

Sources of Masonic Symbolism

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By Alex Horne

Reviewed by Bro. Jason F. Hicks

Brother Horne has written a book, which although short in length, only being a mere eighty-nine pages, that is chalked full of information that will enlighten any brother that picks it up.

In the early chapters, Bro. Horne discusses the basic of symbolism v. emblems and goes into symbols specifically in a Masonic sense. Many people place the symbols of masonry as being a creation of the time when the switch between operative and speculative masonry occurred during the 1700's. However a discovery on a bridge built in the 1500's gives us evidence that our operative brothers involved symbolism into their profession. Upon the squares is the following engraving:

I will strive to lieu (live)

With loue (love) & care

Upon the Leuel (level)

By the square.

This shows that our operative brethren were more than just brick and mortar masons they did realize a greater significance to their work. This lends much more credence to our rituals today because it confirms that beyond simply the transition phase where may have credited the symbolic and moralizing side of masonry was created.

Many believe that our operative brethren did not have a grasp on the seven liberal arts and their significance to a well rounded man. However, there seems to be ample evidence that amongst the writings of the generation there is reference to the sciences and surely our operative brethren were quite involved with using and applying the art of geometry.

One of the next topics discussed is the history of the rites of circumbulation. We are told it is so that the other brethren assembled can make sure the candidate/brother (depending on the degree) is duly and truly prepared. However, Bro. Horne links it to the such earlier customs of a number of peoples. He notes that the British people were very addicted to the rites of circumambulation. He also points out that many churches have "'ambulatories,' or walking areas, and the practice of making processions around their interiors."

Bro. Horne next talks about the tradition of a ceremonial laying of the cornerstone. Although there is no record to support the previous operative masons having ceremonial cornerstone ceremonies, there is some scant evidence of it being an ecclesiastical ceremony. The ecclesiastical ceremonies date back much further to the rule of the Romans during their ceremony there were stonemasons tools used. He also points out that there would have been stonemasons present when these

ceremonies were done and the Master of the worksite could have been involved with the ceremony. Therefore, there is a strong tie between the cornerstone ceremonies of today and the ones of the past.

These topics and a number of others are covered in Bro. Horne's book. He has truly written quite a work on the symbolism of masonry and its meaning and their historical significance.