

THE ROYAL ARCH, THE FOUR VEILS AND THE FIXED SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC

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Throughout Freemasonry's initiatory degrees and the accompanying lectures, explanations of the various sets of symbols are given. These lectures and explanations primarily focus on the moral and ethical interpretations of said symbols. However, there are several alternate interpretations that may be applied to Masonic ritual and symbolism to great effect. These interpretations yield a deeper insight into the Fraternity's wide range of inspirations and the influences with which the Craft has been imbued, in addition to providing a foothold for spiritual, or otherwise metaphysical, contemplation. Among these alternate interpretive keys are the solar and astrological. Freemasonry abounds with allusions to various celestial objects and phenomena in addition to allegorical content, unique to Masonic ritual, which can be understood to represent cycles such as the annual and diurnal solar circuits, planetary orbits and even axial precession. This situation is no different in Royal Arch Masonry.

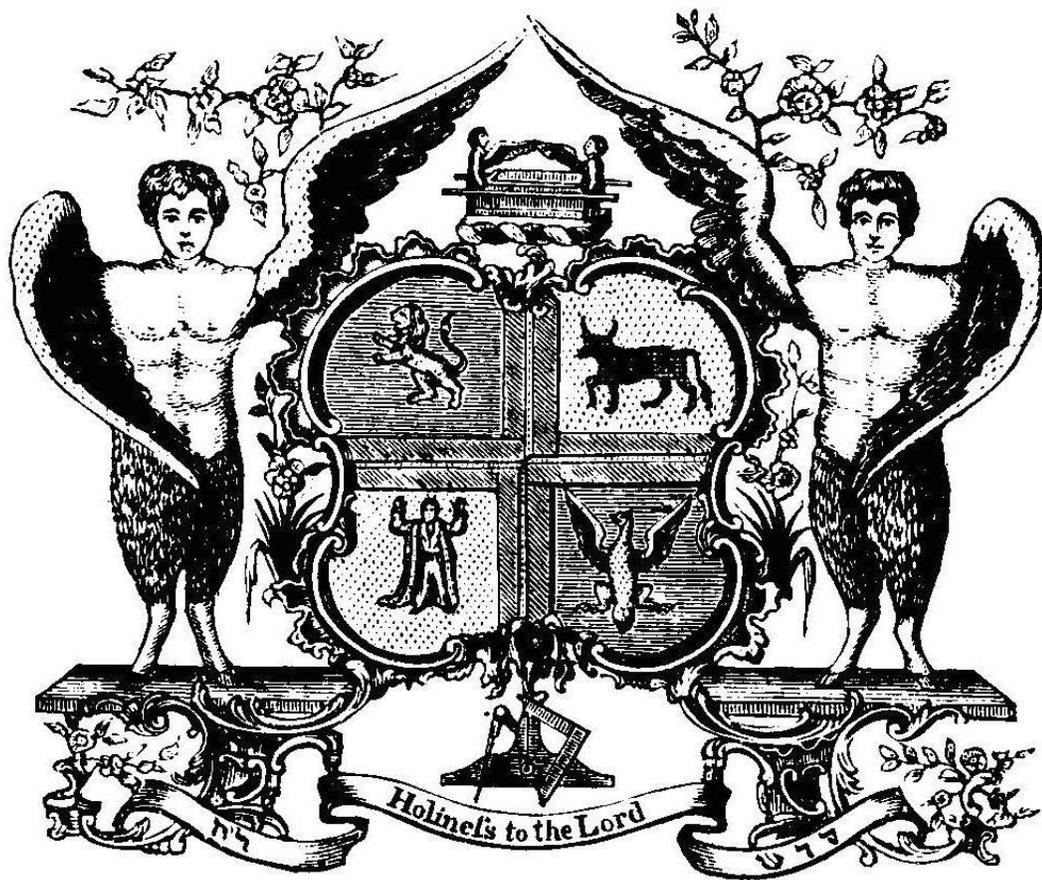
In astrology, both modern and ancient, the twelve houses of the zodiac are divided into quadruplicities, or three groups each containing four signs [Case, *Occult Fundamentals and Spiritual Unfoldment: Early Writings Vol. 1*, Fraternity of the Hidden Light, 2008, pp. 52-57]. These groups divide the cardinal, fixed and mutable signs. The cardinal signs are Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn. The fixed signs are Leo, Scorpio, Aquarius and Taurus. The mutable signs are Sagittarius, Pisces, Gemini and Virgo. The four signs contained in each group equally quarter the zodiacal belt so, due to this configuration, when the vernal equinox occurs in a cardinal sign, for example, the summer solstice, autumnal equinox and the winter solstice will also occur in a cardinal sign. This alignment phenomenon likewise occurs in the fixed and mutable quadruplicities.

The *Anno Lucis* (Latin, 'Year of Light') is a symbolic dating system peculiar to Freemasonry. Often abbreviated as A.L., this dating method is frequently used on Masonic cornerstones and documentation. The *Anno Lucis* adds 4000 years to the Common Era dating system and is a simplification of the *Anno Mundi*, which adds 4004 years to the *Anno Domini*, to which the act of Creation was attributed in the Masoretic text [Mendoza, *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum, the Transactions of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076*, UGLE, Volume 95, <http://freemasonry.bcy.ca>, 1980, retrieved online]. When this date is utilized as a temporal vantage point from which to survey Masonic ritual and symbolism, we begin to realize the value of the *Anno Lucis* as an interpretive key.

The first *Anno Lucis* of Freemasonry, when calculated by the cycles of axial precession, would have occurred in the proximity of the dawn of the Taurian Age [Carter, *An Introduction to Political Astrology (Mundane Astrology)*, Camelot Press, 1973, p. 74], which is the period of 2160 years that the vernal equinox occurred within the 30 degrees of the ecliptic referred to as zodiacal house of Taurus, which spanned from approximately 4000–2000BCE. Bearing this orientation in mind, if one were to wind the

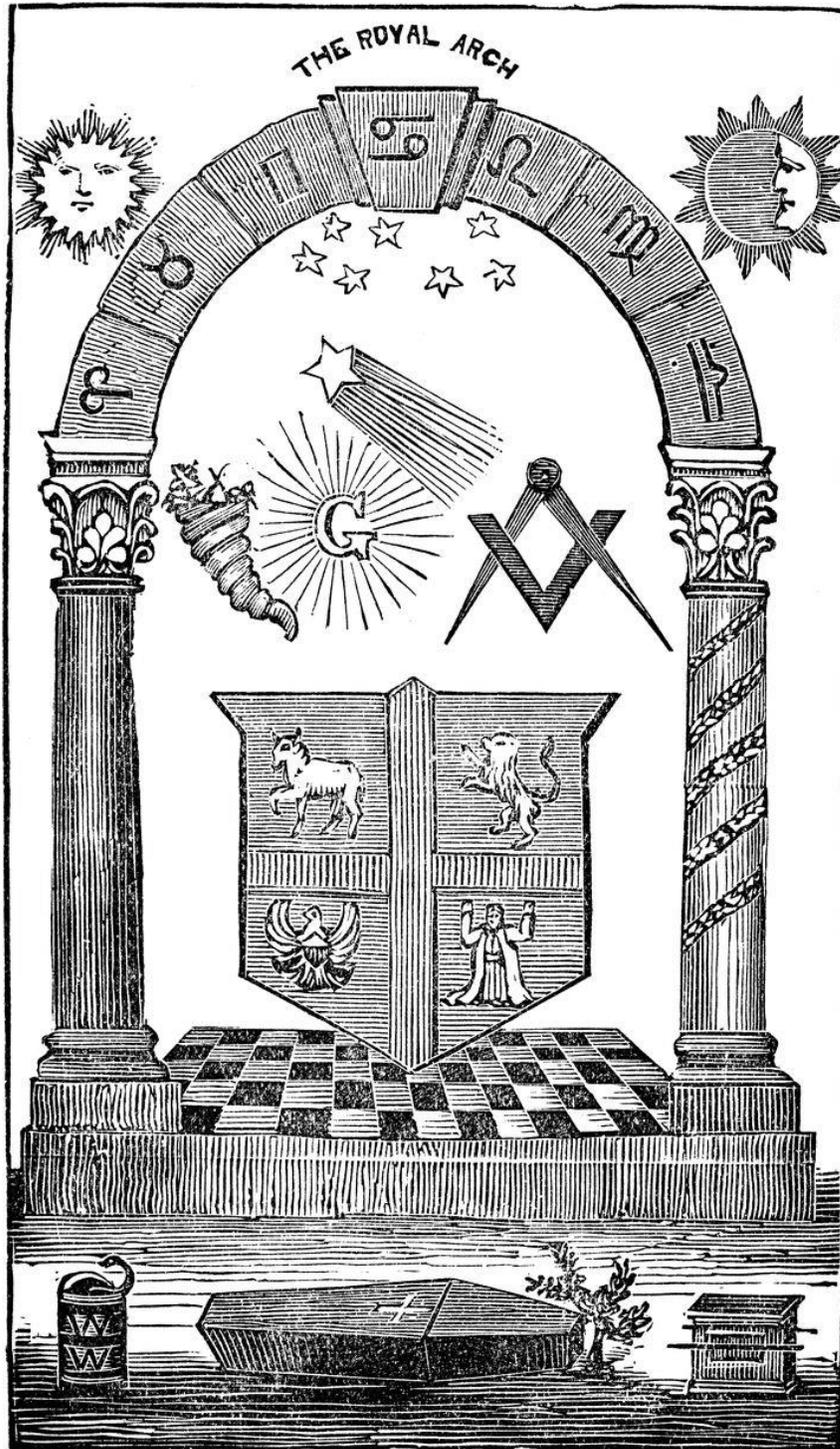
‘precessional clock’ back to the Taurian Age, one would observe the equinoxes and solstices inhabiting the houses of the fixed signs of the zodiac: Taurus, Leo, Scorpio (anciently conflated with the eagle or phoenix) and Aquarius (generally rendered as a man). This astrological quartet, whose most notable appearances are as the *Cherubim* in Ezekiel’s Vision [*The Holy Bible* KJV, Ezekiel 1:10] and as the Four Living Creatures in John’s Vision [*Ibid.*, Revelation 4:6-8], has been frequently depicted in religious visual art, bas-relief and statuary.

We also find these four figures – the ox, lion, eagle & man – depicted in the ritual and symbolism of Royal Arch, or Capitular Masonry, in which they are attributed to the Judaic tribes of Ephraim, Judah, Dan and Reuben, respectively. In the banner of the Royal Arch, the Four Living Creatures, or *Tetramorph*, as to which they are sometimes referred, are depicted on a heraldic shield, crested by the Ark of the Covenant and flanked by two *androsphinxes*. In the astrological interpretation, the ox of the tribe of Ephraim represents the vernal equinox occurring in the zodiacal house of Taurus, as it would have in the year of the Masonic *Anno Lucis*. Thereby, the summer solstice would have occurred in the house of Leo (represented by the lion of Judah), the autumnal equinox in that of Scorpio (represented by the eagle of Dan), and the winter solstice in Aquarius (represented by the man of the tribe of Reuben). The *androsphinxes* are emblematic of the solstices, or Saints John, in the astrological interpretation of the standard – much like the two, vertical parallel lines in the Point Within A Circle diagram. Sphinxes like these have been used since the time of the Babylonian and Chaldean astronomers as hybridized, zoomorphic representations of astrological phenomena. In fact, Ezekiel’s *Tetramorph* itself may be interpreted as a sphinxian composite of the fixed signs.



It is also notable that, within the precessional arrangement at the time of the *Anno Lucis*, the sign of Leo is inhabiting the *Keystone* position of the *Royal Arch* of the Heavens, representing the summer solstice's occurrence in the house of Leo, when the Sun is at its greatest strength – “the beauty and glory of the day”. In the Four Veils of the Royal Arch Tabernacle, we find that the Lion is associated with the tribe of Judah. Applying this as an interpretive key to the Master Mason degree of the Blue Lodge, we notice King Solomon's utilization of the “strong grip, or lion's paw, of the tribe of Judah” as a possible astro-solar allusion. Applying this key, we may interpret the *raising* of Hiram by this leonine grip as a cryptic metaphor for the *raising* of the anthropomorphized Sun from a “dead level to a living perpendicular” which is thereby reconducted to its former position in the *Royal Arch of the Heavens* – the *Sanctum Sanctorum* at High Twelve, i.e. the summer solstice's occurrence in the zodiacal house of Leo.

A similar, though precessionally more current, rendition of this event can be found on several 19th and 20th century Royal Arch tracing boards, where the cardinal sign of Cancer is represented as inhabiting the *Keystone* of the Arch. This is, of course, referential to our current orientation within our tropical calendrical system, in which the summer solstice occurs in the house of Cancer. In modern cartography, as on the globes surmounting the Pillars of the Blue Lodge, this astronomical event is described by the Tropic of Cancer. However, as we have established above, the zodiacal house of Leo would have hosted the summer solstice at the time of the *Anno Lucis* at 4000BCE and throughout the entirety of the Taurian precessional age.



There are myriad other correspondences affixed to the quartet of the fixed signs of the zodiac such as the Four Evangelists, the four Classical Elements, the four suits of the Tarot and the letters of the *Tetragrammaton*, to name but a few [Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, Llewellyn, 2014, p. 207][Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, Dover, 2010, p. 368]. The Four Living Creatures are also referenced heavily in many magical operations, the most common of which is the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram [Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, Llewellyn, 2014, pp. 280-284].

The Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (or, LBRP) is an original ritual of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and, as such, was composed by 19th century Royal Arch Freemasons in England who were also members of the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*. The LBRP is a mainstay in modern ceremonial magick. This ritual functions as a preliminary clearing of the magician's working space and, simultaneously, as an evocation of the four Archangels (Raphael, Gabriel, Michael & Auriel) to act as sentinels at each of the cardinal points. It is generally begun with an appendant ritual called the Qabalistic Cross, which consists of the last few lines of *The Lord's Prayer*, recited in Hebrew, the construction of an astral cross, and the orienting of the magician within the *Etz Chaim* (the qabalistic Tree of Life) and vice-versa. Elemental pentagrams are then traced, either with the fingers or sometimes with an *athame*, or ceremonial dagger, while the names of God (YHVH, ADNI, AHIH & AGLA) are intoned, or vibrated, at their corresponding cardinal direction. The ritual is then generally closed with another performance of the Qabalistic Cross. Within this ritual, certain visualizations are often generated – one of which is the visualization of the Four Living Creatures: the ox, lion, eagle and man.

Now, if thou wilt draw the Pentagram to have by thee as a symbol, thou shalt make it of the colours already taught, upon the black ground. There shall be the sign of the Pentagram, the Wheel, the Lion, the Eagle, the Ox, and the Man, and each hath an angle assigned unto it for dominion. Hence ariseth the Supreme Ritual of the Pentagram, according to the angle from which the Pentagram is traced. The circle or Wheel answereth to the all-pervading Spirit: The laborious Ox is the symbol of Earth; the Lion is the vehemence of Fire; the Eagle, the Water flying aloft as with wings when she is vaporized by the force of heat: the Man is the Air, subtle and thoughtful, penetrating hidden things.

Israel Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, Llewellyn, 2014, pp. 280

Not surprisingly, the *Tetramorph* was also previously found in the ritual and symbolism of the Masonic invitational order *Societas Rosicruciana* which, in addition to Levi's work, is likely where the founders of the Golden Dawn became aware of the quartet's magical import.

In summary, it is of extreme Masonic significance that this *Tetramorphic* alignment – viz. Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius hosting the equinoxes and solstices – would have had its beginning in approximately the year 4000BCE, which is, simultaneously, the *Anno Lucis* and the commencement of the Taurian Age. Furthermore, we believe that the value of this celestial orientation and its corresponding temporal vantage point as an interpretive lens through which to appreciate the ritual and symbolism of Freemasonry in general, and Capitular Masonry in particular, is certainly worth the consideration of those Masons wishing to have a well-rounded understanding of the Craft.