

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE GOAT

BY EUGENE W. PLAWIUK, M.M.

Our first experience upon entering the Lodge as apprentices is to be warned about the Goat. Even before we are informed of 'in whom we should put our trust', we are given knowing looks followed by such comments as; "he's going to get the goat" or " you are going to ride the goat" or even "look out for the goat". It is a good thing that we are informed that we place our trust in God, since some poor unfortunate entered apprentice could understandably be forgiven for replying; "In the Goat".

The origin of this humorous initiatory jest about the Goat is shrouded by the veils of time. Several Older brethren I have conferred with seem to have no idea of where or when it originated. It could have originally been imported from America by that practical joker and fellow Mason; Benjamin Franklin. Or it could be a unique recent development of post World War II Masonry. Certainly I can find no references to the Goat or even "riding the Goat" in MacKay's Masonic Encyclopedia, Duncan's Ritual, Morals and Dogma by Albert Pike or even FreeMasonry and its Etiquette by William Preston Campbell-Everden. Even such anti-Masonic writers as Walton Hannah (Darkness Visible and Christian by Degree) make no reference to it, and it would certainly be something he would not be loathe to use to slander the Craft.

Thus with such sparse reference sources available we could easily dismiss our Goat as a simple joke, a hangover from those other fraternities that abound on college and university campuses across this great nation. In fact a bit of schoolboy prank amongst pals.

Thus dismissed, as a bit of tomfoolery I wouldn't have much of a paper to present this evening. Yet can we dismiss our ancient friend who has played such a great role in the myths and legends, of all religions and cultures of Western Europe? The Goat dates back to the very earliest primordial memories of Man. And perhaps even used as a joke within the Lodge it would do us well to look at him as a totem or symbol of the Great Work. In fact if you will bear with me I think I shall be able to prove to you that, using the training we are recommended as Fellow Craft Masons, we can find that the humble Goat too reflects the truth of Masonry "veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols".

The Goat is known to all of us through the ancient science of Astrology first developed by the Chaldeans, or as they are commonly known; Babylonians.

The Goat symbolizes male fertility, and is known, to even those who peruse the daily astrology columns of the local newspaper, as representing the astrological sign of Capricorn; Dec. 22 to January 22. Capricorn is a combination of both a Goat and a fish. According to J.E. Cirlot in his Dictionary of Symbols; this dual aspect refers to the dual tendencies of life towards the abyss (or water) " or chaos of the beginning of time, and "the heights or mountains "or order and malkuth (the earth) as symbolized by the goat aspect. In fact the very same Babylonians who gave us this symbol of Capricorn and the science of Astrology were the first Temple builders, and the goat for them symbolized the essence of the Temple or Lodge. An animal usually found climbing in the mountains. Thus from the first ziggurats to the Temple of Solomon even to later Churches the Goat was seen as symbol of Man striving to reach God through his building of Temples that represented mountains.

Since in all religions Gods abode is symbolized by mountains.

What a better symbol to attribute to our own striving to understand the G.A.O.T.U. then a Goat. And here too we find an anagram for Goat.

According to a research monograph on the Dionysian Artificers and Early Masonry edited by Manly P. Hall, the symbolism of the goat relates to the prechristian God Pan, Dionysius. The Goat-God was accepted by the later Greek Mystery Schools as the symbol of the Temple Builders. In fact the Dionysian Artificers was such a mystery school. They viewed practical Temple Construction as a source of understanding the mystery of Nature and God; thus being one of the early esoteric schools from which Masonry has inherited certain symbols and teachings.

Most specifically this Greek Mystery School developed the Ionic Column, which are introduced to us in the FellowCraft Degree. Once again, this column which acted as the corner stone of Greek Architecture literally holds up the temple; the very support for the Mountain or home of God.

The Ionic Column is a later development over the Doric, having developed in the 7th Century B.C., it allowed for more filigree work in its base and at its top. It is seen as being more feminine than the masculine Doric Column.

"The Dionysian Artificers or architects were an association of scientific men, who were incorporated by command of the Kings of Pergamus into a corporate body. They had the city of Teas given to them. The members of this association were intimately connected with the Dionysian mysteries, were distinguished from the uninitiated inhabitants of Teos by their Science and by words and signs by which they could recognize their Brethren of the Order.

Like Freemasons they were divided into Lodges, which were characterized by different names. Such is the nature of that association of architects, who erected those splendid edifices in Ionia, whose ruins even afford us instructions, while they excite our surprise. If it be possible to prove the identity of any two societies, from the coincidence of their external forms, we are authorized to conclude that the Fraternity of Ionian architects and the Fraternity of Freemasons are exactly the same" says Dr. R. Swineburne Clymer in his book: Ancient Mystic Oriental Masonry.

Besides representing the Temple or Home of the gods, the goat represents the active male sexual or fertility aspect of nature. As Capricorn he rules the returning sun, from the darkness of winter solstice. In the sign of the Goat/Capricorn the sun begins to resume its ascent towards the spring Equinox. As well the goat horn is a hallow phallic symbol, represented even today as the cup of plenty or cornucopia which we see represented in the Lodge.

Says J. E. Cirlot; " In mythology it was the goat Almathea who fed the infant Jupiter an milk. Given that the general symbolism of the horn is strength, and that the goat has maternal implications, and in addition that the shape of the horn (phallic outside and hollow inside) endows it with complex symbolism (including that of the lingam or symbol of generation) it is easy to understand its allegorical use as the horn of abundance. Plobb points out also that the cornucopia is an expression of prosperity deriving from its association with the Zodiacal sign of Capricorn."

The androgynous symbolism of the horn of plenty is typical of the symbolism of the goat in general. While the Greek Goat Gods Pan and Dionysius were male, we look at the goat as an animal in masculine terms while it is both male and female. The identification of the male goat in by his beard, since both genders have horns. The phrase " by my beard, or he pulled my beard " as well as the style of beard called a 'goatee' all relate to the goat.

The goat-Gods Pan and Dionysius in Greek mythology represent the forest and unbridled nature; lust in the case of Pan and Drinking, and fertility in the case of Dionysius. Hence from the OED we have the term for a lecherous older man; "you old Goat". Pan is represented as being half human, half goat with horns, and would later be used in medieval times to represent the devil.

Ironically the horns on the head of Michalangelos statue of Moses are also Goat horns, symbolizing not the devil but the power of nature and natures God; Fiat Lux. For in the bible it states that Moses was beheld by his people as having two rays of Light springing forth from his head.

"Hark! My Beloved! Here he comes, bounding over the mountains, leaping over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young wild goat." "My beloved is mine and I am his; he delights in the lilies. While the day is cool and shadows are dispersing, turn my beloved, and show yourself a gazelle or a young wild goat on the hills where cinnamon grows." "How beautiful you are my dearest, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are like doves, your hair like a flock of goats streaming down Mount Gilead." The Song of Songs (Which is Solomon's).

Herein as well in the Old Testament we find the beautiful love poem which views the goat as symbolizing nature, and fertility as it did in prechristian times. In the Song of Songs both lovers refer to each other as goats. As to be expected since the lovers in this poem are a shepherd and shepherdess herding goats!!! And we have the symbolism of the goats in relationship to sacred mountains or temples. It is enough to mention that this song is known as Solomon's who plays such an important role in Freemasonry.

In medieval times clerical knights and military orders made up of priests during the crusades differentiated themselves from regular knights by riding upon goats rather than horses. This tradition can be seen in the Knights Templar who would ride horses but two knights to one horse, thus representing their clerical origins.

Need I relate the most obvious use of the goat known to all Master Masons? The Scapegoat. An animal who leads the others to slaughter now commonly used to refer to the unwitting victim of some malice. It is obvious that the initiate stands in for Hiram Abiff and takes his blows accordingly. In referring to the goat perhaps we are unconsciously warning the entered apprentice of his ultimate end in his sojourn through the Degrees.

As I mentioned earlier the Boat and the Goat-God Pan became equated with the devil in medieval Christianity. But to medieval occultists especially Rosicrucians the goat symbolized the elemental energies of the earth, the sign of Saturn and the alchemical element derived therefrom.

In the Tarot it is the Major Arcana card #15 the Devil, who shows a goat headed deity with a man and women chained to him. The symbolism is that of people who strive for material rather than spiritual gain.

The Goat of Mendes or Baphomet whom the Templars were accused of worshipping is a Goat Headed deity, being formed of both male and female principles, with a Caduceus of Mercury for its phallus. One arm points up and one down, with the Latin ' Solve et Coagula' written on them. This is not the Christian devil but a symbol of the ancient alchemists representing the fact that nature and nature's God is a combination and balance of male and female forces, light and darkness, moisture and dryness. The very principle of Hermes Trismegistus; "As Above So Below" is what is symbolized by Baphomet.

Another Goat headed deity worshiped by the ancient pagan Celtic peoples was Cernunnos the horned god of the Wood. Today in witchcraft covens the goat head is seen to symbolize this ancient deity. Unfortunately to those who remain in the dark, these goat deities are seen as something evil rather than as the symbol of the earth, fertility, the prima mater, and the first principle.

Freemasonry in its past like its predecessor the Knights Templar have been accused of being in league with the Devil, being a satanic tool etc.

That has arisen from the fact that Freemasons by their initiation into the Light have been eager to research and study the Mystical symbols of the past and present, without fear or irrational prejudice. In times past of religious persecution and superstition the Mystical Mason has treaded the path of heresy in search of the Light of Truth.

I hope that this paper has afforded us all a broader view of meaning and depth of the symbolism of even something as simple as "our little joke", about the Goat.