

THE SANHEDRIN

By Comp. G.Duddin

The Degrees of the Holy Royal Arch, as practiced in New Zealand under the auspices of Supreme Grand Chapter, revolve around the Sanhedrin. It is an unobtrusive focal point of each degree and the candidate periodically returns to it before being redirected and progressing once again.

I am sure if we cast our minds back a few short years we will recall the Principal guiding and re-directing us from one component of the Mark degree to the next. In the Mark degree he has stepped outside the Sanhedrin while retaining its authority and maintains its presence.

In the Excellent degree the Sanhedrin manifests itself again, but remains remote, while stamping its authority on the proceedings via the direction of the Principal from his veiled sanctuary.

It is not before the final degree, that of the order of the Holy Royal Arch, that the candidate is aware of the body of men comprising the Sanhedrin, and certainly not even then of the full import of its purpose and function in the degree.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to explain the Sanhedrin, its history in fact, and to explore, if possible, how and why it came to be incorporated into the degree structure of the Holy Royal Arch. But in doing so I must now advise the reader that there are areas of the history of this system of degrees that must be viewed as pure speculation. I will attempt to make this obvious and not mislead you. The history of these degrees has many "gray" areas and no useful purpose is served by adding to them.

Holy Royal Arch

Some years ago I came across a comment relating to the formation of the four London lodges and subsequent Grand Lodge as the "revival" of the Craft. In fact this term, although frequently used, is incorrect for the term "revival" is used in conjunction with the birth of speculative freemasonry totally divorced from the operative system. Whereas I consider there to be sufficient evidence to confirm speculative freemasonry as being in existence long before 1717. Research, in recent years, has fallen into two categories which I would term the "authentic" and the "rational" school. The former seems to regard a "revival" as probable because of the operative overtones in early manuscripts. The latter would regard "revival" as being incorrect due to the existence of early speculative Mss. The difference is actually one of attitude but it is nevertheless important as the former approach is somewhat negative and often dismissive of the latter.

The earliest reference I can find that may allude to a degree structure other than that of the Craft is contained in The Constitutions of the Free-masons (Anderson-1723). In this he refers to our brothers of "the royal art". The internal structure of the sentence leads me to the conclusion that he is referring to another part of speculative freemasonry and not to the Craft itself.

Indications, subsequent to Anderson's Constitutions, are, that if there was something else in existence in 1723, it was the culmination of the evolving Craft degree system - but this is conjecture.

In general the consensus of opinion puts Royal Arch origins in the early 1740's. Dr. Oliver opines for its introduction into England about 1740. George Kloss surmises it was introduced from the continent during the Austrian War of Succession in 1742 whereas W.J. Hughan merely settles for the 1740's-and a possible mention of the Order is made in the minutes of a lodge meeting in Youghal, in Ireland, in 1743.

If we examine the Mss available from the beginning of London Grand Lodge freemasonry it is apparent that accepted documentation runs 20 to 30 years behind actuality. In these circumstances I find it difficult to accept a continental origin and think it more likely that Europeans improved, developed or embellished a Scottish "system". The Royal Arch part of the Craft development came back to England about 1710 existing in a very limited and perhaps deliberately restricted way. It was then was transmitted to Ireland with developing Craft freemasonry. Prior to 1717, freemasonry was still Trinitarian, the nature of the Megree" (Judaic) may be the reason for its export and the changed attitude to Jewish brethren in the 1740's the reason for its open return. Once again this is conjecture.

A list of important dates and events, following, gives some idea of the coalescence of this degree into a recognized form. You will note that the dates relate favourably to the same period of the trigradal system of Craft development which could indicate joint or at least influenced development of the Royal Arch but it could also hint at the influence coming from the Royal Arch.

- 1743 The famed procession and meeting of a lodge at Youghal in Ireland.
- 1744 Dr. Fifield D'assigny published a work in which he claimed that in York 9s held an Assembly of Master Masons under the title of Royal Arch Masons, who, as their qualifications and excellencies are superior to others, receive a larger pay than working Masons."
- 1752 The degree was mentioned in the records of the Grand Lodge of the Antients. 1753 Three brethren were raised to the degree of Royal Arch Mason in the Fredericksburg Lodge, Virginia, USA.
- 1758 The first record of a raising taking place in England, at Bristol.
- 1766 The Grand and Royal Chapter of the Royal Arch of Jerusalem was constituted in London by the group of "Modern" masons.

Royal Arch Ritual

Due to an act of vandalism by an overzealous Grand Secretary many historical records were destroyed. This has probably hindered Royal Arch research more than that into the Craft and what was already sketchy is made more so by its initial infrequency of practice and antagonism toward it. Indeed it is not until the unification of the Grand Lodges in England that we can be certain of the full

ritual. Before this there are many aspects of the degrees we would love to know about but at which we can only guess. But there are certain core facts that should be known to all.

The recognized starting dates for the Royal Arch in England and Ireland are quite close but in spite of this there is a fundamental difference. The early Royal Arch ritual, in Ireland, dealt with its history from Adam to the present day; during which the Book of the Law was found by Hilkiah under King Josiah; before the return from Babylon and the rebuilding of the temple. In a later subdivision of the ceremonies one surviving ritual retained the finding of the Book of the Law but excluded the rebuilding of the Temple. While in England and Scotland the finding of the Law under King Josiah was lost but was resurrected under Z., H. and J. This would seem to indicate that in its early form Royal Arch ritual was, unlike its Craft counterpart, diverse. A similar situation may well have existed with regard to the place of the Sanhedrin in the ritual of the 18th century. The Original ritual may have utilized the Sanhedrin in its true Jewish form or the concept only and name may have been used. Perhaps an explanation of the Sanhedrin will help to make this clear.

The Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin has existed in Jewish thought and possibly fact since the time of Moses - but in what form? I have a number of essays on the subject from my own library as well as those provided by a comp. of the Jewish faith. They are very extensive but I will summarize that contained in The Jewish Encyclopaedia as it adequately covers everything of interest to us.

The Hebrew Aramaic term Sanhedrin originally referred only to the assembly at Jerusalem which constituted the highest political magistracy of the country. The term (original - synhedrion) was in use in the 2nd century BCE at the latest. This timing is derived from two sources. One is the Roman governor of Syria, Gabinius (57 BCE); the other is the Greek translation of Proverbs.

These two sources not only confirm its existence but also its form and they conflict markedly.

The Talmudic sources (see Gabinius) refer to the Great Sanhedrin at Jerusalem in contrast to other bodies of that name; and it was generally and usually assumed that this was identical with its namesake in Jerusalem mentioned in later non Talmudic sources, the Gospels and Josephus. This version of the Sanhedrin is designated by Talmudic sources as "Sanhedrin Gedolah hayoshebet be-lislikat ha-gazit or the "Great Sanhedrin which sits in the hall of hewn stone" an interesting translation for Masonic purposes.

There is another term for it with the word "Gedolah" omitted which indicates the existence of another body meeting elsewhere. For neither Josephus nor the Gospels make reference to the priesthood or religious input in connection with its operation but refer only to legal procedure, verdicts and decrees of a political nature. That which met in the hall of hewn stone dealt with questions relating to the priesthood, sacrifices and so on, resulting in the theory that in Jerusalem there were two magistracies. These were entirely different in both character and

function and officiated side by side and at the same time; one dealing with criminal matters and able to impose capital punishment while the other sat in the hall of hewn stone dealing with religious law and the religious instruction of the people. The former we can designate the Political Sanhedrin and the latter the Religious Sanhedrin.

The Political Sanhedrin

Accounts referring to the history of the pre-Maccabean period refer to magistracy at the head of the people, designated Gerusia. In 203 BCE Antiochus the Great wrote a letter to the Jews in which he expressed his satisfaction at the reception they had given at Jerusalem. Antiochus responded in a like vein to his reception.

Although there is no evidence for its existence prior to 203 BCE it obviously did otherwise there would probably be references to the setting up of such a significant body. By its nature and by reference to the V.S.L we can see its function carried out well before this period, in fragmented form, by the Judges, prior to the monarchy of Saul.

This body is that which subsequently came to be called Sanhedrin. This Sanhedrin was entirely aristocratic in character and probably assumed its own authority, since it was composed of members of the most influential families and the priesthood. There are no specific references to rank among members but texts do support the existence of a committee of ten who ranked above their colleagues and who met with the high priest prior to attending the main assembly.

The meetings took place in a hall of the temple, in the vicinity of the altar, with a private room adjacent for the high priest and, when required, co-use by the committee of ten. The Temple was used so that the discussions and decrees of the Sanhedrin might be invested with a degree of religious authority.

In its latter days, when the Pharisees had managed to acquire sufficient influence within the body, it no longer met in the Temple and became totally secular in nature.

The references in both secular history and religious tracts are insufficient to give an exact and detailed idea of its functions or the position it occupied in Jewish life. Its power varied or was restricted by various invaders and occupiers. Indeed, it was even restructured by the Romans into five separate bodies on one occasion; one for each province.

The high priest, who from the time of Simeon, was also the head of the state, officiated as president of the Sanhedrin. His title was Nasi or prince because he held the reins of government as well. Under the Romans both his power and that of the Sanhedrin were reduced the latter meeting only with the procurators permission. This, the political Sanhedrin, perished with the Jewish state in 70 AD.

The Religious Sanhedrin

This body, which met in the hall of hewn stone was called "the Great Bet Din", and was invested with the highest religious authority. According to Talmudic

tradition, it originated in the Mosaic period; the seventy elders who were associated with Moses in the government of Israel together with Moses forming the first Sanhedrin. However the pre exile books of the V.S.L. omit to mention it until the time of the second temple. It therefore, probably, existed in the form of an occasional synod to deliberate or debate important aspects of religious life. The first assembly of this nature was held under the auspices of Ezra and Nehemiah and was called "the Great Synagogue" (Keneset ha Gedolah). At a later and as yet undetermined date this form was replaced by a standing body called Sanhedrin or Bet Din and was regarded as a direct descendent and continuation of the previously infrequent synods.

Originally members were drawn from priests hailing from prominent families, probably under the presidency of the high priest. The Pharisaic influence in this Sanhedrin varied with their success or failure in their conflicts with the Sadducees. At one time the Pharisees domination was so extensive that the Sadducees formed their own Sanhedrin. This did not last and after one or two further reversals of fortune the Pharisees regained full control.

During the last years of its existence a Jabneh it was known to consist of seventy members plus the president. This was exceeded on one occasion when two presidents were elected and the number became 72.

The qualifications for membership were scholarship, modesty and popularity; as well as strength and courage. They also needed to have filled three offices of gradually increasing dignity namely those of local judge and successively two magistracies at Jerusalem. All very sensible qualifications, possibly added to in the 3rd century BCE, by the desirability of being tall, of imposing appearance, advanced age, skill in foreign languages and the arts of the necromancer.

The hall of hewn stone was on the south side of the inner court of the temple and was used by the priests for the daily service of the sacrifices. The larger part of the hall was on the site of the court of laymen. There were two entrances: one from the court of priests and the other in the Water gate, used by the laity.

Talmudic sources give its function as being only religious or appertaining to an aspect of religion. For example it controlled the form and application of sacrifice and if a person was murdered decided from the position of the body (its location) which town or city was the closest and so who was to provide the sacrifice of atonement. It also dealt with matters falling into gray areas such as arranging the calendar, judging women charged with adultery, providing correct copies of the Torah and deciding harvest tithes.

Two persons were at its head. The president or Nasi and the second or vice president "ab bet din" (father of the court). The president, we have already noted, was head of state and high priest but this duality seems to have disappeared in favour of the high priest was often unable to preside so an actual director was required. This arrangement was retained under increasing Pharisaic influence with the title Nasi passing to the president (father of the court) in fact.

In operation a question raised was answered according to known tradition. If there was no known tradition to settle the question a discussion ensued and finally a ballot was taken. After the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem and the fall of the Jewish state the Academy at Jabneh was organized to succeed as the supreme religious authority. There were a further ten reorganizations and locations until the 4th century CE "The bet din hall of hewn stone went on ten journeys until it finally settled at Tiberias

The French Sanhedrin

I cannot be certain as to why the Sanhedrin was resurrected by Napoleon but suspect it was to promote his own interests. One of the "official" reasons given for its revival was to promote the future organization of the Jews in France and Italy. The French government posed 12 questions of a political and religious nature to the French Jewish "Assembly of Notables". The Assembly gave its considered reply which supposedly satisfied Napoleon for he, wishing to give legal sanction to the answers, instigated the convening of a Jewish high court; styled after the Sanhedrin of antiquity.

The Sanhedrin was duly constituted and opened 9th February, 1807 and, succeeded the Assembly of Notables. It comprised seventy one members, two thirds of them rabbis and one third laymen. In appearance and form it reasonably approximated the originals although in purpose it was an amalgam of both its political and religious predecessors.

The concept was very well received by Jews throughout Europe as considered it would give validity to their place in European society or prompt the governments of their adopted nations to treat them as an integral part of society rather than maintain their position on the fringes. After a hand-over period the Assembly of Notables was dissolved April 6th, 1807.

Having passed the answers to the twelve questions into French Judaic law the Sanhedrin declared that, "by virtue of the right conferred upon it by ancient custom and law it constituted, like the ancient Sanhedrin, a legal assembly vested with the power of passing ordinances in order to promote the welfare of Israel and inculcate obedience to the laws of the state." On 17 March, 1808 Napoleon issued a decree restricting the Jews legal rights in France.

The Sanhedrin and the Holy Royal Arch

Now we know what the several Sanhedrins were and have some idea of the beginnings of the Royal Arch, questions must be asked regarding their relationship.

1. Did the Jewish brethren joining the Craft both in Europe and the United Kingdom influence the introduction of the Royal Arch Degrees.
2. Did the involvement of Jewish brethren in Craft Freemasonry influence the development of the Royal Arch Degrees.
3. Why the Sanhedrin in the Royal Arch.

Questions 1 and 2 are obvious ones to ask the third perhaps not. But the reason for its inclusion will be made clear although I can run the risk of offending purists by mingling supposed legend and fact.

Question 1

Bro. Shaftesley, writing in AQC 92 has assiduously tracked, from extant records, Jews joining the Craft. The first he has found is Bro. Edward Rose, joined 17th September, 1732. The first "Jewish Lodge" was Lebeck's Head Lodge, No. 246, constituted 24th August 1759. It had twenty three petitioners of whom thirteen appear to have been Jewish and at its first meeting several apparent Jews were initiated. At the time of the revival of Freemasonry in 1717 the population of England was considerably less than ten million, of which approximately one thousand were Jews. In these circumstances Jewish brethren are unlikely to have directly influenced the beginning of the Royal Arch. On the other hand Jews in England were well connected and well educated and could have been consulted or even contributed to the Craft from outside (indirectly). Against this are some facts and legends. Legends abound regarding Herodim and its place in Scottish Freemasonry. As we are also aware of the Deluge legends in Freemasonry prior to the Hiramic legends it is not unreasonable to accept that the core at least of what we later accept as the Royal Arch could have been around before 1732, a supposed date for its introduction from Europe. Of course of any ritual we are clueless.

Question 2

This is quite possible. But the problem we face is that little concrete is known about the form of ritual during the early 18th century. The earliest evidence I have seen of anything remotely like a recognizable ritual is very early 19th century and concerns the vault. It is so detailed that putting the usual 20 year time lag in place the Royal Arch Degree was probably well structured by 1780. On this basis if we allow a further 20 years for development, back to 1760, we reach the Lebeck period. This of course is pure conjecture and based on the figures given in AQC, I would put Jewish Craft membership at less than 50, possibly in 3 or 4 lodges. In fact if Carlile is consulted the full ritual was in place by 1825. Deduct 40 years, time lag and development and we have 1785 for a degree structure known in 1743 as of Jewish origin. In my opinion our Jewish brethren may have helped refine the order, prior to 1785, but the core and direction of development were well established before any official contribution by Craft Members.

Question 3

This is a very interesting question. The answer is not obvious but reinforces my comments for 1 and 2.

I think that as Craft Freemasonry and its ritual developed in England, supplanting the deluge legends, some brethren attempted to graft aspects of Scottish Freemasonry, the Harodim legends, onto the Hiramic Legend or vice versa. It has been proven that there was no splitting of the third degree to give the Royal Arch but it may be that the Royal Arch legend, not wanted in English Craft Freemasonry, but too good to throw away was introduced as a step beyond

the Craft and to render it desirable it was restricted to Past Masters. Further, this embryonic form via north of England and Scottish Freemasons could have been transplanted to France for a short gestation period before returning to England. I apologize if this seems unclear but to clarify further would require a separate paper.

As the Temple Hiram legend was firmed up I think the degree had elements of Jewish orthodoxy integrated to give it credence. Even an allegory is made easier to understand and practice if it has a factual framework to add plausibility. The Sanhedrin, with its links to both Solomon and the second temple, is such a framework. Indeed the use of the Sanhedrin in Freemasonry may have been the catalyst for introducing the French model.

The reader will note there were two Sanhedrins in operation, in theory, continual existence for 1500 years and again there is a question for us which we do have. Freemasonry, which has the admirable precept of acknowledging a brothers religion but ignoring it by virtual secularity, was of course originally Trinitarian in nature so it would be expected that a pre 1723 introduction of the Sanhedrin would have opted for the political model. However, the discovery of the book of the Law and resultant comments (HTTL), and this is conjecture, shows our model to be religious. This could be the reason for a divergence if we settle for a pre 1723 date for its origin. It could also, in view of Anderson's Constitutions be the reason for its return from Europe. The control of workmen and supervision of the rebuilding of the temple is outside of the stated operation of both but in view of the time when our legend takes place this aspect could be construed as being of necessity.

By stretching the imagination it could also be held to be supervision of a religious task the renewal of the place of sacrifice. Two against one are reasonable odds so I think our Sanhedrin is the religious model but takes its place in the Masonic allegory on the same pedestal as the VSL secular. I also, in the circumstances, believe it was introduced as such to reinforce the finding of the lost Book of the Law and that itself is an allegory for the lost or discarded or even hidden "law" of our various understandings of a creator as well as reinforcing those moral and ethical laws which help bind together and maintain our modern society and originally the burgeoning society responsible for the Promulgation of the order. As Marshall McLuan said "the media is the message".

This being the case, even remotely, there is no choice but to utilize the religious Sanhedrin for orthodoxy. Only it could unequivocally state that the lost "Book of the Law" was found.

The next question is when was it inducted into ritual bearing in mind my previous comments I do not know the first expansive ritual I can find is that reported by Carlile. It is very comprehensive and fully developed if not overblown. Our current rituals are but a pale shadow of those of 1825.

What is notable about Carlile's exposure, if it is a faithful reproduction of the 1825 ritual, is its overt Jewish character. For example the Ark of the Covenant

features along with its accoutrements, and this, along with the general tone of the ritual may indicate developmental influence both prior and subsequent to the "reconciliation", prior by the introduction of aspects of Jewish religious daily life and subsequent to, by its maintenance after the unification of the Grand Lodges.

But it is not possible to state when the Sanhedrin, the pinnacle of Jewish religious orthodoxy, was introduced. The complexity and completeness of it in 1825 could indicate a revision and finalisation or conversely could indicate a ritual long settled in basic form. The ritual of St. Johns masonry, for example, is virtually unchanged since its known inception and is very complete.

Personally I think that the core of the 1817/1825 ritual was in use around 1769 and with the increasing involvement of Jewish brethren and possible influence it came to full flower during this period. It was not a division of the third degree nor even an expansion but a variation of the temple theme, removed 600 years. But in its origins I consider it to be very old - far older than we have so far acknowledged. One of the reasons for making this statement 17th century correspondence between Rosicrucian brethren where the future development (spiritual) of mankind was stated to be possible only if we were to each "take the part of a stone and join together to raise a temple to the glory of God". This correspondence was merely the latest in a long line of such thought actively practiced among thinking men from the mid 16th century. The concepts are of course much older.

Because of lack of proof and much comment of a hypothetical (guessing) nature this essay is far from satisfactory. But there is a dearth of information or rather there is a great deal of legend which can be substantiated by circumstantial evidence and this is less than satisfactory. However I have at least "put the key into the lock". You, companions, must turn it and open the door. The Royal Arch is a much neglected subject it needs more serious research it should not be made subordinate to the Craft. For it is quite possible that the Craft concept sprang out of the Arch concept and not the reverse.