

Knights Templar

The Templars were nothing special. In most respects they were really very ordinary with little known about such people of the twelfth, thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Most of the Brothers of the Order of the Temple came either from the lower ranks of knights or were not of knightly descent at all. Many were craftsmen, or people who performed ordinary agricultural tasks such as herding sheep and cattle. People of these social groups left very few records but, through what surviving evidence from the Templars that there is, an understanding their beliefs, what mattered to them, and their everyday lives. They did not travel far to join a religious house, and they stayed in the same area all their lives, near to their families. They were loyal to their families, to their old lords and to their king, even when they had joined the Order of the Temple. They were devout people, with a simple faith based on Christ as king. Their dearest desire was to lay down their lives on the battlefield in the war against evil, defending Christendom against its enemies. They were defenders rather than aggressors. They were mostly not educated, probably couldn't read, but could understand when texts were read to them. They served God in battle, rather than being scholars.

The Order in Europe concentrated on raising money for the war against the Muslims, so much that contemporaries saw the Templars as more concerned about money than anything else. By the early fourteenth century the Templars in Europe were not regarded as outsiders but were at the centre of the establishment. They were best known in everyday life for their financial activities: looking after the treasure of the crowns of Europe, and financial services for nobles, knights, merchants and squires. If we think of the Templars as bank managers and bank clerks, alongside their role as defenders of God's Church, it gives a far better idea of how they were regarded. There is some possible evidence of Muslims in England at this time.¹

The Templars had no interest in women and took a vow of chastity as well as of poverty, being allowed no personal possessions, and of obedience to their leader under God. The first Templars have been identified in the early part of the 12th century. With nowhere to live, King Baldwin II of Jerusalem gave them one of his palaces. For their first ten or so years, they wore ordinary clothes but then adopted a white habit with a red cross.

As a renegade group who defied or created their own alternative authority, it was inevitable that they would eventually fall foul of the establishment, in this case the Pope. This happened in 1307, some 200 years after they had first emerged, when they were all arrested on trumped-up charges, some burned at the stake, others forced to join other religious houses.

¹ <https://history.stackexchange.com/questions/25613/were-there-muslims-in-12th-century-england>.