



The History of the Knights Templar

Charles Addison

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Addison's *The History of the Knights Templar* is a fascinating history of the ancient order, published in the 19th century. The Order of the Temple of Solomon, also known as the Templars or the Knights Templar, is one of the best-known and least-understood groups in history. They appear prominently in everything from novels (*The Da Vinci Code*) to films (as the Knights of the Cruciform Sword in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*) to videogames (*Assassin's Creed*). In these stories, they are a sinister cult that manipulated historical events since the Middle Ages, via intimidation and assassination. They are usually connected to the Freemasons and, sometimes, to other historical cults like the Hindu Thuggees. The real Templars were both more mundane and more fascinating than the myths and legends. They were the first military religious order – monks who were also knights. The founding members were veterans of the First Crusade in Palestine and their main goal was, in fact, benign. They formed their group as a small tertiary order (Lay people who took monastic vows, but lived in the larger community) in Jerusalem, policing the pilgrim routes and shrines of the Levant and protecting travelers from the many bandits that infested the area. Even though they were used as the core of Crusader armies during the later crusades, the Templars never wavered from their original goal. The Templars were split into knights (about ten percent of the Order), sergeants and chaplains (the other ninety percent), with the non-noble sergeants comprising the majority of the Order, according to historians like Malcolm Barber in his history of the Order, *The New Knighthood*. The knights fought in the main part of the Templar army, but the sergeants appear to have backed up the knights in battle, both as horsemen and as a small infantry. The sergeants also worked as servants and in non-military support functions on the Templar farms (granges) that supported the Order. The chaplains were a small group of priests who were rotated into the Order on a temporary basis and served the monks' religious needs. Like other secretive groups, the mystery surrounding the Templars has helped their legacy endure. While some conspiracy theorists attempt to tie the group to other alleged secret societies like the Illuminati, other groups have tried to assert connections with the Templars to bolster their own credentials. Who they were and what they had in their possession continue to be a source of great intrigue even among non-historical circles.

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