

Later Religious Cults.
~~THE ANTIQUITY OF FREEMASONRY.~~

PERSIA, PALESTINE, INDIA, CHINA AND MEDIAEVAL EUROPE.

If Masonry is regarded as the direct descendant, or as a survival of the mysteries, the peculiarities of the Mithraic worship need to be examined. We must therefore leave the West for a time and return to the East.

The Mithraism of the Zend-Avesta, or of the sacred writings of the Persians is attributed to Zoroaster, the great reformer of the Persian religion. It seems to have had more of a mythological than of an astronomical character; relating to the origin of evil, the two principles, and to the generation, the spiritual renovation, and the future destiny of man.

Mithras is the chief of the Izeds, under Ormuzd (the Supreme Good) who is his creator, and in whose wars against Ahriman (the Supreme Evil) he is the presiding agent. He was the God of Light, external and internal, hence the God of Wisdom and of moral purity.

After the Persian conquest of Assyria and Babylonia, Mithraism became much more prominent, and Mithras himself was identified with the sun. Candidates had to undergo a ceremony of initiation, and to submit to severe trials of physical endurance by fire, water and fasting. There was a ceremony of baptism, an oblation of bread and water and other rites. In these respects, and in the belief in the mystic soul sacrifice of Mithras, it resembled Christianity.

The Persians then conquered Asia Minor but, after two wars with the Greeks and Romans, they were driven back by Pompey the Great B.C.66.

Under Pompey, Mithraism was introduced into Greece & Italy, and it flourished greatly in the Roman Empire until it was suppressed in A.D.378 by Constantine.

We learn from sculptured tablets & tombs that Mithraism prevailed extensively in this country as well as in France & Germany, in each case no doubt having been introduced by the Roman legions.

By those authors who attempt to prove that all secret fraternities form but the successive links of one unbroken chain, it is alleged

that the esoteric doctrines which in Egypt, Persia and Greece preserved the speculations of the wise from the ears and tongues of an illiterate multitude, passed, with slight modifications, into the possession of the early Christians.

~~Before proceeding further~~ We will ^{now} return to the Israelites who we left at the borders of Egypt. Their political and religious history is too well known to refer to in this paper, except in regard to a sect which existed among them, about two centuries before Christ, called the Essenes.

Hirschfeld affirms that "Some Neo-platonic, Pythagorean and Persian ideas found their way among the Essenes, and brought with them some practices and institutions which this brotherhood mixed up with the Jewish religion.

According to Josephus they lived a pastoral life, with community of goods and common meals, other practices were exclusion of women, prayers towards the east before sunrise, daily ablutions in cold water, belief in immortality without a resurrection of the body and a peculiar doctrine of the Angels. It thus appears that they practised a mystically coloured asceticism. They have much in common with Chasidean & Pharisaic Judaism, but Persian, Pythagorean and Buddhistic characteristics appear in their alleged law-worship, their ascetic dualism and their avoidance of animal sacrifices.

The initiate received a copy of the ordinances, a spade and an apron. He was bound by a most solemn oath to love God, to show merciful justice to all men, to be faithful to every man, and especially to rulers, to purity of character, which implied inter alia strict secrecy towards outsiders, so as not to divulge the secret doctrines to anyone, and to perfect openness with the members of the Order.

What ultimately became of the Essenes is purely a matter of conjecture. They are to be traced down to about 400 A.D, after which the fade away into obscurity, being presumably suppressed by the Romans, or perhaps absorbed into Christianity.

Before leaving the middle east it is desirable ^{to note} that virtually the same ideas of religious mysticism & profound truths spread simultaneously East and West. Consequently it occasions no surprise to find

the same or similar symbols and allegories in use in India and China. Giles in his History of Freemasonry states that "in the oldest of the Chinese classics, embracing the period from the twenty fourth to the seventh century before Christ, we meet with distinct allusions to the symbolism of the Mason's art". In the writings of Confucius B.C.481 it is taught that men should apply the square and compasses figuratively to their lives, and the level and the marking line besides, if they would walk in the straight and even paths of wisdom, and keep themselves within the bounds of honour and virtue. In Book VI. will be found these words "a master mason, in teaching his apprentices, made use of the compasses and the square. Ye who are engaged in the pursuit of wisdom must also make use of the compasses and the square".

Returning to Europe we find that, as in Egypt, the advance of civilisation produced a remarkable activity in the building of magnificent edifices mainly for religious purposes. There is no evidence to support the suggestion that these buildings of the ancients were erected solely by gangs of slaves. Most of the labouring was probably done in this way, but the planning and exquisite workmanship must have been done by architects and highly skilled craftsmen. That these latter were organised in crafts or guilds from the earliest times is beyond doubt. Hence we find in Rome at the time of the suppression of the Mysteries a large number of well established institutions under the name of the Roman Collegia.

The leading feature of these colleges was their connection with the religion of the people. They adopted as a fundamental principle the hereditary privilege or duty that the son succeeded to the occupation of the father, just as in later companies and guilds the son became a freeman by right. Under certain conditions the civil law permitted the aggregation of strangers. An analogous system appears to have prevailed in Egypt. Amongst the handicrafts pursued by these operative communities must be included architecture, sculpture and painting. Sir F. Palgrave says that "the Masonic square, the level and the mallet are all carefully displayed upon the memorial of the Roman architect Vitruvius, showing how important a feature the mechanical practise of the art was considered in estimating the calling to which the master belonged".

It has been generally believed that from Constantinople, as the centre of mechanical skill, radiated to distant countries a knowledge of art. Corporations of builders of Grecian birth, according to Müller, were permitted, outside the limits of the Byzantine Empire, to live and exercise judicial government among themselves, according to the laws of the country to which they owed allegiance. This principle, or doctrine of personal right to declare under what law a citizen would elect to live, was publicly recognised in all the legal codes of Europe from the fall of Rome until late in the thirteenth century.

Stieglitz in his "History of Architecture" records a tradition that when the Lombards were in possession of Northern Italy, the Byzantine builders formed themselves into guilds and having received from the Popes the privilege of living according to their own laws, were called Freemasons.

Fort in "Early History & Antiquities of Freemasonry" says that "it may be safely asserted that the junction of Byzantine corporations with Teutonic guilds afforded the substantial basis of subsequent lodge appointments and ritualism, such as have descended to modern Freemasonry.

These guilds eventually developed throughout Europe notably in Germany, where the famous Steinmetzen were established, and were employed in the wonderful era of cathedral building in mediæval times following the spread of Christianity.

At this stage there is evidence of the existence in Britain of a sect referred to as the Culdees, on which the leading authorities are more than usually divided.

The German writer Krause says "that the Essenes, the Druids and the Culdees were all Freemasons in progressive stages of development".

Mr. Higgins in the "Anacalypsis" says "I request my reader to think upon the Culidee or Culdees in the crypt of the Cathedral of York, and at Ripon, and in Scotland and Ireland - that these Culdees or Chaldeans were masons, mathematici, builders of the Temple of Solomon; and that the country, where the

of the Madras Civil Service) gained access to the sacred part of a temple in south India, was called Colida and Uria, that the religion of Abraham's descendants was that of Ras; that Masonry in India is called Raj or Mystery; and that we have found the Colida and most others of these matters on the Jumna, a thousand miles distant in North India - and when he has considered all these matters, as it is clear that one must have borrowed from the other, let him determine the question - Did York and Scotland borrow from the Jumna and the Carnatic, or the Jumna and Carnatic from them?"

It is uncertain when the Christian faith first found its way into Britain. Neander in his "General History of the Christian Religion" says "that the peculiarity of the British Church is evidence against its origin from Rome, for in many ritual matters it departed from the usage of the Roman Church, and agreed much more nearly with the churches of Asia Minor. The tin of Cornwall from a very early period, had penetrated to the Levant, and the bond of connection must thus have been drawn close and firm. A messenger from Syria would have been more readily received than one from Rome. This is held to account for the Oriental character of early British Christianity; the missionaries who conveyed it may have come from the East."

There is also to be considered the class of people to whom the new doctrine was disclosed. The Druidism of our ancestors must have been powerfully influenced by the Paganism of the Empire, at the period when Christianity dawned on Britain.

Mr. Higgins in another work says "The Culdees were the remains of the Druids, who had been converted to Christianity before the Roman Church had any footing in Britain".

The Culdees then may be taken as the last link in the supposed chain of continuity, from the ancients to the operative guilds of the fourteenth century, and it will not be out of place to conclude with a few general observations from Gould's survey of this interesting hypothesis. He says "It can hardly be doubted that contemporary and successive secret societies must have had some influence on each other. The ceremonies of probation and initiation would be, in most cases, mere imitations of older originals, and the forms of expression perhaps

identical. Still it would be wrong to assume "that because certain fraternities, existing at different epochs, have made use of similar or cognate metaphors in order to describe their secret proceedings, that therefore these proceedings are identical. Similar circumstances are constantly producing similar results; and as all secret fraternities are, in respect of their secrecy, in the same situation, they are all obliged to express in their symbolical language that relation of contrast to the uninitiated on which their constitution depends. To denote this contrast metaphorical analogies will be employed, and these analogies will be sought in the contrasts of outward nature, as in the opposition of light to darkness & life to death. The operations of the ordinary passions of our nature will also require the occasional use of metaphors; and as the prominent objects of the material universe are always at hand, the same comparisons may sometimes be employed by persons who have never dreamt of the initiatory rites and secret associations. However flattering to our pride may be the assumption of a long pedigree, it by no means follows that it will bear the test of a strict genealogical investigation."

Refer Gould's "History of Freemasonry".
 Forster "Early History & Antiquities of Freemasonry".
 Gales. "History of Freemasonry".
 Murray. "Secret Fraternities of the Middle Ages".
 Strickland's "History of Architecture".

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