SUPREME COUNCIL 33°

Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry

OF CANADA

Library and Archives Committee

Reading List #13 – The Comacine Masters

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Ex Libris Episode 45: The Comacine Masters

Introduction

The Comacine Master story, in essence, says that the Freemasons originated in the form of a travelling company of expert architects and builders in Italy. Little is known about them with any certainty, but they supposedly had several of the characteristics which define the later stone masons' lodges in Britain. They travelled freely from one work site to another and had secret methods of identifying their members. They were not only builders, but also expert artists and structural designers. They held the knowledge of their craft as a secret. They controlled the wages, training, and advancement of their members within their trade.

Their name is often said to be a reference to the region of Lake Como. Some versions are more specific, saying that their headquarters was a fortress on the island of Comacina, and that it was those fortifications which enabled them to survive intact after the fall of Rome and the ascendance of the Lombards. On the other hand, some authors suggest that the term "Comacine" may in fact be a mistranslation and may not refer to the island of Comacina or the region of Lake Como at all.

Another version of the story says that the Comacines were descendants of the Roman Collegia or "College of Artificers", taking their own origins back to the pre-Christian era. Yet another says that the Pope issued bulls giving them the right to travel and work in any country within "Christendom" (i.e., essentially, Western Europe). The purpose of granting that Papal authority was to protect their ability to work on cathedrals, unhindered by local authorities in each of the countries where such building might take place. Some references to this having been around the time of King Henry III (born 1207; died 1272; reigned 1216 - 1272) while others suggest it was specifically Pope Nicholas III (was the vicar of Christ from 26 Dec 1277 - 22 Aug 1280).

In an interesting twist, despite some very old references (such as those found in Seventh and Eighth Century legal codes), there are prominent Masonic historians (including Douglas Knoop) who indicate that there is no actual evidence that the Comacines ever existed.

This story seems to be a clear example of many authors, over an astonishing time span, presenting the same rumour, with each one citing the statements of his or her predecessors as proof. Even when repeated efforts to locate primary source material failed, it did not dissuade them from continuing to promulgate the story.

1. The Natural History of Wiltshire (1656)

By John Aubrey FRS
London: J. B. Nichols & Son, 1847

This book contains a single sentence that may constitute the original source of the story that the origins of Freemasonry may be found in the Comacine Masters.

> *"Sir William Dugdale told me, many years since, that about Henry the Third's time the Pope gave a bull or patents to a company of Italian Freemasons to travell up and down over all Europe to build churches. From those are derived the fraternity of adopted Masons."*

The provenance of this quotation is interesting, especially from a Masonic perspective. At the time, Sir William Dugdale was considered one of England's foremost historians and his opinion would have carried a great deal of weight, so it is not surprising that Aubrey specified the source of the story. It is also unsurprising that Aubrey did not follow up further or provide details of the evidence. In the mid-1600's the opinion of an expert such as Dugdale would likely have been perceived by the typical reader as conclusive, and today's academic rigour as regards source citations was not common practice.

More significantly, Dugdale was intimately connected to Elias Ashmole (often cited as the first Englishman known to have been initiated as a Speculative Freemason). They were close friends and travelled together for many years gathering historical data from towns and villages throughout England. Dugdale later became Ashmole's Father-in-law, when his youngest daughter became Ashmole's third wife. We don't know whether Dugdale was deeply interested in Freemasonry, but we do know he was closely associated with someone who was.

The long time between writing (1656 or 1657) and publication (1847) of this book may seem odd. Aubrey did not publish it in his own lifetime, but the Royal Society considered it important enough to pay a scribe to make a copy, which was retained in their archives. Aubrey provided updates during the copying process, and reviewed the resulting manuscript, adding marginalia in his own hand. Nearly 2 centuries later, the Wiltshire Topographical Society recognized its importance as an historical record of the region and undertook to publish it.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

2. Statutes of King Rotharis of the Lombards (643 AD)

King Rotharis signed an edict on 22 Nov 643 codifying the laws governing the Lombards. These laws make specific mention of "*maestri commacini"* in two items. Some sources suggest that this law code granted privileges to the Comacines, however the actual text (see items 144 and 145) specifies who would be liable in cases of death or injury during a building or renovation project conducted by the Comacine Masters. For instance, they refer to incidents of timber or stone falling from a height during a building project.

The important point is that an historical document dated to the 7th Century AD refers to the

Comacine Masters by name, clearly in the context of the stone masons' or builders' trade. The casual use of this term seems to imply that they were sufficiently well-known as to need no further description or clarification. In other words, it suggests that the Comacine Masters were well established if not famous at that time and in this particular regard.

Where to find it:
Available for free online viewing (original Latin side-by-side with English Translation) from the QSA Member Forum at:
https://www.freemasonryresearchforumqsa.com/edictus-rothari.php

3. Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum (731 AD)

by the Venerable Bede

The Venerable Bede records the political and religious history of England, from the time of Julis Caesar, up to the author's present day.

This book refers to the Lombard Statutes (uses words and phrases from the edict of King Rotharis) in the context of builders being sent from Gaul to build the church at Wearmouth in 674 AD.

Bede was an Anglo-Saxon monk and priest, also known as Venerable Bede or Saint Bede (most likely pronounced "beyda"). He is considered by some to be the "Father of English History" and/or the "Father of English Education". He wrote some 40 books, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle relied heavily on his history for information on the dates of important events.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

4. Biographica Britannica—entry on Elias Ashmole (1747)

by Dr. Knipe
London: W. Innys et al., 1747

This compilation of the "*Lives of the Most Eminent Persons Who have flourished in Great Britain…*" includes a lengthy entry on Elias Ashmole (pp 223-236).

Ashmole was a prolific collector of historical information and memorabilia, and several sources suggest that he was planning to write a history of Freemasonry. It is a matter of record that much of his collection was lost to a fire in the Temple (a part of London near the Old Bailey, and where many lawyers keep their offices). Presumably, this loss prevented him from following through on that plan.

The author of this biography alludes to those plans and events. He cites a collection of letters provided to him by a Dr. Knipe of Christ Church, which included the following passage:

> *"What from Mr. Ashmole's collection I could gather was, that the report of our Society taking rise from a Bull granted by the Pope in the reign of Henry III. to some Italian architects, to travel over all Europe to erect chapels, was ill-founded. Such a Bull there was, and those architects were masons. But this*

> *Bull, in the opinion of the learned Mr. Ashmole, was confirmative only, and did not by any means create our fraternity, or even establish them in this kingdom."*

As J. Walter Hobbs points out (in AQC Vol. 40), Ashmole was closely associated with Sir William Dugdale, who was credited as the source of the information in Aubrey's *Natural History of Wiltshire*—possibly the ground zero source of this whole story (see entry above). As a result, Ashmole and may have had better access to the source of this story than anyone since.

Unfortunately, there seems to be no corroborating detail to explain why Ashmole believed the bull was real, nor any indication of how he concluded that the Comacines were not in fact the forerunners of the Freemasons.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

5. Parentalia – from the papers of Sir Christopher Wren (1750)

by Christoper Wren
London: Stephen Wren, 1750

Parentalia is ostensibly a published collection of the papers of Sir Christopher Wren. In fact, it is a somewhat jumbled and confusing mixture of his documents, together with opinions attributed to him, as recollected by members of the family, and other information considered to be related to the great man by the editor(s).

Wren died on February 25th, 1723. The materials in this book were apparently compiled by his son, Christopher, and finally published by his grandson, Stephen, in 1750. The passage of over 50 years and 2 generations has to inspire a certain degree of caution in accepting the contents as representing historical fact.

Nevertheless, many authors have relied on this account as proving the Comacine Master and Papal Bull stories. In a section describing Sir Christopher's opinions regarding the origins of Gothic Architecture, it says:

> *"The Italians, with some Greek refugees, and with them French, Germans, and Flemings, joined into a fraternity of architects, procuring papal bulls for their encouragement, and particular privileges: they styled themselves Free Masons, and ranged from one nation to another as they found churches to be built; for very many, in those ages, were everywhere in building, through piety or emulation. Their government was regular; and where they fixed near the building in hand, they made a camp of huts. A surveyor governed in chief; every tenth man was called a warden, and overlooked each nine; and the gentlemen of the Neighbourhood, either out of charity, or commutation of penance, gave the materials and the carriages. Those who have seen the accounts, in records, of the charge of the fabrics of some of our cathedrals, near four hundred years old, cannot but have a great esteem for their economy, and admire how soon they erected such lofty structures."*
>
> *Parentalia*, pg. 173.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

6. Observations on … Gothic Architecture, and … Free Masons (1788)

by Governor T. Pownall
Published in Archaeologia Vol. IX (1788), pp. 110 - 126

The full title of the paper was *Observations on the Origin and Progress of Gothic Architecture, and on the Corporation of Free Masons Supposed to be the Establishers of it as a regular Order*. Authors in the Victorian era believed in making their titles convey a detailed description of the contents.

In this paper, Pownall indicates that the:

> *"collegium or corporation of Freemasons… about the close of the 12th or commencement of the 13th century"*
>
> *"Assumed a right … of being exempt from the Statute of Labourers"* (because they worked under license of the Pope)

Pownall describes 3 searches of the Vatican Archives to find the source document(s):

1. In 1773 by the librarian of the Vatican, on application by Pownall - "could not find the least traces of any such record".
2. The head keeper of the archives (also due to a request from Pownall) yielded the same answer as above.
3. The Pope became interested and ordered a most minute search to be made. Nothing found.

Archaeologia was the journal of the Society of Antiquaries in England. In the 1788 edition, the society published a paper read out over 2 meetings which was actually a letter from Thomas Pownall to another of the members (Pownall had been a Fellow of the Society since 1770 and was a regular contributor to its journal).

Pownall was Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1757 to 1760. He returned to England in 1760 and sat as a Member of Parliament from 1767 to 1780. It seems he had not relinquished the title of "Governor" even decades after leaving office.

Pownall also had interesting familial connections with Freemasonry. His father corresponded regularly with William Stukeley (regarding the history of Lincolnshire). Dr. Stukeley (also a member of the Society of Antiquaries) is famous as a member of the Royal Society and one of the earliest known Speculative Freemasons.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org.

7. Essay on the Origins, History, and Principles of Gothic Architecture (1813)

by Sir James Hall, Bart
London: John Murray, 1813

Hall's book cites Governor Pownall and Sir Christopher Wren as the sources for the idea that Gothic Architecture was originated by travelling masons in Europe (the Comacine Masters)

and that they were early Freemasons.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

8. Historical Essay on Architecture (1833)

by Thomas Hope
London: John Murray, 1833

In Chapter XXI of his Historical Essay on Architecture, Hope says goes all in on the Comacine story. He states that the best builders in Europe were found in Como, and suggests that their fame for this skill caused all builders in the region to start calling themselves Comacine Masters.

He claims that these masons travelled in search of work and expanded from the Como region to cover all of Europe. He also claims that they had special privileges granted locally, as well as special exemption from local labour restrictions granted by the Pope. The purpose being to ensure the best skills were available for ecclesiastical building.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

9. History of Scotland (1845)

by Patrick F. Tyler
Edinburgh: Willaim Tait, 1845

Tyler is a classic example of the practice (which was prevalent in his time) of assessing the credibility of a proposition based on the famous, important and influential people who can be shown to have supported it. As opposed to considering the evidence on which their opinions are based.

He notes that:

- Sir James Hall described travelling companies of architects in Europe in the early Gothic period, who enjoyed special privileges and called themselves Freemasons.
- Sir Christopher Wren refers to the same group of travelling architects, supporting the notion that they were Freemasons, and adding that there were Papal Bulls protecting their benefits.
- Governor Pownall also described these architects and the Papal bulls supporting them.

To his credit, Tyler appears to have departed from the practice of blindly relying on prominent names to bolster his claim in at least one respect. He claims to have searched for the “original authorities” behind the descriptions by Wren and Pownall, but acknowledged this search was unsuccessful.

This appears to be the FOURTH search for the Papal Bulls in the story.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org.

10. The History of Freemasonry by Robert F. Gould (1883)

by Robert Freke Gould
London: Thomas C. Jack, 1883

As one of the leading lights of the Authentic or Verified school of Masonic History, it should come as no surprise that Gould strives to work from primary sources, to the greatest extent possible, and is reluctant to rely on statements by other authors without supporting evidence.

In Chapter VI (Mediæval Operative Masonry) he is focused on the evolution of Gothic architecture, but in the course of this he makes note of the earlier authors who connect that evolution with Freemasonry. He describes and analyzes the claims made by Wren, Pownall, Hall, and Hope (see the entries for each above). He says:

- Wren blended conjecture with tradition;
- Hall relied on Wren and looked no further;
- Hope cited Pownall, Wren, and Hall.

He laments the weak scholarship of Hope in particular because that book became a highly regarded text in the architecture profession, which caused it to be treated as an absolutely reliable authority by Masonic authors who came along afterward. Gould laments that a collation of the sources shows that all Hope's material is taken from Wren, Pownall, and Hall, without acknowledgment.

Gould's opinion of Hope's scholarship was abundantly clear:

> *"The climax was reached in the fascinating essay of Mr. Thomas Hope … who, building on the old (or assumed) foundations laid by Dugdale, Ashmole and Wren, completed the superstructure of error by bringing in the Magistri Comacini as the original masonic corporations and depositaries of the Papal Bulls, and thus adding (as it were) an upper story to a pre-existing castle in the air."*

In other words, the whole story is a house of cards, with each tier resting on the flimsy base offered by those below.

Despite the fact this this story is clearly a fable, Gould says that it:

> *"was received with acclamation by successive generations of masonic antiquaries and archaeologists, whose enthusiasm seems to haye been contagious [and] … in many learned works written by members of the architectural profession and others, who were in no way connected with the fraternity."*

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

11. I Maestri Comacini: Storia Artistica di Mille duecento anni, 600-1800 (1893)

by Professor Giuseppe Merzario
Milan: Giacomo Agnelli, 1893

Leader Scott acknowledges this book as the chief reference source for *The Cathedral*

Builders.

The focus of Merzario's book was not to delve into Masonic origins but rather to showcase the famous artists hailing from Lombardy. The Comacine Masters figure prominently in this, and consequently much of the background detail he collated is relevant to them.

This book was written in Italian, and unfortunately there does not seem to be an English Translation.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

12. The Cathedral Builders (1899)

by Leader Scott (pen name of Lucy E. Baxter)
London: Sampson Low Marston & Co., 1899

The Cathedral Builders appears to be one of the key English sources relied upon by later authors as evidence to support the story of the Comacine Masters as the point of Masonic origin. In it, the author details the full story of the Comacine Masters being the source of modern Freemasonry. She does not provide comprehensive source citations, but does include references to several of the other sources noted in this reading list, particularly King Rotharis, and John Aubrey.

Scott relies heavily on the Papal Bull story which Aubrey ascribes to Dugdale. However, she reports that she went to Rome to search for the Papal Bull in question but "it is difficult to find" i.e., presumably she looked for the document but did not find it. Nevertheless, she clearly supports the "travelling foreign Mason" story.

The Cathedral Builders was reviewed in Volume 12 of Ars Quatuor Coronatorum (1899). The review begins by saying the story presented in the book is "not susceptible of strict historical proof", but then proceeds to present a (glowing, 3-page long) summary of the story as told by leader Scott as if all points were established fact. It closes by suggesting the lack of verifiable fact is explained by the "secret nature of the society" which would certainly resonate with Nineteenth Century Masons who wish to see the ancestry of their fraternity linked through the Gothic Cathedrals of the Middle Ages to the present day.

This appears to be the FIFTH search for the papal bulls to which the story refers.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

13. Mackey's History of Freemasonry (1906)

by Albert Gallatin Mackey MD
New York: Masonic History Company, 1906

In the chapter on "Prehistoric Masonry" Mackey says that the Lombard Guild of Builders were the source of both skill and organization for the operative masons of the Middle Ages, and that they were the first to be known by the term Freemason. He cites Thomas Hope (Historical

Essay on Architecture) as the authority for this statement.

He proceeds to lay out the story of the Roman Artificers and the Comacine Masters (although he does not use that specific term) becoming the travelling freemasons and establishing Gothic architecture.

However, while accepting this source for operative stonemasons' guilds he disputes the idea that this is the source of Speculative Freemasonry.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

14. Le Origini dell' Architettura Lombarda (1908)

By GT. T. Rivoira
Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1908

This book was published after *The Cathedral Builders*, so it could not have been one of Leader Scott's sources. However, several of the subsequent tellers of the Comacine story seem to have relied on this as a major reference.

This book was written in Italian, and unfortunately there does not seem to be an English Translation.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

15. The Comacines: Their Predecessors and their Successors (1910)

by W. Ravenscroft
London: Elliot Stock, 1910

This book appears to be a gushing testimonial to *The Cathedral Builders* by a Masonic author who attempts to extend the story and reinforce its credibility with Masonic information. He adds very little other than pointing to similar design elements in various times and places. Which amounts to a substitution of correlation for proof of causation.

The point of including this book in the reading list is not to identify further elements of the Comacine story, or even to criticize its veracity. The point here is to understand how compelling the Comacine story (and in particular Lucy Baxter's book) seemed at the time. Individuals were so excited about it that they wrote and published entire books recapitulating the story.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

16. The Builders (1914)

by Joseph Fort Newton
New York: George H. Doran, 1914

This book was commissioned by the Grand Lodge of Iowa, and for many years every new Mason in that Grand Jurisdiction was presented with a copy.

The author explains that his motivation for writing this book stemmed from his own experience as a newly initiated Mason who asked:

> *"… if there was any little book which would tell a young man the things he would most like to know about Masonry - what it was, whence it came, what it teaches, and what it is trying to do in the world? No one knew of such a book at that time, nor has any been found to meet a need which many must have felt before and since."*

Brother Newton's claim that no such books existed when he joined the craft may seem odd. But it serves to underscore the author's belief that he was presenting solid, factual information.

This book is very much in the mode of the "Traditional History". It presents absurd historical sequences and bends backward to infuse it all with a mystical atmosphere and a reverence for the symbolism of the craft.

It may seem odd to include this book in a reading list for the Comacine story, because Newton definitely holds up ancient Egypt as the source of Freemasonry's origins. However, he fits the Comacine Masters into the narrative, and follows the Leader Scott version very closely (with clear attribution of this source). This serves to illustrate how seriously the Comacine Master story was taken at the turn of the Century.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

17. Medieval Building Documents and what we learn from them (1920)

by Professor A. Hamilton Thompson
Taunton: Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, 1921

Published in the Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological Society, this was Thompson's address as President of the Society at its Annual Meeting on July 20th, 1920.

This paper is not in any way about the Comacine Master story of Masonic origin. Rather, it relates to other references to the Comacine Masters in the history of Gothic Architecture. Nevertheless, this passage is cited by most, if not all, of the authors disputing the Comacine Master story.

The thrust of the paper is to understand the significance of documents relating to building and written in the Middle Ages. Obviously, those documents were typically written in Latin, and a close analysis of Latin grammar is at the heart of the matter.

Thompson's paper acknowledges that the term "*comacinus*" is found in the Lombard laws (see

Statutes of King Rotharis, above), and that Como and Comacina are within the region governed by those laws. However, he contends that connecting the term to either location is a mistranslation of the Latin. Thomson says that the Latin for:

> "an inhabitant of Como is *Comensis* or *Comanus* while the Latin adjective from Comacina would be *Comacinensus* or possibly *Comacinanus*."

He concludes:

> "It is much more reasonable to conclude, with the scholars of a less imaginative age, that *comacinus* means simply a mason working at one job with others, than it is a term for a member of a mysterious guild which spread over Europe from the lake of Como."

Where to find it:

Note: This paper can be difficult to find, as many of the authors who refer to it cite the source as "*The Somerset Archaeological Treasures*" which a diligent search has failed to turn up. Thompson may have published the same material in another, more obscure, paper. But the relevant passage is definitely included in the paper specified here.

Available for free download from the website of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society at:
https://sanhs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/08HamiltonThompson-1.pdf

18. Freemasonry and the Ancient Gods (1921)

by J. S. M. Ward
London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1921

The main thesis of the book relates to connections between Freemasonry and ancient religions, including Islam and the "Ancient Gods of India. However, there is also a lot of "mythical" Masonic history added in. The central thrust of this book is a reworking of the Traditional History, as found in the Old Charges and Anderson's Constitutions.

Ward claims the ancient Initiatic Rites as the source of Freemasonry, basing his conclusion on the notion that they used the same signs in their ceremonies as Freemasons. This is not only mistakes correlation for causation but compounds the fallacy by basing it all on the thinnest imaginable fabric of evidence.

As he traced the history forward, he includes the Roman Collegia and the Comacine Masters. All of Chapter 18 is devoted to the Comacines, and it acknowledges Leader Scott as the authority on which it is based.

Ward does not add to the story itself but gives further evidence of the seriousness with which this story was regarded in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org .

19. The Travelling Masons and Cathedral Builders – AQC Vol. 40 (1928)

by J. Walter Hobbs
London: Quatuor Coronati Lodge no. 2076, 1928

This extensive paper examines the Comacine Masters story from many angles, with particularly focus on the question of whether the architects and skilled stone masons of England can be traced back to them. In the end, Brother Hobbs concludes:

> *"The Travelling Masons, as a specially organized and authorized body, appear to be a fiction."*

Where to find it:
Available for free download from the Research Resources page of the Quatuor Coronati website at https://www.quatuorcoronati.com/research/research-resources/.

20. The Genesis of Freemasonry—Knoop & Jones (1947)

by Douglas Knoop and G. P. Jones
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1947

In Chapter 3 of this landmark work, the authors address the various stories of Freemasonry originating in the operative stone masons' organizations of Europe in the Middle Ages. They acknowledge Aubrey's reference to Dugdale and confirm that there are clear references to architects being able to move across borders. However, they dismiss the Comacines in a scant few lines as reading too much into the similarity of design across broad geographic areas "and a mistaken etymology". Knoop and Jones conclude that the name does not refer "to Como or any other place" but was a more generic term for a "fellow mason".

Where to find it:
Out of print and difficult to find, although (for a stiff price) you may be able to obtain a copy from used book sellers. You are most likely to find it in a Masonic library.

21. Pick & Knight—The Pocket History of Freemasonry (First Published in 1953)

by G. Norman Knight and Frederick Smyth
London: Frederick Muller, 1969 (Fifth Edition)

Chapter 1 of this book, addressing the Origin of Freemasonry, opens by stating that:

> *"An immense amount of ingenuity has been expended on the exploration of possible origins of Freemasonry, a good deal of which is now fairly generally admitted to have been wasted."*

It proceeds with an overview of what the authors call a "list of ancient bodies or organizations which have at various times been claimed as ancestors to Freemasonry". The third category of these bodies includes the Comacine Masters (lumped in with the Roman Collegia and the more vaguely defined category of "Travelling Architects". The authors are clearly dismissive of the Comacines as the origin of Freemasonry.

In their brief coverage of the Comacines, Pick & Knight note the reference to Dugdale by John Aubrey (see above) regarding a Papal bull, and point out that no one has been able to find any such document.

They conclude by acknowledging the influence of the Lombard architects (a historical category which would encompass the Comacine Masters) but dismiss them as the source of Freemasonry for two reasons. First, they doubt the Comacines actually formed into a formal organization. Second, they do not believe the Comacines shows any of the distinguishing features of Freemasonry such as the recognition signs and words, or Masonic symbolism. They do not cite any evidence for any of their statements or conclusions regarding the Roman Collegia or the Comacine Masters.

Where to find it:
May be available in libraries, especially your Masonic (Lodge, Temple, Chapter or Valley) library.
This book was widely perceived as the Masonic history "officially endorsed" by Grand Lodge. As a result, it sold in huge numbers over several editions and may be available from used book sellers.

22. Freemasonry Before the Existence of Grand Lodges (1956)

by Lionel Vibert
London: Spencer & Co., 1956

Vibert describes the Comacine story, as per Leader Scott, and cites the Aubrey/Dugdale reference. However, he rejects the suggestion that they are the forerunners of Freemasonry:

"… no such Bull can be traced; and there is no evidence whatever that the Comacine Masters were Freemasons; that is to say, that they had esoteric teachings and legends, and secret signs, or a ritual, or passwords; they were simply a confraternity of builders, which is not the same thing at all."

He also cites Ravenscroft, who extends the Comacine story with a suggestion that the Comacines were Temple builders, which explains the prominent place of King Solomon's Temple in Masonic lore. He says there are no grounds for supporting the idea.

He also cites Findel's support for this story, pointing out that Findel offers no supporting evidence for his statements at all.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from the Linford Lodge of Research website at:
https://linfordresearch.info/other-books-by-author/

23. Freemasons' Guide and Compendium (1956)

by Bernard Jones
London: George Harrap & Company, 1956

This book includes a succinct telling of the Comacine story, followed by a more in-depth analysis which frames it as a fable, unsupported by evidence. Jones indicates that Aubrey, Ashmole and Wren, all writing in the Seventeenth Century, are the earliest references to the story. He makes the flat statement that there are no mediaeval sources supporting this story.

The author goes on to cite Pownall, Gould and even Leader Scott in pointing out that repeated searches have failed to find any evidence of the Papal bull. He also stresses the idea that forgery of Papal bulls was known to be a significant issue, implying that there may have been one or more such documents, but that they were not genuine.

He also quotes Thompson (in The Somerset Archaeological Treasures—see above) and Knoop (see The Genesis of Freemasonry, above) as authorities for rejecting the Lombard reference to the Comacines.

Almost as an afterthought, Jones says it is "generally accepted" that Pope Nicholas III in 1278 issued a Letter of Indulgence to the lodge of Masons working at Strasbourg Cathedral, although he cites no source for this information. He suggests that this, if true, could be the source of the story.

The fact that we find this story included in the Compendium is significant. Jones tells the story, then goes to some trouble to thoroughly discredit it. This suggests that despite the many prominent and credible authors who deny its validity, the story was widely believed for a very long time. Consequently, it could not be ignored in a comprehensive treatment of Masonic history.

Where to find it:
Available for free download from The Internet Archive at www.archive.org.
This book was printed in large numbers, and physical copies should be readily available from used book sellers.
If you have access to a Masonic library (e.g., in your Lodge, Chapter, Valley or Grand Lodge) they are likely to have a copy of this book.

24. Freemasonry: A Possible Origin – AQC Vol. 107 (1994)

by William Kennedy
London: Quatuor Coronati Lodge no. 2076, 1994

One variation on the Comacine Master story suggests that the Comacines had their origins in the Collegia Artificum of Ancient Rome.

In this brief paper the author explores the "possible connections between the Roman Collegia Artificum of the Caesarean empire, and the guild of stone masons who constructed the Gothic Cathedrals in the Middle Ages". In other words a link from the Colleges of ancient Rome, through the Comacine Masters in the Middle Ages, to the Masonic Lodges of the Renaissance and Enlightenment eras.

Kennedy acknowledges that there is no documentary evidence of a connection between the Collegia and the Comacines. However, via somewhat tortured logic and placing enormous weight on very thin evidence, he concluded that those authors who have dismissed this theory are perhaps being too conservative.

This paper points to Karl Krause (1781 – 1832) as the original source of this theory, although no specific source citation is given.

Most helpful of all, this paper identifies several specific historical sources of information regarding the possibility of the Roman Collegia being the point of origin for Freemasonry. If you want to truly take a deep dive into the history of this story, you may want to explore the following:

- Law code of King Rotharis (636 – 652)
- Laws of Dagobert the First (630)
- The capitularies of Charlemagne (789)
- Ordinances of Archbishop Hincmar of Reims (852)

Where to find it:
AQC Volumes after Vol 70 can be difficult to obtain. They are mainly available only in libraries or the private collections of individual Masons who take Masonic history and research very seriously. You are most likely to find these volumes in the Masonic library at your Lodge, Chapter, Temple, Grand Lodge, Scottish Rite Valley or its constituent bodies.

25. The Vatican Website

https://www.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html

The Vatican website lists all Popes in chronological order along with the exact dates on which their respective reigns started and ended. This is helpful in searching for documents, to follow up on references in other sources. Some sources, especially the older ones, may refer to the timeframe in some fashion, but without specifying the Pope involved.

Aubrey's Natural History of Wiltshire (1658) indicates that according to Sir William Dugdale, the Papal bulls creating and protecting the Comasine Masters were issued "*about Henry the Third's time.*"

Henry III reigned England from 1216 to 1272. The Vatican website shows that the Popes in (and slightly after) that span of time were:

- Innocent III 22 Feb 1198 - 16 Jul 1216
- Honorius III 24 Jul 1216 - 18 Mar 1227
- Gregory IX 21 Mar 1227 - 22 Aug 1241
- Celestine IV 28 Oct 1241 - 10 Nov 1241
- Innocent IV 28 June 1243 - 7 Dec 1254
- Alexander IV 20 Dec 1254 - 25 May 1261
- Urban IV 4 Sept 1261 - 2 Oct 1264
- Clement IV 22 Feb 1265 - 29 Dec 1268
- Gregory X 27 Mar 1272 - 10 Jan 1276
- Innocent V 22 Feb 1276 - 22 Jun 1276
- Adrian V 11 Jul 1276 - 18 Aug 1276

- John XXI 20 Sept 1276 - 20 May 1277

Bernard Jones, in his *Compendium*, indicates that Pope Nicholas III in 1278 (and his successors) issued Letters of Indulgence to the lodge of Masons working at Strasbourg Cathedral. The Vatican website confirms that Nicholas III was indeed Pope at the time indicated.

Pope Nicholas III was Pope from 26 Dec 1277 - 22 Aug 1280

His successors were

- Martin IV 23 Mar 1281 - 29 Mar 1285
- Honorius IV 20 May 1285 - 3 April 1287
- Nicholas IV 22 Feb 1288 - 4 Apr 1292
- Celestine V 29 Aug 1294 - 13 Dec 1294

26. The Papal Encyclicals Website

https://www.papalencyclicals.net/document-directory

The Vatican and Papal Encyclicals websites give the original Latin text and multi-language translations for historical Papal encyclicals/bulls.

Yes, the posted records go back far enough to cover the time frames cited by our reference sources for this story.

No Papal documents answering the description of the bulls/encyclicals described in the references for the Comacine Master story are found under any of the Popes listed above. However, it must be acknowledged that the older records on the site are clearly incomplete, so this does not prove that no such document was issued at the time.