



Nugget

Tubal Cain

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Tubal-Cain - the man and the myth.

Summary

A journey through the biblical references to Tubal Cain, looking at his place in Masonic Ritual, symbolism and historiography

Keywords

Tubal-Cain, Artificer, Noah

Tubal Cain

We might wonder why when developing 'Speculative Freemasonry' the writers of the 18th century rituals (with the entire Old Testament to select from) decided to choose one personality rather than another.

One such name that comes to mind is 'Tubal Cain'. In Genesis 4:22, he is briefly proclaimed as '*the first artificer in metals*' and as '*an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron*' as if the skill of metal-smith was especially relevant in a story of morality. We then recall that the central character in another Craft allegory is Hiram Abiff, described (1 Kings 7:13) as a man '*full of skill, intelligence*' and '*knowledge in working bronze*'.

Could a common skill in working metal be the link we are seeking? Certainly, as our allegory centres on the building of King Solomon's Temple in 1000 BC and Tubal Cain reputedly lived circa 2500 BC, some 1500 years earlier, any connection with the Temple can be no more than tenuous.

To seek another explanation, we might reflect on the 18th century 'Founding Fathers' of Speculative Freemasonry. Of the 20 Founders of Grand Lodge, twelve were also members of the influential and learned Royal Society. Of the known compilers of the Ritual both were intelligent and well-educated; both were doctors of theology or divinity; and both were highly motivated towards preserving the traditions of Operative Masonry.

What then were those traditions? From the 14th century onwards the Operative ceremonies were formed of three elements with the central one being an extensive narration of 'the Traditional History of Masonry'. The mediaeval '*Lowland*' and '*Holywell*' manuscripts, although from differing traditions, both tell a similar tale. To paraphrase their Chaucerian English, they read:

'Before Noah's Flood there was a man called Lamech (a descendant of Adam's son Cain) who had two wives. By his first wife Adah he begot two sons, Jabel and Jabul; by his second wife Zillah he begot a son, Tubal Cain, and a daughter, Mahmah. These four children inspired all of Mankind's arts and sciences.

The elder son Jabel founded the science of geometry and built the first house of tree and stone; his brother Jabul discovered music and the song of tongue, harp and organ. The third brother Tubal Cain developed the smith's craft of working gold, silver, copper, iron and steel. Their sister Mahmah gave birth to the art of weaving.

These children knew well that God would take vengeance on Man for his sin, by fire or by water. Therefore, they inscribed all their sciences on two pillars that these might be found after Noah's Flood or Fire. One pillar was of metal that would not burn by fire and the other was of 'burnt brick' that would float and so not be drowned by flood.

After the Flood had receded the pillars were discovered by Hermes, so enabling Man's first tower, in Babylon, to be built from the knowledge they had conveyed. The construction of a building of such size is taken as the first step in the new science of Masonry'.

While the story is assuredly allegorical there is perhaps hidden within it a Masonic truth that reveals the true significance of Tubal Cain. A man of high skill and unique learning, aware of his predicted and inevitable death by Flood or Fire, he chose to devote his remaining hours and effort to recording his knowledge not for self but for the benefit of others in a new world that he would neither see nor share. We can see a similar noble example for Speculative Freemasons in the death of Hiram Abiff.

The giving of one's all for the benefit of others is surely the essence of Charity; the heart-beat of Speculative Freemasonry. When we hear the Warden and Deacon make reference to Tubal Cain let us reflect, not on whether or not the Candidate is going to utter 'articifer' rather than 'artificer', but on the noble and Masonic manner in which our predecessor approached his end. If ever put to the test may we also be given the moral strength to serve our fellow men and those who follow.

##END##

Recommended use of Nuggets

Nuggets offer a short, simple and readily absorbed means of progressing Masonic knowledge and an easy way to introduce learning to Lodges and Chapters. It is hoped that they will become a regular feature of Lodge and Chapter meetings as well as a source for private-study.

Nuggets can be included as an item in the summons and read at most Lodge/Chapter meetings. They can be:

- Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; *though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.*
- Themed with the meeting or activity.
- Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.
- Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.
- Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

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