



The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Supreme Council of the 33rd and last degree of Switzerland

History of the High Degrees and the Supreme Council of Switzerland

The history of the High Degrees in the French-speaking part of Switzerland began in 1773 by the creation of a Rose+Croix Chapter in Geneva. In the county of Vaud a National Directory Helvétique Romand, for the French-speaking part of Switzerland (DNHR) had been constituted in 1739, in spite of the fact that this date has not been agreed upon by some historians. The terms of the constitution of the Directory and the Scottish Directory appeared in documents dating from 1786.

As to the Scottish Directory's creation, it would be situated approximately between 1780 and 1786. One must realise that the political parties at that time, especially the Bernese Government, had issued simultaneously four decrees prohibiting Freemasonry in the county of Vaud. The masons of Vaud at that time continued their activities in other regions when the National Directory of the French-speaking part of Switzerland would have profited by this situation in developing its relationships with other obediences and concluded several alliances.

In the beginning of the 19th century, we saw the creation of several lodges as well as the Chapter, "La Prudence", founded in 1802 under the wings of the Grand Orient of France. In Lausanne, the Chapter "Amitié et Persévérance" was installed in 1810 equally by the Grand Orient of France (GODF). It was on the 7th October 1810 that the Supreme Directory Helvétique Romande (DSHR) was constituted, designed to superintend the workings of the Chapters and Lodges. In 1812 it instituted the organisation of the Chapter of the Valley of Lausanne and from 1821 restricted its activities to the High Degrees.

The Supreme Directory Helvétique Romand, whose activities were restricted until 1869, tied relationships with foreign obediences, limiting its scope however to the High Degrees. These approaches upset the authorities of the Swiss Grand Lodge Alpina (GLSA) which saw it as an interference to their sovereignty, considering that foreign relationships belonged to their competence alone. This led the Swiss Grand Lodge Alpina to cutting relationships with the Grand Orient of France.

It seemed that the Swiss Grand Lodge Alpina would have wanted to weaken the High Degrees, especially the Scottish system, wanting to line up with the Grands Lodges of Germany who had just rejected the High Degrees.

On the Swiss-German side, we saw in the first place the constitution of a Prefecture in 1773 and a Priory in Switzerland coming out of two lodges in Basel and Zürich. The Grand Priory Independant of Helvetia (RER) was constituted in Basel in 1779 and then attached to the Province of Burgundy. Following certain events, masonic activities were reduced and the Lodges of Basel and Zürich stayed dormant for 25 years. The "Rectified Rite" had no more activity in Europe during the period of the French Revolution.

As regards to the AASR, it was between the years of 1920 and 1929 that the first Chapters and Aeropagus of Berne, Basel and Zürich joined up with the AASR of Switzerland.

Several members of the Supreme Directory Helvétique Romand having acquired the 33rd Grade in Paris adopted finally the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite and, on the 30th March 1873, founded the Supreme Council of Switzerland impregnated with a firm will

"to render to Masonry its splendour and its primitive purity, to guarantee its full and entire independence from the authorities and political parties, as well as from professional strife, and for the purpose, of conferring the 33 degrees of Scottish hierarchy to the complete territory of the Swiss Confederation."

The Constitutive Deed puts in the forefront

"the declaration to constitute a Supreme Council of 33rd degree for Switzerland, which shall for ever be the sovereign body of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in our Country and will have its headquarters at the Orient of Lausanne."

"the will to adhere otherwise to the Treaty of the alliance and Masonic Federation concluded in 1834 between the Supreme Councils of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite and to agree to comply with the Grand Constitutions of 1762 and 1786.

The Constitutive Deed terminates by the following declaration:

"May the Grand Architect of the Worlds bless the works of this Supreme Council: may He insure the intimate union between the existing Supreme Councils and the Supreme Council of Switzerland."

After the Supreme Council of Switzerland's foundation in 1873 and given the nearness of the Convent of Lausanne, the Swiss Grand Lodge Alpina decided to settle the differences they had with the High Degrees in withdrawing the decree of 1871, which prevented members of the lodges of the Supreme Council of Switzerland to join up with those of Alpina. The Swiss Grand Lodge Alpina required that the Supreme Council of Switzerland should renounce their authority over the symbolic Lodges.

Henceforth, discussions were held between the Swiss Grand Lodge Alpina and the Supreme Council in favour of the independence of these two obediences. In April 1939, the Swiss Grand Lodge Alpina and the Supreme Council of the AASR of Switzerland concluded a treaty designed to maintain good harmony in Switzerland.

In 1946, a convention was signed with the same purpose between the Grand Priory Independant of Switzerland of the Scottish Rectified Rite and the Supreme Council of the AASR of Switzerland.

At the end of the 20th Century, Mark Masonry had been introduced into Switzerland The Supreme Council of Switzerland and the Grand Priory Independant of Helvetia of the Scottish Rectified Rite had reacted by no longer allowing double membership with

obediences practising degrees superior or different to those of the Swiss Grand Lodge Alpina.

In order to put an end to a situation which had become uncomfortable, the Supreme Council of Switzerland accepted a change in its statutes in line with a convention signed in 2004 between the AASR of Switzerland and the Grand Chapter National Helvetia of the masons of the Royal Arch. Furthermore, it was specified that double membership of a member of the AASR to several ateliers in the same degree in Switzerland or abroad is not authorised, except in the quality as an honorary member and with prior notice being given by the Sovereign Grand Commander.

The membership to the Grand Chapter National Helvetia of masons of the Royal Arch does not come under double membership because the Degree of the Royal Arch is a unique complement to the 3rd Degree in the Masonry of St-John.

We have just skimmed through the hatching of the AASR in Switzerland. The constitutive deed of our Supreme Council mentions the expression “the Supreme Council *for* Switzerland” whereas we use currently the expression “the Supreme Council *of* Switzerland”.

In order to be in complete harmony with our history and the several decisions taken after its foundation by our Supreme Council, we are going to proceed with some research in order to determine the exact historical denomination of our Supreme Council, even if the expressions “of Switzerland” or “for Switzerland” do not have any fundamental effects.

As regards to international relationships, we have seen from its beginnings that the Supreme Council of Switzerland has enjoyed great consideration from foreign Obediences in presiding, 2 years after its foundation, over the universal Convent of the AASR in Lausanne in 1875. Then our Supreme Council had been present and very active at the international Conferences of Supreme Councils, namely those of 1922 and 1995 which were organised in Lausanne.

Simultaneously, we have brought our contributions to the Grand European Commandeurs' Conferences which meet principally every 2 years. The 1965 conference was held in Lausanne.

Very recently, in December 2012, we have made our contribution to the realisation, as well as to the signing of the constitutive deed of the Supreme European Councils'-Conference, with its headquarters at Lausanne.

Already for several years, permanent steps have been taken by the Supreme Council with the view of ensuring better harmony within our Rite. Let us raise our attention to the annual reunion of the Heads of Ateliers which facilitates dialogue between its participants and members of the Supreme Council. On the other hand, the Supreme Council sessions, which take place twice a year in spring and in autumn, permit taking decisions pertaining to the administration of our Rite and to promoting communication.

The cohabitation of obediences in the same country demands a great deal of willingness and impartiality from all sides, because masonic objectives ride well above the Rites. It is natural, it is human that everyone should work more willingly for his own association than for the benefit of others and that frictions can only be avoided through mutual respect. It is thereby, in addition to signed conventions, that the heads of the Swiss Grand Lodge Alpina, of the Scottish Rectified Rite and of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Switzerland meet at least once a year in order to perpetuate their good relationships, to develop exchanges on masonic subjects in general and to anticipate, and even out possible differences.

“In a same optimism I would like to be able to speak of the general situation of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in the world. In all frankness, but with so many regrets, I must recognize that too often, narrow-minded and obstinate views are obstacles to this immense impetus from our hearts which really desire to form the solid chain joining all men loving solidarity, affection and fraternity.”

This reflection emanating from the honorary Sovereign Grand Commander, Paul Collet, was written on the occasion of the centenary of our Supreme Council in 1973. Still topical, it makes us think about difficulties that we still meet today in certain countries.

The Supreme Council of the AASR of Switzerland must above all ensure perfect harmony within itself, in line with the Constitutions of 1762 and 1786. It must contribute to maintaining fraternal links with recognized obediences in our country. With regards to our international relationships, we must start with the principle that “one can only give advice if one has the wisdom to practise it”.

From this moment, let us follow the aspirations of our brethren of 1973:
Fidelity – Work – Hope.

The 33 degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Switzerland

The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Switzerland consists of a hierarchy of 33 degrees.

The Swiss Grand Lodge Alpina is the only sovereign authority in Switzerland for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Degrees of the Masonry of St. John.

All members of the AASR must be an active member of a Lodge under the auspices of the Swiss Grand Lodge Alpina.

The degrees belonging to the Supreme Council of Switzerland are divided up as follows:

- Lodges of Perfection – ateliers working from the 4th to the 14th degree
- Chapters – ateliers working from the 15th to the 18th degree
Note that only the 18th degree, Knight Rose-Croix, is worked in Switzerland with a compulsory ritual reception. It is then possible that a brother could be received in another Chapter through the 4th ritual degree or in other degrees before going through the 18th degree.
- Areopagus – ateliers working from the 19th to the 30th degree
Here equally, only the 30th degree, Knight Kadosh, is worked in Switzerland with a compulsory ritual reception. The Sovereign Grand Commander must give his assent to those called to be passed to the 30th degree prior to the working of the ritual reception.
It is also possible that a brother be called to an intermediate degree at another Areopagus than the one in which he will be received for the 30th degree.
- Courts – ateliers working the 31st degree in Lausanne and Zürich

This degree works generally in Switzerland by communication even if we have already practised it in Lausanne under a ritual form.

- Consistories –ateliers working the 32nd degree, Master of the Royal Secret, which is practised in Lausanne and Zürich. The 31st and 32nd degrees cannot be requested. They form part of the Supreme Council and members are elected by it. Members of the Officers Board of our Consistories (32nd degree) must be members of the Supreme Council.
- It is the Supreme Council which confers the 33rd degree, Sovereign Grand Inspector General, in a ceremony which generally takes place in Lausanne, but alternates every 3 years between the Swiss German and Swiss Italian regions of Switzerland.

Ninety nine active Sovereign Grand Inspectors General are divided up over the different Valleys in Switzerland, according to the number of members in the various Chapters, on the 30th November each year.

The Sovereign Grand Inspectors General can be nominated at any time, at their request, by the Supreme Council, as Honorary Grand Inspectors General and thereby leave their place to new forces.

The Supreme Council is the supreme authority of the AASR and represents the regulating powers of the Rite. In accordance with the provisions of the Grand Constitutions, it is composed of at least 9 active members up to a maximum of 33 members, whom are chosen by co-optation. Our Supreme Council is composed of 33 active members divided up according to the numbers of members in the Chapters on 30th November each year.

The members of the Supreme Council are nominated “ad vitam”. They may request their honorarium, a status which is accorded to them by the Supreme Council.

The Officers Board of the Supreme Council is composed currently of 9 members and exerts a general surveillance over current affairs. It meets generally between 2 and 4 times a year.

The Sovereign Grand Commander presides over the Supreme Council and the Officers Board, directs sessions as well as meetings with the Heads of the Ateliers. He represents the AASR not only in Switzerland but also abroad and takes all decisions relating to affaires which must be dealt with immediately. He has the right to honours in all ritual workings and meetings of the AASR.

Jean-Claude Chatelain 33e
Sovereign Grand Commander