

# The Builders

The five orders of architecture are familiar to all Freemasons, since he meets them with a somewhat lengthy explanation in the Fellowcraft Degree.

William Preston, who made so great an impression upon Freemasonry in its early days in England, tried to make the second degree an introduction to a liberal education. That any man could compress an education into an evening, and a liberal one into a degree, was of course not the thought of as brainy a Mason as Preston; his hope was, apparently, that he might intrigue those who otherwise would not have attempted a greater learning than their school days and position in life had provided, to progress further in the pursuit of wisdom.

Hence, as far as can be read from his labors, his emphasis is upon architecture and its “five orders.”

Today no architect divides his subject into “five orders” and the Masonic names are no longer the labels for the several schools through which architecture as an art has passed.

Yet the subject is of high and romantic interest, and the Fellowcraft Degree of today, if it leads any to a study of what the art science of architecture has meant to man in his struggle from savagery to civilization, is an important integer in a liberal education.

Architecture as an art is wholly creative, as are poetry and music, and as painting and sculpture are not. Painting and sculpture (omitting any consideration of the so-called “modern art” in which painting and sculpture can be anything its creators can dream) are arts that preserve and interpret that which already exists — man, animals, landscapes, foliage, nature.

Architecture imitates nothing; it preserves nothing already existing; it creates in an old world something new with every building. The study of the architecture of ancient civilizations is of primary importance in gaining knowledge of what our ancestors did, how they lived, what they believed, the extent and character of their culture.

The oldest architect faced and the most modern designer of a building still faces the same problem; to enclose a space to be used for a purpose, to protect its users from the weather, and to make a structure as permanent as materials and design may permit.

In doing this, architecture has gone through many periods; has added beauty to utility; has tried a thousand experiments; has failed and risen from its failure to climb to greater heights; has preserved and made manifest for students the lives and times of men whose very races, let alone names, are forgotten.

In place of the “five orders” of the Prestonian degree, modern students see five great periods of architecture, not as separate and distinct inventions or designs, but as schools of the life and times of those who built; as merging, the one into the other, even as one people merge

into another when mass movements of population shift one culture and integrate it with another.

These five periods may be labeled in several ways. Commonest are the Egyptian, the Greek, the Roman, the Gothic and the modern or steel frame architecture that borrows from all and is dependent upon none. Of course there are other architectural divisions — oriental, Byzantine, Russian, etc. which have influenced design in many ways, but in the main the modern “five orders are as stated.

Egyptian buildings go back to an early age — just how early, no man has yet ventured to say. The famous pyramids of Egypt were built almost four thousand years B.C. Whatever the earliest date of Egyptian structures may be, the Egyptians built massive tombs, temples, palaces with a skill and a disregard for expense that could only have been possible to a highly developed civilization and disregard for human values in the slave system that had little or no care for human life and none for human dignity.

For an unknown number of years, obviously in the thousands, Egyptian culture was based upon a cruel and ruthless ruling class, innumerable slaves, a difficult climate, and an anodyne for human misery provided by rulers and priests in the form of a religion that promised future joys as a compensation for present miseries.

The earliest shelter used by man (except a cave) was based on two posts and a lintel. Preston described it in his *Fellowcraft Degree* — “when the rigor of seasons obliged men to contrive shelter from the inclemency of the weather, we learn that they first planted trees on end and then laid others across to support a covering.”

Egyptian architecture was post and lintel architecture.

Easily worked stone is soft; it can be crushed by too great a weight above. Bricks made of mud are even less in strength. Hence Egyptian walls were thick and their columns heavy and large; hence, too, the development of the rake or batter of the sides of temples and tombs, which made the bottom of the walls thicker than the tops. Incidentally, the rake or batter of many ancient Egyptian buildings gave them a look of solid permanency and what has been termed a “magnificent repose.”

Egyptian architecture in its most flourishing centuries changed little. It was impressive; it required great outlays of human labor; it was all for the glorification of ruler and priest; it was a principal weapon in the quiver of the kings to destroy any thought of popular uprising by its constant reminder of the power of religion and of Pharaoh.

Contrast this with the architecture of Greece. And contrast, too, the climate and the terrains of the two areas; Egypt, hot, dry, mountainless; Greece, with mountains and deeply cut into by the sea; a temperate, invigorating climate; the color of the sky and the Mediterranean; marble in quantity! All these made the architecture of Greece grow away from the fixed style and age-

old precedents of Egypt, into a graceful, flowing line, an exhilarating school that reflected the life, color and culture of a people music loving, drama conscious and idealistic in thought.

Architects the world over have agreed that the Parthenon at Athens is an ideal combination of composition, setting, dignity and studied refinement. Here is found that grace of design that makes a straight line something less than straight that it may appear straight; corner columns slightly tilted inward that they may not appear to lean outwards, as perspective would make them seem to do; a slightly greater span between columns in the center than at the ends. The whole for centuries has carried an impression of dignity in beauty and beauty in dignity so great that it has been supposed the Greek architects must have had some mathematical principle, lost to moderns, by which to calculate their effects. Needless to say, no research has discovered such a principle. The art of the Parthenon was the art of artists and not of formula.

Greek beauty has colored the world's conception of beauty. In sculpture, in ceramics, in grace of pottery and loveliness of jewelry, as in architecture, the Greeks were supreme in their golden age, and all their love of perfection was reflected from their pleasant lives into their buildings.

Egypt's stern culture produced beauty for its people, but it was a highly stylized beauty. Greek beauty was not hide-bound by the work of the year, or the decade, or the century, or the millennium before; it was fluid. Where the Egyptians built great outdoor plazas and platforms for temples and religious observances by priests and Pharaohs, the Greeks built theaters for the drama that flourished in a land of people where beauty was a mainspring and where gods and goddesses were not the fearful and cruel gods of Egypt but rather a race of super men and women whose lives and loves and wars and intrigues kept them too busy to threaten dire terrors to those who expressed their worship in temples, the beauty of which had no rivals.

Greek architecture, like that of Egypt, was based on the post and lintel, but greatly refined and much more delicate, perhaps partly due to the strength of their principal building stone, marble.

The principle of the arch has been known for thousands of years; probably the first arch was a mere leaning together of two slabs of stone mutually supporting each other. But the arch posed a difficulty to early builders; they could cut the stones, smaller on one face than the other, fit them together to form a semi-circle and "key" them with a keystone, but they could not easily control the lateral thrust. Hence, while Egypt used the arch, it was usually only for such simple purposes as drains, covered streams (with roads above) and occasionally simple ornamental arches in which the lateral thrust could easily be absorbed by earth or side walls.

It remained for the Romans to make the first complete use of the arch. This they did most often by combining it with the post and lintel that they borrowed from the Greeks, rather than from the Egyptians.

Roman civilization at its height was one of law, the grandeur of the state, the importance of the empire, the greatness of its people. In Rome's greatest era, Romans thought less in terms of

“we, the people” than in thought of “we are the only people!” Hence their architecture attempted to express in form, in decoration and in size the often grandiloquent ideas of the Roman patricians that there was no country to compare to Rome, no people to compare to Romans. The combination of arch with post and lintel made greater spaces available without an interior forest of columns; produced arcades and courtyards and baths and public buildings and such “villas” as that of Hadrian, some seven miles long, to express their belief in themselves and their greatness.

Yet Roman architecture never produced the perfection of the Greeks, the appearance of “magnificent repose” of Egyptian structures. It was its quantity, its size and its dispersion through so many varieties of structure — forums, law courts, public baths, amphitheatres, bridges, triumphal arches, aqueducts, roads, walls and magnificent homes — that made Roman architecture a factor in the development of this great art as we know it today.

It is idle to speculate as to whether religion had the greater effect on architecture, or architecture the greater effect on religion. Certainly the two developed each the other as if they were two parts of one whole. The cathedrals, churches, monasteries, church schools and other religious buildings of Europe in the Middle Ages were at once an expression of worship of the Most High and a constant development of beauty in structure as spires rose higher, flying buttresses (to take the lateral thrust of arches), grew more beautiful, as pillars and columns disappeared from great interiors and as Gothic architecture taught men to raise their eyes from earth to heaven. If religion was father to Gothic, Gothic was at least nurse to religion!

The massive columns of Egypt and of Rome became the graceful piers of Gothic architecture. The pointed arch carries the eye up and keeps it there — does not bring it back as did the Roman arch. Great openings were made in walls, to be filled with stained glass windows — sometimes with lacy stone carvings. Single towers became two on many cathedrals; transept and nave grew taller, higher, and greater in their reach for heaven; carving became a major art of its own and ecclesiastical carving became an art by itself, with angels and saints promising peace on the one hand and gargoyles and monstrous griffin heads promising damnation for the non-devout on the other.

It was in this architecture, with this architecture, by this architecture, that the builders who were the ancestors of modern Freemasons, worked and were worked upon.

Where and how did Gothic originate? Not from the Goths; the word Gothic was applied in derision of the new style by Italian architects. Of course no one man or small group of men was responsible; Gothic architecture was as much a development of time, experiment and aspiration as was Greek or Roman architecture.

But Gothic architecture developed quickly — it began, apparently in the latter half of the twelfth century (and Freemasonry’s oldest document is of the latter half of the twelfth century!). It was an expression of the aspirations of men who had only the background of the

Dark Ages behind them — a need for something better, a love for religion, an urge to express the hope of the human heart. And so came ribbed vaults of stone; so came into being pointed arches; so originated lofty and narrow windows with stained glass; so began the pointed steeple, the aspiring tower, the carvings and the decorations and the insistence on man's thought flying away from the earth, carried heavenward by graceful lines of stone that bade him look up, up, ever up

The originators of Gothic architecture were the cathedral builders of the Middle Ages.

Freemasonry began with the cathedral builders of the Middle Ages.

Architecture made Freemasonry, but, in its highest form, Freemasons made architecture!

---

### Question Box

*This column will attempt to answer questions about Freemasonry*

#### **What is the “lodge of the Holy Sts. John at Jerusalem”?**

Many a master has been puzzled to answer this simplest and most natural of questions. As there is not now and never was such a lodge, there is certainly some reason for confusion.

Originally, lodges were dedicated to King Solomon. Later — at least as early as 1598 — Masonry connected her name with that of St. John the Evangelist. Dedications to the Sts. John were made by other organizations as early as the third century, when the Church adopted the two pagan celebrations of summer and winter solstices and made them our St. John's Day in Summer and St. John's Day in Winter. It was wholly natural for operative Masons, having dedicated their Craft to the Holy Sts. John, to begin to believe that both Johns were themselves craftsmen. Craftsmen must have a lodge — where should that lodge be but in Jerusalem? Hence “The lodge of the Holy Sts. John of Jerusalem” came into imaginary existence.

No such lodge ever existed in fact, and yet it is not a fiction — it is an ideal, and without such ideals our life would be dim and drab. The thought back of the question and answer, then, is that we come from an ideal or dream lodge into this actual work-a-day world, where our ideals are to be tested.

Today, as we use the phrase as the starting point for a Masonic career, Masons mean only that their Craft is dedicated to these holy men, whose precepts and practices, ideas and virtues, teachings and examples, all Freemasons should try to follow.

[The Masonic Service Association of North America](#)