

Foreword

The pairing of slavery and Freemasonry may be surprising. It actually forms an antinomy a priori, which may seem to make a study on this theme impossible, except perhaps from the angle of the involvement of Masonic circles in the fight for the abolition of slavery, proclaimed in 1834 in the English colonies, in the French colonies in 1848, in the United States in 1861, then in Cuba and Brazil later, between 1880 and 1888. However, aiming to analyze without prejudice the relations between the Freemasons of the great slave powers on the one hand, the practice of trafficking and slavery by these powers on the other hand, is of real interest.

Born in the 18th century, at the very moment when the Atlantic slave trade was experiencing a remarkable boom which would make it the “dark side of the Age of Enlightenment” (Y. Benot), strongly open to the world of shipowners and naval officers, quite established in the ports starting with the quartet of trading ports, Freemasonry was never in fact—although it refers to the notion of Fraternity—a form of sociability whose members were unanimously abolitionist and as inherently impervious to participation in or support for slavery. In fact, it took an evolutionary process, sometimes slow, linked to the Revolution of 1789 in France, to the progress of political liberalism to which most Freemasons in Spanish-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries adhered in the 19th century, for European Masonic societies, as a whole, take a position against slavery, more in line with the representations we have of Freemasonry.

For this reason, the analysis of this ambivalent and evolving relationship between Masonic sociability and the question of slavery is placed at the heart of this issue of *Ritual, Secrecy, and Civil Society* resulting from the contributions presented during the round table organized by IDERM on June 10, 2022 at the Cadet Hotel, during the 4th World Congress on Freemasonry which offers an overview of the situation in three of the greatest European slave-holding powers of the 18th and 19th centuries, also in the United States.

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