The Historical Persona of Hiram Abif

The most contemporary – and to my knowledge the only possible primary – source regarding the life of Hiram Abif is the Holy Bible, specifically the Hebrew Tanakh. Unfortunately, many of the details of Hiram’s life and death are nowhere recorded in the Bible, and, what fragmentary information is provided in the Biblical accounts seems, in many respects, contradictory. Compounding this problem are the many differences in translation of these books, including misunderstandings and misinterpretations of ancient colloquialisms by later translators.

Looking first at the Volume of Sacred Law, we read in the First Book of Kings chapter seven, verses 13 – 15, that

King Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. He [Hiram] was a widow’s son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass, and he was filled with wisdom and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass. And he came to King Solomon and wrought all his work.

The Second Book of Kings goes on to relate that Hiram produced the two pillars Jachin and Boaz, the two bowl-shaped capitals adorned with lilywork, network and pomegranates, a great sea (very large bowl) supported by twelve oxen sculptures, ten bases on wheels holding ten lavers (large bowls), shovels, pots, and basins. These items were all made out of brass, were beautifully adorned by Hiram, and, most importantly, were all located in the porch of King Solomon’s Temple.¹ Curiously, the Bible relates that King Solomon himself created all the gold implements used by the priests inside the Temple,² although this could be a reference to King Solomon having personally ordered the gold implements to be made, presumably, by Hiram Abif.

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¹ Holy Bible, according to the authorized or King James’ Version (Wichita: DeVore & Sons, Inc., 1991), I Kings 7:15 – 7:47.

² Holy Bible, according to the authorized or King James’ Version (Wichita: DeVore & Sons, Inc., 1991), I Kings 7:48 (“Solomon also made all the furnishings that were in the Lord’s Temple . . .”).
Pursuant to the account of the building of the Temple found in the Second Book of Chronicles (II Chronicles 2:12 – 4:32) we are told that King Solomon requested that his friend and Phoenician tributary, King Huram of Tyre, send to Solomon “a man cunning to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in iron, and in purple, and crimson, and blue, and that can skill to grave with the cunning men that are with me in Judah and Jerusalem . . .”³ To which King Huram replied:

And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, of Huram my father’s, the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre, skilful to work in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and in crimson; also to grave any manner of graving, and to find out every device which shall be put to him, with thy cunning men, and with the cunning men of my lord David thy father.⁴

Although in Chronicles it is difficult to discern exactly what Hiram made due to the phraseology used, it seems that Hiram “his father” gilded the Temple in gold, garnished the chambers with precious stones, created the two Cherubim for the Sanctum Sanctorum, made the blue-purple veil to separate the inner chamber, produced 10 gold candlesticks, 10 tables, 10 lavers on bases (for purifying individual offerings), the two pillars with the network and pomegranates, the brass altar, gold altar, the brass sea sitting on 12 oxen (for purification of the priests), brass doors, pots, shovels, fleshhooks, basins, gold vessels and other instruments for the Temple.⁵

In reviewing these two accounts, a Freemason is immediately struck both by the disparities between them, and by what is obviously missing from them. In First Kings Hiram is described as a son of a Naphtali woman whose Tyrian husband is dead. Hiram’s Tyrian father

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³ *Holy Bible*, according to the authorized or King James’ Version (Wichita: DeVore & Sons, Inc., 1991), II Chronicles 2:7.

⁴ *Holy Bible*, according to the authorized or King James’ Version (Wichita: DeVore & Sons, Inc., 1991), II Chronicles 2:13-14.

⁵ *Holy Bible*, according to the authorized or King James’ Version (Wichita: DeVore & Sons, Inc., 1991), II Chronicles 3:1 – 4:22.
was a brass maker and Hiram was noted as very skillful in that art. Pursuant to which, King Hiram sent Hiram the brass maker to his friend King Solomon, where he cast and engraved the many brass fixtures and vessels for the porch of Jehovah’s Temple.

On the other hand, in Second Chronicles, Hiram is said to be a son of a woman from the tribe of Dan and a “Man of Tyre”. In this account, there is no indication that his mother is a widow, and, moreover, he is described by King Hiram as much more than just a skillful brass worker. In fact, Hiram Abif seems to be a veritable Renaissance man of ancient Phoenicia insofar as he is said to be skillful in working with gold, silver, brass, iron, cloth, and engraving metal, stone and wood (timber), as well as being able to “find out every device” which I interpret to mean that he had a mechanical genius in addition to his artistic ability.

In contrast to the First Book of Kings, Hiram the artisan is curiously called “Huram, my father’s” in Second Chronicles. Although Freemasons and Biblical scholars have long debated whether the Hebrew words “HURM ABIV” should be translated as a proper name (Hiram Abif) or a descriptive moniker (Hiram my father), it seems that most agree that the appellation “ABIV” in old Hebrew etymology was used as an honorary title, since the word “Ab” (father) could mean friend, counselor or wise man. Thus, Hiram would probably have been called

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6 For an interesting possible correlation of these accounts of Hiram’s pedigree, see James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons* (London, 1723), 14 at footnote:

... which difficulty is removed by supposing his Mother was either of the Tribe of Dan, or of the Daughters of the City called Dan in the Tribe of Naphtali, and his deceased Father had been a Naphtalite, whence his Mother was called a Widow of Naphtali; for his Father is not called a Tyrian by Descent, but a ‘Man of Tyre’ by Habitation; as Obed Edom the Levite is called a Gittite by living among the Gittites, and the Apostle Paul a Man of Tarsus.

7 Compare the following versions of II Chronicles 2:13: “I am sending you Huram-Abi, a man of great skill” (New International Version); “And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, of Huram my father’s” (King James Version); “misi ergo tibi virum prudentem et scientissimum Hiram patrem meum” (Latin Vulgate); “So sende ich nun einen tüchtigen und verständigen Mann, Hiram, meinen Berater” (Lutheran text).

“Father Hiram” just as today we would refer to a priest as “Father” so and so, or a noted scholar as “Professor” so and so. Dr. James Anderson explained this very fact in a footnote to his Constitutions of 1723, wherein he posits that “Huram my father’s” could be a reference to Hiram Abif having been a master craftsman who was formerly retained by Abibaal (King Hiram’s father), although some scholars maintain that “Abif” was a just a title of respect, with the possessive suffix being merely a peculiarity of the ancient Semitic language.

Another source which may be helpful to ascertain the true identity of the historical Hiram is Antiquities of the Jews by Flavius Josephus. A very colorful character, Josephus was actually born a member of the Jewish priest class in the first century A.D., and actively led some of his people in the revolt against Rome. However, once captured, he managed to “reinterpret” scripture to satisfy the Roman military and even became a consultant to the Romans during their subjugation of the vestiges of the Jewish revolt. Because of his dual role as Jewish priest and Roman citizen, his works on the history of the Jewish people were routinely considered accurate by Western readers. In Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus writes that

Solomon sent for an artificer out of Tyre, whose name was Hiram; he was by birth of the tribe of Naphtali, on the mother's side, (for she was of that tribe) but his father was Ur, of the stock of the Israelites. This man was skilful in all sorts of work; but his chief skill lay in working in gold, and silver, and brass; by whom were made all the mechanical works about the temple, according to the will of Solomon. Moreover, this Hiram made two [hollow] pillars, whose outsides were of brass . . . but there was cast with each of their chapiters lily-work that stood upon the pillar, and it was elevated five cubits, round about which there was net-work interwoven with small palms, made of brass, and covered the lily-work. To this also were hung two hundred pomegranates, in two rows. The one of these

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9 James Anderson, The Constitutions of the Free-Masons (London, 1723), 14 at footnote: “tho’ some think Hiram the King might call Hiram the Architect Father, as learned and skillful Men were wont to be call’d of old Times . . .”


pillars he set at the entrance of the porch on the right hand, and called it Jachin and the other at the left hand, and called it Booz.\(^\text{12}\)

Josephus’ account largely mirrors those found in the Bible, and he seems to have struck a compromise between First Kings (wherein Hiram was said to be principally a brass artisan) and Second Chronicles (which leaves little in which Hiram was not skilled) by stating that he was skillful working with “gold, silver and brass”. One very interesting difference between the Biblical accounts and Antiquities, lays in the ethnic identity of Hiram Abif’s father. While the Bible at least implies that Hiram’s father was Tyrian, Josephus clearly states that he was Jewish (“of the stock of the Israelites”) but it is unclear if the “Ur” in the line “but his father was Ur” is meant to be a proper name, or to indicate from whence Hiram’s father came. If in fact Ur is meant to be a place name, that would mean that Hiram’s father – though ethnically an Israelite – originated in the Chaldean city of Ur, which is near the southeastern coast of modern-day Iraq.

These three accounts are all that is said about Grand Master Hiram Abif in the earliest known sources on the matter; the Bible and the writings of Josephus.

But what of Hiram’s directing the stone masons to build the temple? Where does Hiram Abif place his plans for the construction? Where does it say that he is killed by three jealous craftsmen? The truth is, these items of our legend are nowhere found in the traditional Biblical cannon. The historical Hiram Abif was not an architect, probably was not a stonemason and was


> The copies of these epistles remain at this day, and are preserved not only in our books, but among the Tyrians also; insomuch that if any one would know the certainty about them, he may desire of the keepers of the public records of Tyre to show him them, and he will find what is there set down to agree with what we have said. I have said so much out of a desire that my readers may know that we speak nothing but the truth, and do not compose a history out of some plausible relations, which deceive men and please them at the same time, nor attempt to avoid examination, nor desire men to believe us immediately; nor are we at liberty to depart from speaking truth, which is the proper commendation of an historian, and yet be blameless: but we insist upon no admission of what we say, unless we be able to manifest its truth by demonstration, and the strongest vouchers.
definitely not the Master Mason overseeing the building of King Solomon’s Temple. In fact, it is clearly stated in many parts of the Bible that the actual design and plans of Jehovah’s Temple were produced by King David through God’s inspiration, and given to his son Solomon to execute.13 Furthermore, although neither Biblical account mentions what happens to Hiram Abif after the Temple is completed, it would be hard to impute his legendary death and re-internment into the scriptures’ silence. While the Bible describes in great details the completion of the Temple, its dedication and the installation of the Ark in the Sanctum Sanctorum, it most definitely does not say that anyone was buried in the Temple.14 It would most likely have been considered an abomination for any corpse to be interred anywhere near the Ark of the Covenant and the House of the Shekinah.

Therefore, based upon the limited textual evidence available to us, I believe that the historical personage known to us as Hiram Abif was the son of a woman from the tribe of Naphtali15 and lived under the jurisdiction of Hiram of Tyre in ancient Phoenicia. This Hiram was a very skilled and noted artisan, who was sent to King Solomon and successfully crafted all the brass sculptures and implements used in the porch of the Temple, and possibly cast many of the silver and gold implements as well. Hiram was so expert in his field that he was referred to as Master (Father) Hiram by the King of Tyre. While much more than that cannot be said with any certainty, I imagine that if Hiram Abif did not immediately return to his home in Tyre after the completion of the Temple, he was possibly kept on by King Solomon for the building of his own palace, and perhaps later his wives’ pagan temples.


14 See, e.g., Holy Bible, according to the authorized or King James’ Version (Wichita: DeVore & Sons, Inc., 1991), II Chronicles 5.

The Legendary Hiram Abif

Not unlike the results of our search for the identity of the historical Hiram Abif, the origins and identity of the legendary character have proven very much elusive. It seems that the Hiram Abif we know in the third degree ceremony was not in the mind of our operative brethren in Medieval England, insofar as his name and legend are almost completely absent from the Old Charges. There is no mention of Hiram Abif in the Regius Manuscript of 1390, and the later Cooke Manuscript of 1450 relates only that “Solomon held four score thousand masons at work [a]nd the son of the king of Tyre was his master mason.”\(^\text{16}\) This is less information even than is contained in the Bible, and a gross mistranslation of the Hebrew. The Old Constitutions according to Roberts repeats this misunderstanding of a mistranslation when it states that “there was a King of another Region or Country, called Hiram . . . and he had a Son called Amon, and he was Master of Geometry, and he was chief Master of all his Masons of Carving Work, and of all other Work of Masonry that belong’d to the Temple.”\(^\text{17}\)

That’s not to say that it isn’t possible that an oral tradition of the Hiramic Legend existed in old England. Though there is no direct textual evidence of our Hiramic Legend, certain disjointed elements of the allegory can be found throughout the Old Charges.\(^\text{18}\)

The London Grand Lodge Constitutions of 1723, compiled by Anderson and Desaguliers, contain more detailed accounts of Hiram Abif, although they largely track and rationalize the


\(^{17}\) J. Roberts, *The History of Free Masons, etc.*, (London, 1722).

\(^{18}\) See, e.g., *A Poem of Moral Duties [Regius Manuscript]*, (England: 1390) (tale of the Four Crowned Martyrs); George William Speth, trans., *Matthew Cooke Manuscript*, (England: 1450) (Jabal and Jubal as the names of the sons of Lamech; Jabal having discovered Geometry and masonry, and made two pillars with all known science and art written on them – one would not sink and the other would not burn; the friendship of Ashur and Nimrod prefiguring the relationship between King Hiram and King Solomon).
same Biblical descriptions we explored earlier. Some interesting points contained in Anderson’s Constitutions (1723) are that the author describes Hiram Abif as “the most accomplish’d Mason upon Earth,” and further that “King Solomon was Grand Master of the Lodge at Jerusalem, and the learned King Hiram was Grand Master of the Lodge at Tyre, and the inspired Hiram Abif was Master of Work . . .” These statements are in line with some of the legendary descriptions of Grand Master Hiram Abif given in our ritual and lectures of the Third Degree. However, instead of mentioning the tragic death of the “Master of Work”, Anderson claims that,

after the Erection of Solomon’s Temple, Masonry was improv’d in all the neighboring Nations; for the many Artists employed about it, under Hiram Abif, after it was finish’d, dispers’d themselves into Syria, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Chaldea, Babylonia, Media, Persia, Arabia, Africa, Lesser Asia, Greece and other Parts of Europe, where they taught this liberal Art . . . [and] built many glorious Piles, and became the Grand Masters, each in his own Territory . . .

While this doesn’t necessarily foreclose the death and re-interment of Hiram Abif, it certainly implies that all the secrets belonging to Master Mason were not lost before the completion of King Solomon’s Temple.

Interestingly, the legend of Hiram Abif seems to have been developed more thoroughly – or at least exposited more explicitly – between 1723 and 1738. For, in 1738, Anderson issued a new edition of the Constitutions, which contained much more detail on the building of King Solomon’s Temple and Hiram Abif’s life and death. For example, Anderson in 1738 states that Hiram Abif was not just a Master builder, but also “in Solomon’s absence fill’d the chair as

Deputy Grand Master, and in his Presence was the Senior Grand Warden, or principal Surveyor and Master of Work”. 22 Furthermore, Anderson adds that

It [the Temple] was finished in the short space of 7 Years and 6 Months, to the Amazement of all the World; when the Cape-Stone was celebrated by the Fraternity with great Joy. But their Joy was soon interrupted by the sudden Death of their Dear Master Hiram Abbif, whom they decently interred in the Lodge near the Temple according to antient Usage. 23

And further, “many particular Lodges were constituted under Grand Master Solomon, who annually assembled the Grand Lodge at Jerusalem for transmitting their Affairs to Posterity: tho’ still the Loss of good Hiram Abbif was lamented.” 24

Anderson’s Constitutions of 1738 also contains an address entitled “A Defense of Masonry” originally presented by Martin Clare in 1730 as a response to the expose “Masonry Dissected” which was an Anti-Masonic pamphlet that referred to the Craft’s ritual as an “unintelligible Heap of Stuff and Jargon, without common Sense or Connection.” 25 In offering this defense, Mr. Clare explains some of the many secret symbols employed in the Legend of the Third Degree, including why Hiram’s body was found by use of a shrub or sprig of acacia, relating that the acacia was used in ancient embalming practices, and that finding a murdered friend’s body on a hill by a shrub was a story often told by Greek and Roman poets. 26

This disparity between the facts surrounding Hiram Abif in the Constitutions of 1723 and 1738 have led some historians to believe that the Master Mason degree – along with the Hiramic Legend – were created sometime after 1725 but before 1727. Prior to 1729, most literature only

indicated two degrees were regularly worked; Entered Apprentice and Fellow Craft, implying thereby, that the Master Mason’s degree was an innovation of the London Grand Lodge. However, I am inclined to agree with those who posit that the “new” Master Mason degree created in the late 1720s was actually just the separation of multiple parts and lectures of the Fellow Craft degree. This would explain the descriptions of Hiram Abif and the building of the Temple of Solomon contained in the Second Degree’s Middle Chamber lecture, as well as the lack of recorded opposition to the “new” Degree of Master Mason.

Regardless of the antiquity of the Hiramic Legend, two questions remain: how was this legend originated, and what was, or is, the intended meaning of the legendary Hiram Abif?

Unfortunately, those questions also cannot be answered with certainty. As brother Coil remarks, “the most striking of [Grand Lodge’s] innovations was the Legend of Hiram, the origin of which is unknown.” This problem could possibly be due to the fact that, in 1720, the Grand Lodge “met with a severe loss in the destruction of important manuscripts committed to the flames by over-scrupulous members of St. Paul’s Lodge, who were alarmed at the proposed publicity about to be given them.” To my knowledge, there are no letters, autobiographies or diary entries of Anderson, Preston or Desaguliers, which set forth, in their own words, what the ritualists of the early Grand Lodge meant to impart to the newly raised Master Mason. But,


while this lack of documentary evidence is frustrating to the rigorous scholar, it has provided ample room for fanciful speculation as much today as in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Before embarking on my own interpretation of the Hiramic Legend and the symbol of Hiram Abif, I will briefly discuss some of the many theories that have developed over the centuries.

One theory posits that Hiram represents the Christ, who was a worthy and holy man with the great secret of eternal life, but was betrayed, murdered, and “raised” on the third day. If we assess the name “Huram Abiv” through Qabbalistic methods, there seems some support to this explanation, for, Huram Abiv in Hebrew has the numeric value of 273, which correlates to the numeric value of the phrase “Eben Maasu ha-Bonim”, meaning “the Stone that the builders rejected.”31 The rejection of the Stone – or Hiram – by the builders has obvious relation to the Hiramic Legend, and it was also an appellation given to Jesus Christ in the Bible. Further, the latter part of this Hebrew phrase bears striking resemblance to the Substitute for the Master’s Word. However, other than the universal themes of betrayal, death and resurrection, very little parallels are found in the two stories. It does not make much sense that a brotherhood founded in Christian England would need a legend with an ancient Hebrew character to teach them the story of Christ that they would have already learned in home, school and Church.

On the other end of the spectrum, many noted 19th century Masonic scholars contended that the legend of Hiram Abif was “the modern heir” of the Ancient Mid-Eastern Mystery cults. For example, Albert Mackey saw Hiram Abif as a representation of the gods Osiris, Baal and Bacchus.32 Albert Pike implies the link between Hiram Abif and Osiris, noting the death, loss,


and rebirth as well as the prominence of the acacia (tamarisk tree) in the ritual, but he confusingly also equates “Khurum” with Horus of the Egyptians, who was the son and avenger of Osiris. It is this Horus, which is the Redeemer, the Equilibrium between the Father-principle and the Mother-principle, and thus known as the Kosmos in Neo-platonic parlance. Kosmos is “‘a word signifying equally Beauty and Order, or the Universe itself.’”

Pike also points out the potential significance of the names of the three ruffians, insofar as they represent both the “good” (being “Jah”) and “bad” (Baal) as well as contain one part of the Hindu mantra A-U-M.

Therefore, according to Pike, since the name of Hiram Abif can be closely linked to the Egyptian god Horus and the Greek Sun god Heracles, Hiram is a modern representation of the ancient cult of the redeeming Sun. While I do of course see similarities between some of the ancient Greco-Egyptian legends of the murdered and re-born god of immortality, I strain to imagine that Anglican ministers – whom many of the learned Speculative founders of the London Grand Lodge were – would purposefully try to re-create pagan rituals. Even though the knowledge of the Greeks, Romans and Egyptians was in vogue at the end of the Renaissance and beginning of the Enlightenment, I doubt that scholars, ministers and aristocrats would risk the approbation of the Crown, the Church of England, and the scorn of commoners by facilitating an obviously non-Christian ritual.

Another very interesting theory put forth, is that the Hiramic Legend was politically motivated, being an allegory of the execution of King Charles I of England and an exhortation to

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33 Albert Pike, “Chapter III: The Master”, in *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, (Charleston: Supreme Council of the Thirty Third Degree for the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States, 1871).

34 Albert Pike, “Chapter III: The Master”, in *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, (Charleston: Supreme Council of the Thirty Third Degree for the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States, 1871).
action by the Jacobites. In 1649, Charles I was executed by Cromwell’s Parliament after the English Civil War. This was the first time in England that a sitting regent was executed by the Parliament (rather than an invading army) and scholars suggest that it was thoroughly traumatic for the many royalist Freemasons of the time, such as Elias Ashmole and Inigo Jones.35 Cromwell was later overthrown, and the monarchy was restored by Charles II. However, his son James II was deposed by Parliament in 1688 and replaced by the Hanoverian dynasty. There were still a number of Englishmen who were loyal to the House of Stuart, and supported James Edward (the Old Pretender) and Bonnie Prince Charlie (the Young Pretender) in exile. These people were called Jacobites, and it is surmised that the Master Mason degree and Hiramic Legend was created to impart on Freemasons the need to restore the House of Stuart (Hiram Abif) to its proper place (the English throne) after its deposition by the three ruffians (Cromwell, Parliament, and the House of Hanover).36 There are many interesting links between 17th and early 18th century Freemasonry and the Jacobite cause, such as the fact that Michael Andrew Ramsay (noted Freemason and inventor of the High Grades) was the tutor to the Young Pretender while in French exile, and, after the death of James II, James’ son the Old Pretender was known as the “widow’s son” for at least 17 years.37 While this is definitely an intriguing theory, it runs counter to the many exhortations to brethren in the Old Charges and Constitutions to avoid partisan politics and treasonous plots. Further, there was a failed Jacobite uprising in


1715 (prior to the first evidence of the London Grand Lodge’s utilizing the Third Degree) and a final failed uprising in 1745. If this were merely a political statement, presumably there would be no further need for the Hiramic Legend after the fate of the Jacobite cause was sealed in 1745.

**An Individual Interpretation**

Every great allegory can be interpreted many ways, on many levels. Perhaps that is part of the point of using such allegories: by avoiding dogmatism in the explanation of these mysteries, we encourage each brother to undertake the diligent work to come to his own personal understanding of the tale, thereby obtaining a deeper and more long-lasting understanding of the same.

The first level of interpretation is the literal, wherein the story of Hiram is of a wise and good man, who suffered death rather than betray his word to his friends and employers. For this, they punished the killers severely, went to great lengths to find his body, and re-interred his body in a most holy and sacred place. One of the most common literal interpretations of the Legend’s meaning is that a Mason will be rewarded in the afterlife by being a good and true friend and brother. In this way, it teaches us the importance of morality, fortitude and fidelity.

On a secondary, level, the Legend can be explained as the story of a wise and good man who was killed because of a great secret word that he possessed. By killing Hiram, the ruffians caused the word to be forever lost to humanity. Hiram’s friends so loved him that they found his body, and “raised” him before re-interring his body in the Temple. On this level, one could view the Hiramic Legend as a cautionary tale against violence. After all, the ruffians used all sorts of

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threats of violence and actual harm to extort the secret word from Hiram, but they ultimately failed, and, in destroying Hiram, destroyed the very secret they were after.

On yet another symbolic level of understanding, some have said that the “raising” of Hiram is meant to teach us that our soul lives on after death, insofar as Hiram Abif represents the individual Mason, or man’s soul. Just as the newly raised Mason is brought up – from “death” to “life” by the grip of a faithful friend – so too Hiram Abif was “raised” by his friends. As attractive as it may be to find the universal mystery theme re-enacted here of the murdered God or dead Soul brought back to eternal life, the ritual clearly does not bring Grand Master Hiram Abif back to life. His body is just raised out of the earth in order to be re-interred in a more holy and suitable location.

Therefore, I think that these interpretations somewhat miss the mark. After all, what boy isn’t taught about the immortality of the soul in Sunday school, obviating the need for a two-hour spectacle to impress upon him this universal truth? And, if the Hiramic Legend is needed to teach the new Master Masons to be good, honest and trustworthy, one must question whether these newly raised brothers were qualified to be admitted as Entered Apprentices in the first place.

After much contemplation, I have come to a quasi-mystical interpretation of the Hiramic Legend. That is, I believe it tells the story of the Fall of the Human Spirit, and the manner in which it can regain its place in union with God. That is, if we accept Hiram Abif as a symbol for the Spirit (a perfectly good and wise being), the weapons used by the three ruffians to murder him could be interpreted as those aspects of existence which trap the Spirit in the physical form. For example, the working tool of the 24” gauge is explained in our lectures as, “being divided into 24 equal parts [] emblematical of the 24 hours in the day.” Thus, the 24” gauge represents
Time. We are taught in the lectures to “square our actions by the Square of Virtue.” While it might be a stretch, the Square used by Jubelo might represent Duality, for, to perceive Virtue, there must be an equal and opposite Vice. The Setting Maul used by Jubelum is very sparsely mentioned in our lectures, and is only described as “that weapon which slew our Grand Master Hiram Abif.” However, the Setting Maul was an instrument used by operative Masons to place or “set” the stones in their final place, to make sure that they did not move. Thus, I think the Setting Maul could be considered emblematic of Physical Space. Therefore, the Spirit is accosted and constrained by the illusions of Space, Time, and Duality.

Once killed, Hiram is secreted in rubbish and later buried in the earth. This could be interpreted as representing the “entombment” of the Spirit in physical matter. Nevertheless, the sprig of acacia remains alive at the head of the tomb, which I agree with most scholars, symbolizes the eternal life and immortality of the Spirit.

Finally, after tracking down and executing the killers, King Solomon and King Hiram of Tyre find Hiram’s grave, and “raise” his body by use of the Strong Grip of Master Mason or Lion’s Paw. Once again, our ritual does not state that Hiram Abif is brought back to life by this grip, or that he is admitted to heaven. Instead, we are told that the Kings find and raise his body for the purpose of taking it to the Temple for “more decent interment.” Thus, after King Solomon (representative of Wisdom) destroys the illusions of Time (Jubela), Duality (Jubelo) and Space (Jubelum), the Lion’s Paw is used to raise the Spirit out of the animated tomb of flesh, and be joined with God by interment in or near his Holy Temple. In my interpretation, it is not the lost Master’s Word which is the true secret of the Degree, but rather the proper meaning of the “Strong Grip of Master Mason or Lion’s Paw” utilized to accomplish the reunification of the Spirit with its source.
Although there have been many misunderstandings, perversions, and wild conjectures of the meaning of the legend of the third degree on certain levels, there is not necessarily a “right” and a “wrong” interpretation of it. So long as the true intentions of our Speculative forebears are lost to history, it is our duty to interpret the meanings of the ritual as best we can. Though we might not find the “true” secret of the Master Mason’s degree, as long as there are learned brethren available to contemplate these mysteries, I have no doubt we will at least have a proper substitute.