

THE MASON WORD

by

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1977, I was in South Florida in a very enjoyable military assignment, and thinking about nothing in particular, when the phone rang. It turned out to be my assignments officer at the Army's Military Personnel Center in Washington, DC, who informed me that I had been back from overseas for some eight years and was currently at the top of the roster to go again. As things developed, I was headed for Saudi Arabia and in January, 1978, found myself at the Army Language School in California studying the Arabic language.

It was in the course of this study that I stumbled on an Arabic word which has, ever since, sparked my interest in the possible relationship between the Arabs and the Fraternity. That virtually all thinking researchers discount the theory that Freemasonry actually originated at the building of King Solomon's temple as stated in our ritual is not questioned. That the Near East, however, may have been a real influence on the development of Freemasonry seems to me to be more and more a possibility or perhaps even a probability. The word in question is one of the many Arabic greetings and is heard hundreds of times a day in Saudi Arabia. I used it myself countless times in dealing with the Arabs. It means, simply, "welcome".

A cautionary note is perhaps necessary. The Word is given in varying forms in most of the manuscripts, exposures, and other evidentiary material originating in England and on the Continent of Europe. Inasmuch, however, as the subject deals with one of the most sensitive pieces of esoterica in our ritual, the quoting of the Word itself has been carefully avoided. Citations are provided, however, to the most relevant of these documents and the reader is urged to consult these sources for more complete information.

BACKGROUND

There is dearth of information, in the literature, concerning the Mason Word itself and, frankly, most explanations which do appear center on convoluted explanations attempting to tie the word, or part of it, to ancient words, or concepts, primarily of Scottish or Hebrew origin. None of these are plausible, none have even so much as an indirect relationship to the ritual of the Third Degree, and none have the comfortable ring of authenticity.

First, there are many mistakes made in regard to language, not the least of which is a rather widely held conviction that the language of Christ was Hebrew — it was not Hebrew, but rather Aramaic, now extinct. Words and concepts are not easily translated from one language to another, and the sound of a word in one language obviously does not have the same meaning in another language. Certain of the existing approaches stumble badly on this point.

Second, the great towers of strength in Masonic history, Gould and Mackey are strangely silent on the subject of the origin of the Word. Harry Carr, a contemporary Masonic historian of great stature, was of opinion that the word was probably Hebrew in origin and, as such, would consist of a noun part and a verb part.¹

The lead article on the subject of the Word is the Prestonian Lecture for 1938, by Douglas Knoop, MA, and PM of Quatuor Coronati Lodge of Research No. 2076, London.² In this article, Knoop cites several of the old manuscripts and exposures where the known Word appears, in some cases perhaps as a mnemonic. He states that "Although it is almost certain that the area to which the Mason Word applied was Scotland, its age as an institution is more problematical." He cites as an early reference to it, a metrical account of the city of Perth, Scotland and its

environs, entitled "The Muses' Threnodie" by Henry Adamson in 1638 which includes the phrase "We have the Mason Word and second sight." While no clue is given as to what the Mason Word was, it evidently did exist in some form at that early date.

Knoop believed that the Mason Word implied much more than a mere term. Its value, in the operative days of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Scotland, was to distinguish an Entered Apprentice from a mere apprentice serving his first seven years in the operative craft. Both the Schaw Statutes of 1598 and the minutes of lodges at Edinburgh, Perth, Melrose, Aberdeen and Dumfries support the concept of the entrusting occurring at the successful conclusion of the initial apprentice period. Its use was to clearly distinguish and identify those who had completed their initial period of training and were free to seek work independently of the masters to whom they were, up to that point, bound.

Virtually all of what we know of the origin of our great Fraternity is drawn from two sources: The so-called "Manuscript Constitutions" which are our earliest records as to the manner of receiving new members commencing in the operative period with the Regius MS of c.1390, and extending into the speculative period as late as 1750; and the so-called "exposures" commencing in 1723 and apparently written by disgruntled former members for varying reasons which are not always apparent. These latter are, of course, immediately suspect in regard to authenticity but nonetheless must be accepted as being at least reflective of lodge practices in general as of their date of publication.

In reviewing the more significant of the early manuscripts pertaining to the Craft and its evolution, including the Edinburgh Register House MS of 1696,³ the Sloan MS of 1700,⁴ and the Trinity College Dublin MS of 1711,⁵ we find references to the Word, which through time, is gradually debased. More important to us, however, is the Graham MS dated 1726. It comes after the formation of the premier Grand Lodge in 1717, and interestingly, while it

describes a raising, the ceremony has to do with Noah and not Hiram Abiff. Thus, as late as 1726, the Hiram legend had not yet made its official appearance. In the ceremony described, the three sons of Noah decide to exhume his body in order to determine if there was anything on or about it to give them a clue as to the secret of how Noah knew what things would be needed in the new world after the Flood and thus placed them in the Ark. After exhuming the body and raising it masonically, we find this statement:

Father of heaven help us now for our Earthly father cannot so laid down the dead body again and not knowing what to do - so one said here is yet marrow in this bone and the second said but a dry bone and the third said it stinketh so they agreed for to give it a name as is known to free masonry to this day⁶

The first and most important of the exposures in which the Word is explicitly discussed is Prichard's Masonry Dissected, which appeared in 1730 and was reprinted several times, perhaps attesting to its accuracy for use as an aide-memoir. Further, however, it is our earliest evidence of three full degrees and of the adoption of the Hiram legend. Here the word is given but there is no explanation offered as to its meaning.⁷

We then pass to the French exposures occurring during the thirty year gap of such material in England from 1730 to 1760. Only one such exposure is included for our story; it being from the "*L' Order des Francs-Masons Trahi, et Le Secret Des Mopses Revele*", translated: "The Order of the Freemasons Betrayed and the Secret of the Mopses Revealed", commonly referred to as the "*Trahi*." Here the Word is given in two ways: Once signifying "Word of the Master" and later signifying sacred.⁸

Back to the English exposures, in Three Distinct Knocks, published in 1760 and alleged to represent the Antients' working at that stage, the word is given and a meaning supplied⁹, as is the case with Jachin and Boaz, appearing in 1762,

and alleged to represent the Moderns' working;¹⁰ except that no explanation is supplied in this latter case.

In this country, we have William Morgan's exposure of 1827, entitled Illustrations of Masonry, which launched the so-called Morgan Affair with its disastrous effects on the Fraternity. Morgan gives the word almost as in Three Distinct Knocks.¹¹

While perusal of these sources attests to the use of a single word, variously spelled in the sources cited, a major question remains unanswered: What is its origin? While the evidence is admittedly incomplete, I believe it possible that it could have evolved out of the Middle East. If so, how was it obtained?

THE NEAR EAST CONNECTION

First, let us examine the Arabs and the world of Islam. The story begins with the Prophet Muhamed. (A word here on spelling: The Arabic language uses characters, not unlike our letters, but of a distinct and different form and proceeding from right to left rather than the reverse to which we in the West are accustomed. There is utterly no direct correlation between any of their 28 characters and our 26 letters. Thus, we spell Arabic words in English as the sound to us in Arabic and there is no absolute spelling in English of an Arabic word. There are great variations in the spelling of the Prophet's name, in the word Muslim or Moslem and in the English spelling of their cities. This phenomenon is not restricted to the Arabic language but to any language where the characters are different from our letters. Thus, the Chinese city is variously known as Peiping, Peiking, or Beijing. Only the Chinese spelling, in their own characters, and their own pronunciation of it, which varies with dialects, remains constant. To illustrate this point, R. E. Lawrence, in writing the Seven Pillars of Wisdom, devised a total of seven different ways to spell in English the name of the city of Jiddah in Saudi Arabia, and used the seven indiscriminately in his text to hammer home the point.)

Back now to the Prophet. He was born at Mecca in Saudi Arabia in AD 571, a poor member of the high ranking Quraysh tribe which was the custodian of the Kaaba, a shrine to some 350 deities. Muhamed was orphaned at the age of six and married a wealthy widow at the age of 25.

At about this time, he began secluding himself in a small cave above the city of Mecca and was perplexed by the observation that while the Jews and the Christians each had a book of sacred writings, the Arabs had no book and were comparatively backward. Directly, he heard his first call: "Recite then in the name of the Lord who created" recorded in Koran, 96:1. The speaker was not the God of the Jews and the Christians, but the angel Gabriel speaking for that God. One of the most common misconceptions of Islam is that the term Allah refers to a Supreme Being separate from the Supreme Being of the Jew and the Christian. Conversely, it is indeed the same Supreme Being. Allah is merely the Arabic word for God, literally "The One". Thus, the well known declaration of the Muslim should not be quoted in the West as "There is no God but Allah and Muhamed is his Prophet", but rather "There is no God but God and Muhamed is his messenger."

Muhamed began to take his message of the one God to his Quarishi tribesmen and exhort them to forsake their multitudinous deities and embrace the new religion with its promise of Paradise for the true believers and of hell for those who refused. (Sound familiar?) There were, of course, few early adherents. The Koran itself was not written during the lifetime of the Prophet. Rather, he memorized what Gabriel told him and handed it onto his followers who likewise memorized it and handed it on. (Sound familiar?) Even to this day, many Muslims memorize the entire volume of the Koran.

In AD 622, the Prophet left Mecca and went to Medina. The reasons given for this so-called migration vary. One is that his message struck at the economic heart of his tribesmen who made their money selling icons and other

paraphernalia associated with the many deities. Gold, frankincense and myrrh, by way of interest, were all used in various ceremonies associated with the false deities. The Prophet's message rendered two of these materials almost worthless, for they had no other worthwhile economic purpose.

One of the other reasons given for the migration was that it was contemplated for over two years in order to find a more amenable population for the new religion. In any event, Muhamed went to Medina on September 24, 622 (AD) and it is from this date that Arabs measure time, it being year 1, and termed Al Hegira, or Year of the Migration.

At one point, the Prophet travelled to Paradise, being instantly transported from the Kaaba in Mecca to Jerusalem and thence to Paradise. His departure site was no other than Mount Moriah where Solomon's Temple was erected, and the Dome of the Rock on that site houses a footprint in the rock made by the winged horse which is said to have carried him on his visit to Paradise. Thus did Jerusalem become the third holiest city to the Arab world after Mecca, where he was born and died, and Medina where he flourished and is buried.

In connection with Jerusalem, we in the West tend to view the Crusades of the Middle Ages as a correct and proper campaign to wrest the Holy City from infidels. In fact, they were not infidels, but worshiped the same God as the Christian. They, also, viewed the fight as protecting their Holy City from the outside infidels of Europe. The Arabs point is that their side of the story has never been correctly told. Education produces understanding, my brethren.

Muhamed returned to Mecca in 632 AD (10 A.H.), became desperately ill and died on June 8. His sermon during that Farewell Pilgrimage includes these words:

"O ye men! Harken unto my words and take ye to heart! Know ye that every Moslem is a brother to every other Muslem, and that ye are now one brotherhood. It is not legitimate

for any one of you, therefore, to appropriate unto himself anything that belongs to his brother unless it is willingly given him by that brother."¹²

The concept of the level, my brethren, is very real to the Arab. Each man is utterly and absolutely no better and no worse than every other man, a message which should have some meaning to the Freemason.

Muhamed created a theocracy in Medina, and made a community with no priesthood, no hierarchy, no central see. The idea of a King has been accepted in the 20th century as modern life has pushed itself into Saudi Arabia, but there is no crown or State jewels, utterly nothing to set him apart from his brother Muslims. All who see him address him or call to him "*Ya Fahd, M . . .*" — "Hi Fahd, welcome!"

The Islamic religion has five tenets or pillars: The profession of faith (There is no God but God, etc.); fasting during the month of Ramadan; Alms Giving (interestingly, 2.5% of one's income or acquired property); praying five times each day; and a pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime provided it does not otherwise deprive one's family.¹³

Subsequent to the death of the Prophet, he was replaced by a succession of Caliphs, or Successors. The concept grew that they must propagate the faith to the outside world, and by sword if not otherwise possible. Thus arose the concept of the "*jihad*", or holy war, which was raised to the level of being virtually a sixth tenet of the faith. "Make war . . . upon such of those to whom the Book has been given until they pay tribute offered on the back of their hands, in a state of humiliation" (Koran 9:29).¹⁴ These words and concepts sound perhaps barbaric to the Westerner, yet one must remember that the Christians are also enjoined to propagate the faith, albeit not necessarily by the sword; further we do not have to look beyond the currently raging battles in Northern Ireland, the actions of the Puritans in Massachusetts Bay Colony concerning Roger Williams, and the Inquisitions of the Roman Church to recognize the

Christians also have made frequent use of the sword.

The Arabs, in their zeal, came boiling out of their desert home in the century following the Prophet's death and subdued most of the known world.¹⁵ They had no great civilization of their own, providing little more than their Book and their language. However, unlike some other world conquerors, who left little but destruction and desolation in their wake, the Arabs soaked up like a sponge the culture of their subjugated populations including classical literature, Hellenistic thought, Byzantine institutions, Roman law, Syriac scholarship and Persian art.¹⁶ In fact, it was the Arabs who maintained the vast bulk of the world's knowledge through what we know today as the Dark Ages, and they became the source of the European renaissance occurring between the 14th and 15th centuries.¹⁷

THE WORD TRAVELS

In their conquests, they proceeded first North reaching Constantinople (Istanbul to the Arab), but never subduing it, East to what is now India, and West through Egypt, across North Africa, reaching Europe via Gibraltar, subduing Spain, and across the Pyrenees into France where their advance was finally halted at the great Battle of Poitiers (or Tours) in 732 AD, by one Charles Martel, the grandfather of Charlemagne.¹⁸ Martel was a titular king of France and, more importantly, a patron of the stone masons. Brother Denslow informs us in 10,000 Famous Freemasons, that according to legend, Martel sent many stone masons into England, and it is certainly possible, indeed, perhaps even probable, into Scotland as well, and we begin to see how an Arabic word may well have traveled into the British Isles.¹⁹

A word, perhaps, is necessary on Arab customs. The Arabs, particularly in the area from which the Prophet came, produced perhaps little of importance to the world with the exception of their language. It is a beautiful sounding language and amongst their customs is the matter of the extended greeting. We in the West pay little heed to greeting one another

beyond "Hello", "*Bon Jour*" or "*Guten tag*". The Arab, however, will spend as long as ten minutes greeting, and being greeted by, a friend, beginning with "*a salaamu alayacum*" (familiar words to the Shriner, and meaning "The Peace be upon you"), the response being "*wa alaycum musalaam*" (and upon you be the Peace); "*Ahalan was sahalan*" (welcome), the same in response meaning, this time, welcome, I am glad to know you; "*Kayf Hayalak*" (How are you); "*Tayyib*" (good, fine); "*Haalakum*" (your condition?), "*Tayyabyn al Hamdu lil-laah*" (fine, fine, thanks be to God); "*faddal istariyh*" (please have a seat); "*shukran*" (thanks); "*afwan*" (you're welcome), "*was sholhak*" (and how are you?), "*B-Khayr*" (in good health), "*M . . .*" (welcome to my home, office, etc.)²⁰

A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION

It is my thesis that the word used by the Arabs for the latter purpose, that is "welcome", having been heard many times by the Franks from 732 AD onward, was carried, probably as a curiosity, by the French Stone masons into Scotland, or perhaps to England first, and was adopted by the operative masons as a unique word of identity symbolizing, probably, welcome to the ranks as an Entered Apprentice, handed on to the Speculatives and has come down to us unaltered. And, if you think about it, in our present third degree, what better way to greet the new mason, or any brother, than with the word "welcome". Welcome back from the dead, welcome to the Lodge, welcome to the Fraternity.

NOTES

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- ¹. Carr, Harry, The Freemason at Work, London, 1976, P. 9.
 - ². Knoop, Douglas "The Mason Word", Prestonian Lecture, 1938, appearing in The Collected Prestonian Lectures, 1925-1960, editor, Harry Carr, Quatuor Coronati Lodge, No. 2076, London, 1967, pp. 243-264.
 - ³. Knoop, Jones and Hammer, Early Masonic Catechisms, Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, London, 1975 (hereinafter referred to as EMC) p. 32.
 - ⁴. EMC, p. 48
 - ⁵. EMC, p. 70
 - ⁶. EMC, p. 93
 - ⁷. Prichard, Samuel, Masonry Dissected, Masonic Book Club, Bloomington, IL, 1977, p. 29 of the reproduction.
 - ⁸. Early French Exposures, ed., Harry Carr, Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, London, 1971, p. 254 and 267.
 - ⁹. Carr, Harry, Three Distinct Knocks and Jachin and Boaz, Masonic Book Club, Blooming, IL, 1981, p. 62 of the reproduction of Three Distinct Knocks.
 - ¹⁰. Ibid., p. 46 of the reproduction of Jachin and Boaz.
 - ¹¹. Morgan, William, Illustrations of Masonry, as reproduced in Three Distinct Knocks and Jachin and Boaz, op. cit., p. 84 and 85 of the reproduction.
 - ¹². Hitti, Philip K., The Arabs, Gateway Editions, LTC, South Bend, IN, Second revised paper back edition, 1970, p. 30-41.
 - ¹³. Ibid., pp. 49-54

¹⁴. Ibid., p. 59

¹⁵. Rogers, Michael, The Spread of Islam, Elsenier Phaidon, Phaidon Press, Ltd., published in the US by E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1976, p. 24.

¹⁶. Badeau, John S. et. al., The Genius of Arab Civilization, New York University Press, New York, 1975, pp. 5-8.

¹⁷. Ibid., p. 215.

¹⁸. Rogers, op. cit., pp. 24-25; and Hitti, op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁹. Denslow, William R., 10,000 Famous Freemasons, Missouri Lodge of Research, 1957, Vol. 1, p. 200.

²⁰. Defense Language Institute, Saudi Arabic Language and Cultural Familiarization Course, 1975, Vol 1, pp. 1-4 and p. 79.