

Academia Lodge № 847

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1° Tracing Board



First Degree Tracing Board
W. Bro. Josiah Bowring

Oil on panel, 1819

This is the archetypal tracing board of the Entered Apprentice degree. The essential symbolism of the first degree is arranged in a columnar order:

1. the setting Sun, the Doric pillar symbolizing Strength ("S"), and the Level
2. the All Seeing Eye of Deity, the Ionic pillar symbolizing Wisdom ("W"), and the Square
3. the Moon, the Corinthian pillar symbolizing Beauty ("B"), and the Plumb

These arrangements have relevance within Masonic ritual, where the pillars are associated with the officers of the Lodge, and the tools represent their philosophical and moral tasks.

The floor upon which everything rests in this painting is an alternative surface of black and white tiles. Masons call this the Mosaic Pavement, and it refers (among other things) to the realities of human existence, "checkered with good and evil."

Although the lower world is beset with duality, it is not left helpless in the face of it. On the floor (between "S" and "B") we see the blueprint of the Temple, and a ladder leading upward to the supernal world. It is Jacob's Ladder, and the "angels" on the ladder are the allegorical figures of Faith, Hope and Charity.

The two blocks of stone represent the Rough and Perfect Ashlars, symbolizing the undeveloped and developed man.

Note the symbolic Key suspended from the ladder at the point of Hope, who is classically represented with an anchor. It is one of the oldest symbols in Freemasonry, although some rituals no longer refer to it.

Finally, note the beautiful golden border around the image, This is a symbol called the Indented Skirting or Tesselated Border. William Preston defined it as "a striking emblem" exemplified "by Divine Wisdom concentrating into one mass the disjointed parts of the Creation and cementing the whole in union for general preservation and protection."

Notes by Shawn Eyer, P.M.