

Victoria Lodge of Education and Research

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ANCIENT MYSTERIES AND FREEMASONRY

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Ancient Mysteries is a very wide subject. In order to connect it with Free Masonry, an effort has been made to present this paper, in only two parts. The first part deals with the ancient mysteries in general and the Egyptian, while the second refers to those Hellenic Mysteries who have more commonality to Free Masonry.

Upon its birth, philosophy faced the challenge of the 'not-being' (unknown). From its struggle for the discovery of the 'being' (ON), became victorious and with the help of (ὀρθός λόγος-orthós lógos), the meaningful and rightful reason, explained the meanings which are related to ON, and advanced to the 'seeking science' which is the research of the knowledge of the kinds of 'ON', the 'being'.

The battle to explain ON was won, the other battle to attempt to explain the 'other', (the Platonic "ἕτερον"-héteron) was lost, as the 'other' is not a kind of 'ON' but is the one which in defiance, remains the 'other', the 'all-secret'.

A person's mind can only conceive what is his like, and not that which is the absolute 'other'. Even during his most unverified fantasies he cannot approach it, cannot 'see' it and therefore must confine himself by giving it various names that cannot fulfill his desire, the desire for its knowledge.

In the meantime, although 'other' reveals itself in many forms: in the sky, in the earth, in celestial spheres and stars, in plants and animals, the fate of man is that he cannot listen and understand the melody of the universe. As much as the mind is elevated it cannot succeed to understand, and can only contemplate the possibility of a last hope: The hope for a revelation. Thus, the aim of the mind and the soul are in need of an apocalypse.

When it is revealed to him through the strange and mystic rituals in which the soul delights but the eyes of the body obscure, then man follows the paths of mysteries. Then the whole of nature appears as a great mystery and

reveals a form of religiosity that he wants to share with only a few, and then, the 'other' is called God, the beginning of all, the One.

Mysteries date from the cradle of civilization.

In all ancient religions, worship service was performed mainly in public as well as in secrecy during which only the initiated permitted to participate. Strávon (Strabo, 1st century B.C.), says that this dual form was a common custom to all the religions. Those secret worships, named Mysteries, a word that derives from the verb 'μύω' (mýo), which means to seal the eyes and the mouth. The neo-platonic philosophers gave to the initiated the name 'Μύστης' (Mýstes), a meaning related to the mysticism of their philosophy.

There are various definitions of Mystery. In general, Mystery is the 'mystic worship', the symbolic ritual with which the initiated communicate with the divine. According to Christian Lobeck, German man of letters and Hellenist (1781-1860), mystery is what is subjected to mystic worship, the secret or confidential sacred, the rituals.

Mysteries were practiced by group of people with a higher intellectual and emotional structure (texture). Their main purpose was the spiritual perfection of the initiates, whose first aim was spiritual purification.

Ploútarchos, (Plutarchus, 1st century) in his book, 'About Isis and Osiris' delivers the "Sacred Lógos" in which the initiate must fast, abstain from spicy food that excite the desire for vice and avarice.

The main components of the Mysteries are the 'apocálypsis' (revelation) and the 'Catéchesis' (Catechism- indoctrination), which are the disclosure of secret signs that contain the meaning of the mystic myth and the purpose of Mysteries. Sometimes the disclosure is performed by unveiling a picture or triptych (not alike the Tracing Board found in Free Masonry) on which the "Sacred Lógos" is written or depicted, followed by the indoctrination (catechism). In Dionysian Mysteries, according to testimonies, a representation of a sacred marriage was taking place, which was the symbolic marriage of the soul of the initiate to Diónyos, the divine bridegroom. According to Diódoros of Sicily, (circa 90-21 B.C.), into this sublime drama many orphic-dionysian elements were married.

With the initiation into sacrificial-mystical worship of the divine, the initiated is identified with the 'dying god' and secures for himself the fate of 'the

dying god', the 'victory against death' and the triumphant 'apotheosis'. The initiate becomes homomorphous with god during the initiation performed by the gynaecocratic (female dominated) Dionysian Mysteries drama, which gave many elements to the later on Orphic Mysteries that, as male domineering, may have caused its dismemberment.

Here, we should mention that the main characteristic of the later-on religions is the death-sacrifice of the leader with whichever title appears: god, semi-god, son of god, prophet or delegate. The most common is the crucifixion which is, almost always, followed by the resurrection. Some examples: 700 B.C. Thoulis (Egypt), 200 B.C. Krishna, (India), 170 B.C. Attis, (Phrygia), 160 B.C. Tammouz (Syria), 834 B.C. Hess us (of Celts, Druids), 721 B.C. Indra, (Tibet), 622 B.C. Iao (Nepal), 600 B.C. Mithras (Persia), 600 B.C. Sakia (India). All those are much earlier than the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

A religion with mythological elements can walk together with the birth of scientific thought. Philólaos (Φιλόλαος), Pythagorean philosopher, 5th century B.C., Archýtas, (Αρχύτας) Pyth. Philosopher, 4th century B.C., Alcmaéon (Άλκμαίωv), (the first who dissected animals and he made some important discoveries on anatomy and natural philosophy) pupil of Pythagóras, are scientists, mathematicians and physicians. Orthós lógos do not take the place of faith as mysticism keep pace with rationalism. Both are the answer of inextricable questions which torture humans, even to those who are not willing to accept it.

Here, we have to remember that mysticism does not mean occultism. Under the burdens of tradition, the first pure and authentic signification and meanings of a philosophy, the form of the originator and his teachings, are lost as the fate of his work is handed to his students, followers and zealots. The premature giving of high level spiritual nourishment by the teacher to the new and immature initiate is dangerous of misinterpretation.

We, Masons, can presume what happens when we have to resolve and understand symbolic teachings as well as symbolic texts. The symbolic structure of teaching, either in verbal form, or in recorded logos, arranged and expressed with symbols, obtains a possible liberality in the sector of interpretation which is dangerous. If someday, in the present or in the future, concern for the original work is revived, then to the new comers, History will return as a rigorous Judge.

The comprehension of the number that expresses measurement of the unit (τό μέτρον- τό métron), the rhythm and the ratio, exercises a magical power according to the 'mystic' perception of numbers. During the 2nd and 3^d centuries A.D., the cosmopolitan climate and the old doctrines of the East are fused and

amalgamated with a 'pythagorism', which adapted, during this time, the most vivid and the most anarchical syncretism.

"Θεουργία", (Theurgía) is a sort of magic in which the 'theúrgians' claim that they have communicated with God. Thus, we see the philosophic religiosity of Plotinus to express himself in his "Porphyrius" through a mixture of popular religiosity. Although he does not believe in magic, he does believe that the salvation of the soul occurs through the theurgic purification. (Κάθαρσις- Catharsis, purgation)

Thus Theurgía opens the way to religious ceremonies where the unification with God is succeeded through symbols and signs. All those, excite imagination that without control leads to all sort of exaggerations.

There are two elements that make it credible to understand how mysteries, worship ceremonies and the first myths of 'Theogonía' (Theogony, birth of gods) are linked with social life and convey the philosophic beliefs. The first one is historical. It is a fact that in ancient Hellás (Greece), there were neither religious texts, nor priesthood. The second element is human, as it has to do with the character of the mysteries. The soul longs for mysteries. The soul is the one that "suffers", is the one that "opens" to the divine sight and accepts directly the influence of the mystic ceremonies.

Mysteries are not taught or learned. Mysteries are not lessons.

..τούς τελουμένους οὐ μαθεῖν τί δεῖν, ἀλλὰ παθεῖν. (Periphrastically: ...you must not educate the initiated in what they have to do. They have to learn internally.)

J.P. Vernant in his 'Meléte thanátou' (Study on death), Revue Philosophique (1960), formulated and enlightened the mystification as follows: «On a personal level, it is the exercise that brings salvation through purification of the soul. On the city level, it is the exercise that shapes the youth with virtue and prepares the most deserving to practice authority with justice».

The most significant of the ancient Mysteries are as follows: the Egyptian, Mithraic in Persia (today Iran) Zoroaster, Scandinavian (of Goths of N. Europe), Druids (of Celts), Adonian (in Syria) and the Hellenic which include the Cretan, Kavirian, Dionysian, Orphic, Eleusinian, Pythagorean and the Hyakinthian.

As per the recent researchers, there are Greeks and non-Greeks who take different stands about the origin of mysteries. Their views are only indications and have no proofs.

In this paper, as stated above, we will refer partly to the Egyptian and the Hellenic Mysteries as Free Masonry has more commonality to them.

Egyptian Mysteries

The information we have on the Egyptian Mysteries is derived mainly from the Hermetic Scripts, which include the ancient Egyptian wisdom moulded with the ancient Hellenic thought. This happened, when they were translated into Greek by Manéthon (Manetho) during the Ptolemaéos (Ptolemy) years, between 4th and 1st centuries B.C.

The Egyptian priest, Manéthon who knew both hieroglyphics and the Hellenic language well, with the assistance of Timótheos, a Greek priest and adviser to Ptolemaéos the 1st (337- 283 B.C.), undertook the task of translating into Greek the ancient Egyptian scripts. Their work gave a history about Egypt which is considered authentic and objective. Manéthon wrote eight books, although “Kýphon” and “Critics on Heródotos” are disputed as not belonging to him. One of his books, (Sóthios) is dedicated to Ptolemaéos the 2nd, Philádelphos. Among others things, he wrote: «...in accordance to your instructions, the sacred books written by our ancestors will be presented to You ».

Manéthon (Thoth) means truth. Thoth or Tot or Tat is the name of the god of Wisdom, whose scribe wrote in hieroglyphics the famous works of Egyptian wisdom about mankind. Thoth is attributed as Hermés and to distinguish him from the Greek Hermés, is called Trismégistos (Thrice Greatest). Therefore, Thoth is Lógos which penetrate everything. His wife Nehemáout, is characterized by the pre-Christians Gnostics as a form of wisdom in Lógos. She is Nature. According to the Egyptians, Lógos (Thoth) and Nature (Nehemáout) are those who put Order in the Universe.

There are elements in Hermés Trismégistos’ scripts related to Orphéfs (Orpheus) and the Orphic Mysteries. There are similarities but while Orphism became religion, in the Hermetic Scripts, even though there are elements characteristic of religion (such as praise), religion is not evident. In addition, there are no rituals or atonements, which are the basic characteristics of religion and which are the main content in Orphic Mysteries. The only mystery in Hermetic Scripts is Lógos, the mystery that exists in Christianity. Humans can reach the absolute intellect with the help of Lógos, the utmost god of knowledge.

Not the knowledge we know today which is the product of science, but by the knowledge gained through introspection, brought forth through Initiation.

The Hermetic Scripts are the Gospel of a community of esoteric mysticism in which the individual, on his own, can reach perfection and the union with the Supreme Intellect.

Poemándres (Poemander) is considered the founder of this community and, according to the scripts, he is a non-existing person but a personification of a powerful teaching, the Enlightened Mind. He leads the determine individual to the Absolute Knowledge. Although we are sure that the Hermetic Community existed, we have no evidence to prove it. The Gnostic perception which followed, owes much to the Hermetic Scripts.

The meaning of Lógos as the creator of the Universe, exists among the Hermetic Community as well as in Christianity. In St. John's Gospel: "Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος,..." "In the beginning was Lógos,..." "Lógos", has the same meaning as has in the Hermetic Scripts which are older than the Christian Gospels and Gnostics.

From Hermés Trismégistos, it is evident that Egyptians took mysteries from the Greeks, as the hermetic scripts that include the ancient Egyptian wisdom moulded along with the ancient Hellenic thought of Ptolemaíos years between 4th and 1st centuries B.C.

The Hellenic mysteries

The information we have on the Hellenic mysteries are derive from the ancient authors such as, Aristophánes, and Damágetos (5th century B.C.), Athenagóras (2nd century B.C.) and Próclos (5th century B.C.), who supports that the entire Hellenic Theology derives from the Orphic mysteries and that Pythagóras (6th century B.C.) was initiated by the Orphic priest Aglaóphemos. Also Pláton (5th century B.C.) obtained the entire Orphic knowledge from Pythagorian and Orphic script.

(Part one of a two part series)