

The Myth of No History before 1717

A Research Paper for Scientia Coronati Research Lodge No. 4

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Contents

<i>Prologue</i>	3
<i>The Dionysian Artificers</i>	4
<i>The Comacine Masters</i>	6
<i>European Secret Societies</i>	7
<i>The Machine</i>	8
<i>Epilogue</i>	9

The “Myth” Of No History Before 1717

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Prologue

Ancient myths have almost disappeared in our understanding of them. This is due to mans mental advancement and, at the same time, forgetfulness. Mans tendency is to decry and ridicule the most outstanding of these myths as “child’s play” and contrived nonsense. Regardless, if pursued with an open mind, it will be found that the ancients understood more than meets the eye about nature and its inner secrets. In addition the ancients used these myths as teaching tools for candidates. To keep the secrets hidden truths were presented in the form of allegory and thus kept from the vulgar and unworthy. It is wise to note also St. Matthew: **Mat 7:6** “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you”. It is submitted that the spirit of what St. Matthew quoted is one of three reasons there *appears* to be no Masonic history before 1717. It was difficult if not sometimes impossible to remain a viable organization when during the centuries of darkness, fear, and inquisition many died for their beliefs and doctrine. These three reasons (fear, inquisition and casting pearls before swine) are why secrecy was required and one of the reasons secrecy is maintained today regardless of the thought of “there are no secrets in Freemasonry”. In addition, one has to wonder, why and how Speculative Freemasonry has become a worldwide organization and enjoys little or no persecution. This is not to mention the reformation that was undermining traditional authority. We shall see, as presented, a golden thread weaving it’s way through time before 1717 (when the Grand Lodge of England was formed) that survived and is now what is called Speculative Masonry.

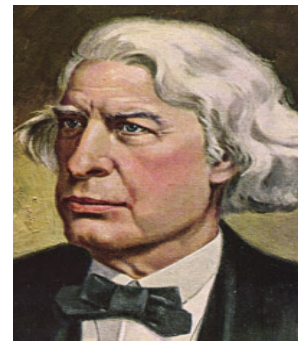
The Dionysian Artificers

The earliest known (in the Western world) order of Masons (stone masons and architects) who had enshrouded their secrets in allegory, rites and initiations and contemplated the mysteries of life and nature were the Dionysian Artificers. A myth now is all that is left of their legacy.

Dionysius, who was considered to be a god of ecstasy (or rapture), was one facet of the Greek symbolism of God. The symbol for this rapture was the vine of grapes¹. The grape, in ancient Greece, was considered to be the symbol of universal consciousness. St. Francis of Assisi lived for these moments of union with the divine. As all know St. Francis was the founder of the Franciscan Order

Theatre also played an important part in the life of Greece. However, in its inception, it was in order to teach initiates and disciples in a sacred place. This was the original intention of the amphitheatre. First it was in groves (now the outdoor degree?) and later buildings designed to inspire (now a modern lodge). Regardless, Operative Masons (Dionysians) were required to build them.

The Dionysian Artificers were a perfect example of group of people that, along with their outer work (architecture), taught a system of morality, conduct and mysteries of nature. They had a system of three degrees which communicated to the applicant the sacred mysteries². Similar to our present day Order an aspirant was required to be of a certain age. What we call now the investigating team was required to examine and prepare him for the initiations and ceremonies. If the candidate's conduct was found to be



Albert G. Mackey

irregular or he had committed some heinous crime he was disqualified. In preparation of the third initiation the lesser mysteries were taught during the first and second initiations. Then

¹ Not wine which is a degradation of the original concept of Dionysius. Jesus also referred to himself as a vine. See **Jhn 15:1** I am the true **vine**, and my Father is the husbandman.

² Vide **The Dionysian Artificers**, DaCosta (a Mason, circa 1820) and Manly P. Hall; The Philosophical Research Society. This is a very rare manuscript. Mackey wrote a book concerning them (see **The Dionysian Artificers**).

finally the candidate was put on a couch to symbolize death and resurrection. Of the parallels to the many landmarks of modern Masonry there is no doubt. Yet our beloved modern Masonry remains dry in some ways that the Dionysian's seem to have been adept at; bringing livingness to thirsty souls wandering in the wilderness. Albert G. Mackey writes extensively about the Dionysian Architects and the mysteries of which they taught³

The concept of death and resurrection appears everywhere and in many forms. Yet they were pivotal points in the history of orders and fraternities like a golden thread weaving its way through the fabric of life. The myth of Dionysian contains the journey of Dionysian into the underworld to rescue the soul of his mother from the darkness of Hades. Adonis's journey to the netherworld to look for his wife and his subsequent return and resurrection is a good example. In order of time, Jesus died and was resurrected. So we too must die and be resurrected. This does not always mean physical death. It is a death to our souls that must be undertaken. The drama of the third degree echoes this concept. Strangely enough Hellenistic religion taught the concept of no life after death. That there "was no future and no return"⁴ from the shadowy underworld. The Dionysian was the first "religion" to proclaim life after death. This was in direct conflict the Hellenes. Eventually the Dionysian's claim of reincarnation and life after death won the day.

This they did BEFORE the birth of Jesus and the appearance of the Christ. Darkness seemed to reign after this period, Rome fell....officially in 476.

One argument is this: We teach in the third degree the legend of M.E Hiram Abif; An event that clearly happened before the birth of Christ. Passed down from generation after generation is the drama of the strong grip of the Lions paw raising M.E. H. A. Where who and what happened that someone sat down and wrote the landmarks of Masonry during this time and having survived hundreds of years! One has to wonder where and how the landmarks continued from the Dionysius (teaching a system of morality, grips etc.) to our modern day Freemasonry. And continue they did. These are the murky days of our history

³ Refer to page 213. The Encyclopedia of Freemasonry. Albert G. Mackey 33°, Charles T. McClenachen 33°, the Masonic History Company 1920.

⁴Manly P. Hall's The Myth of the Dionysius

that where, possibly, a light will shine from the as yet untranslated documents and records of old are revealed. Secrecy was obviously a must for the early Masons or else how did we acquire the requirement of secrecy⁵ in present day Masonry. Did the Roman Catholic Church pose a threat to the secrets of modern Masonry?[?] Regardless, there is no question or doubt that what we have received from the past has remarkably been preserved in the form of landmarks recognizable to Masons. What is interesting to contemplate is where and how was the legend of M.E. H. A. was incorporated into the teachings of modern Freemasonry.

The Comacine Masters

After the Dionysian's settled in what was called Ionia, Rome gathered the intelligencia and artificers until their zenith under the reign of Augustus Caesar (63 B.C.-14 C.E.). Called the Roman College of Architects much of Rome's architecture was built during this time. At each turn of the page of history we find the Craft in its various forms resurfacing. Particularly when the tradition of the builders passed to the Order of Comacine Masters which bridged the gap between "Pagan" artificers and Christian cathedral builders. The Comacine had meeting places called Logia. White aprons, gloves, tokens and passwords for identification were used by the disciples and Masters.

Regardless of Rome's fall the tradition of Masonry was carried on by the guilds (see Fig. 1) that were contracted to build churches and cathedrals. What is interesting to note is that they were ardent students of Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism and Manichaeism. They were greatly influenced, when their time came, by the Lollards⁶. The Lollards, as taught by John Wycliffe, believed an individual and priests did not have to belong to the Church of Rome to be a Christian or a priest much more a Mason. What is more is that the Lollards taught the supremacy of the Holy Scriptures over the authority of priests. This philosophy was considered heretical to the Church of Rome. They were also influenced by the Templar philosophy.

⁵ Secrecy concerning password, grips etc. Much more was considered secret until the rituals were published.

⁶ Wikipedia

We cannot forget the influence of the Inquisition upon society, Freemasons and the early Church of Rome. From 1476 to 1834 an estimated 2,000 people were executed. The early craftsmen during this time were ostensibly Christians and protected by the Church of Rome. On the other hand one cannot dismiss the influence of such groups as the Monks, Catharoi, Templars, Albigensis and Rosicrucians and a host of other secret societies that sprang up during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. John Yarker⁷ remarks also that the early Lodges were conversant in “Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Cabalism and Rosicrucianism”⁸

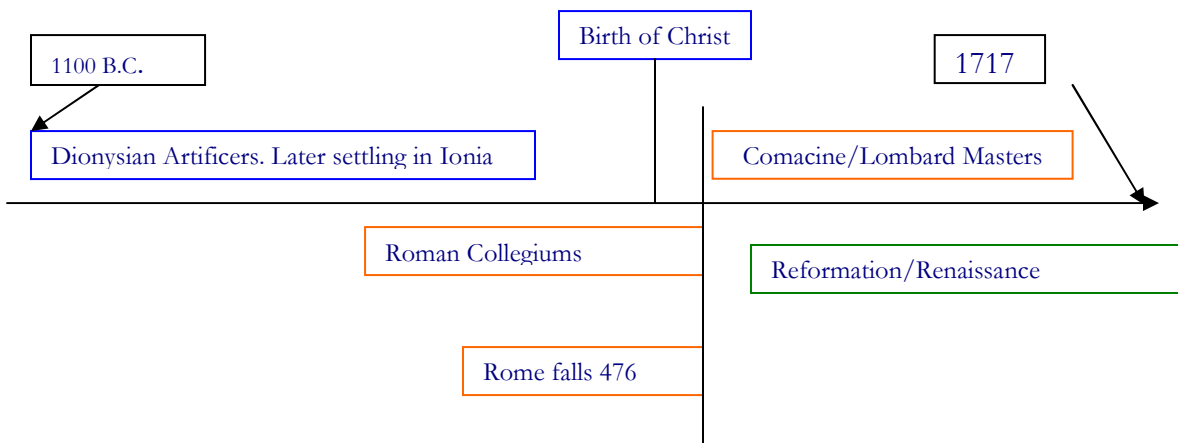


Figure 1. Estimated timeline for early Masonry.

European Secret Societies.

In addition to the atmosphere of inquisition Europe was inundated with secret societies. Many of them were spurious and of dubious merit. Some promised much but delivered only

⁷ Initiated: October 25, 1854
 Lodge of Integrity No. 189 (later 163) Manchester
 Affiliated: April 27, 1855
 Worshipful Master, 1857
 Fidelity Lodge No. 623, Dunkinfield
 Demitted: 1862

⁸ See *The Arcane Schools* (Belfast, 1909)

a parchment with cabalistic designs and unreadable signatures. Many a neophyte were duped into paying large amounts of money for “secrets” of a Hermetic nature. These societies flourished in Italy and Germany. It was during this time that Modern Freemasonry was born with arguably an esoteric background. Figures such as Voltaire⁹, Cagliostro, Louis Claude de Saint Martin¹⁰ and Pasqually were instrumental in forming the higher degrees of Masonry; a remnant Egyptian thought and practice. Masonry survived the charlatans of Mysticism and went on to be a worldwide organization.

The Machine

Another influence to early Masonry is little considered. The advent of the Machine in the early 18th and 19th Centuries all but eliminated the need for operative (old school) masons. Technology for cutting stone rather than a chisel made its appearance. This fact added to the impulse of separation between Operative and Speculative Masonry and made the F.C. degree no longer needed for Operative Masons.

⁹ Voltaire spent a great deal of time defending Manichaeans from the early church. Made a Mason a few months before his death (1778) he was involved in the processes of social reformation (Manly P. Hall, *Masonic Orders of Fraternity*, page 65).

¹⁰ Saint Martin (1743-1803) was arrested during the French “Reign of Terror” because he was a gentleman by birth and from a wealthy family. He was rescued from certain death because of affiliations with Freemasons.

Epilogue

So we see the thread of Masonry, now speculative, winding its way throughout history. Many are those who have gone this way before leaving a pathway for men to tread. We look behind, as brothers, to help new brothers on their way. Regardless of what it was called thousands of years ago the path remains the same. Masonry in its truest spirit is a path of initiation. Our landmarks and ritual testify to this.

Our candidate education system¹¹ teaches us that in 1717 a Grand Lodge was formed from four lodges. This is the official date of our beginning and recognized for centuries. The substance¹² though of Masonry existed in some form that is traceable back to ancient times. Thus it is evident we owe a great deal to these ancient organizations. Operative or speculative there is still the outline of philosophic and spiritual searching for the meaning of life. Morality, so very important to any spiritual path, is the corner stone handed down from age to age.

¹¹ Candidate Education System, Arizona Grand Lodge, p. 7 “Approaching the Portals”

¹² Landmarks, philosophy, technology etc.

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