

THE TABLEAUX: ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES OF THE TRACING BOARDS MITCH CHARMAN

“To study the symbolism of Masonry is the only way to investigate its philosophy.”

— RWBro Albert Mackey



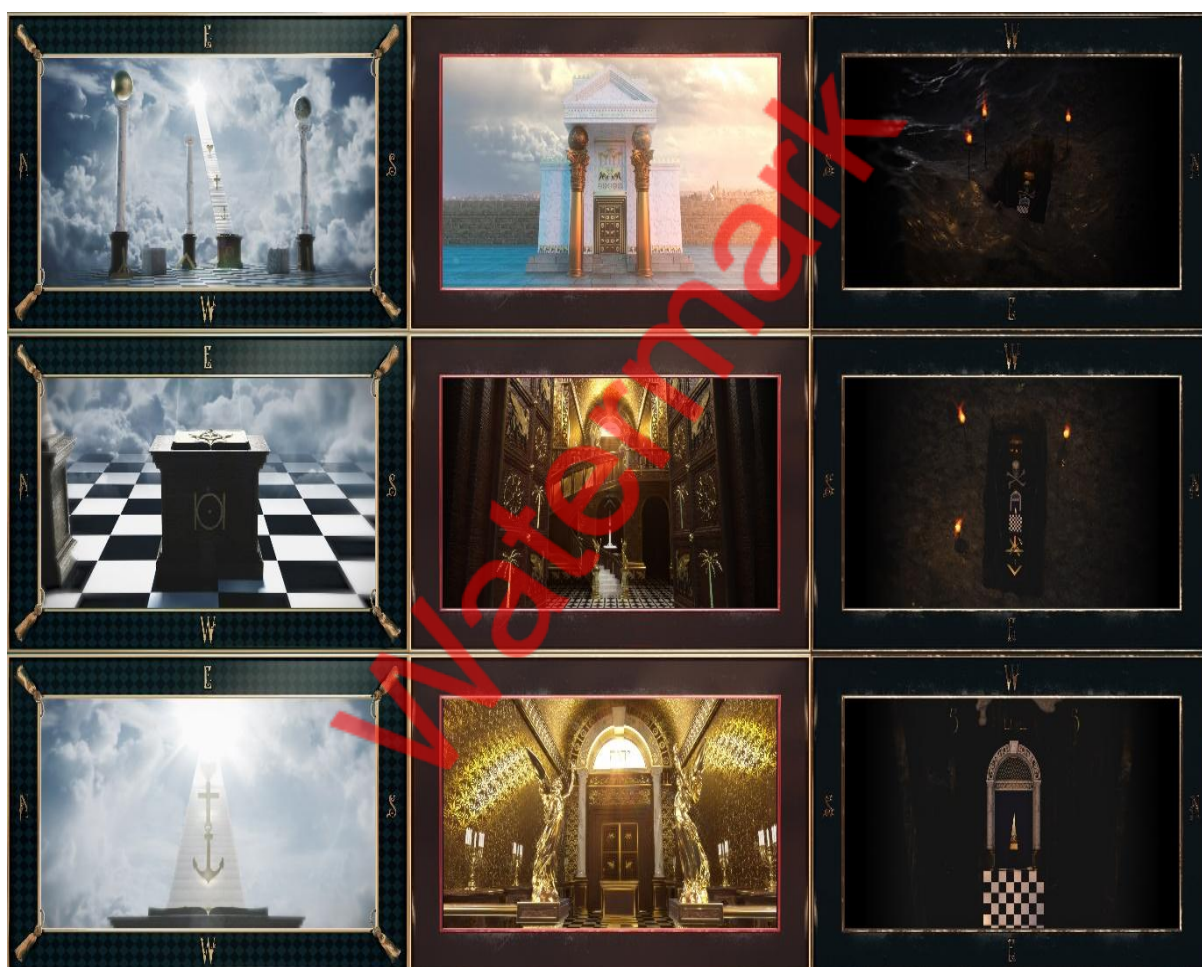
INTRODUCTION

Overview

The tracing boards, also known as lodge boards or trestle boards, are one of the most striking aspects of Masonry. They're densely symbolic, crystallising the essence of each degree's ritual in time and space. Although they're static and unmoving images, they're far from stagnant.

They sit, patiently waiting for an eye to engage so they can spark to life, pulling your attention around the scene, dynamically illuminating new insights, forging new relationships between symbols, and synthesising ideas beyond language which words can only approximate. The longer you look, the more they reveal. They're wonderful teaching aids and companions for concentration, contemplation, and meditation.

Ever since I first saw John Harris's three craft degree tracing boards, I wanted to create my own, a visual artist for film, television, and exhibition by trade. In late 2023 I decided to create my own. I started with the three familiar craft degree tracing boards based largely on John Harris' designs from c. 1820-45 and Josiah Bowring's designs from 1819. I also created some animated videos, with the camera moving through the scenes to explore their many parts. The ultimate goal would be to create longer versions of these to accompany a voice over of the official tracing board lectures, for presentations in rural lodges who have limited access to brethren with lectures memorized.



Among many features, my first degree tracing board includes a photographically accurate 3D model of the moon, based on high resolution photographs and topographical maps from NASA.¹ I'm also proud to say, I've made what could be considered the closest to an accurate

¹ Wright E. (USRA) and Petro N. (NASA/GSFC). "CGI Moon Kit." NASA Science Visualization Studio. September 6, 2019. <https://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/4720>

On presenting these boards and animations in open lodge, I was subsequently approached to design three more craft degree tracing boards, this time based on those used in the Ancient and Accepted Rite. For clarity, I will refer to the familiar modern tracing boards as Emulation boards, and those of the Ancient and Accepted Rite as the AASR boards.

representation of King Solomon's Temple at a 1:1 scale, or one that is congruent with Masonry, at least. To rebuild the Temple, I returned to the descriptions in the Bible, specifically 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles of the New International Version (NIV), as well as the current second degree tracing board lecture as recognised by the UGL of NSW and ACT.

Additionally, I referenced surviving Phoenician architecture, with an emphasis on the Ain Dara Temple in modern day Syria, built during the period of the first Temple in what was, at the time, part of the Tyrian empire, and which shares many glaring similarities to the First Temple.

Modelling, texturing, arranging, animating, and compositing every object of all six craft tracing boards was a considerable contemplative and meditative exercise. I learnt a lot. Pulling apart each element to isolate for this book revealed even more. It's my privilege to share some of this with you.

In the interest of brevity, I've kept this paper relatively short. It truncates ideas found in my more comprehensive book, a companion piece to this paper, titled *The Tableaux: Reflections and Insights into the Tracing Boards and their Symbols*. It includes deeper analyses of the tracing boards, more perspectives on each symbol, a thorough history, and insight into the design process, with diagrams illustrating the Biblical references for the King Solomon's Temple. I've also sourced historical tracing boards from c. 1740 to 1850 and have upscaled them to full page, high resolution images using archival detail-preservation software. You can learn more about *The Tableaux: Reflections and Insights into the Tracing Boards and their Symbols* at ionicpublications.com.

In both the book and this paper, some sections are deliberately vague to preserve the secrets of the Craft with which we've been entrusted. I won't discuss the widely recognised and agreed upon interpretations of the tracing boards and their symbols, but rather posit unique perspectives for your consideration. These are my own views and not those of any Grand Lodge, order, chapter, or lodge of brethren.

Ultimately, I'd love if any part of this text encouraged you to try your hand at making your own tracing boards or esoteric art. The benefits of this practice are gained, not through the quality of the end product, but the observations made during their creation. There may be new relationships you notice between symbols or compositional choices you might question at first, but which the boards themselves will answer in time. I can guarantee additional layers of meaning will be illuminated through the practice of recreating them. As Homer wrote in The Iliad: "To labour is the lot of man."

Comparative Analysis

Conceptual Framework

While most mentions of tracing boards are generally Masonic, the concept of tracing boards exists much earlier, and in a broader context. In fact, the Masonic artwork known as tracing boards are, by a purely physical definition, are not tracing boards at all. Traditionally, tracing boards are blank.

In preparation for bas-relief engravings and paintings, ancient Egyptian artists first laid down string to draw a grid of red lines, allowing them to maintain proper proportions for their hieroglyphs and figures. Their work is often cited as some of the first most accurately proportioned depictions of the human form.² These red lines can still be seen to this very day

² Robins G. *Proportion and Style in Ancient Egypt*. (p76). Texas: University of Texas Press, 1994.

on some abandoned carvings, which will forever remained unfinished.³ Artists still use this technique to scale up images or for initial sketches onto larger surfaces. This is an especially useful for mural artists who are so close to their massive designs, there's no way they can keep the big picture in mind while focusing on the details.

More recently, drawing boards and computer software supersede most of the need for an artist to draw the grid themselves. However, in some way, shape, or form, the grid is still the basis for many forms of art and design. The legacy of the tracing board continues. I frequently use a gridded linoleum cutting mat and a ruler/straight-edge for physical ink and graphite illustrations. And within the computer, 2D and 3D design software contain guides and world grids to aid alignment and perspective.

From these first instances in ancient Egypt to the most modern computer software, all achieve the same ends: surfaces for laying down designs with consistent proportions, arranged in a grid to aid drawing and cutting level horizons, upright verticals, and square corners.

Though the Masonic boards don't meet the physical definition of a tracing board, they certainly are symbolically: that is, guides and outlines, within which we may effectively design and craft ourselves with square conduct, level steps, and upright intentions within due bounds. Within the lodge, the mosaic pavement is technically the real tracing board. It's where the ritual work takes place to sketch out the architect's designs that will be applied to life. In some lodges, the tracing board or floorcloth placed (or drawn) on the mosaic pavement.

One Blueprint

As architectural blueprints or schematic form the plans of a building with many floors, so the tracing boards can be seen as schematics for a philosophical structure with many layers. Continuity implied through all three boards suggests they are connected, or three floors of the same blueprint.

On the mosaic pavement of the first degree emulation board sits a schematic of King Solomon's Temple: a tracing board within a tracing board. The first board containing the design of the second within it. In the second emulation board, the mosaic pavement has risen from the ground floor to the second storey landing. It also shows us the porch of the middle chamber ajar, but at a distance. This alludes to a central feature in the third board, where the mosaic pavement has progressed to the Most Holy Place.

The boards could also be seen as maps. Or more particularly, three overlays of one map. All AASR boards, as well as the first, third emulation boards (and early renditions of the second) even have cardinal directions on their borders.

Three Journeys

All boards point toward the Divine Light and show us methods of approaching it. They also highlight the layers of creation descend from it. The first emulation board directs us there via a ladder. More specifically Jacob's Ladder. Interpreted literally, a ladder is a straight trip upwards using both all limbs: a direct route. The end is always in sight. The whole body and mind are engaged on the task of climbing.

The second emulation board contains a long, winding set of stairs. Stairs only require the feet, but traversing them does require some additional effort. One also cannot see the top while they

³ "Principles of Egyptian Art." *Royal Society of Chemistry*. Accessed March 4, 2024.
<https://edu.rsc.org/resources/principles-of-egyptian-art/1622.article>

climb, only a few steps ahead. The third is arguably the easiest journey of all, a 'letting go.' It requires no limbs or effort, however every step on the journey is terminally opaque.

Similarly, the first two AASR boards contain stairs, three in the first, five in the second. Some historical versions of the third contained seven stairs. The third AASR board is very similar to the corresponding emulation board in its stark and obvious references to death, however it contains noticeably fewer elements.

Sacrifice

All three tracing boards outline a sacrifice. In fact, each ritual is, in a symbolic form, a sacrifice. Think about what work is done at the altar during each ritual and what we are willingly obligated to give up.

The first degree tracing board, framed by the Cardinal Virtues, shows the three Theological Virtues rising from the altar. And what is the practice of virtue, if not the overcoming of our animal nature? A willing sacrifice of sin. We purify ourselves when we give up our impurities. To attain freedom, we must give it away.

Fortitude is a sacrifice of fear, a biologically natural, primal response that requires constant, difficult decisions to willingly overcome. Justice, of both wrathful revenge as well as meekness, striking a balance of the two with less emotionally charged results, but always a better outcome long term. Prudence is an overcoming of sloth and Temperance, an unshackling from the gluttony and lust for those things keeping us bound to materiality and our lower nature.

As illustrated by the first degree tracing board, the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love (or Charity) are thus attainable on the conduit between the material and the Divine, once we can square our lower nature. The second degree tracing board shows the sacrifice of labour, the fruits of which are received in the symbolic form of wages in the Middle Chamber in direct proportion to the work. The third degree tracing board shows the ultimate sacrifice. Not death, but rather our lives: our time, vitality, and life force. As stated in Romans 12:1: "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship."

It is possibly an unrelated coincidence, given I can't find it written anywhere, but in ancient Rome, the dish used to collect the blood of sacrifices was a shallow, circular pan known as a 'patera.' The more common Greek equivalent for pouring libations, on which the patera was modelled, was called a 'phiale.' They often had a dimple in the middle for the thumb to be placed underneath, thus from the top they appear as a circle with a point at the centre, strongly alluding to the circumpunct.

A potent and enduring symbol in many orders and mystic traditions, the circumpunct symbolises many things, not least of which are the Sun (Sol), and the soul, the axis mundi, the Christ Centre. The seat of the Higher Self. And what are our lives, really, if not a living sacrifice for something higher? As sure as the Sun will set, and rise again, so too do we give up our vital life force to the Most High that granted it, so that for a time we may live in His Light and glory.



First Degree Tracing Board

The Frame

For many, the first impressions of the tracing boards tend to begin with the frame. It was certainly mine. It's hard to look past the fact North is not at the top, but rather East. The formal significance of this is widely discussed and understood. Something struck me while I was modelling the earth for the next tracing board, however, which I haven't come across anywhere else, but which is pertinent in any discussion of the Cardinal Directions.

North and South arrive. They have destinations. Travel far enough North eventually it becomes South and vice versa. On the other hand, East and West never arrive. They are eternal orientations without destination. You can travel Eastward for eternity. You can travel Westward for eternity. They are a direction to travel, not a destination to reach.

This reminds me of an audio recording of a lecture by Alan Watts. He describes life like a dance and a piece of music. The recording I heard of this is long detached from the original source, making it impossible to formally cite or find again, but it goes as follows: "In music, though, one doesn't make the end of the composition the point of the composition... Same with dancing, you don't aim at one particular spot in the room... The whole point of dancing is the dance... Existence is musical in nature." — Alan Watts

Music and dancing are always arriving but never arrive; they are purely of, and for, themselves. For those with an understanding of the significance of traveling East (and why you'd turn around and travel West again), I hope this may add a new dimension to your understanding. And for those who don't, this concept will keep returning through your journey, I encourage

you to investigate further and hope this points you in the right direction to shed light on the subject.

The Sun and Moon

The three pillars are often the centrally discussed feature in the first degree emulation board, or the two pillars in the AASR boards. Their symbolic meaning is robustly understood so I'll skip over my analysis of them here. But I analyse them at length in the book, *The Tableaux*.

Above the pillars appear the Sun and Moon, enduring symbols in most, if not all, spiritual traditions. Their central associations are with duality, illustrating that life and consciousness can only exist between two extremes, and of the harmony of balance (though never stasis).

Only between the light and dark can exist colour, beauty, and the myriad experiences of living: the only place to find the transcendent journey of drawing closer to the Creator. Though perhaps not the direct intention of this verse, for me this duality resonates with the Bible passage, Matthew 18:20: "For where two or more gather in my name, there am I with them."

In Taoist philosophy, specifically the Tao Te Ching, Lao Zhu says "The Tao gives birth to the One. The One gives birth to the Two. The Two gives birth to the Three. And the Three gives birth to the Ten Thousand Things. The Ten Thousand Things are bolstered by [or carry] Yin and wield [or embrace] Yang. Together they harmonize as Breath [or, they achieve harmony by combining these forces]."⁴

Between the Sun and the Moon is a considerably brighter light, denoting that the Divine Light is far more brilliant and illuminating than anything material.

On a canvas, it's hard to paint something brighter than the Sun. Previous tracing boards have approximated this by making the sun's rays orange and the Light between white.

In my version of the first degree emulation board, I've opted to make the sun a sphere of gold, still bright, but strongly reinforcing its material quality. The use of lens flares and effects has allowed me to render the Divine blindingly brighter, indicating its quality as transcendent beyond visible and material light.

Vitruvian Virtues

On the topic of the classical orders of architecture, it would be worth discussing the work of Vitruvius, the Roman architect. He wrote the *Ten Books on Architecture*, known as *De Architectura* or *On Architecture*. Today, his name is more commonly associated with Leonardo da Vinci's "Vitruvian Man," modelled after Vitruvius's theories on the ratios of a 'perfectly proportioned man' (although additional research has revealed da Vinci also applied a lot of his own empirical measurements⁵). As an aside, relevant in a Masonic context it's worth noting how da Vinci illustrates the Vitruvian Man, the human form, squaring the circle.

In Vitruvius's work, he posits many theories that defined the rules of the classical orders of architecture which are still regularly used today. Many have to do with proportions, taking inspiration from Nature and, specifically, the human body. For example, the ratio of the capital

⁴ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* chapter 42, trans. by McDonald J. H. and Yutang L.

⁵ Baugh L. S. "Vitruvian Man: figure study by Leonardo da Vinci." Encyclopaedia Britannica. Updated February 26, 2024.

to the pillar being the same ratio as that of the human head to the body. Some Roman pillars were even fashioned in the likeness of human figures.⁶

One glaring relationship to Masonry is his three central virtues, which Vitruvius strongly encouraged: *firmitas*, *venustas*, and *utilitas*.⁷ In other words, strength, beauty, and utility, or the Masonic concepts of Strength, Beauty, and Wisdom. Some consider Wisdom closer to Knowledge than to utility but, as the old saying goes, knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit, wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad. Wisdom is inextricably bound with utility.

Many Masonic and artistic lessons can be learnt from the classical orders of architecture and the Greek and Roman philosophy surrounding them. For example, the six concepts within beauty, or *venustas*, are: *ordinatio*, *dispositio*, *symmetria*, *eurythmia*, *decor*, and *distributio*. In English, respectively: proper proportions, proper arrangement, symmetry, harmony, proper appearance, and proper distribution of resources. Five of those are actionable rules which, when followed, ultimately create the sixth, *eurythmia*, the pleasant feeling of beauty and harmony. It's an experience that, though discussed exhaustively, is difficult to articulate, something like the striking experience of awe when absorbing the sight of something beautiful and with considerable grandeur. Various ancient and contemporary definitions have been synthesised by author Pavlos Lefas: "A beautiful aspect and a balanced appearance of the members in their composite assemblage."⁸

Today's utilitarian society downplays the importance of beauty, especially in architecture. But it is the highest and quite possibly the most important feature of living. As an artist, author, and filmmaker, it is forever my pursuit to provide these keys of beauty so that audiences and readers may unlock this door to Divinity within themselves.

The Four Cardinal Virtues

The word virtue comes from the Latin *virtus*. It's last common usage in the ancient world closely associated it with the four cardinal and canonical virtues, but it also had earlier associations with manliness, bravery, and moral excellence, commonly associated with the military.

There was a strength to the word which has been watered down over centuries until the concept has become somewhat commonplace today. In schools, kids and adults alike brush them off as obvious and accepted, even though I doubt most people could name them all, much less define them.

The word comes from the root *vir*, meaning man, or, more specifically, "not as the state of being a man, but as the proper characteristic of a man."

It is also the root of 'virile.' There's connotations of nobility and chivalry in acting virtuously by its original usage. And rightly so, being virtuous is rarely always easy. Only those who truly practice them, especially under stress to act otherwise, know their difficulties.

In researching this, I discovered the Old English word for virtue was *cræft*, which, as far back as the writing of the legendary epic Beowulf (700-1000 AD), meant "strength," as well as its

⁶ Vitruvius Pollio. *On Architecture*. "Book III, Chapter I: On Symmetry: In Temples and In the Human Body," trans. Morgan M. H. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. London: Humphrey Milford. Oxford University Press. 1914.

⁷ Vitruvius Pollio. *On Architecture*. "Book I, Chapter II: The Fundamental Principles of Architecture," trans. Morgan M. H. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. London: Humphrey Milford. Oxford University Press. 1914.

⁸ Lefas, P. "On the Fundamental Terms of Vitruvius's Architectural Theory." *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, Vol. 44 (p179). Oxford University Press. 2000

current definition of “skill, art, and profession.” It’s no surprise that Masonry is referred to as the Craft. Craft and virtue were once synonymous.

The three Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope, and Love/Charity are central and apparent in all modern designs of the first degree tracing board. But although I’d heard it in the lecture, I’d not taken too much notice of the much more subtle inclusion of the four Cardinal Virtues: Temperance, Prudence, Fortitude (or Courage), and Prudence (or Wisdom).

In the tracing board lecture of the first emulation degree, it is mentioned the tassels in the four corners are symbolic of the Cardinal Virtues. That seemed very ambiguous to me, and somewhat arbitrary and out of the way. I initially considered tassels and ropes a frivolous choice for the symbols representing something as important as these Virtues.

However, as I finished modelling the hair simulation for the splayed tails of the tassels and placed them in the corners of the first emulation board, it struck me that the object itself was not the importance, but their location.

In most lodge rooms, the Cardinal Virtues are placed in the corners of the room, as well as adorning the corners of the mosaic pavement in the centre. The similarity between their presence in lodge and on the tracing board was their location: always corners, all of which are perfect right angles.

Every Mason knows to pay attention when a 90-degree angle is mentioned. What we have is a room, a tiled floor, and a frame, all made square by the Cardinal Virtues. And only within a stable structure can the Theological Virtues be cultivated.

To square one’s conduct is to construct the Virtues within the self (and this has additional implications in the rendering of the perfect ashlar from the rough with the practical use of tools).

The circumpunct, with its two parallel lines as shown on the altar, are interesting in this respect. The circumpunct itself is a motif frequently recurring in many esoteric orders and occult works, but never elsewhere that I’ve found with lines on either side.

Not only are they parallel with each other, but also perfectly perpendicular to the Bible or other Holy Book sitting on top, these being the sources in which we learn the Virtues.

If the circle is related to boundaries set around our passions and the lines define their outer limits, then the Bible (or equivalent) becomes that which adds right angles to the lines on either side of the circumpunct. Thus, the Bible squares the circle.

The Three Theological Virtues

Faith, Hope, and Charity (or Love) are clearly central features of the first emulation board, depicted in various forms throughout its evolution. I feel their truest form are in their appearance as ethereal women, the three daughters of Saint Sophia for their allusions to angels. For contemporary viewers, however, their conventional symbols of the cruciform (or cup), anchor, and heart are perhaps clearer.

It is a common conception that the rungs of Jacob’s ladder are formed of the Theological Virtues and are what allow us to travel upwards toward the Creator. I agree, but I’d also like to posit an additional perspective that I’ve not heard or seen discussed much.

By placing the Theological Virtues on Jacob’s Ladder where angels are known to traverse, the tracing board relates these virtues with angels by association. Virtues are also a class of angel

according to the Christian hierarchy of angels. From this perspective, we could interpret this as breathing life into angels and doing their work by acting virtuously.

Rather than winged people, angels are perhaps better understood as divine forces, titles, and dignities that can become present in the material world when channelled through living beings: us. Adopting angelic qualities, the Theological Virtues, allow angels to walk among us.

In Genesis 28:12 it states, “He [Jacob] had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to the heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.” Note the angels are both ascending and descending. In this interpretation, the Theological Virtues are not simply present on Jacob’s Ladder in the ascent, but also the descent. The common conception is that one must hold these Virtues in order to ascend to Divinity.

The Theological Virtues are also a lot easier to practice and come much more naturally once the Cardinal Virtues are in balance. One could go as far as to say, they descend from above and bless us with their presence. Hope is easier with courage/fortitude, and almost impossible without it. Faith is far easier with a regular practice of temperance, as well as the prudent study and application of wisdom. Divine Love is blessed upon us naturally when in harmony, or balanced, with justice.

I have rendered the Theological Virtues as golden jewels for this reason: though we also need to cultivate and reach for them, they are also gifts we receive from On High once we have strong foundations of the four Cardinal Virtues.

Jacob’s Dream at Bethel

The Biblical events surrounding Jacob’s Ladder, that is, Genesis 28:10-22, is of considerable significance to Masonry. Initially, Genesis 28:11, “taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep.”

When taken with the events after the dream in verse 18, “...Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel.”

It’s not hard to see its relation to the Craft. Here we have a sacrifice made on a pillar to consecrate, and establish, the house of God. The word Bethel literally means the house of God.

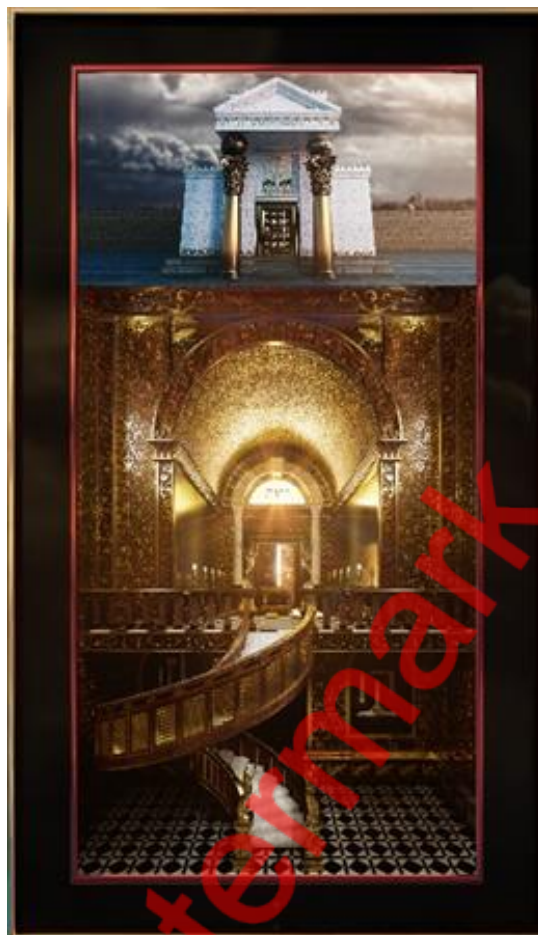
The other relevant point in these verses is Genesis 28:16-17, “When Jacob awoke from his sleep he thought, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.’... This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”

One interpretation is that Jacob refers to his physical location. The other, that he speaks of the world itself or, more specifically, the world for those who recognise it for what it is. Many go about the material world unaware.

For those who open themselves up to Jacob’s Ladder, they can feel the angels ascending to and descending from heaven in this divine dwelling place of God.

This reminds me of a quote by the filmmaker and mystic, Alejandro Jodorowsky who once said: “A temple is not the ‘exclusive’ place of the sacred. We go to the temple to learn the sense

of the sacred. If the lesson has been understood, the entire earth becomes a temple, every man becomes a priest, and every food is a Communion host.”⁹



Second Degree Tracing Board

Building the Temple

Rebuilding King Solomon's Temple was a daunting feat. I wasn't sure if I was up to the task, partly because I didn't feel I could do it justice. But also, because of many the Masonic lectures and discussions mentioning the honour and importance of contributing to such a remarkable structure.

To ensure I could do this justice, I abandoned the visual reference of previous tracing boards and online renditions of the temple. I returned to the original literature: 1 Kings 6-7, 2 Chronicles 3-4 (in this case, the King James Bible), plus the second Tracing Board lecture, as given during a second degree ceremony of the emulation ritual as it is currently held in the UGL of NSW and ACT.

What I discovered in comparing these three descriptions of the Temple was considerable granular detail, but also much ambiguity and many contradictions: within themselves, between Biblical descriptions, but mostly between the Biblical and Masonic descriptions. The discrepancies are what I'd like to focus on here for, in highlighting them, they reveal a lot about the Temple and the Craft.

⁹ Jodorowsky A. *The Finger and the Moon: Zen Teachings and Koans*, trans. Ulquiola A. T. (p. 5). Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2016.

Importantly, I don't believe any description of King Solomon's Temple was meant to be taken literally. They weren't written down as blueprints for operative builders, but spiritual blueprints for builders of the Self. Perhaps the discrepancies are deliberate attempts to point this out. However, as I had to build a physically congruent Temple, I had to arrive at some conclusions.

I weighted most heavily the Masonic description, being that these are Masonic tracing boards. I tied to the best of my ability to avoid taking purely artistic license, except in instances requiring visual legibility or where there was a lack of adequate description. I looked to architecture of the surrounding areas of the same period. King Solomon's Temple took heavy inspiration from Phoenician temples, not least because King Hiram, the lead architect, supplier of material, and designer of many of the elements including the pillars, was King of Tyre, a Phoenician city which is now found in modern day Lebanon.¹⁰

In the Afrin District of neighbouring Syria, also once part of the Phoenicia, is the home of an archaeological site of a temple, the Ain Dara Temple, now an archaeological site, which bears a striking (and controversial) resemblance to the description of King Solomon's Temple.¹¹ Though space does not permit me to elaborate here, I investigate this in more depth in *The Tableaux*.

The Cubit

Unlike previous artists, in creating my version of the second degree tracing board, I had the luxury of using 3D software, in this case Maxon Cinema 4D, which allowed me to work to accurate scales. I can easily define and alter the measurement and position of every object to the thousandth of a millimetre. With this, I could build King Solomon's Temple to the exact measurements specified in the Bible. However, all measurements are given in cubits, specified in 2 Chronicles 3:3 as, "the cubit of the old standard."

A cubit is referred to as the length of 6 palms, or from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. Indeed, the word cubit seems to have derived from the Latin word, *cubitus* which means elbow. Naturally, as this is based on a variable human measurement, this fluctuates depending on the individual, age, gender, culture, and time. Luckily, and unsurprisingly, ancient cultures standardised their measurement system, as the imperial system has done with the length of a foot, although evidence shows some variation was still present.

We're also fortunate to have abundant research done on the topic, with many measurements being taken across culture and time periods to arrive at some accepted standard cubit lengths from those periods. The Babylonian cubit around 49.5 cm (19.8 in) and the Egyptian cubit is cited as 6-7 hands ranged from 42 to 48 cm (17-19 in), with a common cubit averaged at 44.425 cm (17.5 in). Archaeological evidence places the Israelite cubits in the same range as the Egyptian. More specifically are the Biblical measurements of the royal, or architectural, cubit of approximately 52.5 cm and the short, or anthropological, cubit of 45 cm.

Based on the 2 Chronicles definition, I chose the Israelite Standard cubit of 44.425, rounding up 0.475 cm to a flat 45 cm, which is also the Anthropological cubit, or Egyptian average cubit. As most measurements provided in the description of King Solomon's Temple are an even number of cubits, this allowed me to work in multiples of 90 cm which resulted in nicer round numbers when working at larger scales. It's possible the actual King Solomon's Temple was

¹⁰ "Phoenicia," *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed March 4, 2024.
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Phoenicia>

¹¹ Monson J. "The New Ain Dara Temple: Closest Solomonic Parallel," *michaelsheiser.com*. Archived Jul 14, 2011.

built in the Royal or Archaeological cubit of 52.5 cm, so my version may be a little smaller with a ratio of either 1:1 or 1:0.95.

Laying the Foundations

The dimensions of King Solomon's Temple are given in 1 Kings 6:2 as "... sixty cubits long, twenty wide and thirty high." 9m W x 13.5m H x 27m D. However, later descriptions reveal this must be the interior dimensions. Verse 16 says, "He [King Solomon] partitioned off twenty cubits at the rear of the temple with cedar boards from floor to ceiling to form within the temple an inner sanctuary, the Most Holy Place. The main hall in front of this room was forty cubits long."

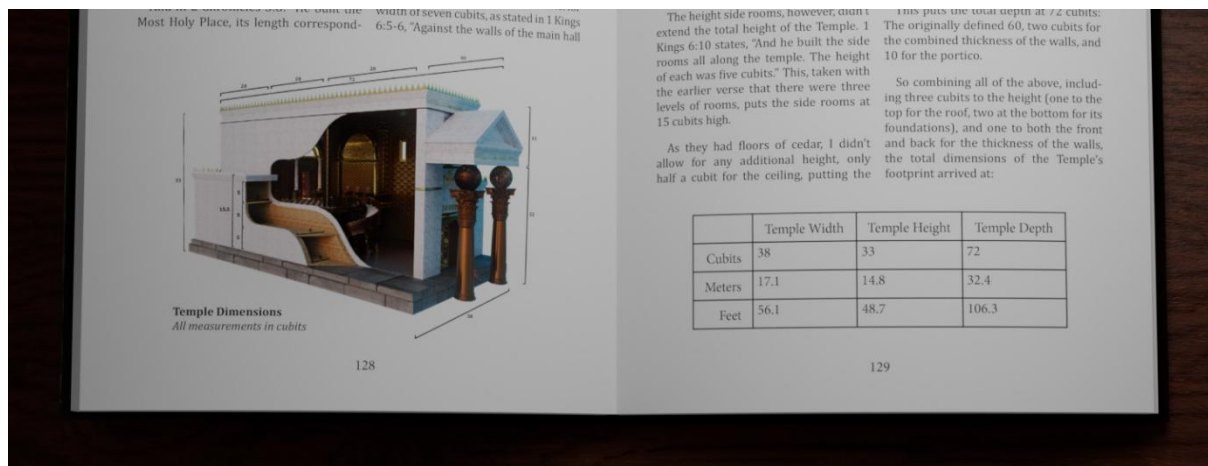
And in 2 Chronicles 3:8: "He built the Most Holy Place, its length corresponding to the width of the temple—twenty cubits long and twenty cubits wide." Additional descriptions of the two cherubim's 10 cubit wingspan, touching the walls and each other in the centre, further reinforce the interior dimensions of 20 cubits. Thus, if the width inside is 20 cubits and the walls must be more than zero cubits thick, the exterior of the temple must be larger than stated.

There was also additional width allocated for the side rooms with interior width of seven cubits, as stated in 1 Kings 6:5-6, "Against the walls of the main hall and inner sanctuary he built a structure around the building, in which there were side rooms. The lowest floor was five cubits wide, the middle floor six cubits, and the third seven. He made offset ledges around the outside of the temple so that nothing would be inserted into the temple walls. Side rooms on both sides with the widest width of seven cubits adds an additional 14 cubits, or 6.3 m (20.66 ft). Allowing for one cubit thick interior walls, seven cubit side rooms, and one cubit thick exterior walls adds nine cubits on either side, 18 cubits overall, or 8.1m, leading to a total exterior width of 38 cubits, 17m.

But the side rooms' height doesn't extend the total height of the Temple. 1 Kings 6:10 states, "And he built the side rooms all along the temple. The height of each was five cubits." This, taken with the earlier verse that there were three levels of rooms, puts the side rooms at 15 cubits high. I allowed one cubit for the ceiling, made the total exterior height of the side rooms 16 cubits, or just over half the height of the Temple's main structure.

There is also mention of a portico at the front, adding to the temple's depth. 1 Kings 6:3 states, "The portico at the front of the main hall of the temple extended the width of the temple, that is twenty cubits, and projected ten cubits from the front of the temple." And in 2 Chronicles 3: 4 it says, "The portico at the front of the temple was twenty cubits long across the width of the building and twenty cubits high." This gave me the dimensions of the portico: 20 W x 20 H x 10 D, or 9m x 9m x 4.5m, putting the total depth at 72 cubits: the explicitly mentioned 60 cubits, plus two for the combined thickness of the walls, and 10 for the portico.

Combining all the above, including three cubits to the height (one for the roof, two beneath for its foundations), and a combined one for the thickness of both the front and back walls, the total dimensions of the temple's footprint becomes: 17.1m wide, 32.4m deep, and 14.8m high.



Ad Orientum

One thing that always bothered me about the Harris tracing board was the orientation of the Holy of Holies, in relation to the orientation of the entrance. I can see why he chose his layout. The stairs must wind, and he's arranged it all in such a way that viewer can see everything at once: the exterior, the pillars, the curvature in the stairs, and the middle chamber. To achieve all of that from one realistic perspective is a feat worth recognition. But it's come at a cost. Temples, lodges, and indeed the tabernacle the temple was based on are, or should, be facing ad orientum: the doors facing West, so the journey in and though is an Eastward one.¹² Or, in the case of some temples of the Mysteries such as the Temple of Mithras, the Roman-era remains of which were discovered in Walbrook in the City of London in 1954, the doors face East so the journey in is Westward and return out is due East.¹³ If John Harris placed his entrance due West, the journey up the stairs puts the Most Holy Place in the North, which strikes me as unlikely both for temples of the period, as well as for its Masonic connotations.

There's one Biblical passage that I physically haven't been able to square, which is 1 Kings 8: "The entrance to the lowest floor was on the south side of the temple; a stairway led up to the middle level and from there to the third." This is also the only reference to stairs. What is odd about it is the placing of the entrance on the South side. If this is the case, Harris is placing the Most Holy Place due West, the opposite direction.

Placing the entrance on the South side is problematic for a number of reasons. First, the description of the two pillars is differentiated by referring to them on the North and South sides which, if the entrance was on the South, would put the pillars one in front of the other, instead of side-by-side.

Additionally, given the width of the main hall is the same as the Holy of Holies, 20 cubits, it can only be approached lengthwise. Since the main hall is 40 cubits, if the entrance was indeed on the South side, this would put the pillars and entrance far down one end of one long side of the temple. While there is nothing that says the side rooms ran the entire length of the temple, one side would have to end short of the wall to allow for the entrance. This all leads to a structure that breaks all the virtues of Vitruvian architecture and ultimately creates a visually unbalanced structure lacking in beauty.

¹² Lewis C. T. Ph.D. and Short, C. LL.D. *A Latin Dictionary*. Founded on Andrews' edition of Freund's Latin dictionary. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1879.

¹³ "Temple of Mithras," *London Mithraeum*, accessed 4 March, 2024. <https://www.londonmithraeum.com/temple-of-mithras/>

If the temple is indeed modelled on the tabernacle, the only conceivable orientation is with the pillars and entrance on the West side to proceed due East, through the ground floor and up the stairs into the middle chamber, conjointly 40 cubits, and then reach the Most Holy Place at the back third, a perfect cube of 20 cubits in all directions. This is one of the only explicit elements from the Bible, pertaining to the building of the temple, with which I have taken artistic license, and I feel it was the right decision. But it did present me with one more glaring hurdle to overcome.

The Staircase

Although the Bible doesn't mention it, the winding staircase is one Masonic feature I absolutely could not omit. But given the orientation of the temple, there's only two ways winding stairs could arrive at the second storey: the first, if each step were too tall to climb, or the second, if the staircase curved more than 90 degrees as is done in Harris's tracing boards. In fact, by modern, international step height regulations, 33 stairs perfectly complete a 360 degree rotation.¹⁴ This also puts the second storey at a similar height for buildings of the period, as well as modern standards. The second floor landing also splits the temple directly in half, which all supported my decision.

A full 360 degree rotation for the staircase also reinforces one of my favourite symbolic interpretations of the winding staircase. Though it far exceeds the symbolic (but physically impossible) fifteen steps, it embodies a deep truth regarding the journey of life, labour, and knowledge: being unable to see more than a few steps in front as you advance.

Decor

In the interest of space, I'll mostly skip over the discussion of the décor. A few relevant passages: 1 Kings 6:18 says, "The inside of the temple was cedar, carved with gourds and open flowers. Everything was cedar; no stone was to be seen." The Harris tracing board disregards this, and indeed most reference to decor, entirely. I agree with him in some cases, disagree in others, and have struck a middle balance for my designs.

The interior of the temple is often depicted with absolutely every surface plated in gold. This is elaborated at length in 1 Kings 6:29-35 and 2 Chronicles 3:4-7. The impression is: lots of cherubim, palm trees, flowers, and an overwhelming amount of gold. I tried this out for my version but, while it strikes an awe-inspiring mental image, in practice it's wildly excessive and monotonous. It's much better in the imagination and for its symbolic connotations, the gold losing its majesty and rarity in its sheer gross abundance.

For my versions, I wanted to stay true to the impression created by the Biblical descriptions of the interior of the temple, without going overboard on the gold. I opted for cedar and deep juniper wooden surfaces with the flowers, palm trees, and cherubim plated in gold. Ultimately, though a little artistic license was taken, I feel my result is far closer to the literary impression of the Bible than a literal rendering would have created. To me, it holds adheres closer to the Masonic (and Vitruvian) virtues of wisdom, strength, and beauty.

Setting Up the Pillars

I spent a lot of care and attention on the pillars. 1 Kings 7:15-20, states, "He [Hiram, King of Tyre] cast two bronze pillars, each eighteen cubits high and twelve cubits in circumference. He

¹⁴ "3.9.1.2 Stairway Construction," *National Construction Code*, accessed 4 March 2024.

<https://ncc.abcb.gov.au/editions/2019-a1/ncc-2019-volume-two-amendment-1/part-39-safe-movement-and-access/part-391-stairway>

also made two capitals of cast bronze to set on the tops of the pillars; each capital was five cubits high. A network of interwoven chains adorned the capitals on top of the pillars, seven for each capital. He made pomegranates in two rows encircling each network... The capitals on top of the pillars in the portico were in the shape of lilies, four cubits high. On the capitals of both pillars, above the bowl-shaped part next to the network, were the two hundred pomegranates in rows all around.”

But in 2 Chronicles 3:15, “For the front of the temple he made two pillars, which together were thirty-five cubits long, each with capitals five cubits high. He made interwoven chains and put them on top of the pillars. He also made a hundred pomegranates and attached them to the chains.” Then in 2 Chronicles 4:12-13, “The two pillars; the two bowl-shaped capitals on top of the pillars; the two sets of network decorating the two bowl-shaped capitals on top of the pillars; the four hundred pomegranates for the two sets of network (two rows of pomegranates for each network, decorating the bowl-shaped capitals on top of the pillars).”

In the Masonic description, there is also the two spheres denoting earth and the heavens on top of the pillars, not mentioned anywhere in the Bible nor given any measurements. Additional to the network, the lecture also refers to nets thrown over both pillars to complete them.

So many renditions of these famous pillars have been made, interpreted by artists for centuries. But none have fully satisfied me. They’ve either looked like standard Corinthian capitals, which would have been much easier to describe, else they are a vast array of bulbous and extravagant structures. The only similarity between everything I’ve seen, is they all ignore or exaggerate one or more parts of the very detailed but elusively ambiguous descriptions. And, once I embarked on building them myself, I fell prey to the same complexities.

My first versions looked like pineapples, but my second fell back on other Phoenician pillars of the era and became simply Corinthian capitals. Throwing them both out and reading the instructions much more carefully, I arrived at my third and final design. To their historical accuracy, I cannot elaborate further. But of all the many varied versions I’ve seen, these sit best with me.

In the Biblical passages above, the only measurement I had for certain was the circumference, 12 cubits, from which I could work out the radius: $r = c / (2 \times \pi)$, giving me 85.94 cm. This appears as roughly 3-4 cubits wide from the front.

We also have described the pillars at heights of either 18 or 17.5 cubits high with capitals of 4 or 5 cubits or, in some artists’ renditions, a combined 9 cubits. 17.5 to 18 cubits isn’t a huge discrepancy, this could easily be owing to the ambiguity of a measurement system as inconsistent and varied as a forearm. I settled on 18 cubits for the pillars, or 8.1m, and five for the capital, or 2.25m. Given the reference to four cubits was in specific reference to the lilywork, the network would be kept for the bottom one-fifth of the capital. This was an ultimately satisfying conclusion, as it relatively resembles the laws of harmonious Vitruvian proportions, with the bottom one cubit of the capital for the network, and the top four for lilywork.

What remained ambiguous was whether the 18 cubits is inclusive or exclusive of the height of the capital, not to mention the addition of the height of the spheres added on top (a purely Masonic addition that felt important to keep). If the pillars are 18 cubits excluding the capitals, assuming there are no additional measurements omitted, the additional five cubits on top places them at a combined height of 23 cubits, plus the spheres.

From a literary and philosophical point of view, this doesn't make a difference either way. The symbolic associations are drawn from their decorations, grandeur, and duality. But, as I had to physically build them to proceed, I needed an answer. So, the first question I asked is: are these pillars freestanding, or are they supporting the structure?

Establishment

In the emulation board and some artists' illustrations of the temple, the pillars are freestanding. In others, they're supporting the roof. In the much more prevalent depictions, usually based on the second temple, they're shown embedded in the walls. But in no depiction that I've seen has anyone fashioned the portico for the front, or at least not one as described in the Bible. Some renditions have allocated a small alcove of the additional 10 cubits, but none place the portico forward from the temple at the prescribed height of 20 cubits, 10 shorter than the temple's main structure. Unless I've missed another passage saying this should be ignored, all existing artists' renditions of the temple seem to have missed this bit.

In chapter 7:21 it states, "He erected the pillars at the portico of the temple." As previously mentioned, the portico protruded 10 cubits forward from the temple. One would imagine 4.5 meters of protruding stone would need supporting. A portico by design, both now and at the time, is, by definition, separated from the main structure by its protrusion from the walls, their load supported by pillars.

Much more important symbolically is the consideration of King Solomon's Temple, and indeed the human body and the lodge, as the house of God. Much attention and significance are given to the stability that is established because of the two pillars. 1 Chronicles 17:12 speaks of God saying to King David of Solomon building the temple: "He shall build me a house and I will establish his kingdom [or throne] forever." And of course, the striking Masonic equivalent stated during the second degree.

The importance is placed precisely in the stability provided by the two balanced sides. One pillar provides strength to hold up a roof, but two pillars provide the stability that establishes the temple in which can dwell the presence of the Divine. If the pillars were freestanding, they're not doing much in way of achieving either.

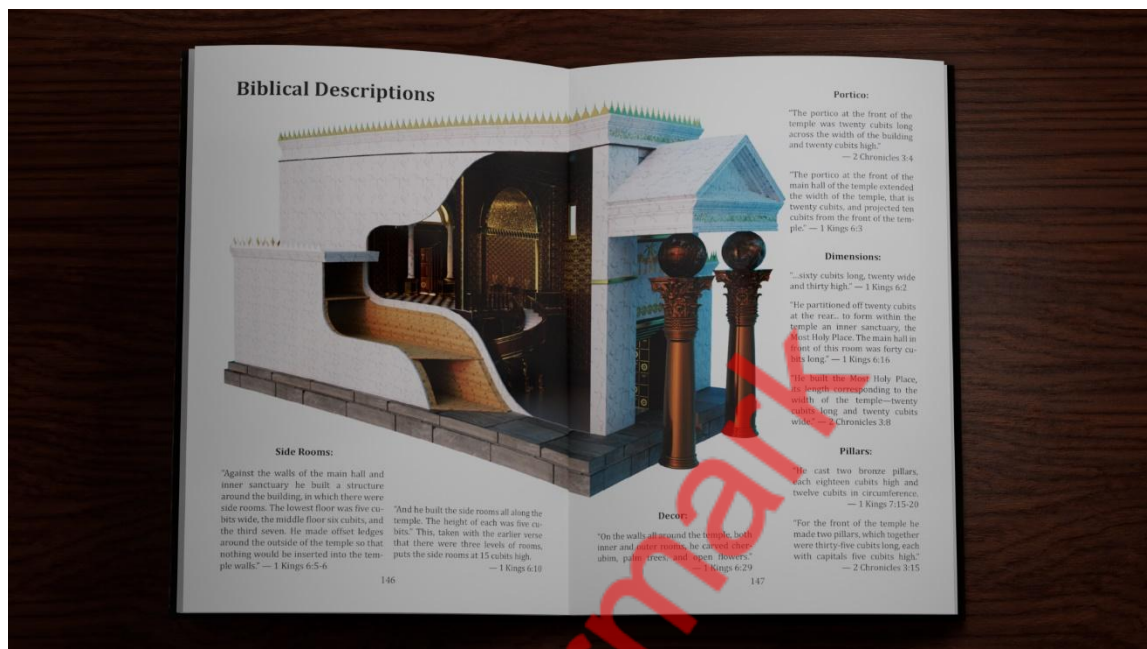
One could advocate a position that the spheres atop the Masonic rendition of the pillars illustrate that the world itself is the temple, and that the pillars support the macrocosm, thus there is no need for a material roof to represent this. I agree with that metaphorical stance in depictions of the columns separate from a temple, notably inside lodges. But as the pillars of my rendition of the temple must physically stand at the front of a physical building with a stone portico physically extending almost five meters out from the main structure, I would need the pillars of my temple to hold up the portico, physically as well as symbolically, to establish the entrance to this house of God.

This ultimately provided a solid answer to the ambiguity of the pillars' height: they could not have a height of 23 cubits or they would be taller than the portico they're supporting. They must be the Biblically described 18, inclusive of their capitals.

This places them 2 cubits or 90cm shorter than the portico, which isn't enough for meaningful or noticeable spheres of earth and the heavens on top of the pillars. But if the spheres were four cubits high then the pillars' total height becomes 22 cubits each. Stepped down in front of the two cubit foundation beneath the Temple, they stand at the perfect height to support the portico. For bonus points, the combined height of the five cubit capital and the four cubit spheres is nine cubits, making it congruent with the passage from 1 Kings which mentions they capitals

are both four and five cubits in the same sentence. This makes them one cubit shy of the 23 cubit alternative also described.

One Masonic feature I had to omit was the nets thrown over the pillars, which would only work if they were freestanding. However, all other passages describe “network,” that is, a lattice resembling a net but formed of the bronze cast. The grid depicted over the spheres would suffice as this network, preserving its symbolic function.





Third Degree Tracing Board

Atmosphere

I had many goals in mind from the outset when I embarked on the task of recreating the tracing boards. I sought understanding, through the act of meditating on each symbolic object as I built them, as well as deeper insight into relationships between symbols as I arranged them in three-dimensional space. I also wanted to pay homage to the artists and architects before me, especially the first, the Creator Himself.

But there was also another intention, something I felt I could contribute for the first time, specifically for the third degree emulation board. I wanted to create, not just an image, but a scene. An evolving series of moments with an unfolding story that not just conveys information, but also arouses strong emotions.

While I was excited to recreate the first two tracing boards, it is the third to which I felt I could contribute the most, specifically giving it a strong injection of atmosphere closer to the feeling of the third degree raising ceremony. Some previous third degree tracing boards are very moving. They do succeed in conveying emotion as well as all the symbols to fulfill its role as a teaching aid. The third, board, however, has always felt somewhat lacking, at least to me.

Given the depth and richness of its symbols and the deeply cathartic, unsettling story to which it alludes, the Harris tracing boards (and earlier designs) felt too bright and two-dimensional.

The events of the third degree allegory refer to a depiction of an open coffin, but the only existing tracing board that depict it as such is the later design by John Harris from much later in his life. The more common varieties of the board, including those by John Harris are a stark departure from the realism of the previous designs in favour of flat, almost cartoon-ish illustrations, appearing as though the objects are sitting on top of the lid of a closed coffin. I speculate Harris must have felt the same, or he wouldn't have gone back to drastically redesign just the third board later in his life.

With the benefit of physically accurate lighting tools which I could adjust and real-time, I spent a significant amount of time lighting the three-dimensional scene, I dare say as long or longer than I spent on any other part of it. I trialled a variety of lights but couldn't help but arrive at three flaming torches. Three lights allowed me to obscure the objects inside the coffin for an uncanny and deeply unsettling atmosphere, while still providing enough light to see every object.

Given I could also work with the temporal dimension in my animated versions of the tracing boards, and I could shift and manipulate light and perspective over time, I started the animation at a distance, creating an uneven, eerie, and desolate landscape in all surrounding directions, and moved the camera through the scene so the viewer themselves could stumble upon and discover the coffin and its contents within the grave. The way the coffin is uncovered in the animation is inspired by the allegory it reflects, of which I won't say any more.

Starting the animation at a distance from the grave required my lighting sources to be physically visible, otherwise to have one patch of landscape lit from invisible sources felt too unrealistic. Flickering, open flame torches felt historically accurate as well as appropriately atmospheric, as though it were a makeshift grave someone (or some three) had abandoned halfway through digging by firelight. The three torches also allude to three lights which are either figuratively or literally present in the Lodge, depending on which version of the ritual is being performed. The RER depicts this very effectively during its work in all degrees. The AASR board required the objects remain on the coffin's lid instead of within it, and its colour palette limited my scope of being able to light the scene, but I managed to arrive at similarly stark, chiaroscuro lighting with one key light off to the right hand side and a much dimmer fill light from the left side, with a very faint softbox overhead to fill in the shadows for the milky detail in the darks.

Impressions

One of the features that stood out to me the most in my creation of the third degree emulation board was the three fives, arranged in a triangle. There's the official and accepted meaning, but one alternative I came across was a version of the board with Roman numeral Vs instead of 5s. I liked the allusion to the candidate's feet during three particularly important steps during the raising ceremony. Yet another version used five-pointed stars instead, which could also allude to 'seeing stars' during three notably high-impact moments that occur at a similar time as the aforementioned steps during the ritual.

It should have been obvious, but only once I designed the board did I see it as a map of the human body, with the skull at head height and square resembling feet. This means the porch is over the heart or solar plexus at the centre. In the AASR board, the golden triad featuring a G or, in my version, the Hebrew letter Yod, is at head height, the branch of acacia over the body, and the square and compasses at the foot.

The triangle is often the symbol for the Trinity and for God, as per previous the previous discussions of the Theological Virtues, pyramids, and the All-Seeing eye. Its presence in the third degree tracing board is perhaps the most critical element. When else can one truly and completely reunite with the Creator than in death?

In this interpretation, the coffin becomes the material box housing the Most Holy Place, within which hides God. This tracing board, and indeed all of them, act as spatial maps of how to reach Him.

Returning to Eden

If each tracing board is based on the lodge and the lodge is symbolic, both of the body and of King Solomon's Temple, which is based on the tabernacle, based on the Garden of Eden, then one could conclude that both the Temple and the Garden of Eden is inside us. 1 Corinthians 6:19 states, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?"

A great Kabbalistic theory I've heard, though I'm unsure of its origin, is that the Tree of Life is the circulatory system, connected to the heart, while the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is the nervous system, connected to the brain.

Removed from the body, both have a striking resemblance to trees with their complex networks of connected, fractal branches. From this perspective, the Fall from Grace can be seen as the maturation of the mind as we age, the loss of the innocence and nakedness of childhood, and the development of the adversary: the cold, Luciferian intellect which has some of the power from the Divine but lacks the warmth of its emotional connection.

Enlightenment, or the return to Eden, can thus be attained by the reintegration of the head and the heart to restore Unity inside us. As the Buddhist monks say, the attainment to enlightenment is achieved by returning to a childlike state.

The difference of adulthood, after the Fall and eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, is we can't easily forget the knowledge. Already knowing evil, the only way to return to Grace is to choose to act well. And here we return full circle to the earlier chapters of the Virtues, and the willing sacrifice of the lower self toward acting virtuously.

The Third Temple

There's something fundamentally different about the third degree boards in both the AASR, as well as the emulation tracing boards. They mark a significant departure from the previous two. While those were brighter, more densely symbolic, and focused within a large room of sorts, the third is unavoidably related to death, confined within the claustrophobic space of a grave.

I couldn't help but want to find some sort of continuity to carry me through from the previous two. The clue was in the porch in the centre of the coffin, a feature of King Solomon's Temple, and the allegory the tracing board represents, involving King Solomon and a handful of Hiram's. Any mention of the temple is forever inextricably linked with the events that subsequently followed: it was ransacked and demolished, rebuilt, and subsequently destroyed again.¹⁵ There are any varied points of view on the topic, but a belief persists that the

¹⁵ "Temple of Jerusalem," *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed 4 March 2024.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Temple-of-Jerusalem>

apocalypse will begin around the time of the building of the third Temple. Or, more specifically, that a third Temple is a requirement for the apocalypse.¹⁶

The main Biblical passages supporting this (loosely, I might add) are Matthew 24:1-2, reading: “Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, ‘You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.’” And continuing in verses 15-16, “So when you see the abomination of the desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel standing in the holy place (let the reader understand).”

Also in Revelations 11:1-2, which says, “Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told ‘Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.’” And subsequently, if anyone harms God’s two appointed messengers, it continues into Revelations 11:6-7: “they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague ... the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them ... The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.”

The perspective of the third temple marking the end times is disputed on many fronts. Foremost is the fact there has already technically been a third temple, the first built by Solomon during the 10th Century BCE, the second by returning exiles in around 515 BCE, and the third (often cited as the second), was built under Herod in 19-9 BCE.¹⁷

If we should collectively disregard this third temple on technicalities, we still run into problems. The accepted location of the temple is the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, where the Dome of the Rock currently stands. Therefore, unless there comes a time it is removed, there could never be an official third temple resembling King Solomon’s. Since 2015, some controversial Jewish groups have been allegedly making progress to reinstate a physical third temple, one claiming to have already built an altar and are currently planting appropriate trees for its construction and some of the required sacrifices.¹⁸

I believe a stronger, less literal argument comes from the fact that Jesus and the church are as referred to as the third temple, superseding the need of a physical one, and deeming any attempt to rebuild a material Temple both pointless, as well a rejection of Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 says, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.” If Christ is the third temple, then a belief in him, or an embodiment of him, would be the beginning of that apocalypse.

This could appear a little terrifying on the surface until one digs into the etymology of the words. Apocalypse is Greek for ‘uncovering, disclosure, revelation.’¹⁹ And what is it to have a ‘revelation,’ but a sudden burst of ideas, a revealing of information? Key spiritual insights often lead to some kind of end. Not the end of the world, but an end to a way of being, a shift,

¹⁶ Kettley S. “End of the world: Jerusalem Third Temple ‘fulfills Biblical prophecy’ of end times – claim,” *Daily Express*, August 10, 2021. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/weird/1043186/End-of-the-world-prophecy-Jerusalem-third-temple-Bible-apocalypse>

¹⁷ Murray D. “The Temple in Jerusalem.” *World History Encyclopedia*. 6 January 2016. <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/852/the-temple-in-jerusalem/>

¹⁸ *The Temple Institute*. Accessed March 4, 2024. <https://templeinstitute.org/statement-of-principles-2/>

¹⁹ “Apocalypse,” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Accessed March 4, 2024. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apocalypse>

and a changed state of mind. Revelations 21:22 reads, “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.”

In this figurative interpretation, the building of the third temple does indeed usher in the apocalypse and the events of Revelations. But the building of the temple is that an embodiment of Christ, the events of Revelation represent the destruction of the old self and the liberation of a purified, Higher Self, and the apocalypse is the uncovering of spiritual truths, unable to be attained in the old way of living and being.

The sacrificial death and rebirth of Christ within the individual allows for the revelation of knowledge and relationship with Divinity. John chapter 2 verse 19-21, Jesus says, “‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days’... But the temple he had spoken of was his body.” This brings us back to the emblem in the middle of the third degree emulation tracing board and the veil of the Most Holy Place.

The tracing board and the allegorical death it represents could be an allusion to the Most Holy Place we discover on the other side of our living sacrifice and rebirth with, and as, Christ, and the fundamental physiological and spiritual shift that occurs afterwards. In Epistle to the Hebrews 10:19-21 it reads, “Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings.”

I believe this tracing board acts as a map marking the place where one can find the Most High within oneself to have a relationship and to do His work on Earth here, now, during this lifetime, not only on the other side of physical death. It shows the Light, stripped away from mortality: the eternal spark within us all.

Closing Remarks

It was an absolute honour and delight to go on the journey and craft these six illuminating artworks of our craft, rich in symbolism and allegory. I have learnt far more than what has been discussed here, and more still than is published in *The Tableaux*.

I hope you’ve taken something away with you from my tracing boards and this discussion on them. I believe what makes the ancient and royal craft of Freemasonry so rich are the many perspectives that contribute to it. Accepting it as already complete misses its beating heart, alive in its constantly evolving art and discussion. I’ve visited many lodges who don’t dig beneath the ritual and symbols they observe and practice, and who actively suppress new observations in strict adherence to the dogma on the page. This, in any art (and this is an art, in its truest and highest definition), is death to the living, breathing Creator that has His being in the discussions, creations, and belief.

The creation of any art as a homage to the Creator is one of the purest forms of worship. I encourage all readers to embark on some act of creation, letting the Light speak through you to bestow your work upon others, becoming as the Creator yourself. Everyone hosts angels within and around them, and the thoughts, emotions, sights, sounds, and ideas you generate will entertain more than just the people around you.

Thank you for the opportunity to present these perspectives and illustrations to you. If you’d like to see more, you find the companion book to this paper, *The Tableaux: Reflections and Insights on the Tracing Boards and their Symbols*, at ionicpublications.com.

I look forward to seeing what you create.