

CORN, WINE, AND OIL

Corn, Wine, and Oil have been significant symbols in the Masonic tradition. These three commodities have been closely linked throughout history. In ancient times, they were a source of wealth and a measure of trade. Workers were paid in corn, wine, and oil as a practical currency.

The significance of these commodities can be traced back to the Bible. Deuteronomy states that the nation that destroys the people will not leave behind any of these three items. II Chronicles also mentions that the children of Israel brought in abundance the first fruits of these crops. Nehemiah speaks of a great chamber where the meat offerings, frankincense, vessels, and tithes of corn, new wine, and oil were previously laid. In addition, all of Judah brought the tithe of these crops into the treasures.

Olive oil was essential to the Jews living in Palestine, similar to how butter and other fats are necessary to occidentals. Due to its importance, it became a crucial component of sacrificial ceremonies. Olive oil was not only used as food but also for lighting and anointment purposes. It was mixed with perfumes and spices such as myrrh, cinnamon, galbanum, and frankincense to create the "Precious ointment upon the head" mentioned in the Entered Apprentice Degree and Nevada's Master Mason opening and closing. Olive oil was also used as a surgical dressing due to its soothing properties. An ancient use of cold-pressed oils is to treat depression by pouring the oil over the head, which gives a genuine feeling of joy.

The production of olive oil was a source of wealth and employment for many people. Olive oil was obtained by pressing or gently pounding the olives.

Corn, or grains, was another commodity that was highly valued. The corn of the Bible refers to all grains that the Jews cultivated, including barley and wheat. Our modern corn, a result of cultivation and cross-breeding, was not known to the ancients, although they may have had similar grain crops to Indian maize. Throughout history, an ear of grain has symbolized abundance and wealth. The goddess of abundance, Ceres, still represents our cereals today. In Greek mythology, she is known as Demeter and is considered the Mother Earth. Demeter wore a garland made of grain and held ears of grain in her hand. The Hebrew word Shibboleth means an ear of corn and a flood of water, both symbols of abundance.

Vineyards were considered a symbol of wealth and comfort, and the "vine and fig tree" provided a pleasant shade for guests. Vineyards on hills or mountain slopes were carefully tended and protected from erosion by walls and terraces, a practice still visible today in the Rhine region. Thorn hedges were used to keep cattle from eating the grapes. Vineyard owners frequently lived in watchtowers or huts on elevated areas to keep a close eye on their ripening grapes and protect them from predators. During the feast of Booths in the early fall, when the grapes were ripe, people celebrated with joy and happiness. They drank "New Wine," the freshly pressed grape juice that had not yet been fermented. To make fermented wine, the juice was stored in skins or bottles. In Old Testament times, red wine was likely the most common, but later on, white grapes became more popular and are now the primary grape used for production in that region.

Our ancient ancestors valued wine almost as much as their crops and oil. This brings us to the significance of corn, wine, and oil in the Masonic tradition. During the dedication and consecration of a new lodge or the laying of cornerstones, we pour the fruit of the land, the brew of the grape, and the essence of the olive to inaugurate a new fraternity or structure for public use. The dedication of a lodge that is expected to flourish and produce a bountiful harvest of moral character calls for the natural accompaniments of the land - corn, wine, and oil. These offerings are essential for its "erection" or "consecration." The Grand Master instructs the Deputy or another customary officer to pour the corn. The Senior Grand Warden pours the wine, while the Junior Grand Warden pours the oil onto the "lodge," which typically represents the original Ark of the Covenant. The corn represents nourishment, the wine represents refreshment, and the oil represents joy and happiness.

In conclusion, corn, wine, and oil have significant value, both historically and in the Masonic tradition. They represent nourishment, refreshment, joy, and happiness. These commodities have been closely linked throughout history and have been used as a measure of trade and currency. The Masonic tradition incorporates these symbols during the dedication and consecration of a new lodge or the laying of cornerstones to signify the beginning of a new fraternity or structure for public use.