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Máté Molnár, *A templomos lovagrend alkonya [Twilight of the Order of the Temple]* (Miles Christi), 348 pages, Budapest 2010, ISBN 978-96-306903-62.

In this book Máté Molnár focuses on the last ten years of the Templars, with its main theme being the indictment, the trial and finally the dissolution of the order. In his preface to the book, János Pánczél Hegedűs mentions the many misconceptions in public opinion about the Templars (i.e. occultism) which occur in most works published on the topic. He regards Máté Molnár's book as so significant, as he aims to refute these misconceptions and tell the genuine history of the order, using contemporary sources and the latest research.

In the first chapter the author gives a detailed description of the Holy Land after the fall of Acre in 1291, telling how the Ilkhanate and Mamluk Egypt fought over the control of Syria, and how the order failed to establish a new "beachhead" on the island of Ruad. We are given a comprehensive picture of the region's political and military history and a sense of the balance of powers that a new, long-planned crusade would have had to face. The author then goes on to describe the political situation in France, emphasizing the Templars' respectable position within society. For example, the royal treasury was guarded at the order's chapter-house in Paris, while some members were overseeing the collection of royal taxes when they were arrested. Even King Philip himself applied for membership (he was rejected, eventually), which could hardly have occurred, if the order had not been well-respected and highly trustworthy. In examining the accusers of the order, the author notes that although only one of them is known by name (Esquieu de Floyran), all of them were renegade members of the order and all of them were arrested for ordinary crimes. They could avoid punishment only by revealing a crime greater than theirs. Since heresy was the greatest sin according to contemporary law, the accusers wanted to make sure they would avoid imprisonment. Examining the first part of the trial, the author is quick to point out the characteristics of a show-trial. All members were arrested simultaneously throughout kingdom, confessions were often extracted by torture and records of the proceedings were greatly manipulated. For example, all of the confessions were recorded, but only a few denials, so the guilty members seemingly outnumbered the not guilty. The trial was also conducted by the secular authorities, although heresy was supposed to belong to the jurisdiction of the church in the form of the inquisition.

The following two chapters are probably the most important chapters of the book as they elaborate the question of the guilt of the order and the reasons for the trial. In this question the author cites other researchers according to their conclusions, that is: guilty, partially guilty, or innocent. Those advocating the innocence of the order (the majority) emphasize the greed of King Philip and Pope Clement's

inability to protect the order as the main reasons for the conviction. Those claiming the order's guilt point out their corruption and defend the king for his actions. The third opinion (partial guilt) seems to be a compromise between the other two. There may have been transgressions in the order but these could not have been as widespread as the charges lead us to believe, while there is also no reason to suppose that other orders (knightly or monastic) were completely free of misdemeanours. Thus the trial seems to be an overreaction and was unlawful with regard its target, which should have been individuals and not the whole institution. What then was the real reason behind the persecution of the order? The author tries to answer this question in the following chapter. He examines possible reasons in six categories: personal, moral, financial, ecclesiastical, and matters of domestic, foreign and military affairs. The personal (Philip's rejection by) and moral (corruption, heresy) reasons were simply excuses to persecute the order. King Philip showed rationality when dealing with other matters of state, so it seems highly unlikely that he would undertake a conflict of this magnitude because of an insult. It was even more unlikely considering that he also had reason for gratitude. When a riot broke out in Paris because of his fiscal policies in the summer of 1306 (the arrests were made in October of the following year) King Philip found refuge in the Templar chapterhouse which was besieged for three days unsuccessfully. He has previously dealt with the moral reasons of corruption and heresy on many occasions and concluded that they have little plausibility. The financial reason (i.e. acquisition of the wealth of the order) could have been a real reason, but still not as important as popular belief regards it. Although the estates of the order were seized and used by the king for the duration of the trial, he did not have a real chance to acquire them permanently. According to the scholars and theologians of the University of Paris, who offered their written opinion on the matter, the estates of the order were composed of benefices donated over the previous centuries, and had to be used according to the original intent of the donors, that is to liberate the Holy Land. The ecclesiastical reasons can be considered a valid cause for the persecution. At the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century there were four major (show) trials against the church, including that of the late Pope Boniface VIII, who was accused of heresy. These events seem to indicate the beginning of a power-struggle between the King of France and the Pope, similar to the one that had already been concluded between the Emperor and the Papacy, and the trial of the Templars fits well within this process. The domestic reasons for persecution state that the Templars' power and privileges were a threat to Philip's centralization efforts, although upon further investigation they also turn out to be highly unlikely, since there were a number of other groups in French society with privileges similar to those of the Templars. The circumstances of their arrest also prove that their power and organization (at least in Europe) was

overrated. They could not put up any kind of resistance, since their chapter-houses were scattered throughout the country and most of the fighting members of the order were deployed in Cyprus. Reasons of foreign and military affairs show the ambitions of Philip and the Capetian dynasty. Because of their importance, the author examines them in separate chapters, where he discusses Philip's plans to merge the two knightly orders under the leadership of his son and for a new crusade for the restoration of the kingdom of Jerusalem, led by his other son. He also describes the king's plans to sponsor Charles of Valois in the imperial election and the effort to restore the Latin Empire of Constantinople under Charles' rule.

The last chapters of the book are concerned with the last part of the trial, the Templars' defence and the fate of the order's wealth. King Philip originally wanted a rapid trial, which is indicated by the manner of the arrests, the nature of the charges and the large number of coerced testimonies. Pope Clement by contrast defended the order and tried to postpone the verdict, which came only at the Council of Vienne in 1311–1312. By that time the Pope no longer supported the order and was only concerned with transferring its wealth to the Hospitallers. Upon investigating the reasons behind this change of heart, the author concludes the probability of a political compromise: the Pope abandoned the Templars, while the king dropped the charges against Pope Boniface VIII. With this settlement Pope Clement aimed to encourage a new crusade since the main participants would no longer have been preoccupied. The author also touches upon the process of the trial and the fate of the order's property in other parts of Europe. He concludes that nowhere outside of France did anyone seriously believe the guilt of the order. There were considerably fewer cases of torture and thus confessions. The wealth of the order was also transferred to the Hospitallers, more or less intact, except in the Iberian Peninsula, where due to the Reconquista rulers tended to favour local orders.

Máté Molnár's work gives a comprehensive picture for anyone who wants to become familiar with the last chapter of the history of the order. The bibliography provides a wide range of sources and literature on the subject, making it a good base for further research. The author has succeeded in achieving his aim of refuting the misconceptions surrounding the Templars.

*Ádám Debreczeni (Debrecen)*