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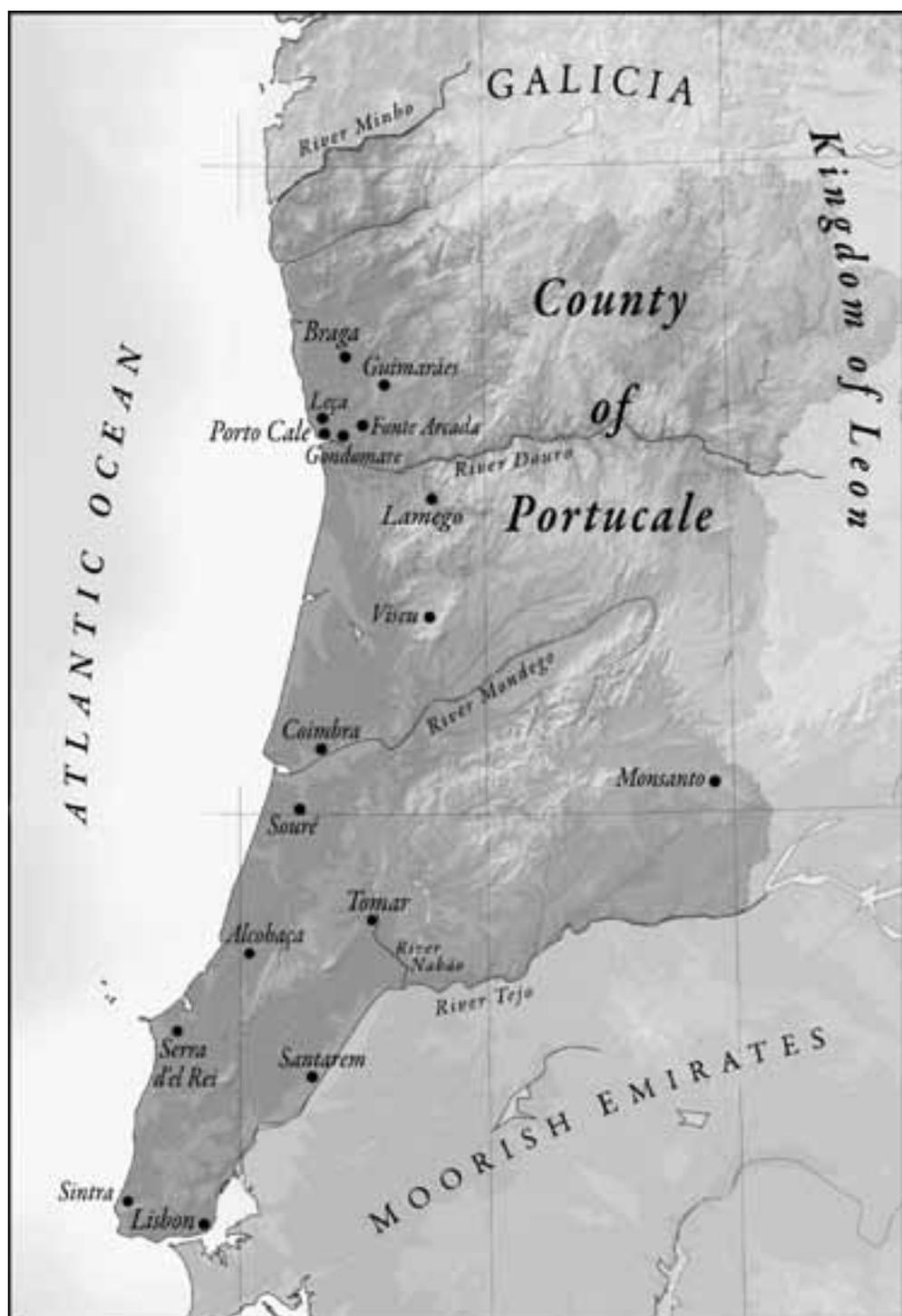
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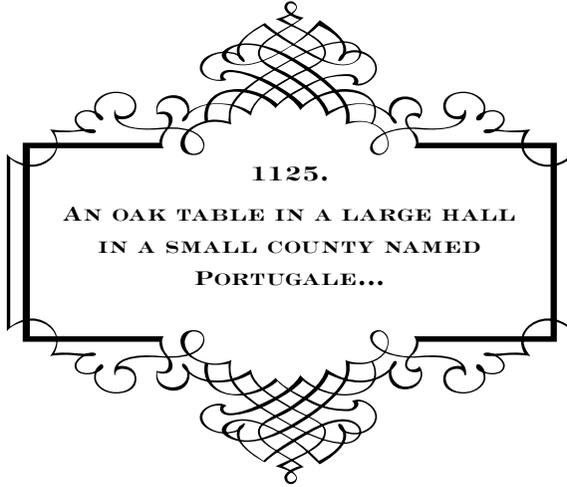


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he aged velum parchment is a donation of a small town near the city of Braga.

It reads, “*I, Queen D. Tereja give to God and the Knights of the Temple of Solomon the village called Fonte Arcada...with all its rights and benefits, for the good of my soul.*”¹

The generous donation includes no less than seventeen additional land grants by local families.² Meticulously written in pen and ink, it is signed, “*I, Guilherme, Procurator of the Temple in this territory, receive this document.*”

The signatory holds the key to a mystery. As Procurator of the Temple, Guilherme Ricard is invested with the power and authority to conduct transactions on behalf of the Grand Master of the Knights Templar in Jerusalem, Hugues de Payns.

But he is much more than that. His name appears on a second grant — this time as *Magister Donus Ricardus* — for half the estate of Villa-nova donated by Affonso Annes “*to God, and the brotherhood of the Knights Templar.*”³

This Guilherme Ricard is also the first Master of the Knights Templar in Portugale.⁴

These events are extraordinary because the year is 1125 and no members

of the Knights Templar are known to exist outside Jerusalem, least of all in a region on the far side of Europe. Stranger still, in 1111, seven years *before* the Templar brotherhood came into existence — seventeen before their official sanction by the pope — the knights were awarded a strategic property in this same county.

Three things are certain. One, the Knights Templar pledge allegiance not to the pope but to an influential monk in the French county of Champagne.

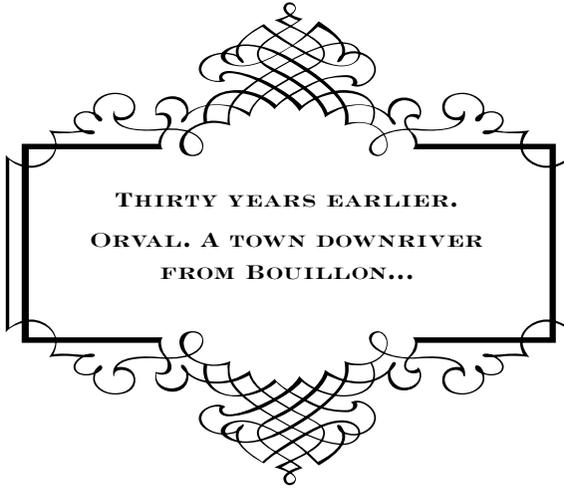
Two, in a document addressing the Templars, the future king of Portugal reveals that “*within your Brotherhood and in all your works I am a Brother.*”

And three, during interrogation by the Holy Inquisition, a Templar knight made a cryptic statement: “*There exists in the Order a law so extraordinary on which such a secret should be kept, that any knight would prefer his head cut off rather than reveal it.*”

And virtually all captured Templars proved this by being burnt alive at the stake.

What follows is the true and untold story behind the first Templar nation.





In 1070 a group of monks made their way from Calabria in southern Italy to Orval in Upper Lorraine, a grand adventure of 1200 miles, and appeared on the doorstep of Mathilde de Toscane, Countess de Briey. The monks had come to take charge of a tract of land kindly granted by the Countess and her husband.⁴⁹ This graceful land had been a sacred place for centuries, and since at least the ninth century a chapel had stood there. Now it was the monks' turn to leave their mark. They needed a quiet place to do their business and quickly set about building a monastery thanks to the generosity of their new patrons.

It is a mystery why a group of monks — led by an individual named Ursus, meaning 'Bear' — should venture so far in search of peace and tranquility. It has been suggested that the monks harbored secret scrolls and other long-suppressed material pertaining to the ancient Mysteries, as well as evidence of records relating to a holy bloodline, and indeed the land in and around Orval was once associated with a Merovingian bloodline. What is certain is the monks recently escaped persecution in Jerusalem by sailing to Calabria and the safety of monasteries in Sicily, then made their way north via Burgundy and Champagne to meet with people who were friendly to whatever cause they harbored.⁵⁰

Perhaps an examination of their patron Mathilde de Toscanne will present an answer.

Mathilde was an Italian noblewoman and a fief of the Comte de Champagne, and briefly, wife to Godefroi the Hunchback.⁵¹ She was also aunt and foster mother to a ten year-old nephew who was himself of



Merovingian descent,⁵² and whose name was also Godefroi. Some years later this exceptionally pious young man would inherit this land, become a knight, acquire the title ‘de Bouillon’, liberate the church of the Holy Sepulcher and become king of Jerusalem.

It takes quite an effort to erect a monastery, and yet less than forty years into its construction the monks at Orval just packed up their meager belongings and vanished as mysteriously as they’d appeared. Some say they departed for the Holy Land because their sect already possessed a church in Jerusalem. Indeed this may be true, for the monks are said to have been associated with a certain Ordre de Sion — the namesake of the hill outside Jerusalem and its run-down basilica, which a grown-up Godefroi de Bouillon would call home after becoming Protector of the city.

Of great interest is the identity of one of the original monks at Orval, a noble who renounced his worldly possessions to lead an ascetic life, a certain Peter the Hermit.⁵³ Peter was a vassal of Eustache de Boulogne who was the father of Godefroi de Bouillon.⁵⁴

When these two men met at Orval, Godefroi was a mere ten years of age. It is probable that Peter became a tutor to the impressionable young man, and if so, the monk’s view of the world must have imprinted itself on young Godefroi, given how their friendship remained true over the course of thirty years and right up to that fateful day when Godefroi’s crusading army picked Peter’s emaciated body up off the dirt road near Antioch.

The story sounds like a meticulously executed plan, perhaps because it is reasonable to assume it was. Various chroniclers and historians, both contemporary and modern, have suggested that a small, tight-knit enclave of highly influential people lay behind Godefroi’s initial motivation to march on Jerusalem to relieve the Holy Sepulcher of infidels, even in installing him as king; at one time this group may even have been involved with restoring the Merovingian bloodline in Lorraine.⁵⁵ Albert of Aachen, the historian who

traveled with the First Crusade, describes a small group of knights who were separate and close to Godefroi whom he refers to as *clientele Godefridi and domus Godefridi*, consisting of clergymen and close relatives, quite possibly family.

All these connections converged in 1099 in a freshly re-conquered Jerusalem.

It is said that Godefroi assisted a group of monks from Orval in taking up residence in the compound of holy buildings on Mount Sion,⁵⁶ the high ground barely half a mile from the site of Solomon's Temple, then installed an order of twelve knights to protect the compound. One account says of this: "*There were in Jerusalem during the Crusades...knights attached to the Abbey of Notre Dame de Sion who took the name of Chevaliers de l'Ordre de Notre Dame de Sion.*"⁵⁷ The commune became known as Sainte-Marie du Mont Syon et du Saint-Esprit.⁵⁸

But what was so special about Mount Sion that drew so much attention — its dilapidated church in particular — that monks, knights even the Protector of Jerusalem himself chose above all other domiciles despite its exposed location? Were they simply paying homage to their faith, motivated by a promise in the Bible, "*you come to Mount Sion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels.*"⁵⁹

Indeed the rock of Sion does receive an unusual amount of attention throughout the Bible, where it is regularly referred to as a stone that is overlooked during the building of the Temple that must be retrieved and incorporated as the structure's keystone.⁶⁰ This 'precious cornerstone' of the New Jerusalem described in the Book of Isaiah⁶¹ is similarly identified in Islamic scholarship as the cornerstone of the Ka'Ba in Mecca⁶² — the holiest of Muslim shrines — and by the Prophet Mohammed who refers to it as *Sahyun*.⁶³ The origin of the word *sion* is related to the Arabic *sahi* meaning 'ascend to the top',⁶⁴ a metaphor that suggests the hill is somehow associated with a process of rising, perhaps where the Mysteries of initiation and resurrection were conducted.

The Arabic interpretation is echoed in Jewish Kabbalah, where the reference to Sion assumes an esoteric mantle as *Tzion*, a spiritual point from which all reality emerges. It is the center of existence, nay, the purpose of existence itself, the underlying goal of life. As Rabbi Heshy Grossman describes it, "*there is a purpose and theme that unites all of creation. Just as the center of a sphere, which is the common point unifying every extremity on its surface, so too Tzion is the 'Tachlis' that all of life aspires to... and it has the power on earth to wake us from our stupor and remind us of Heaven.*"⁶⁵

The Byzantine basilica on Mount Sion stood on the site of an earlier



community of Essenes who lived there during the era of John the Baptist, and who granted Jesus the use of their ritual room in order for him to conduct his own ritual, the Last Supper. Following the destruction of the city in 68 AD, a new sanctuary was erected. Emperor Hadrian saw the tiny building still intact during his visit to the city following the Roman rampage, and even by his time it was already referred to as the ‘Mother of All Churches’, built as it was over the tomb of King David and probably an even

older temple.⁶⁶ By the 4th century this small church was enlarged into the Byzantine Hagia Sion, but in the waning and waxing political fortunes of subsequent centuries the honorable basilica inevitably fell into disrepair. It was its empty shell that Godefroi de Bouillon recycled when he expressly ordered the construction of the new Abbey de Notre Dame. Interestingly, Godefroi made additions to the original floor plan. One room in particular was named the Chamber of Mysteries. It was supported on a foundation of eight pillars and built right above the Tomb of David, the room associated with the Last Supper.⁶⁷

Godefroi’s refurbished abbey became a self-contained community, heavily fortified, with high walls and battlements. Not only was it an unusual deviation from standard ecclesiastical building procedure, it was totally out of character for a place of worship, as though the architect intended to keep something very secret. A place of veneration, after all, is supposed to beckon the faithful, not scream “go away”. Of all the real estate available to him in Jerusalem, Godefroi not only chose a property outside the city and in a state of total disrepair, he picked one with a legacy of sacred space spanning at least two thousand years by his time. And now that we know the origin of events surrounding young Godefroi’s life in Orval, none of it appears to have been by accident: Peter the Hermit and a group of monks came from Calabria to

build a monastery on land owned by Godefroi's aunt, claim their seat to be the church on Mount Sion, and during their tenure there, become associated with the name *Ordre de Sion*.

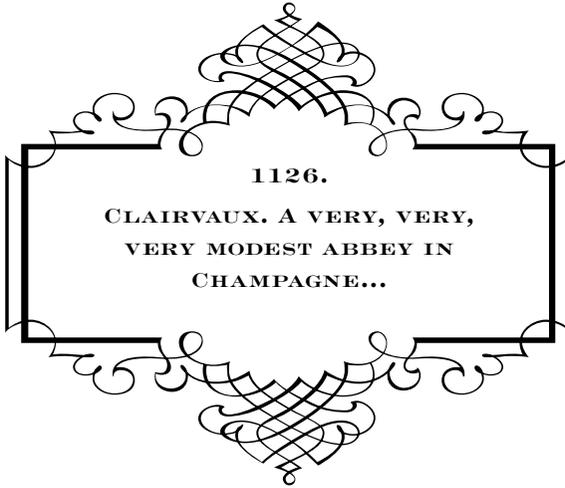
One document goes so far as to claim the *Ordre de Sion* was founded in 1090 by Godefori de Bouillon himself — six years before the Crusaders marched to Jerusalem — while another states the founding date as 1099.⁶⁸ Depending on the point of view, both could be right. A plan may have been initially drawn up between Peter the Hermit, the Calabrian monks and Godefroi, then executed nine years later thanks to the convenient timing of a Crusade marching on Jerusalem, which allowed for the city to become accessible once again to Christians.

If the *Ordre de Sion* was indeed an echo of a former sect with a long history on Mount Sion — the Essenes — changing circumstances and war would have rendered its *corpus* dormant for a thousand years, and in returning to Jerusalem the brotherhood was merely recovering its original place of veneration. By rebuilding the abbey, Godefroi helped the brotherhood re-establish its long lost physical domicile on that hill.

Whatever went on inside the abbey's compound it was conducted within a perimeter built more like a fortress than a church and pursued with utmost conviction, tenacity and secrecy,⁶⁹ as though the *Ordre de Sion* was engaged in some crucial yet undisclosed plan, to all intents and purposes behaving like a secret society pursuing a holy grail.



Abbey de Notre Dame du Mont de Sion



It was early autumn when the relatively new monastery of Clairvaux received two bearded visitors clad in anonymous old clothing,¹⁷⁵ but beneath their couture there could not have been two more distinguished men — Brother Gondemare and André de Montbard, two Knights Templar. André was uncle to the man they had traveled all the way from Jerusalem to see, Bernard de Clairvaux, head of the Cistercian Order and the most influential and respected figurehead in all Christendom. Bernard had not seen his uncle for a good decade, and for that alone the visit was joyous enough.

Still, there was other good news, particularly with regard to the burgeoning Templar fraternity. The brotherhood had been diligently following God's work on Temple Mount, site of the former Temple of Solomon, and just the previous year King Baudoin II had acknowledged Hugues de Payns as the Grand Master of the Knights Templar when he cited him as *magister Templi* on a grant of privileges to the Venetians.¹⁷⁶

The two Templars came bearing a letter from the king to Bernard. It read: *"The Templar brothers...desire to receive apostolic approval and also their own Rule...Since we know well the weight of your intercession with God and also with*



His Pontiff [the Pope] and with the other princes in Europe, we give into your care this two-fold mission, whose success will be very welcome to us. Let the constitution of the Templars be such as is suitable for men who live in the clash and tumult of war, and yet of a kind which will be acceptable to the Christian princes, of whom they have been the valuable auxiliaries. So far as in you lies and if God pleases, strive to bring this matter to a speedy and successful issue.”¹⁷⁷

That the Templars had come with a “two-fold mission” was not entirely accurate. Baudoin II’s letter was opportunistic, he sought to expand his campaign against the

Arabs and for that he needed men and arms and money. A papal decree would free up these requirements just as surely as it had done for the First Crusade and Bernard was in a position to champion his cause to the pope.

But this had nothing to do with the Templar’s principal motive for their dispatch to Champagne. Their leader Hugues de Payns was not a fief of Baudoin II, nor did the knight owe him any favors; nor did the two bearers, neither of whom were in Baudoin’s employ but in the Grand Master’s.

The central purpose of the meeting was, first of all, that Hugues de Payns was seeking a Rule for the Templars from an ecclesiastical figure of high repute that incoming members could follow, especially those knights concerned with temporal matters which inevitably brought them into close contact with the tumult that was life in the Holy Land. These were insecure times and boys will be boys, away in a foreign land, tempted by the growing opportunities around them and with the power of a sword at the hip. It would be the first of several pleas from Hugues who was clearly struggling to maintain discipline in the ranks. One of his letters to the Templars stationed in Jerusalem illustrates the fragility of the situation: *“Dearest brothers, the more the devil stays awake to deceive and subvert us, the more we, through the zeal of our circumspection, ought to be particularly on our guard not only against evil but also while doing good. The first task of the devil is to draw us into sin; the second is to corrupt our intentions in good deeds; the third is that as if with the appearance of helping he should divert us from our intended act of virtue and make us falter. To guard us from the first error the Scriptures say, ‘Son, take care never to consent to sin’. To avoid the second error they say elsewhere, ‘Do good well’; for he does not do good well who seeks in the good work his own glory and not that of God. For the third error they state in yet another*

place, 'Stay in your place'; as though he who is always diverted from that which he is obliged and duty-bound to do other things because of the lack of constancy in his mind and the capriciousness of his desires, does not want to stay in his place...

*"If all the members of the body had one and the same function the whole body could not survive...The humblest are often the most useful. The foot touches the ground but supports the whole body. Do not deceive yourselves; each one shall receive his reward according to his work. The roofs of houses receive the rain and the hail and the wind, but if there were no roofs, what would happen to the painted galleries?"*¹⁷⁸

Many of Hugues de Payns' discourses to the Templars indicate an interest in following a monastic life rather than involvement in military activities. He was concerned that the knights' core purpose had been weakened by pride and ambition — the devil inside — which must be tempered with humility, duty, perseverance and patience if a man is to stay the course; in all cases, the religious aim must supersede the temptation to fight lest it becomes an obstacle to inner contemplation.¹⁷⁹ If the words of the Templar Grand Master were not enough to guard men against temptation, a Rule establishing a code of conduct from a renowned spiritual figurehead, like Bernard, would present the best possible management tool. This was the first aim of the Templar envoy to Clairvaux.

It has been suggested that Bernard and Hugues de Payns had known each other for many years, least of all because when Hugues resided at Chateau Payns in Champagne the two men were practically neighbors.¹⁸⁰ In truth they were much closer: Hugues de Payns was the uncle of Bernard de Clairvaux.¹⁸¹

The second aim of the envoy was a signal to Bernard that whatever the Templars had been up to on Temple Mount — and conducted with the utmost secrecy — had been accomplished, and preparations were now necessary to pave the way for its implementation. This plan most likely involved Brother Gondemare, since he was an alleged member of the Ordre de Sion,¹⁸² and more tellingly, the son of a Portugale family.¹⁸³ Certainly this was no casual meeting between the three men. When the Knights Templar swore an oath of obedience it was not to a king or pope, even their own Grand Master, but to the Cistercian abbot. Thus, to understand the motivation behind Order of the Temple it is necessary to first understand their primary benefactor.



Bernard was born in Fontaines-les-Dijon, within sight of the late Count Dom Henrique's original family estate. Likewise, he was a descendent of the




 o put into place a plan as bold as “*the establishment of a Portuguese crown,*”²¹⁴ the Templars would require a domicile in a location already friendly to their cause, and ideally, accessible to the Portuguese court in Guimarães. Situated a mere nine miles to the north-west, Braga would suit the purpose well, as one Templar Master would later acknowledge, “*the home of the Temple, which is in the city of Braga.*”²¹⁵ They already had a friend there in the form of the procurator for the Knights Hospitaller, Archbishop Payo Mendes, who had earlier secured properties for the Templars in and around the Hospital for the Poor.²¹⁶

When the five Templar procurators from Jerusalem finally landed in the city of Porto (the former Porto Cale) they were greeted at the quay by the typical damp, gloomy grey weather that so characterizes the region in winter. Three of the men — Raimund Bernard, Guilherme Ricard and Hugh Martin²¹⁷ — were of French origin; the fourth, a young man named Gualdino Paes, was born in Braga and was thus wholesomely Portuguese; and finally, Pedro Arnaldo da Rocha, was Portuguese of Burgundian parentage.

These men arrived armed with nothing more than a clear objective, no doubt minutely discussed with Hugues de Payns and the Templar inner circle,



which would now call into play relationships and alliances lain dormant since the death of the Count of Portuguese. Even during those early years, knights associated with the Order of the Temple had rendered him services: “it was well known and believed throughout the land that after D. Enrique engaged in war with the Moors, the Knights Templar had come to his aid, and asked to be admitted into his service.”²¹⁸ As a gesture of gratitude Dom Henrique awarded them the castle of Souré in 1111,²¹⁹ coincidentally the same year he made a rapid and mysterious trip to France and presumably to his original home in Burgundy.²²⁰

This relationship would serve his son Afonso now that his star was rising in the east, in the city of Zamora, his light spreading ever westwards over his nascent kingdom, for just as they’d once supported his father, so the Templars now rallied around his son against his ever more errant mother.

By the time Afonso Henriques arose a knight on his sixteenth birthday he was said to be “*greatly obliged*” to the Order of the Temple. How does a teenager acquire that much responsibility, and that to an elite group of knights over two thousand miles away? Is it indeed true that Afonso Henriques was himself inducted into the Templars in Zamora?²²¹ Given the bond between his father and the Knights Templar, it is realistic to assume the Order nurtured his offspring, taught him their method, then through fine grooming (and a touch of providence) Afonso would implement the vision of an independent nation-state begun by his father, assisted by the Templars and their co-dependent brotherhoods. We know the protective arm of the Templar fraternity always followed young Afonso because even after his father’s death “*they always came to his aid,*”²²² especially at the time of his knighthood when knights belonging to the Order openly offered him their allegiance.²²³

It was the confrontational archbishop Payo Mendes who took up the role of mentor to the infant Afonso following his father’s death. In Mendes’ grooming of Afonso for kingship we see an echo of the spiritual mentor/pupil relationship established between Peter the Hermit and Godefroi de Bouillon, who was also said to be “*greatly obligated*” — in his case to the Ordre de Sion — after being offered the throne of Jerusalem.

Likewise, we see an echo of Baudoin I and how he too “*owed his throne to*

the Ordre de Sion,” a fraternity with whom Hughes de Payns was well connected thanks to his friendship with Prior Arnaldo, now also a Templar Procurator in Braga, the diocese of Payo Mendes.

We are looking here at an extraordinarily intricate but well developed web of connections, friendships and family ties spanning three decades and three separate geographic regions!

One French source adamantly claims the Knights Templar was deeply rooted in Portugale by 1126,²²⁴ especially as the village of Ferreira was granted to the Order that June.²²⁵ Templar involvement in Portugale accelerated around this period thanks to regional appointees (such as the procurators) all of whom were invested with the power to make decisions and sign documents on behalf of the executive back in Jerusalem: “*The highest Prelates, the first and principal heads of the Order in Portugal, sometimes were named preceptors, others ministers, and Provincial Masters, with regard to the Grand Master who resided in Palestine... they resided in homes, hospices, or small convents which the Order had in cities, towns or castles, so they could gather the fruits to raise the level of the people and agriculture.*”²²⁶

The Templar chronicler Bernardo da Costa not only concurs but claims their presence to be even earlier: “*by the year of their confirmation the Order of the Temple was not only already accepted, but established in Portugal; and not only in that year but in preceding years, and shortly after the nine knights established the Order in Jerusalem.*”²²⁷

This is a remarkable assertion, so let’s be very clear about it. The Order of the Temple was confirmed in 1117 by King Baudoin I, and the following year the knights relocated to Temple Mount and became known as Knights Templar. Da Costa implies the Order was not only established in Portugale by this point, it did so prior to this date, “*shortly after the nine knights established the Order in Jerusalem.*” This would refer to the ‘brotherhood within a brotherhood’ established in the church of the Holy Sepulcher around 1104 when Hugues de Payns took up residence there. Those proto-Templars were still living there by 1114 — the year Comte Hugh de Champagne sailed to Jerusalem to join this *Militiae Christi*. Clearly one of the richest men in Europe did not dispose of his entire wealth and embark on a perilous sea voyage to join a phantom organization, thus the Order of the Temple must have been a fully-fledged group years before its official declaration.

The same argument holds true in Portugale. A land grant from Ejeuva Aires and sons is made out “*to you Knights of the Temple of Jerusalem, Pelagio Gontimiris and Martino Pelagii,*” of a property owned by the family in the city of Braga, “*around the well of the hospital.*”²²⁸

The transaction could not have been made to any other organization because one of the recipients is Pelagio Gontimiris. *Pelagio* typically denotes a member of the clergy; *Gontimiris* is the Latinized form of Gondemare. This Brother Gondemare is none other than one of the original Templars, the very same person who met with Bernard de Clairvaux, and would have had good cause to do so because Brother Gondemare was himself a Cistercian monk.²²⁹

But the plot thickens because Brother Gondemare was also the son of a Portugale family and,²³⁰ if the source documents are correct, a member of Ordre de Sion.²³¹ This makes him not only a direct link between the Templars, the Cistercians and the Ordre de Sion, it also proves that one of the founding Templars lived in Portugale right from the very beginning.

Of all the original knights, Gondemare stands out in that he is one of only two of the original knights not named after his place of origin, a deviation from the standard practice of the age (ie. Hugues de Payns, André de Montbard, etc). Or is he? A few miles from where the Knights Hospitaller owned their first Chapter House at Leça, there existed at this time another monastery in the town of Gondemare. To all intents and purposes, if Godemare was not in fact the knight's name but his place of origin, it means all that was required of the Cistercian monk to accept the aforementioned property transaction in Braga on behalf of the "*Knights of the Temple of Jerusalem*" was a brief twenty-eight mile horse ride.

There is another revelation in the chronicles by Bernardo da Costa concerning the Templars' presence in Portugale and it is equally riveting. It states: "*After the death of Conde D. Henrique, due to his son D. Afonso Henriques being a minor, governorship of the Kingdom was taken up by Queen Tereza... Already by this time the Order of the Temple was accepted and established in this Kingdom, and in the government of Queen Tereza, as the original documents in the Archive of the Convent of Tomar prove...the same Queen had made another title deed to the Order of the Temple, without a date, but it can be shown this deed was made before those in 1128.*"²³²

Da Costa is unequivocal about that Templars and their regional representatives being embedded within the Portugale court and from a very early date. The deed without a date refers to a substantial property donation for a small town in the vicinity of both Gondemare and Braga. It reads: "*I, Queen D. Tereja give to God and the Knights of the Temple of Solomon the village called Fonte Arcada, in the land beside Penafiel, with all its terms and benefits, for the good of my soul.*"

It is accepted by and signed, "*I, Guilherme, Procurator of the Temple in this territory, receive this document.*"²³³ The aged parchment goes on to mention no

less than seventeen additional land grants by local families.²³⁴

The ancient village and its arched sacred spring²³⁵ is the first documented location where the Knights Templar developed a convent.²³⁶ The original title deed still exists,²³⁷ signed by Tareja with the highly imaginative title ‘independent sovereign of all of Portugale’, and indeed bears no date, so here a little sleuthing is required.

By law, Afonso Henriques should have ascended the throne on his fourteenth birthday in July 1123, to become *de facto* ruler of Portugale and thus administrator of the affairs of state and signatory of legal documents. Until then his mother acted as regent with sole authority to sign official documents on his behalf. Since the grant of Fonte Arcada bears her signature there are two possibilities: either it was made before July 1123, or before 1128 when her historical — and questionable — status as ‘sovereign’ ceased altogether.

Between 1123 and 1128 Afonso was in exile and at war with his mother, literally, thus he had little or no access to government offices. It is plausible that Tareja’s need to assert herself as a ruler meant she started signing away property that technically was not hers to give away, what amounted to a usurpation of power. Whether this was the case or not, the accepting signatory on the donation of Fonte Arcada holds the key to the dating of the document: *Guilhermus P. Templi*, *P* standing for Procurator, a person with the power and authority to conduct transactions on behalf of the Grand Master of the Knights Templar. Guilherme Ricard was one of the five procurators arriving in the autumn of 1125 to “*establish the Portuguese crown.*”²³⁸ Early in 1126 he is elevated to first Master of the Knights Templar in Portugale,²³⁹ and his new title is reflected on a follow-up land grant, for half the estate of Villanova donated by Affonso Annes “*to God, and the brotherhood of the Knights Templar,*”²⁴⁰ which he signs as *Magister Donus Ricardus* (names in those days were written in different languages and spellings). So the most likely date for the donation of Fonte Arcada — when he was still mere procurator — would be the fallow days of 1125.

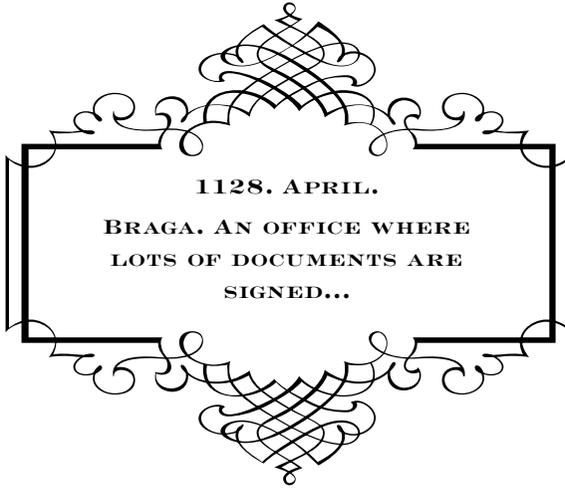
It is worth bearing in mind that a property transaction is a complicated and time-consuming process, both the paperwork and legal framework do not appear overnight but over the course of months, sometimes longer. And in those days of pen, ink and vellum the process would have been equally, if not more laborious, meaning that the preparations to transfer such a considerable property must have been on Countess Tareja’s mind for quite some time. If so, the Portuguese court must have known in advance of the impending arrival of five Templar Procurators from Jerusalem.

Tareja was an extremely insecure individual to begin with, and as acting

head of state she would hardly have awarded a large property like Fonte Arcada to complete strangers of unknown provenance. Furthermore, in 12th century Europe nothing moved without papal blessing, and since in 1125 the Templars had yet to be recognized by the pontiff, officially speaking the Knights Templar did not yet exist. So the Order of the Temple must have established quite a solid reputation within Portugale during Tareja's tenure. If her late husband had trusted them, in theory so would she.

Which may explain why later that year a small Templar army quietly disembarked along the Portuguese coast, at the estuary of the river Mondego,²⁴¹ twenty six miles from the administrative city of Coimbra, to take possession of the town of Souré, the exchange being made to the captain of the army.²⁴²





It was both a busy and confusing month for Raimund Bernard. On April 19, the long-time French resident of Braga took possession of yet another residence in the city.²⁵² He handled the translucent vellum bearing the deed and signed it, in Latin, *in manu D. Raimundi Bernardi*.²⁵³

Not only did the French knight own and acquire property, he'd done so as a Templar Procurator ever since the day he arrived from Jerusalem with four other members of the brotherhood. Obviously Hugues de Payns was pleased with his work because three years after his arrival he became the new Templar Master in Portugale. "*Master Raimundo Bernardo lived there, a Frenchman, and always a foreigner...in the year 1128 he occupied this ministerial post, since his Order had already established residence in Braga.*"²⁵⁴ For some reason the Templars developed a sudden thirst for property in this region, and in Dom Raimundo Bernardo — as he was known locally — they had a reliable man looking out for the burgeoning interests of the Order.

Indeed Master Raimundo's signature seemed to be in great demand of late. Earlier in the month he accepted a special deed on behalf of the Templars, a castle from Countess Tareja who, for some bizarre reason, donated the same property again less than two weeks later.

The first donation of the castle of Souré was made on April 4 and her name appears on the document. Ten days later the transaction is replaced by an expanded donation, with the entire *town* of Souré thrown in.²⁵⁵ The signatories on the second deed differ greatly — and suspiciously — from the first, most notable being the addition of her nephew Affonso VII, now king of Castilla e León, plus that of her lover Fernán de Traba, along with a new clause stressing that the land and the castle about to be donated had previously been granted to Fernán by Tareja. Regardless, both documents are signed and graciously accepted by Raimundo Bernardo, Templar Master and Procurator.²⁵⁶

And so concludes a confusing transaction. But this being 12th century Portugale the story couldn't possibly end there.

The town of Souré had for quite some time marked the southern frontier between the Portuguese and the invading Moors and changed hands accordingly; back in 1111 its castle was donated to the Order of the Knights of the Temple by Count Dom Henrique.²⁵⁷ Which makes one wonder, if it already belonged to the Order, why should it be re-granted to the same people seventeen years later by his widow? It would appear Tareja was either suffering from a loss of memory or she was keen to ingratiate herself with the Templars at whatever cost and quickly. One historical account sheds some light on the circumstances: “*With the permission of her husband, said Queen [Tareja] made a donation to the Order of the Temple of the Castle of Souré... Another donation was made by the Queen to the same Order of the deserted lands between [the towns of] Coimbra and Leiria.*”²⁵⁸

The first thing we learn is that Fernán de Traba has been elevated to the status of husband. This tragic event allegedly took place in Coimbra in 1125, where Tareja was indulging her lover. In her defense, she accepted his proposal after suffering from a protracted fever and illness,²⁵⁹ and presumably excuses her actions.

The second thing is that the donation is made ‘with Fernán’s permission’, not Tareja’s, indicating how Galician lord had deluded himself into believing he was ruler of Portugale. He wasn’t, so the addition of his name along with the king of Castilla e León’s indicates Tareja was being strong-armed — in fact the actions by the acting regent of Portugale read like an act of desperation. But the pressure was not so much coming from within as from without, applied by her exiled son Afonso Henriques, whose three-year campaign against Tareja, Galicia, and his cousin Affonso VII was having far more destructive impact than anticipated.

Afonso Henriques, the rightful owner of the county of Portugale, was receiving logistical support from the Templar knights, just like his father

before him.²⁶⁰ Their military numbers were further bolstered by members of the Knights Hospitallers whose charitable mandate had since been expanded by the pope to include military activities.²⁶¹

It is quite possible none of the incumbents in the Portuguese court were fully aware of the strength of the bond between the Templars and the heir to the Portuguese throne, but certainly they were aware of the Templars' military arm and its prowess on the battlefield. In their calculations, breaking that bond made perfect strategic sense, and a sizeable donation of a castle, a town, plus the surrounding, albeit useless territory would do just that. Should the Templars take the bribe they would in effect become a buffer between Tareja, Fernán, Affonso VII, and the truculent Moors. It would also put an end to Afonso Henrique's campaign.

But the plan went askew when the ever-scheming Tareja conveniently forgot she was married, that she'd previously awarded the castle to her new husband, and hoped the Templars too had forgotten the 1111 donation — and for that matter, that their military arm had been stationed in Souré itself for the past three years, making the donation somewhat redundant!²⁶² Perhaps she may have entertained, for a brief moment, a vision of the Templars siding with her own army, thereby giving her tactical advantage to run everyone out of Portugale. With their patronage, the kingdom would be protected, and it would be hers. Perhaps.

Perhaps the same motive lay behind her previous donation of Fonte Arcada. In any event, it appears Tareja's move was unmasked. Or circumstances forced her to sweeten the deal the second time around. After her half-sister Queen Urraca passed away, the ambitious Alfonso VII demanded Tareja's loyalty. Having discovered the benefits of independence for herself, she refused. But with the king's armies carving away her territory on one front, and those of her son waging war on another, and rightly so, the best course of action for Tareja was to make an ally of the king of Castilla e León and tempt the Templars to change sides. So the donation of Souré was expanded, with the 'gang of three' added as joint partners, hoping the Templars could be turned like mercenaries to break allegiance with her son.

There was one major point in their favor, a powerful figure with whom they were on excellent terms: Pope Honorarius. News had just arrived from Champagne that Hugues de Payns approached the pontiff with a request for papal approval of the Knights Templar. Should the pope agree, he'd no doubt instruct the knights to side with his favored Spanish and Galician brethren.

It was a good plan. Except for the one small glitch: the Knights Templar never swore allegiance to the pope.



In the afternoon of February 15, a team of British excavators landed at the pier in spite of the convulsions of the waters of the Mediterranean. After unpacking various crates filled with spades, handspikes, crowbars, theodolites and sextants, they headed east on the dirt road to Jerusalem at 4 AM to the accompaniment of a piercing cold wind that at times was forceful enough to blow over the laden mules. Corporals Birtles, Phillips and Hancock, together with Captains Warren and Wilson were seasoned to such inclement weather. What they were not prepared for was the creeping pace of their party, which accomplished the 33-mile journey in an unreasonable thirteen hours.

Finally upon reaching Jerusalem, Captain Wilson presented himself to the British Consul and together they called upon governor Izzet Pacha, who regretted to inform the Captain that the letter had not arrived, and that pending its arrival he would be happy to grant Captain Wilson authority to dig anywhere except inside al-Haram ash-Sharif — the Noble Sanctuary, the Dome of the Rock. The Moslems were jittery about the engineers digging on Temple Mount to begin with, especially es Sakhra (the ‘sacred rock’), for it was tradition that beneath this foundation stone all the rivers of the earth sprang,

and prying into this holy site could bring calamity upon the country. The world, even. Nevertheless, the letter requesting archaeological approval finally arrived, asking that the men be afforded *“the necessary facilities in respect of the object of the mission, and permission and all possible facilities to dig and inspect places after satisfying the owners...with the exception of the Noble Sanctuary and the various Moslem and Christian shrines.”*³⁴¹

The digging was slow, cumbersome, uncomfortable and dragged on for years. It consisted mostly of square shafts sunk into runny shingle and hard limestone and layers of debris of ancient cities piled one on top of the other. Sometimes the Royal Engineers encountered ancient sewage that would fester any blister on the digger’s hands. The working trenches were sometimes no more than two feet wide and in soil so loose it would widen into holes large enough to swallow an ox.

Warren and his team found encouragement whenever they suddenly broke through unexpected galleries and chambers. And there were many. Some had formed by the natural force of water acting on the porous limestone, yet others were clearly shaped by men from a bygone era. Who had been deranged enough to dig tunnels under Temple Mount in air so vitiated even candles found it difficult to breathe?

Their tenacity was rewarded as they came across halls and vaults and archways flanking the subterranean foundations bearing the Sanctuary’s walls. Arches supported more arches beneath, creating a labyrinth of chambers. This was easily the oldest masonry in Jerusalem, or under it, some later overlaid with Saracenic architecture.

One chamber above all stood out from the rest and merited Warren to be lowered by rope into its rectangular form, 30 feet by 23, the walls built of square stones and joined without mortar, each corner marked with a pillar topped by a capital; in the center arose a column. One such room adjacent to the Temple of Solomon itself was once described in the Talmud as a secret chamber kept for special ceremonies.

Then the engineers came across tunnels cut centuries earlier in which were found artifacts belonging to the Knights Templar: a cross and sword as well as a spur and remnants of a lance.

The artifacts made their way to a Templar archivist in Edinburgh, the grandson of a friend of Captain Parker, one of the Royal Engineers who’d assisted Warren in the digs. He was also given a letter written by Parker explaining that during one of the excavations beneath Herod’s Temple he discovered a secret room beneath Temple Mount with a passageway leading to a wall. When he broke through the stonework he found himself briefly

inside the Mosque of Omar, in the south courtyard of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. His astonishment was curt, however, as he was immediately chased by an angry mob of devout Muslims praying inside the Mosque.³⁴²

Among the many findings by the Royal Engineers was one of the shafts sunk by the Templars beneath Temple Mount, 80 feet in depth through solid rock before branching out horizontally in a series of laborious radial tunnels. Like the British, the Templars before them had obviously dug surreptitiously to avoid a confrontation with the Muslims, who continued to be granted access to their sacred sites even after their defeat in 1100.

Almost a century elapsed before the next significant excavations were conducted by a group of Israeli archaeologists, who also stumbled upon a tunnel dug by the Knights Templar: *“The tunnel leads inward for a distance of about thirty metres from the southern wall before being blocked by pieces of stone and debris. We know that it continues further, but we had made it a hard-and-fast rule not to excavate within the bounds of the Temple Mount, which is currently under Moslem jurisdiction, without first acquiring the permission of the appropriate Moslem authorities. In this case they permitted us only to measure and photograph the exposed section of the tunnel, not to conduct an excavation of any kind. Upon concluding this work...we sealed up the tunnel’s exit with stones.”*³⁴³

Without question, the Templars had dug their way to the most sacred parts of Jerusalem — the church of the Holy Sepulcher, the es Sakhra of the Muslims, the Shetiyya of the Jews — the very foundation stone of the sacred mount where Solomon’s Temple had once stood. But what specifically had they been looking for and how had the Templars known where to dig?



Tunnels beneath Temple Mount.



 he plain Cistercian interior of the rotunda⁵⁵⁶ lasted four centuries until it became unfashionable for a house of God to resemble the domicile of a hermit. What once was a soaring arc of eight plain columns within a circular ambulatory eventually became a decadence of décor and polychrome statues, proving the Baroque maxim that what is worth doing is worth overdoing. Bernard de Clairvaux would be venting liquid magma were he standing beside me right now. I could almost hear his famous admonition of the Benedictines bouncing off the rotunda's lofty walls: "*I say naught of...the costly polishings, the curious carvings and paintings which attract the worshipper's gaze and hinder his attention of God.*"⁵⁵⁷

It had been fifteen years since I asked myself, "*why did the Templars come to my country of origin?*" The silent reply was a slow and soaring hill of research. Looking under one stone led to a maze of roots, each connected to an ever-expanding and boundless body of a benevolent monster whose intricacies became as multi-faceted as the triple-faces of Hermes. I had asked an honest question. I had not anticipated the loudness of the reply or the controversial nature of the material I unearthed. Now I had to complete the journey by returning to the rotunda of Tomar (as the name is now spelled) and the

labyrinthine convent that since sprouted around its core.

It is a maiden I adore. Only now did I become profoundly aware I'd been inadvertently following a Graal quest.

One aspect of the Graal is a search for secret knowledge capable of 'raising the dead'. This knowledge derives from an ancient system of teachings spanning incalculable ages, brotherhoods and continents, and its source material is often linked to the Ark of the Covenant. Perhaps elements of the Graal or the Ark were deposited right here. Perhaps inside the rotunda was the same marble keystone with an iron ring leading to a chamber of Mysteries, as it once did on Temple Mount. Certainly the founding of the rotunda became such a potent symbol that it remains the civic day for the town of Tomar, and until the change of calendars from Julian to Gregorian it even marked the first day of Portugal's official civil calendar.

To reach the rotunda it is necessary to walk up the hill along a meandering old cobble track that leads to the Gate of the Sun. Once inside the castle walls and its well-manicured courtyard, the aroma of lavender, lemon and orange is as intoxicating to the senses as the sight of the round temple the knights erected. Indeed it does bear a passing resemblance to the church of the Holy Sepulcher, even the old basilica of Mount Sion — the sacred places whose allure captivated the imagination of Godefroi de Bouillon, Hugues de Payns, Count Dom Henrique and so many other protagonists in this Templar-Cistercian drama.

The building is not so much attractive as it is bewitching and entrancing.

Its exterior circular look is in fact an optical illusion; it is a sixteen-sided polygonal structure held by reassuring buttresses. Inside, the ceiling rests on a central arcade of eight slender columns, gathered like quatrefoils and arranged in accordance to the eight-sided octagon. The space between the columns and the gallery wall is defined by the invisible geometry of a hexagram — two intertwined triangles each representing nature's polar opposites in perfect equilibrium, much like the symbolism behind the Templar emblem of two knights riding a horse.

The octagonal motif of the churches the Templars erected is heavily indebted to Arabic sacred architecture, which uses this geometry because it represents the fully illuminated human. It is a square unfolded twice, and just as the circle represents spirit and 'all that exists', so the square represents its physical counterpart, matter, and the four elements that make it so: earth, air, fire, water. The four remaining faces are representative of the invisible realm. Thus by working with this talisman one strives to achieve utmost harmony between the material and spiritual. This was the aim of all esoteric and gnostic sects.

The octagon's derivatives are the infinity symbol and the number 8. Notable avatars associated with these are Jesus, Mohammed, the archangel Michael, the Arthurian wizard Merlin, and last but certainly not least, Djehuti, patron of scribes and god of magic, healing and wisdom. His temple is situated in Khmun, meaning 'eight-town', after the group of eight Egyptian deities who represent the world before creation.⁵⁵⁸

The Templars followed a secret doctrine,⁵⁵⁹ and so their ceremonies appropriately took place in small, secret chapels inside their temples, such as the one below their preceptory in Paris.⁵⁶⁰ What rituals were performed not only required total devotion to the craft but the contents were revealed strictly to an inner brotherhood, and then only after a period of observation, typically one year. This law was broken on pain of death, as graphically described in Article 29 of the *Rule of the Elected Brothers*:

*If a Brother forgets, either by carelessness or by gossip, and makes known the smallest part of the secret rules or what happens in Chapters at night, let him be punished according to the greatness of his fault, with detention time in chains and exclusion from the chapters. If treason is proven and he has spoken with malicious intent, he is condemned to life imprisonment or even secretly put to death if it serves the best interests of all.*⁵⁶¹

The Templars were utterly devoted to Tomar, and given what we know so far about their tendencies to follow an ancient system of knowledge, it would be uncharacteristic if they hadn't adopted these practices in, around or under the rotunda itself. In the Copper Scroll, one the most important buildings described in the Inner Temple court is the House of Tribute. Its entrance was still known in the first century BC as the Gate of Offering and it stood on a stone platform, each of its four corners bearing a small chamber, one of which was the Chamber of the Hearth.⁵⁶² Inset into its stone floor was a marble slab that could be raised by a fixed metal ring to reveal an opening into a deep cavern below.⁵⁶³ In an adjacent chamber, a flight of stairs named the Staircase of Refuge led to an underground passageway and into the Chamber of Immersion where, presumably, rituals such as the 'raising of the dead' were performed. This may be the same chamber that stood out from the others and merited Captain Warren to be lowered by rope into its rectangular form, its walls built of square stones and joined without mortar, each corner marked with a pillar topped by a capital; in the center arose a column. The chamber was once described in the *Talmud* as a secret room kept for special ceremonies.

The *Book of Ezekiel* similarly describes how the elders of Jerusalem "engaged in secret mysteries...of Egyptian provenance" in darkness under the Temple of Solomon.⁵⁶⁴ Such chambers still exist beneath the altars of early churches

and cathedrals throughout Europe, particularly those erected above pre-existing ancient temples, where identical rituals were once performed. Some are well known: Chartres cathedral, Mont St. Michel, Roslin Chapel, and so forth. In Egypt there is a narrow, claustrophobic chamber beneath the temple of Dendera decorated with one-of-a-kind reliefs depicting a kind of rebirthing process. Just to the west, the Chapel of Osiris in Abydos contains a mural depicting the same ceremony in graphic terms, while in the adjacent Osirion — an underground temple made



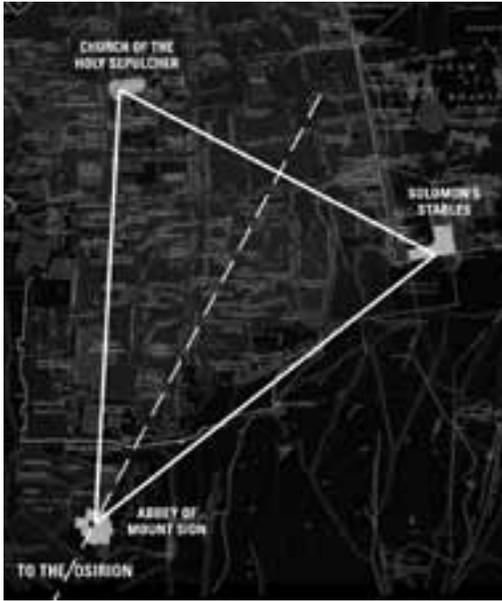
Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

from cyclopean blocks of red granite — the Mysteries of birth and rebirth were also taught and conducted, and although the whole site lies five hundred miles south-west of Jerusalem, the Osirion and the Templars are linked.

The prime Templar locations in Jerusalem are marked by the church of the Holy Sepulcher, and Solomon's stables, where they resided; the third is the Abbey de Notre Dame du Mont de Sion. The three sites form a perfect equilateral triangle, a figurative holy trinity. When this triangle is bisected, an imaginary line extends all the way into the Osirion.

The Essenes similarly conducted their Mysteries teachings in underground chambers on Mount Sion, and after their church fell into a state of disrepair Godefroi de Bouillon made additions to the original floor plan in the form of a Chamber of Mysteries, which was supported on a foundation of eight pillars built right above the Tomb of David, the room associated with the Last Supper.⁵⁶⁵ Godefroi therefore may have been maintaining a tradition upon which Sion is based, because the word *sion* is related to the Arabic *sabi* meaning 'ascend to the top',⁵⁶⁶ suggesting the location is somehow interconnected with a process of ascension. This Arabic interpretation is echoed in Jewish Kabbalah, where the reference to Sion assumes an esoteric mantle as *Tzion*, a 'spiritual point from which all reality emerges'.

By far the most direct reference to Templar secret chambers lies in Gisors, France, whose own rotunda is indistinguishable from the one in Tomar. Gisors



The Osirion triangle.

sits atop an ancient mound upon which the Romans built another temple; beneath its floor an extensive tunnel system links two nearby churches, one possessing an underground initiation chamber.⁵⁶⁷ Because such rooms are fundamental to the structural integrity of the building, they cannot be removed without making the structure above unsafe. It follows that if the Templars practiced the Mysteries in Portugal they must have built a similar chamber under the rotunda, and that chamber must still exist.

Alas poverty and ignorance — the twin devils of conservation — have not been kind to the rotunda of Tomar. Details that would help the quest for a hidden chamber have been covered or replaced by well-intended attempts at preservation, and worse, by a lack of documentation. When its flagstone floor was refurbished in the mid-20th century no notes were made (at least none that survived), nor were photographs taken of details that might appear out of the ordinary. If I'd hoped to find a replica of the rectangular keystone with an iron ring and a staircase leading to an underground chamber, my quest was temporarily thwarted.

I retired to the adjacent courtyard and comforted myself with an orange freshly plucked from one of its four trees. Hope was in need of resuscitation. This was provided later that afternoon during a visit to the town archives, where a brief, yet tantalizing account from the 1940s described how the exterior rotunda had been coated with reinforced concrete that hid or destroyed the entrance to what was then described as a kind of crypt.



The rotunda, Tomar.



Interior of the rotunda.



Interior of the rotunda. The decor was added four centuries later.



Resurrection ritual. Abydos.