

The Nine Arches to and of the Vault

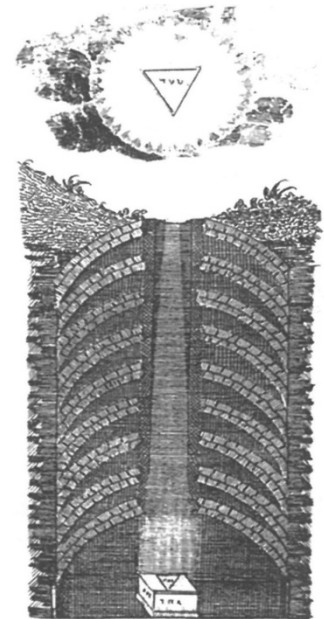
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Grand Council of Cryptic Masons of Missouri Education Committee

Within Cryptic Masonry we explore a profound series of events and allegories involving several individuals, and in particular the Secret Vault which rested below the Temple built by Solomon. Yet to arrive at the Vault we must inherently pass a series of smaller apartments or spaces each delineated by its own arch and leading us to the retired abode of the Kings and their great treasured secrets. The Nine Arches of the Select Master Degree are thus often for the most part saw as a plot point, inherently bearing some basic symbolism but passed over by many but the most observant companions in the course of the degree. To a further exploration of which, each of us, on the path to greater understanding, and seeking true full admission beyond the Nine Arch, should pause momentarily and reflect.

Initially as we observe the Nine Arches we should consider perhaps the significance of their total number, and the relevant symbolism of the number nine in general. Amongst various ancient mystery traditions, schools of thought, religious groups, philosophers and other gatherings numbers took upon themselves great meaning, and even magical properties elevating them to a sacred consideration by their varied adherents.¹ Companion Albert Mackey informs us that “The number *nine* is the sacred number of the Select degree, which however also refers to *twenty-seven*, simply because that is the product of *nine* multiplied by *three*.”² This repetition of the number nine three times may seem a bit loaded but from a sense of completion and relevance we can see some direct correlation from symbolism and discussions in the work. Inherently the number three represents a triad concept and layering that with the three initial Grand Masters we can make comparisons to such things as the Divine Will, Divine Wisdom and Divine Logos, three functions per se of the Great Architect. Each Grand Master or aspect is needed to compose one whole, and all are needed within each to compose the other. In such connotations we can find interesting value to the concept of the number nine and its relationship from three to twenty-seven.

The use and context of the Nine Arches as saw in the Select Master Degree appears elsewhere in Masonry and other avenues. The allegory of Enoch and his Vault, built vertically into the earth, utilizing nine levels or vaults in succession bears most striking comparison to Solomon’s Secret Vault. Dependent upon Masonic tradition we are informed each level of Enoch’s Vault had upon its arch a name of the Divine, and in various contexts those represented passwords which must need be communicated to effect safe passage. In Enoch’s case the final Vault held the Pillar of Alabaster, upon which rested the Cubical



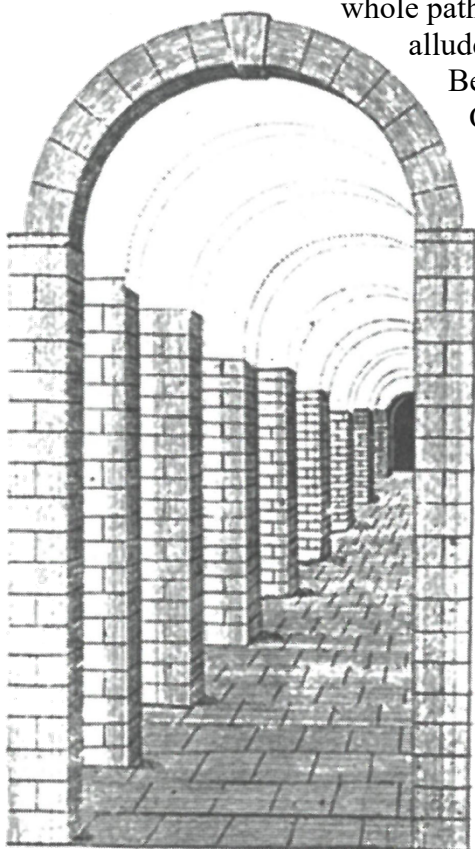
Enoch's Crypt
From Jeremy Cross

¹ In at least one masonic body the closing statement of written communications is “By the Sacred Numbers”, and further within various bodies Candidates are on occasion consecrated “by the mystic numbers”.

² *Cryptic Masonry: A Manual of the Council*, A. Mackey, Pg. 60-61

Stone, and the Ineffable Name of the Great Architect therein engraved.³ This vault like Solomon’s secret one was made as a safe repository for items of great importance and symbolic magnitude.

The path of the Candidate, and each Select Master leads us into the deepest part of Solomon’s Temple and its superstructure, there deep in the Earth, we work, we seek, and we labor. Each Arch imparts to us lessons as we near the final Arch and Chamber, and in them as a



whole path and journey we are reminded that, “The number nine alludes to the nine attributes of the Deity, which are said to be: 1. Beauty. 2. Wisdom. 3. Power. 4. Eternity. 5. Infinity. 6. Omniscience. 7. Justice. 8. Mercy. 9. Perfection.”⁴ such considerations weave also an immediate notice for those paying attention to the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, although not perfectly one for one in correlation.

During the Select Master Degree our moving through the Arches is not a drawn-out process in the work, nor does it seem a lengthy endeavor- that said the ritual itself in spoken instruction paints a different picture and one with levels of division and protection at each Arch and certain forms and ceremonies needed to pass them when challenged before advancing onward.

Considering this in relation to the Kabbalah and its greater symbolic discourse as one moves on a path through the Tree of Life we see further comparisons. In this consideration we can

contemplate the associations of various guardians or sentinels(or Angels in another sense) being associated with each individual arch, and who in turn “allowed one to pass if they were in possession of certain words or names.”⁵ Further pulling this thread we can note that the Nine Arches(or thresholds) are actually and truly ten in number, considering “the first arch is the passage from the first chamber”⁶ forward to the series. This leads us again to a Kabbalistic perspective and we can be reminded of the Divine Names associated with the Tree of Life and its points, a harkening back perhaps to the



³ See *The Foundation Stone: A Consideration* J. Thompson, Part V(a) Grand Council of Cryptic Masons of Missouri Education Committee, <https://www.moyorkrite.org/Education-The%20Cryptic%20Vault/5-The%20Foundation%20Stone.pdf>

⁴ *Cryptic Masonry: A Manual of the Council*, A. Mackey, Pg. 61

⁵ *Cryptic Masonry Education Course*, R. Davis, Pg. 62

⁶ *Cryptic Masonry Education Course*, R. Davis, Pg. 62

mentioned Vault of Enoch and its passages with Divine Names. In going to the Kabalistic Tree of Life the Divine name associated with the highest level (each “level” being called a Sephiroth) is Eheieh, or “I AM”. The relationship of this Divine Name, “I AM”⁷ and that which is symbolized in greater context by the space, objects, and events which occur beyond the Ninth Arch cannot be set aside. Understanding the nature of our passage through the Arches we can come to see it as a rite of purification, a rite of preparation, and a testing of the perfection of our labor and willingness of service to the Divine and our fellows. Only through those works can we gain the knowledge that will stay the hands of the sword, allow us to communicate the words and signs, and pass onward deeper into our own path of understanding our existence and Creator,

“The 9th arch essence can be known to those who having employed their sword and trowel to build and secure the Secret Vault with its treasures. Those who with a genuine innocence seek the truth and knowledge granted to them as a Select Master. This elemental essence is the Light that radiates, connects, and illuminates the York Rite system of Freemasonry to overcome the darkness we experience in shortcomings of humanity and this fallen world.”⁸

Thus, our labor, our mastery of the lessons of Masonry, and an understanding of the path set for the Select Master allows us a greater ability to extenuate the virtues to which we place our support, and combat those great enemies that lurk within the World, and our own selves, holding us from a greater better coming day, and a greater self. The Nine Arches carry us through this process and conveniently enough the Arch, based off a spherical shape in its vaulted nature reminds us of the Divine in that symbolic association, to such focus we could labor quite a bit more, suffice to say that arches, circles and spheres are traditionally associated with the celestial and Divine in man, as is the Compasses by which we draw such things.

Reflecting on the Nine Arches of the Select Mater degree and realizing its tests, its inherent symbolized knowledge, and the wisdom it imparts we can clearly see why “*Nine* was called by the Pythagorans *tēieios*, or the number of completion, and as such it is appropriate to that degree which professes to complete the circle of Masonic Science.”⁹ Such is our passage in the Vault, a completion of our Craft Journey, an approaching toward a nearness of the Divine, and an ascent of the spiritual and celestial within each of us over the animal, material, and terrestrial which surrounds and perhaps entraps us. It is a decent and ascent in equal action as,

“We must descend into the center of our own being in order to discover that divine spirit within us wherein we will uphold God in the mirror of existence- and there will be then, as there was in the beginning – only God.”¹⁰

⁷ Cryptic Masonry Education Course, R. Davis, Pg. 61

⁸ Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters of Texas: 2022 Cryptic Masonry education Program, Pg. 18; Courtesy of the Gr. Council of R & S. Masters of Texas -Cryptic Masonry Education Special Committee 2022, Comp. J.S. Bennett, Chairman

⁹ *Cryptic Masonry: A Manual of the Council*, A. Mackey, Pg. 61

¹⁰ Cryptic Masonry Education Course, R. Davis, Pg. 63