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The Knights Templar Commandery in Coulommiers, built in the 12th century



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## THE ORDER OF THE TEMPLARS AND THE MARÉCHAUSSÉE

The History, Gendarmerie, Security, and Territories Research Chair (HiGeSeT), hosted by the National Gendarmerie Research Center (CRGN), has just released its very first publication with the launch, on July 3, 2025, of the journal *History of Internal Security Forces (HFSI)*.

The first *issue* of this periodical contains an article<sup>1</sup> by David Bièvre, which explores the hypothesis of a Templar influence on the royal constabulary in the context of the sociogenesis of the state during the High Middle Ages. Professor Josserand<sup>2</sup>, from the University of Nantes, a specialist in the work of the Knights Templar and the medieval period, describes the argument as convincing, original, and credible. Thus, the journal's *Varia* section offers an interdisciplinary perspective by examining a historical sequence of rare intensity through the lens of political science and sociology. From this perspective, the author examines the conditions under which power was exercised in the Middle Ages, drawing in particular on the work of Eugène Enriquez regarding the psychoanalysis of social bonds<sup>3</sup> as well as Norbert Elias's work on the civilizing process in medieval sociology<sup>4</sup>.

Between the 12th and 14th centuries, the Knights Templar amassed military, financial, and political power, emerging as a potential rival to the King of France, Philip the Fair, who was striving for absolutism. The Knights Templar carried out security missions that went far beyond the mere protection of pilgrims, as Simonetta Cerrini repeatedly emphasizes<sup>5</sup>, and not merely along the routes that facilitated their commercial activities. Thus, it appears that the population of the Kingdom of France expressed a need for greater security at a time when there was no standing army. However, the protection provided by the Knights Templar, through their dense network of commanderies, became increasingly important throughout the kingdom once the Holy Land was definitively lost. The reorganization of the Knights Templar's structure, the adjustment of its ambitions to this new situation, and the need for the emerging state to assert itself as a protector of its subjects then led to an extremely violent clash between the spiritual power of the popes and the temporal power of the kings of France.

The author points out, as Professors Demurger<sup>6</sup> and Josserand do so forcefully, that the Knights Templar continue to fuel myths and fantasies even today, but the need to stick to the historical facts ruthlessly sweeps aside these rewritings of French history, which are often motivated by a lack of legitimacy.

1 BIÈVRE, David. « Sociogenèse de l'État. Un marqueur Templier dans le phénotype de la maréchaussée ? » [online]. *Journal of the History of Internal Security Forces*, n° 1, 2024, p. 110-117. Available via : <https://www.gendarmerie.interieur.gouv.fr/crgn/chaire-recherche/la-chaire-higeset/actualites-higeset/lancement-de-la-revue-hfsi>. To purchase this issue (15 euros), please send your request to this email address: [aprg.melun@gmail.com](mailto:aprg.melun@gmail.com).

2 JOSSERAND, Philippe. « Les Templiers en France : histoire et héritage ». *Historical review*, n° 669, 2014/1, p. 179-214.

3 ENRIQUEZ, Eugène. *De la horde à l'État: essai de psychanalyse du lien social*. Gallimard, 2003, p. 25.

4 ÉLIAS, Norbert. *Moyen Âge et procès de civilisation. Inédit*. Éditions EHESS, 2021, 219 p.

5 CERRINI, Simonetta. *La révolution des Templiers*. Paris : Tempus Perrin, 2009, 364 p.

6 DEMURGER, Alain. *Les Templiers : Une chevalerie chrétienne au Moyen Âge*. Paris : POINTS, 2014, 720 p.

The article then poses a bold question: what if the gendarmerie were one of the successors to the Knights Templar? In this case, political science and sociology offer new perspectives for examining certain historical events during a period ripe for major social and political upheaval.

Given the constraints of the format, this presentation is intended to be concise and is structured in three parts: establishing the framework of the issue through the socio-historical context, analyzing the sociogenesis of the state and the new need for security expressed by the population, and, finally, a discussion of certain characteristic features of the Order of the Temple that may have served as a source of inspiration for other organizations, such as the *maréchaussée*. In short, this approach aims to enrich the history of the *maréchaussée* by offering a new perspective on its origins, which are often debated and uncertain<sup>7</sup>.

## I) A process of civilization

Of course, the heresy trial against the Knights Templar had motivations beyond the official practices denounced by the royal authorities, as David Bièvre points out, because the Templars found themselves caught in the middle of the conflict between the King of France and the popes. Philip IV, known as “the Fair,” on one side, and Popes Boniface VIII and Clement V on the other, would use the Templars as a bone of contention—the former to undermine papal authority, the latter as a means of distancing himself following the assassination attempt in Anagni in 1303. Norbert Elias’s theoretical contributions are thus invaluable for a socio-historical analysis, particularly when he examines the evolution of institutions in the Middle Ages. Thus, the upheavals within medieval society constitute the observable part of a profound social reconfiguration that foreshadows what Elias describes as a process of civilization. Indeed, to highlight the power acquired by the Knights Templar, the philosopher Stéphane Lalut remarks: “*He who controls the register controls the world.*”<sup>8</sup>

To support his argument, the author provides a brief overview of the history of the Knights Templar. First, it is important to recall the context of the Crusades aimed at (re)conquering the Holy Land, particularly in 1099 with the conquest of Jerusalem. However, pilgrims’ journeys were fraught with danger between the landing ports on the mainland and the holy sites. Hugh de Payns then offered his services to the King of Jerusalem, Baldwin II, to secure the pilgrimage routes; thus began the history of the militia of the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, which would later take the name of the Order of the Knights Templar. The author is quick to point out that for the king, the constant availability of a military force was invaluable at a time when there was no standing army. In 1129, Saint Bernard formalized the Order, which ten years later would come under the sole authority of the pope. But in 1187, at the Battle of Hattin, the Franks lost Jerusalem for good, and after Philip the Fair ascended the throne, Acre was lost in turn in 1291. The Knights Templar would resist as long as possible, but the loss of the Holy Land would, among other things, lead to a reevaluation of the Templars’ structure on the European continent and a redefinition of some of their missions, as the disappearance of their *raison d’être* would pale in comparison to the resources they had accumulated. At the start of the 14th century, events surrounding the Templars came to a head: the conflict between Philip IV and Pope Boniface VIII led to the events at Anagni, where the pope was assaulted and threatened with arrest for heresy by representatives of the King of France. Clement V, one of Boniface’s successors, was tasked with finding a diplomatic solution. The Templars were thus arrested in 1307 on the king’s orders; after numerous twists and turns regarding the confessions of the Order’s servants, he demanded their condemnation. No rival authority would be tolerated, and the king remained deeply resentful of having sought refuge in 1306 within the Temple compound in Paris to escape the riots sparked by unbearable tax levies.

The first historical references to the *maréchaussée* appear around 1337, following the dissolution—without conviction—of the Knights Templar in 1312. We thus find ourselves in a window of opportunity where the king must establish the absolute authority of the state he represents and justify it by offering, in exchange for an already unpopular tax system, sufficient compensation to unite a population demanding security—a need to which the Templars had partially responded before their disappearance. Indeed, following their departure from the Holy Land, the Templars would increase their security operations against highwaymen, and not only on pilgrimage routes, as a fundamental issue remained regarding the economic success built upon the network of commanderies.

7 BROUILLET, Pascal. Le corps le plus utile de l’État. *Sociétés & Représentations* 16, n° 2, 2003.

8 LALUT, Stéphane. *Anthropie. Ordre ici. Dette ailleurs : une longue histoire de l’humanité – de la conscience à l’IA*. French Édition, 2025, p. 222.

Furthermore, following the dissolution of the Order, many Templars who had not been executed, along with their servants, joined the ranks of the army or various institutions, thereby facilitating the spread of the Order's methods and mindset. S. Lalut adds: "*Philip did not merely steal a fortune: he appropriated a technology. [...] And history warns us: you don't eliminate a function; you displace it.*"<sup>9</sup> In this way, the king was also able to grasp the essence of the Templar Order.

## II) On the Emergence of a New Sacredness

"*The Knights Templar are convinced they have a mission to carry out in the name of Christ, but the emerging state, having forgotten the horde, calls for a different kind of sacredness.*"<sup>10</sup> In this case, the confrontation between authorities represents the visible face of a life-and-death struggle between different sacred realms, for these are domains that belong to the forbidden, the indisputable, and the inviolable. There cannot, therefore, be multiple sacred realms, just as there cannot be coexisting authorities without absolute and universal power. In his psychoanalysis of social bonds, Enriquez demonstrates the emergence of a new sacred entity—the State—entrusted with an organizing role, to which citizens voluntarily surrender a portion of their individual freedoms in exchange for the formation of the group, the collective, and the nation. And to understand that this is indeed a new sacred entity, Enriquez points out that these citizens are prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for it. In addition, Élias notes that the medieval period was marked by a long series of power struggles, but that these were accompanied by a process of resource sharing that must not be overlooked when reconstructing the dynamics of the various social groups; he dates the acceleration of the process of territorial consolidation within the Kingdom of France to the late 12th century. Within this window of opportunity, which stabilized between the late 12th century and the mid-14th century, it is also important to understand the role played by a body of law that would find ways to consolidate itself in the 13th century. Thus, the issue of violence, at a time when the population was calling for greater security, began to receive standardized responses, but only the sovereignty of regal rights authorized by the structuring of the state gave this body of law the opportunity to consolidate itself.

To complete the picture necessary for addressing this fundamental issue of protecting the populace, we must keep in mind, on the one hand, the need for a force responsible for enforcing the law and, on the other hand, the role of Guillaume de Nogaret, legal advisor to Philip the Fair, who appears to have been the principal architect of the reconfiguration of royal power, before being swept away along with "the Accursed Kings" and the last Capetians.

Thus, "*the legal framework is currently taking shape within a fragmented society*"<sup>11</sup> and the population turns to the state, which it has elevated to a new sacred entity, entrusted in particular with maintaining public order. In this way, Élias observes a reconfiguration of the "*structure of desires*"<sup>12</sup>, whose satisfaction cannot escape the notice of anyone who claims absolute authority.

Did the general public—who had witnessed the Templar Order's contribution to security—on the one hand, and the King of France and his advisors—who had observed the Templars' organization and the resulting convergence of interests—on the other, help to embed these political ideas within the institutions that were in the process of being consolidated?

## III) A body of corroborating evidence

To further explore the hypothesis that the gendarmerie underwent a form of acculturation through the spread of Templar ideas, D. Bièvre offers a non-exhaustive overview of organizational and practical aspects, as well as certain missions, which may serve as markers of identity.

Thus, the Rule and its revisions since the Council of Troyes in 1129—when the Order was founded by the Cistercians—are being reexamined thanks to the valuable work of S. Cerrini<sup>13</sup>. The organizational structure of this complex is undoubtedly military in nature and can easily be compared to the former general disciplinary regulations in force within the armed forces. The Rule thus addresses issues of discipline and punishment, as well as organization and ceremonial protocols. While it accorded spirituality a significant place in the early days of the

9 LALUT, Stéphane, *op. cit.*, p. 220-221.

10 BIÈVRE, David, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

12 ÉLIAS, Norbert, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

13 CERRINI, Simonetta, *op. cit.*

Order, S. Cerrini demonstrates that this aspect gradually gave way to a more military dimension; A. Demurger even refers to a veritable “*military code*.”<sup>14</sup>

With regard to the mission of protecting travel routes, the argument that the Templars were tasked solely with protecting pilgrimage routes is forcefully refuted by S. Cerrini, who even describes the Templars’ role as that of a “*highway patrol*,” as they regularly served as a military force alongside the king’s armies. His research has made it possible to determine the missions actually entrusted to the Templars: “*The Templars took up arms against thieves, kidnappers, and marauders found on public roads, for the king had said that he would fight against such bandits.*”<sup>15</sup>

After discussing the organizational structure and the missions assigned to them, D. Bièvre examines, within the Templars’ organizational chart, the conditions of service, logistical functions, support arrangements, and equipment. Similarities can thus be observed with the role assigned to inspectors general, as well as the presence of sergeant brothers, who are divided into two categories: the sergeant brothers of arms and the sergeant brothers of trades. The former are indispensable to military operations and share some of the attire of the knight brothers, while the latter are entrusted with all logistical and support operations.

“*Based on the hierarchical structure, Demurger reveals that, although limited, social advancement within the Temple does exist; this is not the case with the other Orders*”<sup>16</sup>. In addition, with regard to equipment, it appears that the Rule contains strict specifications concerning the uniforms to be worn, their appearance, color, and seasonal variations, which are reminiscent of military discipline. D. Bièvre successively analyzes the conditions for admission into the Order and, in particular, the requirement to be debt-free (a point found in the marshalry), the obligation to first establish a family environment (which is also found in the 1778 ordinance on the marshalry), the territorial network and the conditions regarding the mobility of the Templars so they could serve at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. Next, two fundamental aspects are examined: on the one hand, the oath that every Templar candidate takes “*... to always obey the head of the Order*” and, on the other hand, the awareness of a possible ultimate sacrifice (Article 1 of the Rule).

Finally, two arguments sometimes put forward to dispute a possible link between the *maréchaussée* and the Knights Templar do not hold up to scrutiny. First, it should be noted that in its early days, the *maréchaussée* was sedentary, just like the Knights Templar; its shift to a sedentary lifestyle did not occur until later. Second, “*while the maréchaussée was originally a judicial body dedicated to dealing with disbanded soldiers, it must be noted that until the end of the Hundred Years’ War, there was no standing army. Thus, combatants would appear one day under the royal banner, and the next day be idle, roaming the countryside as brigands and highwaymen. The Templars and the maréchaussées may thus have had the same adversaries.*”<sup>17</sup>

The transitional period between the dissolution of the Order and the establishment of the royal police force(s) offers an interesting window through which we can see that many Templars continued to serve as soldiers of the king or joined the civil service, making them potential vehicles for spreading Templar ideas.

The Order of the Knights Templar was a religious and military order, but the thesis presented here demonstrates that, with the emergence of a new form of the sacred, the religious aspect gave way to the state. Thus, with the dissolution of the Order, a void was created to fill the role of protecting the populace within a military framework and in the name of the state. Admittedly, the *maréchaussée*’s duties regarding the securing of roads would not be expanded until 1536, but this overlooks the fact that, in reality, it was difficult prior to that to distinguish the “ordinary” offender from the “demilitarized” offender. The article in the HFSI journal argues for a political legacy linking the Order of the Templars and the *maréchaussée*, and highlights a body of corroborating evidence within the context of the sociogenesis of the state. Read the full details in the HFSI journal<sup>18</sup>.

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The content of this publication reflects the views of the author alone and does not necessarily reflect the views of the CRGN.

14 DEMURGER, Alain, *op. cit.*

15 CERRINI, Simonetta, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

16 BIÈVRE, David, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

17 BIÈVRE, David, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

18 Cf. note 1.