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## The Mysteries & The Practices

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The story of the great building societies who traveled Europe from the pre-Christian days to the Renaissance, is a long one, and I am afraid, not very attractive to the majority of present day Craftsmen. Nevertheless a few brief outlines are necessary for those who desire to visualize something of our noble lineage.

Eminent students are telling us that the Ancient Mysteries of Egypt were practiced in temples whose buildings were supervised by the priests themselves. This was the connection between the Mysteries and Operative Masonry. From there, the building societies migrated to Persia, Greece and later to Rome where they were known as the Roman Collegia. In the declining days of that Empire, they were persecuted, but one lodge found refuge on Lake Como, and later under the protection of the King of Lombardy, branched out as the great Comacine body. They later went to England, by invitation of Lanfrane and built all the Norman edifices. It is obvious that they later united with the local trade guilds.

Meantime their mystical and esoteric teachings were still held, but only by very few, to be resurrected and remodeled at a later age by Dr. Anderson and others, after the creation of the Grand Lodge of England.

Such is the theory of those eminent scholars, Bro. Dr. Churchward and Bro. J.M.Ward. They are in contradiction with many other theories concerning the early origins of the Craft, but they represent the most probable explanation of this curious and much discussed matter. To disprove the many wild theories concerning the subject, one cannot do better than consult Freke Gould's monumental "History of Freemasonry". In it, with ruthless logic, the highly regarded historian and legal-trained Bro. Gould, deals with all available evidence concerning the Templar Theory of the origin of Freemasonry; with the schools which ascribe if only to Druidism, the Druses or the Devil, with the Gypsy theory and with practically every theory plausible or impossible which has been offered from time to time with a view of deceiving the unlearned and unwary and affording gullible brethren an opportunity of making themselves ridiculous.

After collecting the evidence he in every case establishes its value, and as a result is forced to the general conclusion that we are still as much in the dark as ever concerning the direct connection of modern times Freemasonry with the Ancient Mysteries and early societies.

Later, in the early 19th century, in the times of Dr. Oliver, the claims of Emblematic Masonry, became a scorn and a byword to all that was sane in scholarship, and even today the output of most awful Masonic unproved and low quality claims continue to litter the terrain of pure research.

Bearing all these facts in mind, therefore with no intention to change Masonic History, but for the benefit of those thinking brethren who realize that a knowledge at least in outline of something of our ancestry is essential to a right perception of Masonry's noble mission.

These were religious practices. The first and original Mysteries appear to have been those of Isis and Osiris, but exactly what went on in the Temples has never been positively ascertained. Some Works

containing some information have appeared from time to time, the most interesting that I know of, being Koppen's "Crata Repoa" which is a collection from numerous ancient literary sources.

Then there is the famous "Book of the Dead", the ritual of ancient Egypt. It is considered by the authorities as a real authentic record of some of the rites and ceremonies, and a study of it leaves an impression mounting almost to a conviction that in these Ancient Mysteries we have a good deal of the fountain head of Freemasonry... Let us look a little into the information we have at hand.

In the "Book of the Dead", we learn that the fear of mutilation of the body made the Egyptians exceedingly attentive to the embalming and preserving, not only of the body itself, but also of the bowels. They were taken out of the body, and after being mummified, were put into four jars and placed in the tomb alongside the mummy. These vessels were called Canopic jars and they had as lids the distinguishing emblems of the four sons of Hours [Horus?]- the head of an ape, a man, a jackal and a hawk. These also represented the four cardinal points, N, S, E, W.

The following quotations are from the "Book of the Dead":- "Let not my head be cut off, let not my brow be slit"; "Let not my heart be torn away from me, let it not be wounded, and may neither wounds or gashes be death upon me"; "Let not my head be taken off or my tongue torn out"; "Take ye not this heart into your grasp"

In the ceremonial procedures there were probably many things which a Freemason of today would look at with keen interest and understanding.

The Perambulation, for instance and some of the signs would be quite familiar to us. There is a statuette of Isis, which might easily be taken for a Mason, entering a lodge and facing the W.M. The right and left hands are exactly as they should be, while the arms are true squares, the whole attitude being that of a Mason. There is also to be found on the walls of one of the tombs a very fine initiation scene, where we have Sethi I. facing Isis and standing with hand to hand and foot to foot in such an attitude, as would lead one to anticipate the remaining three points of this part of our present day ceremonial.

Again, in the "Book of the Dead", we read that "They covered it again with all respect and reverence, and to distinguish the spot placed a sprig of acacia at the head of the grave" and again: "Homage to thee (Osiris), O Lord of the Acacia Tree."

In a temple dedicated to Osiris we have a relief of the tomb, over which there grows the acacia tree. In its branches sits the bennu bird, or Phoenix, emblem of immortality and symbol of the soul of Osiris, while in the left hand corner is the all-seeing eye, the hieroglyph of Osiris. A singular circumstance in connection with the acacia is the fact that it is never pictured except near the tomb of Osiris.

It has been established that there were seventeen Mysteries in all. Seven of them were what are known as Primary; the other ten were called Greater mysteries. Diligent research points to the probability that the seven Primary or Lesser Mysteries were practiced with signs, symbols and exhortations very similarly as Speculative Masonry is practiced today in our Lodges.

## ***The Lesser Mysteries***

Here again the "Book of the Dead" gives us some information, it has been asserted by Dr. Churchward that the priests who had received two of the seven degrees were the actual operatives, but students have not been able to satisfy themselves as to the grounds on which the assertion is based.

It would seem that such celebrities as Pythagoras, the great geometrician, Zoroaster, Orpheus the Greek poet, and Thales the philosopher, were among those who were initiated into these systems, but all is so shadowy, and confused that dogmatic assertion is at once vain and foolish.

Most of the great Masonic students, including the celebrated Dr. Joseph Fort Newton, have liked to think that in the heart of these mysteries was a real stream of pure unpolluted teachings which had survived in essence to the present time. Whether these old Mysteries were the only receptacles of living truths in those far off days, is unknown.

When and by whom these teachings were introduced within the circle of Emblematic Masonry is, as previously stated, unknown.

## ***The Greater Mysteries***

Once more we are in the shadows. Many have asserted that the Lesser Mysteries spread first, through Persia, Greece, Europe, and America, but that the Greater mysteries were more jealously guarded, and took longer to reach those countries. Also, that all the so-called Higher degrees of present day Masonry are true interpretation of the mysteries of Egypt as defined in the "Book of the Dead." The evidence seems feasible. These Greater mysteries, like the Lesser, once formed the heart of every great religion of the world. The goal of the Mysteries was seemingly nothing less than Deification, whereby man was led step by step from the ordinary life of the world until he put on the splendour and loveliness of God Himself. In other words the "vital and immortal principle" is a spark of God's Fire, evolving from latency to potency through long continuing training. The teachings were all given in dramatic form, and to the initiates were indeed mighty realities. Would such were the case still, but alas!, this is a cynical and materialistic age, and Man has strayed far. Just how far and for how long the mysteries remained unsullied is problematic. Other great schools of religious and ethical thought arose, and through them all one traces something of the same method of teaching.

## ***Mithraism***

This was in ancient doctrine, attributed to Zoroaster, practiced in the early Persian Monarchy. It became greatly altered and modified in the first four centuries of the Christian era. Fundamentally it expressed a belief in the transmigration of souls under the influence of the seven planets, over whose operations Mithrias presided. It is absolutely certain that it is mostly derived from the Mysteries of ancient Egypt.

## ***Druidism***

The study of the cult of Druidism has always exercised a fascination to Masonic students. It was a pagan system of worship and like all the old priesthood systems, it comprised two sets of doctrines and opinions, one for the inner circle, so to speak, and the other for gulling the people. The initiates were taught in the most private places such as in the deepest caves or the thickest forests. No written records were ever kept. The other system, was made public and was, in essence, a series of pagan and barbaric rites suitable to the superstitious state of the people.

Druidism taught the doctrine of immortality of the soul. Sun worship, inextinguishable fires, moon worship, animal and human sacrifices as well as the practice of all that was superstitious were the distinguishing characteristics of this fearful wonderful system of tyranny and religious corruption.

The question arises: "What then, does Masonry owe to Druidism? The plain fact is that it owes nothing of an ethical nature. Possibly some of our symbolisms are Druidical in origin, the cable-tow for instance, is probably a relic of the chain used by the Druids.

So too, the fact that a man enters Masonry blind and neither naked nor clothed. These were conditions precisely enforced by the Druids. Their places of worship were circular surrounded by large stones and in the centre stood an altar on which sacrifices were made. The point within the circle was a well known symbol with the Druids.

It is not known how Druidism became an integral part of the national life of the early savages of Britain. Most probably its tenets and customs were introduced by priests who traveled with the early Phoenicians, those hardy maritime pioneers who went to Cornwall to trade for tin some two thousands years or so before the Christian Era.

### ***The Eleusinian Mysteries***

These were the earliest and greatest of the Greek Instituted mysteries and were not Egyptian origin. The central myth tells of Demeter, Zeus, Cybele, Persephone, Cyclops and other mythological characters, also the rape of Prosperine. Around it were woven the dramas of the system even as masonry today is woven around the Hiramic legend. History remains uncertain as to what connections there were between the Egyptian Mysteries, the Greek Eleusinian Mysteries, Mithraicism of Persia, and Druidism of Britain. They most probably had some remote common origin away in the very dawn of human life, but evidence recede from our vision into a background that is quite obscure.

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