

Freemasonry In America

Symbolic Meaning of the Signet Ring Art Moore Scholarship Essay

APA Format

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Abstract:

The Masonic ring has significant historical, symbolic, and ideological value in the Masonic community.

As a signal of membership and adherence to the values of the brotherhood, the ring is a constant reminder of values upheld by Masons.

A signet ring has been worn by many noblemen throughout the history of the world, and was often used as an official stamp to seal or mark important documents. Such rings were traditionally worn by royalty and were forged from the most expensive metals and encrusted with precious jewels. Wearing a signet ring proved the wearer's credibility and authenticity, and symbolized their power in the community. Men of significant status such as Julius Caesar, Caesar Augustus, Pompey, and even Michelangelo wore a signet ring. These historic figures' rings bore the faces of their predecessors or meaningful symbolic images. Just as these men carried symbols of strength with them, modern Masons wear the Masonic ring to authenticate themselves as being a member of a unique fraternity that has translated the tradition of building architectural wonders into building better men through brotherhood and moral values. The Freemason signet ring is a "sign" in the sense it is a silent signal of membership and adherence to the beliefs of the oldest fraternity on earth.

No one knows for sure when the Freemasons began wearing signet rings, but early tradesman and workers who were the first to join the Masonic brotherhood made their signet rings by hand by carving symbols, mottoes, and logos into different metals. The Masonic community is a system of morality, and for modern Masons the signet ring signifies a Mason's loyalty to their brotherhood and their degree as a Master Mason. Even today, the Papal signet ring is similar to the Masonic ring in that it bears the seal of authority to its wearer.

Many of the components of the Masonic ring are indicative of capstone ideologies of the Masonic brotherhood and are stonemason tools that stand for basic virtues such as brotherly love, relief, and truth. Each Masonic ring possesses a circular face, which symbolizes the cyclical nature of the eternal bond shared with the Freemason brotherhood. The center of the ring bears typical working tools (the Masonic square and compass with a capital letter G). This central symbol is believed to signify the medieval architectural tools used in building King Solomon's Temple; the square implying moral

righteousness, fairness, and virtue, while the compass usually is interpreted as the single Freemason within the all-encompassing circle of his brotherhood. Some believe the "G" in the center of the square and compass might represent "God", or "Great Architect of the Universe." The symbol can also be interpreted to mean "Geometry", which was used by the early Freemasons in their architectural creations. Because the Freemasons are a non-denominational fraternity, the symbol of the "G" in the center of the ring is really a universal symbol of faith, regardless of specific religion.

The ring on the hand of the Mason is a constant reminder of the Freemasons' ideal of "better men make a better world." The set of principles which all Masonic brothers live by begins with a moral code of living responsibly and honorably, and to turn principles and convictions into actions. A Freemason is devoted to giving, expanding his knowledge of the world around him, to be religious by having faith in a non-denominational Supreme Being, to not discuss politics or attempt to influence elections or legislation as a group, and to judge no one by their wealth, social status, or outward appearance.

The orientation in which the ring is worn is believed to have personal significance. Some believe the two legs of the compass should point toward the brother to help him remember his obligation as a Mason. Others believe the two legs of the compass should point away from the wearer as they point away from the Master at the Lodge Altar. Some rings have a colored background that denotes the attained level of membership, or represents a certain Lodge.

The Masonic community is a brotherhood that reaches to all corners of the world, and the symbols of the Freemasons are universal. The ring worn by Mason brothers, while containing much history and symbolism, is a universal signal of membership in the oldest, largest, and possibly most coveted fraternity known to the modern world.

Works Cited

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