

LIVINGSTON MASONIC LIBRARY ACQUIRES COPY OF :

VATICAN'S TEMPLAR TRIAL TRANSCRIPTS

One of only eight hundred bilingual copies of *Processus Contra Templarios* to be made available to American scholars at Freemasonry's premier research facility.

NEW YORK - The Chancellor Robert R Livingston Masonic Library of Grand Lodge has announced the acquisition of *Processus Contra Templarios*, an unprecedented publication containing a collection of facsimile manuscripts relating to the trials of the Knights Templar.

The Holy See shocked the world when it announced that the Vatican Secret Archive would publish exclusive and previously unavailable source material on the hearings against the medieval warrior-monks. The announcement was of special interest to Freemasons and students of Masonic history, as many theorists trace modern Freemasonry's origins to the military-religious order, and the modern Masonic Templar organization is an important part of the fraternity today. To date, there is no proven historical link between the medieval Knights Templar and modern Freemasonry.

Presented to the world in October 2007, the 700th anniversary of the arrest of the Templars, *Processus Contra Templarios* is a joint project of the Vatican Secret Archives and Italy's *Scrinium* cultural foundation. This unique work is being published in a limited run of 800 copies, under the supervision of Archive officials, and includes faithful replicas of the original parchments closely guarded at the Secret Archive, along with exclusive critical commentary on the minutes of the inquiry.

The publication is highly valued for its documents and critical texts. The most exciting manuscript in the document collection is the "Chinon Parchment," which contains Pope Clement V's absolution of the Templars on charges of heresy, which had been the backbone of King Philip of France's attempts to eliminate them. The pontiff had suspended the Templar Order, without disbanding it, and eventually re-admitted the Templar officials and the entire Order back into the Roman Church community. The pope recognized that they were guilty of many other minor crimes, but not heresy. The parchment, also known as the "Chinon Chart," was misplaced in the Vatican archives until 2001, when a medieval historian stumbled across it. The parchment was incorrectly catalogued at some point in history and was the key document historians had been looking for.

The Vatican expected most copies of the work to be purchased by specialized libraries at top universities and by leading medieval scholars. The Livingston Masonic Library may be the only Masonic-affiliated research facility to purchase a copy, and one of only a handful of copies in the entire United States. "We are aware that this purchase will raise some eyebrows, both within and outside the Masonic fraternity," noted Thomas M. Savini, Director of the Livingston Masonic Library. "But the acquisition of this work coincides with our mission to collect, study and preserve the Masonic heritage. The Masonic heritage includes investigation into Freemasonry's historical roots, but also the study of its inspirational roots, which include Rosicrucianism; the study of philosophy from the European Enlightenment; and study of the Knights Templar. This collection of documents is important not only to students of Freemasonry, but to medieval and religious scholars and historians as well. It is important that someone in the U.S. make this available, and the Library's Board of Directors unanimously agreed that it should be us."

President of the Library's Board of Directors, Barry Mallah, explained the reasoning behind the purchase. "With such an important announcement rippling through the Masonic world, we felt the Livingston Masonic Library should continue its ground-breaking traditions of presenting important works to the research community. We were the first Masonic research library to provide online access to our museum collections and book catalogue, and obtaining the Processus is a continuation of our commitment to research." He also described an exciting opportunity for Masons and the public at large to participate. "To help offset the cost of the book and further our fundraising goals, we are inviting Masons, their lodges, other Masonic organizations, and non-Masonic individuals or organizations to make a donation to the Library on behalf of the Processus. In return, the names of donors will be added to a special commemorative document that will be deposited within the publication."

Original documents of the trials of the Templars have never before been offered to scholars. The epic work of Scrinium is presented in a soft leather case that contains a large-format book with scholarly commentary in Italian and English, reproductions of original parchments in Latin, and replicas of the wax seals used by 14th-century inquisitors. One parchment measuring about a foot and a half wide by more than six feet long is so detailed that it includes reproductions of stains and imperfections seen on the originals. The precise reproduction of the parchments will allow scholars to study them, touch them, and admire them as if they were dealing with the real thing. It also means the originals will not deteriorate as fast as they would if they were constantly being handled and viewed.

Using a "Wood's lamp," or ultraviolet light, to thoroughly analyze the original parchments, parts of text that were previously unseen were recovered by the conservators at Scrinium. The newly available text, along with standardized designations for both people and locations, will allow scholars to obtain a more accurate and genuine reading of the documents and to amend previously misinterpreted text sections, translations and commentaries. Through their collaboration with Scrinium, the Vatican Secret Archive has given academics access to a precious primary source of research into the facts surrounding the Templar Order. Further to the record and transcription of papers and parchment documents, a section focuses on the review of the Templar history and on the trial against them.

The Knights Templar have been a subject of both scholarly research and popular fiction for centuries, but never as popular as in recent decades. Legends of their hidden treasures, secret rituals and political power have figured over the years in medieval romances, Victorian novels, modern bestsellers such as *The Da Vinci Code*, and action films like *National Treasure*. The Knights have also been portrayed as guardians of the legendary Holy Grail. One theory says that Templars who went underground to escape the persecutions of the inquisitors in the early 14th century evolved as an organization and emerged in Scotland almost two centuries later as early modern Freemasonry.

Library Director Savini said the Livingston Library makes no claim that Freemasonry is descended from the Templars. "Our Library has a duty to provide our patrons with resources that fulfill their interests and research needs, and that expand the general public's understanding of all areas relating to Freemasonry, including the numerous theories and legends relating to its origins. The Processus is an important work that helps us to serve our patrons."

The Processus Contra Templarios was acquired through the Edward J. Scheider Book Fund.

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