

GLOBES ON THE PillARS

Maps, Celestial and Terrestrial

Q. Why do we talk of the pillars, B. and J., being crowned with two spheres on which were delineated maps of the celestial and terrestrial globes' when everybody, at that time, believed the world to be flat?

A. The Biblical account of the objects which surmounted the pillars is by no means clear. The original Hebrew word is *goolot* (plural) or *goolah* singular) and it may mean globes, bowls or vessels. Various forms of the same word are often used to describe anything circular or spherical. The Geneva Bible of 1560 was one of the early illustrated Bibles that contained a picture of the pillar surmounted by an ornamental sphere, not a map; but there are several illustrations, produced about the same time and later, showing the pillars surmounted by hemispheres or bowls, and the Authorized Version of the Bible at 1 Kings vii, v. 41, speaks of 'the two bowls of the chapiters that were on the top of the two pillars...' Whether they were really bowls or globes cannot now be determined, but it is quite certain that they were not maps, either celestial or terrestrial.

Solomon's Temple was completed, according to Usher, in 1005 B.C. (Graetz, the Jewish historian, says 1007). The earliest known map of the world is believed to have been designed, some 400 years later, by Anaximander (c. 611-546 B.C.) who held that it was flat and shaped like a cylinder of great thickness, bounded round its circumference by water, and suspended in the circular vault of the heavens.

During the next 1500 years or so, the science of cartography made very little progress, although celestial globes were already known in the time of Bede, A.D. 637-735. The map-makers were generally agreed that the world was flat, though they differed as to whether it was an 'oblong-square', or oval, or circular. The fathers of the Christian Church did not encourage scientific pursuits and it was not until the period c. A.D. 1100-1250 that the sphericity of the globe began to find acceptance among philosophers and scholars. The earliest known 'global maps' (the Nuremberg globe, by Behaim, and another, known as the Laon globe) are both dated 1492, the year in which Columbus began his first major voyage.

Masonic interest in these matters seems to have developed in a very gradual and somewhat roundabout way. Most of our early ritual texts contain questions relating to the 'lights of the lodge', always three in number, at first denoting the Master, warden, and fellow-craft. Later they are said to represent the 'Sun, Moon, and Master', and c. 1727-1730 we find the expansions 'Sun to rule the Day, Moon, the Night', the first faint hint of an interest in the celestial bodies. By this time, 1730, *Masonry Dissected* indicates in its catechism that the Lodge is 'as high as the Heavens' and as deep as 'the Centre of the Earth', and is covered by 'A cloudy Canopy of divers colours (or the Clouds)'.

The next main link in the chain of evolution is in the French exposure *L'Ordre des Francs-Masons Trahi*, 1745, which repeated all the details summarized from *Masonry Dissected*, above, but added a new piece of interpretation to the dimensions:

Q. Why do you answer thus?

A. To indicate, that Free-Masons are spread over all the Earth, & all together they form only one Lodge.

Here is the first hint, in any Masonic ritual, of the idea which was soon to be enshrined in the phrase 'Masonry universal'. In the French texts generally, the canopy is now 'studded with golden stars', but the *Trahi* has another embellishment of rather greater interest. At the centre of the combined E.A.-F.C. 'Floor-drawing' or Tracing Board, there is an 'armillary sphere', i.e., a kind of skeleton celestial globe consisting of metal strap rings or hoops, used in the study of astronomy. This was, apparently, the first precursor of the handsome globes which became a distinctive feature in the wealthier and well-equipped Lodges in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

The final evolutionary stages cannot be determined precisely, though they seem to be directly linked with the words 'Masonry universal' which appeared for the first time in Three Distinct Knocks, 1760, and then in J. & B., 1762:

Que. Why...from the Surface to the Center of the Earth?

Ans. Because Free Masonry is Universal.

Both texts describe the Wardens' columns in detail and there is no hint at this stage, that they were surmounted with globes. Many later editions of these and other English exposures contain an engraved frontispiece showing the furniture of the lodges of their day, in which the globes are a regular feature, and we cannot be sure which came first, i.e., the handsome globes or the words 'Masonry universal' which may well have inspired their introduction.

The evidence of Lodge minutes and inventories suggests that it was not until the last quarter of the 18th century that the Lodges began to acquire these costly items of furniture and there is a strong possibility that the globes with maps were added to the Wardens' columns as an economy measure, in place of the far more expensive globes on ornamental stands.

Eventually the term 'Masonry universal' made its appearance in the Lectures, and in the 'Explanation of the Second Tracing Board' in which the Masonic description of Solomon's pillars stated that they were 'further adorned with two spherical balls, on which were delineated maps of the celestial and terrestrial globes (symbolizing)...masonry universal'. The symbolism of the globes is wholly acceptable, but the statement that Solomon's pillars were adorned with globes depicting those two maps is nonsense, a flight of fancy, doubtless introduced by a fanatical 'improver' who was determined to make the ritual comply with his ill-founded theories.