Templar Origin of Freemasonry

*Editor's Note: Ramsay's Oration did not mention the Templars by name, therefore Mackey is incorrect in his comments on the matter.*

The theory that Freemasonry originated in the Holy Land during the Crusades, and was instituted by the Knights Templar, was advanced by the Chevalier Ramsay, for the purpose, it is supposed, of giving an aristocratic character to the association It was subsequently adopted by the College of Clermont, and was accepted by the Baron von Hund as the basis upon which he erected his Rite of Strict Observance. The legend of the Clermont College is thus detailed by M. Berage in his work entitled Les Plus Secrets Mysteres des Hauts Grades, Most Secret Mysteries of the High Degrees.

The Order of Freemasonry was instituted by Godfrey de bouillon, in Palestine in l330, after the defeat of the Christian armies, and was communicated only to a few of the French Freemasons, sometime afterwards, as a reward for the services which they had rendered to the English and Scottish Knights. From these latter true Freemasonry is derived. Their Mother Lodge is situated on the mountain of Heredom where the first Lodge in Europe was held, which still exists in all its splendor. The Council General is always held there, and it is the seat of the Sovereign Grand Master for the time being. This mountain is situated between the west and the north of Scotland, sixty miles from Edinburgh.

There are other secrets in Freemasonry which were never known among the French, and which have no relation to the Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Degrees which were constructed for the general class of Freemasons. The high Degrees, which developed the true design of Freemasonry and its true secrets, have never been known to them. The Saracens having obtained possession of the holy places in Palestine, where all the mysteries of the Order were practiced, made use of them for most profane purposes.

The Christians then leagued together to conquer this beautiful country, and to drive all these barbarians from the land. They succeeded in obtaining a footing on these shores under the protection of numerous armies of Crusaders which had been sent out there by the Christian princes. The losses which they subsequently experienced put an end to the Christian power, and the crusaders who remained were subjected to the persecutions of the Saracens, who massacred all who publicly proclaimed the Christian faiths This induced Godfrey de Bouillon, towards the end of the third center, to conceal the mysteries of religion under the veil of figures, emblems and allegories.

Hence the Christians selected the temple of Solomon because it has so close a relation to the Christian Church of which its holiness and its magnificence make it the true symbol. So the Christians concealed the mystery of the building up of the Church under that of the construction of the Temple, and gave themselves the title of Masons Architects or Builders, because they were occupied in building the faith. They assembled under the pretext of making plans of architecture to practice the rites of their religion, with all the emblems and allegories that Freemasonry could furnish, and thus protect themselves from the cruelty of the Saracens.

As the mysteries of Freemasonry were in their principles, and still are only those of the Christian religion they were extremely scrupulous to confide this important secret only to those whose discretion had been tried and who had been found worthy. For this purpose they fabricated Degrees as a test of those to whom they wished to confide it, and they gave them at first only the symbolic secret of Hiram, on which all the mystery of blue Masonry is founded, and which is, in fact, the only secret of that Order which has no relation to true Freemasonry.

They explained nothing else to them as they were afraid of being betrayed, and they conferred these Degrees as a proper means of recognizing each other, surrounded as they were by barbarians. To succeed more effectually in this they made use of different Signs and words for each Degree so as not only to distinguish themselves from the profane Saracens, but to designate the different Degrees. These they fixed at the number of seven, in imitation of the Grand Architect, who built the Universe in six days and rested on the seventh, and also because Solomon was seven years in constructing the Temple, which they had selected as the figurative basis of Freemasonry. Under the name of Hiram they gave a false application to the Masters, and developed the true secret of Freemasonry only to the higher Degrees.

Such is the theory of the Templar origin of Freemasonry, which, mythical as it is, and wholly unsupported by the authority of history, has exercised a vast influence in the fabrication of advanced Degrees and the invention of Continental Rites. Indeed, of all the systems propounded during the eighteenth century, so fertile in the construction of extravagant systems, none has played so important a part as this in the history of Freemasonry. Although the theory is no longer maintained, its effects are everywhere seen and felt.

- Source: Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry