

# *Anno Lucis et al.*

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You are all familiar with the term 'Anno Lucis'. But where did it come from? When was it first used? And how widely is it used? I was surprised to find that there was no ready answer to these questions when I first asked them. Hence this paper.

To set the scene, as it were, one must make some reference to our present-day chronology. The current year is 1980, i.e. 1980 years after the Nativity, but there seems to be some evidence that the Roman monk who first used the terms 'Before Christ' and 'Anno Domini' was not as accurate as he might have been. There are some, including the Venerable Bede, who put the date of the Nativity four years earlier than the date commonly ascribed, though there are variants - e.g. three or even six years earlier. And here let me quote a rhyming couplet:

*How strange it is for us to see*  
*That Christ was born in 4 B.C.*

So much for Anno Domini. Now let's look at B.C. Here, of course, we work backwards. Dates nearer the Nativity would be reasonably easy to determine; assigning dates to events described in the early books of the Old Testament becomes exceedingly difficult - indeed impossible in the early books. As one encyclopedia puts it: 'The eras of the creation of the world are purely conventional and arbitrary.' It might be worth mentioning that one encyclopedia says that the age of the solar system is variously estimated between 4,700 million years and 6,000 million years. So do not let us take the 'Anno Lucis' dates too seriously!

The chronology appearing, without authority, in many English Bibles dates from an edition printed in 1701. The date therein of the Nativity is taken as the central event in history and, apparently for the first time in any English Bible, the years are reckoned as either 'Before Christ' or 'Anno Domini'. The chronology was based on a work by James Ussher, Bishop of Armagh, who gives the date of the Nativity as 'Anno Mundi' 4004, i.e., 4,004 years after the Creation of the World.

It has been said that Ussher's chronology was not solely based on information given in the Old Testament, but was subjected to a Messianic or apocalyptic view of history according to which the Messiah would come about 4,000 years after the Creation. This apparently tallied with Ussher's totalling as 4,004 of various dates mentioned in the Old Testament. However, although this 1701 edition may have been the first Bible to have used the terms 'B.C.' and 'A.D.', it was not the first edition of the Bible which had dates in the margin. That honor probably belongs to a Bible printed in Oxford in 1679. An interesting point in this is that the date of the Nativity is given as 'Anno Mundi' 4000.

Although many English Bibles show Ussher's chronology of 4,004 years between the Creation of the World and the Nativity there are variants. For example, according to the modern Greek calendar the number of years between the two events is 7,388; the ancient Greek Church says 5,508 years whilst a Professor Hales says 5,411. The only other chronology I want to mention before proceeding with the Masonic aspect of this paper, is the Jewish reckoning. This puts the Creation at 3760 B.C. but, as the Jewish New Year falls in the autumn, it is necessary to add another year after that Festival. One of the reasons for the lesser number of years (according to one Jewish scholar) is that they were counted according to the Years of Release and the Years of the Jubilee. Reference to the Years of Release is found in Exodus 22,10-11:

And six years shalt thou sow thy land, and shall gather in the fruits thereof; But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still.

Reference to the Years of Jubilee is found in Leviticus 25, 10:

And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land and to all the inhabitants thereof.

So much for background information. Before turning to the Masonic references it is as well to point out that, despite a careful check of encyclopedias and other books of reference, I have been unable to find any mention of the term 'Anno Lucis' outside Freemasonry.

Now for the Masonic side. The earliest mention of 'Anno Lucis' in England that I have found so far is in 1777. I am referring to the phrase in full and not to its abbreviation, A.L. These initials can be found as early as in 1725, and frequently in the years afterwards. But it does not follow that these letters stood for 'Anno Lucis'. Indeed, as I will explain later, I do not think that they did.

Where is this 1777 reference to 'Anno Lucis' found? It is in a rather unusual certificate issued by the premier Grand Lodge. Briefly, the Lodge of Alfred (which was erased in about 1790) had, by diploma, made six well-known Grand Officers members of their lodge. A little later, because a candidate (possibly a relation of one of the Grand Officers) was prevented by army duties from attending the lodge where he was to be made, the Alfred Lodge gave these Grand Officers a 'Deputation' to make, pass and raise the candidate '...in their usual place of making, passing and raising masons, as if he were made in our presence, and within our said lodge...' The Grand Officers duly did so at Freemasons' Hall and issued a certificate recording the event. The certificate is dated '15th Day of February Anno Lucis 5777'. Until that date references in England to Craft Masonic eras had usually been either to the Year of Masonry or by the abbreviation 'A.L.'

In both the first and second editions of our Constitutions (printed in 1723 and 1738 respectively), the author uses the English phrase 'Year of Masonry'. The same phrase is found in some later editions, though not all. Throughout the Historical Section, Anderson frequently quotes Ussher's dates but there are only a few references to the Year of Masonry. Occasionally he uses 'A.M.', which could mean Anno Masonry' or 'Anno Mundi', i.e. in the Year of the World. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the phrase 'Anno Mundi' came into popular use about the 9th century A.D. The phrase 'Year of Masonry' was also used occasionally by the premier Grand Lodge in their Minutes, for example in the Minutes dated 6 and 27 December 1729. It also appears in the 1730s on 'Deputations', in Irish Warrants and on the foundation stone of a London building. The Rules and Orders of the Ancients have the date '...in the Year of Masonry 5751'. The phrase also appears in their 1735 Minutes. In fact it is found fairly regularly on all sorts of documents throughout the 18th century and well on into the 19th.

We also have a reference to 'Anno Masonry'. It comes from a stone uncovered when the present Bank of England was being built in the 1930s. The stone was inscribed with the names of two masons and the Grand Master, Lord 'Montacute'. [the 2nd Duke of Montagu]. It bore the date 'Anno Masonry 5722'. The abbreviation 'A.L.' is first found in Pine's List of Lodges of 1725. The letters appear under the armorial bearings of the Grand Master. Pine continued to use this abbreviation in subsequent editions of his List. So did Cole who produced them after Pine. The abbreviation is also found under the armorial bearings of the 8th Duke of Norfolk, Grand Master 1730-1, which were included in the second Minute Book of the premier Grand Lodge. Throughout the 18th century the abbreviation 'A.L.' was used on various documents such as Warrants and Constitutions. It is seen more frequently after the formation of United Grand Lodge in 1813 but, as I indicated earlier, it did not necessarily stand for 'Anno Lucis'. I very much doubt if it did during the early years. There were other terms which could be abbreviated as 'A.L.'

The first such term so far discovered is on a set of three jewels presented in 1732 to Dr. Richard Rawlinson of the Castle Lodge. There is a Latin inscription on each jewel; this includes the date 'Anno Lat. 5732'. The abbreviation 'Lat.' almost certainly stands for 'Latomorum', a word regularly seen in *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* as the title of the Supplement - *Miscellanea Latomorum*. *Latomorum* is the genitive plural case of the Latin word 'Latomus' (or in its more usual form 'Lautomus') itself derived from Greek, and means 'of stone-cutters'. First seen in 14th-century Fabric Rolls it came to represent 'of freemasons'. Thus 'Anno Latomorum' can be read as 'in the Year of Freemasons' and, not unreasonably, 'of Freemasonry'. 'Latomorum' is also found in the text under the armorial bearings of the Duke of Norfolk to which reference has already been made, and there are at least two other appearances at about this time. The first is on the scabbard of the Sword of State given to the Craft by the same Duke of Norfolk and still carried before the Grand Master in procession. The inscription refers to the donor as 'Latomorum Archimagistri' - Grand Master of Masonry. The date is 'A.L. 1730'. Three years later we have an engraved form of summons presented to the lodge held at 'The Sash and Cocoa Tree', Moore Fields. The word 'Latomorum' appears here too. I have little doubt that it was used elsewhere in the Craft during these early years.

The abbreviation 'A.L.' can apply also to 'Anno Lithotomorum,' which is found in 1735 in the Minutes of a lodge at Salisbury. The prefix 'litho' derives from the Greek and has reference to stone. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'lithotomic' as meaning 'stonecutting, a mason'. So perhaps the 18th-century writer of those Minutes intended the words to mean 'the Year of Masonry'.

A few years later we find the phrase 'Anno Laotomiaie'. It appears both on banners and certificates. One such certificate was issued in the Beaufort Lodge No. 167, Bristol; it is a printed document, the date and name being inserted by hand. It is printed in English on the right and in Latin on the left. The former refers to 'the Year of Masonry 5814' and the latter has 'Anno Laotomiaie' which must be taken as a direct translation. In 1752 we have the first List of lodges published by the Grand Lodge of the Ancients and engraved by Ellis. He uses 'Anno Lap'. This could safely be assumed to mean 'Anno Lapidarium' 'in the Year of the Stonecutters' and, by definition, 'of Freemasonry'. 'Anno Lap' was again used by the Ancients in 1753 and in 1757, in each case 4,000 being added to the date. Surely we have yet another variant of the 'Year of Masonry' used by Anderson in 1723 and found on various documents in every year for decades thereafter.

So we have four phrases - all beginning with the letters 'A.L.' During the whole of the 18th Century and indeed, the early part of the 19th there is only one instance in England so far discovered of the Latin term 'Anno Lucis'. I submit, however, that there is a strong possibility even a probability that the abbreviation 'A.L.' originally stood for a Latin phrase (more than one seems likely) signifying 'in the Year of Masonry'.

In the latter half of the 18th century and up to the Union of the two Grand Lodges, the most commonly used designations in England were 'the Year of Masonry' and the abbreviation 'A.L.' The words 'Anno Laetomiae' appears a few times, usually in those lodges owing allegiance to the Grand Lodge of the Ancients. During the 1790s and into the 1830s we find 'Artis' (or occasionally 'Aerae') 'Architectonicae' and 'Artis Aedificatoriae', such phrases being found on both Craft and Royal Arch certificates. They are also found in Scotland on foundation stones that had been laid with full Masonic ceremonial. But when do we next find 'Anno Lucis', bearing in mind that the only date so far recorded in England is 1777? The next occasion is on a copy of a Knights Templar 'Patent of Constitution' granted by Dunckerley in 1791. There are four dates given on the document, but we are interested in only the first two. These are 'Anno Lucis 5795' and 'Anno Domini 1791'. Unfortunately, the original patent has disappeared and we have to rely on a copy. One can only assume that the original did have the words 'Anno Lucls' in full, and not just the abbreviation 'A.L.'

Still in England, our next find is in the writings of Carlile, a non-mason, but the author and publisher of (amongst other things) *The Manual of Freemasonry*. A letter printed in another of his publications (and bearing his temporary address Dorchester Jail), has the date 'July 8 A.D. 1825. Anno Lucis to Freemasons'. Another letter has 'July 14 Anno Tenebrae 1825. Anno Lucis (to masons).' 'Anno Tenebrae' can be translated as 'in the Year of Darkness' - presumably some joke of Carlile's. It would seem that by 1825 Carlile was of the opinion that the words 'Anno Lucis' were known (and presumably used) by freemasons. Furthermore one can assume that, according to Carlile, the abbreviation 'A.L.' had by then come to mean 'Anno Lucis'.

Three years later we find the words again this time on a bilingual certificate issued by the Portuguese Lodge Fidelity at Plymouth in 1828. The Portuguese side of the certificate refers to 'Anno do Verd Luz 5828'; the Latin side has the words 'Lucis Anno 5828'. Over the years a number of manuscript documents have been found purporting to record the ceremonies used in both Craft and Royal Arch. Some of these are in 'clear', others either wholly or partly in code. The word 'Lucis' is found occasionally in Royal Arch manuscripts that were probably written in the latter part of the 18th century. It occurs in that part of the catechism which later became the Historical Lecture. Carlile followed this practice in his *Manual of Freemasonry*. From about 1845 onwards the phrase appears regularly in Royal Arch printed books of ritual.

Although I have not been able to find 'Anno Lucis' on any Craft certificate issued by the United Grand Lodge, the words do appear on certificates issued by Supreme Grand Chapter, and have done so since the 1840s. To the best of my knowledge they do not occur in any other official document issued by either authority. It would, of course, be helpful if we had some guidance from one of the Grand Lodges pre-Union or today, regarding the abbreviation. The United Grand Lodge obviously considers it to stand for 'Anno Lucls'. But is there anything in the Articles of Union to confirm this? No. The date given is '25th day of November, in the Year of our Lord, 1813, and of Masonry, 5 813'. No 'Anno Lucls' - and indeed no 'A. L.'

As for the premier Grand Lodge and the Grand Lodge of the Ancients, we have seen that they used both the phrase 'in the Year of Masonry' and the abbreviation 'A.L.' but not 'Anno Lucis'. There remains one other source of information and that is in the drafts of the inscription that was to be used on the brass plate to be placed in the north-east corner of the first Freemasons' Hall. There are two drafts. The first has the phrase 'In the Year of the World (or of Light) 5779. 1775'. (Note, incidentally, the addition of 4,004 years, not 4,000.) The second draft has two dates 'each of which is preceded by an abbreviation 'A.L., and 'A.C.', the latter presumably standing for 'Anno Christo'. In fact neither draft was used. The wording actually used is recorded in *Grand Lodge Minutes* (and reprinted in full by Noorthouck in the 1768 Constitutions). The English version reads: 'In the fifteenth year of the reign of George III and the seventeen hundred and seventy fifth of human salvation.' There is no reference to 'the Year of Masonry', 'A.L.' or 'Anno Lucis'.

So no guidance there, either in the original drafts or in the wording finally adopted. Or is there? Perhaps there is. You will recall that the first draft had 'In the Year of the World (or of Light) 5779. 1775'. The words are in English, but, the Latin word for light is 'Lux' from which is derived the genitive 'Lucis'.

Now I would suggest that this may take us to the Continent. There is evidence that 'the Year of Light' was being used on official documents, Charters and Masonic certificates and in Masonic inscriptions in France and other European countries not in English, but in the language of the country (mainly French) and occasionally in Latin. Furthermore it is in France that we first find 'Anno Lucis'.

In his 1772 edition of *Illustrations of Masonry*, Preston laments the fact that freemasons had to resort to taverns and to hiring halls for their general meetings. He refers to - and describes in detail - the Banqueting Hall belonging to the Lodge of St. John in Marseilles, over a door of which there is an inscription which includes the date 'Anno Lucis 5765' - the earliest use so far discovered. But ten years earlier, in 1755, the phrase 'L'an de la Grande lumière' was being used in France in Masonic documents, particularly in those relating to the higher degrees. It might have been used earlier. I have seen a printed date of 5730 with a corresponding date of 1730, but evidence suggests that the figure '3' in both cases was a misprint for '5', which would make the date 5750 and 1750.

The same French phrase (sometimes with minor variations) was constantly used throughout the second half of the 18th century, again more frequently in relation to the higher degrees. I have examined a large number of Continental Masonic certificates issued by the Grand Orient of France and various other Masonic bodies and by far the majority of them had that French phrase meaning 'the Year of Light', sometimes in full, sometimes abbreviated.

I might add that 'Year of Light' also appears on a bilingual French prisoner's of war certificate issued in Chesterfield, Derbyshire, in 1811 and on a Provincial Grand Lodge certificate issued in Jersey in 1795.

Bro. A.C.F. Jackson, a Past Master of Quatuor Coronati Lodge in his book *Rose Croix A History of the Ancient and Accepted Rite for England and Wales* (1980) reprints a Patent said to have been issued in 1761 which shows the date 'Anno Lucis 5761' four years before the earliest reference to 'Anno Lucls' found by me.

The author tells us that there is every reason to think that some form of Patent was issued, but says that: 'The original document has never been found and there are only copies of copies which date from about the end of the XVIII century.' He also says that, for various reasons (which he gives), 'the version of the Patent given ... must ... be treated with suspicion'. We cannot therefore accept this printed document as evidence that 'Anno Lucis' was used in 1761. In any case the original Patent was almost certainly in French and would probably have contained the French phrase 'L'an de la Grande lumière' which, as I have already stated, can be found on many French Masonic documents before 1761. In the translation of the original Patent this phrase may well have become 'Anno Lucis' (in full) or the abbreviated 'A.L.' which later became transcribed as Anno Lucis. We shall never know. (The author was kind enough to confirm to me that the copy from which his copy was made (and which is believed to date from the late 18th century) does show Anno Lucis in full.) What conclusions do I draw from my study? First I would suggest that the abbreviation 'A. L.' - when first used - stood for one of the Latin phrases meaning 'in the Year of Masonry' probably 'Anno Latomorum'. Secondly I suggest that 'Anno Lucls' came from the Continent and that its origin may well stem from the higher degrees. The phrase has now been adopted not only by our own United Grand Lodge but also by Freemasonry throughout the world.

Finally, brethren, let me say that although the title of this paper could be construed as embracing Masonic eras of other Orders, such was not my intention. My aim has been to deal with 'Anno Lucls' and its variants.

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