

Secret Societies



The Priory of Sion



“Fact:

The Priory of Sion—a European secret society founded in 1099—is a real organization. In 1975 Paris’s Bibliothèque Nationale discovered parchments known as *Les Dossiers Secrets*, identifying numerous members of the Priory of Sion, including Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo da Vinci.”

—Prologue to *The Da Vinci Code*

"The Priory of Sion . . . was founded in Jerusalem in 1099 by a French king named Godefroi de Bouillon, immediately after he had conquered the city . . .

King Godefroi was allegedly the possessor of a powerful secret—a secret that had been in his family since the time of Christ. Fearing his secret might be lost when he died, he founded a secret brotherhood—the Priory of Sion—and charged them with protecting his secret by quietly passing it on from generation to generation . . .

“. . . During their years in Jerusalem, the Priory learned of a stash of hidden documents buried beneath the ruins of Herod's temple, which had been built atop the earlier ruins of Solomon's Temple. These documents, they believed, corroborated Godefroi's powerful secret and were so explosive in nature that the Church would stop at nothing to get them.”

-- *The Da Vinci Code*, 157-58

The Priory of Sion

- First Historical Appearance—1956
 - In 1956, the *Priory of Sion* was registered in France as a society
 - Pierre Plantard, a draftsman, and six other Frenchmen were listed as the charter members
 - Its stated purpose was to defend the rights of those in low-rental housing
 - It dissolved in 1957

Mythology of the Priory

- In 1957, Plantard heard the story of the Abbé Saunière, who lived in the early 20th century
- Saunière was said to have been able to reconstruct his church from a treasure he found in the nearby village from clues from a parchment found in the pillars of his church
- In fact, Saunière had gained his money from charging for masses
- Near the end of his life, Saunière was suspended from his duties by his superiors for this reason

Les Dossiers Secrets

- Plantard drew from Saunière's story to create his own parchments
- With the help of Philippe de Chérisey, Plantard forged parchments suggesting that Plantard was the direct descendant of King Dagobert II (died 679) of the Merovingian dynasty
- One of the parchments also claimed that the Priory of Sion was founded in 1099 by Godefroy de Bouillon
 - Past Grand Masters listed included Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, Victor Hugo, and Claude Debussy
- Plantard deposited these in the Bibliothèque Nationale in the early 1960s

Exposure of the Fraud

- With the help of Gérard de Sède, Plantard published a book about the parchments, *L'Or de Rennes*, in 1967
- Following a dispute over royalties for the book, in 1971 Philippe de Chérissey publicly admitted that he had forged the parchments deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale
- Plantard later confirmed this, though he claimed that those parchments were copies of an original set that had been lost

Holy Blood, Holy Grail

- In 1982, three British journalists, Henry Lincoln, Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, published the book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*
- In the book, the journalists accepted the Priory myth, but further argued that the Merovingians were the descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene
- Plantard himself never accepted this view—he was content to simply be the heir of French kings

Plantard's Demise

- In 1989, Plantard created a new history of the Priory of Sion, claiming it began in Rennes-le-Château in 1681
- He also drew up a new list of Grand Masters, which included Roger-Patrice Pelat, an important French official who had recently committed suicide
- In the Official Inquiry, Plantard's rooms were searched, revealing new parchments, "certifying" that Plantard was the true King of France
- Under courtroom cross-examination, Plantard confessed that he had forged the documents
- He was released with a reprimand for consuming the court's time with nonsense
- He died in 2000

“I have never claimed to be a descendant in the male line of Dagobert II, nor a pretender to the French throne, anymore more than I have ever claimed to be a descendant of Jesus. All that is a writer’s hoax, the aim of which was and remains the generation of financial profit from the publishing of books or the making of films”

—Pierre Plantard, 1990

The Knights Templar



"In order to retrieve the documents from the ruins [of the Temple], the Priory created a military arm . . . The Knights Templar . . .

“Although unpaid and sworn to poverty, the Knights told the king they required basic shelter and requested his permission to take up residence in the stables under the ruins of the temple. King Baldwin granted the soldiers’ request, and the Knights took up their meager residence inside the devastated shrine . . .

“The odd choice of lodging, Langdon explained, had been anything but random. The Knights believed the documents the Priory sought were buried deep under the ruins—beneath the Holy of Holies . . . For almost a decade, the nine Knights lived in the ruins, excavating in total secrecy through solid rock.”

—*The Da Vinci Code*, pp. 158-159

Origins of the Knights Templar

- Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)
 - In 1128, Bernard of Clairvaux, head of the Cistercian order of monks, created a new order of Pilgrim Knights, originally nine in number
 - Bernard himself wrote their Rule, which committed them to poverty, chastity and protection of Pilgrims to the Holy Land
 - In 1139, Bernard convinced Pope Innocent II to grant the order official recognition, with the proviso that they report only to the Pope

Crusader Jerusalem

- In 1099, Godfrey de Bouillon captured Jerusalem from the Muslims
- At the time, the Dome of the Rock had been standing on the site of Herod's Temple for four centuries
- The Crusaders turned both it and the nearby al Aqsa mosque into churches (until 1187 when Saladin recaptured Jerusalem)
- The Knights Templar were involved in activities in the Holy Land from the middle of the century
- They lost a decisive battle to Saladin at the Horns of Hattin (Sea of Galilee) in 1187
- The Crusaders fell back to Acre (Mediterranean Coast), which fell to the Muslims in 1287

Dome of the Rock



Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, from the South

“The Knights found what they had been searching for. They took the treasure from the temple and traveled to Europe, where their influence seemed to solidify overnight . . . Pope Innocent II immediately issued an unprecedented papal bull that afforded the Knights Templar limitless power and declared them ‘a law unto themselves’—an autonomous army independent of all interference from kings and prelates, both religious and political . . .

"By the 1300s, the Vatican sanction had helped the Knights amass so much power that Pope Clement V decided that something had to be done. Working in concert with France's King Philippe IV, the Pope . . . Issued secret orders to be opened simultaneously by his soldiers all across Europe on Friday, October 13, 1307 . . .

"On that day, countless Knights were captured, tortured mercilessly, and finally burned at the stake as heretics . . . The Templars' potent treasure trove of documents, which had apparently been their source of power, was Clement's true objective, but it slipped through his fingers. The documents had long since been entrusted to the Templars' shadowy architects, the Priory of Sion, whose veil of secrecy had kept them safely out of range of the Vatican's onslaught."

—*The Da Vinci Code*, pp. 159-60

The Demise of the Knights Templar

- After the Battle of Hattin, many of the Knights Templar returned to Europe
- Corruption emerged, with their wealth arising from charging tolls on bridges and highways
- Though usury was outlawed, they found a way to charge interest legally, earning large sums
- In 1307, King Philippe IV, who held Pope Clement V in the "Avignon Captivity," influenced the Pope to order the arrest of the Templars on various charges:
 - These included heresy and the use of illegal means to acquire property and increase their wealth
- Many were tortured, condemned and burned at the stake
- The Order was disbanded

Opus Dei



“Fact The Vatican prelature known as Opus Dei is a deeply devout Catholic sect that has been the topic of recent controversy due to reports of brain-washing, coercion, and a dangerous practice known as ‘corporal mortification.’ Opus Dei has just completed construction of a \$47 million National Headquarters at 243 Lexington Avenue in New York City”

—*The Da Vinci Code*, Preface

Opus Dei

■ Founding

- Founded by Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, a Spanish Priest, in 1928
- Conceived as a way of encouraging lay people to aspire to holiness without changing their occupation
- In 1939, he wrote *The Way*, containing 999 maxims, which reads as a Christian book of Proverbs

■ Expansion

- The movement soon spread to many countries, and in 1950 it received recognition from the Vatican as the first “secular institute”
- After that time, it moved into the Americas and in 1982 was made a Personal Prelature of the Pope
- It currently reports 77,000 members in 80 countries, including 3,000 in the United States

Opus Dei

■ Organization

- **Prelate:** Bishop Javier Echevarría in Rome
- **Numeraries:** Single members who live celibate lives in community (20% of Membership)
 - Have daily masses, devotional reading, private prayer and physical mortification (usually fasting)
- **Supernumeraries:** Married couples who contribute financially and attend weekly meetings
- **Associates:** Single members who do not live in community

Opus Dei

■ Rule of Life

- Daily devotions
- Financial Support of organization
- Continued vocation “In the World”
- Recruitment of new members

Opus Dei

■ Controversial Aspects

- Secrecy
- Surreptitious recruitment methods
- “Monasticizing” of the laity
- Devotion to a worldview seen by some as excessive and intolerant

The Da Vinci Code and Opus Dei

- Does the *Da Vinci Code* cross the line?
 - It attributes Opus Dei's status as originating from a massive financial "bail-out" the Vatican—an untrue claim
 - It portrays the Opus Dei Prelate and his underling at the center of a massive conspiracy involving murder and corruption

Question:

Would the American public tolerate a novel in which the head of *B'nai B'rith* and his henchman set about assassinating Christian scholars to prevent the release of a secret *Dead Sea Scroll* that portrays Moses as an Egyptian priest who taught the worship of the earth goddess Ishtar?

To Ponder:

The plot of *The Da Vinci Code* does all these things and more—only with Catholics and Jesus, instead of Jews and Moses

It has been at the top of the NY Times Bestseller list for over a year

What does this say about sanctioned religious bigotry in America?