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## A New Order of Ages

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### The Masonic Enlightenment and the symbols of America

The Great Seal of the United States is one of the world's most easily recognized emblems, yet the obscure symbolism it contains is understood by few. Over the years since its creation, there have been a number of controversies about just what, exactly, is the meaning of the obscure ancient symbols and numbers in its design.



There are those who argue that despite appearances, the Masonic looking symbolism is pure accident. Despite arguments to the contrary, the easily recognized symbols on the back of the US one dollar bill appear to have an unmistakably Masonic flavor. This of course gives rise to numerous conspiracy theories about ancient 'Satanic' cabals\*\* with designs on world rulership, most based on bizarre interpretations of Masonic philosophy.

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Certainly, Masonry and its ideals played a part in the founding of this country. The enlightenment philosophy embraced by Jefferson, Madison, Franklin, and other engineers of American Democracy evolved from the same Rosicrucian roots that Freemasonry did. To understand the symbolism employed by the founders, one must look at the historical development of their unique philosophies.

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Rosicrucianism was born in a time when the divine right of Kings was understood as a universal truth. Rulers were empowered by God and God's Church, which alone held the keys to salvation and knowledge of God. A newly evolving movement began to bubble up throughout Europe, spreading dangerous ideas- that individuals could approach the divine

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without the aid of the Church, that the development of reason and the pursuit of knowledge were more important than faith, and that religion, science, and philosophy could be used together to create an ideal society. The Rosicrucians also taught a curious philosophy of personal unity with God, a mystical Christianity that relied heavily on kabbalistic practices learned from Hebrew Mystics, designed to bring an aspirant a first hand experience of the Divine. The newly invented printing press allowed a new freedom- the anonymous promulgation of ideas. Despite the intense secrecy of the movement's founders (to this day, the original authors of the [Rosicrucian manifestos](#) have never been pinned down), the ideas caught like wildfire.

The primary incubators of this secretive movement were the lodges of Freemasonry, where the utopian ideals of the Rosicrucians took root. According to Masonic philosophy, man in the beginning of his journey is like an [undressed stone](#)- full of potential, but rough and unrefined. According to these ideas, man did not reach his potential as a slave to religious superstition, social striving, and blind obedience, but through reason and understanding the laws underpinning the natural world. To the Freemason, God was expressed in the complexity and beauty of the creation- and by understanding that Creation, one could understand one's true place in the world. Diligent study and exploration of universal truth was stressed over blind acceptance of dogma, yet the hand of the divine was to be acknowledged always.

The primary educational vehicle of the Rosicrucians and Freemasons was symbolism. Lacking the dogmatic belief system of religion, the Masons employed symbols as a teaching aid. Masonic historical legend is understood to be allegorical, and points to the ideas of the wisest of history as originators of its body of thought- King Solomon, Euclid, Pythagoras, and the architects who brought the Egyptian civilization out of the mud- all men who, to some degree, rejected the established superstitions of their day to pursue enlightenment through the natural order they observed in the universe.

Even before the time of the US revolution, these ideas had spread to the political arena. No longer was it universally accepted that God chose a King. The Church was already significantly weakened by the Protestant reformations (A Rosicrucian involvement suspected here as well, and the [personal seal of the Father of the Reformation](#)- a [rose cross](#)), and philosophers and scientists were much less in danger of losing their lives for challenging the Church's authority. The Rosicrucian ideal of reasoned enlightenment led to the rebirth of an old ideal- Democracy. Followers of this philosophy in the colonies included Mason Ben Franklin (who at one time belonged to the same Lodge in Paris as

Court de Gebelin, the inventor of the esoteric tarot), and sympathizers like Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, who borrowed heavily from enlightenment philosophers in the formation of their new government. (So much so that Jefferson is often accused of plagiarizing portions of John Locke's writings for his Declaration of Independence) Freemasonry played a larger part in the founding of the United States than most people realize, both directly and indirectly. The Founders acknowledged their debt to the past and their hopes for the future by incorporating the symbols of Freemasonry into the symbols of their newly formed country.

Freemasons were involved in virtually all aspects of the building of the Capitol City, from Pierre Charles L'Enfante, the original designer of the District of Columbia, to James Hoban, the Worshipful Master who supervised the building of the White House. As a result of this Masonic involvement, Masonic symbols abound everywhere in DC, from the layout of the streets and ornaments on buildings, to the design of monuments and public parks. It is probably no accident, then, that Masonic symbols found their way onto the Seal of the United States and our currency design.

## **Order out of Chaos**

If one examines the symbolism of the Great Seal of the United States, one cannot help but see the influence of the enlightenment at work. The Masonic idea of the unfinished stone, and its acknowledgment of the architectural feats of the ancients is visible in the choice of a pyramid in its design. Like the Ashlar, the rough stone, the pyramid is unfinished. It's four sides, however, converge at the apex, suggesting the common purpose of separate entities. Above the unfinished pyramid is the radiating "eye of providence," and the motto, borrowed from the poet Virgil, "Annuit Coeptis," [*It, He, depending on the interpretation*] favors our undertaking. This is an unmistakable homage to the Great Architect, the benevolent Universalist God of Freemasonry who encourages enlightened progress. The finishing stone of the pyramid lies not in the earthly realm, but the spiritual one.



Below the pyramid is found the motto "Ordo Novus Saeclorum," or, *A new order of the Ages* (Not, as the conspiratorial minded claim, "New World Order.") This phrase suggests that our new formed government was seen as only the beginning of a new period of enlightenment. The eye itself is enveloped in radiating light, breaking up the dark clouds of the "old order." This brings to mind the Masonic motto "Ordo ab Chao," *Order out of Chaos*. The "all seeing" eye, too, is commonly found in Masonic art, and its ancestor was the eye of Horus, the ever present guardian of justice.

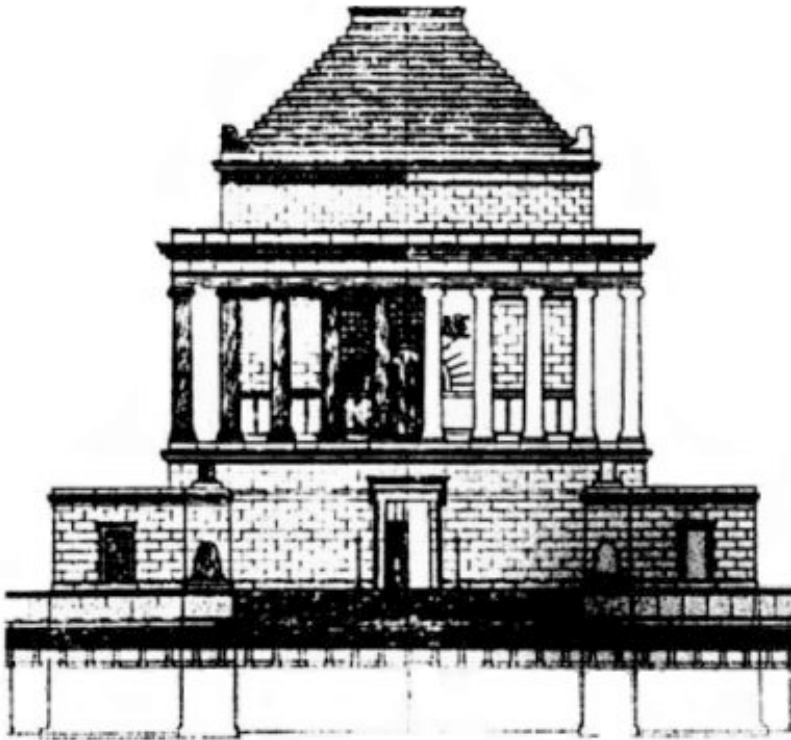
In the poem of Virgil that inspired these mottoes:

*"Time has conceived and the great sequence of the ages starts afresh. Justice, the Virgin, comes back to dwell with us, and the rule of Saturn is restored. The Firstborn of the New Age is already on his way from high heaven down to earth. "*

(Those familiar with Masonic emblems will also see in this line illustrated in the Masonic icon [The weeping Virgin](#))

The symbolism does not end there. The right triangle which forms the face of the pyramid has sides consisting of 5, 12 and 13 units in length, illustrating one of Freemasonry's best known symbols, the [47th problem of Euclid](#)- the cornerstone (no pun intended) of geometry, and an ancient proof of resurrection. In fact, if one were to add another triangle, to form another important Masonic symbol, the [Seal of Solomon](#), a secret is revealed: connect the points of the newly formed hexagram, and they spell out *Mason*.

There are seventy-two bricks in the pyramid- the number of the names of God in Kabbalistic and Masonic lore (For the astrologically oriented, it takes 72 years for the earth to move degree of precessional movement). Residents of DC might even recognize that pyramid as part of the local architecture- stroll thirteen blocks from the White House, and you'll find Washington's only truncated pyramid- a thirteen stepped affair perched atop the [House of the Temple](#), today's Headquarters of the Supreme Council of Scottish Rite Masonry (a building patterned after an ancient marvel, the tomb at Halicarnassus). Coincidence? Probably not- connect up the White House, the House of the Temple, and one other obvious Masonic landmark, the Washington Monument, and you'll get *another* Euclidian triangle.



The eye itself is an ages old, universal symbol of God, used in ancient Egypt and India. The eye in the triangle is also a symbol of divine birth

### **An Eagle Resplendant**

The other side of the Great Seal is better known- a Great Eagle, with a bunch of arrows in one claw and an olive branch in the other- emblems of war and peace. Above is a six pointed star made up of thirteen smaller stars. The eagle carries the Latin motto "E

Pluribus Unum," *Out of many, one*. Earlier designs for the seal included a Roman eagle, and a phoenix. The bald eagle was eventually selected as a more fitting emblem of the US. This bird's forerunner is often referred to in Masonic terms as the "eagle of Lagash," an early Persian symbol of duality and divine authority. The rightward glance of the bird symbolizes not only the choice of peace, but the choice of the right hand path- the choice of a moral life. The repetition of the number thirteen is the overriding symbolism on this side of the seal- and where the reverse emphasizes geometry, the obverse emphasizes gematria- number.

(A note on [Gematria](#): The word gematria is derived from the Greek *geometria*- geometry; however, gematria is a system of numerical correspondence. Both Greek and Hebrew letters do double duty as numbers, therefore any Greek or Hebrew word is also a number. In kabbalah, words of equal values are considered related, and Gematria is the practice of discovering the divine relationships between concepts by their number.)

In the "glory" above the eagle's head are found thirteen stars representing the thirteen colonies. These are arranged together to form a hexagram, the Seal of Solomon. Alone, they are simply stars, but *together*, they are a sign of wisdom and power. The number thirteen is repeated many times on the Seal, and its significance goes deeper than the number of soon-to-be states. Kabbalistically, the number thirteen is the value of unity, *Achad*, Hebrew for "one." (As if to further cement this relationship, the phrase "E Pluribus Unum" contains thirteen letters) It is also the value of *Ahbah*, love. Thirteen is also the number of the path connecting the Sephiroth of [Tiphareth](#) and Kether- attainment of unity with the divine, the final path on the tree.



There is more kabbalistic symbolism to be found in the eagle's feathers. In the left wing are found 32 feathers, 33 in the right. In Masonry, there are thirty two degrees that can be earned, and a thirty-third which can only be conferred. The thirty-two correspond to



the thirty-two paths on the kabbalistic Tree of Life. (The thirty-third can only be conferred, which is analogous to Tree of Life- the unity which can only be conferred by divine grace). The thirty-second path on the tree is that found between Malkuth and Yesod- the beginning path on the tree. What is the Masonic symbol for 32? A cross and wreath, symbols of the thirty-second path, from [Malkuth](#) to [Yesod](#). The symbol for the thirty-third? An eagle, crowned and resplendant, a symbol of the attainment of [Kether](#):



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- [Hermetic Tradition](#)

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