

August 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 Rome and the Comacine Masters.

### **Whence We Came? Comacine Masters**

The Comacine Masters were Lombard stonemasons, who worked in stone architecture. They were headquartered near Lake Como. The first known mention of this guild was in 643, when King Rothari of the Lombards put out an edict detailing the legal remedies should a house collapse that was built by a Comacine Master.

The Comacine Masters formed a secret brotherhood, whereby they would protect and preserve the secrets of stone building, provide mutual protection for each other, fraternalization, engage in lavish banquets, act as insurance brokers for their members, and care for their widows and orphans.

Members were limited to men, generally free although they did at times allow slaves, and each “lodge” was limited to a specific craft or the worship of a single God. A city would be limited to one lodge. The members would employ their “marks” in their work to identify who labored on what edifice (think Mark Master Mason). A Comacine Master had the full legal authority to engage in contracts and building works, and were presumably free to travel, a liberty not granted too many, so that they could engage in different building projects around Europe. It is believed that in 598, when Pope Gregory sent Augustine to Britain for

the purposes of converting the British Isles, that Augustine brought with him Comacine Masters to build churches and other edifices.

Mythology states that when Rome fell to the barbarians, ushering in the Dark Ages, it was the Comacine Masters who preserved civilization by being the keepers, not just of the knowledge of stone building, but also keepers of the studies of art, sculpture, literature, carving, and other liberal arts and sciences, that otherwise would have been lost to the ages. (Is this similar to our myth, where Enoch preserves wisdom from fire and flood within the two pillars?) They preserved their knowledge by sharing it only with those initiated into the organization and would solicit rulers to protect their monopoly over building projects.

The Comacine Masters were divided into three separate classes; novices, operatori, and magistri. They were paid different wages based on their skills. Each lodge was led by a Gran Maestro or Capo Maestro and had a treasurer and a secretary, they wore aprons, and possibly used as an emblem a Solomon's Knot. They had secret signs with which to recognize each other, especially as they travelled from town to town.

The Solomon Knot has many interpretations, one of which is that since it has no beginning nor end, it represents immortality or eternity. In Kaisersteinbruch Austria, there is a stone relief carving of a Comacine Master at work, with a hammer, and interestingly, he is wearing pants, with both legs rolled up at the knees.

Did the Comacine Masters preserve secret doctrines after the fall of Rome? Did they scatter their secrets within their building projects across Europe? Did they bring Freemasonry to England in 598? Was the Solomon Knot passed down to them from the ancient builders of Solomon's Temple? Is it all just a simple coincidence? Having touched upon Britain in this article, next month we will explore the linkage with the Druids.

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