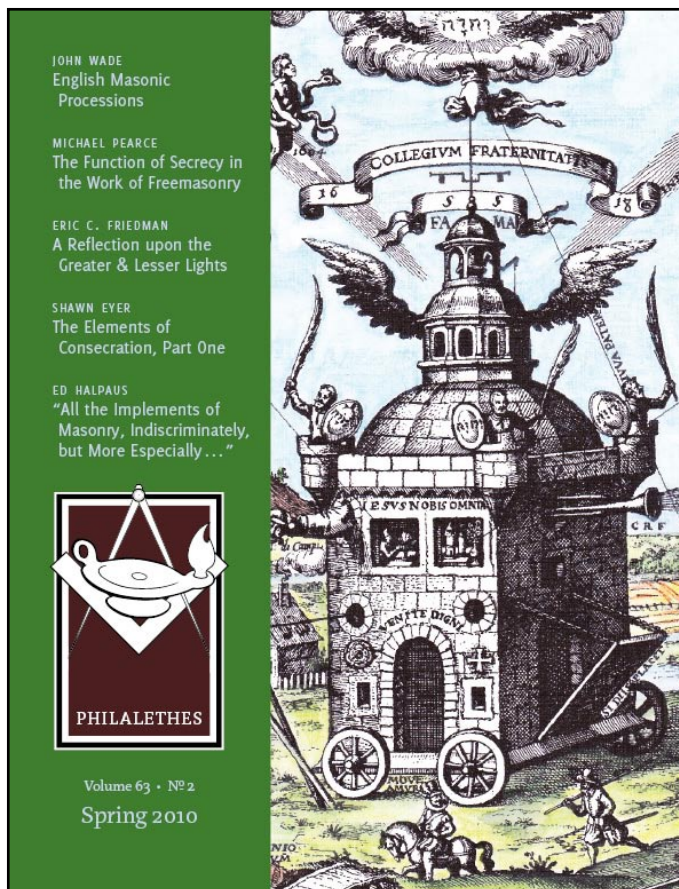


Sample Article from Volume 63 • Nº 2

SHAWN EYER

The Elements of Consecration, Part One

A careful review of the ceremony of Lodge consecration, focusing on the symbolism and language in use during the times of William Preston and Thomas Smith Webb, the most important figures in the development of the Masonic rituals in use in the United States.



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The Elements of Consecration

PART ONE

SHAWN EYER TAKES A CLOSER LOOK AT THE TRADITIONAL WAGES OF A FELLOW CRAFT AND WHY THEY ARE CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL TO THE CONSECRATION OF EVERY MASONIC LODGE

Corn, Wine and Oil are well known to Freemasons everywhere as symbolic wages. Containers of them are on display in many Lodges, and sometimes small vials of them are given as gifts to newly passed Fellow Crafts. But as common and familiar as these items are, why are they so important in our Craft?

It is not uncommon for many of us to assume that these three substances are meant to represent primitive “money,” paid to the builders of the Temple. However, we need to remember that everything in Masonry is symbolic. And in fact, even in the public cornerstone-laying ceremony they are called “the Corn of nourishment, the Wine of refreshment, and the Oil of joy.”¹ These clearly indicate that the Wages are of a symbolic nature, although many are still tempted to interpret them materialistically, as if they refer to the financial and emotional well-being of an individual brother.

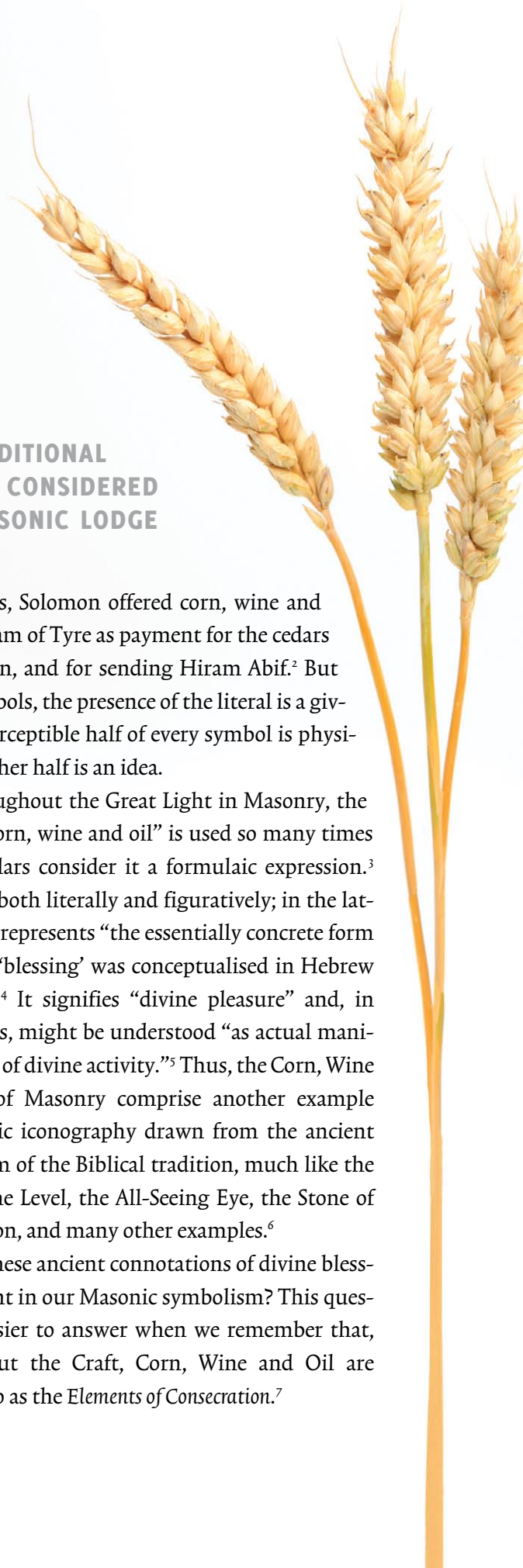
There is, of course, a traditional basis for understanding the Wages as literal payment. After all, according to the ancient account in the book of

Chronicles, Solomon offered corn, wine and oil to Hiram of Tyre as payment for the cedars of Lebanon, and for sending Hiram Abif.² But with symbols, the presence of the literal is a given: the perceptible half of every symbol is physical, the other half is an idea.

Throughout the Great Light in Masonry, the phrase “corn, wine and oil” is used so many times that scholars consider it a formulaic expression.³ It is used both literally and figuratively; in the latter case it represents “the essentially concrete form in which ‘blessing’ was conceptualised in Hebrew thought.”⁴ It signifies “divine pleasure” and, in some cases, might be understood “as actual manifestations of divine activity.”⁵ Thus, the Corn, Wine and Oil of Masonry comprise another example of Masonic iconography drawn from the ancient symbolism of the Biblical tradition, much like the Plumb, the Level, the All-Seeing Eye, the Stone of Foundation, and many other examples.⁶

Are these ancient connotations of divine blessing present in our Masonic symbolism? This question is easier to answer when we remember that, throughout the Craft, Corn, Wine and Oil are referred to as the *Elements of Consecration*.⁷

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THE CONSECRATION RITUAL

Consecration is a ritual used in Freemasonry when a new Lodge is established. Nobody knows when it began. There is no evidence that operative stonemasons observed the custom. But speculative Freemasons, as early as 1736, have often seen fit to “consecrate” their Lodges.⁸ Consecration is similar to, but distinct from, the rituals of constitution and dedication—although historically they have often been performed as part of a single occasion. Terence O. Haunch, in his seminal article on the subject, offers this definition:

*Consecration is the Masonic rite, religious in form, by which a new lodge is blessed for, and dedicated to the purpose for which it is regularly constituted, i.e. the practice of Freemasonry.*⁹

Early descriptions of Lodge consecration are vague. The 1736 example, from Lodge Canongate Kilwinning N^o 2 in Edinburgh, describes it only as “being done in most due and solemn form.”¹⁰ Another Scottish Lodge, Canongate and Leith, was consecrated in 1755.¹¹ From 1756, the Antients’ *Ahiman Rezon* refers to certain “other Ceremonies and Expressions that cannot be written,” taking place in the context of a Lodge constitution.¹² In 1772, when William Preston produced the first edition of his *Illustrations of Masonry*, an outline of the consecration ceremony was included. Preston lamented that this ritual was “too frequently omitted.”¹³ His early descriptions of the cer-

emony are only summaries, and exclude many of the prayers and blessings, as well as the actual act of consecration itself. Luckily, we have two other versions from Preston: first, his slightly expanded account as given in the 1781 and later editions of the *Illustrations*, and finally in some records of his third degree lecture, wherein esoteric details of the ritual are described.¹⁴ Another early version is found in Thomas Smith Webb’s American adaptation of Preston’s work.¹⁵

The consecrations performed today in the United States and England are ultimately derived from the versions that Preston and Webb promoted. There is no one perfect form of the ceremony, but in all its forms it is both impressive and beautiful. Space here permits only the most essential outline, based only upon sources dated 1808 and earlier.

The ceremony was traditionally preceded by a Grand Procession [see John Wade’s article on p. 56] in which certain key objects were paraded before the witnesses. These included the Holy Bible, two silver pitchers containing Wine and Oil, a golden Cornucopia containing the Corn [these vessels are illustrated on p. 57 & 79], and a special object called “the Lodge,” carried concealed beneath white satin. But how is a Lodge carried?

This “Lodge” is of course neither a physical lodge hall, nor the brethren who compose the Lodge. By “the Lodge,” the ceremony refers to a portable object that is symbolically identified with the new Lodge about to be created. It was often a version of the lodge board or tracing board. Dyer says that in England it was “usually a first degree tracing board.”¹⁶



In many American jurisdictions, a simpler board depicting the “internal ornaments” of the Lodge (the Mosaic Pavement, Blazing Star, and Tesselated Border) is used. In other jurisdictions, a special wooden box or ark—understood as a model of the Lodge—is used; according to *Coil’s Masonic Encyclopedia*, it is “treated with the deference due a holy vessel or other sacred object.”¹⁷ Haunch refers to it as a *cista mystica* and theorizes that this type of “Lodge” may have originated at the Union of 1813.¹⁸

The procession would enter “the church or house where the services are to be performed.”¹⁹ Only Freemasons could proceed past this point, as the Lodge would now be tiled in all three degrees. The representation of the Lodge was placed in the center, generally upon a cushion, still covered with white satin, and the pitchers of Corn, Wine and Oil were arranged around it.²⁰

After some preliminaries, often including an oration on the purpose of Freemasonry, the actual consecration began. The Grand Master and his officers, with “some dignified Clergyman” (usually the Grand Chaplain) gathered themselves around the symbol of the Lodge. “All devoutly kneeling,” the Chaplain proceeded to consecrate. Solemn music played as the satin sheet was removed, revealing the Lodge. Taking up a card upon which the Hebrew name of God (יהוה) was inscribed in blazing letters,²¹ the Chaplain began the first clause of the consecration prayer:

The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, O Lord, far less the house which we build. Here have we stampt thy sacred name (placing the name upon the lodge) and as thou dost promise where thy name is

there will thou be, hear our supplication May the characters here impressed inspire us with awe and veneration towards thee; and enable us to direct our progress to that state which is the essence of truth, of glory, and of goodness.²²

The brethren responded, “Glory be to God on High.” A pot of incense was then swung above the Lodge model as the grand honors were given (apparently from the kneeling position). It is unclear from Preston’s work exactly when the Corn, Wine and Oil were poured onto the Lodge. In Webb’s version, the Chaplain intones, “Glory be to God on High,” and the Brethren respond, “As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be!” As

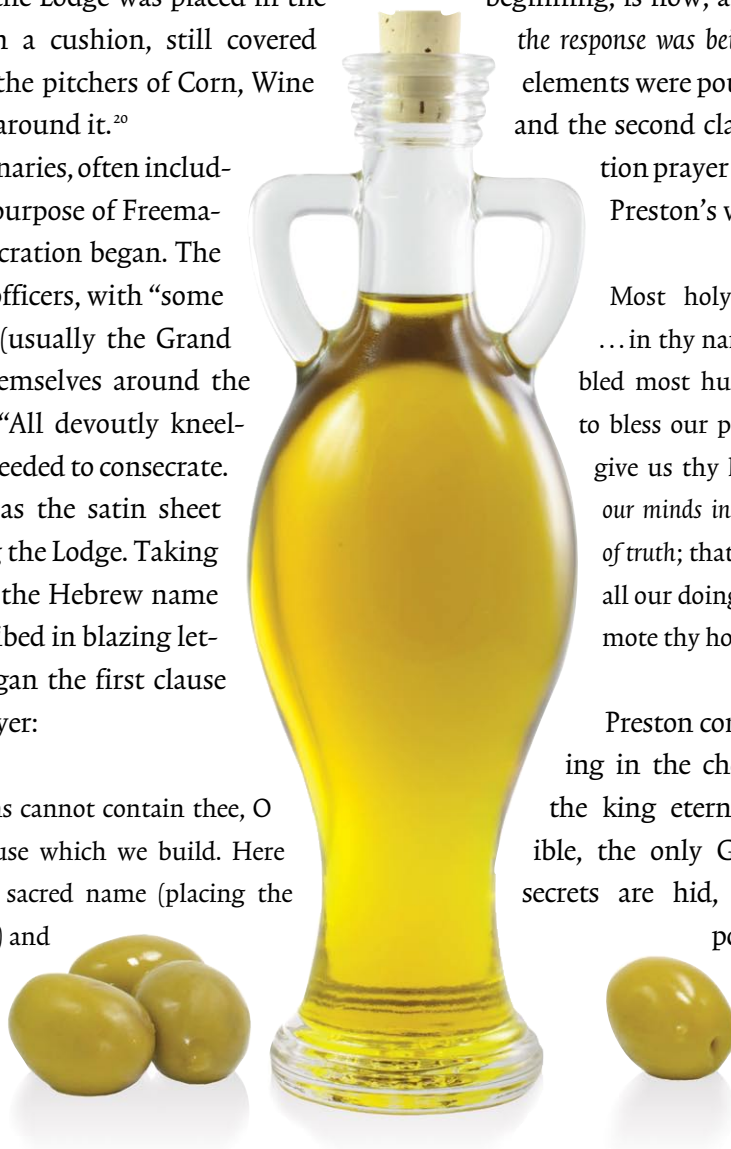
the response was being spoken, the three elements were poured.²³ An invocation and the second clause of the consecration prayer were then rehearsed.

Preston’s version says:

Most holy, glorious Lord God . . . in thy name we are here assembled most humbly beseeching thee to bless our present designs, and to give us thy holy spirit to enlighten our minds in the knowledge and love of truth; that serving thee aright in all our doings we may further promote thy honour and glory. . . .²⁴

Preston concludes with all joining in the chorus: “Honour unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God from whom no secrets are hid, be wisdom, might, power, and dominion for ever, Amen.”²⁵

Webb repeats his



Wages From Heaven

And the Lord said where my Name is I am
While Descartes said I think therefore I am.
There is a high road and a road of reason.
Come with me for a while in to a plane,
Un-reasonable and Blessed!

Where a Mason's wages fill their coffers
Faster than they're spent, and lead
Spins to gold, lifting the soul
From a hallowed space, a sacred place
Upon which this building is found
Rising from soil into hearts that delight
with a purpose assured as Amen!

Secure within, they consecrate
With corn, wine and oil a building
Imbued with the Most Holy Name.
A Masonic Mansion, a Temple
Requesting a blessing
A sacrament of burning incense,
Raising prayers through portals
As high as the sky by the mercurial nature
Of wine that's sublime, stabilized salt,
and an old jumpstart quickening of time.

Each offering a welcome sacrifice
Each element when given coming
Back in infinite fold, each consecration
Reaching beyond what we temporally think
To an eternity of a holy reality, a covenant
Between Creator and Creation, an intimate bond
To begin the Great Work where heaven on earth
Will commence and each brother is empowered
To love one another and to celebrate a work
Constant as a star, noble as a King, celebrating
Nature's divine industry and the glory
Of our Great Architect's blessed
and fruitful beautiful work.

response: "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be!" The grand honors were given, the Lodge covered once more, and with solemn music playing, the ceremony was complete.

THE THREE "GRAND OFFERINGS"

As noted earlier, today's ceremonies are different, but all derived from Preston's model. One of the most interesting features of Preston's version is the placement of the Name of God upon the Lodge, calling the presence of the divine into the tiled space. This invocation is meant to have a lasting effect, as we can see by looking at Preston's first degree lecture, where he points out that "the ground we are about to tread is holy."

Q: What rendered it holy?

A: The name of God impressed on it; who has declared 'Where my name is there I am' and therefore must be holy.²⁶

We learn more about this later in the lecture, where it is explained that the "masonic mansion" must be raised on "holy ground" for two reasons. First, "Because the name of God must be thereon impressed." And second, "Because the ground on which the first regular Lodge [Solomon's Temple—ED], on Royal sanction, was formed, was peculiarly sacred." It is explained that what rendered the Temple site holy were three Grand Offerings which "were on that spot presented, which met with Divine approbation."²⁷ These Grand Offerings were acts of Abraham, David and Solomon that took place at the Temple site. Abraham's offering was his son, Isaac (thankfully substituted by the ram). David's offering was to humbly prostrate himself on the threshing floor of Araunah. And Solomon's offering was the building of the Temple. "On this basis then," says Preston's ritual, "we found the

real sanctity of the Masonic pile.”²⁸ The holiness of the Lodge is thus based upon the holiness of the Temple, even the very site of the Temple on Mount Moriah.

CORN, WINE AND OIL IN THE TEMPLE

The use of Corn, Wine and Oil to sanctify Masonic temples obviously parallel the three Grand Offerings that according to Craft tradition consecrated Solomon’s Temple. And our offerings of Corn, Wine, and Oil are themselves rooted in the actual ceremonies that took place at that Temple. Corn was used for the grain offerings, wine was used for sacred libations, and oil was used for many things, including the preparation of the meal offering and as fuel for the seven lights of the large hammered gold menorah that stood in the Holy Place. Incense was mixed in with the grain offerings upon the main altar, and was also offered in pure form at the special incense altar that stood before the Holy of Holies.²⁹ Haunch emphasizes the appeal that these ancient ritual elements had for the early Masons:

The sacrificial use in this ceremony of corn, wine and oil (transferred from the rite of foundation stone laying) with the addition of the symbolic purifying and hallowing power of incense — usages firmly founded in Old Testament lore — these would all make their appeal to the religious and masonic fervour of mem-

bers of the Craft. We may remember, too, that incense found its way not only into the Consecration ceremony but also into certain usages in the Royal Arch.³⁰

That the wider significance of these thoroughly established Masonic symbols seems strange to us is a situation that is actually easy to understand. A dramatic decrease in the formation of new lodges in recent decades has meant that very few living Masons have seen a Lodge being consecrated. This can lead to a perception of the Lodge’s mission that excludes or diminishes the philosophical and mythical themes that are so central to the consecration rite, and decontextualizes the symbolism of the Corn, Wine and Oil.

But by remembering the consecration ritual, and studying its symbolism, we can help repair the disconnect. One way to do that is to bear in mind that the Elements of Consecration are recurring symbols. Poured out upon the Lodge at consecration, they are later symbolically transmitted to every Freemason during the course of his degrees. One can interpret this to mean that all Masons have a share in the consecration of the Lodge. Even if the ceremony itself took place generations ago, as long as there are eager candidates, the Corn, Wine and Oil are still pouring forth for our benefit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be!

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THE GREATER & LESSER LIGHTS

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- N.B. Cryer (Lewis Masonic, 1989); W. Kirk MacNulty, *Freemasonry: Symbols, Secrets, Significance* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2006); Julian Rees, *Tracing Boards of Three Degrees in Craft Freemasonry Explained* (Hersham, UK: Lewis Masonic, 2009).
13. See Harry Carr, "The Full Moon and Freemasonry," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 80(1967): 318–23; Silas H. Shepherd, "The Moon in Ritual and Symbolism," *Square and Compass* 48(1939): 28–30.

THE ELEMENTS OF CONSECRATION

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NOTES

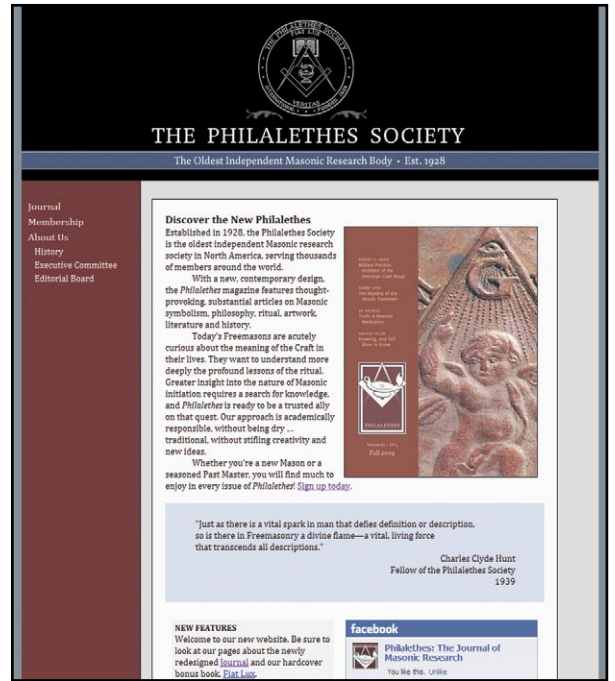
1. Thomas Smith Webb, *The Freemason's Monitor, or Illustrations of Masonry in Two Parts* (New York: Southwick & Crooker, 1802), 116.
2. 2 Chronicles 2:2–15.
3. See the entries by N. Wyatt, "Oil" (640), and J. F. Healey, "Dagon" (216–19) and "Tirash" (871–72) in the *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed., edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, & Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 640.
4. Wyatt, "Oil," 640.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Cf. Alex Horne, *Sources of Masonic Symbolism* (Richmond, Va.: Macoy, 1981), 48–53.
7. William Preston, *Illustrations of Masonry*, 8th ed., (London: G & T Wilkie, 1792), 94.
8. T. O. Haunch, "The Constitution and Consecration of Lodges under the Grand Lodges of England," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 83(1970): 10.
9. Haunch, "Constitution and Consecration," 1.
10. Haunch, "Constitution and Consecration," 10.
11. At the Dec. 1, 1755 meeting of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, it was requested that the GL "appoint a proper person" to "consecrate" is new temple room for the Lodge at Canongate and Leith. The Grand Chaplain was so selected, and performed the ceremony in the presence of the Grand Master and other GL officers. See Alexander Lawrie, *The History of Freemasonry, Drawn from Authentic Sources of Information* (Edinburgh: A. Lawrie, 1804), 186–87. The same book features several times the Corn, Wine and Oil, carried in the Cornupia and two silver vessels; the earliest instance given being 1753.
11. Laurence Dermott, *Ahiman Rezon: or, A Help to the Brother* (London: James Bedford, 1756), 40.
12. Preston, *Illustrations*, 1st ed. (London: J. Williams, 1772), 216. Preston's first account of the consecration ritual itself is found on pp. 219–221.
13. William Preston, *Illustrations of Masonry*, 3rd ed., (1781), 112–17.
14. See Haunch's article for a complete comparison of the Prestonian sources.
15. Thomas Smith Webb, *The Freemason's Monitor, or Illustrations of Masonry in Two Parts*, 4th ed. (Boston: Joshua Cushing, 1808), 98–108.
16. Colin F. W. Dyer, *Symbolism in Craft Freemasonry*, Rev. Ed. (Hersham, UK: Lewis Masonic, 2003), 59.
17. Henry Wilson Coil, *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia, Revised Edition* (Richmond, Va.: Macoy, 1995), 389.
18. Haunch, "Constitution and Consecration," 13–15.
19. Webb, *Freemason's Monitor*, 102.
20. Webb, *Freemason's Monitor*, 103.
21. Haunch cites a description of the card from an 1865 manuscript: "The Tetragrammaton is the Hebrew word יהוה within an oval surrounded with Blue and White rays in letters about 14 inches long in light blue colour upon a Card about 9" x 5" but the sacred symbol G within a circle of rays as our symbolical 'Word' or name of God will also answer the purpose." (15)
22. Haunch, "Constitution and Consecration," 45.
23. Webb, *Monitor* (1808), 106.
24. Haunch, "Constitution and Consecration," 47.
25. Haunch, "Constitution and Consecration," 49.
26. Colin Dyer, *William Preston and His Work* (Shepperton, UK: Lewis Masonic, 1988), 176.
27. Dyer, *William Preston*, 191.
28. Dyer, *William Preston*, 192.
29. See Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1985) for a detailed study of the Temple sacrifices.
30. Haunch, "Constitution and Consecration," 20. One might also include the symbol of the Pot of Incense, not mentioned by Haunch most likely because it is no longer a symbol in the English Craft degrees — however, it once was, and remains so in most American jurisdictions.

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