A PLAIN-ENGLISH FACT CHECK

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR AND FREEMASONRY

What the Records Show



TEMPLARS | FREEMASONS | THE MORGAN AFFAIR | RUMORS

The Medieval Order, the Lodges and the Legend Between Them

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TRINFINITY Enterprises

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR AND FREEMASONRY

What the Records Show

The medieval order, the lodges, the Templar legend in between, and the rumors about all three

Andrew Dominguez

Fact Check Series

Trinfinity Enterprises

The Knights Templar and Freemasonry: What the Records Show

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The information in this book stops at November 18, 2026. Every source was read on that date unless the note says otherwise. Membership numbers and church statements can change, so check the sources named in the footnotes for the latest.

This book reports what records show about real organizations and about rumors told about them. When a claim is an allegation, it is labeled as one in the text, the tables, the captions and the timeline. Naming a person or a group in the rumor chapters does not mean the claim about them is true. Most of the claims in those chapters are not.

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Abstract

Ask ten people about the Knights Templar and Freemasonry and you will hear ten versions of one story. Medieval warrior monks found a treasure under the Temple in Jerusalem. A greedy French king destroyed them on Friday the 13th. The survivors fled to Scotland, went underground and came back three hundred years later as the Freemasons, who now guard the secret and run the world.

It is a great story. Most of it is not in the records.

What the records do show is plenty dramatic on its own. The Templars began around 1119 or 1120 as a handful of knights protecting pilgrims near Jerusalem.[1] They grew into an international order with castles, farms and a money-moving network that kings trusted. On October 13, 1307, Philip IV of France had every Templar in his kingdom arrested on charges that historians now regard as baseless.[2] Pope Clement V suppressed the order in 1312 without ever pronouncing it guilty, and its last Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, was burned in Paris in 1314.[3]

Freemasonry grew out of a different world: the lodges of working stonemasons in Scotland and England, which slowly began admitting gentlemen who did not cut stone. The first Grand Lodge was formed in a London tavern in 1717.[4] Within a few decades some Masons were telling a new story about where they came from, and it ran through the Templars.[5]

This book tells the history of both, including the story of Prince Hall and the Black Freemasons of Boston, whose charter from London dates to 1784.[6] Then it follows the Templar story as it moved into the lodges. It grades thirteen of the best-known claims about the Templars and the Masons, from Friday the 13th to Lucifer worship to the Catholic Church's position.

The Central Question

What do primary records show about the medieval Knights Templar and about Freemasonry, and is there any documented link between them?

That breaks down into six smaller questions.

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[1] Britannica Editors (revised by Adam Augustyn), "Templar", Encyclopaedia Britannica, October 19, 2026, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Templars, accessed November 18, 2026.

[2] Britannica Editors, "Templar". Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), excerpt published by the press, https://assets.cambridge.org/052185/6396/excerpt/0521856396_excerpt.htm, accessed November 18, 2026.

[3] Council of Vienne, "Decrees of the Council of Vienne, 1311-1312 (Vox in excelso, Ad providam, Considerantes)", Papal Encyclicals Online, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum15.htm, accessed November 18, 2026. Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*.

[4] United Grand Lodge of England, "History of Freemasonry", undated page, https://www.ugle.org.uk/discover-freemasonry/history-freemasonry, accessed November 18, 2026.

[5] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[6] Sibyl E. Moses, "Prince Hall Freemasonry: Introduction", Library of Congress research guide, 2019, updated 2022, https://guides.loc.gov/prince-hall-freemasonry/, accessed November 18, 2026. Stephen Cresswell, "Hall's Masonic Lodge Chartered", EBSCO Research Starters, 2023, https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/halls-masonic-lodge-chartered, accessed November 18, 2026.

1. When and why were the Templars founded, how did they live and what did they own?
2. Why and how were they destroyed, and what happened to their people and property?
3. Where did Freemasonry actually come from, and what do Masons say about their own beliefs?
4. What is the history of Freemasonry in America, including the backlash against it?
5. When, where and by whom was the Templar story attached to Freemasonry?
6. For each major rumor, what is the claim, where did it start, who spread it, and what does the evidence show?

How This Book Works

This is the companion to *Secret Societies: What the Records Show About the Illuminati, Skull and Bones and the Rumors Around Them*. It uses the same methods.

Sources

Every consequential fact has a footnote placed right after it, in Chicago style, and the full list of sources is in the bibliography. Sources are grouped in five tiers:

- **Tier 1: Primary sources.** The Templars' own Rule, the decrees of the Council of Vienne, church declarations, court judgments and letters.
- **Tier 2: The organization's own statements.** What the United Grand Lodge of England, the Scottish Rite, the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar and other bodies say about themselves. These are good evidence of what a group claims about itself.
- **Tier 3: Scholarly work.** University press books, the Library of Congress and scholarly reference works.
- **Tier 4: Reference works and journalism.** Encyclopaedia Britannica, news organizations and essays.
- **Tier 5: Promoters and interested parties.** Writers with a stake in the answer, such as Masonic historians writing about attacks on Masonry, or authors whose books are the source of a claim. I cite them to show what was claimed, or with a note that the source is interested.

Evidence labels and verdicts

People in the roster carry the same five labels used in Volume 1: Confirmed, Documented association, Self-reported, Disputed and Unsupported. The rumor chapters use the same six verdicts: Supported, Partly supported, Disputed, Unsupported, Contradicted and Unresolved. Both scales are explained with tables in Volume 1. In short, "Unsupported" means no credible record backs the claim, and "Contradicted" means records directly show it is wrong.

What I could not reach

A few useful sources would not load for this research, including the Fordham translation of Bernard of Clairvaux's *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, the Spanish state archive record for the Order of Montesa, and the encyclopedia entries on Andrew Michael Ramsay and the Rite of Strict Observance. Where those gaps matter, the text marks the claim [Not verified] and says it comes from my earlier research notes.

Assumptions

- Using a name is not the same as inheriting it. A modern group called "Knights Templar" is a modern group unless a record shows otherwise.
- Medieval confessions given under torture are evidence of what was said under torture, not proof of what happened.
- An old ritual text tells us what was printed in that text. It does not tell us what every lodge does today.

Part 1: The Medieval Knights Templar, 1119 to 1314

Chapter 1: Poor Knights of the Temple

The First Crusade ended in 1099 with Jerusalem in Christian hands. The crusaders set up small kingdoms along the eastern Mediterranean, but most of the fighters went home once they had kept their vows. That left a problem. Pilgrims kept coming from Europe to visit the holy places, and the roads were dangerous. Britannica describes Christian pilgrims suffering attacks from Muslim raiders, and kingdoms too short of soldiers to do much about it.[7]

In late 1119 or early 1120, eight or nine French knights led by Hugh de Payns vowed to protect those pilgrims and to live together as a religious community.[8] King Baldwin II of Jerusalem gave them quarters in a wing of the royal palace, in the area of the former Temple of Solomon. That is where the name comes from. Their full name was the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon.[9]

The idea was new and, to some people, strange. Monks prayed. Knights fought. A monk who fought, or a knight who took monastic vows, was something the church had not quite seen before. My earlier research notes add a useful caution here: much of what we know about the very first years comes from William of Tyre, a chronicler who wrote decades later, so details like "exactly nine knights" are reported tradition. [Not verified: William of Tyre's account was not read for this book.]

Approval: the Council of Troyes

Starting in 1127, Hugh toured Europe to raise support, and nobles gave land and money.[10] The order won official church approval at the Council of Troyes. Britannica dates the council to 1128.[11] The Fordham University translation of the order's original Rule gives 1129 in its introduction, while the Rule's own text says 1128.[12] The difference comes from the way medieval calendars started the year. Under the old reckoning, which began the year in March, January 1129 was still counted as 1128.

Bernard of Clairvaux, the most influential churchman of his day, backed them. Britannica says the council may have asked him to write the Rule, and around 1136 he wrote *In Praise of the New Knighthood* to defend the idea of a religious military order.[13] In 1139 Pope Innocent II gave the order special privileges: its own chapels, freedom from paying the church tax called the tithe, and freedom from the authority of local bishops. The Templars answered to the pope alone.[14]

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[7] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[8] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[9] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[10] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[11] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[12] Paul Halsall, ed., "The Primitive Rule of the Templars", Internet Medieval Sourcebook, Fordham University, excerpted from Judith Upton-Ward, trans., The Rule of the Templars (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), sections 3, 17, 64, 68, 70, 71, https://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/source/templars-primitiverule.asp, accessed November 18, 2026.

[13] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[14] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

That last privilege matters for the end of the story. An order that answered only to the pope had no protector closer to home when a king came for it.

Chapter 2: How the Templars Lived

The Templars' Rule survives, and it is one of the best windows we have into the order. Judith Upton-Ward's English translation was published in 1992, and Fordham University's Internet Medieval Sourcebook carries excerpts from the earliest part, called the Primitive Rule.[15]

The Rule reads like a monastery handbook with horses. Britannica describes it as modeled on the Benedictine Rule as the Cistercians practiced it. Templars swore poverty, chastity and obedience. They heard the daily prayer services, kept fasts, slept in a common dormitory and ate together. They were not allowed to gamble, swear or get drunk.[16] Most Templars could not read Latin, so they were not expected to do the devotional reading monks did.[17]

Knights, sergeants and chaplains

The order had classes. Knight-brothers came from the military aristocracy. Only they could wear the white mantle; the Rule says so directly.[18] The sergeants, who were the majority, came from lower ranks of society and served as both soldiers and servants. The Rule says sergeants and squires wore black, not white.[19] Later the order added chaplains to run its religious services.[20] The famous red cross on the white mantle became the best-known Templar emblem.

The Rule is strict about women. It forbids admitting sisters into the order and forbids brothers to kiss any woman, even a relative.[21] Britannica notes, though, that there seems to have been at least one Templar nunnery.[22] Rules and real life do not always match.

Organization

By the mid-1100s the order had a structure. A grand master, elected for life, served in Jerusalem. Templar lands were divided into provinces under provincial commanders, and each local house, called a preceptory, had its own head. General chapter meetings handled major business and elected new masters.[23]

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[15] Paul Halsall, "The Primitive Rule of the...".

[16] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[17] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[18] Paul Halsall, "The Primitive Rule of the...". Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[19] Paul Halsall, "The Primitive Rule of the...".

[20] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[21] Paul Halsall, "The Primitive Rule of the...".

[22] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[23] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

The Temple Church in London

One building still standing shows the order's reach. The Temple Church in London has a round nave built to recall the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. According to the church's own history, it was consecrated in 1185 by Heraclius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and a new chancel was consecrated on Ascension Day in 1240.[24] The round church is still in use.



Inside the round nave of the Temple Church, London, consecrated in 1185. Plate 84 of The Microcosm of London, 1810, drawn by Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Charles Pugin. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Chapter 3: War and Wealth

Soldiers of the crusader states

The Templars' first job was guarding pilgrims, but the job grew. Britannica says they gradually expanded to a broad defense of the crusader states: they built castles, garrisoned towns and fought in major battles until the fall of Acre, the last crusader stronghold in the Holy Land, in 1291.[25] Their enemies respected them. After the crusader defeat at the Battle of Hattin in 1187, the sultan Saladin bought the Templar prisoners and had each of them executed.[26]

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[24] The Temple Church, London, "History", undated page, https://www.templechurch.com/history, accessed November 18, 2026.

[25] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[26] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

The bankers' myth and the bankers' reality

You will often read that the Templars "invented banking." The record supports something more modest. Kings and nobles in Spain, France and England gave the order lordships, castles and estates, so that by the mid-1100s it owned property across western Europe, the Mediterranean and the Holy Land. Because the Templars could safely collect, store and move gold and silver between Europe and the East, Britannica says, their storehouses and transport network "made them attractive as bankers to kings as well as to pilgrims."[27]

That is real and impressive. But banking existed before the Templars, and other orders and merchants did similar work. Chapter 13 grades the "invented banking" claim.

The loss of the Holy Land

When Acre fell in 1291, the Templars lost much of their reason for being. They still had great wealth, big landholdings in Europe and a long rivalry with the other major military order, the Hospitallers. By the late 1200s people were already proposing that the two orders be merged.[28] An order of soldiers without a war, with lots of property and no protector but a distant pope, was exposed.

Chapter 4: The Fall, 1307 to 1314

The arrests

An ex-Templar accused the order of blasphemy and immorality as early as 1304, or more likely 1305.[29] Nothing much came of it until King Philip IV of France acted. Malcolm Barber, the leading English-language historian of the trial, writes that the arrests came in the early hours of Friday, October 13, 1307. Every Templar in France was seized, along with the order's property there.[30]

The charges were designed to shock. Barber lists denial of Christ, spitting on the crucifix, indecent kissing, homosexuality and idol worship.[31] Britannica adds worship of a bearded male head said to have great powers and even worship of a cat, and describes a supposed initiation in which the new member denied Christ three times.[32] Britannica's judgment on all of it is blunt: "The charges, now recognized to be without foundation," were designed to stir up fears of heretics, witches and demons, and they resembled charges Philip had already used against Pope Boniface VIII.[33]

Why did Philip do it? Nobody knows for certain. Britannica offers two possibilities: genuine fear and religious zeal, or an opportunity to seize the order's wealth by a king who was "chronically short of

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[27] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[28] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[29] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[30] Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*. Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[31] Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*.

[32] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[33] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

money."[34] Many Templars were tortured into confessing.[35] Philip also wrote to other European rulers urging them to act.[36]

The pope steps in

Clement V, a Frenchman, was in a hard spot. The Templars answered to him, not to Philip, and a king arresting a papal order was a direct challenge. In November 1307 Clement ordered the arrest of Templars everywhere, partly to take the process into church hands.[37] In 1308 he sent three cardinals to question the order's leaders at Chinon, and there were hearings at Poitiers in May and June of that year.[38]

The Chinon Parchment

What the cardinals did at Chinon was forgotten for centuries. In 2001 an Italian researcher at the Vatican Secret Archives, Barbara Frale, found the record of it.[39] It records the cardinals' hearings with the order's leaders at Chinon in 1308. Reuters summed up the find in a headline that Pipes quotes: Clement V absolves Templars of heresy.[40] In 2007 the Vatican published a facsimile edition of the trial records, *Processus Contra Templarios*, in 800 copies: 799 numbered copies for sale and one for Pope Benedict XVI. The Law Library of Congress holds copy number 164.[41]

News reports at the time described this as the pope clearing the Templars. Historian Daniel Pipes, writing in 2007, pushed back on that reading.[42] Chapter 13 grades the claim.

The burnings of 1310

Some Templars tried to defend the order. On May 12, 1310, fifty-four of them were burned as relapsed heretics near Paris, which, as Barber explains, broke the defense.[43]

The Council of Vienne

A general council of the church met at Vienne, in France, in 1311. Britannica says the council voted overwhelmingly against suppressing the order, and Templars tried in countries other than France were

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[34] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[35] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[36] Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*.

[37] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[38] Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*.

[39] Nathan Dorn, "Templar Secrets at the Law Library of Congress?", In Custodia Legis, Law Library of Congress, September 12, 2011, https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2011/09/templar-secrets-at-the-law-library-of-congress/, accessed November 18, 2026. Daniel Pipes, "The myth of the Knights Templar", History News Network, October 12, 2007, https://www.historynewsnetwork.org/article/43732, accessed November 18, 2026.

[40] Daniel Pipes, "The myth of the Knights...".

[41] Nathan Dorn, "Templar Secrets at the Law...".

[42] Daniel Pipes, "The myth of the Knights...".

[43] Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*.

found innocent.[44] Under heavy pressure from Philip, Clement went ahead anyway. In the bull *Vox in excelso*, dated March 22, 1312, he wrote that he was suppressing the order "not by definitive sentence, but by apostolic provision or ordinance."[45] Barber's summary: the order was suppressed, "although not the condemnation."[46]

That wording is important. The Church abolished the order as an administrative act. It never issued a judgment that the order was guilty of the charges.

Two more decrees followed. *Ad providam*, of May 2, 1312, gave Templar property "forever" to the Hospitallers, except in the kingdoms of Castile, Aragon, Portugal and Majorca, which were handled separately. *Considerantes*, of May 6, 1312, sent individual Templars to church councils in their own provinces to be judged one by one.[47]

The last Grand Master

On March 18, 1314, Jacques de Molay and Geoffroi de Charney, a senior officer, were brought before papal representatives in Paris. They took back their confessions. Barber writes that they were burned that same evening on a small island in the Seine, the Ile des Javiaux.[48] Britannica calls de Molay the last victim "of a highly unjust and opportunistic persecution."[49]

Chapter 5: What Survived

The order died in 1312, but its people and property did not vanish.

The Hospitallers. Most Templar property was handed to the Knights Hospitaller under *Ad providam*.[50] The Hospitallers were an older, separate order with their own history, which continues today in Catholic and Protestant orders of St John.

Portugal's Order of Christ. Portugal took another path. According to Portugal's cultural heritage authority, King Dinis created the Military Order of Christ in 1319, after the Temple was abolished, and it took over the Templar castle at Tomar with its round church, the Charola, built in the 1100s and 1200s.[51] This is the clearest case of a Templar institution passing into a new one, and it was done openly by a king with church approval.

Aragon's Order of Montesa. My earlier research notes say the Crown of Aragon set up the Order of Montesa in 1317 with papal approval and gave it Templar and Hospitaller lands in Valencia. [Not verified: the Spanish state archive record could not be read for this book.]

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[44] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[45] Council of Vienne, "Decrees of the Council of...".

[46] Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*.

[47] Council of Vienne, "Decrees of the Council of...".

[48] Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*.

[49] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[50] Council of Vienne, "Decrees of the Council of...".

[51] Patrimonio Cultural (Portuguese cultural heritage authority), "Convento de Cristo em Tomar", undated page, https://www.patrimoniocultural.gov.pt/pat_mun/convento-de-cristo-em-tomar/, accessed November 18, 2026.

The brothers themselves. Individual Templars who confessed and were reconciled to the church were sent to live in the order's former houses or in monasteries.[52] Those who would not confess, or who took back their confessions, faced trial.[53]

Notice what is missing from that list: a secret underground order. Every documented line out of 1312 goes into a known institution or a known life. None of them goes into a Scottish lodge.

[52] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[53] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

Part 2: Freemasonry

Chapter 6: From Stonemasons to Gentlemen

Working masons

Medieval Europe built its cathedrals, castles and town walls with skilled stonemasons who organized themselves into lodges and guilds. Britannica's short version of what happened next: as cathedral building declined, some lodges of working, or "operative," masons began to accept honorary members to keep their numbers up, and out of a few of those lodges grew modern "speculative" Freemasonry, which uses the tools and language of building as symbols for moral lessons.[54]

Scotland around 1600

The best documentary evidence for that change comes from Scotland. Historian David Stevenson, in a 1988 Cambridge University Press study, argued that "the real origins of modern freemasonry lie in Scotland around 1600."[55] A central figure in his account is William Schaw, the king's master of works and general warden of the masons, who issued rules for Scottish lodges at the end of the 1500s.[56] [Not verified: the exact dates of the Schaw Statutes, usually given as 1598 and 1599, come from my earlier research notes.]

England: Ashmole and the Goose and Gridiron

The United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE), which governs Freemasonry in England and Wales, points to the antiquarian Elias Ashmole, who recorded his own initiation at Warrington in 1646. UGLE calls it "the first recorded evidence of the initiation of an English speculative mason."[57]

The founding date Masons celebrate is June 24, 1717. On that day, according to UGLE, four London lodges met at the Goose and Gridiron tavern and formed the first Grand Lodge, choosing Anthony Sayer as Grand Master.[58] A Grand Lodge is a governing body over a group of lodges, and the idea caught on. My earlier research notes add a fair caution: the familiar account of the 1717 meeting was written down later, so the date is a tradition with good support rather than a meeting with surviving minutes. [Not verified: the date of the earliest written account of the 1717 meeting was not checked for this book.]

The 1723 Constitutions

The first firmly dated publication of the new Grand Lodge is its *Constitutions* of 1723. UGLE describes the book as setting out a principle of "religious tolerance," and says that within a decade Freemasonry had

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[54] Britannica Editors, "Freemasonry", Encyclopaedia Britannica, undated page, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Freemasonry, accessed November 18, 2026.

[55] David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590-1710*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, doi 10.1017/CBO9780511560828, chapter "William Schaw, master of works and general warden," 26-51, https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/origins-of-freemasonry/EB839D576657C1FBAD7BC26965468B30, accessed November 18, 2026.

[56] David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's…*.

[57] United Grand Lodge of England, "History of Freemasonry".

[58] United Grand Lodge of England, "History of Freemasonry".

become the largest secular club in Britain.[59] The book opened with a long legendary history that traced the craft back through biblical times. That habit of writing grand legendary histories is the soil the Templar legend later grew in.



THE
CONSTITUTIONS
OF THE
FREE-MASONS.
CONTAINING THE
History, Charges, Regulations, &c.
of that most Ancient and Right
Worshipful *FRATERNITY.*
For the Use of the LODGES.

LONDON:
Printed by WILLIAM HUNTER, for JOHN SENEX at the *Globe*, and JOHN HOOKE at the *Flower-de-luce* over-against *St. Dunstan's Church*, in *Fleet-street.*
In the Year of Masonry —— 5723
Anno Domini —— —— 1723

268. a. 31.

Frontispiece and title page of the 1723 Constitutions of the Free-Masons. Photograph of the public-domain book by Christophe Dioux, via Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

Antients and Moderns

English Masonry split in the middle of the 1700s. In 1751 a rival Grand Lodge was formed in London by Masons, many of them Irish and Scottish, who said the original Grand Lodge had changed the old ways. They called themselves the "Antients" and their rivals the "Moderns." The two united on December 27, 1813, forming the United Grand Lodge of England.[60]

Chapter 7: What Masons Say They Believe and Do

A fraternity, not a church

Freemasonry is not one organization. Each Grand Lodge governs its own territory and decides which other Grand Lodges it recognizes. With that in mind, here is what the largest English body says about itself. UGLE requires members to believe in a "Supreme Being," admits men of any religion that holds that belief, and describes its approach as "privacy rather than secrecy." It says it has about 180,000 members.[61] (Other UGLE pages give 170,000 or 175,000, so treat the number as a range.)

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[59] United Grand Lodge of England, "1723 Constitutions", undated page, https://www.ugle.org.uk/discover-freemasonry/1723-constitutions, accessed November 18, 2026.

[60] United Grand Lodge of England, "History of Freemasonry".

[61] United Grand Lodge of England, "Frequently Asked Questions", undated page, https://www.ugle.org.uk/discover-freemasonry/frequently-asked-questions, accessed November 18, 2026.

Britannica calls Freemasonry "the largest worldwide secret society," but defines that term carefully. Secret societies, it says, "do not necessarily conceal their membership or existence"; they keep some rituals or customs private.[62] Worldwide membership estimates in the early 21st century ranged from about two million to more than six million.[63]

Britannica also says plainly that "Freemasonry is not a Christian institution, though it has often been mistaken for such." It contains many elements of a religion and teaches morality, charity and obedience to the law. Most traditions require belief in a Supreme Being and in the immortality of the soul.[64]

Degrees

Most lodges work three degrees: Entered Apprentice, Fellow of the Craft and Master Mason.[65] Each degree is a ceremony, a kind of moral play in which the candidate takes part. On top of the three, many systems add further degrees, sometimes many of them, and Britannica notes that these additions are "not uniform from country to country."[66]

Around the lodges sits a large family of related groups. Britannica lists the Shriners, the Order of the Eastern Star, which admits women and men, and the youth groups DeMolay, Job's Daughters and Rainbow for Girls. It adds a detail many Americans would not expect: English Masons are forbidden to join these recreational or quasi-Masonic societies, on pain of suspension.[67]

Christian, non-Christian and secular Masonry

Freemasonry's relationship to religion depends on where you are standing.

- **England.** UGLE requires belief in a Supreme Being and welcomes members of different faiths.[68]
- **Sweden.** The Swedish Order of Freemasons says its Swedish Rite is "based on the Christian faith." It works ten degrees in three divisions, plus an eleventh for Grand Lodge officers.[69]
- **France.** The Grand Orient de France puts "absolute freedom of conscience" first in its constitution and ties its secularism to France's 1905 law separating church and state.[70] Britannica notes that Masonry in Latin countries has drawn people who question religious dogma or oppose the clergy.[71]

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[62] Britannica Editors, "Freemasonry".

[63] Britannica Editors, "Freemasonry".

[64] Britannica Editors, "Freemasonry".

[65] Britannica Editors, "Freemasonry".

[66] Britannica Editors, "Freemasonry".

[67] Britannica Editors, "Freemasonry".

[68] United Grand Lodge of England, "Frequently Asked Questions".

[69] Svenska Frimurare Orden (Swedish Order of Freemasons), "The Swedish Rite", undated page, https://frimurarorden.se/en/start/the-swedish-rite/, accessed November 18, 2026.

[70] Grand Orient de France, "Nos valeurs", page dated November 2026, https://godf.org/qui-sommes-nous/nos-valeurs/, accessed November 18, 2026.

[71] Britannica Editors, "Freemasonry".

Women in Freemasonry

Mainstream "regular" Masonry under UGLE is for men only, but women's and mixed Masonry exist and have long histories. UGLE itself describes two women's bodies in England: the Order of Women Freemasons, constituted in 1908 and renamed in 1958, with about 4,000 members, and the Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons, founded in 1913, with about 800. UGLE says it has "an excellent working relationship" with both.[72] In France, Maria Deraismes was initiated on January 14, 1882, and on April 4, 1893, she and Georges Martin founded the first mixed lodge in Paris. Their order, Le Droit Humain, was formally proclaimed in 1901 and reached Britain in 1902 through Annie Besant.[73]

Chapter 8: Freemasonry in America

Washington the Mason

George Washington was a Freemason, and it is well documented. The George Washington Masonic National Memorial says he became an Entered Apprentice on November 4, 1752, in the lodge at Fredericksburg, Virginia. A charter dated April 28, 1788, named him the first Worshipful Master of Alexandria Lodge No. 22, and on September 18, 1793, he laid the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol in a Masonic ceremony, serving as acting master.[74]

Washington's own words in 1798 show how far that went in practice. He wrote that he had not been in a lodge "more than once or twice, within the last thirty years."[75] He was a member, and an honored one, but not a regular.

Prince Hall and Black Freemasonry

On March 6, 1775, Prince Hall and fourteen other free Black men in Boston were initiated as Masons, and in 1784 they received an English charter as African Lodge No. 459.[76] Their story has its own chapter, Chapter 9.

The Scottish Rite and Albert Pike

The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite is a system of additional degrees beyond the first three. Despite the name, its first Supreme Council was opened in Charleston, South Carolina, on May 31, 1801.[77] Albert Pike became its Grand Commander for the Southern Jurisdiction in 1859.[78] In the United States its

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[72] United Grand Lodge of England, "Women Freemasons", undated page, https://www.ugle.org.uk/become-freemason/women-freemasons, accessed November 18, 2026.

[73] Le Droit Humain, "Histoire du Droit Humain", undated page, https://ledroithumain.international/histoire-du-droit-humain/, accessed November 18, 2026.

[74] George Washington Masonic National Memorial, "George Washington, The Mason", 2026, https://gwmemorial.org/pages/george-washington-the-mason, accessed November 18, 2026.

[75] G. W. Snyder to George Washington, August 22, 1798, with editorial notes quoting Washington to Snyder, September 25 and October 24, 1798, "Founders Online", National Archives; original source The Papers of George Washington, Retirement Series, vol. 2, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-02-02-0435, accessed November 18, 2026.

[76] Sibyl E. Moses, "Prince Hall Freemasonry: Introduction".

[77] Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction (adapted from Arturo de Hoyos, 2010), "History", undated page, https://scottishrite.org/about/history/, accessed November 18, 2026.

[78] Scottish Rite, "History".

degrees run up to the 32nd, and the Supreme Council says it confers the 33rd degree, "Inspector General Honorary," every odd-numbered year.[79] The 33rd is an honor, not a rank that commands other Masons.

Pike's 1871 book *Morals and Dogma* is the source of one of the most-quoted passages in anti-Masonic writing. Its preface tells readers that "Every one is entirely free to reject and dissent from whatsoever herein may seem to him to be untrue or unsound."[80] Chapter 14 looks at what Pike actually wrote about Lucifer.

Shriners and DeMolay

The Shriners began on September 26, 1872, at the Masonic Hall on 13th Street in New York City, founded by Dr. Walter M. Fleming and the actor William J. "Billy" Florence. Its full name was the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. In 1922 it opened its first children's hospital, in Shreveport, Louisiana.[81] The Order of DeMolay, a youth organization named for the last Templar Grand Master, was founded in 1919 by Frank S. "Dad" Land.[82]

The Morgan Affair and the Anti-Masonic Party

America's biggest fight over Freemasonry began with one man. William Morgan, a New Yorker who planned to publish the lodge rituals, was seized in September 1826 and disappeared. [Not verified: his plan to publish comes from my earlier research notes.] A Masonic history from the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon (an interested source) dates his disappearance to September 19, 1826, and says he was "taken to Canada by Masons."[83] An older encyclopedia account says he was released from jail on September 12 and seized.[84] The dates differ, and what happened to Morgan after that has never been settled.

The public reaction was enormous. New York had about 480 lodges and 20,000 members in 1826, according to the Masonic account; its count of lodges fell from 228 in 1827 to 49 in 1835, and by 1832 there were 141 anti-Masonic newspapers.[85] The two lodge counts for 1826 and 1827 come from the same source and probably measure different things, so I show them separately in the chart below rather than as one trend.

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[79] Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction, "Questions", undated page, https://scottishrite.org/about/questions/, accessed November 18, 2026.

[80] Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, Charleston: Supreme Council of the Southern Jurisdiction, 1871; Internet Archive MoralsAndDogmaAlbertPikeTheCouncil1871, https://archive.org/details/MoralsAndDogmaAlbertPikeTheCouncil1871, accessed November 18, 2026.

[81] Shriners International, "Celebrating 150 Years", undated page, https://www.shrinersinternational.org/en/celebrating-150-years, accessed November 18, 2026.

[82] DeMolay Foundation, "About", undated page, https://foundation.demolay.org/about/, accessed November 18, 2026.

[83] David P. Brownback, "The Morgan Affair", Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, from Masonry Universal, updated 2001, https://freemasonry.bcy.ca/texts/MorganAffair.html, accessed November 18, 2026.

[84] Alexander Johnston, "Anti-Masonry", in Cyclopaedia of Political Science, ed. John J. Lalor, vol. 1, Library of Economics and Liberty, https://www.econlib.org/book-chapters/chapter-v-1-entry-65-anti-masonry/, accessed November 18, 2026.

[85] David P. Brownback, "The Morgan Affair".

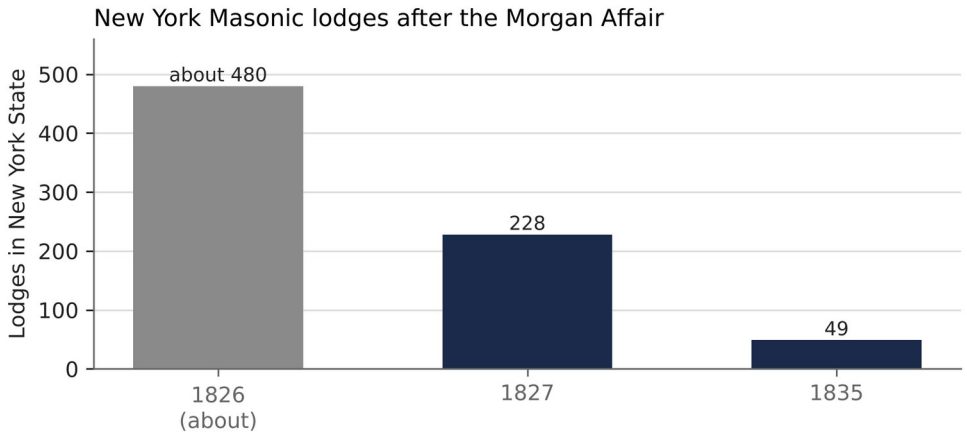


Chart 1. New York Masonic lodges after the Morgan Affair, 1827 to 1835, with the 1826 figure shown separately. Source: Brownback, The Morgan Affair (a Masonic source). Made for this book.

Year	New York lodges	Note
1826	about 480	Total lodges with about 20,000 members, before the Morgan Affair
1827	228	Same source; likely a different count
1835	49	Same source

The anger became a political party. In the August 1828 New York election the anti-Masons drew 33,345 of 276,583 votes.[86] In September 1831 the Anti-Masonic Party met in Baltimore and nominated William Wirt for president, with Amos Ellmaker for vice president.[87] In 1832 Wirt carried only Vermont and its seven electoral votes.[88] The party's biggest win came in Pennsylvania, which elected the anti-Mason Joseph Ritner governor in 1835.[89] After that its leaders drifted into the new Whig Party.[90]

Chapter 9: Prince Hall and Black Freemasonry

Prince Hall Freemasonry gets a few lines in most Masonic histories, and that sells it short. The Library of Congress calls it "the oldest recognized and continuously active organization founded by African Americans."[91] Its paper trail runs from the American Revolution to today, and it holds up better than almost anything else in this book. It is also a story about what it took for Black men to be counted as Masons at all.

[86] Alexander Johnston, "Anti-Masonry".

[87] Britannica Editors, "Anti-Masonic Movement", Encyclopaedia Britannica, undated page, https://www.britannica.com/event/Anti-Masonic-Movement, accessed November 18, 2026. Alexander Johnston, "Anti-Masonry".

[88] Britannica Editors, "Anti-Masonic Movement".

[89] Alexander Johnston, "Anti-Masonry".

[90] Britannica Editors, "Anti-Masonic Movement".

[91] Sibyl E. Moses, "Prince Hall Freemasonry: Introduction".

Who Prince Hall was

The sources don't agree on when Prince Hall was born. The Library of Congress gives about 1748.[92] A history by Charles H. Wesley, posted by a Masonic grand lodge, and a 2023 reference article both give about 1735, and the reference article says he was born enslaved.[93] The sources agree that he died in 1807; Wesley gives the date as December 4, 1807.[94] The Library of Congress describes him as "an abolitionist and civil rights activist."[95] Other details of his early life that show up in popular accounts were not checked for this book, so I leave them out.

Made a Mason, 1775

On March 6, 1775, Prince Hall and fourteen other free Black men in Boston were initiated as Masons.[96] Who initiated them is less clear than it sounds. Wesley names John Batt of the 38th Foot Regiment of the British Army.[97] A report from a Masonic committee in 1897, quoted in a Connecticut Masonic magazine, calls it "an army Lodge, warranted by the Grand Lodge of England."[98] The Museum of Freemasonry in London says only that it is "possible" Hall was made a Mason in a traveling military lodge, and it names the Grand Lodge of Ireland as the likely warrant.[99] So the date and the soldiers' lodge are solid. Which grand lodge stood behind that army lodge is disputed.

The new Masons organized African Lodge No. 1 on July 3, 1775.[100] Wesley says they were given a permit to meet as a lodge.[101]

The English charter, 1784 to 1787

Shut out by the white lodges around them, the Boston men went over their heads to London. Prince Hall wrote to the Grand Lodge of England on March 2, 1784, and again on June 30.[102] The warrant was issued under the Duke of Cumberland, Grand Master of the "Moderns" Grand Lodge, one of the two rival English grand lodges of the day.[103] It was dated September 29, 1784, and it named the lodge African

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[92] Sibyl E. Moses, "Prince Hall Freemasonry: Introduction".

[93] Charles H. Wesley, "Prince Hall: Life and Legacy (excerpt)", 1977; excerpt posted by the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, updated May 16, 2003, https://www.freemasonry.bcy.ca/prince_hall/history.html, accessed November 18, 2026. Stephen Cresswell, "Hall's Masonic Lodge Chartered".

[94] Charles H. Wesley, "Prince Hall: Life and Legacy...".

[95] Sibyl E. Moses, "Prince Hall Freemasonry: Introduction".

[96] Sibyl E. Moses, "Prince Hall Freemasonry: Introduction".

[97] Charles H. Wesley, "Prince Hall: Life and Legacy...".

[98] Carl G. Ek, "Twenty Years of Mutual Recognition", The Connecticut Freemason, January 2009, reprinted with permission of the Grand Lodge of Connecticut by Phoenixmasonry, https://www.phoenixmasonry.org/20_years_of_mutual_recognition.htm, accessed November 18, 2026.

[99] Museum of Freemasonry, London, "The African-American Connection", Black History Month article, updated June 16, 2020, https://museumfreemasonry.org.uk/node/771, accessed November 18, 2026.

[100] Sibyl E. Moses, "Prince Hall Freemasonry: Introduction".

[101] Charles H. Wesley, "Prince Hall: Life and Legacy...".

[102] Stephen Cresswell, "Hall's Masonic Lodge Chartered".

Lodge No. 459, with Prince Hall as Master.[104] Getting the paper to Boston took almost three years. The 1897 committee report says it was "not received until May 2, 1787."[105]

That charter is the heart of the whole story. It means a Black lodge in Boston held a warrant from the same grand lodge in London that white lodges looked to as their source. Later arguments over whether Prince Hall Masonry was "regular" all came back to that document.

Petitions and charges

Prince Hall was more than a lodge master. In January 1777 he and other Black men petitioned the Massachusetts legislature to end slavery.[106] The Massachusetts Archives describes the petition as pointing out the "inconsistency of acting themselves that part which they condemn in others."[107] In other words, a state fighting a war for its own freedom was still holding people in slavery. That petition failed.[108]

In 1787, three free Black men from Boston were kidnapped. According to the reference article, a petition circulated by Hall helped push the legislature to pass a law in response. The same year he circulated another petition asking the state to help people of color who wished to return to Africa.[109]

Hall also gave two charges, or formal addresses, to his lodge, one published in 1792 and one in 1797.[110] The Library of Congress holds a copy of the second, *A Charge, Delivered to the African Lodge, June 24, 1797, at Menotomy*.[111] Wesley quotes one line from the 1797 charge that sums up Hall's hope: "Blessed be God, the Scene is Changed!"[112]

From one lodge to many

Prince Hall Masonry spread from Boston. Wesley says an African Grand Lodge was formed in 1791 with delegations from Philadelphia, Providence and New York.[113] The 1897 committee report gives 1808

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[103] Museum of Freemasonry, London, "A little better acquainted", article on Frederic S. Monroe, updated March 26, 2021, https://museumfreemasonry.org.uk/node/776, accessed November 18, 2026.

[104] Stephen Cresswell, "Hall's Masonic Lodge Chartered". Carl G. Ek, "Twenty Years of Mutual Recognition".

[105] Carl G. Ek, "Twenty Years of Mutual Recognition".

[106] National Constitution Center, "Prince Hall, Petition to the Massachusetts Legislature (1777)", Historic Document Library, https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/historic-document-library/detail/prince-hall-petition-to-the-massachusetts-legislature, accessed November 18, 2026.

[107] Massachusetts Archives and Commonwealth Museum, "Freedom's Agenda: African-American Petitions to the Massachusetts Government, 1600-1900", Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, exhibit guide, https://www.sec.state.ma.us/divisions/commonwealth-museum/download/Freedoms-Agenda-Petitions.pdf, accessed November 18, 2026.

[108] National Constitution Center, "Prince Hall, Petition to the...".

[109] Stephen Cresswell, "Hall's Masonic Lodge Chartered".

[110] Stephen Cresswell, "Hall's Masonic Lodge Chartered".

[111] Sibyl E. Moses, "Prince Hall Freemasonry: Introduction".

[112] Charles H. Wesley, "Prince Hall: Life and Legacy...".

[113] Charles H. Wesley, "Prince Hall: Life and Legacy...".

instead, when three lodges joined to form the African Grand Lodge of Boston.[114] I can't settle that from the sources I read, so both dates stand.

What happened next was a matter of English paperwork. After the two rival English grand lodges merged into the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) in 1813, all the American lodges, including African Lodge, were dropped from the English rolls.[115] In 1827, African Lodge declared its independence from the English grand lodge.[116] The body later took the name Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts.[117] I did not find the year of that name change in a source I could read.

The long road to recognition

In Masonry, "recognition" is a formal act. One grand lodge declares that another is legitimate, and its members can visit each other's lodges. For most of the history covered here, white grand lodges refused to recognize Prince Hall grand lodges in the same state.

There were early tries. The Grand Lodge of Washington recognized Prince Hall Masonry in 1897 or 1898 (the sources differ by a year) and reversed itself the following year.[118] The Grand Lodge of Massachusetts recognized Prince Hall Masons in 1947 and rescinded that two years later.[119]

The change came in a wave beginning in 1989. Connecticut was "on the forefront," and its grand lodge voted for mutual recognition on October 14, 1989.[120] Washington followed with mutual recognition in 1990.[121] The Grand Lodge of Massachusetts recognized the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts in 1994.[122] The Museum of Freemasonry adds that "until 1994, the United Grand Lodge of England could only recognise one grand lodge in a state."[123]

By about 2009, according to the Connecticut article, "almost 80%" of U.S. grand lodges had formally recognized Prince Hall Masonry.[124] A Canadian grand lodge's page, last updated in 2015, says 42 of 51 U.S. jurisdictions had extended recognition or visiting rights, and that UGLE recognized 21 Prince Hall grand lodges.[125] Those counts are older than this book's cutoff date, and the page does not name the states that held out. [Not verified: current recognition counts as of 2026.]

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[114] Carl G. Ek, "Twenty Years of Mutual Recognition".

[115] Museum of Freemasonry, "The African-American Connection".

[116] Charles H. Wesley, "Prince Hall: Life and Legacy...". Stephen Cresswell, "Hall's Masonic Lodge Chartered".

[117] Museum of Freemasonry, "The African-American Connection".

[118] Carl G. Ek, "Twenty Years of Mutual Recognition". Museum of Freemasonry, "A little better acquainted".

[119] Carl G. Ek, "Twenty Years of Mutual Recognition".

[120] Carl G. Ek, "Twenty Years of Mutual Recognition".

[121] Museum of Freemasonry, "A little better acquainted".

[122] Museum of Freemasonry, "The African-American Connection".

[123] Museum of Freemasonry, "The African-American Connection".

[124] Carl G. Ek, "Twenty Years of Mutual Recognition".

[125] Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, "Prince Hall Freemasonry", page last updated March 19, 2015, https://freemasonry.bcy.ca/prince_hall, accessed November 18, 2026.

How big is it? The reference article puts membership in the United States at 300,000 in 1995.[126] I did not find a newer national count from a source I could read.

What this chapter shows

Prince Hall Freemasonry is a documented history, not a legend. Its key dates rest on records: an initiation in 1775, a charter dated 1784, a petition to end slavery in 1777, and a declaration of independence in 1827. Where the sources disagree, on Hall's birth year, on who stood behind the army lodge and on when the first African Grand Lodge formed, I've said so. For a book about rumors, it is a useful contrast. The Templar story in the next part of this book has to borrow its history. Prince Hall Masonry has its own.

Chapter 10: The Churches and the Lodge

Freemasonry has drawn opposition from organized religion almost from the start, especially from the Roman Catholic Church.[127]

The Catholic Church

The Catholic position is the clearest. On November 26, 1983, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then led by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, issued a Declaration on Masonic Associations, approved by Pope John Paul II. It said that the Church's negative judgment on Masonic associations was unchanged, that "membership in them remains forbidden," and that Catholics who join are "in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion."[128] Forty years later, on November 13, 2023, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith answered a question from a bishop in the Philippines and repeated that "active membership in Freemasonry by a member of the faithful is forbidden." The note carries Pope Francis's approval.[129]

The Southern Baptist Convention

Protestant churches vary. The Southern Baptist Convention is often said to have condemned Freemasonry. Its resolution of June 1, 1992, on "Christian Witness and Voluntary Associations" does not name Freemasonry at all. It urges Baptists to avoid organizations with teachings, oaths or "mystical knowledge which are contrary to the Bible."[130] My earlier research notes dated this resolution to 1993. The text I read is dated 1992. A separate 1993 Southern Baptist report on Freemasonry exists, but I did not read it for this book.

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[126] Stephen Cresswell, "Hall's Masonic Lodge Chartered".

[127] Britannica Editors, "Freemasonry".

[128] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Declaration on Masonic Associations", Rome, November 26, 1983, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19831126_declaration-masonic_en.html, accessed November 18, 2026.

[129] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Response to the request of Bishop Julito Cortes of Dumaguete on Freemasonry", November 13, 2023, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20231113_richiesta-cortes-massoneria_en.html, accessed November 18, 2026.

[130] Southern Baptist Convention, "Resolution on Christian Witness and Voluntary Associations", adopted June 1, 1992, https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/resolution-on-christian-witness-and-voluntary-associations/, accessed November 18, 2026.

What the Masons say

The Masonic answer, from UGLE, is that Freemasonry is a fraternity, not a religion, and that a member's faith is his own business.[131] Reasonable people disagree about whether that answer is enough. As a Christian I understand why churches ask hard questions about oaths and shared prayers. That is a real debate about belief. It is a different thing from the claims in Chapter 14 about Lucifer, which are not a debate about belief but a question of fact.

[131] United Grand Lodge of England, "Frequently Asked Questions".

Part 3: How the Templars Got Into the Lodges

Chapter 11: A Legend Is Adopted

By now you can see the gap. The Templars were suppressed in 1312. The first Grand Lodge was formed in 1717. The best documentary roots of the lodges are among Scottish stonemasons around 1600. Nothing in the records of the lodges, the Templars' successors or the papacy connects them. So how did so many people come to believe Freemasonry is the Templars in disguise?

The answer is that eighteenth-century Masons told that story about themselves. Britannica puts it simply: "In the 18th century the Freemasons claimed to have received in a secret line of succession esoteric knowledge that the Templars had possessed," and later fraternal orders "similarly invoked the Templar name to bolster claims of ancient or revealed wisdom."[132] The link was a claim made by Masons, centuries after the fact. It was not a memory handed down from the Middle Ages.

Chivalry comes into the lodges

Remember that the 1723 *Constitutions* already opened with a legendary history reaching back to biblical times.[133] Once Masons were in the habit of claiming ancient roots, knights were an attractive ancestor for gentlemen who were not stonemasons.

Two eighteenth-century steps are usually named:

- **Ramsay's oration, 1730s.** Andrew Michael Ramsay, a Scottish writer living in France, gave a speech that tied Freemasonry to the knights of the Crusades. My earlier research notes say he linked Masonry to crusading and to the Knights of St John, the Hospitallers, rather than to the Templars by name. [Not verified: the oration's text and date were not checked for this book; the reference pages did not load.]
- **The Strict Observance, mid-1700s.** In the German lands, Baron Karl Gotthelf von Hund's Rite of Strict Observance made Templar descent an explicit claim. A research page from the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon (an interested source) dates Hund's first Templar chapter to 1751. It says the Masonic convent at Wilhelmsbad, which opened in July 1782, rejected the claim of Templar descent, and that after it the Strict Observance in effect ceased to exist.[134]

The French revival of 1804

In Paris in 1804, a physician named Bernard-Raymond Fabre-Palaprat founded a new Templar order. The modern body that descends from it, OSMTH, says so plainly on its own website. It traces itself to Fabre-Palaprat's initiative and "does not assert any direct descent from the ancient Order."[135] That is an honest statement from a group with every reason to claim more. My notes add that Fabre-Palaprat's order displayed a document called the Larmenius Charter, which claimed an unbroken list of Grand Masters

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[132] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[133] United Grand Lodge of England, "1723 Constitutions".

[134] Trevor W. McKeown, "The Rite of Strict Observance", Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, June 15, 2006, https://freemasonry.bcy.ca/texts/strict_observance.html, accessed November 18, 2026.

[135] OSMTH (Ordo Supremus Militaris Templi Hierosolymitani), "History of the Modern Order", 2025, https://www.osmth.org/templar-legacy/modern-order-history, accessed November 18, 2026.

since 1314; no medieval original has been authenticated. [Not verified: from my earlier research notes; OSMTH's page does not mention the charter.]

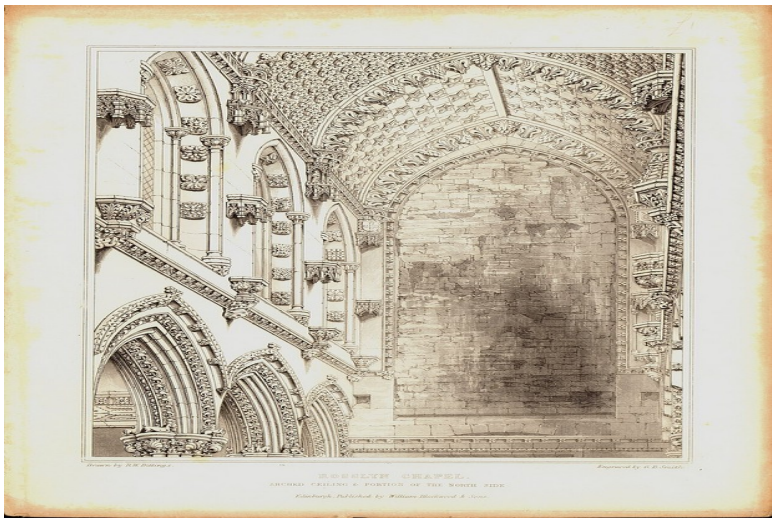
Knights Templar in American Masonry

In the United States the Templar name lives on mostly inside Freemasonry. The Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the U.S.A. dates itself to a meeting in New York in June 1816; its own founders page gives both June 21 and June 22. It names Thomas Smith Webb as the leading figure, with Henry Fowle, John Snow and Thomas Lowndes.[136] Masonic Knights Templar today are part of what Americans call the York Rite. My earlier research notes say the Grand Encampment requires its members to profess the Christian religion. [Not verified: the Grand Encampment constitution was not read for this book.]

The youth group DeMolay, founded in 1919 by Frank S. Land, carries the last Grand Master's name.[137] That is a tribute, not a claim of descent.

Rosslyn Chapel

No building carries more Templar legend than Rosslyn Chapel, outside Edinburgh. The Rosslyn Chapel Trust's own history says it was "Founded in 1446 as a family chapel" by Sir William St Clair, who died in 1484.[138] That is 134 years after the Templars were suppressed. The Trust's history page makes no claim of Templar origin.[139]



Rosslyn Chapel, north side, engraved by Robert William Billings for The Baronial and Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Scotland, 1845 to 1852. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

[136] Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the U.S.A., "1816 Founders", undated page, https://knightstemplar.org/1816/founders.html, accessed November 18, 2026.

[137] DeMolay Foundation, "About".

[138] Rosslyn Chapel Trust, "History", undated page, https://www.rosslynchapel.com/about/history/, accessed November 18, 2026.

[139] Rosslyn Chapel Trust, "History".

The modern layer

In the twentieth century the Templar story was pulled into new conspiracy theories. Britannica notes that writers claimed the Shroud of Turin was the head the Templars supposedly worshipped, and that some authors "claiming to assert historical fact but writing what most scholars regard as fantasy" tied the Templars to a conspiracy to protect a bloodline of Jesus.[140] That story, and the "Priory of Sion" behind it, are graded in Chapter 13.

Documented links and alleged links

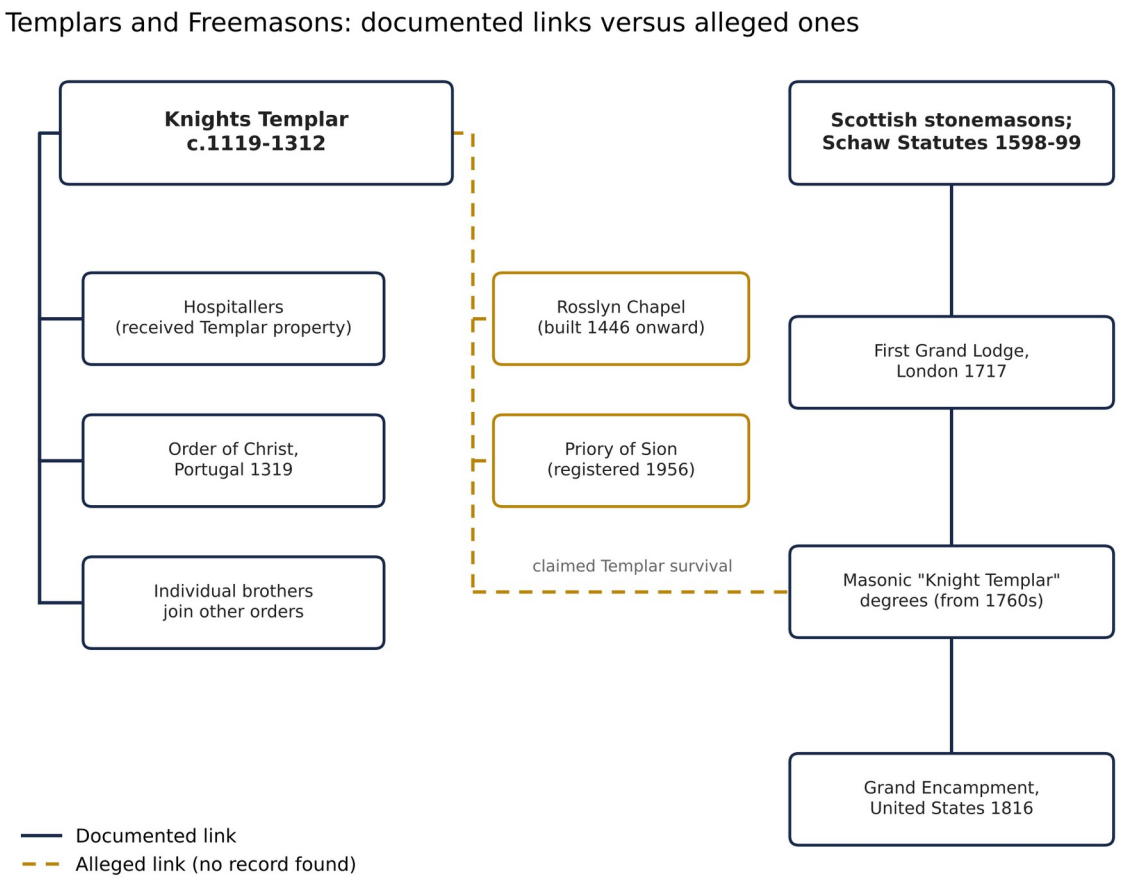


Chart 2. Where the Templars' people and property actually went (solid lines), and where legends say they went (dashed lines). Made for this book from the evidence in Chapters 4, 5 and 11.

The diagram makes the point better than a paragraph. Every solid line out of 1312 goes somewhere known: to the Hospitallers, to Portugal's Order of Christ, to individual brothers in monasteries. Every line into Freemasonry is dashed until the eighteenth century, when Masons themselves started drawing it.

Chapter 12: The People We Can Document

This roster covers the people whose role in the Templar story or in the history of Freemasonry can be shown from the records used in this book. The labels are the same as in Volume 1. I left out celebrities

[140] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

who appear only in modern rumors. A dash in the dates column means the dates were not checked for this book.

The medieval order

Person	Dates	Role	Evidence	Label
Hugh de Payns	-	Leader of the first knights, about 1119-1120; toured Europe from 1127	Britannica	Confirmed
Baldwin II	-	King of Jerusalem; gave the knights quarters near the Temple	Britannica	Documented association
Bernard of Clairvaux	-	Defended the order in *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, about 1136; may have written its Rule	Britannica	Documented association
Innocent II	-	Pope; granted privileges in 1139	Britannica	Documented association
Philip IV	-	King of France; ordered the arrests of October 13, 1307	Barber; Britannica	Documented association (opponent)
Clement V	-	Pope; suppressed the order March 22, 1312	Council of Vienne decrees	Documented association
Jacques de Molay	died 1314	Last Grand Master; burned March 18, 1314	Barber; Britannica	Confirmed
Geoffroi de Charney	died 1314	Senior officer; burned with de Molay	Barber	Confirmed
Dinis	-	King of Portugal; created the Order of Christ in 1319	Portuguese heritage authority	Documented association
Barbara Frale	-	Historian; found the Chinon record in 2001	Library of Congress; Pipes	Documented association (researcher)

Freemasonry

Person	Dates	Role	Evidence	Label
William Schaw	-	Master of works and general warden of the Scottish masons around 1600	Stevenson 1988	Documented association
Elias Ashmole	-	Recorded his own initiation at Warrington, 1646	UGLE	Confirmed
Anthony Sayer	-	First Grand Master, 1717	UGLE	Confirmed
George Washington	-	Initiated 1752; Master of Alexandria Lodge No. 22, 1788	Washington Masonic Memorial; his own letters	Confirmed
Prince Hall	about 1735 or 1748 to 1807 (sources differ)	Initiated 1775; Master of African Lodge No. 459; petitioned against slavery, 1777	Library of Congress; Wesley; Massachusetts Archives	Confirmed
John Batt	-	Soldier of the 38th Foot who initiated Prince Hall and others, 1775	Wesley; EBSCO reference article	Documented association
Albert Pike	-	Grand Commander, Scottish Rite Southern Jurisdiction, from 1859	Scottish Rite	Confirmed
Walter M. Fleming and William J. Florence	-	Founders of the Shriners, 1872	Shriners International	Confirmed
Thomas Smith Webb, Henry Fowle, John Snow, Thomas Lowndes	-	Founders of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar, 1816	Grand Encampment	Confirmed
Maria Deraismes and Georges Martin	-	Founders of the first mixed lodge, 1893 (Le Droit Humain)	Le Droit Humain	Confirmed

Person	Dates	Role	Evidence	Label
Annie Besant	-	Brought Le Droit Humain to Britain, 1902	Le Droit Humain	Confirmed
Bernard-Raymond Fabre-Palaprat	-	Founded a Templar revival order in Paris, 1804	OSMTH	Confirmed (of the revival, not of the medieval order)
Frank S. Land	-	Founded DeMolay, 1919	DeMolay Foundation	Confirmed
Andrew Michael Ramsay	-	Gave an oration in the 1730s tying Masonry to the Crusades	My earlier research notes	Not verified for this book
Karl Gotthelf von Hund	-	Led the Rite of Strict Observance, which claimed Templar descent; first chapter about 1751	Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon research page	Confirmed

People who shaped the story from outside

Person	Year	Role in the story	Source
William Morgan	1826	Disappeared after planning to expose Masonic ritual; set off the Anti-Masonic movement	Brownback; Johnston
William Wirt	1831-1832	Anti-Masonic Party presidential candidate; carried Vermont	Britannica; Johnston
Joseph Ritner	1835	Anti-Masonic governor of Pennsylvania	Johnston
Leo Taxil (Gabriel Jogand-Pages)	1890s	Invented "Palladism," a supposed Luciferian Masonry; confessed in 1897	L'Illustration, 1897
Eliphas Levi	1856	Drew the goat-headed "Baphomet"	Wikimedia Commons record of the 1856 book plate
Pierre Plantard	1956	Registered the Priory of Sion	CBS News; High Court of England and Wales
Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh	1982	Co-authors of *The Holy Blood and the Holy*	High Court of England and Wales

Person	Year	Role in the story	Source
		Grail	

Part 4: The Rumors, Traced and Graded

Each claim gets a short record and then the evidence: the claim in its most precise form, the earliest place I could trace it, who started and spread it, whether it is still around, who it names and whether they answered. Every claim is an allegation until the verdict says otherwise. "No statement found" means I looked and found none.

Chapter 13: Claims About the Templars

Claim 1: "The Freemasons are the secret descendants of the Knights Templar."

Claim record	
Precise claim	Templars who escaped the suppression of 1312 went underground and became, or founded, Freemasonry, passing down Templar secrets.
Earliest appearance	Eighteenth-century Masonic claims, according to Britannica; usually traced to Ramsay's oration in the 1730s [Not verified] and the Rite of Strict Observance, from about 1751
Who started it	Freemasons themselves
Who spread it	Masonic Templar degrees; Barruel and other anti-Masonic writers; modern popular books
Still around?	Yes
Named	Freemasonry; the Knights Templar
Statements	OSMTH, the main modern Templar revival order, "does not assert any direct descent from the ancient Order."

What the evidence shows. The order's property and people went to known places after 1312: the Hospitallers, Portugal's Order of Christ and individual lives in monasteries.[141] The documented roots of the lodges are among Scottish stonemasons around 1600, and the first Grand Lodge dates to 1717.[142] No record connects a Templar house or officer to an early lodge. Britannica identifies the Templar line of succession as something "the Freemasons claimed" in the 18th century.[143] Even the leading Templar revival order does not claim descent.[144]

Verdict: Unsupported. Masons adopted the Templar story in the 1700s. No record shows they inherited it.

Claim 2: "The Templars were guilty of heresy, idol worship and secret rituals."

Claim record	
Precise claim	The charges of 1307 were true: Templars denied Christ, spat on the cross and worshipped an idol.
Earliest appearance	An ex-Templar's accusation in 1304 or 1305; Philip IV's arrest order,

[141] Council of Vienne, "Decrees of the Council of...". Patrimonio Cultural, "Convento de Cristo em Tomar". Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[142] David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's...*. United Grand Lodge of England, "History of Freemasonry".

[143] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[144] OSMTH, "History of the Modern Order".

Claim record	
	October 13, 1307
Who started it	Philip IV's government
Who spread it	French royal officials and inquisitors; later occult and conspiracy writers
Still around?	Yes, in occult and conspiracy literature
Named	The Templars; Jacques de Molay
Statements	De Molay and Geoffroi de Charney took back their confessions on March 18, 1314, and were burned that evening.

What the evidence shows. The confessions came largely in France, many under torture.[145] Templars tried in other countries were found innocent, and the Council of Vienne voted overwhelmingly against suppression.[146] When Clement V abolished the order he did so "not by definitive sentence," and Barber stresses that the suppression was "not the condemnation."[147] Britannica calls the charges "now recognized to be without foundation."[148]

Verdict: Unsupported. The only evidence for the charges is confessions extracted under pressure in one kingdom, and the Church never found the order guilty.

Claim 3: "The Vatican's Chinon Parchment proves the pope cleared the Templars."

Claim record	
Precise claim	A document found in the Vatican archives shows Clement V found the Templars innocent.
Earliest appearance	News coverage of Barbara Frale's 2001 find and the Vatican's 2007 facsimile edition
Who started it	News reports summarizing the find
Who spread it	Press coverage in 2007; documentaries
Still around?	Yes
Named	Clement V; the Templars
Statements	The Vatican published the trial records in 2007 as *Processus Contra Templarios*.

What the evidence shows. The document is real. It records the cardinals' hearings at Chinon in 1308, and Reuters summed it up as Clement V absolving the Templars of heresy.[149] But absolving individual leaders is not the same as declaring the order innocent. Four years later the same pope abolished the

[145] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[146] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[147] Council of Vienne, "Decrees of the Council of…". Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*.

[148] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

[149] Nathan Dorn, "Templar Secrets at the Law…". Daniel Pipes, "The myth of the Knights…". Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*.

order anyway, choosing an administrative route instead of a verdict.[150] Daniel Pipes, writing at the time, cautioned against reading the find as a full exoneration.[151]

Verdict: Partly supported. The pope's cardinals absolved the leaders in 1308, and the Church never condemned the order. It did not declare the order innocent, and it abolished it in 1312.

Claim 4: "The goat-headed Baphomet is the idol the Templars worshipped."

Claim record	
Precise claim	The winged, goat-headed figure called Baphomet is a picture of the Templars' secret god.
Earliest appearance	The image: Eliphas Levi's *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*, volume 2, 1856
Who started it	Eliphas Levi, a French occultist (the image); the 1307 charges (an idol of some kind)
Who spread it	Occult writers; later popular culture
Still around?	Yes
Named	The Templars
Statements	Not applicable

[150] Council of Vienne, "Decrees of the Council of…".

[151] Daniel Pipes, "The myth of the Knights…".



Baphomet, drawn by Eliphas Levi for Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie, volume 2, 1856, more than 540 years after the Templars were suppressed. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

What the evidence shows. The charges of 1307 included idol worship, described by Britannica as a bearded male head.[152] The famous goat-headed figure is something else entirely. It was drawn by the occultist Eliphas Levi and published in 1856, 544 years after the order was suppressed, according to the Wikimedia Commons record of the image. [The 1856 publication date comes from the image record and was not checked against a library catalog.] A nineteenth-century drawing cannot show what medieval knights worshipped.

Verdict: Contradicted. The image dates from 1856.

Claim 5: "Friday the 13th is unlucky because the Templars were arrested on that day."

Claim record	
Precise claim	The superstition about Friday the 13th began with the arrests of Friday, October 13, 1307.
Earliest appearance	Not traced in this research
Who started it	Not established
Who spread it	Popular books, websites and novels
Still around?	Yes

[152] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

Claim record	
Named	The Templars; Philip IV
Statements	Not applicable

What the evidence shows. The arrests really did begin on Friday, October 13, 1307.[153] That is the true part. What is missing is any chain of evidence from 1307 to the modern superstition. My earlier research notes found none, and I found none either. A memorable date makes a good story; it does not make a cause.

Verdict: Unsupported.

Claim 6: "The Templars invented banking."

Claim record	
Precise claim	The Templars created the first banking system, including checks and letters of credit.
Earliest appearance	Not traced in this research
Who spread it	Popular histories and documentaries
Still around?	Yes
Statements	Not applicable

What the evidence shows. The Templars did act as bankers. Britannica says their storehouses and ability to move gold safely "made them attractive as bankers to kings as well as to pilgrims."[154] My earlier research notes caution that the popular claim that every pilgrim carried a standard Templar letter of credit cashable anywhere goes beyond the surviving evidence. And banking, in the sense of deposits, loans and transfers, existed long before 1119.

Verdict: Partly supported. The Templars ran an important financial network. They did not invent banking.

Claim 7: "Rosslyn Chapel was built by the Templars and hides their treasure."

Claim record	
Precise claim	Rosslyn Chapel was a Templar building, and the Templars' treasure or secret archive is hidden there.
Earliest appearance	Not traced in this research
Who spread it	Popular books, novels and films
Still around?	Yes
Named	Rosslyn Chapel; the St Clair family
Statements	The Rosslyn Chapel Trust: "Founded in 1446 as a family chapel."

[153] Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*.

[154] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

What the evidence shows. The chapel was founded in 1446 by Sir William St Clair, who died in 1484.[155] The Templars had been suppressed for 134 years by then. The Trust's history makes no claim of a Templar connection.[156] No excavation or record shows a Templar treasure there.

Verdict: Contradicted that the Templars built it. Unsupported that it hides their treasure.

Claim 8: "The Templars served a secret Priory of Sion that guards the bloodline of Jesus."

Claim record	
Precise claim	A medieval secret society, the Priory of Sion, created the Templars and still protects descendants of Jesus.
Earliest appearance	Pierre Plantard's Priory of Sion, registered in France in 1956, and documents ("Dossiers Secrets") placed in France's national library in the 1960s
Who started it	Pierre Plantard and associates
Who spread it	*The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, first published 1982; Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code*
Still around?	Yes
Named	The Templars; the Priory of Sion
Statements	Not applicable; Plantard's organization was itself the source.

What the evidence shows. CBS's 60 Minutes reported in 2006 that a French expert found no evidence the Priory existed before Plantard's 1956 version, called it "a pure invention," and called Plantard "a fantasist."[157] The same year, the High Court in London heard a copyright case brought by two authors of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* against Random House. The judgment notes the book was first published in 1982, that the "Dossiers Secrets" were in France's national library, and that material had emerged suggesting the documents were "an elaborate hoax in which Mr Pierre Plantard had a significant role," though the judge did not need to decide the point.[158] The authors lost, and their appeal was dismissed in 2007.[159] Britannica says the bloodline theories are what "most scholars regard as fantasy."[160]

Verdict: Contradicted. The Priory of Sion was a 1956 creation.

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[155] Rosslyn Chapel Trust, "History".

[156] Rosslyn Chapel Trust, "History".

[157] Daniel Schorn, "The Priory of Sion", 60 Minutes, CBS News, April 27, 2006, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-priory-of-sion/, accessed November 18, 2026.

[158] High Court of Justice, Chancery Division (Peter Smith J), "Baigent and Leigh v The Random House Group Ltd (2006) EWHC 719 (Ch)", judgment of April 7, 2006, paragraphs 11, 16, 34, 37, 51 and 53, The National Archives Find Case Law, https://caselaw.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ewhc/ch/2006/719, accessed November 18, 2026.

[159] High Court of Justice, "Baigent and Leigh v The...".

[160] Britannica Editors, "Templar".

Chapter 14: Claims About Freemasonry

Claim 9: "Freemasons secretly worship Lucifer, and Albert Pike admitted it."

Claim record	
Precise claim	High-degree Masons worship Lucifer, as shown by Albert Pike's *Morals and Dogma* and by secret instructions.
Earliest appearance	Leo Taxil's "Palladism" writings of the 1890s, which invented a Luciferian high Masonry
Who started it	Leo Taxil (Gabriel Jogand-Pages)
Who spread it	Taxil's readers in the 1890s; later anti-Masonic writers quoting Pike out of context
Still around?	Yes
Named	Albert Pike; the Scottish Rite; Freemasonry
Statements	Taxil confessed the hoax in Paris on April 19, 1897.

What the evidence shows. Start with what Pike actually wrote. In his chapter on the 19th degree, he praised "that Sublime Faith which aspires to God alone, and despises all the pomps and works of Lucifer," and then remarked, "LUCIFER, the Light-bearer! Strange and mysterious name to give to the Spirit of Darkness!"[161] That is a writer musing on the strangeness of a name, in a passage that "despises" Lucifer's works. It is not a statement of worship. Pike's own preface also says readers are free to reject anything in the book.[162]

The Luciferian story itself came from a confessed fraud. Leo Taxil spent years publishing sensational "exposes" of a Luciferian Masonry he called Palladism, with a supposed ex-Palladist named Diana Vaughan as his star witness. On April 19, 1897, before an audience in Paris, he admitted it was invented and that "Diana Vaughan" was his typist. "I am admitting my crime," he said. "Palladism, now, is dead, very dead."[163] My earlier research notes add that the often-quoted "instruction" in which Pike supposedly declares Lucifer to be God has no authenticated Pike original. [Not verified for this book.]

Verdict: Contradicted. Pike's passage says the opposite of what it is quoted to mean, and the Luciferian story was a confessed hoax.

Claim 10: "The Catholic Church lifted its ban on Freemasonry in 1983."

Claim record	
Precise claim	Since 1983, Catholics have been free to become Freemasons.
Earliest appearance	Not traced; often linked to the 1983 revision of church law
Who spread it	Word of mouth; some websites
Still around?	Yes
Named	The Catholic Church

[161] Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the…*.

[162] Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the…*.

[163] Edmond Frank, "Leo Taxil's confession (report of the April 19, 1897 lecture)", L'Illustration, no. 2827, May 1, 1897, trans. Suzanne D'Aoust, posted by the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, 1997, https://freemasonry.bcy.ca/texts/taxil_confession.html, accessed November 18, 2026.

Claim record	
Statements	Declaration on Masonic Associations, November 26, 1983; Dicastery response, November 13, 2023

What the evidence shows. The 1983 declaration says the opposite: "membership in them remains forbidden," and Catholics who join "are in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion."[164] In 2023 the Vatican repeated that "active membership in Freemasonry by a member of the faithful is forbidden."[165]

Verdict: Contradicted.

Claim 11: "Freemasons control the government, and the 33rd degree controls all Masons."

Claim record	
Precise claim	A hidden Masonic leadership, centered on 33rd-degree Masons, directs governments and gives orders to Masons everywhere.
Earliest appearance	Robison and Barruel, 1797, for the political plot (see Volume 1); the 33rd-degree version not traced
Who spread it	Anti-Masonic writers from the 1790s on; the Anti-Masonic Party in the 1820s and 1830s
Still around?	Yes
Named	Freemasonry; the Scottish Rite
Statements	The Scottish Rite says the 33rd degree is "Inspector General Honorary," conferred every odd-numbered year.

What the evidence shows. Freemasonry has no world headquarters. Each Grand Lodge governs its own territory, practices are "not uniform from country to country," and the main English body even forbids its members to join many American-style Masonic side groups.[166] The 33rd degree is, in the Scottish Rite's own description, an honorary title.[167] None of that means Masons have never used lodge ties for political ends. Italy's parliament investigated the P2 lodge in the 1980s and traced real Masonic ties to covert political networks. [Not verified: the P2 inquiry comes from my earlier research notes.] But one lodge's documented scandal is evidence about that lodge, not about millions of Masons worldwide.

Verdict: Unsupported.

Claim 12: "The Masons murdered William Morgan."

Claim record	
Precise claim	Freemasons kidnapped and killed William Morgan in 1826 to stop him publishing their rituals.
Earliest appearance	September 1826, in New York
Who started it	Morgan's supporters and local investigators

[164] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Declaration on Masonic Associations".

[165] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Response to the request of...".

[166] Britannica Editors, "Freemasonry".

[167] Scottish Rite, "Questions".

Claim record	
Who spread it	Anti-Masonic newspapers, 141 of them by 1832; the Anti-Masonic Party
Still around?	As a historical question
Named	New York Freemasons
Statements	A Masonic history from the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon says he was "taken to Canada by Masons."

What the evidence shows. Morgan was seized and disappeared in September 1826; sources disagree on whether the key date was September 12 or 19.[168] Even a Masonic source accepts that Masons took him away.[169] What happened after that has never been proven in the records I could read. The political fallout is fully documented: New York lodges collapsed and a national party was born.[170]

Verdict: Unresolved. Masons abducted Morgan. Whether they killed him has not been established.

Claim 13: "George Washington was a Freemason and laid the Capitol cornerstone in a Masonic ceremony."

Claim record	
Precise claim	Washington was an initiated Mason and acted as master at the Masonic laying of the Capitol cornerstone.
Earliest appearance	Not a rumor; documented at the time
Named	George Washington
Statements	Washington's own letters of 1798

What the evidence shows. Washington was initiated on November 4, 1752, named Master of Alexandria Lodge No. 22 in 1788, and served as acting master at the Capitol cornerstone ceremony on September 18, 1793.[171] His own letters confirm his membership and show he seldom attended a lodge.[172]

Verdict: Supported.

The tally

Verdict	Number of claims	Claims
Supported	1	13
Partly supported	2	3, 6
Disputed	0	-
Unsupported	4	1, 2, 5, 11
Contradicted	5	4, 7, 8, 9, 10

[168] Alexander Johnston, "Anti-Masonry". David P. Brownback, "The Morgan Affair".

[169] David P. Brownback, "The Morgan Affair".

[170] David P. Brownback, "The Morgan Affair". Britannica Editors, "Anti-Masonic Movement".

[171] George Washington Masonic National Memorial, "George Washington, The Mason".

[172] G. W. Snyder to George Washington, "Founders Online".

Verdict	Number of claims	Claims
Unresolved	1	12

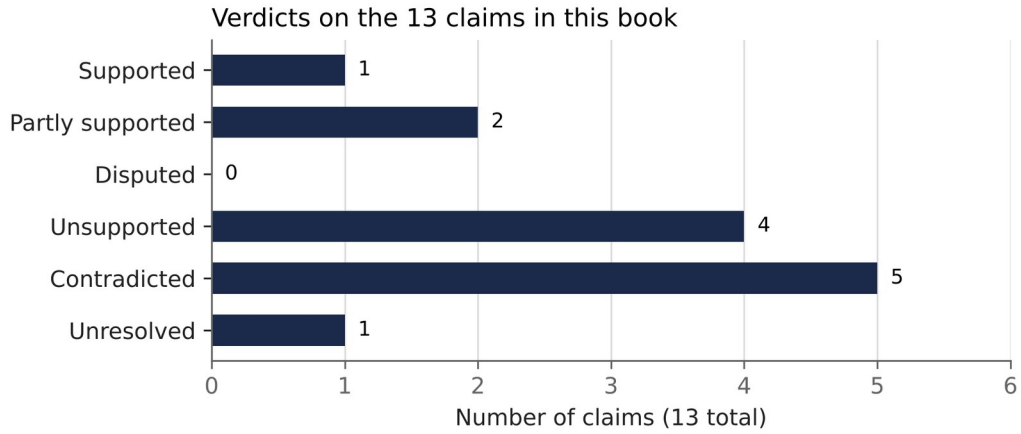


Chart 3. How the 13 claims in this book were graded. Data from the table above. Made for this book.

Conclusion: What the Records Show

Chapter 15: Two True Stories and One Borrowed One

The Knights Templar were real, and their history is well documented. They began around 1119 or 1120 as a few knights guarding pilgrims, won church approval at Troyes, and grew into an international order of soldiers, farmers and money-movers. When the Holy Land was lost in 1291 they lost their purpose, and a cash-hungry French king destroyed them with charges historians now regard as baseless. The pope abolished the order in 1312 without ever finding it guilty. Its property went mostly to the Hospitallers, and in Portugal to the new Order of Christ. Its last Grand Master burned in 1314.

Freemasonry is real too, and its history is just as documented, though less dramatic. It grew out of working stonemasons' lodges, with its best early evidence in Scotland around 1600. Gentlemen joined, the first Grand Lodge formed in London in 1717, and within a century Masonry had spread across Europe and the Americas. Washington was a Mason. Prince Hall and his brothers built Black Freemasonry in Boston in the 1770s and 1780s. Women built their own lodges. A disappearance in New York in 1826 nearly destroyed American Masonry and gave the country its first anti-Masonic political party.

What connects the two is a story, and the records show exactly when it was told. In the 1700s Masons began claiming descent from the Templars. They put Templar degrees into their systems, and in 1816 American Masons formed a Grand Encampment of Knights Templar. That is a real tradition with a real history. But it is a tradition of borrowing a name, not of inheriting an order. Even the main modern Templar revival order says it does not claim direct descent.

Of the thirteen claims graded in this book, one is supported, two are partly supported, four are unsupported, five are contradicted and one is unresolved.

Why it matters

Legends about the Templars and the Masons are mostly harmless fun until they are not. Philip IV used made-up charges to destroy an order and take its wealth. Leo Taxil used made-up Luciferian rituals to sell books, and his inventions are still being quoted as fact more than a century after he confessed. The pattern is the same as in Volume 1: a claim gets repeated until people forget to ask where it started.

For Christians, there is a real conversation to have about Freemasonry. The Catholic Church forbids membership, and some Protestant bodies urge caution about oaths and shared prayers. That conversation deserves accurate facts on the table. Pike's actual words, Taxil's actual confession and the actual text of the 1983 declaration are more useful in that conversation than any rumor.

What I could not settle

- What happened to William Morgan after he was taken in 1826.
- The exact text and date of Ramsay's oration, which I could not check for this book.
- The founding of Aragon's Order of Montesa, which I could not check against the Spanish state archive.
- Where the Friday-the-13th link to the Templars first appeared in print.

If you have a primary source on any of these, I would like to see it. My address is on the copyright page.

Check It Yourself: Five Questions for Any Claim

You will hear new stories about secret societies long after this book is printed. Here are the five questions I used on every claim in this book. They work on the next one too.

1. **Where did it first appear?** Find the oldest source you can, not the newest post. A story that has been repeated a thousand times still has one first teller. The idea that Masons descend from the Templars shows up in Masonic writing of the 1700s, more than 400 years after the order was shut down.
2. **Who is saying it, and what do they gain?** A group speaking about itself, a scholar, a newspaper and a book seller all have different reasons to say what they say. That doesn't make any of them wrong, but it tells you how hard to check.
3. **Is there a record from the time?** Letters, court papers, minutes, laws and receipts beat memories written down years later. The papal letters and the trial records of 1307 to 1312 are why we know what the Templars were actually charged with, and what the pope decided.
4. **Did the people named ever answer?** Look for what the accused person or group said. Leo Taxil stood up in Paris in 1897 and admitted his Luciferian Masonry was a hoax, and modern Templar groups such as OSMTH say on their own websites that they do not descend from the medieval order. If you can't find a statement, say "no statement found" rather than guessing.
5. **Do the dates line up?** A lot of famous claims fall apart on the calendar alone. The goat-headed Baphomet image dates from 1856, more than 500 years after the Templars, and the Priory of Sion was registered in 1956.

If a claim fails two or more of these, treat it as a rumor until someone shows you a record. For a full workbook on this kind of checking, see *How to Fact Check Anything Yourself*, also in the Fact Check Series.

Appendix A: Chronology

Events are documented unless marked **[Allegation]**, **[Legend]** or **[Not verified]**.

Date	Event	Chapter
1099	First Crusade ends with Jerusalem in crusader hands	1
Late 1119 or early 1120	Hugh de Payns and eight or nine knights vow to protect pilgrims	1
1127	Hugh tours Europe to raise support	1
1128 or 1129	Council of Troyes approves the order	1
About 1136	Bernard of Clairvaux writes *In Praise of the New Knighthood*	1
1139	Innocent II grants the order privileges	1
1185	Temple Church, London, consecrated	2
1187	Battle of Hattin; Saladin executes Templar prisoners	3
1240	New chancel of the Temple Church consecrated	2
1291	Fall of Acre	3
1304 or 1305	An ex-Templar accuses the order **[Allegation]**	4
October 13, 1307	Philip IV's arrests of the Templars in France	4
November 1307	Clement V orders arrests everywhere	4
1308	Cardinals' hearings at Chinon; hearings at Poitiers	4
May 12, 1310	Fifty-four Templars burned near Paris	4
1311	Council of Vienne opens; votes against suppression	4
March 22, 1312	*Vox in excelso* suppresses the order "not by definitive sentence"	4
May 2, 1312	*Ad providam* gives Templar property to the Hospitallers	4
March 18, 1314	Jacques de Molay and Geoffroi	4

Date	Event	Chapter
	de Charney burned in Paris	
1317	Order of Montesa founded in Aragon **[Not verified]**	5
1319	King Dinis creates the Order of Christ in Portugal	5
1446	Rosslyn Chapel founded as a family chapel	11
About 1600	Scottish lodge records under William Schaw	6
1646	Elias Ashmole records his initiation	6
June 24, 1717	First Grand Lodge formed at the Goose and Gridiron, London	6
1723	*Constitutions* published	6
1730s	Ramsay's oration ties Masonry to the Crusades **[Not verified]**	11
1751	"Antients" Grand Lodge formed	6
November 4, 1752	George Washington initiated	8
March 6, 1775	Prince Hall and fourteen others initiated	9
July 3, 1775	African Lodge No. 1 organized	9
January 1777	Prince Hall petitions the Massachusetts legislature to end slavery	9
July 1782	Wilhelmsbad convent rejects Templar descent	11
September 29, 1784	Warrant for African Lodge No. 459 dated in London	9
May 2, 1787	Warrant reaches Boston	9
1791 or 1808	African Grand Lodge formed (sources differ)	9
September 18, 1793	Washington lays the Capitol cornerstone	8
June 24, 1797	Prince Hall delivers his charge at Menotomy	9
May 31, 1801	First Scottish Rite Supreme Council, Charleston	8
1804	Fabre-Palaprat's Templar revival in Paris	11
1807	Prince Hall dies	9

Date	Event	Chapter
December 27, 1813	United Grand Lodge of England formed; American lodges, including African Lodge, later dropped from its rolls	6, 9
June 1816	Grand Encampment of Knights Templar formed in New York	11
September 1826	William Morgan seized and disappears	8
1827	African Lodge declares independence from the English grand lodge	9
September 1831	Anti-Masonic Party convention in Baltimore	8
1832	Wirt carries Vermont	8
1835	Joseph Ritner elected governor of Pennsylvania	8
1856	Eliphas Levi publishes his Baphomet drawing	13
1859	Albert Pike becomes Grand Commander	8
1871	Pike's *Morals and Dogma*	14
September 26, 1872	Shriners founded in New York	8
January 14, 1882	Maria Deraismes initiated	7
1890s	Taxil's "Palladism" hoax **[Allegation]**	14
April 4, 1893	First mixed lodge (Le Droit Humain)	7
April 19, 1897	Taxil confesses	14
1908	Order of Women Freemasons constituted	7
1913	Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons founded	7
1919	DeMolay founded	11
1922	First Shriners children's hospital, Shreveport	8
1956	Priory of Sion registered by Pierre Plantard **[Legend begins]**	13
1982	*The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*	13
November 26, 1983	Catholic Declaration on Masonic Associations	10

Date	Event	Chapter
June 1, 1992	Southern Baptist resolution on voluntary associations	10
2001	Barbara Frale finds the Chinon record	4
April 7, 2006	High Court judgment in Baigent v Random House	13
2007	Vatican publishes *Processus Contra Templarios*	4
November 13, 2023	Vatican repeats that Masonic membership is forbidden	10

Appendix B: Claims and Evidence

#	Claim	Strongest evidence	Earliest traceable appearance	Verdict
1	Masons descend from the Templars	Vienne decrees; Stevenson; UGLE; OSMTH	18th-century Masonic claims	Unsupported
2	The Templars were guilty	Vienne "not by definitive sentence"; Barber; Britannica	1304-1305 accusation; 1307 arrests	Unsupported
3	The Chinon Parchment cleared the Templars	Chinon record; Vienne decrees	2007 news coverage	Partly supported
4	Baphomet image shows the Templar idol	Levi, 1856	Levi, 1856	Contradicted
5	Friday the 13th began with the arrests	Barber (arrest date only)	Not traced	Unsupported
6	The Templars invented banking	Britannica	Not traced	Partly supported
7	The Templars built Rosslyn Chapel	Rosslyn Chapel Trust: founded 1446	Not traced	Contradicted
8	The Priory of Sion and the bloodline	CBS 2006; High Court 2006	Plantard, 1956	Contradicted
9	Masons worship Lucifer	Pike's text; Taxil's confession	Taxil, 1890s	Contradicted
10	Catholic ban lifted in 1983	1983 declaration; 2023 response	Not traced	Contradicted
11	Masons control government; the 33rd degree rules	Scottish Rite; Britannica	Robison and Barruel, 1797	Unsupported
12	Masons murdered William Morgan	Brownback; Johnston	September 1826	Unresolved
13	Washington was a Mason	Masonic Memorial; Washington's letters	Documented at the time	Supported

Appendix C: Visual Credits

Every image was checked against its record on Wikimedia Commons on November 18, 2026. Rights are as stated on that record. Charts were made for this book from the data in the text.

#	Title	Creator and date	Repository	Rights	Placement
1	Microcosm of London, Plate 84: Temple Church	Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Charles Pugin, with aquatint engravers; 1810	Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Microcosm_of_London_Plate_084_-_Temple_Church_edited.jpg	Public domain	Chapter 2
2	Frontispiece and title page of the 1723 Constitutions	Book of 1723; photograph by Christophe Dioux, 2007	Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anderson%27sConstitutions.jpg	Public domain, as stated by the photographer	Chapter 6
3	Rosslyn Chapel, North Side	Robert William Billings; The Baronial and Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Scotland, 1845-1852	Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rosslyn_Chapel_North_Side_ca_1850.jpg	Public domain	Chapter 11
4	Baphomet	Eliphas Levi; Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie, vol. 2, 1856	Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baphomet_by_%C3%89liphas_L%C3%A9vi.jpg	Public domain	Chapter 13, Claim 4

Alt text, in the order above:

1. Engraving of the inside of a round church with tall columns, tomb effigies on the floor and visitors walking.

2. An open old book showing an engraved frontispiece of robed figures under an arch on the left and the printed title page on the right.
3. Engraving of the north side of a richly carved Gothic chapel with buttresses and pinnacles.
4. Drawing of a seated winged figure with a goat's head, a torch between its horns and a pentagram on its forehead.

Images considered and left out: a portrait of Elias Ashmole whose record carries third-party copyright claims, and a portrait of Prince Hall whose creator and date could not be confirmed. A Vermont Anti-Masonic Almanac cover of 1831 was cleared for use but could not be downloaded during this research.

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Every source cited in this book is listed here once, grouped by the five tiers explained in the Introduction. Web sources were read on November 18, 2026.

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