



Grand Commandery of Minnesota
Knights Templar

Editor S.K. Tom Hendrickson P.G.M.

Friday the 13th and the Templars Curse

By Tom Hendrickson-PGM

Friday the 13th, is probably the most feared day and date combination of the year. This is especially true if you were Jacques DeMolay or a Knights Templar in France in 1307. Here is the story in a nutshell. At dawn on Friday, October 13, 1307, throughout all of France, soldiers, bailiffs, and officials simultaneously opened sealed orders from King Phillip IV of France ordering them to arrest all Knights Templar, take them into custody, charge them with heresy and obtain confessions using torture as needed. They were also to confiscate all Templar properties and treasuries before the actions could be reported to Pope Clement. Sham trials were conducted, and all Templars were declared guilty of heresy. Sixty-one Knights Templar, including the Grandmaster Jacques DeMolay, were burned at the stake. The remaining Templars were imprisoned where many died, and some were eventually pardoned by the Pope and released.

Now for more of the story....

King Phillip was obsessed with obtaining power and money. He used all means to obtain them no matter what the cost of who stood in his way. His ambitions knew no bounds. In other words, he was just a well-dressed thug on a nice horse and like any other common criminal he possessed no ethics, conscious on any integrity.

By 1306, pressed by the cost of the ten-year war with England along with regional conflicts, the French finances were in trouble and King Phillip's credit line was stopped. King Phillip did not have a stable system of taxation to generate new revenue, so he attempted to raise funds in other ways. Several of the things he did were to expel 100,000 Jewish citizens from France, seizing all their property and money, and he reduced the gold content of the currency by two thirds, which resulted in riots.

With the country being on the threshold of bankruptcy, King Phillip needed to devise another plan and his eyes turned to the Knights Templar. The Knights Templar rivaled all of the European kingdoms in political influence, military strength and wealth. The Templars reported not to any king, but only to the church. In fact, at that time, the Paris temple was the largest bank in Europe which included much of the treasury of the French government.

King Phillip IV attempted to tax the clergy which resulted in an argument between King Phillip and the Pope about who had the power for taxation.

Pope Boniface VII responded by preparing a bill of excommunication against King Phillip (Super Petri Solo). The Pope intended to publish the bill, but he was assaulted and kidnapped by French troops prior to being able to publish the bill.

King Phillip the Fair had great influence over the election of a new Pope (Clement V). Pope Clement was from Gascony France and moved his office from Rome to France. King Phillip had no authority to arrest the Templars, so he devised a devious plan to eliminate the Templars and seize their wealth.

Rumors and gossip had been circulating within France of strange practices and rituals practiced by the Knights Templar. King Phillip, with sinister motivation, whispered these rumors into the ear of Pope Clement V at the papal coronation. King Phillip asked the Pope to investigate the Templars, meanwhile King Phillip secretly had his attorneys compiling evidence against the Templars. He argued masterfully for an investigation of the Templars for repudiation of the faith and for heresy.

In addition, the King began a smear campaign defaming the order to the various royal courts of Europe. He also had his lawyers establish a spy network to live among the Templars and collect information.

The arrest operation was a huge undertaking in many aspects. France, at that time, was a large country of about 44,000 square miles to be covered by hundreds of the King's men. The Knights Templar had approximately 9000 land holdings ranging from castles to vineyards. These holdings were occupied by approximately 15,000 Knight Templars.

On the first day of the operation, it is believed that over 600 arrests were made with an emphasis on the orders command staff. This includes the Grandmaster, the Treasurer, and various Preceptors. These individuals were isolated and immediately questioned and subjected to torture to obtain confessions. King Phillip wanted many confessions to present to the Pope to overwhelm the Pope and to gain his support for the operation.

Pope Clement, at King Phillip's request, issues arrest warrants Knights Templar throughout Europe. These Papal warrants were served very slowly and no Templars, outside of France, were found guilty (if they were even located). In France, during the trials, many Templars recanted their confessions because they were obtained under torture or the threat of death. In 1310, King Phillip ordered that 61 Templars be burned at the stake because they had recanted their confessions. Pope Clement V saw the persecution doing irreparable harm to the church and granted immunity to the Templars leaders (plus other actions see bull Ad providam). His actions were never carried out as the Pope became seriously ill.

Jacques DeMolay and other Templars were sentenced to life imprisonment. When Grandmaster DeMolay heard this, he refused to accept the sentence. On March 18, 1314 King Phillip seized Jacques DeMolay and Geoffrey de Charmey from legal custody and had them burned at the stake on an island on the river Seine. Jacques DeMolay asked that his wrists be untied. As the fire started his eyes gazed at the Cathedral Notre Dame and he prayed. The Grandmaster then gave the Templars curse. Within a year following DeMolay's death both Pope Clement and King Phillip IV were dead.