

The Sword and the Trowel: Armed and Laboring
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The Sword and the Trowel are perhaps our most identifiable marks beyond the broken triangle when it comes to Cryptic Masonry (ignoring the occasional overly bright polyester purple blazer of course). The Sword and Trowel feature centrally on our altar and evoke both destructive and constructive implements as well as thoughts and emotions wove in individual perspective. The Sword is that which defends and acts, the Trowel which build and unites, and to each of us as Cryptic Masons we see the greater value, the lessons beyond the surface considerations of such explanations, and to weighing their impact and use we must set ourselves as we labor within and without the Secret Vault.

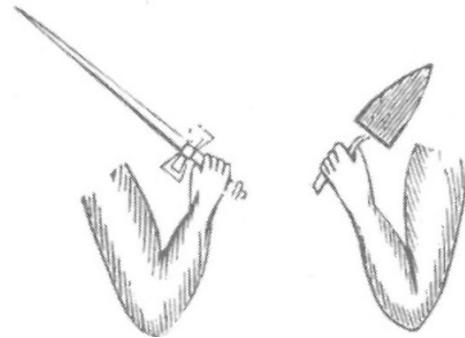
The Sword and Trowel as emblems of the Cryptic Rite come to us in the labors of the Select Master. Solomon has engaged 27 Craftsmen in a secret project beneath the Temple, the erection and furnishing of a Secret Vault, recessed back and accessible through a passage and series of Nine Arches. The project occurs in secret, primarily in the evening, away from prying eyes, and under strict security with the labors not only handling their tools but armed for the least alarm and danger. In direct reference the Sword and Trowel are discussed and presented to us as symbols upon the apron of the Select Master and thus trusted to our care in that form.

Further in current practice¹ the Sword and Trowel rest upon the Altar, as was and is a traditional practice in Councils of Royal and Select Masters. We see the Sword and trowel so prominently placed, presenting a clear image and so to,

Remind us of the secret and important work performed by those 27 ancient craftsman that secured the sacred treasures of the Jewish race. The high importance and secret nature of constructing the nine arches to the secret vault demanded that both the treasures and the construction project itself be protected.²

Such insinuation show to us properly why these were among the Ish Sodi, the select men, called to labor and defend the Secret Vault as it existed.

Inevitably as with just about any symbol in the masonic lexicon, the Sword and Trowel are not wholly the property of the Cryptic Mason and appear both in tandem and separately across a myriad of ritual workings. Its most consistent blended representation appears within the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, wherein we are advised of the Warrior Masons of



¹ Report of the Committee on Ritual, and as a proposal within it approved, “The square and compasses are placed on the right-hand page of the Bible in all degrees of the Council. The trowel is placed at north-east corner at the Altar, the point facing East. The sword is placed lengthways at the East edge of the Altar, the point of the sword crossing on top of the blade of the trowel.” *2022 Preliminary Proceedings of the Grand Council of Cryptic Masons of the State of Missouri*, Pg. 41

² Cryptic Masonry Education Course, R. Davis, Pg. 33

Zerubbabel who worked with the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other. This visualization coming with the stark reminder,

Let us still remember that the only question for us to ask, as true men and Masons, is, what does duty require; not what will be the result and our reward if we do our duty.

Work on, with the Sword in one hand, and the Trowel in the other!³

In that same Rite we are told that the edges of the Sword (by which the candidate is received) represents “CONTEMPT and PITY”, said to be the punishments for those who violate their obligations.⁴ Stark reminders of the implications and weight of our duty and obligations.

Considering these implications, we are led back to the clear instructions of one degree wherein we are told regarding the sword and it’s two functions (as symbolized by its two edges), that it serves to:

- 1.) Maintain and protect the rights of Masonry and Mankind
- 2.) Punish the enemies of Masonry and tyrants/enemies of Mankind.

This explanation and others show us a blend of labor and knightly or warrior ethos, an attitude of practice set forth in service with a two-pronged set of resources.

In the Select Master Ritual we are told that the Sword “designates us as Guardians, whose peculiar duty is the preservation of those Sacred treasures, which are ours through Masonic Heritage.”⁵ The Sword is thus our tool, by which we labor and act, and stand always ready. As a symbol generally, the sword evokes much in both tangible consideration and imbued symbolism. It is a weapon, but can also be ceremonial. An item that bridges between passive and active use, rude or ornate, and while quality may vary its function is left much in the hands of the bearer whose skill and assiduity will propose its course of action as well as success thereof. It is tool of destruction but also maintenance, and a visible symbol of both even when sheathed. It is because of the sum of these various concepts that the sword and its edges undertake specific symbolism meant to impress deeply on us the necessity of our duty and the dignity of it. It carries the tinges of chivalric or warrior traditions, now wove into our Craft. Knightly traditions in the Masonic Fraternity have existed in one form or influence from very early on in the history of our work and bubbled up during those nascent moments, even if not in the form of a medieval or crusader knight per say. These early traditions were fanned by efforts like those of Chevalier Ramsey⁶ and early Haut Grade ritual. Such developments brought the crusader influence as well as a mix of chivalric and masonic themes to a blending point across time and historical allegory. These allegories brought with them the tools of the Warrior or Knight and became common to the development of such ritual and the adaptation of common elements to a greater symbolic purpose for our own spiritual and contemplative labors. As a tool the sword is described by one such ritual as used to,

³ Morals and Dogma: Knight of the East, Pg. 239

⁴ 1883 Ritual-Perfect Elu

⁵ Official Ritual of the Grand Council of Cryptic Masons of the State of Missouri, Pg. 56

⁶ Sir Michael Andrew Ramsey, was a Scotsman and tutor to Charles Edward Stuart. While in France Ramsey produced an oration in 1737, inevitably his remarks about Crusaders and the craft marked the beginning the long line of masonic content directed toward a connection of Freemasonry with the Knights Templar and other chivalric or Knightly orders.

To enable you to maintain the rights of Masonry and of men, and to punish their enemies and tyrants. If in that contest you should fall, you will have fulfilled the noblest destiny of a Knight and gentleman.⁷

This echoes a similar degree wherein the sword is given to the aspirant with the admonition not to draw it in an “unjust cause or in resistance to lawful authority”. The initial statement gives signaling to the two-fold nature of the sword, and our duties and expectations that come with it. We must work to maintain the rights of men and Masonry and punish the enemies who oppose them. Noticeably the first duty expressed is the work to maintain the right of Men and Masonry-preservation.

Perhaps not as frequently focused on, yet pivotal to masonic craft symbolism is the Trowel. As Select Masters we are told it “Reminds us that we are builders, and that our lives should be constructive in their influence upon the Brotherhood and upon the world.”⁸ We are here to work, to labor, and to make the effort for a better day through the practice of our lessons. In the work of Missouri Freemasonry and in most jurisdictions which work the Preston-Webb Ritual we are told the Trowel is,

An instrument made use of by operative masons to spread the cement which unites a building into one common mass; but we as Free and Accepted Masons, are taught to make use of it for the more noble and glorious purpose of spreading the cement of brotherly love and affection; that cement which unites us into one sacred band or society of friends and brother, among whom no contention should ever exist, but that noble contention or rather emulation, of who can best work and best agree.⁹

The Trowel is in action a tool of finishing, of completion, of unification. It binds the structure together, much as we are bound by the Mystic Tie of the Craft, and the more particular tie of Royal and Select Masonry, and those called to serve in the Secret Vault. It is a finisher as it's use to spread mortar or other compounds can serve to be the finishing action of the labor, creating to the observer thereafter the complete edifice, and the structure secure and sound. It

To our charge as Select Masters we take up the Sword and Trowel and realizing their weighty meanings we can see our path is not passive, nor reactive, but a proactive labor for the betterment of mankind and our own self transformation and contemplation. We must as is said in other rituals, with sword and trowel in hand “build dungeons to vice” to ensnare that which fetters man and prosperity of mind and existence. Yet then using the sword, be enabled to protect and if called for punishment to those who transgress those inalienable rights of man. The trowel allows us to labor constantly, working to better the world through spreading the Light of Truth, and the lessons of Freemasonry through our actions. Using the Sword we block and fend off those frailties which men and society has, which hamper our work, which hold us back, and which bring forth the clouds of ignorance, superstition, fanaticism, and error. Inherently the tools are also a fervent reminder of the completion of our journey in Ancient Craft Masonry, and the evolution of our work, from the craftsman to the laboring Knight, Warrior, or Solider of Masonic principles, duty and our Creator. It is said that,

“The sword and trowel have been adopted by Masons of the Royal Arch to commemorate the valor of those worth Masons who carried on the building of the Second Temple, with

⁷ Liturgy of the AASR, Pt. IV, Pg. 165

⁸ Official Ritual of the Grand Council of Cryptic Masons of the State of Missouri, Pg. 56

⁹ *Masonic Manual of Missouri*, 1943 Edition, Pg. 48-49

the Trowel in their hands and the Sword by their sides, that they might be ever ready to defend the holy city and sanctuary against the unprovoked attacks of their enemies; but which they left a sacred and impressive lesson to succeeding ages; that next to the obedience due a lawful authority, a manly and determined resistance to the lawless violence is the first step to social justice”¹⁰

Additionally as we focus on the Select Master Degree and the meaning of the Sword and Trowel in use, perhaps we are struck by the unwieldiness of the tools in tandem- yet this connection expresses and important implication regarding the value of our work, it would go slow, but it needed to be protected, not just what was to be kept within but the labor itself, through slow and deliberate work- secrecy could be maintained and security assured. In a greater reflection we see the tools in regard to our understanding of the temple and Vaults symbolic nature- they represent ourselves, or parts of us, our being- to which we “are building a just and moral life by means of your spiritual temple with the aid of the trowel, you must be on constant vigil to defend the work already completed in the secret vaults of your soul with the defense of the sword.”¹¹ To this understanding we set our watch, guarding the Vault and realizing that all our labors stand to remind us in part that,

The progress you have made in securing the treasures of a righteous life will be destroyed and God’s plan setback for a generation, if your enemies are to freely attack the secret vault of your spiritual temple.”¹²

Our time has come to begin the battle which Masonry prepares us for having completed the Circle of Perfection and reached the summit of Ancient Craft Masonry we now take the lessons gained and work onward. Ever onward we press, toward truth and the defeat of



ignorance, superstition, and enslavement of mind and body- both ours and others- toward nearing the final veil of our own secret Vault, and coming to greater understanding of our Creator, our existence, and our duty in truest action. We each must now take up the Sword and Trowel from the altar of the Secret Vault, and carry them onward- out into the world, to build a better day, a better self, and defend that which the light of Truth endorses and puts under our charge.

Portions of this paper were adapted from “The Edge of a Sword”, a paper exploring the significance of the Sword within the masonic framework of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, written by the Author of this paper.

¹⁰ Cryptic Masonry Education Course, R. Davis, Pg. 32-33

¹¹ Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters of Texas: 2022 Cryptic Masonry education Program, Pg. 16; Courtesy of the Gr. Council of R & S. Masters of Texas -Cryptic Masonry Education Special Committee 2022, Comp. J.S. Bennett, Chairman

¹² Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters of Texas: 2022 Cryptic Masonry education Program, Pg. 16; Courtesy of the Gr. Council of R & S. Masters of Texas -Cryptic Masonry Education Special Committee 2022, Comp. J.S. Bennett, Chairman