

THE TEMPLE OF KING SOLOMON

A paper by

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There are many references to King Solomon's Temple in our Rituals. Some of these are Biblical quotations, some are Masonic Traditions. In the case of the latter there is often good reason to ask whether they have any factual basis, but also, in some quotations there is good reason to doubt the accuracy of the Biblical translation. The problem is that the quotations are all taken from the Authorised Version of the Bible, known to the illiterati as the King James Version. This translation was published in 1611. It is in many ways a most remarkable work, which gives the lie to the theory that nothing good can come from a committee. Although many of the passages which we instantly recognise as coming from it were, in fact, taken directly from its predecessors, its work of polishing and knocking off the superfluous knobs and excrescences has left us with a great literary work which over almost four centuries has had a very powerful effect on the development of English style. But two things work against it: firstly, the translators attempted to preserve the structure of the Hebrew sentences, even when this produced very un-idiomatic English, and secondly, the translators did not have available to them a great many manuscripts that have come to light since 1611 which assist in understanding the more obscure parts. For this reason, while I much prefer hearing the Authorised Version read, preferring it to any of the more recent versions, if I want to actually understand what the text means, I consult a modern translation. For example, I shall later examine what light other translations throw on the nature of the "middle chamber". It is interesting to note that Luther's Bible of 1522, played an even more important part in the development of literary German, and the Welsh Bible of 1588 was central to the preservation of the Welsh language, which, although having the oldest continuing literature in Europe, was threatened with extinction by the policy and legislation of the English government, ironically enough, a policy initiated by the Tudors, themselves of Welsh origin. So, in hankering after the resounding phrases of the Authorised Version (which, very often, were Tyndale's resounding phrases) I am conscious of being a member of a large international company (I nearly said -conspiracy") who value the important part the Scriptures have played in the formation of our literary languages.

King Solomon's Temple plays a part in the Craft Degrees of, as far as I know, all mainstream Constitutions, more so in those of direct descent from the UK Grand Lodges than in those descended via French sources. It is hard for us to imagine Masonry without King Solomon's Temple. But Harry Carr draws our attention to evidence that, although the Temple and King Solomon have probably always received mention in the ritual, they have not always had a central place, and that the Tower of Babel seems to have at one time had more attention than King Solomon's Temple. Moreover, in the First Degree ceremony of some Continental rites and their descendants King Solomon's Temple receives only the most cursory mention. But let us leave that to one side and concentrate on some of the things that our present rituals say about King Solomon's Temple.

There are two common versions of the Second Degree Tracing Board; that is, of the diagram itself, as opposed to the explanation thereof. The most common, and the older, is the Harris Tracing Board, found in many Lodges round the city, and illustrated in many ritual books, Taylor's, for example, and in *The Freemasons' Guide and Compendium*. The other is a more recent design, and is found in the Logic Ritual, and in the Masonic Centre, Latimer Square, for example.

In the explanation of the Second Degree Tracing Board in the Emulation Ritual we find: "When the Temple at Jerusalem was completed by KS, its costliness and splendour became objects of admiration to the surrounding nations, and its fame spread to the remotest parts of the then known world." What I would like to ask now 'this true?' Was King Solomon's Temple known and admired by the surrounding nations, let alone in the remotest parts of the then known world?

Israel was surrounded by nations which left written records. In some cases we have whole

storehouses of what we would now call Foreign Office documents. But the curious thing is that nothing has ever been turned up which clearly refers even to David or Solomon, let alone the Temple. This, of course, has led to a great deal of scholarly speculation. Worse than that is the fact that archaeologists have never found any remains in Jerusalem itself which incontrovertibly belong to the First Temple. Some historians have gone so far as to claim that the First Temple never existed in fact, and some have even questioned the existence of David and Solomon.

The Babylonians left what is sometimes called the 'Babylonian Chronicle', a series of tablets containing a historical record. Until 1956 no one had found in that chronicle any reference to Nebuchadnezzar's sacking of Jerusalem. But in 1956 some additional tablets were discovered in which were described the capture of Jerusalem on 16 March 597 BC, the appointment of Zedekiah as king and the removal of the Israelite prisoners (among whom was Jehoiachin) to Babylon, although we still have no direct mention of the Temple. Horne also offers various other evidence which, while not definitive by any means, seem to make it highly likely that the Biblical story is founded on fact.

"But what about the Queen of Sheba?" you might ask. Unfortunately, apart from the Biblical references, we know nothing about the Queen of Sheba at all. We can only speculate where Sheba might have been, and until some other evidence is found, her existence is even more doubtful than that of Solomon.

But I do not think we need be too disheartened by the absence of archaeological evidence for the Temple. There is plenty of archaeological evidence for a vast public building campaign throughout Israel at the right time, and if little of the First Temple has survived we can blame (i) the good job done by its destroyers; (ii) the efficiency of the scavengers who used the remaining materials, and (iii) the assiduity with which those preparing the ground for the foundations of the Second Temple either removed all remaining traces of the First Temple, or used them in the construction of the new foundations. Since Zerubbabel's Temple was considerably larger than Solomon's, and since Herod's Temple was larger still, it is not unreasonable to suppose that all traces of the first Temple now lie well buried under the remains of the third.

There is, moreover, something which might be corroborative evidence, but in order to deal with it properly I have to go into quite a bit of Egyptology. The sequence of Egyptian Pharaohs has been reconstructed from a few main sources: a chronicle of the kings compiled by the Egyptian priest Manetho (323 to 245 B.C.) which is known only from extracts quoted by later authors; a hieratic papyrus dating from about the time of Ramesses II (1290 - 1224 B.C.) now in the Turin Museum and known as the Turin Canon which, although said to have been in good condition when discovered, was, by the time hieratic script could be read, in tatters; an incomplete list on the wall of the Temple at Abydos dating from the time of Sethos I (1309 - 1291 B.C.); similar lists from Sakkara and Karnak. Constructing the sequence from these fragmentary lists is a matter of great difficulty. Apart from the fact that the lists are fragmentary, there is the problem that we know that the reigns of pharaohs overlapped, that there were co-regencies, but the lists do not indicate these. So although the lists give numbers of years for the various kings, we can not just add these numbers up.

Even when we have established the list with tentative dates we need to find some method of tying it to similar tentative chronologies for neighbouring countries. The connection to Jewish history was made at two points.

In Exodus 1:7 ... 11 we read that the Jewish slaves in Egypt built the store cities of Pithom and Raamses. From Egyptian history we know that the pharaoh Ramesses the Great built a new capital in the delta and named it Pi-Ramesse. In Victorian times scholars decided that this capital Pi-Ram esse is what the Exodus account is referring to, and that therefore Ramesses II was pharaoh at the time of the Oppression.

In 1 Kings 14:25 & 26 we read: "In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak, King of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem; he took away the treasures of the House of the Lord" Historians generally suppose that Shishak was the Pharaoh Shoshenk I. Shoshenk's campaign is celebrated in an inscription at Karnak, in Egypt, but unfortunately the inscription is damaged and the readable parts contain no reference to Jerusalem, let alone the Temple. Moreover,

the parts which are readable strongly suggest that Shoshenk's campaign did not enter the kingdom of Judah at all . So, although, Shoshenk did carry off Temple material, it seems unlikely that it was from the Temple at Jerusalem.

I must say though, that these two linkages between Egyptian and Jewish history are not unchallenged; Rohl's whole book is an argument against them and Velikovsky has argued for a vastly different alignment. Both these authors find the notion that the Exodus occurred during the reigns of Ramesses II or his successor Merneptah unacceptable. Ramesses II was a sort of cross between Frederick the Great and Cecil B. DeMille. His reign was a time of almost unparalleled splendour and success. There is no trace in it of the sort of disasters which the Book of Exodus describes - plagues, the deaths of all the first born, the Pharaoh perishing beneath waters of the Red Sea. Merneptah waged war in the East with great vigour. A stela in his funerary temple records that as a result of his efforts "... Canaan is plundered with every ill. Ashkelon taken ... Israel is desolated and has no seed ..." So if the events described in Exodus are not completely fictitious we have to locate them somewhere else in Egyptian history. Rohl chooses the date that Manetho gives - the end of the Second Intermediate period, 300 years earlier than the generally accepted date. But there are problems with that too, as Manetho identifies the Israelites with the Hyksos who were expelled from Egypt at that time. But the Hyksos were conquerors of Egypt, 'whereas the Jews were far from that.

Velikovsky placed the Exodus at the beginning of the Second Intermediate period, 500 years earlier than the generally accepted date. This has certain attractions, as Egypt was certainly thrown into turmoil at that time, and there are indications of catastrophic natural events which Velikovsky interprets as accounting for the 'hailstones' and fire, and dividing of the waters of the Red Sea recounted in Exodus. Moreover, his scheme makes Solomon a contemporary of the female Pharaoh Hatshepsut, who, he claims, is the Queen of Sheba.

But with either of these schemes we have either to abolish 300 (or 500) years of Egyptian history, or stretch Jewish history a similar amount, or some combination of these. I doubt whether there is any chance of Velikovsky's thesis being accepted, but Rohl's argument may have more chance of winning support, so it is still premature to rule that Egyptian records contradict the Biblical account.

How well supported by Biblical sources are Masonic Traditions about the First 'Temple'?

In the Tracing Board we have the porchway or entrance of the Temple; we have the two great pillars; we have a winding staircase leading up to the Middle Chamber, where, we are told, the Fellow Crafts went to receive their wages.

Scripture informs us that there were about 150,000 workers employed on the construction. Of course not all of these were employed at the Temple site. In the Lecture of the Master Mason degree we are told there were 80,000 operatives employed, part of whom were hewers in the quarries at Zeredatha, part builders at the Temple, and in addition there were 30,000 working in the forests of Lebanon. These numbers are not too far out of kilter with the Biblical ones. In Webb's Monitor we are told that there were 80,000 Fellow Crafts employed on the Temple. This he presumably took from Preston's Lectures, and we find in the 1813 revision of those Lectures by Dr. Hemming the following: "There were 300 Rulers, 3,300 Overseers, and 80,000 Craftsmen.' And this: "They were arranged into companies or Lodges, consisting of 7 Entered Apprentices, 5 Fellow Crafts and a Master or Overseer. But this does not agree with what we are told in the Mark lecture . Let us be rather conservative and say that of the 80,000 operatives, 60,000 were at Zeredatha, and only 20,000 at the Temple. And let us suppose that each Fellow Craft had 3 Entered Apprentices under his charge, so there were 5,000 FC's needing to be paid every Thursday in the Middle Chamber. Let us suppose that the pay clerks worked a 10 hour day. Then they would need to pay 500 Fellow Crafts per hour. Each Fellow Craft needed to prove himself, be looked up on a list, and given his pay. It is hard to see how this could be done in less than a couple of minutes. So each pay clerk could deal with 30 Fellow Crafts per hour. So there would need to be at least 17 pay clerks. This doesn't sound untoward. Surely the Middle Chamber depicted on the Tracing Board could hold 17 pay clerks with their desks and chests of coins. Well, let us try to find out.

The 1st Book of Kings in Chapter 6, verses 2 & 3 tells us the dimensions of the Temple. It was 60 cubits (90 feet) long, and 20 cubits (30 feet) wide. In front there was a vestibule as wide as the building, and 10 cubits (15 feet) deep. These dimensions are also given in 2 Chronicles 3:3 & 4. Artists, and Masonic illustrators, have tended to produce depictions of the Temple which make it look like a rival to St Peter's, Rome, in size. But 90 ft X 30 ft makes it about half as big again as a tennis court. The dome of St Paul's cathedral, London, is 112 feet in diameter, so the Temple would have fitted comfortably inside it. The Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, in Barbadoes Street is 210 ft by 106 ft, so the Temple would fit comfortably crossways inside it.

Along both sides of the Temple, running the full length, were additional structures about 15 ft wide. These were apparently the same height as the main structure, but while it was all one storey, the side buildings were divided into three storeys. What we call "The , Middle Chamber" seems to be just a bad bit of Biblical translation for "The Middle Storey". These side structures seem to have been storerooms. So our "Middle Chamber" was in fact a long narrow space, probably subdivided into numerous stores. I suppose you could have got 17 pay clerks in if you wanted to, but I'm prepared to bet heavily that no one ever did.

And what about the "Winding Staircase"? We all know about its shape, don't we? "As if ascending a winding staircase, or the fourth part of a circle," the NZ Ritual says. But at that point in the 2nd degree in the Emulation Ritual we have this rubric. "In doing so he completes a semi-circle, starting on the centre line of the Lodge and also finishing on it." Notice that none of the Tracing Boards agree with this description in the Emulation Ritual (though they do agree with the NZ Ritual)

In the NZ version of the 2nd Tracing Board we read: "... the door of the middle chamber was in the right side of the house; and they went up with winding stairs into the middle chamber". This is a quotation from the Authorised Version 1 Kings 6: 8. Consulting independent translations from the same era we find in Luther's Bible "Die Tuer zum unteren Seitengemach war auf der rechten Seite des Hauses, so dass man durch eine Wendeltreppe hinaufging auf die mittleren Seitengemacher ... "

The Welsh Bible has: "Drws y gell ganol oedd ar ystlys ddeau y ty; ac ar hyd grisiau troe-dig y dringid j'r ganol."

Let us look at what more recent translators have made of this. The Revised Standard Version has:

"The entrance to the lowest storey was on the south side of the house, and one went up by stairs to the middle storey ... "

The New English Bible has: "The entrance to the lowest arcade was in the right hand corner of the house; there was access by a spiral stairway from that to the middle arcade ... "

The New Jerusalem Bible has: "The entrance to the lowest storey was at the right hand corner of the Temple; access to the middle storey was by a spiral staircase ..."

An even more inglorious description of the Middle Chamber is given in The Jerome Biblical Commentary. According to 1 Kings 6:5-10, a structure of three low stories surrounded the three sides of the main body of the Temple. Apparently only one such storey, 7.5 ft high, was in the original plan. Later it proved inadequate as a place for storage and two more stories were added, each 1.5 ft wider than the other, and were fitted into the existing recesses in the outer wall of the Temple. We are not certain where the entrance to these storerooms was, but it may have been in the right corner (1 Kings 6:8). Access to the second and third stories was by means of trapdoors.

I think the term 'arcade' gives a better idea of what we are dealing with than 'storey', and certainly 'chamber' seems to be quite misleading. The fact that the two latest versions allude to a 'spiral-staircase' is also significant. Probably it was more like the spiral staircases in the towers of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, and steeple of the Anglican Cathedral, than the sort of Gone-With-The-Winds-Great-Ballroom sweeping staircase we have depicted

on the Tracing Board. If the Jerome Biblical Commentary description is correct, there was probably a series of ladders going up through trapdoors, like those in a watchtower, or inside scaffolding. So those 5,000 or more Fellow Crafts trying to get up there each Thursday against a counter current who had already received their pay and were making for the pub, would have had a hard time of it.

Note also that the Harris Tracing Board has the entrance to the Middle Chamber going between the two great pillars. That is to say, through the main entrance of the Temple, in the East end thereof. But the Biblical passages all agree that that is not where the entrance to the Middle Chamber was. It was in the 'right side' or the 'right hand corner', and certainly didn't involve passing between the pillars.

Which brings us to the pillars themselves. In the First Book of Kings, Chapter 7, verse 21 we read (in the Authorised Version): "And he set up the pillars in the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar and called the name thereof Jachin; and he set up the left pillar and called the name thereof Boaz." It is often asked: but which is meant; left and right as in going in, or as in going out?

This question has been adequately and correctly answered before, but there are still some who are unconvinced, so I shall attempt to give an exhaustive (or exhausting) explanation. In attempting to answer this question some authors rely on what they take to be the standard English usage. This they assert to be 'as going in'. But this ignores the fact that the Temple was a real building. It is not a Masonic mythological construct, it was actually constructed on a site still observable in Jerusalem. Its foundations were laid about 967 BC. It was dedicated in about 960 BC. It was pillaged by the Egyptians about 927 BC, restored about 830 BC, robbed by Ahaz about 730 BC, and restored by Hezekiah about 716 BC. But he was forced to give the Temple treasures to Sennacherib in about 703 BC. Manasseh desecrated the Temple in about 687 BC. Josiah restored the Temple in 622 BC. Nebuchadnezzar robbed the Temple in 606 BC and again in 597 BC, and finally destroyed it in 588 BC. The Temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel in 515 BC. The so-called third Temple of Herod was a restoration and enlargement of Zerubbabel's Temple. It was begun in 7 BC and finished in AD 4, only to be destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

Therefore, in order to determine what is meant by 'on the left' it is irrelevant to consider what present day English speakers, architects or builders mean by this term. We have to find out what the writers of the Old Testament meant by it. This is not as difficult as it may appear. There are three sources of information. Firstly there is the general Jewish usage of that time as explained in the *Encyclopedia Biblica* and in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*. These confirm that the East was called 'the front'; the West, 'the back part'; the South, 'the right'; and the North, 'the left'. A *Dictionary of the Bible* states: "Jachin ... that on the right (looking Eastwards) or south of the porch. Boaz ... on the left looking eastwards." ie. it was on the north side of the entrance. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Bible* has: "Jachin: A bronze pillar on the right (the South side) of the Porch of Solomon's Temple." These equivalences are so well known to biblical translators that in many versions they are made automatically. For example, the passage from 1 Kings 7:21 appears thus in the Revised Standard Version: "He set up the pillars in the vestibule of the temple; he set up the pillar on the south and called its name Jachin; and he set up the pillar on the north and called its name Boaz".

A second source of information is the Volume of the Sacred Law itself. In the descriptions of the Temple references to the right and left sides of the building are sometimes expanded by giving compass equivalents. In 1 Kings 7:39 in the Authorised Version we read: "... and he set the sea on the right side of the house ... over against the south." Similarly in the second description of the temple in 1 Chronicles 4:10 we read: "And he set the sea on the right side of the east end, over against the south."

The third source of information is the works of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus who lived from AD 38 until about AD 100. His works were written at about the same time as the New Testament was being written, and like it were written in the lingua franca of the time, Greek. I refer in particular to his *Jewish Antiquities* completed in AD 93-94. Josephus had, of course, seen the second Temple before its destruction by the Romans. It is generally agreed that in its main features the second temple was modelled on the first. In Bk viii Sec 64 he

states of the Temple: "tetra pto de pros ten anatolen. Of the pillars he says in Sec 78: "touton ton kionon ton men heteron kata ten dekhian estese tou propulaiou parastada kalesas auton lakhein, ton d' heteron kata to aristeron onomasas auton Abaiz 41. A little later, in Sec 86, he says: "pente de louteras histesin eks aristerou merous tou naou, tetra pto de touto kata borean anemon ..."

So it is clear that the porchway or entrance was in the East side of the Temple, that Boaz was on the North side of the doorway, and Jachin on the South side. Thus, when we say "that on the right was called Jachin", we mean "that on the right going out."

It would be remiss of me not to mention that there are some whose opinions can not be lightly cast aside who disagree with this finding. For example, Alexander Horne, from whom I have quoted extensively, holds that Jachin was on the right going in. But since he acknowledges the power of the argument that Jachin was on the South side of the entrance, he is forced to suppose that the entrance of the Temple was at the West end, not the East. Here he parts company with the great body of opinion. And why does he wish to argue for Jachin being on the right going in? His only ground is "The first view of a building is always from the outside." So he is arguing from how he uses words. As I said earlier, such arguments are useless in the face of evidence on how the Biblical writers used these words.

In our rituals we find words to the effect that the two great pillars were so named after (i) Boaz, a great grandfather of David, and (ii) Jachin, an assistant High-Priest who officiated at the dedication of the Temple. As other writers have remarked, these are examples of how the unbridled enthusiasms of the compilers of the ritual have foisted on us explanations which are at best doubtful, and in fact almost certainly wrong. In the accounts in I Kings 7 and 11 Chronicles 6 & 7 of the dedication of the Temple there is no mention of the High Priest (let alone his assistant) playing any part at all. Solomon alone is mentioned as speaking and praying. But the compilers of the ritual, faced with the names of the pillars, obviously decided that some explanation of these names was necessary. So they seem to have trolled through Holy Writ until they found the names used elsewhere in circumstances with at least some connection with the Temple and offered those uses as explanations. Of course David did have a great grandfather called Boaz, and in I Chronicles 24 where the twenty four divisions of priests are named, Jachin appears at the head of the twenty-first division. But there is no evidence outside of the ritual for the pillars' having been named after those two people. The Jews seem often to have named objects. For example in Exodus 17:15 we read that Moses built an altar and named it Adonainissi ("the Lord is my banner") The *Jewish Encyclopedia* takes the names as belonging to the pillars in their own right, and translates them thus: "Jachin: He shall establish; . "Boaz: In him is strength: I am informed that the "az" of "Boaz" means "strength", and that the "b" is the preposition "in", so that those Masons who, when asked for the denotation of "Boaz" answer "strength" are wrong; the "in" is an integral part of the name. The weight of expert opinion seems to be that the names of the pillars were given before the Temple was dedicated, that the names commemorate the blessing of the Lord on the throne of David, his kingdom and seed forever and that, if there were individuals associated with the Temple who also bore those names, .this is merely coincidence.

We should note, also, that there is no evidence whatsoever for a dormer which gave light to the sanctum sanctorum. Many scholars believe the Holy of Holies was in darkness except on those rare occasions when the High priest entered it. Nor were the pillars placed at the entrance to be a reminder to the people " ... on going to and returning from Divine Worship." Whoever penned that part of the Second Tracing Board probably had a mental image of the Jews, attired in their Sunday best, dutifully going to Matins and Evensong. But congregational worship was not a feature of Jewish religion before the Babylonian exile. Congregational worship occurred not in the Temple, but in the synagogues, which appear to have been invented either during the Exile, or after the return to Palestine. Finally, "a grave ... as near to the sanctum sanctorum as Israelitish law would allow" would have been a long way away. Contact with dead bodies brought ritual uncleanness, and was especially forbidden for priests. Later rabbinic law required that carcasses, graves and tanneries must be kept a distance of fifty cubits from the city. From the city, note, not just from the Holy of Holies, or even the Temple. The Christian custom of interring dignitaries in churches was, and is, completely contrary to Jewish religious principles.

Unfortunately time will not allow me to dwell on other matters I would like to raise. I would like to take time to consider how likely it is that there were any arches in the Temple, with or without keystones, and to delve into the provenance of the name "Hiram Abif", and into the Masonic legends associated with it, but these must wait for another occasion.

CONCLUSIONS.

Reliance on the Authorised Version of the Bible, and indulging in an unrestrained penchant for invention have lead the compilers of the ritual to include much that is erroneous or misleading. The Temple was not as widely known and admired as the ritual suggests. It is highly unlikely that the Fellow Crafts working on the Temple were paid in the middle chamber. The winding staircase was probably a narrow spiral staircase or even a series of ladders. The pillars were not named after the great grandfather of David and an assistant High-Priest. When the ritual says " ... that on the left", it means that on the left going out The Holy of Holies was not lit by a dormer window

But the ritual is not meant to be a manual of ancient history or a Tour Guide to King Solomon's Temple. We should value the ritual for what it is, namely, ritual. It is meant to be done; the things it has to tell us are not descriptions of how the furniture of the world is arranged. It veils what it has to say in allegory, and illustrates it by symbols. Unfortunately many Masons, even many very experienced Masons, seem never to have grasped this. Moreover the temptation to invent explanations and pass them off as fact is as alive and well now as it was in the days of the Reverend Doctor Anderson. Deep symbolic explanations for the blue colour of the edging of English and New Zealand Master Masons' aprons, and for the seven chains and balls on the tassels, for the rosettes and the inverted taus or levels are advanced as the "real" reason for these things without the slightest acknowledgement that there is no evidence whatsoever that those explanations ever occurred to the people who ordained the features (and some of them seem not to have been ordained at all, but to have merely happened.) Books are still written and lectures given in which we hear such bold claims as: "in every ancient religion so and so ... ", when we know full well that no one, let alone the author or speaker, has examined every ancient religion. I am gratified that such bodies as The Masters' and Past Masters' Lodge exist to try to bring some rationality to these matters, to do some research which will not be a laughing-stock in places where research is a day-to-day activity.