

THE NOBLE ORDERS OF ARCHITECTURE

Pillars or columns have always held a unique and important place in Freemasonry and are objects of great interest to the Craft in general.

Eleven pillars, applications no doubt of the Five Noble Orders, are spoken of in Masonry - Two appear in the "Old Charges", two were placed at the porch or entrance to King Solomon's Temple, two were allotted to the Wardens and five, including the three which support a Mason's Lodge, are mentioned in the Noble Orders of Architecture.

As Fellowcrafts we are directed to study the symbolism mainly of the Five Noble Orders of Architecture, but more especially the three original ones, the Ionic, Doric and Corinthian, they being representative of the three pillars on which a Mason's Lodge is supported, wisdom, strength and beauty. The other two are the Tuscan and Composite. The operative Mason was required to know something of these Five Noble Orders from the practical point of view.

An "Order" in Architecture is a combination of columns, including capital and base, and horizontal entablature or part supported, designed in relation one to the other. The column by itself is not the Order. The Tuscan is the first of the Five Orders. There is no certainty as to its origin; it was not used by the Greeks, and it is unlikely that the Romans invented it. It was probably used by the Etruscans. The Composite Order, also called the Roman, the last of the Five, is a combination of the Corinthian and the Ionic. As it was a Roman invention it was unknown to the Greeks.

The Doric is the first and simplest of the three Greek Orders. It was evolved by the Greeks of the Western territories at the same time as the Greeks of the Eastern territories were creating the Ionic Order. The true Doric style is found in Greece, Sicily and Southern Italy, the finest example being the Parthenon on the Acropolis at Athens (447-432 BC). This was the Order mostly favoured by the Greeks and they used it almost exclusively in Temple buildings. It was too severe and plain for the Romans who needed something more ornate for their buildings.

It was found that the length of a man's foot was generally one sixth of the height of his body, so the height of the pillar, including the capital, was made six times its thickness at the base. Thus, the Doric pillar exhibits the proportions, strength and beauty of the body of a man. Although it is thought that the style originated in Egypt the reason for its being called Doric is based on legend. In about 1,000 BC, the Dorians, a tribe to the north of Corinth, invaded and conquered Southern Greece and established settlements also in Sicily and South West Italy. The Dorians gave their name to the style of architecture that became characteristic of the lands over which they ruled.

The Ionic is placed second to the Doric although the two Orders were developed simultaneously. The Romans adopted it but treated its details with less beauty and refinement. The best example is the Erechtheion on the Acropolis at Athens, but the true home of the Order was in Asia Minor. It is suggested that whereas the Doric pillar was

modelled on the form of a man, the Ionic pillar was fashioned on the proportions of the female figure. The height of the pillar was made eight times its thickness at the base to give it a slender look, and in its capital, volutes or scrolls were placed hanging down at the right and left like curly ringlets, and with festoons of fruit arranged in place of hair. The flutes, were made to fall down like the folds in the robes of matrons. Thus, the Ionic pillar has the delicacy, adornment and proportions characteristic of women.

The Corinthian is the third of the three Greek Orders. It first appeared as a variant of the Ionic, the difference being almost entirely in the capital. Being less used by the Greeks than the other two, the Order was fully developed by the Romans. The richness and exuberance of its decoration appealed to Roman instinct, and so they used it more frequently in their buildings than any other Order of Architecture.

It was modelled on the tenderness of a maiden, for the outlines and limbs of maidens being more slender on account of their tender years than those of men or women, admit of prettier effects in the way of adornment. The pillar is more slender than that of the Doric, being usually ten times the diameter at the base.

This has been a very brief summary of the subject to acquaint you with a few facts concerning terms used so frequently in our ritual, "the Five Noble Orders of Architecture, but more particularly the three original ones, the Ionic, Doric and Corinthian, they being the pillars on which a Mason's Lodge is supported, viz wisdom, strength and beauty" being one such reference.

How are the three Orders applied in Masonry?

The Ionic pillar, symbolical of Wisdom, is allotted to the Master who must possess that Wisdom necessary to rule and govern the Lodge efficiently and employ and instruct the Brethren in Freemasonry. Wisdom is knowledge and the Scriptures say:

"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, the gain thereof than fine gold".

Just as a Mason strives to gain the Master's chair, so he must strive to gain Masonic knowledge to enable him to obtain that Wisdom which is necessary for a full appreciation of the principles and tenets of the Order of Freemasonry. In doing so, he becomes a keener and better Mason fit to take his place among the supporters of a Mason's Lodge.

The Doric pillar, symbolical of Strength, is allotted to the Senior Warden, who, in ancient times, was responsible for the actual operations of the workmen according to the plan of the Master. The Senior Warden must possess Strength to enable him to perform the important duties allotted to him. Strength, without Wisdom, is dangerous, therefore, he is directed at his investiture to act in conjunction with the Master. Strength of character is obtained by carefully watching all his thoughts, words and actions.

Every member of the Lodge is engaged, under the direction of the Senior Warden, in building the spiritual temple of his own character, perfect in all its parts and honourable to the builder.

The Corinthian pillar, symbolical of Beauty, is allotted to the Junior Warden. He is in charge when the sun is at its meridian, when life giving properties and brightness are at their highest point. At this time of the day work ceases for a period and peace prevails. There is brief rest after toil, intimate conversation among Brethren, and general relaxation of mind and body so that pleasure and profit may be the result. The power to express Beauty of thought, word and action is given to man alone of all the living kingdom. It is in the period of relaxation that such Beauty of character becomes most manifest provided it is properly controlled. It can be properly controlled if the Mason gives due attention to the teachings of the Three Great Emblematic Lights in Freemasonry; duty to God, regularity of conduct towards all mankind, and passions and prejudices kept within due bounds. Every brother must ensure that Beauty adorns the inward man.

Perhaps the finest reference to these Orders and their Masonic significance is to be found in our Ritual, Second Lecture, 4th Section.

The Five Noble Orders of Architecture appear in an irregular catechism issued in 1723 in the form of question and answer:-

Q: How many Orders are there in Architecture?

A: Five; Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite or Roman.

In Dr James Anderson's first Book of Constitutions in 1723 the frontispiece shows a pavement or arcade with the Five Orders coupled on each side, the Composite Order in the foreground, receding to the Tuscan in the background.

As early as 1710 a set of three pillars makes its entrance in the catechisms and exposures.

In the early ceremonies, apart from brief forms of oath, entrusting and greeting, the body of the ritual work was made up of questions and answers, including those which exhibit the first simple attempts at speculative interpretation. Among these arose a whole series of questions which brought the answer "three". The earliest and most consistent of these were:-

Q: Are there any lights in your Lodge?

A: Yes. Three.

Q: Are there any jewels in your Lodge?

A: Yes. Three.

These two questions and answers appear in the earliest version of the catechisms, the Edinburgh Register House MS of 1696 (which has already been mentioned) and with variations, in almost every version of the exposures throughout the 18th Century.

The three pillars appear for the first time in the Dumfries No 4MS, which is dated about 1710:-

Q: How many pillars are in your Lodge?

A: Three.

Q: What are these?

A: Ye square and compasses and ye Bible.

The three pillars do not appear again in the eleven versions of catechisms between 1710 and 1730, but the question arises with a new answer in Prichard's famous exposure of 1730, "Masonry Dissected".

Q: What supports a Lodge?

A: Three great Pillars.

Q: What are they called?

A: Wisdom, Strength and Beauty.

Q: Why so?

A: Wisdom to contrive, Strength to support, and Beauty to adorn.

The same questions appear in the Wilkinson MS, a version of which may be dated about 1727, and in a whole series of English and Continental exposures throughout the 18th Century, invariably with same answer. "Three, Wisdom, Strength and Beauty". In the 1760s an exposure added several further questions, which allocated the pillars respectively to the Master, Senior Warden and Junior Warden. But the descriptions of Lodge furnishings at this date do not include such pillars and it must be emphasised that these pillar questions belong to a period long before there was any idea of turning them into actual pieces of furniture in the Lodge room.

Whilst it is fairly certain that the early Lodges were only sparsely furnished, the records show that after the 1730s there were already a number of Lodges reasonably well-equipped. Never-the-less early references to sets of three pillars in Lodge records are extremely rare. To this day the ancient Lodge of Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel), No 1, now over 260 years old, uses a set of three pillars each about three feet tall. The Master's pillar stands on the Alter, almost in the centre of the Lodge; the other two stand on the floor at the right of the Senior Warden and Junior Warden respectively. (The principal officers there do not have pedestals).

It seems likely that the earliest special furnishings used in a Lodge room were a set of three candlesticks. These are perhaps the most constant items in the 18th Century inventories.

Perhaps the first hint of a combination between the two sets of equipment, three candlesticks and three pillars, appears in the records of the Old Dundee Lodge, which

purchased in 1739, a set of three candlesticks of elaborate design in Doric, Ionic and Corinthian styles. (They are still in use today). The connection is perhaps not immediately obvious, but these were the architectural styles associated with the attributes of the three pillars belonging to the Master and Wardens, "Wisdom, Strength and Beauty". The Masonic symbolism of the three pillars had been explained by Prichard in 1730, and it is almost certain that the Old Dundee Lodge was putting the words into practical shape when it ordered its set of candlesticks to be made up in these styles.

The Old Dundee candlesticks may serve as a pointer to what was happening, but it was by no means general practice, and sets of three pillars are usually absent from early inventories and lists of Lodge equipment.

And so we can trace the three pillars from their first introduction as a purely symbolical question in the catechisms, throughout the period when their symbolism was expanded, until they were equated with three specific architectural styles. It is fairly safe to assume that the pillars were already appearing in the drawings, floorcloths or tracing boards in the early 1700s.

In the 1750s and 1760s we have definite evidence that sets of three pillars were already in use as furniture in several Lodges, and this adds strong support to the view that they had formerly appeared in the tracing boards. When towards the end of the 18th Century, the Lodge rooms and Masonic Halls were being furnished for frequent or continuous use, the three pillars became a regular part of the furnishings, occasionally in their own right, but more often as ornamental bases for the three "lesser lights", thus combining the two separate features into the one frequently seen today.

In his confession to the Inquisition in 1742, John Coustos is reported to have said: "In addition they also teach that the complete and perfect Lodge should have three columns to support it, denominated Wisdom, Strength and Beauty in adornment".

When pillars of the three Orders came to be attributed to the three principal officers, it should be noted that the pillars were allotted in their historical order, namely, Doric to the Master, Ionic to the Senior Warden and Corinthian to the Junior Warden.

In 1791 it was decided to provide a throne for the Grand Master of the English Premier Grand Lodge and chairs for the Wardens more in keeping with the dignity of their offices. This decision was made soon after the election of the Prince of Wales (later George IV) as Grand Master. The maker of these chairs was instructed to "make the Columns or Pillars on the Chairs strictly conformable to the Order and Usage of the Society, viz, the Grand Master's to be of the Doric Order, the Senior Warden's the Ionic Order and the Junior Warden's the Corinthian Order".

With the revision and standardisation of the working by the Lodge of Reconciliation (1813-16), the Ionic pillar was allotted to the Master, the Doric to the Senior Warden and the Corinthian to the Junior Warden.

With the one exception, the certificates issued to Master Masons by the two English Grand Lodges and the United Grand Lodge of England, have one feature in common; the pillars of the three principal Orders of Architecture. When our Grand Lodge was established in 1888 the "Pillars" certificate was adopted and it's still in use today.

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