

Many Things in One:

An interpretive essay on Jared Stanley's Composite Masonic Emblem.

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Endeavoring to interpret any Masonic symbol is always enjoyable and thought-provoking, and it's even more interesting when there are many symbols incorporated into one. The more complex the symbol, the more challenging it is to interpret. The jewel of a Knight Rose Croix is a perfect example of this, as it contains several symbols grouped together in a very deliberate fashion. Among its features are a Pelican feeding seven chicks from the blood of its own breast, a crowned compass set at an angle of 60°, a quadrant, a passion cross, a crucified rose, green leaves (presumably acacia), an eagle, and two words written in cipher. Every aspect of that symbol is pregnant with meaning, and each of those aspects come together to paint one big picture that is relevant to the subject matter of the 18° Knight Rose Croix Degree. One could easily write an entire book in the process of trying to elaborate on that jewel, and the same is undoubtedly the case for an interesting emblem created by Worshipful Brother Jared Stanley, Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Mississippi.

This particular emblem, pictured at the top of this essay, has a lot going on in it. The most central item in the emblem is a pillar. From the top down, this pillar features a celestial globe, what appears to be a lily blossom, a chain, a woven lattice or checker work, a row of circles (possibly pomegranates?), three shelves containing five books each (with the books being blue, brown, and reddish in color), and a square or cubical base, upon which is a silver, 3:4:5 ratio carpenter square interlocked with a yellow/gold compass. To the left of the pillar is a stylized fire, composed of yellow, orange, and red flames; and to the right of the pillar is a depiction of water, composed of three waves or splashes.

The first thing that comes to my mind when I look at this emblem is the notion that all four Classical Elements are incorporated into it. With the flame on the left, you have Fire; with the waves on the right, you have Water; with the celestial globe at the top, you have Air; and with the earth-tone colors of the pillar and its square-shaped base, you have Earth. This denotes universality, or an all-encompassing versatility.

The next thing that jumps out at me is the repetitive use of the number 3. Three flames, three waves, three shelves (which discretely correspond to what we are told about the pillars in the Middle Chamber Lecture of the Fellow-craft Degree), and three blue books. Perhaps these repetitive usages of the number 3 allude to the three degrees in Craft Masonry, the three infinite attributes of God (Omniscience, Omnipotence, & Omnipresence; or Wisdom, Strength, & Beauty), the three stages of human life (Youth, Manhood, & Old Age), the three aspects of time (Past, Present, & Future), the three Principle Columns of Masonry (Doric, Ionic, & Corinthian), the three Theological Virtues (Faith, Hope, & Charity), the three parts of which Man is comprised (Body, Soul, and Spirit), or the three personages of the Christian Godhead (Father, Son, & Holy Spirit). Perhaps there is an endless array of ways we could interpret the number three and its inclusion in this emblem.

Continuing on with the number symbolism, I notice at least two occurrences of 3, 5, & 7 on the column. The most obvious is three shelves, five lily leaves, and seven balls/circles. The other, which is more subtle, is to be found in the books and their respective colors. There are

three blue books, five reddish books, and seven brown books. Naturally, any Mason should correlate the numbers 3, 5 & 7 with the steps of the Winding Staircase.

Going a little bit further with number symbolism, I can't help but notice that the chain on the pillar consists of twelve links. Maybe those twelve chain links allude to the twelve Fellow-crafts, the twelve signs of the Zodiac, the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve months of the year, and/or even the twelve disciples of Jesus. On the celestial sphere, I count what appear to be thirteen stars. I can think of no overtly Masonic significance to the number thirteen, recalling no blatant use of that number in any Degree, but perhaps it alludes to the Zodiac including the long-argued, thirteenth sign of Ophiuchus. Not only is that constellation figured in the 25° Knight of the Brazen Serpent Degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, but it has had significance in the Western Mystery Tradition for a long time. Among other things, that constellation corresponds to Asclepius, the snake-handling healer of Greek mythology. And in my opinion, it also has a symbolic parallel to St Paul; the apostle who was bitten by a venomous snake, unharmed by the venom, while shipwrecked on the island of Malta. Any member of a Commandery of Knights Templars ought to find that comparison to be of interest, if he would think back on the Mediterranean Pass and the Order of Malta.

Looking at the deliberate placement of the water and the fire to the right and left of the pillar, respectively, I think one could argue that they represent duality or polar opposites. Fire could be said to represent an active or masculine principle, whereas water could be said to represent a passive or feminine principle. Just like the two pillars on the porch of King Solomon's Temple, I believe the placement of these two elements alludes to the idea of opposite forces in balance. With three flames to the left and three waves to the right, the one pillar is centered between opposing forces in equal proportions; and it illustrates the idea of dynamic equilibrium. It insinuates a middle way, a way of harmony; much like the Sephirothic Tree of Life, with which any Scottish Rite Mason ought to be familiar.

Looking at the bottom of the pillar, I now direct your attention to the cubical base surmounted by the most familiar of all masonic symbols: the Square and Compass. But that's not just any old square. It's a 3:4:5 square, one which can be used to symbolically represent the Pythagorean Theorem. Its proportions, forming a right-triangle, allude to the three parts of which Man is composed. Three alludes to the part of man which is most inherently divine, which is his Soul. Four alludes to the corporeal part of man, his Body, which symbolically consists of the four classical elements. Finally, the number five alludes to the fifth element, which is the Spirit, or the quintessence. It is the life-giving principle, and it is fittingly represented by the hypotenuse of the 3:4:5 square. Now let's consider the color symbolism deployed in the Square and Compass on this pillar. The square is silver, and the compass is gold. I suspect that this alludes to the masculine/solar characteristic of gold and the feminine/lunar characteristic of silver. Just like the Sun and Moon are inseparably related, with the Sun regularly ruling the day and the Moon governing the night, the Square and Compasses are likewise inseparably linked in our Craft. The compass, being the tool of the astronomer, used to draw circles and trace the orbits of celestial

bodies, represents that which is heavenly and divine in the nature of man. The square, being a tool used to measure and try solid objects, represents that part of man that is corporeal and earthly. The two are intermingled in the Fellow-craft fashion, with one point of the compasses laying on top of the square, and I believe this alludes to the interconnectedness of the Divine and the Mundane. We are divine and human all at once, belonging to heaven and earth in equal measure. Life is a struggle between the animal and angel in the nature of man, and the goal of the Mason is to subdue his passions; not destroying the animal altogether, but making it subordinate to the angel. This ideal goal of self mastery, the hope of reaching a state of perfection wherein one's spiritual aspect is more dominant than his physical aspect, though it may well be unattainable, is illustrated beautifully in the Master Mason configuration of the Square and Compass; with both points of the Compass elevated above the Square. And when we begin our Masonic journey as Entered Apprentices, symbolically groping in a state of ignorant darkness, humbly seeking Light for the first time, we find the Square laying on top of both points of the Compass to denote a state of imperfection wherein our physical aspect is much more prominent than the spiritual. In the Fellow-craft degree we advance towards that ideal state of perfection we seek, and that step of progress is illustrated by the configuration of the Square and Compasses in that degree.

In reality we will always be Fellow-craft Masons working on our respective ashlar, will we not? We continue to chip away at our individual characters, trying to improve the quality of our own souls, hoping that they'll one day be perfect enough to be fit for the Builder's use in that Temple made without hands, eternal in the heavens. As long as we live in the flesh, we are subject to the imperfections, flaws and limitations of the flesh. But one day, when we've laid down our working tools after the completion of the Temple, hopefully we will all be found worthy to receive the True Word and reach that immortal state of perfection that the Master Mason Degree so beautifully suggests. Until we travel to that undiscovered country beyond the grave, from whence no traveler returns, we will never attain the certainty we seek in regards to the Absolute. Until then, we must content ourselves with certainty's substitute: Faith. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known." (1 Corinthians 13:12)

The Cubical Base on the pillar may well allude to the ancient idea that the Earth was square and flat. We now know it's a sphere, of course, but we may still find the old cosmology useful for the sake of symbolism. It isn't uncommon in the Western Mystery Tradition to see material existence depicted as a cube. Consider Paul Foster Case's Cube of Space symbol, for example. The cube was anciently considered to be a symbol of perfection, having equal dimensions of height, width, and breadth. And with the Square and Compass surmounted on the face of the cube, I think it creates a nice illustration of the nature of reality. The Divine and the Mundane are eternally intermingled throughout the whole of existence. God is within us all, and yet we have our very existence within God. In the words of St Paul, "He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:27-28) Think of the most

famous Hermetic axiom: “That which is above is like unto that which is below, and that which is below is like unto that which is above.” Also, consider the fact that there’s a celestial sphere on top of the pillar and a cube at the base. With these two opposing shapes, we see a depiction of the infinite opposite from the finite. The sphere has no beginning and no end, being drawn only with perfectly curved lines, whereas a cube or square is drawn by straight lines only. The celestial sphere at the top of the pillar could be said to represent heaven and infinity, whereas the square or cube at the bottom of the pillar could be said to represent earth and all that is finite. Though these things may seem to be opposites, they are inseparably interconnected; and we see that interconnectedness illustrated here on this pillar.

Now let’s talk about the biblical significance of this pillar. I find that the pillar in Brother Stanley’s creative emblem matches the biblical description of the pillars that stood on the porch of King Solomon’s Temple, apart from the Square and Compass on the bottom. Let’s look at what the Bible has to say about the appearance of the pillars.

We find the first description of the pillars in the 7th chapter of I Kings, verses 15-22:

“15 For he cast two pillars of brass, of eighteen cubits high apiece: and a line of twelve cubits did compass either of them about. 16 And he made two chapiters of molten brass, to set upon the tops of the pillars: the height of the one chapter was five cubits, and the height of the other chapter was five cubits: 17 And nets of checker work, and wreaths of chain work, for the chapiters which were upon the top of the pillars; seven for the one chapter, and seven for the other chapter. 18 And he made the pillars, and two rows round about upon the one network, to cover the chapiters that were upon the top, with pomegranates: and so did he for the other chapter. 19 And the chapiters that were upon the top of the pillars were of lily work in the porch, four cubits. 20 And the chapiters upon the two pillars had pomegranates also above, over against the belly which was by the network: and the pomegranates were two hundred in rows round about upon the other chapter. 21 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. 22 And upon the top of the pillars was lily work: so was the work of the pillars finished.”

We find further description of the pillars in the 3rd chapter of II Chronicles, verses 15-17:

“15 Also he made before the house two pillars of thirty and five cubits high, and the chapter that was on the top of each of them was five cubits. 16 And he made chains, as in the oracle, and put them on the heads of the pillars; and made an hundred pomegranates, and put them on the chains. 17 And he reared up the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand, and the other on the left; and called the name of that on the right hand Jachin, and the name of that on the left Boaz.”

We find yet more said about them in the 52nd chapter of Jeremia, verses 21-22:

“21 And concerning the pillars, the height of one pillar was eighteen cubits; and a fillet of twelve cubits did compass it; and the thickness thereof was four fingers: it was hollow. 22 And a chapiter of brass was upon it; and the height of one chapiter was five cubits, with network and pomegranates upon the chapiters round about, all of brass. The second pillar also and the pomegranates were like unto these.”

We find one more biblical mention of the pillars in the 40th chapter of Ezekiel, verse 49:

“49 The length of the porch was twenty cubits, and the breadth eleven cubits; and he brought me by the steps whereby they went up to it: and there were pillars by the posts, one on this side, and another on that side.”

In addition to the descriptions found in the Bible, Masonic tradition informs us that the two pillars each contained three chambers, wherein important books and records were stored, although this interesting detail is not rooted in fact. In the Middle Chamber Lecture of the Fellow-craft Degree, it is “said that there were doors at the back of each pillar, where books of the Law and other records were kept in safety.” (Louisiana Masonic Monitor, page 85)

Considering the above information, I think Brother Stanley’s emblem is a fairly accurate, although quite original, representation of how the Bible and Masonic tradition each describe the Pillars that stood on the Porch of King Solomon’s Temple! Lily work? Check! Pomegranates? Check, if that’s what the row of circles represents. Nets of checker work? Check, in the form of a woven lattice! Chain work? Check! A chapiter? Check, as we find it represented by the Celestial Globe! Three hollow chambers containing books? Check! All in all, it’s a lovely, artistic illustration of what either one of the two pillars may have looked like; and it’s got a bit of extra Masonic stuff added in as a lagniappe! It’s a very interesting, complex, and obviously intentional, compound symbol that’s pregnant with meaning from top to bottom. It’s loaded with food for contemplation, and I hope the reader of this essay will have as much fun with it as I have.

Fraternally,

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