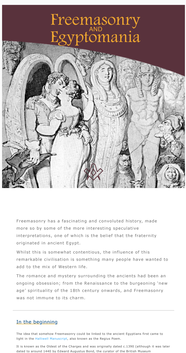

Freemasonry has a fascinating and convoluted history, made more so by some of the more interesting speculative interpretations, one of which is the belief that the fraternity originated in ancient Egypt.

Whilst this is somewhat contentious, the influence of this remarkable civilization is something many people have wanted to add to the mix of Western life.

The romance and mystery surrounding the ancients had been an ongoing obsession; from the Renaissance to the Surgeoning 'New age' spirituality of the 18th century onwards, and the Freemasons was not immune to its charm.

In the beginning

The idea that somehow Freemasonry could trace its origins back to the ancient Egyptian cultures to fight in the mythical Renaissance, was known as the Hermetic Tradition.

It is known as the Ethiest of the Charges and was originally dated c.1390 (although it was later found to be a forgery, it was thought to be genuine by the members of the British Masonic Fraternities, which has been confirmed by modern analysis).

It consists of 64 certain pages of rhyming couplets, written in Middle English, which relate the tale that God had given geometry in Mesopotamia, taught it to the children of the nobility and "called it masonry".

This learning then spread to "divers lands" and made its eventual way to England during the reign of King Athelstan (AD 924-939).

It goes on to say how the masons of England came to the king for guidance as to their craft governance and how Athelstan and his nobles put together the fifteen articles and points for their rule.

The origins of the manuscript are uncertain, but it was donated to the British Museum in 1757 by King George II.

Its name is derived from James Heiwitt's Poem, Hermes, which in 1838, delivered a paper on "The Early Mystery of Freemasonry in England".

Heiwitt's interpretation of the poem, relating a manuscript of the Regius Poem, and from that time, the Historical Bond first came.

Later, in Scotland, statutes appeared that echoed the possibility of Egyptian origins due to what appears to be Hermetic/cosmetical reference:

James Stevenson Cull, in his The Egyptian Revival: Ancient Egypt as the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West (Routledge 2005) states:

> Protestant countries, notably Scotland, seem to have developed Hermetic notions which had an important influence on the development of Freemasonry.
>
> Legends of the Craft hold that Freemasonry is as old as the art and science of architecture, and so there are debts to Ancient Egypt, to great works such as the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, and to the Egyptian Mysteries.
>
> The connection this Craft lodge of Operative Masons to organisations concerned with what Dr Yates has called the "occult tradition of transmission of building and trades to "a secret society with esoteric rites and teaching".

The 'Egyptian' Rites

However, probably the largest influence of Freemasonry with regards to its possible Egyptian roots were the Free Thinkers of the Age of Enlightenment.

In Europe, during the mid to late 1700s, a revival of Renaissance hermeticism and alchemy became the rigour – with chapters of Knights of Rosicrucian Masonry and Templars.

The combination of theurgic (the invocation of a deity) and Freemasonry was present in various rites including the Rite of Memphis (1738), Martinez de Pasqually's Order of Elus Coens (1767), Cagliostro's Egyptian Rite (1784) and later a variant on Mauriac, the Rite of Memphis (1814), Jacques Etienne Marconis de Negre's Ancient Egyptian Rite (1815) and Bedarride (1816).

There was no real connection to ancient Egypt within any of these rituals – the etymology of many of the 'Egyptian' words are either pomegranatesque or corruptions of existing mystical phrases or in other cases, inventions by the authors.

This is further compounded when one considers the language of hieroglyphs had not yet been translated, the Rosetta Stone was not found until 1799 and published in 1802 by Pierre-François d'Hancarville (1803), and even then, were not widely published.

From these facts, one can logically surmise that at the time most of these rituals were written, they contained no evidence based wisdom of the ancients.

Much of the content had its roots in a Hermetised blend of Biblical, Kabbalistic or alchemical symbolism; the Rite of Memphis even managed to combine elements from Templarism and Chivalry with Egyptian and alchemical symbolism.

FIG. 1: RITE OF MEMPHIS

These quasi Masonic Orders were incredibly influential amongst the occultist and more spiritual Freemasons and by the fin de siècle and the early 1900s, the Rite had sold and truly downed, the melting pot on the range of boiling over.

From the traditional history of Regular Freemasonry, it was hoped further had been created, one that would invariably lead Freemasonry, as an organisation, into centuries of th repute.

To well known Masonic Historian, Dr Wallace McLeod, the Rite had been the estimated river in the Garden of Eden, which had caused the Craft to be "Corrupted".

From the having of the two Rites of Memphis and Mizraim and the ensuing intervention of John Yarker and Joseph Rayon (1855-1915), the rites metamorphosed once again into the quasi-Masonic mixed gender Ordre Temple Oriental (OTO).

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was another short lived esoteric Masonic 'styled Order founded by Freemasons William Wynn Westcott (1848-1925) and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (1854-1918), both members of the Rite of Memphis (R.A.M.C).

Aziote from the rituals, the European Freemasons lapped up anything that hinted of Egypt – Jean Gérard Persianelli's novel Lilia d'Jamina, Tatian from Private Research of the Answer Tablet, Gustav Meyrink's novel The Golem, Aleister Crowley's Liber Aleph and the inspiration for Russell's Legend The Magic Flute, which combined both Masonic and ancient Egyptian symbolism.

Meyrink wrote incidental music for Thomas, King of Egypt, a play by Tobias Philipp, Baron von Gleichen.

Count Cagliostro, creator of the Egyptian Rite and self styled 'Grand Cophtor', held sessions in the Egyptian themed salon in Paris

Cagliostro (1743-1810) even wrote a play about it all in 1792 – entitled Der Grosse Cophtha (The Great Cophtor).

FIG. 2: THE GREAT COPHTA, CAGLIOSTRO

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http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003672812/

Egyptian motifs and symbolism were also an influence depicted in Masonic jewels. There are many examples of jewels with the Egyptian Pyramids, the Sphinx, the Egyptian Hieroglyphics and which featured in their 2019 exhibition Freemasonry: Religion, Brotherhood and Secrecy.

Freemasons and Follies

Between 1798-1801, Napoleon began his French Campaign in Egypt and Syria.

The campaign included not only officers but also artists, scientists, and other savants – the Commission of Sciences and Arts. The Description de l'Egypte first appeared in 1809 and continued until the final volume in 1826.

This extraordinary work aimed to comprehensively catalogue all known aspects of ancient and modern Egypt, as well as its natural history.

A collaborative work that involved about 160 civilian scholars and scientists, 2000 artists and technicians, including 400 engineers, who would later compile it into a considered text.

It was a pivotal point in the influence of ancient and modern Egypt upon the West and with the publication of the Description de l'Egypte, the Rosetta Stone, it was the beginning of understanding of this enigmatic and unfathomable culture began in earnest.

Another figure to bring the ancients to Europe (quite literally) was the former entrepreneur turned adventurer archaeologist Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778-1823).

Belzoni was a Freemason; his place of initiation is unknown, but he was recorded as joining the Royal Arch in Cambridge and Knights Templar in Norwich, around 1821.

One of his greatest achievements in Egypt was the discovery of the tomb of Seti I (1323-1279 BC) and the publication of his book, Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries in Egypt and Nubia, which spread wonder and questions within the lodge systems within the land.

These notes were included in his and his wife Sarah's work, Narrative of the operations and recent discoveries within the pyramids, temples, tombs, and excavations, in Egypt and Nubia (1820).

During 1820 and 1821 Belzoni exhibited Ramesses of the tomb of Seti I, at the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, London – the hall had been built in Egyptian Revival style by William Bullock to house his collection of antiquities and to exhibit the frieze of others.

FIG. 3: THE EGYPTIAN HALL, PICCADILLY, LONDON, 1812

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Cleopatra's Needle – saved by a Freemason

FIG. 4: THE GREAT COPHTA, CAGLIOSTRO

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http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003672812/

The obelisk known as 'Cleopatra's Needle' was gifted to George IV in 1819 by Pasha Mohamed Ali.

However, the British, although unsure in their appreciation for the gift, rejected the transportation costs and the obelisk remained in Alexandria where it had lain since c. 15 BC.

It was the intervention of Freemason Sir William James Erasmus Wilson (1809-1884), that led to the obelisk making its final, symmetrical perilous, journey to England.

Wilson was a Freemason, a wealthy master dance dancer William Harris David (1821-1891) and a man with Masonic connections.

Finally, on 12 September 1878 the obelisk was raised on the Victoria Embankment in London. The final cost to Sir Wilson was £10,000.

The obelisk is flanked by two Sun Egyptian sphinxes, which ironically were placed facing the wrong way – instead of guarding the monument, they are looking at it!

The symbolism of the sphinx is that of a guardian and in ancient Egypt there were often entire avenues of sphinxes leading up to a temple, or temples, for example, the linking avenue between Karnak and Luxor temples.

FIG. 5: THE GREAT COPHTA, CAGLIOSTRO

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Freemasonry adopted this icon, especially in the Art Deco period of the early 1900s and there are many examples of Masonic Halls/Temples flanked by varying representations of Egyptian-Grave sphinxes.

Another prominent obelisk to have been erected in honour of Egyptian origin but was designed to be neutral, is Washington.

The Washington Monument, situated on the National Mall in Washington DC, was constructed between 1848 and 1884 to honour the first President of the United States, George Washington, himself a prominent Freemason.

In Ice American style, the designers attempted to audio the magnitude of ancient Egyptian Obelisks, and the monument is a stone obelisk, 555 feet and 5 inches (169.3 m) high.

Sad, it is not known 100 AD nor 1 and 1800 when it was surmised by the erection of the Eiffel Tower.

The ceremonial of the Memorial was laid on 4 July 1884 with great ceremony and was apparently 'pronounced equal after a Masonic ceremony using George Washington's Masonic gloves, apron and tools, as well as other Masonic symbols'.

FIG. 6: THE GREAT COPHTA, CAGLIOSTRO

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http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003672812/

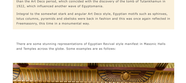
Egyptian themed Masonic Buildings and Temples

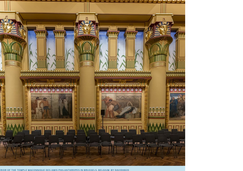
The Egyptian Revival encompassed not only architectural but also furniture, ceramics and jewellery.

It was a fashion that ebbed and flowed over the course of three centuries and none more so than the Art Deco period, which coincided with the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922, which influenced another wave of Egyptomania.

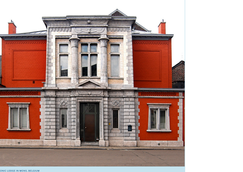
Unique to the somewhat stark and angular Art Deco style, Egyptian motifs such as sphinxes, pyramids and hieroglyphs were incorporated in fashion and this was once again reflected in Freemasonry, this time in a monumental way.

There are some stunning representations of Egyptian Revival style manifest in Masonic Halls and Temples across the globe. Some examples are as follows:





INTERIOR OF THE TEMPLE BRUSSEGEZELLEN ARCHITECTURALCENTRUM IN BRUSSELS, BELGIUM, BY DAVIDMEER
IMAGE CREDIT: WIKIMEDIA, ATTRIBUTION 4.0 INTERNATIONAL (CC BY 4.0)

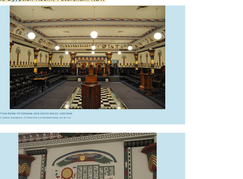


MASONIC LODGE IN MONS, BELGIUM
IMAGE CREDIT: WIKIMEDIA, ATTRIBUTION 4.0 INTERNATIONAL (CC BY 4.0)

THE SCOTTISH RITE TEMPLE (1913) IN MOBILE, ALABAMA, BY ALTHOUSEPAUL
IMAGE CREDIT: WIKIMEDIA, ATTRIBUTION 4.0 INTERNATIONAL (CC BY 4.0)

FREEMASONRY HALL, BRISTOL, UK, CREATED BY STANDFREEMASONRY
IMAGE CREDIT: WIKIMEDIA, ATTRIBUTION 4.0 INTERNATIONAL (CC BY 4.0)

The Egyptian Room, Petersham NSW



EGYPTIAN ROOM, PETERSHAM, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA
IMAGE CREDIT: WIKIMEDIA, ATTRIBUTION 4.0 INTERNATIONAL (CC BY 4.0)

EGYPTIAN ROOM, ROYAL ANCIENT ORDER OF FREEMASONS, LICENSED UNDER LICENSE FOR NON-COMMERCIAL USE WITHOUT ATTRIBUTION
IMAGE CREDIT: WIKIMEDIA, ATTRIBUTION 4.0 INTERNATIONAL (CC BY 4.0)

One of the most stunning examples of Egyptian Revival in Freemasonry is the Egyptian Room at the United Supreme Grand Chapter of Mark and Royal Arch Masons of NSW & ACT in Petersham, New South Wales.

The history of the Egyptian Room reads:

> Royal Arch Freemasonry in NSW originated from Irish, English and Scottish Freemasonry, each of which established separate Orders during the 1800s.
>
> From the 1880s, ten attempts were made to unify the various Royal Arch Orders without success. It was not until 1980 – and the eleventh attempt – that unification was achieved with the Consecration and Dedication of the United Supreme Grand Chapter (USGC).
>
> The showpiece of the Order, the Egyptian Room, was originally incorporated in 1927 in the Royal Arch Temple built in College Street Sydney.
>
> This building stood until late in the 1960's and after being sold and before demolition the focal point of the Egyptian Room, the frieze, was dismantled and stored until re-erected at the new Royal Arch centre at Petersham in 1977.
>
> The frieze depicts certain scenes or vignettes from the Scroll of Ani dating from the 18th Dynasty. The scroll, a papyrus roll 23.78 metres long and 391 mm wide, was found at Thebes and purchased by the late Egyptologist Sir Wallis Budge in 1888.
>
> The Scroll, which is now in the British Museum in London, depicts in pictorial form, and by text, the author's version of the life hereafter based on ancient beliefs.
>
> Another feature in the Egyptian Room is the funerary stele, which dominates one of the walls of the room and dates from the 20th Dynasty.
>
> The vision of leaders of the Order in the early 1920s in creating the Egyptian Room and the engagement of Rayner Hoff to sculpt the vignettes has left a lasting legacy, which is classified by the National Trust.
>
> Rayner Hoff was himself a Freemason and later became famous for his work on the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park in Sydney.

Text about the Petersham Egyptian Room © The United Supreme Grand Chapter of Mark and Royal Arch Masons of NSW & ACT – reproduced with kind permission. For more information about the Order, and the Egyptian Room, visit https://usgcnsw.org.au/

ARTICLE BY: Philippa Lee, *Editor*

Philippa Lee *(writes as Philippa Faulks)* is the author of eight books, an editor and researcher.

Philippa was initiated into the Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons (HFAF) in 2014.

Her specialism is ancient Egypt, Freemasonry, comparative religions and social history. She has several books in progress on the subject of ancient and modern Egypt. Selection of Books Online at Amazon

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Recent Articles: *Esoteric* series

Reflections on the Second Degree Work

Rev. Dradko Milatić offers his reflections on his Second Degree Work – using metaphors, allegory and symbolism to understand the challenges we face as a fellow Craft Mason to perfect the rough ashlar.

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Explore the rich tapestry of Masonic work, a testament to diversity and universality. Uncover its evolution through the 18th century, from the stabilisation of Symbolic Freemasonry to the advent of Scottish rite and the birth of Great Continental Rites. Dive into this fascinating journey of Masonic systems, a unique blend of tradition and innovation. Antonio Jorge explores the diversity and universality of Masonic Work.

Resonance as a Factor in Soul Growth

Although written 100 years ago, this article on retaining humour as a means of self-development and soul growth is as pertinent today as it was then! Let us remember the words of an ancient philosopher who said, when referring to the appearance of a King, "It takes the brightest man in all the land to make my greatest friend."

Freemasonry: The Rules of Blue and Gold

Three Fates weave this living garment and man himself is the creator of his fates. The triple thread of thought, action, and desire binds him when he enters into the sacred place or seeks admittance to the Lodge, but later this same cord is woven into the wedding garment whose purified folds shroud the sacred spark of his being. – Manly P Hall

The Path to Human Flourishing

By such a prudent and well regulated course of discipline as may best conduce to the preservation of your corporal and metal faculties in the fullest energy, thereby enabling you to exercise those talents wherewith god has blessed you to his glory and the welfare of your fellow creatures.

The Philosophy of Freemasonry

Jacob Ernst's 1870 treatise on the Philosophy of Freemasonry – The theory of Freemasonry is based upon the practice of virtuous principles, inculcating the highest standard of moral excellence.

Alchemy and Freemasonry

Alchemy, like Freemasonry, has two aspects, material and spiritual; the lower aspect being looked upon by initiates as symbolic of the higher. "Gold" is used as a symbol of perfection and the earlier traces of Alchemy are discoverable in the work of a man before the Albert Edward Rose Crew Chapter no. 87 in 1909. by Dr. Jos. H. Perry 32°

The State of Being

The spirit of the Renaissance is long gone and today's globalized and hostant man, no matter ideology and confession, is the one that is deprived of resoluteness, of decision making, the one whose opinion doesn't matter. Article by Dradko Milatić.

A Mason's Work in the First Degree

Every Mason's experiences are unique – here writer and artist Dradko Milatić shares insights from his First Degree Work.

Initiation and the Lucis Trust

The approach of the Lucis Trust to initiation may differ slightly to other Western Esoteric systems and Freemasonry, but the foundation of training for the neophyte to build good moral character and act in useful service to humanity is universal.

Who were the Elus Cohns

Who were the mysterious 18th century Élus Cohns – a.k.a The Order of Knight Masons Elect Priests of the Universe – and why did they influence so many other esoteric and pare Masonic Orders?

Blackheath Degrees

Bro. Chris Hodkin gives us his personal reflections on the history of the House at Blackheath and the Blackheath Orders', in this wonderful tribute to Andrew Stephenson, a remarkable man and Mason.

Book Review – Cagliostro the Unknown Master

The book review of the Cagliostro the Unknown Master, by the Editor of the book

Freemasonry and Egyptomania

We explore fascinating and somewhat contentious historical interpretations that Freemasonry originated in ancient Egypt.

Is Freemasonry Esoteric?

Is Freemasonry esoteric? Yes, no, maybe!

Egyptian Rite

Egyptian Freemasonry, founder Cagliostro was famed throughout eighteenth century Europe for his reputation as a healer and alchemist

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