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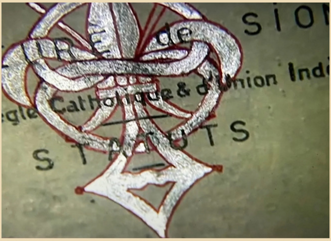
THE TREASURE - THE PRIEST - AND THE PRIORY



The mystery of the movement which is supposed to vie with Papal power now - and in the future. What treasure lies within the strange triangle of the towns of Gisors, Rennes and Stenay? Is it material or spiritual?

REPORT - JANIA MACGILLIVRAY [1]

Pierre Plantard, a tall, gaunt and quite ordinary-looking man in his sixties, walked into the room. Jean-Luc Chaumeil, author of 'Le Triangle d'Or'[2] (published by Alain Lefeuvre, France 1979), the man from Belfont, the publishers, and a couple of others quickly stood up deferentially while he greeted them in a surprisingly princely manner. Roy Davies from BBC's Chronicle series and his two researchers were impressed. Here was the man they had been trying to contact for several years, the man who held the key to the mysterious story of the Abbe Saunière and to the Priory of Sion. "*Ever since I made the first film six years ago*", said Roy Davies, who describes himself as a quite normal soccer-playing Englishman, "*the whole thing has haunted me*." It has also intrigued a host of Chronicle viewers who still flood Davis' office with requests for further information. A third film on the subject will now be broadcast this autumn. After a great deal of initial hesitation, Pierre Plantard had agreed to meet the BBC team and be filmed in Paris.

TRUE KINGS

But who was this strange man who seemed to have so much influence over those who knew him? His significance for them comes from his family history. For Pierre Plantard claims he is the scion of the oldest branch of the descendants of the Merovingian Kings, the most well-known of whom was Clovis, the first Christian king of France. There are a number of Capet and Bourbon pretenders to the throne of France today should the monarchy be restored. But Plantard's claim, although not seemingly to the throne of France, is that he is descended from Sigebert IV, son of Dagobert II who was murdered by Heristal-Carolingian supporters in the VIIth century. His infant son Sigebert was supposedly hidden from the assassins and taken to the prosperous southern town of Rhedae where he became the town's first Count. Pierre Plantard's title is therefore Pierre VI, Comte de Rhedae. His claim might seem preposterous, and Plantard retorts expediently: "*Let those who say this is not true prove the contrary*!" No history book mentions the existence of Sigebert IV although the church records in the 16th century at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris do refer to him, as well as the 17th century ecclesiastical documents of Father Vincent of the Church of Saint Sulpice. But if Plantard's claim is not for political power (which might seem dubious), it certainly is for some sort of moral power. He is proud of his forefathers, who, he claims, together with the mysterious Priory of Sion, have never forgotten that the Capet dynasty usurped the throne. And that they were not the Defenders of the True Faith. There are many legends which describe the unusual power of the Merovingian Kings. Contemporary German historian Godefry Kurth wrote: "*These Kings, sons of Gods, could be recognized by their long hair which they did not cut...they also had, according to Theophanus, pigs' bristles down their backs. Another hereditary mark distinguished them from common mortals: they had a red birthmark in the form of a cross usually on their chests, over their heart. So as well as the hair, a symbol of holy strength, these were supernatural magic signs*." Their '*holy blood*' was thus visible in the strange birthmarks, stated popular writer Gerard de Sede. In his book 'La Race Fabuleuse'[3] he wrote that their origin might even have been extra-terrestrial. Even so, it was due to a certain dissipation of the Merovingian Kings' power that the Carolingian dynasty was able to overthrow them. But even though they were no longer on the throne, claims Plantard, they retained their regal pride and a sense of moral responsibility. Merovingian descendant Godefroy de Bouillon was one of the early Crusaders who took the Christian doctrine to the infidels in Jerusalem. When he had captured the Holy City in 1099, he refused the crown of Jerusalem. But remembering that it was his ancestor Clovis who had christianised France, he founded a new Order which was to vie with Papal power over the centuries. In Jerusalem de Bouillon had met the Brothers of Ormus, a spiritual and Christian sect which put greater stress on the spirit than did the temporal church at Rome. It was to counter the political and material power of the Papacy that he founded the Priory of Sion, with the emblem of the Red Cross used by the Brothers of Ormus. After de Bouillon's death the following year, the Order was headed by Hugues de Payen, Bisol de Saint Omer and Hugues de Champagne, who in 1118 were among those who founded a military order to protect the power of the Order of Sion - the Knights Templars. The first Grand Master of the Knights Templars was Hugues de Payen and thus the Order of Sion was in direct control of the Knights Templars. When in 1187 Jerusalem was recaptured by Saladin, the Knights Templars and the members of the Brothers of Ormus and the Priory of Sion returned to Europe - the latter took up residence in the Priory of St Samson which had been given them by Louis VII, or entered the small priory of Mount Sion at St Jean le Blanc (today a part of Orleans). The Order thereafter took its name from this Priory of Sion. In 1188 the Knights Templars and the Priory of Sion definitely broke their ties at Gisors. It would certainly be extremely difficult to prove the survival of the Priory of Sion through the ages. Even though some Free Masons today claim that their movement had links with the Knights Templars, history has it that the latter died out in 1314 when their members were persecuted and killed by Philippe-le-Bel. A 16th century manuscript at the Bibliotheque Nationale, 'Assises de Jerusalem' on Godefroy de Bouillon, and Jules Doinel's 19th century manuscripts do mention the Priory. But why hasn't more been heard of it? Pierre Plantard has an enigmatic reply. The Priory of Sion, he says, has kept very much in the quiet over the centuries on account of the 'destructive period' in ethical values. But a 'constructive period' is now beginning and the Priory of Sion can now come more out into the open.

THE TREASURE AND A RED HERRING

In 'coming out into the open', enigmatic references are made to three key places in France, and the mystery surrounding these towns. Jean-Luc Chaumeil, a young Paris journalist, seems to have been given the task of explaining the occult significance of these towns in the history of France. His book is entitled 'The Triangle of the Treasure of Gold'. Although the cover of his book displays a bright pile of gold coins (the publishers', not the author's choice), he maintains that there is no material treasure involved, only a spiritual one. The first of these towns is Gisors, the reputed cache of the treasure of the Knights Templars. And when, during the 60s, the then Minister of Culture, Andre Malraux, decided to put an end to the speculation caused by a certain Roger Lhomoy's account of his discovery of a Knights Templar treasure by ordering digs which in fact produced nothing, Plantard, who was a friend of Malraux's, accused both Lhomoy of fabrication and the authorities of digging in the wrong direction - "a red herring, to tale attention away from the really important spot". Important spot? "*That is to say the former Merovingian's tombs where St Catherine's crypt is now built. It is here that the old archives of the Priory of Sion were hidden. But there is no other treasure at Gisors. Lhomoy and others made the whole thing up*." Jean-Luc Chaumeil cites a letter that Plantard supposedly wrote to Gerard de Sede, author of Lhomoy's account: "*Gisors, as well as three other towns, is known to the Initiated as being an ancient sanctuary of the Knights Templars. The secret of the Temple is not lost, it is simply hidden from the profane. The Initiated will tell you that there is no need to dig to find the entrance to the sanctuary; everything in the temple points in the right direction, even its foundations. There is only a symbolic key, the clue to the Arch where the famous treasure lies*...." Pierre Plantard has stated that there is no material treasure, and this reference to one still leaves a lot of questions unanswered.

THE POOR PRIEST

A second story of treasure is perhaps less well-known today but even more mysterious. The story takes place at Rennes-le-Château, in the South of France, near the site of the ancient town of Rhedae, and is interwoven with strange references to the existence of the Priory of Sion, to Freemasonry rites, and a new Arcadia. It begins in 1885 when a young and handsome priest, Berenger Sauniere, of peasant origin, was appointed priest to this small parish. Little did he guess that the dillapidated church he had been appointed to would in fact change his very modest expectations from life. Although St Madeleine's, built in the 8th century, had been partially restored two centuries earlier, it was again badly in need of repair. Sauniere's accounts show that he could only survive at that time on credit from the villagers, and he had to undertake the most pressing work himself with the help of two young neighbours. In 1891, whilst moving the stone of the altar, they found that one of the supporting Visigothic pillars was hollow - and hidden inside were ancient parchments in Latin. They loosened one of the stones in front of the altar and found two very strange scenes under the stone. These bas-reliefs are still visible in the church today and lend credence to the legend that when Dagobert II was ambushed and killed in a forest, he had had time to hide his infant son, Sigebert, from his assassins. One of the carvings shows a cavalier brandishing a sword and holding the reins of a horse which is drinking at a well. Over them is a Roman arch with two fighting animals - either dogs or bears. On the second engraving, the cavalier is saddling a child on his horse, the two animals are still there, but this time one is fleeing from the other. Exploring further with spades, Saunière and his aides found three skeletons - one of which was Sigebert IV's, says Chaumeil - and an earthenware pot containing a small treasure. But of greatest interest were undoubtedly the parchments in Latin. Saunière was the only person in the village who could have understood what was written. Did he have difficulty deciphering the manuscripts or did he consider them too important to publicize? In either case, it was only a year later that he informed his superior, Monseigneur Felix-Arsene Billard, Bishop of Carcassonne, who immediately dispatched Saunière to Paris to report to the priest Bieil, director of the seminary of Saint Sulpice.

SAINT SULPICE - AND A NEW ARCADIA

The majestic church of Saint Sulpice in the heart of Paris is a strange monument of symbolism and mystery, housing one of the best-known gnomons of modern times. If the present-day visitor cares to make use of Jean-Luc Chaumeil's book as a guide, he will be initiated into the hidden symbolisms of the church and its decorations, with its roses, initials PS on the gnomon and elsewhere. But if he does, warns Chaumeil, he might be chased away by a priest as furiously as Chaumeil himself was when shown around by a Priory of Sion member. Perhaps of greatest importance is the Seventh Station of the Cross, which is blatantly out of place or order. This little chapel houses three superb masterpieces by Delacroix. "*These three paintings are the map to the treasure at Rennes*", Jean-Luc Chaumeil was told. The plate at the entrance to the chapel carries the inscription from the Book of Psalms: '*Take me out of the mud that I remain not buried there*'. Is this a reference to a treasure hidden in the earth? At the same time that Saunière reported to the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, a religious order which does not take an oath to God or to the Pope, Paris' intellectual circles were dabbling in magic and the occult. Was it strange that a modest little priest, on his first visit to the capital, should have been so warmly welcomed into these somewhat closed circles? Had he in fact brought documents with him which were considered of prime importance to a number of people interested in Rennes-le-Château? In any case, Saunière was introduced and well received by a group of people who belonged to a movement of occult catholicism, whose emblem was the Rose+Cross (not to be confused with the Rosicrucians). The term '*occult catholicism*' had been used for the first time by the aesthete Josephin Peladan$_4$ and among those who supposedly espoused the philosophy were such prestigious figures of the time as J K Huysmans, Leon Blum, Maeterlink, Debussy and the Count of Rochefoucault. The movement was in reaction to the rationalism accepted by the majority of the French Freemasonry, and to the social evolution of the time. But a minority of the Freemasonry, and an elite in the church, who wanted to remain more traditional, closed and mystical, tried to find a common ground for entente. A helping hand in this direction seems to have been extended by the Jesuits. The movement did in any case have large funds at its disposal. Its members, writes Jean-Luc Chaumeil, were interested in Rennes-le-Château and a new Arcadia. For historical and topological reasons, the little town had cause to be the elected spot, the naval of the earth. In 1605, a book '**Presages tires de ceaux de M Nostradamus**' mentions the region five times as an '*elected*' spot. The theme of Arcadia had been depicted by the painters Signorelli, Guercino and Poussin with their paintings 'Shepherds of Arcadia', and the enigmatic inscription 'Et In Arcadia Ego'. Of special interest is Poussin's painting and the resemblance, as an earlier BBC Chronicle programme showed, to the surrounding mountains at Rennes-le-Château where there is also a tombstone similar to the one painted by Poussin. In the 19th century too, French writers had been inspired by the subject. Auguste de Labouisse-Rochefort very clearly linked Rennes-les-Bains and the new Arcadia, and Gerard de Never wrote of the Merovingian Kings and Arcadia. Labouisse-Rochefort, as well as others, believed that Rennes was a 'holy land' which hid an important treasure which was both material and spiritual. This then was the mystical and intellectual climate of Paris when Saunière arrived in the city. Among the people he was introduced to were Emile Hoffet, a quiet clergyman interested especially in the Merovingian line and the Freemasonry movement; composer Claude Debussy, and occultists Stanislas de Guaita and Jules Bois. Jules Bois' mistress was the greatest soprano of the time, Emma Calve, who two years later was to meet with such success in London that Queen Victoria invited her to Windsor and had a bust made of her. Saunière courted and found favour with Emma Calve, and their liaison was to last several years.

SUDDENLY RICH

Saunière remained in Paris for only a week, but it must have been fruitful for when he returned to Rennes-le-Château it was with new knowledge of his church. Why else did he spend the night hours in the cemetary breaking up a tombstone and re-erecting the dismantled pieces around the graveyard? The tomb was that of Marie Negri d'Ables, 'Dame d'Hautpoul et de Blanchefort', of Merovingian descent. The inscription on the tombstone, now probably lost, had been the work of Abbe Bigou, a Priory of Sion Member, asserts Chaumeil. Did Saunière destroy one of the keys to the mystery? But Saunière was not only preoccupied with getting rid of the tombstone. Together with his young servant and companion, Marie Dénarnaud, he would trek through the countryside, claiming to be searching for stones to build a grotto, and come back heavily laden at the end of the day. What was he bringing back? Whatever it was, Bérenger Saunière was as from 1888 a rich man. He had his church completely restored and lavishly decorated by a team of handsomely-paid workers. Saunière supervised and directed the work himself in the somewhat grotesque Sulpician style which will be described later. Some years later he bought land in the village. Here he built a Neo-Gothic tower which he named the 'Magdala', a spacious villa 'Bethania' with a superb view over the valley, wonderful gardens, ponds, orchards and even a zoo. All this he put in the name of his servant Marie Dénarnaud, a poor church girl, and it had cost 3 million Francs. The priest, who had come to the parish fifteen years earlier without a sou, then began to lead a life of luxury. He built up a superb collection of books and stamps, hired a full-time book-binder and photographer, and bought expensive furniture, cutlery and crockery. And Rennes-le-Château, the little unknown village, was suddenly on the map. An influx of well-known Parisians came to see Saunière and his new domaine - writers, artists and sculptors - and even the Minister of the Arts, Mr Dujardin-Baumetz. Yet the strangest visitor, known to the villagers as 'the foreigner', or Mr de Chambord, was in fact Archduke Jean de Hapsburg, of Merovingian descent, the Austro-Hungarian ruler's cousin. Saunière entertained his guests well as his accounts today show. On 1 November 1900, he paid for 30 barrels of Martinique rum, 45 litres at 2 Francs, and 50 litres at 2.35 Francs, 33 litres of white Haut Bersac, 33 litres of Malvoisie, 17 litres of golden quinquinq, 55 litres of Banyuls and 12 litres of Muscatel.

GOLD

Was it gold that Saunière had found? The region is known for its gold deposits which the Romans were the first to mine. But time-old legends indicate that there might be more than just one treasure hidden in the region. Had this treasure already been found before Saunière time? The gold at Rennes was in the news in the 17th century when Gaston d'Orleans, Louis XIII's brother, conspired with Henri de Montmorency to overthrow the king, and was so certain of victory that he had gold coins minted with his effigy. Some of these were later found at Rennes-le-Château. In the 19th century, more gold was found in the region - a 20 kilo block of gold made from melted Arab coins, then a 50-kilo gold block covered with a bituminous substance which showed it had been hidden under water for a long time. The region had a tumultuous history of invasions from the Damascans, Charles Martel's troops, the Arabs and the Francs. The now-lost treasure of Jerusalem which was pillaged from Rome by Alaric, was in nearby Carcassonne in the 7th century. After the Saunière affair, the region was invaded by treasure-hunters. There were a number of accusations that the Church was covering up for Saunière, and the Bishopric of Carcassonne felt strongly enough about these to issue a rather enigmatic "Warning" in the 'Semaine Religieuse de Carcassonne' on 1 June 1967. Who this "Warning" was written for remains a mystery, but of interest was Monseigneur Georges Boyer's remark that the treasure was said to be hidden in a tomb. This was the first reference (but not the last) to the existence of a tomb with a treasure.

OPENING THE WILL

Even if it was not gold that Saunière found (and Plantard is adamant that it was not), the priest continued his high standard of living, and the Church did not interfere until Bishop Billard was replaced as Bishop of Carcassonne in 1902 by Mgr de Beausejour. The latter promptly offered Saunière another parish. But Saunière refused curtly, "*I will not leave a parish where my interests retain me*". The Bishop then summoned Saunière to Carcassonne, but each time the priest was conveniently able to produce medical certificates stating he was too ill to travel. Finally, Beausejour wrote and asked Saunière where his money was coming from. "Professional secret", was the reply. "Very generous sums are being given to me by sinners whose names I cannot reveal". Then in 1910, Mgr de Beausejour accused the priest of charging excessive sums for masses he celebrated and Saunière was suspended from office. He appealed to Rome who took his side. Mgr de Beausejour continued his attacks over a number of years until Saunière was definitely suspended in 1915. But he still refused to leave his parish where his generosity had made him very popular. During the period of battle with his superior, Saunière wealth seems to have dwindled to the point of not being able to cover certain bills. But in 1916 he was wealthy again. He commissioned running water for the village, roads, a new chapel, a swimming pool and a 70 metre tall tower as a public library. The work was signed for on 5 January 1917 but a fortnight later, on 22 January he was to die under mysterious circumstances. When Saunière heirs opened his will, they discovered that their extravagant relative owned in fact nothing - everything was in the name of his servant Marie Dénarnaud. Did the key to the mystery of Saunière wealth die with the Abbe?

PRESSURE ON THE VATICAN

Although in 1967, the Carcassonne religious paper implied that Saunière wealth was no longer a mystery for them, the Church was still enormously interested in his domaine after World War II. At that time the Bishopric of Carcassonne approached Marie Dénarnaud, who was still living in the magnificent abode at Rennes-le-Château and tried to buy the property. But Marie turned a deaf ear. According to a diocesan priest, M l'Abbe Mazieres, the Church then elaborated a complex plan to recover the domaine. The Bishopric commissioned a priest in the diocese, Abbe Gau, a Resistance Hero, to contact Noël Corbu, a distant cousin of Marie's who was jailed in the region for wartime activities. If Corbu consented to convince Marie to give the Church the property, he would be freed. The prisoner agreed, but when freed, double-crossed his liberators by persuading Marie to sell him the property - and it was he who started the digs. But Corbu had not lost all respect for the Church. He sent his two children to religious schools in Carcassonne - but soon he found the fees too expensive. Not lacking in initiative, he wrote to the Vatican and asked the Holy See to cover the expenses of educating his offspring. The Carcassonne Bishopric learnt of this with astonishment when the apostolic nonce, Mgr Angello Roncalli (the future John XXIII) turned up to make enquiries about Corbu's letter. Not very pleased to say the least, Carcassonne gave a negative answer which was relayed to the Vatican. Even so, the astounded Bishopric learnt a short time afterwards that the Vatican had in fact accepted Corbu's request. What sort of pressure, if any, was Corbu able to exert on the Vatican? Perhaps we shall never know, because Corbu died a few years later in a tragic car accident. According to Chaumeil, this might not have been so accidental.

A TERRIBLE SPOT

Pierre Plantard says that Abbe Bérenger Saunière was just a pawn in a bigger game which involved other more important priests before him and the ubiquitous Priory of Sion. And the clues which Saunière included in the decoration of the little church supposedly point to the story of the real treasure, which is spiritual and not material. It will seem to those visitors not versed in the occult that the little church, with the strange inscription on the porticle "Terribilis est locus iste", and the roses and crosses (or Rose+Cross) is part of the complex world or rites, obediences, scissions and ideological confrontations of Masonic movements. For inside, the floor is laid with sixty-four black and white stones, like a chessboard, with the angles oriented towards the cardinal points. Such a floor is apparently quite usual in a masonic lodge, where white and black symbolize the white and black years in a person's life. There are tombstones in the graveyard which repeat the symbolism, such as Abbe Jean Vie's, with the inscription 'Born in 1808, ordained in 1840, died 1 September 1872' - thus, since the date of his death is false, he was 'made' to live 64 years, 32 in "white" before being ordained, and 32 in "black" as a priest. Curiously enough, the same symbolism can be applied to Saunière own existence - he was ordained when he was 32, and died 32 years later. Is this mere coincidence or part of a more complex design?

THE STATIONS

When one looks at the slightly grotesque paintings in Saunière church, one might be struck by several additions in the descriptions of Christ's Passion. At the First Station is a Negro holding a white plate ('plateau' in French) - this says Chaumeil, refers to the neighbouring mountain of Le Roc Noir and the Plateau of Blanchefort, as well as to the black and white emblem of the Temple, or 'Baucean' or the Priory of Sion. "The themes of 'black' and 'white' are of primordial importance in deciphering the clues at Rennes-le-Château", said Plantard. "Wherever you look, you are referred back to these two symbols". Gérard de Sède and Jean-Luc Chaumeil also wrote of the Second Station and a woman in black holding the hand of a child in a kilt. I couldn't find this detail - the nearest was a woman draped in a lighter colour and a naked child, with something which might just resemble a Scottish tartan scarf draped around his neck. Chaumeil explained that in any case the church had been "redone" several times by the present owner of Saunière's property, M Buthion. But the painting, according to Chaumeil, was a symbol of the true Masonic movement, which was hermetic, Christian and aristocratic and which had its following in the region. Priests such as Vie, Boudet, Bigou and Saunière, and the local aristocracy such as the Fleurys of Blanchefort were members. The Scottish rite supposedly died out in France in 1828. But at the end of the century, Edouard de Ribaucourt, a member of the French Masonic movement, the Grand Orient de France - which was condemned by the British in 1877 for being too secular - decided to recreate the Scottish Rite. This brought him into conflict with the movement, and in 1913, with the help of the oldest free-masonry lodge in France, 'l'Anglaise 204' which had been founded in Bordeaux in 1732 by three Britons, he founded the 'Grand Loge Independante et Ruguliere', today known as the 'Grand Loge Nationale Francaise'. This was immediately recognised by the British Free Masonry Society and the six million free masons around the world. But what was the relationship between Saunière and the Scottish Rite? And between the free masons and the Priory of Sion? Chaumeil tells us the story of a strange friend of Ribaucourt's - Alexis de Sarachoga y Lobonoff - who together with the Father Dernon, who Chaumeil asserts was a member of the Priory of Sion, founded a mystical-cum-political movement, the Hieron du Val d'Or. As this is the only movement whose philosophy is clearly described in Chaumeil's book, it might as well be the philosophy of the Priory of Sion, about which Plantard is reticent. The Hieron was a small occult group which, to quote Chaumeil, "had a political ambition of 'international ethnarc order'. This terminology, borrowed from that of the Roman Empire, is significant: it encompassed a theocracy with the nations acting as provinces, their leaders proconsuls in the service of a world government which was occult and made up of an elite. For Europe, the establishment of a Sovereign would imply the dual hegemony of the Papacy and the Empire, of the Vatican and the Habsburgs".

THE MYSTERY OF THE PARCHMENTS

As great a mystery as that of Saunière wealth surrounds the parchments which the Abbe found in his church. Plantard asserts that in October 1955, they were 'illegally' acquired by two Englishmen, Captain Ronald Stansmore and Sir Thomas Frazer, who were acting for Etienne I, Plantard's cousin who lived in England. The parchments, he says, are now in a safe at Lloyd's Bank, London. What did the parchments contain? Three things, according to Plantard. A genealogy of the Counts of Rhedae, dated 1243, with the seal of Blanche of Castille, a document drawn up by Francois Pierre d'Hautpoul in 1608 completing the genealogy, and thirdly the will of Henri d'Hautpoul dated 24 April 1695, with, below his signature, the Gothic letters PS, as well as an invocation to five saints - Anthony of Padoua, Anthony of Egypt, Sulpice of Bourges, Rock of Montpellier and Mary Magdalen.

THE MAGIC SQUARE

The last esoteric mystery linked to the story of the Priory of Sion surrounds the magic square ROTAS/ARTOS. One was found at Gisors, another allegedly at Rennes-les-Bains and a third at Stenay which is the third place of importance in the story. It was in this town that Dagobert II, who was later canonised, was buried (his remains were discovered in 872 and transferred elsewhere). In the 11th century, Stenay belonged to Godefroy de Bouillon, who led the Crusades. Although the town belonged to Merovingian descendants, the Dukes of Lorraine, many kings and princes covetted it. It was of little economic or strategic interest, but Francois I considered it 'indispensable to the safety of the Kingdom'. Did the many rival armies believe that the town hid the treasure of the Merovingian dynasty? When Charles III of Lorraine reconquered his family fiefdom in 1593 from Henry IV, he did find a treasure of sorts. In rebuilding the foundations of the old church of Saint Dagobert, a series of old tombs were discovered - and the remains of Merovingian Kings Theodoric I, Theodobert I and Theodobald I. But most astonishing of all, wrote Saint Sulpice's Father Vincent in the 17th century, 'was another tomb, whose enormity as well as the size of the bones within, made one think that a giant had been buried there'. During World War I, the Kaiser's son, Crown Prince Frederick-William was at Stenay. When he heard that a ROTAS/ARTOS square was owned by a Monseigneur Manguin, a local priest, he summoned the man and in a fit of unexplained rage destroyed the magic square. The next day he had Monseigneur Manguin killed, and then apparently in the throes of remorse 'half-Naked and with corns on his head, he drove around the town in his huge car, gesticulating, cursing and sometimes singing the 22 couplets of the song 'Roi Dagobert'. ' (Abbe Vigneron).

ET IN ARCADIA EGO

Gisors, Rennes-le-Château, Stenay - a complex triangle, and within this triangle, the church of Saint Sulpice and the village of Sainte Colombe, near Nevers, with its church consecrated to the Holy Spirit. The only clue Chaumeil gives us as to the significance of Sainte Colombe is that it is occultly linked with the legend of the baptism of Clovis, the first Christian King of France and a Merovingian. A dove 'colombe' in French) flew down from the heavens carrying the Sainte Ampoule, the vase which contained the ointment used for the consecration of the future Kings of France. The vase was destroyed during the French Revolution at Reims, although a bit of the ointment it contained was supposedly rescued by Abbe Seraine of Saint Remy. Charles X is said to have used some of this ointment, and Napoleon to have refused it. There was in any case an Order of the Sainte Ampoule with four knights who were responsible for the safeguard of the treasure. A limetree was planted at Sainte Colombe in their honour under Henry IV. Chaumeil tells us that the town was (or still is?) the centre of a pilgrimage for a mysterious sect who would deposit red roses on the cross - this seems to be an allusion to the Rose+Cross. The mysterious pilgrims, Chaumeil writes, had come in search of some treasure linked to the legend of the Sainte Ampoule. "The enormous forest of the Nievre, of the Druids, under which there are miles of abandoned mine shafts, has been the ideal spot to preserve the secret of a time-old tradition. With its lakes and its rivers, with its limetree and its belfry, Sainte Colombe is the mirror of the Triangle of Gold", writes Chaumeil in his book 'The Treasure of the Triangle of Gold'. A very enigmatic reference is to the discreet visit made to the church by the head of the very conservative movement, the Catholic Integrists, Mgr Lefebvre, and by Mgr Ducaud-Bourget, head of the breakaway Catholic group which held their masses at the Church of St Nicholas de Chardonnet, against the Vatican's orders. What was the purpose of their visit? The person who holds the key to all these mysteries, if mysteries there are, is Pierre Plantard, whose magnificent family ring, bearing the inscription 'Et In Arcadia Ego' is a continual reminder of a better world somewhere. "Do you believe in God?" Chaumeil asked him one day. "If God is the Great Architect of the Universe, Yave, then the answer is Yes", he had replied. And if one wonders why Chaumeil wrote his book, his reply is contained in an allusion to a schism in the Plantard family some years ago. One branch, he hints, held that the secret of the Priory of Sion belonged to the Church, the other claimed that it was public property. But even if Pierre Plantard believes that the secret should now come out into the open, he claims that Saunière went 'too far'. No-one could accuse Plantard of going 'too far', or being too explicit. When asked about the Priory of Sion, Plantard only answers in symbols: "The Priory of Sion could not have existed without the Merovingians, and the Merovingians could not have existed without the Priory of Sion". "I do not need the Priory of Sion, but the Priory of Sion needs me...I have no political ambitions as the descendant of the oldest Merovingian branch but I am continuing - ethically - the tradition of those who made France."

THE PRIORY OF SION

Chaumeil gives some answers, but not many. There are apparently 121 leaders, and at the head is the 'Nautonier' (pilot), seconded by thirteen 'Croises' (crusaders) or 'Rose+Cross'. The most surprising information offered was that the last head of the Priory of Sion was none other than the renowned JEAN COCTEAU, writer, film-director, playwright and poet. He also decorated two French churches - at Milly-la-Foret and at Villefranche - and further clues to the Priory of Sion might be found in these two places. Cocteau, said Chaumeil, had altered the statutes of the Association in 1956. At the same time, the French Law Gazette published the information that an Association called the Priory of Sion had been founded. I acquired a copy of the statutes of the Association, but when I checked out the names and addresses I found that they did not exist. Are the statutes also false or are they being used to divert attention? Philippe de Cherisey, a Belgian-born actor and writer, and member of the Priory, wrote: "The statutes are false. They were drawn up by the 'Opposition' which started in Switzerland with Mgr Lefebvre and M Andre Bonhomme's movement, then continued in Rennes-le-Château with Noel Corbu and Abbe Joseph Courtauly. The 'Opposition' founded an association in Annemasse which took the name of the Priory of Sion. This led to confusion and anarchy with regard to the venerable Order, and to trouble in the Vatican. In 1957, the 'Opposition' was in control. This is reflected in the Grand Master's bitterness in his decoration of the Chapel of Saint Pierre in Villefranche, and in the Church's veering away from its traditional position." When asked whether there were thus two Priories of Sion, de Cherisey replied: "In May 1958, Pierre Plantard who was in the Opposition saved the situation and avoided another Gisors, another break similar to the one in 1118. Jean Cocteau drew up his 'philosophical testament' in the film 'Le Testament d'Orphee'. The statutes, as published in the Law Gazette, are no longer valid and there is only one Priory of Sion, the one which was founded on 13 October 1099 by Godefroy de Bouillon." Another document at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris lists the heads of the Priory of Sion. Included are such eminent names as Darwin's or Leonardo da Vinci's. In response to my scepticism, Chaumeil claimed that these two men had been heads of the Priory even though he admits that some of the other names are false. A clue to the 'Initiated', he says, can be found in their reference to the sentence used by Darwin: 'I have leaned on the shoulders of Giants'. According to Chaumeil, American writer Irwin Ginsburgh's book 'First Man, Then Adam'$_5$ which quotes this sentence in the Preface - gives many answers to those interested in the Priory of Sion. One preposterous hoax, a series of little mysteries or more than meets the eye? As Jean-Luc Chaumeil himself writes: 'The shortest jokes are always the best, and this whole thing has now lasted too long...' Is the Priory of Sion to be taken seriously? Whatever the answer, many mysteries remain.

1] A Paris-based researcher for the BBC, Jania Macgillivray, made enquiries and found that everyone was confused about the matter: “one journalist warned her, for example, that anyone probing Sion too closely sooner or later got killed. Another journalist told her that Sion had indeed existed during the Middle Ages, but no longer did today. An official of Grande Loge Alpina, on the other hand, reported that Sion did exist today but was a modern organisation – it had never, he said, existed in the past.” By stressing the interest of the BBC, who have rather more prestige on the continent than they do in Britain itself, she was eventually able to arrange a meeting with Plantard and his entourage in a Paris cinema. She also worked on the BBC programme Chronicle: The Shadow of The Templars, which aired on BBC2 on 27 November 1979. It was produced by Roy Davies. Researchers included Richard Leigh , Michael Baigent, Anthony Wall, Jania Macgillivray. It was written and narrated by Henry Lincoln and featured Professor Christopher Cornford and Pierre Plantard de Saint-Clair.

2] Jean-Luc Chaumeil states in 'Le Triangle d'Or' that the “The Hieron du Val d’Or”, practiced a version of Scottish Rite Freemasonry, and the upper degrees of this order constituted the lower degrees of the Priory of Sion itself. Chaumeil describes the group’s disposition as “Christian, Hermetic, and aristocratic.” They proclaimed themselves to be Catholic, even though the Church of Rome condemned them. Their mystic teachings contained, according to Holy Blood, Holy Grail, “a characteristic emphasis on sacred geometry and various sacred sites… an insistence on a mystical or Gnostic truth underlying mythological motifs”, and “a preoccupation with the origins of men, races, languages, and symbols…” The Hieron order was, “simultaneously Christian and ‘trans-Christian.’ It stressed the importance of the Sacred Heart… sought to recognise Christian and pagan mysteries”, and “Ascribed special significance to Druidic thought - which it… regarded as partially Pythagorean.

The Hieron du Val d’Or was also unabashedly pro-monarchist, and sought a restoration of the Holy Roman Empire. But this one would be built, unlike the previous one, on an ultimately spiritual basis - a vision specifically echoed in the Priory of Sion’s own literature. The new empire would have been a reflection of Heaven on Earth, that specifically Hermetic Arcadian ideal. Jean-Luc Chaumeil described the Hieron’s ideals as: “…a theocracy wherein nations would be no more than provinces, their leaders but proconsuls in the service of a world occult government consisting of an elite. For Europe, this regime of the Great King implied a double hegemony of the Papacy and the Empire, of the Vatican and of the Habsburgs, who would have been the Vatican’s right arm.” The authors of Holy Blood, Holy Grail were quick to point out that this envisioned scenario accords with the Nostradamus prophecy about the “Great King” who would issue from Lorraine, since the Habsburgs essentially were the House of Lorraine. At the same time, though, this vision accords with that shared by numerous other cultures throughout the world and throughout history who have embraced the myth of the King of the World, a quasi-divine global monarch discussed in many ancient legends. Perhaps even more shocking, Chaumeil claims that Berenger Sauniere, Abbe Henri Boudet, Emile Hoffet, and the Bishop of Carcassonne were all members of this organization, and that it was a political scuffle within this organization which led to Sauniere’s premature death. Chaumeil describes Sauniere as a pawn in the Priory of Sion/Hieron du Val d’Or’s bizarre plot regarding Rennes-le-Chateau and the surrounding area. According to this version of the story, Sauniere had been involved with the order since before his arrival at the parish of Rennes-le-Chateau, and had actually been dispatched there by them for the purpose of finding the parchments. But in 1916 he is said to have had a falling out with the order, which supposedly explains his mysterious death the following year. Chaumeil states that Sauniere’s “handler” with regard to lodge business was actually the curé of Rennes-le-Bains, Abbe Henri Boudet, who is said to have orchestrated all of Sauniere’s activities, including the remodeling of his church and the surrounding domains. Boudet was also purportedly the middleman who passed along Priory of Sion hush money - not to Sauniere, but to his housekeeper, Marie Deneraud, who was also in their employ and to whom all checks were made payable. She also, says Chaumeil, was the agent through which Boudet transmitted all of his highly specific instructions for Sauniere. And Chaumeil tells us that Sauniere did not even know true nature of the “treasure” and “secret” which he protected until 1915, one year before his supposed falling out with the order, when Boudet made a deathbed confession to his fellow cleric and conspirator. Whatever it was, Sauniere must have found it disturbing to say the least. [from https://harllatham.livejournal.com/59253.html].

3] 'La Race Fabuleuse' a work by Gérard de **Sède** - By studying the history of Stenay, a small town in the French Ardennes, the author draws the attention of the Marquis de B., a fascinating man, endowed with amazing knowledge, who puts him on the trail of the origins of French royalty (the Merovingians) and, beyond, introduces him to the greatest mysteries of Humanity. In the book "La race fabuleuse" it is a certain Marquis de B. who plays the informant of Gérard de Sède, of whom some strongly think is Philippe de Chérisey while according to others it is Paul Rouelle, author of the cover photo of the book, who may be involved. In this book, Gérard de Sède tries to trace the migrations of the Merovingians and the origin of the francs. For this, he refers to Frégédaire, St Jérôme, Virgil... and thinks he will find the way of this lineage which carries a sacred blood, this lineage of king-priests. Among their attributes, he notes their long hair and hairy character drawing a parallel with Hebrew priestly rites and Nazir with intact hair. He also reminds us of their symbols: bees, toads and fleurs-de-lis. It is the city of Stenay that poses many problems for historians in connection with the royal lineage of the Merovingians, a lineage whose origin is lost in the mists of time. Godefroy de Bouillon, lord of Stenay, ascended the throne of David, in the Holy Land, in 1099. It is still in Stenay that the spiritual father of the Templars, Saint Bernard, comes to seek his inspiration, as well as, later, the prophet Nostradamus. The painter Poussin paints a mysterious tomb there and suggests that he has discovered a terrible secret. As soon as he learns it, Superintendent Fouquet surrounds himself with precautions, but too late. Gérard de Sède has thus found the true story of the lazy kings, in reality the kings "made nothing" by a secret ritual. Kings whose last descendant would actually have survived and given birth to a posterity that makes illegitimate all the dynasties that have since succeeded one another on the throne of France. In the light of these new discoveries, the mystery of Stenay upsets all our preconceived ideas about the history of France and, perhaps, about that of humanity.

4] Joseph-Aimé Péladan, who will later give himself the first name of Joséphin, is the son of Louis-Adrien Péladan, journalist at *La France littéraire*, founder of *La Semaine religieuse* and Joséphine Vaquier. His older brother, Adrien, born in 18442, future doctor and scholar, instructed him very early in all kinds of knowledge and, from childhood, he traveled, to Avignon or Nîmes. He showed an independent spirit that led to him being expelled from high school for treating an atheist teacher, then from the small seminary of Nîmes. In 1888 he was initiated by Papus and Stanislas de Guaita, he entered the first Martiniste lodge in Paris, rue Pigalle, but did not stay there long. It was to his brother Adrien (1844-1885), one of the first French homeopaths, that Joséphin Péladan owes his entry into a Toulouse branch of the Rose-Croix. [This Occult group has some links with Henri Boudet?] In 1888, Péladan founded with Stanislas de Guaita the Kabbalistic Order of the Rose Cross, which also welcomed Papus and Charles Barlet. On the pretext of a refusal of operative magic, he separated from the group in 1891 to found the Order of the Catholic and Aesthetic Rose Cross of the Temple and the Grail. He composes the formula "Ad Rosam per Crucem ad Crucem per Rosam, in ea in eis gemmatus resurgam - Non nobis non nobis Domine, sed nominis tui gloria soli, Amen", which takes up a Templar motto by adding a Rosicrucian note (How we become mage, 1892). This formula will later be taken up by other Rosicrucian movements. The following year, he organised the first of the Salons de la Rose-Croix, from March 10 to April 10, at the Durand-Ruel gallery: "This day, the Ideal had its temple and its knights, and we, Maccabées du Beau, went to bring to Our Lady, at the feet of our Suzerain Jesus, the tribute of the temple and the kneeling of the Rose-Crosses." It is a very great success. Sixty French and foreign artists exhibit their works, including many talented painters and sculptors (Ferdinand Hodler, Fernand Khnopff, Jean Delville, Carlos Schwabe, Antoine Bourdelle). Twenty thousand Parisians and the worldly and artistic Tout-Paris, Stéphane Mallarmé, Émile Zola, Paul Verlaine, Gustave Moreau, come to visit it, to the sound of the prelude of Parsifal and the Trumpet composed by Erik Satie. Several Salons de la Rose-Croix will follow from 1892 to 1897. These groups and figures have direct links with the Affair at Rennes-le-Chateau.

5] First Man! Then Adam! by Irwin Ginsburgh is either a whimsical and entertaining fantasy, or a serious and realistic attempt to reconcile science and religion, FIRST, MAN. THEN. ADAM! puts forth the daring idea that Adam and Eve were members of an advanced species from far off outer space who crash-landed their spaceship, effectively stranding themselves, here on a very primative earth occupied by early Homo Sapiens. Skilled in genetic science, they were able to breed with these early peoples, to produce a long-lived (900 years!), durable and intelligent species from which present mankind is descended!Dr. Ginsburgh, a Physicist, maintains that the Biblical Genesis story is a true though transformed history of this and following events (with the spaceship as the Garden of Eden and the ship's central computer as the Tree of Knowledge, for example). The shorter lifetimes and growing subsceptibility to disease of each suceeding generation of these early space/earth men and women is stated to be due to continual dilution of the space people's genetic heritage by interbreeding with native earth people. A large number of occurrances described in Genesis are shown to be consistant with this space origin theory. The description of the origin of the universe given in Genesis, can, according to Dr. Ginsburgh, by giving modern interpretations to some of the terms used in the description, be shown to be entirely consistant with the current Big Bang Theory!Altogether, this is a stimulating and challenging attempt to reconcile religion and science, and can be read as a serious theoretical proposal, or if this is too hard to accept, as, at least, a very entertaining speculation. Unfortunately, the book is not easy to find.

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