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# La Masonería en el mundo – (Islam 2)

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# **THE CRAFT IN ISLAMIC COUNTRIES**

## **- An Analytical Review -**

Delivered in the Victorian Lodge of Research on 24 November 2000

“There is a profound irony to the relationship between Freemasonry and the Middle East. No world organization owes more to the region in the way of its motifs, its symbols, and its rituals. But no organization in the course of its presence in the Middle East has encountered more criticism, more disapproval, and more outright government persecution”. - Dr. Paul Rich i [i]

## **INTRODUCTION**

Most Masons are aware, although perhaps only vaguely, that the Islamic Countries in general, and the religion of Islam in particular, have a problem with Freemasonry. However few, one suspects, are aware of the reasons for this, or of the historical and current situation. The purpose of this paper is to examine the causes of Islamic antipathy towards the Craft, locate them within an historical perspective, and discuss the surrounding issues. The focus will be on Arabic countries, but reference will be made to other Islamic countries.

## **AN OVERVIEW – NORTH AFRICA & THE MIDDLE EAST**

Scotland established the first lodge erected in the Middle East, at Aden in 1850. It was followed by a lodge in Palestine in 1873. However, most Masonic development was spawned in this century, beginning with English lodges located in Iraq shortly after the First World War. Unfortunately, the lot of the Craft in the Middle East has not generally been a happy one. Only in Israel, which possesses a mainstream Grand Lodge, and to a lesser extent in Lebanon, has Masonry flourished in recent times.

Outside of Israel and Lebanon, only one mainstream and two Prince Hall lodges remain – a Scottish lodge in Jordan, Lodge Jordan #1339, dating from 1925; and James R. Jones Military Lodge #172 and Pernell Cooper Military Lodge #177, under the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Oklahoma, which meet on US military bases in the Persian Gulf. British-warranted lodges that formerly existed in Iraq, South Yemen (Aden), and elsewhere on the Arabian Peninsula have all been extinguished as the result of political/religious pressure. A few German lodges are warranted for Saudi Arabia, but these effectively do not meet, and their longer-term future must be uncertain. In Iran, which has lately had a regular Grand Lodge, Freemasonry has been destroyed, almost

literally, and this occurrence must rate as one of the greatest tragedies in Masonic history.

Northern Africa has seen an analogous Masonry history. Freemasonry arrived in Morocco in the 1860s. A Scottish lodge was formed in the country in 1902, and an English lodge in 1927. Both subsequently moved to Gibraltar. A self-constituted Grand Lodge was erected in Morocco in 1967, but within a few years it seemingly disappeared. Somewhat surprisingly, the Grande Loge Nationale Francais (GLNF) chartered three lodges in Morocco on 30 June 1997 – at Casablanca, Rabat, and Marrakech. The GLNF obtained permission of the Moroccan Government to erect lodges because this French Masonic Grand Body, the only one generally recognized by mainstream Grand Lodges, strictly prohibits political and religious discussion in its lodges. The three lodges were constituted by the GLNF into The Grand Lodge of the Kingdom of Morocco (Grande Loge du Royaume du Maroc) on 15 June 2000, in Marrakech.

Algeria, Libya and Tunisia all had lodges during their French or Italian colonial periods, and Egypt once possessed an active Grand Lodge, together with many lodges under the home Grand Lodges. Popular opinion has it that no lodges operate in these countries, but that is not entirely the case.

The Masonic history of Egypt, in terms of influence on prevailing Arab/Moslem opinion towards freemasonry, is pivotal. A brief resume will be offered here, although certain aspects will be revisited shortly. Lodges began appearing in Egypt in the early 19th century, with the first warrants coming from France and Germany. In the 1860s, England, Scotland, and the Grand Orient of Italy all chartered a number of lodges in the country. In the period immediately following the Second World War, Scotland had three lodges under charter, and England had fourteen lodges—the oldest of which, Bulwer Lodge of Cairo #1068 EC, was chartered in 1865 - under a District Grand Lodge formed in 1899.

The story of the non-British lodges is one of schism and confusion, with several Grand Orients rising and falling, combined with heavy influences from Supreme Councils and other “higher” degrees and rites. A National Grand Lodge of Egypt was the predominant body, and it had an uneasy relationship with the British Grand Lodges. Its lodges worked variously in Arabic, Greek, French, Italian, Hebrew, and German. As will become clear shortly, it is not unlikely that general Arab opposition to Masonry stems from perceptions of this period.

The rise of the Nationalist Movement in Egypt and the assumption of power by President Nasser led to Freemasonry being suppressed in the mid-1950s. All British lodges were subsequently closed, with most English lodges being formally erased from the United Grand Lodge of England’s *Roll of Lodges* in 1965. Similarly, Nasser closed Egyptian-chartered lodges. ii [ii]

# ISLAM AND FREEMASONRY

Clearly, the lot of the Craft in Islamic countries in general, and Arab countries in particular, has not been a happy one. The question is why?

Most Masons will be aware of various Papal Bulls issued, historically, by the Roman Catholic Church against Freemasonry, as it understood (or more correctly, misunderstood) it. In reviewing Islamic attitudes towards Masonry, it must be first observed that this religion has no personage analogous to the Pope. However, most Islamic countries do have an official legal/religious consultant. A number of articles have been written on the subject, dating back as far as the mid-Nineteenth Century.

Possibly the most influential body in promulgating and interpreting Islamic Law is the Islamic Jurisdictional College (IJC). At its meeting on 15 July 1978, it issued an opinion concerning the "The Freemasons Organization". iii [iii]

The SAJS declared: "After complete research concerning this organization, based on written accounts from many sources, we have determined: (Ed. This is an edited summary due to space.)

1. Freemasonry is a clandestine organization, which conceals or reveals its system, depending on the circumstances. Its actual principles are hidden from members, except for chosen members of its higher degrees.
2. The members of the organisation, worldwide, are drawn from men without preference for their religion, faith or sect.
3. The organization attracts members on the basis of providing personal benefits. It traps men into being politically active, and its aims are unjust.
4. New members participate in ceremonies of different names and symbols, and who are frightened from disobeying its regulations and orders.
5. Preferred members are free to practice their religion, but only members who are atheist are promoted to its higher degrees, based on how much they are willing to serve its dangerous principles and plans.
6. It is a political organization. It has served all revolutions, military and politically transformations, and in all dangerous changes a relation to this organization appears either exposed or veiled.
7. It is a Jewish Organization in its roots. Its secret higher international administrative board are Jews and it promotes Zionist activities.
8. Its primary objectives are the distraction of all religions and it distracts Muslims from Islam.
9. It tries to recruit influential financial, political, social, or scientific people to utilize them. It does not consider applicants it cannot utilize. It recruits kings, prime ministers, high government officials and similar individuals.

10. It has branches under different names as a camouflage so people cannot trace its activities, especially if the name of “Freemasonry” has opposition. These hidden branches are known as Lions, Rotary and others. They have wicked principles that completely contradict the rules of Islam. There is a clear relationship between Freemasonry, Judaism, and International Zionism. It has controlled the activities of high Arab Officials in the Palestinian Problem. It has limited their duties, obligations and activities for the benefit of the Judaism and International Zionism.

Given that Freemasonry involves itself in dangerous activities, it is a great hazard, with wicked objectives, the Jurisdictional Synod determines that Freemasonry is a dangerous, destructive organization. Any Muslim who affiliates with it, knowing the truth of its objectives, is an infidel to Islam”.

Undoubtedly, we would see many of the assertions in this ten-point pronouncement as absurd, or at best inaccurate. But it does give us several clues as to the reasons behind Arab/Islamic antipathy toward the Craft. This would be seemed to be based largely on political considerations, with religion used as its justification.

## **CURRENT ARAB ATTITUDES TO FREEMASONRY**

In terms of the Arab world, an interesting article recently appeared in Cairo’s “Egyptian Gazette”, under the title: *FREEMASONRY IN EGYPT. Is it still around?* iv [iv] Authored by Samir Raafat, it is quoted here in full:

“In Egypt, arguments levelled against Freemasonry were selectively derived from the writings of George Zaidan and Shaheen Makarius --turn of the century writers and freemasons. Both had commended contemporary businessmen and entrepreneurs, many of them Jewish, for their active role in reviving Egypt’s capitalistic economy. Six decades later their statements were being salaciously re-interpreted so that the businessmen and entrepreneurs of yonder were portrayed as eager tools of a Judeo-Zionist collusion bent on dominating the regional economy. In his 660-page volume entitled “Freemasonry In The Arab World”, Hussein Omar Hamada dedicates much of his book juggling to Masonic conspiracy theories.

As the predominant conspiracy hypothesis takes credence in the Near East, the legality of Freemasonry is questioned and subsequently tabled on the Arab League's agenda. In any case, with the post-1952 departure of Egypt’s *haute khawagerie*, lodges and Masonic temples were rapidly losing their members. Some freemasons, whether out of fear or self-interest, simply stopped turning up at the meetings so that even the all-Egyptian Star of the East Lodge had a hard time supporting itself.

On 4 April 1964, the Masonic Temple on Alexandria’s Toussoun Street was shut down by order of the Ministry of Social Affairs. ‘Associations with undeclared agendas were incompatible with rules covering non profit organizations.’ Further disturbing evidence for the State concerning Freemasonry’s political goals would turn up the following year in Damascus when master spy Eli Cohen (an Egyptian freemason) was apprehended.

In Jordan and I believe in other parts of the Middle East, the obligation is taken on the Holy Quran, the Bible or the Old Testament when Jews were members of a lodge. The perception of ‘What Freemasonry Is?’, is the problem. We can’t promote something people know nothing about. There are too many myths that are allowed to continue.”

It is noteworthy that Raafat in this article poses the proposition that Rotary and Lions clubs are a front for Masonic lodges. Interestingly, this fanciful assertion, in Egyptian terms, gains even less credence given that Mrs. Susan Mubarak, the wife of Egypt’s current president, is a strong supporter of Rotary and plays a prominent role in its international activities. Nonetheless, it does indicate, again, a measure of paranoia within Arabic opinion.

## **POLITICS AND RELIGION**

Other authors have tackled the subject. Mustufa El-Amin, in his book “Freemasonry, Ancient Egypt and the Islamic Destiny”, v [v] compares the symbolism of the Ancient Egyptian mysteries, and Islamic scriptures, with those of the Craft. He draws on comparisons made by several authors, included C. W. Leadbeater vi [vi] , who asserts “Although our modern Freemasonic rites and symbols are derived from Egypt...they have reached us for the most part through the Jews. ....the wisdom of Egypt was handed down in the secret lodges of Masonry.” While the veracity of Leadbeater’s thesis is open to question, it undoubtedly has its uses for anti-Masonists, particularly those with an Islamic perspective.

El-Amin’s study is rational and studied, rather than sensational, and not rabidly anti-Masonic. He concedes that the purpose of Masonry is to seek truth. He states: “I have observed through my research that there are some aspects of Freemasonry that point in the direction of the Islamic destiny”. However, he stops short of pronouncing on the compatibility of Islam and the Craft. Expectedly, he asserts that truth is to be found through the revelations of the Prophet Mohammad. In addition, he does take exception with a number of aspects of Freemasonry from his religious position. He is particularly unhappy with the American “Masonic” order of The Shriners. “It should be noted that The Shriner’s ritual and initiation pertaining to the “Kissing of the Black Stone” (an allusion to the Kaaba at Mecca) is ridiculous, offensive and disgraceful. It is a direct mockery of that solemn tradition in the life of Muslims”. vii [vii]

The “problem” of Masonry “mocking the Moslem Faith” is addressed by another author. Dr. Paul Rich states: “The prohibition of Masonry in the Muslim countries of the Middle East is paltry because there are aspects of Masonry which religious people feel verge on mocking their faith. An example of Masonic ritual which offends some, and that shows the gulf between believers and Masons, is the resemblance between the assassination and exhumation of the candidate in the third or Master Mason degree and religious accounts of resurrection. Almost nothing can be said to correct their common interpretation of the third degree that the Mason is saved by Freemasonry, and not by religion”. viii [viii]

The studied work of El-Amin contrasts with widespread sensationalist anti-Masonic propaganda, much of which the regular Mason would find incredible. An article in the American *New Solidarity* newspaper in 1983 is a case in point. Under the banner heading “British Masons Push Mid East Holy Wars”, the author states that “The Duke of Kent, controller of the international Mafia from his position as Grand Master of Freemasonry, arrived last week in Saudi Arabia...(as) the flag-bearer in a widespread effort to destabilise the Middle East.” As ridiculous as such assertions may be, they do not enhance the image of Masonry amongst the unwitting body of the Islamic world. ix [ix]

## DISCUSSION

The overriding impression of Freemasonry in the Arab world is that of a pro-Zionist, anti-Islamic organisation; involved in conspiracies to undermine their political-religious status quo. Religious antipathy, based upon the perception that Masonry mocks the Islamic faith, is certainly a relevant factor. However, it can be argued that the larger problem lies in the fact that Arab governments, in looking for someone to blame for their colonized past, saw Freemasonry as a convenient victim. As a result, Zionism and Freemasonry are largely seen as the same thing. On the other side, the ‘side of the defence’ if one will, there is little doubt that indigenous Freemasons in Arab countries have remained silent for fear of persecution. It is noteworthy that, officially at least, Islam recognizes and respects both the Jewish and Christian faiths. Thus, while religion is a factor, politics would seem to be more so. El-Amin draws a clear distinction when he states: “There is a difference between Arab nationalism and Islam. Arab nationalism oppresses...enslaves...denies women their rights...is racist. Islam is universal; it is not nationalist.” x [x]

A problem for regular, mainstream Freemasonry, even in Western countries, has been the anti-clerical and atheistic attitudes of the Grand Orient of France and its minions. To the uninformed, regular Freemasonry and irregular ‘Freemasonry’ are indistinguishable. The Grand Orient of France has historically been very active in the Middle East. On 14 September 1877, the Grand Orient voted to eliminate reference to the existence of God from its Constitution, and subsequently altered its rituals accordingly. As a result, The Grand Orient, as far as regular Grand Lodges were concerned, ceased to be “Masonic”.

This split in Freemasonry into two ‘camps’ was certainly felt in the Middle East. The Grand Orient of Egypt was the mother of several lodges and Grand Lodges across the area. Initially widely recognized by other mainstream Grand Lodges, it effectively followed The Grand Orient of France into irregularity. One suspects that subsequently, it was convenient for Arab governments and Islamic religious authorities, even if they had the knowledge to differentiate between regular and irregular Freemasonry, to tar the Craft with the anti-religious brush.

As the Egyptian Masonic experience is probably the basis for much of the Islamic antipathy towards the Craft, it is useful to consider Egyptian Masonry in more depth. The degree to which Freemasonry permeated Egyptian society prior to its banning in 1964 is not particularly clear. Gerard Galtier suggests that the Craft, especially the ‘Egyptian’ Order of Memphis and Misraim, enjoyed ‘immense success’ among the high

society of various nationalities and religious groups until at least the reign of King Farouk in 1952. Subsequent to the demise of the Egyptian monarchy, lodges were viewed with considerable suspicion and began to fade away. xi [xi]

After the 1956 Suez War, Egypt's first president, Gamal Nasser, expelled most resident foreigners, which included many Masons. As a result, lodges lost members, and those remaining undoubtedly became very circumspect given the new regime. According to Galtier, in 1964, after a huge scandal involving the Israeli master spy Eli Cohen, who reportedly belonged to an Egyptian lodge, "the Egyptian government banned Freemasonry from Egyptian soil altogether." xii [xii]

The article of Samir Raafat, if nothing else, does reflect the extreme sensitivity with which Masonry is viewed in the Arab world. In his discourse on Freemasonry in Egypt, particularly during the formative years of the modern Egyptian state, author Karim Wissa, a civil servant in the Egyptian Foreign Affairs Ministry, makes a number of accusations concerning the Craft. In summary, Wissa's hypothesis is that early Egyptian political parties, which served as the backbone of the country's 1952 revolutionary movement, were either pseudo-Masonic organisations or, at least, highly influenced by Masonic principles and ideals. Unlike many other Arabic researchers, Wissa does seem to recognise the difference ('strong rivalry', in his terms) between French and British Masonic groupings. He noted that the British brand of Freemasonry, regulated in Egypt by the United Grand Lodge of England, was traditionalist in style, and practiced religious tolerance with no political overtones. The French brand, regulated by the Grand Orient of France (and to a lesser extent by the Orders of Memphis and Misraim), was definitely 'anti-clerical' and 'anti-monarchy' with extremely political overtones, especially in the spreading of ideals of revolution and republicanism. He asserts, not without proof, that this French brand of Masonry infiltrated the Egyptian *new elite* – those people who played a prominent part in the revolution to follow. xiii [xiii]

As his evidence, Wissa identifies a wide assortment of important Egyptian personalities who were directly involved with Masonic lodges in Egypt prior to its outlawing in 1964. These included several members of the Royal Family from Ismail Pasha (known to the West as the 'Khedive') to the last monarch of Egypt, the exiled King Farouk. Wissa also identifies the Masonic affiliations of Egyptian political leaders such as Ahmad Orabi, who headed the failed coup against Tewfik Pasha in 1882, and Mohamad Farid and Saad Zaghloul, who headed the influential National and Wafd Party which started the popular uprising against British rule in Egypt. After Nasser's revolution, the tide turned sharply against the Egyptian Masonry, with the new Order looking upon it with suspicion, and accusing it, conveniently, of strong Zionist tendencies. xiv [xiv]

It is an interesting aside that, although Masonry is banned in Egypt, the American Rosicrucian order (AMORC) – not to be confused with the Masonic Rosicrucian order (SRIA in England, or SRIS in Scotland) – is tolerated in Egypt today. AMORC does possess ritualistic aspects that are imitative of Freemasonry being, arguably, a hybrid of Hermeticism and Gnosticism. Reportedly, it has even been permitted to perform its rituals and ceremonies inside ancient Egyptian monuments, including the Great Pyramid. xv [xv]

## A FINAL COMMENT

Islamic antipathy towards Freemasonry, as Moslems have been led to understand it (or more correctly, mostly, misunderstand it). If regular Freemasonry is to address the issues and problems involved in the future, it is necessary that we have this understanding. That said, it is nonetheless difficult to see Islamic anti-Masonic attitudes being arrested swiftly.

However, there is some hope. The re-introduction of regular Freemasonry into Morocco, with government permission, would seem to indicate that at least in that country, an understanding of the issues has been achieved. However, given the unresolved Arab-Israeli dispute, and the rising tide of religious fundamentalism in the Arab world, it would appear that general Masonic prospects in the Islamic world do not look widely positive, at least in the short term.

## APPENDIX

An historical synopsis of each country in the Arab/Islamic world, which follows, provides a useful background to the subject. They are detailed alphabetically.

### Algeria

The introduction of Freemasonry into Algeria, a former French colony, goes back to 1831 with the creation of the French military lodge 'Cirrus' followed by lodge 'Bélisaire' and lodge 'Ismaël' in 1833. All three were erected under the Grand Orient of France. A major step towards the acceptance of non-Europeans in colonial Algeria was achieved with the initiation in 1864 of Emir Abd-el-Kader, who had led the war against the French conquest from 1832 to 1847. However, this breakthrough was short-lived and few Muslims subsequently joined Freemasonry in Algeria, evidently because they could generally not share the anti-religious views of the Grand Orient of France Masons.

In 1939, just before WWII, Algeria possessed eleven lodges under the Grand Lodge of France and twenty-one lodges under the Grand Orient of France, plus a couple of lodges under *Le Droit Humain* and a lodge of Memphis-Misraïm. After 1945 Freemasonry did not regain its former importance and with the independence of Algeria in 1963 it disappeared altogether, following the repatriation of most French nationals back to France. Freemasonry is today prohibited. xvi [xvi]

## **Bahrain**

This oil-rich Arab State on the Persian Gulf has until relatively recently possessed several lodges. Its first lodge was St. Andrew of Bahrain, erected in 1949 under the Grand Lodge of Scotland. It first met in an aerodrome, and then in a church hall, prior to building its own temple in the desert. The then Emir of Bahrain gave the lodge the land on a ninety-nine year lease at nominal rent. In 1954, St George Bahrain #7389, was founded under the English Constitution. Both lodges largely consisted of British oil workers. Plainly to this point, the Bahrain government was decidedly not anti-Masonic. However, by the 1970s it had become so, and both lodges ceased operations in the country. Why this change occurred is unclear, although the reasons can be surmised. The Scottish lodge was subsequently erased, while St George Bahrain Lodge moved to Ashford, England, where it continues to meet. xvii [xvii]

## **Iran (Persia)**

The fate of the Craft in Iran forms the greatest Masonic catastrophe since the Second World War. The discovery of oil in Persia brought many British workers and traders, a percentage of whom were Masons. Scotland was the most active in issuing warrants, beginning with Lodge Light in Iran #1191 at Shiraz in 1919, which later moved to Teheran. Three other Scottish lodges followed prior to World War Two. England weighed in with St George Abadan Lodge #6058 at Abadan in 1945. French (GLNF) and German lodges were also erected in the country after the War.

Subsequently, the growth of the Craft in Iran led to moves to form a Grand Lodge, and this was achieved with Scottish sponsorship in 1969. By 1978, the Grand Lodge of Iran had 43 lodges and 1,035 members. That was the last year of its existence in Iran. The Islamic Revolutionary Government took control of Iran in that year, whereupon the Islamic Revolution Guards immediately raided all Masonic Temples and confiscated the property of all Lodges. They reportedly found a list of seven hundred members in the residence of the Grand Master, Ja'afar Sherif Emami, who was formerly Prime Minister to the Shah. The Islamic Revolution in Iran saw Freemasonry swept away rapidly, and it appears that a number of Masons suffered execution at its hands. Whether these deaths were occasioned for political or anti-Masonic reasons will probably never be known, and the fate of many Iranian Masons may equally remain a mystery.

Many Iranian Masons, however, escaped to the USA, where they formed the Grand Lodge of Iran in exile. A reasonable number of American Grand Lodges, in particular, maintain fraternal recognition of the Grand Lodge of Iran in exile, which maintains an office in California. xviii [xviii]

## **Iraq**

Iraq's first lodge, Mesopotamia Lodge #3820 EC, was established in 1917. The first lodge in Baghdad was Baghdad Lodge #4022 EC, erected in 1919. By the 1950s, Iraq

possessed nine lodges under an English District Grand Lodge. A Scottish lodge, Lodge Faiha #1311, was erected at Baghdad in 1923. However, the coming of Iraqi independence, and the subsequent left-wing government attained by this country, made the continuance of Masonry impossible. All lodges in the country were forced to close their doors in 1965. xix [xix]

## Israel

In the land of the legendary birthplace of Freemasonry, the Craft has flourished, particularly since the Second World War. The first symbolic lodge (Royal Solomon Mother Lodge) was established under charter from the Grand Lodge of Canada about 1873. It was comprised mostly of North American Masons who had come to Palestine expecting to establish an agricultural settlement. Their colony floundered and so did the lodge. However, some of their members then applied to the *Misraim Rite* then active in Egypt and established the Port of Solomon's Temple Lodge in Jaffa. Shortly afterwards this lodge received a large contingent of French engineers who had come to build the Jaffa–Jerusalem railroad. In 1906 the lodge changed affiliation to the Grand Orient of France and became Barkai Lodge. Today, it meets at Tel Aviv as Barkai #17, within the Grand Lodge of Israel. Lodge Barkai admitted many prominent Turkish, Arabic and Jewish citizens of Jaffa, and later Tel Aviv.

Subsequently, several lodges were established in the Holy Land by the then widely-recognised National Grand Lodge of Egypt, which in turn formed themselves into the National Grand Lodge of Palestine in 1933. In the years between 1930 and 1940, the United Grand Lodge of England warranted three lodges in the area, and Scotland chartered eleven in the same period. In addition, five German lodges were established in the 1930s by German Masons who had fled the Nazi tyranny.

In 1948, the British mandate over Palestine ended and all English lodges withdrew from the Holy Land. A general desire for administrative and fraternal unity among lodges in what was now the State of Israel was felt at this time. In 1953, the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel came into being, largely under Scottish sponsorship. Its thirty founding lodges consisted of all those in Israel holding Scottish charters, those under the National Grand Lodge of Palestine, and the five German lodges. Rarely in the formation of a new Grand Body has such unanimity of purpose been seen, as it was in Israel, and it has since expanded steadily.

The seal of the Grand Lodge of Israel is of particular interest. It is unique in design and includes the square and compasses, together with the emblems of the three great faiths to which the great majority of members belong: the Star of David of the Jews, the Crescent of the Muslims, and the Cross of the Christians.

After 1948 about 200,000 Arabs remained in the Palestinian sections of what became Israel, comprising 20% of the total population. Of the thirty lodges that formed the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel, ten worked in the Tel Aviv/Jaffa area, five in Jerusalem, four in Haifa and one lodge in Tiberius. Arabic, Hebrew and English was the working language for most of the lodges. The majority that worked in Arabic subsequently changed their language to Hebrew. Interestingly, in 1981, Brother Jamil

Shalhoub, from Nazareth, was the first Arab who was elected as Grand Master. He was re-elected in 1982.

Presently, four lodges work in Arabic in Israel, as follows: Akko Lodge # 36 and Haddar Lodge # 45 at Acre; Torch Lodge # 65 at Jerusalem; and Nazareth Lodge # 71 at Nazareth. xx [xx]

## **Jordan and the West Bank**

No lodges remained working in the Palestinian territories of West Bank or Gaza after 1967. After the Oslo Accords of 1996, some members of the Arab “Orient Lodge” of Jericho tried to revive lodges to work in Jerusalem, Jericho and Nablus but they were unsuccessful.

Jordan, formerly the British protectorate of Trans-Jordan, is an independent Monarchy. It would seem that Jordan, based on its present boundaries, has never possessed many lodges. The first lodge in Trans-Jordan was Lodge Quraish founded by an Egyptian Freemason in 1923. The lodge subsequently changed its affiliation and name to Lodge Al-Naser (‘Victory’). In 1956 it united with another four lodges that were working in Palestine prior to 1948 on the West Bank of Jordan, to form Beit Al-Maqdes (Jerusalem) Lodge.

In 1956, a Grand Lodge of Jordan was self-constituted, with all its lodges on the West Bank. The origin of these lodges is obscure. These lodges (now in the area politically under the Palestinian National Authority), then numbering five, ceased operation after the annexation of the West Bank by Israel in 1967. It would appear the Palestinian lodges were subsequently revived, but ceased operation in 1994 in the face of political opposition. In 1995, there were evidently attempts to revive the West Bank lodges, but the result is unknown, although anecdotal evidence suggests at least some are operating.

The only remaining mainstream lodge is Lodge Jordan #1339 SC. It was originally chartered by the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1925 at Jaffa (Tel-Aviv), but it moved to Amman in 1952, where it has worked since. Lodge Jordan now has the unhappy distinction of being the only British-warranted lodge still working anywhere in the Middle East, and effectively the only mainstream lodge operating in this area outside Israel and Lebanon. It has had something of a beleaguered history. In very recent years it was forced to close through political pressure. It is again operating, but understandably keeps a low profile. It works in Arabic, using a Scottish ritual. xxi [xxi]

## **Kuwait**

Another small Arab State bordering the Persian Gulf, oil-rich Kuwait had, until recently, two English lodges. These were Kuwait Lodge #6810, and the Rowland Chadwick Lodge #7472. The former was erected in 1949, the latter in 1956. Strong opposition from the Kuwait Government saw both these lodges become dormant, and

sadly, neither re-appeared on the English Roll of Lodges in 1982. A Masonic study club was commenced by members of various Prince Hall jurisdictions in 1999, meeting every Saturday on a US military base, with Masons of all Prince Hall and mainstream jurisdictions welcome to attend. However, as personnel are rotated every few months, this does not enhance the club's chances of longevity. xxii [xxii]

## Lebanon

Lebanon has an unparalleled Masonic history. It has been the Grand Lodge of Scotland and, somewhat surprisingly, the Grand Lodge of New York that have been responsible for most of the regular lodges located in this country. The first Scottish lodge was formed at Beirut in 1862, working in French. After several dormant periods, it ceased operation in 1895. Four other Scottish lodges were erected in Lebanon up until the time of the First World War, but only some of these revived thereafter. The Grand Orient of France was next into Lebanon, forming a lodge in 1869, working in Arabic. Two further lodges followed. None survived the First World War.

Other new lodges formed before the Great War were a lodge at Beirut under the Ottoman Grand Lodge (later the Grand Lodge of Turkey), and a lodge under the National Grand Lodge of Egypt, erected about 1914. A number of other Egyptian-warranted lodges were chartered thereafter, and after the First World War these were formed into a District Grand Lodge. By the end of World War Two, it would seem these lodges were extinct, merged, or hived off into various spurious 'Masonic' bodies. An exception would appear to be a 'Grand Lodge of Lebanon', which was founded in 1936, probably descended from Egyptian lodges, which stills exists today, and with relative success.

Until recent years, five Scottish lodges had survived in Lebanon, with a few others being less fortunate. The three lodges in Beirut met at the aptly named Peace Lodge Building, in Beshara Street, Beirut. With the arrival of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, the Scottish lodges found continuance impossible and all five became dormant. The Peace Lodge Building was badly damaged in the war, and has not yet been restored.

The first New York-chartered lodge was the Syrio-American Lodge #1, formed in 1924 by returning American-Lebanese immigrants. Several further lodges were erected prior to World War II, and subsequently. With the exception of one lodge originally erected in Syria, all New York chartered lodges in its Syria-Lebanon District (ten in total) have operated in recent times. During the Lebanese Civil War, most lodges became dormant, although at least Syrio-American lodge continued to meet intermittently. Since the cessation of the civil war, only three of the five Scottish lodges has re-commenced work, though it is hoped the two still remaining dormant will be restored in the future. All the New York lodges revived subsequent to the civil war, although some are still experiencing meeting difficulties. Presently, six of the New York lodges are working, but in due course it is expected that all ten will again be operating. One further mainstream lodge has been previously chartered in Lebanon. This is *Fraternità Italo-Libanese*, erected at Jounieh in 1989 under the Grand Orient of Italy. However, it is reported as not meeting currently.

A large range of other lodges and Grand Lodges operate in Lebanon. The Grand Orient of France has two lodges in Beirut. Over the years a large number of spurious and/or self-constituted Grand Lodges have been erected in Lebanon. Aside from the Grand Lodge of Lebanon, already mentioned, others include the Lebanese Grand Lodge, Federal Grand Lodge of Lebanon, The Federal Grand Lodge of Lebanon; The United Grand Lodge for Lebanon; and The United Lebanese Grand Lodge, and about twenty other so-called Masonic bodies. Many of these 'Grand Lodges' has one constituent lodge, and its own 'Grand Master for Life'. Not a few sell Masonic degrees for profit. The existence of these spurious and disreputable "Grand Lodges" do nothing to enhance the public profile of Masonry in Lebanon, or the wider Arab world. xxiii [xxiii]

## Morocco

This former French and Spanish colony has an interesting Masonic history. From 1860 onwards a small number of 'colonial-type' lodges were created, mainly in Tangier, under the Grand Orient of France, the Grand Lodge of France, the Grand Orient of Spain, the Grand Lodge of Spain and even the Grand Lodge Lusitania of Portugal.

In 1902, Lodge Coronation #934 was established with a Scottish charter, and in 1927 England warranted New Friendship Lodge #4997. These two British lodges started their lives in Tangier, but both soon moved to Gibraltar. New Friendship Lodge later changed its name to Gibraltar Lodge.

The period between the two World Wars was one of further development of Freemasonry in Morocco, but also one of increasing leftist political and anti-religious involvement of the French Masonic Grand bodies. In 1925 a radical member of the Grand Orient of France was appointed *Resident-General* of French Morocco. In 1936 the Fascists took over in Spain, and as a result Freemasonry was brutally suppressed in Spanish Morocco.

Subsequent to Moroccan independence in 1956, all Masonic lodges disappeared from public view from 1958 onwards, as a result of a law banning all 'foreign inspired organizations'. After a difficult period in semi-clandestine operation, the Grand Lodge 'Atlas' of Morocco was erected at Casablanca 'by three lodges under the aegis of the Grand Lodge of Switzerland' on 24 July 1967, three years after the first of these lodges was formed.

It would seem that the original lodge in Casablanca (erected in 1964) was 'self-constituted', although its members largely hailed from mainstream lodges in Switzerland. It was sponsored by Swiss Masons, but it was not actually placed on the Roll of the Swiss Grand Lodge, it being 'totally independent of Switzerland'. The reason for this is that the Constitution of the Grand Lodge 'Alpina' of Switzerland does not permit it to charter lodges outside Switzerland.

It would appear likely that the original 'self-constituted' lodge split itself into three in order to form a Grand Lodge. It is noteworthy that it was twelve months after the Grand Lodge 'Atlas' was formed that 'Alpina' recognized it. Had 'Alpina' sponsored/constituted 'Atlas', it would probably have recognized it immediately. Given that 'Atlas' was, in fact, self-constituted, this would almost certainly explain why it was never recognized by any other mainstream Grand Lodge.

Between 1971 and 1974, some members under the Grand Lodge 'Atlas' broke away in order to create a rival Grande Loge du Maroc. Subsequently, Moroccan Government authorities became highly suspicious of the assumed leftist anti-religious and anti-royalist activities of Grand Orient Masons and effectively forced all existing lodges to cease functioning. It would appear that a few remaining Moroccan Masons continued to work although, not surprisingly, little or nothing was heard of them either inside or outside the country.

Happily, a change has taken place since 1997, with the official constitution of three lodges in Morocco by the Grande Loge Nationale Française (GLNF). The GLNF obtained permission of the Moroccan Government to erect lodges because this French Masonic Grand Body, the only one generally recognized by mainstream Grand Lodges, strictly prohibits political and religious discussion in its lodges. It is unclear whether any "remnant" Masons from the defunct Grand Lodge 'Atlas', or Grande Loge du Maroc, became founders of these three lodges.

The three GLNF lodges were consecrated on 30 June 1997. These are *Loge el Andalouss* #1081, which works in Casablanca in both French and English; *Loge Ahl al Kitab* #1082, which works in Rabat in Arabic; and *Loge al Hikmat* #1083, which works in Marrakech, in both Arabic and French. These three lodges were constituted by the GLNF into The Grand Lodge of the Kingdom of Morocco (Grande Loge du Royaume du Maroc) on 15 June 2000, in Marrakech. xxiv [xxiv]

## Saudi Arabia

One would suspect that Saudi Arabia, being a very traditional Islamic Monarchy, would be devoid of Masonic lodges. Indeed, that was the case until 1962, when the American Canadian Grand Lodge (within the United Grand Lodges of Germany) erected Arabian Lodge #882. It was followed by four others. All these lodges were formed to cater for foreigners in the country, mainly North American and British Masons in Saudi Arabia as a result of its oil. However, following successive crackdowns by the Saudi police, none of these lodges are effectively operating, except as casual *fraternal groups*. xxv [xxv]

## Syria

The British Counsel to the Ottoman Empire, Sir Alexander Drummond, opened a lodge in Aleppo (now in modern Syria) on the 3 February 1748, but it would appear to have

been short-lived. It has been claimed that Drummond was appointed District Grand Master (EC) for the Orient in 1747. There are also claims that a Syrian prince, who was initiated in Egypt, introduced Masonry into Syria in the 1860s, but evidence appears scant. The Grand Orients of Italy and France established lodges at Damascus in Syria (then part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire) in the 1860s, but details of both are sparse. The French lodge, *Loge le Liban*, in particular, seems to have involved itself in political activities. The Italian and French lodges appear to have expired by the turn of the century, although there are also suggestions that Egyptian and Turkish-chartered lodges were working in Damascus by the time.

There is evidence of a lodge being formed in Damascus under the National Grand Lodge of Egypt in late 1936. This lodge appears to have promptly split itself into three, whereupon they then formed a Grand Lodge of Syria, under Egyptian patronage, although it may have only been a District Grand Lodge under Egypt—the available documentation being ambiguous. Either way, these indigenous lodges seem to have remained active, although they appear to have remained unrecognised outside the country, until the Craft was banned in Syria by decree, on 9 August 1965.

Scotland chartered Lodge Light in Damascus #1058, in 1909; and the Grand Lodge of New York had Ibrahim el Khalil Lodge #4, formed in 1924, at the same location, under its District of Syria-Lebanon. Subsequent to the Second World War and Syrian Independence, as with the unrecognised lodges, these also were closed in 1965. There was no change in this situation in the 1990s. xxvi [xxvi]

## Tunisia

Freemasonry came to Tunisia in the 19th century, with a number of lodges being chartered by the Grand Orient of France. In 1879, eight French lodges formed the Grand Orient of Tunisia, under a warrant from the Grand Orient of Italy. Lodges were still reported to be working in Tunisia after the Second World War, but they did not survive Tunisian independence in 1956 and the subsequent proclamation of Islam as the state religion.

However, in 1998, a lodge was formed in Tunisia under the recently-formed Italian “Grand Lodge of the Union” (*Gran Loggia dell’ Unione*). This is *Loggia Italia* #16. It meets quarterly at the Oriental Hotel, Tunis. The legal position of this lodge is unclear. xxvii [xxvii]

## United Arab Emirates

This oil-based Persian Gulf country is made up of several small Arab Emirates, which used to be referred to collectively as Trucial Oman. England erected its first and only lodge, at Sharjah, in 1967. This was Trucial Lodge #8160, and it largely serviced Masons who were British oil workers. However, this lodge had become dormant by the early 1980s, and was later erased. xxviii [xxviii]

## Yemen

Yemen, located at the base of the Arabian Peninsula, consisted of two separate countries, North Yemen and South Yemen, until they were politically united in 1990. South Yemen was formerly known simply as “Aden”, or more correctly, the British Protectorate of South Arabia. Aden had the honour of receiving the first charter for a lodge in the Middle East. The Grand Lodge of Scotland granted this in 1850 to Lodge Felix #335. Lodge Centenary #1449, was erected under the same authority in 1900. England stepped in with Lodge Light in Arabia #3870, in 1918. This lodge now works at Croydon, England. The Independence of South Yemen brought it under the control of a totalitarian government, which made the conditions for Freemasonry untenable. After World War Two, a third Scottish lodge was established in Aden, Lodge Pioneer #1305. The Scottish lodges ‘went into darkness’, but two of them have since been resurrected as research lodges meeting in Scotland. North Yemen appears to have never had a lodge. xxix [xxix]

## OTHER ISLAMIC COUNTRIES

Three other Islamic countries, while not Arabic, are also useful to consider comparatively. They are Indonesia, Malaysia and Turkey.

## Indonesia

Freemasonry no longer exists in Indonesia, having been banned by the Indonesian Government in 1965. England had established a lodge at Sumatra as early as 1765, but it later expired. By the 1950s, the Grand East of the Netherlands has four lodges in Sumatra and nineteen in Java. In April 1955, four lodges in Djakarta combined to form a Grand Lodge (called *Timur Ageng Indonesia*). It was *dissolved* by President Soekarno in 1965. One Dutch lodge, *De Ster in het Oosten #14* (Star of the East), dating from 1759, moved back to the Netherlands where it still meets at Bilthoven. There are occasional reports concerning a Grand Lodge working in Indonesia, but if it does operate, the politics of the country would suggest an *underground* existence. It is certainly not recognised outside Indonesia by any mainstream Grand Lodge. That stated, Co-Masonry (*Le Droit Humane*) still has at least one lodge in Indonesia – Lodge *Hermes* at Bandung – although there may be others. Co-Masonry was evidently not banned, as its membership includes women, and thus “could not be involved in political activity”.xxx [xxx]

## Malaysia

Malaysia is a South East Asian country consisting of the former British colonies of Malaya (now East Malaysia), and North Borneo (Sarawak and Sabah, now West

Malaysia). Masonry in this area is controlled by District Grand Lodges under England and Scotland. The first lodge in the country then known as Malaya was established at Penang in 1809. This was an English lodge warranted by the *Antients*, but it subsequently expired. It was not until 1875 that Malaya received a lodge that was to survive. This was the English lodge, Royal Prince of Wales #1555, which still works happily at Penang. Scotland's earliest surviving lodge also works at Penang, Lodge Scotia #1003, warranted in 1906. Currently, twenty-nine regular lodges work in the country.

In recent decades, the Malaysian Government has taken an interest in the Craft within its boundaries. The Government's *Societies Act* requires that Masonic lodges regularly disclose their membership and certain other details to the *Registrar of Societies*. However, this statute does not appear to have been directed against Freemasonry in particular, although the Craft has in the past been discussed in the Malaysian Parliament. Nevertheless, satisfactory relations between Craft authorities and the Government have been maintained, and there appears to be no reason to suspect that this relationship will not be continued in the future. It is interesting to note that Malaysia does have a substantial ethnic Chinese minority, and that membership of the Craft is largely drawn from that quarter, rather than from the Malays who are mostly Moslem. xxxi [xxxii]

## Turkey

Turkey is not an Arabic country, but its people are overwhelmingly Moslem. The difference is that, unlike Arabic countries, Islam is not the State religion, thanks to the founder of modern Turkey, Kemal Ataturk, who constructed a strictly secular state.

There is documented reference to the existence of lodges in Turkey in 1738. These lodges appear to have emanated from various European sources. In 1748 Sultan Mahmud I used the pretext of Pope Clement XII's Bull, 'In Eminenti' (April 1738) to ban Freemasonry by royal edict, but the edict was never put into force. By the end of the 18th century many lodges were operating and they flourished after the French Revolution and during Napoleon's reign. On 15/16 June 1826, in order to reform the army, the corrupt military order of the Janissaries was abolished in a bloodbath, by Sultan Mahmud II. The Janissaries were mostly members of the Bektachi sect, which was also abolished. Freemasonry was closed with the pretext that it was a kind of 'Bektachism' and many Freemasons were sent into exile.

However, the political climate eventually changed, and the Craft was re-introduced during the Crimean War, in 1856. In that year an English-warranted lodge, Oriental #988, was formed in Constantinople (later Istanbul), with Lord Bulwer, the British Ambassador, as Foundation Master. After an irregular Grand Lodge was created by an Irish officer (Captain Atkinson) in the British contingent, during the Crimean War, the United Grand Lodge of England decided to create its own District Grand Lodge in the area, with Bulwer as District Grand Master. The District Grand Lodge was consecrated on the 24 June 1862 in the British Embassy. Ten English lodges were established in Turkey between 1860 and 1870. Ireland, Scotland and several other Grand Lodges/Grand Orients issued charters in Turkey during this period. Italy had

fourteen lodges, Germany five, France three, Poland two, Spain two, Greece two, Hungary one and Egypt one. xxxii [xxxii]

The expansion of the Craft was slow, as various Ottoman Sultans issued edicts suppressing Freemasonry. However, during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909), the position changed. Abdülhamid favoured Anglo-Saxon Freemasonry, and even donated money towards its balls and charities. On the other hand, he considered Freemasons working under lodges chartered by the Grand Orients of France and Italy to be politically suspect, and he had them closely watched by his police. His fears were to prove justified. Members of these lodges favoured the overthrow Abdülhamid's rule and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. This 'politically-active Freemasonry' achieved its goal through the 'Unity and Progress' political party, which organized its political and subversive activities in Masonic lodges under the Italian, French and Spanish jurisdictions. In 1908 a constitutional monarchy was declared and Abdülhamid was deposed by a committee of deputies, all of whom were Freemasons.

A Turkish Supreme Council had been founded in Istanbul in 1861 by Prince Abdülhalim Pasha, brother of the Khedive of Egypt (who was also District Grand Master for Egypt, EC). This Supreme Council became dormant in the 1880s but was revived on 3 March 1909 and immediately formed the Grand Lodge of the Ottoman Empire (13 July 1909). The new Grand Orient attracted the allegiance of most lodges under non-British foreign jurisdictions. It initially consisted of fourteen lodges then holding French, Italian or Spanish charters. It modelled its constitution on that of the Grand Orient of France. The Grand Lodge of the Ottoman Empire (later re-named the Grand Orient of Turkey) enjoyed a period of sustained expansion, erecting 65 lodges prior to 1935. However, the political climate in Turkey had been deteriorating, and the Grand Orient became dormant in 1935. xxxiii [xxxiii]

The Turkish Supreme Council revived in 1948, and controlled Turkish Craft lodges until it divested control to the Grand Lodge of Turkey, founded in 1956 and formed by 29 Craft lodges. The Grand Lodge of Scotland consecrated the 'new' Grand Lodge in April 1965, and Turkish lodges at this time largely adopted the Craft ritual of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, although still exhibiting a Continental heritage, particularly French. The Grand Lodge also adopted, largely, the rules and regulations of the Grand Lodge of Scotland. The Grand Lodge of Turkey was recognised by England and Ireland in 1970, and today enjoys fraternal relations with most mainstream Grand Lodges around the world.

In total, the secular nature of the Turkish body politic, combined with its Freemasonry adopting regularity despite doubtful antecedents, has created a most successful Masonic establishment. xxxiv [xxxiv]

# NOTES

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xix [xix] Ibid. p 293.

xx [xx] Ibid. p 293 – 299.

xxi [xxi] Ibid. p 299 – 300.

xxii [xxii] Ibid. p 300.

xxiii [xxiii] Ibid. p 300 – 305.

xxiv [xxiv] Ibid. p 41 – 43.

xxv [xxv] Ibid. p 305.

xxvi [xxvi] Ibid. p. 306.

xxvii [xxvii] Ibid. p 79.

xxviii [xxviii] Ibid.

xxix [xxix] Ibid. p 307.

xxx [xxx] Ibid. p 327.

xxxi [xxxi] Ibid. p 328 – 331.

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xxxiii [xxxiii] Henderson, K. W. & Pope A. R. Op cit. p 280 – 284.

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