

The Murdered Magicians, The Templars And Their Myths

By Dr. Peter Partner

A Review By

John Shroeder, PM

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Nearly all Scottish Rite Masons, and surely all Masonic Knights Templar and De Molays, are familiar with the Masonic legend of the Order of the Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon or Knights Templar. According to this legend, these brave and pious monk-soldiers, after suffering horrendous losses to the forces of Islam in the Holy Land, were treacherously betrayed on Friday, October 13, 1307 by Pope Clement V and King Philip the Fair of France in order to confiscate their treasuries and estates.

In this book, Dr. Peter Partner traces what is factually known about the Templars and also the myths that subsequently grew concerning their supposed occult knowledge and practices. His explanation of the causes of the Templars' downfall attributes it to far more complex factors than the greed of Clement V and Philip alone.

Dr. Partner points out that there were, from the establishment of the Templar Order, ambivalent feelings about the Order among the Church hierarchy, and even among the Templars themselves, concerning the very basic concepts of an Order of the Church, dedicated to humble and holy service on one hand, and that of a group of blood-spilling warriors on the other.

He also emphasizes strong, long-term resentments of the Bishops who felt their local authority had been abrogated by those dispensations granted by the Pope to the Templars. One of the most powerful tools of the Bishops was to issue an interdict, banning any rites or sacraments in churches within their See that had failed to adhere to their orders or doctrines. The Templar Priests had independent Papal authority that enabled them to re-open interdicted churches, offer sacraments and bury ex-communicants in sacred ground. The Templars were, of course, well rewarded for these dispensations with funds that otherwise would have gone to the

Bishops. When the Templars became wealthy by virtue of moneys received for dispensations and the bequests of lands and estates, they became the bankers of kings and noblemen. The kings and noblemen, although glad to have the convenience of these first bankers, also resented them as most borrowers resent bankers.

When the later crusades bankrupted the treasuries of the countries of Europe and were unsuccessful in their efforts to overturn the "infidel", these resentments grew in light of the Templars' high maintenance costs and their apparent ineffectiveness. Questions arose about the military strategies and competence of the Templars. No country has ever long supported a costly and losing army. The losses in the Holy Land also brought a radical philosophical change and questioning of the Templar cause. In an age that believed that God would decide justice and the right by trials of combat, the victories of the Moslems caused the faithful to question the righteousness of the Templars. Saracens, Jews and Tartars, all of the so-called "dark forces", seemed to mock the defeat of these "sons of light".

At the same time, the Templar Grand Masters were railing at the Popes and Church hierarchy for diluting their resources for the prosecution of the war in the Holy Land by costly battles against the Papal enemies in Europe – the subjugation of heretics in France and the feudal Lords of Italy. These Templar complaints engendered further Papal annoyance with the Order. Jacques DeMolay's estimates of the moneys and forces needed to mount another successful crusade, though probably reasonable, like those of many Generals, far exceeded the resources that the King of France and the Pope were willing to devote to that purpose, especially if the chances of winning seemed doubtful, based on recent history. The Byzantine problem was more demanding of their immediate concerns than the Moslems. This presentation of the

issues may remind us of the U.S. military in Viet Nam when the people and the Government would no longer support the will to prosecute the war with the resources the military said were necessary for its successful conclusion.

Philip the Fair pressed for consolidation of the Templars and the Hospitallers but DeMolay refused. The wealth of the Templars engendered jealousy by the petty nobles as well as by the clerics. All of these forces combined to bring about their downfall.

From our twenty-first century perspective, the charges of black magic, witchcraft and heresy against the Templars, levied at their trials, appear ridiculously trumped-up and obviously false. However, Dr. Partner points out the strong fears, held by high and low alike at the time, that magicians and witches could cast spells on those they wished to harm, or were bribed to harm, that could result in barrenness, loss of fortune and even death. Guillaume de Nogoret, special agent and Templar prosecutor for King Philip, successfully used charges of demonic practices to defend his capture, in 1303, of Pope Boniface VIII who had long been involved in bitter quarrels with Philip. Boniface was later freed by his supporters but died only weeks later, a broken and disgraced man. Though his successor as Pope, Benedict XI, excommunicated Nogoret, and that penalty was never lifted, Nogoret was the chief prosecutor of the Templars only a few years later and his efforts were supported, though perhaps reluctantly, by Pope Clement V. Such trials for demonic practices spread throughout France and into England and were being prosecuted as late as the reigns of Louis XIII in France and James I in England.

Pope John XXII subsumed the crime of witchcraft in the more serious crime of heresy making these trials effective tools to use against one's enemies. Lest we think that these were purely cynical employments of the charges by the educated against the superstitious, Partner informs us that Pope John XXII kept a magical horn with him at all times because he believed it could magically prevent him from being poisoned by his enemies. Nogoret was also deathly afraid of the potential black magic of the Templars.

Although Dr. Partner makes a very good case for a multiplicity of causes for the Templars downfall,

and, at least partly provides a rationale for the acts of Philip and Clement V, it should be noted that several contemporaries, such as the Genoese politician Cristian Spinola, attributed Philip's motives to greed and a nespotic desire to consolidate the Templars and Hospitallers under one of Philip's sons. The Italian poet Dante also attributed the Templar downfall to Philip's avarice and these opinions have been handed down to our own day via a long line of poets, philosophers and playwrights, as well as by Freemasonry.

Dr. Partner does a good, and fairly even-handed, job of research, tracing the rise and decline of Masonic Templarism in Germany and France, and to a lesser extent, in the United States, although he refers to Albert Pike as "an eccentric Civil War General." The 180 pages of text in this book are supported by 156 end-notes.

After I prepared this review, I received my Winter 1999 issue of "The Royal Arch Mason" and found that the noted Canadian Masonic scholar and author, Wallace McLeod, had reviewed the same book in that magazine, although under the title, *The Knights Templar and Their Myth*, under which it was published in 1990. He chose a slightly different tack than I have in my review. He discussed and emphasized the book's tracings of the antecedents of our present Masonic Knights Templar which I have just touched on above. This part of the book should also be of considerable interest to Masonic readers. I chose my emphasis because I believe it provides a careful exposition of a position not usually held by Masons familiar with the Templar story.

Masons interested in Templar, medieval and Masonic history will find this book both interesting and informative, and, perhaps, a bit disturbing. Those who have read *The Templar Revelation; Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ* will find this work a good counter-balance to that compendium of Egyptian, Hebrew, Cathar, Druse, Grail, Templar heresy conspiracies. This is so despite the fact that *The Murdered Magicians* was written several years before *The Templar Revelation* and not as a rebuttal to it.

Notes:

¹ *The Murdered Magicians, the Templars and Their Myth*; Partner, Peter; Barnes & Noble Books, N.Y.; 1993; ISBN 1-56619-494-6

