

THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF SPECULATIVE FREEMASONRY

CHAPTER I

MASONIC ESSAYS (1998)
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SPECULATIVE FOUNDATIONS

Speculative freemasonry is a natural extension of man's spiritual and mental attempts to unravel his origins, to comprehend the meaning of life and to perceive his ultimate destiny, as well as to communicate his thoughts on these matters to others. Although purely speculative lodges are of recent origin, speculative freemasonry is as old as the operative art itself. Moreover, the speculative rituals were not invented by those who established the first purely speculative lodges, which led to the formation of the early Grand Lodges in the eighteenth century. These early speculative freemasons were intellectual men who saw great value in existing rituals, which they culled, collated and codified into the form used speculative ceremonials. In so doing they were careful to ensure that every passage of ritual was expressed appropriately in the best language of the day. The resulting rituals neither did nor could include all the available material, but they do provide a sound and effective basis for the speculative ceremonials.



It must be emphasised that those who established the early speculative lodges did not see the ritual work as an end in itself, but rather as a foundation for philosophical discussion. The ceremonials used in the lodge room should provide only an unobtrusive vehicle, subsidiary to the primary function of communicating one's thoughts to others. These ceremonials have been standardised to relieve the participants' minds of extraneous matters, that otherwise might impede clear thought and hinder the delivery of the charges. Furthermore, word perfect delivery of ritual has no value unless communicated to the recipient in such a manner as to engage his mind, arouse his interest and incite his comprehension. Nor are the words of the ritual intended to be the sole instruction, but rather to provide a sound basis on which to establish discussion on a subject of relevance and interest. Unlike other animals, man has an insatiable curiosity concerning his origins and the environment in which he lives. Since recorded history began some 6,000 years ago, there is continuing evidence of mythologies and religions being developed in an attempt to provide answers to these concerns, as does speculative

freemasonry also. To appreciate better how masonry assists man to contemplate his existence, it will first be helpful to consider the origins and evolution of mankind.

MAN IN PRE-HISTORY

It is presently considered that the physical universe as we now know it has existed for about 20,000 million years, but that our solar system was formed only about 4,600 million years ago. Although the first living organisms on earth probably came into existence about 3,500 million ago, they appear to have remained unchanged for several thousand million years. Life first flourished in the seas, but dry land was not successfully colonised until about 400 million years ago, while all the present continents were still intact, forming a single continent called Pangaea. It was about 100 million years ago when the present continents began to split apart, reaching their present configuration around 40 million years ago at the height of the last Ice Age, when so much water was locked up in the polar ice caps that the sea level fell, exposing most of the continental shelf areas. The ice caps and glaciers had retreated to roughly their present positions by about 8,000BC.

The most recent investigations of archaeologists and palaeontologists suggest that the ramapithecines, which lived between fourteen million and eight million years ago and flourished across Africa, Asia and Europe, might be our earliest hominid ancestors, distinguishing us from all other primates. But this is by no means certain, because the ramapithecines are followed by a gap of some four million years in the fossil record, after which several hominid species begin to appear. A more recent and more certain ancestor, called *Homo habilis* which signifies "skilful man", lived in the East African Rift Valley around two million years ago and survived for almost a million years. Our most recent forebear, *Homo erectus* which signifies "upright man", seems to have lasted for about one-and-a-half million years. Finally, *Homo sapiens* which signifies "wise man", has existed for a mere 100,000 years or so. When compared with the age of the universe, our occupation of the earth has been short indeed.

The first 50,000 years of *Homo sapiens* existence was almost at the end of the Old Stone Age, which had lasted for nearly 250,000 years. This was the period of the Early Hunters, during which cultural advance was very slow. Nevertheless, they made a wide range of stone implements and weapons and also achieved the control of fire, although they could not kindle it. They could cut and stitch fur clothing, approaching the standard of modern Eskimos, whilst both men and women ornamented themselves with necklaces and bracelets of shells, teeth, ivory beads, mother of pearl and stone. However, their most significant cultural advance towards the end of this period, probably was that they buried at least some of their dead with ceremony. It was not uncommon for graves to be marked with stones or horns and for food and implements to be placed beside the bodies.

Thus, for the first time, man was manifesting a belief in some form of after-life, heralding the "age of wisdom" signified by his name. Henceforth man's development would accelerate at an ever increasing rate.

The Early Hunters usually lived in limestone and sandstone caves where these were prevalent. In other areas they gradually learnt to use locally available materials such as grass, reeds, mud and even mammoth bones to construct huts, as well as to make tents from the skins of animals. Around the Mediterranean the Early Hunters developed into Advanced Hunters between 35,000BC and 30,000BC, at the height of the last Ice Age, then into the Late Hunters who preceded the Agricultural Revolution which began between 10,000BC and 8,000BC from region to region. The advanced Hunters developed a remarkable artistic genius and were the originators of representational art. The Gravettians of eastern and central Europe used ivory, bone, clay and even stone, to make small figurines of women and also some lively animal carvings.

But the greatest achievement of the advanced Hunters was to develop painting, principally in the south-west of France and in Spain. This was achieved by the Magdalenians, who most probably were descendants of the Gravettians. These paintings were made between 15,000BC and 10,000BC, mostly deep inside caves and far from the hearth and living area. Many of the cave roofs are crowded with paintings of bison and other animals in the polychrome style, using powdered ochre, haematite and manganese applied moist with brush, pad or blowpipe. This period also is noted for being the first when stone was used in construction, albeit in the simplest form. Although natural caves are quite common in the eastern Mediterranean, huts with circular stone footings were built in Palestine and Syria, probably with light domed coverings made from twigs and daub. There is evidence that at about the same time on the plains of Mesopotamia, where there are no caves, shelters with stone footings were also used, probably with superstructures of reeds. These people, the advanced Hunters of around 10,000BC, therefore were the unlikely progenitors of architecture and masonry.

THE EARLIEST MASONS

These humble beginnings ushered in the Agricultural Revolution, which was begun by the Late Hunters in the New Stone Age and provided the necessary foundation for the growth of civilisation. True farming was first developed in the uplands that sweep to the east and north on the flanks of the valley formed by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. This was the natural area for development, because the wild ancestors of wheat and barley, sheep and goats were native to it and the upland valleys generally provided fertile soil and good water supplies. The oldest known evidence of the domestication of sheep and goats is to be found in this area, dating from 8,200BC and earlier. As the cropping and grinding of cereals and the herding and domestication of animals developed, the small

upland settlements were extended down into the fertile valley, where villages began to form around 6,000·BC. Mixed farming had been carried to the fertile plain of Thessaly in Greece at about the same time, thence southwards to the Peloponnese, as well as to Crete and Cyprus.

The population grew with these developments, with settlements becoming larger and more permanent. As a result of this impetus, mud bricks were first made in Mesopotamia and the Eastern Mediterranean and used in the construction of houses. These bricks were first shaped by hand, as a Jericho, but later the mud was rammed into moulds. The use of stone for walls and dykes also became more prevalent. The largest villages may then have held up to 5,000 people, but generally were much smaller. Jericho is probably the oldest city in the world and when constructed around 8,000BC it occupied 4 hectares. It was surrounded by a massive stone wall 3 metres thick and 4metres high, against which was constructed at least one circular tower of rock 10 metres in diameter and 8.5 metres high, with a built in stairway, which presently is the world's oldest known structure. The city was abandoned for a period, but was colonised again about 7,000BC. The town walls were not renewed, but rectangular houses of mud brick with high quality plastered walls and floors spread over the whole site. Jericho was abandoned and reoccupied a number of times thereafter and perhaps is best known for its destruction by Joshua in Biblical times.

Two other events in this period also were of particular significance, these being the construction of some of the earliest known religious buildings at Catal Huyuk in Turkey and the construction of "beehive" houses at Khirokitia in Cyprus. The "beehive" houses were circular in plan, around 8 to 10 metres in diameter, with high thresholds to keep out surface water. Their foundations were of stone, which was carried to a height of about 2 metres, while the superstructures were corbelled vaults constructed of mud brick and of sufficient height to accommodate a bedroom gallery accessed by ladder or stairway. The ground level compartment was partitioned as required with mud brick walls which also served as supports for the gallery. These houses continued in use until supplanted by more conventional houses around 5,000BC or even more recently. The mud brick vaulted arch was a significant advance in architectural design and construction, paving the way for arch construction in stone. The "beehive" houses in Cyprus thus reflected the greatest advances of the earliest masons.

Catal Huyuk was occupied from about 6,500BC to 5,500BC and covers an area of 13 hectares. It is thought to have had a population of 6,000 in its heyday, comprising three different races nowhere else found together in this period. The houses were rectangular timber framed structures, with mud brick exterior walls and flat mud rooves placed on closely packed timber poles supported by timber rafters, furnished with hearths, platforms, benches and ovens. Among the houses was a series of elaborately decorated

shrines which were similar to the houses in construction and furnishings, though frequently larger. Their sanctuaries were decorated with wall paintings, plaster reliefs, cult statues and animal heads. The richly coloured wall paintings frequently depicted hands and ritual or magic hunting scenes, but the most unusual painting found was a unique landscape depicting a terraced town of individual houses and blocks of houses and shrines, with a volcano erupting in the background. The dead of successive generations of the same family were buried within the platforms of the shrines, together with appropriate grave goods. This indicates a significant advance in religious thought, even though the rather crude and sometimes barbarous manifestations within the shrines were in stark contrast to the great religious inspiration of architecture and art that was soon to blossom with civilisation.

Masonry, by its very nature, is conducive to speculation in relation to building work in progress, however primitive the building might be. It is necessary to consider the suitability and dimensions of the available materials; to determine the best location and orientation for the structure; and to prepare sound and level foundations that will support the structure adequately and can be properly drained. The dimensions must be delineated on the ground before erection commences and walls must be plumbed, corners must be squared and tops of walls must be levelled during erection to ensure that the structure is both stable and pleasing to the eye. Even the earliest masons had to accomplish some or all of these operations, requiring constructive thought that inevitably would heighten their awareness to things other than their immediate requirements. Having constructed walls of rough stones, for example, the first masons soon comprehended the advantages of regular bricks and used their ingenuity to provide them. Thus, in a practical sense, speculative masonry was born and soon would also embrace moral contemplation through a natural association of ideas.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERACY

The next important period of development, from 5,000BC to 3,000BC, roughly coincides with the copper age and ushers in the first of the monumental architecture in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Using the simplest of raw materials, principally mud brick and imported timber, the local inhabitants achieved remarkable results. Egypt concentrated on huge royal tombs. The mastaba tombs of the First Dynasty are typical, being decorated externally to represent a "palace facade". Efforts in Mesopotamia were concentrated on temple building. Their temples rapidly grew larger, more complex and externally more impressive, as typified by Eridu, in Sumer, where a continuous series of temples has been distinguished from about 5,500BC to 3,000BC. At Arpachiya, in northern Mesopotamia, circular houses were constructed similar to the earlier "beehive" houses of Cyprus, usually extended by a rectangular gable roofed wing, the unit being called a "tholos". Another notable development was the fortified settlement at Dimini in Greece, one of

the earliest towns known in Europe, dominated by the "megaron" palace with its pillared porch. Dimini was surrounded by six concentric walls of undressed limestone, with narrow gateways and passages which formed a defensive system.

Although great advances were made in architecture and the development of cities during this period, the greatest achievement undoubtedly was the dawning of literate civilisation. The Sumerians of the southern plain of Mesopotamia, around 4,500BC, first drew cuneiform pictograms which represented actual material objects, to assist in the recording of inventories for grain, cattle and other commodities. The turning point came when it was realised that a sign could also stand for a sound, when phonetic writing began. But as the scribal profession and schools developed, the system of combined ideograms and phonetics became extremely complicated and it was not until about 3,500BC that writing had been forged into a practical vehicle for the communication of language. Meanwhile the Egyptians were developing hieroglyphic writing, which incorporated a combination of signs for both sounds and ideas when it was first used about 3,300BC. The Egyptian name for their writing meant "speech of the gods", reflecting its original use for royal inscriptions for the divine pharaohs, not for the keeping of accounts as cuneiform was originally used in Sumeria.

With the continually increasing emphasis on the construction of larger and more complex buildings, palaces, temples, shrines, monumental and sepulchral structures, masonry was no longer a simple task for a small gang of men. It must, therefore, have been during this period that skilled gangs of masons began to develop. To enable the work to be carried out successfully it would have been necessary for the chief of the builders, or master mason, to arrange training and supervision for very large gangs of masons and allied workers. This must have been an extremely difficult task, especially as written instructions could not then be given in writing. The only means of tuition available to them was by catechism, aided by sketches on slate or an earthen floor, which constituted their tracing boards. Archaeological investigations have provided overwhelming proof that, despite these difficulties, the early masons did indeed construct many outstanding edifices that had a remarkably high standard of finish.

Masonic instruction could only have begun as outlined above, as it has continued in principle to the present day. Moreover, the frequent if not continual contact that masons through all ages have had with shrines, temples, cathedrals, monuments and sepulchral buildings, must have induced masons to contemplate the meaning of life and certainty of death, as well as to seek an understanding of the hereafter, much more than would have been usual among the general population. This would contribute significantly to the speculative aspects of masonry and would also foster symbolic explanations of the mason's implements of labour. As in the present day, so then had many relevant masonic expressions become a part of the languages of those bygone days, which were recorded

with the advent of cursive script. Such philological evidence proves beyond doubt that at least some elements of symbolism and speculative thought must have been a part of masonic instruction from the earliest days of organised masonry.

A host of symbolic references in masonic terms are to be found in the Scriptures, of which many such as the following are very well known. During a visit to Bethel about thirty years before the fall of Israel around 745BC, that event is prophesied in Amos 7, v. 7-9, when the Lord measured his people Israel with a plumb line and found them to be irremediably warped by sin. In the reign of Manasseh, the murderous and idolatrous king who ruled from 696BC to 642BC, the captivity of Judah by Babylon around 606BC is foretold in II Kings, Ch. 21, v. 13, when the Lord said he would "stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab". In Isaiah 28, v. 16, written between 750BC and 700BC, the coming of Christ is foretold in the words "Behold I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious corner stone, of a sure foundation." This prophesy is referred to in I Peter 2, v. 6-8 around 60AD, when the death of Christ is alluded to in the following significant words added "for those who do not believe": "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner, a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall". Other Passages from the book of Genesis, taken in conjunction with some of the traditions preserved in Sumerian, Assyrian and Hebrew literature, also provide some interesting sidelights on masonry.

In Genesis 4, v. 19-22, we read that Lamech a descendant of Cain had two wives, Adah and Zillah. Adah bore two sons, Jabal and Jubal, the former being recorded as "the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle" and the latter as "the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe". Traditionally, Jabal is also said to be the founder of geometry and the first mason who built stone walls and houses of stone. Zillah bore a son Tubal-cain and a daughter Naamah, the former being recorded as "the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron" and the latter being referred to in the traditions as the founder of weaving. These four are thus credited with the origin of civilised society. We also read of Nimrod in Genesis 10, v. 8-11, where we are told that he was "the first man on earth to be a mighty man", "a mighty hunter" and that "he built Ninevah . . . that is the great city". Traditionally, it is said that masons first became of note at the building of the Tower of Babel, the first structure to be mentioned in the Scriptures (Genesis 11, v. 1-9); also that Nimrod was a master mason who loved the craft, formed his masons into lodges and gave them a charter and a charge when he sent them forth to build all the cities in his kingdom. Although it is impossible at present to date events such as these with any accuracy, they must have occurred around the beginning of the Agricultural Revolution.

MONUMENTAL MASONRY

By 3,000BC the Egyptians had developed a calendar with 365 days to the year, from which time their historical records are accurate. The development of writing and literature continued apace in Sumeria, but Egypt was supreme in the visual arts and architecture. Civilisation began to flourish and monumental masonry developed on an immense scale and with unprecedented complexity. The three Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt and the huge Ziggurat of Urnammu in Mesopotamia are typical of this period. Although the scale of architecture in Mesopotamia was not as great as in Egypt, it was the Mesopotamians who were more innovative in their use of the arch, which they used extensively in tombs. The art of writing continued to develop and its use was becoming more widespread. Signs unearthed at Byblos in Lebanon date from around 2,500BC and are in a script similar to that then used in Syria. Pottery found at Byblos and Sidon, also in Lebanon, from the period 2,100BC to 1,700BC, provide some of the earliest evidence of the use of a linear script called pseudo-hieroglyphics. This was an early form of non-Egyptian alphabetic script variously designated as Canaanite, Sinaitic or proto-Phoenician.

This comparatively simple script progressively replaced the syllabic cuneiform scripts of Babylonia and Syria, as well as the complex hieroglyphic writing of Egypt, so that by about 1,500BC an alphabet was in general use. From this alphabet were progressively derived the Phoenician about 1,000BC, early Hebrew about 700BC, old Greek also about 700BC and formal Greek about 500BC whence the Roman was derived. With the development of writing in an era of prodigious monumental construction, coupled with the advances being made in moral and religious teaching, albeit spasmodically, it must reasonably be assumed that the speculative aspects of masonry also were developing and would have received considerable impetus when the building of so magnificent an edifice as King Solomon's Temple was commenced around 960BC at Jerusalem. The later desecration of the temple and its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar about 587BC must have had a serious impact on the faith of masons in those days, but that faith would have been renewed by the decree of Cyrus in 538BC, allowing the captives in Babylon to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of the Lord, initially under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, or Zerubbabel. The restoration and enlargement of the temple by Herod in the period 20BC to 64AD, when 1,000 priests were trained as masons to build the shrine, must have significantly enhanced speculative masonic thought.

CLASSICAL MASONRY

The emergence of Greece as a colonising nation and centre of learning, art, and religious thought in the western Mediterranean, from around 1,100BC, heralded the era of classical masonry. Their first stone temples were erected at Corinth and Isthmia before 650BC, whence the Doric order originated, followed by the temples at Corfu and Ephesus within the next hundred years, whence the Ionic order originated. The Corinthian order was first used in Delphi around 390BC. Until the ascendancy of Rome, even in Rome

itself, Greek architecture prevailed around the Mediterranean and temples proliferated. Without doubt the most famous classical Greek structures are the Parthenon at Athens and its surrounding structures, built between 447BC and 432BC. The emphasis which the Greeks placed on the ancient Mysteries in classical times must have been a significant influence on speculative masonic thought, still being reflected in some masonic ceremonials. This influence continued into the turbulent period of Roman rule.

Rome began to expand her territory by taking Carthage and Corinth in 146BC and Pergamum in 133BC. By 100BC Rome's territory nearly encircled the Mediterranean and by 117AD the Roman empire was at its greatest in strength and extent. During this period Rome developed cities and constructed amphitheatres and temples apace throughout its region of influence, particularly in the Middle East. Of the Roman era, the two most celebrated structures probably are the Colosseum in Rome and the temple complex at Baalbek in Lebanon, between Beirut and Damascus in Syria. The temple complex was built on the podium of an ancient temple, progressively over a period of almost 300 years, being completed around 260AD. When it became part of Ptolemy's Egyptian empire in 332BC, until the Roman occupation around 30BC, Baalbek was known as Heliopolis in Phoenicia and was the religious centre of the region. Baalbek is remarkable for its size and architectural finish, many foundation blocks being 4 metres square in section and 20 metres long, weighing up to 800 tonnes. Many of the columns were monolithic, of pink Aswan granite and having an overall height of 19.6 metres.

CATHEDRAL MASONRY

The decline and fall of the Roman empire heralded the beginning of the final phase in speculative evolution, that period of almost continuous cathedral building in Britain and Europe lasting from 500 until at least 1,700. Operative or Guild Masons were organised in England with royal approval dating at least from the Annual Assembly of 926, which was authorised and encouraged by King Athelstan. The lodges of operative Free Masons were organised under the guardianship of craft guilds, originally in the form of religious fraternities, continuing in this manner until Henry VIII dis-endowed all religious fraternities by the Act of 1547. Masters of lodges were responsible for the moral and religious welfare of their indentured apprentices, as well as for their practical training in the craft of masonry. The ancient charges testify to this. It is clear from the old catechisms and other records that have come down to us from the operative lodges, especially in Scotland where the Reformation was less drastic in its effect, that moral instruction was an integral part of the ceremonies. The working tools clearly were vehicles of moral instruction from a very early date, as also were various aspects of a mason's work that were converted to simple plays to communicate a message. These were adapted by Dr James Anderson and other early speculative ritualists in the preparation of the rituals in use today.