

THE TWO GREAT PILLARS

A talk by RW Bro Richard King, PJGW to
Fassifern Kilwinning Lodge, No 83, UGLQ
at Harrisville, Qld, on 24th June, 2005

Wor. Master, and brethren, thankyou very much for inviting me here to talk to you tonight. I have been here before as a member of a Grand team, and I am delighted to return.

Brethren, allow me to take you back into the mists of ancient times. I mean really ancient, not just in historic times. Between about 500,000 and 200,000 years ago, evolution threw up a series of bi-pedal creatures, something between the first hominids, *Homo erectus*, and modern man, *Homo sapiens*. Among these was Neandertal man, a creature which may or may not have been our forbear. They looked remarkable like us, but curiously, they had a larger brain, and their DNA was quite distinctly different from ours. Casual observation would not have allowed us to see much difference, but notwithstanding their bigger brain, they were mentally developed only to about the standard of a modern 5 year old. If you came face to face with him, you would not have been able to connect - to him you would have been something to eat!¹

From about 100,000 years ago, our forbears, whether Neandertal men or not, started to become civilised. They started to form groups, erect permanent structures, husband the natural resources of their environment, develop speech and sophisticated abstract thought, develop cave art, make tools, and so on. One of the things which seems to have accompanied these advances was the development of the need to have Gods - the pre-cursor of religion. Of course, the world of settled communities, towns, temples, and infra-structure, took a long time to evolve.

Conventional wisdom seems to agree that the outburst of speedy advances which led to modern civilisation occurred around 10,000 years ago, ie, somewhere about 7,500 - 8,000 BCE. See generally in this regard, Knight & Lomas, *Uriel's Machine*, Arrow Books, 2000, p.33.

This flowering of civilisation in Mesopotamia (what is now Iraq), commencing around 4000 BCE led to the first known constructed columns. There is some theory further that the idea for columns came from the much earlier Megalithic peoples of Western Europe who raised great stones ("mega liths") vertically. In many instances they joined the tops of paired columns with stone lintels, such as those seen at Stonehenge in England. At all events, these columns and their predecessors are now seen as a sort of pointer or umbilical cord connecting men

¹ Bill Bryson *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, Black Swan Books, 2004, Chapter 28.

on earth with the heavenly Gods, and there seems little doubt that the great monoliths of Egypt, such as Cleopatra's Needle (now on the Thames Embankment in London), derived from these early origins.

The evolution of settled populations also gave rise to the development of leaders or monarchs along with the rise of the priestly caste who took charge of emerging religions. And from those ancient times, right up until the present day, we still have kingly and priestly leaders who rule civilly and spiritually.

It is probable that the alignment of kings and priests with paired columns reached its zenith in Egypt prior to 2000 BCE. In those times, Egypt consisted of two lands, forming one nation. They were upper (the southern part), and lower (the northern part) Egypt. The distinguishing national trait of the Egyptians then (and indeed for most of their history) was that they were a kindly friendly and relatively gentle people. Universal goodness was their common aim, and this crystallised into the idea of Ma'at. This ideal was one of pure goodness, a concept which Knight & Lomas² have reasoned was the ancient fore-runner of Masonic Morality.

In each of the two lands there was a great column erected – one at ancient Heliopolis in the North not far from the Nile delta, and one at Nekheh in the South, near ancient Thebes. The one in upper Egypt represented “strength”, and that in lower Egypt “to establish”.

The spiritual connection, by the two pillars forming a completed arch when the tops were joined figuratively by the sky god, Nut³, was said to create national stability. This stability came to be the reflection of universal goodness represented by the spiritual ideal of “Ma'at”.

When the early Israelites escaped Egypt and journeyed into Palestine, the Promised Land, they took the theology of Egypt with them. A temple to the seminal Hebrew God Yaweh was built very early in the Exodus (300 or so years before Solomon) by Abimalech, and the remains of two pillars at the Eastern entrance can still be seen today.

The two great pillars we use in Masonic ritual refer to those at the entrance to King Solomon's Temple, built around 1000 BCE. In developed Israelite theology, they represent the kingly power, on the one hand, and the sacerdotal or sacred power, on the other. Boaz represents the Kingly power, and Jachin the priestly power⁴.

At the time of Jesus, the Essene community at Kumran was nearing its peak as the standard for the orthodox and pure religion of Yaweh. The original Temple built by King Solomon had been destroyed long before, and the Hebrews taken away to

² *The Hiram Key*, Ch 7.

³ *Ibid*, p.134

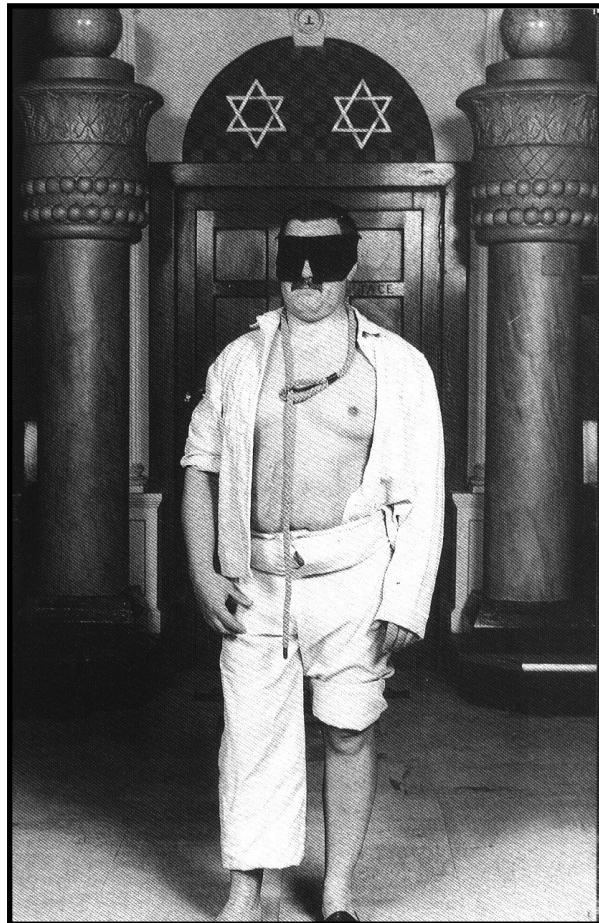
⁴ Knight & Lomas, *Op cit*, Ch 11.

the Babylonish captivity. The temple at Jesus' time was the so-called Herod's temple, itself destined for destruction when the Israelites rebelled against Rome in 70 AD.

Contemporary with Jesus, the Israelite religion had adopted the two pillars as representing the kingly and priestly roles of leadership of the Hebrews. There is little doubt that Jesus, a lineal descendant of the royal house of David, represented the kingly pillar. After the execution of John the Baptist (who was, in all probability the priestly pillar), Jesus, for the first time ever, took both the kingly and priestly roles uniting the offices in one man. And, after Jesus execution, his brother James continued to represent both Mishpat (Boaz) and Tsedeq (Jachin) – both the left and right pillars⁵.

I encourage all who have an interest in the origins of Christianity and the life, times and destiny of Jesus, to read *The Hiram Key*. To my mind, it should be compulsory reading for all Freemasons.

What we learn from all the forgoing is that the two columns, so emphatically involved in the EA & FC degrees, are one of the most ancient of our symbols. In many British lodge rooms, we find the candidate entering the lodge room from the West between the paired columns.



⁵ *Loc cit*, pp 269 - 279

In some Australian temples, there are two columns in the East (but west of the WM's chair)..

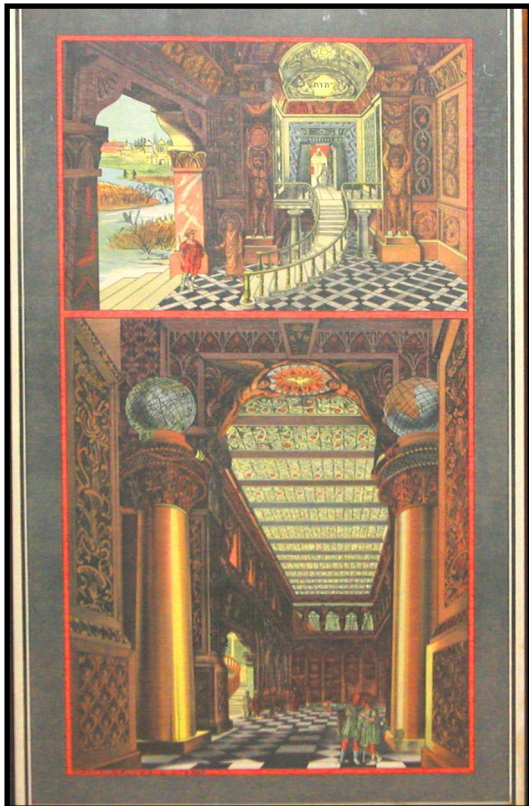


In each case, one looks between the pillars, from West to East, towards the rising sun and 'that bright morning star'.





Our 2° Tracing Boards show various depictions of the pillars – but none, apparently, at the East entrance.





These are all 18th century work; in Masonic terms, very recently conceived by the artists. But they retain, in Masonic symbolism, the ancient Egyptian meanings.

I now proceed to the practicalities of the pillars as described in our 2^o Tracing Board lecture.

First, their position: it is clear that the words describe their being at the entrance. In the 1^o, we are told that our lodges are situated East & West. But we are **not** specifically told that the entrance is at the East. Indeed, most 2^o tracing board pictures seem to show the entrance where the pillars are as being at the **side** of the building. That, in my view, is just licence, or worse, failure to realise the symbolism of the Light of God – the Shekinah – entering the Temple from the East, between the sacred pillars.

Second, their dimensions: the cubit was a variable measure and is described quite widely differently depending on where one researches the matter⁶. In general, I have come to the conclusion that the writers of our ritual meant no great precision, but rather, intended approximation based roughly on the traditional length of a cubit – from point of elbow to tip of outstretched middle finger – about 20 inches or so.

The lecture gives the following dimensions:

18 cubits high
12 cubits circumference
4 cubits diameter

⁶ Eg., see the UGLQ Mentor Scheme.

Anyone with even a passing knowledge of geometry will immediately see that the given measurements cannot stand as precise. If the radius is 2 cubits, then the circumference is worked out by the formula $2\pi r$, giving a circumference of something over 12.5 cubits, which cannot, of course, stand with the lecture, which says it is 12 precisely.

If one adds the 5 cubit chapters, as described in Chapter 7 of the First Book of Kings, then the total height of each pillar was about 23 times 20 inches, a total of 38.3 feet, or just under 12 metres. They would have been 4 times 20 inches across, giving a diameter of about 6.66 feet, or near enough 2 metres. Note that the proportion of base diameter to height is about 5.75 base diameters for the height. Note also that even the Doric, the most massive and squat of the ancient orders was a minimum of 7 base diameters high, so the pillars of the Temple must have looked *very* squat and massive!

Third, their adornment: In I Kings 7, there is a quite long and complicated description of the chapters. Without a pretty difficult analysis, I am prepared to accept that how we have the chapters depicted on our tracing boards will do. There, generally, the painting shows two rows of symmetrical round red ornaments at the junction of the column and the chapter. These are apparently the 2 rows of pomegranates. Above them appears some cross hatching, presumably the net work referred to in the lecture. Above them appear vertically aligned leaves, acanthus leaves consistent with ancient architecture, and described as lily work in the lecture. They cannot have been true acanthus leaves as the acanthus is not a lily, or of that family at all. AW Martin, in *Understanding Freemasonry*, says as follows :

Network

"Network from the connection of its meshes, denotes unity", states the ritual. Psalm 133, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for the brethren to dwell together in unity", recited at the opening of the Lodge stresses the importance of the brotherhood of man to Freemasonry. Unity among the brethren gives strength and harmony. Society would be better if all people could live in unity in their home life, achieve unity between employer and employee, experience unity of mind and action in our governing bodies and live under a unity of national and international intentions and distribution of resources.

Lily-work

"Lily-work from its whiteness denotes peace" The lily-work spoken of is designed from the Egyptian Lotus or Water Lily. It is the white beauty of this flower not its shape that denotes Peace and Purity. Long before Masonic times, this flower was in use as a symbol in such places as Egypt, Persia, Palestine and India. The peace referred to is the peace of brotherly love and affection and will be achieved only by a purity of life and action. Freemasons must therefore be careful to bring forward only those candidates whom they believe will not disturb this Peace.

Pomegranates

"Pomegranates, from the exuberance of their seed, denotes plenty." Like the Water Lily, the Pomegranate is widely spread over the Middle East as a symbol of fertility and Plenty. It has been a custom in Oriental countries to give as a present, an object decorated with Pomegranates, as much as to say, "I give you this, wishing you Plenty."

The symbolism of the chapters then is Unity, Peace and Plenty.

In all pictures used in modern lodges around Australia, in conformity with the lecture, the columns are shown surmounted by spherical balls or globes. Both the balls themselves and the lecture describing them are not truly ancient Masonic emblems. William Preston, for whom the Prestonian Lectures in England are named, was, from some biographical sources, completely obsessed with the idea of Masonry Universal.

AW Martin⁷ says as follows:

Bowls or Balls

The Good News Bible states that Hiram made pots, shovels and bowls and two bronze columns each 8ms tall and 5.3ms in circumference. On top of each he placed a capital (chapter) 2.2ms tall. Each capital was bowl shaped (shaped like a lily). There were no balls on the pillars. Why then does Freemasonry show balls on the top of each pillar? The Geneva Bible published in 1560 included an illustration of one of the pillars surmounted by a ball that is covered with a network of meshes. It is thought that early tracing board painters copied this into their work. According to the Bible the pomegranates were around the columns below the capitals and the network of mesh was thrown over the bowl.

The addition of the celestial and terrestrial maps to the balls or globes as they then became, did not occur until probably the last quarter of the 18th Century and may have resulted from the work of William Preston who was so keen on the concept of 'Masonry universal'. The terrestrial map symbolises the principles of Freemasonry as being applicable over the whole world and the celestial map no doubt relates to the concept of the early Masonic writers who tried to show by an exaggerated time line for Freemasonry that the basic principles of it are such as are inherent in the Great Architect's concept for the Universe.

Fourth, the material from which they were made: they could not have been brass, as that metal, (an alloy of copper and zinc), was not discovered until about 300 AD, although, as AW Martin says, it was occasionally made earlier accidentally. They must therefore have been bronze (an alloy of copper and tin), which had great currency at the time of building of the first Temple. It had been in use to make weapons and household utensils for up to 500 years prior. As there is no doubt that the version in the Old Testament is that the pillars were of cast brass, that description, in light of our present knowledge of the development of metallurgy, must have been used by the writers of the King James I Bible out of mere ignorance.

An item of some interest concerning the two pillars has arisen in the last decade or so. Sometime in the not too distant past, a discussion arose as to which was the Left pillar, and which was the Right pillar. Many brethren around the world became interested in this matter, and some quite strong opinions were formed, and heated debate ensued.

Looking at the question and attempting to apply common sense to its solution, some said the view must be from the outside, as one could hardly conceive that

⁷ *Understanding Freemasonry*

any view of 'sidedness' with respect to buildings could be other than from standing in front of it, looking at it. If you told someone that they would recognise your house because of the windmill in the right hand corner of the front yard, there wouldn't be one in a thousand who would think that in referring to the 'right hand' you would have been thinking from a view-point inside the house, looking out.

On the other hand (excuse the play on words), if you were describing the right hand side of a vehicle or a bicycle, it would be the common view that your point of observation was the operator's seat. Horsemen have overcome the right/left side argument by referring to the 'right' side of a horse as the 'Off-side'. The same with a cattle beast or a sheep. Very neat!

Our pillars conundrum was eventually submitted to Quator Coronati Lodge for resolution. The answer arrived at by the learned members of the world's premier research lodge was that the left pillar was that on the Left ***from within***. That all seems clear enough, and UGLQ has adopted this 'ruling'. However, just to keep the pot boiling, most (but not all!!) of the American jurisdictions have decided the answer is that the Left pillar is that on the left when looking at the front of the building ***from without***. Wow, you might say.

AW Martin⁸ says as follows:

Left or Right

A further point concerns which pillar is on the left and which on the right. The Hebrew method of giving directions was east was in front, West behind, North to the left and South to the right. As the only entrance to the Temple was in the East and the Holy of Holies was in the West, to get the direction correct one must be standing inside of the Temple looking East, which is in front, while West is behind and so North is to the left and South to the right. Thus in the Tracing Board view which is from within the Temple looking out into the country, that on the left is to the left of one's view and that on the right is to the right of one's view.

If, however, the Tracing Board view is from outside looking towards the Temple, then the left hand pillar is to one's right and the right hand pillar is to one's left.

Now, if you were thinking in terms of the pillars having some framing symbolism as to either the rising sun, or that bright morning star, then in order to use the pillars for that purpose, one would have to be inside the temple looking out. Going further back in history to the undoubted Egyptian origins of the pillars, Knight & Lomas have come to the view that the pillar in Lower Egypt (ie in the North, at Heliopolis) was that named Jachin, while that in Upper Egypt (ie in the South, at Nekheb) was the Boaz pillar. See *The Hiram Key*, pp 134 et seq. This means that if those pillars, when arched by the figurative sky God, Nut, form a

⁸ *Op cit* p. 47

portal through which you could watch the rising sun, then Jachin would be on your left, and Boaz on your right.

There seems to be no ready and completely convincing solution. But, perhaps it doesn't matter. It seems to me that there is no significant difference, whichever way you look at it. The complex mystery of this most ancient of all Masonic symbols remains, whichever answer you choose to adopt.

If any brother would like to ask questions, I will be happy to try to answer them.