

The Symbolism Behind the Masonic Lodge Stewards

By Michael Souza

Hello Brethren,

Recently, Tristan Brown and I were installed in Sacramento 40 Lodge as Stewards for the 2014-year. As most of you know, the emblem of the Stewards in a Masonic Blue Lodge is the cornucopia, also known as the Horn of Plenty. Traditionally in a Masonic lodge the cornucopia emblem on both the Junior Stewart's jewel and apron has the opened end pointing to the left, while the emblem of the Senior Stewart's jewel and apron has the opened end pointing to the right. As the Junior Stewart sits to the left of the Bible (the Volume of Sacred Law - or VSL) and the Senior Stewart sits to the right, the open ends of the cornucopias symbolically point away from the VSL signifying that blessings and bounty issue forth outwards from the VSL into the lodge.

The cornucopia has an interesting history. Though we are accustomed to seeing it as a centerpiece for thanksgiving table settings, its history goes back much further.

The cornucopia, or Horn of Plenty, is actually representative of the horn of the goat Amalthea, the nurse of baby Zeus in Greek mythology. This is interesting since, as we as Masons are taught, we are indebted to the Greeks and not the Romans...and you know the rest.

In the Greek myth, Zeus' father Cronus knew the prophecy that a son would be born that would dethrone him so he attempted to eat all of his children. Cronus' wife Rhea managed to hide their youngest son Zeus, and wrap a stone in a blanket in his place. Cronus ate the stone not realizing that the young baby (who was destined to overthrow him) was still alive hidden in a cave.

Rhea could not give away the secret location where the baby was hidden by visiting Zeus because Cronus might follow her and find the baby, so she entrusted the raising of young Zeus to a magical goat named Amalthea. Eventually, Zeus became an adult, overthrew his father and freed his brothers and sisters from inside the stomach of Cronus. But alas, in time the old nurse-goat Amalthea died. In honor of her kindness, Zeus threw her body up to the stars where she became the star Capella (little goat).

If you are not asleep by now, you may be wondering how this ties in with the cornucopia. As the story goes, Zeus was an exceptionally strong child and managed to pull a horn off Amalthea's head as she played with him one day. Because she was a magical goat, the horn issued forth fruit, grain, and honey to feed Zeus and in this way he was never hungry or without a meal even if Amalthea was not around to feed him.

The cornucopia has thus been associated with giving and a bountiful harvest for well over 4,000 years and is one of the most common symbolic motifs carried down through the ages.

And now a bit of background on the star Capella, which you will remember represents the nurse-goat Amalthea. It is the third brightest star in the Northern Hemisphere and is not actually one star but a star system made of two binary pairs of stars - in other words two star systems that orbit around one center of gravitational mass. When observed through a telescope they look like two bright stars moving in unison. Is this a coincidence that in Masonic lodges there are two stewards working in unison represented by an emblem signifying a binary star system? This is but one of the connections between Masonry and astronomy - but 'further light' will have to wait for another time.