



Topic  
History

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Civilization & Culture

# The Real History of Secret Societies

Course Guidebook

Professor Richard B. Spence  
University of Idaho



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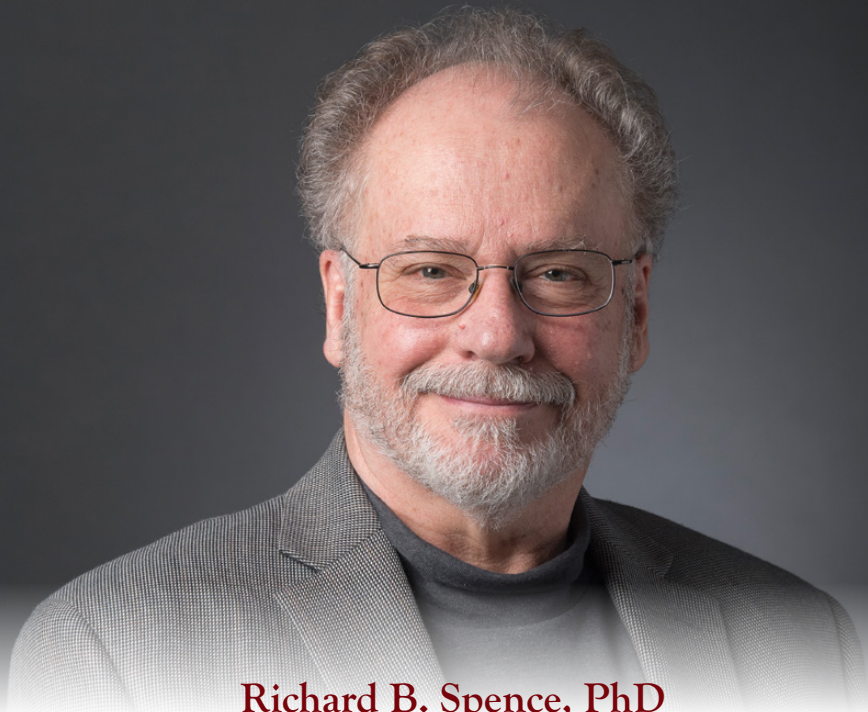
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# The Real History *of* Secret Societies

Secret societies aren't just as old as civilization; they're older—much older. And most don't hide their existence from the outside world. Many, in fact, advertise it. As revealed in this course, what makes secret societies secret is what goes on inside them: rituals, beliefs, sometimes the very purpose of their existence. Another key point is that secret societies are selective. They aren't for everyone, and that quality of specialness drives much of their appeal.

Secret societies have attracted some of history's most brilliant minds, along with some of its most depraved. Some have become the subject of conspiracy theories. All secret societies organize for a purpose, which may be practical, philosophical, or political. Secret societies have inspired and even led revolutions, including both the American and Russian Revolutions. Animating many secret societies is the unshakeable belief that they are the vanguard of a new world order.

This course exposes the history, doctrines, and meaning of secret societies. It will explore the most infamous secret societies, such as the Illuminati and the Knights Templar, as well as those that are more obscure, such as the Society of the Elect and the Priory of Sion. It will examine Gnostics, Manicheans, Assassins, Cathars, Rosicrucians, Freemasons, Bolsheviks, anarchists, the Ku Klux Klan, and even the puzzling Blue Lamoo.

Rather than a laundry list of strange rituals and secret handshakes, the course will reveal how secret societies—and the ideas that animated them—have influenced history from ancient times to the present. It will examine how some societies seem to appear, disappear, and reappear and how some inspired or influenced others. Often, we'll have to consider whether we are looking at different things or the same thing under different names.

The course will also reveal that behind most secret societies there is a founder or leader. In the case of the medieval Assassins, it was the shadowy Hasan-e Şabbāh. With the Bavarian Illuminati, it was the cunning Adam Weishaupt. With the Theosophists, it was the

mystical-minded Helena Blavatsky, who was also a spy. We'll examine what inspired these men and women and how they, in turn, inspired others.

By the end of this course, you will have learned that secret societies aren't freakish sideshows in history. Rather, they are usually at the very heart of it. They have influenced religion, politics, and, most visibly, popular culture. Secret societies are all around us. They always have been, and they always will be.



1

Small-Town Secrets



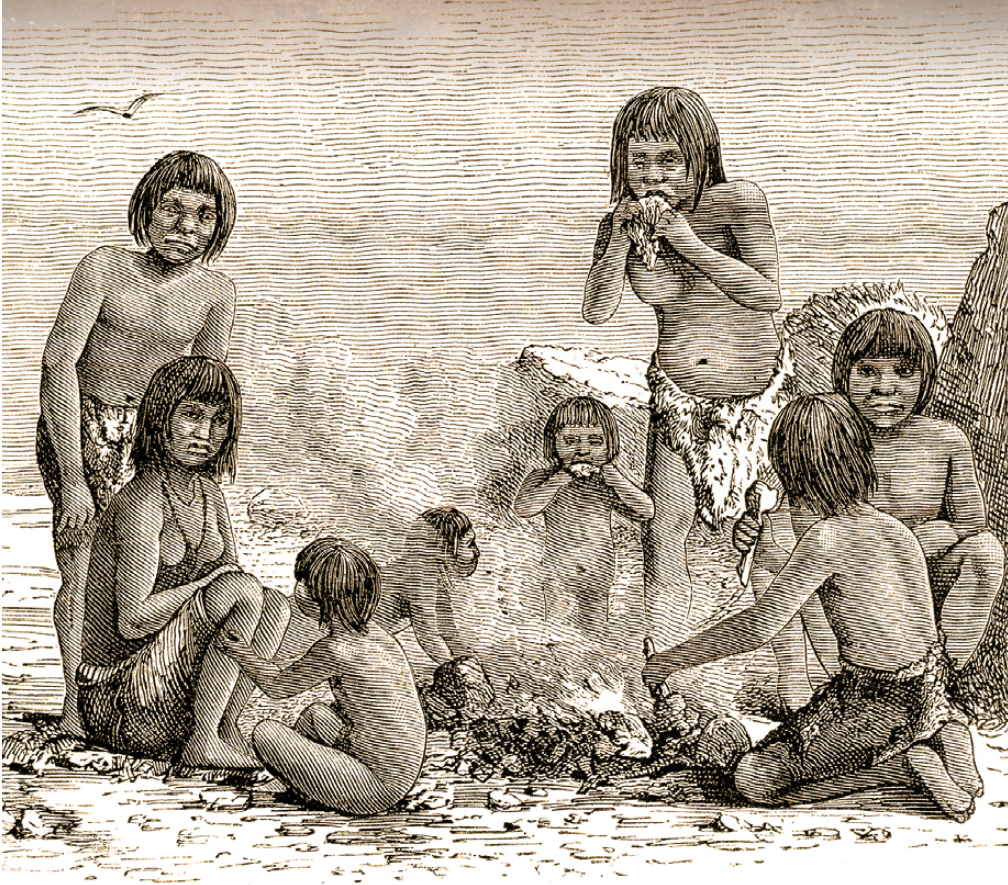
Secret societies have attracted some of history's most brilliant minds and some of its most destructive. Often demonized by their enemies, many secret societies have become the stuff of myths and conspiracy theories. Why do they exist? And when they are invented or imagined, why would someone pretend they exist? What do secret societies believe? Who do they recruit? Most importantly, what influence do they have?

## Taft, California

- ◆ Taft, California, in the San Joaquin Valley, was a dry, gritty, blue-collar oil town. It had the usual array of fraternal societies: Freemasons, Odd Fellows, Elks, Knights of Pythias, and so forth.
- ◆ Like any town, Taft also had its sordid underbelly and its secrets. In the 1950s, a secret sex club in which members wore animal masks was busted. Was it just a bunch of oil-town swingers, or was there something else going on?
- ◆ During the 1920s, Taft had a thriving chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. Keep in mind this was California; the town had no African American population and barely a Jewish one—nor much of anyone that the Klan would have organized against. So why were they there?
- ◆ The town had for decades harbored a genuine satanic cult that conducted black masses in motel rooms and private homes. Did they wear animal masks?
- ◆ Espionage, political intrigue, and the occult tend to come together in secret societies. And once you know what to look for, secret societies pop up everywhere.

# 2

## Secret Societies: The Underworld of History



There's a common belief that history is a known quantity—that it's all recorded in a book, just sitting there for us to absorb. But real history is incomplete, contradictory, and argumentative. When you add secrecy to the mix, things really get messy. Secret societies come in many forms and operate under many names. If you know what to look for, you'll find them everywhere.

## The Blackburn Cult

- ◆ On October 6, 1929, Lieutenant Frank Condaffer of the Los Angeles Police Department peered down into a wooden box. Inside was the body of a young woman. She lay in a fetal position, wrapped in a white blanket, her hair spread over her face like a veil. At first glance, she almost appeared to be sleeping. But she was dead—and had been for almost five years.
- ◆ In the years since the girl's death, her body had been moved at least twice, kept on ice for 14 months, embalmed with pickling spices, and concealed in a hidden tomb under her parents' bedroom. Next to her were the corpses of seven pet dogs, killed to keep her company.
- ◆ The girl's name was Willa Rhoads. She was 16 when she died. LAPD officers, acting on a tip, had come to her parents' door to ask the couple about the disappearance of their adopted daughter. William and Martha Rhoads were uncooperative at first. Soon, however, William broke down and led the cops to the makeshift mausoleum under the floorboards.
- ◆ Martha Rhoads insisted that Willa wasn't really dead and wasn't just Willa Rhoads. She was the Tree of Life: a celestial princess and future queen awaiting resurrection. The seven dead dogs represented the Seven Notes of Gabriel's Celestial Trumpet, and they were part of a ritual, or concord, that promised this.
- ◆ The woman the Rhoadses regarded as their leader and a messenger of God had told them this, and they believed it. The leader's name was May Otis Blackburn, and she led something called the Divine Order of the Royal Arms of the Great Eleven. Some just called it the Blackburn Cult.
- ◆ The Blackburn Cult was already under investigation. An oilman named Clifford Dabney had accused Blackburn of bilking him out of 40,000 dollars that was supposed to finance the writing and publication of a book to be titled

*The Great Sixth Seal.* Blackburn said the work would be dictated to her by the Archangel Gabriel and would reveal the secrets of the universe.

- ◆ Blackburn had convinced Dabney to deed her some land in Southern California's Simi Valley. There she'd built a colony dubbed Harmony Hamlet. Its centerpiece was a golden throne inside a temple that awaited the arrival of a so-called White Messiah. There was also a natural amphitheater where the cult conducted elaborate nocturnal rituals, including the bloody sacrifice of mules, dogs, and—just maybe—humans.
- ◆ Known to her faithful as Queen May, Blackburn ruled everything and everyone with an iron fist. People who crossed her had a tendency to disappear. Given what we know, it's easy to label Blackburn a charlatan and her order a con. But the Great Eleven was just one of hundreds of cults, new religions, and esoteric orders operating in California at the time. There were still more nationwide.
- ◆ Willa Rhoads most likely died from an untreated abscessed tooth, but Queen May insisted that the girl had perished from "wrongful belief." Still, there's a creepy suggestion that her death may have been some kind of test or sacrifice. May Blackburn had a knack with poisons, and she told the faithful that Willa had "died to save the world." As for the Rhoadses, authorities decided that all they could charge them with were failure to report a death and unlawful disposal of a corpse. They did neither.

Is a cult the same thing as a secret society? Not always, but it can be. The term *cult*, after all, is often an insult. It's used to disparage groups—mostly religious ones—that fall outside the mainstream. Cults are also commonly assumed to exercise powerful psychological control over their members.

## Defining Features

- ◆ Secret societies generally aren't secret. Most don't hide their existence. Sometimes, in fact, they advertise it. What's secret about most secret societies is what goes on inside: everything from rituals and passwords to what the members really believe in, as well as their individual identities. The best-known secret society, the millions-strong Freemasons, prefer to think of themselves as "a society with secrets."
- ◆ May Blackburn played by the same rules. She didn't hide the Great Eleven under a bushel.

She relished publicity, or at least good publicity. At the same time, she built an isolated community to hide her organization's activities and swore her followers to absolute secrecy.

- ◆ Secret societies are selective in who they recruit. The selection might be broad or narrow, but it's always there. Most of May Blackburn's followers were female, and women held all the power in the order.
- ◆ Another common denominator among secret societies is the promise of special knowledge, status, or power to the chosen initiates. For the men following her, May Blackburn dangled the bait of the White Messiah: the man who would ascend the golden throne. The frustrated oilman, Clifford Dabney, dreamed that role would be his, but so did almost every other man in the cult.

## Throughout History

- ◆ Secret societies come in many shapes and sizes. Consider the following examples, taken from very different places, circumstances, and times.
- ◆ The first example comes from Tierra del Fuego, at the bottom of South America. It is among the most isolated and inhospitable places on earth. For thousands of years, this island was home to the Ona people, who survived by hunting and fishing. They lived in small groups of 50 to 100 and had a system of beliefs and rituals that guided their day-to-day lives.
- ◆ An important part of Ona culture was a secret society into which all males were initiated soon after puberty. The society was run by shamans, who communicated with the spirits and who, in turn, controlled natural forces. Controlling access to the spirits and their power meant controlling everything else, including the women. But it wasn't always that way.
- ◆ The Ona's all-male secret society was based on the legend of an earlier female order. In the beginning, women were believed to control access to the spirits. From the spirits, the women learned magic to control the men. The men, growing to resent this, hatched a conspiracy to overturn the matriarchy. One night, the men killed the initiated women and girls as they slept, sparing only the young and ignorant. From then on, Ona men were in charge.

- ◆ The next example comes from medieval Italy, where a well-known religious dissident, Fra Dolcino, led a society of like-minded believers dubbed the Dulcinians. Rejecting the authority of the pope, the church, and all worldly power, the Dulcinians built a fort in the mountains where they practiced primitive Communism and gender equality, awaiting the Day of Judgment.
- ◆ Fra Dolcino assured his followers that they were an enlightened elite. Everything they did was blessed by God, and all who rejected their views were sinners and enemies. So the Dulcinians raided the villages below, pillaging, torturing, and murdering. Papal crusaders eventually stormed the Dulcinians' hideout and killed or captured most of them. Fra Dolcino himself was castrated and dismembered and his remains burned.
- ◆ Like many secret societies, the Dulcinians never disappeared. Their spirit and their example lived on. In the 20th century, for example, Italian leftists hailed Fra Dolcino as a "Socialist Jesus."
- ◆ Another example comes from the American West. Around 1851, a group of miners in Mokelumne Hill, California, formed the first chapter of a group known as E Clampus Vitus. Called "Clampers" for short, the new order spread like wildfire among the mining camps and shantytowns. The Clampers' rituals and terminology were a lampoon of the stuffed-shirt Freemasons. Every lodge, or chapter, was headed by a Grand Noble Humbug. Presiding over the whole thing was the Clampatriarch. Instead of aprons and sashes, Clampers paraded around in red shirts, vests, and hats festooned with handmade badges and ribbons.
- ◆ Membership in the Clampers was by invitation only. Initiation rituals were rowdy, rough, and often invented on the spot. Clampers weren't just drunken hell-raisers, though. They came to the aid of sick and injured miners, as well as widows and orphans.
- ◆ As the mining towns played out in the late 1800s, so did the Clampers. But in 1931, a San Francisco lawyer and amateur historian named Carl Wheat decided to revive the order. He kept the drinking, while adding a new purpose: historical preservation. Thus, E Clampus Vitus was reborn, and still exists today.
- ◆ The final example comes from present-day Disneyland. Around 2015, something new appeared at the park. Among the throngs of visitors, some noticed roaming groups in matching jackets with matching emblems. The sleeveless denim cuts were dead ringers for those worn by the Hells Angels and

other biker gangs. But these weren't bikers. They were social clubs formed by devoted Disney fans, with names like the Big Bad Wolves and White Rabbits.

- ◆ It was all harmless fun, or that's how it started out. The social clubs grew, some attracting 50 or more members who would visit the park together. Some members of the general public began to feel uneasy, even intimidated. Stories of social clubbers behaving aggressively toward other guests began to spread. Unease increased when some clubs started packing lines to "take over" rides for their exclusive use.
- ◆ What started out as good-natured competition grew tense as some started taking things seriously. Members of one club were accused of trying to shake down a charity promoter. There were incidents of verbal and even physical confrontations between rival clubs. Disneyland officials started to wonder if welcoming the social clubs had been a good idea.
- ◆ These examples—ranging from the semi-mythical to the deadly serious to the almost comical—have plenty in common. Whatever their avowed purpose, each is selective, internally secretive, and offers its members some sort of special status.
- ◆ Among the Ona people, membership was based on gender. The purpose was to gain power and control. The Dulcinians believed that they had a direct pipeline to the divine. The followers of Fra Dolcino are an example of something else, too: a secret society seen only through the eyes of its enemies. Were they really as terrible as the church claimed?
- ◆ The Clampers demonstrate the tendency of societies to disappear and reappear. The Disneyland clubs show the continued appeal of selectivity, special status, and a unifying devotion to something—even if it's Tinker Bell. They also show how secret societies can spontaneously evolve and how they can arouse suspicion and hostility among outsiders.

## Questions to Consider

1. While cults like Blackburn's Great Eleven weren't unique to the West Coast, they do seem to have sprung up in greater abundance there. Why do you think that was?
2. Besides cults and secret societies, what other groups might employ the "to the pure all things are pure" argument?



# 3

## The Knights Templar

Jacques de Molay



The Knights Templar have been the subject of so much rumor, speculation, and outright fantasy that it's almost impossible to separate fact from fiction. Some people say they were genuine Christians; others claim they were secret Muslims, or even devil-worshippers. Some describe them as guardians of a holy bloodline reaching back to Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Centuries of lies, myths, and theories have transformed the Knights Templar into a subject of endless fascination.

## Medieval Origins

- ◆ The Knights Templar originally appeared in Jerusalem after the First Crusade as a small group of knights who protected Christian pilgrims. The group comprised nine men, including their leader—and the order's first grand master—Hughes de Payens. Officially, they were the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon. The Templars quickly acquired patronage, wealth, and influence, and this rise fueled speculation that a hidden hand promoted and protected them.
- ◆ By 1122, the order had the means to start buying properties in the Holy Land. Five years later, they expanded to Europe. Things really took off in 1129 when the church granted the order official recognition. Among those expressing support was Bernard of Clairvaux, who drafted the Templars' original rules. Ten years later, Pope Innocent II issued a decree that made the Templars answerable to the pope alone.
- ◆ Recruits poured in. The original nine knights expanded to at least 300. But the image of thousands of knights galloping into battle in flowing white cloaks adorned with the red Templar cross is pure fantasy. At its peak, the order consisted of 15,000 to 20,000 "brothers" of one sort or another. But at most only a few thousand were knight-brothers, the only ones to take monastic vows and wear the trademark white cloaks.
- ◆ The knight-brothers were the order's inner society. Their special status was enhanced by the fact they were all ordained knights before taking holy vows. Most were noblemen, often from important families. Below them was a larger body of sergeants—mostly commoners—who wore black cloaks and didn't take full vows. The sergeants handled most business of the order. While some fought, most were estate managers, notaries and bureaucrats.

- ◆ Next were the associates, or confreres. These were basically noble laymen who volunteered to fight with the Templars, usually temporarily. But they were not true initiates. Finally, there were the squires, who also fought but mostly served as valets, grooms, and cooks for the knights. In addition, there was a small army of craftsmen, servants, and dependents.
- ◆ Templars served as the shock troops of crusader armies, fighting in almost every battle and siege. But their real power lay on the business end. They came to acquire some 9,000 properties, or preceptories, stretching from England to Syria and Portugal to Poland. And the Templars organized one of the first international banks. The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ soon became rich.
- ◆ One of the accusations against the Knights Templar was “secrecy of proceedings” concerning initiation rituals that were conducted indoors, at night, with no outsiders present. Wizards and witches were also believed to conduct secret nocturnal rituals. Another concern about the Templars was that they seemed to be far too familiar with the heretical ideas of their Muslim enemies and might have secretly converted to Islam.

The Templar kingdom, if it were a state, would have been one of the largest and wealthiest in Christendom. This notoriety and conspicuous wealth of course raises the question of how the Templars can be called a secret society. But remember, most secret societies don't conceal their existence. Visibility is not the same thing as transparency. Secrecy is on the inside.

## In Decline

- ◆ The wealth and power of the Templars was enough to make any king envious. And it did. The Templars' nemesis was King Philip IV of France. Having bankrupted France in fruitless wars, Philip looked around for other sources of money. One of his first targets was the Roman Catholic Church.



King Philip IV of France

- ◆ When Pope Boniface VIII dared to excommunicate him, Philip had the old man kidnapped and beaten so badly that he soon died. Boniface's successor, Benedict XI, was promptly poisoned by Philip's henchmen. Philip then put his own man, Clement V, on the papal throne in 1305. For good measure, he moved the papacy from Rome to the French city of Avignon.
- ◆ The following year, Philip turned on the Jews. In a kind of dress rehearsal for his coming attack on the Templars, Philip arranged the mass arrest of all the kingdom's Jews on a single day. He then confiscated their money and property and kicked them out of France. Any who resisted were put to death.
- ◆ In 1307, Philip turned his attention to the Templars. While still rich, the order was already in decline, and the Crusader states had fallen. In 1303, the Templars lost their last foothold in the Holy Land. Jacques de Molay, the grand master, moved the order's headquarters to Paris, where he hoped to rally support for a new crusade. The order's numbers had dwindled to less than 10,000, with maybe 1,000 actual knights. Approximately 2,000 to 3,000 Templars of all kinds were in France.
- ◆ De Molay seems to have suspected nothing. The day before his arrest, he was a pallbearer at the funeral of King Philip's sister-in-law. Philip doubtless invited him to make sure that de Molay would be easy to catch. Philip sent sealed orders to his officials throughout the kingdom decreeing that all Templars were to be arrested and their properties seized.
- ◆ The way the story is commonly told, Philip, with the backing of the pope, tortured the imprisoned Templars to extract confessions of heresy and other heinous acts, then burned them at the stake. The Templars ceased to exist. But the story was much more complicated—and less conclusive—than that.
- ◆ Philip's arrests violated the decree exempting the Templars from all but the pope's authority. Even the tame Pope Clement was outraged. Beyond that, the arrest order covered only lands under the jurisdiction of the French crown, and that included only part of France. The initial roundup bagged around 500 Templar brothers of all types. But confessions were taken from only 138, and just four confessed. The rest escaped or were released.
- ◆ The basic charges against the Templars were that they engaged in blasphemy by spitting on the cross and cursing the names of Jesus and Mary. They were also accused of engaging in "unusual sexual practices," i.e., homosexuality; refusing

to celebrate mass or other sacraments; practicing secrecy; and worshipping a false idol. But there was little consistency in the confessions, some of which were obtained through torture.

- ◆ The supposed idol, called Baphomet, was described as a human head, but occasionally as a cat. Some said it was a bearded man, some said a woman, and others said it had with two faces or three. It might be gold, wood, or glass. The idol supposedly had the power to grant protection, make land fertile, make trees grow, and find and guard riches. Some argue that this is what Philip was really after. If so, he didn't find it.
- ◆ In the summer of 1308, Pope Clement screwed up the courage to intervene. He interviewed dozens of arrested Templars, including de Molay. Most admitted to errors but offered plausible explanations. Spitting or cursing at the cross, they claimed, was a test to demonstrate loyalty to superiors by doing as commanded, or to prepare for possible capture by Islamic Saracens who would press them to renounce their faith. By convincingly—but insincerely—insulting Christ, they saved themselves but committed no sin.
- ◆ In the end, only three Templars admitted to homosexual acts, and only a handful recalled any idol. Pope Clement concluded that while the order was guilty of irregular practices, they weren't heretics. A document discovered in 2001 in the Vatican archives—the so-called Chinon Parchment—shows that Clement absolved the knights, including de Molay, and didn't support the order's dissolution.
- ◆ Philip wasn't going to stop, pope or no pope. The French proceedings dragged on for years. In 1310, 54 Templars were found guilty of blasphemy and heresy and were burned at the stake. De Molay and his lieutenants were kept alive, probably because Philip thought they'd cave and reveal the location of their treasure.
- ◆ In 1312, Pope Clement gave in and ordered the Knights Templar formally disbanded. Philip next tried to pressure a public confession from de Molay, even though the grand master and the others had been absolved. De Molay sealed his fate, perhaps deliberately, by turning the tables on the king and publicly recanting his old confession.
- ◆ While the order was dismantled in France, most of its members survived. Outside France, things were very different. Prosecutions were mostly symbolic and resulted in acquittal more often than not. Only a few Templars stood

trial in Scotland, only three in Germany, and only 14 in Ireland. In Spain and Portugal, local monarchs protected the order by simply changing its name. In Portugal, the Templars became the Order of Christ; in Aragon, they became the Order of Montesa.

## Continued Influence

- ◆ The Templar order was never really destroyed. And the knights had ample reason to carry a grudge against the French crown and the church, but did they really launch a conspiracy that would lead to the French Revolution? And what about their treasure? If Philip didn't get it, who did? Maybe the real secret was that the Templars didn't have one. Maybe they were as insolvent as Philip.
- ◆ Some stories maintained that de Molay ordered the treasure spirited away to the port of La Rochelle, on the French Atlantic coast, and from there to Scotland. The Scots, under Robert the Bruce, were engaged in a desperate war of independence from England from 1307 to 1314. Templar gold and Templar warriors would have been welcome. It seems entirely possible that some Templars found sanctuary there.
- ◆ Over the past seven centuries, many groups have claimed to be the heirs, or resurrection, of the Knights Templar. Probably the best known are the Freemasons. By the 1700s, it was widely accepted in Masonic circles—and still is—that a Templar connection existed. Another secret society with supposed Templar roots is the Rosicrucians. In 1804, a society called the Ordre du Temple—the Order of the Temple—appeared in France, claiming to be nothing less than the original Templars restored.
- ◆ A 20th-century self-proclaimed expert on secret societies named Nesta Helen Webster claimed that the Templars “imported a secret doctrine from the East capable of a Christian or anti-Christian interpretation.” Similarly, 19th-century French Freemason Jean-Marie Ragon thought the Templars “renounced the religion of Saint Peter” and adopted “a certain Judaic doctrine” attributed to Saint John the Apostle. Of course, Ragon was a member of the Ordre du Temple.

## Questions to Consider

1. While most secret orders come and go with little notice, the Knights Templar may be more famous today than in their heyday. Why does their story generate such interest?
2. What do you think really happened to the Templars' fabled riches?

# 4

## Masonic Revolutions in *America and France*



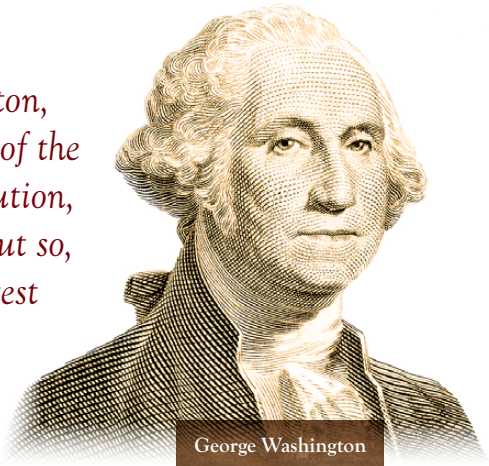


**T**he American and French Revolutions basically started over the same issues—taxation and representation—but took very different courses. The revolutions were upheavals that would transform America, France, and the world. And they were largely the handiwork of secret societies. But did the secret societies—especially the Freemasons—instigate or control the revolutions? Did they infuse them with a Masonic agenda?

## The Sons of Liberty

- ◆ On December 16, 1773, a crowd gathered at Boston's Griffin's Wharf to protest the presence of three East India Company ships, all carrying cargoes of tea. Somewhere between 50 and 200 men, most disguised as Mohawk Indians, boarded the vessels and threw overboard 342 chests, equal to about 45 tons, of tea. This act was later dubbed the Boston Tea Party. And as an act of overt resistance to British rule, it was a critical step toward the American Revolution.
- ◆ In the American colonies, the group most responsible for the revolution was the Sons of Liberty. It first appeared in Boston around 1765 in response to new British taxes on the colonies and became a kind of franchise, spreading throughout the colonies. Sons of Liberty members organized resistance—even physical attacks—against royal authorities. After 1776, the organization acted as a shadow government in British-controlled areas. But the group was a spin-off of an older, more important, and more familiar secret order: the Freemasons.

*George Washington, the greatest hero of the American Revolution, was a Mason. But so, too, was its greatest traitor, Benedict Arnold.*



George Washington

- ◆ Great Britain's East India Company had actually reduced the cost of tea in the colonies—so much so that American smugglers faced being put out of business. Two future revolutionary luminaries in the British sites, Samuel Adams and John Hancock, were Sons of Liberty members and Freemasons.
- ◆ But not all Masonic brothers approved of their actions. Two other American Masons and future revolutionaries—Benjamin Franklin and George Washington—were appalled by what they regarded as vandalism. Franklin thought the East India Company should have been reimbursed for its loss.
- ◆ This points to a danger of generalizing about Freemasons: Despite all the boilerplate rhetoric about brotherhood and loyalty, Freemasons were as likely to end up on opposing sides as the same ones.

## Lodge of Nine Sisters

- ◆ In May 1789, France faced national bankruptcy, partly caused by King Louis XVI's financing of the American Revolution. This state of affairs forced Louis to summon France's long-disused consultative assembly, the Estates-General.
- ◆ Two of the estates—the clergy and the nobility—represented only two percent of the French population but held more than half of the assembly's seats. The third estate—basically everybody else—naturally thought this grossly unfair. Instead of finding a solution, the Estates-General ignited a revolution.
- ◆ As the revolution progressed, radical groups took more and more control. The most important of these radicals, the Jacobins, first appeared in late 1789 as the Society of the Friends of the Constitution. The Jacobins would later abolish traditional religion and initiate a reign of terror.
- ◆ The storming of the Bastille—which took place on July 14, 1789, and incited the French Revolution—is usually portrayed as a spontaneous attack on a hated symbol of royal tyranny. But it was anything but spontaneous. Three days before the assault on the Bastille, King Louis dismissed his liberal finance minister, Jacques Necker. While this may or may not have been a plot by Louis to restore royal authority, that's the way it was spun by agitators in the Palais-Royal in Paris.

## The storming of the Bastille



- ◆ The Palais was owned by Louis Philippe, the Duke of Orleans, the most powerful Freemason in France. He was master of the powerful Grand Orient Lodge and brother of the influential Lodge of Nine Sisters—which was founded in 1776 and served as an important link between the French and American Revolutions.
- ◆ Louis Philippe was also the king's cousin. But the duke himself dreamed of sitting on the throne, and at the Bastille, the mob carried his bust around like an idol. And the radical orator who whipped up the mob—which demanded the surrender of the old fortress—was the duke's Masonic brother in the Nine Sisters, Camille Desmoulins, who was the protégé of another prominent Freemason, Count Mirabeau. All three would end up joining the Jacobins.

*The Palais-Royal in Paris was a popular area of stalls, shops, and coffee houses considered a “hotbed of Masonic activity.”*

- ◆ Two American revolutionists, Benjamin Franklin and John Paul Jones, were initiated as members of the Lodge of Nine Sisters in 1778. And Franklin introduced at least three other Americans into its circle: Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams. The great French hero of the American Revolution, Marquis de Lafayette, was yet another Nine Sisters brother.

## The Freemasons

- ◆ In 1776, Freemasons were a tiny minority in the American colonial population, and they were not evenly distributed. Despite lots of talk about brotherhood and equality, American Freemasonry wasn't egalitarian. Membership was pricey—and deliberately so. Lodges attracted the upwardly mobile and well-to-do. Masons were far more likely to be literate and well-educated than small farmers and working men. Thus, lodges were filled with men who already occupied positions of influence and already saw themselves as hereditary, or natural, leaders. But while they were an elite, they weren't a unified elite.

*The capital of the American Revolution, Philadelphia, was home to at least 2,000 Masonic brethren, meaning that about one out of five eligible males was a member.*

- ◆ Freemasonry first took off in the colonies in the 1730s. This coincided with a bitter schism in the Grand Lodge of England that pitted the more free-thinking—and more political—faction, known as the Moderns, against the more traditional and religious Ancients. But all American Masons—whatever their camp—swore allegiance to King George. Thus, patriot Masons violated their oath when they turned rebel.
- ◆ Of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence, nine were indisputably Masons. Among the 39 signers of the Constitution, 13 were confirmed Masons. Among the 33 generals of Washington's Continental Army, 74 were confirmed Masons—including the future president. So, none of these groups was exclusively, or even mostly, Freemason. But the brothers were disproportionately represented among the revolution's founders and leading officers. Still, does that translate to Masonic control?

- ◆ Something often pointed to as evidence of a secret Masonic agenda in the American Revolution is the great seal of the United States. Special significance is attributed to its reverse side, which features an incomplete pyramid topped by a radiant all-seeing eye, commonly interpreted as the Eye of God or Eye of Providence. Some claim it's the ancient Egyptian Eye of Horus.

Between 1934 and 1935, American Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace, a Freemason, convinced President Franklin Roosevelt—also a Freemason—to put the seal of the United States on the dollar bill. To Wallace, the all-seeing eye on its reverse side symbolized the Masonic Great Architect of the Universe.

The great seal is also commonly believed to have been designed, or at least inspired, by Benjamin Franklin—definitely a Freemason—and Thomas Jefferson. However, none of their proposals ended up in the final version of the seal.

Instead, its creation took half a dozen years and three committees, and consultants did most of the design work. One of the most influential was Francis Hopkinson, another Freemason who had put an unfinished pyramid on a 50-dollar bill issued in 1778. And it's a dead ringer for the one on the seal.

- ◆ Alleged Masonic influence also crops up in the layout of the new capital, Washington DC. One Masonic publication hailed it as “the world’s foremost Masonic City.” The man tasked with the job, Pierre L’Enfant, was indeed a Freemason. He laid out DC streets in a diamond pattern that formed triangles and pentagrams, and the Capitol building squats like an all-seeing eye at the top of a pyramid formed by Maryland and Pennsylvania Avenues.
- ◆ A more blatant example of Masonic influence was the laying of the cornerstone in 1793. George Washington officiated, decked out in full Masonic regalia, surrounded by fellow Freemasons.
- ◆ The first proposal for Washington’s monument was a pyramid. What he ultimately got was something akin to an Egyptian obelisk, and Egyptian imagery had significance not just to some Freemasons but to other secret societies as well, such as the Rosicrucians.

- ◆ Masonic influence didn't end with the revolution. At least 14 presidents, 37 Supreme Court justices, and countless senators, congressmen, diplomats, bureaucrats, and soldiers would be lodge brothers.
- ◆ Public concern about Masonic influence sparked a national backlash in the 1820s, starting with the disappearance—and presumed murder—of a dissident Mason named William Morgan in Upstate New York. This so-called Morgan affair gave rise to a national Anti-Masonic Party. It declined after the 1828 election of Andrew Jackson, who was a Freemason.
- ◆ Freemasonry wasn't the only secret society that was active in the revolution, or in the fledgling republic. After the creation of the republic, some of the Sons of Liberty morphed into dissident “democratic” or “democratic-republican” societies. Washington believed they harbored dangerous elements. Dissident Sons of Liberty helped ignite at least one abortive uprising: the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion.

## The Jacobins

- ◆ The Jacobin Reign of Terror has come to symbolize the French Revolution in the minds of many. The Jacobins had their roots in a secret association of politicians from Brittany. These men shared membership—and, to some degree, ideology—with other quasi secret societies that sprouted like mushrooms in the revolutionary ferment. Those include the Society of Thirty, which counted Lafayette as a member, and the Club des Cordeliers, to which Desmoulins belonged.
- ◆ The Jacobins finally got their name when they set up shop in an old Dominican monastery in Paris. The Dominican monks had been called Jacobins because they were associated with the Church of Saint Jacques. The name Jacques also belonged to the last Grand Master of the infamous Knights Templar, Jacques de Molay. Some inevitably suspected that the name Jacobin was a thinly disguised homage to de Molay. Others suspected that the Jacobins' hostility to king and church were part of a long-cherished secret plan of revenge.
- ◆ Radical Jacobins were obsessed with de-Christianizing French society and replacing the Catholic Church with a Cult of Reason or Cult of the Supreme Being. And some see this supreme being as identical to the Freemason's Great Architect of the Universe.

- ◆ Many Jacobins were Freemasons. The bloodiest of the lot, Maximilien Robespierre—a champion of the Cult of the Supreme Being who presided over the terror—might have been a Masonic brother.
- ◆ Jacobins were split by bitter ideological and personal rivalries. The two main factions were the relatively moderate Girondins and the more radical Montagnards. When Robespierre—a Montagnard—and his faction took control in 1793, they launched a purge of the Girondins.

## The Bavarian Illuminati

- ◆ Soon, two books appeared alleging that the French Revolution was a Masonic conspiracy. But behind this supposedly lurked a more insidious secret society: the Bavarian Illuminati.
- ◆ The first book, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*, was written by refugee French priest Augustin Barruel, who argued that the French Revolution was the end result of “subterranean warfare” waged by secret societies to destroy the church and the monarchy.
- ◆ Scottish scientist John Robison produced the second work, *Proofs of a Conspiracy*, which alleged that the Illuminati laid the groundwork for the French Revolution by infiltrating and manipulating Masonic lodges and reading societies—which is precisely what Illuminati founder Adam Weishaupt said they should do.
- ◆ Robison and Barruel arrived separately at their conclusions. However, Robison got much of his information from a Catholic monk and British secret agent named Alexander Horn. That’s led some to conjecture that both books were part of a Vatican-inspired plot to discredit the French Revolution. Others see the hidden hand of the British government, then at war with revolutionary France.
- ◆ In 1777, right after the founding of the Illuminati, Italian adventurer Count Alessandro Cagliostro visited Germany, where he reportedly met Weishaupt. Like Weishaupt, he was initiated into the Masonic Rite of Strict Observance. In 1785 in Paris, Cagliostro created a new Masonic rite, the Egyptian, which he touted as “true” Freemasonry. It later became the Rite of Memphis-Misraim, which attracted radical and nonconformists across Europe.

- ◆ In 1786, Cagliostro ended up jailed in the Bastille. Demonstrations organized by his Masonic supporters eventually secured his release. Cagliostro later wrote an open letter to the French people, urging them to mount a “peaceful revolution” and destroy the Bastille. So, some believe the Duke of Orleans and Desmoulins were following Cagliostro’s instruction when they targeted the old fortress in 1789.

### Questions to Consider

1. What is the evidence for and against Thomas Jefferson being a Freemason?
2. Would either the American or French Revolutions have been possible without the active participation of secret societies?



# 5

## Bolsheviks, Masons, *and* Russian Revolution



Lenin

**T**he Russian Revolution was one of the most important events in modern history. It was, at its heart, a battle among secret societies. The winners—the Bolsheviks—started out as a revolutionary cult. Under men such as Lenin and Trotsky, the Bolsheviks out-conspired their rivals, exploited opportunities, and rode the waves of historical events. Once in power, they turned their cult into a mass religion with delusions of global domination. Millions of people would perish in that pursuit. The world wasn't conquered, but it was forever changed.

## Masonic Influence

- ◆ In May 1917, Sir William Wiseman—the chief of British intelligence in New York—wrote to his superiors in London:

The Germans have managed to secure control of the most important secret societies in Russia, and it is necessary that this German influence should be exposed and counter-societies organized, if necessary. It must not be forgotten that the Russian people are accustomed to regard their secret societies as the most important part of their liberal political machinery.

- ◆ Wiseman recorded this shortly after the Russian tsar had fallen and only months before the Bolsheviks would seize power.
- ◆ A few months earlier, the French physician and occultist Gérard Encausse had predicted something similar. Known as Papus, he had formerly served as a spiritual adviser to the Russian imperial family—a role since assumed by the infamous Grigori Rasputin. Along with being an occultist, Papus was a secret agent of the French government. He worked to ensure that the Russo-French alliance remained intact. He was also an emissary of French Freemasonry in the organization of Russian lodges.
- ◆ But Papus's scheming would have nothing to do with the coming fall of the tsar. He was beaten to the punch by another conspiracy, hatched by liberal members of Russia's parliament, or *duma*. It was no coincidence that every one of these liberal plotters was a Freemason. Most were brothers of a single lodge: the Grand Orient of the Peoples of Russia.
- ◆ The Russian empire of 1917 had almost 180 million inhabitants but fewer than 1,000 Masons. "Political Masons"—of which the Grand Orient was the biggest

bunch—numbered maybe 400. They used the lodge as a vehicle for political organization and agitation as opposed to fellowship and enlightenment. However, this seemingly insignificant group counted many of Russia's most influential people: politicians, captains of industry, financiers, military officers, and even members of the royal Romanov family.

- ◆ Once the Freemason-dominated duma forced Tsar Nicholas to abdicate, the same political Freemasons dominated the provisional government that replaced the Tsar. Over the next eight months, almost every member of the Russian provisional government was a Masonic brother. It would be wrong to suppose that Russia's Freemasons—least of all the political ones—were unified beyond a desire to remove Nicholas from the throne. Still, this tiny fraternity dominated almost every corner of Russian politics.

## Bolsheviks and Mensheviks

- ◆ As the winners of the Russian revolutionary sweepstakes, the Bolsheviks deserve close scrutiny. They were certainly a political movement, but were they a secret society? Selective recruitment, the promise of special knowledge and status, the demand of absolute loyalty—Bolshevism had all these characteristics.
- ◆ The Bolsheviks wanted to overthrow not just a government, but the entire social and economic order. And Lenin aimed beyond regime change in Russia to a revolutionary wave that would sweep the entire globe and culminate in a new world order.
- ◆ The Bolsheviks began as a small faction of the larger Russian Socialist movement. Their chief rivals were a group called the Mensheviks. Both groups were Marxist, viewing history as a struggle

One fundamental difference between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks came down to a matter of organization. Mensheviks favored a mass workers' party and open organization, while Lenin argued for a small vanguard party of committed revolutionaries who would rely on conspiratorial techniques—in other words, a political secret society as opposed to a mass political movement.

Lenin's mantra was "flexibility in means, inflexibility in goal." This single-mindedness probably explains why he succeeded and why the Mensheviks disappeared into the dustbin of history.

between the dominant Capitalist system and the exploited working class, or proletariat. Marxists believed the proletariat was bound to triumph in the end. The question was how long it would take them to triumph and what form the revolution would take.

## Lenin and Trotsky

- ◆ Lenin's real name was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov. Like many of his comrades, he took a revolutionary alias. As with most leading Bolsheviks, Lenin's family background was anything but proletarian. He was a hereditary nobleman, a nephew of bankers and millionaires.
- ◆ As undisputed leader of the Bolsheviks, Lenin displayed characteristics that might be identified with a cult leader. Bolshevism and its governing faith, Marxism-Leninism, were impossible to conceive without him. No one rose or remained in the party without his blessing.
- ◆ The lifeblood of politics is money, and that point certainly didn't escape Lenin, who was always looking for ways to get his hands on more. The triumph of the revolution represented the ultimate good, so anything that facilitated it was sanctified by the cause. This included robbery and even murder.
- ◆ The boldest and bloodiest of the Bolshevik "expropriations," as they called them, was the Tiflis bank robbery of June 1907. In the main square of today's Georgian capital, a Bolshevik band—including a young Joseph Stalin—ambushed a payroll convoy and got away with more than 340,000 rubles (4 million dollars in today's money). The attack also left 40 people dead and 50 injured.
- ◆ More reliable were contributions from wealthy supporters. Among them were some of the very same Capitalist exploiters the Bolsheviks aimed to destroy. A prime example was Savva Morozov, who belonged to the fifth-richest family in Russia. The Morozovs owned textile mills, and Savva funneled some of the profits to the Bolsheviks. When his mother put a stop to it, Morozov supposedly became so despondent that he shot himself through the heart. But another version holds that the industrialist was murdered by one of Lenin's trusted brethren, a Freemason named Leonid Krasin. At stake was a large insurance policy.

- ◆ Another important figure in the Russian Revolution was Leon Trotsky, whose rise in the revolutionary firmament began with a failed uprising dubbed the Revolution of 1905. At that time, Trotsky was a friend and protégé of arch-conspirator Alexander Helphand, known as Parvus.
- ◆ By 1916, Trotsky was living in France, spreading antiwar and anti-tsarist propaganda. This created a problem, however, because France was an ally of tsarist Russia. In the fall of 1916, France booted Trotsky to neutral Spain.
- ◆ During his brief Spanish interlude, a mysterious benefactor supplied him and his whole family with cash and first-class tickets to New York. Various clues suggest that the man behind this was his old pal Parvus. Trotsky arrived in New York in mid-January of 1917 and remained there until after the tsar's fall that March. In New York, he immediately threw himself into Socialist and antiwar politics. One story claims that when Trotsky left New York to return to Russia, he carried 10,000 dollars and an American passport. (There's no proof of either.)
- ◆ By early 1917, Bolshevik membership had dwindled to around 10,000, less than a quarter of what it had been a decade earlier. As regards Russia and the war, Lenin was a complete defeatist. He believed that peace at any cost was necessary to advance the revolution in Russia and the world revolution to follow. This was not a popular position, even among revolutionaries. Trotsky, for instance, publicly opposed a separate peace in March 1917.
- ◆ Lenin ultimately beat Trotsky back to Russia. There, Lenin rallied the Bolshevik faithful with slogans of "All Power to the Soviets" and "Peace, Land and Bread." He unleashed a torrent of propaganda funded by German money. Bolshevik ranks mushroomed from 20,000 in April 1917 to 200,000 by late summer.
- ◆ In the meantime, the liberal Freemasons running the provisional government staked their fortunes on winning the war against Germany and its allies. But as Lenin, Trotsky, and many others could see, it was already lost. Russia was war weary, and its economy was in shambles.
- ◆ In August 1917, Lenin finally admitted Trotsky into Bolshevik ranks. What brought them together? It was partly because they'd both come to the

Often labeled a Menshevik, Leon Trotsky was a movement unto himself and did not become a Bolshevik until 1917.

conclusion that the popular revolutionary councils, or soviets, were the key to power. Trotsky could also see that Lenin ran a growing operation, while he himself could muster only a few thousand followers. Another factor might have been financial arrangements Trotsky made in New York. Regardless, Lenin placed Trotsky in charge of organizing the October Revolution, which established the Soviet regime.

- ◆ The October Revolution was really a coup d'état, and it didn't hand the Bolsheviks full control of Russia—mostly just big cities like Petrograd and Moscow. Their hold on power was fragile and would not be secure until they won a bloody civil war in 1920.
- ◆ Parvus held that a Socialist revolution in Russia could not survive without outside aid. Lenin believed this would come through a world revolution sparked by their efforts in Russia. Germany, France, America, and the rest of the industrialized world would soon follow, he believed. It was a great theory, but it didn't materialize.
- ◆ The downfall of most secret societies is infighting, and the Bolsheviks were no exception. In August 1918, someone put two bullets into Lenin, nearly killing him. Lenin's would-be assassin was pegged as a disgruntled rival revolutionary, Fania Kaplan. Not everyone believed this, and a post-Soviet review of the case cast serious doubt on Kaplan's role. Among other things, Kaplan was almost blind.
- ◆ In such cases, one usually considers who would most benefit from the victim's removal. Undoubtedly, that would have been the man everyone acknowledged as the Bolsheviks' second-in-command, Leon Trotsky. That's something another Bolshevik, Joseph Stalin, never forgot. Stalin's fear—real or imagined—of a secret society he dubbed Trotskyism would drive him to murderous excesses against his own party.

## The Mad Monk

- ◆ No figure from Russia's revolutionary era has received more attention—or more mythologizing—than the Mad Monk, Grigori Rasputin. Vilified during his lifetime as a charlatan, traitor, and all-around moral degenerate, popular culture has since turned him into an embodiment of evil. The real Rasputin was an unscrupulous con man. But the rest is based mostly on lies, jealousy, and hearsay.

- ◆ Rasputin was never a monk or any type of representative of the Russian Orthodox Church. He might have had a connection to a secret religious sect of sexual ecstasies, the Khlysty, but there's no proof. Most interesting are accusations that Rasputin was yet another tool of insidious German conspiracies and their secret-society accomplices.
- ◆ Rasputin's chief accuser was his onetime friend Father Iliodor, who wrote a book exposing Rasputin's baleful influence on the tsar's government, with the ultimate aim of encouraging its overthrow. After being implicated in an attempt to assassinate Rasputin, Iliodor fled Russia in 1914 for the sanctuary of Norway. There, he supposedly learned that Rasputin was entangled with Empress Alexandra in a plot to arrange a separate peace with Berlin. In pursuit of this, Rasputin was said to be in contact with a secretive cabal called the Greens, based in Stockholm.
- ◆ In late 1916, Iliodor turned up in New York, where he came to the attention of British intelligence, including Sir William Wiseman. Iliodor later claimed British agents warned him that if the plan for a separate peace wasn't stopped, "Rasputin would be killed and the Romanovs would fall." That is precisely what came to pass.
- ◆ British intelligence itself had a direct role in Rasputin's murder, which took place in Petrograd on December 30, 1916. On hand—overseeing a band of Russian plotters—was British officer Oswald Rayner. When the Russians' efforts at poisoning, bludgeoning, and shooting Rasputin failed, Rayner pulled out his Webley revolver and calmly put a bullet through Rasputin's head.

### Questions to Consider

1. Besides being a British intelligence officer, what was Sir William Wiseman's actual profession?
2. If it wasn't friendship, why did Lenin admit Trotsky to Bolshevik ranks and entrust him with such important jobs?

# 6

## Adolf Hitler *and* the Thule Society



Adolf Hitler



**A**dolf Hitler is arguably the most notorious figure in modern history. His name is almost synonymous with evil. Hitler's Nazi regime murdered millions of people and brought chaos and destruction to the world. A mass of scholarship, memoir, speculation, and outright fantasy purports to explain him. Understanding his rise to power requires studying his historical context and various influences. Secret societies played a role in the Nazi leader's rise and influenced his beliefs, and he came to embrace secret-society methods for his own purposes.

## German Brotherhoods

- ◆ Germany's unification in 1871 combined some two-dozen previously independent kingdoms, duchies, and free cities into a single empire. But Germans remained divided by religion, dialect, and history. Completely excluded were several million Austro-Germans living in the neighboring Austro-Hungarian empire. One of them was Adolf Hitler.
- ◆ In an effort to bind the Germans into a single people, many scholars and artists sought to create a common German culture, history, and even mythology. The German composer Richard Wagner's *Ring* cycle is a prime example. Some Germans on the esoteric end of things went further, dreaming of a Germanic religion and a Germanic manifest destiny. Two such men were the racial theorist Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels and the occultist Guido von List. Like Hitler, both were Austro-Germans.
- ◆ Liebenfels and List fathered small secret societies devoted to Germanic racial mysticism. Liebenfels called it Ariosophy, meaning "wisdom of the Aryans"; others called it the Völkisch movement. Liebenfels imagined the Aryan race as the spawn of godlike aliens. He and those like him saw modern Germans as the purest surviving example of these divine supermen. In 1908, Liebenfels formed a secret brotherhood called the New Templars to promote German "racial consciousness."
- ◆ List yearned for the resurrection of Germanic paganism, complete with the worship of warrior gods and the use of magical runes and symbols. Among those symbols was the swastika, a potent symbol in many cultures. List's teachings spawned a whole constellation of secret societies. The two most important were the Reich Hammer League and the German Order, which appeared in 1912.

- ◆ Within these brotherhoods, the seeds of Nazism were waiting for the right conditions to grow. Those conditions came with World War I in 1914. The European conflict decimated the ranks of the Ariosophist orders while also opening the door to younger and harder men. The war brutalized and radicalized millions of men—one of them being Corporal Hitler.
- ◆ Rudolf von Sebottendorf, the man who would truly set the stage for Hitler, has been described as “a spectacular version ... of the shady and mysterious adventurer ... who attaches himself vehemently to an extreme nationalist cause.” Sebottendorf’s sponsor was a Jewish Freemason and occultist named Termudi. Their lodge was one of the incubators of the Young Turks, who seized control of the teetering Ottoman Empire in 1908.
- ◆ Sebottendorf enjoyed a cozy relationship with the Young Turks. Under the influence of nationalist and racialist doctrines, the Young Turks degenerated into a murderous cabal later responsible for the Armenian genocide. In 1913, Sebottendorf returned to Germany from Turkey. There, he styled himself as an occult sage and “agent of mysterious paymasters.”
- ◆ Sebottendorf took charge of the German Order’s Munich branch and renamed it the Thule Society, in homage to a mythical Aryan homeland near the North Pole. Sebottendorf devised an emblem featuring a ceremonial dagger superimposed on a swastika.
- ◆ Sebottendorf immediately steered Thule into political intrigue. Plotting to seize political control, he created satellite “study societies,” one of which was the Political Workers’ Circle, which aimed to counteract Socialism and Bolshevism among the working class. This was the seed of the Nazi Party.

## Setting the Stage

- ◆ In November 1918, revolution swept Germany. Kaiser Wilhelm abdicated, and the armistice finally ended World War I. Germany now fell into the hands of the Socialists, but they splintered into factions. On the far left was the new Communist Party of Germany (KPD), which aimed to emulate the Russian Bolsheviks.
- ◆ In April 1919, a Bavarian Soviet Republic arose in Munich. It was taken over by Communists loyal to Russia’s Vladimir Lenin. Seven members of the Thule Society were taken hostage and executed by the Munich Reds on April 30,

1919. But the Bavarian Soviet Republic soon collapsed. It was overthrown by the right-wing Freikorps, many of whose soldiers had swastikas painted on their helmets.

- ◆ Watching all of this happen was Hitler. While millions of German veterans returned home, Hitler wasn't one of them. He remained on the army's payroll until April 1920. During the Soviet Republic, Hitler was "particularly close to Munich's revolutionary soldiers' councils"—even wearing a red armband. After the Communists were defeated, Hitler switched sides and was enlisted to investigate the political reliability of other soldiers.
- ◆ In May 1919, Hitler came to the attention of Captain Karl Mayr, chief of the German army section that handled education and propaganda. Mayr was also involved in the secret financing of Sebottendorf's Thule Society.
- ◆ Captain Mayr described Hitler as a "stray dog looking for a master." Mayr sent him to attend lectures at Munich University. One of Hitler's instructors was Gottfried Feder, a Thule member who aimed to instill "correct political and ideological thinking." Hitler became a V-man, or agent-informant of military intelligence.
- ◆ On September 12, 1919, Mayr assigned Hitler to attend a meeting of the German Workers' Party (DAP). Fewer than 50 people were there. Hitler called it an "absurd little organization" and listened to a talk about how Capitalism could be eliminated.
- ◆ The DAP detested Marxism but also hated Capitalism. It saw both as manifestations of Jewish influence. To counter the international Socialism of the Judeo-Bolsheviks, the DAP wanted to create national Socialism based on the German nation and Aryan race.
- ◆ Hitler became involved in a debate after the anti-Capitalist talk. Members of the DAP, impressed by his speaking skills, invited him to join the party and put him in charge of party propaganda. Hitler claimed to have no prior knowledge of the DAP or the Thule Society. That wasn't exactly true.
- ◆ The man who delivered the anti-Capitalist talk that night was Hitler's recent instructor and Thule member Gottfried Feder. Hitler's army boss, Captain Mayr, was well acquainted with Sebottendorf and Thule and used its propaganda in the training of his V-men, including Hitler. The founder of the

DAP, Anton Drexler, had attended Thule gatherings as a “guest” for months and had combined his struggling party with Thule’s Political Workers’ Circle.

There’s no proof that Hitler was ever a member of the Thule Society. But American author and lecturer David Luhrssen is probably right to suggest that Hitler attended Thule meetings as a guest. This makes sense because the German army, Hitler’s employer, forbade soldiers to join organizations requiring an oath of allegiance.

- ◆ Soon after Hitler came on board, the DAP changed its name to the National Socialist German Workers’ Party. The idea was that the term *National Socialist* would better highlight the party as an alternative to Communism’s international Socialism.
- ◆ Without Sebottendorf at the helm, the Thule Society gradually withered. By 1925, it was down to a few dozen members. Five years later, it vanished from the registered secret societies in Weimar Germany. Meanwhile, under Hitler’s leadership, the new Nazi Party began to grow.

## Hitler’s Rise to Power

- ◆ By February 1920, Hitler was firmly established in the Nazi Party’s leadership. The Nazis adopted a 25-point program that had planks red enough to warm any Bolshevik’s heart: nationalization of industry, confiscation of war profits, abolition of usury and debt, and sweeping expansion of social welfare. They even promised equal rights and freedom of religion. The program mentioned Jews only as non-Aryans undeserving of German citizenship and in the party’s opposition to the “Jewish-materialistic spirit.”
- ◆ Hitler’s personal anti-Semitism went much further. Yet its origin, and even sincerity, are far from clear. In an interview Hitler gave to the journalist Josef Hell in 1922, Hitler boasted: “Once I really am in power, my first and foremost task will be the annihilation of the Jews.” But when Hell asked him why, Hitler gave a dispassionate explanation: “My aim is to create first-rate revolutionary upheavals, regardless of what methods and means I have to use in the process.” He looked around and decided that Jews were the ideal scapegoats.

- ◆ German Jews, though less than one percent of Germany's population, were prominent, prosperous, and widely held in suspicion. Hitler said:

Once the hatred and the battle against the Jews have been really stirred up, their resistance will necessarily crumble in the shortest possible time. They are totally defenseless, and no one will stand up to protect them.

- ◆ Nazi political fortunes were tied directly to the economic fortunes of the Weimar Republic. In 1922, German unemployment was less than two percent. A year later, it spiked to more than 10 percent. At the same time, hyperinflation destroyed the German currency, the mark.

The usual story is that once Hitler took charge, the Nazi Party began an inexorable rise. Yet in fact, the Nazi ascent was neither steady nor inevitable. And Hitler never seized power; it was handed to him, legally.

- ◆ In 1920, the Nazis were a regional party with barely 3,000 members. By autumn 1923, they swelled to 25,000 or more. But in a nation of 65 million, with 35 million voters, that was a drop in the bucket. But a fresh wave of political and economic crises encouraged Hitler to launch an ill-conceived bid to seize power in late 1923. This fiasco, called the Beer Hall Putsch, landed Hitler in prison. But it also gave him national recognition.
- ◆ In May 1924, Hitler's party entered national politics, grabbing less than seven percent of the vote. Inflation and unemployment came under control. A second vote in December 1924 gave the Nazis only three percent. In May 1928, the Nazi vote dropped below three percent.
- ◆ The Nazi Party was going nowhere fast. This brought challenges to Hitler's leadership. One rival was the Nazi boss in Berlin, Gregor Strasser, who considered Hitler way too cozy with Germany's Capitalists. In response, Hitler organized a personal guard, dubbed the Schutzstaffel (SS).
- ◆ In 1926, Hitler rammed through measures giving him absolute power over party doctrine and organization. But Gregor Strasser created his own secret organization and continued to plot against Hitler.
- ◆ Strasser wasn't wrong about Hitler being soft on Capitalism. The party needed money, and big business was an important source of it. One could say that

Germany's business elite itself operated as a secret society. They had no love for Hitler but saw Nazism as a useful counterweight to Communism. Hitler was the "reasonable" Nazi who kept anti-Capitalist firebrands like Strasser in check.

- ♦ American historian Guido Preparata advanced the provocative notion that the Great Depression, beginning in 1929, was no accident. Rather, it was orchestrated by a secret brotherhood of international bankers. Their supposed aim was to create chaos that would facilitate the rise of Hitler and others like him. In Preparata's scenario, no matter how much Hitler might have believed himself master, he was nothing but a tool.
- ♦ New Zealand historian Greg Hallett paints Hitler as a "psychologically conditioned" pawn created by "occult magicians" bent on world conquest.

### Questions to Consider

1. What "mysterious paymasters" do you think Sebottendorf might have been working for?
2. Would Hitler have ever risen to power without the help of "secret backers"?

# 7

## Synarchy, Schemers, *and* Vichy France



The 1930s saw economic crisis, the rise of Hitler, Stalinist terror, and the general decline of democracy. Was there a hidden hand at work, undermining democratic institutions and encouraging dictatorship? There's a possibility that these events were connected to a secret organization known as Synarchy, which exists in the twilight zone where fact, fiction, and speculation blend. Synarchy invites us to consider whether and to what extent the scheming of French technocrats overlapped with the plotting of American coconspirators on Wall Street.

## A Mysterious Death

- ◆ On May 19, 1941, Jean Coutrot, a 46-year-old unemployed engineer, died under mysterious circumstances. The initial reports about Coutrot's demise are curiously contradictory. He's first reported to have died in his bed from an overdose of sleeping pills. But it turns out that he really fell, or was pushed, from the window of his Paris apartment. How does one mix those up? That's what Henri Chavin—the chief of the Sûreté, the French Vichy government's police—aimed to find out.
- ◆ That the Sûreté's chief involved himself in what appeared to be a routine suicide is itself strange. But Chavin had had his eye on Jean Coutrot for some time. For years, the engineer had been mixed up in a bewildering array of secret societies and questionable associations.
- ◆ The most important discovery Chief Chavin made was a leather-bound book among Coutrot's papers. Titled *The Synarchist Revolutionary Pact*, it purported to be the manifesto of a “polytechnic secret society” called the Synarchist Empire Movement or the Synarchic Revolutionary Convention.
- ◆ The manifesto outlined a plan for “an invisible revolution from above” that would destroy the French Third Republic and replace messy parliamentarianism with an authoritarian regime controlled by big business and run by technocrats. It declared itself to be a force of “relentless action governed by divine law” and warned that the pact and the very existence of the Synarchist movement must be kept absolutely secret.
- ◆ Nowhere could Chavin find Synarchism defined; the manifesto seemed intentionally vague in the language. The basic implication was that Synarchy would be for France what Bolshevism was for Russia, what Fascism was for



Italy, and what Nazism was for Germany. And French Synarchy was only part of a larger international Synarchist movement that would eventually unify Europe and dominate the world.

## Synarchism

- ◆ The term *synarchy*—which means “to rule together” or “joint rule”—originated with 19th-century French writer and occultist Marquis Alexandre Saint-Yves d’Alveydre. In the 1880s, Saint-Yves concocted an ancient lineage for Synarchy stretching back to the fabled island of Atlantis. He even claimed the notorious medieval Knights Templars as “spiritual fathers in Synarchy.” Saint-Yves touted Synarchy as the “normal organization of all societies.” It would establish “harmonious cooperation” in society instead of competition.
- ◆ But there was nothing democratic about it. Authority would belong to an enlightened elite that would dole out power to technical, judicial, and commercial bodies headed by hand-picked experts. Secret societies also had an assigned role in the Synarchist utopia: They would create a new class of oracles and priests to guide the masses.
- ◆ Saint-Yves claimed he was introduced to Synarchy by a wandering Eastern mystic who claimed to be in telepathic contact with “ascended masters.” In 1886, Saint-Yves formed a press syndicate to promote Synarchist ideas. His aim was to identify and recruit key persons in politics, business, and academia. He put all this down in a book but suddenly balked at publishing it—supposedly on the ascended masters’ orders.
- ◆ The man who really got Synarchy rolling was another French occultist, a student of Saint-Yves, Gérard Encausse—known as Papus—who set up Masonic lodges in Russia. Papus and a gaggle of French occultists also formed the Martinist Order, claiming it was the revival of an 18th-century mystical order.
- ◆ Vichy police chief Chavin discovered that Saint-Yves was also involved with the Martinists, maybe as their grand master. Regardless, Chavin believed that Saint-Yves and Papus used Martinism as a cover to spread Synarchist ideas.

*Papus later became a spiritual adviser to Tsar Nicholas.*

- ◆ World War I devastated the ranks of the French Martinists. Many bright young initiates filled cemeteries instead of positions of influence. There was a need to refill ranks quickly. And the war created another problem: The revolution in Russia unleashed the genie of Bolshevism.

Synarchy's roots are firmly embedded in secret societies and occult doctrines.

- ◆ Even if Bolshevism was a mutant strain of Synarchy, the Western Synarchists wanted it contained to the Eurasian hinterland. So in 1919, the surviving Martinists formed a Synarchist International to oppose the Communist International in Moscow. Supposedly, among the first fruits of this Synarchist counteroffensive was the emergence of Benito Mussolini's Fascists and the German Thule Society, which helped prepare the ground for Hitler.

## Synarchy in France

- ◆ Chief Chavin believed that Synarchists conspired to spread their “new revolutionary ideology” in France. He claimed the first step was the 1921 appearance of a new Martinist sect dubbed the Martinist and Synarchic Order. At its head, as sovereign grand master, was another Saint-Yves protégé, Victor Blanchard.
- ◆ The Martinists had closely attached themselves to the Grand Orient Lodge, France's largest Masonic body. In fact, the Martinists initiated only master Masons. Blanchard thought this was too restrictive. He wanted a bigger net to bring in non-Masons, and even women.
- ◆ Blanchard and his Synarchists wanted to infiltrate the Pan-Europeanists—who advocated for a unified European state—and make Synarchy the unifying principle. But he had more up his sleeve.
- ◆ According to Chief Chavin, in 1922 Blanchard spun off the even-more-secretive Synarchic Revolutionary Convention, which oversaw yet another secret society, the Synarchist Empire Movement. Blanchard also reigned as supreme master of the spooky Polaire Brotherhood, which ultimately took orders from an elaborate Ouija board that answered to hidden masters.

- ◆ The final result of Chief Chavin’s investigation was an 18-page report to the French Ministry of Justice—where it sat until it was rediscovered after World War II. The report exposed a Vichy regime infested with Synarchists. Chavin identified Synarchists in every ministry. Especially prominent were the heads of big banks. The conspirators also included Socialists, Fascists, monarchists, Catholics, atheists, technocrats, and occultists. So who—or what—was really behind the Synarchist cabal?
- ◆ Chief Chavin pointed the finger at high finance and big business. But Chavin warned that Synarchy was ultimately an “international movement” whose ultimate goal was to replace governments throughout the world. In their place, Synarchy would impose global authoritarianism, with the financiers at the top, the industrialists just below, and an army of technocrats and spiritual snake-oil salesmen to keep the masses in line.
- ◆ But what did Chavin decide about engineer Jean Coutrot? Was he murdered? Chief Chavin considered Coutrot a very important Synarchist and possibly the author of *The Synarchist Revolutionary Pact*. Chavin also believed that Coutrot—with the connivance of fellow Synarchist Charles Spinasse—had deliberately sabotaged the French economy before the war. Chavin argued that was all part of the Synarchist plan to create revolution through disaster. And that led to France’s calamitous defeat in 1940.
- ◆ But Chavin suspected Coutrot either lost faith or got careless. The Sûreté chief noted that in early May 1941, shortly before Coutrot’s death, a mysterious dossier was sent to the head of state that revealed many details of the Synarchist plot. The Synarchists covered this up, but Chavin believed Coutrot paid the price for perceived treachery or indiscretion.

*Why did Blanchard need so many secret orders?*

The basic answer is that each group catered to different constituencies. One might cater to the mystical minded; another might cater to the technocrats. One attracted leftists; another attracted rightists. From the Synarchist view, all political ideologies were equally meaningless. But they were all useful in casting a bigger net.

## Synarchy in America

- ◆ In 1931, US General Smedley Butler retired after 30 years in the Marine Corps, having earned two Congressional Medals of Honor. After leaving the Marines, Butler's politics drifted to the left. He condemned his past service in places like Central America as a “gangster for capitalism.” And Butler published a scathing denunciation of Wall Street–driven interventionism titled *War Is a Racket*. How odd, then, that some of those very same Wall Streeters would try to enlist Butler in a plot against the newly elected president, Franklin Roosevelt.
- ◆ In the summer of 1933, Butler said, a New York stockbroker named Gerald MacGuire asked him for help in raising an army of veterans. That armed militia would march on Washington and install a corporatist regime like the one in Italy and Hitler's new government in Germany. The next step was to install a dictator: retired army general Hugh S. Johnson, who was an open admirer of Fascism and was intimately connected to Wall Street. He was also President Franklin Roosevelt's first head of the controversial National Recovery Administration.
- ◆ The man who approached General Butler—Gerald MacGuire—was a small fry. But behind him were men like his boss, Wall Street big shot Grayson M. P. Murphy. And behind Murphy loomed financial titan J. P. Morgan. According to Butler, the du Pont family, the Guggenheim family, and many others supposedly also backed the plan and were willing to pony up 300 million dollars to make it work.

*The du Pont family is named as Synarchist backers in Chief Chavin's report, along with other unnamed “American interests.”*

- ◆ Butler decided to play along with the conspirators to see how much they would reveal. In late 1934, he went public, sparking brief national controversy and a congressional investigation. Congress tiptoed around the scandal, declining to call any Wall Street big shots to testify. But its final report concluded that there had been “an attempt to establish a fascist organization in this country” and that “there is no question that these attempts were discussed and planned” and had “financial backers.” They just weren't going to name them.

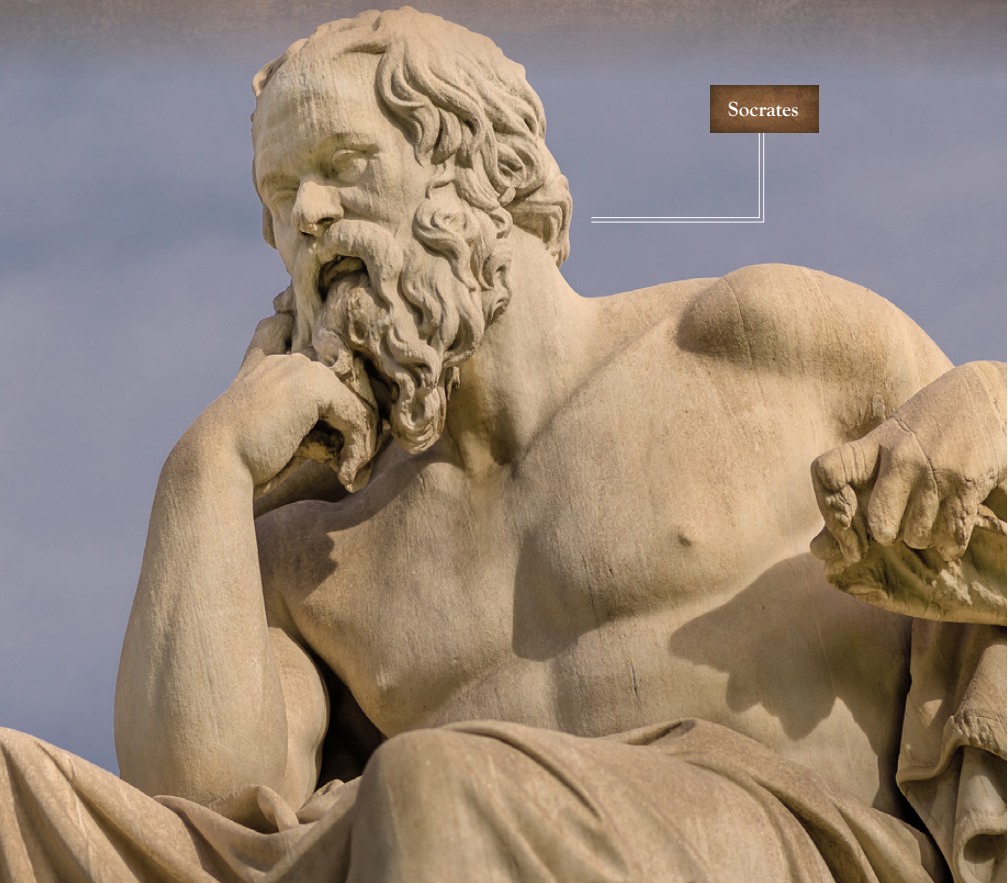
- ◆ The mainstream press almost universally attacked Butler; there was little to go on besides Butler's accusations. The Roosevelt White House stayed mum, and the Justice Department didn't lift a finger. Somehow a plot to overthrow the government was out of their jurisdiction.
- ◆ However, Communist journalist John Spivak took Butler's charges seriously. Spivak conjured up an even larger Wall Street Fascist conspiracy that roped in the Kuhn Loeb and Warburg banks, among others. Spivak's scenario was mostly dismissed as a commie lunacy and "classically paranoid conspiracy theory." The real extent of the plot remains a mystery.
- ◆ Perhaps Butler inconveniently lifted the veil on something that was never supposed to be discussed in public. Some even suspected that FDR secretly instigated the affair to make himself look like a victim of Wall Street, as opposed to its accomplice.
- ◆ Was the so-called Business Plot of 1934 the American wing of Synarchy? In 1934, the same stockbroker, Gerald MacGuire, and his boss, Grayson Murphy, visited France. One of the people they purportedly met there was Eugène Scheuller, the L'Oreal boss and the bankroller of the right-wing Cagoule terror outfit. One can only wonder what they discussed.
- ◆ Nevertheless, the Synarchist International—assuming it existed—failed, right? It bungled the job in France and never got off the ground in the United States. Or did it just mutate like a virus, adapting to suit new realities and new hosts? Did it spawn new fronts and new secret societies?

### Questions to Consider

1. What exactly *is* Synarchy?
2. Was General Butler telling the truth?

# 8

## Ancient Mystery Cults



Socrates

Thinking about mystery cults often conjures images of pagans indulging in wild sex and bloodlust. But that's not a complete picture. In one way or another, mystery cults tackled the big mysteries of life and death, and the basic lesson was that there is a greater world beyond this one. And the stones they left behind provided the building blocks for societies to come.

## The Eleusinian Mysteries

- ◆ In 391 in Eleusis, a small city northwest of Athens, Greece, crowded into the Telesterion—an underground amphitheater—a group of initiates waited in the blackness for the Great Mystery to begin. For each, it was the culmination of a spiritual odyssey that began more than a year earlier.
- ◆ Earlier on the same day, each walked the Sacred Way from Athens—14 sun-drenched miles—offering prayers to Demeter, the goddess of fertility. They've drunk *kykeon*, the sacred brew whose psychoactive effects led them to the ecstasy of illumination. On a signal, fire lit the darkness and sent shadows flickering. The initiates started to dance and would emerge in the morning changed men and women. No longer fearing death, they were immortal.
- ◆ No person today can say for certain what happened in the Telesterion. The Eleusinian Mysteries—among the most ancient and prestigious of the Greco-Roman world—guarded secrets on pain of death. And initiates kept quiet, which says something about what they experienced.
- ◆ But the Great Mysteries of 391 would be the last. The Christian emperor Theodosius closed the shrine and banned its rituals. Four years later, marauding Visigoths sacked and burned Eleusis, leaving it a pile of rubble. The secret society—which had endured for almost 2,000 years and counted among its members Socrates, Plato, Plutarch, and Cicero—ceased to exist. Or did it? The priests of Eleusis taught that there was no death, only transformation. It's a question with broader applications, as well: Do secret societies ever die, or do they just change into something else?
- ◆ The Eleusinian Mysteries started out as a local cult, gradually expanding to Athens and later to all of Greece. By the 1st century AD, they'd reached Rome. The invisible network of initiates spread through the whole empire.

The central myth of the Eleusinian cult was the story of the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone. Demeter was the goddess of fertility and vegetation—especially grain, the staff of life. When Hades, the god of the underworld, carried off Persephone to his dark domain, Demeter fell into mourning, and all growth stopped. Eventually, a deal was made. Persephone spent most of the year on earth with her mother, but for three months she returned to Hades to live with her husband. Thus, the seasons were born.

- ◆ Despite the veil of secrecy, a few things are known. The mysteries had an internal hierarchy. Ordinary initiates were called Mystes. At the top was the hierophant, the “revealer of holy things.” Rituals included taking sacred objects from a chest and putting them into a basket. It sounds silly, but the point wasn’t the action, but what it symbolized. The final revelation was also simple but puzzling: “An ear of grain reaped in silence.” Christian writers mocked this as proof of the cult’s silliness. But the words were meaningless without the context of initiation.

## Mysterious Origins

- ◆ The first three centuries of the AD era were the heyday of mystery cults. And it’s no coincidence that this corresponds to the heyday of the Roman Empire. Rome, by bringing most of the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world under its control, became a melting pot of peoples, religions, and ideas.
- ◆ A big problem in understanding mystery cults—or almost anything about the ancient world—is that we don’t have much to go on. In addition to the overall shroud of secrecy, most written records were lost. We’re left with scattered bits and pieces to reconstruct entire civilizations. The popular image of ancient Greece and Rome are based more on Hollywood than scholarship.
- ◆ However, it’s clear enough that the mysteries represented something quite different from Greco-Roman civic or state regions. Those were the official observances—such as the worship of the emperor—demanded of all citizens. Mystery cults were far more personal. They offered individual mystical experience, even direct contact with the divine, in an atmosphere of fellowship and confidence. The ultimate goals were redemption, salvation, and immortality.



- ◆ Mystery cults shared common features:
  - They all had some connection to seasonal progressions and to the movements of the planets and stars.
  - They all had initiation ceremonies, often tough and prolonged. These included fasting and ritual purifications.
  - Vows of secrecy bound and protected the community. Group rituals, meals, dancing, and the occasional orgy reinforced these bonds.
  - Mystery cults had a central myth, or story, that almost always involved themes of death and resurrection. Whether it was to be taken literally or allegorically was part of the mystery.
  - Cults seldom had written scripture or set dogma. Everything depended on individual experience, which was part of the appeal.
  - The goal was mystical illumination and personal union with God. Illumination isn't learned; it arrives full-born like Athena, in a flash of revelation.
  - The use of mental shock—including terror and physical pain—to induce altered states isn't unique to religious experiences. It's also been employed in everything from so-called enhanced interrogation techniques to psychotherapy and plays a key part in initiations and mental conditioning by many secret societies.

## The Pythagorean Brotherhood

- ◆ Pythagoras—of Pythagorean theorem fame—was the founder of a secret society based on the immortality of the soul, reincarnation, vegetarianism, and, naturally, math. The Pythagorean brotherhood cropped up in southern Italy around 500 BC.
- ◆ Initiates lived a monastic existence, shared possessions and labor, and were sworn to secrecy. Initiation took five years. Pythagoras taught that numbers and numerical ratios were the keys to understanding reality—the *real* reality, that is. Mathematics, thus, was a mystery.

Despite its name, the Pythagorean brotherhood occasionally initiated women.

- ◆ Pythagoras combined this with belief in an immortal soul that fell from the stars to be imprisoned in an earthly material body. The ultimate goal was to end the cycle of rebirth, escape the prison of flesh, and return to one's celestial home.
- ◆ The Pythagorean brotherhood also nurtured a murky political agenda. In 5th-century Athens, the brotherhood infiltrated aristocratic secret societies—basically rich-boy social clubs—to overthrow the democratic government. Such political intrigue led to the Pythagoreans' persecution and eventual disappearance. It's a pattern seen over and over again: a political agenda disguised by mysticism and one secret order using others to achieve its ends.
- ◆ The Pythagoreans disappeared, but they weren't destroyed. Their doctrines lived on in other cults. Among these were the Platonists, who appeared a few centuries later. Through their founder, Plato, they combined the Eleusinian Mysteries with Pythagoras's fallen soul and cycle of rebirth. The Platonists elaborated this by claiming that as the soul fell to earth, it was influenced by the planetary spheres through which it passed. This notion became part of what we call astrology. And the Platonists went on to inspire the Neoplatonists of the late Roman Empire, who in turn influenced many other cults and societies.
- ◆ Pythagorean influence also shows up in the Orphic Mysteries, whose basic plotline was a takeoff on the Demeter-Persephone myth. Orpheus descended into Hades to retrieve his departed wife, Eurydice. Unfortunately, he turned to look back, and she was trapped forever. It was all an allegory for the Orphics' obsession with the divine soul and its liberation from rebirth and mortal captivity. Sacred music and dance were very important, as were concepts of sin, redemption, and ritual purification.



- ◆ The Dionysian Mysteries embraced similar notions with a carnal twist. They believed in spiritual liberation through ecstasy induced through ritual intoxication, orgiastic sex, and acts of spectacular violence. The cult had an inner society of female initiates called Maenads or Bacchae. Through dance and drugs, they worked themselves into a frenzied trance that ended with them tearing apart and devouring a consecrated bull—or sometimes a man.

## The Mithraic Mysteries

- ◆ Another popular cult of the Roman Empire was the Mithraic Mysteries. Mithras, or Mithra, was an old Persian god or demigod. Paintings and statues portray him dressed in a Roman fantasy version of Persian attire, and that's pretty much where his connection to Persia begins and ends. Nothing like the Roman Mithras cult was practiced in Persia, or ever had been. The cult popped up during the 1st century AD, nowhere near Persia, but in Italy, and spread from there.
- ◆ The Mithras cult was even more secretive than the Eleusinian or Isis cults. Mithraists met in underground temples, or Mithraeums, often constructed in natural caves. The cult left no written records, probably because none were ever written.
- ◆ Mithraism was mostly male; why, as usual, isn't clear. It was popular among Roman soldiers, who spread the cult to frontier posts along the Rhine and Danube Rivers and Hadrian's Wall in Britain.
- ◆ About its only visible artifacts today are the representations of Mithras found in its underground temples. The centerpiece—the equivalent of the Christian altar—was the tauroctony. Paintings show Mithras, always wearing a red tunic and blue cloak, slaying a bull. Helping him in this apparent sacrifice are a dog, a snake, and a scorpion, and overlooking the scene are what appear to be the sun god and moon goddess. It's all right there in front of us, but we, the uninitiated, don't know what it means. We aren't illuminated.
- ◆ The Mithraists also had a Eucharist-like sacred meal of unleavened bread marked with a cross. That's led some to argue that Mithraism and Christianity were somehow “sister religions.”

- ◆ History, like the universe, abhors a vacuum, so there's plenty of speculation about the Mithraic Mysteries. Some believe the tauroctony is a coded celestial map. Reinforcing this are the stars emblazoned all over Mithras's flowing blue cloak.
- ◆ One scholar, David Ulansey, claims that the bull represents the constellation Taurus. The dog, serpent, and scorpion also correspond to constellations—Canis, Serpens, and Scorpius. In killing the bull, Mithras symbolically progresses time. Thus, the presumed big “mystery” is the connection between the movements of the stars and the rotation of the seasons. But humans had figured that out ages before.
- ◆ One theory even argues that Mithraism was a kind of star cult. Mithras represented Orion, the mythical hunter and slayer of beasts, whom the ancient Greeks believed had been turned into a constellation by Zeus. Astrological symbolism can also be seen in the Mithraic Mysteries' seven grades of initiation, each linked to one of the seven planets.
- ◆ Another common symbol is the crescent moon—or at least what looks like one—so you just know that others read ancient aliens into this. Still others make the case that Mithras is really the legendary Greek hero Perseus, and the tauroctony was a stylized version of Perseus slaying the minotaur. There's even an idea that Mithras is somehow Jesus.
- ◆ Mithraic initiates got titles like raven, lion, and Persian and called one another *syndexioi*, “those united by a handshake.” Brethren recognized each other by the “signs of the mouth, hand, and crescent.” The first two were vocal and hand signs, and the last maybe an amulet or ritual scar. Handshakes, hand signs, recognition words, and special jewelry aren't the only similarities to later Masonic practices. Initiates were blindfolded and ritually slain and reborn. The theme of reincarnation also reappears.

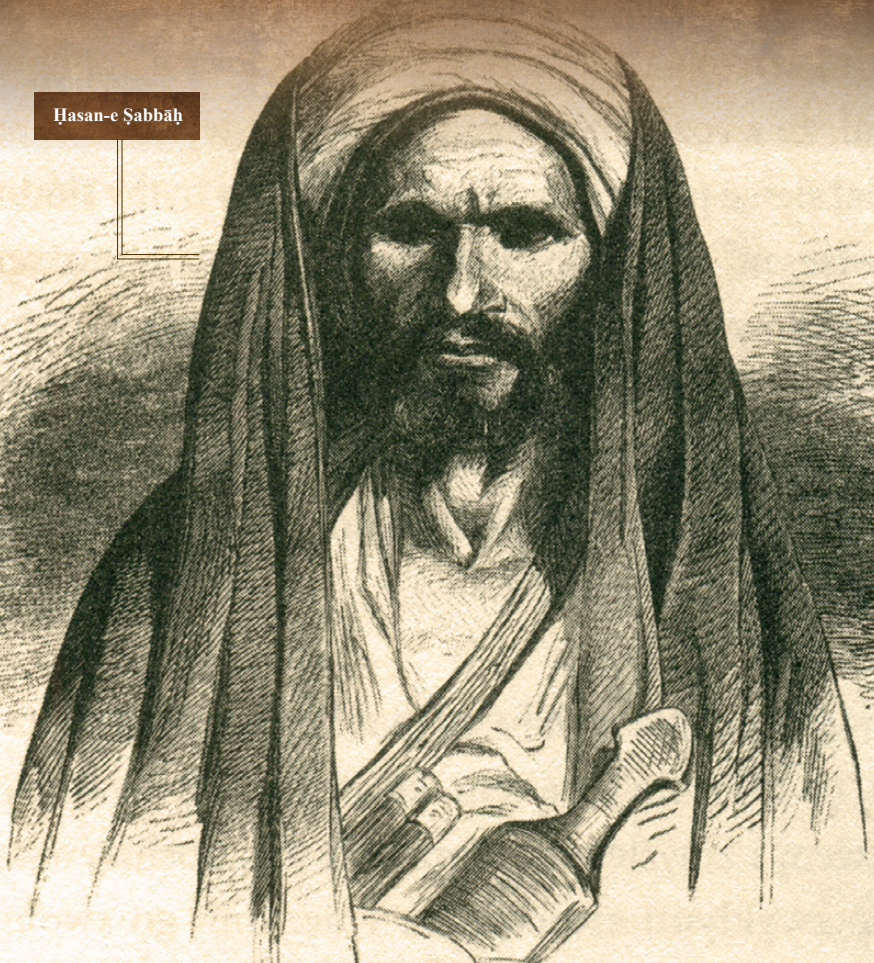
### Questions to Consider

1. Other than the cult of Isis, where might early Christianity have gotten inspiration for its cult of Mary?
2. If Albert Pike is right that Freemasonry is “an imperfect image” of the ancient mystery cults, where is that visible in Masonry's rites and regalia?

# 9

## The Islamic Assassins

Ḥasan-e Şabbāḥ



The Assassins were a secret society based on religious factionalism, political violence, and absolute loyalty. Led most famously by the mysterious Ḥasan-e Ṣabbāḥ, the medieval Assassins shaped history in ways that are often difficult, if not impossible, to verify. The origin of the modern word *assassin*, the Assassins have since become stock characters in legend, conspiracy theories, and modern pop culture.

## The Assassins

- ◆ It's 1092, and two men stand side by side in Persia's snow-peaked Elburz Mountains. They look up at the looming, fortified outcropping of Alāmūt. A third man stands there, his white tunic and red sash clearly visible at the edge of the precipice. One of the figures below nods, and the man in white jumps to his death.
- ◆ One of the two men who had witnessed the scene was an emissary of the sultan Malik-Shāh, ruler of the mighty Seljuk empire. The other was Ḥasan-e Ṣabbāḥ, grand master of a religious order that recently had taken control of Alāmūt. The man who jumped had been a follower of Ṣabbāḥ. His death was an act of devotion, vivid proof of Ṣabbāḥ's hold over his followers.
- ◆ Sultan Malik-Shāh was the most powerful ruler in the Muslim world—or so he thought. He controlled an empire stretching from Anatolia to Central Asia. But Ṣabbāḥ ruled an invisible empire of faith and discipline. He was the absolute master of a secret society whose covert influence spread throughout Malik-Shāh lands and beyond.
- ◆ Ṣabbāḥ called his acolytes *asasiyun*, “the faithful.” That later became confused with *hasbasbin*, or “hashish eaters.” Today, *assassin* is our generic term for a professional killer, especially one who commits political murders. Stock characters in legend, conspiracy theories, and pop culture, the Assassins even have their own video game franchise.
- ◆ Ṣabbāḥ may have exaggerated his numbers, but he didn't exaggerate his control, or the threat it posed to the sultan. Malik-Shāh's vizier, or chief minister, Nizam al-Mulk, was struck down that same year by an Assassin's dagger. Not long after, the sultan himself was poisoned, likely by another of Ṣabbāḥ's minions.

Ḥasan-e Ṣabbāḥ  
claimed to have  
70,000 faithful  
who would  
die—and kill—  
for him.

The Seljuk empire splintered, and the Middle East fell into chaos. This was the beginning of 200 years of terrorism and murder. The victims would include many more viziers, emirs, and even a crusader king.

- ◆ The true number of the Assassins' victims, their beliefs, and even their origins are hazy. Secrecy, lies, and time have distorted everything. Like so many secret societies, the Assassins left almost no written records. And we see them almost entirely through the eyes of their enemies—a dim reflection in the dark mirror of history. Where did they come from? What did they aim to achieve? Where did they go?

## The History

- ◆ The Assassins' roots reach back at least as far as the beginning of Islam in the 7th century. Muhammad's religion split into two irreconcilable sects almost as soon as it was born: the Sunni and the Shia. The dispute was more political than theological. It revolved around who would reign as the caliph of Islam, the successor to the prophet Mohammad.
- ◆ Many believed that Muhammad wanted his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, to succeed him. But that didn't happen. Others in Muhammad's entourage opposed Ali's bid. The reasons stemmed mostly from jealousy, but some worried that anointing Ali would create a dynasty and a royal bloodline. And that's exactly what Ali's partisans had in mind. They believed that a holy spark flowed from the Prophet to his daughter, Fatima, and his cousin Ali, and all their descendants.
- ◆ Ali's supporters came to be called the Shia, meaning the "party" or

The schism between the Sunni and the Shia still exists today and fuels bloodshed throughout the Muslim world.



“sect”—the sect of Ali. They were also called Fāṭimids. The inheritors of the holy bloodline were dubbed imams. Ali would have to wait a quarter of a century and watch three men elevated before him until he filled the shoes of caliph. But a secret, factional war was already underway. Two of his three predecessors were assassinated, and, barely five years after becoming caliph, Ali also fell to an assassin. So, too, did his sons Hasan and Hussein and almost every Shia imam for the next 250 years. The Assassins didn't create a culture of political violence; they were created by it.

- ◆ The Shia split into subjects that further divided into sub-subjects. At issue was which way the holy bloodline flowed and who was the rightful imam. Regardless of sect, the Shia were almost everywhere a minority and usually a persecuted minority. Many Shia went underground. They became a secret society. Some adopted *taqiyya*, or dissimulation, which meant you could conceal, or even lie about, your true allegiance as a means of self-preservation. Secret pass phrases and hand signs completed the picture.
- ◆ The Shia, while a minority, did enjoy occasional triumphs. Around the year 900, they seized control of Egypt and instituted the Fāṭimid caliphate. Its mission was to wage war, both physical and psychological, against the rival Sunni Abbāsīd caliphate in Baghdad. The shock troops of the Fāṭimids were specially trained missionaries, or *dais*, who penetrated enemy territory, bringing information and encouragement to scattered Shia communities and recruiting new faithful. Their ultimate aim was to create a Shia shadow state that would undermine and ultimately replace the hated Sunni Abbāsīds.
- ◆ In 1005, the Fāṭimid caliph al-Ḥākim, sometimes called Ḥākim the Mad, opened the House of Wisdom in Cairo. Outwardly a public library and university, it was also the training school of a secret organization dubbed the Society of Wisdom. Unusual in the Islamic world, it enrolled both men and women. Typical of a secret society, initiates were told they would “receive hidden power and timeless wisdom.”

## The Methods

- ◆ One graduate of the Society of Wisdom was the future master of the Assassins, Ḥasan-e Ṣabbāh, who became a *dai*, or missionary, and returned to his Persian homeland to carry out a secret mission. Somewhere along the way—maybe as part of his training—Ṣabbāh encountered a book called *The Art of Imposture*. It



was a primer for what we'd call stage magic and illusions, a manual of trickery and deception.

- ◆ In one of Ṣabbāḥ's deceptions, he would carefully prepare a concealed garden stocked with beautiful and exotic plants and animals; streams flowing with wine, milk, and honey; and the expected bevy of virgins ready to frolic. A chosen acolyte was first drugged and then awakened in the phony heaven. After a few days of delight, he was again knocked out and returned to the "real" world. Ṣabbāḥ assured the acolyte that when he died for the order, these wonders would be his again—forever.
- ◆ This tale mentions the Assassins' use of intoxicating drugs. While their supposed drug of choice was hashish, that is unlikely; the Assassins almost certainly made use of opium and possibly psychedelic mushrooms. In another tale, Ṣabbāḥ swore a follower to confidence and then buried him in sand up to his chin. Blood and gore were spread around to make it look like a severed head. Other followers were then shown the head, which spoke to them, regaling them with visions of paradise in which his soul now resided. His main job completed, the confidant was beheaded for real, and the severed head was hung up for all to see.
- ◆ By the time of Ṣabbāḥ's death in 1124, his invisible empire was in full swing. Alāmut was only the most important in a string of 18 fortresses scattered across Persia. In 1141, the Assassins captured Maṣyāf Castle in northwestern Syria, extending their power almost to the Mediterranean. This Syrian bastion—which would outlast Alāmut—also brought the Assassins into direct contact with the Knights Templar, the storied and controversial order of crusader Christian knights.
- ◆ As time went on, the authority of Alāmut's masters weakened, and the Syrian branch acted independently. The Syrians' greatest leader was Rashīd al-Dīn al-Sinān, who ruled Maṣyāf from 1162 to 1193. He was the Assassin leader the crusaders called the "old man of the mountain." In 1192, his followers murdered the newly named crusader king of Jerusalem, Conrad of Montferrat. The killers struck him down at prayer. Taken prisoner and subjected to torture, they died laughing about the joys awaiting them in paradise.

## The Aftermath

- ◆ In 1270, the Sunni Muslim Mamelukes took Maşyāf without a fight. Still, the Assassins didn't just vanish. The survivors were ordered by some unknown person to "conceal their faith and await a signal that the cult was in full operation again." Other Assassins joined the mystical Sufi brotherhoods that arose in Muslim lands. Yet others took a different path. Writing in the late 1300s, the Moroccan historian Ibn Baţţūṭah claimed that the Assassins had degenerated into criminal enterprise based on murder for hire.
- ◆ Some believe that some of the Assassins found sanctuary in Europe. One suspect is the Garduña criminal society in medieval Spain. They appeared just as Muslim power in Spain declined. The Garduña brothers were criminal entrepreneurs, and their specialty was murder for hire. They harbored a special hatred for Muslims that ingratiated them with the Catholic Church. They supposedly became the "dirty work" arm of the Inquisition and survived until the 1800s. The Garduña were rumored to have spawned other criminal societies in Italy. If there's any truth to that, maybe the spirit of the Assassins lives on in the Mafia.
- ◆ If the fate of the Assassins remains open, so does their origin, though all roads lead back to Persia. It also brings us back to that mysterious secret society earlier mentioned by Idries Shah. In the 9th century, a Persian named Abdullah is said to have dreamed of overthrowing Arab Muslim control of his homeland. He concocted a plan to destroy the political and religious basis of their power, the Abbāsīd caliphate. He formed a secret society with seven degrees of initiation that would undermine faith not just in Islam, but in all religions—which he contended were nothing but vain and empty rituals. In their place, Abdullah promoted the worship of Ali, which would exploit Shia hatred and subvert the Sunni caliphate. If this is true, Abdullah may be the true founder of the Assassins.
- ◆ Another inspiration might have been an anti-Arab, anti-Muslim revolt in 9th-century Persia. This was the Khorram-dīnān, the "Religion of Joy," which combined Shia Islam and Persian Zoroastrianism. At first glance, this religious sect doesn't much resemble the Assassins. Its adherents embraced pacifism and practiced free love. At its core was the antinomian doctrine that all religious rules were meaningless and that the goal of life should be to enjoy all pleasures and satisfy all desires.

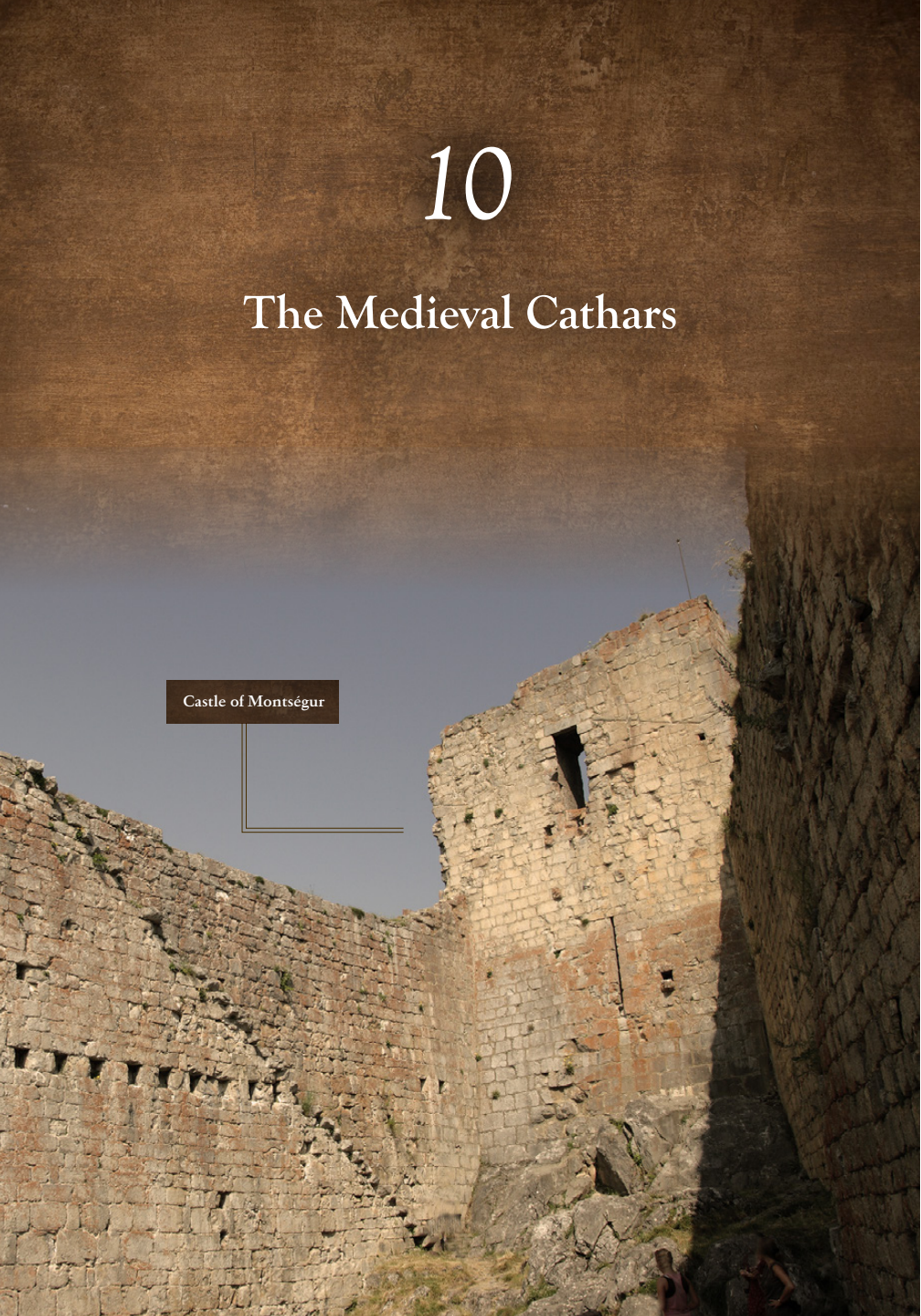
## Questions to Consider

1. Much like the Knights Templar, the Assassins have become permanently etched in collective memory. Why?
2. Where else can you hear the echo of the Assassin motto “nothing is true; everything is permitted”?

# 10

## The Medieval Cathars

Castle of Montségur



The Cathars were a dualistic religious sect that arose during the Middle Ages. Their true origins are lost in time, but they must have come from somewhere. The efforts of soldiers and inquisitors, including a genocidal crusade, were insufficient to stamp them out. What made Catharism so difficult to eradicate? And was it ever truly destroyed, or did it simply adapt and become invisible?

## The Fall of Montségur

- ◆ In March 1244, 10,000 troops serving the pope and the king of France huddled in their cold, wet camp in the Pyrenees, near the present-day border of France and Spain. For almost a year, this army had fruitlessly besieged the small mountaintop castle of Montségur.
- ◆ Trapped inside was a small band of fighting men—perhaps 50 to 100—and around 500 noncombatants. The besieged were among the last survivors of a religious sect known as the Cathars. Among the noncombatants were many of the elite of the Cathar faith known as perfecti, or “perfects.” Realizing their fate was sealed, the defenders of Montségur agreed to surrender.
- ◆ For decades, the pope’s crusaders had laid waste to southern France in a ruthless campaign to stamp out the heresy. Whole cities had been put to the sword. With the surrender of Montségur, final victory seemed at hand. The crusaders constructed a massive pyre at the base of the rock. The Cathars who renounced their sin and accepted absolution would go free. But some 200 perfecti stubbornly refused. On March 16, 1244, as the pyre was lit, the condemned perfects embraced and walked into the flames singing hymns. They were leaving this world and not coming back.
- ◆ According to legend, prior to the surrender, three or four perfects escaped Montségur by secret passage. The escapees were said to have taken with them some kind of Cathar treasure. Just what that was, few could specify, and those who could, wouldn’t. Some thought it was the Cathars’ holy books, or gold and silver, or the Holy Grail. Or maybe it was a person—the Cathars’ secret leader.

In most history books, if the Cathars are mentioned at all, the fall of Montségur is portrayed as their last stand as an organized movement. But that’s not really true. Heresies are hard things to kill.

- ◆ Eleven years later, another royal host attacked the nearby castle of Quéribus, where more Cathars and their perfects were holed up. But the attackers found the place deserted. The heretics had all slipped away; where to, no one knew.
- ◆ Cathar bishops, the highest rank of the perfecti, were still active in the Pyrenees a half century later. In 1321, the last known perfect in France was put to death. Church officials in northern Italy burned another in 1340.
- ◆ The Cathars—condemned as diabolical heretics by the Roman Catholic Church—are often hailed as a manifestation of a separate, primitive brand of Christianity; proto-Protestants; or enlightened harbingers of social and sexual equality. Like many other secret orders, the Cathars have been spun, coopted, and mythologized, which makes sorting out who they were and what they believed almost impossible.

## Origins and Beliefs

- ◆ The name *Cathar* comes from the Greek term *katbaros*, or “pure.” It’s the same root as our modern term catharsis, meaning “cleansing” or “release.” But the Cathars never called themselves such. Instead, they referred to themselves as *bons chrétiens* (good Christians) or *bons hommes* (good men). Despite the heretic label, Cathars regarded themselves as Christians—the true Christians. An alternative name was Albigenses, taken from one of their main strongholds, Albi.
- ◆ The essence of Cathar belief was that there wasn’t one god but two. It’s called dualism. This solved that sticky problem of how a good god lets bad things happen. The good god, the lord of light and mercy, rules the world of spirit—the celestial realm from which humankind’s pure, immortal souls had fallen. What they fell into was the material world, a spiritual prison ruled by the evil god—the Demiurge, or Satan.
- ◆ In other words, we’re trapped in hell. Everything in the material realm is corrupt, and our pure souls yearn to escape it. But we’re condemned to eternal rebirth in this cosmic hellhole through the allure of its seductive, but false, pleasures. None of these was more insidious than lust, which caused the creation of more fleshly prisons, babies, to trap more divine souls. The only way to escape the cycle was to reject the physical world, pleasures and all.

- ◆ By its encouraging of reproduction and wallowing in wealth and privilege, Cathars saw the Catholic Church as a tool of the evil god. They reviled it as a monstrosity of brick and mortar, sumptuousness, and idolatry that did nothing but mislead. Cathars rejected the Old Testament and identified Jehovah with the evil god. To them, the Holy Trinity was a lie.
- ◆ To the Cathars, Jesus was neither god nor man. He was a manifestation of the Holy Spirit sent by the good god to show us the way to freedom. So naturally, the evil god had him destroyed. But the Cathars didn't believe that Christ was really flesh and blood. Rather, he was a kind of hologram. So in their view, there was no real crucifixion or resurrection or virgin birth because Jesus had no material form. To Cathars, the cross was a hateful symbol, which is why there's no such thing as a Cathar cross.
- ◆ Catholic critics frequently accused the Cathars of witchcraft and sexual perversity. There isn't any real evidence of witchcraft, but there might be something to the perceived perversity. The Cathars' issue wasn't so much with sexual gratification as procreation. Thus, masturbation and homosexuality may have been condoned as acceptable, if not desirable, practices.
- ◆ As a visible movement, Catharism lasted about 250 years. But it was part of a much wider phenomenon that embodied beliefs and practices dating back hundreds, maybe thousands, of years, and that survived long after Catharism vanished. Catholics frequently referred to Cathars as Manichees and the Cathar church as a revival of Manichaeism. This was a dualistic religion founded by the Persian prophet Mani in the 3rd century AD. It was one of the main rivals of Christianity during the later Roman Empire.
- ◆ Another theory is that Catharism and kindred heresies were survivals of an original, primitive Christianity. This was the supposed true church before it was taken over and perverted by a self-serving cabal of bishops, pontiffs, and patriarchs. References to a primitive, true Christianity also crop up among Masonic and neo-Templar groups in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- ◆ The reasons Catharism spread so quickly were both cultural and political. France as we know it today didn't exist. The northern area around Paris was

Cathars ordained women alongside men and generally afforded them social and spiritual equality.

semicivilized. The southern lands of Occitania and Provence, also called Languedoc, gave lip service to royal authority but spoke their own language and retained much of the old Roman culture. Cathar leaders understood the value of sucking up to the well-connected. Powerful local rulers, such as Count Raymond of Toulouse, granted the Cathar church toleration and protection. Among known perfects, almost a third were of noble origin.

## Apparent Disappearance

- ◆ The Vatican eventually sat up and took notice. In 1208, Pope Innocent III sent a papal legate to Toulouse to reconvert the heretics. The legate's murder, probably at the instigation of the powerful pro-Cathar nobleman Count Raymond of Toulouse, set off the Albigensian Crusade, which raged for the next 20 years. An army of 20,000 northern crusaders descended on Languedoc with fire and sword.
- ◆ An early indication of what was to come was the sack of Béziers in 1209. The town was the home of many Cathars, and ordinary Catholics, too. The crusaders who stormed the walls asked another papal representative, Arnaud Amaury, how they could tell good Christians from the heretics. Amaury issued the order that still echoes today: "Kill them all and God will know his own." It's said that 20,000 were butchered in Béziers, including 7,000 cut down while praying in the town cathedral.
- ◆ By the time peace was signed in 1229, the south was devastated, with 500,000 to 1 million people dead and the power of its nobles crushed. This did much to increase the power of the king in Paris.
- ◆ The war against Catharism wasn't over, as became clear in the 1244 siege of Montségur. But the struggle changed. The Cathars now had to truly become a secret society. And to root it out, the Catholic Church formed a secret society of its own: the Inquisition. For the next hundred years, the secret police of the Vatican conducted a ruthless campaign of extermination against the Cathar underground, burning their perfects—and their books—wherever they were found.
- ◆ Cathars who repented were forced to wear a yellow cross and live apart from other Christians. The heretics were amazingly resilient and preserved a large number of secret supporters among the population. There was even a brief Cathar resurgence in the Pyrenees in the early 1300s. But thereafter, the once-



powerful sect just seemed to fade away. But did it? One theory is that the Cathars blended into various organizations that sprang up on the fringes of the official church.

- ♦ Others see Cathar influence among the Beguines and Beghards, who cropped up in northern France and Flanders in the 13th century. These were lay orders of women and men, respectively. Celibacy and poverty were required, and the societies ignored the authority of church officials. Beguines and Beghards were closely connected to the weaving trade, and weavers, or *textores*, featured prominently among the Cathars. There's even a theory that weaver guilds preserved Cathar doctrines by encoding the secret gospels as abstract patterns in cloth, turning them into symbols that only the initiated could understand.

### Questions to Consider

1. Were the Cathars a manifestation of a primitive or folk Christianity that had always existed outside the official church, mostly invisibly?
2. What do you think the supposed Cathar treasure might have been?

# 11

## The Rosicrucians



Rosicrucianism was never a movement or a secret society per se. It was an idea—arguably a philosophy—of universal spiritual illumination and liberation, led by an initiated and enlightened elite. If one looks closely at the history of the idea, Rosicrucianism’s influence can be seen from 17th-century Europe to modern-day America.

## Harvey Spencer Lewis

- ◆ In San Jose, California, Rosicrucian Park covers a city block. Its centerpiece is an Egyptian museum full of antiquities. Egyptian-style architecture abounds. A pyramid festooned with esoteric symbols marks the resting place of the park’s creator, Harvey Spencer Lewis. It’s a secret society–themed park in the middle of Silicon Valley! Behind it all is the headquarters of the society: the Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (Rosy Cross), or AMORC.
- ◆ If you glance through old comics or pulp magazines like *Amazing Stories*, *Popular Science*, or *Mechanix Illustrated*, you’re bound to come across AMORC ads offering to reveal “ancient wisdom,” the “suppressed knowledge of the ages,” the “secret method for the mastery of life,” and the “psychic power of attraction.” From depression to vague ennui, Rosicrucianism offers a cure. For a low, low cost, the “secrets entrusted to a few”—plus handy skills like levitation and telepathy—could be yours. Lewis, the mystical order’s grand imperator, turned it into a mass marketing empire that is still going.
- ◆ Lewis built his empire on old foundations that he reinvented for the 20th century. His Order of the Rosy Cross had its immediate roots in French Rosicrucian orders that appeared in the 1880s. They, in turn, drew inspiration from 18th-century Rosicrucian societies who traced their origins to the original Rosicrucians of the 17th century.
- ◆ Lewis’s Rosicrucian adventure started with a vision. In the spring of 1908, then a 25-year-old struggling artist, Lewis claimed to have had “a profound mystical experience.” A “spirit guide” instructed him to “journey East” and “seek out the Rosicrucians.” The following summer, Lewis said he accompanied his father, Aaron Lewis, on a business trip to Paris. That started the young man on a journey that ended in the ancient city of Toulouse. It was there, Lewis said, at an old chateau near the Garonne River, that a man named Count du Belcastel-Ligne initiated him into the Rosicrucian mysteries.

- ◆ The young American was given free access to the order's library and archives. He made notes and copied whatever he wished. But there was a catch. The Rosicrucians' mission for Lewis was to restore "true Rosicrucianism" to America, which he did, starting in New York. While he accepted the challenge, the masters—in their mysterious way—decreed he couldn't launch his order until 1915. Another vision later directed Lewis to California, where "restored" Rosicrucianism came home to San Jose in 1927.
- ◆ That is Lewis's version of founding the AMORC, but how much of it is true is another matter. The Canadian-born esoteric scholar Manly P. Hall had his doubts. Hall claimed that the history of Rosicrucianism was "intensely complicated by misrepresentation and impostures." And he considered Lewis a big part of the problem.
- ◆ A big question mark hangs over Lewis's 1909 pilgrimage to France. There's no proof that it ever happened, at least as Lewis described. Also, Lewis had taken an interest in the mystical as early as 1903, when he joined the New York Institute for Psychical Research. In 1915—the year he launched his Rosicrucian order—the New York State census lists Lewis as an advertising salesman.
- ◆ Subsequent events surrounding Lewis exude a distinct odor of flimflammy. In his September 1918 draft registration, Lewis lists himself as "manager" of the Order Rosae Crucis. In June 1928, he was arrested and charged with fraudulently selling thousands of dollars of bond certificates, based on the claim that his order was "a recognized branch of a worldwide institution devoted to studies of the occult." New York State rejected his application to incorporate the Ancient Mystical Order as an organization engaged in the "analysis of all ancient, medieval, and modern religions, philosophy and moral codes." That setback probably prompted his move to California. By 1920, he was living in San Francisco as a "scientific lecturer."

## Early Rosicrucianism

- ◆ Rosicrucianism, like Freemasonry, was a generic label, not a brand name. Secret societies operate under a kind of apostolic succession. The legitimacy of a new group is based largely on its pedigree of its ancestors. So, Lewis claimed initiation into a French order, which claimed descent from a line of still-earlier Rosicrucians. Add to this the tendency of one society to split into two or three

and you end up with something like a huge family feud with siblings and half-siblings all squabbling over inheritance.

- ◆ Rosicrucianism first became visible in 17th-century Europe. This was a hundred years into the Reformation, and Europe was still bitterly divided by religious hatred. The biggest and most destructive religious conflict—the Thirty Years’ War—was just around the corner.
- ◆ According to secret-societies historian Idries Shah, the Rosicrucian ball first got rolling in 1597. Rumors spread of a mysterious “alchemist” wandering the continent drumming up recruits for a “society to carry out alchemical researches.” Eight years later, a so-called Rosicrucian constitution surfaced in Germany, but quickly vanished.
- ◆ Then, in 1614, the first of two Rosicrucian manifestos appeared in Germany. Titled *Fama Fraternitatis*, (*Famous Fraternity*), it was an appendage to a bigger work titled *The General Reformation of the World*. A year later came a second Rosicrucian manifesto. It was the equally brief and equally anonymous *Confessio Fraternitatis* (*The Testament*).
- ◆ The manifestos told the story of Christian Rosenkreuz (“Rose-Cross”), a German monk who traveled to the Holy Land around 1400. A curious sort, he encountered a secret society of wise men in Damascus.
- ◆ Idries Shah speculated that there may have been a smidge of truth in the story. According to Shah, a 12th-century Sufi mystic named Abdulkadir al Gilani formed an “Arabic school of illuminati” in Baghdad. After Baghdad’s destruction by the Mongols in 1258, survivors of his order took refuge in Damascus. Sufi mystic Gilani was known to his followers as The Rose. His secret doctrine was called the *Path of the Rose*, or *Sebil-al-Warda*. Curiously, the slightly altered phrase *Selib al Warda* means “Cross of the Rose.”
- ◆ Regardless, Rosenkreuz had picked a bad time to visit Damascus. In 1400, the conqueror Tamerlane sacked and burned the city and built a massive tower of severed heads to commemorate it. Nevertheless, Rosenkreuz supposedly soaked up the secret knowledge of the East and received initiation. He next traveled to Egypt, then to Morocco, then Spain, and finally back to Germany. Much of what Rosenkreuz supposedly learned smacks of Gnosticism and Hermeticism.

- ◆ Back home, Rosenkreuz decided the time wasn't right to reveal his knowledge, so he formed a secret society to conceal it. The society consisted of seven carefully selected acolytes who swore vows of secrecy and celibacy. Rosenkreuz commanded that they outwardly observe the religions of their home countries to avoid drawing attention.
- ◆ Each initiate picked a successor, who picked another, and so on. The brothers claimed to feel no hunger or thirst and "could command spirits and make themselves invisible." Rosenkreuz reportedly died in 1484 at the ripe age of 106. He was buried in a secret tomb.
- ◆ His tiny brotherhood carried on invisibly for 120 years until 1604, when one of them opened Rosenkreuz's tomb. Inside, "strange inscriptions and a manuscript in golden letters" were supposedly found. The time was apparently right, and someone set to writing those manifestos. Their basic purpose was to reveal the existence of the Rosicrucian society—not its secrets—and to recruit new members for the work to come.

Gnosticism is the notion that spiritual enlightenment and salvation comes through knowledge.

Hermeticism is a means to acquire that knowledge through alchemy, astrology, and theurgy—the invocation of gods and spirits.

## Possible Origins

- ◆ There's no evidence that Christian Rosenkreuz or his society ever existed. Later Rosicrucians were divided on whether Rosenkreuz was a real person or just another allegory. Some see the model for Rosenkreuz in the Swiss alchemist Paracelsus, who lived from 1493 to 1541.
- ◆ Others believe the Rosenkreuz story is a disguised reference to Italian monk and wandering mystic Giordano Bruno. The Inquisition burned him as a heretic in 1600. Widely regarded as a martyr for free thought, Bruno was an occultist who was well versed in Arab astrology, the Kabbalah, and Hermetic doctrines. He got into trouble for denying the divinity of Christ, the virginity of Mary, and all the sacraments. If that makes him sound like a Cathar heretic, some have argued that's exactly what he was. And some have argued that Rosicrucianism was just a repackaging of Cathar beliefs.

- ◆ Yet another theory holds that Rosicrucianism sprang from radical Protestantism. Its second manifesto, the *Confessio*, is strongly anti-Catholic. It also prophesizes a sweeping revolution in Europe, “wiping the slate clean.” It proclaimed that the Rosicrucians’ goal wasn’t to fix society but to destroy it in order to build a new and better one. The *Confessio* also echoes ideas found in alchemy and Hermeticism.
- ◆ It’s probably no coincidence that Rosicrucianism surfaced around the same time as early Masonic lodges. In the centuries to follow, Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry were talked about in the same breath, and most Rosicrucians would start out as Masons. Rosicrucian influence also manifested in esoteric branches of Christianity.

### Questions to Consider

1. Was Harvey Spencer Lewis a genuine mystic, a clever businessman, a con artist—or something of all three?
2. What do you think the rose and cross stand for?

12

The Illuminati





What do Henry Kissinger, Queen Elizabeth, David Rockefeller, and arms magnate Basil Zaharoff have in common? They've all been accused of being Illuminati. This mysterious organization, led in the 18th century by a man named Adam Weishaupt, has spawned endless conspiracy theories over the years.

## Adam Weishaupt

- ◆ On May 1, 1776, five men gathered around a table in Ingolstadt, Bavaria. Leading them was a local professor of canon law: the 28-year-old Adam Weishaupt. They gathered to inaugurate a new secret society—the Order of Perfectibilists. Its name soon changed to the Order of the Illuminati, or, in German, the *Illuminatenorden*, (the Order of the Enlightened). Its totem was the owl of Minerva, or Athena, the ancient goddess of wisdom. Another symbol was a dot in a circle representing the all-seeing eye—not the eye of God, but of the mysterious “unknown superiors” to whom the order answered.
- ◆ Weishaupt envisioned nothing less than a world revolution that would result in a universal republic: a new world order. This necessitated the destruction of Christianity and all other forms of religion. It also meant the annihilation of all governments. The new order would bring liberation from all social, moral, and religious restraint and would embrace absolute equality and social fraternity. Religious superstition would be replaced with atheism for the masses and a kind of enlightened pantheism for the higher classes. A “Communism of goods” would govern economics. The benevolent enlightened elite—the Illuminati—would reign over this earthly paradise.
- ◆ There was nothing new about Weishaupt’s utopian vision. The term *illuminati* had been used many times before. In the classical age, any initiate of a mystery cult was considered an *illuminatus*. The same was true for a Christian who had undergone baptism.

Adam Weishaupt



- ◆ In essence, Weishaupt envisioned the realization of heaven on earth: the “immanentizing of the eschaton.” That notion goes back a long, long time. A 5th-century Persian prophet named Mazdak imagined something much the same. Another version is the millennial paradise that many believe Christ will usher in on his return or the perfect kingdom Jews anticipate with the Messiah. The difference is that Weishaupt’s perfect kingdom would be instituted by humans themselves—at least the illuminated ones.
- ◆ Weishaupt’s original contribution to this ancient theme was organization. As opposed to open proselytizing, mass movements, and direct confrontation, he advocated secrecy—or, more to the point, conspiracy. “The great strength of our Order lies in its concealment,” he decreed; “let it never appear in any place in its own name, but always covered by another name, and another occupation.”
- ◆ Outwardly, Weishaupt and his brethren came nowhere near achieving their lofty ambitions. The Bavarian Illuminati officially lasted barely a decade. The group is easy to dismiss as another of history’s countless failed pipe dreams, but it’s not as simple as that. The Illuminati were never rounded up or brought to account. Weishaupt lived to write, plot, and influence until his death in 1830 at the age of 82. The society’s organization was not seriously disrupted. There’s every reason to suppose that the Illuminati carried on in another form.

## The Organization

- ◆ Weishaupt was obsessed with secrecy. He proclaimed that “of all the means I know to lead men, the most effectual is a concealed mystery.” Noting that “the games and abuses of secret societies were without end,” he said, “I wanted to make use of this human weakness for a real and worthy goal—the welfare of mankind.”
- ◆ Simply put, Weishaupt saw that men desired status. Offering them access to secrets was a way to manipulate them. He looked for an existing secret society to serve as a cover for his new one and decided that “none is fitter than ... Freemasonry; the public is accustomed to it, expects little from it and therefore takes little notice of it.”
- ◆ In 1777, Weishaupt joined a Masonic lodge and demanded that every illuminatus do likewise. Once initiated, they were to attain positions of leadership and turn the lodges into vehicles for Illuminati propaganda and expansion.

- ◆ Weishaupt also saw great value in literary societies and libraries. He commanded his order to establish or infiltrate them so “we may turn the public mind which way we will.” At the same time, the Illuminati would monitor everything appearing in print.
- ◆ The ultimate goal was to make men free and happy. But first one had to make them good, and that required manipulation, trickery, and even coercion. While the Illuminati would be the enlightened aristocracy of the new world order, even they weren’t equal—or free. A recruit, or novice, was under the complete control of his recruiter, or insinuator. Novices were told what to read and how to think, and they kept a daily account of their every thought and action. They also compiled detailed personal histories. They had no secrets from their insinuator and obeyed every command without question.
- ◆ There were also two higher ranks: minor and major illuminatus. Weishaupt decreed that no “religionist”—that is, anyone retaining a scrap of their old belief—could be admitted to them. There was also no room for patriotism. Absolute loyalty to the order and one’s Illuminati superiors was the rule. Ordinary morality was also forbidden. “Calumnies, poisonings, assassinations, perjury, treasons [and] rebellions” were not crimes if done on the command of superiors and for the good of the order.
- ◆ The Illuminati later instituted higher grades unknown to the rank and file. There were Scotch Knights (a nod to the Masonic Scottish Rite), Epopts, Prefects, National Directors, National Prefects, and, finally, the Grand Master—Adam Weishaupt himself.
- ◆ Known Illuminati came almost exclusively from the 18th-century intelligentsia. Lawyers, academics, physicians, writers, and theologians abound. The Illuminati roster includes an astounding number of barons and counts as well as more important aristocrats, such as dukes and princes. Peasants, butchers, and chimney sweeps are absent. Jews, pagans, and ex-Jesuits were generally excluded, though exceptions were made. The great majority of Illuminati were Freemasons. Most were Germans, but there were brethren in Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, France, Denmark, Italy, and even Russia.
- ◆ Despite the secrecy and conspiracy, Weishaupt’s order seemed to evaporate under scrutiny. Under pressure from the church, Karl Theodor of Bavaria banned the Illuminati in 1784, 1785, 1787, and 1790. Obviously, suppression wasn’t easy. Outside Bavaria, the order was mostly unscathed. Weishaupt

slipped away to nearby Gotha and he was protected by its illuminatus prince. Franz Xaver von Zach—one of Weishaupt's key lieutenants—was briefly jailed but escaped to Paris in 1786. A year later, so did Johann Bode, whom Weishaupt made executive secretary of the order.

## Heirs and Offshoots

- ◆ Illuminism wasn't just a Western concept. In the 1500s in modern-day Afghanistan, a brotherhood called the Roshaniyya, or "Illuminated Ones," appeared. They had elaborate, very secret initiatory rituals. Their founder and illuminated master was a Sufi warrior and mystic named Bāyazīd Pīr Rōshān. He decried the tyranny and spiritual imperfections of secular rulers, including the powerful Mogul emperor, and preached the overthrow of the existing order and the creation of a new world order based on an egalitarian society.
- ◆ Around the same time in Spain, there were the Alumbrados, or Aluminados. They're first mentioned in 1492 and were supposed to have come to Spain from Italy. Church officials suspected them of being a survival of the earlier Cathars. Supporting the notion was the Alumbrados' rejection of the Catholic Church's authority and sacraments. Following masters guided by visions of angels and saints, these Spanish Illuminati sought mystical knowledge and ecstatic union with God. The Inquisition intervened, and the Alumbrados were banned by 1525.
- ◆ The Alumbrados survived, however, and spread to France in the early 1600s. There, they were called Illuminés. Under the leadership of a former Catholic curate, Pierre Guérin, these Illuminati attained a following in Picardy before being suppressed—but not destroyed—in 1635.
- ◆ In the early 1700s, yet another bunch of Illumines appeared in the remote Cévennes region of southern France. Some of these Illuminati had fled England, forming a sect called the French Prophets and joining—or infiltrating—Masonic lodges.
- ◆ In 1754 in France, an occultist named Joachim Martinès de Pasqually founded yet another illuminist sect dubbed the Order of Knights-Masons Elect Priests of the Universe. Their doctrine was drawn from the ancient Jewish mystical tradition, the Kabbalah; ritual magic; and even the doctrine of Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. They spread all the way to Russia, where a cell thrived in Moscow until suppressed by Catherine the Great in the 1790s.

- ◆ In the 1760s, still another group—the Illumines of Avignon—surfaced in the southern French city of Avignon.

As a fixture of popular culture, the tale of the Illuminati keeps evolving. Some see Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein* as an allegory for Adam Weishaupt's creation of the Illuminati, the monster over which he lost control. Mary's husband, poet Percy Shelley, was fascinated by the Illuminati. Jane Austen mentions the Illuminati half-jokingly in *Northanger Abbey*. They come up in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, as well as in works by contemporary novelists, such as Umberto Eco and Dan Brown.

### Questions to Consider

1. If Adam Weishaupt really was a secret Jesuit, how would his order of the Illuminati have served Jesuit interests?
2. Was Weishaupt's plan of subversive influence practical or impossible?

13

The Freemasons



Freemasonry isn't one thing, but many, and it always has been this way. Much of this vagueness and variety stems from the fact that Freemasonry's origins are lost in time. As ever, people see what they want to see and believe what they want to believe. Therefore, unsurprisingly, Freemasonry grew into a worldwide presence, and it inspired and influenced other societies.

## Rites and Rituals

- ◆ The candidate for Entered Apprentice stands behind the door, waiting to be summoned. He's blindfolded, and there's a noose around his neck with a length of rope trailing behind. His chest is exposed at the left breast and his left pant leg rolled up. The doorkeeper knocks three times and announces that the candidate desires to enter and obtain the privileges of Freemasonry.
- ◆ The candidate is escorted into the lodge by the inner guard. The guard holds the tip of a dagger against the candidate's bare chest and asks if he feels anything. Next, the candidate kneels before the head of the lodge—the worshipful master—and they engage in a ritual question and answer session. The candidate is led by the rope to an altar with a Bible or other holy book.
- ◆ Standing with his heels together to form a square, the candidate now kneels. He places his right hand on the Bible and, with his left, presses the point of a compass against his chest. He swears to “forever conceal, and never reveal any of the secret arts, parts, or points of the hidden mysteries of Freemasonry.” If he breaks that promise, he commits himself to “having my throat cut across, my tongue torn out ... my body buried in the sands of the sea at low-tide.”
- ◆ The assembled brothers rise and give the sign of the Entered Apprentice—right hand held palm-down beneath the chin with the elbow straight out. The master asks the candidate what he seeks. He replies: “the light.” The master strikes his gavel, and the hood is removed.
- ◆ The candidate is then shown three sacred objects: the holy book, the square, and the compass. The master reminds him that he faces terrible retribution should he ever betray the organization's secrets. Next comes instruction in the secret hand sign, or grip, and the secret word: *Boaz*. The candidate receives his badge and symbolic tools: a gavel and a ruler.

- ◆ The candidate leaves to change clothes and returns to receive the “final charges.” He is instructed that he must understand the importance of God, obey the law, abstain from political or religious discussion in the lodge, and obey the master and other officers. He’s again warned that he must never reveal any secrets of the brotherhood. The new brother is now an Entered Apprentice.
- ◆ Above Entered Apprentice are two more grades: Fellow Craft and Master Mason. Each has its ritual, oath of secrecy, and prescribed horrible punishments.
- ◆ In regular, Blue Lodge Masonry, that’s all there is to it. But there has never been just one Freemasonry; no one owns the rights to the name. There are many variations, and they don’t play by the same rules.
- ◆ American Masonic lodges are mostly split between two grand lodges, or jurisdictions: the Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, and the Free and Accepted Masons. One controls the grand lodges in 24 states; the latter controls the grand lodges in 25 states. There are two exceptions: South Carolina, which is under its own Ancient Free Masons, and the District of Columbia, which has the Free and Accepted Masons. They mutually recognize each other as “regular” but differ in details. Yet all trace their origin to the Grand Lodge of England.
- ◆ Ask the average Mason what the lodge is about and a common answer will be “fellowship.” Formally, Freemasonry is “a system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.” Consider again the initiation described previously. The candidate entered the lodge through the western door and proceeded toward the worshipful master at the eastern end. That represents the Masonic myth that wisdom—the “light”—comes from the east, and those in search of it symbolically travel from west to east.
- ◆ The candidate was blindfolded to symbolize his ignorance before “the light” was received. His breast was exposed to prove he wasn’t a woman. His left pant leg was rolled up as evidence that he was able-bodied. The gavel, square, and apron the new Mason receives are based on actual stonemason gear. But none of them will be used to do real work. With rare exception, no one in the lodge is actually a mason; they are all just pretending to be. Why?

Most Masonic lodges don’t admit women, but some do. The usual age for admission is 21, but it can be 25 or 18.



- ◆ Then there are the terms *free* and *accepted*. Free originally meant a man who wasn't a slave or bond servant and who was therefore able to travel from place to place; later, it acquired the additional meaning of someone unencumbered by any obligations that might conflict with Masonic ones. *Accepted*, also called *speculative*, Masons are men admitted to lodges without any intention of actually laying bricks or stones. They are symbolic masons.
- ◆ The widely accepted belief is that for some inexplicable reason, stonemason guilds began accepting nonworking members. Over time, the accepted brethren—mostly wealthy aristocrats, or tradesmen—became dominant, and the real masons dropped out. The problem with this scenario is that no one can really say how, when, or why it happened. Why would rich men want to pretend to be common workmen? And why would guilds admit a bunch of dilettantes?
- ◆ Over time, there have been about 20 Masonic rites. The best known are the Scottish Rite and the York Rite. Others include the Egyptian Rite of Memphis-Misraim. There also are—or were—French, Mexican, and Swedenborgian rites. Among the things they have in common is that they are open only to Master—that is, third-degree—Masons. But the rites aren't under the authority of any grand lodge. Thus, the higher rites can pretty much do and believe whatever they want. The number of additional degrees offered by the rites varies widely.

## Origins of Freemasonry

- ◆ The history of modern Freemasonry begins in 1717 in London. It started with the creation of the United Grand Lodge of England, which grew out of four existing lodges and steadily expanded in England and abroad. By 1800, more than 300 affiliated lodges existed in England alone. Separate grand lodges appeared in Ireland and Scotland. A franchise was born.
- ◆ But in the 1730s, the Grand Lodge was hit with schism. A dispute broke out between factions dubbed the Ancients and the Moderns. At issue was the importance of rituals and associated mystical traditions. The Moderns, influenced by the rationalism of the Enlightenment, wanted to chuck ritualism. The Ancient purists were determined to preserve it. The underlying question was whether Freemasonry was to be a social (i.e., political and philosophical) order or a mystical-religious one. The same schism hit American colonial lodges.

- ◆ The Ancient and Modern rift finally healed in 1813. The Moderns yielded on the rituals, and the Ancients became more tolerant of politics. Even earlier, in 1799, they were forced to work together to avoid being banned under the British Parliament's new Unlawful Societies Act.
- ◆ Fearing that secret societies were being used to spread French revolutionary ideas and to shelter spies, the government proposed to quash all societies requiring a secret oath. Groups like the prorevolutionary London Corresponding Society and the Society of United Irishmen were banned. But the Freemasons received an exemption so long as they maintained records of their members. That says a lot about the prestige and influence they'd attained, though it isn't surprising considering that members of the royal family were initiates.
- ◆ If Freemasonry went public in 1717, it certainly didn't start then. Speculative Freemasonry had been slowly evolving for at least 300 years. The 18th-century grand lodges grew out of older ones, supposedly "meeting from time immemorial."
- ◆ The 18th-century lodges based their rituals and rules on a collection of documents called the Old Charges, most of which date to the 15th century. The oldest—the Regius, or Halliwell, manuscript—may go back to 1390. It invokes the Greco-Egyptian mathematician Euclid, who lived around 300 BC. Euclid, the story goes, "counterfeited geometry" and thereby invented Freemasonry. Of course, how or why Euclid did that, or what "counterfeit geometry" was, is left a mystery.
- ◆ One of the earliest-known Masonic documents is the Cooke manuscript from 1450. It also mentions Euclid, but brings in King Solomon and pushes things all the way back to Adam. The Dowland manuscript from the mid-1500s elaborates the connection to Solomon's Temple and its legendary Master Mason, Hiram Abiff, whose death—at the hands of three "unworthy apprentices"—became a centerpiece in Masonic mythology.

Clearly, no one had any real idea when and how Freemasonry began. The blank canvas made it possible to paint in almost anything.

- ◆ British Freemasonry would go on to become the secret society of the establishment. In England, 300 lodges grew to 1,000 by the 1860s, 2,000 by the 1880s, and 3,000 by the start of the 20th century. Hundreds more sprouted

throughout the empire. The poet laureate of British imperialism, Rudyard Kipling, a Mason, popularized the brotherhood in his writing. Yet the estimated 250,000 British Freemasons in 1900 were a small fraction of a population of almost 40 million people in Great Britain and were downright insignificant among a population of nearly 400 million people in the British Empire.



Rudyard Kipling

## Political Involvement

- ◆ The Grand Lodge of England was always picky about who, and what, it regarded as legitimate. Masonic bodies like the Scottish Rite were branded “irregular” or “clandestine” and tended to attract dissidents, both moral and political.
- ◆ While politics was officially forbidden within the lodge, it was practically impossible to keep out. Masonic lodges, remember, were selective; a single dissenting vote could blackball a candidate. The frequent result was a lodge full of men sharing more-or-less common views—and all sworn to secrecy.
- ◆ Connections formed inside the lodge could take on a different dimension outside of it. Simply put, Masonic lodges were like petri dishes for political conspiracy. This was most obvious in French Freemasonry and the continental lodges it spawned and influenced.
- ◆ Even French Freemasonry was of English origin. The first lodge was set up by British merchants in Dunkirk in 1721. In 1733, a Grande Loge de France was formed. It, too, was mostly English-speaking and an extension of the Grand Lodge of England.
- ◆ Forty years later, however, the French Masons formed a new grand lodge, the Grand Orient de France. It was strongly influenced by the radical ideas of the Enlightenment. While English Freemasonry became a mainstay of the social order, the Grand Orient became an incubator of revolutionary sentiments. It passed this radical flavor on to lodges in Italy, Germany, Turkey, and Russia.

Fears that Freemasonry nurtured and encouraged dangerous ideas—while exaggerated—weren't baseless. And no one looked on the Freemasons with greater displeasure than the papacy. In 1738, Pope Clement XII issued the first edict against Freemasonry.

### Questions to Consider

1. In the absence of any concrete evidence, why are so many Masons determined to see a connection between their fraternity and the Knights Templar?
2. What explains Freemasonry's success both as a secret-society franchise and as a template for other orders?

# 14

## Ireland's Secret War *for Independence*



**A**s in the American and French Revolutions, secret societies were no minor sideshow in the Irish struggle for freedom. They were at the heart of it. And despite innumerable glorious failures, Irish independence would never have been achieved without them.

## Bloody Sunday

- ◆ On the evening of November 20, 1920, seven men met in the basement of a young women's school known as St. Ita's College in central Dublin. They came to plot murder—not one, but many. At their head was the director of intelligence and chief strategist of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Michael Collins. With him were hand-picked assassins dubbed the Twelve Apostles, or the Squad.
- ◆ Agents inside the British administration, plus a small army of barmen, cabbies, and maids, had provided the IRA with information on the addresses and habits of the intended victims. The question was only how many victims there would be. About 20 were selected. The attacks would be at nine o'clock the following morning. It would afterward be known as Bloody Sunday.
- ◆ The IRA was a tightly organized secret society battling the greatest power on Earth, the British Empire. Collins didn't have better arms or superior manpower. He knew he could succeed only by out-secreting—and out-conspiring—his enemy.
- ◆ The Squad itself was a specialized cell within the larger one. Its members were carefully selected and sworn to absolute loyalty. The main objective of the coming attacks was to quash a rival secret group run out of Dublin Castle, the seat of British power in Ireland. Known as D Branch, the rival group was referred to by Collins's men as the Murder Gang. It was a select group of about 20 British officers specially trained by Scotland Yard and MI5 and sent to Ireland to find and liquidate IRA members. For Collins and his men, it was kill or be killed.
- ◆ D Branch members lived as civilians, often with wives and families in tow. They resided in hotels and boarding houses scattered throughout the city. To carry out Bloody Sunday, Collins organized teams to execute simultaneous attacks

at 10 locations. There were 30 to 40 gunmen in all, including 14 members of the Squad.

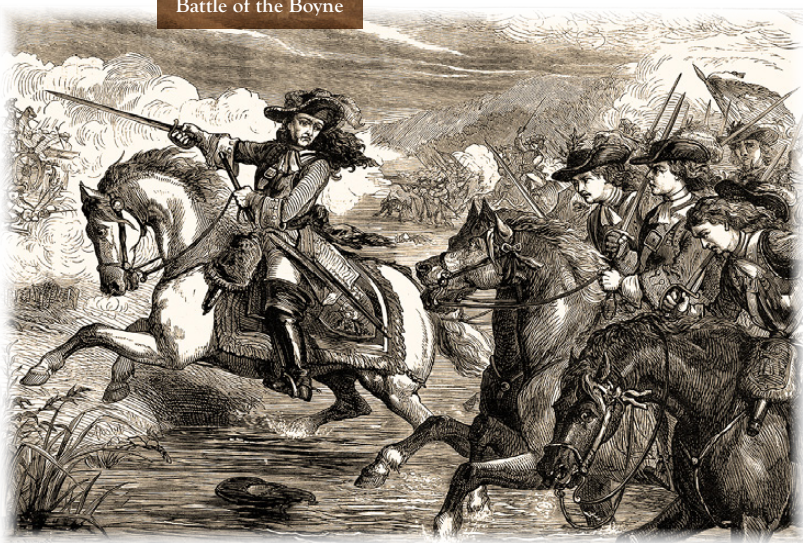
- ◆ The next morning, when the clock struck nine, an IRA team led by Vincent Byrne forced a terrified maid at 38 Upper Mount Street to point out the rooms of Capt. George Bennett and Lt. Peter Ames. Taken half asleep, the officers were lined up, ordered to face a wall, and shot in the back of the head. At the same time, at 22 Lower Mount Street, a team under Tom Keogh gunned down Lt. Henry Angliss as he reached for his gun.
- ◆ At the Gresham Hotel on O'Connell Street, an IRA trio dressed as British soldiers shot Capt. Patrick McCormick and Lt. Leonard Wilde as they opened their door. The biggest single slaughter occurred at 28 Pembroke Street, where a team under Michael O'Flanagan first killed Maj. Charles Dowling and Capt. Leonard Price and then turned their pistols on Lt. Col. Hugh Montgomery and Capt. Brian Keenlyside. At 117 Morehampton Road, gunmen killed Lt. Donald Maclean and the suspected informer T. H. Smith.
- ◆ Similar scenes played out elsewhere. By 10 o'clock, 19 men had been shot, 14 fatally. A 15th, Lt. Col. Hugh Montgomery, later died of his wounds.
- ◆ Some of Collins's targets slipped away or weren't at home. Of the dead, only about half were actually intelligence officers. Some were just at the wrong place at the same time. At least seven of the D Branch members escaped altogether. Still, the day's bloodshed wasn't over. As word of the shootings spread, so did a desire for revenge. Shortly after 3:00 p.m., a force of British auxiliaries, known as the Black and Tans, stormed into Croke Park, where thousands of spectators were watching a football match. Firing indiscriminately, they killed 14 people and wounded at least 60.
- ◆ The Murder Gang would soon reform and was never again penetrated by the IRA. But Bloody Sunday was a critical psychological victory for the Irish rebels. It showcased their cunning and ruthlessness and highlighted British vulnerability. Moreover, the Croke Park massacre cost the British any claim to moral superiority.
- ◆ Some six months later, reluctant British politicians, including Winston Churchill, accepted a truce. That led to a December 1921 treaty creating the Irish Free State (Northern Ireland had been partitioned a year earlier).

Bloody Sunday wasn't an end or a beginning. It was an episode in a struggle that had begun centuries before and would continue for decades more. It's still not over today. And it wasn't the only episode in which secret societies played a role.

## Historical Background

- ◆ English rule in Ireland dates back to the 12th century, when English kings began calling themselves lords of Ireland. In 1542, Henry VIII took the title of king of Ireland.
- ◆ Another turning point was a bloody period of war and rebellion in the 17th century. Almost a third of Ireland's population perished. The native Irish nobility was decimated and dispossessed. In its place rose the Protestant Ascendancy.
- ◆ The dominance of the Protestant land-owning elite over the Catholic population was sealed by the 1690 Battle of the Boyne. The Catholic majority was mostly reduced to impoverished peasantry and subjected to harsh penal laws.

Battle of the Boyne





- ◆ There was resistance, but it had to be clandestine. And that called for secret societies. In the mid-18th century came the Whiteboys, who attacked landlord agents and tax collectors. But they dreamed of a “tumultuous rising” to overthrow the Protestant elite.
- ◆ In the 1780s, Northern Ireland saw the rise of the Catholic Defenders and their Protestant enemies: the Peep o’ Day Boys. These were oath-bound secret orders that mimicked the Freemasons. In 1795, this rivalry led to a pitched battle won by the Protestants. The same year, the Peep o’ Days morphed into the Loyal Orange Institution, or Orange Order. Again modeled on the Freemasons, the Orangemen swore to uphold the Protestant Ascendancy.
- ◆ In 1791, a new secret society known as the Society of United Irishmen appeared in Belfast. It was different because it included Catholics and dissident Protestants alike. In 1793, United Irishmen adopted oaths and passwords to become a true secret society. Then they went underground.
- ◆ Not coincidentally, Britain went to war with revolutionary France that same year. Believing that “England’s difficulty was Ireland’s opportunity,” the United Irishmen opened secret negotiations with Paris. In 1796, a plan to land 14,000 French troops in Ireland fizzled. But London responded with martial law.
- ◆ The United Irishmen expanded to an estimated 200,000 members. Things came to a head in 1798, later dubbed the Year of the French. Led by the Protestant Irish revolutionary Wolfe Tone, the United Irishmen launched an uncoordinated rebellion. However, betrayed by informers, a plan to seize Dublin failed. Hoped-for French intervention arrived too little, too late.
- ◆ Piecemeal rural uprisings went on for months. All were snuffed out. Tone was captured by the British and sentenced to hang. But he never made it to the gallows. Depending on the story, he either slit his own throat or was murdered by his jailers.
- ◆ In 1801, things got worse. A new Act of Union abolished the Irish parliament, the last vestige of autonomy. But the secret societies didn’t give up. The United Irishmen reformed as rural oath-bound lodges with names like the Fraternal Society and the Sons of the Shamrock, collectively called Ribbon Men.
- ◆ The Ribbon Men conducted a low-level guerrilla war against landlords, officials, and, above all, the Protestant Orange Order. In 1829, the British

Parliament repealed the anti-Catholic laws, but the Protestant Ascendancy clung to power.

## The New Century

- ◆ Setbacks throughout the 19th century left Irish secret societies thwarted, divided, and demoralized. But they weren't giving up. In 1914, another difficulty for England offered them yet another opportunity. That, of course, was World War I.
- ◆ Just before war broke out, Ireland was gripped by a fresh political crisis, setting the stage for all that followed. In September 1914, the British Parliament approved a Home Rule law for Ireland that remained inoperative for the duration of World War I. It would have established a separate Irish parliament to handle internal affairs, while Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom. But a restored Irish parliament was bound to be controlled by the Catholic majority. That especially alarmed the Orange Order.
- ◆ If put into effect, Home Rule would have destroyed the last vestiges of the Protestant Ascendancy. In response, Orangemen formed the Ulster Volunteers, a 100,000-strong militia determined to resist Home Rule by force. In turn, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, backed by the Ancient Order of Hibernians, formed the Irish Volunteers. They claimed up to 200,000 members.
- ◆ Most British officers in Ireland were Protestants, and many were members of the Orange Order. In March 1914, nearly 100 officers of the Irish garrison threatened to resign and join the Ulster Volunteers. Loyalty to faith and lodge trumped loyalty to king and country. Civil war loomed. The crisis was only averted by the outbreak of the European war. Home Rule passed, but the British government decided to suspend it for the duration. This convinced wavering nationalists that London would never surrender control.
- ◆ Elections were held in Ireland in December 1918. The Sinn Féin party—the legal political wing of the Irish Republican Brotherhood—swept to victory. In January 1919, nationalist

*A movement based on secret societies is hard to destroy.*

militants, including Michael Collins, proclaimed Irish independence. The War of Independence was on.

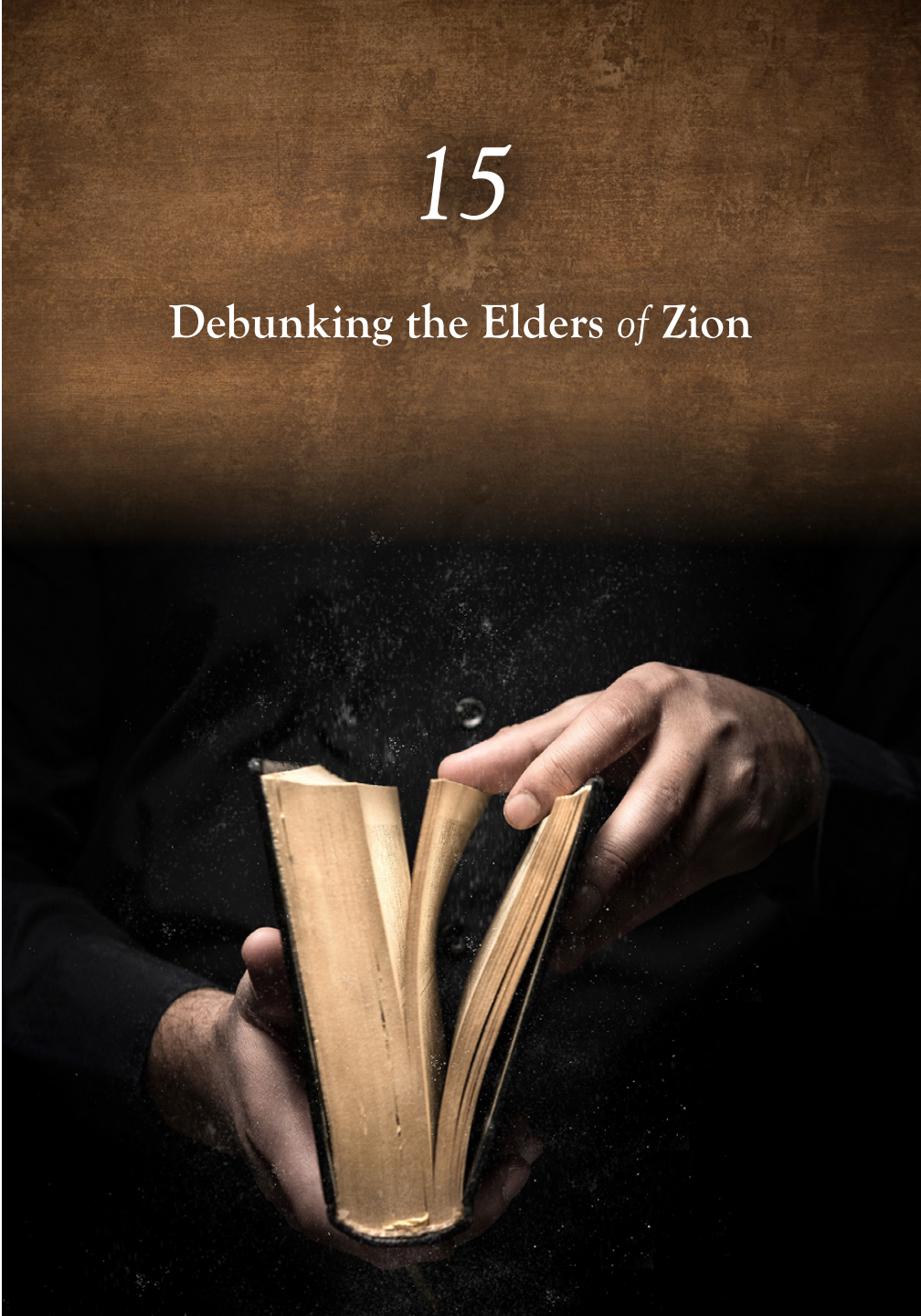
- ◆ From past history, Collins drew important lessons. The bane of Irish nationalism had been factionalism and betrayal. Thus, as the IRA's adjutant general and director of intelligence, he demanded unquestioned loyalty and obedience. Collins organized the Squad to eliminate informers in IRA ranks first. He avoided pitched battles. By operating the IRA not as an army but as an armed secret society, Collins frustrated and stymied the might of the British Empire.
- ◆ A truce led to the proclamation of the Irish Free State in early 1922. This didn't secure full independence or Irish unity. While the Free State had internal autonomy, it was still a dominion of the British crown. Members of the Irish parliament had to swear an oath of fidelity to the king. Worse, to many, had been the separation of predominantly Protestant Ulster into a separate Northern Ireland, still attached to Britain.
- ◆ Collins argued that these compromises—hateful as they were—gave Ireland “the freedom to attain freedom.” Others rejected the treaty and vowed to keep fighting. The fledgling Irish state was plunged into civil war. IRA brothers became enemies.
- ◆ In August 1922, Michael Collins was killed in an ambush by anti-treaty forces. In the long run, though, he was proved right.
- ◆ In the 1930s, the Irish Free State became the Republic of Ireland, and in 1949, it threw off the last ties to the United Kingdom. To die-hard nationalists, however, the job was unfinished. An underground IRA, bent on unification, maintained its secret existence. Before and during World War II, IRA factions aligned themselves with the Soviet Union and German Nazis to continue the struggle against England.
- ◆ In the 1960s, a new generation—calling itself the Provisional Irish Republican Army—launched the so-called Troubles. For 30 years, IRA violence—and retaliation by the British Army and the Orange-backed Ulster Defence Association—kept Northern Island in a state of war. The Troubles also spawned a new terrorist bombing campaign in England. The Good Friday peace agreement of 1998 officially ended the Troubles. Nevertheless, a faction calling itself the Real IRA is still active today.

## Questions to Consider

1. Why has it been said that Irish rebels were their own worst enemies?
2. What's the Royal Black Institution, and how is it connected to the Orange Order?

15

Debunking the Elders *of* Zion



A secret society called the Elders of Zion never existed. But the spurious document that invented it—the so-called *Protocols*—does exist. It has been responsible for incalculable harm in the past, and it still is. The story of the *Protocols* is a story full of lies, deception, and, of course, secret societies.

## Uncertain Origins

- ◆ Picture a semi-dark room in Paris. The year is 1904 or 1905. Two men peer at papers laid out on a small table. One copies from one of the documents to another. The second watches with satisfaction. The writer is Matvei Golovinsky, an employee of the Russian secret police, the Okhranka. The other is his boss, Peter Rachkovsky, who oversees the Okhranka's foreign operations.
- ◆ The document Golovinsky is copying from is an 1864 political tract titled *The Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu*. The document he's creating is the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Rachkovsky will soon put the finished product in the hands of the religious fanatic Sergei Nilus, who will publish it in his 1905 book *The Great in the Small*. The rest, as they say, is history.
- ◆ Except the story isn't true. It never happened. The true origins of perhaps the most pernicious document in modern history remains a mystery. The *Protocols* purport to be the minutes of a Jewish secret society—the Elders of Zion—bent on world domination. Anti-Semitism was nothing new; it had been around for centuries. But the *Protocols* subtly and critically changed this prejudice.
- ◆ While Jews had long been persecuted for not being Christians, they generally weren't seen as irredeemable or inhuman. The *Protocols* framed Jews as predatory monsters scheming to enslave the rest of humanity. Jews weren't seen as a nuisance but were considered a threat—one that could only be removed by extermination.
- ◆ The *Protocols* were created somewhere, by someone. The “Okhranka did it” theory of the *Protocols'* origins was popularized by the late Norman Cohn in his 1967 book *Warrant for Genocide*. Cohn believed the *Protocols* were instrumental in preparing and justifying the Holocaust. But Cohn inadvertently relied on some very unreliable sources. The same was true of researchers who simply repeated what had been picked up from many of the same dubious sources. A lie ended up being explained with more lies.

- ◆ Doubts about the Okhranka's role in the *Protocols* arose early on. The Russian scholar Vladimir Burtsev was a revolutionary and staunch critic of the tsarist secret police. Nevertheless, investigation convinced Burtsev the Okhranka had nothing to do with it. Burtsev determined that neither Rachkovsky nor Golovinsky were even in Paris at the time. And Rachkovsky had been dismissed from Okhranka service in 1902. So why would he have been concocting the *Protocols* for that agency two years later?
- ◆ More recently, Italian researcher Cesare De Michelis found that the first version of *Protocols* actually appeared in 1903, not 1905. It appeared in a small Saint Petersburg paper called *Znamya*, which was a mouthpiece for violently anti-Semitic groups known as the Black Hundreds. Even the common portrait of the *Protocols*' supposed publisher, Sergei Nilus, is wrong: He wasn't a monk, nor a bearded mystic, nor a "strange hermit." And the *Protocols* he published in 1905 formed only a chapter of his book.
- ◆ About 40 percent of the *Protocols* are indeed lifted from *The Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu*, written in the late 19th century by the Frenchman Maurice Joly. But it's not simple cut-and-paste plagiarism. More than 300 separate bits and pieces of Joly's work are scattered unevenly throughout the document. Joly wrote *The Dialogue* as a personal attack on Napoleon III.
- ◆ Joly's friend and mentor was his fellow lawyer Adolphe Crémieux. The two shared an abiding hatred for Napoleon III. But they later fell out, and Crémieux went on to play an important part in the Third Republic. Crémieux was Jewish and was head of France's Jewish organization, the Alliance Israélite Universelle. Crémieux was also a Freemason; in fact, he was master of the Grand Orient lodge, France's largest Masonic body. If that wasn't enough, Crémieux was simultaneously head of the Masonic



Maurice Joly

Scottish Rite in France and organized a Scottish Rite “supreme council” in Switzerland.

Something often ignored or glossed over in discussion of the *Protocols* is that they don't just describe a Jewish conspiracy, but a Judeo-Masonic one. The original 1903 version is titled *The Protocols of the Sessions of the “World Alliance of Freemasons and of the Sages of Zion,”* and Masonic lodges are described as the main front for the Elders' secret society.

## A Wider Audience

- ◆ Before 1919, the *Protocols* were strictly a Russian phenomenon, and a minor one. But in the wake of revolution and civil war, 2 million refugees fled Russia for Europe, America, and the Far East. As a virus spreads, so did the *Protocols*.
- ◆ The first American version appeared in 1919, in the Philadelphia newspaper the *Public Ledger*, under the title “The Red Bible.” The author, Carl Ackerman, was a well-known journalist. But Ackerman removed every mention of Jews and replaced them with Bolsheviks, or Reds. He thus converted a piece of anti-Semitic propaganda into an anti-Communist one.
- ◆ In 1920, two English editions of the *Protocols* appeared in the United States and a third in Britain. Others sprouted in France, Germany, Poland, Austria, and Italy. These did not exclude mention of Jews. A man with a hand in the production of both American versions was the Russian refugee Boris Brasol, who was also a member of the Black Hundreds, the same group behind the paper that first published the *Protocols*.
- ◆ Years later, Brasol advocated exploiting the kidnap-murder of American aviator Charles Lindbergh's son as another Jewish ritual killing. Oddly, when quizzed about his personal opinion of the *Protocols*, Brasol confessed that he was “rather inclined to think they are a forgery.” Nevertheless, for years he was their tireless promoter.
- ◆ Brasol's greatest contribution to the spread of the *Protocols* was the influence he exerted on American automaker Henry Ford, who printed and disseminated half a million copies of it. Ford also published a 91-article series aiming to expose the “Jewish menace” at home and abroad. While these went well beyond the



scope of the original *Protocols*, Ford's series rested on the same notion of global Jewish conspiracy.

- ◆ In 1921, editors of the Jewish weekly *The American Hebrew* thought they'd found an answer to the quandary. A Russian-born Polish aristocrat, Catherine Radziwiłł, claimed that she'd seen the original *Protocols* manuscript in Paris in 1904 or 1905 in the hands of Rachkovsky and Golovinsky, as well as a third Okhranka agent named Ivan Manasevich-Manuilov. Radziwiłł, however, was a con artist and convicted forger who made a career out of peddling gossip and lies. Radziwiłł hadn't even been in Paris at the time.
- ◆ Catherine Radziwiłł's bogus story got support from a seemingly independent source: French nobleman Alexandre du Chayla. In May 1921, du Chayla wrote an article for the Parisian Jewish newspaper the *Tribune Juive* claiming that Russian "religious fanatic" Sergei Nilus showed him the original French draft of the *Protocols* when both were residing in a Russian monastery in 1909.
- ◆ Nilus purportedly claimed to have gotten it from a female friend, and she supposedly got it from Rachkovsky, who stole it from the archives of the French Freemasons. Du Chayla's description of this manuscript matches Radziwiłł's. Of course, he could easily have gotten that by reading Radziwiłł's account—which he did. About the only factual element in du Chayla's story is that he and Nilus were at the monastery around the same time.
- ◆ In August 1921, London *Times* journalist Philip Graves landed a solid blow against the *Protocols*. He finally discovered the connection to Maurice Joly's *Dialogue*. Just a year earlier, *The Times* had run a piece about the *Protocols* that seemed to validate the manuscript, described as "a disturbing pamphlet." Graves didn't believe it and went to Constantinople, then full of Russian refugees, to investigate. He met a former Russian naval officer, staunch monarchist, and former intelligence officer named Mikhail Raslovlev, who showed him the numerous similarities between the *Protocols* and *The Dialogue*.

One candidate for the *Protocols*' creation is Maurice Joly, the same man who penned *The Dialogue*. In this version of the story, Joly plagiarized himself. More accurately, he adapted his previous work for a new purpose: an attack on his former friend Adolphe Crémieux, one of France's most prominent Jews and Freemasons.

- ◆ Henry Ford, facing a series of libel suits and concerned that his anti-Semitism was hurting sales, abruptly issued a public apology in 1927. Nevertheless, other defenders of the *Protocols* kept up the fight. They argued—and still do—that the similarities between *The Dialogue* and the *Protocols* exist only because Joly plagiarized the *Protocols*, and not the other way around. In this scenario, the *Protocols*—or some common source of both documents—predate the 1864 *Dialogue*.

## The *Protocols* on Trial

- ◆ A 1934 court case in Switzerland finally offered the chance to drive a stake through the heart of the *Protocols*. Adolf Hitler had come to power in Germany, and the Nazi regime launched a massive propaganda campaign at home and abroad. The recycled *Protocols* were part of it.
- ◆ In Switzerland, German agents and Nazi sympathizers hawked a version titled the *Zionist Protocols*. In response, the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities insisted that anti-obscenity charges be brought against the book's distributors. The argument was that the *Protocols*, like pornography, posed a threat to the moral health of both reader and society. It was a shaky argument, but a court in Bern, Switzerland, agreed to hear it.
- ◆ The defense maintained that the *Protocols* were true because they could not be proven false. The court heard 16 witnesses. The star witness was du Chayla, who simply repeated his story that the Russian Okhranka was behind the whole thing. What the court didn't hear was that he demanded—and received—4,000 Swiss Francs for his testimony. Du Chayla by now had a reputation as a swindler, and some again suspected that he might be acting as yet another Soviet agent.
- ◆ In the spring of 1935, the Swiss court heard from three more experts. Two affirmed the *Protocols* as a forgery, while the third said it was possible that they were authentic. The court handed down a verdict in favor of the plaintiffs. Two of the four defendants were acquitted, however, and the other two received token fines.

Perhaps the best argument against the *Protocols'* authenticity is that it simply makes no sense for such a document to exist. No secret society worth the name would craft a detailed description of its nefarious plan and then simply let it fall into the wrong hands.

- ◆ In 1937, an appeals court overturned the verdict because the anti-obscenity statute did not constitute a legal basis for prosecution. The legitimacy of the *Protocols* thus returned to a kind of legal limbo, where it has remained ever since.

### Questions to Consider

1. Why do you think the *Protocols* document has been so damaging over time?
2. What do you think of the theory that *The Dialogue* and the *Protocols* were basically crafted by the same person, Maurice Joly?

# 16

## Mafia! Criminal Secret Societies



**D**o criminal gangs really qualify as secret societies? An argument can be made that they do. They're selective in membership and require oaths and initiations, and members usually advance through grades or ranks. Most importantly, what they do and how they do it are matters of intense secrecy. Once you're in, there's usually no getting out—not alive, anyway. With these organizations, oaths of loyalty and silence aren't mere formalities.

## The Mafia

- ◆ The Mafia is the most famous criminal secret society. In fact, the term *Mafia* has become generic for just about any organized crime group: the Russian Mafia, Irish Mafia, Mexican Mafia, and so on. But as an actual Sicilian criminal society, the Mafia never existed; no member of the society ever called it by that name. To the initiated—the made men—it was simply La Cosa Nostra: “Our Thing.” Like so many secret societies, its origins are lost in time.
- ◆ Nineteenth-century Sicily was the scene of a long-standing struggle between angry peasants and ruthless landowners. The new Italian government tried to impose its control over both. The landlords employed armed henchmen to intimidate the peasants, and the peasants responded by forming secret societies to carry out intimidation of their own.
- ◆ In the 1880s, many of the peasant societies became known as the Fasci Siciliani—half Socialist organization, half secret society. Here, gangsterism rubbed elbows with revolutionary ideology. One young, illiterate gangster to join the Fasci was Vito Cascioferro from Palermo. As Don Vito, he became an important figure in the Sicilian Mafia and, according to some, the man who established it in America.
- ◆ When Italian authorities cracked down on the Fasci Siciliani, Don Vito emigrated to New York, where he modernized the extortion racket. Instead

The term *Mafia* derives from *mafiusu*, a Sicilian word of uncertain origin. It basically means “guts” or “bravado.” From that, toughs, or people who wanted to be tough, started calling themselves *mafiosi*. As a label representative of organized crime, it first came into focus in the 1860s, when officials of the newly created Kingdom of Italy started to compile and analyze crime statistics.

of directing a one-time squeeze on prominent citizens for large amounts of money, he offered protection on an easy installment plan. The victims weren't driven out of business, and regular payments gave the organization a steady income.

- ◆ Don Vito's power seemed unassailable. He was arrested 69 times but was never convicted. No one dared—or lived—to testify against him. But he met his nemesis in Benito Mussolini. The Fascist dictator was determined to smash the Mafia. Don Vito was arrested in 1926 and convicted of a single count of murder. It was, Don Vito claimed, the one crime of which he was accused that he didn't commit. He died in prison of malnutrition in 1943.
- ◆ Much of what made Don Vito and other mafiosi such tough nuts to crack was their rigid adherence to *omertà*, the code of silence. *Omertà* was the soul of the organization. A mafiosi never talked and never asked for mercy. So long as *omertà* was held sacred, the society had an almost impenetrable firewall.
- ◆ When it was broken, as eventually happened, the Mafia's decline quickly followed. Starting with the 1963 testimony of Joseph Valachi—a member of the Genovese crime family—the downfall of most American Mafia kingpins has been someone turning rat.
- ◆ By the 1930s, American organized crime was mostly a fusion of Italian and Jewish mobs and a few Irish ones. The two figures most often associated with it are Charles “Lucky” Luciano and Meyer Lansky. But the guy who really envisioned running crime like a business, with assigned territories and a corporate commission to settle disputes, was Arnold Rothstein. Today, Rothstein is probably best known as the gambler who supposedly fixed the 1919 World Series.
- ◆ Rothstein embodied the maxim that a smart man with a pencil can steal more than a thug with gun. Unlike Don Vito, Rothstein didn't grow up in poverty. He was the son of a wealthy and respected businessman. His older brother studied to become a rabbi. Arnold had no use for such things.
- ◆ Able to make lightning-fast calculations in his head, by 1910 Rothstein had made a splash on the New York gambling scene. And that was just the start. He used money to buy influence, and influence to make more money. His influence reached from Manhattan's street gangs all the way up to Tammany Hall.

- ◆ Rothstein immediately realized what a gift Prohibition was for the underworld. But he also saw a bright future for other illegal commodities, including narcotics. Rothstein played a part in setting up one of the first international drug operations. From top to bottom, it was run by secret societies, including Chinese Tongs, German militarists, Japanese Black Dragons, and even the Soviet secret police.

## Thuggee

- ◆ India in the early 1800s was the setting for a secret society straight out of a horror movie. Picture this: It's evening along a country road in Bengal. A group of travelers, maybe 50 in all, settles down for the night. There are bandits on the roads, so everyone travels in numbers. Most are merchants or pilgrims, and many carry money and valuables. In the wee hours of the morning, responding to a signal only they understand, some of the men rise from their beds, moving stealthily in groups of three.
- ◆ Creeping up on a sleeper, two assailants pin him to the ground while the third, taking a long cloth belt from his waist, silently strangles the victim. This is repeated methodically throughout the camp until everyone except the attackers is dead. Anyone able to make a run for it is killed by pickets specially deployed for that contingency. The bodies, stripped of valuables, are buried in a secluded spot nearby. What just happened was a premeditated attack by members of a criminal secret society called Phansigar, or, more commonly, Thuggee.
- ◆ Thuggee had been around since at least the 14th century. Over the centuries, the dark brotherhood may have murdered between half a million and a million people. In 1830 alone, they're estimated to have killed 50,000. One Thug strangler admitted to 900 murders over 40 years. This was kept hidden by strict rules of secrecy.
- ◆ Admission to Thuggee was generally hereditary, and a Thug father usually initiated only one of his sons into the cult. Wives usually had no idea what their husbands really did for a living. Thugs lived as respected members of their communities. They

*Thuggee is the origin of the English term thug. But the original Thugs were quite different from the image of the gangster we imagine today. The name comes from a Sanskrit word meaning "to cover or conceal."*

recognized and communicated with each other using secret signs and a secret language called Ramasee. They could plot murder right in front of their intended victims without anyone catching on.

- ◆ Thuggee was also a religious cult. Brothers were devotees of the Hindu goddess Kali, or at least her darker aspects. Their victims were sacrifices to Kali, and she rewarded her faithful by allowing them to keep the loot. She also commanded that they shed no blood. And she forbade the killing of women and children unless unavoidable. Like many criminals, Thugs were extremely superstitious. They paid great attention to signs and omens. The hoot of an owl—a bad sign—might make them call off an attack.
- ◆ Thuggee was also remarkable for transcending the rigid lines of caste and religion. Although Kali was a Hindu goddess, roughly one-third of Thugs were Muslims. They firmly believed that Kali controlled their fate in this world, even as they expected Allah to forgive them in the next.
- ◆ The demise of Thuggee began in the 1820s. British authorities appointed a former army officer, William Sleeman, to get to the bottom of reported disappearances. Sleeman carefully plotted the times and places of Thug attacks, predicted where new ones would occur, and placed undercover agents among travelers. He was thus able to prevent assaults and, more importantly, capture Thugs alive.
- ◆ While most refused to talk, others, deciding Kali had forsaken them, divulged what they knew. Between 1830 and 1870, Indian authorities captured at least 3,700 Thugs and gradually put the brotherhood out of business.

## Aryan Brotherhood

- ◆ In the 1960s, the state penal system in California produced another criminal society noted for exceptional murderousness and its platform of racist ideology: the Aryan Brotherhood, or the Brand. It began after California responded to changes in society by desegregating its prison system. Whites, blacks, and Hispanics who previously had been housed separately were now combined into a general population. By 1966, this set off a race war for protection and control of the internal drug, prostitution, and other rackets.



- ◆ The Aryan Brotherhood had roots in earlier criminal gangs, as suggested by its emblem: a swastika combined with a shamrock and the number 666—Irish symbolism mixed with Nazi-biker imagery mixed with a dash of the occult. The brotherhood would spread from San Quentin to become a nationwide organization with 15,000 to 20,000 members in and out of custody. Real power was held by an inner circle of some 300, most of them lifer inmates.
- ◆ Because the Aryan Brotherhood was relatively few in number, it was more reliant on violence. A blood oath bound members for life—or else. Brothers developed a reputation for murderously attacking any perceived enemy, whether or not members of a rival gang. The Aryans' reputation for violence eventually won them allies. They collaborated with the Mexican Mafia (La Eme) and their allies, the Sinaloa Cartel. Of course, that made the Brand the enemies of La Eme's Hispanic rivals, La Nuestra Familia.
- ◆ Proficient in murder, Aryans were hired as hit men for other gangs. By the 1990s, the Aryan Brotherhood was estimated to be responsible for one-quarter of prison homicides. But the brotherhood could also offer protection. Charles Manson and Mafia boss John Gotti both benefited from the Aryans' help on the inside.

### Questions to Consider

1. Who do you think killed Arnold Rothstein?
2. Besides the Thuggee cult, what else was the goddess Kali connected to?

# 17

## Aleister Crowley, Occultism, *and* Espionage

Aleister Crowley



**D**ubbed by some “the wickedest man in the world,” Aleister Crowley preferred to call himself the Great Beast 666. To some, he was a faker and con man; to others, he was a spiritual master and misunderstood genius. Undoubtedly the most influential occultist of the 20th century, Crowley was also something else: a spy. As such, he exemplifies the murky connections between secret societies, occultism, and espionage.

## Aleister Crowley

- ◆ On Halloween 1914, the British ocean liner *Lusitania* docked in New York City. A tall, well-dressed man of around 40 with an athletic body going to flab and a slight limp was among the disembarking passengers. Under his hat was a single, upright forelock on an otherwise cleanly shaved head. His hands were large and adorned with rings. The ship’s manifest identified him as Edward Alexander Crowley, but he is better known as Aleister Crowley.
- ◆ Over the next five years, Crowley took lots of drugs, had lots of sex, summoned spirits, and had time left over to write, paint, and travel. He spent most of his time in New York but roamed the United States. In 1919, he confided: “I was employed by the Secret Service, my main object being to bring America into the war.” His method, he said, was “to get the Germans to make asses of themselves by increasing their frightfulness until even the Americans kicked.”
- ◆ After the United States entered the war in April 1917, Crowley’s pro-German activities drew the attention of American authorities. Some brushed off his claims of working for the British government as “absurd.” But investigation revealed otherwise.
- ◆ In July 1918, the British consulate in New York reluctantly revealed that “Crowley was an employee of the British Government ... in this country on official business of which the British Consul ... has full cognizance.” Moreover, “the British Government was fully aware that Crowley was connected with this German propaganda and received money for writing anti-British articles.” In essence, Crowley was acting as an agent provocateur—an agent who gains the enemy’s confidence and influences them to commit illegal or self-defeating acts.
- ◆ Crowley is commonly regarded as a Satanist, though that’s highly debatable. He was entirely English and came from a well-to-do, fundamentalist Christian home. That inspired his desire to start a new religion. He cobbled his mystical

experiences and pet beliefs into something he dubbed Thelema, or “Will.” Others called it Crowleyanity. He dreamed it would push aside Christianity and usher in a new age of enlightenment.

- ◆ Crowley’s occultist career began when he joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1898. One leader of the Golden Dawn—the very man who initiated Crowley—was a British occultist named Samuel MacGregor Mathers, who was the close friend of a peculiar English peer named Lord Bertram Ashburnham, who operated an armed training camp on his estate. Mathers, Ashburnham, and other members of the Golden Dawn were neck-deep in a conspiracy to arm and finance a revolution in Spain. Once successful, they expected the new king, Don Carlos, to return the favor.
- ◆ It’s not hard to see why the British authorities wanted to know what was going on at those lodge meetings. The man they sent to find out was Aleister Crowley. With Mathers’s backing, Crowley wormed his way into the Spanish plot, which included smuggling a shipload of arms. Someone—probably Crowley—betrayed it.
- ◆ Crowley’s joining the Golden Dawn was like tossing a grenade into the room. His theatrical flamboyance ruffled feathers. He stirred up more trouble by introducing sex into some of their rituals. The result was an internal feud that all but destroyed the Golden Dawn. That probably suited Crowley’s employers just fine.
- ◆ Crowley again became involved 15 years later in New York. An important Irish nationalist known as Sir Roger Casement had just visited the city to negotiate a secret deal for German support of an uprising in Ireland. British intelligence caught wind and proceeded cautiously. America was a neutral country, and the Irish cause enjoyed wide support there.
- ◆ But the Brits knew a secret: Casement was a homosexual, and that offered a means to entrap and compromise him. Crowley was, or affected to be, bisexual. His ability to infiltrate the gay underworld made him ideal to dig up dirt on

The Golden Dawn was among the many esoteric societies that popped up like mushrooms in the 1880s. Its notable members included poet William Butler Yeats and occult scholar Arthur Edward Waite.

Casement—all unofficially, of course. If Crowley was exposed, London's hands would be clean.

- ◆ When Crowley sailed from England, the British believed that Casement was still in New York. But he'd quietly slipped away. Crowley arrived in Manhattan to find the plot was spoiled. He found other ways to be useful, however.
- ◆ On July 3, 1915, as the first rays of dawn reflected off the Hudson River, 10 people gathered on the 50th Street pier. Leading them was Crowley, acting as self-proclaimed “leader of Irish hope” and representative of the “Secret Revolutionary Committee of Public Safety of the Provisional Government of Ireland.” Of course, that was an organization that existed only in Crowley's imagination.
- ◆ The chief German propagandist in New York, George Sylvester Viereck, had already hired Crowley to write anti-British articles for his magazine, *The Fatherland*. Handily, Viereck was an aspiring occultist and a secret-society member with a fondness for drugs and orgies. Through him, Crowley gained the ear of the Propaganda Kabinett, a secret group that included German-American journalists and academics as well as German officials.
- ◆ Crowley bamboozled—or maybe even hypnotized—the Germans into believing that his study of the occult gave him insight into the mass psychology of the Americans and the British. The big topic of discussion was the ocean liner the *Lusitania*. The Germans knew the ship was being used to ferry war supplies from New York to Liverpool. That made it a military target, but the sticking point was the hundreds of innocent passengers on board. Would the propaganda benefit from sinking the *Lusitania* be offset by the negative publicity?
- ◆ Crowley argued no. The Propaganda Kabinett forwarded his opinion to Berlin, and on May 7, 1915, a German U-boat torpedoed the *Lusitania* off the coast of Ireland. More than 1,000 people perished. The United States wouldn't join the war for two more years, but Germany's reputation was now thoroughly blackened in the eyes of much of the American public.

## Occultism and Espionage

- ◆ Spy agencies are basically bureaucratic secret societies. Their aim is to acquire the secrets of others and conceal their own. They are selective in recruitment and bind members by oaths of silence. They prefer to operate outside of public

awareness and scrutiny. The pursuit of occult knowledge is quite similar. As Crowley put it, “investigation of spiritualism makes a capital-training ground for secret service work; one soon gets up to all the tricks.”

- ◆ Espionage has its own moral code. One British agent recalled being told at the time of his recruitment that “you mustn’t be afraid of forgery and you mustn’t be afraid of murder.” Crowley’s personal motto of “do what thou wilt” fit perfectly.
- ◆ While popular imagination connects occultism with the supernatural or diabolical, *occult* really just means “concealed.” An occultist seeks to reveal what is hidden and, as often as not, reconceal it. A cardinal rule in secret societies is that the knowledge such organizations offer isn’t for everyone. It’s for the elect, and part of the elect’s job is to keep it to himself.

Did Crowley exaggerate his influence? Probably, but that’s not to say he had none. Crowley’s story continued to World War II, when he was again called on to render secret service to king and country.

## Theosophy

- ◆ Russian-born Helena Blavatsky mixed Western occultism with elements of Hinduism and Buddhism to create an exotic system of spiritual enlightenment: Theosophy. She was inspired by her great-grandfather, a Freemason and Rosicrucian who possessed a library of rare and occult books. Blavatsky established the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875.

Blavatsky did much to popularize Hinduism and Buddhism in the West, and she is the mother of the New Age movement.

- ◆ Theosophy, or divine wisdom, sought to create a “universal syncretic religion.” Theosophists believe that spiritual evolution is guided by ascended masters, or mahatmas. Blavatsky gave them exotic names like Koot Humi and Master Morya and portrayed them as quasi-divine beings levitating somewhere in the Himalayas.
- ◆ Blavatsky claimed to channel the mahatmas by using her powers as a medium. She produced letters from them, apparently written in different hands. However, Blavatsky’s claims came under the scrutiny of the Society

for Psychological Research, which investigated claims of the paranormal and supernatural—especially mediums. In 1886, a researcher branded Blavatsky a fake and liar. He detailed how she'd concocted the mahatma letters and other evidence. Blavatsky's reputation never quite recovered, but most followers stuck by her.

- ◆ As it turns out, Blavatsky's masters weren't entirely fictional; invented names disguised real persons. For instance, her cofounder, Charles Sothoran, was a master, as was her great-grandfather. Another was the Italian nationalist, revolutionary, and Freemason Giuseppe Mazzini. The masters also included Indian nationalists and members of the revolutionary secret society known as the Carbonari.
- ◆ Theosophy was to be a stepping stone to a brotherhood of humanity—a new world order based on enlightened spiritual principles. But there wasn't anything democratic about it. The masters ruled, and everyone else obeyed.
- ◆ After Blavatsky died in 1891, the Theosophical Society splintered. The main faction ended up under Annie Besant, an Englishwoman of even more radical tendencies. Besant was a Fabian Socialist and a founder of Co-Freemasonry—the branch that initiated women. She was also a militant supporter of Indian nationalism. She gravitated to Communism in the 1920s.
- ◆ Winston Churchill's spy master, Desmond Morton, later concluded that “nearly all these theosophists and theosophical societies are connected in some way with Bolshevism, Indian revolutionaries and other unpleasant activities.” Aleister Crowley, as a secret servant of the crown, despised Besant. He damned her as a “shameless, nauseating fraud” and, worse, a member of the evil Black Brotherhood.
- ◆ A notable Theosophist is the Russian artist and explorer Nicholas Roerich, who, through his wife Helena the medium, claimed his own communication with the mahatmas. He also claimed to see a convergence between the ideals of Communism and Theosophy. Both aspired to create a new world order based on brotherhood.
- ◆ Roerich became a Soviet agent of influence. Roerich and his brand of Theosophy also spread their influence to America. During the 1920s, he cultivated a following among wealthy spiritual seekers in New York and other cities.

## Questions to Consider

1. Who dubbed Aleister Crowley the “wickedest man in the world”? Why?
2. Besides his devotion to Nicholas Roerich’s Theosophy, what other secret-society connections did Henry Wallace have?



# 18

## Red Octopus: The Communist International



In the United States in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the activities and membership of Communist secret societies were shrouded in mystery. But there is much we now know about Soviet espionage in America, the clandestine communities supporting such activities, and the events that led to their downfall and eventual dissolution.

## Secret Communists

- ◆ In the summer of 1922, something strange was happening around the sleepy lakeside village of Bridgman, Michigan. A large number of men and a few women had gathered at Karl Wulfskeel's resort out by the dunes. They claimed to be a "singing society." But there wasn't much singing to be heard. They rented the whole place and kept strictly to themselves. Still, a really nosy person might have noticed their nighttime gatherings in a wooded hollow.
- ◆ Numbering almost 50, the mysterious visitors talked and argued for hours, and not always in English. All the while, others furiously banged away at typewriters. The whole scene was bathed in yellow lantern glow. What almost no one would have guessed was that they were watching the secret convention of the American Communist Party—something that legally didn't exist.
- ◆ A year earlier, dogged by government harassment, the Communist Party had basically cloned itself. It created two parties with overlapping membership. The new Workers Party of America was spun off to conduct political activity according to the letter of the law. Meanwhile, the former party went underground to carry on preparations for a revolution. In this work, the American Reds were closely guided by the so-called Communist International, or Comintern, headquartered in Moscow.
- ◆ Two years prior, the Communists had pulled off an earlier secret convention at the same Wulfskeel resort and had since conducted two other clandestine gatherings in Upstate New York. The party's central committee—the inner sanctum—was confident in its rigorous security. The comrades traveled by different routes, repeatedly changing trains. Few even knew they were headed to Bridgman until they got there.
- ◆ At the lodge, no one could leave without permission, send any messages, or talk to the locals. Everyone had aliases, and no one asked real names. Any

incriminating papers were handed to the central committee, which either burned them or hid them in barrels out in the dunes.

- ◆ Who were these Communists hiding from? The answer was agents of the US government, especially the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Yet a government agent was sitting right in their midst. His codename was K-97, but to his party pals, he was known as Comrade Day.
- ◆ Comrade Day's real name was Francis Morrow. He'd started out as a party organizer in New Jersey. Disgusted by factional squabbling, he became a federal informant. Before reaching Bridgman, Morrow managed to get a message to Washington from his last stop, the nearby town of Saint Joseph.
- ◆ The bureau immediately dispatched one of its best agents, Jacob Spolansky, to track down the convention's precise location. On Sunday, August 20, Spolansky and another agent posed as vacationers and wandered onto Wulfskeel's property. Finding the guests less than talkative, Spolansky knew he'd found the right spot. He contacted the local sheriff and laid plans for a raid. But the appearance of outsiders spooked the Commies. They burned or buried their papers and began to slip away. By the time law enforcement raided the site on the morning of August 22, only 17 comrades remained.
- ◆ The arrests in Bridgman did little damage to the party or its leadership. What they did prove was that the Workers Party was nothing but a front and that the more underground party was fully controlled by the Soviet-led Comintern.

## The Comintern

- ◆ The Comintern had been formed in Moscow in March 1919 to pursue Vladimir Lenin's goal of world revolution. Lenin grandly predicted that through the Comintern, an international Soviet republic would be a reality by 1920. Things didn't go according to plan, but Lenin wasn't going to stop trying.
- ◆ During the 1920s and 1930s, the Comintern's master of propaganda was a German Communist named Willi Münzenberg, dubbed the Red Millionaire. Münzenberg became a media tycoon who controlled newspapers, magazines, film studios, publishing houses, and even orphanages. He created front organizations that abetted and concealed Communist activity.

- ◆ Münzenberg realized that control of media was key to effective propaganda. Using the Kremlin's money—lots of it—he built a “trust” of media outlets reaching all the way to America and even to the Far East.
- ◆ In 1921, Münzenberg set up shop in Berlin, where he formed the International Workers' Aid organization, whose official aim was to collect foreign aid for famine victims in Soviet Russia. But it also diverted some of those funds to propaganda. In the United States, Workers' Aid spun off another front, the Friends of Soviet Russia, which collected more than 1 million dollars for the cause.
- ◆ Münzenberg dubbed his fronts Innocents' Clubs. The less charitable called them dupes or useful idiots. Regardless, it was absolutely essential that such fellow travelers believed they were acting on their own initiative and not under the guidance of the Comintern.
- ◆ Nowhere did the Red Octopus spread its tentacles wider and deeper than in the United States. Prior to World War II, America possessed almost no domestic counterintelligence. In 1929, the American Communist Party emerged from the underground and reabsorbed the Workers Party. But along with its card-carrying comrades, the party also had secret members that were known only to the party's highest initiates.

The three pillars of Münzenberg's propaganda were anti-militarism, anti-imperialism, and anti-Fascism. By design, this attracted more than just Communists.

## Later Influence

- ◆ Party faithful—especially the secret faithful—provided ready and willing recruits for special tasks. Many became servants of the most secret society in international Communism, Soviet intelligence. Benjamin Gitlow, a prominent American Communist during the early 20th century, noted that the Comintern maintained “very close ties” with the Soviet secret services and assisted them in foreign countries.
- ◆ One example was Nicholas Dozenberg, a veteran Bolshevik and naturalized American citizen. He was recruited by the Soviet military intelligence organization, or GRU, in 1927. The GRU first sent him to Romania, where he set up the American Rumanian Film Corporation. After he returned to the

states, Dozenberg's company became a cover for other Soviet agents and the center of an ambitious scheme to pass counterfeit US currency. When that collapsed, Dozenberg got a new identity and headed to China. In 1939, the FBI finally caught up with him in Oregon, where he was quietly running another business.

- ◆ Stalin unceremoniously abolished the Comintern in 1943. This was partly a wartime gesture to his new American and British allies and partly because—for Stalin—the organization carried the stench of Trotskyism. But this did nothing to slow down Soviet intelligence and its infiltration of the US and British governments. Behind the mask of wartime Allied solidarity, Soviet clandestine activity actually accelerated.
- ◆ One person who started to suspect something was Army intelligence officer Carter Clarke, who oversaw a select and very secret band of military cryptologists dubbed Arlington Hall. Earlier, they'd cracked Japanese codes. In 1943, Clarke turned his wizards loose on intercepted Soviet cable traffic. The top-secret project was code-named Venona. Laboriously poring over hundreds of thousands of Soviet cables, Clarke's wizards managed to decode about 3,000 of them. Even that paltry number revealed a shocking truth.
- ◆ The Venona decrypts uncovered hundreds of Soviet agents and informants disguised behind a bewildering array of codenames—some identifiable, some not. Among them were a top US spy official, Duncan Lee; the Ukrainian-American cryptanalyst Bill Weisband; a New York congressman, Samuel Dickstein; a State Department economist, Laurence Duggan; and a top Treasury official, Harry Dexter White. Other clues pointed to presidential adviser Harry Hopkins.
- ◆ Venona provided evidence against two of these spies, relatively minor ones: Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. But because Venona had to be kept hidden, the evidence of their guilt could never be presented in court. The Soviets—thanks to their man Weisband, the cryptanalyst—learned in 1945 that their codes were compromised and took countermeasures.
- ◆ As with most secret societies, the downfall of the Communists' clandestine apparatus in the United States ultimately came from two disaffected initiates.

Perhaps most disturbing was evidence that Communist agents had infiltrated America's secret of secrets: the atomic Manhattan Project.

Party members and Soviet agents Whittaker Chambers and Elizabeth Bentley both confessed fully to the FBI. Chambers, in fact, had decided to defect in 1939 but couldn't find anyone in Washington interested in what he had to say.

- ◆ Soviet espionage and clandestine Communist activity didn't stop after the late 1940s, but it arguably never again attained the same level of free reign. In the 1950s, the American Communist Party became infested with FBI informants and withered to insignificance.
- ◆ Communist success had always depended on secret-society techniques: selective recruitment, rigorous discipline, and fanatical loyalty. The party still had loyal comrades, but years of Stalinist tyranny, factional infighting, and flip-flop orders from the Comintern had taken a toll. A secret society can survive the loss of initiates, but it can't survive the loss of their faith.

### Questions to Consider

1. Why has the Communist International sometimes been called the Red Vatican?
2. What do you think Efraim Skliansky was carrying in that briefcase?

19

Japan's Black *and* Green Dragons



**T**he Black Dragons, a Japanese secret society that enjoyed a close relationship with the criminal yakuza, exercised great influence in imperial Japan and did much to steer Tokyo into World War II. In addition to the Black Dragons, another, more mysterious secret society known as the Green Dragons lurked deeper in the shadows. Potentially the Black Dragons' masters, possibly their rivals, it's not entirely clear whether the Green Dragons even existed. As is often the case with secret societies, the Green Dragons inhabit the twilight zone between reality and imagination.

## Violent Origins

- ◆ The story starts with the Japanese Meiji Restoration of 1868, which ended 250 years of feudal isolationism and started the crash transformation of Japan into a modern world power. As in any social upheaval, there were losers. In this case, the big losers were the samurai warrior aristocracy.
- ◆ While some samurai prospered under the new order, most saw their traditional privileges stripped away. Among other things, they lost the right to kill any commoner who offended them. An army of peasant conscripts replaced them as guardians of the nation. Some resentful samurai, including Tōyama Mitsuru, formed a secret society called the Koyosha to foment a counterrevolution. The rebellions failed, leaving the samurai defeated and further marginalized.
- ◆ Out of the ruins of the Koyosha, Mitsuru and some of his fellow samurai formed a new society in 1881. They named it called the Genyosha, or the Dark Ocean. It styled itself as a “patriotic” fraternity. Mitsuru didn't want to overthrow the new government any longer; he wanted to control it. So, Genyosha pledged undying loyalty to the emperor. The group believed that Japan had a divine mission to bring





all of Asia under its sway and woes betide anyone who got in the way.

The name *Dark Ocean* referred to the strait separating Japan from Korea, the nearest foothold on the Asian mainland.

- ◆ Mitsuru was Genyosha's mastermind. He was a fanatic but also a pragmatist. He brokered an alliance with yakuza gangsters, whose gambling, prostitution, and smuggling provided loads of untraceable cash. A yakuza thug could be paid to do things a samurai might find beneath his dignity.
- ◆ Dark Ocean also cultivated influence among imperial officials who could provide protection. Mitsuru despised the civil government but welcomed cabinet ministers and parliamentary deputies into his brotherhood. He also enrolled members of the zaibatsu, Japan's emerging industrial elite.
- ◆ In 1889, Genyosha carried out its first political act: a bombing aimed at the foreign minister, Ōkuma Shigenobu. Shigenobu survived, but the point was made: Genyosha was not to be ignored.
- ◆ Mitsuru focused first on Korea, which was then considered a weak hermit kingdom dominated by Manchu China. Genyosha wanted to change that. The society dispatched a hundred hand-picked agents to Korea to stir up revolution. When the Korean Queen Min looked like she might be an obstacle to Japanese ambitions, she was assassinated.
- ◆ In 1894, Mitsuru got what he really wanted: war with China. The brief Sino-Japanese War was a complete triumph for Tokyo. Victory was aided by intelligence from Genyosha agents spread across China. But there was a new fly in the ointment: Russia. Russian-led pressure forced Japan to yield a hard-won foothold in Manchuria, the huge Chinese province bordering Korea. The Russians immediately moved in and started to build a railroad. The stage was now set for a new war.

## The Black Dragons

- ◆ Mitsuru's growing power made him politically conscious. He decided to transform Genyosha into a mainstream political organization. In 1901, he tapped a faithful follower, Ryōhei Uchida, to form a new secret order: the Kokuryūkai, or Black Dragon Society. It was created to take over clandestine

operations, such as assassination cooperation with the yakuza. Uchida especially appreciated the gangsters' growing chain of brothels. Not only did they generate income, but they also provided valuable intelligence, blackmail opportunities, and a means to push opium.

- ◆ The Black Dragons' main target was Russia. The Russo-Japanese War broke out in 1904 and was fought in Manchuria. Black Dragon spies and saboteurs played an active part. It was impossible to say where the activities of the Black Dragons began and those of Tokyo's military intelligence left off.

As with Dark Ocean, the name of the Black Dragon Society had geographic significance. The Black Dragon River, better known as the Amur, separated Manchuria from Russian Siberia. The Black Dragons believed it was Japan's manifest destiny to expand control to the Black Dragon River and perhaps beyond.

- ◆ After Russia's defeat, the Black Dragons turned back to China. Black Dragon agent and army officer Kenji Doihara aided the revolution brewing against the decrepit Manchu dynasty. The Manchus fell in 1911. The result wasn't peace and democracy for China, but 40 years of warlordism and civil war—just as the Black Dragons desired.
- ◆ Dragon operatives insinuated themselves into the entourages of future Chinese leaders Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek. In league with the yakuza and Chinese gangs, Doihara used opium to recruit agents and corrupt enemies. In the process, he became an addict himself.
- ◆ In 1928, Doihara assassinated troublesome Manchurian warlord Chang Tso-lin. Three years later, he used another bomb to engineer the Mukden Incident, a false-flag provocation that provided the excuse for Japan's invasion of Manchuria, another critical step toward World War II.
- ◆ In Japan, the 1930s had ushered in the era of "government by assassination." A new secret society surfaced. Dubbed the League of Blood, its members murdered finance minister Junnosuke Inoue and industrialist Dan Takuma. Both were outspokenly pro-Western—and especially pro-American.
- ◆ That same year, a group of young military officers killed Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi and attacked other officials in a half-baked coup known as the May

15th Incident. The rebel officers received light punishment for the attempted coup. The fix was in, and few doubted that the Black Dragons had a hand in it.

- ◆ In 1936, another bunch of military conspirators staged the more serious February 26th Incident. The home minister, Saitō Makoto, was slaughtered, along with the finance minister and the inspector general of military education. All were deemed “unpatriotic” pro-Westerners. This time, the plotters were severely punished; 19 ringleaders were hanged. But the real instigators—Mitsuru, his disciple Uchida, and their Black Dragons—remained untouchable. Japanese democracy had suffered a fatal blow.
- ◆ The following year, in 1937, the military launched a full-scale invasion of China, igniting a war that would eventually draw Japan into a confrontation with the United States. Once again, the Black Dragons got their war. This time, however, it would lead imperial Japan to ruin.
- ◆ Uchida died in 1937 and never lived to see the debacle. Mitsuru—probably always the real master of the Black Dragons—held on until 1944.
- ◆ The Black Dragon Society was banned under the Allied occupation. But banning secret societies seldom works. A new Black Dragon Society appeared in 1961. Ostensibly, it was just a harmless martial arts society. But Black Dragon influence wasn’t limited to Asia. Uchida created a worldwide organization. Black Dragon agents operated in Tibet, Mongolia, Central Asia, the Middle East, Morocco, and even Ethiopia.

## The Green Dragons

- ◆ The Black Dragon Society is an open book compared to the more elusive Green Dragon Society. The big question about the Green Dragons is whether they existed at all. A key bit of evidence appears in the memoir of Ch’ien Chieh-ju, one of Chiang Kai-shek’s wives. She recalled that her husband wanted to create a “secret system of private investigators” modeled on the Green and Black Dragon Societies of Japan. The Green and Black Societies also furnished Chiang with money. She clearly distinguishes between the two societies. And both seemed to be involved in political intrigue.
- ◆ Some propose that the true origins of the Green Dragons lay in China or Tibet. It’s also claimed that unlike the Black Dragons, the Greens didn’t deal in

political action but in occult influence. Arguably, they were parallel societies, pursuing the same ends by different means. The Green Dragons, like the Black, operated globally; their reach supposedly extended to tsarist Russia and Nazi Germany. Emperor Hirohito, Adolf Hitler, and Grigori Rasputin have been tied to them, fairly or not.

- ◆ The earliest, and maybe most intriguing, mention of the Green Dragon Society is in the 1933 French novel *Les sept têtes du dragon vert*, or *The Seven Heads of the Green Dragon*. The book portrays the Green Dragons as a shadowy sect bent on world domination. It was allegedly run by 72 secret masters, a number identical to the “72 unknown superiors” revered by various occult orders. To achieve their nefarious aims, these unseen masters generated war, revolution, and chaos.
- ◆ *The Seven Heads of the Green Dragon* claims that the Green Dragons’ invisible hand was behind the assassination of the Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 as well as the Bolshevik Revolution, the murder of the Romanovs, the 1922 assassination of German foreign minister Walther Rathenau, and the 1932 death of Swedish industrialist Ivar Kreuger. A French secret society, the Martinist Order, is named as a tool of the Green Dragons. The book’s story is set in 1929 to 1930, with the mysterious Greens facilitating the rise of Adolf Hitler.
- ◆ Others see the Green Dragons as the “inner cabal” of Genyosha and the Black Dragons. Is it possible that Mitsuru spun off the Black Dragons to handle political intrigue while inventing the Greens to handle mystical skullduggery?
- ◆ A Buddhist connection makes some sense. A revered Buddhist figure in Japan is a medieval monk named Kūkai who studied at the Green Dragon Temple in China. There, the story goes, Kūkai was trained in occult and tantric doctrines from Tibet. Does it mean anything that the Chinese nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek later took refuge in the same Green Dragon Temple?

Today you can find many Green Dragon Societies. Most are linked to the martial arts. Green Dragon kung fu groups exist throughout the world.

A Green Society or Green Gang was, and arguably still is, a major force in the Chinese underworld. Was their relationship to the Green Dragons similar to the yakuza’s with the Black Dragons?

## Questions to Consider

1. What's the best evidence that the Green Dragon Society actually existed?
2. Were the Black Dragons a tool of the Japanese Imperial Army, or was the army a tool of the Black Dragons?

20

Italy's Secret Government:  
The P2 Lodge



**L**icio Gelli and the Propaganda Due (or P2) lodge were linked in one way or another to Freemasonry, Fascism, secret armies, assassinations, terrorism, coups, black magic, money laundering, drug smuggling, the Mafia, the CIA, and possibly the murder of a pope.

## A Distinguished Roster

- ◆ On March 17, 1981, Italy's special anticorruption police stormed a villa in the quiet Tuscan town of Arezzo. It was the home of local mattress manufacturer Licio Gelli. The police had come because of Gelli's connection to two fugitive bankers: Roberto Calvi and Michele Sindona. All were rumored to be members of a secretive Masonic lodge called Propaganda Due, or P2. And in fact they were.
- ◆ Investigators hoped that Gelli's papers might yield information on the whereabouts of the fugitives. They didn't. But police did uncover a membership roster of the P2 lodge. The list contained an astounding 962 names. Among them was the special police's own commander, Orazio Giannini. And that wasn't the only surprise.
- ◆ On the P2 roster were the names of 119 senior military officers, 22 high-ranking police officials, 59 members of parliament, and 30 journalists. In addition, it listed 128 corporate chiefs, one of them an up-and-coming media mogul named Silvio Berlusconi. Last, but not least, were the names of the heads of all three of Italy's intelligence agencies. Some called it a roster of Italy's "secret government." Further investigation revealed that the P2 lodge's real membership was at least 2,400.
- ◆ There even seemed to be a secret lodge inside the secret lodge—"two overlapping pyramids"—with Gelli as the link between them. Obviously, Gelli was much more than the mattress king of Tuscany. He had friends in the highest circles. Most importantly, he was the venerable master of the P2.
- ◆ The best place to start untangling this web is with the man seemingly at the center of it. Licio Gelli grew up under Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime. He joined the Fascist Party around 1938 and served as a Blackshirt volunteer in the Spanish Civil War. During World War II, Gelli collaborated with the German army and SS while serving in the security service of Mussolini's Italian Social Republic.

- ◆ After the war, Gelli's political sympathies remained pro-Fascist. That brought him into contact with men such as Prince Junio Borghese, another Mussolini loyalist, dubbed the Black Prince. Gelli and Borghese belonged to a resurrected Fascist party: the Movimento Sociale Italiano, or the Italian Social Movement. In 1956, this spun off a small, violent subset dubbed Ordine Nuovo, or New Order.
- ◆ The Italian Social Movement was a mass political party. New Order was a kind of neo-Fascist think tank. A third group, National Vanguard, was made up of street fighters and terrorists. Because they seemingly were separate entities, one couldn't be automatically blamed for the actions of another.

In 1966, Licio Gelli was tapped to revitalize the near-defunct P2 lodge and set about enrolling hundreds of new members into P2.

## Setting the Stage

- ◆ To understand what happened, a crash course in postwar Italian politics and the history of Italian Freemasonry is needed. After 1945, Fascism and the Italian right lay defeated and discredited, but not dead. Political power rested in the hands of two parties: the right-center Christian Democrats and the far-left Communists. Playing third fiddle were the moderate-left Italian Socialists. The Christian Democrats were stronger than either of the leftist parties individually, but not if they combined.
- ◆ The Communists controlled large parts of Italy and relentlessly pushed for seats in the government. So, the Christian Democrats made the Socialists their junior partners, keeping the Communists at bay. The alliance was unstable, however, and the future was unpredictable. The neo-Fascists were no threat at the ballot box, but they could be useful. Above all they hated the Communists. Anti-Communism created a convergence of interests among the Christian Democrats, Socialists, and Fascists. But this had to be hidden from the public. Arguably, the P2 lodge was a way to do that.
- ◆ In 1947, the new Italian constitution outlawed secret organizations—that is, those that didn't share their membership lists with the government. The P2 lodge reconstituted as a regular lodge but more or less sat on the shelf until Gelli took over in the late 1960s. No sooner had Gelli rehabilitated P2 than he and the lodge became involved in a plot to overthrow the government.



- ◆ In December 1969, National Front cells conducted a series of bombings. The biggest, the Piazza Fontana blast in Milan, killed 17 and injured nearly 90. The explosions were officially blamed on anarchists and Communists. A year later, in December 1970, the stage was finally set for a full-blown coup, the Golpe Borghese.
- ◆ The armed activists involved numbered only about a thousand. The question, never answered, was what parts of the Italian military and security services were standing by to help. The chiefs of almost all of those services were members of P2. Borghese and other conspirators later boasted that they had the secret support of the United States and NATO, especially the CIA station in Rome.
- ◆ The plan was to seize the ministries of defense and interior along with key government officials and the RAI television station. P2's venerable master, Licio Gelli, was in the thick of things. He led a team tasked with capturing—or killing—Italian President Giuseppe Saragat. But something unexpected happened just hours before the coup was to go down: Borghese, the Black Prince, called it off.
- ◆ Borghese later claimed that the government had been tipped off. It's possible. Maybe he just got cold feet. Or maybe someone higher up—the real architect of the coup—pulled the plug. The Black Prince fled to Francisco Franco's Spain. He died suddenly in Cadiz in 1974. The official verdict was a heart attack, but other signs pointed to arsenic poisoning. Either way, Borghese took what he knew to the grave.
- ◆ Gelli also fled to Spain, where he met with exiled Argentine dictator Juan Perón. Gelli initiated Perón into P2 and directed lodge brothers to assist Perón's efforts to return to power. P2 branches were soon established in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. With or without P2's help, Perón returned as Argentina's leader in 1973. Gelli traveled with him to Buenos Aires, and under Perón's protection, Gelli and P2 took over the Italian embassy in Buenos Aires and turned it into a base of conspiratorial operations.
- ◆ Perón died in 1974, and Gelli eventually returned home. In the meantime, the Italian government had banned several organizations, including New Order. As with many secret societies before and since, however, the group simply changed its name. New Order became Ordine Nero, or Black Order, and continued to operate without a hiccup.

- ◆ P2 also came under scrutiny. The Italian Grand Orient decided to distance itself by suspending the lodge's charter. P2 simply went back to being a "black," or clandestine, lodge, outside normal jurisdiction. Gelli continued to lead it. He also forged an alliance with a new Roman crime syndicate, the Banda della Magliana, whose leader became a P2 member.

## Michele Sindona

- ◆ Italian authorities had other things to worry about besides rogue Masonic lodges. One was a shady lawyer-turned-shadier-banker named Michele Sindona. In the 1950s, Sindona started out as a money launderer for the Sicilian Mafia and later for the Gambino crime family in New York. Sindona used his earnings to buy control of banks. He also cultivated connections to the Vatican and Pope Paul VI, who just happened to be a relative of the late Prince Borghese. Sindona was also member number 501 of the P2 lodge.
- ◆ Sindona's criminal empire started to unravel in the late 1970s. One problem was the 1978 death of Pope Paul and the ascension of a new pontiff, John Paul I. The new regime in the Vatican made noises about investigating alleged corruption in the Vatican Bank. Those suspicions centered on one of Sindona's—and P2's—money-laundering fronts, the Banco Ambrosiano.
- ◆ The head of Banco Ambrosiano was yet another P2 member, Roberto Calvi, nicknamed "God's banker," because the main shareholder in Ambrosiano was the Vatican Bank. When Ambrosiano failed, the Vatican Bank lost 250 million dollars. Some found it more than curious when the new pope, John Paul I, was discovered dead in September 1978, just 33 days into his reign. The official verdict was heart failure. Whatever the truth, Sindona and P2 were implicated in other killings.
- ◆ Under intense investigation, Sindona soon faked his own kidnapping and vanished for months—no one knew where. In 1980, Sindona was finally arrested in the United States and convicted of fraud. Four years later, he was extradited to Italy to face murder charges.
- ◆ It was the Sindona investigation that finally led the anticorruption police to Licio Gelli's door and the P2 membership list. Once that came out, the Italian Grand Orient again moved to distance itself from the black lodge. In 1981, the Grand Orient formally expelled Gelli and, in 1982, abolished P2. Of course,

such edicts did nothing to destroy a secret society with hundreds or thousands of members, most of whom remained unidentified.

In July 1982, Italian authorities seized a suitcase from Licio Gelli's daughter as she was trying to leave the country. Hidden in a false bottom was a document, apparently written by Gelli, titled "Memorandum on the Italian Situation."

### Questions to Consider

1. Why did Licio Gelli survive when so many of his associates died mysteriously?
2. Was the P2 lodge a secret society of the CIA, or are they both the tools of something else?

# 21

## From the KKK to the Black Shriners



**M**ost American secret societies sprang up during the golden age of fraternalism from 1890 to 1930. At the turn of the century, an estimated one-third of American men, as well as many women, belonged to some oath-bound order. Some were devoted to fellowship and mutual aid. Others promoted political and social causes ranging from prohibition to white supremacy to black separatism. The KKK perpetrated racial violence based on ideas of white superiority, terrorizing African American communities. This secret society was in fact a hate group that prompted anti-terror legislation.

## The Ku Klux Klan

- ◆ In the 1920s, the most powerful American secret society was the Ku Klux Klan, or KKK. This was a time when the Invisible Empire claimed 10 million members. The reality was probably half that. But the terrorist hate group was still one of the biggest secret societies around.
- ◆ In 1925, 25,000 Klansmen paraded down Washington's Pennsylvania Avenue in full regalia.
- ◆ Two things about the Klan are often overlooked or forgotten. The first is that there wasn't one Klan, but three. The second thing is who or what inspired and influenced them.
- ◆ The characteristic pointed hoods and white robes weren't standard attire among the original KKK, nor did they burn crosses. The initial KKK was formed by six ex-Confederate officers in Pulaski, Tennessee, in late 1865. Their original aim isn't clear. Some say it was to carry on the Confederate cause. Others think it was more about good ol' boy hell-raising.
- ◆ The KKK quickly grew into a paramilitary force targeting the African American population. In part, the KKK was attempting to push back the limited gains of the Reconstruction era and its enfranchisement of freed blacks. Motivated by ideas of white racial superiority, the KKK perpetrated violence, terrorizing

The pointy hoods are properly called capirotes. They were used by secret societies in medieval Spain, and they can still be seen today in Holy Week celebrations in Seville and other Spanish towns. In the centuries to follow, the capirote was adopted as ritual attire by many secret orders, including some Freemasons.

black communities and murdering thousands of African Americans from the end of the Civil War through the first decades of the 20th century.

- ◆ The founders drew up a loose set of rules based on two defunct orders: the Sons of Malta and the college fraternity Kuklos Adelpthon. *Kyklor*—the ancient Greek word for “circle”—morphed into *Ku Klux*. The Sons of Malta and the fraternity were both influenced by Mardi Gras traditions, such as silly names and costumes, from New Orleans, Louisiana, and Mobile, Alabama. However, some insist that the Klan was really the strong-arm branch of something older and more secret: the Knights of the Golden Circle, or KGC.
- ◆ The KGC surfaced in the 1850s. They championed the preservation of slavery through Southern secession. Ultimately, they envisioned a huge slavery-based empire embracing Mexico, parts of South America, and the Caribbean Islands. The brainchild of a Cincinnati physician named George Bickley, the KGC had more influence in the Midwest and Texas than in the Old South.
- ◆ KGC was prominently involved in the Confederate invasion of New Mexico during the Civil War as well as in the bloody guerilla war that raged in Missouri. Among those KGC stalwarts were Frank and Jesse James. Later stories held that the KGC plotted to kill or kidnap Abraham Lincoln and that it was the hidden hand behind his assassination by KGC member John Wilkes Booth.
- ◆ Organized or not, the original KKK sparked the first anti-terror legislation in US history. In 1870, a federal grand jury labeled the Klan a “terrorist organization” and began issuing indictments. The following year, Congress passed the Enforcement Acts, which mandated federal authorities to protect voting.
- ◆ By 1872, the original Klan was in decline. But the Klan’s spirit continued in new societies, such as the Red Shirts, the Knights of the White Camelia, and the Democratic rifle clubs. The second Klan—the one that really formed the KKK as we know it—appeared in 1915. Its inspirations were a book, a movie, and a murder.
- ◆ In 1905, a North Carolina minister and writer named Thomas Dixon Jr. penned a novel called *The Clansman*. Dixon painted a romanticized picture of the Klan for a new generation of readers. He invented the most iconic of KKK rituals: the cross burning. Dixon’s novel sought to justify segregation and the Jim Crow laws taking hold in the South.

- ◆ Despite protests that the book was grossly inaccurate and inflammatory, *The Clansman* was a hit and was adapted as a popular play. Filmmaker D. W. Griffith adapted it again for his film *The Birth of a Nation*, which opened in February 1915. This popularized the fantasy of a heroic KKK nationwide.
- ◆ Two years earlier, in Atlanta, Georgia, a 13-year-old factory worker named Mary Phagan had been brutally murdered. Suspicion fell on her boss, the factory manager, Leo Frank. He was Jewish—and a Yankee. In a gross miscarriage of justice, Frank was convicted of murder and sentenced to death. In June 1915, Frank's sentence was commuted to life in prison. That sparked his abduction and lynching, organized by a new secret society calling itself the Knights of Mary Phagan.
- ◆ The Knights of Mary Phagan and the visual extravaganza of *The Birth of a Nation* caught the imagination of an unsuccessful Georgia businessman named William Joseph Simmons—who was already a member of at least a dozen secret societies. Now he decided to form his own order.
- ◆ On Thanksgiving Day 1915, he and 15 companions climbed Stone Mountain near Atlanta, where they burned a cross and proclaimed the birth—or rebirth—of the Invisible Empire of the KKK. Their professed aim was “the betterment of man.”
- ◆ Simmons's Klan wasn't exclusively or even largely Southern. It became a national phenomenon, with its strongest appeal in the Midwest and West. While preserving contempt for blacks, the second Klan expanded its hate list by feeding off the social militancy, moral self-righteousness, and fear of foreign influences unleashed by World War I.
- ◆ By the mid-1920s, the Klan boasted millions of members. The start of its decline was connected to another murder. In April 1925, a leader in the Indiana Klan, D. C. Stephenson, was arrested and later convicted of the shocking kidnapping, rape, torture, and eventual death of a young woman named Madge Oberholtzer.
- ◆ The Indiana Klan was one of the biggest chapters in the country. Stephenson posed as a paragon of moral virtue. When his belief that he was untouchable proved wrong, he turned on the Klan and aired its dirty laundry in open court. The spell was broken, and the Klan's reputation sank.
- ◆ The third version of the KKK—still around today—arose after World War II. It was mostly a response to desegregation and the civil rights movement. It never

became a unified national organization. More like the first Klan, it was a loose collection of secret societies roughly sharing the same name and ideas.

- ◆ In the 1980s and 1990s, a wave of younger, more politically savvy leaders, such as white supremacist David Duke, gave the Klan new energy and publicity. The same period saw younger Klansmen join forces with skinheads and neo-Nazis.

## The Shriners

- ◆ The most influential fraternal order in America remained Freemasonry. Catering to special interests, “side orders,” or “appendant bodies,” also emerged. Probably the best known is the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, or simply Shriners. They were partly an outgrowth of an obsession with the Orientalism gripping European and American society during the late 19th century.
- ◆ In 1870, a wealthy New York Freemason named William J. Florence visited France. One evening, he was invited to an exotic entertainment hosted by an Egyptian diplomat. He and other guests even went through a mock—or perhaps real—initiation into a secret society.
- ◆ Back at Manhattan’s posh Knickerbocker Hotel, Florence enlisted a dozen well-heeled Masons to establish Mecca Temple, the first lodge of the Shriners. Initiation was restricted to master Masons who had completed the Scottish or York Rite. Exclusivity added to its mystique. In time, however, membership would grow to tens and hundreds of thousands.
- ◆ Maybe the most interesting thing about the Shriners is that they’re a kind of fake Islam. Prayers are offered to Allah, and oaths are taken on a Qur’an. Their imitation inspired even more imitators. In 1889, a group of master Masons in Upstate New York formed the Mystic Order of Veiled Prophets of the Enchanted Realm. Their headgear was a black fez, as opposed to the Shriners’ red one.
- ◆ Black Shriners first appeared in Chicago in 1893. To distinguish themselves from white Shriners, the African American version was named the Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine.

To offset a reputation for rampant carousing, the Shriners—whose motto was “fun and fellowship”—founded their first children’s hospital in 1920.



## Masonic Imitators

- ◆ American Freemasonry inspired several outright competitors. The most direct of these was the Knights of Columbus—basically Freemasonry for Catholics. Founded in 1882 in New Haven, Connecticut, the Knights of Columbus mostly attracted Irish and Italian immigrants. That led to overlapping membership among the Knights of Columbus, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and revolutionary Fenians.
- ◆ Some Masons saw the Knights of Columbus as a threat. For instance, in the 1920s, a rumor circulated that Knights of Columbus initiates took an oath to exterminate Freemasons and Protestants.
- ◆ Another quasi-Masonic society was the Knights of Pythias, which first appeared in 1864. Pledging “friendship, charity and benevolence,” the Pythians copied the Masons—right down to the three degrees—but called their lodges castles. Pythians traced their origins to the ancient mysteries of Pythagoras and the fabled friendship of Damon and Pythias circa 400 BC.
- ◆ There was also the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. The original Odd Fellows appeared in England in the 18th century side by side with the Freemasons. Originally known for their drunken revelry, the Odd Fellows eventually turned to mutual aid and charity like other orders. The American version, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, appeared in the 1840s.
- ◆ The Odd Fellows also followed the Masonic template. An Odd Fellow earned three degrees—Friendship, Love, and Truth—and could become a patriarch in a higher rite called encampment. By 1900, Odd Fellows outnumbered Freemasons in the United States. Their lodges tended to be more blue collar and less snobbish than many Masonic ones, and many Oddfellows were linked to labor unions. In 1851, Odd Fellows even started admitting women as equal members.

Secret societies played a very important role in American society. Their biggest appeal was to the wealthy and the middle class, but countless poor benefited from their philanthropy. Secret societies were in many ways America’s first social welfare system.

### Questions to Consider

1. Fellowship and enlightenment aside, what practical advantages did secret-society membership offer average Americans circa 1900?
2. How was the rise and fall of the second KKK tied to the rise and fall of Prohibition?

# 22

## Bohemian Grove, Bilderbergers, *and* Elites



**A**lmost all secret societies promise their members special status, but an elite secret society is one that exclusively recruits members who are—or are likely to become—rich and influential. Such societies offer the fellowship of people like themselves and may offer the ability to become even richer and more influential. Are these just rich guys having rich-guy fun, or are they secret masters working their magic?

## The Bohemian Club

- ◆ As the sun descends behind the redwoods, elaborately robed men gather at the base of a 40-foot stone owl. They place a human-shaped wicker effigy on an altar. They try to ignite it but have trouble. A voice booms from the owl instructing them to use the Lamp of Fellowship. They do as commanded, and the wicker figure is soon ablaze. Chanting and music fill the air as hundreds of other robed figures look on. In this way, some 2,000 members of a secret society known as the Bohemian Club kick off their annual three-week summer retreat at a private woodland playground. The ritual is called the Cremation of Care.
- ◆ It doesn't take much imagination to see the ceremony as a mock human sacrifice. Some critics allege it's a thinly disguised pagan cult masquerading as an exclusive men's club. Others see a sinister manifestation of Druid rites or a Secret Owl Society linked to the 18th-century Bavarian Illuminati. Still others detect the odor of Scottish Rite Freemasonry. A Bohemian Club brother would insist that the ceremony, like the club itself, is just for fun. Of course, the main reason the event attracts attention is because those who gather there aren't ordinary men. They're all rich.



- ◆ For many who attain great wealth, there's a nagging question: Why me? The answer that creeps into the heads of some is they have wealth to achieve some great thing. If so, then what better way to realize this than by joining with others who have been chosen?
- ◆ Bohemian Club members are men—and only men—of wealth and influence: CEOs, politicians, financiers, media figures, and a smattering of entertainers. Their ranks have included Henry Kissinger, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and George W. Bush. Other members include those who make decisions that shape corporate, governmental, and even international policies.
- ◆ The Bohemian Club was born in 1872 in the offices of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. It was initially a club for newspapermen. That's where the *Bobemian* comes from: It was then a term for a wandering reporter, a trade most of the founders had practiced. Artsy types like painters and writers were admitted as honorary members. That distinction soon disappeared.
- ◆ The club's growing reputation and exclusivity began to attract businessmen. The advantage of rich members was that they could pay for things like a tract of old-growth forest north of the city, the future Bohemian Grove. Journalists and artists never entirely disappeared from the club's roster; by the turn of the 20th century, however, they were outnumbered by CEOs and politicians.
- ◆ The Bohemians likely lifted their emblem, an owl, from an earlier secret society known as Schlaraffia, a German order that started in the Bohemian capital of Prague in about 1859. German emigrants brought it to the United States, including San Francisco. Schlaraffia's totem was the Owl of Bohemia, and the group attracted artists, actors, and musicians.
- ◆ The Bohemian Club probably began as an Americanized rip-off of Schlaraffia. But there might have been something more at work, as Prague was also home to an occult secret order called the Sath-Bhai, or Asiatic Brethren.
- ◆ Sath-Bhai rituals incorporated the Jewish Kabbalah, alchemy, and ritual magic. Everything they did was shrouded in allegory and secrecy. And there was heavy crossover in membership between Sath-Bhai and Schlaraffia.

*F. Scott Fitzgerald  
once said the rich  
“are different from  
you and me.”*

- ◆ If the Bohemian Club drew its inspiration from Schlaraffia, it may have absorbed some occult elements as well. Bohemian Club rituals evolved over time, however. There was no owl statue until the 1920s, and the Cremation of Care rite didn't come together until later.

*Today, most remember Herbert Hoover as the president who ushered in the Great Depression. But Hoover had a long career steeped in international business and secret diplomacy.*

- ◆ Membership and rituals were more closely guarded after 1930. Some link this to the influence of one member: Herbert Hoover, businessman and president, who hailed Bohemian Grove as “the greatest men’s party on Earth.” But the club was never just—or mostly—politicians. Members also included the likes of publisher Henry Luce and financier David Rockefeller.

*Walt Disney stayed at the Bohemian Grove as a guest in 1936, and that visit heavily influenced the look of his animated film Snow White in 1937—especially the snoring scene.*

- ◆ Another guest was Richard Nixon. He was invited to give a Grove “lakeside talk” in 1967. The experience, Nixon wrote, was “the first milestone on my road to the presidency.” He was being evaluated, and he knew it. That’s the kind of influence some find suspect and even dangerous.
- ◆ The Bohemian Club’s influence, like its paganism, is probably exaggerated. But that doesn’t mean it has none. Secret societies bring like-minded people together in an atmosphere of trust. Intended or not, that

*It’s not unusual for Bohemian brothers to belong to other secret societies, nor is it unusual for those societies to intersect with the Bohemian Club.*

can become a petri dish for all kinds of intrigue, such as insider trading and revolutions. It becomes even more volatile when money and power are added into the mix.

## The Bilderberg Group

- ◆ The Bilderberg Group first appeared in 1954. Their name comes from the site of their initial meeting at the Bilderberg Hotel in Oosterbeek, Netherlands. The real name of the group, if it has one, is a secret. The meetings have continued every spring.
- ◆ What do the Bilderbergers do? About all they'll say is that they're an informal "advisory body" to the Atlantic Alliance. Some say Bilderberg is a manifestation of Synarchy, a shadowy movement that aims to govern the world through a "technocratic elite." Researcher Daniel Estulin speculates that they're an "extrapolation" of an older elite society, the Coefficients Club.
- ◆ Maybe the most interesting thing about the Bilderberg Group are two of its founders: Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands and Józef Retinger. Both were men of vague nationality and questionable ethics. The prince was a German aristocrat who at one point became a Nazi Party and SS member. In 1937, Bernhard married Princess Juliana of the Netherlands and more or less transformed into a Dutchman. Prince Bernhard was the formal head of Bilderberg until 1976, stepping down after being caught red-handed in a bribery scandal.
- ◆ Retinger, a Pole with a German name, was general secretary and—some believe—the real head of the outfit. He had a shadowy career as a political activist, conspirator, and probable spy going back to World War I. He was at one point or another expelled from France, Mexico, and the United States. But he also became an advisor to presidents, prime ministers, and corporate chiefs. He always preferred to work behind the scenes.
- ◆ Bilderberg's members and invitees are a select mix of politicians, bureaucrats, bankers, and industrialists with a flavoring of lawyers and academics. A roster of the original 1954 gathering indicates some 60 attendees, mostly Western Europeans but including 12 Americans. And most of these were technically guests, not necessarily members. In more recent years, attendance has grown to 100 or even 150. All who attend are "magically stripped of their office" once

they enter the meeting. They're sworn to hold in strict confidence everything discussed there.

## The Society of the Elect

- ◆ Cecil Rhodes was a Victorian English businessman and an unabashed imperialist. Rhodes also believed he'd been "chosen." His devotion to the British Empire was downright fanatical. He became a Freemason, but he quickly became disillusioned with ordinary Masons. He thought they wasted time on "ridiculous and absurd rites without an object and without an end." Rhodes had more important things in mind.
- ◆ In 1877, at the tender age of 24, Rhodes made a will. In it, he dedicated his life and fortune to the "establishment, promotion and development of a Secret Society, the true aim and object of which shall be the extension of British rule throughout the world."
- ◆ Rhodes dreamed of extending British rule over Africa and South America, the Pacific Islands, the Holy Land, Malaya, and the seacoasts of China and Japan. He obsessed over "the ultimate recovery of the United States of America as an integral part of the British Empire." Rhodes was convinced that Britons were "the first race of the world." He wanted nothing less than British hegemony; he believed a world order dominated by Britain would be in the best interests of humanity.
- ◆ Rhodes made his fortune in diamonds and gold. Along with men such as Alfred Beit, Rhodes formed the giant De Beers Mining Company as well as the British South Africa Company that controlled the Cape Colony. In 1890, Rhodes became the governor of Cape Colony, which bordered the Transvaal



Cecil John Rhodes

and Orange republics in South Africa. In 1884, lots of gold was discovered in Transvaal, and Rhodes was determined to secure it for the empire.

- ◆ Rhodes had been busy preparing his secret society and dedicated large amounts of funds to the order in several different wills. He recruited men including Beit, financier Nathaniel Rothschild, press baron William Thomas Stead, and up-and-coming statesman Alfred Milner. In 1891, the order was formally inaugurated as the Society of the Elect.
- ◆ At the top, of course, sat Rhodes. Below him was the Junta of Three, consisting of Stead, Milner, and Viscount Esher, a man with great influence at the royal court. Below the Junta, the Elect included men carefully recruited from the political and business elites. Many, like Milner, would play important roles in the British government for years—even decades—to come. Below the Elect was an Association of Helpers, the less influential but promising members of the establishment. One of these, Leander Starr Jameson, was an officer in Rhodes's South African enterprise.
- ◆ Meanwhile, thousands of foreign miners and businessmen flooded into the Transvaal goldfields. The rulers of the Transvaal, the Dutch-speaking Boers, called these interlopers *Uitlanders*, or Outlanders. They were free to work, but the Boer governments denied them political rights. That bred resentment that Rhodes's conspirators exploited.
- ◆ In the Transvaal capital of Johannesburg, Cecil's brother, Frank Rhodes, organized a reform committee that secretly prepared an Outlander uprising. Meanwhile, Elect member Alfred Beit financed the reform committee and a small army of 600 men led by Leander Jameson.
- ◆ In 1895, Jameson's force invaded Transvaal and headed for Johannesburg, where it was expected that the committee had seized control. The British government approved none of this—it was all the work of Rhodes's society. The result was a complete fiasco.
- ◆ The reform committee got cold feet and Jameson's troops surrendered to the Boers. In the fallout, Cecil Rhodes resigned as governor of the Cape Colony. It was a setback, but not a defeat. Rhodes's wealth, influence, and secret society were intact.



- ◆ In 1899, new provocations goaded the Boer republics into declaring war. This time, the full weight of the British Empire descended upon them. By 1902, they were crushed, occupied, and annexed, just as Rhodes desired. He got what he wanted but didn't live to savor it. Rhodes died in 1902 at age 49.

The two most important goals for Rhodes were creating an imperial federation and bringing the United States back into the fold. The imperial federation became reality as the Commonwealth. While the United States never returned to the bosom of the empire, America and Britain did unite in two world wars and forged a unique “special relationship.”

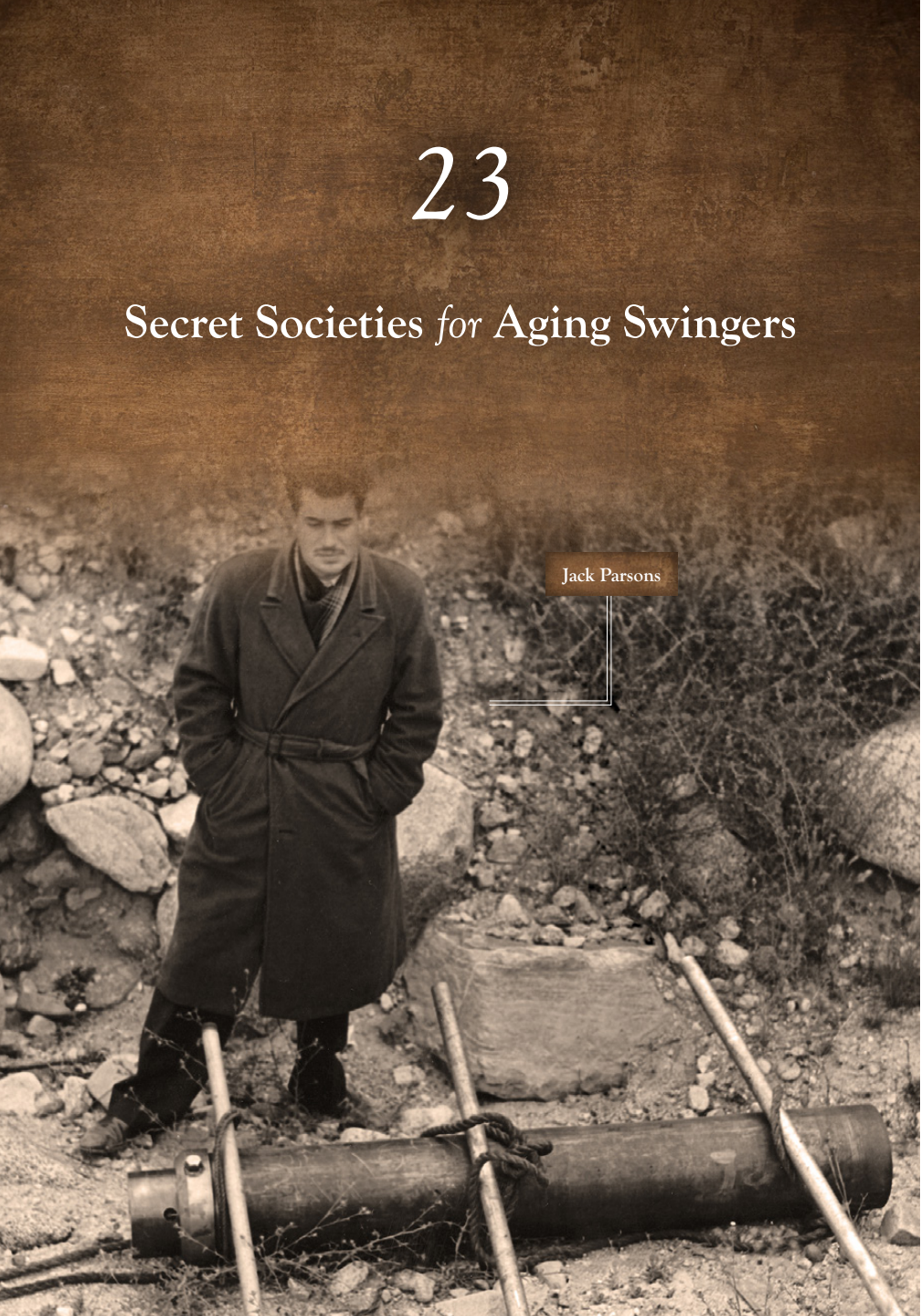
- ◆ In his 1966 book *Tragedy and Hope*, American historian Carroll Quigley laid out a history of the Society of the Elect after Rhodes's death. According to him, Lord Milner ran things until the mid-1920s. Other leaders followed right up to the present day. Milner diversified the society by bringing in not just Conservatives and Liberals, but also Socialists. With members in all camps, the Elect would be present no matter who was in charge.

### Questions to Consider

1. What attracts people of wealth and power to secret societies?
2. Why is the society called Skull and Bones?

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Secret Societies *for* Aging Swingers



Jack Parsons

**P**hony secret societies are those that pretend to be something other than what they really are. They're an odd assortment, but each is connected to theories claiming that there's something larger and more sinister behind it. Many of these stories are pure bunk. Nevertheless, it's worth investigating why someone would invent them.

## The OTO

- ◆ June 17, 1952, was a perfect day in Pasadena, California. Jack Parsons—a rocket engineer, explosives expert, and occultist—was working at home. Shortly after 5:00 p.m., the house was rocked by two loud explosions. The first came from under the floor of Parsons's lab; the second came from its store of volatile chemicals. Parsons was killed.
- ◆ Thus perished a founding member of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) and a pioneer of the American space program. Parsons was also a follower of the English occultist Aleister Crowley and belonged to Crowley's secret society: the Ordo Templi Orientis, or OTO.
- ◆ Police ruled Parsons's death an accident. Others weren't so sure. Some smelled murder. One was Parsons's wife and partner in the occult, Marjorie Cameron, who suspected dirty work by government agents.
- ◆ Parsons had twice received—and lost—top-secret clearances. The first time, in 1948, was largely due to his membership in the OTO. An FBI report branded it a possibly “subversive” cult “believed to advocate sexual perversion.”
- ◆ Parsons was also “associated” with at least one Communist Party member. He regained his clearance, however, and started working on classified government projects for Hughes Aircraft Company—that is, until he “borrowed” some classified documents. In 1950, the FBI ruled that Parsons constituted a “danger to national security.”
- ◆ Blacklisted in the United States, Parsons made plans to go to Mexico and possibly Israel. Some suspected he was really headed behind the Iron Curtain. Soon he was dead. Did his own government kill him because they feared he might defect?

- ◆ An engineer Parsons had worked with at JPL had recently gone to Red China after he'd been stripped of his clearance. Some of the FBI's information about Parsons likely came from a former Navy officer he'd befriended named Lafayette Ronald Hubbard—yes, that L. Ron Hubbard.
- ◆ In 1946, Hubbard assisted Parsons in an occult ritual aimed at incarnating a goddess in human form. Hubbard later claimed he'd been tasked by naval intelligence to infiltrate the OTO, which he described as a “black magic cult” trying to compromise and blackmail scientists.
- ◆ Parsons had joined the OTO's Agape Lodge in Los Angeles in 1939. At the time, it was pretty much a “love cult” for aging swingers led by a protégé of Aleister Crowley, Wilfred Talbot Smith. But Parsons took his esotericism more seriously. To him, occultism and science weren't at odds; they were just different ways of discovering the same truth.
- ◆ In 1942, Parsons became the dominant figure in the Agape Lodge and tried to steer it in a new direction. After Crowley died in 1947, Parsons started to see himself as Crowley's successor. Parsons penned *The Manifesto of the Antichrist*, vowing an “end to all authority that is not based on courage and manhood.”
- ◆ The OTO withered and splintered after the deaths of Crowley and Parsons. The Agape Lodge closed its doors in 1953. Was Parson's death connected to a struggle for power in the OTO? There really wasn't much left to fight over.
- ◆ Shortly before Crowley's death, he'd appointed a German follower named Karl Germer as his successor. Germer became the guardian of Crowley's personal belongings, including his books, magical accoutrements, and maybe even his ashes. To the OTO's die-hard faithful, these had great value. Germer's basic approach to running the OTO was to let it die. He claimed that Crowley had decided the OTO was a mistake, so Germer stopped initiating new members.

## Lights in the Sky

- ◆ Another strange case takes place in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1917. That spring, many people claimed to see mysterious lights in the night sky, often far from habitation. Any kind of flying contraption was a rarity in 1917, especially in the wilds of the American West. The lights were attributed to “mystery airships.”

There was a war on, and some were quick to see the hidden hand of Kaiser Wilhelm behind these nocturnal visitations.

- ◆ Special Agent Leon Bone of the FBI decided to find out what was going on. He made contact with a local man, John van Valkenburg, who was the leader of a group that claimed to build and operate the mysterious flying machines.
- ◆ Valkenburg spun an incredible tale. He claimed that the machines could fly a thousand miles an hour across any distance and in any weather. The power supposedly came from miraculous “revolving discs” that produced limitless lift and energy. Even more amazingly, he claimed to have flown to the North Pole and visited a marvelous land that sounds like the mythical Hollow Earth.
- ◆ Where did the amazing technology come from? According to Valkenburg, it came from a mysterious being, an “old man” who lived in a huge craft hovering high above the Earth. He commanded Valkenburg to form a secret society to guard the technology. The old man claimed that the society would become the elite of a new world order that would bring peace and prosperity to humanity.
- ◆ Valkenburg’s tale sounds a lot like what we’d now call a UFO encounter. And like most UFO encounters, it was unsupported by physical evidence. It turned out that Valkenburg was the only one to have actually flown in a craft or to have seen the old man. Nevertheless, the others were unshakeable in their faith. If it was a con, Bone couldn’t find that anyone was making money off it.
- ◆ Hoping to learn more, Bone accepted initiation in the secret order. It turned out to be much larger than he’d imagined. Brethren included ranchers, prospectors, and tradesmen, though none with any notable education or scientific knowledge. None seemed obviously insane, however.
- ◆ Curiously, almost all the brothers were Freemasons, and most were affiliated with the Mormon Church. Valkenburg hinted that the church was mixed up in the mystery and claimed connection to a “Mormon secret service.” Valkenburg coaxed letters from Bone stating that he and his cult brothers were involved in “government work” and weren’t to be bothered.
- ◆ Other federal officials in Salt Lake City decided that Bone had lost his objectivity. They called in a new investigator from Los Angeles, Robert Whitson, who became convinced the airship gang was serving German interests. Whitson hauled in Valkenburg and several others and gave them the third degree. They

stubbornly clung to their implausible tales. For instance, some of the accused claimed to have snuck out on secret nocturnal missions when federal agents could prove they were under surveillance the whole time.

- ◆ Whitson finally put them on trial for impersonating government agents. When he couldn't prove that, he persuaded psychiatrists to declare Valkenburg and his chief lieutenant "selectively insane" and shipped them off to a mental hospital in Provo. A month later, they walked out free men. Had they recanted? We don't know. But they never publicly said anything about airships again.
- ◆ Meanwhile, Bone argued that Whitson's ham-fisted methods had destroyed any hope of getting to the bottom of the case. Bone fretted that if he'd had more time, he could have uncovered the truth. People were still seeing lights in the sky. If Valkenburg and his group weren't behind them, who was? No one ever figured that out.

## The Priory of Sion

- ◆ In France in May 1956, Pierre Plantard, a one-time Fascist turned occultist, instigated the creation of a new secret society: the Prieuré de Sion, or Priory of Sion. But Plantard's name appeared nowhere in the official paperwork—and for good reason. Three years earlier, he'd been convicted of fraud for forging and selling esoteric degrees. Plantard's career read like a rap sheet of dubious associations.
- ◆ Plantard's concoction of the Priory of Sion looks like the fresh gambit of a career con man. Regardless, it proved more successful than his previous efforts. The group claimed to be the restoration of an order dating back to the First Crusade in the 11th century, the same period that spawned the infamous Knights Templar and the Assassins.
- ◆ To make this sound convincing, Plantard invented an elaborate



pseudohistory. The Priory of Sion's original grand master was supposed to have been the first crusader king of Jerusalem. Over the centuries, the title was said to have been held by the likes of Leonardo da Vinci, French novelist Victor Hugo, and composer Claude Debussy.

- ◆ Roping in Johann Andreae, alleged author of one of the mysterious 17th-century Rosicrucian manifestos, allowed Plantard to claim the Rosicrucians—not to mention the Knights Templar and the medieval Cathars—as manifestations of the Priory of Sion. The priory supposedly became a super-secret society that created or manipulated other secret societies for hundreds of years. To seal the deal, Plantard packaged the fake history in a dossier and planted it in the National Library of France.
- ◆ The secret the Priory of Sion guarded was said to be a holy bloodline descending from Jesus and Mary Magdalene—a bloodline that survived in the veins of European royalty. Plantard and the priory aimed to restore one of the descendants as ruler of a unified Europe.
- ◆ Some claim that even if Plantard's dossier is fake, the story it tells isn't. Writers Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince argue that the Priory of Sion was a front for another secret organization: Synarchy. Others claim the priory was an attempt to gin up an esoteric justification for the European Union. Still others see a connection between the Priory of Sion and another historical hoax, the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

If this tale sounds familiar, it's because it's basically the same one Dan Brown mined for the plot of his 2003 novel *The Da Vinci Code*. He got the story from the 1982 nonfiction book *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, written by Micheal Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln. And they mostly bought it hook, line, and sinker from the original forgery by Pierre Plantard.

## Questions to Consider

1. What was John Whiteside Parsons's real name?
2. What was the source of those mysterious lights in the skies of 1917 Utah?

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Terrorism's Long Trail of Secret Cells





The preparation and execution of bombings and other acts of terror typically require a group effort. Conspiracies are at work. And wherever you find conspiracies, you often find secret societies. While most secret orders are relatively harmless, some have used—and continue to use—violence to further their agendas.

## Anarchists

- ◆ In the late 19th century, anarchism was seen as the great threat to established order. Anarchists carried out a string of assassinations and bombings from the 1870s through the 1920s. They succeeded at murdering six monarchs, including the tsar of Russia, the empress of Austria-Hungary, and the kings of Italy, Portugal, and Greece. An anarchist assassin also killed US President William McKinley, the leader of France, two prime ministers, and hundreds of officials, policemen, and innocent bystanders.
- ◆ In 1886 in Chicago, someone threw a bomb during an anarchist demonstration in Haymarket Square. Seven policemen were killed. Four anarchists were later hanged. In 1893, anarchist Santiago Salvador Franch tossed two bombs into the packed Liceu theater in Barcelona, killing 20. Another anarchist, Auguste Vaillant, detonated a nail bomb in the French parliament, wounding around two dozen.
- ◆ Anarchism isn't the rejection of law but the rejection of the state. Anarchism sees the state as a tool of the ruling class, a system of control and exploitation. Anarchists believe destruction of the state will free humanity to create a genuine egalitarian society. The state is an instrument of violence, so it's acceptable to use violence to fight it. Anarchists see violence as defensive and as a means of revenge.
- ◆ Anarchists had no supreme leader, nor was there an anarchist international to order them around. But they did have ideological gurus who exerted wide influence in the movement. Early examples included such thinkers as Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin.

Anarchism isn't lawlessness, vandalism, or a fashion statement. It's a philosophy that influenced many parties, groups, and movements. There are pacifist anarchists, but no one pays much attention to them.

- ◆ By the start of the 20th century, however, one of the most influential anarchists was another Italian, Luigi Galleani, who created an anarchist secret society dedicated to terrorism. Escaping prison in Italy, he came to the United States in 1901—the year McKinley was shot. In Paterson, New Jersey, Galleani edited an anarchist journal, *La Questione Sociale*.
- ◆ Galleani's followers called themselves the Galleanisti. Galleani didn't order terrorist acts; he inspired them through his stirring oratory. In 1916, one of his followers poisoned soup at a fancy reception in Chicago, sickening more than a hundred people. The same year, another Galleanisti stabbed a policeman. In 1917, a Galleanisti dynamited a Milwaukee police station. In 1918, the US government used the new Sedition Act to close *Cronaca Sovversiva*, Galleani's latest publication, and deported him to Italy.
- ◆ The Galleanisti didn't give up, however. In April 1919, they mailed 36 bombs to congressmen, governors, mayors, police commissioners, and the US attorney general. Most of the targets had backed anti-sedition and anti-anarchist measures. Most of the bombs were intercepted before reaching their targets.
- ◆ In 1898, the shocking murder of Habsburg empress Elisabeth had led to an International Conference of Rome for the Social Defense against Anarchists. The great powers declared the first war on terror. Russia led the charge, demanding governments enact harsh penalties, including the death penalty for regicide—that is, killing a king or queen—along with uniform extradition laws and sharing of police information. The British, among others, balked at such measures. In the end, the conference achieved little.
- ◆ Continued assassinations and bombings led to a second conference in Saint Petersburg in 1904. It drew 10 countries, and the proceedings were conducted with all the secrecy of a lodge meeting. This resulted in a secret protocol signed by seven governments—eventually 12—including Russia, Germany, and Austria. It called for anti-anarchist offices in each country that would share information with a central anti-anarchist office. This was the first step toward what would eventually become Interpol.

The Galleanisti probably numbered no more than a few dozen. But a secret society's impact is almost never based on numbers.

## Revolutionary Marxists

- ◆ During the 1970s, a new generation of radicals sparked a new wave of terrorism: revolutionary Marxism. Their incubators were university campuses in Europe, the United States, and Latin America. Among the best-known groups were West Germany's Red Army Faction, better known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang, and Italy's Brigate Rosse, or Red Brigades.
- ◆ At the core of the Red Army Faction were Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof. Neither was a student radical. In 1970, Meinhof was a 36-year-old Communist journalist, and Baader was a 27-year-old high school dropout. Baader and Meinhof—along with others—were enraged by the 1968 attempted assassination of German student leader Rudi Dutschke. They believed the gunman was a secret agent of the West German authorities and that the West German government was a pack of Nazis.
- ◆ Like the anarchists, Baader and Meinhof justified bombings, robberies, and murders as revenge and self-defense. Also like the anarchists, the Red Army Faction wanted to provoke the West German government into repressive responses, thereby proving that it was repressive.
- ◆ Baader and Meinhof were arrested in 1972. Over the next several years, most of the group's actions were designed to extort their release from jail. The wave of violence peaked in the so-called German Autumn of 1977. That coincided with the abduction and murder of German industrialist Hanns Martin Schleyer, plus the hijacking of a Lufthansa airliner and the suspicious deaths of three Red Army prisoners, including Baader, in their jail cells. Meinhof had hanged herself in prison a year earlier.
- ◆ The Italian Red Brigades lasted from 1970 to 1988, dubbed Italy's Years of Lead. This coincided with political and financial scandals, including the ones surrounding the Masonic P2 lodge and the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II. Some thought this was no coincidence.
- ◆ Like the Baader-Meinhof Gang, most original members of the Red Brigades were arrested early. They were replaced by new ones bent on revenge. Between 1970 and 1980, the Red Brigades were credited with 14,000 acts of violence and 75 deaths. The violence peaked from 1978 to 1979 and included the murder of former prime minister Aldo Moro.

- ◆ The Italian government, riding a wave of outrage, rounded up 12,000 leftists. Detained Red Brigadists included Mario Moretti, Moro's kidnapper. Moretti turned informant. Once a secret society loses secrecy, it's finished.
- ◆ Italy wasn't plagued just by left-wing terrorism. Italy's worst single act of terror, the Bologna train station bombing of August 1980, left 85 dead and more than 200 injured. It was the work a secret neo-Fascist group, the Armed Revolutionary Nuclei, who were linked to the shadowy P2 Masonic lodge. From 1977 to 1981, the Armed Revolutionary Nuclei was responsible for at least 33 other murders.

Some believe the Armed Revolutionary Nuclei and possibly the Red Brigades were really controlled by the Italian police and intelligence services.

There's a name for this: the strategy of tension. The theory is that governments, or secret organizations within them, facilitate or create radical terrorist groups to pursue a larger purpose. Basically, the perceived terrorist threat justifies the expansion of governmental control.

- ◆ The United States also saw a wave of domestic terrorism in the 1970s. Probably the best-known group was the Weather Underground, or Weathermen, who were more about performance art than deadly mayhem. Their first big stunt was breaking LSD guru Timothy Leary out of prison in 1970. They did that as work-for-hire for another secret society, the drug-dealing Brotherhood of Eternal Love, better known as the Hippie Mafia.
- ◆ From 1971 to 1975, the Weather Underground set off bombs at the US Capitol building, the Pentagon, and the State Department to protest American actions in Vietnam. Their most destructive act came in March 1970: Three Weathermen died when their amateur bomb making demolished a brownstone in New York's Greenwich Village.

## The War on Terror

- ◆ The current War on Terror is waged nominally against Islamic extremism. The notion that Islam was under attack by the West began with an obscure 19th-century figure, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, whose birthplace and real name are uncertain. Born in 1838 or 1839, probably in today's Iran, al-Afghānī

watched Islamic lands fall helplessly under the military, cultural, and financial dominance of the Europeans. He believed that only the creation of a Pan-Islamic consciousness would reverse this state of affairs.

- ◆ Al-Afghānī didn't reject Western material progress and took almost no interest in theology. Some thought he seemed more at home in Europe than in the Middle East. In 1868, al-Afghānī was initiated into a Masonic lodge in Egypt. He later formed his own lodge with himself as master. Al-Afghānī also belonged to at least one occult order, called the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, which had murky connections to European Rosicrucians. Some also suspect that al-Afghānī was a British spy; the fact that he settled in the Ottoman capital of Constantinople in 1892 under British diplomatic immunity is indeed curious.
- ◆ Among other things, al-Afghānī argued that Muslims needed to overthrow corrupt rulers. In 1896, one of his followers assassinated the unpopular shah of Persia, Nāṣer al-Dīn. Thus, some think al-Afghānī's real mission in Constantinople was instigating more instability throughout the Muslim East.
- ◆ Coincidentally or not, revolutionary societies formed within Masonic lodges like the one run by al-Afghānī. One of these, the Young Turks, forced Ottoman sultan Abdūlhamid off the throne in 1909. Under the domination of the Young Turk cabal, the Ottoman government degenerated into a genocidal military dictatorship, thus creating more instability.
- ◆ In the 1920s, al-Afghānī's Pan-Islamic vision inspired a young Egyptian school teacher named Ḥasan al-Bannā', who was strictly religious and believed that the Qur'an held the answers to everything. In 1928, he and a handful of followers formed the Muslim Brotherhood. It wasn't a secret society—not yet, anyway. By the late 1940s, it was an educational and charitable organization with 500,000 members.

There might appear to be little connection between revolutionaries and holy warriors, but there's one important similarity: All terrorists justify their actions as defensive. To the revolutionary, it's defense against an oppressive state. To the jihadi, it's the defense of Islam against infidels and godless materialism.

- ◆ Outwardly, the Muslim Brotherhood preached peaceful reform. But al-Bannā' created a secret militant organization within the movement. In the late 1930s, that cell aided an anti-British and anti-Zionist uprising in Palestine with money and volunteers. It did the same during the First Arab-Israeli War of 1948.
- ◆ Al-Bannā' also plotted to overthrow the Egyptian monarchy, which he deemed a tool of Western imperialism. This plot was discovered by Egyptian king Farouk's own secret society, the Iron Guard. In 1948, Farouk's prime minister, Maḥmūd al-Nuqrāshī, banned the Muslim Brotherhood. That didn't destroy the brotherhood, but it did turn it into a secret society. In retaliation, the brotherhood assassinated al-Nuqrāshī. Tit for tat, the Iron Guard murdered al-Bannā'. The Muslim Brotherhood lived on—underground.
- ◆ Another Islamic secret society is al-Qaeda, which roughly translates as "the Foundation." The story of al-Qaeda begins with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Afghan Muslim rebels battling the Soviets and the Afghan Communist regime got help from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the CIA. By 1988, they were also receiving aid from a coalition of nominally Islamic societies that banded together to become al-Qaeda. Its key figure was Saudi businessman-turned-jihadist Osama bin Laden.
- ◆ When the war in Afghanistan wound down, al-Qaeda found a new opportunity in Bosnia where Muslims, Serbs, and Croats fought over the ruins of Yugoslavia. Through fronts like the curiously named Benevolence International Foundation, al-Qaeda supplied the Bosnian Muslims with money, weapons, and soldiers. Al-Qaeda also got involved in conflicts in Chechnya, Sudan, China, and the Philippines. Terrorist acts were seen as a way of taking the war to the unbelievers.
- ◆ Al-Qaeda's main target was the world power they called "the Great Satan:" the United States. The attacks began in earnest with a 1992 bombing of US troops in Yemen. Attacks continued through the 1990s, culminating in the bombing of the USS *Cole* in Aden. In 2001, the 9/11 terror attacks hit most Americans like a lightning bolt. What many Americans didn't realize was that a secret society had been at war with them for a decade.

Al-Qaeda was never a single organization but several, collaborating to a common end. That common end was a universal caliphate under Islamic law.

- ◆ Al-Qaeda still exists, but its thunder was stolen by a group that began as one of its vassals: the Islamic State, better known as ISIS or Daesh. ISIS took off after the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003. The outbreak of civil war in neighboring Syria in 2011 energized ISIS and turned it into a more extreme version of al-Qaeda.
- ◆ In 2014, the Islamic State proclaimed itself the universal caliphate incarnate and stunned the world by capturing the Iraqi cities of Fallujah and Mosul. ISIS's military gains were later rolled back. But its real strength lies not in thousands of soldiers, but in a stateless secret society that recruits, propagandizes, and directs its members.

### Questions to Consider

1. Who do you think was responsible for the Wall Street bombing of 1920?
2. Was Patty Hearst the victim or accomplice of a secret society—or both?

25

Secret Societies:  
The Never-Ending Story





Where secret societies are concerned there is no ending. They've existed since the beginnings of human society and will continue to exist. They're an integral part of the human experience. In exploring the history, organization, and impact of secret societies, a notable recurring component is the presence of a charismatic or visionary individual whose leadership or inspiration is essential to the society's creation.

## Robert Jay Mathews

- ◆ On the evening of June 18, 1984, Alan Berg pulled into the driveway of his home in Denver, Colorado. A late-night radio host, Berg encountered all kinds of people on the other end of the line, and he argued with many of them. Some he berated with sarcasm and insults, and this earned him admirers and enemies. Berg was Jewish, and among those he reserved special disdain for were anti-Semites, white supremacists, and neo-Nazis—some of whom were members of a secret society known as The Order. That evening, The Order was waiting for him.
- ◆ As Berg got out of his car, he was mowed down by a hail of bullets. The killer got away. The assassination was only one of many crimes allegedly committed by The Order in little more than a year's time, beginning with a robbery at a porn shop in Spokane, Washington, and graduating to a 3.6-million-dollar armored-car robbery. The Order also dabbled in counterfeiting, which proved to be the organization's downfall. A member was caught passing phony 50-dollar-bills, and the feds turned him into an informant.
- ◆ By December 1984, the FBI had rounded up most of the group and cornered the order's founder, Robert Jay Mathews, in his farmhouse in Whidbey Island, Washington. Mathews refused to surrender and died in a fiery shootout with 75 federal agents.
- ◆ More than 70 members and associates of The Order were convicted of crimes, though none for Berg's murder. The best the feds could do was convict two Order brothers for violating Berg's civil rights.

In 1964, 11-year-old Robert Mathews joined the rigorously Conservative and fiercely anti-Communist John Birch Society. The society isn't associated with violence, but it was an odd thing for an 11-year-old to dedicate himself to.

- ◆ A book that lit a fire under Mathews was *The Turner Diaries*, published in 1978. Its author, William Luther Pierce, ran a white nationalist society called the National Alliance. The book was set in a future dystopian America in which the government had collapsed and race war raged. Its heroes are white Christian “Patriots” who eventually triumph and purge the world of their enemies.
- ◆ In *The Turner Diaries*, Mathews found his vision. He joined the National Alliance, and by September 1983, he invited eight like-minded young men to his home in Metaline, Washington. They pledged to form a new order to fight for the white race. In homage to the Nazis, Mathews and his comrades officially dubbed their group the Brüder Schweigen, or Silent Brotherhood. Outwardly, it was known as The Order.
- ◆ Mathews’s career as leader of a secret society was brief and bloody, but it didn’t really end with his death. In the white supremacist universe, he became a martyr and source of new inspiration. One person he inspired was Timothy McVeigh, perpetrator of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. Mathews is symptomatic of a pattern repeated over and over.

## Isaac Aguigui

- ◆ In 2011, Georgia police found the bodies of two young people, 19-year-old Michael Roark and 17-year-old Tiffany York, dumped along a road. Both had been shot execution-style. Investigation led to the arrests of four young men. All turned out to be members of a secret militant group called Forever Enduring, Always Ready—FEAR for short. All four, along with the murdered Roark and most of their other associates, were current or past members of the US Army. The ringleader was an Army private named Isaac Aguigui.
- ◆ Aguigui and his associates killed Roark and York because they feared that the couple would betray the group. FEAR took their oaths of secrecy very seriously. Among other things, they were planning to blow up dams, assassinate the president, and overthrow the US government.
- ◆ There was also more mundane criminal activity. The most glaring example involved the sudden death in July 2011 of Aguigui’s pregnant wife. She supposedly died from a blood clot. But in fact, Aguigui murdered her and his unborn son to collect 500,000 dollars in insurance.

- ◆ FEAR was planning similar murders while also engaged in theft, weapons smuggling, and probably drug dealing. They needed money to buy land in Washington State—Robert Mathews’s old base of operations—where Aguigui and his comrades planned to build a secret army that would take over the country.

## William Dudley Pelley

- ◆ William Dudley Pelley was a Hollywood screenwriter, religious mystic, UFO contactee, and would-be American führer. During World War I, Pelley was a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*. In 1918, Pelley traveled to Vladivostok, Russia, where he got a firsthand look at Bolshevism. It turned him into a lifelong anti-Communist. He also encountered Jews among the Siberian Bolsheviks, some of whom were Americans, and he began to imagine a “Jewish plot” in the Russian Revolution.
- ◆ Back in the States, Pelley ended up in Hollywood. Between 1919 and 1929, he was a writer on many films. But his Hollywood days weren’t all tinsel and sunshine. He had a writer’s usual conflicts with studio management. And among the studio execs were Jews, who fed his anti-Semitic suspicions.
- ◆ One night in 1928, Pelley had an out-of-body experience. He described it as best he could in the book *Seven Minutes in Eternity*. Pelley left the Hollywood rat race and moved to Asheville, North Carolina, where he soaked up mystical doctrines including Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, and pyramid power. He started his own magazine, *The New Liberator*, in which he promoted spiritualism, reincarnation, anti-Semitism, and “Christian economics”—basically “do unto others” applied to Capitalism. Pelley also dabbled in telepathy, levitation, and automatic writing.
- ◆ By now, Pelley was convinced that Jews were “dark souls” responsible for most of the world’s evils. He saw Hitler as a kindred spirit and a model for the role Pelley felt destined to play in America. So, in 1933, he formed the Silver Legion of America. Its members wore silver shirts emblazoned with a scarlet letter *L*. By 1935, the Silver Shirts numbered about 15,000 nationwide.
- ◆ The Silver Legion’s doctrine was anti-FDR, anti-New Deal, and anti-Jew. Although outwardly a

William Dudley Pelley’s Silver Legion of America was only one of at least a hundred imitation-Nazi groups across America.

political movement, the legion was at its heart a secret society. Membership was selective—white Christians only—and there were insignia, rituals, and oaths. Pelley promised his Silver Shirts they would become the new elite in a future Christian commonwealth.

- ◆ Pelley rode a wave of discontent generated by the Depression. As that waned, so did his support. By 1939, Silver Shirt membership had dropped below 5,000.
- ◆ Pelley soon forged alliances with the pro-Nazi German-American Bund and even the Ku Klux Klan. He consorted with known Axis agents and has even been accused of masterminding the construction of a secret Nazi base in the hills above Los Angeles. In some versions, this secluded hideaway was to be a guesthouse for Hitler after Germany won the war and Hitler moved to Hollywood.
- ◆ Pelley dissolved the Silver Legion in 1941 but remained an unrelenting critic of Franklin Roosevelt. After Pelley publicly accused the White House of lying about Pearl Harbor, the government struck back. In 1942, he was arrested, tried, and convicted of 12 counts of sedition. He served 15 years in prison before his release in 1950. The terms of his parole forbade him from engaging in political activity, so he repackaged his mystical ideas into a mail-order religion dubbed Soulcraft, which basically fizzled out after Pelley's death in 1965. But it's still around today.

## Francis Parker Yockey

- ◆ Francis Parker Yockey personifies the frequent amalgam of secret societies, political extremism, espionage, and occult philosophy. He had a deep hatred for his native country of America and everything it stood for. In that, Yockey reflected something commonplace among secret societies and those attracted to them: contrarianism, a festering dissatisfaction with the way things are and a desire to change them. At its root is the feeling that the present order denies them the power or status they deserve.
- ◆ A book that deeply influenced Yockey was German author Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. Yockey was struck by Spengler's contention that Western civilization had entered a degenerate phase that would end in its reformation or destruction. Yockey was also impressed by Spengler's unabashed elitism and the notion that race is more cultural than biological.

- ◆ By the late 1930s, Yockey was drawn to Fascism and Nazism. By 1939, he'd joined the Silver Shirts. The FBI had evidence of Yockey addressing a meeting of Pelley's group in Chicago that year. It's probably while in the ranks of the Silver Shirts that Yockey got his exposure to occult doctrines. There's even a suggestion that Yockey dabbled in ritual magic. At the very least, he had a taste for bondage and discipline, with himself in the role of master.
- ◆ Given his ideological stance, Yockey was not a supporter of America's war with the Axis powers. In 1946, Yockey went to work for the US War Department as an attorney involved in prosecutions of war crimes. That took him to postwar Germany, where he was put to work reviewing materials used in the Nuremberg trials. Yockey's secret aim was to find errors in the prosecution and loopholes for the defense. He was soon fired from his post, basically because he abandoned it.
- ◆ In 1948, Yockey resurfaced in Ireland, where he wrote his magnum opus, *Imperium: The Philosophy of History and Politics*. In essence, Yockey echoed Spengler's criticisms of rationalism, liberalism, and materialism. But Yockey believed that "Americanism" embodied the worst aspects of all. He wanted to preserve and restore the supremacy of European high culture. The book got little attention outside of the postwar Fascist underground. But to some, it became a kind of bible.
- ◆ In the postwar years, Yockey threw himself into a variety of secret and open organizations. One was the European Liberation Front, which appeared in 1949. He made contact with former members of the German SS as well as British Fascist leader Oswald Mosley, who was trying to retool his old British Union of Fascists into the new Union Movement. Yockey signed on as a secret agent of Mosley's European contact section that sought to establish cooperation with neo-Fascist cells across Europe.
- ◆ The problem was that many Fascists distrusted Yockey. Besides being an American, he also had contacts with Communist agents. He had briefly flirted with Communism in the 1930s. He now believed that Stalin had freed the Soviet Union from Jewish influence.

*Francis Parker Yockey was highly intelligent. He studied law and graduated cum laude from Notre Dame in 1941.*

- ◆ During the 1950s, Yockey traveled constantly and mysteriously. In 1952, he appeared behind the Iron Curtain to watch the purge trial of 11 Czech Jewish Communists in Prague. Some, including the FBI, suspected he had been recruited by Soviet intelligence.
- ◆ In 1953, he appeared in Egypt, where Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser had just taken control. Yockey wrote anti-Israeli broadsides for Nasser's propaganda ministry. While in Cairo, Yockey made contact with the Pan-Islamic Muslim Brotherhood. They despised Jews and Americans, but also Nasser and high European culture.
- ◆ The FBI and other US agencies didn't ignore Yockey. But like everyone else, they had a hard time pinning him down. In 1960, Yockey's luck finally ran out. When he flew to San Francisco, his luggage was diverted. Officials discovered a trove of fake passports and other documents inside. The FBI nabbed him. But before he could be interrogated, Yockey killed himself with a cyanide capsule hidden in his shoe. In a note, he claimed he died to protect his brothers in the secret underground.

### Questions to Consider

1. Is there a type of person that is more likely to be drawn to secret societies? If so, what is the type?
2. Who do you think Francis Parker Yockey might have been working for when he died?

## Quiz

1. What did May Blackburn's followers in the Divine Order of the Royal Arms of the Great Eleven call her?
  - a. The Horn of Gabriel
  - b. Mom
  - c. The Heel of God
  - d. The Jaws of Death
2. The Roman Catholic Church's veneration of Mary was allegedly influenced by what ancient mystery cult?
  - a. The Mysteries of Isis
  - b. The Eleusinian Mysteries
  - c. The Mithraic Mysteries
3. The Knights Templar are commonly believed to have inspired or influenced what later secret society?
  - a. The Rosicrucians
  - b. The Illuminati
  - c. The Freemasons
4. The Assassins were an offshoot of what sect of Islam?
  - a. Sufi
  - b. Sunni
  - c. Shia

5. What was the priesthood of the Cathars called?
- The Bogomils
  - The Perfecti
  - The Elect
6. Who was the founder of the Ancient Mystical Order Roase Crucis?
- H. Spencer Lewis
  - R. Swinburne Clymer
  - Christian Rosenkreuz
  - W. Spenie Cerve
7. Adam Weishaupt, founder of the Bavarian Illuminati, was educated at what university?
- Heidelberg
  - Munich
  - Ingolstadt
  - Geneva
8. In what year was the United Grand Lodge of England founded?
- 1410
  - 1717
  - 1903
  - 1666
9. Which of the following was not *definitely* a Freemason?
- Benjamin Franklin
  - George Washington
  - Marquis de Lafayette
  - Thomas Jefferson



10. From where did the Cairo Gang supposedly get its name?
- a. Cairo, Egypt
  - b. Lt. Col. Francis W. Cairo
  - c. The Cairo Café
11. According to Richard Spence's theory, who was the author of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*?
- a. Adolphe Crémieux
  - b. Sergei Nilus
  - c. Maurice Joly
  - d. Matvei Golovinsky
12. Who was commonly (if erroneously) credited with being the first "boss of all bosses" of the Sicilian Mafia?
- a. Charles "Lucky" Luciano
  - b. Joseph Petrosino
  - c. Vito Cascio Ferro
  - d. Gabriele D'Annunzio
13. British occultist and spy Aleister Crowley later became the head of what German secret society?
- a. The Ordo Templi Orientis
  - b. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn
  - c. The Propaganda Kabinett
  - d. Schlaraffia

14. Who sold the Germans on a plan to use revolutionary secret societies to subvert tsarist Russia?
- a. Sir William Wiseman
  - b. Alexander Helphand
  - c. Leon Trotsky
  - d. Grigori Rasputin
15. The Red Vatican was a nickname for what organization?
- a. The Worker's Party of America
  - b. The KGB
  - c. The Communist International
16. What did one of Hitler's military superiors once dub him?
- a. "a dog looking for a master"
  - b. "a tool of the powers of darkness"
  - c. "an opportunist"
17. What does the *Black Dragon* of the Black Dragon Society refer to?
- a. A mythical dragon
  - b. The title of the society's grand master
  - c. The Amur River
18. Who revealed the so-called Business Plot against FDR?
- a. George Seldes
  - b. Smedley Butler
  - c. Hugh Johnson
  - d. Grayson M. P. Murphy

19. What was Licio Gelli's name as master of the P2 lodge?
- a. Wanda
  - b. Beelzebub
  - c. King Cobra
20. The second Ku Klux Klan was partly inspired by what film?
- a. *Birth of a Nation*
  - b. *The Perils of Pauline*
  - c. *Intolerance*
21. From where do the Bilderbergers get their name?
- a. A mountain
  - b. The name of their founder
  - c. A town
  - d. A hotel
22. Which secret society was implicated in the “boy in the box” case?
- a. The Priory of Sion
  - b. The Clampers
  - c. The Solar Lodge of the OTO
  - d. The Manson Family
23. Who allegedly confessed to the Wall Street bombing of 1920?
- a. Luigi Galleani
  - b. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani
  - c. Mario Buda

24. What was William Dudley Pelley the founder of?

- a. The Silver Legion of America
- b. Synarchy
- c. The Order
- d. The Uplifters Club

### Answer Key

- |      |       |       |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. a  | 11. c | 16. a | 21. d |
| 2. a | 7. c  | 12. c | 17. c | 22. c |
| 3. c | 8. b  | 13. a | 18. b | 23. c |
| 4. c | 9. d  | 14. b | 19. c | 24. a |
| 5. b | 10. c | 15. c | 20. a |       |

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