

Tyranny of Egypt Over Freemasonry

THE TYRANNY OF EGYPT OVER FREEMASONRY: A Study of The Influence Exercised by The Ancient Mysteries Over Freemasonry

By Bro. Michael Adam Neulander

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Introduction:

Since childhood I have had a fascination and a real “thirst” for conducting an in-depth study of the Egyptian civilization. However, I did not have the opportunity to “slake my thirst” for most of my life due to work requirements. The last ten years of my working life was spent as an Adjunct Professor of History at Old Dominion University, in Norfolk Virginia. My area of expertise was history of Asia. It was in the last two years before I retired that I was finally able to satisfy my long-held desire to embark on my “journey of discovery” regarding Egyptian history, culture, and especially its language. Part of my journey has led me down the path towards learning Egyptian hieroglyphs; so far, I have memorized over 500 of them. One of the other passions of my adult life has been my over thirty-six-year membership in Freemasonry. I am grateful for how its moral philosophy has made me a better man by teaching me how to “subdue my passions and keep me in due bounds towards all mankind.” I have also enjoyed researching its rich allegory steeped in history hearkening back to the building of King Solomon’s Temple. Thus, when the Tennessee Lodge of Research started its “Academy of Masonic Knowledge” program I eagerly enrolled. It is in this past year as I started to read books and write reviews about them that I came to realize two of my life passions, Egyptology and Freemasonry, would cross paths. I was so pleased by this nexus of intellectual pleasure that I knew I had to write about Egypt’s influence on Freemasonry and present my paper at a meeting of the Tennessee Lodge of Research.

My discovery of the nexus between Egyptology and Freemasonry started with the second book I read for the “Academy of Knowledge” program. The book was *The Builders: A Story and Study of Masonry*, which was authored by the imminent Masonic scholar, Joseph Fort Newton, (1876-1950). I was pleasantly surprised when Newton in this book looked to Egyptian hieroglyphs and the importance of their symbolism to both Egyptian culture and Freemasonry. Newton made a fascinating connection for me between the Egyptian hieroglyph for the “Sun God” *Ra* and the Masonic significance of the “All seeing-eye.” Newton stated: “There is less mystery about the Circle, which was an image of the disk of the Sun and a natural symbol of completeness, of eternity. With a point within the center it became, as naturally, the emblem of the Eye of the World—that All-seeing eye of the eternal Watcher of the human scene.”^[1] Therefore, like the Egyptian *Ra*, the Masonic “All seeing-eye” is the symbol for the omniscience of the “Great Architect Of The Universe.” It is important to note that Newton like so many other distinguished Masonic scholars, such as: Albert Mackey, (1807-81), William Leslie Wilmhurst, (1867-1939), and Oliver Day Street, (1886-1944), understood that Masonic symbolism which took “root” in the Egyptian mysteries continued to “flower” through the various ancient mysteries that developed throughout history. After reading Newton’s book, I had an epiphany, Newton’s book re-awakened in me my lifelong belief, formulated by my rigorous academic study of over forty years, that so much of what happens in history and philosophy is connected. Often, these connections are hidden from a cursory view of

events. However, with rigorous examination and study the connections can be found. Thus, it is because of the connection of Egyptology and Freemasonry that I decided to title my paper and presentation, *The Tyranny of Egypt Over Freemasonry: A Study of The Influence Exercised by The Ancient Mysteries Over Freemasonry*.

Upon seeing this title, I am sure many of you are curious as to why I selected it; thus, it deserves a brief explanation. Over twenty years ago, when I was a graduate student studying philosophy and history at Old Dominion University, in Norfolk Virginia, I came across a curiously titled book that just compelled me to take it off the library shelf and read it. The book was authored by Eliza Marian Butler in 1935 and it was entitled *The Tyranny of Greece Over Germany: A Study of The Influence Exercised by Greek Art and Poetry Over the Great German Writers of the 18th, 19th, and 20th Centuries*. It is no wonder that I had such a visceral compulsion to picking the book off the shelf after its title caught my eye. After all, I was double majoring in graduate school because ever since I was a student in the late 1970's at the University of Miami in Coral Gables Florida, I came to realize that rarely does any idea or any phenomena spring out of a vacuum. My studies in the Liberal Arts taught me that different academic disciplines are intertwined by sharing ideas. In addition, I also learned that different historical epochs are intertwined as well. Thus, I was not surprised that when I became a Freemason over thirty-six years ago I rapidly learned that the Masonic allegory and symbolism used to teach us "wise and serious truths" were handed down to us by a plethora of wise men from all different cultures and periods of time. It is only after reading Newton's book that I realized that Masonic "truths" reached all the way back to ancient Egypt. This epiphany caused me to continue my research and I soon came across another book, Erik Hornung's *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West*. Hornung's book helped me to understand the nexus between ancient Egyptian wisdom, which he defines as "Egyptosophy," and Freemasonry. Hornung argued that Egyptosophy was the prevailing discipline that researchers studied to understand the history, culture, and "ancient wisdom" of ancient Egypt. "It was only after the decipherment of hieroglyphs by Jean-François Champollion in 1822 that its younger sister, the discipline of Egyptology, made its appearance."[\[2\]](#) In essence, this handing down of our "wise and serious truths" from time immemorial to when "speculative" Freemasonry came into being in the eighteenth century in Great Britain is the reason why I embarked on trying to discover the nexus between Egyptosophy and Freemasonry. After all, my studies in Freemasonry, much of it conducted after I retired from being an Adjunct Professor at Old Dominion University, have convinced me that the greatness of Freemasonry was created by "men who stood on the shoulders of giants." With this idea in mind, it was only natural for me to borrow Butler's title of her book and use it for the title of my paper. Thus, I present for the pleasure of the audience my paper entitled; *The Tyranny of Egypt Over Freemasonry: A Study of The Influence Exercised by The Ancient Mysteries Over Freemasonry*.

The thesis of my paper is really a simple notion. All my years of academic studies have thoroughly convinced me that there is an "unbroken chain" of Egyptian wisdom that has been transmitted through several epochs of history and found its way into Freemasonry during the "Age of Enlightenment." Now I am not arguing that this "unbroken chain" of Egyptian wisdom has been passed down verbatim by word of mouth through every generation of humans from ancient Egypt to "speculative" Freemasonry. However, I do argue that the ancient Egyptian wisdom, (known as Hermeticism, which I will define in this paper when I write about Egyptian history), has been discovered by the initiated intelligentsia during every major historical epoch of history up to the "Age of Enlightenment." In addition, I assert that in every one of these historical epochs of history,

these men of intelligentsia, who have been initiated into various rites and societies, often secretive in nature, believed that they were chosen to spread the Hermetic wisdom of ancient Egypt. These initiated intelligentsia also believed that this “revealed” wisdom could be used to interpret the esoteric knowledge necessary to better understand their place in the universe, the “truth” behind human existence, and their relationship with our G-d.

Although I stated that my thesis is a simple notion, it is a complex story to explain, since much of the evidence is hidden in esoteric allegory. In addition, the scope of my paper covers a vast timeline of history. However, the historical methodology I will use to examine the “long march” that Egyptian culture has made through different historical epochs culminating with the “Age of Enlightenment” and 18th century Freemasonry will clearly “illuminate” the proof of my thesis. Since I have become a professional historian, I have viewed all my historical data through the “hermeneutic lens.” Hermeneuticism is defined by historians and philosophers as the necessity to immerse oneself in the entire social milieu associated with a historical epoch to fully understand its significance on a historical event. Sometimes this is not an easy task. Borrowing a phrase used by Winston Churchill to describe Communism, one can describe Freemasonry’s allegory and symbolism as a “mystery wrapped in an enigma.” More academically defined, Freemasonry is steeped in esotericism which is defined as follows. The concept of the “esoteric” originated in the second century CE with the coining of the ancient Greek adjective *esôterikós*, meaning “belonging to an inner circle.” Historically esotericism was concerned with “metaphysical truths” deliberately obscured from all but a very few who were initiated into several ancient mysteries. Often these “chosen few” were identified throughout history as “adepts,” “magi,” and “seers” who were trained to grasp the real “metaphysical truth” of the universe which had been “hidden in plain sight” from the uninitiated. I will show in this paper that esoteric wisdom really began to be revealed to only a small coterie of the intelligentsia, first in ancient Egypt, and then fully flourishing during the “Age of Enlightenment.” These initiated philosophes of the “Age of Enlightenment” were often Freemasons, Illuminati, and/or Rosicrucians. They were the last group of men to use the Hermetic teachings which “beckoned” to them from ancient Egypt as a way of searching for and understanding the esoteric meaning in ideas and written text. In addition, they also conducted their scrupulous examination of data by using such disciplines as philosophy, science, and art. I end my introduction using a Bible quote which I think sums up the need, in each generation, for at least an “initiated few” throughout history to be able to use the Hermetic knowledge, born in ancient Egypt, to interpret the esoteric wisdom of our metaphysical world which has been “hidden in plain sight” throughout history. “Wisdom crieth aloud in the street, She uttereth her voice in broad places;” (Proverbs 1:20). “Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man attended.” (Proverbs 1:24).

Egypt: 3,100-30 BCE

It all starts in Egypt! Architecture, religion, mythology, and esotericism all sprang up from the banks of the Nile River. Before I tell you about how the ancient mysteries started in Egypt, I need to show you a view of Egypt through the “hermeneutic lens.” Ancient Egypt was known as the “breadbasket” of the ancient world due to its rich harvest of wheat which sprouted up every year along the banks of the Nile River. There were two factors that contributed to their rich bounty. The Nile would overflow its banks every year, this phenomenon was known as the “inundation season,” which was predictably marked by ancient Egyptian calendars for several millennia. The flood that it caused irrigated over several million square miles of land. In addition, the flood would bring with it

extraordinarily rich silt from its source, Lake Victoria in Tanzania. This phenomenon naturally fertilized the land along the banks of the Nile making it the best land for agricultural growth on the planet. The rich agricultural properties of Egypt allowed its population to have more leisure time away from the arduous farming activity that was necessary for survival in most other locations in the ancient world. With leisure time human imagination is allowed to grow which allows several aspects of culture to flourish, such as, a written language, literature, religion, government, art, and architecture. All this development was made possible earlier than in almost any other civilization in human history. This phenomenon is known as "Geographic Determinism," which is a term used by historians to note when geography creates an agricultural advantage for a civilization to develop faster than in other regions. I now examine the development of Hermeticism which also sprung from the banks of the Nile.

Hornung stated in his book, *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West*, that he would concentrate on Egyptosophy: "the study of an imaginary Egypt viewed as the profound source of all esoteric lore. This Egypt is a timeless *idea* bearing only on a loose relationship to the historical reality."^[3] This esoteric ancient wisdom of Egypt is commonly known as Hermeticism; which I will now explain in greater detail. Hermeticism originated out of the description of the Egyptian deity Thoth and his function in Egyptian religion. The first thing to remember about ancient Egypt is that they invented an extraordinarily complex polytheistic religion which literally contained over 100 deities. My extensive research in Egyptology has led me to rely on the book from one of the most renowned Egyptologists who teaches at Oxford University, Geraldine Pinch. Her book, *Egyptian Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses, and Traditions of Ancient Egypt*, is my source of knowledge regarding Egyptian religious practice. The deity Thoth was portrayed as an ape or ibis headed man. He was considered in Egyptian mythology as the deity that invented all spoken languages, writing, wisdom, and secret knowledge. His main Temple where he was worshipped by his priests was in the city of Hermopolis. He was also known as the scribe for the Gods, and an incorruptible judge. "Thoth acted as the advocate of the murdered Osiris before the Divine Tribunal."^[4] In fact, Thoth had an instrumental effect in the afterlife of all Egyptians. During the twelfth Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom (c. 1938-1759 BCE), Thoth was credited with authoring the first Hermetic text, *The Book of Two Ways*, which is the first account of the afterlife. In the famous Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, Thoth's responsibility was to stand next to every Egyptian soul wanting to gain entrance to the heavens. Any soul that had trepidation regarding their entrance into the heavens asked Thoth to advocate their case for them as he did for Osiris. When the soul's heart was weighed on the scales against the feather of *maat*, "truth," Thoth recorded the verdict. It is the next attributes of Thoth that are the subject of this paper. "A tradition grew up that Thoth had written forty-two books containing all the knowledge needed by humanity. Some of this was occult knowledge to be revealed only to initiates who would not misuse the power it gave them."^[5] You will see in this paper that occult knowledge, often also termed alchemy throughout history, figures prominently in esoteric knowledge. As I will explain in greater detail under this paper's heading on "Greece," Thoth is renamed Hermes in Greek mythology. Therefore: "The body of literature known as the Hermetica claimed to preserve the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus (Thoth the Thrice Great). Hermes Trismegistus was eventually reinterpreted as a great thinker who had lived thousands of years in the past."^[6] Thus, the knowledge imparted by Hermes Trismegistus became the bulk of the knowledge that started the "unbroken chain" of esotericism that was communicated by most of the ancient mysteries. This esotericism wound ("travelled") through all the historical

epochs up to the “Age of Enlightenment,” and “burrowed” its way into Masonic allegory and symbolism. Now is a good time to “illuminate” some of the Egyptian esoterica that made its way into Masonic allegory and symbolism; especially when it concerns architecture and the resurrection of the soul as told in our “Hiramic” legend.

Newton noted in his book, *The Builders: A Story and Study of Masonry*, that humans have always been builders. There is plenty of evidence for this claim; especially, when one studies the early civilizations of Egypt, Sumer, India, and China. Of course, for Masonic purposes, Newton focused his attention on the Egyptian civilization; with the building of the great pyramids and temples in Egypt starting about 5,000 years ago. Newton correctly pointed out that agricultural life in Egypt was essentially an effortless endeavor due to the yearly “inundation cycle” of the Nile River. Therefore, Egyptians had plenty of “free time” on their hands to spend on other pursuits; thus, they were able to turn their attention to architecture. One only has to observe the collective “genius” that was required to construct the magnificent Great Pyramid of Giza, the tallest man-made edifice in the world until the Lincoln Cathedral was finished in 1311 CE, to realize the great contribution the Egyptians made to the “architectural arts.” As Newton most beautifully stated: “Here then are the real foundations of Masonry, both material and moral: in the deep need and aspiration of man, and his creative impulses; in his instinctive Faith, the quest of the Ideal, and his love of the Light.”^[7] Therefore, it should come as no surprise to anyone that “speculative” Freemasons, during the “Age of Enlightenment,” would focus on Egyptian civilization’s architectural achievements as the “starting point” for some of its own symbolism and allegory.

Oliver Day Street, (1886-1944), was a distinguished Freemason who served two terms as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Alabama from 1925-27. His article “*Symbolism of the Three Degrees*” in *The Freemason’s Key: A Study of Masonic Symbolism*, edited by Michael R. Poll, contains a plethora of information concerning the three degrees of Freemasonry. However, I was able to “dig out” some real “nuggets” of useful information on symbolism and myth. In Street’s section explaining symbolism and myth of the Master Mason’s degree, he asked the following question. “Do we find any institutions in ancient time similar to our own and employing our symbols for like purposes? I answer at once that we do.”^[8] Street’s answer pointed him towards the history of the ancient mysteries, starting with Egyptian mythology as a source for the allegory of the “Hiramic” legend in the Master Mason degree. On this notion of the ancient mysteries, Street walked a familiar path with such eminent Masonic scholars as: Albert Mackey, William Leslie Wilmhurst, and Joseph Fort Newton. Street, along with the Freemasons just listed, agreed that Freemasonry’s “Hiramic” legend was based on many ancient mysteries that followed a historical lineage all the way back to ancient Egypt. “In Egypt they were known as the Mysteries of Osiris and Isis, and these appear to have been the model for all others.”^[9] Freemasons are obviously knowledgeable about the “Hiramic” legend; and most probably recognize that it has a direct parallel relationship to the resurrection of Jesus. However, most Freemasons have no idea that the “Hiramic” legend owes its conception to the legend of the murder of the Egyptian deity Osiris and his resurrection, which is history’s earliest resurrection story.

Pinch noted that the Osiris myth first appeared during Egypt’s Fifth Dynasty, during the 24th century BCE, on the walls of pyramid burial chambers. After their translation in the nineteenth century, these funerary texts became known as the *Pyramid Texts*. Since the texts explained the Osiris myth, and his rulership and afterlife, they served as a script explaining the reign of the kings

buried in their own funeral chambers. All these kings were expecting to be resurrected, as Osiris was, so that they could reign in the heavens. In addition, the *Pyramid Texts* contained healing incantations that were popularly used by all Egyptians. Although the Osiris myth is Egyptian, its impact on esoteric knowledge really got its start from the pen of one of the greatest historians of the ancient world, Plutarch (c. 46-c. 120 CE). His writing style is still studied and emulated by professional historians today. Plutarch was Greek by birth and a citizen of the Roman Empire. He was famous for being the first historian who, when he wrote historical biographies about Greek and Roman political leaders, examined and opined on the moral nature of their actions and decisions. It is interesting to note that Plutarch received some esoteric knowledge himself since he spent the last thirty years of his life serving as an oracle and priest at the Temple in Delphi. In addition, he was enamored with Egyptian history and culture, understanding that it was the fount of much of Greek culture, and he wrote extensively on the subject. Plutarch wrote the most comprehensive ancient account of Egyptian religious practices and of the Osiris myth in his book, *On Isis and Osiris*. His version of the Osiris myth is the most popular retelling of the story and still used by historians today.[\[10\]](#) Below is a brief synopsis.

Osiris rules Egypt, having inherited the kingship from his ancestors in a lineage stretching back to the creator of the world, Ra or Atum. His queen is Isis, who, along with Osiris and his murderer, Set, is one of the children of the earth god Geb and the sky goddess Nut. The evil Set is jealous of Osiris and devises a scheme to murder him. Set has an elaborate chest made to fit Osiris's exact measurements and then, at a banquet, declares that he will give the chest as a gift to whoever fits inside it. The guests, in turn, lie inside the coffin, but none fit inside except Osiris. When he lies down in the chest, Set and his accomplices slam the cover shut, seal it, and throw it into the Nile. With Osiris's corpse inside, the chest floats out into the sea, arriving at the city of Byblos, where a tree grows around it. The king of Byblos has the tree cut down and made into a pillar for his palace, still with the chest inside. Meanwhile, Isis searches for her husband's body and finds and finds out it is in Byblos. Isis finds the chest and removes it from within the tree in order to retrieve her husband's body. Having taken the chest, she leaves the tree in Byblos, where it becomes an object of worship for the locals. Isis returns the body to Egypt; however, Set steals it and cuts it into forty-two pieces and buries the pieces throughout the land. Isis then searches for her husband's bodily parts with the aid of Nephthys. Isis restores Osiris's body parts, with the help of other deities, including Thoth, a deity credited with great magical and healing powers, and Anubis, the god of embalming and funerary rites. Osiris becomes the first mummy. With the gods' Thoth and Anubis' efforts to restore his body are the mythological basis for Egyptian embalming practices, which sought to prevent and reverse the decay that follows death. Mummification allows for Osiris's resurrection as king of the underworld, where he ruled and judged the dead in the Hall of Two Truths.[\[11\]](#)

Pinch pointed out that besides Osiris being the example of the first resurrected entity in history; he was also connected with life-giving power. He also epitomizes righteous kingship, and the rule of *maat* "truth," which is the ideal natural order of the world; whose maintenance was a fundamental goal in ancient Egyptian culture. By contrast, Set is depicted as an evil force in Egyptian mythology. In addition, Set is associated with violence and chaos. Therefore, the slaying of Osiris symbolized the struggle between "good and order" and "evil and disorder," and the disruption of life by death.[\[12\]](#) Once Freemasons learn of the Osiris myth, they instantly realize its parallels to our "Hiramic" legend. Thus, one should not be surprised that the progenitors of "speculative"

Freemasonry understood that fashioning the Osiris myth into the “Hiramic” legend would become a useful tool to allegorically cause every Freemason to go through their own resurrection—teaching each Freemason being “reborn” that with his newly revealed “truth” from Masonic moral teachings he will be in a titanic struggle with his own passions and desires. Thus, each Freemason will emulate how ancient Egyptians saw the struggle between “good and order” and “evil and disorder” in the world. The Freemason will eternalize that struggle for himself with the goal of having “good, order, and truth” being victorious, which is the ideal natural order of the world. The one Masonic scholar that understood this concept better than any other I have ever read is Walter Leslie Wilmhurst.

I bring to your attention the last Masonic source I want to use for the “Egypt” part of the paper. Wilmhurst, a British Freemason, is one of the most widely read Masonic scholars in history. His book, *The Meaning of Masonry*, is one of the best books I have ever read explaining the philosophical teachings of Freemasonry. As a historian, I wholeheartedly agree with Wilmhurst’s acknowledgement that Masonic philosophy and its “Hiramic” legend borrowed heavily from ancient mysteries dating as far back as to the Egyptian civilization. Wilmhurst also correctly recognized that there was no direct historical continuity between the Egyptian mysteries running through the long line of historical epochs up to the start of speculative Masonry in the 18th century. However, he did correctly recognize that the “Hiramic” legend had elements that harkened back to the very first “regeneration myth” from Egypt which told of the “resurrection” of their deity Osiris, and ran through other legends of “rebirth” up to that of Jesus.^[13] Wilmhurst noticed that the purpose of our “Hiramic” legend is to turn the ordinary man into a “superman” through resurrection. Thus, Wilmhurst sums up his notion about the importance of the resurrection myth with the following passage. “This—the evolution of man into superman—was always the purpose of the ancient “Mysteries,” and the real purpose of modern Masonry, is...the expediting of the spiritual evolution of those who aspire to perfect their own nature and transform it into a more god-like quality.”^[14]

Greece: 12th century BCE to c. 600 CE.

“In the world of the intellect the Greeks pushed to limits of accomplishment which mankind must not fail to appreciate and aspire to, even when it cannot equal the Greeks in achievement.”^[15] This is a quote from the book, *History of Greek Culture*, authored by one of the most respected historians in the profession, Jacob Burckhardt, (1818-97). I think it describes perfectly what Western Civilization owes to ancient Greek culture—almost everything! For example, ancient Greece is responsible for contributing its unique DNA to the following bulwark of institutions that comprise what historians classify as components of Western Civilization: democracy, philosophy, medicine, rhetoric, geometry, grammar, literature, religion, art, and architecture, just to name a few. Of course, many of these disciplines should be readily recognizable by my Masonic brethren from their Fellowcraft lecture. Developed during the classical times in ancient Greece; the “Seven Liberal Arts” were the dominant and oldest form of education for all scholars in Europe. These arts are classified into two groups: the *trivium*, or “lower studies”—grammar, rhetoric, and logic—and the *quadrivium*, or “higher studies”—arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. The ancient Greeks considered knowledge of the “Seven Liberal Arts to be essential for all free men to properly take an active role in civic life.”^[16] In addition, without a thorough knowledge in the “Seven Liberal Arts” no man could hope to have the intellectual capacity necessary to understand esoteric knowledge of the metaphysical world. In this section of the paper I will also show how the legend of Hermes

Trismegistus really blossomed during the Greek epoch of history. Another tool that the initiates in all the ancient mysteries had at their disposal to learn and remember their esoteric knowledge was the art of memory. This art was invented in ancient Greece, and I will write about it in this section of the paper since it is so important to the attainment of knowledge before the invention of the printing press in the 16th century, and is still used today for how Freemasons learn and distribute knowledge to their initiates.

Interestingly, the Ancient Greeks understood full well that they, too, “stood on the shoulders of giants”—the ancient Egyptian culture. Great luminary intellects such as Herodotus, Pythagoras, Euclid, and Plato travelled to Egypt and wrote extensively about the knowledge they gained after being initiated into ancient Egyptian mysteries. Sadly today, most average people do not realize how much of ancient Greek culture “had its roots in, and grew out of,” ancient Egyptian culture. For example, almost the entire pantheon of Greek mythological deities was copied from Egyptian mythology. For instance, the Egyptian deity Thoth was renamed Hermes in ancient Greek religious mythology. Thus, the ancient Greeks are the next link in the unbroken chain of esotericism to inherit the wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus, and to add their unique DNA to his esoteric wisdom that eventually is transmitted through the ages.

Florian Ebeling is currently a lecturer at Heidelberg University in Germany. His book, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus: Hermeticism from Ancient to Modern Times*, is one of several great books explaining the historical path Hermeticism travelled. Ebeling, like other historians, commented on the time and place of the “invention” of Hermes Trismegistus. “In Hellenistic Egypt Hermes Trismegistus arose from a merging of the figures of Thoth and Hermes. After the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great in the year 332 BCE, the Greeks in Egypt adopted the outward forms of Egyptian culture, investing them, however, with their own Greek content.”[\[17\]](#) Thus, Hermes Trismegistus in Hellenized Egypt becomes metamorphosized into a human who winds up teaching wisdom to a select few. His written wisdom first started out historically from Egyptian works mentioned earlier in this paper, such as *The Book of Two Ways*, *Pyramid Texts*, and *The Book of the Dead*. While they are difficult to date with precision, these Egyptian-Greek writings of the wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus were compiled in book form, known as *Corpus Hermeticum*, between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE. The *Corpus Hermeticum* touch on a wide variety of topics, such as, G-d, the cosmos, nature, and humankind’s place in the world. The Hermetic philosophy systematically rationalized a religious cult like practice and illuminated for their “adepts,” (a frequently used term in the *Corpus Hermeticum*) a personal path for their souls to ascend from the physical world to a place of bliss. Thus, all the ancient mystery rites I illuminate in this paper all share this philosophical belief. In addition, some of the *Corpus Hermeticum* delves into astrology and alchemy. The *Corpus Hermeticum* was written in dialogue form whereby Hermes Trismegistus is lecturing to his enlightened student.[\[18\]](#) As a philosopher I recognize that this dialogue form of imparting wisdom was used by many great sages in history. For example, all of Plato’s writings regarding the wisdom he received from Socrates are in dialogue form. It was also the literary structure used by Confucius to impart his wisdom to his students in his *Confucian Analects*. The Gospels in the New Testament are the teachings of Jesus in dialogue form with his disciples. Ebeling’s research brought him to understand that: “This ‘lord of reason and rational speech’ was viewed as the forefather of all wisdom, philosophy, and theology, and Egyptian priests supposedly instructed Democritus, Plato, Pythagoras, and Eudoxus in the knowledge of Hermes.”[\[19\]](#) Hermes Trismegistus remained a human figure throughout the rest of human history. I will now examine the

evidence showing how some of these Greek intelligentsia were initiated into ancient mysteries. Besides all these ancient mysteries teaching a belief in the immortality of the soul, they also shared a commonality of their tenets being built on esoteric wisdom grounded in Hermetic thought.

As a Freemason, the name on the list of ancient Greek initiates that piqued my interest is Pythagoras (c. 570-c. 495 BCE). I well remember from my Master Mason lecture that we Freemasons are taught that he “was initiated into several orders of priesthood” when he travelled throughout the world. I admit that other than the information imparted to me in the Master Mason lecture about Pythagoras, I did not know much about this wise sage until I started to do my research for this paper. I had no idea about the breadth of knowledge he received from several of the ancient mysteries he was initiated into from various distant lands. Only after my research do I fully realize now why Pythagoras became such an honored figure in our rituals. According to Hornung’s research on Pythagoras he found from ancient Greek writings: “...he was supposed to have spent twenty-two years in Egypt, where he was initiated into all the mysteries, after which the Persian conquest (525 BCE) took him into the magi of Babylon.[20] There is no doubt that the progenitors of “speculative” Freemasonry, men who were well versed in classical writings from history, received their information about Pythagoras from the ancient Greek biography, *The Life of Pythagoras*, written by the Greek philosopher Iamblichus, (c. 245-c. 325 CE). Of course, Freemasons know Pythagoras from his famous Pythagorean theorem. However, most Freemasons have no idea about his other great achievements, which I am sure is the real reason he attracted the attention of our progenitors and insured he would be forever honored with the title of “our ancient Brother” in our ritual. Iamblichus stated that Pythagoras studied with the Egyptian priests at *Diospolis*, “Thebes,” and that he was the only foreigner ever “initiated” into their rites and allowed the privileges of taking part in their worship. Pythagoras also received instruction from the Egyptian priest Oenuphis of Heliopolis.[21] In addition to the Egyptians, Pythagoras also studied under Hindu Brahman priests in India. He learned from them their religious tenet of the *Samsara*, “reincarnation cycle.” Pythagoras brought this notion back with him to ancient Greece and taught it as a philosophy of the “transmigration of souls.” He believed that our souls were immortal and that soon after the body died the soul entered a new body.[22] Another belief the ancients attributed to Pythagoras was what he called the “harmony of the spheres,” in which he postulated that the planets and stars move across the night sky according to mathematical equations. He believed this movement of the celestial bodies corresponded to musical notes and thus produced an inaudible symphony together.[23] Pythagoras is credited with discovering that musical notes could be translated into mathematical formulas. He discovered this notion by “accident” one day when he passed several blacksmiths at work and heard the sound their hammers made when they were banging against the anvils.[24]

Iamblichus writes in his biography, *The Life of Pythagoras*, that, around 530 BCE, Pythagoras journeyed to Croton, in southern Italy today, and founded an academy in which “initiates” took a vow of secrecy and lived in a monastic ascetic commune. The academy’s purpose was to teach logic and an ethical “way of life” to its “initiates.” The academy’s reputation enabled it to attract the brightest men in all of Greece to hear Pythagoras lecture and follow this new “way of life.” His “initiates” called themselves “Pythagoreans,” and he developed a whole new school of philosophy known as “Pythagorean philosophy.” Plato, some 200 years later, wrote that this commune was probably Pythagoras’s greatest achievement since it pointed to a new “way of life” not offered anywhere else in the world. Although it was called an “academy,” in many ways it was akin to a monastery. The

initiates were bound by an oath to their leader Pythagoras and each other in order to pursue the ascetic doctrines of Pythagoras's philosophical theories.[25] In addition, Pythagoras taught his initiates the esoteric knowledge of numerology. He used mathematics for this mystical study of numbers. Pythagoras touted that "ten" was the "perfect number." Pythagoreans honored this notion by never meeting in groups larger than ten. In addition, Pythagoras learned about the tetractys on his travels in Babylon. Tetractys is a Greek word meaning four; because, the tetractys is an arrangement of ten points in a triangular form with each of the sides of the triangle consisting of four points, and the whole number of ten was made up by the summation of the first four figures, $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$. The tetractys became a mystical symbol of importance in the academy. Iamblichus, wrote that the tetractys was considered: "so admirable, and so divinized by those who understood it, that Pythagoras's students would swear oaths by it." [26] It has to be obvious to all Freemasons who have been initiated in the York Rite and/or Scottish Rite degrees that our progenitors of "speculative" Freemasonry saw the same mystical beauty of the tetractys that our "ancient brother" Pythagoras saw! This monastic commune required that its "initiates" share all their worldly possessions in common. In addition, they ate their vegetarian meals in a communal setting. One Pythagorean maxim of the academy was *koinà tà philōn*, "All things in common among friends." [27] This maxim has a "ring" of Masonic moral philosophy to me. Iamblichus very much portrayed Pythagoras, in his biography, as a divine-like figure, sent by the gods to make all humankind better. In addition, Iamblichus, touts this "Pythagorean Way of Life" as a pagan alternative to the Christian monastic orders of his own time. [28] Soon after Pythagoras's death the commune disbanded. However, his initiates carried with them and spread the Pythagorean philosophy wherever they travelled. "The Pythagoreans had signs and symbols by which those who had never seen each other in the body could perform acts of friendship when necessary. Worthy men who dwelt in the most remote parts of the earth were mutually friends even before they had become known to and saluted each other." [29] For me, the Pythagorean philosophy has many parallels to the tenets of Freemasonry. After my research on Pythagoras, there is no doubt in my mind he was the earliest of the great esoteric initiates in the world, and the rules of his academy and its philosophy had a profound influence on our progenitors who invented "speculative" Freemasonry.

Before I write about two of the most important ancient Greek mystery rites, it is imperative that I impress upon the reader how important mythology is to human understanding of the metaphysical world. As I did the research for this paper, I found myself "transported" back to my graduate school days sitting in class, in rapt attention, to one of my favorite philosophy professors, Lawrence Hatab. Hatab's lectures on "Myth and Philosophy" were so erudite on the subject of mythology and its effect on philosophy and history. The semester I spent learning with professor Hatab was a life altering experience for me; it forever changed the way I understand what "truth" is. Thus, I found that the "truths" taught in the ancient mysteries so neatly "dove-tailed" with what professor Hatab wrote in his book concerning the importance of mythology to human understanding. "There is a deep meaning in mythological language which expresses what cannot be expressed in rational or scientific language. Such matters include, among other things, existential meaning, the lived world, and primal origins." [30] I always found Hatab's quote on the worth of mythology to human understanding an incredibly beautiful and astute description of Freemasonry's "Hiramic" legend.

The ancient Greeks developed their own ancient mystery based on Greek mythology. One of the great scholars of ancient Greek religion was Harold R. Willoughby, (1890-1962). He was a classical scholar at the University of Chicago. I used his book *Pagan Regeneration: A Study of Mystery*

Initiations in the Graeco Roman World, as my main source for the history of Orphism. The Orphic Mysteries were a state recognized religious cult which was started in the 6th century BCE and lasted well into the Roman Empire period of history. Ancient Greek history credits the poet Orpheus with writing poems that embodied the philosophical and religious doctrine that served as the basis of the Orphic Mysteries. There is scant factual knowledge about Orpheus other than the fact that he was born in Thrace. However, the folklore built around him is quite remarkable. Orpheus is famous for his lyrical voice and the poetry he wrote titled the *Rhapsodies*. Even the ancient Greeks understood that music, one of "The Seven Liberal Arts," was known to tame the breast of the savage beast. He also served a role in the classic legend of the "Golden Fleece," as the poet who tames the Sirens with his lyric voice. His reputation as a divine like figure was sealed in the myth of his ability to travel down to Hades to save the love of his life, the nymph Eurydice. The myth ends sadly though; for Orpheus loses Eurydice forever when he looks back to see if she is following him as they are making their escape from Hades. It is no wonder then that, in similar fashion to Hermes Trismegistus, the ancient Greeks believed Orpheus to be a pseudo-mythical and deified figure. Orphism's rites were based on the myth pertaining to the Greek deity Dionysus, (known as Bacchus in Roman mythology). Dionysus is the god of wine, vegetation, fertility, ecstasy, and resurrection. Greek mythological tradition says he was the son of Zeus and Persephone, who was not the wife of Zeus. Zeus's jealous wife Hera had Dionysus murdered when he was a small boy. However, the Greek goddess Athena was able to save his heart from destruction, thus saving his life. It is through this act of altruism and empathy that Dionysus is resurrected. This act of empathy and resurrection became the model for the main philosophical tenets that "initiates" into the Orphic Mystery cult adhered to. The Orphics believed that our souls had a divine origin and would become reincarnated for eternity. In addition, the Orphics believed that only through initiation into the Orphic Mysteries, could the soul be perfected. The perfected soul would then break the cycle of reincarnation and rest in eternal bliss. The actions that Orphics took to perfect their souls was to adopt certain ascetic practices such as vegetarianism and living by a strict ethical and moral philosophy. These practices enabled the initiates to purge their evil inclinations and cultivate, as the modern quote says, "the better angels of their nature."[\[31\]](#)

Another seminal book on ancient mysteries that I read for this paper was authored by Joscelyn Godwin, a music professor at Colgate University. Interestingly, he has become an authority on esotericism. Although, his scholarship on ancient Greek mysteries tracks with Willoughby's work, he made a very insightful observation about Orphism that I bring to your attention. He noted in his book, *The Golden Thread: The Ageless Wisdom of the Western Mystery Traditions*, that there were two aspects of Orphism that classified it as the first esoteric religion. "First, it imposed the seal of the Mysteries, so that the teachings given in initiation were not revealed to outsiders. Second, it gave a profounder, 3symbolic interpretation to existing myths...mysteries and the knowledge of hidden meanings in the scriptures have since been two of the chief marks of esotericism."[\[32\]](#) Thus, I find that this description of Orphism shows parallels not only to the Pythagorean philosophy, but also to the Dionysian rite that I will write about next, and Freemasonry's philosophy. In addition, the notion of resurrection is a prominent feature in Orphism as it was with the Osiris legend, the Pythagorean philosophy, the Dionysian rite, Freemasonry's "Hiramic" legend and the life of Jesus.

I need to introduce some notions from a "revolutionary" philosopher, of the nineteenth century before I write about the Dionysian mystery rite. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), was the first modern philosopher who studied Greek mythology to shine a light on the eternal struggles that

humans still wrestle with today, such as life and death, and good versus evil. Nietzsche received his Ph.D. in Greek philology but quickly became a monumental philosopher. His aphoristic writing style makes him an exceedingly difficult philosopher to understand. I was lucky to have Dr. Hatab, a Nietzsche scholar, as my “Sherpa” to guide me down the path of understanding his philosophy. Nietzsche’s first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, is a great treatise on ancient Greek mythology’s effect on not only the psyche of the ancient Greeks, but on the condition of humankind’s place in the metaphysical world today.

Nietzsche noted that Dionysus, Bacchus in Roman mythology, was a deity of earthly forces associated with wine, fertility, divine ecstasy, and the natural cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. There are a few different versions of the mythology of Dionysus. The most prevalent version describes the myth of Dionysus in similar fashion to that of Orpheus. Both were born from the illicit union between Zeus and Persephone. Hera, the wife of Zeus, had Dionysius murdered just like she had done with Orpheus. In the Dionysian myth, Hera gets the Titans to inflict a heinous death on Dionysus by dismembering his body. However, when his body parts were buried, Persephone’s mother, the goddess Demeter, responsible for the harvest, agriculture, fertility, the sacred law, and life and death, restored Dionysus to life again. From this mythology of Dionysus, Nietzsche observed that the Dionysian mystery rite started in ancient Greece and was practiced all the way through Roman history. The Dionysian “initiates” were taught to believe in reincarnation. They frequently became intoxicated and committed frequent acts of debauchery, which they believed were acts of divine ecstasy. Thus, these initiates had a close association with wine, which in turn was connected with fertility, the spring, and again rebirth. Despite the Dionysian practices of ecstasy, Nietzsche observed a close relationship between the Orphic and Dionysian rites when it came to their notions on reincarnation. In addition, Nietzsche recognized in Greek mythology a theme of a religious view that made sacred all the conditions of earthly life, both benevolent and terrible, constructive, and destructive. He also noted two common features in all the ancient Greek mysteries. First, Greek mythology was polytheistic; thus, not organized around any one deity. Second, Greek mythology often emphasized the tension between opposites, such as birth and death. Finally, Nietzsche realized that Greek mythology viewed the metaphysical world as a contrast between the beautiful deities who dwelled in Mt. Olympus above and the cruel deities who inhabited the Underworld below. Humans live between these two realms and experience the tension of their alternating forces, such as life and death, reason and unbridled passion.[\[33\]](#) One cannot help but observe that the description of the dismemberment of Dionysus’s body and his rebirth is a virtual copy of the ancient Egyptian myth of Osiris.

As mentioned earlier, another tool that the initiates in all ancient mysteries have at their disposal to learn and remember their esoteric knowledge is the art of memory. Frances Yates, (1899-1981) is one of the preeminent authorities on Medieval and Renaissance history. Yates attained this status because, for over twenty years, she conducted research at the prestigious Warburg Institute of the University of London and wrote over fourteen books, four of them dealing with the art of memory. In her book *The Art of Memory*, Yates relates the ancient Greek story of the inventor of the art of memory, Simonides of Ceos, (c. 556-468 BCE), who was a Greek lyric poet. In explaining this art of memory, Yates wrote: “In the ages before printing a trained memory was vitally important. This art seeks to memorize through a technique of impressing ‘places’ and ‘images’ on memory.”[\[34\]](#) As she explained later in her book, architecture was the key tool to the art of memory which is classified today as “mnemotechnics.” I will show in this paper how the art of memory along with esoteric

knowledge was passed along through every epoch of history up to the “Age of Enlightenment.” Interestingly, after this historical time period, the only institution I can think of that still actively practices the art of memory today is Freemasonry. I find it interesting that after the invention of the printing press Freemasonry still uses the art to transmit our allegorical philosophy. After all, our progenitors of “speculative” Freemasonry were “children” of the enlightenment. These men of the “intelligentsia” were noted for their voracious reading appetite. Gaining knowledge through reading is obviously a much more efficient way to gain knowledge than passing it on by word of mouth. Thus, I can only think of two reasons why Freemasonry still uses the ancient art of memory. First, if one wants to keep a secret, do not write it down. Since our “operative” Masonic Brethren closely guarded the secrets of their craft, it is not unreasonable to assume our progenitors of “speculative” Freemasonry wanted to guard their secrets thus following the traditional practice of our “operative” stonemason Brethren. Second, as Yates explained in her book, architecture was a major tool used for people to use the art of memory. Thus, I am not surprised that our “operative” Masonic Brethren used it to learn and remember the myriad of facts necessary for their trade craft. Once again, I think our progenitors of “speculative” Freemasonry wanted to honor our connection to our ancient Brethren.

I close this portion of my paper with looking at the connection that the ancient Greek mysteries had with Freemasonry. A Masonic scholar whose work I used in the “Egypt” section of my paper, Oliver Day Street, elucidates that the myth of Osiris and Isis gave “root” to later ancient mysteries around the world. Two examples he included were: the “Dionysian Mystery” in Greece, which I have just written about, and the “Mithras Mystery” of Persia which I will write about next in my section on “Rome.” Street also pointed out that all these ancient mysteries had the similarity of having a Deity or “heroic figure” at the center of their mythology. In addition, they emphasized in their teaching’s death, resurrection, and the immortality of the soul to all their followers. Not surprisingly, one could also see that the story of Jesus and the “Hiramic” legend followed the same formula from the ancient mysteries. Thus, Street correctly surmised that when he studied the form and tenets of many of these ancient mysteries, they had other similarities as well. These similarities included the following practices. Members went through an initiation to welcome them into the “mystery.” Members had to show a proficiency in the “mystery’s” tenets so that they could proceed along their journey through the “mystery.” Members were taught certain “signs” or modes of recognition that could be used to identify each other. Finally, members took secret oaths.[\[35\]](#) Obviously, Street’s description of the dogmas and practices of the initiates of these ancient mysteries must be familiar to Freemasons.

Rome: 753 BCE-476 CE.

Roman culture developed out of Greek culture and was the rule and guide over the Roman civilization during their entire existence. The only new innovations to Western Civilization that the Romans are credited with are the following: government administration and cement. Since Roman culture was virtually a “carbon copy” of ancient Greek culture, it stands to reason that all of the ancient Greek mystery rites had “initiates” in Rome who built temples to their deities and continued practicing the precepts that they had inherited from the ancient Greeks. At the height of the Roman Empire period they conquered much of the known ancient world at the time. This conquest brought them into contact with other esoteric knowledge from far off cultures. Thus, for this paper I am going to highlight an ancient mystery rite that was inherited from Persia instead of Egypt or Greece,

the Mithras mystery rite. In addition, in this paper I will illuminate how the art of memory developed under Roman influence.

Franz Cumont (1868-1947), was a Belgian archaeologist, historian, and philologist. He is best known for his expertise on the Pagan mystery rites, and their impact on the Roman Empire. He asserted that the Pagan religions “gave greater satisfaction first, to the senses and passions, secondly, to the intelligence, finally, and above all, to the conscience.”[\[36\]](#) I found this to be a very erudite description of all the ancient mysteries that I have studied. His archaeological excavations in lands that once comprised the Roman Empire afforded him a special insight into the Mithras mystery rite, known in the modern world as Mithraism. Thus, I used his book, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, to research Mithraism for this paper.

Since Cumont was an archeologist as well as a historian he was enabled to gather a plethora of knowledge about the tenets, allegorical symbolism, and initiation rites of Mithraism. Historically, it was a religion that migrated to Rome from ancient Persia and was prevalent from the 1st to the 4th century CE. The central deity was Mithra, the same god worshipped by the ancient Zoroastrian religion. Members met in *mithraea*, “underground temples,” large numbers of which still exist today. Rome appeared to be the central city for the rite; however, *mithraea* have been found scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Thus, Cumont surmised that Mithraism was extremely popular, especially in the western part of the empire. *Mithraea* have been located in Roman Africa, Syria, Egypt, Dalmatia, Britain and along the Rhine and Danube frontier. In every excavation of a *mithraeum*, archaeologists have found images of Mithra slaughtering a bull. Another important image found is a depiction of Mithras and the Roman deity Sol Invictus, “Unconquered Sun,” banqueting on the slaughtered bull. By the way, the deity Sol Invictus was made the official sun god by emperor Aurelian on 25 December 274 CE. This deity wound up being the “patron” of Roman soldiers as did Mithra. In Roman art, Mithras was portrayed being born as a nude youth, who emerged from a rock, with a torch in one hand and a dagger in the other. *Mithraeum* were built below ground and, windowless, they emulated caves—always located near a fresh water source with a baptismal like basin built inside the structure. Cumont surmised that this meant that ritual cleansing was used to “purify” the initiates. He also noted that their structure was different than all the other ancient Mystery temple structures. Cumont’s archaeological excavations revealed that most Mithraic rituals revolved around feasting. He found large amounts of food residue consisting of animal bones and pits from a variety of fruits. All the altars had burn marks on them denoting that animal sacrifice was a common feature of the rite.[\[37\]](#)

No man was initiated into the rite until he could prove himself to be holy and steadfast. Initiates into each degree had to endure physical tests, exposing their bodies to cold, heat, and physical peril. Actual membership lists of names were inscribed on the walls of the *Mithraeum*, they are all male. It is a well-known fact that the rite was a favorite of Roman soldiers. Cumont found that the ethics of the rite is probably the reason it attracted soldiers to its membership. Very few members were from the upper-class families or senatorial families of Rome. “The world is the scene and stake of a contest between good and evil. Life is a combat: soldiers under the command of Mithra, invincible heroes of the faith, must ceaselessly oppose the undertakings of the infernal powers which sow corruption.”[\[38\]](#) As a retired army officer and historian, I viewed through the “hermeneutic lens” the description of the requirements to join the rite and the explanation of its ethical tenets, and I am in no doubt that this was a military religious order which has parallels to the future order of the

Knights Templar founded in 1119 CE. I am also not surprised that the rite conducted frequent banquets. I have first-hand experience in knowing that when soldiers fight hard, they build up a voracious appetite.

Initiates swore an oath of secrecy, and had to progress through seven degrees, culminating in attaining the title *pater*, “father.” Evidence has even been found that some of the degrees had ritual oral catechisms that members had to pass in order to matriculate to higher degrees. Full admission to the rite happened when the member received his “handshake” from a *pater*. The receiving of the “handshake” allowed members to be known as *syndexioi*, “those united by the handshake.” Cumont observed that the members believed in the notion that when the world came to an end, Mithra would raise their bodies from the grave and those who led a good life would enjoy eternal bliss; the evil doers would be annihilated by fire. I believe Christian doctrine was already creeping into Mithraic ethics with this notion. They prayed to the Sun three times daily, Sunday was their sacred day of the calendar. Although they held no public festival ceremonies, they participated in the Roman festival of *Natalis Invicti*, celebrated by several ancient mysteries on 25 December. For centuries, Christianity in Rome viewed Mithraism as a major rival religion. Once the Roman Empire turned Christian, the rite’s membership was persecuted and suppressed into extinction by the end of the 4th century.[\[39\]](#)

A few observations. One cannot help but see how prominent Sunday prayer and the December 25th festival was to Roman Pagan religious practice. I am not surprised that when Christianity developed in Rome it would co-opt these practices and make them central to their religious practice. Although it is outside of the purview of this paper, I wonder if the men who started the Knights Templars order were aware of Mithraism and used its tenets as a basic model for their military order? Once again, I cannot help but think that the progenitors of “speculative” Freemasonry were exposed to many of the tenets and initiation practices of Mithraism. Ancient Roman structures and art were discovered and excavated during the Renaissance era. Thus, since so much information of the rite was unearthed before the “Age of Enlightenment,” I find it only natural that it became a part of the “mosaic” of esoteric information our progenitors relied on to develop “speculative” Freemasonry. Another “tile” in the “mosaic” is the art of memory, and it became a major factor in humans learning Hermetic and esoteric wisdom during the Roman period of history.

Marcus Tullius Cicero, (106-43 BCE), was a Roman senator, orator, lawyer, and philosopher. He is really the ancient historical figure that “propelled” the art of memory into the world. His reputation as the greatest orator in the ancient world is still recognized by historians and rhetoricians to this day. His reputation is “burnished” as well by the fact that he was a staunch defender of liberty over tyranny, and democracy over despotism during Rome’s tumultuous period of change when Gaius Caesar imposed himself as Emperor of Rome. Cicero’s “enlightened” speeches were well known by the intelligentsia of the “Age of Enlightenment” and served as a model for all who were looking to bring about individual freedom and democratic rule. Thus, it is no wonder that his writings in his book, *De oratore*, “The Orator,” which highlighted his reliance on using the technique of the art of memory to help him deliver his passionate arguments advocating for liberty and democracy, was widely read from its time of publication until today. Yates noted in her book, *The Art of Memory*, that the genesis of the art of memory came from the liberal art of rhetoric. She stated that it was: “A technique by which the orator could improve his memory, which would enable him to deliver long speeches from memory with unfailing accuracy.”[\[40\]](#) Thus, men like Cicero, who were politicians

and/or lawyers found the techniques especially useful in the historical period before the printing press. Yates points out that the technique relied heavily on architecture. Thus, to memorize a long speech, the orator would envision a building familiar to him like his own home or a larger public building familiar to him. "We have to think of the ancient orator as moving in imagination through the memory building *whilst* he is making his speech, drawing from the memorized places the images he has placed on them. The method ensures that the points are remembered in the right order, since the order is fixed by the sequence of places in the building."[\[41\]](#) Later in this paper you will learn how this architectural technique became more elaborate and sophisticated, especially during the Renaissance. For now, I want to highlight an obvious observation that Yates made about the art of memory vis-à-vis Freemasonry. Yates surmised that it was only natural that "speculative" Freemasonry would adopt for its use the art of memory—especially since the Craft relied on "...its symbolic use of columns, arches, and other architectural features, and of geometrical symbolism, as the framework within which it presents a moral teaching and a mystical outlook directed towards the divine architect of the universe."[\[42\]](#)

As a historian I am compelled to make the following comment. One of the most significant historical movements on the timeline of humanity is the birth of Christianity out of Judaism, which took place in Rome, under the leadership of the Apostle Paul, during the 1st century CE. This event is responsible for a whole new body of religious text, the "New Testament" of the Bible. As part of hearkening back to its Jewish roots, the book of *Acts* has a very curious quote. "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in words and in deeds." *Acts* 7:22, King James version. This quote compels me to think that the early church fathers recognized that as Judaism was the "mother" of Christianity, they also recognized that ancient Egypt was its "grandmother." Once again, I maintain that the progenitors of "speculative" Freemasonry understood that Egyptian esoteric knowledge was the craft's "grandmother" as well.

Gnosticism:

For my research on Gnosticism I relied on the works of two erudite scholars on the subject. First, I return to Hornung's work, *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West*. Gnosticism, from the ancient Greek: *gnōstikós*, "having knowledge," started c. 1st century CE as a religious movement that relied on the esoteric ideas from not only Pagan religions, but also Judaism and Christianity. There were several groups known as "Gnostics" by their detractors. Hornung stated that "Simon Magus, one of its founding fathers, was supposed to have acquired his learning in Egypt—and with Alexandria as one of its most important centers, it also incorporated concepts from Pharaonic Egypt."[\[43\]](#) The biggest detractor of Gnosticism is the Roman Catholic church since Gnostics were taught to place emphasis on their spiritual development through personal spiritual knowledge, "Gnosis," above church orthodox teachings and ecclesiastical authority. Gnostics proclaimed that the soul's salvation relied on gaining knowledge of G-d through esoteric insight. The Gnostics of the Christian tradition viewed Jesus as a deity who had taken human form so that he could lead people to the "Light." Christianity's leadership observed that many leaders of the Gnostic groups in the Roman Empire were Jewish Christians still using the Hebrew words and names to identify G-d. Most Gnostic literature ignore the concepts of sin and repentance and emphasize "enlightenment." Thus, it is not hard to understand why the early Roman Catholic church leadership, who worked so hard to spread their religion across the known world, would view Gnostics as heretics and use all their powers to eradicate its doctrine. Hornung also found that Gnosticism came in for criticism from

Rabbinic Judaism as well. “With respect to the Jewish influence, we must recollect that proportion of Jews in the population of Alexandria in the Roman Period is estimated to have been forty percent. But Gnosticism thoroughly rejected and scorned all laws, especially those of the Old Testament.”[44] In fact Alexandria was the capitol of Gnosticism and was a very cosmopolitan port city on the coast of Egypt, with the largest library of the ancient world. Thus, Gnosticism attracted adherents from several ancient mystery rites as well.

The second erudite researcher on Gnosticism whose work I relied on is Garth Fowden, who is a research fellow at the Center for Greek and Roman Antiquity of the National Hellenic Research Foundation in Athens. In his seminal work, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, he especially focuses on Gnosticism’s more esoteric teachings, which came from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, regarding humanity’s connection with the metaphysical world around it. “In the first place, Man’s contemplation of G-d is in some sense a two-way process. Not only does Man wish to know G-d, but G-d too desires to be known by the most glorious of his creations, Man; and to this end He freely bestows on the initiate some of His own power, mediated through a spiritual instructor.”[45] What the *Corpus Hermeticum* is alluding to is that there is actual interaction between G-d and Man. Hermeticism and Gnosticism purport the notion that Man received the “divine spark” from G-d, thus, Man is a divine being as well, albeit a “lesser divinity.” Thus, “Man is of a double nature, and so the difference between the divine and human spheres is less substantial than it seems.”[46] Fowden observed that most Gnostics practiced asceticism in their dietary and sexual practice. Gnostics did not marry which would be another reason both Christianity and Judaism would oppose their doctrinal precepts. For Gnostics ritualistic practice was unimportant unless it was “rooted in” one’s internal motivation to seek knowledge. Fowden found that Gnostics borrowed wisdom from the *Corpus Hermeticum* concerning the stages necessary for an adherent to be reborn. “The divine vision is only granted to those that are reborn—and rebirth can be brought about only by divine action. But before the initiate can be reborn he must acquire wisdom and virtue.”[47] After reading this quote and the ideas concerning Man’s relationship with G-d, I have no doubt that the progenitors of “speculative” Freemasonry were well versed in the teachings of Gnosticism, and more especially the wisdom from the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

Medieval Europe: 5th to the 15th century

Medieval Europe has been often referred to by historians as the “Dark Ages.” However, in the last 100 years, historians have been involved in reassessing this “bleak” moniker attached to the Medieval era of history. No doubt there was a slowdown in the development of scientific knowledge, technology, and human liberty. However, what modern historians are learning about the era is that there were rich contributions made in other fields. Gothic architecture saw advances with the use of flying buttresses which enabled stonemasons to create such magnificent cathedrals as Notre-Dame de Paris, (1160-1260 CE). Christianity became a stabilizing force in Europe politically, although it was not without its problems. In addition, philosophy continued to grow under the wisdom of such luminary thinkers, who also happened to be church theologians, as Peter Abelard (c. 1079-1142), Albertus Magnus and (1200-1280), and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). In addition, there was created a very sophisticated monastery system devoted to copying out by hand the wisdom of the ancient world that survived the destruction of the library of Alexandria which contained over 700,00 scrolls. These achievements of the monastic scribes alone make the Medieval historical era important to the advancement of Hermeticism, esotericism, art of memory, and the establishment of stonemason

guilds throughout Europe. It is these achievements that I will cover in this section of the paper.

Hornung's research revealed that during Medieval times the luminary thinkers of the Catholic church were also the intelligentsia of their day. Thus, many of the church intelligentsia were familiar with Hermes Trismegistus and studied the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Although Gnosticism and other ancient mysteries were eradicated by the early Catholic church, "Their ideas resurfaced in the Middle Ages...Later, they would be claimed as precursors by Freemasons and the Rosicrucians, and they would be discovered anew by Romantics."[\[48\]](#) Even some of the theologians I just mentioned above relied on the wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus. "In his *Theologia Christiana*, Peter Abelard knows Hermes Trismegistus as a celebrated philosopher of great antiquity, while for Albertus Magnus, the "Egyptian Hermes" was above all a leading authority on astrology."[\[49\]](#) Hornung also noted that Medieval Europe had its first face-to-face contact with the Arab world due to the five Crusades with the first one starting in 1095 CE and the fifth one ending in 1221CE. It was this "clash of cultures" that ultimately brought about more genteel contact between them, which in turn brought about the "cross fertilization" of ideas between them. One of the benefits of this "cross fertilization" of knowledge was that Arabic scribes saved much of the wisdom of the ancient world before it had been lost in the destruction of the library of Alexandria in 297 CE. Albertus Magnus was one of the important astronomers of his time. In his book, *Speculum Astronomiae* "The Mirror of Astronomy," he postulated, with the help from his readings of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, that the wise "adept" could deduce the movement of the stars and planets to prove that astrology improved rather than negated the free will of mankind. This was an unusual belief to hold for a church father. Hermeticism became enamored with astrology during the Hellenistic period of Egyptian rule under the Ptolemaic Period, (middle 1st century CE). Hornung noted: "The best-known example of integration of the zodiac into traditional Egyptian representation of the sky is the round zodiac on the ceiling of the Osiris chapel at Dendara."[\[50\]](#)

Yates noted that one of the few books of wisdom that survived the sacking of Rome by the Vandals in 410 CE was a treatise on the importance of "The Seven Liberal Arts" to spreading knowledge. Martianus Capella (c. 410-420 CE) wrote in his treatise a description of the art of memory while writing on rhetoric. "He thus handed on the art to the Middle Ages firmly lodged in its correct niche in the scheme of the liberal arts."[\[51\]](#) Yates found that Albertus Magnus was not only interested in the esoteric knowledge of astronomy, but he also had a great interest in ethics. His book *De Bono*, "On the Good" is about the four cardinal virtues of Fortitude, Temperance, Justice, and Prudence. These virtues are also ancient wisdom that were transmitted through the ages that our progenitors of "speculative" Freemasonry relied on to form our moral precepts taught to all Entered Apprentice initiates. When Albertus wrote about the virtue of prudence, he included Capella's writings on the art of memory and believed that he was: "...recommending an art which seems to be forcing the lower power of imagination up into a higher rational part of the soul."[\[52\]](#) Thus, even the art of memory is entering into the realm of esoteric wisdom that the intelligentsia throughout history will become attracted to. Another of the great sages of the church that wrote on the efficacy of the art of memory was St. Thomas Aquinas, who also happened to be a student of Albertus Magnus. Yates did groundbreaking work on exposing the writings of Aquinas regarding his thoughts on the art of memory. Before Yates, historians paid little attention to this facet of Aquinas' intellect. Aquinas understood that the followers of Catholicism were largely illiterate during his lifetime. Thus, for parishioners to receive the "bliss" of the Gospels and other church doctrine they could only receive it through the sermons of their parish priests. The scrupulous research conducted by Yates found

the following quote attributed to Aquinas. "For every 'thing' which the preacher might have to treat is based on the memory principle. To make people remember things, preach them to them in 'unusual' similitudes for these will stick better in memory than the spiritual intentions will do." [53] What Aquinas is emphasizing to church leaders is that for sermons to make a proper impact on the minds and passions of parishioners, priests would have to use powerful language and skilled rhetorical devices to, as we say in Freemasonry, "imprint on the mind wise and serious truths" of their sermons. Obviously, the progenitors of "speculative" Freemasonry agreed that their moral precepts and allegorical teachings needed to make the same impact on the minds and passions of their members.

Besides the Catholic churches' political control over Europe, and its monastic system of saving knowledge from the ancient world, I think cathedral building is one of great achievements of Medieval history. Joscelyn Godwin whose book, *The Golden Thread: The Ageless Wisdom of the Western Mystery Traditions*, I introduced earlier in this paper reinforces my assertion. He referred to these great edifices as "cathedrals of light." When I read his book, I was drawn to the "magnetic" language he used to describe these cathedrals as a physical manifestation of man's understanding of the esoteric knowledge of G-d. For example, he described cathedrals in the following way. "The towers and spires point to heaven as a symbol of aspiration to G-d. But they could also be seen as lighting-rods, drawing down celestial influences into the soil. In either sense, the cathedral, with its unearthly bulk and height, seems to loom somewhere between heaven and earth." [54] Godwin states the obvious that all buildings start with design, encompassing arithmetic and geometry. He makes an interesting biblical connection between geometry and G-d's creation of the world. He noted that the apocryphal New Testament book *Wisdom of Solomon*, which is thought to have been written in Alexandria Egypt, in the 1st century CE, described G-d in the following way: "Thou hast created all things in number and weight and measure." (Solomon 11:20). Godwin noted that this scripture has affected the way humans have described G-d both in word and art as: "...the Geometer mapping out the cosmos with a pair of compasses." [55] As a Freemason, I must make a Masonic observation on this subject. Godwin brought to my attention that the first artistic depiction of this biblical verse appeared in the French 13th century illuminated *Bible Moralisée*. In it there is a picture titled, *God as architect of the world*. Needless to say, Godwin's research on the nexus between G-d's creation of the universe and geometry really got me thinking about Freemasonry's description of G-d as "Grand Architect Of The Universe." I am not sure how many of our progenitors of "speculative" Freemasonry may have seen the illuminated *Bible Moralisée* picture. However, knowing that they were well versed in biblical scripture, especially a book named the *Wisdom of Solomon*, there is no doubt that they were compelled to name G-d in their allegory as "Grand Architect Of The Universe." Of course, they made this connection even more clear with our beautiful lecture on geometry in our Fellowcraft degree. Thus, Godwin perceptively observed that: "The cathedrals—are the supreme human effort to imitate G-d by imposing geometry and number on matter. One can say the same of Egyptian, Greek, and Roman temples, indeed of sacred structures the world over." [56] Thus, the stonemasons who were responsible for building these esoteric monuments reaching out towards a better understanding of G-d are all, in a sense, practitioners of esotericism that they learned in their stonemason's guild lodges which I will now explain in further detail.

The men that created these beautiful and technologically demanding cathedrals also created one of the first trade guilds in European society. The guild system was a way wherein a group of men could

control the numbers of men allowed to work in a profession for the following reasons. First, it made sure that there was not an overabundance of workers which would have the effect of depressing wages below a comfortable living wage. Second, it made sure that, through a rigorous apprentice system and series of tests, their members insured to maintain the high quality of their work, and their cathedrals were safe for parishioners to pray in. Third, since the stonemason guild was primarily responsible for building church structures it had a close affinity to the ecclesiastical leadership in all the villages and towns that had a guild. This connection to their church “patrons” caused them to make sure that they only accepted men in the guild of strong moral character. All of these factors I have just listed makes me believe that the “operative” stonemasons had several reasons to be interested in learning the following social conventions, such as, the “Seven Liberal Arts,” esoteric knowledge, and the art of memory. Thus, in line with my thesis, I maintain that starting in Medieval Europe, it is our “operative” stonemason Brethren that will be one of the main conduits for learning and transmitting down to their “speculative” Freemason Brethren esoteric knowledge which reached all the way back to ancient Egypt. To help prove my case I will use the scholarship of two Masonic authors and one professional historian. The first is from a man who was the first scholar to study what is referred to in Freemasonry as “the old charges,” Edward Conder, Jr.

The reprinted book of the *Records of the Hole Crafte and Fellowship of Freemasons*, written by Edward Conder, Jr., (1861-1934), is an important book that helped to “illuminate” my path on the quest for a better understanding of Freemasonry’s antecedents. Conder’s book is useful to the Masonic researcher because, besides just translating the old documents into modern English, he gave a good treatise on the history of the building of Pyramids and Temples by ancient civilizations, as well as the history of masonry from its introduction to Britain by the Romans in 43 CE up to modernity. Conder felt compelled to do this because he noticed how the old documents hearkened back to ancient history to give its membership a historical context to how important their profession was to human civilization from time immemorial. Thus, the old documents that Conder investigated taught their membership that the Mason’s art had its antecedents back to the building of magnificent temples in early civilization to honor their Deities. As a for instance, Conder found in the *Regius Manuscript*, which experts have dated to 1390 CE, the following statement concerning the birth of the “operative” stonemason’s craft. “On this manner, through good wit of geometry, began first the craft of masonry; the clerk Euclid on this wise it found, this craft of geometry in Egypt land.”^[57] Conder understood that much of the accounts of the magnificence of the Egyptian Pyramids and Temples taught to early stonemasons came from the ancient Greek historian Herodotus (c. 484-425 BCE). For his information on the Egyptian civilization Conder relied on the scholarship of some imminent historians and antiquarians, such as Richard Rawlinson (1690-1755) and Sir John Gardner Wilkinson (1797-1875), the Father of British Egyptology. Of course Conder, in similar vein to other contemporary Masonic scholars such as Albert Mackey, (1807-81), William Leslie Wilmhurst, (1867-1939), and Joseph Fort Newton, (1876-1950), came to the conclusion that Masonic symbolism which took “root” in the Egyptian mysteries continued to “flower” through the various ancient mysteries that developed throughout history and reached its “tentacles” into the old charges of “operative” masonry. Additionally, Conder noted that the stonemason’s guild system rapidly spread throughout the land in the fifty years since the start of the London Masons Company. The *Regius Manuscript*, was written during the reign of King Richard II; however, it makes special mention of how the craft of stonemasons came to England during the reign of King Athelstan who

was also responsible for instituting the first “charges,” which were fifteen rules for Master Masons to live by.[58]

The second book I am using to help prove my thesis is from a man whom I have relied on earlier in this paper, Joseph Fort Newton. In the second part of Newton’s book, *The Builders: A Story and Study of Masonry*, he expounded on the rich history of the “operative” stonemasons’ guilds of the “Middle Ages” and how they eventually gave birth to “speculative” Freemasonry in the British Isles. Newton, like Conder, astutely noted with his reading of the *Regius Manuscript* that “operative” stonemasons like their later “speculative” Brethren were interested in teaching their members about the historical antecedents of their profession, as well as how to act morally in society. Historically, the transition between “operative” and “speculative” Freemasonry started during the beginning of the 17th century. Newton perceptively wrote about this transitory period in the following way: “For the Free-masons, be it once more noted, were not only artists doing a more difficult and finished kind of work, but an intellectual order, having a great tradition of science and symbolism which they guarded.”[59] Newton’s claim throughout the rest of this chapter is that, although most “operative” stonemasons were illiterate, they were enabled to learn many of the “arts and sciences” required to build the miraculous cathedrals of Europe through an oral tradition of learning using allegory and symbolism. After reading Yates book on the *Art of Memory*, I have no doubt that our “operative” stonemason forefathers were taught to practice the ancient art of memory. After all, it is only natural for a group of men who were builders and architects to use this art since it used architecture as its “tool” to increase one’s memory.

The third book I am using to help prove my thesis is from David Stevenson (1942-present), who is one of the very few modern-day historians who has decided to look at the effect that Freemasonry has had on social history. He is not a Freemason which he understands gives him a measure of credibility against accusations of bias when it comes to his historical conclusions regarding the influence Freemasonry has had on history. His book, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland’s century, 1590-1710*, is a very insightful investigation into the history of Scotland’s “operative” stonemasons, and how their guild “metamorphosized” into “speculative” Freemasonry. Stevenson turned to the “old charges” of the *Kilwinning Manuscript*, which were in essence a facsimile copy of the English *Regius Manuscript* from the 1390’s and were replete with references to esoteric symbolism, the antecedents of the stonemason’s craft, and the rituals that found their way into “speculative” Freemasonry—for example: the teaching of the “Seven Liberal Arts,” with a special emphasis on geometry. “It taught the measurement of the earth, and all crafts are based on measurement and weighing, from agriculture to astronomy. Therefore, it is the most worthy of sciences and underlies the rest.”[60] To me, this quote once again is an obvious recognition of the verse in the Book *Wisdom of Solomon* 11:20. Another example of esotericism that Stevenson found in the *Kilwinning Manuscript* includes the description of the teaching of the ancient mysteries, which it says started in Egypt where knowledge of building pillars for temples was: “...discovered by ‘The great Hermarius,’ a great grandson of Noah.”[61] Stevenson noted that this quote from the manuscript was making a direct reference to Hermes Trismegistus who was credited with teaching the sciences to man, including knowledge of masonry and geometry. The transcript then describes how this new knowledge spread to Babylon where they tried to build the Tower of Babel, and then progressed to King Solomon’s Temple. The *Kilwinning Manuscript* continues to weave a tale that the knowledge learned from Hermes Trismegistus continued to wind its way through Medieval history, culminating in St. Alban, (c. 3rd or 4th century CE), bringing masonry to England where it

was adopted by King Athelstan of the Anglo-Saxons, (c. 894-939). In addition, the “old charges” in the *Kilwinning Manuscript* laid out the ethical rules which all members of the stonemason’s guild would have to follow. Thus, what Stevenson found was that “speculative” Freemasonry was built on a foundation of a long history of esotericism which was used to create a system of “ethical symbolism” using stonemason’s working tools to teach a moral philosophy.[\[62\]](#) I will be returning to Stevenson’s book again in my summation of this paper. Now I introduce an epoch of history that most people have some knowledge about from their primary school days and are familiar with some of its artistic achievements, the Renaissance.

Renaissance 15th and 16th centuries:

The classical philologist and scholar, Isaac Casaubon (1559-1614), proved, through a meticulous analysis of the Greek language used in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, that those texts believed to be of ancient Egyptian origin were in fact written in 300 CE; most probably in Hellenized Alexandria Egypt. Despite this fact, Hermeticism and esotericism had its greatest impact on human thought during the Renaissance. Frances Yates in her book, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, summed up what the Renaissance was all about. “The great forward movements of the Renaissance all derive their vigour, their emotional impulse, from looking backwards.”[\[63\]](#) The Renaissance saw the full blossoming of human capacity concerning the arts. Since the discovery of Greco-Roman art in the excavations of Rome at the time, human imagination was finally unleashed from the stultifying conventions of Gothic art. My “minor” course of study at the University of Miami was “Art History.” I remember well how many of my professors would say that the pinnacle of art occurred in the Renaissance. For example, one only has to look at the “Mona Lisa” or “The Last Supper” painted by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) as an example of the supreme heights that Renaissance art reached with his invention of “perspective” to make a two dimensional painting look three dimensional. Thus, the works of Leonardo stands as an example for anyone to truly understand the sublime apex that Renaissance art achieved. However, the other achievement that the Renaissance epoch of history became responsible for was to shine a “light” of knowledge on the Dark Ages. This new “light” is known as Renaissance humanism, which started in Italy and spread rapidly throughout Europe, and was based on the revival of learning classical knowledge. Margaret C. Jacob (1943-present), is presently a professor of history at the University of California Los Angeles. She is the preeminent historical authority living today who analyzes Freemasonry’s effects on the social history of the “Age of Enlightenment.” Jacob attained this status because, for over forty years, she was the first modern historian who “rolled up her sleeves” and did the hard work of “rummaging” through the ignored and “dusty” archives in Europe. Her research has brought to light the nexus between “speculative” Freemasonry and the “Age of Enlightenment’s” social, political, and religious history. In her book *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans*, she laid out a good explanation of the knowledge the Renaissance era “bestowed” on the “Age of Enlightenment.” “Enlightenment radicals searched for their philosophical foundations in two intellectual traditions. They embraced aspects of the new science while attempting to salvage and to revitalize purely naturalistic explanations of the universe that had largely flourished during the late Renaissance.”[\[64\]](#) Thus, Jacob found that much of the classical knowledge that the Renaissance intelligentsia relied on was the ancient esotericism which reached all the way back to Hermes Trismegistus and earlier to ancient Egypt itself. She stated in her book that the Renaissance intelligentsia searched for the “ancient writings of the Egyptian priests, Hermes Trismegistus, for the key to this ancient wisdom, for *gnosis*, an immediate and direct comprehension that would

unlock the secrets of nature.”[65] With this description of the importance that esotericism was to the Renaissance, for the rest of this paper I am really going to hone in on the nexus between all of esoterica, such as Hermeticism and the art of memory, and “operative” and “speculative” Masonry.

Many historians and philosophers from the time of Plato to today have agreed that artists and art movements have helped to shape all the historical movements throughout human history. In this context, it should not be surprising that Leonardo da Vinci was not just an artist, he also studied esotericism as well, and I will write about him now in that context. Leonardo was an Italian polymath whose skills were unparalleled in such areas as drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture, science, mathematics, engineering, literature, astronomy, and anatomy just to mention a few! I learned about the genius of Leonardo in my introductory Humanities class as a graduate student at Old Dominion University. My professor, Dr. Dana Heller, had us read *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, which gave us a fascinating insight into the complex mind of this polymath. He was the epitome of Renaissance humanism, constantly learning from the classical age in art and the sciences. However, his “thirst” for knowledge caused him to use classical ideas to expand knowledge in new ways, especially when it came to the knowledge of human anatomy. At first, he started his study of human anatomy as a way of improving the knowledge of the human body, which, in turn, made him a better artist. However, we learned that he was also using his studies in an esoteric sense as a way of understanding the natural world. As Heller taught us, Leonardo first appeared to be quite a traditionalist, he studied the ancient Greek forms of art. When he viewed their statuary, he believed the ancient Greeks had a better understanding of human anatomy than he did. Thus, he decided to break the church prohibition of performing dissections on dead bodies and decided to spend years dissecting human bodies and drawing sketches of what he observed in his journals. What we learn from his notes in his journals is that his anatomical studies took him down the path of seeking esoteric knowledge of the natural world. His studies caused him to compare the microcosm of the body and the macrocosm of the world. As a for instance, he wrote: “The human body is a complex unity within the larger field of nature, a microcosm wherein the Elements and Powers of the universe were incorporated.”[66] These analogies extended to everything that he attempted to trace, to record, and to know about the human form. In his journals, he made comparisons between the arteries in the body and the underground rivers of the earth. He believed that almost everything that occurred in the human body could be found in the natural world. His interest in these analogies became very evident in his notebooks and sketchbooks. Scholars found that his microcosm and macrocosm analogies were more than outright comparisons that belonged to a prescientific age, they led him to compare the study of the body and the first century CE Greek scientist Ptolemy’s study of the earth. So, anatomy and geography here became one in Leonardo’s mind. The forms of the earth and those of the human body have a parallel. Heller emphasized to us that within the intricate details of human anatomy Leonardo discovered a way of describing and recording not only the geographical construction of the natural world, but of the Divinity itself.

I return to David Stevenson’s book, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland’s century, 1590-1710*, to show how esoteric knowledge and Hermeticism reached its apex of importance during the Renaissance era. Stevenson observed in his book that when the Renaissance intelligentsia were first being exposed to art of the classical Greco-Roman world it caused them to wonder what other wisdom could be found in studying the ancient mysteries. Thus, they started to think that: “If old was good, oldest must be best. Ancient Egypt was the oldest civilization of which Renaissance man had any real knowledge; therefore, it must represent the knowledge of the ancient world in its

purest form.”[67] Stevenson argued that this thirst for “pure knowledge” by the Renaissance intelligentsia was the reason why modern historians were reassessing the importance that such esoteric subjects like alchemy, magic, and astrology had to the time period, and should not just be ignored out of hand as embarrassing endeavors. The interest by the intelligentsia of the Renaissance, like Leonardo, in these subjects caused them to become more aware of their metaphysical world around them and to start to search for answers. Thus, Stevenson remarked that these esoteric ideas, “Dead ends in themselves, they were based on the belief that man could understand the world around him and would then be able to alter it, bending the powers of nature to his own ends, a novel and optimistic attitude changing man’s whole idea of his position in the universe.”[68] Once again this is the real important reason the intelligentsia delved into esotericism and Hermeticism; so that they could gain knowledge of the metaphysical world, and to come closer to understanding God and to emulate his creative powers. One of the popular areas of esoteric wisdom during the Renaissance was alchemy. I have not mentioned it much but will now write on its popularity with the intelligentsia during the Renaissance. Stevenson noted that; “...alchemy had been described as the greatest passion of the age in Central Europe.”[69] The one document that fired the imaginations of alchemists was what they commonly referred to as the “philosopher’s stone,” the act of transmutation, turning base metals into gold. Alchemy had been around since the times of ancient Egypt. Its knowledge waxed and waned throughout the ages. It got its real impetus once again during the Renaissance with a newly revealed Latin translation of a document that became known as the *Emerald Tablet*. It is a cryptic portion of Hermitical writings originally believed to have been penned by Hermes Trismegistus himself. The *Emerald Tablet* was supposed to be the “philosopher’s stone;” however, since it was written in cryptic form no one was able to truly uncover its hidden formula for transmutation. It is not as if some of the greatest minds did not try to uncover its secrets. None other than Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1726), one of the smartest human beings who ever walked the earth, spent years trying to find the “philosopher’s stone,” to no avail. Stevenson noted that there was another reason for trying to find the “truth” in the “philosopher’s stone.” It was esotericism’s search for the Divine and not “... merely a materialistic search for ways of turning base metals into gold, but an attempt to achieve the moral and spiritual rebirth of mankind.”[70] Cannot the same thing be said of Freemasonry? We are not just interested in taking “good men and making them better.” Freemasonry wants to help men to change their nature and hearts to search for the Divine; so that they can perfect their souls so that they may be “admitted into that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” I will now write about the art of memory, which also reached its apex during the Renaissance, using the scholarship of Stevenson and Yates once again.

If Cicero was the prime mover in propelling the art of memory forward into the future from ancient Rome, Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) was responsible for bringing the art in full view during the Renaissance. Although Bruno’s story is an amazing one concerning his “thirst” for esoteric knowledge, it ends in tragedy. Bruno’s tragic end still evokes a feeling of disgust, by all liberty loving people, toward the Roman Catholic Church for burning him at the stake for the crime of heresy. Bruno was an Italian Dominican friar, philosopher, mathematician, and Hermetic occultist. Bruno was seventeen years old when he joined the Dominican Order and became an ordained priest at twenty-four years of age in 1572. He learned the art of memory at a young age and his supreme grasp of the skill made him famous throughout Italy. He even travelled to Rome where he was invited to demonstrate his art for Pope Pius V. However, Bruno had another side to his intellect that

would ultimately cause his life to end in tragedy, he was one of the great proponents of Hermetic philosophy of the Renaissance era. He held some extremely controversial views that were obviously heretical in the eyes of the Church. Stevenson noted that Bruno: "...took up an extreme position, holding that the Egyptian religion was the only true religion, Christianity being a corruption of it." [71] With the Church already under siege from the Protestant Reformation rapidly spreading across Europe, there is no way it would ignore Bruno's heresy. Thus, as he started to espouse his Hermetical philosophy, he started to raise the ire of the ecclesiastical leaders who heard his ideas, and he had to flee Italy in 1580. From this time forward he became a "man on the run." In fact, his story becomes one of a man who, soon after he arrived, became *persona non grata* wherever he went. In her book, *The Art of Memory*, Yates asserted that: "For his secret, the Hermetic secret, was a secret of the whole Renaissance. As he travels from country to country with his 'Egyptian' message Bruno is transmitting the Renaissance in a very late but peculiarly intense form." [72]

Bruno fled to Toulouse France in 1580, where he earned a doctorate in theology and became a popular lecturer of philosophy with his students. It was in this new position that Bruno was able to show off his prodigious skill in the art of memory when he gave thirty lectures on theology. His fame for the art of memory reached the "ears" of the French king Henry III, who summoned him to the court to demonstrate his powers of memory. Yates relates the following story that Bruno relayed to friends on meeting King Henry III in her book, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. "King Henry III sent for him and asked him whether the art of memory which he taught was natural or done by magic art. Bruno says that he proved to the King that it was not magical. He then said that he dedicated a book called *De Umbris Idearum*, "The Shadows of Ideas," to the King." [73] The King was so impressed, he bestowed an "Extraordinary Lectureship" with a salary on Bruno. Yates noted that Bruno started to make a connection with the art of memory and his Hermetic philosophy in his book, *The Shadows of Ideas*. "Thus, the classical art of memory, in the truly extraordinary Renaissance and Hermetic transformation of it which we see in the memory system of *Shadows*, has become the vehicle for the formation of the psyche of a Hermetic mystic and Magus." [74] However, Bruno quickly wore out his welcome with his espousing Hermetical philosophy. Thus, in April 1583 Bruno travelled to England with letters of recommendation from Henry III, he stayed there for two years as a guest of the French ambassador. He was given a unique opportunity to give a guest lecture at Oxford University; however, he was unsuccessful in obtaining a permanent position there. His ideas became too controversial for John Underhill, bishop of Oxford, and George Abbot, who later became Archbishop of Canterbury—most notably for his supposition that he espoused in his lecture that "The marvelous magical religion of Egyptians will return, their moral laws will replace the chaos of the present age." [75] In 1586 he travelled to Germany to accept a lectureship in Wittenberg. Five years later, believing that his controversial teachings were forgotten in Italy, he accepted an invitation to privately tutor a rich patron of Venice, Giovanni Mocenigo, in the art of memory. His tragic story ends when his patron denounced him as a heretic to the Venetian Inquisition in 1592. He was transferred to the ecclesiastical authorities in Rome to stand trial for heresy in 1593. After languishing in jail for seven years, he was tried in 1600 and found guilty of heresy. Some of the heretical crimes the Church found him guilty of included Bruno's denial of Christian doctrinal teachings regarding the Divinity of Jesus, the virginity of Mary, and the Trinity. He was also guilty of being a pantheist and teaching the transmigration of the soul, known as reincarnation. For these crimes he was burned at the stake. Despite this sad ending, the Church was unsuccessful in killing off the insatiable "thirst" other members of the intelligentsia had for Hermeticism and esoteric knowledge. Some of these men were the progenitors of "speculative"

Freemasonry and I will look at this burgeoning movement now.

Once again, I return to Stevenson's groundbreaking work on the metamorphosis of "operative" stonemasonry into speculative Freemasonry. His thesis is that around 1600 in Scotland "Aspects of Renaissance thought were then spliced onto the Medieval legends, along with an institutional structure based on lodges and the rituals and the secret procedures for recognition known as the Mason Word. It is in this late Renaissance Scottish phase, according to the main argument of this book, that modern freemasonry was created."[\[76\]](#) The man responsible for this metamorphosis in Scotland is William Schaw, (c. 1550-1602), who was Master of Works and General Warden of the master stonemasons to James VI of Scotland. Schaw became a favorite courtier of the King and was entrusted by him with diplomatic missions in France and Denmark. More interestingly for Freemasonry's development, Stevenson's research revealed that Schaw was himself a student of esotericism and in particular a proponent of the art of memory. Thus, Schaw infused his esoteric beliefs in the already existing stonemason guild system which he was put in charge of in Scotland. He decided that after reading the existing *Kilwinning Manuscript*, he would write a new set of statutes to govern the guild members by. "He wanted masons to be an exclusive body of men qualified as masons both through training in trade skills and through initiation to esoteric lore of the craft."[\[77\]](#) Adding esoteric wisdom into his new *Statutes* would not be a wholly foreign concept for these Scottish stonemasons. As pointed out earlier in this paper the *Kilwinning Manuscript* contained the history of architecture from the ancient Egyptians up to its arrival on the British Isles. In addition, stonemasons were already taught that: "...Hermes Trismegistus was their patron."[\[78\]](#) Stevenson argued that this long historical record also gave the stonemason guild a most unique pedigree that would make it stand out from all the other professional guilds that existed at the time. Thus, what became known as the *Schaw Statutes* were written in 1599. Another one of the important aspects of the *Schaw Statutes* is its emphasis on the art of memory. Stevenson noted that in the 13th statute: "The warden of Kilwinning Lodge was ordered to test every entered apprentice and fellow craft in 'the art of [memorie] and science [theirolf].'"[\[79\]](#) When Stevenson saw this requirement in the *Schaw Statutes* he made an assertion that I am not sure I agree with. He believed that these lodges might have been "dabbling in occult and mystical strands of late Renaissance thought."[\[80\]](#) I believe that Schaw, who was a practitioner of the art of memory, was really introducing the art to the craft as a way for members to use as a convenient "tool" to remember the secrets of their craft. It would come naturally to them since the art always relied on architecture as the "tool" for practitioners to use to improve their memory skills.

Returning to Jacobs to end this section on the Renaissance, she made a statement about Freemasonry serving as a "bridge" between the Renaissance and the "Age of Enlightenment" that I found most cogent. "Freemasonry provides one link between Renaissance hermeticism, with the strongly naturalistic tendencies, and the early stages of the Enlightenment in England. Gradually the Hermetic lore would be replaced by the 'magic' of Newtonian science, just as the artisans would be displaced from this 'speculative' institution."[\[81\]](#)

Enlightenment: 17th to 19th century.

Since I ended my Renaissance section of this paper with wisdom from Margret Jacob, I find it only fitting that I open my section of this paper exploring the "Age of Enlightenment" with more wisdom from her. "The importance of this ostensible link with the past should not be underestimated. Part

of the appeal of Freemasonry in the eighteenth century lay in its claim to being in contact with a universal and ancient wisdom made manifest in the mathematical and architectural skills displayed in those early artisan achievements.”[82]

When I attended graduate school at Old Dominion University, I double majored in philosophy and history. The most intelligent, and the most academically demanding professor I studied under was Dr. Michael Carhart. He had a master’s degree in philosophy and a Doctorate in history. Thus, we were “kindred spirits” in the sense that we both realized one could not fully grasp an understanding of history without a deep knowledge of philosophy, and vice versa. Dr. Carhart virtually taught me how to truly “see” and ultimately understand all the historical, social, and philosophical complexities that made up what is known as the “Age of Enlightenment.” After I completed Carhart’s course on the “Age of Enlightenment,” one definite effect it had on me personally was that I gained a much deeper and better understanding of Freemasonry and its proper place it had in cultural and philosophical history.

I would define the “Age of Enlightenment” in the following way. The “Age of Enlightenment” was an eighteenth-century intellectual movement which started in Europe and spread through the rest of the Western Civilized world; it emphasized reason, knowledge, science, philosophy, individualism, liberty, democracy, and the study of human culture and the natural world. To help view this epoch of history through a hermeneutic lens I turn to the wisdom of one of the most imminent scholars on the “Age of Enlightenment,” Dr. Jürgen Habermas; (1929-present), a German philosopher and sociologist.

Thomas McCarthy did the best translation of his works in his book, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*. Habermas believed that “Enlightened” philosophes understood that science contained universal truths, and that progress was a process of discovery, with perfection at the end of a linear progression. To be “Enlightened,” a person had to know themselves. The philosophes believed that one way to do this in the eighteenth-century was through the arts. Now I can hear some of my Masonic Brethren asking the question; “what does art have to do with it?” Habermas would answer, and I whole heartedly agree with him, that many imminent philosophers from as early as Plato and Aristotle and running up through many modern philosophers, such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer and Habermas, have all agreed that artists and art movements have helped to shape historical movements throughout human history. Examples of the historical epochs that were shaped by and in many ways even defined by the arts are as follows: the Greco-Roman classical period, the Renaissance, the “Age of Enlightenment,” Romanticism, Modernism, and post-Modernism just to mention a few. In fact, Habermas argued that the “Age of Enlightenment” gave birth to the development of the “public sphere,” a phrase he coined in his doctoral dissertation, where rational private people took their ideas and judgments and publicly developed them through the arts and communal associations. For example, Habermas noted that during the “Age of Enlightenment,” the “public sphere” invented the modern novel with character development. In addition, Habermas noted that this great historical epoch spawned the “public sphere” of newspapers, coffee houses, salons, and Freemasonry. Finally, Habermas maintained that since Great Britain was the most liberal country in Europe during the “Age of Enlightenment,” the culture of the “public sphere” emerged first from there, around 1700. The “public sphere” culture then spread throughout most of Continental Europe during the rest of the eighteenth-century.[83] Thus, I am convinced that Habermas superbly described the social conditions that “spawned” the “Age of

Enlightenment.” In addition, he has definitely proved to me that this historic epoch gave birth to “speculative” Freemasonry, leaving no doubt in my mind that “speculative” Freemasonry is the “longest living child” of the “Age of Enlightenment.” Now that I have provided a more nuanced definition of the “Age of Enlightenment” and have given some historical context to it *vis-à-vis* to the birth of “speculative” Freemasonry, it is time to take a unique view of how art infused with esoteric knowledge from ancient Egypt entered the “Age of Enlightenment.” My view is through the work of genius of one of the epoch’s greatest “children,” Brother Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791).

Unfortunately, most Freemasons have no idea that one of the greatest classical composers of music, Mozart, was a Freemason and composed beautiful music specifically for use in the Masonic Lodge. The French musicologist Dr. Jacques Henry, who was also a Freemason, in his book, *Mozart the Freemason: The Masonic Influence on His Musical Genius*, clearly recognized Freemasonry’s importance to the “Age of Enlightenment” when he wrote: “Among the currents of thought of the period, freemasonry stands out as one that has most deeply influenced intellectual society. In Mozart’s time, the Masonic order assembled everything that Europe considered brilliant. Thinkers and artists fully supported the great principle of Masonic thought, the betterment of man through the respect and observance of ideals of a rigorous morality.”[\[84\]](#) I found Henry’s quote a most incisive description of Freemasonry’s influence on one of mankind’s greatest intellectual movements in history. I am not surprised by his understanding of Freemasonry’s influence on the “Age of Enlightenment” since he “Understood that in order to rigorously evaluate the influence of Masonic symbolism, it would be necessary to study it not from the outside but to live in it in its context within the fraternity and above all to practice the rite and its ceremonies.”[\[85\]](#) Henry elaborates on this sentiment in his thesis for the book. He essentially takes a “deep dive” in analyzing the initiatory symbols and Masonic philosophy to “see” the “light” they projected on Mozart. Henry fully understood how the light of Freemasonry had a profound influence on Mozart’s music. However, for this paper it is necessary for me to point out two important moments in Mozart’s life that not only influenced his music, but also allowed him to influence two other institutions of the day, the Monarchy and the Roman Catholic Church. I think that, unlike any other Freemason of his time, Mozart was uniquely suited to be the best spokesperson for the Fraternity to allay the fears that the Austrian government and the Roman Catholic Church held regarding Freemasonry. I think that there are two examples from Mozart’s early age to prove this point. Mozart throughout his life was a staunch supporter of the Austrian monarchy. The precocious six-year-old performed for the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa and then climbed up onto her lap and kissed her on the cheek. From that time until his death, he was always a welcomed visitor at court not only by the Empress, but by her two sons who reigned after her. At the age of fourteen, Mozart had already composed beautiful religious music and performed for Pope Clement XIV. The Pope was so moved by the religious fervency this child prodigy displayed that he bestowed on him the monastic “Order of the Golden Spur.” Thus, from an early age, Mozart’s zeal for his Roman Catholicism never waned; he was composing spiritually uplifting music for his Church until his death.[\[86\]](#)

The brief biography of Mozart shows that his fervent religious beliefs along with his zeal for learning and living Freemasonry’s philosophical teachings acted as the “rule and guide” for his musical compositions. Thus, at the age of twenty-eight Mozart “took his first step in Freemasonry.” Initiated in the Viennese Masonic lodge “*Zur Wohltätigkeit*” (“Beneficence”) on 14 December 1784, he was passed to the Fellowcraft degree on 7 January 1785 and became a Master Mason shortly thereafter. Mozart also attended the meetings of another lodge, named “*Zur wahren Eintracht*” (“True

Concord"). When Mozart's father Leopold came to visit him in Vienna in 1785, he was initiated a Freemason in his son's Lodge. Mozart met two Lodge Brothers that had a profound influence on Mozart's musical works. Emanuel Schikaneder was an actor, theatre owner and playwright. He would become very friendly with Mozart, producing many of Mozart's operas in his theatre and he wrote the libretto for Mozart's great opera *Die Zauberflöte*, *The Magic Flute*. Thus, Schikaneder as a fellow artist like Mozart really served as a "kindred spirit" in helping Mozart produce Masonic music. Mozart was drawn into Baron Ignaz von Born's, "orbit of influence" soon after he was initiated a Freemason. Born was the General Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Austria and was one of the great luminaries of the "Age of Enlightenment" in Europe. Mozart obviously admired Born so much that he composed a cantata in his honor. *Die Maurerfreude*, "Masonic Joy" was composed to honor Born on April 20, 1785. Born was a major progenitor of the idea that much of Freemasonry's rituals were borrowed from the ancient Egyptian mysteries. There is no doubt most of the Masonic knowledge and philosophy that Mozart learned came from the very close relationship Mozart had with Born.^[87] Thus, it is not surprising that both Mozart and Schikaneder would rely heavily on Born's intellect and why Mozart's great opera *Die Zauberflöte*, "The Magic Flute" was "dripping" with Egyptian motifs and Hermetic philosophy.

To explore this opera, I used the expert research of Dr. Jacques Chailley, in his book *The Magic Flute: Esoteric Symbolism in Mozart's Masonic Opera*. The creators of the opera were all Freemasons. The music was composed by Mozart, the libretto written by Freemason Emanuel Schikaneder, and with a fair amount of collaboration from both Mozart and Baron Ignaz von Born, General Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Austria. *The Magic Flute* premiered on 30 September 1791 at Schikaneder's theatre; its debut was only two months before the premature death of Mozart at thirty-five years old. Mozart's opera is his last great composition and occupied his mind even after its completion; he was literally commenting about it on his death bed. Opera goers initially had a hard time understanding the genius of his work.^[88] Chailley succinctly described the plot as follows: "The first act begins as a fairy tale, continues as a *commedia buffa*, and ends in philosophic tirades. The second act is even less comprehensible: we watch the chief protagonists being subjected to unexplained trials of astonishing arbitrariness and then suddenly learn that they have earned the right to places of honor in glory of Isis and Osiris."^[89] I agree with Chailley's assessment that initially the lack of understanding by audiences was due to their being exposed to new information not known to most viewers in Viennese society. I describe the opera by borrowing a phrase used by Winston Churchill to describe Communism. For the audience, Mozart's opera was a "mystery" of Masonic symbolism "wrapped in an enigma" of Egyptian motifs. I find that Mozart and Schikaneder's purpose for this opera was unlike any other work they created. There is no doubt in my mind that they were on a special mission to shine a light on the virtues of Freemasonry with this opera and were most enthusiastically supported in their mission by the high-ranking Freemason Born. Thus, I believe that these three men in essence formed a *Troika* for the purpose of "revealing" some Masonic philosophical light to the world. It is important to "illuminate" the influence Born had on the opera and what possible motivation he would have had in giving his expertise on esoteric Masonry to Mozart and Schikaneder for the opera. As I stated earlier in this paper, Mozart became friendly with Born after he was initiated a Freemason. They maintained a remarkably close relationship until Born's death during the rehearsals of the opera in July 1791. Born was one of the great luminaries of the "Age of Enlightenment" in Europe. He was a frequent correspondent with Benjamin Franklin during Franklin's time spent in France lobbying the French government to help

the American Revolutionary cause. Born was a major progenitor of the idea that much of Freemasonry's rituals were borrowed from the ancient Egyptian mysteries. Born authored a long article supporting this idea published in 1784 in the *Journal for Freemasons*, which had a wide circulation in Europe. As Chailley pointed out: "Rumors spread that he [Born] had inspired it, and that the librettist and composer had portrayed him in the personage of the wise Sarastro."[\[90\]](#) I return to Florian Ebeling's research in his book, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus: Hermeticism from Ancient to Modern Times*, to give us a more insightful look at Born's beliefs regarding his notion that the ancient Egyptian mysteries were the real antecedents of both "The Age of Enlightenment" and Freemasonry. "Born extensively paraphrased and quoted from classical sources on ancient Egyptian religion. He interpreted Egyptian culture as fostering proto-Enlightenment scientific pursuits...The Egyptian priests had been in the service of an ancient Enlightenment, pursuing the single-minded goal of improving the welfare of the people."[\[91\]](#)

Unlike all of Mozart's other Masonic compositions, his Masonic opera was not composed for use in the lodge, but to proclaim the wisdom of Freemasonry's philosophy to the world. I am thoroughly convinced that the *Troika* composed the opera for several reasons and were inspired to do so with the prodding and assistance of Born. First, the *Troika* used the opera as a recruitment tool to attract "enlightened" like minded men to join Freemasonry. Secondly, I believe that the *Troika* used the opera as a "vehicle" to show profanes that Freemasonry was an organization whose primary purpose was to improve society through improving the characters of individual men by using the ideals espoused by Enlightenment philosophy. Thirdly, Freemasonry had raised the suspicions of Emperor Leopold II and the Roman Catholic church, and I believe the *Troika*, with Mozart as their "front man," were speaking directly to the government and ecclesiastical authorities by showing them through the opera that Freemasonry was not a danger to their rule. I think that the *Troika* understood that, unlike any other Freemason of his time, Mozart was uniquely suited to be the best spokesperson for the Fraternity to allay the fears that the Austrian government and the Roman Catholic Church held regarding Freemasonry. I re-acquaint you with two examples from Mozart's early age to prove this point. Mozart throughout his life was a staunch supporter of the Austrian monarchy. First, the precocious six-year-old performed for the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa and then climbed up onto her lap and kissed her on the cheek. From that time until his death, he was always a welcomed visitor at court not only by the Empress, but by her two sons who reigned after her. Second, remember that at the age of fourteen, Mozart had already composed beautiful religious music and performed for Pope Clement XIV. The Pope was so moved by the religious fervency this child prodigy displayed that he bestowed on him the monastic "Order of the Golden Spur." Thus, from an early age, Mozart's zeal for his Roman Catholicism never waned; he was composing spiritually uplifting music for his Church until his death.[\[92\]](#) Thus, I am convinced that, because of the "cache" Mozart earned from these two institutions, the *Troika* thought him uniquely suited to prove with this opera that the moral teachings of Freemasonry were compatible with both government and church authority. Undoubtedly, this was a brave artistic move on Mozart's part, both with regard to the attention he drew to himself from the political and ecclesiastical authorities, and the attention he brought to the Fraternity he loved. It must be understood that the *Troika's* action of revealing Masonic "secrets" was a radical idea for Freemasons of their time, especially since the Fraternity was even more secretive during their time than it is in today's world. To amplify this point, soon after the opera's debut and up until modern times, the popular movie *Amadeus* (1984) being the most recent example, there had been speculation that it was Mozart's own

Brethren who poisoned him to death because he revealed Masonic “secrets” to the world through his opera. There is too much evidence to prove that this is just another slanderous claim made by anti-Masons. As a matter of fact, this slander was most recently perpetuated by the Nazis in the 1930’s; not surprising since they were virulently anti-Masonic themselves. This claim is baseless since we know that the opera, which premiered on 30 September 1791, received rave reviews and had over 100 showings in less than a year. The entire Masonic community in Vienna came out to watch it and spoke in its support as a great achievement for spreading Masonic philosophy to the world.[\[93\]](#)

At this point in the paper it is important to focus in on some of the obvious uses of Hermetic and Masonic symbolism in the opera that the *Troika* deployed to educate the masses about Freemasonry. As a for instance, Chailley noted that the number three, which is Masonry’s most important number, plays a prominent role in the opera. “Not only 3 Ladies, 3 Boys, etc., but also 3 temples, 3 virtues praised 3 times by the Boys.”[\[94\]](#) In Hermeticism the number three is also of great importance. First and foremost, the number three helps to comprise Hermes honorific title, the Latin word Trismegistus, which means “thrice-greatest.” Central to the opera’s plot in *Act II* of the opera are the three trials the protagonists must endure which culminate with initiatory ceremonies. The *Troika* really “pulled back the curtain” and gave their audience a detailed glimpse into the importance of the act of initiating a candidate had regarding Masonic ritual. One important feature of Masonic initiation that the *Troika* revealed to the audience is the requirement of initiates remaining silent concerning the actual initiation rituals Freemasons participated in. In this paper I have already shown that in fact all the ancient mysteries demanded that their initiates keep secret about certain tenets of their rites. Yet, as a “titillating” device that the *Troika* deployed to capture the attention of their audience, they made their audience privy to the “innermost secrets” of Freemasonry by portraying the true meaning of Masonic initiation in the opera. Chailley wrote that: “Every cycle of trials presupposes a complete transformation of the personality: the future elect must first die in their former life if they are to be born into the new one later.”[\[95\]](#) Thus, the *Troika* were communicating to the audience that we Freemasons are ritually tested just like the protagonists were in the opera; as well as the Egyptian Diety Osiris, as “poor Hiram” was, and of course Jesus was as well. Thus, they are all tried, die, and are reborn. I think that this was the key concept of Freemasonry that the *Troika* wanted to communicate to their audience. They were telling the audience through this opera that all good men could join Freemasonry and learn its philosophy. Freemasonry offered an enlightened moral philosophy to all men who only had to believe in a Supreme being and an eternal soul. Freemasonry’s moral philosophy, when “practiced in life,” could “purify one’s character,” thus “perfecting themselves” to be “re-born” with a “purified soul.” Their “purified soul” would then enjoy eternal bliss to occupy that “Temple not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.” Chailley also understood that the *Troika* conveyed to their audience the notion that only after the protagonists successfully complete their trials will they be allowed “To take the oath and the blindfold be permanently lifted from their eyes, whereupon the most blinding light will dazzle them.”[\[96\]](#)

More Masonic and Hermetic symbolism that I think is important to take notice of is that each act of the opera is divided into three scenes. Musically, Chailley noticed how Mozart artfully deployed the number three throughout the score. “With the significance of the Number is born the hieratic preeminence of E-flat major, which brings together the Three of perfection, the major of serenity, and the flats of solemnity...This tonality, which encloses the entire opera, will be not only that of the grand initiatory scenes, but also that of most of the pieces, and even phrases, having solemn or

didactic meaning”[97] Besides words and music, a successful opera uses the visual arts, such as set design and costumes, to help convey an idea. Thus, it is not surprising that the setting for the opera takes place in ancient Egypt, which was believed by many Freemasons of the time period to be the true historical antecedent of Freemasonry. By the *Troika* imbuing the opera with an Egyptian motif, they were portraying to the audience a notion that was becoming increasingly popular to their fellow enlightened Europeans, that the ancient Egyptian mysteries represented the earliest progenitors of human knowledge. This idea would be greatly boosted in just a few years after the opera’s debut by Napoleon’s military foray into Egypt and the wondrous artifacts and knowledge Napoleon’s “army” of academics sent back to France. The Egyptian motif is placed front and center for the audience in *Act II* during the *Chorus of Priests* scene. It portrays a retinue of priests marching onto stage depicting the inner vault of a pyramid. Each priest carries an illuminated lantern in the shape of a pyramid, and two priests carry a much larger pyramid that they bear on their shoulders in the same fashion that the Hebrews would carry the Ark of the Covenant. The opening singing for this scene has the priests praising Isis and Osiris for the early morning’s Sun’s rays illuminating the inner chamber of the pyramid. Mozart’s music reinforces the joy of the Sun’s radiance with the sharps climbing up the musical scale. As the Sun’s rays are causing the dark of the “Night” to recede, Mozart’s music matches the words with the musical flats descending the musical scale in a somber tone. Then the priests sing the following phrase in unison, and it is important to note that the following phrase is repeated three times. “Soon the noble young man will feel new life; soon he will be given over to our service. His spirit is bold; his heart is pure; soon he will be worthy of us.”[98] Once again, they were really exposing the true meaning of Freemasonry’s rituals and moral philosophy to the audience. Thus, what the *Troika* was revealing about Freemasonry to the audience was that by obligating ourselves to learn the moral philosophy of Freemasonry we are giving ourselves over to the “service” of the fraternity. By following Freemasonry’s moral precepts and “circumscribing our desires” we “purify our hearts” and “prepare our souls.” Thus, when we Freemasons perform these tasks our souls will “become worthy” of “a new life,” we are “reborn.”

The opera was a great success, one of its great admirers was none other than Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, (1749-1832) who was a German luminary author of his time. Brothers Goethe and Mozart were friends since Mozart’s early age. Henry reports that “Goethe, also a freemason, perfectly perceived the profound meaning of the work and the value of its message. He considered *The Magic Flute* to be one of the most beautiful and most noble of opera; even began writing a sequel to it.”[99]

I think Henry detected the key philosophical concept of the opera; I am sure it was what Goethe saw as well. “Can good vanquish evil? Can any layman be initiated? Despite the diversity of their culture, their beliefs, or their social standing, all men have a right to attain happiness and love. For such a subject one must have a morality like that referred to in the libretto: the man who takes as an ideal the attainment of the light reaches through initiation to a greater, purer happiness and a more perfect love.”[100] I hope this example of Mozart, Schikaneder, and von Born, using art to spread the “wise and serious truths” of Freemasonry gives the reader a better understanding of how the intelligentsia of the “Age of Enlightenment,” much like the progenitors of the ancient mysteries, used rational thought “clothed” in a passionate emotional appeal to draw attention to their teachings. I am now going to highlight how the progenitors of “speculative” Freemasonry, many members of the intelligentsia themselves, used the esoteric wisdom of the past fused with the new ideas from this epoch of history to create the greatest non-sectarian organization dedicated to improving the souls of men—Freemasonry.

Freemasonry:

I found that it took a mix of “profane” historians and Masonic scholars to “weave the tapestry” of Freemasonry’s important place in social history of the “Age of Enlightenment.” Thus, I will now write about what that Masonic “tapestry” looks like. I am going to use a long quote from Frances Yates book *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, whose scholarship I have relied on so much in this paper. Even though I have been a Freemason for over thirty-six years, I have learned so much from her books about the Craft. I am amazed that she was so perceptive about Freemasonry’s importance to the historical milieu of the “Age of Enlightenment.”

Where is there such a combination as this of religious toleration, emotional linkage with the medieval past, emphasis on good works for others, and imaginative attachment to the religion and the symbolism of the Egyptians? The only answer to this question that I can think of is —Freemasonry, with its mythical link with the medieval masons, its toleration, its philanthropy, and its Egyptian symbolism. Freemasonry does not appear in England as a recognizable institution until the early seventeenth century, but it certainly had predecessors, antecedents, traditions of some kind going back much earlier, though this is a most obscure subject. We are fumbling in the dark here, among strange mysteries, but one cannot help wondering whether it might have been among the spiritually dissatisfied in England, who perhaps heard in Bruno’s “Egyptian” message some hint of relief, that the strains of the Magic Flute were first breathed upon the air.[\[101\]](#)

Yates homed in on the notion that the progenitors of “speculative” Freemasonry, like their “operative” stonemason brothers before them, believed that the ancient Egyptian mysteries, essentially Hermeticism, were passed down through history as an “inheritance” to the Craft. This notion was recognized by David Boyd Haycock, who wrote in his article *Ancient Egypt in 17th and 18th Century England*, that: “This argument from ancient history, the passing down of ancient knowledge to the present day, appears to have remained a strong historical force in the early decades of the 18th century England. It was enshrined in the history of the Freemasons, who emerge into the full light of history in 1717, with the establishment in London of the Grand Lodge.”[\[102\]](#) I will now include further research from some of the Masonic scholars I have used in this paper.

I have shown plenty of evidence in this paper regarding how every ancient mystery rite, as well as all esoteric schools of knowledge have used symbolism to teach its initiates how to improve their lives and perfect their souls. Freemasonry has once again gained a lucrative “inheritance” of symbolism from these groups as well. One of the greatest Masonic scholars recognized how Masonic allegorical myth followed a similar pattern from the ancient mysteries. In chapter V. *Freemasonry In Relation To the Ancient Mysteries*, Wilmhurst illuminated further his notions on the Craft’s connections to the ancient mysteries which had been handed down from time immemorial. He went into greater detail in this chapter on how one could not miss the similarities that many civilizations and various religions shared. “Now one of the first things to strike any student of Masonic literature and comparative religion is the remarkable presence of common factors, common beliefs, doctrines, practices and symbols, in the religions of all races alike, whether ancient or modern, eastern or western, civilized or barbarian, Christian or pagan.”[\[103\]](#) Thus, Wilmhurst perceptively picked up on the fact that the Craft, following in the footsteps of the ancient mysteries, used myth to impart wisdom to its initiates.

I bring to light another article concerning symbolism. In "The System of Symbolic Introduction," written by the very renowned Masonic author Albert Mackey, (1807-81), he stated that our English brethren had the best definition of Freemasonry. "Freemasonry is a science of morality, developed and inculcated by the ancient method of symbolism."[\[104\]](#) Mackey correctly asserted, in my opinion, that if you stripped away symbolism from Freemasonry then what is left is a lifeless and soulless institution. In fact, Freemasonry relies on symbolism more than any other civic organization, and as much as any religion that I have ever studied. Mackey astutely recognized the importance of symbolism to the development of ancient humankind from his reading of the eminent classical historian, George Grote (1794-1871). Grote's following quote is well known among all historians. "At a time when language was in its infancy, visible symbols were the most vivid means of acting upon the minds of ignorant hearers."[\[105\]](#) I think that Grote's quote about symbolism serves as a perfect example of how the adherents of Hinduism, the vast majority of whom were illiterate, have learned the teachings of their religion over the past five millennia. In addition, Grote's quote also explains how our ancient "operative" Brethren, the medieval stonemasons, many of whom were illiterate as well, learned their craft. I found that Mackey made a remarkably interesting observation about the development of symbolism and the use of language *vis-à-vis* religious development throughout mankind's history. For example, Mackey found that the Egyptian religion was "heavily laden" with symbolism; however, with the advent of written language, Judaism was less reliant on symbolism, and Christianity even less so than Judaism.[\[106\]](#)

In the article, "What is Symbolism?" by R. L. Meekren, I found a common idea for the entire paper. "Nothing is actually isolated in the world."[\[107\]](#) I find that Meekren's idea is right on target with my understanding of how human cognition works. Since humankind's inception, we have been comparing, contrasting, and categorizing things from the "metaphysical" world around us to gain a better understanding of "particulars." Thus, what Meekren essentially purports in his thesis is that in order to truly understand symbolism one must use a "comparative" approach to the subject. Thus, Meekren argued that to understand the "metaphysical" Masonic world one must have the following realization. "Masonry cannot be understood fully as an isolated fact. Its history cannot be properly understood in ignorance of the secular history of the countries and communities in which it has appeared."[\[108\]](#)

In the article, *Symbolism in Mythology*, written by C. T. Sego, he, like the other Masonic scholars in this section of my paper, recognized the importance of symbolism and myth to how humans understood the "metaphysical" world. "There is a psychological need for symbols, a real demand for stories, which man has ever supplied."[\[109\]](#) Sego made a fascinating and important observation about the use of myth throughout social history. Sego argued that based on what the goal of a myth was depended on whether it evolved over time or not. For example, when myths were employed for entertainment purposes, they tended to be changed by the bards who told them with each new generation. An example of this is our knowledge of the development of Homer's *Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Literary experts for over the last 100 years have convincingly been able to prove that Homer did not invent those myths credited to him; however, he was the first bard to write them down, and he no doubt made substantial changes as he transcribed them. In addition, Sego convincingly pointed out that when myths were not employed for entertainment purposes, then their form and lessons did not change or evolve over time. Thus, the myth of the Egyptian Deity Osiris, Freemasonry's "Hiramic myth," and of course Christianity's story of the resurrection of Jesus are connected and have not changed over time. Thus, Sego stated: "So the legend of the third degree,

introduced into our body I do not know when, is the same today as it was when we first learned it.”[\[110\]](#)

Stevenson, a “profane,” realized that to understand what was taking place during the transformative period between “operative” and “speculative” Freemasonry he had to find a nexus of ritual and symbolic practice that continued between the two organizations. Thus, Stevenson had to investigate some of the central features of what was practiced in “speculative” Lodges that found its origins in “operative” Lodges; as well as who or what was the “primal force” behind the creation of Masonic symbolism and ritual in “operative” Lodges. In his search for the answer to his question, Stevenson turned to the “old charges” of the *Kilwinning Manuscript*, which were in essence a facsimile copy of the English *Regius Manuscript* from the 1390’s and were replete with symbolism, the antecedents of the stonemason’s craft, and the rituals that found their way into “speculative” Freemasonry. A few examples include the following: the teaching of the “Seven Liberal Arts,” the teaching of the ancient mysteries, which started in Egypt and progressed to King Solomon’s Temple, ultimately winding their way through Medieval history including St. Alban, and finally bringing masonry to England. In addition, the “old charges” in the *Kilwinning Manuscript* laid out the ethical rules by which all members of the stonemason’s guild would have to adhere.[\[111\]](#) Thus, what Stevenson found was that “speculative” Freemasonry was built on a foundation of a long history of “ethical symbolism” which used stonemason’s working tools to teach a moral philosophy. Finally, I think the progenitors of “speculative” Freemasonry understood how much our craft was “shaped” from the knowledge it “inherited” from ancient Egypt when they included the following beautiful language in the Fellow Craft lecture. “Tools and implements of architecture and symbolic emblems most expressive are selected by the Fraternity to imprint on the mind wise and serious truths, and thus, through a succession of ages, are transmitted unimpaired the most excellent tenets of our Institution.” In fact, I believe that this quote proves my thesis.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I believe that the facts that I brought to “light” in this paper have proven my thesis which I restate now. The thesis of my paper is really a simple notion. All my years of academic studies have thoroughly convinced me that there is an “unbroken chain” of Egyptian wisdom that has been transmitted through several epochs of history and found its way into Freemasonry during the “Age of Enlightenment.” Now I am not arguing that this “unbroken chain” of Egyptian wisdom has been passed down verbatim by word of mouth through every generation of humans from ancient Egypt to “speculative” Freemasonry. However, I do argue that the ancient Egyptian wisdom, (known as Hermeticism, which I defined in this paper when I wrote about Egyptian history), has been discovered by the initiated intelligentsia during every major historical epoch of history up to the “Age of Enlightenment.” In addition, I assert that in every one of these historical epochs of history, these men of intelligentsia, who have been initiated into various rites and societies, often secretive in nature, believed that they were chosen to spread the Hermetic wisdom of ancient Egypt. These initiated intelligentsia also believed that this “revealed” wisdom could be used to interpret the esoteric knowledge necessary to better understand their place in the universe, the “truth” behind human existence, and their relationship with our G-d.

I would love for Freemasonry to follow the example of our enlightened Brethren of the eighteenth century and make a more concerted effort in exposing the public to Freemasonry’s moral precepts. I

have often wondered why Freemasonry has been so publicly “shy.” I have been a Freemason for over thirty-six years, and I am often stupefied by the general ignorance my Brethren have regarding the history of the “true” antecedents of Freemasonry. The “Age of Enlightenment,” and its “first born child” Freemasonry, was about spreading “light” to all humanity. However, I believe, as a historian and a Freemason, a historical event took place in America that effectively caused Freemasonry to severely “shade” the “light” of our moral philosophy and drove its membership to “hide in the dark.” The historical event was the “Morgan Affair.” William Morgan of Batavia, New York, in 1825, threatened to publish a book exposing all the secrets of Freemasonry. He soon went missing and many people across the country accused Freemasons of murdering Morgan to keep him from divulging Freemasonry’s secrets. This event became commonly known in history as the “Morgan Affair.” A country wide anti-Masonic movement soon grew and even formed a national political party. It caused many people to believe that Freemasons had too much political power in society and they should be distrusted because of their membership in a “secret” society. Unfortunately, this event caused a large decrease in Masonic membership across the country. It also caused the remaining members to become especially secretive about their membership; thus, they “hid in the dark,” to escape social criticism. Thus, I believe that the “Morgan Affair” caused several generations of American Freemasons to have an aversion to speak about any aspects of the fraternity to the “profanes” around them, including members of their own family and close friends. These men believed in a misguided notion that everything regarding their Masonic membership had to remain “cloaked” in secrecy. Thus, we turned away from the examples set by our Enlightenment era Brethren of promoting the life affirming values of Freemasonry to not only the public, but even to our own relatives and friends who we believe should bask in the “glow” of the “light” that Freemasonry’s precepts have to offer to improve their lives.

I need to state a few *caveats* about this paper. An astute reader of this paper will notice that I did not use any quotations or source information from two of Freemasonry’s most prolific writers: Albert Pike, and Manly P. Hall. Admittedly, I am a little more familiar with Albert Pike’s work *Morals and Dogma* than I am the plethora of works by Manly P. Hall. However, as a professional historian and philosopher, when I read an author’s work, I expect to see supporting evidence for their assertions.

When I have consulted the works of both authors, I have found that their works either lack supporting citations, as in the works of Pike, or the citations like, in the case of Hall, list no page numbers in his citations. In addition, I have made no mention of the Rosicrucians who emerged during the “Age of Enlightenment.” They were essentially a group of men, many of them Freemasons themselves, who were involved in looking for the esoteric wisdom of the Jewish Kabbalah. I did not want to research Kabbalah in this paper for two reasons. First, Kabbalah’s esoteric knowledge cannot show a strong connection to ancient Egyptian history or its mystery rites. In my research for this paper, I did not find any strong connections between Egypt and Kabbalah. Second, if I am wrong, I invite anyone to challenge my assertion and complete my work by writing about an Egyptian connection to Kabbalah. Afterall, as a Freemason, I am always interested in gaining “more light.”

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