

THE ARKS OF THE ROYAL ARCH CHAPTER

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To Mount Ararat Chapter No. 3, Raleigh, NC
on January 8, 2005**

In the York Rite of Freemasonry reference is made to three arks: first, the Ark of Safety or Noah's Ark; second, the Ark of the Covenant, or the Ark of Moses; and third, the Substitute Ark, or the Ark of Zerubbabel. The passwords of the second, third and fourth Veils in the Royal Arch Degrees allude to these three arks in this order, which is in fact chronological order. The first was constructed by Shem, Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, the second by Moses, Aholiab, and Bezaleel. The third was discovered by Jeshua, Zerubbabel, and Haggai.

The Ark of safety or of Noah was a place of refuge or asylum for Noah and his family. It is alluded to in the Passwords of the second Veil: Shem, Ham and Japheth. We could say that God was the architect, Noah was the builder and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth were the craftsmen. Many commentators have called Noah's Ark a tabernacle of Jehovah. It has been noted that the word which has been translated window when describing Noah's Ark is translated to "meridian light" or "light as its brightest in all other scriptures where it occurs. Some have interpreted this to mean that it was not an aperture that let light in but a source of light itself, that it was the Divine Shekinah or Glory of God, which afterward dwelt between the cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle and Temple. I personally do not have an opinion on this, but the Bible tells us that Noah released a raven and a dove through some type of opening. There could have been both the Shekinah light and an opening.

The traditional resting-place of Noah's Ark is on Mount Ararat, the namesake of this Chapter. It is located in Turkey, near the Iranian border. Ararat is like the name Jehovah in that it is a hybrid word. Like Jehovah the original writings did not contain the vowels, but only the consonants "rrt". This was translated "Urartu" or later "Ararat." During the time of the Old Testament the Urartian region was an extensive area, much more than just one mountain. Thus there exists the possibility of a misinterpretation of Genesis by post-Christian writers and Armenians restricting the Ark's landfall to the smaller Araxes Valley area including Mount Ararat rather than the larger Urartian region or "Mountains of Urartu" as described by Moses in Genesis. So no one really knows exactly where Moses was referring to when he stated that the ark came to rest on the "mountains of rrt." Many people believe that Mount Ararat is the place where Noah's Ark landed, but the Bible does not state this. It simply says that the boat landed in the Urartian Mountains, of which there are hundreds, although Ararat is the highest. Since Mount Ararat is the highest location in Urartu, some people throughout history have jumped to the unproven conclusion that it was the landing place and promoted that concept as a regional tradition.

There has been extensive interest in locating the remains of Noah's Ark for centuries. Several people have made claims of locating it or finding pieces of wood that were parts of it. Others have thought that images of the Ark have shown up on pictures taken from satellites in

space. For political reasons expeditions have been limited, most of which have been illegal entries. At this time no definite proof has been offered that the Ark or any part thereof has been discovered, so the search goes on.

The Ark of the Covenant, or of Moses, is also known as the Ark of the Testimony. It is alluded to in the Passwords of the third Veil: Moses, Aholiab, and Bezaleel. A very good description of this Ark is given in the lecture of the Royal Master Degree in the Council. In Exodus Chapter 25 God gave Moses detailed instructions on how to build the Ark and what to include in it. The contents were the 2 stone tablets on which were engraved the 10 Commandments, a golden pot containing manna, Aaron's rod and the tables of the Covenant. We are told that it was made of wood and overlaid with gold. It had two cherubim on the cover or lid. This lid was called the mercy seat. It was here between the cherubim on the Mercy Seat that the Shekinah or Divine Presence of God dwelt and gave answers when God was consulted. It was first placed in the most holy place in the Tabernacle and later placed in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. It was the most important item in the religious lives of the Hebrew people. It remained the focal point of their lives from the time of Moses until the destruction of the first Temple. Much speculation has been offered as to the fate of The Ark of the Covenant. Many think that it was destroyed or carried away with the other Holy vessels to Babylon by the Chaldeans at the destruction of the first Temple. Others believe that it was hidden or moved by the Priests to a safe location, and is still in existence today. Books have been written and movies have been made depicting the destiny of this most holy relic of all time, but no proof or evidence has been offered as to its real fate. So like Noah's Ark, the Ark of the Covenant will be searched for and written about and speculated about, unless found, as long as time lasts. The George Washington National Masonic Memorial contains the most beautiful reproduction of the Ark of the Covenant ever created for Masonic purposes. It is displayed in the Royal Arch Room.

The third Ark, the Substitute Ark, is a chest or coffer which makes up a part of the furniture of the Royal Arch Chapter and the Council of Royal and Select Masters in the American system of the York Rite. It is alluded to in the passwords of the fourth Veil Jeshua, Zerubbael and Haggai. The Ark from our Masonic traditions is very similar to one from the Talmudic Legends. This substitute Ark was not intended to replace the Ark of the Covenant or have any of its powers. In our Masonic traditions it was intended to preserve Masonic as well as religious heritage. To the Israelites the Ark was an indispensable item in their worship; therefore, a substitute Ark was placed in the Second Temple in the same place that the Ark of the Covenant had occupied in the first. Here again it was not intended to have any of the powers or be held in the same veneration as the first.

Now I am going to give you a little bit of personal interpretation, which is not worth very much coming from me. What about the First Veil? We have tied the passwords of the second, third and fourth Veils with the three Arks we have discussed, but have not mentioned the first Veil. The passwords are the name Jehovah gave himself to Moses: "/ AM THAT I AM". How can this fit in with our descriptions of the passwords of the Veils? In the lecture of The Master Mason's Degree, the first class of emblems has the Anchor and Ark as emblems. The Bahnsen's Manual says, "The Anchor and Ark are emblems of a well-grounded hope and a well spent life. They are emblematic of **that Divine Ark which safely wafts us over this tempestuous sea of troubles.** and that Anchor which shall safely moor us in a peaceful harbor, where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary shall find rest." (emphasis added) I know that there can be more than one interpretation of these words, but to me that

Divine Ark which safely wafts us over this tempestuous sea of troubles is God Himself. And by His own words to Moses he declares that he is also known as "***I AM THAT I AM***". So here again we find that even the first Veil has passwords that can be tied to an Ark. So now we have a connection with an Ark for each Veil, The first Veil — / *AM THAT I AM* — the Divine Ark; The second Veil Shem, Ham and Japheth Noah's Ark; The third Veil Moses, Aholiab, and Bezaleel The Ark of the Covenant; and the fourth Veil Jeshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai. The Substitute Ark, which is the Ark of Zerubbabel.