

EGYPTIAN GRAND ORDER OF THE GRAND ORIENT DE FRANCE

PRESENTATION

The first three grades of Apprentice Mason, Fellow craft mason and Master Mason are the foundation of Freemasonry and form a veritable symbolic entity. However, since three centuries the Masonic tradition also includes other Masonic grades generally known as high-grade and which introduced a complementary symbolism. The following text has the intention to introduce the high-grade of the Memphis-Mizraim ritual as practiced by the Councils regrouped by the Egyptian Grand Order (Grand Ordre Egyptien) of the Grand Orient de France.

The origin of high-grades

The exact origin of Masonic high-grades will probably remain unknown. It is certain that they have been defined during the eighteenth century in the wake of speculative Freemasonry. However, they relate to more ancient sources. The "esoteric vision", questioning the mysteries of the soul and the universe beyond the official religious truth, has certainly always existed. But we have to recall that in western culture, this vision has only started to bloom with the rise of Humanism during Renaissance. During the early years of the sixteenth century, student circles of Neo-Platonism, Hermetic, Kabala, or the religion of the Egyptians are established in Italy and France. Due to its relativism, its interest in other forms of spirituality as well as its faith in the unfathomable richness of the human being, this initiatory quest is inseparably connected to a humanistic perspective. With a change in the political climate and periods of restricted freedom of expression, these circles of initiation had to sought their refuge in secrecy more than once.

After the Hermetic movement of Renaissance, the seventeenth century gave birth to a new cycle when the German originated Rosicrucian movement reached England and France.

In the early eighteenth century, the emerging Freemasonry circles offered for these movements a particularly well-suited structure.

Origins and History of the Egyptian Rite

The creation of high-grades is in consequence the Masonic form of the teachings and practices of the initiatory circles, which survived more or less clandestinely during the previous centuries. The liberal atmosphere of the Enlightenment prepared the ground for a wider spread of Freemasonry resulting in a duplication of and real passion for high-grades. This enthusiasm was admittedly accompanied by some confusion. Consequently, during the last third of the eighteenth century the striving for clarification led to an organisation of the high-grades into proper rites representing a number of specific features and a hierarchy. Such as: the "Rite of Perfection", around 1770 (since 1801-1804, the "Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry"), the "Rectified Scottish rite" in 1782 and in 1784 French Rite.

The creation of these rites enabled an alignment of the majority of the then existing high-grades.

However, some small Masonic circles, mostly with a strong esoteric connotation, remained untouched from this reforms.

This was possibly the origin of the " Rite of Mizraïm" which was in the early years

of the nineteenth Century answering to the then fashionable "Back to Egypt" mood.

With an impressive scale of 90 grades the Mizraïm Rite gave place to many grades, which had been overlooked or neglected by other rites. Established in Paris in 1814, the Egyptian Rite (Mizraïm is the Hebrew translation for Egypt) underwent periods of unrest, divisions and new beginnings throughout the nineteenth century. When the brethren Ragon, Joly and Gaborria left the Mizraïm Order for the Order of the Grand Orient, they were joined by a number of other dignitaries. Some others formed the Rite of Memphis in 1839.

As in the case of their predecessors of the Renaissance, the commitment to the humanistic values of liberty, equality and fraternity, brought some of the members (as Morrison Greenfield, Pierre-Joseph Briot or Garibaldi) in conflict with the authorities and police and caused the orders ban.

At the same time, it has always been a place where Freemasons could meet to share their interest in esotericism and join in their quest for initiation. In 1862, Brother Marconis de Nègre, Grand Hierophant of the Rite of Memphis unified the latter with the order of the Grand Orient of France.

The Egyptian Grand Order (Grand Ordre Egyptien) of the Grand Orient de France (G.O.D.F.)

Acknowledged by the Grand Orient of France in a jointly signed convention, the Egyptian Grand Order addresses itself exclusively to the Brothers of this obedience who have already reached the grade of Master. It allows the practice of its proper high-grades according to the agreement with the G.O.D.F. signed in 1862. The basic principles are the same as those of the Grand Orient de France: democratic rules and freedom of conscience.

One characteristic of the Egyptian Rite is, while emanating from a mutual symbolic and ritual tradition, to have adapted its organisation according to places and eras. One noteworthy point of the 1862 agreement is that the rite is taught in a scale of 33 grades. What traditionally is called the A.A., appears here as a three step deepening of the last degree.

(For additional information, please refer to the bibliography on this site.)

In conclusion,

The initiatory work of the Egyptian Grand Order attempts a harmonious combination of humanistic pretensions with the quest of spirituality, both of which are, we believe, inseparable from our Masonic tradition.