

Allegories of Hiram Abiff: Exoteric and esoteric philosophies from Christianity,
Rosicrucianism, and the ancient Egyptian mystery schools.

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Freemasonry is "veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols" because these are the surest way by which moral and ethical truths may be taught. It is not only with the brain and with the mind that the initiate must take Freemasonry but also with the heart.

C. H. Claudy

Who was Hiram Abiff?

We all know the story. The widow's son is sent for to be the architect of King Solomon's temple. King Solomon, Hiram, King of Tyre, and Hiram Abiff are the first three Grand Masters. During work on the temple, three Fellowcraft Masons demand the word from Hiram Abiff but he refuses. Each time he is assaulted with a Masonic tool, and is killed by the third assailant. Subsequently the murderers bury the body in a shallow grave, marked by a sprig of Acacia. The body is found, the "ruffians" are brought to justice by King Solomon, but the secret word is lost and replaced with substitutions given by Solomon based on words and gestures at the time the discovery of Hiram Abiff's body. He is raised at that time, and this Rite of the Raising has been part of the third degree.

The name Hiram Abiff (sometimes written Abif) is not found in Scripture, but Freemasons accept him as the architect of the temple of Solomon. Hiram, or Hiram, is certainly found in two parts of scripture, the first in Chronicles and the second in the book of Kings.

Abstracting from the website *Ephesians 5:11*, the following is noted about Hiram, who we believe is Hiram Abiff:

Hiram-Abi is found in 2 Chronicles 2:13 in the NAS and NIV translations. Hiram is a variant of Hiram. In the KJV translation of the verse, the name Hiram is found. The KJV translation of 2 Chronicles 2:13 does not contain -abi, but rather "Hiram my father's." The Hebrew word from which the KJV "father's" was translated is "'ab," according to the Hebrew Dictionary found in Strong's Concordance. Strong's entry for the word 'ab indicates that it can also mean father-less, as the son of a widow would be. The entry also mentions "Abi-." Studying the various translations along with a Hebrew dictionary allows us to see how Freemasonry may have settled on the name Hiram Abi-ff, also sometimes spelled Abif.

2 Chronicles 2:11-14

Hiram King of Tyre replied by letter to Solomon: "Because the Lord loves his people, he has made you their king." 12 And Hiram added: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who made heaven and earth! He has given King David a wise son, endowed with intelligence and discernment, who will build a temple for the Lord and a palace for himself. 13 "I am sending you Hiram-Abi, a man of great skill, 14 whose mother was from Dan and whose father was from Tyre. He is trained to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, and with purple and blue and crimson yarn and fine linen. He is experienced in all kinds of engraving and can execute any design given to him. He will work with your skilled workers and with those of my lord, David your father.

2 Chronicles 4:16

The pots, shovels, meat forks and all related articles. All the objects that Hiram-Abi made for King Solomon for the temple of the LORD were of polished bronze.

From 1 Kings 7:13-14 in the KJV: 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 works in brass. And he came to King Solomon, and wrought all his work.

'Abif' itself means "chief" or "head". We also know that at that time, the Tyrians and Sidonians were felt to be the greatest mechanics in the world, and also celebrated artists.

So, to summarize, from scripture we can understand the following:

Hiram Abiff was likely the Hiram who was a worker in metals, stone, wood and linens. He was a widow's son. His father was from Tyre and he was brought to the temple by Hiram, King of Tyre. Whether and how his mother was from Dan and Naphtali both is beyond the scope of this talk, but has been well reasoned by others.

On a side note, Albert Pike, most likely incorrectly, felt that "Khurum, therefore, improperly called Hiram, is Khur-om, the same as Her-ra, Her-mes, and Her-acles" attributing him to be the same as the god of the sun.

There is no mention of Hiram Abiff in the *Old Charges*, such as the Regius Poem, the Matthew Cooke manuscript, or the 1632 document. According to Worshipful Brother Madhaven, writing for Pietre-Stones, *The first record of the third degree being conferred was at London in 1724. But the Hiramic Legend was probably not part of the ritual of that time. We had seen earlier that Anderson's Constitutions of 1723 make no mention of the tragedy, but just fifteen years later, in the second Constitutions of 1738, the three ruffians had killed the Prince of Architects. This is conclusive proof that the Hiramic Legend became a part of Masonic Traditions between 1723 and 1738, and not earlier.*

What became our three degrees is similar to what was required for admittance to any of the middle age craft guilds: oath, rules and regulations read to the apprentice, and penalties for violations of the oath were impressed upon the candidate. These were often combined into a ceremony or ritual. Many of these guilds had many secrets. The extreme consequences of revelation to others outside the guild was cause for the elaborate rites of passage. Any “intellectual” knowledge that did not conform to orthodox teachings could lead to accusations of heresy, with great consequences, regardless of whether there were esoteric teachings involved, or only Masonic discussions of deity and teachings of the enlightenment. Truly, only those apprentices who were felt to be worthy could be trusted with the secrets of the order.

Before we continue, some definitions are in order (from the Oxford English Dictionary):

Allegory- The use of symbols in a story, picture, etc., to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning, typically a moral or political one; symbolic representation. The story itself, picture, etc. which uses symbols to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning. A character or figure that symbolically represents someone or something else.

Exoteric- Designed for or suitable to the generality of disciples; communicated to outsiders, intelligible to the public. Hence of disciples, etc.: Belonging to the outer circle.

Esoteric- Of philosophical doctrines, treatises, modes of speech, etc.: Designed for, or appropriate to, an inner circle of advanced or privileged disciples; communicated to, or intelligible by, the initiated exclusively. Hence of disciples: Belonging to the inner circle. Private. Confidential.

What is the exoteric teaching we can learn from Hiram Abiff? It appears to be lessons on virtue, justice, and merit. Hiram appears to be a virtuous man, full of integrity, regardless of the consequences- essentially the concept of virtue ethics. This would be the opposite of consequential ethics, or the ends justifies the means theorem. The concept of justice for wrongdoing is universal across cultures and political and religious thought. Reap what you sow, Karma, punishment by legal decree... We also learn that we have to earn what we have, we should believe in our merits and achievements. These are the basic tenets of the Hiram Abiff story. How are these different from any esoteric (or hidden) philosophies found therein?

What did the raising of Hiram Abiff denote? From Albert Mackey we know of at least 17 different meanings.

1. The real and actual death of an historical Hiram Abiff
2. Legend of Osiris
3. Allegory of setting sun
4. Expulsion of Adam from Paradise
5. Death of Abel
6. Entry of Noah into the Ark
7. Mourning of Joseph for Jacob
8. An astronomical problem

9. Death and Resurrection of Christ
10. Persecution of the Templars
11. Violent death of Charles I
12. A drama invented by Cromwell
13. A representation of old age
14. Drama of regeneration
15. A savage ceremony of initiation
16. A memorial to the murder of Thomas Becket
17. An invention by the Jacobites

Due to the lack of time, I'd like to devote a few minutes on three of these possible meanings from the Hiram Abiff story: The Christ allegory, the Rosicrucian Temple Legend, and that of Osiris from the Egyptian schools.

Christ Type

Mackey's dictionary "*Hiram Abif was the architect; he made plans and designs ("the Word")*". *Was HA himself "raised"? The text does not say so; nor do the self-imprecations of the culprits; nor does he re-appear to sit beside Solomon. There was a substitution of one man to take the place of the old one, and this appears to be the whole point of the raising. If this be true - and to question it is to question the text - then the text itself does not support the theory that we have a drama of resurrection.*" Even so, many see similarities in the fact that Hiram was raised from his earthly sepulcher, and the three murderers are similar to Caesar's agent (state), the Sanhedrin (the church) and the incited mob. However, it is unlikely that these early Masons would have made such a ceremony over something so sacred.

Rosicrucian Temple Legend

Rudolf Steiner is a modern Rosicrucian and gave a lecture in 1904 on the Temple Legend, one not well known in the craft, and having distinctly different ideas than what we have just seen in the Christian allegory of Hiram Abiff. He founded a Rosicrucian school of Anthroposophy and is known for his work in biodynamic agriculture (a precursor to organic permaculture). His teaching as to the meaning of this legend is that a union is required between those who have wisdom and those with fires of passion, and that this union, brought about by Hiram Abiff, led to something lasting and durable. I will read parts of this legend that also includes references to T...C...

There was a time when one of the Elohim created a human being whom he called Eve. That Elohim united himself with Eve and she gave birth to Cain. After this, another Elohim, named Yahveh, created Adam. Adam also united himself with Eve and from this union came Abel.

Thus we see that Cain is a direct descendant of the gods, but Abel is a descendant of Adam and Eve who are human.

Now the myth proceeds:

The sacrifices which Abel made to Yahveh were pleasing to him, but the sacrifices brought by Cain did not please him because the birth of Cain was not ordained by him. The result was that Cain committed fratricide. He killed Abel and for this he was excluded from communion with Yahveh. He went away into distant lands and founded his own race there.

Adam again united himself with Eve and from this union came Seth, also mentioned in the Bible, who took over the role of Abel. Thus we have two generations of mankind: the race of Cain, who was a descendant of Eve and one of the Elohim, and the other race which had human parentage and was brought into existence at the command of Yahveh.

Among the descendants of Cain are all those who have been creators of art and science, as, for instance, Methuselah, the inventor of the Tau script, and T...C..., who taught the use and working of metal ores and iron. In this line of descent, stemming from the Elohim, were all those who trained themselves in the arts and sciences.

Hiram also descended from the race of Cain, and he was the inheritor of all that had been learned by the others of his line in technology and art. He was the most significant architect we can imagine.

Out of Seth's line came Solomon, who excelled in everything which came from Yahveh. He was endowed with the wisdom of the world and all the attributes of calm, clear, objective wisdom. This wisdom can be expressed in words which go straight to the human heart and can uplift a person, but it is unable to produce anything tangible of a technical nature, in art or science. It is a wisdom which is a directly inspired gift of God and not attained from below through human passions welling up from the human will — that would be the wisdom pertaining to the sons of Cain, a legacy of the other Elohim, not Yahveh. They are the hardworking industrious ones who seek to accomplish everything through their own efforts.

Solomon now decides to build a temple and calls upon Hiram, the descendant of Cain, to be his master builder. It was at the time when Balkis, the Queen of Sheba, was visiting Jerusalem because she had heard of the wisdom of Solomon. And she was certainly impressed and charmed by the exalted and clear wisdom and beauty of the King when she first arrived, and when he made love to her she consented to be his bride. Now she heard about the temple which was being built and she desired to make the acquaintance of the master builder, Hiram. When she first met him she was captivated merely by his glance. As a result, a certain mood of jealousy arose between Hiram and Solomon and the latter wished to do something or other against Hiram, but he was dependent upon him for the completion of the temple.

Now came the following: The temple was almost complete. Only one thing was still lacking, which was to have been Hiram's masterpiece; that was the Molten Sea, which was to represent the ocean cast in bronze and was to have adorned the temple. All the

necessary mixtures of ores had been prepared by Hiram in a most wonderful manner, ready to be cast. Now, however, three apprentices got to work, whom Hiram had found so lacking in skill that he had been unable to promote them to become masters. They had therefore sworn to be revenged on him and desired to prevent the casting of the Molten Sea. A friend of Hiram, who got to know about these plans, confided them to Solomon, so that he should prevent their realisation. But Solomon, through jealousy, did nothing to stop them, because he wished to destroy Hiram. The result was that Hiram had to look on while the whole casting disintegrated due to the addition of a wrong ingredient in the mixture by the three apprentices. He tried to quench the bursting flames by pouring water over them, but this only made matters worse. Just as he was on the point of despairing about the work ever being completed, T...C..., his ancestor, appeared to him and told him that he should not hesitate to cast himself into the fire, as he was invulnerable to the flames. Hiram did as he was advised and came to the centre of the earth. He was led by T...C... to Cain, who there resided in a condition of pristine divinity. Hiram was thus initiated into the Mystery of Fire and into the secret of bronze casting, receiving from T...C... a hammer and a Golden Triangle which he was able to carry with him as a pendant round his neck. Then he returned and was able to complete the casting of the Molten Sea and to put everything in order again.

Hereupon the Queen of Sheba consented to become Hiram's bride. He, however, was set upon by the three apprentices and murdered. But before he died, Hiram managed to throw the Golden Triangle into a well. As no one knew where he had disappeared, a search was made. Even Solomon was afraid and was anxious to find out what had happened. It was thought that the ancient Master Word could be betrayed by the apprentices, and therefore another one was devised. The first word to be spoken when Hiram was discovered should be the new Master Word. At last Hiram was found and was able to utter a few last words. He said: 'T...C...had promised me that I shall have a son who will be the father of many descendants who will people the earth and bring my work — the building of the Temple — to completion.' Then he pointed to the place where the Golden Triangle was to be found. This was then collected and brought to the Molten Sea and both were preserved together in the Holy of Holies. They are only to be discovered by those who can understand the meaning of the legend of the Temple of Solomon and its Master Builder Hiram.

The interpretation is thus: There are two races in mankind, those like Solomon who are in possession of divine wisdom, and the other race who came from Cain, who are conversant with fire, that of wishes and desires. The Sons of Seth have great wisdom and are religious, but lack enthusiasm, while the Sons of Cain are impulsive, but out of their desires came the arts and sciences. It was not until Hiram Abiff was able to use the water of calm wisdom with the fire of passion and desire, that he was able to create the union of enduring brotherhood.

Isis and Osiris

There is much written about whether Hiram Abiff could be the Masonic interpretation of a much older legend, that of Osiris from Egypt. The most famous interpretation of the

myth comes from Plutarch, the famous second century Greek writer. The following synopsis of the myth of Osiris was abstracted from Glen Knapé's internet site on *The Temple and the Word*, specifically chapter 10.

Osiris was a complex Egyptian deity. The most familiar version of his myth (by the Greek writer Plutarch) is the most recent. Plutarch wrote long after the pyramid era, and closer to the period in which the Temple is set. However, his version leaves out several important events, and misinterprets others. Thus, the following is a brief composite of several versions. Seth, the evil brother of Osiris, tricked him into a chest. The chest was sealed with lead, thrown into the Nile, and floated downstream to the Mediterranean. It eventually washed-up on the shore of Lebanon, at Byblos, and a tree grew around it. The king of Byblos had the tree cut down and turned into the central column of his palace. Isis the sister/wife of Osiris, found the column, recognized that her husband/brother lay within, and brought it back to Egypt. Seth discovered the chest, stole it, cuts Osiris' body into fourteen parts, and scattered the parts along the Nile shore. Isis searched for the parts, found them, reassembled the body of Osiris, and attempted to raise it. She failed, and her sister Nephthys tried. Nephthys failed, and their brother Thoth tried, using a special grip. The third attempt worked, and Osiris rose up to heaven.

The mysteries of Isis and Osiris included a ladder, a pillar, a tree or sprig of Acacia and a casket in their symbolism, similar to those in Freemasonry. Both went to foreign lands to share their knowledge. Both have something that evil men wish to take, the word from Hiram, the kingdom from Osiris. After a struggle both are murdered by their brothers, either biological or fraternal. Both men are hastily buried and Acacia identifies the body.

So, was Hiram Abiff developed by early Masons as an allegory for Christ, about Osiris, Noah, Adam, or a son of Cain, or about a real Hiram Abiff? Does it matter? If one takes the story at face value, as exoteric teaching, then it is a beautiful drama about virtue, integrity, and brotherhood. These are so valuable to the fraternity that the legend has great meaning, regardless of the origin, or any hidden, esoteric meaning. We don't need a metaphysical explanation or spiritual mysticism to obtain the light we are looking for. We see the underpinnings of modern ethical theories of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice.

Esoteric teachings draw upon hidden or secret knowledge. These philosophies have been present for millennia and across all cultures and belief systems. In Masonry, the esoteric teachings from the Hiramic legend would lead us towards a deeper understanding of man's actions and motivations, having the perseverance to continue to try to raise ourselves and fellow brothers out of earthly bondage towards freedom. It is in the knowing that even when things that are truly important to us are forever lost, we can find a substitute that will allow us to continue a fulfilling life. We are reminded that there are others outside our fraternity, and some from within, who may do us harm out of jealousy or other of their uncontrolled passions. We, by understanding this legend and living through its example, can be a model to our leaders (represented by King Solomon and King Hiram) and other fellow citizens and brothers by our pure actions and goodness, despite repeated temptations. If we so choose, it can be tied to our faith. We will be better

humans, husbands, fathers, sons, and Freemasons by delving deep into our histories and values that have been so richly given to us by those masons who have come before.

I have to believe that Hiram Abiff would have understood the sentiment from Mitch Albom (who wrote *Tuesdays with Morrie*) who wrote “Sometimes when you sacrifice something precious, you're not really losing it. You're just passing it on to someone else.”

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