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# Secret Societies and the Modern World, how has the Past Influenced the Present?

Salam Abdulqadir Abdulrahman<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Human Development. Email: salam.abdulrahman@gmail.com

## Abstract

The influence of secret society organisations is not confined to a time in the past. It extends to today's world. Many important events and phenomena in the modern world are linked to the ideologies and works of past secret societies. This study is an attempt to show the relevance of secret societies in the contemporary world. It looks at three organisations, two of which existed in medieval times and one that has survived to the present time, and shows how they have influenced our world. Suicide bombing and similar terrorist acts have roots in the Assassins; cultural protectionism against invading immigrants and the international banking system are argued to have been inspired by the Templars; secularism, awareness about political equality in the former European colonies and the philosophy on which the United States was founded are argued to have roots in the Freemasonry. The paper is an attempt to show that secret societies can be understood in a new light and used in the analysis of certain events and characteristics of the modern world.

**Keywords:** Secret Societies, Modern World, Assassins, Knights Templar, Freemasonry

## Introduction

Secret society organisations need to be salvaged from negligence by academia or be considered all-powerful and influential by conspiracy writers. Controversial author David Icke (2007), for example, claims that secret societies are a link between humans and aliens and they follow the aliens' wishes. Therefore, there need to be efforts to study them in a new light.

There can be several reasons why secret societies are largely neglected by academia. One reason is that the name 'secret' implies that these groups had operated secretly so this makes their investigation hard. However, we can say that using the word 'secret' to describe these organisations is not very accurate since they were and are known by people and information about them is available. However, one thing has remained secret about them which is the rituals carried out in their lodges. Another reason is the association of these groups with conspiracies and plots. Michelle Campos (2003), for example, claims that many military revolutions in the world

were the work of Freemasonry. The last reason is that secret societies are considered to be something of the past; they existed or were powerful in the distant past hence they are not relevant to us today. This paper argues that secret societies are relevant; they have influenced the modern world in one way or another.

The question this paper tries to answer is to what extent secret societies contribute to the analysis and understanding of the modern world. And our hypothesis is that the ideologies and actions of secret societies, which were founded in different time periods, have contributed to the creation of certain events and phenomena in the modern world.

The paper reviews and highlights important areas of the history of three secret societies, therefore it allocates three sections for them. In the Assassins' section, the focus is on suicide assassination carried out by agents of the Assassins. In the Knights Templar, the focus is on the financial activity of this group and the protection of the Christian identity. And in Freemasonry, the focus is on the secular aspect of this group, its involvement in the rise of political awareness in the former European colonies and also its contribution to the foundation of the United States.

### *1.1. The Assassins*

The Assassins was a radical Muslim group operated in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries, from 1090 to 1270, in the northern part of modern Iran and the Levant. This group is known for its notorious acts of assassination of prominent individuals who were often Muslims but sometimes Christians in positions of power. The assassination acts were suicidal in the sense that the Assassins were certain that there would be no return from the mission; the murder act they carried out led to their own death as well. But this was what they wanted as they were convinced that suicide assassination was a short and definite way to Paradise. The Assassins were destroyed by the Mongols after a power struggle. The Mongols believed that the Assassins were a threat to them and they were convinced that their extermination was necessary (Campbell).

During the time the Assassins existed, fear of assassination was felt in the region and in other parts of the world. A German priest in 1332 prepared a treatise to the King of France asking him to be very cautious of a secret murderer group in the Levant when and if he wanted to recapture the holy places of Christendom. The priest who was called Brocardus named the group the *Assassins* and described its members as "thirsty for human blood...suffer death as soon as they are recognised...very skilful and dangerous [and] ruthless and competent killers" (Lewis, 2003, pp. 14&15).

Fear and terror became widespread in the region as a result of assassination attacks. There was a common belief that the Assassins could strike throughout the Muslim and Christian worlds (Chambers, pp. 245-251). One time the *Old Man of the Mountain* (a title referring to the leader of the group) sent an agent to France on the mission of killing King Louis IX, Saint Louis, but he soon sent other agents to inform the agent-on-mission not to carry out the plan. This event demonstrated that the Assassins could reach, or at least tried to reach, places like France. Newman (2009, p. 154) writes about the Assassins' terror in the Islamic world saying that their attacks were unexpected:

In their time, the Assassins managed to spread terror throughout the Islamic world. No one knew when or where they would strike. Stories were told of the fanaticism of the Assassins and of the immoral lives they led.

The founder and first leader of the Assassins was Hassan ibn Sabbah. *Ibn* means son in Arabic. His name is also spelt as Hasan-i Sabbah. He declared his order in 1090 and continued running it until he died in 1124 (Campbell, p. 10).

Hassan was the most powerful of all the leaders of the Assassins. He was a military and theologian man. He fed his members with ideas and justifications for their actions and he was very skilful in organisation (Lewis, 2003, p. 167).

Soon after he declared his order, Hassan started the art of assassination and his group became known for such a thing. Members of the order started a long and very terrifying terror campaign which “brought sudden death to sovereigns, princes, generals, governors, and even divines who had condemned Ismaili doctrines” (Lewis, 2003, pp. 62-65). Ismaili doctrine was adopted by the Assassins. It constituted a branch of Islamic theology.

Obedience was a major principle of the Ismaili doctrine in which the knowledge that the imam possessed was believed to be God-inspired and so his orders must be followed without questions because there is no single chance for error (Burman, 1987, p. 48). Hassan capitalised on this doctrine, introduced himself as the representative of the imam and turned his followers to become his slave-like obedient. He called them *fidais* (self-sacrificers), a name that is now used by modern radical groups. On one occasion and in front of several emissaries of the Seljuk Sultan, Hassan nodded at a young *fidai* who responded by slitting his own throat and he made a signal at two others who responded by jumping off to death from the Castle of Alamut, the Assassins’ headquarters. Hassan then told the emissaries that he had 60.000 men like these. Indeed, he was never short of “fanatics willing to die for his cause” (Wujcik, 1983, p. 4 and Reynolds, pp. 20-25).

### 1.2. The word Assassins and the brainwashing technique

The word *Assassins* is used in many European languages: “a murderer, more particularly one who kills by stealth or treachery, whose victim is a public figure and whose motive is fanaticism or greed” (Lewis, 2003, p. 15). Reynolds (2007, p. 21) says that although the Assassins were active in the past, their legacy is still with us. One legacy is their name; the word *assassin* now means murderer of prominent individuals usually in a violent manner. Another legacy is that the Assassins “serve as the model for the most deadly and prevalent terrorist group at large today.”

French scholar Silvestre de Sacy claims that he had finally found the true origin of the word *assassin*. He says that Assassins comes from the Arabic word *hashishiyyin* in plural form or *hashish* in singular form. Hashishi means hashish-taker, and hashish is a drug. The Assassins were given hashish so they could be deceived into what Hassan told them (Lewis, 2003, pp. 25&26). But as these hashish-takers murdered people in cold blood, the word transformed to mean murderers.

Webster (2000) and other scholars provide detail on how the Assassins used hashish (a drug) on new recruits to make them ready to carry out suicide assassinations. According to them, Hassan used the technique of giving doses of hashish to the initiates so that they would obey him and carry out his order when admitted to his group. The technique worked this way: the new recruit was first taken to see the residential place of the *Grand Master* (another title of the Assassins’ leader), there he was given a dose of hashish without his knowledge and as a result, he became unconscious. He was then taken to a Paradise-like place where everything was available including beautiful black-eyed girls. The place was similar to what was described in the Quran, the Muslims’ holy book, about Paradise. There was wine, honey, milk, and water and many beautiful women. When the new recruit regained consciousness, he found himself in ‘Paradise’, surrounded by beautiful girls and everything was at hand. He was then given another dose of hashish, again without his knowledge, and taken back to the Grand Master. When he regained consciousness, the Grand Master explained to him that he did not go physically anywhere but he, in the Grand Master’s presence, experienced a sample of Paradise that awaited him if he fully obeyed the orders of his master (Webster, 2000, p. 28, Gardiner, 2009, p. 110 and Wujcik, 1983, p. 5). The initiation was usually followed by taking the oath of allegiance to the Grand Master.

Some authors suggested that the Assassins used hashish on their members when they went on the mission of suicide assassination. They used certain drugs to make them be triggered into action by a word at any time (Lung, 2004, p. 67 and Harding, 2005, p. 24). In addition, the Assassins operated secretly during assassination missions. Members of the order who were given the task of assassination had to disguise themselves under different names, mix with local people and learn their language if needed, and sometimes they had to wait for a long time until they got the opportunity to act. So, the nature of the work required the adoption of secret methods. “You cannot fight what you cannot see” (Lung, 2004, p. 2 and Harding, 2005, p. 23).

### 1.3. Terrorism through assassination and aftermath

Assassination was not the invention of the Assassins but organised suicide assassination was theirs. The Assassins were the first group to do “systematic implementation of political assassination.” Hassan, the leader, used assassination to strike “horror into the hearts and imagination of his contemporary...it is for this that his sect became known and feared in the West and generated legends” (Burman, 1987, pp. 37&38). Leaders of the group had political goals to achieve but not the *fidais*, the self-sacrificers, who carried out suicide assassinations to get to the Paradise they falsely experienced during the initiation process.

The Assassins made assassination their profession. They practised it for a long time as their sole weapon to terrorise their enemies and the population in general. Just to remember, the Assassins were suicide murderers because they carried out assassinations in such places that they could not escape; they were killed by their enemies at the scene. According to Wujcik (1983, p. 5), the Assassin, like many terrorist organisations today, “used assassination as a tool of terrorism.”

The Assassins were no match for the superior armies of their enemies, yet with their *fidais*, who often spent months infiltrating the enemies and stabbing their victims to death, they terrorised the whole Middle East, “even the most powerful and carefully guarded rulers of the age lived in dread of...Assassins agents” (Grey).

For a terrorist group to exist, there must not be any affection or sympathy when they carry out merciless attacks. If mercy or affection exists members of a terrorist group might not then be able to carry out the missions they are given. The Assassins set a bad example for the later terrorist organisations in that regard. Hassan, founder and leader, executed his three sons, one on murder charges which later proved to be false and the other two were executed for drinking wine. Historian von Hammer suggests that Hassan’s execution of his own sons was “a deliberate effort to inculcate in the community a disregard for all natural bonds of affection” (Hodgson, 1955, p. 51).

The first suicide assassination by the Assassins was the murder of the statesman Nizam al-Mulk, the Seljuk ruler in Persia. He was murdered in 1092 by an agent of the Assassins who disguised himself as a Sufi submitting a petition (Hodgson, 1955, p. 75). The agent was killed at the scene in retaliation. In reaction to the murder of al-Mulk, the Seljuk Sultan Malik Shah—the dominant power in the Middle East—launched a massive aggression against the Alamut. After two months of assault and failure, Malik Shah had a meeting with his generals in which he discussed their unsuccessful military operations and he drank a cup of water. He immediately died. It was understood that the cup was poisoned by the Assassins. The death of two high figures brought about chaos among the Seljuks (Lung, 2004, p. 19). Grey writes about the Assassins and their violence in connection to this event:

Over the next century, as other fida'is followed in Bu-Tahir's footsteps [Bu-Tahir was the Assassin who murdered Nizam al-Mulk], caliphs, viziers, generals, emirs, urban and religious leaders, and even Christian princes fell to their daggers, and their sect came to be known by the chilling sobriquet, the “Order of Assassins.”

Nizam al-Mulk (1018/19-1092) is best remembered for his treatise *Seyāsat-Nāme*h (The Book of Politics). He occupied the position of vizier for 30 years. He was the cornerstone of the empire. With his wisdom and great knowledge, he “guided the sultan’s decisions, sometimes even military ones, and his firm control of the central and provincial administration, through his numerous dependents and relatives, implemented those decisions.” During his time “the Seljuk Empire was at its zenith” (Nizam al-Mulk).

The assassination had proved to be an effective and successful weapon for the Assassins. The reason was that within the Muslim world power and authority were often “invested in the person who managed first to gain and then to keep it.” When the founder of a monarchy, for example, died or was killed the future of the monarchy was in jeopardy; it soon started to decline and disappeared (Burman, 1987, p. 37). The weapon of assassination had also worked to create mistrust among elites in the Near East and in Europe; “numerous rulers or leaders

were accused of being in league with the Old Man and of employing the services of his emissaries to destroy an inconvenient enemy” (Lewis, 2003, pp. 23&24).

#### 1.4. Assassins and modern suicide bombers

Here we look at the similarities between Assassins and modern suicide bombers but we do not claim that modern suicide bombers are direct descendants of the Assassins, besides there is a great time gap – the Assassins existed in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries. However, we argue that suicide bombers’ methods and actions resemble those of the Assassins. Grey uses the word “echo” to link modern suicide groups to the Assassins. He says that terror acts by the Assassins find echoes in today's terrorist actions.

There are two main similarities between the Assassins and modern suicide bombers and two differences but they are differences in detail, not principle. One similarity is that both the Assassins and suicide bombers were and are convinced that they go to Paradise upon their death. Another similarity is dying in action; i.e., the Assassins carried out assassinations in such places and among such people that they could not escape death; they were immediately killed, or tortured to death, by the guards or followers of the person whom they murdered. “The Assassin is almost always caught, and usually indeed makes no attempt to escape; there is even a suggestion that to survive a mission was shameful” (Lewis, 2003, p. 163). Newman (2009, p. 150) agrees with this point and argues that the Assassins wanted death for their victims as well as for themselves; it was a point of honour that they faced their victims who were usually well-guarded. For this reason, the assassinations were considered suicide missions. Modern suicide bombers wear explosive belts and detonate themselves among crowds of people, they kill themselves and others. The Assassins and suicide bombers differ in two aspects in detail. One difference is that the Assassins chose their victims carefully, often from the elite. They often attacked military chiefs, local community leaders, sultans, those who opposed them, those who incited people against them, judges and the like. And sometimes they carried out murder for symbolic reasons like the murder of two caliphs of Baghdad. The Assassins were also targeting individuals who had learned about them and intended to reveal information (Hodgson, 1955, p. 112). Today suicide bombers kill indiscriminately. They kill as many people as possible in a single action (Pape, 2003, p. 345). Another difference is that the Assassins would just use one kind of weapon, a dagger, while it was available for them bows and crossbows, swords and other weapons. Modern suicide bombers use explosives and other weapons to maximise the number of casualties (Lewis, 2003, p. 12).

Historian Sadler is quoted saying that agents of the Assassins carried out suicide murder attacks and they were enthusiastic about it:

One never knew when they would strike, and there was nothing that could be done to scare them off. Indeed, when captured they went to their deaths eagerly, joyfully. How can one deal with men who do not fear death? What was the power the Old Man of the Mountain had over his followers that they obeyed his every wish without consideration for their own lives (Lung, 2004, p. 7)?

This description of the Assassins can apply to modern suicide bombers. Suicide bombers are almost impossible to be scared off from their attacks. They know that they will die but they are ready and willing to go ahead with their plans, and they call dying martyrdom.

“The concept of *shahid* [somebody who gets martyrdom] or *martyr* is, by Islamic definition, a warrior killed by the enemy in battle in the name of Allah. This entitles him to life after death in paradise with 70 of his dearest relatives and friends and the pleasure of 72 virgins” (Grimland et al., 2006). However, this is very different from being killed as an assassin or as a suicide bomber: suicide bombing is an attack that is “politically motivated, [it is a] violent attack perpetrated by a self-aware individual who actively and purposely causes his own death by blowing himself up along with his chosen target. The perpetrator’s death is a precondition for the success of the mission” (Grimland et al., 2006). Durkheim contends that:

Altruistic suicide may actually spring from the hope and belief that there is a beautiful life after death. For suicide bombers, the belief in becoming a martyr following death can in some cases be enough to engage in the suicide attack. Suicide for martyrdom is also labelled acute altruistic suicide (Bakken, 2007, p. 3).

Reporting on young Muslim Palestinian bombers, Goldenberg writes in the *Guardian*:

The friends and families of suicide bombers say they killed themselves as an act of absolute faith: martyrdom, not suicide. "According to Islam, he will be married to 70 virgins and he will not be dead. He will be alive with God," says a friend of the first bomber of this intifada, Nabil Arir. "It is an honour to be able to blow yourself up this way," says the friend, an activist of Islamic Jihad, who says his name is Mohammed.

Goldenberg writes that the terrorist Muslim organisations in Palestine had a process of selection of young Muslims for the act of suicide bombing. They first chose them and isolated them for a month from their families and friends so that they could well indoctrinate them. They were been shown videos of previous bombings and "they were taken to cemeteries and told to lie in a grave for several hours to overcome their fear of death."

Maiese argues that though there is no single motive for suicide bombers, however ideology is a big motive. Individuals are motivated to believe that a much better life is awaiting them in the afterlife and they believe that self-sacrifice is a glory. Other reasons are social and cultural; suicide bombers believe that by committing such actions "they will be heroes, they will help the cause of their group."

The Assassins were "the first to create an effective and enduring [terrorist] organisation" (Lewis, 2003, p. 164). They were the first who terrorised the region for a long time by carrying out systematic assassinations. The Assassins always had terrorists willing to die upon the command of the Grand Master. Similar to today's suicide bombers, agents of the Assassins were sure that they would not return from their assassination attack and they were well prepared and ready to take it.

Agents of the Assassins were lured by their leader to the point that they preferred to die sooner rather than later as they believed that a much better and enjoyable world was awaiting them. This is why they killed without questions and died in action. We can see how the same idea of a better world after death is propagated by modern terrorist groups. The suicide bombers of terrorist Islamic groups believe that by blowing up themselves among crowds they will be given a special place in Paradise. They believe that their leaders guide them to the right path, the path of pleasing God by fighting his enemies. Some failed suicide bombers who were interviewed later admitted that they became more religious before their failed attempts and they wished for martyrdom (Brym and Araj, 2012).

It might be hard for some people to believe that Hassan had young men willing to sacrifice their lives upon his order. However, looking around these days, we see young men and occasionally women blow up their bodies among crowds of people in Iraq and Palestine and other places in the world "in the belief that they will be transported instantly to Paradise" (Reynolds, 2007, p. 34).

Hassan ibn Sabbah developed two strategies which later defined his group and the same strategies can define modern terror groups. The first strategy was that Hassan created an ideological atmosphere in which he received a constant supply of volunteers ready to sacrifice their lives. And the second strategy was that he instructed his men to murder selected victims in public places and at busy times such as Friday prayer to terrify people and make leaders feel unsafe. We can see that these two strategies find replicas in modern terror groups. Modern terror groups use ideology to recruit young people for suicide bombing missions to cause immense terror (Grey). Another thing that has a replica in modern terror groups is "fanatical dedication to an ideal, to a worthy cause or a respected leader" (Lung, 2004, p. 16).

### *1.5. Assassination in the Levant*

The headquarters of the Assassins was the Castle of Alamut in Persia but the group had an active branch in the Levant which operated under the direction of Alamut but sometimes behaved as an independent body (Burman, 1987, p. 119). The story began when early Assassins propagandists were sent from Alamut to the Levant in the early years of the twelfth century by Hassan ibn Sabbah. Same to Persia, the Assassins in the Levant began killing important Sunni political figures in a cold-blooded manner (Burman, 1987, p. 95).

The assassination of the King of Jerusalem Conrad Montferrat in 1191 (it was in 1192 according to some accounts) is an often-told story about the threat and danger this group posed to the Franks. This murder happened in a way that turned out to be very shocking and unexplainable for the King's personal guards and for those who later heard about it. Three Assassins disguised as monks were allowed to approach the King. The 'monks' made signs of the cross and passed the security barriers. When they reached Montferrat, they withdrew daggers and cut him to pieces in a very savage manner before the security guards could stop them. When they finished their job, they did not try to escape or resist being captured. They surrendered to the guards and smiled in the face of the punishment awaiting them. They wanted to die so that they could attain Paradise. The three Assassins were burned to death in retaliation for the murder. Later the guards stayed bewildered at what happened. It was unexplainable and unspeakable for them (Reynolds, 2007, pp. 18&19).

The assassination of Count Raymond II of Tripoli by the Assassins in 1152 was another incident that alarmed the Franks. While he was on his way back to Tripoli, a group of Assassins stopped him and killed him and killed his two guards as well (Campbell, p. 42).

To summarise the section, suicide bombing is a major threat in the modern world. Radical individuals, often young Muslims, carry explosives and detonate themselves among crowds of people. They cause immense casualties and destruction. Suicide bombers have attacked different parts of the world in the past decades. Governments around the world have taken many security measures to face this threat but it is not certain that they can fully prevent all suicide attacks in the future knowing that the bombers have the conviction of going straight to Paradise by committing suicide attacks.

Modern suicide attacks are new only in the form, of using explosives and modern devices. Suicide attacks were practised hundreds of years ago by Assassins who mainly had behind their acts a belief in immediate access to Paradise. Mohammed Atta, leader of the 9/11 suicide bombing group, wrote a letter before he hijacked two planes into the World Trade Centre. He mentions "God's satisfaction" and the things that men can do to "enter God's eternal paradise" (Grimland et al., 2006). According to a report, many Palestinian suicide bombers' last words to their friends and masters were "Inshallah, we will meet in Paradise" (Bakken, 2007, p. 8).

### 2.1. *Knights Templar*

The Knights Templar was founded as a Christian military order in the Holy Land in 1119 by a French nobleman called Hugues de Payens. Members of the order stayed on a site near the Solomon Temple hence they became known as *The Knights of the Temple* or *The Knights Templar* or just *The Templars* for short. After several decades this group became the "first-ever multinational corporation" (Sora, 2002, pp. 12-14).

In an incident at Easter time in 1119, a group of 700 Christian pilgrims were ambushed, 300 of them were killed and the rest were sold to slavery. Baldwin II was on the throne as the King of Jerusalem by that time. Hugues de Payens proposed to the King the idea of a knightly order to protect the routes to the Holy Land by *might* and live as monks at the same time. Baldwin supported the idea (Martin, 2004, p. 135 and Burgtorf, 2008, pp. 2&48). Templars grew in membership and reached places so distant that the Vatican could not reach such as Portugal and England (Helsing, p. 16). The many cities and towns in the Latin Kingdom such as Tripoli and Antioch witnessed a lot of military activities of the Templars (Burgtorf, 2008, pp. 2&48).

The Templars as a military order had to be justified theologically as well because they introduced themselves as fighting monks but monks were not allowed to fight in the Christian belief system. Individual Templars argued and tried to convince fellow Christians that "not only was it possible to gain Christ by dying for him, it was...also possible to attain salvation by killing for him as well" (Burgtorf, 2008, pp. 2&48). Eventually, the idea of taking up arms for the purpose of defence became accepted, slowly however, by the Christian clerics and bishops in Jerusalem and in other places. The Templars benefited from the change of attitude in the Christian community toward using arms in self-defence.



The Templars declined over the passage of time. They were mass arrested in 1307 in France and officially dissolved by the Pope in 1314. A number of Templars were executed including the Grand Master Jacques de Molay by the French King Philip but some had managed to flee.

## 2.2. *Financial activities and international banking*

One of the important things associated with the Templars is *banking*. The Templars are referred to as the inventor of the first international banking system; some functions of the modern banking system were created and performed in Templars' houses. This banking service boosted the order to an international level and it is one of the factors that make the Templars relevant in modern life. The Templars were "excellent engineers" and "the bravest soldiers of the age." They built strong houses and provided incomparable security and protection to their houses. These features assured people about the safety of their money in the Templars' hands (Ferris, 1902, p. 2). The Templars transferred money from Europe to the Latin Kingdom not just for their members but for the Christian pilgrims too, and they were able to lend money to the monarchs in Europe. By doing so they laid the roots for and eventually became the bankers of Europe (De Coster, pp. 3&30).

In the unwarlike atmosphere of the counting room, the soldiers of the Temple, for over a century, handled much of the capital of Western Europe, becoming expert accountants, judicious administrators, and pioneers in the development of credit and its instruments, which was destined to revolutionize the methods of commerce and finance (Ferris, 1902, p. 2).

The complex banking system the Templars developed included financial transactions, giving loans, providing safe deposits and many more services. The involvement of the Templars in this business was to an extent that they were seen as "the precursors of the Italian society of merchants" (Ferris, 1902, p. 2).

*American Banker* writes about the Knights Templar's business side and their influence on the modern banking system. It says that "a good case can be made for crediting [the Templars] with the birth of deposit banking, of checking, and of modern credit practices." The Templars became very rich and powerful by inventing such a system. They had branches in France, Portugal, England, Aragon, Hungary and various Mid-Eastern capitals (Biema). Sora (2002, p. 14) says that the Templars gradually became professional bankers in Europe. They had different ways to avoid the Church's restrictions on lending money. For example, they did not charge interest on the money they lent but they charged "crusading interest." They often lent money to the kings of England and France to fight their wars.

The banking ability of the Templars largely stemmed from their huge properties in Europe which were given to them in the form of donation and sometimes as a religious duty by the donors. In the first decade of its establishment, the Templars received vast amounts of money and property; food, clothes, arms and horses were supplied to them (Martin, 2004, p. 57). They also owned a large number of castles in Europe and in other places and this enabled them to develop a banking system throughout Europe (Yahya, 2003, p. 35).

According to Sora (2002, pp. 14-17), the Templars developed a system of transaction and transferring money facilitated by their network of houses and vessels which operated in the Mediterranean Sea. They were trusted by the European elites to protect their wealth and money. The Templars made a profit from any deposit entrusted to them. Their financial capability reached a point that "threatened the whole world with an immense revolution." Webster (2000, p. 25) adds that had not for their destruction, capitalism with all its evils would have been inaugurated in the fourteenth century.

The Templars are often referred to as the first bankers in Europe. They invented a system whereby one could deposit money at one Templar's house and withdraw it at another upon issuing a credit note. Money was safe in their hands. Their strongly-protected and fortified castles were such a place that people could comfortably leave their money with them. "In Europe, the imposing edifice of the Paris Temple became their financial base as did, to a lesser extent, the London Temple" (Martin, 2004, pp. 47&48).

We need to bear in mind that the Templars did not plan to become bankers in their early days but they became so after they received vast amounts of money and assets and so they started to invest and lend money (Knights

Templar UK). Thanks to this development, tradesmen and other people did not have to take large sums of money with them when they travelled from one country to another. They handed over their money in one country and were given a paper with a code and the sum of money and they could collect their money in another country. The Templars charged a fee for this transaction as we mentioned before. In the twelfth century, travelling was very risky; travellers were likely to be attacked and robbed and so they used the Templars' service. The Templars had the same service in Jerusalem and the Latin Kingdom too. Pilgrims handed over their money in Europe and got them back in Jerusalem but the fee for this transaction was much more than the fee to other countries.

Yahya refers to *The Temple and the Lodge* which is co-authored by Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh and says that "the beginnings of modern banking can be traced back to them [Templars]" (Yahya, 2003, p. 43).

Templars were also involved in the financial arrangements of the Crusades. The money was provided by the papacy but shipment was carried out by the Templars to the Near East (Martin, 2004, p. 50). The Templars owned their own fleets to transport goods to and from the Middle East. They provided the best security to their monasteries—called *houses*, *commanderies* or *temples*, as well—where they used chambers in them as banks. As a result, many rulers and noblemen "turned in their valuables to the monastery for safe keeping and was then able to retrieve them at their pleasure, just as is the case today with a safe deposit box at your local bank." Thus, we can say that the modern banking system began with the Templars (Webb, and Newman, 2009, p. 199).

### 2.3. Cultural protectionism

The Templars were first the protectors of the roads in the Holy Land for the European pilgrims visiting the holy sites and then they became the protectors of Christianity and the Christian way of life against the Saracens, the Muslim Turks and Muslims in general. This notion has now transformed into a larger picture of protecting the Western way of life against the invading immigrants mostly from Muslim countries. The Templars are now remembered by a number of groups or individuals in Europe for being the symbol of Christian and European identity and resisting changes that immigrants bring to their countries. This idea has sometimes led to violence.

In 2011 a Norwegian young man called Anders Breivik carried out a deadly attack in a young summer camp on the island of Utoya in Norway. He shot 69 people dead, mostly teens, and injured many more. Hours before the attack, Breivik emailed a manifesto of 1,500 pages to thousands of people in which he claimed that he belonged to an order called the 'Knights Templar' (Cohen). In the manifesto, he talked about his motivation which was saving Christianity and he calls himself the "Saviour of Christianity." For Breivik, the Templars were the defenders of Christianity against the foreigners and so he and his 'group' were inspired by them (Nizam al-Mulk).

There are organisations and groups nowadays which call themselves *Templars*. Some of them are local and some are international and they have causes to promote and goals to achieve. One thing they share is that although they do not claim to be descendants of the medieval Templars, they claim that they are inspired by them and their goals are similar to them but they use different and peaceful methods to achieve them.

The *Knights Templar UK* is an example. It is based in the United Kingdom. It states that its mission is similar to the Knights Templar's original mission which was, according to them, protecting Christianity from Muslim threats. In brief, the Templars were there "to protect against invasion of Christian beliefs," or "to protect the rights of Christians and their way of life." Today the Knights Templar UK opposes immigration and works to protect the British way of life (Knights Templar UK).

Another example of the Templar organisation is the *Ordo Supremus Militaris Templi Hierosolymitani* which dates back to 1804. It stresses that it does not have a direct link to the medieval Templars but it is inspired by them (Rohrer). Other examples are the *U.S. Grand Priory of the Knights Templar* and the *Grand Priory of the Knights Templar in England and Wales*. These organisations "are in the business of charitable works inspired by the original order" and they attempt to unify the Christian community (The Grand Priory of Knights Templar in England and Wales).

The above examples support our assumption that the medieval Knights Templar is relevant in the modern world. There are individuals and groups inspired by them, by their courage and by their message. They have named their groups or organisations after them and they claim that they are working to achieve goals similar to the original Templars' goals. Members of these groups wear Templars' dresses and symbols on their special occasions.

### 3.1 Freemasonry

There are disagreements over the nature of Freemasonry and the extent of its activities and influence in society but there are aspects of it which are less controversial and make it relevant in the modern world. We will focus on these aspects in this section.

It appears that Freemasonry is the most relevant secret society in the modern world. Professor Andrew Prescott, director of the Masonic Research Centre at the University of Sheffield, says: "We can safely say that the modern society would have been very different in its culture, in its aesthetics, in its outlook if we have not had Freemasonry developing in the way it did in the eighteenth century" (BBC Documentary and de la Cova, p. 98).

Unlike the two other organisations we have studied in this paper, Freemasonry still exists and it is global, it has branches in many countries. It has members from all walks of life and it has a belief system which constitutes a religion in itself (Knight and Lomas, 2004, pp. 350&351, Liagre, 2014, p. 184, Morgan, 2007, p. 1, de Castella and Freemasons Revealed). Its 'religion' is sometimes referred to as quasi-religion because no heavenly message, no revelation, is involved. Members believe in God or what they call *the Great Architect of the Universe* or *the Supreme Being* but they understand that this is not the God of orthodox religions (Wilson, 1980, p. 125). This is the secular aspect of Freemasonry as we will come to later.

The footmark of Freemasonry is apparent in many countries. America is a good example. It is argued that America thrived because of Freemasonry. Freemasonry spread into many parts of the world with the colonial powers during colonialism. It attracted successful members of "the Church, the country, industry, the armed forces and academia" (Knight and Lomas, 2004, p. 336). Freemasonry's activity in the European colonies and its activity in America together with secular ideas are probably three of the highlights of this organisation.

### 3.2 1717 and after

There is almost consensus that the creation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717 is the beginning of the Freemasonry as we know it today. 1717 marks the beginning of a great era in the history of Freemasonry. It was when a number of Freemasons in London decided to come out publicly, organise and centralise their work and activity, but the movement is much older than the Grand Lodge (Rognon, 2014, p. 478 and de la Cova, p. 98). The name of *the Grand Lodge of England* later changed to the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) after it merged with another grand lodge. Let's now turn to secularism, political equality and the foundation of America to show how Freemasonry has influenced the modern world.

### 3.3 Secularism

Freemasons believe in *the Great Architect of the Universe* or *the Supreme Being* but they do not believe that this Supreme Being makes laws for humans or wants to regulate their lives. They believe that it is up to human beings to make their own laws and live by them. They also believe that humans can define their relationship with the Supreme Being. Not like atheists who do not believe in the existence of God or religious men who believe that human behaviour should be regulated by the laws of God, Freemasons believe in a middle way. They believe in a Supreme Being but at the same time, they believe that humans are free and they can define their relationship with that Being. However, this view was too much for the religious establishment in the past to take in, therefore the Church labelled them as heretics. Jolicoeur and Knowles (1978, p. 15) write about this matter:

The Masonic God is first of all a deistic God who is found at the top of the ladder of Masonic wisdom. From God emanates a rational order for the universe, which includes a moral order for the affairs of humanity.

According to the *Advanced English Dictionary*, deism is the form of theological rationalism that “believes in God on the basis of reason without reference to revelation.”

Freemasonry combined the divine and earth in a time when the two were seen as the opposite of each other. Religion was dogmatic toward material development and supporters of material development often thought that they could go on their way without religion. The idea of the Great Architect of the Universe to replace the God of Christianity and other religions, the rituals practised in the lodges and support for scientific development constituted the secular principles of Freemasonry and made it be seen as “the most widespread and influential form of secular association in eighteenth-century England” (Elliott and Daniels, 2006, p. 228).

Elliott and Daniels (2006, pp. 207&208) claim that Freemasonry was the most important and active *secular* organisation in Britain and other countries after its foundation in 1717. Masonic lodges were a place for the study of natural philosophy which was seen as opposing the religious foundation of the society, and they stimulated the development of music and art.

The implication of this secular belief which led to the support of natural philosophy was the exploitation of nature and the development and use of machines. Masons were prepared through the lodge teachings and gatherings to take a positive approach toward the natural sciences and contribute to their development. Elliott and Daniels (2006, pp. 213-215) quote Jacob to say that “under the guidance of English Grand Lodge Freemasonry, lodges became places where gentlemen, whether lowly or titled, could receive a minimal instruction in mathematics and listen to scientific lectures.”

Freemasonry as a secular order continued to grow and influence the society in England and in other parts of Europe. This made the Catholic Church feel uneasy hence the Church started to speak against it. During the term of Pope Pius IX, the longest-reigning pope in the history of the Catholic Church, and Pope Leo XIII in the nineteenth century the Church clashed with Freemasonry a number of times. These two popes collectively spoke about 2000 times against Freemasonry. In the eyes of the Catholic Church Freemasonry was conspiring against the religious foundation of the society (Benimeli, 2014, p. 143).

Masons actually wanted to establish a society not ruled by religious laws and tried hard to separate church and state. In other words, they tried to isolate religion and let the state cultivate its own ways and make laws without going back to religious texts. So, can we say that secularism has roots in Freemasonry? Hasselmann (2014, pp. 345&346) answers the question this way:

In the eighteenth-century Freemasonry was a driving force in both Europe and North America with regard to the introduction of the separation of church and state, the attainment of democratic structures and of freedom of religion and thinking as well as the establishment of civil welfare and educational institutions.

Jacob (1991, p. 9) talks about the identity of Freemasonry because for him this group has developed an identity for itself as it exists for hundreds of years. According to him, secularism is the first and foremost characteristic of Freemasonry identity.

Masonic lodges played a great role in secularising the societies in Europe. Throughout the nineteenth century, Masonic lodges acted like intellectual centres and the general atmosphere in these lodges was toward more secularisation and attacking the tradition of religion and ethics (Jacob and Crow, 2014, p. 111).

In the Muslim world too, Masonic lodges promoted secularism, the separation of church and state or, more accurately, the separation of mosque and state (Harland-Jacobs, 2014, p. 453 and Zarcone, 2014, pp. 251&252).

### 3.4 Political equality

The idea of political equality slowly became a highlight of the Masonic lodges in the European colonies. Following European colonisation in the eighteenth century, Freemasonry reached the colonies and established lodges. Indigenous people often felt that they were discriminated against by the colonial power. The colonial men occupied the foreign lands, looked down upon people and they thought of them as backward. Now the lodges, though lately, accepted indigenous inhabitants and called them *brothers*. The term brother was understood to put the colonisers and the colonised on equal foot (Harland-Jacobs, 2014, p. 456).

However, this 'equality' thing worked against the colonial powers. Indigenous people who joined the lodges began to use *equality* to challenge their unequal relationship with their masters. They were encouraged by what they received in the lodges and started seeing themselves as equal to the colonisers and later revolted against them. "American, Irish, and Latin American Freemasons had done just that during the age of revolution." The Muslim Masons too started to challenge the colonial powers. Ultimately "Freemasonry...contributed to the demise of the very empires that had taken it "to the ends of the earth" (Harland-Jacobs, 2014, pp. 457&458).

Equality in the Masonic lodges can still be an issue for modern writers. Kaplan mentions in an article that despite great rivalries and conflict between Israelis and Arabs, Freemasonry has not abandoned its principle of equality among members regardless of their race, ethnicity or religious background. He refers to an event in 2010 in which the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel elected Nadim Mansur, a Christian Arab, as the Grand Master. This happened in a country where Arabs had little chance to hold high positions in national organisations and civic associations (The Middle East Journal, p. 393).

### 3.5 *The American Revolution (1765-1783)*

It is argued that Freemasonry contributed to the American Revolution through its members such as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin and through its lodges which became a forum for free discussion of different ideas and "served to a great extent as a unifying factor for the colonies" (Morgan, 2007, p. 112). Members of the organisation used their Masonic ties to support the revolution. And Freemasonry claims "to have conceived, argued and ratified the Constitution" (Wilson, 1980, p. 132).<sup>1</sup>

The United States, it is argued, is considered a triumph for Freemasonry. The Masonic ideas of freedom of thought, liberty and equality became the basis of the new state, and the American Independence Declaration has many of the Masonic ideas embedded in it (History Channel Documentary).

Here are a few facts about Freemasonry in America: Freemasonry had a presence in New York by 1730 and the first Masonic lodge was founded by 1733; a great number of the founding fathers of the US were high-degree Masons; 27 of those who signed the Independence Declaration in July 1776 were Masons; there were 40 signers of the US Constitution, 28 of them were high-degree Masons including Benjamin Franklin and George Washington; during the American War of Independence more than half of the generals who participated in the war were Masons; so far, 14 of the presidents of the United States have been Masons; and the biggest population of Freemasonry now live in the US (Sora, 2002, p. 169 and United Grand Lodge of England).

According to Knight, Freemasonry had an important role in building the United States of America. The so-called founding fathers of the new state were either Masons or were close associates of them. They were inspired by the ideas developed in the lodges such as justice, truth and equality (Knight C., 1997, p. 354).

Morgan (2007, p. 111) argues that America was first seen as fertile ground by Freemasonry to cultivate and implant their agenda. The reason was that America was far from the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, and not only by Freemasonry but by many other European powers the continent was seen as an opportunity to establish the ideal society they might have hoped for one day.

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<sup>1</sup> Clause 1976:16 of the American Constitution.

There are two leaders who are often referred to as very influential and important figures in the American Revolution and in the creation of the United States. They were Benjamin Franklin and George Washington. These two individuals were high-degree Masons. Their Masonic background was helpful to make them leaders of the country.

Benjamin Franklin was very instrumental in the American Revolution. He used his Masonic ties to achieve his goals. Franklin was initiated into the Lodge of Saint John in Philadelphia in 1731. One-quarter of Saint John's lodge was merchants and Franklin found an opportunity there. So, it appears that he joined Freemasonry because for him it was an elite organisation in which he could "pursue [his] projects of both self and social improvement" (Jacob and Crow, 2014, p. 105). In 1734 he was elected as the Grand Master of the Masons of Pennsylvania. Franklin established contacts and became a publisher. He was the first who spoke against "taxation without representation" and he "draw up a plan for union" (Sora, 2002, p. 123). Franklin worked hard in support of the revolution. He used his Freemasonry connection to recruit officers and generals to fight for the American Revolution (History Channel Documentary).

George Washington was the first American president and a very important leader of the American Revolution. He was the commander-in-chief of the American colonial army which fought the British colonial power during the revolution. He was a Mason for thirty-six years before he became the president. He was the Grand Master of New York when he was sworn into office on 30 April 1789.

Washington was "sworn in on the Bible of a Masonic lodge." When he laid down the cornerstone of the new capital city in 1793, a Masonic ritual was held and Washington himself was dressed in a ceremonial apron. The capital city of *Washington* was named after him. The new and the first president, Washington, formed a government in which some of its members were high-degree Masons (Sora, 2002, p. 3 and History Channel Documentary).

October 13, 1792, is when the president laid the foundation of the White House. And when he laid down the foundation of the Capitol building in Washington on 18 September 1793, he was in full Masonic dress and regalia (Knight, 1997, pp. 356&357). Freemasonry continued after the revolution and contributed to the very foundation of the new state, the US:

Military lodges created during the American Revolution provided a space for chaplains and Army officers. After the Revolution, Freemasonry, unlike other fraternal orders, did not disappear from the public sphere. Masons took part in cornerstone ceremonies and built a dynamic social order during this period (Johnson, *Journal of the Early Republic*).<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

Secret societies are generally a trait of the past but they have left a huge mark on the modern world. Certain things in the modern world are the creation or have roots in the work and ideologies of organisations known as secret societies. The organisations studied in this paper are not connected with each other nor are they rightly classified under the name 'secret', but they have had considerable impacts on our world today.

We have demonstrated that both elements of the incentive for attaining paradise after death and long systematic attacks can be found in modern suicide bombings by Muslim fundamentalists and in suicide assassinations by Assassins in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries. The financial activities of the Knights Templar in the twelfth-fourteenth centuries led to the creation of a cross-national banking system which is described as the beginning of the modern international banking system. And there are individuals and groups in the modern world who are inspired by the Templars' resistance to the non-Christian and non-European or Western people. Finally, we have found three least controversial ways through which Freemasonry has become part of the modern world: secularism, political equality so rising up against the colonial power in the former European colonies and Freemasonry's contribution to the foundation of the United States of America.

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<sup>2</sup> Johnson refers to David Hackett's book *That Religion in Which All Men Agree: Freemasonry in American Culture*, *Journal of the Early Republic*.

The secret societies should not be seen as dispensable in the modern world either because of their association with secrecy or because they are old and something of the past. The secret societies can become an additional tool for the analysis and understating of the modern world.

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