

The Five Noble Orders of Architecture

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Pillars occupy an important place in Freemasonry and feature prominently in our ceremonies, having great significance as symbols with different layers of meaning.

In one of our lectures, one of the significances of the number five is indicated by the five noble orders of architecture. They are the Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite.

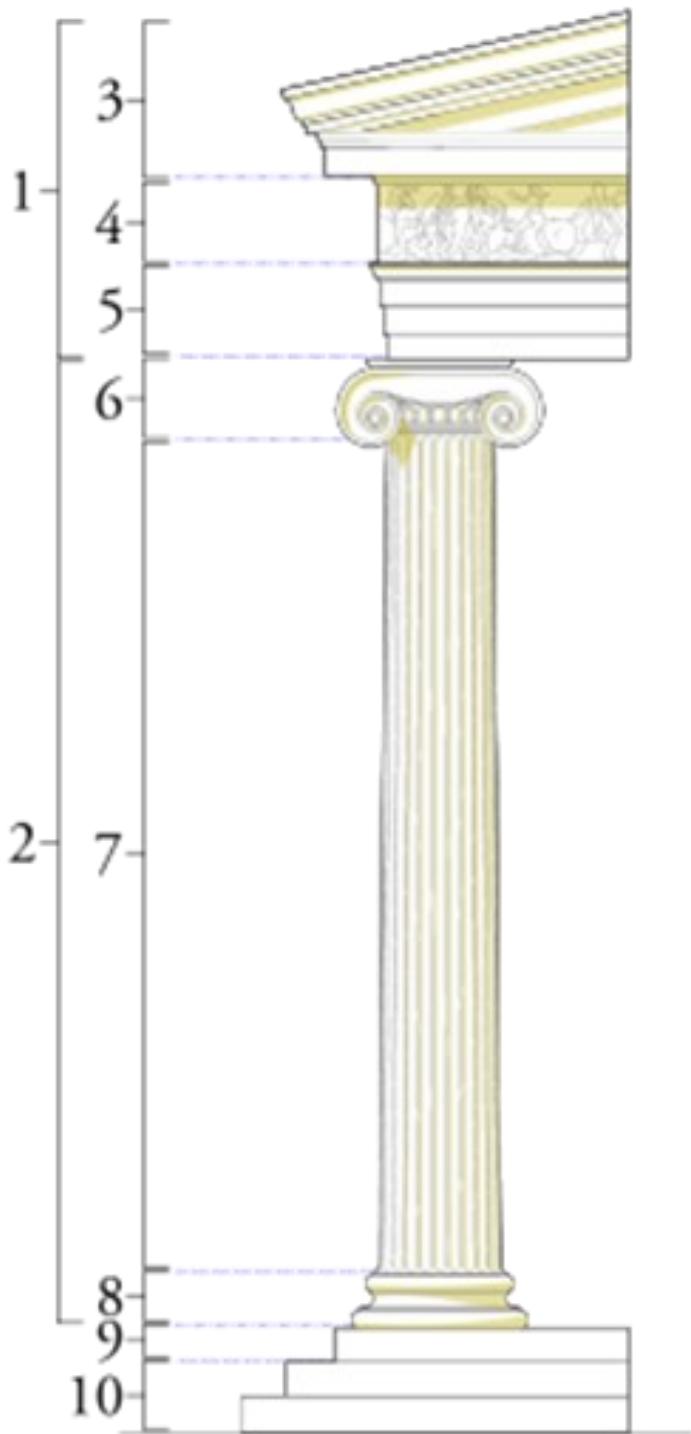
This short article is a summary of the characteristics of these orders of architecture, mainly from an architectural point of view, and is meant to provide some basic knowledge on these objects which we refer to in our ceremonies but may not know much about.

The orders appearing most commonly in the lodge are the Greek orders: Ionic, Doric, and Corinthian, and indicate wisdom, strength and beauty. The other two orders are Roman: Tuscan and Composite.

Firstly, we should know that an “order” of architecture, in this instance, refers to, not just the pillar, but everything that is meant to go with it. This includes the column, the base, the capital, the entablature (the part of the building that rests on the column, composed of Cornice, Frieze and Architrave), and the proportions of all of these. These are all designed to be in harmonious relation to each other.

The diagram on the right shows the constituent parts of an order.

Recognizing each of these orders is made easy by their very different capitals. The diagram below shows the distinctive designs.



Key to diagram:

Ionic order: 1 - entablature, 2 - column, 3 - cornice, 4 - frieze, 5 - architrave or epistyle, 6 - capital (composed of abacus and volutes), 7 - shaft, 8 - base, 9 - stylobate, 10 - krepis.

The Tuscan order, as can be seen in the diagram on the next page, is shorter in proportion to the others, and has a smooth



column. Both the base and the capital are relatively plain, as is the architrave.

This order was used mainly underground for constructions such as vaults. It was something not always in the public eye and so did not need to be that decorative. It does, however, in my opinion, have a certain elegance to it.

The first of the Greek orders is the Doric. It is the simplest of the three orders, as can be seen by the plain capital and relatively plain base. The column, however, is fluted. You may notice that the flutes are different to the other orders: they touch each other, unlike the others where the flutes are separated and narrower.

The height of the column is six times the thickness of the base. This was derived from the height of a man being six times the length of his foot, and denotes strength. In the lodge, this is to

support us in all our undertakings, and also represents the Senior Warden.

This order was used often, and almost exclusively, in Greek temples.

The second Greek order, the Ionic, was developed at the same time as the Doric, but is proportionately slimmer, the column height being eight times its width. It has a slightly more decorative capital with the volutes reminiscent of curls of hair. Due to these two factors, it can be thought of as representing a woman, and denotes wisdom. In the lodge this is to help the thought and planning process, and also denotes the Master of the Lodge.

This style was used in the Acropolis in Athens.

The third of the Greek orders is the Corinthian. It is slimmer still than the Ionic, with a height-width ratio of ten to one, representing the figure of a maiden. The capital is very fancy, being decorated with curly leaves and sometimes fruit. These features denote beauty. In the lodge, it is to adorn the inward man, and also represents the Junior Warden.

The final order, the Composite, is really just a combination of the Ionic and the Corinthian, and used by the Romans who wanted the fanciest, most decorative pillars.

In the lodge, the three Greek columns are referred to as the “lesser lights” in Masonry, and further represent the sun, the moon, and the Master of the Lodge.

The number three, which occurs often in Masonry, is also representative of: Solomon, King of Israel; Hiram, King of Tyre; and Hiram Abif. It also represents the triune nature of Deity, which is reflected in the universe and in ourselves, as in body, mind, and spirit.

These are the noble orders of architecture, but, in Freemasonry, they are not as noble as that which they represent.