The continuity from 3rd Degree to Royal Arch.

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1. Apparent history of the RA

The first unequivocal reference to the RA is in 1743, in Youghall, County Cork. RA, however, only really took off by about 1766, according to Beresiner[i], as quoted in Acaster.

As usual, the objective history doesn't tell the whole story. There was definitely something on the go before it merited the 1743 mention (County Cork referred to it as if it was already a going concern). Also, it is a fair assumption that, like the Craft, the legends we currently use are not the same as those used in the distant past.

The issue I want to tackle in this paper is the way in which the underlying themes in the Royal Arch interlock with the underlying themes in Craft Freemasonry.

2. Links between the 3rd degree and the Royal Arch

The two degrees fit together very well on several levels:

The Temple-building theme
The "place" where the lost secret is found fits the suggestions in the Craft ritual as to where we should look
The content of the lost secret, when rediscovered talks very strongly to the idea of inner revelation and power (a very modern concept)
The Qabbalistic theme of Craft Freemasonry is carried forward in a hint about the 72 Names of God
The echoes in the two degrees, of the Ancient Mss.

3. Preliminary: the underlying themes in the 3rd degree.

We are told at the beginning of the explanation of the Tracing Board: "The usages and customs of Freemasonry have ever born a near affinity with those of the Ancient Egyptians."[ii] This affinity is not just about keeping out the Cowans, but in the ancient practice of dividing the Lesser from the Greater Mysteries. Candidates are inducted into the lesser mysteries (the mysteries of Isis) by means of rituals within a temple, and these Mysteries can actually be taught.

The Greater Mysteries, the Mysteries of Osiris, I only discovered after much searching, cannot be taught; they can only be discovered by the Candidate on his own, as he negotiates his way through the World.

The other ancient Mystery religions use the same principles: the ultimate test of your Christian Faith is how you live it in the World.

As I mentioned in a previous paper, Craft Freemasonry also embraces both Lesser and Greater Mysteries. The lesser Mysteries are taught through the three Degrees; the Candidate's progress through the Greater Mysteries is called the search for the "Genuine Secrets of a Master Mason".

We sometimes lose sight of the fact that we are expected to search for the "genuine secrets of a Master Mason" – partly because we seldom see the long method of closing a Lodge in the 3rd degree.

All three degrees refer to the heart, the safe and sacred repository of Masonic secrets; it's so clear that the quest for the "genuine secrets" is supposed to be inward, digging down through the layers of pretence and habit to reconnect with the real person. It fits what Caroline Myss calls [iii]"Mystics without a monastery" **This** is the purpose of Craft Freemasonry; we learn the progressive science of Freemasonry as a process of personal spiritual growth and transformation.

We get so tied up in the actual story of Hiram Abiff that we forget *why* it has been chosen as out main legend. We are also relatively unaware of the fact that the Legend only came into the Craft in the 1730's. Prior to that, Freemasons raised Candidates in a Working about Shem, Ham and Japheth raising the body of their father by the 5 points of fellowship.

4. Important issues in the two degrees

Just as our thinking can be misdirected by the Legend in the 3rd Degree, the same misdirection can occur in the RA. We can be blinded to the real *"Sod"* levels of significance without even realizing it. When I first presented my paper on the quest for the "genuine secrets of a Master Mason", a very senior Bro. mouthed the words at me: "It's a Word."

I had been at pains to show that "Word" is itself a metaphor – based on the various shades of meaning we find in John 1[1]. "Word" there carries the connotations of "logical principle, guiding Truth, creative spark," and so on.

So, for many Brn., the Legend of the RA is merely about the recovery of the "Lost Word." That begs a question: when you find that Word, what use is it? Whatcha gonna **do** with it?

This "Lost Word" idea is tantalizing if we choose to remain on the merely analogical plane. Whilst I was pondering this, problem, I yet again lost my temper with the Muses' Threnodie[iv]:

… For we be brethren of the Rosie Crosse

We have the Masons Word and the second sight

Things for to come we can foretell aright.

[Note, by the way, the date of publication of that poem!]

a. Continuity of the Legends

We should first look at the Legends of the RA themselves. As in Craft Freemasonry, they have to do with Temple building. There is a major lesson in the fact that we are dealing with the **re**-building of the Temple. The parallel is to be found in the Grail Quest.

After some years, Perceval had become totally wrapped up in the affairs of the Round Table, and had lost sight of his experiences in the Grail Castle – forgetting his solemn vow to attain to the Grail that he had lost. This oblivion of busy-ness came to a rude and abrupt end with the visit of the Loathly Maiden.

For many of us, especially after reaching the end of our upward climb to the Chair or a Chain, there comes the question: "What now?" The Quest for the Lost Word/Genuine secrets has been interrupted, **unfulfilled**. There is a need to revisit the Temple and to rebuild it. Now, of course, innocence and zeal will have to be replaced by sobriety and wise skill …

b. Continuity of the hiding place of the Lost Word/Genuine Secrets

We can then look at the location of this Word in the RA. It is discovered in a crypt, within a triangle. This crypt is referred to, not in Masonic legend, but in Josephus, as paraphrased by Manly P. Hall[v]. This legend states that Enoch created 2 pillars, one to withstand fire, the other to withstand flood. On the one he inscribed all the learning of his time, and on the other, an instruction to dig deep to find greater knowledge. He then placed, on a golden triangle on an altar, the name of God. This altar he buried in the bottommost chamber of nine crypts, each one under the other. Solomon discovered this crypt when starting to build the Temple, and replaced the original pillars with J & B.

So the Pillars are in the Craft, and the Crypt is in the RA.

Other versions of this legend are found in the Cooke and Dowland Mss. These Masonic legends ascribe the pillars to Tubal Cain.

I haven't worked out why Hall should have roped in Josephus, but he gets a lot of mileage out of him, even linking the nine crypts to the nine levels of initiation of true adepts. I note, in passing that the number of the RA degree is 9 …

On an esoteric level, however, is the fact that true seekers have to dig down. The genuine secrets of a Master Mason, as hinted at in Craft ritual *passim*, are buried within a mason's heart. We are required to grow as Masons by uncovering our true selves, and bringing God's presence within our hearts to the light. This is a Great Work, just as the alchemists believed, requiring lifelong diligence (1st degree working tools).

c. Continuity of the story line

The third level of linkage between the Craft and the RA lies in the idea, now firmly fixed in Freemasons' minds, that what HA died for is the Word of the RA.

Yes, and no. The idea is only true inasmuch as the two legends taken together are **meant** to be understood as metaphors. The Name we find in the Crypt is the analogy of the Person; not the Person himself. The Crypt is the "safe and sacred repository". We are to journey downward an inward till that indwelling Entity is revealed to us and then through us.

As I hinted above, there was a little bit of consternation when I first mooted the idea that we should be questing inward to find the Lost Word, but confirmation of my correctness came from an unexpected quarter. I was shown a painting of a blue Buddha. He is depicted with a large red heart, in which is a chalice, or Grail. In meditation, the Initiates in this group journey inward to the heart, and then experience a merging with the Divine …

That Word is of no value whilst it is merely a name, and external/intellectual; it must become Personal, and then it is powerful and transforming.

d. Continuity of the Qabbalistic themes

Whenever we talk about pillars and names, Freemasonry touches common ground with the Qabbalah. In Craft Freemasonry, we find triplets of pillars, all pointing to the same thing: the Tree of Life, a schematic representation of God's nature and attributes, and thus, a representation of the perfect state that Mankind was supposed to be and attain to (Adam Kadmon).

Having negotiated the infinite ramifications of the Tree of Life in the Craft, we will discover the 72 Names of God[vi] in the RA. The single Name in the RA serves as a symbol: a nod in the direction of 3 consecutive verses in Exodus which have the same numerical value, and the same number of letters. These letters can be placed in 72 triads, all of which have exactly the same numerical value. These names can be used by a Seeker as tools for meditation, transformation and prayer – Words of power to heal and transform from within.

This becomes more like the implied power and insight referred to in the Muses' threnodie.

Both this point and the point above have eerie echoes for me in the Working in the Royal Order: a constant reminder that the symbol is not the reality – the Name is not the Person … until the Person is called upon by that Name.

e. Continuity of themes in the Ancient Mss.

As I have noted above, Cooke and Dowland (15th Century) talk about the Pillars, attributing them to the great-grandson of Cain. The purpose of these pillars is made clear by reference to Enoch and Noah in other degrees – the retention of knowledge for the benefit of the survivors of God's judgement.

The story of God's judgement is found in the Book of Enoch, as referred to in Genesis, one of Peter's epistles, and Jude's epistle. This work was suppressed by ecclesiastical authorities in the West in the 4th Century, and only restored to us when the Book of Enoch was found in the Eighteenth Century, and translated in 1821.

So how come the Ancient Mss mention it?

Another link is the story in the 2nd Degree, that the pillars of the Temple were fashioned hollow that they might serve as repositories for the archives of Freemasonry. This is an attractive adaptation of the original legend from which it derives.

Taken together, the 3rd Degree and the RA present a fascinating new look at Scripture. The descendants of Cain are highly skilled Operatives. Their motivation to preserve knowledge after judgement day is complemented by the descendants of the Speculative Seth, who adds the power within (and places it where only a true and genuine seeker will find it).

These two lines become, later in Scripture, the lines of King and Prophet (Z & H). To them is added the line of the Priesthood, represented originally by Abel. Those three offices are represented in the RA by the three Rulers. Much can be made of this theme psychologically, sociologically and theologically.

Significantly, the Operative knowledge inscribed on the pillars is quickly appropriated and propagated – even by Heroes of Faith (Abraham is cited in the Mss) [a telling insight into Human Nature?].

5. Conclusion

It is stating the obvious to maintain that the RA sequence of degrees follows on logically from the Craft. As the creators of the York rite worked on the Craft Legends, they harmonized the other degrees in their sequence.

I originally began this study with the objective of finding themes and subject matter in the Ancient Mss. which pointed to the Royal Arch degree. This did not transpire … yet. What I had read as an Ancient Legend when I was new to Masonry turned out to be Manly Hall's appropriation of Josephus. Still, there are about 130 Mss., I've only found a few so far.

As my study of the RA progressed, I found the last thing that I wanted to discover. I had been quite happy to accept the secularization of Freemasonry, as long as it allowed me to find my own spirituality in my own way.

I was thus unprepared for the ritualized allegory of digging down into my innermost being until the Divine Presence is revealed – a theme to be found in every Faith tradition with which I am familiar.

Thus the only thing to be derived from this study is confirmation of the old adage: that Freemasonry is the handmaiden of religion; nothing less.

That conclusion, however, begs many other questions.

6. Sources

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    - Acaster, E. John T. Making sense of Royal Arch history. – Internet reference

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[i] Acaster, p. 2.
[ii] Rainbow ritual,
[iii] In Entering the castle, passim.
[iv] Adamson, Henry The Muses' threnodie. – Edinburgh, 1638.
[v] An encyclopedic outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic and Rosicrucian symbolical philosophy. p. 273.
[vi] The 72 names of God : technology for the soul, passim.