

The Ballad of the Architect

An Anthological Allegory of Two Lebanons

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This work is a philosophical and poetic fiction inspired by the symbols and cultural heritage of Lebanon and the Middle East.

It reinterprets, in an allegorical manner, ancient and modern figures through a reflective lens focused on the relationship between matter, thought, and language. The text carries no religious intent nor factual commitment; it is a literary construction guided by intellectual freedom and a humanistic purpose.

- I -

THE FIRST FOUNDATIONS

1.1. THE TWO CITIES

Tyre, Phoenicia, 10th century BCE

There are cities that time cannot bury. Even when their ancient buildings no longer stand, the persistence of their people ensures their immortality. Tyre is one of these - born from the sea, it endures as one of the oldest continuously inhabited centers of civilization.

This ancient city was already a masterpiece of urban planning in immemorial times. Originally composed of two main islands, it saw its territory expand under the reign of King Hiram I, with the construction of a causeway that united them.

That particular feature made it, above all, a vast workshop of the nascent architecture of the Iron Age: the limited space for construction forced its inhabitants to build upward, adding as many stories as possible to make the best use of the land. Perhaps it was from this very ingenuity that arose the reputation which led other peoples to regard the Phoenicians of that region as master builders - but more on that later.

Tyre also stood out for its maritime power, possessing two harbors: one commercial - whose success was due to the exceptional use of astronomy by its navigators, further favored

by its privileged position, near Egypt, the Levant, and southern Europe - and another, military, remembered in history as the origin of several campaigns across the Mediterranean.

Thus, its position as a gateway between the Mediterranean and the Middle East was remarkable. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the ancient world, other cities were emerging with equal complexity.

Though not known for the bustling maritime life of the former, Jerusalem too was living a moment that would be etched in eternity. Around that same period, King David had recently captured the city and founded the Kingdom of Israel.

Physically, it was quite different, it rose clustered over the mountainous terrain surrounding the Mount Moriah.

Instead of the sea breeze, the dry desert air prevailed - which made its inhabitants all the more resigned to the hardships of their time.

The contrast between the two cities already announced the threshold of the story now told: while Tyre, in every description of it, stands out for its technical ingenuity, Jerusalem was already defined by the faith of its people.

Perhaps it was that very faith that led Solomon, son and successor of David, to seek the aid of Hiram I. The former is said to have sent word to the latter, asking that, just as he had dealt with David, his father - sending him cedars to build a house to dwell in - he might do the same again, this time to build a temple of worship.

And so, an alliance was made. Hiram I agreed to send cedar and cypress for the construction, declaring that he would cut timber from Lebanon in the required quantity and transport it in rafts by sea to Joppa, from where Solomon would carry it up to Jerusalem.

In exchange, Jerusalem would supply Tyre with wheat, oil, and wine.

Yet perhaps the most remarkable of Hiram's contributions to the project was the sending of his most trusted craftsmen - already renowned, as said before, as the finest builders of Tyre.

Among them was one in particular whose name would be engraved in biblical, historical, and esoteric memory alike.

He bore the king's name: Hiram Abiff, the artificer.

1.2. THE FINAL ACT

Tokyo Bay, September 2, 1945

It was the end of an era. The whole world watched.

That morning, beneath the gray Pacific sky, surrender was sealed - and with it, a new time began.

Aboard the *USS Missouri* stood the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, General MacArthur, and Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs. The latter formally signed the instrument of surrender announced by Emperor Hirohito weeks earlier.

The sea, calm and gray, mirrored the weight of the moment. The waves lapped gently against the ship's hull, as if the ocean itself were holding its breath. The deck of the Missouri was a synthesis of the century: American and British uniforms, Japanese pens, and cameras from every press agency in the world. The silence that preceded the signatures seemed more eloquent than any speech.

The ceremony took place amid a shared sense of mourning and resignation; after all, the battle had been harsh - marked by the barbarity in Europe, by Pearl Harbor, and finally, by what had befallen Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

There was no euphoria in the scene. The officers stood in rigid posture, yet their stern faces betrayed fatigue. Around the ship, the fleet remained in ceremonial silence. The sailors knew they were witnessing something greater than the end of a war: they were seeing the dawn of an era in which survival would depend less on force and more on reason. Victory was no longer measured by conquered lands, but by humanity's ability to rebuild itself.

The act officially ended six years of war. The document, signed at 9:04 a.m., confirmed Japan's unconditional surrender. The signing took only a few minutes, yet it symbolized the close of the most devastating conflict in history.

Perhaps Hirohito's prior announcement had already cast upon all nations the premonition that, if nothing were changed, human civilization itself might vanish.

The feeling of victory for one side of the war brought, however, an inevitable question: at what cost? Thus emerged a collective awareness that the world needed to be reborn upon more rational and compassionate foundations.

A few months earlier, in San Francisco, representatives of fifty nations had signed the Charter establishing the United Nations. The goal was simple and urgent: to create a permanent dialogue among peoples, so that history would not repeat itself.

The inhabitants of the Tower of Babel, at last, would begin to understand one another. So it was envisioned - whether that vision would be fulfilled is a matter for another text.

Among the delegates was a 39-year-old Lebanese scholar, Charles Habib Malik, who - without prior diplomatic experience, at least until then - had been called to represent his country. Trained in philosophy, he saw in that moment the practical confirmation of an ancient idea: that understanding among men must rest upon moral grounds, not merely political ones.

The deck of the *Missouri* and the conference hall in San Francisco represented, in different ways, the same gesture of renewal. One sealed the end of violence; the other opened the space for dialogue. Between them ran a common thread: the awareness that the coming century would have to be less about power and more about understanding.

Malik, among many, understood that to rebuild the world was, above all, to relearn how to respect the human.

- II - THE CONSTRUCTION

1.3. THE ARTIFICER AND THE PHYSICAL TEMPLE

Solomon is said to have begun the construction of the Temple in the fourth year of his reign, in the second month, known among his people as *Iyar* or *Ziv*.

Hiram Abiff, unlike many men of his time, was neither a soldier nor a priest, but an artificer. When he first looked upon the Mont Moriah and saw the ground still bare - a sight that might have discouraged even the most visionary of common men - his eyes, trained by the art of building, already beheld the completed work.

Solomon's project was ambitious. It was to be not only a house of worship, but also a political symbol of his newly established reign. It fell to Hiram Abiff to transform the King's ideas into executable plans.

The foundations were laid upon the earth. As the historian *Flavius Josephus* would record centuries later, the base of the structure was made of immense stones. It was not a vast building in size, but a grand one in intention. Stone and bronze - two of the densest elements known to the ancient world - formed the backbone of an architecture meant to resist not only time but also oblivion.

At the entrance of the Temple rose two bronze columns, polished until they reflected the light of the eastern sun. They were named *Boaz*, on the southern side, and *Jachin*, on the northern - names that meant stability and strength, virtues that supported not only the building itself but also the idea behind its construction and the spirit with which the Phoenician craftsmen labored.

The main hall was built of white stones. The structure formed a great parallelepiped - about twenty meters long, ten wide, and fifteen high - so that its façade faced the rising sun. The ceiling and the doors, heavy and solid, were fashioned from the cedar of Lebanon sent by Hiram I - wood of enduring fragrance and resilient fiber, chosen not only for its beauty but for its incorruptible nature.

The brilliance of gold, burning beneath the Jerusalem sun, dazzled visitors at first sight. Yet beyond the richness of the material, the Lebanese craftsman's devotion to his task was already evident. Hiram Abiff ensured that each stone was polished so finely that no trace of the tools remained - each fitted perfectly with the next, like pieces of a great puzzle.

In the end, when the work was completed, little was said of Hiram Abiff. Perhaps he is remembered by the devout Christian who, reading the Bible, encounters his description in Chronicles and Kings - or by members of initiatic orders who study allegories inspired by his name. Yet even among these sources, there is no consensus as to whether the references point to a single figure. What is certain is that the man responsible for the architecture and coordination of the Temple's construction - whoever he truly was - worked with the conviction of one who knows that perfection is not a gift but a commitment, just as another Lebanese would do some three thousand years later.

1.4. THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE MORAL TEMPLE

In the corridors of the United Nations, the echo of war still lingered. The world, though gathered under the banner of the new Organization, resembled a building under reconstruction: the columns of hope still held the wet mortar of suffering. It was in this context that the Lebanese Charles Malik, diplomat by chance, took upon himself the task of directing his *magnum opus* - the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Still bearing on his hands the chalk dust of the Academy's blackboards, Malik arrived at the first headquarters of the UN. That provisional seat mirrored the Organization's own state: before the grand building in Manhattan - designed by the Frenchman Le Corbusier and the Brazilian Oscar Niemeyer - there was only the simplicity of a converted factory. There were no manuals to follow - no prior human endeavor to serve as guide - save the founders' own conscience, learning, and experience.

Under the presidency of Eleanor Roosevelt, Malik was appointed rapporteur of the Declaration. There he understood that his mission was not merely to compose words, but to restore humanity's faith in itself.

The atmosphere was tense. The victorious powers eyed one another with mutual distrust. Newly decolonized nations sought to make their voices heard. And so, the Lebanese rapporteur - with oriental patience, like a conductor before a dissonant orchestra - guided the music toward harmony.

Then, in the winter of 1948, in Paris, the world drew breath again. It was solemnly affirmed that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and in rights; endowed with reason and conscience, they must act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood. This gave the great powers some hope that, despite conflicting interests, radicalism would no longer prevail. And to the smaller or long-subjugated nations, it offered - perhaps for the first time in five centuries - the belief that their rights might at last be minimally respected.

In the end, when the work was finished, as with Hiram Abiff, little was said of Charles Malik. Among his fellow Lebanese, his name may still be recalled, yet in countries far from his personal story, many - especially outside academic circles - have never heard it. A condition unworthy of the role he played in shaping the unparalleled evolution of global society in the second half of the twentieth century. The truth is that the man responsible for the architecture and coordination of the Declaration's creation worked with the conviction of one who knows that perfection is impossible amid conflicting interests, yet whose duty is to seek a middle path between them - so that, in the end, the least protected might be protected.

- III - THE CONSECRATION

Lebanon is more than a place; it is a bridge - between East and West, between the faith that builds and the reason that rebuilds, between the temple of stone and the temple of human dignity.

From its land were grown the timbers that upheld great constructions, just as from its thinkers sprang the ideas that upheld the coexistence of societies.

In ancient times, as in many other civilizations, this spirit took form in Tyre, a city born of the sea that was compelled to learn - and to master - the art of building.

It was there, they say, that Hiram Abiff was born - the artificer who, together with King Solomon, raised the famed Temple. That work, the result of cooperation between two nations, symbolized the enduring possibility of mutual collaboration among peoples - a collaboration that transcends borders.

It seems that Hiram Abiff already understood that a work could transcend the physical. In constructing and dedicating the columns Boaz and Jachin - "He shall establish" and "In Him is strength" - he expressed, more than the simple act of setting stone and metal, a belief in immaterial principles.

In that work which marked the history of civilization, Lebanon, though known by another name, revealed its constructive vocation: the power to transform ideas into execution.

Centuries later, Malik, as rapporteur of the Declaration, led nations once more to reflect upon the principles that precede the making of laws - and that justify them, or at least should. He conceived and made others conceive of freedom not as a political concession, but as a spiritual element - an indispensable guarantee of human dignity.

Under his pen and philosophical framework, the text took shape: thirty articles - thirty steps of a staircase ascending toward a temple of hope, not of stone, copper, or cedar, but of ideas.

Malik's role, as said, that of rapporteur, made him the very cornerstone of this construction, by the peculiar nature of his task: even if his peers did not agree entirely with his draft, the shared effort that united them on that occasion ensured that few changes were made, preserving its foundation.

He saw in the Declaration the modern counterpart of Solomon's Temple - a spiritual dwelling raised by many nations, where the divinity is called conscience. And if once Hiram Abiff had lifted columns of bronze, Malik had raised them in words - perhaps even more enduring than the first.

Hiram Abiff had built a house for God; Malik, a house for man - the reflection of the divine. The gesture is the same, separated only by three millennia. Both understood that the true temple is neither a building nor a document, but the idea that sustains them.

And both, Lebanese - like the bridge their homeland itself represents - played the part of mediators between worlds: between faith and reason, between social need and philosophical principle.

Thus Lebanon appears in two sacred moments of history: in the first, as the timber that upheld the Temple; in the second, as the cornerstone in the formation of the thinker who drafted the Declaration.

And so, in the twilight between the ruins of one era and the dawn of another, Charles Malik became the new artificer - the one who built, with words, the invisible temple of human dignity.

The End.