# BROTHERHOOD OF VICE:
## SODOMY, ISLAM, AND THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

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On Friday October 13, 1307, members of the Order of the Knights Templar in France, under the orders of King Philip IV (d. 1314), were arrested *en masse*. Amongst the charges levied against the Templars were: denying Christ, God, the Virgin and the Saints; committing sacrilegious acts against both the Cross and images of Christ; denying the sacraments; performing idol worship; absolving fellow Templars of sin; engaging in secret ceremonies; illegally increasing their own wealth; placing obscene kisses on new entrants on the mouth, naval, and buttocks; and practicing sodomy.[1] Undoubtedly a majority of the charges were legitimate concerns for both secular and ecclesiastical authorities. To have a religious order denying Christ and worshiping false idols or allowing non-clerical officials of that Order to absolve brethren of sin infringed on the authority of the Church. Even the charges relating to financial impropriety were legitimate concerns for secular authorities. The Templars had, by the beginning of the fourteenth century, become one of the most economically powerful organizations in Europe, one that remained independent of secular and religious authority, beholden only to the Pope himself. But the charge of sodomy was unique because it was a crime of personal moral failure, rather than an organizational heresy which could threaten state authority. On the other hand, charges of moral corruption does offer institu-

[1]Edward Burman, *Supremely Abominable Crimes: The Trial of the Knights Templar* (London: Allison & Busby, 1994), 117.

tionalized power, whether state or Church, a way to essentialize an enemy and attribute to it the ability to corrupt society. For much of medieval history that enemy was Islam, which by the time of the Templar trials had become associated with sodomy. Accompanying the belief that the crusaders' moral failures had contributed to the inability to wrest control of the Holy Land from Islam, sodomy added a recognizable moral element to the charges of religious heresy and financial impropriety.

The Templars, like many other religious military orders, were founded to protect Christian European pilgrims visiting sacred sites in the Holy Land. Though the Christian crusaders were victorious in the bloody battle at Jerusalem in 1099, roads to the Holy Land were dangerous places for Christian pilgrims. The Russian abbot Daniel described the region as "terrible and difficult of access for here live fierce Saracens (Muslim Turks) who attack travelers at the fords on these rivers."[2] The desire to protect such pilgrims led to the formation of the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon (Knights Templar). The first of the purely military orders, it was founded in 1118 by veterans of the First Crusade, the French knight Hughes de Payens and the Flemish knight Godfrey de Saint-Omer. The Order was permitted to establish their headquarters at the Temple Mount by King Baldwin II of Jerusalem; thus the Order was born.[3]

The Order was relatively quiet until 1139 when Pope Innocent II issued his bull *Omne datum optimum*. This bull made the Templars beholden only to the papacy, a situation which awarded them almost unheard of independence. The bull exempted the Order from tithes while allowing for their collection, granted the Order its own priests, and permitted their own oratories which allowed for divine offices to be heard without interference from secular authorities. Later bulls added to the Templars' independence. Pope Celestine's *Milites Templi* (1144) allowed for Templar brothers to collect their own tithes. The *Militia Dei* (1145) of Pope Eugenious

[2] Daniel. The Life and Journey of Daniel. Abbot of the Russian Land, in *Jerusalem Pilgrimage*, ed. J. Wilkinson, Hakluyt Society 167, London, 1988, 126, 136, 145, 156, quoted in Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1994), 6.

[3] There are innumerable excellent histories on the Knight Templar. This much abbreviated history of the Order draws extensively from Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood*. Also referenced was *The Military Orders Volume 2: Welfare and Warfare*, ed. Helen Nicholson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998) and Desmond Seward, *The Monks of War: The Military Religious Orders* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1972).

III expanded the tithe collection to burial fees. Thus by 1307, when the Templars were arrested in France, the Order had unprecedented independence from both Church and secular authorities.

While the Templars provided an important service in protecting pilgrims in the Holy Land, it was their financial administration which made them valuable allies, and later attractive targets, for both the Church and state authorities. Initially the Templars acted as a quasi-international bank in which pilgrims could make deposits with one Temple house then for a fee, retrieve those funds in the preferred specie of their destination. This system developed into other banking functions: the issuing of loans for crusading endeavors, the maintenance of important documents, administering of state treasuries and, in the case of Philip IV, housing monarchs facing civil unrest. Cooperation between the Crown and the Templars notwithstanding, the Templar wealth offered a heavily indebted King Philip IV an attractive target for him to replenish state coffers. After the fall of Acre (the last Christian outpost in the Holy Land) to the Muslims in 1291, the time was ripe for Philip to imply that the Templars had become corrupted through their contacts with the immoral Muslims.

For some medieval Christians, Islam embodied all that was antithetical to Christian beliefs. Muhammad was considered a false prophet and a magician who ruled over a depraved people. Muslims were thought to practice idolatry and it was believed that Islam promised a sensuous, materialistic afterlife. In fact many polemics against Islam focused on the theme of sexuality. The institutions of polygamy and concubinage provoked the recriminations of Christians who believed it corrupted its practitioners and made them enervated and effeminate. For medieval Christians Islam lacked spirituality, and was a religion of licentiousness and depravity.[4] The perceived dissoluteness of Islam was the antithesis of Christian canons which celebrated celibacy and chastity, therefore sodomy was a believable accusation to be levied against Muslims.

The genesis of the belief that Muslims practiced sodomy is difficult to locate historically. Gregory Hutcheson's study of "The Sodomitic Moor" in Spain, argues that associating Islam with sodomy was a method to construct categories of differences between Spanish Christians and Muslims to fuel the *reconquista*.

[4] For Christian attitudes towards Islam, see Hachem Djait, *Europe and Islam*, trans. Peter Heinegg (Berkley: University of California Press, 1985) and Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Perhaps due to its singular importance as one of the only areas in continental Europe where Islam had a continual presence, Spanish Christians were compelled to produce the "sodomitic Moor" as a response to their own perceived queerness, thereby essentializing Moorish homosexuality to assert Christian heteronormativity.[5] Hutcheson is less interested in how sodomy came to be associated with Islam, because his focus is on the historiography of the *reconquista* and how historians have constructed its narrative.

John Boswell, in his ground-breaking study of homosexuality and Christianity through the fourteenth century, notes that many Christian polemics against Muslims centered on their perceived sexual depravity, including sodomy, which were antithetical to Christian beliefs. Boswell also claims that until the Third Lateran Council (1179), the first ecumenical council to rule on same-sex acts, Europe had a robust "gay subculture."[6] Yet by the dawn of the fourteenth century Boswell argues that many factors contributed to the demonization of subaltern groups, such as the expulsion of the Jews from England and France, the death of the last purportedly gay medieval monarch, England's Edward II, and the prosecution of lepers for poisoning wells and being in league with Jews and witches. Furthermore, the dissolution of the Templars on charges of sodomy produced an environment in which minority groups, such as Jews and homosexuals, were feared as disruptive social elements.[7] Boswell's work has been endlessly debated and criticized for his argument that, until the twelfth century, Christianity was at most ambiguous towards homosexuality, but he does effectively argue later events resulted in antipathy towards those who engaged in

[5] Gregory Hutcheson, "The Sodomitic Moor: Queerness in the Narrative of Reconquista" in *Queering the Middle Ages*, ed. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 107. Coined by queer theorist Michael Warner, "heteronormativity" pertains to variations of heterosexuality that are marginalized by social practices, beliefs and policies. See Michael Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[6] John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 243-66. Boswell uses the term "gay" and "homosexual" throughout his text, but these terms, in the modern sense, denote a lifestyle rather than an act. "Same-sex" is more accurate and less political and that term will be employed here.

[7] Ibid., 272.

same-sex relations.[8] This essay expands on Boswell's argument that medieval discourses on Islam included the belief that Muslims practiced sodomy. By using the Templars as a case study, this essay will show that the Islam/sodomy dialectic was used to prosecute political enemies. By associating sodomy with Islam, Church and secular authorities could claim that those who were believed to have engaged in same-sex relations were simultaneously engaging in Islamic practices and were therefore internal representatives of an external threat.

When King Philip IV and his advisors accused the Templars of sodomy they were continuing a tradition of character assassination. Both Boswell and Jeffrey Richards have noted that accusations of sexual deviancy were frequently utilized in medieval politics to impugn the character of one's political enemies.[9] It should not be assumed, however, that accusing one of sodomy was mere political maneuvering or that those making the accusations believed them ultimately to be untrue. Malcolm Barber, in his study of the Templar trials, believes that larger contextual issues were at play. With a weakened papacy under Pope Clement V, the fall of the last Christian stronghold at Acre, and a sincere belief by many secular and religious authorities that Christendom was under attack both internally from heresies and externally from Islam, the faithful were required to strike down evil when it was exposed; thus strengthening the moral structure of Christian society.[10] The conjunction was set involving the Templars, Islam, and sodomy.

During the High Middle Ages polemics on Islam often included a belief that Muslims were sexually immoral and were threats to moral Christian society. An analysis of Christian writings, from Hrotswitha of Gandersheim's biography of Saint Pelagius through Jacques de Vitry's *Oriental History*, shows that many medieval Christians believed Muslims practiced sodomy. As is often the case with essentializing the "other," the way to assert one group's normative behavior is to compare it to the perceived abnormative behavior of an "alien" or minority group. Islamophobia and homophobia had become interchangeable. Though it is almost

[8] For an excellent debate on this topic see Warren Johansson, Wayne R. Dynes, and John Lauritsen's criticism of Boswell at http://www.pinktriangle.org.uk/lib/hic/index.html.

[9] Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 144; Boswell, *Christianity*, 279.

[10] Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1978), 247.

impossible to know what the average medieval Christian thought about same-sex relations, Islam, or the Templars, the sources are geographically and historically diverse enough to infer that many people believed the sodomy-Islam-Templar dialectic. In his rivalry with the Templars, sodomy provided Philip a moral context which would have been recognized and believable for many European Christians.

One of the earliest Christian writings documenting the connection between sodomy and Islam was the biography of Saint Pelagius by Hrotswitha, canoness of the Benedictine monastery of Gandersheim in Saxony. In *The Passion of Saint Pelagius* (962), Hrotswitha recounts the death of the young Christian prince Pelagius (912-926) under orders from Abd ar-Rahman III (912-961), Emir and Caliph of Córdoba. The modern story of Pelagius states that he was martyred for refusing to convert to Islam, yet Hrotswitha's biography claims that he was killed for refusing the sexual advances of Abd ar-Rahman. As Hrotswitha tells it, while in the dungeon at Córdoba, courtiers noticed Pelagius' "handsome face and savored the words of his sweet mouth."[11] Aware the Abd ar-Rahman was "debauched by the sin of sodomy" and that he was "passionately fond of boys who were lovely of face, [and that] king desired to unite with them in friendship," the courtiers suggested Pelagius be brought to court.[12] Once in court:

> all eyes turned to gaze at him, to marvel at both the young man's face and sweet words he spoke. The king too, drawn to him at that first glance, burned with desire of the good looks of that princely young man. Finally, kindled with immoderate longing, he ordered that Pelagius be seated with him on the royal throne so that he might touch him ardently.[13]

Hrotswitha's writings often featured young pious women defending their virginity, and her tale of Pelagius did not stray from this theme. Abd ar-Rahaman tried several times to kiss the young martyr, but "the soldier of Christ would not suffer this kind of love from a pagan king who was polluted with the lust of the flesh."[14]

[11] Hrotswitha of Gandersheim, "The Passion of Saint Pelagius, Most Precious Martyr, Who in Our Own Time Was Crowned with Martyrdom at Córdoba," in *The Writings of Medieval Women*, ed. and trans. by Marcelle Thiebaux (New York and London: Garland, 1994), 193.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 194.

[14] Ibid.

Hrotswitha's acceptance of contemporary views on same-sex desire and a belief that Islam promoted such relationships contributed to the discourse on sodomy and Islam. During the next three hundred years the theme of Muslim sexual depravity would be present in many crusade histories.

The first call to Western Europe to free the Eastern Christians from Muslim rule came in the form of the "Spurious Letter" (1095) which detailed the sexual depravity of the Turks at Anatolia. The letter was purportedly written by the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1048-1118) to Count Robert II of Flanders (1065-1111) imploring him to send aid against the pagan Muslims who had overrun the Holy Land. The first part of the letter is a detailed account of all the perverse crimes committed by the Turks against Christians. The Turks "circumcise Christian boys and youths…and spill the blood of circumcision right into baptismal fonts and compel them to urinate over them…"[15] After describing the sexual atrocities against women, the letter recounts the same-sex crimes committed by the Muslim Turks:

> But what next? We pass on to worse yet. They have degraded by sodomizing them men of every age and rank—boys, adolescents, young men, old men, servants, and, what is worse and more wicked, clerics and monks, and even—alas and shame! something which from the beginning of time has never been spoken or heard of—bishops! They have already killed one bishop with this nefarious sin.[16]

Though most historians doubt the authorship of the letter, there is little doubt as to its contemporariness, as the perceived sexual crimes of the Muslim Turks detailed in the letter made their way into contemporary histories of the crusades.[17]

[15] Alexius Komnenus, "The Spurious Letter to Count Robert of Flanders Imploring His Aid against the Turks," translated from Charles du Cange's (1610-1688) *Alexiad* by John Boswell in *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, 367-69.

[16] Ibid.

[17] The authorship of the letter, as well as the early crusade histories, is open to debate. Plagiarism did not hold the same stigma as it does today. The accepted theory is that many of these early crusade histories were based in large part on the anonymously written *Gesta Francorum*, a probable eyewitness account of the first crusade. Robert the Monk, Guilbert of Nogent, Baudry of Bourgueil, William of Tyre, Ralph of Caen and others all have overlapping references. For a good overview see "The Textual History of the Historia Iherosolimitana" chapter in Carol Sweetham's translation of *Robert the*

Many early crusade histories included a version of the "Spurious Letter" and its detailed accounts of Muslim sexual atrocities. Robert the Monk (d. 1122?) included a version of the letter in his *Historia Iherosolimitana* (1106-07), yet it differs in some respects from other versions. For instance Robert does not go into graphic detail of the defilement of women at the hands of Turks, yet almost verbatim he chronicles the sodomitic crimes against men. Furthermore, in contrast to other versions, Robert states that the bishop, rather than being killed by the "nefarious sin" actually "succumbed to the lure of this appalling sin."[18] It is as if the bishop became an active and willing participant in same sex relations. Therefore the danger the Muslim Turks posed was not merely in sexually defiling Christians in the Holy Land, but that the Muslims could turn otherwise pious men into sodomites.

The "Spurious Letter" and perceived Muslim sodomitic behavior found its way into other crusade chronicles as well. In his *The Deeds of God Performed through the Franks*, a history of the first crusade purportedly written in 1109, Guilbert of Nogent (1053-1125) writes that the Turks "became worse than animals, breaking all human laws by turning on men."[19] Guilbert also retells the story of the bishop killed by the "nefarious sin" when he writes, "Their lust overflowed to the point that the execrable and profoundly intolerable crime of sodomy, which they committed against men of middle or low station, they also committed against a certain bishop, killing him."[20] Yet for Guilbert these are not isolated instances of rogue elements within Islam, but are indicative of Muslim practices. Guilbert wrote that, "although, according to their own judgment, these wretches may have many women, that is not enough, but they must stain their dignity at the hog-trough of such filth by using men also." Guilbert concludes by linking Islam with story of Sodom, proclaiming "[it] is not surprising that God could not tolerate their ripe wantonness, and turned it into grief, and the earth, in its ancient way, cast out the excrement of such destructive inhabitants."[21] Early

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*Monk's History of the First Crusade* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 1-11.

[18] Robert the Monk, *Historia Iherosolimitana*, translated by Carol Sweetenham, Ibid., 220.

[19] Guilbert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God Performed Through the Franks*, translated by Robert Levine, retrieved June 9, 2006, from University of Pennsylvania online books. http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu. http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=4370

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

crusade histories contained references to Islamic sodomy, and this theme would only become more common as the struggle to regain the Holy Land continued.

Well into the Fifth Crusade (1217-1221), the association between sodomy and Islam had become almost matter-of-fact in Christian writings on the Middle East. In William of Ada's *De Modo serracenso extirpandi* (thirteenth century) Muslims, to whom he referred as Saracens, engaged in a variety of sexual acts and that "they have effeminate men in great number" who would dress and act as women. Thus "men with men working that which is unseemly…Saracens, oblivious of human dignity, freely resort to these effeminates and live with them as among us men and women live together openly."[22] As crusade after crusade failed to capture the Holy Land from the "sodomitic Muslims," tales of their sexual depravity began to appear in other polemics against Islam.

It was not only crusade histories in which Muslims were portrayed as sodomites; general histories and religious writings also perpetuated the myth of the "sodomitic Muslim." The theologian and historian Jacques de Vitry (1180-1240), author of hundreds of sermons as well as criticisms of the immorality of students at the University of Paris, site of the French Templar trials, wrote of Muslims in his *Oriental History* (1219), a history of the Holy Land from the founding of Islam to his present day. De Vitry wrote of Islam's founder Muhammad that "the enemy of nature, popularized the vice of sodomy among his people, who sexually abuse not only both genders but even animals and have for the most part become like mindless horses or mules…."[23] Like Guilbert, de Vitry sees sodomy as something inherently Islamic but also attributes a geographic basis for it. De Vitry writes "in the East, especially in hot regions, bestial and wanton people, to whom the austerity of the Christian religion seems intolerably burdensome…easily embark on the path which leads to death."[24] Crusade histories often relied on scandalous tales and jingoism to galvanize support for crusading missions, though it was not just histories that referenced the perceived wantonness of Muslims.

[22] William of Ada, "De modo sarracenos extirpandi" from *Recueil des historiens des croisades*, a collection of medieval documents written during the crusades compiled in Paris 1869-1906. Quoted in Boswell, 282.

[23] Jacques de Vitry, "Historia Hierosolymitana (Oriental History)," excerpt from Boswell 281. Translated by Boswell from the French by M. Guizot, *Histoire des croisades* (Paris, 1825).

[24] Ibid., 279, n. 32.

Religious texts, seemingly not directly connected to crusade history, also contained references to the perceived sexual depravity encouraged by Islam. Paul of Hungary's *Summa of Penance* (1219-1221) was written to make known the Fourth Lateran Council's (1215) constitution on confession; essentially a guidebook on type of sin and appropriate confessional practices. Interestingly, up to forty percent of the work on types of sin focuses on one sin, that of *luxuria*, or sodomy.[25] After a lengthy explanation of why sodomy is the worst of the sins of the flesh, Paul warns that "some count the sin as nothing and…in some regions men are abused almost publicly as if from a sort of urbanity, and those with whom they perpetuate this terrible and abominable vice are called charming."[26] Though it could merely be a coincidence, Paul's reference to "some regions" appears strikingly similar to de Vitry's assertion that sodomy is prevalent in "hot regions." As Mark Jordan points out, Paul's *Summa* was not missionary handbook to be taken by crusaders to the Holy Land, but was a confessor's manual to be used throughout Christendom.[27] However, few aspects of medieval European intellectual life were untouched by the crusades. Hence Christian theological writings, while not directly related to crusading, were in part influenced by them. As the crusades wore on there was a belief that crusading endeavors had unintended negative influences.

From the onset of the crusades some Christian propagandists accused crusaders who remained in the Holy Land of having adopted Muslim customs.[28] Fulcher of Chartres (1059-1127) wrote that "we who had been occidentals have become Orientals; a man once Italian or French has here become Galilean or Palestinian: and the man who once lived in Reims or Chartres now finds he is a citizen or Tyre or Acre. We have already forgotten the places of our birth."[29] Fulcher continues by observing that, "He who once was a stranger here is now a native, and every day, our dependants and relatives follow us here."[30] Arab writers too observed the close relationship between some crusaders and Muslims. The Muslim

[25] Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 93.

[26] Paul of Hungary, *Summa of Penance* quoted in Jordan, 99.

[27] Jordan, 99.

[28] Boswell, 281.

[29] Fulcher of Chartres, *Chronicles of the Crusades: Eye-Witness Accounts of the Wars between Christianity and Islam*, ed. Elizabeth Hallam (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989), 118.

[30] Ibid.

warrior and associate of crusader nemesis Salah al-Din, Usmah Ibn Munqidh (1095-1188) wrote in his autobiography that, "Among the Franks are those who have become acclimatized and have associated long with the Muslims. These are much better than the recent comers from the Frankish lands."[31] One of the charges against the French Templars in 1307 hinted at the adoption of pagan practices when it was claimed that they worshiped a pagan idol known as *Baphomet*, believed by some to be an etymological variant of Mohammad.[32]

Though the connection between *Baphomet* and Muhammad is historically tenuous at best, it is not surprising that Philip's inquisitors believed that the Templars had formed relationships with their Muslim counterparts if not completely having "gone native." Ibn Munqidh commented on the friendship between Templars and Muslims when he relayed his own experiences with the Order. On a visit to Christian Jerusalem to pray at the Aqsa mosque a Frank seized him and objected to the Muslim practice of praying towards the west. Ibn Munqidh states that, "The Templars, who were my friends…expelled him. They apologized to me, saying, 'This is a stranger who has only recently arrived from the land of the Franks and he has never before seen anyone praying except eastward.'"[33] Considering there was no religious plurality in the Holy Land, it was important for whoever was in control to maintain at least cordial relationships between Christians and Muslims whenever possible. Furthermore, some Templars who were born in the region spoke fluent Arabic and adopted regional dress. Though speaking the tongue of one's enemy would have aided the crusading effort and wearing regional dress was appropriate considering the environment, it also contributed to the belief for many European Christians that the Templars had indeed "gone native." With the

[31] Usmah Ibn Munqudh, *An Arab-Syrian Gentlemen and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usmah Ibn Munqidh*, Fordham University, Internet Medieval Sourcebook, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/usamah2.html.

[32] Peter Partner, *The Murdered Magicians: The Templars and their Myth* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 34. The Baphomet-Muhammad connection is a complex argument that has been debated by historians. Partner sites the Old French term "Bafometz" found in French troubadour ballads as referencing Muhammad. While Partner's thesis can be questioned, he has shown that *Baphomet* was a known term to both Templars and non-Templars. For a connection between Sufism and French troubadours see Idries Shaw, *The Sufis* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964).

[33] Usmah Ibn Munqudh, quoted in Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 203.

perceptions that Islam was a religion devoid of sexual morality and that the crusaders were in turn morally influenced by their experiences in the Holy Land in place, the setting was then ripe for King Philip IV to move against the Order.

There is little doubt among historians that the destruction of the Knights Templar was politically and economically motivated. Simply put, Philip was threatened by a military Order independent of his authority that was answerable only to the papacy, with which Philip had an ongoing conflict. Philip also desired the Templar wealth to replenish his depleted coffers. In engineering their destruction, Philip required along with religious heresy and financial impropriety, charges that would draw upon fears of an external "other" which would be recognized by all who were familiar with the accusations. Sodomy provided this moral element as it had, by the beginning of the fourteenth century, become associated with Europe's most dreaded enemy, Islam.

Over three hundred years of polemics against Islam had imbedded in the Christian European consciousness the perception that Muslims practiced sodomy. Scores of theological writings had also warned of the sinfulness of sodomy and the threat it posed to Christian morality. The implication in the charges of sodomy against the Templars was that the Order not only engaged in sinful sexual behavior, but that through its practice they were acting as Muslims and were therefore un-Christian. Where charges of financial impropriety and performing sacrilegious acts may have appeared abstract to many of those who followed the Templar trials, the charge of sodomy was instantly recognizable as something Muslims practiced. The sodomy-Islam-Templar dialectic thus provided Philip with the basis in which to expose the perceived wantonness of the Order.

The accusations against the Templars came from an unlikely source, a fellow Templar. Esqui de Florian of Beziers, former Templar prior of Montfoucon, had been expelled from the Order for irregularities. Hearing the accusations against the Templars, King Philip IV's chancellor, Guillaume de Nogaret, brought de Florian to Philip's court after King Jaume II of Aragon had declined to pay de Florian for his secrets. As minister of the royal finances and a lawyer, Nogaret would have seen the need and had the ability to lead the prosecution of the Templars. Nogaret was also intimately familiar with heresy trials and the variety of charges levied against them since his own parents had been burnt at the stake as Albigensians, who coincidentally were also accused of practicing

sodomy.[34] Any successful crusade against perceived heretics would have been greatly aided by a level of demonization and propaganda which stigmatized those charged as sexual deviants. Yet the propaganda against the Templars as sexual deviants would not go unchallenged. Throughout the proceedings against the Order little evidence would emerge conclusively showing that the Templars engaged in same-sex acts.

Of all the charges, the three which were most denied by the ninety-four Templar witnesses at the Paris trials were worshiping of an idol, obscene kisses on the mouth, naval, and buttocks, and sodomy.[35] Of those who did admit to at least the knowledge of same-sex practices, their confessions were remarkably uniform. During the Paris trials Ranier of Larchent stated that Psalm 33, "How good, how delightful it is for all to live together like brothers," was actually a coded message for Templars to have relations with each other.[36] Jean de Saint-Loup testified that he was told it would "be better to satisfy their [Templars] lust among themselves, whereby the Order would escape evil report, than if they went with women."[37] John of Tortavilla claimed that he was told it was sinful to have sexual relations with non-Templars, but that sodomy was permitted in the Order.[38] The claim that Templar beds were *communes inter ipsos* (common between them) was made by Fulk of Trecis and confirmed through the testimonies of John of Bersees, Galfrid of Fera, John of Poissons, Milo of Saint-Fiacre, and others.[39] Yet the testimony at Paris reveals only that same-sex relations were encouraged by the order, generally during initiation, but very few admitted to actually practicing it themselves. In fact, only two of the ninety-four witnesses at Paris gave compelling evidence as to its actual existence within the Order.[40]

[34] Seward, *Monks of War*, 200.

[35] Partner, 34.

[36] Ps. 133., Translated from Jerusalem Bible in Anne Gilmour-Bryson, "Sodomy and the Knights Templar," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1996): 173. Gilmour-Bryson states that this was associated with monasteries and was therefore commonly used in monastic reception ceremonies. Most of the evidence on the Templars reaction to the charges of sodomy comes from Gilmour-Bryson's work.

[37] Thomas Wright, George Witt, and Sir James Tennant, "The Templars and the Worship of the Generative Powers," in *The Guilt of the Templars* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 263.

[38] Gilmour-Bryson, 176.

[39] Ibid., 177, no. 134.

[40] Ibid., 177.

The testimony of the seventy-two Templar witnesses at Poitiers, a town in west-central France, mirrored that of Paris. Peter of Claustro, a Templar and witness at the Poitiers trials, stated that "according to the statute of the Templar order one could commit sexual acts with the brothers without sin."[41] Another witness at Poitiers, Raymond of Narbonne, said he was told that "it was a greater sin to lie with women [than with men]" but that he never did.[42] Robert of Gay substantiated this point when he confessed to being told that "if any brother of the Order wished to lie with him, he should permit him."[43] Hugo of Guamaches admitted to being told to abstain from relations with women, but that it was acceptable to engage with brothers if he became aroused.[44] John of Cranaco claimed that during the Templar initiation he was told he could have relations with fellow Templars if he wished.[45] Again, as in Paris, many of the witnesses at Poitiers admitted to the existence of sodomy, yet refrained from practicing it themselves.

Admissions of sodomy, whether actually practicing it or merely the knowledge of its existence, should be doubted. Torture was a legitimate method to extract confessions; even Templar Grand Master Jacques de Molay confessed to some of the charges, only subsequently to deny them, resulting in his death in 1314. Furthermore, the uniformity of the confessions indicates that the accused were merely admitting to what they believed they were supposed to. Yet there were those who also vehemently denied the charge of sodomy. Theobold de Taverniac testified that the crime of sodomy was untrue because the Templars "could have very handsome and elegant women when they liked, and that they did have them frequently when they were rich and powerful enough to afford it."[46] The Templars were, after all, immersed in the same culture as their accusers and were undoubtedly familiar, and most likely concurred, with the belief that sodomy was a grievous sin.

Though it is likely that some same-sex relations were practiced in the Order, as they were in other all-male institutions, the disproportionate amount of denials to actually committing it is

[41] Gilmour-Bryson, 173.
[42] Konrad Schottmuller, "Untergang des Templerordens," quoted in Gilmour-Bryson, 173.
[43] Gilmour-Bryson, 173.
[44] Ibid., 175.
[45] Ibid., 173.
[46] Wright, 263.

astounding.[47] It should be noted that admissions to same-sex relations were almost always in regards to initiation ceremonies; thus they were structural heresies rather than individual. The Templars would also undoubtedly have recognized the inference to Islam in the charges of same-sex behavior and worshiping of the idol Baphomet; hence those were the most widely denied charges. Denials notwithstanding, Pope Clement V abolished the Order in March of 1312. Philip's desire to attain the Templars' wealth was thwarted by the Pope in May of the same year when the Order's property was transferred to the Hospitallers rather than the French crown.[48] Two years later Templar Grand Master Jacques de Molay was burned at the stake as a relapsed heretic (one who has recanted a previous confession). Before the year was out both Pope Clement V and King Philip IV were dead, from illness and a riding accident respectively. Their deaths contributed to the legend of the Templars as it was later claimed that de Molay had cursed his persecutors.[49]

The Koran is clear in its condemnation of same-sex relations. Yet in the fourteenth century most Christians knew little of this strange religion from the east, instead relying on a variety of Christian writings in which to form their opinions of Islam. From Hwrotwistha's biography of Pelagius portraying Muslims as sexual predators through the crusade histories of Robert the Monk, Guilbert of Nogent, William of Ada, Jacques de Vitry and others chronicling the perception that sodomy was inherent to Islam, many medieval Christians accepted the Islam-sodomy dialectic. Furthermore, following the failure of the Templars and other crusading knights to recapture the Holy Land, it was argued that the failure to take Jerusalem stemmed in part from the crusaders' adoption of Islamic practices, including sodomy. In his own crusade against the Templars, Philip and his inquisitors were able to draw upon these perceptions to accuse the Order of having abandoned Christianity by embracing Islamic sodomitic practices. Seven hundred years later the Vatican published the proceedings from the Templar trials in Rome (1307-1312), which, at the behest of King Philip, Pope Clement V had suppressed. In these parchments it has been revealed that Pope Clement V cleared the Templars of most of

[47] Gilmour-Bryson, 183. Other historians have shown that same-sex relations in all-male orders were a concern for Christian theologians; hence the large amount of Christian writing on the sin of sodomy. See also John Boswell and Mark Jordan.

[48] Barber, 280, 304. The Hospitallers were another crusading order who the papacy had earlier considered merging with the Templars.

[49] Ibid., 314-15.

the charges, except those of immorality.[50] Thus even those who were aware of Philip's true intentions appeared to accept sodomy-Islam-Templar connection.

[50] Maria De Cristofaro and Tracy Wilkinson, "Vatican lifts a 700-year-old bum rap: Documents show a 14th century pope absolved the Knights Templar of heresy but reversed himself under pressure." *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 2007, A3.