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650 Fisgard Street, Victoria, B.C. V8W 1R6
1989 - 5

THE PILLARS OF KING SOLOMON'S TEMPLE.

by

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The first we hear of the Solomonic Pillars in our craft ritual is in the Edinburgh Register House MS. of 1696. They are associated with the Mason Word Ceremonies whose existence were known and referred to in diaries of 1637, but with ceremony itself, wasn't completed in one manuscript until 1696 when one question in the catechism asked; "where was the first lodge" to which one answered:- "In the porch of Solomon's Temple". Previous to these pillars of Solomon, there is mention of pillars formed hollow to act as archives, in the old charges. The pillars of the old charges are thought to be those described in the writings of Josephus who ascribes them to Seth while another ascribes them to Enoch and yet another to Noah.

The ancient legend contends that fourteen pillars were constructed to house or have engraved on them the seven Liberal arts and sciences. Seven pillars were made of brick and seven of marble. The purpose was to protect the arts and science against flood or fire which was to be a judgment of God around that time. The same description is given to the Antediluvian Pillars save the fact that they were constructed of brass and brick. They were referred to as early as 225 B.C..

The fact that Solomon's Pillars were formed hollow was probably a solution to an engineering problem of weight, as they would have to be transported from their place of casting to the temple and erected. The line in our ritual - "the pillars were formed hollow the better to serve as archives to masonry" was thought by H.L. Haywood to be a convenience of 18th century lodges, in combining the pillars of the old charges with Solomonic Pillars of the Speculative mason in order to harmonize the differences in the Modern Ritual.

The word KO-THOR-OTH according to Harry Carr means a chapter, capital or crown. This is from 1 Kings 11:16 and later in verse 41 speaks of Gooloth HA-KO-THOR-OTH. The word Gooloth meaning bowl or vessel or globe and ball. While Mackey refers us to Esther 8 where he suggests the word "Keter" means crown which is the base of the word "Koteret" which is used to describe the chapter. They have been described as 'ovals 5 cubits high...'. The Geneva Bible has illustrations and foot notes describing the "chapter or round ball on top of the Pillars". To further confuse the issue the Book of Kings refers to capital above the chapters of lily work which is dismissed as possibly being an entablature needed to complete the whole pillar and support the ceiling of the porch.

There is probably one certainty in this whole mess of descriptions and much to our disappointment would be that there would not have been maps of the terrestrial or celestial bodies on these chapters, were they spherical. We are looking at the date of about 900 B.C. the time of the building of Solomon's Temple. It would be some 600 years later before anyone would entertain the thought, that the world was round. They believed the world flat and oceans the end of it. A Spherical map shouldn't appear logical for the time.

However lodges of the 18th century were using as part of their lodge

furniture, floor globes depicting the earth and stars and once again found their way to the top of the pillars as a matter of convenience in combining ritual and furniture. In lodges in 1767 "ALL SOULS LODGE" records having a pair of globes mounted on tripods. Between 1696 to 1730 there was no evidence of the globes on lodge

8.

pillars. Around 1745 there were accounts of floor drawings beginning to show pillars with globes, but in the 1760's and 70's, Solomon's' Pillars appear frequently with globes in the illustration of Lodge furniture and on aprons.

Moving on we can now begin to attack the description of the pillars themselves. We are told from our rituals, and Kings Version of the Bible, that their height was $17\frac{1}{2}$ cubits, their circumference 12 cubits and their diameter 4. The Book of Chronicles suggests 35 cubits, and all other references say 18 cubits.

Brethren on this one we have an answer, If the pillars themselves were indeed 18 cubits high when cast, and when erected and the chapters placed on them, a half of a cubit was taken up inside the chapter. The exposed pillar would then measure 17 cubits to the bottom of the chapter, and when doubled would be the 35 cubits referred to in the Chronicles version as if their aggregate height had been calculated.

Now a cubit is a measure of distance from the elbow to the extremity of the middle finger or my favourite the fourth part of a well proportioned man's stature. As you can summarize we are not talking laser technology here, however, a cubit is generally accepted to be between 18 and 22 inches and in most cases is figured to be Hebrew translation of 18" making the height of the pillar 27 feet, the circumference 18 feet and the diameter 6 feet.

Another question arises when discussing the pillars' names and position with respect to our ritual. We are told that the pillar on the left was called B and denotes in strength and that the pillar on the right was called J denoting to establish. That is fine as we stand in our lodges showing our candidate. We would however have to think later on when we come to say our lodge face east ... etc. We are told King Solomon's' temple faced east and yet B... could only be on the left should the temple face west or if we were viewing the pillars as we were leaving the porch. Why describe a building as if you were leaving it without first describing the arrival. The Bible does not deny the building faced west, yet it is contrary to the normal positioning of holy edifices.

There are many other examples in our ritual concerning the Pillars of Solomon which demonstrate the fact our rituals were not to be taken as historical reality but rather a collection of facts mixed with myths taken over an extended period of time creating a vehicle for teaching and demonstrating moral principles.

Reference: Harry Carr's World of Freemasonry
Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry
King Solomon's Temple in the Masonic Tradition
The Holy Bible.
