

The Majesty Comacini

A GREAT MASONIC GUILD

The Majistri Comacini was a guild of architects who, on the breakup of Roman Empire, fled to Comacina, a fortified island in Lake Como, and there kept alive the traditions of classic art during the Dark Ages. It is suggested that from them were developed in direct descent the various styles of Italian architecture; and that they carried the knowledge and practice of architecture and sculpture into France, Spain, Germany and England. It is also suggested that the Comacine Masters were the veritable stock from which Freemasonry of the present day sprang.

We may admit' says Leader Scott, 'that they were the link between the classic Collegia and all other art and trade Guilds of the Middle Ages. They were Freemasons because they were builders of a privileged class, absolved from taxes and servitude, and free to travel about in times of feudal bondage.'

The name Free-mason - libera muratori - may not actually have been used thus early, but the Comacines were in fact free builders long before the name was employed - free to travel from place to place, as we see from their migrations; free to fix their own prices, while other workmen were bound to feudal lords, or by the Statutes of wages.

An Edict of the Lombard King Rotharis, dated November 22, 643, confirms certain privileges to the Majistri Comacini and their Colligantes. From this Edict it is clear that it is no new order that is alluded to, but an old and powerful body of Masters capable of acting as architects, with men who executed work under them. For the Comacines were not ordinary workmen, but artists, including architects, sculptors, painters and decorators and if affinities of styles left in stone be adequate evidence; to them were due the changing forms of architecture in Europe during the cathedral-building period. Everywhere they left their distinctive impress in a way so unmistakable as to leave no doubt. Under Charlemagne the Comacines began their many migrations, following the missionaries of the Church into remote places, from Sicily to Britain, building churches.

An inscribed stone, dated from 712, shows that the Comacine Guild was organized as Magistri and Discipuli, under a Gastaldo, or Grand Master, the very same terms as they were kept in the lodges later. Moreover, they called their meeting places loggia. They, too, had their masters and wardens, their oaths, tokens, grips, and passwords, which formed a bond of union, stronger than legal ties. They wore white aprons and gloves and revered their Four Crowned Martyrs of the order. Square, compasses, level, plumb-line and arch appear among their symbols. "King Solomon's Knot" was one of their symbols, another being the endless, interwoven cord, symbol of Eternity, which has neither beginning nor end.

They were an order of Artists, an aristocracy, to be sure, but an aristocracy of service, of talent. They were also democratic, because industry and merit enabled worthy workmen to attain the highest honours. In spirit, therefore, as in form and symbol they were Masonic."

These extracts are taken from "The Builder" by Joseph Fort Newton and "The Cathedral Builders" by Leader Scott.