The 47th Proposition

- Scott Rowe

Masonry teaches us that symbols taught in the various degrees have speculative meanings that go beyond the operative implications implied on a casual first glance.

Perhaps none are considered as important as the famous 47th Problem of Euclid, a geometric solution that is one of the basics of Trigonometry and a foundation of Masonry. Though hardly just a Masonic secret, every student of mathematics is taught that the square of the two sides of a right angle triangle is equal to the square of the hypotenuse or longest side of the triangle. In its most simple and famous form this starts with sides with lengths of 3, 4 and 5.The name of this important discovery derived from the 47th and last of a series of mathematical proofs by the renowned Alexandrian scholar Euclid and is more readily recognized as the Pythagorean Theorem. It also goes by several other names such as Pythagoras's Pants, Fransican's Cowl and the Bride's Chair.The symbolic proof of this theorem is found in many Masonic jewels and depictions throughout lodges in many different jurisdictions.

The design of a Masonic Lodge, according to Mackey's Masonic Encyclopaedia, should be an oblong square which actually refers to a room of dimensions 3 to 4. Thus an angle from the north east corner to the southwest forms a hypotenuse of 5. The mirror image of this triangle suggests the well known Hermetic Divine theosophy that suggests "That which is below is alike to that which is above, and that which is above is alike to that which is below."

Many ancient religious beliefs attached great importance to the 3-4-5 relationship with the suggestion that the two shorter lengths represent the Male and Female and the hypotenuse the product or Offspring of their combining. Albert Pike the great Civil War Masonic authority suggested an Egyptian relationship to 3-4-5 stating in his Morals and Dogma that the triangle represents matter (Isis), spirit (Osiris), and the union of the two (Horus).

It is known in Egyptian history that the goddess Isis wore a crown in the form of a right angled throne, hence the name Bride's Chair. Egyptian surveyors of that time employed a 12 knotted circle of rope to measure right angles and help restore boundaries after the numerous Nile floods using the importance of 3+4+5 to determine precise and accurate 90 degree angles.

So important was the knowledge of how this rope could be used to solve legal problems it may have even been considered one of the 'secrets' worthy of attempting to extort and ultimately killing our ancient brother and Grand Master Hiram Abiff.