

The Anchor

by Jonathan Paz

As all Masons (and most everyone else) know, Freemasonry is filled with symbols. We use these symbols to teach lessons of morality and virtue. This series intends to analyze a single symbol used by Freemasonry – not for its deeper lessons or alternative teachings, but simply the symbol as it is. Perhaps you may find deeper meaning for the symbol for your life or in your journey through Freemasonry, but that's for you alone.

The Anchor

For thousands of years, maritime cultures have placed enormous importance on the anchor, both for its practical purposes as its symbolic meaning. The symbolism is pretty obvious—grounding— but it can be applied to many parts of one's life or even a whole culture.

The first anchors, doubtless, consisted of little more than large rocks. Evidence of such types of anchors are found everywhere, dating back to the Bronze Age (c. 3000 BC). These kinds of anchors are, obviously, the simplest of anchors, using the sheer weight of the rock to keep the boat from moving. This kind of anchor was usually attached to a simple but effective rope that is attached to the boat in any useful fashion.

Ancient Greek and Latin poems describe the use of teeth in anchors. Pliny the Elder claimed the invention of toothed anchors to the Etruscans (c. 700 BC), but the Greek writer Pausanias attributes the invention to King Midas of Phrygia (c. 700 BC?). These anchors would help keep the anchor from sliding across the ocean floor, helping to keep the boat from moving away from its intended spot in high winds.

The 19th century saw the manufacture of anchors start to become more of an intentional design of skill rather than simple weights trying to keep a boat still. About this time the Admiralty Pattern anchor, or the Fisherman anchor, was invented. Today it is seen as the most recognizable image of an “anchor” and the most used as a symbol. The bars at the top of the anchor induce it to fall “sideways” so that one of the bottom arms, or flukes, then dig into the sandy bottom of the sea.

The stockless anchor was patented in England in 1821. Its holding power was far less than the Admiralty Pattern, but its ease of use made it the most popular anchor to use on large boats by far. The Admiralty Pattern anchor needed to be carefully stored on deck, otherwise it would become tangled up, or fouled, in its rope; whereas stockless anchors simply hang on the side of the boat. The stockless anchor literally digs itself into the sea floor as its being set. These anchors do not, in fact, supply the primary weight that older anchors supplied; the weight is instead supplied by a

scaled very heavy chain attached to the anchor itself. This chain is actually what keeps the boat still, while the anchor keeps the system from sliding along the bottom when the wind pulls the boat.

The 20th century saw the stockless anchor and nearly universal use among the navies of the world, with continued developments to improve its holding power. It also saw the innovation of small-boat anchors. Previously, all small-boat anchors were simply scaled-down versions of admiralty anchors or simple grapnels. As time passed, advancements in these small-boat anchors led to better hold-to-weight ratios and better safety for smaller vessels. -down versions of admiralty anchors or simple grapnels. As time passed, advancements in these small-boat anchors led to better hold-to-weight ratios and better safety for smaller vessels.

It's important at this time to return back to the Admiralty Pattern anchor and its use as a symbol, in particular by navies. Many navies of the world, including the United States Navy and United States Coast Guard, uses a fouled anchor as its symbol. It instantly brings to mind large ships or cutters racing through the waters. Navies for hundreds of years have taken to the fouled anchor despite the fact that the image itself suggests a shoddy situation! The Admiralty Pattern anchor needed to be carefully stowed, otherwise the rope would get caught in the anchor, and its weight usually precluded efforts to unwrap the device, forcing the crew to cut out the rope and reattach it. However, the fouled anchor remains an enduring symbol of the power of a nation's navy.

The very nature of the anchor, to hold fast a ship, lends itself well to finding deeper meaning within its symbolic use. It is my ardent hope that understanding its history and its function will help you to dig deeper into its hidden mysteries.