

Templar Seal

Before looking at the seal that has become synonymous with the Knights Templar, it is important that we have an understanding of the purpose of such seals.

The most common way to show the authenticity of a document during the middle ages was to affix a seal to it. The seal was the equivalent of a modern day signature. Furthermore, in a time when the majority of people were illiterate, the seal was an acknowledgment of a document's authenticity. A seal was a declaration that the person or group whose seal was affixed validated the content of the document, even if they couldn't sign their names. This seal identified the author of the document and was meant to stop people from forging or tampering with official documents and correspondences. The Templars, like any other individual or group, would have needed a seal whose imagery expressed something positive and fundamental about their organization.

Although one image would, in modern times, become synonymous with the order, there were in fact many seals used by the Templars throughout their two centuries of existence. However, it is but one seal, often referred to as the 'traditional seal,' that has garnered the most attention and speculation.



The traditional seal of the Knights Templar we see today depicts two knights riding a single mount surrounded by the inscription "Sigillum Militum Xpisti" which in English translates to roughly "The Seal of the Military of Christ." It was used by several Grand Masters over the Templars' 200 year history.

Bertrand de Blanchfort first used this seal in the year 1168 when he was Grand Master of the order in France. As his personal seal it would be used to sign all-important documents originating from that high office. Blanchefort's seal: SIGILLUM MILITUM obverse; CHRISTI DE TEMPLO reverse The Seal of the Military of Christ.

The last to use the seal was the Reynaut de Vichiers, who was Master of the Temple from 1255-1259. His seal has the same images, but it is not the same seal. Vichiers' seal: had the inscription SIGILLUM MILITUM XPISTI. Although the phrase is written using the Latin alphabet, the first two letters of Christ's name are the Greek XP (Chi Rho) rather than the Latin CHR. The XP symbol's origin lies in the early roots of Christianity, but came into popular use after the Emperor

Constantine had a vision of it and, according to legend, converted to Christianity in the early fourth century. From the time of Constantine, it became one of the most significant symbols of Christianity, surpassed only by the cross itself. Its early associations with the military make it the more apt of the two symbols for the Templars. In fact the Chi Rho can also be seen on the shields of the knights on de Vichiers' seal.

In later days, this personal seal would come to be used by and to symbolize the order. It is today perhaps the most recognized among Templar symbols with the sole exceptions of the Red Cross and the Beauseant.

The seal is believed to originate at a time when Hugh de Payens, Geoffrey de St. Omer and a handful of other Christian knights first took a vow of poverty, chastity and obedience at Jerusalem, it is said that they were so poor they could only afford one horse between two knights. This seems to have been little more than a poetic tradition, for as early as the Council of Troyes, when the Latin Rule was composed, an individual knight was permitted to have three horses and a Grand Master was permitted to own even more.

Whether this poetic tradition is the case or not will perhaps never be known, but suffice it to say that Grand Master de Blanchfort may have intended his seal to be homage to that often told story, still fresh in the minds of Templars 50 years after the start of the order.

Some have theorized that the dual knights riding a single mount was a reference to the communal "ownership" and sharing of resources that was integral to the Templar Rule and methodology. At this level, the idea of poverty and shared resources is clearly communicated.

Still others have thought that the Templar seal's is a representation of the duality or conflict that existed in the order:

- They were poor by vow, yet rich beyond belief (in their assets)
- They were introspective, yet well versed in the matters of the world
- They were monks on one hand, yet feared as warriors on the other

The depiction of the two riders on a single mount is also seen as an allusion to that noble vow of poverty taken on by each new initiate in those days, but there is another more important symbolic meaning.

When you took upon the vows of this Holy Order you agreed to support a Sir Knight and the Sir Knights of the commandery have every confidence that you will now and evermore live up to those vows.

May this seal ever remind you and all Sir Knights who see it, of your commitment to the order and your fellow knights.

Lastly, others have cited the Gospel of Matthew as the source of the seal's symbolic meaning claiming that the one knight represented a Templar while the other depicted Christ. This comes from the passage in Matthew where Jesus Christ says:

“Wherever two or more of you are gathered in My name, there am I, in the midst of them.”

Sir Knights I ask of you to dwell upon this lecture today and see in the two knights riding a common mount with the firm knowledge that the Sir Knight who rides with Jesus Christ, indeed does not ride alone.



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