

Corinthian Lodge No. 513

January 25th, 2007

Lecture

From Operative Masonry to Speculative Masonry. Why was there a connection?

Brethren, this evening I am going to elaborate on an often mentioned, but rarely explained topic. That topic is how the connections of Operative and Speculative Masons came to be. This connection, after all, gave origin to our present fraternity of Freemasonry. Some Masonic historians have said that the connection is because of Geometry; the rules of geometry applied to a philosophy of life. They even go as far as to believe that the letter "G" in the centre of a Lodge room stands for "geometry" or "Geometrician". Others have said it is because the Working Tools; allegorical symbols to teach a philosophy concerning the nature of the Creator, the origins of the universe, and humanity's universal destiny.

Historically we learned that long time ago, operative Guilds of various Crafts, faced a decrease in appeal and membership. No longer were castles and cathedrals being built of stone. These Guilds found it necessary to accept unskilled members into their ranks. In many cases these men were learned men, business men, professors, chemists, artists, theologians, and to top it all up, it was proper and convenient for the nobility to join the Craft.

We know Speculative Masonry became public in England in 1717, but that it had been practiced in secret for many years before then. Records indicate the term "Speculative Masonry" was first used in England as far back as 1157, Jasper Ridley

Hand shakes and pass words as secret signs of recognition can be traced back as far as 1550. During the building of cathedrals in Europe in the sixteenth century there was even a designated officer, known as the Tyler, who was placed outside the door of the shop in the construction site. His duty was to keep the door to the shop closed to

“cowans”, a Scottish word meaning “unskilled labourer”. Common sense shows us that this emphasis on secrecy may well have been related to the need to operate at “closed shop”, in order to maintain high standard of workmanship, and to prevent outsiders from entering the trade and competing for business.

If that is the case, why would Operative Masons would later become to accept Speculative Masons? Why would they later attract each other? What force would keep them together?

To help us answer this question we need to understand the period in time. A number of Masonic historians, whose work was researched in preparation for this lecture, take us back to the times of the Roman Empire. This was a period during which stone masonry reached a level of high splendour and complexity. One prominent Roman architect of the period, Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, was the first to draw together the various architectural styles in the orders of Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. Pollio believed that architecture could best represent the qualities of the deity to whom it was dedicated and really bring them to life for the benefit of the worshiper. Of course, it would be unwise to assume that every stonemason working on the religious and administrative buildings of the Roman Empire was a scholar of ancient knowledge and mysterious rites. However, it is proper to assume that there was a core of well educated architects with interest in philosophy, religion and classical concepts of psychology who followed Pollio’s teachings. Well, why not? We know that centuries later, for example, Michelangelo carved his *David* (March 6, 1475 – February 18, 1564), to the famous Divine Proportion of 1=.618. It is called “The Divine Proportion” because it is a proportion found through out the entire natural world including the human body. This fascination with the core of secret teachings, preserved by schools of classical mysteries, combined with man’s preoccupation and desire to use architecture as a means to acknowledge God, found its way to England with the Roman architects who arrived on the island after the Roman Empire invasion in the first century AD. Years later, when the Empire collapsed and Rome withdrew from England; this tradition continued to exist: Secret knowledge continued to be passed on by word of mouth among like-

minded individuals allegorically using architectural concepts and architectural tools.

Unfortunately, the period which followed the fall of the Roman Empire and its great architecture became known as the “dark ages”. For several centuries, there were almost no stone buildings built by the Saxons, who used wood and thatch as the most popular building materials. Architecture, and stonemasonry, in particular, became declining crafts. A resurgence of these crafts did not appear until as early as the 11th century, when the great cathedrals, castles and temples of Europe began to be build of stone.

Once again, architecture, building tools, and Masonic symbols began to be used by men as a means to help them understand the deity. For instance, let us look at some of the Masonic symbols which were used to teach us about harmony in our lives. We can take the Working tools for example, which are explained to us in the various degrees:

The level symbolizes balance by reminding us to be level in our actions. The plumb symbolizes balance by teaching us to walk as just and proper citizens and to be straight and upright in our actions.

The square symbolizes virtue or morality, the balance of good and evil in our lives.

The compasses symbolize morality which contains evil while promoting good.

The apron symbolizes innocence.

The 24-inch gauge symbolizes the balancing act Masons must achieve for a fruitful life by dividing the daily twenty-four hours into eight hours of work, eight hours of divine contemplation, and eight hours of rest.

In order to understand how something as seemingly uninspiring to our modern minds as the building trade became part of a set of secret and heretical teachings, we need to take a look at the function of public building to the pre-modern mind. In an age of widespread illiteracy, ideas about the nature of the universe were incorporated into the fabric of Gothic and Romanesque cathedrals. In many ways man was believed

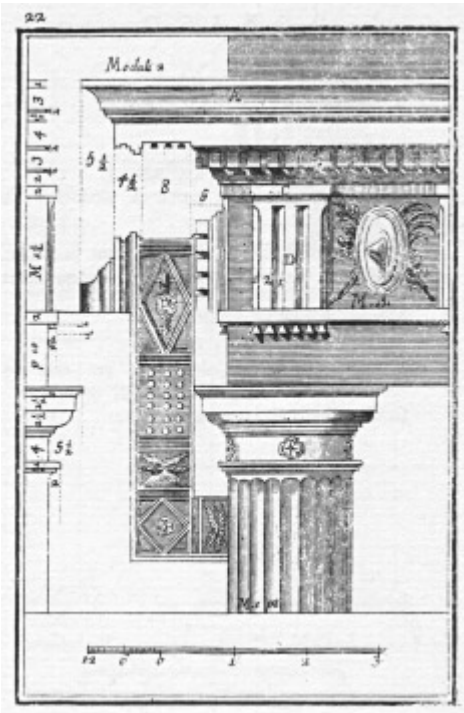
to have been made according to the same principles as the Universe and this level of existence was mapped in the way the cathedral was laid out.

Thus, sacred buildings could be read even by the peasantry in ways that are almost completely lost to us modern men. To go still further back in time, the stonemasons working on the temples of classical Greece and ancient Rome, and even the architects of the pyramids of ancient Egypt could have been very comfortable with the use of sacred geometry, whereby principals of ratio and harmony were so beautiful and universal in their application as to appear divine, and inspire both devotion and awe. This knowledge of Geometry was more widely known by many in the Ancient World than it is today to modern man.

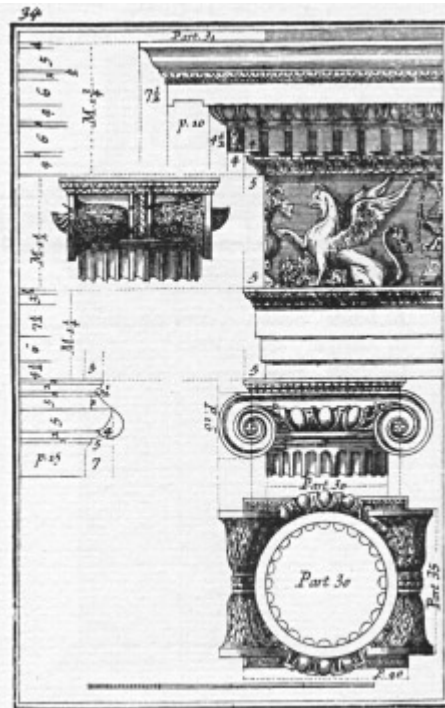
Masonic ritual, if examined closely, transcends Christian and Jewish thought and is inclusive of all religions, past and present. It is founded on the belief of a Living God and in the belief that man's divine spirit has the ability to "bind back" to his Creator. If we look at Freemasonry in this light, we should be able, by careful contemplation, to realize our divine mission while in human form.

Finally my Brethren, if Freemasonry does nothing else, it will continue to shape world events as it has in the past by bringing together men of different races, creeds, and nationalities under the canopy of the Masonic teachings of brotherly love, relief, and truth. In this one act, as in the union of Operative and Speculative Masons, it will have served mankind on a grand scale by promoting a dialogue among all members of the human race for years to come. But that is another story for another day.

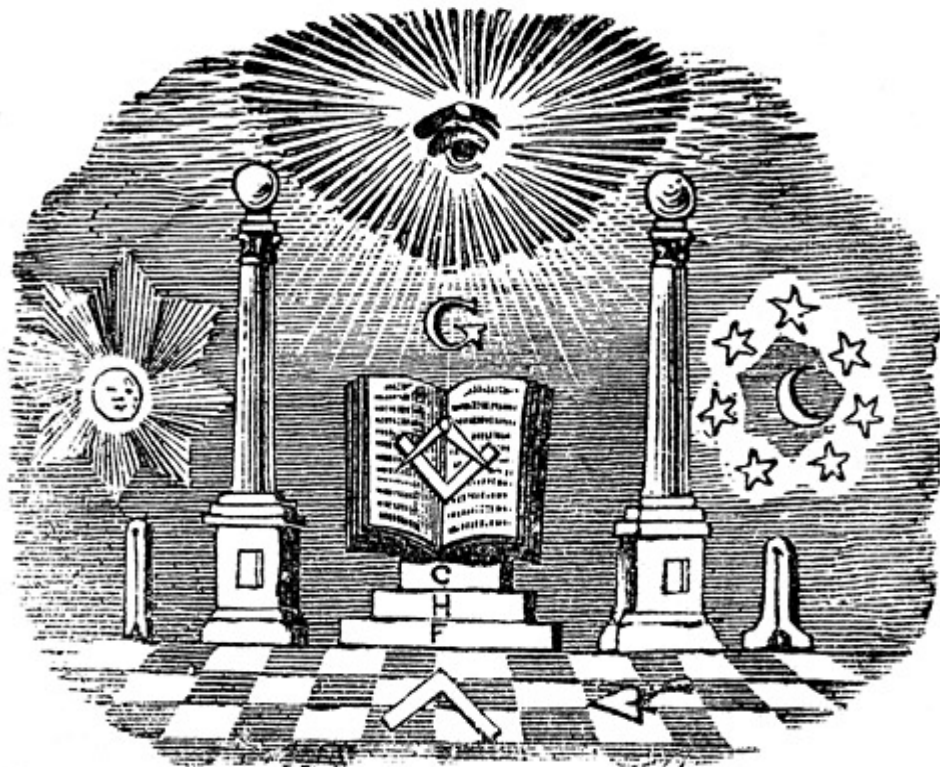
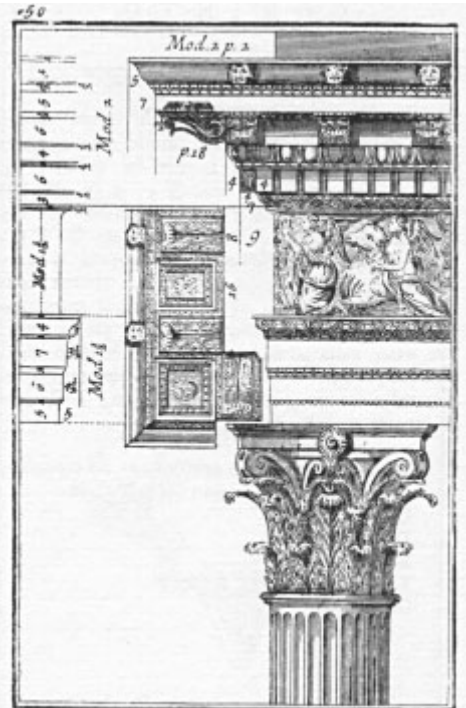
Doric



Ionic



Corinthian



MASONIC SYMBOLS