



The Two Pillars

A remarkably interesting item from
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which has some great information on
this topic.

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THE TWO PILLARS

Few references in Freemasonry are less understood than the two brazen pillars in the porch of King Solomon's Temple. Probably a greater mass of misinformation exists regarding these than any other symbol in the Craft.

Early ritualists confused the mythical pillars of stone, spoken of in almost all the old Charges, or Manuscript Constitutions of the Craft, with the Brazen pillars of the porch - the result is that modern Freemasons have composite pillars, fusing of the ancient and the mythical pillars on which were supposed to be engraved the arts and sciences of the time before the flood, and those which Hiram Abif erected - undoubtedly with Egyptian influences and memories of Egyptian Temples to guide him - before the great house of the Lord which Solomon built.

The fascinating, if wholly legendary, history of the Craft, repeated with variations in the majority of the old manuscript rolls, beginning with the Regius of 1390, is older than any Freemasonry we know in practice. The story varies from manuscript to manuscript, but in its essentials is much the same - it was evidently a tradition as strong in its day as is our legend of Hiram. To quote but a few lines bearing on the pillars, consider these words from the York Manuscript No. 1, written about A.D. 1600:

“Before Noah flood there was a man called Lamech as is written in the Scriptures in ye Chatr of Genesis And this Lamech had two wives ye one named Adah by whome he had two sons ye one named Jabell ye other named Jubell And his other wife was called Zillah by whome he had one son named Tubelcaine & one Daughter named Naamah & these four children founded ye beginnings of all ye Sciences in ye world viz Jabell ye oldest Sone found out ye Science of Geomatre he was a keepr of flocks and sheep Lands in the Fields as it is noted in ye Chaptr before sd And his bother Jubell found ye Science of Musicke Song of

the Tongue harpe & organ And ye third brother Tuball Caine found ye Science called Smith Craft of Gold Silvr Iron Coppr & Steele & ye daughter found ye ara of Weaving And these persons knowing right well yt God would take vengence for sinne either by fire or water wherefore they writt their severall Sciences yt they had found in two pillars of stone yt might be found afr Noah his Flood And ye one stonbe would not burn wth fire & ye othr called Lternes because it would not dround wth wtr etc.”

The word here spelled “Lternes” is rendered on other old Constitutions as “laterns,” usually translated “brick.” But marble does not resist fire; brick - especially early unscientifically vitrified brick - does not resist water. If the word be considered a perversion of “latten,” which means brass or bronze, then the ancient legendary pillars are made of metal and marble, a more sensible idea, since metal would resist fire, and the marble, water. In Tyre was the great Temple to Herakles with two pillars, one of gold, the other of smaragdus (polished green marble). Other Tyrian Temples to Melkarth had two metal pillars or two monoliths. Modern Masonry has hollow pillars to serve as safe repositories for the “archives of Masonry” and to preserve them from flood and fire, in spite of the fact that sacred history says nothing of Masonry, or the reason for the pillars being hollow. It is reasonable to suppose that the ancient Masonic tradition of Lamech’s children and their pillars was confused, as knowledge of the Bible became more common after the invention of printing, with other “brazen pillars” of an ancient day, and finally with those of Solomon’s Temple. How high were the pillars? A question which has agitated Freemasonry - largely without reason - for many years!

A majority of rituals state that they were thirty-five cubits in heights. A minority hold to eighteen. One compromises on thirty.

A few do not give the height at all.

Mackey (Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry) says:

“Immediately within the porch of the Temple, and on each side of the door, were placed two hollow brazen pillars. The height of each was twenty-seven feet, and the diameter about six feet, and the thickness of the brass three inches. Above the pillar and covering its upper part to the depth of nine inches, was an oval body or chapter seven feet and a half in height. Springing out of from the pillar at the junction of the chapter with it, was a row of lotus petals, which first spreading around the chapter, afterwards gently curved downward toward the pillar, something like the acanthus leaves on the capital of a Corinthian column.

About two fifths of the distance from the bottom of the chapter, or just below its most bulging part, a tissue of network was carved, which extended over its whole upper surface. To the bottom of this network was suspended a series of fringes, and on these again were carved two rows of pomegranates, one hundred being in each row.”

This description, it seemed to Dr. Mackey, is the only one that can be reconciled with the various passages which relate to these pillars in the Books of Kings, Chronicles, and Josephus, to give a correct conception of the architecture of these symbols. In 1904 Brother John W. Barry, of Iowa, later to become Grand Master, rendered an exhaustive report to his Grand Lodge on the height of the pillars, proving anew the belief, practically accepted by Biblical students, the that “thirty-five” dimension is that of both pillars together, the actual height of each being eighteen cubits.

The confusion arises in the two accounts in Chronicles and Kings. Various explanations have been advanced as to the discrepancy between thirty-five as the height of each. The missing cubit is explained on the theory that while actually each pillar from root to summit was eighteen cubits, only seventeen and one-half showed. The rest being hidden in chapter and base.

This explanation apparently began with the Genevan Bible (Breeches Bible) in which is a marginal note stating of the pillars “every one was eighteen cubits long, but halfe cubite could not be feene, for it was hid in the roundeneffe of the chapter, and therefore he giueth to every one 17 and a halfe.”

To know the “actual” size of the pillars, it is necessary to know the length of a cubit. And here is room for speculation and many authorities! The Abingdon Bible Commentaries says: “The common cubit, equal to about 18 inches, the longer Royal cubit to about 20-½ inches.” John Wesley Kelchner, whose restorations of King Solomon’s Temple are to be found in Masonic Bibles, considers the cubit to be equal to two feet. The Standard Dictionary gives the cubit as the measure of length determined by the average arm from elbow to middle fingertip.

The Britannica considers that the Temple cubit must have been in excess if 25 inches, Canon J.W. Horsley, Past Grand Chaplain, England, who has studied and written much upon the pillars, give a table of sizes in which the cubit is but 14 2/5 inches. Many rituals set forth the fact that Hiram cast the pillars on the plains of the Jordan, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarthan, or Zeredetha. Both I Kings and II Chronicles are authority for the statement.

But if there ever existed a “clay ground” in the location specified, it has disappeared and left no trace. Explorations (Lynch in 1847, Ridegway in 1874 not only found no clay ground, but no trace of smelters, furnaces, or other means of melting and casting brass.

The point is of little importance - the pillars and the Temple vessels were cast, somewhere. But a failure of fact in a statement so absolute may be an indication the other I Kings and II Chronicles’ statements about the pillars were also inaccurate as to facts - “vide” the height statements.

The “globes celestial and terrestrial” which usually surmount Lodge room pillars are wholly modern inventions, without basis in Scriptural fact. Somewhere, at some time, some ritual maker confused the spherical form of the chapter with an additional an additional sphere. Desiring to account for it, he drew a map of the world on one and a map of the heavens on the other!

But in the Kings and Chronicles accounts and in Josephus, there are no mentions of celestial and terrestrial globes.

All this is more interesting than important. The symbolical meaning of the pillars is the vital matter to Freemasons. In the eyes of critical scholarship, the ancient meaning was of the might and majesty of Deity. From the dawn of religion, the pillar, monolith or built up, has played an important part of the worship of the Unseen. From the huge boulders of Stonehenge, among which the Druids are supposed to have performed their rites, through East Indian temples, to the religion of ancient Egypt, scholars trace the use of pillars as an essential part of the religious worship; indeed, in Egypt the obelisk stood for the very presence of the Sun God himself.

The ancient believed the earth to be flat and that it was supported by two Pillars of God, placed at the western entrance of the world as then known. These are now called Gibraltar, on one side of the strait and Cueta on the other.

Some writers have suggested that the pillars represent the masculine and feminine elements in nature; others, that they stand for authority of Church and State, because on stated occasions the high priest stood before one pillar and the King before the other. Some students think that they allude to the two legendary pillars of Enoch, upon which, tradition informs us, all the wisdom of the ancient world was inscribed in order to preserve it from inundations and conflagrations. William Preston supposed that, by them, Solomon had reference to the pillars of cloud and fire which guided the Children of Israel out of the

bondage and into the promise land. One authority says a literal translation of their names is: "In thee is strength," and, "It shall be established," and by a natural transposition may thus be expressed: "Oh Lord, Thou art almighty and Thy Power is established from everlasting to everlasting."

Quoting Abingdon again:

"The fact that each pillar had a particular name further suggests that they were not simply a part of the architectural adornment, but originally bore some analogy to the pillars which, singly or in pairs, formed an important feature of the Semitic sanctuaries. At Melkart's shrine at Tyre there were, according to Herodotus, two costly obelisks at which Melkart (and probably his wife-consort) was worshiped. Two pillars also stood before the temples in Paphos and in Hierapolis. Ashurbanipal on his expedition to Egypt and Ethiopia recounts that part of his spoil included 'two obelisks high with resplendent plating of fine workmanship from the threshold of the gate of the Temple.'

Therefore these pillars at Jerusalem, built, like the Temple itself, by Phoenician workmen, were probably intended to be symbols of the Deity; they were an artistic refinement of the Mezzabah, or stone obelisk which, at many Israelite sanctuaries, still stood beside the altar in much later days. But it does not necessarily follow that Solomon and his subjects so interpreted the significance of these novel and foreign brass objects: for them, the Ark in the 'oracle' seemed to have symbolized Jehovah.

But it is possible that instead of Jachin (or Jakin,) 'he (Jehovah) was carved on one pillar by Hiram-abi and subsequently altered into his name; and Boaz (i.e., 'in him is strength') may be a later substitution for 'Tammuz,' whose cult was very prevalent in the Semitic world."

The Entered Apprentice in the process of being passed to the degree of Fellowcraft "passes between the pillars." No hint is

given that he should pass nearer to one than the other; no suggestion is made that he either may work a greater influence than the other. He merely passes between.

A deep significance is in this very omission. Masons refer to the promise of God unto David; the interested may read Chapter VII of II Samuel, and gather that the establishment promised by the Lord was that of a house, a family, a descent of blood from David unto his children and his children's children.

Used to blast stumps from fields, dynamite is an aid to the farmer. Used in war it kills and maims. Fire cooks food and makes steam for engines fire also burns houses and destroys forests. But it is not the power but the use of power which is good or bad. The truth applies to any power; spiritual, legal, monarchical, political or personal. Power is without either virtue or vice; the user may use it well or ill, as he pleases.

Freemasonry passes the brother in the process of becoming a Fellowcraft between the pillar of strength - power; and the pillar of establishment - choice or control. He is a man now and no minor or infant. He has grown up Masonically. Before him are spread the two great essentials to all success, all greatness, and all happiness. Like any other power - temporal or physical, religious or spiritual - Freemasonry can be used well or ill.

Here is the lesson set before the Fellowcraft; if he, like David, would have his kingdom of Masonic manhood established in strength he must pass between the pillars with understanding that power without control is useless, and control without power, futile. Each is a compliment of the other; in the passage between the pillars the Fellowcraft not only has his feet set upon the Winding Stairs but is given - so he has eyes to see and ears to hear - secret instructions as to how he shall climb those stairs that he may, indeed, reach the Middle Chamber. He is to climb by strength but directed by wisdom; he is to progress by power,

but guided by control, he must rise by the might that is in him, but arrive by the wisdom of his heart.

So considered, the inaccuracies and misstatements of ritual regarding the pillars become relatively unimportant; whether eighteen or thirty-five cubits high, whether cast in one place or another, whether or not surmounted in Solomon's day with globes terrestrial and celestial, matter little. The lesson is there, the meaning of the symbol to be read. The initiate of old saw in the obelisk the very spirit of the God he worshiped.

The modern Masonic initiate may see in the two pillars the means by which he may travel a little further, a little higher towards the secret Middle Chamber of life, in which dwells the Unseen Presence.