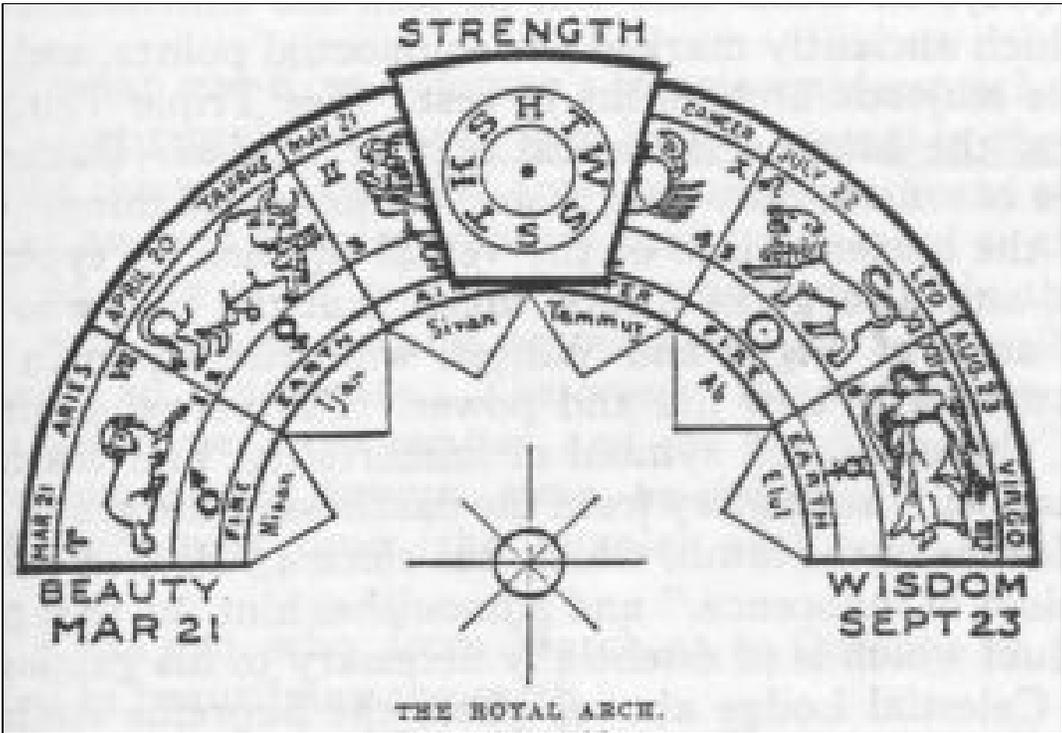


EARLY RITUAL OF THE HOLY ROYAL ARCH



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1. BACKGROUND

The origins of the Holy Royal Arch Degree are, like Blue Lodge Masonry, shrouded in mystery. We should remember that in 1717 there were only two degrees, and that the third was added around 1740, and it is also about this time that we find the first hints of a *fourth* degree. It was this that caused this degree to become one of the major sticking-points between the Antients and Modems, with the latter becoming ever more entrenched in their official attitude of non-recognition towards it.

As we are taught, the ‘official’ founding of the Grand Lodge of England took place in 1717. Many papers have been given suggesting that the earliest rituals may have in fact focused on the legend of the Ark – now preserved in the Royal Ark Mariner's Degree – and in an earlier paper I commented that the word ‘Arc’ in French can refer both to an Ark as a ship and as an arch, as in ‘arc-en-ciel’ (rainbow) or the ‘Arc de Triomphe’ in Paris. Pick & Knight say that “some students believe that the Royal Arch was born in France as one of many degrees created after the spread of Freemasonry to the continent”, an idea which we will return to later. In most degrees of this era, we see the idea of something which was lost being found, whether it is Hiram's body, the Ark of the Covenant, dry land (in Noah's case), Enoch's pillars of knowledge, or a triangle of gold with a message to mankind inscribed upon it. This has always been a powerful myth for man, as we see in Parsifal, Excalibur, the Holy Grail and other European legends.

The first known mention of the Royal Arch, according to Charles Leadbeater and others, is found in the minutes of Youghal in Ireland in 1743, when it is reported that two Excellent Masons carried the Royal Arch; and again in 1744 in Dr. Dassigny's ‘Serious and Impartial Enquiry into the cause of the Present Decay of Freemasonry in the Kingdom of Ireland’ (and this only 27 years after it was founded!), in which he tells us of the existence of an Assembly of Royal Arch Masons at York.

Various references suggest that part of the Royal Arch may have been found in other early Degrees. For example, a parody from 1726 refers to “the necessity there is for a Master to understand well the Rule of Three.” A catechism from the previous year contains the words:

43. Whence is an Arch deriv'd? From Architecture.
44. What doth it resemble? The Rainbow.

Already by the 1750s Laurence Dermott, Grand Secretary of the Antients

was calling the Royal Arch Degree the “very root, heart and marrow of Freemasonry.” This suggests that the Royal Arch must have been popular enough - at least among the Antients - to have developed into an independent Ritual quite rapidly. Certainly the Royal Arch was worked in Craft Lodges from the inception of the Antients, along with the Mark Degree and the Order of the Temple a little later.

At first, its government was exclusively in the hands of the Antients; while the Moderns officially ignored its existence. We find in Dermott's Book of Constitutions, entitled *Ahiman Rezon or Help to a Brother*, published in 1756, the following comment in Rule II:

“the Master of a particular Lodge has the right and authority of congregating the members of his own Lodge into a Chapter upon any emergency or occurrence.”

Despite its labeling as an ‘Antient’ ritual, there was no shortage of ‘Modern’ members, and a good deal of fraternizing between both sides outside of London and the eagle eye of Grand Lodge! That the Premier Grand Lodge was not hostile to the idea of the Royal Arch itself can be seen in the fact that, when a Modern Grand Chapter was created in 1766, the Grand Master, Lord Blayley, was also titular Head of the Royal Arch; and when the Grand Lodge moved to Great Queen Street in London in 1775, the Hall Committee:

“Resolved that Bro[ther] Riley be permitted to use this Society’s Room for the accommodation of the Society calling themselves Royal Arch Masons.”

However, we should remember that, while the Premier Grand Lodge did not proscribe the Grand Chapter, it did not officially recognize its existence. Samuel Spencer, Grand Secretary (1757-1768), wrote to Gogel, the Modern’s Provincial Grand Master for the Rhinelands in 1766 to deny that the Royal Arch Degree was recognized by the Grand Lodge – this in reply to a question about how to deal with the newly formed Rite of Strict Observance, which was a chivalric body containing a Royal Arch Degree (as well as Rose Croix and Templar Orders), and asking for advice on how to deal with them.

The next Grand Secretary, James Heseltine (1769-1780), replying to the same Province of Frankfurt-am-Main during a resurgence of problems with the ‘Strict Observance’, wrote the following fascinating reference to the Royal Arch, which is an excellent summary of the Premier Grand Lodge's position at that time:

“...With respect to the information you have rec[eive]d as to the Grand

Lodge of England's having Degrees and Mysteries superior to the three Degrees already communication to you, you may rest assured it had not the least foundation of truth. I now give you my word of honour as a Mason that the Grand Lodge of England has not any other acknowledged Degrees. It is true that many of the Fraternity here belong to a Degree in Masonry say'd to be *superior* (italics mine) to the other three, call[ed] the Royal Arch. I have the honour to be a member of this Degree and its principles and proceedings are truly praiseworthy - but it is unknown in Grand Lodge, and all Emblems or Badges or distinction in that Degree are prohibited from being worn in GL."

The oldest documents specifically of a Royal Arch meeting (as opposed to indirect references) come from the United States, when, on December 22nd, 1753, three Brethren were "raised to the Degree of Royal Arch Mason" in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

The fact that there was by no means a single Royal Arch Degree is demonstrated by the pithy comment of C. Shirreff to William White in 1789: "I met three R:A: and they all differ'd."

Around the time of the Act of Union, the debate over whether the Royal Arch should be included in the Degree system raged on. A fine example of the Antient's position in the matter can be read in W.H. Dee's eloquent argument for a four Degree system. At the time he was Zerubbabel of the Chapter of Goodwill, Braintree, having been Exalted in 1796, and his argument, from "Royal Arch Ritual & Discourses" is worth quoting here:

"The reasonableness and necessity of progressive Degrees in the pursuit of every Society, Art, and Science both Ancient and modern. no unprejudiced person will deny. The Elsenes among the Jews, who were a kind of Pythagorians, had 4 distinct degrees in their society. The Antient Kings, Philosophers and Rulers of Egypt had every one 3 or 4 Probationary-degrees. The Jewish sect called the Levites had 4 distinct degrees. The Eastern schools about the time of our Saviours Nativity had all of them 4 separate classes, under the denomination of Disciple, junior, bachur or elect, and graduate. Pythagoras, who flourished about 500 years before Christ, never permitted a pupil to speak in his school, till he had undergone a probation of at last 4 years. Amongst the learned Societies of Almost every Denomination, for instance, in Academic Degrees there are Bachelor, Master, Doctor: in the Church, Deacon, Priest, Bishop, and Arch-Bishop: in the municipal law, those of Student, Barrister and Serjeant: in the Civil law, and physics, Student, Bachelor And Doctor. In each of these Degrees the Disciple or Scholar undergoes proper examinations, and must, or at [least] ought to be found well qualified prior to his Admission to a Superior Rank. Hence the Institutors of our Society have with the greatest Wisdom, and

prudence adapted sundry Probationary Degrees not to attained but by time, patience, probity and Application.”

As an example of the diversity of rituals at the time, we can cite a letter from William Raper of Chichester to William White in 1800, which alludes to “the Ornaments of our late Chapter”, and mentions specifically “the Anchor, Cock and Triangle” which cost “upwards of Sixty Guineas”. A strange ritual indeed - though I should temper this by suggesting that the items may have been code words for the more familiar Volume of the Sacred Law (Anchor of our Faith), Compasses (Triangle) and Square (Cock which, like the Master, announces the rising sun and the time to commence labor).

In the second Article of the Act of union, it was stated that: “It is declared and pronounced that pure Antient Masonry consists of three degrees and no more, viz those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch.” So the degree beloved of the Antients and many Moderns was preserved ... but in no particular form.

In 1817, four years after the Act of Union, there is reference to a single Grand Chapter, arising out of the Modems Grand Chapter and that part of the Antients which administered the Royal Arch Degree. However, the first ‘official’ ritual, the Sussex Ritual named in honor of the Duke of Sussex, was not actually published until the mid 1840s, indicating that there were a large number of individual rituals practiced around the United Kingdom until then; and Chapter regulations continued to be printed as part of the rules for Lodges right up to the 1830s.

What are we to draw from all this? Firstly, that the Royal Arch either grew out of diverse Blue Lodge rituals or possibly came to us from the continent. Secondly, that we have no full published ritual before the 1840s. Before this time we only have ciphers, excerpts and diaries from which we can obtain some idea of what the early rituals might have been like. This also implies that variants were actually accepted and approved by the United Grand Lodge for some 30 years after its creation.

Finally, before we turn to look at the rituals themselves, we may conclude that, far from being a clear-cut progression, the Royal Arch was practiced in many forms across countries, with the Antients predominantly – but not exclusively – favoring the use of veils. In Companion G. Claret's , “The Ceremonies, Etc. of The Holy Royal Arch also Passing the Vails”, the first published Royal Arch Ritual in 1845, there is a footnote to “Passing the Vails”, which reads: “This Ceremony usually takes place soon after the Obligation. It is

not much known or practiced in London. It was always given in the Athol Chapters before the Union in 1813, but not in those under the Prince of Wales. I am aware that it is still practiced in some parts of the Country, as such it may be given or omitted.”

On the American side of the pond, we have a book by John Sheville and James L. Gould dated 1867 which, we should remember, was a good 70 years after the separation from England. Their adherence to the Antient Grand Lodge is evinced by their comment in the History of the English Royal Arch that: “the first authentic account of it is the history of the assembly of Masons at York A.D. 926 at which EDWIN presided as Grand Master.” This does not exactly inspire us with confidence as to the accuracy of their pronouncements! Nevertheless, it does contain several interesting points to which we shall return later.

By virtue of claiming independence from England before the Act of Union, we have been bequeathed the Antient version of the ritual. We have also missed out on the Domastic version, largely practiced around the world, and because of this our ritual, little altered in 200 years, provides a fascinating link with early Freemasonry.

Now we will examine some of the differences in rituals around the British Isles in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

2. EARLY RITUALS

Rather than laboriously recount the several rituals researched, I have included them in an Appendix to this paper, and the interested Companion may peruse them at his leisure at a later time. However, I would like to draw attention to four particular points, which may aid him in his reading. Firstly, I consider some of the different Openings and how they differ. Secondly, we briefly look at a couple of early penalties which remind us that these went through a number of variations before being united in 1845. Thirdly, and probably the most interesting, we find that several stories were used in outlining the ritual. Finally, I quote in full a particularly beautiful speech on death, which may well have inspired the writing of Hiram's famous soliloquy in the Royal Master Degree of the Cryptic rite. This comes from the Baldwin Rite of Bristol dated 1878, and is likely an early version of what came to the United States with the Antients. If this is true, it is quite possible that this speech inspired the authors of the Cryptic Rite which, we should remember, was invented in New York and promulgated by Columbian Cryptic Council, the Premier Council of the World.

2.1 OPENINGS

The Virtual Past Master Degree allowed Brothers who had not received the benefit of Installation to be received as Royal Arch Masons. It is interesting to note that, while this custom is continued here, in England the rules were amended. Now only one month's standing as a Master Mason is required to be invited to join a Chapter (the Royal Arch being to all intents and purposes the Fourth Degree). However, even in the Domatic Rite only a Worshipful Master can be installed as one of the three Principal Officers. This leads to an interesting problem: how is the Royal Arch formed? In the Domatic rite only the three Principal Officers for the Royal Arch can speak the ineffable name, while the other members watch. Indeed, the Opening (and Closing) is quite a 'slight' ceremony, the three Principals approaching their thrones in the East by seven steps, while bowing and pronouncing "Omnipotent", "Omniscient", "Omnipresent", before Zerubbabel offers a brief prayer. They then "meet and agree" to keep the secrets (but there is no mention of "raising the Royal Arch"), before declaring the Chapter duly open.

Of the texts available to me, I could find no reference to the lengthy, involved and militarized ceremony which is now practiced here in the United States. I was interested to note that in the reconstruction of an Opening based on early 19th Century ritual in Canajoharie earlier this month, that the ritual was

broadly as it is now.

In Sir A. Commins' opening dated 1795 we find the rituals almost identical to the modern day Domatic, with the addition of the Christianizing: "In the beginning was the word.." also spoken with 'triple voice', that is to say, by breaking the quotation down into three parts, each spoken by one Principal Officer. However, in William Finch's manuscript of circa 1800, from Bengal or Calcutta, we see the words: "We three do agree the Royal Arch to raise." But this is said with right hand on left breast. The Bristol Rite expands on this still further, also including the briefest indication of duties, and also of interest to us, requiring of the Candidate that he prove himself proficient in the preceding three degrees by signs and words. Here we may detect the elements that were developed far more by the Antients. It does not take a great leap of faith to surmise that the overall layout of what finally became the seventh degree largely followed the format of a Blue Lodge Opening, with the addition of proofs from the Candidate, and an increasingly elaborate conclusion. Given that the Domatic rite only requires the three Principals to support the Bible with their left hands, and to place their right hands upon it in the form of a triangle, we can also guess that the great elaboration of the raising of the Royal Arch was a later and whimsical addition. However, my review of the documents to this date only allow me to speculate on this. I hope another Companion may be inspired to research how, why and when the Opening went from a short and simple ceremony to the involved ceremony we are now used to. Is it possible that Thomas Smith Webb took the deliberate step of distancing the ritual from the English version by making such sweeping changes?

It is noteworthy that in England the First Principal is Zerubbabel the King, while in the United States the First Principal is Jeshua or Joshua the High Priest. Popular belief ascribes this to the hatred of monarchy at the time of the rewriting of the rituals in America; but the High Priest ruled in the Temple, where the drama is set, and it is more likely that Thomas Smith Webb, in reworking the rituals, simply deemed it more appropriate that the High Priest should be the First Principal.

2.2 PENALTIES

The modern day penalty of Royal Arch Masons in the United States has always fascinated me. Given all the generous allusions in the biblical stories surrounding Moses as the Candidate makes his way through the veils; or equally thinking of some of the gruesome things which could be done with an unfaithful Companion in a subterranean vault, it seems odd that we have ended up with a penalty which, while undeniably bloodthirsty, does not seem directly connected

with the story.

Unfortunately most penalties in the early diaries are entirely missing. This is largely because most parts of the ritual are in cipher or shorthand; it being not permitted to commit the rituals to writing. However, there are a few instances where the penalty can be discerned or guessed at. The Arundel Chapter Index, for example, gives the penalty as: “may my right arm be withered and changed to a state of Leprosy and my left arm struck by a Serpent and the contaminated matter circulate through every vein of my body that this corrupt frame of mine is totally...[illegible].” This is rather more in keeping with the general story. The Bristol Ritual contains the penalty of: “having the hand struck off with the sword of human justice, and publicly exposed in token of my infamy, or the Royal Arch fall in on me and crush me beneath its ruins”.

It would be interesting to conjecture that originally there were as many penalties as variations in ritual. However, that we ended up with a penalty which seems more at home in a Foreign Legion movie than a Royal Arch Degree Ceremony surprises me.

2.3 STORIES

One of the most fascinating differences in early rituals are the different settings for the ritual story. While some most certainly focused on the building of the Second Temple, at least one is set in the time of King Solomon, and involves the building of the secret vault and the discovery of the vault of Enoch. We mentioned earlier that the story of the Ark of Noah is one of the oldest of all Masonic devices. The story of Enoch is intimately intertwined with this story, leading us to suspect that the Enochian slant also reflects an early version of the myth.

In the Finch manuscript of circa 1800 we find the most fully developed version of this particular story. Enoch is taken to heaven and is shown the triangular plate bearing the name of God, then a vision of an underground vault with nine arches one upon another, within which is a white marble pedestal. God commands him to build this, as well as two pillars of brass and brick, containing all the knowledge of mankind (later seen in the Second Degree lecture, this time pertaining to the pillars at the entrance to the Temple of Solomon). This he does. In this version we are then transported forward to the time of King Solomon, who is commanded to build not only a Temple but also an underground corridor, and he is promised that on completing the Temple the true name of God revealed to Moses would be restored. According to the text, next to Mount Moriah was another Mount called Mount Calvary (*sic*), which the

workmen were excavating in order to lay foundations for another building. They come across the ruins of a more ancient building, upon vertical arches. Solomon tells his three principal architects to investigate, which they do, lifting each keystone by its ring, and in the ninth arch they discover the pedestal and the triangular plate.

This story also introduces us to the mysterious names of the three architects or sojourners: Stolkyn, Jacobert and Giblim. This extraordinary development is, perhaps, the strongest hint that the Degree is indeed descended from the French system, as we will see in the conclusion.

Most of the other Rituals studied are rather more familiar, dealing with the rebuilding of the Temple by Zerubbabal, Jeshua and Haggai. The use of three sojourners is common to all, as is the idea of descending into a place of darkness, there finding something bright which in many rituals shines with its own light. In most cases, too, the pedestal is a double cube – more of an altar – which means its surface is square, bearing a circle which contains a triangle (of gold): a device familiar to Masons in the Hermetic degrees. Sometimes the language is quite fun. For example, in the Bristol rite the sojourners angrily reply to Zerubbabel's taunt that they may be "of the lineage of that set of traitors who fell away during the siege and went over to the enemy", that: "we are not, Most Excellent, of that timorous race of parasites who...fell away and deserted their trust."

Nevertheless, given that the earliest rituals focus on the period from Enoch, the Flood, and the Building of the First Temple, there is reason to suppose that the action was moved to the Second Temple to continue the biblical tradition, and to move away from apocryphal stories. After all, there is no reference in the Old Testament to finding a secret vault containing a pedestal or sacred delta in the books of Ezra, Haggai or Nehemiah.

2.4 A RITUAL TREASURE

In the exquisite hand-written scrapbook collected by F.W. Irvin, entitled "Bristol Rituals" and dated 1878, interspersed with cut-out pictures, we find the following rituals: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, Master Mason, Past Master, Royal Arch, 9 Selected Masters, Scotch Knight & Grand Architect, Knight of the East, Sword & Eagle, Knight Templar, Knight Rose Croix; and a Service of Masonic Knights composed for the use of the Encampment of Baldwin (1813).

After a short Obligation with the penalty left blank, we find this beautiful soliloquy on death, surely one of the great treasures of Masonry:

“In the name of that Great and Omnipotent Being arise (*takes him by the hand*) and may the remembrance of the spring of acacia which was found on the grave of him who was the Most Excellent of Masons, and who parted with his life because he would not forfeit his honour and [illegible] stimulate his successors to imitate his glorious example, that the essence of virtue may enshrine our Moral Law, and like the Beautiful Rose of Sharon - in conjunction with the Lily of the Valley exalt our intellectual part - when death the grand leveler of all human greatness has drawn his sable curtain around us - and when the last arrows of our mortal enemy hath been dispatched, and the bow of this Mighty Conqueror broken, by the iron arm of time, when the angel of the Lord declares that time shall be no more - and when by this victory God hath subdued all things to Himself, then shall we receive the reward of our virtue, in those heavenly mansions veiled from mortal eyes when every secret of Masonry shall be opened, never never to be closed, *then* shall the G[rea]t Jeh[ovah], the G[ran]d Master of the Universe, bid us enter into his celestial Lodge, when peace, order, and harmony shall eternally reign.”

3. CONCLUSIONS

If we can summarize the situation, so far as we can tell:

1. The fourth degree, later the Holy Royal Arch, existed in some form at least by the 1740s, and therefore predated the Antient-Modern split; it also probably arose around the same time as the 3rd Degree.
2. Following the split, although the Royal Arch was not invented by them, it was seen to be a part of the Antient system of Degrees, and as such remained officially unrecognized by the Moderns.
3. The ritual itself had many forms, although it taught the same underlying message. This was not standardized even following the Act of Union and the creation of a Grand Chapter, and indeed a unified ritual did not appear until the 1840s.
4. Veils were not peculiar to the Antients - indeed records show that both Antients and Moderns used, or did not use, veils. This is preserved in England in the Bristol Rite and in Scotland in the Excellent Master degree.
5. Despite all this, both Antients and Moderns - even Grand Line Officers - flocked to receive this Degree, as they clearly perceived something in it which was more important than their jurisdictional quarrels.

And yet, despite the contemporaneous development of the 3rd and 4th Degrees, their origins are clearly very different. In no way can the Royal Arch – even though it is referred to as the “completion of Masonry” – be seen as a natural continuation of the 2nd or 3rd Degree. A.E. Waite states – without citing sources – that: “It follows that in the Royal Arch we are entering a new field of Masonic Symbolism, a new thesis on the preservation and perpetuation of the Secret Tradition, postulating antecedently a traditional history which is not comprised in the Craft. It follows also that, as now known and worked among us, the Arch never formed part of the Third Degree.” The discontinuities of time, symbolism, message, language, characters and movement are clear indicators that the inclusion of the Royal Arch Degrees by the United Grand Lodge of England & Wales was more a matter of the preservation of a clearly important and much loved rite, than because it fitted closely with the existing Degree system. It is interesting to speculate why, if the 3rd Degree and the Royal

Arch appeared as broadly the same time, why the Premier Grand Lodge embraced the new 3rd Degree with scarcely a murmur, yet refused officially to recognize the Royal Arch.

Similarly, Dr. Oliver regretted that Dunckerley had not improved still further on the ritual of the Royal Arch Degree, which he was developing from the Dermott ritual around the time of Grand Chapter's founding, from the materials which he had derived from the Antients, observing, with much force, that he could not have failed to see their incongruity¹.

Earlier we saw a Royal Arch ritual practiced in India around 1800, which mentioned Enoch and the peculiar characters Stolkyn, Jacobert and Giblim. We find these same characters – and the legend of Enoch – in the thirteenth degree of the Rite of Perfection, which took rise in France in the 1750s. The Thirteenth, or “Royal Arch Degree” outlines almost the exact same story. For example, in the Opening the inspector says: “I dug in the ruins of Enoch. I penetrated through nine arches under ground, and in the end I found the Delta which God had promised the Holy Patriarchs should be found in fullness of time.” Here the pillars of Enoch are called “Strength and Beauty, and “on the pillar of Beauty, he inscribed the methods of Art, and on the pillar of Strength, he inscribed the rules of moral action.” Here we also meet the architects Joabert, Stolkin and Guiblim (or Adoniram according to Albert Pike in *Morals and Dogma*) in an extremely lengthy lecture which covers history from Enoch, through Noah to their discovery, and which lasts some sixteen pages in my copy.

Further, in *Guide to the Royal Arch Chapter*, pages 17 and 18 we read: “In the year 1755 it was currently reported among the brethren that some of the members of Lodge No. 94 had been on the continent and there witnessed extraordinary manifestations in ancient Masonry, which that Lodge had agreed to practice every third lodge night...The Deputy Grand Master, Dr. Manningham, at once visited the Lodge, and there learned that this pretended Ancient Masonry was nothing more than a mixture of what is now known as Ramsay's Royal Arch with Dermott's Degree, the principal features of which was a transfer of the real Landmark of a Master Mason to a new degree, which was unknown and unrecognized by the Grand Lodge of England.” This also suggests France as a possible source of much of the symbolism of the Royal Arch through the Rite of Perfection..

For all these reasons I am convinced that the Royal Arch Degree has its origins in France.

¹ Dr Oliver, *Insignia of the Royal Arch*, p. 11, paragraph quoted from *Guide to the Royal Arch Chapter*, John Sheville and James L. Gould, p 20.

As an aside, the veils are preserved in the Scottish ritual of Excellent Master. I had personally wondered if there was any connection between the four veils and the four ancient elements. Many Masonic rituals require the Candidate to be ‘tried by the four elements’ before being judged worthy to be admitted. In Trevor Stewart’s treatise on Hermetic influence in Masonry, I found a possible answer: “In some of the early versions of this ceremony (mostly English ones) there were only three veils but in at least one ancient Jewish source (Josephus’ *Antiquities*), the veil of the Temple was composed of four colours: fine white linen)to signify the **earth**, from which grew the flax that produced it); purple (to signify **water** because that precious colour was derived from the blood of a rare shellfish); blue (which signified **air**) and scarlet (which signified **fire**). The ritual of the Excellent Master Degree, however, gives other interpretations to the Candidate at a later stage.”

If our past Brethren, even knowing the story being told, spent most of the 18th Century fighting off any attempt to introduce new rituals to their stable, even while rituals were proliferating in other countries, what persuaded them to exempt this single ritual from the battle for recognition? What did it contain which transcended all material and earthly reason, and why did it attract the greatest thinkers who, like Dermott, Grand Secretary of the Antients, saw in it the “root, heart and marrow of Freemasonry”, and Heseltine the Grand Secretary of the Moderns, a degree “superior to the other three, called the Royal Arch”?

One of the versions of the Royal Arch story found its way into the Rite of Strict Observance founded by Baron von Hund, and thence into the Scottish Rectified Rite penned by Jean-Baptiste Willermoz in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Now, while I have learned from experience that American masons tend to veer away from spiritual or deeply philosophical interpretations of our Degrees, preferring to stick with the safer levels of allegory and metaphor, the equivalent of the Royal Arch Degree in this system - the Master of St. Andrew - specifically states that in this Degree, all symbolism and allegory have been stripped away and that the Candidate now beholds the truth, face to face. This cannot be called yet another interpretation, for this is laid out in the ritual itself, *which is considered to be the oldest continually worked ritual in Masonry*²!

So what is this truth, which is presented in its complete and unveiled form?

² It was written around 1785 and has been performed without innovation until the present day.

While this is not the place to discuss the exact nature of the ritual itself, we can at least examine some of the philosophy underlying this version of the Royal Arch Degree, written at the time of Dermott and Dunckerley, which makes explicit what is only implicit in our modern Degree, and which can safely be ignored by all who do not wish to delve that deeply.

The first temple is Mankind. More specifically it is Adam Kadmon, created by God as the perfect, immortal reflection of Himself, and set to rule the world or universe created by the Grand Architect. The Temple, like our Lodges, rests upon three Pillars, and should one of those be removed the edifice would become unstable. In Kabbalah these three pillars are the two opposing pillars of B and J , or Strength/Severity and Beauty/Mercy, the central or Middle Pillar being the balance of the two poles, or Wisdom. Our ritual tells us that Hiram, the Grand Junior Warden, or the Pillar of Beauty, or Mercy was taken away. This left an excess of Strength with no Mercy to temper it, and as one old ritual states, an excess of Severity (or Strength) is but cruelty. So Adam Kadmon, or Collective Man, attained a state of arrogance and believed himself to be equal to God. However, the First Temple could not endure upon two Pillars alone, and the whole edifice collapsed. Thus, for his arrogance, Adam Kadmon was banished to earth and splintered into many pieces, comprising the human race. Now man's sojourn on earth is to be found in the Royal Arch Degree. For the ruins of the First Temple endured intact, and upon them was build a Second, or very inferior Temple, which caused the old men who remembered the First to weep with frustration and bitterness. Nevertheless, this poor reflection of the first Man in his original state of Glory contained something precious. He still contained a spark of the Divine spirit, or breath, as evinced by the remarkable discovery made by the three workmen: a triangular golden plate upon which was inscribed the sacred name of Deity.

Perhaps it is because they saw a profound message of hope for humanity that those early Royal Arch Masons rose above their temporal quarrels and found a common interest in what is probably the most important lesson in all of Masonry.

APPENDIX 1 - EXCEPTS OF EARLY RITUALS TRANSCRIBED FROM MANUSCRIPTS IN THE U.G.L.E. LIBRARY

Conventions used: personal notes in *italics*. Incomplete words completed in []; for example Comps would be written Comp[anion]s. This is only done for the sake of clarity on some places. I do not guarantee that they are all correct. I also cannot guarantee that all abbreviations have been retained: I may have written some abbreviated words in full. Old English 's' retained as f.

A. MS: Sir A. Commins: "Initiation to the Royal Arch according to Sir. A Commins, c.1795"

OPENING

- Z. In the b[eginning]...
H. was the W[ord]...
J. and the w[ord] was with God].
Z. Om[nopoten]^t.
H. Om[mniscien]^t.
J. Om[ni]p[resen]^t.
All. Rept - G[od].
Z. Before whom we 3 do meet and agree, in love and unity, the Sac[re]^d. W[or]^d. to keep, and never to reveal to any in the world, unless it be when 3 or more than 3 such as we do meet. They now bow the 3^d. time which done they advance to their places, and standing upon the footsteps of their chairs.
Z. I declare this G.R.C. open in the name of G[od]. Then ea[ch]. Laying his right hand upon his h[ear]t, they severally pronounce hkt³ Eli (this is my G^d). Bow and sit down.

FORM OF DEGREE

1st Section:

The C[ouncil]. duly opened. All seated. The Scri[be]s with desks, and books open. Z. address[ing] himself to E the P. Seri., says hkt⁴.

- Z Is there any thing of which we are not acquainted that requires our present care and attention?

³ I do not know what this stands for. The bracketed comment suggests it is Hebrew for "This is".

⁴ Again the word 'hkt' this time uttered by the P[rincipal?] Scribe. In the Domatic ritual there are two scribes – Scribe Nehemiah and Scribe Ezra.

- E Looking on his minutes, answ^{rs} only our constant duties and the public welfare; except (pointing to the 3 Soj[ourn]^{ers}) those strangers.
- Z Addressing himself to the strangers. Pray, Sirs, what is your request?
- 1ⁿ SojrWe 1st beg leave to soj[our]ⁿ amongst you, and hearing you are about to build a T[emple] to the Lord, we beg your acceptance of our best services to forward that glorious work.
- Z Pray what branch of the businefs wo[ul]^d you wish to engage in?
- Soj^{is} We deem the lowest service in the Lord's work an honor, and therefore only beg employ.
- Z Your humility bespeaks your merits and we doubt not, but you are qualified for much superior offices; but those being full, and as you are furnished with Tools for the purpose; we at present must appoint you to prepare for the foundation, and must give you this caution, that sho[ul]^d you meet with any thing appertaining to the O[I]^d T[emple] you will immediately give us information thereof.

The Soj[ourner]" bow and withdraw. Having (namely the Soj^{rs}) waited some short time they give the signal, and N[ehemiah?], going to the door signify their having made a discovery, which they beg leave to communicate to their G[rand] and R[oyal] C[ouncil]. He (namely N.) shuts the door and acquaints the C.⁵ who receives orders to admit them. This done.

- Z We are told you have made a Discovery which you want to inform us of.
- Soj^{rs} We have. Being at work early this morning in pursuance of your Orders, our Comp. breaking up the ground with his P[ick] ax, we judged from the sound it was hollow. When calling our other Comp[anion] with his Shov[el] to clear away the loose earth and rubbish, we discovered the perfect crown of an A[rch] but not being able to find any way into, I loosened 2 k[ey] stones with my Crow, which having drawn forth and discovered the cavity; it excited our desire to know what it contained. But being apprehensive of danger from damp, or other unknown causes, we cast lots who sho[ul]^d go down. The chance fell upon me. Having agreed on proper signals, I was let down by my Comp[anions] by the help of my C[abl]e Tow. Being got to the bottom, and meeting no obstruction, I found somewhat wrought into due and regular form, and also a Roll of a C[harter?]; but the Sun only just now peeping from the portions of the East, and darting his beams parallel to the plane of the Horizon, I co[ul]^d not discern what it contained, but giving the signal before agreed on. namely 3 gentle pulls, on my right hand C[able] Tow, I was drawn up by my loving Comp[anions]. On approaching the light we found the [?] contained part of the Holy Law. This gave us much joy and made us

⁵ Unclear what 'C' stands for, but clearly takes the role of Inner Guard or Sentinel.

resolve on a further search; for which reason, we drew forth a 3rd k[ey] stone, and I was let down a 2 time. The sun was approaching nearer to his meridian, darted his beams on the front of a Ped[esta]^l whereon was inscribed the names of the 3 most E[xcellent] G[rand] M[aster]^s who presided at the building of 1st glorious T[emple]. On the top was a plate of gold, whereon was inscribed in the form of a O that great mysterious name vuvh, and within that in the figure a [Delta] what we suppose to be the Sac[re]^d w[or]^d itself. Having made this discovery we again closed [u]p the A[rch], with care as in duty bound, and come to make our report.

etc...

The subsequent sections cover the Qs & As, which later became the Principals' Lectures. Interestingly, the ceremony is performed as though with no Candidates!

B. MS: William Finch, "Ceremonies of Royal Arch & N.R.+", c1800

Book dated up to 1776, written in Bengal or Calcutta, apparently.

The Mode of Opening the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Jerusalem. Usual opening In the beginning...Om...Om... Om... (kneel) before whom we three do agree iIn love and unity the Sacred Word of Royal Arch Mason to keep and never to reveal it to any in the world unless it be when the sign, word demand me. Shortly after, each with right hand on left breast: "We three do agree the Royal Arch to raise. We three do agree the Royal Arch Word to seek. We three do agree the Royal Arch Word to keep."

Here we find the mysterious reference to the names of the 3 Sojourners. this time set in the time of King Solomon. The story opens with Enoch taken to heaven to be shown the triangular plate bearing the name of God, then to a vision of an underground vault of 9 perpendicular arches in which was a white marble pedestal. God commands him to build this and he does. Then the wickedness of the world brings about the flood. After having the two pillars of brass and brick created upon which are engravers all the arts and sciences. Solomon dreamed that on completing the Temple the true name of God revealed to Moses would be restored Also, he is commanded to build a corridor. So Solomon builds the vaulted walk from his apartment to beneath the Sanctum Sanctorum, there placing a pedestal of white porphyry called 'Abeshasco' or 'Abenshasco'. This was the second Vault of Wisdom, where the 3 GMs met. Next to Mount Moriah was Mount Calvery(?), and on building foundations they had come across the ruins of a more ancient building. So Solomon sent for his 3 Chief Grand Architects Stolkyn, Jacobert and G-1-m to explore. The first one

let down by rope is Stolkyn, who explores the first 3 arches before his courage fails him. In fact the arches are one atop of another, similar to the vault of Enoch. Each keystone comes with a ring which Stolkyn uses to prise open with his crowbar. Jacobert then goes down and opens up the next 3 arches. Then G-1-m goes down with a lighted flambeau, and in the 9th arch, which is illuminated by the brilliant light coming from the 12 jewels in the High Priest's breastplate, he finds the pedestal and instinctively gives the Sign of Admiration.

Also mentions the “different mystical ages of Masonry 3-5-7-9, and the mystical numbers, of the 12 Grand Names (tribes??) 3 with 3 letters, 3 with 5 letters, 3 with 7 letters, 3 with 9 letters. These are the mystical numbers of the degree of perfection. These add up to 72.”

C. MS: John Knight, “Sub. Deg. Of R.A. Mas.” (manu) 1791?

This is clearly the Antient Ritual (as opposed to the Domatic version elsewhere). Written in Redruth, Cornwall, where he was a member of the Druids Chapter of Royal Arch Masons No. 79 in 1791 . However, John Knight lists himself as "MEGP Z" and the other Principals EGP H and EGP J, so Zerubbabel was still the senior officer. The Candidate is examined in a MM Lodge to ensure he has gone through the Past Master Degree (evinced by giving the sign of a Master of Arts & Sciences), after the Chapter is Opened with “In the beginning.... Om/Om/Om”).

The cipher is confusing, substituting letters for others. However, after the opening prayer the Opening continues (probably)!:

Z From whence came Joshua (Jeshua)?
J From Babylon.
Z Where going?
J To Jerusalem.
Z What sho[ul]^d induce him to leave Babylon and go to Jerusalem?
J To afsist in clearing away the Rubish from the Building of the First Temple in hopes of finding the S. W. of Mcspnry [Masonry].
Z Was the S.W. lpst [lost]?
J It was.
Z How came it to be lost?
J By the D[eath] of our G[ran]^d M[aste]r HAB.
Z Let us then Search and use our best endeavours to find the S[acred] W[ord]....

Candidate enters, prayer said then led round with Scriptural reading: “ I

will bring him by a way that he knows not"....etc. *He kneels a first arch but finds nothing. Kneels at second arch and finds Law which he takes to Jeshua. Kneels at third arch and finds S.W. of God. Two prayers and Obligation including the words: "so that I will not in any wise aiding or afsisting at the Exaltⁿ of a MERAM except it be in a regularly constituted Chapter under Warrant or Sanction of His Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland Deceased of his Succesor."* Then welcomed into Order and Catechism given. Followed by Lectures.

As an interesting variation the triple tau is seen as a 'T' above an 'H' to stand for Templum Hierosalymum - Temple of Jerusalem. Also, the triangle stands on a pedestal so the "Sacred name of God sho^d never fall to the ground." Called "Royal" because it is presided over by a descendant of King Solomon.

Note no mention of veils!

D. MS: Anon., "Arundel Chapter index", c. 1808

Penalty "as the High Priest" shorthand indicates: "may my right arm be withered and changed to a state of Leprosy and left arm struck by a Serpent and the contaminated matter (?) circulate through every vein of my body that this corrupt frame of mine is totally ... [illegible]."

E. Com. G. Claret, "The Ceremonies, Etc. of The Holy Royal Arch also Passing the Vails", pub. London 1845 (first published H.R.A. Ritual)

This is broadly in line with modern working. However, the explanation of the signs is most interesting:

"On the front of the Pedestal are graven the names of the three Grand Masters, who presided at the building of the former Temple, viz. Solomon King of Israel, Hiram King of Tyre, and Hiram Abbiff, and are meant to perpetuate their names, as well as to commemorate the proceedings during the erection of the former temple; there is likewise a Triple Tau, or letter T, a mark or character affixed to the summonses of R.A. Masons, when summoned on other than usual occasions. The triple Tau or letter T is translated from the Hebrew, a mark or sign, spoken of by Ezekiel, when he said to the man with the inkhorn: "go thy way thro' the midst of the city of Jerusalem, and set a mark on all those who sigh and lament for the abomination thereof", by which mark they were saved

from among those who were, slain for their idolatry, by the wrathful displeasure of the Most High. In ancient times this mark was placed on the forehead of all those who were acquitted by their judges, as proof of their innocence; and military commanders caused a T to be placed on all those who had escaped unhurt from the field of battle, denoting that they were in perfect life, it has ever been considered the mark of life. The union of the three Ts, allude to the grand tri-union of the Deity by whom the horrific, gloomy and unshapen chaos was changed into form and existence. The Word you observe on the triangle is the sacred word, which you have promised and sworn never to divulge unless with the assistance of two or more R.A. Masons, lawfully congregated, constituted and dedicated, which as Principal of this Chapter, I am authorized to pronounce. It is in itself a compound word, and its combination forms the word J.B.O. J. the Chaldean name of God, signifying His essence of majesty incomprehensible, it is also a Hebrew word, signifying I AM, and shall eternal existence of the Most High. B. is an Assyrian word, signifying Lord or powerful. It is also a compound word; from the preposition Beth; which signifies in, or in heaven, or on high, therefore this word means Lord in heaven, or on high. O. is an Egyptian word, signifying father of all, it is also an Hebrew word implying strength, power, and expressive of the omnipotence of the father of all. Taking each together will read thus: I AM and shall be, Lord in heaven, father of all in every age, in every clime adored by saint, by savage and by sage, Jehovah Jove or Lord. The word on the circle is the grand, awful, tremendous and incomprehensible name of the Most High, signifying I AM the beginning and the ending, which was and is to come, the actual future, and all sufficient God, who alone has His being in, and of himself, and gives to all others their being, so that He was, what he is, is what he was, and shall be both what he was, and what he is, from everlasting to everlasting, all the creation being dependant on His mighty will. The Circle also typifies the Omnipotent and Almighty author of the universe, having neither beginning nor ending; it also calls to our remembrance the grand and awful hereafter, or futurity, where we hope to enjoy endless bliss, and everlasting life. The characters which are placed on each angle of the triangle are Hebrew, and particularly worthy of your attention, the Aleph answering to our A. the Beth to our B. and the Lamed to our L. Take the Aleph and the Beth, they form the word Ab, meaning father. The Aleph and Lamed the word Al, which means word. Take the Lamed the Aleph and the Beth, they form the word Lab, meaning Spirit. Take the Beth, Aleph and Lamed, the word Bul, meaning Lord. Take each angle of the triangle, they will form the following sentence, Father Lord, Word Lord, Spirit Lord.

“The triangle; was in the days of Phygoras (sic!) esteemed as the most sacred of all emblems, and when any oath of more than usual import was to be administered it as given on the triangle, and when so administered, none were even known to have violated it, the ancient Egyptians called it the sacred number

three, or number of perfection, and was an object of worship amongst the ancients as the grand principle of animated existence, and they gave it the name of God, representing the animal vegetable and mineral creation, it was also called Avolet, that is to say the soul of nature. The sacred Delta is usually placed in the midst of squares and circles, indicating the vivifying principle, extending its ramifications, throughout all created matter, it is therefore denominated the great all, or summum bonum.

F. Province of Bristol Ritual of the Degree of the Holy Royal Arch copied from the Standard Ritual 1949

- Z. Companions, assist me to open this Chapter. Ex. Comp. J., what is your duty?
J. To aid and assist in promoting the Lord's work.
Z. Ex. Comp H., what is your duty?
H. To aid and assist in protecting the Lord's work
Z. Let us pray. Almighty, Supreme and Incomprehensible Jehovah, assist us mercifully in this our undertaking. Grant that our endeavours to spread the knowledge of Thy Holy Word may be crowned with success, through Thy All-powerful protection.
All S.M.I.B.

All 3 rise and take the VSL each in his right hand.

- Z. In the beginning was the Word.
H. And the Word was with God.
J. And the Word was God.
Z. What are the attributes of this omnific Word?
J. Omniscience.
H. Omnipotence.
Z. Omnipresence. To the All-wise, All-powerful and Ever-present Being around whose throne may we hereafter assemble.

Each kisses the VSL in turn They proceed to the East.

Candidate is asked to give proofs of EA, FC and MM by signs and words. Then quizzed more completely on the 3rd Degree: how prepared, how received, differences in the Lodge room, death as the peculiar subject of the Degree, who killed, the instruments used, explain the meaning of FPOF. Pledge of fidelity.

Principle Sojourner now reads Exodus III, v1 -5 (Can removes shoes); v6 (Can. covers face with left hand); v 13-14; Exodus IV,v 1 -3 (Can throws

down rod); v4 (Can picks up rod); v5. Then PS says : The Sign of the First Veil is _____. The Password is _____. Can, led by DC now passes first veil. Ditto Veils 2 – 4. 2nd AS at first veil; 1st AS at second veil, PS at third veil.

Candidate readmitted.

Z. Then Bro, I exhort you to persevere with fidelity and firmness, and not to fall away as our forefathers did the time of need, when the wrath of God fell upon them for their disobedience as foretold by Jeremiah, and other prophets by whom he declared that for having forsaken His laws, and disobeyed His commandments, their city should become a desolation, their Temple reduced to ruins, and that they should feel the weight of His displeasure for seventy years. This prophecy began to be fulfilled in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakin, Anno Lucis 3398. An account of the destruction of the Temple will now be read by Ex. H. (reads II Chronicles XXXVI, v14-21). Long perambulations and scriptural readings of an eclectic nature, including Proverbs II v1-5 and III v13-26 (then Obligation taken - penalty: “than that of having my hand struck off with the sword of human justice, and publicly exposed in token of my infamy, or the Royal Arch fall in upon me and crush me beneath its ruins” - sealed four times on VSL); Exodus XXVIII (1st time), 36; Ezra III v8-10(2^{od} time); Nehemiah IV v1-6 & 16-18 (3^{1-d} time); Psalms LXVIII v4 (4th time); Haggai I v1-5 (5th time); Ezech VIII v1-3 (6th time); St. John I v1 (7th time).

Z. Who are you? Are you of the lineage of that set of traitors who fell away during the siege and went over to the enemy when liberty and kindred had most need of their assistance, or are you of the poor of the people, left in the land of Judah by Nebuzaradan, the chief of Nebuchadnezzar's officers to cultivate the fields and vineyards, or are you (as we are more inclined to suspect) descendants of those princes carried away captive into Babylon with King Zedekiah? Speak, who are you?

PS We are not, Most Excellent, of that timorous race of parasites, who, when their city was besieged and the Temple destroyed, basely fell away and deserted their trust; neither are we of the lower class, left behind by Nebuzaradan to cultivate the vineyards, till the land, and perform other servile offices; but as you rightly suspect, we are descendents of those brave but unfortunate princes carried away into Babylon with King Zedekiah. We now come to offer our best services in repairing the walls of our city, and rebuilding the Temple of our Lord.

Z. How have you been engaged during your captivity in Babylon?

PS In Masonry, Most Excellent.

Z. What do you mean by Masonry?

- PS That grand and comprehensive science which more especially teaches us the knowledge of ourselves and the duties incumbent upon us as men and Masons.
- Z That is worthy of your noble ancestors. In what labor do you wish to be engaged?
- PS We deem the lower situation in the Lord's house an honour, and therefore only seek employment.

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