

# The Stuff that Dreams Are Made Of



by [Geoffrey Clarfield](#) (March 2022)

**Seventeen years ago, 2005.** Another hot summer day in Jerusalem, forty degrees centigrade, muggy, not cloudy, and not clear. I took no joy in walking to the office.

I walked out from my apartment in Rechavia and made it as far as two blocks away to the local Italian pizzeria. I was thirsty and hungry. I ordered a “quattro staticione” from Daniel the owner. He was in his thirties and had come here from Italy ten years ago.

He traced his family back to the Mantuan Jewish composer Salomone Rossi, who in turn had traced his family back to the Jews who came to Rome as slaves of Titus to build the Colosseum. After getting his degree in historical archaeology from the University of Rome he could not find work and became a freelance tour guide. He began specializing in the Jewish history of Rome.

As an art historian I had read a fair amount of archaeology

and visited most sites in Israel and the Mediterranean at one time or another, and so we had had many interesting discussions. What Daniel does not know is that I work for the Mossad, the Israeli secret service. I am a very, private detective on the public dole and my job is to handle all and every art and archaeological scandal that comes to or from these shores.

Daniel had told me, "I love Italy. I love Italians. I love their sense of art and joy but I do not love the European Union. They are turning us into slaves of the Germans and the French and so one day, as I was showing some American tourists the Arch of Titus it dawned on me. I dreamed that night that I am going back to Jerusalem. This is where I come from. I have come home but this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I can always go to Rome for the summers.

"To my surprise and delight I found that I loved to speak Hebrew. It makes me come alive. I mean in Italian you never mean what you say. We Italians never say what we mean. Here people say what they mean and mean what they say. Israelis are "dugri" straight, as the Arabic slang goes. I prefer that." ( I thought of my ongoing private quest to find the Menorah of the Jerusalem Temple in the sewers of Rome and in my heart I agreed whole heartedly with Daniel).

I paid the bill, put down my tip and as usual he presented me with a cappuccino as good as any that I had tasted in Rome." I knocked it down in one go. "Arrivederci," I said. "Shalom, lehitraot," he answered in his lilting Italian accent.

The caffeine energized me. My pace picked up. I made it to the Israel Museum in forty minutes, passing by the beautiful Menorah in front of the Knesset (our parliament) itself roughly based on the Menorah depicted in the Arch of Titus in Rome and which had been looted by the Romans when they burnt down the Temple.

The Knesset is a hot bed of debate, argument, and verbal abuse. But it is a democracy, the only one around in this part of the world. I thought that our Arab neighbours will stop trying to kill us when they finally adopt this kind of governance. One can always hope.

The security guard greeted me warmly. His family had come to Jerusalem from the Yemen in the 1820s and had never left. I greeted him and he told me proudly that his last son had volunteered from some sort of super commando unit. He used to volunteer in my department after high school and I asked him to send my regards. I walked down the stairs to my basement office.

Olga was in her office next to mine. She was cataloguing a collection of woven tapestries that had been donated by the Jewish community of Sofia Bulgaria after the fall of Berlin Wall. She had a PhD in ethnography from Moscow University. She spoke English, Russian, French, German and fluent Hebrew. She made me feel uneducated. Her daughter Sarah was sixteen, looked like a super model with her blue eyes and long blond hair. Her dream was to be a Hollywood film star, like Gal Gadot. Olga thought I was writing a book on Renaissance masters and always bothered me to show her chapter. Of course, that was out of the question and she must have concluded that I am a paranoid academic.

Eventually I entered my office, stared at pictures of my wife and our two sons, photos of my late parents visiting us and taking the kids out for Kosher Chinese food, anything not to work. Then I opened the box. I pulled out the crown. It consisted of a thick gold band with four crosses equidistant from one another, symbolizing the four directions of the earth and the four elements, earth, wind, fire, and air.

It was heavy. I tried it on and despite my large, long head, it fit. I kept it on for the next hour. I wanted to feel the weight and burden of kingship that had afflicted the men of

the middle ages and somehow it made me think differently, the way I felt and thought when as a visiting scholar at Oxford I had participated in a Shakespearean play. In my Roman Toga, I felt like Brutus and when Caesar spoke I really hated him. I was in character.

Very few people knew that the crown was in my office. Those that did were the archaeologist Adrian Boas who had found it, the head of the Israeli antiquities department, my boss, the head of the Mossad and the Prime Minister.

Adrian excavated the Crusader castle Montfort every summer with volunteers from all over the world. During the last season, a German volunteer had murdered an Armenian volunteer at the dig. The German escaped, seemingly into thin air. When the police checked out the identities of the volunteers neither the German nor the Armenian embassies had any idea of who they were. They were here under false pretences. The case was hard to crack. Clearly they were agents of some foreign interests, but whose?

The police brought in Bedouin trackers and dogs and surveyed the castle, the river and hills around it. With Adrian's expert help they discovered a recently dug pit which Adrian insisted that they excavate properly, documenting everything that they found. It took seventy two hours. Ten feet into the pit they found this crown wrapped in newspapers and burlap. What was it? Adrian had no idea at the time and so he put it aside. I had it registered and we kept it in a special safe for "unsolved artifacts." I soon forgot all about it.

Six years later Adrian sent me an article by an Israeli colleague called:

*The Transfer of the Armenian Crown to the Holy Land-A Test Case for the Teutonic Military Order in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*" I read the first paragraph and sat back stunned.



In 2005, an historical document was published by the University of Innsbruck's library, which contained a reference to the transferring of the Armenian crown (*Corona regni Armeniae*) from the Armenian Kingdom to the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. This document, dated 1253, which is incomplete, included an explicit demand concerning the Armenian crown, made by Emperor Conrad IV, son of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II – and addressed to the Teutonic Order's master and convent in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. The Emperor, it turns out, had demanded his envoy to the Holy Land, the Archbishop Elect of Palermo, retrieve the crown from the custody of the Teutonic Order and brings it back to the Armenian Kingdom, to King Het'um of Armenia. This was the very crown that his father, Emperor Frederick II, had entrusted with the Teutonic Order during his 1228-1229 Crusade in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem<sup>1</sup> (fig. 1).

I had a hard time reading any further. This was pretty dry stuff, but electrifying given what we had found near Montfort for that was the Castle of the Teutonic Order. When they surrendered to the Muslims in 1281, they were allowed to retreat to Acre with their archives and all their treasure intact. The whereabouts of the Armenian crown had disappeared from the annals of history. It was one of those great archaeological treasure stories that had baffled everyone.

Montfort was first excavated by Americans in the early 1920s by Bashford Dean. The American millionaire who sponsored the dig wrote to the director that:

*Dear Bash:*

*I am sending one million dollars to the Barclays bank in Jerusalem to cover all and any of your expenses at Montfort. This should cover all your costs and staff salaries for the next ten years.*

*I have only one friendly request. If you happen to find the Holy Grail, the Spear of Longinus, Richard the Lion Heart's sword, Saladin's helmet or the crowns of any of the many kings who spent time in the Holy Land during the Crusades, I would appreciate that you approach my friend Sir Ronald Storrs and ask permission from him and the Mandate authorities that the artifact be loaned to my family who*

would then put it on display here in New York at the MET.  
(I am just kidding.)

Good luck and God Bless.

Your friend and benefactor William Calver (call me Bill in  
your correspondence.)

Later in the article the author writes:

effect. It stands to reason, however, that during the period of the crown's stay in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (1228-1253) it was moved from Acre to Montfort. Moreover, it is very likely that such a move occurred during the 1240s – possibly, to be somewhat more accurate, in the early forties. This would coincide with the transfer of the headquarters, archives and treasure to the Grand Master's residence at Montfort, which was carried out for security reasons, to better protect the Teutonic treasures, which were no longer safe in the Teutonic compound in Acre (fig. 2).

Future excavations at Montfort may reveal more information that may help in resolving this issue<sup>16</sup>.

The next day I had an official visitor come to my office. He was a bald, portly man in his early sixties, wore an old-fashioned English tweed suit, a white shirt and no tie. He spoke like a character from a black and white film, from the thirties or early forties. His British English had the tinge a German accent. He told me his name was Hans. He said:

*I represent an ancient order. We are now simply an Austrian based Christian charity that carries out medical missions around the world. Yes, we see ourselves as the spiritual descendants of the Teutonic Knights of Montfort. Some of our ancestors lived, prayed, and fought there. Some years back one of our members went rogue. I believe his name was Gutmann, or that is what he called himself in public. He came here under false pretences and we understand murdered someone. He was never heard of again but I can assure you as a gentleman he did not live long. I am really not a liberty to say more except that our organization is willing to fund your department to the tune of one million dollars*

*to complete the excavation at Montfort. By the way, I know about the crown. We would like to rent it from the Israeli government for 20 million dollars, for ninety years and display in the capital of the Island of Malta. Please share this with your superiors.*

He gave me his card. It had the organizations name and a telephone number. Nothing more.

When he left, I realized who he was and what he represented. The spiritual and organization descendants of the German Teutonic knights went through many iterations. Today their treasure is kept in a church in Vienna. It is called the Treasury of the Teutonic Order. I had heard that their agents had recently spread out across the middle east in the hope of reconstituting their original treasure and partly sympathized with them. That was because as he spoke ISIS in Syria was destroying churches and libraries that went back to the middle ages and the time of the Crusades. I opened my encyclopaedia and read the following excerpt.

*Treasury of the Teutonic Order-The church is incorporated in the Deutschordenshaus, the seat of the Order. Next to the cobbled inner courtyard is the Schatzkammer (the Treasure Room), a real ecclesiastical treasure trove that has been turned into a museum, consisting of five rooms on the second floor. The different collections have been built by successive Grand Masters during eight centuries. They constitute one of the oldest treasure collections in Vienna, covering the Gothic, [Renaissance](#), and Baroque periods. The real start of the Schatzkammer can be dated to 1525 when the Grand Master [Albert of Prussia](#) converted to [Lutheranism](#) and declared the collections his private property. The museum was reopened on 22 April 2006 after an extensive renovation.*

*The first room displays Gothic coins, medals, seals, crosses, and a 13th-century coronation ring.*

The second room shows [chalices](#) with silvery [filigree](#), but also some more extravagant features. There is a salt-cellar tree, made from red coral, hung with sharks' teeth. In medieval times these were thought to be fossilized [adders'](#) tongues, able to detect poisoned food. Also remarkable are a number of vessels made of coconut shells, such one from [Goa](#) with silver mountings and another one in [chinoiserie](#) style. Also notable is a silver chain (ca. 1500) for the sword carried by the members of the Order. It carries a hanger depicting the [Madonna and Child](#) and the insignia of the Order. A precious table clock is adorned with [garnets](#) and [turquoise](#) and surrounded with a garland of gilded leaves.

The other rooms contain a collection of oriental arms such as a [Sumatran kris](#) with a wavy blade and a rhino horn handle, carved in the shape of [Buddha](#) with precious stones. Another valuable of the collection is the charter by [Pope Gregory IX](#) from 1235, declaring Elisabeth of Thuringia a saint. Finally, there are several Gothic paintings and a [Carinthian](#) woodcarving of [Saint George and the Dragon](#).

The next day I skipped Pizza at Daniels and went directly to my office. Before I entered the building a man with a thick Armenian accent greeted me, pointed to a bulge in his pocket (a gun) and curtly told me to walk ahead of him. I was scared stiff.

He told me he knew about the crown and expected me to deliver it to him at the Jaffa Gate at four in the afternoon and if not, he would come after me. Clearly, he had a case of Jerusalem madness. I called security, they overwhelmed him on the spot, they called the Armenian hospital, they confirmed one of their patients had gone AWOL, apologized, and asked if I would press charges. I did not as I did not want the world to know that we had what may have been the Crown of the Cilician kingdom of Armenia and whose subjects had fought in the Crusades.



The next day the lab tests arrived. The crown was indeed made out of pure gold but, there were traces of a mineral that is only found in southeast Anatolia, more evidence that this was indeed the crown of the medieval kingdom of Armenia.

I was asked to prepare a press conference displaying the crown and two weeks later, with the entire international press assembled we made the startling announcement. I imagined an eventual gala opening at the Israeli Museum and a visiting exhibit in Yerevan, capital of a once again independent Armenia eager to maintain good relations with small states like Israel.

As the news leaked out, our legal department received ten letters, mostly from lawyers. Each one argued that the crown belonged to them or their clients, that is. One woman from Yerevan claimed to be the direct descendant of the King of Cilicia. The most amusing was from a man called Hans.

*I am reminded of our meeting some years ago in your office. It is clear that the crown belongs to our order and you will soon be sued for one billion dollars or hand over the crown to our treasury in Vienna. If you prefer to deliver it in Malta we would happily receive it there. Please inform your superiors.*

*Your colleague,*

*Hans*

At the next meeting with my bosses we decided to go all out with the exhibit. The Armenian Ambassador was to be the guest of honour and he gladly accepted. The Israeli government ignored the various letters threatening to sue us and asked me to personally invite Hans as an honored representative of the Teutonic Knights to the opening in Jerusalem.

That night my wife and I watched Humphrey Bogart's classic acting in the film The Maltese Falcon. My favorite line in the

film is spoken by the rather unscrupulous character, Kaspar Guttman who would betray everyone and anyone to get his hands on the Maltese Falcon. He reminded me of “cloak and dagger” Hans, from the Teutonic Knights.

In one scene he opines, “That’s an attitude, sir, that calls for the most delicate judgement on both sides. Because, as you know, sir, in the heat of action men are likely to forget where their best interests lie and let their emotions carry them away.” That night I slept like a log.

The next day I took a leisurely stroll to Daniel’s. He recommended his spaghetti Bolognaise and I ordered myself a plate. I asked him to open his best bottle of Italian wine. I offered him a glass and he took it gladly. I toasted his glass with mine. “Daniel” I said. “Yes?” he replied. “Do I have a story for you; do you have twenty minutes?” “Sure,” he said. “What is it about”

I picked up my wine glass, watched the midday sun’s rays illuminate the rich red wine within and answered, “It’s about the stuff that dreams are made of.”

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**Geoffrey Clarfield** is an anthropologist at large. For twenty years he lived in, worked among and explored the cultures and societies of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. As a development anthropologist he has worked for the following clients: the UN, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Norwegian, Canadian, Italian, Swiss and Kenyan governments as well international NGOs. His essays largely focus on the translation of cultures.

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