SOFTWARE & TECH

# Lady Knights Templar

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## Introduction: Debunking the Myth of the Lady Knights Templar

The Knights Templar, officially the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, stood as one of the most powerful military orders of the Middle Ages. For nearly two centuries, these warrior monks defended pilgrims, guarded holy sites, and built a vast financial empire that stretched across Europe and the Holy Land. Their iconic white mantles adorned with the red cross have fueled countless legends, from secret treasures to whispered conspiracies. Within this rich tapestry of history and myth, one question persistently arises: **Were there Lady Knights Templar?**

The short answer is no, not in the strictest historical sense. The Knights Templar was a military order, and its membership was exclusively male. The Rule of the Order, originally written by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and based on the Cistercian model, explicitly forbade the presence of women within its ranks. However, the longer and far more fascinating answer reveals that women played significant, albeit carefully circumscribed, roles in the life and work of the Templars. Moreover, in the modern era, the concept of the **Lady Knights Templar** has been embraced by revivalist and neo-Templar organizations, giving new life to an ancient ideal. This article explores the historical truth, the supporting roles women played, and the modern revival of the Lady Knight Templar.

## The Historical Knights Templar: A Brotherhood of Warrior Monks

Founded in 1119 by Hugues de Payens and eight companions, the Knights Templar was conceived as a protective force for pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem after the First Crusade. The order received papal recognition at the Council of Troyes in 1129, and its Rule was heavily influenced by the Cistercian tradition, which emphasized austerity, obedience, and a life separate from worldly temptations. **Women were seen as a distraction and a potential source of moral weakness** for men sworn to poverty, chastity, and obedience.

The Rule of the Templars was remarkably clear. It stated that the company of women was a dangerous thing, for "the old enemy has through women driven many from the straight path to Paradise." Therefore, the order forbade the admission of women as sisters. Furthermore, Templar knights were instructed to avoid kissing women, even their own mothers or sisters. This stricture was not misogyny in a modern sense but a practical application of monastic discipline designed to maintain focus on the spiritual and military mission.

However, the complete absence of women from the order is a simplification. While they could not be sworn knights or sergeants, women were deeply embedded in the Templar ecosystem as donors, associates, patrons, and even as spiritual affiliates.

## Women in the Medieval Templar Order: Associates and Benefactors

To understand the role of women within the Templar sphere, one must look beyond the military arm and toward the order's vast economic and spiritual network. The Templars managed extensive estates, farms, churches, and fortified houses across Europe. This network required management, labor, and significant financial support. **Women played a crucial role as benefactors and associates.**

### Donations and Patronage

Many noblewomen made substantial donations to the Knights Templar. These donations included land, properties, annual rents, and valuable goods. In return, the donors received spiritual benefits, such as prayers for their souls, burial in Templar cemeteries, and the privilege of being remembered in the order's liturgical services. Records from England, France, and the Crusader states document numerous women, often widows or heiresses, who granted estates to the Templars. These women were not "Lady Knights Templar" in any military sense, but they were vital partners whose generosity sustained the order.

### Affiliated Sisters and Conversae

In some Templar houses, particularly in Europe, there is evidence of women living under a form of Templar rule. These women were often referred to as **sorores** (sisters) or **conversae**(converts). They were not full members of the military order but were attached to Templar communities, often living in separate quarters or in associated convents. They performed domestic tasks such as laundry, cooking, and caring for the sick. They also participated in the spiritual life of the community, attending Mass and receiving the sacraments.

This arrangement was common in many religious orders of the time. The Cistercians, for example, had a parallel order of nuns, and the Templars appear to have accommodated a similar, though much smaller, female presence. **These women were the closest historical approximation to "Lady Knights Templar,"** though they did not bear arms or wear the mantle and cross in the same manner as the knights.

### Templar Hospitals and Hospices

The Knights Templar were also involved in charitable work, including running hospitals and hospices for pilgrims. Women often served in these institutions as nurses and caretakers. Their presence was practical and necessary, and they were likely considered part of the wider Templar familia, the extended household of the order. They would have worn simple clothing, perhaps with a small cross, but they were not considered knights.

## Notable Women Connected to the Knights Templar

While no woman was ever a sworn knight of the Temple, several historical figures had notable connections to the order.

- Queen Berengaria of Navarre: Wife of Richard the Lionheart, she was a generous benefactor to the Templars. After Richard's death, she relied on the order for financial and administrative support. The Templars managed some of her estates and served as her bankers.
- Margaret of Beverley: A remarkable Englishwoman who accompanied her brother to the Holy Land and was present at the Siege of Acre in 1187. While not a Templar, she fought in the defense of the city, armed with a pot of boiling water and a crossbow. Her story, recorded by her brother, shows the active role women could play in the crusading movement, even if they were not formal members of a military order.
- Noblewomen of the Crusader States: Women like Queen Melisende of Jerusalem and Queen Sibylla were powerful rulers in their own right and interacted with the Templars extensively. They granted lands, sought advice, and sometimes clashed with the order. They were patrons and allies, not members.
- Women in the Trial of the Templars: During the infamous trial of the Templars (1307-1312), initiated by King Philip IV of France, some women were questioned as witnesses. They provided testimony about the order's practices, both positive and negative. Their accounts offer a glimpse into the daily life of Templar communities and the role of women within them.

These examples demonstrate that **women were not absent from the Templar world**. They were present as supporters, workers, and occasionally as defenders, but they were never Lady Knights Templar in the formal sense of bearing arms and taking the full vows of the order.

## The Dissolution and the Erasure of Female Roles

When the Knights Templar were suppressed by Pope Clement V in 1312, their properties were largely transferred to the Knights Hospitaller (the Order of Saint John) or were seized by secular rulers. The women associated with Templar houses were dispersed. Some may have transferred to other religious orders, while others returned to lay life. The memory of their contributions faded, overshadowed by the dramatic story of the Templar trial, the burning of Jacques de Molay, and the subsequent legends of hidden treasure and secret knowledge.

For centuries, the idea of a female warrior monk remained a contradiction in terms. The medieval imagination could conceive of a female warrior, like Joan of Arc, or a female ruler, like Eleanor of Aquitaine, but the specific identity of a **Lady Knights Templar** was culturally and institutionally impossible.

## Modern Templar Organizations: The Rise of the Lady Knights Templar

The 19th and 20th centuries saw a remarkable revival of interest in the Knights Templar. Numerous Masonic and quasi-Masonic organizations adopted Templar imagery and rituals. These neo-Templar orders, such as the Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem (SMOTJ) and various independent Grand Priories, began to admit **women as full members**.

This modern development is the true birthplace of the **Lady Knights Templar**. In these organizations, women can hold all ranks, from Knight to Grand Commander. They wear the white mantle and the red cross, participate in ceremonies, and dedicate themselves to the charitable and spiritual missions of the order. They are not reenactors playing a historical role; they are members of a living, evolving tradition that has adapted the ideals of the medieval Templars to the modern world.

### Admission of Women in Neo-Templar Orders

The admission of women was a controversial step for many neo-Templar groups, just as it was for the Freemasonry from which many of them derived. However, most major organizations now accept female members, often on an equal basis with men. They argue that the core values of the Templars, such as chivalry, charity, and defense of the Christian faith, are not gender-specific. **Women can be knights in the same sense as men**, embodying the same virtues and performing the same service.

### Modern Roles and Activities of Lady Knights Templar

Today's Lady Knights Templar are involved in a wide range of activities, including:

- Charitable work: Many Templar organizations run food banks, homeless shelters, and medical missions. Lady Knights are often at the forefront of these efforts.
- Historical research and education: Some members focus on studying the history of the medieval Templars and educating the public.
- Spiritual development: The orders typically have a Christian foundation, and members engage in prayer, retreats, and pilgrimages.
- Ceremonial and social activities: They participate in investitures, chapter meetings, and public processions, often wearing the distinctive Templar habit.

The **Lady Knights Templar** of today are not trying to rewrite history; they are creating a new tradition based on an old one. They acknowledge that the medieval order was male-only, but they argue that the spirit of the Templars, their commitment to God, to the protection of the weak, and to the ideal of chivalry, transcends the historical particulars of gender exclusion.

## The Symbolism and Appeal of the Lady Knights Templar Today

Why does the concept of the Lady Knights Templar hold such appeal in the 21st century? Several factors are at play.

1. Reclaiming History: For many women, adopting the title of "Knight Templar" is an act of historical reclamation. It acknowledges the women who supported the order in the past while creating a space for women in the present. It challenges the narrative that chivalry and knighthood are exclusively male domains.

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