

CERES, CADUCEUS, and the MEDICAL INSIGNIA MISTAKE

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(IMAGE: CERES holding 'The Staff of Caduceus' along with ethical Writs of civil, moral, and medical laws; other hand the outpouring of the cornucopia bestowing Blessings from a rich harvest)

Most people are aware of the "winged symbol" that Medical Doctors, Health-care Professionals; and Medical supply houses utilize as the symbol of Medicine. The symbol that most people see is the "Caduceus", which is traditionally the symbol for "Commerce and "Negotiation"; two realms whereby balanced-exchanged and reciprocity are prized as ideal virtues.

Originally, it had no connection with Medicine whatsoever. It is formed by the herald's staff of Hermes, entwined by two serpents with two wings at the top.

Traditional Medical Doctors are quite aware that this symbol was confused long ago with "The Rod of Asclepius", which is a single rod entwined by a single serpent, wielded by the Greek god Asclepius, a supposed deity associated with medicine and healing, in Greek mythology.

The original Hippocratic Oath began by the invocation: "I swear by Apollo the Physician and by Asclepius and by Hygieia and Panacea and all the gods".



Technically: 'Meditrine', 'Hygiea', and 'Panacea' were daughters of 'Asclepius'. Extending the lineage outward: 'Asclepius' had the parents 'Apollo' and 'Coronis'. I find it humorous that Coronis discovered she was pregnant while Apollo was away; and she fell in love with Ischys, son of Elatus. A white crow which Apollo left to guard her, informed Apollo of the affair and Apollo, enraged that the bird had not pecked-out Ischys' eyes as soon as he approached Coronis, flung a curse upon it so furious that it scorched its feathers, which is (supposedly) why all crows are black. Apollo sent his sister Artemis to kill Coronis because he couldn't do the act himself. Apollo only regained his presence of mind when Coronis' body was aflame on a funeral-pyre. Upon a sign from Apollo Hermes cut the unborn child out of her womb, and gave it to the centaur Chiron to raise. To me, this kind of scandalous heritage, marred by moral-turpitude and sexual improprieties, makes any 'Rod of Asclepius' automatically associated with pain, misery and misfortune; therefore unbecoming for any use in the Healing Arts.

The use of a serpent (in both emblems) has always been a mystery to me, because I associated it with snakes and evil-doing. However, in the days of primitive Medicine, many people were afflicted with illness and infection due to parasites and worms. Physicians treated this by cutting a slit in the patient's skin and the worm literally crawled out; and the physician carefully wound the pest round the stick until the entire creature was removed. Physicians advertised their services by displaying signs with a 'worm on a stick'. In other cultures, the shedding of a snake's skin was a sign of renewal and rejuvenation. And, in primitive cultures, snake venom was sometimes prescribed as a form of therapy. By the 16th Century, Alchemists and Hermetic scientists studied Medicine, Pharmaceuticals, Chemistry, Mining and Metallurgy.

As noted, many traditional Medical Doctors prefer the single rod emblem: the "Rod of Asclepius" because it supposedly originated from the Greek island of Kos, where Hippocrates, "the father of Medicine" may have begun his career. Such traditionalists prefer the single serpent wrapped around a single rod. They feel that the words "caduity" and "Caducous" refer to things which are fleeting in time, perishable, or as with human frailty: in dotage and even



senility. The Medical Profession as a whole promotes healthy, vitality and restoration of vigor. However, I see no conflict-of-interest. Mortal man is inherently cast in a temporal body with weaknesses and vulnerability; and which will someday die and pass-away. Diseases such as cardiac-arrest and stroke reveal the perishable nature of the brain. Lastly, senility does not have the stigma it once did, since a whole host of diseases from Alzheimer's to Syphilis and scores of other ailments (including some viruses) have been linked to senility.

Helping sufferers of ailments of ailments was a prime tenet of The Society of The Rose and Cross, founded by the month Father Christian Rosenkreutz. He laid down a set of "Rules" for his Society. The first Rule was: "That none of them should profess any other thing than to cure the sick, and that gratis".

Personally, I feel that the MISTAKE of using the Caduceus is quite fortunateand perhaps even MORE SYMBOLIC of the TRUE MISSION OF MEDICAL HEALING. Not every life-saving procedure or therapy is successful. Just as "Life" versus "Death" are at odds --being at opposite ends of the spectrum--- so are the various shades-of-grey of other various sicknesses....ranging from from 'mild' to 'major' afflictions of the Body or Mind.

If a person justifies the usage of the Staff of Caduceous, several logical reasons come forth: First, the single snake represented by Asclepius looks rather "sinister" wrapped around a pole--almost akin to the proverbial "snake-oil salesman" quacks of long ago. By contrast, the winged Caduceus looks slightly more benign. The two snakes are more subtle in the background, and not as threatening as a single snake prominently in the foreground of any emblem.

Secondly, even if a closer inspection reveals that the Caduceus is composed of two separate entities wrapped around the same Staff....I would compare it to the common-practice of two Physicians making a "Second Opinion" as to a Patient's diagnosis, prognosis, or treatment.

The staff of Caduceus has been spoken of, by the Masonic Scholar, Dr. Albert G. Mackey, M.D., 33^o, and a Knight Templar in his Encyclopedia of Freemasonry. Mackey (himself a Medical Doctor who knew the significance of both emblems and, interestingly: he was not offended by the Caduceus) states: "The rods of the Deacons (in a Lodge-setting), who are the Messengers of the Master and



Wardens"....are supposedly derived from the Caduceus, the herald's staff which was the symbol of that (ancient era), and hence the Deacon's Staff is often surmounted by a pine-cone.

Mackey goes on to say: "The history of the Caduceus, is likened to a magic-wand. And, you can be certain that he was NOT referring to black-magic. **The wand itself was an olive-branch** around which were two fillets of ribbon. Afterward, when (the mythological) 'Mercury' was in Arcadia, he encountered two serpents engaged in deadly combat. These he separated with his wand; **hence the olive-wand became the symbol of Peace**, and the two fillets were replaced by the two serpents, thus giving the Caduceus its well-known form of a Staff, around which two serpents are entwined." Peace is a key component of Health. Peace brings relief to those in battle; and Peace equally gives comfort to people who are ailing with disease, pain or infirmities.

Although the 'Staff of Caduceus' is technically a mistake (or was initially confused and misused), it may ironically bestow much a better symbolism for the Medical Profession than the bland and austere emblem of the 'Rod of Asclepius' with its single snake. Asclepius's Rod is literally an emblem "without wings"....and rather thin on merit.

In the illustration (at the TOP of this Presentation) is CERES holding the Caduceus in one hand and the Agricultural Cornucopia spilling a bountiful harvest with the other. Dr. (and Bro.) Mackey has comparatively little to say about CERES except that Ceres was "among the Romans, the goddess of Agriculture; but among the more poetic Greeks she was honored under the name Demeter, as the symbol of the prolific earth".

Ceres is often associated with prosperity, fertility, and harmony. Another Masonic scholar of the 19th Century, Charles T. McClenahan, 33^o, and a Knight Templar, noted that Masonic Ceremonies (in that century) (keep in mind: that was BEFORE THE WIDESPREAD USE OF GAS-LAMPS and well before ELECTRICITY became commonplace) that "Meetings were held on or near nights of the Full Moon, because such custom "was the ancient custom of the Order, derived from the mysteries of Ceres..." Moonlight enabled safer travel by horse or by horse & buggy.

Detractors of Freemasonry will condemn the references to ancient symbols and they falsely claim that today's modern Masons worship anything. That accusation is baseless and



entirely false. All Masons have a belief in a Supreme Being. For a great bulk of North American Masons: that is more accurately described "Almighty God." And, for us as Masonic Rosicrucians: We profess a further belief in Christianity with the unequivocal statement that we regard Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Unworthy symbols can distract from any symbol's true meaning. Veneration of any such alternative deity would be idolatry and blasphemy. Regular and legitimate Freemasons do not engage in such things. Honorable symbolism can (and does) make Judeo-Christian Principles have a higher, stronger, and more glorious meaning inside the human heart, provided that we are drawn closer to our Creator by these simple reminders.

The illustrative two stone tablets with 'The Ten Commandments' engraved thereon are likewise a symbol. However, it is not the "the slab of stone" (per se), that captivates attention (and hopefully instills obedience/compliance) ---- **it is the message that is conveyed, which makes it honorable.** Although originally etched into stone, 'The Ten Commandments' convey The Word of God...regardless of whether the message is carved into wood, inscribed in stone, printed on paper, or posted via television or today's electronic Social Media.

Ceres, itself, is an ancient symbol depicted in feminine form: long associated with Agriculture, grain crops, fertility and motherly relationships. Even our modern word "cereal" is derived from "Ceres;" yet, no one objects to such a designation of a nutritious food which most people consume regularly.

Ceres was credited with Spelt wheat (or dinkel wheat) which was an important staple in parts of Europe from the Bronze Age to Medieval times. Now, dinkel wheat is a residue crop in central Europe. Spelt flour was often used for making biscuits and crackers. Ceres is also associated with the yoking of oxen and plowing, as well as the sowing, protection, and nourishing of young seed.

Ceres was also a "Protector of Laws"; and protected transitions---from girlhood to womanhood; from unmarried to married-life and motherhood. Statues of Ceres top the domes of the Missouri State Capitol and the Vermont State House, and Ceres is the right figure on the "Great Seal of the State of New



Jersey." There is a statue of Ceres on top of the Chicago Board of Trade Building, which conducts trading in agricultural commodities. During the American civil war, images of Ceres appeared on several \$10 and \$20 Confederate States' paper currency notes. Ceres was even depicted as a character in William Shakespeare's play, "The Tempest," in the year 1611.

With Nebraska having its noteworthy status as "The Cornhusker State," it is highly appropriate that Nebraska College of S.R.I.C.F., celebrates (via this Presentation here) the contributions of Ceres as well as clarifying the accidental "Medical Mistake" of the "Rod of Asclepius" being inadvertently confused with and now...commonly replaced by "The Staff of Caduceus" as a Medical Insignia, commonly seen by the public-at-large. To me, that anomaly of accidental History may be a gift of Providence. In the end, the Caduceus may be more striking, more appropriate, and more accurate. And, the above illustration of the matron Ceres holding the cornucopia (the horn of plenty) while simultaneously holding the "Staff of Caduceus" is the perfect linkage between Health & Ethics bridged by Peace & Prosperity.

Sources / Exhibits / Recommended Readings:

- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Dr. Albert G. Mackey, M.D., 33^o and a Knight Templar. Regarding History of Caduceus.
- Charles. T. McClenachan, 33^o and a Knight Templar...in his Ritual of The Noachite or Prussian Knight (commonly known as the 21^o of The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry...Page 322 (Monitor section) 1867 Edition.
- Fama Fraternitatis. Published posthumously after the death of Fr. Christan Rosenkreutz. It was published in Kassel, Germany in the year 1614, with the full title: Fama fraternitatis Roseae Crucis oder Die Bruderschaft des Ordens der Rosenkreuzer.

- Exhibit (Illustration above) CERES holding the "Staff of Caduceus" with ethical, moral and civil Writs in one hand --while intentionally spilling (bestowing) the Bountiful Harvest and the fruits of Liberty. Unknown date.

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(Example: The Rod of Asclepius) (for contrasting comparison only)

