

**Degree of St. Lawrence the Martyr
c. 225–258 CE**

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My Brother you have just received the degree and listened to the Lecture. I would like to address some anomalies both in the ritual and the Lecture and expand on some historical aspects.

The opening paragraph of the Lecture in the American A.M.D. ritual states: 'About the year 258 when Emperor Valerian was prisoner of Sapor, King of Persia and Gallienus, his son reigned in the East that the persecution of the Christians intensified.'

First, the wording is curious in that it states 'About the year 258...' implying it is an approximation of the year and it could be earlier or later. It also makes three assertions that are incorrect.

1. Valerian was a prisoner when the persecution intensified
2. Gallienus reigned in the East when Valerian was prisoner
3. The increased persecution of the Christians was attributable to Gallienus

It is well recorded that 258 C.E. was the date when St. Lawrence was executed and August 10th is held as the Annual Saint Lawrence Feast Day by the Catholic Church. It was in the year 258 C.E. that the persecution of the Christians 'intensified'.

In the year 253 C.E. Valerian made Gallienus, his son, co-Emperor with responsibility to maintain order in the west¹. In 256 C.E. Gallienus travelled north to suppress the Visigoths who had settled south of the Danube. His initial successes along the River Danube were negated by further incursions from the Huns, Jutes, Franks and Sueves. From 256 C.E. to 260 C.E. Gallienus was actively engaged in battles along the Rhine. Therefore, the impression that Gallienus was in Rome and reigned as Emperor (*in the East*) is not entirely correct. Valerian was serving as Co-Emperor in the East while Gallienus was embroiled in battles in the West.

It is recorded that Emperor Valerian was somewhat sympathetic to Christianity but became disaffected after being introduced to religious teachings from Egypt. Yet, he retained his Imperial

¹ The Roman Empire was finally divided in 395 C.E. between East and West with separate Emperors

upbringing and continued to worship the Roman gods. This was a turbulent period of philosophical and religious resurgence.

It is difficult to be certain whether it was due to the influence of Porphyry ²(c.234 -305 C.E.) who was critical of Christianity but in the summer of 257 Valerian issued a decree requiring all Christians to conform to the Roman religion³. In early August 258 C.E. Valerian, while in Antioch, issued a second decree that ordered the execution of Christian leaders and compulsory conversion of all Christians to the Roman religion or deportation as slaves. It was Valerian who initiated the persecution of the Christians and intensified it with his second decree when in 258 C.E. Gallienus was merely the Co-Emperor serving in Germany.

The battle in which Valerian was taken prisoner did not occur until the summer of 259 C.E. Therefore, the Emperor could not have been a 'prisoner of Sapor' in 258 C.E. as stated in the Lecture.

The initial conflict in 259 C.E. against the Persians proved successful for Valerian but a subsequent attack by King Sapor became a disaster for Valerian and his army. Valerian's army was decimated by a famine in the area and sickness. Under a flag of truce he sought a pact with King Sapor. The truce was violated by Sapor; Valerian was taken prisoner and sent to Persia. The historical records conflict as to what happened to Valerian but it is reported that he died in 260 C.E.⁴

On August 6th 258 Pope Sextus II was arrested with four of the seven Deacons (*or Archdeacons*) and he was summarily beheaded with two of the Deacons. Another legend purports that Lawrence, one of the Deacons of the Church followed Pope Sextus II to his execution lamenting that he wished to join the Pope in death. It is said that Pope Sextus II predicted Lawrence would follow him to his death in three days. In my opinion, it is unlikely that St. Lawrence was present on August 6th. He was the keeper of the 'treasures of the Church' and would have been one of the first to be placed in captivity by the avarice Prefect.

St. Ambrose (c337–397C.E.) and Prudentius (c345-415 C.E.) state that Lawrence was broiled over a gridiron. Some historians have cast doubt that happened. However, from the records of Basilica di San Lorenzo fuori di Mure (*Church of St. Lawrence outside the walls*)

² Plotinus (c204-270 C.E.) had a Neo-Platonism school that attracted many 'high born' and influential pupils. Porphyry, a student of Plotinus, wrote the *Enneads* – teachings of Plotinus He also wrote 17 texts critical of the Christian doctrine

³ Christians were required to make sacrifice to the Roman Gods. Mithraism was popular among Roman soldiers and came from Persia. Hermeticism (accepted to some extent by both the Christians and Jews) had been established in Egypt and Greece and spread to Rome Neo-Platonism was introduced by Plotinus based upon the teachings of Plato. Gnosticism and Stoicism was practiced.

⁴ Various reports suggest that Valerian was humiliated, tortured and finally executed by having his skin flayed from his body. Gibbon recounts that Valerian was forced to kneel while King Sapor stood on his neck to mount his horse. He also records that Valerian's body was stuffed with straw and put on display.

in Rome, where Lawrence's remains were said to have been buried, it is stated that St. Lawrence was brought before '*Cornelius Secularis, prefect of Rome under the Emperor Valerian*' and was first scourged; then tortured on the rack before being burned on a gridiron⁵. It also states that St. Lawrence, after his torture on the rack, offered comfort to other prisoners. This so impressed the Guards that when St. Lawrence was dead they allowed his remains to be buried⁶.

On August 10th 258 Lawrence was the last of the seven Deacons to be executed. This occurred 4 days after Sextus II's supposed prediction⁷. Both Sextus II and Lawrence were later canonized.

After his father's death Gallienus⁸ moved to Rome. In 260 C.E. on coming to the throne he restored the right of Christians to practice their religion⁹. Churches and Cemeteries were returned to the Christians and Bishops were allowed to resume their Office.¹⁰ The persecution of Christians diminished during the reign of Gallienus – it did not intensify!

A Paper presented by Bro Stowe in the Philalethes Magazine in 1972 described the working tools of Masons found at San Lorenzo (St. Lawrence) de El Escorial in Madrid, Spain¹¹. One of the artifacts discovered was a trowel with a gridiron impression on the surface. The official records of El Escorial claim that the floor plan is in the form of a gridiron¹² to commemorate St. Lawrence and the upper structure represents King Solomon's Temple.

It is explained in the Lecture that St. Lawrence was the custodian of the treasures of the Christian Church. In the intervening days before his execution it is said he '*dispersed the riches of the new religion*' to the poor. Legend has it that he sent '*a soldier*' with the Holy Grail to his parents in Huesca, Aragon, Spain. The Holy Grail was said to have been placed in the monastery of St. Juan de la Pena. It was later removed to Valencia, Spain where it is regarded as a sacred relic. The significance of Spain ties in with the lecture that states he was '*a Spaniard by birth*'. Very little is known about the early life of St. Lawrence.

⁵ Dom Gueranger Vol. XIII Liturgical year

⁶ The Roman rules for burial or cremation varied during this period and often those executed were cremated

⁷ August 6th to August 10th

⁸ Gibbon considered Gallienus to be poor emperor who spent his time in philosophy (with Plotinus), the Arts and cooking with little time for the affairs of the State. Robert Grant expresses the opposite view!

⁹ August 12th 260 C.E.

¹⁰ It was not until the reign of Constantine, when it is said he converted to Christianity after the battle of Saxa Rubra in 312 C.E., that Christianity was fully accepted. It was under Constantine that the East and West Empires were combined.

¹¹ Based upon a book called "El Escorial," by Mary Cable and the Editors of the Newsweek Book Division, New York, copyrighted in 1971, printed and bound in Italy, Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 70-154726.

¹² I had difficulty in seeing that from the floor plan. A similar floor plan is found in other cathedrals.

St. Lawrence is said to be the patron Saint of butchers, chefs and comedians! The traditional history of the Masonic degree of St. Lawrence the Martyr states *'In its present state there is evidence of this degree having existed in England over 200 years, principally in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and it must have been of great practical importance to our Operative Brethren in former times when travelling from place to place in search of employment'*.

It is suggested in the Paper by Bro. Stowe that the legend of St. Lawrence was carried to England. A suggestion that the gridiron in the 'Goose and Gridiron' Ale House¹³ may have been named for St. Lawrence is pure speculation.

The late R. Wor. Bro. Revd. Neville Barker Cryer¹⁴ shows a connection between York Minster, Yorkshire, England and St. Lawrence. There is a medieval stained glass window of St. Lawrence with a gridiron in York Minster. His speculations, based upon extensive research of Minster records, suggest there were plays in the 15th Century by Parish Guilds that included St. Lawrence the Martyr. At Lincoln Cathedral¹⁵ he states *'The St. Lawrence plays showed him conquering the avarice of the Roman officials by his Charity or care for the poor.'*

Among confiscated church relics at York Minster he recounts *'There were also the bones and blood of St. Lawrence.'*¹⁶ I find it difficult to conceive that blood could survive burning and a thousand years storage!

In Chapter 6 of 'York Mysteries Revealed' he describes the formation of 'fixed' Guild Lodges and later explains that in 1726 Freemen gathered at a square table after the 'Apprentice step' was recognized and speculates: *'... in Yorkshire and Lancashire the practice of the St. Lawrence ceremony happened here to identify those with a building trade connection, we cannot be certain but their exemption would require some test of approval that the St. Lawrence degree may have been used to qualify Apprentices who were Operative Masons.'*

In the 'Installed Master' Degree of St. Lawrence the Martyr there is a lecture that suggests the signs of the degree were used by Operative Masons to identify themselves when among non-operative masons. The evidence from Cryer gives credence to the statement *'the degree existed in Lancashire and Yorkshire....'*

¹³ 'Goose and Gridiron' in Paternoster Square, London was the meeting place for the formation of the Grand Lodge of England on June 24th 1717.

¹⁴ Revd. Neville Barker Cryer 'York Mysteries revealed' Pgs. 79,144,176,198,258.

¹⁵ About 150 miles south of the city of York in the county of Lincolnshire

¹⁶ Conflicts with the records of Basilica San Lorenzo but then there were many supposed religious relics and after a cremation who can account for all the bones. Blood may have degraded after burning – if he was burned!

The American A.M.D. ritual calls the last sign the 'due guard'. American Craft rituals call the salute the 'due guard'¹⁷. In American craft ritual the 'due guards' are taken from the position at the Altar as the preparatory sign or due guard. The St. Lawrence sign does not approximate to the position at the Altar nor is it a preparatory sign but the final sign. It is used 'to prove a brother' – much like going on the 'five points of fellowship' in a Craft degree. In America and in other degrees the due guard is the sign of salutation. If the term 'due guard' is to be so named it would be logical for that to be the sign of salutation given *'on entering and leaving a Lodge of St. Lawrence the Martyr or when addressing the Worshipful Master'*. In the English ritual there is no mention of a due guard.

As a point of interest the original first sign was given from the shoulder but in the 1930's it was changed to the sign we now use from the hip. The original sign appeared to be the salute of a notorious German Party! The ancient penalty has been removed from the English ritual¹⁸ and referenced only in the Lecture.

M. W. Bro. John L. Cooper III¹⁹ P.G.M., P.S.M. in an article on the St. Lawrence the Martyr degree explains: *'True charitable giving is giving without any expectation of receiving anything in that giving to others makes us rich. We do not enrich others by our giving – we enrich ourselves. We become the "treasures" not because we have great wealth, but because we understand.'*

The Grand Council of the Allied Masonic Degrees of England, Wales and its Districts and Lodges overseas has jurisdiction over the degrees of: St. Lawrence the Martyr, Knights of Constantinople, Grand Tylers of Solomon, Red Cross of Babylon and Grand High Priest. The 'St. Lawrence the Martyr degree' is the 'working' and initiatory degree of the English Allied Masonic Degrees. The Grand High Priest degree is a Chair Degree for the presiding officer (High Priest) of a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons in America²⁰.

Edgar W. Fentum P.S.M., K.C.O.R.B.I

10th July 2011 Updated 2016

Charter Sovereign Master of Siminoff Council No 485 in 2010

¹⁷ The term is believed to be 'American'. It was first used in 1757 and referred to the sign. It may have been derived from 'Dieu le garde' or 'God guard it'. It is not found in English Emulation ritual but is used in a few English Lodges

¹⁸ England removed the ancient penalties as part of the obligation from Craft Degrees in 1986 and other degrees and orders followed with a similar action. It was argued that the ancient barbaric penalties were inconsistent with a solemn obligation taken upon Holy Writings - V.S.L.

¹⁹ Past Grand Secretary and Junior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of California in the 'Freemason'

²⁰ This caused some confusion when as the Grand High Priest of California I visited the Supreme Grand Chapter of England. A subordinate of the English Grand Chapter assumed I was a visiting Sovereign Master of the Allied Masonic Degrees and gave me a very curt reception until the Grand Scribe E. (Secretary) corrected him!

Charter Sovereign Master of Britannia Council No 303 in 1994
Former member of Escorial Council T.I. Havant. Hampshire. England
from 1977-1995

References

Gibbons 'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire'.
Robert M. Grant 'Augustus to Constantine The Rise and Triumph of
Christianity in the Roman World'
Revd. Neville Barker Cryer 'York Mysteries Revealed'
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
E. W. Fentum 'Neo-Platonism' and 'Hermeticism' private Papers.

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Ven. Brother Ed,

The paper was well received - they especially enjoyed the fact the he
is patron of comedians, also the change in the way the sign is given. I
thank you for letting me make use of your work.

S&F

Doug

Douglas L. Jordan
Sovereign Grand Master
23 July 2011

Hermano Ed

Your paper titled "Degree of St. Lawrence the Martyr" c. 225-258
triggered many memories from my childhood to the present day. My
grandfather was my "life mentor" and by listening his oral traditions
and tales I thought some of them were part of his inventions. Age and
life experience as well my masonic journey has proved that many of
his tales were part of his "learning life process". The name of
St. Lawrence (San Lorenzo) is founded from America to Argentina and
in some instances cities have adopted the "gridiron" or the "statue of
San Lorenzo" as part of their cultural patrimony. Masonic activities as
well "Celebracion de Cofradias= Brotherhood Celebration" has been
common in many lands by celebrating and preserving the actions of
St. Lawrence.

Your paper as well your research provided one of the most peculiar
issues in the Craft: The origin or genesis from our traditions,

catechisms, and rituals that in instances provided "facts" that we repeat without the "historical research". In the current status of our Craft such "facts" will be memorized or recited without the proper instruction of their origins. I hope that our "masonic virtual information" will provide more LUX to those brethren that will take care and maintain the values of our Fraternity.

According to historical documents, St. Lawrence was elevated or ordained as deacon on 257 from that time to 258 many events happened as in referred in your paper. A lot of research on how he was tortured or burned has been speculated. For example, in some instances some authors said that "He was torture with scorpions before to be burned". Artist, painters, poets dedicated part of their creative inspiration on the "martyrdom" of St. Lawrence. Boccaccio on his Decameron mentioned the process of his torture and his virtues as human being. I am surprise that there are few artistic works on the "martyrdom" of St. Lawrence" after his death, probably due to the intellectual suppression on artist or intellectuals by the people in power. Mostly of the paints are related to early X to XI century. Hopefully, if I dedicate more time I would be able to find out early paints close to his death time that would reflect more visual images for his life journey. Many legends have been created after his death that recreates importance on his life. Also many professions have adopted him as patron including the librarians as well the ones mentioned in your paper. The legend on the Holy Grail in Huesca, Aragon, Spain (please correct the spelling of Aragon in your paper) and the inclusion of his parents and Precelio sound very speculative for discussions as well for a research.

<http://www.flickriver.com/photos/tonyynot/6905460206/>,<http://www.flickr.com/photos/tonyynot/6590493103/>.

"A saint named Hippolytus was martyred in Rome in the third century. He is treated in the Golden Legend, which says he was a soldier who participated in the torture execution of St. Lawrence but converted as a result of that saint's example. He was then sentenced to be torn apart by horses". "the feast of St. Lawrence, deacon and martyr, who, even in the company of the martyrdom of Pope Sixtus, when he would, as is related by St. Leo the Great, he was ordered to hand over the treasures of the Church, to the poor, in whose faculties cumulaerat food and clothing, and they had mocked the tyrant, he shows that after three days He surpassed the flames for the Christian faith and in honor of his triumph was passed also the instruments of punishment. His body in the field of Art in Rome in the churchyard belonging to his name is deposited" (Google translation from a Spanish site, sorry). "A legend cited by St Ambrose of Milan says Sixto, & Lorenzo met on his

way to martyrdom, and asked, "Where are you going, dear father, without your son? Where do you hurry, Holy Father, without your deacon? Never mounted the altar of sacrifice without your servant, and now want to do without me? ", To which the pope prophesied: "In three days you will follow me."

"According to the "Life and Martyrdom of St. Lawrence" apocryphal. XVII supposedly based on the work of the monk Donato (sixth century), Pope Sixtus II gave him the holy chalice along with other relics, to put them safe. In the cave Hepociana Roman, Lorenzo went to a Christian meeting chaired by Father Justin. There he found a fellow classmate and Hispanic, called Precelio, a native of Hippon (modern Toledo), in Carpetania, who gave several relics, including the Holy Grail, with the order to take them to the family that remained in Huesca (his parents lived in Rome)".

Precelio brought the relics to uncles and cousins of Lorenzo in Huesca that hid, losing the track, although some traditions say the holy chalice was deposited in the church of St. Peter in the town, where it would be pulled to safety by Bishop Acilso in 711 when he fled before the advance of the Muslims, to hide in the Pyrenees"

Probably the celebration of St. Lawrence day on the Roman calendar fixed on August 10th was due to many saints that suffered the "martyrdom" during that month. For example, St. Sixtus day is on August 6, as well St. Felicitus, and St. Agapitus. Three saints at the same day. The reference that Sixtus told Lawrence that he would die in three days does not fit the legend but as historian and pundits they fixed dates and time for SL day. (Unless the initiated start to match dates and events like you)

In Spain the proliferation of "Cofradias" (Brotherhood) dedicated to St. Lawrence from ancient times and their rituals and celebration continues until today. The city of Huesca recognizes that is the land where St. Lawrence was born. The ritual in Spanish cities is rich of traditions with a mix of religious and party time. (See the links below). Moreover, in my opinion the creation of new masonic lodges started in Spain by the influence of many British/Scottish retirees who have propagated the masonic ritual of SL traditions.

I was intrigued for many "words" in the current "Lodge of St. Lawrence the Martyr" ritual, for example in the opening when the SW replies "I could if I were in a hidden vault or in some secret place". "Tooth and Nails", or in the Introduction when IG reply with "travels to distant land, and desires to be admitted to the degree", or during the obligation "I further engaged that, should a brother present to me the token of the degree, I will prepare for him food sufficient for his necessities, especially bread, water and salt"

or when the WM say "eat the food on the token of the degree, which you hold in your left hand, I offer you salt and water". Finally, on the sign "Turn me over". Despite the simplicity of the degree they are several indications related with the "chamber of reflection", where the candidate overcome life trials, initiation, Eleusinian mysteries. "Bread", salt and water" as elements necessary for life and existence that are related to inner voice. Salt and water also connected with the chamber of reflection and alchemy work on transformation. Water as an inverted triangle, feminity, water related to a cup. As well virtues such as "humility, discipline, metamorphosis, responsibility, strength, and integrity". Finally, I am glad to read your paper being able to refresh my memories and sharing some thoughts with you. As I mentioned before, our discussions, rituals and fraternal gathering are moving to a "fraternal social spectrum" as it has been predicted by Francis Fukuyama, Paul Rich, Guillermo de Los Reyes, Ferrer Benimelli and other authors. The core spirit of our traditions has been jeopardize by the lack of "wise and savvy brethren" that are depository of the "called ancient traditions".

At least your contribution and the genesis of small lodges (i.e. Siminoff) is an indication that some brethren are aware of such changes and the impact of "modern life" in our fraternity. Here are some links that would feed your curiosity on your speculative paper.
Fraternally
Alberto.'.