



# Ritual, Secrecy, and Civil Society

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## **FOREWORD:**

# **Freemasonry and New Social Ideas**

In the Latin countries, since the 18th century, and even more so during the 19th century, Freemasonry has been a sounding board and a vector of new ideas. This is reflected in the idea of Freemasonry that the Masons of these countries have, but also in the image that Masonry has in the general public. One of the challenges of Masonic history is to try to understand why Freemasonry has taken this direction in Latin countries while in Anglo-Saxon areas it has remained above all a sociability and even, globally, a rather conservative one. It is clear that the very early opposition of the Roman Catholic Church to Freemasonry played a great role in this evolution. Its very important weight in Latin societies made that the conservative circles turned away from the Lodges. On the contrary, Lodges became attractive for the liberals.

But this progressive character of Freemasonry is perhaps not only due to a combination of historical circumstances? It may also be rooted in the deep nature of Freemasonry and its concern for human happiness. What elements can the historical approach bring to this problem? This is what we will try to answer in these pages.

This new issue of *Ritual, Secrecy and Civil Society* includes some of the papers from the World Congress on Fraternalism, Social Capital, and Civil Society (WCF) organized in Paris in spring 2022 by PSO in collaboration with the Museum of Freemasonry in Paris. The Grand Chapter General of the Grand Orient de France sponsored a special session devoted to the links between the 18th century French Rite and the Enlightenment.

Pierre Mollier  
*Editor*



Opening of the French Rite Workshop by Philippe Guglielmi  
at the BnF (National Library)

# Enlightened Values: The Masonic Paradox

Margaret Jacob

## ABSTRACT

By the 1680s in parts of northern and western Europe a new set of values could be seen at work in cities. Central to the new enlightened values were certain fundamental principles: a growing abhorrence of absolutism in church and state, with a special disdain for the French king, Louis XIV; a belief in religious toleration with John Locke as its major theorist. Freemasonry embodied the new enlightened values: men meeting “upon the level” suggested that symbols of power and authority could be earned and were not necessarily inborn and inherited. Even if the search for enlightened forms of governance evolved in many directions and that in the masonic case the evolution presents us with paradoxes.

*Keywords:* Masonic Enlightenment, Literate Protestants, Newtonians, Dutch Republic, Dutch freemasonry, Rousset de Missy, Huguenots, Whigs

## Valores Iluminados: La Paradoja Masónica

En la década de 1680, en partes del norte y oeste de Europa, se podía ver un nuevo conjunto de valores en funcionamiento en las ciudades. En el centro de los nuevos valores ilustrados había ciertos principios fundamentales: un creciente aborrecimiento del absolutismo en la iglesia y el estado, con un desdén especial por el rey francés, Luis XIV; una creencia en la tolerancia religiosa con John Locke como su principal teórico. La masonería encarnaba los nuevos valores ilustrados: los hombres que se reunían «en el nivel» sugerían que los símbolos de poder y autoridad podían ganarse y no eran necesariamente innatos ni heredados. Aunque la búsqueda de formas ilustradas de gobierno evolucionó en muchas direcciones y que en el caso masónico la evolución nos presenta paradojas.

*Palabras clave:* Ilustración masónica, protestantes alfabetizados, newtonianos, república holandesa, masonería holandesa, Rousset de Missy, hugonotes, whigs

## 启蒙价值观：共济会悖论

17世纪80年代，北欧和西欧的部分地区城市出现了一套新的价值观。这一新启蒙价值观的核心是一些基本原则：教会和国家越来越厌恶绝对主义，尤其蔑视法国国王路易十四；推崇以约翰·洛克为主要理论家的宗教宽容信仰。共济会体现了新的启蒙价值观：“平等”相待的人表明，权力和权威的象征是可以获取的，不一定是天生被继承的。即使关于“治理的启蒙形式”的探索在许多方向上都有所发展，但对共济会而言，这种发展带来了悖论。

关键词：共济会启蒙运动，有文化的新教徒，牛顿派，荷兰共和国，荷兰共济会，Rousset de Missy，胡格诺派，辉格党

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**B**y the 1680s in parts of northern and western Europe a new set of values could be seen at work in cities where we find literate Protestants, among others, particularly in Britain and the Dutch Republic. Central to the new enlightened values were certain fundamental principles: a growing abhorrence of absolutism in church and state, with a special distain for the French king, Louis XIV; a belief in religious toleration with John Locke as its major theorist; and not least the emergence of illicit publications, best associated with the unknown publisher supposedly located in Cologne, Pierre Marteau. An imprint rather than a person, Marteau published anti-clerical, sometimes pornographic texts, aimed at the French king and clergy. Political events solidified, if not caused, adherence to this new enlightened counter-culture: the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 (hence a renewed persecution of French Protestants), the Rev-

olution of 1688-89 in England and the end of absolutist monarchy in the British Isles; the outbreak of a war between England and France that threatened the independence of the Low Countries.

Amid these fundamental political events, allied as they were to a new understanding of state power and religious freedom, stood the practice of the new science. With the publication of Newton's *Principia* in 1687 came a set of practices and beliefs: the experimental and mathematical complemented the search for order and regularity in worldly events, all made possible by the order and law-like behavior of nature proclaimed by Newton's achievement. Freemasonry emerged in this new political and cultural universe, and it reflected these new enlightened values. Or did it?

I will be arguing here that freemasonry embodied the new enlightened values: men meeting “upon the



level” suggested that symbols of power and authority could be earned and were not necessarily inborn and inherited. In London and Dublin lodges, where we can identify the religious affiliation of members, Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Catholics broke bread together and addressed one another as brother. In 1731 there was a London lodge where six surnames out of twenty-nine were in all probability Jewish. In the same decade masonic surnames in Amsterdam also indicate Jewish identities. Significantly and at the same time, brothers can easily be located who were Newtonian practitioners of the new science, of whom Jean Desaguliers is the most famous. Indeed, there is a very high collaboration between early lodge membership in Britain and being a Fellow of the Royal Society. Yet despite the identification with the science and the practice of religious toleration, a paradox lies at the heart of masonic history’s relationship to the Enlightenment, one that suggests a more complicated story.

Where we find enlightened values, we also find contradictions. British masonic leadership after 1717 displayed an identification with the court, not the country. Whig grandees like the Duke of Chandos, in 1737 grand master of the united English and Scottish lodges, dedicated himself to the Hanoverian succession and a strong monarchy. Recall that masonry regarded itself as “the Royal art,” and had seen the craft as furthering monarchical strength. After 1688-89 in Britain the commitment was no longer to absolute monarchy, but still it was to the strength of king and court. William of Orange had been given the

kingship by act of parliament; James II had been dethroned, yet the lodges were led by brothers who identified with the court and not the parliament.

A similar identification with the court can be seen in the Dutch Republic where freemasonry entered through the entourage of the stadholder, the closest thing the Dutch had a centralized monarchy. William IV’s French chef, Vincent de la Chapelle, also served as master of this court-centered lodge. This, the earliest Dutch lodge with official standing, began in 1731 in The Hague and it included the British ambassador, Lord Chesterfield. Once again, we have identification with the court, and in this case with the British-Dutch alliance against France. And once again, over time, we find another evolution, this one toward a more radical and representative message visible in masonic rhetoric and ceremonies. By the 1750s we find the Dutch lodges, with the blessings of the British Grand Master, establishing “at The Hague a National Grand Lodge for the Estates General of the United Provinces.”

What began as an enterprise of the Dutch court was evolving into a form of constitutional government that included a symbolic version of the major representative institution, the Estates General of the Republic. In this instance enlightenment values look forward to the nascently democratic forms of government that emerged in the 1770s in Philadelphia, and in the 1780s in Brussels and most spectacularly in Paris. To effect this transformation from an enlightened political ideal to an institu-

tional reality, required some reworking of canonical texts. John Locke's second *Treatise on Government*, translated into French in 1691, had to be subtly reworked. The skilled translation was supplied by the most prominent freemason in the Dutch Republic, Rousset de Missy, in a new preface to the French Locke. The 1691 translation into French had already identified a commonwealth as "a republic." Rousset's enlightened preface of 1755 proclaimed Locke as the theorist of a republic and the safety that it offers "free men." Rousset warned that some who are distinguished as "noble" would try to introduce an unbearable slavery. The preface reads as a call to preserve the historic opposition to French absolutism and to repudiate any compromise that the aristocratic Dutch oligarchy would make with it.

Rousset de Missy provided a republican preface to the 1755 French edition of Locke which became the most widely read and referenced Continental version of Locke from the second half of the eighteenth century. Rousseau knew it, as did the French revolutionaries who looked for justifications of their new republican form of government.

The search for enlightened forms of governance evolved in many directions. In the masonic case the evolution, once again, presents us with paradoxes. After the Revolution of 1747 in the Dutch Republic freemasons around the stadholder, William IV, also turned to new social mores and values. While men "meeting upon the level" might mean religious tolerance, as we saw on both sides of the Channel in the 1730s, it could also lead to an unprecedent-

ed meeting upon the level of men and women. We will stay now with freemasonry in The Hague where we find one of the earliest social expressions of a gendered egalitarianism to be found in European thought and practice.

By the 1750s on the Continent gender exclusion within freemasonry had begun to break down. Lodges "of adoption" as lodges for both men and women are called turn up fleetingly in records from Bordeaux, for example. The most extensive set of records, however, come from The Hague in 1751. In that year Juste Gerard, baron van Wassenaer initiated a French speaking lodge for men and women and signed its *Livre de Constitution*. Possibly in recognition of this unique break with the commonplace, and in recognition of his special patronage, the new lodge took his name, *La loge de Juste*. Central to the lodge's membership were actors and actresses in the theatre in residence, the Comédie Française. They were joined by William Bentinck, who paid the largest initiation fee of 52 guilders to belong to *La loge de Juste*. Bentinck was at the heart of the Dutch court, an intimate of William IV. He was joined by various local elites, among them a few members who could not pay the initiation fee. When the fees did not meet the cost of opening the lodge, the Grand Lodge of the Republic covered the overhead. Using French, all the male and female officers were identified by gendered nouns, *le maistre, la maitresse*. Songs and orations given at the lodge justified the admission of women: ignorance has been displaced, "our profound study in the art of masonry has enabled us to

find a true method of perfecting our buildings. It is by the assistance of our sisters.” There were women and men equally as officers, each with garments and jewels that signified their position.

We have no evidence that this lodge survived beyond 1751. A subsequent history of Dutch freemasonry said that the lodges of adoption were not well received. In the 1760s and 70s orations were given on why women were excluded from the lodges although in 1778 there is evidence for a lodge of adoption at work in The Hague, and in 1790s they appear to have returned to the Dutch Republic. In general, these lodges were much more common in France where a brother from Vienna described them as “without a doubt one of the most noteworthy new developments in the world of masonry.” The American historian, James Smith Allen has written a remarkable account of French women’s freemasonry and its forward-looking political meaning, “Briefly but intensely, during the revolutionary events of 1789, 1830, 1848, and 1871, assertive women played roles in political clubs, in the streets, even on the barricades. Their subsequent participation in politics grew as the first feminist movement pushed for female education and training, married women’s property rights, fertility control, and integral suffrage. (p. 16)” Women’s participation in freemasonry had always been controversial; indeed, the majority of brothers probably disapproved. This did not stop the lodges of adoption from spreading.

And these lodges also began to invent their own rituals. These spoke

brazenly about the “tyranny” that men exercised because of their knowledge of the sciences. In response to such tyranny women need to take up “the bearing of arms and the study of the sciences.” If they do that there will be “equality” between “the Amazons and the Patriarchs.”

Having arrived at amazons and patriarchs we would seem to have wandered far from the high ideals we associate Locke or the *Encyclopedie*, or have we? The lodges were places where highly literate men, and as we now know some women, could pursue a variety of purposes, some of them paradoxical in relationship to the abstract values associated in the first instance the Enlightenment. Support for king and court might seem a lesser good than support for parliament and country. But having just defeated the absolutism of James II the strength of the Hanoverian court and king, along with the weakening of the established Church, seemed a progressive, indeed enlightened, move.

The Whigs, and especially the radical Whigs like Toland and Collins, supported enlightened values and the alliance against France. They and their Huguenot associates in the Dutch Republic are central to the first generation of European *philosophes*. With their coterie we can associate some of the most extremely anti-religious works of the first quarter of the century, in particular, *Le Traité des trois imposteurs*. It labelled Jesus, Moses and Mohammed as the three. Out of this same coterie also came Picart and Bernard’s *Ceremonies and Religious Customs of all the Peoples of the World*, that beginning in 1723

was the first text anywhere in Europe to treat all the religions of the world even-handedly, and not least, to give us the first pictorial representation of freemasonry.

The association of the generation of Pierre Bayle's Huguenot refugees and freemasonry places both at the epicenter of the early Enlightenment. They translated English texts and sociability into French and thus spread both into circles at odds with the religious persecution effected by the French Church and monarchy. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes created a diaspora of Protestants, many of them highly literate, all of them angry and bitter, and

free from French censorship. Their international associations knitted the early Enlightenment together with publishing ventures, clandestine treatises, and personal ties aided by their spoken and written use of French. Not least the Continental lodges brought women into formal association with lodges that conformed to a constitution, made their own rules, and contributed to secular forms of charitable activity. Centuries would pass before women entered the public sphere as voters, officials, leaders. But in the mid-eighteenth century, a few women – actresses for the most part – played at a fantasy that we have been able to make a reality.

# Enlightened Ideas, Renaissance Culture: Syncretism and Emblems in Eighteenth-Century's English Freemasonry

Felipe Corte Real de Camargo

## ABSTRACT

The eighteenth-century developed sophisticated readings of practices and ideas that were fermenting since the Renaissance: the fascination for architecture and its mysteries, Neoplatonism, and the development of a language based on symbols and allegories. Among the outcomes of the enlightenment is Modern Freemasonry, and as such, it is no different to the other phenomena, meaning that it was a long-fermented idea. The syncretism presented by Freemasonry was typical of its time. Among this syncretical thinking there was a subtle use of Emblems. Through the performance of ritual Freemasonry creates connections between symbols, allegories and moral philosophy spread by Enlightenment.

**Keywords:** Masonic enlightenment, Emblems, Emblemata, Masonic symbols, Masonic ritual, Renaissance Culture, English Freemasonry

## Ideas ilustradas, cultura renacentista: sincretismo y emblemas en la masonería inglesa del siglo XVIII

El siglo XVIII desarrolló lecturas sofisticadas de prácticas e ideas que fermentaban desde el Renacimiento: la fascinación por la arquitectura y sus misterios, el neoplatonismo y el desarrollo de un lenguaje basado en símbolos y alegorías. Entre los resultados de la Ilustración está la Francmasonería Moderna, y como tal, no es diferente a los otros fenómenos, lo que significa que fue una idea largamente fermentada. El sincretismo presentado por la masonería era propio de su época. Entre este pensamiento sincrético hubo un uso sutil de Emblemas. A través de la realización de rituales, la masonería crea conexiones entre símbolos, alegorías y filosofía moral difundida por la Ilustración.

**Palabras clave:** Iluminación masónica, Emblemas, Emblemata, Símbolos masónicos, Ritual masónico, Cultura renacentista, Masonería inglesa

## 启蒙思想与文艺复兴文化：十八世纪英国共济会的宗教融合与图案

十八世纪出现了一系列对文艺复兴以来不断发酵的实践与思想的复杂解读：例如对建筑及其奥秘的迷恋、新柏拉图主义，以及基于图案和寓言的语言发展。启蒙运动的成果之一是现代共济会，因此，它与其他现象没有什么不同，这意味着共济会是一个酝酿已久的想法。共济会提出的宗教融合 (syncretism) 则是当时的典型。在这种融合的思想中，有一种对图案的微妙使用。通过仪式的表现，共济会在启蒙运动传播的符号、寓言和道德哲学之间建立了联系。

关键词：共济会启蒙，图案，Emblemata，共济会图案，共济会仪式，文艺复兴文化，英国共济会

The eighteenth-century developed sophisticated readings of practices and ideas that were fermenting since the Renaissance: the fascination for architecture and its mysteries, Neoplatonism, and the development of a language based on symbols and allegories. Resembling any other historical period, the enlightenment and its products were constrained by their time, the apathy and excitement of synchronicity. It is a far-fetched, but contagious, idea to assume that such developments were intended or designed, that the men developing such traditions were “speaking to the future” in the expression used by Jules Michelet.

Among the outcomes of the enlightenment is Modern Freemasonry,

and as such, it is no different to the other phenomena, meaning that it was a long-fermented idea, that was developed overtime, and that also had no design.

Freemasonry is not the only thing that came anew in the eighteenth century, one of its most prominent features, was also put under a different light: syncretism. This element of society and philosophy regarded negatively before, was started to be seeing as a positive merge of knowledge (or beliefs) which would contribute to critical and free thinking. The first major change towards a positive attitude on syncretism comes in the entries associated to it in the *Encyclopédie*, such as *synchrétisme* and *éclectisme*.<sup>1</sup>

1 ‘Emblème’ in *L'Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisoné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers, par une Société de Gens de Lettres*, ed. by Diderot and D'Alembert, 5<sup>ème</sup> Tome (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1755), p.556.

The syncretism presented by Freemasonry was typical of its time. In it, was a huge claim of antiquity which was used to give the required respectability, a ritual framework which resembled the fashionable modes of sociability of the time, and also presented in a performative and esoteric way the moral teachings so widespread in England at that time.

Among this syncretical thinking there was a subtle use of Emblems. Subtle because they were not used as in the previous centuries, but diluted in a new and compelling way. The emblems were ensembles of a picture (drawing) and a poem conveying a moral and/or moralizing message. They were part of the *ut pictura poesis* (*as is painting, so is poetry*) tradition, meaning that the emblem was a parallel between poetry and painting, or, according to Dieter Sulzer, “a synthesising art”<sup>2</sup>

Emblems were popularized by the printing revolution through works called “Emblem Books” which became the primary form of erudite communication during the Early Modern period. The Emblems evolved from a literary relation between the meaning of the picture and the poem to a more independent characteristic of both. The correlation between poem and figure was regarded by some authors as essential, and any trace of independence from any of them seem as vulgarity.

The Emblems were part of a wider taste for allegories which were

not only present in the 16th and 17th centuries, but also became the common language for paintings and poetry. The art of Emblem making reposed on the interconnection between poetry and painting, however, it is a fair assessment to say that they were mostly constructed in opposition to each other. Plutarch reading of Simonides of Keos that “painting is dumb poetry, and poetry is speaking painting” used to resonate until the Renaissance. Leonardo da Vinci represented the beginning of a turn in this understanding since in his notebooks, published under the title *Tratatto della Pittura* (1632), advocates for the superiority of painting as being closer to nature, and a more accessible art form. However, the relation marked out by Plutarch was still used in the early modern period by Emblem writers and its critics as a critical formula.

The entry *emblème* of the French *Encyclopédie* demonstrates that by the year of publishing of the fifth volume, 1755, the concept of emblem was already simplified. From the literary and poetic discussions of the seventeenth century, now emblems were understood as “image or painting which, by representing some known story or symbol, accompanied by a word or a legend, leads us to the knowledge of another thing or a morality.”

Therefore, the relationship between images and moral teachings was not a singularity brought by Freemasonry, but rather a tradition that was re-

2 Peter M. Daly, *Emblem Theory: Recent German Contributions to the Characterization of the Emblem Genre*. By Wolfenbütteler Forschungen, Vol. 9 (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus-Thomson Organization Press, 1979), p.9.

habilitated by it. We may see in these practices the influence of the Emblem Culture which had a late life in England. The first English emblem book was published in 1586, a hundred years later, in 1686, its popularisation could be seen by the publication of a children's emblem book. For most researchers, engaged on the higher forms of that genre, the children's book signify the death of that convention.

A less peremptory approach can be made if we see the emblem culture not dying, but migrating. The same way in which emblem culture flourished from the taste for allegory inherited from the Middle Ages, the early modern period was seeing the growth of a living tradition. Especially in England, emblems may be defined by two types: one the 'moralising emblem', based on classic and humanist *topoi*, the rhetorical commonplaces from the Renaissance Culture; and the other the 'religious' or 'spiritual' emblem, based on the revival of the Christian meditation in the 17th century. These two types can be seen as having an influence on Freemasonry since its imagery has elements of both.

Regarding under an iconological approach, in Freemasonry three types of images are constructed: verbal, mental, and graphical. The verbal ones are derived from the practice of the ritual, not just the descriptive parts of it, but from the whole meaning of the ceremony. They are built through the metaphor, the synecdoche, and the description

In the same way, through the mental images we have the dreams,

the memories, and the ideas. Thus, the imagination, the mental picture, the idea of the lodge, the legends, the journeys around the lodge room, are also an important part of the process of forming the masonic imagery.

The experiences of the rituals printed the masonic symbols and allegories in the minds of initiates, synchronically, the Freemasons were forming, and thereafter depicting, the representation of a verbally constructed and mentally elaborated universe.

The outcome of this path, following verbal and mental images, is the third type of image: the graphic. In this category are pictures, designs, statutes, and everything that has materiality.<sup>10</sup> Curiously, an abundance of graphic images related to Freemasonry during the eighteenth-century appeared in anti-masonic publishing. Nevertheless, for the freemasons there was the additional input of the drawings on the floor of the masonic lodge, made and erased each meeting, and their own depictions starting to be visible in their regalia, and in France, in their tracing boards.

Is possible to observe, and therefore establish a work hypothesis, that Masonic imagery has several elements in common with emblems, being probably a survival of that culture. The sophistication of Freemasonry may be credited to its syncretism. While emblems relied on a tradition that had not much space to renew itself, due to the inseparable nature of image and poem, and the literary cannons built around it; Freemasonry, unceremoniously, divided both.



In masonic rituals, the images, the *pictura*, would be all over; in the verbal images constructed in the rituals; drawn on the floor of the lodge; in the objects furnishing the lodge; in the several depictions of symbols present in aprons, panels, and illustrations of masonic literature.

The text and performance of masonic ritual thus took the place of moralising poems. More than read and absorb these values under a literary, and possibly hermetic, style, through Free-

masonry the connection between symbols, allegories and moral philosophy was explained and experienced through the performance of ritual.

What Freemasonry developed was the public depiction of images, being those symbols or allegories used by the Fraternity, or depicting passages of the ritual, and the concealed explanation of their moral and/or spiritual meaning. Basically, formatting and standardizing the *pictura*, and offering the *poesis* for its initiates.



# The French Rite: Bearer of the Enlightenment Cultural Flame

Cécile Révauger

## ABSTRACT

The first Grand Chapitre (Grand Chapter) of the French Rite was constituted in a very official way on February 2, 1784. This was the first governing body of higher degrees in France.

Just as Freemasonry is the heir to the Enlightenment, there is no doubt that Enlightenment philosophy directly inspired the French Rite. Dogmas and despotism were discarded, while new concepts such as critical thinking, religious tolerance, secularism and emancipation were advocated, paving the way for democratic and Republican values.

**Keywords:** Grand Chapter, French Rite, culture of the Enlightenment, critical thinking, religious tolerance, Secularism, Emancipation, Cosmopolitanism, Universalism

## El rito francés: portadora de la llama cultural de la Ilustración

El primer Grand Chapitre (Gran Capítulo) del Rito Francés se constituyó de manera muy oficial el 2 de febrero de 1784. Este fue el primer órgano de gobierno de grados superiores en Francia. Así como la Francmasonería es heredera de la Ilustración, no hay duda de que la filosofía de la Ilustración inspiró directamente al Rito Francés. Se descartaron los dogmas y el caciquismo, mientras se defendían nuevos conceptos como el pensamiento crítico, la tolerancia religiosa, el laicismo y la emancipación, allanando el camino a los valores democráticos y republicanos.

**Palabras clave:** Gran Capítulo, Rito Francés, cultura de la Ilustración, pensamiento crítico, tolerancia religiosa, Laicismo, Emancipación, Cosmopolitismo, Universalismo

## 法兰西礼仪：启蒙运动文化火焰的承载者

1784年2月2日，法兰西礼仪（共济会）的第一个总会所（Grand Chapter）以非常正式的方式成立。这是法国第一个管理更高会员等级的机构。正如共济会是启蒙运动的继承者一样，启蒙运动哲学无疑直接启发了法兰西礼仪。摒弃了教条与专制，提倡批判性思维、宗教宽容、世俗主义和解放等新概念——为民主价值观和共和价值观创造了条件。

关键词：总会所，法兰西礼仪，启蒙运动文化，批判性思维，宗教宽容，世俗主义，解放，世界主义，普世主义

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Freemasonry appeared in the wake of the Enlightenment, in a more favorable religious and political context than that of previous centuries, in 1717 or 1721 in England, after monarchy by divine right had been replaced by parliamentary monarchy and the partial emancipation of religious dissidents.

The Enlightenment emerged in the Netherlands, England, and Scotland before spreading to France and other European countries, and Enlightenment thought ranged from the radical to the moderate, to use the terminology deployed by historians.

Lodges affiliated with the first Grand Lodge, known as the Grand Lodge of Moderns from the 1750s onward, had a minimal ritual practice, which primarily consisted of reciting “catechisms” for each degree during initiation or when advancing from one degree to another; these fairly simple rituals drew symbolically on builders’ tools (such as the compass, square, plumb, level, and trowel). As this was an

oral culture, the rituals were not written down, but instead learned by heart. It was not until the “exposures” (the revealing of secrets starting with Prichard in 1730) that rituals became fixed and more easily passed on, in France in particular. For this reason, anyone seeking to understand the ritual practice of the lodges needs to rely on speeches from the time as much as on the rituals themselves: welcome speeches given during initiations, the inaugurations of Grand Masters and Provincial Grand Masters, and stone-laying ceremonies for public buildings. These speeches give us insights into the principles that underpinned Freemasonry in the eighteenth century.

In France, blue lodges practiced a rite similar to that of the Moderns’ lodges. As for the higher degrees, these were practically non-existent in England at that time, apart from a few exceptions of which much has been made; in France they grew and multiplied in a highly random and disordered manner.

It would therefore be fruitless to look for a formalized, precise ritual for these higher degrees.

What is indisputable is that the first Grand Chapitre (Grand Chapter) of the French Rite was constituted in a very official way on February 2, 1784, and that this was the first governing body of higher degrees in France. This implies that there were French Rite chapters in existence before this date. The Amitié (Friendship) Lodge, to which Roëttiers de Montaleau belonged, certainly already practiced the higher degrees of the French Rite. The French Rite probably began to be practiced in the higher degrees at the same time that the Grande Loge (Grand Lodge) became the Grand Orient de France (GODF) (Grand Orient of France), so from 1773 onward.

Today, it seems more pertinent to study the values behind rituals rather than trying to date them. Following this approach, there is no doubt that Enlightenment philosophy directly inspired the philosophy of the French Rite, as will now be demonstrated.

### **Enlightenment philosophical culture yesterday and today: From the rejection of dogma to critical thinking**

**L**ittle by little, the Enlightenment replaced the concept of natural law, i.e., divine law, with the concept of natural rights. In the previous century, humankind was considered to have no freedom of choice or action, and was simply the puppet of divine

will. Spinoza and John Locke, followed by many English, Scottish, German, and French thinkers, cast aside these preconceptions, encouraging people to use their own understanding, to favor reasoning over blind faith, and to exercise their own critical judgement.

In the literary, scientific, philosophical, and political domains, writers freed themselves from censorship and dared to express themselves, even if there were still some limits on freedom of expression.

Like the philosopher, Bahrtdt, and the philosopher and founder of the Illuminati, Weishaupt, Kant encouraged people to reach maturity by freeing themselves from the influence of others.

Carl Friedrich Bahrtdt (1740–1792), a German doctor of theology and professor of philosophy, initiated into the Grand Lodge of England around 1777 in London, and attacked by Barruel, gave a very clear definition of Enlightenment thinking in 1787 in his essay “What is Enlightenment?,” which starts with a veritable paean to liberty, recognizing man’s right to happiness:

1 - The freedom to think and to judge is the only true source of all human Enlightenment, and without these freedoms there is no way to train our minds.

2 - The Enlightenment is the essential origin of all human happiness: true happiness is not possible without Enlightenment and the more a man becomes enlight-

ened, the more his capacity to be happy grows.<sup>1</sup>

Kant, in a passage that is too often reduced to the final injunction “*Sapere Aude*,” “dare to know,” encourages people to grow and develop themselves by using their reason and thinking for themselves. This is how he defines Enlightenment:

*Enlightenment is the human being's emancipation from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one's intellect without the direction of another. This immaturity is self-incurred when its cause does not lie in a lack of intellect, but in a lack of resolve and courage to make use of one's intellect without the direction of another. “Sapere aude! Have the courage to make use of your own intellect!” is hence the motto of enlightenment.*<sup>2</sup>

Here is Weishaupt, leader of the Illuminati, once more: “Why should it be impossible that the human race might reach the highest level of perfec-

tion, the capacity to rule themselves? Why should one be eternally led, who knows how to lead themselves? Is it therefore impossible for the human race, or at least the majority of people, to become adults in time?”<sup>3</sup>

People were encouraged to reason. Several other authors of English Masonic speeches use the metaphor of geometry, going so far as to speak of moral geometry, in order to inform Masons of the virtues toward which they should strive. This is very close to the geometer's mind, first mentioned by Pascal, but greatly clarified by Voltaire: “Nowadays, I believe, we might call *the geometer's mind* the methodical and reasoning mind.”<sup>4</sup>

Once it is established that each human being has the capacity to evolve, to improve themselves through education and the use of reason, it becomes self-evident that there is no shame in seeking earthly happiness. Humans have the right, almost the duty, to work joyfully. Sociability and conviviality are at the heart of both the Enlightenment and of Freemasonry.

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1 See Charles Porset's excellent biographical note, “Bahrtdt, Charles-Frédéric (1740–1792),” in *Le Monde maçonnique des Lumières (Europe-Amériques & colonies): Dictionnaire Prosopographique*, ed. Charles Porset and Cécile Révauger (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), 1: 189–95; and Jean Mondot, ed. and trans. (from German to French), *Qu'est ce que les Lumières?* (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2007), 96.

2 Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?,” in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace and History*, ed. Pauline Kleingeld, trans. David Colclasure (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 17.

3 Adam Weishaupt, “Adresse aux candidats *Illuminatos Dirigentes*,” in *Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?*, ed. and trans. Jean Mondot (from German to French) (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2007), 37. Translator's note: Our translation. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of cited foreign language material in this article are our own.

4 Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters, or Letters Regarding the English Nation*, trans. Prudence Steiner (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 119.

In what ways can the French Rite be seen as part of this school of thought? When Roëttiers de Montaleau and the Chambre des Grades (Chamber of Degrees) codified the degrees of the French Rite, their motivation was to simplify and clarify, considering that the richness of a rite came neither from an accumulation of details, nor a jumble of symbols, but from the transparency of its message. In order to be comprehensible and teachable, the rite needed to be structured: this is why the French Rite only includes seven degrees (three + four), as well as a fifth order, corresponding to the original eighty-one degrees.

In its initiation ceremony, the French Rite foregrounds the symbolism of the stages of life. Each man or woman is encouraged to grow and to reach, through their own efforts, their own age of reason: to become an adult, just as Kant and the Illuminati encouraged people to leave childhood behind and take responsibility for themselves.

Brothers and sisters are invited to use their critical faculties, to carry out a personal research project, without tutoring or mentoring, simply put, to emancipate themselves through their own judgment. Everyone must stand up and speak. However, people cannot live alone, being social animals, as the Enlightenment thinkers demonstrated. This is why they must educate themselves in a mutual way, through connecting with one another. The art of conversation, which in Enlightenment times meant this very sort of interaction between individuals, and was expressed

through sociability and conviviality, is highly valued in Freemasonry. In the French Rite, collective work is the constant companion of individual progress.

### **From Enlightenment religious culture to secularism**

Prior to the Glorious Revolution, England had known centuries of religious persecution, and in France the Edict of Nantes had been revoked, resulting in the exile of numerous Huguenots, including the family of Jean Théophile Desaguliers. Finally, however, the tolerance advocated by John Locke won out and the climate became favorable to the establishment of lodges. The advent of havens of religious tolerance such as these met with almost immediate disapproval from the Pope, and the infamous papal bull of 1738. This explains why reason and religion are considered compatible in England and antithetical in the Roman Catholic world, to the point where Voltaire, initiated into the famous Neuf Soeurs Lodge, wanted to “crush the loathsome [Catholic Church].”

Margaret Jacob has ably demonstrated the cross-pollination between John Toland, Robert Collins, Jean Rousset de Missy, the pantheists, the free-thinkers, and the first lodges in the Netherlands and in England. In his *Pantheisticon*, John Toland praised the Socratic society of pantheists, who shared convivial meals, whose religion was cheerful and not gloomy like that of the Catholics or Calvinists: “You may perceive that their Religion is simple,

clear, easy, without Blemish, and freely bestowed, not painted over, not intricate, embarrassed, incomprehensible, or mercenary; not luring Minds with silly fables, and ensnaring them by the Filth, Inhumanity or Ridicule of Superstition.”<sup>5</sup> An anonymous treatise of 1743 defined a “philosophe” as any thinker who turned away from God and took a greater interest in society. Bernard Picart, author of the first iconographic representation of Masonry in volume six (1736) of his magnum opus, *The Ceremonies and Religious Customs of the Various Nations of the Known World* (of which the first volumes started to appear in 1723), placed all Western and Eastern religions on the same footing and gave significant importance to Freemasonry.

In the same spirit, in 1723 and 1738 James Anderson only required Masons to believe in that religion which united them, rather than setting them against one another, leaving everyone freedom of choice unless they were an atheist—certainly a sizable restriction, but one that must be seen in context. Religious dogmas and rigid theological precepts were rejected in favor of a latitudinarian religion that gave people freer rein in their beliefs. Thomas Paine, a friend of Nicolas de Bonneville and the author of *On the Origin of Free-Masonry*, who cannot be shown to have been a member of any lodge, recommends his Masonic friends turn to the religion of the druids rather than the revealed religions that imprison them with dogma.

There is only space for religious tolerance when philosophical doubt, which relies on reason, is permitted.

The French Rite has been built on this basis of tolerance, from Roëttiers de Montaleau onward. In 1877, Frédéric Desmons managed to drive through a major change in Article 1 of the GODF constitution, replacing the requirement to believe in “God and the immortality of the soul” with freedom of conscience, which some years later (1884) became “absolute freedom of conscience.” The Great Architect of the Universe did not disappear from the constitution, but this phrase was gradually abandoned by the French Rite over the course of the twentieth century. In fact this notion, which was a step toward increased tolerance in the eighteenth century, was later coopted into a transcendental principle, and into the recognition of a single God in the monotheistic tradition. While Anglo-Saxon Freemasonry still requires a belief in God, and therefore allegiance to a dogma, what is known as “liberal” Freemasonry, in the sense of fundamental human liberties, espouses absolute freedom of conscience. In the French Rite, Grand Maître (Grand Master) Phillippe Guglielmi, today the Très Sage et Parfait Grand Vénérable du Grand Chapitre Général (Most Wise and Complete Worshipful Master of the General Grand Chapter) has championed a new and very clear label, “adogmatic Freemasonry.”

At the start of their meetings, all lodges and chapters within the French

<sup>5</sup> John Toland, *Pantheisticon: Or the Form of Celebrating the Socratic-Society* (London: Cooper, 1751), 94–95.



Rite proclaim their allegiance to the Republican principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, to which they add secularism, the contemporary manifestation of Enlightenment religious tolerance.

### **From Enlightenment political culture to emancipation and the Republic**

**I**n England, it was the simultaneous rejection of absolute monarchy and Catholicism following the Glorious Revolution of 1688 that permitted the Enlightenment and Freemasonry to blossom in a calmer political and religious context.

The American Revolution was inspired by these principles a century later, rejecting the despotism of George III and his desire to subject the thirteen colonies to unfair economic and political laws. The number of lodges doubled during the American revolutionary period, while the inverse occurred during the French Revolution some years later. Of course, it would be untrue to assert that Freemasonry has always embraced emancipation, and today we know that some Freemasons were proponents of slavery while others were abolitionists. While in England the most prominent abolitionists were predominantly evangelists and Methodists, the figure of Freemason Victor Schœlcher, architect of both the 1848 Republic and the abolition of slavery, dominated the debate in France.

British and American Enlightenment figures were little affected by republicanism, unlike their French coun-

terparts, whose ideas culminated in the French Revolution and the declaration of human rights. However, it is the Scotsman Andrew Michael Ramsay, not himself overly partial to political republicanism, to whom we owe the superb formulation: “The whole world is but one great republic, of which each nation is a family, and each individual a child.” Ramsay was orator of the Grande Loge (the future GODF) when he gave his famous speech, which he delivered twice, in 1736 and in 1737. It was above all the Illuminati, whose radicalism worried many Masons, including George Washington, who established cosmopolitanism as a Masonic virtue.

In order for Freemasonry to develop, a minimum threshold of democracy must be reached. We know that in times of repression and tyranny, when freedoms are being removed, Freemasons have always been among the first victims. No-one can forget the Second World War, or more recently the events in Chile. What is happening in Russia and Ukraine is a matter for journalists, as historians cannot yet achieve the necessary distance from events.

Masonic orders are not immune to the diplomatic divides that separate peoples. This is not the place to study the nature of the divergences between Anglo-Saxon Freemasonry and Latin Freemasonry. Let us therefore focus on our central theme, the French Rite as bearer of the Enlightenment cultural flame.

The Grand Chapitre Général wanted to promote the development of the French Rite worldwide, by encour-

aging new Grands Chapitres to find their own feet and set out under their own steam, while retaining fraternal links with one another.

In Lisbon on April 25, 2011, a *Charte des Principes Fondamentaux du Rite Français* (Charter of Fundamental Principles of the French Rite) was signed by seventeen Grands Chapitres Généraux from France and around the world, later joined by other Grands Chapitres Généraux. Today there are thirty Grands Chapitres Généraux of the French Rite worldwide. This charter affirms the liberal and adogmatic principles of Freemasonry, namely absolute freedom of conscience for all Freemasons under the French Rite. Ramsay meetings are a way for those Grands Chapitres of the French Rite that have signed this charter to meet regularly.

Enlightenment culture is at the heart of our democracies, of Freemasonry in general, and in particular of the French Rite. However, it would be imprudent, even irresponsible, to put

on blinkers and pretend that these values are not under attack. Enlightenment culture, a culture of religious tolerance that in France is called secularism, has been threatened many times in the last decade. Aggressive forms of nationalism have tried to expunge Enlightenment universalism.

Some have used Enlightenment weaknesses, weaknesses that in general can be attributed to the historical context, such as the rejection of atheists, the exclusion of women and all those born into slavery, and discrimination along ethnic lines, in order to reject Enlightenment thought wholesale. There is no need to leave our critical faculties behind and rhapsodize about the Enlightenment. Instead, we should hold firm to its fundamental approach, to the values that can and should inspire our modern democracies. This Enlightenment culture is essentially tolerant and universalist, emancipating men, women, and entire peoples. The French Rite is steeped in this culture, and continues in that tradition.

# Roëttiers de Montaleau and the Work of the “Chambre des grades”: The Spirit of the Symbolic Degrees

Pierre Mollier

## ABSTRACT

In 1773 the first Grand Lodge of France (born in 1735) underwent a profound reform that transformed it into the Grand Orient of France. This reform is the application to Freemasonry of the ideas of the Enlightenment. In the early 1780s, the Grand Orient’s “Chambre des grades” undertook a work on the Masonic ritual to finally establish a reference version that it promulgated in 1785. This version, made under the direction of Brother Roëttiers de Montaleau, is known today as the “Régulateur du Maçon” and is considered the standard text of the French Rite. This article studies the process of fixing this ritual, its sources and the ideas it carries.

**Keywords:** Masonic enlightenment, Grand Orient de France, French Rite, Roëttiers de Montaleau, Chambre des grades, Masonic ritual, Régulateur du Maçon

## Roëttiers de Montaleau y la Obra de la “Chambre des grades”: El Espíritu de los Grados Simbólicos

En 1773 la primera Gran Logia de Francia (nacida en 1735) sufrió una profunda reforma que la transformó en el Gran Oriente de Francia. Esta reforma es la aplicación a la masonería de las ideas de la Ilustración. A principios de la década de 1780, la “Chambre des grades” del Gran Oriente emprendió un trabajo sobre el ritual masónico para finalmente establecer una versión de referencia que promulgó en 1785. Esta versión, realizada bajo la dirección del hermano Roëttiers de Montaleau, se conoce hoy como la “Régulateur du Maçon” y se considera el texto estándar del Rito Francés. Este artículo estudia el proceso de fijación de este ritual, sus fuentes y las ideas que conlleva.

**Palabras clave:** Ilustración masónica, Grand Orient de France, Rito francés, Roëttiers de Montaleau, Chambre des grades, Ritual masónico, Régulateur du Maçon

## Roëttiers de Montaleau 与“等级管理议会”的职责：象征性等级的精神

1773年，首个法兰西总会（诞生于1735年）经历了一场深刻的改革，转变为法兰西大东方总会（Grand Orient de France）。这次改革是启蒙运动思想在共济会中的应用。1780年代初期，大东方总会的“等级管理议会”（Chambre des grades）着手研究共济会仪式，最终建立了参考版本并于1785年进行宣传。该版本在 Roëttiers de Montaleau 兄弟的指导下完成，今天被称为“Régulateur du Maçon”，并且被认为是法兰西礼仪的标准文本。本文研究了确定该仪式的过程、仪式来源及其所承载的思想。

关键词：共济会启蒙，法兰西大东方总会，法兰西礼仪，Roëttiers de Montaleau，等级管理议会（Chambre des grades），共济会仪式，Régulateur du Maçon

The formation of the Grand Orient de France (GODF) (Grand Orient of France) between 1771 and 1773 was the work of a team centered on the Duc de Montmorency-Luxembourg. For several months, they busied themselves creating and proposing a whole suite of reforms in order to constitute a functioning organization. This new Masonic administration naturally needed to address the important question of rituals at one stage or another. On December 27, 1773, during its second plenary assembly, the GODF decided that:

The codification of the Masonic degrees requiring much wisdom and a great deal of diligence on the part of the brothers wishing to undertake it, the Grand Orient has established a commission

specially charged with this work and the Most Respectable Brothers Bacon de la Chevalerie, Comte de Stroganoff, and Baron de Toussaint were appointed as commissioners to draw up this great work. All Brothers who have Masonic knowledge are invited to communicate it to one or other of these Brothers, who can in their turn appoint such learned Brothers as they see fit to assist with their work, so that this knowledge, once codified, can be reported to the Grand Orient and sanctioned by it.

Until this codification is complete, it has been decreed that lodges shall be encouraged to only make use of the first three symbolic degrees.<sup>1</sup>

1 GODF meeting records, FM<sup>1</sup> 114, f°54, Bibliotheque Nationale de France. Translator's note: Our

However, after this bright start, the activities of the commission seem to have been very limited. In fact, it is not mentioned again until 1776. The codification of degrees was referred from body to body, and took almost twelve years. In 1781 this task was transferred to the “Assemblée des trois chambres réunies” (Assembly of the Three Joint Chambers), and then in 1782, to a new “Chambre des grades” (Chamber of Degrees), originally created to take care of the higher degrees. It was at this time that Brother Roëttiers de Montaleau became involved with the issue, gradually taking on a more and more important role. Finally, partly at his initiative, the rituals were finished and voted on: the degree of apprentice on July 15, 1785, fellowcraft on July 29, 1785, and master on August 12, 1785. This was the text published during the consulate and the empire, entitled *Régulateur du Maçon* (Masonic Regulator), and it is still known under that name today.

The Grand Orient finally had a standardized ritual for the three initial degrees. But upon learning that it took twelve years of debate, proceedings, and referrals between bodies, one might have concerns as to the fidelity of the result to the original ritual heritage of

French Masonry. Buried under views, opinions, and contributions, might not the traditions of early French Masonry have been disfigured by the painstaking labor of the various Grand Orient bodies? Examining the text, however, it is surprising how faithful they are to the rituals of the 1740s–1760s, and beyond that, to those of the first Grand Lodge of 1717, and even to the most ancient known Masonic rituals.<sup>2</sup> The reason for this, generally speaking, is that although the process was long, the Grand Orient’s work concentrated on the finalization of the texts and, above all, the development of a certain number of rules<sup>3</sup> (majority required to be present within a lodge for a non-Mason to be initiated, time periods for moving from one degree to another), or elements peripheral to the ritual itself (phrases provided for new initiates to meditate on, details of tracing boards, etc.). However, these procedures did have a certain philosophical import. For example, on June 22, 1781, the Assemblée des trois chambres réunies was working on the questions a candidate should be asked on the threshold of being admitted into the Order:

The Brothers then presented various questions to be put to

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translation. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of cited foreign language material are our own.

2 See: Pierre Mollier, “De l’authenticité traditionnelle des rituels symboliques du Grand Orient de France et du Régulateur,” in *Le Régulateur du Maçon: Les grades symboliques du Rite Français; Histoire et textes fondateurs* (Paris: Dervy, 2018), 375–91.

3 This aspect might seem secondary today, but at the time, the Grand Orient often received queries from lodges about such problems. One example among numerous others: in October 1784, the president of the GODF assembly received an accusation that the “Réunion des Etrangers Lodge (Strangers’ Meeting Lodge), of the Paris Orient, after having received a new member advanced him, five days later, on the same day, to the degrees of fellowcraft and master” (FM<sup>1</sup> 16, f°126 verso, Bibliothèque Nationale de France). The matter was referred to the Chambre de Paris (Paris Chamber) to be examined.

new members in the Chamber of Reflection. After having examined these, the Trois chambres adopted the five following questions, presented by the Most Venerable Brother Millon.

1. What is the first duty of an honnête homme (respectable man)?
2. What does an honnête homme owe to himself?
3. What does he owe to his peers?
4. What is the most proper way to make our happiness immutable in this world?
5. What are the most proper virtues to obtain universal esteem and affection?<sup>4</sup>

It is very interesting to note that these questions do not ask the candidate about their metaphysical ideas in any way. Their area of investigation is exclusively moral, and for the two final questions, social. Of course, overly quick or anachronistic conclusions must be avoided, but nonetheless this can be seen as a sign of the approach of those leading the Grand Orient around 1780. During the twenty-fifth assembly, on July 13, 1781:

The Venerable Brother Salivet then proposed a number of different maxims to be placed in

the room of reflection. The Trois chambres chose five of them, which were agreed in the following form.

1. If you only came here out of curiosity, go.
2. If you fear being shown your own faults, you will do badly among us.
3. If you are capable of lying, beware, for we will find you out.
4. If you believe in human differences, leave, for we know none.
5. If your soul has felt fear, go no further.<sup>5</sup>

These five maxims survived the vicissitudes of the years of debates that followed. We find them in the definitive text and, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, printed in the *Régulateur du Maçon*. Both the questions for candidates and the maxims for the room of reflection would last through the highs and lows of the eventful existence of the GODE, to such an extent that they seem to be a defining feature of the prerequisites for initiation under the French Rite.

On some points, however, the work of standardizing the degrees went beyond simply formalizing them. For the degree of apprentice, the text in-

4 Twenty-fourth assembly of the Trois chambres réunies, June 22, 1781, FM<sup>1</sup> 89, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

5 Twenty-fifth assembly of the Trois chambres réunies, July 13, 1781, FM<sup>1</sup> 89, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

cluded elements that were not part of either British sources or the first French disclosures of the 1740s, but which can be found in several manuscripts from the 1760s and 1770s. For example, both the test of the cup of bitterness and the purifications by water and fire are present in the rituals of the “Scottish” Mother-Lodge of Avignon.<sup>6</sup> Were these elements typical of the Mother-Lodge’s Scottish Rite, or were they simply examples of the embellishments added by those eighteenth-century brothers who enjoyed ritual, in Avignon and elsewhere? The question is not clear cut, as it should be remembered that the “Scottish” were present in the process of codifying the degrees. Thus the Respectable Le Contrat Social (The Social Contract) Lodge was among the lodges consulted by the Grand Orient’s 149th assembly, and Thory, then a member of the Saint-Alexandre d’Écosse (Saint Alexander of Scotland) Lodge, took part in several sessions. It should be noted in any case that it was not (yet?) a matter of a passage through the four elements, but only a purification by water and fire. The “test” relates therefore less to alchemy and more to the traditional sym-

bolism of Christian baptism. Whether a “Scottish” import or inclusion of a more widespread practice, these new rites show symbols that originally belonged to the higher degrees descending into the three initial degrees.<sup>7</sup> The same goes for the “test of blood.” However, the higher degrees, by their nature more flexible, may here only be a link in the chain connecting Masonry to more ancient societies. Thus we find a test of “salted wine” in the initiation ritual of the Compagnies d’Archers (Archers’ Guilds) that is strongly reminiscent of the Masonic “cup of bitterness.”<sup>8</sup> The same rite was also part of the seventeenth-century journeymen’s guilds.<sup>9</sup>

The major undertaking of the Grand Orient dignitaries was the revitalization of the degree of fellowcraft. Since the tripartition of the two former Scottish degrees of “entered apprentice” and “master mason or fellow craft” around 1720, the new degree of fellowcraft had not yet found its own identity. Almost all the symbolic content of the former fellow craft—the word Mason and the five points of fellowship—had been transferred to either the first or the third degree of the new system. It

6 See: René Désaguliers, “Essai de recherche des origines, en France, du Rite Ecosais pour les trois premiers grades, Premier grade de la Franche-maçonnerie [. . .] suiv. le Rit de la M.L.E. de l’Orient d’Avignon,” *Renaissance traditionnelle* 54–55 (1983): 135. Pascal Du Santra, “Un rituel avignonnais d’Apprenti du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle ou la Maçonnerie théâtralisée,” *Renaissance traditionnelle* 133 (2003): 2–19.

7 And perhaps more precisely from Pirlet’s “Scottish Trinitarian” system, oral communication with René Désaguliers and Roger Dachez, December 1989. See also the ideas put forward by Guy Verval, “A propos de trois rituels remarquables,” afterword to *Rituels du Rite français Moderne 1786: Apprenti-Compagnon-Maitre*, (Paris and Geneva: Champion-Slatkine, 1991), XV.

8 See the admission ritual for archers, documented in 1751, cited in Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, *Nobles jeux de l’Arc et loges maçonniques dans la France des Lumières: Enquête sur une sociabilité en mutation* (Cahors: Éditions Ivoire-Claire, 2002), 191–92.

9 Emile Coornaert, *Les Compagnonnages en France du Moyen-âge à nos jours* (Paris: Les Éditions ouvrières, 1966), 353.

had admittedly been allocated teaching around the blazing star and the letter G, but the ceremony was only a simple reception into the lodge accompanied by the taking of an oath. The ritual for the intermediary degree was then so short that, until the 1780s, it would frequently be conferred in the same evening following initiation as an apprentice. A new member therefore went from being a layman to “Apprentice-Fellowcraft” in just a matter of hours! The Grand Orient bodies therefore designed a ceremony and teachings to enrich the degree of fellowcraft and at last give it real symbolic coherence and weight. To reach the second degree, the apprentice would need to make five journeys, each of which would allow them to discover a tool. This addition was destined for great posterity and the five journeys of fellowcraft became a classic part of French Masonic tradition. Another interesting point is that although throughout the eighteenth century French Freemasons seemed to be doing everything they could to put distance between themselves and the operative sources of the order—oh, were it that they were just symbolic!—in order to provide teaching for the degree of fellowcraft, Roëttiers de Montaleau and

his friends went back to “practical masonry.” Was this a development that followed logically from the very name of the degree (“compagnon” [member of a journeymen’s guild] in French), with elements being borrowed from the practices of these guilds? The Parisian bourgeois, readers of Rousseau and the *Encyclopédie*, would have encountered guild members in everyday life during this paradoxical period, when the distance between social classes was highly compatible with social promiscuity.<sup>10</sup> A more likely explanation is that this was a reconstruction based on the allegorical commentaries typical of European esoteric sensibilities from the sixteenth century onward. Speculations about tools were common in Renaissance emblem books.<sup>11</sup> Here again, it is important not to overestimate the rigidity of the border between learned and popular culture. Trade guilds—in particular their higher ranking members from the artisanal middle class—were highly likely to be familiar with these glosses on the symbolic meanings of tools. Whatever the reason, for the first time since its conception, “speculative” Freemasonry honored elements relating to “operative” masonry<sup>12</sup> and directed its adherents to meditate on them. At the

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10 The ostracism the text demonstrates in the prerequisites for initiation—“No man should be admitted who is in a base and abject state. Rarely shall an artisan be admitted, even if he is a master craftsman, especially in places where corporations and guilds have not been established. Those workers known as journeymen in crafts or trades shall never be admitted”—does not preclude such borrowings. Besides which, this exclusion was merely theoretical and eighteenth-century Parisian Masonry included many brothers, some of considerable importance, from the “trades.”

11 Roger Dachez, “Tradition du métier et sources historiques de la pensée symbolique dans la Maçonnerie spéculative,” in “Symboles et Mythes dans les mouvements initiatiques et ésotériques (XVII<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècles): Filiations et emprunts,” special issue, *ARIES* (1999): 49–57.

12 Thierry Boudignon, “Le néo-opérativisme dans la Franc-maçonnerie spéculative anglaise et française à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> et au début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in “De la Maçonnerie opérative à la Franc-maçonnerie spéculative: Filiations et ruptures,” special issue, *Renaissance traditionnelle* 118–19



same time, to complete this veritable renaissance of the degree of fellowcraft, the Grand Orient officials allocated to it an entire tranche of Masonic instruction that had until then been taught to apprentices. As the fifth science, geometry, ought to command a fellowcraft Mason’s whole attention, the sections of the catechism relating to the dimensions of the lodge, its shape, its orientation, and the elements that support it—the three pillars—were transferred to the second degree. New initiates therefore did not discover the meaning of certain symbolic elements present in the first degree until they advanced to the second.

The degree of master sanctioned by the Grand Orient is completely consistent with the most venerable French traditions on the subject. Thus, the ancient word is not forgotten, and is known by all masters, but another is used instead for reasons of prudence.<sup>13</sup> There is therefore no more left to discover and this version of the Hiramic Legend thus preserves a real independence from the symbolic degrees. The higher degrees are not necessary to complete the story. The instruction for the degree of master includes an inspired turn of phrase that proved highly successful and entered French Masonic tradition, becoming a classic expres-

sion: “To bring together that which is scattered.” Some might see within it an allusion to the analogies between the Hiramic Legend and the myth of Osiris, while others point to the way it echoes the passage of Anderson’s *Constitutions* that explains that “Masonry becomes the Center of Union.”<sup>14</sup> In another echo of long-standing practices, the text underscores several times the importance of instruction by questions and responses—catechism—which brothers are encouraged to recite as often as possible. Between a symbolic litany and the “art of memory,” it is presented as a fundamental part of the practice and teaching of each degree.

As for the general approach of the codification, it should be emphasized that there is a clear tendency to sideline the ostensibly religious phraseology that is found in several places in the French Rite between 1740 and 1760. This choice was probably governed by diverse, perhaps even contradictory, factors. First there was a concern to expunge anything that could be interpreted as parody or even sacrilege, a desire to avoid blurring the boundaries between domains that was inspired by a respect for religion that would have been natural for men steeped in the culture of the ancien régime. But it is possible that this was also muddled

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(1999): 113.

13 Verval, “A propos de trois rituels remarquables,” XX–XXIV; and Jan Snoek, “The Evolution of the Hiramic Legend from Prichard’s Masonry Dissected to the Emulation Ritual, in England and in France,” in “Symboles et Mythes dans les mouvements initiatiques et ésotériques (XVII<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècles): Filiations et emprunts,” special issue, *ARIES* (1999): 59–92.

14 James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons: Containing the History, Charges, Regulations, &c. of that most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity, For the Use of the Lodges* (London: Hunter, Senex, and Hooke, 1723), Article 1, “Concerning God and Religion.”

with another concern that was emerging at that time: an aspiration to secularization in line with Enlightenment values. This subtle formal emancipation from Judeo-Christian sources should not be seen as militant, however, and while some expressions were watered down, the entire symbolic corpus was carefully conserved. This meant that the religious resonances were no longer imposed, and only “those with ears to hear” would detect them, leaving others free to engage with the purely moral and allegorical content.

From 1773 to 1785, twelve years passed between the decision to set down a ritual that would ensure “uniformity within the work of workshops” and its adoption, followed by its diffusion. But the work of codification itself only started in 1781, so the gestation of

the symbolic degrees only ultimately lasted four years. Behind the splendor of sessions of the various Grand Orient bodies, it was in fact a small team centered around Roëttiers de Montaleau that brought this work to fruition. Work that consisted less, it should once again be stressed, of creating a ritual than setting down ceremonies common to the majority of French lodges in the eighteenth century, in a way that favored sobriety and authenticity. As the foreword states, “the Grand Orient de France [. . .] thought it necessary to return Masonry to its ancient practices, which some innovators have attempted to alter, and to reestablish these first and important initiations in their antique and respectable purity.” Thus these texts are linked to the very sources of the ritual and symbolic heritage of Freemasonry.

# **A Study of the Brothers in the First French Rite Chapters: Between a Spiritual Need and a Culture of Distinction; the Example of Normandy**

Éric Saunier

## **ABSTRACT**

Based on a study of the first six thousand initiates into Freemasonry in Normandy between 1740 and 1830, this paper wants to sketch an overview of the social context and spirit in which the higher degrees of the French Rite were practiced. The first motivation of joining a French Rite Chapter between 1784 and 1789 is unquestionably the pursuit of an aristocratic dream. But does this situation necessarily exclude the idea of a spiritual motivation on the part of these Freemasons? Social elitism can sit happily alongside an ideal of self-improvement through initiation. Masonic Enlightenment is a complex phenomenon.

*Keywords:* Masonic Enlightenment, High degrees, Normandy, Grand Chapter, French Rite, Aristocratic dream

## **Un estudio de los hermanos en los primeros capítulos de rito francés: entre una necesidad espiritual y una cultura de distinción; el ejemplo de normandia**

A partir de un estudio de los primeros seis mil iniciados en la masonería en Normandía entre 1740 y 1830, este artículo pretende esbozar un panorama del contexto social y del espíritu en el que se practicaban los grados superiores del Rito Francés. La primera motivación para ingresar en un Capítulo de rito francés entre 1784 y 1789 es, sin duda, la búsqueda de un sueño aristocrático. Pero, ¿esta situación excluye necesariamente la idea de una motivación espiritual por parte de estos masones? El elitismo social puede sentirse felizmente junto a un ideal de superación personal a través de la iniciación. La Ilustración Masónica es un fenómeno complejo.

*Palabras clave:* Ilustración Masónica, Altos Grados, Normandía, Gran Capítulo, Rito Francés, Sueño Aristocrático

## 关于首批法兰西礼仪会所成员的研究：精神需求与荣誉文化之间——以诺曼底为例

基于一项对1740-1830年间诺曼底共济会的前6000名入会者的研究，本文试图概述法兰西礼仪更高成员等级实践所处的社会情境与精神。1784-1789年间加入法兰西礼仪分会的首要动机无疑是追求贵族梦。不过，这种情况是否必然排除这些共济会成员的精神动机？社会精英主义能愉快地与“通过入会获得的自我完善”这一理想并存。共济会启蒙是一个复杂的现象。

关键词：共济会启蒙，高成员等级，诺曼底，总会所，法兰西礼仪，贵族梦

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**H**aving written a study of the first six thousand initiates into Freemasonry in Normandy between 1740 and 1830,<sup>1</sup> here I want to sketch an overview of the social context and spirit in which the higher degrees of the French Rite were practiced in the province in the first half-century of their existence, from the end of the eighteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth. I will provide a broad overview of the sociology of those brothers who decided to practice the higher grades under the authority of the Grand Chapitre Général (General Grand Chapter), as well as a reflection on the spirit in which they practiced: the latter point requires an explanation. This approach is dictated by two questions that arise when studying the early days of the higher degrees of the French Rite during this period. The

first question relates to the motivations of initiates, and the second, due to the proximity of the French Revolution to the founding of the Grand Chapitre Général, relates to the impact of the political crisis on those motivations. Did belonging to the higher degrees of the French Rite relate to the extended initiation journey offered by red Freemasonry and/or the prospect of social advancement? From the second half of the nineteenth century onward, the choice to practice these rites undoubtedly demonstrated a uniquely spiritual orientation, but at what point can we see this becoming concrete? These two questions form the basis for my argument, and I will begin by summarizing the context in which the higher degrees of the French Rite were first practiced in Normandy.

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1 Éric Saunier, *Révolution et sociabilité en Normandie au tournant des XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles: 6000 francs-maçons de 1740 à 1830* (Rouen: Presses universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 1999).

As for all provinces in the kingdom of France, it is impossible to give an exact moment when the first higher degrees emerged in this province, which had a higher population than the country of Sweden in the eighteenth century. However, one thing is certain: the passion for the higher degrees among Norman Freemasons was immediate, almost concomitant with the emergence of Masonic sociability in Caen, Le Havre, and Rouen, between the middle of the 1730s and the start of the 1740s.<sup>2</sup> This immediate success can be better comprehended through reading the correspondence between the first Norman Masonic organizations and the Grande Loge de France (Grand Lodge of France) collected in the precious Chapelle collection at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (French National Library), and even more importantly through studying the first memberships list that the Norman lodges sent to the new Grand Orient de France (GODF) (Grand Orient of France) in the middle of the 1770s. An unequivocal picture emerges from studying the Norman files in the Chapelle collection. The craze for “Scottishness” in the 1760s is visible in the diplomas given to masters so that they could travel, and in the observation that lodges used the fact of having members who were master Masons bearing higher degrees as an argument for attempting to impose their au-

thority over other lodges by obtaining the status of “mother lodge.” This status allowed older bodies to regulate local Masonic life throughout the 1760s, when Freemasonry was undergoing a dynamic initial period.<sup>3</sup>

The first lodge membership rolls that were sent to the young GODF in the middle of the 1770s show high levels of practice of higher degrees in Normandy after only twenty years of existence. With a third of Freemasons bearing these degrees in 1773, their success was highly impressive, especially if the high proportion of “occasional Masons,”<sup>4</sup> between a quarter and a third of initiates, is taken into account. As further evidence of widespread practice of the higher degrees in Normandy, in addition to high levels in the major Norman Masonic cities under the reign of Louis XVI (over 40 percent in Caen, Le Havre, and Rouen), we find French Rite chapters even in very small towns, like Eu.

Mentioning the town of Eu, whose existence is explained by the highly elitist character of the local blue lodge, brings me on to the description of the sociological aspects and motivations of the brothers who attended the first five chapters of the French Rite present in Normandy: one in Le Havre, one in Caen, one in Eu, and two in Rouen 1789.

2 On the contributions of the Chapelle collection and the birth of Normandy’s Grand Orient de France lodges, see: Saunier, *Révolution et sociabilité*, 45–65.

3 On this point, see: Gérard Gayot, *La Franc-maçonnerie française: Textes et pratiques (XVIII–XIXe siècles)*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).

4 My term for Freemasons who attended lodges for less than three years. On this point, see: Saunier, *Révolution et sociabilité*, 188–94.

Since they have around a hundred brothers who can be precisely identified, it is the two Rouen French Rite chapters that allow us to draw the most convincing conclusions when trying to make sense of the social nature of higher degree practice. The popularity of these degrees increased the conflict in Rouen Masonic life. There was tension between the most exclusive lodges and the more recent lodges, which were open to the petite bourgeoisie, as well as between Masonic elites, united by wealth but culturally different, as evidenced by the short lives of two local chapters, Les Chevaliers Réunis (The Reunited Knights) and La Parfaite Union et Raoul (The Perfect Union and Raoul), which emerged simultaneously in 1784.

These chapters had almost a hundred members (eighty-six) between them, and clearly had different recruitment bases, with one being predominantly drawn from the Normandy *parlement*, and the other being predominantly mercantile. This segregated approach was in fact the result of a refusal on the part of Rouen's venal office bourgeoisie and nobility, who attended La Parfaite Union (Perfect Union) Lodge, to allow the merchants to dominate. The foremost Rouen chapter, Les Chevaliers Réunis, had forty members, mostly major traders, almost all of them part of a majority-mercantile lodge, La Céleste Amitié (Heavenly Friendship). It had managed to obtain the status of

mother lodge to La Parfaite Union, despite the latter being older.

After the mercantile elite's major victory in having obtained mother lodge status for La Céleste Amitié when the GODF was founded, Les Chevaliers Réunis was a fresh cause for jealousy among the venal office bourgeoisie and nobility. These two latter groups—the venal office bourgeoisie and nobility—united and, as a result of an initiative on the part of members of La Parfaite Union, found the support of brothers from a highly exclusive lodge recently established near Rouen, in Pavilly. Raoul Lodge was composed almost exclusively of nobles from the Normandy *parlement*, many of whom were at the forefront of the parliamentary response in spring 1788.<sup>5</sup> This union resulted in the birth of La Parfaite Union et Raoul chapter, whose forty-six members continued to have a conflictual relationship with Les Chevaliers Réunis. The only thing on which the two Rouen chapters worked in concert was to block the request of brothers from Ardent Amitié (Ardent Friendship) Lodge, a blue lodge whose members were of more modest extraction, to establish a French Rite chapter. In order to be able to practice the higher degrees of Freemasonry, these brothers would eventually need to adopt a heterodox rite: the Heredom of Kilwinning Rite.<sup>6</sup>

Thus it is clear: before 1789, social motivations seem to have won out over spiritual motivations for joining

5 See: Saunier, *Révolution et sociabilité*, 243–248.

6 See: “Mathéus, Jean,” in *Le Monde maçonnique des Lumières (Europe-Amériques & colonies): Dictionnaire prosopographique*, ed. Charles Porset and Cécile Révauger (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), 3: 1917–18.

the higher degrees of the French Rite, and a look at the social makeup of these two chapters confirms this. Their recruitment base validates Joseph de Maistre's description of the higher degrees of Freemasonry as "the noble branch of a hydra with two heads." Sociological analysis, both of the proportion of brothers by order or of individual standings within the internal categories of these orders, gives edifying results. On the first point, we can see that the level of higher degrees among nobles was 44.6 percent, but among commoners was only 33.8 percent. Going on to look at the divisions within these orders, the higher the social status, the higher the position reached. Thus, among members of the nobility, the only two groups where over half of initiates practiced the higher degrees of the French Rite were dignitaries from the Cours souveraines (Sovereign Courts, such as *parlement*) (53 percent) and officers of state (57 percent). Among commoners, the trend for these degrees was more pronounced among royal officers (35 percent) and merchants (33 percent) than among shopkeepers and the legal profession (30 percent).

As it was a result of aspirations to distinction,<sup>7</sup> the practice of higher degrees evokes strategies aiming to compensate for a lack of peer recognition, comparable to those studied by Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret in the context of

financiers.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that it was ennobled traders, such as the bibliophile Midy d'Andé and the industrialist Rondeaux de Montbray (who was one of the first mayors of Rouen under the Revolution), who took the reins of Les Chevaliers Réunis, established by Rouen traders who wanted to steal a march on the *parlement's* nobility.

The pursuit of an aristocratic dream within the first French Rite chapters is therefore in little doubt between 1784 and 1789, but does this situation necessarily exclude the idea of a spiritual motivation on the part of these Freemasons? Let us see. Social elitism can sit happily alongside an ideal of self-improvement through initiation. At least this is the case in the private papers of Armand Gaborria, who, as I have mentioned more than once before, is a rich source with an interesting Masonic journey.<sup>9</sup> In terms of the pronounced liking that this eighteenth-century Freemason had for initiation and personal development, the moment when he advanced to the higher grades of the French Rite seems to have been crucial, even if Gaborria later preferred to follow other initiatory paths.

It is impossible to distill here all that which the thousands of pages written by this Bordeaux trader, initiated aged twenty, have to tell us on this point. However, perhaps the greatest emphasis should be on how his ad-

7 See: Eric Saunier, "Les noblesses normandes et la Franc-maçonnerie: Diversité des cultures et culture de la distinction au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Les noblesses normandes: XVI<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Alain Hugon and Ariane Boltanski, (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011), 267-89.

8 See Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, *Gens de finance à Paris au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Complexe, 1993), 129-46.

9 "Gaborria, Armand," in *Le Monde maçonnique*, ed. Porset and Révauger 2: 1241-2.

vancement to the higher grades of the French Rite were a turning point in his spiritual development. When he arrived in Lille at the end of the 1770s to set up in manufacturing, Gaborria was already a Freemason, but his spiritual preoccupations were few. It was when he was initiated into the higher degrees by a Brother Alavoine that his Masonic journey began in earnest in this area. Taking on senior responsibilities within the Collège des Philalèthes, founding a branch of the Rite of Memphis-Misraim during the Consulate,<sup>10</sup> and disseminating the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in France and Italy during the First Empire: the spiritual dimension of Gaborria's Masonic involvement after reaching the higher degrees is strongly evident. It took the form of a passion for Rites that shows in his writing, in particular in an unfinished personal encyclopedia.

More concerned with self-development through Masonry than social prestige (he was but a very small-scale manufacturer), Armand Gaborria is of course only one example. However, in reading his "intimate Masonic writings," it seems that the spiritual dimension was very much present in the engagement of this blue Freemason in the higher degrees of French Rite Freemasonry, although he would soon aban-

don it due to disenchantment caused by the Revolution.<sup>11</sup> Let us now consider the Revolutionary period through the lens of the ways in which it represented a fundamental rupture, leading motivations for advancing to the higher grades of the French Rite to take an exclusively spiritual direction.

In a research context when sources from the Revolutionary period are rare or sometimes entirely absent, the First Empire is the easiest period, in Rouen, Normandy, and elsewhere, through which to establish the chronology of this rupture. What conclusions can be drawn based on Norman sources, and in particular the sources from those Rouen lodges that were on the more modest end of the financial scale?<sup>12</sup> The evolutionary schema for the practice of the higher degrees is simultaneously clear and perhaps also more complex than it appears. At first sight, the reasons a brother might choose "red Freemasonry" do not seem to have changed compared to 1784–1789. The "aristocratic dream" seems to have been intact and to have remained the key factor fueling advancement to these grades. Thus, in Rouen, while blue Freemasonry was mostly open to the middle class, the social elite gathered at the *Ardente Amitié* (Ardent Friendship) chapter, as had previously

10 See: Eric Saunier, "Les bâtisseurs de Rite: Armand Gaborria, Turin et le rite de Misraïm," in *Les plus belles pages de la franc-maçonnerie*, ed. Alain-Jacques Lacot and Pierre Mollier (Paris: Dervy, 2003), 98–102.

11 See: Eric Saunier, "Le parcours initiatique d'Armand Gaborria au temps de la Révolution ou la réciprocité des influences," in "Franc-maçonnerie et politique au siècle des Lumières: Europe-Amériques," ed. Cécile Révauger, special edition, *Lumières 7* (2006): 83–95.

12 See: Eric Saunier, "Cambacérés et l'éco-sisme: Du rêve de perfectionnement initiatique à l'instrumentalisation politique," in *Jean-Jacques Régis de Camacérés: Aux origines de l'éco-sisme institutionnel*, ed. Jacques Oréface (Nancy: Kairos, 2019), 41–53.



been the case with Les Chevaliers Réunis and La Parfaite Union et Raoul. In fact, among the members of the Ardente Amitié chapter we find the mayor, Lézurier de la Martel, his two deputies Baron Desmadières and Baron Héron d'Agironne, a senator of the empire, Nicolas Vimard, the four most prominent bankers in Rouen, and many other members of the Rouen elite. The membership rolls from other Norman chapters are highly similar. In Alençon, the La Fidélité (Fidelity) chapter was headed by François Lelièvre, president of the Orne Conseil général (Regional Council), and included the *préfet* La Magdeleine, the mayor Jacques Mercier, and the five most prominent manufacturers in the city.

However, it should be noted that there are limitations to the idea of perfect stability in the recruitment of brothers into French Rite chapters centered on elitist choices identical to those which prevailed before the Revolution. In Rouen too, we see the prestigious chapter Ardente Amitié using the Heredom of Kilwinning Rite and not the French Rite, the latter being used by a second chapter, La Parfaite Egalité (Perfect Equality), with a more democratic recruitment profile.

A more democratic recruitment profile and therefore more similar to the normal social composition of the blue lodges, proof that the spiritual dimension won out as motivation to advance to these degrees: this may be a change

that began during the First Empire. This is undoubtedly what emerges from the study of the social makeup of the eighteen French Rite chapters that operated for varying lengths of time and with varying levels of activity during the Restoration in Normandy, in particular in the Seine-Inférieure département (11) where they prospered, especially in Rouen where we see four chapters,<sup>13</sup> and in Le Havre, where Aménité (Affability) competed with the Trois H (Three Hs) chapter, higher degree Freemasons at this time ruling out any idea of cohabitation. Three groups effectively shared control of these chapters between 1815 and 1830. These were the new professions doctors and engineers associated with merchants (those that Ch. Charle named “le monde des capacités”). The thirty-six members of the Arts Réunis (United Arts) chapter during the Restoration offer a good example of the transformations that came about during the Bourbon Restoration, and in particular from the 1820s onward when the destiny of Freemasons seemed more threatened by the ultra-royalists coming to power. More than half the members of this chapter (nineteen) were in fact ordinary city-center traders in a city where thirty years earlier the first French Rite chapters only included the most illustrious merchants. A new stage had begun.

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13 Each of the lodges operating in Rouen at the time of the Restoration—La Parfaite Egalité, Les Arts Réunis, La Persévérance Couronnée (Crowned Perseverance), and La Sincère Amitié (Sincere Friendship)—had its own chapter.



## Masons Seeking Modernization and Reason on the Eve of the Revolution

Jean Mondot

The Masonic congress held in Wilhelmsbad in 1782 and then in Paris were the place of intense philosophical debates within the late XVIIIth century Masonic thinkers. In Wilhelmsbad the major opposition was between the mystico-spiritualist approach represented by Jean-Baptiste Willermoz and the rationalist approach, supported in particular by the German Baron Franz Dietrich von Ditfurth (1738–1813). Those debates continued in Paris within the Philalethes's Congress and its main animator, Savalette de Lange, was finally sensitive to the rationalist criticism and the conceptions defended by Bode during his stay in Paris. The Revolution was soon to come.

*Keywords:* Masonic Enlightenment, Wilhelmsbad's congress, Philalethes's Congress, Dietrich von Ditfurth, Jean-Baptiste Willermoz, Adam Weishaupt, Adolph Knigge

## Masones en busca de la modernización y la razón en vísperas de la revolución

El congreso masónico realizado en Wilhelmsbad en 1782 y luego en París fueron el lugar de intensos debates filosóficos dentro de los pensadores masónicos de finales del siglo XVIII. En Wilhelmsbad, la principal oposición se produjo entre el enfoque místico-espiritualista representado por Jean-Baptiste Willermoz y el enfoque racionalista, apoyado en particular por el barón alemán Franz Dietrich von Ditfurth (1738-1813). Esos debates continuaron en París dentro del Congreso de Philalethes y su principal animadora, Savalette de Lange, fue finalmente sensible a la crítica racionalista y a las concepciones defendidas por Bode durante su estancia en París. La revolución estaba por llegar.

*Palabras clave:* Ilustración masónica, Congreso de Wilhelmsbad, Congreso de Philalethes, Dietrich von Ditfurth, Jean-Baptiste Willermoz, Adam Weishaupt, Adolph Knigge

## 共济会成员在革命前夕寻求现代化与理性

1782年在廉姆斯巴德举行的共济会大会，以及随后在巴黎举行的大会是18世纪末期共济会思想家进行激烈哲学辩论的场所。在廉姆斯巴德，Jean-Baptiste Willermoz所代表的神秘唯心主义方法与德国男爵Franz Dietrich von Ditfurth (1738-1813)支持的理性主义方法之间存在主要的对立。这些辩论在巴黎的Philalethes大会上继续进行，其主要推动者Savalette de Lange最终被Bode所捍卫的理性主义批判和概念所撼动。革命很快就要到来。

关键词：共济会启蒙，廉姆斯巴德大会，Philalethes大会，Dietrich von Ditfurth, Jean-Baptiste Willermoz, Adam Weishaupt, Adolph Knigge

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### *In memory of Charles Porset*

**H**ow radicalized were people's minds as the storm clouds gathered over Europe, in particular in the major monarchies of the time?

Due to the considerable influence they had over society at the time, the evolution of the involvement of the Freemasons in social and political life is of much interest.

The crises within Freemasonry in the 1770s and 1780s and the simultaneous renewal of Masonic activity are in fact symptomatic of the new political understanding Masons had both of themselves and of their actions in society.

### **The Wilhelmsbad Congress (1782)**

**T**he Wilhelmsbad Congress came after the Gaules Congress in Lyon (1778) and before the Par-

is Congresses of 1785 and 1787. From July 16 to September 1, 1782, in Wilhelmsbad, near Hanau and not far from Frankfurt, a congress was held that had major consequences for the history of Franco-German Freemasonries, and European Freemasonries more generally. This was not the first congress, but on this occasion, a decision was to be taken on the future of the Rite of Strict Observance. It had become necessary to restructure the Masonic networks that had been thrown into disorder or rendered defunct by the crisis ongoing in that body since the death of Baron de Hund in 1776. There was widespread doubt about the fundamentals of the Rite of Strict Observance and the "Unknown Superiors." It was felt necessary to restore order by bringing together Masons from across Europe. This meeting was a Franco-German initiative and involved thirty-five Masons in total.

The historian Ludwig Hammermayer has undertaken a methodical analysis of this congress of “restoring order.”<sup>1</sup> It was overseen by a “triumvirate” composed of two German princes, Charles of Hesse-Kassel (1744–1836) and Ferdinand of Brunswick (1721–1792), and the Lyon Mason Jean-Baptiste Willermoz (1730–1824). Hammermayer identified three “philosophical” currents running through the Wilhelmsbad congress: one hermetico-alchemical, another mystico-spiritual, and another rationalist, in the Enlightenment tradition.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Ditfurth-Willermoz conflict

The major opposition within the congress was between the mystico-spiritualist approach represented by Jean-Baptiste Willermoz and the rationalist approach, supported in particular by the German Baron Franz Dietrich von Ditfurth (1738–1813). He entered the Rite of Strict Observance with *Eques ab Orno* as his pseudonym in 1777.<sup>3</sup> He soon engaged in a flurry of Mason-

ic activity, founding fifteen “rectified” lodges in two years. A report written by Ditfurth for the Illuminati reveals a bit more about his intervention and the scandal it caused.<sup>4</sup> The full text of the speech that began the scandal has not survived. We only know about its content through Ditfurth’s report, and an account by Willermoz. Ditfurth relates his adversaries’ reactions, first among them that of Willermoz (*ab Eremo*), of which he gives an extract in French: “Brother *ab Orno* (Ditfurth) has just made a scandalous, impious, and seditious speech, contrary to the Christian faith, unfit to be heard by Masons and good subjects [ . . .].”<sup>5</sup> Ditfurth did not allow himself to be disconcerted by the violence of these attacks, replying: “My brothers, I thought I was attending a Masonic congress among brothers, not an eighth-century ecclesiastical meeting. That is why I made this speech, believing that if I should be wrong I would be gently corrected and not condemned as a heretic and sentenced with no right of appeal.”<sup>6</sup> In accordance with Chappe

1 Ludwig Hammermayer, *Der Wilhelmsbader Freimaurer-Konvent von 1782: Ein Höhe und Wendepunkt in der Geschichte der deutschen und europäischen Geheimgesellschaften* (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1980). The “literature” on the Illuminati, Bavarian and otherwise, is endless, especially where this subject is combined with the theme of illuminism up to the present day. Cf. Pierre-André Taguieff, *La Foire aux Illuminés: Esoterisme, théorie du complot, extrémisme* (Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 2005). On the Illuminati, see more recently Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, *Les Illuminati, de la société secrète aux théories du complot* (Paris: Tallandier, 2022).

2 Cf. Hammermayer, *Der Wilhelmsbader Freimaurer-Konvent*, 37–38.

3 It is regrettable that so few studies are available on this individual, whose role in the history of German Freemasonries at the end of the eighteenth century is far from insignificant. See the biographical and bibliographical entry in Charles Porset, *Les Philalèthes et les Convents de Paris: Une politique de la folie* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1996), 548–50.

4 Porset, *Les Philalèthes et les Convents de Paris*.

5 Hammermayer, *Der Wilhelmsbader Freimaurer-Konvent*, 125. Translator’s note: Our translation. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of cited foreign language material in this article are our own.

6 Hammermayer, *Der Wilhelmsbader Freimaurer-Konvent*, 126.

de la Henrière's advice, Ditfurth agreed to retract his speech and present another version at a future session after making corrections, but not without denouncing the intolerant sectarianism of the brothers who had attacked him and reaffirming the orthodox nature of his statements on religion. Outside of the session, he lashed out sarcastically at the opposing camp: "What a magnificent goal it is for Masonry to keep the world blind, stop the spread of the Enlightenment, and to prohibit beneficent monarchs from wanting to guide men to their destination through making them happy. Assuredly, I was not previously acquainted with the goal, but I am stupefied with admiration for it."<sup>7</sup>

## **2. Princes or brothers?**

On July 31, Ditfurth thus submitted a report, this time written in German, and limited himself to adding a few highly characteristic verbal remarks to the submission of his reworked text: "When I affirm that sovereigns have been created for and are there for their subjects and not the subjects for their sovereigns, and that consequently it is their duty to make them happy, this is in no way seditious. The wisest monarch in the world, Joseph II, knows this, and he has no need of a long speech."<sup>8</sup>

Prior to this, he had had a discussion with Johann Joachim Christoph Bode (1730–1793), who after the "Weishaupt era" would later be giv-

en very senior responsibilities within the Illuminati Order. He denied the sacredness of the secrets and mysteries that the heads of the Rite of Strict Observance forbade them to communicate to their brothers. Both had requested and pleaded for egalitarian access to the fundamental secrets, arguing forcefully that brothers could not be convinced of the truth of the doctrine if they could not be informed of the original mysteries. Here too, it was clear that times had changed and that for an entire "wing" of Freemasonry, there was now an urgent need for transparency, at least internally, and for reform of this feudal organization that would soon be labeled as belonging to the *ancien régime*. Ditfurth's double attack against religion and the powers that be was explicitly denounced in a text written by Willermoz. Reporting on Ditfurth's intervention at the congress, Willermoz expressed outrage that the former had had "[. . .] the effrontery, at a meeting of Christians, to attack all principles of religion in the most scandalous manner, to bitterly ridicule all that relates to it, to reduce the ranks and titles of princes to the level of all other parts of society, and to there propose to found a new Masonry on these principles, which are harmful to all true connections between men, a Masonry that would be based only on the new philosophy of this century."<sup>9</sup>

7 Hammermayer, *Der Wilhelmsbader Freimaurer-Konvent*, 128.

8 Hammermayer, *Der Wilhelmsbader Freimaurer-Konvent*, 130. Note that in 1782, Joseph II enjoyed the unwavering support of the Freemasons.

9 Hammermayer, *Der Wilhelmsbader Freimaurer-Konvent*, 222. In French in the text.

### **3. A pyrrhic victory**

At the Wilhelmsbad Congress however, this approach—"the new philosophy of this century"—met with stiff opposition and it was Willermoz who emerged victorious. Ditfurth acknowledged this defeat and left the congress. Was his behavior astute? It would seem not. Baron de Knigge, who did not like him, thought he had been totally counterproductive.

However, even with a more developed talent for diplomacy and compromise than Ditfurth displayed, conciliation between such divergent positions, "radically" opposed as they were, was hardly imaginable. Moreover, the victory achieved by Willermoz's Chevaliers bienfaisants de la cité sainte (Beneficent Knights of the Holy City) was only partial. They did not win over all Freemasons to their point of view, particularly not the radical wing led by Ditfurth. This wing came together as the Alliance éclectique (Eclectic Alliance), which soon included a significant number of lodges. It was enough to defeat the Illuminati's hopes of leadership, and signaled the failure of their attempt to absorb what was left of the Rite of Strict Observance. Ditfurth was subsequently invited to the Paris Congress, but declined the invitation. He did, however, send a response to the Philalèthes (Philalethes) in which he decried any link between Masonry and theosophy, alchemy and magic or kabbalah. Whatever the outcome of the congress for the rationalist wing, what

is striking is the vivacity and clarity of the opposing sides. A true ideological battle came into the open, and the Masonic "compromise" found it difficult to contain the violence of opposition. The Revolution, it should be said, was soon to come.

### **4. Weishaupt/Knigge: The end of the Bavarian Illuminati**

For Weishaupt it was clear that "[. . .] Monarchical power is only dangerous in the hands of egotistical, brutal, uncultured, and immoral men. But such men should not be authorized to become our superiors. The higher a superior rises within the Order, the more moral he must be. Our entire system is built on this supreme degree of morality, without which it is only a chimera."<sup>10</sup>

This was a deeply held conviction relating to his conception of the Order, and one can imagine that Knigge's strategy of flattery and rapidity in recruitment can only have displeased him. Knigge himself did not think particularly well of princes, but his approach was more tactical. He did not want to offend or exclude them, thinking that he could use them, and subject them to the common law of the Order. On this point, he was in agreement with Bode who, in a letter, argued in paradoxical but period-typical fashion for allowing princes to enter the Order: "[. . .] I must on this occasion say that after long reflection, the following truth seems to me to be evident: 'all princes are men by birth: therefore they must

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10 Cited in W. Daniel Wilson, *Geheimräte gegen Geheimbünde: Ein unbekanntes Kapitel der klassisch-romantischen Geschichte Weimars* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991), 274–75.

have the same rights as others.”<sup>11</sup> The reversal of perspectives is striking. In the name of equal rights, princes must be allowed the benefit of the education the Order provided! Weishaupt, on the other hand, did not believe in this equality of birth. One was born a prince and it was then not possible to return to original equality. This undoubtedly went against the non-essentialist anthropology of the Enlightenment, but ensured the cohesion of the Order. As previously mentioned, Knigge and Bode did not share this anti-monarchical exclusivism. This difference of opinion fueled the increasing tension between Knigge and Weishaupt throughout 1783. Suddenly, these were no longer educators of the human race who were disagreeing with one another, but rather adversaries or even enemies who pulled no punches. The Munich Areopagites attempted to intercede (April 24, 1783).<sup>12</sup> As their representative, Zwack told Knigge that Weishaupt would resign his role as “General” of the Order, that a sort of federal structure would give more autonomy to each of the provinces of the Order, and finally, that Knigge still had, or had (re)gained, Weishaupt’s esteem. But nothing could be done. The difference of opinion was too great. In July 1784, Knigge resigned from all of his roles and a few months later Weishaupt was replaced by Bode. The coup de grâce, as we know, came from without, at least for the Bavarian section: the

Order was banned in Bavaria (the authorities issued a decree in June 1784, renewed in March–August 1785).<sup>13</sup> Under Bode’s leadership, it continued to exist until around 1790 in other “provinces.” What was just as decisive a blow as the Bavarian ban, or perhaps an even greater one, was the disorder provoked by the all-too-human behavior of the Bavarian branch of the Order.

## **The Paris Congresses (1785–1787) and the Masonic renewal**

### ***1. The renewal of the Illuminati***

This political failure of the Illuminati Order in 1785 did not, however, mean the end of the Order, as the Bavarian ban did not extend to the entire Germanic region. Bode steered the course of the area not affected by the ban on the Order: Thuringia. He was in regular contact with other Freemasons and Illuminati. In 1787, he decided to attend the second congress organized by French Freemasons. He traveled with Wilhelm von dem Bussche (1756–1817) to the French capital, but arrived too late to attend the sessions. Instead, he had the opportunity to both meet some prominent French Masons, in particular the president of the Philalèthes’ council, Savalette de Langes (1746–1797), and to consult all the documents he wished. Before concluding, it should be noted that Bode was well-known to

11 Hammermeyer, *Der Wilhelmsbader Freimaurer-Konvent*, 655.

12 *Ibid.*, 598.

13 In 1785, a lightning strike killed Father Johann Jakob Lanz (1735–1745), known as Socrates, and secret documents found on his body led the Bavarian government to take steps to ban the Illuminati. A real “witch hunt” ensued.



French Freemasons after the Wilhelmsbad Congress and that the Franco-German alliance was taken for granted, as evidenced by the two members of the congress allocated to Franco-German exchanges during the congress.<sup>14</sup>

Bode's report read to the Paris Congress in absentia is striking for its author's anticlericalism, or more specifically his anti-Catholicism. Draw your own conclusions: Bode starts by attributing the creation of Freemasonry to the Jesuits. He then interprets the murder of Hiram by two of his fellowcraft masons as the allegorical destruction of the Roman Catholic hierarchy by the two reformers Luther and Calvin. After having toyed with the theory of Freemasonry being brought from England by the Stuarts and having discussed the degree of St-André d'Écosse (St. Andrew of Scotland), he tells of how the lodges spread throughout Europe. But the meaning of the institution was soon lost. To keep their followers and to disguise their real origins, other secrets were invented. "The secret was then only made up of words, signs, and ceremonies that gave the impression of another more important secret, and one sought it from degree to degree without ever finding anything but more words and more signs. In the end, these meetings were just fraternal organizations of men who helped each other out when

needed [. . .] and held symbolic ceremonies whose mysterious meaning was no longer known and that each of them interpreted in his own way."<sup>15</sup>

It is striking to see Freemasonry being subject to anthropological deciphering by its own members, deconstructing the reality of its beliefs and rites. Freemasonry—or let us say Masonic rites—was nothing but an artifact intended to bring together its members but with no historical basis.

## ***2. Illuminati and Philalèthes***

In fact, it was the religious connection that was the subject of radical critique. Savalette de Langes was truly struck by this, leading him to compliment Bode.<sup>16</sup> The latter had heard French Masons say that "skillful words have brought these Brothers out of their superstitions relating to occult and sublime science and they are finally ready to accept the ideas of right and pure reason."<sup>17</sup>

Savalette was so convinced by Bode's anticlerical words that he crossed the aisle and, followed by three other French Masons, joined illuminism: "All four of us have made the solemn promise to work for the good of humanity through the means that our connection offers us. Amen."<sup>18</sup>

Thus there was indeed a movement of French brothers, Philalèthes, to illuminism in 1787.

14 Porset, *Les Philalèthes et les Convents de Paris*, 275.

15 Porset, *Les Philalèthes et les Convents de Paris*, 226.

16 He politely said to him "As you alone, sir, are an entire congress," Porset, *Les Philalèthes et les Convents de Paris*, 229.

17 Porset, *Les Philalèthes et les Convents de Paris*, 230.

18 Porset, *Les Philalèthes et les Convents de Paris*, 230–31.

The first invitational circular from Savalette de Langes to European Masons, with the aim of organizing a congress to be held 1785 (delayed until 1787), confirms the stability of their new beliefs: “This century that some have called Philosophical, seems to be destined by divine wisdom to be the period of great revolutions in all areas of human knowledge. The exact sciences are making rapid, confident progress. Conjectural knowledge is seeking to reinforce itself through experience, to become more methodical and consistent: the most interesting discoveries are multiplying, political systems have themselves experienced the most unexpected changes; everything has, simply put, felt to a greater or lesser extent the

vibrations of the immense shock that has struck this Universe.”<sup>19</sup>

The clarity and modernity of the style is striking. A new grounding in time and space was renewing the experience of living in the world. Here is how Savalette de Langes summarized the principles required by Masonic morals and/or religion at the end of his text: “The existence of a single God, the Immortality and Immateriality of the Soul, Suffering, and Reward in another life.”<sup>20</sup>

This was a reaffirmation of a simplicity of philosophical and religious engagement and a clear distancing from the occult sciences. Cagliostro had lost a great deal of ground.

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19 Porset, *Les Philalèthes et les Convents de Paris*, 255.

20 Porset, *Les Philalèthes et les Convents de Paris*, 263.

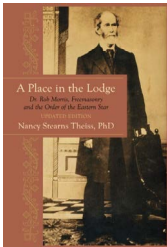




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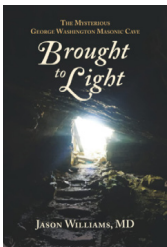
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## A Place in the Lodge: Dr. Rob Morris, Freemasonry and the Order of the Eastern Star by Nancy Stearns Theiss, PhD

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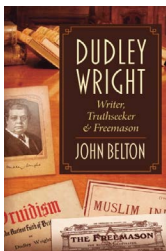
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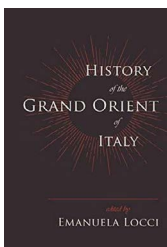
The George Washington Masonic Cave near Charles Town, West Virginia, contains a signature carving of George Washington dated 1748. This book painstakingly pieces together the chronicled events and real estate archives related to the cavern in order to sort out fact from fiction.



## Dudley Wright: Writer, Truthseeker & Freemason by John Belton

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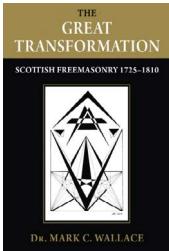
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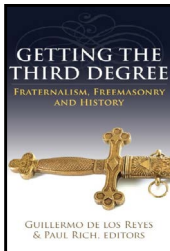
No book in Masonic literature upon the history of Italian Freemasonry has been edited in English up to now. This work consists of eight studies, covering a span from the Eighteenth Century to the end of the WWII, tracing through the story, the events and pursuits related to the Grand Orient of Italy.



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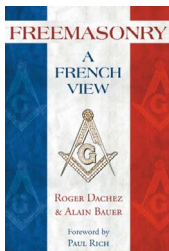
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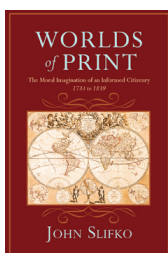
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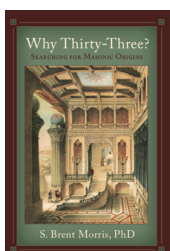
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