

**The Royal Arch Of Zerubbabel (York Or American Rite) And  
The Royal Arch Of Solomon (Scottish Rite)**

By

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**Presented to A. Douglas Smith, Jr. Lodge of Research, #1949**

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*The opinions presented in this paper are strictly those of the author and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Master and Wardens of the A. Douglas Smith Jr., Lodge of Research #1949 or the official views of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Virginia.*

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Being a member and therefore very interested in both the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction, and of the York or American Rite, I was curious about the relationship between the Royal Arch of Solomon degree of the Scottish Rite and the Royal Arch of Zerubbabel Degree of the York or American Rite. When I started my research on this subject, I became even more intrigued when I read that the three degrees now known as the Cryptic degrees, were originally so-called “side degrees” of the Ancient Accepted Rite or Rite of Perfection and were conferred upon Royal Arch Masons, or Masons of the Ninth Arch. research on this subject, I became even more intrigued when I read that the three degrees now known as the Cryptic degrees, were originally so-called “side degrees” of the Ancient Accepted Rite or Rite of Perfection and were conferred upon Royal Arch Masons, or Masons of the Ninth Arch.<sup>11</sup> It was equally as interesting to learn that the second Council for the Cryptic Degrees in the world was formed right here in Virginia where there is no longer any separate Council for the Cryptic Degrees, they being awarded in the Royal Arch Chapters and under the auspices of the Grand Chapter.

Many Masons who are members of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite may be interested to know that Mackey’s Revised Encyclopedia offers the following definition, “Royal Arch Masonry: That Division of Speculative Masonry which is engaged in the investigation of the mysteries connected with the Royal Arch, no matter under what name or in what Rite. Thus the mysteries of the Knight of the Ninth Arch Masonry constitute the Royal Arch Masonry of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite just as much as those of the Royal Arch of Zerubbabel do the Royal Arch of the American Rite.”<sup>2</sup> At least one Masonic author has therefore declared that anyone who has received this 13<sup>th</sup> degree of the Scottish Rite is equally as entitled to the title “Royal Arch Mason” as one who has

received the degree of Royal Arch of Zerubbabel under the York Rite, or, as it is known in the rest of the world, the American Rite.

The Knight of the Ninth Arch degree is now known as the Royal Arch of Solomon, the thirteenth degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction, U.S.A. It has also sometimes been called the Royal Arch of Enoch which is probably a more accurate name as it is not until the Fourteenth Degree that the Royal Arch, constructed at the command of Solomon for the re-interment of the lost word, is found to appear in those degrees.

## Which came first, the American Rite Royal Arch of Zerubbabel or the Scottish Rite Royal Arch of Solomon?

Brother Mackey traces the history of the Thirteenth Degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite as being very closely related to the Grand Royal Arch Degree of the Rite of Mizraim.<sup>3</sup> The Rite of Mizraim originated at Milan in 1805.<sup>4</sup> The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction traces its origins to the establishment of a Grand Lodge of Perfection in 1783<sup>5</sup> and the foundation of the Supreme Council in Charleston in 1801<sup>6</sup>, although the degrees are said to be descended from those of the Council of Emperors of the East and West, formed in Paris in 1758.<sup>7</sup> It seems to me that these degrees must have come from legends which existed prior to the formal foundation even of that Council. Pike says that the Irishman, Lawrence Dermott, introduced into England about 1750 the Royal Arch, modified from that of Enoch, “with other French degrees”<sup>8</sup> and this was to become one of the bones of contention between Dermott’s Antients and the Moderns. Art DeHoyos, Scottish Rite Supreme Council Archivist, tells us, “Further, a Samaritan tradition existed in the Scottish Rite’s 13<sup>th</sup> Royal Arch ritual Pike received from Albert G. Mackey which stated, ‘The sacred name was still to

be seen in the Temple in the time of St. Jerome, written in ancient Samaritan characters...'”<sup>9</sup>

The booklet, “A Preview of York Rite”, prepared by the York Rite Sovereign College of Detroit Michigan, states that the first Grand Lodge in England was formed in 1705 at York and “perhaps” conferred the EA, FC, MM, Mark, Royal Arch and Templar Orders. The earliest actual record of the conferral of the American (or York) Rite Royal Arch Degree dates from December 22, 1753 when three Brethren were exalted to that degree in Fredericksburg Lodge. However, references to the degree occurred in 1743 in England.<sup>10</sup> Fredericksburg was a Moderns Lodge while Royal Arch references in England in 1752 were in the records of the Antient Grand Lodge, founded in 1751, whose growing success and the popularity of its Royal Arch compelled the older Modern Grand Lodge to adopt the degree. The cited booklet reports that as late as 1759 the Grand Secretary of the Moderns wrote, “Our society is neither Arch, Royal Arch, or Ancient...” At the union of the Antients and Moderns in 1813, they declared that “pure Ancient 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.”<sup>11</sup> Scholars have disputed the real meaning of this four-in-three statement ever since.

However, the noted Masonic scholar and author, Brother Arthur Edward Waite scathingly denounces this amalgamation of the Master Masons and Royal Arch Degrees saying, “There is nothing in the Third Degree to suggest that any precious objects were laid in a place of concealment; on the contrary, the genuine secrets had living custodians. ... as now known and worked among us, the Arch never formed part of the Third Degree.”<sup>12</sup> According to this, then, the Master Masons and Royal Arch Degree origins cannot be considered contemporaneous.

In my opinion, it is very highly probable that the York Rite Royal Arch degree, as practiced in Virginia prior to its modification in 1820, originally came from the Scottish Rite heritage as it was introduced to Virginia by Joseph Myers, a Deputy Inspector General of the Rite “Ancient and Accepted” or Scottish Rite. The Virginia Grand

Chapter was organized in 1808 and continued to work this ritual until 1820 when William Cushman convinced Grand Chapter to adopt the Zerubbabel ritual, very similar to what is worked today, that had been approved by the General Grand Chapter. This incidentally, resulted in the appointment of Companion Cushman as the Grand Lecturer, which, in those days, was very likely a very profitable position. It is believed that the earlier ritual was similar to that worked in Ireland today based upon the legend of Josiah.<sup>13</sup>

Since the date of origin of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Royal Arch of Solomon degree cannot be established beyond doubt, I feel it is not possible to say definitively which came first and believe that they both came from earlier legends. Wallace McLeod, noted Canadian Masonic scholar and author, has written regarding the Royal Arch legend, “Actually the story ... comes from the ancient Greek historian Philostorgius of Cappadocia (c. 400 AD) who wrote a *History of the Church*. Philostorgius tells the following story: “*The Roman Emperor Julian ordered the Temple at Jerusalem to be rebuilt ...when the foundations were being readied, one stone, that had been laid in the bottom of the course was dislodged and revealed a cavern built into the rock ...they could not see inside ...The overseers wanted to know the truth, so they fastened one of their workmen to a long rope and let him down... feeling around, in the centre he discovered a block of rock projecting ... when he put his hand on it he found a scroll. He picked it up and gave a signal to be pulled up ... the scroll astonished both Gentiles and Jews, for when it was opened it displayed the words, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’...*”<sup>14</sup>

#### **How do the American Rite Royal Arch of Zerubbabel and the Scottish Rite Royal Arch of Solomon degrees compare?**

The legend of the Royal Arch of Solomon degree centers on the recovery of the lost word which had been revealed to Enoch in a dream. He journeyed in search of the site of his dream but, becoming weary, stopped in Canaan where he caused workmen to excavate nine vertical apartments in the earth, each covered by an arch. In the lowest apartment, hewn from rock, he engraved the ineffable name of deity,

which could not be pronounced, in a triangular plate of gold placed on an alabaster pedestal. Over the top arch he constructed a modest temple to conceal that which was below. When King Solomon started construction of a building for administration and justice, the workmen constructing the foundation found the ruined modest temple and uncovered the opening to the underground vaults. They were then lowered into the vault where they recovered the triangle which was carried to King Solomon, who immediately recognized the ineffable name and gratefully conferred upon the workmen the title, Masons of the Ninth or Royal Arch.<sup>15</sup>

Pike tells us that the name Enoch means initiate or initiator, which here has allusion to the advancement in the mysteries. Pike says it does not matter if the legend is historically accurate, because the allegory, like the parables in the Bible, teaches truth at least as much as the history. Pike explains that the allegory perpetuates the knowledge of the true God. The underground vaults may be understood as the place of initiation which was often underground in the ceremonies of the ancient mysteries. He says, “the name of the Diety, engraven upon the triangular plate, and that sunken into the cube of agate, taught the ancient Mason, and teaches us, that the true knowledge of God, of his nature, and his attributes, is written by Him upon the leaves of the Great Book of Universal Nature and may be read there by all who are endowed with the requisite amount of intellect and intelligence. This knowledge of God, so written there, and of which Masonry has in all ages been the interpreter, is the Master Mason’s Word.”<sup>16</sup>

The Royal Arch of Zerubbabel Degree of the American Rite is preceded by the degrees of Mark Master, Past Master, and (in Virginia) the Council Degrees which set the stage for it. Prior to the reformation of the Royal Arch Chapters in Virginia in 1820, some 12 years after the foundation of the Grand Chapter, the titles of the Officers were based upon the legend of Josiah, which ritual was used in the Grand Lodge of Ireland, rather than upon the legend of Zerubbabel.<sup>17</sup> The underground vaults, (and again there are nine), are also accidentally discovered during later construction but this time during removal of rubbish for the re-building of the Temple of Solomon by Zerubbabel. Upon the first descent of three workmen, they find the jewels of our Most Excellent First Three Grand Masters. A

second descent reveals a copy of the Ark of the Covenant with contents, and with markings on a triangle upon the top of it. The markings prove to be the long lost omnific word communicated to Enoch long before.

George H. Steinmetz finds in this degree a great deal of sacred symbolism and stresses its lessons about the triune nature of man, created in the image of God, and that each man must discover for himself the truth that the Kingdom of God resides within him. This he can discover by following the dictum, “Seek and ye shall find.” or “Know Thyself.”<sup>18</sup>

The Knight Masons, an honorary and invitational adjunct of Royal Arch Masonry, work three degrees – Knight of the Sword, Knight of the East, and Knight of the East and West. These “Green Degrees” which were brought to the United States from Ireland in 1936, were worked in Ireland under the auspices of the Royal Arch Chapters and later under the Commandery Preceptories. There are indications that the degrees may be older than the Master Mason Degree. These three degrees are very similar to the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, and 17<sup>th</sup> Degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

In summary, while there are differences between the details of the Royal Arch degrees of the two Rites, I find more basic similarities than differences. To me, the core of each is the recovery of the lost word, the ineffable name of God, which had been communicated to Enoch and later buried under nine vaults. Since I cannot trace their exact origins, I cannot conclude definitively that either provided the pattern for the other. In the back of my mind, it is my strong hunch that it is likely that both descended from a common legendary origin.

**ENDNOTES**

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- <sup>1</sup> Hinman, Denslow and Hunt, *History of the Cryptic Rite*
- <sup>2</sup> Mackey, Albert G., *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, Vol. II, p. 645; The Masonic History Company; Chicago, New York, London; 1921
- <sup>3</sup> Mackey, Albert G., *Op. Cit.*, p. 644
- <sup>4</sup> Mackey, Albert G., *Op. Cit.*, p. 487
- <sup>5</sup> Mackey, Albert G., *Op. Cit.*, p.671
- <sup>6</sup> Clausen, Henry C., *Clausen's Commentaries on Morals and Dogma*; The Supreme Council 33<sup>o</sup> Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry Southern Jurisdiction, U.S.A.; 1983; p. 2
- <sup>7</sup> Pike, Albert, *The Book of the Words*; The Scottish Rite Research Society, Washington, D.C.; 1999; p. 28
- <sup>8</sup> DeHoyos, Art, *The Book of the Words, Introduction*; The Scottish Rite Research Society, Washington, D.C.; 1999; p. xii
- <sup>9</sup> Mackey, Albert G., *Op. Cit.*, p. 671
- <sup>10</sup> Mackey, Albert G., *Op. Cit.*, p. 644
- <sup>11</sup> Mackey, Albert G., *Ibid*
- <sup>12</sup> Waite, Arthur Edward, *A New Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, Wings Books, Avenel, N.J.; 1994, pp. 375, 376
- <sup>13</sup> Report of Committee of Foreign Correspondence of Grand Chapter 1855, as reported in *The Cryptic Rite in Virginia*, William Mosely Brown, © Grand Chapter, Royal Arch Masons in Virginia, 1958
- <sup>14</sup> Macleod, Wallace, “\_\_\_\_\_”; “*Philaethes Magazine*, \_\_\_, 19\_\_; p. \_\_
- <sup>15</sup> Clausen, Henry C., *Op. Cit.*, p. 76
- <sup>16</sup> Pike, Albert, *Morals and Dogma*, The Supreme Council of the Southern Jurisdiction, A.A.S.R., U.S.A.; 1950; pp. 204 – 217
- <sup>17</sup> Gay, Archer Bailey, *A History of the Grand Chapter of Virginia*, Masonic Home Press, Inc., Highland Springs, VA; 1958; p.4
- <sup>18</sup> Steinmetz, George H., *The Royal Arch, Its Hidden Meaning*, Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co., Inc., Richmond, VA; pp. 64 - 138