

The mysterious origins of Freemasonry



The origins of **Freemasonry** are complex, shrouded in mystery, and surrounded by legends. There is no clear consensus on the exact founding of Freemasonry, but its development is generally associated with England in the early 18th century. Here's an overview of the key historical elements and theories regarding the foundation of this organization:

Medieval Roots in Mason Guilds

Freemasonry traces its roots to the ancient operative mason guilds of the Middle Ages. These guilds consisted of craftsmen specialized in building cathedrals and stone structures. They held technical knowledge and trade secrets passed from master to apprentice. These guilds met in "lodges," which were spaces where they worked and shared technical expertise.

The Transition to Speculative Freemasonry

In the 17th century, Freemasonry evolved from an operative practice (linked to the masonry trade) to a speculative one, where people from other professions were accepted into lodges. These members were not literal stonemasons but used the tools and symbols of operative masons as metaphors for moral, spiritual, and philosophical exploration. This transition marked the beginning of modern Freemasonry as we know it today.

The Creation of the Grand Lodge of London (1717)

The most commonly cited event marking the start of modern Freemasonry is the founding of the **Grand Lodge of London and Westminster** on June 24, 1717. On this day, four existing Masonic lodges in London gathered at the "Goose and Gridiron" tavern to form the first Grand Lodge in the world.

The exact names of the founders of this first Grand Lodge are not well-documented. However, key figures like

Anthony Sayer, **George Payne**, and **John Theophilus Desaguliers** played significant roles in shaping the new organization.

- **Anthony Sayer** is often referred to as the first "Grand Master" of this Grand Lodge. Although little is known about him, he is considered one of the founding figures.
- **George Payne** was elected Grand Master in 1718 and again in 1720. He contributed to formalizing and codifying the ancient rules and regulations of Freemasonry.
- **John Theophilus Desaguliers**, an Anglican minister and scientist, was one of the most influential figures in the movement. He played a key role in establishing the philosophical foundations and rituals of speculative Freemasonry, incorporating elements of Enlightenment thinking and modern science.

Anderson's Constitutions and Their Influence

In 1723, **James Anderson**, a Scottish Presbyterian minister, published *The Constitutions of the Freemasons*, a foundational text that laid out the principles and rules of speculative Freemasonry. This document, revised several times over the decades, was one of the first attempts to codify Masonic rites and obligations. It had a profound impact on the structure of the organization and contributed to its global spread.

Myths and Legends of Ancient Origins

Although modern Freemasonry's foundation is linked to 18th-century England, many Freemasons believe the order's origins date back to much older traditions. Some claim that Freemasonry originates from the builders of King Solomon's Temple, others from the mysteries of ancient Egypt, or even the medieval Knights Templar. These stories are largely symbolic and legendary, serving to root Freemasonry in a long spiritual and esoteric tradition.

Conclusion

Freemasonry as we know it today is the result of a complex blend of medieval building traditions, Enlightenment thought, and ancient mysticism. The official founding of the first Grand Lodge in 1717 marks a pivotal moment in this evolution, though Freemasonry's influences reach back centuries, and in some interpretations, millennia.

Sources

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