

The Knights of the Holy Grail

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Ancient Egypt had a sustained system of initiation preserved through a hereditary priesthood documented in the Pyramid Texts. Egyptian science, medicine, mathematics, and astronomy were of an exponentially higher order of refinement and sophistication than many modern scholars will admit. The high level of gnosis which came through initiation was not used for personal in by the priestly and royal initiates. Although their rank entitled them to privilege, they used their sacred knowledge of astronomy, agriculture, architecture, building, medicine, mathematics, metallurgy, and navigation for the benefit of the entire community. After the Exodus, this initiatory tradition continued in the emerging Judaism.

Egyptians referred to the supreme god of their pantheon as the Most High God. This is the same term used by Abraham and the mysterious priest of Jerusalem Maichizedek. It is also interesting to note that Abraham adopted for himself and his children the Egyptian custom of circumcision, practiced by Egyptian priests and royalty since 4000 BC. The Jewish hereditary priesthood coming from the tribe of Levi is like the Egyptians whose priests were of a hereditary caste and were guardians of sacred knowledge.

Mystical speculations in the Jewish Talmud focus on the work of creation described in Genesis and the divine chariot in the account of Ezekiel. These mystical doctrines were carefully guarded and only allowed to be expounded to a chosen few in the traditional Egyptian tradition.

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The Kabbala was a major Jewish mystical tradition received from Aaron. A major tenet is the idea of the Zaddik or Righteous One. Ezekiel mentions the Righteous One and Noah referred to Him as the Foundation of the World. Noah himself was referred to as Righteous... and the embodiment of the world's Covenant of Peace.

The Old Testament began to take form during the Babylonian Exile and work continued over several centuries. It has repeated references to the 24 ma'amadot, the hereditary priesthood who took turns serving in the Temple in Jerusalem. The high-priestly families were descendants from Aaron and Zadok the Priest who anointed Solomon as King. The pagan Selucid King Antiochus IV deposed the last Zadokite high priest in 175 B.C. and installed his own nominee. The son of the deposed high priest built a rival temple at Leontopolis in Egypt. The other zealous Zadokite high priests of the ma'amadot formed their own sect in the wilderness at Qumran observing traditional worship and observing strict rules of purity and following Torah under the leadership of one called Teacher of Righteousness. Josephus wrote of the Essens, commonly called the Essenes descended from Zadok. They held their goods in common, lived pure and austere lives, maintained ritualistic purity, and believed in the immortality of the soul. Josephus wrote that they exceed all other men that addict themselves to virtue and righteousness.

The family of Jesus were certainly members of one of the 24 families of the ma'amadot because Jesus' brother James the Just was recorded at being a high priest in the scriptures, the works of Josephus, and the writings of some of the early Christian fathers. This explains why the teachings of Jesus were not regarded as the foundation of a new religion. The only thing separating Jesus and his followers from other Jews was the fanatical adherence to Jesus' interpretation of the Law and their complete devotion to doing Torah.

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The priestly and kingly Messiahs, John the Baptist and Jesus, both members of the Nazorean sect of Essenes, were regarded as the fulfillment of Jewish religious thought and belief and not a contradiction. His teachings were so pure and right that other sects such as the Pharisees and Sadducees saw Jesus as undermining their priestly authority and power.

After the crucifixion, James took on the role of the priestly Messiah which had been previously held by John the Baptist prior to his beheading by Herod Antipas. The Apostles, including Paul, acknowledged James as ". . . of the lineage of David and officiated after the manner of the ancient priesthood. Whereof also he as permitted once a year to enter the Holy of Holies as the Law commanded the high priests, according to that which is written: for so many before us have told of him, both Eusebius and Clement and others. Furthermore he was empowered to wear on his head the high priestly diadem as the aforementioned trustworthy men have mentioned . . ." The preeminence of James is well documented, yet later Church teaching about him is sparse at best. And, why was his role minimized by the Church in referring to him as "James the Less?"

The earliest writings of Jesus do not claim his divinity nor the claim of Mary to be a virgin. In fact the Gospel of Mark starts with Jesus' ministry and teaching, completely omitting his birth narrative which was later added to the other Gospels. How could Mary be considered "ever virgin" when Mark's Gospel lists his brother by name and mentions his sisters? Matthew's Gospels also names his brothers.

Another brother of Jesus marginalized by the Church is Didymus Judas Thomas, marginalized by the Church with the characterization "Doubting Thomas." The Gospel written by Thomas was suppressed and disappeared for over 1,500 years until discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945. In this Gospel the disciples ask Jesus who to follow when he

departs. His answer is "Wherever you are, you are to go to James the righteous, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being." Some scholars believe that this indicates that James' role as priestly Messiah was superior to that of Jesus as the kingly Messiah. It is interesting that the Nazarenes, from whom Jesus himself sprang, later called the Ebionites, continued the traditions of the ma'amadot and elected their leaders from among the family of Jesus until well into the 2nd century A.D.

It was Saint Paul, a man who never actually walked with Jesus nor learned at his feet, who first preached the blasphemy that Jesus was divine. Jesus never claimed to be divine. The Apostles regarded themselves as an ultra-orthodox Jewish movement. The idea of a divine human would be so far away from the Jewish concept of God that no Jew could accept that belief and would be stoned for blasphemy if they spoke of such an idea. Also, the idea of an innocent man suffering for the sin of others went against fundamental religious principles (as stated by Ezekiel), not to mention that human sacrifice was completely against the law. Yet Paul preached these concepts to the Greeks and Romans, to whom a sacrificial death would be familiar and attractive. A document titled the Kerygmata Petrou, written in the early years after the Crucifixion, describes Paul as the hostile man who falsified the true teachings of Jesus.

The Council of Nicaea, which created the Nicene Creed, was convened by Constantine (not the Church bishops) to end the religious disputes. He didn't really care what Christians believed, he just wanted them stop the fighting and believe the same thing. This led to the suppression of what the winners of that battle defined as heresies, namely that Jesus was a man, chosen and empowered by God. Constantine, who was a follower of Mithras, incorporated the Mithraic myths into Christianity such as a holy birth on Dec. 25th in a grotto attended by shepherds, the idea of resurrection of the body, moving worship away from the Jewish Sabbath to Sunday as in the cult of Sol Invictus and the concept of a Holy Trinity. Constantine imposed sentences of exile on all bishops who

refused to sign the council's decrees, and all who refused to accept the divinity of Jesus would be excommunicated. It was after Nicaea that the Bishop of Rome claimed to be the head of the entire Church.

The Essenes and Ebionites, descendants of the ma'amadot priestly families of ancient Egypt and early Judaism went underground, outwardly following prevailing religious practices and secretly preserving the true teachings of Jesus. They began calling themselves Rex Deus and continued the strict marriage laws that bound them to the Church.

Once the heretical religions were suppressed, the Church began to restrict education only to Priests, and the world entered what are referred to as the Dark Ages. The clergy were the only scribes who codified the laws and recorded the histories and oral legends, omitting all that was offensive to doctrine and adding their own religious gloss. Pagan festivals were incorporated into the Christian calendar such as the festival of Astarte, goddess of love and fertility which became Easter, the summer solstice became the feast of John the Baptist, and the birth of Mithras became Christmas.

Because of its remote location from the Empire, Celtic Christianity was largely unaffected. Priests were encouraged to marry and there were no images of the Crucifixion in any of their churches. Celtic mystics and monks used an initiatory belief system, education was treasured and the monasteries had large and well used libraries. They evangelized much of Europe, but were opposed by the repressive attitudes of the corrupt Church in Rome.

At the end of the 8th century Pope Leo crowned Charlemagne as the new Holy Roman Emperor. He expanded his empire creating over 600 counties to be ruled over by his most trusted and newly created counts. By Charlemagne's death in 814, much of Europe was

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under the administration of the Rex Deus families. These families who outwardly conformed to the religion of their time and place secretly handed down an initiatory system based on the true teachings of Jesus. They tried to influence and change the Church from within by taking positions of importance.

A noble of Burgundy, Bernard de Fontaine, expressed a desire to become a monk in the new and struggling Cistercian Order much to the horror of his family. But suddenly the family's attitude changed and 32 of his friends and relatives became novices with Bernard in 1112. Historian Dom David Knowles described Bernard as a leader, writer, preacher with spiritual power which was irresistible. Men came from all over Europe to Clairvaux and were sent out all over the continent. Among them were the pope, Archbishop of Canterbury, cardinals and bishops. In spite of never rising above the office of Abbott of Clairvaux, Bernard advised kings, popes, emperors, and nobility. He also played a significant role in the spiritual traditions of Craftsmasons known as the Children of Solomon. His Rex Deus relatives included his cousin who became Patriarch of Jerusalem, Uncle Andre de Montbard, Hugh de Payen, the St. Clairs and Setons of Scotland, the Royal House of Flanders, and the most important noble in Europe, Count Hughes de Champagne.

Hughes met with Rex Deus families in a secret conclave in 1104. He then left for the Holy Land and did not return until 1108. In 1114 he made another mysterious trip to Jerusalem. On his return he made a donation of land to the Cistercians upon which they erected the Abbey of Clairvaux and Bernard was appointed the first Abbot. These are the events which led to the formation of The Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon. The first Grand Master, Hughes de Payen, was cousin of Bernard of Clairvaux.

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During the first 8 or 9 years of the Order's existence, they largely neglected their avowed purpose of protecting pilgrims for the purpose of digging tunnels on Temple Mount. Those tunnels were discovered in the early 20th century when Lt. Warren of the Royal Engineers explored them finding many Templar artifacts. When the Templars completed their excavations, Grand Master Hughes de Payen asked King Baldwin to write to Bernard of Clairvaux asking him to intercede with the pope for formal recognition of the Order. Bernard being the principal advisor and former teacher of the pope, the recognition was granted. Nobly throughout Europe began giving lands and estates to the new Templar Order.

According to the Rex Deus family accounts, after the Scottish victory at Bannockburn, as an act of gratitude and recognition, King Robert the Bruce became the Sovereign Grand Master of the Templar Order. As a pragmatist, the King knew that his country needed to live in the medieval world which meant making peace with the pope and that would require the Templars to go underground to insure the survival of their traditions. The Templar properties in Scotland were given to the Knights Hospitallers, but they were accounted for separately as though being held in trust to be returned at a future time.

What were the beliefs and secret teachings of the Templars? One hint comes to us engraved on the stone walls of massive cathedrals and churches. After the Templars made their discoveries digging under Temple Mount in Jerusalem, suddenly we see the building of great churches in the Gothic style. There seems to be no transitional period between Romanesque and Gothic architecture. We see great buildings incorporating the sacred geometry of the Egyptians. We see buildings reaching greater heights than ever before. The person we find at the center of all this new building is Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Order.

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At the center of this Gothic building was a fraternity of builders called the Children of Solomon. With encouragement of Bernard of Clairvaux, the Knights Templar gave a rule to this fraternity in March 1145. The true nature of the relationship between these two orders is impossible to directly establish, but at the suppression of the Templars, the Children of Solomon lost all privileges and immunities. The great Cathedral at Chartres, built by this fraternity, has no image of the Crucifixion, a hint of the underlying heresy of the Gnostics. It is also considered to be an initiatory center and one of a number of churches featuring the Black Madonna which has connections to the Knights Templar.

Why did so many intellectuals join the Masonic fraternity in the Renaissance? Unlike the Church which attempted to limit and control access to knowledge, the fraternity operated in secrecy not only to protect their trade secrets, but to protect their moral and spiritual teachings as well. From where did these moral and spiritual teachings come? Did they come from the ancient Egyptian priestly families? Did their traditions and teachings transmit to the Jews through their priestly families? During the Diaspora, did these priestly families spread through the world? Did these priestly families create the Knights Templar to preserve and propagate this secret knowledge? When the Knights were suppressed, did they pass their knowledge to the Children of Solomon?

The story is much more complicated than I am able to communicate in such a short time, but Tim Wallace-Murphy does a superb job in his book *The Knight of the Holy Grail: The Secret History of the Knights Templar*. He follows the history in an easy-to-follow manner. Although he carefully documents his sources, it is a pleasant and easy read. The last 20% of the book is footnotes with all of his sources. At the end of the book, he points out the fruits of initiation in the treasured works of Freemasons such as the poetry of Goethe, music of Mozart, writings of Jean Sibelius, Rudyard Kipling, Jonathan Swift, the music of W.S. Gilbert, and Duke Ellington just to name a few.

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In a world assailed by terrorism and wars, Freemasonry brings together men of every class, race, and creed; uniting Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists with principles of Truth and Justice. Perhaps this is the ultimate result in the search for the Holy Grail.