



SOLOMON'S TEMPLE – THE PILLARS OF THE PORCH (PART II)

by George Weil

Thought is the Raw Material

In this article, we explore the pillars of Solomon's Temple by going more into the details of the architecture. The pomegranates, lilies and spheres will be our focus.

Let's begin.

The pillars are topped by chapters, which are the upper part of a column that supports the entablature and are decorated with pomegranates, lilies and spheres. How many of them and how they are distributed depends on which Biblical passage you read.

POMEGRANATE: *“And four hundred pomegranates for the two networks...”* (1 Kings 7:42) Commentators on rituals have compared the seeds of the pomegranates to the Freemasons, who are joined together by their souls. It was customary to place ornamentation like pomegranates upon the tops of columns and on other symbolic applications.

For example, the skirt of Aaron's robe was decorated with golden bells and pomegranates. *“And they made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates upon the hem of the robe, round about the pomegranates.”* (Exodus, 39:24-26)

In ancient Greece, pomegranate seeds were linked to the idea of error. Persephone tells her mother how she was seduced against her will: *“He cunningly placed sweet sugared food in my hand, a pomegranate seed, and forced me to eat it despite myself.”* (Homeric Hymn to Demeter)

Was this then a forbidden fruit, like the one eaten by Eve? In the text of Genesis the fruit is not actually named. *“But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.”* (Genesis, 3:3)

The word used for fruit is *peri*. This has become “the apple” in translation, but many commentators and scholars now associate the apple with the pomegranate, which are more common in the Middle East than apples.¹

¹ Symbols of Freemasonry, Assouline, New York, 2000, Chapter 8, p. 44.

LILIES: The lily ornamentation that is described as a part of the two pillars in the porch of Solomon's Temple is said to be, from the whiteness of the flower, symbolic of purity and peace. The plant so frequently mentioned in the Old Testament under the name of lily was actually, the lotus of Egypt and India. This was among the Egyptians a sacred plant, found everywhere on their monuments, and used in their architectural decorations. It is evident from the description in Kings, that the pillars of the porch of King Solomon's Temple had a striking resemblance to the pillars of the Egyptian temples.

Another explanation for the symbolism of the lily or lotus: "The flower of the water lily or lotus rises from a root growing at the bottom of the water, and maintains its position on the surface by its columnar stalk. It is therefore symbolic of the power of the Almighty constantly employed to secure the safety of all the world."²

SPHERES: Scholars have surmised that the chapter or upper part of the pillars was in a shape of a bowl, not a sphere as is often said. Modern research indicates that the upper bowl probably was a vessel to contain oil, which was used to illuminate the darkness. It is known that similar decorated pillars were used at shrines in Palestine and Cyprus during the period 1000 BCE to 900 BCE, when King Solomon's temple was built.

The Greek historian Herodotus, writing in about 450 BCE, described two large pillars that stood near the temple of Hercules at Tyre, which "*shone at night*". Like the Phoenician models, the two immense incense stands at the porch of King Solomon's temple would have illuminated the facade of the temple on Mount Moriah at night, while also catching the first glint of the sunrise at Jerusalem. They have been interpreted as sacred obelisks, their blazing smoking wicks recalling to worshippers the pillars of fire and cloud that led the Israelites of old through the wilderness.³

CONCLUSION: Each Masonic degree ceremony is based on the preparation and usage of the relevant stone during construction and ultimately the completion of the temple. The way in which a stone is prepared by a stonemason and utilised by fitters and erectors on the building site, is used to illustrate how an individual should prepare himself for the life hereafter. The moral lessons imparted are also illustrated by the application of the various working tools used at the various stages of the work, not only in the shaping, testing, fitting and marking of the stones, but also during erection on the site.⁴

By no means are we finished. This article is just a glimpse into a very complex subject that requires a great deal of review and study. An informed Mason is a better Mason. Hopefully, this and future articles will help each of us develop a deeper appreciation of the symbolism woven into the entire fabric of Freemasonry.

My brothers, until the next article.

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² Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Kindred Sciences, Albert Mackey, Vol. II, Chicago, 1878, p. 781.

³ King Solomon's Temple, R.W. Bro. Don Falconer, Pietre-Stones Article, Masonic papers on-line

⁴ Ibid. Introduction.