

# THE AFRICAN ARCHITECT RITE

By Robert Burns Lodge 59

**The African Architect Rite**, also known as the **Order of African Architects** or the **Rite of the “Crata Repoa,”** was a mysterious and short-lived Masonic order that emerged in the late 18th century. Founded in 1767 in Prussia under the patronage of Frederick II (Frederick the Great), the rite claimed to hold the secrets of the ancient Egyptian priesthood and to trace the origins of Freemasonry back to the land of the Nile.[1][2]

At its head was von Köppen, a member of the Strict Observance – a Templar-themed high-degree Masonic rite that had gained popularity in Germany.[1][3] The African Architects seem to have been influenced by the 18th century fascination with Egypt, hermeticism, and alchemy. This was a time when the mysteries of ancient civilizations were being re-examined in a new light, often through a lens of esoteric and occult philosophy.[4]

In Prussia, the rite consisted of seven degrees:[1][2][5]

- 1. Pastophoris**
- 2. Néocoris**
- 3. Melanophoris**
- 4. Chistophoris**
- 5. Balahate**
- 6. Astronomer of the Gate of Gods**
- 7. Prophet or Saphenath Pancah**

These degrees were said to represent a progressive initiation into the secrets of the Egyptian priesthood. The first degree, Pastophoris, allegedly involved tests of the candidate’s courage and resolve through trials of the elements.[6] As the initiate progressed, they were supposedly instructed in the esoteric meaning of Egyptian symbolism, mathematics, astronomy, alchemy and other occult sciences.[1][6]

Interestingly, the rite seems to have worked with a mythos centered around the death and resurrection of Osiris. In the 3rd degree, the “Gate of Death,” this murder was ritually reenacted, but unlike other Masonic rites, the candidate was not immediately “raised” or resurrected. This only occurred in the 4th degree, where they received the “Shield of Isis.” The 5th degree involved a drama where Horus avenges his father by slaying Typhon.[1] This focus on the Osiris myth and the triad of Osiris-Isis-Horus suggests the rite was working with authentic Egyptian symbolism and mysteries.[7]

In France, where the rite spread in the 1770s, the system was expanded to eleven degrees under the name “Crata Repoa.” According to the 19th century Masonic historian Ragon, the degrees in France were as follows:[1][5]

- First Temple: The three Craft Degrees
- Second Temple:
  4. Architect or Apprentice of the Egyptian Secrets
  5. Initiate of the Egyptian Secrets
  6. Cosmopolitan Brother
  7. Christian Philosopher
  8. Master of the Egyptian Secrets
- Higher Degrees:
  9. Armiger
  10. Miles
  11. Eques

Beyond the names and themes of the degrees, however, very little is concretely known about the substance of the African Architect teachings or rituals. No original rituals or documents from the order survive, and it remains unclear exactly how they conducted their initiations or what esoteric knowledge they claimed to possess.[8]

What does seem apparent is that the African Architects were part of a larger 18th century movement to reinterpret the roots and purpose of Freemasonry. At a time when the Craft was rapidly evolving and expanding, many Masonic thinkers were looking to ancient mystery schools and initiatic traditions as a way to deepen the meaning and scope of Masonic ritual. [4][9]

Orders like the African Architects, the Strict Observance, the Asiatic Brethren, the Illuminati and others all represented attempts to infuse Masonry with a more esoteric and transformative purpose, often by tracing its lineage back to ancient wisdom traditions.[10] The African Architects stand out for their specific focus on Egypt and their incorporation of Egyptian myth and symbolism at a time when knowledge of hieroglyphs and Egyptian culture was still very limited.[11]

Ultimately, the African Architect Rite was very short-lived, lasting only about 20 years.[1] Its fate and the reasons for its disappearance are uncertain. Some scholars speculate that it may have been a victim of the more conservative backlash against esoteric and occult Masonry that set in towards the end of the 18th century.[12]

Nevertheless, despite its brief existence and the scarcity of records it left behind, the African Architect Rite remains an intriguing example of how 18th century Masons sought to link their Craft to the allure and mystery of ancient Egypt. In many ways, it foreshadowed the “Egyptian Rites” of the 19th century, like the Rites of Misraim and Memphis, which would go on to greatly influence the development of esoteric Masonry.[13][14] As such, the African Architects can perhaps be best understood as a pioneering attempt to re-envision the soul of Masonry through the prismatic lens of Egyptosophy and hermeticism.

Though much about them remains obscure, they stand as a testament to the enduring power of ancient Egypt to inspire and transform the Western esoteric imagination. The African Architect Rite’s dream of a Masonry illuminated by the lost wisdom of Egypt may have been short-lived, but the aspirations and mysteries it embodied would echo far beyond their brief moment on the Masonic stage.

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