

The Case For Hiram Abiff

By

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The year was 1000 B.C.; the place was the ancient Near East. A new king, the fabled Solomon, sat on the throne of an up and coming regional power called Israel. Conquered by the warrior, King David, it stretched from the borders of Egypt to the plains of western Asia. To the north was Phoenicia (modern Lebanon) with its cities of Tyre, Biblos, and Sidon strung like pearls along the Mediterranean coast. The Phoenicians were a seafaring people of traders and merchants. Their written alphabet, the Phoenician script, was the lingua-franca of the civilized world of the time. This alphabet was adopted by the Israelite dynasty of David to document the story of its rise. The King of Tyre is called Hiram. Like Solomon and David before him, he is a man to be reckoned with. Unlike Solomon who outshines him in glory, King Hiram is historically and independently attested in extra-biblical sources. His name is engraved on a sarcophagus found near the Phoenician coast.

Upon this background of ancient kings and kingdoms, we read in the Biblical book of Kings (I Kings 5) and in the third chapter of Second Chronicles, a detailed account of the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. In order to begin the Temple's construction (no little undertaking as the Bible makes clear), King Solomon asked Hiram to send him cedar wood and other supplies along with a master artisan who could work in stone; "a cunning man" who could work gold, silver, brass, and iron; who knew how to work in purple and crimson; a master stone mason and chief architect who would be in charge of the work force required for the undertaking. In describing this "cunning man," the Bible says that "King Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. He was the son of a widow woman of the Tribe of Naphtili, and his father was a man of Tyre."

It is clear from the Biblical account that written correspondence was carried out between the two kings. According to the historian, Josephus, writing in Roman times, "copies of this correspondence were preserved both in the Hebrew and Tyrian archives and were still existent in his day" (Antiquities 8:28). According to Masonic tradition, the cunning artisan mentioned in the Bible is called Hiram Abiff. The particular name "Abiff" is not found in the Biblical account. From whence did it come? We shall leave this question for further discussion later in the article. Let us start here with the premise that the Masonic Hiram Abiff was an actual historical figure of whom the Masons somehow acquired extra-Biblical knowledge.

What can we say about the linguistic possibilities of such a name within the context of the times and the ancient Semitic languages? We can only speak here of the possibility that a name of such a man might have survived in the traditions of Tyre to be later picked up by the Templars during the crusades two thousand years later. Such an idea, though improbable, is not impossible. That there was a Templar presence in the principality of Tyre during the crusades is a certainty. They could have stumbled on such a name in the archives of Tyre if such archives still existed as attested by Josephus.

Let us now discuss the Hiram Abiff of Masonic tradition. It states that he was the Master Mason sent by King Hiram to Solomon. In charge of a workforce of many thousands of laborers and artisans, Hiram Abiff was the Grand Master and architect over the entire project. One tradition says that among the common laborers, craftsmen, and master masons, were fifteen men of the highest rank of artisan. These fifteen conspired, so the story goes, to petition Hiram Abiff, their boss, to elevate them to the status of Grand Masters in order to improve

their lot within the system. This, the master architect refused, explaining that only King Solomon himself or King Hiram could sanction such a request.

Angered at being put off, they murdered Hiram Abiff in a doorway of the Temple and hid his body in the rubble of the construction site. This they did, thinking that with the chief architect out of the way, Solomon would have no choice but to appoint them in his place. The three murderers; Jubela, Jubelo, and Jubelum by name, fled to the coastal town of Yaffo (Joppa) where they were tracked down by Solomon's men. Brought back to Jerusalem, they were judged, found guilty, and executed for their crime. Quite an extraordinary story! Could it be true?

Of the name Abiff itself, the following can be said: It may be an abbreviation of Masonic origin or code, each letter of the name standing for a word or key to something else which only an adept or initiate might understand. We will speak of this matter more fully when discussing the name "Abiff" in an allegorical sense. Of the name "Hiram" there is no problem. The name is Biblically attested and is of Hebrew or Phoenician origin. It means simply "high born." The Phoenician King Hiram is known to have lived in the 10th century B.C. between the years 980-947 B.C., roughly parallel to Solomon's reign. This was the same Phoenician king who built ships for the Israelites at the port of Etsion Geber (modern Eilat). These ships were piloted by Tyrian navigators who set sail in quest for King Solomon's mines. (II Chronicles 8:14-17). Another Tyrian sarcophagus bearing the name "Ahiram" and dated to the same period could conceivably relate to the same dynasty of the Biblical Hiram. It bears an inscription and a curse. "This coffin was made by Ethbaal son of Ahiram king of Byblos (Gval) as the resting place for his father. If any ruler or governor or general should harm this coffin, may his scepter be broken." The inscription engraved on the sarcophagus in a twenty-two consonant alphabetic script of the Phoenicians, is of the same alphabet and letter style used by the Israelites at the time of the first Temple and was the script used to write the original Old Testament of the Bible. The Ahiram inscription was found in 1923 at Byblos and contains thirty-eight words. It is one of the longest existent inscriptions in the old Phoenician script ever found.

When we turn to the second element of the Masonic name "Hiram Abiff" i.e., "Abiff," we run into trouble. This part of the name is clearly not Hebrew nor is it Phoenician or Arabic in origin.

One might argue that it is a later mistransliteration of an Arabic word "bufham" meaning "understand" (v) or, understanding, knowledge etc. (n). Note the similarity of the word "Baphomet" of the Knights Templar, also believed to mean "knowledge" or "wisdom."

In studying this problematic name "Abiff," I had originally considered that it might represent an error, or mistransliteration of the possible Hebrew verb roots:

Afaff (to encompass)

Hafaff (to align)

Bafham (Ar.) understand

Though such readings are improbable, it is of interest that these three Semitic roots all seem to bear a relation or interpretation reminiscent of stone masons and Freemasonry i.e., "encompass" (compass), "alignment" as in the alignment of stone blocks in a wall, and a word associated with the Knights Templar taken to mean "understanding." Concerning the names of the three ruffians who waylaid and murdered the Grand Master Hiram Abiff, we are on firmer ground, for the three names are surely Semitic and are most likely of Phoenician origin. Jubela, Jubelo, and Jubelum have a number of ancient Near Eastern root parallels.

One possibility is that they contain the name element of the chief Phoenician god, “Baal.” Another reading could be “jebel” the word for mountain in Arabic. Another possibility is “Jubal” a Hebrew personal name pronounced “yooval” and in common use in Israel today. The Masonic word “Jubelum” is easily familiar in Hebrew “yuvalim” which means “streams” or “brooks”, the “um” ending being the plural marker. Though these names or words make sense phonetically, it is very difficult to explain why three different people would all have the same name. Two could be a coincidence, but three? Fortunately, there is a way out of the dilemma, and one which I am confident is the true meaning. Jubela, Jubelo, and Jubelum are not personal names of people at all! Rather, the word, despite its apparent case endings a, o and um, is simply the name “Jubayal” i.e., the Arabic rendering of the Phoenician city of “Gval” or (Javal) a name that translates into “Byblos” in the Greek and known to us, as “Bible.”

In the following I will show that this last interpretation is the correct one, i.e., a hidden allegorical term of the Knights Templar of later times and their Masonic heirs. In order to prove this, let us go back to the 14th century A.D. when the Knights Templar were dispersed and their leaders killed. The year was 1314 A.D. The place was Paris, France. The Grand Master of the Knights Templar writhed in agony over the funeral pyre of the stake. For more than two hundred years, the Templars had fought and died on far flung fields for the glory of kings, popes, and the church—only to be betrayed by all three!

Just before the end, the dying man called out a curse upon the king and pope. The curse took effect shortly, for within the space of one year, both Philip the IV, King of France, and Pope Clement V were dead. The first from an accident and the second from poison. We return to the pyre. In the final moments before oblivion, came the last dying thoughts of the condemned man, Jacques de Molay, last Grand Master of the Knights Templar.

The French King, deeply in debt to the Templars, had charged them with heresy, and together with the weak and vacillating Pope, had brought them before the Inquisition. In this one treacherous act, the king planned not only to erase his debt but to get his hands on the Templar treasure.

Concerning the curse of Jacques de Molay, it must be said in all fairness that no one really knows what the man at the stake said as he died over the fire. There exists no trustworthy reference, as far as I know, concerning his last words at the stake. The only sure fact is that within the space of one year, both the king and the pope were dead.

A supposed eye-witness to the burning said only that De Molay was a very brave man, showing no fear, and that their deaths would be revenged. No exact words were taken down or preserved for posterity. The popular claim that he would see both the king and pope brought before God for judgment, is also without reliable sources and seems a little bit too poetic or stylized to have actually been spoken by a real person in the throes of indescribable agony. The crackling flames and swirling smoke would have choked off any sound coming from the poor man’s pyre. In short, the hearsay curse can only be taken as a combination of different things that were perhaps said to have been spoken by different people who allegedly witnessed the scene. No one really knows.

So it might be imagined that as the condemned man slowly burned on the fire, his last thoughts came in the form of questions and answers. They are not really heard nor actually spoken. Some things are better said in one language than another. What a strange thought for a man only seconds from death! Stranger still, the words might have come in Arabic:

Question: Shoo shikloo Allah?

Answer: Shikloo ayakan howe yared.
What is the form of God?
The form of God is as he pleases (it to be.)

Question: Kif betchoof Malach el Mawet?
Answer: Hatha yat'al fi ilee yashoof.

What does the Angel of Death look like?
It depends who is looking!

Then peace and a dark tunnel that leads to the everlasting light.
So there we have it, the final reckoning and the real meaning of the word "Abiff!" Jacques de Molay is a Christ figure put to death by the church, the Bible (Jubayal), the pope, the Christian king, and the Inquisition. On what do we base this assertion? The proof lies in the Masonic tradition of the three murderers Jubela, Jubelo, and Jubelum who murdered Hiram Abiff in Solomon's Temple. The whole story is an allegorical condemnation of the king and the church! For you see, the Arabic word for the ancient Phoenician city of Gval, Byblos or Bible in English, is Jubayl, none other than the Masonic Jubela, Jubelo, Jubelum. What the hidden meaning of the Masonic story is saying, is that the Bible itself (Jubayal), the King, and the Pope were the three murderers of Hiram Abiff who is one and the same with Jacques de Molay.

After the Knights Templar were dispersed, hunted down, and murdered by the Inquisition, the survivors had to guard their tongues with extreme care, for the king's spies were everywhere. In their hearts, the last Knights Templar cursed the church that had betrayed them. They hid their condemnations in mystery stories, secret codes, and disguised names that only brother Templars (Masons) could understand. Some fled to Scotland, others to places of refuge farther afield. Some even say that they reached America, and perhaps they did, but that is a story for another day!

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Knight Templar Magazine Index - ARCHIVE of ARTICLES

HOME	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------

[Top](#)