

Masonic Interpretation of Manitoba Legislative Building **By Frank Albo**

INTRODUCTION:

Completed in 1920, the Manitoba Legislative Building is a remarkable monument to Masonic architecture and ancient temple design. Its iconography, replete with arcane imagery and esoteric lore, honors numerous deities from the Classical and ancient Near Eastern world. The building's principal architect, Frank Worthington Simon (1862-1933), a man of incomparable genius, was deeply inspired by philosophical tenets of Freemasonry. What follows is a brief synopsis of the interpretative tour conducted on April 3, 2004.

PEDIMENT:

The tour began with an allegorical interpretation of the North pediment relief and a detailed examination of the seated female figure, called "Lady Manitoba." Her imagery closely corresponds to fertility goddesses Ishtar and Demeter, who in the ancient world were both patron deities of agriculture as well as honorees of secret initiatory cults. Flanking the north pediment at the main roof level are two Egyptian sphinxes facing east and west.¹ Although in Egypt, the sphinx symbolized the king and the sun god, Ra in later periods sphinxes stood as reminders of archaic wisdom and the unknown. The exceptional feature illustrated here is the hieroglyphic inscription and cartouche found on the sphinxes' chests. The text reads: "To the firm and everlasting manifestation of the Sun-God Ra (do your work)." Perhaps more remarkable is that the inscription surrounds the cartouche of Thutmose III (1504-1451 BCE), a prolific New Kingdom Pharaoh regarded by Masons and Rosicrucians alike as the founder of the first secret society, established on April 1, 1489 BCE – nearly 3469 years to the day of our tour.

GRAND STAIRCASE HALL ("Room of Protection"):

Moving from the antechamber we entered the impressive Grand Staircase Hall. This room, called the "Room of Protection," was coined for its five distinct protective icons: (1) two bronze bison, (2) fourteen lion heads, (3) eight bukrania (cattle skulls), (4) a head of Medusa, and (5) a head of Athena. In the ancient world, each figure was venerated for its unique apotropaic powers, that is, the ability to ward off evil. On the third floor supporting a cornice of the north wall is a reproduction of the Caryatid Porch on the Athenian acropolis. We observed that the figures carried a scroll and key in their hands; a motif readily identified with *The Hermetica*, a compendium of occult writings on magic, alchemy, and astrology. According to legend, its reputed author, Hermes Trismegistus,² provided the wisdom of light in the ancient mysteries of Egypt by introducing the emerald, referred to by initiates as a "scroll," and his caduceus, known as the sacred "key," which enabled him to act as psychopomp, a guide to the souls of the underworld. The Staircase Hall's most fascinating feature was that it was specifically designed to allow sunlight entering through the ceiling's glass atrium to 'ritually' empower each of the room's five protective icons. This feature is similarly witnessed in Egypt, where the rays of the sun-god Ra would penetrate temples in strictly defined angles of geometry.

ROTUNDA: ("Room of Transformation"):

Ascending the stairs of the Staircase Hall we encountered the circular balustrade regarded unofficially as the "Legislative Altar." Though altars were typically rectangular, chthonic altars (altars of underworld deities) were essential circular, as is attested from the fifth-century temple of Persephone (Greek counterpart to Ishtar), whose altar is precisely the same diameter as that of the legislative building (thirteen feet). Within the Rotunda we noticed five patterned rosettes, eight Corinthian columns, and Pompeian lighting fixtures with thirteen bulbs. These numbers (5, 8, 13) serve as the fundamental code for the building's greater architectural structure, (See Appendix One) and form a segment of the *Fibonacci Series*; a sequence of numbers generated from the sum of its two preceding numbers (i.e. 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, . . .). Although deceptively simple the ramifications of the *Fibonacci Series* are nearly limitless and

¹ With the exception of Minoan temples, which faced north, cult sites almost unanimously faced to the east. Simon commits to a northern orientation because it utilizes the sun's east – west orbital trajectory (details to follow).

² Hermes Trismegistus shares many close correspondences with Hiram. In addition to being considered the grand architect par excellence and native of the land of Phoenicia, they share identical etymological roots, H-R-M).

have been used to explain the shape of seashells, the branching of plants, leaf and petal arrangements, as well as numerous other processes of natural propagation. This sequence was also shown to produce the *Golden Proportion*, a divine constant alleged by the ancient Greeks to be the most aesthetically pleasing form in nature. Numerically, the *Golden Proportion* equals 1.618... and formed the basis for some of the most esteemed temple structures of Egypt, the Mediterranean, as well as the gothic cathedrals of the European Middle Ages. A striking example of Legislature's incorporation of the *Golden Proportion* is documented in the Rotunda, whose height to the eye of the dome (87 feet) divided by its diameter (54 feet) is almost exactly equivalent to the golden mean ratio (1.6111...). We next discussed the identity of the Golden Boy observing that he had not only been modelled after a fourteenth century commemorative statue to Hermes Trismegistus (Mercury), but more importantly, he was surrounded by four sculptural groups representing the noble elements Earth, Air, Fire and Water,³ the so-called *materia prima* for the alchemist. In this capacity, the Rotunda serves as an architectural metaphor for the complete alchemical process, which unifies Mercury, the four elements and sulphur. It was shown that sulphur's planetary counterpart is Venus (Ishtar)– the black eight-pointed star directly below the Golden Boy.

HOLY OF HOLIES:

Directly east of the Rotunda we entered the Lieutenant-Governor's Reception Room, a beautiful room paneled to ceiling height in walnut and with an ornamental fluted column in each corner. The room, exactly 24 feet square, is an exact replica of the cubit arrangement (20 cubits square) of the Holy of Holies of Solomon's Temple outlined in 1 Kings 6. Although the ancient cubit has varying values ranging from 15-20," the Masonic cubit was determined to be exactly 14.4," a number which works out as precisely 20 cubits. The Holy of Holies offered sanctuary for the Ark of the Covenant, which was a small chest of acacia wood measuring "two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high," (Ex. 25:10) overlaid with gold and containing the tablets of the Law. Attached to the Ark's covering lid were two Cherubim, feared mythological creatures of antiquity who were familiars, bodyguards, and courtiers protecting the so-called "Majesty of God." Similarly, directly above the Lieutenant-Governor's Reception Room on the exterior roof is a stone chest of equivalent proportion to the Ark of the Covenant flanked by two warrior figures.

POOL OF THE BLACK STAR:

Four entrances lead into the Pool of the Black Star marked by three steps forming the circumference of the room, a perfect circle with a radius of 27 feet. The Tuscan columns surrounding the inner dome of the Rotunda parallel the columns used in Greek temples signifying boundaries and jurisdiction, and parallel the circular colonnade at the Sanctuary of Athena at Marmaria. The most unique feature about the architecture of the Pool of the Black Star is its unique auditory qualities, in which sounds from all over the building are caught, distorted, and magnified within the space occupied by the center of the star. This form of acoustic resonance parallels a similar function in Egyptian temples, which produce some of the most harmonious intervals found in music: the octaves, fifths, fourths, thirds and sixths. In like manner, if one divides the length of the legislature (337 feet) by the height of the dome (223 feet) the musical fifth (2:3 or .66), otherwise known as the Hermetic constant is achieved.⁴ The Pool of the Black Star thus operates as the preverbal "Underworld" of the legislative building, the symbolic *sanctum sanctorum* unifying Ishtar/Venus (a.k.a Sulphur), with Hermes Trismegistus (a.k.a. Mercury). It is not surprising, therefore, that on June 3, 1914, the day the North East cornerstone of the Legislature was laid, the planets Mercury and Venus were superimposed upon one another in the north Winnipeg sky. This illustration corresponds to ancient belief that the temple was the map of the heavens, and provides stunning architectural metaphor to the *golden rule* of Hermetic literature: "As above, So below."

³ Although officially coined "Agriculture," "Science," "Art," and "Industry," a close examination of each of the statuary reveals that are ideal symbolic representations of the four elements. "Agriculture," with its symbolism of the wheat is representative of Earth, "Science," with its central figure holding a genie's lamp is indicative of Air, "Art" with the water jug could be rendered as "Water", and "Industry," with the central figure holding a wooden log could symbolize "Fire."

⁴ Under the temple of Apollo in Cumae, Southern Italy, there is an "echoing chamber," which in antiquity was considered the dwelling of the Cumaean Sybil, an oracle of the god who directed Aeneas in his journey to the "Underworld" through the "true" gate, the Gate of Horn. Is it coincidental that the 'underworld' area of the legislative building, the Pool of the Black Star, also has an "echoing" acoustic effect?

CONCLUSION:

The Manitoba Legislative Building is encoded with powerful images intended to guide, direct, shape and inform the lives of the people who act as our representatives in government. The building is a statement about hopes and dreams, history and culture of Manitoba as told through symbolic metaphor, ancient ideology and Masonic philosophy. The message hidden in its masonry is multi-layered and employs symbolism in a context, which is not only remarkably intelligent but hidden in plain view.

APPENDIX ONE

LOCATION	#	DESCRIPTION
Whole Building	5	Different columns: Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, Tuscan, Composite
Selected Rooms	5	Rooms featuring Acanthus leaves, Olive leaves, and Rosettes
Pool of Black Star	5th	Musical octave featured in the architectural length-height ratio
Staircase Hall	5	Circular mouldings above the openings on the 2 nd floor level
Main Level	5	Archways from the portico to the Pool of the Black Star
Rotunda	5	Rosettes running up the interior of the Great Dome (x 4)
Portico	8	Doric columns surrounding the interior periphery
Pool of Black Star	8	Decorative lamps featured between the Doric columns
Pool of Black Star	8	Triangles and points within the encircled black star
Staircase Hall	8	Pedals exhibited in all the floral rosettes
Rotunda	8	Corinthian columns circling the room's perimeter
Exterior	8th	Letter of the alphabet "H" orients the shape of the building
Rotunda	13	Circular mouldings surrounding the Legislative Chamber door
Legislative Chamber	13	Media seats above the Speaker chair
Staircase Hall	13	Steps on each of the three separate flights
Rotunda	13	Circular lights featured in four tripod lighting fixtures
Rotunda	13	Feet is the length of the balustrade
Exterior	13	Feet is the height of the Golden Boy