of Christianity scattered throughout Palestine. The roads connecting pilgrim sites had become unsafe despite the crusaders' presence. Many of the pilgrim routes ran through areas in the Holy Land that were sparsely populated, meaning that there would be little to no military support in a specific region if a pilgrim camp was discovered by Islamic raiders (Upton-Ward 3). A Russian abbot named Daniel recalls one such attack. He describes the hardship he faced while traveling to the church of St. George in Lydda, just outside the Muslim stronghold of Ascalon (Barber “New” 3): “There are many springs there (at Lydda); travellers rest by the water but with great fear, for it is a deserted place and nearby is the town of Ascalon from which Saracens sally forth and kill travelers on these roads” (Barber 3).

As the influx of pilgrims increased after the fall of Jerusalem, so too did the frequency and brutality of the attacks. During Holy Week 1119, a group of 700 unarmed pilgrims was traveling along the pilgrim route from Jerusalem to the Jordan River when they were ambushed by Muslim raiders, resulting in the deaths of 300 pilgrims and the enslavement of 60 others (Read 92). If the crusader states were going to function as symbols of Christian victory over Islam, the religious sites of Christianity would have to be open to pilgrims, and protection of the roadways that connected these sites was of the utmost priority.

The creation of the Templar Order came about as a result for the need to establish a permanent military escort for the pilgrims in the Holy Land. French knights Hugh of Payns, Godfrey of Saint Omer, and seven of their companions in 1119 received permission from King Baldwin II of Jerusalem to create a new religious/military order. Originally, they desired to found a lay-confraternity that would serve as a monastic refuge for the nine knights and allow them to serve the needs of Jerusalem's poor (Read 91). However, King Baldwin and Warmund, the patriarch of Jerusalem, were quick to convince the knights to retain their military lifestyle. King Baldwin petitioned them to remain knights “in order to save [your] souls, and guard those places [referring to the pilgrim sites] against robbers” or as medieval chronicler James of Vitry bluntly put it “to defend pilgrims against [Islamic] brigands and rapists” (qtd. in Read 92). Patriarch Warmund made similar requests of the knights to “keep the roads and highways safe from the menace of robbers and highwaymen, with special regard for the protection of pilgrims” (qtd. in Barber “The Military Orders” 151).

After these knights were convinced to retain their military identity, they assumed the name of “the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Jesus Christ” and began to use the monastic rule of St. Augustine as the governance of their fledgling religious/military order, keeping in mind the desire to “give themselves to Christ, and to remain fighting men” (Howarth 43). The Poor Fellow-Soldiers would quickly become known as the Knights of the Temple of Solomon or the Templars since they were given the Al-Asqa mosque (known as the “Temple of Solomon” to the crusaders) opposite the Dome of the Rock on the Temple mount as their permanent residence. King Baldwin II of Jerusalem and Patriarch Warmund provided the Templars “fresh horses, a steady income, and supplies of food, clothing and arms” to assure that they would be able to support a community in Jerusalem (qtd. in Barber “New” 18).

Within the first couple of years of the Templars' existence, praise began to come from various clerics in the Holy Land and Christendom. Archbishop William of Tyre described the Templars as “devoted to God, religious and God-fearing” (qtd. in Nicholson 23). Castellan of Saint Omer in France remarked that the Order was “whom divine providence deputed to the

defense of the land of Jerusalem and the protection of pilgrims” (qtd. in Barber “New” 7-8). In addition to receiving praise from the clergy in Christendom and the Holy Land, a number of European nobility soon entered the Templars. In 1120, a powerful French duke, Fulk of Anjou, entered the Templars after their first year in Jerusalem and in 1125, Hugh of Champagne, the feudal lord of Hugh of Payns, formally entered the Order (Read 93). The entrance of these and future feudal lords into the Templars marked the first indications of the respect and acceptance that Christendom had towards the Templars and their mission. As a religious brotherhood, the Templars saw the protection of pilgrims as a priority to maintaining the monastic nature of the Order, since the “defense of pilgrims was charity in itself” (Nicholson “Saints or Sinners?” 35).

B. The Defense of Outremer

The withdrawal of military forces after the victory in Jerusalem created a major crisis in the protection of the new crusader states. Malcolm Barber describes how the First Crusade had been a successful campaign for the soldiers of Christendom: “By the end of the second decade of the twelfth century much had been achieved: the states of Antioch, Tripoli, and Jerusalem, along the coast, and Edessa, inland to the northeast of Antioch, had been established: Most of the vital coastal cities had been captured...” (“New” 2)

All of the territory that had been captured by the crusaders became known as the Latin Kingdoms or Outremer. Divided further in to the County of Edessa, the Principality of Antioch, the County of Tripoli and the Kingdom of Jerusalem; the crusaders’ regarded their conquest to be regaining “a part of Christendom that had been temporarily captured by Islam but was now restored to its rightful owners” (Nicholson 18). The victory in the Holy Land was an outstanding victory for the crusading armies, but it was a victory that was riddled with problems. Piers Paul Read describes the situation: “A shortage of manpower was endemic in Outremer from the start. In the autumn of 1099, after defeating the Egyptian army sent to relieve Jerusalem, most of the surviving crusaders began the journey home” (88). The crusader states of Outremer were now possessed with a dilemma: to give up the newly formed kingdoms because of an inability to convince crusaders to remain and defend the Holy Land; or to search for a new means by which a permanent military presence could be established. The creation of the Templar Order was the solution to the dilemma.

While “the formation of the Templars arose from a desire to provide protection for pilgrims,” (Barber “New” 17) the monastic foundation of the Order allowed their role to be expanded to the defense of Outremer. Simon, a monk from St. Bertin in France, described how the monastic life of prayer and devotion would allow a military mandate to be integrated into the Templar Order:

On the advice of the princes of God’s army, they vowed themselves to God’s Temple under this rule: they would renounce the world, give up personal goods, free themselves to pursue chastity, and lead a communal life wearing a poor habit, only using weapons to defend the land against the attacks of the insurgent pagans when necessity demanded (qtd. in Nicholson 24).

Simon’s praise of the Templars reflected the growing acceptance of European clerics for a military presence within a monastic order. In fact, Alan Forey notes that the idea of a religious military order is a product of European Christian ethos during the Crusades, in that the military orders were seen as achieving salvation by means of the sword (“Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades” 185). Since the Gregorian Reforms, there was a growing acceptance in the Church towards a new breed of soldiers, “The soldiers of Christ”. While this expression was not new to Christendom, since the monastic life had often been considered a type of soldering for

Christ (Barber "New" 40), the idea of "soldiers of Christ" that actually used physical force to defend the Church and save one's soul was only beginning to receive wide spread acceptance. In addition, Forey also notes that the military orders were looked upon as an acceptable way for a layman to enter the religious state and retain his secular knighthood ("Oxford" 185). Entrance into the Templars also provided a layman with the monetary benefits of receiving entrance into the clerical state and acquiring a share in the common property of the Order.

As a monastic brotherhood of knights, the Templars had become the perfect defenders of Outremer. They possessed the sanctity of religious monks that would ensure the continuation of the presence of Christ in Outremer, while using their military skills to defend the kingdoms against the aggressions of Islam.

C. Monks and Warriors?

The Templars were, however, skeptical at the prospect of fighting for the defense of Outremer. They were not convinced that they could adequately serve God as both a religious order and as a contingent of knights: "The Templars were evidently pessimistic about the role they had chosen. In a world in which religious observance of the monastery was reckoned as the surest way to salvation, the obligation to shed blood instead of prayer seemed an inferior way to serve God" (Partner 4).

Forey notes that while the Templars' role as both monks and knights was acceptable to the majority of Christendom, the prevailing tendency was to view the mission of the military orders as inferior to the contemplative orders in Christendom, and that the violence of the battlefield seemed hardly a path to sanctification ("Oxford" 185). Early doubts about the Order led to only nine new recruits in the first ten years of the Templars' foundation (Ratisbonne 123) and caused Hugh of Payns to consider if the Order could continue. What the Templars needed was justification from influential clerics in Christendom that would assure the Templars that their vocations were just in the eyes of God, and seen as a definitive and praiseworthy path to salvation. For Hugh of Payns, his vassalage to Hugh of Champagne, who in turn had contributed greatly to the construction of the Cistercian monastery at Cîteaux, allowed him to have access to the most illustrious and influential religious figure of his day, St. Bernard of Clairvaux. St. Bernard would quickly become the most influential supporter of the Templars, assuring that the Order survived.

Before one can investigate the writings of St. Bernard, there is a need to explore how the mediaeval Church discussed whether violence could be justifiably used when Christians engaged in warfare with a non-Christian enemy. The concept of justified violence and warfare is one that has been present in Catholic theology and political philosophy most notably since the writings of St. Augustine. Jonathan Riley-Smith explores the criteria that the mediaeval Church used in justifying the use of violence in the context of the Crusades, and this paper will use his work and the *Summa Theologica* as the basis for exploring whether the Templars were justified in their use of violence in the Holy Land.

Riley-Smith sets out three criteria that needed to be in place if the Crusades were to be considered just by the Church. First, a crusade must be for a just cause, which normally meant that a crusade could be launched in retaliation for past or present aggression or injury by another (Riley-Smith "What Were the Crusades?" 6). Second, a crusade could be considered just if it was called by a legitimate authority, which was either secular or religious (Riley-Smith "What" 6). Third, a crusade could be just if it was launched for the right intention: that is that each participant in the crusade had pure motives to achieve a just cause, and that force should be used only out of strict necessity (Riley-Smith "What" 6). For the Templars to be justified in their vocations as both monks and warriors, their activities in the Holy Land needed to reflect the three criteria that the mediaeval Church presented as justifications for launching the Crusades.

In terms of the first criteria, the Templars were seen as justified in using violence since their foundation came as a result of Islamic aggression that predated the Crusades, most notably the burning of the Holy Sepulcher in 1009 and the persecution of eastern Christians in the region. In addition, the First Crusade was understood by its participants as a defensive war that sought to reclaim land that formally belonged to Christendom, and in turn would assure the protection of Christians in the region. Riley-Smith notes that the Church during the Crusades believed the Holy Land to have always been a part of Christendom. Christ's presence in Israel forever sanctified it as his rightful property, which he would give to his Church and also to Christendom as the rightful successor of the Roman Empire that had conquered Palestine in the past before it was lost to Islam (Riley-Smith "What" 11). About 170 years after the First Crusade, St. Thomas reiterated the Church's teaching on the use of justified violence when he wrote that Christians could be justified in attacking a kingdom in which the faith of its Christian population was in jeopardy, as was the case of eastern Christians living under the religious intolerance of the Seljuk Turks. Pope Urban II claimed that this religious intolerance manifested itself in the desecration of Christian holy sites and in maltreatment directed towards the Christian inhabitants of the Seljuk Empire prior to the First Crusade (Runciman 107). Specifically, St. Thomas said that if Christians lived in a land that was governed by non-Christian leaders that had forgone granting religious freedom, then Christians were justified in using force to assure that the faith of their brethren remained firm since only Christians of great virtue could withstand the contemptuous influence of their rulers (II-II q.10 a.10). Since the Templars lived in the Holy Land and faced the possibility of attack while protecting pilgrim routes or during warfare with Islamic enemies, the Church justified the Templars' use of violence in a region that had become increasingly intolerant to Christian inhabitants.

In regard to the second criteria, the Templars can be justified for using violence since their defense of the Holy Land was in obedience to the Pope and Christendom as the legitimate authorities in sanctioning the Crusades. The Church at the time of the First Crusade understood Christendom to be more than just a collection of European feudal empires. Rather, it was a Christian state, ruled primarily by Christ the King, and served by his agents (the Pope, bishops, kings, etc...), meaning that a just decree issued from any of these agents would be understood as reflecting the will of Christ himself (Riley-Smith "What" 25). As such, it became the patriotic duty of Christendom to launch a crusade into the Holy Land, since Christ's former presence there had forever claimed it as a part of Christendom, revealing the mediaeval Church's transcendent understanding of Christendom as extending to all lands on earth and in heaven (Riley-Smith "What" 25). St. Thomas also taught that the crusaders and hence the Templars were justified in their actions since they followed the orders of a legitimate authority. He said that while Christians living in a non-Christian state were obliged to observe the dominion and authority of that state by virtue of natural law, this obedience could be ended if the Church called for the capture of that state for Christ, since the Church is the authority of God on earth (II-II q.10 a.10). Since the Templars submitted to the legitimate authority of the Church and answered her call to restore the Holy Land to its proper place in the kingdom of Christendom, they received justification from the Church to engage in warfare while stilling remaining a contemplative religious order.

Concerning the third criteria, the Templars were justified in using violence if they had pure motives for doing so. This is a very difficult criterion to assess since the history of the Crusades is plagued with numerous individuals that traveled to the Holy Land out of sinful motives. However, St. Thomas demonstrated how a military order like the Templars could assure that their motives were just if they viewed their vocations as a form of penitential warfare. St. Thomas said that soldiering could be used for the assistance of one's neighbor and the defense of a whole commonwealth, Christendom in this case (II-II, q.188 a.3). St. Thomas affirmed that soldiering done out of a love for one's neighbor and for protecting one's nation could be a function of a religious order, since biblical figures like Joshua and Judas Maccabeus

had undertaken such a role in order to persevere the law and religious practices of Israel (II-II, q.188 a.3). Since the Templars were using violence to defend their Christian brethren and the faith and liturgical life of the Church in the Holy Land, St. Thomas agreed that the Templars were justified in using violence. In addition, St. Thomas said that a religious order could pursue soldiering as a form of penance for personal sins, since he viewed the military orders of his day (which included the Templars) as being enjoined with this penitential practice as one of the defining features of their service in the Holy Land (II-II, q.188 a.3). Riley-Smith notes that this penitential warfare would become a devotional way of life for the Templars, since they were permanently in conflict with Islam in the throngs of a holy war ("The First Crusader" 161). With all of this in mind, one can understand the Church's mindset towards justifying the use of violence by the crusaders as an attitude that permeated Christendom, and thus influenced St. Bernard into giving his support for the Templar cause.

D. The Contributions of St. Bernard of Clairvaux

In 1127, King Baldwin II sent Hugh of Payns on a diplomatic mission to Europe to gain recruits for the defense of Jerusalem. While historians credit Hugh of Payns with almost single-handedly raising a significant number of recruits for service in the Holy Land as a precursor to the Second Crusade (Riley-Smith "The Crusades: A Short History" 58), his primary reason for traveling to Christendom was to seek St. Bernard's wisdom and influence in helping to fortify his order. St. Bernard was a major supporter of the Templar Order and the Crusades from their beginning, and he agreed to address Hugh of Payn's uncertainty towards the future and purpose of the Templars. During the Council of Troyes (1129-35), St. Bernard presented the council fathers with a short tract that he had composed specifically for the Templars, the *De Laude Novae Militae*. This document contained justifications for the Templars' two-fold identity as monks and knights. It also gave the Templars a definitive rule based on the Cistercian rule. While the document deals mostly with the details of the Templars' monastic life, it does contain important spiritual reflection by St. Bernard that fortified the Templars in their vocations.

St. Bernard saw the Templars as the new knighthood that was the most perfect expression of what a crusader ought to strive towards. The Templars combined the loftiest ideal of the day, the willingness to die while on crusade for the glory of God and in fidelity to Christendom, combined with the sacred contemplation of Christ in a monastic setting (Daniel-Rops 111). The words of Bishop Anselm of Havelberg, a contemporary of St. Bernard, explain the two-fold nature of the order:

...Peaceful at home, outside they are valiant fighters; at home obedient to regular discipline, outside obedient to military discipline; at home enveloping themselves in sacred silence, outside imperturbable in the fracas and violence of war; and to say everything, perfect for the execution of all orders they receive, inside and outside, in the simplicity of obedience (qtd. in Barber "New" 50).

However, St. Bernard gave the Templars a firm warning at the beginning of the *De Laude* that spiritual purity and an intense focus on cultivating a monastic lifestyle was the first priority of every Templar, despite their military identity. St. Bernard lamented that many crusaders had fallen into the clutches of Satan by undertaking a crusade for worldly ambitions or bloodlust, and he demanded that the Templars not allow worldly affairs to dominate the mindset of the Temple (Barber "New" 42). Once the Templars had achieved this detachment from the world, they could pursue the spiritual life with clarity and right intention. St. Bernard told the Templars that a deep spiritual life would help prepare them for war with Islam and he assured them that "it is useless

indeed for us to attack exterior enemies...if we do not first conquer those of the interior" (qtd. in Barber "New" 49).

St. Bernard made it very clear in the *De Laude* that the Templars were not guilty of homicide during battle, because they were pursuing malecide, which is the destruction of injustice as opposed to the killing of the unjust (Seward 35). Each time a Templar killed a Muslim, St. Bernard said that his intention for killing that individual must be to destroy the blasphemy that Islam as a whole stood for, and he was never to kill out of malice or hatred for that specific individual. Whether the act was sinful or not resided in the motive of the each Templar, who could always be justified in killing his foe in battle if he remembered that he was pursuing a defensive war, united to a just cause, with the intention always being to destroy evil at all cost (Evans 19).

In addition to giving the Templars a monastic rule and justification for killing Islamic enemies in defensive combat, St. Bernard also cultivated a unique spirituality in the Order. Since the majority of the Templars were illiterate, the recitation of the Divine Office would be prayed by only a handful of Templars. *Lectio Divina* was also problematic for most of the Templars, so St. Bernard devised a unique form of prayer. Since the Templars lived near many of Christianity's holiest shrines, most notably their close vicinity to the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, St. Bernard encouraged the Templars to meditate on the scenes of Christ's life, death and resurrection by gazing upon these holy sites (Barber "New" 45-6). This contemplative prayer also reinforced in the Templars the purpose of their vocations. Each time they meditated upon the holy sites of Christ's life, they were reminded of the utmost importance that their work in the Holy Land had in assuring that these holy sites would be open to all of Christendom (Barber "New" 47).

The *De Laude* was given approval by the Council of Troyes, and Pope Honorius II permitted patriarch Warmund to enjoin the new Templar rule on the knights (Ratisbonne 124). As Hugh of Payns returned to Jerusalem, St. Bernard assured him that:

Rejoice, brave warrior, if you live and conquer in the Lord, but rejoice still more and give thanks if you die and go to join the Lord. This life can be fruitful and victory is glorious, yet a holy death for righteousness is worth more. Certainly 'blessed are they who die in the Lord' but how much more so are those who die for Him (Seward 15).

The creation of the Templar Knights resulted because of a need to protect pilgrim routes and establish a permanent military presence in the Latin kingdoms of Outremer. Despite the support of Christendom's nobility and clergy to undertake this mission, the Templars were slow in attracting recruits because of their controversial identity as monks and warriors. However, justifications for their two-fold identity and their use of violence were given in the *De Laude Novae Militae* of St. Bernard of Clairvaux and later in the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas as means to support the Templars in their task of defending the Holy Land for Christ and the Church.

III. The Trial and Suppression of the Templars

On October 13th, 1307, King Philip IV of France ordered the arrest of all Templar Knights within the country. Philip described the charges against the Templars to be "a bitter thing, a lamentable thing, a thing which is so horrible to contemplate, terrible to hear of, a detestable crime, an execrable evil.... A thing almost inhuman, indeed set apart from all humanity" (qtd. in Barber "Trial of the Templars" 45). The interrogation, torture and execution of numerous

Templars were based on charges of heresy, blasphemy and sodomy that Philip proclaimed to be prevalent in the Templar Order. While historically critical historians of the Templars claim that the charges were fabricated by the French crown as a means to defame the Templars and allow Philip to obtain their wealth and remove their military presence from his lands, poorly researched and highly sensationalized books like the *Da Vinci Code* offer a historically inaccurate rendition of the Templars' demise.

In the opinion of Dan Brown, the perpetrator for the destruction of the Templars was not primarily the king of France, but was rather pope Clement V. According to *The Da Vinci Code*, Clement V was the one who ordered the Templars' arrest, in a "CIA like sting operation that Brown described as a Machiavellian operation [carried] off with clockwork precision" (Olsen/Miesel 206). Clement's primary reason for destroying the Templars was their alleged worship of a horned fertility god known as Baphomet and their adherence to Gnostic and occultist heresies (Olsen/Miesel 207). In a dramatic finale, Brown describes how Clement watched the Templars burn in Rome, and then threw their ashes in the Tiber (a perfect example of Brown's lack of historical accuracy, since the pope resided in Avignon at that time and was not present at the actual Templar burnings at Paris in 1310) (Olsen/Miesel 209). Dan Brown's version of the Templars' suppression is full of historical inaccuracies and contradicts most critical historical studies of the Templars that all point to Philip as the primary reason for the Templars' demise. In fact, Brown's theory is in directed contradiction with the authors of the pseudo-histories *The Templar Revelations* and *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* that Brown uses exclusively as the basis for his information concerning the Templars (Olsen/Miesel 209).

A historically critical exploration into the trial and suppression of the Templars reveals that the charges Philip brought against the Order were not the reason for the Templars' arrest. Philip's motivations for destroying the Order were because of his desire to possess the vast wealth that the Templars acquired in the decades following their foundation and as a way to remove their military presence from France. Philip was capable of achieving his goal due to the manipulation and control he had over the papacy of Clement V.

A. Criticisms and Consequences

Before an investigation into the trial and suppression of the Templars can occur, a look at some of the criticisms that were made against the Order during the 12th and 13th centuries will show how the stage was set for Philip IV to begin his persecution of the Templars. The papal bull *Omne Datum Optimum*, issued by Pope Innocent II in 1139, declared that the Templars would have the "right to collect tithes from clergy on Templar land; the right to possess their own churches and be exempt from paying a tithe on agricultural produce; and the right to use any wealth captured from Muslims for the Order's means" (Nicholson 154). In addition to these and other minor privileges, "Innocent freed the Templars from all authority, except his own" (Howarth 80). The Templars had the ability to control their wealth as they so desired and were not the vassal of any European monarch or required to render homage to any feudal lord or bishop. This allowed them to buy large estates in Christendom, the Middle East, and purchase the entire island of Cyprus. This unique status as a military order that answered solely to the Pope resulted in recruitment into the Temple to vastly improve, with 20,000 claiming affiliation with the Templars in 1260, housed in approximately 9000 Templar castles in Christendom and the Middle East (Strayer 304).

In addition to gaining many recruits, the Templars also began to set up a wealthy banking network, where the nobility of Christendom could deposit their gold, jewels and important documents in the safekeeping of Templar houses and castles spread throughout Christendom and the Middle East (Forey "Oxford" 198). Whenever a noble desired to have some of his wealth to be transferred to him while he was on crusade, the Templars would ask

for a transfer fee (Forey "Oxford" 198). In addition to obtaining money through these transfer fees, the Templars also began acquire money through offering loans to kings and nobles for crusading expeditions or monetary upkeep in their feudal lands. The Templars were able to conceal the interest that they made on these loans and avoid being charged with usury through fluctuations in currency exchanges. The Templars would set a low value on a certain amount of foreign currency that was loaned to a specific noble, thereby allowing the Templars to keep whatever profit they made once the loan was repaid in a currency that was worth more than the currency it was loaned out as (Barber "New" 273). The Templar headquarters in Paris became the banking centers of the French kings, including Philip IV, with large amounts of money being entrusted to the Order.

However, the Templars' privileged status and extensive banking operations began to create problems within the Order and lead to criticisms. Some of the earliest criticism came during the 12th century, when a German chronicler, Otto of Blasein, accused the Templars and the Hospitallers¹ of conducting secret meetings with the Muslims to assure that their prominence and wealth remained safe in the Holy Land (Seward 208). Papal records from 1179 reveal that even the papacy worried about the Templars desire to obtain land and money (Barber "New" 244). The papacy's concern about the Templars' preoccupation with acquiring money and land reveals that the Order was beginning to ignore the statutes of their Rule that stipulated that each Templar house was to hold money and property in common as a means to maintain the Order's vow to poverty and simplicity of life (Upton-Ward 93).

Another criticism was that the Templars' wealth was beginning to bring pride, avarice, and rivalry in the Order (most notably their fierce rivalry with the Hospitallers). These vices were said to be making the Templars lax in their vocations, lazy in their military training, desirous in living luxurious lifestyles (Forey "Oxford" 211), and often refusing to aid crusading armies in combat against the Muslims during the 12th and 13th centuries (Daniel-Rops 576). In 1259, English chronicler Matthew Paris said that the Templars' vast wealth and laxity in monastic discipline lead them to discourage future crusades from embarking into the Holy Land, since the re-conquest of the Holy Land following the crusaders' defeat at the Battle of Hattin in 1187 would put the Templars out of a job (Seward 208). The criticism that the Templars had become arrogant, lax in their military training, and possibly making secret alliances with Islam were not isolated to a few critics but had become common criticisms throughout Christendom, and the admiration and respect that the Templars enjoyed since their foundation began to diminish (Daniel-Rops 576). While these criticisms are accepted by historians as legitimate accusations for problems that existed with the Templar Order, no mention of heresy, blasphemy or sodomy were ever made about the Order prior to accusations that Philip would bring against them (Forey "Oxford" 215).

The criticisms made against the Templars circulated throughout Christendom and were accepted and rejected by various monarchs and high-ranking clergy. However, the fact remained that the Templars were still an essential entity in the Holy Land without which the small remnants of the Crusader kingdoms were prone to fall, meaning that the moral weaknesses in the Order would be somewhat tolerated. However, this attitude drastically changed when the Templar and Hospitaller orders were defeated at the city of Acre in 1291, the last crusader stronghold in the Holy Land. The loss of Acre meant that Christendom had no permanent holdings in the Holy Land, and would have a daunting task of reclaiming it from the powerful Mamluk armies of Egypt.

¹ The Knights of the Hospital of St. John or the Hospitallers were the other major military religious order during the Crusades. The Hospitallers' vocation in the Holy Land was to provide refuge for pilgrims and care for the sick, but like the Templars, they also participated in the military defense of Outremer.

B. The Prelude to the Trial

The loss of Acre was a watershed for the Templars, since it marked the beginning of their demise. Pope Nicholas IV blamed the loss of Acre on the fierce rivalry between the Templars and Hospitallers, since their quarrels and lack of brotherhood allowed Islam to end a Christian presence in the Holy Land. In addition to Pope Nicholas' criticisms, political theorists of the time like Pierre Dubois argued that the loss of the Holy Land meant that the Templars no longer had any purpose for existing (Barber "New" 290). Pope Nicholas IV proposed that the Templar and Hospitallers orders be merged to end the rivalry between them, pool their resources, and reorganize them into a formidable fighting force (Read 247). However, any serious attempt to bring this about would only occur when Philip IV began to consider assuming the role of the great *Rex Bellator* of Christendom as a means to acquire the Templars' wealth and remove this papal military force of approximately 15,000 men from the French kingdom (Read 264).

On a political level, Philip sought to control the Templars because of his concerns that the Templars' sole allegiance to the papacy made them an infringement to national sovereignty within the French nation (Housley 264), in addition to removing an independent militia-like force from his lands (Forey "Oxford" 215). However, this was not the primary reason for Philip wanting to control the Templars.

The king's financial woes in France were serious and could be solved if the wealth of the Order could somehow come into his possession: "Philip had experimented with almost every financial expedient known to medieval rulers, yet he had failed to achieve the financial security which he sought" (Barber "Trial" 43). He had tried to overtax the rich, seize church land, devalue the French currency, and forcibly take the moneys of foreigners (such as Jews and Lombard bankers from northern Italy); but the financial crisis remained (Barber "New" 237). He also made a bold proposal in 1287 to lay claim to all Templar property in France, yet his plan was never implemented (Seward 209).

Philip then tried to obtain the Templars' wealth by offering to fulfill Pope Nicholas' proposal concerning the fusion of the Hospitaller and Templar Orders. Philip had been enthusiastic about leading a "crusade in the tradition of his family: his forefathers back to Louis VII had all been involved in crusading in one place or another" (Nicholson 202). Philip envisioned the founding of a new military order, the Knighthood of Jerusalem, of which he would be the leader, and thereafter be crowned king of Jerusalem once he had destroyed the vastly superior Islamic armies in the Holy Land (Barber "New" 283). While Philip's desire to launch this new crusade was somewhat motivated out of a pious desire to reclaim the Holy Land for Christ, yet hardly in a manner like his saintly forefather Louis IX who was "a companion in arms of the Templars in the Holy Land;" (Partner 63); a more immediate reason for the "uniting of the Temple and the Hospital and the harnessing of their resource[s]" (Read, 262) was to provide an expedient way to relieve his economic woes. In addition to these demands, Pierre Dubois assured Philip that this was a politically shrewd way "to destroy the Order of the Templars completely, and for the needs of justice to annihilate it totally" (qtd. in Read 262). James of Molay, Grand Master of the Templar Order at this time, rejected the proposal, stating that the differing functions of the two orders made them incompatible, since "the Hospital gave precedence to its charitable work while the Temple was primarily a military force" (Howarth 260). Molay's unwillingness to accept the fusion resulted in the papacy putting a hold on Philip's proposal. Philip was not successful in obtaining the Templars' wealth by taking personal command of the Order and he searched for an alternative means to obtain the Templars' wealth. These means could exist within the papacy if history could repeat itself.

Philip had experienced success in manipulating the papacy in the past, as "the undoubted power of the Capetian monarchy had been effectively and publicly demonstrated in

the conflict with Boniface VIII” (Barber “Trial” 43). Pope Boniface VIII and Philip were involved in many longstanding disputes, but the major one concerned Philip’s right to tax French clergy. The taxation was for Philip a solution to his financial problems, but Boniface prevented the taxation through a papal bull, *Clericis Laicos*, in 1296 which “forbade secular rulers to tax the Church without his permission” (Nicholson 200). Philip conducted a propaganda campaign against the Pope, using his chief adviser, William of Nogaret, as the leader of the campaign. The charges against the Pope were severe and vile:

Boniface was accused of heresy, buying church offices, and of not being the true pope because he was elected by trickery; he had a private demon as an advisor, he had silver images of himself set up in churches, he was a sodomite; he did not believe the French had souls (Nicholson 200).

The alleged charges outraged Boniface and he moved to excommunicate Philip, but Nogaret moved first and besieged the Pope in the Italian city of Anagni. “Guarded by only a token force of Templar and Hospitaller knights, Pope Boniface, in full papal regalia, defied his captors to kill him: ‘here is my neck,’ he shouted, ‘here is my head’” (qtd. in Read 258). Boniface’s defiance had proved successful. Nogaret withdrew and Boniface returned to Rome, yet “he was broken in spirit by the humiliation” (Read 258) of Philip’s accusations and he died shortly after his return to Rome. Philip had not been successful in his desire to tax the French clergy, but he was aware of how the charges he brought against Boniface had been useful in diminishing the prestige of the papacy. Philip also remembered that it was the Templars who defended Boniface, and his animosity continued to grow against the Order.

Philip’s next move in attempting to gain the Templar wealth came in the papal election of the French archbishop of Bordeaux, Bernard of Got, as the new pope Clement V. Clement himself “was no doubt aware that his elevation to the throne of the supreme pontiff was not due any positive qualities but because he was the least objectionable candidate to the different parties concerned: King Philip IV had reason to think the new pope would be amenable to his bidding” (Read 261). Clement had “inherited a papacy that had lost both prestige and power over the last decades through its involvement in factional infighting [in Italy]... And its inability to assist the Latin Christians in the east” (Nicholson 201). Philip offered the overwhelmed Clement political refuge in his native France, which resulted in the move of the papal courts to Lyon, Vienna and finally to Avignon in 1309. Philip possessed ample influence within the papacy since the papal court resided in French land, and Philip demanded that Clement appoint French cardinals of his selection to the papal Curia. His motive for their appointment was to gain control over the office of the Inquisition, because the “means to achieve the spoliation of the Temple were at hand in the form of the Inquisition, developed by the papacy, but in the control of the French monarchy” (Barber “Trial” 44).

C. The Destruction of the Templars

On October 13th, 1307, Philip instructed William of Nogaret to bring charges of heresy, blasphemy and sodomy against the Templars as he had against Boniface VIII, and gave the inquisitional interrogation to the Dominican order. In 1290, Pope Nicholas IV granted the Dominican prior in Paris the power to inquire into heresy in France on his behalf or on the behalf the French monarchy (Barber “Trial” 47). In some cases, the inquisition was entrusted solely to Philip’s officials without even a token presence of a papal official (Barber “Trial” 47). Philip assumed the papacy was now under his control and he proceeded to order the arrest of all Templars in France in October of 1307 based on the fabricated charges that William of Nogaret constructed.

However, Clement was not as weak as Philip assumed, since Clement viewed the arrest of the Templars as an attack on the temporal affairs of the Church. If the Templars fell, then

Clement reasoned that other Church possessions could come under attack, in addition to the Templars' arrests being a grave insult against Clement who was still their overarching superior (Housley 262). However, Philip proceeded despite the Pope's objections, and Clement reluctantly published the papal bull, *Pastoralis Praeeminentiae* in November 1307 to give permission for inquires to be launched into the validity of the charges brought against the Templars (Housley 263). What was to follow was hardly an inquiry, but rather severe forms of torture, brainwashing, and the deprivation of food, water and sleep used to confuse many Templars into giving numerous confessions to the alleged charges. Since most of the Templars in France were either non-military servants or low ranking brothers (the high-ranking officials were still in Cyprus), they possessed little knowledge of Templar rule or governance because of their illiteracy (Forey "Oxford" 211). This would allow the French inquisitors to manipulate the poorly educated Templars into admitting to the various charges. Barber describes the horror that took place:

A board was placed between the fire and a victim's feet during periods when the interrogators wished to question the subject. Bernard de Vado, a Templar priest from Albi, was tortured by this means, a process so vicious that a few days afterwards the bones on his feet dropped out ("Trial" 56).

The extreme torture was successful in forcing some of the Templars to confess to the charges. "There are 138 dispositions surviving from the hearings in 1307...only four of these Templars (none of them of any importance in hierarchy) were able to resist the pressures exerted upon them..." (Barber "Trial" 54-55). Of those 138 Templars that were interrogated, 38 of them died from the brutality of the inquisitors (Seward 213).

By December 1307, Philip had the confessions he needed for the dissolution of the Order, but this was prevented by Clement. He was furious with Philip over the reports he received concerning the manner in which the interrogations were carried out:

You, my dear son...have, in our absence, violated every rule and laid hands on the persons and properties of the Templars...you have treated them without due leniency and have added to the discomfort of imprisonment...you have laid hands on persons and property that are under the direct protection of the Roman Church (qtd. in Read 265).

Clement proceeded to suspend the inquisition of the Templars in France in February 1308, and conduct his own papal inquiry. "At this point James of Molay and other high dignitaries of the Order in France revoked their confessions, saying that they had confessed out of fear of being tortured" (Nicholson 219). Philip reacted to the suspension by conducting a mass propaganda campaign that stigmatized anyone who supported the Templars and "produced anonymous pamphlets attacking the Pope, purporting to express the outraged feelings of the 'people' of France" (Read 269). Clement gave in to Philip's attack and ordered the inquisition to resume, and extended the interrogation by ordering the arrest of Templars throughout Europe.

In spring 1310, "a handful of literate Templars, one of whom had formally been their diplomatic and legal representative at the papal court, tried to organize a defense" (Partner 76). The papacy allowed the defense to argue the Order's innocence, but Philip intervened. At Philip's instigation, the Archbishop of Sens, Philip of Marigny, "who was a brother of one of the chief ministers of the French Crown, held a Church provincial council instead of continuing the examination under papal bulls" (Partner 76). The Archbishop was able to intimidate the papal court into condemning the defendants as relapsed heretics by moving the trial out of papal court and into the jurisdiction of the French monarchy. Under Canon law, any individual who

confessed guilt and then revoked his plea was considered a relapsed heretic. The papal commission was forced to abide by Canon law and the defense for the Templars collapsed. Philip made sure no such defense would again be mounted, and in a public display of his unquestioned authority, he had fifty-four Templars burnt at the stake on May 12, 1310 (Partner 77).

The trial and torture continued until 1312, when Clement produced the bull, *Vox in Excelso*, which decreed the dissolution of the Order. In Clement's own words, the Templars were "not by way of judgment but as a provision and an apostolic decision" (qtd. in Nicholson 218) to be formally suppressed, yet he did not condemn the Order as heretical (Housley 264), but believed the Order to be too defamed for the papacy to justify its continuance. Since the Templars' held sole allegiance to the papacy, the two were closely linked in people's minds. Hence, it was expedient for Clement to put an end to the trial and dissolve the Order as quickly as possible, since the continued publicity of the trial reflected badly on the papacy in general and on Clement in particular. With the issuing of this bull, Philip moved to crush the last remnants of the Order in France by executing the Order's Grand Master, James of Molay. Geoffrey of Paris, a supporter of Philip quoted Molay at the stake, defiant and declaring the Order's innocence right up to his death:

Sirs, you know without argument that all those who have acted against us will suffer for what they have done. I wish to die in this belief.... I beg you to turn my face to the church of Our Lady [Notre Dame in Paris], from whom Our Lord was born...He died like this, and met death so sweetly that everyone was amazed (qtd. in Nicholson 223).

Clement then issued another papal bull, *Ad Providam*, which gave the Hospitaller Order all Templar property and wealth (except for those in Spain and Portugal). From this "Philip extracted a large sum from the Hospitallers in compensation for his costs in bringing the Templars to trial" (Barber "Trial" 3). Philip had been successful in obtaining some of the wealth he desired, although he was angered at Clement for not handing over the entire Templar fortune to himself; but his death on November 29, 1314 prevented any further conflict from arising.

D. The Charges: Authentic or Fabricated?

While historians are capable of giving a historically objective overview of how Philip IV went about destroying the Templars, a more difficult issue to address is if the charges against the Templars were in fact true or merely the fabrications of French ministers in Philip's court. Historians have a difficult time believing that the Templars were truly guilty of all the charges brought against them because of the inconsistencies that exist within their confessions and the inability of French officials to find items like idols, secret rules, etc... that the Templars were accused of possessing (Barber "New" 243). While only four of the original 138 Templars that were interrogated admitted to none of the charges, the remaining 134 confessions contradict one another and fail to produce concrete evidence of a specific crime. An example can be seen in the allegation that the Templars worshipped an idol called Baphomet (a name that is merely a perversion of the French spelling for Mohammed) (Olsen/Miesel 208). While the Baphomet idol was never found in a single Templar house in France (even when those houses were raided without any prior warning) (Forey "Oxford" 215), individual Templars gave various descriptions of what the idol looked like. Some said it was a cat, a severed bearded head, a triple headed idol, or a skull (Read 266). Many historians believe that this so-called idol was most likely a relic or bust of St. John the Baptist, since the Hospitallers were known to venerate him as their patron (Olsen/Miesel 207).

Other contradictions can be found in the allegations that the Templars were involved in a sort of institutionalized sodomy. While various Templars admitted to homosexual relations with other Templars (Read 308), the accusation that the entire Order was involved in sodomy contradicts a rather brutal account in the Templar rule in a section entitled "Further Details on Penances" (Upton-Ward 148). This section recalls how two Templars, found in the act of sodomy, were placed in heavy chains and thrown into prison by order of James of Molay. While in prison, one of the Templars died of harsh treatment and the entire affair resulted in great dismay to be experienced throughout the entire order (Upton-Ward 148).

This pattern of contradictions and a lack of evidence are present in the seven charges that were brought against the Templars. They included the denial of Christ, institutionalized sodomy and a homo-erotic ritual for entrance into the Templars, profanation of crucifixes and holy images, removal of the words of consecration from the Mass, lay absolution given by Templar masters, idol worship, and the conducting of secret meetings (Barber "Trial" 178). Since the trial records reveal glaring contradictions and lack of evidence into the alleged charges, historians have deduced that ministers of the French crown manufactured the charges since the charges were ones that were common accusations against heretics between the 11th to 14th centuries (Barber "Trial" 178-9). Malcolm Barber notes that the charges mirror those of previous accusations brought against alleged heretics. He cites various examples, such as charges brought against an alleged Rhineland heretic in 1233 that was accused of worshipping a black cat idol, indecently kissing incoming members of his heretical following, stealing hosts for desecration and promoting homosexuality (Barber "Trial" 180). Barber notes that similar charges are found in heresy trials conducted in France in 1022, 1114, and 1231, in addition to the heretical charges that Philip launched against Pope Boniface VIII in 1296 ("Trial" 179-81).

Barber and others have concluded that based on an abundance of heresy trials in France between the 11th and 14th centuries, it would not be difficult for Philip's ministers to create a list of accusations that mirrored previous heresy trials. In addition, Forey notes that this is a plausible theory since there is no historical mention of any of the charges before 1307, despite all the negative criticism that was directed towards the Templars after their defeat at Acre ("Oxford" 215). The charges succeeded in defaming the Templars as vile heretics and sodomites, since the fear of heresy was prevalent in the aftermath of the Albigensian crusade and dissatisfaction with the Templars for the loss of Acre that made them the scorn of many in Christendom.

If the Templars are to be accused of any crimes, it was that their avarice for money and land, combined with their prideful rivalry with the Hospitallers and laxity of many in their monastic and military vocations made them fail in protecting the Holy Land and living up to the high ideals that St. Bernard placed within them (Barber "New" 280). These crimes, as sinful as they are, were not enough to destroy the Templars, meaning that Philip would need to defame the Templars as heretics, blasphemers and sodomites to bring about their demise. While many historians have compiled historically critical evidence to show how the charges were fabricated, the belief that the Templars were adherents of the occult, sodomites and misunderstood heretics have continued since the burning of James of Molay.

IV. The Legacy and Defamation of the Templars

To give a complete history of the 700-year legacy of the Templars since their suppression in 1312 is beyond the scope of this paper, but two main issues can be isolated from this legacy to show how the Templars are viewed in our present time. These two issues are the alleged connection of the Templars with the occult and Freemasonry.

In the years following the Templars suppression, public opinion varied as to whether the Templars were guilty of their crimes. Raymond Lull, a renowned political theorist in France believed the Templars to be guilty, while Dante [Alighieri](#) believed that they were the victims of Philip IV's greed (Read 302). However, the Templars were soon forgotten as Europe moved into the Renaissance, and it was not until 1531 that the Templars would be a popular topic once again. The heretical charges brought against the Templars began to spark interest in fledgling occultist movements in Europe that were becoming influenced through a growing interest in "Neoplatonic philosophy, Hermetian wisdom of ancient Egypt, alchemy, astrology, Jewish Kabala, and Rosicrucian occultism" to name a few (Olsen/Miesel 212).

Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, a scholar of the occult during the Renaissance, remarked in his work *De Occulta Philosophia (1531)*, that the Templars were guilty of a "detestable heresy" that included "pagan sex orgies, infant sacrifice, dualist leanings, and other heretical practices" (Olsen/Miesel 211-2). Scholars believe that Agrippa most likely made this claim based on the archived reports in the University of Paris that spoke poorly of the Templars (Partner 93) and on other works that embellished the 1307 charges with more vile crimes like infant sacrifice (a common allegation made against heretics and Jews in Mediaeval Europe) (Partner 94). Agrippa's remark would spark a series of works that would produce even more fantastic stories about the Templars. These would include the worship of a demonic idol with carbuncle eyes, the sacrifice of infants to produce magical potions from their ashes, and even the claim that St. Louis IX's capture by the Saracens was the workings of the Templars (Partner 94)! The writings of Agrippa and others had a small following during the Renaissance, but they are significant since they revived the accusation that they Templars were involved in the occult and would soon find a receptive audience in the lodges of Freemasonry.

A. *The Masonic Connection?*

Historians estimate that Freemasonry most likely began in the late 1590's in Scotland, when guilds of stonemasons began to enroll outsiders that showed interest in their craft into a brotherhood that demanded strict secrecy upon entrance to protect the secrets of their trade (Olsen/Miesel 212). However, the secretive nature of the first Masonic lodges allowed a new "speculative" form of Freemasonry in continental Europe to evolve into esoteric societies that were influenced by the growing influence of the occult during and after the Renaissance. In 1715, Scottish Freemasons fled to France after a failed rebellion against British rule, bringing Freemasonry to the French nobility (Olsen/Miesel 213). In an effort to draw new members into the Lodge, the Scottish Freemasons created an illustrious history for the Freemasons, claiming that Freemasonry was a brotherhood of knights and stonemasons that went to Jerusalem during the Crusades and remained as the last remnants of chivalry in Europe (Partner 103). Once the Scottish Freemasons had wooed many French nobles into the Lodge based on their nostalgic infatuation with the chivalry of their crusading heritage, further myths were added to the Freemasons' identity.

In 1736, a Scottish Freemason named Chevalier Ramsay proclaimed that Freemasonry was the sole possessor of the ancient wisdom of the Egyptians and Greeks that Masonic crusaders discovered while in the Holy Land and then brought to Scotland (Partner, 103). In addition to these claims, Ramsay proclaimed that the Freemasons were also the descendents of the biblical Hiram, whom the Freemasons claimed to be the true builder of Solomon's temple and was murdered by Solomon's advisors for not disclosing the ancient secrets of Freemasonry (Barber "New" 318). Despite having no historical evidence to back up his claims, Ramsay was successful in convincing much of the French nobility of the illustrious past of the Masonic crusaders. However, he never claimed the Templars to be these Masonic crusaders, and yet this is what began to take place once Freemasonry began to spread from France into Germany. Peter Partner notes that this connection occurred largely because of the Masonic claim that they

descended from the “true” builder of Solomon’s temple. Since the Templars’ original headquarters resided on the Temple mount, the Templars became a convenient identity for Ramsay’s Masonic crusaders.

In 1760, Germanic Freemasons added another myth to the history of Freemasonry by claiming that the Freemasons had existed secretly in the Holy Land ever since Hiram’s murder and were somehow able to transfer their wisdom and lineage to the Templars when they arrived in Jerusalem in 1119 (Partner 111). After the burning of Molay in 1312, the remnants of the Templars escaped to Scotland to reestablish Freemasonry. This new chapter of Masonic history also resulted in a change within the degree system of Freemasonry. Originally, there were three degrees within Freemasonry, but soon the Scottish rite of Speculative Freemasonry (most notably in Germany) established a thirty-three degrees system, with the degree of Templar being given to the elite of Freemasonry (Olsen/Miesel 214). Partner notes that alongside the degree of Templar was the degree entitled Knights Kadosch (knights of vengeance), that were sworn to avenge the death of Molay against the French monarchy and the papacy, further connecting the Templars into the pseudo-history of Freemasonry (Partner 113).

B. The Invention of Occultist Templarism

With the Templars firmly rooted in Masonic pseudo-history, many historians of the 1700’s did much to support the Freemasons’ claims that they were the successors of the Templars despite the Freemasons’ adamant refusal to reveal any of their secrets to historians or produce historical evidence for their claims. One of these historians was Augustin de Barruel, an ex-Jesuit priest who lived during the French Revolution and wrote an extensive conspiracy-theory history of the Templars. In his opinion, the Templars, as the forefathers of 18th century Freemasonry, were behind all of the great political conspiracies of European history, with the Jacobin revolution in France standing as the most recent example of the Templars/Freemasons’ desire to avenge the murder of Molay and control the future of Europe (Partner 132) (hence the popular myth that when Louis XVI was executed, a voice cried out “Molay, thou are avenged!”). Barruel’s work is criticized by contemporary historians for his unhistorical presumption that every one of Europe’s great political upheavals was somehow connected with secret societies like the Freemasons (Olsen/Miesel 216). However, Barruel’s work is important in that it is one of the first works to discuss the other significant revision in the history of the Templars, that of their alleged connection with the occult. While most of the Masonic lodges in the United Kingdom would distance themselves from the occult, the majority of the Masonic lodges in France and Germany would incorporate aspects of the occult within their teachings. Inevitably, as the occult began to penetrate the Masonic lodges, so too did the revised version of Templar history begin to be revere the mediaeval Templars as occultists.

It was not until the late 1700’s in Germany that the largest and most prominent occultist/Masonic following, the Germanic Templars of the Strict Observance, would proclaim the Templars to be their spiritual forefathers. The major problem with the claims of these “Neo-Templars” is that their alleged connection to the true Templars lacked any credible evidence for historical study, since the Germanic Templars were not overly concerned with giving a historically critical defense of their connection to the Templars. Rather, “Germanic Templarism” was manufactured by various “charlatans” in the new Templar order to dupe their followers into believing in a mysterious pseudo-history about the origins of the Templars and their alleged proficiency in the workings of the occult (Partner 112).

Some of the important claims of “Germanic Templarism” are that the Templars were the successors of the Essenes, who were said to possess an ancient form of syncretism that included the magical traditions of Egypt (such as the cult of Osiris) and Gnostic teachings (Partner 111). The Essenes then somehow remained hidden in the Holy Land until the

Crusades when they emerged to give their wisdom to the Canons of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem (Partner 111). Once the Templars arrived in Jerusalem, the Canons remarkably taught this illiterate brotherhood their secrets and gave them their treasure. From that point on, the Neo-Templars claimed that the original Templars remained the sole guardians of this ancient magic and treasure until the burning of James of Molay, when he entrusted the Order's wealth with a handful of Templars that escaped to Scotland and continued the Order that would eventually find a home in 18th century Germany (Partner 111). Partner notes that there is no credible evidence to back up these claims and that attempts at finding it would be in vain considering the Neo-Templars obsession with maintaining secrecy in the order.

There was one attempt by a Germanic Neo-Templar named Joseph von Hammer in 1818 to give historical evidence for his Order's claims. In his popular occult work, *The Mystery of Baphomet Revealed*, Hammer claimed that Templars were not only the successors of the Essenes, but also the children of a heretical sect known as the Ophites that engaged in magical ceremonies that degraded into orgies. Origen wrote about the Ophites in the 2nd century as a heretical sect that made public denunciations of Christ, yet Origen's writings contain no reference to orgiastic rituals (Partner 140). Partner reveals that Hammer's alleged connection of the Templars with the Ophites based on sexual rituals is not found in any written documents but are in fact his own innovation (Partner 140). Hammer also claimed that the cross on the Templars' mantle was that of a Tau (it was actually a proper Latin cross) which he claimed was a Gnostic phallic symbol, hence emphasizing his claim that the Templars were members of a homosexual cult dedicated to Gnostic magic (Partner 140). Hammer also produced various coins that he claimed contained depictions of the magical practices of the Templars, yet historians note that all of these were forgeries (Partner 140). The biggest blow to Hammer's claims was that of his extensive writings of the idol Baphomet, which he claimed to be a goat-faced fertility god that the Templars worshipped in a manner similar to satanic followings of 19th century Germany (Olsen/Miesel 217). While Hammer drew many pictures of what he claimed to be the original idol, he was never able to produce any sources that he used as the basis of his depictions, since they never existed (Partner 138), just as the French officials during the Templar trials had failed to find a single Baphomet idol.

While Germanic Templarism is the most noted form of occultist Templarism, due to its lasting impact as the source from which subsequent occultist movements would find their own alleged connections to the Templars, it is by no means the only one. A common trend among all these followings up to the present is that they all attempt to make the Templars into the forefathers of their occultist movements without any historically critical or verifiable evidence to support their claims. This lack of critical scholarship greatly compromises their claims as the Templars' rightful successors. However, the mysticism and seduction of the occult that allured many adherents in the past and today show that most occultists who claim the Templars as their spiritual forefathers care little for critically historical evidence to support their claims, since they are more interested in the empowerment the occult brings to their lives.

V. Conclusion

The circumstances of the victory of the First Crusade in the Holy Land led to the formation of the Templar Order, and the personal desire of King Philip IV of France to obtain the Templar Order's wealth and remove the Order from his kingdom resulted in their destruction. In the centuries following the Templars' suppression, various pseudo-histories about the Templars began to emerge that presented a rendition of Templar history that lacked critical scholarship.

The creation of the Templars brought protection to pilgrims wishing to pay homage to Christianity's holiest shrines, and their presence in the Holy Land allowed a permanent military force to be established within the hostile lands of Outremer. Despite slow beginnings, the

Templars soon won the praise and admiration of Christendom's nobility and clergy, and their somewhat objectionable identity as monks and warriors and use of violence was reconciled through the writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St. Thomas Aquinas.

As the Templars guarded the Holy Land, problems within the Order led to moral corruption and military laxity, resulting ultimately in the Templars' defeat at Acre in 1291. Since public opinion in Christendom became increasingly hostile towards the Templars after the loss of the Holy Land, King Philip IV of France was able to built on this animosity and begin his persecution of the Templars. The Templars became the target of King Philip's desire to obtain their wealth and remove their military presence from his kingdom, as the destruction of the Templars would allow Philip to alleviate his kingdom's financial woes and remove a papal army from his kingdom. Despite the Papacy's early efforts to protect the Templars from Philip's assault, the French crown's ability to manipulate the weak papacy of Clement V into suppressing the Templar Order based on fabricated charges of heresy, blasphemy and sodomy meant that the Templar would unjustly undergo severe forms of torture and execution despite their innocence.

After their suppression, various Masonic and occultist movements in Europe claimed the Templars to be their forefathers, leading to the creation of unhistorical pseudo-histories that paint distorted versions of the Templars' history. The Templars' defamation as occultists and Freemasons has experienced wide spread acceptance in our present time and has left much of society with a historically un-objective view into the history of the Templar Knights.

In an effort to give a historically critical rendition of Templar history, my hope is that this paper has presented an extensive exploration of the Templars' foundation, suppression and legacy based on the works of diverse Templar historians as an alternate view to the defamation the Templars have undergone in poorly researched pseudo-histories about the Templar Order.

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