

# Chapter 1

## Defining the Templar Code

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Getting your feet wet on the subject of warrior/monks
- ▶ Following the Templars through the Holy Land
- ▶ Seeing Templars as bankers, diplomats, and nation builders
- ▶ Discovering Templar codes

*Thus in a wondrous and unique manner they appear gentler than lambs, yet fiercer than lions. I do not know if it would be more appropriate to refer to them as monks or as soldiers, unless perhaps it would be better to recognize them as being both. Indeed they lack neither monastic meekness nor military might. What can we say of this, except that this has been done by the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes. These are the picked troops of God, whom he has recruited from the ends of the earth; the valiant men of Israel chosen to guard well and faithfully that tomb which is the bed of the true Solomon, each man sword in hand, and superbly trained to war.*

—St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise of the New Knighthood* (1136)

**I**n A.D. 1119, the Order of the Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon formed in the wake of the First Crusade, and the world had never seen anything quite like them. They were knights, dedicated to the same unwritten, medieval, chivalric code of honor that governed most of these fierce, professional fighting men on horseback throughout Europe and the Holy Land. But they also took the vows of devoutly religious monks, consigning themselves to the same strict code of poverty, chastity, and obedience that governed the brotherhoods of Catholic monks who spent their ascetic lives cloistered in monasteries. These were no mercenaries who fought for money, land, or titles. They were Christ's devoted warriors, who killed when it was necessary to protect the Holy Land or Christian pilgrims.

The Templars became the darlings of the papacy and the most renowned knights on the battlefields of the Crusades. They grew in wealth and influence and became the bankers of Europe. They were advisors, diplomats, and treasureurs. And then, after an existence of just 200 years, they were destroyed,

not by infidel warriors on a plain in Palestine, but by a French king and a pliant pope. In the great timeline of history, the Templars came and went in an astonishingly brief blink of an eye. Yet, the mysteries that have always surrounded them have done nothing but circulate and grow for nine centuries.

In this chapter, we give you a quick tour of who the Knights Templar were, and the two seemingly contradictory traditions of war and religion they brought together to create the first Christian order of warrior monks. We also discuss the meanings of the codes they lived by, both the code of behavior that governed their daily lives and the secret codes that became part of their way of doing business.

## *Knights, Grails, Codes, Leonardo da Vinci, and How They All Collide*

Everyone loves a mystery. Agatha Christie wrote 75 successful novels in a career that spanned decades, with estimated total sales of over 100 million. Her stories remain a fixture in the bookstore, as well as in film and television. But Agatha Christie always neatly wrapped up the mystery by the end of the story. The historical mysteries examined in the tale of the Templars are far more complex, and it's rarely possible to tie them up with a ribbon and pronounce them solved.

Interest in the Templars, the Holy Grail, and various mysteries of the Bible have something in common with lace on dresses or double-breasted suits; over the course of the last couple of centuries, the mania will climb, reach a peak, then recede into the background, consigned to the cutout bin of life, to be picked up, brushed off, and brought to rousing life once more by a new generation with a fresh perspective.

The bare facts are simple. After two centuries of pride and power, the Templars went head to head with the dual forces that would destroy them — the Inquisition, and the man who used it as his chief weapon, Phillip IV, called Phillip the Fair, king of France, whose nickname definitely described his looks and not his ethics.

In the heresy trials that followed, the Templars were often accused of being *Cathars*, a form of Gnostic Christianity that was deemed a heresy by the Catholic Church. We explain Gnosticism in greater detail in Chapter 14, but speaking simply, the Gnostics were dualists, believing that the world was a place of tension between good and evil, light and darkness. The Templar Code may best be defined in the same way — a dual ethic, with two meanings: the decidedly unspiritual violence of the warrior knights on the one side, contrasted with the devoutly spiritual nature of religious life as monks on the other. The most common image signifying the Templar Knights was

that of two Templars, armed for battle and riding the same horse together (see Figure 1-1). It was the perfect shorthand for both their fierceness in fighting, and the vow of poverty they lived by.

**Figure 1-1:**  
A statue  
outside of  
the London  
Temple  
church  
depicting  
two Templar  
Knights on  
the same  
horse —  
symbolizing  
both  
poverty and  
fierceness.



Christopher Hodapp

You'd be hard pressed to find a more important and enduring myth in the Christian West than that of King Arthur, his Table Round, and the quest of his knights for the Holy Grail. The Templars were always another pillar of Western mythology, side by side with the Holy Grail legends. The two fables cross constantly along the way, and the many parallels between the Templars and the story of Arthur and the Grail, the parable of a man's reach exceeding his grasp, may explain, at least in part, the continuing hold of the noble Templar legend on the Western imagination, seven centuries after the destruction of the Order.

And then Dan Brown wrote a book called *The Da Vinci Code*, and people's perceptions of the Knights Templar, and just about everything in their world, changed almost overnight. The Templars were described as sinister gray eminences, dark powers behind the throne, keepers of the true Grail, the most dangerous secret of Christianity. Nowadays, truth can be almost anticlimactic. Yet the truth of the Templars is anything but a bore. It's a story of the highest in the land brought low by greed and envy, of Crusader knights and Islamic warlords, of secret rituals, torture and self-sacrifice, and mysteries that still beguile the historians of the Middle Ages and beyond.

Right now, we're living in a time when interest in the Templars is at an all-time high, and the reason for it is the intriguing way that all these mysteries, and many more, weave in and out of one another, touching, drifting apart, and then coming together again: Templars, the Grail, the Gnostic Gospels, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Spear of Destiny, the heresy of Mary Magdalene as the wife of Jesus — they're all tied to one another, with all the same players, in all the same events. The Templar story begins 900 years ago.

## *The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon*

Yep, that's the full name of the Knights Templar. This name changes here and there, depending on the translation. Obviously, St. Bernard and the others who gave the order this final moniker wanted to make sure that everything about them but their shoe size was reflected in their title.

### The Temple of Solomon

The origin of the temple that makes up the name of the Templars is King Solomon's Temple, described in the Old Testament books of 2 Chronicles and 1 Kings. It was believed to have been constructed in approximately 1,000 B.C. by the wise Solomon, son of King David.

The temple was the most magnificent monument to man's faith constructed during the biblical era. Its innermost sanctuary, the *Sanctum Sanctorum*,

was built to hold the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the sacred words of God — the tablets Moses was given that contained the Ten Commandments. (The temple complex occupied what is known as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, dominated by the Islamic Dome of the Rock; see the first image in this sidebar). It was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.



Israel images / Alamy

A second temple (see the second image in this sidebar) was rebuilt on the same spot by Zerubbabel in 516 B.C. after the Jews had been released by the Babylonians 70 years before. This Temple was of a slightly different design and was extensively renovated and enlarged by

King Herod the Great in 19 B.C. (This is the temple that Jesus threw the moneylenders out of, described in Matthew 21.) The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70 during the Jewish rebellion.



Scala / Art Resource, NY



The Templars were granted the area of Jerusalem's Temple Mount, former site of King Solomon's Temple (see the nearby sidebar "The Temple of Solomon") as their Holy Land headquarters. This is where the term *Templar* originated.

The Templars soon had a nickname, simply the Order of the Temple. Then later came Knights Templar, as well as White Knights, Poor Knights, and just plain Templars.

## Defining knighthood

Templar Knights started life simply as knights. The word *knight* carries with it so much mythological baggage that it may seem a ridiculous question, but just what is a knight, anyway?

You probably think you know all about knighthood, because you've seen Sean Connery, Orlando Bloom, and Heath Ledger each play one. Well, actually, if you have, then you do already know quite a lot. The Hollywood treatment of knighthood and its rituals has been right more often than it's been wrong, which is an amazing thing from an industry known the world over for its cavalier contempt for historical accuracy.

### *Roman origins*

The concept of knighthood is an old one. The word itself — whether it was *knight* in English, *chevalier* in French, or *ritter* in German — simply means a cavalry warrior, one who did battle from the back of a horse instead of clomping along in the mud with the infantry. In the beginning, this didn't necessarily make him a person of higher rank than an infantryman. The cavalry warriors of the Roman army were called *equitatae*, a pretty squishy word that just means “mounted.”

### *The medieval knight*

The cavalry knight of the Middle Ages grew into a powerful force as the centuries passed. And the knight was inseparable from the feudal system in which he lived. As with everything else in Europe, Rome had a hand in the creation of the feudal system. This feudalism, from its very inception, was essentially a contract. The knight and his own vassals made various promises to their lord, to pay taxes or to serve him in wartime for a certain number of days each year, often 40 days, while the lord also made various promises.

Knights were proud and powerful men, with squires and servants, and so on, but their influence shouldn't be overstated. Where the feudal chain of power was concerned, knights were close to the bottom, at least at first. A *knight errant* was a knight who had no lands, a little higher than a paid mercenary. For the knight errant, his first goal was to gain lands in battle, and he fought in the hope of being granted a fief by his overlord in gratitude for services rendered. Eventually, this knightly rank and vow of service became hereditary, and with these inherited titles came land and greater privileges.

A strange development in the history of knighthood was that these warriors, who were not necessarily of noble birth or great wealth, were great military leaders. As a result, the nobility became envious of this “lower class” of men, and became knights themselves. Later orders of knights, Templars included, always preferred their knights to be at least the petty nobility to be a part of their groups, to lend them greater prestige. By this time, sons of earls, dukes, and even kings proudly bore the title of *knight*. Eventually, it made economic sense for the nobility to be knights — it was an expensive way of life to buy horses and equipment, and working slobbs didn't have the kind of leisure hours needed to train themselves for battle.

### *The decline of the knight*

After the fall of Rome, battle tactics changed quite a bit in the following centuries. With the development of body armor, a mounted knight became a far more powerful adversary than a much larger number of men on foot, and knights formed the power core of armies in the way foot soldiers once had. Socially, the feudal system lingered for centuries. But the real end of knighthood, military knighthood, came with changing military tactics. More than any other factor, the development of greater speed, power, and accuracy in the bow and arrow would spell the doom of the knight in the field.

## Flipping the bird: The sign of victory

Like many coarse and vulgar Americanisms that have gone worldwide, if you travel in England, you'll see people from cabbies to pub brawlers use a classic American gesture of defiance — arm extended, fist closed, middle finger pointing in solitary contempt into the air. But this is a relatively recent development, the U.S. pollution of a much funnier British hand gesture. As late as *The Benny Hill Show* or the terrifically funny *Carry On* movies of the 1960s, you see the British using their own, centuries-old method of “flicking thine enemy the royal bird.” The English version looked more like a victory sign — once more, arm extended, fist in the air, but with two fingers up, the index and middle finger. This gesture has a noble, if mythical, history. In several battles with the French, the British military discovered that their most valuable force against a superior number of mounted knights was their skilled archers. The technology of armor-piercing arrows was getting better all the time. And so, the government unleashed a program of training the peasantry in archery, with prizes awarded, clubs formed, and such, to try to make it fun, as well as a point of national pride. They

succeeded. All across England, at dusk on the village green after the day's work was done, men practiced their archery, every day. At the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, British archers as a military force reached their peak of rapid fire, power, and skill, bringing down thousands of French mounted knights and winning a battle in which they had been greatly outnumbered.

Consequently, the French cooked up a counteroffensive. Whenever a British foot soldier was captured in battle, the first two fingers of his right hand were amputated, so that he could never again draw a bow. For centuries afterward, when British soldiers wanted to razz the enemy, they would raise their two fingers high up into the air, with a “you didn't get *mine*, you froggy so-and-so” attitude, usually accompanied by colorful raspberries and shouts about the morals of the French soldiers' mothers. During the dark days of the Blitz in World War II, when Hitler's rockets rained down on London, killing thousands, it became, once more, a treasured symbol of British defiance. That's the legend, anyway.

By the late 16th century and the development of field artillery, the warrior knight of the Middle Ages was already more of a mythic figure than an effective force on the battlefield. Though some still rode horses and wore armor, and hereditary knighthood continued to be passed from father to son, the legendary knights of the crusading period were already the stuff of moldy tapestries and mythic tales.

## Defining monasticism

Monasticism grew out of an idea as old as knighthood. In even the most ancient pagan faiths, there were legends of monks and hermits, men who separated themselves from society, living in caves or the out of doors, in order to achieve a closer relationship to the spiritual. Despite the fact that monks live in communities, the word *monasticism* comes from the Greek word *monachos*, which means “living alone,” in reference to these lone hermits who inspired

it. Not just Christianity, but Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Jainism (a peaceful Indian sect of ascetics) all practice monasticism. Organized Christian monasticism goes back at least as far as the fourth century. As the ideal picked up speed, it formed into the more common orders we know today — the Benedictines, the Franciscans, the Dominicans, and so on. But the name of the game was the same for all. Though each order had its own character, patron saint, and principle type of devotion (as in aiding the sick, teaching, or being strictly a “contemplative” order, devoted to prayer), all monks lived a bare and vigorous existence.

Both jobs — knight and monk — were definitely enough to keep you busy. They were also about as opposite in their goals, actions, and beliefs as two occupations could be; monks were not even allowed to carry a weapon, no matter how dangerous was the pagan territory they were sent into to spread the gospel to the barbarians, mostly the descendants of the Visigoths and Huns who’d brought down the might of Rome. Nevertheless, rather than fight, monks were expected to die for their faith if necessary. Moreover, they were expected to die well, because first impressions are so important where nonbelievers are concerned.

## *Warrior Monks: Their Purpose*

What made the Knights Templar unique in history was that they decided to take on both obligations, knight *and* monk. They would be warriors for God, sworn to a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience. It was a startlingly new concept to the Christian West, and there was a great deal of resistance to it at first. But the idea seized the imagination of the charismatic figure of the Cistercian Order, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who pushed it through the ecclesiastical bureaucracy.

And so, by papal command, the Order of the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon was born. They were also given, in a series of papal bulls, powers and privileges that had never before been extended to any single arm of the Church. (A *papal bull* is an official statement-of-position document issued by a pope, named for the *bull*, or round wax seal, affixed to the document.) The Templars were, in effect, now answerable only to the pope in everything they did. But, like most things in life, that power came with a price.

In the recent wave of books and movies featuring Templars, one thing seems to come across above all else: They were loaded. Everyone seems to know that there’s a lost Templar treasure out there. But this had nothing to do with the way a Knight Templar lived in the day to day. In the Middle Ages, faith was woven into the fabric of life in a way that would be nearly impossible to explain to the modern, secular mind. Only the life of a person in a religious cult would come close, and even that is a flawed comparison. In this medieval world of faith, laymen gave up all sorts of things for the sake of their belief in



God. Monks, priests, and nuns gave up a great deal more: love, marriage, children, freedom, luxury, and any sort of self-indulgence, down to the smallest, most inconsequential comforts.

But few gave up more for the sake of his faith than a Knight Templar. We discuss the daily life of a Templar in more detail in Chapter 4, but for the time being, suffice it to say that the wealth belonged to the order and most decidedly *not* to any individual knight. At that time, the holiest of men and women lived a life of *asceticism*, a constant state of self-denial. The quantity and quality of food was extremely limited; the Templars were allowed the luxury of meat three times a week on the theory that, as fighting men, they needed it. But eating it wasn't much fun — for monks, nuns, and Templars, meals were taken in silence, generally while scripture was being read. The monastic day was roughly divided into four-hour sections, called the Liturgical Hours, or the divine office, the seven Catholic hours being *Matins*, *Lauds*, *Vespers*, *Terce*, *Sext*, *None*, and *Compline*. Each one represented another trip to chapel, for Mass or prayers or readings from Scripture and the Church fathers. Even a good night's sleep was interrupted for a trip to the chapel to pray. No personal possessions were allowed under any circumstances; all that these people owned were the clothes on their back. Visits to and from family were discouraged, because it tied a person to his old life. A Templar was even expected to have light in his private chamber at all times, to prevent even the accusation of hanky-panky.

Some other monastic orders had stricter rules for daily life, but they certainly weren't risking their lives in battle. Along with giving up a wife and children, possessions, and freedom, Templars were also expected to give up their lives fighting for the faith. A Templar was not allowed to retire from the battlefield, even to regroup, unless the enemy had a three-to-one superiority. Whenever Crusader knights went into battle, the highest casualty rates were always among the Templars.

There were perks, of course, here and there, particularly for the officers of a commandery. In the Holy Land, there were few higher in the new kingdom of Jerusalem than the Grand Master of the Knights Templar. He advised the court in all matters — foreign, domestic, and military. The Templars walked with popes and kings, their courage and their honesty never questioned, which is what made their breakneck fall from grace so much more shocking.

## *A vow of nine crusader knights*

We cover the concept of pilgrimage in more detail in Chapter 2. Here, we must explain one thing: The other two major monotheistic faiths — Judaism and Islam — both practiced the obligation of pilgrimage to holy places. Although pilgrimage isn't written down in Christian ritual, it was no less important to medieval believers. Almost since the beginning, pilgrimage was considered a way to save a soul in peril. And Jerusalem was ground zero for Christians, the holiest of holies. Medieval mapmakers referred to it as the

“navel of the earth,” the center of all things. When the Holy Land was in the hands of the Christian Byzantine Empire, this was no problem. The roads were hazardous, yet people generally got there alive. But when the property was stolen by waves of Islamic Seljuq Turks in the 11th century, pilgrims were risking life and limb to get there. They were attacked on the road constantly, not only by the Turks, but by various unsavory bands of thieves and cutthroats. Going in groups didn’t help; the brigands were a lot tougher than the people who had come to pray at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

After the First Crusade, Jerusalem was back in the hands of Christians for the first time in four centuries. But afterward, the majority of the knights went home, back to their feudal obligations. There were barely enough men to garrison the city; there were none to protect the countryside.

One lone knight of Champagne named Hugues de Payens decided that there was something gravely wrong here. What good did it do to take back the Holy Land, if it was still too dangerous a place for pilgrims to visit? With the help of his brother in arms Godfrey de St. Omer of Picardy, they gathered together seven more knights, probably in the year 1119, and vowed to patrol the road from the coast to Jerusalem, in order to protect the Christian pilgrims. What made this vow remarkable — absolutely unprecedented in Christian history, in fact — was that they promised to live as monks as well. Theirs was the holiest of missions, and they decided that the drinking, whoring, and brawling of the typical knight was not appropriate for them. Instead, they voluntarily chose to live by the monastic rule, swearing poverty, chastity, and obedience, on top of the vow to put their lives on the line each day to see Christian pilgrims safely to Jerusalem.

The Templar order grew, though we have no figures from such an early period. They applied for official recognition from King Baldwin of Jerusalem, which he granted eagerly, offering them the plum quarters of the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount, just opposite his own palace. The Christians did not call this place Al-Aqsa, but rather the Temple of Solomon. From here came the various legends of the Temple of Solomon that would forever be associated with their name.

## ***Don't leave home without it: The Templars' role as international bankers***

After a time, the Templars decided that simply protecting pilgrims physically wasn't quite enough. Anything that they did to make the whole process easier was an act of grace. And the biggest problem pilgrims had was making safe passage carrying the money they needed to cover them for the long period of time that they'd be gone from home.

The Templars also became something of a travel agency for pilgrims, recommending routes and carriers, offering aid for injured or lost travelers, and even providing security vaults in which pilgrims could store their most precious valuables until they returned. Even kings availed themselves of this service; King John of England once gave over the Crown Jewels to the Templars for safekeeping, during one of the many and various periods in which he felt his position on the throne to be a bit shaky.

Templar banking was born, and it was a godsend to knights and pilgrims traveling such a distance. Out of it was created the West's first international banking system, a system not dissimilar from the one we have today.

Templars could help a Christian who wanted to mortgage his property to pay for his journey, giving him the cash, and then setting up various holding companies to help insure for the knight on Crusade that he didn't find his property bought out from underneath him before his return.

Say, for example, that you've decided to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. You're probably going to be gone at least a year. No matter how simply you travel, you're going to need access to funds on your journey, and particularly on your arrival. But the state of the roads to Jerusalem, not to mention the routes by ship, with the toughs and uglies hanging out at the docks, would make carrying your money on your person an unbelievably stupid thing to do. With the help of the Knights Templar, a pilgrim could travel with relatively little cold hard cash in his money belt. He could deposit his money at his local Templar commandery or preceptory, which were the Templar centers of Europe and the Near East. At the height of their power, there were an astounding 9,000 of Templar properties in Europe alone (although, admittedly, not all were preceptories). After making the deposit, a pilgrim was given a check. On the way to the Holy Land, he could present this check at any Templar preceptory and withdraw some or all his money.

They were definitely a full-service bank, and it's easy to see from these services that the Templars very soon found themselves indispensable in the day-to-day lives of nobles, merchants, and landowners in the 12th and 13th centuries. And as the *Crusader States* (the four Latin states founded by the Crusaders in the Holy Land at the beginning of the 12th century) became a fixture in the Near East, the Templars were there, negotiating, brokering treaties, helping the kings of Europe to deal with the Saracens who seemed so alien to them. The Templars knew the language and the culture of Islam, and they got very buddy-buddy with many Muslims as the centuries passed. Too buddy-buddy, according to the Inquisition, who used the Templars' knowledge of Eastern customs and faiths to build a case that their pure Christian faith had been "tainted" by this exposure to the infidel. Chapter 5 features a detailed discussion of this business of the "Syrianization" of the Frankish knights, and even more so of the Templars, a process that occurred over two centuries of contact with the exotic cultures of the East.

## *Builders*

Last but far from least, the Templars were builders. Many of their European preceptories were acquired properties, farms, and manor houses willed to them by the devout. But along the frontiers in Palestine, in Spain, and even in the Baltic, the Templars built magnificent commanderies to hold the Christian borders against the Muslims. These commanderies were like cities, and they had it all — chapel, armory, barracks, training grounds and classrooms, as well as equipment for fortification.

Although some of the commanderies are no longer in existence, many still stand, like Tomar in Portugal or Atlit in Syria. They are a testament to Templar skill as architects and masons. In fact, one of the more common theories linking the Freemasons to the Templars is the fact that Templars had the best stonemasons in the world working for them, and Freemasonry grew out of the great medieval guilds of the stonemasons. Countless other secret societies throughout history have either been accused of being Templars, or have proudly claimed a tie that may or may not exist. (For more on these various theories of Templars in other secret societies, turn to Chapter 8.)

## *Templars in Battle*

The Grand Master of the Knights Templar was a very important man in the war councils of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, as well as the other three Crusader States. The Crusader armies organized in Western Europe were a motley crew — true feudal knights in service to a crusading lord; the peasant vassals underneath them, who knew little of war but were tossed in to flesh out the troops; paid mercenaries in the service of the particular king or warlord on Crusade; and last but not least, the sea of pilgrims who drifted into the Holy Land during all the Crusades, the least militarily skilled of all. Men literally dropped by the local Crusader holdings in places like Acre after their arrival in Palestine, to see if they could pitch in and help for a few months, as if it were a barn raising. The Templars, with their skill and courage, were the cream at the top, as well as the glue that held this chaotic assortment together.

The legend of Templar superiority on the battlefield was no myth. In 1177, King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem and a force of 500 troops were pinned down by the Muslim warrior Saladin's army of 26,000. A contingent of just 80 Templars arrived to assist Baldwin. Through surprise and shrewd battle tactics, the Christian forces attacked Saladin at Montgisard. Saladin was forced to retreat with less than 3,000 of his soldiers left. The Templars were revered for their policy of being the first to take up the battle and the last to retreat.

The Templars, and the Frankish knights in general, depended more than anything else on the tactic of the mass charge, “the irresistible first shock,” as it was described by chronicler Anna Comnenus, daughter of the Byzantine emperor. Unfortunately, it wasn’t the well-ordered charge of our own times. The Turks were lighter and quicker, as well as being excellent horsemen. In other words, if the target of the charge could get out of the way quickly enough, the charge could degenerate into a disorganized mob moving too quickly to be reined in, like a Roman candle that couldn’t be called back. When that happened, the enemy was often able to encircle the knights for a counterattack. The charge had to be timed just right, so that it routed the main body of the enemy, and not a phony one deployed to draw them in. If it did so, it was usually devastating. The infamous Frankish charge was feared throughout the Near East, and the Templars were usually in the lead.

The most annoyingly effective Muslim tactic was to use their first-rate horsemen, quick and lightly armed for mobility, to harass the enemy while the enemy was on the march. This could go on for days at a time. The Turks loved to attack from the rear, a very effective ploy until the Templars began organizing lines with a powerful rear guard. The men hated the harassing rain of arrows that came, they said, like flies to cause them misery. There is evidence that, as time passed, the Templars moved forward with attempts to refashion the Christian army with some Eastern tactics. It’s a shame so many of the crusader kings were suspicious of the Templars and their “foreign ideas,” obstinately marching off their own way to destruction.

## *Betrayed, Excommunicated, and Hunted*

There is one more generality about the Templars that is often tossed about, and that’s the simple fact that, with the loss of the last Christian possessions in the Middle East, usually dated at the fall of the city of Acre in 1291, the Knights Templar had lost their *raison d’être*, the purpose for which they were formed. The problem with this theory is that, by that time, at the end of the 13th century, the Templars had undergone quite a metamorphosis, from a small band of fanatical Crusaders, to an unimaginably huge and influential organization of international bankers and diplomatic middlemen who had military commanderies and preceptories from London to the Slavic countries of the East, and all throughout the Mediterranean basin.

Yet, there’s no denying the fact that as the gilded luster wore off the Crusades, they became an investment in money and blood that the nations of Europe were no longer willing to make, because they were back to their old habits of making war against each other back home. It probably seemed to the Templars’ enemies to be just the right time to bring the Poor Knights to heel — and to steal their vast wealth in the process.

## *So where'd everybody go?*

It's true — after the order was outlawed by Pope Clement V in 1312, the Templars did drop off the radar map of history. As for where they went, it probably wasn't the same place for all of them. Many people offered refuge, such as the kings of Spain and Portugal, who created knightly orders to fight the Moors on the Iberian peninsula that strictly existed as a refuge for Templar knights. If Phillip the Fair didn't want these skilled warriors, the kings of Aragon and Navarre certainly did.

But there are dozens of theories about where the rest of the Templars went, and where the vast resources of their international operation disappeared to. Chapter 7 discusses the lost Templar treasure, which probably isn't lost at all, and presents several pretty disappointing answers for what probably happened to it. But that doesn't end the mystery. The Templar treasure of legend was the contents of the Templar commandery in Paris, their home office, as it were. The Templars were predominantly French knights; they became the virtual treasury of the French government in 1165. But there were lots of other commanderies and lots of other treasures, and all vanished without a trace. Chapter 17 takes a look at where some of the swag may have gone, so get out your shovel and your metal detector, and take a look.

## *The riddle of Templar symbols*

Like all special, secret, or elite organizations or brotherhoods, the Templars had a wide variety of symbols and codes that helped to bind them together, as well as to hold them apart from the commonality. At places throughout this book, we discuss Templar secrets and rituals, but for now, here are two of the most common Templar symbols: the Dual Knights (see Figure 1-2) and the Chi-Rho Cross (see Figure 1-3).



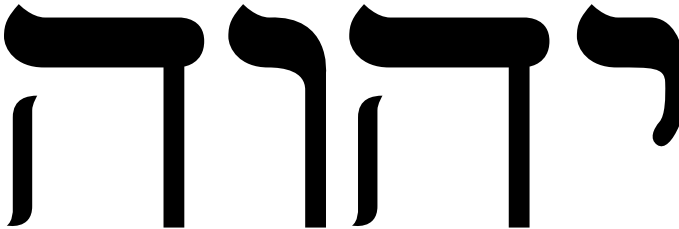
**Figure 1-2:**  
The symbol  
of the Dual  
Knights.

**Figure 1-3:**  
The Chi-Rho  
Cross, or  
*labarum*,  
made up of  
the first two  
letters in the  
Greek word  
for Christ.



There is no question that, for a Templar, the symbol of the Dual Knights was the most important one to the Order, and the oldest. Other symbols changed over the years; this one did not. It was a seal (upon which the statue in Figure 1-1 was based) picturing two knights riding on one horse, a symbol of the poverty and brotherhood of the Order. Other medieval symbols, like the Tetragrammaton (the four Hebrew letters that symbolized the unspeakable name of God; see Figure 1-4) or the Chi-Rho Cross would be used by other organizations. But if you see two medieval knights on one horse, you're looking at a Templar artifact.

**Figure 1-4:**  
The Hebrew  
Tetragram-  
maton, the  
unspeakable  
name of  
God.



All legends aside, the Cross that Constantine saw in the sky just before battle that converted him to Christianity was the Chi-Rho (pronounced like the Egyptian city Cairo) Cross. It consists of an X overlaid with a skinny P inside, often surrounded by a round or oval cartouche. Though the cross we know today was already taking over, the Chi-Rho Cross remained very popular with Templars. The Chi-Rho also flourished once again by the Renaissance. The symbol comes from the first two Greek letters in the word *Christ*; it's sometimes called the *labarum*, the word for the banner Constantine carried into battle that bore this icon. Other Christian symbols used similar logic, such as the IHS or IHC symbol, from the first three Greek letters in the name *Jesus*. The most famous organization that uses the Chi-Rho Cross today is the Jesuits of the Catholic Church.

## *Templars in the 21st Century*

Thanks to a wide variety of books and films, the Templars live on, almost as vibrantly as they did in the Victorian era, when the fascination with them was at its peak. As always, the Templars are tied to that other myth known to every English schoolboy, the Holy Grail. The Templars were the Grail knights, and as Grail theories change over the centuries, the outlook on the Templars changed along with it.

### *Templars and the Grail quest*

To tell the truth, despite humanity's fascination with the Grail, it had sort of gone out of fashion in the last few decades. From medieval troubadours to Celtic bards, Victorian poets to Hitler's SS, many and various cultures have had a love affair with the Grail. But the post-World War II generation seemed to look on it as a relic of the distant past. John Boorman's sumptuously gorgeous film *Excalibur* was the last time that a big money movie took the Grail legends seriously, instead of putting some post-modern occult twist on the story, or playing it for straight comedy, Monty Python-style. Those with a special interest in medieval history, or in the occult, as with the growing community of Wiccans and New Agers, have always had a special fascination with the Grail. But for the most part, it wasn't a very popular myth anymore.

Then *The Da Vinci Code* shambled into your nearest bookstore, and suddenly, without any PR behind it, the book was a smash, and the Grail was all over the place again, as it has been so many times in the past. That's the measure of a truly great myth: It may wax and wane, but it's always there to be picked up and reinterpreted for a new generation. Right now, amateur history buffs, seasoned archeologists, and various university- and privately-funded associations are questing for the Grail as never before. And many of them are convinced that the key to the discovery of the Grail lies in the history of the Templars, the Cathars, and many other organizations featured in this book.

### *Templars and the fringe*

Yes, we know. We're going to get called "judgmental," "close-minded," and "dogmatic," not to mention the ever-popular "blinded by orthodoxy." Or perhaps just willing stooges of the new world order. But we may just as well come right out and say it — the Knights Templar and the lunatic fringe have had a love affair going on for years. The birth of the Templar cock-and-bull industry occurred in 1798, with the publication of a book by a Frenchman named Cadet de Gassicourt, called *The Tomb of Jacques Molay*. De Gassicourt, like everyone else in France, was standing amid the blood-soaked wreckage left behind after the French Revolution, trying to figure out how it all happened. There just had to be *somebody* to blame. Finding a scapegoat is, in essence, what de Gassicourt did.



## Thanks a lot, Sir Walter Scott

Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* is only the latest book to create renewed interest in the Knights Templar. Another book, written two centuries ago, almost single-handedly rescued the Templars from obscurity. Unfortunately, it cast the order in a less than admirable light.

Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) told the tale of Richard the Lionheart's return to England from the Crusades, and the evil plotting of his brother John to keep him off the throne. The story revolves around the character of Wilfred of Ivanhoe, a knight who was on Crusade with Richard, and his rival Brian de Bois-Guilbert, a decidedly impious Templar knight.

*Ivanhoe* was unimaginably popular in England and the United States in the early 1800s. Apart from creating the modern legend of the character of Robin Hood, the book created an international mania for all things medieval, and was instrumental in spreading the cultural movement of Romanticism in literature. It was unquestionably responsible, in part, for the profusion of fraternal orders that sprang up all around the world in the 1800s, patterning themselves after medieval knights.

The American satirist Mark Twain was less than enthusiastic. In his 1883 memoir *Life On The Mississippi*, Twain places the blame of the U.S. Civil War firmly at the feet of Sir Walter Scott and *Ivanhoe*. According to Twain, Scott

set the world in love with dreams and phantoms; with decayed and swinish forms of religion; with decayed and degraded systems of government; with the sillinesses and emptinesses, sham grandeurs, sham

gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society. He did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote.

Absolutely everyone read *Ivanhoe*, and its tales of the knights so enthralled Southern society with its lofty titles of nobility and florid prose that it truly did affect the writing, speech, and social attitudes of the Southern aristocracy. Twain railed that Scott's influence

made every gentleman in the South a Major or a Colonel, or a General or a Judge, before the war; and it was he, also, that made these gentlemen value these bogus decorations. For it was he that created . . . reverence for rank and caste, and pride and pleasure in them. . . . Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war.

Scott followed *Ivanhoe* with *The Talisman* (1825), which told the tale of King Richard in the Holy Land. A key character was the wise, virtuous, moral, and heroic Muslim warrior, Saladin (see Chapter 5). As in *The Da Vinci Code*, the facts didn't get in the way of a good story — again, the Templars were made the bad guys. Scott's fictional version of the Crusades, in which the 11th-century Muslims are kind, peace-loving pacifists attacked by thick-headed, brutish, kill-crazy Christians has enraged historians for almost 200 years, yet it influences popular perceptions to this day.

For men like de Gassicourt, who thought of themselves as being civilized, finding someone to blame was essential, just so they could all go on looking into the shaving mirror every morning. De Gassicourt found his scapegoat in two places — the Templars and the Freemasons. Actually, as far as he was concerned, it was one place — they were, in his mind, one and the same. His

theory was that the Templars, excommunicated and scattered, spent five centuries plotting their vengeance on the French crown. To get it, they founded the brotherhood of the Freemasons, and then awaited their opportunity to kill the king and take their vengeance, raining death on thousands of Frenchmen in the process. Contrived, unfounded, unprovable, and, for want of a better term, daffy, it nevertheless captured the imagination of a large portion of the public, that portion that had always had suspicions about the secret brotherhood of the Freemasons. The books came thick and fast throughout the 19th century, following in de Gassicourt's footsteps. They were all very popular.

Which brings us to the present, and a dynamic that hasn't changed much in two centuries. The books out there with wacko theories about the Templars could fill a warehouse, running the gamut in their absurd conjecture, from Templars using a "death ray" from the Ark of the Covenant to win the Battle of Bannockburn for the Scots, to the Templars as shape-shifting reptilian aliens, left here eons ago by visitors from another planet. The shame of it is that the work of serious historians like Malcolm Barber, Stephen Dafoe, and Helen Nicholson can get lost in this avalanche of horse manure. So, when interesting speculation exists, as in books like *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* or *The Templar Revelation*, we present this information *as speculation*. As for the rest, it gets mentioned once in a while. You know, just for laughs.