

The Early Templars

by Sir Knight William P. Arney

In the January 2009 issue of Knight Templar magazine, Sir Knight Stephen Dafoe described the near-contemporary accounts of the founding of the original Order of Knights Templar and questioned the assertion of William of Tyre that, after nine years of existence, the Order fielded a mere nine knights. Sir Knight Dafoe went on to summarize the other near-contemporary accounts of Michael the Syrian, who uses a figure of thirty original knights, and Walter Map, who offers no specific number. All those medieval accounts are of highly questionable accuracy. Dafoe points out that none of those authors were present during the events they describe. The Templar archives of the East were lost when the Moslems took Cypress after the crusaders were expelled from the Holy Land.

The present article will follow up on Dafoe's work by examining a piece of primary source evidence: a truly contemporary document, the provenance and accuracy of which is beyond dispute - The Original Latin Rule, given to the Templars by the Council of Troyes in 1129. St. Bernard and the assembled noblemen and church officials of the council created the rule. It was widely copied and distributed, and though it was later modified, the original document is still available to us, undiluted. It does not describe the origins of the Order, but it does provide a window into the state of the Order nine years after its founding.

At the Council of Troyes, Hugh de Payen first described to the assembled nobles, bishops, and witnesses that the customs under which he and his knights had lived up until then had been under the auspices of the Patriarch of Jerusalem. The patriarch was a Greek Orthodox official and the ranking Christian churchman in Jerusalem at the time. After Hugh's introduction, the Order was accepted and given its Rule. Some established customs were affirmed, some modified, and some rejected. But within the document are revealing clues regarding the state and customs of the Order at that time. For instance, it is commonly believed that the Templars were given their white robes and mantles by pronouncement of the Council of Troyes. William of Tyre is again the source, but the Latin Rule indicates otherwise.

Article 20 - Servants not to have white clothes, that is cloaks

"We strongly condemn the practice that prevailed without discrimination in the house of God and of His knights of the Temple . . . Sergeants and squires were wearing white clothes, something that was extremely prejudicial to us, since there have appeared on the other side of the mountains some pseudo-brothers who are married, and others claiming to be of the Temple although they are in fact seculars . . ." 1

This passage tells us a number of things. First, the wearing of white was an established custom before the Council of Troyes. Furthermore, white was being worn without discrimination within the Order. Sergeants, squires, temporary members, and married brothers all seem to have been wearing white garments. This was very bothersome to the

Council, and they corrected it in no uncertain terms. In future, white was to be worn only by the chaste.

The passage has a more esoteric message as well-a hidden clue, if you will. It tells us that there were, by 1129, sergeants, squires, temporary, and married members in the Order at the time-and all presumably wearing white. Hugh's mission to the West had a number of components, one of which was fundraising for the Temple. It is instructive that the fundraising tour of Hugh de Payen took place before the Council of Troyes. He could not have successfully done this without an established network already in place throughout Europe. This is pretty good circumstantial evidence that this was a large, organized, international organization by 1129.

Most of what we know about Hugh de Payen comes from this period during which he returned to the West. There are existing documents dated as early as 1126 recording donations to the Temple in Europe. Some of these may be connected to Hugh, Count of Champagne, joining the Order in 1125, but the earliest is Spanish. This would indicate that Hugh de Payen may have returned to Europe as early as that year or sent others ahead. The Council of Troyes opened in January of 1129, so Hugh may have been soliciting support in Europe for up to two years before that date. The last document placing him in the East is dated 1125, though this does not prove that he left immediately thereafter.

Article 53 - No further acceptance of sisters

"It is dangerous to add more sisters to the order because the ancient enemy has expelled many men from the straight path of Paradise on account of their consorting with women.

"Therefore, dearest brothers, in order that the flower of chastity should always be evident among you, it shall not be permissible henceforth to continue this custom." 2

That couldn't be plainer. By the time of the Council of Troyes, nine years after their formation, the Templars already had enough female members to send the council into fits. One wonders if they too had been wearing white. The injunction against more sisters perhaps indicates that the Council was not requiring that the existing sisters should be expelled.

Further investigation leads to the conclusion that the Order subsequently ignored the ban on women. In a practical sense, it would have been nearly impossible to exclude them. Women sometimes made direct donations such that they donated all their lands and possessions in exchange for becoming a dependent of the Templars and sharing the spiritual benefits of membership. The Templars were not inclined to refuse such donations. In one documented instance, the Templars not only ignored the ban on women, but also had a sister commanding at least one commandery in Spain as late as 1198-after the fall of Jerusalem to the Moslems. 3

Article 52 - How married brothers are to be treated

"We allow you to receive married brothers on these conditions . . . they should each bequeath after death a portion of their wealth . . . However, they should not wear white robes nor white mantles. If a married man dies before his wife he should bequeath his part to the brothers and his wife should have the other to sustain her . . ." 4

We again note the proscription on wearing white by the unchaste. But the division of property mandated in Article 52 would prove to be very inconvenient. When the widow died, the property left to support her was lost to the Order. It was much more fiscally practical to take in both husband and wife, support the widow with proceeds of the property and then take all the property when she died. Moreover, any donated property was likely to contain milk maids or other female serfs. The land could not be worked without them. There is ample evidence that the Order ignored Article 52, but it does establish that married men were members of the Temple in 1129.

So we can conclude that the Order had knights, squires, temporary brothers, married brothers, and women, as members in communities all over Europe by 1129, when William of Tyre would have us believe there were only nine knights.

1 Barber, Malcolm, and Keith Bate, *The Templars*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 2002, pp. 40, 41

2 Ibid. p. 49

3 Tommasi, 'Uomine e donne degli ordini militari', 201-202, with commentary at pp. 200-1, quoted by Nicholson, Helen, *The Knights Templar*, Sutton Publishing Ltd., Gloucestershire, 2001, p.132. In email correspondence, Prof. Alan Forey suggests that a preceptrix would not have held authority over knights or other male members, but most likely governed a satellite house of sisters.

4 Barber, *The Templars*, Ibid. pp. 48-49

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