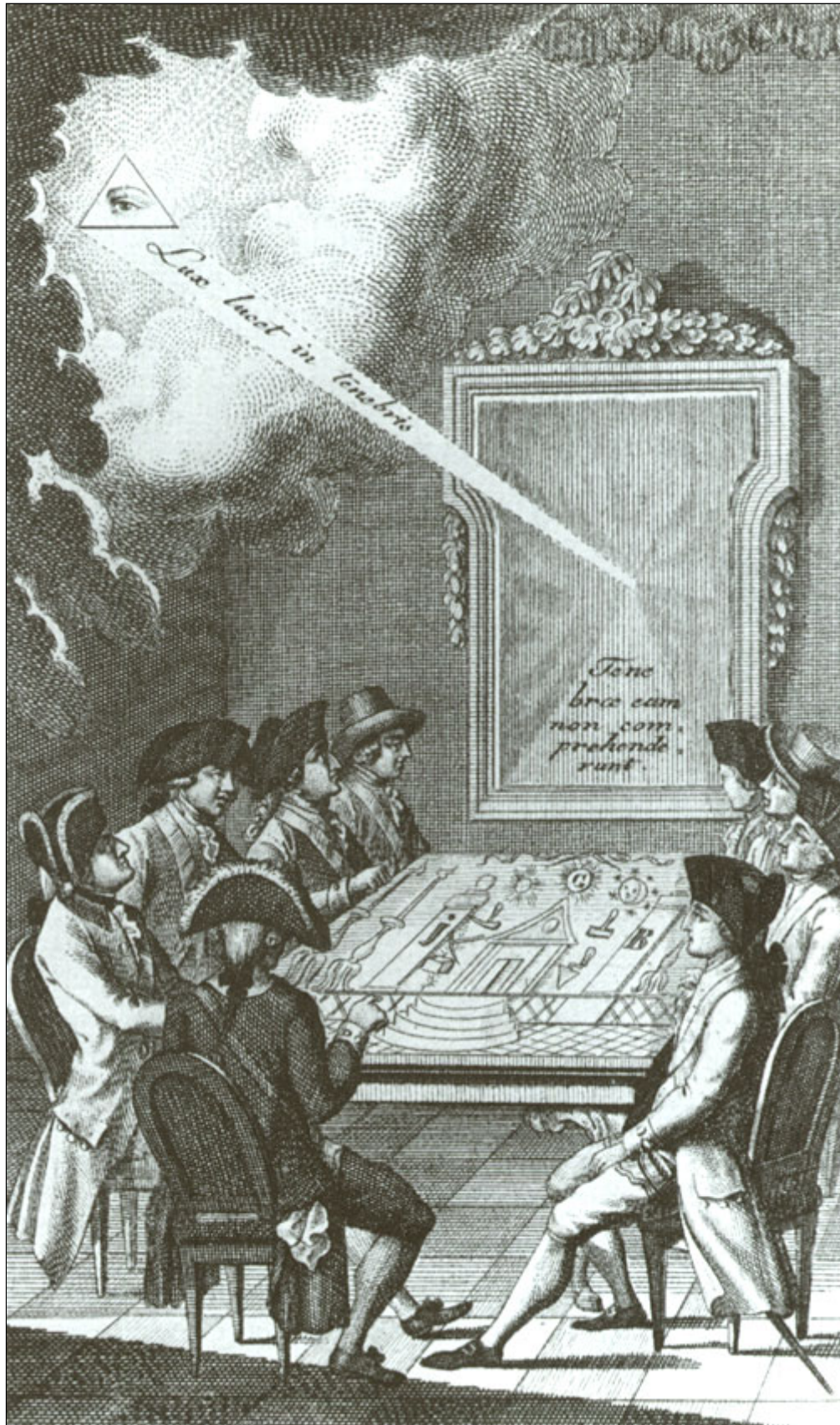


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Freemasons Studying a Tracing Board



Untitled Illustration
from the book *Der verklärte Freymaurer:*
Eine Schrift, worinn ihre hieroglyphische Zeichen, Worte, Werke, wie sie sollen
verstanden und soweit es thunlich ist, ausgedeutet werden

("The Glorified Freemason: An Account in which their Hieroglyphical Signs, Words
and Rites are interpreted")

1791

This charming image shows eighteenth-century Freemasons discussing a tracing board and its symbolism. Their work is guided and illuminated by the All-Seeing Eye of the Supreme Architect.

William Preston's original definition of the tracing board is profound: "The tracing board is an emblem of the book of nature with all the designs of Infinite Wisdom, drawn and delineated by the Supreme Architect of the Universe which, though he who runs may read, the Mason who contemplates will dare to imitate and pursue the plans which will ensure present and lead to eternal happiness."

Tracing boards were not really studied using a mirror. Its usage in this picture is itself symbolic, reminiscent of Plato's myth of the cave in *De Republica*. The Latin is from the Gospel of John: "The Light shines in the darkness / and the darkness has not comprehended it."

Notice that some of the Masons are looking at the mirror, indicating that they realize that the symbols reflect higher truths, while others are looking up at the true light, presumably having grasped the essential meanings. Sadly, some of the brethren are not looking either at the board nor toward the Light, but at one another— failing to understand the great mystery in their midst.

In English Freemasonry, it is taught that the Tracing Board is considered one of the Immovable Jewels of the Lodge. W.:Bro.: W. Kirk NacNulty explains that:

The immovable jewel which relates to the Master Mason is the Tracing Board; and, unlike the other jewels, it does not relate to a single stone. Rather, as the drawing board on which designs are set out, it deals with the relationships between stones and with the whole of the larger structure to which they belong. That is to say, the concerns of the Master Mason are transpersonal and holistic. (**Freemasonry: A Journey through Ritual and Symbol**, 1991, p. 31)

 Notes by Shawn Eyer, P.:M.:

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