

## *The Chinon Parchment*

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It is a cloudy day on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, 1314. Jacques de Molay, the Last Grand Master of the Order of the Knights Templar, Geoffroi de Charney, Master of Normandy, Hugues de Peraud, Visitor of France, and Godefroi de Gonneville, Master of Aquitaine, stand bound and tied to a post upon a scaffold before the people of France in front of Notre Dame. A small fire is set below their feet. This fire is not a monstrous one in size, which can engulf them in a wave of flames, but rather a small and torturous fire that will boil and explode them from the inside out. These men of faith and of the cross are now confined to an agonizing and very painful death. Their charges are that of heresy and blasphemy towards the church. Yet, at the same time, a piece of parchment, written and notarized by church officials, lies within the Vatican that tells otherwise.

The Knights Templar were a monastic order that was created, with the help of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, during the first crusade to assist travelers in their adventures towards the Holy Land or Jerusalem. Their allegiance was solely to the Pope only and they did not have to answer to any king, principality, or person. They did not even have to pay taxes to the church. They were Christian warrior monks who were known for the red cross upon a white mantle uniform that they wore in and out of battle. They were fierce warriors who often took a life of chastity and committed their entire life to the order. There were initiation rituals that were conferred upon new knights to enter the order as well. These were secretive and were not allowed to be discussed outside of the rite being performed.

They enjoyed a massive amount of wealth as they became more popular. Various people would leave their estates to the Order when they died or would give donations of property and wealth to them as well. At one time, all of Iberia was owned, property wise, to the Knights Templar. They started common banking practices that we use even today. They issued traveler's checks and gave loans to persons, including kings of kingdoms.<sup>1</sup> They built particular round-like churches in several cities and countries. The Templar church in London and Segovia, Spain, still remain to this very day. Their demise would accompany the end of the crusades mixed with those of both a weak Pope and an avaricious king.

So the question arises, if the Knights Templar only took orders from one person, the Pope, why then did they still become imprisoned in France and eventually killed when the Pope and church absolved the Knights Templar of all their blasphemies? We shall see for various reasons that the Pope was a weak Pope at that specific time in history and the destitute King of France was looking to acquire new wealth from the Knights Templar to pay for his debts. Not only this but that there is no level of continuity between the persecution and trials of Templars outside France.

When considering the nature and category to which my primary source belongs to, it is plain to see that it falls into a couple of categories. In trying to consider the options of placing one's primary source, it would be understandable to place my primary source, The Chinon Parchment, under the category of a professional and formal church document. It is, first and foremost, an official Catholic Church document or parchment that has been notarized and signed by various cardinals, church officials, and notaries.

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<sup>1</sup> [The History Channel](#), *Decoding the Past: The Templar Code*, video documentary, November 7, 2005, written by Marcy Marzuni.

That being said, it was written in Latin in the year 1308. This means that I needed a translation of said text. One source is a website and one is an actual physical hard-copy text. The format of the text differs from my sources for one is a website and one is a book that can double as a secondary source. I have two sources to look from about the translation and compare and contrast the translations. The website from which my source is found is from [inrebus.com](http://inrebus.com). My other source is entitled, "The Knights Templar Absolution: The Chinon Parchment and the History of the Poor Knights of Christ", by author A.A. Grishin.

I believe that both of these sources are plausible and trustworthy. Even though my ".com" source might seem suspicious, I believe it to be trustworthy owing to the fact that the website is a Latin translation source and was one of the first, if not the first source, to translate the Chinon Parchment. Considering my second source for my primary source, A.A. Grishin has experience with translating works in the field of classical Latin poetry and has translated Medieval and classical prose and poetry. His book offers both his translation and the original text in Latin. His book I will solely refer to in my studies and disregard the .com website. In addition, this text is also considered a secondary source for the author tries to answer several of his own questions about the parchment and discusses its meaning.

When considering the date or period of time for which the Chinon Parchment was recorded and covers is quite easy. The document is dated August 17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>, 1308 and was written and notarized in the town of Chinon, diocese of Tours. Although this document was written at this period, the document explains events and occurrences which were done prior to the document being made. For instance, the document discusses certain rites for which the Knights Templar are accused of performing acts which are sins in the eyes of the mother church. Also,

the capture and charges brought upon the Templars were made in the year before, Friday 13<sup>th</sup> of October, 1307.

The reason why it was written and published is a part of my main question about the parchment. The parchment, at face value, seems to be written because of an inquiry from Pope Clement V. He wished and ordered for several church officials to gather and really get to the basic understanding of these accusations against the Knights Templar and understand if there truly is any validity to the accusations against them. If there wasn't, then they were to be absolved of their sins and accusations and be allowed back into the graces of the church and receive communion once again. Once the parchment was finished it was to be presented to the Pope for his consideration. So from looking at it, the document is one part investigation and one part pseudo-papal bull to possibly release the Templars from constraint. This goes hand in hand with the question though because we already know the outcome of those in captivity and who are being questioned. If the Templars and their order are absolved of sin and charges dropped against them, then why were they still kept in captivity until 1314 when they eventually were murdered?

If they are absolved of their charges, then one might "check-off" a motive for further captivity by the church and instead look towards monarchs of countries or kingdoms who had an interest in the capture of the Knights Templar, i.e. King Philip "le bel" of France. When considering the nature of what the research should entail, pertaining to the subject, you can come into some difficulty. The most concise research being done on the Chinon Parchment and the trial of the Templars is currently in progress right now and the accounts of the Templars and the various motives behind the causation are still being debated by scholars.

The central question is one that is very new. If the Chinon Parchment absolves the Knights Templar of their sins and allows them to take communion in the church, then why were they still kept imprisoned and eventually burnt at the stake? If it weren't for my prior research and involvement with the Knights Templar, then I would have disbanded the question all together and picked something easier to research into. Although, my 24th Great Grandfather was the 11<sup>th</sup> Grand Master of the Order and I am myself a Knights Templar Freemason, the research is all too enjoyable for me. Therefore the resources that I am searching for (most I already have in my library) are ones that I frequently enjoy and have some knowledge of.

When studying the Chinon Parchment and making an analysis of its contents, one can see the point that the Chinon Parchment makes, in relation to the question, is that the Chinon Parchment does indeed absolve everyone who was under investigation of sins of heresy and blasphemy, including the last Grand Master Jacques de Molay. Some of the Templars do agree that some rituals do ascertain a sort of defaming of the cross, by means of trampling or urination, but they informed the investigators that it was out of the test of his heart and not of the mouth when denouncing the cross. When the Templar performs the rite that says to the initiate "you must denounce this one" and the initiate responded by saying "And so, I denounce Him" because he did not feel that he was committing a sin.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the ritual was more about his fidelity rather than his words. Anyone can be forced into saying anything, but it is what the heart holds true that is of the most care. This can be very agreeable to the understanding that during the time of the crusades, if the Knights Templar were captured they would be forced to say and do things against their will. The idea of holding your faith and knowledge to the contempt of your heart

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2 A.A. Grishin, *The Knights Templar Absolution: The Chinon Parchment and the History of the poor Knights of Christ*, (San Bernardino: Knights Templar Vault, 2013), 117.

would be more advantageous than that of verbally speaking the opposite. This isn't so off for being pressured into testimonies was quite common.<sup>3</sup>

Essentially, the charges of blasphemy that the Chinon Parchment explains are that of trampling, denying, and/or urinating on the cross.<sup>4</sup> In addition, there was a charge of homosexual acts in which the initiate was told to kiss the Templar performing the rite on the lower-back, navel, or mouth. It says in the Chinon Parchment, "When asked about the practice of kissing, he replied that the aforementioned brother Roncelin kissed him on the mouth when he received him as a brother".<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the Knight Templar, Geoffroi de Gonneville, explained that he did in fact "denounce the crucifix and to kiss him [the Templar performing the Rite] at the bottom of the spine, on the navel and then on the mouth".<sup>6</sup> Another charge, for which the Templars were convicted, was that of idol-worship of a particular head, but the Templar Raymond de Caron says to the investigators "...that he had never heard any mention of that head until he heard Lord Pope Clement speak of it this past year".<sup>7</sup> Yet, there seems to be some level of incongruence between Templar rites because Geoffroi de Gonneville, when asked about the head responds by saying, "When asked about the head of an idol that was reportedly worshiped by the Templars, he said that it was shown to him at Montpellier by brother Pierre Alemandin, preceptor of that place, and that this head remained in possession of brother Pierre".<sup>8</sup> Geoffroi de Gonneville is

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3 Grishin, pg. 74

4 Grishin, pg. 117,

5 Grishin, pg. 118

6 Grishin, pg. 126

7 Grishin, pg. 123

8 Grishin, pg. 127

the only Templar to mention that he witnessed the head, which was supposedly worshiped by the Knights Templar.

What we can ascertain from the parchment is that there are some charges that seem to be straightforward, in which all the Templars were guilty or innocent of performing. One constant that is obvious is that each Templar was not guilty of performing acts of sodomy. On the other hand, the various Templars seem to have different Rites performed upon them were some are shown a head. Some kiss the Templar performing the ritual on the mouth, while some others, like Geoffroi de Gonneville, kiss upon the lower spine, navel, and mouth as well. Some were told to spit upon the cross, some told to trample upon it instead. All did so, though, thinking that they were not committing a sin. Perhaps it was seen as a test of their heart rather than the action itself which was the lesson.

After viewing this, it seems as if the Church knew about certain aspects of the Knights Templar rite but didn't care too much for the circumstances. Overall, the Knights Templar were extremely wealthy and did do a lot for the mother church. That is all the document tells the reader though. It does tell you that the Knights Templar were absolved of their sins and by that means they should have been released from not only their chains but from their imprisonment as well.

You are able to see this clearly written in the translation of the Chinon Parchment when it says at the end of each investigation done on individual Templars, "...had denounced in our presence the aforesaid and any other heresy, swore in person on the Lord's Holy Gospel and humbly asked for the mercy of absolution, restoring him to the unity with the Church and

reinstating him in communion of the faithful and sacraments of the Church”<sup>9</sup> This is what it says exactly in other cases, with each individual Templar that was brought before the various Church officials. There should be more evidence though as to why the Knights Templar were still kept within the confines of a prison and eventually burnt at the stake. In addition, there should be more evidence as to the relationship to King Philip IV of France and his connection to the Knights Templar and his childhood friend, Pope Clement V.

When looking at various secondary sources on the topic. One is able to get a better grasp on not only what the texts are saying but also how they are able to assist in the answering and understanding the particular question. One secondary source that has assisted me on my intellectual endeavor is that of author Malcolm Barber and his book entitled “The Trial of the Templars”. The reason for why the Church, and more importantly Pope Clement V, going back on his word about the Knights Templar and within a year of the Chinon Parchment being written, issuing a *Pastoralis Praeeminentiae* which told all the various leaders of Christendom to arrest Knights Templar withersoever they were dispersed around the globe.<sup>10</sup> This papal bull was issued after the Chinon Parchment had been written and sent to the Pope which affirmed their innocence and allowance of grace back into the arms of the church again.

So at face value, after considering the effect of the Parchment, it seems moot at best because of the inability for the Pope to really interfere with King Philip’s plan of acquiring the Knights Templar’s wealth for himself.<sup>11</sup> This lends to a better explanation of the events which occurred. The central question seems to be dealing with only one player in this game, primarily

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9 Grishin, pg 122.

10 Malcom Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2006 pg. 219

11 Barber, pg 2.



the Church. Though, we should note the motives of the King of France and his watchful eyes over the Templars' coffers and riches. The relationship between the King of France and the Pope, whom the King Philip IV moved to France, and how this interconnectedness played out is something to consider.

One of the sources that I was able to find, by convenient happenstance, was a monograph of the Chinon Parchment. The source entitled, "*The Knights Templar Absolution: The Chinon Parchment and the History of the poor Knights of Christ*". This book not only gives a definitive source for the Chinon Parchment but also acts as a secondary source as well and explains its intricacies and how it relates to both Pope Clement V and the King of France, Philip IV (le Bel). The Knights Templar didn't have a chance with the King of France due to his power over and the weakness of Pope Clement V<sup>12</sup>. This leads to the point that the church was powerless to really enact the Chinon Parchment and use it for what it was meant to do, absolve the Templars and frees them from restraint. The King of France trumped the Popes power in this divine right of king's notion, for which King Philip was able to overrule the Pope's decision and power.<sup>13</sup> The Pope could have taken the matter into his own hands by excommunicating King Philip or take other papal actions against the King for trumping his authority, but he did not.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the church should have been fearful of the ever growing possibility that they could lose church grounds, owned by the Knights Templar, to the King of France.<sup>15</sup> That is a mutual interest for

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12 Grishin, pgs 93-94.

13 Grishin, pg. 52

14 Grishin, pg. 51

15 Peter Partner, *The Murdered Magicians: The Templars and their Myth*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1982 pg.73

anyone in the confines of the church for they would lose not only land but the money that was made off of that land as well.

Barber also tries to decode the Chinon Parchment and explain if the Templars were indeed absolved of their sins and brought back into the church. The author gives the translation of the document and then gives a translation along with a synopsis of each sector or area of the Parchment. The several sources that this author uses in his resources are, naturally, the Chinon Parchment as his primary source and a list of other reputable authors on the topic of the Knights Templar trials. He uses a source that is quite known in the field of the Templars and their trials.

The next source to better understand the trial of the Templars and help frame a model of an analysis of the Parchment was Malcolm Barber's book entitled "*The Trial of the Templars*". This book is a definitive source in the field of the trial of the Knights Templar and the various proceedings not only France but afar in countries like Portugal and England as well. This secondary source falls under the category of a printed scholar secondary source about the trials of the Templars. The central idea is to trace the course of events that occurred during the trials as well as examine and study the motivations of the various participants of the trials. Lastly, Barber explains that he expresses an interest in discovering the extent to which the charges were brought upon the Templars were justified or not<sup>16</sup>. Malcolm Barber is very diligent in explaining the continuity of the charges pressed against the Templars in other countries and the punishments, if there were any at all, that were inflicted upon them. This all is pointing towards one person, and one person only, that was instrumental in the fall and demise of the Knights Templar. The same charges, as the Chinon Parchments, are brought upon the Templars in London, Portugal, and other principalities with the same effect. All of the Knights Templar were

found to be innocent and therefore “fine” under the terms of the nationalities to which they resided in.

The source explains in great depth the several trials, personalities, and proceedings that occurred during that period of time. The author also explains and shows the reader various proceedings in other countries like England and Portugal. This, in a sense, you are able see if there is some level of continuity in the trials, charges, and punishments of the Knights Templar in other places besides France. The sources listed in the author’s bibliography are vast and range from primary sources of the crusades, Templar documents, and political sources to secondary sources on about everything contained in the context of the crusades and monastic orders of the middle ages.

Another source that I used in my research also gives me insight into the motive of not only King Philip IV of France but also the reasoning behind why the Pope would still follow through with the imprisonment and finally the execution of the Knights Templar after they were all absolved of sin and charges dropped in charging the Knights Templar. This source is entitled “*The Order of Knights Templar Suppressed*” by author Richard Cavendish. This source is an article that was published in the magazine entitled *History Today*. The main thesis of the article, although it is very short, is just to give an overview of the Knights Templar, the trials, and the modern romanticism of the “secrets” of the Knights Templar and their possible connection to Freemasonry. Even so, it does give a piece of information that is helpful in the outcome of why the Templars were chastised after the Chinon Parchment was written. Pope Clement V used a papal bull against the Knights Templar because he was feeling pressured within the

Church<sup>17</sup>. This makes sense for he didn't want to bring about dissent against his long time friend, King Philip, which he was residing in France anyway. The source does not list any cited sources for the article but from what you can read in this article it does seem to be true to its sayings and words for it is written with facts pertaining to the Knights Templar.

Another source which is used in investigating is a document that reviews and explains a book that was written about the Knights Templar trials in the British Isles. The book review was published in the *Catholic Historical Review* and was written by Evelyn Lord. The book she is reviewing is entitled "Proceedings against the Templars in the British Isles". What you are able to extract from this source is the information relating to the trials and punishment of the Knights Templar in the British Isles. The author writes that only three British Templars confessed to the charges and that torture was not used to extract information from the Templars.

The Templars in the British Isles were placed under loose house arrest, in which they were given a lot of privileges, and likewise were not found guilty of blasphemy<sup>18</sup>. This is influential for it gives more credence to the fact that the Knights Templar trials in France were different from the attitude around the world concerning the Knights Templar.

One thing is for certain, the arrest, torture, and murder of Knights Templar around the world was a different story. It took a very long time before the King of England decided to finally move on the Templars after being pressured for so long. King Edward II, after learning of the *Pastoralis Praeeminentiae*, informed the Pope that he would move on the Templars

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17 Cavendish, Richard. "The Order of Knights Templar Suppressed." *History Today*, March 2012. <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.csusm.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=eda2da1b-2c9c-4c36-8d5c-38e1f40831d9@sessionmgr113&vid=2&hid=114> (accessed October 25, 2013).

18 Lord, Evelyn. 2012. "The Proceedings against the Templars in the British Isles, Vol. 1: The Latin Edition; Vol. 2: The Translation." *Catholic Historical Review* 98, no. 3: 550-552. Historical Abstracts, EBSCOhost (accessed October 25, 2013).

immediately. He did in fact move on the Templars but the difference was that it was not orchestrated whatsoever and there was really no concern to bring them in at all.<sup>19</sup> Most of the Templars were just given notice and were able to stay within their preceptories until they were called to court nearly two years later after they were informed.<sup>20</sup> Six Templars were taken into custody in Canterbury. One William of la More, Master of England, was taken to Canterbury where he was allowed the attendance of two brothers with him, a nice bed, personal belongings, robes, and utensils. He was even given an allowance of two shillings and six pence a day for his confinement.<sup>21</sup> His vacation didn't last long though, for he was released 5 months later and given a manor along with the six other Templars that were held as well.<sup>22</sup> When the inquisitors finally arrived from France, they ran into some barriers while investigating the Knights Templar in England. English law was quite different from that of France and it was almost impossible for them to gather evidence against the Templars or for them to prove them guilty of heresy.<sup>23</sup> They had such a problem performing torture and extracting information from the various Templars that they had to ask the Pope for help. The Pope wrote a letter to the King of England telling him that he would absolve him of all his sins and give him eternal mercy if he would move the Templars in England to a French island to be interrogated instead.<sup>24</sup> Even in Scotland and Ireland, it became almost comical for the witnesses that confessed against the Templars because they did not have any evidence but rather just gave their opinions about the Order.<sup>25</sup>

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19 Barber, pg. 219

20 Barber, pg. 219

21 Barber, pg. 219

22 Barber, pg. 220

23 Barber, pg. 221

24 Barber, pg. 223

25 Barber, pg. 224

In Iberia, all the various principalities endorsed and had strong emotions of affection for the Knights Templar. They all received a letter from King Philip but sent back letters saying that they would not charge the Templars unless it came from the Pope's office and there were serious offences.<sup>26</sup> When King James of Spain was finally pressured into moving on the Templars; he gave the Templars due notice of an attack on their castle in Miravet, Spain. Secondly, King James gave all the non-Templars staying within the castle safe passage to leave before he attacked. Some stayed for some level of chivalry to support the Templars. Lastly, when he finally brought his troops, a small group of knights, they barely engaged the people in the castle. They tended to be more of skirmishes in which the Templars only had to worry about sustenance, rather than loss of life<sup>27</sup>. When the Templars were finally taken and investigated by Church officials, they had problems similar to that of England, but even more so because the law of the land forbade torture.<sup>28</sup> So there is no level of continuity between the trials or persecution of Knight Templars in France and those trials in other countries.<sup>29</sup>

The Pope even got so far as agitated by Cyprus that he learned of the trials and the verdict of innocence of the Templars there, that he sent back a letter telling them to investigate them again but this time with the instrument of torture.<sup>30</sup> Likewise in the areas of Lombardy, seven Knights Templar appeared before a group of church investigators, and there confessed their innocence. All the Knights templar were found to be innocent before the investigators. Going even further, the several investigators voted to preserve the Order as a whole if the majority were

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26 Barber, pg. 229-230

27 Barber, pg. 233

28 Barber, pg. 236

29 Barber, pg. 219

30 Barber, pg. 258

found to be innocent.<sup>31</sup> This can be seen as a major problem for the Pope for a vast majority of his own officials are finding the Templars to be innocent.

Overall, it is plain to see that the Chinon Parchment, although officially absolving the Knights Templar, was lacking in the department following through with the actual church instrument. What one can collect from all the various sources on the issue is that they are all leading to one main cause as for the destruction of the Templars. All signs point to the King of France, Philip IV. There is absolutely no continuity in the persecution and trials of the Knights Templar, as seen through the trials or lack thereof in England and Iberia that had to arrest and perform interrogations upon the monastic order.

The Knights Templar suffered a horrible outcome for the greed of one broke and destitute King. The Chinon Parchment gives more precedence to the fact of this matter for it shows the willingness of the Church to forgive the Templars but the lack of control by a weak Pope to enact it. Though, the Knights Templar might have actually acquired some level of revenge for their ill-fate. For both the King of France and the Pope joined the Templars in death within a year of Jacques de Molay and the other Knight's deaths. It is said that as Jacques de Molay was upon the scaffold, while it was burning, and he exclaimed "from this your heinous judgment to the living and true God, who is in Heaven", in which he cursed the Pope and King to join him in heaven within a year.<sup>32</sup> Truth be had, that both the Pope and the King of France did indeed die within the year.

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31 Barber, pg. 247-248

32 de Vicenza, Ferretto. "*Historia rerum in Italia gestarum ab anno 1250 as annum usque 1318*", c. 1328, in Malcolm Barber's, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 314–315

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