

## **The Double-Headed Eagle: Scottish Rite Freemasonry's Veneration of Nimrod**

Much has been written about the symbols of Freemasonry. To some, they are simply the emblems of a fraternal organization that promotes fellowship, good will, kindness, loyalty, tolerance, and brotherly love. Others see clues pointing to an esoteric mystery religion that seeks to establish a New World Order.

Without opening a debate over the proper interpretation of centuries-old arcania, it can be shown, through their own words and symbols, that Scottish Rite Freemasonry honors perhaps the greatest rebel against God—the greatest *human* rebel, at least—in all of history.

Symbols are, simply put, images that represent ideas. They are as simple as traffic signs and can be as complex as a symbol's creator wishes it to be. They are everywhere. In our multilingual world, text—itself a symbol representing sounds—is increasingly being replaced with images that communicate important concepts such as “no left turn”, “men's room”, or the types of payment accepted at the checkout.

The sporting world, for example, is full of symbols. Athletic jerseys, helmets, and stadia are covered with symbols intended to inspire confidence and loyalty in fans or fear and trembling in the hearts of rivals. In the business world, symbols represent strength, compassion, friendliness, professionalism, and a host of other attributes to shape a company's image.

Symbols are employed because they work. The human mind associates the characteristics of an image with the entity to which it is attached. A university athletic department wishing to convey the sense of being a fearsome opponent might choose to brand itself with the image of a powerful, snarling tiger in mid-leap. Certainly that communicates a much different impression than an image of a sleeping tiger cub.

Or the marketing department for an automaker might choose to advertise a new model with images of the product zipping around a series of sharply curved mountain roads, but they almost certainly would never launch a campaign with video of the car being towed into a repair shop.

It is safe to say that people and organizations choose symbols that represent characteristics or ideals that they consider desirable.

So what about the symbols of Freemasonry?

Much has been made of the basic square and compass surrounding the capital letter G, the pillars Boaz and Jachin, the checkered floor, the beehive, and the rest. Much of the analysis of the symbolism of Freemasonry is necessarily speculative. And frankly, some of what is presented on the Internet about Freemasonry is fanciful at best.

Even a brief review of Masonic symbols is well beyond the scope of this piece. We will focus on just one—the double-headed eagle that represents the highest degrees of Scottish Rite Freemasonry. We'll examine what Scottish Rite Freemasons themselves say about this symbol and what it represents. And then we will simply ask whether an organization that chooses such a symbol is one to which a serious, thinking Christian should belong.

The author is aware that there are different paths Freemasons may choose if they want to advance beyond the three basic levels of the Blue Lodge. In the United States, the main appendant bodies to Freemasonry are the York Rite, more correctly called the American Rite,<sup>1</sup> and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, or simply the Scottish Rite. In simple terms, the York Rite is considered the “Christian” path of Freemasonry while the Scottish Rite holds a more tolerant attitude, requiring only that its members profess faith in some deity.<sup>2</sup>

Men may belong to both organizations, so while there are differences in philosophy and emphasis, there is at least a degree of fraternity that exists between the York and Scottish rites.

The 32<sup>nd</sup> Degree of Scottish Rite Freemasonry, the highest degree one can attain in the rite (the 33<sup>rd</sup> Degree is honorary, conferred on about 1.5% of Scottish Rite Freemasons)<sup>3</sup>, is represented by a symbol well-known in Europe since the Crusades, a bicephalous (two-headed) eagle. Nations and royal houses have used the emblem, including the Holy Roman Empire, the House of Habsburg, and the ruling houses of what eventually became Russia. It was resurrected by the Russian Federation in 1993 during the administration of President Boris Yeltsin.

However, the double-headed eagle was a royal insignia in the Ancient Near East for centuries before the arrival of Crusaders. It has been known since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that the Hittites used the double-headed eagle as a royal motif. Examples of the bicephalous eagle are found at sites in Turkey dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> through 13<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.<sup>4</sup> It appears that the image of the two-headed eagle originated with the Hittites in Anatolia and spread from there to Europe, India, and Asia over the next three thousand years.

Scottish Rite Freemasons, however, claim that the symbol is even older, that it is “the oldest Royal Crest in the World,”<sup>5</sup> nearly two thousand years older than the earliest representations known to archaeologists. According to various Masonic publications, the double-headed eagle originated in the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://yorkrite.com/degrees/>, no pagination (accessed 5/25/12).

<sup>2</sup> J. Howard Duncan, “The York and Scottish Rites,” *The Scottish Rite Journal*, September 1997, <http://srjarchives.tripod.com/1997-09/Duncan.htm> (accessed 5/25/12).

<sup>3</sup> Pete Normand, “The Distinctive Regalia of the Scottish Rite,” *The Scottish Rite Journal*, October 2001, <http://www.scottish-rite-mn.org/docs/regalia.htm> (accessed 5/25/12).

<sup>4</sup> Hubert de Vries, “Two Headed Eagle,” <http://www.hubert-herald.nl/TwoHeadedEagle.htm#Twoheadedeagleorigin> (accessed 5/26/12).

<sup>5</sup> “The Double Headed Eagle of Lagash,” <http://unitedsupremecouncilnjpha.com/page.php?id=11> (accessed 5/26/12).

Sumerian city of Lagash “a thousand years before the Exodus from Egypt,”<sup>6</sup> or perhaps even as far back as “five thousand years ago,”<sup>7</sup> or circa 3000 B.C.—approximately 1300 years before the oldest known Hittite artifact.

Since this link is apparently unknown to archaeologists, or at least considered unworthy of much attention, the obvious question is, why do Scottish Rite Freemasons identify themselves in this way?

Lagash, located northwest of the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, was one of the oldest cities of the Ancient Near East and played an important role in the history of Mesopotamia. It was the center of one of the first verifiable empires in history, conquering all of Sumer around 2500 B.C. Interestingly, Lagash filled a power vacuum left by the decline of Uruk, which the Bible informs us was the “beginning of [Nimrod’s] kingdom.”<sup>8</sup>

The religious center of Lagash was a temple called the E-ninnu<sup>9</sup> devoted to the god Ningirsu, or Ninurta (Nin Ur, or “God of War”). Ninurta remained popular in the cosmology of Sumer, Akkad, Babylon, and Assyria for millennia; two Assyrian kings were named Tukulti-Ninurta, and Ashurnasirpal II built a temple to Ninurta in his new capital city of Calah around 880 B.C. Several hundred years later, during the Neo-Babylonian and early Persian empires, the character of Ninurta was apparently fused with that of the war god Nergal.

Why is this significant? First, scholars draw clear parallels between the god Ninurta/Ningirsu and the shadowy figure named Nimrod<sup>10</sup> (derived from the Hebrew *marad*, “to rebel”<sup>11</sup>). And second, Ningirsu was often represented as, or accompanied by, a lion-headed (and *single*-headed) eagle called Imdugud or Anzû.

Apparently it is this icon that the Scottish Rite connects its symbol of ultimate achievement. Yet when one searches for the link between the double-headed eagle of the Scottish Rite and Imdugud, the only assertions that the symbol originated at Lagash appear to come from Scottish Rite Freemasons.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “The Double Headed Eagle of Lagash,” <http://unitedsupremecouncilnjpha.com/page.php?id=11> (accessed 5/26/12).

<sup>7</sup> John V. Lawer, “The Double Headed Eagle of Lagash,” *The Clarion*, Winter 2011, p. 5, [http://www.scottishritemasons-can.org/clarion/Clarion\\_Magazine\\_Online\\_v3\\_2011.pdf](http://www.scottishritemasons-can.org/clarion/Clarion_Magazine_Online_v3_2011.pdf) (accessed 5/26/12).

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 10:10. Uruk is spelled “Erech” in most English translations.

<sup>9</sup> E-ninnu = “House of 50,” apparently a reference to “the fifty great divine powers.” “Ninurta’s journey to Eridug: a *cir-gada* to Ninurta,” <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.4.27.02&charenc=j#> (retrieved 5/25/12).

<sup>10</sup> K. van der Toorn and P. W. van der Horst (1990). “Nimrod Before and After the Bible,” *Harvard Theological Review* 83, 1-29.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. David Livingston, “Who Was Nimrod?,” <http://davelivingston.com/nimrod.htm> (retrieved 5/25/12).

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Jesse D. Chariton, “The Mesopotamian Origins of the Hittite Double-Headed Eagle” *UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research XIV* (2011), <http://www.uwlax.edu/urc/JUR-online/html/2011.htm> (accessed 5/26/12). The only source cited in the paper that claimed an early Mesopotamian origin for the double-headed eagle was a 1923 article written by Freemason Arthur C. Parker. Chariton, according to his online resume, is a 32°

So what were the characteristics of Ningirsu/Ninurta that Scottish Rite Freemasons consider emblematic of their highest degrees? As mentioned, Ninurta was a god of war and hunting. He was also depicted as a farmer, especially related to rainstorms and thunder, and a healing god who freed humans from illness and the power of demons.

Ninurta was generally a heroic figure in Sumerian myth who confronted and destroyed a number of monsters that threatened the divine order. The “Slain Heroes” felled by the god include the Warrior Dragon, the Palm Tree King, Lord Saman-ana, the Bison-beast, the Mermaid, the Seven-headed Snake, and the Six-headed Wild Ram.<sup>13</sup> In one legend, interestingly, Ninurta battles and defeats his alter ego, the lion-eagle Imdugud/Anzû, who had stolen the Tablets of Destiny that the chief Sumerian deity Enlil required to maintain his rule.

Ninurta was ambitious, and perhaps headstrong. According to one legend, he was willing to risk a rebellion against Enki, the Sumerian god of creation, intelligence, mischief, and fresh water—and one of the most powerful deities in Sumerian cosmology. The objects of Ninurta’s scheme were the *mes*, decrees of the gods that were foundational to the creation of society (i.e., truth, shepherdship, descent to and ascent from the nether world, law, art, metalworking, falsehood, music, etc.). Ninurta’s plan was easily foiled by Enki, who punished the upstart by creating a turtle that dug a pit into which Ninurta and the turtle fell, and from which Ninurta was unable to escape.

The link between the lion-eagle Imdugud/Anzû and Ningirsu/Ninurta is especially intriguing in light of research that makes a compelling case for equating the god with the biblical Nimrod. Much of what follows in the next few paragraphs is distilled from the 1990 paper by Karel van der Toorn and P.W. van der Hoorst, “Nimrod Before and After the Bible.”<sup>14</sup>

The authors acknowledge the theories that propose a human prototype of Nimrod, but discard them as unsatisfactory. The most attractive candidate, the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta (1243-1207 B.C.), lived in an era that simply doesn’t fit the political situation described by the author of the biblical account of Nimrod’s dominion.

Theories that the character of Nimrod was inspired by or derived from a Mesopotamian deity date back over 150 years, when a scholar suggested that Nimrod was to be identified with the Babylonian god Marduk, the biblical Merodach or Bel. This theory was revived in the 1960s when Nimrod’s characterization as a “mighty hunter before the Lord” was compared with the role played by Marduk in the Babylonian creation epic, the *Enuma Elish*. In it, Marduk confronts and kills the monsters of the army of Tiamat, a chaos monster representing the primordial ocean. Marduk eventually slays Tiamat

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Scottish Rite Freemason and a librarian at the Chicago Scottish Rite Masonic Library.

<sup>13</sup> “The Exploits of Ninurta,” <http://www.gatewaystobabylon.com/myths/texts/ninurta/exploitinurta.htm> (accessed 5/26/12), no pagination.

<sup>14</sup> Van der Toorn and van der Horst, “Nimrod Before and After the Bible,” *Harvard Theological Review* 83 (1990), 1-29.

herself, is elevated to chief among the gods, and proceeds to construct Babylon.

Despite the similarities between the two, however, van der Toorn and van der Hoorst rejected the proposed identification on linguistic and historical grounds. It is difficult to make the case that “Marduk” could become “Nimrod” in the Bible, they wrote, and while the cult of Marduk was introduced into Assyria, the god never became the symbol for Assyrian political power as did the god Ashur—and, to a lesser extent, Ninurta.

It is to Ninurta/Ningirsu we look as a possible prototype for the later Marduk legends. Ninurta, too, served as a champion of the gods by retrieving the Tablets of Destiny and displaying his skills as a mighty hunter by felling a Who’s Who of monstrous opponents. Just as Marduk’s defeat of Tiamat preceded his acts of creation, Ninurta’s conquest of Azag in the mountains was the precursor to his ordering of the irrigation systems essential to Sumerian agriculture. Indeed, this heroic act of conquest was preliminary to Ninurta’s role as the very founder of Mesopotamian civilization.

In that respect, then Ninurta/Ningirsu was the first on Earth to be a hero, which is similar to the biblical description of Nimrod in Genesis 10. And Ninurta’s role as the founder of civilization generally parallels the biblical account of Nimrod’s career as a builder of cities: “From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.”<sup>15</sup>

The only discrepancy which must be reconciled is Nimrod’s reputation as a builder of Assyrian cities. Ninurta was not described as a builder *per se*. However, his measures to protect cities from inundation, described in the legend of his battle with Azag, are consistent with the development of urban civilization.

Additionally, the identification of Nimrod with Ninurta is corroborated by the order in which the cities are listed in the Genesis account. The sequence of city names roughly corresponds to the shift in political power in Mesopotamian history. The earliest centers of cultural and political authority were in southern Mesopotamia, and gradually, by Middle-Assyrian times, the great cities of Assyria had become preeminent.

This shift also corresponds to the geographic spread of the cult of Ninurta. From a minor local deity, Ningirsu/Ninurta developed into a warrior god on a par with the chief gods of the Sumerian pantheon, Anu, Enlil, and Enki. The center of worship gradually moved northwest from Sumer in the third millennium B.C. “From that land he went into Assyria,”<sup>16</sup> and the cult of Ninurta was well established there by the time the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I took the throne in 1243 B.C.

Thus we see in the biblical account of Nimrod echoes of the legends ascribed to Ninurta/Ningirsu, as well as a brief history of the growth of Nimrod’s political and Ninurta’s religious domains.

Information about Nimrod outside the Bible is sparse and often colorful, to say the least. He is

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<sup>15</sup> Genesis 10:11-12 (ESV).

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 10:11 (ESV).

sometimes remembered as an evil king who threw Abraham into a fiery furnace; in some accounts he is slain by Esau; in another he was killed by Hayk, the legendary patriarch and founder of Armenia, in the area of Lake Van.

Tradition generally agrees, however, that Nimrod was the builder of the infamous Tower of Babel. Egyptologist David Rohl goes further, believing that Nimrod can be identified with Enmerkar, one of the rulers named on the Sumerian King List.

First, Rohl notes that the Sumerian prefix *en* means “lord”, and the suffix *kar* translates as “hunter”. Enmerkar, then, roughly means Enmer, or Lord Mer, the Hunter. Nimrod, of course, was remembered by the Hebrews as “a mighty hunter before the Lord”.<sup>17</sup>

No wonder, then, that he was represented as both semi-divine hero and god. The Babylonians knew him as Ninurta, the hunter-god armed with bow, and linked him with Marduk, warrior-god and lord of vegetation. The Sumerians of Eridu themselves elevated the mortal King Enmer-kar (‘Enmer the hunter’) to godhood as Asar, ‘son’ of Enki. The Sumerians of the Early Dynastic times named him Ningirsu, god of war and agriculture. In the city of Lagash they built the House of Ninnu (*E-Ninnu*) as Ningirsu’s temple and gave him the epithet Enmersi after his ancient and original name. The Assyrians recognized Enmer/Asar as their state deity, Ashur. When the author of Genesis calls him Nimrod, this is a play on words in which the name Enmer is Hebraised into *nmd* (‘we shall rebel’) because this king rebelled against Yahweh by building the Tower of Babel.<sup>18</sup>

Rohl further theorizes that Babel was not, as most assume, at Babylon. If Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah, was actually the Sumerian king Enmerkar, then his reign would probably not have been much more than two hundred years after the Flood at most, perhaps falling sometime in the early third millennium B.C. Babylon did not achieve prominence until the Amorites established a kingdom centered on the city about a thousand years later.

The ancient poem *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* recalls a conflict between the king of Uruk—the beginning of Nimrod’s kingdom, according to Genesis—and the sovereign of a foreign land, perhaps north in the region of modern Armenia.<sup>19</sup> In the account, probably written in the 21st century B.C., Enmerkar demanded a tribute of precious metals and gemstones for the reconstruction of the temple of Enki at the ancient city of Eridu, as well as for adorning the ziggurat (step pyramid) of the goddess

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<sup>17</sup> Dr. David Livingston, former director of Associates for Biblical Research, translates Genesis 10:8-10 thus: Cush begat Nimrod; he began to be a tyrant in the earth. He was a tyrannical hunter in opposition to the Lord. Thus it is said, "Nimrod the tyrannical opponent of YHWH." <http://davelivingston.com/nimrod.htm> (accessed 5/27/12).

<sup>18</sup> Peter Goodgame, *Against World Powers*, <http://www.redmoonrising.com/worldpowers/awpll.htm#The%20Historical%20Nimrod> (accessed 5/26/12).

<sup>19</sup> A fascinating coincidence, if correct. Could this conflict have inspired the story of the fateful battle between Nimrod at the first Armenian king, Hayk? Hayk, according to Armenian tradition, was a great-grandson of Noah’s son Japheth, through Gomer and Togarmah.

Inanna (Ishtar) at Uruk.

Another significant connection: David Rohl believes that the temple of Enki is the actual site of the Tower of Babel. Eridu is one of the oldest cities in the world and is named in the Sumerian King List as the earliest city in Mesopotamia.<sup>20</sup> Eridu was the originally the home of the god Enki, who was considered the founder of the city. Rohl's gives several reasons for identifying Enki's temple as the biblical Tower of Babel:<sup>21</sup>

- The ruins of the ziggurat at Eridu are far older and larger than any others, and thus seem to better match the description of the tower.
- One name of Eridu in cuneiform logograms was pronounced "NUN.KI" ("the Mighty Place") in Sumerian, but much later the same "NUN.KI" was understood to mean the city of Babylon.
- The much later Greek version of the King-list by Berossus (c. 200 BC) reads "Babylon" in place of "Eridu" in the earlier versions, as the name of the oldest city where "the kingship was lowered from Heaven".
- As noted above, Rohl identifies Nimrod as the Sumerian king Enmerkar. Thus Enmerkar's demands for materials to build Enki's temple—or rebuild, as the earliest layers of the ziggurat at Eridu predate a thick layer of silt deposited by a massive flood.

Further, *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* records another parallel with the biblical account of the Tower of Babel—the confusion of humanity's speech:

In those days, the lands of Subur (and) Hamazi,  
Harmony-tongued Sumer, the great land of the decrees of princeship,  
Uri, the land having all that is appropriate,  
The land Martu, resting in security,  
The whole universe, the people in unison  
To Enlil in one tongue [spoke].  
(Then) Enki, the lord of abundance (whose) commands are trustworthy,  
The lord of wisdom, who understands the land,

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<sup>20</sup> Jacobsen, Thorkild. *The Sumerian King List* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 71.  
<http://oi.uchicago.edu/pdf/as11.pdf> (accessed 5/26/12). The opening line of the Sumerian King List reads, "When kingship from heaven was lowered, the kingship was in Eridu."

<sup>21</sup> See Rohl's books *Legend: The Genesis of Civilisation* and *The Lost Testament — From Eden to Exile: The Five-Thousand-Year History of the People of the Bible*. Rohl argues Nimrod was so influential that he was deified under four main name groupings: Ningirsu/Ninurta/Ninus (the Greek form of Ninurta); Marduk/Merodach, and later Bel/Baal; Assyrian Ashur/Egyptian Asar (Osiris); and Dumuzi/Tammuz/Adonis/Dionysus/Bacchus.

The leader of the gods,  
Endowed with wisdom, the lord of Eridu  
Changed the speech in their mouths, [brought] contention into it,  
Into the speech of man that (until then) had been one.<sup>22</sup>

Enki, as in other Sumerian myths, is credited in the story with actions that the Bible attributes to Yahweh. In the Sumerian flood myth, for example, it is Enki who warns Ziusudra (the analog of Noah) to build a boat, saving Ziusudra, his family, and thus all of mankind.

Identifying the Tower of Babel as Enki's temple at Eridu is an intriguing possibility on a several levels. It fits with the traditions and legends of Nimrod/Ningirsu/Ninurta as a builder, especially concerning irrigation and the development of agriculture.

Additionally, it is worth noting that Enki, the Sumerian god of fresh waters, was housed at a temple in Eridu called the *E-abzu*. There is some thought among scholars that the Greek word from which we derive the English "abyss" is borrowed the Akkadian *apsu* or Sumerian *abzu*.<sup>23</sup>

Then there is Enki's name. It is comprised of two simple words: *En*, or "lord", and *ki*, or "earth". It doesn't require much imagination to connect a god called Lord of the Earth, whose temple is the Abyss, to the biblical Satan (the "god of this world"<sup>24</sup> and "prince/ruler of this world"<sup>25</sup>).

One assumes that an effort to rebuild an ancient, pre-Flood temple to Enki/Satan would provoke a muscular response from the Most High God, Yahweh. And that is exactly what we read in Genesis 11:1-9.<sup>26</sup>

Admittedly, this has moved into the realm of speculation. Who the historic Nimrod was and what he actually did is lost in the mists of time. The Bible doesn't specifically name him as the builder of the Tower of Babel, but tradition and circumstantial historical evidence point to Enmerkar/Nimrod as the mastermind of the project. And whatever his motive, it was a serious enough offense that Yahweh was compelled to come to Earth and intervene personally, something that rarely happened.

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<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, an alternate translation describes "Hamazi, the many-tongued" and calls on Enki to change the many languages of mankind into one.

<sup>23</sup> A.A. Barb, "Antaura. The Mermaid and the Devil's Grandmother: A Lecture," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966), p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4.

<sup>25</sup> John 12:31.

<sup>26</sup> Another detail that may be of interest: Rohl notes the similarity between "Eridu" and Irad, the name of Cain's grandson recorded in Genesis 4:18. Could Eridu be the city built by Cain in the Land of Nod? Speculation, to be sure, but interesting to consider the possibility that a city built by Cain (or his immediate descendants) might be the site of an ancient temple to Enki/Satan/Lucifer that Nimrod tried to rebuild after the Flood.



Setting aside the speculation, it can be agreed that history generally views Nimrod/Enmerkar/Ninurta/Ningirsu as a rebel against Yahweh. And yet, through the double-headed eagle and its alleged link to ancient Lagash, this is the figure Scottish Rite Freemasonry holds up as the emblem of its highest levels of honor and achievement.

It could be argued that the early leaders of the Scottish Rite were not privy to modern archaeological discoveries that have added to our knowledge of Ancient Near Eastern history, symbology, and religion. For example, the Hittites, who gave us the double-headed eagle, were not even known outside the Bible until about a hundred years after the Scottish Rite was established.

There is some truth to that. Still, early Freemasonic legends from the late 15th and early 16th centuries credit Nimrod, not Solomon, with being the first great mason.<sup>27</sup> With new information about the character of Nimrod came a change in the official legends of the origins of the craft.

But about the end of the last century [*i.e., the 18th*], or, perhaps, still later, about the beginning of the present, this legendary account of the origin of Freemasonry began to be repudiated, and another one, in contradiction of the old manuscripts, was substituted for it.

Masonry was no longer believed to have originated at the Tower of Babel; the Temple of Jerusalem was considered as the place of its birth; and Solomon and not Nimrod was called the "first Grand Master."<sup>28</sup>

Yet while the official history has changed, the symbols, at least for the Scottish Rite, have not.

The double-headed eagle was probably introduced into Freemasonry in the early 1760s by a body in Paris called the Council of the Emperors of the East and West.<sup>29</sup> And for over 250 years, the symbol of political and religious power from the ancient Hittites through the Byzantine Empire to the modern nation-states of Russia, Albania, Serbia, and Montenegro (and, interestingly, the Greek Orthodox Church) has also represented advanced degrees of Scottish Rite Freemasonry.<sup>30</sup>

While this author has been unable thus far to find a documented link between the double-headed eagle and ancient Sumer, Scottish Rite Freemasons claim a connection where one, if it exists, is tenuous at

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<sup>27</sup> Albert Gallatin Mackey, *The History of Freemasonry*, Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry, <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/mackeyPH01.html#4> (accessed 5/26/12). [Original source: Albert Gallatin Mackey, *The History of Freemasonry* (New York: The Masonic History Co., 1898.)]

<sup>28</sup> Albert Gallatin Mackey, *The History of Freemasonry*, <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/mackeyPH03.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Pierre Mollier, "The Double-Headed Eagle: iconographic sources of the masonic symbol", *The Chain of Union* Special issue No.3 (2004), 14. <http://pierre.mollier.perso.sfr.fr/articles/PM-12-Double-Headed-Eagle.pdf> (accessed 5/26/12).

<sup>30</sup> Although, to the best of my knowledge, none of those entities refer to the bicephalous eagle as the "Eagle of Lagash."

best. Again the question is, why?

Setting speculation aside, this may be nothing more than attachment to a symbol that is retained simply through inertia. Is it possible that Freemasons of the Scottish Rite honor the symbol just because they have always done so? It is conceivable; how many of us actually think about the symbolism behind, say, the American flag (beyond the obvious—stars for states, stripes for the original colonies)? One can imagine members of the Scottish Rite honoring the choices made by its founders for the same reasons Americans tend to overlook character flaws in the nation's Founding Fathers.

It is conceivable, perhaps, but not likely. Freemasonry, especially the appendant rites, are devoted to the pursuit of knowledge. It is difficult to imagine an organization devoted to teaching its members through allegory and symbols giving so little thought to the emblems that represent the pinnacle of achievement within the group.

So what, then, does the double-headed eagle mean to Freemasons? That is a difficult question to answer. Masons themselves say no one person speaks for Freemasonry,<sup>31</sup> and no Grand Lodge presumes to issue directives to lodges under another Grand Lodge's jurisdiction. Freemasonry describes its philosophical pursuits as speculative, and there is no central body to issue authoritative decrees on matters of Masonic doctrine. Therefore, any conclusions we draw from the writings of prominent Freemasonic thinkers such as Albert Pike or Manly P. Hall are likely to be met with denials from Masons on those grounds.

That said, at least some belonging to the Scottish Rite view the double-headed eagle as an alchemical symbol representing the process of separating elements and then bringing them together again after purification and consecration.<sup>32</sup> In that sense, the eagle symbolizes a sort of Philosopher's Stone, facilitating the alchemical transformation of spiritual regeneration (and perhaps apotheosis).

Regardless of how widely held that particular view happens to be among Scottish Rite Freemasons, the question remains: Why insist on a symbolic link to Nimrod? Some fascinating theories have been advanced by researchers--and not all of them Christians: Nimrod represents the one-world government of the New World Order; Nimrod is the Antichrist; the Freemasons designed Washington, D.C. as an alchemical "resurrection machine" to bring back Nimrod/Osiris; the Freemasons financed research into the pyramids on the Giza plateau to find the tomb of Osiris/Nimrod, and so on.

While these lines of thought are fascinating and worthy of consideration insofar as they fit within the bounds of scripture, they are unlikely to convince Freemasons. Telling a member of the Blue Lodge that

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<sup>31</sup> Which, frankly, is a convenient tactic for avoiding uncomfortable debate. It is also a self-contradictory statement, since the Freemason who says that no one speaks for Freemasonry is himself making a blanket statement on behalf of Freemasonry.

<sup>32</sup> Gregory H. Peters, *Solve et Coagula: Alchemical Symbolism of the Double-Headed Eagle*, Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry, <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/double-headed-eagle.html> (accessed 5/26/12).

the Scottish Rite plots to bring the Antichrist to Earth at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. is likely to draw a derisive response.

Setting aside theories and speculation is necessary if we hope to open a conversation that encourages serious thought. No one responds well to being told, “You’re stupid and everything you know is wrong.” Regardless of the strength of the evidence or the brilliance of the logic, that’s the subtext we hear when somebody attacks our convictions.

But a flanking approach based on evidence already acceptable to the listener meets less resistance. How can a Scottish Rite Freemason deny what his own organization says about itself?

The rite claims a link to the ancient Sumerian god Ningirsu through the double-headed eagle that represents its 32nd and 33rd degrees. Non-Christian scholars consider Ningirsu a deified form of Nimrod, and Nimrod has been an infamous character at best since ancient times. He was a great builder, but a tyrant. And, if the listener will admit evidence from the Bible, whatever Nimrod tried to build at Babel provoked the wrath of God.

So that line of logic leads from an observation about the meaning of the double-headed eagle to this question: How can Scottish Rite Freemasons belong to an organization that venerates one of the most reviled, ungodly figures in all of history?

More to the point is the question that needs to be put to Free and Accepted Masons and members of the York Rite, Eastern Star, DeMolay, Job’s Daughters, and every other Masonic organization that associates with the Scottish Rite: Why haven’t they broken fellowship with the Scottish Rite over this?

Perhaps a simple question about the Scottish Rite’s double-headed eagle can open the door to serious thought and discussion about the true beliefs and purposes of Freemasonry—and, at the very least, whether Christians should belong to such a fellowship.