

The Templar's Memory in Sci-Fi: Cultural Appropriation of the Knight Templars in Warhammer 40,000

NAME: ETIENNE VAN DIJK

USER NUMBER: U768063

COURSE NAME AND CODE: BACHELOR'S THESIS IN THEOLOGY U30021-B-9

LECTURER: FRANK BOSMAN

ACADEMIC YEAR OF COURSE: 2021/2022

DATE OF SUBMISSION: DATE OF SUBMISSION

TILBURG SCHOOL OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGY (TIU)

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Introduction:

The Knight-Templar order has been long gone from the face of this planet but despite this, they have managed to capture the imagination of people. The Knight-Templars have been the foundation for Dan Brown's best-selling *The Da Vinci Code* from 2003. The Knight-Templars have also found their way into Hollywood movies such as Ridley Scott's *The Kingdom of Heaven* from 2005 and video games such as Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* from 2007. These titles I mentioned are examples of a phenomenon called 'Medievalism'. Medievalism is the phenomenon where events and cultures from the medieval period have been adopted in a modern concept. The result of these changes is often a romanticized version of a period in history, or on a group of people such as the Knight-Templars.

Examples of medievalism can be found in the franchise called *Warhammer 40,000* by Games Workshop. This franchise spans across movies, books, and games. It contains multiple inspirations from the Catholic Church in the form of its own religion. They have a military order of giant humans called the Black Templars. The Black Templars have been on a galactic crusade of repentance to continuously prove their loyalty for over ten thousand years.

This inspiration in the *Warhammer 40,000* franchise has led me to my research question that will be answered. How are the historical Knight-Templars appropriated by Games Workshop for the 'Black Templars' faction? In order to do this I will complete the following steps. Firstly, I will give an overview of the historical Knight-Templars. Secondly, I will give an overview of the cultural appropriation of the Knight-Templars in the 20th and 21st centuries by looking at four common tropes in fiction. Thirdly I will discuss the *Warhammer 40,000* franchise and the place of the Black Templars therein. In the final chapter I will discuss the appropriation based on 5 selected cases of aesthetic and rhetoric appropriation.

The Historical Knight-Templars:

As I have told in the introduction, the first part that ought to be discussed are the historical Knight-Templars. By going to the very beginning, it will establish who the historical Knight-Templars were and the things they did so that the reader has a background understanding in the analysis of the cultural appropriation analysis.

The Templar Order has its historical origin in the First Crusade, that started in 1096 with the conquering of a swath along the coast of modern-day Syria and Palestine. The crusaders formed four new realms that were governed by people that stayed behind when the other soldiers went back. As Karen Ralls summarizes: "The Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, which was the primary crusader state"¹ Pilgrims from all over Europe traveled to the Holy Land. They were eager to visit the sites that were in and around Jerusalem. The ruler Baldwin II (1075-1131) had too few military soldiers with him in the time period of 1100 to 1120 to see the pilgrims protected.

Hugues de Payen, the most prominent founder of the Templar saw the dangers that the pilgrims had to undertake. Malcolm Barber summarizes the

¹ Karen Ralls, "C," *Knights Templar Encyclopedia: The Essential Guide to the People, Places, Events, & Symbols of the Order of the Temple*. (Newburyport: New Page Books, 2007), 60.

reason as the following. “The formation of the Templars arose from a desire to provide protection for such pilgrims.”² They approached Baldwin II in 1118 and petitioned him and Patriarch Warmund for the possibility of functioning as guards, specifically for the purpose of protecting the Western pilgrims to the Holy Land. This was approved, and the Knight-Templars were given residency in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which was built near the Temple of Solomon. The Knight-Templars followed a set of prescribed precepts, some of which were described by Barber like this.

“Attendance at the offices of the choir together with regular canons, communal meals, plain clothing, unostentatious appearance, no contact with women. They differed from canons in that they were frequently on outside service.”³ These unofficial set of rules were an attempt of mimicking monastic orders and their behaviors.

Despite the Templars having permission from the king for the task of protecting pilgrims, life was far from easy for them as warrior monks. Sean Martin explained the problems in the following way.

“They had no money, wore clothes that were donated to them, and suffered from a constant shortage of new recruits and equipment in the early years of their existence”⁴. They were forced to rely on the kindness of others in their early years. Through years of networking Hugues de Payen and the other Knight-Templars managed to become more prominent in Western Europe. Nobility left them estates or donated funds for them so that after a period of time the Knight-Templars were an independent force, able to provide for its own members.⁵

In 1129 at the Council of Troyes, the Knight-Templars have been officially accepted by the papacy. This made them the first knight-order to be constituted by the Roman Catholic Church⁶. This acceptance was accompanied with a systematic overhaul so that it could function as a monastic order. Bernard of Clairvaux was one of many that worked on codifying a ruleset that combined the monastic rules with a military set of rules. These rules were the Latin Rule, a set of 73 clauses that the Templars were expected to adhere to. Over time more and more clauses were included into the Latin Rule. The Rule with all the additions to the Latin Rule is commonly known as the French Rule. It is a comprehensive list that explains how the Knight-Templars are to behave in their faith, and by the time of the Order's downfall it contained 686 clauses. This Rule was a combination of monastic and secular army rules. It contained the vows of poverty and humility that the Templars were to take. In rule 17 of the translation by Upton-Ward it says that the habits of all brothers were to be white, black, or brown.⁷ In rules 26, 27, and 28 it describes the regular diet that templars are expected to have⁸. Rules such as eating meat three times in the week, two or

² Malcolm Barber, “Origins,” *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), PDF, 6.

³ Barber, “Origins,” *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple*, 15.

⁴ Sean Martin, “The Rise of the Order of the Temple,” *The Knights Templar: The History and Myths of the Legendary Order*, (Harpندن: Pocket Essentials, 2004), PDF, 15.

⁵ Martin, *The Knights Templar: The History and Myths of the Legendary Order*, 15-38.

⁶ C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), PDF, 192.

⁷ J M Upton-Ward, *The Rule of the Templars: The French Text of the Rule of the Order of the Knights Templar*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), PDF, 24.

⁸ Upton-Ward, *The Rule of the Templars*, 26.

three meals of vegetables and bread during the week, and exceptions for the feast days. It was a strictly regulated life for the Templars that combined the rigid monastic life with the discipline of a military order. When they were at peace the Templars lived a conventual life as was described in rule 279. "Each brother of the Temple should know that he is not committed to anything so much as to serve God, and each one should apply all his study and understanding to this"⁹

Failure to live up to these expectations that were set resulted in punishments summarized by Barber in *A New Knighthood*. "The whole pattern of Templar life was enforced by a detailed schedule of penances, imposed after confession or successful accusation in weekly chapter-meetings"¹⁰ Punishments were given for lying, stealing, and the killing Christians and brothers to give three examples. Punishments for failing to uphold the rules ranged from penance to losing their habit and expulsion from the Order.¹¹

In addition to that secrecy was a key element of the Order. The Rule wasn't allowed to be kept by members of the Order as a personal possession lest the squires read it and spread the details around. Nor were Knights allowed to share what was said in meetings or elections. This was to protect the military secrets they had.¹²

Once this knight order was recognized by the pope, the Templars became independent. They did not have to pay tithes and could acquire them from the faithful. The Knight-Templars received holdings in Francia, England, and other regions of Western Europe as gifts. This allowed them to build up a network to be completely independent. In addition to those material gains, the Knight-Templars were also allowed to have their own priests to officiate services.¹³

In the following years, there were three papal bulls that gave the Templars special privileges. The first was *Omne Datum Optimum* by Pope Innocent II in 1139 and made the Knight-Templars answerable only to the Pope. *Milites Tempri* from 1144 addressed the Knight-Templars as defenders of the Christian faith to the clergy and requested them to give donations to the Templar order. The third one is *Milites Dei* from 1145 allowed the Knight-Templars to take on priests of their own.¹⁴

The Knight-Templars continued to increase their influence over time through other means too. They set up the first banking system. Someone could get a bond in France and then exchange that bond in Jerusalem for the money that the Templars kept. In addition to that, they provided loans and the safekeeping of possessions. It was a popular system not just for nobles and royalty but also for pilgrims and crusaders. The Knight-Templars were also the bankers to Pope Alexander III from 1163 and onward. When Pope Innocence III presented a new tax to finance the Crusades the Knight-Templars were essential for transporting the funds. The levies were paid to their locations and then the Knight-Templars would see that the funds were safely transported to the Middle-East.¹⁵

In addition to the Knight-Templars' success as bankers, they were also architects spread all over Europe and the Middle East. The Knight-Templars were

⁹ Upton-Ward, *The Rule of the Templars*, 82.

¹⁰ Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple*, 219.

¹¹ Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple*, 221-222.

¹² Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple*, 184.

¹³ Martin, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple*, 29-30.

¹⁴ Martin, *The Knights Templar: The History and Myths of the Legendary Order*, 39-41.

¹⁵ Martin, *The Knights Templar: The History and Myths of the Legendary Order*, 47-51

active throughout modern-day Syria. Martin briefly summed up the most important parts. “and were involved in several major projects, including the construction of the new Church of the Holy Sepulchre, dedicated in 1149,”¹⁶ Two other structures that they were essential for were the construction of a church in Bethlehem and the Knight-Templars provided an elaborate tomb to Baldwin IV in 1185. This knight order build churches and fortresses. Their style for most of the buildings in the West was something sober and simple. When Baldwin II moved away from the Al Asque mosque to another palace, the Templars had free rein to completely renovate the palace grounds. This creation and restoration of churches made the Templars prominent in the public sphere as it showed them what they did to everyone and helped them gain recruits.¹⁷

As defenders of pilgrims surrounding Jerusalem, they were active participants in the conflicts from the beginning. When their power increased substantially after their acceptance by the Pope, their duties also expanded. With the increased wealth and land, they also gained more recruitment which allowed them to spread out in Syria. The Knight-Templars were intricately linked to the Crusades as religious warriors. The Knight-Templars were at the forefront of battles and fought fervently. When Saladin conquered Jerusalem in 1187 he gave the Knight-Templars and Hospitallers prisoners a choice. They could either convert to Islam or die. Over 200 Knight-Templars and Hospitallers were killed. The Knight-Templars had lost the Al-Asque mosque then and never saw it again.¹⁸ In the following 120 years, the Templars participated in Crusades and wars in the Middle East, suffering multiple defeats over those times and being pushed back further. In 1291 the Knight-Templars lost Acre and their last foothold in the Holy Land.¹⁹

1306 was the year that the Knight-Templars’ fall was set in motion. In that year itself there was talk of a merger between the Knight-Templars and the Hospitallers. The areas had grown too small and the missions of the two orders were deemed similar enough. Later that year King Phillip IV of France arrested the Templars in his country on the grounds of sodomy, heresies, and the rejection of Christ. These were the only grounds upon which he could make any form of accusation to accomplish his political goals to gain the treasure of the Templars. When Jacques de Molay and senior Templars confessed of heresy, Philip IV managed to pressure pope Clement V into issuing the bull *Pastoralis Praeementiae*. This bull called the arrest for all Knight-Templars. The admissions of guilt varied per region. Areas where torture was not allowed did not get many confessions, while in regions where torture wasn’t dissuaded there were more admissions of guilt. Gathering evidence was a slow process and the Knight-Templars had little legal defense. In 1310 two Templars, Peter of Bologna and Reginald of Provins stepped forward to defend their order. They were trained in the legal system and made a compelling case, especially regarding the unreliability of the confessions under torture. They disappeared later that year and the Order was left to struggle without lawyers again. In 1311 the Council of Vienna convened and would determine the final fate of the Order. At that Council several knights who had escaped capture for all those years presented themselves to defend the order. The result of that Council was that while the

¹⁶ Martin, *The Knights Templar: The History and Myths of the Legendary Order*, 61.

¹⁷ Martin, *The Knights Templar: The History and Myths of the Legendary Order*, 61-64.

¹⁸ Martin, *The Knights Templar: The History and Myths of the Legendary Order*, 74-75.

¹⁹ Martin, *The Knights Templar: The History and Myths of the Legendary Order*, 74-110.

Order did not commit any heresies, they were to be disbanded by the order of the papal bull *Vox in excelso*. Their possessions were to be transferred to the order of the Hospitallers. Jacques de Molay, the Grand Master at the time was burned at the stake for heresy.²⁰

The Appropriation of the Historical Knight Templars in Modern Culture

With the abbreviated history of the historical Knight Templars told it is time to look at the myths and how we perceive them today. Some myths that we remember the Templars by are that they have travelled all across the globe, that they possessed relics like the Holy Grail or the Turin shroud, that they still exist, or that they are Satanists.²¹ Rather than looking at the myths, I consider it more fruitful to look at their portrayals in media through the 20th and 21st centuries. In modern media Patrick Masters has identified four tropes for the Knight-Templar. The first two tropes are the archetypes of the Knight-Templar, the good knight and the bad knight. In the latter part of the chapter I will discuss the two forms of Quest trope associated with the Knight-Templars.

The following citation of Patrick Masters explains rather well how the viewer in media can observe the morality of a character. "Violence is a key indicator to depict the moral compass of the character as perceptions of knighthood are contrasted in the oppressive force and romantic notions."²² With this, he meant that when a character uses excessive violence then that expresses to the reader or view that this character has questionable morals at best and evil at worst. When they minimize the amount of violence and blood that has been shed it shows that a character is of good moral nature.

The Good and the Bad:

This metric of morality leads me to the first archetype that Patrick Masters discussed. This archetype is the Bad Templar Knight. These modern portrayals are based on the 19th-century influence of literature. The main examples that were portrayed were the book *Ivanhoe* (Thorpe, 1952), the movie *Kingdom of Heaven* (Scott, 2005), and the first *Assassin's Creed* game (Ubisoft, 2007). The main traits that Masters' recognized regarding bad Templars in these forms of media were the following. "the game does feature the other key traits of the bad Templar aspect, including unjustified violence and disdain of religion."²³ As I explained in the previous paragraph, Patrick Masters expresses that violence often shows the moral nature of a character. In the opening scene of *Kingdom of Heaven*, the following is what happens.

"'Aye, no sport otherwise.' The Templars then roar, "God wills it!" (Scott, 2005), before they charge down the hill to slaughter the merchants. Scott uses close-ups of Guy to show his ecstasy as blood splatters across his face, while he

²⁰ Martin, *The Knights Templar: The History and Myths of the Legendary Order*, 116-125.

²¹ Michael Haag, *The Templars: The History and the Myth* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2009), 329-331.

²² Patrick Masters, *The Knights Templar in Popular Culture: Films, Video Games, and Fan Tourism*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc., 2022), Kindle, 49-50.

²³ Masters, *The Knights Templar in Popular Culture*, 123

and the Templars slaughter the almost defenseless merchants.”²⁴ This opening scene portrays how the Templars rush down in an act of unjustifiable violence. It sets up the antagonists of the story clearly, which in this case were the Knight-Templars. This approach removes them from the reality of how they were and transforms them into a tool that suits the narrative. The disdain for religion is implied in how they act compared to what they are supposed to represent. In both *Kingdom of Heaven* and *Assassin's Creed*, the Templars make use of the conflict between Crusaders and Muslims to accomplish their own goals.

With the archetype of the Bad Templar explained Masters moved the discussion towards the archetype of the Good Templar. For case studies, he used the poem from 1596 *The Fairie Queene*, the movie *Ironclad* (English, 2010), the movie *Arn: The Knight Templar* (Flinth, 2007), and the game *the First Templar* (2011, Haemimont games). One of the shared elements between these stories is how they draw upon Arthurian mythos. Patrick Masters summarized it well in the following citation.

“It seems as if Arthurian chivalry and the Templar mythos have been mixed together, much in the same way that the good Templar protagonist is fashioned as a national hero in *Arn: The Knight Templar* and *Ironclad*.”²⁵ These elements of Arthurian chivalry are their penchant for acting just, to do what is right and justly. It is an idealized version of what the Medieval culture was. In *Arn: the Knight Templar* the hero was an open-minded knight that spoke Arabic, quoted the Quran, and made friends with a Saracen. The open-mindedness and chivalry portrayed in these case studies are the opposite of what is depicted by the Bad Templars. Both the good and the bad templars are a depiction of the warrior monk image.

The Quest for Truth or Holiness:

With the tropes of the archetypes discussed it is time to look at how the Knight-Templars are perceived in media through the association with a religious quest. These quests come in two forms. Either it is the quest that a knight would have to undertake himself or the quest of modern people following the footsteps of the Knight-Templars.

I will first discuss the first form of questing. The knight that has to accomplish his quest draws heavily upon the myth that the Holy Grail was protected by the Knight-Templars. Patrick Masters explained the essence of it as follows. “This aspect of the Knights Templar quest narrative is a formulaic tool used by filmmakers to retell the grail narrative and further cement the Templar narrative within popular culture.”²⁶ Masters used *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Gilliam and Jones, 1975) as a case study for this phenomenon because of how it portrays the quest for the Grail, as well as how the knight Galahad is full of Templar symbolism. The way that he is dressed with the red cross on white cloth, as well as his virginity made him examples of Templar thought. The influence of the Templars in this type of quest is more directly displayed because these stories are often reflections of the myth that connects the Holy Grail to the Knight-Templars.

The second type of quest plays out in more modern settings. Masters summarizes it like this. “This aspect of the grail guardian archetype sees the

²⁴ Masters, *The Knights Templar in Popular Culture*, 52.

²⁵ Masters, *The Knights Templar in Popular Culture*, 83.

²⁶ Masters, *The Knights Templar in Popular Culture*, 162.

protagonist revisit the past through researching a Templar conspiracy story.”²⁷ Patrick Masters identified the movie *National Treasure* (Turteltaub, 2004) as well as Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* (Brown, 2006) as prime examples of this archetype. In both stories, there is a theory that piques the interest of the protagonist. In the case of *National Treasure*, the protagonist knows about a map that leads to a treasure the Templars left behind. These stories also incorporate other large myths that are connected to the Templars in modern culture. These myths are that they were spread wide across the world and that they have continuously existed in the background throughout the ages and have influenced world events.

Each of these four tropes in fiction portray the Knight-Templars in a different light. It showcases that today, the modern perception on the Knight-Templars is difficult to fully encapsulate because they have become tools for creatures to tell their story.

The Universe of Warhammer 40,000 and the Black Templars

This description of the appropriation of the Knight-Templars leads me into the next part of the thesis. To accurately describe how the Knight-Templars have been appropriated by Games-Workshop an explanation is needed. First, I’ll briefly describe the overall setting by use of the rulebooks of the tabletop war. After explaining the key elements of the setting, I will explain who the Black Templars faction are with the guidance of the rulebooks specific for this faction.

The Setting of Warhammer 40,000:

The universe of the Warhammer 40,000 franchise is a fictional universe where war and strife are perpetual on a galactic scale. The state of not only the human empire but also the galaxy is best exemplified by the first text of the 9th edition rulebook. A small excerpt from it is, “To be a man in such times is to be one amongst untold billions. It is to live in the cruelest and most bloody regime imaginable.”²⁸ Various races are battling against each other for survival have been battling for millions of years. In addition to the physical struggles that are present, the races that inhabit this universe are also beset by a meta-physical realm called the Warp. One brief explanation from the 8th edition rulebook is. “From that realm of madness, great powers conspire to bring about a doom so absolute that the entire galaxy would be consumed”²⁹. These great powers of doom are often called the Ruinous powers or Chaos within the setting. Daemons and the corruption of the material plane are aspects of this realm that threaten all the races of the galaxy.³⁰

²⁷ Masters, *The Knights Templar in Popular Culture*, 162-163.

²⁸ Anonymous, *Warhammer 40,000: Core book*, 9th ed, (Nottingham: Games Workshop Ltd., 2020), 1.

²⁹ Anonymous, *Warhammer 40,000: Core book*, 8th ed, (Nottingham: Games Workshop Ltd., 2019), 92.

³⁰ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Core book*, 8th ed, 22-45.

The Imperium of Mankind:

The human empire, better known as The Imperium of Mankind is spread out over the galaxy and counts a million worlds in its register. It is too threatened by dangers from all sides and too large to rule with anything other than an iron fist. On page 27 of the 9th edition core book, it explains how the Imperium is organized. This is only a small excerpt from it to give a general idea. "Beneath the aegis of the High Lords lies the Adeptus Terra. The colossal bureaucratic engine of the Imperial governance that is itself broken down into myriad organizations"³¹ Twelve High Lords govern the Imperium and make rules for the organizations to implement. The managing of the Imperium is further broken down the line into the myriad organizations as it was put. There are the administrators, the army, the fleet, the Adeptus Mechanicus, and the Ecclesiarchy to name the most important ones. At the end of this line of power on a galactic scale are the imperial governors who have almost absolute freedom in how they govern as long as they reach the quotas that the High Lords demand.

In order to survive in this desperate universe of conflict and oppression workers and nobles alike turn to the Ecclesiarchy for hope and guidance. "at their heart lies Holy Terra and the divine God-Emperor interred forever within his Golden Throne"³². The God-Emperor is the central figure that the people worship. It is based on the knowledge that he has founded the Imperium and united everyone through his psychic powers. When he was struck down and entombed in his Golden Throne his mind was still alive and uses his will to preserve humanity. This gives the people faith in him, and they fervently pray to him that their personal conditions will improve.³³

The Church of the Imperium

In the previous sub-chapter I have mentioned the Ecclesiarchy. Here I will elaborate on what the Ecclesiarchy is. This Church of the Imperium is based on the worship of the God-Emperor of mankind. It has developed many rites and rituals for prayer and thanksgiving. One of the many functions of this organization is to unify the people of the Imperium. This means not only taking care of the existing flock, but they also look after new populations that join the Imperium. Onn page 37 of the 8th edition core book it says the following regarding traditions on new worlds. "The Adeptus Ministorum has found many belief systems already established on planets they visited for the first time... the Ecclesiarchy had become adept at assimilating all manner of creeds into the Cult Imperials – the worship of the Emperor."³⁴ The Ecclesiarchy calls its flock together by assimilating creeds, as was explained by the text. They also say that the Emperor was always a part of those religions and that the Ecclesiarchy merely showed them the Truth. It is a complex religion with many aspects that relies on blind faith, rituals, and grandeur to keep a hold of its followers.³⁵

³¹ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Core book*, 9th ed, 27.

³² An, *Warhammer 40,000: Core book*, 8th ed, 18.

³³ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Core Book*, 8th ed, 22-45.

³⁴ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Core book*, 8th ed, 37.

³⁵ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Core book*, 8th ed, 36-37.

The Elite Warriors of the Imperium

A second organization that I will discuss now to establish the basic framework are the Adeptus Astartes or Space Marines. The purpose of the Adeptus Astartes is to be a bulwark against the myriad of dangers. These warriors are genetically engineered transhumans. They are stronger, faster, more resilient, and they have a multitude of extra organs that give them special abilities. To make these changes to their body possible and to indoctrinate them Space Marines induct new recruits from a young age.

The Adeptus Astartes are broken up into a thousand chapters spread out over the galaxy. Each chapter has a thousand active battle brothers as prescribed by the Codex Astartes. The rulebook explained the Codex Astartes like this. "The Codex Astartes dictates all aspects of chapter organization and battlefield tactics to ensure the efficiency and loyalty"³⁶ Their tasks and roles have been carefully defined in this doctrine for how they behave. It regulates their daily lives and provides examples for how they are to function in military settings. Despite these guidelines that are accepted by all Space Marine chapters, there is a lot of diversity. Each chapter has its own culture and battlefield tactics.

The Black Templars:

With the framework given for the universe, the Imperium, and the Space Marines it is time to look towards the subject of this thesis, the Black Templars. The Black Templars are a chapter with a unique culture amongst the diversity. Unlike the other Space Marine chapters, they do not limit themselves to a thousand soldiers for a sector nor are they secular warriors. The Black Templars are one of the few religious Adeptus Astartes chapters within the Imperium.

The Chapter was founded shortly after the Emperor was struck down by his son Horus over ten millennia ago. In the wake of the Emperor's death armies of Space Marines roamed across the galaxy, plundering and waging war. The founding high marshal Sigismund saw this and made for himself and his followers an oath. One of the earliest explicit mentions of this oath in the franchise is from the 2009 Black Templars rulebook.

"Sigismund swore a mighty oath that upon leaving Terra, he would prove his loyalty never resting in the prosecution of his duties against the enemies of the Emperor"³⁷. This oath has been renewed with each high marshal that followed. This oath is more than just a tradition that was established by the founder Sigismund. This oath is implicitly the central identity of the Chapter throughout their existence. The understanding can be drawn from the Codex Supplement of the Black Templars faction.

"And now was Sigismund named as High Marshal, and did he offer his sacred vow to bear the Emperor's holy truth upon his eternal crusade, and by certainty of its scripture he would punish the sinful, the heretical, and the tainted in his righteousness and his wrath"³⁸. There are two elements in this citation that encapsulate how the Black Templars function. The first element shows that they have religious knowledge which they adhere to. This is proven by the existence of the Emperor's holy truth as well as the certainty of its scripture. This is theological language that is expressed in this excerpt and portrays that the Black

³⁶ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Rule book*, 8th ed, 58.

³⁷ Graham McNeil, *Codex: Black Templars*, (Nottingham: Games Workshop, 2009), 6.

³⁸ Anonymous, *Warhammer 40,000: Codex Supplement Black Templars*, (Nottingham: Games Workshop Ltd., 2021) 7.

Templars are a religious chapter. This knowledge is what they keep as the foundation of their identity and their actions. The second element is that this religious knowledge is expressed in a zealous and violent manner. The vow expresses that they will go on an eternal crusade and will punish the sinful, the heretical, and the tainted. This portrays that they do not accept other truths because those would be heretical, and possibly sinful. These two elements, their religious base as well as their zeal are what distinguish them from the other Space Marine chapters. Their purpose is to defend humanity by purging “the sinful, the heretical, and the tainted”³⁹

They wage this eternal crusade not from a single homeworld, but rather from a fleet. Their most prized battleship and home is aptly called the *Eternal Crusader*. This spaceship is one of the most powerful battle barges in the entire Imperial Navy. An apt description of this ship is found in the Codex Supplement. “This immense warship plays host to the command sanctum of the incumbent High Marshal. It also houses the Temple of Dorn wherein rest the Chapter’s most precious relics”⁴⁰ This ship is central to this Space Marines chapter a holy site for them to protect, a command center from which they organize military operations, as well as fight battles with it.

In addition to this location from which they operate. The Black Templars also build chapter keeps on worlds they conquered. These small bastions are stocked and maintained to oversee the worlds and ensure that they will not fall to enemies or Chaos. The added benefit to these chapter keeps overseeing these worlds are that they give the Black Templars worlds that they can recruit from as well as resources to draw upon.⁴¹

Analysis of the Appropriation of the Historical Knight Templars and the Black Templars:

With the foundation laid for who the Knight-Templars and Black Templars are as well as how the Knight-Templars are perceived in the modern era. It is time to look at how the Games Workshop has appropriated the historical Knight-Templars for the Black Templars faction in the Warhammer Franchise.

The Ranks of the two Orders:

The first possible appearance of cultural appropriation that I would like to discuss is the hierarchies between the two organizations. Each of the following positions has been explained what their powers are and what possessions they are allotted in the Rule of the Templars. “At the head of the whole structure was the Grand Master”⁴². It was the Grand Master that led the order in meetings, diplomacy, and overarching elements of the Order. The Seneschal is the right-hand man of the Grand Master. He takes the role of leadership upon himself when the Grand

³⁹ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Codex Supplement Black Templars*, 7.

⁴⁰ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Codex Supplement Black Templars*, 8.

⁴¹ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Codex Supplement Black Templars*, 3-17.

⁴² Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple*, 184.

Master is absent. When the Order is in war, they are led by a general that is called the Marshal.

In addition to these overarching roles, individual countries like the Kingdom of Jerusalem were led by a Commander. This Commander was also the treasurer of the Order. His financial powers were balanced out with the grand master's. The order is then even further broken down into houses. Each Templar House was led by a Knight-Commander. The lowest in the initiated hierarchy were the Knight-Brothers and the Sergeants. In addition to these roles there were also special functions such as a draper, also known as a tailor and the standard-bearer.⁴³

For the Black Templars the entire chapter is led by the High Marshal. The Codex Supplement explained further subdivisions as. "When they need to bring organization to larger crusading forces, the Black Templars employ formations known as Fighting Companies."⁴⁴ An individual crusade is led by a marshal who directs the fighting companies of a crusade. A minor officer called the Castellan then in turn leads a fighting company of the Adeptus Astartes. The ranks of the Fighting Companies and warriors at rest of the chapter are called Initiates. The trainees of a chapter are called Neophytes and are trained personally by Initiates. In addition to the main personnel there are also a few special positions, these are filled out by Techmarines, Apothecaries, and Chaplains, and standard-bearers that hold up that wield the honor of the chapter. These do as the name suggests. Techmarines are mechanics, apothecaries are medics, and the chaplains are the spiritual caretakers and priests of the chapter.

As can be seen when these two hierarchies are listed next to each other, there is overlap between the two orders. In both organizations the chapter's war efforts are led by the rank of the marshal. In the case of the Black Templars, because they are always in war, the ultimate leader of the Black Templars is a high marshal instead of a grand master. The other ranks that can be seen as a one-to-one inspiration are the standard-bearers and the priests. There is one major difference between the role of the chaplain of the Knight-Templars and the Black Templars. That is that the chaplains of the Black Templars are combatants, while the chaplains of the Knight-Templars were generally ordinary priests rather than fighting men.

The other roles appear to be inspired by religious thought. The Initiates and Neophytes are distinct terms that speak of the status of a cult. But the tasks of the Initiates are like a Knight-Brother. The squires served the Knight-Brother much like the Neophyte servers the Initiate. The Castellan has a similar function to the Knight-Commander in that they guide a smaller unit that is a brotherhood.

The Schedules of the Two Orders:

The second sign of possible cultural appropriation that I am going to address now is the daily schedule of the Knight-Templars and the Black Templars. The Knight-Templars did not have a specific and strict schedule that completely defined the day in the Rule. However, the Rule did describe when they were supposed to follow mass. In the morning, which would be around 6 am there would be mass, at noon there would be mass before lunch, in the afternoon there would be a vigil for the Dead and a vesper that they were expected to attend, then at dusk there was another vesper. After the first mass, the brothers are supposed to do the

⁴³ Upton-Ward, *The Rule of the Templars*, 39-66.

⁴⁴ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Codex Supplement Black Templars*, 11.

following. The Rule explained how the Knight-Templars could keep themselves busy in this manner.

“each one should go to his place and repair his armor and his equipment, if there is anything to repair, or he should have it repaired, or should make tent-posts or pegs or anything else that befits their office. And each brother should ensure that the Enemy does not find him lazy,”⁴⁵. Idleness was not appreciated by the Order. After service was done and they were expected to keep themselves busy doing tasks. After they have done work and when the bell rang, the Brothers were allowed to eat after a priest gave a blessing. After supper, the Templars were expected to give thanks in the chapel. There is no mention of specific training times in which a Knight-Templar brother could train. This could be potentially explained by the following, “It was not usual in the 12th and 13th centuries for commanders-in-chief in Western Europe to oversee the training of their troops; it was the individual’s responsibility to organize his own training”⁴⁶. This would imply that it was expected of a Brother to schedule his training during the moments that he wasn’t in mass, at a meeting, or at a meal.

The Space Marines’ schedule comes from a different rulebook than what I have previously used. It is from a third-edition rulebook that has a page dedicated to the daily rituals.⁴⁷ The rituals that they follow are strict and grueling. Every morning they wake up at 4 am and start the day with prayer in the chapel. After an hour of prayer, repeating oaths, and announcements of the day the Space Marines spend eight hours of battle training to hone their skills and knowledge of battle situations. At 12 am the Marines gather in the chapel or on the practice field and they give praise to the Emperor and pray once more. After an hour of prayer they get 15 minutes to eat before they spend the rest of the day learning tactics and more battle practice. At 8 pm the Marines gather once more at the chapel for contemplation. They pray and give thanks for the activities of the day. After that hour has passed, they spend two more hours on combat practice and an hour on maintenance.⁴⁸

There are similarities to draw in the disciplined schedules of both orders. The schedule of the Space Marines has some resemblance to the Knight-Templars’ schedule in the way that the spiritual services are scheduled. In the morning when they get up, the Knight-Brothers and Adeptus Astartes gather at the chapel and partake in their religious ceremonies. This is then repeated at noon. The third service is accomplished at the end of the day. A reasonable part of the Space Marine day is spent in prayer, much like a warrior monk befits. But it is also much more secular than the day of a Knight-Templar. The Knight-Templars were expected to spend their time first and foremost focused on God and learning about him. The training is supposed to fit in between the masses. For the Space Marines training is the majority of the day and the prayers are scheduled in between training sessions. The theology and religious aspects are displayed as significantly less important than it does for the Knight-Templars.

⁴⁵ Upton-Ward, *The Rule of the Templars*, 83.

⁴⁶ Helen J. Nicholson, *Knight Templar: 1120-1312*, ed. Michael Axworthy (Oxford: Osprey, 2004), PDF, 24.

⁴⁷ Andy Chambers, Jervis Johnson, and Gavin Thorpe, *Codex: Space Marines*, 3rd ed. (Lenton: Games Workshop, 1999), 48.

⁴⁸ Chambers, Johnson, and Thorpe, *Codex: Space Marines*, 3rd ed, 48.

The Aesthetic Appearance of the Two Orders:

The third potential sign of cultural appropriation that I am going to discuss is the type of dress that the orders wear. In peacetime, the Knight-Templars are prescribed to wear the following. They wore a soft-cap, brown clothes, and a white habit over that. The white habit functioned to portray their purity and chastity. A red cross was embroidered over their hearts on the habit.

During wartime, the standard issue of armor for Knight-Templars was a padded jerkin or a haubergeon, a chainmail hauberk that covered the hands and torso of a knight, a coif to protect their heads, and a white surcoat or cappa. A cappa was a long habit that was worn by monks. It would go over the armor and cover the arms as well. Over their coifs the Knight-Templars would wear helmets. These could either be open-faced or have a closed visor. In the latter half of the order's existence, there was a change to their wardrobe. Around 1240 Pope Gregory IX changed the cappa to a tabard in style because this would allow the Templars to move more freely in combat. The weapons that a knight-brother would carry were standard for that time. This means that they carried spears, a longsword, a dagger, a Turkish mace, and a shield with them into battle. Some of the Knight-Templars could also use bows or crossbows.⁴⁹



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In the Warhammer universe, the Black Templars wear black ceramic plate armor that covers their entire body. They wear a white tabard that either covers the entirety of their chest or goes underneath their breastplate. Their helmets are close-faced and have red visors. The weaponry of a Black Templar is usually a boltgun, a firearm that shoots grenades and a chainsword. These two items are the base equipment of the Initates, but the image above portrays two-handed swords. The Black Templars have a wide variety of weapons. The Black Templars are very open about their achievements, symbols, and purity symbols. Purity symbols are ribbons that have a prayer on them. The experienced veterans can look quite lavish as a result when they are covered in adults, crusade seals, and golden embellishments to their armor. It is not portrayed in the codices what Black Templars, or other Space Marines, wear during their moments of rest.

One prominent difference between these two orders are the color schemes. The Black Templars are indeed wearing the symbol of a knight-order

⁴⁹ Nicholson, *Knight Templar: 1120-1312*, 29.

⁵⁰ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Codex Supplement Black Templars*, 9.

with the white tabard and the black cross, but it is not the symbolism of a Knight-Templar. Rather their appearance is more akin to that of the Teutonic order.⁵¹ An additional difference is in how the Black Templars present themselves. They wield symbols with pride, they portray their achievements and decorations. This is a very different ideology from the Knight-Templars who were dressed simple with no embellishments that showed wealth.

The Symbolism of the Two Orders:

The fourth potential sign of cultural appropriation that I am now going to discuss are the symbols and importance of relics between the two orders.

The Knight-Templars are Catholics. As such they use the same symbols that are used by the Roman Catholic Church. Examples of this are how their white tabard is meant to portray their purity. The red cross that the Knight-Templars portrayed as a symbol of martyrdom.⁵² The mantle that the Knight-Templars wore was also an important symbol to them because it portrayed the status that they had. In addition to these symbols, the Knight-Templars also valued relics. They believed that they had a piece of the True Cross which was one of their most precious possessions. They venerated relics from the saints also as pointed out by Ralls. "But from their Rule and other documents, it is known that the Templars were certain they owned a genuine piece of the True Cross, the head of St.

Euphemia, a piece of the Crown of Thorns, and other precious relics, including a vial of the Precious Blood."⁵³



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For the Black Templars, the symbols and relics are equally important, although they are not expressly explained. On pages 44 and 45 of the *Codex Supplement* there are four shields. Each shield has its very own specific color scheme and symbols that are included. These symbols on the shields are primarily Greek crosses, Latin crosses shaped like swords, and the skulls of martyrs. There is little variety to the symbols, but the placement, number, and structure differ greatly throughout the images in the book. There is little variety to the symbolism in the number, but the variations of these three can differ greatly.

The Black Templars prized relics greatly and have a substantial reliquary that they cherished. These relics are either items that have been passed down through the ages like master-crafted weapons or they are items like bones and skulls from martyrs. The Crusader's Helm is one example of an item that combines the two.

⁵¹ Ralls, *Knights Templar Encyclopedia*, 152.

⁵² Ralls, *Knights Templar Encyclopedia*, 151.

⁵³ Ralls, *Knights Templar Encyclopedia*, 153

⁵⁴ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Codex Supplement Black Templars*, 45.

“The imposing helm has been passed down to champions of the Black Templars for many centuries. Worked into its ancient voxpiece is the jawbone of Saint Sebatus the Ancient, a sanctified relic that emboldens the voice of the wearer.”⁵⁵ One thing that can be taken from this example is that in the Warhammer universe the relics do have powers that affect the material realm.

In regard to this topic of sanctified items, the tradition has been observed how it has been in history. The relics that came from saints were often skulls and bones, like the skull of saint Euphemia that the Knight-Templars cherished. There are minor exaggerations that betray the modern perspective on history. The Black Templars have a relic called the Aurillian Shroud which is an imitation of the Turin Shroud that the Knight-Templars were rumored to have. Games Workshop has drawn inspiration from the use of the crosses with the Black Templars, which were also a prominent symbol for the Knight-Templars and still is regularly portrayed for modern art of the Knight-Templars.

Ideology of the Two Orders:

The 5th potential sign of cultural appropriation I am now going to discuss are the vows and beliefs between the two orders. The Knight-Templars are Roman Catholics as I have mentioned previously. As Catholics, they believed in doctrines like the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit being one and that Jesus died for their sins. When they were inducted into the Order they took three monastic vows. These vows that they took were the vow of poverty, the vow of obedience, and the vow of humility. The Knight-Templars were the first to become accepted knight monks. The influence of Bernard of Clairvaux in his letter called *In Praise of the New Knighthood* created a theological reason for why they could exist. Ralls explained this reason as. “This letter established the image of the Templars as a fierce spiritual militia for Christ...pursuing a double conflict against both flesh and blood, and the invisible forces of evil.”⁵⁶ It is unknown how closely the Knight-Templars took this to heart, but Bernard of Clairvaux expressed the ideas both in this letter and in the writing of the Rule. A part of the Templars’ theology is not that they fight against humans but against servants of evil and Evil itself.

While the game is centered around war, its extensive background information contains elements of theology. When I described the Black Templars there was a citation that mentioned the God-Emperor. This is the deity they believe in. The Black Templars believe in saints as was mentioned earlier in the comparison of relics. Alongside these mentions, the Black Templars also express their doctrines in oaths they take before a battle. These oaths are elaborate prayers in which they vow to do something and express more of the theology behind it. I will cite the “Uphold the Honour of the Emperor”⁵⁷ vow from the rulebook.

“Trust in the Emperor at the hour of battle/Trust to Him to intercede, and protect His warriors, and protect His warriors true as they deal death on alien soil./ Turn their seas to red with the blood of their slain./Crush their hope, their dreams, And turn their songs into cries of lamentation”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Codex Supplement Black Templars*, 50.

⁵⁶ Ralls, *Knights Templar Encyclopedia*, 105.

⁵⁷ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Codex Supplement Black Templars*, 28.

⁵⁸ An, *Warhammer 40,000: Codex Supplement Black Templars*, 28

There are a number of elements expressed here in this vow. The first is that the Black Templars take the task of combat upon themselves with a religious fervor. It is a task that has a divine purpose to them because they express it in such a prayer. The second is that they express faith in the deity that they profess. It is not a request for the God-Emperor to do it, but rather a belief that he already does so for these holy warriors. The third element in this oath marks their religion as a religion of war. The vow of the Black Templars is to turn seas red with blood and to deal death on alien soil express a religious desire for bloodshed. They call for excessive violence on a large group of people to achieve those results, which implies an intolerance towards people and aliens that they deem to be enemies.

In this connection, there are signs of cultural appropriation. Games Workshop has drawn some elements from the Christian religion such as monotheism. Another element that has been clearly inspired by Bernard of Clairvaux's letter is the religious warrior's aspect. The Knight-Templars were proclaimed to be warriors that battled against evil. The Black Templars follow this reasoning and throw themselves into what they consider to be holy wars. This also expresses the Black Templars as Bad Templar archetypes from the model that Patrick Masters expressed. The reader or player cannot think that the Black Templars are the national heroes according to our standards. This one prayer alone already asks for excessive violence that would be incredibly difficult to defend for the historical Christian Order.

Conclusion:

The first statement I would like to make is that Games Workshop has indeed appropriated the historical Knight-Templars.

They have done this by adopting the symbolism that the Knight-Templars used, the hoarding of relics, the daily schedule, a number of roles within the order, the connection between church and order, the order as an entity that is answerable to few people, and the religious warriors for a monotheistic religion are all elements that I have pointed out or elaborated on throughout the paper. These elements are used to create an imitation of warrior monks that fit within the universe. There are a number of elements that are not included in the setting. The humility of the historical Knight-Templars is not reflected in the Black Templars' love of showing off their deeds and wearing gold ornaments. The Black Templars emphasize the material realm and express the grandeur of the Imperium rather than the humility of servants of God. This lack of humility is most likely connected to the lack of a transcendent God like Christianity. The deity they worship is from their plane of existence. Death is the end of the human life, there is no heaven or savior to look forward to that will end the suffering of existence. There is no reason for the Black Templars to be anything other than the bad Templar-Knight archetype that Masters described. A theological message that can be taken away from this is that God is necessary for people to improve and to have hope. A world where the Christian core is removed is one that is bleak and hopeless.

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