

**ARIZONA
SUPPLEMENT**

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Jacques de Molay, Grand Master 1292-1314

Jacques de Molay (French: [də mɔlə]; c. 1240-1250 – 11 or 18 March 1314), also spelled "Molai", was the 23rd and last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, leading the Order from 20 April 1292 until it was dissolved by order of Pope Clement V in 1312. Though little is known of his actual life and deeds, except for his last years as Grand Master, he is one of the best-known Templars. Jacques de Molay's goal as Grand Master was to reform the Order, and adjust it to the situation in the Holy Land during the waning days of the Crusades. As European support for the Crusades had dwindled, other forces were at work which sought to disband the Order and claim the wealth of the Templars as their own. King Philip IV of France, deeply in debt to the Templars, had de Molay and many other French Templars arrested in 1307 and tortured into making false confessions. When de Molay later retracted his confession, Philip had him burned upon a scaffold in March, 1314. Both the sudden end of the centuries-old order of Templars and the dramatic execution of its last leader turned de Molay into a legendary figure.

After the Fall of Acre to the Egyptian Mamluks in 1291, the Franks (Catholic Europeans) who were able to do so retreated to the island of Cyprus. It became the headquarters of the dwindling Kingdom of Jerusalem, and the base of operations for any future military attempts by the Crusaders against the Egyptian Mamluks. Templars in Cyprus included Jacques de Molay and Thibaud Gaudin, their 22nd Grand Master. During a meeting assembled on the island in the autumn of 1291, de Molay spoke of reforming the Order and put himself forward as an alternative to the current Grand Master. Gaudin died around 1292 and, as there were no other serious contenders for the role at the time, de Molay was soon elected.

In spring 1293, he began a tour of the West to try to muster more support for a reconquest of the Holy Land. Developing relationships with European leaders such as Pope Boniface VIII, Edward I of England, James I of Aragon and Charles II of Naples, de Molay's immediate goals were to strengthen the defense of Cyprus and rebuild the Templar forces. He was able to secure authorization from some monarchs for the export of supplies to Cyprus, but could obtain no firm commitment for a new Crusade. There was talk of merging the Templars with the Knights Hospitaller; the Grand Masters of both orders opposed such a merger, but pressure increased from the Papacy.

It is known that de Molay held two general meetings of his order in southern France, at Montpellier in 1293 and at Arles in 1296, where he tried to make reforms. In the autumn of 1296, de Molay was back in Cyprus to defend his Order against the interests of Henry II of Cyprus.

From 1299 to 1303, de Molay was engaged in planning and executing a new attack against the Mamluks. The plan was to coordinate actions between the Christian military orders, the King of Cyprus, the nobility of Cyprus, the forces of Cilician Armenia, and the Mongols of the Ilkhanate (Persia), to oppose the Egyptian Mamluks and take back the coastal city of Tortosa in Syria.

In 1300, de Molay and other forces from Cyprus put together a small fleet of sixteen ships which committed raids along the Egyptian and Syrian coasts. The force was commanded by King Henry II of Jerusalem, the king of Cyprus, accompanied by his brother, Amalric, Lord of Tyre, and the heads of the military orders, and the ambassador of the Mongol leader Ghazan. The ships left Famagusta on 20 July 1300, and raided the coasts of Egypt and Syria: Rosetta, Alexandria, Acre, Tortosa and Maraclea, before returning to Cyprus. The Cypriots then prepared for an attack on Tortosa in late 1300, sending a joint force to a staging area on the island of Ruad, from which raids were launched on the mainland. The intent was to establish a Templar bridgehead to await assistance from Ghazan's Mongols, but the Mongols failed to appear in 1300. The same happened in 1301 and 1302, and the island was finally lost in the Siege of Ruad on 26 September 1302, eliminating the Crusaders' last foothold near the mainland.

Following the loss of Ruad, de Molay abandoned the tactic of small advance forces, and instead put his energies into trying to raise support for a new major Crusade, as well as strengthening Templar authority in Cyprus. When a power struggle erupted between King Henry II and his brother Amalric, the Templars supported Amalric, who took the crown and had his brother exiled in 1306. Meanwhile, pressure increased in Europe that the Templars should be merged with the other military orders, placed under the authority of one king, and that individual should become the new King of Jerusalem when it was conquered. De Molay was sentenced to death together with Geoffroi de Charney in 1314 as a direct result of cardinal legates' decisions and actions rather than being ordered by King Philip the Fair. He was burnt at the stake on the Ile des Javiaux in the River Seine in front of Notre-Dame de Paris. The most probable date of the execution was 11 March 1314 although it is also quoted as 18 March 1314.

Courteously,
Russell R. Sayre, Grand Commander 2020-21

Thank you, Grand Commander, for this most interesting series. – Ed.