

## WHO WAS HIRAM, KING OF TYRE?

Our Masonic tradition tells us that our Craft had three original Grand Masters. The first of these, Solomon, the King of Israel, figures prominently in our Masonic story and is still known as a great personage thirty centuries after his time. The third of this trio is the center and source of our deepest teaching and to him all Masons are bound by a unique tie. But the second of our Grand Masters has only a passing reference in our Ritual and outside of a Masonic Lodge is known only to a few specialists in history, Hiram of Tyre was a monarch who ruled over a powerful kingdom at the peak of its greatness. He and his people deserve to be known better by the Masonic fraternity.

The Kingdom of Tyre, or Phoenicia, as it was more generally known, was located on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean north of Palestine. Its principal city was the seaport of Tyre, which because of its geographical location became a converging point on the great trade routes. Tyre became one of the foremost commercial centers of the ancient world and grew rich and powerful.

Phoenicia has two just claims to high achievement.

In the first place, the Phoenicians were among the first known sailors of the world. It is said that they were the first to navigate upon the open sea and to chart their course by means of the stars. Thus to the men of Tyre goes the distinction of being the fathers of modern navigation. They must indeed have been an alert and venturesome race. It is known that Phoenician sailors traveled all over the Mediterranean - sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar, down the coast of Africa, up the coast of Spain and even as far as England. If we wish to romanticize history a little we can see in our mind's eye a sea captain of Hiram of Tyre sailing through the Pillars of Hercules and gazing out upon a vast ocean - not knowing that 3000 miles beyond his sight lay a land where 3000 years later the name of his royal master would be perpetuated in Masonic Lodges.

As the Phoenicians went about the Mediterranean they founded colonies in various places, the most famous of which was Carthage on the northern coast of Africa. Carthage flourished, and as the parent Tyre began to decline, Carthage carried on the Phoenician tradition. It came into conflict with the rising power of Rome, and after years of furious struggles known as the Punic Wars, Rome was triumphant and Carthage was destroyed. But Carthage almost prevailed - her general, Hannibal, one of the greatest military commanders of all time, took an army across northern Africa, through Spain and southern France, over the Alps and down to the very gates of Rome before he was stopped. It is very interesting to speculate that if Carthage had conquered Rome, our civilization, which so largely bears the imprint of the Romans, might instead have been influenced by the people of Hiram of Tyre.

In the second place, the Phoenicians may claim to a high place in the history of mankind because they were the inventors of one of the first known alphabets. We take the alphabet so much for granted that it is hard for us to conceive of the time when it did not exist. Hiram's people were certainly possessed of intellectual curiosity and skill to formulate a way whereby the thoughts of men could be transmitted through other than oral means. The Phoenician alphabet influenced the Greek, and the Greek the Roman. In reading these lines you are bearing a certain mute testimony to the genius of the people over whom our second Grand Master once ruled.

Solomon's name and fame are still remembered today while that of his neighbor to the north has been largely forgotten. Solomon was fortunate in having adequate chroniclers (himself included) which Hiram lacked. Solomon did not equal Hiram in wealth and in worldly power, but he did surpass him in the greater and more enduring values of wisdom and of the spirit.

King Hiram of Tyre has been saved from complete oblivion in the dusty tombs of history and is remembered by Freemasons because he gave freely of his resources to help, aid and assist a neighbor in a great and important undertaking.

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