

# Academia Lodge № 847

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## 3° Tracing Board



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W. Bro. Josiah Bowring  
Oil on panel, 1819

Once again, Josiah Bowring provides an extremely rich and visually striking assembly of Masonic symbolism.

The third degree of Freemasonry is an extremely dramatic experience which deals with ultimate concerns: good and evil, life and death.

The central object is the imposing black coffin lid, upon which many symbols have been carefully arranged. From top to bottom, they are:

- the united Square and Compass
- the Skull and Bones
- the Hebrew letters mem, beyt, tav and kuf (M-B, T-K)
- the Plumb, Square and Level in a downward pointing triangle arrangement, with with the numeral 5
- the closed Temple door
- the Setting Maul
- a unique hieroglyph which likely refers to the Masonic concept of the Five Points of Fellowship
- the Point within the Circle (without Parallel Lines)

The head of the casket is oriented toward the Holy of Holies in the West, with the feet toward the sunrise.

The casket is surrounded by the Flowering Rod of Aaron, the Pot of Manna, the Tablets of the Law and the Acacia. All of these are symbols of the Ark of the Covenant, which was kept in the Holy of Holies of Solomon's Temple. The first three items were, according to tradition, kept within the Ark. The ark itself was a box of acacia wood covered on the inside and outside with hammered gold so that no wood was visible. Thus, all four items have reference to the inside of the Ark, and all of these items are traditionally held to be hidden underground until the Temple can be rebuilt (BT Horayot 12A; Yoma 52B).

Notes by Shawn Eyer, P.M.