

June Issue

## **Introduction**

### **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. This month we explore Ancient Greece and the Mystery of the Dionysian Artificers.

### **Whence We Came? Dionysian Artificers**

In last month’s issue, we discussed the similarities between Freemasonry and the Ancient Egyptian mysteries of Osiris. In this month’s issue, we will explore the mysteries related to the Dionysian Artificers.

### **Dionysian Artificers**

The ritual was based on civilizing and mastering the inner beast and primal nature that exists within each individual. The ritual consisted of two sets of rites, a public one and an initiatic one. The main festivities of the rites were held during the spring equinox. The ritual included a mourning period over Dionysus’ death, and then a rejoicing over his resurrection. Once again, similar to Osiris we see this concept of a ritual for the public to see but then a private ritual for only the select and worthy to see.

In Greek mythology, Dionysus is the son of Zeus and a mortal, Semele. Therefore, he is part man and part divine. Does this suggest the notion that all men, if they can control their desires and ambitions can become divine? In Greek mythology, Semele had an affair with a mystery man, who she did not realize was Zeus. Hera, Zeus’ wife, became jealous of the affair, and told Semele that the mystery man was indeed Zeus, and that if she didn’t believe her, she



should ask her mystery man to reveal himself. Semele begged her mystery man to reveal himself, and when he did as Zeus, she died, for no mortal could behold a God in all his glory. To save Dionysius, Zeus sewed him into his thigh, until he was born. Thus, Dionysius is sometimes referred to as twice born (once from Semele and once from Zeus). Are masons, twice born, once at birth and once after they are raised during the third degree?

The Dionysian Artificers were a secret society whose primary purpose was the erecting of buildings. To join this sect, a candidate had to be a certain age, and a conductor was appointed to prepare the candidate for initiation. Only those deemed worthy and qualified were advanced. At the ceremony of admission into these mysteries, the candidate was first shown into a dark room (a Chamber of Reflection?), called the “mystical chapel”. There certain questions were put to him (much like our candidate during their circumambulation around the altar). A holy book (or was it a sacred volume of law?) was presented from between two pillars (dare I say like J & B?). During his initiation, there was a “revealer of sacred things” and he was clothed in a sheep skin (is this our lamb skin apron?) or with a veil of purple. There was a torch-bearer who represented the sun, and beside the altar was a third person, who represented the moon. (Are they our Senior and Junior Deacons, who bear rods with the sun and the moon?). The initiation process included three degrees, where in the third degree the candidate was made symbolically to approach death, and then return to life (see below). The ceremonies were symbolical of the triumph of the spirit over matter. Interesting, in masonry we know the triangle represents Deity or soul and the square represents matter, body, or earth. Symbolically, the apron represents the triumph of the triangle over the square or man’s divine spirit controlling his worldly desires.

During the degrees, the candidate was made to represent the events connected with the slaying of Dionysius. After a variety of preparatory ceremonies, intended to call forth all his courage and fortitude, the initiate was laid in a coffin. Then began the search for the remains of Dionysus, which was continued amid scenes of great confusion until, the search having been successful, the mourning was turned into joy, light succeeded to darkness, and the candidate was invested with the knowledge of the secret doctrine of the Mysteries, namely the belief in the existence of one God, and a future state of rewards and punishments. I’m



sure I need not repeat the second section of the Master Mason degree, for one to see the obvious comparisons between this ritual and our degrees.

Laurence Gardner, in his book *Shadow of Solomon* quotes a book written in 1802 by Joseph Hippolyte da Costa that the Dionysian Artificers were associated with a group of Ionians who built the Temple of Diana, and when in Jerusalem, they referred to themselves as the Sons of Solomon. It is they who Hiram of Tyre sends to King Solomon to build the Temple, and as their mason mark, used Solomon's six-pointed interlaced triangles. In addition, they teach the Jewish people about sun worship and the immortality of the soul.

So do we carry the torch of the Dionysian Artificers or once again are any similarities merely conjecture and coincidence? Next month we will explore the Mithraism.

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Grand Historian - 2017