



A View of CONTEMPLATIVE GEOMETRY in Freemasonry

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FROM ITS EARLIEST recorded beginnings Freemasonry has had a connection with geometry, beginning for purposes of our discussion with the Regius Poem of ca. 1390. An Excerpt of this Poem may be found at Appendix I, along with excerpts from the Cooke MS. [ca 1450], the Old Charges [ca. 1610], and Anderson's Constitutions [1723].

In the context of these early documents, geometry appears in several ways:

- There tends to appear those ideas which portray the word 'geometry' as being somewhat synonymous with the word 'masonry,' such as may be found in the Regius Poem: "At these lord's prayers they counterfeited **geometry**, And gave it the name of masonry."
- There appears a reference to the Seven Liberal Arts, with geometry being given as the principle one, such as may be found in the Cooke MS: "Our *intent* is principally to treat of [the] first foundation of the worthy science of **geometry**, and we were the founders thereof, as I said before."
- There appears a reference to the earliest beginnings of geometry to the times of Adam's descendant: "... Jubal [Tubal], he was the first man that ever found geometry and masonry, and he made houses ... " [Cooke MS.]
- There also appears those words pertaining to Euclid, such as: "And that worthy clerk [Euclid] gave it the name of **Geometry**; and now it is called in this land Masonry. [Wood MS.]
- Bringing the tale of Euclid forward, there often also appears the reference to Athelstan: [Chapter Fifteen. Athelstan and Edwin – Wood MS.] "And he was a great practiser in **Geometry**, wherefore he drew him much to commune and talk with Masons, and to learn of them the Craft."
- Others, at times bring in Nimrod, or in the case of Anderson's Constitutions [1738] even more characters, but always with the central themes of geometry, masonry and the building Craft.

The present work is not one to examine these and other early manuscripts, but to merely make note that geometry prominently appeared from the earliest days of the Craft. In time the Charges and Constitutions are found to retain the Liberal Arts, geometry still being principle among them, but a richer lexicon of symbols and 'secrets' began to appear in the surviving catechisms and exposures.

In the Wilkinson MS. we may find such old rubrics as: "Q62. Where do [you] keep y^r Secretts as a Mason. A. in a bone box that Neither Opens or Shuts but with ivory keys, nine Inches or a Span from my Mouth." Also appearing at this time are the Three Great Lights, representing the "Sun, Moon & Master Mason."

Qs63 & 64 we may also find in the Wilkinson MS at this time:

Q63. Have you any Principles A. I have.

Q64. What A. Point, Line, Superfices & Solid

Definitions in Euclid

A point is y^t wch hath no Part

A line is a length with^t a breadth

A superficies is y^t wch hath only length & breadth

A Solid is y^t wch hath length breadth & Depth

The corresponding words to the above may also be found in Prichard's *Masonry Dissected* [1730]:

Q73. How many Principles are there in Masonry? A. Four.

Q74. What are they? A. Point, Line, Superfices and Solid.

Q75. Explain them.

- A. Point the Centre (*round which the Master cannot err*)
Line Length without Breadth,
Superfices Length and Breadth,
Solid comprehends the whole.

It would obviously not be fair to build a case for Contemplative Geometry in Freemason on only what has been discussed up to this point. But we shall dwell here for awhile and develop some matters of relevance . . . and then attend to some of the other symbols in their due course.

Keeping, then, within the discussion above, let us recognize that the above Wilkinson and Prichard Q&As have little changed in over 250 years from what we presently find in our ritual. We shall address a few representative American and UGLE workings to see where these Q&As have taken us, but first let us take a brief look at Preston . . . and then an early American ritual or two [ca. 1829-1860]. In Preston, of course, we may find in the rather classical Masonic Lectures a quite expanded form from which they had been previously know. Perhaps the great Preston experiment did not survive in quite the way that he may have envisioned it to, but many essences and elements have indeed survived in the current Lectures of the Craft.

The most direct allusions to geometry, of course, may be found in the Fellowcraft Degree. From Preston's Lecture we may find concerning this a considerable body of information and symbolism. One could rightly ask, "Was this the intent of the earlier founders of the Craft? . . . or did Mr. Preston take some liberties here?"

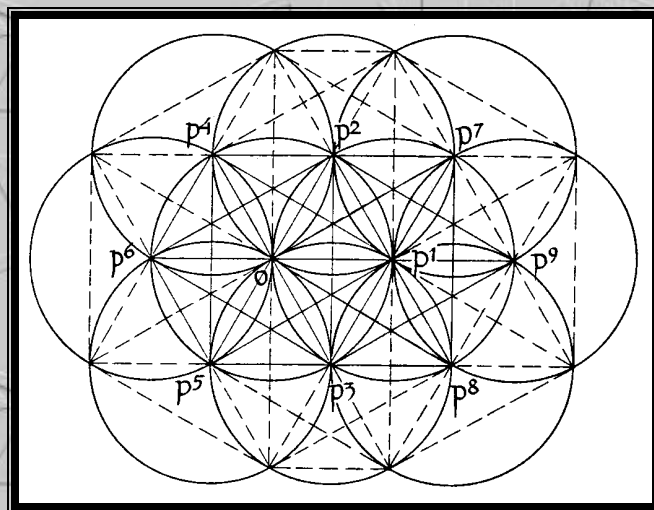
A comparison of the earlier Work to Preston will clearly indicate that he took many liberties, just as a comparison of his liberties to more current Work will find that much . . . if not most . . . of his Work was reduced drastically, either because of the sheer difficulty in memorizing so much material or because it was felt that Preston may have exceeded the intent of the Craft in his Lectures. Nonetheless, enough must have been felt to have been relevant for quite a bit of it survived in Thomas Smith Webb's 1798 'Americanized' version of Preston's *Illustrations*, and continues to survive to this day.

Let us then look for awhile at perhaps the closest thing we may ever get to in terms of an 'official' view of the Craft on the subject at hand . . . 'Masonic' geometry.

We will here change the format of these pages so as to take greater advantage of graphic layout and smaller type size potentials.

Preston's 'Masonic' Geometry

Continued in Part II, titled as above.



Appendix I

Excerpts of MSS.

THE REGIUS POEM

HALIWELL MANUSCRIPT – CA 1390

ref. <http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/Writings/regius.html>

The MS is a very small quarto on vellum, and is No. 17, A1. in the Bibl. Reg., British Museum. It is described in David Casley's Catalogue of the MSS. of the Old Royal Library, 1734, page 259, as "A Poem of Moral Duties: here entitled, *Constitutiones Artis Gemetrie secundem Euclidem*. - *Whoso wol bothe wel rede and loke.*"

The existence of this MS. has been known for a long time, but its contents were mistaken until Mr. Halliwell-Phillips drew attention to it in a paper "*On the introduction of Freemasonry into England*," read before the Society of Antiquaries in the 1838-9 session. He thereafter published two small editions of a work entitled "*The Early History of Freemasonry in England*," giving a transcript of the poem. "In the year 1757, King George II., under an instrument that passed the Great Seal, presented [the old Royal] Library to the nation. At that time it was deposited in the old Dormitory at Westminster, to which place it had been removed from Ashburnham House, at the time of the lamentable fire which broke out in that building on the 23rd October, 1731 from which it fortunately sustained but slight injury." [Sims's *Handbook to Library of Brit. Mus.*, 1854. p. 35.]

The *facsimile* is the exact size of the original. It bears the Royal arms stamped on both covers, and G.R.II., with the date 1757. The lettering on the back has also been reproduced. The MS. was bound in its present cover in or about the year 1838. The age of the MS. has been variously estimated. Mr. Halliwell and the late Rev. A.F.A. Woodford supposed it to have been written about 1390, or earlier.

Extract

Here begin the constitutions of the art
of **Geometry** according to Euclid.
Whoever will both well read and look
He may find written in old book
Of great lords and also ladies, . . .

In that time, through good **geometry**,
This honest craft of good masonry
Was ordained and made in this manner,
Counterfeited of these clerks together;
At these lord's prayers they counterfeited **geometry**,
And gave it the name of masonry,
For the most honest craft of all.
These lords' children thereto did fall,
To learn of him the craft of **geometry**,
The which he made full curiously;
Through fathers' prayers and mothers' also,
This honest craft he put them to. . . .

Furthermore yet that ordained he,
Master called so should he be;
So that he were most worshipped,
Then should he be so called;
But masons should never one another call,
Within the craft amongst them all,
Neither subject nor servant, my dear brother,
Though he be not so perfect as is another;
Each shall call other fellows by cuthe, (friendship)
Because they come of ladies' birth.
On this manner, through good wit of **geometry**,
Began first the craft of masonry;
The clerk Euclid on this wise it found,
This craft of **geometry** in Egypt land.

In Egypt he taught it full wide,
In divers lands on every side;
Many years afterwards, I understand,
Ere that the craft came into this land. . . .

There they sought by their wit,
How they might govern it;
Fifteen articles they there sought,
And fifteen points there they wrought,
Here begins the first article.
The first article of this **geometry**:-
The master mason must be full securely
Both steadfast, trusty and true. . . .

Another ordinance of the art of **geometry**.
They ordained there an assembly to be y-holde, (hold)
Every year, wheresoever they would,
To amend the defaults, if any were found
Among the craft within the land;
Each year or third year it should be holde, (held)
In every place wheresoever they would;
Time and place must be ordained also,
In what place they should assemble to,
All the men of craft there they must be,
And other great lords, as you must see,
To mend the faults that he there spoken,
If that any of them be then broken. . . .

Many years after, the good clerk Euclid
Taught the craft of **geometry** full wonder wide,
So he did that other time also,
Of divers crafts many mo. (more)
Through high grace of Christ in heaven,
He commenced in the sciences seven;

Grammar is the first science I know,
 Dialect the second, so I have I bliss,
 Rhetoric the third without nay, (doubt)
 Music is the fourth, as I you say,
 Astronomy is the fifth, by my snout,
 Arithmetic the sixth, without doubt,
Geometry the seventh maketh an end,
 For he is both meek and hende, (courteous)
 Grammar forsooth is the root,
 Whoever will learn on the book;

But art passeth in his degree,
 As the fruit doth the root of the tree;
 Rhetoric measureth with ornate speech among,
 And music it is a sweet song;
 Astronomy numbereth, my dear brother,
 Arithmetic sheweth one thing that is another,
Geometry the seventh science it is,
 That can separate falsehood from truth, y-wis. (I know)
 These be the sciences seven,
 Who useth them well he may have heaven.

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COOKE MANUSCRIPT. CA 1450

ref. <http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/Writings/cooke.html>

EXCERPT

Next to the Regius the oldest manuscript is that known as the Cooke. It was published by R. Spencer, London, 1861 and was edited by Mr. Matthew Cooke, hence his name. In the British Museum's catalogue it is listed as "Additional MS. 23,198", and has been dated by Hughan at 1450 or thereabouts, an estimate in which most of the specialists have concurred. Dr. Begemann believed the document to have been "compiled and written in the southeastern portion of the western Midlands, say, in Gloucestershire or Oxfordshire, possibly also in southeast Worcestershire or southwest Warwickshire.

The 'Book of Charges' which forms the second part of the document is certainly of the 14th century, the historical or first part, of quite the beginning of the 15th." (A.Q.C. IX, page 18) The Cooke MS. was most certainly in the hands of Mr. George Payne, when in his second term as Grand Master in 1720 he compiled the "General Regulations", and which Anderson included in his own version of the "Constitutions" published in 1723. Anderson himself evidently made use of lines 901-960 of the MS.



THANKED BE GOD, our glorious father and founder and former of Heaven and of earth and of all things that in him is, that he would vouchsafe, of his glorious God-head, for to make so many things of divers virtue for mankind; for He made all things for to be obedient and subject to man, for all things that are comestible of wholesome nature he ordained it for mans sustenance. And also he hath given to man wits and cunning of divers things, and crafts, by the which we may travel in this world to get with our living to make divers things to God's pleasure, and also for our ease and profit. The which things if I should rehearse them it were too long to tell, and to write. Wherefore I will leave (them), but I shall shew you some, that is to say how, and in what wise, the science of **Geometry** first began, and who were the founders thereof, and of other crafts more, as it is noted in the Bible and in other stories.

How and in what manner that this worthy science of **geometry** began, I will tell you, as I said before. Ye shall understand that there be 7 liberal sciences, by the which 7 all sciences and crafts, in the world, were first found, and in especial for he is causer of all, that is to say the science of **geometry** of all other that be, the which 7 sciences are called thus.

As for the first, that is called [the] fundament of science, his name is grammar, he teacheth a man rightfully to speak and to write truly.

The second is rhetoric, and he teacheth a man to speak formably and fair.

The third is dialecticus, and that science teacheth a man to discern the truth from the false, and commonly it is called art or sophistry.

The fourth is called arithmetic, the which teacheth a man the craft of numbers, for to reckon and to make account of all things.

The fifth [is] **geometry**, the which teacheth a man all the metcon, and measures, and ponderacion, of weights of all mans craft.

The 6th is music, that teacheth a man the craft of song, in notes of voice and organ, and trumpet, and harp, and of all others pertaining to them. The

7th is astronomy, that teacheth man the course of the sun, and of the moon, and of other stars and planets of heaven.

Our intent is principally to treat of [the] first foundation of the worthy science of **geometry**, and we were the founders thereof, as I said before. There are 7 liberal sciences, that is to say, 7 sciences, or crafts, that are free in them- selves, the which 7 live only by **geometry**. And **geometry** is as much to say as the measure of the earth, "Et sic dicitur a geo ge quin R ter a latin et metron quod est mensura. Una Geometria in mensura terra vel terrarum," that is to say in English, that gemetria is, I said, of geo that is in gru, earth, and metron, that is to say measure, and thus is this name of Gemetria compounded and is said [to be] the measure of the earth.

Marvel ye not that I said, that all sciences live all only, by the science of **geometry**, for there is none [of them] artificial. No handicraft that is wrought by mans hand but it is wrought by **geometry**, and a notable cause, for if a man work with his hands he worketh with some manner [of] tool, and there is none instrument, of material things, in this world but it come[s] of the kind of earth, and to earth it will turn again, and there is none instrument, that is to say a tool to work with, but it hath some proportion, more or less. And proportion is measure, the tool, or the instrument, is earth. And **geometry** is said [to be] the measure of [the] earth, Where- fore, I may say that men live all by **geometry**, for all men here in this world live by the labour of their hands.

Many more probations I will tell you, why that **geometry** is the science that all reasonable men live by, but I leave it, at this

time, for the long process of writing. And now I will proceed further on my matter.

Ye shall understand that among all the crafts of the world, of man's craft, masonry hath the most notability and most part of this science, **geometry**, as it is noted and said in history, as in the Bible, and in the master of history. And in [the] Policricon a chronicle printed, and in the histories that is named Bede. "De Imagine Mundi;" et Isidorus "Ethomolegiarum." Methodius,

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Anderson's Constitutions of 1728

Excerpt

THE
CONSTITUTION,
*History, Laws, Charges, Orders,
Regulations, and Ufages,*

OF THE
RIGHT WORSHIPFUL
FRATERNITY OF
Accepted Free MASONS;

COLLECTED
From their general RECORDS, and their
faithful
TRADITIONS of many Ages.

TO BE READ
At the Admiffion of a NEW BROTHER, when the *Mafter* or
Warden fhall begin,
or order fome other Brother to read as follows :

Episcopus et Martiris, and others, many more, said that masonry is [the] principal of **geometry**, as me thinketh it may well be said, for it was the first that was founded, as it is noted in the Bible, in the first book of Genesis in the 4th chapter; and also all the doctors aforesaid accordeth thereto, and some of them saith it more openly, and plainly, right as it saith in the Bible, Genesis.



Engraved by John Pine in Aldersgate Street London.



DAM, our first Parent, created after the Image of God, *the great Architect of the Univerfe*, must have had the Liberal Sciences, particularly **Geometry**, written on his Heart; for even since the Fall, we find the Principles of it in the Hearts of his Offspring, and which, in process of time, have been drawn forth into a convenient Method of *Propositions*, by observing the Laws of *Proportion* taken from *Mechanifm* ; So that as the *Mechanical Arts* gave Occasion to the Learned to reduce the Elements of **Geometry** into Method, this noble Science thus reduc'd, is the Foundation of all those Arts, (particularly of *Masonry* and *Architecture*) and the Rule by which they are conducted and perform'd.

No doubt *Adam* taught his Sons **Geometry**, and the use of it, in the several *Arts* and *Crafts* convenient, at least, for those early Times ; for **C A I N**, we find, built a City, which he call'd **CONSECRATED**, or **DEDICATED**, after the Name of his eldest Son **ENOCH**; and becoming the Prince of the one Half of Mankind, his Posterity would imitate his royal Example in improving both the noble Science and the useful Art.

Nor can we suppose that **SETH** was left instructed, who being the Prince of the other Half of Mankind, and also the prime Cultivator of *Astronomy*, would take equal Care to teach **Geometry** and *Masonry* to his Offspring, who had also the mighty Advantage of *Adam's* living among them.

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The Old Charges

A Tentative Reconstruction of the

'STANDARD ORIGINAL' VERSION OF THE OLD CHARGES, IN MODERN SPELLING
by Bro. Wallace McLeod, from *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Vol. 99, 1986

EXCERPT

Chapter Three. The Seven Liberal Sciences



OR THERE BE SEVEN LIBERAL SCIENCES, of the which it is one of them, and the names of the seven sciences be these.

²The first is Grammar, that teacheth a man to speak truly and to write truly.

³The second is Rhetoric, that teacheth a man to speak fair and in subtle terms. ⁴The third is Dialectic, that teacheth a man to discern or know truth from falsehood.

⁵The fourth is Arithmetic, that teacheth a man to reckon and account all manner of numbers. ⁶The fifth is **Geometry**, that teacheth a man to mete and measure of the earth and all other things, of the which science is Masonry. ⁷The sixth is Musick, that teacheth a man the craft of song, and voice of tongue, organ, harp and trumpet. ⁸The seventh is called Astronomy, that teacheth a man to know the course of the sun, moon and stars.

Chapter Four. **Geometry**: The Fundamental Science

¹These be the seven liberal sciences, the which seven be all found by one science, that is to say, **Geometry**. ²And thus may a man prove that all the sciences of the world be found by **Geometry**. ³For it teacheth mete and measure, ponderation and weight, of all manner of things on earth. ⁴And there is no man that worketh any craft, but he worketh by some mete or measure; nor no man that buyeth or selleth, but by measure or weight, and all this is **Geometry**. ⁵And these merchants and craftsmen find all other of the seven sciences; and especially the ploughmen, and tillers of all manner of grain (both corn and seeds), vine-planters, and setters of other fruits. ⁶For Grammar nor Rhetoric, nor Astronomy nor none of all the other sciences, can find a man measure or mete without **Geometry**. ⁷Wherefore methinketh that science is most worthy that findeth all other.

Chapter Eight. Euclid

MOREOVER, when Abraham and Sara his wife went into Egypt, and there he taught the seven sciences to the Egyptians; ²And he had a worthy scholar that hight Euclid, and he learned right well, and was master of all the seven sciences. ³And in his days it befell that the lords and estates of the realm had so many sonnes that they had gotten, some by their wives and some by other ladies of the realm, for that land is a hot land, and plenteous of generation, that they had no competent livelihood to find their children, wherefore they made much care. ⁴And when the King of the land made a great council and a parliament, to wit how they might find their children, and they could find no good way. ⁵And then they did cry throughout the realm, if there were any man that could inform them, that he should come unto them, and he should be well rewarded for his travail, that he should hold himself well pleased.



Chapter Nine. Euclid teaches **Geometry** in Egypt

¹After this cry was made, then came this worthy clerk Euclid, and said to the King and all his great Lords: ²If ye will, take me your children to govern, and to teach them the seven sciences, wherewith they may live honestly as gentlemen should; ³Under condition that ye will grant me a commission, that I may have power to rule them as the science ought to be ruled.' ⁴Which the King and his council granted him anon, and taught them the science of **Geometry** in practice, for to work in stones all manner of worthy works that belonged to building of temples and churches, castles, manors, towers, and all other manner of buildings.

¹²And thus was the Craft grounded there. And that worthy clerk gave it the name of **Geometry**; and now it is called in this land Masonry.

Chapter Fifteen. Athelstan and Edwin

³And he was a great practiser in **Geometry**, wherefore he drew him much to commune and talk with Masons, and to learn of them the Craft. ⁴And afterward, for love that he had to Masons and to the Craft, he was made a Mason.

