

# About the Order of Royal and Select Masters

## Unknown

### **Companions,**

The other day someone asked me to explain what the Council was all about and why anybody should take the additional degrees it offers? My answer was, at best, a bit confused and I have since put some order into it.

The Cryptic Order, or, to give it its correct title, the **Order of Royal and Select Masters** consists of four separate and distinct ceremonies, each one relating to a specific period in Biblical history.

It is often thought that the term cryptic refers to cryptology or extreme secrecy. This is not the case; Cryptic simply refers to the Crypt or Secret Vault as we find it in the Royal Arch, in other words a room specially constructed beneath the Sanctum Sanctorum or Holy of Holies of the Temple at Jerusalem.

The Cryptic Order is one of the essential links in the history of the Temple and the four degrees cover the time between the building of the Secret Vault and the building of the second temple (c.586 BC).

These degrees are entitled:

- Select Master
- Royal Master
- Most Excellent Master and
- Super Excellent Master

Now let us briefly relate those four degrees to the history of the Temple.

The degree of **Select Master** takes for its scenario the point where we are into the fifth year of the building of the Temple (i.e. 969 BC) and the Secret Vault is being constructed to house the sacred treasures and other important artifacts of the Jewish people in order to keep them safe from attack by enemy forces. The construction of the vault and its approach tunnel is carried out by specially selected craftsmen and the existence of the vault is known only to the three Grand Masters and those actually engaged in the work. A craftsman not entitled to be there

accidentally enters into the vault and is sentenced to death; however, his fortunes turn and he is eventually pardoned and admitted to the elite band of Select Masters.

The **Royal Master** degree follows chronologically, where the vault has been completed and is in the process of being loaded up with the sacred treasures, Adoniram, one of the senior overseers, engages in conversation with Hiram Abif and the latter inadvertently explains how he intends to ensure that the Master Word shall never become lost; in the course of this explanation the candidate hears some truly magnificent ritual which is certain to remain in his mind for a long, long time. Hiram Abif realises, too late, that he has revealed to Adoniram something he should not have done and Adoniram is sworn to secrecy. Shortly after this, Hiram Abif is slain and it is only through Adoniram's knowledge of Hiram Abif's intentions that the Master Word is indeed preserved.

The degree of the **Most Excellent Master** takes for its scenario, the point where the Temple is being dedicated to the glory of God and King Solomon determines to reward some of his most skilful craftsmen with the rank of Most Excellent Master.

The **Super Excellent Master** is the fourth and final degree in this series and is built around the invasion of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the siege and fall of the city and the eventual destruction of the Temple and the removal of the Jews to Babylon, where they remain in captivity for seventy years until, by the good grace of Cyrus, King of Persia, they are allowed to return to Jerusalem and make a start on building a second temple on the site where the first formerly stood.

All Royal Arch Masons will, of course, be very familiar with the course of events from this point.

It is interesting that the Cryptic Degrees, along with the Mark Master Degree, fill in the spaces between the Third Degree of Craft Masonry and the Exaltation ceremony of the Royal Arch. This is of course not the only reason for my recommending the Cryptic Order, there are some very moving and beautiful passages in the ritual and some good lessons to be learned.