

History of the Crusades.
Episode 22.
The Crusader States: The Knights Templar, Part 1.

Hello again. Over the past few weeks, we've been looking at the establishment of the Crusader states and generally following the history of the Crusades in chronological order. Well, today we are going to take a break from that. This is the first specialist episode. The specialist episodes will delve into a topic in more detail than would be the case if it was just part of the chronology. You could, of course, skip these episodes if you want, and it wouldn't affect the chronology, although the episode on Eleanor of Aquitaine coming up in a few weeks will include quite a bit of background to the Second Crusade, so you wouldn't want to miss that one. Hopefully, these specialized episodes will improve your knowledge about topics relevant to the Crusades, and hopefully you'll find them interesting. So with no further ado, let's get started.

Around the year 1118 a French Knight in Jerusalem called Hugh de Payns had an idea. It was a pretty radical idea, and he must have pondered on it a lot and talked it over with his fellow knights before deciding to act on it. His idea was this. What if you were to take a group of knights and incorporate them into a religious order? The purpose of a knight was clearly to fight on behalf for their patron, whether that be the King of Jerusalem or a nobleman to whom they owed allegiance back in Europe. But what if the knight swore allegiance only to God? Monasteries were common in medieval Europe, full of men who had dedicated themselves to God, living lives of poverty, chastity and obedience, spending their days in quiet contemplation, and undertaking charitable deeds. What, thought Hugh, would happen if you bought a group of knights together, had them swear vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and made them a self-governing entity bound by monastic rules, fighting not for a secular leader but for the Church? As I said, it was a radical idea.

Nowadays, of course, it probably wouldn't work. Even though there are men and women willing to serve in the armed forces of their country in return for a wage, it would be a hard sell to convince those in the military today to join a new group where they would receive no wages. Not only would they not receive a fortnightly pay packet, they would not be allowed hardly any personal possessions. Add to this the fact that they would have to swear a vow of chastity, and I think you would be struggling to find any recruits.

But things were different back in the Middle Ages. As we discussed way back in Episode 1, religion permeated every facet of society. People tended to be very concerned about the remission of their sins. They knew from the terrible images displayed in their churches, and from fiery sermons preached in those churches, exactly what awaited them if they died a sinner. They would go to hell, where they would be tortured for eternity. No one wants to be tortured for eternity, so deeds undertaken during a person's lifetime to wash away their sins, such as pilgrimages to holy sites and dedicating their lives to quiet contemplation in a monastery, became rather popular. One of the reasons why the First Crusade managed to attract over 60,000 participants was the fact that they were promised remission of their sins if they reached the Holy Land.

And of course knights, by the very nature of the job, were in constant danger of sinning. Killing a person where their death was part of a mission sanctioned by the Church, such as those missions which formed part of the Crusades, was generally thought to be okay. But there was always the risk of getting carried away, plundering and pillaging towns you had

taken, raping women, killing civilian captives to obtain extra loot, that sort of thing. That brought you within the realms of sinning. But what if these temptations were removed? If you weren't allowed personal possessions there was no point going on a destructive plundering rampage. If you had sworn a vow of chastity, you couldn't rape anyone. So that was Hugh's' idea. Combine a monastic order with the fighting capacity of knights, thereby creating a military religious order, full of armed men who would not sin, would not rape and pillage, and would fight in the name of Christianity. I've said it once, but I'm going to say it again. This was a radical idea.

So who was Hugh de Payns? He was a knight of noble birth from the County of Champagne in France. He was vassal to the Count of Champagne, also somewhat confusingly called Hugh. The two Hughes were related, and Hugh de Payns served as an officer in Count Hugh's household. Count Hugh made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1114 and Hugh de Payns accompanied him. When Count Hugh returned to Europe, Hugh de Payns remained in Jerusalem. He must have discussed his plans for the establishment of a military order with other knights in Jerusalem, and eventually he had a small group of supporters, enough he thought, to approach King Baldwin II with a proposal to formally establish an order of fighting monks.

At the time King Baldwin was considering the proposal, things were not going so well in the Crusader states. The Principality of Antioch was in disarray and teetering on the brink of disaster, after the annihilation of its army and the death of its Prince in the Field of Blood, the battle we discussed in Episode 19. Pilgrims were streaming in from Europe, but were getting attacked on the lawless roads in the Kingdom of Jerusalem. During Holy Week in 1119 a group of 700 unarmed pilgrims traveling from Jerusalem to the River Jordan were set upon by Muslim forces; 300 were killed and 60 were taken to be sold as slaves. Pilgrims really needed armed escorts when traveling around the countryside, and King Baldwin's forces were severely stretched, trying to secure strategic strongholds along the coast, defending the Kingdom against Muslim attacks, and attempting to assist the rulers of the other Crusader states. So it was likely that he was going to welcome the idea of a new type of fighting force, maybe one which could attract new recruits from Europe, with open arms.

But there was still some risk involved. As King, he would have no authority over the knights, as they would only serve the Church, and the only person they could take orders from would be the Pope. Plus, there was quite a big question mark hanging over the venture. Would it actually work? Nothing quite like it had been tried in Latin Christendom before, and there were bound to be religious leaders who opposed its establishment, arguing that fighting and killing had no place within a religious order. But in the end, King Baldwin II decided to support the proposal.

On Christmas Day 1119, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a total of nine knights, comprising Hugh de Payns, Geoffrey of Saint Omer, and seven others, took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience from the Patriarch of Jerusalem. The knights called themselves "The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Jesus Christ". King Baldwin gave them somewhere to live, dedicating to them some rooms within his own palace. His palace was situated within the al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount, known by the Crusaders as the Templum Salomonus, the Temple of Solomon. The knights then became known as "The Poor Knights of Jesus Christ and the Temple of Solomon". As this was a bit of a mouthful, it soon became abbreviated to the "Knights of the Temple of Solomon" and later, just to the "Knights of the Temple", the "Templar Knights" or the "Templars".

Now, although they only started out with nine knights, the order itself would have contained between 25 to 30 men and around 40 horses. This is due mainly to the number of attendants required by a knight. Every knight required at least two horses, a heavy warhorse for use in battle and a lighter horse giving a more comfortable ride to travel on. Each knight required one or more attendants to look after the horses, assisting with transporting the armor and weaponry required by a knight, and to carry extra weapons and the knight's shield in battle.

Dressed in heavy armor, with one hand controlling his horse, a knight in battle only had one hand left to wield a weapon, carry a shield and hold extra weapons such as a lance sword, axe or mace. While this could sometimes be alleviated by the knight carrying his shield around his neck, what he really needed was an attendant in battle to carry the extra items and hand them over as required.

A traveling knight also needed pack horses and attendants to look after the pack animals, dealing with loading and unloading the animals, and cooking the food. So with only nine knights, you can see that a reasonable group of attendants and horses would be required to support those knights.

The uniform of the Knights of the Temple of Solomon was a red cross worn on a white tunic for the knights, and a red cross worn on a black tunic for the attendants, who were known as sergeants. Membership of the Knights Templar was completed by the clerics, religious men who concentrated on non-military duties.

When the knights were first established, things must have been tough financially. The knights, having taken a vow of poverty, relied on donations to make basic purchases such as clothing and food. Luckily, Hugh de Payns was a well connected man, and was not averse to seeking contributions from the wealthy nobility of France. An example was Count Fulk of Anjou. Yes, the same Fulk who we saw become King Fulk of Jerusalem in last week's episode. He visited Jerusalem on a pilgrimage shortly after the Templar Knights were established. He must have been impressed by this new Order of Holy Knights as he became an associate member, and endowed the Order with an annual income. Other members of the French aristocracy followed his example, and the coffers of the Knights of the Temple began to swell.

In 1125 Hugh de Payns' former overlord, Hugh the Count of Champagne, visited Jerusalem. He had been experiencing some troubles back in France. He departed France for good after leaving his wife, who had been unfaithful, disinheriting his son, who he was convinced was not his, and leaving his vast land holdings and fortune to his nephew. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, he took the required vows and became a knight of the Temple.

Ten years earlier, Count Hugh of Champagne made another decision, which, although no one could have known it at the time, would have a huge impact on the development and success of the Knights Templar. He had given a parcel of wild, forested land to a group of holy men led by a young, charismatic monk called Bernard Fontaine-les-Dijon.

Bernard and his followers were concerned at the manner in which the influential monastery Cluny was run. Wealthy and extremely powerful, Cluny was deeply involved in political affairs and, according to Bernard, the clerics at Cluny were much too concerned with worldly matters. He yearned for a simpler existence where monks worked the land and led

austere lives. Three years earlier, he had joined a new community of monks, the Cistercians, who rejected ties with the local nobility and lived a self-sufficient existence, their days filled with hard labor and prayer. Using the Cistercian model, Bernard set out to establish his own monastery on the land donated by Count Hugh. He and a band of enthusiastic followers cleared the land and built a church and a dwelling. They called it the Valley of Light, Clairvaux.

To say that the monastery at Clairvaux was a success is an understatement. Bernard was a talented leader, teacher, preacher and writer. He had a dynamic, charismatic personality and was clearly a man who acted on his convictions. His fame and influence soon spread, and he attracted recruits from across Latin Christendom. His monastery at Clairvaux rose to become the spiritual center of Europe, and monks from Clairvaux went on to become cardinals, bishops and influential figures in the hierarchy of the Church. At one time, both the Pope and the Archbishop of York were men from Clairvaux. What does Bernard of Clairvaux have to do with the Templar Knights? We shall see shortly.

Remember in last week's episode, when King Baldwin II of Jerusalem sent a delegation to France to find a suitable candidate to marry his eldest daughter? Well, Hugh de Payns was part of that delegation, and it's probably no surprise that his influential and wealthy friend, Count Fulk of Anjou, who had become an associate member and financial supporter of the Knights Templar, was chosen to marry into the royal family in Jerusalem. Between 1127 and 1129, Hugh toured Europe, traveling as far as England and Scotland, as well as covering a lot of territory in France. While King Baldwin had delegated to him the task of recruiting soldiers to participate in an offensive against the city of Damascus, Hugh also actively recruited for the Knights Templar, seeking actual members as well as financial donations. And he was pretty successful. Records show that during this time, grants of land, rents, and war materials were made to the Order.

That was all well and good, but there was one thing that Hugh desperately needed if the Knights Templar were to become more than just a flash in the pan. He needed the Order to be approved by the Church. He needed Papal endorsement. Trouble was, the Church was inherently conservative. They didn't tend to support radical schemes, and a bunch of monks who fought and killed people in the name of religion, well that was pretty radical. After all, one of the Ten Commandments was "Thou shalt not kill", and there were plenty of theologians who couldn't reconcile the quiet, contemplative lives led by those in religious Orders with going into battle, wounding, maiming and killing. Obtaining formal endorsement from the church for his Order was going to take some impressive behind-the-scenes maneuvering.

And this is where Bernard of Clairvaux comes in. Hugh de Payns had written to Bernard before he left Jerusalem, requesting his assistance in seeking the Church's approval of the Order, and in drafting the formal rules for the Order. Bernard was only too happy to help. His patron, Count Hugh of Champagne, was a member of the Knights Templar, as was his uncle. Over a period of time, the rules by which the Order would be governed were duly drafted, heavily influenced by the Cistercian principles favored by Bernard.

In January 1129, Hugh and five other Knights of the Order appeared before the Church Council at Troyes in France. Happily, the Council was hosted by Count Theobald of Champagne, Count Hugh of Champagne's nephew to whom he had left his fortune and title. The Council was presided over by the Papal Legate Matthew of Albano, and consisted of two archbishops, ten bishops and seven abbots, among them Bernard, Abbot

of Clairvaux. We don't know exactly what happened at this meeting. We do know that at least one of the Council members opposed the endorsement of the Knights Templar, and we also know that Bernard dominated the proceedings, speaking passionately in support of the order. In the end, Hugh got what he had come for. The draft rule of the Order was scrutinized and revised by the Council, and was eventually transcribed into a document of 73 clauses, prescribing the rules by which the Order was to be run and by which its members were to live. For the first time in history, monastic discipline was formally applied to a military unit, making monks out of knights. The Order of the Knights of the Temple was officially established.

So, what was life like for a Templar knight? How far did the influence of the Knights Templar spread and what happened to them on Friday, the 13th of October 1307? These are all very good questions, but unfortunately we don't have time to answer them this week. So join me next week as we discuss the life of a Templar Knight, examine how far their influence spread and find out what happened to them on Friday, the 13th of October 1307.

As for further reading for this week, there's a veritable mountain of books available on the subject of the Knights Templar. For my money, the best one I've come across is "The Templars" by Piers Paul Read. It's an historically accurate yet readable account of the rise and fall of the Knights Templar, and if you want to find out some more about the Knights Templar, it's a great place to start. Until next week, bye for now.

End