

Templars, Trials, and Torture: The Factors Behind the Suppression of the Knights

Templar

During the Middle Ages, virtually all of western Europe was a profoundly religious place. Although its power declined throughout the medieval period in the face of increasingly powerful secular rulers, the Roman Catholic Church was the single most influential institution in western Europe and quite possibly the most powerful establishment in the entire world. The increasing popularity of the Christian religion led to the creation of multiple religious orders that worked with the Church to ensure the spread of Christianity throughout Europe. With the beginning of the crusades to the Holy Land during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, an entirely new type of organization began to emerge. Several military orders combining the traditional values of the monastic life with those of secular knighthood were formed, composed of warrior monks who dedicated themselves to a life of service to Christianity through the military defence of the Holy Land and the protection of the European pilgrims who came to visit it. By far the most famous of these military orders were the Knights Templar.

Founded in the early twelfth century, the Templars evolved from humble beginnings to become one of the largest of the military orders, and the Order played a significant role in the defence of the Holy Land against various non-Christian attackers for over a hundred years. By 1291, however, the Christian armies, including the Knights Templar, had been thrown out of the Holy Land by Muslim forces, and the Templars were forced to retreat to their new headquarters on the island of Cyprus. This defeat was not without consequence: the military orders, and particularly the Knights Templar, were blamed for the loss of the Holy Land.¹ Once one of the most respected institutions in Europe, the Knights Templar were increasingly subjected to criticism and animosity. This culminated in 1307, when King Philip IV of France arrested virtually all the members of the Knights Templar living under his jurisdiction. The arrests of these Templars in France marked the beginning of the suppression of the Order.

To justify the arrests, Philip accused the Templars, a religious order responsible only to the pope himself, of a variety of heretical crimes against the Church and God. On Philip's urging, Pope Clement V also ordered the arrest of all other members of the Order of the Temple living in Christian Europe, and virtually the entire order was imprisoned and forced to face the accusations. In 1310 fifty-four Templars were burned as relapsed heretics near Paris, and in 1312 a papal bull officially disbanded the Knights Templar.² Two years later, the remaining senior leaders of the Order – including the Grand Master, Jacques de Molay – were executed. Though the official charges of heresy and crimes against Christianity were given by Philip IV and Clement V as the justification for the suppression of the Order, the great majority of the accusations levied against the Templars by Philip IV were almost certainly false.³ In reality, a significant number of other factors, combined together, were the true cause of the ultimate suppression of the Templars. This paper will examine the reasons for the suppression of the Templars. It will discuss the falsity of the official accusations

¹ Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 295.

² Evelyn Lord, *The Templar's Curse* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2008), 89.
Edith Simon, *The Piebald Standard: A biography of the Knights Templars* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1959), 281.

³ Alan Forey, *The Military Orders: From the Twelfth to the Early Fourteenth Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 231.

against the Templars, examine King Philip IV's motivations for suppressing the Templars, and examine other factors contributing to the suppression of the Knights Templar. Ultimately, this paper will conclude that it was underlying factors, particularly the advantages which Philip IV saw for himself in the elimination of the Templars, and not the official charges, which were the true reasons for the suppression of the Knights Templar.

The suppression of the Knights Templar began on 13 October 1307, when by order of King Philip IV of France, officials arrested virtually all the members of the Order living in France. Philip presented the justification for these arrests in a secret order sent to French officials nearly a month before the actual arrests, on 14 September 1307. In this order, he wrote that “brothers of the Order of the knights of the Temple, wolves in sheep's clothing, in the habit of a religious order vilely insulting our religious faith, are again crucifying our Lord Jesus Christ ... they are causing Him greater injuries than those he received on the Cross.”⁴ He categorized the collective charges against the Order as “a heinous crime, an execrable evil, an abominable deed, a hateful disgrace, a completely inhuman thing, indeed remote from all humanity.”⁵ Philip accused the Knights Templar of three main crimes: they denied the existence of Christ and spat on a crucifix or an image of Christ; they participated in rituals which included obscene kissing and even homosexuality; and they worshipped various sorts of idols.⁶ In July 1308, the list of official charges was expanded to incorporate a full 127 articles which fell under seven main categories: the spitting on images of, and the denial of, Christ; worship of idols; misconduct of Templar priests during mass; belief that the Templar leadership could hear confession and absolve from sin; charges of inappropriate kissing and homosexuality; Templars' greed and their tendency to seek gain for the Order through illegal means; and the enforced secrecy of Templar meetings.⁷ These accusations constituted the official charges levied against the Knights Templar, charges which were quickly made against not only Templars living in France, but against virtually every member of the Order living in Europe.

It appears as though these accusations against the Templars were first made not by Philip IV, but rather by an exiled Templar by the name of Esquiu de Florian.⁸ This alone makes the allegations against the Templars somewhat suspect, for de Florian, having been forcibly removed against his will from the Order, cannot be considered a reliable or a non-biased source. In fact, de Florian actually appears to have benefited financially from the suppression of the Templars: among other things, he came to possess some land previously owned by the Templars as well as a monetary reward.⁹ It is also significant that de Florian first went not to Philip IV with his allegations, but rather to King James II of Aragon, for it appears as though the Aragonese monarch simply did not believe de Florian's allegations against the Templars: in a letter to James II written early in 1308, de Florian wrote that “I am he who exposed the actions of the Templars to my lord king of France, and may you acknowledge that you were the first prince in the whole world to whom I exposed their actions ... you were unwilling, lord, to give full credence to my words at the time.”¹⁰ It is significant, perhaps, that James II (who had nothing to gain from the suppression of the Templars) did not believe these accusations, whereas Philip IV (for whom the destruction of the Order could have been advantageous) not only believed but also acted upon de Florian's

⁴ King Philip IV, “Order for the arrests to John of Tourville,” in The Templars: Selected sources translated and annotated, ed. M. Barber and K. Bate (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 245.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁶ Malcolm Barber, The Trial of the Templars (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 202.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 202-203.

⁸ Piers Paul Read, The Templars (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 263-264.

⁹ Edward Burman, The Templars: Knights of God (Great Britain: Crucible Publishing, 1986), 161.

¹⁰ Esquiu de Florian, “Letter of Esquin of Floyran to King James II of Aragon,” in The Templars: Selected sources translated and annotated, ed. M. Barber and K. Bate (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 256.

accusations.¹¹ James II of Aragon was not the only secular ruler to view the charges with scepticism, as King Edward II of England was also doubtful of the validity of the charges: “King Edward II of England had received a letter from King Philip the Fair in mid-October, 1307, describing how he had uncovered the cesspit of corruption in the Temple ... Like King James of Aragon, King Edward was at first incredulous.”¹² This initial refusal of two prominent European monarchs to believe the charges against the Templars is significant, and seems to cast doubt on the validity of the numerous accusations against the Order. If even a fraction of the accusations were true, it seems likely that the two monarchs would not have been so incredulous towards the charges.

The actual evidence against the Templars, and its thinness, also casts some measure of doubt upon the validity of the accusations. There was virtually no physical evidence against the Templars, and much of the testimony against them was relatively unreliable. Concerning the trial of the Templars in England, Clarence Perkins writes that

The evidence was almost entirely hearsay. Very few could name even one living man from whom the story had come, and in most cases the persons named had heard the tale from some one else not named. The stories themselves were extremely fantastic and improbable in character, remarkable productions of overheated imaginations, based largely on the secrecy of the Templar ceremonies.¹³

This lack of proper evidence against the Templars has also been acknowledged by other historians. Edith Simon notes simply that “No documentary proof of the charges was ever found. In spite of the surprise effect of the arrests in 1307 and in spite of exhaustive research, the idol which thousands of prisoners confessed to having worshipped ... no such idol was unearthed.”¹⁴ Simon also writes that “The prosecution [at the Templars' trial in France] was not doing very well, even though the defence had no right to cross-examine witnesses. A lot of hearsay was produced and much that was inconclusive, even manifestly dubious.”¹⁵ Perhaps the most damaging argument, however, was a simple logical one. Piers Paul Read writes that

all the evidence against the Order was tainted and, moreover, defied common sense ... Surely knights of this calibre, if they had discovered such iniquities in the Temple, in particular the blasphemies against Jesus Christ, 'would have all shouted out, and have divulged all these matters to the whole world?'¹⁶

It is indeed hard to believe that knights willing to sacrifice their lives for the Christian religion would have put up with even a fraction of the accusations against the Templars. Significantly, Alan Forey has noted that although many Templars confessed to priests who were not members of the Order, no priests ever came forward with allegations similar to those made by Esquiu de Florian and Philip IV. In fact, Forey writes that “All the non-Templar priests who testified during the trial and who had heard Templar confessions stated that these had been orthodox.”¹⁷ Thus, the trials of the Templars in various countries produced only unreliable and questionable evidence, a lack of evidence which seems to suggest that the great majority of the official charges against the Templars were almost certainly false.¹⁸

Throughout the course of the investigations into the accusations against the Order, a significant number of Templars confessed, either in full or in part, to the charges against

¹¹ Simon, Piebald Standard, 241-242.

¹² Read, Templars, 288.

¹³ Clarence Perkins, “The Trial of the Knights Templars in England,” The English Historical Review Vol. 24, No. 95 (1909): 440.

¹⁴ Simon, Piebald Standard, 288.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹⁶ Read, Templars, 280.

¹⁷ Forey, Military Orders, 234.

¹⁸ Simon, Piebald Standard, 288.

them. Despite a lack of proper physical evidence, and the questionable quality of testimony from witnesses, the confessions of the Templars themselves were by far the most significant proof against the Order. However, it seems probable that in many cases the confessions of the Templars were not freely given but were rather extracted through the use of torture. In France, particularly, both actual torture as well as the threat of such, was often used in order to gain confessions.¹⁹ Edward Burman notes that the original order commanding the arrest of the Templars, sent by Philip IV to his officers, authorized the use of torture in the investigation into the Templar charges, even before the arrested Templars were presented to the formal inquisition.²⁰ The order mandates that officers of the French government will “investigate them [the Templars] first before calling the commissioners of the enquiry, and will determine the truth carefully, with the aid of torture if necessary.”²¹ Burman even suggests that the arrest order's authorization of torture before the Templars had even been imprisoned amounts to “arrangements to obtain confessions of the initial charges ... even before the arrests were carried out.”²² It is beyond question that an extensive amount of torture was used during the Templars' trial in France. Peter de Boulogne, a Templar priest who had been chosen to act as the principal defender of the Templars during the trial in France, was actually able to conclusively prove that the Templars had been submitted to torture during their trial in France:

He [Peter de Boulogne] had offered to prove the use of torture, bribery, and forged letters by the prosecution, and was able to make good at least a part of his promise – that pertaining to torture. Witness after witness gave the most frightful details, and the visible evidence of their bodies was not lacking.²³

Another historian, Piers Paul Read, suggests that “given that a large number of those arrested were not battle-hardened warriors ... the shock and disorientation, combined with the mere threat of torture, quickly led many to admit whatever the King's officers and the Inquisitors suggested.”²⁴ In other countries where torture was not used, however, the situation was very much different. In England, for example, the general conditions of the Templars' imprisonment were much less severe, and English law did not permit the use of torture in order to gain confessions.²⁵ Although papal inquisitors questioned forty-three members of the Order for nearly a month, between 20 October and 18 November 1309, every single Templar maintained the innocence of the Order.²⁶ Although some Templars eventually confessed when the use of torture was temporarily permitted in England, Clarence Perkins has noted “that the full confessions of crime were extorted by the inquisitorial procedure with torture temporarily established in England, and that the guilt of the Templars was not proved.”²⁷ Many scholars have noted this apparent link between the use of torture and the obtainment of confessions. Edith Simon writes that “it is suggestive that nowhere but in France or under immediate French influence were the wholesale confessions obtained.”²⁸ Piers Paul Read observes that “Only those from France contained credible confessions; those from outside France, in particular from England, Aragon, and Cyprus, could only come up with hearsay evidence from non-Templars to give substance to the accusations.”²⁹ Most explicitly, Herbert Wood writes that “In England and France [where torture was used] the

¹⁹ Lord, Templars' Curse, 71.

Read, Templars, 265.

²⁰ Burman, Knights of God, 162.

²¹ King Philip IV, “Order for the arrests,” 247-248.

²² Burman, Knights of God, 162.

²³ Simon, Piebald Standard, 267.

²⁴ Read, Templars, 266.

²⁵ Perkins, “Trial,” 432-435.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 434.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 447.

²⁸ Simon, Piebald Standard, 289.

²⁹ Read, Templars, 293.

result [of the trials] was unfavourable to the Templars; but in Aragon, Castile, Portugal, and the archbishopric of Mayence the inquiries resulted in an acquittal.”³⁰ It seems clear, then, that a definite correlation existed between the use of torture and the confessions of the Templars. This connection can only serve to further weaken the legitimacy and truthfulness of the official accusations made against the Templars.

Despite the existence of serious and extensive doubts concerning the accusations against the Templars, it is still possible that some of the charges were in fact true. In particular, it appears as though the Templars may have been to some extent guilty of the charge of sodomy, and of the accusation that senior Templar leaders could hear confessions and absolve sins. During the Templars' trial in England, for example,

Two Templars asserted that the pope had granted their chaplains greater power of absolution than other priests, and several more made damaging admissions regarding absolution from sin by the visitor or the grand master.

Three of these said that the master or grand preceptor could absolve from sin, though they had not seen it done.³¹

This same belief seems to have existed in both Scotland and Ireland. In Scotland only two Templars were arrested, and they denied all the charges against the Order, with the exception of the accusation concerning the ability of senior Templars to absolve members of the Order from their sins.³² In Ireland, six of fourteen Templars questioned confessed that Templar preceptors did absolve members of the Order from sin.³³ Clarence Perkins suggests that these confessions regarding the absolution of sins could have originated quite simply from confusion about the rules of the Knights Templar concerning the matter.³⁴ It appears, as well, as though this was not a phenomenon limited to the British Isles. Evelyn Lord has noted that the Templars imprisoned in Aragon had a similar confusion: “like the English Templars, they [the Aragonese Templars] seemed to have misunderstood the rule about absolution and thought that the master could absolve sins.”³⁵ It is certainly possible that, as Perkins suggested, the Templars could have simply been confused about the rules concerning absolution; it is also possible that the Templars could have been guilty of this particular charge.

It has also been suggested that the Templars could have, to some extent, been guilty of the crime of sodomy and homosexuality. Many Templars did confess to the existence of homosexuality and sodomy within the Order, though these confessions all came from areas in which torture was used by the inquisitors.³⁶ Despite this questionable testimony, however, Anne Gilmour-Bryson concludes by stating that “I remain convinced that some homosexual acts were practiced in the Templar order, as they were in all other institutes of religion, [and] that the frequency of such behaviour was not particularly high.”³⁷ Though perhaps less likely than the accusations concerning the absolution of sins, it is nevertheless possible that the Knights Templar were guilty, to a relatively minor degree, of the crimes of sodomy and homosexuality. However, though it is very much possible that these two accusations were true, they represent but a small amount of the total charges against the Templars.

Even so, it is nonetheless important to consider that many of the accusations made against the Templars by Philip IV were not unique to the trial of the Order. In fact, multiple scholars have noted that a considerable number of charges bear a startling resemblance to

³⁰ Herbert Wood, “The Templars in Ireland,” Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature 26 (1907): 355.

³¹ Perkins, “Trial,” 436.

³² *Ibid.*, 443-444.

³³ *Ibid.*, 444.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 447.

³⁵ Lord, Templar's Curse, 116.

³⁶ Anne Gilmour-Bryson, “Sodomy and the Knights Templar,” Journal of the History of Sexuality, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1996), 157.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

other trials of the time. Edward Burman writes that “what is most striking is the fact that in the context of contemporary witchcraft trials all these charges are quite familiar.”³⁸ Alan Forey goes even farther in *The Military Orders*, and suggests that “the charges levelled against the Templars were not very original. Precedents can be found for almost all of them in earlier accusations against alleged heretics ... some of the same offences had even been imputed to Pope Boniface VIII only a few years before the Templars' arrest.”³⁹ Yet another scholar, Ian Mortimer, has also noted this trend; he suggests that the same similarities seen in the charges against the Templars and Boniface VIII may also be observed in the accusations made against King Edward II of England in the early fourteenth century.⁴⁰ Perhaps most significant, however, is the fact that the charges made against Pope Boniface VIII were levied by none other than Philip IV, who was also the principal accuser of the Templars. Thus, the accusations against the Templars were not an isolated occurrence; rather, they must be seen in the context of similar charges being laid throughout Europe at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

It seems almost certain, then, that the great majority of the charges against the Templars were almost certainly false. The falsity of the charges may even have been evident at the time, and several European monarchs including James II of Aragon and Edward II of England initially refused to believe the validity of the charges. It is also significant that none of the contemporary critics of the Templars, such as Walter Map and Matthew Paris, made any suggestions concerning alleged wrongdoings and religious crimes among the Knights Templar. Had they known about such wrongdoings they almost certainly would have mentioned them.⁴¹ Religious chroniclers of the early fourteenth century also seem to have had a hard time believing in the Order's guilt. Pierre de la Palud, a Dominican friar, presented evidence in favour of the Templars; Jacques de Thérines, a Cistercian theologian, noted the many contradictions in the evidence against the Templars and seems to have been unable to determine the Templars' guilt or innocence; and perhaps most significantly, the Dominican Bernard Gui, an experienced member of the inquisition, appears to have been unable to interpret the evidence against the Templars.⁴² Thus, none of the Templars' contemporaries (including several already well known for their criticisms of the Order) appear to have believed in the truth of the charges made against the Templars. In this context, it also seems difficult to believe that Philip IV of France, the main persecutor of the Templars, could have possibly believed the charges against the Templars. Instead, it seems far more likely, as Malcolm Barber suggests, that he only used the charges to justify his actions against the Templars, which were in fact motivated by other, less straightforward purposes.⁴³

Philip IV certainly had several reasons to persecute and suppress the Knights Templar, and he was undoubtedly in a position to benefit from the potential disbanding of the Order.⁴⁴ Foremost among these reasons were financial ones: Philip was deeply in debt due to wars against Flanders and England, and much of this money was owed to the Templars themselves: by 1307, Philip owed no less than 260,000 *livres parisi* to the Order.⁴⁵ Malcolm Barber notes that there were “obvious financial reasons for the sudden arrest of the Templars in France, for as bankers they possessed considerable liquid wealth and negotiable assets, and as landowners, fixed and moveable properties in every region of France from

³⁸ Burman, *Knights of God*, 167.

³⁹ Forey, *Military Orders*, 234.

⁴⁰ Ian Mortimer, “A Reconsideration of Edward II's Sodomitical Reputation,” in *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*, ed. G. Dodd and A. Musson (Rochester: York Medieval Press, 2006), 51-52.

⁴¹ Helen Nicholson, *Templars, Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights: Images of the Military Orders, 1128-1291* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 133.

⁴² Burman, *Knights of God*, 169-170.

⁴³ Barber, *Trial*, 202.

⁴⁴ Lord, *Templar's Curse*, 70.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

Normandy to Provence.”⁴⁶ Clarence Perkins, in an article on the wealth of the Knights Templar in England, even goes so far as to explicitly characterize the overall wealth of the order as “the immediate cause of the attack on them by Philip IV.”⁴⁷ It seems clear, then, that the considerable wealth possessed by the Templars was a significant factor the decision of Philip IV of France to suppress their order.

This motivation can even be seen in Philip's own writings. In early 1308, Philip IV wrote to the masters of theology at the University of Paris, posing seven questions on the subject of his persecution of the Templars. In his sixth, he inquires as to whether “the goods which the said Templars possessed in common as their own property, in a case of this type should be confiscated for the profit of the prince in whose jurisdiction they are situated, or should rather be used for that of the Church.”⁴⁸ In the case that the confiscated goods of the Templars were ordered to be used for the benefit of the Holy Land, Philip asks in his seventh question “to whom should their [the confiscated goods] distribution, regulation and administration belong? Is it to the Church, or [to] the princes, particularly in the kingdom of France.”⁴⁹ In this letter, Philip is essentially asking whether he must surrender the wealth and possessions of the Templars to the possession of the Church or other military orders, or whether he may retain it himself. Even in the event that the Templars' wealth must be used in the Holy Land, Philip seems eager to retain control over the distribution of the Order's money and possessions. Thus, it seems entirely possible that this letter can be seen as evidence of Philip's desire to acquire the wealth and property of the Templars; undoubtedly, the Templars' wealth played a significant role in their suppression at the hands of Philip IV.⁵⁰ It is perhaps also interesting to note that in a letter sent to Philip in 1313, the Knights Hospitaller (who had received a good deal of the Templars' assets from the pope) renewed a promise to pay Philip a sum of 200,000 *livres tournois*, taken mainly from the inheritance from the Templars: “we have promised and promise by the present document that we will release and repay to the aforesaid lord king [Philip IV] or his representative 200,000 *livres tournois* from the assets of the Temple and of our Order.”⁵¹ It seems clear, when considering both the context of the suppression of the Templars as well as Philip's own writings, that financial motivations played a significant part in Philip's suppression of the Knights Templars.

It is also possible that Philip IV had personal reasons to suppress the Knights Templar⁵²: along with several other European leaders Philip had advocated for the unification of the military orders prior to a new crusade, and had seen himself as the grand master of this new, united order. Piers Paul Read has noted that “in Philip's mind, a prerequisite to a successful crusade was the merger of the military orders. He would command the united order and be succeeded by one of his sons.”⁵³ Certainly, this position would have given Philip a considerable degree of power. However, this unification of the military orders, popular among the leaders of secular Europe, was far less so among the military orders themselves. Evelyn Lord has described the possible unification of the military orders as “a merger which [Templar Grand Master] Jacques de Molay refused to

⁴⁶ Barber, *New Knighthood*, 298.

⁴⁷ Clarence Perkins, “The Wealth of the Knights Templars in England and the Disposition of it after their Dissolution,” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 15, No. 2 (1910): 252.

⁴⁸ King Philip IV, “Questions of King Philip IV to the masters of theology at the University of Paris and their reply,” in *The Templars: Selected sources translated and annotated*, ed. M. Barber and K. Bate (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 259.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 259-260

⁵⁰ Perkins, “Wealth of the Knights Templars,” 252.

⁵¹ Knights Hospitaller, “Letter of the Hospitallers to King Philip IV,” in *The Templars: Selected sources translated and annotated*, ed. M. Barber and K. Bate (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 323.

⁵² Lord, *Templar's Curse*, 70.

⁵³ Read, *Templars*, 261.

countenance.”⁵⁴ De Molay was so opposed to the potential unification of the military orders that in 1306 he wrote a letter to Pope Clement V containing no fewer than fifteen separate arguments against a potential unification, acknowledging only two possible benefits for the Templars.⁵⁵ It is certainly possible, then, that the refusal of Jacques de Molay to permit the merger of the military orders into a single, unified order under the grand mastership of Philip IV could have manifested itself as a personal reason for Philip to suppress the Templars in 1307.

It is also highly possible that Philip IV chose to suppress the Knights Templar in order to remove a potential challenge to his own position as King of France. The Templars were, without question, the most militarized of the military orders: James Brodman has noted that “within the Templar Rule, the rhetoric is military: the brethren are knights ... The terminology in the Hospitaller Rule, by contrast, is one of service.”⁵⁶ In fact, the Templars had become so militarized even by the middle of the twelfth century that an additional set of regulations, known commonly as the “French Rule,” was created mainly to guide and regulate the conduct of the Templars' military affairs. Among its articles are four documents clearly relating to a military life: “How the Brothers Should Make Camp,” “How the Brothers Form the Line of March,” “How the Brothers should go in a Squadron,” and “When the Marshal takes up the Banner to Charge.”⁵⁷ The contents of this additional rule, as well as the necessity for the creation of the document, both demonstrate the unprecedented extent to which the Templars had become a primarily military organization, even at this early point in the Order's history. However, with the fall of Acre in 1291 the Templars no longer had an immediately clear military purpose, and it seems entirely possible that this could have made Philip IV uneasy about his position on the throne. Moreover, the Knights Templar, and Jacques de Molay in particular, had a recent history of intervening in the affairs of secular government. In 1306, King Henry II of Cyprus was forced to abdicate in favour of his brother, and several historians have suggested that the Templars were implicated in this plot. Malcolm Barber, for example, has suggested that “while not the instigator of the move against Henry II, he [Jacques de Molay] was certainly heavily involved.”⁵⁸ This incident, concerned with Philip's recent troubles with the Church (in particular with Pope Boniface VIII), could easily have made the French king apprehensive about his position on the throne of France.⁵⁹ Indeed, Clarence Perkins notes that “It has been asserted, too, that the great military strength of the Order made it a menace even to the crown.”⁶⁰ Thus, the considerable military strength of the Templars, and the consequent threat that they could potentially pose to the French crown, could easily have contributed to their suppression and ultimate disbandment at the hands of Philip IV.

In addition to the factors which directly contributed to Philip's suppression of the Templars, two long-term factors also contributed indirectly to the suppression of the Order: the loss of the Holy Land, and general dissatisfaction throughout Europe with the Knights Templar. As the most militant of the military orders, the Knights Templar took a considerable amount of blame for the loss of the Holy Land.⁶¹ Piers Paul Read writes that

⁵⁴ Lord, *Templar's Curse*, 70.

⁵⁵ Jacques de Molay, “The reply of James of Molay to Pope Clement V concerning the proposal to unite the Orders of the Temple and the Hospital,” in *The Templars: Selected sources translated and annotated*, ed. M. Barber and K. Bate (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 234-238.

⁵⁶ James W. Brodman, “Rule and Identity: The Case of the Military Orders,” *The Catholic Historical Review* Vol. 87, No. 3 (2001): 386.

⁵⁷ Knights Templar, “French Rule,” in *The Templars: Selected sources translated and annotated*, ed. M. Barber and K. Bate (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 67-73.

⁵⁸ Barber, *New Knighthood*, 290.

⁵⁹ Lord, *Templar's Curse*, 66-70.

⁶⁰ Clarence Perkins, “The Knights Templars in the British Isles,” *The English Historical Review* Vol. 25, No. 98 (1910): 209.

⁶¹ Read, *Templars*, 248.

“the defence of the Holy Land had been their [the military orders] *raison d'être* ... the surrender of Sidon and Castle Pilgrim without a fight, while undoubtedly justified by strategic considerations, had not added to their prestige.”⁶² Malcolm Barber seems to agree with this:

More than any of the other military orders the Temple was associated with the defense of the crusader states and the holy places. The decision to abandon first 'Atlit and then, in August 1291, Tortosa as well ... was a portentous step, the repercussions of which were certain to be profound both inside and outside the order.⁶³

Edward Burman also argues that the loss of the Holy Land had a significant impact upon the ultimate suppression of the Templars. He suggests that “It is possible to interpret their decline in the closing years of the thirteenth century as an inevitable consequence of the fading of the crusading ideal.”⁶⁴ According to Burman, it was the Templars' reliance on the Holy Land and the crusading ideal for their *raison d'être*, as well as the inability of the Order to adapt to the new circumstances after the loss of the Holy Land (a difficulty not seen among the leadership of other orders such as the Hospitallers), that ultimately sealed the fate of the Templars.⁶⁵ Thus, due to their preeminent position in its failed defence, and because of the Order's failure to adapt to a world without a strong crusading ideal, the fall of the Holy Land had a significant – and negative – impact upon the perception and reputation of the Knights Templar in Europe.

Throughout the existence of the Knights Templar, there was an increasing amount of general discontent with the Order, due both to the Templars' inability to live up to the extremely high standards originally laid out for their order, as well as the privileges and exemptions afforded the order by the Pope. In his *De laude novae militiae*, written in the early twelfth century around the date of the Templars' founding, Bernard of Clairvaux highly praised this new order of religious knights. Among other things, he claimed that “truly the knight is without fear and totally without worries when he has clothed his body with the breastplate of iron and his mind with the breastplate of the faith. Indeed, endowed with both sorts of arms he fears neither demon nor man.”⁶⁶ Despite the elaborate praises of Bernard of Clairvaux, however, it is clear that the Templars were not able to achieve this almost inhuman standard. Around the same time that *De laude novae militiae* was written, Guigo, the Prior of La Grande Chartreuse, wrote a letter to the Templar Grand Master Hugh of Payns, in which he observed that “it is pointless to wage war against external enemies without first overcoming internal ones. If we are unable first to subject our own bodies to our wills, then it is extremely shameful and unworthy to wish to put under our control any sort of military force.”⁶⁷ It appears, then, as though the Templars were unable to live up to the standards laid out for them, and this likely contributed to the increasing discontent directed towards them from several parts of European society. In fact, Burman has argued that the trials were the direct result of the criticisms made against the Templars. He writes that “The history of the Templars can be viewed in terms of the mounting vehemence and authority of these criticisms, culminating in the series of trials which led to their

Brodman, “Rule and Identity,” 386.

⁶² Read, *Templars*, 249.

⁶³ Barber, *New Knighthood*, 283.

⁶⁴ Burman, *Knights of God*, 145.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, “In Praise of the New Knighthood,” in *The Templars: Selected sources translated and annotated*, ed. M. Barber and K. Bate (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 217.

⁶⁷ Guigo du Pin, “Letter of Guigo, Prior of La Grande Chartreuse, to Hugh of Payns,” in *The Templars: Selected sources translated and annotated*, ed. M. Barber and K. Bate (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 213.

suppression. The trials were by no means a bolt from the blue, but an inevitable consequence of two centuries of criticism.”⁶⁸ Even in the early thirteenth century, nearly a century before the suppression of the Templars by Philip IV, the Order was subjected to a considerable amount of criticism. Appreciating the seriousness of the criticisms against the Templars, in 1218 Pope Honorius III wrote a letter to members of the clergy in Sicily, urging them to protect the Templars. He wrote that

some people returning from Outremer have so blackened their [the Templars'] reputation, that if their innocence had not shone forth in the furnace like gold in time of need we ourselves would have been forced by the rumours and the calumnies of their detractors to suspect that they had occasionally committed crimes.⁶⁹

Without a doubt, the criticisms of the Templars, even in the early thirteenth century, must have been considerable to have required the intervention and support of the pope himself. Therefore, the criticisms of the Templars were increasingly serious and numerous, and had a significantly negative effect upon the Order as a whole.

Even more than the Templars' own failures, however, the special privileges and exemptions granted to them by the pope had an increasingly negative effect on their popularity.

In 1139, not long after the foundation of the Order, Pope Innocent II issued the bill *Omne Datum Optimum*. In this bill, Innocent laid out the fundamental papal privileges afforded to the Templars. He wrote that “Those things that you take from their spoils you may in all confidence convert for your own uses, and we forbid that you should be forced to give a part of them to anyone against your will.”⁷⁰ Thus, the Templars were permitted to keep all spoils of war and use them for their own purposes in the Holy Land, and were exempt by papal decree from paying any sort of taxes on these spoils to secular rulers. Innocent also wrote that “We establish that the house or Temple, in which you have assembled for the praise and glory of God, with all its possessions and goods ... will be under the protection and tutelage of the Holy See for all time to come,” effectively giving the Templars and their property direct papal protection.⁷¹ However, this widespread papal support negatively impacted the Templars' popularity, especially in the eyes of many secular rulers. Malcolm Barber notes this problem, writing that “the papacy's enthusiastic patronage created an organization whose position and activities increasingly came to chafe upon the society within which it needed to function.”⁷² Piers Paul Read also notes this, writing simply that “the Templars were resented for their privileges and exemptions.”⁷³ There was, therefore, a considerable and increasing amount of discontentment with the Knights Templar throughout Europe, due partially to their own failures and partially to the exemptions and privileges that the pope granted to the Order. Though none of these factors contributed directly to the persecution and suppression of the Knights Templar, they did contribute to an environment in which the suppression of the Order by Philip IV was made possible.⁷⁵

The causes of the suppression of the Knights Templar are both many and complex. The great majority of the official accusations made against the Templars by King Philip IV of France were almost certainly false. The biased nature of the origins of the charges, the quantitative lack and questionable nature of the evidence against the Templars, and most

⁶⁸ Burman, *Knights of God*, 138.

⁶⁹ Pope Honorius III, “Pope Honorius III orders the prelates of Sicily to protect the Hospitallers and Templars,” in *The Templars: Selected sources translated and annotated*, ed. M. Barber and K. Bate (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 231.

⁷⁰ Pope Innocent II, “Omne Datum Optimum,” in *The Templars: Selected sources translated and annotated*, ed. M. Barber and K. Bate (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 60.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

⁷² Barber, *New Knighthood*, 282.

⁷³ Read, *Templars*, 250.

⁷⁵ Barber, *New Knighthood*, 295.

seriously the correlation between confessions and the use of torture during the investigations, all cast a serious amount of doubt on the accusations against the Templars. That King James II of Aragon and King Edward II of England did not initially believe the charges, and that contemporary Templar critics make no mention of the charges in their writings, suggest that Philip IV of France simply used the charges as a means to achieve his own personal goals. A closer examination of Philip's situation reveals compelling evidence that this may have been the case. Philip's dire financial situation, combined with the relative wealth of the Templars, would have made suppressing the Order a potentially profitable exercise for the French King. The refusal of Jacques de Molay to accept a unification of the military orders, combined with Philip's desire to personally head a united military order, point to personal motivations on Philip's part in favour of the suppression of the Knights Templar. It is also very much possible that, given the recent events in Cyprus and the military power of the Templars, Philip might have suppressed the Templars in order to remove a potential threat to his position on the throne. Although the loss of the Holy Land, and the increasing discontentment with the Templars in Europe, were not direct causes of the suppression of the Order, as Malcolm Barber suggests these factors did certainly contribute to a climate in which the suppression of the Templars by a secular king was possible. In the end, it was both these long-term factors, as well as the benefits of the suppression of the Order for Philip IV, which were the true causes of the suppression of the Knights Templar.