

The Traveling Mason  
by  
Johnnie K. Hill  
Springhill Lodge No. 348  
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Looking back through the misty reaches of time in an attempt to find the beginning of the Masonic Fraternity is very difficult. Many great Masonic scholars have tried to separate fact from fiction, and myth from reality. It is my belief there was no central starting point, but that it evolved from a series of originating points, taking the best of each until it became the Fraternity that we are today.

The evidence is overwhelming that the medieval guilds were part of the process that resulted in modern day Freemasonry. There is solid evidence that prior to the guilds of England, France, and Germany, there existed an organization called the Comacina, and prior to it, the Roman College of Artificers, which was begun by Numa in the year B.C. 714, and whose members were originally Greek. Prior to that there were secret organizations, and religions known as the Ancient Mysteries which may have had an effect on Freemasonry.

The most important of these mysteries were the Osiric in Egypt, the Mitharic in Persia, the Cabiric in Thrace, the Andonisian in Syria, the Dionysiac and Eleusinnian in Greece, the Scandinavian among the Gothic, and the Druids among the Celts. Others were the Sarmoung Society, Manicheism, Zarathustra, Crata Repoa, Magism, Brahman, and many others. In all the mysteries, we find certain basic similarities: qualifications for admission; ceremonies of initiation that celebrated the death of an admired figure and their resurrection; doctrines of a system of secret knowledge; and an oath of secrecy, which, if violated, was considered a sacrilegious crime, and carried a serious penalty.

There are many different theories as to the relationship of the ancient mysteries to the rites of Freemasonry. They bear many similarities, but perhaps the truest theory, according to Mackey, is that we should disregard a supposed chain of descent from the mysteries to Freemasonry and attribute it to a natural coincidence of human thought. The legend of the third degree, and the legends of all the ancient mysteries are identical in their teachings of a future life after death. This lesson was and is taught by allegories and symbolism. This does not prove a link between the mysteries and Freemasonry, but is in the minds of humans to nourish a belief in the future life and to dress it with symbolic meanings. Any connection between the mysteries and Freemasonry must be explored in the Roman College of Artificers.

As Roman Legions spread throughout the world into poorly developed countries, they took with them their building expertise. With every Roman Legion came lodges of artificers that built bridges, a system of roads, aqueducts, and great and important buildings. The German historian Krause's theory of the relationship between the Roman College of Artificers and Freemasonry is outlined in his work entitled "Die drei alltesten Kunsterkunden." He advances the theory that the organization of Freemasonry can be traced through its design, its characteristics, its interior

organization, and its very purpose, from the Roman College through the Guilds of the middle ages to the English organization of 1717. Comparing the form and organization of colleges and Masonic Lodges, we find many similarities. First, no College could consist of less than three members. Three Masons are required to constitute a Lodge. Both require three members to make it legal. The Colleges had officers with duties that are similar to the officers and their duties in a Masonic Lodge. Each college was presided over by a Magister, which, when, translated into English, is Master. The next officers were the Decuriones, analogous to the Masonic Wardens. There was a Scriba or Secretary and a Treasurarius or Treasurer. The Colleges had three classes: Seniors or Elders, or chief men, journeymen, and apprentices. The Masonic Lodge has masters, fellowcraft, and entered apprentices. Candidates for admission were voted on as in Lodges, and regular meetings were held to initiate candidates, conduct business, instruct members, and contributions were made to assist destitute members and strangers. The most important point made by Krause was that the colleges made a symbolic use of their tools to teach moral lessons. After the destruction of the Colleges, Freemasonry, in the establishment of its Lodges, used these Colleges as a model to frame its organization. Or, was it the result of the growth of a variety of organizations with the Roman College as the principal contributor? There is solid evidence that there is a remarkable similarity between the form of the Roman Colleges and Masonic Lodges, and there is some evidence of similarity in the substance of the two, namely, symbolism and charities. These colleges continued until 460 A.D., when Rome was overrun by barbarians, and many of its institutions destroyed. Members of the Architectural College of Rome escaped to the Island of Isola Comacini in Lake Como in Lombardy, Northern Italy, where they formed an Association called Comacini. The first record of a written document was an edict called the Code of Rotharis, signed November 23, 643 A.D. concerning the operation of the Magestrai Comacini. It was followed by "The Code of Luitbrans" eight years later, containing further regulations of the practice of the Comacini Masters.

As time went on, the Comacini Masters, and other associations were formed to design and build Monasteries, Cathedrals, and other important buildings. It spread throughout Europe, and the phrase "Traveling Masons" came into existence.

Assured of assistance and safety on the road by the Popes of the Catholic Church, through his ministers in different countries, and a monopoly for the erection of religious buildings, independent of the laws of the countries they were in, and subject only to the laws of the Association, Masons constructed many important buildings.

The same men were employed in one Lodge after another. Not only were these changes or migrations from one Cathedral to another accomplished in Italy, but in France, Germany, England, and many other countries.

There are many examples of Lodges of operative Masons who were engaged to build great buildings. One was the Cathedral of Strasburg, Germany, founded in 504 A.D destroyed by lightning in 1007, and rebuilt between 1015 and 1439. The ancient register of Masons quotes the regulations of the association that built the splendid cathedrals of that city. The Masons who were engaged in construction were divided into separate ranks of Masters, Craftsmen, and

Apprentices. The place where they assembled was called “Hutte,” a German word equivalent to our English term “Lodge”. They employed the implements of Masonry as tools and emblems and received new members with secret ceremonies, and admitted many eminent persons, especially ecclesiastics, who were not operative Masons, but who gave them patronage and protection. When work was completed by the Traveling Masons, so the transition theory goes, the operative Masons moved on to their next job. Those who remained behind, and who had participated over the years, may have decided to continue to meet and use all of the rituals and practices of operative Masons except that of actual building. This may have been the start of Speculative Masonry.

The Cathedral of Strasburg is closely connected with the history of Masonry. Erwin Von Steinbach, [according to Von Aldeuch Bauk] convoked The First Congress of Strasburg. The reason for the Congress was to establish a brotherhood for the continuation of the work on the Cathedral. It was at this Congress that they assumed the name Freemason as had been done in England previously. The Congress was attended by Masons from Germany and Italy. As Hutten or Lodges were scattered over Europe, it became necessary that some type of governing authority be created to govern the Lodges. According to Abbé Grandidier, an assembly was held in Ratisbon on April 25, 1459. By the statutes of this association, the Haupt-Hutte, the Grand or Mother Lodge of Strasburg was created with authority over all of the lodges in Germany under the title of Ordenunge der Steinn-metzen, the Strasburg or Constitutions of the stone-masons of Strasburg. This action was confirmed by Maximilian I in 1498. This document has been published many times - in 1810 by Krause, in 1819 by Heldman, and in 1844 by Heideloff. The master of the works of Strasburg and his successors were made the Grand Masters of the Fraternity of German Masons. Hindle [Hist. 72] says that even though German masonry was abolished by imperial edict on August 16, 1731, the Mother Lodge never lost its prestige in German masonry. The Haupt-Hutte in German Masonry takes a position equivalent to the legendary Lodge of York in England or Kilwinning in Scotland.

The Second Congress of Strasburg was convoked by the Grand Lodge in 1564 as a continuation of one which had been held at Basle. Its purpose was to adopt statutes by which the Stein-Werksrecht, or Stone-Masons’ law, was improved.

Many of the documents to support the history of Masonry were destroyed when Hitler came into power and outlawed Masonry; however, there are many Masonic scholars who made reference in books and papers, prior to Hitler’s rise to power, to the events connected to the history of German masonry.

There was created by papal edict, Corporations or Fraternities of Masons, giving them certain privileges and immunities. Its purpose was to encourage Italian artisans who were capable of erecting imposing religious structures. The earliest structure of this kind in Scotland, of which we have documented evidence, is the Abbey of Kilwinning that was begun in 1140. This is the account of the events surrounding the building of the Abby by Sir John Sinclair-- a number of Freemasons came from the continent to build a monastery (my words—Probably Italian) and with them an architect or Master Mason to superintend and carry out the work. Being a good and true Mason, intimately acquainted with all the arts and parts of masonry as known on the

continent, was chosen as Master of the meetings of all the brethren of all Scotland. He gave the rules for the conduct of the brethren at those meetings, and decided appeals from all over Scotland. Traditional belief is that the Lodge was held in a chamber in the Abbey, measuring 38 feet square. Today you can see the Mason's marks, and many of them are still beautiful.

Further evidence of the authenticity of these accounts is the existence in the archives of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, Charters issued from Kilwinning Lodge to Scoon and Bertha Lodges [today, known as Scone and Perth Lodges]. There are few early records in existence. Historians have given a combination of reasons. 1- The destruction of the buildings during the period of the reformation (1560). 2- Records may have been carried back to the Vatican by the monks when the Catholic Church lost its power in Scotland.

3- Records may have been transferred to Eglinton castle that was destroyed by fire in 1544. In any event in 1807, The Grand Lodge of Scotland, after a period of negotiating, recognized the Lodge of Mother Kilwinning No. 0 as the first Lodge to be established in Scotland.

There came a point in time when the Kings of Scotland were the Grand Masters of Masons. The time cannot be determined, but we can establish that James I (1406-37) was Royal Grand Master. He gave up that office when he levied yearly dues on every Mason in Scotland of Four Pounds to be paid to the Grand Master chosen by the Brethren and approved by the King. His son, James II (1437-60) granted the office of Grand Master to William St. Clair and to his successors. They were Grand Masters until 1736 when the last male heir line resigned the hereditary office. The Barons of Roslin assembled the Grand Lodge at Kilwinning to select a new Grand Master and establish the Grand Lodge on November 30, 1736.

King James VI of Scotland (later James I of England) was initiated as a Mason in 1601 in the Lodge of Scot and Perth. He appointed William Schaw as the General Warden of the craft, and instructed him to improve the general structure of Masonry. He issued two codes of statutes in 1598 and 1599. Those statutes laid down the regulation for the organization and practice of the craft. He did more to develop the system of Freemasonry than any other person, because he was partly responsible for not only developing the regulation of the working stonemasons, but revived the medieval Masonic mythology and rituals in a renaissance atmosphere, and continued the process that developed into Speculative Masonry. No proof exists, but it is a probability that Sir Francis Bacon, Solicitor General, appointed by King James I, played a large part in the development of the second degree.

The Regis MS, 1390 and The Cook MS, 1420 support and make reference that many great and important buildings in the west of England, including Magnificent Cathedrals, Abbeys and Castles in Wells, Gloucester, Worcester, and Hereford were built or started during the reign of King Athelstan, (895-939). King Athelstan (Grandson of Alfred the Great) encouraged many Masons from the Continent to come to the west of England where he was King of Wessex before he became King of all England. He appointed them overseers of the buildings that he and others commissioned. He also gave them charges as to how to conduct themselves and they brought with them the charges and regulations that were in effect in Lodges since the early Roman days. According to the Cook MS, Athelstan's son (some differ whether it was his son or brother), Edwin, loved well the science of Geometry and he became a Mason himself. He gave charges to

Masons, as is now used in England. Moreover, he obtained a patent from the King that they should make assembly when they saw reasonable time to come together.

Using the authority from the King, according to the Regis MS and the Cook MS, Edwin summoned all Free and Accepted Masons to meet with him in congregation in York in 926 A.D., to form a Grand Lodge under him as Grand Master. "That they brought with them many old writings and records of the craft, some in French, some in Latin, some in Greek, and other languages; and from the content thereof, they framed the Constitutions of the English Lodges, and made a law for themselves, to preserve and observe the same for all time."

Accepting that an assembly took place in York, and you must accept it if you are convinced of the authenticity of the Regis and Cook documents, then it is reasonable also to assume that a written outline of the results of that assembly took place. These regulations are now called the "York Constitutions." There is strong evidence that the Regis to the Papworth Manuscripts had as a common origin the 926 A.D. Constitution. There had to be a starting point in England for the craft to begin, and the best theory is that it began in York.

In 1859, Brother W.J. Haughan, in his book, listed 57 manuscripts dated from 1390 to 1720 that were framed with changes and additions to the 926 A.D. document. Since that time more than 100 documents have come to light. In 1723, Anderson wrote the first Constitution on which the Grand Lodge of 1717 was based. In it, he declared the history of Freemasons was "collected from their general records and their faithful traditions of ages." He said in the "Book of Constitutions" that the record was taken from "a certain record of Freemasons written in the reign of King Edward IV." According to the famous Masonic historian, Preston, the manuscript "is said to have been in the hands of the famous Elias Ashmole." Ashmole is the first person, of whom we have documented evidence, admitted to a Lodge of Freemasons who did have a craft. According to legend, many others, in times past, had been admitted, hence the term "Accepted Masons."

Masonic and other historians have questioned the lack of written documentation, official records, and laws governing the craft. There are several reasons: 1- Destruction by natural forces; 2- The nature of the craft; 3- Wars; 4- Governmental action that forbade membership in the FRATERNITY; and 5- Papal bulls that would ex-communicate its members if they were Masons. Most countries at one time or another attempted to suppress Masonry. The most recent example was Hitler's persecution of Masons. Like all other attempts, it failed, and in Germany today, all the bodies of Masonry are alive and well.

Historians generally do not accept legends without proof; however, in the case of the Masonic fraternity, legend must be an integral part of our history. In my own Lodge, there are events that occurred that I know to be true, but I can't prove them because there is no documentation. Nevertheless, they are true because a brother told me that this event occurred and that he was there. By the same token, events in the history of our fraternity, occurred that we know to be true because of the confidence we have in those Masons who were there when the event occurred, and because the telling of it down through generations have not diminished its authenticity.

The five centuries prior to the fifteenth century were a period of the building of most of the great Cathedrals and Castles in Europe and England. During that time there is overwhelming reason to believe that most of the design and building was done by Lodges. The term “Traveling Mason” came into being because Masons traveled from one site to another and from one country to another. Masons are responsible for the Gothic style of building. Of course, some credit should be given the Catholic Church for inspiring that style of architecture, for having a part in the design by its monks, for funding the cost of the building, as well as full credit for supporting our operative brethren through many centuries. It is regrettable that they have been so antagonistic toward the fraternity since the papal bull of 1738 by Pope Clements XII.

There have been many attempts to directly connect the Operative Lodges of Masons of the middle ages to modern Speculative Lodges of today. There are many similarities as to form, organization, purpose, membership requirements, and initiations. There was a period of time after the 1500’s when there were fewer buildings to build and more Masons to erect them. The old Operative Masons had begun their Lodges as a matter of business, but it developed into much more than that. The fellowship, teachings, and rituals had become an important part of their life. To keep their Lodges alive, other men became interested in Freemasonry, so they began to accept other than builders into Lodges. The leaders of the day; artists, teachers, ecclesiastics, governmental officials, poets, and mathematicians were accepted which led to the title of Free and Accepted Masons.

This theory of transition has some evidence to support its concept. In Scotland, Kilwinning Lodge, and some of the lodges that it chartered were operative lodges. They are still in existence today operating as speculative lodges. There is further evidence in the minute books of Scottish Lodges from 1599 on that, in addition to managing the Mason’s trade, there was some form of ritual work being performed. The Lodge minute books of Aitcherison’s Haven show non-operative admissions in 1672, 1677, and 1693, and the membership roles at Aberdeen in 1670 show ten operative and thirty-nine non-operative Lodges.

There is less direct evidence in England to support the transition theory. Ashmole’s diary clearly describes his initiation in 1646 into a Lodge as a non-operative Mason. The Grand Lodge No. I MS, issued in 1583, is highly relevant to speculative masonry. Many English believe that the craft came from medieval stonemasons. The rational that Operative Lodges developed into Transitional Lodges then into Operative Lodges is a reasonable assumption, taking into consideration that the ancient mysteries, the Biblical time of building and the Greeks had an influence on the development of our Fraternity.

There are many theories as to the origin of Freemasonry and its development into the fraternity that we know today. One thing is certain, the “TRAVELING MASON” in the Middle Ages, and during the time of the dark ages, created some of the most beautiful and stately buildings that the world has ever known.

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