It is well known that Freemasonry, or Speculative Masonry, as it is sometimes called, was crafted over several centuries, and continued to develop in Britain before it found its way into America. Many theories exist as to the major influences on the Craft, from the Knights Templar to Rosicrucianism, and there are just as many hypotheses about its origins. While for most scholars on the subject, Freemasonry made its first appearance in the late sixteenth century in Scotland,¹ there is evidence that it began much earlier. According to the Abbé LeFranc, a French monk from Caen writing in the late eighteenth century, Freemasonry began in the Italian town of Vicenza in 1546 when a brotherhood arose from Reformist supporters intent on destroying the Catholic Church.² Founded by Lelio Socinus, the assemblies in Vicenza were organized around a systemic renunciation of the Catholic Church, until the conspiracy reached the ears of officials from the Republic of Venice, when members who were not put to death were forced to disperse or move their agenda further underground.

LeFranc’s theory has been both supported and contested by scholars of Freemasonry. Albert Mackey disagrees with the claim, arguing that LeFranc’s accusations stemmed from a deep loathing for Socinus and Freemasons alike.³ For George Dillon, on the other hand, the number of Socinians that made their way into Scotland and England following their expulsion from Vicenza by the Venetians are far too many to overlook.⁴ This, combined with the fact that Oliver Cromwell,

likely a Socinian himself, bestowed upon them the title of Freemasons, and invented the allegory of the Temple of Solomon that would become a symbol for the society, only supports LeFranc’s assertion.\(^5\) The lack of scholarly consent suggests the subject will likely never be resolved, and it would seem foolhardy to take sides. However, the unprecedented number of Reformers in Vicenza at the time arouses suspicions that there was something pivotal at work in the city. In identifying Socinus and his group of supporters as those responsible for the origin of Freemasonry, LeFranc also singles out the city of Vicenza at the very precise date of Andrea Palladio’s first project in the city. In my new book *From Mythos to Logos: Andrea Palladio, Freemasonry and the Triumph of Minerva*, I follow this thread to the end, and unravel the knots that history seems to have tied so tightly.

Abbé LeFranc’s proposition that Freemasonry as an organized society originated in Vicenza in 1546 warrants further consideration, given Palladio’s presence in the city at the time. In his *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* of 1863, Albert Mackey provides a persuasive account of Palladio’s contribution to the Brotherhood. While Palladio may be renowned for being the creator of the neo-Classical style and celebrated as the “modern Vitruvius” by many, according to Mackey such a description of the master is shamefully weak in the eyes of any English Freemason.\(^6\) Mackey explains how John Shute had gone to Venice for three years in the 1540s to study Palladio’s architecture, and how Palladio was the guided inspiration for architects such as Inigo Jones and Christopher Wren, both of whom had ties to Freemasonry. Mackey insists that it was Palladio who paved the way for Speculative Freemasonry, and how enthusiasm for the Venetian master played a fundamental role in Lodge meetings. As an example, Mackey provides the Minutes for a 1737

\(^5\) Ibid.
meeting of the Old Kings’ Arms Lodge in which Palladio’s *Four Books of Architecture* was read instead of the Laws and Constitutions normally read by Freemasons.7 In *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons* (1734), James Anderson argues that the Augustan Style, so important to Freemasonry, was raised from rubbish “above all by the Great PALLADIO, who has not yet been duly imitated in Italy,” with several Master’s songs venerating him.8

According to Mackey, and other Freemasons like John Fellows and Albert Pike, the entire mystery of Freemasonry can be unvailed in one single ambition: to recover the lord word, or *logos* of God, the same *logos* said to have been contained in the Ark of the Covenant. When discussing the ancient temples of Rome in Book Four, Palladio explains the relationship between the time and the perpetual revolving of the heavens.9 Here Palladio alludes to the *logos* of God, the Divine Architect, and suggests that, without a doubt, the temples created by architects on earth should compare with the universe, which was perfectly created by God with one single

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8 James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons*, (London, 1734), 36. For the songs of praise see page 85,

Thus tho’ in Italy the Art
From Gothick Rubbish first was rais’d;
And great Palladio did impart
A Style by Masons justly prais’d

And page 88,

That rival’d wise Palladio, justly prais’d
In Italy, and Britain too,
For Architecture firm and true.

9 Andrea Palladio, *I quattro libri dell’architettura*, 1570, Libro quattro, 3: “E veramente considerando noi questa bella machina del Mondo di quanti meravigliosi ornamenti ella sia ripiene; & come i Cieli co’l continuo lor girare vadino in lei le stagioni secondo il natural bisogno cangiando, & con suavissima armonia del temperato lor movimento se stessi conservino; non possiamo dubitare, che dovendo esser simili i piccoli Tempij, che nio facciamo; a questo grandissimo dalla sua immensa bontà con una sua parola perfettamente compiuto.”
parola, the Italian equivalent of word, or logos. Palladio’s use of the word parola is evidence of the importance of logos to his architectural theory, but also his practice. In his I dieci libri dell’architettura (1556), Palladio’s close friend Daniele Barbaro elaborated on Vitruvius, drawing an analogy between logos opticos and linear perspective,\(^\text{10}\) which he later wrote an entirely separate treatise about.

While Vitruvius made a strong case for the importance of logos in his De architectura, clearly there was something more at risk for Palladio and those in his circle. Theirs was a time when the precise meaning of logos was brought into question and seriously scrutinized. Luther had, after all, made the character of the incarnate, ubiquitous word essential to the Reformation, allowing logos to be examined with particular salience in Vicenza, which had become the stronghold for Lutheranism in the Italian peninsula.\(^\text{11}\) Palladio’s mentor Giangiorgio Trissino saw the divided state of Vicenza’s religious system as a symptom of a larger political and social fragmentation.\(^\text{12}\) He understood the value of logos, and, looking for strategies to recreate peace and harmony in the Italian peninsula, he originally advocated for a shared language that would eliminate rivalry and distrust.\(^\text{13}\) Though his efforts were unsuccessful, his knowledge of Vitruvius inspired new ways of trying to obtain peninsular concord, and he subsequently promoted architecture as an appropriate language in a project

\(^{10}\) Daniele Barbaro, I dieci libri dell’architettura di M. Vitruvio (Venice: Francesco Marcolini, 1556), 24: “Oltra il commertio (dirò così) che tiene l’Astrologia con la Musica per le sopradette ragioni, si vede anche la raccommunanza che ella ha con la Geometria con la prospettiva, che da Greci opticos logos, cioè ragione del vedere, è nominata.”


\(^{13}\) Aureli, Absolute Architecture, 50.
of reform. Vitruvius may have provided architects of the Renaissance an inside view into the essentials of Roman architecture, but there was something more ancient, yet just as captivating to a Christian architect interested in *logos*: The Temple of Solomon.

The Temple of Solomon figures prominently in the art of the sixteenth-century Veneto. Both Titian and Tintoretto painted a version of the *Presentation of the Virgin in Solomon’s Temple* and Sebastiano del Piombo’s *Judgment of Solomon* illustrates the extent to which Solomon was considered an archetype of wisdom. Another dominant theme in architecture and painting in Northern Italy during the period was the Solomonic spiral column. Columns resembling those described in the Temple of Solomon found their way into architect Giulio Romano’s Palazzo del Te and Palazzo Ducale in Mantua, and his obsession with the trope is clearly visible from the many drawings and paintings he left behind that feature the column (fig. 1). Palladio, who worked with Romano on the Palazzo Thiene in one of his first projects in Vicenza, would certainly have been familiar with his predecessor’s work. The Venetian painter Paolo Cagliari, known as Veronese, depicted the columns several times in the Venetian capital. His *Apotheosis of Venice* in the Palazzo Ducale, the *Annunciation* in the church of San Giovanni i Paulo in Venice, and the frescoed walls of the villa Palladio built for Daniele Barbaro at Maser all display a preoccupation with this architectural trope (fig. 2).

Solomon was known for his wisdom, and central to that wisdom is the virtue of prudence, which is mentioned along with Solomon in the Bible several times:

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According to Solomon, “every prudent man dealeth with knowledge,” (Prov., xiii, 16) and “the wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way,” (Prov., xiv, 8), acknowledging that prudence implies an understanding of the end goal. Solomon explains how prudence alone can prevent us from sin, insisting “A prudent man forseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on and are punished” (Prov., xxii, 3).

At the core of Freemasonry is the search for *logos* as it was described by Plato, who for Freemasons is considered the prophet who conceived of the nature of *logos*.\(^\text{15}\) If the spirit of Freemasonry is derived from a quest for the lost *logos*, however, according to John Fellows it is by way of the virtue of prudence that *logos* is believed to proceed.\(^\text{16}\) Lelio Socinus also believed the foundation of prudence was located in *logos*, the divine word of God.

Painted just years after the infamous meeting in 1546 of the *Collegia Vicentina* Anselmo Canera painted an image of *Prudence* in the Palazzo Thiene in Vicenza, that must have been particularly salient in a city that had recently come under intense scrutiny for its public embrace of Radical Reformation. Using prudence as my central thematic thrust my first chapter draws on Canera’s revolutionary depiction of *Prudence* to explore how Reformatory practices were adopted with particular zeal in the city of Vicenza, eventually proceeding independently from Luther, Calvin and other reformers to develop a unique, liberal theology that would be adopted by the Brotherhood of Freemasons.

I begin by identifying the figure that lies above the constellations – the outermost sphere of Plato’s Harmony of the Spheres – and the being who occupies the Empyrean. As Plato describes it in the *Phaedrus*:

“But of the heaven which is above the heavens, what earthly poet ever did or ever will sing worthily? It is such as I will describe; for I must dare to speak the truth, when the truth is my theme. There abides the being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colorless, formless, intangible essence, visible only to the mind, *the pilot of the soul* (italics mine). The divine intelligence, being nurtured upon mind and pure knowledge, and the intelligence of every soul which is capable of receiving food proper to it, rejoices at beholding reality, and once more gazing upon the truth, is replenished and made glad, until the revolution of the world brings her round again to the same place.”

Here I draw heavily on Marsilio Ficino, one of the spearheads of the Platonic Academies in the Renaissance, who wrote extensively on the subject of the immortality of the soul. Drawing on the philosophy of Plato, Ficino was convinced that if the soul is immortal, then only the
cultivation of the soul could bring it closer to the divinity of God.\textsuperscript{17} As if he were quoting Ficino himself, American Freemason Colonel John Fellows explains the importance of the progress of the soul to Freemasonry as: “If the soul is immortal, it stands in need of cultivation and improvement not only in the time that we call life, but for the future or what we call the time of eternity.”\textsuperscript{18}

In my second chapter, Towards a Logos of Architecture in Palladio’s Villa Barbaro at Maser, I continue by examining the ceiling fresco in the Sala Del Olimpo, where a similar being appears above the dragon instead of a snake. Here we discover that this is the same being in the Empyrean talked about by Plato and others. I examine Barbaro’s \textit{Dieci libri dell’architettura} where I evaluate Barbaro’s method for determining the location of the entrance to the Empyrean by first locating the Jewel of Seven Stars, which Manly P. Hall correctly identified as the seven Rishis of the Bear, who act as Guardians to her lair. I continue by identifying the similarities between the ceiling fresco and the alchemical figure of Rebis – one of the identifying emblems of Freemasonry. In this chapter I also evaluate the architectural layout of the villa, as well as its alignment, and show how the building was constructed to transform the living word of God into a living image of \textit{logos} in architecture.

My third chapter considers Palladio’s villa La Rotonda, often regarded as the apogee of his career. Here I examine differences between La Rotonda and the villa Palladio built for Barbaro at Maser, and illustrate how the architect perfected his vision of a living image of \textit{logos} in architecture by highlighting the system used by mariners to determine the location

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\textsuperscript{17} Gillespie, \textit{Theological Origins}, 124.  \\
\textsuperscript{18} John Fellows, \textit{An Inquiry into the Origin, History and Purport of Freemasonry} (New York: Gould, Banks and Co., 1835), 331. 
\end{flushright}
of the Empyrean, and by introducing an oculus as an allegory for *logos* as it is explained in Plato’s Cratylus as something that “signifies all things, moves circularly, is in perpetual motion, and is twofold…true and false together.”

My fourth chapter considers one of the most pervasive elements in Freemasonry: the predilection for symbolism, in the form of emblems and hieroglyphs. Drawing on Titian’s *Allegory of Prudence*, this chapter examines the intersection between hieroglyphs and the Art of Memory, where

My last chapter uses reverse chronology to trace the movements that led to the development of Freemasonry. This chapter looks at predecessors like the Palazzo del Te in Mantua as a model for a *logos* in architecture, and the examines the first illustrated book of its kind, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, and considers how both this wonder of architecture and late Renaissance book were used along with the art of memory to instill the precepts of the cultivation of the soul so fundamental to Freemasonry in its visitors, viewers and readers. The arrangement of the rooms in the Palazzo del Te encourages a quasi-circular progression through the building that highlights the role of the will in the transmigration of the soul through the art of memory. The Hypnerotomachia Poliphili follows a similar movement of the soul in a text.

Readers interested in Freemasonry and the art and architecture of the sixteenth century in Italy should find something of value in my book. Mostly, I hope, they will appreciate how, like Luther, those associated with the origins of Freemasonry demanded we think of evolving with our hearts and souls, as well as our minds, since at its heart Freemasonry seems to be about the evolution of kindness.