

Technical and Ritualistic Analysis: The Opening of the Volume of Sacred Law in the Fellowcraft Degree

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In the framework of Speculative Freemasonry, the Volume of Sacred Law (VSL) serves as the primary spiritual and ethical axis upon which a Lodge functions. While the Apprentice degree focuses on the foundations of morality and the taming of raw impulses, the **Fellowcraft Degree (Grau de Companheiro)** represents a transition toward the intellectual, scientific, and applied aspects of the Craft. Central to this transition is the ritualistic opening of the VSL, a procedure that involves specific liturgical movements, scriptural selections, and geometric arrangements of the Three Great Lights. This article provides a comprehensive technical analysis of these elements, specifically focusing on the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite (REAA) and comparing it with other prominent systems like the Adonhiramite and York Rites.

1. The Theoretical Framework of the Three Great Lights

To understand the opening of the VSL in the Second Degree, one must first master the theoretical relationship between the Three Great Lights: the **Volume of Sacred Law**, the **Square**, and the **Compasses**. In the First Degree (Apprentice), the material world (the Square) dominates the spiritual potential (the Compasses). In the Fellowcraft degree, the symbolic architecture shifts to reflect a state of equilibrium between the material and the intellectual.

The positioning of the Compasses over the Square with one point exposed is a visual representation of the initiate's progress. Mathematically, if we consider the Square as a constant (representing 90 degrees of fixed moral law) and the Compasses as a variable (representing the expanding radius of human knowledge), the exposure of one point signifies the partial liberation of the spirit from the constraints of pure matter. This is the **Equilibrium Phase** of the initiate's journey.

2. Scriptural Analysis: The Prophecy of Amos

One of the most critical components of the Fellowcraft ritual in the REAA is the reading of **Amos 7:7-8**. The selection of this specific passage is not arbitrary but is rooted in the technical tool associated with the degree: the **Plumb Line**.

The text states: *"Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more."*

From a technical standpoint, the Plumb Line represents linear rectitude and the force of gravity as a constant. In the Fellowcraft degree, the initiate is taught to transition from the horizontal plane (the Level) to the vertical plane (the Plumb). This verticality represents the aspiration toward the Great Architect of the Universe (G.A.O.T.U.) and the internal alignment of one's conscience with universal laws.

2.1 Comparative Scriptural Matrix

Depending on the Rite and jurisdiction, the opening passage may vary. Below is a comparison of the technical scriptural selections used globally for the 2nd Degree:

Rite/Tradition	Scriptural Reference	Key Symbolism
REAA (Ancient & Accepted)	Amos 7:7-8	The Plumb Line and Divine Rectitude.
Adonhiramite Rite	Acts of the Apostles	The dissemination of knowledge and work.
York Rite (Emulation)	Judges 12:6 (contextual)	The passage of the Jordan and the test of Shibboleth.
Schröder Rite	1 Corinthians 13	The supremacy of Charity and Brotherly Love.

3. Technical Workflow: The Ritual Opening Procedure

The process of opening the VSL in a Fellowcraft Lodge follows a strict procedural execution designed to shift the "egregore" or collective focus of the assembly from the outer world to the internal sanctuary of the Second Degree. The following is a step-by-step breakdown of the technical mechanics involved:

- Step 1: The Transition of the Lodge: Before the VSL is opened in the 2nd Degree, the Worshipful Master must ensure that the Lodge is properly tiled and that all Apprentices have withdrawn (unless the Rite allows them to stay in a lower part of the Temple, which is rare in standard REAA).
- Step 2: The Approach of the Orator/Master of Ceremonies: The officer designated to open the VSL approaches the Altar (Ara) with measured steps, typically reflecting the rhythmic gait of the Fellowcraft (the 5 steps).
- Step 3: The Manual Manipulation of the VSL: The Book is opened at the predetermined passage. In the case of the REAA, the Master of Ceremonies ensures the text of Amos is visible. This act is the Sacralization of the Space.
- Step 4: Positioning the Square and Compasses: This is the most technically sensitive part. The Square is placed with its vertices pointing toward the Master. The Compasses are then placed over it. For the Fellowcraft, the right point of the Compasses is usually exposed, while the left remains hidden under the Square. This signifies that the Fellowcraft has achieved a degree of mastery over his passions but still requires the Square's guidance.
- Step 5: The Proclamation: The Worshipful Master declares the Lodge open in the 2nd Degree "in the name of the G.A.O.T.U. and by virtue of the power vested in me."

4. The Geometry of the Fellowcraft Degree

In the Fellowcraft degree, the number **Five**(5) becomes the governing mathematical principle. This influences the ritual opening and the overall structure of the degree. The five steps, the five points of fellowship (in some contexts), and the five senses are all integrated into the symbolic framework.

4.1 The Pentagram and the Blazing Star

The Blazing Star (Estrela Flamígera) is the central ornament of the Fellowcraft Lodge. During the opening, as the VSL is activated, the light is symbolically centered upon this five-pointed star. From a technical writing perspective, the Blazing Star can be modeled as a vector representing the **Gnosis**—the practical application of knowledge. Unlike the 1st Degree, which is about the *acquisition* of tools, the 2nd Degree is about the *application* of tools through the lens of the Liberal Arts and Sciences.

4.2 The Five Liberal Arts and Sciences

The Fellowcraft is tasked with the study of the Trivium and Quadrivium. The opening of the VSL serves as a "key"

to unlock these studies:

- 1. Grammar: To refine expression.
- 2. Rhetoric: To persuade through truth.
- 3. Logic: To discern reality from illusion.
- 4. Arithmetic: The basis of all quantification.
- 5. Geometry: The core of the Craft, used to build the symbolic Temple.
- 6. Music: The harmony of the spheres.
- 7. Astronomy: The understanding of the cosmic order.

5. Comparison of Ritualistic Tools: Square vs. Compasses

The interplay between the Square and Compasses at the Altar is a critical metric for assessing the "grade" of the Lodge. The following table highlights the technical differences between their use in the Apprentice and Fellowcraft degrees.

Feature	Apprentice Degree (1st)	Fellowcraft Degree (2nd)
Compass Points	Both points hidden under the Square.	One point exposed, one hidden.
Primary Tool	24-Inch Gauge / Gavel.	Square / Level / Plumb.
Orientation	Horizontal (Ground floor).	Vertical (Middle Chamber).
Symbolic Focus	Morality and Purgation.	Science and Labor.

6. Operational Challenges and Troubleshooting

Even in a highly structured ritual environment, technical errors can occur during the opening of the VSL. These errors can disrupt the symbolic integrity of the session.

6.1 Common Failure Modes

- **Incorrect Scriptural Page:** Opening the VSL to Psalm 133 (1st Degree) instead of Amos 7 (2nd Degree) is a common error. This effectively keeps the Lodge symbolically "stuck" in the first degree, regardless of the verbal declarations.
- **Asymmetrical Compass Placement:** The exposed point of the Compasses must be the one furthest from the Master's heart (symbolically) or strictly follow the Rite's manual. Misplacement indicates a lack of technical proficiency in the Master of Ceremonies.
- **Procedural Lags:** A lack of synchronization between the Worshipful Master's gavel and the Orator's movement at the VSL can break the "chain of union" and psychological focus of the members.

6.2 Solutions and Best Practices

1. **Pre-Session Calibration:** The Orator should mark the required page with a silk ribbon before the session begins to avoid fumbling.
2. **Rehearsal of the Five Steps:** The Master of Ceremonies should practice the rhythmic entry to the Altar to ensure it matches the 2nd Degree's vibration.
3. **Visual Verification:** The Worshipful Master should visually confirm the arrangement of the Great Lights from the East before proceeding with the proclamation.

7. The Symbolic Geometry of the "Middle Chamber"

The Fellowcraft does not work on the ground floor of the Temple; they are said to be in the **Middle Chamber**. This has profound implications for how the VSL is perceived. In the Middle Chamber, the VSL is no longer just a book of rules but a technical manual for the soul. The "Wages" of the Fellowcraft—Corn, Wine, and Oil—are symbolically earned through the correct application of the lessons found in the opened pages of the VSL.

Mathematically, the transition to the Middle Chamber represents a move from the 3rd dimension to a 4th dimension of consciousness where the "Letter G" (representing Geometry, God, Gnosis, or Generation) becomes the focal point. The opening of the Book is the signal that the search for the "G" has officially commenced for that session.

8. Conclusion: The Integration of Sacred and Secular Science

The ritual opening of the Volume of Sacred Law in the Fellowcraft Degree is far more than a traditional formality. It is a technical operation that aligns the physical space of the Lodge with the intellectual and spiritual goals of the

Second Degree. By focusing on the Plumb Line of Amos, the equilibrium of the Square and Compasses, and the expansion into the Liberal Arts, the ritual prepares the Fellowcraft for a life of productive labor and scientific inquiry.

For the Senior Mason or the Technical Writer of Masonic rituals, understanding these nuances is essential for preserving the "True Light" of the Craft. As the initiate stands between the two pillars of Jachin and Boaz, looking toward the Altar, the correctly opened VSL serves as the reliable map for their ascent up the winding stairs to the Middle Chamber of the Temple of Solomon. This process ensures that the transition from a Rough Ashlar to a Smooth Ashlar is not merely an aesthetic change, but a structural transformation of the individual's character and intellect.

Ultimately, the Fellowcraft degree is the degree of **Responsibility**. The opening of the VSL reminds the Mason that while the Apprentice is guided, the Fellowcraft must walk. The plumb line is in his hand, the wall is before him, and the Great Architect is watching to see if his work is true, square, and upright.

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