

# Jacques De Molay



## Born

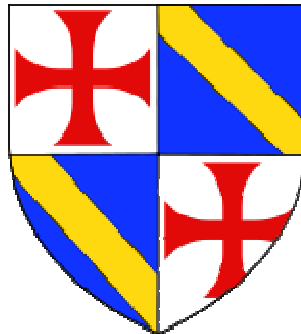
1240–1250 **Franche-Comté**

## Died

18 March 1314 **Paris**

Nationality **French**

Known for **Knights Templar**



*Coat of arms of Jacques de Molay*

**Jacques de Malay** (c. 1244 – 18 March 1314)<sup>[1]</sup> was the 23rd and last **Grand Master** of the **Knights Templar**, leading the Order from 20 April 1292 until it was dissolved by order of Pope **Clement V** in 1307. Though little is known of his actual life and deeds except for his last years as Grand Master, he is the best known Templar, along with the Order's founder and first Grand Master, **Hughes de Payens** (1070–1136). Jacques de Malay's goal as Grand Master was to reform the Order, and adjust it to the situation in the **Holy Land** during the waning days of the **Crusades**. As European support for the Crusades had dwindled, other forces were at work which sought to disband the Order and claim the wealth of the Templar's as their own. King **Philip IV of France**, deeply in

debt to the Templars, had de Molay and many other French Templars arrested in 1307 and tortured into making false confessions. When de Molay later retracted his confession, Philip had him [slowly burned upon a scaffold](#) on an [island](#) in the River [Seine](#) in [Paris](#), in March 1314. The sudden end of both the centuries-old order of Templars, and the dramatic execution of its last leader, turned de Molay into a legendary figure.

### *Youth source*

Little is known of his early years, but de Molay was probably born in [Molay, Haute-Saone](#), in the [county of Burgundy](#), at the time a territory ruled by [Otto III](#) as part of the [Holy Roman Empire](#), and in modern times in the area of [Franche-Comté](#), northeastern France. His birth year is not certain, but judging by statements made during the later trials, was probably between 1240 and 1250. He was born, as most Templar knights were, into a family of minor or middle nobility. It is said he was dubbed a Knight at age 21 in 1265 and that he was executed in 1314 at age 70. These two facts lead to the belief that he was born in 1244



*Ordination of Jacques de Molay in 1265 as a Knight Templar, at the [Beaune](#) commandery.*

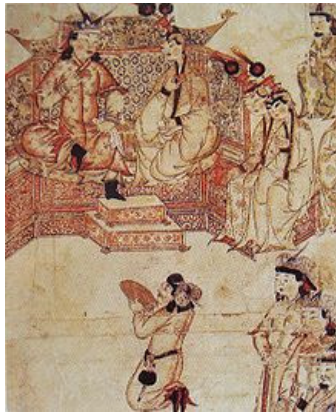
*Painting by Marius Granet (1777-1849).*

In 1265, as a young man, he was received into the Order of the Templars in a chapel at the [Beaune](#) House, by [Humbert de Pairaud](#), the [Visitor](#) of France and England. Another prominent Templar in attendance was Amory de la Roche, Templar Master of the province of France. Around 1270, de Molay went to the East ([Outremer](#)), though little is remembered of his activities for the next 20 years.

### *Grand Master*

After the [Fall of Acre](#) to the Egyptian Mamluks in 1291, the Franks (Europeans) who were able to do so retreated to the island of [Cyprus](#). It became the headquarters of the dwindling [Kingdom of Jerusalem](#), and the base of operations for any future military attempts by the Crusaders against the Egyptian Mamluks, who for their part were systematically conquering any last Crusader strongholds on the mainland. Templars in

Cyprus included Jacques de Molay and [Thibaud Gaudin](#), the 22nd Grand Master. During a meeting assembled on the island in the autumn of 1291, de Molay spoke of reforming the Order, and put himself forward as an alternative to the current Grand Master. Gaudin died around 1292, and as there were no other serious contenders for the role at the time, de Molay was soon elected. In spring 1293, he began a tour of the West to try to muster more support for a reconquest of the Holy Land. Developing relationships with European leaders such as [Pope Boniface VIII](#), [Edward I of England](#), [James I of Aragon](#) and [Charles II of Naples](#), de Molay's immediate goals were to strengthen the defense of Cyprus, and rebuild the Templar forces. From his travels, he was able to secure authorization from some monarchs for the export of supplies to Cyprus, but could obtain no firm commitment for a new Crusade. There was talk of merging the Templar's with one of the other military orders, the [Knights Hospitaller](#). The Grand Masters of both orders opposed such a merger, but pressure increased from the Papacy. It is known that de Molay held two general meetings of his order in southern France, at [Montpellier](#) in 1293 and at [Arles](#) in 1296, where he tried to make reforms. In the autumn of 1296 de Molay was back in Cyprus to defend his order against the interests of [Henry II of Cyprus](#), which conflict had its roots back in the days of [Guillaume de Beaujeu](#). From 1299 to 1303, de Molay was engaged in planning and executing a new attack against the Mamluks. The plan was to coordinate actions between the Christian military orders, the King of Cyprus, the aristocracy of Cyprus, the forces of [Cilician Armenia](#), and a new potential ally, the Mongols of the [Ilkhanate](#) (Persia), to oppose the Egyptian Mamluks and retake the coastal city of



*Tortosa (Tartus) in Syria*

[Ghazan](#), the Mongol ruler of the [Ilkhanate](#), sought a [Franco-Mongol alliance](#) with the Crusaders against the Egyptian Mamluks, but was never able to successfully coordinate military actions

For generations, there had been communications between the Mongols and Europeans towards the possibility of forging a [Franco-Mongol alliance](#) against the Mamluks, but without success. The Mongols had been repeatedly [attempting to conquer Syria themselves](#), each time being forced back either by the Egyptian Mamluks, or having to retreat because of a civil war within the Mongol Empire, such as

having to defend from attacks from the Mongol [Golden Horde](#) to the north. In 1299, the Ilkhanate again attempted to conquer Syria, having some preliminary success against the Mamluks in the [Battle of Wadi al-Khazandar](#) in December 1299. In 1300, de Molay and other forces from Cyprus put together a small fleet of 16 ships which committed raids along the Egyptian and Syrian coasts. The force was commanded by King [Henry II of Jerusalem](#), the king of Cyprus, accompanied by his brother, [Amalric, Lord of Tyre](#), and the heads of the military orders, with the ambassador of the Mongol leader [Ghazan](#) also in attendance. The ships left [Famagusta](#) on 20 July 1300, and under the leadership of Admiral Baudouin de Picquigny, raided the coasts of Egypt and Syria: Rosetta,<sup>1</sup> Alexandria, Acre, Tortosa and [Maraclea](#), before returning to Cyprus.

The Cypriots then prepared for an attack on Tortosa in late 1300, sending a joint force to a staging area on the island of [Ruad](#), from which raids were launched on the mainland. The intent was to establish a Templar bridgehead to await assistance from Ghazan's Mongols, but the Mongols failed to appear in 1300. The same happened in 1301 and 1302, and the island was finally lost in the [Siege of Ruad](#) on 26 September 1302, eliminating the Crusaders' last foothold near the mainland.

Following the loss of Ruad, de Molay abandoned the tactic of small advance forces, and instead put his energies into trying to raise support for a new major Crusade, as well as strengthening Templar authority in Cyprus. When a power struggle erupted between King Henry II and his brother Amalric, the Templars supported Amalric, who took the crown and had his brother exiled in 1306. Meanwhile, pressure increased in Europe that the Templars should be merged with the other military orders, perhaps all placed under the authority of one king, and that individual should become the new King of Jerusalem when it was conquered.

### *Travel to France*

In 1305, the newly elected [Pope Clement V](#) asked the leaders of the military orders for their opinions concerning a new crusade and the merging of the orders. De Molay was asked to write memoranda on each of the issues, which he did during the summer of 1306. De Molay was opposed to the merger, believing instead that having separate military orders was a stronger position, as the missions of each order were somewhat different. He was also of the belief that if there were to be a new crusade, it needed to be a large one, as the smaller attempts were not effective.

On 6 June, the leaders of both the Templars and the [Hospitallers](#) were officially asked to come to the Papal offices in [Poitiers](#) to discuss these matters, with the date of the meeting scheduled as [All Saints Day](#) in 1306, though it later had to be postponed due to the Pope's illness with [gastro-enteritis](#). De Molay left Cyprus on 15 October, arriving in France in late 1306 or early 1307; however, the meeting was again delayed until late May due to the Pope's illness.

King [Philip IV of France](#), deeply in debt to the Templars, was in favor of merging the Orders under his own command, thereby making himself *Rex Bellator* or War King. De Molay, however, rejected the idea. Philip was already at odds with the papacy, trying to tax the clergy, and had been attempting to assert his own authority as higher than that of the Pope. For this, one of Clement's predecessors, Pope, had attempted to have Philip excommunicated, but Philip then had Boniface abducted and charged with heresy. The elderly Boniface was rescued, but then died of shock shortly thereafter. His successor [Pope Benedict XI](#) did not last long, dying in less than a year, possibly poisoned via Philip's councilor [Guillaume de Nogaret](#). It took a year to choose the next Pope, the Frenchman Clement V, who was also under strong pressure to bend to Philip's will. Clement moved the Papacy from Italy to [Poitiers](#), France, where Philip continued to assert more dominance over the Papacy and the Templars.

The leader of the Hospitallers, [Fulk de Villa ret](#), was also delayed in his travel to France, as he was engaged with a battle at [Rhodes](#). He did not arrive until late summer, so while waiting for his arrival, de Molay met with the Pope on other matters, one of which was the charges by one or more ousted Templars who had made accusations of impropriety in the Templars' initiation ceremony. De Molay had already spoken with the king in Paris on 24 June 1307 about the accusations against his order and was partially reassured. Returning to Poitiers, de Molay asked the Pope to set up an inquiry to quickly clear the Order of the rumors and accusations surrounding it, and the Pope convened an inquiry on 24 August.

### *Arrest and Charge*

There were five initial charges lodged against the Templars. The first was the renouncement and spitting on the cross during initiation into the Order. The second was the stripping of the man to be initiated and the thrice kissing of that man by the preceptor on the navel, posteriors and the mouth. The third was telling the neophyte (novice) that unnatural lust was lawful and indulged in commonly. The fourth was that the cord worn by the neophyte day and night was consecrated by wrapping it around an idol in the form of a human head with a great beard, and that this idol was adored in all chapters. The fifth was that the priests of the order did not consecrate the host in celebrating Mass. Subsequently, the charges would be increased and would become, according to the procedures, lists of articles 86 to 127[3] in which will be added a few other charges, such as the prohibition to priests who do not belong to the order

On 14 September, Philip took advantage of the rumors and inquiry to begin his move against the Templars, sending out a secret order to his agents in all parts of France to implement a [mass arrest](#) of all Templars at dawn on 13 October. Philip wanted the Templars arrested and their possessions confiscated to incorporate their wealth into the Royal Treasury and to be free of the enormous debt he owed the Templar Order. de Molay was in Paris on 12 October, where he was a pallbearer at the funeral of [Catherine of Courtenay](#), wife of Count [Charles of Valois](#), and sister-in-law of King



Philip. In a dawn raid on Friday, 13 October 1307, de Molay and sixty of his Templar brothers were arrested. Philip then had the Templars charged with heresy and many other trumped-up charges, most of which were identical to the charges which had previously been leveled by Philip's agents against [Pope Boniface VIII](#).



Interrogation of Jacques de Molay. 19th century print

During forced interrogation by royal agents at the [University of Paris](#) on 24/25 October, de Molay confessed that the Templar initiation ritual included "denying Christ and trampling on the Cross". He was also forced to write a letter asking every Templar to admit to these acts. Under pressure from Philip IV, Pope Clement V ordered the arrest of all the Templars throughout Christendom.



*Jacques de Molay sentenced to the stake in 1314*, from the *Chronicle of France or of St Denis* (fourteenth century). Note the shape of the island, representing the [Île de la Cité](#) (Island of the City) in the Seine where the executions took place.

The pope still wanted to hear de Molay's side of the story, and dispatched two cardinals to Paris in December 1307. In front of the cardinals, de Molay retracted his earlier confessions. A power struggle ensued between the king and the pope, which was settled in August 1308 when they agreed to split the convictions. Through the [papal bull \*Faciens misericordiam\*](#) the procedure to prosecute the Templars was set out on a duality where one commission would judge individuals of the Order and a different commission would judge the Order as an entity. Pope Clement called for an [ecumenical council](#) to meet in [Vienne](#) in 1310 to decide the future of the Templars. In the meantime, the Order's dignitaries, among them de Molay, were to be judged by the pope.

In the royal palace at [Chinon](#), de Molay was again questioned by the cardinals, but this time with royal agents present, and he returned to his forced admissions made in 1307. In November 1309, the Papal Commission for the Kingdom of France began its own hearings, during which de Molay again recanted, stating that he did not acknowledge the accusations brought against his order.



Marker at the site of de Molay's execution in Paris.

(translation): At this location, Jacques de Molay, last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, was burned on 18 March 1314), located by the stairs from the [Pont-Neuf](#) bridge. The top half of this photo shows the part of the island where the executions took place. The lower half shows the plaque, which is on one of the pillars of the bridge, behind the trees.

Any further opposition by the Templars was effectively broken when Philip used the previously forced confessions to sentence 54 Templars to be burnt at the stake on 10–12 May 1310.

The council which had been called for 1310 was delayed for two years due to the length of the trials, but finally was convened in 1312. On 22 March 1312, at the [Council of Vienne](#), the Order of the Knights Templar was abolished by papal decree.

### *Death*

Of his death it is recorded: "The cardinals dallied with their duty until 18 March 1314, when, on a scaffold in front of Notre Dame, Jacques de Molay, Templar Grand Master, Godefroi de Charney, Master of Normandy, Hughes de Peraud, Visitor of France, and Godefroi de Gonnevillle, Master of Aquitaine, were brought forth from the jail in which for nearly seven years they had lain, to receive the sentence agreed upon by the cardinals, in conjunction with the [Archbishop of Sens](#) and some other prelates whom they had called in. Considering the offences which the culprits had confessed and confirmed, the penance imposed was in accordance with rule — that of perpetual imprisonment. The affair was supposed to be concluded when, to the dismay of the

prelates and wonderment of the assembled crowd, De Molay and **GEOFFREY** De Charney arose. They had been guilty, they said, not of the crimes imputed to them, but of basely betraying their Order to save their own lives. It was pure and holy; the charges were fictitious and the confessions false. Hastily the cardinals delivered them to the Prevot of Paris, and retired to deliberate on this unexpected contingency, but they were saved all trouble. When the news was carried to Philippe he was furious. A short consultation with his council only was required. The canons pronounced that a relapsed heretic was to be burned without a hearing; the facts were notorious and no formal judgment by the papal commission need be waited for. That same day, by sunset, a pile was erected on a small island in the **Seine**, the Isle des Juifs, near the palace garden. There de Molay and de Charney were slowly burned to death, refusing all offers of pardon for retraction, and bearing their torment with a composure which won for them the reputation of martyrs among the people, who reverently collected their ashes as relics." (Note: the account varies by one day, not unusual for chronicles of the middle ages)

### *Main article: [Chinon Parchment](#)*

In September 2001, **Barbara Frale** found a copy of the Chinon Parchment in the **Vatican Secret Archives**, a document which explicitly confirms that in 1308 Pope Clement V absolved Jacques de Molay and other leaders of the Order including Geoffroi de Charney and **Hughes de Pairaud**. She published her findings in the *Journal of Medieval History* in 2004. Another Chinon parchment dated 20 August 1308 addressed to **Philip IV of France**, well-known to historians, stated that **absolution** had been granted to all those Templars that had confessed to heresy "and restored them to the Sacraments and to the unity of the Church".

### *Legends*

The sudden arrest of the Templars, the conflicting stories about confessions, and the dramatic deaths by burning, generated many stories and legends about both the Order, and its last Grand Master.

### *Conquest of Jerusalem*



"The capture of Jerusalem by Jacques de Molay in 1299", by Claude Jacquand, Versailles, Musée National Chateau Trianons. This depiction was commissioned in the 1800s, but is about an event in 1299 that did not actually occur. There was no battle, and de Molay was nowhere near Jerusalem at the time. In reality, after the Christians



lost control of Jerusalem in 1244, it was not under Christian control again until 1917, when the British took it from the Ottomans.

In France in the 19th century, false stories circulated that de Molay had captured Jerusalem in 1300. These rumors are likely related to the fact that the medieval historian the Templar wrote about a Mongol general named "[Mulay](#)" who occupied Syria and Palestine for a few months in early 1300. The Mongol Mulay and the Templar De Molay were entirely different people, but some historians regularly confused the two.

The confusion was enhanced in 1805, when the French playwright/historian François Raynouard made claims that Jerusalem had been captured by the Mongols, with de Molay in charge of one of the Mongol divisions. "*In 1299, the Grand-Master was with his knights at the taking of Jerusalem.*" This story of wishful thinking was so popular in France, that in 1846 a large-scale painting was created by Claude Jacquand, titled *Molay Prend Jerusalem, 1299* ("Molay Takes Jerusalem, 1299"), which depicts the supposed event. Today the painting hangs in the Hall of the Crusades in the French national museum in [Versailles](#).

In the 1861 edition of the French encyclopedia, the *Nouvelle Biographie Universelle*, it even lists de Molay as a Mongol commander in its "Molay" article:

"Jacques de Molay was not inactive in this decision of the Great Khan. This is proven by the fact that Molay was in command of one of the wings of the Mongol army. With the troops under his control, he invaded Syria, participated in the first battle in which the Sultan was vanquished, pursued the routed Malik Nasir as far as the desert of Egypt: then, under the guidance of [Kutluk](#), a Mongol general, he was able to take Jerusalem, among other cities, over the Muslims, and the Mongols entered to celebrate Easter"

*Nouvelle Biographie Universelle, "Molay" article, 1861.*

Modern historians, however, state that the truth of the matter is this: There are indeed numerous ancient records of Mongol raids and occupations of Jerusalem (from Western, Armenian, or Arab sources), and in 1300 the Mongols did achieve a brief victory in Syria which caused a Muslim retreat, and allowed the Mongols to launch raids into the Levant as far as [Gaza](#) for a period of a few months. During that year, rumors flew through Europe that the Mongols had recaptured Jerusalem and were going to return the city to the Europeans. However, this was only an [urban legend](#), as the only activities that the Mongols had even engaged in were some minor [raids through Palestine](#), which may or may not have even passed through Jerusalem itself. Regardless of what the Mongols may or may not have done, de Molay was never a Mongol commander, and probably never set foot in Jerusalem.

*The Shroud of Turin*

[Geoffroi de Charny](#) (the French Knight who died at the 1356 [battle of Poitiers](#)) and his wife [Jeanne deVergy](#) are the first reliably recorded owners of the [Shroud of Turin](#). This Geoffroi participated in a failed crusade under Humbert II of Viennois in the late 1340s. He is sometimes confused with Templar [Geoffrey de Charney](#).

### *Historical origin of "Inquisition" charge of an idol of a bearded man*

As stated above, of the five original accusations made against the Knights Templars one was the "worshipping of an idol of a man with a long beard". It specifically states: "... *The cord which the Templars wore over the shirt day and night as a symbol of chastity had been consecrated by wrapping it around an idol in the form of a human head with a great beard, and this head was adored in the chapters ...*" The image was never found. It never mentions the image to be de Molay. Further, it seems to describe a rounded idol. If it existed at all, and was not just a product of torture, it could not have been the Shroud of Turin just by its description. There were many early iconic images of a bearded Jesus that existed at that time.

### *Curse*

It is said that Jacques de Molay cursed King [Philip IV of France](#) and his descendants from his execution pyre. The story of the shouted curse appears to be a combination of words by a different Templar, and those of de Molay. An eyewitness to the execution stated that de Molay showed no sign of fear, and told those present that God would avenge their deaths. Another variation on this story was told by the contemporary chronicler Ferretto of Vicenza, who applied the idea to a Neapolitan Templar brought before Clement V, whom he denounced for his injustice. Sometime later, as he was about to be executed, he appealed "from this your heinous judgment to the living and true God, who is in Heaven", warning the pope that, within a year and a day, he and Philip IV would be obliged to answer for their crimes in God's presence.

It is true that Philip and Clement V both died within a year of Molay's execution, Clement finally succumbing to a long illness on 20 April 1314, and Philip in a hunting accident. Then followed, the rapid succession of the last [Direct Capetian](#) kings of France between 1314 and 1328, the three sons of Philip IV. Within 14 years from the death of de Molay, the 300-year-old [House of Capet](#) collapsed. This series of events forms the basis of *[Les Rois Maudits](#)* (*The Accursed Kings*), a series of historical novels written by [Maurice Druon](#) between 1955 and 1977, which was also turned into two French television miniseries in 1972 and 2005.

The American historian [Henry Charles Lea](#) wrote: "Even in distant Germany Philippe's death was spoken of as a retribution for his destruction of the Templars, and Clement was described as shedding tears of remorse on his death-bed for three great crimes, the poisoning of [Henry VI](#), Holy Roman Emperor, and the ruin of the Templars and [Beguienes](#)".

### *Freemasonry*

Some 400 years after the death of de Molay and the dissolution of the [Knights Templar](#), the fraternal order of [Freemasonry](#) began to emerge in northern Europe. The Masons developed an elaborate mythos about their Order, and some claimed heritage from entities in history, ranging from the mystique of the Templars to the builders of [Solomon's Temple](#). The stories of the Templars' secret initiation ceremonies also proved a tempting source for Masonic writers who were creating new works of [pseudo history](#). As described by modern historian [Malcolm Barber](#) in *The New Knighthood*: "It was during the 1760s that German masons introduced a specific Templar connection, claiming that the Order, through its occupation of the [Temple of Solomon](#), had been the repository of secret wisdom and magical powers, which James of Molay had handed down to his successor before his execution and of which the eighteenth-century Freemasons were the direct heirs."

The modern Masonic [Knights Templar](#) is an international [philanthropic](#) and [chivalric order](#) affiliated with Freemasonry, and begun in [Ireland](#) perhaps as long ago as 1780. Unlike the initial degrees conferred in a [Masonic Lodge](#), which only require a belief in a [Supreme Being](#) regardless of religious affiliation, the Knights Templar is one of several [additional Masonic Orders](#) in which membership is open only to Freemasons who profess a belief in the [Christian religion](#). The full title of this Order is *The United Religious, Military and Masonic Orders of the Temple and of St John of Jerusalem, Palestine, Rhodes and Malta*.

The story of De Molay's brave defiance of his inquisitors has been incorporated in various forms into Masonic lore; most notably in the form of a youth group for young men aged 12 to 21, sponsored by Freemasonry, and named after the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar. [De Molay International](#), also known as "The Order of De Molay," was founded in [Kansas City](#) in 1919 by Freemason Frank S. Land. Similar to what happens in Freemasonry, new members are ceremoniously initiated using "degrees" that are part of the Order's secret ritual, authored, in the case of the Order of DeMolay's ritual, by Frank A. Marshall at founder Land's request in 1919. The first, and less dramatic of the two degrees is called "the Initiatory Degree," wherein initiates are escorted around the meeting room and instructed in the precepts and *Seven Cardinal Virtues* of the Order. The second of the two degrees, known as "the De Molay Degree," which, along with the Initiatory Degree, members and observers are sworn to keep secret, dramatically recreates the trial, "before a Commission in its Council Chamber," of the historic characters named in the ritual as "Jacques DeMolay and his three preceptors, Guy of Auvergne, Godfrey de Goneville, and Hughes de Peralde." The DeMolay Degree, in which players dress in robes and other period costume, and

appear on a dimly-lit stage whereupon they dramatically deliver memorized lines prescribed in the ritual, is described therein as depicting "the tragic climax in the career of Jacques De Molay, the hero and martyr who is the exemplar of our Order." The

stage instructions include that "the foremost point to be remembered is to portray Jacques De Molay as the hero and to select an interpretation for the De Molay Degree which will enhance the lessons of fidelity and toleration." The drama concludes with the commission condemning the four to life imprisonment; however, according to the ritual, "so incensed was the king at the noble defiance and defense of De Molay and Guy of Auvergne that he overrode the Commission's verdict and hurried De Molay and Auvergne to the stake on an island near the Cathedral, where they were barbarously burned."

