

## THE ORIGINS OF FREEMASONRY

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How old is Freemasonry? Nothing appeals so much to the imagination as the story of how travellers have found Freemasons in darkest Africa or among ancient peoples in China or Central America or that evidence has been found that it existed "in Egypt, 40,000 years ago". It is easy to imagine or fabricate such evidence and yet there may be a basis for such discoveries.

The Soul of Freemasonry is its spirit, its principles and its symbols, and these existed long previous to the recorded history of mankind, and have come down to us today but the fact is that they come from widely different sources.

The origin of Freemasonry has been attributed to twelve sources:

1. The ancient patriarchal religions;
2. The ancient mysteries of the pagan world;
3. The temple of Solomon and the Temple builders;
4. The Crusaders;
5. The Knights Templar;
6. The Roman Colleges of Artificers;
7. The Cathedral builders of the Middle Ages;
8. To the Rosicrucian philosophers of the Sixteenth century;
9. To Oliver Cromwell, for the advancement of his political schemes;
10. To the Pretender, as a means for the restoration of the House of Stuart;
11. To sir Christopher Wren, at the building of St. Paul's Cathedral; and

12. To Dr. Desaguliers and his associates.

Some of these theories are today regarded as fantastic and ridiculous and have long been abandoned.

The truth is that Freemasonry owes its origin to no one single source. Our history and symbolism have been influenced from many sources.

The fraternity is the union in one great river of many streams and in the earliest history of mankind, there was nothing that could be said to be Freemasonry either in ritual or organization. The same is true in every century right down to 1720. On the other hand, we can trace our organization and ritual back into history just as we can travel up a river back from the speculative Masonry of today to the operative Masons who built the cathedrals in the Middle Ages; back to the great masters of Architecture in earlier centuries; to the builders of Rome and Athens; back to the Phoenician builders of Solomon's Temple; back to the temple builders of Karnak and Memphis; back to the ancient religions of mankind and the first inspirations of Art and Architecture.

As we go back up the river, we find here and there a new stream contributing to the every growing and every broadening volume of waters; a new degree; a new feature; a tradition; a legend; a landmark.

Dr. George Oliver is not in these times accepted as an authority on Masonic history, his works are more entertaining rather than trustworthy.

His theory was that the Order was founded by Adam, who was the first Grand Master. Oliver tells us that Adam taught Seth his son, and they practised Freemasonry under the name of Primitive or pure Freemasonry.

>From Adam and his children, the practice of Freemasonry descended to

>Noah

and his children and through them to the patriarchs and to Solomon, and thence to the present day. The dispersion of mankind after the Deluge resulted in the spread of Masonic principles far and wide; each nation developed independently and as a consequence we are able to discover Masonic principles, greatly corrupted, in all ancient pagan religions.

Fantastic as this theory is, it is true nevertheless that in the primitive simplicity of patriarchal worship, we do find some of the inspiration for speculative Masonry as we have it today.

The modern world takes squareness for granted, and self evident, but the discovery of the square and how to make a right angle must have been a great step. It opened a new era in the history of mankind. Very early it became the emblem of truth, justice and righteousness. The cube, compasses and keystone were still further and stupendous advances in the art of building.

## ANCIENT RELIGIONS

In these earliest buildings, we find the faint beginnings of the spiritual aspirations of man, and even today their crumbling ruins of towers, temples and tombs, bespeaking a vivid sense of the unseen and the realization of man's relation to it.

The temples of Egypt were built in the image of the earth as the builders imagined it. They thought the earth was a flat oblong slab; the sky was a ceiling or vaulted covering supported by four great pillars; and all early temples were so built. From the pavement grew vegetation and water plants; the ceiling was painted dark blue, and strewn with stars, the sun and moon, the pole star and the constellations. There was an inner shrine or holy place, small and obscure, cubic in shape approached by a succession of courts, all on a central axis, which pointed east and west with the entrance towards the rising sun.

The sun as the source of Light, was represented by a circle, the image of its disk, the symbol of completeness, of eternity and of Light.

Ages before the Christian era, the cross was the symbol of life and for what reason no one knows. The cube, was the emblem of truth and security; the triangle of the trinity of father, mother and child; of body, mind and spirit; in India, of the three gods, Siva, Vishna and Brahma; in Egypt of the three gods, Osiris, Isis and Horus. The compasses, the square, level, marking line, leather apron were all symbols of great moral truths.

Cleopatra's Needle, the great obelisk in Central Park, New York, was the gift to the United States from Ismail, Khedive of Egypt in 1878. It has stood in the great temple of the Sun-god at Heliopolis on the Nile, from the 15th century before Christ. In a cavity in its foundation were found all the emblems of the builders, a

rough cube, a polished cube, a square, an iron trowel, a lead plummet, an arc of a circle, a serpent (the symbol of wisdom), a stone trestle-board, a stone bearing the Master's mark; all evidence that the builders worked in the light of a mystical faith.

An ancient Egyptian legend tells of Typhon (serpent) god of evil; who sought the throne of Osiris, (the Nile-god). The plot was frustrated by Isis. Typhon prepared a richly carved chest, and invited Osiris and others to a great feast. He offers to present it to any one lying down inside it whom it fitted exactly. Osiris gets in, and the conspirators close the chest and fling it into the Nile. Thus far, the gods had not known death.

Isis hears of the treachery, and cuts her hair, and clothes herself in the garb of mourning; weeping and distracted, she seeks the body of Osiris everywhere. The chest is carried out to sea to Byblos in Syria and lodges against a shrub of acacia. The shrub shoots up into a tree, around the chest and protecting it. The King of that country cuts the tree which hides the chest and makes a column for his palace. Isis, led by a vision, comes to Byblos and asks for the column. Hence we get in Freemasonry the symbol of a woman weeping over a broken column, while Horus, the god of Time, stands behind her, pouring ambrosia on her hair. Isis takes the body back to Egypt, but Typhon finds the chest, mangles the body of Osiris and scatters it to the four winds of heaven. Isis continues her quest, gathering piece by piece the body of Osiris, and giving it decent interment. Horus, the faithful son, fights with Typhon and destroys him, and then there is a solemn procession to the grave of Osiris, calling him to rise from the dead.

He is finally raised by the aid of the strong grip of the lion god and lifted from death to life. Osiris becomes Lord of the Land of Death, his sceptre a cross ansate, his throne a Square.

The legend is an ancient allegory of eternal life, common to all ancient nations. The mysteries at Memphis in Egypt and of Eleusis in Greece, the mysteries of Mithras in Persia, and of Adonis at Byblos in Syria; all similar; it was in fact the universal drama of faith portrayed in the mysteries of the ancient world, the source and origin in the opinion of many Masonic students of much of the present day Third Degree.

## THE DIONYSIAN ARTIFICERS

It is a curious and startling fact, that the religious mysteries of the Phoenicians were in the hands of a society called the Dionysian artificers, a fraternal order of architects and builders who erected the temples, stadia and theatres of the

Phoenician people. They had signs and words; they used emblems from the art of building; they practised benevolence, and one of the peculiarities of their construction of buildings was that the timbers and stones to be used were hewn and prepared in the quarries and forests, and brought to the site all ready to be placed in position. It was about 1100 B.C. when we find these artificers organized into communities, or groups or lodges, governed by a Master and two wardens, and holding general assemblies at Lebedos, and elsewhere from time to time.

Now we know that this Order existed in Tyre, when Solomon's Temple was built, 1000 B.C. and until about 300 B.C. and we find faint traces of it down to the time of the Crusades, 1500 or 1600 years later. From the scriptures and Josephus, the historian, we know the Hebrews were pastoral in their habits and inclinations, and warlike by force of necessity. There is nothing anywhere that would warrant the opinion that the Hebrews were skilled in architecture. Nowhere in their history could they possibly have developed the art of building.

In I Chron. 22, vv. 2-4, we read, "And David commenced to gather together strangers that were in the land of Israel, and he set masons to hew wrought stones and build the House of God, also cedar trees in abundance, for the Sidonians and they of Tyre brought much cedar wood to David."

There has never been in the minds of scholars any doubt but that King Solomon's Temple was built by Phoenician architects and workmen. And it is a fact that Sir Charles Warren in his explorations in Palestine found on the foundation stones in Jerusalem Mason's marks bearing Phoenician letters and characters. Surely that is confirmation of the theory that the Dionysian Artificers were the builders of the Temple; they were the repository of the mysteries of the ancient religion; inherited from Egypt and in these facts we find another link in the chain of evidence; another stream flowing into the main river.

## ROMAN COLLEGES

It is a well known fact of history that guilds, or trade unions or colleges of workmen flourished in all parts of the Roman Empire, and traces have been discovered in England, in the first century of the Christian era.

These guilds or colleges followed the Roman legions, building their cities, bridges and temples.

Every trade had its secret order or union, usually influential but always religious or semi-religious in character, and funerary and charitable in their labours.

They had memorial services and they marked the tombs of their dead with the emblems of their trade, a baker with a loaf of bread, a builder with a square, compasses and level.

The college of architects enjoyed special privileges and exemptions. They had their own constitution and regulations, which resembled very much a modern Masonic Lodge. The law required three persons to make a college. It was presided over by a Magister or Master, with two decurions or wardens, a secretary, a treasurer, a keeper of archives, and a sacerdoes or chaplain. The members were organized into three orders or grades. Its ceremonies are not known, probably because they were secret.

In the ruins of Pompeii, buried in 79 A.D., under the ashes of Mount Vesuvius and uncovered in 1878 was found the meeting place of a collegium just as it stood 1800 years previously. In front of the building were two columns or pillars and interlaced triangles were carved on the walls.

A pedestal or altar, found in this room is now in the National Museum at Naples. The top of the pedestal is a square, set with a beautiful mosaic depicting a human skull, made of white, grey and black colours. Above the skull is a level, and from the top to the point, is suspended by white thread, a plumb line. Below the skull is a wheel of six spokes, and on its upper rim a butterfly with wings of red, edged with yellow, and eyes of blue.

To the right and left are representations of soldiers' garments, and equipment and a pilgrim's dress and staff all of them mystical and symbolical beyond a doubt.

From the conquest of Britain by the Romans in 55 B.C. until they left Britain in 410 A.D., four centuries later, we know that these Roman Colleges of Architects worked along the Rhine and in Gaul and in Britain. About 300 A.D. the Emperor Chlorus sent to Britain for architects. They left an indelible mark on the art of building in Britain, at York, Bath, St. Albans, London and numerous other places. I have myself seen the marks of the Roman builders and masons on the stones of the elaborate baths and other buildings erected by the Romans in Bath in England.

COMACINE MASTERS

With the breaking up of the Roman Empire there is a gap in the history of the Art of building, between the classic art of Rome and the rise of Gothic art.

Modern research supports the theory that the missing link is the Comacine Masters, a guild of architects, whose home was the little island of Comacina, in Lake Como in Northern Italy.

This guild erected church buildings all over southern Europe principally around Northern Italy, and in France, Germany, Spain, and England. To this guild we can trace the various styles of Italian architecture.

The Comacine Masters were a privileged class, exempt from taxes and feudal or military service and free to travel. They were architects, sculptors, painters and decorators.

Under the Emperor Charlemagne, the Comacines travelled into remote places from Sicily to Britain, and from Spain to Germany building churches.

When St. Augustine went to England in 595, the Comacines followed. The Venerable Bede, the English historian, in 674, mentions builders from Gaul to build the church at Wearmouth.

The great cathedrals were the work not of individual artists, but of an organized group of builders who planned, built and adorned them. As to their form of organization they had Magistri and Discipuli, (masters and scholars) under a Grand Master. Their meeting places were called loggia or lodges. They had Masters, Grand Wardens, oaths, tokens, grips and passwords.

They wore white aprons and gloves. The square, compasses, level, plumb line, and arch appear among their emblems. "King Solomon's Knot" was one of their symbols, and endless, interwoven cord, symbol of eternity and later the Lion's Paw seems their chief emblem.

Of all the works of art between 800 and 1000 A.D. the greater and better part were under the direction of the Comacine Masters.

## THE GILDS IN ENGLAND

Trade guilds existed in Scandinavia in the VI century, and in France and England in the VII century. The Masons, carpenters, tailors, weavers, tanners, merchants, mechanics, priests and householders formed guilds everywhere.

It seems very possible, and even probable, that the drama of the Third Degree is a survival of a custom which these guilds had of presenting a play each year. We have some of these old plays; presented jointly by the Masons and gold-smiths at Exeter, and by the Masons and hatmakers at York.

These merchant guilds made an indelible influence on modern trading companies; some religious guilds and societies have continued to the present day in England, in Roman and Anglican Churches, and many trade guilds survive in the labour unions of our day.

The members of these guilds relieved one another in poverty; protected them from injury; regulated wages, the instruction of apprentices and the relationship of Master and journeymen. They also acted or set up tribunals for the settlement of disputes among their members.

It is important to note that membership in a guild was a prerequisite to the privileges of citizenship. The guilds consequently rose in importance. The city "companies" or guilds in London in 1375 acquired the entire right to elect not only the civic government but members of the Parliaments as well. The exclusive power of electing the Lord Mayor of London, Sheriffs, Chamberlain, Aldermen in the ancient city of London, is held to this day by these companies.

The charters of these guilds gave them the virtual monopoly of the trade represented. The leather sellers, vintners, goldsmiths, merchants, tailors, etc. each and all had their guilds and the highest personages of church and state were eager to be enrolled, and so enjoy privileges of citizenship.

The guilds of Masons had the monopoly of building, except ecclesiastical buildings. Freemasons and guild masons were entirely distinct. Freemasons confined their work to ecclesiastical buildings, churches, monasteries, cathedrals and abbeys.

Following the Norman Conquest in 1066, England was invaded by an army of ecclesiastics and religious buildings sprang up everywhere.

In the reign of Henry II, 157 such buildings were erected in England; Scotland and Ireland had the same building activity.



In 1270, Pope Nicholas III confirmed all rights previously conferred and bestowed further privileges. All the Popes up to Benedict XII conferred marked privileges and favours on the Order of Freemasons.

In these operative days wherever a church or abbey or cathedral was to be erected a Master builder from a foreign country would come with a few skilled assistants to the locality. Operative Masons came from all directions - they possessed means of making themselves known; few of them could read or write; for certificates of membership were unknown and might be stolen or lost. these Masons would set up a "lodge". There they slept and studied their plans, received instructions and taught their apprentices.

## OLD CHARGES AND ANCIENT LANDMARKS

They had no system of degrees such as we have today. Apprentices were boys 12-14 years of age. They were the learners bound to serve their masters over a term of seven years in return for food, lodging and clothing and instruction. An apprentice took an oath to keep the secrets of his master; later he learned the legends of his Craft, certain charges were read to him from old manuscripts. Later he was made a journeyman or an employed man entitled to work for wages. Ultimately he became a Master builder himself or a Master Mason, not through any ceremony but merely by the circumstances of his employment and his experience. There was at this time no central governing body, or Grand Master or Grand Lodge; lodges were independent and self constituted. There were occasionally gatherings or assembling of all the Craftsmen in a county, district or locality but none for the whole of England. Lodge meetings for the government were presided over by the Master Mason and his Wardens; lodges regulated the hours of work, adjusted difficulties, settled disputes, and approved the terms of employment of entered apprentices. Most important of all, perhaps, these lodges gave "freedom of the lodge" to local notables such as a bishop, architect or nobleman, all of them non-operatives, who were interested in the building. We have the records of the reception of several non-operative- Henry VI in 1450; Sir William Alexander at Edinburgh (to whom Nova Scotia was granted in 1621); Henry Alexander, son of the Earl of Stirling in 1638; Elias Ashmole the antiquarian, in 1646; William III in 1690; Sir Christopher Wren in 1691.

In England, these men were called "Accepted" Masons; they were useful to explain the meaning of stained glass, mural decorations, altar cloths, vestments, the

doctrines of the Church and Bible. In this way symbolism was introduced into the building, so that every statue, stone, cornice, arch, gargoyle, carving, window, etc. had a new meaning.

By 1700 the building of churches was languishing in England and lodges became more social than practical; the speculative or "accepted" masons dominated the lodges and controlled affairs.

## OLD CHARGES

In 1716, we find four lodges in London, remnants of old operative lodges meeting at different taverns; their representatives met at Apple Tree Tavern in June of that year and decided to form a Grand Lodge for London and they did so on June 24, 1717, at the Goose and Gridiron Tavern. They elected Anthony Sayer, one of the oldest Master Masons present as first Grand Master.

In 1718, George Payne was elected to succeed him. The old operative system was too loose and disjointed to this new Grand Lodge decreed that no lodge should be formed without a warrant from it. They decided to have a code and constitution, so they asked the brethren to gather up the old Constitutions and old charges from which they might extract a set of regulations.

The work was actually done by Rev. Dr. J.T. Desaguliers, a Church of England clergyman of Huguenot descent and Dr. James Anderson, a Presbyterian divine.

In 1719, Desaguliers became Grand Master and in 1720, George Payne succeeded him. The Third degrees were perfected about 1720-21 by Desaguliers and the Legend of the Temple introduced. So began our Grand Lodge system.

Here we must stop, we have come a long way from many sources and origins; many factors and influences.

Let me emphasize five points of importance:

1. the fraternal idea, comradeship, fellowship among the builders has always existed and persisted;
2. the idea of building guilds has always existed;

3. the close identification of the Craft with religion, the ancient mysteries, and Christianity later;

4. the continuity from very ancient times, because building and religion have always been factors in civilization - there has always been religion and there has always been building. They have persisted and existed side by side together and knowledge was common and shared everywhere, no nation was ever isolated;

5. lastly, there was a gradual evolution - a flowing together. The many streams from many sources have come together and now flow on in one mighty stream or river.

Realize too that this Order of ours is still growing. Instead of one Grand Lodge there are now a hundred. Instead of four lodges there are 40,000 lodges. Instead of the 100 members who formed the first Grand Lodge there are nearly four million.

There are many more degrees and branches in Masonry. New influences, social and economic, philosophic and religious, have come in, the Stuarts, the Royal Arch about 1740; the Knights Templars about 1760; the Scottish Rite about 1785. Benevolence funds were first engrafted on the Order about 1800, perhaps earlier. Our benevolent institutions were established about the same time.

Even the ritual has grown in variety and in beauty. Each jurisdiction decides what ritual it shall use, and in many, there are several in use. Charges and lectures and floorwork are constantly revised and added to.

In recent years there have been lodges for study of our history, our symbolism, and our jurisprudence. Past Masters' Association and District organization are modern inventions, so is much of our Grand Lodge organizations with its elaborate ceremonies, splendid regalia and many offices. Lodges met at one time in taverns, later in rented halls and buildings, nowadays many lodges and Masonic bodies meet in fine temples of their own.

In recent decades there has been a deluge of other orders - juvenile and women's orders, claiming affiliation with Freemasonry. Our Order is taking up social welfare work, establishing hospitals and scholarship funds, and even service clubs. These all have their influence on the Order and affect its growth.

In the countless centuries we have gathered the best of all philosophies, all political theories, all religious faiths and made them ours.

It is not surprising therefore that Freemasonry today stands for the best traditions and the highest ideals of our civilization and our way of life.

And again it is not surprising that in Freemasonry you will find no support for such theories as communism, or anarchy; or for atheism or unbelief; or for novel political or social theories. But you will find substantial support for a belief in a Supreme Being, the author of the universe; for the doctrine of a future life; for the doctrine of a resurrection to eternal life; for equal rights and justice for all; for freedom of thought and action; for the principles of the Golden Rule; for the duties we owe to ourselves, families, friends and fellow men; such as prudence, temperance, justice, fortitude, fidelity, courtesy, benevolence and all the rest; for devotion to one's country; for the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.