

# Analysis of the Fall of the Templars in the History of International Relations.

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**Abstract.** The Order of the Temple was one of the most powerful and wealthy institutions of the medieval period, persecuted at the command of Philip IV of France. Its assets were confiscated and its members were arrested and tortured as heretics. The present research aims to analyze the process of the Templars' fall in the context of international relations and its consequences for European and world nations. Through bibliographic sources, we can understand that the legacy left by the Templars in their fall is present even today, along with the historical legacy of this event in the great navigations, the formation of Portugal, the demoralization of the papacy, the autonomy of religious orders, and the Hundred Years' War.

**Keywords.** Templars, Inquisition, History of International Relations, Christianity, Middle Ages.

## 1. Introduction

For centuries in the history of the Middle Ages, the power of the Catholic Church stood as a great influence on the way in which relations between states were conducted. The power to initiate and end wars, excommunicate and forgive kings, declare ecclesiastical rules that would reverberate in the appropriation and accumulation of lands, and even in the legitimacy of a monarch to be crowned or not by the highest pontiffs are some examples of how the Church was present on the agenda of the foreign policy of the medieval kingdoms. Even though this power was expressed subtly, the Church began to adopt more visible measures for its projection of power with the creation of the Christian chivalric orders that answered directly to the Pope, exercising their military functions in the crusades. The Order of the Knights Templar went from a humble origin to a rich and prosperous institution with thousands of members from various ethnicities and chapters spread throughout Europe.

The persecution and fall of such a great bastion orchestrated by the schemes of Philip IV of France is an extremely relevant research topic for the history of international relations, as it is a key point in understanding how rulers began to directly confront the power of the Church in order to replace religious political agendas with fully state agendas. Philip IV's expansionism and his hunt for the Templars are directly linked to his attempt to project French

power to the other members of the international system of his reign, as well as to increase the power of the crown vis-à-vis feudal vassals and to confront the power of the pope, even if illegally using the mechanisms of the Church to achieve personal goals of the French crown. These actions reverberate not only with consequences adopted in the French wars, the great navigations, and the independence of Scotland but also for the remaining orders, such as the Teutonic and Hospitaller orders, to safeguard their goals of remaining active in the international system.

Methodologically, this research has a qualitative, basic, and bibliographical nature, using a vast framework of historical journals about the Order of the Temple. Therefore, the aim of this research is to demonstrate how the end of the Templar order, being such a powerful institution, historically affected international relations, with the article organized based on the specific research objectives in sessions for better organization: 1) introduction; 2) the second session explaining the origin and context of the order; 3) the third session explaining the process of the trials of the Templars and their causes; 4) the fourth session to elucidate the consequences of the fall for international relations; 5) the conclusion, and 6) the references of the research.

## 2. The Poor Knights

When Pope Urban II declared the beginning of what would become the Crusades in 1099, calling on all of Christendom to fight against the infidels in the "holy land" of Palestine, the Christian kingdoms united in a great march towards this goal. Founded between 1118 and 1119, the Order of the Temple was the result of the success of the first crusade with the establishment of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Hugues de Payens and other knights also gathered at the initiative of Baldwin II, King of Jerusalem, with the aim of creating a Catholic institution to protect Christian pilgrims who made their way to the Holy Land [1].

The context of its foundation is directly linked to the projection of papal power, since before its foundation Pope Paschal II ratified the bull "Pie postulatio voluntatis," in which the order of the Knights Hospitaller, another organization similar to the Templars and originating from the hospital in Jerusalem, came to respond directly to the pope [2], similar to a private army.

The Templars grew and became a rich and powerful institution with chapters in many Christian kingdoms, mostly in France, with nearly 15,000 knights, each of whom had sergeants and squires at their disposal. This success is attributed to various factors, such as the maintenance of acquired lands, donations and grants, surveillance of roads and commercial routes, tithes, and the management of financial credit institutions similar to banks that ensured the property of pilgrims who often feared being robbed during their travels [3].

Taking an internationalist analysis approach and considering its peak, the Order of the Temple played an important role in the unfolding of the military conflicts between the Christian kingdoms and the Muslim powers of the period, particularly with the creation of fortresses and military aid. The knights participated in important battles, with a vital role in the "Reconquista" war of the Iberian Christian kingdoms against the southern caliphates. This relevance can be evidenced mainly in the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, in which King Alfonso VIII of Spain fought against the Muslim army led by the Almohad Caliph Muhammad al-Nasir, with the Templars playing a very important role in projecting Spanish power and playing a crucial role in the victory of Christian forces that earned them many lands on the Iberian peninsula.

The year 1291 is a crucial milestone to understand the decline of the Order and the "loss" of its role for the Christian kingdoms. On this date, the city of Acre, the last valuable bastion of the Christians in the Holy Land, fell into the hands of the Mamluks of Egypt led by Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil in successive victories that destroyed the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Forced to retreat to their bases in Cyprus, the Templars led by Jacques de Molay, the last grand master of the order, began to devise plans for a possible reconquest. [4]

Upon analyzing historical documents of the period, it becomes apparent that Jacques de Molay's intentions were to garner support from European Christian kings such as Edward I of England, Philip IV of France, and the Iberian monarchs in order to motivate a new crusade to the Holy Land [5], as well as a military alliance with the Mongols to take the coastal regions from the Mamluks. The alliance between the Mongols and the Franks had been discussed and assisted by Jacques along with King Philip IV of France for the execution of a coordinated attack with Ghazan Khan, something that did not materialize due to internal wars within the Khanate of Ghazan. [6]

Furthermore, it is important to note that the kings of the time were facing turbulent periods in their own kingdoms, which could have contributed to their lack of support for Molay's plans. Regarding the international relations of the time, King Edward I was dealing with the prelude to the Scottish Wars of Independence after the death of Alexander III, king of Scotland, as well as consolidating his power in Wales after his conquests, in addition to conflicts with France over sovereignty in Flanders in the northern coast of Europe. As previously mentioned, Philip IV was focused on increasing his conquests to combat English power in continental Europe, sponsoring wars in Flanders as a way to project French power. The Spanish and Portuguese Iberian kings were engaged in the Reconquista wars against the Islamic kingdoms of Al-Andalus, which in part put them on the "front line" of the crusades in Europe, with their efforts for Christianity theoretically being prioritized there rather than in Jerusalem.

All of these events combined led to the Siege of Ruad in 1302, in which all Christian forces were definitively expelled from the Holy Land. The total collapse led Jacques de Molay to continue leading his efforts from Cyprus, with intentions of gathering the hospital and Teutonic orders for future campaigns. Molay was called by Pope Clement V for a possible "crusade" that would definitively unite all Christian kingdoms against the Muslims [7], but upon returning to France, he was confronted with the intrigues of Philip IV and accusations of heresy against his order, with the developments and consequences of these persecutions being discussed in the next subsection.

## 3. Persecution and Trials

When analyzing the end of the Order of the Temple, we must be aware of three important points: i) the geopolitical context of the European kingdoms, as already explained, in which monarchs sought greater centralization and control of the State vis-à-vis the Church and fought parallel wars that led to a lack of support for the Crusades, ii) the exceptionality of Philip IV of France, and iii) the questioning of papal power.

Regarding the last two points, since the first has already been explained in the previous subchapter,

King Philip IV of France was the central figure in the persecution and downfall of the Templars. Philip, known as the "Fair," had accumulated immense debts with the Order of the Temple, with around 400,000 florins being confiscated due to the deficits of the French king [8]. Philip had incurred these debts to finance his wars against Flanders and other rebellious lords, a way to create a personal army and increase his power. Another interesting factor is that the Templars' exemption from clerical taxes gave them considerable autonomy to manage their lands, which irritated the king.

A true campaign of persecution was carried out with the support of the King of France and his adviser Nogaret. In summary, the Templars were accused of heresy, treason, homosexuality, and acts such as spitting on the cross, worshiping the devil, and paganism. The French Pope Clement V was pressured by the French King to authorize the arrests, with Philip IV having already created diplomatic tensions with the former Pope Boniface. Clement V gave in after severe threats, and with the bull "Pastoralis Praeeminentiae" he ordered all the monarchs of the Christian kingdoms to capture the Templars and confiscate their lands in favor of the papacy in the year 1307 [4].

The way in which all these events occurred was rapid but planned. Once captured, the Templars were subjected to various tortures in order to confess their crimes. According to Barber, Jacques de Molay and his preceptors "confessed" their crimes through torture but denied them all later in front of the inquisitorial cardinals and exposed judges. They were also urged to reveal the location of other members of the order as well as the wealth they had accumulated [4].

In 1308, Pope Clement V attempted to revoke his bull to stop the inquisition trials, but after experiencing physical threats from the French King, he allowed the processes to continue. This period of capture was marked by the military presence of the French King in maintaining his armies as a threat to the pope stationed on his lands, as a precautionary measure to ensure his will was done [4].

Finally, on March 18, 1314, the last high-ranking leaders were brought before the inquisitorial courts and sentenced to life imprisonment. The Grand Master Jacques de Molay and Guy D'Auvergne (Geoffrey de Charney), preceptor of Normandy, were outraged by the accusations and claimed that the Order of the Temple was sacred and pure, with all the accusations being lies, while Hugh of Pairaud and Geoffrey of Gonneville, Preceptor of Aquitaine remained silent. Molay and D'Auvergne were burned at the stake as heretics on the banks of the Seine in Paris [4]. In the next subsection, we will see how this persecution impacted the international system, and what was the reaction of the other nations of the time.

## 4. Impact of the Fall

As soon as the "Pastoralis praeeminentiae" bull was released, all Christian kings were obliged to capture the Templars as heretics. Even if it was not the personal will of other kings, as was the case with Philip IV, most obeyed this order. The marriage of Philip IV's daughter to Edward II of England would be the prelude to the future claims of English kings to the French throne, which would lead to the Hundred Years' War. King Edward II was dealing with the shadow left by his father, Edward I, with the wars with France now appeased and rebellious Scotland that had incurred many debts for the English crown, and saw in the papal bull of imprisonment of the Temple the same opportunity as Philip IV to recover that money. Reports show that trials in the British Isles (England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland) occurred along with captures, but the Templars were kept in much more comfortable situations than in France, as did the Iberian kingdoms [4].

Two kingdoms, however, remained more open to receiving Templars who were refugees and fleeing constant persecution: Portugal and Scotland. The Scots had been fighting their war of independence against English domination for years, with Robert The Bruce being a great supporter of the order of the temple. Robert The Bruce had been excommunicated by the pope after assassinating Lord Comyn, one of his opponents, in an abbey, and was later absolved by Wishart, Bishop of St. Andrews. Wishart himself presided over the "trials" of the Templars who were captured in Scotland, but sympathized with their situation, saying he had no authority to judge them [4]. According to Rogan in an article on Roslyn Chapel, there is a legend that the Templars assisted Robert The Bruce in the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, although there is still no proven historical evidence of this appearance [9]. The disagreements with the pope, Bruce's excommunication and the power of his bishops, with Wishart even having been one of the guardians of Scotland, allow us to understand that these may have been reasons why Scotland did not fully obey the papal bull.

The Templar presence in Portugal was extremely strong with a great influence on the country's culture. For centuries, even before its foundation, the Portuguese kingdom was tied to the same crusader spirit of Reconquista against the Muslims as its Spanish neighbors. The strong permanence of the Order of the Temple is due to differences in activities carried out by the Templars on Portuguese soil. According to Silva, the Templar knights of France and England were focused on the economic and financial activities of the Order. The friars who served in the Iberian Peninsula, mainly in the early years of the Order, integrated themselves into the Reconquista Wars. Focused on military activities, the temple in Portugal played a major role in recruiting the nobility, concentrating its efforts on increasing the ranks and chapters throughout Portuguese territory [10].

Another important factor to mention is that the Templars had strong ties with the Portuguese royal family. Unlike other monarchs, Portuguese kings focused on limiting the power of the Templars to avoid possible imbalance. Thus, for every benefit the Order received, they also received an equivalent obligation. The loyalty of the Templars to the crown, cultivated since the beginning, fostered longevity in Portugal. Some of these obligations included: Portuguese Templars could not leave the kingdom to fight in crusades abroad, they had to pay for their own equipment, they had the duty to receive and host the king and his dignitaries, assist in the king's battles against the Moors without pay or spoils, among others. Despite being limited by the authority of the crown, the Order was granted lands and castles, which allowed it to grow even more. [10].

It is known that although receiving direct instructions from the Pope to continue with the tortures and imprisonments, Portugal was extremely contrary to the persecution of the temple that was being carried out. As evidenced, the Order had done an extremely important job in the consolidation of Portugal as a kingdom, which made it sacred in the Portuguese imagination. King Dinis of Portugal, in 1319, in order to maintain the structures of the temple in Portugal, asked the Pope to create a new Order, the Order of Christ, which would play an extremely important role in the great Portuguese maritime explorations to the lands of the new world.

For the Papacy, the fall of the Order of the Temple was a disastrous diminution of its power, as it had not only considerably limited its projection of military power within the Christian kingdoms as a form of pressure, but had also largely lost the chance of reconquering the lands of Palestine [11]. As a military order, many wonder why the knights did not resist the power of Philip IV, as well as the impartiality of Clement V in accepting the king's demands. The fact is that the Pope at the time resided in Avignon, French territory, with Philip IV exerting direct pressure on the Pope through his own royal military forces. Clement V was convinced to yield, and out of fear and self-interest did not call the temple against the King of France for fear of a conflict with the entire kingdom. Even though a rebellion could have occurred, the capture of the Templars was rapid and systematic, with the leaders being subjected to torture and imprisonment, not allowing for an effective reaction from the knights.

The dissolution of the Order not only demoralized the Pope but also led to the loss of his trust and support by other orders such as the Hospitallers and Teutonic, who sought more autonomy [12]. This is evident when we see how the Teutonic grew independently due to the northern crusades in the frontier region of the Holy Roman Empire. The Teutonic formulated a true "State" controlled by the Order in East Prussia, with this papal demoralization caused by the persecution of the Templars being reflected even with the conversion of many Teutonic members and leaders to Protestantism after the religious reforms of Luther and Calvin. The Teutonic

State exerted political and military influence in the region, leading to conflicts with other political powers such as Poland, Lithuania, and Russia until its dissolution in conflicts with these states.

Another significant consequence of the fall and persecution of the Templars for international relations is the autonomy acquired by the Hospitaller Order, which sought to establish its roots in Rhodes and later in Malta. The Hospitallers maintained the support of the Christian kingdoms by defending the Mediterranean Sea against the Ottoman Turks, becoming a maritime power, with emphasis on the Siege of Malta in which, after the victory, the Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette gained many possessions and riches for the island's infrastructure. The Order of Malta still exists today as an international health organization and comes from this crusader heritage.

Although the Order was destroyed, with its heir being founded in Portugal as already explained, many historians and researchers believe that Philip IV's campaign was a true failure: Barber says that Jacques de Molay and other Templar leaders' permanent denial of any heresy charges was a reason why Philip could not truly incriminate the knights [13], which led him to increase his control over the Church [4]. Jones says that this failure created even more gaps to be found by scholars [14]. Still in debt, and now with tensions throughout Europe, Philip IV had condemned France to an era of wars and misery, seen as a major driving force for the future Hundred Years' War. Even with many mysteries, it is said that the King died from a curse prophesied by Jacques de Molay on his deathbed on the scaffold [3].

When we bring all this information to the present day, we can directly link the fall of the Templars and the martyrdom of Jacques DeMolay with the founding of the DeMolay Order in 1919 by the Mason Frank Sherman Land. The DeMolay Order is a youth organization sponsored by the Masons with the aim of developing values of leadership, brotherhood, and philanthropy among male youths aged 12 to 21, with its precepts, including its name, inspired by the events that led to the Templars' death under the Inquisition.

According to Cretella Neto, after the creation of the League of Nations by Woodrow Wilson, there was a real breakthrough for the promotion of international organizations. This breakthrough increased during the 20th century, considering the 4th phase of the history of international organizations, in the post-Cold War era, the massive proliferation of government and non-governmental organizations [15]. Using liberal theory, we can observe that the DeMolay Order can be considered an example of how non-governmental organizations can play an important role in promoting peace, cooperation, and international solidarity. As an organization that promotes universal values, the DeMolay Order can help build bridges between cultures and peoples, promoting mutual understanding and cooperation, as well as carrying out humanitarian and community

projects in many countries, contributing to the well-being of many communities [16]. Although not directly linked to the Templar Order in an organizational way, the DeMolay Order is a legacy of the values defended by the Templar knights who, innocent and accused of heresy, preferred to die rather than betray their ideals, being a highly prestigious international non-governmental organization today.

## 5. Conclusion

Due to the aforementioned information, we can understand that the fall of the Knights Templar had a significant impact on international relations at the time and currently, causing consequences that would reverberate later in the international system, such as the creation of the Teutonic State, the Age of Discovery, and the diminishment of papal power in the face of monarchical authoritarianism. The way in which the papal bull was received differently by the kings of European nations shows that, in truth, European kings no longer saw the pope as having the same authority as in the early medieval period, with the accusation of heresy against the order and its leaders, which resulted in its dissolution, being a major blow to the power of the papacy, raising questions about the use of the Inquisition and the separation between the state and the church. The Templar knights left an active legacy in the formulation of Iberian kingdoms, especially in Portugal, and their presence in the crusades was of vital importance for all the conflicts that ensued. Additionally, the fall of the order along with the failure of Philip IV put France in a risky situation that would lead to future conflicts with England. The demoralization of the pope motivated the other chivalric orders to become more autonomous and gradually distance themselves from the pontiff. Today, the martyrdom of the Templars and their grand master Jacques de Molay is even referenced by the DeMolay Order, a non-governmental organization operating philanthropically on an international level around the world, and there are still many mysteries to be unraveled about the trial of the Templars and its consequences, which makes them a very relevant object of study for all human sciences, including international relations.

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