

May Issue

Introduction for the Bulletin

Whence We Came?

“Whence we came?” is an aged old question. We know the Grand Lodge of England was formed in 1717, but where did the four lodges that formed the Grand Lodge come from? How far back do our traditions go? Does our ancestry really date only so far back as the age of taverns and bars? Over the next series of articles, we will explore our history and in the process, travel through time to ancient lands and rediscover ancient wisdoms. Our first stop on this trek – Ancient Egypt and the Mysteries of Osiris.

Article

Whence We Came? – Ancient Egypt

This year we will celebrate the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Grand Lodge of England. On June 24, 1717, four London lodges met and formed the first Grand Lodge. Does that mean our fraternity is 300 years old? Presumably it must be at least 300 “plus” years old, for where did the four London lodges originate? We know very soon after, Lodges in Ireland formed the Grand Lodge of Ireland in 1725 and the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1736. Elias Ashmole records in his diary that he was initiated into masonry in 1646. We have lodge minutes of a Scottish Lodge meeting dated July 1599, and the Halliwell Manuscript fancifully suggests masonry came to England from Egypt in the mid 900’s.

So whence came us? Over the next several months, we will present different theories on the origins of masonry.

Egyptian Mysteries and the story of Osiris

The mysteries were practiced by a priesthood performing exoteric or public ceremonies shared with the populace (cowans?) and esoteric ceremonies only shared with those who had passed through an initiation process. The mysteries celebrated Osiris and Isis during

the summer solstice (June 21). Could this be the source of masons celebrating the Feast of St. John the Baptist on June 24?

The initiation process began with the mysteries of Isis, which included a preparatory phase where the candidate prepared his mind and body for initiation. Could this have been a version of a Chamber of Reflection? The candidate was led through the bowels of the pyramids by a conductor where he was tested and purified by water, air, and fire. Could this be the source of our oaths (i) ..my body buried between hi and lo *water* mark.. (ii) the beast of the field and the vultures of the *air*... (iii) my bowels taken thence, and *burnt* to ashes? Unfortunately, little is known of the second degree, known as the mysteries of Serapis, however, it included additional trials and tribulations. In the third degree, known as the mysteries of Osiris, the candidate represented the murdered Osiris.

Osiris was King of Egypt, a wise noble king. He travelled the world to bring the blessings of civilization to other peoples. His brother, Typhon, however, conspired while Osiris was away, and upon his return had him murdered by placing him in a box and drowning it in the Nile. Isis, his wife, searches for his body and untimely discovers it entwined in a tamarisk tree in Byblos along the Phoenician coast (Tyre anyone?). For my readers who never studied botany in school, a tamarisk tree is known as the evergreen tree of the Middle East, similar to an acacia tree.

In some versions of the myth she raises Osiris from the dead to impregnate her, and she gives birth to Horus who avenges Osiris' death. The practice of Osirian mysteries included rites of fertility and symbolized resurrection and everlasting life. To some, Osiris represented the Sun, Isis the moon, and Typhon winter which "destroys" the sun until it is reborn again in the Summer. The Kings of Egypt associated themselves with Osiris, so that they would inherit eternal life. Any of this sound familiar? Does H.A.B. not represent resurrection and the acacia tree everlasting life?

In ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, the sun God Ra was represented by a point within a circle. To the ancients, God was represented by both male and female and regeneration. The circle

represented female, the point in the center represented a column or male (phallus), and combined it represented God or the sun, with the sun being a symbol of birth and renewal.

Perchance these mysteries did travel to England in 900 during the reign of Athelstan or maybe it's just coincidental? Next month we will explore the Dionysian Artificers.

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