

The Trial of the Templars Revisited

by John L. Palmer KTCH, KCT

When I was a young boy, I loved cowboys, baseball, and reading. I read about science fiction, race cars, and mysteries. My aunt was a professional secretary and would make rare trips to the big city of Memphis. When she returned, she would almost always bring me a book. The Hardy Boys Mysteries were my favorite. As soon as I was handed the new book, I would open it and be glued to it until I was told that it was time for bed and that I must put it down and go to sleep. After I thought everyone else was asleep, I would grab a flashlight, pull the blanket up over my head so that no light escaped and dive into the book again until I was found out and had the book confiscated for the night. Some of my friends were inclined to immediately turn to the last few pages of the book, read the ending, and feel proud about saving all that time by not reading the entire book. I never figured out the point in that. It is the discovery of the answer to the mystery, not the answer itself that brings the satisfaction for me. This was reinforced in later life when I was assigned as an intelligence analyst in the Army reserve. The interesting part was not so much what we discovered but the discovery process. These were the thoughts that were running through my head as I sat in an office on a hot day in August. I was in the House of the Temple, the headquarters of the Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of the Southern Jurisdiction in Washington, D.C. I had been invited for a chat about the challenges associated with publishing a large Masonic magazine. I had finally arrived

at the House of the Temple after having gotten lost on the way from my hotel in Alexandria. It occurred to me that it was a good thing that Pierre Charles L'Enfant, the designer of the street layout in the city of Washington, was not a Mason, because had he been alive, I would have been tempted to strangle him. After I finally arrived and had a few moments of pleasant conversation with my host, he announced, with a twinkle in his eye, that he had something he wanted to show me. Smiling, he pushed a small, wheeled utility cart from behind his desk and began to clear the coffee table in his office. On the cart was a large object in a fancy cloth bag. He handed me a pair of cotton gloves as he began to untie the strings on the bag. Even though both gloves appeared to be for the right hand and at least two sizes too small, I quickly pulled the petite gloves onto my thick fingers as my host extracted a large object made of handsewn new leather. The leather cover was plain, not like the belt and holster rigs I had received for Christmas more than fifty years before. It reminded me of a huge bi-fold man's wallet. In the compartment that would normally hold currency, were a number of folded documents printed on what appeared to be parchment, vellum, or some other thin leather-like substance. Removing one of them and unfolding it, I discovered it to be a full size facsimile of a much older document approximately two feet square filled with row upon row of meticulous handwritten text, all in Latin. My mind skipped back forty years to a time when my high school Latin teacher had admonished me to pay attention because some day a time would come when



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by Sir Knight John L. Palmer, KTCH, KCT

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When I was a young boy, I loved cowboys, baseball, and reading. I read about science fiction, race cars, and mysteries. My aunt was a professional secretary and would make rare trips to the big city of Memphis. When she returned, she would almost always bring me a book. The Hardy Boys Mysteries were my favorite. As soon as I was handed the new book, I would open it and be glued to it until I was told that it was time for bed and that I must put it down and go to sleep. After I thought everyone else was asleep, I would grab a flashlight, pull the blanket up over my head so that no light escaped and dive into the book again until I was found out and had the book confiscated for the night. Some of my friends were inclined to immediately turn to the last few pages of the book, read the ending, and feel proud about saving all that time by not reading the entire book. I never figured out the point in that. It is the discovery of the answer to the mystery, not the answer itself that brings the satisfaction for me. This was reinforced in later life when I was assigned as an intelligence analyst in the Army reserve. The interesting part was not so much what we discovered but the discovery process.

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My mind skipped back forty years to a time when my high school Latin teacher had admonished me to pay attention because some day a time would come when the ability to read Latin would be important to me. Too late now, I had missed my opportunity over forty years ago! In the left hand pocket of the leather folder was tucked another stack of documents reproduced on the same kind of material and again in Latin. Removing one of these documents, I noticed a seal on the bottom page containing an inscription that I was miraculously able to translate as "The Secret Archives of the Vatican". I asked myself the question, "If the Vatican truly has secret archives, how come I am holding part of it in my hands?"

Replacing the document, I discovered in a pocket on the other side of the case another object that, at first glance, resembled a leather bound, three-ring notebook. It turned out to be a printed, leather bound book. At the top of one of the first few pages was the Latin title which translated into something like "The Prosecution of the Templars".

This whole time I was asking questions like, "Are these just prosecution documents or transcripts of the trial?"; "How many English documents came with this package?"

The answers were fairly consistent; "I don't know; we don't know that yet."

"Are all these documents translated into English or just some?"

"I don't know; we don't know that yet."

Understand that these answers were coming from my host, Dr. Brent Morris, world famous author, mathematician, editor, and first American Worshipful Master of the prestigious Quatuor Coronati Lodge in London. If he didn't know, who did? Wow! Here was a truly unsolved mystery, and I was holding it right there in my hands. There was no last page to get the answers from. The full answers had not been discovered.

On pages 29 and 30 of the August issue, you will find two news stories that will explain some of the events leading up to my good fortune. The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of the Southern Jurisdiction in a magnanimous fraternal gesture has informed me that they are pleased to make available to their York Rite Brethren, through the Knight Templar magazine, full access to the resources of their library and museum including this document recently acquired from the Vatican.

It is our intention to find a way to take advantage of this generous offer and to bring to our readers, ongoing information as we attempt to decipher the contents of this package and to analyze the relevance of these documents to modern Templary and to the Grand Encampment. We will try to publish articles that will establish the context and setting of the historical period beginning on Friday, October 13th, 1307 and culminating with the burning at the stake of Grand Master Jacques DeMolay on March 18th, 1313. We will attempt to discover just how many organizations there are today which claim some sort of relationship to the ancient Templars whether it be direct descendants, a philosophical link, or just a similarity in name. We may even explore the impact that these happenings had on religious and secular culture in Western civilization. I can think of no more appropriate forum in which to pursue this investigation than the Knight Templar magazine. Be patient, Sir Knights; this project will take months if not years to complete. I hope you will join us each month as we begin to unfold this mystery of what really happened seven hundred years ago.

[TOP](#)

History is Always Fiction

A very wise man once said that we are all ignorant – just about different subjects. It seems to me that there is an awful lot of ignorance about the Knights Templar in general and about the ancient Knights Templar in particular. There also seems to be a good deal of interest about the subject. Part of the reason for the ignorance is the fact that it happened so long ago and that everyone involved who wrote anything down had an axe to grind.

There is a reason for this. It seems to me that any history over fifty years old is probably erroneous. It has been said that the victors write the history. Well, other folks do that too. The history of our country as I learned it in "grade school" has been changed significantly since I learned it. It seems to me that seven hundred-year-old history is probably predominantly fiction.

One of the ways to flush out ignorance is to stir up a healthy debate. The articles we publish during the next few months will very probably do that.

Another problem with this subject is that those who are not ignorant about it tend not to communicate very well and in a common sense manner with those who are. What better place to have a debate about the truth of Templar history than in the Knight Templar magazine. I hope these next few issues will be entertaining for you because I cannot guarantee you that, at the end, you will know the truth.

As I indicated in the October issue, the museum and library of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of the Southern Jurisdiction, in a generous and most fraternal gesture, offered us full access to their recently acquired documents from the Vatican. I was able to go back to the House of the Temple in Washington D.C. in October and to spend some time photographing and studying the documents. The feedback on the October issue has been that most of you would like to know a good deal more about the documents; what they say, the history surrounding them, and their relevance to Templary today.

As I see it, this museum piece is not only a copy of an historical document, but the entire package is a history making document. The timing of its publication is interesting. It is of museum quality, and only 800 copies were produced. I know of only two Masonic bodies in the United States which possess one, the Grand Lodge of New York and the Scottish Rite of the Southern Jurisdiction. Most of you will never have the opportunity to visit a museum and actually see one of these, let alone study it. Since many of you are interested in it, I can only offer you a series of articles in which I will attempt to share with you the experience and my thoughts as we explore together the relevance of and the mystery surrounding this curious package of documents. I am neither an historian nor an archeologist so I claim no expertise in the history of Templary. I only know what I read and what I can deduce. I am not a bad observer and I have held the title of “analyst” in a former life, so maybe I can relate to you what I see and the sense I make of it. Much of what I relate will be my perceptions of someone else’s perceptions, so consider yourself forewarned; you may be reading fiction. As the magazine has space, we welcome input from those more knowledgeable than I and will certainly publish contrary opinions as we receive them. Remember that an analysis of the facts depends on the truth of those facts. There is probably no one who is totally impartial on the subject of the history of the Templars, so everything you read or hear is tainted by some bias.

Having said all that, I propose to give you a step by step physical description of the artifact, my opinions about why it might have been published at this time, my perception of the times and environment at the time it was written, some photographs of it, and the sense I get from the rather extensive commentary that is part of the package. We will approach this by publishing a piece each month until I have told you all I know or until you tell me you are tired of hearing about it. We will begin publishing the photos when the magazine goes to full color next month.

Why do you suppose the Vatican chose to publish this package at this time? For one thing, Friday, October 13, 2007, was the 700th anniversary of the initial raid on the Templars in France. This action was the beginning of the end of the Templar era. That still doesn’t explain why they did it on the 700th anniversary and not the 600th or 800th. I believe that it may have had something to do with the recent publicity associated with the publication of several popular novels and the production of movies about the ancient Knights Templar. I can tell you from personal experience that these things have made young men curious about Templary and Freemasonry. Our lodges and Commanderies are receiving petitions from many serious, bright young men who are interested in the ideals and character of the ancient order and who want to become a part of an organization which seeks to perpetuate these ideals. In these recent fictional publications, the Freemasons and the Knights Templar have been characterized in a much better light than the Church. They have often portrayed the Templars as the “good guys” and the Church hierarchy as the “bad guys”. While this has been a refreshing change for us Templars and Freemasons, I am sure that it has been a concern for Church leadership; particularly the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church.

The publication of existing material that would tend to exonerate the Church of all wrongdoing and to shift the blame to the long extinct monarchy of France might seem like a very good idea. The fact that the document packages sell for around \$8,000 each and that the market is ripe for such a product probably didn’t discourage them from producing them either. The package is extremely nice, but I can tell you that the profit margin is not trivial. A part of the package is a rather extensive documentary about its contents and the environment during this period of Templar and Church history. This was written by Dr. Barbara Frale, the researcher who apparently discovered the “misfiled” parchment in 2001. I studied this material and found it to be very logical and informative. She expresses some perspectives on the background of the times that were new to me and which I thought were very interesting opinions. I will, in future issues, attempt to share with you, not so much her exact words as the sense I got of what she had to say. Maybe she will write a less expensive book at some time in the future, and you can read it for yourself. We will attempt to discuss the events, the environment, and the perspectives of the people involved in this drama leading up to the execution of Grand Master Jacques DeMolay. Some of the parallels to our current times seem striking to me. The events leading up to the establishment of the Knights Templar as an organization are all involved with the Crusades.

Next we will attempt to take a look at the environment which led to these Crusades and take a look at some photos of the artifact.

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So What's in the Package?



Since I am able to show you color photos for the first time this month, I thought we might devote this article to a physical description of the Vatican package. The package comes in a cloth bag with a drawstring having the insignia of the secret archives of the Vatican imprinted on one side. The bag contains a leather portfolio measuring approximately 13.5 inches wide, 18.5 inches tall, and 5.5 inches thick which is folded in the center and closed by two sets of leather thongs. Opening the portfolio, we discover three separate compartments; one in the form of a pocket on each side and one thin pocket running the entire width of the portfolio in the same manner as the bill portion of a man's wallet.

From the pocket on the right side, we remove a white or ivory book approximately 11.5 inches wide, 18 inches tall, and 2.25 inches thick. On the front cover of the book is embossed in gold "Processus contra Templarios" (roughly translated "Proceedings Against the Templars"- remember that all my translations are a stretch). Near the bottom is an insignia or logo which is roughly square containing two crossed keys on a checkered field surrounded by a border containing the inscription "Archivum Secretum Vaticanum," under which is the inscription "Archivio Segreto Vaticano." The spine of the book is similarly inscribed. The book contains several hundred pages, the majority of which are printed in Italian or Latin. The left hand pages are printed in English beginning on page 103. We will speak more of the contents of the book in future issues.

From the left pocket, we remove another folio which is approximately the same size as the book and is secured by a string closure. Opening this second, smaller portfolio, we discover that it also has a compartment on either side. The front of the right compartment is embossed with the same inscription as is on the cover of the book. It also has a small outer pocket containing what I perceive to be the certificate of authenticity bearing the serial number of this copy; 504. On the right side is also a cutout containing very real looking synthetic replicas of three different wax papal seals.



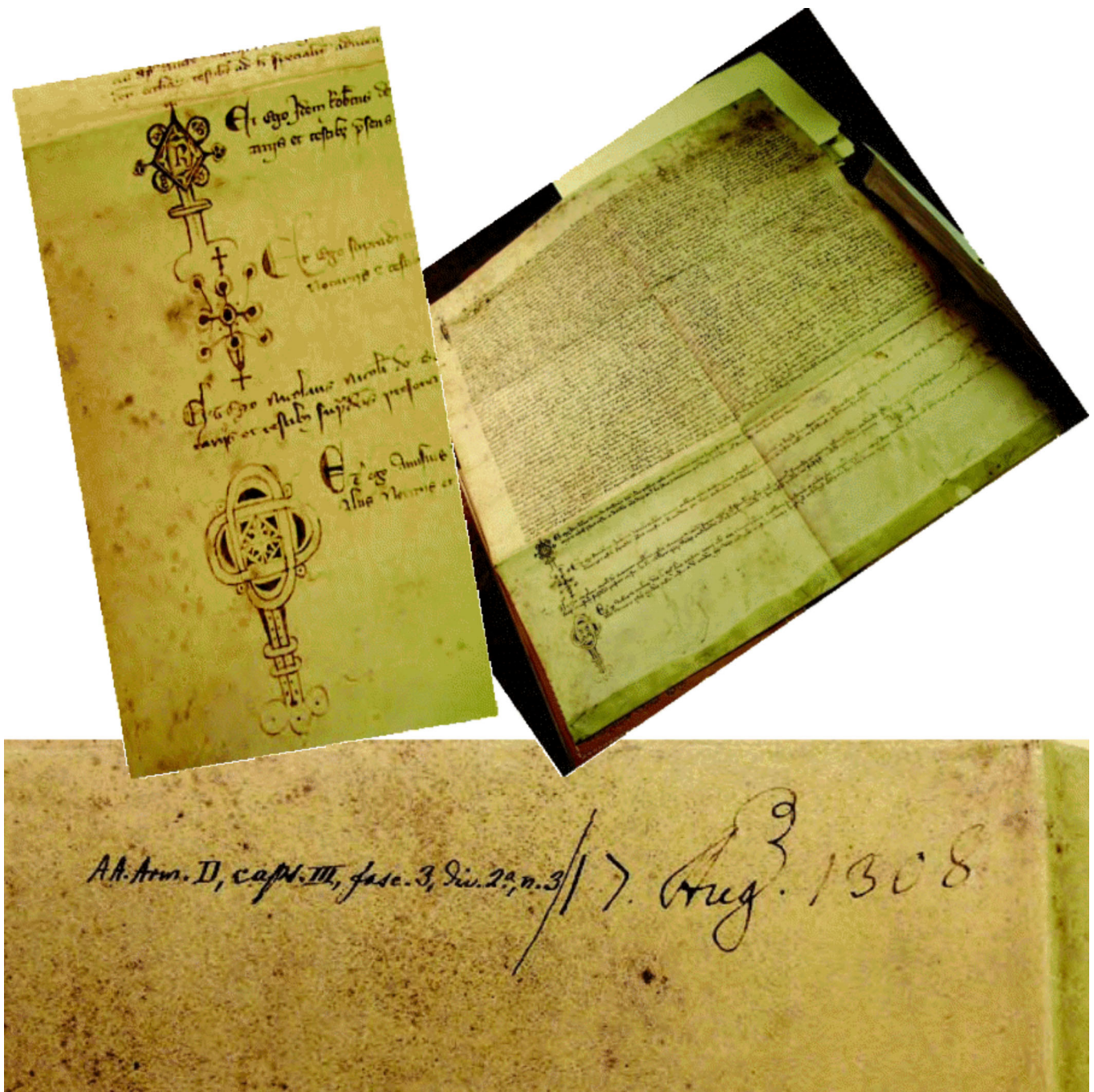
The pocket on the left of the smaller portfolio contains a sizeable sheaf of replica documents each a little larger than letter size, all written on synthetic parchment which looks and feels very much like the real thing. These documents are all, of course, in Latin.

From the large thin pocket, we remove some more documents also written in Latin. I believe that these images were transferred from the original documents to these synthetic ones using some sort of photographic process and that some of the images have been enhanced to improve legibility. These documents differ from the others in that there are fewer of them, they have not been as well preserved, and show signs of what appears to be mould stains, and they are

larger. Each document is folded several times in order to fit the pocket. They consist of several sheets sewn together to form longer documents.

Many of the documents have lengthy marginal notes and several have hand drawn decorative images either in the margins or between written sections. On the reverse side of one of these documents is an inscription which clearly bears the date "Aug 1308."

This article is intended only to give a visual tour of the artifact for those of you who might never get to see one in person. Next we will take a closer look at the contents of the book.



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So Who Were the Players?

Since the book I mentioned last month contains the only English in the package, we will next explore its contents. It has several sections and a few pages in the form of envelopes containing black and white prints of artwork concerning the trials.

The most relevant document and the one that created all the stir is titled Minutes Of The Trial Published By The Papal Commissioner Cardinals Berengar Fredol, Etienne De Suisy, And Landolfo Brancacci Containing The Testimonies Of The Grand Master And The Leading Dignitaries Of The Temple And The Absolution Granted By The Above Mentioned Commissioners To The Same Templars "Demandato Domini Papae." Chinon, 17-20 August, 1308. There is no English translation of this document in the book. What purports to be a rough translation can be found on the web at <http://www.inrebus.com/chinon.php>.

There appears to be printed texts (again not in English) of four dossiers from 1308 and a summary or notebook used in 1311 at the Council of Vienne.

The English portion of the document begins on page 103 with what is entitled "Historical Notes On The Trial Against The Templars" by Barbara Frale. Dr. Barbara Frale is an historian on staff at the Vatican Secret Archives and a specialist on the Templars, the crusades, and the papacy. She earned her Ph.D. at the University of Venice. She lives in Viterbo, Italy, and her photo can be found on the web at <http://www.arcadepub.com/author>. She is due to publish her own book on the subject of the Templars in 2009. As of this writing, it is not yet available. We will try to review it when it comes available. Dr. Frale is apparently the researcher who discovered the misfiled Chinon document in 2001. Since she is on staff at the Secret Archives of the Vatican, we would expect that her commentary would present a relatively favorable perspective of the Church's involvement.

After reading her "Historical Notes", I am favorably impressed with her apparent attempt to remain impartial, her attention to detail, and her methodical approach to drawing conclusions. I have decided to present her conclusions in the light of other materials I have read about the subject.

Like any good story, the author must first develop his characters. There are three main characters in this story. First you have Philip, IV, king of France. Philip has always been portrayed as a villain in this story, and Dr. Frale does nothing to attempt to change this. In fact, from her perspective, he is the number one bad guy.

Next, you have Pope Clement, V. I have seen him portrayed as an evil despot, a weak and helpless puppet, a willing co-conspirator, and a fool, but Dr. Frale gives us a new opinion to consider; one I have not seen before.

Finally, we have not so much the man, Jacques DeMolay but the Order of the Temple as a whole as our third main character. In the end, it seems to me that Dr. Frale portrays them almost as you would an innocent bystander.

Next, we will begin to take a really close look at King Phillip, where he came from, who he was, what motivated him, the events which influenced him, and what appears to have been his objectives. Motives are difficult to determine. A wise man once said that we tend to judge others by their actions and ourselves by our motives. Try to keep an open mind as we attempt to get into the minds of these players.

[TOP](#)

How Fair Was Phillip, Anyway?

Last month I promised we would look into the character and possible motives of one of the main characters in the Templar trial drama, Philip IV (the Fair) of France. There is one thing about this fellow; no matter whose account you read, he was a bad guy. He was apparently a handsome devil to have been called "the Fair", but it appears that his beauty was only skin deep. His family had been involved in the crusades from the very beginning as far back as Louis VII's participation in the second crusade.

Louis VII had managed to obtain the support of Bernard of Clairvaux for this crusade, the same St. Bernard who was instrumental in the legitimization of the early Templars. Louis was accompanied on this crusade by the Master of the Temple, the ranking Templar officer in France. During this crusade, Louis ran out of money, and the Templars financed the remainder of the Crusade for him. In the process they became, for all practical purposes, the treasury of France. They were so good at this that they increased the revenues of the real estate holdings of French King Philip II by an estimated 120 percent. In the long run, this turned out to be a bad move.

Louis VII's great grandson, Louis IX, was Philip IV's grandfather and apparently was idolized by Philip the Fair. Louis IX was a participant and leader of the seventh and eighth crusades and apparently a very devout Christian and servant of the Church. He was captured on at least one occasion and was ransomed by the Templars although somewhat reluctantly and under duress. It appears that Philip IV wanted to follow in his grandfather's footsteps and sort of pick up where he left off. He aspired to the leadership of all Europe and to the title of "Defender of the One True Faith."

In reality, he lacked the finances and power to pull this off. By then, the Templars owned an estimated 9,000 manors, all profitable farming operations, and most of them in France. Because of the Templar relationship with the Church,

none of these were taxable by the King.

Philip had an advisor and co-conspirator in the person of Guillaume de Nogaret, the Keeper of the Seals who appears to have been as fully ambitious and fanatically religious as Philip. In 1294, Philip began his conquest by attacking and trying to seize the assets of the fiefdom of Gascony belonging to King Edward I of England. This war cost both sides so much that they both decided to tax the clergy. This taxation, of course, created a problem between King Philip and the Church in the person of Pope Boniface VIII who threatened to excommunicate him. Since an excommunicated King could hardly claim the title of "Defender of the One True Faith", this constituted a major roadblock to Philip's plans.

Philip retaliated by taking the position that his ancestors were more Christian than the Papal line having been ordained directly by God and by taking the position that a King was completely sovereign in his own territory and not subject to any other authority. He then sent a delegation of French clergy to the Pope that assured the Pontif that the King would not interfere with the authority of the Church and convinced him to allow taxation of the clergy during times of national emergency. They also managed to convince the Pope to canonize Louis IX, thus making him truly Philip's "sainted" grandfather. This did not resolve the issue because in 1301, Bishop Bernard Saisset spoke out against Philip's abuses of the clergy and was sentenced to death for treason by the King. Philip subsequently proposed that the Pope be deposed by the Church.

Pope Boniface then drew up the necessary paperwork to excommunicate the King, but before the Pope published the document, the King sent soldiers who assaulted him and attempted to kidnap him and take him back to Paris for trial. The kidnapping was thwarted by the locals, and the Pope was rescued but died in Rome shortly thereafter. Unfortunately for Philip, the excommunication documents were lost (presumably not destroyed) in the fray, and he had to live with the fact that they might be found and enforced at any time.

Pope Clement V was elected as a compromise candidate between the French Crown who wanted a separate French Church under the control of the King and the Roman Church, but could not take office until the leader of the Roman contingent died because he refused to certify Clement's election. Immediately, Philip bullied the Pope into being crowned in Lyon rather than in Toulouse, the site chosen by the Pope. He was then pressured into remaining in France rather than presiding from Rome.

At the coronation, the King told Clement of rumors of heresy about the Templars and asked him to investigate. He also began his own "investigation" and constantly fed condemning "evidence" to the Pope.

In 1306, Philip, again facing financial difficulties, devalued his currency which created a rebellion, and he took refuge in the Tower of the Temple in Paris under the protection of the Templars; another mistake on the part of our ancient brethren. It is thought that his time spent in the Tower gave him opportunity to see firsthand the riches of the Templars to whom he already owed a great financial debt. He knew the money was really there. He ordered the Templar in charge to loan him an enormous amount without collateral and received the loan. When the books were later audited by DeMolay, the Grand Master expelled the offending loan officer from the Order.

It seems pretty clear to me that Philip IV was motivated by a desire to follow in his grandfather's footsteps and be accepted as the devout and indisputable leader of the Christian world. This required money, and he apparently would stop at nothing to get the money he needed to accomplish his ambitions.

Isn't it bizarre what people will do in the name of the Christian religion? Or any other religion for that matter. Next , we will begin taking a look at the circumstances of the Templars during the time just before their arrest and trials.

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The Templar's Surprise

We have been printing articles by Stephen Dafoe about the origin and history of the ancient Templars, and we will continue to do so. I will only comment in this series about the events leading up to the trials of the Templars and during their incarceration.

As you know, the Templars were originally presumably founded to protect Christian pilgrims on their pilgrimages to the holy city of Jerusalem. Although the Islamic rulers of Jerusalem as well as the Christians had at that time, a policy that allowed these pilgrimages, the pilgrims were apparently often attacked by bands of robbers as they neared Jerusalem. As the region fell more securely under Christian control and as further crusades were launched, the Templars gradually shifted into the role of Christian warriors and crusaders.

This new role at first created a dilemma because of the conflict between the killing of one's enemies and the long established Christian teaching of passivism or turning the other cheek. Their friend, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, assisted

them in this respect by formulating the "doctrine" that killing in defense of the Christian religion was not in conflict with the early Christian teaching and practice of what we now call "non-violence."

Subsequently, they took an active part in most of the crusades in the Holy Land or Outremer. The Hospitalers started out providing medical care and also evolved into crusaders, but retained a medical mission as well. In order to support their military efforts, the Templars developed a very large network of agricultural and banking businesses. They began to admit personnel with skills in business, agriculture, building, and manufacturing and made a good deal of money. Remember however, that all this was strictly in support of the central mission of conquering and holding the city of Jerusalem and surrounding areas.

In 1291, the crusaders were finally defeated and driven off of the continent. The last stand of the Templars was in Acre (not in Jerusalem as the recent TV special portrayed). Take a look at a map and tell me how you could watch Jerusalem burn from the deck of a ship in the Mediterranean Sea. Sorry - back to the story.

When Acre fell, they lost their last foothold in Palestine and also their Grand Master. The ones who survived took refuge on Cyprus and then elected a new Grand Master Thibaud Gaudin who died within a year and then another Grand Master in the person of Jacques DeMolay. Remember that DeMolay was an older knight from the warrior Templars, not from the banking or business side of the house.

With this catastrophic defeat, the Templars lost their entire reason for being. They had to sit and do nothing, find another war, merge with the Hospitalers, or find another mission in life. Their boss, the Pope, had been making noises about merging them with the Hospitalers, and neither group much liked that idea, so when the Pope asked DeMolay to come to France to discuss another crusade, DeMolay jumped at the chance. It is speculated that he brought with him 18 galleys loaded with treasure, ready to help finance this new crusade. What do you suppose ever became of that?

King Phillip had been plotting against the Templars for some time before the surprise attack and arrest on Friday, October 13, 1307. He had planted covert spies among them as members who fed him "evidence" to be used in the public campaign against the order.

Last month, I mentioned that DeMolay had expelled the treasurer of the Paris Temple for providing an unauthorized loan to the King of France. The King tried to persuade DeMolay to reverse his decision and having failed, persuaded the Pope to order his reinstatement. This proved that DeMolay was not untouchable.

After the King ordered the raid, he started a public campaign to incite the general population to force the Pope to suppress the order. The "evidence" presented was almost all completely false. It was particularly scandalous and shocking but simply not true. He then used the inquisition to torture the Templars and to extort confessions from the captive knights. The Templars had been subject to the inquisition since the time of the crusade against the Cathars (See article on page 6 of the October issue).

The Pope, realizing that he was losing control of the situation demanded to personally interrogate DeMolay, but the King deliberately kept the Grand Master away from him. The Pope then sent his own lawyers to Notre Dame in Paris to conduct an interrogation during which DeMolay retracted prior confessions which he insisted were given under torture. After receiving the report from his commission, the Pope ordered an immediate stop to all further action against the Templars and again demanded that the King turn DeMolay over to him at Poitiers.

Finally, Phillip sent a caravan containing seventy prisoners to the Pope. The prisoners were composed of the top Templar leaders in custody and a "select group of Templars and excommunicated fugitives." No doubt, these were ex-Templars who had been expelled from the order and may even have included some of the spies the King had planted for that purpose. Curiously, when the caravan was only part way there, the wagons containing the top Templar leaders including DeMolay himself were diverted to Chinon and never arrived at the Pope's location.

The Pope never personally questioned DeMolay, but found the order innocent of nearly all the charges and granted absolution for the others. The trials were concluded on August 20, 1308, but DeMolay was not released.

In another surprise move on March 18, 1314, the King seized DeMolay and had him burned at the stake for heresy, a judgment and sentence he was not empowered to make.

At the time of the trials, the order was only around two hundred years old; almost exactly the same age as our Grand Encampment. The Templars, after a two hundred year tradition of heroic warfare, prosperous business, exemplary honor and chivalry, and devoted service to their religion, had come to an ignominious end - or had they?

Next, we will look at the infamous Pope Clement V. The Vatican documents tell a quite different story about him than I had heard before. Here is where the mystery really begins to unfold.

[TOP](#)

The Paradoxical Pontiff

Pernicious and Pejorative, Paranoid and Palliative, or Pious and Pitiable?

In attempting to analyze the role of Pope Clement V in the trial of the Templars, his character, and his motivation, it will be necessary to take into consideration the events leading up to the capture, trial, and executions of the Templars and the environment in which these events took place.

Although my primary source for this information is the documentary notes accompanying the Vatican documents, it was necessary to include material from Dr. Barbara Frale's new book *The Templars - The Secret History Revealed*, from *The Knights Templar* by Sean Martin, and from *The Knights Templar Reveled* by Alan Butler and Stephen Dafoe. Although these other authors do not necessarily agree with Frale's conclusions about the nature of the Pope's involvement, they provided many valuable facts, dates, and names that were necessary to round out the story and to place everything in the correct chronological order. Be patient; this is going to take more than one month.

It is first important to understand a few facts. The Papacy did not have a standing army except for the Templars and the Hospitalers. The Templars and Hospitalers, though allies in many ways, were sometimes considered to be rivals and did not always play well together. Pope Innocent II issued a document entitled *Omne Datum Optimum* which "liberated" the Templars from all control of civil or political authority. It declared them to be autonomous and under the sole direction of the Pope. The Templar statutes themselves declared that the Pope alone was the "...head and master of the Temple after our Lord Jesus Christ." This put the Order above all law except for Papal authority, and it flourished in this role.

The immunity the Templars enjoyed began to erode when, during the Albigensian Crusade or the Crusade against the Cathar heresy as the Church then called it, the Pope authorized the questioning of both the Templars and the Hospitalers thus undermining his authority and their Papal protection. An article about this crusade can be found in our October 2008 issue. Understand that "questioning," at that time, included inquisition by torture with a presumption of guilt. For the most part, to be charged with heresy was a guaranteed lengthy torture session ending in execution no matter how you plead.

The Church had been engaged in a struggle with King Philip IV of France for some time before Clement became Pope. Philip was desperate for funds and hungry for power. He wanted all Europe consolidated under him and the funding necessary to launch a universal crusade under his leadership to once and for all drive the infidel from the Holy Land and to establish him as Emperor of the Christian world. First, he wanted the Orders combined and put under his jurisdiction so he could retake Constantinople.

In 1294 when the Italian Benedetto Caetani was elected as Pope Boniface VIII, the strife began and was constant thereafter until Philip died. Philip wanted to take from the Pope authority over the clergy in his kingdom. Philip and Edward I of England, being equally destitute because of warring with each other, both decided to levy taxes on the clergy. This, of course, was considered by the Pope to be defiance of Papal authority. The King then bullied Boniface into declaring Philip's grandfather, Louis IX, a saint.

Philip began to try to expand his influence into the Pope's backyard in Italy by charging the Italian bankers, the Lombards, with heresy and stripping them of their assets. In defense of Church authority, Boniface decided to excommunicate Philip, who in turn, charged the Pope with heresy, had him kidnapped, and intended to put Boniface on trial as a heretic. Although the Pope was rescued with the aid of the locals, this experience broke his health, and he soon died. A pattern of behavior was developing for Philip. These same charges of heresy would soon be leveled against the Templars.

Boniface was succeeded by another Italian, Niccolo Boccasini who was elected as Pope Benedict XI. Although Benedict attempted to reconcile the struggle between the Church and the King, he refused to absolve or pardon those henchmen of Philip who he considered responsible for the death of his predecessor. Benedict died after only one year of a stomach ailment which might have been cancer, but was commonly believed to be poisoning by order of the King.

The King was, no doubt, weary of dealing with Italians, and possibly because of his influence, in 1305 Bertrand De Got, a Frenchman, was selected Pope Clement V in an election which was highly contested between the French and the Italian clergy. The head of the Italian faction refused to certify his election, and Clement assumed the Papacy only after the death of this Italian. Because of this strife between the Italian and the French factions, Clement moved his Papal throne from Rome to Avignon, France where he felt safer.

Around the time the Pope ascended his throne, several Knights who had been expelled from the Templars accused the Order of gross misconduct. Philip, at the coronation of Clement attempted unsuccessfully to force the Pope to initiate an "investigation" of the Templars on the charge of heresy. Although the King ignored the law for the most part, the charge of heresy could not be legally tried and punished by civil authority; this was reserved for the Church. In July of 1306, Philip arrested most of the Jews in the kingdom, deported them, and seized their assets.

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More About Clement

In the above issue, we left Clement just as he had been installed as Pope in France. It is interesting to note that Clement had appointed ten Cardinals, some of whom were his relatives and that all ten resigned because they thought he was being too diplomatic with the King. Appeasement wasn't working with Philip.

On another front, the Pope wanted to discuss with the Grand Masters of his military Orders the plans for another crusade. There had actually been two types of crusades; the general crusade consisting of a large army of untrained, undisciplined, and uncoordinated troops launched for the purpose of taking back the Holy Land in general and the "particular" crusade where a smaller group of highly trained professional troops targeted specific smaller objectives. Probably because of the Templar's recent experience in Acre, DeMolay favored the large, all-out offensive of a general crusade.

Clement called a meeting for November 1, 1306, but the meeting was delayed because he was overcome by an acute gastro-intestinal ailment. One cannot help but wonder if he suspected that he too was being poisoned, and who knows, perhaps he was.

After his arrival in France, DeMolay asked the Pope to investigate and exonerate the Order from the rumors of heresy presumably being proliferated by the King. The Pope wrote to the King in August 1307 agreeing to initiate an investigation but ordering Philip to take no further action until October 14th at which time the Pope was scheduled to have completed his treatment for his stomach ailment. Giving the King a specific date turned out to be a bad mistake.

On Friday, October 13, 1307, one day before the Pope was to initiate his investigation; Philip captured, charged, "interrogated", and convicted the Order so that he could hand the entire matter over to the Pope fully completed for his ratification. To the credit of the Pope, he responded in an entirely different fashion by refusing to accept the verdict, declaring the arrests illegal, ordering the release of the Templars, and declaring that the King's actions were an affront to the authority of the Church.

Of course Philip did not release the Templars, and on October 25th, DeMolay and other leaders, after continuing torture, finally confessed to denying Christ and spitting on the cross. Philip then incited a large crowd to demand the conviction and punishment of the Templars.

On October 27th, Clement declared the King to be blatantly in contempt of the Church, but feeling the public pressure, issued an arrest warrant for the Templars throughout the rest of Europe in an attempt to get control of the proceedings and presumably to get to the truth before he had to sacrifice the entire Order. It is possible that he still held out hope that the Templars would be exonerated by his investigation if he could just wrestle the initiative away from the King.

Philip had published a forged confession from DeMolay under a stolen seal in order to get more of the Templars to confess. On December 12th, Clement sent two Cardinals for the second time to question DeMolay, and they finally managed to get him alone where in private he retracted his confession which he said was the result of torture. On hearing this report, in February of 1308, Clement censured the inquisitors, suspended all proceedings against the Templars, and went to Poitiers in another attempt to regain control of the situation.

Clement demanded that the King send him DeMolay so that the Pope could question him personally, but as I related earlier, the caravan was divided in route, and DeMolay and other leaders were diverted to Chinon while 72 prisoners, no doubt hand-picked by Philip's henchmen, were delivered to the Pope for questioning. These seventy-two prisoners appeared before the Pope on June 27, 1308.

In the mean-time, Philip sent French troops to seal off the town of Poitiers, and the Pope became, in effect, the prisoner of the King. Remember that the Pope's only military force had just been arrested by his own orders. So much for the security and safety of France. In the meantime, at Chinon, DeMolay and the other leaders were again subjected to sufficient torture that they retracted their retractions.

Still trying to gain control of the situation by taking the initiative, Clement set in place two different judiciary bodies; one to try the Order and the other to try individual Templars. He again demanded that DeMolay be turned over to him,

personally for questioning. Failing this, he dispatched three Cardinals, Berenger Fredol, Etinne de Suisy, and Landolfo Brancacci to Chinon who conducted two sessions of hearings, the first from June 28th until July 21th, 1308 and another from August 17th through August 20th, 1308. The second of these produced the now famous Chinon Parchment which triggered this analysis in the first place. This document relates "The testing of the Grand Master and leading dignitaries and the absolution granted to the same."

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Enough About The Pope!

In the above issue, Clement had established judiciary bodies to try the Templars in an attempt to wrestle control back out of the hands of King Philip. Clement either drug his feet or was being extremely meticulous, because it was November 22, 1309, before the Papal hearings began. On the 26th of November, DeMolay again demanded to see the Pope. After some delay, the hearings began again in February of 1310.



This photo of a copy of an engraving included in the Vatican documents package shows the trial of the ancient Templars before Pope Clement V.



This photo of a copy of an engraving included in the Vatican documents package shows Phillip the Fair of France.

On April 1st, two Templar lawyers, Peter of Balogna and Reginald of Provins, stepped forward to defend the Order and convincingly charged Philip with a viscous and greedy plot against the Templars. Philip, angered and realizing that his torture induced confessions were being retracted left and right during testimony before the Papal commissions, retaliated by having fifty-four of the recanting knights burned at the stake as relapsed heretics; a sentence he was not empowered to pronounce. Suddenly, both Templar lawyers disappeared, and on June 5, 1311, the Papal hearings ended.

The Council of Vienne was convened on October 16, 1311, and seven Knights Templar who had thus far evaded arrest showed up as surprise witnesses requesting to testify before the Pope. The Pope and the council consented to hear them. Philip then once again showed up with his troops on March 20, 1312.

Clement, knowing that he was surrounded, issued on March 22nd the document entitled Vox in Excelso in which he did not find the Templars guilty as charged, but essentially dissolved the Order forever. A subsequent decision dated May 5, 1312 and entitled Ad Providum transferred all the wealth and property of the Templars to the Hospitalers thus depriving Philip of the funds as well as the army he had been seeking. A third document entitled Considerantes Dudum and dated May 6th set up provincial councils to deal with the fate of individual Templars but reserved decisions concerning the fate of the leaders to the Pope alone.

In December of 1313, Clement instituted a council to decide the fate of DeMolay and the four other Templar leaders. He clearly considered the proceedings at Chinon to have been part of the Templar trial. On March 18, 1314, these leaders, still in the custody of the commission, were abducted at Vespers by the King's soldiers and subsequently burned at the stake without consulting the Pope. Still being ill, Clement died on April 14th.

As you can see, Dr. Frale does not portray the Pope as a "puppet" of the King, a "weak character", or a vicious and greedy man, but as a leader of the Church at a time when it was under a very real threat by the King of France. He is shown as valiantly trying to defend the Order while preserving the power and sovereignty of the Church. He was a man surrounded by enemies on every side, legitimately fearful for his own life, and trying to maintain the status quo in the face of superior military force and a completely ruthless enemy.

He finally sacrificed the Order in an attempt to protect the lives of its members and to stop the constant and successful assaults of the greedy and ambitious monarch upon the authority of the Church. In short, it seems that she thinks Clement got a raw deal in the history books and that the Chinon Parchment helps to prove that.

On the other hand, although Dr. Frale seems to be a premier expert on the Templars and a formidable historian, we should keep in mind that she is, or at least was, an employee of the Vatican. In the end, we will all have to dig out the

facts for ourselves about this Pope Clement V and make up our own minds. At least, the good doctor has called our attention to some of the facts which had been, heretofore, somewhat obscure.

Next, we will take a look at the actual contents of the Chinon document and what the Templars really confessed to while they were not being tortured and try to figure out why they confessed to anything at all.

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Just the facts, Ma'm

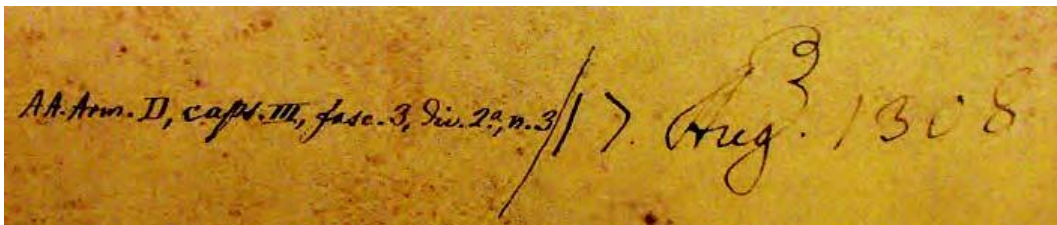


Although there were really no "Ma'm's" involved, I promised you that we would now take a look at the content of the actual Chinon Parchment. This document, in many ways, reads very much like a modern trial transcript. It begins by stating the presiding officials' names, the time and place, the defendants, and the other court officials. The presiding officials were named as Berengar, a Cardinal Presbyter; Stephanus, another Cardinal Presbyter; and Landolf, a Cardinal Deacon, and information is given about the jurisdiction of each. They then begin to establish the authority by which the proceeding was authorized. It is stated that they had been charged by Clement "...wishing and intending to know the pure, complete, and uncompromised truth from the leaders of the Order, namely..." followed by the names of the defendants. There were five defendants as follows:

"Brother" Jacques de Molay, Grand Master of the Order of Knights Templar;
"Brother" Raymbaud de Caron, Preceptor of the Commanderies of the Templar Knights in the Outremer;
"Brother" Hugo de Perraud, Preceptor of France;
"Brother" Geoffroy de Gonneville, Preceptor of Aquitania and Poitou; and
Geoffroy of Charny, Preceptor of Normandy.

These Preceptors would have been the commanding officers of their respective jurisdictions and would have reported directly to the Grand Master. These were obviously most of the key leaders of the entire organization.

The initial date at the top of the document is given as August 17-20, 1308, and it was later stated that Raymbaud was brought before them on the 17th day of August "...in the year of our Lord 1308... the 3rd year of the pontificate of the said Pope Clement V..."



The actual testimony was given one Knight at a time, oaths administered, questions asked and answered, requests made by the defendants for absolution of any sins indicated, absolution given by the Cardinals, and another oath of allegiance to the Catholic faith given. The defendants were called in the following order; Raymbaud de Caron, Geoffroy of Charny, and Geoffroy de Gonneville on the 17th; Hugo de Perraud on the 19th; and DeMolay on the 20th. On the 20th Geoffroy de Gonneville and Hugo de Perraud were read their confession in their own native tongue and ratified the same. This may have meant that they did not read Latin; I am not sure why only these two were mentioned.

At the end of the document, each of the notary witnesses is named, and each of their statements certifying the accuracy of the transcript is written in detail along with their seals.

As far as I can tell, in each instance, the Knights confessed to any sins that the Cardinal had deemed them to have committed based on their testimony, denounced any heresy they had been deemed to have committed, asked for forgiveness and mercy, and were specifically granted absolution from the verdict of excommunication; this right to grant absolution having been specifically granted to these Cardinals by the Pope for this proceeding. It does not appear that these Knights retracted any of the confessions they made at this trial. It does not appear that there was any torture administered during or in conjunction with this proceeding (although it appears that there may have been instances of torture when being questioned by the King's men). It does not appear that these men died under penalty of excommunication from the Church.

Next we will look at exactly what questions were asked and the answers given by each Knight, and finally we will wrap up this series after a long year, by looking at some theories about why these Knights confessed to and may have done some of the things they confessed to having done.



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They Confessed to What?!

At the trial, the Knights were asked mostly the same questions; how old were they when they were received into the Order; how long they had been members of the Order; what had happened during and immediately after their initiation especially concerning denying Christ, spitting on the Cross or Crucifix, or kissing the one inducting them into the Order; homosexual activities among the Knights, specifically sodomy; worshiping a head; and how they had initiated others.

Raymbaud de Caron testified that he had been initiated forty-three years prior at the age of seventeen which made him about sixty years old at the time. Geoffroy of Charny stated that he had been a Templar for forty years since he was sixteen or seventeen making him about fifty-seven years of age. Geoffroy de Gonneville indicated that he had been received into the Order twenty-eight years previously, but did not indicate at what age. Hugo de Perraud indicated that he was initiated at the age of eighteen, forty-six years ago by his father, Hubet de Perraud, who was a Visitator of the Templar Commanderies in France and Poitou. As you may recall, a Visitator was something akin to an Inspector General in today's military. At sixty-four years old, he may well have been the oldest Knight in the group. DeMolay testified that he had been a member of the Order for forty-two years, but apparently was not asked how old he was at the time of his reception.

Concerning the question about worshiping a head or an idol shaped like a head, Raymbaud de Caron, Geoffroy of Charny, Geoffroy de Gonneville, and DeMolay indicated that they knew nothing about it. Hugo de Perraud testified that the head was in the possession of Brother Peter Alemandin and that he had seen it in Montpellier.

Concerning the charge of sodomy, none of the Knights had firsthand knowledge of the practice although Raymbaud de Caron and Hugo de Perraud indicated that three members of the Order had been incarcerated perpetually in Castle Pilgrim for the offence. Hugo also indicated that during initiations, he had imposed on the initiates to abstain from partnership with women, but, if they were unable to restrain their lust, to join themselves with brothers of the Order.

He knew of none who had done so. Raymbaud de Caron indicated that he had been told during his initiation that if he could not restrain his lust, it was better done in secret than publicly.

If I may digress for a moment, Sir Knights, I see a similar problem developing in our fraternity today. It seems to me that some of our brethren are communicating to the younger brethren that some of our principles regarding morality are out-dated and not in touch with the times; that perhaps we should be using something other than the Bible upon which to base our moral standards. It seems to me that a "beautiful system of morality" without the integrity to insist that its members adhere to its espoused moral standards and principles, is doomed to become "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal" and is on the path of demise. Only through the strict adherence to our principles in deed as well as in word, can we expect to sustain our existence. Otherwise, we lose our reason to exist. Sorry for the digression, Sir Knights. I feel better, but I would not want to hurt anyone's feelings or make anyone feel "uncomfortable." Let me get off my soap box and back on the subject at hand.

Concerning questions about kissing, apparently, Geoffroy de Gonneville was not asked the question, DeMolay knew nothing of the practice, both Raymbaud de Caron and Hugo de Perraud said they were kissed on the mouth as a part of their initiation, and Geoffroy of Charny indicated that he kissed his receptor on his mouth and on his chest through his clothing as a gesture of respect. Hugo de Perraud indicated that when he initiated others, he required them to kiss him at the bottom of the back, on the navel, and on the mouth. Hugo appears to me to have been out on the edge.

The most puzzling answers were in reference to either denying Christ or spitting on the cross or a crucifix.

All of them had a similar experience during their initiation. Raymbaud de Caron was taken aside after his initiation by a "brother-servant," shown a small cross or crucifix and told "You must denounce this one" to which Raymbaud replied "And so, I denounce." Geoffroy of Charny was taken aside by the Brother who initiated him, shown a crucifix with an effigy of Christ and told that he should not believe in the Crucified, but should, in fact, denounce him. Geoffroy de Gonneville was shown a cross depicted in some book and told that he should denounce the one whose image was depicted on that cross. On refusing to do so he was finally convinced by his receptor to agree to tell any of the Knights who asked him that he had made the denunciation. Hugo de Perraud testified that he was shown a cross with an effigy of Christ and that the demand was made of him that he "denounce the One whose image was depicted there." He refused at first, but later complied with the demand. DeMolay testified to a similar experience. Geoffroy of Charny also indicated that he had received many others into the order without demanding a denunciation of the cross.

Only DeMolay and Geoffroy de Gonneville indicated that they had been ordered to spit on the cross and neither admitted doing so. It is interesting to note that all pointed out that this business of denouncing the cross was done by them "with the mouth only and not in the spirit."

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And in Conclusion...
The Final Episode of the Mystery of the
Trials of the Ancient Templars

This article is the final issue of a year-long series on the trials of the ancient Templars. We ran this series because the Vatican had recently released important documents which seemed to shed a slightly different light on the events than many of us had previously heard. As we explored these documents, we became interested not only in the legal rulings of the Pope and the wrangling between the Church and the king but in what the Templar leaders actually said during their trials. They indeed confessed to a number of strange things, probably none of which would be a violation of present day law, but which were surprising to some of us.

In this, we will take a look at these confessions and speculate about what they really meant in the context of a 14th century religious trial and if they can tell us anything about the nature of the organization as it then existed.

First, there was the matter of homosexual activity of which they were accused. Some believe that this accusation was made because one of the symbols of the Order showed two knights riding on the same horse. The "official" explanation of the symbol was that the knights had taken a vow of poverty and that at the beginning, they could not, perhaps, afford adequate mounts. Remember that they were the heavy cavalry of the crusaders equivalent to today's armored divisions. The rule of the order, however, limits a knight to three horses and certainly implies that plenty were available by the time the rule was established. The rule also explicitly declared homosexuality to be a grave offense and severe punishment was prescribed. None of the knights testified to any homosexual activity and several testified that they knew only of a very few cases and that the offenders were sentenced to life imprisonment for the offence. I believe that it is safe to say that the charge of homosexual misconduct was trumped up and had no basis in fact.

A closely related charge had to do with indecent "kissing." A close examination of the testimony reveals that much of the kissing was done through the clothing of the individual as a symbol of respect or an affirmation of subordination such as the kissing of a ring or a Bible. The kissing on the mouth puts me in mind of my first friendly encounter with a Frenchman who promptly kissed this old southern boy on both cheeks and left me seriously startled. Remember that most of these guys were Frenchmen. This charge seems also to be superfluous.

The confessions that interested me most were those of denying Christ or spitting on a cross or crucifix. Almost all of them testified that this was a part of their initiation process. The reason this is surprising is that these men enlisted in this Order, for the express purpose of serving Christ and defending Christianity. Dr. Frale suggests that this might have been some sort of training exercise. Some of the training I received in the military was to assist us in staying alive and escaping in the event we were captured. Although the Templar policy was not to ransom captured Knights, many were a part of prisoner exchanges during the years. They all emphasized that their denial was with the mouth only and not from the heart. Perhaps they were taught to tell the enemy whatever they wanted to hear in order to stay alive and live to fight again. We may never know the significance of this part of the initiation but it seems to have been their practice.

Finally, there was the charge that they had some sort of idol in the form of a head which was worshiped. Most of them testified that they knew nothing of such a head, but at least one indicated that he had seen such a thing. There are two possibilities that come to mind to explain this. In the unlikely event that the ancient Templar's ceremonies bore any resemblance to those we use, one might imagine how someone who knew nothing of the Order or the ceremony might jump to an erroneous conclusion concerning worshiping a head. Another intriguing theory might have to do with the relationship between the Templars and the preservation of the Shroud of Turin, sometimes claimed to be the burial shroud of Christ. The history of this relic and any involvement of the Templars opens up a whole new avenue of study and may well be the basis of a future series of articles.

I hope that this series has been interesting to you and that you will continue to send your comments, positive or negative, about the articles we may run in the future.



This photo of the watch tower from the bridge overlooking the Loire River in Chinon where the trials took place was taken and submitted by Sir Knight Thomas P. Hansen of Commandery No. 4 in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

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