The Lost Symbol and Dan Brown: Masonic Secrets of Washington

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MASONIC SECRETS: THE INQUISITION AND MEXICAN FREEMASONRY
PAUL RICH

J. M. Roberts in the *English Historical Review* in 1969, authored an article entitled “Freemasonry: Possibilities of a Neglected Topic”. He complained that, “There must surely be something [more] of sociological interest in an institution whose English Grand Masters have since 1721 always been noblemen and have included seven princes of the blood, while elsewhere the craft has been persecuted by Nazis, condemned by Papal Bulls and denounced by the Comintern.”¹ He renewed this complaint of work not done in a review thirty years later in the *Times Literary Supplement* of Jasper Ridley's book on *The Freemasons*, noting that with a few exceptions the situation of neglect had not changed.²

Part of the reason for the frustrations that arise in studying Freemasonry is that in its secret rituals it presents a historical picture which is, to be charitable, highly mythological.³ Recently, remarkable attention has been given to Freemasonry by the popular media, including the Disney film “National Treasure” (apparently to have a sequel) and the novel by Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*. Attention will continue far into the future, as Brown has written another novel, one involving the alleged Masonic background of Washington, D.C.


³ E.g. The Masonic Order of Quetzalcoatl -- each local chapter is a Teocallis. There are some 200 Teocallis in the United States and Canada. Rituals are based on the story of Quetzalcoatl. Each member (or “Artisan”) must travel to Mexico at some time to learn about Aztec and Mayan culture. The order is only about sixty years old and aside from using motifs borrowed from Mexican indigenous culture has no historic ties to the Aztecs or Mayans.
The situation in Mexico is similar, and has been for centuries. Given the solemnity of the rituals, initiates could be forgiven for thinking that they had been instructed in events which really took place, such as Masonic meetings during the construction of King Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem and the activities of the Knights Templar and other crusading orders. So too with the enemies of the Craft, who even in eighteenth-century Mexico were quick to imagine a magical levathian.

Much of the writing about Masonry in Mexico begins with the early 1800s, often with the meetings of a lodge on Las Ratas street in Mexico City in 1806. However, there is evidence of Masonic activity in the eighteenth century indicating that research into that period would be productive.

4 Freemasonry came to the Middle East in Victorian rather than Biblical times. As far as is known the historic origins of Freemasonry in the Holy Land date from 1868 when Robert Morris of Kentucky conducted rituals in the Cave of Zedekiah, known as King Solomon's Quarries, deep under the old city of Jerusalem. Morris eventually obtained a charter from the Grand Lodge of Canada (Ontario) for Royal Solomon Mother Lodge #293 in Jerusalem.

5 “We may take our choice between two rival affirmations or more wisely suspend our judgment, there being no evidence to offer a ground of settlement. According to one, three Lodges in the city of Mexico were warranted from New York about 1825, and a Grand Lodge was formed. According to the other, Mexico was first colonised by the Scottish Rite before 1810.” Arthur Edward Waite, A New Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry (Ars Magna Latomorum), “New and Revised Edition”, Vol. 2, Weathervane Books, New York, 1960, 10.

6 “Según José Mª. Mateos existía masonería en México antes de 1806 ya que en ese año fue iniciado Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla en una Log.-. ubicada en la calle de Ratas No. 4, a la que asistían prominentes integrantes del cabildo de la Ciudad de México. Según Castillo desde finales del S. XVIII, existían en México (Nueva España) Log.-. militares de españoles. Según el catecismo del Ap.-. del R.-. N.-. M.-. “El Rito Escocés Antiguo y Aceptado fue el primero que se conoció en México...”
http://www.ritonacionalmexicano.org/ “Para José María Mateos (Historia de la Masonería en México, 1884), la masonería se introdujo en México en 1806. En ese año, por iniciativa del señor Enrique Muni, se fundó una logia en la calle de Las Ratas No.4 (hoy Bolivia 73), domicilio particular del regidor Manuel Cuevas Moreno de Monroy Guerrero y Luyando, Pertenecían a ella el propio Manuel Cuevas, el marques de Uluapa, José María Espinosa, Francisco Primo de Verdad y Ramos (1760-1808), Juan Francisco Azcarate y Ledesma (1767-1831), Gregorio Martínez, Feliciano Vargas, Miguel Betancourt, Ignacio Moreno, Miguel Domínguez (1756-1830), Hidalgo (1753-1811) e Ignacio Allende Unzaga (1769-1811).” Wenceslao Vargas Márquez, “Hidalgo, Masón”, Diario de Xalapa, 11 de septiembre de 1993, www.wenceslao.com, 9/26/2006.
The animosity in that time can partly be attributed to the fact that Masonry in ways was the child of the Enlightenment, whose “...spirit was the expression of a bourgeois class on the rise against the hegemonic feudal values of the established society...”. The lack of knowledge about Mexican Masonry in the eighteenth century is partly because here has been no systematic study of Freemasons who were initiated in Spain in that period and then found their way to Mexico. A Spanish lodge was founded in 1728 in Madrid, by the Duke of Wharton, past Grand-Master of the Grand Lodge of London, exiled because of his loyalty to the Stuart cause. The persecution of Freemasons in Catholic countries started soon after and so ironically it is in church records, particularly those of the Inquisition, that reference to early Mexican Masonry can be discovered. Nevertheless, more than one hundred lodges


9 “In Spain, where Philip V was wholly under church influence, the inquisitor Torrubia got himself initiated as a Freemason, he better to know their secrets, having previously been absolved of the Masonic oath by the papal penitentiary. He then accused the Masons of atheism, black magic, heresy, sodomy, and as highly dangerous to the state. A thoroughgoing royal edict resulted from this, although Torrubia’s plea for a wholesale auto-da-fe was not accepted.” Charles H. Lytle, “Historical Bases of Rome’s Conflict with Freemasonry”, *Church History*, Vol.9, No.1, 9 Mar. 1940, 21. The Archivo Histórico Nacional in Madrid will inform Masonic research, but possibly, “…the greatest discoveries will be made not in the Spanish archives but amongst the records of the Portuguese Inquisition, an organization which has been little studied to date as its papers have still to be catalogued satisfactorily.” A.W. Lovett, “The Inquisition under Close Scrutiny”, *The Historical Journal*, Vol.2, No.3, Sep. 1989, 711.

10 “Surely in no country on earth has our kindly Craft had so tormented a career as in Spain, where a Lodge was set up in Madrid in 1728 by the exiled Duke of Wharton; and another the same year at Gibraltar, Alas, in 1740, as a result of the Papal Bull, Philip V issued an edict by which the members of the Lodge of Madrid were either thrown into prison or sent to the galleys. Ten years later Ferdinand VII condemned Masons to death without trial or mercy; in 1793 the Cardinal Vicar repeated the decree. Meanwhile, all the infernal machinery of the inquisition was used against the Craft, but it lived none the less. Under Joseph Napoleon there was respite, and Masonry prospered, forming a National Grand Lodge. With his downfall, the inquisition returned, and perilous times followed.” Joseph Fort Newton, “Modern Masonry”, *Little
existed in Spain by the mid eighteenth century,\textsuperscript{11} so the chances during the period of some Spaniards in Mexico having a Masonic connection are good. And it is doubly ironic that the papal condemnations \textsuperscript{12} were felt more by the Stuart supporters in exile,

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\textsuperscript{12} Email by Michael Segall of the Grand Lodge of France:

\begin{flushleft}
\textbf{From:} Michael L.Segall (FR) [mailto:MichaelSegall@compuserve.com]  
\textbf{Sent:} Sat 8/8/1998 6:59 AM  
\textbf{To:} Philalethes; pdrafalski@btinternet.com  
\textbf{Subject:} PSOC: RE: Catholics etal....

Dear Brother Ralf,

It's never ceased to amaze me reading and hearing about on Masonry by successive Popes. Didn't Masonry flow from the Operatives and or Templars who were, until the Reformation (in the case of the former), all good, clean Catholics men????

Hmmm... Hrrmmph... Not really. The RCC always viewed the Operatives (which it practically couldn't exist without) with deep suspicion, \textit{because} they had secrets, and signs, and rituals, and meetings they never mentioned at Confession... The first Church edict against an Operative organization dates back to the 9th century, and they kept coming ever since.

The Templar business was even worse. Keep in mind that the hypothesis of the knightly and/or Templar origin of Masonry is recent and has no basis in fact. Except for its mention in a poem at the end of the 17th century, the first Mason to hypothetize, for purely political reasons, a connection between knighthood and Masonry was Andrew Michael Ramsay, also known as Chevalier de Ramsay, in his famous 1737 "Oration".

His intention was, as I said, political. A convert to Catholicism, he was trying to mend the widening tear between the RCC and newborn Masonry by alleging that Masons were descended from the Crusaders and, in particular, the Knights of St.John of Jerusalem, who were NOT the Templars (Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon) but the order we now know as the Knights of Malta. The Templars, after what had happened to them four centuries before, were surely not in odor of sanctity with Rome. They were only brought into the picture after Ramsay's plan failed and as a reaction against Rome. Very many rituals inspired by the Templar legend used to have episodes where the symbols of Royalty and Papacy are trampled underfoot, à propos of Philip IV the Fair and Pope Clement V...

Fraternally, Mike Segall, PM,  
LoR John Scot Erigena #1000,  
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staunch Catholics, than by the Masons in Britain, who enjoyed Hanoverian protection.¹³

During this period, “The charge of fostering a conspiracy against an organic Christian community, often levied against Voltaire and the philosophes by the Abbé Barruel and other reactionaries, intensified the traditional xenophobic fears directed against Jews and Freemasons…Voltaire and many philosophes were freemasons, whose lodges were havens of toleration, and emancipating the Jews was, indeed, part of a more general political assault on the ancien régime.”¹⁴ In 1760 a French cook in Mexico City was denounced as a Freemason and confessed that he had been sent by the Viceroy to a mysterious meeting, which he either could not or did not choose to explain. In 1768 a surgeon, Mathurin Loret, was arrested for praising the Masons and confessed that he had lived in England [!] and that he had met two Frenchmen and Italian in Jalapa who had told him they belonged to a lodge. Jailed for two years, he was then deported.¹⁵

An appraisal of 100 years ago that at least gives notice of such activity was that, “When Freemasonry first was introduced into Mexico is unknown. There is some evidence that it secretly existed among the high officers of the Spanish troops and resident foreigners prior to the successful revolution for independence, in 1820.”¹⁶ Nicholas Hans pointed out that early on Masonry attracted Spanish intellectuals: “…Aranda, Caomanes, Rodriguez, Nava del Rio, Salazar y Valle, Florida Blanca, d Rosa, and many other members of the ruling class joined…” A Grand Lodge of

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¹⁴ Bronner, 84.


Spain was organized in 1760 and Aranda became the Grand Master. In Cadiz, the scientist Jorge Juan started a Masonic society and in Vergara, Conde Pena Florida and Marques de Narros founded a society. A Mexican, Miguel de Lozdzizabal, headed the Vergara Seminario, which was connected with the Masons. Moreover, Hans adds that “It is obvious that the scientific missions to America, sponsored by Spanish masons, propagated there not only the diffusion of knowledge but brought over the heterodox opinions of their members.”

Lewis Tambs claims that prior to 1765, the Inquisition in Mexico did not deal with charges of practicing Freemasonry, and that there was a marked change in “semi-political charges” between 1765 and 1800.18 There are a number of incidents at the end of the century. An example was the arrest and prosecution of the hapless Don Felipe Fabris in 1784, who was denounced that autumn and faced the Tribunal in August 1785. Don Felipe was an artist from Venice and endured three audiencias ordinarias or hearings before his primera audiencia, which extended from August 26 to September 22. He confessed to being a Freemason as well as to painting “lewd pictures”, and then went through two more audiencias ordinarias. He was finally indicted on February 26, 1787, and the prosecutor called for torture to produce more evidence, but there is no evidence that Fabris was tortured and in fact he was allowed to reply at length to the specific charges, finally being found guilty and sentenced to two hundred lashes, and deported in 1791.19


There are tantalizing hints of Masonic activity as the century reached an end, some of which occurred during the administration of the Conde de Revillagigedo as viceroy (1789-1794). On June 24, 1791, at what must be the most dramatic Saint John's dinners in history, what seems to have been a lodge was meeting that had been organized by a number of recently arrived French retainers of the Viceroy, prominent among them watchmaker Jean Laroche, cook Jean Laussel and a barber named Duroy, at whose house the dinner was held. The local parish priest had been watching their comings and goings and tipped off the Holy Inquisition who broke into the meeting. One member, Laussel, was sentenced to three years imprisonment. Witnesses testified that he had bragged about being a Mason and he eventually confessed to having been initiated in Montpellier in Languedoc and had at least two friends in Mexico City who were Masons. Languedoc owned Les Réveries d’un promeneur solitaire by Rousseau, which goes to the point about the Enlightenment’s coming to Mexico having some Masonic assistance.

In 1793, The Vicar of Molango in the state of Hidalgo, accused an itinerant merchant, Pedro Burdales, of saying that those who criticized Masonry were “animals and asinine bachelors” and who had given the vicar a pamphlet that maintained that the Masons of Mexico City were protected by the then Archbishop, Don Alonso Nuñez de Haro y Peralta, who himself belonged to a lodge that met in his own palace:

Actualmente se admite como leyenda la fundación de la franc-

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21 Masons then and now celebrate with a dinner in honor of St.John the Baptist, and at Christmastide too when they commemorate St. John the Evangelist. This would seem to be a survival of their medieval history as a guild. See http://www.masonicworld.com/education/files/stjohndays.htm

22 Houdaille, 16.
23 Houdaille, 17.
masonería española por el ilustrado Conde de Aranda en 1780. En cambio, un peluquero francés, Pedro Burdales, sospechoso más de simpatías con la Revolución Francesa que de ser masón, sostuvo en 1793, ante la Inquisición novohispana, que el arzobispo Núñez de Haro, de tan ingrato recuerdo para Servando, pertenecía a la francmasonería, acusación tomada en serio…

Jacques Houdaille considera que “The constant omission of this last detail [about the archbishop] throughout the long investigations of the Holy Office tends to show that Burdales may have been correct, especially since the Archbishop had spent much time in Italy, where many high prelates belonged to Masonic lodges”.

One would give much to know what the ceremonies of such lodges were. During the eighteenth century the Stuarts in exile and their supporters in their claims on the English throne were involved with coining and revising Masonic rituals, some of which became known as the Scottish Rite, but the Rite’s origins were complex and it was a collection of initiations and esoteric rituals that only coalesced gradually. Oscar Salinas, a prominent Mexican Mason, remarks that it “…was brought to the New World from France to the West Indies by Stephen (Etienne) Morin and then gradually spread into Latin America. He was empowered to bring this

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25 Houdaille, 16.

26 “In most ‘regular’ American Blue Lodges the type—or family—of Craft (Blue Lodge) ritual commonly used is the "Webb work," so named for Thomas Smith Webb, an American imitator of one of England’s principal ritualists, William Preston. Webb borrowed much of Preston's popular monitor, Illustrations of Masonry, and produced a somewhat revised American version, entitled The Freemasons Monitor (first ed., 1797). The American Webb work has much in common with the way ritual was worked in England from about 1760 to 1797…The “Scottish Rite” version of the Craft degrees, on the other hand, is a development of the French ‘Ecossais’ Masonry, which began to develop around 1740. Gradual innovations, or, if you prefer ‘refinements’ were made in the ritual which are of a somewhat more dramatic nature. These ‘enhancements’ include features often found today the American ‘York Rite’ degrees. Other features are known to have formed part of the ‘Antients’ ritual as early as the 1760s (Emanuel Zimmermann mentioned ‘the collation of John the Baptist,’ which is a feature retained in New Orleans 16th district lodges -- though under a different name). Art de Hoyos@aol.com, ArtdeHoyos@aol.com, Sent: Sat 2/3/1996 11:58 AM To: wanderso@adan.kingston.net Cc: freemasonry-list@sacto.mp.usbr.gov
Scottish Rite to the Western Hemisphere in Bordeaux, France, in 1761, so that the Craft must have arrived in Mexico sometime in the following 30 years.”

It did spread throughout the Caribbean in the later part of the eighteenth century: “Due to the loose practices of the times, the lack of even the semblance of organization, the assumption of the individual ownership of the degrees with the right to confer them on others…” But in the late eighteenth century in Mexico there has so far been no evidence of either organized Scottish Rite lodges working the so-called higher degrees nor of the Lautaro lodges identified with the Junta de Diputados de los Pueblos y Provincias de la América Meridional that Francisco de Miranda organized in Paris in 1795 and which spread throughout Latin America.

Mexico City was not the only place where Masons could be found; in Real de Catorce near San Luis Potosí, a doctor named Simon Lacroix was accused of being a Mason on the grounds that “he never worked and always had money”. And in 1799, in what was still Spanish territory, the first Bishop of New Orleans, Pentalver Cardenas, complained that “A gang of adventurers, have made much worse the morals of our people. They have formed a Lodge of Freemasons in one of the City’s suburbs and count among their members some officers of the garrison.

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30 Houdaille, 16-17.
meetings – behind closed doors...give this association a suspicious as well as a criminal appearance.”

There is, in any event, general agreement of the importance of the lodge that was established in Mexico City in the residence of Don Manuel de Cuevas Moreno de Monroy Guerrero y Luyando in Calle de las Ratas (today Calle Bolívar) and that its records were lost sometime between 1808 – 1809. Obviously some of its members must have been Masons prior to the establishment of the lodge. The No.5 Las Ratas street (now Avenue Bolivar 73) lodge apparently was known to Father Hidalgo, as well as to Masons in the ayuntamiento or municipal council, and even to the Viceroy Iturrigaray. When Iturrigaray was imprisoned in 1808, the lodge was denounced by one Cabo Franco, who also lived on Las Ratas and met elsewhere, including the country home of a Senor Luyando in the town of San Jacinto. Granting that Las Ratas was a famous lodge and that most antecedent references are to individuals rather than lodges, it remains that there were lodges in Mexico rather than only isolated individual Masons prior to Las Ratas: “En Julio de 1800 los curas mercedarios Joaquín Huesca y Manuel Estrada le acusaron de asistir a ‘tenidas diabólicas’ en una logia en el callejón de El Sapo (frente a la actual central telefonica


32 “Los orígenes de la masonería en México se remontan a finales del siglo XVIII, cuando llegaron a nuestro país un nutrido número de súbditos franceses de la corte del Virrey, algunos escapando de la represión europea contra los jacobinos. No pocos habían estado previamente en Inglaterra, en contacto con las logias británicas. La Inquisición detuvo a Juan Laussel, cocinero del Virrey, y por sus confesiones se supo que en la relojería de Juan Estrada Laroche había conocido al Dr.Durrey y a los peluqueros Lulie y Du Roy, identificándolos “pór las señas estatuidas por la fraternidad”. Con ellos, según se dijo, llegó a celebrar el solsticio de verano de 1791. La primera logia formal, sin embargo, la fundó Enrique Muñiz en la casa No.5 de la calle de las Ratas (ahora Bolívar núm.73), en la ciudad de México, domicilio del regidor Manuel Luyando.” Foro, Presidencia de la Republica, www.foros.gob.mx, 9/24/2006.

de las calles Victoria en la Ciudad de Mexico.”

In 1812, Ramón Cerdeña y Gallardo, a canon of Guadalajara cathedral, founded in the city of Xalapa a lodge named “Caballeros Racionales”, for which he was prosecuted by the Inquisition.

What specifically the rituals were in these early lodges remains a mystery, but what is clear is that the Scottish Rite as an organized body becomes evident in the period after promulgation of the Spanish Constitution of 1812, allegedly tolerated by the then Viceroy Apodaca because he was a Mason. Felipe Martinez de Aragon and Fausto de Elhuyar were members, Elhuyar having become a Mason while studying in Germany. Hans usefully generalizes that, “In 1813 the Spanish officers founded royalist lodges of Scottish rite, which were infiltrated by Spanish-born clergy. The Mexican-born masons, who fought Spain, founded republican lodges of York rite.”

In 1813 a Grand Lodge of Scottish flavor was established with Don Felipe Martinez Aragon as Grand Master. Reference to the York or American Rite appear in México in 1816 when the Grand Lodge of Louisiana chartered Lodge "Amigos Reunidos No. 8" in Veracruz and, in 1817, "Reunida La Virtud No. 9" in Campeche. Although no exact data are available, it can be assumed that these Louisiana Lodges had a brief life.

In 1818 there was a lodge meeting in the convent of Teresas (not then occupied by the religious) on the street of that named which moved to house twenty on Coliseo Street and was called Arquitectura Moral; it had as members two brothers, one of whom was secretary of the Inquisition and the

34 Vargas Marquez, ibid.
37 Hans, 24.
38 Fisher, op.cit.
other an employee of the Viceregal secretariat: “Está bien comprobado, sin lugar a duda, que estuvo en poder de la Güera Rodríguez [alias for María Ignancia Rodríguez de Velasco y Osorio Barba, 1778-1851] la famosa carta de Fernando VII, escrita de su letra y por su mano, de la cual salieron los principios del Plan de Iguala, pues dio la exacta solución para hacer la Independencia. Don José Presas trajo personalmente esta misiva al virrey don Juan Ruiz de Apodaca, la cual vio el marqués del Jaral de Berrio, así como otros señores respetables que pertenecían a la logia Arquitectura moral, sita en la calle del Coliseo Viejo. Como el virrey también era masón, por eso se la mostró a esos sus conmilitones.”39

Virginia Guedea suggests that, “Masonic lodges, organized by officers attached to units sent from Spain, were in existence very early in a few urban centers, such as in Mexico City after 1813, and later in Campeche and Merida in the Yucatan Peninsula around 1818. Freemasons in the capital had much to do with the restoration of the constitutional system in 1820, and with the removal of the Viceroy Juan Ruiz de Apodaca the following year…Thereafter, Freemasonry’s influence grew in the colony. It received added impetus with the arrival in 1821 of a distinguished Freemason, Juan O’Donoju, to be the last superior political chief (the office that replaced the viceroy under the constitution) of New Spain. After independence had been attained and, particularly, after the establishment of a federal republic in 1824, Freemasonry and the groups it organized would play a decisive role in the country’s political life.”40

It was Joel R. Poinsett, who eventually obtained Charters from the Grand Lodge of New York for five Lodges: "Rosa Mexicana", "Federalista" and "Independencia" in 1825, and "Tolerancia No. 450" and "Luz Mexicana No. 451" in 1826. That brings us well into the era of book smuggling that Professor De Los Reyes will cast light upon.


40 Guedea, 128-129.
As for the earlier period, it would be surprising if there was not more that will be learned about Masonry in eighteenth century Mexico. Roberts remarks, “The lodges provided a common fund of ritual, rhetoric and social experience which ran across frontiers in a way only rivaled by the institutions of religion. Their history since the founding era has been one of continuous growth, elaboration, and, in some countries, of deep involvement in public life.”\textsuperscript{41} It may be that by looking for more evidence of eighteenth-century Freemasonry in Mexico, we eventually will better understand better what happened in the early nineteenth century, when the ideas of the Enlightenment became perhaps more visible.\textsuperscript{42} In \textit{The Magic Flute}, that Masonic opera \textit{par excellence}, appear the lines:

\begin{quote}
The rays of the sun

Drive away the night;

Destroyed is the hypocrite’s

Hidden might.
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{41} Roberts, \textit{Freemasonry: Possibilities of a Neglected Topic}, 523.

\textsuperscript{42} “…freemasonry may offer entirely new approaches ot the whole range of eighteenth-century civilization. The craft embodied and announced what were to be central element sin a new sensibility, that of modern man.” Roberts, \textit{Freemasonry: Possibilities of a Neglected Topic}, 35.
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