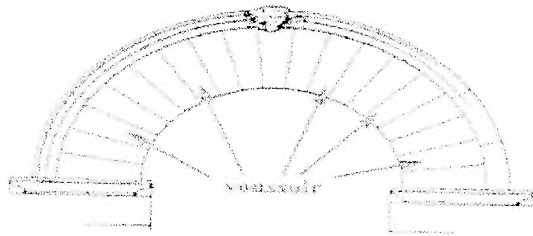


THE PORTRAYAL OF THE CAPITULAR ARCH

<http://www.freemasoninformation.com/2009/04/the-portrayal-of-the-capitular-arch/>

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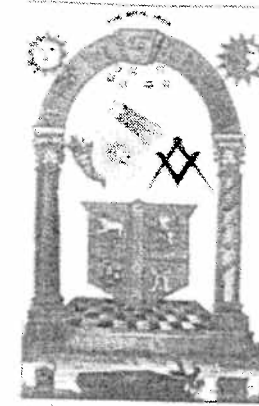
An important part of the capitular degrees is the completion of an arch found in King Solomon's Temple. In the Mark Master and Most Excellent Master degrees, the discovery of the keystone as well as putting it at the apex of the arch constitutes a large part of the ceremonies of those degrees. However, the arch is widely regarded as being a Roman invention. So one may wonder whether the presence of the keystone and the portrayal of the completion of the arch during the time frame of these degrees is historically accurate.



The true arch constructed with voussoirs.

Historians generally agree that the reign of King Solomon began around 970 B.C.¹ The Old Testament states that Solomon began the construction of the temple in the fourth year of his reign.² This means its completion came circa 959 B.C. Could it have been possible that the ability to construct an arch would have been known unto a Phoenician builder at that time?

Sir Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture* states that the true arch was known to the Sumerian builders as early as the second millennium B.C.³ The term 'true arch' is an important detail. The true arch is distinctly different from the corbelled arch used by the Egyptians. The true arch is what the Romans are commonly lauded for creating. A definition of the word 'arch' says that "A true arch is curved. It consists of wedge-shaped stones or bricks called VOUSOIRS (vuswar), put together to make a curved bridge which spans the opening."⁴ The arch shown in art pertaining to the Capitular degrees displays this type of arch. Therefore, the theory that an arch constructed with wedge-shaped stones at King Solomon's Temple is plausible since the true arch was used in Mesopotamia a thousand years before the temple's construction.



A traditional depiction of the capitular arch, notice the freestanding columns.

However, there is a truly Roman characteristic to the arch as depicting in the Chapter. Banister says, "The really significant contribution of the Roman builders to the early development of the arch—and therefore the barrel vault—was to support it on freestanding piers."⁵ The depiction of the arch found in the Chapter degrees shows it supported by freestanding piers. This evolution did not take place until the first and second centuries B.C.⁶ So the piers shown as supporting the arch in the degrees of the Chapter would not have been found at the building of King Solomon's Temple.

The idea that the completion of the temple was accomplished by placing the keystone in the arch could be historically plausible, if the piers of the arch were surrounded by masonry or earth in order to prevent them from moving laterally. So perhaps the stone which the builders rejected did become the keystone of the arch in King Solomon's Temple.

5. Banister, Fletcher and Cruickshank. *A History of Architecture* p. 197.

1. Old Testament Chronology of the NIV Study Bible published by Zondervan in 1985.

2. I Kings 6:37-38.

3. Banister, Fletcher and Cruickshank. *A History of Architecture* p. 74.

4. Whitehead, Anne. "Index of all architectural terms." Utah Educational Network.