Types of stonemasonry are:

- Rubble Masonry

  When roughly dressed stones are laid in a mortar the result is a stone rubble masonry.

- Ashlar Masonry

  Well arranged and cut stones set in mortar.

History

Stonemasonry is one of the earliest trades in civilisation's history. During the time of the Neolithic Revolution and domestication of animals, people learned how to use fire to create quicklime, plasters, and mortars. They used these to fashion homes for themselves with mud, straw, or stone, and masonry was born.

The Ancients heavily relied on the stonemason to build the most impressive and long lasting monuments to their civilizations. The Egyptians built their pyramids, the civilizations of Central America had their step pyramids, the Persians their palaces, the Greeks their temples, and the Romans their public works and wonders (See Roman Architecture). Among the famous ancient stonemasons is Sophroniscus, the father of Socrates, who was a stone-cutter.

Castle building was an entire industry for the medieval stonemasons. When the Western Roman Empire fell, building in dressed stone decreased in much of Western Europe, and there was a resulting increase in timber-based construction. Stone work experienced a resurgence in the 9th and 10th centuries in Europe, and by the 12th century religious fervour resulted in the construction of thousands of impressive churches and cathedrals in stone across Western Europe.

Bavarian stonemasons, c. 1505

Medieval stonemasons' skills were in high demand, and members of the guild, gave rise to three classes of stonemasons: apprentices, journeymen, and master masons. Apprentices were indentured to their masters as the price for their training, journeymen had a higher level of skill and could go on journeys to assist their masters, and master masons were considered freemen who could travel as they wished to work on the projects of the patrons. During the Renaissance, the stonemason's guild admitted members who were not stonemasons, and eventually evolved into the Society of Freemasonry; fraternal groups which observe the traditional culture of stonemasons, but are not typically involved in modern construction projects.

A medieval stonemason would often carve a personal symbol onto their block to differentiate their work from that of other stonemasons. This also provided a simple 'quality assurance' system.

The Renaissance saw stonemasonry return to the prominence and sophistication of the Classical age. The rise of the Humanist philosophy gave people the ambition to create marvelous works of art. The centre stage for the Renaissance would prove to be Italy, where city-states such as Florence erected great structures, including the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, the Fountain of Neptune, and the Laurentian Library which was planned and built by Michelangelo Buonarroti, a famous stonemason of the Renaissance.

When Europeans settled the Americas, they brought the stonemasonry techniques of their respective homelands with them. Settlers used what materials were available, and in some areas stone was the material of choice. In the first waves, building mimicked that of Europe, to eventually be replaced by unique architecture later on.

In the 20th century, stonemasonry saw its most radical changes in the way the work is accomplished. Prior to the first half of the century, most heavy work was executed by draft animals or human muscle power. With the arrival of the internal combustion engine, many of these hard aspects of the trade have been made simpler and easier. Cranes and forklifts have made moving and laying heavy stones relatively easy for the stonemasons. Motor powered mortar mixers have saved much in time and energy as well. Compressed-air powered tools have made working of stone less time-intensive. Petrol and electric powered abrasive saws can cut through stone much faster and with more precision than chiseling alone. Carbide-tipped chisels can stand up to much more abuse than the steel and iron chisels made by blacksmiths of old.

Ashlar is prepared (or "dressed") stone work of any type of stone. Stone masonry using dressed stones is known as ashlar masonry, whereas masonry using irregularly shaped stones is known as rubble masonry. Ashlar blocks are great rectangular cuboid blocks that are masonry sculpted to have square edges and smooth faces. The blocks are generally about 35 centimetres (14 in) in height. When shorter than 30 centimetres (12 in), they are usually called "small ashlar".

- Ashlar blocks were used in the construction of many old buildings as an alternative to brick. Generally the external face is smooth or polished;

occasionally it can be decorated by small grooves achieved by the application of a metal comb. (This process is usually used only on a softer stone ashlar block. The decoration is known as *mason's drag*.)[1]

Rubble masonry is rough, unhewn building stone set in mortar, but not laid in regular courses.[1] It may appear as the outer surface of a wall or may fill the core of a wall which is faced with unit masonry such as brick or cut stone.

[edit] Gallery

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  the wall at Grave Circle A, Helladic cemetery of Mycenae, Greece, dating 16th century BC