

Dossier on the Knights Templar

Richard B. Sorensen, www.unholygrailbook.com

Copyright © 2007, All Rights Reserved

August 10, 2011

*Not unto us Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory.
~ The Templar Motto*

Templar History and Bernard of Clairvaux

The First Crusade which resulted in the taking of Jerusalem in AD 1099 gave rise to a mysterious and arcane organization known as the Knights Templar. It was founded in Jerusalem some time during the period 1113-18, a few years after the European forces of the First Crusade took the city. The founding members were nine knights who dedicated themselves to the protection of Christian pilgrims making their way to the holy places in Palestine.

King Baldwin, the ruler of Jerusalem at that time, gave these men quarters under the temple mount in Jerusalem, and thus they were initially called "The Poor Knights of Christ of the Temple of Solomon" which was eventually shortened to "the Knights Templar," the name by which they became known. Stories were later told that the knights performed excavations under the temple mount and they were said to have found documents, treasures, and perhaps even the Ark of the Covenant which had supposedly been hidden there by the Jews during their last stand against the Babylonians in 586 BC.

Virtually all of these knights were from the Champagne region of France, and were sponsored by Hugh, the Count of Champagne, and a powerful leader. He was intimately involved with the crusades, and was the liege lord of Hugues de Payen and Andre de Montbard, the first two Grand Masters of the Knights Templar. Count Hugh is said to have had a conclave concerning Jerusalem in 1104 in France and then traveled to the Holy Land, remaining there for several years. It was also said that the Count considered joining the Templars, but decided against it, and instead provided financial support by giving land to the Cistercian order of monks.

This initiated a series of interesting connections between Cistercians and the Templars, both of which were nascent monastic organizations in the early twelfth century, but became exceedingly rich and influential

Bernard de Fontaines, later known as St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the nephew of Andre de Montbard (who was later a Grand Master of the Templars), was a leader of the Cistercian order from a very young age. With funds from Hugh, the Count of Champagne, the Cistercians built a new monastery at Clairvaux in 1112, and Bernard, at the age of twenty-five, became its first abbot. Prior to 1112, the finances of the Cistercian order were very limited, but shortly thereafter the order expanded tremendously, and by the time of Bernard's death, the Cistercians had become very wealthy and had 165 abbeys across Europe, many of which Bernard had personally established. In his later career Bernard became the most influential churchman of his time. Thus there were many

familial, spiritual, and political connections among the Templars, the Cistercians, and the Champagne region of France.

In its first years, the Knights were a tiny organization, declining in numbers from the nine knights who founded the order, and perhaps on the verge of dissolution. It is speculated that at some point during the early years between 1118 and 1128, Huges de Payen, the first Templar Grand Master, wrote a letter to Bernard asking for support. Bernard had even then become influential in ecclesiastic circles, and also had blood relations to the Templar knight Andre de Montbard. Furthermore, Bernard's father had fought in the First Crusade, so Bernard agreed to help them. He wrote a document praising the Templars entitled, "In Praise of the New Knighthood," and he drew up the Templar rules of order, basing them on the same ordinances used for his Cistercian monks, but designed for fighters rather than clerics.

In 1128 the knights returned to Troyes, France, for a council sponsored and initiated by Bernard and held at the Cathedral of Troyes. Pope Innocent II was in Troyes at the time dealing with other issues, and Bernard, in a well-planned move, used the occasion to force the Pope's hand concerning the Templars. Innocent was indebted to Bernard for the latter's extensive help in securing the papal election of 1130, and the pope was also interested in maintaining good relations with the ruling house of Champagne to which Bernard was related. Innocent therefore designated the Knights Templar as a papal order, free from all taxation and secular control, and responsible only to the pope himself.

Thus infused with new vision and papal support, the Templars returned to Jerusalem with a large contingent of new knights who had been inducted into the order. Over time the order received many gifts that were used to produce income to support their military operations in Palestine, and they came to see their main purpose as fighting for the overall Christian defense of the Holy Land.

Troyes, the provincial capital of Champagne, became the Templars' European headquarters, with Bernard as their European spokesman and cheerleader. As the "Pope Maker" Bernard became one of the most influential men of his time. He continually encouraged the support of the Templars, as well as the crusades in general as he traveled around Europe, thus giving rise to speculation that there were special deals made between the Templars and the Cistercians.

From the outset the Knights Templar were essentially monks who took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but were dedicated to military rather than to clerical pursuits. The Templars developed the reputation of being ferocious fighters, highly respected and feared by the Muslims, and in battle they wore a distinctive white tunic with the red Templar cross so that they would be easily recognized. Unlike the typical European army of that time, the Knights were highly disciplined and dedicated to total obedience to their leaders, and thus were able to maintain order and control even in the most difficult battle situations. They were never allowed to retreat unless allowed to do so by their leader, and then not unless the odds were greater than three to one against them. The Knights refused to ransom any member captured in battle; therefore the Templars fought to the death. They were also highly organized, having developed a number of skirmishing techniques, such as the use of colored flags to direct troops in the heat and confusion of battle, and they trained their members in all aspects of warfare.

Therefore the Knights Templar were the most dependable, organized, and ferocious fighting force of the crusader era, and attracted many to be trained and to fight with them.

Despite Templar support, the Crusader Kingdom in Jerusalem was always on shaky ground because it was a small Christian kingdom surrounded and potentially threatened by much larger Muslim nations. The crusader leaders continually called for more military support which eventually came (the second through the ninth crusades were all attempts to strengthen or retake Jerusalem). But all of these attempts were too little, too late, and too disorganized to have any serious impact.

In 1145 one of Bernard's former disciples became Pope Eugenius III. He was a rather weak man completely under the influence of Bernard. By this point over forty years had passed since the initial crusader victory, and Christian forces had suffered several setbacks, so under Bernard's direction, the Pope called for the Second Crusade to revive the flame of Christian sovereignty in the Holy Land. Unfortunately, the Second Crusade had the same leadership problems, rivalries, and betrayals as had the First Crusade, with the additional liability that the Turks were now aware of the Christian objectives and better prepared to resist. The Second Crusade was an unmitigated disaster; it resulted in the annihilation of the Christian armies sent to the Holy Land, and was over by 1149. Bernard, who was blamed for the outcome, spent his last days defending himself from the intense criticism that was heaped upon him. He died four years later in 1153.

However, the Order of the Knights Templar continued and became very wealthy. They established preceptories (strongholds) in Jerusalem, Antioch, England, Italy, Portugal, Hungary, and several in France, using the property that had been given to the order, but their purpose remained the maintenance of military forces in support of Christian rule in the Holy Land. Jerusalem was lost to the Muslims only a few decades later in 1187 and was never retaken despite a number of further crusades over the next one hundred years. Therefore the Templars lost the purpose for their existence, but having reached a position of size and influence they turned their attention in other directions.

The Knights became the first international bankers of history. Using their preceptories as treasure houses, they invented the concept of paper money, almost by accident. In those days of poor roads, slow travel, hostile politics, and frequent highway robbers, it was very dangerous to carry treasure for long distances. By paying a fee to the Templars, a man from England, for example, could deposit gold in the London preceptory and be given a paper receipt in return (elaborately signed and sealed). Then he could travel to France, Italy, Portugal, or even Palestine, and get his gold back when he arrived at his destination. The receipts issued by the Templars were thus one of the first instances in world history where paper money was employed.

The Growth and Ultimate Demise of the Templars

The wealth of the Templars further increased as they were freed from the expense of maintaining an army in Palestine. Furthermore, they did not pay any interest or taxes on the gold put in deposit in their vaults, which was often left there for long periods of time, and which they would sometimes acquire if the note holder did not return to claim his or her property. They also maintained very high ethical standards (death was the

penalty for embezzlement and several Templars were executed for stealing funds), so they came to be highly trusted.

The Templars thus had a large, expanding pool of funds that they used to make loans for huge profits. They expanded their landholdings which were free from taxation, and over time became extremely wealthy, powerful, secretive, and arrogant. This generated an increasing level of resentment from the rulers in whose domains they operated, especially in France where most of their property was located.

In 1285 Philip IV le Bel (the Fair) became the king of France, but despite his good looks he was a cold, secretive, and power-hungry man who was jealous of the Templar wealth and land-holdings. The royal treasury was bankrupt because of the many wars that the French kings had engaged in; the Templars had made loans to the government to finance these wars, and Philip therefore owed them substantial sums. In order to raise funds, Philip first expelled all of the Jews from France and seized their lands and assets. It is said that he had Jews arrested, blinded in one eye, and then threatened them with blindness in the other if they did not give him their treasures. He also targeted the Italian Lombards, confiscating all of the assets of their banking concerns. Philip is credited with becoming one of the first rulers to devalue the currency of his own country. By contrast, the Templars had set a standard price for gold and silver by weight, regardless of the country of origin, in an effort to enforce fair standards of exchange. But Philip had all of the gold and silver coins in France recalled and melted down for his use, and then introduced coinage of lesser purity and value, thereby causing a public outrage.

But these measures were not sufficient, and having exhausted other sources of wealth, Philip then went after the Knights Templar, who, having already made large loans to the king and being concerned with the crown's poor credit rating, had refused to give him any more loans.

At that time, the papacy had fled in fear from Rome and with French support, had set up its court in Avignon, France. The pontiff at the that time—Pope Clement V was essentially a lackey of the king, and one of the conditions of French defense of the Papacy was that Clement would submit to French royalty. Philip forced the pope to retract papal support of the Knights Templar and to formally disband the organization. On Friday, 13 October 1307, Philip had all of the Templars in France arrested and charged with sorcery and heresy (this date is the source of the notion that Friday the thirteenth is bad luck).

There is another possible reason that the knights were forsaken by the Papacy. Some of them apparently had become members or supporters of the Cathars, a Gnostic sect that was centered in southwestern France. The Cathars required their members to take up a life of poverty, and to abstain from meat and sex, which was in contrast to many in the French clergy at that time who were wealthy and debauched. The Catholic Church regarded the Cathars as heretics, so in 1209 Pope Innocent III had instigated the Albigensian Crusade in an effort to wipe them out. This crusade continued sporadically until its climax in 1244, when the Cathars made a last stand in their mountain fortress of Montsegur in the Pyrenees. There is a legend that several of their leaders escaped from Montsegur by climbing down the sheer face of the mountain at night with the treasures of the Cathars strapped to their backs. This supposedly occurred several weeks before the final assault when the remaining Cathars barricaded themselves in their stronghold at the

top of the mountain and set fire to it, killing everyone. The purported treasures were said to have possibly included the Shroud of Turin and the Holy Grail.

King Philip IV was thus able to repudiate his debt to the Templars and seize their lands, but he found little treasure. The Templar leaders had brought a large amount of gold with them when they were called to come before Pope Clement, prior to their betrayal, and presumably that was seized. But most of the Templar assets would have been invested in lands and estates, and these were also taken from them. It is said that some of the Templars were able to escape with their treasures, and a number of Templar ships were said to have left France in the days prior to that fateful Friday the thirteenth. They supposedly bore the Templar records and remaining treasure to Scotland, and perhaps elsewhere. It was rumored that some fled across the mountains from France into Switzerland, and were perhaps instrumental in founding that country and in creating the Swiss banking business with its emphasis on secrecy.

It is told that the Templars who came to Scotland supported Robert the Bruce, King of the Scots, at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 when Scotland finally won its independence from England. In gratitude for their support, King Robert supposedly granted them safe haven in Scotland, and they became associated with various groups of freemasons, thus launching stories of historic connections between Freemasonry and the Knights Templar. Rosslyn Chapel near Edinburgh built by the St Clair family was said to be at times the repository of the Templar treasures; when America was founded several centuries later it was supposedly the Freemasons and Knights Templar who provided the leadership and the treasure to carry this through, as depicted in the movie *National Treasure*. However, that story has grown in the telling, and there is little or no documentary support for any significant Templar involvement in Scotland,

King Philip le Bel of France put captured members of the Templars on trial, and in 1314, Jacques de Molay, the Grand Master of the order, was burned at the stake along with the Master of Normandy, Geoffrey de Charney. It was said that de Molay cursed both Philip and Clement from the flames, and both the king and the pope died within the next year.

Even though the Templars were formally disbanded they still continued as a semi-secret society; Grand Masters were thereafter chosen in secret, and the organization has continued in various forms down to the present.

There are many mysteries associated with the Knights Templar. Perhaps the most significant is their purported discovery of treasure under the Temple of Solomon during their years in Jerusalem, as well as the story of the Cathar treasures being spirited away prior to the sack and ruin of Montsegur during the Albigensian Crusade. Tales tell of gold, silver, gems, documents, and perhaps even the Ark of the Covenant, the Shroud of Turin, and the Holy Grail being found and sent to a secret hiding place in Europe and even America for safekeeping and to help establish the Templar banking empire. Is the secret treasure of the Knights Templar hidden somewhere, only to be revealed at an opportune moment in the future?

Following are some of the questions asked about the Knights Templar, and answers from the author:

1. **Q:** Did the Templars actually discover any treasure under Solomon's Temple during their time there?

- A:** Probably not. Some think that treasure taken from the Temple was their seed capital, but the organization did not achieve any real power or wealth until after 1128 (the number of knights had dwindled in the meantime), when Bernard of Clairvaux gained papal support for the order. The foundations of Templar wealth then came from donations of wealthy lords who also sent their sons to train and fight with the Templars, the elite fighting force of their day. No records of any physical treasure have ever been found. However, it is possible that the Templars discovered documents, which they kept and hid.
2. **Q:** Were the Templars involved with the Cathars during their last stand against the Albigensian Crusade at their mountaintop fortress of Montsegur in 1244? Did they help carry off any Cathar treasures, such as the Holy Grail?
- A:** A few of the Templars were Gnostic Cathars, but the vast majority were Catholic. The supposed escape from Montsegur by three Cathar men prior to the destruction of the fortress is a myth promoted by Otto Rahn, the twentieth century German mystic and Cathar enthusiast. Rahn's writing's were the inspiration of many current books on related topics, such as sacred geometry, Gnosticism, the Druids, the Holy Grail, the sacred feminine, and the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Cathar historians and others, however, have debunked Rahn's ideas and demonstrated that they have no historical basis.
3. **Q:** Were the Templars involved in any forms of devil worship, such as with the head or image of Baphomet?
- A:** Probably not. The Templars were a Catholic monastic order, and there is no clear indication that any of them worshipped the devil or the head/image of a man. They were, however, accused of this by the French King because he wanted to prove that they were heretics, and thus worthy of death. Some Templars confessed to this, but the confessions were dubious, as they were obtained by torture. The Baphomet head may instead refer to John the Baptist, who was revered by some Templars.
4. **Q:** Did the Templars sail to Scotland from France with boatloads of treasure prior to the attack by the French King Philip le Bel?
- A:** There is no definitive record of this event, and no record of the Templars serving at the Battle of Bannockburn or being rewarded by Robert the Bruce. But after the Templars were wiped out in France, some survivors did make their way to Scotland. Escaping Templars undoubtedly grabbed all of the treasure they could, but most of their assets were in French land and buildings, as well as in the form of loans, all of which were lost to the king of France. However, there are a number of Scottish preceptories and some early Templar graves have been discovered.
5. **Q:** Is there Templar treasure buried under Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland?
- A:** Rosslyn was built in the period 1446-86 by William St. Clair. Records are clear that he built and dedicated it as a Christian place of worship (i.e., it was not

built for Masonic or Templar purposes). There are Masonic symbols in the chapel, but its connection with Templars is probably fictitious.

6. **Q:** Did the Templars found Switzerland?
A: Very likely they played a part. See the book *The Warriors and the Bankers*, by Alan Butler and Stephen Dafoe.
7. **Q:** Did the Templars sail to Oak Island in Nova Scotia and hide some of their treasure there?
A: This is one of the more ludicrous and imaginative Templar theories, with no historical basis whatsoever.
8. **Q:** Did Templars and Freemasons hide their treasure in America, as alleged in the movie *National Treasure*?
A: This is another romantic and fanciful theory with a dash of evidence, and a huge load of speculation. A number of the founders of America were Freemasons or had associations with Freemasonry, but there is no indication that any Templar treasure was brought to America and hidden there.
9. **Q:** Jacques de Molay, the Templar Grand Master who was burned at the stake—was it his image that appears on the Shroud of Turin?
A: No. See the essay *The True Holy Grail* on the web site www.unholygrailbook.com for more information on this and other aspects of the Templars and the Shroud.