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# *A Dissertation upon Masonry, 1734*

WITH COMMENTARY AND NOTES

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The 1734 *Dissertation upon Masonry* was discovered in manuscript form in 1849 within the archives of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts by Charles Whitlock Moore (1801–1873). Moore was a native Bostonian who apprenticed in newspaper publishing, and later established himself as a leading Masonic journalist of his era. As the manuscript was the discovery of Charles W. Moore, it is rightly denominated the C.W. Moore m.s. for the purposes of scholarly reference. According to Moore, the manuscript contained two documents: the previously unknown 1734 *Dissertation* followed by a transcript of the so-called Leland m.s.

The *Dissertation* has existed for nearly three centuries. It is the oldest extant American lodge oration, and the third oldest surviving Masonic oration in the world. Despite this, it has hitherto escaped not only the thorough scholarly analysis that it deserves, but has even failed to accrue a general awareness of its existence within the corpus of early Masonic literature. It is not that the document has entirely escaped notice within the fraternity. However, an extensive literature review reveals that as few as five writers within the Masonic world have so much as mentioned the document. It has received a bit more attention from two academic scholars of Freemasonry: Steven C. Bullock and David G. Hackett, both of whom recognized it as a significant document providing insight into the ideas circulating in early American Freemasonry. Bullock in particular points out how lodge sermons “often provide the most accessible means of understanding Masonic self-perceptions.” (*Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 321)

MASONIC RECEPTION. Moore’s original preface to the *Dissertation* opined that it was “the first public

A Dissertation  
Upon Masonry, Deliver’d to  
a Lodge  
in America, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1734. †  
Christ’s Reg[nu]m.<sup>1</sup>

| 3 | Although it be Certain, that Justice, Integrity, Uprightness of life, universal Benevolence, & the general practice of what-soever is Required by the Precepts of Morality do in Eff[ec]t [Moore: Effect] make the principal honnour of any Soci[e]ty [Moore: Society], or order of men whatsoever; yet it Cannot be denied that the Vast number of Emperors & Princes, Inventors of usefull arts, Divines and Philosophers, who have in all ages voluntarily taken upon themselves, the Badge of our profession, adds Considerably to the native honnor & dignity of this Right worshipfull Fraternity.

Masonic discourse ever delivered in America”—not simply the oldest *preserved*. His argument was that the *Dissertation* was given in the Lodge at Boston, chartered in 1733, and that “in view of the condition of the Fraternity prior to 1733,” it seemed unlikely to him that there could have been an oration given either in the lodge at Boston or any other lodge.

Robert Morris mentions the *Dissertation* in his 1859 *History of Freemasonry in Kentucky* (5) and his 1884 *William Morgan, Or, Political Anti-Masonry: Its Rise, Growth and Decadence* (49), but offers no interpretations in either.

In 1865, Albert G. Mackey wrote a short article, “The Eloquence of Masonry,” in which he accepts Moore’s assignment for the *Dissertation* to Boston, and offers a short assessment: “This address is well written, and of a symbolic character, as the author represents the Lodge as a type of heaven.” (*The Masonic Trowel* 4: 147)

In 1896, Lawrence N. Greenleaf cited the *Dissertation* as evidence of the antiquity of Freemasonry in general







and of the trigradal system in particular. (Grand Lodge of Colorado *Proceedings*, 1896, 294–95)

In his 1961 *Encyclopedia*, Henry W. Coil acknowledged the oration, but was careful not to adopt the assumptions made by prior authors, stating: “On June 24, 1734, an unknown speaker delivered to an unknown American lodge ‘A Dissertation upon Masonry,’ which was reprinted in Moore’s *Masonic Magazine* [sic], Vol. 8, p. 289 (1849).” (6)

ACADEMIC RESEARCH. The first academic study performed on the *Dissertation* was in the M.A. thesis of Ross Frank Cooke, *An Analysis of Four Speeches Delivered by Masons in Colonial America* (Brigham Young University, 1968). Cooke attempts to critically review the structure of the speech’s argumentation.

Steven C. Bullock’s *Revolutionary Brotherhood* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996) cites the *Dissertation* repeatedly as evidence of the ideals of Colonial Freemasonry, and illustrations of the social challenges and transformations of which the Fraternity was a part.

David G. Hackett’s *That Religion in Which All Men Agree* (University of California Press, 2014) prominently cites the *Dissertation* as evidence of Masonic heterodoxy. He attributes the text to Charles Brockwell—an apparent error, as Brockwell was in England until 1737.

SETTING & CONTEXT. The date of the address confirms that it was an oration for the Feast of Saint John the Baptist, perhaps the most essential holiday of the Masonic Order. The title indicates that the oration was given to “a Lodge in America.” Several commentators have assumed that the location of the address was Boston (Moore, Morris, Mackey, Cooke, Bullock, and Hackett). The discovery of the Moore MS. in the library of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts appears to be the primary basis for attributing it to Boston. However, the manuscript’s origin is unknown, as is the location of the oration it documents. That said, it is not unlikely that it is a relic of the Boston lodge. The possibility of other locations must be considered as well. Coil—and perhaps Greenleaf—hesitated to assign the oration to any specific city. An argument could be made for a Philadelphia origin due to instances of literary dependency within

Among the Rest of the Illustrious names which have been by faithfull Tradition handed down to us,<sup>2</sup> as ornaments of masonry, that of Saint Paul,<sup>3</sup> the powerfull propagator of the Gospel, the profound Scholar, the skilfull architect,<sup>4</sup> the Irresistable orator, stands not the least distinguished: While he Remain’d in the [Moore: a] weak and dark State of Ignorance, he was an Enemy [Moore: Ennemy] to the Lodge, like some of us before admission, he despis’d the Sacred Institution, and Ridicul’d it with all his witt

the Masonic sermons of William Smith (see notes 9, 11, 19, 20, 26 & 29). Although the *Dissertation* could have been delivered in any of the American lodges, it seems likely that it originated either in Boston or Philadelphia.

The summer of 1734 was a pivotal period for American Freemasonry. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* of June 27 recorded that “Monday last, a Grand Lodge of the Ancient Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons in this Province, was held at the Tun Tavern in Water-Street, when Benjamin Franklin being elected Grand-Master for the Year ensuing.” The same day’s events in Boston are recorded as follows: “5734 June 24. Being the anniversary of S<sup>t</sup> John the Baptist the Brethren Celebrated the Feast in due manner and Form, and chose Our R<sup>t</sup> Worsh<sup>l</sup> Bro: M<sup>r</sup> Frederick Hamilton Master of the Lodge. (*Proceedings in Masonry, St. John’s Grand Lodge, 1733–1792, Massachusetts Grand Lodge, 1769–1792*, Boston, 1895, 4)

That summer, Franklin released his edition of Anderson’s *Constitutions*, which was first advertised on May 16; Franklin shipped 70 copies to Boston in August. (P. Royster, *Constitutions*, 94) A few months later, Franklin applied for a charter from Henry Price in Boston, ultimately bringing the Pennsylvania Masons under the Grand Lodge of England. Thus, this particular Feast of Saint John the Baptist took place during an important period of growth. A *Dissertation Upon Masonry*, composed and spoken at the center of all this activity, provides invaluable insight into the internal activities and self-conceptualizations of the Masons of that period.

THE TRANSCRIPT. This new transcription has been made from a clear reproduction of the manuscript. It corrects several dozen small errors found in Moore’s 1849 transcript. The new transcript makes use of the following typographical conventions:

and Eloquence, but he afterward [Moore: afterwards] became its Glory & Support: of this he Speaks in the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter of his first Epistle to | 4 | The Corinthians; *When I was a child* says he, *I understood as a Child, I thought as a Child, & of Consequence I spake as a Child, but when I became a man* (an Expression Emphatically Significant among us) *when I became a man then*, says he, *I put away Childish things*:<sup>5</sup> nor was he withall his Eminent & uncommon Gifts a greater honnor to the Lodge than he esteem'd the

fluid characteristics, but generally presents a special myth of the origination of Masonry interwoven with Western civilization's story from earliest antiquity.

3. The identification of Saint Paul as an initiate of the Craft is a primitive feature not unique to the *Dissertation*. Bro.: Robert Samber (1682–1745), writing under the pseudonym Eugenius Philalethes, Jr.,

- [ ] Square brackets encapsulate editorial comments or material inserted for clarity
- { } Braces enclose material supplied to fill a physical lacuna in the manuscript.
- ◁ ▷ Chevrons bracket information restored from Moore's transcription in cases where the photographic image is cropped.
- | | Vertical brackets enclose the page numbers, likely not original to the C.W. Moore m.s., as seen on the photocopy. Text following these belong to the page number given, e.g., | 6 |.
- abc Italics are used to indicate quotations.

This is an abbreviated version of a more complete analysis of the C.W. Moore m.s. to appear at a future date. Thanks are due to many who assisted my research on the manuscript, especially: R.:W.: Bro.: Walter Hunt, Librarian of the Samuel Crocker Lawrence Library at the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts; Bro.: Bill Kreuger, Assistant Librarian at the Iowa Masonic Library; Larissa Watkins, Assistant Librarian at the House of the Temple in Washington, D.C.; and Bro.: Christopher B. Murphy, MPS, Fibonacci Lodge № 112 of Vermont.

1. As noted by Moore, "Regm." is an abbreviation of the Latin word *regnum*, "reign." This is a highly unusual way to denote the Christian date, *Anno Domini*.

2. The orator here refers to the Traditional History of Freemasonry, as passed down originally through oral tradition and documents such as the Old Charges and (after 1723) the printed *Constitutions*. These legends were recited to the brethren at the time of initiation or "making." The Traditional History exhibits somewhat

wrote a dedication to the Grand Master, Wardens, and Brethren of England and Ireland dated March 1, 1721, in which he refers to "Brother St. Paul" (*The Long Livers*, xii & xlv) and "holy Brother Saint Paul" (xlviii & liii). He emphasized the early Masonic theme of false brethren: "Our holy Brother St. Paul, though he suffered infinite Perils, as he recounts himself, yet the Perils among *False Brethren* were what seemed most to touch his righteous Soul; for most dangerous are a Man's Enemies, when they are of his own House." (xlviii) The Bodleian Library contains a manuscript in Samber's hand, likely from the same time period, which carries another reference in similar terms: "Hear what is promised to the Brotherhood from the words of our Holy Brother St. Paul: *Brethren, says he, be of good Comfort, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*" (MSS. Rawlinson Poetry 11, folio 74 verso; see Edward Armitage, "Robert Samber." AQC 11: 108) This is echoed in the 1728 Masonic oration of Edward Oakley: "Finally, Brethren, (I speak now to you in holy Brother St. Paul's Words,) 'Farewel: Be perfect, be of good Comfort, be of one Mind, live in Peace, and the God of Love and Peace shall be with you.'" (Cole's *Constitutions*, 1729) Other references to Paul as a Freemason occur in a 1737 sermon of Bro.: John Henley (1692–1756), the Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of England for many years. (*On Scripture Masonry*, 4, 8, 15; see the note below for comment.) References to Paul adhering to this formula are found in some later Masonic rhetoric as well. Isaac Head, who was the first Provincial Grand Master of the Scilly Isles, invokes "our holy Brother the Apostle Paul" in a charge given in Cornwall on April 21, 1752 (*Pocket Companion*, 1754, 301). In another charge, given January 21, 1766, Bro.: Head lauds Paul as "our excellent Brother, and great Orator,

the holy and great Apostle Paul,” and encourages the assembled brethren to seek to “be made Partakers of the Beatifick Vision” that Paul experienced. (*A Confutation of the Observations on Free Masonry*, 1769, 88 & 90)

4. The *Dissertation*’s reference to Paul as “the skilfull architect” alludes to the early Masonic concept that any constructive art might bear a connection to the mysteries of Freemasonry. Anderson’s *Constitutions* of 1723 describes the transmission of Masonic knowledge from Adam to his offspring, with Cain’s son Jabal excelling in “Tent-Making . . . which last is good Architecture.” (2) Henley’s 1737 sermon connects antediluvian tentbuilding as a prototype of the Tabernacle to the Biblical tradition of Paul as a σκηνοποιός or “tentmaker” in Acts 18:3. “This Framing of the Tents was the first external Point of holy Masonry, that is discover’d. St. Paul, the great Doctor of the Gentiles . . . was a Maker of Tents, as we read in the Book of Acts.” (4) The presence of this idea in nearly contemporary orations on both sides of the Atlantic is suggestive of an oral tradition to the effect that Paul’s status as a tentmaker was laden with Masonic implications.

5. The orator cites 1 Corinthians 13:11, reordering some of Paul’s words to create a causal relationship: immature thinking and understanding “of Consequence” lead to immature speech.

6. The *Dissertation* asserts that Freemasons can perceive esoteric meaning in the scriptures, unavailable to the “learned annotators & Interpreters of Scriptures,” unless they are “of ye lodge.” This is further asserted to be Paul’s “true meaning,” and which the orator characterizes as “unintelligible” without Masonic “explication.”

The location of esoteric lessons in the Bible is a significant feature in the literature of early grand lodge era Freemasonry, although this aspect of Masonic culture has not been adequately developed in prior scholarship. While the authors of the Old Charges of prior centuries freely interwove Masonic legends and Biblical stories,

lodge an honnor to him: when he mentions his being made a mason fourteen years after it hap[pe]ned (in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, he Speaks of himself as of {anot}her person, & begining with *I knew a man*, he Concludes, *of such a one will I glory*; the whole passage is well worth Repeating & I propose therefrom to Continue my present Discourse; only observing by the way, that the learned annotators & Interpreters of Scriptures, however penetrating & clear they have been in other dark places, yet none of them been of ye lodge, they Could not possibly Conceive the apostle’s true meaning in this mysterious part of

by the end of the seventeenth century, there were signs of esoteric readings of the Bible itself. In 1689 and 1691, Robert Kirk recorded that the Mason Word was like a “Rabbinical mystery” or “Rabbinical Tradition, in way of comment on Jachin and Boaz, the two Pillars erected in Solomon’s Temple.” (D. Knoop & G.P. Jones, *Genesis of Freemasonry*, 88) Many examples illustrate how early eighteenth-century Masons probed the Holy Bible in search of Masonic insight. Anderson’s *Constitutions* features numerous instances of this, including the examination of the Hebrew text of several passages in order to shed light on Masonic ideas. (10, 11–12) The earliest published grand lodge era initiation prayer, found in Pennell’s *Constitutions* of 1730, entreats the divine Architect to “endue him [the initiate] with Divine Wisdom, that he may, with the Secrets of Masonry, be able to unfold the Mysteries of Godliness and Christianity.” (59) The discovery or unfolding of latent Masonic teachings is alluded to in the chorus of “The Master’s Song” by Anderson. In 1737, Grand Chaplain Henley taught that “The Book of God, his Will, and his Works, are Patterns of sacred Masonry: They are full of sublime Mysteries, not imparted to all.” (3) Henley also connects this esoteric approach to certain language used by Paul: “St. Paul distinguishes between Milk and strong Meat, in his Instructions; and between Principles and Perfection . . .” (8)

In terms of taxonomy, the kind of esoteric reading at this location in the Moore MS. belongs to the second order, which could be termed the textual-interpretive taxon. See S. Eyer, “Defining Esotericism from a Masonic Perspective.” (*The Journal of the Masonic Society*, 2:17–18)

his Epistle & I have therefore given the World an unintelligible Explication.[]]]<sup>6</sup>

*I knew a man, Say's he, meaning himself, above 14 years ago whither [Moore: whether] in the body, or out of the Body I cannot tell, but I knew such a one taken up into the third heaven into paradise where he heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for any [Moore: a] | 5 | Man to utter, of such a one will I Glory.*<sup>7</sup> Freemasons know very well why the apostle calls himself a Man, they know why he could not tell whether, when he was made a mason he was in the Body or out of the Body, and what is meant by the body,<sup>8</sup> they know

Historian David G. Hackett notes that there were concerns raised in the American colonies about heterodox ideas being promoted in the lodges. While recognizing the fact that many later Masonic sermons would promote “polite Christianity,” Hackett’s reading of the *Dissertation* “suggests a divergence between it and Freemasonry.” (*That Religion in Which All Men Agree*, 51) If it is true that the *Dissertation* was given in Boston, this point is even more pronounced. Boston had long been the stronghold of Puritans, with many examples of religious persecution and even executions. Through influence from England, this hegemony was weakened somewhat by the Massachusetts Charter of 1691, which established “a liberty of Conscience allowed in the Worshipp of God to all Christians (Except Papists).” However, the Congregational church was the state religion of Massachusetts until 1833, and it seems doubtless that the theory advanced by this early Masonic orator that only Freemasons could fully understand certain Biblical passages would have been viewed as tending toward heterodoxy by most Bostonians had it been known outside the sacred privacy of the Lodge.

7. The passage is paraphrased from 2 Corinthians 12:2–5. The author of the dissertation proposes an esoteric interpretation of this passage to the effect that Paul’s reference is to the experience of Masonic initiation. Interestingly, many Biblical scholars understand this passage as referring to Paul’s participation in an esoteric Jewish practice known as *ma’aseh hekhalot*. This was a male-only initiatic form of Second Temple mysticism in which practitioners learned techniques to obtain

visions of the heavenly Temple. See Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert* (Yale University Press, 1992) and C. Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

8. These are clear references to the initiatic process within Freemasonry. Here, the orator is creatively interpreting Paul’s words as allusions to the liminal experience of a Masonic initiate as he stands in darkness on the threshold of “the body” of the lodge, where he must be presented as

a duly qualified man. Since the early catechisms do not reveal this point, the *Dissertation* provides important, though somewhat indirect, evidence that this manner of admission has early roots.

9. The orator’s identification of Paul’s vision of the third heaven or paradise” with the “the third & Chief degree of Masonry” is noteworthy as it demonstrates that the so-called trigradal system of initiation—which, according to some, originated in the 1720s in London—was apparently well-established in this American lodge, and potentially others like it, by 1734.

This section demonstrates literary influence upon a much later Masonic sermon, given by William Smith (1727–1803) in Philadelphia on the Feast of St. John the Baptist, 1795. The sermon begins on the text of Ecclesiastes 2:21, and Smith immediately directs the hearer’s attention to the word “man,” which he interprets in a technical Masonic sense: “The emphatical meaning of the word Man, as used by our master, Solomon, in the Philosophical and Masonic sense of this text, I need not explain in this splendid assembly of Masons. It is understood within the walls of the congregated Lodge, and carried abroad into the world by every true Brother, in the Grand Lodge of the heart.” (*The Works of William Smith, D.D.*, 1803, 2:73–74) Smith then specifies that he is “such a Man,” (2:74). Then, he connects the concept to St. Paul in terms nearly identical to those found in the Moore m.s.: “I knew a Man, says he (still using the word Man in the same emphatical sense, well understood by Masons, as it was used by Solomon in the text)—‘I knew a man in Christ, above fourteen years ago—(whether in



the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth), but I knew such a man caught up to the third Heaven, into Paradise, where he heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a Man to utter—Of such an one will I glory.’ St. Paul speaks here of his own Trance and Vision, when converted and rapt up into the third Heavens . . .”(2:81)

Smith’s Masonic interpretation of Man in the “emphatic sense” is tied to the human spiritual potential to relate to heavenly realms: “Wherefore, Man, being thus distinguished above the rest of the creatures of this world, by the superior qualities of his soul, was designed for superior pursuits; and his chief labours were to be ‘in Wisdom, in Knowledge, and in Equity’—that he might rise into more intimate kindred with the exalted Beings of superior Worlds.” (2:75)

10. The orator says that it would be “needless” to provide an explanation “to the well instructed Mason.” This indicates that, at least in the American lodge which received this address, Masonic instruction was taking place. This seems to contradict the popular view that there was no instruction in the lodges at this time beyond the ceremonies themselves. The implication of the orator’s statement here is not necessarily that the brethren would already have understood the specific points being made in his speech, but the wording here and the overall nature of the *Dissertation* suggests that Freemasons in this lodge had received sufficient instruction to hear and contemplate his address.

11. The assertion that a Masonic Lodge may be a type or representation of Eden was a key idea of eighteenth-century Masonic philosophy, in a manner parallel to the conception of the Lodge as a representation of Solomon’s Temple. Masonic literature, lectures, sermons, and songs of the period frequently hint at the mythical identification of the Lodge with paradise. This is rooted in the traditional concept of the secrets of Masonry be-

also that by the third heaven or paradise is figur’d out the third & Chief degree of Masonry,<sup>9</sup> & they are very well acquainted with those unspeakable words, which is not lawful for a man to utter, as a particular Explication of these things to the well Instructed Mason<sup>10</sup> would be needless, so to the World it is needless and Improper. I shall therefore wave it at this time & proceed to observe how in Several Respects the apostle[’]s likening the Lodge to a Paradise, or heaven is a Similitude Extremely agreeable to <sup>the</sup> nature of the Thing.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1st</sup>[t] In the first place, the Lodge may be likened to heaven on account of the Excellency & perfection of its Constitution and Government: it is an absolute Monarchy, in which the Will of the Sovereign is a law, but so wisely Contrived & Established, that the Sovereign can never will nor Command any thing which is not exactly agreeable to the nature & reason of things, & by the Subjects Received and Submitted to with Pleasure; the peculiar light of Masonry<sup>12</sup> Enabling to discern what is best with Regard to the Lodge, & that love which is the lasting cement of our

ing communicated to Adam and passed down through his sons. (Anderson, 1723, 1–2, 75, 80; 1738, 1–3)

The concept of restoring paradise was a notable aspect of religious thought in New England, including Puritan beliefs; ref. Zachary McLeod Hutchins, *Inventing Eden* (Oxford University Press, 2014). As Hutchins points out, among American Masons this took two forms: the symbolic identification of the Lodge with Eden, and the “hopes that Freemasons could collectively transform the American continent into a prelapsarian paradise.” (238)

For example, a Charge given by John Eliot at Boston on June 24, 1783, for the installation of John Warren as Grand Master, went beyond the idea of the Lodge as Paradise and poetically expressed the concept that Masonic virtues, practised universally, could return the world to an prelapsarian state: “If men practiced the divine social virtues—The curse would no longer devour the earth—Eden would yield forth her blooms and spices.—Here would be no prickling briar around the lilies and roses of this beautiful garden.—The sons and daughters of men might repose under the bowers of paradise, and angels of light and love would look down not with pity, but with joy upon us.” (C. Gore,

Society, disposes all the the<sup>13</sup> Brethren to agree to it with an unanimity not elsewhere to be practised. Men have in all ages busied themselves | 6 | in forming and Reforming Commonwealths, Monarchies, Aristocrasies & many other Species of Governments; but the Experience of all ages has shewn that all their forms were Imperfect, either unable to Support themselves against outward violence, or dying of their inward deceases, hence we see no State or Constitutions have subsisted many Centuries without Violent convulsions[,] Revolutions & Changes: this has been the Fate of the Syrians, Persian & Grecian Monarchies, the Commonwealths of Sparta, Rome & Athens: but the Constitution of the Kingdom of Masons<sup>14</sup> hapily Tempered, preserves to this day, its ancient and original vigour, and will doubtless last till time itself shall be Swallowed up in the boundless ocean of Eternity.

2<sup>d</sup> I[n] the Second place the apostel might Justly liken the Lodge to a Heaven, on account of the universal understanding which subsistes therein betwixt brethren of vastly different Languages and Countrys. as in that place of Bliss we are not to

*An Oration: Delivered at the Chapel, in Boston.* Boston: William Green, 1783, 17)

William Smith's 1795 sermon again demonstrates a literary dependency upon the C.W. Moore M.S.: "Returning, therefore, to the words of St. Paul—'I knew a Man, whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell!' and comparing earthly things with heavenly—The Brethren here assembled, well understand what is meant by the emphatical words—'Man and Body;' and not being able to tell, in certain situations of the Initiated, whether they 'were in the Body or out of the Body;' and also what is meant by their being taken up to the third Heaven, or Paradise of their Art and Craft; and hearing the words, which it is not lawful to utter, but to the true Brethren; to those who have the Signs and Tokens of fellowship, and the language of Brotherly-love! But passing over all those mysterious expressions (both in the scripture original, and in the copy brought down to the practice of the Lodge); I shall consider, in language familiar to all, and without a metaphor, in what respects a Lodge on earth, duly regulated according to its professed principles, grounded in scripture, may be compared to Heaven, or the Lodge of Paradise above." (2:82, emphasis added)

12. The idea of symbolic Light providing access to otherwise obscure ideas is common in Masonic literature of this period. Light is a metaphor for the knowledge gained through initiation in the earliest edition, circa 1710, of Matthew Birkhead's song, "The Free Mason's Health," of which the second stanza is "The world is in pain / Our secret to gain / But still let them wonder and gaze on / Till they're shown the light / They'll ne'er know the right / Word or signe of an Accepted Mason." (D. Knoop, G.P. Jones, & D. Hamer, *Early Masonic Pamphlets*, 39) Among the oldest prose references to Light in the context of Masonic symbolism are those found in Samber's 1721 dedication to *Long Livers*. The Masonic Light of understanding is clearly linked in Samber's thinking to traditional theological concepts such as the Light of Genesis and

the Light of the World. (iv, v, xiii) Here, God "send[s] out his Light . . . whereby the Brotherhood begins to revive again in this our Isle." (iv) The wisdom this Light imparts is a matter of degree, as we see when Samber addresses his Masonic readers in two distinct classes: those "who are not far illuminated" and those "who are so happy as to have greater Light." (iv) Edward Oakley's 1728 oration, which was directly influenced by Samber, concludes: "I shall now close my Discourse, by earnestly admonishing you to a due and constant Attendance at your Lodge, and heartily wishing you a true Light in your Understanding; that you may instruct, love, cherish, relieve, and promote the Interest of each other . . ." (Cole's *Constitutions*, 1728/9) James Anderson uses the term to denote the initiate's ability to understand esoteric meanings latent in written texts: "Most regular Societies have had, and will have, their own Secrets; and, to be sure, the Free-Masons always had theirs, which they never divulged in Manuscript; and therefore cannot be expected in Print: Only, an expert Brother, by the true Light, can readily find many useful Hints in almost every Page of this Book, which Cowans, and Others not Initiated, cannot discern." (*Constitutions* of 1738, ix)



That Masonic Light was understood by some to connect to esoteric traditions of antiquity; one widely published eighteenth-century lodge prayer reads, “Enlighten us, we beseech thee, in the true Knowledge of Masonry . . . number us not among those that know not thy Statutes, nor the divine Mysteries of the secret Cabala.” (Ahiman Rezon, 1756, 43; cf. Samber, 1721, iv) This last example connotes a third order esoteric theme, which could be termed the formal-systematic taxon. (See Eyer, “Defining Esotericism,” 18–19)

13. Dittography in original.

14. The phrase “Kingdom of Masonry” denotes a primitive Masonic concept. In Anderson’s *Constitutions* of 1723, this idea is connected to the Exodus story. Moses is described as “divinely inspir’d with more sublime knowledge in *Masonry*,” and that through this knowledge, “the *Israelites*, at their leaving *Egypt*, were a whole Kingdom of *Masons*, well instructed.” (10)

15. The term “universal lodge” is used twice in the *Disertation*. Although in later Masonic rhetoric, “the universal lodge” tends to denote the created universe as a regularly ordered system, in the C.W. Moore m.s. it implies the intended environment of all speculative lodges.

16. The “original language” which “none but masons are capable of learning” is an important theme within early grand lodge era Freemasonry, and surely antedates it. Although, superficially, it is easy to understand in simple terms as referring to the modes of recognition and the signs of distress, a close examination of the early Masonic writings reveals a more extensive concept: the notion of a sophisticated primordial language of symbol. The 1721 dedication to *Long Livers* is written in a heavily symbolic style that Samber calls “the true Language of the Brotherhood,” a special form of communication that is found in both “the holy Scriptures”

suppose that none can converse or be understood but such as are able to speak English, Hebrew or any other particular national languages, so in the universal lodge<sup>15</sup> the Beauty and benefit of masonry would be Extremely faint and narrow if Brethren of all nations, could not with pleasure know[,] converse with and understand each others Tongues. When God Confounded the Common language of mankind, at the Building of Babel, the language of | 7 | Masons Remain’d unaffected and Intire; it is true the Building ceas’d because the labourers who were the Bulk of the people could neither understand the master nor one another, therefore the Brethren separated and dispersed with the Rest; but in whatever country they settled and propagated the Royal art, they carefully preserved the original language, which continues among their successors to this day: a language which none but masons are capable of learning, a happiness which none but Brethren are capable of enjoying.<sup>16</sup>

3<sup>ly</sup> In the third place, the apostle might liken the lodge to a heaven on account of that human[,] Kind & fraternal treatment of each other which is therein used among the Brethren. The great, the Riche, or noble of the world, appear in the lodge without pride or Haughtines, an amiable Condescention, a Charming Benevolent freedom brightens their evry actions, those of the lower

and “an uninterrupted Tradition.” (iii)

The Biblical reference is to the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9), wherein God disrupts the construction by confusing the language of the builders. In internal versions of this story, Freemasons connected their special language to the original language or suggested a vestigial connection to it. In other words, the Masons taught that they had special access to some form of this earlier, purer language. This may be viewed as a transgressive theme because the legendary stonemasons sought to mitigate the divine intervention of the confusion of languages by preserving their former means of communication—and the knowledge that would otherwise be lost—through either the preservation of a special “faculty” or the creation of a new means to facilitate that communication.

Anderson’s *Constitutions* of 1723 stated that “the Science and Art were both transmitted to latter Ages

Rank of life, however they may behave abroad are in the lodge, found modest & peaceable[,] free from petulance or Sauciness to Superiours, gentle and loving to each other: In Heaven and in the lodge only are to be Seen humility without contempt, and dignity without Envy.

<sup>4</sup><sup>thly</sup> In the fourth place I would observe that the apostle might Justly Enough liken the lodge to a Heaven on this account, that it is been Composed of good people of all Religions, | 8 | Sects[,] perswasions & Denominations, of all nations and countrys, & I might add of all Generations of men in all ages since the Beginning of mankind. the Scriptures says, that with Regard to heaven, *Verily God is no Respecter of persons but in ev'ry nation those who fear him and work Righteousness shall be Saved*,<sup>17</sup> in like manner in the Lodge no narrow distinctions are made or Ragarded, but good & worthy men who are so in practise & the general conduct of their lives, of whatsoever Speculatife believe or opinion have a Right to desire & if they apply in a proper manner & from true & laudable motives, will doubtless obtain admission: the lodge stands Reddy with an open Bosom to Receave them all with sincere love & affectionate friendship: thus the Calm & quiet heaven of some hospitable port Extends its open arms to the wandering Tempest driven Voyager, affording him a Security & Repose which

and distant Climes, notwithstanding the Confusion of Languages or Dialects," which helped "give Rise to the Masons Faculty and ancient universal Practice of conversing without speaking." (5) In the 1738 second edition, Anderson added a note: "This old Tradition is believed firmly by the old Fraternity." (6)

A lecture read March 8, 1735/6, at the constitution of a new lodge in Gateshead in the north of England, and published in *The Book M*, features some more vivid detail: "Their Design and End in building this prodigious Tower (as we suppose) was not only for establishing a Name, but also to fix a Centre of Unity and Correspondence, to which they might, upon any Occasion, repair, least for Want of some such Remarkable, they might become dispersed over the Face of the Earth, and by that means loose that Intercourse with one another which they wanted to preserve. But their Designs running counter to the Purpose of the Almighty, what

they endeavoured to avoid, he miraculously brought about by the Confusion of Tongues, which gave Origin to the MASONS antient Practice of conversing without speaking, by means of proper Signals expressive of their Ideas. And the Professors of the Royal Art, knowing the Necessity they were under of dispersing, in order to populate the Earth, established several mysterious Ceremonials among themselves, to serve as Principles of Unity, and to distinguish one anothers by in Parts remote." (1:19)

A 1754 exposure further expounds on the idea, saying that after the confusion of tongues, Belus [Nimrod] "assembled another Grand Lodge, and instructed his Men how to converse by Signs, &c. whereby they were capable of executing his future designs." (A. Slade, *The Free Mason Examined*, 1754, 10) A note on this passage reads: "This was what gave Rise to what is called Free-Masonry, being fifty-three Years after the first Assembly, or Lodge held. This Tradition is firmly believed." (Ibid.) "The Masons Faculty, and ancient,

universal Practice of conversing, and knowing each other at a Distance, by Signs, &c is supposed to be greatly lost, by Reason there is so very little remaining, but however trifling the Remains, a Mason is oblig'd to answer all lawful Signs, therefore, if he be at work on the Top of a Building, he is obliged to come down, and answer, if such a Sign is given." (21)

In the Leland-Locke Pseudepigraphon—first published in 1753, and commonly referred to as the Leland *MS.*, although scholars believe that no such manuscript ever existed—it is also clear that this language has extended capability and esoteric connotations. In the "ancient" part of the text, the Masons are described as concealing many things, including "the Wey of Wynnynge the Facultye of Abrac, the Skylle of becommynge gude and parfyghte wythouten the Holpynges of Fere and Hope; and the Universelle Longage of Maconnes." ("The Fundamental Principles of Masonry Explained," *The*



*Gentleman's Magazine* 23: 420) The notes written in the name of John Locke explain this as follows. "An universal language has been much desired by the learned of many ages. 'Tis a thing rather to be wished than hop'd for. But it seems the MASONS pretend to have such a thing among them. If it be true, I guess it must be something like the language of the PANTOMIMES among the ancient ROMANS, who are said to be able, by signs only, to express and deliver any oration intelligibly to men of all nations, and languages. A man who has all these arts and advantages, is certainly in a condition to be envied: but we are told that this is not the case with all MASONS; for though these arts are among them, and all have a right and an opportunity to know them, yet some want capacity, and others industry, to acquire them." (Ibid.) Clearly, more than modes of recognition are intended here, since 1) this language is supposed to express ideas, and 2) it is said that some Masons lack the sophistication and dedication to learn the language, which is hardly an issue with the modes of recognition and signs of distress. The idea of a secret, information-bearing language understandable only by some Freemasons falls under the second taxon of Masonic esotericism. (Eyer, "Defining Esotericism," 17–18) Although the Leland MS. was a pseudepigraphon, it was accepted throughout in the eighteenth century as authentic, and Freemasons took no issue with its description of their Craft. A copy of it, in fact, follows the *Dissertation Upon Masonry* in the C.W. Moore MS.

17. Acts 10:34, paraphrased.

18. Reference to the instruction of younger brethren implies that the Lodge also had older and more acculturated Masons, which is a salient point considering the early date of the *Dissertation*.

19. Outside of the many references to Adam as the orig-

inal Restless ocean, (common life) is not to be met with.

Having thus shewn how in several Respects a lodge may be justly lik'ned to a paradise or Heaven, I shall proceed under a few particulars principally by way of Instruction to younger Bretheren<sup>18</sup> to set forth in what Respect a Lodge ought to Resemble a paradise or Heaven.

<sup>1st</sup> In the first place if the Lodge is properly likened to Heaven[,] you that are members thereof should[,] like the Inhabitants of that happy place, | 9 | as far as possible, Endeavour to preserve a pure and unblemish'd life and Conversation: you should Consider that not onely your own Reputation, but the Reputation of all the fraternity, is affected by your behaviour. Invested as you are with that distinguishing Badge which has been worn with pride by the most noble & most worthy of mankind: you should scorn to do a mean thing: Walk worthy of your vocation, and do honnour to your profession: Remember the fate of that primitive Mason, who being found unworthy of the happy State he was placed in, was justly driven thence by order of the great mason, and an Angel set to Guard the Entrance against him with a Sword of fire.<sup>19</sup> It is true that on this side the grave absolute perfection is hardly

inal Freemason, the most explicit motif demonstrating the comparison of the tiled Lodge to the Garden of Eden was the ritualistic identification of the Tiler with the cherub of Genesis 3:23–24: "Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden . . . and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." The Tiler's sword, from a very early period, was intended to represent this cherubic blade of fire. A lodge song by Deputy Grand Master Nathaniel Blackerby, published in 1729, illustrates this: "Some at our Fraternity will rail / Because our Secrets we so well conceal / And curse the Centry with the flaming Sword / Who keeps Eves-droppers from the Masons Word." The Irish Masons had the same tradition: "Reject all PRETENDERS as Men of base and ignoble Principles, and take at all times an especial care that your House be well Tyled, and your Materials kept close in an Ivory Receptacle, while awful Silence with a Sword of Faith stands Guardian at the Door, and every Brother keeps

to be Expected, yet Encouraged by such a multitude of good Examples, Charg'd with so many Solemn Charges, and Engag'd by such strong and Endearing obligations, Strive, I beseech you, to persevere in the Constant practice of evry vertue: and if any Brother shall offend let the rest be warned thereby & Remember, that if one being a Mason is nevertheless an ill man, much worse (to the honnour of masonry & to his Shame be it Spoken,) much worse would he Certainly be if he was not a mason, and therefore double is his disgrace, and double Shall be his Condemnation.

<sup>2dly</sup> In the second place a lodge ought to resemble Heaven in the most Cheerfull good humour, and the most perfect love and Charity among the Brethren: let there be no heart burning among us, let evry brother who happens to think himself disobliged by another, open his Soul to the lodge & he shall | 10 | be made Easy: let us Rejoice in evry opportunity of serving & obliging each other, for then & then only are we answering the principal End of our Institution:<sup>20</sup> however he that Enters into the lodge with an Expectation of Receiving good office only, do's not act from True & Legitimate motives: he ought Rather to wish to have it in his power to do good offices to others; he should hope that by Joining

his Key." (D'Assigny, *An Impartial Answer*, 1741, 16)

To make this allusion visible, a *flamberge* or wavy-bladed sword was often used—but the symbolism was widely understood regardless of the physical shape of the Tiler's sword. The implication seems to be that the Lodge, when in session, is a "paradise" which must be protected by the "cherub" of the Tiler. The brethren pass the Tiler to enter the Lodge, symbolically re-entering paradise and gaining access to its—generally forbidden—delights. For example, this passage from a lecture "Read before a great Assembly of Brethren in London," and printed in 1736 in *The Book M*: "The World now from West to East, from South to North, affords nothing but Objects of Delight and Surprize; now the mystick Gate of Paradise is open'd, and the Tree of Life presents itself, and such as do not transgress the Lodge's Precept, will be admitted to eat the immortal Fruit thereof." (1:25)

This became a theme of several old Masonic songs. For example, in 1736, a song in *The Book M, or Masonry Triumphant* begins: "Glorious Craft which fires the

Mind / With sweet Harmony and Love / Surely thou wer't first design'd / A Fore-taste of the Joys above." (2:36) Another echoes the same theme—demonstrating the same conflation of Eden and Heaven evidenced in the *Dissertation*—as the Lodge is a place "Where we blest Eden's Pleasures tast[e] / Whilst balmy Joys are our Repast." (2:35) A later song even more explicitly describes Masons re-entering Eden via the Lodge to sinlessly eat from the Tree of Knowledge; it presents humanity "from Eden driven" beset by woes "Until our Order greatly rose / And form'd another Eden here / Where true Pleasure ever reigns / And native Innocence remains / Here Virtue all her Treasures shews / Here nothing vile can enter in / See here the Tree of Knowledge grows / Whose Fruit we taste, yet free from Sin / Whilst Friendship and sweet Peace abound / And guardian Angels hover round." (Robert Trewman, *Principles of Free-masonry Delineated*, 1777, 219)

Although this theme is clearly transgressive by comparison to contemporary religious teachings, the Freemasons of the eighteenth century promoted it quite freely on both sides of the Atlantic. An American Masonic song of the latter part of the century includes lines such as: "We taste what angels do above / Here happiness is found / The fruit of Eden's tree we taste / Its balmy joys are our repast." (Bennett Wheeler, *The Young Mason's Monitor*, 1791, 14) Preston's *Illustrations* featured yet another song with the same idea, directly linking Eden's fruit with the Craft itself: "Happy, happy mortals, rise / Taste with us immortal joys / Blooming on yon sacred tree / Planted by the Deity / The hallow'd fruit is MASONRY." (1792, 369)

In William Smith's June 24, 1795, sermon before the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, this theme was on full display: "our great progenitor Adam, who being found unworthy of the bliss which he enjoyed in his Paradisaical Lodge, was driven from thence by order of the omnipotent GRAND MASTER; and a celestial Tyler, a mighty Cherubim, with a Sword of fire (mark the



emblem) was placed to guard the door, and forbid his future entrance. Since that time, the Lodges of his posterity have fallen from primitive order and perfection. Yet still they will be a resemblance of the Paradisaical lodge, and even of Heaven itself, so far as you labour earnestly in the exercise of Love, that great badge of your profession." (2:86–87, emphasis in the original)

20. The *Dissertation* may be the first literary example of the theme that the harmony of the tiled Lodge reflects the harmony of the heavenly Temple. William Smith was influenced by this idea, and as early as December 28, 1778, expressed it in his prayer given at Christ Church in Philadelphia, with George Washington in attendance: "In thy Name we assemble, and in thy Name we desire to proceed in all our doings. Let the wisdom of thy blessed SON, through the grace and goodness of the HOLY GHOST, so subdue every discordant passion within us, so harmonize and enrich our hearts with a portion of thine own love and goodness, that the Lodge, at this time, may be a sincere, though humble, copy of that Order and Beauty and Unity, which reign forever before thy Heavenly Throne." (2:48, emphasis added) Adapted into a non-sectarian form, this verbiage was recommended as the opening prayer for American lodges in the Baltimore Convention's proposed national system of work and lectures. (C.W. Moore & S.W.B. Carnegie, *The Masonic Trestle-Board*, 1843, 13) It was later adopted as the standard opening prayer of many American jurisdictions.

21. Acts 20:35.

22. Here, "Human" is used in the sense of *humane*, an archaic usage noted in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as

with a number of men whose proper business it is to do good, his power & opportunitys of doing good will be more Extensive and frequent, than when he stood by himself: this is the True and Genuine Motive, & a man of this turn of mind, will think himself happier in doing & Conferring Kindness than in Receaving them. For it is *more Blessed to give than to receive*,<sup>21</sup> we should however Carefully avoid asking things of one another that are improper to be granted, & give one another as little trouble as possible: and thus is the happiness of the universal Lodge promoted.

3<sup>dly</sup> The lodge Should Resemble heaven in absolutely refusing admission to improper persons: people of selfish ungenerous illnatur'd dispositions are utterly unfit to be made Masons, tis the Human<sup>22</sup> Benevolent mind only, that deserves & is Capable of this Felicity: Such will naturally desire to join with us, as being pleased with evry thing, that tend to make mankind more happy; and such will apply with a suitable earnestness, of their own Freewill & voluntary motion[,] for by no means should we Invite or Endeavour to entice | 11 | any-man; *let them Seek & they shall find* says the great & Blessed Architect, *let them knock and it shall be opened unto them, let them hunger and thirst after Righteousness & they shall be filled; for the Kingdom of Heaven is Gotten by violence*, (that is an earnest & hearty Endeavour) *and the violent take it by force*.<sup>23</sup>

4<sup>thly</sup> Fourthly and lastly, the Lodge ought to Resemble Heaven in the most perfect secrecy of all their Transactions.

*All that we know of those Above,*

*Is that they Sing, and that they Love; . . .* says the Poet.<sup>24</sup>

In like manner, all that is known of the Lodge should be that in our meetings we are Good natur'd and Chearfull, & love one another. The Essential Secrets of masonry indeed are Everlastingly

paralleled in 1727.

23. These Biblical references are paraphrased from Matthew 7:7, 5:6, & 11:12.

24. Paraphrased from the English poet Edmund Waller (1606–1687). The quote actually begins: "For all we know / Of what the blessed do above . . ."

Safe, & never can be Revealed abroad, because they can never be understood by such as are unenlightened[.]<sup>25</sup> They are not what I am Speaking of, but I mean the Common private transactions of the Lodge, as if a Brother in necessity ask Relief, if an Erring Brother be Reprouv'd & Censur'd, if possibly little differences and animositys should happen to arise, such things as theys should never be heard of abroad. Learn to be Silent: a Babler is an abomination.<sup>26</sup> Remember the fate of that unhappy man Strong indeed in body, but weak in mind; he discover'd his Secret to his Wife & thus his Ennemys came to the Knowledge of them, this prouv'd his destruction & eternal dishonour, for he is now as a Brother never named among Masons.<sup>27</sup>

| 12 | I shall Conclude with observing that people of dark Suspicious minds, have Imagined that some thing Extremely Weak'd must be the Cement of our Fabrick, and the tribe of Scorners affect to Represent it as some what mighty Ridiculous; but the vast antiquity alone of our Constitution furnishes an argument Sufficient to Confound all such gainsayers: for no Combination of wicked men for a wicked purpose ever lasts long, the want of vertue on which mutual trust & Confidence is founded, soon divides & breaks them to peices. Nor would men of unquestion'd Wisdom & good Sense, though they might be Trapann'd into a foolish or Ridiculous Society, which could pretend to nothing valuable, ever continu'e in it as all the World sees they do, and Contribute towards supporting & propagating it to latest Posterity.

Reverenc'd be the memory of the Widow's Son, and Blessed be the name of the <sup>all</sup> Mighty architecte, son of the virgin:<sup>28</sup> Infinitely honnour'd be the name of the great Geometrican, who made all things, by weight and measure,<sup>29</sup> and let love, peace, and unanimity Continue forever among Masons.

Be it So.

25. Although it is commonly suggested that in early Freemasonry the only secrets were the modes of recognition, this statement shows that the "Essential Secrets" were conceived of as something only attainable by initiates through special understanding. This is, therefore, another example of textual-interpretive or second-taxon Masonic esotericism in the *Dissertation*. (Eyer, "Defining Esotericism," 17–18)

26. This phrase is strongly paralleled in William Smith's 1778 sermon: "Learn when to be silent and when to speak; for a babbler is an abomination." (2:57)

27. Samson is mentioned in two songs in Anderson's *Constitutions* of 1723. The second has: "But Samson's Blot / Is ne'er forgot / He blabb'd his Secrets to his Wife / that sold Her Husband / who at last pull'd down / The House on all in Gaza Town." (91) A footnote in the 1738 second edition of Anderson's *Constitutions* also expresses the blotting out of Samson's name: "The Tradition of old Masons is, that a learned Phenician called SANCONIATHON was the Architect, or Grand Master, of this curious Temple: And that SAMSON had been too credulous and effeminate in revealing his Secrets to his Wife, who betray'd him into the Hands of the Philistins; for which he is not numbered among the antient Masons. But no more of this." (10)

Slade's *Free Mason Examin'd* of 1754 records what purports to be a primitive Masonic practice of using a sign derived from the Biblical story of Samson drinking from a miraculous spring in Judges 15:19. Because this legend took place before Samson became disgraced by revealing secrets, it was still celebrated by Masons. (21)

28. The Great Architect was sometimes specifically identified as Jesus. This primitive feature is echoed in the 1730 exposure, *Masonry Dissected*, wherein the "Grand Architect and Contriver of the Universe" is identified with "He that was taken up to the top of the Pinnacle of the Holy Temple." (22)

29. Wisdom of Solomon 11:20, paraphrased. Allusions to this Biblical passage are also made in the 1778 and 1795 Masonic sermons of William Smith. (2:51, 75)