

Le secret des francs-maçons (1744)

At the 2022 WCHF in Paris, PSO presented the Bibliothèque du Grand Orient de France with a fine copy of the first major masonic exposure published in France: *Le secret des francs-maçons*, printed in 1744 and attributed to Abbé Pérau.

Between 1717 (1721?) and 1730, the first Grand Lodge of London reorganized and enriched the ritual inherited from old Masonry from Scotland into a three-degrees system: Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master. As early as 1730, this ritual was revealed in a small work: *Masonry dissected*, printed by a certain Samuel Prichard. *Masonry dissected* appears as the first “Exposure” of the masonic ritual. In Great Britain, it would be more than thirty years before other exposures were published, such as *The three distinct knocks or the door of the most ancient free-masonry* (1760) or *Jachin and Boaz or an authentic key to the door of Free-masonry* (1762).

But from the late 1730s and especially in the 1740s, the baton was passed to France. After *La Réception d'un Frey-maçon*, printed at the end of 1737 –an interesting but summary text that is sometimes difficult to analyse– *Le Secret des francs-maçons*, published in 1744, opened the cycle of French masonic exposures. The work is attributed to Abbé Pérau, who was very active in the Parisian book trade at the time. He publishes a fairly detailed description of the reception ceremony, the signs and, for the first time, extracts from the ritu-

al. This was the first time that part of the French ritual had been published *verbatim*. A few months later, *Le Catéchisme des Francs-Maçons* by Léonard Gabanon (probably Louis Travenol) presented in detail the Master’s degree, its instruction and, for the first time, reproductions of the Lodges’ Trestle boards. *Le Secret* and *Le Catéchisme* were merged by a compiler in 1745 under the title *L’Ordre des francs-maçons trahi*. Booksellers also offered *Le Sceau rompu ou la Loge ouverte aux profanes* (1745), *Les Francs-maçons écrasés* (1747) and *Le Maçon démasqué* (1751), among others. All these “exposures”, to use the name given to them by specialists, revealed the ritual customs and habits of Parisian Lodges in the Age of Enlightenment, i.e. the Moderns ritual introduced in the late 1720’s in Paris and practiced in France during the XVIIIth century.

Alain Bernheim has convincingly argued that, until 1750, British and French rituals must have been very similar. *Le secret des francs-maçons* is therefore a major testimony to the history of Masonic rituals. On the history of the French exposures and their importance for the study of Masonic ritual in general, see Harry Carr, *The Early French Exposures* (London, *The Quatuor Coronati Lodge no. 2076*, 1971). There is a chapter devoted to *Le secret des francs-maçons*, with a full translation of the work.

