



IDAHO KNIGHTLY NEWS

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Editor's Note

If anyone would like to submit an article for the Idaho Knightly News, please email me your article using Microsoft Word. Keep it between 1 page and 1.5 pages.

Upcoming Events:

Alaska Grand York Rite.....Mar 6-7
Oregon Grand York Rite..... Apr 9-11
Idaho Grand York Rite.....Apr 16-18
Washington Grand York RiteMay 7-9
Montana Grand York RiteJun 4-6
Colorado Grand York Rite..... Sep 10-12
Wyoming Grand York Rite..... Sep 17-19

The Two Tales of the Templars

By Barry E. Newell

The founding of the Knights Templar in the early 12th century is most commonly understood through a single, dominant historical narrative. However, surviving

medieval sources reveal that this account is not the only version of events. Alternative traditions preserved by contemporary chroniclers present differing descriptions of the Order's earliest formation, raising important questions about the reliability and perspective of the sources upon which modern historians rely.

The most frequently cited account of the Templars' origins derives from the writings of William of Tyre, Archbishop of Tyre and one of the principal historians of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. A markedly different narrative is preserved by Michael the Syrian, Patriarch of Antioch. A third account appears in the writings of Walter Map, Archdeacon of Oxford, though modern scholars generally discount his testimony due to his known preference for literary embellishment and historical fiction.

According to William of Tyre (Guillaume de Tyr), during the first nine years of the Order's existence, the Templars were unable to muster more than nine knights. Michael the Syrian, by contrast, records that Hugh de Payens founded the Order with a company of 30 knights. Michael writes:

“Now this man, whose name was Hugh de Payens, accepted this advice; the thirty knights who accompanied him joined him. The king gave them the house of Solomon for their residence, and some villages for their maintenance. The Patriarch also gave them some villages of the Church.”

Stephen Dafoe, Past Grand Historian of the Sovereign Great Priory of Canada, observed in the January 2009 edition of *The Knights Templar Magazine* that although Michael’s chronicle receives comparatively less attention within the historical community, his account appears more plausible than William’s. Given the scarcity of contemporary documentation, it is unlikely that the precise number of the Order’s original members will ever be definitively established.

The inconsistencies and ambiguities surrounding the Templars’ foundation may be explained in part by the fact that neither William nor Michael was alive at the time the Order was formed. Additionally, William’s personal and institutional circumstances warrant careful consideration. Born in Jerusalem around 1130, William received his education in Europe before returning to the Holy Land, where he composed numerous historical works, most notably a 23-volume chronicle of the region following the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem under Caliph ‘Umar. Although unfinished at the time of his death in the late 1180s, this work focused heavily on the First Crusade and the political affairs of the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

William was also a contender for the office of Patriarch of Jerusalem and appears to have regarded the growing independence

of the military orders (particularly the Templars) as a challenge to ecclesiastical authority. This context may help explain his consistently unfavorable portrayal of the Order. Nevertheless, historians who favor William’s account frequently emphasize his methodological rigor, noting his extensive collection of sources and his interviews with individuals who had direct knowledge of the events he described.

Michael the Syrian, on the other hand, is believed to have been born around 1126 in the city of Melitene, now Malatya in southeastern Turkey. He entered monastic life at an early age within the Jacobite tradition and eventually rose to the rank of Archimandrite (the superior of a large monastery or group of monasteries) before being elected Patriarch of Antioch. Michael is renowned for composing one of the most extensive chronicles of the medieval period, written in Syriac. Despite the breadth of his work, modern historians often regard his historical reliability as more limited outside the regions and events with which he had direct familiarity, a factor that has contributed to the relative marginalization of his account in Western historiography.

Given the fragmentary nature of the surviving evidence and the inherent biases of medieval chroniclers, the early history of the Knights Templar remains partially obscured. While definitive answers may remain elusive, the existence of multiple, competing narratives underscores the necessity of critical engagement with medieval sources and cautions against an uncritical acceptance of any single account as definitive.