

was a cache of documents dating from the siege of the castle in 1217-18 during the Albigensian Crusade.

The documents were mostly religious and philosophical texts relating to the Cathar heresy, and Fouchet was an expert on Cathar history. As he studied the documents he found some relating to the Knights Templar, who survived the Albigensian Crusade but were disbanded about a century later.

I spent the whole of that night poring over Fouchet's notes. At first I suspected Fouchet had fallen prey to the kind of conspiracy theories that have always dogged serious Templar scholarship. To my surprise I found Fouchet's facts unassailable, his arguments sound, and his tone manifestly sane. I decided to do as he asked, and you hold the first results of that process in your hands. It is hoped that deeper and more detailed coverage of Fouchet's research will appear over the next few years in peer-reviewed journals.

One sentence in Fouchet's letter still puzzles me. "You must publish," he said, "before they can cover the old fiction with a new one." If "they" are the Templars, or some group claiming the inheritance of their legacy, then it seems the "Plantard conspiracy" – and other Templar myths – were deliberate and well-constructed fictions.

For now, readers must come to their own conclusions and hope, as I do, that someone with the necessary expertise and resources will take up the research that Émile Fouchet can no longer finish.



Jacques de Molay, last official Grand Master of the Knights Templar. In the absence of convincing contemporary likenesses, this later image has become the most influential depiction. (Mary Evans Picture Library / Alamy)

# Origins and Growth

The history of the Knights Templar, from their founding in 1119 to the execution of the last Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, in 1314, is sufficiently well known that it need only be covered here in outline. More details can be found in many excellent sources, some of which are listed in the bibliography.

In addition to the generally accepted history of the Order, the following pages also discuss various points raised in Fouchet's notes, and the startling conclusions he drew from his research.

## The Founding

In July of 1099 the armies of the First Crusade captured Jerusalem, bringing the Holy Lands of the Middle East under Christian control after more than 450 years of Muslim domination. Around 1119 nine French knights, including Hugues de Payens, André de Montbard, and Godfrey de Saint-Omer, approached King Baldwin II of Jerusalem with a proposal to establish an order of knights on monastic lines, whose duty would be to protect pilgrims as they traveled to Jerusalem.

The knights were accommodated in the captured al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount, close to the site of Solomon's Temple. They named themselves the "Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon," which soon became abbreviated to "Knights of the Temple" or "Knights Templar."



Pope Honorius II presides over the Order's official foundation at the Council of Troyes. (INTERFOTO / Alamy)

Their fame spread to Europe, where they returned in 1127 to a heroes' welcome. Leading churchman Bernard (later Saint Bernard) of Clairvaux became their champion, writing *De Laude Novae Militae* ("In Praise of the New Knighthood") and playing a leading role in the 1128 (1129 according to some sources) Council of Troyes at which Pope Honorius II gave their order official status. Hugues de Payens was established as the Templars' first Grand Master.

After this official recognition gifts of money and lands poured in, along with a flood of eager recruits. The Order was further strengthened in 1139 by a bull of Pope Innocent II titled *Omne Datum Optimum* ("Every Perfect Gift"), which exempted members of the Order from the laws of the kingdoms in which they operated. They could pass freely across borders, were exempt from taxation, and answered only to the pope. No king could command the Templars.

## Contemporary Records

Guillaume de Tyre, our main source for the Templars' early history, was born more than a decade after the Order was allegedly founded. When he was writing, between 1170 and 1184, the Templars were already well established and influential.

King Baldwin's own chronicler was his chaplain Fulk, or Fulcher, de Chartres. Fulk himself does not even mention Hugues de Payens. This is curious, as Fulk would surely have witnessed his master's meeting with the nine poor knights.

In fact, nowhere in the records of the time is there any mention of de Payens and his knights being active in the Holy Land. Even the later accounts fail to record any action in which they protected pilgrims. One must wonder how nine impoverished knights could hope to protect so many travelers in such a large area; so far no one has been able to answer this question.

According to Fouchet, the story of the nine poor knights seems less like history and more like a *post facto* origin story fabricated for an organization that already existed.



Bernard was given the Abbey of Clairvaux by Count Hugh of Champagne, the head of the Troyes cabal. (INTERFOTO / Alamy)