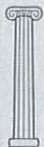


BUILDING
HISTORY
SERIES



THE MEDIEVAL CATHEDRAL

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THE MASONS

It was no coincidence that the vast majority of master builders and architects came from the ranks of the stonemasons. The masons were the most highly skilled and best paid of all of the cathedral workers, becoming fully qualified only after lengthy

Stonemasons, the most highly skilled and best-paid cathedral workers, are depicted on this stained glass window in Chartres Cathedral of Notre Dame.



apprenticeships. Specialists within the masons included the *ce-mentarius*, who laid or set the stones; the *lathomus*, who carved them, the plasterers; and those who mixed the mortar that held the stones together. The mortarmen and plasterers were among the few groups that included women.

Stone carvers were further divided into "roughstone" masons—those who shaped the hard stones used for the walls and ceilings—and the "freestone" masons—who did the more delicate work in softer materials. The freestone masons eventually came to be called freemasons, and the communal lodges in which they lived were the origins of the modern Masonic Lodge social organization.

Each worker who shaped the harder stones used in basic construction had a distinctive symbol, or mason's mark, that was etched into each stone. These marks served two purposes. The first was to quantify the number of stones cut to determine how much the mason would be paid. The second was to identify each individual's work to the foreman who checked the stones for quality. As marks and their variations were handed down from master to pupil, father to son, they became symbols of pride, and masons inscribed their work much as an artist would sign a painting.

Quality control was by no means confined to the stones, however. Mortar and plaster had to meet rigid specifications, and the guilds, or workers' associations, enforced those specifications in order to protect the reputation of their professions. For instance, the *Book of Guilds* for the city of Paris spells out that

no one may be a plasterer in Paris unless he pays 5 Parisian sous to the master [of the guild] who protects the profession for the king. When he has paid the five sous he must swear by the saints that he will put nothing in the plaster save lime and that he will give a good and true measure.¹³