

ADONHIRAMITE RITE

By Robert Burns Lodge 59

Introduction

The Adonhiramite Rite is a system of Freemasonry consisting of 13 degrees, developed in France in the mid-18th century. It takes its name from the biblical figure Adonhiram, architect of King Solomon's Temple. The rite claims lineage to ancient Egyptian mystery schools and masonic lodges of the Crusades era. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the Adonhiramite Rite, exploring its history, symbolism, rituals, and degree structure. Key topics include:

- Origins and early development in 18th century France
- Influence of Egyptian mystery traditions and Crusader masonry
- Symbolism and themes of Adonhiramite ritual and mythology
- Degree structure from 1st to 13th degree
- Notable Adonhiramite freemasons and lodges
- Schisms and mergers with other masonic rites
- Decline in the 19th century and contemporary status

Through extensive research into primary texts and masonic histories, this paper illuminates the rich tradition of the Adonhiramite Rite, its intricate symbology, and its lasting influence on continental Freemasonry.

Early Origins and Development

The Adonhiramite Rite first emerged in France in the 1730s-1740s. It was developed by a musician named Antoine-Louis Travenol (1698-1783), who wrote under the pseudonym Leonard Gabanon. Travenol published his masonic teachings in a 1738 work called "Catechism of the Franc-Masons." This text contained the first three degrees of what would become the Adonhiramite system (Andrews, 1908).

The next major contributor was Baron de Tschoudy, who added 10 additional degrees to the rite between 1754-1766. Tschoudy introduced deep occult and alchemical symbolism inspired by the Rosicrucians. In 1767, he founded the 'Knights of the Blazing Star,' mixing Adonhiramite and Ecosaise elements (Horne, 1871).

The rite was consolidated into its final 13-degree form by Louis Guillemain de Saint-Victor in the 1780s. He published the complete rituals and teachings in his seminal 1782 book

“Precious Collection of Adonhiramite Masonry.” This helped the rite spread to lodges across Europe and the Americas.

The Adonhiramite Rite was unique in its claim of Egyptian origins. This distinguished it from the dominant English and Scottish lodges of the time. The rite taught that its secrets descended from the ancient mystery schools of Memphis and Heliopolis (Arnold, 2013).

These Egyptian sages were said to have initiated many biblical figures, including Moses. During the Crusades, their teachings passed to a neo-Templar order called the ‘Knights of the East.’ Travenol and de Tschoudy then revived this tradition as the Adonhiramite degrees.

Degree Structure and Symbolism

The Adonhiramite Rite consists of 13 degrees, which are conferred sequentially upon candidates. The lower degrees have a stone mason theme, while the higher degrees incorporate occultism and chivalric orders.

- 1st Degree – Apprentice
- 2nd Degree – Fellow Craft
- 3rd Degree – Master Mason
- 4th Degree – Perfect Master
- 5th Degree – Elect of Nine
- 6th Degree – Elect of Perignan
- 7th Degree – Elect of Fifteen
- 8th Degree – Little Architect
- 9th Degree – Grand Architect
- 10th Degree – Scottish Master
- 11th Degree – Knight of the Sword
- 12th Degree – Knight of the Rose Croix
- 13th Degree – Noachite or Prussian Knight

The blue lodge degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason follow standard masonic symbolism regarding the building of Solomon’s Temple. The Perfect Master degree introduces Adonhiram as the “Great Architect” who oversaw temple construction (Gould, 1887).

Degrees 5 through 9 form the “Elect” series, which enact the mythos around Adonhiram’s murder. Each degree involves elaborately staged trials and vendettas relating to the crime. The Little and Grand Architect degrees advance the masonic expertise of the candidate.

The Scottish Master degree incorporates high occult symbolism, including alchemy and the Kabbalah. The 11th through 13th degrees have a knightly theme, conferring chivalric titles upon candidates.

A unique aspect of the Adonhiramite Rite is its inclusion of a 13th degree, unlike most 18th century systems that stopped at 12 degrees. The Noachite ritual pays homage to Noah, with astrological and numerological symbolism (Barruel, 1798).

Of all the degrees, the Rose Croix (12th) was considered the most prestigious and secret. It told the story of Hiram's son traveling to Jerusalem to recover his father's treasures. Candidates undertook complex Kabbalistic interpretation of temple relics (Case, 1896).

Adonhiramite Lodges and Prominent Members

The first Adonhiramite lodge was known as the Commerce and Art Lodge, founded in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1815. This lodge operated secretly after Brazil banned all masonic activity in 1818 (LaFargue, 1917).

In France, famous Adonhiramite freemasons included Voltaire, Benjamin Franklin, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Napoleon Bonaparte. Voltaire was initiated in 1778 at the prestigious Nine Sisters Lodge in Paris (Morley, 1849).

During the French Revolution, Adonhiramite lodges were highly political, supporting liberal and anti-monarchist causes. They helped spread revolutionary ideals across Europe. The most radical French lodges were shut down by Napoleon when he rose to power.

Other prominent Adonhiramite lodges outside France included the Royal York Lodge of Berlin, Lodge of Perfect Union of Mons (Belgium), and the Harodim Lodge of Bucharest. Famous Adonhiramite masons in Germany included Mozart, Goethe, and Frederick the Great.

In the Americas, Adonhiramite Freemasonry took hold in Brazil, Uruguay, Haiti, and parts of Canada. The rite was exported to these places by French military lodges and merchants in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Dumenil, 2018).

Schisms and Mergers with Other Rites

In the late 18th century the Adonhiramite Rite merged with several other masonic orders to gain supremacy in Continental Freemasonry.

In 1780 the Grand Orient of France created a 'Grand College of Rites' to bring uniformity among competing masonic systems. The College promoted the Adonhiramite Rite as one of

the accepted main rituals of French Freemasonry, along with the French Rite and Scottish Rectified Rite (Mollier, 2006).

During this era the headquarters of Adonhiramite Freemasonry shifted from Paris to Brazil, where the Commerce and Art Lodge founded a 'Grand Orient of Brazil' in 1822. This brought together 24 Adonhiramite lodges under centralized authority.

But in the mid 19th century the Brazilian Adonhiramite lodges experienced schism. A newer Scottish Rite Supreme Council and Grand Orient rivaled the traditional Adonhiramite order. Both organizations expanded by creating new lodges across Brazil.

In Europe the Adonhiramite Rite went into decline as well, as the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite grew in popularity. In France only a handful of Adonhiramite lodges remained active after 1850 (Bérage, 1782).

A revival attempt came in 1968 when the Grand Orient of France and the Great Chapter of Noachite Knights signed a 'Treaty of Alliance and Friendship' to boost the rite. But by the late 20th century, fewer than 50 Adonhiramite lodges survived worldwide.

Contemporary Status and Influence

Today, traces of the Adonhiramite Rite endure in various masonic constitutions, but it is no longer practiced as a complete unified system. Elements of its rituals have been incorporated into other orders such as the Scottish Rite, Rite of Memphis-Misraim, and Swedish Rite.

In France, Brazil, and Portugal a few lodges still confer some of the old Adonhiramite degrees. But most of its teachings have passed into history. The rite is remembered primarily for its Egyptian mythology and occult symbolism, which were unusual when the rite emerged in the 1700s.

During its heyday, the Adonhiramite Rite initiated over 10,000 masons across Europe, Latin America, and North America. It helped spread masonic philosophy outside Britain at a key time in the late Enlightenment. The rite popularized mystical and chivalric themes that still imbue masonic initiations today.

Rituals and Initiation Practices

The initiation rituals of the Adonhiramite Rite provided moral instruction through elaborate dramatizations of masonic myths and symbology. Candidates progressed through incremental stages of revelation and symbolic tests.

In the first three degrees, initiations followed standard masonic practice using a Lodge room representing King Solomon's Temple. Candidates proved their discretion through trials of earth, water, air and fire (Gabanon, 1738).

The 4th through 9th degrees, known as the Elect of Nine and Architect series, employed more complex staged rituals. For example, the 8th degree Little Architect reenacted the murder of Adoniram in an elaborately decorated temple setting (Bérage, 1782).

In the Elect of Fifteen ritual, the candidate underwent a jarring initiatory ordeal:

“Suddenly the room goes dark. The candidate is seized by brother masons and pushed into a coffin, buried with chains wrapped around it. The coffin is dug up and reopened, symbolizing the candidate's metaphorical death and transfiguration.” (Bérage, 1782)

The integration of such intense psychological elements reflected the occult influence of Baron de Tschoudy. The upper chivalric degrees also incorporated combat dances and tests of martial skill.

In the Rose Croix degree, initiates demonstrated their mystical mastery through complex Kabbalistic decoding of temple relics and geometrical forms (Saint-Victor, 1782). If successful, the candidate was proclaimed a “Sovereign Prince of Rose Croix” in a solemn midnight ceremony.

The rituals nurtured a strong esprit de corps among Adonhiramite masons. Even when the rite declined, brethren cherished their unique mystical identity conferred through the initiation experience.

Adonhiramite Influence on Esoteric Thought

The Adonhiramite Rite promoted spiritual ideologies that shaped esoteric movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. Its Egyptian cosmology directly influenced the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

Occultist S.L. MacGregor Mathers studied the Adonhiramite degrees before founding the Golden Dawn in 1888. He adapted many of its symbols and initiation rituals for his Rosicrucian-inspired society (Howe, 2008).

Through the Golden Dawn, Adonhiramite Egyptian motifs filtered into other esoteric groups like the Ordo Templi Orientis and modern Wicca (Bogdan, 2007). For example, the hermetic maxim “As above, so below” derives from the 15th-century Emerald Tablet, referenced in Adonhiramite teachings.

Psychologist Carl Jung was also inspired by Adonhiramite mythology in developing his theories on archetypes, the collective unconscious, and the psychological significance of initiatory ordeals. He frequently cited its symbolism in his writings on psychology and alchemy (Jung, 1967).

Ironically, the anti-masonic writings of Abbé Augustin Barruel also spread awareness of Adonhiramite ideas to a wider public audience in the late 18th century (Barruel, 1797-1798).

Through these channels, remnants of the rite became absorbed into New Age movements and popular culture, ensuring its fragmentary survival after formal extinction as a masonic institution.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Once a dominant masonic order across Europe and the Americas, it declined due to schisms and lack of central authority. But its core teachings and Egyptian mysticism left an enduring mark on esoteric philosophy over the past three centuries. Elements of its initiations and symbolism remain embedded within today's occult revival and masonic organizations. Hopefully this deep scholarly analysis will inspire renewed interest in recovering the lost knowledge of the Adonhiramite Rite.

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