

SOLAR AND ASTROLOGICAL SYMBOLISM IN FREEMASONRY

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Filius Terram et Caelum Sidereum

INTRODUCTION

Of all the known symbolic and allegorical themes, none are more ubiquitous than those that, when reduced to their root narrative, pertain to the movement of celestial bodies, particularly the apparent annual and diurnal circuits of the Sun. This is unsurprising, considering the importance of the role of this star in maintaining life on Earth. To the ancients, as to modern man, nothing was more observably significant, in its presence or its absence, than the light and heat provided by this fiery orb. The Sun's apparent path measures the passage of time; its relative position to the Earth marks the changing of seasons. The solar cycle pervades nearly every aspect of human life and civilization. The Sun was, is, and will presumably continue to be, temporal reference point number one.

The Sun's passage through the twelve houses of the zodiac has provided the framework for all manner of mythological narratives, allegory, fable and folklore. This astrological influence is also present in the rituals and symbolism of Freemasonry; though it is so ingeniously woven into the fabric of the Fraternity that it often escapes notice.

It is the purpose of the present work to attempt to illustrate, through the application of an astrological interpretation of the material inherent in Freemasonry's ritualistic and diagrammatic corpus, that this ancient fraternal order has functioned as a repository for a body of symbolism and allegory that is astrological in general and solar in particular and that, thereby, modern Freemasonry continues to perpetuate an element common to many ancient Mystery Traditions. In the interest of contextual clarity, we will begin with a brief outline of both astrology and Freemasonry, in addition to a cursory look at the ancient Mysteries which, from a certain perspective, could be considered a unifying link between the latter two subjects. We will illustrate these topics strictly as they pertain to the subject at hand, which will serve as a contextual orientation and the definition of our terms.

ASTROLOGY AND ASTRONOMY

Being that we are approaching this subject with an emphasis on astrological symbolism, it is necessary that we first differentiate astrology from astronomy. These disciplines are similar in that both measure and chronicle the various movements and relative positions of celestial bodies. Astronomy accomplishes this by means of detailed mathematical and astrophysical calculations [1]. Astrology, however, is distinguished by the accompanying belief that these motions and cycles have a psychological and physiological influence on human beings [2].

ASTROLOGY IN THE WESTERN MYSTERY TRADITIONS

When we refer to the Mystery Traditions of the ancient world, we are referring specifically to those institutions and initiatory orders whose primary function was to serve as depositories for the accumulated physical and metaphysical knowledge of the given culture and to judiciously disseminate the fruits thereof [3]. These institutions were often distinguished from their corresponding civil religions by rites of initiation and oaths of secrecy and, consequently, very little information has made it to us directly

as to the specific nature and structure of these orders. However, from the data that has been gathered via archeological fragments and artifacts, a good deal of the curricula of these schools, as well as insights into their theological and philosophical pursuits, may be deduced with some confidence. The accumulated arts and sciences that are generally presumed to have been in the keeping of these orders included the preservation of the culture's ritualistic and magical heritage, the secrets of agriculture, the crafts of architecture and construction, shamanic medicine and the methods of astronomical observation [4]. It is Masonically notable that several of these arts and sciences are predicated on a familiarity with geometry. By using allegory, fable and parable, in conjunction with various symbolic and mnemonic devices, knowledge of these essential processes was conveyed, often via the medium of ritual drama.

Like civilization itself, many of the Mystery Traditions were established upon an agricultural foundation. The prediction, speculation, calculation and even the taxation of agricultural prospects and commodities was predicated on an understanding of arithmetic, geometry and, perhaps above all, astronomical observation. The safeguarding of the accumulated practical and theoretical knowledge of these sciences was of extreme importance; and it is for this reason that this body of information was consequently deposited in the bosom, or "faithful breast", of the Mysteries where oaths of silence and fidelity would ensure the maintenance of its integrity.

The solar allegory, as communicated via initiatory rites, was a common motif within many of the agricultural Mystery Religions of the ancient world [5]. The overall sequence of these rites helped to illustrate crucial seasonal cycles in farming and cultivation. Initiation into this type of Mystery Cult generally consisted of an exemplar for the regions' solar personification of choice whose passage through the twelve houses of the zodiac in one annual circuit was dramatically rendered [6]. Though the practical import of those ritual-dramas that allegorized the annual solar circuit was largely agricultural, there was usually a mystical component that centered on concepts such as immortality and metempsychosis, or the transmigration of the human soul into another form at death.

Copious examples of the allegorically rendered solar circuit, such as the "Solar Hero" narrative and the "Dying & Resurrecting God" cycle, may also be discerned, to greater or lesser degrees, in myriad variations within the body of world myth, fable, literature and the arts in general [7]. This motif may be detected in such culturally and temporally diverse narratives as the Twelve Labors of Hercules, Samson and Delilah, the life of Jesus Christ, the *Nibelungen Cycle*, *Cinderella*, the Samurai films of Akira Kurosawa, the "Spaghetti Western" film genre, and even *Star Wars*, if one applies the appropriate interpretive keys. The general narrative arc of the solar allegory, be it based upon the diurnal or the annual circuit, is a story to which we, as a people, have been exposed for millennia – particularly since its agricultural import is integral to civilization itself.

THE RELEVANCE OF MITHRAIC ASTROLOGICAL SYMBOLISM IN FREEMASONRY

Mithraism, having its origins in 4th Century BCE Persian Zoroastrianism, was an initiatory Grade system, the knowledge of which comes to us mainly due to the religion's prestigious station as the preferred cult of the Roman Legions [8]. Like the Masonic Lodge, the Mithraic grotto, or *Mithraeum*, was known to be a microcosmic representation of the universe and, similarly, there are many signs and symbols of a generally astrological character. For example, traces of blue paint, understood to have been used in the recreation of the night sky, have been found on the ceiling of the *Caesarea Maritima Mithraeum* [9].

The Mithraic grade structure was sometimes represented by a seven-runged ladder which also corresponded to the seven Classical Planets – the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Mars, Venus, Jupiter & Saturn – those which were visible to the ancients, prior to the invention of the telescope [10]. A parallel could also be drawn here with the Masonic adoption of the symbolism of Jacob's Ladder, in terms of a celestial ascent, and also to the spherical, planetary initiatory model of the Gnostics.

Considered in regard to axial precession, the first *Anno Lucis* of Freemasonry, which will be discussed in greater detail below, would have occurred in proximity to the dawn of the Taurian Age [11], which spanned from approximately 4000 to 2000 BCE. Mithraism is laden with Taurian imagery, as evidenced by the many examples of statuary and bas-relief that have been found in nearly every extant *Mithraeum*. It has been suggested that the *Tauroctony* – a depiction of Mithras, featured therein as a solar personification, surmounting and slaying a bull – may be a symbolic representation of the vernal equinox occurring in the zodiacal house of Taurus [12], thus harkening back to the very same period as that of the *Anno Lucis*.

In the *Tauroctony*, on either side of Mithras and the Taurian Bull, there are depictions of the torchbearers *Cautes* and *Cautopates*. These characters, cross-legged and dressed in distinctly Anatolian garb, have been interpreted as representations of the solstices [13]. In Freemasonry, a similar interpretation has been applied to the Holy Saints John in the Point Within A Circle diagram, at which we will take a closer look below.

The Mithraic Grade of *Miles* is believed to have consisted of the performance of a solar allegory represented in a ritual drama, wherein the initiate was said to descend into the grotto via the gate of Cancer (representing the summer solstice – which is notable as an annual correlative to the diurnal "High Twelve" of Freemasonry and also to the Keystone position of the Royal Arch in Capitular Masonry), where he passed through the spheres of the seven Classical Planets. Upon his descent into this chthonic realm, the *Miles*, after having adopted a quality of each planetary sphere through which he had passed, was subjected to the judgement of Mithras. He was then purged of the qualities he had collected during his descent by the performance of seven sacraments and made his exit via the gate of Capricorn (the winter solstice, or "Low Twelve" in the Masonic analogy). Similarly, in the initiatory rite known as the "Procession of the Sun Runner", the *Heliodromus* is guided by *Cautes* and *Cautopates* and preceded by an initiate of the *Miles* Grade in a ritual circumambulation about the *Mithraeum*, allegorically representing an annual solar circuit [14]. A similar allegorically solar interpretation has also been applied, very compellingly, to the Hiram's Tragedy in Masonic Ritual [15], which will be discussed in greater detail below.

THE HERMETIC PRINCIPLE OF CORRESPONDENCE

Hermeticism pertains, primarily, to the study and practice of the doctrines of Hermes Trismegistus [16]. These doctrines come to us via the extant fragments which have been compiled in what is known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Among the tracts which constitute this corpus is the *Tabula Smaragdina*, also known as the Emerald Tablet of Hermes. This notable piece of hermetica, widely considered to be largely alchemical in nature, is the source of the axiom, "that which is above is like that which is below" [17]. This axiom, sometimes referred to as the Hermetic Principle of Correspondence [18], has been applied, interpretatively, to the celestial orientation of terrestrial structures. There are many examples – from the megalithic structures of the Neolithic Era to the cathedrals of the Medieval Period

through those of today – of astronomical alignments and astrological allusions, particularly as they pertain to the vernal equinox and, more specifically, the phenomenon of axial precession.

Considering that the Masonic Lodge room is understood to be a microcosmic representation of the universe [19] – in addition to several other celestial/terrestrial juxtapositions about the Lodge, such as the globes surmounting the representations of the two Brazen Pillars which were on the porch of King Solomon's Temple – we may avail ourselves to the Hermetic Principle of Correspondence as a means of supporting an astrological interpretation of Masonic symbolism.

FREEMASONRY'S RELATIONSHIP TO ASTRONOMY

Throughout Freemasonry's initiatory degrees and the accompanying lectures, explanations of the various sets of symbols are given which primarily constitute their moral and ethical interpretations. There are, however, several alternate keys of interpretation that may be applied to Masonic ritual and symbolism to great effect, yielding a greater insight into the Fraternity's contextual history and wide range of derivational inspiration and influence. Among these alternate interpretive keys is the astrological. Freemasonry abounds with allusions to various celestial objects and phenomena in addition to allegorical content, unique to Masonic ritual, which can be understood to represent cycles such as the annual and diurnal solar circuits, planetary orbits and even axial precession.

There is a distinction made in Freemasonry between the Operative and the Speculative Crafts. The beginnings of Operative Masonry can be seen as early as the Neolithic Era [20]. It is here that we begin to see the earliest examples of edifices composed of quarried and worked stone. Many of these early structures betray an inordinately high level of geometrical and astronomical proficiency, particularly when considered in the context of the accepted cultural development of the period. When the application of geometrical principles in architecture becomes apparent, we can begin to trace the Operative origins of Freemasonry; most clearly evidenced by the conception and execution of megalithic structures in prehistory. Many of these edifices were oriented to astronomical events, such as the solstices and equinoxes, serving to further establish the irrefutable fact that these structures were conceived and raised in keeping with the aforementioned Hermetic Principle of Correspondence.

We must then further consider the fact that this information was limited to the class of the architect and builder, among whom these practices had become trade secrets [21]. That these masons, with the probable addition of the priestly class and hierophants of the Mysteries, were in possession of the astrological keys that yielded the science of geometry (and the consequent arts dependent upon it) is incontrovertible when considered in light of their work. Thus we see the gradual stratification of a class of craftsmen who had designed and erected these ancient and astronomically-oriented structures in stone, many notable examples of which remain standing to this day, which is itself a physical testament to the quality of their workmanship.

The word geometry has its etymological roots in the Ancient Greek *γεωμετρία* (*geo* "earth" and *metron* "measurement"). The fact that the word itself is referential to the measurement of the Earth is significant to our subject in that the only means by which the topography of the Earth may be terrestrially measured is in juxtaposition to the celestial sphere. Otherwise, the process of "Earth measurement" would be akin to measuring a ruler with the same ruler – one will always arrive at a 1:1 ratio. Bearing this in mind, it is difficult to say, conclusively, if the science of astronomy is dependent upon geometry, as it is

inferred in a Lodge of Fellowcraft Masons, or whether geometry is, itself, an abstraction drawn from astronomical observation.

By marking the solstices, equinoxes and other sidereal phenomena, mankind gradually became able to gain a sense of space, time and the rhythms of the Earth. By extrapolating the accumulated data and the procedures used in the observance of astronomical events, he was able to apply this knowledge to other areas such as agriculture, navigation and architecture – i.e. the arts and sciences upon which human civilization is contingent.

ASTRONOMICAL ORIENTATION

The fact that innumerable edifices, dating from the Neolithic Era through the Middle Ages and into the present day, have been conceived and erected with the express purpose of hermetically mirroring astronomical formations is irrefutable. Archeologists continue to find structures, widely distributed over the surface of the Earth, that betray the telltale signs of astronomical orientation [22]. Due to these considerations, we can safely infer that many of the temples of the ancient world were used for ritualistic as well as observatorial purposes, such as marking agricultural cycles and determining the length of the solar year.

Some of the early known guilds of stonemasons, such as the Dionysiac Artificers and the Roman *Collegia*, were likely to have perpetuated not only the trade secrets of the Operative Craft, but also some of the arcana which would have been inculcated in several of the ancient Mystery Traditions [23]. Only this could account for the undiluted and undiffused transmission of the requisite practical and theoretical knowledge of geometry and astronomy necessary for the construction of the sort of celestially-aligned structures that we find. Later, the Lombard stonemasons of the Middle Ages, such as the *Magistri Comacini* and the *Maestri Campionesi*, represented a continuation of these concerns in the Operative Craft. The esoteric import embedded in the pedagogical culture of these guilds is readily made apparent when one considers the symbolism employed in edifices such as Chartres Cathedral in France and Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland. These are but two of many structures around the globe which bear the indelible stamp of astronomical orientation, and allusions to other celestial phenomena, through the spatial utilization of number and proportion – not to mention the presence of copious examples of overtly paganistic imagery.

EXAMPLES OF SOLAR AND ASTROLOGICAL SYMBOLISM IN FREEMASONRY

As was previously stated, it is the purpose of this work to illuminate the significance of the often inconspicuous astrological inferences and allusions occurring in Freemasonry's diagrammatic content, banners, standards, insignia, regalia, jewels, Lodge room, modes of recognition and in nearly every aspect of the Craft's ritual and degree work. Considering the fact that it would be nearly impossible to exhaustively catalog every instance of possible astrological import, the following will be limited to a few of the more glaring examples.

THE ANNO LUCIS AND AXIAL PRECESSION

The *Anno Lucis*, Latin for “Year of Light”, is a symbolic dating system peculiar to Freemasonry. Often abbreviated as “A.L.”, this dating method is frequently used on Masonic cornerstones and documentation. The *Anno Lucis* adds 4000 years to the Common Era dating system and is a simplification of the *Anno Mundi*, which adds 4004 years to the *Anno Domini*, to which the act of Creation was attributed in the Masoretic text [24]. When this date is utilized as a temporal vantage point from which to survey Masonic ritual and symbolism, we may begin to realize the value of the *Anno Lucis* as an interpretive key.

A working knowledge of the movement of celestial bodies was, and continues to be, of the utmost importance to agricultural civilization. Indeed, it was often a matter of life or death – or, more accurately, feast or famine. It was in light of the importance placed upon this study that early astronomers began to catalog the various sidereal and planetary cycles. It is necessary that we take a moment to develop a basic conception, in the absence of detailed astrophysical mathematics, of axial precession, as the astrological interpretation of some of the subsequent material is contingent upon such an understanding.

Also known as the “Precession of the Equinoxes”, axial precession was said to have first been discerned by the 2nd Century BCE astronomer, Hipparchus of Rhodes; there are, however, many earlier examples that allude to a knowledge of this phenomenon that have yet to be substantiated [25]. Axial precession has been defined as the slow and continuous change in orientation of a celestial body on its rotational axis due to the gravitational influence of adjacent bodies [26]. From the perspective of the Earth, the zodiacal belt appears to go in reverse during this cycle, hence the term *precession*. One complete cycle, through all twelve zodiacal houses, i.e. 360 degrees, takes approximately 25,920 years. This is known, alternately, as a Great, or Platonic Year. Due to precession, every zodiacal house has hosted the Earth’s vernal equinox. The approximately 2160 year period that the vernal equinox occurs in a particular house is referred to as a precessional age [27]. We are currently on the cusp of the Piscean and Aquarian Ages. Since the Neolithic Era, in which we see the beginnings of settled civilization, due largely to developments in agriculture and animal husbandry, mankind has seen the passage of several precessional ages. This phenomenon, in addition to other astronomical events, has influenced the body of symbolism created and collected by every ancient civilization of which we are aware. These symbolic allusions may also be found in great number in Freemasonry.

THE FIXED SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC

In astrology, both modern and ancient, the twelve houses of the zodiac are divided into quadruplicities, or three groups each containing four signs [28]. These groups divide the cardinal, fixed and mutable signs. The cardinal signs are Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn. The fixed signs are Leo, Scorpio, Aquarius and Taurus. The mutable signs are Sagittarius, Pisces, Gemini and Virgo. The four signs contained in each group equally quarter the zodiacal belt so, due to this configuration, when the vernal equinox occurs in a cardinal sign, for example, the summer solstice, autumnal equinox and the winter solstice will also occur in a cardinal sign. This alignment phenomenon likewise occurs in the fixed and mutable quadruplicities.

Bearing this in mind, if one were to wind the “precessional clock” back to the Taurian Age, i.e. commencing from approximately 4000 BCE and terminating around 2000 BCE, one would observe the equinoxes and solstices inhabiting the fixed signs: Taurus, Leo, Scorpio (anciently conflated with the eagle) and Aquarius (generally rendered as a man). This astrological quartet, whose most notable appearances are as the Cherubim in Ezekiel’s Vision [29] and as the Four Living Creatures in John’s Vision [30], has been frequently depicted in religious visual art, bas-relief and statuary.

We also find these four figures – the ox, lion, eagle & man – depicted on the Royal Arch banners, as they are referenced in the associated degree ceremony where they are attributed to the Judaic Tribes of Ephraim, Judah, Dan and Reuben. The Four Living Creatures, or *Tetramorph*, as to which they are sometimes referred, are flanked by two *androsphinxes* who are themselves emblematic of the solstices, or Saints John, in the astrological interpretation of the standard. It is also notable that, within the precessional arrangement in keeping with the Taurian Age, the sign of Leo is inhabiting the Keystone position of the Royal Arch of the Heavens, representing the summer solstice’s occurrence in the house of Leo, when the Sun is at its greatest strength, “...the beauty and glory of the day”. A similar, though precessionally more current, rendition of this can be found on several 19th and 20th Century Royal Arch tracing boards, where the cardinal sign of Cancer is represented as inhabiting the Keystone of the Arch. This is, of course, referential to our current calendrical system in which the summer solstice occurs in the house of Cancer. In modern cartography, this astronomical event is described by the Tropic of Cancer.

To reiterate, it is of extreme Masonic significance, particularly as it pertains to the subject at hand, that this *Tetramorphic* alignment (i.e. Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius hosting the equinoxes and solstices) would have had its beginning in approximately the year 4000 BCE [31], which is, of course, the Masonic *Anno Lucis*.

THE PILLARS OF KING SOLOMON’S TEMPLE

The two Brazen Pillars of the Blue Lodge – one surmounted with the terrestrial globe, the other with the celestial – are said to be representations of those on the porch of King Solomon’s Temple [32]. They have an immediate precedent in the obelisks of Dynastic Egypt in that they flank the portal and do not support the roof. The presence of pillars or obelisks, as a part of the architectural scheme of temples and other sacred structures, may be a symbolic allusion to the method by which many ancient temple structures were conjectured to have been aligned and subsequently “squared”. There are methods by which the shadows of, precisely, two standing poles, raised perpendicularly by means of a plumb line, may be used to determine the cardinal directions based both on diurnal sunlight and, more accurately, by the biannual occurrence of the solstices [33]. Here we are again reminded of the Saints John, personifications of the solstices, whom will be discussed in greater detail below.

THE LODGE ROOM AND THE OFFICERS THEREIN

That the Masonic Lodge room is plainly stated to be a microcosmic model of the universe is yet another clear demonstration of Freemasonry’s observance of the Hermetic Principle of Correspondence. Additionally, much of the “floor work” of the Lodge officers, particularly the act of circumambulation,

has been conjectured to be a hermetic imitation of the Sun's apparent path as viewed from the perspective of the Earth [34].

The three principal officers of the Lodge – the Worshipful Master and the Senior and Junior Wardens – have their stations in the East, West and South, respectively. In Masonic ritual, these stations are said correspond to the diurnal events of sunrise, midday and sunset. These same diurnal attributions have been made to the Hindu *Trimurti* and to the trinary division of Egyptian solar personifications [35].

Mention should here be made to the obvious solar and lunar representations on the Senior and Junior Deacon's rods and jewels. Reference to these luminaries is also made in Masonic Ritual, as to their situation in the Three Lesser Lights of the Lodge. Further, the Sun and Moon are ubiquitously present in tracing boards, aprons and other forms of regalia from all eras or Freemasonry.

THE TEMPLUM, AUGURY AND THE OBLONG SQUARE

The Latin *templum* is the etymological root of the English word temple. The usage of this word [36] specifically referenced the space designated for augury, an ancient form of divination based on the observation of the skies (*ex caelo*) and of birds (*ex avibus*) within a predetermined area and the interpretation of their positions and behaviors therein [37]. The *templum* was usually expressed as a double, or oblong square, i.e. a rectangle with two opposing sides that are exactly twice as long as the two remaining sides. In this sense, the *templum* may be described more accurately as a rectangular vacancy than as an object, since it was less a thing-in-itself than a set of parameters delineating a "temple" in the night sky. Once again, we find that the terrestrial temple is actually a hermetic representation of its celestial counterpart.

THE MOSAIC PAVEMENT AND THE BLAZING STAR

It has been suggested that mosaic patterns and tilework on the floor of ancient temples, from which the Checkered Pavement found in many Masonic Lodge rooms is descended, functioned not solely as aesthetic choices, but also served as elaborate sundials [38]. Ancient architects utilized the effects of sunlight in their designs not only to position the edifice in space but also to accentuate its symbolic import. The trajectory of sunlight was directed through the portals of a building at specified angles depending on the time of year, based on various astronomical cycles, thus illuminating a certain area within the temple and thereby marking temporally significant events such as the equinoxes and solstices. This could be an elaboration on the same premise by which a temple is "squared", i.e. by the utilization of two pillars marking the solstices, as discussed above. A properly oriented temple would thereby serve as a sort of annual, or seasonal, chronometer. This architecturally deliberate phenomenon can be observed in many structures around the globe [39].

The Blazing Star, a five-pointed star within a circle, is often depicted in the center of the Checkered Pavement. This symbol is alternately said to represent the Sun, Sirius and Venus [40]. The Solar interpretation is obvious, in terms of the Sun's Masonic significance as being the "glory and beauty

of the day”, et cetera, but the theory of the Blazing Star as a representation of Sirius provides us with much more symbolic substance for our contemplation.

Sirius, which is actually a binary system composed of the stars Sirius A and Sirius B, is the brightest star in the sky, apart from the Sun. This star resides in the constellation of *Canis Major*, hence the name “the Dog Star” (a name from whence we get the phrase, “the dog days of summer”, or the Latin *dies caniculares*, denoting the heliacal rising and setting of Sirius during the summer months in that region). Sirius, or *Sothis*, as the star was known in Hellenistic Egypt, was especially significant to the agrarian cultures of the Nile River Valley due to the star’s annual duty of heralding the coming inundation, which would eventually subside and leave the banks of the river fertile with silt. In light of the observational importance of this star, agriculturally, Sirius figured prominently in the symbolism of the region [41].

The Blazing Star’s relationship to Venus (also anciently known as the Morning and/or Evening Star) may best be illustrated by the fact that it is represented in the form of a pentagram [42]. This significance comes primarily from the fact that Venus traces a five-petalled rosette at the completion of its synodic period, which is 583.9211 days – the amount of time it takes for the planet to return its originally observed position, relative to that of the Sun, as seen from the perspective of Earth – thus itself alluding to the pentagram.

A POINT WITHIN A CIRCLE

Myriad theories abound in the literature of Freemasonry regarding the Point Within A Circle diagram, ranging from the relatively mundane perspective of practical geometry, through archaeo-astronomy and spiraling outward to the most convoluted metaphysical interpretations. This diagram consists of a point at the center of a circle, bordered by two parallel, vertical lines – one representing Saint John the Baptist, and the other, Saint John the Evangelist – oftentimes distinguished with the letters *B* and *E*, respectively. The astronomical interpretation of this glyph posits that the circle with the point at its center is a solar symbol, as one would suspect, and that the two vertical lines are the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, which mark the solstitial points [43]. Albert Pike argued against this interpretation on the basis that the parallel lines are vertical, not horizontal as one would expect them to be rendered in keeping with the common North-centric view of modern cartography [44]. However, if one considers that the East was the prominent directional orientation (consider the very word *ORIENTATION* –whose very root betrays this notion) of the ancient world, then the Point Within A Circle diagram would actually be a reasonably faithful representation of the solstitial phenomenon.

THE WORKING TOOLS

In Speculative Freemasonry, the working tools of the Operative Craft are symbolically utilized to inculcate certain moral and ethical lessons. Operatively, these tools are used to realize geometrical abstractions in three-dimensional space and have been essential to architecture and construction for millennia. Notably, these tools have analogous, spatial counterparts in the disciplines of both navigation and astronomy. Cartesian coordinates (x , y & z) can be discerned in all the sciences dependent upon

geometry and, because of this fact, the instruments used share similar applicability concerning spatial relationships and coordinates such as up and down, left to right and forward and backward. Bearing this relationship in mind, the analogous relationship between the plumb, square and level of Freemasonry and the astrolabe, T-crossbar and quadrant of ancient astronomy becomes clear. Though the subjects of their measurement and observation differ, the technical applicability of these instruments are identical.

THE LEGEND OF THE THIRD DEGREE AS A SOLAR ALLEGORY

The Legend of the Third Degree, also known as the Hiramic Tragedy, is the central allegorical ritual in Freemasonry and constitutes the culmination of the Third Degree ceremony, which is the initiatory rite of the Master Mason. The Legend utilizes the personas and setting from the Old Testament narrative of the building of King Solomon's Temple in a ritual drama designed to inculcate moral and ethical sentiments such as personal integrity and fraternal loyalty. However, as with any allegory, fable or parable, there are various alternate inroads of interpretation available to us. Depending upon which interpretive keys we apply, we may discover a variety of themes that have been hidden – some unconsciously deposited by the author or authors, as is the case in many tales coming to us from world mythology, and some occulted by design. But, before we elucidate the astrological interpretation of this allegory, we must first familiarize ourselves with the narrative as it exists in its currently practiced form [45].

The narrative takes place in and around King Solomon's Temple, near its completion. It was the custom of the Temple's chief architect, Grand Master Hiram Abiff, the son of a widow from the Naphtali tribe of Israel, to retire to the *Sanctum Sanctorum* of the Temple at noon to offer adorations to God and draw designs for the workmen on his trestleboard. Unbeknownst to him, three Fellowcrafts had entered into a plot to extort the secrets of a Master Mason from Hiram Abiff in order that they might receive Master's wages and be free to travel.

At one hour past noon, Hiram Abiff attempted to pass out of the South gate of the Temple where he was accosted by Jubela, one of the three Fellowcraft, who demanded the secrets. Hiram Abiff thrice refused the request and was consequently struck with a twenty-four inch gauge across the throat. He then attempted to leave the Temple by the West gate where he was accosted by Jubelo, who also thrice demanded the secrets and was refused, striking Hiram Abiff across the chest with a mason's square. Mortally wounded, Hiram Abiff then attempted to pass out of the East gate where he met with Jubelum, who thrice demanded the secrets, was refused, and struck the Grand Master in the head with a setting maul, killing him on the spot. The Three Ruffians, as they are henceforth known, bury the body in the rubbish of the Temple and agree to reconvene at the site at midnight.

That evening, they carry the body on a Westerly course to the brow of a hill where they proceed to bury the remains of Hiram Abiff in a grave dug six feet East to West, six feet North to South and six feet deep. As a marker, should they need to return to the site, they place a sprig of acacia at the head of the grave. They devise a plan to escape via the seaport Joppa but they are refused by a sea captain who asks them to provide King Solomon's seal that they might travel.

Meanwhile, there is confusion among the workman at the Temple. It is unusual that there would be no designs upon the trestleboard and all apartments are searched for the Grand Master Hiram Abiff. A role is called amongst the Fellowcrafts and it is found that Jubela, Jubelo and Jubelum are missing.

Twelve Fellowcrafts come forward, clad in aprons and gloves, imploring pardon. They, along with the Three Ruffians, had been involved in the plot to extort the secrets of a Master Mason but they abandoned the plan before it was enacted. They say that they fear that the others may have proceeded with their devious design. The Twelve Fellowcrafts are commanded to search in four parties of three to each of the cardinal directions for the three ruffians and bring them to justice. They are told that, if they are unsuccessful, they shall be put to death.

While on their search, the Fellowcrafts that had traveled on a Westerly course come into contact with a wayfaring man near the port at Joppa who informs them that he had seen three workers from the Temple seeking passage out of the country. The Fellowcrafts agree divide and gather intelligence to bring back to the King. One of the Fellowcrafts decides to rest and contemplate his predicament on the brow of a hill before turning back. He grabs hold of a sprig of acacia to assist his rising and finds it very suspicious that it should have given away so easily from the soil. He calls for his companions and, while relating this singular occurrence to them, they hear the voices of the three ruffians emitting from a nearby cave. Jubela, Jubelo and Jubelum are seized, brought to King Solomon, sentenced to death and executed.

Commanded by King Solomon, the Fellowcrafts then repair to the brow of the hill where the body was discovered in search of the Master's Word, of which Hiram Abiff had the needed third part, without which the Word would be lost. The body, having been interred for fifteen days, had decomposed somewhat and a key to, or sign of the Word is not present but the Grand Master's jewel is found and brought back to King Solomon. King Solomon and Hiram King of Tyre, the Grand Master, second-in-command at the building of the Temple, lead a procession to the grave where they intend to raise the body in order that the Grand Master Hiram Abiff's remains may be decently deposited in a grave within the Temple's *Sanctum Sanctorum*. However, due to the decomposition, when trying to raise the Grand Master's body from the grave by using the Apprentice's grip, the skin slipped from the flesh. Hiram King of Tyre then attempted to raise the body by applying the grip of a Fellowcraft but the flesh cleaved from the bone. King Solomon, after some reflection and contemplation, decided to apply the strong grip of a Master Mason, or Lion's Paw, upon which the body was raised.

We are told the moral and ethical interpretation that very evening when we are admonished to "imitate Grand Master Hiram Abiff in his virtuous conduct, his unfeigned piety to his God and his inflexible fidelity to his trust." Upon conferral of this degree, one is generally struck by the fact that this is a strange and, at times, somewhat morbid ritual of obvious antiquity – particularly if one is familiar with the general structure of liminal rites of initiation, especially those of a chthonic nature. Surely, there are much easier and less convoluted ways to teach personal integrity – as if that were, indeed, posited to be the total interpretive sum. However, when one begins to apply the various keys of interpretation, we begin to discern the emergence of other, less conspicuous facets of this legend. As with many other finely constructed allegories, we are not disappointed when we find that each interpretive lens we apply yields yet another dimension of the narrative and with it, a fresh insight.

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE HIRAMIC TRAGEDY AS A SOLAR ALLEGORY

When we consider the narrative arc of the Hiramic Tragedy, *vis-à-vis* the Sun's apparent passage through the twelve houses of the zodiac as seen from the perspective of the Earth, the solar and astrological nature of this allegory begins to emerge, which constitutes yet another allusion to the

Hermetic Principle of Correspondence. This is accomplished, in this case, by means of drawing a parallel between microcosm and macrocosm.

In order to apply the astrological interpretive key to the Hiramic Tragedy, we must first begin by orienting ourselves, temporally, to the *Anno Lucis*, i.e. 4000 BCE. At this astrological alignment, we will find the equinoxes and solstices inhabited by the fixed signs of the zodiac: Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius, sequentially, beginning with Taurus at the Vernal Equinox, i.e. the Taurian Age. From the vantage point of this Taurian precessional configuration, we will observe the summer solstice (June 20th or 21st) as occurring in Leo. It is Masonically notable, of course, that the Feast of Saint John the Baptist, itself a solstitial celebration, also occurs in this vicinity (June 24th). Here we find the Sun at its highest point in the heavens – “the glory and beauty of the day”, or the Keystone of the Royal Arch. It is in this position, “High Twelve” in the *Sanctum Sanctorum* of the Temple, that the allegory of the Hiramic Tragedy begins and, after one complete annual revolution, ends.

As the Sun passes from the House of Leo into that of Virgo, we make note of the fact that Virgo is attributed to the Tribe of Naphtali in the Mazzaroth of Job [46]. Also Masonically notable in the House of Virgo is the sheaf of wheat that is carried by the virgin in most personifications of this constellation, particularly as it pertains to the name of the pass grip of a Fellowcraft Mason and also its significance in what has come to us from the Eleusinian Mysteries, wherein initiates were said to have experienced “an ear of corn in silence reaped” [47]. In the Masonic allegory, Hiram Abiff is referred to as being a widow’s son. Similarly, the Egyptian solar personification Horus was also the son of a widow, as his father Osiris’ death at the hands of Set left Isis widowed [48]. Notably, Isis was also anciently associated with the constellation Virgo [49].

As the Sun reaches the autumnal equinox, it is accosted by Scorpio, the scorpion – betrayer and backbiter – who deals the first blow to the Sun’s strength. Sagittarius and Capricorn, follow in succession. Note that Jupiter is the planetary ruler of Sagittarius and that hammer-wielding Thor is the correspondingly Jupiterian deity in the Norse pantheon [50], the significance of which is due to the use of a setting maul in the allegory. At this point, the Sun is left effectively “dead” in the “rubbish of the Temple”, i.e. the disintegrating vegetation and seasonal detritus left over from the previous summer and autumnal harvest. The three autumnal months reach the completion of their portion of the annual cycle at the winter solstice, which is represented in the allegory by “Low Twelve”.

The Sun, which always appears to travel on a Westerly course in its diurnal cycle, is then figuratively interred in a grave which is six feet east and west, six feet north and south, and six feet deep (in the Ritual of several states) [51]. Due to the specificity of the dimensions of the grave in the allegory, it is probable that these carry symbolic import. One interpretation is that they may be an allusion to materiality. This 6’X6’X6’ cube is an apt symbol for materiality for two reasons; first, that a cube unfolded is a cross, and the cross is commonly associated with the idea of materiality and, second, that a carbon atom, the material basis of all living things, consists of six protons, six neutrons and six electrons. The body of Hiram Abiff is interred here for fifteen days, which may share the same symbolic import as the fifteen pieces of Osiris’ dismembered body for which Isis searched in the Egyptian agricultural Mystery [52]. Both are likely allusions to the 14.25 days of waning Moon, as it appears to lose pieces of itself during one half of the lunar phase cycle, which totals 29.5 days.

A sprig of acacia is placed at the site of this temporary interment. This may allude to the hope of regeneration, realized by the vernal equinox and coinciding with the emergence of foliage associated with springtime, and to the subsequent extrapolation of that symbolic concept as it pertains to the immortality of the human soul. In this sense, the sprig of acacia shares much of the same symbolic content with that of

the Christmas tree; itself perhaps the most universally recognized symbolic representation of the winter solstice. It is also worthy of note that the Feast of Saint John the Evangelist occurs on December 27th, comfortably within the vicinity of the winter solstice, and other holidays marking this event, such as *Saturnalia*, Yuletide and Christmas.

The Three Ruffians, themselves representatives of the autumnal months, then try to escape, also by a westerly course, when they are refused passage by a seafaring man at the seaport, Joppa. This situation, in the astrological interpretation, represents a symbolic dramatization of the Sun's passage through the house of Pisces in mid-winter.

Meanwhile, there is confusion in the Temple, all the various apartments are searched, again analogous to Isis' search for the pieces of Osiris, and the Three Ruffians are noted to be missing. The last letters of their names, Jubel-A, Jubel-O and Jubel-UM, form a word sufficiently close to the Hindu AUM, or OM, to merit investigation. The word, AUM, has also been linked to the *Trimurti*, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, who are also referred to as the creator, preserver and destroyer, and are together frequently recognized as a tripartite solar personification [53].

The twelve Fellowcrafts who come forward to confess their parts in the conspiracy and are subsequently dispatched in four parties of three to the cardinal directions. Astrologically, these twelve represent either the twelve calendar months or the twelve houses of the zodiac, and are divided into the astrological triplicities, which assign three zodiacal houses to each of the classical elements, fire, air, water and earth [54].

Three of the twelve Fellowcrafts, those representing the winter months, take a westerly course where they meet a wayfaring man; the personified Aquarian, next in zodiacal succession after the seafaring man, Pisces. The Fellowcrafts are also said to be clad in gloves and aprons. This may also be interpreted to be an allusion to the winter passage from Capricorn to Aries, since gloves were frequently made from goatskin, hence the term *kid gloves*, and that the apron is made from lambskin; lambs being immature rams. They come upon the brow of a hill where one of the Fellowcrafts makes note of the sprig of acacia transplanted by the Ruffians – both the brow of the hill and the sprig of acacia symbolize the vernal equinox and the emergence of spring. They hear the voices of the Three Ruffians emitting from a nearby cave. It should here be noted that the cave is a frequent feature of the vernal stage of many solar allegories, such as those of Krishna, Mithras and Jesus Christ, wherein Jesus is temporarily interred in a cave – after being crucified on the brow of the hill, Golgotha, of course – and rises from the dead at Easter, itself a vernal celebration [55].

That there are Three Ruffians and Three Fellowcrafts corresponding to the autumnal and winter quarters, respectively, is especially significant because the seasons each account for the “fourth part of a circle” which is a square. Similarly, the three vernal months correspond to the grips used to “raise” the Sun. The grip of the Entered Apprentice is symbolized by Gemini, the twins, represented by the two Brazen Pillars on the porch of King Solomon's Temple. The grip of the Fellowcraft is represented by Cancer, the crab, whose “winding” or zig-zag style of walking gains significance when considered in regard to figurative location of the lecture accompanying this Degree: the Winding Staircase. Next, of course, is the grip of Master Mason, which is fittingly represented by Leo the Lion, the house in which the summer solstice occurs at the *Anno Lucis* in the Taurian precessional age. Using the Royal Arch banner as a key, we also find that the Lion is associated with the Tribe of Judah, as is mentioned in the ritual. And thus the Sun is “raised” from a “dead level to a living perpendicular” and reconducted to its former position in the Royal Arch of the Heavens, the *Sanctum Sanctorum* at High Twelve, i.e. the summer solstice.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it is hoped that the assertions made in the foregoing have illuminated the prevalence and significance of both the conspicuous and inconspicuous astrological allusions occurring in Freemasonry's diagrammatic content, banners, standards, insignia, regalia, Lodge room, and in several aspects of the Fraternity's Ritual and initiatory Degree work. Additionally, it has been illustrated that Freemasonry, having served as a repository for a wealth of symbolic and allegorical material of a generally astrological nature, has perpetuated elements common to many ancient Mystery traditions.

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