from Peter Partner, The Murdered Magicians: The Templars and their Myth (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 3-16, 19-20.

CHAPTER ONE

The origins and functions of the Templars

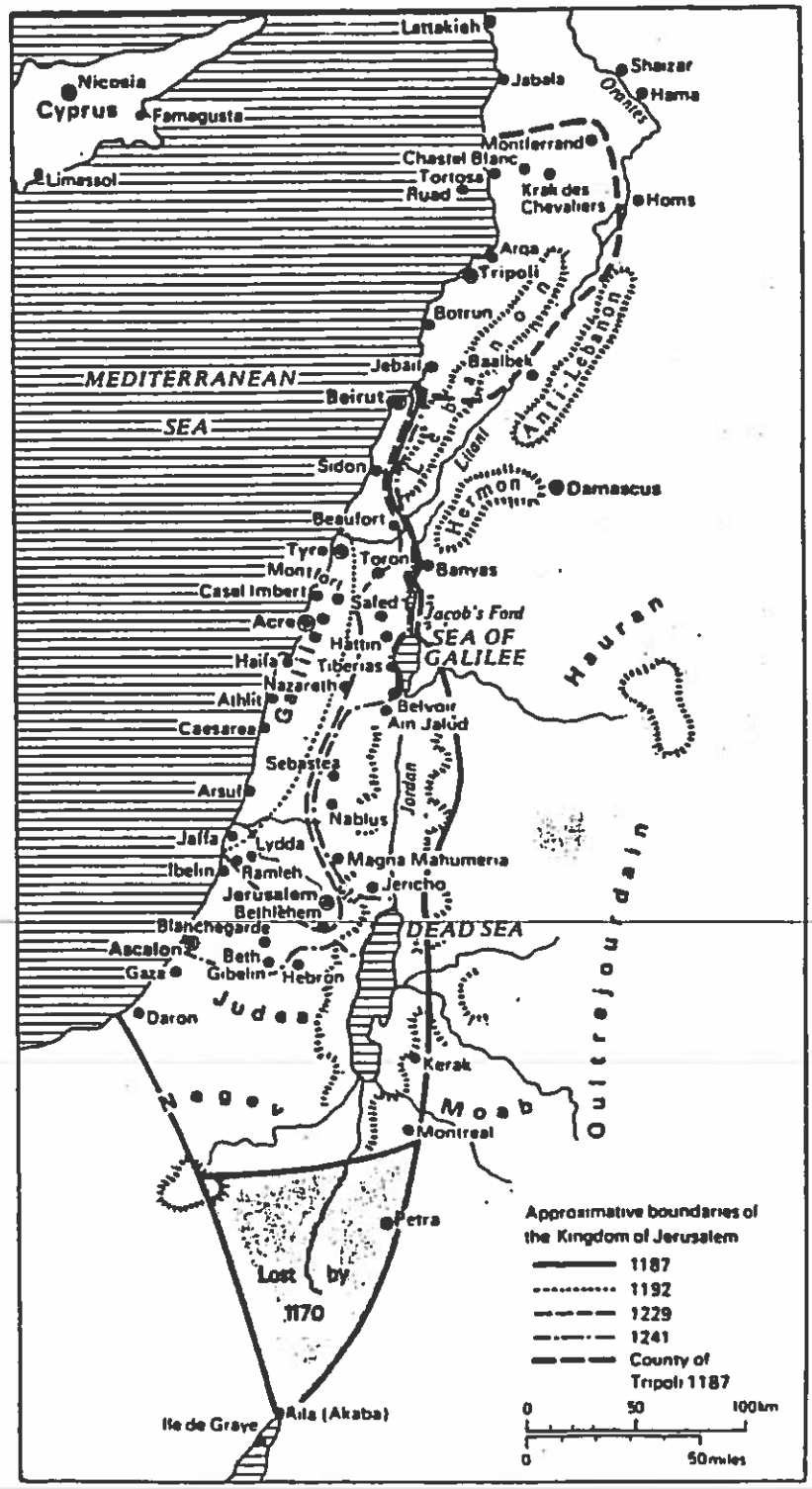
The Templars came into existence in Jerusalem during the aftermath of the First Crusade. Their Order of Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon grew from a group of pious soldiers who gathered in Jerusalem during the second decade of the twelfth century. They undertook the duty of protecting pilgrims on the dangerous roads between Jaffa, where they landed on the coast of Palestine, and Jerusalem. They lived under the religious rule known as that of St Augustine, and they had help and guidance from the canons of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Their leader was a nobleman from Champagne, a member of a cadet branch of the Counts of Troyes, called Hugues de Payns. They came to the Holy Land at a time when the first wave of knightly immigration was spent, and when the crusading state desperately needed not merely men but trained fighters drawn from the military aristocracy.

King Baldwin welcomed the religious knights and gave them quarters in the eastern part of his palace, which stood on the supposed site of King Solomon's Temple and adjoined the former Al-Aqsa Mosque; in the same area the canons of the Holy Sepulchre gave them stabling for their horses. In this first period the Knights of the Temple were laymen who had promised to live, as monks and nuns normally lived, in poverty, chastity, and obedience. They said prayers at set times, and in their mess they observed rules of behaviour which made it like a monastic refectory. They wore no special religious garb. The king, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and the upper clergy fed them. An early Templar seal shows two knights riding on the same horse, as an emblem of the poverty and brotherhood which they professed, but the shared horse cannot represent literal truth, as from the beginning each knight needed two or three horses to fulfil his duties. On the reverse of the same seal is a representation of the Dome of the Rock, the great, glittering Dome built by the early Muslim conquerors in Jerusalem, which stood to the west of the

Templar area, in the centre of the Haram-al-Sharif platform and on the supposed site of Abraham's sacrifice. This was the Dome, made into a Christian church, which was known to the Crusaders as the Temple of the Lord. It was quite distinct from the Temple of Solomon which was supposed to have once existed on the site of the Templar headquarters, a few hundred feet to the east.

At the beginning the Templars were probably under the command of the king and the Patriarch of Jerusalem. In an early letter Hugues de Payns speaks of the resentment which Templar knights felt because they were made to work humbly for others, unknown to the rest of the Christian world and without even the benefit of the prayers of Christian folk. At this early stage the Templars were evidently pessimistic about the role they had chosen. In a world in which the religious obedience of the monastery was reckoned the surest way to salvation, the obligation to shed blood instead of to pray seemed an inferior way to serve God: the poor knights seemed to be accepting the burden of a religious rule of life without obtaining its full benefits. From the tone of Hugues de Payns's letter they seem to have been on the edge of abandoning their task; only the campaign launched in western Europe by de Payns and his ally St Bernard seems to have rescued them from obscurity and to have launched them as an institution which enjoyed the support of Christendom.

In 1127 Hugues de Payns travelled from Syria to Europe to seek funds and support. At Troyes, near his place of origin, a church council was held in 1128 which was attended by French and Burgundian bishops and abbots, by a papal legate, and by St Bernard himself. Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, was a great spiritual leader, the inspirer of a fervent flight into the monasteries which swept over the men of his time like a wave. He was also one of the best-informed and most sensitive religious leaders of the century. St Bernard had an ideal of the religious purification of feudal life in which the Crusade already played a part. The new concept of a military religious Order fitted into his vision of a knighthood which would be cleansed from the bloodshed and ill-doing of feudal greed and conflict, and which would serve the new theocratic world order which he strove to bring into being. At the Council of Troyes in 1128 the association of Poor Knights of the Temple was given an official existence by the



Map of Southern Syria and Palestine

Church, and was prescribed a simple religious way of life. St Bernard certainly advised, and probably dictated, the new Templar Rule, and the Templars were influenced by St Bernard's austere Cistercian Order from this point onwards. Unofficially, at least, many of them thought their Order to be specially dedicated to St Bernard and to the Virgin.

At the Council of Troyes the Church accepted the Templars as a corporate organization of religious soldiers governed by church law. This was no simple or uncontroversial matter, though it was not immediately challenged. The Templars seemed to introduce confusion into one of the basic distinctions of medieval society, between the 'religious order' and the 'military order'. The split between the two lay at the root of the then recent dispute between the 'priesthood' and the 'kingdom', which had shaken the whole medieval political structure. Church reformers had determined to stop men whose hands had been stained with blood from touching holy things. Even when noblemen of knightly status repented, and in mature years sought the life of the cloister, those within the monastery who had been nourished there from childhood were often reluctant to welcome the recruit.[1] The life of a medieval noble was devoted to aggression, bullying, and bloodshed on behalf of his lineage. He might try to mitigate this conduct by founding churches or monasteries, or even by seeking the monastic life for himself, but on the whole the warrior nobles despised or at best disregarded the clerks, and were far from taking them as a model. Our modern idea, which has been influenced by the idealistic glow conferred on chivalry by the Romantics, is of harmony between sword and altar; nothing could be further from the medieval truth. The Templars were making a sharper break with tradition than is at first apparent to modern men.

Far from idealizing chivalry, religious leaders usually represented knightly life as lawless, licentious, and bloody. The clergy were absolutely forbidden to shed blood, and to combine the life of an active soldier, killing and plundering like any other soldier, with the life of a monk, was to go against a fundamental principle. On the other hand, the clergy had for a long time dreamed of harnessing the feudal machine for their own purposes, and the Crusades themselves can be seen as a part-fulfilment of this idea. The popes had conceived the idea of conscripting feudal knights

into a 'militia of St Peter' under their command, but this had not come to pass. Though the general idea of the Crusade tended in the same direction, the institution had never fallen under the direct control of the clergy in the way that the popes wanted; for example, the project of a Palestinian vassal state directly subject to the pope had been frustrated by the realities of crusading politics. The Templars represented a revival of these clerical ideas, and thus though in some ways they went against medieval principles, in others they could be seen as favouring the new theocratic trends.

St Bernard used brutal and even cynical language about the lives led by the knightly class. He espoused the crusading movement with passionate fervour; following Pope Urban II's speech at Clermont in 1095 he called it a way of occupying and reclaiming a dangerous criminal sector of noble society. 'It is really rather convenient', he wrote, 'that you will find very few men in the vast multitude which throngs to the Holy Land who have not been unbelieving scoundrels, sacrilegious plunderers, homicides, perjurers, adulterers, whose departure from Europe is certainly a double benefit, seeing that people in Europe are glad to see the back of them, and the people to whose assistance they are going in the Holy Land are delighted to see them! It is certainly beneficial to those who live on both sides of the sea, since they protect one side and desist from molesting the other!'[2] •

The idea of a perfect Christian knighthood may have passed fleetingly through the minds of these early reformers, but essentially this ideal was a creation of the later Middle Ages and had little place in the earlier society, which was accustomed to the daily use of illicit force and brutality by the warrior class and was more interested in getting rid of knights than in romanticizing them. The Church wanted no truck with these undesirables, who broke all its laws, particularly those of marriage, and even in their diversions, such as the tournament or gambling, tended towards pursuits which could end in bloodshed. It is significant that not until the late thirteenth century was any church liturgical form devised whose aim was to bless the making of a knight with Christian rites. Until then knighthood was regarded as in most respects an illicit business which clerks should not meddle

• All translated quotations are the author's unless otherwise attributed.

with. The appearance of a literature of 'Christian knighthood' from the time of Wolfram of Eschenbach's *Parzifal* in the early thirteenth century did, it is true, represent the beginnings of a more civilized attitude among some members of the knightly class, particularly the courtiers. But for a very long time the clergy continued to view the idea of a 'perfect Christian knight' with well-justified scepticism. Knightly attitudes as preserved in the literature of the troubadours continued to testify to a class ethic which was essentially cruel, proud, and bloody.

When St Bernard wrote his exhortation to the knights of the Temple to persist in their vocation, he was trying to deal both with the doubts which Templar knights felt about their status and with the criticism of orthodox clerics that men pledged to bloodshed ought not to be treated as part of the clerical 'order'. To effect Bernard's purpose it was necessary to glorify the killing of unbelievers and to introduce an important exception to the unanimous teaching of the medieval Church up to that time, that a man consecrated to God may not shed blood. The manner in which St Bernard did this was typical of his disingenuous methods of argument.

> Indeed, the knights of Christ fight the battles of their lord in safety, by no means fearing to have sinned in slaying the foe, nor fearing the peril of their own deaths, seeing that either dealing out death or dying, when for Christ's sake, contains nothing criminal but rather merits glorious reward. On this account, then: for Christ! hence Christ is attained. He who, forsooth! freely takes the death of his foe as an act of vengeance, the more willingly finds consolation in his status as a soldier of Christ. The soldier of Christ kills safely: he dies the more safely. He serves his own interests in dying, and Christ's interests in killing! Not without cause does he bear the sword! He is the instrument of God for the punishment of malefactors and for the defence of the just. Indeed, when he kills a malefactor this is not homicide but malicide, and he is accounted Christ's legal executioner against evildoers.

In the same vein Hugues de Payns assured the Templars that they must not succumb to the temptation of thinking that they killed in a spirit of hate and fury, nor that they seized booty in a spirit of greed. For the Templars did not hate men, but men's wrongdoing; and when they seized booty from unbelievers they did so justly, because of the sins of the unbeliever and also

because they had won the booty by their own labour, and 'the labourer is worthy of his hire'. The last may seem a naïve apology but it reflects the fact that much Templar time and energy was spent in plundering.

St Bernard's argument was radical. It was better that unbelievers should be killed than that they should preside over the destinies of the true faithful. To the objection that a Christian does not kill he replied: 'What, then? if the use of the sword is not allowed in any circumstances to a Christian, why did John the Baptist indicate to the troops that they should be content with their pay [Luke, 3:14]: why did he not rather forbid them any form of military service? If it is right for all, so long as they have been divinely ordained and have professed no better [i.e. no monastic] objective, by whose hands and armed might better than theirs is Sion, the city of our strength, kept safe for the protection of us all? Once the transgressors of the divine law have been driven out, let the just people, guardians of truth, enter Jerusalem in confidence.'

The repute of the saint ensured the acceptance of the Templar movement in the highest Church quarters. A politician as sharp as St Bernard had been astute enough to secure the presence of a papal legate at the Council of Troyes in 1128, when the Templars had been launched into the official world of the Catholic Church. Papal authorization was not lacking for an Order which came with such impressive credentials. Nor did the popes hesitate, apparently, to approve the theory of a religious war waged by men under religious vows. In the papal bull, *Omne datum optimum*, of 1139, by which Pope Innocent II consolidated with papal approval and privilege the status of the Templars as a Religious Order, the pope referred to the Templar dead who had attained eternal life after the sweat of a battle in which they had 'consecrated their hands to God in the blood of the unbelievers'. This reference to Templar warfare was to its aggressive aspect: the defensive Templar duties of protecting pilgrims received no separate mention in the papal privilege. The Templar knights already wore, in imitation either of the Cistercians or of the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre, a white mantle; a few years later Pope Eugenius III gave them the right to bear a red cross upon it.

The Templars from the first had to take part in the daily armed struggle in the Holy Land, and it is most unlikely that

they experienced any conscientious scruples about this. What did inspire them with doubt was the feeling that, though their work was allowable in Church law, it was inferior in the hierarchy of good to the pure contemplation and prayer of the professed monks. Why, when their contemporaries in Europe were flooding into the monasteries, should these knights accept the duties of Martha, and embrace a role which continued the dangers and hardships of knightly life without its temporal compensations, and perhaps also without the perfect assurance of salvation which could be found in the monastery? Hugues de Payns assured them that, like the peasants, they led an active life which was necessary to support the life of the monastic contemplatives. This comparison with despised boors touched them at their most sensitive point, their pride in their noble birth. A feeling of inferiority to the true religious monks who performed nothing but the 'work of God' recurred among some individual Templars as long as the Order lasted. Both the popes and the Temple repeatedly forbade Templars to leave the Military Order to enter a monastic Religious Order, but Templar knights constantly did so. The third Master of the Templar Order, Evrard des Barres (1149–52), returned to France from the Holy Land, left the Order, and entered Clairvaux, the 'true Jerusalem', as a Cistercian monk.

Within a few years of the Council of Troyes in 1128, Catholic Europe gave the Templars strong and almost universal approval. Some religious men expressed doubts about the bloodshed inseparable from their work, but Pope Urban II's letter to the monks of Vallombrosa, forbidding religious persons to bear arms in the Crusade, seems to have been forgotten by the time the Templars had come into existence. The biggest factor in getting governing-class support was the feudal nature of the Order. Thorough feudal gentlemen such as King Stephen were enthusiastic supporters in England. In Spain the possibilities of using Templars in the Iberian war against the Muslims were at once appreciated, and King Alfonso I of Aragon embarrassed both the Order and the Church by bequeathing to the Templars a third part of his kingdom; though this proved to be a bequest which it was politically impossible to accept in full. In Paris, in 1147, shortly before the departure of the French king on the

Second Crusade, a general chapter of 130 white-robed Templars was held in the presence of the king and the pope. Thousands of landed estates large and small were given to the Order, initially in England, France, and Spain, and then in most parts of Europe. A large organization soon had to be set up, not only to recruit new members for the Order but also to administer the huge patrimonies and to transmit money and supplies to the Holy Land. In a short time the transmission of funds gave the Order a new role as a banker not only for itself but for others. By the time King Louis VII of France went to the Holy Land on Crusade in 1147 the Templars were at least to some extent acting as his bankers. Since no system of deposit banking yet existed in Europe, and none was to develop for over a century, the use of the Temple for the deposit and transmission of funds gave it a new and unanticipated importance among the feudal princes.

The two Military Orders, the Templars and the Knights Hospitaller of St John, developed on approximately similar lines during the same period, though the Hospitallers were slower to assume a warlike role, and never assumed it exclusively. The two Orders acted in many ways as the poor-boxes through which Catholic Europe contributed to the running costs of the crusader states in the East. At bottom they depended on the generosity of the faithful, who gave them a secure income through the gift of estates, and a smaller precarious income through contributions, fraternity subscriptions, and the proceeds of indulgences. Their task was made much easier by the lavish privileges conferred on them by the popes. For the Templars the main effects of these were to exempt the Order from the jurisdiction and financial control of the bishops, and to confer on lay members of Templar brotherhoods a variety of other privileges. People of both sexes who had contributed to Templar funds acquired privileges from their status in the Templar confraternities: the knights in these were 'brothers of the Temple' with privileges not far short of those enjoyed by actual Templar knights. Often the associate brothers assumed the Templar habit as they died, or were clad in it after death. Almost all Religious Orders admitted laymen into fraternal relationships of this kind, but the Templar arrangements were especially resented by the bishops, whose authority and incomes they weakened. The bishops complained that where they had placed an area under

church interdict and suspended all church services on account of some disobedience to church law, Templar priests and fund-raisers would rely on papal privilege to break the interdict, open their churches, collect money, administer the sacraments to men and women in the Templar brotherhoods, and bury the dead in their own graveyards. This ecclesiastical strike-breaking was bitterly resented, even if it only took place once yearly. The interdict was the last sanction available to the bishops, and its breaking occasioned anger, and even violence. The Templars connived in breaking the interdicts in order to make money. By receiving layfolk into its confraternities the Order profited, even if only to the extent of an annual payment of from two to six pence. Membership was available to all free men and women: in England not only did a humble parish priest in Templar service belong, but so also did his 'wife'.[3]

The privileged Church corporations of the Middle Ages all provoked similar resentments. But in the case of the Military Orders, the wealth conferred on them also demonstrated widespread social approval. The great effort of the Order was the transfer of funds and men to the east. They erected numerous buildings in the west – preceptories, churches, granges – for training and administration, but these were humble and utilitarian in nature, with a few exceptions. There was no standard form of Templar church: a very few, circular or polygonal, recalled the shape either of the Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem (the 'Temple of God' of the Templar seal) or of the octagon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. But most Templar churches were orthodox apsidal structures.[4] Templar castles were few in the west, and it was inconvenient to build a circular chapel within them; apart from that in Paris the only castles possessing such chapels are at Tomar in Portugal and at Chastel Pélerin (Athlit) in Syria. Very occasionally, where the Templars built with royal licence and approval, the European castles could be great fortifications which would resist a long siege. In Paris the Temple, which was probably the greatest financial institution of the High Middle Ages, contained a great double *donjon*, which was by the thirteenth century one of the strongest in the kingdom. Part of the Templar Church in Paris, like that of the London Temple, was built to a circular plan. Immediately without the Paris Temple, and within view of the royal palace at the

Louvre, the area of exempt Templar jurisdiction was a sizeable village, called the Ville Neuve du Temple, surrounded by high walls.

Partly for reasons which are discussed later, misconceptions have grown up about Templar buildings. It would be wrong either to suppose that Europe was full of circular Temple churches built to meet the special requirements of their chapter meetings, or that it was well-stocked with great Templar fortresses. The first error arose because of the popular superstition that almost any round church is Templar-built. The second opinion is also without foundation. Templar organization was directed in a common-sense way to the financing, staffing, and provisioning of the Palestinian force, and little money was wasted on showy churches, still less on great European castles which would only be an economic and political liability. The only exception was the Iberian peninsula, where in Aragon and Portugal the Order was pledged to fight against the Moors, and needed castles just as it needed them in the Holy Land.

The main strength of the Templars lay in the ability of the feudal class to identify with them. They did not recruit much from the upper nobility; St Bernard was not entirely wrong in stigmatizing the knightly class in the Holy Land as formed from men who had many of them committed serious crimes. Great noblemen could purge their sins by founding monasteries; only small noblemen had to purge them in their own persons. The Grand Masters of the Templar Order were, all but a few, drawn from obscure families. Templar knights were as knightly as they purported to be; that is, they were from warrior families who practised the profession of arms freely, and not as mere mercenaries. In the beginning the distinctions may have been unclear, and it is also possible that in the Holy Land this Foreign Legion did not ask too many awkward questions. By the thirteenth century the enquiry was meant to be precise: an aspirant was required to be a knight, the son of a knight and his lady. Villein descent was a bar to entry as a knight; it was also a bar to the priesthood, so the Military Order was no exception. An excommunicated aspirant was to be brought first to the bishop, and he could be received into the Order only if the bishop would absolve him. It seems from the Statutes of the Order that

breaking the Rule were in some cases severe, and could include life imprisonment. The habits of a nobleman died hard: the Templars were supposed to hunt only 'lions' (by which 'ounces' or Palestinian lynxes are intended), but the Rule notes the case of a Commander who used a borrowed horse to course hares, and was expelled from the Order when the horse was lost.'

The Military Orders operated not only on the Marcher frontiers of the crusading states in Palestine – and the Marches were never far from the heart of that narrow strip of land – but also in and near the Crusaders' main centres. The defence of the towns was originally a royal responsibility, but by the thirteenth century there were Templar forts within Haifa and Acre, and long sections of the urban defences were a Templar commitment. Other groups of Templar castles defended such main internal routes as the Plain of Esdrelon between Samaria and Galilee, and the approaches to Mount Carmel.

Jealousies and clashes of policy erupted spasmodically between Templar and Hospitaller Grand Masters from 1179 onwards, and the disputes grew more frequent and acrimonious during the last tormented half-century of the existence of the crusader states. It has been said that the Templars on the whole pursued a political policy which favoured the Palestinian baronage, and the Hospitallers one which favoured the monarchy. Be this as it may, the disputes were not continuous, and against the instances of open hostility between the two Orders, other instances of co-operation and compromise can be found. The Rules of the two Orders show that in the ordinary conduct of their lives in the Holy Land each Order relied on the other for help and support. Of course, the institutional egotism of all privileged medieval bodies was a factor in their relations, and sometimes was a negative factor for the crusading cause as a whole. Many internecine jealousies and rivalries – of the feudal barons, of the Italian cities, of competitors for the crown –played their part in weakening the crusading settlement. In this divided land the rivalry of the two Military Orders was one source of political weakness among many others.