

The Four Masonic Elements

Part 1 of a series

By

Sir Knight David E. Stafford

Editor's Note

This article was originally presented by Dr. Stafford to the Tennessee Lodge of Research. Both he and the Lodge have granted permission to reprint it here. Because of the length, we have broken it into sections and now present it as a series in the magazine. References will be found following the last part of the series.

Freemasonry has been described as being veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. Through the centuries of time, the allegories and symbols of the Craft have been obscured and made only partially recognizable to the meanings they held in antiquity. The ritual, as used in each jurisdiction, has evolved and been pruned in such a manner that within the work are blurbs and sections that have little meaning in its present context or to modern Masons; however, it is within these scattered gems of purpose that a studious Mason may find great enlightenment.

One such portion of the ritual may be found with the seemingly haphazard mentioning of the four elements, water, fire, earth, and air, usually found at the conclusion of the stereoptics in the Entered Apprentice Degree. Their inclusion within the ritual seems a little awkward and misplaced, but as will be discussed within this paper, other Masonic rites use the elements in a more prominent and pronounced manner than does the common American York Rite system.

In either event, it raises the question as to why the classical elements of water, fire, earth, and air were ever introduced to the rituals of the Craft.

The American Ritual

The rituals used in American Lodges are for the most part similar. Most United States Grand Lodges confer a derivative of the Preston/Webb ritual. There are but few exceptions. The variations within the majority of the rituals adopted by United States Grand Lodges are usually only associated with the verbiage and sequence of events. Although, this ritual does illustrate the importance of our Mother Earth, the elements are not mentioned at all within the ritual of the First Degree as practiced under the auspice of the Grand Lodge of Tennessee, to whom the author owes allegiance. The following is from the 2003 edition of the Tennessee ritual, and it is very similar to Indiana's ritual (Taylor, 1975).

Our ancient brethren, we are told, served their master with freedom, fervency, and zeal, which are symbolically illustrated by chalk, charcoal, and clay. For there is nothing more free than chalk, which upon the slightest touch leaves a trace; nothing more fervent than charcoal, which when properly ignited melts the most obdurate metals; and noth-

ing more zealous than clay or our Mother Earth, for from the earth we came and unto the earth we must all inevitably return.

Another common passage found within the Preston/Webb Rituals pays little to no attention to freedom, fervency, and zeal and a larger amount to the elements. McCoy (1855) and Sickels (1868) are both examples. It will later be shown how this passage is extremely similar to the wording of an ancient Greek authority. On page 98 of Daniel Sickels' 1868 edition of *The General Ahiman Rezon and Freemason's Guide*, the ritual reads:

Our Mother Earth alone, of all the elements, has never proved unfriendly to man; the bodies of water deluge him with rain, oppress him with hail, and drown him with inundations. The air rushes in storms, prepares the tempest, and lights up the volcano; but the earth, ever kind and indulgent, is found subservient to his wishes. Though constantly harassed, more to furnish the luxuries than the necessities of life, she never refuses her accustomed yield, spreading his path with flowers and his table with plenty; though she produces poison, still she supplies the antidote and returns with interest every good committed to her care, and when at last he is called upon to pass through the "dark valley of the shadow of death," she once more receives him and piously covers his remains within her bosom: this admonishes us that from it we came, and to it we must shortly return.

The Freemason's Guide to the Symbolic Degrees (Reed, 1968) welds the two afore quoted passages together in the Entered Apprentice Degree. The combination is found in the same place within the ritual, after the discourse on the virtues and before the charge. The same is done in the *Kentucky Monitor*, the *Louisiana Masonic Monitor*, New York's monitor, and the *Masonic Manual of Missouri* (Carman, 1952; Huckaby, 1927; Missouri, 1952; Pirtle, 1990). The Tennessee ritual includes the latter discourse not in the First Degree but within the Masonic Funeral Service.

These three variations appear to be the most common within the American York Rite craft degrees as practiced in the United States. Within the context of the entire discourse of the third section of the First Degree, the inclusion of references to any of the elements seems a little out of place. The reason for the inclusion of any of these variations has been questioned for at least the last sixty years, and it would probably be safe to say for much longer (Barbour, 1946; Wells, 1947).

The Elements in Other Rites

In various rites and obediences, a candidate for the First Degree of Freemasonry must endure a series of trials to prove his sincerity and character. Perhaps the trial that would be familiar to most American Freemasons would be the chamber of reflection, for many have experienced a similar trial in at least one of the concordant bodies. According to Mackey (1927), the use of the chamber of reflection prior to the Entered Apprentice Degree is common in the French and Scottish Rites, neither

of which are widely practiced within the regular Grand Lodges in the United States. The chamber of reflection will be discussed and examined later in this work.

In a 1946 article found in *The Philalethes*, Barbour discusses the use of the four elements as trials in the Rite of Misraim. Pike and Cummings (2001) spent a great deal of time in combating the legitimacy of this rite and that of Memphis in the United States. They clearly

assert the spuriousness of the Rite of Misraim, the Rite of Memphis, and the one formed through their union. All three of these are frequently, albeit perhaps harshly, called Masonic bastards (Stevens, 1899).

The modern irregularity of the rite in the United States is without question; however, according to Barbour, Marc Bedarride, a former Grand Master of the Rite of Misraim in France and accused charlatan, recorded a “quite lengthy, detailed, and perhaps imaginary” description of the rite’s trials. The description includes the proselyte being caused to transverse an underground cavern, pass between two engulfing flames, to wade a swift current of water of unknown depth without extinguishing his torch, being exalted through space where his light is darkened by a blustering gust of air, and finally being hastened into a “chamber of horror” just outside of the room where he is to be initiated. This is a dramatic account of this obedience’s tri-
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als, but it illustrates the passage presumably required of those seeking enlightenment within the French Rite of Misraim, at least in spirit.

Although extremely impractical within the setting of a Lodge hall, the description corresponds, in narrative, to the trials detailed within Pike’s (1993) *Porch and the Middle Chamber: Book of the Lodge* and Ambelain’s (2006) *Freemasonry in Olden Times: Ceremonies and Rituals from the Rites of*

Mezaraim and Memphis.¹ At least one current Rite of Memphis and Misraim in the United States is purportedly using Ambelain’s work (Brother Methodius, personal communication, July 15, 2008). Robert Ambelain is of Martinist fame. It appears the ritual is more heavily influenced by esoteric and occult thought than is mainstream American Masonry; however, the ritual shows a very strong similitude to Pike’s craft ritual. This is not surprising since both find their origin developing within France. Ambelain’s ritual warrants a review by anyone who is interested in variations of Masonry.

Pike’s craft rituals are not widely known within the United States. He revised the Scottish Rite version of the Craft Degrees not to be worked within the halls of a Lodge but instead as a perquisite reading for a York Rite Mason venturing through the Scottish Rite’s fourth through thirty-second degrees (Pike, 1993). This objective explains the frequent digressions within Pike’s ritual to clarify the

differences between York Rite work and Scottish Rite work. It was believed by Pike that the rites contrasted so greatly in presentation that the York Rite Mason would not be able to fully understand the lessons within the Scottish Rite without some exposure to its craft degrees. Pike believed that after familiarizing himself with the Scottish Rite version of the three degrees that a candidate for the “higher” degrees would not be puzzled by their order. To provide one example of the differences between the American York Rite craft ritual and that of the Scottish Rite, within the American York Rite ritual, the ruffians are apprehended and punished before the conclusion of the Third Degree. This is not so within the Scottish Rite workings of the degree; it is not until the completion of the 10th degree or Elu of the Fifteen, that the fullness of retribution is paid to the ruffians. The following is an examination of Pike’s use of the elements within the First Degree.

Pike’s “Blue Degrees” and the Elements

Pike’s version of the First Degree involved four tests or trials by the elements. The first trial experienced by the candidate is that of earth and involves the Chamber of Reflection. The following three trials are known as “The Journeys” and are made up of circumambulations around the Lodge with various barriers and experiences to encounter. Each journey is accredited with an element; air, water, and fire. The following is a description of each trial paraphrased from Pike’s (1993) *Porch and the Middle Chamber: Book of the Lodge* and (1996) *Esoteric Word of the 1st through 3rd Degree, According to the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite*.

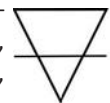


Chamber of Reflection

The first trial of a candidate for the first degree is that of earth. The proselyte is delivered to the lodge by the individual who recommended him to Masonry. The profane is promptly left in the hands of a conductor who blindfolds the proselyte and leads him about the lodge in the allusion of descending into a deep pit or catacomb. The candidate is then seated on a stool and turned over to the instruction of the preparer. The room is prepared with images of death and despair. Present also is a cup of water, a piece of bread, and dishes of salt, sulfur, and mercury.

The proselyte is left to explore the crypt and answer four written questions before him. Each question is related to the duties the candidate owes to himself, his fellow-creatures, his country, and his creator, respectively. He is instructed that once he has answered the questions and followed all the instructions, he is to ring a bell signifying his completion.

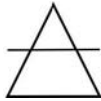
The preparer observes the candidate through a hidden wicket, and when the candidate begins to answer the questions, a disturbance outside of the chamber occurs. The proselyte hears chains rattling, cries, and a loud explosion, followed by silence. Once he answers the questions, the candi-



date is required to write a will, drink the water, eat the bread, and reflect upon the salt, sulfur, and mercury. The latter substances' connections to alchemy are explained. They are described as being representative of man's three fold being: body, mind, and spirit. The salt is a reminder of the endless cycle of the dead becoming part of the living. The smoke from burning a particle of sulfur represents good and evil thoughts. The mercury with its inability to be easily divided into portions is representative of the spirit in simple oneness. After the proselyte has completed his tasks, the preparer blindfolds the candidate and leads him back through the path from whence he arrived at the chamber.

The First Journey

The first journey represents trial by air. During this journey, the candidate is conducted three times around the lodge. He is caused to traverse objects on the floor as if passing over rocks and through hollows. All the while, sounds of thundering and loud claps are made about the journeyman. The candidate

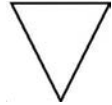


is stopped by the Junior Warden and caused to make an alarm by striking the Junior Warden on the left shoulder three times. At this point, the candidate is given a light electric shock accompanied by a loud clap of thundering sounds. After answering the Junior Warden's brief interrogation, the first journey is completed. The candidate is then informed that the element air is a representation of vitality or life. In a deeper explanation, the trial by air is said to be emblematical of the whims of life and more especially the quality of tolerance and progress from a knight templar

terrestrial to a celestial state of being.

The Second Journey

The second journey represents trial by water. During this trial, the candidate is conducted three times around the lodge. After each circumambulation, the candidate's right hand is dipped in a laver of water. The lodge is completely silent during the journey. After the third revolution, the candidate is stopped at the Senior Warden and caused

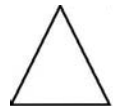


to make the regular alarm by striking him three times on the left shoulder. It is explained to the candidate that baptism by water is a symbol of purification and was used by the Essenes and John the Baptist. It is to be a reminder to the candidate that all men must be driven by a desire to serve his fellow creatures; otherwise, when fortune finds opportunity to invest him with rank and honor, he will serve himself and not the people who gave him opportunity.

The Third Journey

The third and last journey represents trial by fire. To best convey the venture taken by the candidate on the third journey, much of the description to follow is taken directly from Pike's (1996) *Esoteric Work of the 1st through the 3rd Degree*.

According to the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. The profane is once again conducted three times around the lodge. "He is continually exposed to heat which is produced by means of a long metallic tube, having at one end a mouth-piece and at the other a spirit-lamp surrounded with wire-gauze. The



tube contains lycopodium or arcanson powder which, blown upon the spirit-lamp, inflames and passes through the wire-gauze, making a hot flame. Torches may be used with cotton saturated in alcohol and powered with lycopodium which rains out in flames when the torch is shaken (p. 12).” The candidate is to clearly feel the heat from the apparatus but not to be burned. Upon the last circumambulation, the candidate is stopped by the Worshipful Master and caused to make an alarm on the Worshipful Master’s shoulder just as before. The candidate is then taught that through the baptism of both water and fire, he is symbolically free from all sin and vice. He is then instructed that the flame teaches all Masons to aspire for perfection and labor with aspiration, ardor, and zeal (very similar to freedom, fervency, and zeal in the American York Rite ritual).

Ambelain’s Ritual and the Elements

Ambelain’s Freemasonry in Olden Times contains two separate sets of rituals, those of the Rite of Memphis and the Rite of Mizraim. It is suggested that any reader with an interest in various Masonic craft rituals spend some time in studying these unique and beautiful systems. There are some interesting differences between Ambelain’s ritual and that of Pike. The first variation of Ambelain’s ritual from that of Pike’s is the absence of mercury, sulfur, and salt from the Chamber of Reflection. The order of the trials is different in the rituals. In Ambelain’s ritual, the order is water, air, and fire (air, water, and fire in Pike’s).

The first journey includes the candidate being conducted around the lodge with immense noise and harass-

ment. At the conclusion of the circumambulation, at the Junior Warden, the candidate’s hand is plunged into pure water for purification.

The second journey being a test of air, the candidate is led around the lodge in silence, although obstacles are still present. Stopping at the Senior Warden, the Master of Ceremonies blows three times on the candidate’s forehead.

The third and last journey is a trial by fire. The candidate is once again conducted around the lodge and stopped by the Worshipful Master. The Master of Ceremonies takes the right hand of the candidate and passes it three times through the flame of a lit candle.

These differences are only presented to give the reader a little broader view of how the elements are used in different rituals. It is hoped that a reader with an interest will seek out these rituals and read them fully, for they all have a great many gems of purpose to impart to the Masonic student.

To be continued in next month’s issue of the *Knight Templar* magazine.

¹ For other rituals, reference Arturo de Hoyos’ *Rituals of the Masonic Grand Lodge of the Sun Bayreuth, Germany*, Kessinger Publishing, 1997 and Hoyos and S. Brent Morris’ *Committed to the Flames: The History and Rituals of a Secret Masonic Rite*, A Lewis Publishing, 2007.

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The Four Masonic Elements

Part 2 of 2 of a series

By

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Editor's Note

This article is continued from the May 2015 issue of the *Knight Templar* magazine.

The Elements in Literature

Throughout antiquity and the more modern era, the four elements have been included in literature, ranging in genre from poetry and science fiction movies to academic works on conservation and physics (Besson, 1997; Laurie, 1929; Rupp, 2005; Sylvester, 1979). Of particular interest is that the majority of the passage concerning the four elements from Sickel's monitor and various other York Rite renditions is lifted from the ancient writings of Pliny the Elder. Practically word for word, depending on translation, the Sickel and McCoy monitors recite Pliny's discourse from Book II, Chapter 63 of *Naturalis Historia* (Laurie, 1929; Pliny, 1987). *Naturalis Historia* was completed around the year 77 AD, and it is considered to be one of the largest works, consisting of thirty-seven books, to have survived from the era of the Roman Empire until today (Rupp). Pliny reads:

"It is the earth that, like a kind mother, receives us at our birth and sustains us when born. It is this alone, of all the enemies around us, that is never found an enemy to man. The floods of waters deluge him with rains, oppress him with hail, and drown him with inundations; the air rushes on in storms, prepares

the tempest, or lights up the volcano; but the earth, gentle and indulgent, ever subservient to the wants of man, spreads his walks with flowers, and his table with plenty; returns with interest every good committed to her care; and though she produces the poison, she still furnishes the antidote, though constantly teased more to furnish the luxuries of man than his necessities, yet even to the last, she continues her kind indulgence, and when life is over, she piously hides his remains in her bosom."

Joshua Sylvester (1979) in the robust work *The Divine Weeks and Works*, first published in 1621, presents a stanza that is very reminiscent of Pliny the Elder's writing. All four elements are referred to; however, it is the earth that is most revered. Pay particular attention to the commonality of line 467.

"459: The Earth receives man
when he first is born:
460: Th'Earth nurses him; and
when he is forlorn
461: Of th'other Elements, and
Nature loaths-him,
462: Th'Earth in her bosom
with kind burial
cloaths-him.

- 463: Oft hath the Aire with
 Tempests set-vpon-vs,
 464: Oft hath the Water with
 her Floods vndon-vs,
 465: Oft hath the Fire
 (th'vpper as well as ours)
 466: With wofull flames
 consum'd our Towns
 and Towrs:
 467: Onely the Earth, of all
 the Elements,
 468: Vnto Mankind is kind
 without offence:
 469: Onely the Earth did neuer
 iot displace
 470: From the first seat
 assign'd it by thy grace."

In recent literature, the four elements have received considerable attention for their prominent inclusion in Dan Brown's (2000) work, *Angels and Demons*. The book fictionally connects the four classical elements with the practice of an Illuminati conspiracy and an assassin. On page 360, Brown depicts what he refers to as The Illuminati Diamond, an artistic creation forming the words Earth, Air, Fire, and Water into a square figure. The novel repeatedly mentions political figures' connections to Freemasonry and Freemasonry's supposed and illusionary connection with symbols such as the eye within a triangle and the Great Seal of the United States. In the fictional novel, bodies are found branded with an anagram of one of the four elements somewhere on their person.

There are numerous other references

in literature that compare favorably to the subject at hand; however, it would be beyond the scope of the current focus to expound more fully upon them. Let it be made very clear that the similarity of our modern ritual to these older works does not in any way point to the age of the fraternity; yet, it does indicate that the ideas and thoughts propagated within the Lodge are linked to those of a more ancient time.

The History of the Four Elements

It would now be prudent to briefly examine the development of the four elements. Throughout all ages and even today, man sought to identify the *prima materia*, prime matter, or primary material of all substances (Vorhand-Ariel, 1998). The debate over the fundamental building blocks of all material is as old as civilization itself. It was the group of thinkers belonging to the school of natural philosophers in the sixth century

BC who first began to seriously debate the elements (Rupp, 2005). Thales is accredited with being the first to develop a theory of elements. He proclaimed that water was the most basic of all elements and that all things were made of some variation of this base material. The debate continued for centuries. Anaximander, Thales's student, proclaimed

that air was the basic unit of matter. Heraclitus proclaimed the simplest element must be fire, and Xenophanes asserted that all things were made of the fundamental element of earth (Rupp).



It was Empedocles (494-435 BC) who is accredited with combining the theories of his predecessors and developing a four-prong theory of the elements, although Buddha's teachings of the four elements pre-date Empedocles'. In *Thetrasomia or Doctrine of the Four Elements*, Empedocles postulated that all things were made up of various combinations of earth, air, fire, and water. According to Rupp (2005), the development of a set of basic elements was not exclusive to Greece, the cradle of western thought. Japanese and Hindu traditions taught a five element belief. Both taught the four classical elements and a fifth element akasha, aether, or the void which explains the unseen spiritual influences of life and nature. Within the Greek philosophy, the presence of a fifth element, ether, was regularly discussed and debated. Aristotle added a fifth element he called "aether" later termed "quintessence." The peoples of India developed a three element theory and those of China a five element theory. The Indian theory contained fire, water, and earth to which the Chinese added wood and metal. The Indians later expanded the theory to include air.

The Greek thought of the four classical elements has been greatly confused in modern time. When the Greeks debated and discussed the four elements, they did not have a physical substance in mind. When the Greeks discussed earth, they did not necessarily intend for it to be taken as soil; although, it would often be represented as such. The four classical elements more readily referenced physical states of being. The following excerpt clearly explains:

"For Aristotle, matter (hyle), inert and shapeless by itself,

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gained its shape and properties by the action of form (morphe) which could be expressed by such factors as hot, cold, dry and humid, giving in turn, by their combination, four elements: earth (cold and dry), water (cold and humid), air (hot and humid), and fire (hot and dry). The elements were eternal and indestructible and by synthesis (chemical reaction), mixis (mechanical mixing), or krasis (dissolution) gave birth to different substances whose properties depended solely on the contents of each element."²

During the Middle Ages, Western thought was stifled and oppressed. Alchemy and the study of the four elements was overcome in the Western world by superstition and blind faith in the church; however, in the East, the same period was a time of great growth in science, literature, philosophy, and overall intellectual achievement. Alchemy "developed in close relation with metallurgy and medicine" within the Islamic Arabian-Persian world (Tramer,

Voltz, Lahmani, & Szczepinska-Tramer, 2007, p. S6). It was during this time that the Arab scholar Abu Musa Jabir ibn Hayyan, more readily known as Gerber (720-780 AD), lived and worked (Tramer, Voltz, Lahmani, & Szczepinska-Tramer). Gerber was profoundly interested in alchemy, and he believed that all metals were made up of a combination of sulfur and mercury. Gerber's sulfur-mercury theory was expanded by Al-Razi (850-940 AD), a Persian physician, to include salt (Rupp, 2005).

In the late Middle Ages (12-14th centuries), alchemy was studied by such eminent personalities as Albertus Magnus – Albert von Bollstadt (1193-1280), professor of philosophy and theology at the Universities of Cologne and Paris and Arnaldus de Villanova (1235-1313), rector of Montpellier University” (Tramer, Voltz, Lahmani, & Szczepinska-Tramer, 2007, p. S6). In the 16th Century, the Greek theory of elements and the Arabian three elements were combined. Paracelsus (Phillip von Hohenheim, 1493-1541) determined that, though the Greek four were indeed the fundamental components of all matter; earth, air, fire, and water in turn were composed of the three Arabic “principles;” mercury, sulfur, and salt (Rupp, p. 23).

The classical elements composed of either four or five elements dominated philosophic, scientific, esoteric, and mathematical thought from Empedocles through Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Gerber, and Paracelsus, and their dominance began to weaken in the middle of the 17th Century with the scientific research of Robert Boyle. Boyle's (2008) *The Sceptical Chymist* signaled the end of the four elements' dominance in science. For the next one hundred years, the dominance

of alchemy and the four elements over Western society waned. The death of alchemy has been symbolically represented by Antoine Lavoisier who listed thirty-three elements classified as gases, metals, non-metals, or earths in his 1789 dissertation entitled *Elementary Treatise on Chemistry* (Donovan, 1996; Rupp, 2005). From this point, the number of identified elements increased at a steady if not amazing rate (Rupp). It is noteworthy to mention, however, that even today, the classical elements and alchemy are used in astrology, esoteric thought, and several other occult philosophies.

It was not uncommon for cultures to connect their belief of the elements with other basic knowledge such as colors, seasons, symbols, directions, religious iconography, virtues, or planets, attributing one of each to a specific element. The Greeks were no different from their global companions. The Pythagoreans, those philosophers who followed the teaching of Pythagoras, had a natural affection for numbers, and to them, the world of nature and reality seemed to divide itself nicely into units of four. They observed four elements, “four prime faculties, four societies, four seasons, four ages of man, and four parts of living things” (Rupp, p. 12). It was the Pythagoreans who are credited with developing four of the seven liberal arts and sciences, the quadrivium; arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music (Stahl, Johnson, & Burge, 1991). Hippocrates took this fascination with four and connected the four elements to his four essential fluids of the human body (yellow bile, black bile, blood, and phlegm).

Ginsburgh (1995) asserted that the Hebrew people saw a correspondence between the four classical elements

and the letters of the Tetragrammaton. In Ginsburgh's view, water correlates with Yod, fire with Heh, air with Vav, and earth with the final Heh. Bogdan (2007), Castells (2005), and Ozaniec (2005) concur that there is a correlation between the name of God and the four classical elements. According to some writers, the four classical elements when corresponded with the Tetragrammaton may be further associated with the four senses, four evangelists, four angels ruling over the corners of the world, and the four triplicities (Castells (2005); Goldstein, 1990; Labriola & Simmonds, 2000; Ozaniec). "A triplicity is a set of three zodiacal signs: there are four triplicities in all, each of which is associated with one of the four elements" (Goldstein, p. 1). Bogdan stresses that the illustration of this connection is displayed more fully or clearly in the rituals of the Order of the Golden Dawn than they are within Freemasonry. Kabbalistic philosophy is deeply rooted in the study of the Tetragrammaton. The Tetragrammaton and Kabbalistic knight templar



philosophy are repeatedly seen within the degrees of the Scottish Rite, including the craft degrees (Hutchens, 1995a; Hutchens, 1995b).

Within the American York Rite's "higher" degrees is a very clear example of how units of four were associated with each other. In the Royal Arch Degree, the candidate is caused to pass

through four veils, each representing one of the principal tribes of Israel. The first veil represents the tribe of Dan and is represented by a blue banner bearing the representation of an eagle. The second veil represents the tribe of Rueben and is represented by a banner of purple bearing the representation of a man. The third veil represents the tribe of Ephraim and is represented by a scarlet banner bearing the representation of an ox. The fourth veil represents the tribe of Judah and is represented by a banner of white bearing the representation of a lion. According to Royal Arch and early Christian tradition, each of the four veils is said to represent one of the four Christian Gospels of John, Matthew, Luke, and Mark, respectively. The representations of the eagle, man, ox, and lion are further described as corresponding to four astrological symbols of the Zodiac: Scorpio, Aquarius, Taurus, and Leo, respectively.

In *Morals and Dogma*, Albert Pike (1956) connects even more units of four with the four representations on the Royal Arch's banners while discussing the twenty-eighth degree of the Scottish Rite. On page 791, Pike presents an illustration connecting the eagle with azoth and air; the man with mercury and water; the ox with salt and the earth; and the lion with sulfur and fire. Pike continues to explain how the Zohar further connects each illustration on the banners with an angel: the lion with Michael; the ox with Gabriel; the eagle with Uriel; and the man with Raphael.

Alchemy

The four classical elements are intimately related to the ancient science of

alchemy. The discipline, not unlike Freemasonry, is divided into two denominations, material and spiritual or operative and speculative (Tramer, Voltz, Lahmani, & Szczepinska-Tramer, 2007). Alchemy was very en-vogue with the thinkers of the Renaissance (14th-17th centuries) but fell out of popularity with the rise of the "rational and critical philosophy of the enlightenment" mind (Tramer, Voltz, Lahmani, & Szczepinska-Tramer, p. 56). It is not to be assumed however that alchemy instantaneously disappeared from the social, political, and scientific scenes.

Whereas the material practice of alchemy sought to explain and manipulate the physical world, the spiritual alchemist sought to use the terminology, science, and ideas of the material to explain the psychological, spiritual, and sociological existence of man. Alchemy was interested in transmuting one thing into another. Of course the most widely known idea of alchemy is the search for a technique of converting base metals into silver or gold; however, within the spiritual denomination of alchemy there was a search to return man to a pure oneness with the Divine Creator. Although the once prominent theories of alchemy lost position in the open scientific world view, its spiritual half found refuge in the esoteric beliefs of organizations such as Freemasonry and the Rosicrucian movement. The traditional quest within alchemy was transmutation or change into another substance or form (Von Franz, 1980). This quest in relationship to the four elements can still be found within *The Elemental Trials* of Freemasonry.

Before going farther, it would be advantageous to explore what connections the framers of the Craft had with

alchemy and its practice. The beginnings of Freemasonry are shrouded in mystery. At what point the operative Lodges transformed into an organization accepting men of stature and prestige is blurred; however, it is generally accepted that Elias Ashmole, Robert Moray, and Christopher Wren were among the first to transcend the barriers and become speculative or accepted Masons (Beresiner, 2004; Koltko-Rivera, 2007; MacNulty, 1998). It is also noteworthy that all three of these men were founding members of the Royal Society. It is possible that more members of the Royal Society were Freemasons; however, even of the three afore mentioned, Wren and Moray are occasionally questioned as Freemasons. It is not suggested that the Royal Society has any connection in origin to Freemasonry; however, it is implied that both organizations developed during the transition from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment thought. It is also suggested that the men in both organizations probably shared similar interests, two of which were alchemy and the rapidly develop-

ing science of chemistry.

Elias Ashmole was born on the 23rd of May 1617 at Lichfield, Staffordshire England (Beresiner, 2004). Ashmole was made a Freemason in 1646 within the lodge at Warrington (Koltko-Rivera, 2007). From an early age, Ashmole found a fond interest in esoteric teachings. He had a passion for botany, astronomy, and alchemy. He became fast friends with William Backhouse, a noted alchemist, and this relationship was so strong that, according to Koltko-Rivera, Ashmole became the alchemical successor to Backhouse. Ashmole also had an interest in Rosicrucianism; however, there seems to be no record of him ever being a participant in Rosicrucian activities. Ashmole published several works with esoteric and alchemic connotations including *Fasciculus Chemicus*, *Theatrum Chemicum Brittanicum*, and *The Way of Bliss* (Beresiner; Koltko-Rivera; MacNulty, 1998).

Robert Moray was born March 6, 1609. He was initiated into Masonry in 1641 at the Lodge in Edinburgh. Mo-



knight templar Elias Ashmole



Robert Moray

ray was a lover of hermetic philosophy and alchemy, and he was the patron of Thomas Vaughn, an active alchemist (MacNulty, 1998; McGregor, 2005).

Christopher Wren was born October 20, 1632 (McGregor, 2005). It is believed that Wren was initiated into Freemasonry in May of 1691 as evidenced by John Aubray's *Naturell Historie of Wiltshire*. There is little to no firm evidence however to substantiate the assertion that Wren was definitely a Freemason. His interests in intellectual endeavors, however, are unquestionable. Wren was raised in an Anglican family that leaned towards the Royalist agenda during the civil unrest in England. He was educated at an early age by his father and Reverend William Shepherd. He attended Westminster School for several years. Following a change in prosperity, the Wrens resided with William Holder. It was here that Wren was exposed to William Scarborough, a physician. Scarborough was a member of a small group of thinkers who met weekly to discuss such topics as alchemy, physics, astronomy, statics, and the like. Wren was allowed to attend many of these meetings. Christopher Wren was among the first twelve founding members of the Royal Society and served as president for several years (McGregor, 2005).

The Elemental Trials as Illustrations of Transmutation

"According to Aristotle, the prima material combines with the four qualities of coldness, dryness, heat, and moisture to develop into the four elements. He believed that manipulating these qualities would change their elemental composition, resulting in transmutation"

(Vorhand-Ariel, 1998, p. 110). Within alchemy, it was believed that the elements could be manipulated in order to produce a mystical substance or the philosopher's stone. This belief in manipulating what was found in nature into a supernatural substance, transmutation, transposed itself into the philosophy of Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry. Nowhere within all of Freemasonry is this more clearly evident than in the elemental trials.

Earth

Within the American York Rite, it is taught that "our Mother Earth alone, of all the elements, has never proved unfriendly to man." The ritual further admonishes us that "from the earth we came, and to it we must shortly return." The element of earth represents man's alpha and omega, his beginning and his end. Man's body was molded together with the dust of the earth and water. His mortal temple was an earthen clay vessel into which God breathed air through his nostrils to transmute him into a living soul. The first living man was Adam who is recognized within Masonic tradition and myth as being the first Freemason. The name Adam comes from adamah, meaning earth or ground (Mackey, 1927; Vorhand-Ariel, 1998). It may be of interest to mention here that according to Jewish law, it is unlawful for a corpse to be cremated. One explanation for this edict is that a body that is returned to the earth "is capable of bringing forth new life;" whereas, a body that is turned to ash through burning by fire represents complete destruction (Kaplan, 1990, p. 149). The Jewish religion and Freemasonry both teach that man is an eternal being that awaits resurrection

after death. It is therefore proper that man's body be laid under the solemn clods of clay as a symbol of his awaiting resurrection and return to the endless cycle of life.

It is appropriate that the Masonic rituals of elemental trials begin with the candidate being placed deep within the earth. It may be interpreted as a symbol of his beginnings. When the profane candidate leaves the Chamber of Reflection, he is born anew and prepared to receive instruction as a *tabula rasa* or blank slate (Zeldis, 2008).

Air

The word wind is intimately related to the word spirit. It has already been mentioned that it was breath that made man a living soul. God breathed air into man's nostrils to make him a free moral agent, made in the likeness of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Arabic word "*ruch*" and the Hebrew word "*ruach*" are words meaning both soul and wind (Kaplan, 1990; Vorhand-Ariel, 1998). Jung (1989) asserted that it was only natural for man to associate air with the soul. For life begins with a baby's first gasp for breath and ends with a man's last struggle to breathe. When a man breathes his last breath and the air leaves his body, his soul vacates the carnal clay vessel and transmutes to eternal reward or damnation.

Water

The second journey within Pike's ritual is the trial by water. In Western, alchemist, and Jewish thought, water has a deep rooted connection with creation, birth, and renewal (Rupp, 2005; knight templar

Vorhand-Ariel, 1998). The first two elements mentioned within the Christian and Jewish *Bible* are earth and water. In modern science, it is taught that life on earth began within the primordial ooze of the ancient oceans. The process of a mother delivering a baby is signaled by the breaking of her water. Through a study of ancient civilizations, it is found that the earliest societies developed on the banks of the fertile rivers of life; the Tigris, the Euphrates, the Nile, the Indus, and the Yellow Rivers; thus it might be suggested that water has always been a source of life and fertility to the human race (Kaplan, 1990; Vorhand-Ariel, 1998).

Water has played a vital part in the rituals of the world's major religions. Although much of the Christian world views baptism and ceremonial immersion as a rite isolated within their practice, mikvah is a ritual bath practiced in Judaism (Vorhand-Ariel). The Holy Scriptures of the Jews require followers to participate in a ceremonial immersion in order to purify themselves. Causes for such a requirement are varied but include women after childbirth or menstrual cycles, converts to Judaism, and the Cohen Gadol or High Priest before performing a ceremony representing the people (Vorhand-Ariel). Within the Muslim religion, practitioners are required to go through purification by water before prayer. It is thereby a safe assertion that the washing of the body in water is an ancient symbol of the purification of the immortal soul and the carnal vessel. Its use within the Craft is no different. The alchemist used water as a sign of transmutation and purification. Before setting to work, the alchemist prepared his tools and vessels by immersing and washing them in a bath

of water (Vorhand-Ariel). Perhaps it is only fitting for the first degree of Freemasonry to purify and prepare a candidate for the ancient mysteries within a symbolic water baptism.

Fire

To the ancient Hebrews and to alchemists, fire was the most active of the elements. It was fire that served as a catalyst. According to Vorhand-Ariel (1998), "Heraclitus regarded fire as an agent of transmutation and as a symbol of renewal, representing light, spirit, the sun, radiance, and purification" (p. 111). The alchemists used fire as well as water as a source of purifying their tools. The alchemist and metallurgist both used fire to refine metals and make them pure. It separates the base from the precious metal (Tramer, Volts, Lahmani, & Szczepinska-Tramer, 2007). Fire was used by them to transform a crude convoluted mixture into a separated collection of base and precious metals. "The Zohar says that the flaming sword (referred in Genesis as being placed east of the Garden of Eden) symbolizes the trials with which God overwhelms man that he may be purified and restored to the way of goodness" (Vorhand-Ariel, 1998, p. 112). It might be mentioned here that the tiler's sword was traditionally wavy in shape to represent the sword placed in the Garden of Eden (Lawrence, 1999; Mackey, 1927). As afore mentioned, fire is a symbol of renewal and has been since time immemorial. Perhaps one of the best images of this is the traditional phoenix. The phoenix is a mythical bird that after an extensive life combusts into flames and is reborn from its own ashes. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche

(2003) wrote, "You must be willing to burn in your own flame: how could you become new unless you had first become ashes?" (p. 49). The ancients implemented a trial by fire perhaps similar to Pike's variation of the Entered Apprentice degree. Perhaps it is a reminder to the neophyte that he must set aside or destroy his old image of life and self to receive the teachings of Freemasonry and become a new and better creature.

Conclusion

At the onset of this work, the question was raised concerning the inclusion of the classical four elements within the Entered Apprentice Degree in various ritual variations. The examination of this topic has transcended time, passing through the studies of religion, philosophy, and history. In the study of the elements, the topic of alchemy repeatedly revealed itself. It has been illustrated how the discipline of alchemy dominated the religious, political, scientific, and social aspects of human existence. Tramer et al. said of alchemy, "alchemy, an integral part of the medieval world-view, was doomed to death by the spirit of enlightenment well before its official death which coincided with the appearance of the modern chemistry of Lavoister and Dalton. [Now] Only its phantom is still alive" (p. S5). It is most probable that a very prominent place where alchemy is still shining is within Freemasonry. The early speculative Freemasons came from the ages of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. It is without question that these patriarchs of the Craft were knowledgeable in both denominations of alchemy and their relationship with the four classical elements. It

is proposed, and hopefully supported that sporadic mentioning of the four elements within the York Rite system and the blatant use of the elements within the rites of continental Europe are direct descendents from the reign of alchemy in pre-Enlightenment Europe. The early framers of the Craft during the Renaissance probably drafted the rituals to include the philosophies of spiritual alchemy that aligned with the spiritual needs

and goals of the fledgling organization of Speculative Freemasonry.

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Elements	Water	Fire	Earth	Wind/Air
Zodiac	Aquarius	Leo	Taurus	Scorpio
Gospels	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Daniel's Vision	Man	Lion	Ox/Bull	Eagle
Principal Tribes	Reuben	Judah	Ephraim	Dan
Angels	Raphael	Michael	Gabriel	Uriel
Alchemy	Mercury	Sulfur	Salt	Azoth
Greek Gods	Neptune	Vulcan	Juno	Jupiter
Hippocrates' Four Humours	Phlegm	Yellow Bile	Black Bile	Blood
Platonic Shapes	Icosahedron	Tetrahedron	Cube	Octahedron
Colors (Pike)	White	Red	Black	Blue

(Barbour, 1946; Pike, 1956; Rupp, 2005; Wells, 1947)

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² Tramer, A., Voltz, R., Lahmani, F., Szczepinska-Tramer, J. (2007). What is (was) Alchecmy?, *Acta Physica Polonica A*, 112(Suppl.), S5-S18.

Foreign aid might be defined as a transfer of money from poor people in rich countries to rich people in poor countries.

-- Douglas Case

Giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys.

If you think health care is expensive now, wait until you see what it costs when it's free!

-- P. J. O'Rourke

Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner.

--James Bovard

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