CHAPTER 12

Freemasonry and Judaism

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Introduction

The relations between Freemasonry, Judaism, Jews, and Freemasons have attracted the attention of many buffs, bigots, and conspiracy theorists, and as a result the vast majority of information on the topic is pernicious and delusional drivel. In this contribution I seek to offer some solid ground amidst the quicksand by means of a very quick overview of the religious and social aspects of these real or imagined ties while providing a more substantial discussion of the political and apocalyptic aspects. The intrinsic significance of all four connections is little, yet, tragically, the extrinsic importance of the limited political association between Jews and Freemasons has been significant, while the extrinsic impact of the imagined apocalyptic aspect has been catastrophical.

The Religious Aspect

Both Freemasons and Jews and their enemies have commented on the apparent influence of Judaism on Freemasonry. In the late eighteenth century the German officer Ernst August Anton Göchhausen, who is today remembered as a whistleblower about the allegedly nefarious aims of the Illuminati, confidently proclaimed that "no order bears more revealing marks or birthmarks—let me emphasize this very appropriate word—than the symbolism of masonry, which is centered on the purest Jewish hieroglyphics. All its implements, cloths, institutions, instructions, as well as its history—it has been published—are a heap of Hebraic imagery" (Göchhausen 1786: 398). In the 1890s the Most Reverend Johann Gabriel Léon Louis Meurin, Titular Archbishop of Nisibis and Bishop of Port-Louis (Mauritius) wrote that "everything in Freemasonry is fundamentally Jewish, exclusively Jewish, enthusiastically Jewish, from the beginning to the end" (Meurin 1893: 260). And in the late nineteenth century

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the Italian rabbi Elijah Banamozeq, a radically unorthodox and universalist thinker who believed in the unity of Judaism with all other religions, observed in his *Israel et Humanité* (*Israel and Humanity*) that "Judaism has been accused of forming a sort of Freemasonry" and that it is certain that "the theology of Freemasonry is quite similar to that of the Kabbalah" and that "the Aggadah was the popular form of a secret discipline whose initiation methods bore the most striking resemblances to Freemasonry" (Benamozegh 1995: 78). But are such assertions and allegations true?

Freemasonry developed in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Britain. It was created by mostly Anglicans in the midst of a Christian society. In the early modern period Christians were completely ignorant of and disinterested in the reality of rabbinical Judaism, that is the form into which Pharisaic Judaism evolved after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Whatever they thought they knew about Judaism was the result of the fact that the Christian Bible encompassed the so-called ‘Old Testament’, which was by and large identical to the Judaic *Tanakh*. Judaic in origin, the Old Testament was a Christian document, interpreted by Christian theologians from a Christian perspective in order to show the so-called economy of salvation—that is the idea that Christ recapitulated and fulfilled in his passion and resurrection the whole of human history (Tillich 1972: 43 ff). But the Old Testament was not equal to the New Testament.

As one of the founding texts of Christendom, the Old Testament was a source of inspiration for those who created and developed within Christian, European civilization institutions, organizations, and movements, including Freemasonry. But does that mean that as a result we may speak here of Jewish influence? I do not think so. The Hebrew religion influenced Pharisaic Judaism, which in turn influenced Christianity, which influenced Christian culture, which influenced European civilization. Therefore if we find Old Testament themes in, for example, Freemasonry, then we must follow the chain of influence in proper order, moving from the closest relation to the most remote. In other words, we have to assume first that the presence of the Old Testament theme is a manifestation of the dominance of Christian culture within European Civilization, then we might look at the Christian religion, and so on. Only if we can see that the apparently Old Testament theme is in fact directly derived from the Tanakh without the mediation of the Christian Bible, Christian religion, and Christian culture may we define it as a token of influence of Pharisaic Judaism—but even then not necessarily of rabbinical Judaism, which is, like Christianity, a daughter of Pharisaic Judaism.

There is no evidence that the most important Old Testament stories, themes and symbols that found their way into Freemasonry were directly derived from