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Semper Sursum Chapter explanation of the Royal Arch Certificate produced by Excellent Companion J W Campbell P.A.G.Soj. , P.2nd Pr.G.Principal.

EXPLANATION OF THE ROYAL ARCH CERTIFICATE

Companion during the ceremony of your Exaltation you were rewarded with, a Jewel as a mark of our entire approbation, and admitted a Companion amongst us. The Most Excellent has now handed to you your Certificate from the Supreme Grand Chapter of England, as documentary evidence that you are a regular Royal Arch Mason, and that your name has been entered as such in the books of Supreme Grand Chapter.

But the value of this Certificate is not confined to the script thereon, for like the Royal Arch Jewel, it contains certain symbols which I shall explain.

Before proceeding however to an explanation of these symbols, it is necessary to direct your attention to the pre-eminent position held by this Supreme Decree in the early part of the eighteenth century.

Long before the union of the two Grand Chapters in 1817, the Royal Arch Degree was held in the highest esteem, and conferment of the degree was the highest privilege that could be obtained by a Mason. But the ceremony was not worked in a separate Chapter as at present, for the Royal Arch was definitely considered by the Antients to be an integral part of the Craft.

I should here explain what I mean by the "Antients". In 1717 the Premier Grand Lodge --- the Mother Lodge of the world, was founded. But a rival Grand Lodge was founded in 1751. The second called itself the "Antients", saying that it practised true and ancient Freemasonry. And as a mark of disrespect it called the first Grand Lodge the "Moderns". Both practised the Royal Arch - the Moderns very quietly --- but the Antients very publicly, so that they became known as the Grand Lodge of the Four Degrees.

When the privilege of Exaltation was to be conferred on a Brother in pre-union days the ceremony was given in a Craft Lodge after it had been* opened in the "High and Excellent Supreme and Holy Royal Arch Chapter of Jerusalem."

If you will now look at your Certificate you will find ample evidence of this close affinity between the Craft and the Royal Arch for it still contains Craft features which appeared in the Royal Arch Certificate designed by Laurence Dermott in 1753.

Thus at the head of the certificate you will find the initials "In The Name Of The Great Architect Of The Universe" and not "In The Name Of The True And Living God Most High", and you will remember the first set of letters from your First Degree in Craft Masonry. You will also note that the letters are in the form of a Catenarian Arch, which is mentioned in the Symbolical Lecture. At the foot you will find the Mosaic pavement of a Craft Lodge instead of the concave flooring of the Royal Arch, in allusion to the Secret Vault. Many Chapters do not have a Royal Arch carpet, so that explanation is necessary. But if you go to Grange Chapter you will see the Royal Arch carpet in use, and you will find that the normal carpet assumes a concave formation, and when you look at it you can imagine that you are descending into a cavern.

In addition, the seal of Supreme Grand Chapter, except for the lettering around it, is identical with the seal of United Grand Lodge.

In the centre of the certificate is a pedestal in the form of the Altar of Incense, the doubled cube. From earliest ages the doubled cube has been a venerated symbol signifying immensity of space, extending from the base of the earth, represented by the bottom square of the doubled cube, even to the vault of the heavens, represented by the top square.

Immediately above the pedestal you will observe the Blazing Star, the Glory in the centre, the Beacon Light framed by the sacred delta. The equilateral triangle is the ancient symbol referring to G. to whom we must all submit and ought most humbly to adore.

At the left of the pedestal is a radiating sun, that life-giving element, within a triangle situated in the centre of interlaced triangles symbolically representing our twofold nature, spiritual and material, and the whole is framed by two circles denoting the Deity and Eternity.

At the right of the pedestal is the seal of Supreme Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of England, but the arms are those of the United Grand Lodge of England. The present certificate having been designed in 1817 it may appear strange that a Royal Arch device such as the triple tau was not adopted. There are however at the top of the seal some characters not visible to you, which being interpreted mean "Holiness to the Lord". These words constituted the pass words of the crimson veil, the last of the three veils which candidates for this supreme degree were previously required to pass before entering upon the ceremony of exaltation. But although the ceremony of "Passing the Veils" was discontinued in this country over a hundred years ago the pass words of the crimson veil should still be apparent in our Chapters, for the words "Holiness to the Lord" should be engraved on the sceptre of every Third Principal. It is also of interest to recall that before the union of the two Grand Lodges in 1813 the motto of the Antients was "Holiness to the Lord".

Companion, let the motto of the Antients be your future guide so that you may indeed justify our partiality in having exalted you into this Supreme Degree, the essence of Freemasonry.

You will now complete your Certificate by affixing your signature, at Scribe E's table, and from that signature there should be no deviation.

*If the Companion has not previously heard the reason that there should be no deviation in signature and if he has not heard how the Anno Lucis dating was arrived at then the explanations can be given at this point.

See appendix for explanations.

APPENDIX

Reason for no variation of signature on Grand Lodge or Chapter Certificate

When you visit other Lodges, you will generally go to Lodges where you are known, or where some Brother can vouch for you.

But if you go to a Lodge where you are not known or cannot be vouched for, you will take with you your Grand Lodge Certificate, and you will produce this for examination by the Junior Warden or a senior member of the Lodge. He may also ask you to prove yourself by answering certain questions - e.g. How were you first prepared to be made a Mason ? or - Give me the pass word leading from the ... to the ?

If he is not satisfied he may compare your signature on your Certificate with that in the Attendance Register, and any noticeable lack of similarity could justify him in not admitting you.

A practical point is to take with you your last Lodge Summons, and your last receipt for fees. These show that you are in good standing.

Remember that if you are considering visiting abroad, you must give details to your Lodge Secretary, so that he can ascertain from the Provincial Grand Secretary that you are in order in visiting lodges in that particular country.

Anno Domini and Anno Lucis

In the early 1600's an Irish Clergyman called James Usher determined to calculate the date of the beginning of the world - which he took to be the dates of the creation of Adam. His method was to take the ages of the patriarchs in the Old Testament and add them back. His result was that the date of the creation of the world was 4004 B.C. This was generally believed to be correct until well into the 1700's.

So when Dr. James Anderson, who compiled the first Book of Constitutions of Grand Lodge wanted a date for the beginning of Masonry, which he, in common with all others believed to be the date of the creation of the world, he used Usher's 4004 B.C. But for some reason quite unknown to us he rounded this off to 4000 B.C.

Hence there is a difference of 4,000 years between Anno Domini and Anno Lucis.