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On the myth-history of Freemasonry[1]

The historical continuity between Roman and medieval guilds and Masonic lodges, fantasy or reality?

The Masonic collective imagination is based on two fascinating illustrations of the origin of Masonic lodges: The first is a some sort of millenarianism that assigns a fracture or hiatus between religious culture and secular culture, the so-called "secularization" that would explain the birth of Masonic lodges as a pollution of the secularization of European island and continental society; the second is that the lodges themselves are the product of the medieval *Universitas*[2] (corporations or guilds) that in turn would be a direct historical continuation of the Roman *Collegia* (corporations).

There are two levels of interpretation on the similarity between the three distinct phenomena of the Roman guilds, the medieval ones and the Masonic lodges. One level of interpretation is that all three have the common characteristics of religiosity and occultism, therefore of spiritualism both in a general-generic and esoteric-initiatic sense; the other level of interpretation that would justify the first is a sort of historical continuity between the three phenomena, as if they were intertwined by linear cause-effect relations. The attribution of the generic term spirituality or spiritualism does not allow for an examination of the dynamics of this characteristic and therefore cannot be examined here. The case of mystical-religious and magical-esoteric characters attributed to corporations and lodges is different. And this will be discussed later. To this range of interpretations is added a thesis of a wider dimension which is the so-called socio-cultural phenomenon of "secularization". It must be said immediately that this denomination has aroused and still arouses much discussion in the historicist sphere, assigning different definitions and methods of analysis. The thesis of certain Authors in the Masonic sphere is that the establishment and development of modern lodges from the 17th century onwards would be the effect of a slow process of secularization that would differentiate the Middle Ages seen as an era of high spirituality from the post-Renaissance period characterized by ever higher levels of secularization. The complex problem of secularization, if we want to adopt this nominalisation, exposed in these simplistic terms, creates perplexity, in fact an old historiographical logic is proposed again, so that subsequent events are linked to the previous ones in a linear and causalistic way. This logic was at the basis of certain analyses by important exponents of the Enlightenment who took up the even more ancient methods of historiographic analysis; however, even then they were subjected to severe criticism by contemporary scholars who denied the causalistic linearity of historical phenomena, emphasizing a different approach[3]. What is most striking is that accepting the thesis of the Masonic lodges as a result of secularization would undermine the presuppositions of spirituality between the corporations of different ages and the lodges. The present essay attempts to give critical answers to these problems.

First of all, it should be noted that the theses mentioned above are based on the idea of the historical-cultural continuity of the initiatory and esoteric characteristics of the Roman *Collegia*, the medieval *Universitas* and the modern masonic *Lodges*. This idea assigns an exclusive, esoteric-initiatic chrism to the lodges and then assigns the same chrism to other previous social-historical phenomena; in other words, it is an evident inference of an event of the present on previous events, i.e. the cause-effect relations are overturned. The uncritical adhesion of many "Masonologists" to the paradoxical *cum hoc vel post hoc, ergo propter hoc* [with this or after this, therefore due to this] appears evident.

Freemasonry myth-history

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[2] The word *universitas* had a dual meaning in the Middle Ages, that inherent in the guilds and in Italy that related to the city or municipality, so named by Charles I of Anjou (*universi cives*, union of citizens). In Roman law there were three types of *Universitates*: *rerum or facti*, *personarum*, *iuris*. The corporations were universites personarum, a legal entity that united people of the same trade. There is a lively discussion on the distinction between the words *universitas* and *corpora*, in particular the abstract sense of "everything" (*universitas*) in Roman times, as in Cicero, Pliny the Elder, Apuleius and Tertullian. In the 3rd century it was the jurist Gaius who first used the word *universtitas* to unite *Societas*, *Collegium* and the similar referring to a group of men, but as public bodies distinct from private individuals. See the treatise on Roman guilds by Andreas Groten *Corpus und universitas, Römisches Körperschafts- und Gesellschaftsrecht: zwischen griechischer Philosophie und römischer Politik*, Mohr Siebeck, 2015, in which he points out the difficulty of knowing the activities of the Roman guilds precisely because of the lack of documentation.

[3] An important critic of the Enlightenment historiographic method was Johann Gottfried Herder, who pioneered the stylistic device of the modern historiographic method.

In the Masonic sphere the myth-history has a particular charm and among the many mythologies about the origins of modern Freemasonry the most celebrated is that of its direct derivation from the medieval guilds. The thesis is linear: it is affirmed that in Roman times the guilds of professions followed in historical continuity the medieval ones and from these in the 17th and 18th centuries the Masonic lodges. The hypothesis follows a logic of "necessary causation" precisely on the linear principle of cause-effect (the Roman guilds ein the end caused the Masonic lodges, in the same sense that the Masonic lodges are the necessary consequence of the Roman guilds); an understanding of history as a continuum, an uninterrupted development of socio-cultural processes where each event is the consequence of the previous ones and the cause of the subsequent ones, without breaks and returns, binding in this case *Collegia* to *Universitates* and to *Lodges.*

Obviously in the deterministic logic of *cum hoc vel post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, a event that appeared together with another or subsequent one must necessarily be causally linked to the previous one; this rigidly rationalist logical construct examines only the factors chosen and not all those that can contribute to exclude the causal link.

Modern Freemasonry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has changed the esoteric character into occultist, privileging the mysterious, secret, magical and initiatory aspects of esotericisms and assigning to them an exclusively spiritualist character, unlike the ancient esotericisms which were beyond the spiritualist or rather theological value also a way of accessing the mysteries of nature and the cosmos; a declarative figure that nature and cosmos are regulated by metaphysical but also physical laws, for which there were empirical and spiritualist esotericisms, where in these seconds the empirical research was the basis of a metaphysical and spiritual research. In this speculative framework of neo-modern Freemasonry the thesis has developed of assigning to the Roman and medieval guilds inner sacred and religious purposes and principles of initiatory and esoteric character, which would justify the initiatory and esoteric aspects of Masonic lodges. From the previous logic of the causation of events we adopt the anti-historical logic of the *post hoc, ergo ante hoc*, what comes after justifies what was before, eliminating the time line for which paradoxically the present causes the past.

Without going into the merit of a precise criticism of this historiographical pseudo-method, the thesis of the continuity between the Roman trade associations, the medieval ones and the Masonic lodges needs a greater deepening of the characteristics of the first two phenomena that would justify the third, paying attention to the semantics used in different eras for the three phenomena. The way of proceeding, typical of a certain Masonic myth-history, is an ancient methodology used at the beginning of 1700 by James Anderson when he wrote the "historical" part of the Constitutions of Free Masons in 1723, later expanded in the 1738 edition. Already at the end of the 18th century the young Herder, a historian and Mason, demonstrated the groundlessness of the causalistic historiographic method and the idea of history as a linear progress of events. The supporters of historical and operational continuity between the Roman and medieval guilds and the Masonic lodges of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries do not seem to be interested in the fact that this thesis cannot be proved with established documents, since they do not exist, but only fideistically declare it.

Secularisation

Always in the Masonic myth-history appears a third proceeding, more methodologically correct, but still in the historiographic field it arouses controversy for certain indeterminacy of the definitions used[4]. Someone advances the thesis that the English Masonic lodges were born as a product of the "secularization" of the European culture, distinguishing themselves from the masonic corporations which, instead, were an intimate part of a religious culture, not secularized. Secularization, in extreme synthesis, is a process in which a society or culture loses its religious or confessional connotations with the consequence of the separation of social and state institutions from religious ones, influencing the cultural processes of peoples and nations. In other words, a slow unfolding of events whereby civil institutions and the culture of a society overlap forms of secularism that separate the religious world from the profane one. Such a process is the subject of many discussions among historians who have not yet definitively clarified the concept of "secularization", but also because the definition of secularization has been assigned to a set of events of great complexity that historians alone, without the contribution of other humanistic and social disciplines, can hardly solve if not in single aspects.

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[4] G. Marramao in *Cielo e terra. Genealogia della secolarizzazione*, Laterza, 1994, reconstructs in an exhaustive way the notion of secularization and the disputes around it.

The term secularization therefore seems more like the title of an interpretative model of particular phenomena rather than a theory capable of explaining the unfolding of a cultural-historical process that has lasted more than a thousand years for the entire Western world[5]. On closer inspection the term "secularization" can be misleading or at least it is to be used when it is limited to the condition in which the nation and the state pass from the "confessional" to the " non-confessional" condition. The question is more complex, in the sense that the structural processes of society do not abandon "religiosity" but it is "sacredness" that withdraws from its all-encompassing value, a value that gave meaning to every form of social organization. Instead of secularization, one should speak of a crisis of the system of totalizing religiosity, what Hans Blumenberg calls "theological absolutism". This system permeated the centuries from the Middle Ages to the Reformation and formally ended with the French Revolution, so one could say that the 18th and especially the 19th century were rather the centuries of the "great secularisation".
In conclusion, the logic of the post hoc, ergo ante hoc is presented again, whereby a secularization begun in a certain century is credited to the previous centuries.

Secularization and laicalization

The processes of secularization in fact do not mean the abdication of religious institutional forms (churches, cults, precepts and dogmas, faiths), these remain well present fighting with every instrument any contrary sociocultural manifestation. On the other side of the barricade there are the production processes that it is difficult to trace back to patterns of secularization, being such (secular) by their nature. The logic of modern Freemasonry as a consequence (sic) of secularisation starts from the preconception that medieval production processes in the era of « theological absolutism »[6] were imbued with spiritualism without considering that if a religious institution can secularise itself, it is difficult to reverse the process, that a secular institution "spiritualises" itself by losing its secular connotations[7]. This consideration of the spiritualization of both Roman and medieval guilds advanced by a certain Masonic publicity probably derives from a superficial reading of specific cultural aspects of the Middle Ages, when the only cultured class, the clerics with Thomas Aquinas at the head, resumed the "contempt for concreteness" of Platonic figures[8] by linking economy and morality[9]. Strictly speaking, the character of religiousness and brotherhood more marked than economic[10], belonged rather to the Greek guilds of the classical era[11].
In a more mediated position, Max Weber places the processes of secularization of the Western world within an ineluctable totalizing «rationalization », a « destiny of the West » predestined and of ancient roots, in a wide historical-religious path of « disenchantment of the world » that rejects « all magical-sacral methods of search for salvation »[12]. The Werberian «rationalization » could correspond to the process of logical-rational organization of institutional society and the « magic-sacral methods » to the totalizing sacredness of primitive societies, while the « disenchantment » is precisely the abandonment of the sense of the sacred towards the institutionalized religious sense or, if desired, the loss of the Aristotelian enchantment before the cosmos with the search for the laws that regulate it. More concretely, Weber's reasoning is to be

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[5] These parastorical hypotheses do not take into account the fact that trade associations were not exclusive to the Western world, as similar forms also exist in Middle Eastern countries, see as non-exhaustive indications: Randi Deguilhem and Suraiya Faroqhi *Crafts and Craftsmen of the Middle East: Fashioning the Individual in the Muslim Mediterranean*, I.B.Tauris, 2005. Craftsmen's guilds in certain countries are still present by ancient tradition, see Thomas Weyrauch *Craftsmen and Their Associations in Asia, Africa and Europe*, VVB Laufersweiler, 2001.

[6] See Blumenberg, Hans, La legittimità dell'età moderna, Marietti, Genoa, 1992, part two: "Assolutismo teologico e autoaffermazione umana".

[7] There have been rare cases in Northern Europe of commercial guilds that for various reasons lost their economic character and became confraternities dedicated to solidarity activities, but these were individual cases that do not justify a broad generalization.

[8] For an analysis of Thomas Aquinas' thought on economic problems, see S. Sangalli *Il lessico settoriale delle realtà e dei fatti economici nell'opera omnia di s. Tommaso d'Aquino: esame filosofico del suo insieme*, Gregorian Biblical BookShop, 2005.

[9] Such " disregard" derived from the evaluation, posterior to the Homeric and Themistole epoch, which gave itself to the artisans (*technites* or *demiurgeons*) considered a lower class, calling them with rather vile terms such as *bausoi*, *edraioi*, *kathemenoi* for the sedentary and painful activity or for the condition of mercenary dependence with the derogatory term of *chrematistai*. This cultural attitude was theorized by Aristotle [Pol. III, 3, 4 and VI, 4, 5] denying craftsmen the rank of citizens, like Sparta who denied citizens any manual activity and reserved it for slaves, unlike the Athens of Pericles where rich craftsmen could rise to important public offices. In Ptolemaic Egypt, artisan activities were under strict state control. In Roman times the artisans called by the various sources *mercenarii*, *opifices*, *operarii*, *artificies* gathered in the above mentioned state-controlled *Collegia*, especially under Diocletian. More power and autonomy from the State were under Justinian.

[10] See Luciana Aigner Foresti *Antichità classica*, Jaca Book, 1993, pp. 196-197.

[11] There is documentation after the first century B.C. on the existence of Greek corporations of actors in Naples, Syracuse and Reggio. See Nicola Savarese *Teatri romani: Gli spettacoli nell'antica Roma*, Cue Press, 2015, p. 71.

[12] See Weber *L'etica protestante e lo spirito del capitalismo*, Sansoni 1982 e *Economia e società*, Comunità, 1980.

understood in a process of laicalization rather than secularization. The distinction between «secularization» and « laicalization » is therefore of some importance; the first term, as already mentioned, is relative to those socio-cultural processes in which the loss of the sense of the sacred does not necessarily imply the elimination of religious forms that remain connected to more specifically social forms by syncretically assigning a divine will to the superior civil power, while the second term defines the detachment of the sense of the sacred and religious forms from the institutional forms of society, that is, when social institutions remove from their constituent characteristics any religious or magical-sacral reference or aspect. More precisely, society secularizes institutions and, by changing the meaning of the word sacred, it assigns to institutions a sacred value devoid of any sense and metaphysical meaning, a sacredness of only civil meaning. If we really want to speak of secularization, if we really want to speak of secularization, this has some sense for the guilds of merchants and before that for the associative realities in the Nordic societies with ancient customs, even pre-Christian ones, associations of brotherhood that had more markedly spiritualist and religious characters. With regard to the guilds of trade, instead, the ritualistic formulations, common to every public manifestation both in Roman and medieval times, did not assume a character such as to identify them as religious or parareligious associations and therefore it is difficult to speak of secularization since the guilds from their emergence were substantially secular in their nature and without spiritualist functions. Concretely, since the times of the Greeks and Latins, the guilds had not abandoned the religious sense but had lost the sacred sense of their work; sacredness had been reduced to ceremonial forms, therefore it was not the sacred that defined them as a work of super-human value. This loss occurred much earlier in human history, it was lost when the processes of socialization and social organization (the sense of belonging to a community and its organizational forms) became more complex, they became "civilized" from tribal to regional and national communities. In the tribal or clan communities, those not yet organized in wider geopolitical institutional structures, the social was identified with the religious in the scheme of the "religious-social" and human expectation configured every activity in a sacred sense, in the sense that the religious or faith phenomena together with the social aspects, individual and group, merged into an "absolute sacred" and consequently every social phenomenon was characterized by ceremoniality and rituality that gave it sacred meaning; the sacred absolute in those eras was identified with a "spiritual absolute". The more communities settled in sedentary forms, the more they expanded and organized themselves institutionally, the more religion was ordained in structures and the social system was desacralized; it passed to the "social-religious" where the expectations eluding the sacred were transferred to the social level while the religious was preserved under the forms of institutionalized practice, creating religious hierarchies and different cults. Thus, schematically, the gradual process of "desacralization" developed in a condition in which social and religious together constituted an "absolute theological" where the whole of society and its institutions were pervaded by this absolute religiosity for which the theologal also dictated the social rules and conditioned the institutional ones that developed their own rituals and ceremonies now devoid of sacredness even if with formal religiosity; this, however, cannot be defined as "spiritual absolute", since social structures of a commercial, military and in some ways power type are not characterized by their spiritual value and do not in themselves produce a sense of spirituality.

Finally, at the beginning of the 19th century, we reached the phase of separation between institutionalized social and institutionalized religiousness, the so-called "secular absolute" in which the civil and the religious separate with possible reciprocal antagonisms. The religious sense in the terms of "theological absolute" pervaded European history from the Middle Ages until the end of the 18th century when the break-up of the pact between State and Church began and the first forms of non-confessional, laical State were experimented. Cause and consequence on a cultural level was the questioning of morality as the only and universal system of religious behaviour; a process that became evident in the second half of the 17th century and in the following one in European countries with a widespread innovative ferment on the relationship between person, State and religion, a process that Hegel formalized with the distinction between morality and ethics.

Returning to the thesis of the Masonic lodges as a product of the secularization of the Western world, the statement is too general to have an explanatory value, moreover, too many things are taken for granted that instead should be individually and critically evaluated. Accepting this thesis uncritically, the consequence of the affirmation would be that the lodges of the late 17th and early 18th centuries were forms of secularization of a previous phenomenon, that of the medieval guilds which in turn would have been expressions of a socio-economic reality characterized by the religious-spiritualist, neither secularized nor secularized. As a logical consequence of the nascent Masonic lodges, therefore, the spiritual sense that would have characterized the Roman and medieval guilds would be lacking. In other words, according to

this thesis the connection with the world of the sacred and with the sense of spirituality would be missing and Freemasonry would be a reflection of the desacralization and secularization of society, as if to say that lodges are a full expression of the dominant desacralized culture and the secularized changes taking place in society. From a formal point of view this idea has some suggestion and reliability. It must be considered, in fact, that the seventeenth-century lodges, although secret and well separated from civil society, were nevertheless made up of men well inserted in the socio-cultural reality of the time and that they were not immune to this process of secularization. The question, however, is not posed by the supporters of the idea of Masonic secularization in these terms, they make it a process that lasted several centuries, a process that historians have not yet solved because of the problems mentioned above and their idea is that there is a causalistic-linear process in the history of Western societies. The idea probably comes from an uncritical assumption of the Enlightenment philosophy and also of previous tradition, especially of the Christian church, which effectively placed human history as a progressive linear-causalistic process, a historicist vision that Freemasons like Herder and many others contested.

A more careful and less prejudicial analysis shows that the men who constituted the first lodges at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century were men who rather pursued the ideals of a " laicized" culture that was developing in their time and who wanted to constitute a new more modern reality with absolutely innovative rules whose references to cultural phenomena and to a social reality of other times (medieval corporations) had only ideal and allegorical value. Let us see then what the three institutions responsible for the construction of civil and religious buildings were in the historical reality.

Roman Collegia

In a certain Masonic publicity, the first Roman forms of cooperation of work are charged with manifestations of esotericism and initiatory ritualism that would continue in history in medieval corporations and guilds, also permeated with esotericism and initiatory practices, up to modern Freemasonry, decreeing a sort of spiritualistic-mystery continuity. As said, Roman trade associations were not called corporations but *Collegia* or even *corpora opificum* when they received legal recognition[13].Every community organization was a *Collegium* and in fact also the religious organizations of the *Pontifices*, the *Augures*, the *Fetiales*, the *Luperci*, the *Arvales*, the *Salii*, the *Vestales* were *Collegia*[14]. These religious *Collegia* had close links with civil and political life, prefiguring the first forms of the aforementioned absolute theology. However, it should be noted that the choice of the members was made in a way that was not initiatory but of religious and civil ceremoniality together.

Of quite another aspect were the mysterious-initiatic religions that were cultivated outside the religious-civil ceremonies such as the Eleusinian, Dionysian, Orphic, Sabatian and Cabyric religions and, in more advanced times, the Mithraic and Attisic religions and others of Egyptian and Persian derivation[15] . These

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[13] *Corpora* is derived from the legal name *corpus habere*, in the sense of an association legally and contractually recognized by the State. Hence, people called themselves *corporati*, bound by a contract and related obligations, hence the word corporation. Work activities outside of corporations were juridically defined as *illicita* and therefore certain no *legitima* associations were sometimes suppressed.

[14] The *pontifices*, five originally, were the connoisseurs of sacred things, with the authority to advise on matters of religion. Later, the close relationship between religious and civil things gave the *Pontifex* almost absolute power in jurisprudential matters, power superior to other sacerdotal colleges. Only the patricians were part of this Collegium, but after 300 B.C. even the plebeians were able to become pontifex, so the number increased to nine members. For a long time the members were co-opted, only in 104 B.C. did the Domitian law decree the nomination by public election. Titus Livius in his *Ab Urbe condita* libri, X, 6 mentions the augurs (*augures*) as priests from the ancient tribes of the Ramnes, Titienses, Luceres, the only ones available to the religious function to interpret the will of the gods. Livius also notes in the first book that the fetials (*fetiales*) had the religious-diplomatic function of declaring war on another people by mouth and acts of the chief, the *pater patratus Populi Romani*, the only one who could stipulate treaties on behalf of the Roman people with a special ceremonial and symbols of sacred rather than religious value. They were the image of the City inside and outside it. The arvals (*arvales*) constituted an ancient priestly college whose members were chosen among the patrician families. With the beginning of the Empire, Augustus of authority became part of it by reorganizing the *Collegium*. It was dissolved in the 4th century with the advent of Christianity. Another priestly college was that of the salî, (*salii*) distinguished between *salii palatini* and *salii quirinales*, all chosen among the patrician families. Their function was to officiate the passage from military to civil time. Ceremonies that ended with opulent banquets and cited by Cicero and Horatio Flacco. The vestals (*vestales*) were originally four and then six, drawn among the girls always from patrician families. The investiture ceremony was officiated by the *Pontifex Maximus*. They were freed from their homeland and had special civil and religious privileges. They were bound to virginity. The *Collegium* of the vestals was abolished by the Christian Theodosius I in 391.

[15] The main Roman mystery religions with an initiatory character were the Eleusina religion deriving from the cults of Demeter and Persephone, the Orphic ones with the cults of Dionysus and Orpheus, the Phrygian one of Attis and the one imported from the Cabiri of Samothrace. We should also mention the cults of the Great Mother Cybele, those of the Persian Mithras and the Egyptian cults of Serapis, Isis and Osiris. For an overview of the religions present in ancient Rome see Jacqueline Champeaux La religione dei romani, Mulino 2002.

religions, precisely because of their initiatory character, could not be professed in social and economic, political and cultural conditions open to the profane[16] and therefore not even in corporations. This does not detract from the fact that forms of ancient religious tradition were present in the less cultured social classes, but they were accepted more as forms of associative than reserved life. Moreover, the expansion of Roman conquests brought exotic cults that aroused emotions and curiosity, especially during the decadence of the empire, establishing a clear boundary between popular piety and the more cultured classes[17], cults that in the people often assumed orgiastic-entusiastic forms, as in the cults with the strong oriental pollution of Dionysus and Cybele, which however in narrow circles had initiatory-mystery rituals[18]. It should also be noted that religious cults, even mysterious ones, were simplified and made accessible to the people, unlike the more initiatory forms, reserved to a few elected[19]. Information on the Roman *Collegia* and *Corpora* (colleges and trade associations) is rare in the Republican period and more numerous in the Imperial period; it consists mostly of inscriptions (196 are known in total) and some references by Livy, Tacitus[20], Cicero, Pliny and other minors and, later, in the late-imperial period by many jurists who dealt with conflictual issues between the State and the Collegia or the definition of their internal regulations. These documents almost always deal with the relationship between the *Collegia* and the State, especially the *fabrorum*, which was the most representative one, gathering many different manufacturing activities, administrative organization and the public duties they had to perform, the state obligations and the tax privileges reserved only to manufacturers (*sed artificium dumtaxat*). What characterised them in relation to society and civil authorities was their character as a necessary publicis utilitatibus opera, failing which they were not recognised and could not operate[21]. The *Collegia* were, however, of three different types: professional, religious and governmental-administrative and their membership was not occasional but implied continuity. According to Plutarch[22] there was the official recognition of the *Collegia opificum* since the royal age for the professions of carpenters, potters bakers, shoemakers, dyers, boilermakers, goldsmiths and flute players. According to the Gaius jurisconsult, the *Collegia* were already present at the Greeks who called them ἑταιρείαν (etaireìan) understood as political and also trade associations, characterized by solidarity among their members. The *Collegia structorum* (builders' associations) brought together a variety of professionals, such as the *arcuarii*, who specialised in the construction of vaults involving complex wooden support structures. The same stone working required different professional skills, for which the *Collegia* of *lapidarii, marmorarii, quadratarii* existed. This was not unlike the case for ironworking, which included

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[16] See Jean Bayet *La religione romana: storia, politica e psicologica*, Ed. scient. Einaudi, 1959, p. 203.

[17] Cf. Arnaldo Momigliano (ed.) *Quinto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, Volume 5,Part 1, Ed. di Storia e Letteratura, 1975, p. 19. The Author questions, given the absolute scarcity of documents, whether the cults of Isis, Cybele or Serapis themselves were esoteric cults and whether there were any initiatory characters.

[18] Cf. Giulia Sfameni Gasparro *Interpretazioni gnostiche e misteriosofiche del mito di Attis*, in Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions: Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday, Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance Volume 91 by Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain, edited by Raymond van den Broeck, Maarten Jozef Vermaseren, Brill Archive, 1981, pp. 376-377. The author presents an interesting analysis of the influence of over-interpretations of ancient texts by later commentators and scholars and other religions, especially Christians, and also on the difficulty, in the light of current historiography and hermeneutics (*ibid.* p. 378) to establish how esoteric and initiatory characters were prevalent over others and how difficult it is today to establish a precise definition of the terms "mysterious" and "mystical" if not in a formal way (*ibid*. n. 3. p. 377).

[19] Si veda Antonio Virgili *Culti misterici ed orientali a Pompei*, Gangemi, 2008, Introduction.

[20] Livius and Tacitus define the Collegium as an aggregation of people united by such a purpose. This type of aggregation will be defined in the Middle Ages by the word *Universitas*.

[21] The Gaius jurisconsult of the 3rd century wrote: « It is not permitted for everyone without distinction to set up a society (*societas*) [commercial], a *collegium* [professional] or such a corporate structure (*corpus*): this matter is in fact strictly regulated (*coercetur*) by both laws, senate-consults and imperial constitutions. Only for a few purposes [public utility] have such corporate structures (*corpora*) been allowed: so it has been allowed to members who collect public revenue or exploit the gold and silver mines, or the salt marshes , to form themselves into corporate structures (*corpus habere*). Likewise, there are certain *Collegia* in Rome, whose corporate structure has been confirmed by imperial senators and constitutions such as that of millers and certain others (similar) and sea transporters, which are also found in the provinces. 1. It is then precisely those who have been granted (*permissium*) to set themselves up (*corpus habere*) in corporations (*collegii societatis*), as members of a professional college, a commercial company or other organization of the same kind to have, following the example of the political community (*rei publicae*), common property, a common chest, and a representative (*actorem*) or mayor (*syndicum*), by means of which, as in the political community (*re publica)*, everything that needs to be implemented and done in common (*comuniter*) can be implemented and done ». Cit. in Francesco Milazzo *Affari, finanza e diritto nei primi due secoli dell'impero* - Acts of the International Conference on Roman Law (Copanello, 5-8 June 2004), Giuffrè, 2012, p. 195. Even Gaius in his treatises makes no mention of initiatory or esoteric practices in Roman colleges and corpora.

[22] See Plutarco, *Vite parallele. Licurgo e Numa Pompilio*, Bur, 2012.

ferrarii, *clavarii*, *tignarii*, *legnarii*, *centonarii*, *rectores materiarum*[23]. The *Collegia* in Republican and Imperial times were not voluntary associations, but constituted by senatorial or imperial law and to which it was obligatory to join, if you wanted to operate you had to be a member. These professional associations were granted, in exchange for a *corvée* for public utility[24], special privileges such as exemption from certain public obligations, military service and extraordinary taxes. The regulation of relations between the state and the *Collegia* was well defined in the Byzantine Empire and in the Italic regions under its domination until the 9th century[25]. Some Latin authors report that the *Collegium fabrorum* had Janus as its protective body and that sacrifices were made to it. This is not surprising, the practice of referring to some deity or deity was very widespread in social and economic activities in every period of Roman and later culture[26]. The *Collegium fabri tignari* (guild of builders and carpenters) stood out among the others because it proudly claimed its sacrificial altar with the tools of its art[27] but only as a logo or trademarks of its activity, they were "signs" (in the linguistic sense) or emblems and not symbols; a sort of trademark in the modern sense. The Collegia of Entrepreneurs were not religious or sacred but professional organizations, authorized and controlled by civil authorities[28]. Pliny is known to have written about the senatorial debate *de instituendo collegium frabrorum*[29] demonstrating that the establishment of a *Collegium* did not take place spontaneously but was granted to a group of entrepreneurs who wanted to establish an economic-financial and fiscal relationship with the State (*res publica*)[30].

Carrié says: "à l'époque tardive tout les membres d'une profession faisaient ipso facto partie du collège correspondant» [at that time all the members of a profession were ipso facto part of the respective collegium][31]. This *ipso facto*, in the sense of automatism, would document that even in the late Empire the *Collegia* did not have an initiatory constitutive logic, but entered by right/duty of law and those who were members were called *co-ptarius*, accepted by the members of the *Collegium* with the formula of *recipere in Collegium*.

There were, however, unrecognised *Collegia* with religious and solidarity value such as the *Collegia funeraticia*, which dealt with funerals that had a high sacred value. From these probably derived certain medieval solidarity and religious forms of association, the so-called "confraternities". With regard to the professional *Collegia* in the republican and imperial age, the information, which can only be deduced from Livius and Cicero, does not speak of esoteric, mysterious or other practices, nor that the admission and organization of the *pontifices* was of an initiatory type; the two authors cite only a few administrative rules

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[23] A complete list of Roman guilds is given by Waltzing J.P. in his monumental *Étude historique sur le corporations professionelles chez le Romains* I-IV, Lovain, 1895-1900. The author enumerates forty-five different Greek and Latin corporations; more recent epigraphic studies have identified others, in this regard we can see Marcella Chelotti's *Epigrafia e territorio, politica e società: temi di antichità romane*, Edipuglia, 1994. The text by Cameron Hawkins *Roman Artisans and the Urban Economy*, Cambridge University Press, 2016, is also relevant to Roman corporations.

[24] The concept of public utility (*utilitas publica*) was understood quite broadly by the Romans, so that the *Collegium Centonariorum*, a guild of fabric manufacturers, was also in every way of public utility.

[25] It is recalled that in Byzantium Leo VI the Wise (866-912) with the "Book of the Prefect" regulated the activity and internal organization of the trade associations called πολιτικά σωματεῖα (politicà sometèia) or συστήματα (sustémata) so that the craft activities were brought together in associations and the admission of new craftsmen was under control and acceptance of public officials.

[26] For example, today in Italy protectors are for hoteliers San Giovanni Battista, waiters Santa Zita, firefighters, bombers and others have Santa Barbara, craftsmen San Giuseppe, drivers San Cristoforo, electricians Santa Lucia, and so on.

[27] See Jinyu Liu, *Collegia Centonariorum: The Guilds of Textile Dealers in the Roman West*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2009. The Author notes that, limiting the research to this Collegium, it was very present in central and northern Italy, a little in the south, but also in the south of Gaul, in Hiberia, in the provinces of Pannonia (between the rivers Danube and Savia), in the Noricum; traces have been found in Africa consularis but not in Britannia and Germany, while the inscriptions of the *Collegia fabrorum* have been found in two places in Britain. This *Collegium* was certainly very distributed in the Empire for obvious necessity (pp. 30-33), the *centonari* as much as the *fabrori*, on certain occasions attended the *vigiles* to extinguish the fires.

[28] In the *De cognitionibus* of Callistrato, the *Collegia* had to comply with certain conditions in order to obtain *beneficia/privilegia*: a) legal status: *quibus ius coeundi lege permissum est*; b) composition: *in quibus artificii sui cause unusquisque adsumitur ut fabrorum corpus est et si qua eandem rationem originis habent*; c) purpose: *instituta sunt, ut necessariam operam publicis utilitatibus exhiberent*. Cit. in Rossella Laurendi, *Riflessioni sul fenomeno associativo in diritto romano.I collegia iuuenum tra documentazione epigraficae giurisprudenza: Callistrato de cognitionibus D. 48.19.28.3.*, Annali del seminario giuridico della Università di Palermo, volume LIX (2016), p. 269.

[29] Plinius, Pan. 54,.4, Ep. 10.34.

[30] Between the 1st century, during the age of Plinius, and the 2nd century, the building activity was very lively as the population of Rome increased from 1 million inhabitants to 1.5 million who lived in about 48,000 buildings. A great number of companies had to be involved in this urban development, without thinking about the urbanization works that were started in the enormous empire of the time in Europe, Africa and Asia. See *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, lettere ed arti*, Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, Ed. 1949 Vol. XXIX and also AA.VV. *Ancient Rome*, edited by Andrea Giardina, Mondadori Milan, 2002.

[31] .-M. Carrié, R. Lizzi Testa (éd.), *Humana sapit. Études d'Antiquité tardive offertes à Lellia Cracco Ruggini* (BAT, 3), Turnhout, 2002: « Les associations professionnelles à l'époque tardive, entre munus et convivialité », p. 309-332.

for their election, the composition of the board and little more[32]. Plinius asserts that the *Collegium* of the *Pontifices* had only religious and non-administrative functions. public[33], and that these functions were of jealous preservation of traditional religiosity[34], but more is not known. In short, the corporations of the Roman era were made up of entrepreneurs to negotiate their interests before the authorities and used sophisticated professional techniques that had nothing esoteric and were indeed known and applied throughout the Empire[35]. For a number of obvious reasons there was no need for keep secret the knowledge and construction techniques possessed by the *Collegia structorum*[36]; which was necessary in the Middle Ages when those knowledge and techniques were lost collectively and were reworked only by those who had the intellectual and cultural skills and made them available to organizations willing to pay for such knowledge. In the latter era the economy was without state control and competition between corporations was very lively and it was convenient to keep the "industrial secret" to obtain orders. It is well known that it was the custom and peremptory norm of the guilds that at the end of the works every document was destroyed, probably to avoid that other competing guilds could copy the construction methods and in fact this technical-project monopoly[37] was defended with internal pacts of secrecy. Incidentally, it is curious to note that the practice of destroying documents was taken up again by the first Masonic lodges, which at the end of the work eliminated any trace of what belonged to the rituals, carefully avoiding that information about what was going on in the Masonic lodge leaked out of it. But this certainly does not justify a historical continuity between the present and the past.

Beyond the religious or political *Collegia*, the *Collegia* and *Corpi* with an economic-productive character in this public, secular and economic function did not differ from the medieval guilds and corporations, in the sense that in the Middle Ages the Roman organizational and professional tradition was continued for economic purposes and not for religious or initiatory or esoteric tradition. Rituals and ceremonies of a civil and political nature responded to the widespread religiosity of the time and with no little nonchalance these religious methods were used for a better appropriation of social consensus for direct political purposes, in fact the guilds were connected to the political and religious potentates who ensured the commissions. It is

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[32] Si veda Mario Trommino, *Il collegio dei pontefici nell'architettura costituzionale Romana - Dalla nascita ai rapporti con i componenti dell'ordo sacerdotum*, Università degli Studi Mediterranea di Reggio Calabria - Dipartimento di Giurisprudenza ed Economia, Dottorato di ricerca in Storia del pensiero e delle istituzioni giuridiche romane, 2013-2014.

[33] Cf. *La storia romana di Tito Livio*, Vol. 2, tra. di C. Luigi Mabil, Typ. by Giuseppe Antonelli, Venice, 1842, p. 1275 (vers. lat.) and 1276 (vers. it.). In Livius's text the Senate asks the *Collegium* of *Pontifices* for an opinion on the expenses to be incurred for certain games. The *Collegium* replies that it is not a religious question and refers back to the Senate. It is likely that the Senate wanted an opinion on the morality of overspending on games, but the *Pontifices* do not get involved and distinguish markedly between administrative and religious issues.

[34] Livius also mentions a case in which a public holiday was repeated for pontifical opinion because the ritual was carried out incorrectly, having omitted a call to the Senate and the Roman people.

[35] An example of non-esoteric religiosity is an inscription of the presence of the "*Collegium fabror*(um)" on the edge of the Empire which was found in Britannia, Chirchester (Novomagnus) dating back to the period 403-410 and in which we read that the *Collegium* dedicates a temple to Neptune and Minerva.
[N]heptuno et Minervae
templum
[pr]o salute do[mus] divinae
[ex] auctoritat [e Ti(beri)] Claud(s)
To]gidubni r[eg(is) m]agni Brit(anniae)
[hill]gium fabror(um) et qui in eo
[sun]ṭ d(e) s(uo) d(ederunt) donor aream
[... Pud]ente Pudentini fil(io) ".
See on line: https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/91. Another funerary epigraph found in Corbridge cites a "Palmyra vexillary" which experts believe to be the bearer of a corporation's banner, as there is no such title in Roman military and political terminology. Another interesting British epigraph is that of a member of the *Collegium peregrinorum* (free people but without Roman citizenship who in the Claudia era were 91 % of the population of 70 million subjects); see ibidem .../69 The term *peregrinus* was used from 30 BC to 212 AD. The lemma *Collegium* is therefore to be understood here as an aggregation of people. There are many British epigraphs of people who claim to be worshippers of different deities, both from social and professional groups. In any case, it is evident that professional corporations were present in the Empire and not only on Italian soil as a demonstration of their lay and secular character. In fact, no epigraph refers to mysterious cults.

[36] Only as an example, Plinius the Elder said in the *Naturalis Historia* of 77 A.D. that the structures of Roman ports, exposed to the force of the sea, were becoming more and more robust. The Roman building works have been preserved for two thousand years due to the construction technique of the cement mortar. This mortar was produced with a sophisticated elaboration of various materials including volcanic ones that even in the presence of sea water do not disintegrate, while modern cement mortar lasts only a few decades. The composition of the Roman mortar was recently revealed by a group of researchers. See Phillipsite and Al-tobermorite mineral cements produced through low-temperature water-rock reactions in Roman marine concrete, in American Mineralogist, 102 (7), 2017, pp. 1435-1450.

[37] On the technical-productive monopoly and economic protectionism of corporations, its reasons and socio-economic effects and the conditions of secrecy of knowledge see Douglass C. North *Structure and Change in Economic History*, ed. sc. 1981, p. 134 and also Henry Pirenne *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, Harcourt, Brace, 1937.

sometimes claimed that Roman builders possessed esoteric knowledge such as Pythagorean knowledge. The theses elaborated by Pythagoras and his disciples and by all the arithmetic and geometric culture of antiquity were knowledge developed by an elite belonging to an academy of a speculative type, similar to the Platonic or Aristotelian one, with a more scientificity[38][37]. Such knowledge was quickly known by all and applied by the Romans for its technical functionality and certainly not for its esoteric "value". The construction of a bridge, a circus or a domus did not fulfill esoteric purposes and the presence of any frescoes or statues of esoteric appeal did not justify the construction itself nor the operativeness of those who built them, but the cultural and religious needs of the client. The ceremonies linked to the construction of circuses, spas, bridges or aqueducts were social rituals with a strong political dimension further validated by religious ceremonies, as were their building purposes. In the case of temples, as for every religious building everywhere and always, the conditions were different, but the possible esoteric mode was reserved for the client and the building itself and not attributable to the construction company.

The arithmetic-geometric principles of building were known to many people who exchanged this knowledge and in fact the building techniques of one people quickly passed to another without special rituals. The civil and religious building works of the Romans spread this technological knowledge throughout Romanized Europe and elsewhere. Of course they were not "popular" knowledge, but a scientific and cultural background of specialists and technicians with high culture, that is, they were not reserved for magicians, esotericists or initiates. The Romans elaborated autonomously some construction techniques, such as the arch and the vault, unknown to the previous builders and this elaboration came from the creative deepening of the techniques learned mainly from the Etruscans, the Greeks, the Egyptians and other Middle Eastern populations and it is difficult to represent the arch or the vault as an elaboration of the initiatory-esoteric thought. The fact that certain "scientific" elaborations were developed by communities reserved for specialists, erudite in particular fields, such as Greek, Hellenic or Italic academies, does not ipso facto make such knowledge as initiatic-esoteric.

Ultimately, the Colleges were "secular" economic structures in a non-secularized world; a world impregnated with religiosity but which, as in any social reality, also presented purely secular aspects and if in these aspects there were ritualistic and ceremonial values, these are not necessarily definable as initiatory or esoteric. Any assertion about the esoteric-initiatic characters of the Roman guilds is an over-interpretation based on fantasy, in order to create a mythologeme in terms of *cum hoc vel post hoc, ergo propter hoc*.

The Medieval Universitates

The state dissolution of the Roman Empire was also the juridical dissolution of the institutions following the radical change in the European and non-European economy.

The Roman imperial economy which was mainly based on war and conquest collapsed. Nothing remained the same as before, the jus romanum was adapted to the peculiarities of the new conquerors, not least the emperors of non-Latin origin, and to their cultural traditions even if it remained at its foundations, so that the daily social realities were borrowed in different jurisprudential forms. The communities of people with the same profession (the Collegia) could not be replaced by economically different social institutions; the historical moment did not allow for ideological, economic or operational leaps. In a period of severe economic crisis when gold was no longer the currency of exchange[39] , when international trade collapsed due to the lack of a state organization that controlled and administered it, when the cities were drastically

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[38] Pythagoras of Samos, who arrived in Crotone around 530 B.C., founded a school of philosophical and scientific studies; it seems that it was he who coined the word philosophy, philosopher. Unlike the physiological, naturalistic Ionian schools, his was characterized by deep religious implications in the worldview. Pythagoras' severe religiosity or mysticism was approachable to Orphism, not popular religion but rather elitist. It was a vision based on the balance of forces and which also had political implications, in a Crotone at that time in crisis, having been defeated by the Locri Epizephyrians. His vision influenced the political thought of Plato and, in the first half of the 4th century, of Magna Graecia, such as the government of the Pythagoreans in Taranto. Subsequent interpolations of his thought depicted him as a shamanic thaumaturge, founder of an initiatory and esoteric school. The "esoteric" character of the Pythagorean school is justified by the organization of the school itself which divided the disciples between experts and listeners (who did not intervene in the lessons); therefore with an elitist, reserved character and not because secret or mysterious wisdom was transmitted orally. The confidentiality of the Pythagorean religious spirit was also due to the fact that this religiosity was far from the official one practiced in the polis and was invented by both the rulers and the people. Even his political ideas were innovative, suggesting that the government of a polis or of any community should be exercised by a group of wise people, an idea later developed by Plato. Pythagoras, when he left Crotone, went to Locri but was not accepted because of his religious and political ideas. He took refuge in Metaponto where he died at the beginning of the 5th century BC. For a more detailed examination see Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli, *Magna Grecia: vita religiosa e cultura letteraria, filosofica e scientifica*, Electa, 1985.
[39] SeeMark Bloch *Lineamenti di una storia monetaria d'Europa*, Einaudi, 1981.

reduced from about two thousand in Roman times to villages of dozens of families, it was organized following the local customs of the past[40]. The only possibility for a new economy to maintain a certain solidity was represented by the Universitates (personarum)[41]40 [associations of people], structures that progressively became autonomous from the local powers, assuring their associates forms of solidarity and control of the exclusivity of technological knowledge, unlike before when technological innovations passed from one side of the Empire to the other. The shattering of the state and institutional power of the empire changed the scenario. The barbarian invasions brought new forms of associationism based on "brotherhood" characterized by different criteria that were not those of kinship or descent; they were the "voluntary and free associations" that Gierke called *Genossenschaften*[42] of genuine Germanic law, distinguished by both religious and civil functions. For quite a few historians, the guilds that arose in the urban agglomerations of the early Middle Ages contributed to the development of these agglomerations in the city, thus also assuming a certain political character due to the privileges they obtained from the civil authorities; especially in England this process was of considerable importance[43]. The political power of the guilds became so strong that in the 15th century in Münster no member of the guild could be arrested without the guilds' permission and especially in Italy this power was very strong[44], but also in England under Edward II, to the point that there were rebellions of small bourgeoisie against the guilds of merchants who ruled over the poorest citizens and imposed exorbitant taxes[45]; this condition of governing power, which was based on religious recognition[46], was also present in France[47].

From the 11th century onward, the new guilds retreated into a defence of their know-how (technical knowledge) of the trade. Technological development, at first generalized and public, became private possession within increasingly exclusive professional categories in strong competition with each other. The guilds managed to preserve the principle present in the legislation of the Roman Empire that no one could carry out any non-agricultural activity without being a member of a guild, directed to commercial activities, or of a corporation, directly dedicated to productive/manufacturing activities. The scientific-technological innovations were not publicized, they remained the exclusive patrimony of the single professions, an intellectual capital protected with coercive mechanisms in no different from the current industrial secrets that require the management and workers not to disclose the production processes to the competition. In this way the secrecy constraint ensured that the medieval guilds were able to compete with other guilds in the same trade. Any innovative production process involving greater and easier acquisition of orders had to remain within the higher operational hierarchies. This gave rise to mechanisms of acceptance of new tradesmen on ritualistic and ceremonial bases that determined well-articulated professional level differentiations with an increasingly sophisticated and reserved cognitive progressiveness of the trade. Lively and without respect was the struggle for the acquisition of important orders such as the construction of sophisticated and imposing civil or religious buildings. There is no historical information on the maneuvers of the so-called industrial espionage, which was probably very dynamic and this could be stopped by imposing with ritual methods the non-disclosure of technologies and knowledge that could be acquired during the work. The discourse on the secrecy of construction techniques (there was not yet a theoretical corpus such as engineering or architecture in the modern sense) seems more a formalism than an operative reality, in fact a good builder or craftsman who had finished his work and wanted to move to a corporation in another region or nation did not need any particular signs or gestures to recognize his professional skills and these were now his personal heritage that he could not ignore. Such signs and gestures had more a ceremonial than an initiatory meaning, a sort of professional gestural and verbal

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[40] See Marc Bloch *Lavoro e tecnica nel Medioevo*, Laterza, 2009[5], pp. 111-156.
[41] The term is significant even today where the places in charge of study keep the word that designated the medieval student guilds (*universitas scholarum*). The word expanded in the following centuries to the concept of the community of citizens.
[42] Cf. O. Gierke *Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht*, vol. 1, Rechtsgeschichte der deutschen Genossenschaft, Weidmann, 1868, pp. 9 and 21. The concept of the "brotherhood of craftsmen" was also advanced by W.E. Wilda in *Das Gildewessen im Mittelalter*, Rengen, 1831.p. 31.
[43] See Ch Gross, *The Gilde Merchant. A contribution to British Municipal History*, vol. 2, Clarendon Press, 1890.
[44] Cf. M. Weber *Economia e società - La città*, Donzelli, 2003, p. 134.
[45] *Ibidem* p. 77.
[46] *Ibidem*, p. 75.
[47] *Ibidem*, p. 72.

certificate[48].

The rituals within the corporation to ensure the solidity of the corporation itself had to have formulations of indisputability that only their " lay sacralization " could ensure, however, in the cultural climate of theological absoluteness the best sinecure was to cloak such rituals in religiousness. On a personal level, entering the corporation as a person with good professional potential meant a professional development otherwise unachievable, so it was a very important moment for those who wanted to acquire a technical expertise and for the organization itself also had the sense to increase and stabilize their human capital. As said, the corporate system was ensured by a local and/or national legal system which, under pressure from the corporations and guilds themselves, did not allow them to operate unless they belonged to a trade association, taking up the original dictates of the *ius romanum*.

Until the economic and productive situation experienced a phase of stagnation with modest levels of stagflation, the corporations were allowed to operate in a rather stable way; in reality the situation of the social processes of production were far from solid. The permanence of the socio-productive conditions was in truth only the expression of an artificial rigidity based on the strength of the most powerful over the weakest. The guilds and corporations were the powerful forces that dominated the economic-productive structure, real lobbies of the time, with which even the state and institutional powers had to come to terms. They had the positive effect of making productive activities and the entire economy continuous, but at the same time the technical-economic rigidity in the structural and superstructural aspects of these associations could not respond with the necessary flexibility to the changes in societies and juridical and governmental institutions; finally, they were a phenomenon of rigidity within an extremely changing reality. The fact that the corporations were closely linked to the city and national political institutions is not simplistically justifiable on the grounds that the corporations themselves were flexible in their negotiations[49], but rather the necessary relationship between economic structure and political superstructure. A relationship that saw the political powers, connected to the corporations, give up intervening in the internal affairs of the corporations themselves, unlike in Roman times when the corporations were under the control of the laws and jurisprudence of the state. This report, however, when civil power took on primary importance, as in situations of municipal power, which was also capable of opposing imperial power, corporations were subject to the laws and jurisprudence dictated by political power[50].

However, it should be noted that within this structural "rigidity", the guilds expressed, after the 10th century, many technological innovations and productive organization[51] compared to the period of the High Middle Ages, politically, economically and legislatively devastated by the barbarian invasions.

In order to understand this phenomenon of trade corporations, one must go back in time, to the end of the Roman Empire, when the value of currency, economy and industry collapsed on the one hand and when, on the other, the system of Latin religious values had to give way to cultures and religions from the north-eastern European area and from the Hellenistic and Middle-Eastern ones. The late imperial economy, with the enormous territories conquered, was still based on the great mass of slaves who supported agriculture, manufacturing and industry; such a large quantity that the price of slaves was within the reach of almost all free men and even the libertes, freed slaves, could buy some[52]. At this time, slaves in almost all were barbarians of regions of the extreme belt of the empire and not even the humanitarian theologies of Greek-Latin neo-Christianism questioned the necessity of slavery.

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[48] Some documents attest that among the Masons (but perhaps also in other guilds and guilds) they exchanged gestures (particular ways of shaking hands or other) and words known only to them that showed their professional role. However, in an age when professionals of a certain level were rare and the names of those who possessed them quite well known should suggest that there were other ways of recognizing a certain level of trade and that such gestures and words had more of a ceremonial meaning. Moreover, there were many masonry guilds in every European country and it is difficult to believe that there was a unique way of recognition or that everyone knew the recognition formulas of all the guilds of a trade. No secret formula could have existed for many years or centuries.

[49] This is the thesis proposed by Maarten Roy Prak in his *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power and Representation*, Ashgate, 2006.

[50] See E. Artifoni, *Forme del potere e organizzazione corporativa in età comunale: un percorso storiografico*, in *Economia e corporazioni. Il governo degli interessi nella storia d'Italia dal medioevo all'età contemporanea*, edited by C. Mozzarelli, Milano 1988, pp. 9-40.

[51] See Sheilagh Ogilvie *Rehabilitating the guilds: a reply*, in Economic History Review, 61, 1, 2008, pp. 175-182. Jay S. Epstein in his *Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship, and Technological Change in Preindustrial Europe* in The Journal of Economic History 1998, pp. 684-713, puts forward a thesis, perhaps too enthusiastic, of corporate apprenticeship as a driving force for the development of corporations in terms of stimulating the international distribution (between region and region and between country and country) of knowledge and technical inventions. A distribution resulting from the interregional migration of "experts in the craft", which allowed the corporations to compete successfully with the economic-productive realities of the moment. The thesis is further developed in *his Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400-1800*, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

[52] On the situation of slavery and servitude in the High Middle Ages see Marc Bloch *Lavoro e tecnica nel Medioevo*, Laterza, 20095, pp. 221-263 and for the denotation of free and freedom pp. 29-71.

It is known that between the *Collegia* of the Roman Empire and the first forms of medieval craft associations there is a gap of almost five centuries. The collapse of the empire and its economic system dates back to the fifth century[53], but the crises were also previous, and the Collegia in such conditions could no longer operate. The first trade guilds (Universitates) started between the end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century when the general economy began to recover and internal and foreign trade increased; it was the time when the maritime powers, especially the Italian ones, began their development[54]. It is therefore difficult to demonstrate a direct historical continuity between *Collegia* and *Universitates*. Continuity was a productive logic because in the absence of alternatives the condition of merging on the basis of the same trade remained, but this was not a choice and not even a cause of the creation of the *Universitates* but a consequence of a shattered economy under reconstruction. The difference between the two economic institutions was clear, the *Collegia* operated only if authorized by the political power and with rules defined by the state and not internal, while the *Universitates* were free from any constraint and their rules were established by the officers and administrators of the corporation or guild. The same state and legal powers could not interfere in internal matters and regulations of the corporations especially, as mentioned above, in municipal situations; we will see then that in the legal sphere things were not so clear-cut. No one in the Empire could do business unless they belonged to a *Collegium* while this rule for guilds and corporations took over much later when the central powers and citizens became stronger. The only exception was in the Italian regions under Byzantine rule where in the 7th century there were residual Roman-type guilds called *scholae*, under public control[55]. In the North European area, however, there were corporations in the sixth century and in particular guilds[56], but both were more like brotherhoods characterized by solidarity among the members. Under the Lombards there were rare cases of guilds that were regulated (e.g. by the edict of Rotarians) such as the comancini magistrates, builders with freedom of movement from region to region, and soapmakers from Piacenza. The first forms of monopolistic regime of productive activities, paying taxes to the royal treasury, were formed in the 11th century with the *miniteria* of merchants, fishermen, cookers, boatmen, soap makers. At the time of the end of the central powers, now shattered among nobles, feudal lords and bishops, craft associations took on more precise religious characteristics when they were subject to the bishoprics, thus losing that nature of aggregation of trade unrelated to religion as the *Collegia* of the imperial era. Control by the public authorities was strengthened during the municipal period and the urban economy, preventing activities of public interest from operating without civil supervision.

Medieval corporations and guilds were born in Europe[57] with the end of feudalism and the rise of free economic activities, free for the disintegration of central government institutions. The first merchant guilds

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[53]Since the end of the 5th century Pope Gelasius forbade Christians to attend public places, ceremonies and pagan festivals. At that time, especially in Rome, public places such as baths, libraries, temples, urban military camps and institutional buildings lost their importance and were no longer frequented, even dismantled by private individuals. Maioranus in 458 issued a coercive edict on religious practices in public places. In the fifth century and later the building is confined almost only to the construction of Christian churches, new or as for the Pantheon of Rome turned to Christian worship. On the subject of building activity, particularly cosmatesque, in Italy and in the Rome of the early Middle Ages see G. Tomassetti, *Dei sodalizi in generale e dei marmorari romani*, in BCom, n.33 (1906), pp. 235-69.

[54] Cf. Gabriella Piccinni *I mille anni del Medioevo*, Pearson Italia, 2007, pp. 124-125.

[55] In *Summa Perusina - Adnotationes constitutionum codicum domini Iustiniani*, a cura di F. Patetta, Bullettino dell'Istituto di diritto romano 12, 1990.

[56] The word guild comes from the ancient *gjald*, in Gothic *gild*, in ancient German *gelt*, in ancient Saxon *geld* and in Anglo-Saxon *gield*, all words with the same meaning of confraternity.

[57] Trade associations were present in all Western countries as far as the Far East. We have news of such associations in remote times in China and India even from 400 BC. For India see: Jain, Dr. Beena *Guild organization in Northern India (from earliest times to 1200 bc)*, Delhi, 1990 and where it appears that any trade was organized in corporation from the earliest times; for China see Morse, Hosea Gallou *The Gilds of China, with an account of the Gild Merchant or Co-Hong of Canton*, London 2nd Ed. 1932, where there is a list of trade guilds in many cities.

officially appeared in England[58] in 1087 and soon became part of the civil and administrative life, while craft guilds arose soon afterwards, again in England in 1100 with the weavers of Oxford, but in a subordinate role to the merchant guilds since these workers were excluded from affiliation to the merchant guilds.

There are indirect reports that similar corporations appeared in Germany and Flanders at the same period. At the same time, in the wider organization of socio-economic activities which also included professional colleges, religious confraternities and noble consortia, there were guilds of mercantile and artisan type. There are currently no statutory documents prior to the 13th and 14th centuries illustrating the practices of trade guilds and presumably everything was transmitted orally. The only reference is Goffrey de Monmouth's *L'Histoire des rois de Bretagne* where it talks about the seven liberal arts and geometry and a legendary history of the Craft and the moral and professional duties of the "bricklayers" (*maçon*). Later, from about 1390 onwards, other statutes of masonry guilds known as *Old Charges* or *Antiens Devoirs* are known, studied by the founders of the first Grand Lodge (1717) and ideally at the basis of the Constitutions of Free Masons drawn up by Anderson (1723)[59].

The founding element of these trade associations, in particular the productive-industrial ones, was the defence of the monopoly of the activity and of the operating techniques owned by their foremen and the control of production. Especially in the merchant industries, the quality of the work carried out was important, so that internal regulations established precise rules on the raw materials to be used, tools and processing techniques. These regulations defined a formal equality between the members in order to prevent unfair competition, even if they were hierarchically divided between simple workers, apprentices and masters with considerable economic differences between them. Apprenticeship in trade associations was rigidly codified in the same way as disputes between affiliates were the sole matter of the association and whose appeal in certain regional situations was left only to the royal authority. A classic example of the alienation of city power from the internal affairs of the corporation. Corporations and guilds were administered with different levels of power for the different activities carried out, in short, it was a complex of administrative, civil and operational activities that were not reducible only to work site activities. Behind the work site there was a complex articulation of economic, organizational activities and social and political relations that were the responsibility of the management team and in which the role of the designer or architect of the work to be carried out was subsidiary. The work site was the last phase of a major operation without which no project could have started[60].

A rather widespread thesis among some historians is that in France in the 15th century a particular form of workers' guild had developed, the *compagnonnage*, a primordial form of workers' coalition in opposition to the autocratic management of the guild masters. The conflictual thesis is doubtful and difficult to corroborate but probable, in fact as seen above in certain cases the power of the corporations created disagreements and social alarm in the lower classes. In the more than one hundred known official documents of medieval and later guilds, there are few that illustrate ceremonies of affiliation or acceptance of new members, but these cannot be understood as initiations in the strict sense. Likewise, the references of a Christian religious type as parts of prayers or appeals to the divinity and saints, did not give a specific sacred or spiritual value to the documents, being part of an officiality cloaked in the common religious sense that reigned at the time, that theological absolutism mentioned above, where he *nomina sunt numina*, where the words reflect the divine even in political documents.

In conclusion, these attestations of religiousness cannot characterize the guilds as groups of spirituality or in any case devoted to the sacred, which instead was well expressed in conventual groups and

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[58] In England there are reports of guilds, corporations but more exactly religious brotherhoods in many cities. The English word guild does not distinguish between corporations, guilds and brotherhoods. There was a guild in Abbotsbury in the Orkneys during the Anglo-Saxon period; then the Guild of the Holy Cross in Abingdon, the Gild of the Crucifix founded in 1369 in Althorp, the Gild of Corpus Christi of 1376 in Alvingham and many other dozens. However, there are no data of guilds of craft prior to the 10th-11th centuries; see the interesting list of British guilds with an interesting bibliography for almost all guilds compiled by Tom Hoffman *Guilds and Related Organisations in Great Britain and Ireland*, Draft, 2011. Hoffman quoting the text *Merchant and Craft Guilds. A History of The Aberdeen Incorporated Trades* by Ebenezer Bain, notes that the guild name in Scotland was exclusively applied to merchant associations or organisations formed by the merchant class of the community. These had almost identical rights and often conflicted with those of private merchants. From 1520, it became customary in some towns that the aggregation of craftsmen was given authorisation (Seals of Cause) by local magistrates. The power to form associations and to elect their representatives was conferred by law by Parliament and by royal power. However, these representatives (deacons) had to be elected with the consent of the city council or the chief officer of the city. These deacons had jurisdiction over all members, workers, servants and apprentices on internal craft matters and the conduct of the members themselves.

[59] Subsequent discoveries of documents and statutes have increased the historiographical knowledge of medieval guilds.

[60] Brunelleschi could not have designed and built the domed Duomo of Florence without the political and financial cultural will of Cosimo dei Medici.

confraternities, associations connected to the guilds and guilds but with different purposes and functions. In any case, the function of economic stability and the preservation of institutional political power was prevalent until the 16th century, when, on the other hand, the States took on a broader geopolitical character and control; when the first forms of professionalism independent of the guilds were more defined and technical knowledge developed to the point that they could not be secret. But it was in the seventeenth century that the final process of dissolution of the guilds began for complex reasons, both with regard to their civil and political power and their economic function, as will be seen below.

The crisis of the corporations in the seventeenth century

In Masonic mythology, the phenomenon of guilds of merchants and corporations (of the productive type) presents itself as if from the 10th and 11th centuries until the beginning of the 18th century these had remained the same and, with naïve generalisation, did not have internal regulatory differences, were not regulated by the civil powers, did not operate organisationally and functionally in a different way and did not have a territorial distribution in a leopard spot throughout Europe. Moreover, it is not considered that in the various countries the guilds had different names and that often, as in Great Britain (England, Scotland, Ireland) the same name was used for different associations, for example, bringing the guilds together with the confraternities. It must be said, however, that a knowledge of the names of the guilds, always connected to the activity carried out, reveals the difference from the confraternities named by a purely religious reference, a place of worship, a saint or a Trinitarian element.

Operating by application of the *post hoc, ergo ante hoc* we paradoxically come to ignore the discontinuity of the corporative reality in the course of history and also any analysis of the situation of deep institutional and economic crisis of the corporations in the seventeenth century coinciding with the rise of the first non-operational lodges. A thesis of historical-social and spiritual continuity (sic) that does not explain why in a generalized situation of continental crisis of corporations only in Scotland and England there would have been such continuity. It could be said with some reliability that the Masonic lodges were not a direct effect of the corporations, but were the "sociocultural" response to more complex phenomena including the dissolution of the civil and economic function of the corporations themselves.

In the 17th century the changed economic conditions of the European nations saw the importance of trade guilds decline for several reasons. This was a century of serious general crisis due to multiple factors that individually do not justify the serious general problems but whose interaction had negative synergistic results. Structurally, these factors were: the regression of agricultural production, plagues and numerous local wars with the consequent sudden halt in population growth, the decrease in the volume of international trade due to local problems, the stagnation of technological development and a whole series of other minor factors, both structural and superstructural.

Returning the theme of secrecy, so important in the Masonic sphere, with the passage of time, from the 16th century onwards, keeping the secret of technology was a difficult task to accomplish; scientific development made those who had adequate education and professional experience understand the technical principles once jealously preserved; now it was possible to trace back to its constructive-theoretical principles. What is more important, however, is that the individual professions alone could not survive and with entrepreneurial acumen the corporations and guilds joined forces in larger structures than the guild of the specific craft. If in the past many guilds were involved in the construction of a large civil or religious building, those of the carpentry of the sculptors and painters of the cabinetmakers and many others, in this new socio-economic reality each one alone saw the operational and economic possibilities drastically reduced. The solution was forced: to merge into larger organizational structures including multiple specializations in order to obtain contracts and procurements advantageous for all, thus ensuring a complete work without having to force the client to bargain with different corporations and suffer the blackmail of "without us and on our terms you do not finish the work". Clients who were well aware that they finally had greater bargaining power in front of the corporations favored, under the multiple aspects of jurisprudence, legislation and operational practice, to focus on results rather than on how to achieve results. The competition for the procurement market and the consequent operational rationalization overshadowed the superstructural aspects of operations, so that effectiveness was overwhelmingly flanked by efficiency and the construction of major works no longer lasted a few centuries but a few decades. Effectiveness and technical-organizational efficiency meant that the links with ancient history and culture as well as the references to symbolism and mysticism of various esoteric matrices took on formal modalities that aimed at aesthetics rather than the pedagogy of the citizen or the faithful, and this is clearly visible for example in

the façade of the cathedral of Granada and the subsequent Spanish cathedral of the Churriguera builders of Seville. The substance became "invisible", covered by superstructures dripping with the "visible" formality of the late baroque and rococo that also invaded the Masonic iconographic style. Nor can we overlook the fact that certain esoteric knowledge such as Kabalistics, brought to knowledge in Europe and especially in Italy by the diaspora of Jewish Kabalists after 1492, but equally many hermetic, astrological, magical knowledge were not part of the general knowledge of the members of the guilds being written in languages such as Greek or Arabic unknown to the mass of people in the Middle Ages and known only to small circles of clerics. We must arrive at the 16th century so that with the translations of Ficino and Pico della Mirandola this knowledge could be extended to larger circles. It is therefore difficult to think, once again, that in the guilds before the 15th century there were well-defined esoteric notions but only vague and fragmentary information introduced by people who had relations of various kinds with distant countries. But at the end of this fifteenth century social and cultural economic situations, including religious ones, changed drastically.

Science and technology in the late Middle Ages

For the remaining seventeenth-century craft corporations, the contractual objective to be achieved was imposed in terms of a different timing in the sense that the possibility of using the result as soon as possible obliged a different organization of work. If before the intervention of a specialization was conditioned by that of other specializations to be contracted in the course of the work, now the same company (multidimensional guild of trades) is asked to ensure the result in due time. The new corporations of unified trades could ensure the requests of the clients who were operating for the most varied reasons to the realization of the stringent contingencies of a political power very variable in space and time, a power anxious to be handed down before disappearing from the face of politics and history.

The medieval internal regulations of the exclusivist type with the opposed religious ritualisms, the Aristotelian logic of the pervading omniscient hierarchy in every sphere of secular and spiritual human activity broke down. Now the individual professions claimed their own specificity, also putting the name of the author and the year of realization on the works, and the first forms of professional sociality were seen to arise, prefiguring the future Trade Unions or syndicates. The corporations no longer satisfied the professional affirmation needs of the many who did not want to wait for the long time it took to move from one category of professionalism to a superior one. In the seventeenth century the works are now signed by the designer or architect and no longer anonymously by the corporation. To think that the anonymity of design and construction has a meaning of sacralization as opposed to secularization would obviously make no sense, it was just a sign of times gone by when the work was the fruit of an entire community and in which the individual, architect or labourer, had no personalistic socio-cultural significance, a time in which the individual identified with a social group. In this new era the only historical remnant was the client, not in the form of characters that can be defined historically but of social groups operating publicly, so in the end who gave and meant the work was the client and not the creator (corporation), although for art historians the name of the designer remains a priority.

After the end of the Middle Ages, technological knowledge developed rapidly with "scientific" characters that were reserved for a few brilliant figures. The figure of the creator of the work came forward and impressed on the work itself the mark of its artistic and technical individuality. The Master as an intellectual figure imposed himself not only on the client but also on the entire community of the workers who created the work, a community that did not identify itself but represented itself in a masterful individual. In terms of construction activity, the name of the architect is handed down but not the names of dozens of masters of the many specializations that had contributed to the work as a whole. A well-known example was the construction of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London of which much is known about its architect, Christopher Wren, but little or nothing about the guild that built it and its master builders. These were the first timid steps of the liberal professions.

The corporate phenomenon cannot be torn from the social, juridical, political and cultural context, so it must be contextualized in macroeconomic situations and this crisis situation of a disintegrating past appears with the rise of the 17th century impregnated with problems that cannot be solved with the solution schemes of past centuries and therefore with the crisis of the socio-economic functions of corporations.

On the other hand, since Freemasonry was born in England, it is in the context of the British territories (England, Scotland and Ireland) that one must look at. The seventeenth century is dramatic: wars and devastation of the countryside, with the influx of agricultural populations in the largest towns, in miserable

conditions, favoured the plagues. The population declined drastically and so did the workforce[61]. Wars of religion in the 16th and 17th centuries destroyed the prosperous monastic communities, the main commanders of large building works. The other great commanders, the royal and noble courts, dissipated economic resources and drastically reduced investments for major construction works. The masonry corporations for lack of manpower and orders were those that suffered the greatest crisis. With entrepreneurial logic, they changed into multi-kraft corporations, as mentioned above, but the crisis was irreversible, the economy changed and entrepreneurship turned towards non-corporate privatization. The private entrepreneurial bourgeoisie began to develop alongside the financial, commercial and professional ones. In all this fairly rapid process, the crisis certainly did not have the characteristic of spiritual decadence, the so-called secularisation. The masonry corporations dedicated themselves mainly to civil orders, reconstructions of city districts and public buildings, buildings where architects and master builders had little room for expression of their eventual mystical and esoteric and even less spiritual knowledge.

Focusing on masonry guilds, referring to the interesting though traditionalist text by Thomas Carr (1911)[62] we know that in Britain since the beginning of the 17th century the so-called " masons" were distinguished in many categories related to their practical work. Mainly there were the Free Masons, effective members of the guild and then other specializations used on command and organized separately: the *Wallers* (builders of walls mainly of stone fortifications), the *Slaters* (builders of roofs, usually slate), the *Paviors* (builders of stone, marble or hard stone floors), the *Plaisteres* (plasterers and painters present in London since 1501), the *Bricklayers* (builders of brick walls) the *Carpenters* (carpenters or axe masters). In 1604 there was a guild in Oxford called *The Company of Free Masons, Carpenters, Joiners, and Slaters of the city of Oxford*[63]. In Kendall, in 1667, the *12th Trade Company* included Free Masons, rough masons, wallers, plaisterers, slaters and carpenters. Always T. Carr reports that in 1761 in Gatesgate there was a curious aggregation, merged in Cosin Bishop of Durham, of various operational specializations: *Free Mason*, *Carvers* (first stone engravers), *Stonecutter*, *Sculptures*, *Brickmaker*), *Tylers*, *Bricklayers*, *Glaysiers* (glaziers), *Penterstainers* (interior painters), *Fonders* (bronze founders) *Neilers* (nail makers), *Pewterers*, *Plumbers*, *Millwrights* (machine carpenters), *Sadlers* (saddlers), *Bridlers* (animal bridle makers), *Trunkmakers* (boundary markers) and *Distillers*, thus a series of different craft and professional specializations not necessarily united by the same operational projects. Also in Edinburgh were incorporated in *St. Mary's Chapel* another series of different specializations, together with the *Masons* (bricklayers) there were *Coopers*, *Upholterers*, *Bowmakers* (bookmakers), *Slaters*, *Glasiers*, *Painters*, *Plumbers* and *Wrights* (carpenters). The author himself mentions a considerable series of aggregations of different professional skills in operational corporations.

In modern terms it could be said that the corporations were progressively structured into *Incorporations*[64], losing all the operational and cultural characteristics of the medieval trade guilds of a single trade, so it is not possible to speak in these not sporadic cases of a general process of secularization, since they are real mechanisms of entrepreneurial adaptation to new economic-productive situations. These historical-cultural trends demonstrate the fundamentally profane, lay character of the corporations, and no document at present can allow us to speak of a global process of secularization and a loss of spiritual, religious and sacred characteristics, starting from individual situations to generalize them to the whole of medieval society. The loss of the so-called sacred values held to be the foundations of a craft would not then be the cause of socio-cultural change (superstructure in the Marxian sense) but the inevitable consequence of the change in the social structure of production (always in the Marxian sense). The superstructural changes accompany, solidify, give explanation or justification, in a word they can condition but rarely determine the structural ones.

Masonic Lodges

In the 17th century a new reality begins. The corporations of builders constituted by the free-stone masons continued their activities but alongside them groups were created that contracted the generic definition in free-masons and that did not belong operationally to the corporations. The use of the adjective free is mainly coming, in the British Middle Ages, from the existence of people who, not being servants or slaves but free,

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[61] Only in the decades between 1600 and 1700 the process was reversed with a strong demographic increase, with the repopulation of the countryside and the increase and improvement of agricultural production and the consequent increase in the value of land and land income, with the development of industrial production and the increase in domestic and foreign trade.

[62] Carr Thomas, *The Ritual of the Operative Freemasons'*, London, 1911

[63] This Company is also cited by Robert Freke Gould in *The Concise History of Freemasonry*, Courier Corporation, 2012, p. 77.

[64] In the sense of aggregation, legally recognized, of enterprises with different purposes and/or activities.

joined together in associative forms with different purposes and also those who had purely civil activities distinct from those corporations.

From the rare documentary data it is easier to suppose that laterally to the corporations there were associations of influential personalities of the non-operational civil world who flanked the corporations themselves, giving them a greater social significance than the confraternities dedicated to solidarity-religious activities. Typical in more modern times, in the early eighteenth century was the figure of Christopher Wren, English architect of St. Paul's Cathedral who belonged to an association linked to the guild of masons in London, without being a member of the guild. In fact, his function as designer of the cathedral was not entrusted to him by the corporation but by the London municipality and under ecclesiastical control. One could then put forward a thesis which is not easy to prove today that in the context of a decline in the political, social and economic importance of the corporations, the parallel and support organisations of the corporations had assumed greater importance also for the high-ranking members who constituted them and had gradually structured themselves into organisational forms with the character of Masonic lodges in which the members were not operational. This is a thesis that can be comforted by the fact that the operational members of the corporations present in such structures were a small minority compared to the non-operational ones. In order to distinguish them from the non-operational ones the definition of *adopted* or *accepted* was adopted, probably to maintain a close link with the adoptive corporation but declaring that they did not belong to it. Another important term is added, that of *free*. A term also taken from the historical tradition of medieval corporations, but with a different meaning. It is no longer the worker who is not bound by a servant or slave relationship with a landowner being a member of a corporation, but the one who does not belong to any artisan or professional institution (Métier or Craft), who works individually with a family enterprise. At the same time the adjective was generally assigned to scholars, military men, gentlemen, nobles. Even in previous times there were many guilds in Scotland that admitted freemen, independent operators or simple citizens, and this tradition can probably be attributed to the presence of non-operational members[65] 63 in the first Masonic lodges of the 17th century in Scotland.

The term *free* in the Masonic sphere took on a meaning as important as that of accepted. Without addressing the linguistic question of the various over-interpretations of the *free* lemma resulting from socio-cultural modifications, its original meaning, different from the socio-cultural over-interpretation that was given between the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century, can be found again. Originally, in the medieval era, the *free* word did not have a precise and generalized juridical sense, depending on countries, social customs, historical moments and therefore determining a great variability of meanings[66]. Therefore, the word has never had a social, juridical, legislative and finally culturally solidified meaning before modern democracies because of the fluidity of the geopolitical and socio-cultural situations of the Middle Ages and the following epochs. In fact, in the Early and Late Middle Ages in the same large linguistically and culturally defined region there could exist different enclaves of culture, language and institutions. The same borders between one country and another were not defined by a river, mountain range or other, they were large regions where cultures and languages as well as institutions flowed and mixed without precise determination with easy mutations, which was further complicated by the invasions of certain peoples in other regions, which involved more or less stable normative changes.

The concept of free in itself is not definable if we do not compare it with two other concepts, slavery and servitude, concepts deriving from the explanations offered by the legal and political regional categories; so that the same word, free servant and slave, assumed different meanings; at the same time the words servant and slave or servant and free could be identified on the basis of local regulations. In fact, the very concept of servitude sometimes came close to that of free, depending on the obligations due to a higher authority. It was therefore the obligations due that determined the nuances of meaning, for example vassalage could be considered a form of servitude with respect to the nobleman of higher rank or the high nobleman with obligations of military servitude with respect to the king or emperor. Consequently, the very concept of liberty itself was dependent on and conditioned by greater or lesser obligations to a higher authority, as if to say that the deprivation of liberty was variable and it was the courts and legislative institutions that determined the controversial terminology, to the point that in 1263 in France the parliament of Saint Martin d'hiver delegated the servile condition to the *consuetudo patriae* [custom of the country], in the sense that

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[65] In 1611 a guild of merchants was established in Alnwick (Northumberland) to which Freemen, presumably independent operators, could also be admitted. See Tom Hoffman *Guilds and Related Organisations in Great Britain and Ireland,* Draft, 2011, p. 3. The same thing happened, again by city or internal rule, in the guilds in the 16th and until the 18th century in Barnstaple (Devon) and also in Bishop's Castle (Shropshire), in Berwick Upon Tweed (Northumberland) where there were religious guilds and also of merchants, tanners, minstrels. Still others especially in Scotland.

[66] For these observations reference is made to Mark Bloch, *Lavoro e tecnica nel Medioevo*, Laterza, 20095

every village is a country[67].

In conclusion, the concept of free is derived from the definition of slave and servant and not the opposite. The variability of the bonds in use therefore makes it extremely difficult to adopt generic definitions of these terms and the issue has dragged on until the 18th century, noting the legal and legislative differences in the various European countries[68]. This obviously takes on a particular meaning in the Masonic lexicon adopted by the Constitutions of Anderson in 1723 in which the word free-stone masons never appears, probably in order to distinguish the new Freemasons from the workers of the mason corporations.

Today, to speak of the first "Masonic lodges", reference is made to certain associations present in Scotland in the early 17th century. Of some of these lodges we have news of their existence, the places and dates of their meetings, the names and profession of their associates but nothing more. We have no information about their initiation rituals, what they consisted of, whether they were esoteric and what esotericisms they related to. The only interesting information resulting from rare documents is that in certain lodges the associates were mostly bourgeois and provincial nobles with rare participation of members of the residual masonry corporations, as if to suppose that it was the latter who were "accepted" rather than the first ones. The first dates that confirm the existence of Masonic lodges date back to 1641[69] in Scotland and then in England in 1646, with the famous annotation in Elias Ashmole's diary of 1682[70], from which it is deduced that there was a Masons's Hall in London, probably the headquarters of the Corporation of Masons in London; more interesting is the fact, which does not seem to have attracted the attention of scholars, is that Ashmole does not speak of guild or corporation but of lodge (without specifying the name) and it is reasonable to suppose that the lodge to which he refers was an organization external to the corporation but linked to it if it met at the corporation headquarters. It would therefore be confirmed, if this hypothesis is plausible, that the lodge was not an emanation of the corporation or that it was not subordinate to it, in other words that there was no direct filiation of the lodge from the corporation.

In the context of mytho-historiography, little consideration has been given to David Stevenson's work *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590-1710*[71]. Stevenson's careful documentary research recreates the timeline of the process of transition from operational to speculative lodges, which took place before the end of the 17th century and in Scotland before England, challenging the undocumented claims of anti-historicist Masonic myth-history. An address of "history-fiction" that leaves the path of ascertained documents for the path of the possible and invented more than imaginable, a virtual history address to which one must recognize no small force of attraction. The history of Freemasonry, Stevenson observes, is not comprehensible only in its internal events: it must understand the relations with the context of its events by making use of the contributions of other social and humanistic disciplines. The documentation on the first Scottish speculative lodges of the 17th century is extensive in Scotland but, for the same period, non-existent in England. When Stevenson reports that the first lodges created in Scotland by non-operatives

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[67] On the condition of slave, servant and free in the Middle Ages see March Bloch *Liberté et servitude personnelles au Moyen-âge, particullièrement en France - Contribution à une étude des classes*, Mélanges historiques, 1963, p. 286-355. The author himself cites similar examples in Germany and England.

[68] M. Bloch also points out how the idea of service is expressed in *hommage* [homage] which implies the recognition of subjugation to a higher power and the change even with ritualistic modalities of the formalities of subjugation. See Bloch *Les formes de la rupture de l'hommage dans l'ancien droit féodal*, Mélanges historiques, 1963, p. 189-209.

[69] MQ 11.10.2004 mentions Sir Robert Moray's affiliation on 20 May 1641 in *St Mary's Chapel Lodge* in Edinburgh.

[70] Cf. Conrad Hermann Josten, *Elias Ashmole (1617–1692). His Autobiographical and Historical Notes, his Correspondence, and Other Contemporary Sources Relating to his Life and Work*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1966, vol. II, pp. 395–396, In his diary Ashmole, thirty-six years later [sic], noted March 10, 1682: «About 5 H: P.M. I received a Sumons to appear at a Lodge to held the next day, at Masons Hall London». The next day still notes: «11th Accordingly I went & about Noone were admitted into the fellowship of Freemasons, Sir William Wilson Knight, Capt. Rich: Borchwick, Mr Will: Woodman, Mr Wm Grey, Mr Samuel Taylour & Mr William Wise. I was the senior Fellow among them (it being 35 years since I was admitted). There were present beside myself the Fellowes after named. Mr Thos: Wise Mr of the Masons Company this present yeare. Mr Thomas Shorthose, Mr William Hamon, Mr John Thompson, & Mr Will: Stnaton. We all dyned at the Half Moone Tavern in Cheapside, at a Noble Dinner prepared at the charge of the New-accepted Masons. » cf. Josten 1966, vol. IV, pp. 1699-1701. His diary with the title <u>Memoires of the Life of Elias Ashmole Esq</u>, was published in 1717 in London; see the editorial on Ashmole in MQ magazine of 11 October 2004.

[71] David Stevenson *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590-1710*, 1990, p. 207. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

seem to have been those of Canongate Kilwining (1677), Canongate Leith (1688)[72]70 and Hamilton (1695)[73]71 he is not saying that Scottish Freemasonry was born at the end of the 17th century like other English lodges, but he confirms that those lodges were the conclusion of a process begun some time ago. Stevenson's merit is that of repositioning the history of Freemasonry within the history of the British countries. He, speaking of "phases" of Freemasonry history (medieval, Renaissance and Enlightenment), identifies the Scottish historical centrality, in implicit controversy with those who want to make a history of the origins of Freemasonry exclusively of English brand. Stevenson acknowledges that the earliest documents of the Old Charges or Old Constitutions masons are English and are no different from those of other guilds; Scottish copies only appeared around the middle of the 17th century. In these Old Charges there appears a special emphasis on the morality identified in the Geometry and references to ancient buildings such as the Egyptian ones and the Temple of Solomon. These references, however, do not justify a relationship of historical continuity, of which in Scotland only around the beginning of the seventeenth century is begun to speak. In England the presence of gentlemen in the lodges appears only around the 40s of 1600 and it must be said that the process of " laicalization" of the English lodges is still obscure. At the same time, as we have seen, in Scotland and other countries the practice of admitting people not in the craft (freemen) to the guilds was quite usual before the 17th century. The phase of Scottish influence on English protomassonry ended at the end of the 17th century, when new intellectual and cultural stimuli involved both Scottish and English lodges, Enlightenment rationalism first and foremost, and Freemasonry took a new direction. Stevenson claimed from the Scottish Masonic movement a precise and documentable list of the primogeniture of the manifestations or aspects that would later characterize modern Freemasonry[74]:

« Earliest use of the word 'lodge' in the modern masonic sense, and evidence that such permanent institutions exist

Earliest official minute books and other records of such lodges

Earliest attempts at organising lodges at a national level

Earliest examples of 'non-operatives' (men who were not working stonemasons) joining lodges

Earliest examples of 'non-operatives' (men who were not working stonemasons) joining lodges

Earliest evidence connecting lodge masonry with specific ethical ideas expounded by use of symbols

Earliest evidence indicating that some regarded masonry as sinister or conspiratorial

Earliest references to the Mason Word

Earliest 'masonic catechisms' expounding the Mason Word and describing initiation ceremonies

Earliest evidence of the use of two degrees or grades within masonry

Earliest use of the terms 'entered apprentice' and 'fellow craft' for these grades

Earliest evidence (within the Lodge of Edinburgh) of the emergence of a third grade, created by a move towards regarding fellow craft and master not as alternative terms for the same grade but as referring to separate grades (or at least status) ».

Stevenson recognizes several primates in English Freemasonry at the same time[75]:

« Earliest copies of the Old Charges (no Scottish copies are known which pre-date the mid seventeenth century)

Widespread use of the word 'freemason', and use of the term 'accepted mason'

Earliest lodge composed entirely of 'non-operatives' (which can be interpreted as indicating how English masonry was, much more than Scottish, an artificial creation, not something that grew out of the beliefs and institutions of working stonemasons). The earliest grand lodge ».

The masons working in Scotland, but also in other countries, did not differ from other craftsmen, but compared to the members of other corporations and guilds just for their activity they could move from one

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[72] In Cannongate, an ancient suburb of Edinburgh, there were several guilds (twelve) gathered in the Convenery of Trades of Edinburgh, which included blacksmiths (already present in 1483), hatters, dyers, leatherworkers, furriers, butchers, builders (to which were added in 1489 the coopers and in 1633 the painters, tile makers and sieve makers). There were also building builders (Masons) who in 1633 were joined by arch and vault builders, glassmakers, tinsmiths and upholsterers. Also present were the guilds of tailors, bakers, shoemakers, goldsmiths and weavers. A guild of merchants was operational in the 15th century (1403) and King James IV of Scotland was a member in 1505, a presence that gave great prestige to the guild. It reordered its statute, guaranteed by King Charles II, in 1691 by admitting non-commercial citizens. See Tom Hoffman *Guilds and Related Organisations in Great Britain and Ireland*, Draft, 2011, p. 253.

[73] Cf. David Stevenson *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590-1710*, 1990, p. 207. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

[74] David Stevenson *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590-1710*, 1990, p. 207. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.7

[75] Ibidem, p.8

region to another with a certain freedom for new jobs. Disconcerting is the fact that since 1590 the guild was the only one in the corporate world to emerge for its development. It was during this period that the importance of William Schaw, Royal Master of Works (King's Maister o' Wark)[76] emerged.

Stevenson reports that Schaw issued a code of rules on the organisation and administration of masons in 1598, followed in 1599 by a second code in which the Kilwinning Lodge and the Lodges of Edimburgh and Stirling are mentioned; that of St. Andrew's is mentioned in a minute of the Edimburgh Lodge. It was in those years (1600-1601) that Schaw confirmed as protector of the masonry William Sinclair of Roslin[77], descendant of William 1st Earl of Caithness of the Norman-Scottish Sinclair family, who had the famous Chapel of Rosslynd built in the middle of the 15th century[78].

Nothing is known about the secrets of the seventeenth-century lodges, the documents and minutes of the lodge obviously do not contain confidential things, and this, as Stevenson observes[79], creates quite a few problems for historians. However, the presence of non-operatives (freemen) in these lodges is well known and it has been seen that this practice was quite frequent in many medieval European corporations and guilds in middle and high age. Nor do we have any information about their way of operating and to define them as initiatory and esoteric is only a supposition. Another mystery is the relations between these lodges, which couldn't not be there, even if they probably didn't take the forms that took place in the era of eighteenth-century Masonic cosmopolitanism.

David Stevenson's questions are first and foremost, "What were the secrets and rituals of the operative masons and how had they acquired them?" and then, "Why did men who were not stonemasons wish to participate in the activities and secrets of the stonemasons, and what sort of men were these non-stonemasons who joined lodges?" The first question cannot be answered without information on the rituals and so-called secrets of the stonemasons. The corporations as we have seen were not initiatory groups and there is a lack of any information to affirm that they carried out esoteric activities, so the secrets were possibly industrial secrets and, if industrial secrets can be spoken of, these were acquired not through special initiatory or esoteric formulas but with work experience and under the guidance of the most experienced. The most complex construction techniques were not within everyone's reach, only the rare non-clerical educated people could have studied and elaborated them. But at the same time it has to be said that there was no science of architecture and engineering, construction methods were the product of empirical experience, of the consciousness of the errors made previously and of intelligence and rationality in finding the right solutions to those errors. The more sophisticated this empirical procedure was, the more the art of building was perfected. To say "art of building" is antithetical to "science of building"; verified and repeatable method and theories are the foundation of science, while experience, technical memory, intellect, reason and creativity are the cognitive baggage of the artist. In fact, construction activity was given the definition of "art" and since this was applied to important civil, military and religious works, always under the protection of the highest civil and ecclesiastical offices, it became "Royal Art", a way of defining it that was also adopted in Masonic lodges.

Therefore, secrecy could only make sense for reasons of competition between corporations, but since it is known that master masons moved to different regions working for other corporations, even this secrecy was not real secrecy. The rituals were almost certainly ceremonies aimed at committing the new worker to respect the rules of the corporation and his fellow craftsmen and to solve the problems that had arisen not to turn to any authority other than the corporation's board of directors. The corporation, in return, undertook to guarantee the work and compensation appropriate to his abilities, assistance to him and his family in case of need and, in certain guilds, especially merchants, that in case of death his wife would replace him within the guild. These covenants were very demanding and certainly were carried out with adequate ceremoniality and a minimum of ritualisation proper to each corporation.

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[76] Gordon Donaldson in *Register of the Privy Seal of Scotland, 1581–1584*, Scottish Record Office, 1982, vol. 8, pp. 276–277 no. 1676, reports Schaw's functions: «Grit maister of wark of all and sindrie his hienes palaceis, biggingis and reparationis, – and greit oversear, directour and commander of quhatsumevir police devysit or to be devysit for our soverane lordis behuif and plessur.' or, in current words; 'Great master of work of all and sundry his highness' palaces, building works and repairs, – and great overseer, director and commander of whatsoever policy devised or to be devised for our sovereign lord's behalf and pleasure».
[77] By deed of notary Laurentius Robertson.
[78] The Roslin Chapel is another of the debatable Masonic myths that would like to link the Sinclair family with the Templars. Indeed, chronicles report that a William Sinclair, Baron of Roslin and father of Prince Henry Sinclair died in 1358 in Lithuania in a battle led by the Teutonic Knights, but not the Templars. The chapel was spared by Cromwell but seems to have been used as a stable by his troops. It was restored by James Sinclair in 1736. It is more likely that the burial place where a statue of a Crusader knight with an angel appears is a tribute to the ancestor who died in Lithuania, rather than a declaration of connection with the Templars.
[79] Cf. David Stevenson *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590-1710*, 1990, p. 9.

There is another question to ask: if corporations had been initiatory and esoteric, with direct references to pagan knowledge and practices, how could this be admitted and granted in an age of theological absolutism, when the Church intervened with capillary social control and ironclad intransigence against any form of preservation of pagan practices? Some might answer that these esoteric-magic practices were the secret of the guilds, but it is an answer that descends from the unsubstantiated assumption that such practices existed, and it is difficult to believe that in all European regions and in all guilds such a secret has been kept for many centuries without any information leaking out. Unlike mystery, which is something unknown that cannot be communicated, secret is something known that is not communicated.

With subtle irony Stevenson notes a certain snobbery in assigning to construction site builders « the work of respectable, educated gentlemen ». The Author with semiological accuracy observes that there are limits to possible interpretations. Stevenson is radical and provocative when he peremptorily observes that the distinction between operative and speculative is intended to distinguish two historical phases: as the Author says, this is a very bizarre definition (of speculative), which overestimates the differences in social status when he argues that modern Freemasonry began when the gentlemen entered the operative lodges. So that Freemasonry would be defined by the rank of the people who carry out certain activities, and not by the activities themselves[80].

We observe that Freemasonry at the beginning of the eighteenth century came out of the secrecy of seventeenth-century lodges and was openly placed in society, configuring itself as a civil association (Grand Lodge), as it was immersed in the social and cultural concreteness of the time and whose members must have a relevant social position. This is well evidenced by the lists of members of the Premier Grand Lodge in which among the first Grand Officers there were mostly gentlemen (booksellers, scientists, scholars), but very soon to these were added, especially in high offices, exponents of the nobility and rich bourgeoisie and important intellectuals.

The declarations, on the part of the new Masonic lodges, of benevolence and other direct relations with the civil community are, however, emancipated from the social prescriptions of religious culture of previous epochs and of that moment, and this is certainly a cultural novelty, coming out of the books and petitions of philosophers. The founders were people who quite often adhered to both deist and latitudinarian forms of religiosity, but in a rather confused set of Anglican, episcopal and other religious reformisms, as well as Catholic, tensions. What, however, surreptitiously unified the different positions was the idea of a "universal morality" that detached itself from the specific moral expressions of the many churches; there were also present and not uncommonly active cultural minds, such as cultured libertines and enlightened atheists. This mixture of religious and even political expectations, all aimed at breaking with the bloody wars of religion, gave rise not to the elaboration of a generic spirituality but to an idea of universal morality of man that was expressed in the first article of the Constitutions of Free Masons in 1723.

The first Masonic spirituality had no strictly religious value, it was connected to the new ideas that arose from the disillusionment that religion and church spirituality could solve contingent human problems, developing new ways of interpreting the world, nature and man in a key based on morality rather than faith. The first Freemasons wanted to achieve a new and higher humanity in today's world without referring to the afterlife, and this was their idea of human "progress". A sort of cultural revolution that laicized the tradition of formal religiosity of medieval guilds and the same references to the Bible had the allegorical sense of a way of thinking and acting alien to codified religion, because always in the first article it is explicit that religions are phenomena linked to individual social realities that tend to impose them on everyone, violating freedom of conscience. One could then say that the first Masonic lodges were among the first social forms of laicalization, since Masonic associationism was separated from all forms of religious confessionality; laicalization is not secularization.

There are Scottish and even English documents from the end of the 17th century that describe, also in catechetical form, certain rituals that were performed in some lodges. The only observation to make is that they did not reflect in any form the medieval guilds except for some allegorical aspect such as the adoption of certain ritualistic and symbolic instruments, such as the tools used by the builders (team, compass, level, chisel, hammer, apron, etc.) and the internal hierarchy of the two degrees of Apprentice and Companion. Every other characteristic of the Masonic lodges was extremely new compared to the past, a past that took on the guise of mythical, or preferably allegorical and not of historical continuity, but rather of ideal contiguity. The end of this historical phase can be designed with the creation of an unprecedented organizational structure, the Grand Lodge, which, to the extreme, could recall the guilds of the multiple trades of the seventeenth century, when several guilds were federated into a single organization.

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[80] «That would make the rank of a person doing certain things, not the things themselves, define freemasonry.» *Ibidem* p. 12.

From the facts currently known in the previous Roman or medieval trade associations there were no initiatory rituals, equally there is no news of esoteric practices but possibly of practices of public religiosity and internal institutional ceremoniality. The same roles assigned to the "lodge officers" in the Premier Grand Lodge existed only in part in previous eras and the new "lodges" did not correspond as organizational structure to the corporations. The only exception may have been the use of the term Waren, assigned to Schaw, but then in the sense of guarantor before public authority, a different role from that of the eighteenth-century Masonic lodges.

The "lodge" in the new semantics defined the group of affiliates, while everyone knows that originally, it was a building structure present in the yard which fulfilled the functions of deposit and meeting and which, at times, was extensively applied to the corporation. The word lodge in 17th and 18th century English had the meaning of a small building or a doorman's dwelling and the verb to lodge was to stay in a temporary dwelling[81]. The reference in the context of building is obvious, the lodge is a building where to store something and gather, so it is a term used to define a structure with multiple functions within the worksite. Even thinking that certain construction sites could operate for tens of years, it cannot be considered that such a structure was a constituent part of the corporation, which carried out its activities in other more appropriate locations and within the city. The lodge was a more or less stable building in which first of all the designers of the building worked preparing the construction plans, giving the operational directives of the site and managing the most immediate administrative issues. Meetings were probably held in the lodge between the master builders of the multiple activities that were necessary for the construction of the building. Perhaps in some part of it were also kept all the specialized instruments necessary for the master builders and architects and also as an archive of the administrative and operational documentation of the building site. At the end of the construction, when the building site was closed, the lodge also fulfilled its function. Referring to the meeting place inside the building sites, the first Freemasons had the suggestion to recall precisely this sense of community gathered in a restricted and reserved space, for a grand purpose and discussion on issues of major importance and perhaps this was the underlying reason for the choice of the name, giving it a symbolic meaning.

There are questions to which there seems to be reluctance on the part of the official Freemasonry at the mere manifestation of them. The Masonic lodges operated in absolute secrecy, why? It wasn't the custom of the corporations to which they were returning. The answer that the Masonic lodges wanted to retrace symbolically or allegorically the operational secrets of the corporations is a weak answer. Why did they carry out ceremonial rituals of which there is no record in the then known ancient corporate statutes except towards the end of the 17th century? Were they rituals that arose from the internal needs of the Masonic lodges, was it the need to give themselves an ideological solidity? The answers can only be hypothetical.

Rather, a more serious question arises: were the first rituals of the lodges at the end of the 17th century really initiatory rituals or just ceremonial rituals, as were those of the corporations? The concept of initiation does not seem to belong to the first speculative Freemasonry. In the known documentation there is always and only talk of *Accepted Free Masons*, of accepted and not *Initiated*. As if to say that the new Freemason was accepted in the lodge and not initiated to Freemasonry and anyway the possible use of the term *Initiated* always had the sense of acceptance[82]. This is an issue that still needs to be approached, that of the meaning of Masonic "initiation" and the beginning period of its use in Freemasonry. It is presumable that the concept of initiation is a consequence of the emergence of new Masonic ritualisms that gave a spiritual, almost sacred value to the acceptance ceremony.

The fact that these post-corporative lodges were made up of operational members open to extraneous people is nothing new, as we have seen that this practice has existed on British soil for quite some time. As mentioned above, more reliable would be the thesis that the first Masonic lodges were subsidiary circles not internal to the corporations and not necessarily created by the corporations themselves, but rather by prominent citizens of the municipality or free entrepreneurs and in any case not members of the corporation

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[81] See in *A complete dictionary of the English language,* 1797, By THOMAS SHERIDAN, A.M. the fourth edition, vol, II, London, pr. for Charles Dilly et al., 1767: « To LODGE, Iodzh'. v. a. To place in a temporary habitation; to afford a temporary habitation; to place, to plant; to hx, to settle; to place in the memory; to harbour or cover; to afford place to; to lay flat. - To LODGE, lòdzh'. v. n. To reside, to keep residence; to take a temporary habitation; to take up residence at nsight; to lie flat. - LODGE, Iodzh'. f. A small house in a park or forest; a small house, as the porter's lodge». Si veda anche: An Universal Etymological ENGLISH DICTIONARY..., Twentieth Edition with considerable Improvements, by N. Bailey, London, 1763: «A LODGE [loge. P.] a Hut or Apartment for a Porter of a Gate, &c. – To LODGE {loger, F. jelojian, Sax.] to lay up; to take up Lodging in. - To LODGE [among Hunters] a Buck is faid to lodge, when he goes to Rest. - LOGE, a Lodge, a Habitation. Chou».

[82] Robert Cawdrey in his *A Table Alphabeticall Of Hard Usual English Words,* London, Printed by I. R. for Edmund Weaver, 1604, defines « Initiated: to begin, instruct, or enter into ».

or under servitude, therefore *freemen*. Circles in which various activities were carried out, including discussion and study on subjects unrelated to the technical subjects dealt with in construction sites and that any scientific masonry issues such as mathematics and geometry were carried out within a more theoretical vision and hence the name of "speculative lodges".

Conclusions

The birth of the Grand Lodge in 1717 sanctioned the definitive breaking of a supposed historical continuity between Masonic lodges and operating corporations, defining an absolutely original organizational structure with innovative rituals and new rules. The only similarity with the seventeenth-century corporations lies in the fact that with the economic crisis of the seventeenth century the corporations became a sort of Trade Unions unifying different trades and that in the early eighteenth century several lodges wanted to federate into a single organization.

Within this theme of historical continuity between Roman and medieval corporations and Masonic lodges, there is an aspect that deserves a special and more in-depth treatment, that of the alleged spiritual continuity in an esoteric key between the three different phenomena. In short, both Roman and medieval corporations and lodges would have carried out a ritualistic operation and an esoteric thought, which someone specifies as hermetic-esoteric, of spiritualistic value. The affirmation is difficult to document and at the moment it is waiting to be. Therefore, this esotericism would not be a characterizing element of the two professional associations and neither would that of a generic spirituality. This is not the place for an analysis of the spiritual character of esotericisms, also because the spiritual word itself is too general and difficult and complex to interpret. Were the Masonic lodges of the first hour spiritualist? Here too it is impossible to give an answer for the lack of information and documents, not even knowing if they carried out esoteric activities and what specific forms of esotericism. It is known that individual Masons of the eighteenth century were interested, and passionately, in various esotericisms, but this is not enough to support the thesis that the lodges of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were in general esoteric lodges; always remembering that this was a time when interest in nature and its laws was not carried out through the sciences, but through esoteric study. There were many associations and academies in Europe dedicated to research on nature. One must arrive around the middle of the 18th century to observe such a generalisation of esoteric interests. Even if we accept the argument that esotericism and spirituality are identified, the thesis that the original Freemasonry was spiritualist is still to be proved. It is more likely that the cultural centre of gravity was morality, or rather the attempt to establish a morality unrelated to the particular religious cults then in strong contrast with each other, a morality that was therefore more lay and civil than spiritual.

With regard to medieval corporations, there are no documents from the High to the Low Middle Ages that demonstrate that these corporations operated on the basis of a spirituality that can be referred to in an esoteric and even less hermetic way. Hermeticism in particular is not a complete theoretical corpus as alchemy or astrology could be, it appeared around the second century A.D. in Hellenistic culture and developed as an intricate set of mystical-religious doctrines, Semitic astrology, elements of Platonic and Pythagorean philosophies, Gnostic religiosity and, it seems, also of magical Egyptian references[83].

The interpretation of esotericisms and especially hermetic ones in a spiritual-religious key appeared in the Italian Renaissance with the discovery and translation of ancient esoteric texts. Especially in the 19th and 20th centuries a spiritualistic over-interpretation of hermetic texts and other esotericisms was consolidated. It is difficult to prove that medieval corporations and in particular some planners/architects were aware of these texts that had not yet been translated into Latin.

On the other hand, the real question is that the modern concept of Masonic "spirituality" lacks a precise hermeneutical and epistemological direction and construction and that with this general-generic word one can understand any human aspect that is not of biological concreteness. The fundamental thing, however, is that such Masonic spirituality is not defined in an initiatory sense and saying that it is esoteric does not resolve the question, but creates further complication by adding a term that must also be specified in its initiatic-Masonic value, because the terms "spiritual" and "esoteric" are not synonymous and one does not

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[83] We do not know the original versions of Corpus Ermeticum, a collection of hermetic-neoplatonic writings, but only the Greek translation dating back to the 11th century by the Byzantine Michele Costantino Psello. His text was then acquired around 1460 by Cosimo dei Medici who had it translated by Marsilio Ficino into Latin. Isaac Casaubon, in *De rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis* of 1614, demonstrated that the hermetic writings were not prior to the Hellenistic period and doubted that Hermes ever existed. This hermeneutical thesis has not yet been refuted by scholars.

qualify the other, as well as "Masonic" and "esoteric".

In human language words are used to describe reality, visible or invisible, physical or metaphysical, but if the words used are not precisely defined, no reality is described.

Language Annotations

The terminology used in the Roman and medieval guilds would deserve a specialized study (philological and hermeneutical), with analysis of the vast documentation produced by these institutions; but this is not the right place; therefore, it is limited to approximate notes of a general nature.

Since the text refers to the real or mythical links between modern Freemasonry and the corporative realities of the past, the emphasis is placed on the situation of the British countries where Freemasonry was born; therefore, also the philological and hermeneutical aspect deserves some attention and for this reason some introductory clarifications are necessary.

The first English word dictionaries appeared in the 16th century, mostly as interlanguage dictionaries, i.e. other language/English[84]84. Reference has been made here to these and subsequent dictionaries of the 18th century.

In English the word *guild*, also *gild*, is used more often in an extensive sense, both for manufacturing and commercial associations. Many historians prefer to call *guilds* the associations of merchants and *corporations* the manufacturing ones. The distinction is due to the fact that the two types of associations were distinguished not only for the activities carried out but also for the regulations and statutes and the relations they had with the civil authorities[85]. Since Freemasonry was born in the British countries, it is for these, for their civil and economic institutions and related documents, that philological and hermeneutical attention must be present.

It is found in English-speaking authors the use of the word *Guild incorporation* to define a guild by trade. The first time this word was used was in the 14th century in the sense of «the act or an instance of incorporating something or the state of being incorporated » - Merriam-Webster Dictionary-, also in M-W for *corporation* is « a group of merchants or traders united in a trade guild (see guild sense 1) » and for *guild* « an association of people with similar interests or pursuits especially: a medieval association of merchants or craftsmen »[86]

Also in English-language publishing the word *guild* or less frequently *corporation* is used; in Scottish authors' documentation the word *Guildry* or even *Guildry Incorporation* is used instead of *Guild*. The latter designation would have the meaning of « creation or formation of a legal corporation », in other words, an association of workers recognized by local authorities.

In the middle of the 17th century Guild also had the meaning of currency, tribute and also « A society incorporated ». In a dictionary from 1647[87] «Corporation, A body politick, having by the King's grant a common feal, a chief officer, and inferiour persons belonging to it. » More extensively, Edward Phillips in 1658 writes « Corporation, (Lat.) in the Civil-Law, signifieth a Body politick, autorised by the King Charter, to have a Common Seal, one, or more head Officer, and Members, able by their common consent to grant or receive in Law any thing whitin the compass of their Charter. »; in greater synthesis he defines *Guild* as « a society incorporated »; he also writes that the word *University* means: « in the Civill Law, is taken for a body politique, or corporation: also an Academy »[88]. *University* is a word of clear medieval derivation. It is also interesting to note that Phillps mentions the Guild-Hall: « *Guild-Hall*, a place where the Magistrates of any City meet to consult about tradind, judicial proceedings, or any other grand affair, *Guild*, being a Society incorporate from the Dutch word *Gueld*, i.e. mony. » [d. d. Aut.].

After a century in *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, by Nathan Bailey[89], for *Guild*: « A company of men united together, with laws and orders made among themselves, by the licence of the prince - or - a company or society of men incorporated by the king's authority. » In these years the word *Guild*

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[84] Among the first of course the Latin/English dictionaries, such as Thomas Elyot's in 1538, but also, in 1583, that of Richard Mulcaster of eight thousand headwords; Richard Mulcaster is considered the founder of the lexicography of the English language. We should also mention the erudite lexicographer Giovanni (John) Florio, for his Italian/English dictionary, he was the royal guardian of the language at the court of James I. and one of the most important humanists of the English Renaissance; he was the first to use quotations to better explain the words. William Salisbury, who compiled an English-Wallen dictionary in 1547, is worth mentioning. The first dictionary of the English language appeared in 1604, followed in 1607 by a dictionary of legal words, by John Cowell; later, in 1658, the cited dictionary by Edward Phillps. English language dictionaries multiplied in the 18th century.

[85] Cf. Ewing James, *View of the History, Constitution, & Funds, of the Guildry, and Merchants House of Glasgow*, printed for J. Hedderwick, p. 7, 1817.

[86] Here Merriam-Webster Dictionary repeats the Latin definition (Livius and Tacitus) of *Collegium* - see later in the text.

[87] In *The English Dictionarie* (sic) *of Interpreter of Hard English Words*, by H.C. Gent, Printed by A. M. for T. W., London, 1647. A popular dictionary with printing inaccuracies. It should be noted that until the 18th century dictionaries were compiled for an audience of learned people or scholars.

[88] In *The New World of English World or a general Dictionary…*, By Edward Phillips, London, Printed for Nath. Brook, 1658.

[89] Printed for T. Osborne, C. Hitch and L. Hawes, B. Dod, London, 1757

takes on a more articulated meaning; it can be read in Thomas Sheridan, *Dictionary of English Language* ...,[90], *Guild* is : «A society, a corporation, a fraternity; an for corporation: a body politick»; for *incorporation*: « formation of a body politick, adoption, union, association » It is presumable that in the 17th and 18th centuries the *incorporated guilds* had a dual sense of association/union of people carrying out the same trade and also of aggregation in a single guild of several trades.
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