

The Royal Ark Mariner Degree

The first known reference to Noah in connection with Freemasonry is in the Regius Poem of about 1390. This is the earliest of the “Old Charges” — the earliest of the British code of regulations relating to Freemasonry.

Other references to Noah occur from time to time, including Anderson’s Book of Constitution of 1723, the Graham Manuscript of 1726 (another of the Old Charges), and a number of the other Old Charges. These however are not so much concerned with Noah and the Ark as they are with the discovery, after the flood, of Enoch’s two pillars. Enoch was the great grand father of Noah, and legend has it that he built two pillars, one of brick, the other of stone. On these he inscribed the knowledge and principles of the seven liberal arts and sciences as then known, and the history of mankind. This legend is part of the lecture to the newly Installed W.C.N., given at a R.A.M. installation.

As far as we can tell, Noah was more important to the early Freemasons than Hiram Abiff, even though there is evidence that Hiram appeared in Craft documents as early as 1550. There is also some evidence that in some early ceremonies, it was Noah who was found dead in a grave, not Hiram Abiff, and that it was Noah’s three sons, Ham, Shem and Japhet who raised the dead body.

It seems that the Royal Ark Mariner degree came into being between 1730 and 1780, when many new degrees appeared. It is possible, perhaps even probable, that it arose because of the interest of early Freemasons in Noah, but we cannot go beyond this. The earliest record we have of the degree being conferred is dated 1790, which means that the degree was known and practised before 1790.

The degree fell by the wayside in about 1800, and was little practised except in the north of England until 1870. Late in that year, the Grand Mark Lodge of England took control of the R.A.M. degree, and since then, it has made steady progress. In 1968, there were 464 active R.A.M. lodges in England and Wales, and 77 in four states in Australia. These 77 were attached to Mark Lodges.

In Scotland, the R.A.M. degree is taken after the Royal Arch, just as we do in Queensland. It is there controlled by the S.G.R.A.C. of Scotland. It is apparent, therefore, that the S.G.R.A.C. of Queensland is following Scottish practice in working and controlling the R.A.M. degree, whilst R.A.M. lodges attached to Mark Lodges are following the English practice.

The Altar of Incense.

In both the Jewel lecture and the Mystical lecture is mentioned “an altar of incense, or true double cube”. What is an altar of incense?

We find the answer in Exodus, chapter 30, commencing at verse 1; “You shall make an altar to burn incense on; of acacia shall you make it. A cubit shall be its length, and a cubit its breadth, and two cubits shall be its height;

.And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it;... .a perpetual incense before the Lord.....”

It is clear that the altar was a true double cube. Moreover, the altar was specifically for burning incense: “You shall offer no unholy incense thereon, nor burnt offering, nor cereal offering; and you shall pour no libation thereon.”

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