



Who was Hiram Abiff?

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According to Masonic legend Hiram Abiff was the central character in the building of King Solomon's Temple and his untimely death precipitated such a devastating blow to the degree of the Master Mason that substituted secrets had to be adopted in its stead, since without him the process of making further Master Masons was discontinued by the two remaining Grand Masters.

But who was Hiram Abiff? And why is he so central in our Masonic tradition? These are the questions I will try to answer in the following lecture.

Surprisingly, the bible tells us very little about this enigmatic individual, but what it does tell us is very different to the established Masonic version. According to the Bible Hiram King of Tyre offered to build a temple to house the Jewish god 'Yahweh' to King David. Since the exodus from Egypt this god had resided in a tabernacle or tent where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. King David was unable to take up the offer; he had "shed blood abundantly" and so it was left to his son Solomon to agree to this endeavour, to which King Solomon also included a huge palace and harem quarters for his legendary 700 wives and 300 concubines in addition to the much smaller temple.¹

It was therefore not surprising that the whole project became so expensive that it left the Royal Treasury almost bankrupt. Solomon gave Hiram 20,000 measures of wheat and the same quantity of oil, which was nearly 200,000 bushels of one and 1,500,000 gallons of the other; an almost incredible amount,

but not disproportioned to the magnificent expenditure of the Temple in other respects.

In the end however, the debt was unable to be repaid in full and Hiram King of Tyre was forced to write off the loan; over three tons of his own gold as unrecoverable.²

Accordingly, we are informed that Solomon received 33,600 workmen from Tyre, besides a sufficient quantity of timber and stone to construct his Temple. Hiram also sent him a far more important gift than either men or materials in the person of an able architect, "a curious and cunning workman," whose skill and experience were to be exercised in superintending the labours of the craft, and in adorning and beautifying the Temple. His name was, of course, Hiram Abiff.

Hiram was, according to the bible in Kings 7, 'a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass.'³

However, in Chronicles he is described as 'the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre, skilful to work in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, in crimson;'⁴

No doubt, the brethren who have seen are members of the Chapter will be aware of the importance of the coloured veils in that degree.

His first task was of casting all the vessels of brass and gold that were to be dedicated to the new temple, including the two pillars so prominent in the first and second degrees. He also made a huge brass container called a 'molten sea' as well as innumerable other sacred objects, which scripture informs us was cast in the plain of Jordan, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredatha.⁵

Moreover, he was responsible for overseeing the cutting of cedars in Lebanon and transporting them by floats to Joppa and from there carried overland to Jerusalem.⁶ This historical fact is covered in Masonic tradition by our Mark Master Mason's degree as you all well know, but here is where the mystery deepens for no-where in the bible does it state that Hiram Abiff was murdered just before the completion of King Solomon's temple, in fact the bible states that 'all the work that Solomon made for the house of the Lord was finished: and Solomon brought in all the things that David his father had dedicated.'⁷

Even Robert Freke Gould agrees that 'he was certainly alive at the completion of the Temple' when he refers to the 2nd Book of Chronicles which states that 'Hiram made the pots, and the shovels, and the basins. And Hiram finished the work that he was to make for King Solomon for the house of God.'⁸

No mention of the body of Hiram Abiff being interred anywhere near to the Sanctum Sanctorum is even hinted at. In fact only the priests entered the Holy of Holies whilst the Levites, the guardians and carriers of the Ark arrayed themselves in white linen at the east end of the altar.⁹

The Bible leads us to conclude that Hiram Abiff successfully completed King Solomon's Temple and returned home safe and sound, presumably to die at a ripe old age. It is at this point that Masonic tradition offers an alternative account to that offered in the Old Testament.

So, does Freemasonry know something the bible has omitted to mention? Or is the Masonic legend of Hiram Abiff simply pure invention? It is time now to take a closer look at the central character of Masonic tradition.

In the first instance, biblical chroniclers are at pains to emphasise Hiram's Jewish descent from his mother's side. In

Chronicles he is referred to as 'the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre'.

In Kings as 'a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali and his father was a man of Tyre'. Dan lies within Naphtali territory so the inclusion of the tribe of Naphtali appears to be a clear attempt to blur the fact that the Temple was being built by a pagan architect. Our own ritual supports this view since we are told quite specifically Hiram was murdered as he made his way to the Temple 'where he was to offer his adorations to the 'Most High' at the hour of high twelve, as was his wanted custom'. In other words, it seems, he dutifully retired to the Temple to pray to the Sun god, a deity considered an abomination by the Jews. Note that in the Third Degree much emphasis is placed on the position of the sun as it moves from east to west and the rising of Venus at dawn, that 'bright morning star' which is clear indication of Sun worship typical of the Phoenicians of which Tyre formed part. Tyre was one of the principal seats of the Dionysiac fraternity of artificers, a society engaged exclusively in the construction of edifices, and living under a secret organization, which was probably subsequently imitated by the Operative Freemasons.

Of this association, it is not too unreasonable to suppose that Hiram Abiff was a member, and that on arriving at Jerusalem he introduced among the Jewish workmen the same exact system of discipline which he had found of so much advantage in the Dionysiac associations at home, and thus gave, under the sanction of King Solomon, a peculiar organization to the masons who were engaged in building the Temple. With such a huge workforce reputed at 153,300 distributed into so many different departments it would make sense for each section to be organised into sections or 'lodges' with secret signs, grips and passwords as a guard to their employment status in the worker hierarchy.

Again, the Mark Masons degree refers to such a custom, in both the stone workers and woodcutters of Lebanon. Our second degree also provides practical reasons for the need to organise workmen into selective groupings as a means of obtaining just payment for their services. If this is the case, then it is with historical accuracy that Freemasonry can indeed be traced back to the building of the Temple at Jerusalem.

If Hiram Abiff was indeed responsible for initiating a system of degrees to distinguish the lowliest Apprentice all the way up to the supreme degree of Grand Master, he must undoubtedly be a key figure in Freemasonry and not the junior partner in relation to the other more illustrious Grand Masters, King Solomon and King Hiram of Tyre.

A significant clue to his prominence can be found in his actual name which is not only intriguing, but relevant to our investigation as regards his real identity. The name is undoubtedly Phoenician, but there is some confusion, as to its actual form. "Hiram" is the more common rendering, but the author of the Chronicles adheres to the spelling "Hiram," and other writers adopt the variant "Hirom." In Hebrew all three variants together with Ahiram denotes the 'exalted one' and may therefore refer to a title rather than an actual name. The appellation Abiff is even more interesting. The Hebrew definition of Abi is 'my father' and so when read in original Hebrew Hiram Abiff translates to:

Shelomoh lammelech Abhif Churan ghafaf

The translation suggests that Hiram was father to King Solomon. However, since we know David was Solomon's father, it is therefore possible to speculate that Hiram was Solomon's father-in-law.¹⁰

It is reputed that King Solomon entertained around 1000 wives and concubines including the daughter of the Pharaoh of Egypt

as his Chief wife, in addition to his flirtations with the exotic Queen of Sheba, therefore such a notion is not entirely unrealistic. It would also explain the apparent discrepancies between the two Kings - Solomon and Hiram of Tyre and a supposed commoner Hiram Abiff in the tetrarch of Grand Masters, something which was as unthinkable in those days as I am sure would be the case even today. In fact Hiram King of Tyre as did all Phoenician kings considered themselves a living god, the incarnation of the god Adonis so they in particular would never have allowed themselves to be on the level with mere 'mortals'. The name Hiram literally means 'exaltation of life' 'the father of him who destroys' so how come a mere architect also possesses such an exalted title?

Furthermore Hiram king of Tyre similarly to Hiram Abiff was also a renowned architect and engineer in his own right who successfully transferred the bulk of the city of Tyre 'from the mainland to an island lying 600 metres from the shore which formed a highly defensible stronghold and also provided a fully integrated docking system for his fleet.'¹¹

This has been described by archaeologists as an engineering feat of gigantic proportions.

Hiram King of Tyre was the son of Abibal. Hiram succeeded Abibal in 980 B.C just ten years before construction of the Temple at Jerusalem began so there is no reason to believe Abibal was not alive at the time the temple was constructed. Josephus informs us that the father of King Hiram was 'Abi-Baal' which means, of course, 'The father of the God'; this would imply that he was alive at the time his son was proclaimed Priest-king and the recipient of the divine soul of Adonis. It would thus appear according to the Masonic historian J.S.M Ward that Abi-Baal and Hiram Abiff were the same persons. Certainly their titles imply precisely the same thing and connect up with the same King of Tyre, Hiram.¹²

This would also explain the discrepancies between the two bible versions which refer to one Hiram as a son of the daughters of Dan and the other more specifically to 'the son of the widow'. Was Hiram King of Tyre the 'son of the widow' who completed his dead father's work after his murder? Interesting 'Abibale' is the name of the first Assassin in the Elu of the Modern French Rite though it is said to mean le Meurtrier du Pere, this phrase meaning in French the Murder of the Father.¹³

If both Hiram's were 'operative' masons in other words skilled in the building craft and initiated into the Dionysiac fraternity of artificers who according to their rituals claimed descent of Tubal Cain himself, it could well be that King Solomon was the first instance in which a non-operative mason was initiated into the Order. Was Solomon the first 'Speculative' mason? If the above hypothesis is correct, then the relationship of the three Grand Masters would make much more sense.

We now have to deal with another thorny issue in the legend of Hiram Abiff, was he actually murdered? If indeed he was, why?

Before we answer this question we must first of all take touch briefly on Middle Eastern Mystery religions and practices which is central to our understanding of the Hiramic legend. These Mystery Religions were very selective in their membership. No uninitiated person was permitted to take part in the ceremonies. Note the relationship here with the practices of Freemasonry. The Mystery Religions appear to have had a double purpose. First, they wished to hand down, from generation to generation, the traditions associated with the gods in whose honour they were organized. Secondly, they taught very carefully how certain rituals were to be performed, and then trained their initiates to carry out those rituals exactly. Under no circumstances were there to be variations from the ancient traditions, even in the words of the rituals. The prime purpose of the Mystery Religions was not to teach dogmatic religious beliefs; it was to strive for the moral improvement of their

membership. The rituals were designed not only to improve the morals of the adherents, but also to implant in their membership a hope for the life that would go on after death. This is the most important principle stressed to all candidates undergoing the 3rd degree in Freemasonry.

The cult of Adonis and Astarte was one such mystery religion associated with the rite of fertility. He was the god of the sun as well as of corn and wine and his symbol was the pomegranate which represented plenty. To the Babylonians he was known as Tammuz and his consort was Ishtar. I will not deviate too much into the actual legend regarding Adonis suffice to say that as a result of his untimely death his lover the goddess Astarte (the moon goddess) searched for his body all over the earth. She finally found him in the underworld where she successfully brought him back to life. However, she was only able to restore him to life for only six months of the year, for the remaining months Adonis returned to the underworld and so the ceremony of raising the dead god was performed annually so that the two lovers would fertilise the earth and so the corn harvest would be guaranteed for the ensuing year. In this way a new son of the Goddess would be born, destined like his father to wed the Goddess and thereby lose his life. Thus Astarte was every year a widow and her son the 'son of a widow'.¹⁴

I am sure you have already identified the various connections between this legend and Freemasonry. The sun and the moon represent Adonis and Astarte and the Masonic symbol of an ear of corn no longer looks out of place on our 2nd degree Tracing Board. Neither will the fact that Installations were required to take place on St. John's days, December 27th or June 24th representing the Fertility Festivals of the summer and winter solstice or the times Adonis ascended or descended from the underworld. In Syria the greatest centre for the Adonis cult was at Byblos, whose Semitic name was Gebal. It was from the name of the town, Gebal that the words Gblim and Gblites, originated.¹⁵

The Phoenician Kings claimed to be the incarnations of Adonis and it was originally the custom for the king of Tyre, like other divine Kings, to be sacrificed when his body grew old, in order that the divine soul might pass into another and younger body¹⁶, usually his son and heir. The idea of human sacrifice may be repugnant to us today but it was accepted practice in the Middle East and in many other parts of the world even as recently as the last century. Over the course of time it is very probable that such a sacrifice might be mitigated or a substitute used in his stead, but at times of emergency and on occasions of great solemnity such a sacrifice might still be exacted from the old king.

According to J.S.M Ward 'Perhaps the completion of the great temple at Jerusalem was regarded by the less civilised Phoenician workmen as just such an occasion as required that the old king should die and, with his blood, consecrate the temple.'¹⁷

Such a custom of burying a human being under the foundation of a building as a sort of 'tyler' or guardian was at a time an almost universal practice. Even today, the modern custom of burying coins under a foundation stone has a more sinister origin than most people realise. This may be another reason therefore as to why we place a newly initiated brother at the North East part of the lodge, thus representing the sacrificial victim of the foundation stone. In other words he is already earmarked and being prepared for the ordeal he will endure in the 3rd degree where he will be ritually murdered much in the same way as our Master was at the completion of King Solomon's Temple.

Such a blood sacrifice would have been considered an abomination to the more orthodox Jews at and even in the period following King Solomon so it is no real surprise that such an incident would have been kept secret from the general

population or perhaps censored altogether from the Volume of the Sacred Law at a later date. At the time of King Solomon the Jews were not as monotheistic as many believe. In fact King Solomon was known to have flirted with other deities when he deemed it desirable. He was known to worship the local God Adonis, one of whose great sanctuaries seems to have been Mount Moriah. The degree of the Royal Arch mentions very explicitly that this very site was chosen for the building of the Great Temple purchased by King David from Auranah, the Jebusite. That it was purchased from a Jebusite is irrelevant at this point, but the fact that the area selected for the Temple had previously been a threshing floor for corn reveals the true reason why this site in particular was chosen. A threshing floor would be a particularly appropriate place as a sacred place for the God of vegetation. As the corn was said to represent his body, the threshing floor, where the corn was beaten, represented the martyrdom of the God. We are also told in the legend of the certain 3rd degree Rituals that 'all the work was prepared so that the timber and stone should take its place without sound of axe or hammer or the use of any iron tool.' Metals are the materials used to forge the implements by which the corn is cut down, so no metals were allowed to be used in the construction of a temple dedicated to the god of vegetation. This is the real reason why candidates are divested of all metals and not necessarily money as he is introduced into the Craft, although today we apply moral teachings to this, and we are told, extremely important requirement.

It is also on Mount Moriah where we are also told that Abraham offered up his beloved son Isaac as a destined victim to the altar of his God. The original name for Abraham was Abram, which is the same as Abiram, and so the same as Hiram Abiff.¹⁸

In the Bible the tetragram YHWH who was the Hebrew God of vegetation is often preceded by the appellation Adonai which means 'Lord', to which we can not fail to recognize the

similarities between that title and Adonis. Thus it would seem the Great Temple at Jerusalem was built as a House for Adonai/Adonis under his particular aspect of the Jewish god of vegetation. The two pillars therefore, situated outside the Great Temple were in fact cleverly disguised phalli, dedicated to Astarte and the Jewish custom of circumcision may well have its origins in ancient fertility rites in honour of the same Goddess. The dove often represented on deacons wands were also symbols of Astarte so for the candidate to be led around three times round the Lodge by doves would be emblematic of one who seeks communion with that Goddess. To the uninitiated the Great Temple was simply a House for YHWH residing in the Ark of the Covenant. However, under the vaults of the Temple the secret rituals of Adonis were being performed by those initiated into its mysteries as explained in the Royal Arch and other so called Higher Degrees and these in time were transferred to the degrees of Freemasonry.

Our 3rd Degree tells us much of the secret ritual performed during the ceremony of transmitting the Divinity from one Priest-King to the next as these have been preserved from time immemorial as our Ancient Charges and Landmarks of our Order. Therefore in our 3rd Degree ritual the candidate is conducted round the Lodge before he is symbolically murdered just as the representative of Tammuz/Adonis was in the original bloodthirsty rituals. The real victim would be clothed in red robes as he lay in state for three days in an open grave with a sprig of acacia stuck upon it. The signification of the acacia is apparent as the transference of the Divine Soul was made by someone stepping over the dead man's grave and raising him in one's arms in such a way that the raisers mouth comes near the corpse.¹⁹

It is therefore plausible that the secret words uttered in the raising the candidate on the F.P.O.F is part of a magical incantation passing the soul of one representative of Adonis to another. This may have also included the sniffing the bough

which had either formed part of the Adonis tree or had been planted on his grave as it was commonly believed the soul of a dead man would pass into a shrub or tree which grows from a grave.²⁰

It is also interesting to note that the body was only raised on the third day as this represented the soul's journey through the underworld and the trials and tribulations which the soul must endure before approaching the Light of Day as explained in the Charge of the degree. The moon vanishes from the sky for three whole days every month and this accounts for the recurring importance of the number three in Freemasonry. The journey of the soul through the underworld forms part of the ritual of the veils in the Excellent Master Degree, which must be passed by the candidate before he is admitted into that degree. It is also found in the higher degrees of the R.O.S (the sentries of the Tower) and in the three rooms of the 18th degree of the Rose Croix, both of which involve a symbolical descent into a place of misery or dungeon.²¹

For three days therefore, the corpse was mourned by women assembled at the North Gate weeping for the dead god Tammuz²², the traditional place of darkness, whilst we are told twenty-five elders stood in front of the altar facing east,²³ invoking the sun to rise and as we are told by the incensed prophet Ezekiel even 'holding a branch to their nose'²⁴. Facing the east is re-enacted by all who turn to the east prior to opening the Lodge in the 3rd Degree. Finally, at dawn on the third day just as Venus that 'Bright Morning Star' appears on the horizon, the corpse would be raised by virtue of a special grip. Tammuz was a Lion god, so the use of a lion's grip would have been appropriate. It was in this manner that Tammuz, raised the soles of the victims from corruption to in-corruption. The F.P.O.F representing the five points of Venus as a morning star was emblematic of the role of the female deity Astarte in the magical ritual of transferring the soul from one Priest-king to

the next and so continues the tradition of the living and dying god. Without her, the rite would not have been possible.

After the slaying of the old Worshipful Master it would be necessary to elect a new representative to take his place and so the installation of a new Master would immediately follow the death of the previous one. We know for a fact that Hiram Abiff was succeeded by Adoniram, which is really an amalgamation of the names Adonis and Hiram. In the bible he is also called Hadoram and like his predecessor also met a violent end, stoned to death by a rebellious Jerusalem mob.²⁵

In many ways both murders appear strikingly similar and far too much of a coincidence that both men of the same name and position met with a violent end.

If indeed such an event was a ritual murder carried out to re-enact the death of Adonis it would probably have taken place in conjunction with the reaping of the wheat harvest which occurs in June when a great festival was held. In Europe, this festival was fixed to St. John's day which is why Freemasonry is so closely associated with St. John and referred as St. John's Masonry. The month of June and July is known as Tammuz to the Jews which link it closely with Adonis, the Greek name for Tammuz. In Phoenicia however, Adonis was also particularly associated with barley, and the barley harvest in that country falls in March²⁶ so it is possible therefore that Hiram may well have been slain either in June or around Easter. Even today, despite attempts to standardise the feast, Easter continues to be set as the first Sunday after the full moon that occurs next after the vernal equinox. Easter is a corruption of the word Ishtar (Astarte) and its association with symbolisms of fertility, such as the Easter egg, is blatantly obvious.

In our ritual the raising of our Master from the grave is heralded by the appearance of the Bright Morning Star in the east which accounts for the position of the elders facing that direction and

waiting for the Morning Star or Venus to appear in the horizon. Venus is also known as the star of Astarte and its risings was seen as a real omen that brought 'peace and salvation to the human race'. To a pastoral and agricultural race such as Israel a good crop would have ensured 'peace and salvation' for the ensuing year. A bad harvest would be catastrophic and often led to war as tribes sought to take from their neighbours what little food was left in order not to starve themselves. For this reason alone, the cult of Adonis was popular and tolerated even amongst such monotheistic people as the Israelites. Despite attempts to eradicate its adherents there is ample evidence that the worship of Adonis continued even as late as 70 A.D by the Essenes, just before the destruction of the Temple. Jesus Christ was himself a disciple of Essene teachings and perhaps his own 'sacrifice' has more points of similarities with Hiram Abiff than the Church would like to admit. That however is best left for another lecture.

However, having traced the man who became the Chief Architect of the Temple and whose life was brought to such a tragic end just before its completion we can now picture the last scene just before his ritual murder as so vividly interpreted by J.S.M Ward whose contribution to the completion of this lecture has been enormous.

'The work is practically finished and Abibaal knows that his hour has come, and so at High Noon, the hour when according to ancient custom the Devine man must die, he goes alone to the great Temple over whose creation he has presided over the last seven years. There, solitary and alone, he kneels and prays to his Father in Heaven. Whether he called him Baal or Moloch we don't actually know, but for the last time he calls on Him as His son, the God-man Tammuz, ready to lay down his life for the sake of the people, as ancient custom prescribed. Outside the courts are crowded by a huge assembly of workmen. The messengers of death enter silently and alone – and then comes the end.'²⁷

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- ¹ The Book of Hiram, C. Knight & R. Lomas p. 113
 - ² Ibid. p 113
 - ³ 1 Kings 7, 14
 - ⁴ Second Chronicles 2, 1-18
 - ⁵ 1 Kings 7, 15-51
 - ⁶ Second Chronicles 2, 14-16
 - ⁷ Second Chronicles 5, 1
 - ⁸ Second Chronicles 4, 11
 - ⁹ Second Chronicles 5, 7-12
 - ¹⁰ The Book of Hiram, C. Knight & R. Lomas p. 23
 - ¹¹ The Book of Hiram, C. Knight & R. Lomas p. 129
 - ¹² Who was Hiram Abiff, J.S.M Ward, p. 33
 - ¹³ Mackey's Masonic Encyclopaedia
 - ¹⁴ Who was Hiram Abiff, J.S.M Ward, p. 101
 - ¹⁵ Ibid., p.31
 - ¹⁶ Ibid., p.33
 - ¹⁷ Ibid., p.33
 - ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 150
 - ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 135
 - ²⁰ Ibid., p. 106
 - ²¹ Ibid., p. 137
 - ²² Ezekiel 8, 14
 - ²³ Ibid 8, 16
 - ²⁴ Ibid, 8, 17
 - ²⁵ Second Chronicles 10, 18
 - ²⁶ Who was Hiram Abiff, J.S.M Ward, p. 56
 - ²⁷ Ibid., p. 192