

# New York Masonic Library Obtains 'Processus Contra Templarios'

by **Sir Knight Jay Hochberg**

What better setting than the French Ionic Room could there be to display the documents of the Avignon Pope's trial of the French monastic order we call the Knights Templar?

There they were, October 29, at the Regular Communication of American Lodge of Research in the Grand Lodge of New York building in Manhattan: the spectacular reproductions of historic documents published as "Processus Contra Templarios."

It isn't only a book. In addition to the oversize multi-lingual tome, there are multiple facsimile copies published on a realistic synthetic fabric that retains the look and feel of medieval parchment - of many ancillary documents including one text that happens to record Pope Clement's absolution of the Templar Order of the most serious charges against them. This item, dubbed the "Chinon Parchment," was discovered in the Vatican Secret Archives in 2001 by a researching scholar who found it and recognized its significance. It had simply been misfiled all these centuries, obscuring a giant historical fact.

This stunning package of historical documents was purchased by the Grand Lodge of New York's Chancellor Robert R. Livingston Masonic Library; disbursing \$8,600 from a fund donated to the library for the purpose of acquiring singular research materials that otherwise would elude the brethren. But what has the fate of a crusading order of knights to do with Freemasonry, and why would one of the most important Masonic research libraries in the world acquire these archival reproductions?

R.W. Bro. Thomas Savini, director of the library, explained, saying that part of the library's mission is to "provide resources for the experiential side of Masonry - the intangibles that drove us all to become Freemasons - for our discussion, and study, and growth." (The other Masonic organization in the United States known to have acquired a copy is the House of the Temple, headquarters of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in Washington D.C.) Savini and R.W. Bill Thomas, who was acting Master of the lodge for the evening, continued the talk with a history of the medieval Knights Templar, from its founding to its dissolution. The details are known to the Sir Knights reading this article, so to make a long legal story short, the Order had been charged with the capital crime of heresy, plus a variety of lesser crimes, like sacrilege and sodomy, and were absolved by the pope of the former, but convicted of the latter.

R.W. Bro. Thomas, a trustee of the Livingston Library, noted the similarity of the Templar organization structure to Freemasonry, and how that affected the Inquisition's prosecution, explaining how junior members of the Order were arrested, but were unable to answer the Inquisition's most serious questions due to their lack of seniority. But about these wonderful documents and their value to historian and hobbyist alike, they provide

"a real tactile experience," Savini said, explaining how both the synthetic material employed in the construction of the "parchments" and the deliberately placed folds, and even the replica mold stains all combine to replicate the original records. Having these facsimiles grants great freedom to scholars because these documents can be handled, studied, and admired as though they were the originals, while sparing the originals the wear and tear.

And the reproduction process involved much more than photographic copying. Because of the advanced age of the documents and the manner they were folded and stored, it was necessary for restorers to employ a Wood's lamp to project ultraviolet light onto the original parchments to reveal handwritten content otherwise misunderstood or unintelligible.

In addition to the massive book itself, the Chinon Parchment, and a six-foot long parchment, the package includes smaller parchments containing interrogation notes, summary documents, and executive findings, some of which show Pope Clement's handwritten notes and signature.

Other attractions appeal to a broader scope of researchers. The original documents' authenticity and authority were attested by the wax seals of the three Papal commissioners who examined the Templars. And sure enough, viewers of the replica collection are indeed greeted by three intricately molded replica wax seals, which brought students of that art to view the collection during its seven-stop tour of New York State in October in the care of Thomas and Savini. The calligraphy likewise lured mavens of that craft.

"This is fascinating," said ALR Secretary Harvey Eysman. "I have a facsimile of Anderson's Constitutions. It's one thing to see the imperfections on those pages, but those are just copies. This is history!"

"Processus" is on hand at the Livingston Masonic Library. Library hours are:

Mondays, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Tuesdays, from noon to 8 p.m.

Wednesdays - Fridays, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The library, located on the 14th floor of the Grand Lodge building at 71 West 23rd Street in Manhattan, is open to the public. The Livingston Library also takes "Processus" on tour. Director Savini can be reached at (212) 337-6620 to make arrangements.

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