**Knights Templar**

**History**

After the first Crusade of 1099 captured Jerusalem from Islamic control, it became common for European Christians to take lengthy pilgrimages to the Holy Land. These could be very dangerous, and so in 1120 the French knight Hugues de Payens came up with a plan to form a group of knights to protect pilgrims on the roads from bandits and mercenaries. The king of Jerusalem gave the knights their headquarters on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which was believed to be built on the ruins of the Temple of Solomon, the palace of a very rich and powerful ancient Jewish King. The knights took the name Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, or the Knights Templar, meaning knights of the temple. They were officially recognized as a holy order by the Pope in 1129 and quickly became one of the most respected and skilled fighting units of the crusades.

Although they started as poor knights, the Templars quickly rose in fame and wealth. As they established forts along the major roads between the Holy Land and Europe to support pilgrims and fight Islamic armies, the Knights Templar developed an early system of banking. Pilgrims deposited valuables at one Templar fort, received a letter of credit stating the value of the items or money, and exchanged it at another Templar location for cash. Templar banking was so successful that they became extremely wealthy. They bought vineyards and farms, built churches and castles, became involved in manufacturing and shipping, and even owned the island of Cyprus.

In 1187, Jerusalem was recaptured by newly united Islamic forces. The Templar headquarters was pushed further back towards Europe as the Islamic armies advanced. As they lost banking areas in the Holy Land, their wealth and power dwindled. In 1307, the King of France Philip IV, who was deeply in debt to the Templars, used a series of rumors that had recently surfaced about the Templars being involved in heresy to arrest the knights. On Friday 13th of October 1307, all members of the Knights Templar were arrested for heresy. Many were coerced under torture to confess that their initiation ceremonies involved spitting on the cross or financial corruption. Philip IV had many Templars burned at the stake, and in 1310, the Pope dissolved the order and handed over their assets to another group, the Knights Hospitallers.

**Hospitallers**

Since shortly after 1050, the Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem (Sovereign Order) has focused on aiding the sick and the poor and developing methods to improve survival rates and patient care. A convent was built in Jerusalem which became the Benedictine monastery of St. John the Baptist.

After the successful occupation of Jerusalem by the First Crusade, a group of knights discovered the hospice run by Brother Gerard in 1099. This hospice used very advanced techniques for the day. It kept clean facilities, each resident slept in an individual bed and food dishes were not shared, all of which led to a superior survival rate.

The group of knights joined in the hospice’s charitable works, thus strengthening what would evolve into the Sovereign Order of St. John. On February 15, 1113, Pope Pascal II recognized this Knight – Hospitaller order as a self-governing organization.

The Sovereign Order evolved into a Christian, chivalric, and sovereign military order which continued the work of helping the sick and the poor while also defending Christians in the Holy Lands. In Western Europe, the Sovereign Order embodied the essence of the Crusades, uniting arms and religion to serve where needed in the name of Faith for Humanity.

After Jerusalem was lost in 1187, the Sovereign Order moved to Acre, in Palestine, then on to Cyprus and would later be driven out of Rhodes in 1524 after 200 years.

In March of 1530, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, signed the Act of Donation of Malta, giving the main island and several smaller ones to the Sovereign Order. In return, the Order made an annual payment, given on All Saint’s Day.

Thus, the members were now referred to as the Knights of Malta. The Ottomans followed them there, too, but this time the attack was rebuffed in 1565 CE. Malta was not so great for agriculture, only cotton and cumin being notable sources of revenue, but the island did have one of the best harbors in the Mediterranean.

The Hospitallers, and their island retreats of Rhodes and then Malta had lasted longer than anywhere else as bastion of medieval chivalry, but eventually, even there, modernity caught up with the order. Even the order’s role as a provider of hospitals was largely superseded by institutions run by local councils and the Hospitaller’s traditional role as a guardian of pilgrims was less in demand as fewer and fewer westerners made the long and arduous journey to the Muslim-controlled Holy Land. Still, the order soldiered on until Malta was captured by Napoleon in 1798 CE, and it still exists today in various forms in various countries, from medal-awarding chivalric orders to volunteer ambulance services, the latter, of course, continuing the Hospitallers original purpose of giving free medical aid to those most in need.