

Speculation on the Steward's Rods

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One of the more interesting, and less-discussed, symbols of the Blue Lodge is the Steward's rod. If any thought at all is given to it, it is usually dismissed as simply containing a cornucopia; and that is equated with the stewards' traditional role of providing refreshments.

It is of course possible that the symbol means no more than that. But there are other possibilities on which it is interesting to speculate. And there is an interesting clue in the ritual which tells us that something may be going on. The ritual does not specify the color of the Deacons' rods. But it does tell us that the Stewards' rods are supposed to be white.

There is another white rod, famous in the mystery tradition. That is the thyrsus [THEER-sus], the rod or wand which was the symbol of the Greek god Dionysus. It was carried by his followers, and usually had a pine cone mounted at the end. It was often decorated with ribbons and/or twined with ivy or grape vine. The grape was sacred to Dionysus, and wine was considered to be his blood. The kylix [KÍ-licks], or Greek wine cup was also a symbol of the god.



Sometimes, the thyrsus was topped by a bronze figure of a pine cone sitting in a kylix. The pine cone was an almost universal symbol of initiation. Baskets of pine cones were at

the door of the Greek temples of initiation, and the candidate took one as he entered. The symbolism was that, like a pine cone, the valuable part of a human being was inside, and like the pine cone, he had to "open himself" before his true nature and value could be seen.

Dionysus was the god of the theatre (the word "theatre" comes from the name of his temple, the Theatron) but he was far more; he was the god of the life force—the untamable urge to life which makes the tree seed force its roots deep into solid rock or makes life find a way to thrive in almost any environment. It is not just sexuality, but the far more basic thrust of the life energy itself. Dionysus was the son of the god Zeus and the mortal woman, Semelie. Shortly after Dionysus was conceived, Semelie beheld Zeus in his full glory as a god and the sight proved fatal. Zeus removed the



fetus from her womb, slit open his own thigh, and inserted the fetus there. Nine months later, Dionysus was born from Zeus' thigh, and was known as the "one of two births" or the "one who was born again." He is therefore seen as a symbol of the divine in the human.



He is often pictured as a virile young man, dressed in the robes of a woman. The symbolism is that of the combination of male and female which is necessary for life, but there is nothing effeminate about Dionysus.

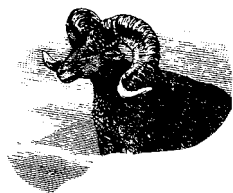
Again, the thyrsus, symbol of Dionysus, was a white rod topped a pine cone or a bronze casting of a pine cone sitting in a kylix. If one imagines a cross-section through the image of a pine cone in a kylix, one comes up with something very much like the shape of the "spear head" which forms the framework of the Steward's rod.



The cornucopia is an ancient symbol. We tend to associate it with Thanksgiving in the United States, but is more than just a symbol of abundance. To understand it, though, we need to consider the original *cornu copia* (horn of copiousness, or horn of plenty).



Back to Zeus, and his adventures with mortal women. This time, the half-man-half-god resulting was Heracles or Hercules. Hera, the wife of Zeus, was infuriated by the birth and determined to destroy the baby, sending giant snakes to kill it in the crib. The infant strangled the snakes, but Zeus decided it was too dangerous to leave the infant Heracles where his wife could find him.



Accordingly, he entrusted the child to the goat, Amalthea. She cared for the child in a cave on Mt. Olympus. Amalthea could detach one of her horns at will, and when she did so, it produced whatever was needed in the way of food, clothing, or other material.



In the original, then, the cornucopia was a symbol of Heracles, and he, along with Dionysus, was a combination of the divine and the human.

So the Steward's rod can be seen as combining the symbols of Heracles and Dionysus, who are, themselves, symbols of the divine within the human. In the ancient traditions, initiation was seen as a process of freeing or realizing the spark of the divine in each person. It is appropriate, then, that the Steward's rods should be carried by those who prepare the candidate for initiation.