

THE EXALTATION CEREMONY - SETTING THE SCENE

As the Exaltation Ceremony is rather complicated and often leaves Companions somewhat bemused, probably because we don't hear it as often and it's so different to the Craft ritual. Also, unlike the Craft, it can be confusing as the location of the story changes throughout the ceremony without any obvious change in the scenery. Therefore, it might help the members to understand what is happening if the Chapter DC or other nominated Reader sets the scene during the intervals when the Sojourners have retired from the Chapter:

After the Sojourner has retired to entrust the Candidate - DC or Nominated Reader: "Companions, the story about to unfold, takes place some 500 years after the dedication of Solomon's Temple. King Solomon has long since died. Jerusalem has since been attacked by the Babylonians, the city and its once magnificent temple have been destroyed and its inhabitants taken into captivity into Babylon where they have remained for 70 years.

We are now at that period in history where the Babylonian Empire itself has been attacked and defeated by Cyrus the King of Persia. Cyrus has recently issued a decree allowing the descendants of the Hebrew exiles to return to their native land. The Candidate enters the Chapter blindfold representing one of those exiles returning to Jerusalem seeking to participate in the light of our mysteries with his colleagues as Sojourners or Journeyman builders. The Chapter room and the carpet represent a building site in the ruined city, where Solomon's temple formerly stood; the Candidate is traversed across the ruins and arrives at the crown of a vaulted chamber where the first change in the scene occurs. The carpet and equipment on the floor of the Chapter now represent an underground vaulted chamber and its contents, where, as we shall see, a most important discovery is made."

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After the candidate has been informed: 'You may now retire and on your return you will be permitted to participate in the further mysteries of the Order' and after the Sojourners and candidate have retired – DC or Nominated Reader: “When the Sojourners return to the Chapter, we go right back to the start of the story but, this time, as the Candidate is not hoodwinked he is able to see what happened in the previous part of the ceremony – Whilst scenery in the Chapter has not changed, the room now represents the Grand Sanhedrim, the Council of 72 Elders which sat together to regulate the affairs of the Temple and the religious life of the Jews, where Zerubbabel presides, with Haggai and Joshua. You now represent the Council Members. You have to imagine that the secret vault, represented by the carpet and its equipment, is still undiscovered under the foundations of the former temple building.

Cyrus has issued his decree allowing the exiles to return to Jerusalem. The three Sojourners (or journeymen builders) including the Candidate are about to arrive from their captivity in Babylon, having heard that the Temple is about to be rebuilt, offer their services in that great and glorious undertaking.”

After Haggai orders them to “Go then, and may the God of your forefathers be with you and prosper in your handiwork and the 1st Assistant Sojourner, PS and Candidate have retired. DC or Nominated Reader: “Companions, the Sojourners including the Candidate, having been issued with the implements of labour have left the room figuratively to prepare the ground for the foundation of the second temple, on their return, the Chapter room still represents the Grand Sanhedrim but, the secret vault represented by the carpet and other equipment where the important discovery was made now becomes the focal point of the story. The discovery made by the Sojourners, as

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members of the princely tribe of Judah, (the elite) who were given the heavy and menial task of clearing the ground for the foundations of the 2nd Temple, make an important discovery, as we shall see. A lesson that truly humble workmen, though engaged on unskilled and uninteresting work, may nevertheless find in it great reward entitling them to a place among the wisest of men in the Council of Rulers. Traditionally, the Grand Sanhedrin was the Council of Princes and Rulers of the people set up by command of God to assist Moses. The word Sanhedrin means, 'the body of elders', its foundation is recorded in the Bible - Numbers, Chapter 11.

When the Candidate is rewarded and presented with his staff of office he is told that he will ever have the right to bear it unless 72 of the Elders are present. You might therefore be interested in the details of Royal Arch Regulation 48 which states: 'According to ancient custom a complete Chapter of this Order of Freemasonry consists of Three Principals who, when in Chapter assembled are to be considered conjointly as the Master and each severally as a Master, two Scribes, a Treasurer, A Principal Sojourner, two Assistant Sojourners, and other companions, making up the number 72 as a Council: and no regular chapter can consist of more; but any number may be elected, exalted and received as Companions with all the privileges of membership save they are not to hold the staff of office or to be considered as Councillors when more than 72 are present.

We will now hear a detailed dramatic account of how that discovery was made."

The following paragraph only applies if the Arch has been rebuilt for this part of the Ceremony, so that the PS can, at the appropriate time,

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knock out the Arch stones and Keystone when he is describing his access into the vault:

“You will notice that the Arch has been re-built so that the Candidate will have an opportunity to see and appreciate what he did whilst hoodwinked earlier in the ceremony.”