

ABIF / ABIV



Tomb of Hiram Abif in Tyre Lebanon

ABIF or more correctly ABIV

A name appeared in scripture to that celebrated builder who was sent to Jerusalem by King Hiram, of Tyre, to superintend the construction of the Temple. The word, which in the original Hebrew is ...and which may be pronounced Abiv or Abif, is compounded of the noun in the construct-stateAbi, meaning father, and the pronominal suffix i, which, with the preceding vowel sound, is to be sounded as iv or if, and which means his; so that the word thus compounded Abif literally and grammatically signifies his father. The word is found in second Chronicles iv, 16, in the following sentence:

"The pots also, and the shovels, and the flesh hooks, and all their instruments, did Hiram his father make to King Solomon." The latter part of this verse is in the original as follows: shelomoh lamelech Abif Hiram gnasah

Luther has been more literal in his version of this passage than the English translators, and appearing to suppose that the word Abif is to be considered simply as an appellative or surname, he preserves the Hebrew form, his translation being as follows: "Machte Hiram Abif dem Konige Salomo." The Swedish version is equally exact, and, instead of "Hiram his father," gives us Hiram Abiv. In the Latin Vulgate, as in the English version, the words are rendered Hiram pater ejus. We have little doubt that Luther and the Swedish translator were correct in treating the word Abif as a surname.

In Hebrew, the word ab, or father, is often used as a title of respect, and may then signify friend, counselor, wise man, or something else of equivalent character.

Thus, Doctor Clarke, commenting on the word abrech, in Genesis XLI, 43, says: "Father seems to have been a name of office, and probably father of the king or father of Pharaoh might signify the same as the king's minister among us." And on the very passage in which this word Abif is used, he says: "father, is often used in Hebrew to signify master, inventor, chief operator."

Gesenius, the distinguished Hebrew lexicographer, gives to this word similar significations, such as benefactor, master, teacher, and says that in the Arabic and the Ethiopia it is spoken of one who excels in anything.

This idiomatic custom was pursued by the later Hebrews, for Buxtor tells us, in his Talmudic Lexicon, that "among the Talmudists abba, father, was always a title of honor," and he quotes the following remarks from a treatise of the celebrated Maimonides, who, when speaking of the grades or ranks into which the Rabbinical doctors were divided, says: "The first class consists of those each of whom bears his

own name, without any title of honor; the second, of those who are called Rabbanim; and the third, of those who are called Rabbi, and the men of this class also receive the cognomen of Abba, Father."

Again, in Second Chronicles 11, 13, Hiram, the King of Tyre, referring to the same Hiram, the widow's son, who is spoken of subsequently in reference to King Solomon as his father, or Abif in the passage already cited, writes to Solomon: "And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, of Hiram my father's." The only difficulty in this sentence is to be found in the prefixing of the letter lamed, before Hiram, which has caused our translators, by a strange blunder, to render the words Hiram abi, as meaning of Hiram my father's, instead of Hiram my father. Brother Mackey remarked that Hiram my father's could not be the true meaning, for the father of King Hiram was not another Hiram, but Abibal.

Luther has again taken the correct view of this subject, and translates the word as a surname: "So sende ich nun einen weisen Mann, der Berstand hat, Hiram Abif"; that is, "So now I send you a wise man who has understanding, Hiram Abif." The truth, we suspect, is, although it has escaped all the commentators, that the lamed in this passage is a Chaldaism which is sometimes used by the later Hebrew writers, who incorrectly employ, the sign of the dative for the accusative after transitive verbs.

Thus, in Jeremiah XL 2, we have such a construction, vayikach rab tabachim l Yremyahu; that is, literally, "and the captain of the guards took for Jeremiah,"

Where the l, or for, is a Chaldaism and redundant, the true rendering being, "and the captain of the guards took Jeremiah." Other similar passages are to be found in Lamentations IV, 5; Job V, 2, etc.

In like manner we suppose the.. Before Hiram which the English translators have rendered by the preposition of, to be redundant and a Chaldean form.

The sentence should be read thus: "I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, Hiram my father;" Or, if considered as a surname, as it should be, Hiram Abi.

From all this we conclude that the word Ab, with its different suffixes is always used in the Books of Kings and Chronicles, in reference to Hiram the Builder, as a title of respect. When King Hiram speaks of him he calls him "my father Hiram," Hiram Abi and when the writer of the Book of Chronicles is speaking of him and King Solomon in the same passage, he calls him "Solomon's father, his father," Hiram Abif. The only distinction is made by the different appellation of the pronouns my and his in Hebrew. To both the kings of Tyre and of Judah he bore the honorable relation of Ab, or father, equivalent to friend, counselor, or minister. He was Father Hiram.

The Freemasons are therefore perfectly correct in refusing to adopt the translation of the English version, and in preserving, after the example of Luther, the word Abif as an appellative, surname, or title of honor and distinction bestowed upon the relief builder of the Temple, as Dr. James Anderson suggests in his note on the subject in the first edition (1723) of the Constitutions of the Freemasons.

- Source: Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry

The Story of Hiram Abiff

William Harvey, J.P., F.S.A. (Scot.)

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The outstanding figure in modern Freemasonry is undoubtedly the widow's son who is known to members of the Fraternity under the somewhat obscure name of Hiram Abiff. He dominates Craft Masonry. and that in spite of the fact that neither the Entered Apprentice nor the Fellow-Craft knows anything at all about him. It is true that, when the Master Mason recites what is called "the first part of the traditional history." to the Fellow-Craft who is on his way to the secrets of the third degree, he pays the Fellow-Craft the compliment of saying, "As you are doubtless aware," Hiram was the principal architect at the building of King Solomon's Temple.. But if the Fellow-Craft is so informed, he must have acquired the knowledge apart altogether from Freemasonry as, up to that particular moment, no glimpse of the widow's son has been obtained in all the ceremonial of the First and Second Degrees. From that point onwards, however, he is chief actor in the drama, and the legend of Hiram is the most characteristic part in the ritual of the Order.

Hiram, like many other notable men in the history of the world, was distinguished in the manner of his death as that is set forth in the legend, and the dramatic circumstances attending the tragedy are what give amplitude to his biography. Beyond the time, place, and means of his murder, Freemasonry knows little about the man, nor, apart from Freemasonry, are many particulars to be gleaned. All that is known

of him is contained in the Volume of the Sacred Law, and even there there is confusion, and one statement that in the opinion of Bro. Robert Freke Gould stamps the Masonic legend as a myth.

According to the author of the Second Book of Chronicles (Chap. ii.) Solomon sent messengers to Hiram, King of Tyre, to acquaint that friendly sovereign with the fact that he contemplated erecting a Temple, and inviting him to furnish men and materials for the prosecution of the work. Solomon's first demand was for a specially gifted craftsman.

"Send me now," he says, "a man cunning to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in iron, and in purple, and crimson, and blue, and that can skill to grave with the cunning men that are with me in Judah, and in Jerusalem:" The King of Tyre received the embassy with cordiality, and returned a favourable answer to Solomon.

"I have sent a cunning man," he says, "endued with understanding. . . The son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was 'a man of Tyre.'"

The account given in the First Book of the Kings (Chap. VII.) differs somewhat so far as the parentage of the man is concerned. There it is stated that he was "a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali." The author or editor of Kings agrees with the Chronicler that Hiram's father was a Tyrian, adding that he was "a worker in brass." Josephus describes him as of Naphtali on his mother's side, his father being Ur of the stock of Israel. It is not easy to reconcile these differences. One Biblical student - Giesebrecht - suggests that the dislike felt by the editor of Kings to the idea of the Temple being built by a half-Phoenician caused him to insert the words "a widow of the tribe of Naphtali," the alteration of the phrase "of the daughters of Dan" into "of the tribe of Naphtali," being the more permissible, since Dan lay in the territory of Naphtali.

The clear points that emerge are that Hiram was of mixed race, the son of a brassworker, and a man so high in his profession as to have secured the patronage of his King, and to have been deemed worthy to uphold the reputation of his country. His exalted position is inferred from the description given by the author of the Chronicles who alludes to him as "Hiram Abi," and the word "Abi," meaning "my father," is usually taken in the sense of "master," a title of respect and distinction.

The name is undoubtedly Phoenician, but there is some confusion, as to its actual form. "Hiram" is the more common rendering, but the author of the Chronicles adheres to the spelling "Hiram," and other writers adopt the variant "Hirom." Mr J. F. Stenning says that it is equivalent to "Ahirom," and means "the exalted one." According to Movers, Hiram or Hiram. is the name of a deity, and means "the coiled or twisted one," but other scholars regard this derivation as very improbable.

Whatever his real parentage, and whatever the exact meaning of his name, the widow's son of Freemasonry reached Jerusalem and was thereafter intimately identified with the building of the Temple. What exact share did he have in that great work?

The editors of "The Jewish Encyclopedia" point out that there is an essential difference as regards the nature of his technical specialty between the account preserved in the First Book of Kings and that in the Second Book of Chronicles. According to the former, Hiram was an artificer only in brass, and the pieces which he executed for the Temple were the two pillars, Jachin and Boaz, the molten sea with its twelve oxen, the ten layers with their bases, the shovels and basins, all of brass. But in the Second Book of the Chronicles he is depicted as a man of many parts, and the impression is conveyed that he superintended all the work of the Temple. Josephus seeks to reconcile the two accounts by saying that Hiram was expert in all sorts of work, but that his chief skill lay in working in gold, silver and brass.

And there our exact knowledge of Hiram ends. History knows nothing of him. The volume of the Sacred Law is silent as to his fate. Brother Robert Freke Gould, founding on the eleventh verse of the fourth chapter of the Second Book of the Chronicles, says he "was certainly alive at the completion of the Temple."

Out of this slender basis of fact Freemasonry has created a wonderfully vivid character. The Order maintains that he was the chief architect at the construction of the Temple and associates him with Hiram, King of Tyre, and Solomon, King of Israel, on a footing of Masonic equality. It suggests that these three were the most exalted personages in the Masonic world and that the secrets of a Master Mason had either descended to them, or been invented by them, and could not be communicated to anyone else without the consent of all three. There were Master Masons in abundance at the Temple, but apparently none of them had been admitted to a knowledge of the secrets and mysteries of the High and Sublime

Degree. Consequently, when certain curious Fellow-Crafts sought to obtain the hidden knowledge they were compelled to approach one or another of the three grand masters. They selected Hiram and when he refused their request they murdered him in the manner described in Masonic ritual.

"Taken literally," says Charles William Heckethorn in "The Secret Societies of all Ages and Countries," "the story of Hiram offers nothing so extraordinary as to deserve to be commemorated after three thousand years throughout the world by solemn rites and ceremonies. The death of an architect is not so important a matter to have more honor paid to it than is shown the memory of so many philosophers and learned men who have lost their lives in the cause of human progress The legend is purely allegorical. . . . The dramatic portion of the mysteries of antiquity is always sustained by a pity or man who perishes as the victim of an evil power, and rises again into a more glorious existence. In the ancient mysteries, we constantly meet with the record of a sad event, a crime which plunges nations into strife and grief, succeeded by joy and exultation."

Leaving for the moment the question as to the meaning of the allegory and whence it was borrowed, let us consider at what date the legend of Hiram was engrafted upon Craft Masonry.

It is generally admitted by students that the elaborate ceremonial, and multiplicity of degrees which flourish to-day under the general terms of Freemasonry, are of comparatively modern growth, and that before the era of Grand Lodges not more than one, or at most, two degrees were in existence. The Freemasonry of to-day appears to owe a good deal to the enthusiasm and imagination of two brethren who were active in the first half of the eighteenth century. These were Dr, James Anderson, an Aberdonian, who was a Presbyterian minister in London, and Dr John Theophilus Desaguliers, a native of La Rochelle, an Episcopalian clergyman, who also labored in the Metropolis. Dr George Aliver, another parson who, was keenly interested in the Craft, and contributed much to masonic literature, says that "the name of the individual who attached the aphanism of H.A.B. to Freemasonry has never been clearly ascertained; although it may be fairly presumed that Brothers Desaguliers and Anderson were prominent parties to it," adding that when "these two Brothers were publicly accused by their seceding contemporaries of manufacturing the degree " they "never denied " it. Brother Robert Freke Gould, noticing the statement of Oliver, says that Anderson and Desaguliers had been many years in their graves when the accusation was made, and that, consequently, their silence "is not to be wondered at." But if Gould himself does not lay the blame or credit of the Third Degree at the door of these Brethren he favours the view that Hiram became a prominent character in Masonic ritual during the years of their activity.

"When the legend of Hiram's death was first incorporated with our older traditions, it is not easy to decide," he says, "but in my judgment it must have taken place between 1723 and 1729, and,," he adds, "I should be inclined to name 1725 as the most likely year for its introduction."

Gould is led to this view from two considerations: first, the remarkable paucity of references to Hiram in the Old Charges and early catechisms of Freemasonry, and, secondly, the prominence given to him in the edition of Dr Anderson's "Constitutions," published in 1738. He thinks, wisely most people will agree, that if the murder of Hiram Abiff had been a tradition of the Craft in early days, not only would allusions to him be found in the literature of the Order, but he would have appeared in the earlier degrees, and not been thrust without any sort of warning into the third degree, much to the surprise of all who regard Craft Masonry as a gradually developing spectacle. As Palgrave says, "It is not well for the personages of the historical drama to rise on the stage through the trap-doors. They should first appear entering in between the side scenes. Their play will be better understood then. We are puzzled when a king, or count, suddenly lands upon our historical ground, like a collier winched. up through a shaft."

It is not improbable, that just about the time mentioned by Gould - the close of the first quarter of the eighteenth century - the traditionary history was enlarged, the ceremonial rearranged, and what was formerly the second degree expanded and then divided so as to form the degrees of Fellow-Craft and Master Mason. Countenance to this view by a comparison of the first and second editions of Anderson's "Constitutions." In the earliest editions, issued in 1723, the author dwells at some length upon the magnificence of King Solomon's Temple. This is repeated in the later edition, published in 1738, but a number, of details as to the manner of its erection are given which suggests that it had grown in Masonic ceremonial importance during the intervening years. For example, Anderson states that after "the Capestone was celebrated by the Fraternity, their joy was soon interrupted by the sudden death of their dear

master, Hiram Abiff, whom they decently interred in the Lodge near the Temple, according to ancient Usage.

If it be assumed that the third degree was invented about 1725, and that the invention involved the introduction of the Hiram legend the next point for consideration is, to what source did the founders turn for material? Beyond casual references to him, the Old Charges are silent concerning Hiram, and there is nothing to indicate that he was commemorated in any way. He is simply referred to as a "Master of Geometry," and the chief of all the various classes of workmen engaged in the building of the Temple. He appears to have been slightly more prominent in the ceremonial of the Rosicrucians with whom Freemasons are sometimes identified. Professor Buhle, in his "Historical-Critical Enquiry into the Origin of the Rosicrucians and Freemasons, says: - -

"The building of Solomon's Temple had an obvious meaning as a prefiguration of Christianity. Hiram, simply the architect of this temple to the real professors of the art of building, was to the English Rosicrucians a type of Christ: and the legend of Masons, which represented this Hiram as having been murdered by his fellow-workmen, made the type still more striking."

In a footnote to his Essay, Buhle explains that "Hiram" was understood by the older Freemasons as an anagram H.I.R.A.M. derived from two Latin phrases: the one, "Homo Jesus Redemptor Animarum," and the other, "Homo :us Rex Altissimus Mundi." By "older Freemasons," Ruble probably means Rosicrucians as phrases relating to Jesus seem singularly out of place in the plan of Craft Masonry.

If the inventors of the third degree got the suggestion from the Rosicrucians to make Hiram the central figure in their new scheme, it is very obvious that they found their details as to his murder in "The Legend of the Temple," and turned that story to suit the purpose they had in view. The Legend is given at length in Charles William Heckethorn's singularly attractive work, "The Secret Societies of all Ages and Countries," from which it may be summarized as follows:

"Hiram, the descendent of Tubal-Cain, who first constructed a furnace and worked in metals, erected a marvellous building, the Temple of Solomon, raised the golden throne of Solomon, and built many glorious edifices. But, melancholy amidst all his greatness, he lived alone, understood and loved by few, hated by many, including Solomon, who was envious of his genius and glory. When Balkis, the Queen of Sheba, carne to Jerusalem, Solomon led her to behold the Temple, and the Queen was lost in admiration. The King, captivated by her beauty, offered his hand, which she accepted. On again visiting the Temple she repeatedly desired to see the architect. Solomon delayed as long as possible, but at last was forced to present Hiram Abiff to the Queen. When she wished to see the countless host of workmen that wrought at the Temple, Solomon protested the impossibility of assembling them all at once; but, Hiram, leaping on a stone to be better seen, with his right hand described in the air the symbolical Tau, and immediately the men hastened from all parts of the work into the presence of their master. At this the Queen wondered greatly, and secretly repented of the promise she had given the King, for she felt herself in love with the mighty architect. Solomon set himself to destroy this affection, and to prepare his rival's humiliation and ruin. For this purpose he employed three fellow-crafts, envious of Hiram, because he had refused to raise them to the degree of masters on account of their want of knowledge and their idleness. The black envy these three projected that the casting of the brazen sea, which was to raise the glory of Hiram its utmost height, should turn out a failure. The day for the casting arrived and the Queen Sheba was present. The doors that restrained the molten metal were opened, and torrents of liquid fire poured into the cast mould wherein the brazen sea was to assume its form. But the burning mass flowed like lava over the adjacent aces. The terrified crowd fled from the advancing stream of fire, while Hiram, calm, like a god, endeavoured to arrest its advance with ponderous columns of water, but without success.

"The dishonoured artificer could not with draw himself from the scene of his discomforture. Suddenly he heard a strange voice coming from above and crying, 'Hiram, Hiram, Hiram;' He raised his eyes and beheld a gigantic human figure. The apparition continued, 'Come, my son, be without fear, I have rendered thee incombustible, cast thyself into the flames.' Hiram threw himself into the furnace, and where others would have found death, he tasted ineffable delights nor could he, drawn by an irresistible force, leave it, and asked him that drew him into the abyss, 'Who art thou?' 'I am the father of thy fathers,' was the answer, 'I am Tubal-Cain.'

"Tubal-Cain introduced Hiram into the sanctuary of fire, and into the presence of Cain, to author of his race. When Hiram was about to be restored to earth, Tubal-Cain gave him the hammer with which he

himself had wrought great things, and said to him, 'Thanks to this hammer and the help of the genii of fire, thou shalt speedily accomplish the work left unfinished through man's stupidity and malignity.' Hiram did not hesitate to test the wonderful efficacy of the precious instrument, and the dawn saw the great mass of bronze cast. The artist felt the liveliest joy. The Queen exulted.

"One day after this the Queen accompanied by her maids, went beyond Jerusalem, and there encountered Hiram, alone and thoughtful. . They mutually confessed their love. Solomon now hinted to the fellow-crafts that the removal of his rival, who refused to give them the master's word, would be acceptable unto himself; so when the architect came into the temple he was assailed and slain by them. They wrapped up his body, carried it to a solitary hill and buried it, planting over the grave a sprig of acacia.

"Hiram, not having made his appearance for seven days, Solomon, to satisfy the clamour of the people, was forced to have him searched for. The body was found by three masters, and they, suspecting that he had been slain by the three fellow-crafts for refusing them the master's word, determined nevertheless for greater security to change the word. The three fellow-crafts were traced, but rather than fall into the hands of their pursuers, they committed suicide, and their heads were brought to Solomon."

Based as it obviously was on this legend of the Temple, the question still remains, why was the story of the death of Hiram engrafted with so much detail upon Freemasonry? The postulant is taught that the peculiar object of the Third Degree is to teach the heart to seek for happiness in the consciousness of a life well-spent, and invited to reflect upon death and to realise that to the just and virtuous man death has no terrors equal to the stain of falsehood and dishonor. All excellent moral teaching, but not illustrated in any way by the career of Hiram Abiff concerning whose life and conduct we know absolutely nothing. And it seems that we must look for an explanation in some other direction."

Many writers - chiefly non-Masons - have sought to throw light upon the subject, and with one voice they agree that the story of the death of Hiram is simply the Masonic way of serving up an ancient mystery. Mr John Fellows, who brings a mass of knowledge to a study of the subject, says that "the story of Hiram is only another version, like those of Adonis and Astarte, and of Ceres and Prosperine, of the fable of Osiris and Isis. The likeness throughout," he adds, "is so exact as not to admit of doubt. The search for the body of Hiram; the enquiries made of a wayfaring man, and the intelligence received; the sitting down of one of the party to rest and refresh himself, and the hint conveyed by the sprig over the grave; the body of Hiram remaining fourteen days in the grave prepared by the assassins before it was discovered, all have allusion to, and comport with, the allegory of Osiris and Isis. The condition even in which the grave of Hiram is found, covered with green moss and turf, corresponds very much with that in which Isis found the coffin of Osiris."

Assuming that Mr Fellows and those who agree with him are correct what is the reason why the inventors of the Third Degree in the first quarter of the eighteenth century gave a Biblical turn to an old-world fable and introduced it into Freemasonry to teach the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead? The question is not easy to answer, and at most one can but hazard a guess.

May it not be that those who were anxious to build up the degree found their starting point in the anagram familiar to the Rosicrucian which, by a very striking coincidence, agreed with the name of the principal architect of the Temple? Thus directed to Hiram they, decided to turn that craftsman to account and found much material ready to their hands in the Legend of the Temple. But the love story of the Queen of Sheba and the jealousy of Solomon were of no dramatic value to them in developing the degree, and consequently they had to adapt the story to their particular needs. What the ultimate origin of Freemasonry was may never be discovered, but much of the elaborate ceremonial has a close affinity to early sun-worship and where, therefore, would the Authors more readily turn than to one of the solar myths. In the legend of Osiris they found something that fitted in exactly with their scheme, and just as the H.I.R.A.M. of the Rosicrucians referred to that Son of God who is the Light of the World, so their Hiram was made to represent Osiris, or the sun, the glorious luminary of the day. The three fellow-crafts, as the ceremonial of the degree takes form, are stationed at the west, south and east entrances, and these are regions illuminated by the Sun. Twelve persons play an important part in the tragedy; the number, no doubt, alludes to the twelve signs of the Zodiac, and it has been suggested that the three assassins symbolise the three inferior signs of winter, Libra, Scorpio, and Sagittarius. The Sun descends in the west, and it is at the west door that Hiram is slain. The acacia which typifies the new vegetation that will

come as "a result of the Sun's resurrection, and is found in many ancient solar allegories, and is therefore quite naturally introduced into the Masonic story. According to one statement, Hiram's body is found in a state of decay, having lain fourteen days; the body of Osiris was cut into fourteen pieces. Another statement insists that the body was found on the seventh day, and this again may allude to the resurrection of the Sun, "which actually takes place in the seventh month after his passage through the inferior signs, that passage which is called his descent into hell." Other details in the Masonic tragedy are related to the solar myth. It is through the instrumentality of Leo - the Lion - that Osiris is raised, for when he re-enters that sign, he regains his former strength. Hiram was raised by the Lion's grip, and it is by that grip that the Freemason is raised from a figurative death to a reunion with the companions of his former toil. The parallel is wonderfully complete.

An early catechism of the Craft says that Masonry is "a system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols." To-day it is something more. The first degree accords with the definition; but the second degree is largely concerned with the erection of a Temple to the Lord, and, the Third Degree points the Craftsman to the Grand Lodge above to which he may hope to ascend after he has passed through the valley of the shadow of death. All this is religion - not morals; and it is as part of our common faith in immortality that Hiram's death is used as an illustration in the high and sublime degree. Just as, in early pagan belief, the Sun was supposed to lose his strength in the dark days of winter, and rise again to glory in the height of summer tide; and just as, in the ceremonial of the Rosicrucians, the Son of Man, who was slain had a glorious resurrection to eternal life, so, throughout all the world, wherever Craft Masonry is practiced, the postulant typifies our Master Hiram, not alone to show that death is preferable to dishonor, but to impress upon the Fraternity that the just and virtuous man may hope to be received as a worthy brother into the Grand Lodge above, where the world's Great Architect rules and reigns forever.

- Source: William Harvey
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Hiram Abif, The Man

By Bro. David E.W. Williamson, Nevada

There is an attempt to write history that is merely a rearrangement of documents, dry or dead, and there is an attempt, born of fancy, which sails off into the air in child-like indifference to facts. Most essays on Hiram Abif have fallen between these two stools but that cannot be said of this beautiful study, which is an imaginative reconstruction based on the most careful studies of history. It is a pleasure to publish here this contribution from a friend and brother who for long has been so loyal a worker in this Society, and who, so Ye Editor is happy to report, has been a personal inspiration to those who work at headquarters. If this essay proves to be the first chapter of a book, as Bro. Williamson plans it to be, we shall be safe in predicting for it a wide reading.

WHEN King Solomon stepped over from his palace every day to watch the building of the great Temple in Jerusalem, he was met by a broad-shouldered, swarthy man, standing about five feet six inches in height, wearing his black hair in curls to his shoulders and bearing himself with the dignity that was natural in a man who, while still young, had won such fame as to be called to undertake the greatest work of construction that the Israelites had ever attempted.

That man was Hiram, called Abif. Biblical history says little about him and profane history nothing, but amid the crowd of courtiers and figures in Israel that are mentioned in the biblical descriptions of Solomon's reign, where the king, himself, his chief queen, the daughter of the Pharaoh of Egypt, the Queen of Sheba, King Hiram of Tyre, Adoniram the tax collector and the officers he placed over the various districts, including his son-in-law Ahimaaz, fill so large a place in the public eye, this Hiram Abif stands out as a personage. In the feasts and entertainments with which Solomon must have made his people merry in the same way as his neighboring princes made theirs, Hiram Abif was undoubtedly a prominent guest, for in Egypt men who built and decorated temples were honoured and, in a city where a princess of Egypt was queen, accustomed from her earliest days to rule, she would quite naturally set the fashion. Hiram, too, accustomed to the atmosphere of courts, for he the friend of King Hiram of Tyre, and as an artist designer was a man of rank and standing in Phoenician cities, as judging from the remains visible of the architecture of those regions, an architect was also an artist in all the cities around

the Mediterranean and Aegean seas. In short, Hiram must have appeared to the people to be a prince. In addressing him they would call him "lord" and regard him as of only a little lower rank than the sovereign.

What raised him even higher in the eyes of the Hebrews of Jerusalem was the fact that he was an artist. In a Temple to the great Jehovah there could be no figure of man or of beast, such as was common in Phoenicia at both Tyre and Sidon, and such as the Egyptian princess knew in the land of her birth. There could, however, be images of beautiful flowers, of lilies and of palm leaves, of strange creatures with faces of men, wings of birds and feet of animals, and there could be intricate and graceful arabesques and geometrical designs. Hiram Abif's was the ability that could produce such works and a people who but a few generations previously had lived in tents must have looked at him with awe. In Phoenicia he had probably had many men working under him to whom he was absolute master, and this while he was what today would be described as scarcely more than a youth. He was the son, too, of a man evidently famous in his time.

To understand what position he held at the court of his master, Hiram, and that of King Solomon as well, it must be realized that Hiram Abif was not a brass-worker in the same sense that the word is used now, but was a master artist in the working of metals; a man who, thanks to the gifts of his royal sovereign, was among the wealthy subjects of the Tyrian monarch. Nor would he be regarded as altogether a foreigner in Jerusalem, for it was undoubtedly known to everyone at Solomon's capital that this master craftsman, this artist lord and prince, was the son of a Jewish mother. His language was the same as that of the Jewish people, except perhaps for a different sound to this or that letter, and it is even possible, owing to the fact that his mother was a Jewess, that he spoke pure Jewish without a trace of accent. To the poor of the nation and to the lower ranks he would seem to be an Israelite as much as themselves, and it may be that, by contrast with Adoniram, who, as collector of the tribute, would be hated, he was actually popular, although the people were groaning beneath the taxes and forced labour drawn from them to erect the very building of which he was the constructor.

Prince though he was and rich lord in the eyes of the people, when he was called before Solomon he fell upon his face before the great king and so remained. That was the universal custom in the courts of despotic Eastern rulers and Solomon was not different, as the biblical descriptions reveal, from other monarchs of the time. The King of Israel possessed absolute authority and was accountable to no human power. Nor did Hiram rise until he was ordered to do so. So it was with the highest subjects in Egypt and in Chaldea before their royal masters and so it was at the court of King Solomon. But there must have existed a kind of intimacy between the king and his chief artist, and it is likely that in the social life of the court Hiram Abif was one of the circle of friends with whom Solomon surrounded himself. Hence the abject signs of obedience demanded of a subject in all Oriental courts would only be required of the half-Tyrian in public, while in private he would be admitted to the close confidence of the great king. No such a principle as democracy was ever known in an Oriental country and all honours and advancement could come from but one source, the throne. It is easy to understand, therefore, that every person around Solomon must have won his employment by a certain subserviency to the master's will. However free and upstanding he might be in the building of the Temple, Hiram was a courtier when in the presence of the Israelite monarch and behaved as all the other courtiers conducted themselves. It was the manner of the times and he could never have won his way to eminence by any other course. And Solomon was no easy ruler to deal with, for he was subject to the whims of the women in his palace and the whip, judging from the comment of his son, Rehoboam, was freely used upon his people.

HIS FAMILY LIFE

When the sun went down Hiram Abif would be found at his own home in the midst of the women of his household, as it is not probable that a young Tyrian lord, brought up in strict accordance with the customs of the Phoenicians and their neighbours, would remain unmarried long after reaching the age of sixteen, for child marriages were the rule in the ancient Orient from the earliest times of which there is anything known, just as they are today. The men employed upon the Temple, both those from abroad and the subjects of Solomon, were housed in a temporary village built especially for them, because there would be no place in the city of Jerusalem. Their quarters would certainly be far from luxurious, but

they were probably kept clean and the wives of the workers, who, of course, accompanied them in compliance with the customs of all Eastern peoples, lived there, too, preparing the meals, looking after small wants and raising their families. But Hiram Abif was not one of these people. Either through his father's efforts and talents, or because of his own early genius, he would long since have been placed in a higher class and these people would regard themselves as his servants. They recognized that they were apart from him. In dress, bearing and in all his surroundings he was very different from them in every respect.

It is almost possible to reconstruct the daily life of Hiram the artificer by taking what is known of the history of Phoenicia, its people and its industries; utilizing what modern learning has revealed to us about the Israelite monarchy and its place among the states of the times, and judging from the available facts just what position he would have held in an Eastern despotism if he were alive today. Yet the actual references to him in all ancient literature are few - six in the Bible, two or three in Menander and Dios, as quoted by Josephus, and two or three more independent references by Josephus, himself. His fame; the greatness of which in his day must have been such that his connection with the Temple at Jerusalem was deemed a notable event, was almost completely over shadowed in the course of a few centuries by the development of the legend of King Solomon's greatness. Stories formerly attributed to tribal heroes of the whole Semitic race gradually clustered around Solomon, until the king of the Bible narrative had become a superhuman being, a demigod like the Hercules of the Greeks, and the important parts played by those associated with him in the building of the Temple had been forgotten or belittled. Hiram Abif was not alone in thus losing what may be termed the center of the stage. Adoniram, the master of the tribute, under whose direction the always mutinous and turbulent Israelites were compelled to perform the, to them, new labour of cutting trees in the forests of Lebanon and hauling the logs down to the sea, deserves a greater place in the history of the work than has been given him, and it was he, too, who had to devise the means of collecting what must have been huge taxes from a people that prior to the previous reign had probably been called on to contribute little toward the support of the king. The rulers in the different districts, enumerated in the account in Kings, all had their share in the work and all had their troubles to overcome.

But, as time passed, Solomon became more and more the hero of the story and the others dropped out of it or into subordinate positions. Thus Hiram, a leader among the artists in metal work of Phoenicia, the industry for which that country had been famous for centuries in all the lands around the Mediterranean Sea and even as far as Assyria toward the east, occupies in the story as it has come down to us a position much lower than that which he actually held, as shown by the accounts preserved of the building of Egyptian temples and the rank of the men who held similar positions there to that of Hiram.

The oldest notice of Hiram Abif is in First Kings, VII:13, 14: "And King Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. He was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass; and he was filled with wisdom and understanding and cunning to work all kinds of brass. And he came to King Solomon and wrought all his work." The account in Chronicles is in the Second Book, II:13, 14, where King Hiram of Tyre is represented as saying: "And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, Hiram my father's, the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre, skilful to work in gold and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone and in timber, in purple and blue and fine linen, and in crimson, and to find out every device which shall be put to him, with thy cunning men and with the cunning men of David, thy father."

KINGS AND CHRONICLES VARY IN THEIR ACCOUNT

King Hiram, of Tyre, reigned from 969 to 936 B.C., and the building of the Temple at Jerusalem was begun by Solomon in the eleventh year of his Tyrian contemporary's rule, or in 958. The two books of which Kings is composed were not all written at the same time and the authors, or editors, themselves refer to two of their sources of information as "The Acts of Solomon" and "The Book of Jashar," but it is the general belief of biblical scholars that, according to the method of Hebrew writers, the actual text of the older narratives has been preserved, though the book itself did not assume the form in which we have it before 535 B.C. It is not thought that the description of the building of the Temple is of contemporary date, for instance, but was probably written long afterwards, yet the late William Robertson Smith and

Prof. E. Kautsch, of Halle, have written that it is probable the original author had access to exact particulars as to dates, the "artist Hiram and so forth, which may have been contained in the Temple records." At any rate, of several accounts of Solomon's reign and the building of the Temple, the only one we possess is Kings that is at all near the date of the event cords. The account in Chronicles is now generally assumed by scholars to be founded upon the earlier canonical books of the Bible with the exception of a lost volume called "The Book of the Kings of Israel," referred to in Chronicles itself. The editor of Chronicles has introduced material peculiar to himself, the value of which is not accepted without question, and the book was compiled some time after 300 B.C., nearly seven centuries after the time of Solomon and the building of the Temple.

Among the alterations made by the Chronicler, unfortunately, are those which cause the account of Hiram Abif to differ in Chronicles from that in Kings. Indeed, it is in Chronicles that the addition of "abif" to the name of Hiram occurs, or rather, as it is in the Hebrew, "abi" in one place, meaning "my father," and abiw" in the other place, meaning "his father." The "w" in the latter word is an attempt to transliterate the Hebrew letter that was formerly called "vav" into, English. It is still pronounced "v" among the Jewish-speaking people of Southern Russia and Rumania and at the time Luther translated the Bible into German, it was so sounded by the scholars of Western Europe, whence in translating the Hebrew into English, Miles Coverdale, who followed Luther's views, made the word "Abif" or "Abiv." It is from this source that we obtain the name Hiram Abif.

It is to the Chronicler, too, that we owe the statement that Hiram Abif, besides being a worker in brass, was "skillful to work in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple and fine linen" and all the rest of that description, which, as Tyre was not different from other lands of the age, is very unlikely. As the metal workers of the lands of antiquity were called upon to devise art work of the greatest technical ingenuity and artistist taste, it is not improbable that Hiram Abif was able to work gold and silver and copper as well as brass, and he may even have known how to treat iron, as the Chronicler says. That he would have been a worker in stone and timber, however, is contrary to all tradition in the Orient, and it is out of the question to imagine him turning his hand to "purple and blue a linen," which, although it was one of the most important industries of Tyre, was entirely foreign to metal working.

And neither the Chronicler nor the author of Kings gives us any inkling of what finally became of Hiram Abif. "So Hiram made an end of doing the work that he wrought for King Solomon in the house of God," says the Chronicler, just as the author of the description in Kings had written at least three centuries before him: "So Hiram made an end of doing all the work that he wrought for King Solomon in the house of Jehovah."

- Source: The Builder - October 1923

HIRAM ABIF

The word "Abif" (sometimes written "Abiff." but far less often than with the single "F") has in one way or another caused considerable controversy among both Biblical and Masonic scholars.

Those who are familiar with Hebrew speak learnedly of its derivation from Abi or Abiw or abiv - the consonants W and V being approximations, apparently, of a Hebrew sound not easily rendered in English letters. Our familiar King James Bible translates the word two ways "Hiram my father's" and "Hiram his father" which in itself has led to some confusion as to whether our Hiram Abif was the only Hiram or the father of another. Scholars, however, are fairly well agreed that "my father" as a translation of "Abif" is correct if the words be understood as a title of honor. Hiram the Widow's Son was "father" in the same sense that priests of the church are so known; the same variety of father that was Abraham to the tribes of Israel. Abif, then, is a title of respect and veneration, rather than a genealogical term.

Just when the legend of Hiram Abif came into our symbolism is a study by itself of which only a few bare facts can here be included.

Common understanding believes that Hiram Abif has always been in our system, and descended to us from the days of Solomon. But critical scholarship will have none of "common understanding" and demands proof; names, dates, places, documents before setting a date to any happening.

Our oldest Masonic manuscript (**Regius Poem**, dated approximately 1390) traces Masonry not to Solomon but to Nimrod and Euclid, in a still earlier time. In this is no mention of Hiram Abif. The Dowland manuscript, dated about 1550, mentions him but only as one of many. Not until The King James version of the Bible appeared (1611) do we find Hiram Abif known as such with any degree of familiarity. Yet here a curious fact it to be found; sometime after the new Bible made its appearance - late in the sixteen hundreds, when the King James version had become well known - interest in King Solomon's Temple was so keen that many models were made and exhibited and handbooks about it printed and distributed. Such specific interest in this particular building from the then new book may easily have come from the familiarity of Operative and some Speculative Masons with the Temple symbolism and, by inference, with Hiram Abif.

Anderson's explanatory footnote of Hiram Abif in his Constitutions (1732) is as follows (spelling and capitalization modernized and Hebrew letters omitted):

"We read (2 Chron. ii, 13) Hiram, King of Tyre (called there Hiram), in his letter to King Solomon, says, I have met a cunning man, le huram Abi not to be translated according to the vulgar Greek and Latin, Hiram my Father, as if this architect was King Hiram's father; for his description, ver. 14, refutes it, and the original plainly imports, Hiram of my Father's, viz, the Chief Master Mason of my Father, King Abibalus; (who enlarged and beautified the city of Tyre, as ancient histories inform us, whereby the Tyrians at this time were most expert in Masonry) tho some think Hiram the King might call Hiram the architect father, as learned and skillful men were wont to be called of old times, or as Joseph was called the father of Pharaoh; and as the same Hiram is called Solomon's father, (2 Chron. iv, 16) where ♦tis

said: Shelomoh lammelech Abhif Churam ghmasah. Did Hiram, his father, make to King Solomon. But the difficulty is over at once, by allowing the Abif to be the surname of Hiram the Mason, called also (Chap. ii, 13) Hiram Abi, as here Hiram Abif; for being so amply described (Chap. ii, 14) we may easily suppose his surname would not be concealed: And this reading makes the sense plain and complete, viz., that Hiram, King of Tyre, sent to King Solomon his namesake Hiram Abif, the prince of architects, decried (1 Kings vii, 14) to be a widow's son of the Tribe of Naphthali; and in (2 Chron. ii, 14) the said King of Tyre calls him the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan; and in both places, that his father was a man of Tyre, which difficulty is removed, by supposing his mother was either of the Tribe of Dan, or of the daughters of the city called Dan in the Tribe of Naphthali, and his deceased father had been a Naphthalite, whence his mother was called a widow of Naphthali; for his father is not called a Tyrian by descent, but his a man of Tyre by habitation; as Obed Edom the Levite is called Gittite, by living among the Gitties, and the Apostle Paul a man of Tarsus. But supposing a mistake in transcribers, and that his father was really a Tyrian by blood and his mother only of the Tribe either of Dan or of Naphthali, that can be no bar against allowing of his vast capacity, for as his father was a worker in brass, so he himself was filled with wisdom and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass; and as King Solomon sent for him, so King Hiram, in his letter to Solomon, says: And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, skillful to work in Gold, silver, brass, iron, stone, timber, purple, blue, fine linen and crimson; also to grave any manner of graving, and to find out every device which shall be put to him with thy cunning men, and with the cunning men of My Lord David thy father. This divinely inspired workman maintained this character in erecting the Temple, and in working the utensils thereof, far beyond the performances of Aholiab and Bezaleel, being so universally capable of all sorts of Masonry."

In First Kings we read: "And King Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. He was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphthali and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass; and he was filled with wisdom and understanding and cunning to work all kinds of brass. And he came to King Solomon and wrought all his work."

In Second Chronicles Hiram, King of Tyre, is made to say:

"And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, Hiram my father's, the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre, skillful to work in gold and silver, in brass, iron, in stone and in timber, in purple and blue and fine linen, and in crimson, and to find out every device which shall be put to him, with thy cunning men, and with the cunning men of David, thy father."

Alas for those who would believe in the literal truth of the Legend if they could find but a single word to hang to; the end of the story of Hiram Abif is short and calm, not great or tragic. The Chronicler says "And Hiram finished the work that he was to make for King Solomon for the house of God" and the writer of Kings is no less brief:

"So Hiram made an end of doing all the work that he made King Solomon for the house of the Lord."

This is not the place to speculate upon the formation of "The Master's Part" into our Third Degree - critical scholarship does not believe our ceremony was cast into anything like its present form prior to 1725 at the earliest. But Anderson would not have devoted so much attention to Hiram Abif without some good reason; it seems obvious that "in some form," the story of Hiram Abif was of importance in 1723, and by inference, in the Lodges which formed the Grand Lodge which led to the writing of the Constitutions.

Facts are stubborn and frequently run counter to our desires. We would like to believe in the verity of the legends which cluster around Hiram Abif, but we actually know very little about him.

In addition to six Biblical references, Josephus quotes Menander and Duis in reference to him two or three times, and refers independently as many more . . . and that is all; not very much on which to build our belief in his character, his greatness, his towering moral and spiritual entity.

On the other hand, it is perfectly possible to envisage any historic character at least in large outline by careful analogy with other contemporary characters, by reference to his time, his civilization, his opportunity, his work. Suppose that all we knew of George Washington was that he was General In Chief of the Revolutionary Army, lived at Mount Vernon, and was the first President of the United States. Much might be read of him merely from these three facts. Thirteen colonies, engaged in a struggle to the death for freedom, would not choose for a leader a man without experience in military affairs. The fact that the Revolution succeeded would tell us that his leadership must have been superb. That he was made First President of the new Republic would indicate with certainty that he had the confidence of the people as a soldier, a man, a leader, and consequently possessed a character to be admired and revered, otherwise he would not be so chose. Merely to look a Mount Vernon is to see a lover of beauty, a man of taste and education, one who loved the earth and its products; the great house speaks with emphasis of hospitality. Much more might be read of Washington from only these three facts, but enough has been said to show the process by which we may envisage something of Hiram Abif, even with only meager data. Sacred history teaches much of the time of Solomon; of his queen, the daughter of Egypt; of Hiram, King of Tyre; of Adoniram, the tax collector; of officers Solomon set over various districts. We have a regal picture of Solomon's court, and lengthy and minute description of the Temple.

The chief builder, architect, master workman, give him what title you will, could hardly have mixed in such company, directed the greatest work in Israel's history, been received by Solomon from Hiram King of Tyre as the best he had to offer, and not been a man of parts, ability, skill, learning, culture. To think of him only as one "cunning to work all kinds of brass," in other words, only as an artisan, is completely to misunderstand the too few words in Chronicles and Kings. Rather let us put our belief in the statement that Hiram Abif was "filled with wisdom and understanding" and recall Solomon's many words of admiration for wisdom; he must have been a wise man indeed into whose charge Solomon the Wise was content to give his most ambitious undertaking.

It is commonplace that genius is eccentric; those touched with the divine fire are often "different" from men of more common clay. So it is not surprising that one legend tells of intense loyalty, of firmness and fortitude under duress, reading into these characteristics an exalted and elevated character, quite in keeping with the architect and builder of the Temple.

The distinction between architect and builder is often hazy - it should be acute. Our ritual speaks of Hiram Abif as one "who by his great skill in the arts and sciences was so effectually enabled to beautify and adorn the Temple," which seems to make him a mere adorer! Anything wholly fitted to its use becomes beautiful because of unity and completeness, yet it is also true that what is also useful as a building is not necessarily beautiful to the eye. Any square box of a house gives as secure a shelter as one beautiful in proportion. But complete beauty of building comes when the utility is combined with an appeal to sense and soul.

The Temple built by Hiram Abif was no mere shelter; it was the expression of Israel's love of God. To consider Hiram Abif as a mere decorator, beautifier, ornamenter is to deny the very thing for which he

lived and - in the legend - gave his life. Architect he was, in all that the best sense of the word implies; builder he was, in that he carried out his own plans.

Of his physical being we have no details. The probability is that he stood about five feet six inches in height, was bearded, swarthy in countenance, had dark eyes, his hair likely long and curly, his shoulders broad - these were the characteristics of his people. Doubtless he was married and a father when he built the Temple. The men of the Twelve Tribes married early; an unmarried man was almost unknown, so be it he was not a cripple, maimed or diseased. Hiram Abif would have a reasonable amount of wealth; the chief workman which Hiram, King of Tyre, sent to King Solomon who "wrought all his work" would be no tyro, amateur or beginner; but a man famed for his art and science and craftsmanship, and thus, one who had already won fame and fortune before he was given this, the greatest task ever laid on the shoulders of a man of the time of Solomon.

Undoubtedly he was regarded with awe and veneration by those workmen over whom he came to rule while building the Temple, and all their families and connections, because of his ability as a great artist. Tribes which but a short time back had been tent-dwelling nomads, whose art was small and whose handiwork was of the crudest, must have looked at one as skilled as Hiram Abif as at a magician, a miracle man, one equal to the very High Priest himself. No wonder they called him Abif, "my father!"

Hiram Abif must have been, at least in private, treated by Solomon as a familiar friend, as much an equal as was possible for an Eastern Potentate of absolute power and authority. Consultations would be daily in the building of the Temple. Hiram Abif would be received as an honored guest at Solomon's table. If in public the Architect treated his lord and master with the profound respect which such as Solomon have always exacted from subjects high and low, it is probable that such asteroids were relaxed in private, so that there is nothing incongruous in our legendary picture of Solomon, King of Israel, Hiram, King of Tyre, and Hiram Abif, acting together in concert as co-rulers - "our first three most excellent Grand Masters" - in governing the workmen and erecting the mighty structure which engaged their attention for seven years.

It is easy to say this verbal picture is but a flight of fancy. It is less easy to draw a less attractive one in its place and make it appear true. While we know Chronicles and Kings and a few other ancient accounts almost nothing of the architect, we do - thanks to patient scholarship, much digging in the earth, and a reading of the literature of all times - know much of the people of Israel, how they worked and ate and lived and loved and labored. After all, it is less important that our mental picture of the illustrious Tyrian be absolutely accurate in small detail than that we keep a true image of a venerated character in our hearts. The color of his eyes and hair matter little; the hue of his conscience, everything. We are told of his knowledge of art and building, of brass and stone, of carving and sculpture - knowing other great artists who have devoted their lives to the creation of the beautiful, it is with some assurance that we liken Hiram Abif's character to the average of great workmen who have labored to produce beauty before the eyes of Him they worshipped. Legendary though our story of Hiram is, and must ever be, our conception of the Architect can continue to be an inspiring fact, and we are the better men and Masons that it is such a man as this we are taught to represent.

- Source: Short Talk Bulletin - Feb. 1934

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