

The Masonic Mizrah

A Forgotten Relic of Albert Pike?

Shawn Eyer on an item of Judaica from 1862 that may have been produced by a preeminent leader of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite

LOOK TO THE EAST! These words inspire respect and reverence among Freemasons. Among Jewish people living in Western Europe and the Americas, for whom the East is symbolic of the location of the Temple in Jerusalem, directing prayers and meditations to the East is a longstanding practice. An object held at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., illustrates the intersection of those two traditions. It appears to some to have been created by none other than the widely revered Scottish Rite philosopher, ritualist, and author, Albert Pike.

The item is a large ink drawing of $25\frac{15}{32}$ by $34\frac{7}{8}$ inches. It is covered in Hebrew inscriptions, and features numerous illustrations of a Biblical character. The nature of the artwork is defined by the large word in the center of the print: מזרח, *mizrah*. The meaning of this word is “sunrise” or “the east,” and it is derived from the verb root זרח, “to rise.” In modern Hebrew, a *mizrah* (pronounced “miz`rakh”) also means the eastern wall of a synagogue or an “ornamental notice indicating the east.”¹

Shawn Eyer, FPS, is Junior Warden of The Lodge of the Nine Muses № 1776 in the District of Columbia, and the Editor of *Philalethes*.

Such *mizrahim* are found in both synagogues and private homes. The practice of hanging a *mizrah* has been followed by many Jews living to the west of Jerusalem since the eighteenth century.

The Purpose of a Mizrah

Placing a *mizrah* on the eastern wall of a house serves several functions. Although it most literally marks the general direction of Jerusalem, it is unlikely that members of the household would forget which wall of the home represented the East. The *mizrah* serves as a reminder for prayers and as a repository of sacred ideas. Inscriptions on *mizrahim* are drawn from the Bible and even from kabbalistic texts.²

The word מזרח was often considered to be an acronym for מצד זה רוח חיים, *mizad zeh ru'ah hayyam*, “from this side the spirit of life.”³ The Biblical text which is the basis for praying toward the holy site is King Solomon's speech at the Temple dedication:

In any plague and in any disease, in any prayer or supplication offered any person among all Your people Israel—each of whom knows his own affliction—when he spreads his palms toward this House, oh, hear in Your heavenly abode, and pardon and take action!⁴

השכיבנו יי אלהינו לשלום והעמידנו מליכנו לחיים ופריש עלינו סכת שלומך



אמת מארץ הצמח וצדק משמים נשקף

חסד ואמת נפגשו צדק ושלום נשקף

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 חסד ואמת נפגשו צדק ושלום נשקף
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תנו בנצח טובה מלפני ה' וה' יעשה עמך ויבנה לך את ביתך ויבנה לך את ביתך

תנו בנצח טובה מלפני ה' וה' יעשה עמך ויבנה לך את ביתך ויבנה לך את ביתך

ששטן מלפנינו ומאחורנו ובצל כנפיד תסתירנו כי אל שומרנו ומצילנו אתה

This language is not merely metaphorical. For example, the Israelite Daniel was cast into the den of lions for the crime of praying at his window facing Jerusalem.⁵ An ancient *baraita* (secondary or external comment upon the Mishnah) reveals the spiritual logic:

If one stands outside the land of Israel, he should direct his heart towards the land of Israel—as it was spoken, “and they will pray to You in the direction of their land.” (1 Kings 8:48) If one stands within the land of Israel, he should direct his thought toward Jerusalem—as it was spoken, “and they will pray to the LORD in the direction of the city which You have chosen.” (1 Kings 8:44) If one stands in Jerusalem, he should direct his thought toward the Temple—as it was spoken, “and they will pray toward this House.” (2 Chronicles 6:32) If one is standing within the Temple, he should direct his thought toward the chamber of the Holy of Holies—as it was spoken, “and they will pray toward this Place.” (1 Kings 8:35) If one stands within the Holy of Holies, he should direct his thought toward the very cover of the Ark. [...] Thus it is seen that all of Israel are directing their minds to a singular place.⁶

The *Shulchan Aruch* (1565) specifies that even when one is standing outside the holy land, he should visualize the Temple and the Holy of Holies during prayer.⁷ These sources make it clear that the practice of praying toward the Temple is not merely a matter of physical orientation, but constitutes an inner practice of contemplation.

The Pike Mizrah

That a *mizrah* was likely created by Albert Pike first came to light in 1997, in a catalogue of Judaica pub-

lished by the Smithsonian Institution and edited by Grace Cohen Grossman and Richard Eighme Ahlborn.⁸ Bro.: Albert Pike (1809–1891) was one of the most respected American Freemasons of the nineteenth century, and is most famous for his work promoting the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. He was initiated in 1850, and quickly emerged as a charismatic leader within the fraternity. As the Sovereign Grand Commander of the Southern Jurisdiction of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite from 1859 until his death thirty-two years later, he became the guiding star of Scottish Rite Masonry and deeply influential among other Masons in the United States and even around the world. During that time, Bro.: Pike became known for his outstanding ability to delve productively into many topics, and he had a profound intellectual interest in the religions and philosophies of the world, including esoteric traditions such as kabbalah.

As noted by the Smithsonian’s catalogue, the Pike *mizrah* bears three explicit marks noting its creator.⁹ The lower part of the image depicts two figures: Aaron on the left and Moses on the right, standing between the pillars of the temple. In both of these vignettes, the bases of the pillars contain attributions. On the left, one pillar base notes “Designed and Executed by A. Pike, Richmond Jan 5th 1862,” while the other reads: אברהם בן משה ת”ר”כ”ב (*avraham ben mosheh TRKB*). This reflects the creator’s Jewish pseudonym and the Hebrew year equivalent to 1862: “Abraham, son of Moses, 5622.” The attribution in the scene on the right is identical, except the date given is January 6th. Additionally, at the bottom of the drawing is penned a later notice: “Copyright 1890 by A. Pike.” It has been theorized that this was added to the original drawing in preparation for publication,

which certainly took place, as the Smithsonian has had—since 1890!—a specimen of Pike’s design printed on cardboard in its collection.¹⁰ The original drawing by Pike is reference number NMAH 314398, and the cardboard print is NMAH 154417.

The Pike *mizrah* is created through a process called micrography, whereby minuscule lettering is used to form the fine lines of a drawing. A close inspection of the image on page 119 will demonstrate how most of the fine lines of the *mizrah* are actually made of Hebrew script. According to the Smithsonian’s researchers, this item represents “a tour de force of integration of text and image, created primarily with micrographic script. Included is the entire book of Genesis and a selection of verses from the prayerbook and the Bible that refer to daily ritual, ethical behavior, and charity.”¹¹ Also plainly visible within large cartouches above the human figures are the ten commandments.

While the Albert Pike so prominent in Masonic history apparently created this *mizrah*, it remains unclear how much of it was designed from scratch. The design is perhaps not wholly original, but could be based closely upon an earlier—and perhaps lost—Jewish original. However, if based upon an earlier work, it seems likely that Pike did introduce the Masonic elements into the composition. For example, the symbol of the All-Seeing Eye appears near the center of the design. The All-Seeing Eye is a Jewish literary symbol found in the Bible; for example, the Book of Psalms taught that “the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him.”¹² This idea was developed into a discrete mystical symbol in the *Zohar*, the thirteenth-century Jewish classic that forms the seminal text of kabbalah. From there, it was imported into Christian symbolism during the Italian Renaissance; it seems that within this Christian setting, the

ancient literary symbol was transformed into the graphic emblem that is now so familiar.¹³ Although it is a quintessentially Jewish symbol, it would be highly unusual for an observant Jew to employ this emblem on a religious item like a *mizrah*, owing to the aniconic tradition within Judaism which forbids the graphic depiction of God.

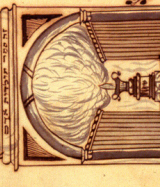
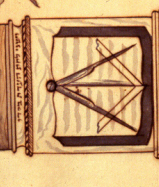
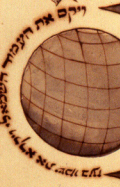
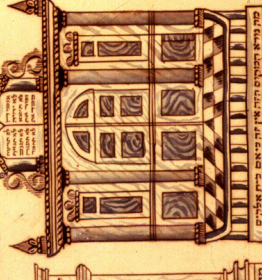
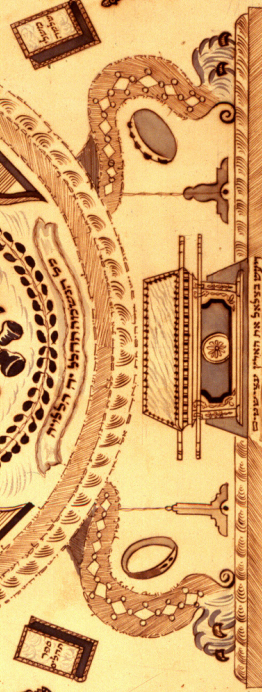
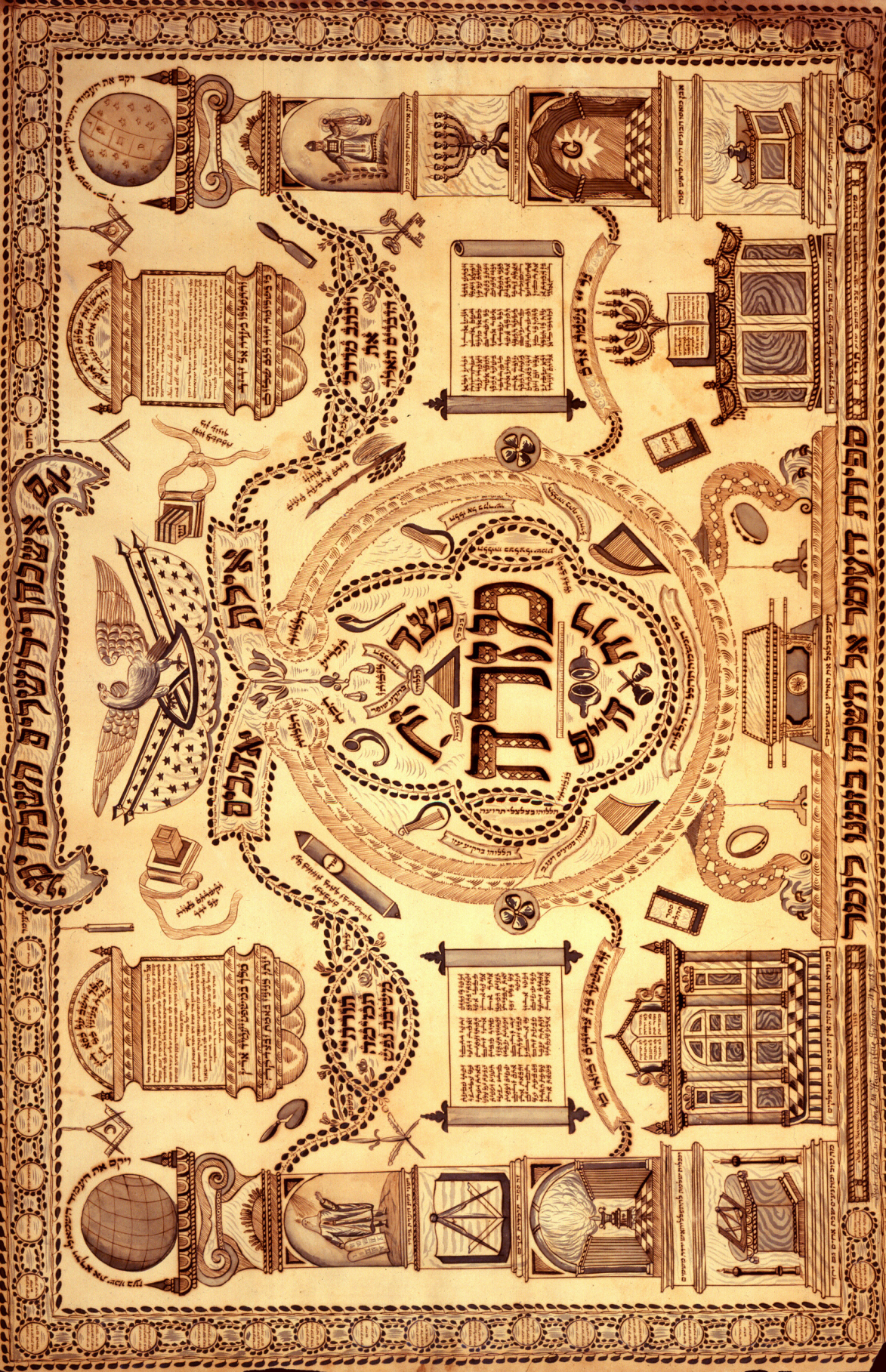
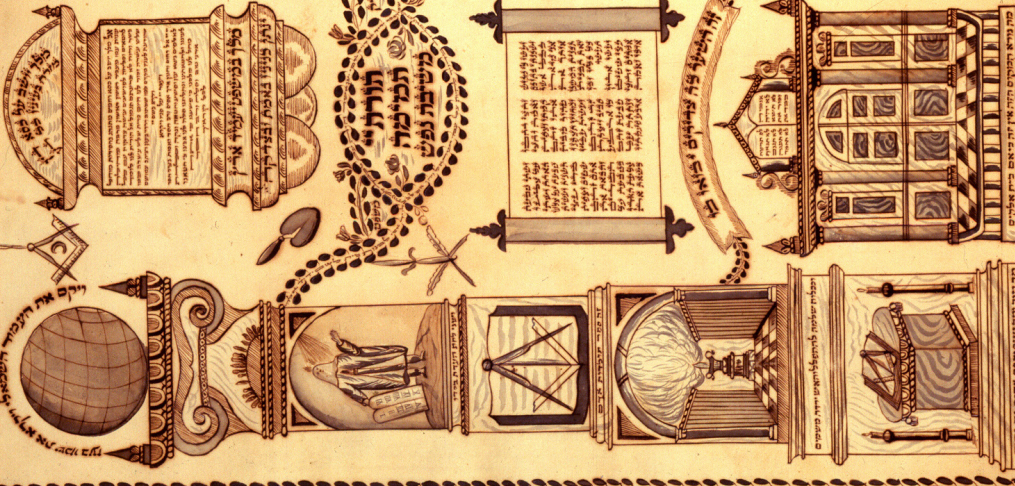
In addition to the All-Seeing Eye, it is possible that other aspects reflect Pike’s integration of Masonic imagery. The alternating tones of the pavement at the feet of Moses and Aaron seem intended to denote the Masonic symbol of the Mosaic Pavement. Like the All-Seeing Eye, this symbol is derived from Jewish tradition, referring to part of Solomon’s Temple.¹⁴ At the top of the design, two cornucopias appear, inscribed with a verse from Deuteronomy: ברוך אתה בבאך וברוך אתה :בצאתך, “Blessed shall you be in your comings and blessed shall you be in your goings.”¹⁵ Professor E.R. Goodenough, an established authority on Jewish symbolism, found that the cornucopia was borrowed from paganism in ancient times and found on Jewish coins and in some synagogues. While it could perhaps denote “beneficent sovereignty” or the “royal birth of immortality,” it never developed a clear meaning in its Jewish context.¹⁶ As such, the introduction of the two cornucopias on the Pike a *mizrah* may be seen as an allusion to the Masonic jewel of the Stewards, who traditionally serve wine at the festive board.

Pike’s Encounter with Jewish Tradition

Where might Albert Pike have derived sufficient interest in Judaism to be inspired to create a *mizrah* of his own? We know that, as part of his wide-ranging philosophical interests, Pike studied Jewish traditions—including the mystical literature of kabbalah—for much of his adult life. Kabbalistic

ספירת העומר אל השנה בזמנו לומר

אם אשחקך לולשלים השנה תי



teachings were notable in the Scottish Rite degrees that Pike inherited, and figured more prominently still in his revisions of those degrees (1857–1868) and in his classic exposition of their meaning, *Morals and Dogma* (1872). That said, his opinion of kabbalah was not uncritical. He rejected some aspects of it as “wild and useless speculations” and once described much of it as an “ancient and misunderstood medley of absurdity and philosophy.”¹⁷

Overall, however, Pike accepted the main doctrines of kabbalah as profound, and he also believed that they were genuinely reflected in the teachings of Freemasonry. Bro.: Arturo de Hoyos, FPS, who has conducted decades of research on Albert Pike and his philosophy, remarks that:

It is noteworthy that the mature Pike was convinced that Freemasonry embodied Hermetic and Kabbalistic symbolism, and his study, entitled *Esoterika: The Symbolism of the Blue Degrees of Freemasonry* (1888), written just two years before he died, concentrated this thesis into a text so insightful that it convinced several of the leading scholars of the day of the antiquity of Masonic symbolism.¹⁸

OPPOSITE There are many instances of Jewish *mizrahim* that include Masonic symbolism. This example, produced in 1850 by Moses H. Henry of Cincinnati, Ohio, is now in the collection of the Skirball Museum in Los Angeles. It includes the Masonic Altar, the Pot of Incense, the Three Great Lights, the jewels of the officers of the lodge, the Mosaic Pavement, the Letter G, and specifically Masonic renderings of the Pillars of the Temple, including the Terrestrial and Celestial Globes. Ink on paper, 25⁵/₈ × 37¹/₂ inches. SCC 39.1. Skirball Museum, Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles, California. Gift of Mrs. Jacob Goldsmith. Photograph by Susan Einstein.

Other Masonic Mizrahim

Bro.: Pike was certainly not the only person to create a *mizrah* with Masonic imagery. In an illuminating study of the subject, scholar Alice M. Greenwald has documented numerous other examples of *mizrahim* with Masonic themes. “The juxtaposition of Masonic imagery with more traditional iconography might initially strike one as intrusive and inappropriate,”¹⁹ she notes, but ultimately finds a deep compatibility between the two symbolic spheres.

The inherent compatibility of Masonic ideology with the tenets of late eighteenth-century Haskalah and most especially, the universalistic accommodations of the emerging Reform Movement in Judaism, becomes evident when one examines Freemasonry in light of its own philosophical underpinnings.²⁰

That consonance is rooted in Freemasonry’s contemplation of the Temple of Solomon. “It is the site of the Temple to which the *mizrah* points,” Greenwald observes.²¹ “The very symbols of Freemasonry derived from a presumed historical connection to the stonemasons and builders of Solomon’s Temple, whose tools and materials became the allegorical emblems of the fraternity.”²²

All of the currently known surviving *mizrahim* depicting Masonic symbols were made in the United States. Greenwald identified three creators of these items.

1) Moses H. Henry of Cincinnati, Ohio. A manuscript *mizrah* of his, made in 1850, is currently part of the collection of the Skirball Museum in Los Angeles (SCC 39.1). Shown on page 122, this is perhaps the oldest documented *mizrah* with Masonic symbols. Greenwald notes that it “may

itself represent an allegorical Temple, providing access to God through prayer and adherence to the moral law contained in Torah," because many of the inscriptions upon it refer to the transcendent nature of the Temple site, Psalms 118:20 and Genesis 28:17.²³ Another text shown is the whole of King Solomon's prayer to dedicate the Temple (11 Chronicles 6:1–20), which was the root of the tradition for Jews living west of the holy land to face eastward, toward the Temple, when praying.²⁴ And, at the base of the Boaz pillar, the artist has inscribed words from one of the songs of ascent used in the Temple liturgy, "How good and how pleasant it is that brothers dwell together."²⁵

2) Levi David van Gelder (1816–1878) of Amsterdam, relocated to Chicago in 1864. A longtime creator of *mizraḥim*, around 1865, van Gelder produced an exceptionally beautiful design filled with Masonic themes. The original drawing, shown on page 125, is nearly four feet high. Once engraved, this product was sold in colored and plain versions, of which numerous specimens exist in museums and private collections.²⁶ It is a highly complex *mizraḥ* in which many of the cartouches enclose Biblical scenes of Masonic significance. Indeed, Freemasonry enjoys pride of place in this van Gelder *mizraḥ*, for the symbolical Lodge is depicted in its topmost segment. Moreover, this highest cartouche even includes a representation of the All-Seeing Eye, an indicator that it could only have been produced in a liberal Jewish context.

3) Aharon ben Eliezer Katlinsky (c. 1816–c. 1909) of Poland, relocated to Chicago. Katlinsky made numerous papercuts which served simultaneously as a *mizraḥ* and *shiviti* (a similar calligraphic motif, often depicting the menorah). Bro.: Katlinsky's surviving Masonic *mizraḥim* date from 1893, 1895, and 1904.²⁷

The Pike Masonic *mizraḥ*, first identified as such by Grossman and Ahlborn, makes Albert Pike the fourth documented creator of such an item. Other artists may well come to light.

One Temple, Two Traditions

One can only agree with Greenwald when she concludes that "The *mizraḥ*, as a visual reminder of the Temple, serves as a logical arena for the incorporation of Masonic emblems."²⁸ As such, it became "an art form in which imagery drawn from both traditions would be collapsed into a single composition."²⁹ The manner in which Masonic symbolism was easily integrated with traditional *mizraḥ* design is arguably based equally upon the common mythopoetic foundation of the Hebrew Bible as esteemed by Judaism and Freemasonry, and the devotion of that religion and the Craft to the Temple. The Jerusalem Temple, which every Craft Lodge is said to represent, is the central focus of Freemasonry's symbolism and ritual. Within Judaism, the practice of addressing one's prayers toward the Temple dates to the era when the Temple stood atop Mount Moriah. Today, while the Temple does not physically exist, the *mizraḥ* represents a symbolic and inward orientation, "a lens for prayerful focus on the Temple."³⁰

Additional research is necessary in order to determine a number of things pertinent to the Pike *mizraḥ*. First, the possibility that it is not actually by Albert Pike needs to be fully explored. It seems unlikely, but it could be that there was a Jewish Freemason named "A. Pike" based in Virginia in

OPPOSITE A *mizraḥ* by Levi van Gelder, produced in Chicago circa 1865. It is notable for the inclusion, in the top-most enclosure, of the All-Seeing Eye—a feature it shares with the Pike *mizraḥ*.

THIS IS THE GATE OF THE LORD, INTO -

WHICH THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL ENTER!

HAZEL
BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD



INDIAN
FROM NOW TO ALL ETERNITY. AMEN.



FROM HEAVEN THE LORD LOOKETH DOWN

ONE IS OUR GOD, YEAVS OUR FORESAC, ED IS HIS NAME!

AND BROTHER ALL THE SONS OF MEN!



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the 1860s. Next, it will be interesting to learn if anything might be found about Pike's motivations for first creating, and then—twenty-eight years later—publishing his *mizrah*. Perhaps Pike learned of this art form through one of his Jewish brethren in Freemasonry and elected to try his hand at participating in the custom himself? The fact that it was printed, at least once, shows an interest in making it more than a strictly personal project. Finally, there is the question of the overall composition: the variety of texts used in the design appear to be the selections of an insider rather than those of an outside admirer, however gifted. Was Bro.: Pike imitating the design of an earlier *mizrah*, not yet identified—or perhaps did he have recourse to the services of an experienced Jewish calligrapher? Future research may shed light upon these matters and lead to greater understanding of the historical intersection of Masonic and Jewish symbolism.

Notes

Special thanks to Bro.: Arturo de Hoyos, FPS, Grand Archivist and Grand Historian at the House of the Temple in Washington, D.C., for his useful consultation during the preparation of this article.

- 1 Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 566.
- 2 R.J.Z. Werblowsky & Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966), 267
- 3 Iris Fishof, *Jewish Art Masterpieces from the Israel Museum, Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 1994), 84.
- 4 1 Kings 8:38–39, NJPS.
- 5 Daniel 6:10.
- 6 Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 30a, author's translation.
- 7 *Shulchan Aruch* 94:1.
- 8 Grace Cohen Grossman & Richard Eighme Ahlborn, *Judaica at the Smithsonian: Cultural Politics as Cultural Model* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 138–39.
- 9 Grossman & Ahlborn, *Judaica at the Smithsonian*, 138.
- 10 Grossman & Ahlborn, *Judaica at the Smithsonian*, 138–39; Cyrus Adler & I.M. Casanowicz, "The Collection of Jewish Ceremonial Objects in the United States National Museum." *Proceedings of the United States National Museum* 34(1908), 736 (the print is item 155).
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Psalms 33:18, NJPS.
- 13 Shawn Eyer, "The All-Seeing Eye: Symbol of the Great Architect, Part One." *Philalethes: The Journal of Masonic Research and Letters* 68(2015): 106–118, 130.
- 14 See Shawn Eyer, "The Mystery of the Mosaic Pavement," *Philalethes: The Journal of Masonic Research and Letters* 62(2009): 90–97, 114.
- 15 Deuteronomy 23:6, NJPS.
- 16 Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), 12:148.
- 17 Arturo de Hoyos, *Albert Pike's Morals and Dogma of the Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry: Annotated Edition* (Washington, D.C.: Supreme Council, 33°, S.J., USA, 2011), 38–40.
- 18 de Hoyos, *Albert Pike's Morals and Dogma*, 45.
- 19 Alice M. Greenwald, "The Masonic Mizrah and Lamp: Jewish Ritual Art as a Reflection of Cultural Assimilation," *Journal of Jewish Art* 10 (1984): 87–101; 92–93. She later rejects this perception: "The very appearance of Masonic emblems on Jewish objects should not be considered as a secular or Christological intrusion on pristine Judaica, nor should they be seen as religiously neutral emblems of rationalism and the fraternity of mankind, as they came to be utilized on the currency and state insignia of both post-Revolutionary America and France." (96)
- 20 Ibid., 95.
- 21 Ibid., 96.
- 22 Ibid., 95.
- 23 Ibid., 99.
- 24 Ibid., 96.
- 25 Psalm 133:1, NJPS.
- 26 See scc 39.30 at the Skirball Museum, Los Angeles.
- 27 See Murray Zimiles, *Gilded Lions and Jeweled Horses: The Synagogue to the Carousel* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2007), 94–95; Joseph Shadur & Yehudit Shadur, *Traditional Jewish Papercuts: An Inner World of Art and Symbol* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2002), 144–47; and scc 39.18 and scc 39.19 at the Skirball Museum, Los Angeles.
- 28 Greenwald, "The Masonic Mizrah and Lamp," 96.
- 29 Ibid., 97.
- 30 Ibid., 98.