

# From Swedish to Scottish: The Masonic Rites of Europe

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## Introduction

In Masonry, a Rite is a series of progressive degrees. All begin with the same three: Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason. In some jurisdictions, the word "Companion" is substituted for "Fellowcraft". But they all teach similar lessons. These degrees belong to the Symbolic, or Craft, or Blue Lodge. The earliest Lodges in England practiced what is known as the York Rite, and so does nearly every American Grand Lodge. But there are a number of other Rites that originated in Europe, and spread to the rest of the world. Let us explore their similarities and differences.

## The York Rite

We begin with the York Rite. According to custom, the ritual of the earliest Lodges came from the city of York in England, thus the term "York" Rite. We do not have a specific date of origin, just as we do not know when these Lodges began. But we can say that in 1717, the York Rite was the official Rite. This Rite requires that a man believe in a Supreme Being, but how he practices his faith is up to him.

After the Grand Lodge of England was founded, there developed a schism between two groups, known as the Antients and the Moderns. The Antients point to the Book of Constitutions for the importance of the Royal Arch:

"Ancient Masonry consists of four degrees, the first three of which are that of the Apprentice, the Fellowcraft, and the Sublime Degree of Master, and a brother being

well versed in these degrees, and having discharged the offices of the Lodge, particularly that of the Master, and fulfilled the duties thereof with the approbation of the brethren of his Lodge, is eligible, if found worthy, to be admitted to the fourth degree, the Holy Royal Arch."

When the Antients and the Moderns merged in 1813, forming the United Grand Lodge of England, part of the compromise was adding this proclamation:

"That pure Ancient Masonry consists of three degrees, and no more: viz. those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellowcraft, and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Royal Arch."

So as far as England is concerned, the York Rite consists of our first three degrees and the Royal Arch, which is part of the Blue Lodge. In the United States, when people think of the York Rite, they tend to think of appendant bodies. An appendant body, or concordant body, is a separate organization that requires you to be at least a Master Mason to join. The York Rite is thus the Royal Arch Chapter, the Knights Templar or Commandery, and in every state except for Virginia and West Virginia, the Council of Cryptic Masons. But the Royal Arch is only a continuation of the ritual of the Blue Lodge. Thus, the Rite practiced by two thirds of all Grand Lodges can rightly be called the York Rite. Some may argue that a better term would be the American Rite. But excluding the Royal Arch degree, our ritual does not vary significantly from England. There is an exception we will address later in this paper.

The origin of the Cryptic Degrees is unclear. The Select Master and Royal Master were conferred in the United States in the early 1800s. This led to the formation of the first Grand Council in 1819. But while most states formed Councils to confer these degrees, the Grand Chapters of Virginia and West Virginia decided to fold them into the Royal Arch Chapter. The third degree, the Super Excellent Master, was first conferred in 1817 and is a regular part of the degrees in some Grand Councils; an honorary degree in others; and

a separate Grand Council of Super Excellent Masters in yet other jurisdictions. This degree, unrelated in a ritualistic sense to the Select or Royal Master, is only available to Virginia and West Virginia Companions at special conferrals every few years, courtesy of another Grand Council such as North Carolina.

## The Swedish Rite

Count Axel Wrede-Sparre started the first regular Swedish Lodge in 1735 using York Rite ritual. In 1756, the first high-degree "Scottish" lodge was started with Carl Friedrich Eckleff as Master. In 1774 Duke Karl combined the two Lodges into the Grand Lodge of Sweden, and in 1801 now King Karl XIII launched the Swedish Rite with eleven degrees. This Rite is practiced with minor differences in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Finland, and parts of Germany. The major distinction with other Masonic Rites is that you must be a Christian, and remain a Christian, to be in the Swedish Rite.

The Swedish Rite consists of ten degrees across three groups: two Lodges and a Chapter. Unlike other Rites, all of the degrees are integrated into the same system. Thus, there are no side degrees or appendant bodies, all Masons belong to the same Rite. During your progress as a Mason, your status is not measured by what office you hold, but what degree you have attained. For example, the first line signer of a petition must have received at least the seventh degree, and the second line signer at least the third.

The Saint John's Lodge confers the first three degrees, and may require two to three years. Masons from Grand Lodges of other Rites are allowed to visit a Saint John's Lodge.

The Saint Andrew's Lodge confers the next three degrees: Apprentice and Companion of St. Andrew (a double degree), and Master of St. Andrew. A Brother may reach the sixth degree in four to six years.

The Chapter confers the final four degrees: Very Illustrious Brother, Knight of the East; Most Illustrious Brother, Knight of the West; Enlightened Brother of St. John's Lodge; and Very Enlightened Brother of St. Andrew's Lodge. A Brother may take twelve to twenty years to reach the tenth degree from the time he is initiated. Candidates are examined on their proficiency before receiving the next degree, they do this by writing in their own words the moral teachings of the degree they have received.

The eleventh degree is Most Enlightened Brother, Knight and Commodore with the Red Cross. It is referred to as the "R&K". This degree is by invitation only and is only offered to members of the Grand Council.

Each group meets and works in their own buildings. Most towns will have a St. John's Lodge, a few will have a St. Andrew's Lodge, and there is only one Chapter in each country. In Sweden, Finland, and Iceland, once you join a St. Andrew's Lodge, you are no longer a member of a St. John's Lodge, and only pay dues to the body you belong to. But as there is often a great distance to visit a St. Andrew's Lodge or a Chapter, travel expenses can be great. Thus, Friendship Clubs have been established to allow members to meet locally without conferring degrees, except by special dispensation.

## The Rite of Strict Observance

As Freemasonry spread in France, around 1725 the variant of Templar Masonry began to take hold. This system held that Freemasonry was a direct descendant, or continuation if you will, of the Knights Templar that participated in the Crusades. Their last Grand Master was Jacques DeMolay, who was executed in 1314. The legend is that his successor, Pierre d'Aumont, fled to Scotland with a few of his knights and established Freemasonry. The order spread to France and then to Germany, where Karl Gotthelf von Hund founded the Rite of Strict Observance in 1748 as a continuation of these principles. By 1768 this Rite had over forty Lodges. There were seven degrees in the Rite of Strict Observance:

1. Apprentice
2. Fellow
3. Master
4. Scots Master
5. Secular Novice
6. Knight
7. Lay Brother

One of the mysteries of this Rite were the true leaders of the organization, referred to as the "Unknown Superiors", of which Baron von Hund assured the members he was not one, but he did know who they were. Although initially popular, there was dissatisfaction among the membership from never learning this secret, and the Rite did not last beyond the death of its founder in 1776. Why are we discussing a Rite that is no longer being practiced? The answer will be revealed in the next section.

## The Rectified Scottish Rite

The Rectified Scottish Rite was established in 1778 under the leadership of Duke Ferdinand of Brunswick-Luneburg. It evolved out of several orders, such as the Rite of Strict Observance, the Order of Knight Masons of the Elect Cohens of the Universe, Scottish Masonry, and Craft Masonry from England. The Rectified Scottish Rite retained some of the trappings of Strict Observance but dropped the pretense of being a literal successor to the Knights Templar. The Rite, which still requires members to be a Christian, completed its evolution in 1782. After going dark for many decades, the Rite grew in popularity at the end of the 19th century. The Rectified Scottish Rite is practiced primarily in France, where individual Lodges may choose from a wide variety of Rites. The Rite has eight degrees divided into four classes, or lodges.

The first is the Lodge of Saint John, or "Blue" Lodge, with the familiar three degrees.

The Lodge of Saint Andrew, or "Green" Lodge, has the Scottish Master of Saint Andrew Degree.

The Inner Order has the degrees of Novice Squire and Beneficent Knight of the Holy City, also known as "CBCS Knight".

The Secret Class has two degrees, Professed and Grand Professed.

The governing body in a country is typically referred to as a Grand Priory. In some jurisdictions, this Rite exists as an appendant body, in others, all the degrees are conferred by the Rite. Members wear swords and other regalia. This makes the Rectified Scottish Rite quite similar to the Commandery here in the United States, showing the ongoing influence of the Rite of Strict Observance.

Speaking of which, the Rite of Strict Observance was responsible for the first conferral of the Order of the Temple in North America in 1769, when Captain William Davis, a Past Master, was knighted. Knights Templar in the United States did not officially begin until the Grand Encampment in Philadelphia was founded in 1797, some thirty years later!

We now observe a remarkable thing about the Rite of Strict Observance, which ended around 1776. It was responsible for the founding of not one but two Masonic organizations, years after the Rite had dissolved! Jacques DeMolay would be proud.

## The French Rite

The French Rite, or Traditional French Rite, or Modern Rite, was founded in 1786 by the Grand Orient of France. It traces its origins back to the Modern Masons who imported it from England, but the Grand Orient wanted to set French Freemasonry apart and gave it another name. The Rite has eight degrees, the first three are in the Blue Lodge.

There are four Orders conferred in a Chapter:

First order (4th degree): Secret Elect

Second order (5th degree): Scottish Grand Elect

Third order (6th degree): Knight of the Orient

Fourth order (7th degree): Sovereign Rose-Cross Prince, Perfect Freemason, Grand Commander of the Temple

There is a fifth Order conferred by certain Grand Lodges that requires the study of the ritual of all eighty degrees practiced across all French Rites. This order is very similar to the 28th Degree, or "Knight of the Sun", in the Scottish Rite.

## The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite

In 1745 Etienne Morin founded the Respectable Lodge of the Perfect Elected in the city of Bordeaux, which conferred the Eccosais or Scottish Master Degrees. These ten degrees culminated in the Scottish Master Degree, later Grand Elect Perfect, or Perfect Elu. By 1799 the Eccosais degrees had become quite popular in France, and the Grand Orient banned their conferral within the confines of the city of Paris.

In 1801 in Charleston, South Carolina, the first Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite was formed. The ten Scottish Master degrees have grown to 32 degrees culminating in Master of the Royal Secret. The Supreme Council is composed of nine members who received the 33rd and last degree. Alexandre de Grasse-Tilly, who was instrumental in establishing the Mother Supreme Council, returns to France in 1804. Shortly after his return, several Scottish Master Lodges, at odds with the Grand Orient, meet to establish a "General Scottish Grand Lodge of the Rite Ancient and Accepted". This Supreme Council spawned others in Europe and South America, sharing the Scottish Rite degrees with a hungry audience. There are now nearly as many Supreme Councils as there are Grand Lodges throughout the world.

Earlier in this paper we mentioned that nearly all American Grand Lodges practice York Rite. The one exception is the Supreme Council of Louisiana, which confers all 32 degrees of the Scottish Rite, including those of the Symbolic Lodge.

In most jurisdictions, the Scottish Rite is an appendant body, like the Royal Arch Chapter. In others, a Mason is initiated an Entered Apprentice and receive all his degrees from the same body. An interesting fact about how quickly these degrees are conferred: In the United States, you may receive them all over several days or even a single day, while in Europe and South America it takes up to twenty years to receive your 32nd degree.

## The Emulation Rite

The Emulation Rite is not a separate Rite as such, but a variation of ritual for the first three degrees. It was constituted by the United Grand Lodge of England in 1817 to symbolize the reconciliation of the Ancients and Moderns. There are no higher degrees, but some English and French Lodges will confer the Royal Arch Degree using this ritual.

## The Standard Rite of Scotland

The Standard Rite of Scotland was codified in 1969, and claims to descend from the original Scottish ritual practiced before the Grand Lodge of England was founded. The original ritual had five degrees. As practiced in France there are only three, with the "brand" or "mark" degree as a side degree.

## Conclusion

There are other Rites that are practiced, in this paper we focused on the most popular and the most influential. One consistent element is found among all Masons: We are all initiated, passed, and raised. We are all taught the same virtues no matter what our Rite may be called.