

The Baldric in Templary

by **Sir Knight George L. Marshall, PGC**

In the Order of the Temple there is a brief lecture on the Baldric given by the Eminent Commander, but what exactly is a baldric? What is its history? How has the baldric evolved in its connection with Masonic Templary? This article will attempt to answer these questions.

The baldric as used in Templary today is often referred to informally as a "sash" and is probably thought of by many Sir Knights as having a purpose similar to those worn by members of other Orders of Knighthood or merit, such as the sash



at left for the French Legion of Honour. However, the earliest use of the baldric was not for mere decoration, but it served a more practical purpose for carrying a sword, dagger, or even a bugle or drum!

A baldric (also spelled baldrick, bawdrick, or bauldrick) dates from ancient times. Known then by the term balteus, it was usually made of leather and was chiefly used to support the sword by both the Greeks and Romans. Since the sword commonly hung beside the left hip, its belt was supported by the right shoulder and passed obliquely across the breast. Although much of the weight of the sword rested on the hip, the shoulder strap provided extra support from the opposite side of the body. This added balance and comfort. The balteus might also be adorned with metal devices of gold or silver, as well as precious stones. A Roman soldier



with a plain balteus is shown at right.

The practical use of the baldric continued well into the 17th century. When we think of a pirate, we often imagine him wearing a wide leather baldric having a

buckle in its center from which is hanging a sword or a pistol.

Did the medieval Knights Templar use a baldric? This question is somewhat difficult to answer. If one goes on the Internet and looks at the Templar costumes being sold by various re-enactment supply houses, practically all costumes are shown without it. Looking at drawings of Templars from period manuscript illustrations is inconclusive. The best way I could think of answering the question was to view some photos of the Templar effigies contained in the Temple Church in London, England. The picture below clearly shows the knight wearing a baldric.



Another effigy picture shown on the right



also indicates the knight is wearing a baldric. Thus, it would seem safe to assume that, on occasion at least, the baldric was a part of the normal costume of a knight, particularly when arrayed for battle.

The Masonic Order of Knights Templar was brought to this country from England sometime in the middle 1700s. The first Templar to be initiated in the United States was William Davis who was given the degrees of Excellent, Super Excellent, Royal Arch, and Knight Templar by the St. Andrew's Royal Arch Lodge on August 28, 1769. Also, Paul Revere was initiated on December 11, 1769, and on May 14, 1770, Joseph Warren, another Revolutionary War hero, would add his name to the roster of early American Templars. (Dafoe) The problem is, scant evidence exists as to what was the prescribed costume for Masonic Templars in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.



Apparently, although Knight Templar members did wear regalia from the start in the late 1700s, it was generally governed by loose traditions until the 1850s. (Newell 31) The watershed year for an attempt at standardization was 1859. According to Mackey, "The costume of a Knight Templar in the United States is of two kinds. First, the original uniform, which was in general use until the year 1859, and is still used by Commanderies which were in existence before that time." (Mackey 412) On the same page, Mackey goes on to describe the baldric, calling it a sash: "A black velvet sash, trimmed with silver lace, crosses the body from the left shoulder to the right hip, having at its end a cross-hilted dagger, a black rose on the left shoulder, and a Maltese cross at the end. Where the sash crosses the left breast is a nine-pointed star in silver, with a cross and serpent of gold in the center, within a circle, around which are the words, 'in hoc signo vinces'...." One wonders if Mackey made an error here-most cabinet cards of the period show the sash worn from the right shoulder to the left hip. A cabinet card of a Knight wearing essentially the sash described above by Mackey is shown at right ("DA VINCI CODE" CABINET CARD KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLAR MAN IN BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS). Apparently, this sash could be or was embellished by Commanderies or Grand Commanderies at their whim. I will have occasion to return to a sash similar to this along with some symbolic interpretations later in this article.

At the 1859 Grand Encampment Conclave, a report by the Committee on Costume was adopted after some discussion and was further modified at the 1862 Grand Encampment Conclave to adopt the following form of the baldric, now styled as a "scarf," and which is the one that is referred to in the modern Order of the Temple ritual.

"Five inches wide in the whole, of white, bordered with black one inch on either side, a strip of navy lace one-fourth of an inch wide, at the inner edge of the black. On the front center of the scarf a metal star of nine points, in allusion to the nine

founders of the Temple Order, enclosing the Passion Cross, surrounded by the Latin motto, "In hoc signo vinces"; the star to be three and three-quarter inches in diameter. The scarf to be worn from the right shoulder to the left hip, with the ends extending six inches below the point of intersection." (Mackey 412)



Of course, today the Templar baldric often does double duty-the inside being green and having a red Greek cross thereon for use in the Illustrious Order of the Red Cross, and the outer side as described above. Also, at the point of intersection is commonly found a silver metal Templar cross with In Hoc Signo Vinces upon it as



at right.



Even after these official attempts at a standardized uniform and baldric, variations still appeared in the baldric and the devices thereon as shown in the photos. The left and middle baldrics shown above page are particularly interesting because a close inspection of the top star reveals that the serpent has been removed from the cross although the inscription remains around them. Also, on the left photo, a post-1862 star is with the serpent star on a pre-1862 baldric. Was this some sort of transition baldric?

Did the officers, either at the local, state, or national levels wear a different style baldric? The answer appears to be "yes." In the cabinet card shown below, the Knight is perhaps a Commander or an officer at the state or national level. (His insignia is the Patriarchal Cross, which today is used by Grand Encampment officers below the rank of Grand Master as well as Department Commanders).



This photo is especially interesting to me because several years ago, when Helion Lodge No. 1 in Huntsville, Alabama (where my York Rite bodies meet) was cleaning up and going through some old boxes, a baldric and apron identical to that shown in the cabinet card photo was found and is now on display at that Lodge.

Apparently, at some point in time, wearing the Baldric with the uniform was no longer required. We find the following in the 2011 Edition Grand Encampment Constitution, Statutes, Disciplinary Rules, Standing Resolutions, Ceremonies, Forms and Approved Decisions: in 1922, a decision by MEGM Orr was to eliminate the baldric; a 1955 decision by MEGM Gordon states "May dispense with baldric"; and in 1961 by MEGM Wieber, "Baldric lecture not mandatory." Both of these latter decisions were rescinded in 2009 by decision of MEGM Koon. The current regulation with respect to the baldric is as follows: "The entire full dress uniform for Knights and Officers below the rank of Captain General shall be the same as for Generalissimos, except that the shoulder strap shall be omitted and the following described Baldric worn: The Body of the Baldric shall be four inches in width, the center of white moiré antique or watered material bordered on each side with black velvet one inch in width; over the seam where the velvet joins the white center shall be a single strip of silver lace one-fourth inch wide. On the center and front of the baldric a white metal star of nine points; in the center of the star the Passion Cross without rays, the center of which is lined or filled with bright red velvet, surrounded by the motto, "In Hoc Signo Vincas"; said star to be three and three-fourths inches in diameter. The ends of the Baldric shall be held in place by metal clasp or fastener so that the point of intersection shall be six inches from the lower ends of Baldric; on the outer side, at point of intersection, a white metal plate, in the shape of a Templar Cross. Baldric shall be lined with green throughout its entire width and length. The shoulder seam on the outside of the Baldric shall be covered, on the white center only, with a single strip of silver wire lace one-fourth inch wide. The Baldric shall be worn from the right shoulder to the left hip."

We now turn our attention to the symbolic significance of the devices displayed on an earlier baldric. In the modern ritual of the Order of the Temple, the significance of the star device is explained by the Eminent Commander. The really interesting devices in terms of their possible symbolic meaning occur on the baldrics used

before 1862. A very commonly seen baldric worn by Knights in photos in the middle-to-late 19th century is that shown below. I was fortunate in obtaining one like this in excellent condition at an on-line auction site. Thus, I will offer for each separate device some personal symbolic interpretations which I hope will be plausible. These explanations will accompany individual close-up photos of the device being considered.



Before discussing the symbolism, it may be of interest to give some details about the manufacturer of the baldric I own, the Ames Sword Company whose tag is sewed inside the baldric. My research found the Ames Sword Company was purchased and dissolved by M.C.Lilly in 1923. The N.P. Ames Company opened its doors in 1791 at their factory at Chelmsford, Massachusetts. In 1832 Nathan P. Ames signed his first contract with the United States Government for foot artillery swords. The historic sword and armament factory, located at 5-7 Springfield Street in Chicopee, Massachusetts, was built in 1847. Though the Ames family eventually left the business, it continued for many years until sold to the largest regalia manufacturer in the United States, the M.C. Lilly Company of Columbus, Ohio. M.C. Lilly was then sold to the C.E. Ward Company of New London, Ohio in 1951. In 1893, a fellow named Henderson who had been an agent selling Ames swords acquired the Ames company. Henderson sold swords with the name "Henderson Ames Sword Co." until his company was bought by the Lilly Sword Company in 1925. It may be my baldric was made prior to 1893 as the tag does not show the "Henderson" name. It certainly was made prior to 1925 because the Chicopee works was closed and moved that year. My baldric is 4" wide, black velvet, with 3/8" wide silver cloth strips bordering the sides.



Starting at the shoulder level on the sash and working down, is a 3½" black rosette with 1" triangle on shoulder. The triangle is of silver metal and is equilateral, which is a common symbol for Deity. In addition, the triangle has upon it twelve raised circular "bumps." It seems that this is to symbolize the triangular table with the twelve candles upon it as utilized in the Order of the Temple.

Approximately 3" below the rosette is an ornate 2¼" square Templar cross made of silver metal with scrollwork embossed upon it. No inscription appears.



Next, in the center, is a 3½" nine-pointed star with rays embossed upon it: In the center is a circular metal rim with IN HOC SIGNO VINCES inscribed upon it in black, and the rim secures a clear glass plate beneath which is a red velvet background against which is displayed a bronze metal Calvary cross with a bronze-silver serpent entwined about it. This is undoubtedly the most interesting device on the baldric. The nine-pointed star (nonagram) alludes to "the nine founders of the Temple Order" as stated in the 1859 Grand Encampment Proceedings. However, the nine-pointed star has even wider symbolic significance. The nine-pointed star symbolizes the nine fruits of the Spirit listed in the Epistle to

the Galatians, which are: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control-true knightly virtues, indeed.

We also notice that the nine-pointed star is comprised of three interlaced equilateral



triangles. From ancient times, the equilateral triangle has been symbolic of Deity (omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence); also of creation (animal,



vegetable, mineral) and of man (body, mind, soul). Thus, the three interlaced triangles could be taken to represent the harmonious interaction of God, (His) Creation, and Man. The serpent entwined about the Calvary cross is symbolic in two important ways: first, the serpent reminds us that in the Garden of Eden, man was led by Satan (in serpent form) to sin and thus humanity incurred the penalty of sin, death. However, man's sin was redeemed by Christ, both God and man, on the Cross of Calvary. This was wonderfully expressed by Paul in I Corinthians 15: 21-22: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." The second symbolic significance refers to Moses lifting up on a pole a serpent of bronze in the wilderness by order of the Lord so that the Israelites would not die when looking upon it after a plague of venomous snakes was sent upon them by the Lord for speaking against Moses and God. (Numbers 21: 4-9) Christ alluded to this when referring to his coming death on the cross to atone for the sins of mankind: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:14-15) It is rather interesting that later versions of this device show the cross without the serpent. Could perhaps some well-intentioned Templars have not understood the significance of the symbol and decided that a serpent (a symbol of Satan?) on Christ's cross was somehow incompatible?



Moving lower, we next find a 3½" black rosette with silver metal square and compasses on hip. Very likely this was included to show the connection of the Knights Templar to Freemasonry. Below this is a black bow with an 8" bronze dagger suspended from its hilt. Here is another interesting item on this baldric. All existing CDVs or cabinet cards that I have seen always show the sword suspended from a belt going round the waist, never from the baldric, but we know that in ancient times the baldric was often used by warriors to hold their swords. Could it be, perhaps, that the dagger was placed there as a symbol of where the sword was once located? As an alternate interpretation, it is known from the year 1250 onward, gravestones and other contemporary images show knights with a dagger or combat knife at their side. Hilt and blade shapes began to resemble smaller versions of swords. This is also a symbol of the church because the dagger looks much like a cross. With the advent of protective plate armor during the Middle Ages, the dagger became increasingly useful as a good close-in weapon for stabbing through the gaps in armor. Thus, the dagger on the Knight Templar baldric may symbolize this secondary weapon used by a knight.

In conclusion, the baldric was an integral part of the Masonic Knight Templar costume or uniform until the early 1920s when it was possibly dispensed with by MEPGM Orr and was later made optional (as was the Baldric Lecture). Until 1859, its style and ornaments appear to have been at the discretion of each existing Grand Commandery. Today, if we abide by the current regulations and decisions of MEPGM Koon as previously cited, it may again be worn as part of the dress uniform, and the Baldric Lecture is a mandatory part of the Order of the Temple ritual.

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Roman Soldier picture courtesy of The Sword, Inc. and is used by their permission. The Web site is located at

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