

Ensigns of the Principal Tribes

In Royal Arch Masonry there are said to be four principal Tribes of Israel that wandered in the desert for forty years. We are told in the Talmud, as well as within our ritual, that each of the tribes carried a banner or ensign peculiar to their respective tribe. The tribe of Judah bore on its banner the emblem of the lion, Ephraim bore the emblem of the ox, and the tribe of Rueben bore the emblem of the man, while Dan bore the emblem of the eagle. Such emblems are superficially explained within Capitulary or Royal Arch Masonry, but since they are well known to occur in places outside of traditional Freemasonry, it seems that there might be more to their explanation than is given within the Royal Arch.

One frequently encounters the very same emblems within the sanctuary of most Roman Catholic churches. There is one difference; that being that the animal representation is a depiction representing each one of the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John rather than the principal tribes of Israel. According to the multivolume set, Butler's Lives of the Saints, St. Matthew is represented by a "winged figure", which is representative of an angel or the "intelligence of man." The lion characterizes St. Mark, which is said to represent "courage." St. Luke is represented by an ox or cloven animal also said to be a bull, and representative of "patience." The eagle is said to allude to "swiftness" and, represents St. John, the Evangelist. It is an interesting transposition from the Judaic to the Christian belief system. All four characteristics would be critical to wandering in the desert for forty years, and all four characteristics would be crucial to the development of a "new Judaism" namely, Christianity. However, such explanations are superficial at best, and we must look even further. Then we will find that such depictions in either format, Judaic or Christian occur frequently in other places and even in combined forms, and also with additional symbols to help us get to the secret meaning of these ensigns.

On the crest of the Grand Lodge of England, we will find the four animal emblems as noted. They are also reportedly to be found along the ceiling line of the Grand Lodge of England and peculiarly, at each of the four cornices as "decorative" representations of the signs of the zodiac. Their relevance to Freemasonry becomes more intriguing when one examines the Royal Portal to Chartres Cathedral in France. The same ensigns are there to be found as well, although they play a secondary role to a more central carving, that of Jesus Christ within an egg shaped oval, which is centered among the four ensigns.

It is of some Masonic interest that St. Bernard of Clairvaux commissioned the cathedral, circa 1130-1140 A.D. and reportedly, in concert with the original nine Knights Templar from whom many authors declare a descendant lineage to Freemasonry. Interestingly, Bernard de Clairvaux was reportedly the nephew of Andre de Montbard, who was also one of the original nine Knights that inhabited the ruins of Solomon's Temple in the Holy Land. The commission occurred immediately on the heels of the return of the Knights to France (about 1130 A.D.) from their many years of excavation under the ruins of King Solomon's Temple in the Holy Land. The famed north tower of Chartres was under construction in 1134 A.D. and shortly following the return of the Knights and, coinciding with the pinnacle of St. Bernard's power as a Cistercian abbot and church leader, and was in close proximity to his abbey headquarters. Both Graham Hancock in his book the Sign and

the Seal, as well as the informative booklet, *A Guide to Chartres Cathedral*, described the various and unusual statuary and carvings, geometrical designs, stained glass windows, and underground labyrinth that comprise the interior and exterior of the cathedral. Victor G. Popow in "Freemason, Know Thyself" describes from the work of Louis Charpentier in *Mysteries of Chartres Cathedral*, "a rose over the north door or the Gate of the Initiates, where a Negro St. Anne is seen carrying a fleur-de-lis: there is a depiction of Melchisedek, the Chaldean Magus handing to Abraham the cup said to be the Holy Grail"; Aaron, the Egyptian Magus and "brother" to Moses is represented. It will be recalled that Aaron was the instigator of the building of the Golden Calf amongst the Israelites during their wandering in the desert: and amongst these figures are also depicted King David and King Solomon."

St. Bernard of Clairvaux was a Roman Catholic abbot and clergyman. Powerful as he was during his medieval time, it is difficult to fathom how he managed such a feat as to erect statuary of such a pagan and "heretical" nature. But, perhaps that "heretical" nature was only the "party line" meant for the common faithful. Maybe there was much more to the symbols and allusions than we have been led to believe, and maybe Freemasonry is one of the last bastions to keep guard of those secrets.

Of more exacting interest to the point of this paper is that relief above the Royal Portal to Chartres Cathedral. There is depicted the four ensigns correlating precisely with the animal depictions of the four principal tribes and the four evangelists. In that relief carving over the Royal Portal and centered between the four emblems is a carving of Jesus Christ with the Cross-Patee instead of the customary halo of the time. York Rite Masons immediately recognize the Cross-Patee as the "Templar Cross." It is contained within an egg shaped oval. Victor G. Popow refers to this as a Vesica Piscis, and here I will take licensure to digress since the Vesica Piscis contains its own occult meaning.

The Vesica Piscis is that oval shape obtained when one interconnects two circles of the same circumference and does so through use of a common radius. Where both circles overlap in the center there is then formed an oval. Much of the "New Age" literature describes the Vesica Piscis as representative of the womb. If such is to be accepted, it can then easily be inferred that the Vesica Piscis containing the image of Christ with a Cross Patee rather than the traditional halo, refers to the immaterial (Deity) becoming material (man) within the womb. Such an idea is well within the scope of orthodox Christianity, and the Cross Patee easily serves as an indicator of Templar acceptance of this belief and an indicator of their purported involvement in the construction as well.

In the *History of Man* by Rabbi David Azuli (1724-1805) there is an even more interesting explanation for the oval shape. In his chapter entitled "The Days of Man are the Measure of Mikvah," Rabbi Azuli goes into great detail describing the Mikvah purification incumbent upon all faithful Jews. He discusses the volume of "naturally occurring" water to be used for the immersion bath, and details for us exactly how that volume is calculated at a minimum of forty "seahs" where the smallest volumetric equivalent is that of one egg. He states that three eggs can be held in each hand and six eggs are considered a "log." Four "logs" or two-dozen eggs are called a "cab" and six "cabs" equal one seah. It requires forty "cabs" or 5,760 seahs to fill a mikvah immersion pool to the minimum level for the purpose of Jewish purification. Beyond the volumetric use of the egg there is also a Hebrew reference to time where one seah (oval egg shaped) is equal to the time it takes the earth to

revolve around the sun (one year). It will be recalled that the earth's rotation around the sun is actually oval in nature and not precisely circular. The reader will also recall that Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) was excommunicated from the church because he believed that the earth revolved around the sun. Was Galileo inadvertently yielding up some part of the long secret knowledge that was privy to only the initiated few?

Vendyl Jones, of the Vendyl Jones Research Institute, further asserts that the Hebrew calendar is measured from the creation of Adam, and that contained within the ancient Hebrew literature is a prediction as to when the history of man will begin to change. That time is supposed to be 5,760 years from the creation of Adam, or the same number of seah as required in filling a Mikvah immersion bath or earthly rotations around the sun.

From the above description, the oval shape has deep connotation that is not readily apparent to the unenlightened. If we extrapolate the "New Age" thought with the old Jewish precepts, we end up with a volumetric measurement for ritual purification of the body that is somewhat akin to a resurrection, and a timeframe, which might apply to a period of time when man's history may begin to change due perhaps to a lack of vision for the immaterial made manifest in material terms and the methods for application of that knowledge. According to the Jewish calendar 5,760 years from the creation of Adam was upon mankind on March 22nd 2000.

The Vesica Piscis helps us to understand something about the oval derived from interlacing two circles of the same circumference and using a common radius, something about purification, and something about time with a particular earth reference. From an architectural point of view, the pointed Gothic arch seems dependent on knowledge of the Vesica Piscis. But still, we must go back to the Royal Portal and the accompanying ensigns at Chartres Cathedral to comprehend what our ancient brethren were trying to convey to posterity.

Chartres was reportedly, the very first Gothic structure of its kind on the face of the earth. How did it suddenly appear? There were no prototypes. It was not a gradual evolution of the stonemason's craft, nor the architecture of the time, though indeed it was built by medieval stonemasons of the day. Suddenly it burst onto the European landscape without even a hint as to its perceptual origins. We do know that it appeared immediately following the return of the Knight Templars; we know that they had a close tie with St. Bernard of Clairvaux; and we know that it was he and the Templars who had commissioned that unusual Christian edifice. It seems possible that the years spent in the Holy Land may have easily had influence on the Knight Templars and that they could have gained access to a certain uncommon theology symbolized in the form of a sacred geometry, old characters from ancient Judaism, dualistic connotation of saintly figures and other obscure renditions of Christianity which would help to explain St. Bernard's willingness to facilitate with the Papacy, the Templars formal Charter as an Order of Knights devoted to Jesus Christ, as well as the construction of such a cathedral or story in stone. Such an idea would lend some help in understanding the construction of Chartres embodying certain secrets unearthed or learned in the Holy Land. Knight and Lomas in, *The Hiram Key* proffer this very point suggesting that the building of Chartres was the fulfillment of the Nazorean Scrolls unearthed by the Knights Templar and, which ordered the building of a "Heaven on Earth" a mission said to be unfilled in earlier Judaic times by James, the brother of Jesus due to his untimely death.

In the Gospel of Thomas, a part of the cache of scrolls recovered at Nag Hammadi, James does seem

to be the one to whom Jesus instructs his followers to look to for leadership and completion in the event of His absence. If such uncommon theological precepts and findings were shared with and accepted by St. Bernard, it could then be understood why he chose and condoned such unorthodox depictions of the theological message, a sort of spiritual alchemy that was a critical statement as an enduring landmark, but not readily apparent to every profane eye. He must surely have had some insight that we do not have. It is for us to work at unraveling those secrets.

If we take just a cursory examination of Gothic architecture we can very quickly see that the pointed Gothic arch could not possibly have been understood without knowledge of the Vesica Piscis, the same geometrical oval containing the image of Christ at Chartres. As an example, if we interlace two circles of the same circumference and sharing a common radius, the center of one circle we'll call "A" while, the center of the second we'll call "B." The oval sides of the then resulting Vesica Piscis, which will then lay in the exact center between A and B, we will call "V" and "P." The exact center diameter of V and P will fall precisely on the points also labeled A and B. From these two points it is then only necessary to draw a downward vertical line, and magically a two-dimensional pointed Gothic arch will appear. It seems unlikely that such a concept just simply appeared at the commissioning of Chartres Cathedral by St. Bernard. It does seem more likely that it was imparted to him by the returning Knights who likely learned of the geometry from their contact with the peoples of the Holy Land or from their findings beneath the Temple of Solomon.

But still, how does it fit into the milieu of Freemasonry? The answer becomes even a little more complex because now we have to work with the geometry to find the hidden message. Within the Vesica Piscis can be drawn two inverted (opposing) equilateral triangles where both bases are aligned at the center point of the Vesica Piscis. The downward pointing triangle represents the Perfection of Deity, while the upward pointing triangle represents that to which, the Master Mason strives, the Perfection of Man. If we round the Vesica Piscis we will create a circle, while simultaneously merging the two equilateral triangles into an interlaced pattern, the result of which, will be the Seal of Solomon that is well known amongst Scottish Rite brethren. As such, we then represent the union of man with Deity in perfect harmony. Going a step further, we find that another equilateral triangle can be drawn around the outside of the Vesica Piscis, and we might say that such a tracing represents the material world contained within a Divine balance. If we turn the Vesica Piscis horizontally, we will then have a representation of the shape of the human eye, or perhaps the sacred eye of the Egyptians, or the All Seeing Eye of Freemasonry.

At this juncture we must return again to the Royal Portal and the carving above it. As stated earlier the Vesica Piscis is flanked in four quadrants, and each quadrant containing the image of one of the ensigns assigned to the four principle tribes of Israel where Israel represents the older Mosaic Dispensation. Although it would be negligent to not point out that contained within the name Israel are the syllables for deities beyond that inferred by the Judaic reference. The first syllable "Is" could be easily taken as a reference to Isis, the sacred feminine from the Egyptian mythos. "Ra", the second syllable might also be taken to refer to the Egyptian monotheism of Ra, the sun god. "El" is also the first syllable of Elohim, a reference to the sacred and symbolic name of Judaic deity.

Those same four ensigns are used to represent the four evangelists of the Christian Dispensation in the New Testament representing the newer story of Truth in a kinder, gentler form. The most obvious common thread to tie these respective representations together is seen in the signs of the

zodiac. In the table below the reference becomes clear:

1. Tribe of Judah - St. Mark - Lion - Zodiacal Sign, Leo
2. Tribe of Ephraim - St. Luke - Ox or Bull - Zodiacal Sign, Taurus
3. Tribe of Rueben - St. Matthew - Man or Winged Being - Zodiacal Sign, Aquarius
4. Tribe of Dan - St. John - Eagle - Zodiacal Sign, Scorpio (the sign of the Eagle must be converted to the old Egyptian astrological chart where the Eagle and the Scorpion or Lizard held the same significance)

By solving the direct and indirect correlation between Judaic, Egyptian, Christian and Astrological symbols we have made an enormous step, however we still have no meaning for the relationships, nor do we have a meaning for the relationships as they occur in carved history at Chartres Cathedral or within Royal Arch Masonry, Freemasonry in general, or Christianity. We have applied, as we are instructed to do in the FC degree, art, science, geometry, and astronomy, but we must yet apply arithmetic. By examining the common thread, the zodiacal signs themselves, we find that they have a certain fixed position on the zodiac table, a position from which, they do not deviate. Each of those positions is sequentially number one through twelve. We can therefore, take the number of each position in the zodiacal table to determine its numerical equivalent, i.e. Leo is 5, Taurus is 2, Aquarius is 11, and Scorpio is 8. The combined total of the numerical equivalents is then 26.

The number 26 can only be interpreted if we apply it to an older theological body of knowledge, that being the Judaic system of beliefs, that system from which Freemasonry has gained so much of its esoteric doctrine. The last step in the secret then is to correlate each zodiacal number position with the Hebrew alphabet since Hebrew letters also represent Hebrew numbers as well. In so doing we arrive at the sacred and more ancient Hebrew name of Deity (HWHY). It is not exactly the same designation taught in the Royal Arch since certain letters in English are not contained in either the Greek or Hebrew alphabets.

The trail thus far has been circuitous and tangential, however that is only because through the corruption of time we hold only fragmentary pieces of the ancient knowledge. But, without doubt we have a profound message contained within our ancient carvings and partially within our Royal Arch ritual and Scottish Rite. That message implies the divinity of Jesus in material form on this earth! That He made the transition from immaterial to material form and that His divinely human experience was in perfect harmony and balance! It seems further, that we are invited to participate in that perfection although neither the ensigns themselves, not the Vesica Piscis specifically elucidate the formula. For that, we must look deeper and elsewhere within our ritual, our history, and our landmarks, and we must utilize the tools as we are instructed in the FC degree.

Realizing that the symbolic name of Deity is obscurely disguised within our ritual, and appreciating that certain corruptions must have occurred over the millennia, we can quickly see why only certain Tribes of Israel are mentioned in our work. We can see a ready connection between Masonic knowledge today and its relationship to our guild brethren of the medieval period. We can also see that the Knights Templar did indeed impart some special knowledge, and that the revered St. Bernard of Clairvaux was likely privy to it before 1130 A. D. Given the very nature of Chartres Cathedral, it seems highly improbable that our ancient brethren were merely guild workers performing by rote memory and brute force the fashioning of stone blocks. Perpetuation of that fable

seems ignorant and irresponsible, reflecting little more than those who have been given a great gift and tools with which to cultivate it, but hear no message, see no message, nor speak of any message. In order for work as evident as that which exists within Chartres Cathedral and other medieval edifices, the stonemasons had to be initiated into something deeper than simply shaping and fitting blocks of stone. If nothing else, the climate of church dominance and its control of the popular thinking of the day would have caused most masons to tremble for fear of being cast a heretic and hung or burned alive for mindlessly creating theological insights in stone. A simple momentary glance at the obvious would suggest that our ancient brethren were most likely far better immersed in the mysteries of Masonry than many of us today. They were clearly versed in the sacred geometry in order to fulfill the designs they created. They obviously knew the meaning of what they were carving or it otherwise would have been meaningless to them and would not have survived the ages as a relevant Masonic communication. Someone over them had to have been initiated into the deeper meanings in order to condone those creations. Whoever or whatever that was, also knew the hidden meanings and knew that they contained truth, truth handed down from ages long before, at least back to the time of Moses, and likely from ages well before that since Moses was an Egyptian prince for much of his life. He was a man of "power" and some think a man of magic, i.e. a Magus who learned the very ancient mysteries and their uses from the very earliest of times. Those truths have been passed to our Order, albeit in fragmentary form. It is those truths of Freemasonry that will lead men to know Deity each perfectly, in their own way. Therein lies the truth of Freemasonry. Therein is the rationale for our insistence on tolerance and a required belief in a Supreme Being.

It is further noteworthy that the Cross-Patee replaces the traditional halo around the head of Jesus in the depiction at Chartres. According to the Old Testament description of the Jews wandering in the desert, they camped according to the tribe to which each belonged. The banners of the principal tribes were hoisted higher than the others thereby presumably making it easier for one to locate his people and his tent with ease. They camped according to the cardinal compass points, north, south, east, and west with three tribes in each encampment and the Levites camped precisely in the center of the encampment. This interestingly, corresponds to the head of Jesus occupying the center of the Cross-Patee just as the Levites were charged with the care and keeping of the Ark of Covenant, which would have been squarely in the middle of the bisecting lines of the cardinal points of the encampment. Those bisecting lines obviously formed a cross as well. Steinmetz points out that the primitive usage of the figure of a cross anciently represented man with outstretched arms. If that is the case, then the heart of a man lays squarely at the center.

In most representations of the Ensigns of the Principal Tribes the ensigns are placed in a quadrangular form whether in the church sanctuary as the evangelists, on the shield of a Grand Lodge, Grand Chapter, or an emblem above a Royal Portal. Of necessity their placement forms a cross as does a certain grave dug six feet long, six feet wide, and six feet deep where the Word of Master Mason was buried. Allegorically, whether the center of the Hebrew encampment, the Cross-Patee, the center of the Visica Piscis, or the center of a man, it would seem the location of the Word of a Master Mason can be found in the heart and that the word is spelled out with some degree of specificity by the Ensigns of the Principal Tribes.

The following table is an illustration of the symbolism of the four principal tribes.

TRIBE	EVANGELIST	COMMON SIGN	ZODIAC EQUIV.	No. POSITION
Judah	Mark	Lion	Leo	5
Ephraim	Luke	Ox/Bull	Taurus	2
Rueben	Matthew	Man/Angel	Aquarius	11
Dan	John	Eagle	Scorpio	8
TOTAL				26

*In the ancient Egyptian zodiac the sign of the Eagle, and sometimes the Lizard occupied the same place on the zodiac table as

our present day Scorpion. The Eagle and the Scorpion therefore, seem to be interchangeable zodiac signs, at least for symbolic purposes.

Two sources of the Hebrew alphabet and numeric equivalents were researched to determine if there was a correlation in the total above with Hebrew letters in a numerical position that would correlate with anything in the symbolism of the Holy Royal Arch. The first source researched was THE GREEK AND HEBREW ALPHABET WITH NUMERIC EQUIVALENTS found in the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry. The second source was Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary Alphabet Table showing the transliterations used in etymologies. Two distinctly different results were identified with the same essential meaning.

**CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS:
LETTER NUMERIC-EQUIVALENT**

J	10
H	5
V	6
H	5
TOTAL	26

WEBSTER'S LETTER NUMERIC EQUIVALENT

Y	10
H	5
V	6
H	5
TOTAL	26

CONCLUSION

Although the ensigns of each tribe have multiple meanings, each as deeper meanings, here is suggested that the emblems clearly represent the sacred name of Deity. Transliterations from one text to another suggest that there are different English equivalents for the representations of Hebrew letters, and therefore, also the numeric equivalents. The letters "J" and "Y" appear interchangeably, as do the letters "W" and "V".

Irrespective of the source or the transliteration the numeric equivalents of those respective letters add up to 26. From an alphanumeric interpretation the banners of the four principal tribes are then a secret disclosure of the symbolic Name of Deity. Their respective positioning may further indicate where the meaning of the Word may be found.

REFERENCES

1. Victor G. Popow, "Freemason, Know Thyself." *The Ashlar*, Issue 16, March 2002, pp. 31-41.
2. Christopher Knight & Robert Lomas, *The Hiram Key*, Barnes & Noble, 1998, pp. 271-273.
3. *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, Vols. I-IV, Edited, Revised and Supplemented by Herbert J, Thurston, S.J. and Donald Attwater, Christian Classics, Inc., 1956. Originally published 1756-9.
4. Graham Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 1992.
5. Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *The Temple and the Lodge*, Arcade Publishing, New York, 1989.
6. Charles G. Addison, *The History of the Knights Templar*, Adventures Unlimited Press, Kempton, IL 1997. Originally published in London, England, 1842.
7. Rabbi David Azuli (1724-1806), *The History of Man*, "The Days of Man Are The Measure of Mikvah", excerpted from the Vendyl Jones Research Institute, Researcher, Nov. 2001.
8. Rivkah Slonin, *Total Immersion*, Jason Aronson, Inc., Northvale NJ 1996.
9. K. Doore, *The Trilogy Part II*, Labrintha.com 2002.
10. *The Grand Chapter of Tennessee Royal Arch Masons, Compiled Proceedings*, 1994.
11. William Anderson, *The Rise of the Gothic*, Hutchinson Publishing, London, England, 1985.
12. "A Guide to Chartres Cathedral," Editions Houver-La-Crypte.
13. Louis Charpentier, *The Mysteries of Chartres Cathedral*, RILKO, London, England, 1983.
14. George Steinmetz, *Freemasonry, Its Hidden Meaning*, Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co., Richmond, Va., 1948, 1976
15. *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Heirloom Bible Publishers, 1991