

The Great Pillars of Freemasonry

*Sir Knights Benjamin F. Hill, Knight Templar Cross of Honor
Grand Commander, Grand Commandery Knights Templar of Virginia 2020*

From earliest recorded history, pillars have been used, in a figurative sense, to describe an imaginary support on which the heavens rests upon earth and have always held an important place in Freemasonry. The word is derived from the Latin *pila*, any vertical support, a general term including *column*, *pilaster* or *pier*.¹ The scriptures abound with references to structural pillars but this paper will focus on Masonry's use of pillars or columns.

THE FIRST TWO PILLARS IN MASONIC LITERATURE

"The first two pillars in the literature of the Craft are those described in the legendary history which forms a part of the *Cooke Manuscript.*, c. 1410, one of the oldest versions of the "Old Charges". The story goes that they (the pillars) were made by the children of Lamech, in readiness for the destruction of the world by fire or flood. One of the pillars was made of marble, the other of "lacerus", because the first would not burn and the other would not "drown". The pillars were intended as a means of preserving "... all the sciences that they had found". This legend dates back to the early Apocryphal writings (based on the ancient Greek *Old Testament*), and in the course of centuries there arose a number of variations in which the story of the indestructible pillars remained fairly constant, although their erection was attributed to different heroes. The "Old Charges" were designed primarily to display the antiquity and high importance of the Craft...."²

There are ten (10) pillars mentioned on our ritual—five (5) are classed under the heading of Orders of Architecture, three (3) are spoken as supporters of the lodge, and two (2), the Great Pillars at the entrance to King Solomon's Temple.

THE FIVE ORDERS OF ARCHITECTURE

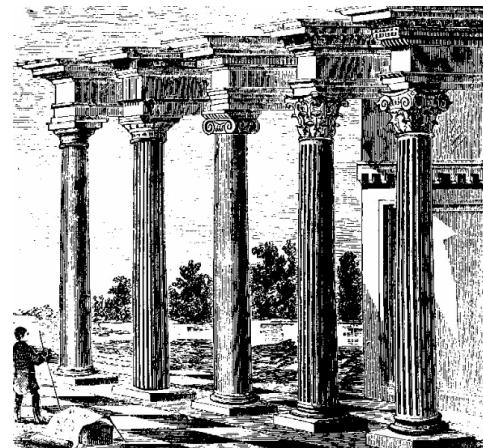
An architectural "order" is one of the classical systems of carefully proportioned and interdependent parts which include a *column* (comprised of base, shaft, and *capital*) and its *entablature* (comprised of *architrave*, *frieze*, and *cornice*). Although the capital of each of the five generally recognized orders is its most distinctive feature, each order also has its own

¹ From *ABACUS to ZEUS: A Handbook of Art History*, James Smith Pierce, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1977, p. 45

² *Pillars and Globes, Columns and Candlesticks*, Transitions of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, UGLE Vol. IXIX (1962), pp 204-211

characteristics system of propitiation, so that any alteration in the size of one part necessitates a change in the size of all other parts. It is a regular arrangement of the projecting parts of a building, which, united with those of the column, from a beautiful, perfect, and complete whole.

The Five Orders of Architecture are classed: **Tuscan**, **Doric**, **Ionic**, **Corinthian**, and **Composite**. The ancient and original Greek Orders of Architecture were the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian; to these the Romans added the Tuscan, which is plainer than the Doric, and Composite, which is nothing more than the Corinthian enriched with the Ionic **volute**, rolled ornaments on the capital. It is to the Greeks, not the Romans that Masons are indebted for great, judicious, and beautiful Architecture.



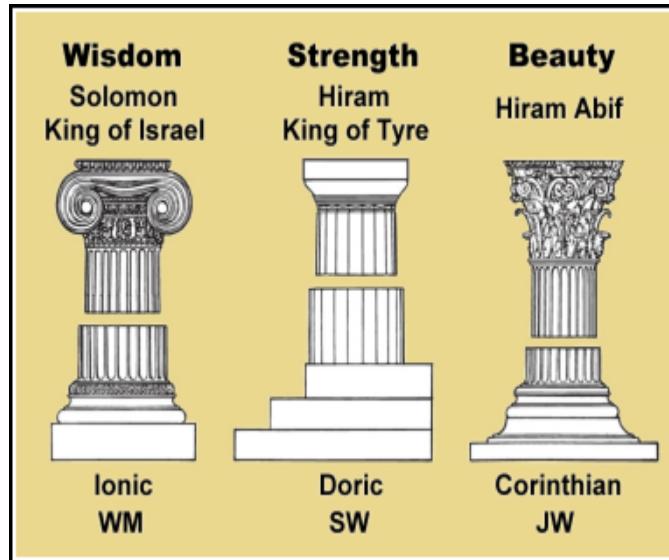
THE FIVE ORDERS OF ARCHITECTURE

Tuscan Doric Ionic Corinthian Composite

THE THREE SUPPORTING PILLARS OF THE LODGE

The old lodges of operative freemasons had a catechism for the instruction of supervisors concerning **Wisdom**, **Strength** and **Beauty**. Supervisors were enjoined to exercise wisdom when examining the work, so as to distinguish good work from bad work; to have the strength to reject anything that was not in accordance with the plans and the designs; and to have the capacity to appreciate beauty in the adornment of the structure.

This theme was carried over into early speculative rituals drawing attention to “three great pillars” that symbolically support Masonic Lodges. The “three great pillars” are emblematic of **Wisdom**, **Strength** and **Beauty** and are represented in Masonic Lodges by Ionic, Doric and Corinthian Pillars. These pillars represent the three Grand Masters at the building of the temple: Solomon King of Israel, Hiram King of



of Tyre and Hiram Abif the Tyre artificer in charge of the work, because King Solomon was wise to construct the temple, Hiram King of Tyre gave strong support with men and materials and Hiram Abif adorned the temple with great beauty. In Freemasonry the Master, the Senior Warden and the Junior Warden respectively represent those three Grand Masters.

A Masonic Lodge is not just a gathering of Masons. It is representative of the universe: the sun, the moon, the columns holding up the sky, and the stairs to the heavens. Freemasonry has been often defined as a "system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols." A system of morality reminds us of God's system, or pattern, which He established for us to follow each day of our lives. *Mysteries Veiled in allegory* reminds us that the Hidden Freemasonry can be found in the ritual and Holy Scriptures - expand your vision, seek the greater depth and understanding in those things deemed secretive in Freemasonry. Illustrated by symbols verifies the fact that Masonry is hidden within the Physical World, but open in the Spiritual and Intellectual Worlds.

WISDOM is seeing life simply and clearly. The ritual dramas that constitute the three ceremonies of Craft Masonry are part of a single initiation, as only after completing the three degrees does an initiate becomes a full Master Mason. It is also clear that the ritual is more moral than religious as Freemasonry is not a religion, even if it has religious basis, but a fraternity dedicated to teaching social concepts and promoting the three ideals of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. Wisdom, in short, means the constant striving towards the good and the understanding of the views of others. Wisdom implies bringing changes towards what is noble and true in religion, politics, and moral in the social life. The Craft and its principles are a means of transcending social, political and religious divisions and to lead to stability.³

STRENGTH represents the moral regeneration of the individual, and the moral aims of the Craft, as it is a universal symbol of the building of the spiritual temple within. The tools of the stonemason, too, symbolise the qualities essential to the perfection of the inner temple. There is little doubt that the same dedication that inspired the Craftsmen, who built Solomon's Temple, inspired also the Speculative Masons of the eighteenth century who were their spiritual heirs. Their views of King Solomon's Temple were based on their study of the Bible, but the Temple itself was seen as a cosmic symbol with a great spiritual significance that they tried to convey to others.⁴

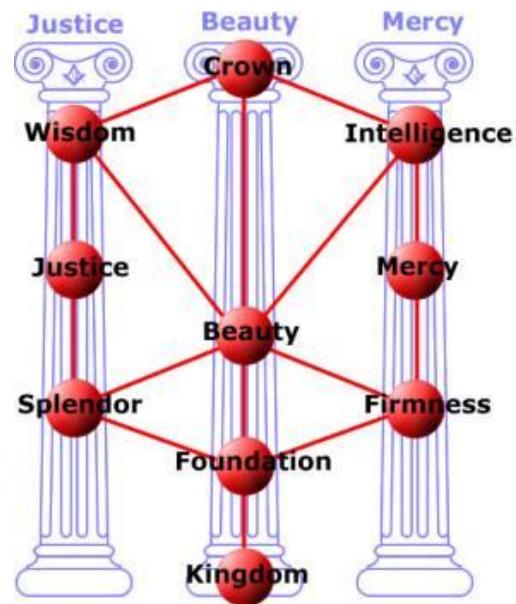


Figure 1 -
The relationship between the three pillars of the Sephiroth
and the three Great Columns of Freemasonry.

³ *The Three Pillars of Freemasonry*, Gilles C H Nullens, Fairfax Masonic Lodge No. 556, 2015

⁴ Ibid

BEAUTY, the third pillar of Freemasonry, represents the perfected Soul quality that every Mason should manifest in himself, and in every aspect of his life. The keywords for Beauty are Balance and Harmony. Balance between force and form, coupled with awareness, produces joy and fulfilment, the spiritual experience of Beauty. Harmony relies on the perfect proportion of its several parts and leads to Unity. When a Mason enters the Masonic Temple, between the pillars of Strength and Wisdom and of force and form, he experiences the Pillar of Beauty in all its Glory, and he becomes one with all his initiated brethren. It is a living Temple built from the enlightened Souls of Man. Masonry is the story of the transformation of the Soul, and the ritual of its ceremonies is an allegory of that journey that all Masons must make to achieve their higher potential.⁵

The Mason is informed that the Three Supporting Pillars of the Lodge are Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty because it is necessary that there should be wisdom to contrive, strength to support, and beauty to adorn all great and important undertakings.

SOLOMON'S PILLARS IN THE RITUAL

Since the dawn of civilization, the entrance of sacred and mysterious places has been guarded by two pillars. Whether in art or in architecture, twin pillars are recurring symbols in literature, art or mythology representing an important gateway towards the unknown. In Freemasonry, the pillars are called *Joachim* and *Boaz* and represent one of the Craft's most recognizable symbols, prominently featured in Masonic Art, documents, and buildings.

The Biblical account of King Solomon's Temple describes the work of Hiram, a worker skilled in metal:

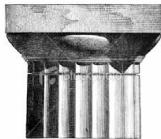
"King Solomon sent to Tyre and brought Hiram, whose mother was a widow from the tribe of Naphtali and whose father was from Tyre and a skilled craftsman in bronze. Hiram was filled with wisdom, with understanding and with knowledge to do all kinds of bronze work. He came to King Solomon and did all the work assigned to him. He cast two bronze pillars, each eighteen cubits high and twelve cubits in circumference. He also made two capitals of cast bronze to set on the tops of the pillars; each capital was five cubits high. A network of interwoven chains adorned the capitals on top of the pillars, seven for each capital. He made pomegranates in two rows encircling each network to decorate the capitals on top of the pillars. He did the same for each capital. The capitals on top of the pillars in the portico were in the shape of lilies, four cubits high. On the capitals of both pillars, above the bowl-shaped part next to the network, were the two hundred pomegranates in rows all around. He erected the pillars at the portico of the temple. The pillar to the south he named Joachim and the one to the north Boaz. The capitals on top were in the shape of lilies. And so the work on the pillars was completed."⁶

⁵ Ibid

⁶ 1 Kings 7:13-22, KJV

The explanation in the Fellowcraft Degree is similar in detail of the pillars in the Biblical account in 1 Kings; however Masonic ritual alludes to two spherical bodies placed on top of the pillars representing the terrestrial and celestial spheres depicting the earth's features and the heavenly bodies. An account of King Solomon's Temple in II Chronicles 4:13 suggest the pillars were topped by bowl-like containers. The difference between the Masonic and Biblical accounts does not distract from the symbolism of the spherical shapes representing the universality of Freemasonry.

The pillars Boaz and Joachim are steeped in symbolism and ritual. The two pillars are symbols of opposing forces in life: darkness and light; creation and destruction; male and female; above and below.



The construction of the pillars imparts the first clue to their difference in polarity. The left pillar is a Doric pillar of the Greek order of architecture known for their strength and stability.



The right-hand pillar is a Corinthian pillar, the most ornate and beautiful of the Greek architectural orders.

They are constructed as such for two different reasons. The Doric pillar for its Strength; Joachim represents masculinity and male polarity of the universe, strength of the heavens and all that is above, light, motion, and action. The Corinthian pillar for its Beauty; Boaz represents feminine beauty and female polarity of the universe, establishment of the earth and all that is below, darkness, passivity, receptivity, and silence.

In the process of becoming a Fellowcraft, you passed between those two great pillars, Joachim and Boaz, of your own free will, signifying you were no longer a minor but a man, you grew masonically, with the essentials for success, achievement, and happiness. Therefore, those pillars represent the spiritual development of man.

THE BROKEN COLUMN

Before I conclude this paper, it is important to address one of the ten pillars in our ritual—the Broken Column. The basis for the Three Supporting Pillars of the Lodge can be traced to an ancient Kabalistic concept that “the idea that the universe and the individual human being are made according to the same *plan fundamental to all Western philosophical thought until early in the 19th century* and represented in the design of Gothic cathedrals which are, in this sense, a representation of the universe and of mankind: Nave, the *Physical World or Body*; Choir, the *Psyche or Soul*; Sanctuary, the *Spirit*; and



the Tabernacle, the *Divinity*.⁷

The meaning of the Broken Column as explained in the ritual of the Master Mason Degree is that the column represents both the fall of Hiram Abif as well as the unfinished work of the Temple of Solomon. In Kabalistic thinking the Broken Column represents the severing of the path between Deity (Crown) and man (beauty). From this it can be inferred that it is a Mason's duty to restore and maintain the third pillar within himself and repair the spiritual bond between himself and the Great Architect of the Universe.

Masonry is the art of free thinking. It allows us to not only look back upon the knowledge of those who passed before us, but also to look deeper into ourselves, and temper our own understanding of the universe within us. Masonry is not a static thing, it has evolved and adapted over centuries.

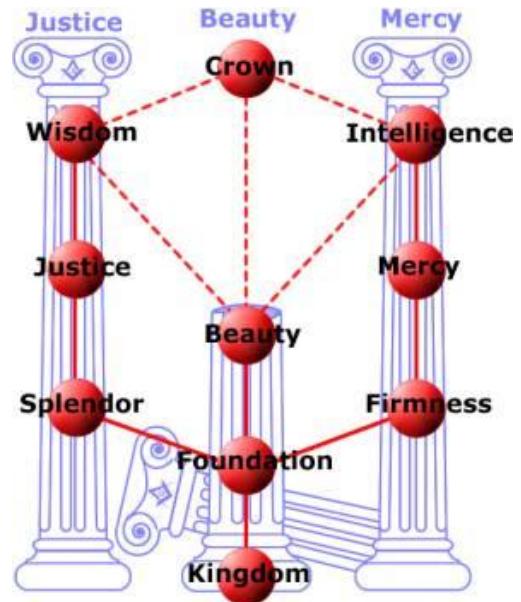


Figure 2 -
The Sephiroth and three Great Columns illustrating the gap in the middle pillar of the Sephiroth and the discontinuous path between Beauty and Crown. The allusion to the Broken Pillar is evident.

IN CONCLUSION

During the Craft's early years, Europe was in its renaissance and the influence of Masonic reformers James Anderson, John Desaguliers, Elias Ashmole, and John Montague the Second Duke of Montague. Albert Pike, a Masonic philosopher and reformer of the Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite, and Albert Mackay, Masonic author and scholar, both influenced American Masonic thinking on the Ancient Mysteries, Symbolism, and Cabalistic Numerology. Brothers Walter Leslie Wilmshurst, Arthur Edward Waite, and Manly Palmer Hall were Masonic authors and lecturers who devoted their time and talents to the fields of philosophy, comparative religion and psychology and their influence on Freemasonry.

It is likely the *Pillars of Enoch* mentioned in the *Cooke Manuscript* and other Gothic Constitutions gave a sense of authenticity as Dr. Anderson wrote the *Constitution of 1723*.

The *Five Orders of Architecture* in the Fellowcraft Degree, especially use of the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian Orders and Kabbalah thinking influenced symbolism in the *Three Supporting Pillars of the Lodge* of the Apprentice Degree and *Solomon's Pillars* in the Fellowcraft Degree.

⁷ MacNulty, W. Kirk, *Freemasonry: A Journey Through Ritual and Symbol*, Thames and Hudson Ltd., New York, New York, 1991, page 9

And by the *Broken Column* in the Master Mason Degree, we are reminded far too many men stop growing once raised a Master Mason; their Temple, the house not made with hands, is unfinished.

The purpose of Freemasonry is to make good men even better. To achieve that purpose, we place an emphasis on the individual man, strengthening his character, improving his moral and spiritual outlook, and broadening his mental horizons. We impress upon Master Masons the principles of personal responsibility and morality, encouraging each to practice in his daily life the lessons taught through symbolic ceremonies within the York and Scottish Rites.

As the tools of the craftsman have both operative and symbolic purposes, also both have a material and a spiritual (or quality) state as it relates to the duality of man. A Master Mason in quest of Light must look beyond the physical lodge and study their metaphysical world as well.

Thank you and ...

So Mote It Be!

