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Religion, Warrior Elites, and Property Rights

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# Religion, Warrior Elites, and Property Rights<sup>†</sup>

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## Abstract

In 1119 King Baldwin II of Jerusalem granted nine French knights space on the Temple Mount over the ruins of Solomon's Temple to create the headquarters of a new monastic order: The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, or the Knights Templar. They grew in wealth and power and became an influential and pervasive organization throughout Western Europe until King Philip of France suppressed them in 1307. The Templars were only one of a number of Christian holy orders of "warrior monks" founded after the First Crusade, with more than two-dozen others founded in Syria, Central and Eastern Europe, and Iberia. More importantly for this paper, the Templars are one example of what we label "warrior elites." Our definition of warrior elites is not precise but includes pre-industrial full-time specialized soldiers that represent a relatively small part of a region's military forces but possess disproportionate military strength. In addition, warrior elites often possess significant political and social power. This paper explores the extent to which warrior elites have two characteristics: they adopt a special religion, either different from the mainstream religion or a unique adaptation of the mainstream religion, and the special religion has provisions that enforce property rights. To the extent warrior elites have these two characteristics, we hypothesize they are an example of a social institution that evolves as a low-cost alternative to government and to ordinary religion as a method of property rights enforcement.

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In 1119 C.E., King Baldwin II of Jerusalem granted nine French knights space in the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount over the ruins of Solomon’s Temple to create the headquarters of a new monastic order: The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon (*Pauperes commilitones Christi Templique Solomonici*). The Knights Templar, or Templars, as they have become known, grew after that modest beginning to become a powerful, wealthy, and pervasive organization throughout Western Europe.

More importantly for this paper, the Templars are one example of what we label “warrior elites.” Our definition of warrior elites is not precise but is intended to focus on full-time preindustrial specialized soldiers that represent a relatively small part of a region’s military forces but possess disproportionate military strength. In addition, warrior elites possess significant political and social power. We restrict the definition to warriors before the emergence of modern centralized governments.

This paper explores the extent to which warrior elites have two characteristics: they adopt a special religion, either different from the mainstream religion or a unique adaptation of the mainstream religion, and the special religion has doctrinal provisions which enforce property rights. To the extent warrior elites have these two characteristics, we hypothesize they are an example of a social institution that evolves as a low-cost alternative to both government and to ordinary religion as a method of property rights enforcement. Our argument can be viewed as similar to Avner Greif’s (1989, 1993) work on Maghribi traders—Jewish merchants who worked outside the protection of government-enforceable contracts. Using religion as a method of property right enforcement has also been explored by Peter Leeson (2012) in medieval use of ordeals.

Beyond property rights enforcement (the focus here), military orders also provided other public goods and services. The Templars gave to the needy and required commanders to give a tenth of their bread to the poor. The Orders of St. Thomas of Acre, St. Lazarus, the Teutonic Knights, and the Hospitallers all began as medical establishments, with the Order of St. Lazarus focusing on leprosy. The Order of Santiago helped ransom the kidnapped, as did the Teutonic Knights, the Order of the Most Holy Trinity for the Redemption of the Captives, the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy, the Order of Calatrava, and the Order of Santiago. Tens of thousands of pilgrims received assistance from military orders beyond medical aid and ransoming, including military support, transport, and escorted visits (Morton, 2013: 87, 109, 120, 126).

The emergence of warrior elites in Europe coincided with the crusades. Warrior monks mostly came into being to battle Muslims in the Holy Land and Iberia, as well as pagans in northern Europe. In their recruitment, warrior elites would face adverse selection. Orders gained power that spanned Europe and into Asia with vast land holdings and riches. To mitigate inferior or opportunistic

warriors from joining, thereby making the group weaker on average, religiously specific and demanding qualifications were required. Common requirements were vows of celibacy and poverty, additional to the requirement of being of noble birth.

Kings who employed warrior elites had to deal with moral hazard—after gaining power the new warrior class could turn against the king and supplant them. Indeed, the Teutonic Knights became the government in the Baltic areas they conquered. Individual vows of poverty decreased this possibility; an individual warrior monk did not own a castle, but rather it belonged to the order, thereby separating the riches of the organization from the individual. While this practice clearly did not fully eliminate the issue, it did separate the warriors from their wealth to some extent.

Although we focus on the benefit of warrior elites to the larger society, an obvious question is why would an individual join an organization with such strict and demanding standards? The strictness is valuable to society, but how is it valuable to the individual member?

We offer three complementary explanations. First, members gain wealth and the status associated with being elite. Individual poverty is a requirement but does not forbid shared collective wealth. Closely related, members gain security in the form of income over time, just as insurance annuities function today.

Second, a warrior's success and even survival in battle depends on the commitment of the other warriors in the group. A single charging lancer is powerful; a thousand united charging lancers are an awesome force. Here the group cannot afford a free rider (pun intended). The same holds true (albeit less dramatically) for other collective activities in which members might engage. Iannaccone (1992) demonstrates convincingly how the "sacrifice and stigma" associated with religious cult membership strengthens the group and benefits its members, and religious warrior elites certainly have cult-like characteristics.

Third, we cannot dismiss or underestimate the value of religion itself. For Stark and Bainbridge (1987), religion provides "general compensators," an intellectual abstraction describing something of immense value to many. Further, the value of religion to an individual increases if others share that religion. One's faith strengthens when others have that same faith. Economists describe the latter as "network externality," present in modern day phenomenon like social media, where a person gains if others are also active (Church and Gandal 1992).

#### *PROPERTY RIGHTS AND RELIGION*

A substantial body of literature has drawn attention to the role of property rights in the level and direction of economic development and activity, property rights being broadly defined as the right to use, earn income from, and transfer a

good. Early examples of this literature include classic work by Coase (1937), Demsetz (1967), and Alchian and Demsetz (1973). Well-defined property rights in turn reduce transaction costs, encouraging economic activity. Menard (2004) provides a comprehensive overview of the property rights and transaction costs literature. Allen (1995) extends this work to the church, noting especially that Catholic Church doctrine evolved to encourage priestly financial honesty.

Other work argues that religious institutions and doctrine can serve as alternatives to family, community, and government in defining and protecting property rights (Hull and Bold 1989, 1994). Fukuyama (1995) makes a similar argument. In fact, the historical prevalence of religion may reflect its secular role as a low cost instrument for defining and enforcing property rights. The basic rationale is that if a populace believes adherence to or violations of an established set of rules will result in some sort of divine reward or punishment, people will tend to follow those rules. The symbiotic relationship between a society and a religion will direct religions toward such things as non-salvageable, quality-assuring capital including large religious structures, priestly garb, and unique icons. Further, the religion's doctrines about the afterlife in general and about rewards for good behavior or punishment for bad behavior after death will change in predictable ways as religion is more or less important in property rights enforcement. Religion's temporal reward and punishment structure will follow a similar pattern. Research focusing on the High Middle Ages supports the argument (Clegg and Reed 1994; Hull 1989).

It is clear that other property rights enforcement methods, notably government-produced coercion, can and do coexist with religion. This paper explores the interplay between religion and government coercion as alternative institutional tools for enforcing property rights. This framework suggests a possible societal path. A more localized society possessing an effective religion experiences economic growth because it has a defined and divinely enforced property rights system. With increased wealth and trade, growth takes two forms. There is a transition to greater specialization and trade with other societies as well as geographic expansion, which pushes the geographic extent of the society outward. In both instances there is contact with people who may be less inclined to follow the religion-based property rights system. In other words, a society with a successful religion-based property rights system may have an inherent tendency to evolve to one in which religion plays a declining relative role and institutions for coercive enforcement become increasingly important.

Note that a substantial literature focuses on the rent-seeking behavior of religious organizations, following from the assumption of profit maximization (Anderson et al., 1992; Ekelund et al., 1996). This hypothesis need not compete with ours. Profit maximization is not inconsistent with production of valuable products.

*RISE OF EUROPEAN WARRIOR ELITES*

As mentioned above, military orders arose in Europe during the time of the crusades. European kings used warrior elites during the crusades as a way to expand their control into enemy occupied territory. With limited fiscal capacity, weak governments outsourced military activities to organizations outside of full state control. With kings lacking a standing army of their own, religious military orders offered an attractive alternative. Monks could spread their religion and gain adherents, whereas kings cheaply acquired troops to expand territory.

The orders were concentrated in Iberia, the Holy Land, and the Baltic areas, all regions where Christian kings had little to no power. Table 1 is a (non-comprehensive) list of military orders that arose in Europe beginning in the 11th century. Various orders merged with others, and some were short lived, but the table gives an idea of where these orders operated. Of the twenty-seven orders listed, three were in the Baltics, three in Portugal, and eight in Spain. Five others began in the Holy Land and later expanded. Of the remaining eight, the Hungarian order fought the Ottomans. Three French orders existed, with two in southern France where crusades were held. The French king at this time did not control what is now the south of France, and these orders could function as a substitute army. The other French order (Order of Aubrac) protected pilgrims, or those who travelled in areas with weak to no property right protection. At least four Italian orders existed, with one (Order of Saint Stephen Pope and Martyr) designed to fight against the Turks and pirates that disrupted Mediterranean trade. The Militia of Jesus Christ fought against the Cathars and Waldensians and the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary was organized to deal with unrest in Lombardy. The last order, the Order of Saint James of Altopascio, protected pilgrims, similar to the Order of Aubrac in France.

All of these European military orders operated near regions where the Christian king was weak or lacked power. They filled a useful void not just in military might but also in protection of kidnap victims, pilgrims, the sick, and the poor, thereby improving and maintaining property rights for Christians.

**Table 1: European Military Orders**

<b>Military Order</b>	<b>Location</b>
Livonian Brothers of the Sword	Baltic
Order of Dobrzyń	Baltic
Teutonic Knights	Baltic
Order of the Faith and Peace	France
Militia of the Faith of Jesus Christ	France
Order of Aubrac	France
Hospitallers of Saint Thomas of Canterbury at Acre	Holy Land/expanded
Knights Hospitaller	Holy Land/expanded
Knights Templar	Holy Land/expanded
Order of Saint Lazarus	Holy Land/expanded
Order of Saint Maurice	Holy Land/expanded
Order of the Dragon	Hungary
Order of Saint Stephen Pope and Martyr	Italy
Militia of Jesus Christ	Italy
Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Italy
Order of Saint James of Altopascio	Italy
Order of Aviz	Portugal
Order of Saint Michael of the Wing	Portugal
Order of the Knights of Our Lord Jesus Christ	Portugal
Order of Alcántara	Spain
Order of Calatrava	Spain
Order of Monfragüe	Spain
Order of Montesa	Spain
Order of Mountjoy	Spain
Order of Santa María de España	Spain
Order of Santiago	Spain
Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy	Spain

\* France, Italy, and Spain refer to the modern boundaries of those countries, not their historic medieval ones.

### *DECLINE OF EUROPEAN WARRIOR ELITES*

Military religious orders eventually declined in importance and necessity in Europe. Initially the orders complemented the king—they expanded Christian power and territory. In Iberia after the Reconquista, however, the orders became substitutes for the king as the warrior elites controlled vast territories. In northern Europe the Teutonic Knights became the government but were later defeated by

opposing forces. Knights returning from the Holy Land following defeats lost their main *raison d'être*, and travelling powerful warriors could be viewed as threatening to the king, leading to royal opposition (as happened with the Knights Templar). That is, while initially warrior elites complemented the king, over time they became substitutes and thus suppressed by the state after governments became sufficiently strong to combat them.

To suppress the orders, some kings relaxed membership restrictions (Iannaccone 1992). As stated before, Iannaccone postulates that religious groups often impose restrictions on members that are outside of normal behavior. While perhaps irrational at first glance, such restrictions eliminate free riding in the group and leave only the strongest adherents. This practice allows these remaining members to have a higher level of worship within the group, as all are highly devoted. By relaxing membership the median member is not as pious, thereby weakening the system and leading to an erosion of power.

As an example, the Order of Aviz in Portugal in its earliest form began in 1146. Following the expulsion of the Moors, the order lost direction, but overseas expeditions gave it a new purpose with new crusades in northern Africa. These crusades soon ended, however, and the pope eliminated the order's vow of celibacy in 1502. The order became secularized in 1789 and completely eliminated in 1834 (Moeller 1907).

As orders became wealthier, they became a target for kings. The Order of Santiago de la Espada formed in 1171. The military order provided protection to pilgrims in Galicia. At its peak the order had two cities, 178 boroughs and villages, 200 parishes, five hospitals, five convents, and a university under its control and had possessions in Portugal, France, Italy, Hungary, and Palestine. In 1499 King Ferdinand persuaded the pope to give him administrative power over the order. Charles V took even greater control over the order (along with Alcántara and Calatrava), which ended its autonomy (Moeller 1912).

A different explanation for the decline of military orders can be given in Northian terms. North, Wallis, and Weingast (2009) describe the progression of institutions in three stages. The first is the primitive order in small bands of high-violence societies. Natural states then arise, which use politics to regulate economies to create rents and control violence. Eventually the natural state can give way to open access orders, which expand property rights to the masses as opposed to the elites.

The move from the natural state to open access orders is difficult, which North and colleagues explain in three steps. The first condition is for elites to extend property rights beyond themselves to a broader base. The next step is to allow more organizations, arising from the first step, to flourish. The final condition is the removal of military control from the elites.



In a natural state throughout the time of warrior elites, large tracts of land remained outside the power of European royalty. Lacking the capacity to establish their own armies, the elite expanded property rights to the religious orders to expand territory. Kings became more powerful, however, and viewed the orders as a threat. This recognition led the elites to scale back the power of the religious warriors to maintain institutions in a natural state. That is, the kings took the first step to move towards an open access system, then after their power expanded rescinded the step.

Viewed another way, the success of the medieval military orders in protecting property rights and creating viable financial institutions encouraged growth and development of their host societies, leading in turn to the orders' decline in importance. Focusing on religion's role in economic growth and development, Kuran (2011) shows how key elements of Jewish and Christian doctrine helped the West beginning in the 11th century, parallel to the growth of the orders. The orders helped the West grow rich. Similarly, Blaydes and Paik (2016: 551) show how areas with more crusaders up to the year 1200 had better long-term economic growth: "areas with large numbers of Holy Land crusaders witnessed increased political stability and institutional development as well as greater urbanization associated with rising trade and capital accumulation."

Interestingly, over this time of diminishing military religious orders, the system of purchasing military posts and use of prizes increased (Allen, 2012: 150–51). The venal post system dates to the 13th century but was more widespread after the 17th, shortly following the decline of our warrior elites. The rise of government armies due to the increasing strength of states leading to decreased necessity to rely on warrior monks is consistent with our theory.

#### *CASE STUDY: THE TEMPLARS (PERIOD OF INTEREST: 1119–1307 C.E.)*

The First Crusade culminated with the capture of Jerusalem in 1099. Christian control of Jerusalem in turn made the city more attractive to pilgrims and others traveling to the Holy Land. Although the city itself was relatively safe for Christians, the intervening travel route was not. Further, most of the crusading knights who captured Jerusalem had returned to their homes, leaving the city and Kingdom of Jerusalem with only minimum defense. Founded to protect the route to the Holy Land, the Templars' mission expanded to include its defense (Forey, 1992: 18–19). Later, and especially after the fall of the Holy Land, the order participated in the defense and reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula.

The Templars initially received support for their efforts in the form of money and especially of estates donated by nobles concerned about keeping Jerusalem in Christian hands. Bernard of Clairvaux was an early benefactor who also promoted the Templars throughout medieval Europe. The order's prosperity was assured

when Pope Honorius II endorsed it at the Council of Troyes in 1129 and when Pope Innocent II granted it exemption from temporal laws and taxes in 1139.

Templars were a warrior elite. They were elite in part because they were few, numbering no more than several hundred in any region (Forey, 1992: 77–83). They were few in part because each one was very expensive to train and support. Each was heavily armed and armored and was trained to fight effectively on foot or on horseback. In the latter case, development of an effective stirrup and the breeding of heavy horses gave mounted knights tremendous striking power, especially against lightly armored cavalry or less disciplined infantry. Likely the most dramatic illustration of the Templars as warriors came at the Battle of Montgisard in 1177, where a force of perhaps 500 Templars and a few thousand supporting infantry crushed Saladin's army of 26,000. Interestingly, Saladin's battle losses included his personal bodyguard of Mamluks, another warrior elite.

Templar numbers were limited as well by the order's demands on its members. Members adopted a version of the Benedictine Rule including vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience:

58. You who have abandoned the pleasant riches of this world, we believe you to have willingly subjected yourselves to poverty; therefore we are resolved that you who live the communal life may receive tithes.

17. For if any brother does not take the vow of chastity he cannot come to eternal rest nor see God...

1. We speak firstly to all those who secretly despise their own will and desire with a pure heart to serve the sovereign king as a knight and with studious care desire to wear, and wear permanently, the very noble armour of obedience ("The Primitive Rule of the Templars," as cited in Upton-Ward 1992).

Members of course were bound by the same standards as other Christians, and some of these standards clearly benefited society in ways significant here. The Ten Commandments, for example, included prohibitions on murder, theft, and dishonesty. It seems reasonable to presume members of the order were expected to adhere to these standards more strictly than the general population given the degree of their commitment to the faith.

As mentioned, the order received significant donations of land and money directly to support defense of the Holy Land. Because of the vow of poverty, additional significant Templar income came from new members donating their wealth and estates. Further, nobles traveling to the Holy Land on pilgrimage or to fight allowed the order to manage land (and receive a portion of its income) while absent. Eventually more of the order's members lived in Europe maintaining these estates than lived in the Holy Land.

Of special interest to our research is Templar financial and trade activity. The order built a chain of forts to protect the route to the Holy Land. To support these forts and its efforts in the Holy Land and to transport pilgrims, the order built and maintained a fleet and also engaged in significant international trade. The Templars became bankers, lending money to pilgrims and knights and even to kings, managing to circumvent the Christian prohibition on charging interest on loans.<sup>1</sup> King Philip IV of France's suppression of the order in 1307 was motivated in part by a desire to eliminate his debts to the Templars.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Philip did not confiscate Templar estates, choosing instead to transfer them to the Hospitallers.

The order created what might be the first example of a "debit card and ATM" system. Travelers to the Holy Land deposited cash at a Templar facility in Europe and received a letter of credit, possibly coded. The traveler redeemed part or all of the funds, less a fee, at Templar facilities en route or upon arrival. Not only did this practice reduce the risk of a traveler being robbed, it also eliminated the difficulty posed in an era before efficient currency markets enabled exchanging silver currency used in Europe with gold currency common in the Near East (Marvin 1989).

The Knights Templar were an international banking, trade, and travel conglomerate. They became wealthy by providing valuable goods and services at relatively low cost. Their cost advantage came in part from their temporal tax exemption but also from their ability to cross national boundaries freely and from the low cost of uncertainty about the reliability of their services.

This latter point tends not to be acknowledged. Financial markets were in their infancy, and especially in the area of banking, widespread institutions protecting participants from opportunistic behavior had not evolved. The unique character of the Templars with their code and religious beliefs assured product quality. As mentioned, it was their very success at banking that made them King Philip's target. It might even be argued that the order's suppression and the decision by other orders to discontinue banking and financial activities set back European progress in this area.

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<sup>1</sup> Interest was paid, but not always directly as such. If a farm was used as collateral for a loan, the knights had claim to the revenue stream from the property and would collect it until the principal was repaid. The stream of payments from the land functioned as interest even if not labeled as such (Stark, 2009: 113, 177).

<sup>2</sup> Jews, another lending group, had been expelled the prior year.

*CASE STUDY: THE HOSPITALLERS (PERIOD OF INTEREST: 1113 TO 1565 C.E.)*

The story of the Hospitallers is similar to that of the Templars but with a different emphasis. The Order of Hospitallers, or Knights Hospitaller, began as a group of men supporting a hospital in Jerusalem intended to aid Christian pilgrims. After Christians captured Jerusalem in the First Crusade, the Hospitallers organized as warrior monks under the Benedictine Rule and were confirmed as such by Pope Paschal II in 1113. The Hospitallers defended the Holy Land, along with the other holy orders, until Muslim forces reconquered Jerusalem and other regions of the Holy Land. The order then established itself on the Iberian Peninsula and on Rhodes and then on Malta, defending against Muslim advances from the east and into the Iberian Peninsula. The successful defense of Malta against the Ottoman leader Suleiman in 1565 was the last time members of the order fought as armed knights. The order then changed its (increasingly modest) focus to efforts against the Ottoman-sponsored Barbary pirates.

The Hospitallers engaged in trade, banking, and finance activities, as did the Templars, but on a more modest scale. Land as a source of wealth was always more important to the Hospitallers than to the Templars, and of course Hospitaller holdings increased significantly after the Templars' suppression. The order had estates (commanderies) in Portugal, Spain, Italy, England, Ireland, Germany, Eastern Europe, and as many as 250 commanderies in what is now France (Sire 1994). The holdings mainly consisted of agricultural estates but also included hospitals for the sick, facilities for travelers, villages, and convents.

Consistent with this paper's hypothesis, the Hospitallers managed their assets responsibly, with an eye to long-run benefits. In 1296 Master Vissaret in granting a charter of independence to the village of Le Burgaud stated, "The more the town grows in consequence of the liberties accorded the inhabitants, the more the house of St John also will prosper" (Sire, 1994: 107). When he took possession of the commandery in Cours in 1459, Fortanier de Lat took a formal oath to protect the vassals: "That he will be to them a good lord and legal and will guard their right and their liberties and their usages and will guard them from wrong and from force of his own and of others of his legal power" (Sire, 1994: 107–8, trans. from French original by authors). French commanderies prospered even until the French Revolution, during which time they were confiscated. Commanderies in other nations lasted even longer. The order also maintained roads and bridges in their holdings. They were active in reclaiming and attracting settlers to wild lands in southern France and in Germany. The fact that vassals tended to move away from exploitive estates and toward prosperous ones is an endorsement of the order's policies (Bloch 1961).

Not only did the Hospitallers benefit from exemption from temporal taxes, but the order's beliefs and practices further enhanced land values. Having taken a vow of poverty, the inclination of individual members to exploit land holdings for personal benefit was attenuated.

*CASE STUDY: THE ORDER OF CALATRAVA (PERIOD OF INTEREST: 1100s TO 1487 C.E.)*

This 12th century Cistercian military order was founded in Castile to fight the Muslims. Alfonso VII, the king of Castile, took the castle Calatrava from the Moors in 1147. Located on the southern edge of the kingdom, the king struggled to maintain possession. The Knights Templar were defeated, and a new military order began in Calatrava's defense as the king had no standing army of his own.

Various vows bound the knights: silence in the refectory, dormitory, and oratory; specific fasts throughout the year; paternoster recitations; requirements to sleep in their armor; and others. In addition, there were vows of poverty and celibacy.

Over time the order grew; it acted as the feudal lord over thousands of peasants and had upwards of 2,000 knights—a large force for the time. This power became a threat to the monarch, Pedro the Cruel, who put to death three consecutive Grand Masters of the order, including one the king killed himself. As the Muslims were defeated, the order turned on itself with divisions and rivalries.

The order, however, corrected itself and reached its height of prosperity in the second half of the 15th century. It had control over more than sixty villages with a combined population of 200,000 and large annual revenues. Kings again felt threatened by this rival institution with vast riches and power. Instead of murdering the Grand Masters as before, King Ferdinand of Aragon through a papal bull in 1487 ended political autonomy of the order. The order slowly lost its power, the vows of celibacy and poverty were later eliminated (Iannaccone 1992), and the order dissolved completely in 1838 (Moeller 1908).

*CASE STUDY: THE SAMURAI (PERIOD OF INTEREST: 1100s TO 1603 C.E.)*

Warrior elites existed outside of Europe, the samurai being one example. The definition of the term samurai is somewhat imprecise. In use among historians, a samurai is "a lightly armored mounted archer characteristic of Japan after 1100" (Farris, 1992: 1). The term samurai means literally "one who serves" and can also refer to a person occupying the Sixth Court Rank who served a person of higher rank (one of the first five court ranks). A person occupying the Sixth Court Rank need not have been a warrior, however, nor did all warriors serve in the court. Before and even after the term samurai entered common usage, these specialized

warriors were typically called *bushi*. Not all samurai rode horses, nor did they rely on the bow.

Japan's Heian period, roughly 794 to 1100, was characterized by a bureaucratic central government similar to China's. *Heian* refers to Japan's capital city during the period: Heian-kyō, or modern Kyōto. Of interest to this paper, military technology evolved during the Heian period. At its start, the imperial army consisted mainly of relatively poorly trained and equipped mass peasant militia. Over time, mounted archers became more common and eventually completely replaced the peasants as fighters (Friday 1992). Well-trained mounted horse archers could literally run rings around foot soldiers and kill them at ranges that posed little risk to the archers. As with Europe's mounted knights, innovations in saddles and stirrups complemented this new method of warfare.

But, as in the case of the Templars and other knightly orders, an effective mounted fighter required specialized skills and training and expensive equipment. Instead of recruiting them from the peasantry, the emperor hired *bushi* as needed from the lower nobility in the capital as well as from the provinces. The lower nobility were relatively wealthy and had time available for training.

At the end of the Heian period, the *bushi* began to employ their unique military power to acquire political power, culminating in 1185, when Minamoto no Yoritomo seized significant imperial powers and gave himself the title Shogun. Although the emperor remained Japan's nominal leader, *bushi* maintained practical control of the central government until the latter 1860s.

Establishment of the Shogunate gave samurai control of the central government but did not assure the central government's control of Japan. In fact, the power of the central government began a 500-year decline, sometimes labeled Japan's Medieval Period (Adolphson and Ramseyer 2009). Warfare between local leaders, which had occurred before, became more serious, culminating in a full-scale civil war from 1467 to 1573. Local leaders kept samurai on permanent retainer and hired others as needed. Samurai in turn benefited to the extent they could align themselves with a successful leader, and those alignments could and did change.

What role did religion play in a samurai's life? Did the samurai adopt a unique religion? Interestingly, new forms of Buddhism came to Japan at the beginning of the Medieval Period. While much of the population adopted Pure Land Buddhism, the samurai tended to choose Zen Buddhism. This pattern, at least, is consistent with our hypothesis.

As adopted by the samurai, Zen Buddhism did not encourage behavior conducive to property rights enforcement, however. Not just Buddhist doctrine but samurai teachings in general tended to focus on loyalty to the leader and fearlessness in battle (Wilson, 1982: 33): "When one is serving officially or in the master's court, he should not think of a hundred or a thousand people, but should

only consider the importance of the master. Nor should he draw the line at his own life or anything else he considers valuable" (Hojo Shigetoki, "The Message of Master Gokurakuji," [1256], as cited in Wilson, 1982: 38).

So the interesting question is whether or not Medieval Japan can be considered a successful society. If Japan during this time was successful or was creating successful institutions, samurai doctrine is not consistent with this paper's hypothesis. To the extent Japan's Medieval Period can be regarded a failed society, however, the paper's hypothesis is supported. That is, the society was a failure in part because the samurai did not adopt a religious doctrine useful to society.

One perspective comes from work by Adolphson and Ramseyer (2009). These authors argue that the Medieval Japanese government, supported by the samurai, largely failed. They further argue that Buddhist temples and monasteries became substitute enforcers of property rights: "By helping to secure basic claims to property, the temples and monasteries helped to promote investment and growth; by competing against the government itself, they helped to forestall the crippling effect of a predatory monopolistic state" (Adolphson and Ramseyer, 2009: 660). In other words, religion did play a role in enforcing property rights in Medieval Japan, but the instrument of that enforcement was the church, not a warrior elite. This conclusion does not contradict our more general view of religion's role in preindustrial societies.

Historians date the end of Japan's Medieval Period as 1603 when Tokugawa Ieyasu unified Japan and established himself as shogun. The Tokugawa Shogunate endured until it was abolished in 1867 during the Meiji Restoration. The Tokugawa period was peaceful, stable, and rigid, perhaps in its later years more accurately described as ossified. The powerful central government successfully ended warfare between estates and generally neutralized the samurai as active warriors. As the era progressed, samurai became more or less wards of the state or petty bureaucrats (Yamamura 1971).

*CASE STUDY: THE JANISSARIES (PERIOD OF INTEREST: LATE 1300s TO 1826)*

Founded in about 1300, the Ottoman Empire ultimately encompassed the western Mediterranean region, the entire Middle East, and Egypt (Goodwin 1998). It eventually declined, evolving into the nation of Turkey in the early 1900s. During much of its existence, the empire's leader or sultan employed a class of elite infantry warriors called Janissaries, the term meaning "new troop." The Janissaries typically constituted about 10 percent the Ottoman army's numbers.

Formed after about 1383 by Murad I, the Janissaries were first recruited from prisoners of war and slaves and not long after from Christian boys in the Balkan territories of the empire given as an alternative to taxes. Behavior standards were strict and included celibacy. A recruit did not formally enter the ranks until age twenty-five and then only after proving worthy. The Janissaries adopted (or were forced to adopt) Bektashism, a sect in the Islamic Sufi tradition founded by Hajji Bektash Wali expressly for the Janissaries under orders from Sultan Murad II. The sect borrowed significant rituals from Christianity. Interestingly given that recruitment was from youth, higher ranked individuals in the sect were called *baba* (father) and *dede* (grandfather).

Although certainly elite warriors, the Janissaries are not a warrior elite as defined in this paper. Until after the late 1500s, they exercised no political power. Further, given their loyalty and attachment to the sultan, they served to protect property rights only to the extent this task was the sultan's objective. But the sultans tended not to impose themselves on conquered regions, leaving a fairly loose administration whose main objective was to levy taxes and tribute. Who provided a legal structure? "Charismatic sects, chivalric orders, brotherhoods, and guilds imposed codes of behavior which maintained a kind of order in areas where authority such as Osman's was weak" (Goodwin, 1998: 9). Note again religion's enforcement role.

The late 1500s saw the beginning of three trends. First, recruitment and requirements became more lax. The celibacy rule was relaxed in 1566, volunteers were accepted, and Muslims from within the empire joined the ranks. Recruits eventually also came from the children of Janissaries with little restriction or training.

Second, and following from the first, the military effectiveness of the Janissaries declined. They had been military innovators, being early adopters of the musket, for example. But over time innovation ceased. Their suppression came in part because they objected to the sultan forming newer units based on Western models.

Third, at the peak of their military power, they began to make increasing demands on the sultan. These demands began with simple extortion: striking for higher wages. Eventually the Janissaries staged palace coups to install malleable sultans. They became landholders and business owners. Eventually they dominated Ottoman politics. Thus they became an elite, but were not warriors. Mahmud II suppressed and killed the Janissaries in 1826 after the mutiny mentioned above.



*MODERN WARRIOR ELITES*

While our focus is historical, our hypothesis can be generalized to modern versions of warrior elites. Gangs in the United States are associated with violence, with popular thought being that gangs cause crime. Sobel and Osoba (2009) demonstrate the opposite, however: crime causes gangs (at least for Los Angeles over their time of study). Their approach is similar to ours. When crime increases—or there is a decline in the stability of property rights—residents seek to protect themselves. One mechanism of property protection is to join a gang, which can be viewed as a privatized government. Gang members have initiation rituals and pledges, as did warrior monks, to deal with adverse selection. Religious orders extended property rights for the kings where their power was weak, whereas gangs protect property rights of individuals where the government is weak (see also Skarbek [2014] on Californian prison gangs).

Likewise the mafia in Sicily can be interpreted as a form of modern warrior elites who protect property rights. Buonanno et al. (2011: 1) argue that following “the demise of Sicilian feudalism, the lack of publicly provided property-right protection from widespread banditry favored the development of a florid market for private protection and the emergence of a cartel of protection providers: the mafia.” The Freemasons, among other groups, provided the Mafiosi with rituals and organization. Along similar lines Dimico, Isopi, and Olsson (2012) argue the mafia arose as a non-governmental institution to protect property rights within the unique market structure of Sicily. These studies coincide with the famous Mafioso Calogero Vizzini assertion: “The fact is that in every society there has to be a category of people who straighten things out when situations get complicated. Usually they are functionaries of the state. Where the state is not present, or where it does not have sufficient force, this is done by private individuals” (as cited in Friedman and McNeill, 2013: 180). An interesting question beyond the scope of this paper is the extent and character of mafia member religious belief.

There are obvious differences between warrior monks and gang members. Initial warrior elites were sanctioned by the state and acted under the banner of God and king, whereas government opposes gangs and the mafia. Yet both modern and historic warrior elites filled a void of weak property rights, use initiations, and have codes of conduct among members.

*CONCLUSION*

This preliminary analysis of warrior elites shows at least some support for the hypothesis that they adopt unique religious doctrines of value in protecting property rights. Clearly the Templars, the Hospitallers and the Order of Calatrava did so, and other orders likewise filled a property rights void.

But outside of Western Europe, our results are weaker. Although the samurai adopted a unique religion and were certainly elite warriors, their actions during much of the period of interest did little to help their host society. On the other hand, to the extent medieval Japan's economy failed to achieve its potential, the samurai's failure to protect property rights is a useful counter-factual. In addition, the role Buddhist monasteries and temples substituted for the government (and the samurai) provides some support to our general theory of religion.

By our definition the Janissaries in their early history were elite warriors but not a warrior elite. In their later history, they were an elite but not warriors. We suspect other examples in this same mold might include Rome's Praetorian Guard. Unlike the Templars and Hospitallers but like the samurai and Janissaries, the Praetorians operated as agents of the emperor within relatively unified empires. In their ascendancy, however, Praetorians did not adopt a unique religious doctrine (Bingham 2013).

Significant additional research is obviously required. Additional warrior elites should be analyzed; examples include the Mamluks, the Immortals, and the czar's Streltsy soldiers. Furthermore, our current case studies present only a cursory examination of the warriors and their context. As an additional issue, these warrior elites existed in roughly the same historic period and might be a response to the extant military technology, as might the cause of their demise: the increasing power of central government and effective weapons usable by mass armies that required discipline but not skill. Further study into how military elites, especially in Europe, directly improved institutional development could be a fertile area of research. Another possible question is if the different European warrior elites led to varying long-term outcomes based on the institutional set up of the military order. Nevertheless, we feel this first effort provides an interesting addition to the body of work relating religion to property rights enforcement.

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