

Masonic Conspiracy Theories and Conspiracy Theory Masons

by Midnight Freemason Contributor

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There are two things I found surprising when I became a Mason. Firstly, the number of us who, even after hearing all the conspiracy theories about the Freemasons, still became Freemasons. I think every Mason is a little weird because of that. There is something a little off about each of us. Secondly, even with all the conspiracy theories about the Freemasons, it is surprising how many Masons have their own conspiracy theories about our fraternity.

I'm not talking about those Masons who, when passing through Denver International Airport, pull out their dues card and swipe it over the cornerstone, just to see if it's true what they say. I will never forget the time a brother from another lodge told me about newly made Master Mason they had just raised. A few meetings after he passed his catechism, he finally asked when he gets his secret access to DIA. He and a few others thought he was joking and laughed it off. Then seeing his straight face, they had to tell him that all that is false. He demitted a few weeks later. Again, there is something a little off about every Freemason.

Then there are some really strange Masonic conspiracy theories. Several years ago my lodge was broken into. Just some broken glass, a few things rummaged through, and the Tiler's sword and jewel were stolen. One of the brothers who was with me at the time said that this could be the work of clandestine Masons who break into true and lawful lodges to steal paraphernalia to use in their clandestine lodges. He actually said this in front of the cop who was taking the report, who gave us an inquisitive look, and I had to explain that Freemasons have their own conspiracy theories.

I'm not really interested in discussing any of this sort of stuff. I just need to illustrate the conditioning conspiracy theories have on Freemasons and that we tend to think the way conspiracy theorists themselves think. In particular, it is interesting to me the number of Masonic-origin theories that possess the same thought processes that conspiracy theorists have.

In particular, I think of theories such as that Freemasonry comes from the Knights Templar, the cults of Mithras, the Eleusinian Mysteries, the Roman collegia, or the Artists of Dionysus (the so-called “Dionysiac Architects”), the Druids, you name it. Sometimes it is a combination of these things, such as that put forth by Hipólito José da Costa, who posited that the Dionysiac Artificers passed their rites and wisdom onto the Hebrews, who passed it onto the Essenes, who then went underground until the Crusades and emerge as the Freemasons via the Knights Templar. Manly P. Hall, who was heavily influenced by da Costa’s essay, would skip the Essenes and would simply say that the Dionysiac Architects would just go underground until the Middle Ages when they reemerge and start to build the cathedrals of Europe...but then he gives a second version, in which the Dionysiac Architects passed their knowledge to the Templars, who in turn spread these things throughout Europe. Yeah, almost back-to-back he contradicts himself.

This is what I find fascinating, namely the conspiracy thinking that a group would go underground and reemerge later. How could these guys possibly know these groups went underground? There is absolutely no evidence for this. Well, that’s the conspiracy thinking: the lack of evidence is proof of how secretive they were.

Christopher Hitchens would create a rational maxim, which has been named after him. Hitchens’ razor states: “What can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence.” Now, this was originally used as an atheistic argument, as it comes from his 2007 book *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. He must be a delight at holiday parties. He’s one of those “New Atheists,” and yeah, he would like to see everyone become atheists, and he is rather obnoxious about it.

This razor follows from Bertrand Russell’s strawman analogy of a teapot that orbits the sun between Earth and Mars. It is too small to be seen by a telescope, but you also cannot disprove that it is not out there. Russell was an atheist, so obviously he is establishing who has the burden of proof of the existence of God, just like the person who claims there is a space teapot is the one who bears the burden of proof, not the people who don’t believe it. Add to this Carl Sagan’s maxim, called Sagan’s Standard: “Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.” Atheists have a surprising number of quippy sayings and analogies.

But this post isn't about atheism. Hitchens' razor has been taken up by several philosophical thinkers as well as scientists, in particular when dealing with pseudoscientific conspiracies and discourse. For instance, the theory of Atlantis. Atlantis is a case of "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." And there is no extraordinary evidence. There isn't even evidence. It is just "Plato said..." and wishful thinking.

Masonic origin theories frequently use arguments that conspiracy theorists and pseudoscientists use. A common argument is the "it looks like..." argument. Ever heard of the conspiracy theory of pyramids in Antarctica? There isn't a pyramid in Antarctica, it is just that there is a mountain that kind of "looks like" a pyramid. How about the Bimini Road? It is an underwater rock formation that looks like a road (or a wall), because of how the formation formed and then eroded as sea levels rose over thousands of years.

We see this in Masonic origin theories. For instance, the cults of Mithras: they kind of look like Masonic lodges. It is actually kind of weird how similar Mithraicism is to Freemasonry. But there is no connection between them. The cults of Mithras were stomped out in the fourth century CE and the first stonemason guilds are recorded in the eleventh century CE. There is about a 600 or 700-year gap. Still, I know a Mason, a very intelligent, well-read, well-versed in technical research Mason, who believes there is a connection—he believes one day he will be able to demonstrate how the cults of Mithras survived underground for six centuries, even though there has been zero evidence for such. He knows there is no evidence, but he is determined to prove it nonetheless just because he believes it.

This isn't uncommon in my opinion: that a very intelligent Mason would believe in something without any evidence beyond wishful thinking. In particular, I am thinking of the claim here in Colorado that there is a lodge in southern Colorado that has the signatures of Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday in their sign-in register, implying that they were Masons. There is no evidence for such, whatsoever. No lodge or Grand Lodge claims them as one of their own. King Solomon Lodge in Tombstone only has evidence that Virgil Earp petitioned to be made a Mason and that he was rejected. Both men were regarded in their time as gangsters, gamblers, drinkers, frequenters of prostitutes, et al.

Not exactly prime candidates for the Degrees of Masonry. Earp did later become an Odd Fellow, but not a Mason. Nowhere in the heavily scrutinized lives of these two men has there ever been a point that they could have possibly been made Masons. When I dispute those who claim a lodge in southern Colorado has them in their register, I am told that I need to disprove it, because they believe it.

No. No, I don't. They need to prove it. In my experience with this sort of goose chase, I will first need to deeply research both men's lives, especially around the timeframe they were out West, and look for timeframes they were in or near southern Colorado. Then I will need to schedule time off from work, and schedule time with the lodge secretary or building association to look at their records. I'm going to assume their old records are in a very disorganized and dusty closet. So I will probably need a whole day just to organize and dust things off. Then get a hotel room. Come back the next day and start going through the registers and minutes. No one ever said the minutes, but I will check them anyway. I will need to familiarize myself with the Secretary's handwriting. I will first check the timeframes that I know these men were in southern Colorado, then broaden my search to the entire period they were out West. And when I report that no such evidence exists at this lodge, and that's when I will be told: "Actually, it was this other lodge." Then I would have to start the process all over again. And I don't have that kind of time and money to disprove something that I really don't even care about, because there is no evidence.

It is strange to me that Masons think this way, given how conspiracy theorists talk about Freemasonry. Have you met someone talking about how the Masons control everything, know where the Ark of the Covenant is located, and have the records of Jesus's bloodline, or whatever? Then you reveal that you are a Mason and none of that is true. That's when they say, "Well, you haven't gotten to a high enough position to be given those secrets." And even when you tell them that you are a Past Master, Knight Templar, 32°, Shriner, Knight Mason, KYCH, Rosicrucian, St. Thomas of Acon, et cetera, they still say that you haven't gotten high enough to know these things. Of course, if any of us Masons haven't gotten powerful enough to know these things, how did these non-Masons learn these things? Isn't all that stuff supposed to be super-duper-secret? So secret that even the rank and file of the fraternity aren't allowed to know any of it? So how did these outsiders get this non-existent information?

I suppose that it shouldn't be surprising that some Masons think this way. Masonry is largely founded upon legends and tales, and these are important, because Masonry is established upon them. Can you imagine the Blue Lodge without the Hiram Legend? Yes, there was once the Noahite Legend of the Third Degree, but can you imagine doing that instead of the Hiram Legend? The Legend of the Royal Arch, the Order of the Temple, et al. These do not really necessitate evidence and critical analysis, because they are myths: they hold a larger function than factuality. It doesn't mean they are not subject to analysis and interpretation, or even criticism, but they are not the same as, say, the claims that Freemasonry comes from the Gnostics. Just because Masonry has foundation myths does not mean we should believe any Masonic theory without evidence, or with flimsy evidence, or even wishful thinking.

We really should be thinking more critically than the conspiracy theories about our fraternity.