

A Brief Account of the Knights Templar and of their Heritage



When Prior Matthew asked me to speak to you about the illustrious and tragic history of your Order and handed me a stack of books that would choke a small bundle buggy to begin reading into, by pure coincidence I also happened to be reading into the history of US covert operations in Afghanistan.

Don't ever try this at home.

Three nights straight I woke up screaming and with the hiccups, trying to remember whether bin Laden was funding Saladin through Mossad or the Templars were running Stingers to Massoud through the Old Man of the Mountain.

On the fourth night a great light dawned as I realized that the answer to all these things was 'yes'. Nothing much has changed in that part of the world for two thousand years.

I'd like to start with a thought about the nature of time. Jerusalem fell to the First Crusade in 1099. The Latin lands of Outremer were eradicated by the Mameluke Sultans of Egypt in 1291 – the whole adventure lasted less than two hundred years. The blink of an eye in one sense, but only looking backward over a wide gulf of time. Generally, we have real trouble grasping the measure of eras that precede our own. There is a compression effect, and the farther back you go, the more compressed things get. We say 'the Roman Empire' casually – but Rome's superpower status began around 200 BC and ran uninterrupted until nearly 1000 AD – more than twice as long as our whole modern era if you count from Shakespeare and Good Queen Bess.

What I am sneaking up on here is that two hundred years is a very long time in human experience, but a short time in memory. The names and forms of institutions change more slowly than the minds of men do, and that can confuse us. There was a Roman Catholic Church and there were Popes at the beginning of the period as there were at the end. There was a Byzantine Empire. There was Islam. There were the forms of feudalism. And for much of the period, there were the Knights of the great military

orders. But nobody who knew any of them in 1099 would have recognized them in 1300.

To a human being, ‘time immemorial’ doesn’t mean ‘in the middle ages’, or even ‘Victorian times’. At best, it usually means ‘when Grandpa was young.’ Here’s an experiment –take an imaginary yardstick about 80 years long and lay it between any two years in history. You will find that the societies at each end will be nearly unrecognizable to each other. You **can** try this one at home, in fact it’s great fun when the TV is broken.

I am spending time on this because it is important for understanding both what happened to the Templars during their existence and what may have happened afterward.

What becomes immediately obvious about the First Crusade is that it was something on a scale nobody could possibly have imagined, certainly not Pope Urban II as he stood there in 1096 listening to the cries of **Deus Lo Vult**. Half of Western Europe picked up and headed straight for the Holy Land. It wasn’t so much a campaign as a heavily armed pilgrimage. Those that got there in fighting condition – not a whole lot of them – very significantly lacked what we would call a ‘strategic objective’, and in that there is a striking parallel with certain other adventurers in those parts closer to our own time.

The Crusaders captured Jerusalem, and then had to face the problem ‘Now that we’ve got it, what do we do with it?’ ‘**Free the Holy Land**’ had been the slogan since everyone left Europe but nobody had thought about what should happen next. Of course some of the leaders had personal ambitions of their own and the various feudal kingdoms of Outremer were the result, but that is not a substitute for ‘the vision thing’.

The Eastern Mediterranean littoral became a strip of Frankish Christian colonies about 300 miles long and twenty miles deep, in which the new Christian lords were very much a minority among a highly unfriendly local population. This is something that causes some modern Israeli strategists to wake up nights with that horrible sense of **déjà vu** all over again. It is something that, if modern English had been around at the time, would have allowed the Crusaders to bequeath us the word ‘**quagmire**’.

Interestingly enough, over two centuries, lords and locals seem to have gotten along well enough. The Frankish – from whence, **Ferenghi** – colonists were happy to learn all the civilized warm-climate refinements that the locals could teach them, like silk and cotton and fresh fruit and real baths and medicine that almost worked. They scandalized new arrivals still full of crusading spirit and Western fleas by having Muslim friends who (gasp) drank wine, while they themselves sometimes wouldn't eat pork. Muslim chroniclers and ambassadors in turn were scandalized by the sight of good Muslim families being happy and prosperous and paying taxes to the infidels, who, some of them said, were a good deal less trouble than the local emirs had been. But that was the background. The foreground was a whole lot less peaceful.

The local Muslim sovereignties were anxious to attempt a reconquista. There was continuous trouble with raids and border skirmishes throughout the hastily-founded feudal demesnes. The Latin presence was hopelessly undermanned for tasks they had never conceived of because nobody had thought past the taking of Jerusalem. And now that Jerusalem was taken, the pilgrim traffic from the West was burgeoning and that meant that banditry and all its associated evils was increasing commensurately. In fact the problem was one of counter-insurgency. The Military Orders were a very pragmatic answer to a very pressing need.

We tend to think that the Orders sprang into existence as soon as Jerusalem was liberated. But they didn't. In the case of the Templars, it took about thirty years.

The Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, otherwise known as the Hospitallers, came into existence first. They had roots in the Holy Land, having developed from a Latin pilgrims' hospital founded in Jerusalem in 1070, and they always kept that association afterwards. They were established by papal bull in 1113 under the direct protection of the Holy See. Around 1118, they began transforming themselves under pressure of events into a fighting Order just as the founders of the Templars arrived.

The first Templars were nine French knights, headed by Hugh de Payens, all from the Champagne region, and most of them dependents of Count Hugh de Troyes, Count of Champagne. The composition of this first group established a tendency ever after for the centre of gravity of the Order to be French – which may have been the first of the seeds of its ending.

It seems that they came as pilgrims, but that the obviously bad security situation – a party of 700 unarmed pilgrims was massacred or enslaved by raiders in Holy Week of 1119 – persuaded King Baldwin II of Jerusalem to come to an arrangement with them where they would have headquarters in the al-Aqsa Mosque, said to be located on the site of the Temple of Solomon, in return for what we would call convoy escort on the pilgrim routes. From their headquarters they took the name of ‘**The Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon**’. They probably were pretty poor at that point too.

It would seem that they spent the next few years reconnoitering and recruiting and grasping the scope of their job. We don’t know that more knights were added, but certainly they would have acquired support personnel. We don’t know how they supported themselves, very likely both from the donations of grateful pilgrims and a subsidy from Baldwin, but it seems that by 1127 they were considered both valuable enough and expensive enough that a more stable footing had to be found than sporadically grateful pilgrims and Baldwin’s somewhat shaky expense account. The template chosen was already in existence – the Hospitallers.

By 1127 the Hospitallers had property in Europe that was substantially helping their war chest, and it was growing gradually by legacy and donation. In that year the Templars acquired their first holdings back home – not coincidentally, two in Champagne and one in Ypres, and not coincidentally, one being the lands of Hugh de Puyens, who had put his treasure where his faith was.

Also not coincidentally, Champagne happened to be the homeland of Bernard de Clairvaux, one of the fastest-rising young stars of the monastic rejuvenation in Western Europe. He was close with both Hugh de Troyes and Pope Honorius II, and so in 1127 the Original Nine left Outremer for Italy and France with a letter from Baldwin to Bernard asking for his intercession with the Pope on the Templars’ behalf. Today this would be called a high-level fundraiser and lobbying mission.

It worked. There must have been a lot of political machinery grinding away behind the scenes, but it worked. The Hospitallers already had recognition, property and privileges. Over the period 1128 – 1137 the Templars overleaped them, both in terms of property and of entitlements. Already in 1128, with the Pope’s recognition in hand, they added properties in England, Scotland and Portugal, and in 1129 the newly-

minted Grand Master or Prior Hugh de Puyens headed back to the Holy Land with three hundred newly-sworn knights in tow.

In 1131 the King of Aragon and Navarre granted a third of his lands to the Temple. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote a promotional piece – *De Laude Novae Militiae* (“Praising the New Order”)– that was a major hit across Europe. In 1135 the Papal Council of Pisa granted the Order a large annual subscription, and finally in early 1139 they made the killer deal: Pope Innocent II signed off on a papal bull *Omne datum optimum* (All the Best Gifts), declaring the Order to be free from any ecclesiastical or secular authority but the Pope Himself. In 1143 and 1145 this was followed by two bulls, granting massive financial privileges that basically diverted revenues from the local church administrations.

There was good enough reason for it. The Holy Land was in a very precarious position. It was becoming obvious that the assorted feudalities in Outremer could not even agree on when to have dinner, let alone coordinate defensive strategy, not that that was especially different from anywhere else in Europe at the time or now. The Military Orders were the only rapid-reaction forces available, but they would need a reliable source of funding. They were in fact the first international intervention force, and they had all the associated budgetary problems, but no system of strong sovereign Governments to pay the dues. The military value and financial cost of one knight and his support chain and force protection was about equivalent to one main battle tank today. Fortifications were hugely expensive, and all reinforcements and too much of the logistics had to come from Europe. Only the Church was universal enough, and wealthy enough, to take on a support role of that scale, and with the undeveloped judicial and administrative machinery of the time it was easier to simply cede the rights and let the Templars run their own show. But in those three empowering bulls together lies the second seed of destruction.

In fact something like this has occurred in our own day. In 1991 the USSR had fallen apart, the economy had collapsed, the social safety net had evaporated and there were thousands of veterans of the Afghanistan war starving and in need of medical care. So in 1992 Boris Yeltsin simply granted their Veterans’ Association a monopoly on alcohol and tobacco sales in Russia. Can anybody guess what happened?

Of course the veterans' association went haywire, the criminal gangs moved in and the whole thing turned into a huge scandal with an amazing number of dead bodies lying around, not to mention that the Russian Government lost a vital revenue source. All of which was bound to happen in the circumstances.

The Templars never went off the rails in that fashion, but with massive resources diverted from local authorities, a taste for secrecy that bordered on the obsessive (one Templar under interrogation post-1307 said, 'it was just foolishness'), and a complete lack of political accountability in practice, you have a recipe for trouble. Fifty years after those privileges were conferred, Richard the Lion Hearted was accused by some suicidal idiot of having three dissolute daughters, Pride, Greed and Lust, and he answered that he'd marry his Lust to the Bishops, his Greed to the Monks, and his Pride to the Templars and damn fine marriages they'd be. He had known them in Palestine by then so he probably knew what he was talking about.

What is notable in this story – and in accounts like that of Archbishop William of Tyre – is that nobody was accusing the Order of financial wrongdoing or even of being especially greedy. Anyone who knew their fighting ability knew that it was money well spent and badly needed. At the Battle of the Horns of Hattin in 1187, which lost Jerusalem and effectively sealed the fate of the Latin kingdoms in the East, the Templars lost 250 knights – that's 250 Leopard tanks, remember – which was half their effective strength in Outremer, and could only be replaced from back in the West. Think in terms of the current Iraq or Afghanistan expenditures.

Incidentally, look at those numbers for a minute. For all of their deployments in the Holy Land – strongpoints, castles, patrols and expeditionary forces – the Templars had about 500 knights total, each with about a four-man support force, plus some light cavalry formations. The Hospitallers had no more. At the disaster of La Forbie in 1244 – they were almost all disasters – there were about 5,000 total Christian dead and three hundred Templars. But a thousand years before in those parts, the Roman Army had been used to fielding forces of thirty and forty thousand men to meet any serious threat, and the Muslims could still put 20,000 men in the field whenever they could get their act together long enough. Even united, the Latin forces had the very short end of the stick for 200 years. The only thing that saved them at all was the discipline and reputation of the Orders.

The third seed of destruction may well have been the Templars' failure to take over the island of Cyprus when it was offered to them by Richard in 1191. Because a century later it might have ensured their survival.

The Christian kingdoms in Outremer lived on for another 104 years after the Horns of Hattin. The fall was long and slow, but inevitable. Generations of people lived out their lives peacefully between the intermittent disasters, and the Latin colonists – and the new commercial powers Venice and Genoa – fell into new patterns of life and trade that had little to do with why their ancestors had come East in the first place. And the Templars added a role as bankers and custodians of wealth.

We don't know just when this became a major role. It was certainly one by 1250, and probably was earlier. But, as with so many aspects of Templar history, especially in Outremer, we have very few facts because the records were destroyed in the downfall – not that lack of records is at all unusual for the period. Men thought in other ways about the events of their times, and what was not lost was often simply not recorded because it didn't seem important at the time. In 500 years, who can tell what our descendants will make of this age's obsession with GDP and markets – what little may have survived on readable digital media?

But the Templars were bankers, and the role grew out of the need for safe transfer of money for pilgrims. By the 1200s they were into all sorts of things including financing the Venetian munitions trade into Cairo, there to be used against the Templars...they also acted as safety deposit boxes for the treasuries of kings and nobles and just about anybody going on pilgrimage, and had invented financial instruments like bills of exchange. Since all money then was hard money, it had to be carried along with its owner or otherwise safeguarded, and there was no safer strongroom than Temple House. The Kings of France began to make a habit of entrusting the royal treasury to the House in Paris.

On which topic, there is a curious story about St. Louis' disastrous crusade to Egypt in 1250. After a thorough defeat by the Mamelukes, Louis agreed to pay a 200,000 **livre** deposit on his army's ransom – but came up 30,000 short. His councilor de Joinville pointed out that there was way more than that on the Templar flagship. Whereupon a very strange scene ensued. The ship's captain refused to hand over the

money, saying it was all on safe-deposit and belonged to somebody whose name wasn't Louis.

But Louis had 30,000 **livres** on deposit in Acre and everybody present knew it. This is good old Soviet-style accounting. You could have an account in Leningrad but the bank in Odessa wouldn't give you a ruble because **your** 300 rubles weren't in **their** branch. Eventually the Templar commander stepped in and said, 'Look, if you just take it by force, we can't stop you...let's sort this out when we get home'.

Something is wrong with this story. Either (a) the Templar accounting system wasn't as sophisticated as we think it was, or (b) somebody left the head bean-counter back home in Acre, or (c) there was some weird political byplay going on that makes no sense whatever out of context. And if you think about how much of any two days' worth of politics in a modern democracy actually makes any sense afterward, it's probably (c).

In 1291 the city of Acre was lost, the last Christian city in the Holy Land. The Templars' headquarters was the last bastion to fall, it literally fell (**splat**), taking the Grand Master, the garrison, a bunch of refugees and half the assaulting force with it. The survivors evacuated to Cyprus. The last two Templar strongpoints on the mainland were evacuated the same year. Nine years later, the garrison of a small island two miles offshore was also quietly evacuated, and that was the end of Outremer, and the beginning of the end of the Templars.

They still had their massive revenue-generator and feeder system in Europe. But the spearhead had been chopped off, and since their mandate was purely military, for the protection of the Holy Land and the fight against Islam, they were left without a purpose. Western Europe had changed in the two hundred years since the Orders had come into existence. The Papacy had weakened, while the power of secular rulers had grown, and there was perhaps less reverence around than there once had been, certainly at decision-maker levels, and the properties of the Poor Companions began to look rather rich, just for example amounting to 25% of the territory of France.

Had the Templars had different leadership, things might have turned out differently. The Hospitallers were not in much better shape at the time, but their Grand

Master, Fulk de Villaret, seems to have been a more imaginative manager than the man the Templars now elected, Jacques de Molay.

De Molay's reputation is coloured by his martyrdom, and nobody can take anything away from him for his resistance to injustice. But the strong impression that one has is of a gallant, old soldier who couldn't read or write and was completely overwhelmed by events.

After absorbing the fact that Outremer was gone, the Hospitallers under de Villaret reinvented themselves by capturing Rhodes in 1310 and becoming a major naval power. The Templars were not able to bounce back.

It seems to me that they could have adjusted. They had always had a second front – or a secondary market – in Spain and Portugal, fighting with the Christian kingdoms against the Moors. Why they did not throw all their resources into that market immediately may represent one of the great lost opportunities of history, but they seem to have been focused on the old markets to the exclusion of everything else.

It seems clear that shortly after 1302, everyone who was anyone knew that two Military Orders were now redundant, and proposals were mooted widely for a merger in which Fulk de Villaret was proposed for CEO, which in itself is indicative.

If all this sounds slightly sacrilegious, we have to remember that these organizations in their day were very much the sort of large but earthly entities that modern corporations are now, and much the same rules applied. In a very real sense the Templars had lost their principal market, were heavily overcapitalized and ripe for an Mergers and Acquisitions move.

But nobody saw a hostile takeover in the cards, least of all Jacques de Molay.

In Europe, the power relationship between the Papacy and the secular rulers had been deteriorating for a century. The Popes had managed to fight off the ambitions of the German Emperors, but French power had been rising steadily through the 1200s.

Philip IV of France, called Le Bel, came to the throne in 1285, just before the end of Outremer, He was embroiled in a power struggle with the Papacy from Day One, usually through his French cousins in Naples, and his sole purpose in life was the

acquisition of power by any means at all. In the process he managed to get himself heavily into debt with the Templars, and in fact one of his principal advisors was Hugh de Peraud, the Treasurer of the Paris Temple, whom some sources allege to have had side deals going with Philip, and who certainly ‘turned’ after Friday the Thirteenth, 1307.

Philip seems to have been a personality type well-represented in our century by Joseph Stalin and Saddam Hussein – the pure sociopath in power. The only thing nastier than a man like that is his main hitman, and such men always have them. Stalin had Yezhov, Yagoda and Beria in series, and Philip had William de Nogaret.

At the end of the 13th century, Rome was overrun with contending noble families, and yes, that is with a capital F. Since the Popes were Italian, and the succession was always deadlocked, the Papacy became a football between the families, principally the Colonna and the Orsini. In 1294, Philip le Bel managed to get the College of Cardinals stacked with Frenchmen through his cousin Charles in Naples, and their votes with the Orsini faction swung the election in favour of one Benedetto Gaetani, who took the throne as Boniface VIII.

Boniface turned out to be really good at making money, but not so compliant as Philip would have liked. In fact, he turned out to be a bona fide megalomaniac himself, at one point riding through Rome in a chariot crying, ‘Behold I am Caesar!’ In 1301 Philip arrested a French bishop who had got on his wrong side. Boniface issued the bull *Ausculta Fili*, which translates literally as ‘Now Listen, Kid’. When that had no effect he issued a broader bull *Unum Sanctum* (One Holy), in which he decreed that all secular sovereigns were subject in all things to himself as Pope.

In 1305 a raiding party led by William of Nogaret had the bare-faced gall to take him prisoner and beat him up for three days in the Italian town of Anagni. He was freed by the aroused locals, but died in Rome a month later, some say of a broken heart; others of a broken head. The fact that his brains were found all over the floor seems to point toward answer N^o 2.

In his place was elected almost immediately Bernard de Got, Archbishop of Bordeaux, a known sympathizer of Philip. For reasons of ‘physical security’, the new Pope Clement V never crossed the Alps to Italy, and the seventy-year period known (by

the Italians) as the Babylonian Captivity commenced. Since we've been reflecting on the nature of Time, the USSR itself didn't last any longer than that in our age, it just feels like it.

In the meantime, Grand Master Jacques de Molay was in Cyprus, drafting strategic plans to revitalize the Order, and Philip le Bel was in Paris drafting other plans.

What he had in mind, and pulled off almost without a hitch, resembles nothing so much in scope, precision and absolute breathtaking viciousness as the assorted purges of the Communist Party by Stalin, or Adolf Hitler's Night of the Long Knives of 1934.

Philip was concerned enough about his regional chiefs' ability to manage something like this that he actually did a dry run against the Jewish population on July 22, 1306, which proved to him that his boys were competent, if not necessarily 100% reliable under the emotional pressure that would be needed for the next operation. Over the next year, he began a whisper campaign against the Templars, buttressed by a couple of nice confessions pre-extracted from two ex-Templars whom he had been able to persuade to cooperate quietly for a reasonable sum and all their fingernails left intact. William de Nogaret was the persuader as usual.

In early summer of 1307 Jacques de Molay came back to France with his revised strategic plan. He met with the Pope at Poitiers and in the course of the discussion asked for clarification of 'certain charges' that had been circulating concerning the Order. There was communication between Philip and Clement; Philip raised 'allegations' and Clement urged him to take no precipitous action pending a Papal board of inquiry.

On Thursday October 12 de Molay was a pall-bearer at the funeral of Philip's sister in law in Paris. The next morning, Friday October 13 he was arrested, along with every other ranking Templar in France.

The orders had gone out from Paris three weeks before with instructions to the recipients to assemble troops but not to open their sealed orders until the night of the 12th. Philip took the very unusual step of sending a covering personal letter to all regional chiefs justifying the orders by means of a highly emotional denunciation and a

shortlist of the charges which were then pressed against the detainees. This was a fairly regular practice of Stalin's as well.

There were rumours and have continued to be legends that some got away; for instance that fifteen, or perhaps eighteen, ships sailed that day from La Rochelle with treasure on board. I have to say that in my view it is highly unlikely that anything or anyone significant got away from territorial France on that day. There were some advance warnings to certain persons, yes. One or two highly placed individuals may have been able to get away, mostly by pure luck. But usually in these cases the enormity of the deed is so great that no one actually believes it until it happens.

I had a best friend in the Soviet Union. His dad was a colonel in the Kiev garrison, until one day in 1937 he woke up to find he was the **only** colonel in the Kiev garrison. All the rest had been shot overnight. He and his wife spent months waiting for them to come and take him away and it never happened. The only explanation my friend ever had to offer was that the name had simply fallen off a Gestetner machine somewhere in NKVD headquarters. When a coup like that is organized as we know Philip and de Nogaret were capable of organizing it, nothing significant escapes it. If nothing else, the shock is paralyzing.

As for treasure – the point of the Templars' financial system was that gold should not have to be moved or shipped any more or any farther than necessary. There was no good reason for a large concentration of gold (or of ships) in La Rochelle at the time, and nobody was going to get a large shipment out of Paris under William de Nogaret's nose with all his people on high alert.

Every Templar establishment was confiscated; the Temple treasury in Paris was entered. Nobody knows whether Philip actually found any money there but he probably did find a fair amount of it. Remember, the revenue machinery had kept churning even after there was no sharp end left in the East to finance – although to some extent, there must have continued to be a channeling of resources into Cyprus, because it would have been a necessary part of de Molay's strategic plan for recovery.

What Philip certainly found – and destroyed – were the records. They say there is nothing that feels quite as good as eliminating your debts by eliminating the creditors.

Across France on Friday the 13th and in the weeks following, the Templars were immediately put to hideous torture and the confessions began flowing. The charges were neither more nor less outrageous for their time than anything pressed in a Stalinist show-trial. Blasphemy, sexual perversion, conspiracy, and heresy were the major categories. It is not the actual charge that matters, it is the confession that counts.

And at this point the Stalin analogy starts falling apart, because the Pope actually began to resist. The resistance was mainly of the ‘you don’t get to burn them, that’s **my** jurisdiction’ sort, but Clement used judicial guerrilla warfare to fight Philip’s thugs to a standing draw for seven years. He was able to draw out proceedings for three years before about 120 Templars were actually executed by burning. Many Templars recanted their confessions and stuck to it, including in the end Jacques de Molay, who finally denounced the whole process in public in 1314 and at the age of 74 was burned at the stake as fast as Philip could manage it. It is said that as they lit the fire, he called on Philip and Clement to join him before God’s Judgment, and it is certain that before the year was out they did so. I hope that legend is true because he is one of the truly sad figures of history.

Four days before the purge of Friday the 13th, Philip had sent letters to every ruler in Christendom repeating the charges and demanding that similar action be taken to suppress the Order on their territories. This was supplemented by a Papal bull of November 22, 1307.

In most jurisdictions, very little happened except for some fairly open skepticism at the extravagance of the charges, and what did happen didn’t happen very fast. There was sporadic persecution in some parts of Italy. In Germany, England, Christian Spain, Cyprus and Portugal local rulers either simply dragged their feet, or the Templars were tried and acquitted.

In Germany the Order pulled a gaudy and thoroughly impressive show of force in Cologne and then apparently stomped off into the sunset snickering behind their beards. In England Edward II, who otherwise doesn’t get much good press, resisted the use of torture as contrary to English law, as did many rulers elsewhere. When they sent him some skilled technical advisors from France, he said, you can do your job as long as you don’t actually hurt them or contravene the Charter of Rights. Two leading English

Templars died in prison, as far as I can tell of natural causes before Edward managed to get them sprung.

What happened after? There really were no more mass executions and imprisonments than the ones I have mentioned. Karen Rails believes, and I agree, that after all the hue and cry was over, thousands of Templars, knights, administrators and ordinary workers, simply took their pensions and faded back into the landscape across Europe, or joined the Hospitallers or some other quieter Order. In Christian Spain and Portugal, new Orders were created and many Templars simply made the switch, although by that time the fighting knights will have been getting old. Every one of those men will have kept the legend alive and green.

By Papal bull of 1311, the Order was disbanded, though Clement was careful not to actually suggest that the Church formally concurred in the charges. By a bull of 1312, the Hospitallers succeeded to the properties of the Templars, but we can reasonably assume that more than a few tasty morsels were snapped up by local interests in the ensuing shakeout.

In 2001, a document known as the "**Chinon Parchment**" was found in the Vatican Secret Archives, apparently after having been misfiled in 1628. It is a record of the trial of the Templars, showing that Clement initially absolved the Templars of all heresies in 1308, before formally disbanding the Order in 1312.

Scotland is the really interesting place in terms of the denouement. I find it hard to believe on the basis of available information that a drop of gold actually got out of France, but as we have seen, the repression in England was very mild. Edward's officers reported that very little of interest beyond operating inventory was found in Templar properties across the country. Most of the English funds will have been in the Temple at London, but we have no record that any of it found its way into Edward's pocket.

But throughout the entire period, Robert the Bruce of Scotland was under sentence of excommunication. If the papal bulls reached him at all, they went into the royal wastebasket, and we know that he paid no attention at all to Philip. There are stories that some Templars were with him at Bannockburn in 1314, and there is no reason to think there weren't, although they were probably not wearing red crosses. The Templars and the Hospitallers merged across Scotland, essentially voluntarily. And

it will have been the logical place for English Templars to have sought refuge – quite possibly with certain heavy chests of an interesting nature.

We are told that about this time the family StClair of Rosslyn became much wealthier than it had been. It is said that the StClairs were a family with Templar connections. In the mid 15th century, William StClair Baron Rosslyn and Prince of Orkney reared the very beautiful and mystic Rosslyn Chapel which contains sculptures of great significance to the Order of Freemasons which afterward arose in Scotland. He was also a Knight of the Order of Santiago, which had close Templar connections in the 12th and 13th centuries. That Templar money could have found its way north from London to the keeping of the StClairs is no mystery at all to those of us who realize how many American potentates suddenly found themselves more potent through the tragic and somewhat abrupt run that the Kuomintang had to make for Taiwan in 1949.

Is there a direct line of organizational succession from Templars to Scottish Freemasons? It's a vexed question. My own view is that the gulf of time between 1307 and 1736 is too great for there to have been a link of the formal sort, and that is one reason I spent so much time earlier talking about the nature of Time. Human institutions and traditions mutate far too quickly to preserve direct organizational links. But what we are speaking of here are oral traditions and beliefs through closely-linked families. These things can pass through societies for many many generations and find their own time to blossom.

Thucydides said in his introduction to the History of the Peloponnesian War that he was unsure of the truth of the founding legends of Greece, but what he was very sure of was that what actually happened is much less important than what we believe happened. That there is a spiritual and traditional link from Templars to Freemasonry I feel is beyond question. No more than that is needed to keep alive a kinship of spirit that can remain living down the ages, and in each generation throw out green shoots that inspire men and women to new works of greatness.

—Eric Morse, Toronto, 2008