



Cracking the Freemasons Code: The Truth About Solomon's Key and the Brotherhood

By Robert L.D. Cooper

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Prompted by mounting public interest and provoked by controversial stories on the Freemason Society, respected historian and Scottish Freemason Robert L.D. Cooper offers a rare inside look at this secret brotherhood. As curator of the Scottish Masonic Museum and Library, the author has unparalleled access to material dictating the history and function of the Masons.

In *Cracking the Freemasons Code* Cooper explains the structure of the Masonic interculture, its connections to covert organizations, the identities of historical Masonic members (who include George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle), the locations of famous Masonic sites, and much more.

Readers will discover the true role Freemasonry has played throughout history, its purposes, the functions of its many members, and the way in which it has helped shape our modern society. Laying out the symbolism, beliefs, and ethos of a Mason, Cooper addresses the considerable amounts of controversy surrounding those practices. His book includes never-before-published images and seldom-seen documents to give readers a privileged view of this elect brotherhood.

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Editorial Review

Review

"What a breathe of fresh air...excels at putting rewriters of history in their place" Fortean Times "Here is a researcher who can separate historical fact from hysterical fiction" -- Brent Morris

About the Author

Robert L.D. Cooper is a Scottish Freemason as well as a recognized historian and expert on Scottish Freemasonry, the Knights Templar, and the Sinclair family. He has authored numerous articles on Freemasonry and lectured in Masonic Lodges and other venues across the world. He lives in Scotland.

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From Stonemasons to Freemasons

The true origins of Freemasonry are obscure and belong to a period when the academic discipline of history was not nearly as rigorous as it is at present, with the consequence that over the years a considerable number of different theories have been put forward regarding the beginnings and history of the Craft. The earliest records relating to a body of men with clear links to modern Freemasonry occur in Scotland during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Some of these men began to speculate regarding the origins of the Lodges and organizations of which they were members, and as they did so, the early Freemasons came up with an unusual way of speculating about the past and about life in general. That unusual method of exploration is the basis of modern Freemasonry. What it is, what it means and what it does is the subject of this book, but let us first consider the beginnings of Freemasonry itself.

The Knights Templar

There can be no doubt that the dominant theory regarding the origins of Freemasonry current at the time of this writing is that modern Freemasonry derives directly from the medieval order of the Poor Soldiers of Christ and Solomon's Temple, founded about 1118 and more commonly known as the Knights Templar. The order's country of origin was France, where it owned the most property and where the Knights Templar were most numerous. The order was monastic in that its members lived in closed communities and followed the Rule of the Cistercian Order, another monastic order of the Church.

When the order was first established, its members were given quarters on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem on or very near to the site of King Solomon's Temple. Mysteriously, within a few years the order became extremely wealthy, and it was claimed that while stationed on Temple Mount they had excavated down to the foundations of King Solomon's Temple, where they had found something that made them not only wealthy but also enormously powerful. So powerful did they become that they were answerable only to the Pope himself. They were excused all taxes and were independent of all Church authority -- in other words, they could do pretty much whatever they liked.

But what had the Knights Templar discovered in the foundations of King Solomon's Temple? What was it that made the Pope the only one who could command them? And what was it that attracted so many people to join them? There have been many rumors, speculations and suggestions: the Holy Grail, the Ark of the Covenant, the secret teachings of Jesus Christ or perhaps something else altogether -- something called Solomon's Key.

The order continued to grow and become even wealthier as more and more people donated land and money. It owned land in every part of Europe and recruited people from all walks of life, although only knights could become full members. The knights had to take vows of chastity, obedience and poverty and were therefore in this respect monks much like any others. They differed from monks in that they were authorized to fight non-Christians, especially those who occupied the Holy Land (modern Israel), because that was the birthplace of Christianity. According to their principles, the Holy Land had to be freed from the infidel and re-Christianized. They were therefore warrior monks -- knights of Christ. The Knights Templars' training and fanaticism caused their fighting abilities to become legendary, and they were a major element of the crusading forces in the Holy Land. Their rivalry with the Knights of St. John (the Knights Hospitaller) was fierce, and it would ultimately contribute to their undoing, as would the order's wealth.

The Knights Templar invented international banking. Because they owned property throughout Europe, it was possible to deposit money in one of their preceptories, on receipt of which they would prepare a note to be sent to another preceptory, where the creditor could collect the money. This meant that large sums of money no longer needed to be transported through dangerous country. Needless to say, the order charged a fee for this service.

After the fall of the last Christian outpost in the Holy Land at the Battle of Acre in 1291, the Knights Templar retreated to Cyprus, where they established their new headquarters. With the loss of the Holy Land, the Knights Templar had effectively lost the justification of their existence, but this did not prevent them from becoming arrogant and self-indulgent and flaunting their wealth.

Philip the Fair and the Fall of the Knights Templar

The theory that modern Freemasonry is directly descended from the medieval Order of the Knights Templar concerns Machiavellian intrigue and the affairs of both Crown and Church. As we have seen, the Knights Templar had strong links with France, a country that relentlessly promoted the belief that the monarchy, its own monarchy, was divinely ordained. Philip the Fair (1268-1314), so called because of his complexion, not his disposition, had been king of France since he was seventeen years old and ruled with a rod of iron. He was the eleventh Capetian king of France and came to a throne burdened with huge debts as a consequence of previous wars; he owed money to just about anyone who would lend it to him. The Jews, the Lombards (a people originally descended from North European tribes) and the Knights Templar were major creditors.

Philip struggled to free himself from debt but could never quite manage it: he could not raise enough or spent too much or both. He introduced special taxes on certain businesses, licenses on exports and forced loans. He also introduced special taxes on Jews, Lombards and the Church, which brought him into direct conflict with the pope, Boniface VIII, a conflict that only ended with the pope's death shortly after Philip had had him kidnapped. Benedict XI, who followed Boniface, died in mysterious circumstances after only nine months as pope, following a series of arguments between him and Philip. The election of the French Pope Clement V (1264-1314) in 1305 was supported by Philip, and these two characters were to play a central role in subsequent events concerning the Knights Templar.

In the 1290s Philip devalued the coinage to the extent that after ten years it was worth only a third of its original value. This temporarily increased income for the Crown but also reduced the amount received in taxes. In June 1306 Philip declared that the value of money would return to the level that had existed prior to the devaluations, which meant prices, and therefore taxes, would triple overnight. The people of Paris rioted, and Philip was forced to flee to a Templar preceptory for protection. It is known that a few years previously he had applied to join the order and had been rejected. It must therefore have been especially galling for the king of France to ask for protection from an organization that had not wanted him as a member, but during the three days he was under its protection he studied the order, how the preceptory operated and what its

fortifications and security were like. After the riots a new strategy was necessary, and on emerging from the protection of the Knights Templar, Philip moved quickly. Secret orders were issued, and on June 21, 1306, every Jew in France was arrested and all their property stolen, thereby eliminating a group of the king's major creditors.

In 1306 Pope Clement V called a meeting to discuss a possible amalgamation of the Knights Templar with the Order of St. John (the Knights Hospitaller). The Grand Master of the Knights Templar, Jacques de Molay (ca. 1244-1314), traveled from Cyprus to France for the meeting, accompanied by a large retinue of sixty knights and a baggage train loaded with gold and jewels of an immense but unknown value. However, the Grand Master of the Hospitallers, William de Villaret, replied that he could not attend because he was overseeing the transfer of the order to Rhodes.

The Hospitallers had reinvented themselves. They had become a powerful naval force continuously engaged in keeping the Mediterranean sea lanes clear of infidel pirates. In complete contrast, the Knights Templar had changed hardly at all, having failed to recognize that the world and their role in it was changing, especially after Christians had been ejected from the Holy Land fifteen years earlier. Their failure to acknowledge the changing times was owing to their fixed belief that there would be another crusade; it was not a question of if, but when, and this was exactly what de Molay proposed to set in action when he arrived in France early in 1307.

He did not go directly to Poitiers, where the pope was residing, but instead went to Paris to deposit the treasure he had brought with him into the Knights Templar preceptory. He was received by Philip at the royal court and, with all seeming well between the order and the monarch, de Molay traveled on to Poitiers, unaware that Philip had already informed the pope that the Knights Templar were indulging in heretical and abominable practices in the secrecy of their preceptories.

As the order was part of the Church and answerable only to the pope, nothing could be done to follow up the allegations against it without his permission. The Church had no army of its own, relying on the secular authorities, so if the allegations had any basis in truth, Clement would have to ask Philip to arrest the Knights Templar and the Church would investigate. Clement was therefore in a very difficult position. He knew that he had been made pope with Philip's help and he was also aware of how Philip had treated his two predecessors. The pope that Philip had made could just as easily be unmade. It seems that Clement adopted the tactic of simply delaying making a decision until Philip finally resolved to take action himself.

Up to the very last minute de Molay was lulled into a false sense of security. On October 12, 1307, he was accorded the honor of being a pallbearer at the state funeral of Catherine of Valois...

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